

Charles Louis Seeger, Jr. (1886–1979): Composer

PROFILED IN ALL major music lexicons, Charles Seeger never fails to be listed as both a musicologist and a composer. Although a String Quartet composed in 1910, while he served Otto Lohse (1858–

1925) at Cologne as an unpaid assistant on the conducting staff of the Municipal Opera,¹ was reportedly lost in the “Berkeley fire of 1923” along with the “scores and parts of two masques,”² his numerous compositions deposited at the Library of Congress, and catalogued at pages 327–328 of Ann M. Pescatello’s prescient biography range from 1908 to 1953 and eminently deserve rescue from oblivion.

His *Graduate Overture*, performed at a Boston Symphony Orchestra Pops concert in June 1908, the year of his emergence from Harvard, was again played at Munich later that same year, and at Bohemian Grove (Sonoma County, California) in 1912, the year that he began heading the nascent music department at the University of California, Berkeley³ (and also the year in which his poet brother Alan [1888–1916] left for Paris). Other than his *Graduate*

¹ After graduation in 1908 from Harvard, Seeger spent thirty months in Europe, the first twelve financed by his father. See Ruth Blume, “Seeger, Charles Louis,” *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band 16, Supplement (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1979), 1689: “Nach kurzer Tätigkeit als Volontärkpm. an der Städt. Oper unter Otto Lohse 1910 . . .” Seeger’s fondness for Germany that in a sense cost him his Berkeley professorship dated back to 1910.

² Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger, A Life in American Music* (Pittsburgh and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), p. 327. Whatever the exact date of the fire, he had already located in New York City, where he taught at the Institute of Musical Art 1921–1923 and at the New School for Social Research 1931–1935 (Blume, 1689).

³ Pescatello does not provide precise dates of these performances. His composition teachers at Harvard had been Walter Raymond Spalding, author of *Music at Harvard, A Historical Review of Men and Events* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1935), Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940), and William Heilam.



Charles Seeger in 1908



Overture, his orchestral *Overture* to William Butler Yeats's *The Shadowy Waters*, a "musical dramatic poem in one act with a prologue" (a poem that Seeger intended originally to use as libretto for an opera) testifies to a creative gift and a mastery of orchestration not less than that of his fellow students at Harvard who took music degrees in 1904 (Paul Hastings Allen), in 1906 (Archibald Thompson Davison), in 1907 (Edward Ballantine, Edward Royce), and in 1909 (Philip Greeley Clapp).⁴ All five eventually achieved visibility sufficient to stimulate profiles in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, eighth edition, 1992.

Begun in the same graduation year, but revised in 1913, Seeger's elegant *Sonata for Violin and Piano-forte* was a work that he often played with his first wife, Constance Edson, pupil of Franz Kneisel, whom he married on December 22, 1911, "in a ceremony in her brother Elie's apartment in the [Manhattan] east eighties."⁵ Recorded during July 1978 at Berkeley, California, in Hertz Hall by Ronald Erickson,⁶ violinist, and Earle Shenk, pianist, Seeger's 24-minute violin and piano sonata in three movements⁷ joins the extremely limited repertory of violin and piano sonatas composed before World War I by such Americans as Amy Marcy Beach (Op. 34), Arthur Foote (Op. 20), and Charles Ives.

If for no other reason than its intrinsic excellencies—not to dwell on Seeger's pioneering fame as musicologist—this sonata should be now published. In a letter to Pescatello dated October 15, 1979, Klaus Wachsmann (1907–1984) recalled how often while at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the years 1963 to 1968, Seeger had "talked more and more about his compositions," showing Wachsmann without any prompting his violin and piano sonata "and various other compo-

sitions of his." In the same vein, Wachsmann continues thus: "It was all the more overwhelming to be aware of his wish to analyze his own creations."⁸

According to Seeger's recollections confided to Erickson, author of the explanatory notes accompanying Stereo 1801 AB, copyrighted in 1984 by 1750 Arch Records (a division of 1750 Arch, Inc., 42138), he played his violin and piano sonata quite frequently with his first wife, especially during their concert tour through the eastern states from North Carolina to New York City in the Spring of 1921.⁹ Both piano and violin parts demand virtuoso performers. Their other offerings during their 1921 tour undertaken to foster love of "good" music dwelt on Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.

No less demanding are the piano parts of at least three of his *Seven Songs for a High Voice with piano accompaniment*, published by G. Schirmer in 1911.¹⁰ Alexander Scriabin wrote neither violin and piano sonatas nor songs, but "at the ecstatic peak of the first movement" of Seeger's sonata he inscribed the words, "hommage à A. Scriabin, in memory of a great man"¹¹ (Scriabin died at Moscow April 27, 1915). Not the final depositions of Scriabin, but rather the ecstasy of the D sharp minor étude concluding Scriabin's Opus 8 (1894) and the sweeping finale of his *Sonata*, Opus 30 (1903) better correlate with Seeger's intensity, than the songs of Duparc and Fauré, to which they have on occasion been compared.

Seeger's choice of poetry illustrates his high minded eclecticism. From *India's love lyrics: including the Garden of Kama*, arranged in verse by Laurence Hope (1865–1904), woman poet, he chose *Till I Wake*, the same poem selected to end *Four Indian*

⁸Pescatello, p. 282.

⁹*The New York Times*, July 11, 1921, 17:4, contains a 480-word article headed "Musical Pair Here on Auto-House Tour. Charles Seeger, Wife and Three Children on North Carolina-Maine Trip, Giving Concerts." The *Times* article makes her a pupil of Fritz Kreisler, rather than of Franz Kneisel.

¹⁰*Endymion*, poem by Oscar Wilde (12 pp.), *When we two parted*, lyrics by Lord Byron, and *Asleep*, poem by John Keats, demand virtuoso agility, chordal mastery, and dynamics control of the pianist.

¹¹Ronald Erickson, *Music of Charles Seeger*, liner notes accompanying the 1750 Arch Records 1984 album. However, Seeger in 1929 turned up his nose at Scriabin (Pescatello, p. 104), and took exception to Scriabin's influence on Ruth Crawford's pre-1930 compositions.

⁴Spalding, pp. 214–215.

⁵Pescatello, p. 52.

⁶Born at Seattle (year not divulged), Ronald Erickson reported himself as having taught at the University of California, Berkeley in 1978, in which year he was concertmaster of various professional orchestras in the Bay area. At the Juilliard School he had been a scholarship student with Ivan Galamian, Paul Makanowitsky, and Louis Persinger. In 1995 G. Schirmer published his edition of three violin and piano sonatas by George Antheil (1900–1959).

⁷Moderato con moto (11 minutes), Dialogue-Grave (10 minutes), Rondo-Allegro (3 minutes).



Love Lyrics copyrighted by Boosey & Co. in 1903, with music by Amy Woodforde-Finden.¹² In her sensuous setting the far simpler vocal line is constantly etched by a piano part negotiable by an amateur. Not so in Seeger's more compact but much more demanding setting.¹³

Song To —, fifth of *Seven Songs*, enlists poetry by Harvard classmate John Hall Wheelock, who like him, escaped to Europe immediately upon graduation, but returned in time to become Seeger's best man at his marriage to Constance Edson. The remaining five of the seven songs revert to passionate poetry by John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, a whimsical outburst by Sir Walter Scott, and a tribute to Keats—Oscar Wilde's *Endymion*. Reaching twelve pages, and requiring over four minutes to perform, Seeger's *Endymion* nonetheless omits the second of the three 14-line units in Wilde's poem, which in the 1881 first volume of his collected poems is expressly designated for a musical setting.

Endymion, Keats's *Asleep* and Scott's *The Pride of Youth* from Seeger's 1911 publication join four songs from his unpublished *Twelve Songs for High Voice and Piano* (1907-1912) in the 1977 (© 1984) LP album, *Music of Charles Seeger*—Robert Herrick's *Where as in silks my lady goes*, Shelley's *The Lady of the South*, Edgar Allan Poe's *To Helen*, and Cristóbal de Castillejo's *Alguna vez* (translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow). The

¹²Profiled in Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel, editors, *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (New York/London: W. W. Norton, 1995), 502, with portrait, Amy Woodforde-Finden (born Amelia Ward at Valparaiso, Chile, 1860; died at London March 13, 1919) married in 1903 a colonel who was a medical officer "in the Bengal Cavalry," and had served in India with an army officer whose wife was Laurence Hope. Woodforde-Finden's *Kashmiri Song*, "taken up by singer Hamilton Earle," became a world class concert song. In it, as well as in *Till I Wake*, Woodforde-Finden duplicates the voice line with the upper notes in the piano part. Seeger never so easily condescends to the singer.

¹³African American immensely successful composer Harry Thacker Burleigh (1866-1949) concluded his *Five Songs of Laurence Hope* (New York: G. Ricordi, 1915) with a setting of *Till I Wake*. His *Five Songs* demand no more than a competent amateur pianist, but the publishers made available also an orchestral arrangement (by Alfred Brüggenmann). H. E. Krehbiel, musical editor of the *New York Tribune*, prefaced *Five Songs* with an ecstatic analysis of Burleigh's *Till I Wake*, which ends the collection, praising it as one of the great songs of the epoch. Seeger deserved such a publicist.

record album includes also unaccompanied *Psalm 137* (dedicated to Carl Ruggles, composed in 1923, published in *New Music Quarterly*, 1954)¹⁴ and Wheelock's *The Letter* (dedicated to Ruth Crawford Seeger, his second wife, composed in 1934, published *New Music Quarterly*, 1954).

Without here attempting to flesh out this tribute with further enumeration of the items listed in Pescatello's catalogue, and leaving to Seeger's galaxy of admirers the joys of listening to the LP that should now be replaced with a CD, this remembrance closes with republication of four songs issued in 1911, the year of his first marriage. An even more desired tribute will be the embrace of his total surviving creative output by members of the Society for Ethnomusicology that now annually remembers him with its most prestigious prize but has not yet taken the total Seeger to heart.

¹⁴According to Erickson (note 11), Seeger quoted a theme from Scriabin's Black Mass Sonata (Op. 68) in this psalm setting. Seeger does not balk at the imprecation ending the psalm.

CHARLES' SEEGER, JR.

SEVEN SONGS

FOR A HIGH VOICE
WITH PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT



| | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------|
| ASLEEP | From by KEATS | .30 |
| ENDYMION | From by OSCAR WILDE | 1.00 |
| THE PRIDE OF YOUTH | From by Sir WALTER SCOTT | .50 |
| TILL I WAKE | From by LAWRENCE HOPE | .30 |
| SONG TO — | From by J. H. WHEELLOCK | .30 |
| WHEN SOFT WINDS AND SUNNY SKIES | From by SHELLEY | .50 |
| WHEN WE TWO PARTED | From by BYRON | .30 |

NEW YORK : G. SCHIRMER
BOSTON : THE BOSTON MUSIC CO. LONDON : SCRIBN & CO.

Endymion

Oscar Wilde

Charles Seeger, Jr.

Voice *Con moto gentile*

Piano *mp*

una corda sempre legato e liberamente

Ar - ca - dy, The sheep lie beat - ing in the

fold, *resc.* The wild goat runs a - cross the

wold. *dim.* But yes - - - - - ter -

day his love he

The ap - ple - trees are hung with

gold, And birds are loud in

*1 There should be a *decrecendo*, rather than a *crescendo*, at the top of the arpeggios throughout; except when otherwise marked.



Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "La - dy" are written below the notes. The dynamic marking *piu. f* is present.

Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "Moon! Be you my lov - er's" are written below the notes. The dynamic marking *piu. f* is present.

Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "sen - ti - nel, be you my lov - er's sen - ti -" are written below the notes. The dynamic marking *meno f* is present.

Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "nel;" are written below the notes. The dynamic marking *10* is present.

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Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "told," are written below the notes. The dynamic marking *30* is present.

Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "know he will come" are written below the notes.

Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "back to me," are written below the notes. The dynamic marking *(ad = d)* is present.

Two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef. The lyrics "ris - ing moon!" are written below the notes. The dynamic marking *poco rit.* is present.



impetuously
 You can - - not choose but
 29
fp subito

know
 my love,
f

For he a shup - - herdá crook doth

dim.
 bear,
dim.

dim.

mp
 You can - not
 29
mp

choose but know him well,
 For

he is shod with pur - - ple shoon,
f
ritacros



And he is soft as an - - y

p

gently

dove,

And

brown and curl - - y is his half a tempo The fall - ing dew is

ten.

poco rit.

cresc.

cold and chill, And no bird sings in

Ar - eady, The lit - - le

fauns have left the hill,

poco a poco dim.

ff

E - - ven the tir - ed daf - fo - - dil Has

closed its gold - ed doors, and still My lov - er comes not

dim.

dim.

back to me. False moon!

False moon! O wan - - - ing moon!

Where has my own true

lov - - er gone,

leggero

p a tempo
 Where are the lips ver - mil - - lion, The

a tempo
p

shep - herd's crook, the pur - ple shoon?

Tempo I

espress.

Why wear that

veil



of - drift - lag
mist?
Ahi thou hast young En -
dy - ml - on,

Thou hast the
lips that should be kissed!
ppp
dim.
non ritardando

Asleep

John Keats

Charles Seeger, Jr.

Adagio rubato

Voice
 A - sleep! Oh sleep a lit - tle while, white

Piano
mf sempre legato

ten.

pearl And let me kneel, and let me pray to thee, And let me call heaven's blessing on thine

ten. *dim.*

scherz. a tempo

eyes, And let me breathe into the hap-py air That doth enfold and touch thee all a - bout,

p f *piu f* *cresc.*

poco allarg. poco accel. allarg.

Vows of my slav - er - y, my giv - ing up, My sud - den a - do - ra - tion,

ff *poco allarg.* *poco accel.* *allarg.*

a tempo *molto riten.* *a tempo*

my great love!

a tempo *molto riten.* *a tempo* *rit.*

dim.

Tempo I

mp *m. d.*



When Soft Winds and Sunny Skies

P. B. Shelley

Charles Seeger, Jr.

Voice *Allegro*
 (♩ = 116) When soft winds and sun-ny

Piano *mp*
una corda

skies With the green earth

har - mo-nize, And the

cresc. e accel.

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young and dew - y dawn

Bold as an un - hunt - ed fawn Up the

mf *cresc.*

Poco meno mosso (♩ = 96)
piu f *ff* *dim.*
 wind - less heav'n is gone, Laugh: for am - bush'd in the

piu f *ff* *dim.*

22559

Charles Louis Seeger, Jr. (1886-1979): Composer

When We Two Parted

Lord Byron

Charles Seeger, Jr.

cresc. *dim.* *rit.*

day, Clouds and whirl - - winds watch their

cresc. *dim.* *rit.*

Ancor meno (♩ = 69)

prey.

mp *pp* *rapidamente* *m.d.* *m.s.* *m.d.*

una corda e sostenuto

Laugh!

ppp

Largo

Voice

When we two part-ed_ In si - lence and_ tears, Half broken-

Piano

mf

hearted, To - sev - er for years, - Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

cresc. *f*

molto espress.

Cold - er thy kiss; - Tru - ly, that hour fore-told - Sor-row to this.

molto dim. *allarg.*

non strasciante

p sempre legato e sostenuto

The dew of the morn-ing— Sunk chill on my

brow; It felt like the warn-ing— Of what—

cresc.

più marcato

Con moto

I feel now. Thy vows are all bro-ken, And light is thy fame:

ff *dim.*

I hear thy name spoken, And share in its shame. — They name thee be-fore —

mf *cresc.*

quasi gridato

— me A knell to mine ear; A shudder comes o'er me — Why —

fff *poco allarg.* *molto decresc.* *sempre mp*

molto espress.

wert thou so dear? — why wert thou so dear? —

poco sf *dim.*

meno marcato

They know not I knew thee, Who knew thee too well, too well—

p

espress.
 Long, long shall I rue — thee, Too deep- -ly to tell.

dim.

Tempo I
 In se-cret we

mp

met: In si-lence I grieve— That thy

heart could for-get, Thy spir-it de-ceive— If I should meet thee

cresc. *mf*

molto espress.
 Af-ter long years, How should I greet thee?— With si-lence and tears.

dim. e rit. *pp*

più rall. *molto*