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News

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CD release date: Oct. 29, 2013

Guitarist Denis Azabagic Evokes Exotic Sounds of Four Continents on New Cedille CD

'Out of Africa ... and Around the World' Offers World-Premiere Recordings

Multi-award winning, Bosnian-born guitarist Denis Azabagic evokes the sounds of a West African kora, Middle Eastern oud, and Bulgarian tambora on *Out of Africa . . . and Around the World*, the Chicago-based virtuoso's first solo album for Cedille Records.

Brimming with international folk influences and virtuosic technique, the new album on the mid-price Cedille FOUNDation label presents works by five prominent living guitarist-composers, including the world-premiere recordings of Alan Thomas's atmospheric *Out of Africa*, the album's title work, and Vojislav Ivanovic's complete *Café Pieces*, drawing on material as varied as Viennese waltz, Balkan jazz, and Spanish lullaby. Also on tap are Atanas Ourkouzounov's *Folk Song Variations*, Carlos Rafael Rivera's *CanCIÓN*, and Dusan Bogdanovic's *Blues and 7 Variations* (Cedille FOUNDation CDR 7005).

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

"These are all pieces that I came across over the past 25 years that I really liked and felt needed to be recorded," Azabagic says, in an interview to be published in *Soundboard*.

"If the piece speaks to me, then I decide to play it," he says. "The musical experience of the audience is a direct consequence of the emotional engagement of the player."

Works Interweave Musical Genres

Bulgarian-born Ourkouzounov (b. 1970) based his *Folk Song Variations* on a traditional melody of his native country. In one of the variations, the guitar imitates the tambora, a traditional Bulgarian stringed instrument resembling a long-necked lute.

Bosnia's Ivanovic (b. 1959) wrote his six *Café Pieces* in the mid-1980s while studying guitar at the Athens Conservatory. "Tear Prelude" is a sentimental slow dance. "Funny Valse" is a tongue-in-cheek Viennese waltz "spiced with my own jazz color," Ivanovic writes in the CD liner notes. "Tango Café," an homage to Astor Piazzolla, is "a tango with a Balkan jazz flavor." The composer dedicated this revised version of "Tango Café" to Azabagic, "through whose unique performances the Café Pieces have become celebrated around the world." "Nostalgia" is a moody concert piece expressing homesickness and existential longing. Following the Spanish-style "Lullaby," "Improvisation and Dance" combines an easygoing Mediterranean-flavored improvisation with a vigorous dance.

A native of Washington, D.C., Rivera (b. 1970) is of Cuban and Guatemalan descent and has lived in Central America, Miami, and Los Angeles. Yet, his brief *Canción*, written as a thank-you gift to a friend, "contains no borrowed folk melodies or rhythmic patterns," he says. Rivera credits Azabagic with popularizing the piece among guitarists and audiences around the world.

Serbia's Bogdanovic (b. 1955) describes his *Blues and 7 Variations* as "a virtuoso set of variations based on an unorthodox thirteen-bar blues in 9/8 meter." Idioms and influences range from "finger-picking" country blues, big band jazz, and George Gershwin to Fernando Sor's *Mozart Variations* and a Brazilian carnival rhythm. "The seeming incongruity . . . points to my interest in developing a widely based musical world," he writes.

A native of Atlanta, Ga., living in the U.K., Thomas (b. 1968) weaves together strands of African singing styles, scales, and rhythms in his five-movement suite for solo guitar *Out of Africa*, while paying homage to the kora and oud and conjuring percussion instruments. Inspired by the

Karen Blixen memoir and film of the same name, *Out of Africa* traces an arc from daybreak to night. In the liner notes, Thomson takes care to point out, “This is not African music, but rather music that is inspired by my distilled memories of particular African styles of singing,” as well as characteristic rhythms, metric groupings, and scales. Between the opening “Call at Sunrise” and the closing “Cradle Song,” listeners hear intimations of South African popular music in “Morning Dance,” microtonal inflections from Islamic North Africa and percussion effects in “Zenith,” and what could be strains of an up-tempo Western pop ballad on “Evening Dance,” which segues into the tender “Cradle Song.” “The cross-breeding of different musical traditions is precisely what I was aiming for in this piece,” Thomson writes.

Recording Information

Out of Africa . . . and Around the World was produced by Eugenia Moliner and engineered by Bill Maylone at Ganz Hall, Roosevelt University, Chicago, Ill., Oct. 4–6, 2011, and Dec. 19, 2012.

Guitarist Denis Azabagic

Denis Azabagic (pronounced DEH'-nis AH'-sah-baa-gehj) has won 11 first prizes in international guitar competitions, including the prestigious Jacinto e Inocencio Guerro competition in Madrid, Spain, and the Guitar Foundation of America competition, which launched him on a 60-concert tour. He has performed as guest artist and soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Madrid Symphony, and Belgium's l'Orchestra Royal de Chambre de Wallonie, among other ensembles. He has been featured in *Classical Guitar*, *Guitarrissimo*, and *Guitarra* magazines. *Soundboard* said his playing “is virtually flawless and his technical facility is a joy to see as well as hear.” As half of the Cavatina Duo with flutist Eugenia Moliner, he appears on the Cedille Records albums *The Balkan Project* and *Acrobats: Music of David Leisner*. He performs with flutist Mary Stolper in Easley Blackwood's Rondo Caprice for Flute and Guitar, Op. 35, on the Cedille album *Chicago Duos for Flute*. He has also recorded for the Naxos, Opera Tres, Bridge, and Orobroy labels

and appears on two DVDs for the Mel Bay Company. He heads the guitar department at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. His website is azabagic.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.

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 major international classical music markets.

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Out of Africa . . . and Around the World
(Cedille FOUNDation CDR 7005)

Atanas Ourkouzounov: Folk Song Variations (6:54)

Vojislav Ivanovic: Café Pieces (25:22)

Carlos Rafael Rivera: Canción (1:35)

Dusan Bogdanovic: Blues and 7 Variations (5:46)

Alan Thomas: Out of Africa (19:42)

Denis Azabagic, guitar