

CHARLES IVES, GEORGES BIZET, EDWARD ELGAR

COMMENTARY, TEXTS, AND TRANSLATIONS

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CHARLES IVES (1874-1954)

"Some have written a book for money; I have not. Some for fame; I have not. Some for love; I have not...In fact, gentle borrower, I have not written a book at all—I have merely cleaned house. All that is left is out on the clothesline."

—"Postface to *114 Songs* and letter to the Sun," in *Essays Before a Sonata, The Majority, and Other Writings*, by Charles Ives, ed. Howard Boatwright (WW. Norton, 1970)

SONGS MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME (1895)

—ADOLF HEYDUK (1835-1923, TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY NATALIE MACFARREN)

Songs my mother taught me, in days long vanished
Seldom from her eyelids were the teardrops banished.
Now I teach my children each melodious measure;
Often the tears are flowing from my memory's treasure.

This song was dedicated to Ives' mother, Molly Parmalee Ives. The daughter of a local Connecticut farm family, Molly had only limited education and no interest in music, and she seems to have busied herself almost exclusively with domestic concerns. She rates little more than a mention in the biographies and Ives' own memos, but his affection for her is evident. (Rodda, <https://songofamerica.net>)

THE THINGS OUR FATHERS LOVED (AND THE GREATEST OF THESE WAS LIBERTY) (1905)

—CHARLES IVES

I think there must be a place in the soul
all made of tunes, of tunes of long ago;
I hear the organ on the Main Street corner,
Aunt Sarah humming Gospels; Summer evenings,
The village cornet band, playing in the square.
The town's Red, White and Blue,
all Red, White and Blue; Now! Hear the words
But they sing in my soul of the things our Fathers loved.

During this time period Ives settled into life as an insurance agent, abandoning a career in music. With his day job secured and no need for a church job, Ives had abundant time to compose during evenings and weekends. Ives also rekindled a friendship turned courtship with Harmony Twitchell, although it was slow going during to Ives' shyness. They eventually married in June 1908.

This style of song was a departure from the traditional focus on folk music towards popular music, including Stephen Foster songs, patriotic songs "The Battle Cry of Freedom," "My Old Kentucky Home," "On the Banks of the Wabash," gospel songs, and hymn tunes "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," and "In the Sweet By and By." The majority of urban Americans were more familiar with these genres of music, and were several generations removed from folk music.

MEMORIES (1897)

A. VERY PLEASANT

B. RATHER SAD

A. Very Pleasant

We're sitting in the opera house;
We're waiting for the curtain to arise
With wonders for our eyes;
We're feeling pretty gay,
And well we may,
"O, Jimmy, look!" I say,
"The band is tuning up
And soon will start to play."
We whistle and we hum,
Beat time with the drum.

We're sitting in the opera house;
We're waiting for the curtain to arise
With wonders for our eyes,
A feeling of expectancy,
A certain kind of ecstasy,
Expectancy and ecstasy... Sh's's's. "Curtain!"

B. Rather Sad

From the street a strain on my ear doth fall,
A tune as threadbare as that "old red shawl,"
It is tattered, it is torn,
It shows signs of being worn,
It's the tune my Uncle hummed from early morn,
'Twas a common little thing and kind 'a sweet,
But 'twas sad and seemed to slow up both his feet;
I can see him shuffling down
To the barn or to the town,
A humming.

Ives wrote this while he was still a student at Yale, the two songs reflect the breadth of his personal approach to music at an early age. "Memories" is comprised of two highly contrasting sections, so distinct from each other, in fact, as to constitute nearly independent songs. (The date "1897" appears at the beginning of both sections, supporting the idea of their separate origins within the same year.)

The first section ("Very Pleasant") is a faithful evocation of the breathless anticipation of waiting for a stage performance to begin. The section is full of whimsical touches such as whistling and even rapidly declaimed tongue-twisters ("expectancy and ecstasy"). This excitement reaches a sudden halt ("Curtain!"), and we immediately move into the featured act: the performance of a slow, nostalgic melody (marked "Rather Sad") in the style of a Victorian parlor song, the lyrics of which (in typical Ives fashion), are curious in that they do not quite make sense, but are nonetheless highly evocative of the touching and

somewhat nostalgic sentiments associated with songs of this genre. (Library of Congress, www.songofamerica.net)

SERENITY (1919)

—JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER (1807-1892 EXCERPTED FROM THE POET "THE BREWING OF SOMA")

O, Sabbath rest of Galilee!
O, calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee,
The silence of eternity
Interpreted by love.
Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess,
The beauty of thy peace.

Serenity is the sixth song of Ives' set *Seven Songs for Voice and Piano*, published in 1930. Composition date listed as 1919. The song has a subtitle Unison Chant, and Ives remarks that the song is to be sung "very slowly, quietly and sustained, with little or no change of tempo or volume throughout." Whittier was a Quaker as well as an important figure in the abolition of slavery.

THE HOUSATONIC AT STOCKBRIDGE (1921)

—ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON (1858-1937)

Contented river! In thy dreamy realm
The cloudy willow and the plummy elm:
Thou beautiful!
From ev'ry dreamy hill
what eye but wanders with thee at thy will,
Contented river!
And yet over-shy
To mask thy beauty from the eager eye;
Hast thou a thought to hide from field and town?
In some deep current of the sunlit brown
Ah! there's a restive ripple,
And the swift red leaves
September's firstlings faster drift;
Wouldst thou away, dear stream?
Come, whisper near!
I also of much resting have a fear:
Let me tomorrow thy companion be,
By fall and shallow to the adventurous sea!

In this song, Ives sought to capture American life, especially American experiences with music, in a more directly programmable way. The Housatonic at Stockbridge evokes a walk that Ives shared with Harmony soon after their marriage. The main melody harmonized with simple tonal triads, suggests a hymn wafting from a church across the river, while repeating figures in distant tonal and rhythmic regions subtly change

over time, conveying a sense of the mists and rippling water. Most of Ives' music about life experiences is composed in layers, distinguished by timbres, rhythms, pitches and dynamic contrasts to present a three-dimensional experience. (Burkholder, *Ives*, www.oxfordmusiconline.org)

HE IS THERE! (FROM *THREE SONGS ABOUT WAR*, 1917)

The United States' entrance into World War I in April 1917 inspired Ives to write the song "In Flanders Fields" to a text by a Mutual medical examiner, John McCrae. He is There! is another song in the collection *Three Songs About War*.

Ives wrote his own text, in strophic form and free verse, with no apparent rhyme scheme.

1st Stanza:

Fifteen years ago today, a little Yankee, little Yankee boy,
Marched beside his grand-daddy,
In the Decoration Day parade.
The village band would play those old war tunes,
And the G.A.R. would shout,
"Hip-hip hooray!" in the same old way
As it sounded on the old campground.

1st Chorus:

That boy has sailed o'er the ocean;
He is there, he is there, he is there.
He's fighting for the right, but when it comes to might,
He is there, he is there, he is there.
As the Allied beat up all the warlords,
He'll be there, he'll be there, and then the
World will shout the battle cry of freedom,
Tenting on the new campground.

2nd Stanza:

Fifteen years ago today, a little Yankee, with a German name
Heard the tale of "forty-eight";
Why his grand-daddy joined Uncle Sam.
His father fought that medieval stuff
And he will fight it now.
"Hip-hip hooray!" this is the day
When he'll finish up that aged job.

2nd Chorus:

That boy has sailed o'er the ocean, etc...

3rd Stanza:

There's a time in ev'ry life
When it's do or die, and our Yankee boy
Does his bit that we may live
In a world where all may have a "say."
He's conscious always of his country's aim,
Which is Liberty for all,
"Hip-hip Hooray!" is all he'll say,
As he marches to the Flanders front.

3rd Chorus:

That boy has sailed o'er the ocean; etc...

Coda:

Tenting on a new campground.
Tenting tonight, tenting on a new campground,
For it's rally round the Flag boys,
It's rally once again,
Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom.

The first stanza recalls a memory, when a boy of about fifteen is with his grandfather at a Decoration Day parade commemorating the Civil War dead. The G.A.R. stands for the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans that was the precursor to the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The chorus brings the boy to the present as he has left for war in Europe.

The second stanza is also a memory, but with more context. The boy, "with a German name," recalls his grandfather leaving Germany for the United States after the failed 1848 German revolution. Many German revolutionists fought for free speech, trials by jury, and popular representation.

The final verse is the boy, now a soldier—being "passed the torch" from his grandfather to "finish up that aged job," and defeat the Germans, thus bringing "Liberty for all in a world where all may have a say." (Brandt, R. Lynne (Rebecca Lynne). *Transcendentalism and Intertextuality in Charles Ives's War Songs of 1917*, thesis, December 1998; Denton, Texas. (digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc278789/: accessed February 18, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, Digital Library, digital.library.unt.edu; .

GEORGES BIZET (1838-1875)

Georges Bizet might have been considered to be one of the greatest French composers of the end of the nineteenth century had it not been for his untimely death at the age of 36 in 1875. Bizet's opera *Carmen* was premiered three months before his death and is still one of the most important operas in the repertory in modern times. The *Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe* is considered to be one of the most masterful of the two dozen *mélodies* Bizet published.

ADIEUX DE L'HÔTESSE ARABE (1866)

In the words of the pre-eminent collaborative pianist Graham Johnson:

"Bizet's republican political sympathies are covertly emphasized by his decision to lavish his musical powers on a lyric by the most famous exile from the corrupt France of Napoléon III. It is without question the composer's greatest song. The piano's seductively writhing ostinato cradles a vocal line which swoons and sways on the desert sands in the most sultry fashion.

Despite the fact that it is set in French-speaking North Africa, this is perhaps the most effective of all the 'oriental' evocations in the *mélodie* repertoire, Ravel's orchestra-accompanied *Shéhérazade* excepted. It abandons the rigid strophic form of the stultifying and unvarying couplet tradition, and the composer's utter originality seems to have been genuinely inspired by the words – like the young Schubert led to higher expression by Goethe.

The song contains the louche sexual promise of the colonies set against a background of monotonous heat and lassitude. The lower pedal (also typical of Gounod) enables the vocal line to undulate mesmerically, as if we were watching (or hearing) a slow belly dance. A composer as different as Francis Poulenc expressed his admiration for this Arab hostess in his *Journal de mes mélodies*: Bizet 'knew how to vary a strophic song in detail. That is often what is missing in Gounod'.

Certainly, the older composer never dared to compose a piece so explicitly sexual, for we sense that there is nothing that this girl would not do in order to keep the young Frenchman; indeed, we are musically invited to imagine the sensual implications of the girl's pleading. It also emphasizes Winton Dean's observation that Bizet was not at his best with conventional love music but always more inspired by what might be termed the 'forbidden', or the unusual, in relationships between men and women. (*Carmen* is the ultimate case in point, and Dean also tells us that Bizet had a great enthusiasm for prostitutes.)

Although the composer ruthlessly cut four of Hugo's strophes, and adapted some of the remainder, we have here a hauntingly hypnotic masterpiece, a true collaboration between a great poet and a great musician despite the fact they never met. The direction on the last page which instructs the singer to use a voice 'broken by sobs' gives us a glimpse of the musical manners of another epoch, impossible to reproduce in our own without raising an eyebrow, or even a laugh."

(from notes by Graham Johnson © 1998 https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W4842_GBAJY9797603)

ADIEUX DE L'HÔTESSE ARABE (1866)

Puisque rien ne t'arrête en cet heureux pays,
Ni l'ombre du palmier, ni le jaune maïs,
Ni le repos, ni l'abondance,
Ni de voir, à ta voix, battre le jeune sein
De nos soeurs dont les soirs, le
tournoyant essaim
Couronne un coteau de sa danse,
Adieu, beau voyageur! Hélas adieu!
Oh! que n'es-tu de ceux
Qui donnent pour limite à leurs pieds
paresseux
Leur toit de branches ou de toiles!
Qui rêveurs, sans en faire, écoutant les
récits,
Et souhaitent le soir, devant leur porte
assis,
De s'en aller dans les étoiles!
Hélas! Adieu! beau voyageur!

Si tu l'avais voulu, peut-être une de
nous,
Ô beau jeune homme, eût aimé te servir
à genoux
Dans nos huttes toujours ouvertes;
Elle eût fait, en berçant ton sommeil de
ses chants,
Pour chasser de ton front les moucheron
méchants,
Un éventail de feuilles vertes.

Si tu reviens pas, songe un peu quelque
fois
Aux filles du désert, soeurs à la douce
voix,
Qui dansent pieds nus sur la dune.
Ô beau jeune homme blanc, bel oiseau
passager,
Souviens-toi, souviens-toi, car peut-être,
ô rapide étranger,
Tons souvenir reste à plus d'une!
Hélas! Adieu! Adieu! bel étranger!
Hélas! Adieu! Souviens-toi!

Victor Hugo

THE FAREWELL OF THE ARAB HOSTESS

Since nothing will keep you in the happy
land,
neither the shade of the palm tree, nor
the yellow corn,
neither rest, nor abundance, nor the
sight, at your voice,
of the young beating hearts of our sisters
who, at night, in a whirling swarm,
crown the hillside with their dance,
farewell, handsome traveller! Alas,
farewell!
Oh! if only you were one of those
whose lazy feet are bounded by their
roof of branches or canvas!
Who idly dreaming, loisten unmoved to
talkes,
and at eventide, sitting before their door,
wish to be off and away among the stars!
Alas! Farewell! Farewell, handsome
traveller!

Had you wished it, one of us perhaps
o young man, would have liked to serve
you on bended knee
in our ever open huts;
while lulling your sleep with her songs
she would have made,
to drive the tiresome gnats from your
brow,
a fan of green leaves.

If you do not come back, dream a little
from time to time
of the daughters of the desert, sweet-
voiced sisters,
who dance barefoot on the sandhills,
o handsome white man, fine bird of
passage,
remember, remember, for perhaps
o quickly passing stranger,
your memory remains with more than
one!
Alas! Farewell! Farewell, handsome
stranger! Alas! Remember! Farewell!

EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934)

His abundant invention and largeness of vision place him high among European Romantic artists and at the peak of British music of his time.

He drew inspiration from the culture and landscape of his own country, resourcefulness from the study of his continental colleagues; and contributed to all the major forms except opera, creating a significant body of symphonic literature, oratorio, and in his popular music a style of direct national appeal. (Diana McVeigh, *Edward Elgar*, www.oxfordmusiconline.com, published January 11, 2001)

SEA PICTURES (1899)

An orchestral cycle of five songs, Elgar composed this work on his 1894 Broadwood Square piano, originally set in a higher key for soprano, but were transposed to a lower key for the orchestral version, largely due to the request of famed English contralto Clara Butt (1872-1936). The cycle premiered in October 1899 at the Norfolk and Norwich festival with Elgar conducting, and Dame Clara dressed as a mermaid. Yes, a mermaid.

The Sea that the text evokes largely represented the "Great Unknown," the first (Sea-Slumber Song) takes the sea's viewpoint, the remainder of the songs (2. In Haven and 4. Where Corals Lie are of a bucolic, peaceful nature, then 3. Sabbath Morning at Sea and 5. The Swimmer being passionate and majestic) represent opposing human sentiments. All five texts are written by different poets.

I. SEA SLUMBER SONG

—HON. RODEN NOEL (1834-1894)

SEA birds are asleep,
The world forgets to weep,
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song
On the shadowy sand
Of this elfin land;
"I the mother mild,
Hush thee, O my child,
Forget the voices wild!
Isles in elfin light
Dream, the rocks and caves,
Lulled by whispering waves,
Veil their marbles bright,
Foam glimmers faintly white
Upon this shelly sand
Of this elfin land;
Sea-sound, like violins,
To slumber woos and wins,
I murmur my soft slumber-song;
Leave woes, and wails, and sins,
Ocean's shadowy might
Breathes good-night.
Good night!

II. IN HAVEN (CAPRI)

—MRS. C.A. ELGAR (1848-1920)

Closely let me hold thy hand,
Storms are sweeping sea and land;
Love alone will stand.

Closely cling for waves beat fast,
Foam-flakes cloud the hurrying blast;
Love alone will last.

Kiss my lips, and softly say,
Joy sea-swept, may fade to-day;
Love alone will stay.

III. SABBATH MORNING AT SEA —MRS. BROWNING (1806-1861)

The ship went on with solemn face:
To meet the darkness on the deep,
The solemn ship went onward.
I bowed down weary in the place;
For parting tears and present sleep
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!
The waters around me, turbulent,
The skies, impassive o'er me,
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,
As glorified by even the intent
Of holding the day glory!

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day,
The sea sings round me while ye roll
Afar the hymn, unaltered,
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,
And bless me deeper in your soul
Because your voice has faltered

And though this sabbath comes to me
Without the stolid minister,
And chanting congregation,
God's Spirit shall give comfort. He
Who brooded soft on waters drear,
Creator on creation.

He shall assist me to look higher,
Where keep the saints, with harp and song,
An endless sabbath morning,
And, on that sea commixed with fire,
Oft drop their eyelids raised too long
To the full Godhead's burning

IV. WHERE CORALS LIE —RICHARD GARNETT (1835-1906)

The deeps have music soft and low
When winds awake the airy spry,
It lures me, lures me on to go
And see the land where corals lie.

By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When night is deep, and moon is high,
That music seeks and finds me still,
And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well;
But far the rapid fancies fly
To rolling worlds of wave and shell,
And all the land where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,
Thy smile is like a morning sky,
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go
And see the land where corals lie.

V. THE SWIMMER

—A. LINDSAY GORDON (1833-1870)

With short, sharp, violent lights made vivid,
To southward far as the sight can roam,
Only the swirl of the surges livid,
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.
Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,
And the rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,
Waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward,
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, grey coast and the seaboard ghastly,
And shores trod seldom by feet of men—
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast lie,
They have lain embedded these long years ten.
Love! When we wandered here together,
Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather,
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer, and shores were firmer—
The blue sea over the blight sand roll'd;
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold.

* * * * *

So, girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,
And strong winds treading the swift waves under
The flying rollers with frothy feet.
One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims on
The sky line, staining the green gulf crimson,
A death-stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun
That strikes through his stormy winding sheet.

O brave white horses! You gather and gallop,
The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins;
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
In your hollow backs, on your high-arched manes.
I would ride as never man has ridden
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden;
To gulfs foreshadow'd through strifes forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.