

Charles Ives' *Decoration Day* – A Conductor's Guide

Brian Coffill
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Charles Ives' *Decoration Day* – A Conductor's Guide

Charles Ives' *Decoration Day*, a dreamy haze of almost-forgotten memories and half-remembered tunes, depicts communal recollections of the American Civil War through the eyes of a Connecticut youth at the end of the nineteenth century. The work, originally published as the second movement of Ives' *New England Holidays Symphony* for orchestra, is a musical representation of the composer's childhood memories of that eponymous holiday.

This paper links Ives' own descriptions of the composition, his childhood, and his memories of the somber annual memorial to the musical gestures in the score, synthesizing extant scholarship with practical analysis and performance experience. Through better understanding Charles' connections to the Civil War, specifically by way of his father, the bandmaster George Ives, *Decoration Day* comes to life as a stirring epitaph for a boy's long-lost hero.

The *New England Holidays Symphony* is also known alternatively as *A Symphony: New England Holidays*, *A New England Holiday Symphony*, and

Holiday Symphony, all somewhat despite Ives' own etymological preferences.¹

This larger work surrounding *Decoration Day* was the fifth of six such major symphonic compositions for the groundbreaking American modernist composer, including his unfinished *Universe Symphony*. While his first two symphonies might fit the late-nineteenth century mold, Ives began tinkering with the form upon beginning his third such monumental work, *the Camp Meeting*, with greater use of programmatic and borrowed elements. This compositional shift, with Ives moving away from his musical contemporaries and towards his own unique style, found full fruition in his fifth, *New England Holidays*.

The four movements of *New England Holidays* depict seasonally-associated memories of the composer's youth in Gilded Age, late nineteenth-century Danbury, Connecticut, weaving familiar melodies of his childhood through tone-painted vignettes; perhaps this is Ives' take on the familiar concept of the "Four Seasons." Beginning with *Washington's Birthday*, representing Winter, *New England Holidays* then moves through the Spring of *Decoration*

¹ Ives took particular umbrage with regards to certain musical traditions, music criticism, and individual critics themselves, stating, "These four pieces together were called a symphony, and later just a set of pieces, because I was getting somewhat tired of hearing the lily boys ["lily boys" being one of Ives' many disparaging terms for those conventional, conservative musicians and critics] say, "This is a symphony! – Mercy! – Where is the first theme of 12 measures in C major? – Where are the next 48 measures of nice (right kind of) development leading nicely into the second theme in G?" (second donkey contrasting with Ass #1) – the nice German recipe, etc. – give it a ride, Arthur!-to hell with it! – Symphony = "with sounds" = my Symphony!" Charles Ives, *Charles E. Ives – Memos*, ed. John Kirkpatrick, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 94.

Day, the Summer of *The Fourth of July*, and, finally, the Autumn of *Thanksgiving and Forefather's Day*. The Danbury in question was a booming nineteenth-century factory town in southwestern Connecticut, famous worldwide for its hat industry.² The small city was only a short train ride from New York, and rapidly expanding as part of the post-Civil War industrial northeast.

Scholars differ on the dates that should be assigned to many of Ives' works, and *New England Holidays* is no different. The composer constantly tinkered with his compositions throughout his life, adding and subtracting, embellishing dissonances, and tossing new snippets of melodies into his manuscripts, making it difficult for musicologists to definitively date any such work.³ Much like Stravinsky, Ives undertook many larger revisions of his early works late in his life; in the case of *New England Holidays*, various dates have been assigned to each movement. Interestingly, the critical edition of *Decoration Day* by James B. Sinclair, approved by the Charles Ives Society, lists the definitive composition dates of each movement stretching across a decade at the start of the twentieth century. Sinclair also asserts that the four

² The Danbury High School mascot is the "Mad Hatter," cheekily evoking both the Lewis Carroll character and the mercury poisoning suffered by laborers in the hat industry.

³ A fascinating way to conceive how Ives' compositions evolved is to listen to recordings of his art songs in different contexts. Comparing a "professional" recording of *They Are There!* to the wild, rambling, unhinged performance of the composer himself on the album *Ives Plays Ives* is an enlightening experience, and provides a candid glimpse into the mind of the unique musician.

movements, composed out of order, may not have fit together into a larger form in Ives' mind until the completion of *Decoration Day*.⁴

Ives began composing *Decoration Day* in the fall of 1912, mere weeks after finishing *The Fourth of July*, but years after the completion of the other movements, *Washington's Birthday* (1909) and *Thanksgiving and Forefathers Day* (1904). Multiple revisions occurred to each movement over the succeeding years (as mentioned previously, Ives was wont to add increasing dissonance to his work as he grew older), and eventually the entire set was pieced together with the heading, "arranged from Orchestra Set 'Decoration Day' Holiday Symphony," scrawled on the first page in Ives own hand, circa 1930.⁵ John Kirkpatrick suggests considering *Decoration Day's* gestation stretching over a period of twenty-seven years, extending from Ives' youth, in 1886, through his mature period, in 1913, given the earlier material from Ives' catalog that forms such a prominent portion of the work.⁶ Potential evidence for later revisions can be seen in quotations of the George M. Cohen tune, *Over There* (discussed later), a popular song written in 1917, in reference to the First World War. This is a seemingly impossible quotation for the Ives work in question, considering it was composed in 1913, but *Over There* was a favorite musical quotation of Ives

⁴ James B. Sinclair, Preface to *Decoration Day*, (New York: Peer International, 1989), iii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁶ Ives, *Memos*, ed. Kirkpatrick, 102.

later in his life,⁷ and, as previously discussed, it is known that he undertook at least some revision of *Decoration Day* in 1930, just prior to its premiere.

Some decades after Ives completed, and then later revised the *Decoration Day* portion of the symphony, Jonathan Elkus transcribed the movement in 1962 for the Yale University band.⁸ In fact, the composer's own writings support future musicians, such as Elkus, transcribing and programming a sole movement of the larger work. "These four pieces," Ives stated in his *Memos*, "movements of a *Holiday Symphony*, take about an hour, and although they were first called together a symphony, at the same time they are separate pieces and can be thought of and played as such – (and also, and as naturally, be thought of and played as a whole)."⁹ He later continued, interestingly, "There is no special musical connection among these four movements... which leads me to observe that quite a number of larger forms (symphonies, sonatas, suites, etc.) may not always necessarily form, or were originally intended to form, such a complete organic whole that the breath of unity is smothered all out if one or two movements are played separately sometimes."¹⁰ In fact, while the symphony was premiered as a whole in 1954, the *Decoration Day* movement was

⁷ See: Clayton W. Henderson, *The Charles Ives Tunebook, Second Edition*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 107.

⁸ The Elkus band edition and the James B. Sinclair Critical Edition of the original orchestral *Decoration Day* are both published by Peer International.

⁹ Ives, *Memos*, ed. Kirkpatrick, 94.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

presented alone, thirteen years prior. As a result of conductor Nicolas Slonimsky's interest in, and performance of, Ives' *Three Places in New England* with the Orquesta Filarmónica de la Habana (Havana, Cuba, Philharmonic Orchestra) in early 1931, the orchestra premiered *Decoration Day* on December 27 of that year, under the baton of Amadeo Roldán.¹¹

In Ives' *Memos*, he describes the larger *Holidays* set as encompassing the four seasons of the year in his youth, "...pictures of a boy's holidays in a country town."¹² It is within those memories, and specifically within *Decoration Day*, that Ives musically depicts other individuals' remembrances and feelings associated with the (at the time) somewhat recent American Civil War. According to scholar David W. Blight, the Decoration Day holiday, the precursor to our modern Memorial Day, was first commemorated in Charleston, South Carolina, on May 1, 1865. This ceremony, led by freed African-Americans, marked the completion of a cemetery built by those same former slaves, consecrating the mass grave of Union Army soldiers on the site of a former Confederate prison camp. White Charlestonians later suppressed the collective memory of the event through the post-war United Daughters of the Confederacy organization, and a codified national remembrance in the shape of a "decoration day" did not take place until 1868, at the suggestion of General John A. Logan, the commander-in-chief

¹¹ Sinclair, Preface to *Decoration Day*, iv.

¹² Ives, *Memos*, ed. Kirkpatrick, 94.

of the Grand Army of the Republic (cited by Ives in his postface as the G.A.R.).¹³ It was not until the close of the First World War, and its own terrible bloodshed, that other wars were included in the ceremonies; up until that time, Decoration Day remained solely a remembrance of the Civil War. It eventually took until 1971, and an act of Congress, to officially declare the last Monday in May as "Memorial Day."¹⁴

In order to fully grasp the poignancy and weight of the musical material in *Decoration Day*, it is important to consider Ives' own proximity to the Civil War. Charles Ives was born eight years after the truce at Appomattox Courthouse, and his entire youth would have been spent in a country struggling to overcome a conflict that tore the country in two. Even living in Connecticut, hundreds of miles from the nearest battlefields, the still-hanging shadow of the war would have been pervasive in those early years after the conflict. Many of Danbury's citizens, including Ives' father, George, fought in the Civil War, and still many more could count themselves as survivors of the conflict, whether as supporters on the home front, or as families left to deal with the wounding, disfiguration or loss of a loved one. This may have been what Ives was speaking of in his

¹³ For a more detailed account of the complicated nature of early memorial celebrations in both the North and South, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 64-97.

¹⁴ "Memorial Day History," United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public Affairs, Accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www1.va.gov/opa/speceven/memday/history.asp>.

postface, stating that, “During the forenoon as the people join each other on the Green there is felt, at times, a fervency and intensity – a shadow perhaps of the fanatical harshness – reflecting old Abolitionist days.”¹⁵ It is also important to note that Danbury’s survivors of the Civil War, firmly ensconced in the North, would nearly all have been supporters of the Union’s cause, leading him to reference the “fanatical Abolitionist harshness” that still pervaded his memories. For context, we in 2017 share the same proximity to the events of September 11, 2001, that an eight-year-old Charlie¹⁶ Ives in 1881 would have had to the end of the Civil War. Though he did not see the conflict for himself, he would have encountered many, first and foremost including his father, George, who would have still carried the physical and emotional scars of the battlefield with them, or felt the toll that the bitter struggle left on the young nation. Our own individual worlds have been shaped by events that happened before we drew our first breath, and young Charlie’s world was no different.

Stuart Feder, in his psychoanalytical biography of the composer, suggests that, like many of Charles Ives’ works, *Decoration Day* can also be interpreted as

¹⁵ See Appendix I for full postface.

¹⁶ Charles was primarily referred to as “Charlie” by his immediate family, although, interestingly, the familiar form of his middle name also crept in from time to time. Ives would also refer to himself in the third person as “Eddy” in some of his more interesting discourses, especially the *Memos*. “If he has a nice wife and some nice children, how can he let the children starve on his dissonances – answer that, Eddy!” Stuart Feder, *Charles Ives: My Father’s Song, A Psychoanalytic Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 65.

latter-day hero-worship of his father, George; the elder Ives, a failed army bandsman turned local bandmaster, left incredibly strong musical and psychological influences on his son. There are many pieces of evidence to point towards the supposition that Charlie Ives' mental image of his father, George, was undoubtedly seen through rose-colored glasses, especially when concerning the elder Ives' service during the Civil War.

George Ives served as a bandmaster in the Union Army, beginning at the age of seventeen. Not long after his own father died, George enlisted in the Army, on November 4, 1863, spending the next few months recruiting his own band for the Union cause, made up primarily of Danbury-area musicians.¹⁷ His musical unit was said to be of such remarkable caliber that Charles would later recount a story, apocryphal or otherwise, of an occasion during the siege of Richmond, when President Abraham Lincoln himself praised the George Ives' own First Connecticut Heavy Artillery Band.¹⁸ It was during the preparations of this siege, a mere six months into his enlistment, that George wrote a letter to his commanding officer requesting to be relieved of his duties, and destroyed

¹⁷ Feder, *My Father's Song*, 37.

¹⁸ "That is a good band," President Lincoln told General Ulysses S. Grant while reviewing the Union troops, eliciting a reply from General Grant. "It's the best band in the army, they tell me. But you couldn't prove it by me. I know only two tunes. One is *Yankee Doodle* and the other isn't." Stuart Feder, *The Life of Charles Ives*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22.

his army-issued cornet.¹⁹ Due to his subordination, George was court-marshaled, and sent home to Danbury, where he fell ill. Not long thereafter, George slipped on ice, sustaining injuries, and stayed home for the rest of the war, only returning to his regiment in June, 1865, months after the end of hostilities. George's unit was discharged three months later, whereupon he returned to Danbury for good.²⁰ Despite this checkered service history, Charlie seemingly thought of George as a hero, not a deserter, both in his youth, and as an adult.

George Ives would become both a leader and a pariah simultaneously in his hometown of Danbury, leading the Town Band in somewhat outlandish experiments, pushing the boundaries of acceptable performance in the nineteenth century. At one particularly famous concert, the reopening of Danbury's Elmwood Park, George led his three bands from the surrounding towns in a massive joint concert. While a massed band was playing on the bandstand, a fourth band from yet another town began marching up Main Street, clashing with the music already in the air. While the "bewildered" audience attempted to piece together what was happening, the new band joined in the concert on the stage, uniting with the other three to play the

¹⁹ Feder, *My Father's Song*, 40.

²⁰ Feder, *My Father's Song*, 42.

remainder of the event.²¹ Later, the adult Charles would catalog additional examples of his father's musical experimentation, including:

1. The slide cornet, an instrument capable of playing any interval.
2. Musical glasses (filled with varying amounts of water and struck with a stick), for very small intervals.
3. A piano tuned in actual partials (individual frequencies which usually comprise complex tones acoustically), with George tuning the piano himself, by ear.
4. Water-filled glasses tuned in a scale without octaves.
5. Twenty-four violin strings stretched out over a clothes press and attached to weights. "He would pick out quarter-tone tunes and try to get the family to sing them."²²

Charlie's formal musical instruction began under his father's tutelage as a child, but likely with no official, definitive starting point.²³ Charlie showed an interest in music at an early age, with the young boy imitating snare drum rhythms on the keyboard of the family's piano. Charlie's lessons eventually grew from the piano to encompass the study of violin, cornet, sight-reading, harmony,

²¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

²² Ives, *Memos*, ed. Kirkpatrick, 46-46.

²³ Ives notes that he began lessons at five years old in his *Memos*, but later reported it as eight years old when supplying biographical information to Henry and Sidney Cowell for their 1955 biography, *Charles Ives and His Music*. Feder, *My Father's Song*, 88.

counterpoint, and orchestration, all with George, and, later, organ study with additional teachers in the area.²⁴ As Charlie's musical instruction advanced, he joined his father's Danbury-area bands as a snare drummer by the age of twelve, also composing music for the bands; he similarly became a local church organist not long thereafter.

George's tutelage of Charlie provided a distinct musical framework that the precocious young composer could build upon, as George encouraged creativity, improvisation, and experimentation. Charles later revisited his "piano drumming" technique when he became bored with the usual lessons, banging his fist or palm "for the explosive notes or heavy accents,"²⁵ in what would later be described by music theorists as a tone-cluster. Charles also acquired an immense repertoire of popular nineteenth-century folk tunes from George, many linked to the Civil War, and was instructed as to the sentiment behind each of them; this would prove to be an invaluable resource for his later compositional style. George strove to teach young Charlie about the authentic feelings that music carried forth when performed by amateurs; many of the younger lves' compositions carry hallmarks, or at least imitations, of "amateur" musicians, whether in boisterous dynamics, unstable rhythm, or the washing of familiar melodies with layers of dissonance.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁵ Feder, *My Father's Song*, 90.

George Ives passed away suddenly in 1893, during Charles' first year away at Yale University, but not before the elder Ives' musical pedagogy, experimentation, and energy had a profound effect on the younger Ives' musical world; the modern musician can see the result of these influences in Charles' later music. According to Ives biographer Frank Rossiter, "George Ives lived an obscure life in Danbury, and its people treated him badly, both socially and musically. When his son acquired a reputation as a composer, he felt justified in using that reputation to secure for his father some small posthumous recognition."²⁶ *Decoration Day* can potentially be interpreted as Charles' epitaph for his late father George, a musical ceremony of remembrance.

Decoration Day can be broken into two distinct large sections: a meandering two-part opening that eventually gains musical motion, and a raucous final march that dominates the second half of the work; the piece then ends with a very short coda that briefly returns to the opening material. As Ives' postface describes, the work begins with an ethereal representation of many individuals gathering flowers for a village²⁷ memorial celebration, "with tender memories and devoted hands," implied by the use of many short, often

²⁶ Frank Rossiter, *Charles Ives and His America*, (New York: Liveright, 1975), 23.

²⁷ The village in question is undoubtedly Danbury, Connecticut, young Charlie's home from his birth in 1874 until he moved to New Haven for college preparatory school (and, eventually, Yale, in 1893); one can surmise, from Ives' own previous quote, that this is a representation of the remembered Danbury of his youth, in which the memories, tragedies, and sacrifices of the recent Civil War, only years prior, still held much lingering poignancy.

overlapping musical motives. These “remembered” tunes, familiar, yet somewhat altered, flow “very slowly”²⁸ through unorthodox meters and various tempi, stopping and starting in distinct statements. Some feature points of repose as a means of delineation from the other musical ideas; many feature multiple time signatures and tempi, creating an uneasy haze of musical memory that pervades this first section.

As the musical mist rises over the remembered town, haunting variations on *Adeste Fidelis*²⁹ (measures 1-3 B-flat clarinets, E-flat cornet) and other melodies, potentially quoted or invented, filter through Ives’ lens of musical remembrance. James B. Sinclair posits that, “The important [B-flat flugelhorn]³⁰ melody at m. 5 may well be a quotation from a now-forgotten song (perhaps relating to the gathering of flowers, the ‘early morning flower-song,’ in Ives’ scenario).”³¹ However, Clayton W. Henderson, the author of *The Charles Ives Tunebook*, a source repository for Charles’ borrowed musical material, speculates that the “now-forgotten song” may, in fact, be a “gentle citation” of the familiar Latin hymn, *Dies irae*.³² Beginning in the fifth measure, this Ivesian,

²⁸ Perhaps an understatement by Ives here, the piece opens at a tempo marked as “Very slowly, starting around quarter = 40;” no further specific metronome marking appears until much later, at Rehearsal **G** (measure 37).

²⁹ See Appendix II for source material.

³⁰ English Horn in the orchestral score.

³¹ Sinclair, Preface to *Decoration Day*, v.

³² Henderson, *The Charles Ives Tunebook*, xv. The melodies are quite similar, only differing by shifted half-steps, and the association between the two has not been definitively codified by

ever-changing melody becomes almost a “fantasy” on the tune, repeating in numerous voices many times, and overshadowing the musical landscape for nearly a third of the work. The hazy texture is punctuated by brief interjections of other musical quotations, including *Over There*,³³ *Lambeth* (“People of the Living God”),³⁴ and *Amazing Grace*.³⁵

The three *animando* sections, beginning in measures 24, 28, and 32, all gain considerable intensity through tempo, orchestration, and dynamics, only to quickly fall away again a few bars, or sometimes, beats, later. Ives often uses bars in odd time signatures to end these short phrases, at times elongating the final beat of the motive’s ultimate bar, such as in measure 29 (the bar before Rehearsal **E**), written in 3½ /4. This measure also features another hallmark of *Decoration Day*, a tutti eighth-note rest at the end of the bar, possibly to clear the air before the next musical idea enters. Ives’ use of tempo alterations in the middle of a bar (ex: beat 3, measure 33), and his placement of 5/8 or 7/8 bars in the middle of phrases both serve to destabilize any feeling of constancy in these

scholars, but, upon repeated listening, one can make a strong case for the relationship. See Appendix II for source material.

³³ As discussed earlier; potential quotations of *Over There* include measure 6, Horn 1 (solo); measure 22, Trombone 1 (solo), Clarinet 1, Bassoon 1, Tenor Saxophone; measure 23, English Horn, Clarinet 1, Bassoon 1, Tenor Sax, Horn 1. See Appendix II for source material.

³⁴ Measure 20, B-flat Clarinet 1. Measure 24 in particular was identified by Ives as the hymn tune *Lambeth*, but, according to James B. Sinclair, “there appears to be no related material.” Sinclair, Preface to *Decoration Day*, v. See Appendix II for source material.

³⁵ Measure 20, Oboes, concurrent with the previous quotation of *Lambeth*; see Appendix II for source material.

tumultuous musical remembrances. After an additional gathering and release of musical energy beginning at Rehearsal **F** (measure 24), the music winds down in a succession of call and response eighth notes, and a last *poco ritenuto*, before landing on a bar one eighth note rest long, a written pause³⁶ before the next idea begins.

At Rehearsal **G** (measure 37), implied musical motion truly begins for the first time, as a feeling of inertia is established with a steady tempo, and only the second metronome marking of the piece, giving the instructions, "A little faster, about quarter = 60." The earlier melodies, representing the individual villagers, fall into line, as "*the parade is slowly formed.*"³⁷ The motives begin to appear in succession around the ensemble, and sounding more definitively like their original melodies, highlighted by the recognizable presence of *Marching Through Georgia*,³⁸ initially appearing in the first flute in measure 37. Adding to the feeling of inertia is the piece's first string of successive, uninterrupted measures in 4/4 time, and a palpable, steady sense of tempo, as the melodies begin to weave together. In the background, the tubular bells chime in a slow succession of offset rhythms, perhaps implying church bells ringing from further down a remembered Main Street. The music gains, in Ives' own words, "a

³⁶ Both Ives orchestral score, edited by Sinclair, and Elkus' band score highlight this incomplete bar as a "slight pause."

³⁷ Ives, Postface to *Decoration Day*; see Appendix I.

³⁸ See Appendix II for source material.

*fervency and intensity – a shadow, perhaps, of the fanatical harshness – reflecting old Abolitionist days*³⁹ – just prior to the *Poco meno mosso* in measure 47, the low woodwinds and brasses, led by the B-flat Cornets and bassoons, interject a boisterous potential quotation of “Yankee Doodle”⁴⁰ that explodes out of the texture. Measure 50 brings a *Meno mosso*, and a series of three elongated smears from the flutes, clarinets, and horns, possibly depicting the arrival of “*the volunteer Fire Brigade[s]... decorated hose-cart.*”⁴¹

At Rehearsal I (measure 52), directly after the last, most deliberate smear, a slow lament on *Adeste Fidelis* is heard from the brasses and bassoons, the commencement of the somber parade. As Ives states in his postface, “*The march to Wooster Cemetery is a thing a boy never forgets. The roll of the muffled drums and ‘Adestes Fideles’ answer for the dirge.*”⁴² The use of this particular melody in this particular context sounds quite strange to the ears of a twenty-first century listener, with our near-automatic association of the tune to a vastly different holiday. This poses the question, why did Ives weave a Christmas hymn into a Decoration Day commemoration? According to J. Peter Burkholder, *The Portuguese Hymn*, as it was referred to at the time, had many potential sets

³⁹ *Ibid.*; see Appendix I.

⁴⁰ See Appendix II for source material.

⁴¹ Ives, Postface to *Decoration Day*; see Appendix I.

⁴² *Ibid.*; see Appendix I.

of text, "including some appropriate to this occasion."⁴³ Some additional clues are offered by Ives' notes on the genesis of *Decoration Day*, given in the "Scrapbook" section of his *Memos*. According to the composer himself, "The middle section (from **G** to about **K** before the march starts) was taken from an organ piece written some years before."⁴⁴ John Kirkpatrick, the editor of Ives' *Memos*, reports that this lost work "may have been an organ version of the lost *Slow March* for band on *Adeste Fidelis*," dated "'86 or 87" in Ives' own catalog.⁴⁵ Stuart Feder confirms that this would place the musical memory presented in *Decoration Day* directly in the twelve year old "boy's holidays" of the larger *Holidays Symphony*,⁴⁶ as this slow march was, in fact, "played by the Danbury Band, Decoration Day, and Carmel, N.Y., Band about '87-'88."⁴⁷

After another *ritenuto* and uneven-metered 7/8 bar, serving to give another slight moment of repose, Rehearsal **K** (measure 61)⁴⁸ brings a statement of *Tenting on the Old Camp Ground*⁴⁹, a prominent Civil War tune from the final, weary days of the war, in the clarinets, bassoons, and euphoniums.

⁴³ J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 345.

⁴⁴ Ives, *Memos*, ed. Kirkpatrick, 102.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁶ Stuart Feder, "Decoration Day: A Boyhood Memory of Charles Ives," *The Musical Quarterly* 66, No. 2 (April, 1980), 236.

⁴⁷ Ives, *Memos*, ed. Kirkpatrick, 148.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, there is no Rehearsal **J** in either Sinclair's edited edition or Elkus' band version, perhaps a publisher's choice. For reference, this is where the editions begin to differ slightly – Rehearsal **I** is the last marker that matches in both editions.

⁴⁹ See Appendix II for source material.

Measures 68 and 69 repeat this figure, almost clearing the air before an additional, now disfigured, statement of *Adeste Fidelis* is presented by the brass. Rehearsal L (measure 74) ushers in the most poignant portion of *Decoration Day*, even to modern ears; Ives states, "After the last grave is decorated, *Taps*⁵⁰ sounds out through the pines and hickories, while a last hymn is sung."⁵¹ This is represented musically by a duet between an offstage, muted trumpet, playing the familiar military funeral tune, with the flutes, remaining onstage, very softly intoning *Bethany* ("Nearer, My God to Thee")⁵². *Taps* strikes the listener immediately, with no explanation necessary, and the hymn tune fades to the background. Ives may have placed even more import on *Taps* than may be first realized, which is surprising, considering our associations with the simple melody. When Charles was a boy, his father George had the honor and responsibility of playing *Taps* for the Decoration Day commemorations; young Charlie's memories of this holiday would presumably have been rife with pride, even considering the somber commemoration, due to his father's prominent role on this important day.⁵³

⁵⁰ See Appendix II for source material.

⁵¹ Ives, Postface to *Decoration Day*.

⁵² See Appendix II for source material.

⁵³ Jan Swafford, "Ives the Man: His Life," Charles Ives Society, Accessed May 12, 2016, <http://www.charlesives.org/ives-man-his-life> .

As the final note of *Taps* sounds, at Rehearsal **M** (measure 81), the low woodwinds and string bass quietly begin an imitation of a snare drum roll-off, subtly at first, but quickly gaining volume, tempo, and additional instruments (between measures 81 and 88, marked “Gradually louder and faster into Quickstep time”). The final two, increasingly energetic, measures of this section switch to 6/8 meter, keeping the implied beat the same, a metric modulation that prepares for the direct quotation of a march at Rehearsal **N** (measure 89). As Ives writes, “*The ranks are formed again, and ‘we all march to town’ to a Yankee stimulant – Reeves inspiring Second Regiment Quickstep*⁵⁴ – *though, to many a soldier, the somber thoughts of the day underlie the tunes of the band.*”⁵⁵ This march in question is David Wallis Reeves’ *Second Regiment Connecticut National Guard March*, which Ives referred to as “majestic... inspiring... as good a march as Sousa or Schubert ever wrote, if not better.”⁵⁶

The Reeves quotation begins at the trio section of *Second Connecticut*, but in true Ivesian fashion, all musical hell begins to break loose shortly thereafter. According to Ives, “In the cornet band days of the 70s, 80s, and 90s,

⁵⁴ See Appendix II for source material.

⁵⁵ Ives, Postface to *Decoration Day*; see Appendix I.

⁵⁶ Ives, *Memos*, ed. Kirkpatrick, 102. Sousa himself even loved this march, and Reeves, stating “He made me everything I am... I would gladly give up everything I have won if only I might have written the *Second Regiment* march... I well may call him the Father of Band Music in America.” Jonathan Elkus, “Charles Ives and the American Band Tradition: A Centennial Tribute,” (Exeter, United Kingdom: University of Exeter Press, 1974), 27.

(at least in Connecticut), these quicksteps, so-called, were usually played twice, and often during the last strain of the repeat a little extemporaneous fun would be allowed – partly to let the boys know that the parade was going to stop or, at least, that this quickstep was.⁵⁷ This is manifested by a series of wild interjections, beginning with the saxophones in measure 95, and playful syncopations, most notably in the horns and trombones on the “repeat” of the trio, at measure 108, and again in measure 112.

The energetic texture thins at Rehearsal **P** (measure 121), clearing way for a delicate statement by the flutes of the Reeves trio’s second theme, the regimental march’s fourth strain, scored against the soprano saxophone’s boisterous, short quotation of “For He’s A Jolly Good Fellow.”⁵⁸ The ensemble joins in again, with increasing intensity, over what one might call the previous harmonic structure of the march,⁵⁹ abandoning the original Reeves melody altogether, led by a roaring, building bass line in the low brass. This cacophony is then punctuated by the E-flat Cornet, E-flat Clarinet, and B-flat Clarinet, all interjecting a short quotation from *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*,⁶⁰ from measure 132 through 136. The wild festivity ends abruptly at measure 136, with

⁵⁷ Elkus, “Charles Ives and the American Band Tradition,” 20.

⁵⁸ See Appendix II for source material.

⁵⁹ Admittedly, “harmony” is an odd term to use in a work by Charles Ives, though it was, ironically, his wife’s name.

⁶⁰ See Appendix II for source material.

a cornet and euphonium fanfare that arrives a bar earlier than the previous four-measure phrase structure would suggest. In fact, Ives has cut out a measure from the extant Reeves march, creating a three-bar phrase, making the entrance of the coming fanfare sound jarring and premature. He then slightly alters the rhythm of the tutti response from Reeves' original version, again making it sound harsher than the first, and plays the march out to its end, landing on a riotous **fff** chord, a four-beat, would-be march "stinger."

Hidden beneath the strident march, *Taps* returns as a "shadow" in the bells and marimba, a favorite compositional technique of Ives, beginning concurrently with the Reeves quotation at measure 89, and continuing through the end of the march section at measure 145.⁶¹ Scored for bells and "Extra Viola" in the original version, Elkus chose to replace the viola with a marimba, playing in the same octave, creating the same ghostly, distant effect that is barely audible, if at all, behind the cacophony of the march. This quiet, meandering, chromatic rendition of *Taps* may be the musical manifestation of Ives' narration, "... *though to many a soldier, the somber thoughts of the day underlie the tunes of the band.*"⁶²

⁶¹ Author's note: Special thanks to the eagle eyes of Dr. Joseph Parisi, who noticed this hidden quotation at the 2017 CBDNA National Conference in Kansas City, Missouri.

⁶² Ives, Postface to *Decoration Day*; see Appendix I.

Finally, the band releases its enormous chord, leaving a solo alto saxophone, intoning the earlier *Dies irae* melody, "offstage, or as if from a distance." Ives writes, "*The march stops – and in the silence of the shadow of the early morning flower-song rises over the Town.*"⁶³ The individual townspeople, again represented by their own fragments of familiar melodies, vanish into the ether, as the bells and string bass echo the last two notes of *Taps*, "*and the sunset behind the West Mountain breathes its benediction upon the Day.*"⁶⁴

⁶³ *Ibid.*; see Appendix I.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; see Appendix I.

Appendix I: Ives' Postface to *Decoration Day*

In the early morning the gardens and woods around the village are the meeting places of those who, with tender memories and devoted hands, gather the flowers for the Day's Memorial. During the forenoon as the people join each other on the Green there is felt, at times, a fervency and intensity – a shadow perhaps of the fanatical harshness – reflecting old Abolitionist days. It is a day as Thoreau suggests, when there is a pervading consciousness of "Nature's kinship with the lower order-man."

After the Town Hall is filled with the Spring's harvest of lilacs, daisies, and peonies, the parade is slowly formed on Main Street. First come the three Marshals on plough horses (going sideways), then the Warden and Burgesses in carriages, the Village Cornet Band, the G.A.R. [Grand Army of the Republic], two by two, the Militia (Company G), while the volunteer Fire Brigade, drawing a decorated hose-cart, with its jangling bells, brings up the rear – the inevitable swarm of small boys following. The march to Wooster Cemetery is a thing a boy never forgets. The roll of the muffled drums and Adestes Fideles answer for the dirge. A little girl on a fencepost waves to her father and wonders if he looked like that at Gettysburg.

After the last grave is decorated, Taps sounds out through the pines and hickories, while a last hymn is sung. The ranks are formed again, and "we all march to town" to a Yankee stimulant – Reeves inspiring Second Regiment Quickstep – though, to many a soldier, the somber thoughts of the day underlie the tunes of the band. The march stops – and in the silence, the shadow of the early morning flower-song rises over the Town, and the sunset behind the West Mountain breathes its benediction upon the Day.

- Charles Ives

Over There⁶⁷



m. 6, Horn 1 (solo)

m. 22, Trombone 1 (solo), Clarinet 1, Bassoon 1, Tenor Sax

m. 23, English Horn, Clarinet 1, Bassoon 1, Tenor Sax, Horn 1

Lambeth ("People of the Living God")⁶⁸



m. 20, B-flat Clarinet 1

Amazing Grace⁶⁹



m. 20, Oboes

Marching Through Georgia⁷⁰



m. 37-38, Flute 1 (solo)

m. 39-40, Horn 1 (solo)

m. 65-68, Flutes

⁶⁷ Henderson, *The Charles Ives Tunebook*, 107.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

⁶⁹ Not listed as a potential quotation in Henderson; the author disagrees.

⁷⁰ Henderson, *The Charles Ives Tunebook*, 103-104.

Yankee Doodle⁷¹



m. 46, Bassoons, B-flat Cornets 1-2 (melody); Contra-alto Clarinet, Contrabass Clarinet, Alto Sax, Tenor Sax, String Bass, Horns 3-4, Trombone 2, Basses (harmony)

Tenting on the Old Camp Ground⁷²



m. 61-64, Clarinets
m. 61-62, Bassoons, Horns
m. 63-64, Euphoniums
m. 68-69, Flutes, Clarinets, Bassoons, Euphoniums

Taps⁷³



m. 75-82, Trumpet 1 (solo, offstage, muted)
m. 89-145, Bells, Marimba
m. 149, String Bass, Bells

Bethany ("Nearer my God, to Thee")⁷⁴



m. 75-80, Flutes; Clarinets, Bassoons (offset)

⁷¹ Henderson, *The Charles Ives Tunebook*, 119.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 114-115.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Second Regiment Connecticut National Guard March⁷⁵

Trio, Bugles

A musical score for a bugle piece in G major and 6/8 time. It consists of eight staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 6/8 time signature. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing rests. There are first and second endings marked with '1.' and '2. tr' (trill). The piece concludes with a double bar line.

m. 87-145, Tutti

For He's A Jolly Good Fellow⁷⁶

A musical score for a soprano saxophone piece in G major and 6/8 time. It consists of a single staff of music. The piece begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 6/8 time signature. The melody is simple, primarily using quarter and eighth notes.

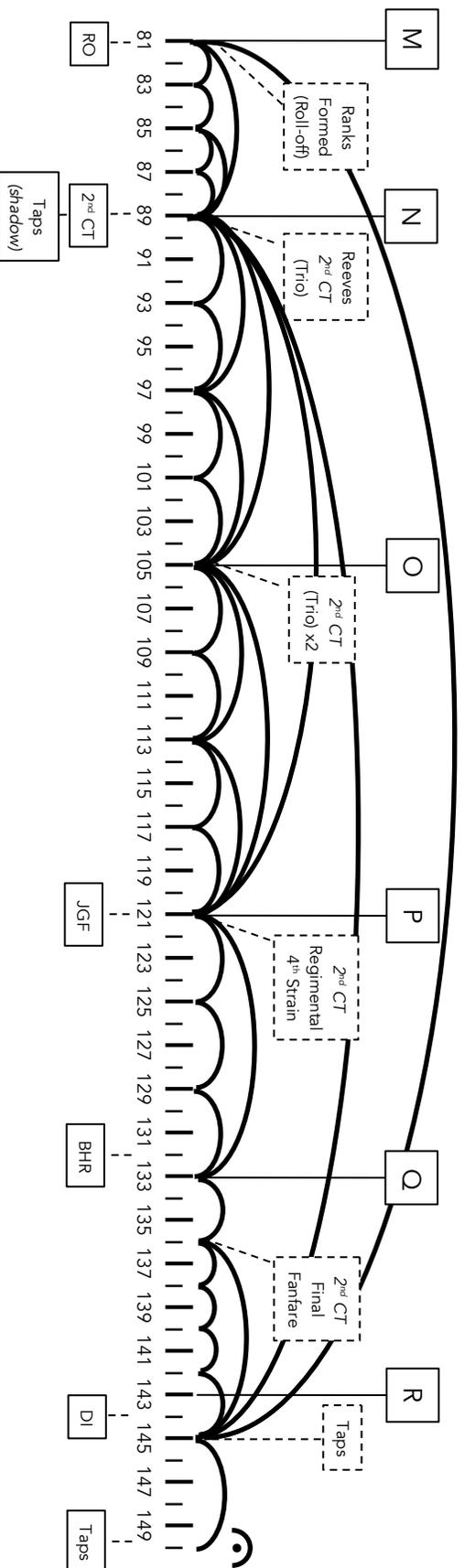
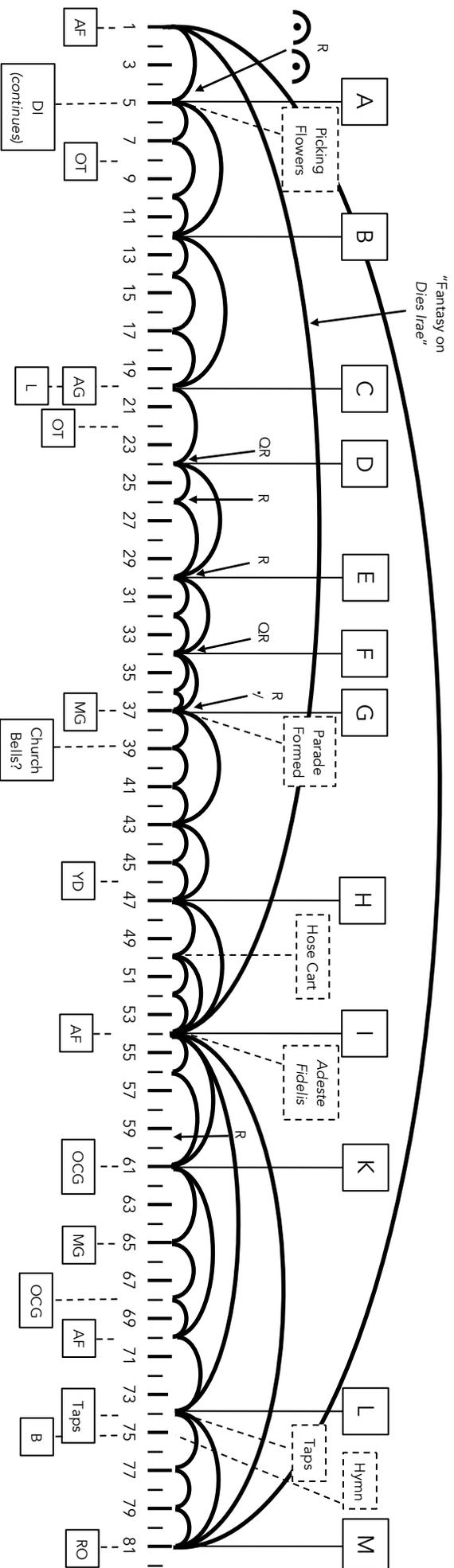
m. 121-125, Soprano Sax

⁷⁵ Henderson, *The Charles Ives Tunebook*, 109-110.

⁷⁶ Not listed as a potential quotation in Henderson; the author disagrees.

R: Point of Repose
QR: Quasi-Repose

Charles Ives: *Decoration Day* Form Chart and Borrowed Tunes



Charles Ives' *Decoration Day* – A Conductor's Guide

Brian Coffill

CBDNA National Conference, Kansas City

March 17, 2017

Required Instrumentation (Elkus):

2 Flutes + 1 Piccolo	Tenor Saxophone
2 Oboes + 1 English Horn	Baritone Saxophone
E-flat Clarinet	E-flat Cornet
6 B-flat Clarinets (2x 1-2-3)	4 Trumpets (2 B-flat Cornets + 2 Trumpets)
Alto Clarinet	2 B-flat Flugelhorns
Bass Clarinet	4 Horns
*E-flat Contra-alto Clarinet	3 Trombones
*B-flat Contrabass Clarinet	2 Euphoniums
2 Bassoons	2 Tubas
*Contrabassoon	String Bass
B-flat Soprano Saxophone	5 Percussion + 1 Timpani
(1) Alto Saxophone	

* = Preferred, but doubled elsewhere

Potential Borrowed Tunes:

(in order of appearance)

Adeste Fideles

Dies irae

Over There

Lambeth ("People of the Living God")

Amazing Grace

Marching Through Georgia

Yankee Doodle

Tenting on the Old Camp Ground

Taps

Bethany ("Nearer my God, to Thee")

Second Regiment Connecticut National Guard March

For He's A Jolly Good Fellow

Battle Hymn of the Republic

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Brian Coffill, Conductor

briancoffill.com • brian.coffill@gmail.com

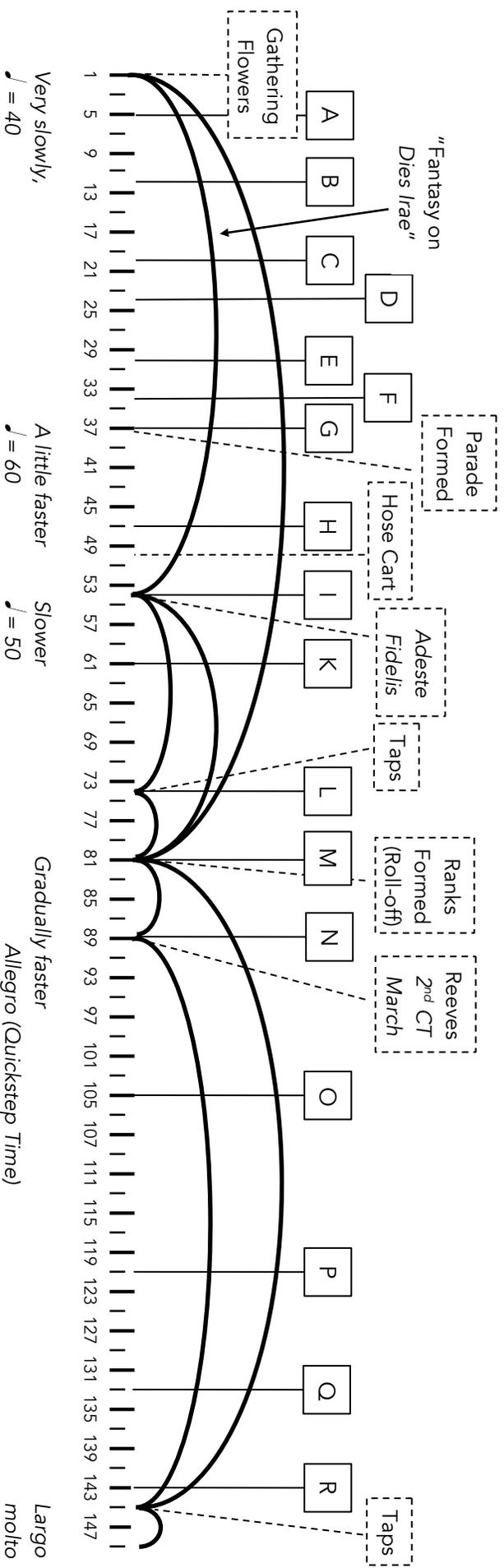
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Form Chart and Programmatic Analysis



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