An excellent bargain is available from Columbia—fine performances (Ormandy/Bernstein/Bernstein/Stokowski) of all four symphonies in one box (Columbia D38-783) on three discs, priced at the equivalent of two CDs. This is really an excellent buy, and I would strongly recommend it to anyone who is starting to listen to Ives.

Ives wrote two symphonic-scale tone poems for orchestra, his Three Places in New England (Orchestral Set No. 1) and Orchestral Set No. 2. Though Ormandy's reading of Three Places is good (available with the First Symphony—see above), it is totally outclassed by the recent recording of the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Michael Tilson Thomas (DG 2530048). This is an extremely sensitive performance of a pensive piece of music, and as a bonus you get a stunning performance of Carl Ruggles's Sun Treas- ury, a piece which, though worlds apart in mood from Three Places, is no less a masterpiece. Though I am not as fond of the Orchestral Set No. 2, it too has its points. The third movement, entitled From Harper Square North at the end of a Tragic Day (1913) the Voice of the People again Arise, is intended as an evocation of the faces and sentiments of the crowds Ives encountered in New York City on the day of the striking of the Lusitania. A fine recording is with Leopold Stokowski and the London Sym- phonie Orchestra (London OSA 21060), bracketed with a performance of Olivier Messiaen's L'Ascension.

Ives was for much of his creative life an organist and choir director at the Central Presbyterian Church in New Haven, Connecticut. During his tenure he wrote many striking works for chorus. Chief among these are the psalm settings, The Harvest Home Chorales, and one of the most amazing things Ives ever wrote, General William Booth Enters Into Heaven. Ives himself often was heard to remark that of all the works he had authored, only his Psalms 90 really satisfied him. Two recordings by the Gregg Smith Singers under the direction of Gregg Smith (Columbia MS 6921 and MS 7231) cover most of the major works for chorus with fine performances, including a really excellent General William Booth.

A major new release (Nonesuch 720325, 2 discs) has Gilbert Kalish and Paul Zukofsky in performances of the first Sonatas for Violin and Piano.

Charles Ives
A Centennial Discography
by George Harper

There is a great man living in this Country—a composer. He has solved the problem how to preserve one's self and to learn. He responds to negligence by com- tempt. He is not forced to accept praise or blame. His name is Ives.

—Arnold Schoenberg

1974 has been a big year for commem-orations: it is the 150th anniversary of Anton Bruckner's birth, and the centen- nial of the births of Arnold Schoenberg and Gustav Mahler. It is also the centen- nial of the death of Gaulliame Dufay. The year has seen the Boston Symphony Orchestra pay tribute to Schenect: first at Tanglewood, with performances of Verklarte Nacht, the Violin Concerto, a gargantuan The Wondrous Cross in the second move- ment. The fifth movement ends nowhere near any sort of resolution—in fact, it strongly reminds me of the conclusion of Mozart's Magic Flute. The recording of choice is with Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, bracketed with a performance of The Unanswered Question, the Fourth of July from Ives's Holidays Symphony. The Third Symphony is one of the loveliest things Ives ever wrote. Substituted The Camp Meeting, its introspective air is quite striking and thoroughly at odds with the common and mistaken image of "Ives the rambler." A good recording is with the short (3-movement, roughly 25 minute) symphony with Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic (Columbia MS-8483), bracketed with performances of Decora- tion Day (from the Holidays Symphony) and an amazing piece, The Unanswered Question. The real mind-boggler, though, is the Fourth Symphony, Ives's last. It is a work as a set of three answers (movements two through four) to the question of the purpose of life, posed in the first movement by the hymn (sung by union chorus) Watching, Tell me if the Night. This wild composition was for years considered unperformable. When in the mid-'60's Leopold Stokowski finally premiered the work, it was with the aid of two sub-conductors to handle the independent meters of the hair-raising fourth movement. The third movement is a double fugue on the hymn theme From Greenland's Ice Mountain and All Hallows. There are two excellent recordings available: one is with Stokow- ski and the American Symphony Orches- tra (Columbia MS-7875), and the other is with Jose Serebrier (one of Stokowski's sub-conductors) and the London Philhar- monic Orchestra (RCA ARL1-0590). If pressed (pun intended), I would recom- mend Serebrier's over Stokowski's; though Stokowski is perhaps more ener- getic (some might even say frenetic), Serebrier benefits from fantastic sonics and really lays out the complex textures and overlapping lines much more clearly (especially in the second and fourth movements) than does Stokowski. Ser- ebri is more than capable of handling the choral segments the John Aldlin Choir, a group many consider to be the finest choral group in the world.