

From: Nat Silverman (847) 328-4292

For Release: November 2000

For: Cedille Records
5255 N. Lakewood Ave.
Chicago, IL 60640-2220
(773) 989-2515

**BLACK SYMPHONISTS RETURN
ON NEW CD SERIES INSPIRED
BY LANDMARK LPs**

**Volume One of Cedille's *African Heritage Symphonic Series*
Offers Works by Coleridge-Taylor, Sowande, and Still**

Cedille Records has released the first disc in an 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.

The inaugural release, *African Heritage Symphonic Series, Vol. 1* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 055), offers works by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), Fela Sowande (1905-1987), and William Grant Still (1895-1978), and was funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to the Chicago Sinfonietta.

Best known for his serious choral masterpiece, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, Afro-British composer Coleridge-Taylor is represented by two works in a lighter vein. A *Danse Nègre* from *African Suite* (1898) sounds like a rousing overture evocative of Broadway musicals of a later era.

The work was inspired by the writing of Paul Laurence Dunbar, the celebrated African-American poet whom the composer knew and admired. Coleridge-Taylor's charming, often balletic *Petite Suite de Concert*, Op. 77 (1910), was championed by England's counterpart to Arthur Fielder, Sir Dan Godfrey.

Nigerian Fela Sowande's *African Suite* (three selections) from 1930, scored for string orchestra and harp, incorporates traditional Nigerian melodies and the influence of Ghanaian composer Ephraim Amu. The suite's first movement, aptly named *A Joyful Day*, is lovely and energetic, with a big-hearted opening that brings to mind Copland's *Appalachian Spring* from 1944. Sowande was also an accomplished organist, schooled in the works of Bach and Handel, which perhaps accounts for the fugal orchestral writing in the *Nostalgia* movement. The delectable, folkloric movement titled *Akinla* adapts a melody from West African *Ahighlife*, a spirited dance style that mixes African, Caribbean, and Western sonorities.

William Grant Still's *Symphony No. 1, Afro-American* (1930) evolved from blues-based sketches he wrote during the 1920s Harlem Renaissance while arranging for jazz ensembles. Freeman's sultry, swinging interpretation is several minutes faster than competing CD versions. Freeman, who worked directly with Still on performances of the First Symphony and other works, says Still always emphasized the *flow* of the music, and faster tempos were often the natural outcome.

Volume 2 of Cedille's *African Heritage Symphonic Series*, planned for release in November 2001, will comprise Adolphus Hailstork's *An American Port of Call* (1985) and *Epitaph: In Memoriam, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1979); Roque Cordero's *Eight Miniatures* (1948); George Walker's *Lyric for Strings* (1941); Ulysses Kay's *Overture to Theater Set* (1968); and Hale Smith's *Ritual and Incantations* (1974).

Volume 3, planned for release in November 2002, will present David Baker=s *Le Chat Qui Pêche* (1974), with vocal soloist Jonita Lattimore, and William Banfield=s Piano Concerto (1990s), with pianist Leon Bates.

While there is considerable (and intentional) overlap of composers between the new Cedille series and the 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* (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. AA 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 which 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.

Cedille CDs are distributed to retailers by Qualiton Imports and are available at finer record stores nationally. For a free catalog and the whereabouts of local retail outlets, consumers are invited to write to Cedille Records, 5255 N. Lakewood Ave., Chicago, IL 60640-2220, call (773) 989-2515, or send e-mail to info@cedillerecords.org. Its Web site is www.cedillerecords.org.

###

AFRICAN HERITAGE SYMPHONIC SERIES, VOL. 1
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 055)

**Samuel Coleridge-Taylor: ADanse Nègre@ from African Suite (6:14);
Petite Suite de Concert (13:36)**
Fela Sowande: African Suite (selections) (10:02)
William Grant Still: Symphony No. 1, AAfro-American@ (21:10)

Chicago Sinfonietta
Paul Freeman, conductor