

Music of Astor Piazzolla and Frank Proto

The Merling Trio

Renata Artman Knific, violin

Bruce Uchimura, cello

Susan Wiersma Uchimura, piano

Tom Knific, bass

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This disc released last year features the world premier recording of Frank Proto's Quartet for Piano and Strings (which was commissioned by the Merling Trio and premiered by them in London in 2003) together with five works for the piano trio by Astor Piazzolla. The Merling Trio are, along with past ISB president Tom Knific, resident at the Western Michigan University School of Music. This is the third CD for a group that was formed in 1988 and gave their Carnegie Hall debut in 1992. They are gathering an impressive list of commissions, concert and press review and a quick listen through to the opening Piazzolla *Nuevo tango* arrangements for piano trio will show you why. All of these trios have been arranged from the classic Bandoneon quintet (with violin, piano, guitar and bass) except the final *Oblivion*, which came from the score to the film *Enrico IV*. The musicians here play with a great sense of nuance, style and flair; the ensemble is really outstanding, committed and convincing throughout the performances.

In the liner notes for this piano quartet, Proto gives a thorough explanation of the work and its origins describing it as a "piece for both players and listeners to have a good time with". Like so many of Proto's works it is hard to pigeon-hole but to those familiar with his other chamber music will instantly recognize his signature in much of the writing. There are a host of styles intermingled (Latin, funk, blues, various dances, etc.) and Knific and the Merling Trio give a striking and definitive account of the work. Like Proto's other chamber compositions he writes idiomatically for all the instruments, the parts can be exceptionally tricky but they really work. It also helps to have a bass player with world-class jazz chops like Knific play those improvised solos! Overall I think Proto has struck greater depths in the writing here – the languid opening of the third movement is really beautiful and the ensemble climaxes are wonderfully paced. This is an exciting and entertaining work and will no doubt be very popular. It's certainly a really great way to conclude and excellent CD!

-Review by Robert Nairn