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The Unanswered Question



Photo © Paul Kolnik

Music The Unanswered Question; Calcium Light Night; Fugue in Four Keys, Mists; From the Housatonic at Stockbridge; Sonata No. 2 for Piano and Violin (In the Barn); Remembrance; An Old Song Deranged, by Charles Ives



Choreography Eliot Feld

Premiere April 30, 1988, New York City Ballet, American Music Festival, New York State Theater

Original Cast Valentina Cozlova, Damian Woetzel

Average Length 27 min.

The Unanswered Question shows Eliot Feld in a complex and mysterious mood, responsive to the music of Charles Ives. Fully theatrical in its staging, with lighting by the Feld Ballet's Allen Lee Hughes and costumes by Willa Kim, it creates an atmosphere often surreal, sometime humorous, sometimes dream-like. The dancers entwine and become parts of musical instruments (a Sousaphone, a drum) and a large tricycle. An exotic and daring pas de deux climaxes with the woman's mysterious disappearance. Eliot Feld, at age 12, while a student at the School of American Ballet, danced the Prince in New York City Ballet's production of The Nutcracker. His career as a dancer included roles on Broadway, in the film version of West Side Story and with American Ballet Theatre, where he created his first ballets, Harbinger and At Midnight. Since 1974, Feld has choreographed mainly for his own company, creating works that range from costume mini-dramas, to elegant piano ballets, to modern pieces that mix dancers with ramps and trampolines. Charles Ives (1874-1954) was born in Danbury, Connecticut. His early training was with his father and he began composing at age 12. During his lifetime, he was known more for his career in the insurance business, an economic necessity, as his musical ideas were ahead of his time. His early resetting of hymns and psalms, and an interest in New England Transcendentalism, lent a religious

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— R.G. Collingwood

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and philosophical tone to much of his work. He also used marches, parlor songs and other American popular songs. His music, much of which evokes the landscaped history of New England, is unconventional and experimental, using atonality, clashing meters and quarter-tones. Ives died in Connecticut at the age of 79.

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