

Cedille Records
1205 W. Balmoral Ave.
Chicago, IL 60640
(773) 989-2515
www.cedillerecords.org

Press contact: Nat Silverman
Nathan J. Silverman Co. PR
2906 Central St. #250
Evanston, IL 60201-1283
Phone: (847) 868-1417
Email: natsilv@aol.com

News

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Violinist Jennifer Koh Traverses Kaija Saariaho's Distinctive Sound World on New Cedille Records Album

*'Saariaho X Koh' features world premiere recordings
of acclaimed Finnish composer's 'Light and Matter'
and her violin-and-cello version of 'Aure'*

American violinist Jennifer Koh showcases chamber works and a violin concerto by the visionary and much-honored contemporary Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho on her new album *Saariaho X Koh* from Cedille Records.

Kindred spirits and close friends, the violinist and composer share the distinction of having received top honors from *Musical America*: Saariaho as 2008 Composer of the Year, Koh as 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year.

World-premiere recordings on *Saariaho X Koh*, available November 9, 2018, are *Light and Matter* for violin, cello, and piano and the violin-and-cello version of *Aure*. The program also includes *Tocar* for violin and piano; *Cloud Trio* for violin, viola, and cello; and the violin concerto *Graal théâtre*, performed in its chamber-orchestra version (Cedille Records CDR 90000 183).

Koh's collaborators on the album include pianist Nicolas Hodges, violist Hsin-Yun Huang, cellists Anssi Karttunen and Wilhelmina Smith, and, for *Graal théâtre*, the Curtis 2021 Ensemble, conducted by Conner Gray Covington.

Timbral Colors

While Saariaho is renowned for her digitally enhanced, operatic soundscapes, the works on *Saariaho X Koh* contain no electronic effects. All, however, reflect her longstanding collaborations with

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string players, such as Koh and Karttunen, her intimate knowledge of string technique — the violin was her first instrument — and a compositional voice “marked by its timbral colors,” as Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti writes in the album’s liner notes.

Opera and theater director Peter Sellars, in an interview excerpted in the album notes, says Saariaho’s music “takes you into this other world of visual art which is not about things as they appear but their secret existence shimmering in the dark.”

The album’s opening track, *Tocar* (2010), Spanish for “to touch,” explores the playful and tactile aspects of the word. *Cloud Trio* (2009) was prompted by shape-shifting clouds in the French Alps. *Light and Matter* (2014) was inspired by sunlit colors and shadows in a city park outside the composer’s window. The violin-and-cello version of *Aure* (2011), meaning a gentle breeze, was created for and dedicated to Koh and cellist Karttunen. The album’s largest work, *Graal théâtre* (1994) is the piece that first attracted Koh to the composer and one she has performed many times. *Grove Music Online* says the work illustrates “Saariaho’s rich and expansive string style, but places a greater emphasis on melody than earlier works.”

Recording Team

Saariaho X Koh was produced by multiple Grammy winner Judith Sherman, with recording engineers Drew Schlegel and Guillaume Dujardin. The album was recorded October 31, 2016, in the Miriam and Robert Gould Rehearsal Hall, Curtis School of Music, Philadelphia; December 11, 2016, at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York; and November 25–26, 2017, at Studios Ferber, Paris.

Jennifer Koh

Jennifer Koh is a “brilliant violinist” (*The New Yorker*) who performs with “conviction, ferocity, and an irresistible sense of play” (*Washington Post*). *Saariaho X Koh* is the violinist’s twelfth Cedille Records album in a discography that includes the Grammy-nominated *String Poetic*. In reviewing her album *Bach & Beyond Part 2*, ClassicsToday.com proclaimed, “When Jennifer Koh plays, people listen. Or they should.” Koh has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of

commissioning projects and has premiered more than 70 works written specially for her. Her website is jenniferkoh.com.

Cedille Records

Launched in November 1989, Grammy Award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing and promoting the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area.

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

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille Records is the label of Cedille Chicago, NFP. Sales of physical CDs and digital downloads and streams cover only a small percentage of the label's costs. Tax-deductible donations from individual music-lovers and grants from charitable organizations account for most of its revenue.

Headquarters are at 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call (773) 989-2515; email: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: cedillerecords.org.

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Saariaho X Koh
Jennifer Koh, Violin
Cedille Records CDR 90000 183

Kaija Saariaho (b. 1952)
Tocar (6:51)
Cloud Trio (13:30)
Light and Matter (13:53)
Aure (5:47)
Graal théâtre (27:40)