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DAVID VAN VACTOR (1906-1994), the son of David Ellsworth Van Vactor, an inventor, housebuilder, factory owner, Church of Christ minister, and Mathilda Fenstermacher Van Vactor, was born in Plymouth, Indiana on May 8, 1906. He completed three years in pre-medicine at Northwestern University before enrolling in the School of Music there. At Northwestern, he earned the Bachelor of Music degree in 1928 and the Master of Music in 1935. He was a flute student of Arthur Kittl in the Chicago area. He studied composition with Anne Oldberg, Mark Wessel, Ernst Nolte, and Leo Sowerby. In Europe, he studied at the Wiener Akademie in Austria in 1929 and L'Ecole Normale of Paris in 1931. These studies prepared him for a long and fruitful career as composer, conductor, flutist, and teacher.

The songs written in 1926 and 1927 are his earliest compositions. The first orchestral work, *Chaconne for String Orchestra*, was written in 1928; it was performed the same year by the Rochester Symphony conducted by Howard Hanson. While in Vienna in 1929, Van Vactor studied flute with Josef Niedermayr and composition with Franz Schmitt and harmony with Arnold Schoenberg. That year he composed the *Five Small Pieces for Large Orchestra* and *Ten Variations on a Theme by Beethoven* for Flute and Piano.

In 1930 he composed several more songs and the *Overture Cristobal Colon*. From this point on his composition career progressed steadily. In 1931 he traveled to Paris to study flute with Marcel Moyse and composition with Paul Dukas. The *Masque of Red Death* won honorable mention in the 1932 Swift Competition in Chicago. On his return from Europe he began his professional career as a flutist with the Chicago Symphony, a position he held for the next thirteen years. He was also assistant conductor of the Chicago Civic Orchestra in 1933 and 1934. Van Vactor received the Frederick Stock Scholarship in conducting in 1939 and became Dr. Stock's protege with the Chicago Symphony until Stock's death in 1942. From 1936 to 1943, he taught theory and conducted the chamber orchestra at his alma mater, Northwestern University. He started composing the *First Symphony* in April 1936 and completed it in July 1937. It won a prize of one thousand dollars in a competition sponsored by the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. The first performance was given by that orchestra at Carnegie Hall on January 19, 1939 with the composer conducting.

During this productive period Van Vactor composed the *Five Bagatelles for Strings*, commissioned by Daniel Saidenberg for The Saidenberg Sinfonietta. Van Vactor's most often performed composition, *Overture to a Comedy, No. 2*, was written in 1941 and won the Juilliard Publication Prize in 1942. It was first performed by the Indianapolis Symphony. Performances followed by the Montreal Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony, Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, St. Louis Symphony, and the San Francisco Orchestra. His *Quintet for Flute and Strings* won the Society for American Music Publication Award in 1941.

Under the sponsorship of the United States Department of State and the League of Composers, Van Vactor made four extended tours of South America, as a member of a woodwind quintet in 1941, and as a guest conductor of the orchestras of Rio de Janeiro and Santiago de Chile in 1945, 1946, and 1965. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Chile during 1945-46. He had a listing influence on many young Chilean composers. His *Sinfonia Breve* was performed by the Philharmonic de Santiago, in 1965, the composer conducting. On several occasions in the ensuing years, he conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Palmengarten and Hessian Radio Symphony Orchestras in Frankfurt-am-Main.

From 1943 to 1947, he served as assistant conductor of the Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra and head of the Department of Theory and Composition at the Conservatory of Music. Van Vactor's second symphony was composed in 1943 with the title *Music for the Marines*. It was commissioned by

the Sixth Marine Corps and was first performed by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Fabien Seitzky. During this period, he ran a family farm in Marshall, Missouri, for the war effort. In November 1946 he completed his *Introduction and Presto for Strings*. This excellent work was first performed by the Allied Arts Orchestra of Kansas City with the composer conducting.

In 1947, he founded the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where he was a professor until 1976. He also appointed conductor of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra in 1947, a post he held for the next twenty-five years. Under his direction, the orchestra experienced a period of growth and technical polish and made its first professional recording for the CRI label.

The *Pastorale and Dance for Flute and Strings* was composed in 1947 also. Commissioned by Roy Harris for the Summer Music Festival at Colorado Springs College, it was first performed there with Van Vactor performing and Harris conducting. Van Vactor wrote a somewhat longer version for flute and string quartet.

April 10, 1951 saw the first performance of the *Violin Concerto*, his fourth concerto. Previously had written the *Concerto for Flute* in 1931, the *Concerto a Quattro for Three Flutes and Harp* in 1935, and the *Concerto for Viola*, commissioned by Milton Preves and performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1940. The new violin concerto was first performed with soloist William Starr and the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra under the direction of the composer.

The following years saw the completion of five more symphonies: the third in 1958 and the fourth for chorus and orchestra in March 1971, with the title *Walden*. The *Third Symphony* was first performed by William Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and *Walden* received its first performance by the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra and the Maryville College Concert Choir with the composer conducting. The *Fifth Symphony* was commissioned as a part of the observance of the American Bicentennial by the Tennessee Arts Commission with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts. It was completed on September 19, 1975, and the first performance was given on March 11, 1976 by the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra with Arpad Joo conducting. The *Sixth Symphony*, of 1980, is in two versions composed more or less simultaneously. The orchestral version was begun in January of 1979 and the band version in February of the same year. The *Seventh Symphony* followed in 1982.

The *Suite for Orchestra on Chilean Folk Tunes* of 1963 was first performed by the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra. Van Vactor's compositional style has been described by Katherine K. Preston in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*: "He writes in a concentrated and economical manner; his music is lyric, and often contrapuntal but unmistakably modern in idiom." He is attracted to traditional forms — *passacaglia*, *chaconne*, *fugue*, *sarabande*, etc. Dance rhythms are prominent in his works, and marches are often found as last movements.

In 1957, Van Vactor was awarded a Fulbright grant to study comparative reactions of school children to educational concerts. *Every Child May Hear*, a book by David Van Vactor and Katherine D. Moore (The University of Tennessee Press, 1960), describes the findings of this project. Among his many awards, David Van Vactor was named "Composer Laureate of Tennessee" by the State Legislature in 1975.

He was Professor Emeritus of Composition and Flute at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. David Van Vactor and his wife Virginia Landreth (now deceased), married on May 28, 1931, resided in Knoxville for forty years and after retirement in California. They had two children, daughter Raven Harwood (nee Adriaen Virginia, now deceased) and son David Landreth, living in Boston, Paris, and Normandy.

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