

CEDILLE



SAARIAHO X KOH

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Jennifer Koh, violin

KAIJA SAARIAHO (b. 1952)

1 *Tocar* (6:51)

Nicolas Hodges, piano

Cloud Trio (13:30)

Hsin-Yun Huang, viola

Wilhelmina Smith, cello

2 I. Calmo, meditato (2:32)

3 II. Sempre dolce, ma
energico, sempre a
tempo (3:22)

4 III. Sempre energico (2:33)

5 IV. Tranquillo ma sempre
molto espressivo (5:01)

6 *Light and Matter** (13:53)

Anssi Karttunen, cello

Nicolas Hodges, piano

7 *Aure*** (5:47)

Anssi Karttunen, cello

Graal théâtre (27:40)

Curtis 20/21 Ensemble

Conner Gray Covington
conductor

8 I. Delicato (17:20)

9 II. Impetuoso (10:19)

TT: (68:06)

*World Premiere Recording

**First recording of violin/cello version

INTRODUCTION

Program Notes

by Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti

Kaija Saariaho's string writing is beautiful and compelling. At moments the sound seems to lose all its weight, the timbre brightening with flutters of harmonics, evaporating suddenly. Other times, the sound presses to the edge of force, breaking purposefully. While Saariaho is known for her ability to create incredible operatic, digitally enhanced soundscapes, her compositional voice is marked by its timbral colors. Her demand of formal structures is made powerful by her intimate knowledge of string technique, allowing for these wonderful details.

Violinist Jennifer Koh remembers hearing Saariaho's music and knowing immediately that this was someone she related to. In an interview for *Meet the Composer*, Koh said, "I almost felt like I knew that I would be close to (Saariaho) when I heard her music. . . . I felt like I understood this person."

Aside from her longstanding collaborations with string players such as Koh and Anssi Karttunen, Saariaho

herself has a unique relationship with the violin. In our conversations about this album, Saariaho recalled:

I started playing violin at the age of six — it was my first instrument. I then started playing piano at the age of eight. My early memories of playing violin are filled with smells: I always liked a lot the smell of a rosin, and my first teacher smoked a lot, and in fact he left me during the lesson to play alone to go to smoke in another room.

The evocative sound world Saariaho creates draws from all these senses. In an interview for *Music & Literature*, Peter Sellars commented of Saariaho that:

. . . the music is there to remind you of the power of invisibility and that all of the things that are moving are actually invisible. But Kaija moves them imaginistically. And so it takes you into this other world of visual art which is not about things as they appear but their secret existence shimmering in the dark. And that is where Kaija's music lives.

TOCAR 2010

“Tocar” means “to touch” in Spanish, and is the verb used for “to play an instrument.” The playfulness and tactile aspect of the word is explored in this work for violin and piano. In her essay “In Music, of Music, toward Music” (2005), Saariaho commented of her own compositional process:

These last years, I've wanted to physically get closer to my music. So I've tried to find new aspects of my musical expression, aspects that I hadn't known, like playfulness, joy, or movement.

Taking the physicality of the title as an entry point, Saariaho asks the listener to explore different translations and possibilities. In the composer's program notes for the piece, she writes:

One of my first ideas for Tocar about the encounter of two instruments as different as the violin and piano, was the question: how could they touch each other? . . . In Tocar both instruments move forward independently, but also keep an eye on each other. I imagine a magnetism becoming stronger and stronger — the piano becomes more mobile — which draws the violin texture towards the piano writing culminating in an encounter in unison. After this short moment of symbiosis, the violin line is released from the measured piano motion, continuing its own life outside the laws of gravity.

Tocar asks the question, “how does an idea or a person touch us?” This album gives the listener a window into the answer that binds these two great artists, Koh and Saariaho.

CLOUD TRIO 2009

In the morning, clouds come low into the mountains so that you can breathe them, touch them with your hands. Midday they rise, creating shelter from the relentless sun, or shift suddenly as a storm emerges. Saariaho told me of her time in the French Alps writing this piece:

When you are high in the mountains, one often sees many different layers of clouds, having all different forms, speeds and textures. They are all different, and yet we all know that they all are clouds. These notions turned into musical ideas in this trio.

As with clouds, Saariaho asks the performers to take on different roles in this piece, sometimes creating shadows, building new forms, or creating atmosphere around other objects. In her essay, "In Music, of Music, toward Music," Saariaho elaborates:

Every instrument houses a rich and multidimensional world that the musician must awaken and breathe life into. It's true that this world isn't manifested in the same way for every person: "my cello" in particular makes use of the high register and the noise of a bow that glides from the bridge to the fingerboard . . . Stretching out its usual recognized and established sound broadens the range of colors and expressions; the musician produces a sound in a different way that isn't used in classical repertoires.

Cloud Trio invites the listener into the changing soundscape built by the violin, viola, and cello. As they move and shift, they represent ourselves projected onto clouds: aware of our surroundings, weighed down by the shadow of past forms, or daydreaming of the future and what could be built.

LIGHT & MATTER 2014

The most recent work on this album, *Light and Matter* draws on the landscape of a city park as it changes with the light. Saariaho told me in personal correspondence:

I composed this piece in New York when we lived next to the Morningside Park. I could see the park during the whole day, from sunrise until sunset, and that change of light modified constantly the park: the trunks changed colors, the shadows moved and reshaped the landscape. And I had these images in front of me from fall to spring. All that inspired me to compose Light and Matter so that I have very reduced musical material that is then varied constantly in different ways.

In the work, violin, cello, and piano trade the musical material across different textures, as though the light — as expressed by harmonic spectrum — is shifting between them. In her essay, “Earth and Air” (2005), Saariaho wrote:

Time is light: the light indicates the time, gives the rhythm, influences nature. I've always needed daylight when I work. I can't compose at night. For me, each instrument's sound has a different intensity of light. The whiter the light, the purer the spectrum.

The piece ends with all three instruments collecting on the note C, where the piece began. This pitch center from the opening of the piece returns, now viewed through a slightly different light, having traversed the path of the composition.

AURE 2011

“Why us, why the star?”

This single line of text from Anne Frank’s diary is woven through the texture of Saariaho’s *Aure* for violin and cello. The piece takes this motive from the third movement of Dutilleux’s *Mémoire des ombres* (*Shadows of Time*), in which the phrase is sung by a single child’s voice. Dutilleux writes that his piece is “for Anne Frank and for all the children in the world, all innocent.” Saariaho’s work — originally written (for violin and viola) as an homage to Dutilleux for his 95th birthday — remembers this phrase, and in doing so echoes the former composer’s sentiment.

In Saariaho’s duo, the motive is first asked by the solo cello. It immediately begins to unravel and change as the two instruments pass the question back and forth. As the melodic memory of “Why us, why the star?” is stretched through time, it becomes more pleading. Saariaho marks in the score for the gesture to be “calm,” then “intense,” then “fragile,” as though the performer is turning the words around in her mind, trying to understand them. Perhaps unheard, the melody fades into memory in flickers of harmonics as the work comes to a close. The overheard phrase was just a breath or breeze — *aure* — now lost in time.

GRAAL THÉÂTRE 1994

Saariaho's violin concerto, *Graal théâtre* takes its title from the Jacques Roubaud novel of the same name. The title itself inspired her to think about the theatricality of performance, and the tension between the composition as a fixed score and its realization by a soloist. When asked about the influence of the text, Saariaho said:

I was interested in the combination of the words Graal (Grail) and théâtre, thinking of an abstract search for the holy grail — whatever it would mean for each of us — and the concrete art form of the theatre. I imagined the violinist as the main character in a play. As with all my music, these were some of the ideas which then become abstract music, and the storyline and the imagined are left behind.

This violin concerto was originally written for soloist Gidon Kremer, but it is also the reason that Koh and Saariaho met. Recalling their first meeting, Saariaho wrote:

Jenny contacted me in 2006, telling me that she was going to play my concerto Graal théâtre with the LA Phil, and asked whether I would be in the US so that we could work together before the concert. I did visit NYC for concerts, and we met . . . she was full of energy and questions concerning details. I like Jenny's willpower and intensity when she performs. She is a truly creative performer, and more generally has all kinds of ideas!

Koh has now performed the work many times, and her skillful interpretation draws out the raw pain inherent in the work. In conjunction with recording for this album, Koh commissioned pianist and filmmaker Yang Bao to create a work based on the concerto. In our interview, Bao said that he was drawn to the strong sense of duality in the piece, continuing:

We attract duality — the shadow of ourselves on a wall. There's a struggle within my body, myself, my mind of all the possibilities. It's a miracle that I am who I am, as there are infinite versions of who we could be. I wanted to bring out these variables in the visuals: the movement of nature, the body, and imagination. The reason I chose the shade of red was that it jumped out at me as the color, as though I had seen it before.

This chain of inspiration — from the Roubaud title, to Saariaho's craft, to Bao's visual rendering — shows the process of translating a creative work across mediums. In doing so, each artist reveals her own personal search: the complex theatricality of performing one's intimate thoughts in order to express oneself.

Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti is a composer, performer, scholar, and educator. For her complete biography, please visit annelanzilotti.com

BIOGRAPHIES

JENNIFER KOH

Jennifer Koh is recognized for intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. A forward-thinking artist, she is dedicated to exploring a broad and eclectic repertoire, while promoting diversity and inclusivity in classical music. She has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of commissioning projects, and has premiered more than 70 works written especially for her. Her quest for the new and unusual, sense of endless curiosity, and ability to lead and inspire a host of multidisciplinary collaborators, truly set her apart.

Ms. Koh's critically acclaimed series include *Bach and Beyond* and *Two X Four*, both of which have been recorded for Cedille Records, as well as *Shared Madness*, *Bridge to Beethoven*, *The New American Concerto*, and *Limitless*. These projects feature commissions from today's foremost composers, including Kaija Saariaho, whom she has long championed and

closely collaborated with, as well as Chris Cerrone, Anthony Cheung, John Harbison, Philip Glass, Vijay Iyer, Missy Mazzoli, Andrew Norman, and Tyshawn Sorey, among others.

Ms. Koh was named *Musical America's* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, was a winner in the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow and Concert Artists Guild Competition, and received an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Born in Chicago, she has a BA in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir. She is an active lecturer, teacher, and recording artist for Cedille Records, and is the Artistic Director of *arco collaborative*, an artist-driven nonprofit that fosters a better understanding of our world through a musical dialogue inspired by ideas and the communities around us.

KAIJA SAARIAHO

Kaija Saariaho is a prominent member of a group of Finnish artists who are making a worldwide impact. She studied in Helsinki, Fribourg, and Paris.

At IRCAM (Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music), Saariaho developed techniques of computer-assisted composition and acquired fluency in working on technology and with electronics. This experience influenced her approach to writing for orchestra, with its emphasis on the shaping of dense masses of sound in slow transformations. Significantly, her first orchestral piece, *Verblendungen* (1984), involves a gradual exchange of roles and character between orchestra and tape. And even the titles of her linked pair of orchestral works, *Du Cristal* (1989) and *...à la Fumée* (1990) suggest her preoccupation with color and texture. Although much of her catalogue comprises chamber works, she has turned increasingly to larger forces and broader structures in pieces such as *Orion* (2004), *Laterna Magica* (2008), and *Circle Map* (2008). Detailed notation using harmonics, microtonality, and continuum of sound extending from pure tone to unpitched

noise are all features found in one of her most frequently performed works, heard on this recording: *Graal Théâtre* for violin and orchestra (1994). Her catalogue also includes concertos for other instruments titled *Aile du songe* (2001), *Notes on Light* (2006), *D'om le Vrai Sens* (2010), and *Maan Varjot* (2014). In 2015, Gerald Finley and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, premiered *True Fire* for baritone and orchestra.

Since the late-1990s, Saariaho has turned to opera, with outstanding success: *L'Amour de Loïen* (2000), *Adrian Mater* (2006), *Émilie* (2010), and the oratorio *La Passion de Simone* (2006). Her opera, *Only the Sound Remains* (2016) was premiered at the Dutch National Opera, with other performances following in Paris, Helsinki, Madrid, New York, and Toronto.

Saariaho has received many distinctions and has claimed numerous major composing awards: the Grawemeyer Award, Wihuri Prize, Nemmers Prize, Sonning Prize, Polar Music Prize, and BBVA Award. In 2015, she served as the judge for the Toru Takemitsu Composition Award.

CURTIS 20/21 ENSEMBLE

Conner Gray Covington, conductor

Flexible in size and scope, the Curtis 20/21 Ensemble performs a wide range of music from the 20th and 21st centuries, including works by Curtis students, faculty, and alumni. The ensemble has appeared at major U.S. venues such as the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall, and has presented concert portraits of iconic composers-in-residence John Corigliano, George Crumb, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Steven Stucky, among others. Of the ensemble's Joan Tower portrait program, *The New York Times* wrote, "Ms. Tower could hardly have hoped for more passionate performances."

Conner Gray Covington is currently Assistant Conductor of the Utah Symphony and recently extended his contract through the 2019–2020 season with a promotion to Associate Conductor. He has conducted various orchestras throughout the world including the Danish National, St. Louis, Virginia, and Nashville symphonies and has served as a cover conductor for

such orchestras as the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, and Atlanta Symphony, among others.

HSIN-YUN HUANG

Violist Hsin-Yun Huang has forged a career performing on international concert stages, commissioning and recording new works, and nurturing young musicians. Her 2017–2018 season included performances as soloist under the batons of David Robertson, Osmo Vänskä, Xian Zhang, and Max Valdés in Beijing, Taipei, and Bogota; she is also the first solo violist to be presented in the National Performance Center of the Arts in Beijing. She has commissioned compositions from Steven Mackey, Shih-Hui Chen, and Poul Ruders. Her 2012 Bridge Records recording, *Viola Viola* won accolades from *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*.

Ms. Huang first came to international attention as the gold medalist in the 1988 Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition. In 1993, she was the

top prize winner in the ARD International Competition in Munich, and was awarded the highly prestigious Bunkamura Orchard Hall Award. A native of Taiwan and an alumna of Young Concert Artists, she received degrees from the Yehudi Menuhin School, The Juilliard School, and the Curtis Institute of Music; she now serves on the faculties of Juilliard and Curtis.

WILHELMINA SMITH

Cellist Wilhelmina Smith is founder and Artistic/Executive Director of Salt Bay Chamberfest. Smith made her solo debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra while a student at the Curtis Institute of Music. She was awarded the 2015–2016 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Performing Musicians and was a prizewinner in the International Leonard Rose Cello Competition. She has been a guest artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Boston Chamber Music Society, and Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. Her festival appearances include La Jolla Music Society SummerFest, Caramoor, and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Smith is a founding member of Music from Copland House, the Variation String Trio,

and the Artymiw-Keefe-Smith piano trio. Her collaborations with composers include her performance of Esa-Pekka Salonen's cello concerto *Mania* and the American premiere of his *Knock, Breathe, Shine* for solo cello. Her CD of solo cello works by Kaija Saariaho and Salonen will be released by Ondine Records in 2019. Her recording of sonatas by Britten and Schnittke was released in 2006 on the Arabesque label and her recordings of chamber music include the complete chamber works of Aaron Copland and works by Sebastian Currier, Jennifer Higdon, John Musto, and Aaron Jay Kernis.

NICOLAS HODGES

An active, and ever-growing, repertoire that encompasses such composers as Beethoven, Berg, Brahms, Debussy, Schubert, and Stravinsky reinforces pianist Nicolas Hodges' superior prowess in contemporary music.

Born in London and now based in Germany, where he is a professor at the Musikhochschule Stuttgart, Hodges

has established himself as one of the world's leading contemporary music figures, with close associations to many of today's most respected composers, conductors, and orchestras.

Hodges has appeared as soloist with orchestras including the Boston Symphony, Berliner Philharmoniker, BBC Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, London Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony, MET Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Sydney Symphony, Tokyo Philharmonic, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, and WDR Sinfonieorchester Cologne.

Hodges appears regularly in recital at venues such as Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, and Wien Konzerthaus, and collaborates widely with artists including the Arditti Quartet, Adrian Brendel, Colin Currie, Ilya Gringolts, Anssi Karttunen, Michael Wendeberg, and Carolin Widmann, and also performs as a member of Trio Accanto.

ANSSI KARTTUNEN

Finnish cellist Anssi Karttunen leads a busy career as a soloist and chamber musician, performing extensively with many of the world's leading orchestras, ensembles, and soloists. Karttunen is a passionate advocate of contemporary music and his collaborations with composers have led him to present more than 170 world premieres of works by composers as diverse as Pascal Dusapin, Luca Francesconi, Betsy Jolas, Magnus Lindberg, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kaija Saariaho, and Tan Dun. Karttunen performs all of the standard cello works from early baroque onwards, has rediscovered many forgotten masterpieces, and transcribed numerous works for cello and chamber ensembles. Karttunen performs with the Zebra Trio and in duo with pianists Nicolas Hodges and Magnus Lindberg and multi-instrumentalist John Paul Jones, among many others.

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