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**DEVILISH WORKS FOR VIOLIN
PLAYED WITH SPIRIT ON NEW CD**

Rachel Barton Explores Instrument's Diabolical Image

On *Instrument of the Devil* (Cedille CDR 90000 041), gifted young violinist Rachel Barton displays her technical prowess and the instrument's emotional range in an unusual, virtuosic program that, in her words, offers listeners something other than "the usual potpourri of encores."

The new CD explores the mythic and frequent literary associations of the violin with death the Devil. With pianist Patrick Sinozich and other collaborators, Miss Barton performs fiendishly difficult works by Saint-Saëns, Tartini, Liszt, Bazzini, Berlioz, De Falla, Ernst, Paganini, Stravinsky, and Sarasate. The novel violin CD was inspired in part by pianist Earl Wild's recording of Liszt's music on diabolical themes (*The Demonic Liszt*), Miss Barton says.

The cover photo on Cedille's generous, 16-page CD booklet shows Miss Barton peering out from a hooded cape. A disembodied pair of outstretched hands from the underworld offers up a flaming violin. An essay by musicologist Todd E. Sullivan of Indiana State University traces the origins of the violin's otherworldly associations back to ancient Greek religious cults, who identified musical instruments with deities and their ethical attributes. By the 1500s, violins were linked with dancing, an activity denounced by religious conservatives. Tales of demonically

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endowed fiddle players first emerged during the 17th century -- an image that endures in today's pop culture.

Miss Barton says she has been fascinated by the paradox that the violin has developed a diabolical image in popular imagination, while at the same time it symbolizes the sound of tender emotions and romantic love. "In the movies, when people fall in love you hear violins," she says.

Lest anyone get the wrong idea, Miss Barton points out that she is a regular churchgoer who believes musical talent is a God-given blessing. Her fiendish technique comes "from constant practice," not a pact with the devil, she promises. "And there's no hidden message if you play the CD backward."

The CD opens with a dramatic prelude: the violin-made sound of bells tolling midnight in Saint-Saëns' arrangement of his symphonic poem *Danse Macabre*, Op. 40. With a penchant for historically informed performances, Miss Barton performs Tartini's Sonata in G minor ("The Devil's Trill") from a 1798 first edition, rather than Kreisler's familiar, romanticized version. She's joined by harpsichordist David Schrader and cellist John Mark Rozendaal from her acclaimed recording of Handel violin sonatas (Cedille CDR 90000 032).

Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* is a piano piece that depicts the Devil playing a frenzied dance on the violin. In a turnabout, Miss Barton performs Nathan Milstein's monstrously challenging arrangement for solo violin. Bazzini's *Round of the Goblins* is one of Miss Barton's standard encores. Even without the theatrics of live performance, this addictive musical confection is a crowd-pleaser.

In the great tradition of virtuoso violinist-composer-arrangers, Miss Barton co-wrote and performs, with pianist Sinozich, an original transcription of Berlioz's *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath* from *Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14 -- a familiar theme in an unusual guise. "I tried to

stay true to Berlioz's score, without any gratuitous technical display," Miss Barton says. "But the arrangement turned out to be demanding nevertheless."

Polish violinist Pawel Kochanski, a contemporary of Manuel de Falla, transcribed several of the Spanish composer's works. Miss Barton performs his version of the *Dance of Terror* from *El amor brujo* (Love, The Magician), depicting the ill-timed appearance of a lover's angry ghost.

Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's Grand Caprice on Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*, Op. 26, is considered one of the most difficult works ever written for solo violin. The violin assumes three vocal roles and the piano's ubiquitous galloping-horse leitmotiv. The demands of providing distinct characterizations for the father, the young son, and the demonic Erl-King intent on stealing the child's spirit, make this piece, in Miss Barton's words, "a real finger-twister."

No disc exploring the associations between the Devil and the violin would be complete without a work by the great nineteenth-century virtuoso Niccolò Paganini. Miss Barton, winner of the Paganini Caprice Prize at both the Sziget (Budapest, 1992) and Paganini (Genoa, 1993) competitions, has chosen to include Paganini's *The Witches*, Op. 8. This work displays the composer's "whole bag of virtuoso tricks," Sullivan writes. "Technical difficulties . . . combined with the enchanted subject matter helped foster the growing association between Paganini and the Devil."

Stravinsky's *The Devil's Dance* comes from the trio version of his *L'Histoire du soldat*. "I feel a real affinity for Stravinsky's percussive, rhythmic use of the violin. It's a different approach to the instrument," Miss Barton says.

Of the many instrumental fantasies based on Gounod's *Faust* opera, Wieniawski's is the most familiar for violin -- and the most physically challenging. But Miss Barton and producer James Ginsburg felt Pablo Sarasate's version was musically superior and more in the diabolical spirit of Gounod's original. Miss Barton earned a reputation as a stellar Sarasate interpreter with her acclaimed CD, *Homage to Sarasate* ("What a pleasure to hear this delicious music performed with such verve!" -- *Fanfare*).

The 23-year-old Chicago-born violinist holds prizes from many of the world's leading competitions. She has appeared as soloist with major orchestras across Europe and North America including the Chicago, St. Louis, Montreal, Vienna, and Budapest Symphony orchestras, working with conductors such as Semyon Bychkov, Neeme Jarvi, Erich Leinsdorf, and Zubin Mehta. She plays the "ex-Lobkowitz" A&H Amati of 1617, on generous loan from her patron, and is represented by ICM Artists.

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

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INSTRUMENT OF THE DEVIL
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 041)

Saint-Saëns: *Danse Macabre*, Op. 40
Tartini: Sonata in G minor, "The Devil's Trill"^{**}
Liszt/Milstein: *Mephisto Waltz*
Bazzini: *Round of the Goblins*, Op. 25
Berlioz/Barton-Sinozich: *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*
from *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14
De Falla/Kochanski: *Dance of Terror* from *El Amor Brujo*
Ernst: Grand Caprice on Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*, Op. 26
Paganini: *The Witches*, Op. 8
Stravinsky: *The Devil's Dance* from *L'Histoire du Soldat* (trio version)^{**}
Sarasate: *Faust Fantasy*

Rachel Barton, violin

Patrick Sinozich, piano

*David Schrader, harpsichord; John Mark Rozendaal, cello

**with John Bruce Yeh, clarinet

Available for interview: Violinist Rachel Barton is available for interviews in connection with her new CD. Phone Nat Silverman at (847) 328-4292; fax (847) 328-4317; e-mail: natsilv@aol.com