

AMERICAN PIANO MUSIC  
1900-1930  
Richard Zimdars, piano

Acknowledgements go to:

Richard Neher, who assigned the Copland *Variations* to me as a sophomore in 1966, and who introduced me to Dane Rudhyar; to my late teacher Béla Boszormenyi-Nagy, who assigned me the Ives Sonata No. 1 in 1971; to my late teacher John Simms, the first pianist to record the complete violin and piano sonatas of Ives; and to my late teacher James Avery, whose example gave me the greatest impetus to pursue performance of new music.

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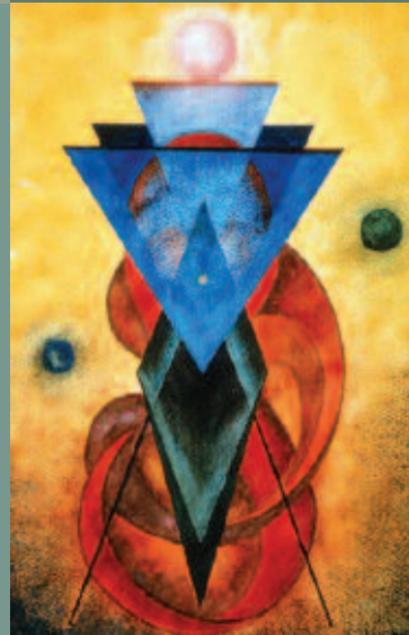
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CHARLES IVES  
Sonata No. 1 for Piano

HENRY COWELL  
Three Irish Legends

DANE RUDHYAR  
Third Pentagram — Release  
(First Complete Recording)

AARON COPLAND  
Piano Variations



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## THE MUSIC

### Charles Ives: Sonata No. 1 for Piano (1909-1919)

The four composers represented on this recording had contact with each other in various combinations. Carol Oja's *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (Oxford University Press) presents a superb picture of some of their interactions, attitudes, and work in a decade important for all of them. The following notes are indebted to Oja's book, Shanna McCalla's unpublished dissertation "The Piano Works of Dane Rudhyar," and the other books cited.



Charles Ives (1874-1954) was born in Danbury, Connecticut, population about 3,000 at the time. It had no cultural life to speak of except tea party musicales and town band concerts. Ives' father George, a bandmaster in the Civil War, was town band director and a church musician. According to Charles, his father had an inquiring and adventuresome musical mind.

Ives studied music at Yale, receiving a solid traditional training from composer Horatio Parker. While at Yale, Ives offered his keyboard skills to sacred and secular realms as a church organist and in bars, spelling the regular pianist with his own unique improvisations. His unexpected and unorthodox additions and improvisations in church services did not go unnoticed by the congregation.

Ives' career eventually took him into the life insurance industry, producing personal wealth for him. He married Harmony Twichell. They had no children, but adopted a daughter. Ives vigorously led a double life as a businessman and as a composer on weekends and holidays. This took a toll, and his health broke down in 1926-27. Thereafter he wrote no new music, but revised and organized his compositions and actively, but from behind the scenes, supported new American music.

Fame came late to Ives. In 1939 his second piano sonata, the *Concord Sonata*, was premiered by John Kirkpatrick to a great *New York Times* review. In 1947 he received the Pulitzer Prize for Music. William Masselos premiered the Sonata No. 1 for piano in 1949 in New York City to appreciative reviews in the New York press.

Larry Starr hit upon one reason why acceptance of Ives' music was so long in coming. Starr writes that Ives' works often exceed "the range of expectation" that we assume we will encounter in one piece. "...we can no longer speak of the music as being composed in a particular style. Rather, the music is composed of styles..." Ives created "challenging and unprecedented expressive and formal experiences out of the compositional manipulation of stylistic change." (Larry Starr, *A Union of Diversities: Style in the Music of Charles Ives* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 8-9.)

Dane Rudhyar visited Ives in the mid 1920s, and described Ives' manner at the piano: "When he played on the piano — it was a little upright — he danced, jumped on the seat, shouted, and sang. If Cowell had not told me that he had heart trouble, I would never have known it. He was very exuberant." (Vivian Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 171.) The pianistic demands in the first sonata reflect this exuberance: rapid repetitions of changing white-key tone clusters; throwing the hands rapidly to the extremes of the keyboard; rhythmic independence of the hands; and long stretches of loud chord playing. Considerable delicacy of touch is also required.

Ives scholar J. Peter Burkholder states that the first sonata shows Ives "investing American hymn tunes with all the seriousness and profundity of the greatest art music... Rather than pay homage to Europe, as in his First and Second Symphonies, he uses the techniques and ethos of European art music to pay homage to the music of America." (J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 246.) Ives recounts youthful memories of hearing hymns at outdoor religious services in his *Memos*:

I remember how the great waves of sound used to come through the trees — when things like *Beulah Land*,... *Nearer My God To Thee*,... *In the Sweet Bye and Bye* and the like were sung by thousands of "let out" souls... Father, who led the singing, sometimes with his cornet or voice, sometimes with both voice and arms, and sometimes in the quieter hymns with a French horn or violin, would always encourage the people to sing their own way... If they threw the poet or composer around a bit, so much the better for the poetry and the music. There was power and exultation in those great conclaves of sound from humanity. (Charles E. Ives, *Memos* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 132-133.)

Ives described the first sonata as follows:

"What is it all about? — Dan. S. asks. Mostly about the outdoor life in Conn. Villages in (the) eighties and nineties — impressions, remembrances, and reflections of country farmers in (the) Conn. Farmland... Fred's Daddy got so excited that he shouted when Fred hit a home run and the school won the baseball game. But Aunt Sarah was always humming *Where is my Wandering Boy*, after Fred and John left for a job in Bridgeport. There was usually a sadness — but not at the Barn Dances, with (their) jigs, foot jumping, and reels, mostly on winter nights. In the summer times, the hymns were sung outdoors. Folks sang (as *Ole Black Joe*) — and the Bethel Band (quickstep street marches) — and the people liked (to say) things as they wanted to say, and to do things as they wanted to, in their own way — and many old times... there were feelings, and of spiritual fervency!" (Ibid., 75.)

Ives also gave this brief scenario of the sonata: "the family together in the first and last movements, the boy away sowing his oats in the ragtimes, and the parental anxiety in the middle movement." (Ibid.) A movement-by-movement summary follows. Hymns used are italicized:

I: Adagio con moto; Allegro risoluto; Adagio cantabile. Sprawling, fragmented melodies; march section; cadenza "in a furious way;" *Lebanon* (first line is "I was a wand'ring sheep") and *Where's my Wandering Boy Tonight?* interrupted by Fred's home run (hit hard).

II: Allegro moderato; In the Inn. Mixture of sacred and secular. *Oh Happy Day*, which has the same opening melodic shape as *How Dry I Am*; *Bringing in the Sheaves*; ragtime barroom piano; chorus from *Welcome Voice* (tr. 2, 1:32 and 6:06).

III: Largo; Allegro; Largo, come prima. *What a Friend We have in Jesus*.

IV: Allegro; Presto, as fast as possible; Slow. Jumping, polyrhythmic introduction (noise of the revival wagon coming to town); barroom and gospel piano mixture; *Bringing in the Sheaves*; chorus from *Welcome Voice* (tr. 3, 3:48).

V: Andante maestoso; Allegretto; Adagio cantabile; Allegro; Andante. Eight sections (the first quoting *Lebanon*, tr. 5, :13), six of which are variations on a three-note motive from the main theme of the first movement, gather momentum until they dissolve into a gentle, slow version of *Oh Happy Day* (tr. 5, 5:23); the three-note motive is again developed and varied, leading to a coda and closing emphatically quoting *Lebanon* (tr. 5, 8:52) and the home run from the end of the first movement; an echo of the three-note motive occurs after a loud chordal "Amen."

The third line of *Lebanon* reads: "I was a wayward child, I did not love my home." This tune, placed so close to the "home run," could indicate the parents' desire to have the "boy away sowing his oats in the ragtimes" still run home to them. Ives wanted a son, and his nephews were very dear to him. But he knew his wife couldn't bear children. In the manuscript of the first sonata, a note in the margin reads "to our son."

### Henry Cowell: Three Irish Legends (1917-1922)

Henry Cowell (1897-1965) had parents with an educational philosophy of "complete freedom." His father was an Irish immigrant. Cowell picked up his interest in Irish folksongs from relatives and the influence of poet John Varian, who became a father figure to Cowell.



Cowell's use of special effects in his piano works such as tone clusters and strumming and plucking the strings inside the piano brought him great notoriety and good publicity. He made a Carnegie Hall debut in 1924, gave lecture-concert tours of the United States, and made five tours of Europe from 1923-33. He played for Arnold Schönberg's classes in Berlin in 1932. Anton Webern conducted his works in Vienna. In 1929 he was the first US composer to visit the USSR. Two of his piano pieces were published by the Soviet state publishing company.

In the United States, Cowell launched an extremely important publication in 1927, *New Music: A Quarterly of Modern Compositions*. In its first two years, its contents included first publications of works by Ives, Rudhyar, and Copland. Cowell lectured from 1941 to 1963 at the New School of Social Research in New York City. He also taught at Peabody Conservatory and Columbia University. John Cage, Lou Harrison, and George Gershwin were among his pupils.

The *Three Irish Legends* feature Cowell's famous use of tone clusters played gently or aggressively with the flat of the hand or the forearm. (Now no longer a novelty, Cowell's keyboard clusters still grab audiences' attention. After hearing me play these works in Ireland in St. Canice's Cathedral at the 1974 Kilkenny Arts Week, Peggy Butler, sister of Sir Tyrone Guthrie, commented: "Mr. Zimdars, I just love your clusters!") Each legend is printed in the score and acknowledged as follows: "Story according to John Varian."

"The Tides of Manaunaun: Manaunaun was the god of motion, and long before the creation, he sent forth tremendous tides, which swept to and fro through the universe, and rhythmically moved the particles and materials of which the gods were later to make the suns and worlds.

"The Hero Sun: The gods created all the suns and sent them out into space. But these suns, instead of lighting the universe, congregated closely together, enjoying each others society, and the universe was in darkness. Then one of the gods told the suns of a place where people were living in misery on account of the lack of light, and a strong young sun rose and hurled himself out into the darkness, until he came to this place, which was our earth; and the Hero Sun who sacrificed the companionship of the other suns to light the earth is our sun.

"The Voice of Lir: Lir of the half tongue was the father of the gods, and of the universe. When he gave the orders for creation, the gods who executed his commands understood but half of what he said, owing to his only having half a tongue; with the result that for everything that has been created there is an unexpressed and concealed counterpart, which is the other half of Lir's plan of creation.

### Dane Rudhyar: Third Pentagram — Release (1926)

Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985), born in Paris as Daniel Chennetière, began to compose in 1912, influenced by a good knowledge of Debussy. That year he played piano for chorus rehearsals of Debussy's *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*. In 1913 he attended the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Around this time he discovered Nietzsche, which led to two ideas affecting his life and works: 1) time



is cyclic and the Law of Cycles controls all civilizations and existence; 2) Western civilization is entering the Autumn of its existence.

Rudhyar, like Scriabin, grew interested in a synthesis of all the arts: music, dance, poetry, geometrical form, color, and incense. In 1917, a year after he came to the United States, his "Metachory" was premiered at New York's Metropolitan Opera house under Pierre Monteux on April, 4, 1917, the day the United States entered WWI. This score is now lost.

Space does not allow more than a summary of Rudhyar's subsequent fascinating life.

He continued his study of philosophy as well as Buddhism, alchemy, and Asian music. He painted and wrote poetry, science fiction, and books on astrology. He changed his given name. In Sanskrit, Rudhyar implies dynamic action, the color red related to the sign Aries, and the electrical power released during storms — the god Rudra. He added the first name Dane in 1926 for legal reasons when he became a US citizen. "Rudhyar" was his preferred appellation.

Rudhyar had contact with many significant composers: Cowell; Ruth Crawford Seeger; Roy Harris; Lou Harrison; Ives; Otto Luening; Leo Ornstein; and Carl Ruggles. These are some of the musicians who have performed his works over the past sixty years: conductors Dennis Russell Davies and Nicholas Slonimsky; pianists William Masselos, Dwight Peltzer, Michael Sellars, and Marcia Mikulak; the Kronos Quartet; and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Attention to Rudhyar has been sporadic over the years. High points include a recital of his works in Carnegie Recital Hall in 1950. Near the end of his life he was honored in many ways, including a Rudhyar Festival in 1977 at the University of Minnesota featuring the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Despite his wide range of activities, Rudhyar "considered himself first and foremost a composer. . . . He typically asserted that music made his life complete." (Deniz Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought, and Art* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 1.)

Rudhyar wrote this preface to his Pentagrams:

In performing these Pentagrams, and in general all of my music, the pianist should think of the piano as a miniature orchestra capable of producing a great variety of sonorities and impacts. The quality and psychic intensity of the tones are of the utmost importance, as the continuity and consistency of the musical flow depends on psychological more than formal factors. The performer should try to experience the tones, to allow them to resonate into his own inner being. This is a subjective rather than an objective type of music, even though its subjectivity is free from romantic self-indulgence and lengthy developments. It is a music of "tones" rather than one made up of "notes." Everything therefore depends on the quality and the sustained intensity — the "livingness" of the tones.

I have spoken of it as a "music of speech" to differentiate its substance from that of classical music (suites, sonatas, symphonies) which originally came from the dance and thus features even rhythms, rigid developmental patterns and repetitive statements. If the score contains bars (measures), these are merely for the sake of convenience. No strong or weak beats are implied. The flow of the music in most instances should have the freedom — yet the consistency and directiveness — of the beautiful recitation of a poem. A very sensitive use of the pedal is most important in order to control the resonance of the chords and avoid an undifferentiated roar in the bass register, as well as assist the phrasing. It can hardly be indicated in a strict sense because so much depends on the resonant quality of the piano.

The Pentagrams are “poems” using tone combinations, melodies and chords as words. But no literal intellectual or episodic meanings are implied; the titles used came to mind in most cases after the music was composed. They are merely suggestive or evocative.

“Gates” (Maestoso rubato) grows from its opening two notes, an ascending diminished fifth. Near the end (tr. 9, 1:44), the diminished fifth expands to a perfect fifth, and then contracts on the last chord formed from two diminished fifths. In contrast to “Gates,” “The Gift of Blood” (With compassion and tenderness) features a descending melodic motive. Diminished and perfect fifths are the chief components of the chords, the final chord containing both. “Pentecost” (with intense excitement) employs repeated chords, trills, and tremolos to reach a pulsating close again built on a final chord containing a diminished and perfect fifth. In its first chord, containing four perfect fifths, “Stars” (Andante contemplativo) foreshadows the triumph of the perfect fifth in the next movement. Its melody (marked “clear and pure,” and later “like a soft trumpet”) is set against an accompaniment built of perfect fifths. An attempt of the diminished fifth to intrude into the accompaniment is defeated at the loudest moment (tr. 12, 1:56), and “Stars” closes on its opening chord, expanded with an additional perfect fifth. “Sunburst” (Impetuous and radiant) releases trills, tremolos, repeated chords, and rolled chords covering the whole keyboard on its way to affirming the perfect fifth in its final chords, chords using the notes of the first chord of “Stars.”

#### Aaron Copland: Piano Variations (1930)

Aaron Copland’s *Piano Variations* is a landmark in the twentieth-century piano repertoire. Regarding his friendship with Copland, Leonard Bernstein, a ceaseless advocate for Copland’s music, wrote: “at its core those *Variations* have been ceaselessly hammering. Similarly with his music: from *Billy the Kid* to *Inscape*, from *El Salon Mexico* to the *Nonet*, those *Variations* are the key. There is always the prophetic statement, the reflective meditation, that curiously tender hesitancy; there are those angular leaps, those scherzando spasms.” (Aaron Copland, *El Salon México; Clarinet Concerto; Connotations; Music for the Theatre*, New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, Deutsche Grammophon CD 431-672-2, 1991.0.)



Some of Copland’s thoughts on the *Variations* appear in his letter to the poetess Lola Ridge (21 April 1931):

“To affirm the world is meaningless, unless one also affirms the tragic reality which is at the core of existence. To live on-to develop means, as I see it, to enter always more and more deeply into the very essence of tragic reality. The Ode [for orchestra] is an affirmation, of course, with tragic implications. The *Variations* also affirm, but the reality they affirm is more particularized, it is the reality of our own age and time,... I feel sure that there is a certain essence of contemporary reality which is expressed in the *Variations* which I was too young to grasp at the writing of the Ode.” (Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1984), 173.)

The opening four notes of the theme are the building blocks out of which the whole structure is chiseled. The twenty variations include contemplative, explosive, playful, and dance-like characteristics. Its coda presents a grand apotheosis of the opening theme (tr. 14, 11:29). The composer wrote: “From the start, my first major piece, the *Piano Variations*, had a “rightness.” The piece flowed naturally...” (ibid., 183.) Copland’s metronome marks in the score give the performer the guide to produce the overall flow of the piece.

## THE PERFORMER

**Richard Zimdars** is Despy Karlas Professor of Music in the Hugh Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia. His students have won prizes in national competitions, been awarded the Fulbright Grant for piano study in Germany, and hold college teaching positions in the United States, Brazil, and South Korea. He has given master classes at London’s Royal Academy of Music, Dublin’s Royal Irish Academy of Music, the Stuttgart and Detmold Musikhochschulen, and the San Francisco and Oberlin Conservatories. From 2006-2008 he served on the Fulbright National Screening Committee for piano applicants.



In 2001, as Director of the University of Georgia Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, he founded the series “UGA Concerts 1900+.” For these concerts he has conducted and coached works of Boulez, Carter, Crumb, Kupferman, Messiaen, Ohana, Ran, Huang Ruo, Scelsi, Stockhausen, Wolpe, and Isang Yun.

Zimdars has performed and broadcast in Europe and the United States. His awards include a National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalist Grant, first prize in the Music Teachers National Association Collegiate Artist Competition, and a Fulbright Grant for piano study in Germany. Bay Cities, Spectrum, ACA, and Albany released his performances of the four violin and piano sonatas of Charles Ives, the complete piano music of Roy Harris, and solo and chamber works of Randall Thompson, Leslie Bassett, and Claude Baker.

Zimdars’ articles have appeared in *Clavier*, *The Piano Quarterly*, *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, and *The American Music Teacher*, for which he served on the editorial board from 2002-05. Indiana University Press has published his translations titled *The Piano Master Classes of Hans von Bülow* and *The Piano Master Classes of Franz Liszt*. He has lectured on the piano teaching of Franz Liszt in Budapest, Dublin, Canada, and throughout the United States. He is the host and artistic director for the 2011 American Liszt Society Festival celebrating the bicentennial of Liszt’s birth.