

**SOPRANO PATRICE MICHAELS RELEASES
LA VIE EST UNE PARADE
A VIBRANT PROGRAM OF FRENCH SONG**

**Cedille Records Recording Features Britten's *Les Illuminations*,
Milhaud's *Quatre Chansons de Ronsard*, and Songs by Tailleferre and Satie
with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Led by Paul Freeman
and The Chicago Chamber Musicians, In Stores September 23**

The droll wit and dazzling passion of French poetry are on display in full bloom on soprano Patrice Michaels' new Cedille recording *La vie est une parade*, featuring works for voice and orchestra or large chamber ensemble by Britten, Milhaud, Satie, and Tailleferre. The CD contains nine songs by Germaine Tailleferre — including four apparent premieres, presents new chamber-ensemble arrangements by Chicago composer Easley Blackwood of two songs by Erik Satie, and includes a significant group of Satie songs arranged for orchestral accompaniment by the composer's protégé, Robert Caby.

Central to the recorded program is one of English composer Benjamin Britten's most celebrated vocal works, *Les Illuminations*, set to the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud. The disc concludes with Darius Milhaud's *Quatre Chansons de Ronsard*, a sparkling, rarely recorded vocal tour de force for soprano and orchestra written for the legendary French coloratura Lily Pons, who premiered the set in 1941. Paul Freeman conducts the Czech National Symphony Orchestra in the Britten, Milhaud, and Satie/Caby selections; Michaels is joined by The Chicago Chamber Musicians in the new Satie/Blackwood arrangements and the Tailleferre songs.

The four unknown Tailleferre songs came to Patrice Michaels' attention only after she requested some scores from the composer's French publisher, Editions Salabert. Expecting a set of five folksong settings, Ms. Michaels received nine. The surprise heightened her delight in discovering the richness of Tailleferre's unjustly neglected work: "the simple melodies are underscored, overlaid, and reworked with wonderfully complex harmonies, neatly and sparsely orchestrated with an ensemble that seems at times transparent and at times surprisingly rich," says Ms. Michaels.

In her personal statement at the beginning of the recording booklet, Patrice Michaels comments, "The Tailleferre songs use deceptively simple material the way a master baker makes a baguette: the result appears inevitably natural and tastes irresistible." The Satie arrangements, she adds, "tie the whole program together the way wine and spices unify a meal."

When Michaels sang the Tailleferre songs and Blackwood arrangements of Satie on The Chicago Chamber Musicians' subscription series in March 2002, the *Chicago Tribune's* John von Rhein wrote, "Michaels sang everything with beguiling freshness, warmth and clarity, bringing just the right naughty wit to [Satie's] 'Diva de l'Empire.'"

The music on *La vie est une parade* reflects the fresh energy of early 20th century French culture. Like Tailleferre, Milhaud was a member of "Les Six," a razor-sharp group of young French composers who abandoned the bourgeois sentiments of the music with which they grew up. His *Quatre Chansons de Ronsard* are, in Michaels' view, "lyrically gymnastic, with uniquely detailed and humorous orchestrations." The singer has long been familiar with this work: she first performed it with the Montreal Symphony early in her professional career, prompting *La Presse's* Claude Gingras to write, "[Michaels'] vocal rendition is intelligent, musical and natural."

The iconoclastic Erik Satie was an important influence on "Les Six." His short, spare compositions merrily deflated the pretensions and long-windedness of French Romantic music. As Michaels remembers, "The Czech National Symphony had never performed the Satie songs. They were highly amused by the witty, sardonic songs amplified by Caby's quirky orchestral settings which prominently feature horns, bassoons, and plenty of percussion: rather large forces for one- and two-minute songs!"

By contrast, Michaels characterizes Benjamin Britten's masterpiece as "serious and spiritual." The Englishman was immediately taken with Rimbaud's passionate *Les Illuminations* when W.H. Auden introduced him to it. As with the Milhaud, Michaels has had the Britten in her repertoire for several years.

While the Milhaud and Britten cycles call for the pyrotechnics of an operatic diva, the other works on *La vie est une parade* place their most stringent demands on the singer's subtlety and interpretive skill. The program reflects the passionate interests and varied gifts of Patrice Michaels, who came to classical vocal repertoire from the theater and a lifelong love of folk music and jazz.

"The music and the texts always come first when I begin putting together a program," the California-born singer explains. "Then I look for the range of vocal expression inherent in the lyric line, the coloratura writing, the tessitura, and so on. I enjoy trying to find the points where styles meet, and where they diverge."

Patrice Michaels' knack for conceiving intriguing, well-varied programs is evident in the twelve recordings she has made for the Cedille label, including *Divas of Mozart's Day* and the collections *Songs of the Romantic Age* and *Songs of the Classical Age*. Michaels, currently Associate Professor of Opera Theater and Studio Voice at Lawrence University's Conservatory of Music in Appleton, Wisconsin, has sung opera throughout the United States, and has appeared in concert all over the world.

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Contacts: Rachelle Schlosser Public Relations
(718) 268-8829
rspr@mindspring.com
<http://www.rspublicrelations.com>