

**Preview: Recording in Cleveland—the making of Joshua Smith’s second Bach CD (Part I)**

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Cleveland has played a major role in the classical music recording industry for many years, thanks largely to the Telarc label, founded in 1977 by Jack Renner and Robert Woods. But recently, the recording industry has been

changing rapidly with the increasing distribution of music via the Internet. Things also changed dramatically for Telarc in 2005 when the label was sold to Concord Records and a number of its engineers and producers were cut loose. Some created their own companies and others have been operating as freelancers.

ClevelandClassical.com will devote this and several forthcoming articles to the new recording industry in Cleveland.

Although we have been in the music business forever and have been part of many recording sessions, we really did not know exactly what goes into the making of a CD from the first light of an idea to its release. An opportunity to follow this process arose when we were invited by Cleveland Orchestra principal flutist Joshua Smith through producer Erica Brenner to follow his second Bach CD through the recording and editing process.

Smith’s first CD of J.S. Bach solo flute music was inspired by his participation in the Telarc CD, ‘Air’, with harpist Yolanda Kondonassis, violist Cynthia Phelps and The Oberlin 21 under Bridget-Michaele Reischl. Released in October, 2008, the disc was recorded with Erica Brenner as producer and Tom Knab as audio engineer. During the sessions, Joshua Smith tossed around the idea of making his own recording.

At the time, Smith only had one solo recording on the market, the Mozart Flute and Harp Concerto, with Lisa Wellbaum, Christoph von Dohnányi and the Cleveland Orchestra. “I sounded like a

kid, but then I was”. But what repertory would he record? “I’m not an easy consumer of flute music. There were only a few projects that really interested me”, Smith recalls. “I thought of Bach, the Debussy ‘Trio’ and an all-20th century solo flute music program. Then I met harpsichordist Jory Vinikour through Philip Cucchiara, and we scheduled a Bach reading. It was amazingly fun.”

So Bach it would be. “His music is complicated, but easy to engage with emotionally”. And having been impressed by the quality of recording in the ‘Air’ CD, it was clear from the beginning that Erica Brenner and Tom Knab would be the production team of choice. At first, Smith was looking for a label and thought it might be Telarc, “but then the recording climate completely changed”, Smith observed. “Five to ten years back, you would do a recording and then push it to a company”.

Erica Brenner, now a freelancer, leapt at the project. “When a recording label decides what to record, it’s very different from an artist deciding what to record, and it’s fun to produce music I know so well”. Indeed she knows the repertory, for Brenner begin her own career as a professional flutist, moving to Cleveland to study with William Hebert and to play with the Canton Symphony. Carpooling to Canton for two years with Telarc’s Elaine Martone eventually got her into the recording business. One day, Martone told her, “You’d make a great editor”. A few years and a degree at Yale later, she called Martone and asked if the offer was still good.

Engineer Tom Knab was studying composition at CIM and had a part time job as an engineer at Telarc. He taught Brenner how to edit and fifteen years ago recommended her as a freelancer on a recording project with the Akron Symphony, a disc that was released on Telarc with Elaine Martone assisting. This led to further collaborations on recording projects with trumpeter Ryan Anthony, Apollo’s Fire, and Yolanda Kondonassis as well as with the Cincinnati Symphony.

With Jory Vinikour, Tom Knab and Erica Brenner lined up, it was time to address the basic sound concept of the album and to look for

a recording venue. “I want the feeling of a live concert”, said Joshua Smith. “I ask the artists for examples of recordings that they like and don’t like”, said Tom Knab. “I always ask the artist what is special about what they’re trying to do”. “We needed to look for a venue that would support the repertory”, said Erica Brenner, “hopefully without external noise from lawn mowers and busses”.

After vetting several locations for the December 2008 session, the team settled on First Baptist Church in Shaker Heights, a venue with highly agreeable acoustics and a very accommodating staff. The church was available when the artists needed it and the recording setup wouldn’t have to be taken down after every session, although the production crew did end up battling with those lawn mowers and busses. It comes with the territory, says Brenner: “Traffic and outside noise are often a unpleasant aggravation when using natural acoustics of a church or hall, but we sometimes make a decision in favor of the natural sound over going into a small studio where reverb or sound enhancement

would be necessary later”. ‘J.S. Bach Flute Sonatas’ was released on the Delos label in October, 2009 to critical acclaim.

“The first Bach disc ended up being perfect”, Smith remembers, and inspired him to take on disc no. 2. First Baptist was the choice for the second Bach album as well, which now included violinist Allison Edberg and cellist Ann Marie Morgan in addition to Smith and Vinikour. A recording date was set around the musicians’ forthcoming performance of the album’s repertory during the Baldwin-Wallace Bach Festival in April, 2010.

We joined them on Monday, April 13, the day after they had laid down tracks for the Trio Sonata from ‘The Musical Offering’. “Just follow the cords”, Erica Brenner counseled us, “they’ll lead you right to the control room”, where we found the musicians and production team listening critically to the last takes of a sonata.

*Next week: from recording session to CD.*