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News

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Chicago Sinfonietta Showcases New Works By Women Composers on ‘Project W’ from Cedille Records

**Music Director Mei-Ann Chen Conducts World-Premiere
Recordings of Music by Jennifer Higdon, Clarice Assad,
Jessie Montgomery, and Reena Esmail**

**Album includes first-ever recording of William Grant Still’s
orchestral arrangement of Florence Price’s
‘Dances in the Canebreaks’**

Music Director Mei-Ann Chen and the Chicago Sinfonietta — the adventurous, MacArthur Award-winning orchestra that champions racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in classical music — give world-premiere recordings of newly commissioned works by American Jennifer Higdon, Brazilian-American Clarice Assad, African-American Jessie Montgomery, and Indian-American Reena Esmail on *Project W: Works by Diverse Women Composers*.

Available March 8, 2019, *Project W* is the capstone project of the Sinfonietta’s 30th anniversary season (2017–2018).

“This album reflects the Sinfonietta’s year-long initiative highlighting and celebrating contemporary, diverse women composers,” Chen writes in the liner notes. “In the four commissioned works on this CD, you’ll hear music shaped by a variety of cultures and experiences.”

Higdon, winner of a Pulitzer Prize and two Grammy Awards, invites listeners to luxuriate in the beauty of a virtuosic string orchestra with *Dance Card*, a five-moment suite that *San Francisco Classical Voice* praised for its “pleasurable sounds” and “intellectual heft.” Assad is a Grammy-

-more-

nominated composer and performer. Her *Sin Fronteras* (Without Borders) lives up to its title with an exotic blend of musical influences from throughout the Americas. Juilliard-trained Montgomery, a violinist member of the Catalyst Quartet and a collaborator with Yo-Yo Ma’s Silkroad Ensemble, imbues her *Coincident Dances* with the frenetic energy and multicultural sound worlds of her native New York City. Esmail, a graduate of Juilliard and the Yale School of Music, draws from Western and Hindustani (north Indian) classical music. She sings her *Charukeshi Bandish*, a short melodic piece in traditional Hindustani bandish form, as the introduction to *#metoo*, a composition rooted in her own painful personal experiences and in which the bandish melody represents the work’s female protagonist.

Leading off this singular program of premieres is the first-ever recording of William Grant Still’s orchestral arrangement of groundbreaking Chicago African-American composer Florence Price’s tuneful *Dances in the Canebrakes* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 184).

Recording Team

Project W was recorded by Grammy-nominated producer James Ginsburg and multiple Grammy-nominated engineer Bill Maylone at Wentz Hall, Naperville, Illinois, Sept 19, 2017, and March 13–14, 2018.

Forging a Relationship

Project W is the Chicago Sinfonietta’s eighth Cedille Records album and its second with Maestro Chen. She led the orchestra on its previous Cedille release, 2013’s *Delights & Dances*, a one-of-kind program featuring music for string quartet and orchestra, with guest artist, the Harlem Quartet. “The performances on this disc are outstanding,” proclaimed the *Journal of the Society for American Music*. “Their intonation and clarity of textures throughout the disc are revelatory.” *The Absolute Sound* called it “irresistible.”

The Sinfonietta and Cedille forged a relationship in the 1990s when internationally acclaimed African-American conductor Maestro Paul Freeman, the orchestra’s founding music

director, and James Ginsburg, the Chicago-based classical label's founder and president, mapped out a plan to update Freeman's landmark 1970s *Black Composers Series* on CBS Records with symphonic repertoire by 20th-century African-descended composers.

That collaboration yielded Cedille's three-volume *African Heritage Symphonic Series*, whose first installment was released in November 2000. The series has become a staple of classical radio stations and library music collections across the United States.

Chicago Sinfonietta and Mei-Ann Chen

The Chicago Sinfonietta was founded in 1987 by Maestro Freeman (1936–2015) to reflect an exceptionally broad range of the Chicago community in its musicians, its music, and its audiences. Highlights of the orchestra's 31 years include six European tours, two Kennedy Center performances, two Chicago Millennium Park concerts attended by more than 19,000 people, and 15 recordings. In 2016, the Sinfonietta received the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions. The orchestra's website is chicagosinfonietta.org.

Taiwanese-American conductor Mei-Ann Chen has been music director of the Chicago Sinfonietta since 2011. She is also artistic director and conductor for the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra Summer Festival and conductor laureate of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. A sought-after guest conductor, she has appeared with numerous major orchestras in North America, including the symphony orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, and Toronto, among others, as well as throughout Europe, South America, and the United Kingdom. Her website is meiannchen.com.

Cedille Records

Launched in November 1989, 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.

The audiophile-oriented label releases every new album in multiple formats: physical CD; 96 kHz, 24-bit, studio-quality FLAC download; and 320 Kbps MP3 download.

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille Records is the label of Cedille Chicago, NFP. Sales of physical CDs and digital downloads and streams cover only a small percentage of the label's costs. Tax-deductible donations from individual music-lovers and grants from charitable organizations account for most of its revenue.

Headquarters are at 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call (773) 989-2515; email: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: cedillerecords.org.

Cedille Records is distributed in the Western Hemisphere by Naxos of America and its distribution partners, by Select Music in the U.K., and by other independent distributors in the Naxos network in classical music markets around the world.

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Project W: Works by Diverse Women Composers
Chicago Sinfonietta
Mei-Ann Chen, conductor
Cedille Records CDR 90000 185

Florence Price, arr. William Grant Still: *Dances in the Canebrakes* (9:28)
Clarice Assad: *Sin Fronteras* (13:27)
Jessie Montgomery: *Coincident Dances* (11:40)
Reena Esmail: *Charukeshi Bandish* (2:58)
#metoo (13:02)
Jennifer Higdon: *Dance Card* (23:07)