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—ClassicsToday.com (Disc of the Month selection, June 2008)

# Rhapsodic Musings

21<sup>st</sup> century works  
for solo violin

Elliott Carter

Esa-Pekka Salonen

Augusta Read Thomas

John Zorn

Jennifer  
Koh

CEDILLE



Producer & Engineer Judith Sherman

Assistant Engineer Jeanne Velonis

Digital Editing Bill Maylone

Recorded June 1 and 2, 2008 (Salonen and Thomas); January 5, 2009 (Carter); and March 30, 2009 (Zorn) at the Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City.

Art Direction Adam Fleishman / www.adamfleishman.com

Photos of Jennifer Koh Fran Kaufman

Microphones Schoeps CMC6 with MK2 capsule, Sonodore Pre-amp

Violin 1727 Ex Grumiaux Ex General DuPont Stradivari

#### Publishers

Salonen: *Lachen Verlernt* — © 2002 G. Schirmer, Inc.

Carter: *Four Lauds* — © 1999, 1984, 2000 & 1999 Hendon Music, Inc.

Thomas: *Pulsar* — © 2002 G.Schirmer, Inc.

Zorn: *Goetia* — © 2002 Hips Road

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## Rhapsodic Musings — 21st Century Works For Solo Violin

### Jennifer Koh, violin

#### Esa-Pekka Salonen

① *Lachen Verlernt (2002)* (9:43)

video by Tal Rosner\*

#### Elliott Carter

*Four Lauds* (17:22)

② *Statement — Remembering  
Aaron (1999)* (3:59)

③ *Riconoscenza per Goffredo  
Petrassi (1984)* (5:10)

④ *Rhapsodic Musings (2000)* (3:05)

⑤ *Fantasy (1999)* (5:00)

#### Augusta Read Thomas

⑥ *Pulsar (2003)* (5:33)

#### John Zorn

*Goetia (2002)* (19:00)

⑦ I (1:24)

⑧ II (3:13)

⑨ III (1:15)

⑩ IV (2:35)

⑪ V (1:44)

⑫ VI (2:56)

⑬ VII (3:45)

⑭ VIII (1:52)

**Total Time:** (52:00)



\*Place the CD in the CD-ROM drive of your computer. The presentation should open automatically on Windows Platforms (if it does not, go to the "Start Menu," select "Run," find your CD-ROM drive and select "Run\_Me.exe"); for Mac, depending on the operating system, double-click on either the "Run Me OS9" or "Run me OSX" icons that appear in the CD-ROM Window.

# A Personal Statement

The program for this recording was born out of my search for a sense of meaning in the days, months and years following the events of September 11, 2001. I believe that music begins when we cannot find the words to express what we feel. It offers us the gift of empathy, a way for us to collectively distill the experiences and events of the world in which we live. Music gives us a glimpse of the summit of who we hope we can be, while addressing the best and worst sides of who we are.

Each of the pieces on this program spoke to me in metaphorical and musically direct ways. Salonen's *Lachen Verlernt* (Laughter Unlearned) was inspired by Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, in which the speaker yearns to be able to laugh again. *Lachen Verlernt* reminded me that music is the medium through which we can experience the emotions we thought we had lost. Each of Carter's *Four Lauds* is an intimate portraiture of artists I have long admired — two were written as tributes to past artists and two were written for contemporaries. I was inspired by Carter's celebration of life as well as the "musical reincarnation" of composers Roger Sessions and Aaron Copland. Zorn's *Goetia*, which was written for me in the early months of 2002, captures the terror and solitude that haunted many of us at the time. And finally, Thomas's *Pulsar* offered me a spatial vision of the future that I hope for.

—Jennifer Koh

## Alone, singing

Notes by Paul Griffiths

The violin, normally playing with, for, and to other instruments, other musicians, so that our hearing is partly overhearing, here addresses us directly and alone. It is a situation of extremity, demanding virtuosity, unflagging imagination, and ceaseless attention from both composer and performer, and offering the listener, perhaps especially the listener to a recording, an unusually intimate communication. Daring and secrets.

Composed in 2002, Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Lachen Verlernt* (Laughing Unlearned) takes its title from one of the poems Schoenberg set in *Pierrot Lunaire*, a poem whose speaker has lost the ability to laugh and wants it back. "I felt," the composer writes, "that this is a very moving metaphor of a performer: a serious clown trying to help the audience to connect with emotions they have lost, or believe they have lost."



Esa-Pekka Salonen  
Photo by Nicho Södling

The piece is, Salonen goes on, "essentially a chaconne, which in this case means that there is a harmonic progression that repeats itself several times." First comes a melody the composition shares with Salonen's orchestral piece *Insomnia*, written at the same time. Elements of this melody reappear from time to time as the music becomes faster and more complex. Eventually, to return to the composer's words, the piece "develops an almost frantic character, as if the imaginary narrator had reached a state of utter despair. A very short coda closes this mini-drama peacefully."

Elliott Carter wrote his first solo violin piece in 1984 as an eightieth birthday present for an admired colleague and friend, the Italian composer whose name forms part of the title: *Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi*. A few years later he composed a concerto for the Norwegian violinist Ole Böhn, who suggested he follow this up with a suite, which he duly did by adding three more tributes: *Statement—Remembering Aaron* [Copland] and *Fantasy—Remembering Roger* [Sessions] in the early months of 1999, and *Rhapsodic Musings* in 2000 for another eightieth birthday, that of Robert Mann, longtime leader of the Juilliard Quartet. For the set as a whole he picked out an old term for praise song and called the pieces *Four Lauds*.

Embracing musical ideas from Copland, notably from his *Ukulele Serenade* for violin and piano, *Statement*, Carter says, “also suggests the warmth and generosity and nobility that meant so much to me.” *Riconoscenza* exemplifies a Carterian type in classic form: flying melody is interrupted (or is it stimulated?) by music of other characters, assertive or, in the double-stopped passages, pensive. In *Rhapsodic Musings*, the dedicatee’s initials are encoded not only in the title but also in the music, in the upward step from re (D) to mi (E) on which this big short piece is founded.

Finally, the wide-ranging *Fantasy* seems to celebrate qualities Carter found in Sessions the man, “how his convictions were combined with charm and humor”—qualities that also shine through these pieces of Carter’s.



Elliott Carter  
Photo by Jeffrey Herman



Augusta Reed Thomas  
Photo by Dan Rest

instrument to its lowest note, and from this point the music becomes far more songful, though without forgetting previous exertions.

John Zorn’s piece, written for Ms. Koh, conveys us from almost unimaginable objects deep in space to the alternative cosmos of necromancy, “goetia” being a system of black magic used to conjure demons. As the composer has explained, goetia demands the strict observance of elaborate rules and conditions if the demons are to appear, and “in keeping with the meticulous and ascetic nature of these processes, *Goetia* was composed under an equally rigorous formal model, taking the form of eight short movements (incantations) each employing the same sequence of 277 pitches.”

Because these pitches can be transposed across a range of four octaves, and because they can be transformed in all sorts of ways in terms of



rhythm, dynamics, and color, the fact that we are hearing the same line—the same spell—eight times over (nine times, indeed, as the very fast third movement runs through the sequence twice) is not at all obvious. There is, for instance, a repeating loop early on, notes 17–21 (A–G–E–C–F) not only recalling notes 5–8 (A–G–E–F) but also reappearing exactly as notes 22–26 and 27–31. This is obvious in the slow melody of the second piece, where the motif even seems to remain pervasive; it is also clear in the seventh incantation and—to a lesser degree, because of the speed—the second. However, it is completely obscured in the angular multiple stops of the first piece, the scattered pizzicatos of the fourth, the muted flurries of the fifth, the lean extravagance of the sixth, and the skids of the last. What we hear is a set of virtuoso etudes, or caprices, to use an appropriately Paganinian word, for, as Zorn is well aware, the figure of the violin virtuoso as magician, in touch with demonic realms, has a long history in western culture.

© Paul Griffiths

Paul Griffiths, former chief music critic of the *New Yorker* and a regular contributor to the *New York Times*, has been writing about music professionally for more than thirty years and is a recipient of the Commonwealth Writers Prize.



John Zorn  
Photo by Scott Irvine

## JENNIFER KOH

Violinist Jennifer Koh mesmerizes audiences with the sheer intensity of her playing. A virtuoso whose natural flair is matched with a probing intellect, Ms. Koh is committed to exploring connections between the pieces she plays and searching for similarities of voice between different composers, as well as within the works of a single composer. These qualities have been recognized most recently by a Grammy nomination for her *String Poetic* album on Cedille Records, which includes a Jennifer Higdon world premiere, plus music by John Adams, Lou Harrison, and Carl Ruggles.

Highlights of Ms. Koh's 2009–2010 season include return guest appearances with the New Jersey Symphony, National Symphony of Washington, D.C., and the New World Symphony, among other ensembles. Abroad, she makes her PROMS debut with the BBC Symphony directed by Jiří Bělohlávek in the UK premiere of Augusta Read Thomas's violin concerto, "Juggler in Paradise," and is also heard with the BBC Scottish Orchestra and Dresden

Philharmonic. A new concerto written and commissioned for Ms. Koh by Klas Torstenssans will be premiered in Amsterdam with the NIEUW Ensemble in May 2010. To commemorate the 325th anniversary of J.S. Bach's birth, Ms. Koh launches "Bach and Beyond," a three-program recital project that will explore the solo violin repertoire from Bach's six Sonatas and Partitas to newly commissioned works for solo violin. In recital, Ms. Koh also plays all six violin sonatas and partitas of Bach at New York's Miller Theatre.

Since the 1994–1995 season, when she won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, the Concert Artists Guild Competition, and the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Ms. Koh has been heard with leading orchestras and conductors around the world, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, and the Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, New Jersey, Detroit, Houston, New World, Montreal, and National Symphonies. Abroad, she has appeared with the Czech Philharmonic, the BBC London and Scottish Symphonies, the BBC

National Orchestra of Wales, Iceland Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Lahti Symphony, Moscow Radio Symphony, Brandenburg Ensemble, and Singapore Symphony.

A prolific recitalist, Ms. Koh appears frequently at major music centers and festivals including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, Marlboro, Wolf Trap, Spoleto, and the Festival International de Lanaudiere in Canada.

Born and raised in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, Ms. Koh studied with Almita and Roland Vamos at The Music Center of the North Shore in Winnetka (now known as The Music Institute of Chicago). At age 11, she had already appeared as a soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and at 15 she won first place at the 1992 Illinois Young Performers Competition, sponsored by the CSO. Ms. Koh completed her studies with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir at the Curtis Institute of Music in 2002. She received a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Oberlin College and a Performance diploma in music from the Oberlin Conservatory. Ms. Koh enjoys outreach activities, working with students of all

ages in masterclasses and lectures/demonstrations. Her uniquely personal education program, "Jennifer Koh's Music Messenger," introduces children to music and encourages music-making as a means of self-expression that can transcend boundaries of culture, language, race, and socioeconomic background. Ms. Koh currently resides in New York City.

This is Jennifer Koh's sixth CD for Cedille Records. She has also recorded Gian Carlo Menotti's Violin Concerto for Chandos Records, Carl Nielsen's Violin Concerto on the Kontrapunkt label, Uuno Klami's Violin Concerto for Bis, and Andre Eshpai's Violin Concerto No. 4 for the Albany label. In 2010, Telarc will release the world premiere recording of Jennifer Higdon's concerto, *The Singing Rooms*, featuring Ms. Koh with the Atlanta Symphony conducted by Robert Spano.

Ms. Koh wishes to thank her private patron for the generous loan of the 1727 Ex Grumiaux Ex General DuPont Stradivari which she uses in performance and for this recording.

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For more information please visit [www.jenniferkoh.com](http://www.jenniferkoh.com)

## Tal Rosner

Since 2005, artist and filmmaker Tal Rosner has completed a variety of commissioned pieces, including a visual exploration of Stravinsky's and Debussy's two-piano music, in collaboration with Katia and Marielle Labèque, released on DVD (KML Recordings, 2007), and a two-screen interpretation of Conlon Nancarrow's *Player Piano Study No. 7* (Barbican Festival, 2007). In April 2008, his 29-minute/6 channel video piece, *In Seven Days*, in collaboration with composer Thomas Adès, was premiered at London's Royal Festival Hall as a part of its reopening season. The piece was cocommissioned by the London Sinfonietta and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which gave the piece its US premiere at Walt Disney Concert Hall in May 2008.

His film for Channel 4/Arts Council Animate Commission, *Without You* (2008), was screened at Tate Modern, London, and featured in various film festivals, including

Clermont-Ferrand, Rotterdam, and Oberhausen. Its North American premiere took place this April at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York. A retrospective of his work was screened at the Forum des Images in Paris as part of the Nemo Festival in April 2009.

Tal Rosner is currently working on a video installation for the Tenderpixel Gallery in London, to be exhibited in February 2010.



Tal Rosner