

ONDINE

# AMERICASCAPES

LOEFFLER · RUGGLES · HANSON · COWELL

BASQUE NATIONAL ORCHESTRA  
ROBERT TREVINO



- CHARLES MARTIN LOEFFLER** (1861–1935)
- 1 **La Mort de Tintagiles**, Op. 6 (1897) **25:48**  
Poème dramatique, d'après le drame de M. Maeterlinck
- CARL RUGGLES** (1876–1971)
- Evocations** (Orchestral version, 1943) **10:13**
- 2 I. Largo 2:33  
3 II. Andante con fantasia 3:01  
4 III. Moderato appassionato 1:34  
5 IV. Adagio sostenuto 2:56
- HOWARD HANSON** (1896–1981)
- 6 **Before the Dawn**, Op. 17 (1920)\* **6:44**  
\* *World Première Recording*
- HENRY COWELL** (1897–1965)
- 7 **Variations for Orchestra** (1956) **19:21**

**Delphine Dupuy, viola d'amore (1)**  
**BASQUE NATIONAL ORCHESTRA**  
**ROBERT TREVINO, conductor**

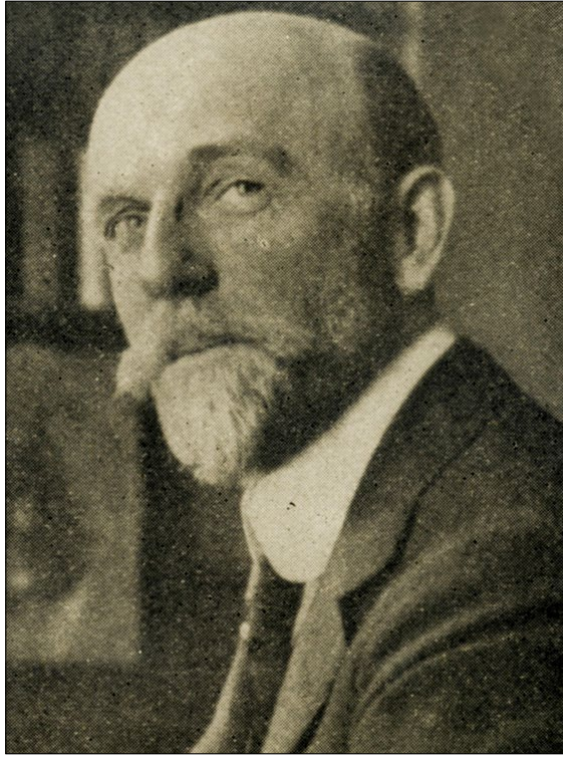
### **'Americascapes'**

All four composers on this recording wrote music that was known, played and esteemed during their lifetimes, but none of them ever had a huge "hit" (an *Unanswered Question* or *Grand Canyon Suite*, say) and so the pieces here are likely familiar only to musical scholars. Yet while it is uncommon enough to find Charles Martin Loeffler, Henry Cowell, Carl Ruggles and Howard Hanson sharing the same album, the conductor Robert Trevino has taken his exploration still further, into the recesses of their repertory – complete with a Hanson piece, *Before the Dawn*, that has had to wait a century for this, its premiere recording.

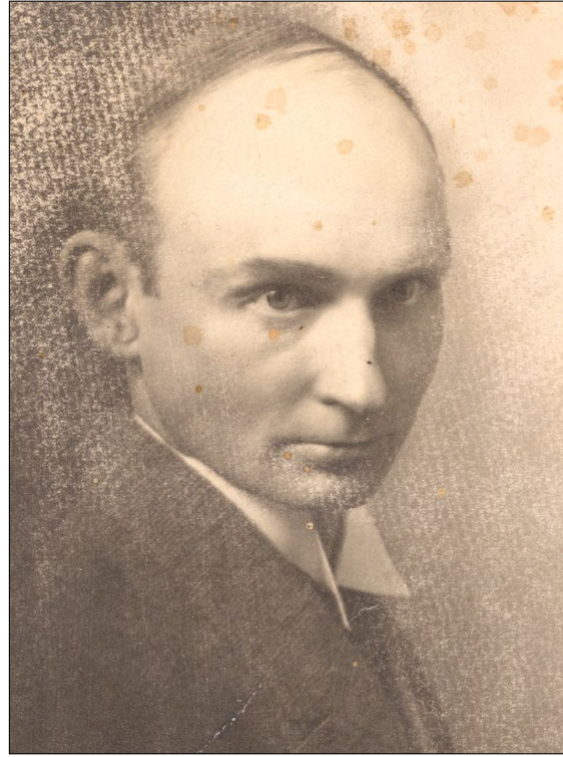
The oldest of the group, **Charles Martin Loeffler** (1861–1935), always referred to himself as an "Alsatian" composer – and, indeed, the young Loeffler lived for a while in that much-disputed piece of land, as well as in Ukraine, Hungary and Switzerland. But he was actually born in Berlin and had settled in the United States by 1882, when he joined the almost-brand-new Boston Symphony Orchestra as a violinist and won his American citizenship in 1887. He is likely best remembered for his *A Pagan Poem*, which was a favorite of Leopold Stokowski and played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra throughout the orchestra's centennial year in 1981.

Loeffler seems to have had a fondness for near-concertos. In *A Pagan Poem*, the English horn is paramount (albeit with some competition from piano and three solo trumpets). In *The Death of Tintagiles* (1897), presented here, the viola d'amore takes center stage. *Tintagiles* is a discursive tone poem, inspired by a very strange play for marionettes by Maurice Maeterlinck about a wicked queen who murders an entire family, one by one. It is orchestrated in a manner that is both brilliant and subdued – imagine Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* as it might have been rewritten by Gabriel Fauré and you'll have the general idea.





Charles Martin Loeffler



Carl Ruggles

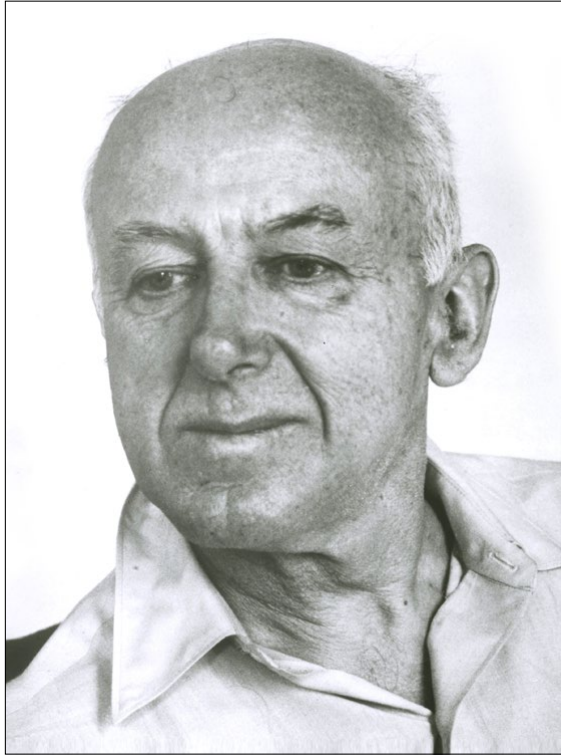
Yet, carried along by the plaintive sound of the viola d'amore, it is a curious masterpiece of its own.

**Henry Cowell** (1897–1965) is best remembered not so much for a single piece as for his early compositional style. Joan Peyser summed it up as “tone clusters, great fist and forearm smashes on the keyboard,” while adding that he was “also fondly remembered virtually climbing into the gut of the piano, with fingers plucking, strumming and scratching the strings in previously unimagined ways.” He was regarded as one of the great American experimentalists and had a profound influence on the early music of John Cage and Lou Harrison.

Yet by the end of his life – which encompassed four years imprisoned in California’s San Quentin for a so-called “morals charge,” followed by a complete state pardon and distinguished work in the War Office during World War II and for the Central Intelligence Agency thereafter – Cowell’s expression, especially in his orchestral music, had mostly turned into a mixture of gentle prettiness and occasional bursts of percussive counterpoint, imbued with a strong Eastern influence (His story has been brilliantly told by the professor and conductor Joel Sachs in *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*.) The *Variations for Orchestra* date from this latter part of his career: written in Shah-era Iran, they were composed for the Cincinnati Orchestra, under Thor Johnson, and then revived by the Houston Symphony, under Stokowski.

“One world” indeed! As Virgil Thomson wrote in his book *American Music Since 1910*: “No other composer of our time has produced a body of works so radical and so normal, so penetrating and so comprehensive. Add to this massive production his long and influential career as a pedagogue, and Henry Cowell’s achievement becomes impressive indeed. There is no other quite like it.”

**Carl Ruggles** (1876–1971) was a notoriously salty New England modernist who alienated admirers and would-be disciples alike with his caustic remarks,



Henry Cowell



Howard Hanson

casual racism and steady use of profanity. Yet he remains among the very greatest of American composers, despite having finished only a little more than an hour's worth of music over the course of his 95 years, preferring to paint instead. *The New York Times*, when Ruggles died, relayed a story of his friend Cowell "standing outside a studio while, listening as Mr. Ruggles hammered away "for at least an hour" on one massive piano chord. When he finally demanded of Mr. Ruggles what he was doing to that chord, Mr. Cowell was told, "I'm giving it the test of time.""

The *Evocations* exist in two versions – one for solo piano (which Ruggles continued to revise from 1934 to 1953) and the other for orchestra (an augmentation created by the composer in 1943). The critic John Rockwell, for one, preferred the latter. "For all the interest of the piano version of *Evocations*, the way in which the orchestral version gains in purpose and variety attests to Ruggles's calling as an orchestral composer above all else" he wrote in 1980.

Finally, there is *Before the Dawn*, by the very young **Howard Hanson** (1896–1981). Hanson won such a following as an educator, conductor and administrator that his music has been somewhat neglected in the years since his death. Of Scandinavian heritage (although born in the brightly named small town of Wahoo, Nebraska) Hanson was a conservative Romantic and sometimes likened to an American Sibelius. Yet he performed music by many modernist contemporaries, and it is estimated that he programmed works by 82 different composers for a CBS radio program entitled *Milestones in American Music*.

Along with a collection of some early works that Hanson assembled as *The California Forest Play*, the symphonic poem *Before the Dawn* won the composer the first *Prix de Rome*, supported by the American Academy in 1921. It permitted the young man three years of study in Italy, where he wrote his first symphony (the *Nordic*). Returning to the United States, he led a successful concert in Rochester,

and was appointed the head of the Eastman School of Music where he would remain for the next 40 years, establishing it firmly as one of the great American conservatories.

It seems that Hanson may have considered *Before the Dawn* juvenilia, for he could certainly have performed and recorded the work had he wanted to. Yet it is engaging from the start, filled with rich melodies, and sumptuously orchestrated in the style that Hanson would make his own over a career that would span six decades.

**Tim Page**

*Tim Page won the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 1997. Long associated with the New York Times, the Washington Post and the University of Southern California, he is presently a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore.*



## **Robert Trevino on his 'Americascapes' album**

It is well known that western art music began in Europe, and was exported to all parts of the globe, including the Americas, by European artists. But this flow did not remain one-way for very long, and in fact the way in which American music has in turn influenced Europe is a somewhat neglected – but perhaps important – subject. Any discussion has tended to relate only to the influence of one, indigenous American style: jazz (and its various musical strands). And American composers who reference, or are overtly influenced by jazz tend to be the ones who get talked about: Gershwin, Bernstein, Copland, even John Adams; there are more. But our story, which is the musical story of my America, is much wider than that.

Surveying American music is also about discussing what it is to be American. Of course, you will get as many answers to that as people whom you ask. But this recording – made, not incidentally, by a Mexican-American conductor, on the great Finnish recording label Ondine with the Basque National Orchestra in their mountainous region in Northern Spain – is my answer, my philosophy around what it is to be American. For me, to be American is not about a passport, it's not about when your ancestors came, or how, or the reason for their coming. What is important – truly American – is a unifying definition of people coming together into a single nation, through humanism; through caring, looking out for each other, and helping others find their place. It's an aspiration. I know my country has a long way to go, it's very far from perfect, a volatile daily evolution. Its history is like that of all nations: utterly as messy as our species.

The four composers on this recording were all American. In many ways they epitomise that American aspiration, and so to me represent the ideal selection. The music we have chosen is deeply under-performed (in one case a world premiere recording) and will, I hope, be a pleasure for many to discover.

Let's start, paradoxically, with a European. Charles Martin Loeffler was not from the USA, but he came, composed, performed, taught and died there. He also contributed greatly to the reciprocal American musical influence back to Europe. Loeffler, who was very active in Massachusetts and especially Boston, was a violinist in the Boston Symphony Orchestra for a while, and a prominent figure whose brought direct connections with Strauss, Wagner, Debussy, Frank and more.

It's in this environment that Carl Ruggles, born in Massachusetts near Boston, would have first heard the European Late Romantics, and developed his love of Wagner and Strauss. However, just as the Second Viennese School developed, so Ruggles' music developed independently in an equally dramatic, and modernist fashion (in fact, the connections and references between Ruggles and the Second Viennese School are fascinating to examine).

If Ruggles could be viewed as a somewhat rigid craftsman of sound, his worldview gives way to his friend, the worldly sound-gatherer that was Henry Cowell. Cowell, an educator, was as curious to collect the diverse sounds of the world as he was to absorb them into his American music. For a measure of the profundity of Cowell's work, we need look no further than the genius Béla Bartók, who adopted Henry Cowell's tone clusters as a primary staple of his aesthetic. Webern conducted his music, Varèse and Ruggles were influenced by it. The reason that Cowell is not a household name today, tragically, is because of his imprisonment and the subsequent destruction of his life and reputation due to his homosexuality.

This album features a world premiere recording of Howard Hanson's *Towards the Dawn*. Hanson was certainly aware of the ways in which Ruggles and Cowell had advanced music – so much so that Hanson himself, in the vein of Henry Cowell, took to incorporating ethnically diverse inspirations into his

1920s 'Americana' Sound, which then became the foundation upon which Leonard Bernstein and others built. Yet Hanson took on a new significance. As a conductor and an educator at one of the most prestigious schools for music in the USA, Eastman School of Music, Hanson performed well over 2000 works by 500 American composers. He beat out Bartók for a faculty position, was commissioned by Koussevitzky, and was considered a pivotal figure in the international music landscape.

Diverse influences, connections and inspirations that go to and fro, and the movement of individual people from a multitude of backgrounds towards a general ideal is the essence of the progression of music. There's something very American about that.

The **Basque National Orchestra** is one of Spain's foremost symphonic ensembles and it is gaining international relevance lately. Its activity is followed by thousands of people through its live concerts and through different digital media. The orchestra works to an established, carefully structured program of four permanent symphonic seasons in four main venues: the Principal Theatre in Vitoria, the Euskalduna Concert Hall in Bilbao, the Kursaal Auditorium in San Sebastian and the Baluarte Auditorium in Pamplona. Along with that, the orchestra offers frequently chamber music concert series and children's concert series and maintains a busy recording schedule focused on the symphonic creations of Basque composers. The orchestra also tackles the recording of new repertoires with a clear intention to promote and encourage Basque creation. It is worth highlighting its latest recording dedicated to the symphonic work of Maurice Ravel, a record by Ondine label that is receiving the best reviews from specialized media around the world, from Japan and Australia to the United States.

The Basque National Orchestra guests in summer festivals and opera productions as well as organizing exchanges with other orchestral ensembles at home and abroad. Touring is part of the orchestra's life, and its desire to extend its artistic project beyond national borders has taken it, to date, on twenty international tours as ambassadors of Basque culture to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, the United Kingdom and Italy, within Europe, and, in the Americas, to Argentina, Brazil and Chile.

Robert Trevino is the music director of the Basque National Orchestra. Through his great involvement and the introduction of new ideas and projects, Trevino is working on the progressive artistic improvement of the orchestra and its new international positioning. Their first joint tour throughout Austria and Germany was very successful, as well as their premiere at the iconic Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris.

This Orchestra has shared the stage with conductors including Yehudi Menuhin, Krzysztof Penderecki, Christopher Hogwood, Yakov Kreizberg, Jerzy Semkov, Lawrence Foster, Semyon Bychkov, Michel Tabachnik, Ruth Reinhardt, Gemma New, Jesús López Cobos, Juanjo Mena and José Ramón Encinar. The list of soloists who accompanied the orchestra also features names such as Maria Joao Pires, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Mischa Maisky, Antonio Meneses, Christian Zacharias, Leonidas Kavakos, Radu Lupu, Arcadi Volodos, Heinrich Schiff, Hélène Grimaud, Martin Fröst, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Alban Gerhard, Pinchas Zukerman, Vadim Gluzman, Augustin Hadelich, Nikolai Lugansky, Joaquín Achúcarro, María Bayo, Carlos Mena, Ainhoa Arteta, Marta Zabaleta, Asier Polo, Pablo Ferrández and a long list of others.

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Delphine Dupuy





Basque National Orchestra

**Robert Trevino** has rapidly emerged as one of the most exciting American conductors performing today, as well as one of the most in-demand talents of the younger generation. He serves as the Music Director of the Basque National Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI and Artistic Advisor of the Malmo Symphony Orchestra.

Most recently, he signed a multi-year recording contract with Ondine, already resulting in a widely-praised complete Beethoven symphonies cycle with the Malmo Symphony Orchestra and, released in April 2021, a Ravel album with the Basque National Orchestra. Trevino's cycle of Bruch symphonies with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra was released by CPO in August 2020, to universally positive reviews.

Having won the James Conlon Conducting Prize at the Aspen Music Festival & School, and subsequently serving as Associate Conductor for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and New York City Opera, Trevino burst into the international spotlight at the Bolshoi Theater in December 2013, leading a new production of Verdi's *Don Carlo* at short notice. The Russian press wrote, "There has not been an American success of this magnitude in Moscow since Van Cliburn." He was subsequently nominated for a Golden Mask award for "Best Conductor in a New Production".

In recent seasons Trevino's European engagements have included the London Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Tonhalle Zurich, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Vienna Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic and Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin among many others. He has conducted the Cleveland Orchestra, the symphony orchestras of San Francisco, Toronto and Detroit and led Washington National Opera's new production of *Evgeny Onegin*.

In the pandemic-shortened 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons Robert led the Basque National Orchestra, the Malmo Symphony Orchestra and the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra on European tours and made debut conducting appearances

with Orchestre de Paris and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. His reengagements included the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, São Paulo Symphony, Vienna Symphony, Bamberg Symphony, SWR Symphony, and RAI National Symphony Orchestra.

Upcoming debut appearances include the Baltimore Symphony, Utah Symphony, Grosses Festspielhaus Salzburg, La Scala Philharmonic, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Orchestre National de Toulouse, Gurzenich Orchestra Koln, Gulbenkian Orchestra and Osaka Philharmonic. Forthcoming return visits include the Basque National Orchestra, RAI National Symphony Orchestra, Malmo Symphony, 'La Verdi' Milan, Vienna Tonkünstler, SWR Symphony, MDR Symphony Leipzig and Sinfonia Varsovia among others. Trevino was Chief Conductor of the Malmo Symphony but announced in 2021 that he would become the MSO's Artistic Advisor for a term of two years. At the same time he announced that he would take up the position of Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, for an initial term of three years.

Robert Trevino has commissioned, premiered and worked closely with many leading composers, among them John Adams, Philip Glass, Sofia Gubaidulina, Jennifer Higdon, Andre Previn, Augusta Read Thomas, Shulamit Ran and John Zorn. His many education projects include, recently, a residency at the Royal Academy of Music.

[www.robert-trevino.com](http://www.robert-trevino.com)

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