

*THE NEW YORK TIMES - SUNDAY, JUNE 19, 2005*

## ARTS &amp; LEISURE

*Evocative Music to String Pearls By*

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CHARLES IVES has a well-deserved reputation as the ultimate maverick composer and flinty New England character. Still, in the flinty maverick department, another New England composer, the salty Carl Ruggles, holds his own. Born in 1876 to a whaling family on Cape Cod, Ruggles pursued music, in the words of Virgil Thomson, "without qualms about failure, poverty, disapproval, or what-will-people-say."

If Ruggles is underappreciated today, it's partly his own fault. Completing compositions went against his grain. He left most scores in sketchy disarray, published only eight works and spent his last decades more involved with painting than with music. (He died at 95.)

For all his stubbornness, Ruggles often caved in and turned to pragmatic musicians to help him put his fragmentary scores into some sort of performable shape. One he frequently sought for such aid was the pianist and editor John Kirkpatrick, who was also a devoted colleague of Ives.

An engrossing new recording - "The Uncovered Ruggles" (New World Records 80629-2), featuring the excellent pianist Donald Berman - should contribute significantly to the understanding of this composer. Mr. Berman, a

pearls." Mr. Berman gives searching and authoritative accounts of 10 solo works. He also accompanies the soprano Susan Narucki in four restless songs and the violinist Daniel Stepner in a volatile piece titled "Mood."

Ruggles's musical upbringing was unconventional: he learned as much from playing violin in theater orchestras during his teens as from studying composition at Harvard. He emerged with a wildly distinctive voice: aggressively modern, highly chromatic, densely polyphonic, indebted to the early atonal aesthetic of Schoenberg.

As the noted English critic Wilfrid Mellers once wrote, Ruggles, in his craggy music, sought freedom from "tonal bondage ... from conventionalized repetitions, from anything that sullied the immediacy and purity of existence - even more remorselessly than Schoenberg."

The piano works offered here, especially the astounding "Evocations: Four Chants for Piano," mostly evolve in long spans of organic, heaving, intertwining contrapuntal lines. The pervasively somber mood is sometimes relieved by a touch of wistfulness or delicacy. Avoiding overt drama, the music grabs you with its inexorable sweep and

musician with a scholarly bent who studied with Kirkpatrick, won critical acclaim for two earlier recordings, both called "The Unknown Ives" (from Composers Recordings and New World). They presented premiere recordings of unpublished works and new critical editions of Ives.

The Ruggles release also offers several first recordings of unpublished sketches, mostly transcribed or realized by Kirkpatrick, who likened the process of assembling scores from Ruggles's fragments and sketches to "stringing

mystical fervor. But don't expect to hear a steady rhythmic tread in "March" or an oom-pah-pah in "Valse Lente."

The songs are utterly strange yet strangely haunting. It's good that Mr. Berman included "Exaltation," a melancholic but sweetly tonal hymn. Ruggles composed it in 1958 in tribute to his beloved wife, Charlotte, who had died the year before. Charlotte had long asked Ruggles to compose a hymn for her. Did this rugged New Englander have a secret soft spot?

