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News

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Violinist Jennifer Koh's Newest 'Bach & Beyond' CD Features Composer 'Firsts'

Cedille Records album includes solo works by J. S. Bach and Béla Bartók,
plus world-premiere recording of Kaija Saariaho's 'Frisés'
for solo violin and electronics

Violinist Jennifer Koh's *Bach & Beyond Part 2*, the second installment in her venturesome, three-album series linking J.S. Bach's landmark violin sonatas and partitas from the early 1700s to the sounds of today, features solo violin "firsts" by Bach, Béla Bartók, and contemporary Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho.

Bach & Beyond Part 2 includes Bach's first work for solo violin, the Sonata No. 1 in G Minor, BWV 1001, and his first exploration of the partita form, the Partita No. 1 in B Minor, BWV 1002; Bartók's first and only work for solo violin, his Bach-inspired Sonata for Solo Violin Sz. 117, BB 124; and the world-premiere recording of Saariaho's *Frisés*, her first large-scale work for solo violin and electronics, which has its own Bach connection.

The album, a two-CD set priced as a single CD, will be released May 12 on CD and as a digital download (Cedille Records CDR 90000 154).

Historical Journey

Koh's *Bach & Beyond* recordings on Cedille are based on her multi-season recital series of the same name. In an introductory essay in the CD booklet, Koh says each installment is intended to "strengthen the connection between our past and present worlds through a historical journey" from Bach's sonatas and partitas to contemporary and newly commissioned works. Each album opens and closes with a Bach Sonata or Partita.

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“My Bach & Beyond project presents the works of Bach that I have long loved, in communion with the music of contemporary composers whom I am dedicated to championing,” Koh writes.

Bach & Beyond Part 2 opens with Bach’s Sonata No. 1 in G Minor, the most frequently performed work among the six Sonatas and Partitas in the cycle. It is also, perhaps, “the most immediately gripping,” writes Patrick Castillo in the liner notes. “Here we have music of startling expressive power.”

Bartók (1881–1945) composed his Sonata for Solo Violin in 1944 for Yehudi Menuhin after hearing the violinist perform Bach’s Sonata No. 3 in C Major. “Bach’s specter haunts Bartok’s Sonata throughout its four movements,” Castillo observes. Bartok proceeds to expand the instrument’s expressive capabilities with microtones and pizzicato, “leading the listener forward to new possibilities and developments in solo violin composition,” Koh writes.

Rare *Frises*

Saariaho’s *Frises* (2011) is a gripping — and rarely heard — work for violin and electronics that sometimes sounds like the violinist is playing an eerie duet with herself.

She composed *Frises* for violinist Richard Schmoucler, who wanted a work to follow the Chaconne of Bach’s Partita No. 2 in D Minor. “Using the Chaconne’s final D as its point of departure, *Frises* launches the listener into an otherworldly soundscape of violin harmonics, electronic bells, and other aural fascinations,” Castillo writes.

The title was inspired by Saariaho’s visit to an exhibit of 19th-century French symbolist painter Odilon Redon’s painted friezes, but the music isn’t intended to depict the artworks.

Saariaho included an electronic dimension “to expand the ideas and possibilities of the instrument,” the composer writes on her website. “In general and in accordance with the score, prepared sound materials are set off by the musician during the piece. These materials are completed by real-time transformations of the violin sounds.”

Frises has received three concert performances to date, according to publisher Chester Music Ltd. Schmoucler gave the world premiere October 2, 2012, in Istanbul, Turkey, and a second performance there the following month.

Koh gave the work its U.S. premiere on February 6, 2014, at New York's Miller Theater. In an innovative programming twist, Koh performed the piece twice during her New York concert, immediately before and after intermission, to give the audience an additional opportunity to absorb its mysterious textures.

"*Frises* is indeed a work that rewards repeated hearings," said James Ginsburg, Cedille Records founder and president. "Now, with *Bach & Beyond 2*, listeners everywhere can immerse themselves in this special sound world."

Composer and multimedia artist Jean-Baptiste Barrière, who formerly led Paris's electronic-music mecca IRCAM, handled "realization of the electronics" (his description) at all three concert performances and at Cedille's recording sessions.

At the concerts, electronic sounds triggered by the violinist emanated from speakers placed around the hall. At the recording sessions, Koh monitored the electronics through headphones as she played the violin score. The electronics were added to the master recording in post-production.

Jennifer Koh on Cedille Records

Koh's *Bach & Beyond* series on Cedille Records debuted in 2012 with *Bach & Beyond Part 1*, offering Bach's second and third Partitas, Eugène Ysaÿe's Sonata No. 2, Saariaho's *Nocturne*, and Missy Mazzoli's *Dissolve O My Heart*. It was chosen as a "CD of the Week" by the *Chicago Tribune*, which called it an "absorbing program" by a violinist of "sovereign technical command and probing musicality." New Jersey's *Star-Ledger* said, "She brings intelligence and nuance to each distinctive style and sounds effortless through all technical obstacles." *The New York Times* named it one of the best classical music recordings of 2012 for its "alluring performances."

Bach & Beyond Part 2 is Koh's tenth Cedille Records album, joining a discography that includes the Grammy-nominated *String Poetic*.

The artist's website is jenniferkoh.com.

Recording Dates and Venues

Bach & Beyond Part 2 was produced and engineered by Adam Abeshouse at sessions April 20–21, 2014, at Westchester Studios, New York; and June 4–5, June 10–12, and July 14–16, 2014, at The Performing Arts Center, Purchase College, State University of New York, Purchase, N.Y.

Cedille Records

Marking its 25th anniversary during the 2014–15 season, 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 debut in November 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 the Naxos network in major international classical music markets.

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille Records is the label of Cedille Chicago, NFP (formerly The Chicago Classical Recording Foundation). Headquarters are at 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call (773) 989-2515; e-mail: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: cedillerecords.org.

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***Bach & Beyond Part 2* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 154)**

J. S. Bach: Sonata No. 1 in G Minor, BWV 1001 (15:33)
Béla Bartók: Sonata for Solo Violin Sz. 117, BB 124 (25:02)
Kaija Saariaho: *Frises* (21:15)
J. S. Bach: Partita No. 1 in B Minor, BWV 1002 (29:11)

Jennifer Koh, violin