

NIELSEN ★ MCDONALD ★ IVES

ANDREW RANGELL, PIANO

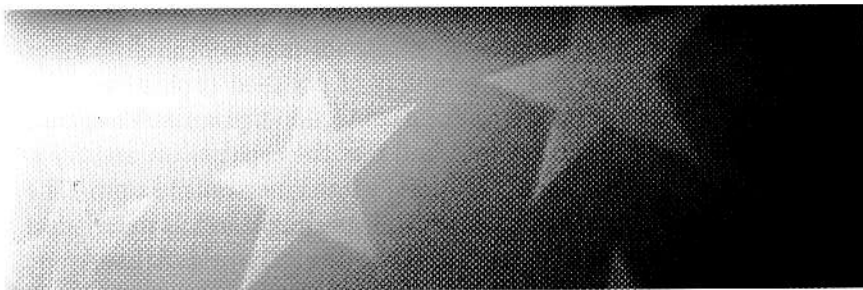
CARL NIELSEN: SUITE, 'LUCIFERIAN' OP. 45 (1919) [21:40]

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|---|--------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | ALLEGRETTO UN POCHETTINO | [3:59] |
| 2 | POCO MODERATO | [2:15] |
| 3 | MOLTO ADAGIO E PATÈTICO | [5:22] |
| 4 | ALLEGRETTO INNOCENTE | [2:05] |
| 5 | ALLEGRETTO VIVO | [1:16] |
| 6 | ALLEGRO NON TROPPO MA VIGOROSO | [6:39] |

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| 7 | JOHN MCDONALD: MEDITATION BEFORE
A SONATA: DEW CLOTH, DREAM DRAPERY,
OP. 406 (2003) | [7:58] |
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CHARLES IVES: FIRST SONATA (1902-1910) [39:08]

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| 8 | ADAGIO CON MOTO | [9:25] |
| 9 | ALLEGRO MODERATO; ALLEGRO ("IN THE INN") | [6:16] |
| 10 | LARGO-ALLEGRO-LARGO | [7:49] |
| 11 | (NO TEMPO INDICATION); ALLEGRO-PRESTO | [4:36] |
| 12 | ANDANTE MAESTOSO | [10:59] |



Nielsen and Ives – together.

Over many years I have felt a special affection and admiration for Carl Nielsen and Charles Ives, two brave tone poets whose diverse musics bridged the 19th and 20th centuries in singular and surprise-filled ways. As evidenced in the pieces recorded here. Now almost one hundred years old, and written only a decade or so apart, these pieces are fully imbued with the imprint and character of their creators. Major works by any standard, neither is widely performed, nor sufficiently appreciated. Therefore I am particularly happy to offer them here together. Not long ago I was surprised and gladdened to find Nielsen and Ives brought together in Lewis Rowell's essay: "Nielsen's Homespun Philosophy of Music". Remarking that while Nielsen has often been compared with Sibelius and Grieg and (less often) with Mahler and Busoni, his sharings with Ives are well worth noting. Among them: "semi-rural backgrounds, deep musical impressions from early childhood, a subconscious teeming with the residue of many popular musical genres and functional musics, an intensely nationalistic outlook, a disdain for musical academicians and all products of polished sophistication, a pantheistic concept of nature, a strong conviction that artistry depends more on matter than on manner, and that the capacity for artistry is within the reach of everyone." (This last idea an Emersonian axiom.) The above list, open to contention (as such lists always are), is in any case illuminating – especially in relation to the musical worlds at hand.

Both Ives and Nielsen, it happens, produced some fascinating and memorable prose, the most notable examples of which are Ives' philosophical "Essays Before a Sonata" (which accompanied his second piano sonata: "Concord, Mass., 1840-1860") and Nielsen's memoir "My Childhood," an account of his early years on the Danish island of Funen. Though greatly differing in style, both men wrote with a spirited and indeed "homespun" candor, conviction, and freshness.

One last connection. Though Nielsen, the older by nine years, hewed far more closely, generally speaking, to traditional forms and procedures than did Ives, there occurs a remarkable incident in the (theme and variations) finale of Nielsen's Sixth Symphony, which highlights Nielsen's own brand of experimentalism. In variation six a blithe and charming waltz in 3/8 begins to run into small disruptions, including clashes between impatient instruments, until finally a gang of trombones (joined by percussion) blares forth its own "waltz" – this one in 4/16! The ensuing chaos has a hilarious gusto which could truly be called "Ivesian." It is doubtful that Nielsen ever heard a note of Ives' work.

Nielsen Suite, Opus 45

Like his fellow symphonist Sibelius, Carl Nielsen produced a significant body of piano music, mostly pushed to the margins of the symphonic achievement. The most ambitious and important

single piece is certainly his 1919 Suite, a work of striking cumulative force and pianistic originality. It is dedicated to Artur Schnabel, the pianist – and fellow composer. Unlike Nielsen's masterful chaconne, written about three years earlier and an explicit homage to Bach's great D minor violin chaconne, the Suite stands well apart from the Baroque model. Instead these six movements seem closer to the multi-movement configurations of Beethoven's last quartets. Three movements are weighty and elaborate (nos. 1, 3, 6). Three are fleeting intermezzi – small in scale, subtle in design. As in late Beethoven, Nielsen's piano writing is actively and arrestingly polyphonic. In the first minute of the piece, notice how the suave counterpoint of the opening theme gives way to a most idiosyncratic conversation between the hands, beginning the second theme area. Or contrast the silken canonic writing of the second movement with the violent invertible counterpoint at the climax (bars 20-22) of the third. Increasingly in his mature work, Nielsen employed tonal centers as touchstones rather than anchors. This suite moves, harmonically, between the polarities of F sharp and B flat, with G and B as subsidiary areas. Nielsen's tonal language, extremely fluent, filled with shifts and surprises, is rigorously controlled. Interwoven across the boundaries of the six movements are several important unifying motives: a descending scale figure, a repeated-note figure, a dotted-rhythm figure, the interval of a perfect fourth. The three large-scale movements share aspects of sonata form: contrasting theme-groups,

development, recapitulation. Movements one and three share obvious symmetries – while the searching finale features a kind of ongoing development which yields, finally, the most powerful effect of all. Nielsen originally supplied the subtitle "Luciferian" for the premiere performance of this suite, a reference to Lucifer the light-bearer, a Greek mythological star which announced the day. Upon publication, two full years later, the designation was dropped, partly for fear of misinterpretation. "Luciferian" is a charged word, yes. To me it feels right for this brilliantly alive and shining music. So here it stands.

Ives' First Sonata

Ives' two epic piano sonatas, the First and the "Concord" span in rough succession the full two decades of Ives' creative prime, 1900-1920. The "Concord," bolstered by the "Essays Before a Sonata" – parts of which are incorporated in the musical score – has gained greater notoriety over the past century, perhaps partly due to its extra-musical trappings. In any case, Ives devoted greater attention to the "Concord" and to its early (1920) publication. The First Sonata, on the other hand, seems to have been left in limbo for more than three decades, after Ives' fair copy of the work was mailed to an older colleague and apparently lost. In the 1940's, composer Lou Harrison, with Ives' approval, prepared from earlier manuscripts a "new" score for publication. But Ives never

stopped emending his piano sonatas and remarked: "I may always have the pleasure of not finishing them." (!) Scholars are seeking, and may yet find, a more authoritative version of this sonata, but it is Harrison's version which is heard here. With a few liberties...

Considering the lesser reputation of the First Sonata, it may be, ironically, the more inviting and the more "regular" of the two. Its dances, hymn-tunes, and reflections are aimed a little closer to the heart than are the sustained abstractions of its sister sonata. The fully symmetrical structure of the First also goes a long way to mitigate its complexity and large scale. At the center, the third movement is a rhapsodic meditation (itself in ABA form: Largo – Allegro – Largo) on "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." This movement is a fantasy so complete and multi-faceted that it could proudly stand entirely on its own. Two kaleidoscopic ragtime movements, different in form but equally fervent and hyper-animated, flank the center. Much of this music derives from a large assortment of ragtime dances in varied instrumental combinations, musical experiments of a sort, which Ives had fashioned between 1899 and 1904. Certain shared materials tend to unify the two ragtime movements: the gospel tune "Happy Day" (also known as "How Dry I Am"), "Bringing in the Sheaves," and the chorus of "Welcome Voice." Both movements also exhibit jagged dissonant rhythmic etudes, though the one in movement two is much more fragmentary. This movement has the obvious symmetry of

two disparate segments, each crowned, at the end, by a full-throated chorus. Movement four, in distinction, is multi-sectional but more concertedly cumulative – eventually erupting in a climactic "Bringing in the Sheaves" which truly goes off the rails (so to say). A suddenly muted final cadence slyly invites "Welcome Voice" back into the mix, an echo of the second movement.

Calmly declamatory, majestic, and orderly at its outset, the sonata's first movement provides a most appealing opening – very different from the initial onslaught of "Emerson" which opens the "Concord!" And taken as a whole, this complex movement gives us a sequence of "regions" somewhat akin to sonata-form sections, and ending satisfyingly in a poignant "return" to a theme which has only been hinted at in a great variety of ways. A distillation then, rather than a recapitulation. This theme is the hymn-tune "Lebanon" – the main theme of the movement, yet disguised throughout. The other, more conspicuous, idea of the movement is an ascending motif introduced in bar three. Both themes are heard throughout the movement, in constant free development. A hypnotically calm, harmonically static section – a kind of second-theme area – follows, supported by a freely repeating, well-anchored left hand arpeggio figure, tracing a C sharp 7 chord. Much of the ensuing music is in Ives' trademark "ragged" march style, with the notable interruption of a brief cadenza! After a final climax and a preparatory calming-down, we are given finally a long-deferred and

very touching event: the full statement of “Lebanon,” floating delicately over a (chromatically shadowed) B major harmony. Yet, typically for Ives, even in its arrival, this theme is assailed by sudden fanfare-like eruptions before its dreamy and indistinct conclusion.

Until recently, and for many years, I regarded the final movement of this sonata to be a kind of “weak sister” (to use an Ivesian phrase), an amalgam of interesting sections connected less organically than those of the first movement – its counterpart. Austere, containing no familiar quotations, and fixated upon a short motive of descending half-step and minor third (heard immediately in bar one), the overall character of this movement seemed to me somewhat unclear and somewhat removed. Donna Coleman, a marvelous interpreter of both Ives sonatas, has pointed out that this finale, in its peculiar detachment and abstraction, is not only a purged and elevated conclusion to the sonata, but a partial foretaste, even a bridge, to the “Concord.” For George Barth, another deep student of the piece, the harsh outcry of the movement’s opening music is closely tied to the remembered loss of Ives’ father during his freshman year at Yale – a devastating blow for young Charlie. Not in doubt about the freshness, intensity, and originality of the substance of this movement, I am glad to say that its purpose and place were heightened in my mind during my final preparation to record the work. Amen.

-Andrew Rangell, January 2009

McDonald Meditation Before A Sonata: Dew Cloth, Dream Drapery, Op. 406 (2003)

In 2003, on behalf of the Boston Celebrity Series, I asked a special favor of my friend the composer John McDonald: that he write a shortish work for piano to be performed on a recital featuring Ives’ “Concord” Sonata and which might in some way suggest a connection to Ives, or possibly to the “Concord” itself. The response was the haunting meditation heard here—in a new context and preceding a different Ives sonata! With equally felicitous results, I think. Here follows the composer’s commentary:

It is possibly morning. The mist is over the pond (in this case, please imagine Walden Pond many years ago, or now). Into the scene, in your mind and from without, waft memories or inklings of tunes you know or tunes yet to be devised (wait: are we listening now in 1852, 1940, or 2009?); perhaps a Spiritual, perhaps a folk song à la Stephen Foster, perhaps something more complex. Yet the mist (“dew cloth”) covers the mind and ear with its “dream drapery” and obscures much, preventing us from divining just what might be meant by these fragmentary tune snippets. We do know, however, that the atmosphere provides food for thought. We continue in reverie, intrigued as we move through the day.

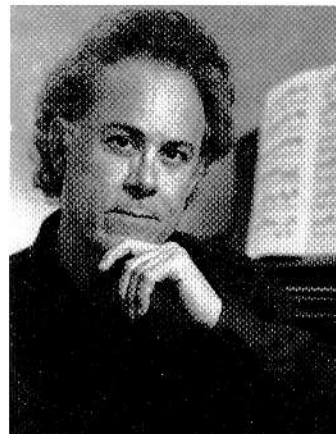
The title alludes to Ives's quirky and visionary "Essays Before A Sonata," and as a musical stage setting, it borrows "Ivesian" musical materials. In fact, it takes an initial poetic cue from the inscription that Ives uses for his "Thoreau" movement, and helps itself to melodic fragments and moments from the "Concord," as well as to an entire verse's worth of melody from the Spiritual "In the Morning," which Ives harmonized in 1929. (John McDonald, January 2009).

John McDonald, Associate Professor of Music and Director of Graduate Music Studies at Tufts University, is a composer who tries to play the piano and a pianist who tries to compose.

McDonald was named the 2007 MTNA—Shepherd Distinguished Composer of the Year by the Music Teachers National Association. His recordings appear on the Albany, Archetype, Boston, Bridge, Capstone, Neuma, New Ariel, and New World labels, and he has concertized widely as composer and pianist.

Recent compositions:

Peace Process (basset horn and piano) *The Creatures' Choir* (evening-long song cycle for voice and piano) *Ways To Jump* (choral work concerning frogs) *Piano Albums* (annual collections of piano miniatures) *Stäudlin As Vogl: Preamble To A Winter Journey* (alto saxophone and piano) *Four Compositions* (flute and piano)



Andrew Rangell

Born in Chicago and raised in Colorado, Andrew Rangell is a graduate of the Juilliard School, earning a doctoral degree in piano under Beveridge Webster. Mr. Rangell made his New York debut as winner of the Malraux Award of the Concert Artists Guild and has since performed throughout the United States, and in Europe and Israel. He has also lectured extensively, and taught on the faculties of

Dartmouth, Middlebury, and Tufts University. His many New York recitals have included an unusually wide range of repertoire, from Gibbons, Sweelinck, and Froberger to Berio, Nielsen, Schoenberg, Enescu, and the two epic sonatas of Charles Ives. Mr. Rangell's gifts as an extraordinary interpreter of Beethoven received high acclaim during three successive seasons (1986-89) devoted to the performance, in a seven-concert sequence, of the thirty-two Beethoven piano sonatas. This period saw ten traversals of the complete cycle (including Boston presentations at both Sanders Theater and Jordan Hall, and at New York's 92nd Street Y) as well as a debut at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival and the award

of an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Of Mr. Rangell's most recent New York recital, Charles Michener of the New York Observer wrote: "For me, the great discovery of the series has been Andrew Rangell . . . Mr. Rangell is an individualist. And such was his intensity—like the late Glenn Gould, he seemed to be propelled by an irresistible force—that the listener's attention was riveted to the music."

Andrew Rangell's extensive discography on the Dorian label includes Bach's Goldberg Variations, Beethoven's final five sonatas, two diverse collections entitled "A Recital of Intimate Works" (Vol. I & II), and a pairing of Beethoven's Diabelli Variations and Ravel's Gaspard de la Nuit. A two-disc set of Bach's six Partitas released in November, 2001 was cited in both The Boston Globe and Boston Phoenix as one of the 'Best recordings of 2001.' Mr. Rangell's performances of the complete Chopin Mazurkas joined the Dorian catalogue in 2003 and were characterized, in Gramophone, as "taking the humble mazurka to new heights of variety and sophistication." 1998-99 marked Andrew Rangell's first active concert season following a long hiatus due to a serious hand injury. Since that time he has steadily reclaimed and expanded his performance and recording career. He was honored to perform a solo recital (which featured Ives' "Concord" sonata) in the 2003 Venice "Biennale," Italy's foremost contemporary music festival. In spring of 2008 Andrew Rangell was Artist-In-Residence of the Philadelphia Bach Festival.

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