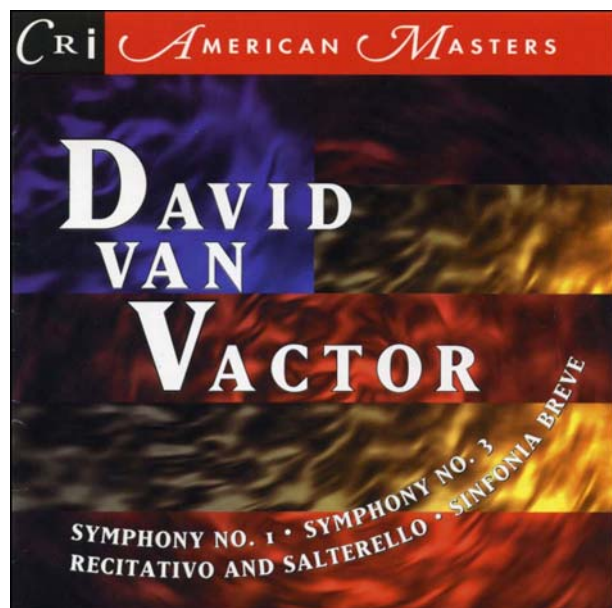


## David Van Vactor (1906–1994)



Symphony No. 1 (1937) .....	(32:45)
1. I – Largo: Allegro vivace .....	(9:35)
2. II – Adagio .....	(7:41)
3. III – Allegretto ma non troppo .....	(5:04)
4. IV – Finale: Largo; Moderato assai .....	(10:22)
Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra	
5. <i>Recitativo and Salterello</i> (1946) .....	(6:47)
Symphony No. 3 (1959) .....	(23:21)
6. I – Allegro moderato .....	(8:22)
7. II – Adagio .....	(11:03)
8. III – Allegretto .....	(3:02)
9. IV – Allegro giusto .....	(5:51)
10. <i>Sinfonia breve</i> (1964) .....	(7:03)
Hessian Radio Symphony Orchestra	
David Van Vactor, conductor	

Total playing time: 75:17

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## Notes

**David Van Vactor** was born in 1906 in Plymouth, Indiana, and grew up in nearby Argos, a town of a thousand people. His mother was a midwife and his father was a Protestant minister, house builder, owner of a small factory that made porch columns and inventor whose five claims to an aircraft designed to take off and land vertically as well as horizontally were patented in 1940.

Taught to play the flute by the town barber at an early age, Van Vactor played the piccolo in the town band from the time he was eight years old until he graduated from high school at seventeen, after which his family moved to Evanston, Illinois, so that he could go to Northwestern University where he earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Although he was a premedical student, he studied music theory and composition and by his senior year in college had written some remarkable songs and the *Chaconne for String Orchestra* which was performed in 1928 by the Rochester Symphony, Howard Hanson conducting.

Having no money to pay for medical school, he was convinced by the dean of the school of music that he could make his way in the world as a professional musician so long as he sought the best training available, which meant a year or more of study in Europe. After graduation, he set out for Vienna and paid for his passage by playing flute recitals during the crossing. The great event of his first ocean voyage was meeting his future wife, then a girl of sixteen, also from Evanston, Indiana. He spent the next nine months in Vienna studying flute with Josef Niedemayer, harmony with Arnold Schoenberg and composition with Franz Schmidt. In 1931 he took his bride to France for five months so he could study flute with Marcel Moyse and composition with Paul Dukas, and in the fall of that year he took second chair in the flute section of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in which he played for thirteen seasons under Frederick Stock, whose protégé he became as a conductor.

It was during this period—while playing in the orchestra,

teaching theory and conducting the chamber orchestra at Northwestern, in addition to teaching thirty-five flute lessons a week—that Van Vactor wrote some of his major works. His Quintet for Flute and String Quartet (1932) won an award from the Society for the Publication of American Music and was published by George Schirmer. Frederick Stock gave the first performance of Van Vactor's *Concerto a Quattro* for three flutes, harp, and orchestra in 1935, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra played it many times in the ten years that followed. Van Vactor achieved a national reputation when he conducted the New York Philharmonic in January of 1939 in the first performance of his Symphony No. 1, which had won first prize in a competition sponsored by the orchestra. The new symphony was well-received and subsequently was played in Chicago and Cleveland. As a result, his music would be played by every major orchestra in America, and many commissions followed: the Concerto for Viola written for Milton Preeves, premiered at Ravinia Park by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1940; five *Bagatelles for Strings* written for the Saidenberg Symphonietta of New York; *Credo* (1941) and *Music for the Marines* (later designated Symphony No. 2) (1943), two large works both commissioned by Fabian Sevitzyk for the Indianapolis Symphony. Van Vactor's *Overture to a Comedy No. 2* won the Juilliard Publication Award in 1942 and was played in Indianapolis, Montreal, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, St. Louis and San Francisco. His String Quartet No. 1, written for the Jacques Gordon Quartet in 1940, was taken on tour by the Budapest String Quartet in 1946.

From 1941 to 1946, he toured South America three times, first with the American Woodwind Quintet, and in 1945 and 1946 returning to conduct his own works with the Municipal Orchestra of Rio de Janeiro and the Orquesta Sinfonica de Chile. In 1944 and 1945 he ran a farm in Marshall, Missouri for the war effort. When he was assistant conductor of the Kansas City Philharmonic from 1945 to 1947, he founded the

Allied Arts Orchestra, devoted to performing contemporary music. *Recitativo and Saltarello*, *Cantata* for Treble Voices, *Introduction and Presto* for Strings, and *Pastorale* and *Dance* for Flute and Strings were written during these years when he was living in Missouri and traveling to South America. Roy Harris had commissioned *Pastorale* and *Dance* for Flute and Strings and premiered it with the Colorado College Orchestra in the summer of 1947, with David Van Vactor as flute soloist.

In the fall of that year, Van Vactor founded the Fine Arts Department at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and became conductor of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, a post he held for twenty-five years. His major works written after he moved to Tennessee were String Quartet No. 2 (1949), Concerto for Violin (1951) and *The New Light* (1954). In 1953, he conducted the London Philharmonia.

In 1957, a Guggenheim Fellowship allowed him to spend part of the year in Frankfurt, Germany, conducting several orchestras and working on his third symphony. The *Trojan Women Suite* was also started during this sojourn in Frankfurt. Upon his return to Knoxville in September of that year, he received a commission from the Louisville Orchestra and quickly wrote *Fantasia*, *Chaconne* and *Allegro*, which was performed in Louisville in November of 1957 and recorded by Columbia, Robert Whitney conducting. Returning to Germany every summer for the next ten years, he reacquainted himself with the many pieces he had written in the 1930s and 1940s by recording them with the Hessischen Rundfunk Orchester. With the orchestra in Frankfurt and the Knoxville Symphony, he also recorded works by a number of American composers, some of whom he had commissioned through a Ford Foundation grant. Many of these recordings would be released on the CRI label. The Louisville piece and the new symphony which he finished in the spring of 1958 mark the end of the first half of his creative output, from a stylistic standpoint.

In 1957, he had begun to use the tone row as a compositional device. Works that benefited most from this practice were longer ones, with several movements, since all the movements of a work would draw on the same thematic material; hence greater unity was achieved. While Van Vactor is resolutely tonal in his approach to serial technique, the character of his music written after 1957 is decidedly different from the Symphony No. 3 starting with *Trojan Women Suite* (1959) and Suite for Woodwind Quintet (1959); the tunes are quirkiest, the harmonies richer, and more freedom is evident in their development. The Suite for Piano (1962), *Sinfonia breve* (1964) and Four Etudes for Winds and Percussion (1968) are

the culmination of the experimental phase of his work. In 1965, he returned to Chile for six months to conduct twelve concerts and play two flute recitals and to meet with the young composers whom he had had the privilege to reach twenty years earlier.

After 1970 followed the fruit of his retirement: two large pieces for symphonic band, *Episodes—Jesus Christ* for double chorus and orchestra; thirty-six pieces for woodwinds, a saxophone concerto and four symphonies. In 1975, he was named Composer Laureate of the State of Tennessee by the state legislature, a life-time honor. He retired from the University of Tennessee in 1976. His magnificent house set high on the bank of the Tennessee River, overlooking the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains was his sanctuary. Three months in the winter at his daughter's home in Los Angeles, two weeks in Honolulu, annual trips to Boston and Maine to visit his son's family, and to Rome and Lake Como, were the rewards of old age that kept him productive. In his manuscripts, there are continual references to these places he loved. His Symphony No. 7 was finished in 1982. His eighth symphony remains unfinished.

Always by his side was his wife, who took care of all practical matters so that he could write music. In 1989, they moved to Los Angeles to be near their daughter. Van Vactor died at home in Century City March 24, 1994, forty-five days before his eighty-eighth birthday. This CD is dedicated to the memory of his daughter, Raven Harwood, who died in December of 1994.

Symphony No. 1 was finished in 1937, won the New York Philharmonic Prize in 1938, and was first performed by the New York Philharmonic in January of 1939, the composer conducting. It was subsequently performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra.

*Recitativo and Saltarello* was written in 1946 in Kansas City as an overture for the Allied Arts Orchestra founded by the composer. It was originally intended as one of *Three Dance Scenes*. This recording was used as part of the musical soundtrack of a film produced by Raven Harwood in 1968.

Symphony No. 3 was finished in 1958 and was first performed by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under the direction of William Steinberg in April of 1959.

*Sinfonia breve* was commissioned by the Brevard Festival Orchestra, was finished in 1964 in Knoxville, Tennessee, and first performed in Santiago, Chile in 1965, the composer conducting.

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## Production Notes

Original recordings produced by Carter Harman

From CRI SD 169:

Symphony No. 2

From CRI SD 225:

Symphony No. 1

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