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News

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Modernism Meets Folk Music On New Cedille Album Featuring Jennifer Koh and Shai Vosner

'Signs, Games + Messages' CD Offers Works for Violin and Piano by Janáček, Kurtág, and Bartók

Grammy-nominated violinist Jennifer Koh and piano virtuoso Shai Vosner present works that weave traditional Central European folk music with 20th-century modernism on the new Cedille Records album *Signs, Games + Messages*.

Leoš Janáček's Sonata for Violin and Piano, JW VII/7, and Béla Bartók's First Sonata for Violin and Piano, Sz. 75, bookend 13 of György Kurtág's potent miniatures. These include his Tre Pezzi (Three Pieces) for Violin and Piano, Op. 14e, and ten pieces chosen from his multivolume *Játékok* (Games) and the series *Signs, Games and Messages*, which inspired the album's title (Cedille Records CDR 90000 143).

The album was slated for digital release October 1 and will be released on CD October 29.

Signs, Games + Messages is Koh's eighth Cedille album and Vosner's Cedille label debut. It's also the artists' first joint recording.

Frequent recital partners, Koh and Vosner have performed works from the new CD for audiences in Philadelphia; Richmond, Va.; Carefree, Ariz.; Denver, Colo.; Kansas City, Mo.; and elsewhere.

“Intertwined strands of musical DNA”

As the artists explain in their preface to Andrea Lamoreaux’s liner notes, they set out to create a program exploring “the tension between the visionary modernism of these masterpieces and the visceral pull of folk and cultural memory that is so essential to the language of these composers.” The artists liken these elements to “intertwined strands of musical DNA.”

The results of this alchemy go beyond the mere borrowing of rhythmic patterns or quoting of folk tunes. Folkloric sources “can be heard behind even the most abstract passages,” the artists state.

As examples, they cite the “condensed, speech-like motifs” of the Janáček Sonata, the “quasi improvisatory freedom” of the Bartók Sonata, and the “allusions of Kurtág’s enigmatic aphorisms.”

Czech composer Janáček (1854–1928) imbued his Sonata for Violin and Piano, first performed in 1922, with some of the Russian flavor found in his 1920 opera *Káťa Kabanová*. A work of dramatic intensity, its “key centers and modes — major or minor — shift constantly as Janáček adds in chromatic tones and sharp dissonances,” Lamoreaux writes in the program notes.

Hungary’s Kurtág (b. 1926) “creates a sound-world all his own,” Lamoreaux writes. She quotes British music critic and BBC broadcaster Tom Service’s comments about Kurtág’s *Játékok* series in which he describes the pieces as “a compositional journey that has often involved reducing music to the level of the fragment . . . maximizing the effect and impact of every gesture.” Among the offbeat Kurtág selections on the CD is the 30-second “Fundamentals” No. 2, from *Játékok*, Vol. 6, scored for piano and wordless voice part, with Koh vocalizing brief noises and sighs. The shortest work on the CD, the comical 19-second “A Hungarian Lesson for Foreigners,” also from, *Játékok*, Vol. 6, is for solo piano, this time with both musicians loudly enunciating Hungarian words.

A Hungarian musical icon, Bartók (1881–1945) wrote his First Sonata for Violin and Piano for his compatriot, violinist Jelly D’Aranyi. Lamoreaux writes: “The folk element in Bartók’s music stems from an intimate comprehension of his sources’ rhythms and melodies that he internalized and blended with his own artistic voice.” She notes that the whole tones and pentatonic scales of folk

music can also be heard in the Sonata, “an ambitiously conceived expansion of tonality.”

Recording credits

Signs, Games + Messages was produced and engineered by multiple Grammy award-winner Judith Sherman and edited by Bill Maylone, Cedille’s chief recording engineer. The album was recorded at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City, April 27–28 and October 14–17, 2012.

Violinist Jennifer Koh

Jennifer Koh is recognized for her intense, commanding performances, delivered with virtuosity and technical assurance. With an impassioned musical curiosity, she is forging an artistic path of her own devising. She is dedicated to performing the violin repertoire of all eras from traditional to contemporary, believing that the past and present form a continuum. She is also committed to exploring connections in the works she performs, searching for similarities of voice among diverse composers and associations within the works of a single composer. Her website is www.jenniferkoh.com.

Pianist Shai Wosner

Shai Wosner has attracted international recognition for his artistry, musical integrity and creative insight. His performances of repertoire ranging from Beethoven and Mozart to Schoenberg and Ligeti, as well as music by his contemporaries, communicate imaginative programming and intellectual curiosity. Critics have praised him for his “keen musical mind and deep musical soul” (*NPR’s All Things Considered*) and for exemplifying a “remarkable blend of the intellectual, physical and even devilish sides of performance” (*Chicago Sun Times*). His website is www.shaiwosner.com.

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 releases every new album in multiple formats: a physical CD; a 96 kHz, 24-bit, studio-quality FLAC download; and a 320 Kbps MP3 download.

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Signs, Games + Messages
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 143)

Leoš Janáček: Sonata for Violin and Piano, JW VII/7 (17:29)

György Kurtág: Doina (2:28); The Carezza Jig (0:45);

Tre Pezzi for Violin and Piano, Op. 14e (5:31);

Fundamentals No. 2 (0:30); In memoriam Blum Tamás (3:08);

Like the flowers of the field ... (1:52); Postcard to Anna Keller (0:30);

A Hungarian Lesson for Foreigners (0:19); Fanfare to Judit Maros' wedding (0:46);

Les Adieux (in Janáček's Manier) (2:05); In Nomine—all'ongherese (4:51)

Béla Bartók: First Sonata for Violin and Piano, Sz. 75 (35:14)

Jennifer Koh, violin

Shai Wosner, piano