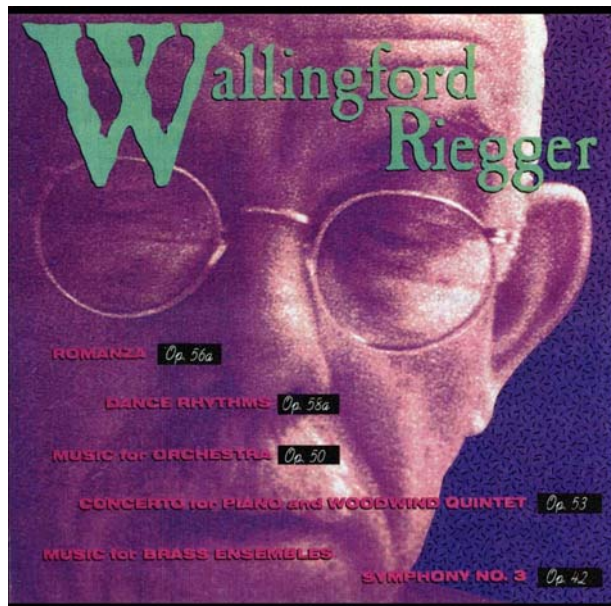


# NWCR572

## Wallingford Riegger



1. *Romanza*, Op. 56a (1953) ..... (3:41)  
Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia-Roma; Alfredo Antonini, conductor
2. *Dance Rhythms*, Op. 58a (1955) ..... (6:15)
3. *Music for Orchestra*, Op. 50 (1953) ..... (5:57)  
The Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra  
Alfredo Antonini, conductor

- Concerto for Piano and Woodwind Quintet, Op. 53 (1953) ..... (12:39)
4. I. Allegro ..... (4:02)
  5. II. Andante ..... (4:32)
  6. III. Allegro Molto ..... (4:05)  
New Art Wind Quintet; Harriet Wingreen, piano
  7. *Music for Brass Choir*, Op. 45 (1949) ..... (8:15)
  8. *Movement for Two Trumpets, Trombone, and Piano*, Op. 66 (1960) ..... (4:20)
  9. *Nonet for Brass* Op. 49 (1951) ..... (8:15)  
Members of the Alumni of the National Orchestra Association; and The American Brass Quintet;  
John Barnett, conductor
- Symphony No. 3, Op. 42 (1948) \* ..... (25:59)
10. Moderato; Allegro ..... (8:15)
  11. Andante affettuoso ..... (5:45)
  12. III. Moderato; Allegro ..... (5:16)
  13. IV. Beginning rather slowly; Allegro; Allegro feroce; Moderato ..... (6:32)  
Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra  
Howard Hanson, conductor

Total playing time: 74:14

\* Mono recording

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## Notes

The history of American music abounds with "forgotten men," but Wallingford Riegger seems more forgotten than most. Or, to put it another way, it is difficult to find a figure of comparable importance who has been so unfairly neglected in recent years.

When Riegger died, after an unspeakably absurd accident near his home on Manhattan's Upper West Side, his passing was reported on the front page of the *New York Times* and he was rightly hailed as one of the great American Modernists. But performances of Riegger's music have been rare in the following decades: even his centennial year (in which every composer's stock rises) came and went with barely a notice.

It is to be hoped, then that this CRI compact disc reissue will help introduce a generation of composers, musicians, and listeners to Riegger's work; those who already know and love these knotty, powerful and original compositions now have the opportunity to hear them in digitally remastered sound. One fact is paramount: a crucial figure in American music is again represented in the recording catalogue, his work easily available to all. Our collective understanding of our musical history cannot but be enhanced.

**Wallingford Constantin Riegger** was born in Albany, Georgia, on April 29, 1885. Like most composers, he showed musical talent at an early age, and was proficient on both the violin and piano by the time he was in his teens. Later on, at the urging of his parents, he took up the cello, so that the family could have its own string quartet. It was as a cello student that young Riegger entered the Institute of Musical

Art (later The Juilliard School); he was a member of its first graduating class in 1907.

Riegger then spent several years in Europe, where he studied composition with Max Bruch and Edgar Stillman-Kelly and made his debut as a conductor in Berlin. In 1917, three days before the United States entered World War I, he returned to America, where he accepted a post as cello teacher at Drake University in Iowa.

In 1922, Riegger moved to New York where he quickly established ties with several prominent people in American music, among them Charles Ives, Edgard Varèse, Henry Cowell and Carl Ruggles. He became known as an "ultra-modernist" composer. "I felt the need to express musical ideas for which the older techniques were inadequate," he later said. "I found the new atonal idiom, with its fresh possibilities in sonority and rhythm, creatively stimulating and more expressive of the feelings I wished to convey in music." Then, as now, it was difficult for a composer to establish himself.

When Riegger's first atonal work was published, a ten-cent credit appeared on his royalty statement for the year: one copy had been sold. On his next royalty statement ten cents was deducted: the copy had been returned. And so Riegger kept solvent by publishing choral arrangements for the commercial market (including editions of "Short'nin' Bread" for every possible combination of voices) under a vast array of pseudonyms.

Riegger classified his own music in four categories: "non-

dissonant (mostly), "impressionist," "partly dissonant" and "dissonant." "Although most of Riegger's later works were atonal and sharply dissonant, some being written in his own version of dodecaphonic technique, others were more or less tonal and traditional," Richard Franke Goldman observed in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. "His strict early training gave him a great and lasting technical assurance. As a rule he wrote slowly, revised extensively, edited his works with care and felt strongly the need for control and clarity. His achievement was that of combining, especially in his later works, an advanced harmonic and rhythmic idiom with traditional structures."

Throughout the 1930s, Riegger wrote a good deal of music for modern dance companies, including scores for Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, José Limón and Hanya Holm. These compositions are driving and powerful, with an emphasis on piano and percussion. After 1941, however, Riegger devoted his energies increasingly to "absolute" music for chamber ensemble and symphony orchestra. The success of the third symphony, in 1948, ensured a steady stream of invitations to compose, teach and lecture.

In 1957, Riegger was questioned by the House Un-American Activities Committee about his connection with the Metropolitan Music School, of which he was then president emeritus. The school, the committee charged, was controlled by "identified Communists." Riegger stood fast, invoking the Fifth Amendment, and refused to say whether he was then or ever had been a member of the Communist Party. A few years earlier, his career might have been seriously damaged by such allegations, but Riegger emerged unscathed. His seventy-fifth birthday was marked by a performance of the *Variations for Piano and Orchestra* by the New York Philharmonic, and the Kansas City Philharmonic engaged Riegger to conduct several of his own compositions.

Riegger died on April 2, 1961, after surgery: he had fallen over a leash while two dogs were fighting on New York's Amsterdam Avenue and suffered a brain injury.

The works on this reissue date from Riegger's late period; indeed, they were all composed over the course of eleven particularly productive years. The *Concerto for Piano and Woodwind Quintet* was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and composed in 1953: Rosalyn Tureck and the New York Woodwind Quintet played the first performance at the Library of Congress in February, 1954. It is in three terse, brilliant movements, bracingly virtuosic yet meticulously structured.

The *Romanza* is a sweet, tangy miniature dating from 1953. It was originally entitled *Lullaby* and served as the fourth movement of a five-part *Suite for Younger Orchestra* that was commissioned by and dedicated to the Dalton School in New York. "When I wrote these little pieces my objectives were that they should be melodious, short, varied and, above all, not too difficult for the players of the average school orchestra," Riegger explained. When he refashioned the movement for full orchestra, he changed the name to *Romanza* because the new version "would seem to hint at something other than childlike innocence."

The influence of Riegger's close associations with modern dance companies can be heard in his concert work, *Dance Rhythms* (1955). Even at its first public performance in Cincinnati, local papers praised the composer for "his polish and style as well as agility in matters of instrumentation." The most recent composition on this disc, *Movement for Two Trumpets, Trombone, and Piano*, was composed in 1960, the year before Riegger's death. Commissioned by the Juilliard

School, the work is dedicated to its then president, William Schuman. At the time of this recording, Paul Affelder noted how "throughout the composition, each participating instrument enjoys an independent career; which is to say that the piano never acts as an accompanist but always as an active competitor." This in Affelder's view, contrasted with the composer's earlier *Nonet for Brass* (1951), where even though "sometimes the music is contrapuntal . . . [with] large blocks of dissonant chords, for the most part, the instruments are treated in homogeneous groups."

*Music for Orchestra* is a succinct and colorful study that also dates from 1951; it would make a stirring curtain-raiser and I am a little surprised that it is not heard more often. *Music for Brass Choir* (1949) is probably the grandest of the smaller pieces on the recording. Scored for ten trumpets, eight horns, ten trombones, two tubas, kettle drums and cymbals, it makes a grand noise in its eight minutes but does not want for subtlety. Riegger's use of tone clusters is particularly eloquent-for once, the technique seems more than a modernist gimmick.

The Symphony No. 3, originally issued on a Columbia Masterworks record in the early 50s, was commissioned by the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University and dedicated to Oliver Daniel. This Symphony represents Riegger's music at its most complicated and dramatic. The opening movement is in what Riegger called a "truncated sonata form" and includes a twelve-tone row played by the oboe," made into a tune," as Riegger put it. The material for the second movement was largely drawn from "With My Red Fires," a dance written in 1936 for Doris Humphrey. "Nothing has been changed for sixteen measures; then, instead of drum beats, the strings intercede to continue the mood," the composer wryly noted.

"The third movement is mostly scherzo-like in character, in the course of which occurs another fugal section," Riegger continued. In fact, all four movements contain fugal passages, the finale being a passacaglia and fugue. The passacaglia theme of five measures is characteristically announced in the basses, but is eventually taken up by other instruments, culminating in excited pizzicato passages compressed into statements of the theme leading into a lively and energetic fugue. The Symphony concludes with a reprise of the passacaglia theme: initially played in the violins, it is then answered by the basses and developed into a stirring and sustained climax.

Elliott Carter, whose music resembles Riegger's in its uncompromising intensity, paid tribute to the older man in an article for the 1952 Bulletin of the American Composers Alliance. "Riegger has followed the dictates of his own personality and musical instinct unobtrusively for years," he wrote, without caring whether he was or was not in step with the fashions of the time, or, apparently, whether he would become known or his music performed."

"While Riegger has been quietly writing music, a host of aggressive younger composers has appeared, most of them more impatient than he to gain acclaim," Carter continued. "So he was generally overlooked in favor of composers more determined and skillful about personal promotion. However, a number of still younger musicians, feeling the need for a change from points of view prevalent in the 1930s have recently found him out and begun to take his music with the seriousness it deserves."

May this release win Wallingford Riegger many more such adherents.

—Tim Page

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## Production Notes

*Romanza*: Published by: Associated Music Publishers Inc. (BMI)

Recorded in Rome, Italy, Sept. 28, 1956 -

*Dance Rhythms, Music for Orchestra*

Published by: Associated Music Publishers Inc. (BMI)

Recorded on Oct. 12, 1956

*Concerto for Piano and Woodwind Quintet*

Published by: Associated Music Publishers Inc. (BMI)

*Music for Brass Choir* Published by: ACA (BMI)

Recorded in the Grand Ballroom of the Manhattan Ctr., NYC, Dec. 11, 1967 Producer: Edward R. Birdwell

*Movement for Two Trumpets, Trombone, and Piano*

Published by: APRS (BMI)

Recorded at Fine Sound Inc., NYC, Dec. 13, 1967

Producer: Edward R. Birdwell

*Nonet for Brass*

Published by: Associated Music Publishers Inc. (BMI)

Recorded at Fine Sound Inc., NYC, Dec. 12, 1967

Producer: Edward R. Birdwell

Symphony No. 3

Published by: Associated Music Publishers Inc. (BMI)

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Cover: Dennis Weeden Designs

Art Direction & Production: Brian Conley

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