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[Letter from J. Philip Lambert]

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## ~ COMMUNICATIONS ~

To the Editor of the JOURNAL:

MAYNARD SOLOMON ASKS SOME important questions in his recent study of Charles Ives (this JOURNAL 40 (Fall 1987): 443–70), addressing problems that have long plagued Ives studies, and offering answers that reflect the author's unique psycho-biographical perspective. In describing the possible ramifications of an idealized father-son relationship, and in revealing inconsistencies and contradictions within Ives's music and writings, Solomon exposes a wealth of evidence to support his theories about deliberate acts of deception and "a systematic pattern of falsification" (p. 463). My review of some of this evidence has often led to different conclusions, or, at least, to revelations of greater complexity than Solomon portrays, and I am compelled to enter the dialogue about his "working hypothesis" with the following observations about evidence and interpretation.

While all of Solomon's observations deserve, and certainly will receive, close scrutiny, I am focusing my comments on a few points for which I can offer additional evidence in support of alternative explanations. Other issues, which future discussions should address, include Solomon's conclusions themselves, apart from any additional data, and the frequent conflicts between his version of events and an explanation consistent with Ives's recollections. Indeed, such conflicts often present the reader with a choice between Solomon's version and Ives's, with no solid evidence to tip the scale in either direction. This is the case, for example, where the author questions Ives's memories of the genesis of *Psalm 67* (p. 462): Solomon presumes that Ives's father "performed" the work in a complete form, but Ives's comments could easily refer to an early choral experiment, perhaps a test of the practicality of the tonal combinations, not necessarily an actual "performance" of a finished product. There are, however, no surviving manuscripts to support Ives's recollection, so the issue remains open to contrasting explanations.

In other cases relating to the Ives father-son relationship, however, there is additional evidence that should temper some of Solomon's skepticism about George Ives's experimental attitudes and influence on his son's innovations (pp. 447–50). Several pages in a copybook belonging to George Ives contain experimental exercises in the hand of a young Charles Ives, apparently entered with his father's advice and approval during the late 1880s and early 1890s. In his *Catalogue* of the manuscripts, Kirkpatrick highlights these materials with the label "burlesque," encompassing organ postludes, choral amens, canons, and general experimental exercises (category 7A2, pp. 214–15, and listed separately within 7C, pp. 219–21). Among the compositional procedures in the pieces are several instances of highly unorthodox

registral “wedge” structures, in which separate successions of chromatically related triads are associated in contrary motion (e.g., 7C10), and fugal expositions with each voice in a different key (7C16/17). Consistent with the younger Ives’s recollection of early experimentation with polytonality, the copybook contains two versions of “London Bridge,” one with the melody in G and the accompaniment in F $\sharp$  and the other with the melody in F and the accompaniment in G $\flat$  (7C5). These exercises, along with other conventional sketches and compositions in Charles Ives’s hand in the copybook, portray the full range of musical activities undertaken by father and son, confirming many of Charles Ives’s memories of his father’s influence.

In another father-son issue, Solomon questions the existence of a letter purportedly sent from George Ives to a student, implying that the younger Ives fabricated circumstances to compensate for a “paucity of external evidence” (p. 449) relating to his father’s experimental attitudes. However, there is another document, written by George Ives and preserved in his hand, that expresses views resembling those in the letter and in a similar style. George Ives’s essay on principles of music theory, apparently written as a pedagogical aid sometime in the early 1890s, includes several reactions to musical conventions not unlike those of the letter in question. (This is discussed by David Eiseman, *Perspectives of New Music* 14/1: 139–47.) The essay criticizes, for example, standard musical terminology, such as the “Dominant chord of the seventh,” which, according to the author, has “more names than it has tones” (p. 5), and the subdominant, whose name is characterized as “horrible” (p. 6). Two passages in the essay particularly recall the sentiments of the letter:

There are a great many unfortunate accidents that are accountable for the difficulties in the way of a person trying to understand even the simplest things regarding music as it’s universally used. . . . The first and most noticeable stumbling block is the staff. (p. 7)

In order to try to explain the illogical products of the staff notation as it is, they have piled names on names and figures on figures till the poor thing *music*, either written or sounded is buried out of sight and out of hearing. (p. 9)

This evidence would at least establish the plausibility that George Ives held views similar to those in the letter, even if his son did not quote the document precisely, or added words of his own at the end.

Solomon’s questions about Ives’s relationship with Horatio Parker (p. 462) point out that Ives did not mention current compositions that he showed to Parker in letters home. In his *Memos*, however, Ives does not imply that the music he showed to Parker was newly composed; rather, he mentions only pieces that were written earlier, presumably under his father’s guidance. According to Ives’s account (*Memos*, 116), Parker’s criticism—and George Ives’s retort—about resolution of dissonance (quoted by Solomon, p. 462) were prompted by “At Parting,” a song he had composed several years earlier. Kirkpatrick notes that the original manuscript of the song exhibits the unresolved dissonances that Ives describes (*Memos*, 116, n. 3). Other recollections concern four-key fugues, possibly including the “Song for Harvest

Season" of 1893 (see *Memos*, 49). It seems entirely possible that Ives did not mention these pieces in his letters home because he was home, working with his father, when he wrote them.

Solomon's discussion of the *Washington's Birthday* page (pp. 456–57) highlights some aspects of a compositional history that is actually much more complex, spanning several years of production, revision, and performance. Indeed, this complexity is reflected in the evidence that Solomon does cite, beginning with his observation that the addresses were "crossed out" (p. 457). My analysis of the manuscript finds that, while the "Hartsdale NY" inscription does appear to be the most recent entry, none of the inscriptions are obliterated. Evidently, Ives's name was written first, and this was followed by the scribble marks, which serve an indiscernible purpose. The Hartsdale and 22nd Street addresses were apparently notated over the scribble marks, and the Liberty Street address is located farther toward the bottom of the page, separate from the scribbles.

An important factor for judging the chronology of the entries is the purpose of the addresses. As is often the case in Ives's scores, the full street addresses (37 Liberty and 120 E. 22nd) were apparently entered for the benefit of copyists. This would also explain the words "return" preceding his name and "to me" preceding the Liberty Street address. In fact, these two addresses correspond chronologically to the two readings of *Washington's Birthday* mentioned in *Memos* (p. 98), occasions when copyists could have been engaged. The first reading, according to Ives's recollection, was in "1913 or early in 1914," when his business address was 37 Liberty, and the second was in "1918 or 1919," when his residence was 120 E. 22nd (*ibid.*). (Both readings led to additional playings by the respective groups; a copyist was necessary during the second series of readings due to revisions.) The "Hartsdale NY" inscription, on the other hand, would not suffice as a return address, but only as a record of the place where the work was composed, a notation common in scores of Ives or, for that matter, of countless other composers. To provide a return address, Ives probably would have indicated a post office box number in Hartsdale, as he did, for example, on a score page for the *Fourth Symphony* ("P.O. 182 Hartsdale NY," Kirkpatrick, *Catalogue*, 23).

Thus the evidence suggests the following sequence of events. First, sometime around 1913 Ives employed a copyist in anticipation of a reading, necessitating the entry of a specific return address. After writing his name, he entered something that he subsequently crossed out (his actual home address, perhaps?), and then his business address below the scribble marks. A second reading several years later required a new home address, which Ives gave priority by placing it closer to his name, even though this required writing over the top of the earlier scribble marks. Finally, at a later time he attempted to clarify the origins of the piece by indicating the place where the work had been composed, prioritizing the information by situating it precisely between his name and the original return address, and using bold lettering to cover scribble marks that are darkest in that particular area. At the same time, he may have also entered another chronological clarification that appears higher on the page: "This was written before the 4th Sym was finished but after it was started" (Kirkpatrick, *Catalogue*, 9).

Solomon also suggests that the published score of *Washington's Birthday* may be substantially different from that of the first reading (p. 459). Though the scores and parts from the earliest performances do not survive, the extant manuscripts for the work do include a few bars of sketch material, a partial score-sketch, and portions of a full score (Kirkpatrick, *Catalogue*, 9), enough material to make a reasonable comparison with the published version. In fact, there are very few substantive differences in basic structure or in significant details—there is, for example, no apparent attempt to increase the level of dissonance, beyond normal, relatively minor revisions in pitch constructions.

Solomon's questions about the *Putnam's Camp* inscription (pp. 457–58) raise the issue of Ives's handwriting. Presumably, Solomon's observation about Ives's "later hand" refers to the "shaky" lettering caused by the palsy that plagued Ives in later life, and that necessitated, for example, the assistance of his wife in conducting correspondence. A characteristic example of this later hand is the signature on a 1938 passport appearing as Illustration 12 in *Memos*. But the *Putnam's Camp* inscription is constructed of straight, well-formed letters that show little evidence of difficulty. Indeed, they resemble comments in other manuscripts from the early part of the century in hand as well as in content. Similar political circumstances, for example, surround the song "Vote for Names," which Ives sketched in 1912 as a reaction to the next election after the topic of the *Putnam's Camp* comment. The facsimile of "Vote for Names" published along with Nachum Schoffman's analysis and realization of the song (in *Current Musicology* 23 (1977): 56–68) displays a strikingly similar criticism of the presidential candidates of that year ("Teddy, Woodrow, and Bill"), similarly inscribed with large and careless lettering but without "shaky" characters or other evidence of physical difficulty.

Based on the handwriting, then, we can easily accept Ives's dating on the first page of the score-sketch: "Oct. 1912." The question is, does a discrepancy between the date to which the inscription refers and the probable date that it was entered indicate an attempt at "pre-dating?" First, we might ask why Ives would, in 1912, want to turn back the clock by only four years, and then would neglect to revise the other datable information on the score. Second, there are any number of equally logical explanations for the date of reference. The inscription might associate, for example, the 1908 election with certain programmatic implications in the music at that point. Perhaps Ives is recalling the circumstances under which the associated musical ideas were originally conceived. We could amass innumerable theories to explain the evidence, including some that support Solomon's hypotheses, but we might never find one that has the support of the "independent evidence" that Solomon pursues. We cannot make an empirically sound judgment; we can only speculate.

Finally, Solomon (p. 460) cites the inclusion of organ interludes in *The Celestial Country* as an instance of a revision for which "the later dates are suppressed" (p. 459). The evidence, while not conclusive, does support Solomon's implication that the interludes were not part of the first performance of the cantata. However, there is also convincing evidence that the nature of the revision was in some ways consistent with the work's chronology, and would not, therefore, seem worthy of acknowledgement.

The chord structures in the inserted interludes reflect musical ideas formulated during the period the cantata was composed and before. They are not “polytonal,” but are superpositions of thirds according to suggestions from George Ives quoted in *Memos*: “Father used to let me, half in fun and half seriously, make chords up of several 3rds, major and minor, going up on top of themselves” (p. 120; see also pp. 33, 47). Several early hymn interludes survive that employ chord structures of this type, as listed in category “ $3D_6$ ” in the Kirkpatrick *Catalogue* (p. 107); one of these is published in the Cowell biography (p. 35). Also, Ives recalls (in *Memos*, 33) playing a “Prelude” using these structures at the concert on which *The Celestial Country* was premiered.

A more significant issue is the apparent anachronism of the cantata’s resulting stylistic mixture, since contrasts of this type are more characteristic of Ives’s later work. In contrast to the stylistic heterogeneity of the later *Fourth Symphony*, for example, his earlier efforts are generally more pure, exploring contrasting styles among, rather than within, different works. But there is at least one exception: the *Variations on “America”* of the early 1890s contains, at some point in its early evolution, polytonal interludes contrasting with more conventional variations. In *Memos* (pp. 38, 115), Ives clearly recalls that his early conceptions of the *Variations* included contrasting interlude material, although his father withheld this from performances in 1891–2 because it “made the boys laugh.”

These disagreements on evidentiary matters should not obscure the basic value of Solomon’s warning to Ives scholarship and the essential dialogue that will ensue. Solomon has asked relevant questions that may inspire a variety of supporting or refuting answers, but that, at least, cannot be ignored. He argues convincingly that Ives’s claims of unfamiliarity with music of his contemporaries do not stand up against much evidence of concert attendance and contradictions within Ives’s own writings (pp. 450–53). Certainly, some of his observations—such as those relating to the *Browning Overture* (p. 459)—identify true inconsistencies that strengthen his warning. While learning from his questions, however, we should view his methods with the critical eye that speculative inquiry deserves. We cannot, for example, deny the accuracy of Ives’s memories, as stated in *Memos* and elsewhere, solely based on Solomon’s theories about the composer’s idealization of his father or motivations for distorting the chronological record. Allegations of this kind beg for strong evidentiary support and consideration of several interpretations, including one in which Ives is presumed innocent without proof to the contrary. Ultimately, it may be that the “independent evidence” Solomon seems to pursue (e.g., p. 458) will not surface, and we will be left with conflicting interpretations, or with judgments about which explanation seems more reasonable than another.

Part of the critical response to Solomon’s questions should identify those areas in which his hypotheses rely most extensively on speculative interpretation of evidence. It would be difficult, for example, to prove or disprove his suggestion that Ives removed publisher’s marks from his scores in an attempt to distort chronological details (p. 461). This presumption of the composer’s motivations identifies a phenomenon that is not a pervasive feature of Ives’s manuscripts, and the suggestion is advanced to support ideas about Ives’s personality that are themselves speculatively conceived. Solomon offers

similar explanations for Ives's motivations where the evidence is more revealing, but such circumstances may still admit of several interpretations. The evidence on the *Washington's Birthday* page, for example, includes an obvious retrospective inscription, but this does not necessarily represent an act of deception; indeed, Ives's notations on this page seem motivated by an attempt to clarify, not distort, the chronological record. Similarly, the evidence shows that Ives failed to acknowledge the date of revisions for *The Celestial Country*, but proving that this was an act of "suppression" requires stronger evidence, such as an obliterated date or a blatant contradiction.

Toward the end of his article, Solomon raises a point that reaches the heart of the issue. He suggests that over a period of "ten or even fifteen years Ives created sketches, outlines, and drafts for many compositional projects . . . but managed to complete very few works" (p. 464). This is a logical explanation of much of Ives's compositional activity from the composer's point of view that renders the notion of a "complete" work inapplicable. He was not composing on a commission or for a specific performance that would require a "finished" product. In those circumstances where he was able to hear some kind of "performance," probably just a reading, this would simply provide the opportunity for him to hear the results of his efforts, and would thus serve as an impetus for further revision and experimentation along similar lines. It is hardly unbelievable that sketches produced under these conditions would generate confusion about chronology.

The basic issue, then, is not whether Ives revised and altered scores, but whether this process was part of the "systematic pattern of falsification" (p. 463) that Solomon describes. It is clear that Ives was inconsistent, that he sometimes obscured facts, and that the circumstances of a creative existence outside the mainstream of the musical establishment promoted impassioned, possibly bitter responses that have clouded the evidentiary trail. But to explain Ives's motivations for these actions requires extensive testing of evidence and full accountability of Ives's entire body of work. Solomon does Ives studies a service by sparking the necessary debate and re-evaluation, even while his own hypotheses only intensify the mystique and amplify the unanswered questions.

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*To the Editor of the JOURNAL:*

J. PHILIP LAMBERT'S COMMUNICATION IS AN exercise in idealization. It seeks to perpetuate the Ives mythology by proposing "alternative explanations" to "a few" of the numerous anomalies, contradictions, and inaccuracies in Ives's writings which I described in "Charles Ives: Some Questions of Veracity." Of course, reasonable people may differ about the significance of the evidence I have presented. But the uncritical multiplication of benign alternatives will not carry us very far and, indeed, could well be indicative of a lack of objectivity.

I will respond briefly to each of Lambert's points. Then I will try to show that the contradictions in Ives's datings may be better understood within the