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« Ce qui nous arrive en musique »
By Matthieu Conquet

We are far removed from Liszt's *Twelve Transcendental Etudes*: neither virtuosity, nor impressive technique, nor speed; just the essential relationship, a vertical one, meditative as well, with sounds and with music. **The Transcendentalist** is an entire program created by **Ivan Ilić**, an American pianist of Serbian origin, a child of Silicon Valley trained in mathematics, who chose the piano before finally settling in France. For those who might interpret this choice of meditative pieces, and of refined miniatures, as a taste for limpness: we would reply that Ivan Ilić has thus far shown little disapproval of virtuosity, having recorded among other things Leopold Godowsky's *Chopin Studies*, transcriptions which are particularly learned and difficult.

Above all, the pianist explores a particular branch of the history of piano music, starting with the legacy of Chopin, with musicians as diverse as Scriabin, John Cage or the young American composer Scott Wollschleger, all of whom tend towards abstraction, in particular by playing with structures. Or, for example, in Morton Feldman's music, where the repetition of asymmetric fragments in constant low volume comprises his signature: "What I want is to listen to music through a telescope."

This **Transcendentalist** is also placed under the sign of Salvador Dalí: the album cover reconstructs the scene of "Hallucination: six images of Lenin on a piano." It includes the symbols and allegories so dear to Dalí: cherries for bountiful nature, ants on the musical score to evoke a certain idea of vanity, and of decomposition... with the difference that the little heads that float on the keyboard are not those of Lenin but of Emerson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American philosopher, a founder of the Transcendentalist movement in the early nineteenth century. In fact, the recital takes the form of an inner journey: the ecstatic mysticism of Scriabin, the Buddhist thoughts of John Cage, the hypnotic style of Morton Feldman... All of these thoughts are summed up in the words of John Cage, "I would like for each man to have his attention fixed upon himself."

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