

Cedille Records
5255 N. Lakewood Ave.
Chicago, IL 60640
(773) 989-2515
www.cedillerecords.org

Press contact: Nat Silverman
Nathan J. Silverman Co./PR
1830 Sherman Ave., Suite 401
Evanston, IL 60201-3773
Phone (847) 328-4292
Fax (847) 328-4317
Email: natsilv@aol.com

News

For release: September 2006

PACIFICA QUARTET'S NEW CD YIELDS 20TH-CENTURY TREASURES FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

On Declarations, Ensemble Asserts Affection For Innovative Works of the Interwar Years

Music by Janáček, Hindemith, and Ruth Crawford Seeger

The Pacifica Quartet breaks new ground this month with a CD of music composed in Europe and the U.S. during the turbulent decades between World Wars I and II.

On Declarations: Music Between the Wars, the Pacifica offers string quartets by three enterprising, public-spirited humanists of first half of the 20th century: Czechoslovakia's Leoš Janáček, America's Ruth Crawford Seeger, and Germany's Paul Hindemith (Cedille Records CDR 90000 092).

The program includes Janáček's String Quartet No. 2, "Intimate Letters" (1928); Seeger's String Quartet (1931); and Hindemith's Quartet No. 4, Op. 22 (1922).

Declarations is a departure from the Pacifica's three previous CDs (all on Cedille Records), each of which focused on quartets by a single composer (Easley Blackwood, Dvořák, and Mendelssohn, respectively).

According to ensemble violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson, the Pacifica felt the stylistic diversity of *Declarations* would make a stimulating and rewarding program for audiences, as well for the performers themselves. "It's an opportunity to present music that touches us emotionally, from an era that's rarely discussed nowadays," he said in an interview for Cedille Records.

Outspoken and energetic, Janáček (1854-1928) turned the provincial Czech city of Brno into a musical center. He conducted choirs, established a symphony orchestra, and founded an organ school to train church musicians. It wasn't until relatively late in his career that his music finally received the recognition it deserved from the cultural establishment in Prague.

Though Janáček's music was rooted in the traditions of late Romanticism, "his style remains uniquely his own," Andrea Lamoreaux of WFMT Radio writes in the CD booklet notes. It's a style informed by Moravian folk music, Russian and other Eastern European cultures, and "the confluence of Romantic and modernist trends that characterized the early 20th century."

Janáček is best known today for his operas, all of which "express the composer's compassion for the human condition," according to the *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Like other composers, he turned to the intimacy of chamber music to express deep, often secret, feelings.

His String Quartet No. 2 was fueled by his romantic infatuation with a married woman nearly 40 years his junior. He originally planned to call it "Love Letters," but worried about what people would think. "The whole piece is one long instrumental love song," Lamoreaux writes. The work's shifting moods and tempos, and unpredictable changes of texture and color, mirror the ups and downs of a risky personal relationship.

On numerous occasions, Janáček asks the violist to play "sul ponticello," near the instrument's bridge, which "adds an astringency to the sound that heightens the tension of the emotions being expressed," Lamoreaux explains.

Many regard Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953) as the most important female American composer of the 20th century. A force in the American modernist movement, she also played a key role in the American folk music revival (as did her stepson Pete Seeger and her children Peggy and Mike Seeger.) In the aftermath of the Great Depression, Seeger and her husband, the composer and musicologist Charles Seeger, became crusaders for social justice, leaving a musical legacy that embraced both serialism and socialism.

The Pacifica Quartet first performed Seeger's *String Quartet* in 2004, as part of a modern music series at the University of Chicago, where they are quartet in residence. Bernhardsson says the ensemble was curious about the work. They knew of the composer and of the work's reputation for innovative writing, but none of them ever heard it because it's rarely performed. The university's interest in presenting it provided the opportunity the Pacifica had been looking for.

The String Quartet is Seeger's most famous work and a modernist masterpiece. Composer and critic Virgil Thomson described it as "in every way a distinguished, a noble piece of work." Composer George Perle, in a landmark essay on atonality and serialism in American music, called it "an original and inventive work whose numerous 'experimental' features in no way detract from its spontaneity, freshness, and general musicality."

Of particular interest is the work's extraordinary third movement, whose slowly evolving sounds, repetitious yet compelling, seem to prefigure the minimalist techniques of the later 20th century.

Seeger thoroughly rejected European neoclassicism, so it's interesting to note that one of the many composers she met while in Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship (the first woman to receive this honor) was Hindemith, who is also represented on the new CD.

Hindemith (1895-1963) was among the young composers of the post-World War I years who rebelled against the orchestral flamboyance and bombastic excesses of the late Romantics. His "degenerate" musical experimentation would ultimately anger Nazi authorities, as would the political undertones and implied social criticism of his operatic masterpiece, *Mathis der Maler*. Suspended from teaching at the Berlin Academy of Music, he emigrated from his native Germany just prior to the outbreak of World War II.

In the 1920s, Hindemith wrote a burst of chamber music in a contrapuntally complex style usually called neoclassical, although his inspiration was the linear counterpoint, concerto grosso textures, and fugues of the Baroque era. Hindemith rejected harsh expressionistic and serialist techniques in favor of a style more accessible to the public, with tonal centers and broader,

recognizable themes. As the CD booklet explains, Hindemith declared that music needs to be “rooted in the old traditions, while employing the more stringent, less opulent sound qualities characteristic of the new era.”

A product of that period, the Op. 22 Quartet became one of Hindemith's most popular works and one of the most often-performed chamber pieces from the 1920s. The five-movement work has an “arch” structure. The third movement serves as the “keystone,” flanked by pairs of related movements. An usual aspect is that, alone among the five movements, only the third has a designated time signature.

Declarations was recorded in September 2005 and January 2006 in the acoustically acclaimed Krannert Center at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, where the Pacifica is faculty quartet in residence (along with its residency at the University of Chicago).

Founded in 1994 on the West Coast, the Pacifica Quartet has won the Coleman, Concert Artist's Guild, and Naumburg Chamber Music Competitions, as well as the Cleveland Quartet Award. In 2006, it became only the second chamber music ensemble ever to receive an Avery Fisher Career Grant. It is a frequent guest of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and enjoys an international career, with two European tours scheduled for the 2006-2007 season.

Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE') is dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from Chicago. The nonprofit label is an arm of The Chicago Classical Recording Foundation. For a free catalog and the locations of local retail outlets, contact Cedille Records, 5255 N. Lakewood Ave., Chicago, IL 60640-2220, call (773) 989-2515; E-mail: info@cedillerecords.org. On the Net: www.cedillerecords.org.

###

Declarations: Music Between The Wars
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 092)

Janáček: String Quartet No. 2, “Intimate Letters” (1928) (26:01)
Ruth Crawford Seeger: String Quartet (1931) (11:53)
Paul Hindemith: String Quartet No. 4, Op. 22 (1922) (26:24)

Pacifica Quartet