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News

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MUSIC BY CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS, LYRICS BY SHAKESPEARE

Chicago *a cappella* Offers Incomparable New CD *Shall I Compare Thee?*

The intimate, nine-voice ensemble Chicago *a cappella* sings contemporary settings of Shakespeare's timeless words on its new CD, *Shall I Compare Thee?: Choral Songs on Shakespeare Texts* (Cedille CDR 90000 085).

The innovative, classical vocal ensemble makes its Cedille Records debut with a stylistically kaleidoscopic selection of 23 songs by composers of the present era, all born between 1933 and 1970.

Ten of the songs on the CD are world-premiere recordings, including three written expressly for Chicago *a cappella* in response to an international call for scores for a series of all-Shakespeare concerts held in early 2003.

In a tenth anniversary profile of Chicago *a cappella*, *Chicago Tribune Magazine* noted the group's "unique and astonishingly wide-ranging repertoire, at times serious and touching and at other times whimsical and witty, but always adventurous."

Shall I Compare Thee? exemplifies that approach with artful arrangements that draw from influences ranging from bossa nova and the blues to Renaissance and medieval modes.

"One hears a fascinating spectrum of styles within single works and across the entire program," says Cedille president and recording producer James Ginsburg. "It's especially engaging to hear how the composers express — and the singers convey — distinctly different moods and points of view for the same texts."

The CD begins and ends with works composed for Chicago *a cappella*, leading off with songs by Kevin Olson (b.1970) and Martha Sullivan (b.1964) and concluding with songs by Robert Applebaum (b.1941). Olson, who is on the music faculty at Illinois' Elmhurst College,

has had works commissioned and performed by the American Piano Quartet, the Rich Matteson Jazz Festival, and others. His smooth, bossa-nova setting of Sonnet 18 has been described as “Shakespeare by way of Brazil.” Sullivan, a New York-based soprano as well as composer, has earned grants from Meet the Composer and won a Dale Warland commission competition. For her setting of “Blow, blow, thou winter wind,” she incorporates styles and influences ranging from medieval Italy to the Celtic and jazz-influenced pop music of Jethro Tull.

Applebaum is a prolific Chicago-area choral composer who recently retired from his “day job” teaching high school chemistry and physics in Winnetka, Ill. His works have been premiered by the Coriolis Ensemble, Kol Zimrah (Applebaum writes in Hebrew as well as English), the Lakeshore Choral Festival, and the North American Jewish Choral Festival. The CD concludes with world premieres of Applebaum’s playful “Spring” from *Love’s Labour’s Lost*; the jazzy Gershwin-tinged “Witches’ Blues” (written for Chicago *a cappella*); and a poignant, gently tonal setting of Sonnet 18, written in memory of his daughter, a young teacher who died of a sudden illness.

Other works receiving their world-premiere recordings on the CD include a song by the much-honored Matthew Harris (b.1956), “And Will A’ Not Come Again?,” with its deft use of chained suspensions, a sixteenth-century technique championed by Monteverdi. Another premiere is the *Four Ballads of Shakespeare* by Finland’s Juhani Komulainen (b.1953), who skillfully moves text around to different voice parts to create texture and harmonic color.

Also on the program: *Four Shakespeare Songs* by Finnish composer Jaakko Mäntyärvi (b. 1963), who describes himself as an “eclectic traditionalist” — harmonically adventurous but within a tonal language; three more songs by Harris; the breezy, jazzy *It was a Lover and his Lass* by the esteemed founder of England’s Cambridge Singers, John Rutter (b.1945); *Shall I Compare?* by Swedish jazz pianist and composer Nils Lindberg (b.1933), which combines elements of folk and jazz within classical music structures; the two *a cappella* installments of the lovely cycle *Three Shakespeare Songs* by Sweden’s Håkan Parkman (1955-1988); and two songs by Romanian-born Hungarian composer György Orbán (b.1947), a highly individualistic musician whose “O mistress mine!” brings to mind spirituals of the American south.

“This CD honors some of Chicago *a cappella*’s most cherished relationships with living composers,” says ensemble member and artistic director Jonathan Miller. “Five of the 10 composers on the CD have worked with us directly.”

The CD, recorded between November 2004 and March 2005 at Northeastern Illinois University's recital hall, was engineered by two-time Grammy Award nominee Bill Maylone. The disc comes with a 32-page booklet that includes notes, texts, and translations.

Founded in 1993, Chicago a cappella, comprising four female and five male singers, presents a four-concert subscription series each season. Tour engagements have taken it to ten U.S. states and Tampico, Mexico. The ensemble's discography includes three releases on the Centaur label and two on its own imprint.

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

For a free catalog and the locations of local retail outlets, consumers are invited to contact Cedille Records, 5255 N. Lakewood Ave., Chicago, IL 60640-2220, call (773) 989-2515; E-mail: info@cedillerecords.org. On the Net: www.cedillerecords.org.

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***Shall I Compare Thee?:
Choral Songs on Shakespeare Texts
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 085)***

Kevin Olson: Summer Sonnet (4:46)
Martha Sullivan: Blow, blow thou winter wind (2:37)
Jaakko Mäntyjärvi: Four Shakespeare Songs (11:53)
Matthew Harris: from Shakespeare Songs (8:44)
John Rutter: It Was a Lover and his Lass (2:28)
Håkan Parkman: from Three Shakespeare Songs (4:40)
György Orbán: Orpheus with his lute (2:20); O mistress mine! (1:03)
Juhani Komulainen: Four Ballads of Shakespeare (10:00)
**Robert Applebaum: Spring (2:51); Witches' Blues (4:53);
Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (3:13)**

Chicago a cappella