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News

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Revered Champion of American Music Ursula Oppens Revisits Frederic Rzewski's Landmark for Solo Piano 'The People United Will Never Be Defeated!' on New Cedille Records Album

*Oppens and pianist Jerome Lowenthal also perform
world-premiere recording of Rzewski's 'Four Hands'*

In 1975, maverick American composer Frederick Rzewski wrote his epochal *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* for pianist Ursula Oppens, who gave the world premiere the following year at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Soon thereafter, she made the premiere recording of this remarkable landmark of contemporary repertoire.

To mark the 40th anniversary of Rzewski's beloved, signature set of 36 solo piano variations, Oppens re-recorded it for Cedille Records, along with the world-premiere recording of *Four Hands*, a new piano duet Rzewski (pronounced ZHEV-skee) wrote for Oppens and pianist Jerome Lowenthal, her duettist on the album.

The new recording, titled *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, will be available September 11 on CD and as a digital download (Cedille Records CDR 90000 158).

'Amazing Variety'

A riveting, audience-pleasing tour-de-force, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* is a nearly hour-long set of variations on Sergio Ortega's popular Chilean protest song, "El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido" from the era of Augusto Pinochet's repressive military dictatorship. AllMusic.com describes it as a work "of bewildering and amazing variety, ranging

from serialism to jazz to romanticism to the further reaches of the avant-garde and back” and culminating in “a superbly emotional climax.”

Gramophone ranks it “among the most politically and musically ambitious of all keyboard epics” and describes it as “a melting-pot of world-wide concern expressed in an ultra-American idiom.”

Oppens’ world-premiere recording of *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* for the Vanguard label was released in 1978 on analog LP and received a Grammy nomination.

“The new recording from Cedille Records offers the advantages of 21st-century audiophile production values and an interpretation that benefits from the artist’s four-decade association with the work,” says James Ginsburg, Cedille founder and president.

‘Wickedly Witty’

Rzewski wrote his four-movement *Four Hands* (2012) on commission from Oppens and Lowenthal. In the liner notes, Lowenthal writes that the piece neither avoids nor ignores the problems inherent in piano duet performance. Rather, the composer “exploits them so brilliantly that they become the subject of the work.” Rzewski’s “wickedly witty” use of a compositional device called a hocket “forces the two performers to fall all over each other while playing music of richly elusive substance.”

Oppens and Lowenthal bestowed the world premiere of Rzewski’s complete *Four Hands* on two young pianists they had mentored, Ran Dank and Soyeon Kate Lee, who gave the premiere performance September 3, 2013, at New York’s Le Poisson Rouge. *New York Times* music critic Anthony Tommasini found himself “absorbed and exhilarated” by it.

Recording Dates and Venue

The album was produced and engineered by multiple Grammy-winner Judith Sherman on December 11, 12, 13, and 15, 2014, at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York.

Ursula Oppens

Grove Music Online notes that Ursula Oppens “is known particularly for the intelligence, technical skill, and warmth she brings to her performances and recordings of contemporary music.”

Her discography includes the Grammy-nominated *Winging It: Piano Music of John Corigliano* on Cedille Records. A *Washington Post* reviewer declared that “her rigorous, unforced performances again prove that few pianists of any era can claim a hold on contemporary piano music as she does.”

Her Cedille album *Oppens Plays Carter*, comprising the then-complete piano works of Elliott Carter at age 100, received a Grammy nomination and was also named a “Best of the Year” selection by *The New York Times*.

Oppens’ and Jerome Lowenthal’s Cedille recording of duo-piano music of Messiaen and Debussy was named a “CD of the Week” by the *Chicago Tribune*.

Oppens is a Distinguished Professor of Music at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. From 1994 through 2008, she served as John Evans Distinguished Professor of Music at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

Lowenthal has appeared as soloist with conductors including Barenboim, Ozawa, Tilson Thomas, Temirkanov, and Slatkin, and with such giants of the past as Bernstein, Ormandy, Monteux, and Stokowski. He has played sonatas with Itzhak Perlman and quintets with the Lark, Avalon, and Brentano Quartets, among other engagements. He has been a faculty member at the Juilliard School since 1991 and has taught for 42 summers at the Music Academy of the West.

Cedille Records

Marking its 25th anniversary during the 2014–2015 season, 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 debut in November 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.

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 the Naxos network 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). Headquarters are at 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call (773) 989-2515; e-mail: info@cedillerecords.org.
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The People United Will Never Be Defeated!
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 158)

Frederic Rzewski:
***The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (50:43)**
***Four Hands* (15:57)**

Ursula Oppens, piano
Jerome Lowenthal, piano