The Treasures of Yvar Mikhashoff



Yvar Mikhashoff Photograph by Edward Nowak

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Curated by John Bewley

The Treasures of Yvar Mikhashoff

Yvar Mikhashoff (1941-1993) was a multi-talented pianist and composer who served on the music faculty at the University at Buffalo 1973-1993. He was an imaginative and tireless concert programmer who explored musical themes via genres (tangos and waltzes), eras, styles, and composers. He expanded the piano repertoire by commissioning new works and made his own transcriptions of other literature for keyboard, including his series of virtuosic opera transcriptions in the same vein as those by Liszt. He also explored lesser-known areas of piano literature as he pursued new programming ideas.



Yvar Mikhashoff (then Ronald McKay) in an undated school photograph

All of this activity drove him to become an avid collector of music, especially piano literature. His collection of annotated and marked scores contains more than 1200 scores, including many that reflect his working relationships with a wide range of composers. The unique nature of the holdings includes

the many contemporaneous works reproduced from manuscripts as well as many works that were either not widely distributed or collected.

While Mikhashoff clearly displayed a showman's flair, he was also an extremely diligent performer who closely examined anything he performed. This is evident in his study of Charles Ives's *Concord Sonata* (Piano sonata no. 2). He wrote an analytical article about the first and second movements, including a color-coded thematic analysis of the entire first (Emerson) movement.

A THEMATIC SURVEY OF THE FIRST MOVEMENT (EMERSON) OF THE SONATA NO. 2 "CONCORD, MASS., 1840-1860" OF CHARLES IVES.

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YVAR-EMILIAN MIKHASHOFF

I. Introductory remarks

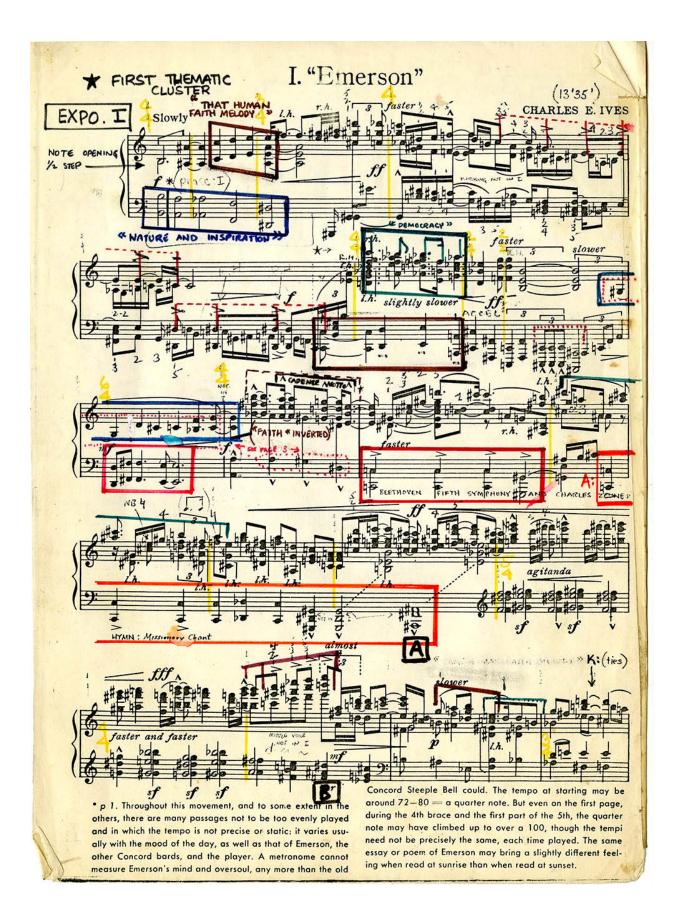
II. Thematic survey.

Henry Cowell's book <u>Charles Ives</u> contains a chapter which is by many considered an analysis of the Sonata No. 2 "Concord, Mass., 1840-1860", better known as the "Concord Sonata". However, by our standards today, and by the retrospective made by Mr. Cowell, it can be truly considered no more than a perusal; he revealed some years later to Mr. John Kirkpatrick that he regarded the chapter as cursory at best, and in fact erroneous in a fundamental thematic identification. He states that the motive found which forms the opening five notes of the bass line is the basis of the entire movement, in conjunction with the motto theme of the Symphony No. 5 of Beethoven. In fact, the motive is of signal importance, yet is only one of seven which woven together form the fabric of the movement.

In an attempt to unravel the threads and form an analysis of this massive and complex movement, I have thought to make this essay more an explanation of the accompanying annotated score than a written analysis. The score is color-keyed in a manner that will make the occurrences and intersticings of the various themes easily apparent. As well, having spent several days with Mr. John Kirkpatrick in an effort to gain a greater overall comprehension of the work, I will also intersperse many of Ives's marginal comments. That is, there exist sixteen copies of the original edition of the sonata that were in Ives possession and in which he made corrections and emendations, since he felt always that this was a "work in progress" and indeed did continue to re-think and correct the sonata until the time of his death. In addition, many of the actual changes in notes and rhythms are noted in this edition that I have prepared for my performances. Many of these changes were culled from these many emended copies, many were made by Mr. Kirkpatrick from Mr. Ives"s suggestions, many I adapted form Mr. Kirkpatrick's

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Part of his preparation also included a close comparison of the two editions of the score (1920 and 1947) as well as acquiring a copy of the score as prepared by Ives scholar, John Kirkpatrick.



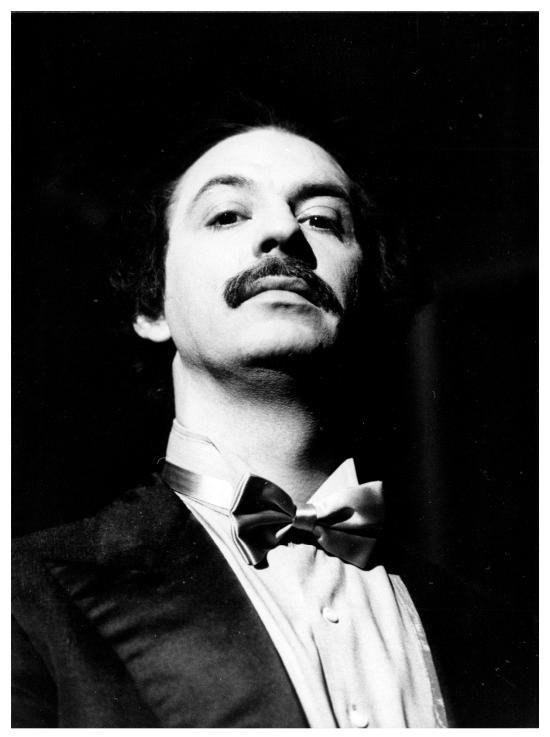
He utilized all his research in a thematic program about the New England transcendentalists, using the *Concord Sonata* as the centerpiece of the program.

Flute accel slightly faster COMMENT # 1: THIS IS NOT A WICE SONATA FOR A NICE PIANO PLAYER. WHAT DO ALL MEAN? WHAT IS BEHIND IT ALL? THE "VOICE OF GOD" SAYS THE ARTIST, WHAT DOES IT THE "VOICE OF THE DEVIL" SAYS THE MAN IN THE FRONT ROW. NO, SIREE! IN THIS SONATA THEY'RE SPITTING ABOUT, THERE IS A DESIGN -- SOMEWHAT MORE THAN THERE SHOULD BE, IT SEEMED TO ME -- AND THE FORM IS OBVIOUS, BUT IT ISN'T DRABBLED ON EVERY MILESTONE ON THE WAY UP OR TO OR ON IN HIS REFLECTIONS EMERSON IS NOT AFRAID TO GO WHEREVER HE IS CARRIED ----TO PARNASSUS OR TO "MUSKETAQUID." WE SEE HIM STANDING ON A SUMMIT WHERE MANY MEN DO NOT DARE TO CLIMB, PEEKING INTO THE MYSTERIES OF WHERE MANY MEN DO NOT DARE TO CLIMB, PEEKING INTO THE MYSTERIES OF LIFE, HURLING BACK WHATEVER HE DISCOVERS THERE -- NOW, THUNDERBOLTS FOR US TO GRASP IF WE CAN -- NOW PLACING QUIETLY, EVEN TENDERLY, IN OUR HANDS, THINGS WE MAY SEE WITHOUT EFFORT --- IF WE WON'T SEE THEM, SO MUCH THE WORSE FOR US. ..BUT IF WE CANNOT FOLLOW ALL THE WATE FOR DO NOT ALWAYS CLEARLY PERCEIVE THE WHOLE PICTURE, WE ARE AT LIGHT FREE TO IMAGINE IT -- HE MAKES US FEEL THAT WE ARE FREE TO DO SO; PERLAPS THAT IS THE MORT HE AVE THE MOST HE ASKS. TAPE OF Flute is offstage throughout Part I STAGE LAYOUT [Part I] Script for Mikhashoff's November 18, 1974 program based on Ives's Concord Sonata: Concord Mass., 1840-1860, a musical stereopticon



Sylvano Bussotti and Yvar Mikhashoff at the Almeida Festival, 1986 Photograph by Sarah Ainslie

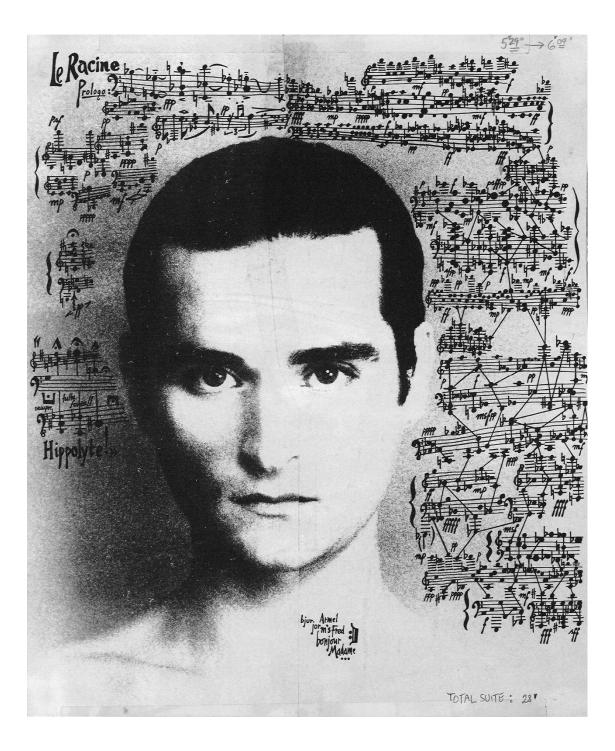
Sylvano Bussotti (born 1931, Creative Associate at the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts 1964-1965) composed *Le Racine, pianobar pour Phèdre* in 1980. It is scored for piano, four singers (including the soprano part of Phèdre), and six mimes. The piano part is performed onstage, non-stop for the 3-hour duration of the piece, by a character in the opera, Monsieur Fred. Bussotti wrote the part expressly for Yvar Mikhashoff and Mikhashoff performed the premiere at La Piccola Scala December 13, 1980.

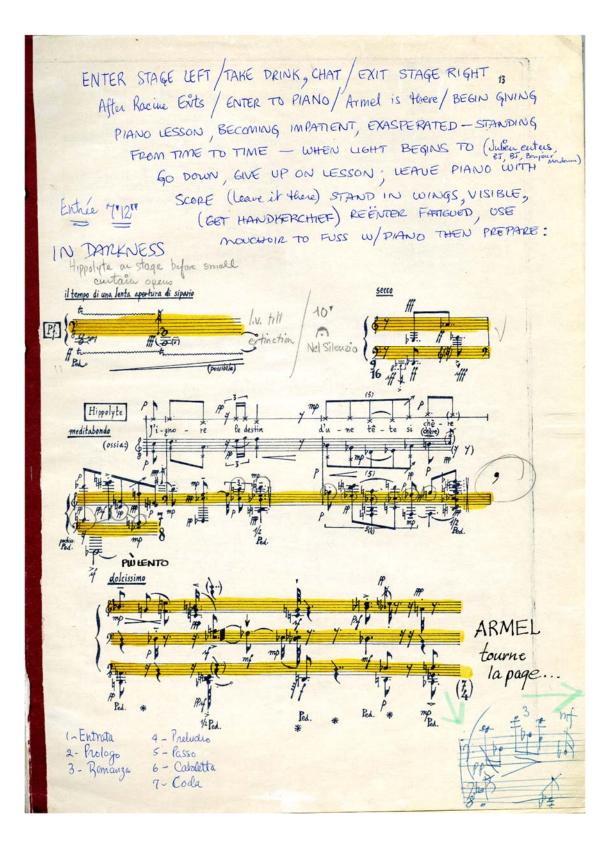


Yvar Mikhashoff as Monsieur Fred in Sylvano Bussotti's Le Racine, pianobar pour Phèdre Photograph by Lelli and Masotti



Yvar Mikhashoff's copy of the full score of *Le Racine, pianobar pour Phèdre* from which he performed the piano part. Mikhashoff marked the score in preparation for performance and in many places attached rewritten versions of passages. Many of these are Mikhashoff's attempts to clarify Bussotti's original notation, sometimes involving enharmonic changes to pitches and the notation of rhythms.





In addition to re-notating portions of Bussotti's score for the purpose of legibility, Mikhashoff also prepared a transcription for solo piano in the form of a suite of music from *Le Racine, pianobar pour Phèdre*. He recorded three movements from the suite during recording sessions August 19-20, 1992 at the University at Buffalo's Slee Hall. The recording was released as part of his two-CD set titled *Opera: Virtuoso opera fantasies, paraphrases & transcriptions* (Mode Records 2006).



Yvar Mikhashoff and Haline Moretti in performance of Sylvano Bussotti's Pianobar pour Phèdre at the Almeida Festival 1986 Photograph by Sarah Ainslie

A patron's request for the score of the entire suite prompted a search of Mikhashoff's collection and revealed that in all likelihood, Mikhashoff never prepared a full score of the entire suite. He fully transcribed some of the movements for the solo piano version, but must have performed the other portions of the recorded suite directly from Bussotti's original score.



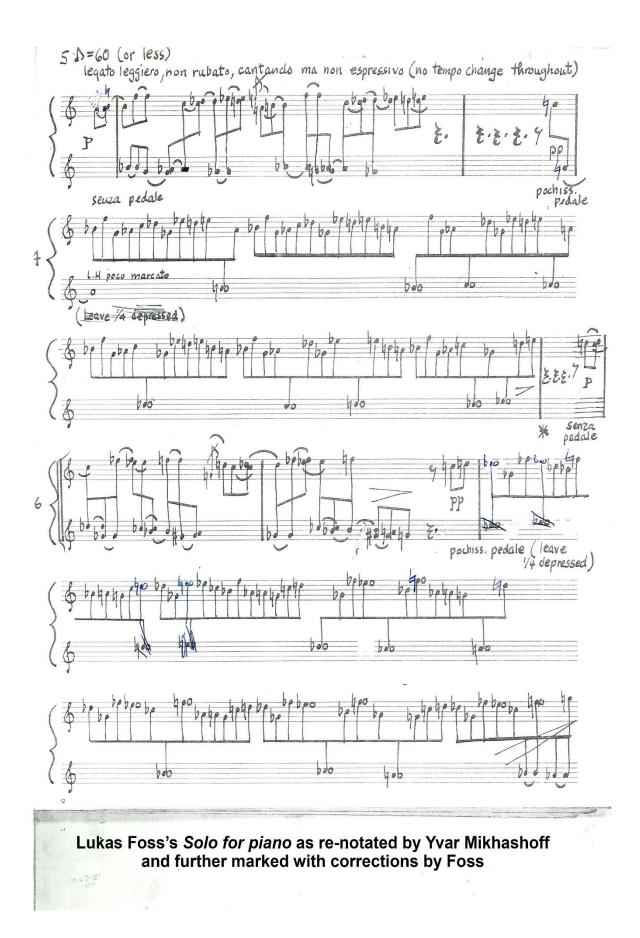


Lukas Foss and Yvar Mikhashoff Photograph by Irene Haupt

Lukas Foss's *Solo for piano* is among the solo piano works commissioned by Mikhashoff. The copies of the score that Mikhashoff kept provide an excellent example of the relationship between a performer and composer and the process of working together on a work from first draft to final published version. Mikhashoff re-notated Foss's original notation in many passages to clarify it for pianists. The scores and accompanying letters from Foss to Mikhashoff also indicate that the title of the work evolved during the process.

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Yvar Mikhashoff and Giacinto Scelsi Unidentified photographer

Mikhashoff also worked closely with Italian composer, **Giacinto Scelsi**, performing five world premieres of Scelsi's works. Mikhashoff's collection contains four unpublished solo piano works by Scelsi. They are not titled but bear stamped numbers. In order to identify the works it was necessary to contact Friedrich Jaecker, a composer and musicologist who has researched Scelsi's music at the Fondazioni Isabella Scelsi in Rome, home of Scelsi's archives. According to Jaecker, the works are most likely drafts of works that were never authorized for performance (indeed, working with pianist Ivan Ilic, we have been unable to get the authorities at the Fondazione to authenticate the pieces **or** grant permission to perform them).

Professor Jaecker explained that, "Scelsi improvised on the piano or on the ondiola (an ancient keyboard) and his collaborators "transcribed" it into scores. So Tosatti, Filippini and others were more than copyists but less than composers. In any case, Giacinto Scelsi can be considered to be the "author" of his works." Jaecker identified Vieri Tosatti identified as the copyist of these four pieces.

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Mikhashoff's collection includes another unusual work by Giacinto Scelsi, also identified for the Music Library by Friedrich Jaecker. His description of the score for horn and bass:

The partition is written by Riccardo Filippini, a student of Vieri Tosatti and today completely unknown. It is a new version of the unpublished orchestral work Kamakala, which I found in the Scelsi archive in Rome and which was premiered 2014 in Berlin. The partition of Kamakala is written by Tosatti probably in the years around 1957/58, the duo version is written probably in the years after 1972 (in this year Filippini began to work for Scelsi). I found also the tape recording referring to this piece.



One of the interesting works acquired by Mikhashoff is La Monte Young's *Piano pieces for David Tudor*. Mikhashoff was co-director of the North American New Music Festival from 1983 until his death in 1993. The music of La Monte Young was featured on the April 7, 1990 concert with Young in attendance and conducting two of his eleven works performed on the program. Mikhashoff performed the *Piano pieces for David Tudor* on that program. This copy seems to be a unique holding.

PIANO PIECE FOR DAVID TUDOR #3

Slowly, on three finger of each hand, simulate slow jumping grasshoppers. Advance from the rear of the piano lid to the front. (There are two young fast ones!). They occasionally crossover. Near the middle of the lid, RH jumps over LH toward the center, then both together. Once they both jump together. Finally, one jumps in the piano, then the other jumps inside the piano; and in tone..."most of them were very old grasshoppers"... BOW

PIANO PIECE FOR DAVID TUDOR #2

Sit down at the piano, prepare to play, in the usual way, begin to lift the lid, with care. Stop when it's halfway up, realizing that it made a sound, act a bit surprised. Try now to lift it more carefully, with two hands, positioning hands differently each time. Then, after an attempt with both hands near the bottom, move to the top and lay head nearly on the lid with ear nearly on the lid as you attempt to lift it without any sound -- you are listening attentively, with face to the audience. At this point you feel anger, changing to disappointment. Sit up, look at the lid, make a few half-hearted attempts, with two finger of the LH, then in a very dejected gesture of just touching the lid with two finger of LH, pause, then tap the lidwith an exhalation and sigh and a gesture of resignation; stand upquickly and BOW.

PIANO PIECE FOR DAVID TUDOR #1

Climb to pulpit. Lift haybale so it appears to the audience, lift it and fling it to the stage. Go downstairs resolutely with the bucket of water (which is actually empty). Place the bucket in front of the kidney of the piano; with right foot, from the back, position is under the piano, the assumed eating position. Go and get the piano bench and place it near the end of the piano, between the pf and the audience on a 45° angle; sit and stare at the hay, waiting

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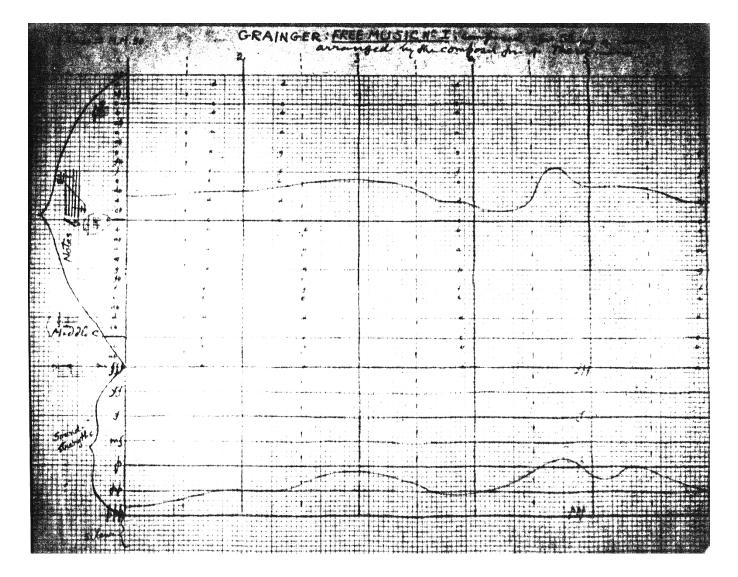
PIANO PIECE FOR DAVID TUDOR #1

for the eating to begin. Cock head slightly when you perceive that the piano will not eat. Lift the lid, get the bucket of water, walk to piano and pretend to pour, methodically and carefully in two different places. Draw back -- it is not drinking! Step back and aggressively throw water into piano. Slam bucket down. Grab some hay, walk around to the keyboard. Thrust lid open, aggressively, from the back of the piano, offer the hay bunch to extreme high register. Hold position. Stuff in hay and - Tam the lid shut. BOW.

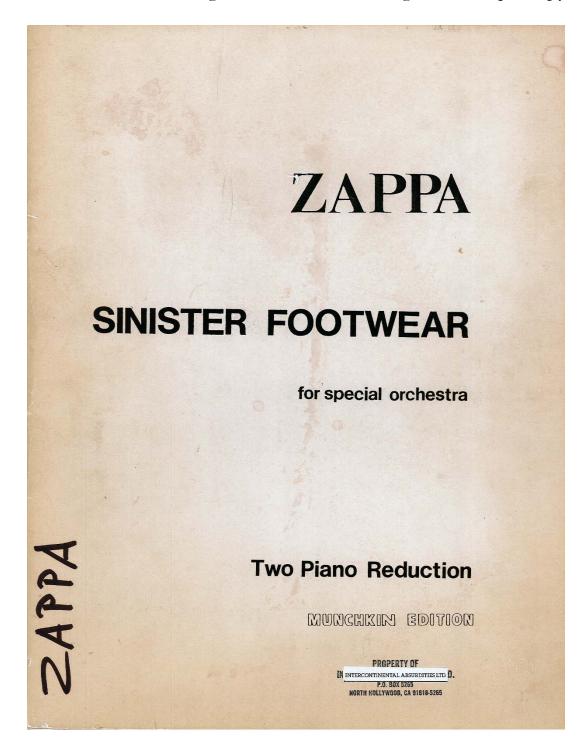
Hotóndo wa Toshi óita Bátta de áru.

....CONT.

The high percentage of photocopies in Mikhashoff's collection is perhaps an indication of Mikhashoff's appetite for collecting unusual music. If music was not commercially available, he would often request and purchase copies from libraries or people who held copies. That is the case with a packet of scores copied from the Percy Grainger Museum in Melbourne, Australia. Grainger is chiefly remembered for his popular settings of folk music, but he also had an interest in the experimental realms of music as represented in the scores acquired by Mikhashoff.



This score of the two-piano reduction by Arthur Jarvinen of Frank Zappa's *Sinister footwear* is marked throughout with performance indications. Although the score currently appears to be available for purchase, no libraries are listed as holding it in WorldCat, making this a unique copy.



For more information about the life and career of Yvar Mikhashoff, please refer to the Music Library's online guide to Yvar Mikhashoff Resources at https://research.lib.buffalo.edu/mikhashoff