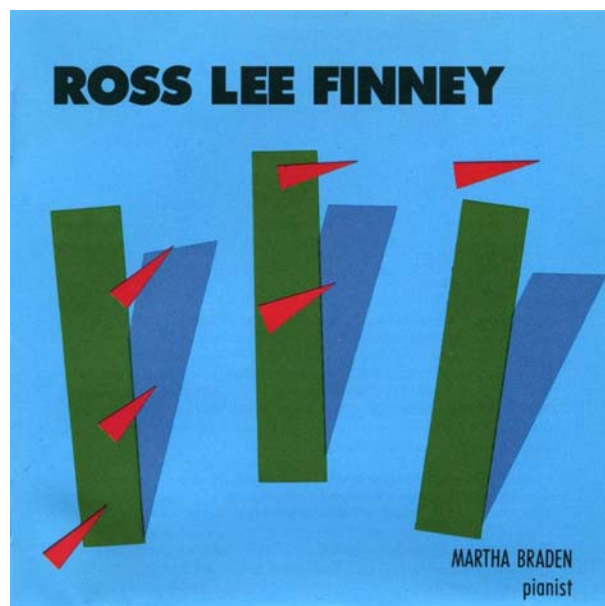


NWCR560

# Ross Lee Finney



1. *Fantasy* (1939) ..... (11:19)
- Sonata No. 3 in E Major (1942)..... (13:08)
2. *Allegro giusto* ..... (3:38)
3. *Lento* ..... (3:31)
4. *Prestissimo* ..... (2:26)
5. *Allegro energico* ..... (3:23)
- Sonata quasi una Fantasia* (1961)..... (13:45)
6. *Allegro appassionato* ..... (5:54)
7. *Largo sostenuto* ..... (3:28)
8. *Allegro scherzando* ..... (4:16)
9. *Narrative in Retrospect* (1984)..... (8:55)

Total playing time: 47:09

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## Notes

This recording brings together piano works from throughout the career of **Ross Lee Finney** (b Wells, MN, 1906; d Carmel, CA 1997). A prolific composer in all musical media, Mr. Finney has written orchestral music that includes four symphonies, concertos for violin, piano and alto saxophone, choral works including a trilogy *Still Are the New Worlds*, *The Marty's Elegy*, and *Earthrise*, works for chamber ensembles and dozens of works for piano, including popular pieces for children. He recently completed *Weep Torn Land*, an opera in seven scenes. He says of his work, "I have always felt that art could not be understood from a single viewpoint; that it unfolded, one might say, on two levels, one highly technical and concerned with minutiae, the other emotional and concerned with the grand design."

Finney was born December 23, 1906 in Wells, Minnesota. He studied with Nadia Boulanger in 1927, and later with Alban Berg and Roger Sessions. In 1937 he received the Pulitzer Scholarship and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

He joined the faculty of Smith College in 1929, where he founded the Smith College Music Archives and the Valley Music Press, a series of publications of contemporary American music. Finney's setting of poems by Archibald MacLeish won the Connecticut Valley Prize in 1935. A program of his chamber music was presented at one of the earliest Composers' Forum concerts of the WPA in New York. His works have been commissioned and performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony and the Erik Hawkins Dance Company, among others.

During the Second World War, Finney served with distinction in the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, and was awarded the Purple Heart and a Certificate of Merit. In 1948, immediately after receiving a second Guggenheim Fellowship, Finney joined the faculty of the School of

Music of the University of Michigan, where he organized and headed the composition department and was composer-in-residence. He taught many distinguished American composers, including Leslie Bassett, George Crumb, and Roger Reynolds. He retired from the University in 1973, and now divides his time between Ann Arbor, Michigan, and New York City.

Ross Lee Finney is a member of the Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in New York City, and of the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston.

Other recordings of Ross Lee Finney's music on CRI include String Quartet No. 6 in E (CAS 116), *Chromatic Fantasy in E* for solo cello and Second Sonata in C for cello and Piano (SD311) and Piano Trio No. 2 (SD 447).

*Fantasy* for piano was composed in 1939. Finney remembers that "there were three musical influences at work in this piece: Beethoven, Stravinsky, and popular choral style of the day, so it is probably best related to Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians, and the Wiffenpoofs. The first movement, with its *misterioso* passages and sudden outbursts, reflects my love of Beethoven. The second movement reflects my reactions to the neoclassic music of Stravinsky, while the last movement relates to a more American feeling, the 'North Dakota' metric drive."

Like the *Fantasy*, the Piano Sonata No. 3 in E (1942) comes from a period when Finney was deeply concerned with tonal structure, but at the same time eager to reflect the popular songs that had been so much a part of his Midwestern experience. In four short movements, wide contrasts disguise an overall unity revealed through related tempi. The Sonata is a study in verve. Edith Borroff, in her book *Three American Composers*, describes it as "immensely zestful, full of direct, honest musical energy." The composer says both the Sonata and *Fantasy* were

profoundly influenced by John Kirkpatrick, who edited and performed them.

*The Sonata quasi una Fantasia* (1961), Finney says, “is based on the same twelve-tone row that I used in composing my *Fantasy in Two Movements*, which Yehudi Menuhin commissioned and premiered at the 1985 World’s Fair in Brussels. I had started the second movement of the Menuhin work with a chord that demanded a resolution the solo violin could not possibly achieve. I set my sketch aside and used it later for the piano work. The Sonata is tonal, but it is also serial in its composition.” Finney speaks of the “elemental, almost primitive force of the last movement.” The Sonata was commissioned by the Quincy Fine Arts Council, Quincy, Illinois for pianist William Doppmann.

Of the *Narrative in Retrospect*, composed in 1984, the composer says, “It uses a serial organization based on two symmetrical hexachords that form a twelve-tone structure. This hexachord (B-flat, C, D-flat, E, F-sharp, G) outlines the diminished seventh chord and leads inevitably to the

quotation of a work deeply rooted in the memory of my youth.”

Martha Braden first encountered Ross Lee Finney’s music as a teenager. She writes, “The wonderful thing about Finney is his vitality. It is the same today as it was years ago. And in the music of those days and of today, the man is there. There is that same intensive energy. He asks a lot of questions, he stirs everything up. Sometimes the speed is just breathtaking. But it always returns to his belief in the beautiful. There is a grace that descends over the pieces.”

American pianist **Martha Braden** enjoys a varied career as a performer, teacher, lecturer, and coach. Her dynamic music-making and imaginative programming have won acclaim in concert halls across the United States and Mexico. Ms. Braden recently completed a three-month concert tour of the Far East, in which she performed solo recitals, conducted master classes, and appeared as soloist with the Pan Asian Symphony Orchestra in Hong Kong.

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## Production Notes

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*Fantasy* Arrow Music Press (ASCAP)

*Sonata No. 3 in E* New Valley Music Press (ASCAP)

*Sonata quasi una Fantasia* Henmar Press, Inc. (C.F. Peters) (ASCAP)

*Narrative in Retrospect* Henmar Press, Inc. (C.F. Peters) (ASCAP)

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