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# Charles Ives Take Me Home

Jessica Dickey

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL  
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FOUNDED 1830

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***CHARLES IVES TAKE ME HOME*** was produced at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater in New York City on May 29, 2013. The performance was directed by Daniella Topol, with sets by Andromache Chalfant, costumes by Michael Krass, lighting by Austin Smith, and sound by Broken Chord. The Production Manager was Eugenia Furneaux, and the Production Stage Manager was Kate Croasdale. The cast was as follows:

**CHARLES IVES** ..... Henry Stram  
**COACH LAURA STARR** ..... Kate Nowlin  
**JOHN STARR** ..... Drew McVety

## CHARACTERS

**CHARLES IVES** – The modernist composer. Well into the latest years of his life, but full of enthusiasm and mischief and humor. Deeply subversive and humanist.

**COACH LAURA STARR** – 30s. Slightly butch, geeky, high school basketball coach. Takes the game very seriously. Great dribbling skills. Tough and vulnerable.

**JOHN STARR** – 50s. A talented violinist. Strict, patriarchal, devoted to his music, a cold father. Resentful of sports.

## SETTING

The recent past. The set should be a simple, open playing area. Very sparse and intimate. An *Our Town* feeling.

## THE MUSIC

All of the songs played by John on his violin are by Charles Ives. It may also be useful to be able to play a few moments of the Bach Chicon. The final piece of music that John plays, accompanied by Coach Starr, should be composed of the sounds and rhythms found in the play.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

The scenes in the play should ebb and flow like a piece of music, and there are moments of “rest” indicated. This should feel like a caesura in the action, like a leaf landing before the wind picks it up again. The play itself should feel like a piece of music. Ives himself loved to use dissonance in his music, often setting sharply contrasting tones and sounds next to each other. Let this give you courage in the staging and interpretation of the interplay of these three characters.

## SPECIAL THANKS

Daniella Topol, Kate Navin and Gersh, David Van Asselt, Brian Long, Daniel Talbott, Denis Butkus, Julie Kline, the entire Rattlestick gang, Kate Croasdale, Diane Hassan and the Danbury Museum, Professor Royce Wates, Henry Stram, Kate Nowlin, Drew McVety, City Theatre, Tracy Brigden, Carlyn Aquiline, Keira Fromm, Strawdog, Curious Theatre Company, The New Harmony Project, Sewanee Writers Conference, the Lark, Morgan Jenness, Leah Hamos, the entire Dickey/Neff family.



*(A bare, simple space. CHARLES IVES enters while the house lights are still on. He is an older gentleman dressed in an old suit. Mischievous, bright, enthusiastic – a deep Musical genius. He addresses the audience.)*

**CHARLES IVES.** *(cheerfully)*

Hello everyone!

Hi hi hi!

*(As the stage lights turn on –)*

Oh!

*(to the tech booth:)*

Thank you.

*(back to the audience:)*

Welcome!

Thank you for being here.

Just a few things before we begin... Let's see...

Thank you for silencing your technological devices.

**DO IT.**

Thank you for not taking any pictures.

Thank you for not needing the bathroom.

And in the case of an emergency,

Thank you for running to the Exit that's back there.

Thank you for kindly tolerating whatever distractions your neighbor might cause.

You may also now thank your neighbor for tolerating you –

your elbows, your pocketbook on the floor (the fashion ever larger),

your emotional life, your fatigue.

Go on. Thank them.

*(He waits until the audience has thanked each other – )*

Good job.

Thank you for coming.

For using your presence as a vote, if you will,

That before we are all dead in the ground,

being in a room together is valuable.

I won't say important – there's no need to be ridiculous  
– but valuable.

Thank you for learning all your lines.

No wait, that's me.

*(He chuckles gently at himself.)*

Thank you for chuckling at any and all tacit attempts  
at comedy.

*(More serious now – with great love)*

Thank you for your comedy.

For the great folly that you are.

For your hypocrisy and emptiness and pettiness and  
loneliness.

For your mortality, your loins.

All these will help you understand

The THREE HOURS traffic of our stage.

HA! I'm just kidding.

This'll be more like 75 minutes.

So let us begin!

Now in music, some say one begins with a "tune".

But for me, music always begins with a Sound.

*(COACH STARR starts dribbling. He listens, like it's a  
precious new language)*

And we're off – like a herd of blue turtles!

*(COACH STARR enters.)*

This is Laura Starr,

Coach of the Jerome High School Girls Basketball  
team.

*(COACH STARR re-tucks her polo shirt into her pleat-front khakis. She stands before her team, in front of a chalkboard. She was never a cool person. She wears a gold chain that is too thick. Her pants are ridiculous. It is half time.)*

Coach Laura Starr was born during an unusually violent thunderstorm in April.

This may or may not relate to the fact that she kicked her mother's tail bone on the way out and broke it.

**COACH STARR.**

Have a seat.

Get some water.

**CHARLES IVES.**

As she grew, her teeth came in prematurely,  
so that by the age of one she had ten little baby teeth  
in her little baby mouth,  
which made her look like a hairless baby LION.  
Not mature enough to handle all those teeth, she was  
what you'd call a "Biter".

**COACH STARR.**

No talking, please.

Let's use – Private voices.

As in – Silence.

Let's just sit in silence for a minute and contemplate  
the first half of this game.

**CHARLES IVES.**

She was also a "Mover"!

From the time she could walk she had excellent  
coordination and showed an excelled proclivity for  
athletics.

**COACH STARR.**

And I'd like us to be honest.

I'd like us to be deeply candid

That the last 16 minutes on that game clock

Were not our proudest.  
 And it matters.  
 I would like us to sit here  
 On these Jerome High School locker room benches  
 And be unabashedly truthful –  
 In this conversation about the last 16 minutes (wherein  
 only I will speak)  
 That the first half of this game  
 And how we performed in the first half of this game  
*Matters.*

**CHARLES IVES.**

The principal of Jerome High School had been  
 meaning to start a girls basketball program,  
 In part to address Title IX  
 (An item on the administrative To-Do list since its  
 inception in 1972),  
 But also with the hope of reducing the rising number  
 of teen pregnancies.  
 Surely young women would be less interested in  
 unprotected sex if they could do a lay-up.

**COACH STARR.**

Marieke–  
 Kimmy stands on the red line which demarcates the  
 boundary of our cherished sport – The referee hands  
 her the ball (As many referees have handed many  
 female players the ball –  
 A privilege earned in 1892 thank you very much Smith  
 College – )  
 And she throws that ball to you and you begin to  
 dribble,  
 And I swear to God, Marieke,  
 I swear to the Big Coach in the sky,  
 You look like a retard giraffe.  
*(She demonstrates.)*  
 A retard giraffe  
 Shalloffaling down the court.

*(She demonstrates.)*

And it *matters*.

Ladies, we have been practicing 90 minutes a day  
for the last 49 days in preparation for our first game  
together,

And this is NOT what we practiced.

When they run a 2-1-2 defense –

You need to bump up the passing game.

You PASS until you find that hole and charge the lane  
–

Either drawing two defenders so you free up the guard  
to pop off a shot,

Or you can go for the lay up and draw the foul.

In our own defensive game you need to

USE your *KNEES*.

You need to hit the deck

*(She slaps the floor, demonstrates)*

Butt DOWN,

Feet moving,

Palms UP.

USE those KNEES to SLIDE with your opponent –

*(She demonstrates.)*

Denise.

THIS is not defense.

*(She demonstrates.)*

Watch her WAIST:

Her feet will fool you, her arms will fool you –

But her WAIST will tell you exactly where she's going,

And your KNEES will take you there.

You've worked hard for those basketball knees, ladies,  
so use 'em.

*(She draws.)*

There is a normal knee. Right? Yes?

*(She draws.)*

And then there is a basketball knee.

THEN—

*(She pulls up her pant leg.)*

There is a basketball knee.

It is a thing of horror —

But to devote your body to a task so much that the  
shape of the body changes —

That is a noble thing.

Does it look good in a — uh — lycra mini skirt?

Not a flippin' chance.

Does it make good defense?

You bet your mullet.

And it *matters*.

Ladies

You gotta DIVE for the BALL.

Dive for the ball more than seems reasonable.

Play the GAME

UNREASONABLY.

That's what we're here to do.

THAT is the ART.

*(We hear a violin. JOHN, middle-aged, worn out shirt  
with sleeves rolled up, enters.)*

**CHARLES IVES.**

Ah — and here comes John, once a student of mine.

Now the Concert Master and first chair of the Queens  
Symphony Orchestra in New York City.

*(JOHN enters.)*

Here we are John.

**JOHN.**

Here we are.

**CHARLES IVES.**

John Michael Starr was born in Kearnsy, Indiana.

His father brought a baseball glove to the hospital to welcome baby John.

*(JOHN gently moves the bow over the instrument, warming up. He is devoted to his instrument, and this has shaped his body, his manner.)*

The first year of his life John couldn't hear very well. So at the age of two he had surgery to help his little ears drain fluid...

*(JOHN gently moves the bow over the instrument, warming up. CHARLES IVES continues over the music.)*

His father Michael had been a gym teacher at the local high school,  
But his mother Katherine taught piano.  
John grew up the beneficiary of such musicianship in the home and quickly distinguished himself as having extraordinary promise.

*(JOHN looks up and begins to formally play his violin. He stops.)*

JOHN.

I went to Juilliard.

*(He goes to play again, but before he does –)*

I don't mind telling you that that feels good to say.  
Like a sheriff showing his badge.

*(He goes to play something else, but stops –)*

This is fun.

It's like you're my Crowd.

I've always wanted to have a Crowd.

*(He plays, he stops.)*

I like TITS.

BIG.

The weirder the nipples the better.

*(He plays. Then stops—)*

Having a daughter is very confusing for a man.

(Women you should be aware of this.)

We spend our lives trying to touch the tits.

To lick them, rub ourselves on them.

And then we do

and a baby gets made

and the baby grows up to have tits of her own.

It's very upsetting.

*(JOHN whips off a gorgeous riff, bow high in the air.)*

That's just something Very Cool

that I can do.

I try not to speak and play at the same time.

It's wrong.

It's like—chewing gum while you sing,

or praying while you shit.

*(He goes to play, then suddenly remembers – )*

Actually, I did that once.

I was twenty, studying at Juilliard, when my mother called.

My father had died.

I started the conversation in my pathetic little kitchenette on 48<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>,

Where the sound of running engines was the permanent accompaniment,

And somehow, by the time we hung up,

I was sitting on the toilet.

I put the phone on the sink

And started to...

He had a heart attack in the middle of the night.

In the kitchen.

He must've been searching for a turkey sandwich (he did that).

They found him the morning, lying in front of the sink.

Like a corn stalk after its been cut.

*(Beat. He touches his chest.)*

My father was the opposite of music:

Dirt that is pale on top.

Like this:

*(He drags his bow on the strings, ponticello. It sounds like rust, dry leaves, tears.)*

Music is wet and pungent.

It leaves a stain.

*(He plays something wet and pungent. COACH STARR back with her team.)*

**COACH STARR.**

They're walkin' all over our zone,

So second half we're gonna go man-to-man.

When you see a pick coming, let each other know, you gotta talk out there.

And I wanna see you SWEAT.

Lemme tell you a secret ladies –

SWEAT is liquid GOLD.

Whatever HURTS in your life, whatever NEEDS IMPROVED in your life – SWEAT will HEAL.

Effort. Sex. Need. Fear.

Anything that makes you SWEAT means the REAL YOU

Is present.

*(Then LAURA, age 5, wet from a sweaty sleep. A kind of strange stand off between her and JOHN, tender, filled with effort, sex, need and fear.)*

**JOHN.**

You're all wet.

**LAURA.**

My room is hot.

JOHN.

I'm sorry.

I need an air conditioner.

I'm still getting settled.

*(LAURA just stands there, pajamas, sweaty, sleepy.)*

LAURA.

Is it cuz of me?

JOHN.

What do you mean?

LAURA.

Is cuz of me

That you live here now?

JOHN. *(heartbreak)*

No.

No no no.

It's not cuz of you.

...

It's just – your mom and I.

LAURA.

Didn't make it?

JOHN.

No.

LAURA.

Will we make it?

JOHN.

You and me?

Yes.

We'll make it.

Sweaty girl.

*(Back with her team)*

JOHN.

So there I was, twenty years old, my father buried in  
the Midwest dirt,

when my teacher

William Schumann –

*(He pauses in that academic way, to make sure you caught his name drop)*

Told us that while he was away (doing some commission or other).

My idol would be teaching our class – composer Charles Ives.

It was just one class, but I was on the moon.

*(CHARLES IVES stands and prepares to teach class.)*

JOHN.

Charles Edward Ives was born in 1874 in Danbury Connecticut.

His father George banged the piano to imitate happy church bells

To announce that baby Charles had arrived.

CHARLES IVES.

Welcome welcome welcome! Hello good people!

Bill Schuman is a brilliant musician, and my friend;

I shall attempt to fill his very *laaaaaaaarge* shoes!

JOHN.

Pick up any piece of Charles Ives' music and you will hear

Dissonance, humor, complexity, beauty.

CHARLES IVES.

You look like a cluster of woodland creatures – turtles, groundhogs, a porcupine!...

The twenties are very hard, aren't they?

Your childhood self no longer serves you.

But your adult self is still a distant shore.

And so there you TREAD.

*(IVES mimes their tread)*

JOHN.

He was fond of setting disparate styles against one another –

A ragtime with a requiem.

CHARLES IVES.

But old age is no better.

I don't mean to depress you,

*(with a wink)* – well maybe I do!–

But THIS is what you have to look forward to.

*(IVES sings an ominous first line of Beethoven's Fifth.)*

Your body cannot do what your whole life would wish it.

*(sincerely, warmly)*

But it's not all Bad, I promise.

JOHN.

He'd won the Pulitzer.

Given the prize money away.

His innovations literally ushered in the music of the twentieth century.

CHARLES IVES.

When I was a little younger than you,

I would sit in the town square and *listen* –

To the marching band rehearsing in the pavilion,

The choir practice coming from the Methodist Church,

And the high school football team practicing in the clover field.

All those sounds coming together in the air...

JOHN.

And here

He

was.

CHARLES IVES.

As a child I was always a little ashamed of music.

It felt silly to sit indoors and practice – all those LA LA LAs.

And maybe I wasn't wrong.

*(a bit declarative)*

Music as an art has been emasculated for far too long.

JOHN. (*earnest passion*)

YES. YES.

CHARLES IVES.

What is your name, son?

JOHN.

Me?

John. Sir. John Starr.

CHARLES IVES. (*checking his notes*)

John Starr...

I once knew a John Starr – fiddler of my father's band  
in Danbury – remarkable man.

And look at that- we have a private tutorial coming up  
later today, John Starr.

JOHN.

We do??!

YYYYEAAAAHHHHH!!!

CHARLES IVES. (*happily startled by the loud sound*)

I do like your fervor, son.

JOHN.

Thank you sir.

I like your everything.

CHARLES IVES. (*kindly*) Alright then.

(JOHN sits, honored, his hand on his chest)

JOHN.

He called me "son"!

CHARLES IVES.

Now.

I want you to take out your textbooks, your scores,

Certainly anything by Debussy,

And I want you to take an enormous

POOOOOOOOH

Right on it.

I promised Bill I'd teach composition.

And I am a man of my word.

But just in case there is still an inch of your mind that  
hasn't been decimated by the

TA TA TA that passes for music today,

I intend to make my case.

My young friends!

I say to you:

*RUUUUUUN FOR YOUR LIIIIIIIIIVES!*

**JOHN.** *(whispered)*

(He was CRAZY.)

**CHARLES IVES.**

*HEEEAAAAD FOR THE HIIIIIIIIIIIS!*

**JOHN.** *(whispered)*

(Totally CRAZY!)

**CHARLES IVES.**

What if I told you

That music has not existed before this moment!??

*(JOHN watches CHARLES IVES, mouth agape.)*

There is nothing to be taught!

There is nothing you need to know!

Your SOLE JOB

Is to strain with all your might

To hear that strange, clanging

Majesty

In your heart.

It will sound foreign to you, even *ugly*...

Do not

be afraid!

Listen.

Listen...!

*(CHARLES IVES refers to their hearts beating in their chests.)*

What do you hear in there?

*(He waits in silence while the class tries to listen to their hearts.)*

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