
NEWS & INFORMATION

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OBOE CD BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO RIVALS OF MOZART AND BEETHOVEN

A new CD of oboe concertos breathes fresh life into music of two classical-era composers whose reputations once rivaled those of their contemporaries, Mozart and Beethoven.

Alex Klein, principle oboist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, performs works for oboe and orchestra by Bohemian Franz Krommer (1759-1831) and Bratislava-born Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837). Paul Freeman conducts the Czech National Symphony Orchestra in Krommer's Oboe Concerto No. 1 in F major, Op. 37, and Oboe Concerto No. 2 in F major, Op. 52; and Hummel's Introduction, Theme, and Variations in F minor, Op. 102.

On the CD's imaginative cover, classical architectural columns morph into oboes, underscoring that Krommer and Hummel were "pillars" of Europe's musical life during the classical period. "Their music proves that the story of the classical era doesn't end with the 'Big Four' — Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert," Cedille producer Jim Ginsburg says.

Krommer achieved a position in Vienna that eluded both Mozart and Beethoven: imperial court composer to the Hapsburg dynasty. He wrote more than 300 works, and his music was published in Denmark, England, France, Germany, Italy, and even the U.S. Modern scholars view his solo concertos for wind instruments as his most distinctively original achievements.

In the late classical era, the presence of a significant number of virtuosic oboe players and new oboe designs opened the way for composers to write interesting, challenging music for the instrument. The solo parts in Krommer's oboe concertos offer rapid passage-work and wide leaps between high and low notes reminiscent of Mozart opera arias.

A child-prodigy pianist who studied briefly with Mozart, Hummel went on to succeed Haydn as music director for Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy. He maintained a long but stormy friendship with his intimidating rival, Beethoven. Hummel's Introduction, Theme, and Variations in F minor, Op. 102, exemplifies his position on the cusp of the classical and romantic eras. The darkly dramatic, expressive Adagio introduction leads to brighter, cheerier musical vistas.

Oboist Klein says the performances on this CD seek to replicate the bright, open, high-volume sound that classical composers had in mind. Cedille's Ginsburg says he and engineer Konrad Strauss set out to achieve a more natural-sounding, equitable balance between orchestra and soloist, compared to recordings "where it sounds like the orchestra is in the next room."

In Klein, Cedille has enlisted an oboist whose playing produces "pure pleasure . . . [an] effortless flow of lovely sound shaped with the most intelligent artistry" (*Seattle Times*). His honors include taking first prize at the first Lucarelli International Competition for Solo Oboe Players, held at Carnegie Hall, and first prize in the 1988 International Competition for Musical Performers in Geneva, Switzerland — the first oboist to do so since Heinz Hollinger three decades earlier. In 1995, Klein became principal oboist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, succeeding legendary player Ray Still, whose tenure dated back to the Reiner era.

Chicagoan Paul Freeman is music director of the Czech National Symphony Orchestra, as well as the Chicago Sinfonietta. Both ensembles have previously recorded under his direction for Cedille.

Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing Chicago's most noteworthy classical artists. The label is an arm of the nonprofit Chicago Classical Recording Foundation.

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***OBOE CONCERTOS OF THE CLASSICAL ERA:
WORKS FOR OBOE AND ORCHESTRA
BY FRANZ KROMMER AND JOHANN NEPOMUK HUMMEL
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 045)***

**Krommer: Oboe Concerto No. 1 in F major (21:54)
Krommer: Oboe Concerto No. 2 in F major (19:37)
Hummel: Introduction, Theme, and Variations in F minor (14:21)**

**Alex Klein, oboe
Czech National Symphony Orchestra
Paul Freeman, conductor**