

The Transcendentalist

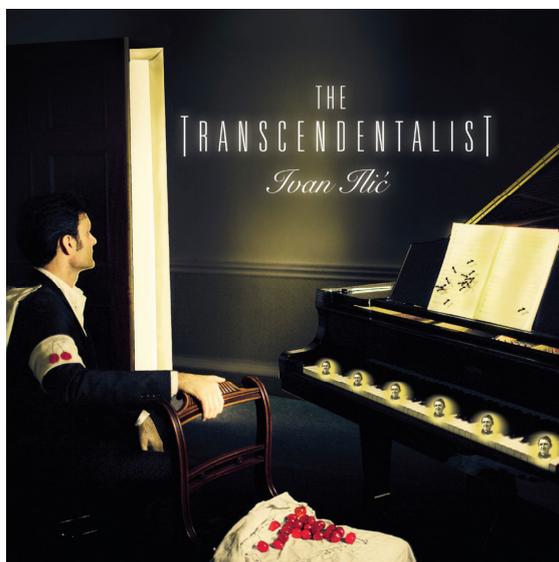
(Scriabin, Cage, Wollschleger, Feldman)

CD: Ivan Ilić, piano.

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Read the original article in French at: <http://j.mp/TT-CN>

A cosmic piano, an intellectual one, a keyboard opening a path to other worlds... In his quest for the invisible, the excellent pianist **Ivan Ilić** makes no concessions to facility (he demonstrated this in a previous album dedicated to Godowsky, a commendable challenge met to perfection with the left hand – a peak for a pianist with full mastery of both of his agile hands). Our voyaging artist now returns, tuned to the grandiose, visionary, intimate universe of Scriabin, Cage, Feldman... and of the least-known of the quartet, Scott Wollschleger... [Ilić] knows how to chisel each composer's intense and voluble interior necessity, how to characterise the travails of thought as much as the fingers' virtuosity.



Aesthetically, the cover and booklet photos refer us to a famous surrealist painting by Salvador Dalí, another adept of supererogatory speech, as delirious as it is... transcendental. Art does not describe; it suggests. This rule clearly applies to the superlative programme in question. There is nothing artificial in the choice of pieces magisterially placed in perspective. The importance of a piano recital, beyond style and the sensitiveness of touch, is primarily to be found in the structuring of the programme; Ivan Ilić meets the very myth of the piano head-on. Beyond the technical challenges, the pianist's playing concretises the sound and resonances of the sublime vibrations that abolish time and space as the works unfold. A time, whose essence is romantic, is lost in perspectives stretching out to infinity, re-establishing themselves as the interior mirror of the selected composers as well as of the interpreter who instigated it all. It is, therefore, an homage to the instrument of Liszt and Wagner, Schubert and Beethoven, not to forget Debussy and Ravel, who de facto make us forget the elements of mere digital performance (speed, agility, control...) to attain the musical conscience from which flows and unfurls a... mind in action.

Beyond the sounds

Ivan Ilić's mystical, irresistible piano

Outlined behind the acrobatics and the material reality of the keyboard is a pure emanation of unknown worlds, painted like visions, both introspective and contemplative, inviting intimate questions that make music the expression of humanisms crucial to the works. This is the challenge of this very personal recording, which both

requires and therefore reveals pianist Ivan Ilić's great sensitivity, his artistic rigour as much as his interpretative ardour and questioning.

To shore up his pianistic purpose and lay a foundation for his programme's coherence, Ivan Ilić follows in the footsteps of American Romantic Ralph Waldo Emerson, the author of *The Transcendentalist* (1842), the manifesto of an aesthetic current opposed to the notions of rationality and materialism, and close to the sacred thoughts of Oriental cultures. The pianist seems happy to display the evidence of his discovery by proposing, in this unusual recital, Scriabin's mysticism, Cage's Buddhist thought, Feldman's highly intuitive approach of hypnotic questionings, and the synthetic offering of a Wollschleger whose synaesthetic writing seems to recapitulate them all. The liquid and lyrical serenity of early Scriabin (*Prelude* opus 16), then his more carefree and seemingly liberated side (*Prelude* opus 11); Cage's enigmatic, suspended climes (*Dream*, 1948), repeated into infinity like answerless questions, embroideries and arabesques sent dancing into space (*In a Landscape*, from the same year, cyclical and flowing) to resonances redolent of Asiatic gongs, while in Feldman's case, the gong-like tones seem rather the funereal sounds of the passing bell.

Scriabin appears to be the most inventive, visionary and experimental, a mentor for them all, a powerful source of inspiration: uninterrupted, the four following pieces (*Guirlandes* [Wreaths] opus 73, *Preludes* opus 31, 39, 15) seem to flow from a radical process that dilates musical space, pushes back and abolishes borders, makes perceptible and tangible all the invisible worlds there to be discovered. With subtle use of the pedal, carefully treading passages of crisscrossing tonalities and the transitions between episodes, Ivan Ilić convinces thanks to a truly superlative suggestive intelligence. It is a journey built like a continual quest of no return, bringing out the great tension that underlies each formulation.

The most recent piece, thirty-year-old contemporary Scott Wollschleger's 2013 *Music Without Metaphor*, inherits its predecessors' interrogative and spiritual legacies and lends them a discreet, dream-like quality – between resonance and silence, chiselled vibrations – that question and... enchant, as well. The same is accomplished by the final picture, the longest of them all: Feldman's 1986 *Palais de Mari*, where the questioning interrogates form itself, silence, and the final resonance; where the noise of the keyboard's mechanics participates in a question that touches on the essence and sense of music as a language of knowledge and surpassing. The intense, powerful playing extenuates a formulation condemned to repeat itself without ever finding a liberating echo. By searching too much, does the thinker not risk losing himself? Does the question not find its answer within itself at the end of this enchanter's voyage?



This recital is one of the most successful interior voyages ever heard. The most striking aspect is perhaps less the technical mastery – which through an ardent, crepuscular, essentially enigmatic style already makes the music thrilling – than the intelligence that preceded it in selecting the various pieces: unspooled interrogations, tense, almost terrifying as

they remain with no possible return. The pianist and programme designer also knows how to free-flow (in Scriabin's *Rêverie* opus 49 and *Poème Languide*, with their Lisztian and Wagnerian lights)... The inter-relationships express a secret correspondence, unsuspected horizons, shared inebriations, a clear musical and human ambition to go beyond mere restrained pianistic performance. Like a mirror rich in true and living vertigos, the interpreter offers a model of deepening, far from, that is to say well above, the nonchalant free-for-all of mere vague demonstrative emanations. Measured gestures, honed sensitivity: Ivan Ilić seduces and captivates us from the beginning to the end of this tremendous programme. Ivan Ilić's album *The Transcendentalist* is an immediate favourite and a **CLIC** for Classiquenews.

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Ivan Ilić, piano. Scriabin, Cage, Wollschleger, Feldman. 1 CD. Heresy. Duration: 1:04. Recorded in Paris in November 2013. Scheduled release: 27th May 2014.

Posted on 22/05/2014 by **Lucas Irom**

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