
NEWS & INFORMATION

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PIANIST BLACKWOOD UNCORKS VINTAGE 'CONCORD' SONATA

Few pianists have had the courage to tackle Ives' "Concord" Sonata in public. Easley Blackwood made it his signature piece. Now, Blackwood has, at long last, recorded that monumental work in a vintage performance for Cedille Records, the new Chicago-based label specializing in unusual repertoire.

On the same disc, Blackwood performs Copland's Piano Sonata for a stimulating program contrasting two styles of serious American piano music.

Blackwood has earned high praise for his concert performances of Ives' "Concord" Sonata, a set of transcendentalist meditations named for Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcott family and Thoreau, all of whom lived in Concord, Mass. Critic Max Harrison of The London Times declared Blackwood's performance of the piece "the finest account I have ever heard."

Chicago Symphony Orchestra flutist Richard Graef, a Blackwood colleague in the Grammy Award-winning Chicago Pro Musica chamber ensemble, performs in the sonata's "Thoreau" movement.

Copland's Piano Sonata, long overshadowed by his populist works, represents his most profound and personal thought. A surprisingly lively middle movement explores fast rhythms in irregular, rapidly changing meters.

(MORE)

"I never would have thought of those rhythms if I had not been familiar with jazz," Copland remarked.

Blackwood, a prominent composer in his own right, is a professor at the University of Chicago. He studied with Paul Hindemith at Yale University and also studied with Olivier Messiaen and Nadia Boulanger. Blackwood's first and only other solo recording, a program of early 20th-century modernist piano works by Alfredo Casella and Karol Szymanowski, is also on the Cedille label.

For Cedille, the "Concord" will be (with apologies to Emerson) the sonata "heard round the world": next month, the label enters international distribution (via Albany Records U.K.) for the first time.

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Ives: Piano Sonata No. 2 ("Concord, Mass., 1840-1860")
Copland: Piano Sonata
Easley Blackwood, piano
Cedille CDR 90000 005

TIP: Use the recording to mark Ives' birthday on October 20 and Copland's birthday on November 14. Broadcasters: How about finding a local insurance company to "underwrite" a special birthday broadcast -- Ives was a successful insurance man who lived a secret life as a composer. Cedille will donate some Ives/Copland CDs for on-air give-way if you put something together. An interesting program idea: Segue between a movement from the "Concord" sonata and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Beethoven's opening theme figures prominently in the sonata, especially in the third movement, "The Alcotts." Casual radio listeners will find that movement and the fourth to be the most congenial.