

Program Notes- *America: Land of Transformation*, March 18, 2018
Symphony No. 3, "The Camp Meeting"
Charles Ives (1874-1954)

This symphony is notable for its use of a chamber orchestra, rather than the complete orchestra Ives used for his other symphonies. The symphony is also short, lasting approximately twenty minutes. The score calls for a relatively small orchestra: flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon; two horns, trombone; and a quintet of strings. Charles Ives composed the Symphony No. 3 between 1901 and 1904.

The work was performed for the first time on April 5, 1946, [more than forty years after its composition!] in New York by the New York Little Symphony with Lou Harrison conducting. The score was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1947.

Ives described the Third Symphony in his autobiographical notes: "The themes are mostly based around hymns and from organ pieces played in Central Presbyterian Church around 1901. Lead pencil score was finished about 1901. But the final ink score (now lost) had, I think, a few of less off-shadow parts in it, and also church bells, that are crossed out in the old score...The middle movement was the 'Children's Day Parade' (for string quartet and organ), played in Central Presbyterian Church, New York, for the organ alone, 1902. Scoring of this symphony was finished about 1904; copied out in full in 1911."

The first movement, *Andante maestoso*, is called 'Old Folks Gatherin'', suggesting a hymn sing. It is based on Ives' organ piece from 1901, and it also uses three hymn tunes. The second movement is called 'Children's Day', marked *Allegro*. The opening theme suggests a derivation from the opening of the American melody, arranged by Lowell Mason and set to William Cowper's hymn "There is a fountain filled with blood." The middle section is music often heard in Ives's work- a march. At the end, the opening metrical returns and is treated in an imitative manner. The third movement, called 'Communion', is marked *Largo*, and is based on an organ piece by Ives written for Communion service in 1901. The melody is built freely on the hymn tune, "Just as I am." The music is contrapuntal, yet lyrical. At the end, the distant sound of church bells is introduced *ppppp* (*pianississississimo!*), basically an instruction for the bells to be inaudibly soft.

Many of Ives' explorations into new harmonic and contrapuntal possibilities antedated the work of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. A long list of compositions, most of them written before 1920, includes four symphonies, chamber music, two piano sonatas, five violin and piano sonatas, and many songs and choral pieces, as well as a number of other orchestral works.

For this symphony, Charles Ives drew upon material from earlier liturgical organ works. Though finished in 1904 and revised in 1909, the Third Symphony was not performed until 1946, subsequently winning the 1947 Pulitzer Prize.

Ives' revisions sometimes amounted to going back and adding dissonance where he felt the music was "too soft" or "easy on the ears." He is often quoted as complaining about the conservative musical establishment, "Can't they take a dissonance like a man?"

Pilgrims (1958) - Ned Rorem (born 1923)

Widely regarded as the leading contemporary American composer of art songs, Ned Rorem is also known as a writer of essays and other works. Born in Richmond, Indiana, he received his early music training in Chicago. He studied composition with the leading American composers of the 20th century, including Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, and David Diamond. He has lived and worked in New York City for the last 60 years.

This work, *Pilgrims*, was written for string orchestra lasting about six minutes. The beginning is dramatic, with trills in the upper strings and hard accents in the lower strings. After that “wake-up call,” the music smooths out and displays its underlying tonal nature. The intensity of the opening returns from time to time, but the overall impression is one of calm and beautiful melodic flow.

Film Score to "The City"

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Discovering how to write music for films was a learning experience for many composers, including Aaron Copland. Copland mastered the medium quickly, noting while writing his first score, for the 44-minute documentary film *The City*: “I [have] learned the most basic rule: a film is not a concert; the music is meant to help the picture.” *The City* made a big impression at the 1939 New York World’s Fair and became a classic of its genre. The film follows a basic tripartite structure. 1) First we see a nostalgic but vanished American Eden in the form of an old New England town and its self-reliant community. 2) The most powerful and lengthiest part of the film descends into the darkest ills of the industrial age, with images that range from Dickensian squalor to poisonous slag heaps. The contemporary urban plight is also illustrated by episodes of mechanized, tachycardia-inducing modern life – and the futile attempts to escape it in autos that jam the roads. 3) A utopian – but practicable – alternative occupies the final section, with its focus on the “new city” which is planned rationally and humanistically.

The score follows the logic of the film quite closely: the opening section has a quiet, relaxed, almost pastoral quality in keeping with the images of the calm New England town. When the film reflects the industrial age, the music becomes dissonant and emotionally distant. The third section brings in a new concept: new cities, built on a more human scale, with respect for the environment and for the city’s residents. As Thomas May, writes, “A utopian – but practicable – alternative” is demonstrated. The music changes from the proto-minimalism of the scenes of urban squalor and rush-rush haste, to a playful, nostalgic view of how it was, and how it can, or could be again.