

CRI SD 219.

Riegger/Luening/McPhee

- Wallingford Riegger
1. *Fantasy and Fugue* for Orchestra and Organ, Op. 10 (1931) (19:46)
Polish National Radio Orchestra
Jan Krenz, conductor
Recorded by Polski Nagrania, Poland

 2. *Synthesis for Orchestra and Electronic Sound* (1960) (7:50)
Otto Luening
Hessian Radio Symphony Orchestra
David Van Vactor, conductor
Synchronized at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center,
New York City

 3. *Fantasia* for Organ (1929) (9:00)
Ralph Kneeream, organist
Recorded in St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University

 4. *Nocturne* (1958) (7:10)
Colin McPhee
Hessian Radio Symphony Orchestra
David Van Vactor, conductor

Wallingford Riegger (b Albany, Ga. 1885; d New York City, 1961) was brought up in Indianapolis where his lumber-merchant father also directed the choir of the Second Presbyterian Church, and in New York. Young Riegger learned piano from his mother and took violin lessons, and later took up cello to complete a family string quartet. After beginning his serious musical study at the Institute of Musical Art in New York, Riegger worked as a cellist and conductor in Germany; by 1916 he had been appointed a regular conductor of the well-known Blüthner Orchestra in Berlin. He was at this time a thoroughgoing musical conservative of Brahmsian bias: “. . . At the first Berlin performance of Scriabin's *Le poème de l'extase*” he wrote, “I hissed exactly in the some manner as did the Philadelphia boxholders twenty years later when Stokowski gave my own *Study in Sonority*.” Riegger returned to the United States in 1917.

Two early conservative Riegger works had won major prizes, but neither public nor professional colleagues were prepared for the radical sounds of his *Study in Sonority* (1926) for ten violins or multiples thereof. He had discovered from Adolph Weiss, who was then studying with Arnold Schoenberg, what the controversial Viennese master had been accomplishing toward the “emancipation of dissonance.” Most of Riegger's more substantial later works were to be built on his own personal interpretation of the “twelve-tone” serialism, interpretation which made highly imaginative use of American-style rhythm. During the 1930s, Riegger composed for such modern dance icons as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Anna Sokolow, Hanya Holm, and Helen Tamiris.

It is against this background that one must view the amply framed and luxuriantly scored (full orchestra with augmented winds and percussion, plus organ with two players) *Fantasy and Fugue* recorded here.

The *Fantasy and Fugue* was originally designated on the cover of the manuscript score as “Atonal”—but this was scratched out (possibly with the thought of chicken-hearted conductors and even more timid audiences). The opening section of the music is an extended Sostenuito 6/8 episode in which the organ plays an important coloristic and harmonic role. Incipient dance elements make their appearance in a 5/8 Scherzando. A slowing of tempo paves the way for the fugue, in which the strings lead off (Allegro-12/8).

Riegger wrote “This is far from being a purely theoretical fugue. Each of the three subjects has been conceived for a particular choir of the orchestra, one being for strings, one for woodwinds, and one for brass, an arrangement which, however, does not preclude an occasional shift of roles. When the fugue is fairly well under way, an atonal and many-voiced chorale is announced, phrase by phrase in the violins—*pianissimo*—while the fugal themes continue their sharply rhythmic progress. After a brief interim the chorale reappears in inverted form, still in the background, played this time by the brass and woodwinds, the fugue continuing restlessly in many kinds of strettos. Meanwhile the organ weaves into the polyphonic texture, threading its way among the higher woodwinds or lower strings, but not asserting itself positively till near the close, where against the fortissimo agitation of the entire orchestra it intones the broad strains of the chorale, overwhelming the warring rhythms of strings, winds, and percussion, as eventually cosmic forces must dominate over humanity’s ceaseless striving.”

Otto Luening (b Milwaukee, 1900) stands out among American composers for, among other things, the astonishing variety of his activities on behalf of more and better music and his enthusiasm for musical experimentation. He has served, and is serving, as a teacher of composers (in 1967 he is teaching at Columbia University) but is equally at home leading neophyte music lovers through their first experiences with classical music. He is active in what might be called musical politics, holding officerships in many upper-echelon organizations devoted to the encouragement and dissemination of music.

His own life reflects his energy and untiring curiosity. Trapped in Europe, where he was studying at the start of World War I, the young musician supported himself in exile as a conductor, flutist and percussionist. It was in Zurich that he had the first of a long series of experiences in the theater, being stage manager and actor in James Joyce’s English Players’ Company. Back in the United States in 1920, he conducted the first all-American opera performance in Chicago, and went on to executive operatic posts at the Eastman School of Music, the American Opera Company, and Columbia’s Brander Matthews Theater (where he conducted the site premiere of Menotti’s *The Medium*).

Luening’s career as a composer is marked by ceaseless creativity—his compositions number well over 200—by a refined simplicity of style that has come to be recognized as “American,” and by an enthusiastic pursuit of unusual media, among them the use of the tape recorder to modify and transmute “natural” sounds and the creation of synthetic musical sounds directly on tape.

Composing directly on magnetic tape was a development of the mid-1950s, and synthesizing musical sounds for this medium by sophisticated electronic devices has since become a familiar activity in the world’s musical centers. Mr. Luening’s *Synthesis for Orchestra and Electronic Sound* combines structures made on the R.C.A. Synthesizer with structures made of sounds produced by cruder machines—the strings, winds, and skins of the nineteenth-century symphony orchestra. It was commissioned in 1960 by Broadcast Music, Inc., for its twentieth anniversary, and the composer conducted its premiere with the Erie Philharmonic in 1965 on the occasion of that organization’s fiftieth anniversary.

The music begins with purely orchestral sounds, which proceed in a mood of almost primitive innocence until they are superseded by purely electronic sounds—some of them not at all “pure” in the high fidelity sense—which are in the concert hall produced by a tape recorder playing through a loudspeaker. The electronic sounds are eventually joined by the percussion section, causing the music to evolve from an atmosphere of concerto-like polarization, in which the orchestra provides the dramatic statements and the tape the lyrical and sometimes playful comments, to one of harmony.

Fantasia for Organ states its theme in deep and strong accents, of almost passacaglia-like effect. It passes to a section of relative tranquillity and the third and more contrapuntal section is prepared by a pedal note above which the higher parts break away in a true mood of fantasy.

Colin McPhee (b Montreal, 1901; d Los Angeles, 1964) was best known to American audiences as a musical exoticist during a period when exoticism was less than fashionable. This reputation resulted from the composer's visit to the island of Bali and his residence there from 1931 to 1939, during which time he became expert in the clangorous music of Indonesia. Several of his subsequent compositions were in Balinese style, creating by imaginative use of the Western orchestra the chiming sounds of the gamelan. The most famous of these works is his *Tabuh-Tabuhan* (1936), a three-movement piece of symphonic proportions. Another is the *Nocturne* recorded here.

McPhee was, moreover, a respected and quite successful composer and pianist before his Balinese experience, and he became a successful author afterwards (*A House in Bali*, 1946; *A Club of Small Men*, 1948, and a scholarly musical work, *Music in Bali*, (1964).

After early studies at the Peabody Conservatory, and piano training with Arthur Friedman, he created a sensation with his Piano Concerto in Toronto in 1924. Other works caused his reputation to flare in New York during the later 20s. During the 40s, he worked on his writing, assisted by grants from the Bollingen, Guggenheim, and Huntington Hartford foundations; he has also received commissions from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the Louisville Orchestra, and BMI. During the last six years of his life he taught composition at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Nocturne for chamber orchestra was commissioned by the Contemporary Music Society and had its premiere in the Metropolitan Museum of Art under the direction of Leopold Stokowski. It is in one movement and has been described as impressionistic, modal, and of deliberate exoticism.

—Carter Harman

David Van Vactor was born in Plymouth, Indiana, in 1906 and has since studied, composed, and conducted in many parts of the world. He played flute with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for thirteen years and with the North American Woodwind Quintet on its tour of Latin America in 1941.

His music has been played by major organizations including the New York Philharmonic Symphony and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. He has conducted in Rio de Janeiro, Santiago de Chile, London, Frankfurt, and in Knoxville, Tennessee, where he now (1967) is conductor of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)