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contribution of American music repertoire.



AMERICAN DISCOVERIES

Edwin Grasse
Daniel Bernard Roumain
Henry Cowell
Anna Priscilla Risher
Mortimer Wilson

The Rawlins Piano Trio

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The Composers

Edwin Grasse (1884 – 1954) was born in New York City. Despite blindness, either from birth or infancy—sources differ—he achieved a substantial career as a violinist and composer. In childhood he had violin and harmony lessons with Carl Hauser and in 1898 went to study with César Thomson at the Brussels Conservatory. He then enrolled at the Royal Conservatory, where in 1900 he won a first prize in violin performance. With the backing of Joachim, Grasse made his Berlin debut in 1902 with the Berlin Philharmonic. He returned to the United States in 1903 and played the Brahms concerto in his New York debut. Successful tours of Europe and America followed, but little is known of his later life. A program indicates that Maud Powell played his *Polonaise*, and there are complimentary reviews dating from his return to this country. One from *The New York Times*, of a concert of his own music on November 29, 1913, praises his talent as composer and violinist, and as pianist in his cello sonata.

Grasse was successful in publishing a sonata for violin and piano as well as six smaller works. In manuscript he left one or two symphonies, an orchestral suite, an American suite for violin and orchestra, a violin concerto, a string quartet, two or three piano trios, three to seven violin sonatas, a sonata for violin and organ, a cello sonata, and numerous smaller works. His violin and piano piece, *Waves at Play* (*Wellenspiel*) has been recorded by Heifetz, Perlman, and Joshua Bell; and a recording of his *Festival Overture* for piano and organ is also available. His *Second Trio in A Major*, is not dated, but must predate the source published in 1914 which lists it. It is in standard four-movement configuration with a third movement minuet instead of a scherzo. The writing is thoroughly romantic and, though not innovative, Grasse achieved a Brahmsian sweep and grandeur with instrumental writing both virtuosic and grateful.

New York-based violinist and composer **Daniel Bernard Roumain** (DBR) (b. 1971) received music degrees from Vanderbilt University and The University of Michigan, however, his musical influences emanate as well from his Haitian roots, jazz styles, rock music, hip-hop and more. DBR blends these influences, along with his commentary on the human experience into an innovative soundscape in compositions as varied as orchestral, film, theater and dance scores, solo works, chamber music, and electronica. His early success has caught the attention of significant media outlets—*CBS Evening News*, *Crain's New York Business*, *Esquire Magazine*, *National Public Radio*, *The Boston Globe* and others.

DBR tours internationally as violinist and band leader for his electro-acoustic show, *DBR & the Mission*. As a soloist, he has a debut album, *études4violin&electronix* on Thirsty Ear Recordings. Collaborators include creative personalities such as Philip Glass, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance

Company, DJ Spooky and DJ Scientific. He has completed commissions for guitarist Eliot Fisk and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra (*WE MARCH!*) and for the Vermont Youth Orchestra (*Voodoo Violin Concerto*). In 2008 he premiered *Darwin's Meditation for the People of Lincoln*, a musical setting of a pocket play by Daniel Beaty. Other recent commissions have been received from ESPN, Inari Winds, Providence String Quartet, Florida Youth Orchestra, and the Ahn and Claremont Piano Trios. He is in demand for a number of artist residencies—Seattle Theater Group, Seattle's More Music @ The Moore, Harlem School of the Arts, the American Composers Orchestra, Arizona State University, the Orchestra of St. Luke's and Vanderbilt and Drexel Universities.

Volvic Maritim, was composed in 2006 and is the first work in a series of commissions by the Rawlins Piano Trio. It has two connected movements, entitled *Wanting* and *Needing*. The slow, plodding, *Wanting* begins with a mournful tune presented by the cello. The other voices enter canonically with the same theme. This theme dissolves into a mesmerizing, minimalist pattern in the piano, signaling the beginning of the second movement. Throughout *Needing*, the ideas alternate and develop.

Henry Cowell (1897-1965) was a major figure in American music. Born in northern California, he began violin lessons at age five and resolved to become a composer at an early age. His parents were “philosophical anarchists,” and their influence led him to accept unusual sounds and ideas, including non-Western music. He also had a life-long interest in Irish folksong and lore. Early on, Cowell established impressive credentials as an innovator. Work with Charles Seeger at the University of California, Berkeley, resulted in the publication of *New Musical Resources*, which catalogued and classified all the techniques which Cowell had explored, including pianistic innovations such as the strumming, scraping, and plucking inside the piano most notably employed in *The Banshee*, and the rolled clusters of notes in the piano's low register found in *The Tides of Manaunau*. Cowell's concerts created sensations wherever he went, both here and abroad. He was also a great supporter of other innovators, contributing essays to journals and books, founding the New Music Society to promote concerts, and publishing many new works, including some by Charles Ives, in *New Music*, a quarterly publication dedicated to bringing out music which traditional publishers found too risky.

Cowell was prolific, writing nearly constantly throughout his life in an eclectic variety of styles. Not in the experimental vein, the *Trio, Four Combinations for Three Instruments*, was written in 1924 and explores all possible combinations of the instruments. The first movement, for violin and cello, is an expressive study in counterpoint that settles into D minor at the end. The second, for violin and piano, features the violin's rhapsodic declamations over the piano's repeated polyrhythmic harmonies.

Cello and piano imitation forms the core of the brief and rapid third movement, ending on a less-than-conclusive altered ninth chord. The final movement, in which all three instruments finally play together, begins with a simple C-sharp minor melody in the violin, answered by the cello. The complexity increases throughout, complicating both meter and harmony, before an affirmative final cadence brings the work to a satisfying conclusion.

According to family accounts, Pittsburgh native **Anna Priscilla Risher** (1875-1946) excelled as a pianist, organist, cellist, violinist, singer and composer. Her formal musical training culminated in advanced studies at the Pennsylvania College for Women and the New England Conservatory. Her teachers included significant American musical figures such as fellow Pittsburgh native, pianist and composer Adolph M. Foerster (Rawlins Piano Trio CD—*American Romance*), New England Conservatory director and composer George Whitefield Chadwick, pianist Carl Stasny, who worked with both Liszt and Clara Schumann, and Leo Schulz, cellist of Berlin, Gewandhaus, Boston and New York Philharmonic orchestras.

Risher served as an organist, choir director and teacher in the Pittsburgh area for a number of years before moving to California in 1918. After four years as music director for the Cumnock School for Girls, Risher moved to the small artist community of Laguna Beach, in order to focus on composition. There she developed an interest in art and painting, at which she also excelled. During this time she founded the Anna Risher String Quartet, the Hollywood Women's Symphony Orchestra and the Laguna Beach Symphony Orchestra, the last of which she also conducted.

Risher's compositions include piano solo, chamber, choral and orchestral works, a piano concerto and more than 300 songs. In addition, she authored pedagogical materials. Her works were some of the most popular to appear in *Etude* magazine in the 1920s. Contemporary reviewers remarked on her gift for melodic invention, showing both charm and originality. In these four pieces for piano trio, the melodies are pleasant and unassuming but are subtly asymmetrical, gently blurring the seams of the ABA forms. An article in the *Los Angeles Express* hailed the popularity of *From the West*, reporting that it was repeated daily, as an encore, during a ten week tour by the Stearns Trio. The piece bears a dedication: *To The Sterns [sic] Girls*. All four pieces were published by The Arthur P. Schmidt Company—*Andante Religioso* and *Berceuse*, in 1922 and *Mazurka* and *From the West*, in 1924.

Mortimer Wilson (1876-1932) was born in Chariton, Iowa. He graduated from the Chicago Musical College where he studied organ with Wilhelm Middleschulte, violin with Simon Jacobsohn, and composition with Frederick Grant Gleason. Wilson then taught from 1901 to 1907 at the University of Nebraska, where in 1907 he wrote and published *The Rhetoric of Music*. Both Jacobsohn and Gleason had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory; and in 1907, when Wilson sought advanced training, he followed their example. In his three years at the Leipzig Conservatory he studied conducting with Hans Sitt and composition with Max Reger. In his last year he also taught at the Conservatory. John Tasker Howard wrote of the rigorously trained Wilson that he "... could toss complicated counterpoint from his pen as easily as he could talk to his friends." Upon his return to this country in 1911, Wilson taught at the Atlanta Conservatory and conducted the Atlanta Philharmonic Orchestra. By 1918 he had taken a job as a consulting editor for the National Academy of Music in New York City. His oeuvre includes five symphonies, two sonatas for violin and piano, seven organ preludes, three suites for flute and piano, and scores for six films. An overture, *New Orleans (Mardi Gras)*, Op. 64, is in the Fleischer Collection of Orchestral Music at the Free Library of Philadelphia and was awarded the Riesenfeld Prize for an American overture in 1920.

From My Youth, Op. 5 was published in 1911 and premiered by the Sitting Trio. Issued in two parts, only the first four pieces are included in this recording, as the last four were recorded by the Rawlins Piano Trio previously, before the first set was located. They are brief character pieces that exhibit complexity and musical sophistication in sharp contrast to their childlike titles. All gracefully written with equal treatment of the instruments, Wilson's skill is evident in the ease with which distant harmonic regions are seamlessly traversed. The lilting *Teddy Bear's Lullaby* is built around the interchange of a dotted 6/8 rhythm. The *Waltz of the Negro Dolls* is a boisterous grand dance with active string parts and frequent hemiolas breaking up the standard waltz meter. Its title includes a word that, though unacceptable now, was most respectful in 1911. *Around the May Pole* is the briefest movement in which each instrument weaves its ribbon of notes into a tidy mosaic, while in *Tiny Spinner* the piano weaves a fabric of continuous sixteenths. Over this texture the theme is presented first by the cello, then by the violin, followed by the strings in octaves. Wilson later orchestrated the suite, which was performed by the New York Philharmonic.

Notes by Richard Rognstad and Susan Keith Gray

THE ARTISTS

Founded in 1987, the **Rawlins Piano Trio** performs regularly throughout the United States and abroad, most recently in Asia and Latin America. The trio has formed a reputation as a preeminent interpreter of 19th and early 20th century American music and, with this publication, has four CDs of these works, all on the Albany Records label. In contrast, this disc presents the Trio's debut work of its composer commissioning program—*Volvic Maritim* by Daniel Bernard Roumain. Within the realm of standard repertoire, the Trio's expertise includes two performances of the rarely-attempted cycle of the complete works for piano trio by Beethoven. Active as teachers as well as performers, the artists are on the faculty of The University of South Dakota Department of Music. The ensemble is named in honor of Marjorie Rawlins and the late Robert Rawlins, its principal benefactors and graduates of The University of South Dakota in the 1940s.



John Thomson was born in England and moved to New Zealand, where he began his violin studies. Thomson has performed as soloist with orchestras throughout New Zealand and the USA, made appearances before dignitaries such as Queen Elizabeth II and former President George Bush, and has served as concertmaster for several orchestras. Critics have praised him as a “stellar soloist” with “brilliant technique and appealing cantabile” and have called his playing a “rare treat.” Other press reviews state: “The audience was in awe of Thomson’s performance”, “Thomson’s performance of Wieniawski was a highlight of the season”, and mentioned “the highest classical style.” Italian violinist Franco Gulli wrote to Thomson after a performance “I have admired your remarkable facility in performing the music of Paganini.” After a recent recital in Seoul, Korea, a reviewer wrote: “his playing was full of great sonority combined with a tender sweetness that tugged at the audience’s heart.” Thomson has published his arrangement of some music of the romantic Norwegian violin virtuoso, Ole Bull (this arrangement was praised by the late Lord Yehudi Menuhin as an “excellent arrangement”) and has written articles on the music of Tartini, Viotti and Joachim. He is also considered to be an expert on Gypsy violin music. Thomson has enjoyed a variety of musical experiences, including the standard classical repertoire, but also frequently accompanying many celebrities such as Frank Sinatra, Paul McCartney, and Bernadette Peters, and acting the part of musical characters in Hollywood movies.



Marie-Elaine Gagnon was admitted to the program for gifted children at the Conservatoire de Musique de Chicoutimi. She earned a Superior Diploma I from the Conservatoire de Montréal and a Superior Diploma II from the Conservatoire de Québec. Gagnon has a Master’s degree from Florida International University in the studio of Keith Robinson of the Miami String Quartet, and holds a DMA from University of Miami and where she was the assistant of Ross Harbaugh. In Canada, Gagnon won numerous music competitions, performed concertos with orchestra and was featured on CBC radio. She has performed in festivals, including Le festival du Domaine Forget, The Penderecki String Quartet Chamber Workshop, Orford Center and The National Youth Orchestra of Canada. In May 2002, she was the first cellist to win a scholarship from the D. Robinson Foundation for study at the Aspen Music Festival. She has studied with many well known cellists such as Leslie Snider (Quebec), Desmond Hoebig (Cleveland), Philippe Muller (Paris), Roland Pidoux (Trio Pasquier), Paul Watkins (London) and David Ellis (Alcan String Quartet). She was a member of the Ibis Camerata from 2002 to 2006, based in Miami. They performed in several countries such as Russia, at the White Nights Festival, Serbia and Switzerland. In 2006, their first recording, *Glisten*, was released under the Albany Records label. Gagnon taught in the youth program at the Université de Montréal in Canada and at Barry University in North Miami prior to joining the faculty and the Rawlins Piano Trio at the University of South Dakota.



Susan Keith Gray is in demand as pianist, teacher, adjudicator and clinician. Acclaimed as a collaborative pianist, Gray has performed with a number of artists including violinist Scott St. John, cellists Wendy Warner and Anthony Elliott, flutists Leone Buyse and Torkil Bye, clarinetists Richard Hawkins and Theodore Oien and singers Carla Connors, Louis Otey and Scott Piper. She has served on the Instrumental Accompanying Faculty at the Music Academy of the West and as staff accompanist for national competitions. Gray holds degrees in Piano Performance from Converse College and the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and the Doctor of Musical Arts in Chamber Music and Accompanying from The University of Michigan. Her teachers have included George Lucktenberg, Ian Hobson, Eckart Sellheim, and Martin Katz and additional work with Kenneth Drake, Theodore Lettvin, Louis Nagel and Jean Barr. As a member of the Kobayashi/Gray Duo (violin/piano), she has toured in South America and the West Indies as a United States Artistic Ambassador and in Norway, South Africa and throughout the United States. Since 1993, the Duo has actively performed, premiered, edited and lectured about the music of 19th-21st century women composers, leading to publications and CD recordings of these works. Other recordings include songs of African-American composers. In 2005, she was recipient of the prestigious Belbas-Larson Award for Excellence in Teaching given annually by the University of South Dakota.