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News

Recording release date: Nov. 15, 2019

Leo Sowerby Works for Solo and Duo Piano Heard in World-Premiere Recordings on Midprice Release

A new release on the midprice Cedille FOUNDation imprint offers world-premiere recordings of solo and duo piano music spanning nearly the entire career of Prix de Rome and Pulitzer Prize winning American composer Leo Sowerby (1895–1968).

The album, with pianists Gail Quillman and Julia Tsien, was recorded in 1997 in Chicago, where Sowerby spent the bulk of his student and professional life.

Available November 15, 2019, *Leo Sowerby: Selected Works for Solo and Duo Piano* includes *Three Summer Beach Sketches*, H109; *Suite for Piano – Four Hands*, H371 (performed on two pianos); *Passacaglia*, *Interlude and Fugue*, H207a; *Prelude* (for two pianos), H212; *Fisherman's Tune*, H161b; and *Synconata*, H176b (Cedille FOUNDation CDR 7006).

[An aside: the Sowerby album arrives a day after the 30th anniversary of Cedille's debut recording, released November 14, 1989. That first album, which likewise features piano music, is Soviet émigré pianist Dmitry Paperno's program of works by Russian composers Tchaikovsky, Liadov, Rachmaninov, Scriabin, and Medtner (Cedille Records CDR 90000 001). That inaugural release, like all Cedille albums, remains in the label's active catalog.]

Pianists Quillman and Tsien share a direct musical lineage to Sowerby. Quillman, now retired, studied harmony and counterpoint with Sowerby in the mid-1950s. She has performed more of his solo piano and chamber music than anyone else, according to the Leo Sowerby Foundation, which she founded in 1989. Tsien, an active Chicago-area performer and teacher, was a Quillman student.

None of the works on the album were published during Sowerby's lifetime, and only *Fisherman's Tune* and *Three Summer Beach Sketches* are in print today, Francis Crociata, Sowerby foundation president since 1993, writes in the album's liner notes.

The album's earliest work, *Three Summer Beach Sketches*, for solo piano (1915), shows the influence of composer-pianist Percy Grainger, with whom Sowerby studied. It's also one of the earliest serious compositions to use jazz and blue harmonies.

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Composed in 1959, Suite for Piano – Four Hands shares a kinship with the music of Samuel Barber, whom Sowerby championed, and that of former Sowerby student Ned Rorem.

Passacaglia, Interlude and Fugue for solo piano (1931) is a dreamy, French Impressionist take on classic forms. Prelude (for two pianos) (1932) manifests “more English austerity than French sensuality, more Delius than Debussy,” Crociata writes.

Sowerby’s brief *Fisherman’s Tune* is an homage to Grainger. The overture-length sonata movement *Synconata*, composer-arranged for two pianos, was originally written in 1924 as a curtain-raiser for American bandleader Paul Whiteman’s “symphonic jazz” concerts on the same tour that launched Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*.

A grant from the Leo Sowerby Foundation funded the album’s recording and production.

Recording Team

Leo Sowerby: Selected Works for Solo and Duo Piano was produced by Francis Crociata and engineered by Hudson Fair in Ganz Hall at Roosevelt University’s Chicago Musical College August 21–23, 1997.

Leo Sowerby

Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians calls Sowerby “a remarkable American composer . . . eclectic in the positive sense of the word.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* credits Sowerby for combining “a fine melodic talent with a use of modern harmonies.” In 1938, the *Musical Quarterly* observed, “This 20th century American composes for the present as a part of it, and for the future perhaps even more than he realizes.”

In 1921, Sowerby received the first American Prix de Rome. He was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1946 for his cantata *The Canticle of the Sun*, whose world-premiere recording appears on the 2011 Cedille Records album *The Pulitzer Project* with Chicago’s Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Carlos Kalmar.

Born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Sowerby taught composition and theory at the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago from 1925 to 1962 and was organist at Chicago’s St. James Episcopal Cathedral from 1927 to 1962. He left Chicago in 1962 for Washington National Cathedral in the nation’s capital to become founding director of the College of Church Musicians, a position he held until his death in 1968. Sowerby, who died in Port Clinton, Ohio, near the summer choir camp where he taught for many years, is buried in Washington National Cathedral.

Cedille FOUNDation Recordings

The Cedille FOUNDation imprint releases archival and out-of-print recordings by Chicago performers and composers championed by Cedille Records. Its CDs are priced about 40 percent less than Cedille Records’ front-line product because they rely on existing recordings.

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.

A highlight of Cedille's 30th anniversary season, 2019–2020, is its first-ever Emerging Artist Competition. Individual performers and ensembles from the Chicago area are competing for the opportunity to make a recording produced by and released on the award-winning label. Semifinal and final rounds of judging will take place in May 2020 during public performances by the contestants.

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 — and on major streaming services.

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.

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Leo Sowerby: Selected Works for Solo and Duo Piano
Gail Quillman and Julia Tsien, pianists
Cedille FOUNDation 7006

Three Summer Beach Sketches, H109 (8:52)
Suite for Piano – Four Hands, H371 (17:25)
Passacaglia, Interlude and Fugue, H207a (16:37)
Prelude (for two pianos), H212 (6:26)
Fisherman's Tune, H161b (2:46)
Synconata, H176b (10:04)