

IVES A Songbook

Gottschick transcribes and orders songs by Charles Ives

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In a just world, credit owed where credit's due, you'd be filing this disc under 'Sebastian Gottschick/Charles Ives – A Songbook'. Gottschick has 'arranged' and transcribed Ives as a jazz arranger, or indeed Ferruccio Busoni, might understand the term. Instrumental pieces are co-opted as interludes. Creative decisions have been taken about where to place Ives's songs in relation to each other, this new context designed to illuminate our understanding of the time and place that begat them.

Ives could never have imagined this narrative sequence himself because he had no idea how his work would be viewed in the modern age. This is a redux in the proper meaning of the word. A dream sequence that dreams of Ives's nostalgic dream sequences. An autobiography rendered in the third person. A piece with premeditated, through-written dramatic integrity that could, without too much tweaking, be staged as music theatre.

That said, no one wants to hear 'Charles Ives: The Musical' and, just very occasionally, a stagy atmosphere prevails. Omar Ebrahim's shouty spoken dialogue over 'All the Way Around and Back' is very Oklahoma!, while in her high register Jeannine Hirzel can inch towards hey-let's-put-on-a-show oversell. But both singers are also sympathetic and technically bulletproof. You wonder quite how Hirzel manages to pitch her line against the floating tonal smog in 'Down East', and Ebrahim cracks the emotional hub of Ives's Rupert Brooke setting 'Grantchester' without emoting.

And let 'Grantchester' also stand as an exemplar of Gottschick's extraordinarily worldly wise scoring: an authentic Ivesian patina splintering into nests of microtonal harmony and instrumentation that bleeds into other historic epochs – Ives's nostalgia for the future.

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