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ALC 0137

Beethoven-Liszt Symphony No. 5
Ives Concord Sonata

Simone Librale, *piano*

Ives Piano Sonata No. 2, Concord, Mass., 1840-60

01. Emerson	16:25
02. Hawthorne	13:11
03. The Alcotts	04:52
04. Thoreau	10:58

Beethoven-Liszt Sinfonia No. 5

05. Allegro con brio	06:39
06. Andante con moto	10:03
07. Allegro	06:04
08. Allegro - Presto	10:52

Total Time: 79:04
Recorded at Fazioli Concert Hall
Photo **Alberto Mantegna** | Concept **Tiziana Tentoni**
Sound engineer **Marco Francini** | Special thanks **Fazioli Pianoforti spa**
Production manager **Rosella Clementi** | Publishing supervisor **Romano Di Bari**
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Why bring together two monuments of piano literature on the same album: Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, Op. 67 in Franz Liszt's transcription for solo piano, and Charles Ives' Concord Sonata, Mass., 1840-60?

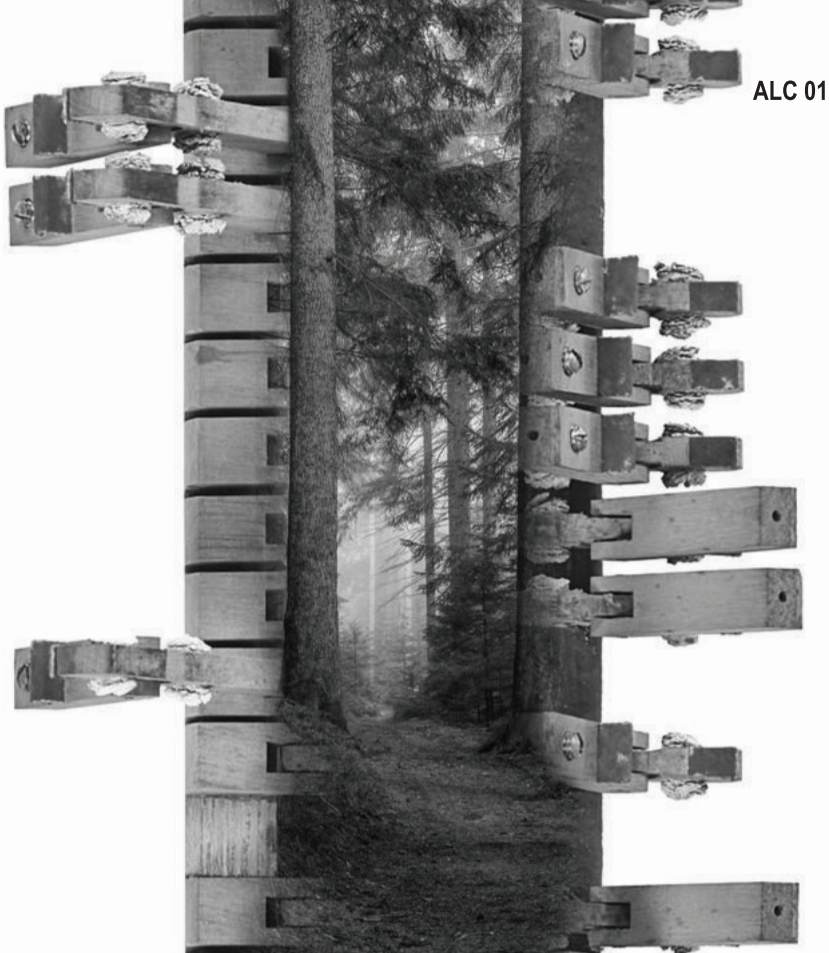
Ives intricately weaves a dense network of quotations into the *Concord Sonata*, drawing from a rich array of musical sources that span American folk traditions to European classical music. Among the most evocative references are references to Debussy's impressionistic language, yet it is the quotation of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* that forms the centerpiece of the entire work. The iconic "motto" of the Fifth—often interpreted in Romantic-symbolist terms as "fate knocking at the door"—is reimagined by Ives in alignment with Ralph Waldo Emerson's spiritual vision: as "the soul of humanity knocking at the door of the Divine Mysteries, radiant in the faith that it will be opened and the human become the divine!" In this way, Ives aligns the motto of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* with the transcendentalist philosophy, which also inspires the title of the *Concord Sonata* (named after Concord, Massachusetts, the epicenter of this American movement) and the four illustrious transcendentalist figures to whom its movements are dedicated.

In Ives' work, one could speak of synesthesia: a fusion of literature and music and the evocation of varied sensory perceptions. Do you agree? How does the literary context of each movement shape the listener's imagination?

I fully endorse this interpretation: the association between the *Concord Sonata* and the transcendentalist authors referenced in its movements stems directly from Ives' intent. Not only does the composer make this connection explicit through the sonata's titles and individual movements, but he also accompanies the work's publication with a collection of essays, known as *Essays Before a Sonata*, wherein he articulates his personal interpretation of each author celebrated in the composition. Ives asserts that understanding the sonata without reading the essays—or vice versa—is impossible. Through this operation, Ives weaves an inseparable bond between music and literature, calling upon both his own texts and the works of the literary figures he honors.

How much does this interplay of literature and music influence the listener's imagination?

In my view, it is crucial for a profound immersion in the work, shielding the listener from the risk of losing their way. For example, the first movement, dedicated to Ralph Waldo Emerson, reflects the fragmented and complex style of the writer, an aspect Ives translates into a dense and "dispersive" composition. Knowing these literary characteristics of Emerson enriches the musical experience, shedding light on Ives' stylistic choices. Similarly, the second movement, inspired by Nathaniel Hawthorne, manifests a direct connection to the author's narrative style: conceived as a "scherzo," even in the etymological sense of the term, this more agitated and lively movement includes references to popular music, paying homage to Hawthorne's short stories and their affinity with transcendentalist themes. The third movement draws inspiration from the Alcott family (Amos Bronson and his daughter Louisa May, known to us for her book *Little Women*), while the fourth honors Henry David Thoreau, with the optional inclusion of a flute—a nod to Thoreau himself—which transports the listener to Walden Pond, where Thoreau sought complete communion with nature.



Simone Librale studied under pianists Giuliano Adorno, Daniel Rivera, Maurizio Baglini, and Emanuele Arciuli. In 2022, he graduated with highest honors, distinction, and special commendation from the Mascagni State Conservatory in Livorno. He is currently advancing his studies at the "Accademia di musica di Pinerolo e Torino". Renowned for his passion for modern and contemporary music, Simone has delved into some of the most significant piano works of the 20th and 21st centuries. His personal collaborations with leading contemporary composers, including Salvatore Sciarrino and Francesco Filidei, have shaped his deep exploration of today's musical aesthetics and the evolving language of music. Simone's career highlights include his participation in the world premiere of 11.000 *Saiten* by Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas, commissioned by the F. Busoni - G. Mahler Foundation for the Bolzano Festival Bozen in 2023. A regular guest on "Rai RadioTre" national radio programmes, Simone recently performed a live solo recital for the series *Concerti al Quirinale* in the Cappella Paolina, featuring Claude Debussy's *Préludes* and Charles Ives' *Sonata No. 2, Concord Mass.*, 1840-60. He was also a featured artist in *Quattro elementi in musica* project, performing Debussy's *Feux d'artifice* and Boulez's *Première Sonate* at the Teatro Verdi in Pordenone. As part of the *Figure oltre il presente* series, he gave a recital dedicated to Luigi Dallapiccola at the same venue. Simone's performances extend beyond the concert stage. He was featured in the "Rai 5" documentary *Marmirolo - Il Bosco delle Emozioni*, which remains available on "RaiPlay". In 2020, he made his orchestral debut as a soloist with the "Roma Tre Orchestra" in the *Mozart Project* under the direction of Sieva Borzak.

How impactful is Liszt in the restitution of the epic quality of Beethoven's symphony in this transcription?

Liszt's transcription, reflecting his compositional genius, has a profound impact. To capture the epic nature of Beethoven's Fifth—a feat masterfully achieved —Liszt enhances the symphony with a stylistic language suited to the piano and his Romantic approach. His transcription is far from a simple copy-paste operation; it represents a meticulous pianistic adaptation. The result is an elaboration that respects Beethoven's symphonic integrity while offering an unprecedented perspective that unveils new facets of the work.Through the formidable technical challenges of the transcription, Liszt presents the symphony in a new light, revealing its internal dynamics and emotional tensions just as Beethoven conceived them.

Would you say it is legitimate to attribute greater importance to Liszt's transcription than to Beethoven's original orchestral score? Why? And to what extent?

To assert the centrality of Liszt's contribution is to acknowledge a dialogue that transcends mere reproduction. While numerous solo piano transcriptions exist, Liszt's version stands out—not just because of his name—but due to its distinctive approach. Why? Because in his transcription, Liszt does not simply include everything Beethoven wrote; he imbues it with his unique interpretive sensibility, reshaping the original score through technical gestures and pianistic solutions characteristic of his own compositional language, as seen in his solo piano works. Liszt, therefore, does not merely adapt Beethoven's notes; he infuses them with the essence of his artistic universe, sometimes introducing structural modifications—for instance, variations in repeated sections of the symphony—that reveal a deeply personal and profound vision. This process represents not just a mediation between orchestral score and solo instrument but a transfiguration that acquires its own identity. Is it then legitimate to attribute to it greater importance? We must first acknowledge that solo piano transcriptions historically made music accessible in domestic or private settings, meeting the need to share masterpieces that orchestral performances made unattainable for much of the public. Today, however, with the orchestral version more widely available, Liszt's transcriptions are not substitutes for the original but stand as autonomous reinterpretations. They are not meant to replicate the orchestra's sound but to offer an alternative vision. Listening to Liszt's transcription is not about retracing the echo of Beethoven's work but rather appreciating a dialogue between two great minds: on one hand, the structural power of Beethoven's writing; on the other, the eloquence and intuition of the pianist-composer, who employs the full range of pianistic possibilities to breathe new life into the work with its own distinctive colors and traits. In this sense, Liszt's transcription can legitimately be regarded as possessing artistic merit equal to that of the original score, recognizing simultaneously Beethoven's genius and Liszt's bold interpretive ingenuity.

This is your recording debut: what are your thoughts on recording in a broader sense? And on the idea that every artist can—or should—create their own legacy?

Recording is not limited, as a concert is, to capturing a fleeting interpretation or the reflection of a single lived moment. Instead, it becomes a medium through which the performer leaves an imprint of their artistic vision—one that encompasses both their individuality and the world they inhabit. Each recording bears witness to how the artist conceives music at a specific stage in their life, inevitably shaped by the dynamics of their existence, the society around them, and contemporary aesthetic ideals, often in ways that are subconscious. Thus, recording becomes a testament to our passage, a document that dialogues with the future, enabling later generations to grasp a fragment of a particular collective sensibility. Just as we can perceive the distinctive characteristics of interpretations from a past era, today's recordings offer a chance to leave a trace of our time—a window through which future audiences may understand not only interpretive choices but also how our society, in 2024, understood music.

Why do you think the general public still regards Ives as a contemporary composer?

There is a common belief that contemporary music is primarily characterized by a greater use of dissonance compared to "non-contemporary" music from earlier eras. This perspective has fostered the widespread perception that any musical output relying heavily on dissonance is automatically "contemporary." In reality, however, contemporary music should predominantly include works composed after World War II—a period marked by explorations of new structures and languages beyond the mere use of dissonant harmonies. In fact, one could argue that contemporary music should strictly refer to works by living composers.This misunderstanding often leads to labeling all music that sounds "strange" or "dissonant" as contemporary, frequently with a negative connotation—even composers like Charles Ives are subjected to this misclassification.

Would you say there is confusion between the ease of listening and a habit to accept only what is already familiar?

I believe this is one of the challenges of our times: the frenetic pace of modern life has created a constant desire for immediacy. We live in a world where every piece of information is instantly accessible, seemingly without effort. This often simplifies the process of discovery and diminishes the urgency to explore something new. What were once rare and treasured occasions—concerts, performances, cultural events—are now more readily available and frequent, reducing the anticipation that once made the experience more intense. The continuous availability of events tends to dull the desire to explore the unfamiliar, steering us instead toward what feels safe, familiar, and already tested. This trend has implications not only for individual listening choices but also for the cultural offerings themselves, favoring musical programming centered on a "reassuring" repertoire for audiences. Contemporary or dissonant music finds increasingly less space in concert programs and recordings. Being less familiar and requiring more effort to engage with, it meets resistance from an audience that rarely feels the urgency to confront the unknown. This lack of a "hunger" for novelty—once perhaps more natural due to the scarcity of listening opportunities—now manifests in repetitive cultural choices, progressively narrowing the repertoire offered and experienced. It marginalizes those sonic experiences that demand effort, curiosity, time to mature, and openness. The problem is that this dynamic becomes self-reinforcing: unfamiliar repertoire remains inaccessible due to lack of exposure, and the perceived difficulty of initial encounters discourages further engagement. Without the need or willingness to make an effort to understand, what we do not know remains excluded, impoverishing musical culture of new and stimulating experiences.

Why did you choose this specific order for the two pieces?

I chose to open the CD with Charles Ives' *Concord Sonata* because I wanted to guide the listener toward the evolution of a musical idea, rather than its origins. My intent is to shift the focus from the genesis of the musical concept to its development and maturation. In this context, placing Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* at the end of the program preserves the perceptual integrity of the listening experience of the *Concord Sonata*. I wished to avoid the evident connection between the two works—particularly the Beethovenian motif echoed in Ives' piece—from influencing the listener's perception of the latter right from the start. Instead, I aimed to allow them to fully immerse themselves in Ives' musical journey.

Do you think that in the future, over the next twenty or thirty years, it will become common practice again to record live music and release it without any editing?

I believe that unedited live recordings represent a fundamental dimension, almost like a missing piece in the current musical practice. Music inherently benefits from both forms of recording: live and studio, as each offers distinct perspectives and meanings. Live recordings capture and allow listeners to revisit the unique, unrepeatable nature of a performance, tied to the specificity of the moment, the venue, and the performer. They are snapshots that preserve the immediacy of the dialogue between artist and audience, embedding the historical and artistic context of the performance. However, this should not detract from concert attendance, as the live experience—with its collective participation and the palpable energy of the audience—is the very heartbeat of music. On the other hand, studio recordings, enhanced by the possibility of technical interventions, offer a considered interpretation—a reflection of the artist's personal evolution and vision of the work, detached from the spontaneity of a live concert. Thus, I believe the two practices complement each other, providing the public with a rich and multifaceted view of music and interpretive thought.

Would you then be open, perhaps in a few years, to recording and publishing the same exact program live as a comparative experiment with this newly released product?

Certainly, it would be an interesting experiment—not so much for comparison, as I am convinced that live performances follow their own distinct path—but rather to capture, almost like a photographic snapshot, a specific and meaningful moment in my life and artistic evolution as an interpreter.

Simone Librale
Interview by Maurizio Baglini