POSTFACE TO 114 SONGS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

SOMETIME in the first half of 1920, Ives jotted down a schedule of “things to be done” on the back of a page from an early draft of the “Postface” to 114 Songs, which reads as follows:

1. Article for Eastern Underwriter “Small Policies” (by Aug. 1).
3. Finish and copy “Circus Day Band” (as soon as possible).
4. After 1 & 2 are finish work daily on correcting “Majority.”
5. Score #3 N. E. Holidays “4th of July” (anytime before Oct. 1).
6. (correct) Presentation, Torts (Insurance).
7. Send “2o Amendment” paper to magazines* (anytime).

*The first edition of the Concord Sonata. (The “prefaces” were excerpts from Essays Before A Sonata.)

§Ives sent the paper to the Atlantic Monthly on May 26, 1920, and two weeks later he sent it to The Outlook.

POSTFACE

8. Address list for “Musical Courier” of names to send sonata (after Oct. or Nov.).
9. Select & correct 25 or 30 songs for printing—also set English words for some of the German (Oct. or Nov.).

This schedule is a valuable summary of Ives’ projects during a crucial period in his life. The last item (“Select & correct 25 or 30 songs”) was not taken care of in October or November of 1920 as Ives had hoped, but in 1922, when the number of songs had grown to one hundred and fourteen. The collection was privately printed at Ives’ expense by G. Schirmer of New York. While the volume has no preface, there are a number of footnotes for individual songs. What in most books would have been a preface—a general description of the contents, and an exposition of the composer’s point of view—turns up modestly at the very end, as a “postface,” so to speak (the text has no caption, nor is it mentioned in the index).

The “Postface” of 114 Songs is one of Ives’ most intriguing bits of prose. Its nervous loquaciousness, its not-too-subtle humor, and its bewildering syntax all would appear to cover the same sort of bashfulness Ives displayed at the age of thirteen, when he remained in the back yard playing handball against the barn door while his father’s band marched past the house playing his “Holiday Quickstep” (see Cowell, p. 27). Ives’ adaptation of “The Danbury News Man’s” introduction to Life in Danbury (“I have not written a book at all—I have merely cleaned house”), while possibly a true description of the act of assembling the contents, is deceptively casual. It is now generally agreed that his song collection is the richest one of its kind by an American composer.

The materials for the “Postface” in the Collection are:
1. A number of rough notes and jottings (it is on the back of one of these pages that Ives’ schedule is found).
2. A manuscript which can be designated as the first real draft.
3. A second and final manuscript.
4. A carbon of the typescript (p. 1 is missing) made from the final manuscript (Item 3).

* Eventually, 114 Songs (1922).
The version printed in the volume of 114 Songs follows the final manuscript and typed copy quite faithfully. That version has been used here except for the punctuation, which has been revised slightly. A few small mistakes have been corrected on the basis of the manuscripts, and occasional variants have been noted. Items 2 and 3 above have been called respectively (in the Notes) MS. 1 and MS. 2.

POSTFACE TO 114 SONGS

Greek philosophers, ward-politicians, unmasked laymen, and others, have a saying that bad habits and bad gardens grow to the "unintendedables"; whether these are a kind of "daucus carota," "men," "jails," or "mechanistic theories of life" is not known—but the statement is probably or probably not true. The printing of this collection was undertaken primarily in order to have a few clear copies that could be sent to friends who from time to time have been interested enough to ask for copies of some of the songs, but the job has grown into something different; it contains plenty of songs which have not been and will not be asked for. It stands now, if it stands for anything, as a kind of "buffer state"—an opportunity for evading a question somewhat embarrassing to answer: "Why do you write so much —— which no one ever sees?" There are several good reasons, none of which are worth recording.

Another, but unconvincing, reason for not asking publishers to risk their capital or singers their reputation may be charged to a theory (perhaps it is little more than a notion, for many do not agree with it—to be more exact, a man did agree with it once; he had something to sell—a book, as I remember, called, "The Truth about

This word in MS. 2 was originally "unintentionables." It was crossed out and "unintendedables" was written in above the line. In the margin, the word "intendedables" is written.

Daucus Carota, in wild form, a weed; cultivated, the root is the carrot.

MS. 2: (most of our friends are too polite to add—"ever hears"?)
Something,” or “How to write Music while Shaving!”) Be that as it may, our theory has a name: it is, “the balance of values,” or “the circle of sources” (in these days of chameleon-like efficiency every whim must be classified under a scientific-sounding name to save it from investigation). It stands something like this: that an interest in any art-activity from poetry to baseball is better, broadly speaking, if held as a part of life, or of a life, than if it sets itself up as a whole—a condition verging, perhaps, toward a monopoly or, possibly, a kind of atrophy of the other important values, and hence reacting unfavorably upon itself. In the former condition, this interest, this instinctive impulse, this desire to pass from “minor to major,” this artistic intuition, or whatever you call it, may have a better chance to be more natural, more comprehensive, perhaps, freer, and so more tolerant—it may develop more muscle in the hind legs and so find a broader vantage ground for jumping to the top of a fence, and more interest in looking around, if it happens to get there.

Now all this may not be so; the writer certainly cannot and does not try to prove it so by his own experience, but he likes to think the theory works out somewhat in this way. To illustrate further (and to become more involved): if this interest, and everyone has it, is a component of the ordinary life, if it is free primarily to play the part of the, or a, reflex, subconscious-expression, or something of that sort, in relation to some fundamental share in the common work of the world, as things go, is it nearer to what nature intended it should be, than if, as suggested above, it sets itself up as a whole—not a dominant value only, but a complete one? If a fiddler or poet does nothing all day long but enjoy the luxury and drudgery of fiddling or dreaming, with or without meals, does he or does he not, for this reason, have anything valuable to express—or is whatever he thinks he has to express less valuable than he thinks?

This is a question which each man must answer for himself. It depends, to a great extent, on what a man nails up on his dashboard as “valuable.” Does not the sinking back into the soft state of mind (or possibly a non-state of mind) that may accept “art for art’s sake” tend to shrink rather than toughen up the hitting muscles—and incidentally those of the umpire or the grandstand, if there be one? To quote from a book that is not read,* “Is not beauty in music too often confused with something which lets the ears lie back in an easy-chair? Many sounds that we are used to do not bother us, and for that reason are we not too easily inclined to call them beautiful? . . . Possibly the fondness for personal expression—the kind in which self-indulgence dresses up and miscalls itself freedom—may throw out a skin-deep arrangement, which is readily accepted at first as beautiful—formulae that weaken rather than toughen the musical-muscles. If a composer’s conception of his art, its functions and ideals, even if sincere, coincides to such an extent with these groove-colored permutations of tried-out progressions in expediency so that he can arrange them over and over again to his delight—has he or has he not been drugged with an overdose of habit-forming sounds? And as a result do not the muscles of his clientele become flabbier and flabbier until they give way altogether and find refuge only in exciting platitudes—even the sensual outbursts of an emasculated rubber-stamp, a ‘Zaza,’ a ‘Salome’ or some other money-getting costume of effeminate manhood? In many cases probably not, but there is this tendency.”

If the interest under discussion is the whole, and the owner is willing to let it rest as the whole, will it not produce something less vital than the ideal which underlies, or which did underlie it? And is the resultant work from this interest as free as it should be from a certain influence of reaction which is brought on by, or at least is closely related to, the artist’s over-anxiety about its effect upon others?

And to this, also, no general answer must be given—each man will answer it for himself, if he feels like answering questions. The whole matter is but one of the personal conviction. For, as Mr. Sedgwick says in his helpful and inspiring little book about Dante,† “in judging human conduct”—and the manner in which an interest in art is used has to do with human conduct—“we are dealing with subtle mysteries of motives, impulses, feelings, thoughts that shift, meet, combine and separate like clouds.”

* The “book that is not read” is Essays Before A Sonata, and the passages may be found on pp. 97–98. The quotation is free.
† MS: (as far as his idea of sincerity goes).
Every normal man—that is, every uncivilized or civilized human being not of defective mentality, moral sense, etc.—has, in some degree, creative insight (an unpopular statement) and an interest, desire and ability to express it (another unpopular statement). There are many, too many, who think they have none of it, and stop with the thought, or before the thought. There are a few who think (and encourage others to think) that they and they only have this insight, interest, etc., and that (as a kind of collateral security) they and they only know how to give true expression to it, etc. But in every human soul there is a ray of celestial beauty (Plotinus* admits that), and a spark of genius (nobody admits that).

If this is so, and if one of the greatest sources of strength, one of the greatest joys and deepest pleasures of men is giving rein to it in some way, why should not everyone instead of a few be encouraged and feel justified in encouraging everyone, including himself, to make this a part of every one’s life, and his life—a value that will supplement the other values and help round out the substance of the soul?

Condorcet,* in his attitude towards history; Dryden, perhaps, when he sings, “...from heavenly harmony, This universal frame began. ...The diapason closing full in man”;6 more certainly Emerson in the “Over-soul” and [in the idea of the] “common-heart” seem to lend strength to the thought that this germ-plasm of creative art interest and work is universal, and that its selection theory is based on any condition that has to do with universal encouragement. Encouragement here is taken in the broad sense of something akin to unprejudiced and intelligent examination, to sympathy and unconscious influence—a thing felt rather than seen. The problem of direct encouragement is more complex and exciting but not as fundamental or important. It seems to the writer that the attempts to stimulate interest by elaborate systems of contests, prizes, etc., are a little over-done nowadays. Something of real benefit to art may be accomplished in this way, but perhaps the prizes may do the donors more good than the donatees. Possibly the pleasure and satisfaction of the former in having done what they consider a good deed may be far greater than the improvement in the quality of the latter’s work. In fact, the process may have an enervating effect upon the latter—it may produce more Roderick Hudsons* than Beethovens. Perhaps something of greater value could be caught without this kind of bait.6 Perhaps the chief value of the plan to establish a “course at Rome” to raise the standard of American music (or the standard of American composers—which is it?) may be in finding a man strong enough to survive it. To see the sunrise a man has but to get up early, and he can always have Bach in his pocket. For the amount of a month’s wages, a grocery-clerk can receive “personal instruction” from Beethoven and other living “conservatories.” Possibly, the more our composer accepts from his patrons, “et al.,” the less he will accept from himself. It may be possible that a month in a “Kansas wheat field” will do no more for him than three years in Rome. It may be that many men—perhaps some of genius (if you won’t admit that all are geniuses)—have been started on the downward path of subsidy by trying to write a thousand-dollar prize poem or a ten-thousand-dollar prize opera. How many masterpieces have been prevented from blossoming in this way? A cocktail will make a man eat more but will not give him a healthy, normal appetite (if he had not that already). If a bishop should offer a “prize living” to the curate who will love God the hardest for fifteen days, whoever gets the prize would love God the least—probably. Such stimulants, it strikes us, tend to industrialize art rather than develop a spiritual sturdiness—a sturdiness which Mr. Sedgwick says shows itself in a close union between spiritual life and the ordinary business of life, against spiritual feebleness, which shows itself in the separation of the two. And for the most of us, we believe, this sturdiness would be encouraged by anything that will keep or help us keep a normal balance between the spiritual life and the ordinary life. If for every thousand dollar prize a potato field be substituted, so that these candidates of Clio can dig a little in real life, perchance

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* Concerning this reference to Plotinus and one in Essays Before A Sonata, see Note 63.
6 M. J. A. N. Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794). The attitude Ives refers to is that shown in his Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrés de l’esprit humain. The work attempts to show the continuous progress of the human race on the path to ultimate perfection.

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* Weak-charactered artist who studied abroad, in Henry James’ novel, Roderick Hudson (1876).
6 The remainder of this paragraph, excepting the last sentence, is from Essays Before A Sonata, pp. 92–94.
dig up a natural inspiration, art’s air might be a little clearer—a little freer from certain traditional delusions: for instance, that free thought and free love always go to the same café—that atmosphere and diligence are synonymous. To quote Thoreau incorrectly: “When half-Gods talk, the Gods walk!” Everyone should have the opportunity of not being over-influenced. But these unpopular convictions should stop—“On ne donne rien si libéralement que ses conseils.”

A necessary part of this part of progressive evolution (for they tell us now that evolution is not always progressive) is that every one should be as free as possible to encourage every one, including himself, to work and to be willing to work where this interest directs, “to stand and be willing to stand unprotected from all the showers of the absolute which may beat upon him, to use or learn to use, or at least to be unafraid of trying to use, whatever he can of any and all lessons of the infinite which humanity has received and thrown to him, that nature has exposed and sacrificed for him, that life and death have translated for him,” until the products of his labor shall beat around and through his ordinary work—shall strengthen, widen, and deepen all his senses, aspirations, or whatever the innate power and impulses may be called, which God has given man.

Everything from a mule to an oak which nature has given life has a right to that life, and a right to throw into that life all the values it can. Whether they be approved by a human mind or seen with a human eye is no concern of that right. The right of a tree, wherever it stands, is to grow as strong and as beautiful as it can whether seen or unseen, whether made immortal by a Turner, or translated into a part of Seraphic architecture or a kitchen table. The instinctive and progressive interest of every man in art, we are willing to affirm with no qualification, will go on and on, ever fulfilling hopes, ever building new ones, ever opening new horizons, until the day will come when every man while digging his potatoes will breathe his own epics, his own symphonies (operas, if he likes it); and as he sits of an evening in his yard and shirt sleeves smoking his pipe and watching his brave children in their fun of building their themes for their sonatas of their life, he will look up over the mountains and see his visions in their reality, will hear the transcendental strains of the day’s symphony resounding in their many choirs, and in all their perfection, through the west wind and the tree tops!

It was not Mark Twain but the “Danbury News Man”* who became convinced that a man never knows his vices and virtues until that great and solemn event, that first sunny day in spring when he wants to go fishing, but stays home and helps his wife clean house. As he lies on his back under the bed—under all the beds—with nothing beneath him but tucks and his past life, with his soul (to say nothing of his vision) full of that glorious dust of mortals and carpets, with his fingertips rosy with the caresses of his mother-in-law’s hammer (her annual argument)—as he lies there taking orders from the hired girl, a sudden and tremendous vocabulary comes to him. Its power is omnipotent, it consumes everything—but the rubbish heap. Before it his virtues quail, hesitate, and crawl carefully out of the cellar window; his vices—even they go back on him, even they can’t stand this—he sees them march with stately grace (and others) out of the front door. At this moment there comes a whisper, the still small voice of a “parent on his father’s side”—“Vices and Virtues! Vices and Virtues! they ain’t no sech things—but there’s a tarnal lot of ’em.” Wedged in between the sewing machine and the future, he examines himself, as every man in his position should do:** “What has brought me to this? Where am I? Why do I do this?” “These are natural inquiries. They have assailed thousands before our day; they will afflict thousands in years to come. And probably there is no form of interrogation so loaded with subtle torture—unless it is to be asked for a light in a strange depot by a man you’ve just selected out of

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* See the reference on p. 94. Still another source for this “misquote” is Emerson’s poem, “Give All To Love,” (IX, 85) which reads: “When half-gods go, /The gods arrive.”

† Freely quoted from Essays Before A Sonata, p. 92.

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*James Montgomery Bailey (1841–1894), founder and owner of the Danbury News, writer of humorous sketches which made his newspaper famous. Since Ives was born in Danbury and lived there until he came to school and college in New Haven (1893), he must have read a great deal of Bailey’s writing.

** The above passage is probably from a newspaper sketch by Bailey. The passage which follows in quotes is from the introduction to Life in Danbury: Being a Brief but Comprehensive Record of the Doings of a Remarkable People, Under More Remarkable Circumstances, and Chronicled in a Most Remarkable Manner by the Author, James M. Bailey, “The Danbury News Man” (Boston, 1873). The quotation is adapted to some extent. For the passage, see Note 64.
seventeen thousand as the one man the most likely to have a match. Various authors have various reasons for bringing out a book, and this reason may or may not be the reason they give to the world; I know not, and care not. It is not for me to judge the world unless I am elected. It is a matter which lies between the composer and his own conscience, and I know of no place where it is less likely to be crowded. . . . Some have written a book for money; I have not. Some for fame; I have not. Some for love; I have not. Some for kindlings; I have not. I have not written a book for any of these reasons or for all of them together. In fact, gentle borrower, I have not written a book at all"—I have merely cleaned house. All that is left is out on the clothes line; but it's good for a man's vanity to have the neighbors see him—on the clothes line.

For some such or different reason, through some such or different process, this volume, this package of paper, uncollectable notes, marks of respect and expression, is now thrown, so to speak, at the music fraternity, who for this reason will feel free to dodge it on its way—perhaps to the waste basket. It is submitted as much or more in the chance that some points for the better education of the composer may be thrown back at him than that any of the points the music may contain may be valuable to the recipient.

Some of the songs in this book, particularly among the later ones, cannot be sung, and if they could, perhaps might prefer, if they had a say, to remain as they are; that is, "in the leaf"—and that they will remain in this peaceful state is more than presumable. An excuse (if none of the above are good enough) for their existence which suggests itself at this point is that a song has a few rights, the same as other ordinary citizens. If it feels like walking along the left-hand side of the street, passing the door of physiology or sitting on the curb, why not let it? If it feels like kicking over an ash can, a poet's castle, or the prosodic law, will you stop it? Must it always be a polite triad, a "breve gaudium," a ribbon to match the voice? Should it not be free at times from the dominion of the thorax, the diaphragm, the ear, and other points of interest? If it wants to beat around in the valley, to throw stones up the pyramids, or to sleep in the park, should it not have some immunity from a Nemesis, a Rameses, or a policeman? Should it not have a chance to sing to itself,

1 MS. 2: (by celebrated opera singers).