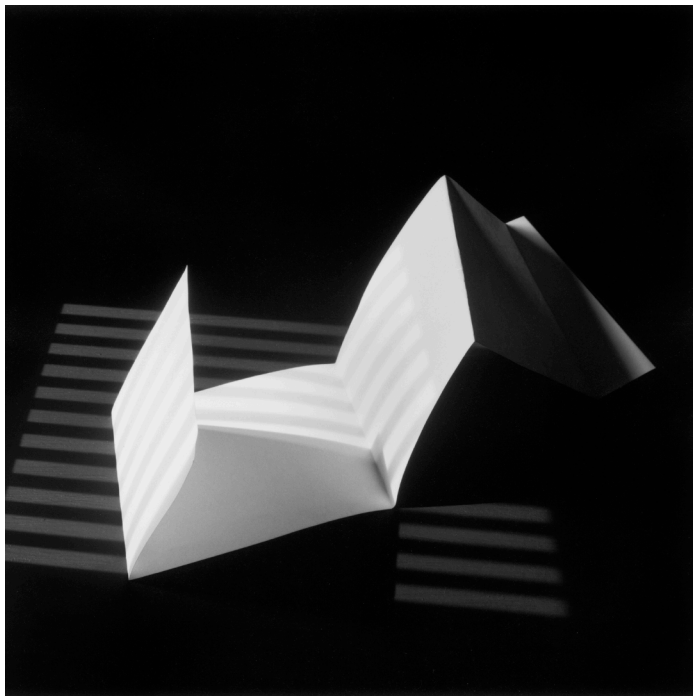


Shane van Neerden

Each and All



Each and All

CD 1

Charles Ives (1874 - 1954)

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

1. I. Emerson.....	17'33
2. II. Hawthorne.....	12'33
3. III. The Alcotts.....	5'29
4. IV. Thoreau.....	12'17

CD 2

Maurice Ravel (1875 - 1937)

Gaspard de la Nuit, M.55

1. I. Ondine.....	7'22
2. II. Le Gibet.....	6'35
3. III. Scarbo.....	10'51

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Piano Sonata No.2, Op.36

4. I. Allegro agitato.....	8'42
5. II. Non allegro - Lento.....	7'15
6. III. L'istesso tempo - Allegro molto.....	5'59

EACH AND ALL

notes by Katharine Dain

*The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
Deems not that great Napoleon
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;
Nor knowest thou what argument
Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent.
All are needed by each one;
Nothing is fair or good alone.*



In these lines from “Each and All,” the philosopher/poet Ralph Waldo Emerson articulated a core belief of the Transcendentalists: the sacredness and interconnectedness of all beings and all Nature. Transcendentalism, a religious and literary movement that sprang up in 1830s America in response to German Romanticism, rejected rationalism and objectivity. Instead, its proponents encouraged every person to

rise above the ordinary and strive for a kind of ecstatic truth—an unmediated, individual relationship with the Divine, a subjective experience of perfect spiritual apotheosis.

The small town of Concord, near Boston, Massachusetts, was the geographical center of the movement. Emerson, the oldest of its famous members, lived on Lexington Street in a spacious white clapboard. The novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne was just up the road. Next door, in a rambling, elm-shaded manse called Orchard House, lived the Alcott family. Not two miles south was the tiny cabin overlooking Walden Pond where Henry David Thoreau retreated from society for two years “in order to live deliberately.”

The Transcendentalists prized individualism of thought and subjectivity of experience but also the innate connections between all creatures—“each and all.” In daily life, they were a community-minded bunch, visiting, helping each other, and critiquing each

other's work. They were ahead of their time in espousing remarkably liberal causes. Although it didn't last long as an organized movement, Transcendentalism casts a long shadow up to the present day for the idealistic beauty of its core principles.

The pianist Shane van Neerden embodies many of these principles in his approach to music. Little wonder, then, that he would take Charles Ives's *Concord Sonata* so to heart. Learning it (and the other pieces on this album, Ravel's *Gaspard* and Rachmaninoff's second sonata) is as much philosophical practice as technical challenge. A score can act as a conduit for individual exploration—a search for enlightenment, a traversal of deep waters of spirituality, eroticism, and emotion, requiring absolute immersion and absolute humility. The rewards can be high: an unmediated certainty of the composers' intentions for every note and the spaces between every note; a sense of rightness, even divinity, in the communion between the performer and the art itself.



Charles Ives (1874-1954) grew up in Danbury, Connecticut, a town similar to Concord. His father George recognized early his son's prodigious musical talent, encouraged regular piano study, and exposed young Charlie to the huge variety of public music in American civic life in the late nineteenth century: hymns, church organs and bells, carnival instruments, folk and popular tunes played and sung at home, marching bands, outdoor concerts, camp revival meetings.

Ives studied music at Yale but bristled against his composition teacher, who pooh-poohed a polytonal fugue Ives brought as an early assignment. Suspecting that the music he wanted to write was too different to be accepted by the conservative cultural establishment of his time, he went into business in New York after graduation, eventually founding a successful insurance

firm. He continued music-making at a furious pace, but on his own time: working as a church organist and composing on the weekends, sometimes hiring groups of players to try out his pieces, publishing at his own expense.

In 1920, scores of *Concord, Mass., 1840-1860*, Ives's second piano sonata, were mailed out to a number of prominent musicians and cultural critics. It bewildered everyone. What was a New York businessman doing writing music like this—so dissonant, technically ferocious, full of inexplicable intrusions (as they were considered at first) of American vernacular music and quotations from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony? But a few people recognized its quality and began to learn parts of the sonata, which finally premiered in 1939. John Kirkpatrick's masterful performance was a resounding critical success, and the piece was labeled "the greatest music composed by an American" by the New York Tribune.

The Concord Sonata contains four movements inspired by Transcendentalists: Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts, and Thoreau.

Emerson begins with a page of such explosive dissonance and overlaying of musical information that it's no wonder people were daunted by the sonata at first. This chaos is deliberate, however, and is the key to the whole piece's structure. Many different motivic elements are stated at once, jostling together in a clamor representing the non-linear rhetoric of Ralph Waldo Emerson's own writing and the noisy public response to it. From the first page until the end of the 50-minute sonata, all these musical ideas are slowly clarified and given their own space. This approach is the opposite of traditional classical form, in which one theme at a time is introduced, developed, and layered until maximum density is reached at the end of a piece or movement.

After the intense first section, Ives continues with a number of episodes presenting ideas in

smaller chunks, including some quieter moments meant to represent Emerson's poetry rather than his prose. The score largely lacks time or key signatures, so the performer carries much responsibility in clarifying its structure, but gets help from some unusually expressive performance indications: "quite slowly and as a song"; "almost as a recitative"; "climbing up with rush and action." Eventually it reaches a recapitulation of sorts, and the movement ends quietly with a snatch of a haunting tune: the "human faith melody" that will be stated most clearly and grandly in the third movement.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is best known for his novel *The Scarlet Letter*, which deals with public shame and the seemingly binary opposition of innocence and sin. Ives chooses not to focus on these weighty preoccupations in Concord's second movement, the scherzo-like **Hawthorne**, but instead on the writer's playfulness and imagination. Writing about the piece, Ives suggests some of the phantasmagorical

elements flitting through the score: "little demons dancing around his pipe bowl; or something to do with the old hymn tune that haunts the church and sings only to those in the churchyard, to protect them from secular noises, as when the circus parade comes down Main Street; or something to do with the concert at the Stamford camp meeting, or the 'Slave's Shuffle' ... or something about the ghost of a man who never lived." It's a wild dance, a cousin of Ravel's *Scarbo* but punctuated with sober interludes evoking the chiming of distant church bells—chord clusters so vast that they must be played with a wooden board pressed down on a stretch of black keys.

The spiritual heart of the sonata is the third movement, **The Alcotts**. A hymn simultaneously simple and profound, it is inspired by the family as portrayed in Louisa May's beloved novel *Little Women* and the noblest of early American values they embodied. Ives wrote that the movement is

characterized by a "spiritual sturdiness ... a deeper feeling, a stronger sense of being nearer some perfect truth than a Gothic cathedral or an Etruscan villa. All around you, under the Concord sky, there still floats the influence of that human faith melody... reflecting an innate hope—a common interest in common things and common men—a tune the Concord bards are ever playing, while they pound away at the immensities with a Beethovenlike sublimity." Shane describes *The Alcotts* as an ecstatic dissolving: player and listener become one with the shimmering perfection of the universe in sublime C major, a fervently Transcendental experience made into music.

This could easily have been the sonata's closing statement, but there's still a dreamy coda: **Thoreau**. This movement includes an optional part for a flute, played here by Marije van den Berg. Shane lived with Marije and his teacher Frank Peters for one hundred days during the 2020 Covid lockdown: a sojourn

far from society, a disorientation of time and place similar to what Henry David Thoreau himself might have experienced during his own self-imposed isolation. The movement represents a day of Thoreau's cabin life: waking, waiting, walking; wrestling with a sense of purpose and striving, setting it aside; hearing the passing of a train and other sounds of civilization outside the woods; playing his flute at dusk as mist gathers over Walden Pond. Toward the end of the movement, a three-note ostinato appears in the bass: the distant strain of church bells from nearby Concord, a tolling motive signalling that this monumental journey is drawing to a close. The surprising inclusion of the flute might represent Thoreau himself playing, or an owl heard across the pond, or it could be a soul immersed in divinity at last, taken up with its fellows ("Each and All"): flowing freely with the current of Nature, no longer encumbered by thorny earth-bound questions of human sin and redemption.



If Concord offers total mystical immersion, ***Gaspard de la nuit*** (1908)—composed just a few years before Ives began work on his second sonata, in a very different artistic milieu—represents immersion of a different kind. It is a triptych of dark fever dreams, unsettlingly erotic, enclosing both player and audience in an otherworldly embrace as inexorable as it is intoxicating.

Though now regarded as one of France's finest composers, **Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937) had a slow start professionally. At the Paris Conservatoire, he did not endear himself to the faculty and was expelled—twice. Early public criticism of his music was mostly negative. He tried five times to win France's most prestigious composition award, the Prix de Rome, and never succeeded. In the early 1900s, he found his footing with a group of Parisian musicians his own age, Les Apaches (the Hooligans), a

community that included Debussy and would profoundly influence the direction of French cultural life.

One member was the Catalan pianist Ricardo Viñes, Ravel's longtime friend. Pianists and audiences of the day were enthralled by the virtuosity of Liszt and his imitators, and showpieces abounded. Ravel especially disliked one of these popular numbers, ***Islamey*** by the Russian composer Mily Balakirev, and set out to write something even more virtuosic but of much higher musical quality. Thus one of the greatest and most difficult of 20th-century French piano pieces was written (partially, at least) as a mischievous exercise in competition. Ravel wanted a poetic subject to inspire him; Viñes suggested ***Gaspard de la nuit*** by Aloysius Bertrand, an 1830 collection saturated in the Romantic exoticism typical of its period. Ravel selected three of Bertrand's prose poems to structure his own work.

Like the 1901 piano piece ***Jeux d'eaux***, the first movement is pure liquid sensuality. **Ondine** is a nymph who appears to a man at night; half-awake, he hears her disembodied voice calling to him, imploring him to join her as king of her underground realm. She sings with ethereal beauty, as alluring as the sirens from whose seductive pull Odysseus lashed himself to his own mast to save himself. The movement begins with shimmering repeated figurations; a singsong melody joins, then is expanded and enriched. Shane speaks personally of Ondine as a character who taught him what seduction could feel like, rippling through Ravel's imagination and channeled through his own body and instrument: quicksilver, pulsating, transparent, irresistible. It is music that takes hold of you as a player or listener, giving you no choice but to follow. In the end, Bertrand's speaker manages to resist Ondine's call. She emits a mournful cry, shudders, then vanishes with an offended shower of milky drops against the window.

The disquiet of Ondine's disappearance continues into the opening bars of ***Le Gibet***, based on an unusually macabre poem. It is early evening; someone crosses a vast expanse of desert toward a village where a bell—a haunting B-flat ostinato—rings inexorably. Stacked fifths in the bass sound the rolling gait of the approaching traveler. Finally, the hazy image in view becomes clear: it is a corpse hanging from a gallows, reddened by the setting sun. Occasionally flashes of illumination in the high register might represent light catching the body as it spins slowly on its rope or a breeze lifting a lock of hair, but these always descend, the light dimming, the harmony never resolving into E-flat minor but staying always suspended around the B-flat tolling of the bell.

As the bell fades, **Scarbo** begins almost imperceptibly in the low register with a questioning rising figure, then a sinister diminished chord from which repeated notes ricochet out. This is the movement that gives

Gaspard its reputation as one of the most challenging pieces in the piano repertoire. Scarbo in Bertrand's poem is a demonic gnome, a whirlwind of fiendish energy. He torments someone lying in bed at night by blocking the moon, scratching at the bed-curtains, and flitting around the room with inhuman speed and agility and menace. Ravel shows Scarbo's capriciousness with rapid-fire arpeggios and octaves and passages of repeated notes, playful and chaotic dances up and down the keyboard, abrupt stops and shifts, trills and leaps. It's a feat of stunning pianism, but the end result should sound effortless, as light on its feet as Scarbo himself. In the end, he melts away with a whisper, leaving us wondering if we dreamed the whole encounter.

Ravel could translate a poetic text with such visionary sonic force that his music could transcend the original source material. *Gaspard de la nuit* certainly does. As he said to his friend Vlado Perlemuter, "I set out to

compose a caricature of Romanticism, but have perhaps allowed myself to be carried away by it." We are carried away too, whether we play or listen, caught in a Ravelian trance: always erotic, sometimes lurid, often dazzling.



Rachmaninoff throws us off a cliff (melodically speaking) even before the first full bar of his **Second Piano Sonata, Op. 36** (1913)—signalling the passionate immersive state we are now entering.

Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) lived a privileged existence as part of a family of Russian aristocrats: country houses, private education, travel, luxury. But from his teenage years onward, he was overtaken with melancholia, oscillating between periods of depression and periods when a positive response to his work would cheer him up for a while. He never stayed in one place (or in one job) for very long; in the 1930s, he was exiled

from his homeland after publicly disapproving of the Stalin regime. A sense of nostalgia pervades his oeuvre—an overt longing for a more emotionally actualized, transcendent (Transcendentalist?) existence than was perhaps possible for any human who still had to deal with ordinary bureaucratic institutions, persistent illness, political revolutions, and other life annoyances.

In 1911, Rachmaninoff gave up a tiring post as chief conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic. The period after quitting was financially precarious but personally and creatively freeing, and he immersed himself in composition, producing a number of beloved works including his choral symphony "The Bells" (based on an eerie poem by Edgar Allan Poe) and the Second Piano Sonata in B-flat minor. He published a revised version of the sonata in 1931; it is this second version that Shane plays here. The piece is richly emotional but still formally precise: Rachmaninoff adhered to sonata

conventions of previous centuries while still putting his own indelible stamp on the form. The first movement, marked **Allegro agitato**, begins with a vertiginous plunge to the depths of the keyboard—no mere theatrical gesture but a true melodic motive that will be explored throughout the piece's three movements. The initial explosion continues in one unbroken build until it exhausts itself and gives way to a pensive second theme: an orthodox chant in the parallel key of D-flat major. It picks up a thread of the initial motive but with a sweeter character in its new key, sober in its chorale-like voice leading. After a searching development that heightens our sense of breathlessness, another plunge: a dissonant bell sequence (a nod to Rachmaninoff's Orthodox upbringing) crashes down the keyboard and rings in the recapitulation, even stormier the second time, with a climax as overwhelming as Edgar Allan Poe's bell tower. "Leaping higher, higher, higher,/With a desperate desire ... How they clang, and



clash, and roar!/What a horror they
outpour/On the bosom of the palpitating air!"

The second movement, **Non allegro**, is a singing intermezzo of almost unbearably poignancy. *Shane imagines the movement as a mother slowly rocking, tightly in her arms, her dead baby.* Its introverted opening melody is heightened and spun away into a harmonically questioning passage with a gentle bell refrain in the high register. Eventually the melody is transmuted via repeated circle-of-fifths progressions, intensified, pulled back, and further developed until—in a moment of sheer magic—the Allegro agitato's second theme is re-introduced as a coda. A sequence of falling sevenths, like mournful sighs, wind the movement down to a quiet cadential finish.

Rachmaninoff picks up this closing harmony but adds a dominant addition to kick off the final movement, marked **L'istesso tempo**. Immediately the plunging motive is

recontextualized as a bass line in a series of discursive explorations. A sudden march-like outburst breaks through, dance-like episodes wheel joyfully, huge chordal statements raise the heart rate of player and listener, and finally a series of accelerations—a tempo, più mosso, presto—push us toward a triumphant conclusion that could be the climax of a genuine folk celebration: a ritualized, thunderous, gasping release of collective emotion.



When Shane considered a program for this debut recording, the Rachmaninoff Second Sonata was the starting point. His description of his immersion in it is perhaps the most personal of all three pieces. He prepared it over a period of years with his teacher, Frank Peters (also the host of Shane's Covid seclusion), who he describes as a soul mate. Their trust deepened partly as a result of working on this piece, which can have quite an extreme

physical effect: the emotional intensity can cause tears, sweat, heaving, or a total stoppage of breath, as though underwater.

Eventually Frank began to give Shane some particular advice: don't want or not want something specific to happen as you play. Don't think. Don't judge. Don't register. Don't try to prevent this overwhelming, inevitable accumulation. This advice continued into the recording sessions themselves, for which Frank was present.

Shane recognizes that the power of all three of these extraordinary works—Rachmaninoff, Ravel, and Ives—is an accumulative one. They take hold of player and listener, keeping us in a trance-like state of suspended, heightened consciousness for as long as they last. It's extraordinary that three composers (all born within two years of each other) could write three such different works within the space of a decade in different parts of the world that

nonetheless share this specific power. Shane emphasizes that to play any of them successfully, he needs to act as a channel for something bigger than himself, setting his fears and barriers down and allowing music and feeling to pass through him rather than trying to measure it out. In the Ives, he is the channel for a roaring river of Transcendentalist bliss; in the Ravel, for an overpowering sensuality that sometimes tips into the grotesque; and in the Rachmaninoff, for passionate, unbridled extremes of human emotion.

Ralph Waldo Emerson recognized the human longing to act as an unobstructed channel for divinity. He codified it in his writings about Transcendentalism. It is impossible, he suggests, to separate any aspect of beauty or feeling from its natural context, its whole, in order to fix it or control it. Beauty is only present entire. It can only manifest at the moment when an individual's striving for truth becomes a greater spiritual dissolving, a

release of self into the divine interconnectedness of all things. His poem "Each and All" ends when his young protagonist accepts this.

*Then I said, "I covet truth;
Beauty is unripe childhood's cheat;
I leave it behind with the games of youth:" —
As I spoke, beneath my feet
The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath,
Running over the club-moss burrs;
I inhaled the violet's breath;
Around me stood the oaks and firs;
Pine-cones and acorns lay on the ground;
Over me soared the eternal sky,
Full of light and of deity;
Again I saw, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird; —
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.*

BIOGRAPHY



Dutch/American pianist Shane van Neerden (b. 1999, United States) has performed as soloist, in chamber music settings, and as soloist with orchestra in Germany, the Netherlands, England, Italy, Portugal, Austria, France, and the United States, as well as for radio in the U.S., Portugal (Antena 2), and in the Netherlands (AvroTros, NTR, and on the television program Podium Witteman).

In May 2024, Shane won the *Dutch Classical Talent Award* after concluding a trajectory of fourteen concerts at the most important Dutch classical music venues. For the competition he developed a theatrical performance 'Lantaarns', including a commissioned work for a piano tuned in just intonation by composer Rick van Veldhuizen. During

the final round of the competition, the jury praised his courage, musical wealth and imagination. According to NRC critic Marnix Bilderbeek, "his velvet touch, sensitive phrasing and warm color palette make him a deserved winner".

Highlights from Van Neerden's 2023-2024 season include a solo CD recording with radio and television broadcaster AvroTros, his solo recital debut in the Small Hall of The Concertgebouw Amsterdam, and a chamber music recital with notorious viola player Máté Szűcs, cellist László Fenyő, and violinist Stella Zake. In February 2025, Shane made his debut as a soloist with the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra during the Zondagochtendconcert in the Big Hall of The Concertgebouw Amsterdam. He also toured with PHION orchestra under the direction of Michał Nesterowicz.

In 2026, a documentary by iAmsterdam (for which he was recommended by the Concertgebouw Amsterdam) will be released and in May he will give a lecture-recital at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam. In February 2027, he will have his Polish debut with the Arthur Rubinstein Philharmonic.

Shane began piano lessons at age six and has studied with celebrated pianists Jacques Rouvier, Robert Levin, and Susan Starr. One of the most inspiring lessons he ever had was in 2021 with French-Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin. After private lessons in the United States with pianist Carl Cranmer, he began undergraduate studies at the Conservatory of Amsterdam with Frank Peters. Recently, Shane graduated from his masters degree, also with a 10 "cum laude". Shane studied at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole in Italy with Eliso Virsaladze in 2021.





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