

Free Radicals

Extract from *The New Yorker*, September 2005.

Long before the days when assistant professors wrote tone rows for tenure, American modernism was something worth fighting for. And perhaps no one fought harder than Carl Ruggles (1876-1971), a hardscrabble New England eccentric (and friend of Charles Ives) whose compositional technique was so rudimentary that a lifetime of labor resulted in only twelve published works, just enough for a single concert.

For Ruggles lovers, that has never been enough, and the pianist Donald Berman has slaked their thirst with "The Uncovered Ruggles" (New World Records), premiere recordings of sketches painstakingly realized by Berman's teacher John Kirkpatrick (such as a surprisingly winsome "Valse Lente") as well as persuasive performances of familiar works (like the "Evocations," for piano, or the song "Toys," lovingly rendered by the soprano Susan Narucki). Berman is an artist both forceful and discreet: he easily provides the big tone that Ruggles's arching lines of dissonant counterpoint require, yet he is also sensitive to the poignantly timeless quality that these strange works have.

—Russell Platt, *The New Yorker*
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