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News

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NEW SYMPHONIC ORGAN, REVERED FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA MAKE RECORDING DEBUTS

Works By Barber, Piston, Sowerby, and Colgrass Showcase Chicago's Grant Park Orchestra and Casavant Frères Organ

A new symphonic organ, a veteran American orchestra, and sonically resplendent works by major twentieth-century American composers make their CD debuts on *American Works for Organ and Orchestra* (CDR 90000 063), a new release from Cedille Records.

Carlos Kalmar conducts Chicago's Grant Park Orchestra in works by Samuel Barber, Walter Piston, Leo Sowerby, and Michael Colgrass on this, the orchestra's first commercial release. David Schrader performs on the heretofore-unrecorded 1998 Casavant Frères organ in Chicago's Orchestra Hall.

The CD offers world premiere recordings of Leo Sowerby's *Concertpiece for Organ and Orchestra*, H. 307 (1951) and Michael Colgrass's *Snow Walker for Organ and Orchestra* (1990) and the CD premiere of Walter Piston's *Prelude and Allegro for Organ and Strings* (1943). Barber's *Toccata Festiva for Organ and Orchestra*, Op. 36, (1960) remains a rarity on CD: when the recording was planned, no other version was available.

Each selection demonstrates a unique approach to writing for organ and orchestra, and each is characteristic of its composer.

Barber (1910-1981) wrote his mighty *Toccata Festiva* to dedicate the Aeolian-Skinner organ at Philadelphia's Academy of Music. Barber intended to exhibit the full technical possibilities of the new organ and the sonorities it could create in combination with conductor Eugene Ormandy's virtuoso Philadelphia Orchestra. Following a sweeping introductory proclamation, the piece encompasses meditative solo passages, majestic full-ensemble fanfares, and organ-orchestra dialogues.

A student of Nadia Boulanger and Paul Dukas, Piston (1894-1976), winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, wrote the *Prelude and Allegro* for fabled organist E. Power Biggs. It debuted in a World War II-era radio broadcast with Arthur Fielder conducting the Fiedler Sinfonietta. Lyrical and deeply moving—not unlike Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*—the *Prelude* eventually gives way to a stirring, rhythmically incisive *Allegro*. Piston biographer Howard Pollack hears the work as a product of its troubled time: “The *Prelude* expresses the tragedy of the War, while the *Allegro* expresses the determination to win it.”

Sowerby (1895-1968), also a Pulitzer Prize winner, wrote in many genres but is best known for his organ music. In *Concertpiece*, brilliant and virtuosic music in the outer sections frame a more meditative central episode. Like other symphonic works by Sowerby, including the *Symphony No. 2* and tone poems heard on previous Cedille CDs, *Concertpiece* glows with a warm-hearted optimism and an upbeat mid-century metropolitan vibe.

From his start as a 1940s Chicago jazz drummer, Colgrass (b. 1932) went on to study composition with Lukas Foss at Tanglewood and Darius Milhaud at Aspen. A boldly imaginative composer, Colgrass received a Pulitzer Prize in 1978 and was the subject of an Emmy Award-winning PBS documentary, *Soundings: The Music of Michael Colgrass*. *Snow Walker*, a tone poem for organ and orchestra, is named after the Inuit personification of death and resurrection. Colgrass’s Technicolor audio travelogue was inspired by a brief sojourn among the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic. Colgrass wrote that *Snow Walker* reflects the Inuits’ “moods, humor, sense of mystery and wonder at the awesome nature around them.”

Founded in 1943, the Grant Park Orchestra is the resident orchestra of Chicago’s seven decades-old Grant Park Music Festival, America’s last remaining free, municipally funded outdoor classical music festival. The orchestra largely eschews “pop” programming for meatier fare. Its Principal Conductors since 1974 have included Leonard Slatkin, David Zinman, Zdenek Macal, and Hugh Wolff. Maestro Kalmar, principal conductor since the 2000 season, was recently named music director of the Oregon Symphony, succeeding James DePreist. Among the Grant Park’s guest artists for its summer 2002 season are sopranos Dawn Upshaw and Jonita Lattimore and guitarist Christopher Parkening.

No stranger to Orchestra Hall, organist David Schrader has made frequent solo appearances with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under such celebrated conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Claudio Abbado, Erich Leinsdorf, and Georg Solti, with whom Schrader made three

recordings for London Records. An artist “noted for his versatility and erudition” (*Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 2001), Schrader has appeared on 17 recordings on Cedille Records, including three solo organ CDs.

In addition to program notes by Richard E. Rodda, the CD booklet includes a two-page stop list for the Casavant Frères organ and an essay on the instrument’s design by Jeff Weiler, Chicago Symphony Orchestra organ consultant. Weiler writes that the organ’s “unique design, incorporating a more retrospective approach to the tonal plan, and advantageous placement give it a musical presence that can be both delicate and heroic.” According to Weiler, the Orchestra Hall organ was designed to be “vivid, expressive, and agile, yet also possess enough brute strength to rise above a full orchestra and massed chorus—and leave them all behind in a cloud of sonic dust.”

Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE), dedicated to showcasing Chicago’s most noteworthy classical artists, is an arm of the nonprofit Chicago Classical Recording Foundation.

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American Works for Organ and Orchestra
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 063)

Barber: Toccata Festiva for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 36 (14:48)
Piston: Prelude and Allegro for Organ and Strings (10:04)
Sowerby: Concertpiece for Organ and Orchestra, H. 307 (18:17)
Colgrass: Snow Walker for Organ and Orchestra (21:42)

David Schrader, organ
Grant Park Orchestra, Carlos Kalmar, conductor