

Cedille Records
1205 W. Balmoral Ave.
Chicago, IL 60640
(773) 989-2515
www.cedillerecords.org

Press contact: Nat Silverman
Nathan J. Silverman Co. PR
2906 Central St. #250
Evanston, IL 60201-1283
Phone: (847) 868-1417
Email: natsilv@aol.com

News

Recording release date: February 12, 2021

Baritone Will Liverman Celebrates Black Composers on Album of Art Songs from Cedille Records Feb. 12

To be released during Black History Month, *Dreams of a New Day* features world-premiere recording of Shawn E. Okpebholo's 'Two Black Churches,' commissioned by the singer

Fast-rising operatic baritone Will Liverman, tapped for major roles at principal opera houses across the country, makes his Cedille Records debut as a featured artist with *Dreams of a New Day — Songs by Black Composers*, a recital album he calls “a passion project . . . years in the making.”

Available Feb. 12, 2021, and coinciding with Black History Month, Liverman's *Dreams of a New Day*, with pianist Paul Sánchez, highlights Black composers across generations, from early 20th-century pioneer Henry Burleigh to Margaret Bonds, Thomas Kerr, Robert Owens, and contemporary composers Leslie Adams, Damien Sneed, and Shawn E. Okpebholo.

In addition to being Liverman's first full-length recording for Cedille, *Dreams of a New Day* is Cedille's 200th front-line album release (Cedille Records CDR 90000 200).

“I'm honored to give voice to the art songs on this album,” Liverman writes in his preface to program notes. “There was an enormous amount of material to choose from; Black composers wrote so much more than just spirituals!”

The album includes a 20-page booklet with extensive program notes by Dr. Louise Toppin, a professor of music at the University of Michigan who specializes in the concert repertoire of African American composers.

A second booklet offers the complete song texts, with words by Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Adela Florence Nicolson, composer Adams, Dudley Randall, Marcus Amaker, and folksinger-songwriter Richard Fariña.

In her program notes, Toppin characterizes the songs as tracing the “trials, tribulations and triumphs” of the Black experience in the U.S. “through a melding of poignant texts and expressive musical settings.”

Liverman performs Sneed's *I Dream a World*; Burleigh's *Five Songs of Laurence Hope*; Adams' *Amazing Grace*, a setting of Adams' own text based on the famous folk hymn; Bonds' *Three Dream Portraits*; Kerr's *Riding to Town*; Okpebholo's *Two Black Churches*, commissioned by Liverman and

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receiving its world-premiere recording; Owens' *Mortal Storm*, Op. 29; and Liverman's own arrangement of Fariña's *Birmingham Sunday*, on which he also plays piano.

Liverman recently performed *Two Black Churches* to great acclaim at his Kennedy Center recital in conjunction with his winning the 2020 Marian Anderson Vocal Award. The *Washington Post* review called the set "absolutely devastating, and one of the most beautiful pieces of music I've heard all year."

The first movement is a setting of Randall's poem "Ballad of Birmingham" about the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, that killed four girls. The score "juxtaposes 1960s Black gospel with contemporary art song," Toppin writes.

The second movement, "The Rain," sets a text by Amaker, poet laureate of the often-flooded coastal city of Charleston, South Carolina. Written especially for this composition, it memorializes the 2015 fatal shooting of nine African Americans in the city's Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Topping describes the movement as "a beautifully haunting metaphor on racism and the inability of Blacks in America to stay above water."

Recording Team

Dreams of a New Day was recorded by the multiple-Grammy-nominated team of producer James Ginsburg and engineer Bill Maylone July 22–24, 2020, at Sauder Concert Hall, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

Will Liverman

"One of the most versatile singing artists performing today" (*Bachtrack*), Chicago-based baritone Will Liverman has sung major roles with Lyric Opera of Chicago, New York's Metropolitan Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Dallas Opera, and Santa Fe Opera and is developing a new opera in partnership with Lyric Opera and its Ryan Opera Center. Praised for his "unique combination of eloquence and unpretentiousness" (*Opera News*), he is slated to star in the MET's season-opening production of Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* in fall 2021 and reprise his role as the first-ever Black Papageno in the MET's holiday production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

Liverman made his Cedille label debut with sopranos Nicole Cabell and Allyson Cambridge on their *Sisters in Song* album, lending his "silken baritone" (*Opera News*) to the "Soave sia il vento" trio from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

His solo debut album, *Whither Must I Wander*, released in 2020 on Odradek Records, drew praise from *BBC Music Magazine* for his "sharp interpretive attitude ... admirable poise and clarity of intention." His website is www.willliverman.com

Paul Sánchez

Praised as a "great artist" (José Feghali, 2013; Cecilia Rodrigo, 2019), pianist and composer Paul Sánchez is director of piano studies at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. He is a co-founder of the San Francisco International Piano Festival, Charleston Chamber Music Intensive, and Dakota Sky Foundation. For more information, visit www.paultsanchez.com.

Cedille Records

Launched in November 1989 by James Ginsburg, Grammy Award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing and promoting the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area.

Cedille has recorded more than 180 Chicago artists, with more than 80 making their professional recording debuts on the label. Its catalog includes the world premieres of more than 300 classical compositions.

The audiophile-oriented label releases every new album in multiple formats — physical CD, 96 kHz, 24-bit, studio-quality FLAC download, and 320 Kbps MP3 download — and on major streaming services.

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille Records is the label of Cedille Chicago, NFP. Sales of physical CDs and digital downloads and streams cover only a small percentage of the label's costs. Tax-deductible donations from individual music-lovers and grants from charitable organizations account for most of its revenue.

Cedille's headquarters are at 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call 773-989-2515; email: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: cedillerecords.org.

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Dreams of a New Day — Songs by Black Composers

Will Liverman, baritone

Paul Sánchez, piano

Cedille Records CDR 90000 200

Damien Sneed: *I Dream a World* (2:39)

Henry Burleigh: *Five Songs of Laurence Hope* (15:48)

Leslie Adams: *Amazing Grace* (3:19)

Margaret Bonds: *Three Dream Portraits* (5:52)

Thomas Kerr: *Riding to Town* (3:09)

Shawn E. Okpebholo: *Two Black Churches* (15:23)

Robert Owens: *Mortal Storm*, Op. 29 (10:17)

Richard Fariña, arr. Will Liverman: *Birmingham Sunday** (3:50)

*Will Liverman, piano