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News

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NEW AFRICAN HERITAGE CD ADDS TO A NOTEWORTHY SERIES

Disc Spotlights Symphonic Works by Kay, Walker, Cordero, Hailstork, and Smith

Cedille Records has released the second disc in its emerging three-CD series devoted to twentieth-century composers of African descent, a project inspired by CBS Records' landmark Black Composers Series of the 1970s.

Paul Freeman, artistic director and featured conductor for the long out-of-print CBS series, conducts the Chicago Sinfonietta for Cedille's *African Heritage Symphonic Series*. Dominique-René de Lerma, chief consultant and program annotator for the CBS series, is writing Cedille's program notes.

Cedille's *African Heritage Symphonic Series, Vol. II* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 061) offers works by Ulysses Kay (1917-1995), George Walker (b. 1922), Roque Cordero (b. 1917), Adolphus Hailstork (b. 1941), and Hale Smith (b. 1925). The series is funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to the Chicago Sinfonietta.

Kay's ebullient *Overture to Theater Set* (1968) exudes a broad and good-natured energy. The orchestral suite was dedicated to Robert Shaw, who conducted its premiere with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. The nephew of early jazz great King Oliver, Kay largely avoids jazz idioms. Among his mentors were Howard Hanson and Paul Hindemith.

Composer and pianist George Walker's *Lyric for Strings* (1941) is widely considered one of the great gems of the string orchestra repertoire. Its intensely Romantic spirit is unusual for a composer better known as a neoclassicist: written as a memorial to his grandmother, the elegiac, completely tonal piece is unique in Walker's output. The first living African-American composer to win the Pulitzer Prize (in 1996, for *Lilacs*), Walker studied with Rudolf Serkin, Mieczyslaw Horszowski, William Primrose, Robert Casadesu, and the legendary French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger.

With his acclaimed *Eight Miniatures for Small Orchestra* (1948), Panama's Roque Cordero succeeded in synthesizing the avant-garde techniques he learned in the U.S. with the Latin and Afro-Caribbean music of his homeland. "In just under a dozen minutes, Cordero successfully captures the essence of Panama's popular musical culture and, at the same time, transforms it into something more enduring," De Lerma writes in the CD booklet.

Accented with archetypal African drumming patterns, Smith's *Ritual and Incantations* (1974) radiates an aura of mystery and suspense. Maestro Freeman conducted its premiere in 1974 with the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Smith's eclectic background includes studies with Marcel Dick at the Cleveland Institute of Music and associations with modern jazz icons such as Ahmad Jamal, Quincy Jones, Dizzy Gillespie, Oliver Nelson, and Horace Silver. *Ritual and Incantations* also shows the influence of serialism: early in the work, Smith uses a 12-tone row as a source for what follows.

Adolphus Hailstork's *An American Port of Call* (1985), commissioned by Norfolk's Virginia Symphony, takes listeners on a lush, fanciful, and jazzy excursion. His *Epitaph: For a Man Who Dreamed* (1979) pays tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King with passages of exquisite tenderness and noble power. Hailstork studied composition with Boulanger in France, David

Diamond at the Manhattan School of Music, and H. Owen Reed at Michigan State University. His orchestral pieces have been played by Daniel Barenboim with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Lorin Maazel with the Pittsburgh Symphony, and Kurt Masur with the New York Philharmonic.

The first volume of Cedille's *African Heritage Symphonic Series* (CDR 90000 055), released in November 2000, includes Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's "Danse Nègre" from *African Suite* (1898) and *Petite Suite de Concert* (1910); Fela Sowande's *African Suite* (selections) from 1930; and William Grant Still's Symphony No. 1, "Afro-American" (1930).

The third and final CD in the series, planned for release in November 2002, will include music by David Baker (Cello Concerto), William Banfield (*Essay for Orchestra*), and Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson (Sinfonietta No. 2).

While there is considerable (and intentional) overlap of composers between the new Cedille series and the earlier CBS project (nine LPs released between 1974 and 1978), there are important differences. For example: CBS included works composed from the eighteenth century to the early 1970s. Cedille's repertoire ranges from 1898 into the 1990s. A previous Cedille release, *Violin Concertos by Black Composers of the 18th and 19th Centuries*, with violinist Rachel Barton (Cedille Records 90000 035), covered some of the same pre-twentieth-century ground as the CBS series.

In some instances, maestro Freeman and Cedille producer Jim Ginsburg diverged from the CBS series by choosing a composer's later work, or replacing an astringent, highly atonal work with a more attractive, accessible one by the same composer. "A certain aesthetic was followed," Ginsburg says.

On the CBS series, Freeman conducted various American and European orchestras; the new series is performed entirely by the Chicago Sinfonietta, a mid-sized professional orchestra Freeman founded in 1987. The ensemble has a reputation for inventive programming, weaving contributions of ethnic composers and soloists into programs of classical, romantic, and contemporary repertoire.

Freeman, an African-American, has conducted more than 100 orchestras and made more than 200 recordings. He received his Ph.D. from the Eastman School of Music and studied with conductor Pierre Monteux. His awards include a top prize in the Mitropoulos International Conducting Competition.

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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AFRICAN HERITAGE SYMPHONIC SERIES, VOL. II
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 061)

Ulysses Kay: *Overture to Theater Set* (4:28)
George Walker: *Lyric for Strings* (5:17)
Roque Cordero: *Eight Miniatures for Small Orchestra* (11:47)
Adolphus Hailstork: *An American Port of Call* (8:32)
Hale Smith: *Ritual and Incantations* (12:45)
Hailstork: *Epitaph: For a Man Who Dreamed* (7:37)

Chicago Sinfonietta
Paul Freeman, conductor