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News

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HARLEM QUARTET AND CHICAGO SINFONIETTA SERVE UP AMERICAN 'DELIGHTS' ON NEW CEDILLE CD

**Mei-Ann Chen Conducts World-Premiere Recordings
of Works for String Quartet and Orchestra by Michael Abels
and Randall Craig Fleischer**

*Program includes concerto by Benjamin Lees
and orchestral piece by An-Lun Huang*

Making her full-length recording debut, Mei-Ann Chen, music director of the Chicago Sinfonietta, leads the orchestra on a new Cedille Records album featuring the Harlem Quartet in world-premiere recordings of works by contemporary American composers Michael Abels and Randall Craig Fleischer.

The new album, *Delights & Dances*, takes its name from Abels's rousing, blues- and bluegrass-inflected *Delights & Dances* for String Quartet and String Orchestra (2007). Fleischer's *West Side Story Concerto* for String Quartet and Orchestra (2011) is an arrangement of musical numbers from Leonard Bernstein's 1957 Broadway hit musical.

American composer Benjamin Lees's dramatic, full-throated Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra (1968) and Chinese-Canadian composer An-Lun Huang's energetic "Saibei Dance" (1975) complete the program.

The album was released digitally May 7 and will be released on CD May 28 (Cedille Records CDR 90000 141).

Contemporary Concerti Grossi

In the CD booklet notes, Andrea Lamoreaux, music director of Chicago's WFMT-FM, places concertos for quartet and orchestra within the concerto grosso tradition of the Baroque era, which produced some of today's best-known classical works, such as J.S. Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos. Concerti grossi enlist "a small group of soloists trading themes with a slightly larger ensemble, about the size of a modern chamber orchestra," she writes.

Abels (b.1962) composed his *Delights & Dances* specifically for the Harlem Quartet.

The New York Times applauded the Harlem Quartet for the "panache" it displayed in its 2007 world premiere of the work at Carnegie Hall.

"It's a great piece," says Ilmar Gavilán, first violinist of the Harlem Quartet. "It has a jazzy grooviness to it, which I've never seen for this instrumentation. We each get to play our own written out solo, and it ends triumphantly in a spectacular exchange between quartet and orchestra."

Publisher Subito Music says *Delights & Dances* "reflects the composer's own experiences as an African American" growing up in Phoenix, Ariz. and later studying at the University of Southern California. "The work culls the unique American musical traditions of jazz, blues, bluegrass, and Latin dance idioms."

Fleischer's *West Side Story Concerto* received its world premiere by the Harlem Quartet and Chicago Sinfonietta under Chen's direction in June 2012. Fleischer (b.1958) studied with Bernstein as a conducting fellow at Tanglewood in 1989.

"The challenge for me in crafting this arrangement," Fleischer writes, "was to retain everything that is unique about the score . . . and transfer all of Bernstein's unique genius from

voices to string instruments.” The work roughly traces the musical’s story trajectory and includes instrumental versions of “Maria,” “Tonight,” and “America” among the memorable tunes. It also features two cadenzas for the solo quartet. The heartbreaking “Somewhere” (“There’s a Place for Us”) forms the basis of the work’s touching “Finale.”

Lees (1924–2010) was born in China to Russian-Jewish émigrés. The family relocated to San Francisco shortly after his birth. His Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra, from 1964, exhibits his trademarks of vigorous rhythmic activity and frequent shifts of meter. The concerto opens and closes with tightly wound, perpetual-motion movements which bookend a relaxed and lyrical central movement. This is only the second recording of the work in its nearly 50-year history.

Huang’s “Saibei Dance” from his *Saibei Dance Suite* No. 2 has special significance for Chen and the Sinfonietta: it was the first piece she and the ensemble performed together when she made her guest-conducting debut with the orchestra in fall 2009.

In synthesizing Chinese and Western musical elements, Huang (b. 1949) incorporates folk melodies from the scenic, mountainous Saibei region near Beijing.

Recording Credits

Delights & Dances was produced by James Ginsburg and engineered by Bill Maylone in sessions June 19–20, 2012, in Wentz Concert Hall at North Central College, Naperville, Ill.

The Harlem Quartet

The Harlem Quartet is “bringing a new attitude to classical music, one that is fresh, bracing and intelligent,” said the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. The quartet was founded by the Sphinx Organization, a national nonprofit that encourages the participation of Blacks and Latinos in classical music. The ensemble aims to engage young and new audiences through varied repertoire, highlighting works by minority composers.

In addition to performing on chamber music series across the country, the quartet recently performed with guitarist Eliot Fisk at New York's 92nd Street Y and with jazz pianist-composer Chick Corea at New York's Blue Note club. Quartet members on *Delights & Dances* are Ilmar Gavilán and Melissa White, violins; Juan-Miguel Hernandez, viola; and Paul Wiancko, cello. For more information, visit HarlemQuartet.com.

Mei-Ann Chen and the Chicago Sinfonietta

Taiwan-born conductor Mei-Ann Chen became the second music director in Chicago Sinfonietta history when she succeeded founder Paul Freeman at the start of the 2011–12 season.

The Sinfonietta was named by ASCAP and the League of American Orchestras as the recipient of the 2012 First Place Award for Adventurous Programming for Chen's first season of concerts. Her work was also recognized by the League, which chose her as the recipient of the 2012 Helen M. Thompson Award that recognizes early career music directors who show exceptional musical leadership and commitment to organizational vitality.

Chen, who is also music director of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, made her conducting debut with the San Francisco Symphony in February. *San Francisco Classical Voice* called her "a dynamo of a conductor." Her subscription-concert debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra this month met with great critical and audience acclaim.

Chen, who holds a doctor of musical arts degree in conducting from the University of Michigan, was the first woman to win the Malko Competition (2005).

Freeman, an internationally revered conductor and prolific recording artist, founded the Chicago Sinfonietta in 1987 as a mid-size orchestra dedicated to promoting diversity, inclusion, and innovative programming.

Delights & Dances is the Sinfonietta's seventh album for Cedille Records. Its discography on the label includes the three-volume African Heritage Symphonic Series and a CD of music by the late African-American composer Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson.

Cedille Records

Grammy award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) has been dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area since its launch in fall 1989.

The audiophile-oriented label is releasing the album *Delights & Dances* as a physical CD; a 96 kHz, 24-bit, studio quality FLAC download; and a 320 Kbps MP3 download.

Cedille Records is distributed in the Western Hemisphere by Naxos of America and its distribution partners, by Select Music in the U.K., and by other independent distributors in major international classical music markets.

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille Records is the label of Cedille Chicago, NFP (formerly The Chicago Classical Recording Foundation). For a free catalog and the locations of local retail outlets, contact Cedille Records, 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call (773) 989-2515; e-mail: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: cedillerecords.org.

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DELIGHTS & DANCES
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 141)

Michael Abels: *Delights & Dances* for String Quartet and String Orchestra (13:03)
Benjamin Lees: Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra (20:49)
An-Lun Huang: "Saibei Dance" from *Saibei Suite No. 2* (4:08)
**Leonard Bernstein arr. Randall Craig Fleischer: *West Side Story Concerto*
for String Quartet and Orchestra (25:47)**

Harlem Quartet
Chicago Sinfonietta,
Mei-Ann Chen, cond.