

Cleveland (OH) Cleveland Plain Dealer

Merling casts spell with Curtis-Smith

November 5, 1995

By Wilma Salisbury

American composer C. Curtis-Smith speaks the language of multiculturalism in the medium of chamber music. His sources range from the intricate drum rhythms of West Africa and the joyous melodies of sub-Saharan songs to the traditional change ringing of English church bells. His structures relate to the romantic fantasy and the baroque passacaglia. His American roots show in ragtime rhythms, rock bass lines and a breezy quality reminiscent of Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein.

Professor of music at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Curtis-Smith was commissioned to write his Second Piano Trio ("The Secret Heart of Sound") by the school's resident faculty ensemble, the Merling Trio. Ensemble members Renata Artman Knific, violin; Bruce Uchimura, cello, and Susan Wiersma Uchimura, piano, met while studying at the Cleveland Institute of Music and continued their collaboration while teaching at the Encore School for Strings in Hudson. The trio which will perform Curtis-Smith's music Nov. 12 at the Cleveland Museum of Art, negotiates complex rhythms with ease and brings a feeling of romantic repose to "The Secret Heart of Sound," a sensitive set of variations on a poem by Theodore Roethke.

The musicians also have fun with the hoedown style of "Sweet-grass Trio," and Knific joins the composer in a passionate interpretation of Fantasy Pieces, an inventive suite that begins with the violin prolonging the reverberations of the piano and ends with bowed piano strings extending the sound of the violin. Completing the collection is an edgy performance of Sextet for Piano and Winds by the Stuttgart Wind Quintet with American conductor Dennis Russell Davies at the keyboard.