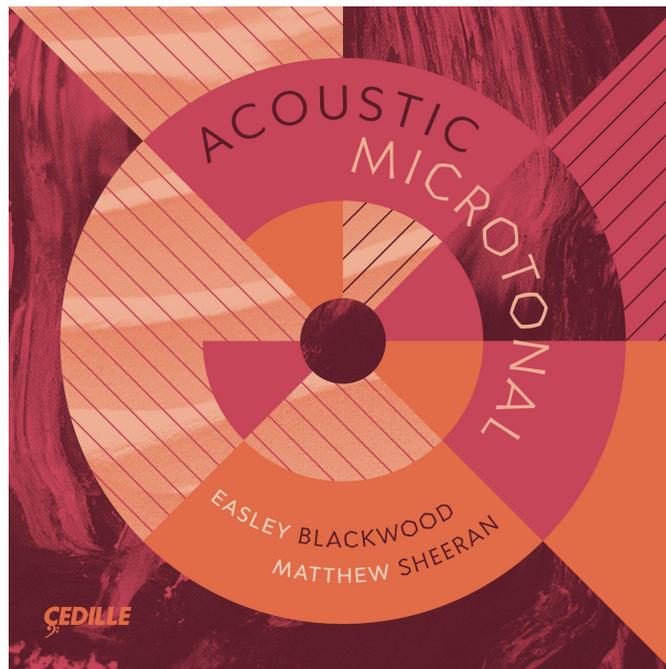


For Immediate Release



**CEDILLE RECORDS RELEASES *ACOUSTIC MICROTONAL* FEATURING
EASLEY BLACKWOOD'S *TWELVE MICROTONAL ETUDES FOR ELECTRONIC MUSIC*
MEDIA ARRANGED FOR ACOUSTIC ENSEMBLE BY MATTHEW SHEERAN**

**Digital-only recording to be available January 19
honors the one-year anniversary of the Blackwood's death**



CHICAGO, ILLINOIS (January 5, 2024) — An early supporter of composer Easley Blackwood's pioneering work in exotic tunings and microtonality, Cedille Records issues a new recording of his *Twelve Microtonal Etudes* (1980) that offers a fresh take on this unique work. Rather than presenting it in the manner typical of microtonal compositions — performed by electronic instruments or a single, specially tuned acoustic instrument — the new album, ***Acoustic Microtonal***, uses today's most powerful recording technology to make Blackwood's "impossible" notes possible for an ensemble of mixed-timbre acoustic instruments (woodwinds, brass, and strings). The arrangement was prepared by Grammy-nominated composer and orchestrator

Matthew Sheeran, who also produced the recording. The featured performers are members of the Budapest Scoring Orchestra. The album was mixed by engineer Brian Bolger.

A digital-only release, *Acoustic Microtonal* will be available on **Friday, January 19**, via all major streaming platforms and [CedilleRecords.org](https://cedillerecords.org). Cedille has previously released 14 recordings featuring Blackwood's music, including *Easley Blackwood: Microtonal* (1994), comprising a re-issue of Blackwood's original 1980 LP recording of *Twelve Microtonal Etudes for Electronic Music Media*, performed on synthesizer by the composer, plus new recordings of then-recent Blackwood microtonal works. In addition to serving as an acoustic follow-up to that release, *Acoustic Microtonal* honors the memory of the composer one year after his passing on January 22, 2023.

Blackwood's etudes explore a variety of "equal temperament" tunings, in which the musical octave is divided into a series of smaller, equally sized steps. Nearly all Western music created today employs 12-tone equal temperament (12-TET), in which the octave is divided into 12 equal steps. Most listeners, and even many musicians, take 12-TET for granted as simply the way musical notes ought to be tuned, but Blackwood's etudes demonstrate that there are alternate tonal universes where notes in-between the standard pitches (called microtones) hold the potential for new expressive possibilities.

Each of Blackwood's twelve etudes uses a different equal temperament, with the collection covering all divisions of the octave from 13 to 24. Blackwood composed each etude in what he felt was a style befitting the tonal resources of each tuning. For instance, the pitches in Etude IV. 23 notes: *Allegro moderato* (23-TET) closely align with scales used in traditional gamelan music, so for his etude in that tuning he adopted a gamelan-influenced idiom. The pitch content of the final Etude XII. 19 notes: *Allegro moderato* (19-TET), by contrast, shares many similarities with common-practice period tunings, which Blackwood illustrates by casting his corresponding etude in a style reminiscent of Mozart.

It is difficult, even impossible in many cases, to perform the microtones in these etudes on standard Western instruments, which are all constructed with conventionally tuned music in mind. It is for this reason that Blackwood originally composed his etudes for "Electronic Music Media." He even cautioned against attempting to perform these works on acoustic instruments due to the seemingly insurmountable technical hurdles involved in achieving the correct pitches. But much has changed since 1980. For this recording, Sheeran deciphered the original score — which has 180 unique pitches overall — and arranged 12-note versions of the *Etudes* by approximating the musical logic and sound of each. He then leveraged cutting-edge "pitch correction" technology (much more commonly used in popular music) to realize a grander vision for Blackwood's microtonal music, essentially pitch correcting the musicians into sounding as if they were naturally performing together in these exotic tunings. The result is a new frontier for the performance and composition of microtonal music, no longer restricted to electronic instruments and specially fretted guitars, but now able to span freely the full gamut of instrumental color.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Composer, pianist, and musical theorist **Easley Blackwood** (1933–2023) is remembered for a long and fascinating career that was consistent only in its seeming contradictions and strong individuality. He received his musical training from such legendary figures as Olivier Messiaen, Paul Hindemith (at Yale, where Blackwood earned his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in 1953 and 1954), and Nadia Boulanger.

As a composer, Blackwood first achieved recognition for his Symphony No. 1 (1955), with *Time* magazine praising him as “a stoutly original musical thinker” after the work’s premiere. His music at first reflected the conservative modernism of Boulanger’s Paris, before giving way to a thornier, more angular style in the 1960s and ’70s. It was during the ’70s that he began his microtonal experiments, incorporating the 15-, 16-, and 23-tone equal temperaments into his 1975 opera, *Gulliver*. In 1978 he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to investigate systematically every equal division of the octave from 13 to 24 notes. This research culminated in the completion of his *Twelve Microtonal Etudes for Electronic Music Media* two years later.

He continued to explore microtonality in subsequent works, but — unusually for a composer who has just made a major technical breakthrough — he also began composing music that looked to the past, embracing a more traditional, conventionally tonal idiom. His compositions after 1980 are entirely of the latter variety, ranging in style from light and neoclassical, to densely post-romantic, to at times even Beethovenian.

A mainstay of the Chicago music scene, Blackwood began teaching at the University of Chicago in 1958 and remained on faculty there—eventually as Professor Emeritus—for the rest of his life. He also co-founded and served as pianist for the Grammy Award-winning chamber music ensemble Chicago Pro Musica, composed primarily of musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Matthew Sheeran (born 1989) is a British composer and arranger. He studied music at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the University of Sussex and King’s College London. In 2010 he won the Presteigne Festival’s Alan Horne Prize for composition and the Shipley Arts Festival’s Chairman of the Jury award. He has had his music performed at the Aldeburgh Festival, St Edmundsbury Cathedral, and Westminster Abbey. His background and expertise in commercial and film music was an invaluable resource when producing this recording. He is represented by SMA Talent.

ABOUT 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. A nonprofit record label, Cedille’s mission is to produce and disseminate audiophile recordings presenting the finest classical music performers and composers in and from Chicago. The recordings further the careers and legacies of these Chicago artists as Cedille invests in not only the recordings but in the artists represented on them. 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, including world

premieres of more than 400 classical compositions. Works from the classical canon, when they do appear, are usually heard in particularly imaginative pairings. Cedille never removes albums from its catalog and each recording is a permanent documentation of the artist's work. With more than 180 Chicago artists and ensembles, over 80 making their professional recording debuts on the label, Cedille brings the area's most significant classical music artists to a worldwide listening public. Cedille recordings are available on CD, as MP3 and hi-resolution FLAC downloads, and on all major streaming platforms.

EASLEY BLACKWOOD (1933–2023)

TWELVE MICROTONAL ETUDES FOR ELECTRONIC MUSIC MEDIA, OP. 28 (1980)

Arranged for acoustic instruments by Matthew Sheeran

Performed by musicians from the Budapest Scoring Orchestra

CEDILLE RECORDS — CDR 3019

[Press only download](#)

- 1 16 notes. Andantino (3:46)
- 2 18 notes. Allegro volando (2:32)
- 3 21 notes. Suite in four mvts. (4:43)
- 4 23 notes. Allegro moderato (3:17)
- 5 13 notes. Sostenuto (3:13)
- 6 15 notes. Lento (3:36)
- 7 17 notes. Con moto (2:50)
- 8 22 notes. Andante ma non troppo (4:36)
- 9 24 notes. Moderato (3:04)
- 10 14 notes. Allegramente (2:43)
- 11 20 notes. Comodo (3:57)
- 12 19 notes. Allegro moderato (4:03)

TT: 43:34

Credits:

Flute/Piccolo/Alto Flute: Anita Szabó

Oboe/English Horn: Béla Horváth

Clarinet/Bass Clarinet: György Reé

Bassoon/Contrabassoon: Zsolt Szabó

Trumpet/Flugelhorn: Zoltán Molnár

French Horn: Dávid Kutas

Harp: Klára Bábel

Violin: Csongor Veér

Viola: Péter Kondor

Cello: Mátyás Ölveti

Double Bass: Dávid Csuti

Production and additional engineering: Matthew Sheeran

Mix engineer: Brian Bolger

Recording engineering: Péter Barabas, Dénes Rédly, Tamás Kurina, Bence Bobák, and Viktor Szabó

Session production: Bálint Sapszon

Recorded in Budapest 2021–2022 at Rottenbiller Studios, Tom-Tom Studio A and Pannónia Sound Systems.

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