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What Charlie Heard



Synopsis

The extraordinary story of the composer Charles Ives. "Sometimes little Charlie lay in his crib just listening. He heard his mother's long dress as she moved around his room. He heard big clocks and little clocks. He heard wagons and horse hooves. He heard dogs and crickets and the church bell next door." Charlie listened all through his boyhood, and as he grew into a man, he found he wanted to re-create in music the sounds that he heard every day. But others couldn't hear what Charlie heard. They didn't hear it as music – only as noise. In this daring and original book, Mordicai Gerstein graphically translates the audible into the visible – filling his pictures with noise – to tell the story of Charles Ives (1874–1954), a great musical innovator who let neither criticism nor public scorn keep him from composing music that expressed all that he heard in the world. He was finally recognized with a Pulitzer Prize in 1947. *What Charlie Heard* is a 2003 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (11 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

"Charles Ives was born with his ears wide open. The very first sound he heard might have been his father's trumpet announcing his birth to the town of Danbury, Connecticut." During his life, no matter where he was or what he was doing, Charlie heard the wonder of music in the everyday sounds

around him. It could be the rustle of his mother's dress, the tick of a clock, the hooves of horses clip-clopping down the street, or the ice cream man's bell. Charlie heard music in a bat hitting a baseball, the rumble of thunder, the applause and cheers of a crowd, and a train's bell and whistle. As he got older, Charlie wrote "music about things he'd heard or seen, or feelings he had. But sometimes it was just to hear how different notes would sound together." Charlie grew up, graduated from college, got married, and started a successful insurance company. But he never stopped writing his music. "It was a new kind of music. It didn't have to be pretty, it had to be true to his feelings... But most people didn't know how to listen to it. Some thought it was a joke. Others just heard noise and got angry." Finally, when Charles Ives was very old, musicians began to play and perform his music, and people began to hear what Charlie heard. "Maybe, if you open your ears like Charlie, you can hear the beautiful, funny, sad, joyous, amazing music he heard..." Mordecai Gerstein has written a spectacular introductory biography that really captures the essence of Charles Ives and his music. His simple, straightforward text is both engaging and informative. But it's Mr Gerstein's creative and inventive artwork that really makes this book stand out and sparkle.

(sung to the melody of "If I were a rich man...")Why, I'd be reading him this splendid illustrated children's book!What on earth is an heirless geezer like me doing, reviewing a children's book? Well, that's a reasonable question. The only sensible answer that I can come up with is that I'm simply somewhere in the middle of my second childhood, "up to my eyeballs in Ives."Mordicai Gerstein prefaces this enjoyable children's book with the statement "Everything I know about Charles Ives I learned from listening to his music, and from my dear friend, Jan Swafford, whose epic biography, 'Charles Ives: A Life with Music,' was the main source and inspiration for this book." And so it is that Jan Swafford has also been the main source and inspiration for my own second childhood with Charlie Ives. I can actually date my "second childhood" study of the life and music of Charlie to the time I was reading a borrowed copy of his Ives biography while awaiting my own copy.The narrative text of "What Charlie Heard" (all accurate, and admirably complete, by the way) is quite brief; probably not much more than a few hundred words in total. (While no expert on the matter, I believe that the narrative can be read by a child of 7 or 8. In fact, I provided a copy of this book to a friend's son for his 8th birthday. But I wouldn't consider him "average" by any definition; very precocious would be more like it. Hopefully he didn't find it to be boring.)Is it possible that a book so brief in its narrative text can actually "tell" the story about Charlie Ives and his life with music, with all of its "ups" and "downs"? Sure it can!

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