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Paul Hanson, piano

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Paul Hanson, piano

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Camp Concert Hall
Booker Hall of Music
Pianist **Paul Hanson** has been acclaimed for his “dexterous authority” (*Los Angeles Times*), “relentless tension and drama” (*The Virginian-Pilot*), and the *San Antonio Express-News* wrote that “Hanson’s tender singing line, intelligent phrasing and total magisterial command made this a distinguished performance.” A noted interpreter of 20th-century music, his repertoire includes the complete solo music of Schoenberg and the piano sonatas of Ives, as well as works by other major modern composers. He has served as Assistant to the Archivist of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute. Currently he is on the music faculty at the University of Richmond.
**PROGRAM**

**Notations** (1945)  
I. Fantasque – Modéré  
II. Très vif  
III. Assez lent  
IV. Rythmique  
V. Doux et improvisé  
VI. Rapide  
VII. Hiératique  
VIII. Modéré jusqu’à très vif  
IX. Lointain – Calme  
X. Mécanique et très sec  
XI. Scintillant  
XII. Lent – Puissant et âpre

**Klavierstück IX** (1954 - 1961)  
Karlheinz Stockhausen  
(b. 1928)

**Études, Book II**  
VII. Galamb borong (1988)  
XI. En suspens (1994)  
XIII. L’escalier du diable (1993)

**INTERMISSION**

**Piano Sonata No. 1**  
Charles Ives  
(1874-1954)

I. Moderato  
IIa. Allegro moderato  
IIb. “In the Inn,” Allegro  
III. Adagio – Allegro – Largo  
IVA. [Allegro]  
IVb. Allegro  
V. Andante maestoso
PIERRE BOULEZ wrote his twelve *Notations* for piano in 1945, when he was 20 years old. Each piece consists of only 12 measures, and all use the same 12-tone row, which is rotated from piece to piece. Most are very short, lasting well under a minute in duration. The longest piece is just over two minutes. The *Notations* remained unpublished for 40 years, and are now the earliest work of this composer to appear in print. Boulez thought enough of these youthful pieces to quote two of them (5 and 9) in his great orchestral work of the late 1960’s, *Pli Selon Pli*. Then in 1978, he began a project to convert these tiny piano miniatures into larger pieces for orchestra. As of now, only five orchestral *Notations* have been completed, with the promise of more to come. These orchestral versions aren’t mere arrangements, but rather radical expansions, with the sparse originals treated as seeds that grow into luxuriant foliage.

Despite the early date of these pieces, they already show many characteristics of the composer’s musical personality. Profoundly calm music (5, 9) contrasts with violent and explosive pieces (2, 10, 12). Free and supple rhythms (1, 5, 9, 11) alternate with stubbornly repeated figures (4, 7, 8) or simple motoric rhythms (2, 6). Some pieces cover the entire range of the keyboard (1, 2) whereas others are confined to a small range in the middle (4, 7, 8). Some seem to allude to deep drumbeats, either loud and violent (2, 12) or distant and muffled (9).

While not one of Boulez’s major works, these small piano pieces nevertheless provide a fascinating glimpse into the early development of one of the great masters of modern music.

*Klavierstück IX*, by KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN, was finished in 1961 and shows the influence of the composer’s pioneering efforts with electronic music. The famous opening, with its multiple repetitions of a single chord, suggests the feedback echo effects made possible by the tape recorders of the time. Other timbral effects are produced by half-pedaling, as well as by holding down silently depressed keys while playing loud chords. These effects allow the strings to vibrate
sympathetically, producing a halo of delicate reverberation (incidentally, the latter technique was used first by Schoenberg in 1908).

In this piece, not only pitch but also other aspects of form are governed by the serial idea, resulting in a formal process quite different from the traditional exposition, development, and recapitulation of musical materials. In the rhythmic dimension, Stockhausen uses three different tempi based on the ratio of 3:6:8, and a scale of durations based on the Fibonacci series (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 12, 21 etc.). Furthermore, his choice to use extremely extended durational values has the effect of heightening attention.

The bulk of the piece is dominated by a highly ordered rhythmic structure. There are frequent references to the opening chord, with its echoes of marching feet (Stockhausen was a teenager in Germany during the war years). Contrasting areas are relatively calm, ranging from hypnotic stillness to glittering trills and short bursts of activity. Towards the end there is an apocalyptic break, ushering in the final section of the piece, which largely consists of groups of fast notes played in the highest register of the piano. The rhythm within each group isn’t specified, and is left to the discretion of the performer. Towards the end the composer instructs that the groups be played ever more softly and with greater rhythmic irregularity. Thus, after the highly structured order of the opening sections, the piece ends in freedom and sheer lyricism.

**György Ligeti** is widely regarded as one of the most important composers of our time. Unlike Boulez and Stockhausen, who took their cue from Webern, Ligeti’s lineage extends back to his great Hungarian compatriot, Béla Bartók. Ligeti wrote his fourteen piano etudes, divided into two books, between 1985 and 1994 (a third book, begun in 1995, is still in progress). These pieces are a major addition to the piano literature, and are arguably the most important piano works to appear during that time. Even though Ligeti uses complex rhythmic and harmonic procedures, the music’s impact is immediate, and the etudes have proven to be highly accessible to audiences. In the words of the composer, “They proceed from a very simple core idea, and lead from simplicity to great complexity: they behave like growing organisms.”
Galamb borong was inspired by Ligeti’s interest in gamelan music. The literal Hungarian meaning of the title, “bird, melancholy,” is irrelevant. Of this title, Ligeti has written: “Galamb borong only sounds Hungarian; this title should be understood in the context of pseudo-Gamelan music, as nonsense Balinese.” Even though this etude is “fake” gamelan music, it does seem to evoke the shimmer of real gamelan music. Through a web of continuous fast even notes, various melodic lines and chords emerge at different speeds. There is great rhythmic freedom, with no sense of regular meter. Ligeti is very consistent with the use of pitch material. Each hand is restricted to a different six-note whole tone scale, so that between both hands, all twelve tones are represented. While the etude is certainly not tonal in the traditional sense, neither is it “atonal.” After reaching several climaxes, the music dies away in the lowest register of the keyboard.

En suspense (In Suspense), like Galamb borong, assigns a group of six different notes to each hand. The difference here is that Ligeti occasionally switches the groups from hand to hand, producing an effect analogous to modulation. Also, “foreign” elements are allowed, such as two ethereal glissandi and some chromaticism towards the end. The overall character of this slow etude is delicate and somewhat impressionistic. More overtly melodic than the other etudes, it has the poetry and simplicity of a cradle song.

L'escalier du diable (The Devil’s Staircase) was written while Ligeti was in Santa Monica, California during the spring of 1993. While there, he enjoyed frequent bicycle trips along the Pacific Ocean. One day he was caught in a ferocious storm caused by the El Niño weather system. As he battled his way back to his apartment, he saw luxury villas slide down the hills above him, and feared for the safety of the homeless population living on the beach. “I had to cycle back against the wind, which took about three hours. I had no coat and was completely wet. On the seashore, with the storm coming from North to South, I could not ride – all the time thinking about the disappeared homeless people.” As he struggled up to his apartment, the title and music for this etude came to him: a wild vortex, an interminable climbing, a staircase almost impossible to ascend. It should be noted that “Devil’s Staircase”
is actually a mathematical term related to fractal geometry and probability theory. Despite Ligeti’s interest in this branch of mathematics, his use of this term for the title is mostly metaphorical.

*L'escalier du diable* is the longest and most extravagant of all the etudes. The main idea consists of a recurring chromatic ascent in even rhythm, grouped in various combinations of twos and threes. Eventually these groups overlap, producing a tightly knit web of cross accents between the hands. Over and over again the music starts softly in the lower registers and builds to a loud climax at the top of the keyboard. Extremes of dynamics are indicated (*pppp to ffffffff*!). Towards the middle, a second main idea appears: massive chords in the low register slowly ascend in irregular but accelerating rhythms, culminating in a wild climax of pealing bells, all ringing in their own tempi. After this, the two main ideas are combined, leading to the final massive climax at the extreme ends of the keyboard (“like bells, gongs, tam-tams”). Ligeti then indicates that the final sonority be allowed to fade away for almost a half minute.

It is well known that *Charles Ives* was the first composer to use, even if in a primitive fashion, modern techniques of composition such as polytonality, polyrhythm, atonality, serialism, special effects, and others. Yet, paradoxically, his inspiration came from looking back in time to the New England of the second half of the nineteenth century. Ives’ music thus expressed his love for a way of life and a set of values that were disappearing even as he reached artistic maturity. The characteristic quotation of hymns and popular tunes, as well as the complex layering of musical events were, for Ives, partly an attempt to recapture and celebrate the rich complexity of his boyhood experiences, especially of events such as revival services, barn dances, marching bands, holiday celebrations, family music-making, and recent historical events, especially of the Civil War era. Not only did Ives want to capture the outer event, but more importantly the inner, and often exulted, response. This deeply human quality is what translates the best nationalistic music from the particular (local) to the universal.
Of the First Piano Sonata (1902-1910), Ives has written: "What is it all about?... Mostly about the outdoor life in Conn. Villages in the '80's and '90's—impressions, remembrances, and reflections of the country farmers in Conn. Farmland." Another scenario, later given by Ives, was of the family together in the first and last movements, the boy away sowing his oats in the ragtime movements, and the parental anxiety in the middle movement. Elsewhere he explained that the sonata contrasted the exuberant life of the young people with the deeply religious life of their elders.

The overall structure of the sonata is symmetrical. The outer movements are sectional and rhapsodic. Powerfully rugged and dissonant passages alternate with music that is quiet, coloristic, and impressionistic. An original feature of this "Ivesian impressionism" is the use of what he called "shadow notes—play just a second after others & PPPP." This effect, if captured properly, produces a scarcely audible dissonance not unlike the overtones of a bell, and heard as if from a distance. The second and fourth movements are based on ragtime rhythms. These were written just after the turn of the century when the ragtime music of Joplin and others was in high fashion. (This gives Ives another first—that of crossover composer!) Both ragtime movements are in two sections, each one ending with a "chorus" quoting *I Hear Thy Welcome Voice* ("...the older people would indicate to the boys that it was time to end their barn dance by humming the chorus of a hymn."). The second section of the second movement, *In the Inn*, seems to depict the rough and tumble of a barroom scene with its kaleidoscope of events and cacophonies crashing in upon each other from all directions. The first section of the fourth movement is some of the last music written for the sonata and is the most abstract and dissonant. It isn't ragtime, but rather a study in cross rhythms, the most complex being a 7 against 10. The second section of this movement starts as ragtime, then builds to a hilariously virtuosic rendition of the hymn *Bringing in the Sheaves*. The third movement, at the center of the five-movement structure, is symmetrical within itself. It is in A-B-A form (slow-fast-slow) and is based on the hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. The slow outer sections are beautifully sensitive and impressionistic whereas the central section features a
fully scored climax of nearly the complete hymn tune. Other hymns and songs quoted throughout the sonata include Lebanon in the first movement ("I was a wandering sheep, I did not love the fold..."), How Dry I Am in the ragtime movements, Where is My Boy Tonight, Happy Day, and There's No Place Like Home. These choices seem to support the second programmatic scenario given above. Throughout all the movements, a motive based on various combinations of a second and a third is prominent. This is especially so in the fifth movement. In addition, the interval of the perfect fifth, either as a melodic succession or together as a chord, is featured in the even-numbered movements.

Throughout this sonata there is a feeling of inspired improvisation. Some, but not all, of this rough-hewn quality derives from the condition of the source materials. When Ives finished the sonata, he sent the final ink copy to a friend. Since this copy hasn't been located, one must turn to earlier manuscript sources. While much of the text is clear and likely close to the lost final version, there are sections that exist only as initial or even incomplete sketches. This is especially true of the beginning and end of the fourth movement. A more frequent problem is that many details are given in several alternate versions. To further complicate matters, Ives later made many changes on a Photostat copy of the manuscript (many of these unpublished changes are incorporated in this performance). Thus the performer must also be an editor, and in keeping with the spirit of the sonata, it is appropriate that choices may change, that there is no final and definitive version. In the work of William Masselos, the pianist who premiered the work in 1949, "The sonata is so bursting with ideas, wild energy and the rustic spirit of the New England Ives loved so much that it always seems like an inspired improvisation, with each performance having a character quite its own...For me it has a very strong mystique. It is not just harmonies and form, but an emotion—a vision aimed high, wide and handsome—an inspired one-shot deal. Its unpolished grandeur and intensely American spirit say something new to me every time."