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News

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Flute for Thought: New CD of Diverse Duos Showcases Chicago Composers Old and New

*Flutist Mary Stolper Premieres Pieces
by Blackwood, Ferris, Grier, and Huydts*

Flutist Mary Stolper, a frequent guest musician with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and other top local ensembles, headlines a new CD of diverse duos for flute by several generations of composers associated with the Windy City.

Chicago Duos for Flute (Cedille Records CDR 90000 071) presents a potpourri of pieces, predominantly premieres, pairing flute with guitar, viola, clarinet, piano, and percussion.

Recording debuts include Easley Blackwood's *Rondo Caprice* for Flute and Guitar, Op. 35; William Ferris's *Lux Aeterna* for Flute and Viola; Lita Grier's (pronounced GREER) *3X2* for Flute and Clarinet; and Sebastian Huydts's (pronounced HOWTS) *Music* for Flute and Piano, Op. 22c.

Three additional works unfamiliar to most listeners round out the disc: John La Montaine's *Sonata* for Piccolo and Piano, Op. 61; three of Robert Muczynski's (pronounced muh-CHINN-skee) *Duos* for Flute and Clarinet, Op. 34; and Leon Stein's *Introduction and Rondo* for Flute and Percussion.

"These composers are so completely different, yet each knows exactly what to do with the instrument," Stolper said in a pre-release interview.

Grier (b. 1937), a Chicago resident since the 1970s, wrote the lively *3X2* for Flute and Clarinet (1953) while a student at Juilliard; she later arranged the piece for solo piano, winning a New York Philharmonic Young Composer's Prize. Two short movements full of vibrant syncopations and angular lines surround a wistful and expressively contrapuntal *Adagio espressivo*.

An Indianapolis native and emeritus professor at the University of Chicago, Blackwood (b. 1933) studied with Messiaen, Hindemith, and Boulanger. From the 1950s through the 1970s, his compositions hewed to a mostly atonal, polyrhythmic path. For the gorgeously tuneful *Rondo Caprice* (1993),

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Blackwood draws on classical forms and Spanish influences in its dance- like faster sections interspersed with lyrical passages.

A professor of music at DePaul University and dean of its music school, Stein (1910-2002) composed more than 100 published works and won the American Composer's Commission Award Competition in 1950. Jaunty and exotic in the Orientalist tradition, the Introduction and Rondo for Flute and Percussion (1960) places a melodious flute against a primal-sounding percussion battery comprising various sizes of drums and cymbals. In the small repertoire of music for flute and percussion, this is one of the few works to withstand the test of time, Stolper says.

Chicago native John La Montaine (b. 1920) played piano and celesta in Toscanini's NBC orchestra in the early 1950s. By the end of the decade, he had received a Pulitzer Prize for his Ford Foundation-commissioned Piano Concerto, followed by other composing awards. His Sonata for Piccolo and Piano, Op. 61 (1993), opens with verve, while subsequent movements live up to their titles: "Sorrowing," "Searching," and "Playful."

Flutist Stolper says it's rare to hear the piccolo in the role of a mellifluous solo instrument rather than as an assertive member of a concert or marching band. The Sonata's second movement, in particular, provides a "perfect example" of the piccolo in its less-familiar role as a lyrical instrument with a personality all its own, says Stolper.

Internationally known for directing his William Ferris Chorale, Ferris (1937-2000) was an accomplished organist and composer who spent most of his life in Chicago, in close association with the Catholic Church. His poignantly expressive *Lux Aeterna* for Flute and Viola (1997) shows his spiritually reflective side. The flute and viola act as equal partners across a continuum of delicate moods and soft colors. The piece's melodies, instrumental interplay, and sense of anxious yearning bespeak Ferris's devotion to contemporary sacred music.

Robert Muczynski (b. 1929), a Chicago native, received numerous fellowships, awards, and commissions from the Fromm Foundation, Louisville Symphony, Grant Park Orchestra, and Ford Foundation, among other sources. He originally wrote his Duos, Op. 34 (1973), a set of six miniatures, for two flutes and later revised them for flute and clarinet. The last three duos are offered here: two spirited allegros surrounding a lovely *Andante molto*.

The young lion among this group of composers, Huydts (b. 1966) was a rising piano star when he left his native Amsterdam to attend the University of Chicago in the early 1990s, where he turned his attention to composing. *Music* for Flute and Piano requires virtuoso playing from both instrumentalists. It's a work that Stolper says "pushes the envelope for the flute" in the sheer power required to hold its own with the piano, especially in the second and fourth movements.

Stolper is principal flutist of the Grant Park Orchestra, the chamber orchestra Concertante di Chicago, and the Chicago Opera Theater. She has performed and toured internationally with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the direction of maestros Solti, Barenboim, and Boulez. She made her recording debut on the Erato label with works of Shulamit Ran and is featured on Cedille Records' *American Flute Concertos*, performed with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra under Paul Freeman (Cedille CDR 90000 046).

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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CHICAGO DUOS FOR FLUTE
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 071)

Lita Grier: *3X2* for Flute and Clarinet
Easley Blackwood: *Rondo Caprice* for Flute and Guitar, Op. 35
Leon Stein: *Introduction and Rondo* for Flute and Percussion
John LaMontaine: *Sonata* for Piccolo and Piano, Op. 61
William Ferris: *Lux Aeterna* for Flute and Viola
Robert Muczynski: *Duos*, Op. 34, for Flute and Clarinet (selection)
Sebastian Huydts: *Music* for Flute and Piano, Op. 22c

Mary Stolper, flute

Eric P. Mandat, clarinet; Denis Azabagic, guitar; Jim Ross, percussion;
Melody Lord, piano; Keith Conant, viola; Sebastian Huydts, piano