

Bernard  
Jacobson

CONDUCTORS  
on  
CONDUCTING

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**JAMES LEVINE**

on **VERDI** and **MOZART**

**COLIN DAVIS** on **BERLIOZ**

**BERNARD HAITINK**

on **MAHLER**

**SIR ADRIAN BOULT** on **ELGAR**

**NIKOLAUS HARNONCOURT**

on **BACH**

**SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS**

on **HANDEL**

**JOSE SEREBRIER** on **IVES**

**CARLO MARIA GIULINI**

on **BRAHMS**

**Publisher's Dedication**

*To Frederick Freedman—  
musician, teacher, scholar, editor,  
and friend to countless musicians, musicologists, and critics,  
who devoted his life to music and the people of music*

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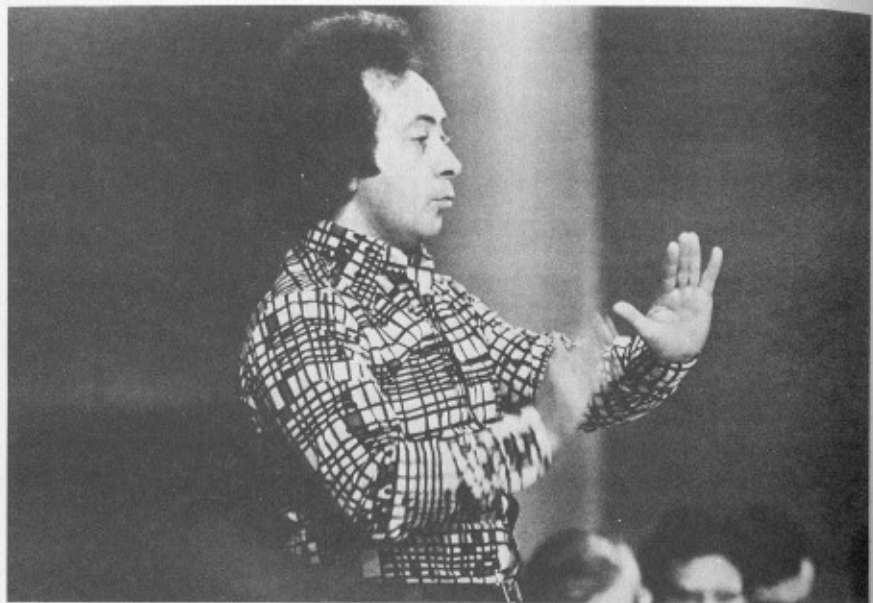
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RCA RECORDS



RCA RECORDS



RCA RECORDS

*During the last few months of Leopold Stokowski's life, I made several attempts to reach him with the idea of asking him to talk about Ives for this book. But Marty Wargo, his agent, explained that Stokowski—already in his middle nineties—was determined to give no more interviews, but to devote whatever time he had left to recording. Then, early in 1977, I received for review a new recording of the Ives Fourth Symphony by Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In the course of making critical comparisons, I became acquainted for the first time with the RCA recording made by José Serebrier in 1974. I found the Serebrier performance breathtaking in its spirit and accuracy. And recalling that Serebrier, a gifted composer-conductor born in Uruguay in 1938, had been one of Stokowski's two associate conductors at the long-delayed world première of the work I decided to see whether he was willing to talk about his own experience with this phenomenally difficult piece, and about his participation in the Stokowski performance.*

*Serebrier agreed, good-humoredly accepting once more the role of understudy that his own success had by now rendered inappropriate. The conversation that follows was taped in his Riverside Drive apartment in New York at the beginning of October 1977, diversified only occasionally by an appropriately Ivesian counterpoint of squeaks from a revolving chair and door-knocks from Serebrier's baby daughter.*

I'm going to talk first about Stokowski. I think it's important to mention Stokowski because the first time I heard of Ives was from Stokowski. When I was a student at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia—I was about seventeen—I had an urgent message from Stokowski to call him in Houston. I didn't follow it up because I thought it was a practical joke being played on me by one of my friends. I was always playing jokes on them, leaving messages to call up Arthur Judson, the manager, and so on. But the next day another message came, and finally a telegram. So I called Stokowski—it was in November 1957—and he said, "I cannot play the Ives Fourth Symphony"; it had been announced as the world première—critics from all over the United States were coming to hear the Fourth Symphony; it was going to be a big occasion. He said, "The orchestra cannot play it. May I play your symphony instead?" So I said, "Fine!" He said, "Good. Come tomorrow with the music. I have the score, you bring the parts." Just like that! Well, first of all, the score existed, but there *were* no parts. So the entire student body, many of whom are now very famous artists, sat up all night helping me copy the parts so that I could take the 9 A.M. flight to Houston.

*How did he know of your symphony?*

This is what, to this day, I don't know, except that it had won a BMI Young Composers award. So my symphony took the place of the Ives Fourth. I went down—I didn't even have enough money for the trip, Mrs. Curtis had to buy my plane ticket—and that's when I became curious about Ives. The critics were curious, too, about what had replaced the Ives, and as they were all there, they stayed for the performance. *Time* and *Newsweek* were there. I only had two rehearsals, and he did a fantastic performance of my First Symphony. But practically nothing came out in the press—the concert coincided with the first Sputnik, so there were no music reviews! I looked then at the score

of the Ives Fourth, and I couldn't make heads or tails of it, so I just put it aside. My next encounter with the score was when I was already working with Stokowski as his associate conductor with the American Symphony Orchestra in New York City.

*Which started about 1962?*

Yes, the fall of 1962. And in the fall of 1963 Stokowski said, "Now I'm going to try for the third time" — the episode in Houston was already the second aborted premiere of the Ives Fourth. Frankly, what had happened was that the Houston orchestra couldn't get past the fourth or fifth bar, they just couldn't play it. So Stokowski sent all the material back to the Fleischer Collection in Philadelphia with the request that they make it clear — not simplify, but clarify it. The score was very confused. This had been in 1957. Anyway, in my first year with Stokowski at the American Symphony Orchestra he never mentioned the Ives Fourth. He conducted my *Elegy for Strings*, and he did two other works of mine. Then, in 1964, he got a big grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to rehearse only the Ives Fourth for a month and a half or two months.

*You had not been working on Ives in any way in the intervening time?*

No. Then I said to Stokowski: "I hear on the grapevine that the work requires more than one conductor. Would you be needing me? Would you be wanting me to begin to study the score?" "No, not necessary. I don't believe in these gimmicks. I think we'll do it with just the one conductor." In fact, I remember, when I saw the score in Houston, what struck me was that it very clearly said "four conductors," and Ives wrote it with four conductors in mind. That's in the manuscript — conductor I, conductor II, conductor III, and conductor IV, all over the score.

*Those things one sees in the big, blue-bound AMP printed edition, about conductor I, conductor II, and so on — they are Ives's own markings?*

Yes. Originally it was for four conductors, which added to the confusion. Stokowski said, "It's too many conductors, it's too complicated." So when he asked the Fleischer Collection to clarify the material, they helped by taking out conductor IV and splitting his contribution among conductors I, II, and III. But Stokowski still didn't believe it should be done with more than one conductor. You know, now it's so common, but at that time it was still sort of strange, even for him. He told me,

"No, don't bother, I will do it myself," so I never had a chance to look at the new Fleischer score. In fact, the first time I saw the score for this performance was the historic day of the first rehearsal of the Ives Fourth in Carnegie Hall.

In typical Stokowski fashion he invited the press. Harold Schonberg of *The New York Times* and about eight or ten other critics were there. Virgil Thomson was not a critic any more, but he was there. Leonard Bernstein had been invited, but he couldn't come. And there were about a dozen musicologists and Ives experts. For the first few minutes Stokowski stood on the podium staring at the score. Nothing was happening. He looked at the orchestra, he looked at the score. Then, unfortunately, he saw me walking by in the wings. "Ah, *maestro*," he said — you know, he always called his associates "*maestro*," as a way of not having to remember our names — "please come over." I walked over. "Please conduct this last movement" — he was starting the rehearsal with the last movement — "I want to hear it." At which point my heart fell; I had never even read it! So that was really my first look at the score — my first exposure to the score was to conduct that last movement before an audience of critics and musicologists! It's incredible, you know, that last movement. You have to open it sideways because it's so big. It was a huge thing — Stokowski had two music stands fixed together to hold the version he used. I could hardly see the score, much less take in the tempo changes and so on. Somehow we got through it from beginning to end, I don't know how, but we got through it. To this day, it was the most difficult moment of my life.

Afterwards I told him, "You know, I was sight reading!" And he said, "Oh, so was the orchestra." So he got to hear it — it broke the ice, so to speak — and then he said, "All right, now we start work," and he went back to the first movement. He didn't touch the last movement for about two weeks.

The way he proceeded to rehearse — and this is why it didn't work and why it took so long — was to take one bar at a time. He said, "Let's play the first bar." Stop, think. "I will think." "Let's play it again." "And again." And then on to the second bar — play it, play it again, play two bars together. You would do it that way perhaps if you were practicing the piano and you encountered a very difficult work, but with the Ives Fourth, that way took forever.

*This was not his common method of working?*

No, never. In fact, Stokowski had the most fantastic rehearsal tech-

nique. This is nothing to do with music making, but the rehearsal technique of Stokowski was the most businesslike and most practical, and made the best use of time. But he had such bad experiences with the Ives Fourth, he was terrified. And it's incredible, I don't know how old he was then—eighty-three or eighty-four—but he still wanted to do it! Nobody else did it, and at his age he took the trouble to learn this work. And despite the fact that I feel he let many things go by, and I think my performance is far superior to his—I can say that because I know it is—I think one must give credit to the old man to have done this first performance, and, you know, really to have discovered quite a bit of the work's character. Not the second movement, perhaps, but the fourth movement and the first are beautiful. With his second movement, well, I totally disagree.

By doing it the way he did, he didn't really go deeply into the piece or find the problems. It did get better as the orchestra played each bar over and over. But it frustrated the musicians no end. So at the end of the first week the musicians were fed up; they were very, very tired of rehearsing with this system. Now, I didn't get involved with the score, because all through the first weeks of rehearsal Stokowski still felt that it should be done by one conductor. In fact, I just attended the rehearsals, but it was like listening to Chinese being spoken—I didn't understand anything that was happening on the stage.

Stokowski eventually realized that the score, the way it was prepared by the Fleischer Collection, definitely required three conductors. So he then asked me to look at the score and decide how much I wanted to do of conductor II and how much of it could be done by the first conductor. From then on he began to rely more and more on my help and advice on preparing this thing. I could see why it didn't work in Houston. They were working a bar at a time until they knew it sideways, but they would go back a week later and it was new all over again. The main problem—I found this out later when I did it on my own—was that he could have rehearsed it for three years that way and it wouldn't have helped, because of the complicated rhythms, with so many parts doing something different from everybody else, unless the musicians can hear what the others are doing they simply cannot coordinate it. But I didn't know this yet. I just simply began to help him by correcting wrong notes and discovering problems in the score. It became a two-conductor piece, because the third conductor was relegated to doing only the percussion *ostinato* in the final movement, and to this day the Ives Fourth has been done that way.

The changes I made were necessary because the Fleischer Collection had left the symphony in a form that was still almost impossible to conduct. If conductors II and III did what's in the score, it would be impossible unless they had computer minds to synchronize  $3/8$  against  $2/8$  against  $4/8$  and then  $6/4$ . In the second movement the musicians are asked to play two bars following one conductor, three bars following another, and the conductors have to do the same thing, conduct the violins for two bars, then switch to the oboes, then switch to the flutes—it's utterly impractical.

*You say if it's done the Fleischer Collection way it's impossible, and you say you divided it the way it's now done. Which of those ways is the one in the AMP printed score?*

The printed score is a combination of the Fleischer Collection version and my simplification. The orchestral material that most people use has my division.

*So, in other words, the printed score is a sort of halfway house between what you originally got from Fleischer and what is actually in the orchestral parts.*

Sure. The parts that are used now are a third form, which is the one I edited. The score was already printed by then, so it couldn't be put into that. There is still another version, the Gunther Schuller version, which we'll talk about later. In any case, if you look at the printed score you will see that it is really quite impractical. For the première, what happened in the end was that I gave myself very little of the actual conducting to do. Stokowski wanted to conduct most of it, and he was right in thinking, from the beginning, that the fewer the conductors and the less the division of conducting duties in the work, the better the performance would be. Following that principle, he did most of the task, and I conducted only when there was absolutely no choice but to have a second conductor.

Really, then, it's a two-conductor piece. The third conductor came in because I felt it was necessary for the orchestra's other associate conductor to do something too. We decided that he could conduct the percussion in the last movement, an *ostinato* almost completely separate from what the rest of the orchestra is doing; but conductor II, who has nothing to do in the last movement, could have done it simply by walking offstage. Some of the places where it is utterly impossible to do it with less than two conductors are in the second movement. One is



the so-called "collapse" section—Stokowski used to joke and call it the "calypse." When I did it with him he said, "You're a wonderful calypser, or should I say 'calypser'?" This section is in the middle of the second movement, one of the most imaginative passages in the work, where the strings and some percussion remain soft and slow and almost static, and then are suddenly interrupted by the second orchestra. Ideally, in Ives's vision, there should have been an entirely separate second orchestra in a different part of the hall. It has never been played that way—it's so expensive to have a second orchestra—but the effect was achieved in the quadraphonic version of my recording. In actual performance it's only practical to have everyone on the stage. Ives was very impractical, but not completely so. He didn't score it for a full second orchestra. What he did was divide the orchestra into two separate halves. So half the orchestra continues in this monotone while it's interrupted by the other half. The orchestra that has the monotone has to be conducted at a very slow three or subdivided six. The other orchestra comes in at a completely different speed, different meter, and in fact goes *accelerando*—it goes faster and faster. And then when the second orchestra stops, the first orchestra is still playing in the old slow monotone. You cannot do without two conductors here. Even Boulez, who prides himself on conducting some Ives—he does *Central Park in the Dark* with one conductor by beating different rhythms with both hands, and successfully so—even he could not do the Ives Fourth by himself, he had to have an assistant conductor in the second movement.

*Presumably because it's one thing to conduct two steady rhythms with two hands, but to conduct one steady rhythm and one accelerando rhythm with two hands is beyond anyone.*

Yes. Now, in the world première performance I conducted a few bars in the first movement, but I've since clarified them—it's not necessary to have a second conductor for this movement. The second conductor conducts mostly in the second movement. Sometimes the violas, sometimes the second violins, sometimes the brass have a rhythm which is so different from the rest of the orchestra that it requires a second conductor—especially in the "collapse" section I referred to, and in two other sections in the second movement where again the rhythms are quite different. But the "collapse" is the only section where really there is no coordination between the two parts, one just hopes that they will end more or less where they're supposed to.

Eventually, after two months of rehearsing, the Ives Fourth

had a very brilliant performance—the world première, as you remember, was a tremendous success. But then nothing had been rehearsed so long. Even *The Rite of Spring* didn't get so many rehearsals for its première. In fact, Monteux told me he only had nine rehearsals. That was part of the reason it was a fiasco—it wasn't well played, nine rehearsals weren't enough. But something happens to these difficult works. As they go from one city to another, the second performance becomes easier.

*I was going to ask you precisely this. It's a curious metaphysical experience that I've had. I've had it with a work that's not actually all that difficult: Wilfred Josephs's Requiem has been performed perhaps a dozen times in different places, and each time it has been much easier to do. How do you explain this?*

There are some practical reasons why it becomes easier. The parts, after each performance, become more marked, and hopefully they have fingerings, bowings, and mistakes have been corrected each time. Perhaps there is a tape of the first performance that may help the conductor. If a work has been heard, you know what it's supposed to sound like. *The Rite of Spring*, for example, is not a mystery any more. Even an orchestra that has never played it knows how it sounds—they hear it in their minds. But there is also an element of mystery in the way it becomes easier. The best example is the American Symphony Orchestra itself. When we repeated the Ives Fourth the following season it wasn't the same orchestra—Stokowski changed many of the players each year, there was a turnover of about forty percent—yet the next time around the work was prepared in the usual four rehearsals, and it was as good a performance.

Over those two years I learned a great deal about Ives, and frankly I wasn't that impressed. I was impressed with the imagination, but not nearly as much as I was later on. I know Stokowski admired Ives enormously, both because of the great imagination of the man, and for his principles and ideas, and he really wanted to do justice to the work. He understood the universality of Ives, he understood the drama, he understood the technical aspects up to a point. But he missed the humor, which is one of Ives's most important elements. Few composers in history have had the humor of Ives, and I'm sorry to say that that was lost. Stokowski had a humor, quite a bit of dry British humor, of his own, but he did not have it in making music. Making music was a solemn experience.

*It was still the nineteenth-century divine experience.*

Yes, absolutely, so he never understood the humor of Ives, which is so irreverent. But he understood very well the so-called religious experience of the fourth movement, and especially the organ-like quality of the third movement. In fact, Stokowski established a pattern of how to perform the third movement which I followed in my own way in my own version. This is perhaps the only aspect in which I was influenced by Stokowski's performance. The Ives experts, by the way, do not entirely agree with us, because they feel both Stokowski and I do it too slowly and too solemnly, and they feel that the ending especially, with the quotations from hymns and so on, should be humorous and not pompous. They have a point, yet we have a point too, because Ives did not indicate anything. Incidentally, I do it even slower than Stokowski. I don't think it's so humorous, at least it doesn't sound humorous, this third movement.

At that time, as I said, I wasn't in love yet with Ives. I didn't even own a score of the Fourth Symphony after those performances—my score went back to the Fleischer Collection. But I became interested in other Ives works. I began to do *The Unanswered Question*, which is an incredible piece—I did that all over the world. And I specialized mostly in *Decoration Day*, from the *Holidays* Symphony, which I still think is Ives's best piece. *Decoration Day* is the most concise, it's the whole Ivesian world in nine minutes, it's the best-written piece. And I'm proven sort of right by the fact that it's the most performed of his works. The Chicago Symphony took it on a European tour and to Japan, the Cleveland Orchestra took it to South America—it's a practical piece, that's part of the thing, and a very successful one. Then I did once or twice the complete *Holidays* Symphony, and I've accompanied some of his songs. I think the songs are fantastic, among the greatest Ives things: Each song is a world, so imaginative, and their humor is just marvelous. But my appreciation of the Fourth Symphony came slowly. It escaped me for years. I didn't understand it at the time of the première. After the première, you know, we made a videotape for National Educational Television and we made a record for Columbia. And then, in the following two years, we repeated the Ives Fourth.

*But it still hadn't really gotten to you.*

No. Speaking as a very young composer myself, I had no doubts about Ives's imagination and his formidable ideas, but I was disgusted by the complete lack of neatness (as against Ravel, let's say), and by the im-

practicality of the writing, which made it so difficult and unplayable at times, and by the complete lack of stylistic unity, especially in the Fourth Symphony.

*Between, say, the second and third movements most extremely.*

Extremely—feeling that they were like two works that really didn't go together. I in fact suspected that the work was never meant as a symphony; at the time I suspected that really he just pasted four movements together, because they are such different worlds. The prelude is so short—it's three minutes, and it's almost like an introduction—and I really saw the second movement as a work that could stand by itself.

*Which of course it does in part as The Celestial Railroad, in the form of a piano piece.*

Yes, but it could never really be played by itself, the second movement of that symphony. In the *Holidays* Symphony you can play the movements separately, but not in the Fourth Symphony. Only the third movement of the Fourth is in fact published separately, as a piece that could be played by itself, but not the second, which I think is the most exciting for me. And I felt the third movement didn't belong, and the fourth I was very impressed by but I didn't quite figure it out—again it was a different style—and somehow I felt the whole thing didn't add up. So I wasn't interested in it, and I didn't see any practical way of playing it anywhere, so that was that.

Years later, as it happened, when I was planning to do my recording, I was in London and I heard about a performance of the Fourth Symphony that John Pritchard was conducting in Manchester with the Hallé Orchestra. I went there, and I was very impressed, because he was the first conductor, I thought, that followed the tempo changes that Ives indicated, and by doing so he suddenly revealed the work to me much better than before. He's done the Ives Fourth quite a few times. He also used a second conductor—in fact, he gave the second conductor the main podium: Pritchard, in a great show of modesty, stood at the side on a smaller podium, and the second conductor only conducted a few times, but he had the main podium. I didn't understand why he did it like that. But Pritchard said to me, "I understand you're going to record this work—you're going to have lots of trouble." He asked me, "What do you think of this piece?" and I said, "I'm still wondering about it." Then he must have read my mind, because he said, "I wonder if one could ever do it skipping the third movement."

We were of one spirit regarding the third movement. We liked it as a separate piece, but not necessarily as part of the whole symphony. This happens with other works of Ives, you know—in the string quartets and the piano sonatas you have this problem. But eventually I realized that the third movement must be there, and you could not do it without, that you need the calm of the third movement. And it happens in performance. You do the second movement—the audience, if they're a bit sophisticated, laugh, always, at the end of the second movement. It's so funny, this ending—the “collapse” section, and then the ending with the violas left hanging out. They always think, “Oh, it's a big joke.” And the third movement has a strange tonic effect of calming everybody's nerves down. I can't think of anything but this third movement now that will work as well as it does, after that second movement ending, as a complete tonal wash of one's ears.

*Is it true to say that, if one thought of it as a three-movement piece, one-two-four, it would be on too intense a level of intellectual concentration?*

Yes, it wouldn't work.

*And you have to have a bit of reculer—a moment of just taking a bit of music easily.*

That's right. Now, why not do it in the same style becomes the question. Stravinsky would never have done anything like that. But this is Ives, and that's the way he solved his problem, and it works. In fact, he borrowed from the *Concord* Piano Sonata for the second movement, and the third movement comes from the First String Quartet. As far as I know, the fourth movement, most of it, is original for the symphony. But he was constantly doing this pasting together.

*The first movement is a song, isn't it?*

That's right. But somehow it all works together, and it does fit as a symphony, and by now it's almost considered a classic. I learned to accept the stylistic anomalies and to make the best of them. I realized that Ives couldn't care less about stylistic unity, just as he couldn't care less about harmonic continuity and all the stipulations about form and orchestration, the notions of which he completely revised. He was not tied up by performance problems because he did not expect performances. He had the unique situation of not being a professional composer writing for a public. He could write as he pleased, for himself, in an abstract

world. So he cannot be analyzed with the same strictness with which we would analyze Beethoven or Stravinsky, who wrote for a public, or even Schoenberg, who wrote for an advanced public. This is the first consideration in Ives: That he wrote in a sort of vacuum, and could thus permit himself flights of the imagination which are almost incredible to this day. He could permit himself to write rhythms so difficult they are almost impossible to play, though by now we have learned to live with them, almost to master them. One simply has to understand that this is the way Ives worked. In other words, I didn't learn to live with it other than to accept it, because it's Ives. America has made a hero of Ives. Everything by Ives is great—because there are so few great composers here, there's a tendency to idolize.

The stylistic problems found especially in the Fourth Symphony are, incidentally, not encountered so much in Ives's earlier works. You have to look at them to know how well schooled he was.

#### *The First Symphony?*

The First Symphony, and even a work like *The Celestial Country*, a big cantata that was his last student piece. It is not a great work, but it is a beautifully written work, with perfect modulations, and in fact already some touches of Ivesian imagination in it. You can see that this composer might come through. But it's very classical. In a way you can almost say the same thing of Cage. Have you ever seen any of Cage's earlier, student works? Perfectly tonal; it's quite extraordinary. You know that Cage studied with Arnold Schoenberg. I'm not talking in the defense of Cage, but it's interesting, because some modern composers that I know, and in fact some young composers today who are quite successful, have never bothered to study harmony, fugue, and counterpoint. What for? If you intend to do aleatoric music, and music that doesn't even employ notes, they feel it's nonsense to go through the years of tying oneself down to the tradition of classical writing.

*Whereas, as Stravinsky knew, you can only break the rules when you know them.*

Exactly. I feel that that's absolutely necessary. Anyway, we know Ives knew the rules. But as he knew the rules, he learned to break them one by one. What challenges me most, as a composer and a conductor, is the use of form; and the most fantastic thing stylistically about Ives is that no two Ives works that I know employ the same form. Ives's form is so elusive, it's incredible.

*It's very interesting that you say that, because it's possible to have a superficial impression from, say, the movements of the Holidays Symphony that there is a formal similarity—the slow build-up, the big climax, then the breaking off for a brief conclusion.*

Yes, you can say that's in principle an A-B-A idea—it is soft and slow, fast and loud, soft and slow—but really not at all. It doesn't add up to a form, because harmonically and thematically there's no relation between the first and the final section. Now, I dare anyone to try and describe the form of any of the movements of the Fourth Symphony. The only way you can describe it is as improvisatory form. It all hangs together—but in a concept that is unique to Ives. The second movement, for example, is based on the idea of interruptions: He presents a theme and interrupts it, and that's the central concept. He tries to surprise all the time. As for the rhythms, unlike *Pacific 231*, where Honegger has worked out the idea of a train getting faster and faster and then slowing down and coming to a stop, Ives, in the similar portions of the second movement, has worked out his rhythms mathematically. If one follows the direction, which is so cleverly done and so clear in the score, the effect is marvelous, of a speeding-up like a train, though he may not have thought of a train. It's a wonderful effect. Ives worked many other things out very cleverly, and if one accepts the idea that he didn't care about consistency of style, then obviously one can live with the different styles that go into the piece.

*It's not actually that much more extreme than, say, the stylistic disunity between the first and second movements of Mahler's Second Symphony. When you go into that minuet after the incredibly wide-ranging first movement, this is like a jump into a different world.*

Absolutely. I'm glad you mention that because there are some parallels between Mahler and Ives, as strange as it seems. You know that it's presumed that they met, at Ives's copyists, and it's further presumed that Mahler was impressed with the score of the Ives Second Symphony and the *Holidays* Symphony, and it is presumed that Mahler took one of these two works with him to Vienna, and further that he may have played one of these two works at one of the Sunday afternoon concerts for which programs were not kept, unfortunately, at that time. This is a bit imaginative, but if you talk to any of the Ives experts they will tell you about this. And there may well have been some influence of Ives on Mahler.

*There is also the same phenomenon quite early in Mahler of tempos that don't entirely coalesce, one group starting in a new tempo before the other has finished.*

Yes, you have it in the First Symphony—the Jewish danceband mixing with the other music.

*Also the Mahler Third Symphony, that passage with the birdsong coming in at a different tempo from the rest of the orchestra, and the Fourth Symphony again—though these are all presumably too early to have been influenced that way.*

Yes. That's just a conjecture, because it is known that Mahler visited the copyist that was working for Ives—that is a known fact—so it is quite possible that he may have seen the scores. We know that Schoenberg was acquainted with Ives's music—you know the famous quote.

*"There is a great man living in this country [the United States]—a composer. He has solved the problem of how to preserve one's self and to learn. He responds to negligence by contempt. He is not forced to accept praise or blame. His name is Ives."*

So he was not unknown to some of the major composers of his time. They probably thought of him as some strange phenomenon. But it took forever for his music to become known, and in fact no publisher wanted his music. It was only Peer—Southern Music, really, the other half of Peer—that sort of accepted his music, and it proved to be an incredible wisdom on their part.

*Speaking of accepting his music, how did you come to record the Ives Fourth Symphony eventually?*

In fact, it wasn't my idea to come back to the Fourth Symphony. It was RCA's. RCA knew the Ives centenary was coming up, and Peter Munvies, then the head of the Artists and Repertoire Department, thought they should do something—he had been at Columbia when they did the world première recording, so he remembered the success. It was a best-seller. Ives was already beginning to acquire a name in the American musical world when Stokowski made the record, but that's what did it, the Fourth Symphony, and the recording was selling in supermarkets! And it sold 38,000 copies, which in America for a record of serious music is incredible, of modern music especially. In fact, Columbia had been so afraid to record the Ives Fourth that they wouldn't do it. Stokowski had to find funding for it. The Samuel Rubin Foundation paid

*It's very interesting that you say that, because it's possible to have a superficial impression from, say, the movements of the Holidays Symphony that there is a formal similarity—the slow build-up, the big climax, then the breaking off for a brief conclusion.*

Yes, you can say that's in principle an A-B-A idea—it is soft and slow, fast and loud, soft and slow—but really not at all. It doesn't add up to a form, because harmonically and thematically there's no relation between the first and the final section. Now, I dare anyone to try and describe the form of any of the movements of the Fourth Symphony. The only way you can describe it is as improvisatory form. It all hangs together—but in a concept that is unique to Ives. The second movement, for example, is based on the idea of interruptions: He presents a theme and interrupts it, and that's the central concept. He tries to surprise all the time. As for the rhythms, unlike *Pacific 231*, where Honegger has worked out the idea of a train getting faster and faster and then slowing down and coming to a stop, Ives, in the similar portions of the second movement, has worked out his rhythms mathematically. If one follows the direction, which is so cleverly done and so clear in the score, the effect is marvelous, of a speeding-up like a train, though he may not have thought of a train. It's a wonderful effect. Ives worked many other things out very cleverly, and if one accepts the idea that he didn't care about consistency of style, then obviously one can live with the different styles that go into the piece.

*It's not actually that much more extreme than, say, the stylistic disunity between the first and second movements of Mahler's Second Symphony. When you go into that minuet after the incredibly wide-ranging first movement, this is like a jump into a different world.*

Absolutely. I'm glad you mention that because there are some parallels between Mahler and Ives, as strange as it seems. You know that it's presumed that they met, at Ives's copyists, and it's further presumed that Mahler was impressed with the score of the Ives Second Symphony and the *Holidays* Symphony, and it is presumed that Mahler took one of these two works with him to Vienna, and further that he may have played one of these two works at one of the Sunday afternoon concerts for which programs were not kept, unfortunately, at that time. This is a bit imaginative, but if you talk to any of the Ives experts they will tell you about this. And there may well have been some influence of Ives on Mahler.

*There is also the same phenomenon quite early in Mahler of tempos that don't entirely coalesce, one group starting in a new tempo before the other has finished.*

Yes, you have it in the First Symphony—the Jewish danceband mixing with the other music.

*Also the Mahler Third Symphony, that passage with the birdsong coming in at a different tempo from the rest of the orchestra, and the Fourth Symphony again—though these are all presumably too early to have been influenced that way.*

Yes. That's just a conjecture, because it is known that Mahler visited the copyist that was working for Ives—that is a known fact—so it is quite possible that he may have seen the scores. We know that Schoenberg was acquainted with Ives's music—you know the famous quote.

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for the recording. Peter Munvies remembered that experience, and he thought the Ives Fourth needed a new recording.

*This was about the early 1970s, presumably.*

The actual centenary year was 1974. It was in 1973 that I had a call from Peter Munvies's secretary.

*You hadn't made any records for RCA at that point?*

No, my only recording experience had been for labels like Desto and CRI, and the only work of my own on records at that time was my Partita on Louisville. The RCA Ives Fourth was my first important record. Peter Munvies called saying he wanted to make a new recording because the Stokowski was already eight years old. I didn't think I liked the idea. I wanted to meet him because I was hoping to convince him to record something else in its place. I proposed Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony, which I am still anxious to record. And he said, "Fine, we might do *Manfred* if you record the Ives Fourth." I said, "But I don't think I can do it, because the Stokowski record was so great—how am I going to do it?" He said, "Listen to the record—we'll send you a record and a score—and then let us know what you think." And that's what I did. I listened to that record—which I had never heard, by the way—I listened to the record with the score over and over, a whole day, twenty times, and I couldn't believe it. In the second movement, all the tempo changes which are the key to the movement, and which are so well worked out by Ives for the effect he wanted—Stokowski just went through them, missed them altogether.

*Not to the degree that Ozawa does.*

Oh, yes, that's something else. In Stokowski's recording there were some things that I felt would be difficult to emulate—the first movement, which he does beautifully, and the third movement, which impressed me, and the understanding of the fourth. But because of the second movement I immediately called Peter and said, "Absolutely, I feel I can do some of it at least as well." I wanted to choose the orchestra itself. He said, "Only if it's a European orchestra"—they couldn't afford to do it in America—and he also said "No" when I asked for a month of rehearsals. So I said, "Right, but I don't want to make a contract until I go to London." I was actually in London a month later, conducting the New Philharmonia in the British première of Bloch's opera *Macbeth*, in

a concert version. I met with Eric Bravington, the Managing Director of the London Philharmonic Orchestra; I told him about the RCA project, and that my first choice would be the London Philharmonic, because it was already becoming one of the best orchestras in London. I was also considering the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, who wanted very badly to do it—I had worked with the other London orchestras, but not the Royal Philharmonic. At that point, most of the London orchestras were lobbying to do it, because they knew that it would be an important record, for the American market anyway. But what clinched it for the London Philharmonic was Bravington's artistic involvement. He felt it was a very important project. I told him that all RCA could afford was five recording sessions. There was no time to have a performance beforehand, which would have helped the recording, because the season was all mapped out, and once RCA decided to do it, it was a matter of a month or six weeks—we must do it now—because Peter Munvies worked that way—to come out in time for the Ives centenary project. So Bravington had this idea—it was his idea—that he could not provide a performance to make the recording more efficient, but he *could* give a gift to RCA of one rehearsal. One more rehearsal, I felt, would do nothing, because I needed two months. What *would* help would be to use it to rehearse sections of the orchestra individually, and this is what we did. It was a very eccentric request, and very few managers, unless they have the vision of Bravington, will agree to such a thing—to give a free rehearsal in order to have a recording done correctly, but then to have that rehearsal broken up in thirty groups! It means that the orchestra lost a week of work practically, because there was always a group missing. But for the LPO Ltd. it only cost one rehearsal, because each group was only working three hours—though they also paid for the rehearsal hall. And so that they wouldn't lose a whole month, I rehearsed every day from nine to midnight. I can't remember the exact order, but I divided them in this fashion: first violins, three hours; second violins, three hours; violas, three hours; cellos alone, three hours; basses alone, three hours; flutes alone, three hours; the solo violins that play in the first and last movements, three hours; harps; the three pianists (who have *impossible* parts), three hours; the solo pianist—that was cheaper, I met with him several times for an hour at a time, it did wonders; organ, three hours by himself; celesta—such a difficult part—three hours; brass divided into groups, three hours; percussion divided into groups, three hours; and on and on. I never

worked so hard. Since then I've done similar things, but it was my first such experience of working from nine to midnight. So it was all done, and it was quite a bit of logistics—letters were going back and forth telling people where the rehearsals were to be held because they could not all be in the same place. Sometimes I had half an hour in between to get from one to another.

*The idea of this presumably being to get the sound of the whole part into the players' ears, so that they could then concentrate on hearing the other people.*

Exactly. I felt that the system of rehearsing one bar at a time didn't work, because the orchestra couldn't hear anything of what was happening. My idea was that they should at least be able to hear themselves, and thus get each part clear.

*Parenthetically, is the sectional rehearsal technique something you only do in Ives?*

Let's see, I use sectional rehearsals when I do some very difficult works, like the *Manfred* Symphony—not to that extent, but I ask for a wind rehearsal and a string rehearsal, which helps enormously, because it's rhythmically very difficult too; and for *The Rite of Spring*, and even for the Second Suite of *Daphnis*. But Ives, I think, cannot be played any other way.

All this, though, was only the finishing touches to the preparation. Before that there was the incredible problem of the orchestral parts. I had Schirmer send me two sets of parts—I was inundated with parts. There were about five sets, and I wanted to see two of them: the parts Stokowski used, and the Gunther Schuller set (he called it the Gunther Schuller Version), which he had arranged for one conductor. For the past two or three years Schuller had been doing it without the aid of other conductors, and he had fixed a set of parts. I looked at this set first because I thought it might be fun to do it on my own. Then I realized what he had done: He rearranged the rhythms Ives wrote that require two conductors in such a way that the players would only have to follow one, but in doing so—for the privilege of having only one conductor—he made it a hundred times more difficult for the players, so what's the point? For example, there are parts where the players have a triplet over two bars—three bars have to sound as long as two—and with two conductors it works, because the conductor concerned bothers to beat it faster than regular bars in order to fit it within the

framework. Schuller rewrote it so that it will fit in two bars, and wrote it beautifully...

*By changing the note values...*

...to a point where the player will have to have a computer next to him as he plays it.

*In a sense it's the reverse process of Stravinsky's later simplification of the rhythms in The Rite of Spring.*

Exactly. So I felt, this is absolutely not doing justice to the work, it's making it more difficult. And I think part of the problem with the Ozawa recording—I'm almost sure—is that he uses the Schuller version. And in spite of the fact that the Boston Symphony Orchestra has played it any number of times—they toured Europe with it, he's done it in New York and all over—part of the problem is that they haven't done the extensive sectional rehearsals that clarify the score.

So I discarded the Schuller version and began to look into the Stokowski parts—they're not Stokowski's personal set of parts, they are the parts that he used. I couldn't believe my eyes. First of all, the players had been so bored, they had scribbled things all over the parts. I found that there were pages upon pages without any dynamic markings in the parts—in the brass, in the winds. I think the Fleischer Collection had done a marvelous job, but many, many mistakes had gone by, an enormous amount of mistakes—wrong notes, missing dynamics. Sometimes Ives wrote wrong notes, I know, on purpose.

Some people who know that I've corrected so many mistakes in the Fourth Symphony, and also in *Decoration Day*, have asked me: "How do you know which are wrong notes, and which are *meant* wrong notes?" It's important to try to clarify this. When I revised the parts, some were obviously wrong notes. Sometimes I found a whole page in the cellos where the notes were correct, but the clef was wrong: They had left a bass clef, and it was supposed to be tenor clef—slight mistake! When a whole page is in the wrong clef, there's no question about it. Other times we know there are wrong notes when the whole section is playing in unison—all the violas and cellos and basses, for example, with one note different in the violas—it's quite simple, it's no mystery. And, in fact, someone on the West Coast is writing a whole errata book on the Ives Fourth Symphony—a musicologist working at UCLA. I sent him my list of errors and he found a few others from that edition.

*But then there are the other sorts of wrong notes, the ones that have a humorous effect or the ones that...*

Oh, that's something else, because they're obvious. It was quite simple for me to find which were mistakes.

*One wouldn't correct the last chord of the Second Symphony, for example.*

No! That's a good example of it. But then there are cases that were obviously copyists' mistakes. I couldn't believe that so many things were wrong. So I called Peter Munvies and said, "Look, this is going to take me months of work, we cannot possibly do the recording next month." So we postponed the recording for six months. I worked hours and hours every day to fix them. And then I cleaned them and put bowings in—there were no bowings in the parts—I edited them. I felt that part of the problem in playing Ives is the tendency to play him literally, as written, the way one might play, let's say, Handel—where there are no dynamic markings most of the time, and there are no *crescendos* or *diminuendos*, and there are definitely no expression marks. Does that mean we should play Bach and Handel without any expression, and only with the Baroque *forte-piano* type of balance, and no *mezzo-fortes*, no echo effects, because they didn't bother to indicate them most of the time? I won't go into the question of how you play Bach and Handel, but I *will* go into the question of how to play Ives. I don't think he intended his music to be played without expression. I did not edit it to the extent that Beecham would have edited it had he gotten hold of the score, but I did use some of the Beecham-type ideas, which I admired, feeling that the music could come more to life if the conductor or the performer would read into it to find the contour of the melodies, of the lines, and bring them forth. Much of my work with the Fourth Symphony, then (and I've since done the same thing with *Decoration Day* and some of the chamber music), was doing what Ives never bothered to do, which is to add these editorial performance effects—*crescendos*, *diminuendos*, some balances. I think the reason he didn't bother with this was that he didn't expect performances. Getting his music down on paper was enough for him. If he had had performances, quite possibly he would have bothered, for example, to consider how many notes a violin can play in one bow before it has to change direction. But as it was, when he *did* write slurs for the strings, he just wrote them as expression marks, which run over for about eight bars. Now Mahler, in his symphonies, also wrote slurs that go for twelve bars at times for the violin, but then below that he very

clearly indicated, sometimes, where the bow should change. Mahler, as you know, is inundated with expression marks from bar to bar, sometimes three different expression marks for one note. He did it because he was a conductor. He knew how much this editing helped a performance. Much of it must have come out of performances, and it helps. But Ives didn't have the experience of performances, and this is part of the problem. And if he's played literally, without expression marks because he didn't put them in, and without the sectional rehearsals that would clarify each part, then the result is an undifferentiated mass of sound, and people think this is the way Ives is supposed to sound.

The reason my recorded performance sounds so clear is that I took the trouble to put bowings in, and to clarify it. I did not simplify it. I did help the players to this extent, that whenever they had some very complicated rhythms, I put lines on top showing where the beat falls. And I put dynamics in, many of which were missing from the parts, and added dynamics of my own to balance the piece. In parts of the second and fourth movements, for example, he has everyone playing every note in the scale, and more, and in all kinds of rhythms, and the result is you don't understand a thing. I don't think Ives meant that. I think he would have wanted at least half of it to come out in the foreground. So I helped a little bit with the dynamics, the way one does with a Beethoven symphony, or even a Brahms or Bruckner symphony, where everything is marked *forte* in the score, or everything is marked *piano*, but if you do it that way it will never come out right—a brass instrument is louder than a flute.

*Piano means a different thing when it's written for a trumpet...*

That's right. Now I had never conducted the piece on my own, as opposed to being second conductor, before the recording. A week before the recording I was engaged to conduct a concert in Poland, with the best Polish orchestra, the Katowice Radio-Television Philharmonic, and I had this sudden idea that I might suggest replacing *The Rite of Spring* on the program with the Ives Fourth. And they fortunately agreed.

*They presumably didn't know what they were letting themselves in for.*

They didn't. I was in Germany when I cabled them—I was conducting, of all things, *Traviata*, at the Cologne Opera—and I was spending every free minute on the Ives parts. I remember I had a deadline for sending them by plane to London—I wanted the London Philhar-



monic to have them a week before rehearsals started so the musicians could study them. My whole room in the apartment in Cologne was filled with parts—I was working on the harp parts to the very last minute, I barely made the plane.

It meant that I couldn't use the LPO set of parts in Poland. In Poland I had to use an uncorrected set of parts, and the set arrived without the piano parts, which are so difficult. So I telephoned New York to get the piano parts, but some orchestra that had played it before hadn't returned them. So the librarians in Poland stayed up all night and, from the score, copied these piano parts, which are like books—they are as thick as three Beethoven piano sonatas. I had three days of rehearsals for the Ives Fourth, and my program was the Ives Fourth, Brahms Violin Concerto, and *Daphnis* Second Suite. But it's a wonderful orchestra, and, of those three days, my first day was devoted to sectional rehearsals. They weren't as extensive as in London—I had to do it all in one day with the Katowice orchestra—but it worked, and even with an uncorrected set of parts (we fixed as many mistakes as we could) they did wonderfully. I was very grateful for the opportunity to have done the Ives Fourth once myself before I recorded it.

In Poland I used the assistant concertmaster to lead the "collapse" section in the second movement, and I used a local composer to conduct the percussion in the last movement—those two cannot be done without in a concert performance. But for the recording in London I simply recorded it twice myself. I had a second conductor stand by, an English composer, because I didn't know until the recording session how we were going to do it, and it all worked out as we were doing it. We decided that the most important thing to do was to do a quadraphonic version, because at that time quadraphonic records were coming into their own. So for the quadraphonic version especially we recorded the brass interruption orchestra separately and then it was superimposed, and if you hear the quad version, it is ten times better than the stereo version. Another thing we superimposed was the percussion in the last movement. I decided to record the percussion separately and then add it, and to this day we can't understand how it worked. It's a seven-minute movement. We only made one take of it, and it worked to the second. I could never do it again. But that's how it was done with one conductor—it could not be done in performance, obviously. And over the whole piece we worked so quickly, as a result of the sectional rehearsals, that we finished the recording in four sessions instead of the five RCA had allocated.

*You spoke earlier of learning "to make the best" of the work's shifts of style. As a conductor, preparing a performance, considering your conception of the work, considering your interpretation of it, do you do anything special, anything specific, as a response to this particular stylistic characteristic? You accept a composer's disunity of style, therefore do you enhance disunity of style? You don't play it down, but do you perhaps play it up in performance?*

That's an interesting question. I have not done so. I have played it as it is—well, I play it up, you're perhaps right, after all. In other words, I don't try to make the third movement "fit" by trying to make it sound more modern than it is. In fact, I play it as Romantic music, as it is written, with full emphasis on the Baroque turns. I make my strings vibrate for all they are worth.

One other thing we did in the recording may be relevant here. In the third movement we used a real organ. (In the Stokowski recording he had to use a little Hammond electric organ.) And the entrance of the organ, in the quadraphonic version, is spellbinding, because it *was* like a church organ. Suddenly, from one speaker, you hear the sound of the organ—it's another interruption. And, in the second movement, it's the only recording that has a quartertone piano. Neither the Stokowski nor the Ozawa used a quartertone piano. Ives wrote very clearly that, if no quartertone piano is available, the part should not be played at all, which makes sense. If you play it on a standard piano the notes are different—it just makes no sense whatsoever, it's a different effect. If you listen to this section of the second movement with Stokowski, it's a regular piano tinkling away. I insisted on a quartertone piano, which doesn't exist in London, so we had a tuner pick up a small upright Steinway and retune it, and I had to write a special part for the pianist. And if you listen to it now, it's a section where the solo violin plays, and the quartertone piano is behind it, and it's fantastic. It's a section about which Ives wrote. He pictured someone being in a very crowded street and walking suddenly into a church, where the organ has been playing forever, for ages, and it's musty and dark—and you feel that in the music, it's really a wonderful tonal picture. And the quartertone piano produces an effect that perhaps only one or two people may notice, but it's what Ives wanted. Yet this raises the whole question of literalness.

Conductors generally pride themselves on being literal: The more literally you follow the score, within an artistic frame, the better

you are. Now, I feel that Ives couldn't have cared less about artists who try to be literal—in fact, he poked fun at them. He felt that the artist should interpret music freely within the dictates of the score. And being a composer myself, I know how important it is to take the composer's words with a grain of salt, to interpret. On the opening page of the Fourth Symphony, Ives makes what could be construed as a joke: For the choral part, he writes "preferably without voices." Well, if you have a conductor who wants to do it exactly the way the composer wanted, what'll he do there?

In some pieces Ives gives the conductor a choice of instruments: in one case, saxophone or bells or piano! Can you think of three more different instruments? How are you going to be literal? This is in *From the Steeples and the Mountains*, one of his best pieces. He has a choice of instruments to use for bells—a carillon, or a piano. Can you imagine a piano playing in place of bells? In *The Unanswered Question* you can use a choice of four flutes or a variety of other instruments. So, in a way, much of the time he's writing in the abstract, almost—and this should not be a sacrilegious comparison—but almost as Bach wrote *The Art of the Fugue*, which is really in the abstract. In the second movement of the Ives Fourth Symphony, again, the conductor has the option of either a bassoon or a saxophone. Stokowski used both playing together—he couldn't make up his mind—and that adds to the muddiness of the movement. Since Ives gave the option, I decided that sometimes the saxophone gives a more interesting sound for a particular passage, sometimes the bassoon. I used both, but separately. So I helped what Ives had in mind, because he really couldn't make up his mind, except in one passage where it's specifically saxophone.

*I think it's important to be conscious how recent is the idea of literal adherence to scores—the result of one or two artists' work in the twentieth century, rather than a sort of law that goes back through the nineteenth century. There is, in fact, a paradox involved in this, because if you are faithful to the letter of a nineteenth-century score, you can for that very reason be unfaithful to the spirit, since the composer expected you to use your imagination.*

Yes, exactly, you're so right. Ives was still in many ways a nineteenth-century composer, a nineteenth-century composer gone wild. Don't forget that when Ives was beginning to compose his imaginative modern works, so called, the latest composers known to him were Brahms,

Tchaikovsky—Wagner was beginning to be popular in America, this was in the 1880s. And so, it's even incredible that he could come up with these fantastic, wild ideas. He was still, though, at heart, in many ways a nineteenth-century composer. He was fighting Romanticism by breaking with everything. In the structural sphere, this made his forms very free, and this in turn makes his music very difficult to interpret, because one of the ways an interpreter makes up his interpretation of a work is by shaping the form.

This is the way I do it: I study the form of a work—after studying the harmony, the orchestration—and it gives me the speed of it, it gives me the breadth of it, and the way I want to make an impact with it. It gives me the way to present it. The only other composer with whom I've had a similarly difficult experience with form was Delius, when I conducted his Violin Concerto in Liverpool on a few hours' notice without ever having conducted a note of his before. The quickest way to learn a score is to find the form: Identify the main entrances and develop an idea of the piece. I couldn't figure out the form of the Delius Violin Concerto.

*There isn't one.*

Now, with Ives, I've tried unsuccessfully to come up with the form in many of the works. What I've come up with is some idea of what went through his mind, and in many ways I think it's like a written-out, carefully thought-out improvisation, in which ideas sometimes recur—A, B, C do come back once in a while—but not as part of a consciously determined, *a priori* form.

In this context, the first movement of the Fourth Symphony is the closest to a simple A-B-A form, but only because, as you mentioned before, it starts off softly and slowly, and it ends softly and slowly. The third movement is more classical and can be pinned down to some sort of a form. He calls it a fugue, but it is really not a fugue though it has fugal entrances. It's no more a fugue than the last section of Verdi's *Falstaff* is a fugue. And the last movement is a fantasy, a very free form like the second movement. The string quartets and the piano sonatas are in very free forms. Some of the songs have simpler, A-B-A-C-A forms. But, in general, the freedom of form is something that makes Ives particularly difficult to conduct. What helps sometimes is following the speed changes, which are so clearly indicated, and thus contribute to bringing whatever form exists to the fore.

I'd like to emphasize finally that I don't consider myself more

of an Ives expert than a Schubert expert—if anything, I consider myself a Tchaikovsky expert. I do more Tchaikovsky than anything else.

*Well, everybody's entitled to some eccentricity.*

No, what I'm trying to say applies, with all respect, to my eminent colleagues too. Haitink, for example, is a great Mahlerian, but he also does other composers very well. I would say that I conduct Ives the way I conduct any other composer. There is no question that when I do, let's say, Schubert, I can't help it, I have a different frame of mind from when I conduct Mozart. Then again, recently I conducted a concert of nothing but Mozart and Schubert, and the next concert was nothing but Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, and it was so different, it was like a different world—it was almost like changing professions. When I conduct Ives, I don't apply any specific secret ideas, but there are specific things about Ives that come through—one can't help it. When I do Prokofiev, there is a percussive quality that comes through, and an edge, an angular quality, which also comes through in Stravinsky, and in many cases it comes through in Ives. And when I do Ives I try to bring out the humor.

*The José Serebrier Ives discography is regrettably brief, but precisely pertinent to our chapter. It consists of the two recordings of the Fourth Symphony discussed at length above: The 1965 Stokowski version on Columbia/CBS, in which Serebrier served as second conductor; and Serebrier's own "solo" version on RCA, released for the Ives centenary celebration in 1974, but currently unavailable in Britain.*