
NEWS & INFORMATION

From: Nat Silverman (708) 328-4292

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1250 W. Grace St., Suite 3F
Chicago, IL 60613-2865
(312) 404-0758

FOR FIRST RECORDING,
NEW GROUP PLAYS MODERN WORKS
FOR OLD INSTRUMENTS

The Rembrandt Chamber Players perform 20th-century works for Baroque ensemble and harpsichord on their debut recording, 20th Century Baroque (Cedille CDR 90000 011).

The disc also marks a milestone for Cedille Records: it's the label's first chamber ensemble recording and first vocal recording.

The Rembrandt players perform four exemplary works from different genres of the modern harpsichord repertoire, including two by living American composers. Minnesota-based Dominick Argento's "Six Elizabethan Songs" are sophisticated and varied settings of 17th-century English texts (reprinted in the program notes). "In the pantheon of American composers Argento occupies a distinct individual category, outside any certifiable modernistic trend or technical idiom," writes Nicolas Slonimsky in Baker's Biographical Dictionary (1992). "He writes melodious music in a harmonious treatment. . . Audiences, and an increasing number of sophisticated critics, profess their admiration for his unusual songfulness."

(MORE)

Elliott Carter's adventurous Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord, with its delicate dissonances, explores new harpsichord tone colors. As noted in The New Oxford Companion to Music (1983), "the [harpsichord's] expressive peculiarities fit the views of some of those who desire to avoid artificial inflection and who seek the level surface, so to speak, of its limited dynamic range."

Czech pianist and composer Ilja Hurnik's music is "marked with impressionistic flavor, while retaining a classical format" (Baker's, 1992). His Sonata da camera recalls the period that spawned the instrumentation assembled for this recording.

Manuel de Falla's Concerto for Harpsichord, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Violin, and Cello, a seminal work commissioned by Polish harpsichord virtuoso Wanda Landowska, is one of the most important contributions to the harpsichord's revival. Spanish-music authority Gilbert Chase considers it Falla's masterpiece and the most complete embodiment of the "eternal essence" of Spain. "The keyboard style ... reveals in the classical lucidity of its writing a certain kinship with Domenico Scarlatti" (Baker's, 1992).

The Rembrandt ensemble has performed all the works in concert except the Falla: they feel that the concerto's dense textures obscure the harpsichord in live performance, whereas a more even balance is achievable in the recording studio.

The players, who are among Chicago's finest free-lance musicians, are beginning their third regular concert season 1992-93. (Rembrandt members are not Dutch, and they eschew funny hats -- at least in concert.) Their repertoire is eclectic -- they usually include Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Modern works on the same program -- thanks to the versatility of keyboard virtuoso David Schrader, who performs on both harpsichordist and piano.

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Larry Combs, principal clarinetist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, joins the ensemble as guest artist for the Falla concerto.

Soprano Patrice Michaels Bedi, heard in Argento's songs, has recorded with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Sir Georg Solti (London Records) and Chicago's Music of the Baroque. She has appeared with the Milwaukee and Atlanta Symphonies and performed with the Cleveland Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, and Boston Baroque.

Dislodged by the modern piano, the harpsichord "fell into semi-oblivion" during the 19th Century (The Oxford Dictionary of Music, 1985). In the 20th century, modern composers -- Falla was among the first -- fostered its revival, along with proponents of authentic Baroque performance. The Dolmetsch family of instrument-makers played a major part, as did virtuosi such as Landowska and Ralph Kirkpatrick.

The New Oxford Companion to Music explains the harpsichord's abiding relevance:

Our experience of music from the last 200 years has conditioned us to think of expressiveness in terms of "loud" and "soft." This conceals the fact that a good musical performance makes use of many other expressive devices: phrasing, articulation . . . the list could continue. All these devices . . . combine with a natural beauty of tone to make [harpsichords] truly expressive and often subtle instruments.

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"20th Century Baroque"

Falla: Concerto for Harpsichord, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Violin, and Cello

Carter: Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord

Hurnik: Sonata da camera

Argento: Six Elizabethan Songs

Rembrandt Chamber Players, with

Larry Combs, clarinet

Patrice Michaels Bedi, soprano

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