



Knudåge
RIISAGER

*The
Symphonic
Edition*

VOLUME 2



Aarhus
Symphony
Orchestra

Bo Holten

*R*NUDÅGE RIISAGER

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Aarhus Symphony Orchestra

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[1]	T-DOXC (POÈME MÉCANIQUE) FOR ORCHESTRA, OP. 13 (1926).....	8:19
[2]	SYMPHONY NO. 2, OP. 14 (1927).....	14:57
	CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA, OP. 24 (1931).....	16:58
[3]	I Moderato e molto sonoro	1:42
[4]	II Allegro non troppo	5:30
[5]	III Grave	4:03
[6]	IV Allegro vivace	5:43
[7]	PRIMAVERA, CONCERT OVERTURE, OP. 31 (1934).....	5:43
	SINFONIA (SYMPHONY NO. 3), OP. 30 (1935)	21:07
[8]	I Feroce	9:14
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[10]	III Tumultuoso	6:44

Total 67:03

World premiere recordings

KNUDÅGE RIISAGER was born on 6th March 1897 in Port Kunda, Estonia, where his father had built and at that time managed a cement factory. On the death of F.L. Smidth in 1899 Riisager's father was called home to work in Copenhagen for F.L. Smidth Company, and the family then moved to Frederiksberg, where Riisager lived for the rest of his life. After his school leaving exam in 1915 he began studying political science at the University of Copenhagen, and in 1921 he took the *cand. polit.* degree. From 1925 until 1950 he worked as a civil servant – for the last eleven years as a Departmental Head in the Ministry of Finance. Knudåge Riisager died on 26th December 1974.

Alongside this straightforward administrative career Riisager was prolifically active as a composer, music writer and organizer. He had his first training in theory and composition from Otto Malling, and after the latter's death in 1915 from Peder Gram. It was a study trip to Paris in 1923 that were to open the young composer's eyes in earnest to the new currents in contemporary music. In Paris Riisager became a pupil of Albert Roussel and Paul Le Flem, and the French influence can be clearly felt in his compositions from the mid-1920s. While the works of the years up to 1921 have a Nordic, lyrical, sometimes Carl Nielsen-esque tone, the compositions of the years up to the mid-thirties show the influence not only of the Frenchmen Roussel and Satie, but also of Prokofiev, Honegger, Bartók, and not least Stravinsky. Riisager's highly personal style is already evident in the works of these years, as expressed for example by the almost provocative use of dissonant seconds, his fondness for bitonality, the humorous element of sheer music-making, and especially Riisager's own distinctive attitude to orchestral setting.

This whole development can be heard in works like the *Overture for Erasmus Montanus* and *Songs to Texts by Sigbjørn Obstfelder*, both from c. 1920, *Suite dionysiaque* from 1924, as well as *Variations on a Theme of Mezangeau* and *T-Doxc. Poème mécanique*, both from 1926. The last of these works, subtitled *Jabiru, mechanical poetry*, is a musical portrait of what was then a brand-new Japanese aeroplane type. The work is quite in the spirit of the 'machine music' of the period and as such a fine example of the young composer's international orientation and will to experiment.

By 1928 Riisager had begun his collaboration with the ballet at the Royal Theatre; that year he composed the music for Elna Jørgen-Jensen's ballet *Benzin* (Petrol) with stage designs by Robert Storm Petersen. The premiere of this work, as far its reception was concerned, must be described as a resounding flop, and when it first appeared in 1930 it only managed a total of three performances. At the end of the 1930s Riisager resumed his work as a ballet composer, supplying the music for Børge Ralov's Hans Christian Andersen ballet *Tolv med Posten* (Twelve by the Mail). But this was not premiered at the Royal Theatre until 1942, incidentally together with Harald Lander's *Slaraffenland* (Fool's Paradise) and *Qarrtsiluni* – also with Riisager's music. Although he composed a number of significant works in the thirties and forties, it was very much these ballet scores that established Riisager's name with the general public as one of the leading composers of his generation.

And for the next few years, too, ballet music was to be Riisager's most prominent field of work. In 1945 he completed the music for Lander's *Fugl Fønix* (The Phoenix), and in 1947 he reworked and scored a selection of Carl Czerny's piano etudes into his and Harald Lander's ballet *Etude* (later called *Etudes*). With this work in particular Riisager won international recognition, and although there are precedents for the use of orchestrated piano pieces as ballet music (for example Ottorino Respighi's *La Boutique fantasque* (1919)), the combination of the piano etudes and the technical progression of the dance steps has a special dimension which is precisely the point of the work as a whole.

In the 1920s Riisager had been one of the most active champions of the performance of contemporary music in Copenhagen, and was thus one of the founders of *Unge Tonekunstneres Selskab* (the Society of Young Composers) (chairman 1922-24) and a member of the judging committee of the society *Foreningen 'Ny Musik'*. Finally, in 1937, he became the chairman of *Dansk Komponistforening* (the Association of Danish Composers) – a post he kept for 25 years.

Riisager's great initiative and his talent for identifying and solving problems made him an obvious candidate for membership of innumerable society boards, committees, councils etc. not only in Denmark but also outside the country. And as we have seen,

alongside these activities he kept up his work at the Ministry until 1950, when he retired as Head of Department. But Riisager refused to rest on his laurels as a senior citizen, so in 1956 he took up the challenge of becoming director of the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. This is quite thought-provoking, since he had never himself attended the institution. And in fact as director he devoted himself to the administrative work and never taught in the eleven years he was at the Academy.

After finishing *Etude* Riisager went to work on his only opera, the one-acter *Susanne*, to a libretto by his close friend Mogens Lorentzen. It was no great success: it only saw 17 performances, and when it was revived in 1957 – for Riisager's sixtieth birthday – it was only on stage six times. Several major works now followed, including a concerto for the violin virtuoso Wandy Tworek, but as before it was to be ballet music that brought Riisager success. In the fifties his compositions included two ballet scores for the Swedish choreographer Birgit Cullberg: *Månerenen* (Moon Reindeer), premiered at the Royal Theatre in 1957, and *Fruen fra Havet* (The Lady from the Sea), first performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1960. Worth singling out from Riisager's last ten years are *Sangen om det uendelige* (The Song of the Infinite) from 1964 to a text by the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi, and the orchestral works *Trittico* from 1971 and *To Apollo*, composed in 1972.

Knudåge Riisager combined a full-time job as a civil servant with extensive activities as a composer, and besides making an important contribution to many of the organizations of the musical world he was an extremely prolific writer; in his younger years especially in music articles, but later as an essayist, as is evident for example from the fine books *Tanker i tiden* (Thoughts in Time) (1952) and *Det usynlige mønster* (The Invisible Pattern) (1957). In these lucidly formulated literary works, too, we experience Knudåge Riisager as a cultural personality with thorough training in the humanities and a broad cultural perspective.

As a composer Riisager had no pupils or successors, but with his unmistakable personal tone he succeeded in enriching Danish music with an extra dimension of spirituality and pithiness.

THE WORKS

After Riisager's first symphony had been given its first performance in July 1926, there cannot have been much of an interval before he began work on the second symphony, which was finished on 30 March 1927. The work had been dogged by problems with the formal aspects, and indeed its form is unusual. The symphony is arranged in one movement which includes an introduction whose most important thematic material is the first five notes of an ascending E minor scale. The introductory bars and several broad, epic passages recall Sibelius' seventh symphony (1924) – a work that Sibelius himself had performed five times in Copenhagen in October 1924 – but soon characteristic Riisager features appear, not least a bitonal section with percussion. After the introduction has culminated in *ff* and ebbed out in a diminuendo, the spirited first subject enters in the trumpet. Now we are no longer in doubt about the name of the composer! A sonorous string passage leads into the delicate second subject, which is played by the first violins. Soon the first-subject material again takes the stage, and the exposition – which includes much development – ends in *ff* and a double bar. After this the true development section begins. It takes its point of departure in the above-mentioned percussion passage in the exposition and paves the way for fragmentary melodic material in changing instrumentations or instrument groups and short rhythmic figures in the percussion, without any of this seeming willing to come together as proper thematic material. But it emerges that the rhythm initiated by the timpani becomes a major element in a short theme presented by the flutes which appears in double note values in the winds. Soon the first subject forces its way in. The progression is interrupted by a resumption of the introductory motif, and the recapitulation sets in. The bridge to the second subject now comes in a retrograde version – that is, a version of the sonorous string passage from the exposition played backwards. A coda arrives, in which the first subject appears in double note values – accompanied by the ascending E minor scale from the introduction – and finally in quadruple note values. This *cantus firmus* conclusion of the symphony gives it a weight unusual for Riisager's works. As in the first symphony, in the second Riisager avoids the traditional tonal scheme of the sonata form; by means of re-instrumentation and changes in

rhythmic details he creates the variation that 'legitimizes' a repetition of the material in a progression that lacks the most important feature of the form type used: the tonal counterbalancing.

In May 1927 Riisager tried to get Carl Nielsen to put the second symphony on the programme at the society Musikforeningen, but it was not given its first performance until 5 March 1929 under the baton of Emil Reesen. The reviewers were certainly not positive. Hugo Seligmann thought it lacked any true basic thematic substance: "He gives this subjectless material a thematic treatment – so one is to understand: a task intrinsically impossible, for the musical core is absent. But what then is left, one will ask. *Will-o'-the-wisps!* Oddities, pseudo-devilries!" In *Ekstra Bladet* one could read: "It was the now-old story of run-ups to something that never *came* to anything. A number of motifs at sixes and sevens, from highly extreme disharmonic figures to an unoriginal pastoral motif à la Händel; but without internal continuity, so one had the feeling that it might just as well have been played backwards as forwards." As was the case with Riisager's other symphonies, this one too was not performed more than a few times, so no revision of these views has hitherto been possible.

One might well imagine that Riisager's first two symphonies from the middle of the 1920s would have marked both the beginning and the end of his work with this form. In the structuring of these works he had shown with all possible clarity an urge to challenge the genre, so to speak from within. In 1940 he was to launch a radical and famous literary assault on the symphony (the article "The symphony is dead – long live music!"), but apparently he had no desire to let go of the genre. Just as he had been inspired at the beginning of the 1930s to hark back to pre-classical genre names such as concerto and suite, in 1935 he chose to use the title *Sinfonia* for his new work. And indeed, several features entail that here too he makes a considerable break with the fundamental principles in the structuring of a symphony: on the one hand it consists solely of three relatively quick movements: I. *Feroce*, II. *Violente e fantastico*, and III. *Tumultuoso*. There is thus no clear contrasting of movements in the work. And on the other hand the first movement has no thematic dualism, meaning that the tonal conflict quite fundamental to a traditional symphony is absent.

The movements in the *sinfonia* are all in ABA form, and the true driving force of the movements is the thematic-motivic development. The introductory theme which wholly dominates the first movement is based on the first five notes, varied and supplemented as a motif. The motif consists of a triplet where the first note is repeated, as well as a two-note figure where the short first note functions almost as a grace note for the long second note. The seven-bar subject may well seem a little unassuming in terms of intervals – after all, it consists almost exclusively of seconds – on the other hand it contains certain recognizable rhythmic elements. Indeed, rhythm is very much what carries the first movement along. The movement ebbs out in a timpani solo where the same two-note figure alternates with triplets. The second movement is based on a clear-cut main subject and includes reminiscences of the theme of the first movement. Finally, material from the subjects in both the first and second movement appears in the concluding *tumultuoso* movement. In this the rhythmic element emerges even more strongly than it did in the two preceding movements. Thus throughout most of the recapitulation the timpani hammers out the rhythm or the rhythmic units that form part of the introductory theme of the movement.

Sinfonia was given its first performance by the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Nicolai Malko in a Thursday Concert on 21 November 1935. It is interesting to cast a glance at some reviews of the concert. It is clear from these that Riisager still lived up to his old reputation as an *enfant terrible*. In *Ekstra Bladet* one could read that *Sinfonia* "was received – as is usual with Riisager – with both hisses and clapping, something he is alone in among living Danish composers." In another newspaper Riisager was called "Denmark's debatable composer", and *Dagens Nyheder* said that "Riisager occupies his own special position among Danish composers. You never know where you have him: he is the man of surprises and caprices."

Towards the end of 1931 Riisager completed what was probably his first decidedly neo-Baroque work, *Concerto for Orchestra*. Using the word concerto as the title of an orchestral genre was not yet common in 1931. The introductory *Moderato e molto sonoro* is slow-progressing. Shortly afterwards a highly dissonant sound appears in the full orchestra, involving all seven notes of the diatonic scale, and a few bars later a sequence

influenced by Stravinsky sets in. This is a dissonance-rich 'bare texture'. The second movement surprises by using a rocking motif in the main subject that recalls the beginning of the *Dies Irae* sequence from the Catholic Requiem Mass. The meaning of the motif is underscored by its later appearance at great volume. In the grave third movement the rocking motif again plays a decisive role in the thematic material. The last movement is in a rigorous neo-Baroque style, with massively polyphonic sections. As in the two preceding movements, here too the main theme is based on the rocking motif.

It will be understood that the neo-Baroque features are highly prominent; this applies both on the small scale – in motifs and themes – and on the large scale, that is in the concerto grosso-like contrast between both the orchestra's instrument groups – winds and strings, woodwinds and brass – and the individual instruments, such that the concept 'concerto' may refer to the contrasting of the instrument groups and the individualization of the orchestral instruments.

From 1934, finally, comes the short, ebullient concert overture *Primavera*. Even in such a direct work as this one finds examples of harmonic treatment of a radically dissonant type, but the overture also has fine elements of birdsong, as is only fitting for a spring overture. *Primavera* was given its first performance under the baton of Emil Reesen in a concert at Det unge Tonekunstnerselskab in collaboration with the society Dansk Koncert-Forening on 30 January 1935 and was presented in the Tivoli Concert Hall on 4 July the same year.

Several of the radical tendencies one encounters in Riisager's works in the first half of the 1920s are concentrated in *T-DOXC (poème mécanique)* from 1926. In the first fair copy the work is called *Jabiru T-DOXC* and even earlier simply *L'avion*. The title that Riisager finally chose was the name of a then brand new type of commercial aircraft with nine seats which was introduced in Denmark in 1926. Writing music that described automobiles, ocean liners, industrial enterprises, trains and aircraft etc. was a hallmark of the Italian Futurists' artistic agenda around the First World War. To this end several of them had developed sound-producing apparatuses, such that one could go beyond the limitations imposed by the traditional musical instrumentarium. If one did not make use of such aids, it was quite legitimate – as the Frenchman Erik Satie did in the

ballet music for *Parade* (1917) – to include sound-makers such as a siren, a revolver, a typewriter and a wheel of fortune in the orchestra in order to get everyday sounds into the composition.

It is quite certain that at this time Riisager felt strongly drawn to Futurism. In the article "New beauty. Musical marginal notes" (1927) he wrote as follows: "Industrialism has taught us the blue-grey poetry of the machine and the beauty of the elastic tension of steel. The machine is a living organism, a steadily working, calm-breathing being. These experiences of daily life enter into the creative mind as motifs, and the free imagination makes poetry of them. The captivating mystique of the geometrical figures and the wide-ranging thought structures of mathematics induce a rhythmic oscillation in the artistically transformative capacity that generates psychic events and becomes the art of our time. The human psyche is a trembling compass needle which oscillates in order to come to rest in a steady point of equilibrium. It is this oscillation that is expressed by art and therefore it impinges on human problems. A cactus and a lily possess the miracle of beauty, but each in its own way."

As indicated, aircraft had been proposed as obvious subjects for the Futurists who wanted to evoke the modern mechanical world, but the question is whether any other 'aeroplane works' than Riisager's were written at all for orchestra. In the piano literature it is a different matter. As early as 1913 the Russian-American composer Leo Ornstein (1892/93?-2002) created his little piano work *Suicide in an Airplane*, which besides impressionistic features also included sound-painting elements. A more prominent and immediate 'precursor' of Riisager's work, however, was the American George Antheil's (1900-1959) second piano sonata with the by-name *The Airplane* (1921, published in 1931). The work consists of two very short movements, and recurring features are the use of changing time signatures, strong dissonances, cluster effects and intense motoric activity as well as constant repetitions of short rhythmic modules.

However, it is far more likely that the inspiration for Riisager's work must be sought in Arthur Honegger's *Mouvement symphonique No. 1 Pacific 231*, which was composed in 1923, given its first performance in Paris on 8 May 1924 and published the same year. The work, which evokes a modern steam locomotive, was played for the first time in

Denmark at a concert in Dansk Filharmonisk Selskab on 30 March 1926. Like Honegger, Riisager renounces specially sound-painting instruments and instead exclusively uses a traditional symphony orchestra ensemble.

In another newspaper article Riisager says of *T-DOXC*: “What I wanted to express in the composition is the mental sensations evoked in me by the sight of the aeroplane gliding over the vault of heaven. It appears as a dot in the distance – gradually sweeps forward like a swelling tension in the sky and loses itself again on the horizon, wrapped in its mantle of detonations. / It is not my intention to claim that the development of technology gives art new psychological content – but when one looks within oneself on the basis of the new technology and the many magnificent inventions, one will sense a new beauty arising and will be filled with a new aesthetic experience which is in principle different from everything one has earlier felt. / It has been a spiritual experience for me to gaze at the aeroplane swelling above me – and it is this experience, which can only be described in music, that I have wanted to express in ‘Jabiru T-Doxc’.”

Although there are strong resemblances between Riisager's and Honegger's works, the differences between the two works are more striking. In *Pacific 231* Honegger uses a strictly organized rhythmic acceleration – as an expression of the increasing and later decreasing speed of the locomotive – kept within the form of a chorale prelude of the kind familiar from J.S. Bach's later works. Much of the thematic and motivic material in the work can be traced back to the bearing *cantus firmus*. While Honegger lets his orchestra work like a machine and actually seem to be a machine, Riisager tries to describe a mental mood evoked by the sight of the aeroplane; he does this by letting his instruments alternate and thus conjure up a late-Impressionistic soundscape. *T-DOXC* opens with mainly pentatonic chords, but soon a motoric rhythm begins in the violins – this is intensified and becomes an ostinato rhythmic figure. Thus the way is paved for the fast alternation of repeated rhythmic figures – for instance in the large percussion group – which takes the process forward to the culminations of the piece and the subsequent relaxations of tension towards the end, where material from the introduction returns in delicate *pianissimo*. Disregarding the introduction and the ending, the process is typified by a quick, almost restless alternation of motifs and short themes in

various instrumentations. Here too the work differs from *Pacific 231*, where the chorale seems to bear the ‘object’ consistently through the orchestral texture.

The work was given its first performance in the Tivoli Concert Hall on 3 September 1927, when Frederik Schnedler-Petersen stood on the podium.

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THE PERFORMERS

THE AARHUS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA was founded in 1935. The orchestra's repertoire ranges wide, from Baroque music to the very latest composition music. This amounts to some 30 concerts a year, as well as about 15 opera performances, 80 school concerts, chamber concerts and CD recordings. In 1992 the orchestra began recording Vagn Holmboe's 13 symphonies with the Welsh conductor Owain Arwel Hughes. The most stimulating challenges for the orchestra have included the productions of Wagner operas begun by the Danish National Opera in Aarhus in 1983 with the staging of *The Ring of the Nibelung*; later this was followed by *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*. The Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has toured in Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Greece and has played at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival and the Edinburgh Festival. Worth singling out among the orchestra's earlier principal conductors are Ole Schmidt (1978-85), Norman Del Mar (1985-88) and James Loughran (1996-2003), who was succeeded by the Italian conductor Giancarlo Andretta in 2003.

BO HOLTEN (conductor) is equally recognized as a conductor and composer. In 1979 he founded Ars Nova Copenhagen which he conducted until 1996, when he founded the new vocal ensemble Musica Ficta. Holten regularly conducts the best choirs in Europe; from 1990 to 2006 he was one of the principal conductors of the BBC Singers, and since 2008 he has been chief conductor of the Flanders Radio Choir in Brussels. His work with Danish orchestras is constantly on the increase and has earned him praise for recorded interpretations of music by Carl Nielsen, Frederick Delius, Thomas Koppel, Emil Hartmann, Knudåge Riisager and Emil Reesen. As a composer Holten has produced no fewer than six operas, five solo concertos, two symphonies, various orchestral and chamber works, film music and some 35 choral pieces. In 2002 Dacapo issued a CD with a selection of his music for voices *a cappella* sung by the BBC Singers. In the spring of 2009 Holten had a major success at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen with his opera *The Visit of the Royal Physician*, which he conducted himself, and which is available on DVD from Dacapo.

KNUDÅGE RIISAGER *af Claus Røllum-Larsen*

KNUDÅGE RIISAGER blev født den 6. marts 1897 i Port Kunda i Estland, hvor hans far havde ladet opføre og nu ledede en cementfabrik. Ved ingeniør Smidths død i 1899 blev faderen kaldt hjem for at arbejde i København for F.L. Smidth & Co, og familien flyttede da til Frederiksberg, hvor Riisager boede resten af sit liv. Efter studentereksamen i 1915 påbegyndte han det statsvidenskabelige studium ved Københavns Universitet, hvorfra han i 1921 blev cand. polit. Fra 1925 til 1950 fungerede han som embedsmand, de sidste elleve år som kontorchef i Finansministeriet. Knudåge Riisager døde den 26. december 1974.

Sideløbende med denne regelrette administrative karriere udfoldede Riisager en frodig virksomhed som komponist, musikskribent og organisationsmand. Sin første undervisning i teori og komposition fik han af Otto Malling og efter dennes død i 1915 af Peder Gram. Det skulle blive et studieophold i Paris i 1923, som for alvor kom til at åbne den unge komponists øjne for de nye strømninger i samtidens musik. I Paris blev Riisager elev af Albert Roussel og Paul Le Flem, og påvirkningen fra det franske fornemmer man klart i hans kompositioner fra midten af 1920'erne. Medens værkerne fra årene op til 1921 har et nordisk lyrisk, sine steder Carl Nielsensk præg, så opviser kompositionerne fra årene op til midten af 1930'erne foruden indflydelse fra franskmændene Roussel og Satie påvirkning fra Prokofiev, Honegger, Bartók, og ikke mindst Stravinsky. Riisagers stærkt personlige stil skinner dog allerede igennem i værkerne fra disse år. Dette kommer således til udtryk i den nærmest provokerende anvendelse af sekunddissonanser, glæden ved det bitonale, det humoristiske, musikantiske islæt samt ikke mindst den for Riisager særegne orkestrering.

Hele denne udvikling kan aflyttes i værker som *Ouverture til Erasmus Montanus* og *Sange til tekster af Sighjorn Obstfelder*, begge fra ca. 1920, *Suite dionysiaque* fra 1924 samt *Variationer over et Thema af Mezangeau* og *T-Doxc. Poème mécanique*, begge fra 1926. Sidstnævnte værk med undertitlen *Jabiru, mekanisk Digtning*, er et musikalsk portræt af en dengang splinterny japansk flyvemaskinmodel. Værket er helt i pagt med tidens maskinmusik og som sådant et fint eksempel på den unge komponists internationale orientering og vilje til at eksperimentere.

Allerede i 1928 havde Riisager indledt sit samarbejde med balletten på Det Kongelige Teater, idet han dette år komponerede musikken til Elna Jørgen-Jensens ballet *Benzin* med scenografi af Robert Storm Petersen. Premieren på dette værk må, hvad modtagelsen angår, betegnes som en eklatant fiasko, og det opnåede ved fremkomsten i 1930 i alt kun tre opførelser. I slutningen af 1930'erne genoptog Riisager sit virke som balletkomponist, idet han leverede musikken til Børge Ralovs H.C. Andersen-ballet *Tolv med Posten*. Denne fik dog først sin premiere på Det Kongelige Teater i 1942, i øvrigt sammen med Harald Landers *Slaraffenland* og *Qarrrtsiluni* – også med Riisagers musik. Skønt han i 1930'erne og 40'erne komponerede en række betydelige værker, så blev det i høj grad disse balletpartiturer, der i en bredere offentlighed kom til at slå Riisagers navn fast som en af sin generations førende komponister.

Balletmusikken blev også i de følgende år Riisagers væsentligste arbejdsområde. I 1945 færdiggjorde han musikken til Landers *Fugl Fønix*, og i 1947 bearbejdede og instrumenterede han et udvalg af Carl Czernys klaveretuder til sin og Harald Landers ballet *Etude* (senere kaldet *Etudes*). Med dette værk opnåede Riisager i særlig grad international anerkendelse, og selv om der er fortilfælde for anvendelsen af orkestrerede klaversatser som balletmusik (fx Ottorino Respighis *La boutique fantasque* (1919)), så rummer kombinationen af klaveretudernes og dansetrinernes tekniske progression en særlig dimension, som netop er det samlede værks pointe.

I 1920'erne havde Riisager været blandt de mest aktive forkæmpere for fremførelsen af ny musik i København og som sådan medstifter af Unge Tonekunstneres Selskab (formand 1922-24) og medlem af censurkomitéen i Foreningen 'Ny Musik'. Endelig i 1937 blev han formand for Dansk Komponistforening – en post han beholdt i 25 år.

Riisagers initiativrigdom og evne til problemafgrænsning og -løsning gjorde ham til et selvskrevent medlem af talrige foreningsbestyrelser, komitéer, råd m.m. såvel i Danmark som uden for landets grænser. Jævnside med denne virksomhed varetog han som nævnt sit arbejde i ministeriet til 1950, da han trak sig tilbage som kontorchef. Riisager lod sig dog ikke friste af en tidlig pensionisttilværelse, så i 1956 tog han imod opfordringen til at blive direktør for Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatorium. Det er ganske tankevækkende, idet han aldrig selv havde frekventeret denne læreanstalt.

Han helligede sig i øvrigt som direktør det administrative arbejde og underviste ikke i de elleve år, han var tilknyttet konservatoriet.

Efter at have færdiggjort *Etude* gik Riisager i gang med arbejdet på sin eneste opera, enakteren *Susanne*, til en libretto af hans nære ven Mogens Lorentzen. Nogen succes var der ikke tale om: den fik kun 17 opførelser, og ved genoptagelsen i 1957 – i forbindelse med Riisagers 60-årsdag – gik den kun over scenen seks gange. Flere større værker fulgte nu, bl.a. en koncert til violinvirtuosen Wandy Tworek, men det skulle som hidtil blive balletmusikken, der kom til at skaffe Riisager fremgang. Igennem 1950'erne komponerede han bl.a. to balletpartiturer til den svenske koreograf Birgit Cullberg, dels *Måneren*, som havde premiere på Det Kongelige Teater i 1957, dels *Fruen fra Havet*, hvis førsteopførelse fandt sted på Metropolitan Opera House i New York i 1960. Af værkerne fra Riisagers sidste ti år må nævnes *Sangen om det uendelige* fra 1964 til tekst af den italienske digter Giacomo Leopardi samt orkesterværkerne *Trittico* fra 1971 og *Til Apollon*, komponeret 1972.

Knudåge Riisager forenede et fuldtidsarbejde som embedsmand med en omfattende virksomhed som komponist, og ud over at gøre en betydelig indsats i et stort antal af musiklivets organisationer udfoldede han sig som en uhyre flittig skribent. I de unge år var det ikke mindst som artikelforfatter, men senere blev det som essayist, hvilket fremgår af bl.a. de fine bøger *Tanker i tiden* (1952) og *Det usynlige mønster* (1957). Også i disse klart formulerede litterære bidrag møder man Knudåge Riisager som en humanistisk dannet kulturpersonlighed med et bredt kulturelt udsyn.

Som komponist havde Riisager ingen elever eller efterfølgere, men han formåede med sin uforvekslelige, personlige tone at berige dansk musik med en ekstra dimension af spiritualitet og fyndighed.

VÆRKERNE

Efter at Riisager i juli 1926 havde fået uropført sin første symfoni, må der være gået meget kort tid, før han påbegyndte den anden symfoni, som lå færdig den 30. marts 1927. Arbejdet havde været præget af problemer med det formmæssige, og værkets form er da også usædvanlig. Symfonien er disponeret i én sats, som rummer en indledning,

hvis væsentligste tematiske materiale er de første fem trin af en stigende e-molskala. De indledende takter og flere brede episke passager leder tanken hen på Sibelius' syvende symfoni (1924) – et værk som Sibelius selv havde opført fem gange i København i oktober 1924 – men snart dukker karakteristiske Riisager-træk op, ikke mindst en bitonal periode med slagtøj. Efter at indledningen er kulmineret i *ff* og ebbet ud i et *diminuendo*, sætter det kække hovedtema ind i trompet. Nu er man ikke mere i tvivl om komponistens navn! Et klangfuldt strygerafsnit leder over i det sarte sidetema, som spilles af førsteviolinerne. Snart overtager hovedtemastof atter scenen, og ekspositionen – som indeholder megen gennemføring – slutter i *ff* og en dobbeltstreg. Herefter sætter den egentlige gennemføringsdel ind. Den tager udgangspunkt i den nævnte slag-tøjspassage i ekspositionen og baner vej for fragmentariske melodistumper i vekslende instrumentation eller instrumentgrupper og korte rytmiske figurer i slagtojet, der ikke synes at ville samle sig til et reelt tematisk materiale. Men det viser sig, at den rytme, som pauken sætter an, bliver et hovedelement i et kort tema, som fløjterne præsenterer, og som dukker op i dobbelte nodeværdier i blæserne. Snart trænger hovedtemaet sig på. Forløbet afbrydes af en genoptagelse af indledningsmotivet, og reprisen sætter ind. Overledningen til sidetemaet foregår nu med en retrograd version, dvs. en udgave spillet baglæns, af det klangfulde strygerafsnit fra ekspositionen. En koda indtræder, hvori hovedtemaet optræder i dobbelte nodeværdier – ledsaget af den stigende e-molskala fra indledningen – og endelig i firdobbelte nodeværdier. Denne cantus firmus-afslutning på symfonien forlener den med en tyngde, som er usædvanlig for Riisagers værker. Ligesom i den første symfoni undviger Riisager i den anden det traditionelle tonale skema for sonatesatsformen; vha. ominstrumentering og ændring af rytmiske detaljer skaber han den variation, som "legitimerer" en gentagelse af stoffet i et forløb, der mangler den benyttede formtypes væsentligste træk: den tonale udligning.

I maj 1927 forsøgte Riisager at få Carl Nielsen til at programsætte den anden symfoni i Musikforeningen, men først den 5. marts 1929 fik den sin uopførelse under ledelse af Emil Reesen. Anmelderne var bestemt ikke positive. Hugo Seligmann fandt, at der manglede en virkelig tematisk grundsubstans: "Dette temaløse Stof giver han en tematisk Behandling – man vil forstaa: en i sig selv umulig Opgave, thi den musikalske

Kerne mangler. Men hvad er der da tilbage, vil man spørge. *Lygtemænd!* Bizzarrierer, Psevdu-Djævlerier!" I *Ekstra Bladet* kunne man læse: "Det var den snart gamle Historie med Tilløb til noget, der aldrig blev udført. En Række Motiver hulter til bulter, fra stærkt yderliggigende disharmoniske Figurer til et uoriginalt Pastoralemotiv à la Händel; men uden indbyrdes Sammenhæng, saa man fik paa Fornemmelsen, at den lige saa godt kunde være spillet bagfra som forfra." Ligesom det gælder for Riisagers øvrige symfonier, har heller ikke denne været opført mere end nogle ganske få gange, så en revideret opfattelse af disse synspunkter har hidtil ikke været mulig.

Man kunne godt have forestillet sig, at Riisagers første to symfonier fra midten af 1920'erne havde markeret såvel begyndelsen som afslutningen på hans arbejde med denne form. Med al ønskelig tydelighed havde han i opbygningen af disse værker vist en trang til at udfordre genren, så at sige indefra. I 1940 skulle han rette et voldsomt og berømt litterært anslag mod symfonien (artiklen "Symfonien er død – musikken leve!"), men at slippe genren havde han øjensynlig ikke lyst til. Ligesom han i begyndelsen af 1930'erne var blevet inspireret til at gribe tilbage til førklassiske genrebetegnelser som concerto og suite, valgte han i 1935 at benytte titlen Sinfonia til sit nye værk. Og flere træk gør da også, at der atter her er tale om et betragteligt brud med grundprincipperne i en symfonis opbygning: dels består den alene af tre relativt hurtige satser: I. Feroce, II. Violente e fantastico, og III. Tumultuoso, der er altså ingen klar satsmæssig kontrast i værket, dels rummer førstesatsen ingen tematisk dualisme, hvorved den for en traditionel symfoni helt elementære tonale konflikt udebliver.

Satserne i sinfoniaen er alle i ABA-form, og den egentlige drivkraft i satserne er den tematisk-motiviske udvikling. Det indledende tema, som helt dominerer førstesatsen, er baseret på dens første fem toner, der som motiv varieres og suppleres. Motivet udgøres af en triol, hvor første tone gentages, samt en totonefigur, hvor den korte første tone nærmest er en slags forslag for den lange anden tone. Det syv takter lange tema kan nok synes intervalmæssigt en smule uprægnant – det består jo næsten udelukkende af sekundskridt – men det indeholder til gengæld nogle genkendelige rytmiske elementer. Det er da også i høj grad rytmen, der bærer førstesatsen igennem. Satsen ebber i øvrigt ud med en paukesolo, hvor netop totonefiguren veksler med trioler. Andensatsen bygger

på et skarptskåret hovedtema, og satsen indeholder reminiscenser af førstesatsens tema. Endelig dukker stof fra temaerne i såvel første som anden sats op i den afsluttende tumultuoso-sats. I denne træder det rytmiske element endnu stærkere frem, end det var tilfældet i de to foregående satser. Således udhamrer pauken gennem størstedelen af reprisen den rytme eller de rytmiske enheder, der indgår i satsens indledende tema.

Sinfonia blev uropført af Statsradiofoniens Symfoniorkester og Nicolai Malko ved en Torsdagskoncert den 21. november 1935. Det er interessant at kaste et blik på nogle anmeldelser af koncerten. Her er det tydeligt, at Riisager stadig lever op til sit gamle ry som *enfant terrible*. I *Ekstra Bladet* kunne man læse, at Sinfonia "blev modtaget – som Riisager plejer – med baade Hyssen og Klappen, noget, han er ene om blandt nulevende danske Komponister." I en anden avis blev Riisager kaldt "Danmarks omdisputerede Komponist", og i *Dagens Nyheder* hed det, at "Riisager indtager sin særlige Stilling blandt danske Komponister. Man ved aldrig, hvor man har ham: han er Overraskelsernes, Kapricernes Mand."

Hen mod slutningen af 1931 færdiggjorde Riisager sit nok første udpræget neo-barokke værk, *Concerto for orkester*. At benytte titlen Concerto som orkestergenre var endnu ikke almindeligt i 1931. Den indledende "Moderato e molto sonoro" er langsom, fremadskridende. Kort efter indtræder i det fulde orkester en stærkt dissonerende klang, som rummer samtlige den diatoniske skalas syv toner, og få takter senere sætter et forløb præget af Stravinsky ind; der er her tale om en dissonansrig "nøgen sats". Andensatsen overrasker ved i hovedtemaet at benytte et vippemotiv, som har mindelser om begyndelsen af "Dies irae"-sekvensen fra den katolske Requiem-messe. Motivets betydning understreges af, at det senere fremføres med stor styrke. Atter i den alvorstunge tredje sats spiller vippemotivet en afgørende rolle i det tematiske. Sidstesatsen er i stram neobarok stil med massive polyfone partier. Ligesom i de to foregående satser er også hovedtemaet her baseret på vippemotivet.

Som man kan forstå, er de neobarokke træk stærkt fremtrædende; det gælder både i det små – i motiver og temaer – og i det store, dvs. i den concerto grosso-agtige modsætning mellem såvel orkestrets instrumentgrupper – blæsere og strygere, træblæsere og messingblæsere – som de enkelte instrumenter, således at begrebet "concerto" kan referere til både modstillingen af instrumentgrupperne og individualiseringen af orkesterinstrumenterne.

Fra 1934 stammer endelig den korte, sprudlende koncertouverture *Primavera*. Selv i så umiddelbart et værk som dette finder man eksempler på en harmonik af en voldsom dissonerende art, men i øvrigt rummer ouverturen fine indslag med fuglesang, som det passer sig for en forårsouverture. *Primavera* blev under Emil Reesens ledelse uropført ved en koncert i Det unge Tonekunstnerselskab i samarbejde med Dansk Koncert-Forening den 30. januar 1935 og blev præsenteret i Tivolis Koncertsal den 4. juli samme år.

Flere af de radikale tendenser, som man møder i Riisagers værker i første halvdel af 1920'erne, er koncentreret i *T-DOXC (poème mécanique)* fra 1926. I den første renskrift benævnes værket *Jabiru T-DOXC* og endnu tidligere blot *L'avion*. Den titel, som Riisager sluttelig vælger, er betegnelsen for en dengang splinterny type trafikfly med ni pladser, som blev indført i Danmark i 1926. At skrive musik, der beskriver automobiler, oceandampere, industrivirksomheder, tog og flyvemaskiner m.m. var mærkesager på de italienske futuristers kunstneriske dagsorden omkring Første Verdenskrig. Til dette formål havde flere af dem udviklet lydgivende apparater, således at man kunne sætte sig ud over de begrænsninger, det traditionelle musikalske instrumentarium opbød. Gjorde man ikke brug af sådanne hjælpemidler, så var det helt legitimt – som franskmænden Erik Satie gjorde det i balletmusikken til *Parade* (1917) – at lade lydgivere som en sirene, en revolver, en skrivemaskine og et lykkeshjul indgå i orkestret for på den måde at bringe hverdagens lyde ind i kompositionen.

Det er ganske givet, at Riisager på denne tid følte sig stærkt draget mod futurismen. I artiklen "Ny skønhed. Musikalske randbemærkninger" (1927) skriver han således: "Industrialismen har lært os maskinens blaanende poesi og skønheden i staalets elastiske spænding. Maskinen er en levende organisme, et støt arbejdende væsen med rolige aandedrag. Disse det daglige livs oplevelser gaar ind i den skabende bevidsthed som motiver, og de digtes om af den frie fantasi. De geometriske figurers fængslende mystik og matematikens vidt favnende tankebygning sætter den kunstnerisk omformede evne i rytmiske svingninger, der afføder sjælelige begivenheder og bliver vor tids kunst. Den menneskelige sjæl er en skælvende kompasnaal, som svinger for at komme i leje i et stadigt ligevægts-punkt. Det er denne svingen kunsten er udtryk for og derfor beror den paa de menneskelige problemer. En kaktus og en lilje ejer skønhedens under, men hver paa sin maade."

Flyvemaskiner havde som antydning tidligt været fremme som oplagte objekter for futuristernes trang til at skildre den moderne maskinverden, men det er et spørgsmål, om der overhovedet er skrevet andre “flyvemaskineværker” for orkester end Riisagers. Hvad angår klaverlitteraturen forholder det sig anderledes. Allerede i 1913 skrev den russisk-amerikanske komponist Leo Ornstein (1892/93?-2002) sit lille klaverværk *Suicide in an Airplane*, som ud over impressionistiske træk også rummer lydmalende elementer. En mere prominent og umiddelbar “forgænger” for Riisagers værk er imidlertid amerikane-ren George Antheils (1900-1959) anden klaversonate med tilnavnet *The Airplane* (1921, udgivet 1931). Værket består af to meget korte satser, og gennemgående træk er anvendelsen af vekslende taktarter, stærke dissonanser, clustervirkninger og en voldsom motorik samt stadige gentagelser af korte rytmiske moduler.

Det er dog langt mere sandsynligt, at inspirationen til Riisagers værk skal søges i Arthur Honeggers *Mouvement symphonique No. 1 Pacific 231*, som blev komponeret 1923, uropført i Paris den 8. maj 1924 og udgivet samme år. Værket, der skildrer et moderne damplokomotiv, blev spillet første gang i Danmark ved en koncert i Dansk Filharmonisk Selskab den 30. marts 1926. Ligesom Honegger giver også Riisager afkald på særligt ind-forskrevne lydmalende instrumenter og anvender i stedet udelukkende en traditionel symfoniorkesterbesætning.

I en anden avisartikel udtaler Riisager om *T-DOXC*: “Hvad jeg har villet give Udtryk for i Kompositionen, er de sjælelige Fornemmelser, som fremkaldes hos mig ved Synet af Aëroplanet, der glider over Himmelbuen. Det dukker frem som en Prik i det fjerne – bruser efterhaanden frem som en svulmende Spændkraft paa Himlen og fortaber sig atter i Horisonten, hyllet i sin Kaabe af Detonationer./Det er ikke min Mening at ville paastaa, at Teknikens Udvikling giver Kunsten nyt, sjæleligt Indhold – men naar man paa Grund-lag af den ny Teknik og de mange storslaaede Opfindelser søger ind i sig selv, vil man føle ny Skønhed opstaa og fyldes af en ny æstetisk Oplevelse, som i sit Udgangspunkt er forskellig fra alt, hvad man tidligere har følt./Det har været en sjælelig Oplevelse for mig at betragte Flyvemaskinen svulme hen over mig – og det er denne Oplevelse, der kun kan skildres i Toner, jeg har villet give Udtryk for i ‘Jabiru T-Doxc’.”

Selv om der er stærke ligheder mellem Riisagers og Honeggers værker, så er forskellene på de to værker dog mere slående. Honegger benytter sig i *Pacific 231* af en strengt orga-niseret rytmisk acceleration – som udtryk for lokomotivets stigende og senere dalende hastighed – holdt inden for et koralpræludiums form, som den kendes fra J.S. Bachs senere værker. En stor del af det tematiske og motiviske stof i værket kan føres tilbage til den bærende cantus firmus. Medens Honegger lader sit orkester fungere og illudere som en maskine, søger Riisager at skildre en sindsstemning fremkaldt ved synet af flyvema-skinen; dette gør han ved at lade sine instrumenter veksle og på den måde fremmane et senimpressionistisk klangbillede. I *T-DOXC* åbnes der med overvejende pentatone akkorder, men snart sætter en motorisk rytme ind i violinerne – den intensiveres og går over i en ostinat rytmisk figur. Hermed er der banet vej for den hurtige vekslen mellem gentagne rytmiske figurer – bl.a. i den store slagtojsgruppe – som bringer forløbet frem til stykkets kulminationer og de derpå følgende afspændinger hen imod slutningen, hvor stof fra indledningen vender tilbage i sart pianissimo. Når man ser bort fra indledningen og afslutningen, er forløbet præget af en hurtig, næsten rastløs vekslen af motiver og korte temaer i forskellige instrumentationer. Også her adskiller værket sig fra *Pacific 231*, hvor koralen ligesom bærer “objektet” konsekvent igennem orkestetsatsen.

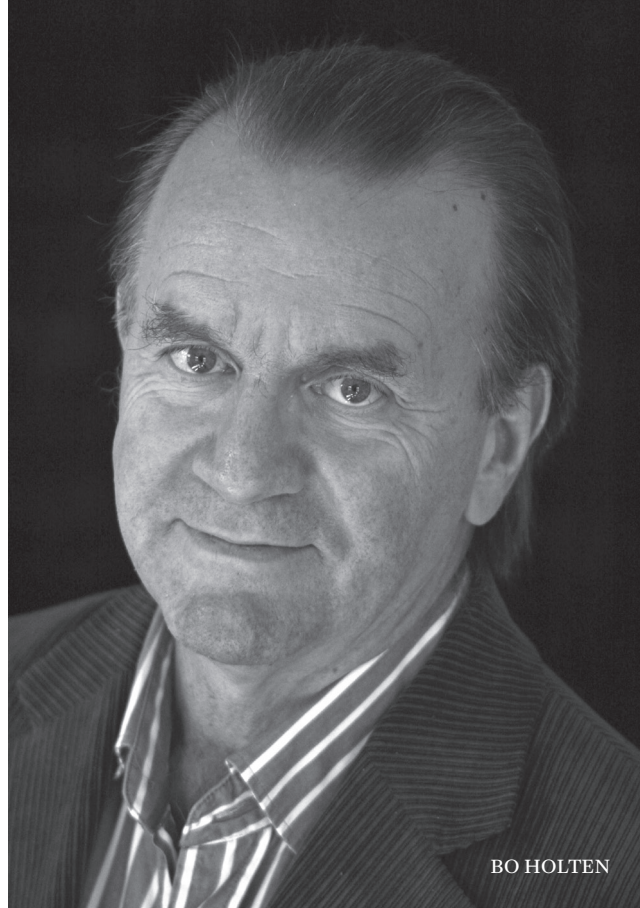
Værket fik sin uropførelse i Tivolis Koncertsal den 3. september 1927, hvor Frederik Schnedler-Petersen stod på podiet.

Claus Røllum-Larsen er seniorforsker Ph.D. ved Det Kongelige Bibliotek.

DE MEDVIRKENDE

AARHUS SYMFONIORKESTER blev grundlagt i 1935. Orkestrets repertoire spænder vidt, fra barokmusikken til den nyeste kompositionsmusik. Orkestret giver ca. 30 årlige koncerter, hvortil kommer omkring 15 operaforestillinger, ca. 80 skolekoncerter, kammerkoncerter og cd-optagelser. I 1992 indledtes indspilningen af Vagn Holmboes 13 symfonier med den walisiske dirigent Owain Arwel Hughes. Blandt de største udfordringer for orkestret har været produktionerne af Wagner-operaer, som Den Jyske Opera påbegyndte i 1983 med opsætningen af *Nibelungens ring*. Siden fulgte *Tristan og Isolde* og *Parsifal*. Aarhus Symfoniorkester har turneret i Storbritannien, Tyskland, Italien og Grækenland samt spillet ved Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival og Edinburgh Festival. Blandt orkestrets tidligere chefdirigenter kan fremhæves Ole Schmidt (1978-85), Norman Del Mar (1985-88) og James Loughran (1996-2003), som i 2003 blev afløst af italieneren Giancarlo Andretta.

BO HOLTEN (dirigent) er lige anerkendt som dirigent og komponist. Han stiftede i 1979 Ars Nova Copenhagen, som han dirigerede frem til 1996, hvor han dannede vokalensemblet Musica Ficta. Bo Holten dirigerer regelmæssigt de bedste kor i Europa. Han var bl.a. forstедirigent for The BBC Singers fra 1990-2006 og har siden 2008 været chefdirigent for Det Flamske Radiokor i Bruxelles. Bo Holtens orkesterarbejde i Danmark bliver stadig mere omfattende med roste indspilninger af Carl Nielsen, Frederick Delius, Thomas Koppel, Emil Hartmann, Knudåge Riisager og Emil Reesen. Som komponist står Bo Holten bag hele seks operaer, fem solokoncerter, to symfonier, diverse orkesterværker og kammermusik, filmmusik samt ca. 35 værker for kor. I 2002 udgav Dacapo en cd med et udvalg af Bo Holtens værker for kor a cappella, sunget af The BBC Singers. Bo Holten havde i foråret 2009 stor succes på Den Kgl. Opera i København med sin opera *Livlægens besøg*, som han selv dirigerede, og som Dacapo har udgivet på DVD.



BO HOLTEN



KNUDÅGE RIISAGER

DDD

Recorded in the Symphonic Hall, Musikhuset Aarhus, on 20-25 June 2011

Recording producer: Morten Mogensen

Sound engineer: Claus Byrith

Mastering: Claus Byrith

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Liner notes: Claus Røllum-Larsen

English translation: James Manley

Proofreader: Svend Ravnkilde

Photo p. 25: © Eva Sommestad Holten

Photo p. 26: © Private photo

Graphic design: elevator-design.dk

Dacapo Records acknowledge, with gratitude, the financial support of Augustinus Fonden, Beckett-Fonden and Oticon Fonden

The Riisager Edition is made in cooperation with Danish Centre for Music Publication



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