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News

Recording release date: April 13, 2018

Chicago Symphony's John Bruce Yeh Headlines Album of Clarinet Works by James M. Stephenson on Cedille Records

*World-premiere recording of 'Liquid Melancholy' concerto
marks commercial label debut of Lake Forest Symphony*

John Bruce Yeh, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's long-serving assistant principal clarinet and solo E-flat clarinet, takes center stage on *Liquid Melancholy: Clarinet Works of James M Stephenson*, a new album of clarinet showpieces for orchestra, chamber ensemble, and clarinet-piano duo by the prolific, award-winning American composer (Cedille Records CDR 90000 176).

World-premiere recordings on the album, available April 13, 2018, include the title work, *Liquid Melancholy*, a concerto for clarinet and orchestra; the chamber ensemble piece *Last Chants*; and two works for clarinet and piano, *Fantasia* and the Sonata for Clarinet and Piano.

The concerto *Liquid Melancholy* (2011) explores the instrument's fluid lyricism and vast tonal and expressive range. In the liner notes, Stephenson says he'd been attracted to the phrase "liquid melancholy" from Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and sought a chance to use it as a title. He found that opportunity in his first major work for clarinet, *Liquid Melancholy*, co-commissioned by three American youth orchestras. "I've always been fascinated by the clarinet's ability to play such smooth and fluid lines at all dynamic levels. This 'liquidity' is something I wanted to highlight in this concerto." The newer version heard on the recording is what Stephenson calls the "composer-preferred score," commissioned by the Lake Forest Symphony, with orchestration akin to Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 4.

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This performance marks the commercial recording debut of the Lake Forest Symphony, a critically-acclaimed, Chicago-area professional ensemble founded more than 60 years ago. Its music director and conductor, Vladimir Kulenovic, earned the 2015 Sir Georg Solti conducting award and was named that year’s “Chicagoan of the Year in Classical Music” by the *Chicago Tribune*.

Clarinetist Yeh founded the Grammy Award-winning Chicago Pro Musica chamber group in 1979. The ensemble, winner of the 1985 Grammy for Best New Classical Artist and comprised almost entirely of Chicago Symphony Orchestra members, joins him in two works. *Colors* (1997), for the novel palette of clarinet, oboe, and string quartet, evokes an angry red, bluesy blue, rustic green, and brilliant white. Guest artist is Alex Klein, the CSO’s former principal oboe. Scored for clarinet, piano, and strings, Stephenson’s whimsically named *Last Chants* (2015) channels ancient, exotic sounds.

On a more intimate scale are the three works for clarinet and piano alone, performed with Patrick Godon, who regularly appears with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as principal keyboardist and served in that role on the CSO’s 2017 European tour.

Yeh calls *Étude Caprice* (1997) “a two-minute sprint that’s literally breathtaking for the clarinetist and a thrill for the listener.” *Fantasia* (2005) is a lyrical extravaganza of waltzes, scherzos, and dances. Originally written for trumpet, the clarinet version is dedicated to Yeh, who Stephenson says “demonstrates a true joy and love for music-making at every occasion.”

The four-movement Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (2015), the longest work on the album, is also dedicated to Yeh, who gave its concert premiere. The sonata reflects Stephenson’s “personal bent toward jazz-inflected harmonies.” While essentially a standard three-movement (slow-fast-slow) sonata, it includes an optional interior movement, “Interlude, Jam Bourrée,” for clarinetists to play on E-flat clarinet. The composer says it was written as a tribute to Yeh’s “exemplary E-flat clarinet playing, which I have so often witnessed at CSO concerts.”

Recording Team

Liquid Melancholy was produced by James Ginsburg and engineered by Bill Maylone and Mary Mazurek (for the concerto *Liquid Melancholy*) May 21, 2017, at the James Lumber Center for the

Performing Arts at the College of Lake County, Lake Forest, Ill. (*Liquid Melancholy*); and July 13–15, 2017, at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago (chamber works).

John Bruce Yeh

John Bruce Yeh is the longest-serving clarinetist in Chicago Symphony Orchestra history. At the invitation of music director Sir Georg Solti, Yeh joined the CSO in 1977, at age 19, as clarinetist and solo bass clarinetist. He’s currently the orchestra’s assistant principal and solo E-flat clarinet. He served as the CSO’s acting principal clarinet from 2008–2011 and has also performed as guest principal of the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Seoul Philharmonic. A prize winner at both the 1982 Munich International Music Competition and 1985 Naumburg Clarinet Competition in New York, Yeh is the dedicatee of new works for clarinet by numerous composers, ranging from Ralph Shapey to John Williams.

James M. Stephenson

Winner of the National Band Association’s 2017 William D. Revelli Composition Contest for his Symphony No. 2 (“Voices”), James M. Stephenson has been praised by the *Boston Herald* for his “straightforward, unabashedly beautiful sounds.” His catalog includes concertos and sonatas for nearly every instrument. Most of these works came through commissions by and for major symphony orchestra principal players in Chicago, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Washington, D.C., St. Louis, Oregon, Milwaukee, and Dallas, among others. His extensive catalog can be heard on more than 30 CDs. Among his major new commissions is a Bass Trombone Concerto, a Chicago Symphony Orchestra Commission slated to receive its world premiere June 13, 2019, with CSO trombonist Charles Vernon as soloist and music director Riccardo Muti on the podium. Stephenson’s website is composerjim.com.

Cedille Records

Launched in November 1989, Grammy Award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing and promoting the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area.

The audiophile-oriented label releases every new album in multiple formats: physical CD; 96 kHz, 24-bit, studio-quality FLAC download; and 320 Kbps MP3 download.

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Liquid Melancholy: Clarinet Music of James M Stephenson

John Bruce Yeh, clarinet

(Cedille Records CDR 90000 176)

Liquid Melancholy (18:00)

Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra

Lake Forest Symphony, Vladimir Kulenovic, cond.

Colors (12:45)

with Alex Klein, oboe; Chicago Pro Music

Last Chants (11:48)

with Chicago Pro Music

Fantasie (9:07)

with Patrick Godon, piano

Etude Caprice (2:09)

with Patrick Godon, piano

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (22:56)

with Patrick Godon, piano