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News

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Pacifica Quartet Presents Works by Pulitzer-Winning Composers on Cedille Records July 10

‘Contemporary Voices’ album offers string quartets by Shulamit Ran and Jennifer Higdon, plus quintet for alto sax and strings by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich

The Grammy-winning Pacifica Quartet showcases works by Pulitzer Prize-winning composers Shulamit Ran, Jennifer Higdon, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich on *Contemporary Voices*, the ensemble’s newest Cedille Records album, available July 10, 2020.

Contemporary Voices includes the world-premiere recording of Ran’s *Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory* — String Quartet No. 3; plus Higdon’s *Voices* and Zwilich’s Quintet for Alto Saxophone and String Quartet, with renowned classical saxophonist Otis Murphy making his Cedille label debut (Cedille Records 90000 196).

The Pacifica has ties to all three composers.

A moving tribute

Written for the Pacifica, Ran’s four-movement *Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory* — String Quartet No. 3 (2012–2013) is a moving tribute to artists who created during the Holocaust, focusing on painter Felix Nussbaum, who perished in Auschwitz in 1944.

Titles of the individual movements suggest the emotional strands the work explores: “That which happened,” “Menace,” “If I perish — do not let my paintings die,” and “Shards, Memory.”

In her program note, Ran relates how she “came to know intimately and greatly admire” the Pacifica when they were in residence at the University of Chicago, where Ran was a professor of composition (now emerita).

The initial impetus for the concept, Ran says, was the Pacifica’s proposition that she use the visual arts as a point of departure. “I found out that the quartet members had special interest in art created during the early part of the 20th century, perhaps between the two world wars.”

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Explosive energy

Higdon's *Voices* (1993) evokes explosive energy, otherworldly calm, and spiritual serenity through three movements evoking different images: "Blitz," "Soft Enlacing," and "Grace."

Higdon and the Pacifica first met in 1997 at a summer music festival, where they were paired up as a young composer and young string quartet. "This is the piece they performed," Higdon writes in the CD booklet. "Inspired by their incredible musicality and enthusiasm, I decided to dedicate this quartet to them."

Singing saxophone

In Zwilich's three-movement Quintet for Alto Saxophone and String Quartet (2007), a lusciously singing saxophone shares the spotlight with virtuosic string playing.

For the recording, the Pacifica, quartet in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, enlisted the services of Murphy, professor of saxophone at IU who has won praise for his "polish and sensitivity" (*Chicago Tribune*) and "the ability to phrase the music so that it takes on a life of its own" (*Saxophone Journal*).

The Pacifica had recommended Zwilich to Arizona Friends of Chamber Music president Jean-Paul Bierny, who was looking to commission a work for the unusual combination of string quartet and saxophone, according to Brandon Vamos, the Pacifica's founding cellist. "Everyone in the quartet knew of her work and greatly admired it." Moreover, Vamos's parents, violinist Almita and violist Roland Vamos, were members of the Lydian Trio, which commissioned, premiered, and recorded Zwilich's 1982 String Trio. "I heard her trio many times as a child," he said.

Recording Team

Contemporary Voices was recorded by the multiple Grammy-nominated team of producer James Ginsburg and engineer Bill Maylone January 16, 2019, at Logan Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Chicago and December 20–21, 2019, in Auer Hall at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

Pacifica Quartet

Contemporary Voices is the Pacifica Quartet's 12th Cedille Records album. Their discography includes, among other projects, *Souvenirs of Spain & Italy*, with guitarist Sharon Isbin; *Mozart & Brahms Clarinet Quintets* with New York Philharmonic principal clarinet Anthony McGill; Brahms' Piano Quintet with Menachem Pressler of the Beaux Arts Trio; and Dvorak's Quintet Op. 97 with violist Michael Tree of the Guarneri String Quartet.

Cedille released the ensemble's four-album cycle of Shostakovich's complete string quartets, paired with works by other Soviet-era composers, to rave reviews: "The playing is nothing

short of phenomenal.” (*Daily Telegraph*, London). Named *Musical America*’s 2009 Ensemble of the Year, the Pacifica earned a Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance for their 2008 recording of Elliott Carter’s String Quartets Nos. 1 and 5 on Naxos. Their website is www.pacificaquartet.com.

Cedille Records

Launched in November 1989, Grammy Award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing and promoting the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area.

A highlight of Cedille’s 30th anniversary season, 2019–2020, is its first-ever Emerging Artist Competition. Individual performers and ensembles from the Chicago area are competing for the opportunity to make their featured debut recording, produced by and released on the award-winning label. Semifinal and final rounds of judging will take place via livestreamed public performances by the contestants this fall.

The audiophile-oriented label releases every new album in multiple formats — physical CD, 96 kHz , 24-bit, studio-quality FLAC download, and 320 Kbps MP3 download — and on major streaming services.

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille Records is the label of Cedille Chicago, NFP. Sales of physical CDs and digital downloads and streams cover only a small percentage of the label’s costs. Tax-deductible donations from individual music-lovers and grants from charitable organizations account for most of its revenue.

Cedille’s headquarters are at 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call (773) 989-2515; email: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: cedillerecords.org.

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Contemporary Voices
Pacifica Quartet
Cedille Records CDR 90000 196

Shulamit Ran: *Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory* — String Quartet No. 3 (22:44)
Jennifer Higdon: *Voices* (18:02)
Ellen Taaffe Zwilich: Quintet for Alto Saxophone and String Quartet (16:54)
with Otis Murphy, alto saxophone