

CHARLES IVES

THE CELESTIAL COUNTRY (1899)

London Symphony Orchestra

The Schütz Choir of London,

Roger Norrington, conductor

Hazel Holt, soprano; Alfreda Hodgson, alto;

John Elwes, tenor; John Noble, baritone

Conducted by Harold Farberman

CHARLES IVES (1874-1954) is known as a daring innovator and a gifted, though sometimes perplexing, painter of musical scenes. The scenes he painted were of New England life and times, recollected from his boyhood around Danbury, Connecticut. The music that resulted became the standard for the “American” sound in symphonic music, while its montage effects, with their multiple harmonies, conflicting rhythms and accoustical overlays, have served as a model for the music of many of our most notable composers through the late '60s and into the '70s as well.

THE CELESTIAL COUNTRY is quite another matter — a fulsome religious cantata in the Old World choral tradition, featuring solo singers, a solo string quartet and organ obbligato. On present evidence, it is the last remaining Ives work of major proportions remaining to be recorded.

THE CELESTIAL COUNTRY was begun in 1898, the year Ives finished Yale and his studies with Horatio Parker, and was completed the next year, when he was starting his three years as organist of New York's Central Presbyterian Church. Program leaflets exist of a performance there in 1902.

Stylistically, the work bears the stamp of the Yale period. It is a companion piece to the First Symphony, and shares with it a marked youthful enthusiasm and vigor, along with what is now regarded as a very un-Ivesian sentimentality. Both works are alike in their scoring for strings, in melodic contours and harmonic values. THE CELESTIAL COUNTRY departs from the earlier tradition in its pre-jazz syncopated treatment of the words “angels” and “pilgrims” in the first and last sections. The tenor aria, in section six, on the other hand, forecasts the religious-spirituality of the middle section of his subsequent General Booth Enters Into Heaven.

THE CELESTIAL COUNTRY presents no thorny listening problems. It shows almost none of Ives' later audaciousness, unless the unexpected richness of its overflowing sentiments can be called audacious. Nor is there overt Americana to be found here, unless the words of the text, all but the last two lines taken from a hymn by Henry Alford, call up visions of a Chautauqua of the spirit:

No. 1. Prelude, Trio and Chorus

Far o'er you horizon
Rise city towers
Where our God abideth
That fair home is ours:

Flash the streets with jasper
Shine the gates with gold;
Flows the gladd'ning river
Shedding joys untold.

Thither, onward, thither,
In the spirit's might
Pilgrims, pilgrims, pilgrims
Forward into light.

Into God's high temple
Onward as we press
Beauty spreads around us
Born of holiness.

Arch and vault and carving
Softened words and holy prayer
Every thought upraising
To our city Bright

Where the tribes assemble
Round the throne of light
Thither, onward thither
In the spirit's might.

No. 2. Aria for Baritone

Naught that country needeth
Of these aisles of stone
Where the God-head dwelleth
Temple there is none;

All the saints that
In these courts have stood
Are but babes and feeding
On children's food

On through darkness
On through sign and token
On through stars amidst the night
Forward into light.

No. 3. Quartet

Seek the things before us
Not a look behind
Burns the fiery pillar
At our army's head.

Who shall dream of shrinking
By our Captain led?
Burns the fiery pillar
At our army's head.

Forward through the desert
Through the toil and fight
Jordan flows before us
Zion beams with light.

Forward when in childhood
Buds the infant mind
All through youth and manhood
Not a thought behind.

Speed through realms of nature
Climb the paths of grace
Faint not til in glory
Gleams our Father's face.

Forward all through life time
Climb from height to height
Til the head be hoary
Til the eve be light.

No. 4. Intermezzo for String Quartet

No. 5. Double chorus, a cappella

Glories on glories hath our Lord prepared
To be shared by souls that love Him.

Eye hath not beheld Him
Ear hath never heard
Nor of these hath uttered
Thought or speech a word

Forward marching eastward
Where the heav'n is bright
Til the veil is lifted
Til our faith be sight.

No. 6. Aria for Tenor

Forward flock of Jesus
Salt of all the earth
Til each yearning purpose
Spring to glorious birth.

Sick, they ask for healing
Blind, they grope for day
Pour upon the nations
Wisdom's loving ray.

Forward out of error
Leave behind the night
Forward till the veil be lifted
Climb from height to height.

No. 7. Chorale and Finale

To the eternal Father
Loudest anthems raise
To the Son and Spirit
Echo songs of praise

To the Lord of Glory
Blessed three in one
Be by men and angels
Endless honor done

Weak are earthly praises
Dull the songs of night
Forward into triumph
Forward into light.

Suffice it to say that Ives' music is perfectly wedded to Alford's text.

HAROLD FARBERMAN is musical director of the Oakland, California Symphony Orchestra. In the course of his busy career as composer-conductor, he has built a reputation as a first-rank Ivesian, having recorded more of Ives' music than any other conductor. His conducting may also be heard on Andrew Imbrie's Symphony No. 3 (CRI SD 308).

THE SCHÜTZ CHOIR OF LONDON was formed ten years ago to perform Baroque music, but has since become known as a leading performer of music of all periods. ROGER NORRINGTON, who prepared it for the present recording, is the choir's conductor. He has also conducted the major orchestras and opera companies in Great Britain and on the continent.

The LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA is one of the world's great orchestras.

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(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)