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News

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MANGOS SISTERS OFFER EXHILARATING AMERICAN WORKS FOR PIANO DUO

After four acclaimed CDs of music by Liszt, pianists Georgia and Louise Mangos tackle exhilarating twentieth-century works written expressly for duo piano or piano four-hands by American composers.

On *American Works for Piano Duo* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 069), the Mangos sisters perform Vincent Persichetti's Sonata for Two Pianos, Op. 13, and Concerto for Piano Four-Hands, Op. 56; Samuel Barber's original *Souvenirs*, Op. 28, for piano four-hands; David Diamond's Concerto for Two Solo Pianos; and Joseph Fennimore's *Crystal Stairs* for piano four-hands (premiere recording).

"These works extend the color horizons of the two-pianist media and demand even more athleticism than the fiery works of Liszt," the sisters said in an interview shortly before the CD's release. "The complex and propulsive rhythms require the performers to produce almost percussion-like sound effects."

Persichetti (1915-1987), a native and longtime resident of Philadelphia, began piano studies at age five. His Sonata for Two Pianos, Op. 13 (1940), traverses scenes of drama, playfulness, and mysterious allure. His densely chromatic Concerto for Piano Four-Hands, Op. 56 (1952) builds to cyclonic, kaleidoscopic frenzies of sound, with the piano yielding effects that could be mistaken for marimbas and xylophones. Here are two pianists and a single keyboard all being pushed to their utmost limits.

Like Persichetti, Barber (1910-1981) hailed from the Philadelphia area and began piano lessons in early childhood. The well-known *Souvenirs*, Op. 28 (1951), was originally written for

piano four-hands — the hands being Barber’s and those of a friend. *Souvenirs* is a suite of nineteenth-century ballroom dances meant to evoke the gracious and elegant atmosphere of the Palm Court of New York’s Plaza Hotel in the first decade of the 1900s. Barber said the piece was written “with affection, not in irony or tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness.”

Despite his renown, David Diamond (b. 1915) is rarely thought of as a composer for piano, much less two pianos. His *Concerto for Two Solo Pianos* (1942) is aptly titled: In an essay for the CD, the Mangos sisters observe, “We are not hearing two pianos as an orchestra but rather the sheer power of the pianos themselves.” A work in Diamond’s familiar tonal style, the piece has at its center a particularly beautiful adagio movement.

Crystal Stairs for piano four-hands (1981), by composer Joseph Fennimore (b. 1940) of upstate New York, is a single-movement work inspired by the opening lines of a Langston Hughes poem. It exudes metropolitan glamour and energy. One can imagine a line of dancers ascending and descending a crystal staircase on the set of a lavish Broadway song-and-dance production. Sometimes playful, sometimes melodramatic, it’s a work of lovely harmonies and exciting contrapuntal chords.

The Mangos sisters observe that relatively few of the late-twentieth century’s leading composers have written for two pianists. Orchestral commissions offer greater rewards, they note, and “there are inherent difficulties in composing for our media, in harnessing the power without sacrificing the clarity. Writing for 20 fingers is very difficult.”

Reviewing the “ebullient sisters” appearance in 2000 at the Great Romantics Festival in Hamilton, Canada, Melton Mowbray of *Musical Opinion* introduced them to readers as a “brilliant Chicago-based duo.” In reviews of previous recordings, *Fanfare* called the sisters an “enormously talented duo”; *American Record Guide* called them “brilliant technicians” who also possess “temperament, style and imagination.”; and the *Chicago Sun-Times* praised their “astounding heavy metal pianism” and “almost surreal musicianship and interpretation.”

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 PIANO DUO
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 069)

Vincent Persichetti: Sonata for Two Pianos, Op. 13 (1940) (10:30)
Samuel Barber: *Souvenirs*, Op. 28 (1952) (16:32)
(original version for piano four-hands)
Persichetti: Concerto for Piano Four-Hands, Op. 56 (1952) (20:41)
David Diamond: Concerto for Two Solo Pianos (1942) (15:34)
Joseph Fennimore: *Crystal Stairs* for piano four-hands (1981) (11:00)

Georgia & Louise Mangos, pianists