NAXOS Historical

Composers At The Piano

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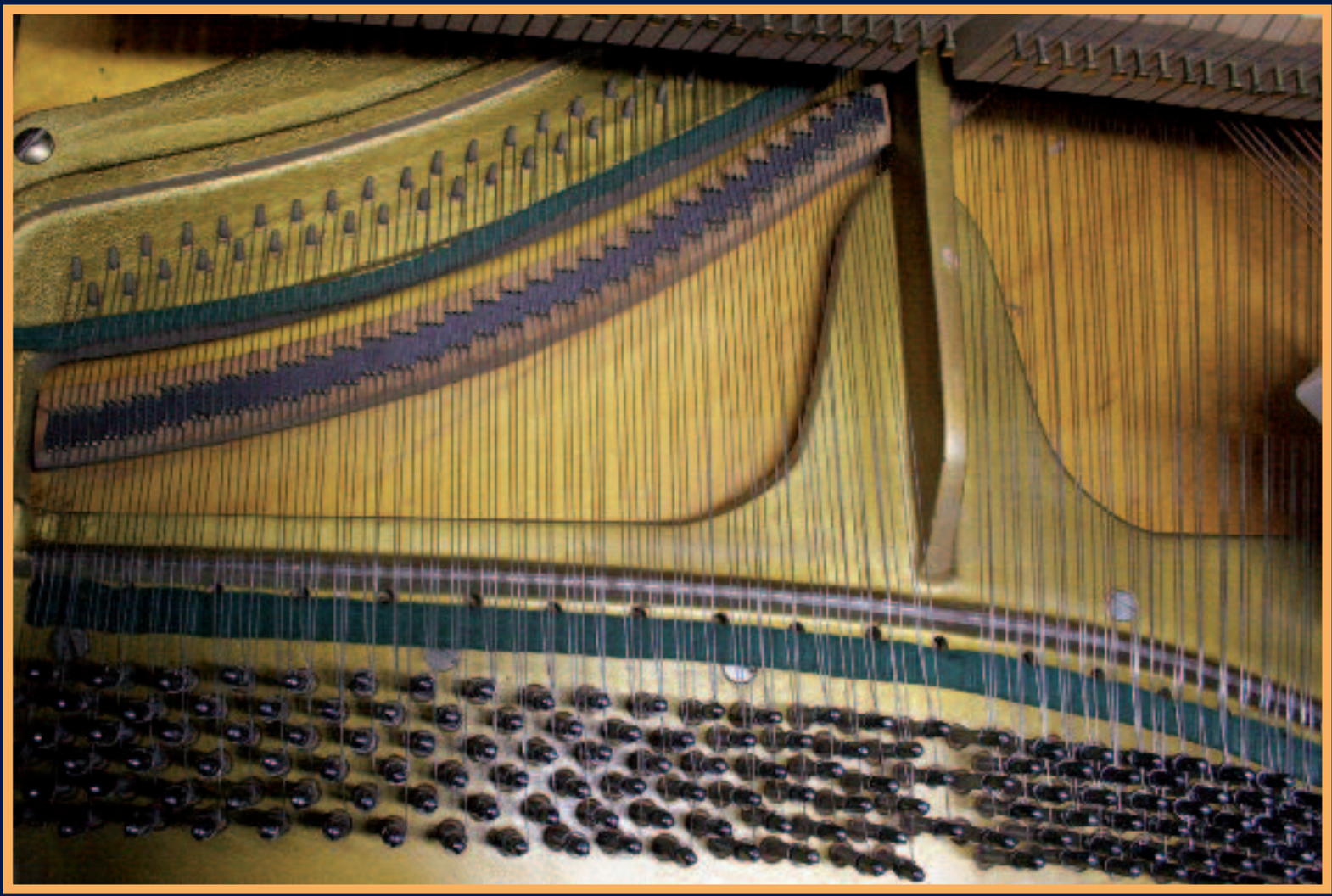
An Anthology of Historic Performances (1928-1949)

Tcherepnin • Vladigerov • Wagenaar • Matthay • Ireland
Broman • Grainger • Chasins • Nat • Peroni
Castelnuovo-Tedesco • Copland • Smit



Composers at the piano

An Anthology of Historic Performances 1928-1949

Alexander TCHEREPNIN (1899-1977)
Bagatelles, Op. 5 (1912-1918) (excerpts):

1 No. 1: Allegro marciale 0:53
2 No. 2: Con vivacità 1:32
3 No. 3: Vivo 0:50
4 No. 5: Dolce 1:09
5 No. 6: Allegro con spirito 0:54
6 No. 7: Prestissimo 1:11
7 No. 8: Allegro 0:57
8 No. 10: Presto 0:54

His Master's Voice D.B.4440
(2RA.854-1 and 2RA.855-1)
Recorded in Berlin, November 1935

Pancho VLADIGEROV (1899-1978)
Suite Bulgare, Op. 21 (1926) (excerpts):

9 No. 1: Quasi marcia 3:20
10 No. 3: Choro Wodna 3:58

Polydor 19766 (B67522 (337be)
and B67523 (340be))
Recorded in Berlin, 1928 (Piano: Ibach)

Bernard WAGENAAR (1894-1971)

11 **A Tale** 3:07

Columbia (US) Set 223
(68332-D (XCO-17330-1 (1-A-1)))
Recorded in New York, 23rd April 1935

Tobias MATTHAY (1858-1945)
Studies in the form of a Suite,
Op. 16 (1910) (excerpts):

12 No. 1: Prelude 2:12
13 No. 8: Bravura 2:06

On Surrey Hills, Op. 30 (1919) (excerpts):

14 No. 1: Twilight Hills 1:34
15 No. 4: Wind-Sprites 1:51

Columbia (UK) DX444
(CAX6582-1 and CAX6583-1)
Recorded in London, 16th November 1929

John IRELAND (1879-1962)
Two Pieces (1925) (excerpt):

16 No. 1: April 4:02

Columbia (UK) L2317 (AX4677 (11417))
Recorded in London, 18th February 1929

Karl Natanael BROMAN (1887-1966)

17 **Rokoko** 3:24

His Master's Voice (UK?) X2730
(7-285517 (BW1548-2))
Recorded in Stockholm in 1928

Percy GRAINGER (1882-1961)

18 **Jutish Medley (Danish Folk Songs collected by Evald Tang Kristensen and Percy Grainger) (1922 & 1927)** 7:56

Columbia (US) 50129-D (98613 (3-A-1)
and 98614 (3-A-1))
Recorded in New York, 21st January 1929

Abram CHASINS (1903-1987)
Three Chinese Pieces (1925):

19 A Shanghai Tragedy 3:42
20 Flirtation in a Chinese Garden 1:47
21 Rush Hour in Hong Kong 1:21

His Master's Voice DA1257 (OB1798-1A
(30-7985) and OB1798-2A (30-7927)
Recorded in London, 12th November 1931

Yves NAT (1890-1956)

22 **Pour un Petit Moujik (1915)** 2:54
Columbia (England) D13114 (WL1457-3 (38445))
Recorded at the Studio Albert, Paris,
9th February 1929

Alessandro PERONI (1874-1964)

23 **Ronda notturna** 3:32

24 **Le Campane di S. Lorenzo in Correggiano** 3:08
Cetra (Italy) TI.7055 (53232B.C. and 53233B.C.)
Recorded in Milan, 3rd April 1948

Mario CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO (1895-1968)

25 **Cipressi (Remembering the Cypresses of Usigliano di Sari) (1920)** 8:25
RCA Victor 16449-A/B
Recorded in New York, 5th January 1939

Aaron COPLAND (1900-1990)
Four Piano Blues

26 No. 1: Freely Poetic 2:07
(for Leo Smit) (1947)

27 No. 2: Soft and Languid 2:19
(for Andor Foldes) (1934)

28 No. 3: Mutted and Drugged 2:41
(for William Kapell) (1948)

29 No. 4: With Bounce 1:09
(for John Kirkpatrick) (1926)
Decca (UK) K.2372 (AR.13657-1 and AR.13658-1)
Recorded at West Hampstead Studios, London,
23rd May 1949

Leo SMIT (1921-1999)
Suite of Piano Pieces (1944) (excerpt):

30 **Toccata-Breakdown** 2:43
Concert Hall Society, Inc.
Release B9 (Side 3 (1202 (CHS#202-7)))
Recorded in New York in 1946

Producers: Marina A. Ledin and Victor Ledin
Restoration Engineering and Mastering: Ed Thompson
Special thanks to Michael Gray, Peter Ford, and Lance Bowling for their discographic research, loan of materials and assistance on this project.

Composers at the Piano

An Anthology of Historic Performances 1928-1949

It is always fascinating to hear composers performing their own works. Throughout the twentieth century enterprising record companies captured performances of many of the greatest composers. "Urtext", one critic, called such performances. Perhaps. In reality these are audio snapshots in time – interpretative glimpses into the minds of musical geniuses, whose only legacy would have remained singularly captured on paper, had it not been for the advent of the phonograph. As listeners we are privileged to be able to hear composers present to us their interpretations of their own music. For performers these historic documents provide insight into the creative and interpretative process. In assembling this anthology we chose not to refrain from the usual group of composer-pianists, and instead sought to present a varied and intriguing collection of composers from many different countries, whose own recorded piano legacies are smaller and rarely heard today.

Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977) studied first at the Petrograd Conservatory (1917-1918) with Sokolov and Kobiliansky, but the civil war prevented him from continuing his studies there. Settling for a time in Tiflis he resumed studies with Thomas de

Hartmann and T. Ter-Stepanova (1918-1921). In 1921 the family went to Paris and Alexander studied with Isidor Philipp and Paul Vidal. A concert of his own piano works in 1922 in London led him to receive a commission from Anna Pavlova. The ballet, *Ajanta's Frescoes*, was produced by her troupe in London. After that Tcherepnin's career as composer-pianist flourished. By 1926 he had given his first American tour. In the 1930s he made two extensive tours of China and Japan, and established a publishing house in Tokyo for promoting Chinese and Japanese composers. After the war he resumed his concertizing career, and in 1949 joined the faculty of De Paul University in Chicago, becoming a U.S. citizen in 1958. Although his early music owed much to Romantic Russian traditions, Tcherepnin was always fascinated by the major-minor triad and its modal possibilities, so he evolved his own musical language, utilizing a nine-tone synthetic scale from the superimposition of two such triads. Tcherepnin once wrote: "I am a pianist, and my great love outside of composition is to perform." He recorded steadily throughout his career beginning in the 1930s. Probably his most popular piano work is his early set of *Bagatelles, Op. 5* [1-8], which he composed between 1912 and 1918. Recorded in Berlin and issued in 1935, Tcherepnin's earliest twelve-inch 78 rpm recording only features eight of the *Bagatelles*.

A virtual contemporary of Tcherepnin, prominent Bulgarian composer-pianist **Pancho Vladigerov (1899-1978)** was actually born in Zürich. He began musical studies in Sofia, but eventually went to Berlin where he took lessons in composition from Paul Juon amd Georg Schumann, and piano with Leonid Kreutzer at the Akademie der Künste. He worked as conductor and composer at the Max Reinhardt Theater in Berlin until 1932 when he returned to Sofia. Until 1972 he was professor of piano and composition at the Bulgarian State Conservatory of Music in Sofia. Among his many students was Alexis Weissenberg. Vladigerov was a virtuosic pianist, performing frequently his five piano concertos. He also left a recorded legacy of many of his other solo works. Vladigerov's music is an artful and brilliant combination of Bulgarian folk influences, peculiar melodic and rhythmic patterns, peppered with stark modern harmonies. We hear the rare early recording of two movements from his *Suite Bulgare*, Op. 21 (1926) [9-10] made in Berlin on an Ibach piano, two years after publication of the score.

Dutch-born American composer, pianist, violinist and teacher **Bernard Wagenaar (1894-1971)** grew up in a musical family in The Netherlands, at Arnhem. At fifteen he went to Utrecht to study at the Muziekschool van de Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst. His teachers included Gerard Veerman, violin, Mme. Bekker-Veerman, piano, and harmony, counterpoint and composition with his father, Johan Wagenaar (1862-1941). In 1920 he settled in the U.S. and became a naturalized citizen in 1927. From 1921-23 he was violinist with the New York Philharmonic. He was on the faculty of the Institute of Musical Art in New York, staying there as it transitioned into The Juilliard School (1925-1968). Recorded in New York on 23rd April, 1935, the short solo piano piece, *A Tale* [11], was the accompanying work to Wagenaar's recording of the *Sonatina for Cello and Piano* (with cellist Naoum Benditzky). The notes that accompanied that recording state: "The piano piece is, so far as the form is concerned, written in the manner of an improvisation. It nevertheless has a certain inner construction, and is held together organically by the composer's typical means of discoursing with short motives. The composer insists that the title is suggestive of no specific happening, and thus remains purely a musical tale, so that the listener is free to indulge in his own romantic reactions if he wishes to do so."

Eminent English pianist, teacher and composer **Tobias Matthay (1858-1945)** studied piano at the Royal Academy of Music, first with William Dorrell. After winning the Sterndale Bennett scholarship, Matthay continued his studies with Sir George Macfarren, took master-classes from Sir William Sterndale Bennett, and after Sterndale Bennett's death in 1875 completed his studies with Ebenezer Prout and Sir Arthur Sullivan. Matthay joined the faculty of the Royal Academy, remaining there as full professor until 1925. In 1900 he established his piano school in London. Stressing what eventually became known as *The Matthay System*, the school became an enormous

success and students flocked to him and carried his teaching methods abroad. Matthay's teaching method stressed mastery of both the psychological and physiological aspects of piano performance. His teaching instilled in his students knowledge of the causes of all good effects and bad effects, technical and musical. He stressed methods of relaxation and always taught that musical performance is the constant search for the Beautiful. He published many books on piano technique and piano playing principles. Among his most famous students are Dame Myra Hess, Ray Lev, Eileen Joyce, Nina Milkina, Denise Lassimonne, Eunice Norton, Bruce Simonds (who also co-founded the American Matthay Association), Ernest Lush, Betty Humby, Raie da Costa, Hilda Dederich, Rae Robertson, York Bowen, Harriet Cohen, Evelyn Howard-Jones, Harold Craxton, Irene Scharrer, among many others. As a composer Matthay left a legacy of over 45 works with opus numbers, mostly for the piano. As a pianist, he only left one 78 rpm recording made in London on 16th November, 1929, that features the *Prelude* and *Bravura* (Finale), from his *Studies in the form of a Suite*, *Op. 16* (1910) [12-13] and two selections from *On Surrey Hills, Op. 30* (1919), *Twilight Hills* and *Wind-Sprites* [14-15].

Eminent English composer **John Ireland (1879-1962)** was born into a family of Scottish descent. His father, Alexander Ireland, a publisher and newspaper proprietor, was seventy at his son's birth. John was the youngest of the five children of Alexander's second marriage (his first wife had died). His mother, Annie, née Nicholson, was thirty years younger than Alexander. She died in October 1893, when John was fourteen, and Alexander died the following year. He received a fine general education before entering the Royal College of Music in London in 1893. There he studied piano with Frederick Cliffe (1857-1931) and composition with Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, and to make ends meet he obtained positions as organist in various churches. In 1905 Ireland received his Bachelor of Music Degree from the University of Durham. From 1923-1939 he taught at the Royal College of Music where, among his pupils, were Benjamin Britten, Alan Bush, E.J. Moeran, Richard Arnell, Geoffrey Bush, and Anthony Bernard. Although virtually all of his compositional output has been recorded, Ireland himself left only a few commercial recordings, among them are his performances of his violin and cello sonatas, and this first recording (made in London on 18th February, 1929) of *April*, from *Two Pieces* (1925) [16].

Swedish pianist and composer **(Karl) Natanael Broman (1887-1966)** was music director of Swedish Radio (1925-1951). He studied piano in Stockholm (1902-1911) with H. Thegerström and L. Lundberg, and composition with E. Ellberg and A. Hallén. In addition he also studied piano with Ignaz Friedman and composition with K. Kämpf in Berlin. As a composer he wrote a symphonic poem, *Fritiof och Ingeborg* (1912), a ballad for baritone and orchestra, *Kung Lif och Drottning Död* (1913), a sonata and romance for violin and piano, many songs and piano solo pieces. His most famous piano composition, *Rokoko* [17] is heard in an early recording made in 1928 in Stockholm. The work was not published until 1938.

The Australian **Percy Aldridge Grainger (1882-1961)** saw himself as an innovator. Writing about what he called "Free music", he said: "It is my only important contribution to music". Only in the last two decades has there been a comprehensive assessment of Grainger's pianistic and compositional art, with numerous recordings of his works and reissues of some of his most important historic recordings. Grainger studied piano with Louis Pabst, and in 1894 went to Germany where he studied with James Kwast in Frankfurt. He also took a few lessons from Busoni. In 1906 he met Grieg and became a lifelong proponent of Grieg's music and one of the great performers of Grieg's *Piano Concerto*. Grainger recorded *Jutish Medley* (1927) [18] in New York on 21st January, 1929. Grainger published this work as one of his Danish folk music settings, assembled from Danish Folk Songs collected by Evald Tang Kristensen and Percy Grainger in 1922 and 1927. He further provides the original titles of the Jutland folk songs used in this medley as: *Choosing the Bride*, *The Dragoon's Farewell*, *Husband and Wife* (a quarreling-duet), *The Shoemaker from Jerusalem*, and *Lord Peter's Stable-Boy*.

American pianist, composer, writer, educator and radio personality, **Abram Chasins (1903-1987)** studied piano with Ernest Hutcheson and composition with Rubin Goldmark. At the behest of Josef Hofmann, Chasins was appointed at the age of 23 to the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He was a radio personality on WQXR as early as 1941 and from 1972 to 1977 he was on the faculty of the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where he also was heard on radio station KUSC. He published books on Van Cliburn and Stokowski, but his most popular and entertaining volume remains *Speaking of Pianists*. A master piano stylist, he wrote two piano concertos, 24 preludes, and various virtuoso two-piano transcriptions. His best-known works are the *Three Chinese Pieces* (1925) [19-21], which he also orchestrated. Although they have been recorded and performed by numerous pianists, Chasins' first recording of the set, made in London on 12th November, 1931 (around the time of his London début) remains the performance by which all others should be judged.

French pianist and composer **Yves Nat (1890-1956)** was a child prodigy, who at ten conducted his own orchestral *Fantasy*. Saint-Saëns and Fauré heard him and insisted that he be sent to the Paris Conservatiore, where he took a premier prix in 1907 in Louis Diémer's piano class. His career began in 1909 when Debussy took him to England. He toured internationally and recorded extensively. In 1934 he began teaching at the Paris Conservatiore, which also allowed him more time for composition. Nat produced works for orchestra, for chorus and orchestra, a *Piano Concerto* (1953) and songs and solo piano pieces. As a pianist Nat is particularly noted for recordings of Beethoven and Schumann. The little oddity, *Pour un Petit Moujik* (1915) [22] may have been his own whimsical answer to the work Nat recorded on the flip side of the ten-inch 78 rpm disc (recorded at the Studio Albert, in Paris on 9th February, 1929) – Igor Stravinsky's *Danse russe*, from *Trois Mouvements de Pétrouchka* (1921).

Italian pianist and composer **Alessandro Peroni (1874-1964)** is a bit of a rarity. He appears in virtually no published dictionary or musical encyclopedia. Born in Mondavio, near Pesaro, Italy, he studied at the Liceo Musicale Rossini in Pesaro. From 1910 to 1939 he taught at the Liceo at the invitation of its director, Amilcare Zanella. Peroni composed over 250 different works, including pieces for orchestra, band, piano, chamber music, songs, organ works, and numerous transcriptions. He also composed three operas, *Il maestro di Cavallara*, *La beffa*, and *Il signore del pigiama*. Peroni toured throughout Italy as pianist, often playing his own compositions, and was praised as a "*Pianista di straordinaria agilità, precisione e sensibilità interpretativa*" (a pianist of extraordinary agility, precision and sensibility in interpretation). In 1987 his scores, manuscripts, personal papers and related materials were deposited at the Scuola Comunale di Musica di Mondavio, where scholars, musicians and the public now have the facility to study his legacy. In a recording made in Milan on 3rd April, 1948, we hear Peroni perform two of his piano landscapes: *Ronda notturna* [23] and *Le Campane di S. Lorenzo in Correggiano* [24].

Italian-American composer and pianist **Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968)** was born in Florence. He began studies with his mother, Noemi Senigaglia. He continued his education at the Cherubini Institute, receiving a degree in piano at the age of fifteen and a degree in composition at the age of eighteen (his teacher was Ildebrando Pizzetti). After composing a patriotic song during World War I (*Fuori i barbari*), Castelnuovo-Tedesco attained considerable eminence in Italy between the two wars, and his music was often heard in European festivals, but that was all to change. In 1939 the Castelnuovo-Tedescos left Italy to escape the anti-Semitism then developing in that country once Mussolini had signed his pact with Hitler. They settled in the United States in Los Angeles, becoming naturalized citizens in 1946. In Los Angeles Castelnuovo-Tedesco composed not only for the film industry, but continued writing eloquent and rhapsodic works. Often inspired by his friends, he composed for Heifetz, Piatigorsky, Segovia, Previn, Schweitzer, Gieseking and Amparo Iturbi. Recorded in New York on 5th January, 1939, shortly after he had arrived in the

United States, *Cipressi* (Remembering the Cypresses of Usigliano di Sari) (1920) [25] is one of Castlnuovo-Tedesco's most eloquent Florentine-inspired works.

By his own admission, **Aaron Copland (1900-1990)** grew up in a household, where music existed but was not particularly fostered or cultivated. Young Aaron discovered music's possibilities when he was thirteen, after a series of piano lessons with Leopold Wolfsohn. From Wolfsohn it was a matter of time before he began harmony classes with Rubin Goldmark. In 1921 Copland saved enough money to go to Paris to study with Paul Vidal and Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger especially encouraged his first efforts at serious composition, even going so far as to commission him to write a concerto for her American tour. After three years in the French capital, Copland returned to America. His compositions were filling his briefcase to capacity; the only difficulty was to find performances for them. Nadia Boulanger started the ball rolling by appearing as organ soloist in Copland's *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*. The resultant publicity brought him to the attention of Serge Koussevitzky, the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Koussevitzky commissioned from Copland an orchestral work incorporating jazz idioms and the result was the *Music for the Theater* of 1925. By 1930, Copland's name was well known in America as one of the first native composers to achieve a reputation for himself, not only abroad but at home too. What followed from his pen were works which made Aaron Copland almost a household name – *El Salón Mexico, Billy the Kid, Lincoln Portrait, Rodeo, Fanfare for the Common Man,* and, of course, *Appalachian Spring*. Copland was a formidable pianist, although he deferred to "professional pianists" to express his musical intentions more eloquently. He recorded as conductor, as solo pianist, and in chamber music. As a result we have a wonderful overview of his pianistic talents, going back to his earliest days. Copland recorded his *Four Piano Blues* [26-29] while in London on 23rd May, 1949. Although these four pieces were composed at various times between 1926 and 1948, each piece is dedicated to a pianist with a close connection with the composer – John Kirkpatrick, Andor Foldes, William Kapell and Leo Smit. The complete set received its first public performance by Leo Smit in 1950, which, connects the Copland work with the final piece on this anthology.

Leo Smit (1921-1999) was born to Russian immigrants in Philadelphia. His father was a violinist who performed in The Philadelphia Orchestra under Stokowski, in the Cincinnati Symphony under Reiner, and in the NBC Symphony under Toscanini. After studies with Martha Lantner, Joseph Wissof and Bert Shefter, Smit traveled to Moscow in 1929 with his mother for three months with Dmitri Kabalevsky on a scholarship at the Moscow Conservatory. Returning to Philadelphia in 1930, he continued his studies with Isabelle Vengerova at the Curtis Institute. He also studied piano with José Iturbi (1933-1935) and composition with Nicolas Nabokov in 1935. Smit made his début at Carnegie Hall in February 1939. As a composer Smit wrote three symphonies, an opera and a chamber opera, two ballets, a piano concerto, more than ninety songs, and numerous chamber, choral, and piano works. In 1962 Leo Smit began teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo. His papers and compositions are housed there at the university library. His association with Aaron Copland was lifelong not only in the concert hall but in the recording studio. Smit recorded all of Copland's piano works, and even appeared with Copland as a duo piano team. In 1946 Leo Smit recorded his *Toccata-Breakdown* [30], from his *Suite of Piano Pieces* (1944). According to Arthur V. Berger, "Toccata-Breakdown is based on "Callahan", a tune in *Frontier Ballads* collected by Alan Lomax, and relies for its sources, as the second part of its title implies, on certain devices of American country dances. Smit draws attention to the elements common to the Baroque toccata, with its swift, running passages punctuated by chords, and our "breakdown", in which the running passages are the giddy improvisations of the players, and the chords represent the periodic syncopated clapped hands or stamping feet."

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Playing Time 74:40

1-8	**Alexander TCHEREPNIN:** Bagatelles, Op. 5 (1912-1918) (excerpts)	8:20
9-10	**Pancho VLADIGEROV:** Suite Bulgare, Op. 21 (1926) (excerpts)	7:18
11	**Bernard WAGENAAR:** A Tale	3:07
	Tobias MATTHAY:	
12-13	Studies in the form of a Suite, Op. 16 (1910) (excerpts)	4:18
14-15	On Surrey Hills, Op. 30 (1919) (excerpts)	3:25
16	**John IRELAND:** Two Pieces (1925) (excerpt)	4:02
17	**Karl Natanael BROMAN:** Rokoko	3:24
18	**Percy GRAINGER:** Jutish Medley (1922 & 1927) (Danish Folk Songs collected by Kristensen and Grainger)	7:56
19-21	**Abram CHASINS:** Three Chinese Pieces (1925)	6:50
22	**Yves NAT:** Pour un Petit Moujik (1915)	2:54
	Alessandro PERONI:	
23	Ronda notturna	3:32
24	Le Campane di S. Lorenzo in Correggiano	3:08
25	**Mario CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO:** Cipressi (1920) (Remembering the Cypresses of Usigliano di Sari)	8:25
26-29	**Aaron COPLAND:** Four Piano Blues (1926-1948)	8:16
30	**Leo SMIT:** Suite of Piano Pieces (1944) (excerpt)	2:43

This unique anthology captures an intriguing array of composer-pianists whose recorded piano legacies are rarely heard today compared to the usual group of better-known composer-pianists. Spanning many different countries and more than two decades of recorded history, the performances range from the unbridled flair of Percy Grainger and the vitality of Pancho Vladigerov to rare recordings by Alexander Tcherepnin and John Ireland, both of whom left behind few commercial discs. There are also less well-known composers, such as the Swede Karl Broman, heard on a rare 1928 Stockholm disc, and the virtually unknown Italian pianist and composer Alessandro Peroni.

A complete track list can be found in the booklet.

Producers: Marina A. Ledin and Victor Ledin • Restoration Engineering and Mastering: Ed Thompson
Special thanks to Michael Gray, Peter Ford, and Lance Bowling for their discographic research, loan of materials and assistance on this project. • Cover Photograph: Paolo Zeccara

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