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News

Recording release date: November 11, 2022

Clarinetist Anthony McGill and the Pacifica Quartet Offer ‘American Stories’ by Living Composers November 11 on Cedille Records

**For their second collaboration on the label, the artists present
world-premiere recordings of works by Richard Danielpour,
James Lee III, and Ben Shirley, plus a hometown tribute
by Valerie Coleman**

Clarinetist Anthony McGill, the 2020 Avery Fisher Prize recipient and first African-American principal player of the New York Philharmonic, and the multiple Grammy Award-winning Pacifica Quartet perform works by four living American composers that depict distinctive and deeply felt narratives on their new album *American Stories*, available November 11, 2022, on Cedille Records.

American Stories includes the world-premiere recordings of Richard Danielpour’s *Four Angels*, James Lee III’s *Quintet*, and Ben Shirley’s *High Sierra Sonata*, plus Valerie Coleman’s *Shotgun Houses* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 216).

“As an artist, you don’t often get to put together a collection of living composers that you love,” McGill writes in the album booklet. “I am in awe of every piece on this album and how each communicates with the other.”

Music such as this, McGill, writes, “opens a pathway for us to empathize with each other and be present in our shared humanity.”

Reflecting on the project, the Pacifica Quartet writes, “Each new musical creation contributes a fresh voice and a unique viewpoint to our [nation’s] story, while ineluctably dealing with the past and shining a light towards the future.”

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A poignant tribute

Danielpour’s poignant, single-movement *Four Angels* pays tribute to the four young Black girls murdered in the racially motivated church bombing in 1963 Birmingham, Alabama, and to civil rights advocates who refused to be intimidated. It was composed in April 2020 for McGill and the Catalyst Quartet on a commission by New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Lee’s four-movement Quintet for Clarinet & String Quartet reflects on the indigenous American experience and references elements of Native American music, such as pow-wow drumming. Lee drew inspiration from figures depicted in “An Emblem of America,” a historic series of prints from the end of the 18th century and early 1800s. McGill and the Pacifica premiered the work in 2021.

Shirley’s *High Sierra Sonata*, which inspired the album’s scenic cover art, evokes California’s Eastern Sierra Nevada mountains where Shirley volunteered at an aid station during the region’s annual high-altitude marathon. Its three contrasting movements depict the mountains’ abrupt weather changes and serve as a metaphor for life’s dramatic highs and lows. The composer is well acquainted with those vicissitudes: he lived in a homeless shelter in Los Angeles’ Skid Row while recovering from drug and alcohol addiction.

Coleman’s *Shotgun Houses* celebrates the life of Muhammad Ali and the culture of West Louisville, Kentucky, where she and the legendary prizefighter were raised. Its three movements conjure the community’s social vitality, Ali’s affection for his mother, and his gold medal victory at the 1960 Rome Olympics. The clarinet depicts the sound of the boxing bell, with action inside the ring “orchestrated through a combination of string pizzicati and clarinet shrieks,” Coleman writes.

Recording Team and Venue

American Stories was produced by the Grammy Award-winning team of producer James Ginsburg and engineer Bill Maylone Sept. 8–10, 2021, in the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago.

Anthony McGill and the Pacifica Quartet on Cedille Records

Clarinetist McGill and the Pacifica Quartet’s previous collaboration on Cedille Records, *Mozart & Brahms Clarinet Quintets*, garnered widespread critical acclaim and continues to be a staple of classical radio programming. “The pure, gorgeous tone and expressive musicianship of the clarinetist Anthony McGill

meshes with the talents of the excellent Pacifica Quartet for thoroughly enjoyable readings” (*The New York Times*).

McGill’s Cedille discography also includes 2021’s widely admired *Here With You*, with pianist Gloria Chien; *Winged Creatures*, with his brother, flutist Demarre McGill, and the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Allen Tinkham; and *Portraits – Works for Flute, Clarinet & Piano*, with Demarre McGill and Irish pianist Michael McHale. Website: www.anthonymcgill.com

This is the Pacifica Quartet’s 13th Cedille Records album. Its *Contemporary Voices*, with works by Shulamit Ran, Jennifer Higdon, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (featuring renowned classical saxophonist Otis Murphy), won the 2021 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance. The Pacifica’s collaboration with superstar classical guitarist Sharon Isbin on Cedille’s *Souvenirs of Spain & Italy* was hailed as “another triumph for Ms. Isbin and a feather in the caps of the Pacifica Quartet” (*New Music Buff*). Cedille released the ensemble’s four-album cycle of Shostakovich’s complete string quartets, paired with works by other Soviet-era composers, to rave reviews: “The playing is nothing short of phenomenal” (*Daily Telegraph*, London).

The Pacifica also earned a Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance for its 2008 recording of Elliott Carter’s String Quartets Nos. 1 and 5 on Naxos. Website: www.pacificaquartet.com.

Cedille Records

Launched in November 1989 by James Ginsburg, 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 label’s catalog of more than 200 front-line albums brims with attractive, off-the-beaten-path repertoire from the Baroque era to the present day. Works from the classical canon, when they do appear, are usually heard in particularly imaginative pairings.

Cedille has recorded more than 180 Chicago artists and ensembles, with over 80 making their professional recording debuts on the label. Its catalog includes the world premieres of more than 400 classical compositions.

Cedille recordings are available on CD, as MP3 and hi-resolution FLAC downloads, and on all major streaming platforms.

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille Records is the label of Cedille Chicago, NFP. Sales of physical CDs and digital downloads and streams cover only a small percentage of the label's costs. Tax-deductible donations from individual music-lovers and grants from charitable organizations account for most of its revenue.

Cedille's headquarters are at 4311 N. Ravenswood Ave., Suite 202, Chicago, IL 60613; call 773-989-2515; email: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: www.cedillerecords.org

Cedille Records is distributed in the Western Hemisphere by Naxos of America and its distribution partners, by Naxos Music UK, and by other independent distributors in the Naxos network in classical music markets around the world.

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American Stories
Anthony McGill, clarinet
Pacifica Quartet
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 216)

Richard Danielpour: *Four Angels** (13:45)
James Lee III: *Quintet** (21:58)
Ben Shirley: *High Sierra Sonata** (19:04)
Valerie Coleman: *Shotgun Houses* (17:43)
*World Premiere Recording