Charles Ives is something of a maverick among composers. A successful insurance executive by day, he composed on weekends and evenings in whatever free time he could find or make. As a result, he didn't rely on composition as a source of money or fame and had "the opportunity of not being over-influenced," in his own words (quoted in Hitchcock, "Charles Ives's Book of *114 Songs*," p. 129). Thus, he was free to develop his own style as he wished, without the pressures inherent in composing for a living, and he is known today for his eclecticism, originality, and wide variety of idioms (see Burkholder, Grove Music Online). In this paper, I consider three Ives songs that showcase that variety: "Majority," "Songs my Mother Taught Me," and "Charlie Rutlage," all of which can be found in Ives' *114 Songs*. Despite their highly varied content and style, these pieces are bound together by two of the compositional parameters of greatest interest to Ives: time and tonality, both of which Ives manipulates in a myriad of ways in order to achieve greater expression in his songs.[1]

To begin, I will give an exceedingly brief introduction to each song for reference, before delving into the details in the next section. "Songs my Mother Taught Me" is a beautiful song and the most accessible of the three presented here. Overall, it is a relatively conventional, with a ternary form, (A B A') and a firmly established tonality centered on the key of Eb major. The structure of this song is summarized in the following table:

Measures	1-2	3-14	15-16	17-26	27	28-39	40
Section	Intro	A	Transition	B	Transition	A'	Closing
Key	Eb	Eb	N/A	G → B → Bm	Eb	Eb	Eb
Dynamics	pp	p	p	mp → ppp	ppp	pp → ppp	ppp

1 I used the following recordings in the course of my listening:
Ives, Charles, William Sharp, Paul Sperry, Irma Vallecillo, Phillip Bush, and Mary A. Hart. Ives, *C: Songs (complete), Vol. 1, 3, and 4*. Hong Kong: Naxos Digital Services Ltd, 2008. Internet resource.

The A and A’ sections, both 12 bars long, can be further divided into groupings of (2 + 2) + 4 + 4 measures, and they firmly establish the key of Eb major. The B section contrasts with A and A’ in that it is more developmental, quickly modulating through a succession of keys.

Moving gradually away from conventional tonality, we have Ives’ “Charlie Rutlage.” This song, too, can be divided up into three large sections as follows:

Measures	1-15	16-20	21-39	40-41	42-53
Section	A	Transition	B	Transition	A’
Key	F → C → Dm	D → C#m	Cm → ~A → N/A	N/A	F → C → D → Bb
Dynamics	mp → f	p	ff → fff → ffff	mp → p	p → mf → pp
Speed	Moderate	Moderate	Fast, Faster, and Faster	Slower	Moderate

A and A’ are relatively steady, in both tempo and character. After one (repeated) bar of introduction, A consists of 6 + 4 + 4 bars, while A’ breaks down into 6 + 6. The B section has two substantial halves, mm. 21-32 and mm. 33-39, each of which intensifies substantially from start to finish, in terms of tempo, dynamics, and harmony.

Moving to the extreme fringes of tonality, there’s “Majority,” which has the distinction of being the first of Ives’ *114 Songs*. Unlike the previous songs, “Majority” divides not into three sections but seven, following the structure of the text. These are:

Measures	1-7	8-17	18-20	21-27	28-33	34-42	43-49
Section	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Text: Action		Toiled	Thinking	Singing	Yearning	Dreaming	
Text: Result		Works	Thought	Art	Hope	Visions of God	
Dynamics	pp-ff	f	mf	mf → mp	mp	pp	ff → fff
Time Signature	None	4/2	None	6/8	4/4	3/4	(4/4)

Also in contrast to the previous pieces, there is little repetition between sections; each one is musically distinct, and the ending is quite unlike the beginning.

Having briefly introduced each piece at a high level, I will now call attention to specific features in each to demonstrate the links between them, and highlight the connection between the technique and the affect. The two common elements in these pieces, which receive Ives's attention and give force to his intentions, are time and tonality. Of course, every piece of music interacts with these elements in some way (possibly by omission, in the case of tonality), but Ives specifically uses these parameters to shape these songs and make them powerfully expressive. Each song manifests these elements differently, but the prominence of these parameters across three very different songs suggests the importance of these compositional parameters to Ives in general.

First, consider Ives' manipulation of time. In "Majority," this takes the form of shifting tempos and especially shifting time signatures, which he uses to distinguish each section from its neighbors and to support the structure of the text. Curiously, the song begins with no time signature at all — Ives simply puts barlines where he pleases, resulting in a first measure containing 22 quarter notes' worth of time. A time signature is established in the second section (m. 8), but it is silently dropped in the third section (m. 18), without any new time signature or explanatory note provided. The presence and details of the time signature contribute to the affect of each section: the strange, weighty first section is slow and timeless — it feels almost primordial, as much from the lack of time and regularity as the enormous, unshaped potential of the clusters. The introduction of a time signature creates some sense of order. Later, the 6/8 time signature supports the text, "the Masses are singing," paired with conventional 6/8 rhythms in the voice and piano. As noted by Matthew McDonald, Ives's text also demonstrates a shifting relationship with time (*Breaking Time's Arrow*, p. 4). At first we're told that "The Masses have toiled," resulting in the works of the world. In subsequent segments, the pitch shifts

from past to present: “The Masses are thinking,” “singing,” “yearning,” and “dreaming,” whence come the “thought,” “art,” and “hope” of the world, and finally the “visions of God.” This last consequence brings us to the end, wherein “God’s in His Heaven, All will be well with the World!” appears in the future tense, as a conviction or a prophecy. Just as the music’s time signature shifts in each section, the text too has a fluid relationship with temporality.

“Charlie Rutlage,” in contrast, creates a strong, regular sense of rhythm right off the bat. In this song, Ives manipulates time differently, via tempo rather than time signature. Thus, the B section, recounting the circumstances of young Charlie’s demise, speeds up dramatically, then holds off for a moment, roughly the span of a single breath. Notably, this first sprint disrupts the sense of temporal stability via an off-kilter hemiola in the piano: the measures are 4/4, but the repeating bass line takes five eighth notes per repetition rather than four, resulting in a progressive phase shift of one eighth note per repetition (such that it takes five repetitions to realign on a half note). After the pause, the piece gets a second wind and rushes forwards, *“faster and faster”* (not to mention *“louder and louder”*) at an increasingly frenetic pace, until it reaches the breaking point just as Charlie reaches his, killed beneath his horse. This use of time is highly affective in contributing to the emotion of the piece — the chaos, the fear, the sense of spinning out of control — in combination with tonal aspects described in the next section.

In “Songs my Mother Taught Me,” the manipulation of time is much more subtle, but still essential to the piece’s character. The character of the piece is more traditional than the others, and so too are its manipulations of time. In m. 11, a *“più rit”* holds the piece back at a particularly emotive moment, lingering on the strange and beautiful harmony beneath it. Later, in mm. 15, 23 and 36, Ives gives more conventional instructions for changing the flow of time expressively via rubato, such as *“poco accel.”*, *“poco rall.”*, *“rit.”*, and the fermata. However, he also disturbs time in more striking

ways; in particular, m. 20 is one of two 2/4 measures in the song, throwing off the meter in the more developmental B section at a moment of tonal ambiguity. Additionally, that *"poco rall."*occurs at m. 23, which is otherwise a verbatim repeat of the preceding measure. This duplication — featuring an unconventional progression that precedes our arrival in Bm — represents a structural means of slowing time down, by repeating a singular moment rather than just slowing down the piece by reducing the tempo (the text here also repeats, on the word "flowing"). Aside from the expressive shifts in timing in the music, the focus on time is also evident in the subject matter of the text (written by Czech poet Adolf Heyduk), which deals with time and memory. As in "Majority," the shifts in tense are significant, and emphasize the connection between past and present — a central concern of Ives.

Ives takes a different approach to temporal organization within each song, but Ives's ideas about time are also evident in higher-level structures, such as the entire collection of 114 songs. In *Breaking Time's Arrow*, McDonald points out that the songs in the collection are broadly in reverse-chronological order, with the oldest songs appearing last (p. 4). Thus, Ives begins with "Majority," but finishes with "Slow March," a short, simple song dedicated to a deceased family pet and the first (published) song Ives composed, dating from when he was thirteen. McDonald connects these two songs by their keys (the anomalous ending of "Majority," discussed below, fits perfectly in "Slow March"), dynamics, and melodies, and imagines the former directly leading into the latter. This connection between the beginning and the end of the collection, between a radically forward-looking song (in both technique and message) and an extremely traditional, sentimental one consumed by memory, highlights Ives's uncommon thinking about time and demonstrates how it applies on multiple scales.

As with time, and often in conjunction with it, Ives varies his approach to tonality extensively throughout his songs. Each piece takes a wildly different approach, but all engage with conventional tonality in one way or another. To start with the clearest, *Songs my Mother Taught Me* is firmly tonal.

That said, it is not *simply* tonal. The initially static oscillation between a strong tonic and weak dominant in mm. 1-6 softly introduces the tonal context and sets the tone for the piece. The ensuing tonicization of the subdominant in m. 8 (and the beautiful passing B naturals preceding it) build interest and poignance. These features, along with the characteristic modulations in thirds in the B section (Eb→G→B→Bm), firmly establish a romantic approach to harmony. To be sure, this song is tonal, but it is more the tonality of Schumann than Mozart; indeed, the music of the piece would not be terribly out of place in the *Album for the Young*. But Ives remains original when composing in familiar idioms, and this is exemplified by the remarkable harmonies he emphasizes in the second beats of mm. 11 and 36. In m. 11, this harmony could be described as a Bb half-diminished seventh if not for the Cb; as it is, it is wildly expressive and retains some dominant function. At its reappearance in m. 36, that Cb turns out to be an appogiatura to a Db, making a bona fide $Bb^{ø7}$. This in turn shifts by half steps to become an Em4/3, which is distinctly out of place in the prevailing key of Eb. If the G natural were a G#, it could be described as a Neapolitan; as it is, that label is tenuous, but it nonetheless functions as a predominant leading back to V. It is precisely these idiosyncratic harmonies that make the piece so moving.

Tonality also plays an important role in *Charlie Rutlage*. Harmonically, the piece begins with a relatively static pattern tonally centered on F, featuring only the tonic and closely related harmonies (I, iv, and iii). In m. 5 we get IV-I before modulating to the dominant, C, in m. 6. At the pickup to m. 8, we modulate to Dm, with an Italian augmented sixth on the last eighth note followed by an exceedingly long stretch of dominant; mm. 8-11 are essentially all A7. The A section concludes with a developmental patch in the tonal neighborhood of Bb. The A' section follows largely the same pattern, with the exceptions that the A7 stretch is shorter (two bars in mm. 48-49) and the ending is unambiguously in Bb major, finally concluding with a large plagal cadence that does its nickname (the

"Amen" cadence) justice and paints the text appropriately ("the shining throne of grace"). Thus, the A and A' sections are in the vicinity of tonality, albeit without much in the way of strong, unambiguous cadences until the last few measures. In the B section, Ives approaches tonality differently. This passage is initially characterized by Cm triads clouded by a descending chromatic bassline and tight, interspersed clusters of dissonance. It then moves from a clear, if restless, Cm to an even less settled area with a tendency towards A7 (m. 25). At this point, Ives brings in another source of musical material, from the same source as the song text: *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, by John A. Lomax. At the pickup to m. 25, he adds in the melody of another cowboy song, "Whoopee ti yi yo, git along little dogies," sitting atop an increasingly dissonant accompaniment in the right hand.[2] Thus, he injects a simple, tonal melody into a decreasingly tonal context to great affect: this quotation evokes the nature of Charlie's work of herding cattle, and it's set amidst a chaotic score that portends his fate. In this song, Ives mixes tonal and atonal writing for contrasting emotions. Another example is in the vocal line: initially it contains a modest cowboy tune, but eventually it abandons pitch entirely — first turning "half spoken" and then "recite[d]" frantically rather than sung, in an original kind of S*prechstimme* that has been compared to Schoenberg's (Hitchcock, *Ives*, p. 14). Likewise, the increasingly dissonant piano part collapses spectacularly into the climax with a similar abandonment of pitch in favor of sheer sonic effect. Ives notates "**fists**" with helpful arrows directed at thick clusters, and inserts a footnote: "In these measures, the notes are indicated only approximately; the time of course, is the main point."

Finally, we have the least tonal piece of the group, *Majority*. Here, Ives takes a starkly contrasting, largely atonal approach to pitch organization, but he experiments with tonal fragments to expressive effect. Upon glancing at the score, one such experiment immediately jumps off the page:

2 Incidentally, this cowboy tune also makes an appearance in Copland's *Billy the Kid Suite*. See p. 162 in: Auner, Joseph. *Anthology for Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.

enormous, boxed tone clusters, which do not suggest any tonal center. Nonetheless, they do have distinguishing features of pitch organization. In particular, there are really only two clusters: one which consists entirely of consecutive white keys and contains exactly two octaves (fourteen notes, where each note appears twice) and one which consists entirely of consecutive black keys and likewise contains exactly two octaves (ten notes, where each note appears twice). Thus, the first type contains every note in the C major diatonic scale, while the second contains every note in the G# major pentatonic scale. Also, the first type is necessarily denser, as it contains the "majority" of the notes in the octave. Notably, only the second type returns at the end of the piece. In any case, these clusters represent one way Ives organizes pitches without conventional tonality: by separating them into unequal groups of seven and five, to a possibly titular effect. But the clusters, though impressive, are not the only means Ives employs to create order. For example, section C (mm. 18-20) deals almost exclusively in chords built in fourths and fifths. Section B shows off contrapuntal contrary motion (m. 16) that consists entirely of parallel perfect fifths, and section C culminates in huge major triads stepping upwards in parallel (m. 27). The next section proceeds by flirting with polytonality, plainly stacking one triad on top of another (e.g. mm. 28, 30, 32). The section after that returns to individual tertial chords, but with wild extensions, as in the complete, close-voiced 13^{th} chords in mm. 34 and 36 — these reach every note in a diatonic scale by stacking thirds. In short, each section appears to have a different approach to tonality! And the song culminates in the most shocking approach of all: the very end, the last five beats, are a completely conventional, root position, V→I.[3] This remarkable cadence follows the text "God's in His Heaven, All will be well with the World!," a reference to the famous line from "Pippa's Song" by Robert Browning.[4] This song, challenging as it is, is not defined by its lack of tonality, but rather by its experimentation with tonality and final dissolution into it.

3 McDonald points out that some have instead interpreted this progression as I-IV in C (rather than V-I in F), representing an incomplete plagal cadence, but he makes a compelling case for V-I (*Breaking Time's Arrow*, pp. 5-6).

4 Thanks to Martin Marks for pointing this out to me.

I have chosen these three Ives pieces in part because there is such stark contrast between them. A large part of that contrast is the way in which each piece approaches the issues of time and tonality; but rather than dividing the pieces, this diversity in approach brings them together and presents a compelling argument that these parameters are among the most essential to Ives as a composer. He does not maintain a consistency in his treatment of time or tonality between pieces, but that's precisely because they are the elements he is most interested in varying. As Ives himself wrote in 1925: "why tonality as such should be thrown out for good, I can't see. Why it should be always present, I can't see. It depends, it seems to me, a good deal — as clothes depend on the thermometer — on what one is trying to do" (quoted in Burkholder, Grove Music Online). He painted scores with an exceptionally wide palette, with techniques from the ancient to the experimental, and for each piece he chose what he felt was appropriate in order to accomplish the expressive goals of that piece and convey the greatest affect.

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