



Charles Ives' Concord Sonata:
David Porter, *pianist*

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

Charles Ives
(1874-1954)

"Emerson"

"Hawthorne"

"The Alcotts"

"Thoreau"

Anne Royston '08, flutist

"This sonata is exceptionally great music—it is, indeed, the greatest music composed by an American, and the most deeply and essentially American in impulse and implication. It has passion, tenderness, humor, simplicity, homeliness. It has imaginative and spiritual vastness. It has wisdom and beauty and profundity, and a sense of the encompassing terror and splendor of human life and human destiny—a sense of those mysteries that are both human and divine."

– Lawrence Gilman, *New York Herald Tribune*,
21 January 1939, reviewing the first
New York performance of the Concord Sonata.

David Porter, Harry C. Payne Visiting Professor of Liberal Arts at Williams College and President Emeritus of Skidmore College, has taught at Williams since 1999. Before coming to Skidmore in 1987, Dr. Porter taught classics and music at Carleton College for 25 years and served as president in 1986-87. He has given recitals and lecture-recitals throughout the United States, in Great Britain, and on radio and TV. Porter is the author of books on Horace and on Greek tragedy and of three monographs on Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury, and editor, with Gunther Schuller and Clara Steuermann, of a book on pianist and Schoenberg colleague Edward Steuermann, with whom Porter studied 1955-62. His book *On the Divide: the Many Lives of Willa Cather*, will be published later this year by the University of Nebraska Press.

Sunday, March 2, 2008
3:00 P.M.

Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
Williamstown, Massachusetts

Upcoming events:

- 3/5: MIDWEEKMUSIC, Chapin Hall, 12:15 p.m.
- 3/5: Williams Chamber Players, Brooks-Rogers, 8:00 p.m.
- 3/7: Williams Jazz Ensemble, Chapin Hall, 8:00 p.m.
- 3/8: Williams Concert Choir, Thompson Memorial Chapel, 8:00 p.m.
- 3/11: Jon Nakamatsu Bösendorfer Concert, Chapin Hall, 8:00 p.m.
- 3/12: MIDWEEKMUSIC, Chapin Hall, 12:15 p.m.
- 3/12: Jon Nakamatsu Master Class, Brooks-Rogers, 4:15 p.m.

*Please turn off or mute cell phones.
No photography or recording permitted.*

Excerpts from Charles Ives' Essays *Before a Sonata*:

“Emerson”:

We see him standing on a summit, at the door of the infinite where many men do not dare to climb, peering into the mysteries of life, contemplating the eternities, hurling back whatever he discovers there....

Emerson wrings the neck of any law that would become exclusive and arrogant.... He hacks his way up and down, as near as he can to the absolute, to the oneness of all nature both human and spiritual, and to God's benevolence.

Let us place the transcendent Emerson where he, himself, places Milton, in Wordsworth's apostrophe: “Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free....”

There is an “oracle” at the beginning of the *Fifth Symphony*—in those four notes lies one of Beethoven's greatest messages. We would place its translation above the relentlessness of fate knocking at the door, above the greater human-message of destiny, and strive to bring it toward the spiritual message of Emerson's revelations—even to the “common heart” of Concord—the Soul of humanity knocking at the door of the Divine mysteries, radiant in the faith that it will be opened—and that the human will become the divine.

“Hawthorne”:

[O]ur music is but an extended fragment trying to suggest some of his wilder, fantastical adventures into the half-childlike, half-fairylike phantasmal realms. It may have something to do with the children's excitement on that “frosty Berkshire morning, and the frost imagery on the enchanted hall window,” or something to do with “Feathertop,” the “Scarecrow,” and his “Looking Glass” and the 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 personal, which tries to be “national” suddenly at twilight, and universal suddenly at midnight; or something about the ghost of a man who never lived, or about something that never will happen, or something else that is not,

“The Alcotts:”

Concord village, itself, reminds one of that common virtue lying at the height and root of all the Concord divinities. As one walks down the broad-arched street, passing the white house of Emerson—ascetic guard of a former prophetic beauty—he comes presently beneath the old elms overspreading the Alcott house.... Here is the home of the “Marches”—all pervaded with the trials and happiness of the family and telling, in a simple way, the story of “the richness of not having.” Within the house, on every side, lie remembrances of what imagination can do for the better amusement of fortunate children who have to do for themselves—much-needed lessons in these days of automatic, ready-made, easy entertainment which deaden rather than stimulate the creative faculty. And there sits the little old spinet-piano Sophia Thoreau gave to the Alcott children, on which Beth played the old Scotch airs, and played at the *Fifth Symphony*.

...And all around you, under the Concord sky, there still floats the influence of that human faith melody, transcendent and sentimental enough for the enthusiast or the cynic respectively, 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....

“Thoreau”:

And if there shall be a program let it follow his thought on an autumn day of Indian summer at Walden—a shadow of a thought at first, colored by the mist and haze over the pond.... As the mists rise, there comes a clearer thought more traditional than the first, a meditation more calm. As he stands on the side of the pleasant hill of pines and hickories in front of his cabin, he is still disturbed by a restlessness and goes down the white-pebbled and sandy eastern shore.... He knows now that he must let Nature flow through him and slowly; he releases his more personal desires to her broader rhythm, conscious that this blends more and more with the harmony of her solitude.... His meditations are interrupted only by the faint sound of the Concord bell—'tis prayer-meeting night in the village—“a melody as it were, imported into the wilderness....” At a distance over the woods the sound acquires a certain vibratory hum as if the pine needles in the horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept.... a vibration of the universal lyre.... It is darker, the poet's flute is heard out over the pond and Walden hears the swan song of the day and faintly echoes.... Is it a transcendental tune of Concord? 'Tis an evening when the “whole body is one sense,”... and before ending his day he looks out over the clear, crystalline water of the pond and catches a glimpse of the shadow-thought he saw in the morning's mist and haze—he knows that by his final submission, he possesses the “Freedom of the Night.” He goes up the “pleasant hillside of pines, hickories,” and moonlight to his cabin, “with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself.”