



A 30th Anniversary
Celebration of Other Minds

January 21, 2023

Littlefield Concert Hall,
Oakland CA

in association with the
Music Department of
Mills College at
Northeastern University

FROM DISCORD TO CONCORD

Pianist
Marc-André Hamelin
performs Charles Ives

Commentary by
Kyle Gann

Hosted by
Charles Amirkhania

otherminds.org

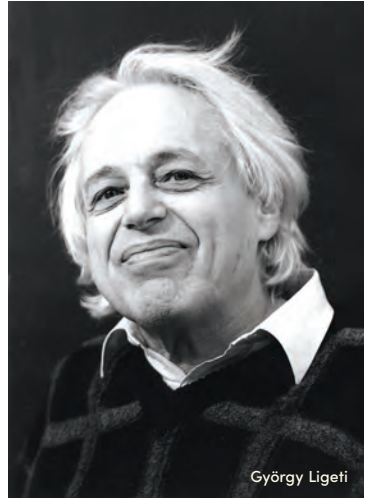


Charles Ives

I CAME, I SAW, I CONCORD: THIRTY YEARS OF OTHER MINDS

Charles Amirkhanian

Tonight we're celebrating the 30th anniversary of the initial public pre-sentation by Other Minds. It took place January 29, 1993, with composer György Ligeti discussing his then-new Piano Etudes. German pianist Volker Banfield played Books I and II in their American premieres. That day, a large audience at Hertz Hall on the U.C. Berkeley campus witnessed the final presentation of the California College of Performing Arts because the non-profit's name had not yet been changed legally to Other Minds.



György Ligeti

CCPA had been the brainchild of gallerist Jim Newman and friends who wanted to support the presentation of classical Indian music with distinguished house concerts in the Bay Area. Among the musicians involved were Pandit Pran Nath, Krishna Bhatt, G. S. Sachdev, Zakir Hussain, La Monte Young, and Terry Riley. As those activities wound down, Jim heard me announce over KPFA that I'd be leaving the station to run the Djerassi Resident Artists Program in Woodside, California, ending my 23 years of broadcasting of contemporary music.

He phoned me in late 1992 and proposed that he turn the CCPA non-profit entity over to activities in new music that would sustain my



involvement in San Francisco concert life. I immediately informed him of Ligeti's impending trip to the Bay Area. Securing the agreement of the Cal Music Department, we arranged what turned out to be a lecture-concert with one of the world's greatest living composers. But when our next event, an international music festival, was to be held nearly a year later in November 1993, we had to establish a name worthy of the occasion, and CCPA didn't fit. It was Jim who, that August, read a dismissive obituary in *The New Yorker* for John Cage and called me with a hint of glee in his voice. "I've got it! *The New Yorker* just announced that Cage's epitaph should read that he composed music in *other* people's minds. What a put-down! I think the musicians we present should proudly embrace the title of those Other Minds."

Now here we are 30 years later, and to celebrate, we're blessed with the presence of two towering figures in classical music: Pianist Marc-André Hamelin and composer-writer Kyle Gann. Both are experts on the subject of tonight's concert—Charles Ives's massive, complex, and extraordinarily inventive *Concord Sonata*.

Gann has written a book thoroughly investigating the work and its connection to the transcendental writers Emerson, Hawthorne, Alcott,



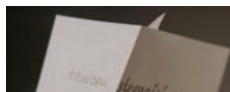
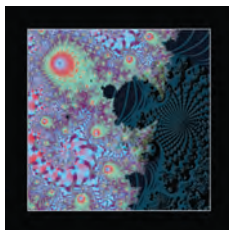
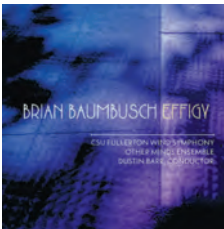
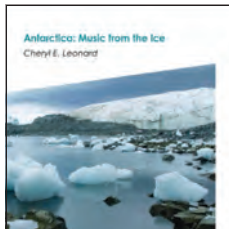
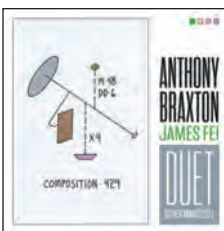
Marc-André Hamelin
Photo: Sim Cannety Clarke

and Thoreau. Hamelin has recorded the Sonata twice and performs it from memory—a seemingly impossible feat.

For many years, both men have been obsessed with collecting scores of a vast number of composers, both famous and obscure, and their personal comments tonight promise to yield some entertaining insights into the birth of modernism launched by Ives. It was he whose success in the insurance business enabled him to secretly fund the publication by Henry Cowell of his New Music Edition scores and discs, devoted solely to living composers at a time when American classical music was emerging from its Eurocentric roots to forge new styles that re-examined the building blocks of music from the ground up.

Out of that rich stew emerged the American Experimental Tradition, led by Cowell students John Cage and Lou Harrison. Their investigations into new musical possibilities have yielded, directly and indirectly, so many musical thrills that continue to serve us well 100 years later. ●

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TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Introductory remarks

Charles Amirkhanian

Discussion & demonstration

Marc-André Hamelin & Kyle Gann

INTERMISSION

Piano Sonata No. 2, "Concord, Mass., 1840-1860"

Charles Ives

- I. Emerson
- II. Hawthorne
- III. The Alcotts
- IV. Thoreau

Marc-André Hamelin, piano

Marc-André Hamelin appears by arrangement with Colbert Artists Management, Inc., 180 Elm Street, STE I #221, Pittsfield, MA 01201-6552.

Marc-André Hamelin records exclusively for Hyperion Records, Ltd.

This concert was made possible with generous support from Charles Céleste Hutchins, Barbara Bessey, Melissa Haddad and Bill Huie. Our thanks to David Bernstein, Chair of the Mills Music Department, and to Brendan Glasson, Technical Director, Mills College Center for Contemporary Music, and their colleagues.



Charles Ives
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
via Wikimedia Commons

CHARLES IVES'S "CONCORD SONATA"

Reprinted from *Charles Ives: Piano Sonata No. 2 ("Concord, Mass., 1840-1860")/ Maurice Wright: Sonata* (New World Records 80378-2), by Kyle Gann. ©1989 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc. Used with permission.

Kyle Gann

"This is not a nice sonata for a nice piano player," wrote Charles Ives about his most famous work, "but something the writer had long been thinking about."

Long indeed: Ives, the backbone of the Ives and Myrick Insurance Co. (which later became Mutual of New York), began what became the *Concord Sonata* in 1904, wrote most of it in 1911 and 1912, and finished it in 1915. Then in 1919 he extended the work still further by writing *Essays Before a Sonata*, intended to be published along with it; the book is one of the most provocative and illuminating aesthetic documents ever written by a composer. The world waited even longer for an audition: Lenore Purcell performed isolated movements between 1920 and 1929, but not until 1939 did John Kirkpatrick give the entire Sonata its New York premiere. In 1948, Kirkpatrick recorded the work for Columbia, and the disc was a best seller for months.

All four movements were programmatically conceived around figures in the Transcendentalist movement (c.1936-1860) in Concord, Massachusetts. The "Emerson" movement had begun as a piano concerto, the soloist representing Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the orchestra, the masses listening to him; "Hawthorne" was conceived for "a piano or a dozen pianos;" "The Alcotts" for organ or piano with voice or violin; and "Thoreau" for strings colored by flute or horn.



THE *CONCORD* SONATA EXISTS AT, AND HELPS DEFINE, THAT EXQUISITE MOMENT WHEN ROMANTICISM, IN FEVERISH PURSUIT OF ITS IDEALS, ERUPTED INTO MODERNISM. KYLE GANN

Much of the *Concord Sonata's* radicalness stems from its reversal of the usual European-based pattern, which moves from unity to multiplicity, stating a theme simply at first and adding complexities later. Ives instead starts with complexity, then gradually strips his textures down to their essential strands. The logical basis for his music is not the prepared dissertation, but the spontaneous argument, in which issues that are at first muddy gradually come into focus. Along with the Second String Quartet and the Fourth Symphony, the *Concord* is a quintessential example of this form—its maximum density lies in the opening pages, while by the “Alcotts” movement that texture has thinned to passages of disarmingly naïve lyricism. To end with a matter-of-fact statement, though, would be a contradiction of Ives’s evolutionary epistemology, and “Thoreau’s” touching tonal ambiguity (is the last page in D-flat or C?) ultimately leaves everything in doubt.

It’s true that in “Emerson” the “paragraphs don’t cohere,” as Ives said of the writer’s prose: “Each sentence points not to the next, but to the under-current.” The “phantasmal” side of Nathaniel Hawthorne (depicted with large, quiet tone clusters played with a 14-inch board) inspired Ives to utilize a stream-of-consciousness technique that anticipated James Joyce’s similar methods of construction for *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake*. The idea that linear thought falsifies reality was a major premise of Ives’s philosophy, and he justified his polythematicism by asserting that “being close to Truth





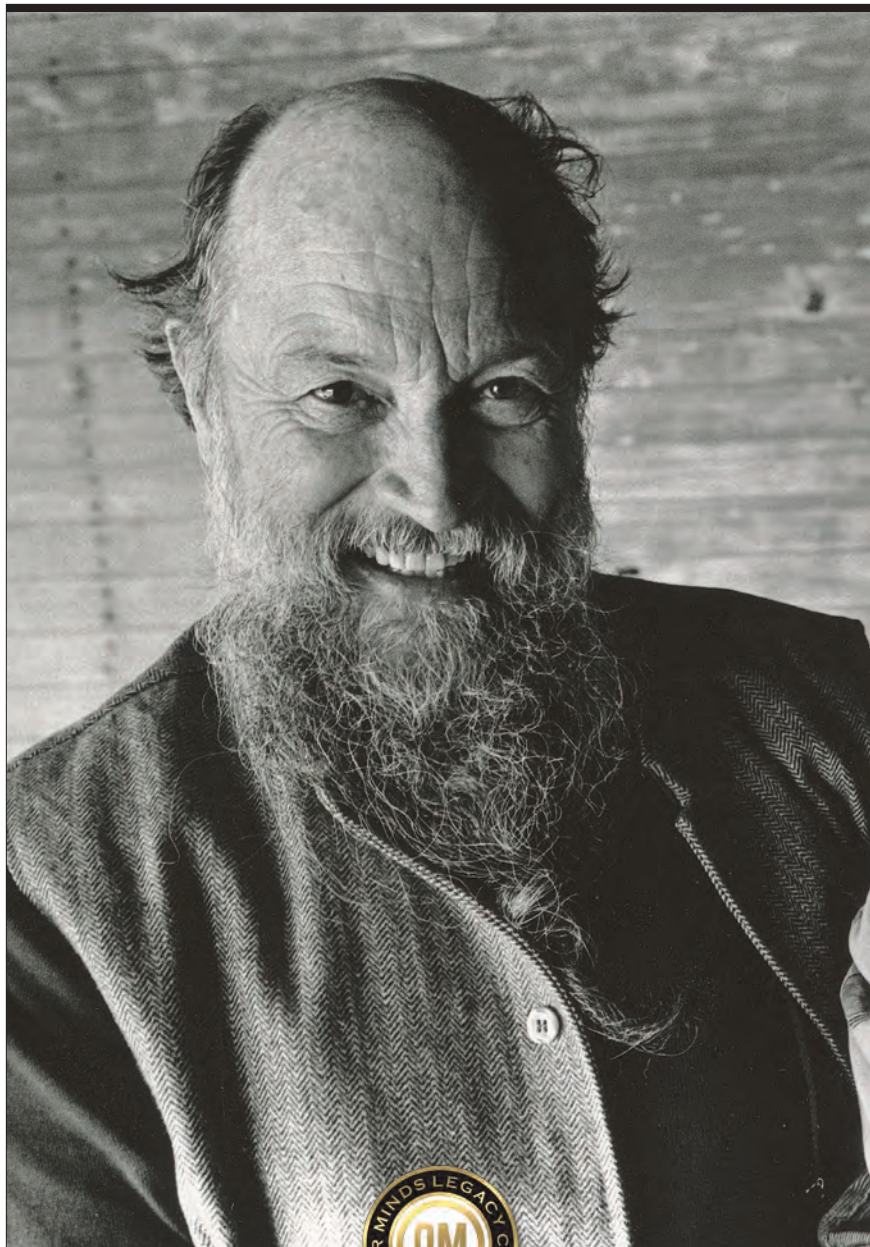
Charles Ives

precludes being close to a truth.” Nevertheless, the *Concord’s* alleged lack of unity is something Ives himself overstated in his own defense; the charge obscures the technical mastery in the music, the incredible profusion of invention, development, and variation.

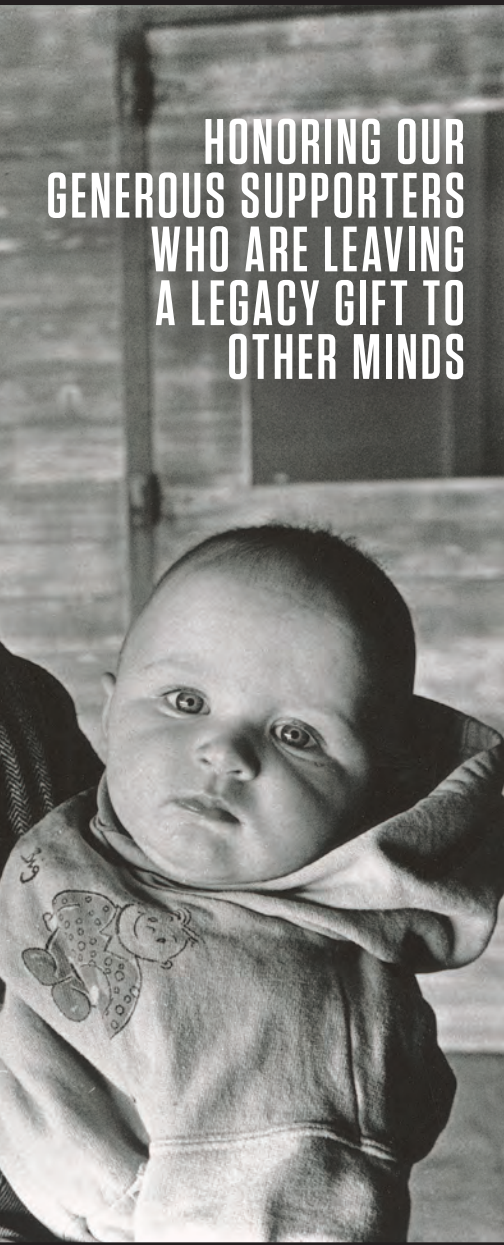
Most of the myriad themes can be traced back to two motives stated before the first bar line; the falling, almost pentatonic octave series with which the left hand opens, and the famous four-note motive from Beethoven’s Fifth, a motive that Ives said characterized “the soul of humanity knocking at the door of the divine mysteries, radiant in the faith that it *will* be opened.” The former motive plunges into the bass to create tension in “Emerson,” and then in “Thoreau” wafts down from the heights to dissipate it. This pentatonic fragment becomes a beautiful octave-displaced song in the middle of “Emerson” (a movement divided into passages of “prose” and “poetry”), is disguised as “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean” in “Hawthorne,” and later, with the first three notes inverted, becomes the introverted flute melody in “Thoreau.” Meanwhile, the Beethoven theme is transformed from a propulsive contrapuntal device in “Emerson” to a hymnlike melody in “The Alcotts.”

One of the most wide-ranging piano works ever written, the *Concord* is also one of the most intuitively unified. Despite his use of such avant-garde devices as polytonality, sound clusters, and un-metered rhythm, Ives remained a true Hegelian romantic, as is apparent from his idealist exclamation, “My God! What has sound got to do with music!” And as a work at once supremely romantic and technically innovative, the *Concord* Sonata exists at, and helps define, that exquisite moment when romanticism, in feverish pursuit of its ideals, erupted into modernism. ●

Terry Riley with his grandchild Simone Jude Riley at Other Minds Festival 2. Photo: John Fago, 1995



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Marc-André Homelin
Photo: Sim Cannety Clarke

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Compiled by Joseph Bohigian

Charles Ives (1874-1954) was a godfather of American experimental music, with a thread drawn from his groundbreaking work to composers of the following generations from Henry Cowell to John Cage and Lou Harrison. Born in 1874 in Danbury, Connecticut, his music is deeply affected by his native New England including the quotation of popular songs and the influence of transcendentalism. His father, a bandleader, gave him his earliest musical instruction, and he went on to study music at Yale with Horatio Parker from 1894-1898.

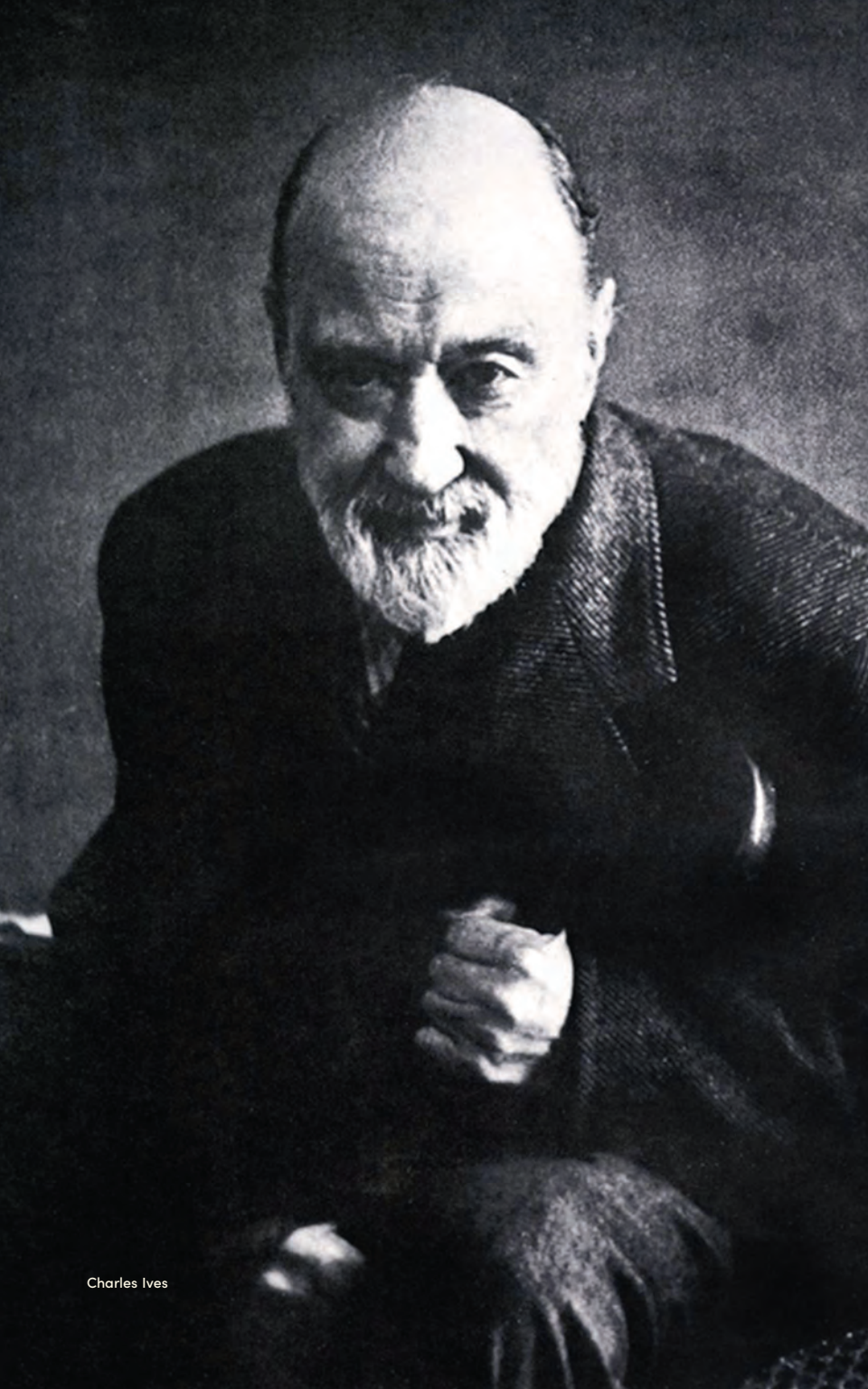
Ives was an early experimenter with musical techniques that would become commonplace later in the 20th century, including microtones, tone clusters, chance music, and polytonality. His works were largely ignored at the time of their composition, with many going unperformed for decades. His music began to receive more recognition from the 1930s onwards, although by this time he had largely stopped composing. Ives was also a supporter of the music of his fellow composers, funding Henry Cowell's *New Music Edition* which gathered the experimental composers of the 1920s to 1950s through concerts and the publishing of scores and recordings. ●

Marc-André Hamelin, named by the *New York Times* as "A performer of near-superhuman technical prowess," is known worldwide for his unrivaled blend of extraordinary musicianship and brilliant technique in the great works of the established repertoire, as well as for his exploration of the rarities of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Highlights of Mr.



Hamelin's 2022–2023 season include performances with the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Carnegie Hall, Berlin Philharmonic and Marek Janowski, San Diego Symphony and Rafael Payare, and Netherlands Philharmonic. An exclusive recording artist for Hyperion Records, Marc-André Hamelin's discography spans more than 70 albums, with notable recordings of a broad range of solo, orchestral, and chamber repertoire – including many of his original works. Born in Montreal, Mr. Hamelin is the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the German Record Critics' Association and has 11 Grammy nominations. Mr. Hamelin now resides in the Boston area with his wife, producer Cathy Fuller. ●

Kyle Gann (b. 1955 in Dallas, Texas) is a composer and the author of seven books on American music, including books on microtonality, Charles Ives's *Concord Sonata*, John Cage's *4'33"*, Conlon Nancarrow, and Robert Ashley. He studied composition with Ben Johnston, Morton Feldman, and Peter Gena, and about a fourth of his music is microtonal. His major works include the piano concerto *Sunken City*, *Transcendental Sonnets* for chorus and orchestra, the microtonal music theater piece *Custer and Sitting Bull*, *The Planets* for mixed octet, and *Hyperchromatica* for three retuned, computer-driven pianos (Other Minds Records two CD set, 2018). His music is available on the New Albion, New World, Cold Blue, Lovely Music, Mode, Other Minds, Meyer Media, Innova, New Tone, Microfest, Vous Ne Revez Pas Encore, Brilliant Classics, and Monroe Street labels. ●



Charles Ives

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Founded in 1993, Other Minds in San Francisco is a leading organization for new and experimental music, devoted to championing the most original, eccentric, and underrepresented creative voices in contemporary music, with an emphasis on composers of the American Experimental Tradition. From festival concerts, film screenings, radio broadcasts, and the commissioning of new works, to producing and releasing CDs, preserving thousands of interviews and concerts and distributing them free on the Internet, Other Minds has become one of the world's major conservators of new music's ecology.

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