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# NEWS & INFORMATION

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## **VIOLA, AMERICAN STYLE**

### **Cathy Basrak Calls Debut CD a "Personal Journey" Through 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music**

Cathy Basrak, the 23-year-old newly appointed assistant principal violist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and principle violist of the Boston Pops Orchestra, makes her recording debut with an all-American program of attractive twentieth-century chamber music that's rarely heard — and largely unfamiliar even to many violists.

On *American Viola Works* (Cedille Records 90000 053), Ms. Basrak, with pianists William Koehler and Robert Koenig, performs George Rochberg's *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1979); Frederick Jacobi's *Fantasy for Viola and Piano* (1941); Alan Shulman's original *Theme and Variations* (1940) for viola and piano; Quincy Porter's *Speed Etude* (1948); and Lowell Liebermann's *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1984). For all but the Rochberg, these are first recordings.

Rochberg's *Sonata*, a highly expressive, romantic work from his post-serial period, is lyrical yet intellectually stimulating. It was commissioned to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of viola phenomenon William Primrose.

Jacobi's 1941 *Fantasy for Viola and Piano* synthesizes classical, romantic, and modern influences with melodies that recall Jacobi's Jewish heritage. Ms. Basrak calls the *Fantasy* "the most

difficult piece I've played on the viola." Likening it to Paganini's violin music, she says it demands virtuosic playing and dramatic expression extending "to all extremes of the spectrum."

The most "familiar" work on the CD (other than the Rochberg) is Shulman's *Theme and Variations*. A fixture of the standard viola repertoire, it's unabashedly romantic in style but rich in substance. Impressionistic reveries alternate with rapid-fire passages of daunting difficulty. (In 1999, Ms. Basrak performed the orchestral version as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra and conductor Luis Biava — the result of her having won a student competition.)

Porter, a Connecticut native who studied composition in Paris with Vincent D'Indy, wrote extensively for strings. His sunny *Speed Etude*, commissioned as a virtuosic tour de force for Paul Doktor, is infused with an ebullient postwar optimism.

Liebermann's *Sonata for Viola and Piano* is an enchanting piece that's by turns ethereal and jazzy. Hailed as "one of America's most gifted 'new tonalist' composers" (*Time* magazine), the 39-year-old New Yorker's music has been performed by Mstislav Rostropovich, James Galway, James Levine, and Leonard Slatkin.

Ms. Basrak assembled the program herself after combing music libraries for substantial viola pieces by American composers. "My orchestral colleagues and friends weren't familiar with a lot of this work," Ms. Basrak says. "They were inspired to know there is American music of this quality" for viola.

To gain insights, she met with two of the three living composers represented on the CD — Mr. Rochberg and Mr. Liebermann — and corresponded with the ailing Mr. Shulman's son Jay. "The whole experience amounted to so much more than finding music to put on a recording," she says. "It was more of a personal journey."

She recalls Mr. Rochberg's passionate enthusiasm for his sonata: "He had such commitment to what he had written," she says. "He related his music to me as if he had written it yesterday. It was still so fresh in his mind."

Born in Arlington Heights, Ill., a Chicago suburb, Ms. Basrak received her bachelor's degree this year from the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

Along the way, she won first prize in the 1995 Irving M. Klein International String Competition — the first violist to do so. Other top honors include Grand Prize in the 1994 General Motors/Seventeen Magazine National Concerto Competition and 1996 American String Teachers Association Competition; and first prize in both the 1995 William Primrose Memorial Competition and 1995 Julius Stulberg Auditions.

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***AMERICAN VIOLA WORKS***  
**(Cedille Records CDR 90000 053)**

**George Rochberg: Sonata for Violin and Piano (1979) (20:24)**  
**Frederick Jacobi: Fantasy for Viola and Piano (1941) (9:47)**  
**Alan Shulman: Theme and Variations (1940) (14:02)**  
**Quincy Porter: Speed Etude (1948) (2:21)**  
**Lowell Liebermann: Sonata for Viola and Piano (1984) (25:23)**

**Cathy Basrak, viola**  
**William Koehler, Robert Koenig, piano**