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## Cypress Quartet Shines in Multifaceted Repertoire

How She Danced: String Quartets of Elena Ruehr. Elena Ruehr: String Quartets Nos. 1, 3 & 4. The Cypress Quartet. Cypress Performing Arts Association, ©2010, 75:03, \$20.

By Patrick Valentino

When a talented and sensitive composer joins with a virtuosic and amiable group of musicians, the results can be magical. Especially if, as is the case with the Cypress String Quartet performing the works of Elena Ruehr, that collaboration takes place on the grounds of friendship, familiarity, and unity of vision. One of the San Francisco based Cypress Quartet's hallmarks is their dedication not only to each other but to the composers they champion; they have worked extensively with Ruehr and it shows in their masterful renditions of her varied and multifaceted work. As Cellist Jennifer Kloetzel puts it in the liner notes, "we decided to champion the composers whose music we really like – by playing their music a lot and playing a lot of their music. We commission and recommission them and really get into their world". If anyone ever doubted just how much the composer-performer relationship matters, this CD is a revelation.

The first half of this artistic equation is the composer Elena Ruehr. Her fourth, third, and first string quartets are featured (respectively) on this CD. Currently a faculty member at MIT and composer in residence at BMOP from 2001-2005, Ms. Ruehr's quartets exhibit many elements which can ensure their success and longevity in the repertoire, among them being a core of musical complexity gilded in the glow of audience-pleasing accessibility. But the most striking, endearing, and respectable element of her music making is its evident, irrepressible honesty. Ms. Ruehr is a composer of wide interests and experience, and each movement on the recording bears some connection to an event, a person, or emotion (a term slowly rediscovering its place in the lexicon of contemporary music) from her life. These allusions are like little secrets to the music-making, not intrusively mandating the piece become artificially programmatic, but simply providing evocative titles that hint at the richness of the work's conception and development. What is the result? Ms. Ruehr's quartets exude confidence and even optimism through the totality of their constituent elements.

Rhythmic complexity underpins lush melodic invention, wherein sweet, even simple tunes allow the listener to ingest striking musical sophistication. Within a relatively traditional timbral palate, novel effects pop out and unique textures emerge which grab the ear instantly and remain in the memory long after. The usual four-movement quartet structure is expanded through the use of extramusical allusions and inspirations which invite the listener further into her mind and world.

The complement to this voice of musical creation at once so personal and universal is an equally powerful and dynamic force of musical execution. In this role, the Cypress Quartet is completely in its element. As a group which probably spends equal amounts of time perfecting their unique sound as it does cultivating lasting and meaningful relationships with the composers whose music they bring to life, Cypress seems the ideal ensemble to present the music of Elena Ruehr. Within the first seconds of listening it is obvious these performers are experts at what they do, but it also becomes evident that their level of performance would not be possible without knowing the composer and living with the music for a long time. When the players are elegantly executing a complex rhythmic passage without losing sight of the overall structure of the movement or breathe life into a delicate texture while spinning a story from the notes on the page, one realizes it is precisely Cypress's dedication to their music and their composers which makes this level of music making possible.

With this CD we not only hear elegantly crafted music brought to life with energy and dedication - we hear a strong and developing bond between composer and performer. A connection based on singularity of vision, the desire to grow, and a deep respect and friendship, which just might be the model for 21st century music making.

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