

## *Largo*

Charles Ives

When Charles Ives (1874-1954) graduated from Yale in 1898 (where he had taken classes in music under Horatio Parker), he moved to New York City and began working as a clerk for the Mutual Life Insurance Company. He was also organist-choirmaster at Central Presbyterian Church and spent all of his free time composing. The *Largo* for violin, clarinet, and piano was composed during this time and the published edition gives 1901 as the date of composition. (However, Henry and Sidney Cowell date it a year later.) Ives himself listed a *Trio* (1902-03) for these instruments but it has not been found.

The work was originally written for violin and organ, then revised for a very early, but apparently discarded, sonata for violin and piano. The *Largo* ranks as an early work and comes at a time when his music was becoming purposely more experimental. This work is absolute music and has no hymn tunes, patriotic or popular songs, band or dance music, etc. Like the slow movement of a classical sonata, it begins in G Major with the piano and violin in a *largo* tempo and closes in the same manner. The clarinet enters at a faster *andante* tempo and leads into a ragtime section with all three instruments playing together. Its twentieth-century aspect consists of complex meters in the piano part and asymmetrical melodic materials in the violin and clarinet lines, making for some quite contemporary and dissonant counterpoint.

Charles Ives (1874-1954) was born in Danbury, Connecticut and pursued what is perhaps one of the most extraordinary and paradoxical careers in American music history. Businessman by day and composer by night, Ives's vast output has gradually brought him recognition as the most original and significant American composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Inspired by transcendentalist philosophy, Ives sought a highly personalized musical expression through the most innovative and radical technical means possible. His fascination with bi-tonal forms, polyrhythms, and quotation was nurtured by his father. Ives later acknowledged his father as the primary creative influence on his musical style, and his studies at Yale guided an expert control over large-scale forms.

Ironically, much of Ives's work would not be heard until his virtual retirement from music and business in 1930 due to severe health problems. The conductor Nicolas Slonimsky, music critic Henry Bellamann, pianist John Kirkpatrick, and the composers Lou Harrison and Henry Cowell all played a key role in introducing Ives's music to a wider audience. In 1947, Ives was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his *Symphony No. 3*, according him a much deserved modicum of international renown. By the time of his death, he had witnessed a rise from obscurity to a position of unsurpassed eminence among the world's leading performers and musical institutions.