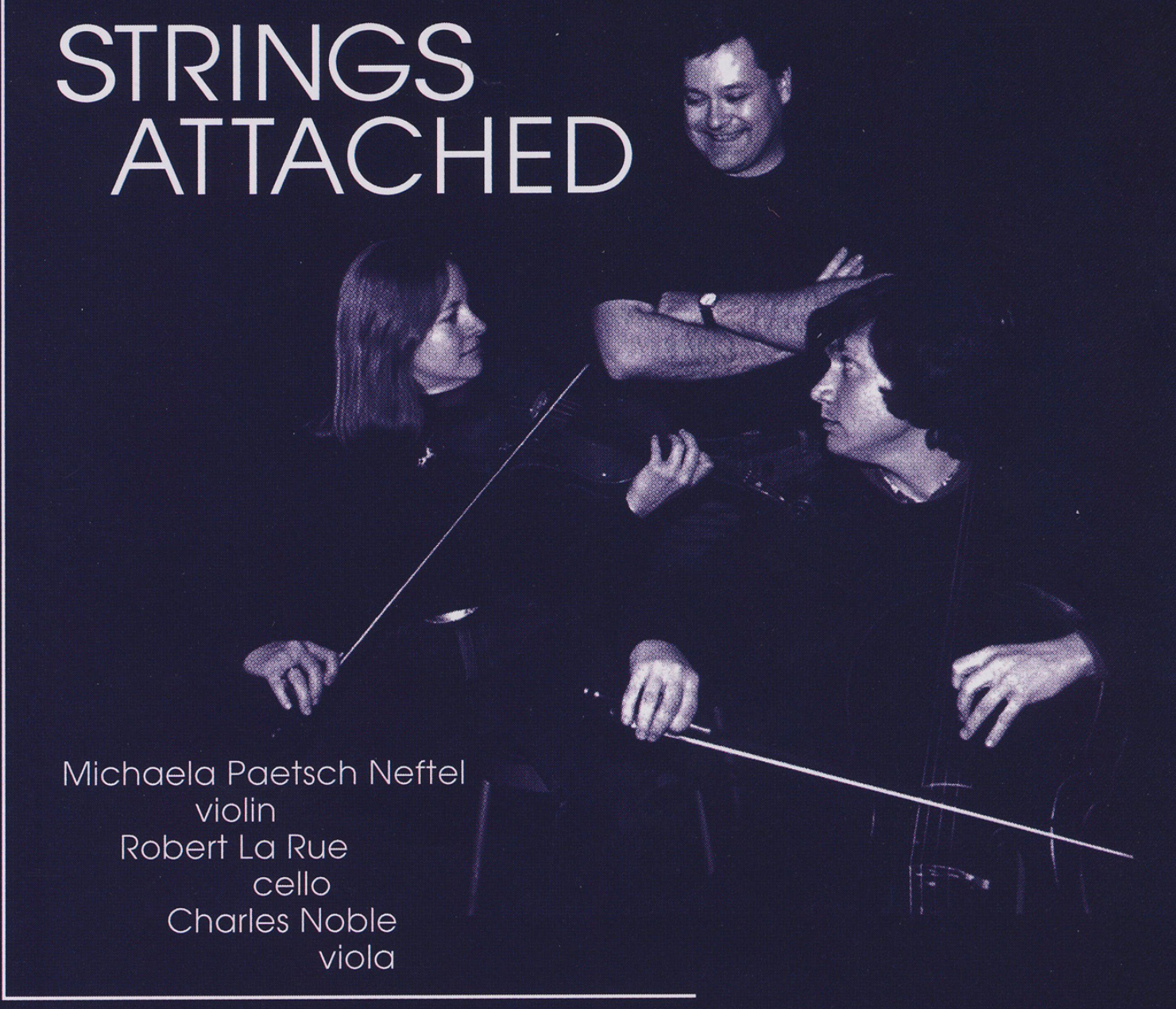


ARSIS

Daron Hagen

# STRINGS ATTACHED



Michaela Paetsch Neftel  
violin  
Robert La Rue  
cello  
Charles Noble  
viola



# Daron Hagen: Strings Attached

Michaela Paetsch Neftel, violin   Robert La Rue, cello  
Charles Noble, viola

## Duo for Violin and Cello (1997)

1	Homage à Ravel	3:55
2	Love Song	6:27
3	Minute Scherzo	1:06
4	Reprise	3:42
5	Finale: Homage à James Brown	3:40

## Suite for Violoncello (1985)

11	Meditation	4:01
12	Rondino	2:02
13	Scherzo: Homage à Copland	2:02
14	"Three Musicians (1921)"	3:23
15	Meditation, Again	2:40

## Suite for Violin (1984)

6	Prelude	4:54
7	Interlude	2:02
8	Burlesque	2:38
9	Interlude	2:20
10	Perpetuum Mobile	2:13

## Suite for Viola (1986)

16	Prelude	2:30
17	Allemande	3:19
18	Courante: Homage à Bach	2:40
19	Sarabande	2:49
20	Gigue	2:22
21	Postlude	3:54

22 Higher, Louder, Faster! 6:13  
(An Editorial, 1987)

Total CD Time: 71:05

Daron Hagen's music for solo strings not only displays the strong craftsmanship and lyrical gift typical of his instrumental compositions, but is the musical fruit of a special nexus of relationships which go back to his student days at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. There the precociously talented composer formed close and collegial friendships with violinist Michaela Paetsch Neftel, violist Lisa Ponton, and cellist Robert La Rue. "I am proud of the long-standing collaborations I have shared with these musicians," the composer writes. "They have taught me to compose for their instruments, and my poetic memory for the sound of these instruments has been shaped by the sound of their playing." The musical results are melodically engaging, technically astute, and historically informed, a fitting tribute to a group of exceptional performers. The recording's ambience is fitting to the New York gestalt these musicians share—Town Hall on 43rd Street, a block from Times Square, where the theater crowds empty out and where the morning papers get scattered to the democratic millions.

Rigorously made yet convivial in mood, these suites not only show a complete identification with both the technical problems that make solo string music interesting, but also with the performer's need for genuine expression. Hagen is a man of strong habits, and his suites (like Walton's concertos) are formally similar. The *Duo* and the violin and cello suites all use a five-movement plan, ensuring order by building two sets of concentric, parenthetical movements around a central scherzo, while the viola suite has a two-movement central core which pays tribute to the distant calm of Baroque dance forms.

Hagen's *Duo for Violin and Cello* was composed in December of 1997 at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, where he has been a frequent guest. This piece is not only dedicated to Paetsch and La Rue but was composed expressly for this recording, and is perhaps its crowning achievement. Separated by a decade from the earlier suites, it surpasses them in refinement while losing none of its composer's energy and style. It is a testament to the friendship of three exceptional musicians.

To those who know Ravel's *Sonata for Violin and Cello* the Duo's "Homage à Ravel" will come as a pleasant shock, for Hagen's first movement closely mirrors the Frenchman's in its gestures and sonata form. This is no mere style study but a *Doppel-gänger* using a different octatonic scale which shadows its model in a friendly way. Hagen's French experience has been affected by that of Copland, and this gives the movement its individual character. Ravel's tone is elegant and elusive, Hagen's warm and direct, as seen in the beautiful downward swoop of the opening violin line. Hagen also makes his American passport known in occasionally propulsive rhythmic interjections, and knowingly naive touches like the violin's exquisite open-string arpeggio at the first theme's return. One moment of the music stands above the rest, a bluesy, major-minor four chord cadential figure which appears several times here and which will be important in the movements to come.

The second movement may be a "Love Song," but if so it is one for two people living in different keys. This is made literal in the middle section of this haunting ABA form, in which the two instruments, muted, dance a ghostly *pas de deux*, each switching off between E major and B-flat major, the key conflict that would be so important in Hagen's tragic Frank Lloyd Wright opera *Shining Brow*. (The cello's opening motif is also notable: in Hagen's song cycle *Dear Youth* it was directly linked to text ideas of loneliness and abandonment.) At the song's capstone



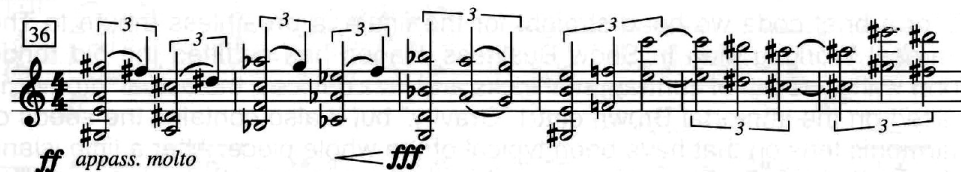
a kind of union is achieved, but as with the rest of the movement its music is shot through with scalar false relations that give the sound a stinging wound. The following "Minute Scherzo" is exactly that, a sixty-bar, sixty-second palindrome which reaches its midpoint on a taut and savage permutation of the four-chord *idée fixe*. Based on a synthetic scale—the key of two sharps and two flats—it compacts and intensifies the *Love Song's* harmonic conflict.

The "Reprise" of the love song is too modestly titled, for it is a rich and loving development of the previous music. The opening idea is a uniquely Hagenesque creation, a Lutheran chorale that has taken an eye-opening trip to France—and is based, once again, on the great four-chord idea. Its middle section recalls the love song more directly, but the lines have a jazzier flair than before, which Paetsch in performance happily picks up on.



After a brief coda we head straight for the finale, a breathless tribute to The Hardest Working Man In Show Business. Hagen has outfitted the old rondo form with a wealth of contrapuntal tricks and jazz devices; the actual groove is based on the immortal Brown chart "Gravity," but it also contains the seeds of harmonic tension that have been typical of the whole piece. After a little island of calm that recalls the love song one last time, we race on through a quodlibet of all the suite's themes, ending with a *pizzicato* slash that could honor both Ravel and Brown: a fitting end to this joyous, virtuosic work.

Hagen's older string works are not only gratifying in their own right, but form a rich background for the *Duo*. The *Suite for Violin* was completed on January 22, 1984 in Philadelphia, where Michaela Paetsch (its dedicatee) gave its first hearing at Curtis Hall on April 13th of that year. (Paetsch took the piece to the Dealey Competition in Dallas, garnering first prize; some minor revisions were made for the official world premiere, which she gave at Carnegie Hall on May 13th, 1984.) The first movement's three-part design (12:345:67) recalls that of Bartok's solo sonata, but the overall impression is one of inexorably gathering energy in a lyrical mode. In the second movement Hagen takes us through a seemingly innocent little tune, each time adding new pitches to enrich the harmony, finally building the phrase to an intense summation. The central "Burlesque" is a straightforward ABA form with a mercurial tone: its outer sections are suitably acerbic, while in the middle left-hand *pizzicati* accompany a curious little tune which keeps getting rudely interrupted. The second of the interludes is a free improvisation on some of the first movement's material. Written in tribute to a close composer friend, Norman Stumpf, who had died in tragic circumstances, it features a doleful stepping-down figure and plaintive minor thirds in the melody. The *moto perpetuo* finale is mostly grim, with flashes of light breaking through; its structure is capped by a passionate development of a motivic idea, sketched in octaves and rich chords, which the composer would return to years later for the pathetic character of Catherine Wright in *Shining Brow*.



The *Suite for Cello* was composed between May and November of 1985 and dedicated to Robert La Rue, who premiered it on March 11, 1986 at Lincoln

Center's Paul Recital Hall. If the violin suite impresses the listener as a lyrically charged composition buttressed by strong motivic ideas, then the cello suite forms the next step in an intense reductive process. Each of the five movements shares material from the first measure of the first movement, and the overall effect can be concentration to the point of brutality. Hagen was studying the process of "cellular development" in the music of Stravinsky and Varese at the time, so his use of a painting by their great contemporary Picasso as a takeoff point for one of the movements is supremely appropriate. If the suite aims to prove the dictum that time in music is equivalent to space in visual art, it also shows how the various levels of a composer's life creatively interlock. The central scherzo is an act of homage to a great composer, the second and fourth movements are portraits of Hagen and Paetsch and La Rue together, while the outer movements are strictly Hagen's internal thoughts: the public, collegial, and private worlds seamlessly coalesce.

In the opening "Meditation" gesture is all, tonality nearly irrelevant.

Declamato, Grave

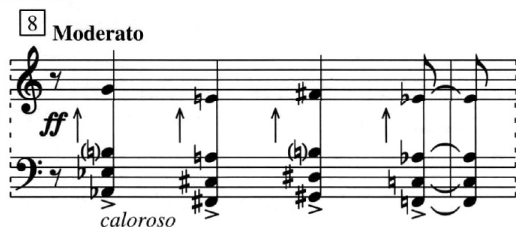


The gestures unfold over an arch-form rondo plan, with each coupled to the intervals of a perfect fifth, diminished fifth, or minor ninth. While most of the music is rugged, a central section provides calm relief, with the violin suite's plaintive minor thirds making a return appearance. Hagen's finale, fleet and grim, is a re-execution of the first movement's material, the vertical sonorities composed-out horizontally. The scherzo is a strong contrast of mood, a cel-



celebration of Aaron Copland's music written by Hagen when he first met the composer at Tanglewood, and given to him as a birthday gift. Copland's muse is most clearly honored in the bouncy two-plus-three mixed meters which influenced so much of mid-century American music; Hagen's voice comes out in the smiling but devilish trickery of the central section, in which difficult left-hand *pizzicati* surround a skipping bowed motif coyly reminiscent of "Tea for Two."

In the two flanking movements Hagen makes portraits of himself and his two friends. "Hagen" and "La Rue," transformed into gutsy musical ideas, make friendly battle during most of the little "Rondino," while "Michaela" is shown in a pastoral central panel. "Robert's" fugal idea (which begins the movement) adds voices on each successive entry until it ardently escapes the instrument's middle range. "Three Musicians (1921)," based on the famous cubist painting of Picasso, is a far more fluid and daring experiment. On sight it is hard to tell whether Picasso's singer, recorder player and guitarist were painted or pasted on, and Hagen goes for a similar collage effect here, daubing on his ideas in an imagistic flow. Paetsch is seen in airy *adagio* lines, pleasant but not serene; Hagen in impetuous *allegros*; and LaRue *pizzicato* is mercurial runs, or mysterious, disinterested chords.



In the *Suite for Viola* (1986) musical cultures collide as much as musical cells. Hagen wrote the piece on trains while commuting to New Haven—he was the copyist for David Diamond's *Flute Concerto*, then premiering with the New Haven Symphony—and his travels engendered a strange type of historical

musical. (Lisa Ponton premiered the piece in Paul Recital Hall on December 2, 1986, and it is dedicated to her.) If the cello suite explores the possibilities of cellular development by itself, then the viola suite explodes that concept to a postmodernist, allusive use of Baroque forms which is sometimes cultured and sometimes raw. Tonality, metric steadiness, and diatonicism are presented as healthy musical states, while atonality and rhythmically uneven music portray psychological disturbance, a lack of centeredness. J. S. Bach's solo string music is held up as a source of solace, and a guide.

The first movement is a palindrome, leading out from a fragmentary quotation of Bach's *First Cello Suite* into turbulent waters and back in again, to a closing section which has been irremediably changed by the middle madness. The composer describes the next movement as a dance movement from Hell. This "Allemande" is not only a German dance movement in 2/4 but a foray into the violent moods of German Expressionism. (Hagen's actual language remains as un-Teutonic as ever, though there is a splendid phrase in octaves which has a distinctly Beethovenian shape.)



The violin and cello suites used a minor third as a "wailing" motif, but here the inclusion of frequent slides and quarter tones bending the pitch have an even more plangent effect, and are used in ways which recall American jazz.

The "Courante" and "Sarabande" together form a calm center for the suite. The first is an extroverted Bachian homage, the second a more private evocation of youthful nostalgia, but both lead their melodic figurations into strange harmonic territory. The "Gigue" is a companion to the "Allemande," being similar in form, but the emotions have now reached crisis stage. There are brief moments of calm, but most of the piece is disturbingly violent, a St. Vitus' Dance

of shaking sixteenth notes and trembling trills. The “Postlude” shows a body at rest—or a funeral bier. The world of Bach is evoked as clearly as in the suite’s opening, but the frequent *glissandi* poison the texture.



One cannot tell if tonality has triumphed or is merely resigned to an unending fight. The mournful world of late Shostakovich is perhaps the nearest analogue.

This disc ends with a very different kind of piece, a musical “editorial” for solo cello that is so reflective of its time and place that its onlie begetter, Robert La Rue, should rightfully have the last word: “*Higher, Louder, Faster!*,” a concert etude for solo cello, is a short, ironic piece about Juilliard. Written while the composer was still a student there in 1986, it is dedicated to Bernard Rands. Subtitled ‘An Editorial,’ it is a composer’s-eye view of the conservatory experience: a juxtaposition of Hagen’s take on the ideals of ‘virtuoso’ performance training (as summed up by his title) and the imperatives of a newer, less traditional aesthetic. Mercifully, it is not a rehash of post-adolescent, graduate school unhappiness. Instead of revisiting his fish-out-of-water claustrophobia—a creative nature enclosed in the sweltering, hothouse atmosphere of intense reverence for the past and a preoccupation with the ‘living tradition’—Hagen extracts a wry, affectionate revenge. For here it is the performer who finds himself out of his element, presented with a schizophrenic work whose carefree, insouciant character is all but incompatible with intricate passagework of calcu-

lated, wholly deliberate awkwardness. (*Higher, Louder, Faster!* is notable for its return to an original purpose of the concert etude: to extend—not merely to reinforce—instrumental technique.)

“Confronted with passively aggressive, purposefully unidiomatic writing, the performer attempts to preserve the veneer of the imperturbable virtuoso (to whom all technical demands, no matter how outrageous, are mere nothings). The listener may choose to enjoy the composer’s gleeful, poker-faced subversiveness, or to rejoice as the performer grows up a bit, casts off inhibitions, and learns to love rough edges and rawness again.

“*Higher, Louder, Faster!* received its long-delayed first performance in Paul Hall at—fittingly enough—the Juilliard School, on 31 January 1997.”

— © 1998 by Russell Platt

—The music of American composer Russell Platt has been performed at the Aspen and Grand Teton Festivals, and has received awards from ASCAP, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Composers Forum, and the Minnesota State Arts Board. His criticism has appeared in **Opera News**, **Strings**, **The New Yorker**, and the major newspapers of Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

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Shown on cover (l. to r.): Michaela Paetsch Neftel, Daron Hagen, Robert La Rue



At the age of 15, **DARON HAGEN's** orchestral music attracted the attention of Leonard Bernstein, whose enthusiastic comments led to Hagen's eventual enrollment at the Curtis Institute of Music. While still a student at the Curtis Institute, his music was introduced by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Before graduating from Juilliard, Hagen had begun fulfilling commissions from the New York Philharmonic and other major American orchestras.

Daron Hagen has served as composer in residence for the Long Beach (CA) Symphony, the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France, and he has been the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation Residency at Bellagio, Italy. His extensive catalog includes four concerti, three operas, three symphonies, six song cycles, numerous choral works, as well as tone poems and chamber music. He has taught at Bard College, New York University, the City College of New York, and the Curtis Institute of Music. His work has received numerous prizes and awards, including the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award, the Bearns Prize of Columbia University, the Charles Ives Scholarship of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Barlow Endowment International Composition Prize, multiple BMI and ASCAP prizes, as well as multiple residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Tanglewood, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. He lives in New York City.



Acclaimed as one of the finest young concert violinists of today, **MICHAELA PAETSCH NEFTEL** was raised in a family of musicians in Colorado Springs. From the age of three she studied with her parents, Priscilla and Gunther Paetsch, later with Ivan Galamian, and ultimately with Szymon Goldberg at Yale University and at the Curtis Institute of Music. She gave her first public recital at age seven, and at age eleven she played the Mendelssohn E-minor Concerto with the orchestras of Pueblo and Colorado Springs.



Since age seventeen Michaela Paetsch has played as soloist, recitalist and chamber musician in the musical centers of the world, including Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, the Library of Congress, and in festival appearances in Marlboro, Banff, Pasadena, Davos, Brandenburg summer Concerts (Berlin), and the Mostly Mozart Festival of New York. She is the winner of the G. B. Dealey Awards in Dallas, a bronze medal from the Queen Elisabeth International Violin Competition in 1985, and the one and only prize of the obligatory Russian composition at the Tchaikovsky International Violin Competition in Moscow.

During the 50th anniversary season (1998–99) of the Clubhouse Concerts, Switzerland, Ms. Paetsch will perform Bela Bartok's Concerto No. 2 as soloist with the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester conducted by Kent Nagano in Geneva, St. Gallen, Bern, Montreux and Basel.

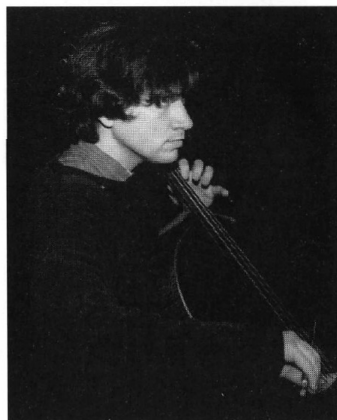
Michaela Paetsch lives in Bern, Switzerland with her husband Klaus NefTEL and their daughter Anna Nora.



**CHARLES NOBLE** is Assistant Principal Violist with The Oregon Symphony. He is a faculty member of the Max Aranoff Viola Institute and the National Youth Orchestra Festival of the Interlochen Arts Center, and is a visiting master teacher/lecturer to the Tacoma Youth Symphony and the Portland Youth Philharmonic. In addition to commissioning works by some of today's most talented young composers, Mr. Noble has participated in several new music ensembles, including the Pacific Chamber Soloists (which he cofounded), and the Third Angle New Music Ensemble.

A native of the Pacific Northwest, he received the BA degree from the University of Puget Sound, the Master's degree from the University of Maryland, and the Graduate Performance Diploma from the Peabody Conservatory. He also spent three summers at the Tanglewood Music Center. Mr. Noble is committed to a continuing effort to expand and promote the importance of new music.

**ROBERT LA RUE** is widely acknowledged as one of the finest young cellists of his generation. He was First Prize winner in the 1992 National Society of Arts and Letters Cello Competition, selected by a jury chaired by Mstislav Rostropovich. He has appeared as soloist with the American Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra Society of Philadelphia, the opera orchestra of the Banff festival, and symphony orchestras in Phoenix, Denver, and Boston. Born in Washington, D.C., Mr. La Rue grew up in the Midwest. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute and of New England Conservatory of Music, and he also attended Indiana University and the Juilliard School.



## DARON HAGEN'S MUSIC ON

### • SONGS — ARSIS CD 106

with Susan Crowder, soprano, Bradley Moore, and Sara Stern, flutist.

Includes • Love Songs (1988) • Echo's Songs (1983)  
• Dear Youth (1990) • Merrill Songs (1995)

### • SILENT NIGHT — ARSIS CD 107

The American Repertory Singers of Washington, DC, Leo Nestor director with cellist Robert La Rue and electronics created by the composer in Hagen's unique settings of well-known Christmas carols.

### • NIGHT, AGAIN — ARSIS CD 112

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