

Vittorio Rieti



- Serenata per Violino Concertante e Piccola Orchestra* (1931) (15:19)
1. I. Allegro..... (4:20)
 2. II. Cadenza..... (1:59)
 3. Adagio e Siciliano..... (4:19)

4. III. Allegretto – Allegro vivace (4:39)
Janet Packer, violin; Longy Artists Ensemble; Melvin Strauss, conductor

- Concerto per Clavicembalo e Orchestra (1957)..... (16:40)
5. I. Adagio – Allegro moderato..... (5:38)
 6. II. Allegro scherzando;
Allegro non troppo alla Tarantella..... (11:02)
Sylvia Marlowe, harpsichord; Chamber Orchestra; Samuel Baron, conductor

- Partita per Flauto, Oboe, Quartetto di Corde e Clavicembalo (1945) (19:02)
7. I. Introduzione e Pastorale variata (6:28)
 8. II. Scherzino; vivace..... (2:54)
 9. III. Aria: Andante mesto;
IV. Fuga cromatica: Allegro moderato;
V. Giga: Allegro..... (9:40)
Sylvia Marlowe, harpsichord; Samuel Baron, flute; Ronald Roseman, oboe; Charles Libove & Anahid Ajemian, violins; Harry Zaratzian, viola; Charles McCracken, cello

Total playing time: 51:19

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Notes

Few composers have sustained as prolific a level of compositional activity into their sixth or seventh decade as Vittorio Rieti has into his tenth. A remarkable flourishing of creative energy has, in the years 1988-1991 alone, resulted in the creation of Symphonies Nos. 9, 10, and 11; the second Harpsichord Concerto, third Violin Concerto, fifth and sixth String Quartets and no less than seven other instrumental works.

Throughout a century of rapidly evolving and radically disparate musical styles, Vittorio Rieti has maintained a consistent, unique stylistic identity. In asserting that his principal composition teacher was Bach, Rieti reaffirmed in words what we hear in his music – that he understood and internalized the artistic workings of earlier masters, giving him the confidence to remain independent of fashionable trends. Joel Sheveloff has written, “Among twentieth-century composers, none knows more about his predecessors than Rieti, particularly about those dark corners in musical creativity in which rough places are made plain, and transitional passages get directed toward their proper goals. Perhaps Rieti’s greatest gift is his ability to see a musical idea through to its logical conclusion. When a Rieti piece ends, the audience is almost always sorry it is over – it was going along so well...”

Vittorio Rieti (*d* New York, 1994) has enjoyed describing himself as a citizen of the world. Born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1898, he traveled to Milan at sixteen to enter Bocconi University. Soon after submitting a doctoral thesis in 1917 on the economy of Turkey, he redirected his life and by 1925 had

composed music for George Balanchine’s first ballet, *Barabau*. He traveled widely throughout Europe and developed relationships of mutual respect with other composers: Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in Vienna; Casella and Respighi in Rome; Lambert and Walton in London; and numerous artistic luminaries in Paris. His friendship with Igor Stravinsky, begun in the 1920s, continued for over half a century. Of all the musicians, dancers and theatrical figures who worked with the legendary Sergei Diaghilev, Rieti alone survives.

After fifteen productive years in Rome and Paris, political conditions in Europe compelled Rieti to immigrate to New York City in 1940. He began a distinguished teaching career in the United States by succeeding Nadia Boulanger at the Peabody Conservatory in 1948. He later held positions at Chicago Musical College and Queens College in Flushing, New York. Rieti’s orchestral works were championed by such great conductors as Ansermet, Kubelik, Mengelberg, Mitropoulos, Monteux, Reiner, and Toscanini. His ballets continue to be frequently performed, *La sonnambula* (*The Night Shadow*) having received more than two thousand performances. In every corner of the world, Vittorio Rieti’s name epitomizes urbanity, charm and technical mastery.

When one is marking time in decades it may matter little that sixty years has elapsed before the first American recording of Rieti’s 1931 *Serenata per Violino Concertante e Piccolo Orchestra*. More significant is the fact that Janet Packer’s performance of the *Serenata* inspired Rieti to compose his third violin concerto, *Concerto giannetto*, in 1991.

The *Serenata* was premiered in Brussels in November 1931 by Yvonne de Casa-Fuerte, the work's dedicatee and Rieti's friend. The composer conducted the Paris premiere, and the work was subsequently performed in Strasbourg, Rome and Vienna.

The first movement, marked *Allegro*, is interrupted after just fourteen bars by a short cadenza, whose striking material returns later to open the major second-movement cadenza. This is a cheerful, neo-classical movement, providing the soloist with lyrical passages as well as brilliant cascades of double stops and string crossings. The breathtaking conclusion frequently elicits spontaneous applause at live performances.

The second movement, in contrast, opens with a cadenza which is as prolonged an example of dissonance as one will find in Rieti's music. While the movement is formally in three separate sections—*Cadenza*, *Adagio* and *Siciliana*—unity is achieved through a gradual progression from tension to repose. That is, the dissonances and metric freedom of the *Cadenza* are tempered in the *Adagio* and subsequently resolved by the tonality and metric regularity of the *Siciliana*.

The *Cadenza* is unbarred, requiring the soloist to establish pulse and phrase. The listener may enjoy following the individual lines here, independent but intertwined, while savoring each dissonance. The *Adagio non troppo* is an interlude of suspended motion, as melodic fragments appear, are repeated with a slight twist, and dissipate. Secondary pulses pull against the bar line, creating a feeling of metric instability. Tonality returns with the first notes of *Siciliana*, in which a mood of warmth and relaxation replaces the angst of the *Adagio*. The initial minor-key material alternates with a melancholy episode in C major. This movement requires extraordinary sensitivity by each performer for the ideal instrumental balances to be achieved. Hear, for example, the trumpet-violin dialogue of such delicacy in the *Siciliana*!

The third movement is in two sections, the first of which, a playful *Allegretto*, is a continuum of shifting meter, syncopation and dynamic contrast. Motives are tossed between soloist and ensemble, while a feeling of lightness and transparency is maintained – sixty percent of the *Allegretto* is marked *piano* or *pianissimo*. After several minutes of dizzying harmonic instability, a cadence to C major announces the movement's concluding section, *Allegro vivace*. This is a breathless romp, each measure revealing surprises too numerous to appreciate at any one hearing. Simple tunes, dynamic extremes and a foot-stomping rhythmic drive produce a remarkable synthesis of strict neo-classicism and music hall merriment.

Vittorio Rieti's *Partita*, like the *Serenata*, has always been a personal favorite of the composer. Commissioned by Sylvia Marlowe and completed in 1945, it is scored for flute, oboe, string quartet (or string orchestra), and harpsichord (or piano) obbligato.

The first movement, *Introduzione e Pastorale variata*, consists of a brief *Adagio*, followed by a *Pastorale* with five variations. The eight-bar tune in E-flat, first stated by solo harpsichord, is characterized by a unique property: each of the first six measures omits a different note of the E-flat major scale, from D to F sequentially. Movement two is a fleet *Scherzino* in C major. Marked *Vivace*, hardly a measure passes without a *staccato* or *pizzicato*. The third movement, *Aria*, is based on a plaintive minor-key melody. This *Andante mesto* includes Tchaikovskian reminiscences. Movement four, *Fuga cromatica*, takes a disjunct, jocular subject and creates an *Allegro moderato* movement of compositional virtuosity,

as challenging to the analyst as it is delightful to the listener. The concluding *allegro* movement, *Giga*, begins with the same eighteen notes, transposed, as those of the fugue subject of movement four, here disguised in a different rhythm and meter.

Sylvia Marlowe's personal observations succinctly express the work's character: "The Rieti *Partita* was the first work I commissioned for the harpsichord. I had heard his *Second Avenue Waltzes* for two pianos and fell in love with them. The *Partita* has everything I admired in the *Waltzes* – and more. It is spirited, elegant, witty, warm and sparkling...sunny, airy, beautifully made and orchestrated – and yes, there is even an element of 'camp' present."

The *Concerto per Clavicembalo e Orchestra* (Concerto for Harpsichord and Orchestra) was composed in 1955 and re-orchestrated in 1957. Dedicated to Sylvia Marlowe and commissioned by the Harpsichord Music Society, the work is scored for an orchestra of flute, 2 oboes, 2 horns, bassoon, strings, tympani, and suspended cymbal.

An extended, lyrical *Adagio* opens the first movement. After a brief cadenza, an *Allegro moderato* begins with a restatement of the tune from the *Adagio*, here *marcato*. A fragment of the *Adagio* returns near the movement's end. The second movement, *Allegro scherzando*, is a brisk, delightful excursion, sprinkled throughout with Rietian compositional gestures. The movement concludes with a cadenza which alternates measures of first-movement melodic material in fixed meter with non-measured, improvisatory-like passages. A three-octave *Vivace* descent heralds the third movement, *Allegro non troppo alla Tarantella*. This movement is pure fun, with driving rhythms and virtuosic flourishes by the harpsichord soloist.

In a commencement address in 1990, Vittorio Rieti observed, "I have been composing for more than eighty years. Creation is an essential activity for me. If I don't do it every day, I become uncomfortable." This compact disc pays tribute to a unique master in his ninety-third year. We look forward to his continued creativity and to more opportunities to experience his extensive and important oeuvre.

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Janet Packer is a concert violinist and educator who has appeared with orchestras and in recital throughout the United States. Her concerts and recordings have received critical acclaim, *Fanfare Magazine* praising the "warmth and conviction that make her performances very emotionally satisfying," and *The Strad* describing a Boston recital as "a high point of the season." Packer participated in twenty-nine world premieres during twelve seasons as principal violinist of Boston's Dinosaur Annex Music ensemble. Composers who have written works for her include Gardner Read, Ezra Sims, and Vittorio Rieti, who dedicated his *Concerto Giannetto* to her. She is currently director of preparatory studies at the Longy School of Music, Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she has been a member of the violin faculty for thirteen years.

Melvin Strauss has been active as a conductor of contemporary music since the 1960s when he was the Fromm Conductor at the Tanglewood Music Center and for which he was awarded the Koussevitsky Conducting Prize by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In that capacity and since, as director of the Penn Contemporary Players and as associate conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, he has performed a considerable amount of new music including numerous premieres. He has also been a member of the music faculties of Rutgers University, the University of Penn-

sylvania and SUNY at Buffalo, as well as President of the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. Currently he is adjunct professor of music at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

The Longy Artists Ensemble recorded the Rieti *Serenata* with the following personnel:

Beth Anderson, flute; Sandy Consiglio, oboe; Steven Jackson, clarinet; Isabelle Plaster, bassoon I; Tom Stephenson, bassoon II; Gerald Serfass, trumpet; Kirsi Perttuli-Kehayias & Luis Ibanez, violins; Harold Lieberman, viola; Michael Curry, cello; Elizabeth Foulser, bass.

Production Notes

Serenata

Recorded by James Donahue at WGBH Studios, Allston, Massachusetts, on June 22 & August 15, 1990. Editing by Toby Mountain. Published by G. Schirmer/Salbert (BMI).

Partita published by Broude Bros. (BMI).

Concerto Published by Galaxy (BMI).

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