

On the last page of the sonata the four-note motive from the Foster chorus (F2) is coloured chromatically and expands to five notes (A-G-F#-D-C at the beginning of example 9b).¹²⁶ The additional long first note (A) creates a motive, of which the dactylic rhythm and descending stepwise movement recalls the opening of the Stephen Foster chorus (motive F1). The first system in example 9b also shows how F1 and F2 merges. By changing the pentatonic character (A-G-F-D-C) chromatically, the characteristic minor third (F-D) changes into a major third (F#-D) at the end of the sonata. The traditional associations of major and minor with affects of joy and sorrow respectively¹²⁷ may suggest a systematic clarifying of musical ideas and therefore support the crystallizing effect of the cumulative structure. Moreover, at the end of the sonata, and on a micro level, it may reflect a shift from sorrow to joy, from a negative to a positive mood.

126 In example 9b the various motives are labelled as follows:

C Concord motive	B Beethoven idea	F Stephen Foster melody
(C) Reverse order of Concord motive	B1 First motive with major third	F1, F2 First and second motive of Foster melody
(c) Reordering of notes	B2 Second motive with minor third	(F1), (F2) Reverse order of Foster motives

127 Cooke, 1959: 54, 57.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano sonata. The first system features a treble and bass clef with various dynamics and performance instructions. It includes markings for 'slightly slower', 'p', 'slightly faster', 'slowly', and 'pppp' with an '(echo)' section. The second system continues the piece with markings for 'ppp', 'pp', 'ppp', and 'loco'. Both systems have '8va lower' markings and dynamic markings like 'F1', 'F2', and 'B?'.

EXAMPLE 9b *Thoreau*, p. 67, system 1 to the end of the sonata¹²⁸

The ‘human-faith-melody’ develops out of an undefined motivic complex in *Emerson*, via its free and expansive treatment in *Hawthorne*, and simply defined as a symbol of Bronson Alcott’s clear and resonating voice in *The Alcotts*. In *Thoreau* this melody is conceptualized metaphysically as this writer’s vision of the connection between music and nature, ultimately exemplifying the ideals of American Transcendentalism.

It is quite surprising and unusual to involve another instrument in a *piano* sonata. In *Thoreau* the pianist may choose to have a flautist play the ‘human-faith-melody’ as a cantilena obbligato. Since Thoreau could play the flute, a more concrete representation of one of the writers is hardly imaginable. By including the flute, Ives realizes the narrative programme physically and quite distinctly. He writes as follows: ‘It is darker – the poet’s flute is heard out over the pond and Walden hears the swan song of that “Day”’.¹²⁹

128 The music in example 9b links directly with the music in example 9a.

129 Ives, 1970:69.

Besides a literal meaning, the inclusion of the flute also hints at extra-musical ideas. Traditionally associated with nature (compare, for example, Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, 1894), the flute exemplifies the representation of Thoreau as the nature philosopher. The clear, silvery timbre of the flute also enhances the transcending effect which is so central to the final movement. It elevates the significant meaning of the human-faith-melody to a metaphysical plane. This is in stark contrast with the understated playing of the viola when it joins the piano in the first movement. Here the characteristically subdued viola plays a descending chromatic contour which lacks the clear physiognomy of the all important 'human-faith-melody'. This again suggests initial vagueness reaching clarity in the final movement

The whole atmosphere that Ives has created is in accordance with the transcendentalists' view that nature has influenced them to be more contemplative. Ives even asks the rhetorical question: 'Is it a transcendental tune of Concord?' and the listener can experience how the theme 'faintly echoes' and thus extends beyond the sensory, becoming soulful in itself.¹³⁰ The significant musical enhancement of the piano sonata through the addition of a flute in the final movement is similar to Beethoven's introduction of a choir and vocal quartet to the Ninth Symphony. It embodies the clear vision of the Concord writers and their ideals.

Contrary to the crystallization of the human-faith-melody, the Beethoven idea retreats as an autonomous entity when the sonata draws to its conclusion. As an earlier feature in the movement, Ives presented the B1 and B2 motives with the notes in reverse order or by omitting the last note (p. 63, system 4). The omission of the fourth note could suggest a reliance on inner knowledge, indeed the world of the Over-Soul. When the descending third represents an almost inaudible sound of nature (p. 68, end of system 1 at **pppp**), a definitive erosion of the Beethoven idea is evident. The fact that these sounds must now be heard in the listeners' imagination underlines the

130 Rhetorical questions were a typical device of the transcendentalist writers. When Ives asks this question in his *Essays*, he emphasizes the fact that the human-faith-melody can be regarded as a musical representation of the essence of transcendental philosophy.

metaphysical context within which the Beethoven idea has manifested itself. The manner in which Ives's musical processes have presented the Beethoven idea is compelling evidence of his personal and unwavering commitment to the transcendental philosophy of the Concord writers.

8 The *Concord Sonata* as a prophetic work

Ives's *Concord Sonata* has redefined the sonata as a genre. The philosophical programme attributed to the sonata is already unusual, but the attempt to depict the Concord writers musically forced Ives to depart from the traditional conceptions of this established structure. (This is especially true for *Emerson*, where Ives's innovative craftsmanship is particularly evident.) Any attempt to emulate their exceptional ability to express the complexities of their ideals without compromise is ambitious in itself. However, the process of exploring the potential of artistic musical expression within such a context may have provided the means to enhance the expressive and representative qualities of music. Yet Ives acknowledges that the strategies which will elevate music to the status of a universal language, similar to the literary arts, possessing a unique autonomy and potential of expression, have not been found as yet.¹³¹

The last movement of the traditional sonata is usually extrovert by nature; it moves at a fast tempo and ends on a high dynamic level. In contrast to this, the *Concord Sonata* ends slowly and the low **ppp** dynamic level is interspersed with **pppp** echoes, creating an introverted effect, as if listening to yourself. In today's world where one can easily 'communicate' globally through the electronic media, it seems as if it is more difficult to listen to one's own voice or the voice of your immediate neighbour. Listening has indeed become the neglected aspect of effective communication.

Just as Ives experienced a richness in Emerson's writings, finding new meanings with every re-reading, the multidimensional and ambiguous signification of the *Concord Sonata* invites a re-listening and a re-interpretation with every single hearing, raising the

131 Cf. 1970:8, 112, and *Memos* (Ives), 1972:30.

experience to a higher level of understanding. A thorough analysis of the music itself assists the listener or performer to arrive at a deeper understanding than the obvious interpretations of, for example, the stereotyped meaning which is traditionally attached to the Beethoven motive could provide.

Adorno promotes the idea that *Verstehen* (interpretative understanding) both dissolves and preserves the enigmatic quality of art.¹³² This attempt to clarify some of the *Concord Sonata*'s 'mystery', mentioned in the introduction, has brought to the fore a diverse range of opinions, suggestions, significations, etc. Nonetheless, by linking the results of a musical analysis to extra-musical knowledge from literary art demonstrates how abstract ideas of the Transcendental writers can be expressed through music. Interpretations arrived at in this manner help to promote a better understanding of the work as a whole. Furthermore, this kind of understanding creates a greater admiration for the magic and enigmatic quality of the *Concord Sonata*. True to Ives's 'Music is Life' approach, the sonata reminds us of the mystery of life itself. It is therefore an ongoing process of listening and interpreting that will create a deeper connection with this monument of the twentieth-century repertoire, an inner knowledge that can translate into real enjoyment.

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132 Adorno, 1970:178.

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