

## CRI 254

**WALTER PISTON: Concerto for Orchestra (1933)**  
**CARL RUGGLES: Men and Mountains (1924-1935)**  
**WELLS HIVELY: Icarus (1961)**

THE POLISH NATIONAL RADIO ORCHESTRA;  
WILLIAM STRICKLAND, Conductor

**HOWARD SWANSON: Short Symphony (1948)**

VIENNA STATE OPERA ORCHESTRA;  
FRANZ LITSCHAUER, Conductor

WALTER PISTON (b. Rockland, Maine, 1894) is one of the generation of New England composers who first established American music as something to be considered with the same seriousness as European music. Although he was fairly firmly established by that time, he recalls that in 1933, when he was offered a performance of a new work by Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, it came as a stunning surprise—as, he writes, "something unheard-of". The work he composed for this special honor was CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA. In it, he says, "I felt for the first time that I had found what I was looking for, and that I had a glimpse of the way to go. ..." He adds, "The truth is, however, that I have continued to search for the way ever since."

The CONCERTO has three movements, as follows:

I. *Allegro moderato ma energico*. It is reminiscent of the baroque concerto grosso in rhythm and form, with ritornello, the episodes in changing instrumental combinations. II. *Allegro vivace* is light, virtuosic. The second half presents the literal retrograde of the first half. Some listeners have found elements of jazz in this movement. III. *Adagio*—*Allegro moderato* is based on the principle of the passacaglia: the theme is announced by the tuba, with slow variations for brass, then woodwinds, followed by a fugal allegro and further culminating variations.

CARL RUGGLES (b. 1876) is one of the legendary composers who brightened the American musical scene during the 1920s and '30s. It was said that he, more than any other composer, inherited the mantle of his friend Charles Ives. Both men were born and bred in New England, and both went their own way, creating brilliant musical structures by sheer determination and in the face of a world that did not understand. Ruggles, who is now (1969) retired in Bennington, did not start serious composing until he was in his forties. Following the first World War, he composed his first orchestral works, which he proceeded to revise and reshuffle extensively. This process, while it resulted in some well-polished and highly original music, left a confusing trail of titles and revisions. At about the same time he began seriously to paint pictures.

The original body of orchestral music consisted of three extended works, PORTALS, VOX CLAMANS IN DESERTO and MEN AND ANGELS. The first and second exist as they were originally composed. MEN AND ANGELS contained three movements, each of which was revised and became separate compositions: MEN AND MOUNTAINS, ANGELS (composed for muted brass), and SUN TREADER. MEN AND MOUNTAINS now itself contains three movements, titled MEN, LILACS and MARCHING MOUNTAINS. The title is taken from an epigram of Blake: Great things are done when Men and Mountains meet.

In 1961, the State of Vermont named his birthday "Carl Ruggles Day" and in 1966, Bowdoin College staged a Ruggles festival honoring the composer in his 90th year. During its three-day run, most of his music was performed and 40 of his paintings were displayed, touching off a revival that included performances throughout New England and scholarly studies that are still appearing.

Howard Swanson's SHORT SYMPHONY was composed in 1948 and was given its first performance by Dimitri Mitropoulos and the New York Philharmonic. It was almost immediately taken up and performed many

times by major orchestras here and abroad. In 1952, the work won the New York Music Critics Circle award and that year Swanson won a Guggenheim Fellowship and American Academy-National Institute of Arts and Letters award. The music is classical in outline, its three movements being in sonata form, song form and rondo form, which the composer says was a deliberate choice to underline "the depth, seriousness and intensity inherent in a large work". All three movements are characterized by Swanson's easy and instinctive love of contrapuntal movement.

HOWARD SWANSON was born in Atlanta in 1907 and began to study music when he was 12. At 20, he went to the Cleveland Institute to study composition with Herbert Elwell, and after graduation he won a Rosenwald Fellowship to study in France with Nadia Boulanger. Despite his obvious happiness with the orchestral medium, he has devoted most of his composing energies to vocal music. His songs in particular have won lasting success, being in the repertoires of such notables as William Warfield, Leontyne Price, Marian Anderson and Helen Thigpen.

WELLS HIVELY (1902-1969) eased into the life of a composer by what, from the last third of the century, looks like a highly romantic path: he was an organist in the movie palaces of the 1920s, accompanying the last of the silent films. Before he was 20, he went from his family ranch, in the San Joaquin valley of California, to Kansas City, Mo. to play in the new Pantages Theater there. Soon after, during the early 1920s, he began alternating years between studies in Paris and playing in the U.S.A. In 1928, he reached a pinnacle, playing in the famous Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood.

When talkies brought that career to an end, Hively moved to New York, where he studied (at Mannes and Juilliard), composed and directed music for the pioneering modern dancer, Ruth St. Denis, and composed music plays for NBC and increasing amounts of concert music. By 1941 he was accompanying some of the great singers of the day, from Dorothy Kirsten and Polyna Stoska to Lily Pons, and touring Europe as a composer-pianist. During the last years of his life, he lived in Florida, teaching, composing, and playing the organ in church. Among his several recordings, SUMMER HOLIDAY appears on CRI.

ICARUS was composed in 1961, after the sudden death in an automobile accident, of a nephew. Before his death, Mr. Hively wrote the following explanation of the title of his work:

"Icarus was the son of Daedalus in Greek mythology. He and his father were flying away from Crete on wings of feathers and wax. In spite of his father's warning, he flew too near to the sun; the wax melted and Icarus fell into the sea and was drowned. The sea where he fell is called the Icarian Sea, and the island where he was washed ashore and buried (by Hercules) is Icaria."

WILLIAM STRICKLAND, who conducts three of the works on this record, has a long and honorable history of recordings for CRI. His orchestras have been in the far corners of the world, the latest being the POLISH NATIONAL RADIO ORCHESTRA.

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*(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)*