



The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors
July/August 1999 • Volume 22, Number 6

***THE UNKNOWN IVES*, Donald Berman (pn) CR1 CD 811(65:51)
IVES 3-Page Sonata. Studies Nos. 6, 7, 8, and 9, "The Anti-Abolitionist Riots." Studies Nos. 15, 16, 19, and 23. *Set of 5 Takeoffs*. Studies Nos. 20, 22, and 21, "Some Southpaw Pitching." **RUGGLES Evocations—4 Chants for Piano****

What, you may be thinking, the *Three-Page Sonata* unknown? This disc is subtitled "Premiere recordings of unpublished works and of new critical editions." It represents decades of critical editing by John Kirkpatrick (for many years the curator of the Ives collection at Yale) and, after his death, Donald Berman. Other Ives scholars and performers also contributed; Berman mentions several, including Alan Mandel's pioneering performances and recordings, made directly from the original sketches (Berman's memory plays tricks on him, however: Mandel's recording of Ives's "complete" piano music was on a 4-LP Desto set; it was Nina Deutsch who later recorded them on a stereo Voxbox). As usual with Ives scores, these pieces have a tortured history too complex to unravel here; even Berman's detailed notes cannot cover everything. He does explain why it took so long to get this far: Both Ives and Kirkpatrick concentrated first on the major works, getting to the small piano pieces and sketches only years later.

The headnote lists the pieces in the order they appear on the disc. The three sets of studies are just that: The "Set" was a favorite Ives form, and he, Kirkpatrick, and Berman have each contributed to the groupings. The combining of Studies 16 and 19 is a Kirkpatrick pairing; he also felt that they foreshadow No.23. Study No. 20 is the longest and most complex movement here; it is a miracle of variety and color as it segues suavely from marches to ragtime to polyphony to transcendental musing.

After all the scholarship, how does the music sound? Wonderful! The editions have convincingly Ivesian tang and loft, and Berman is a marvel. All of this music demands the highest virtuosity, as Ives was experimenting and challenging his own formidable technique. Kirkpatrick's last pupil, Berman plays Ives with both the clarity and power of Marc-André Hamelin and the delicacy and grace of Gilbert Kalish. The booklet includes a quotation from Ives scholar Jan Swafford: "Berman's Ives most resembles the playing of Ives himself, as we hear it in the composer's private recordings." Given that suggestion, I hear it, too, and I second the motion.

Ives and Ruggles were best buddies in their later years, and the latter's inclusion here is most welcome; *Evocations* closes with a piece that is probably Ruggles's impression of his colleague and friend. Berman's performance is as moving as Kirkpatrick's on the two-LP CBS set *The Complete Music of Carl Ruggles*. CRI's recorded sound is clear as a bell, and this release joins Hamelin's "Concord" Sonata as my favorite Ives piano discs; I hope Berman will make it a series.

—James H. North

Here is a disc that immediately goes to my end-of-year Want List. Admittedly, the title for the collection, *The Unknown Ives*, is a bit misleading. Studies No.9 and 21 are quite well known, as well as the *Three-Page Sonata*. But what makes this collection so special is that some of these pieces are premiere recordings (most notably the *Set of Five Take-Offs*), and Berman's scrupulous editing and detective work have in fact uncovered what may arguably be a new Ives "mini-sonata."

Berman studied regularly with John Kirkpatrick, the pianist who premiered the "Concord" Sonata and who afterward devoted his lifelong energies to editing the Ives Collection at Yale. As a result, he is very close to the source, both in terms of his editorial and interpretive judgments. He has two great strengths in his renditions of Ives: (1) he is able to play with the sort of crazed abandon necessary (such as Studies No.21 and 23, and the final movement of the *Three-Page Sonata*), and (2) paradoxically, he also projects real restraint as required, so as to make elegance count as much as excess. Examples of this include his extraordinarily sensitive projection of polytempic layers in Study No.6 and the slow movement of the

Three-Page Sonata.

In addition, Berman has surmised (following initial hunches of Kirkpatrick) that Studies Nos. 15, 16/19, and 23 were intended by Ives to be a set, and as a result they make up a convincing sort of "sonatina" that complements the *Three-Page Sonata*. Perhaps we can now begin to view these two works as a pair of short sonatas that mirror the two larger "real" sonatas.

If you already have any Ives piano collection beyond the two sonatas, you are bound to have some overlap with this disc, but that should not deter you. Herbert Henck's wonderful recital on Wergo 60112-50 is probably the most nearly direct competition to this disc: It does not include the *Take Offs* and several of the Studies, but does include a series of two-piano quarter-tone pieces (as well as using a celesta for the top line of the slow movement of the *Three-Page Sonata*). In those pieces where he and Berman go head-to-head, I find Berman's approach slightly more expressive, projecting an appropriate spirit of freedom, though Henck's steely touch certainly tends to clarify textures. Alan Mandel's VoxBox set remains a comprehensive and impressive collection for those who want (almost) everything in one place (including the two sonatas), though it dates from the analog era and does not benefit from the sort of recent scholarship that Berman's disc represents. In short, you will have to get used to duplication when you enter into the world of Ives's piano music, and in fact should relish it the way Ives probably would.

The Ruggles *Evocations* make a wonderful bonus, contrasting Ives's prolixity with music of exceptional economy (yet similar "transcendental" intensity). The piano sound is rich and clear. Bravo to Berman, CRI, and the ever-reliable Boston recordist/producer Joel Grodon for a great gift to American music.

—Robert Carl