

Cedille Records  
5255 N. Lakewood 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 60201-3773  
Phone (847) 328-4292  
Fax (847) 328-4317  
Email: natsilv@aol.com

# News

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## URSULA OPPENS PLAYS COMPLETE SOLO PIANO WORKS OF ELIOTT CARTER ON NEW CEDILLE RECORDS CD

Survey Celebrates Acclaimed  
American Composer's  
100<sup>th</sup> Birthday

*Album Includes Two World Premiere Recordings*

Pianist Ursula Oppens performs the complete solo piano works of Elliott Carter on a new Cedille Records CD — a tribute to the acclaimed American composer in advance of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on December 11, 2008.

*Oppens Plays Carter* is the only fully-complete CD survey of Carter's solo piano music and includes world premiere recordings of *Matribute* (2007) and *Caténaires* (2006), the second of Carter's *Two Thoughts About the Piano*. Other works on the CD are *90+* (1994), *Retrouvailles* (2000), *Night Fantasies* (1980), *Two Diversions* (1999), *Piano Sonata* (1945–46), and *Intermittences* (2005), from the aforementioned *Two Thought About the Piano* (Cedille Records CDR 900000 108).

“This recording is the perfect tribute to the dean of American composers by the pianist most closely associated with his music,” says James Ginsburg, Cedille Records president.

Carter wrote *90+* for the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of his friend, the distinguished Italian composer Goffredo Petrassi. In his program notes for the premiere performance June 11, 1994, Carter says

the work is “built around ninety short, accented notes played in a slow, regular beat. Against these, the context changes continually.”

*Retrouvailles* was commissioned by London’s Southbank Centre as one of 12 works celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of Pierre Boulez. There is mutual admiration between the two composers. Boulez has written of the “the gripping complexity of [Carter’s] poetic universe,” while Carter has written four celebratory birthday pieces for Boulez. *Retrouvailles* means “things retrieved,” and the piece duly reworks a distinctive theme, based on the letters of Boulez’s name, that appeared in two of Carter’s previous tributes to the French composer.

The transcendental *Night Fantasies* was written for a group of four prominent pianists including Ms. Oppens, who gave the premiere. The others were Paul Jacobs, Charles Rosen, and Gilbert Kalish. One of Carter’s most demanding works to perform, it features continuously changing moods, partly inspired by the contrasting personalities of the pianists.

*Two Diversions* comprises two short studies that “are rather exceptional in Carter’s output,” Bayan Northcott writes in the CD liner notes. The writing is geared “not to the most brilliant virtuosi, but to more modest techniques, particularly of young players.” Carter uses cross-rhythmic ideas to exploit, in his words, “a growing contrast between simultaneous musical ideas.” The pieces were Carter’s contribution to the *Carnegie Hall Millennium Piano Book*, a collection of works by 10 composers. Ms. Oppens and four students presented the entire set at New York’s Weill Recital Hall on March 2, 2000.

*Matribe* was requested by conductor James Levine as a birthday offering to his mother — a tribute to “Ma.” It’s similar to the *Two Diversions*, being “a comparable study in contrary rates of unfolding,” Northcott writes.

The pivotal *Piano Sonata* was the breakthrough work in which Carter found his voice and projected the scope of his talent. The 23-minute sonata comprises two movements, both of which

are unusual in that “they are not really generated by the thematic material that appears in them,” Northcott writes. “The themes serve rather as section-markers on the surface of a musical flow built out of more fundamental rhythmic and harmonic elements.” Despite its resonances of Copland and Stravinsky, the sonata’s “big boned rhetoric is already a world away from the clipped niceties of neo-classicism.”

Carter’s recent *Two Thoughts About the Piano* comprises two separate pieces. *Intermittences* employs dense and gritty chords reminiscent of *Night Fantasies*, while its use of harmonics to alter the timbre of recurrent pitches harkens back to the *Piano Sonata*. But *Intermittences* goes well beyond those earlier works. Here, Carter explores what he calls “the many meanings that silence can express,” using jump-cuts of texture and unpredictable pauses. The second part is the virtuosic *Caténaires*: a fiendishly difficult, toccata-like succession of rapid-fire 16<sup>th</sup> notes, it is one of Carter’s most harmonically compelling recent works.

*Oppens Plays Carter* was produced and engineered by multiple Grammy Award-winner Judith Sherman at recording sessions February 4–8, 2008, at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York.

The winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, Carter is internationally recognized as one of the leading American voices in classical music and is among the few living composers elected to the Classical Music Hall of Fame. A musical innovator with an erudite style, Carter studied with Gustav Holst and Walter Piston; among his early mentors was Charles Ives. Former *New Yorker* critic Andrew Porter has called Carter “America’s great musical poet.”

One of Carter’s leading interpreters, Ms. Oppens is “known particularly for the intelligence, technical skill and warmth she brings to her performances and recordings of contemporary music,” according to *Grove Music Online*. In addition to her long and productive association with Carter, she has premiered works by numerous luminaries of contemporary

music, including Berio, Ligeti, and Rzewski, to name a few. She is a prolific recording artist, and many of her discs are phonographic classics.

Ms. Oppens was John Evans Distinguished Professor of Music at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., from 1994 through the end of the 2007–08 academic year. This fall, she took up her new post as Distinguished Professor of Music at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York.

Grammy award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from Chicago.

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*Oppens Plays Carter:*  
*Elliott Carter at 100 — The Complete Piano Music*  
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 108)  
**Ursula Oppens, piano**

**90+ (1994) (4:55)**  
**Retrouvailles (2000) (1:38)**  
**Night Fantasies (1980) (19:48)**  
**Two Diversions (1999) (7:28)**  
**Matribute (2007) (2:05)**  
**Piano Sonata (1945–46) (23:31)**  
**Two Thoughts About The Piano (2005–06) 10:55**