

## Notes from the Arranger

Why do we arrange music for new combinations of instruments? On one level, it may be fun, challenging, or interesting for us as trombonists to play repertoire that was not originally composed for us. We may learn and grow as musicians from stretching ourselves into new musical spaces. More importantly, though, arranging a familiar piece of music for a new set of instruments can bring out aspects of the piece that may have been overlooked before.

In adapting a movement of Ives's *Concord Sonata* for trombone choir, I find the piece gains a sense of depth, sustain, grandeur, and weight above and beyond the original piano version. Perhaps some agility or speed is lost at the same time, but hearing the piece in a new way brings to light other characteristics which were always in the music, but may not have had a chance to come to the fore until now.

I find the best way to perform transcriptions is not to try to sound exactly like the original instrument(s), but to embrace the strengths of our instruments and breathe new life into the piece, free of any expectation for how it "should" sound. In doing so, something new and beautiful may be able to happen.

Charles Ives was the pioneer of the modern American classical sound. Ives sought inspiration for his compositions from the musical world of America at the turn of the 20th Century. It is common to hear snippets of church music, patriotic tunes, marching band, and American folk songs in his writing. (Listen for distant church bells in this piece between letters B and C, and G and H.)

Ives finished the majority of his *Concord Sonata*, from which this movement is excerpted, in 1915. According to Ives, the piece reflects on the old Alcott house in Concord, MA, but I feel a greater struggle in this work than a mere journal about a piece of architecture. The fact that Ives quotes Beethoven's 5th Symphony so extensively makes me wonder about his views on destiny, fate, the future, and the creative process.

The piece starts serenely, but quickly devolves into uncertainty, doubt, and anger. A floating interlude brings us back to distant memories where we remember that we are shaped by our past, but have control of the direction of our future. Building on that realization and quickly gaining steam, the piece ends with a powerful and joyful climax. The angry Beethoven theme is transformed into one of power, hope, and light. A feeling of calm and contentment ends the piece, finally coming to rest on one simple C major chord.

The original piano version of the *Concord Sonata* is largely free of bar lines. Ives composed in long, stream-of-consciousness phrases that the pianist is free to stretch and mold. Due to the challenges of performing an ensemble work with no bar lines, I have chosen to meter the music according to the way I hear the accents of the melody. My interpretation of the bar lines and phrases is not the "correct" way, nor is it the only possible way this piece could be performed. (I toyed with the idea of a series of "downbeat arrows," similar to the fifth movement of Lincolnshire Posey, but abandoned the idea due to the length and complexity of this piece.) If the ensemble performing this piece prefers to re-bar any passages, or combine or split measures to achieve a different phrase structure, they should feel free. Charles Ives would relish the uniqueness of each performance and each performer adding their own ideas to his score.

The only section that is metered in the original piano score is from letter J to letter N. The rest of the piece should be played extremely freely, and with a sense of natural give-and-take to the tempo. All the italicized tempo indications are Ives's original suggestions for tempo and rubato, and should be heeded when possible.

Ross Holcombe  
Tampa, FL, August 2020

# The Alcotts

from Piano Sonata No. 2

for Trombone Choir

Charles Ives

arr. Ross Holcombe

Moderately (♩ = 60)

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Trombone 3

Trombone 4

Trombone 5

Trombone 6

Trombone 7

Trombone 8

Bass Trombone 9

Bass Trombone 10

*p*

*p*

*p*

*p*

4 A

Tbn. 1 *pp*

Tbn. 2 *pp*

Tbn. 3 *pp*

Tbn. 4 *pp*

Tbn. 5

Tbn. 6

Tbn. 7 *pp* *ten.* *straight mute*

Tbn. 8 *pp*

B. Tbn. 1 *pp*

B. Tbn. 2 *pp*

52 **J** *Slower and quietly* (♩ = 66)

**Tbn. 1**  
*pp*

**Tbn. 2**  
*pp*

**Tbn. 3**  
*pp*

**Tbn. 4**  
*pppp*

**Tbn. 5**  
*pp* open

**Tbn. 6**  
*pp* open

**Tbn. 7**  
*pp* *p* *piu ten.* *hold back a little* *ten.*

**Tbn. 8**  
*pp* *p*

**B. Tbn. 1**  
*pp* *p*

**B. Tbn. 2**  
*pp* *p*

85 **P** *rit. gradually slower* **Q** *maestoso (♩ = 56) slowly and broadly*

Tbn. 1  
*ff*

Tbn. 2  
*ff*

Tbn. 3  
*ff*

Tbn. 4  
*ff*

Tbn. 5  
*ff*

Tbn. 6  
*ff*

Tbn. 7  
*ff*

Tbn. 8  
*ff*

B. Tbn. 1  
*ff*

B. Tbn. 2  
*ff*

98 *dim. e rit.* *slower* **S**

**Tbn. 1**  
*ff* > *mp* *pp*

**Tbn. 2**  
*ff* > *mp* *pp*

**Tbn. 3**  
*ff* > *mp* *pp*

**Tbn. 4**  
*ff* > *mp* *pp*

**Tbn. 5**  
*ff* > *mp* *pp*

**Tbn. 6**  
*ff* > *mp* *pp*

**Tbn. 7**  
*ossia*  
*p* *pp*

**Tbn. 8**  
*f* *p* *pp*

**B. Tbn. 1**  
*f* *p* *pp*

**B. Tbn. 2**  
*f* *p* *pp*