

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

Press contact: Nat Silverman
Nathan J. Silverman Co. /PR
1830 Sherman Ave., Suite 401
Evanston, IL 60201-3774
Phone (847) 328-4292
Fax (847) 328-4317
Email: natsilv@aol.com

News

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John Corigliano's 'Winging It' Takes Flight on New CD by Pianist Ursula Oppens

Recent Work Receives World-Premiere Recording on Disc Devoted to Solo and Two-Piano Music by the Acclaimed American Composer

*Album Marks Launch of Cedille's
Ultra-High Fidelity Downloads*

Pianist Ursula Oppens performs the world-premiere recording of John Corigliano's *Winging It*, an improvisation-based work written expressly for her, on a new CD devoted to piano music of the widely admired American composer.

Winging It: Piano Music of John Corigliano includes a selection of Corigliano's solo works and both of his two-piano works. For the latter, Ms. Oppens is joined by her longtime collaborator Jerome Lowenthal (Cedille Records CDR 90000 123).

The album *Winging It*, available May 31, spans the composer's career from his undergraduate days at Columbia University to the present. Besides the title work, written in 2008, the CD includes *Chiaroscuro* for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart (1997), *Fantasia on an Ostinato* (1985), *Kaleidoscope* for two pianos (1959), and *Etude Fantasy* (1976).

Corigliano wrote the CD booklet's program notes, which provide authoritative and enjoyably candid discussions of the origins of the works and the development of his musical ideas.

In his notes for his *Winging It*, Corigliano discusses the difficulties inherent in translating complex improvisations into a playable score. Corigliano writes that he's enjoyed improvising at the piano since childhood. For *Winging It*, he initially improvised on an electronic keyboard and MIDI sequencer, which captures the sounds and "a crude but accurate notation of what is played." His assistant Mark Baechle reviewed the materials to "figure out how to put it into measures that made sense." A back-and-forth collaboration continued until the written piece matched the recorded sounds. The work's three movements are named for the dates Corigliano first played them. Oppens gave the premiere on May 5, 2009, at Symphony Space in New York City.

The boldly inventive *Chiaroscuro* was commissioned for the 1997 biennial Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition as a test piece for the event. At the outset, Corigliano found himself in an intriguing quandary. "I had composed one previous work for two pianos . . . and couldn't think of anything else I wanted to say in that medium. I couldn't see what made a second piano so important." His inspiration was "to change totally the concept of two pianos by 'preparing' one of them" — but not by inserting objects between the strings. One piano would be tuned a quarter-tone lower than the other, "creating eerie effects and dissonances when the instruments were played together." Corigliano says, "I wanted to use quarter-tone music expressively, as well as to make it a startling device." *Chiaroscuro* takes its name from the visual arts term for using light and shade to create an illusion of depth or other dramatic effect. It was premiered at the Miami, Fla., competition by winners Anne Louise and Edward Turgeon on December 21, 1997.

Corigliano wrote *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, his "only experiment in 'minimalist' technique," for the seventh Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. He felt the world could do without another technical showpiece. Instead, he decided to "investigate the performers' imagination and musicality," challenging their ability to create rather than merely

play what's on the page. The central section is a series of interlocking repeated patterns. "The performer decided the number and, to a certain extent, the character of these repetitions. In other words, the shape was his/hers to build," the composer writes. It was first performed by Barry Douglas on May 24, 1985, at the Fort Worth, Tex., competition.

Corigliano's first and only other two-piano work is the youthful, high-spirited *Kaleidoscope*, which projects a changing mosaic of colorful patterns. It's a single-movement work in three parts, with "an extended lyrical center that treats a folk-like melody to a variety of contrapuntal elaborations." A product of Corigliano's student years at Columbia (1955–59), it began as a project in Otto Luening's composition class and is dedicated to Luening and composer Marc Bucci. Pianists Morey Ritt and Stanley Hollingsworth gave the world premiere June 28, 1961, at the Festival of the Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy.

Etude Fantasy takes the listener on an excursion through studies in left-hand scoring, contrapuntal clarity, a two-note figure, ornamentation, and melody. Corigliano describes the piece as "a set of five studies combined into the episodic form and character of a fantasy." The first etude, "For the Left Hand Alone," has as its basis a six-note row and a "melodic germ" that come together at its climax. The second etude is a study in legato playing, with a constant crossing of contrapuntal lines to provide melodic interest. "Fifths to Thirds" is study on a two-note figure, "a fleet development on the simple pattern of a fifth (fingers one and five) contracting to a third (fingers two and four)." Etude No. 4 invokes trills, grace notes, tremolos, glissandos, and roulades. The final etude requires the player "to isolate the melodic line, projecting it through a filigree that surrounds it." James Tocco gave the premiere October 9, 1976 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The Artists

Winner of an Academy Award, four Grammy Awards, a Grawemeyer Award, and a Pulitzer Prize, John Corigliano (b. 1938) has written more than 100 scores. His music has been

performed and recorded by many of the world's most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber ensembles. According to the *All Music Guide*, Corigliano ranks among “the few ‘serious’ contemporary composers whose appeal has ranged beyond the new-music crowd to reach listeners steeped in more traditional, time-tested fare.” More information is available at www.johncorigliano.com.

Ursula Oppens is known for her enduring commitment to integrating new music into regular concert life. She has premiered works by Elliott Carter, Luciano Berio, György Ligeti, Witold Lutoslawski, and Charles Wuorinen, to name a few of the eminent modern composers she's been associated with. She has performed with virtually all of the world's major orchestras, including the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics and the symphony orchestras of Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco, among others. Abroad, she has appeared with the Berlin Symphony, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, and London Philharmonic, among others. Many of her recordings are phonographic classics. She is a Distinguished Professor of Music at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. From 1994 through 2008, she served as John Evans Distinguished Professor of Music at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. For more on the artist, visit www.colbertartists.com/ArtistBio.asp?ID=41.

Jerome Lowenthal plays with a combination of youthful intensity and eloquence born of life experience. He studied in his native Philadelphia with Olga Samaroff-Stokowski, in New York with William Kapell and Edward Steuermann, and in Paris with Alfred Cortot, while traveling annually to Los Angeles for coachings with Artur Schnabel. He has appeared as soloist with celebrated conductors of the present and past, such as Barenboim, Tilson Thomas, and Temirkanov; and Bernstein, Ormandy, and Stokowski. His chamber music collaborators include Itzhak Perlman and the Lark, Avalon, and Brentano Quartets. He has made numerous recordings and has been on the faculty at The Juilliard School since 1991. His website is www.jeromelowenthal.com.

Cedille Records

Grammy award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) has been dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area since its launch in late 1989.

Starting with its May 2011 release, *Winging It*, audiophile-oriented Cedille offers better-than-CD-quality 24-bit music downloads in the “lossless” FLAC format, available directly via its website, <http://www.cedillerecords.org>. The label introduced its CD-quality, 16-bit FLAC downloads in the summer of 2010. Cedille albums are also available via the label’s website as physical CDs and extra-high-quality MP3 file downloads.

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Winging It: Piano Music of John Corigliano
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 123)

Winging It: Improvisations for Piano (13:25)
Chiaroscuro for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart (11:01)
Fantasia on an Ostinato (11:26)
Kaleidoscope for two pianos (5:41)
Etude Fantasy (17:33)

Ursula Oppens, piano
with Jerome Lowenthal
in two-piano works