

A Discussion of Two Songs by Charles Ives

Honors Thesis

By

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**Table of Contents**

	Page
Introduction.....	4
<i>General William Booth Enters Into Heaven</i> .....	6
<i>Things Our Fathers Loved</i> .....	12
Conclusion.....	15
Appendices.....	16
Bibliography.....	20

## Introduction

*Do all inspirational images, states, conditions, or whatever they may be truly called, have for a dominant part, if not for a source, some actual experience in life or of the social relation? To think that they do not—always at least—would be a relief.*<sup>1</sup> (Charles Ives)

The above statement, by Charles Ives, is an example of Ives's desire to explore the relationship that exists between both life and art. Ives believed that music was, in many ways, a direct expression of life. Ives composed a modernist American music that was both an evocation of human experience, as well as an expression of his own unique vision of American life. This vision is, particularly, reflected in his songs. In these songs, Ives frequently portrays American images and scenes. The challenges posed by Ives's particular brand of American modernism are best understood through an understanding of the portrayal of human experience in his music.

Ives's use of musical quotations, in his music, is one important part of his compositional process. Musical quotation, or musical borrowing, is the appropriation of an existing melody or musical style that is subsequently applied to, or forms, the basis of a new musical composition. Ives's use of musical quotation offers a glimpse into Ives's complex musical personality.

This paper discusses two contrasting songs by Charles Ives: *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* and *Things Our Fathers Loved*. *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* is reminiscent of, and in large part based on, a revivalist hymn and hymn tune. The American poet Vachel Lindsay was the author of the text. The topic of the poem is a particularly American brand of spiritual redemption. The poem is centered on the founder and First General of the Salvation Army, General William Booth. The song is extroverted and dramatic in character.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Ives. *Essays Before a Sonata, and Other Writings*. New York: Norton, 1962, pp. 6-7.

*Things Our Fathers Loved* is rooted in Ives's own love for his country and home. It is introspective and nostalgic in character. Whereas *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* is concerned with the afterlife, *Things Our Fathers Loved* is concerned with the past. Ives, himself, is the author of the text. The song is an expression of Ives's own thoughts of home and its relationship to the tunes that are an expression of that home.

Both Lindsay and Ives loved their country and American themes play an important role in their art. Both were born and raised in different regions of America. Lindsay was a Midwesterner, from Springfield, Illinois. Ives was a Yankee, from Danbury, Connecticut. Their own individual hometowns had a lasting effect on them as artists.

Musical quotation plays an important role in both songs. *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* is what Peter Burkholder refers to as a "cumulative" composition. This is when a preexisting tune is divided into fragments, or is varied in some way, throughout a composition. In a cumulative composition, the preexisting tune is heard in its most complete original form at the end of the composition. *Things Our Fathers Loved* is what Peter Burkholder refers to as a "patchwork" composition. A "patchwork" composition is composed of the parts of two or more tunes that are combined, sometimes through paraphrase or interpolation.<sup>2</sup> That is, the composer stitches the musical quotes together into a musical quilt. It is customary that each of the songs in a patchwork composition be derived from a single musical genre (for instance, popular music).

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J Burkholder. *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. pp. 3-4.

### *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven*

Ives composed the song *General William Booth Enters In Heaven* based on Lindsay's poem, in 1914. It is interesting to note that Ives was the neighbor of Booth's daughter, Evangeline Booth, at the time he set the poem to music and that Evangeline Booth would eventually become the Fourth General of the Salvation Army. The poem is a dramatic and vivid depiction of General William Booth as he leads an army of desolate souls into Heaven. At the end of the poem, Jesus heals these souls and they all march together into Heaven.

Vachel Lindsay was born in Springfield, Illinois, in 1879. He was known as America's "Prairie Troubadour," and was frequently referred to as the father of modern "singing poetry." His poems are recognized for their musical qualities. Lindsay expected that his poems be sung or chanted, rather than simply recited. Lindsay was known to travel, by foot, around the country (much like a revivalist preacher) reciting ("singing") his poems before gatherings of people. In the poem *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* Lindsay drew inspiration from both American hymns and hymn tunes. Harriet Monroe, founder and editor of *Poetry* magazine, published the poem in *Poetry* magazine in 1913. The poem was widely praised immediately following its publication.

Charles Ives set the poem to music shortly after its publication. Lindsay specified that the poem's refrain be sung to the 1888 hymn tune *Are You Washed in The Blood of the Lamb*, by Elisha Hoffman. The poem consists of a verse-chorus structure. The rhythm of the individual lines of verse is composed of a pattern of three long beats, followed by three short beats and

three long beats (for instance: “Booth led bold/ly with his/big bass drum”). Ives closely follows this rhythmic pattern in his setting of the poem.

*Poetry* magazine originally published only six of the poems seven stanzas and Ives sets only these six stanzas to music. Ives never heard Lindsay read or sing the poem. Instead of using Elisha Hoffman’s hymn tune, Ives uses Lowell Mason’s hymn-tune setting, *Cleansing Fountain* (1823), as the basis of the refrain in his setting of the text. Mason’s *Cleansing Fountain* was popular at both camp meetings and with the Salvation Army. Both Hoffman’s and Mason’s hymn-tune settings share similarities in subject matter, form and melodic content, and both are concerned with the healing power of baptism.

The quotation of preexistent musical material is an important element of Ives’s music. Frequently, the material that Ives quotes has its origin in America’s vernacular music. This music represents one distinct aspect of American life. The events described in Lindsay’s poem are vividly rendered through Ives’s choice of musical quotations.

Ives’s setting of the text illustrates his appropriation of America’s vernacular music into his own music. These musical quotes are combined with diatonic, whole-tone and chromatic scales, as well as triadic, quartal/quintal and secundal harmonies. Although this combination of a wide variety of musical elements may appear chaotic at times, within this chaos the music achieves an overall sense of unity. Wilfred Mellers notes that the song, *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven*, leads us to the two qualities that are at the core of Ives’s music as a whole, they are: “the acceptance of life as it is” and “the attempt to discover unity within chaos.” Mellers adds that, in essence, this is a transcendental act.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Mellers. *Music in a New Found Land*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. pp. 46-47.

The body of the song is juxtaposed with the rhetorical question and refrain “Are You Washed In the Blood of the Lamb?” Peter Burkholder notes how, in this song, Ives blends the text of the poem “to a closely related hymn tune without transcribing the hymn tune indicated by the poet.”<sup>4</sup> Burkholder notes the way in which cumulative form “was uniquely suited” to the text and program of Lindsay’s poem, particularly in the way in which it “matched the sequence of events in the story he sought to tell.”<sup>5</sup>

The song can be divided into six sections, mirroring the six stanzas of the poem. Ives’s setting is both through composed and cumulative. Each of the sections concludes with a fragment or variation of the hymn-tune. The exception is the next to last section, which is abruptly interrupted by a return to the opening instrumental introduction. A full statement of the hymn tune closes the song.

The first stanza of the poem (Section I) describes William Booth as he leads his followers, with his “big bass drum,” to the gates of Heaven. The first line of the poem depicts outward action and forward motion (“Booth led boldly with his big bass drum”). The song begins with low cluster chords, in the piano, imitating a drum-like “street beat.” “Street beat” is a technique employed by drummers, in a marching band, for marching together in step. The sixteenth-note, dotted-eighth note rhythm of the first two measures suggests, however, that Booth’s followers are unable to play and march together in synchronized fashion. Their rhythmic errors result in a metrical displacement of the downbeat by a sixteenth-note.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter J Burkholder. *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. pp. 254-255.

<sup>5</sup> Peter J Burkholder. *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 253.

In m. 3, the voice enters with the first line of text, set to a B-minor triad (*forte*), in the key of B minor. The opening vocal phrase is interrupted, in m. 4, by a quote from the hymn tune in the key of C major (“Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb”). The refrain begins with a *piano* dynamic marking (mm. 4-6), increases to *mezzo forte* (mm. 6-8), and culminates at *forte*, in mm. 9-12. The refrain is dramatically interrupted by the sudden shout of “Hallelujah!” in the voice in m. 12. The shout seems to emanate from somewhere outside of the realm of the art song. In m. 13, a variation and intensification of the opening vocal melody returns, in the key of B minor. Ives substitutes a G#4 for an F#4 in the voice, resulting in a tri-tone melisma (D4-G#4) on the word “gravely.” In m. 15, another fragment of the hymn tune returns, in the new key of E major, accompanied by cluster chords, in “street beat,” in the piano accompaniment.

In the instrumental interlude between Sections I and II (mm. 19-20), the piano accompaniment changes to quartal and quintal chords. The second stanza (Section II) is a description of Booth’s followers with their “minds still passion-ridden” and “soul powers frail.” Booth’s motley followers range from “lepers” and “lurching braves,” to “drabs from the alleyways” and “drug fiends pale.” The voice enters, in m. 21, with a variation of the song’s opening vocal melody, only now alternating a B-minor with a B-major triad. This vocal melody ascends to a high Eb5, in m. 25. Starting on a whole-tone scale, the voice then descends an octave until m. 28. Both the vocal line and the piano accompaniment become more chromatic in mm. 30-33 (“Vermillion eaten saints...”), rising now to a high E5. A quote from the hymn-tune returns in the key of C# minor immediately following the word “Death,” in the voice. The syncopation in the vocal line, at the return of the hymn tune refrain, adds to the level of excitement and feverish sentiments that continue to build throughout the song.

The third stanza (Section III) describes Booth's followers as representatives of different nations carrying different colored flags. "The round world over" is represented, in the vocal line, by an ascending and descending whole-tone scale (C-D-E-F#-G#-A#). Ives quotes a fragment from the minstrel tune *O them Golden Slippers*, by James A Bland, in the top voice of the piano, in mm. 52-55. The song *Oh them Golden Slippers* is a song about the wearing of golden slippers as one enters into Heaven. The vocal part animatedly sings the words: "Big voiced lassies made their banjos bang, bang, bang," as the left-hand piano part imitates the strumming of a banjo. A quote from the hymn-tune returns, in the key of G major (*fff*), in mm. 58-60. Robert Morgan notes the way in which the first four key changes associated with the hymn-tune refrain: C major (mm.5-8), E major (mm. 15-19), C# minor (mm. 34-38), and G major (mm.58-60) are linked to a gradual intensification in the music.<sup>6</sup>

This is followed, in Section IV, by more feverish shouts of "Hallelujah!" in the vocal part (mm.61-65). Increased rhythmic activity, in the piano, accompanies the repeated "Hallelujahs" in mm. 61-65. The fourth stanza describes trumpets blaring loudly. A brief quotation from *Reveille*, in the vocal line (mm. 71-73), urges Booth's followers to wake up to their calling: "On, on, upward thro' the golden air." This line of text is a reference to the old gospel hymn *Onward, Upward*, by Fanny Crosby. The section closes with a slightly more subdued return of the hymn-tune refrain, now in the key of E-flat major, accompanied by sixteenth notes in the piano (mm.76-81).

The fifth stanza (Section V) of the poem presents a trance-like vision of Jesus as he appears at the courthouse door, offering his blessing to all of Booth's followers. The song's fifth

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Ives. "General William Booth Enters Into Heaven." *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Music*. Ed. Robert P. Morgan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1992. 71-79.

section (mm.82-91) begins with a change in tempo (*Adagio*) and a chorale-like, quarter-note accompaniment in the piano (*Adagio, and with dignity*). The dynamic is marked *pp-p* in the voice and in the piano. A repetitive whole-tone circling figure in the vocal line (C-Bb-Ab) is a vivid depiction of the crowd's hypnotic and trance-like circling round the courthouse square. (mm. 82-91). The section ends with a *poco e poco ritard e decrescendo*. This is abruptly interrupted by the voice ("Yet!") in m. 91. In the piano, there is a return to the syncopated, "street beat," drum rhythm that was first heard in the opening measures of the song.

The sixth stanza (Section VI, mm. 91-113) describes Booth's healed followers ("The lame were straightened, withered limbs uncurled") as they march on to "a new, sweet world." A quote from *Reveille* reappears in the voice part, in m. 96, accompanied by a change in tempo (*Allegro risoluto*). The music progresses to a climax in m. 97 (*Broadly – but very slightly slower*). Peter Burkholder notes that the complete hymn-tune refrain sung in the vocal part in mm. 97-105 (*ff*) is "the culmination of the cumulative form, with the drum pattern serving as countermelody and harmonization."<sup>7</sup> A varied restatement of the hymn-tune refrain (*pp*), now in the key of E major, is accompanied, in its final measures, by a simple triadic harmonization in the piano. Robert Morgan describes the final refrain of the hymn tune as "a sort of climax in reverse."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Peter J Burkholder. *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 258.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Ives. "General William Booth Enters Into Heaven." *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Music*. Ed. Robert P. Morgan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1992. 71-79.

Peter Burkholder notes that the question “Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?” is taken out of parentheses to indicate its place in the background as part of the underlying tune.<sup>9</sup> He goes on to note that the experience that arises from such a composition is similar to a “gradual revelation.”<sup>10</sup>

The progress towards the final statement of the hymn tune matches the progress that Booth and his followers make toward spiritual enlightenment. This innocent and straightforward statement of the complete hymn tune, in the final measures of the song (mm. 97-113), marks the climax and conclusion of this complex work.

### **Things Our Fathers Loved**

In the same year that Ives composed *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* (1914), he composed *Things Our Fathers Loved*. Charles Ives wrote the text, himself. It is a very personal and heartfelt song. It may also be considered one of his most nostalgic songs. Composed in the “parlor” song tradition of Stephen Foster. The song expresses Ives’s thoughts on past American traditions. Stephen Foster is one of America’s most nostalgic of songwriters, and both Ives and Foster maintained an idyllic image of home throughout their lives. In this song, memories of these traditions are evoked through its songs, in particular, the tunes from these songs. Beneath the title of the song, Ives has written a subtitle that reads “And the greatest

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<sup>9</sup> Peter J Burkholder. *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 259.

<sup>10</sup> Peter J Burkholder. *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 252.

of these is Liberty.” It is a statement of what Ives’s believed to be one of America’s and our Father’s most cherished values.

The essence of the song is poignantly expressed in the first line of text: “I think there must be a place in the soul...” The place Ives refers to exists as a memory “all made of tunes, of tunes of long ago.” *Things Our Fathers Loved* is composed of a dreamlike weaving together of quotes from various popular American songs. These songs include Stephen Foster’s parlor song, *My Old Kentucky Home* (1853) and Paul Dresser’s *On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away* (1897). In addition, Ives quotes Joseph Webster’s gospel hymn tune, *In the Sweet By and By* (1868) and Asahel Nettleton’s gospel hymn tune *Nettleton* (1812). Ives also draws from American patriotic music, in his quote of George Frederick Root’s *The Battle Cry of Freedom*.

The individual character of each of these songs is essential to the nostalgic tone of *Things Our Fathers Loved*. Each of these songs represents and is an expression of a different aspect of American life. Together they recreate the past. These songs color the words of Ives’s text in a poignant way. Stuart Feder describes the song as Ives’s *Scenes from Childhood*: “the Main Street corner, Aunt Sarah humming a gospel, summer evenings, and a cornet band playing music in the square.”<sup>11</sup>

*Things Our Fathers Loved* is a testimony to the power of music to evoke personal memories and the way in which music can convey both the virtues and values of the past. Lloyd Whitesell notes that *Things Our Fathers Loved* can be understood “in terms of the elliptical, oblique, and evanescent process of memory.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Feder. *The life of Charles Ives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. pg. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd Whitesell. "Reckless Form, Uncertain Audiences: Responding to Ives." *American Music* 12.3 (1994): 308.

The song divides into three sections: mm. 1-10, 11-15 and 15-23. The opening of the song and the vocal line move seamlessly from a quote of a fragment of *Nettleton* to a quote from Foster's *My Old Kentucky Home*, first in the key of C major (mm. 1-2), then in the key of F major (m. 3). In m. 6, a melodic fragment from Dresser's *On the Banks of the Wabash* is set to the text "I hear the organ on the Main Street corner." A quote from *Nettleton* returns (mm.8-10), accompanying the words "Aunt Sarah humming Gospels." Impressionistic triadic harmonies in the piano accompany the voice.

The second section (11-15) is a description of a summer evening. The words "Summer evening," in the voice, (m. 10) are accompanied by chromatic chords in the piano. The music abruptly shifts to the key of F major (m. 11) as the text describes a village concert band playing on the square. The vocal melody quotes a patriotic song from the Civil War era (*The Battle Cry of Freedom*), set to the sound of the "village cornet band playing on the square" and the sight of the flag. The chorus from Root's *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, in the top voice of the piano's right hand part, accompanies the tune in the voice. The second section closes (m. 15) on a high D5 ("Now!"), in the voice part, supported by low octave D's (D2-D3) in the piano. It is approached by a descending chromatic line in the left-hand piano part. Excluding the Bb4, which is part of a vocal melisma, on the word "Blue" in m. 14, the voice sings only white-note pitches in mm. 11 through 20.

The third section (mm.15-23) consists of an extended quote, in the voice, of Webster's gospel hymn *In the Sweet By and By*, in G major. It is accompanied by a melodic fragment of Root's *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, in the piano. The surface activity of the piano increases to sixteenth notes in this section. The high point of the song occurs in m. 19 on the word "sing." It marks a return to the high D5 in the vocal line. In m. 20, the arrival on G natural, in the vocal

line (set to the word “soul”), forms a deceptive cadence on vi, in G major. Here the voice is accompanied, in the piano, by a quintal chord built on E. The final two measures are harmonically ambiguous and it is here that the voice no longer adheres to only white-note music. The song closes with a harmonically ambiguous cadence.

In this song, Charles Ives expresses his love of America’s vernacular music and the way in which this music establishes a strong connection to people and the places they call home. It is important to understand, however, that Ives is not writing program music. Rather than tell a story, Ives is more interested in the emotion the music produces in the listener.

### **Conclusion**

Ives’s choice of text, in conjunction with his choice of borrowed melodies, paints a portrait of the composer. The two songs, *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* and *Things Our Fathers Loved* paint two different portraits of a very complex American composer.

- 1) *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven*: The rabble-rousing, forward-looking, maverick composer of modern music, leading the charge, in much the same way as General Booth.
- 2) *Things Our Fathers Loved*: The introspective, sentimental composer, in search of a lost past and the traditional American values and ways of life as they are expressed in popular song.

It is Ives’s unique ability to synthesize, in his music, both the forward looking and traditional sides of his musical personality makes his music so utterly unique.

Appendices

**General William Booth Enters into Heaven**

Vachel Lindsay (1879–1931)

BOOTH led boldly with his big bass drum—  
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)  
The Saints smiled gravely and they said: “He’s come.”  
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)  
Walking lepers followed, rank on rank,  
Lurching bravoes from the ditches dank,  
Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale—  
Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail:—  
Vermin-eaten saints with mouldy breath,  
Unwashed legions with the ways of Death—  
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb))

Every slum had sent its half-a-score  
The round world over. (Booth had groaned for more.)  
Every banner that the wide world flies  
Bloomed with glory and transcendent dyes.  
Big-voiced lasses made their banjos bang,  
Tranced, fanatical, they shrieked and sang:—  
“Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?”  
Hallelujah! It was queer to see  
Bull-necked convicts with that land make free.  
Loons with trumpets blowed a blare, blare, blare,  
On, on upward thro’ the golden air!  
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Jesus came from (out) the court-house door,  
Stretched his hands above the passing poor.  
Booth saw not, but led his queer ones there  
Round and round the mighty court-house square.  
Yet! in an instant all that blear review  
Marched on spotless, clad in raiment new.  
The lame were straightened, withered limbs uncurled  
And blind eyes opened on a new, sweet world.  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

# There Is a Fountain

ZECARIAH 13:1  
William Cowper, *pub.* 1772

CLEANSING FOUNTAIN  
*attr.* to Lowell Mason

1. There is a foun - tain filled with blood, Drawn from Im - man - uel's veins,  
 2. The dy - ing thief re - joiced to see That foun - tain in His day;  
 3. Dear dy - ing Lamb, Thy pre - cious blood Shall nev - er lose its pow'r,  
 4. E'er since by faith I saw the stream Thy flow - ing wounds sup - ply,  
 5. When this poor, lisp - ing, stam - m'ring tongue Lies si - lent in the grave,

And sin - ners plunged be - neath the flood Lose all their guilt - y stains.  
 And there have I, though vile as he, Washed all my sins a - way.  
 Till all the ran - somed church of God Are safe, to sin no more.  
 Re - deem - ing love has been my theme, And shall be till I die.  
 Then in a no - bler, sweet - er song, I'll sing Thy pow'r to save.

*Refrain*

Lose all their guilt - y stains, Lose all their guilt - y stains;  
 Washed all my sins a - way, Washed all my sins a - way;  
 Are safe, to sin no more, Are safe, to sin no more;  
 And shall be till I die, And shall be till I die;  
 I'll sing Thy pow'r to save, I'll sing Thy pow'r to save;

And sin - ners plunged be - neath the flood Lose all their guilt - y stains.  
 And there have I, though vile as he, Washed all my sins a - way.  
 Till all the ran - somed church of God Are safe, to sin no more.  
 Re - deem - ing love has been my theme, And shall be till I die.  
 Then in a no - bler, sweet - er song, I'll sing Thy pow'r to save.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

*There is a Fountain* by Lowell Mason,  
a.k.a. *Cleansing Fountain*



# Things Our Fathers Loved

Melodic Analysis

Charles Ives

[Nettleton] [My Old Kentucky Home]

*p*

I think there must be a place in the soul all made of tunes, of

5 [On the Banks of the Wabash] [Nettleton]

tunes of long ago; I hear the organ on the Main Street corner, Aunt Sarah humming Gos-

9 [Battle Cry of Freedom]

pels; Summer evenings, The village cor-net band, playing in the square.

14 *ff*

The town's Red, White and Blue, all Red, White, and Blue Now! Hear the

17 [In the Sweet By and By]

songs! I know not what are the words. But they

20 *p*

sing in my soul of the things our Fathers loved.

[Things Our Fathers Loved by Charles Ives; melodic analysis]

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