

**TELARC RELEASES *THE SINGING ROOMS*, FEATURING TWO WORLD
PREMIERES BY AMERICAN COMPOSERS
JENNIFER HIGDON & ALVIN SINGLETON**

Featuring Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra & Chorus

Telarc releases *The Singing Rooms* on September 21st, 2010. The CD features the world premieres of Pulitzer Prize winning composer Jennifer Higdon's [b 1962] "The Singing Rooms," and Alvin Singleton's [b 1940] "PraiseMaker," the disc also includes Alexander Scriabin's "La Poème de l'extase."

Higdon's life has been busy since the 2002 premiere of her *Concerto for Orchestra* by the Philadelphia Orchestra. (Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra recorded this work for Telarc.) Ms. Higdon lives in Philadelphia, where she holds the Rock Chair of Composition Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music. She is also a member of the Atlanta School of Composers, reflecting Mr. Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's commitment to nurturing and championing music through multi-year partnerships defining a new generation of American composers — the Orchestra's 2010-11 season will celebrate 10 years of Mr. Spano as Music Director, as well as 10 years of the Atlanta School of Composers. Other prominent members include Michael Gandolfi, Osvaldo Golijov, Christopher Theofanidis, and Adam Schoenberg.

"The Singing Rooms," a violin concerto with an equally important part for chorus, was sparked by a request from violinist Jennifer Koh, for whom Higdon had previously composed a sonata with piano called *String Poetic* (2006). The piece is part of a commissioning consortium with The Philadelphia Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra with funding through grants from the NEA and the Argosy Foundation Contemporary Music Fund.

Though Higdon has written a number of pieces for chorus either *a cappella* or accompanied by one or two instruments, *The Singing Rooms* is Higdon's first work for chorus with orchestra. Aware of only a few examples of orchestral works with solo instrument and chorus, she was largely working in the dark, grappling with how to combine three strong elements "without compromising any of the parties." A flutist and conductor herself, she is always thinking about what will simplify rehearsal and what effects will work without causing headaches: "It's a very thought-out process, said Higdon in the liner notes "this stuff haunts my sleep."

For the poems Higdon turned to a colleague, Jeanne Minahan, who teaches creative writing and literature at the Curtis Institute. The former poetry editor for *The Other Side* magazine, Minahan has recently had poems published in *The Women's Review of Books*, *Mars Hill Review*, and *Cimarron Review*.

American composer Alvin Singleton has resided in Atlanta since 1985, when at Robert Shaw's request he became Composer in Residence of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for three years [1985-88] "PraiseMaker" was commissioned by the Cincinnati May Festival in celebration of its 125th anniversary. James Conlon conducted the first performance on May 22, 1998, with the Festival Chorus and Orchestra. Writing for this important choral festival, the composer requested an original text from Susan Kouguell, with whom he previously collaborated on *The World Is Here with Me* for Spelman College. Singleton prefers to collaborate with living poets for his vocal works, because it gives him the opportunity to work with the author and shape the text to fit his needs. Concerning the work's title, the composer points to the tradition of praise singing practiced by griots in western Africa, particularly Senegal. In speaking about the poem, screenwriter, script doctor and filmmaker Kouguell said "The objective for the text of "PraiseMaker" was to write a piece that was universal, secular, and celebratory. Most universal in celebrating an event is memory." It's important for our communal memory, she says, "to rejoice in accomplishments, to learn from our mistakes, to listen to those around us who have wisdom, and to learn from these words."

Beginning with long, swelling notes from the strings, “PraiseMaker” has a sense of yearning, of reaching out for something, the music at times interrupted by insistently pulsing figures from the brass and woodwind instruments. Tubular bells, vibraphone, and crotales (small pitched cymbals) add scintillant accents at irregular points, and indeed the composer seems to avoid the feel of a regular beat throughout. The choral writing is quiet, measured, and contemplative, seldom rising above *mezzo-forte* until the very end. The final words swell to full volume as the chorus is succeeded by crescendoing brass, which is suddenly cut off to reveal a soft, distant-sounding chord from strings with bassoons and horns, fading away like a last persistent memory.

As a skilled and creative pianist, Alexander Scriabin’s rivaled in fame his Moscow Conservatory classmate and lifelong friend, Sergei Rachmaninov. Their pianistic techniques differed, however: Rachmaninov’s clear and precise, Scriabin’s sensuous and mercurial. At first patterning his music after that of Chopin, Scriabin turned out a myriad of piano pieces: preludes, vales, impromptus, and mazurkas. His Piano Concerto in F-sharp minor was widely praised. Scriabin’s music was “modern” and controversial, but not in the atonal sense of that of Schoenberg

Le Poème de l’extase (“The Poem of Ecstasy”) began about 1903 as a long prose poem (more than 300 lines in length) that Scriabin felt would interpret his philosophy to a world hungry for enlightenment. The title was to be *Poème orgiaque* (“Orgiastic” or “Orgasmic Poem”), but he opted for a less specific name. The work is in one long movement, a succession from yearning to striving to fulfillment.

For more than three years he struggled with the poem and its companion symphony. He kept promising the symphony to conductors and to publishers, though most of it was still in his head. When a performance finally seemed imminent, he and his partner worked almost around the clock for days, preparing the score for its premiere. A projected performance in St. Petersburg fell through, and the debut took place in December 1908 in New York City (which two years earlier had welcomed him as the “Cossack Chopin”), with Modest Altschuler conducting the orchestra of the Russian Symphony Society. The work is in one long movement, a succession from yearning to striving to fulfillment.

Spano has a discography with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra of nine recordings, six of which have been honored with GRAMMY® awards. The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra is well known for its dedication to American music through its Atlanta School of Composers, and since the beginning of his tenure in 2001 (to date), Music Director Robert Spano and the Orchestra have performed over 100 concerts containing contemporary works. He has led the Atlanta Symphony’s performances at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, as well as the Ravinia, Ojai, and Savannah Music Festivals. He has led the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, San Francisco, Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, and Philadelphia Symphony Orchestras, as well as Orchestra Filarmonica della Scala, BBC Symphony, and Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. In addition, he has conducted for Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, and the 2005 and 2009 Seattle Opera *Ring* cycles. Spano was *Musical America*’s 2008 Conductor of the Year.

***The Singing Rooms* [Telarc CD-80721] will be available at retail and online Tuesday, September 21st.**

###

For more information, contact:

Press & Radio: Amanda Sweet/ Bucklesweet Media

202-636-3507

Amanda@bucklesweetmedia.com