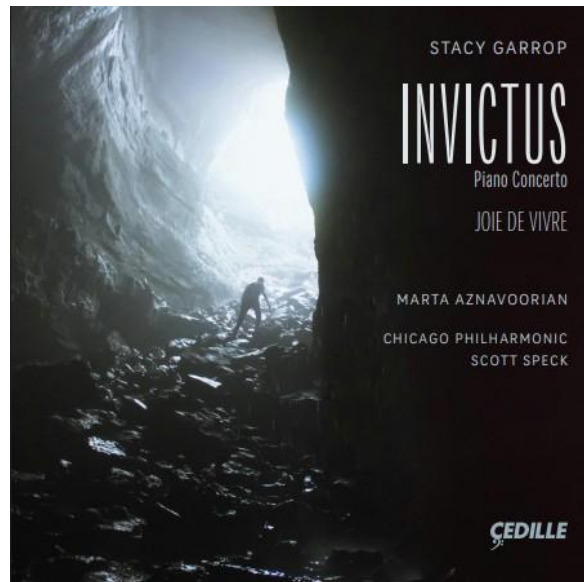


For Immediate Release

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CEDILLE RECORDS RELEASES STACY GARROP'S PIANO CONCERTO, *INVICTUS*, PERFORMED BY MARTA AZNAVOORIAN AND THE CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC CONDUCTED BY SCOTT SPECK, ON MAY 8



Commissioned by Aznavoorian, the concerto — based on William Ernest Henley's poem of the same name — is paired with Garrop's solo piano work, Joie de vivre

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS (APRIL 9, 2026) — Cedille Records will release the world premiere recording of award-winning, Chicago-based composer **Stacy Garrop's** piano concerto, *INVICTUS*, on Friday, May 8. Inspired by **William Ernest Henley's** (1849–1903) iconic poem of the same name, the concerto was commissioned by and written for Chicago native and multi-Grammy-nominated pianist **Marta Aznavoorian**, who performs it with the **Chicago Philharmonic** under Artistic Director **Scott Speck**. Aznavoorian, praised for her “uncompromising intensity” (*Chicago Tribune*), also performs the world-premiere recording of Garrop's bright solo piano piece, *Joie de vivre*.

Celebrated as “an eclectic modernist” (*Fanfare Magazine*), Garrop's *INVICTUS* is structured around the first four lines of Henley's poem, with an interlude connecting the last two

movements. Each line of the poem is reflected musically: in the first movement, “Out of the night that covers me,” the soloist awakens at the bottom of a pit, represented by the orchestra. The soloist attempts to climb out but struggles against the orchestra’s relentless forces. In the second movement, “Black as the pit from pole to pole,” the soloist is violently tossed from side to side. In the quiet, yet intense third movement, “I thank whatever gods may be,” the introspective soloist prays to the heavens for resilience; and in the final movement, “For my unconquerable soul,” the pianist rediscovers strength and climbs once again before triumphantly reaching the rim of the pit and escaping.

Diagnosed with tubercular bone disease at age 12, William Ernest Henley’s life was marked by periods of severe pain. Despite his health issues, he remained a lively and jovial spirit. Henley was hospitalized between 1873 and 1875 after having his left leg amputated sometime between 1868 and 1869. During this hospital stay, Henley wrote his four-stanza, 16-line poem, "Invictus," Latin for "unconquered." Anchored in themes of willpower and perseverance, "Invictus" is a motivational piece that encourages strength in the face of adversity. Famous figures such as imprisoned anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela; labor activist and presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs; and Prince Harry, who founded the 2014 “Invictus Games” to help wounded service members, have recited and paid homage to this poem as a source of inspiration.

INVICTUS premiered in October 2025 at Chicago’s Ear Taxi Festival, a citywide celebration of contemporary music, with Aznavoorian and the Chicago Philharmonic. *Gramophone* lauded the performance: “The music stretches from the Lisztian piano passages of the first movement, via the neo-romantic virtuosity of the second, to the mysterious, haunting poetry of the finale. Aznavoorian made a compelling case for the work as a significant addition to the repertory, with Scott Speck conducting the Chicago Philharmonic in an alert, hard-driving performance at the Harris Theater.”

Garrop’s solo piano work, *Joie de vivre*, is inspired by the life of arts patron and Highland Park native Joanne Bernstein, who commissioned the piece in celebration of her 80th birthday. While collaborating with Bernstein on *Repair the World*, a musical reflection on the mass shooting at the Highland Park, Illinois, Independence Day parade in 2022 (released on Cedille Records in June 2024), Garrop was struck by Bernstein’s joyous embrace of life. To honor Joanne, Garrop drew inspiration from the French expression, “joie de vivre” (joy of life). The piece opens with a brief, introspective introduction that leads into a warm and explorative middle section, traversing through several musical landscapes, from lively dancing to soulful singing. The music builds to a grand climax, then slowly winds back down, returning to the introspective sounds of the opening.

Together, *INVICTUS* and *Joie de vivre* chart a unified emotional narrative from struggle to joy. The journey begins with a profound reflection on resilience and the indomitable human spirit and culminates with a vibrant celebration of life.

Longstanding artists in Cedille Records’ distinguished catalog, Garrop’s work appears on 17 Cedille albums and singles, Aznavoorian, deemed “a pianist of exceptionally finished technique

and purity of musical impulse” (*Boston Globe*), has appeared on 11 Cedille recordings as a soloist, duo partner (with her sister, cellist Ani Aznavoorian), or member of the **Lincoln Trio**. This new release is a major milestone for Garrop and Aznavoorian, further augmenting Garrop’s burgeoning output and solidifying them both as top artists in Chicago’s classical music scene.

ABOUT STACY GARROP

Dr. Stacy Garrop is an award-winning, internationally recognized freelance composer and lecturer whose music is centered on dramatic and lyrical storytelling. Her catalog covers a wide range of genres, with works for orchestra, opera, oratorio, wind ensemble, choir, art song, and various-sized chamber ensembles. Dr. Garrop has received numerous awards and grants, including an Arts and Letters Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Fromm Music Foundation Grant, Barlow Prize, and three Barlow Endowment commissions. Notable commissions include *Forging Steel* for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, *There’s a village in my sneakers* for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *INVICTUS* for pianist Marta Aznavoorian and the Chicago Philharmonic, *Goddess Triptych* for the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, *Frederick and Susan B.* and *The Battle for the Ballot* for the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, *Berko’s Journey* for the Omaha Symphony, *Forged by the Sea* for the U.S. Navy Band, *The Transformation of Jane Doe* for Chicago Opera Theater, *In a House Besieged* for The Crossing, *Give Me Hunger* for Chanticleer, *Glorious Mahalia* for the Kronos Quartet, *Rites for the Afterlife* for the Akropolis and Calefax Reed Quintets, and *My Dearest Ruth* for voice and piano based on a text by Martin D. Ginsburg, husband of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Theodore Presser Company carries her works. Dr. Garrop is a Cedille Records artist with pieces available on 15 albums and two digital singles; her works are commercially available on an additional 25 CDs on other labels. Dr. Garrop earned degrees in music composition at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (B.M.), University of Chicago (M.A.), and Indiana University-Bloomington (D.M.). She taught composition and orchestration full-time at Roosevelt University from 2000 to 2016 before leaving to launch her freelance career. garrop.com

ABOUT MARTA AZNAVOORIAN

Marta Aznavoorian is a multi-Grammy-nominated pianist who has built a distinguished international career as a soloist, chamber musician, recording artist, and educator. Celebrated for her bold, expressive interpretations and her deep commitment to both traditional and contemporary repertoire, she is equally at home performing masterworks of the past and championing new voices of today. Her musical journey began at an early age; at 13, she made her professional debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the personal invitation of legendary conductor Sir Georg Solti — a milestone that launched her onto the international stage.

Aznavoorian has appeared with major orchestras across the United States and abroad, earning acclaim for her technical brilliance, emotional depth, and commanding stage presence. A devoted chamber musician, she is a founding member of the Grammy-nominated Lincoln Trio, an ensemble praised for its polished performances and adventurous programming. With the trio, she

has toured extensively and recorded for Cedille Records, including the albums *Trios From Our Homelands* and *Trios from Contemporary Chicago*. With her sister, noted cellist Ani Aznavoorian, she recorded the critically acclaimed Aznavoorian Duo album *Gems from Armenia*, reflecting their commitment to their cultural heritage.

A passionate advocate for living composers, Aznavoorian has collaborated with many leading contemporary artists and premiered significant new works written specially for her (including *INVICTUS*), showcasing her dedication to expanding the piano repertoire and bringing new music to diverse audiences.

Beyond the concert stage, Aznavoorian is deeply committed to education and mentorship. She serves on the faculties of DePaul University and the Music Institute of Chicago, where she inspires and cultivates the next generation of musicians. As an Ambassador for the Music Institute, she presents her “Healing Power of Music” masterclasses nationwide. Through her nonprofit organization, Keynote Productions, she works to expand access to high-quality music education for students in underserved communities. Ms. Aznavoorian is a Steinway Artist.

martaaznavoorian.com

ABOUT SCOTT SPECK

Scott Speck is an internationally acclaimed conductor known for his passion and intelligence, with performances in major cities including London, Paris, Moscow, Beijing, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. He has served as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Chicago Philharmonic since 2013 and Music Director of the Joffrey Ballet since 2010, while also appearing frequently in Chicago Symphony family concerts. In 2021, he was named “Conductor of the Year” by the Illinois Council of Orchestras.

Speck’s tenure with the Mobile Symphony has featured collaborations with renowned artists such as Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Renée Fleming, and Joshua Bell. He also works with Carnegie Hall through the West Michigan Symphony and previously served as Music Director of the Washington Ballet, earning an invitation to the White House.

He has conducted at leading venues worldwide, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Royal Opera House, and the Kennedy Center, and has led orchestras across the U.S., Europe, and Asia. Speck is also co-author of the bestselling “For Dummies” series books on classical music, opera, and ballet, translated into 30 languages.

Scott Speck can be reached at www.scottspeck.org and on Facebook, X, and Instagram @ScottSpeckMusic.

ABOUT THE CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC

The Chicago Philharmonic is re-imagining the orchestra concert experience through culturally diverse, genre-bending programs, breaking barriers of exclusion in orchestral music. With nearly 200 musician members, diverse and trailblazing leadership, and a deeply collaborative artistic

model, the Chicago Philharmonic is one of the most versatile, innovative, and ambitious orchestras in the country.

The Chicago Philharmonic presents over-30 concerts annually (and year-round), featuring diverse musicians and drawing new-to-the-symphony audiences. The Philharmonic's 2025–2026 partners included Artist in Residence Njioma Chinyere Grevious, Chicago composers Damien Geter and Stacy Garrop, pianist Marta Aznavoorian, *Sleeping At Last*, Cedille Records, The Joffrey Ballet, the Auditorium Theater, Harris Theater for Music and Dance, and Ravinia Festival. Led by Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Scott Speck, the Philharmonic has been called “one of the country’s finest symphonic orchestras” (*Chicago Tribune*) and has won numerous awards including the Illinois Council of Orchestras’ 2023–2024 “Programming of the Year.”

The Chicago Philharmonic Society was created by principal musicians of the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1989 and is now a crucial part of Chicago’s music ecosystem and an incubator of talent, creating thousands of jobs for 425 musicians annually and making Chicago a viable home for talented freelance musicians. Executive Director Terell Johnson, a *Crain’s Chicago Business* “40 Under 40” awardee and Association of Performing Arts Professionals “Spark of Change” winner, has led the orchestra as a force for inclusion with a series of increasingly high-profile events, including its 2024 Lollapalooza debut as the first professional orchestra to perform at the festival to a global audience of over-100,000 in person and live on Hulu.

The Chicago Philharmonic’s audiences number over-200,000 and its community engagement programs reach 6,000 students and other participants annually. The Philharmonic proudly collaborates with the greatest artists of our time, in every genre. Past collaborations have included the English National Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, the Lollapalooza Festival, Laufey, Nas, Lindsey Stirling, Justin Hurwitz, Kishi Bashi, Lady Gaga, Tony Bennett, Joshua Bell, Tank and the Bangas, William Basinski, Ryan Speedo Green, and more. chicagophilharmonic.org

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 not only in the recordings but also 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 well over 400 classical compositions. Works from the classical canon, when they do appear, are usually heard in particularly imaginative programs. Cedille never removes albums from its catalog, and each recording is a permanent documentation of the artists’ 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. Learn more about Cedille Records and explore the label's catalog at cedillerecords.org.

INVICTUS: Piano Concerto by Stacy Garrop
CEDILLE RECORDS — 243

Marta Aznavoorian, piano
Chicago Philharmonic
Scott Speck, conductor

STACY GARROP (b. 1969)

INVICTUS (31:47)

- 1 I. Out of the night that covers me, (7:26)
- 2 II. Black as the pit from pole to pole, (5:21)
- 3 III. I thank whatever gods may be (8:07)
- 4 Interlude (1:31)
- 5 IV. For my unconquerable soul. (9:14)

- 6 *Joie de vivre* (8:08)

TT: (40:01)

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

The recording was produced by James Ginsburg and engineered by Bill Maylone. The album was recorded in Chicago on September 15, 2025, at the Mary Patricia Gannon Concert Hall, DePaul University (Joie de vivre), and on October 20, 2025, at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance (INVICTUS).

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