

These postcards go air mail



MSR Classics MS 1319

Postcards in e is the title of an attractive offering by the Merling Trio of famous works by Dvořák and Shostakovich. In this program the Merling, consisting of Renata Artman Knific, violin; Bruce Uchimura, cello; and Susan Wiersma Uchimura, piano, show the primary quality that distinguishes their art, which the American Record Guide aptly described as “a properly stylistic balance between abandon and control.”

On my first audition of Dvořák's “**Dumky” Trio in e Minor, Op. 90**, I was struck more by the control factor, a passion for precision which enables these artists to bring out many choice points in this well-loved work. These include the subtle interrelations of the first three *dumky* (Czech *dumka*, pl. *dumky*, implies a meditation, sometimes but not always brooding in nature), and the way the melody in the *furioso* section of Dumka 2 is accented by precisely accented double-stops in the strings. But the Merlings also have a nice sensitivity for fluent rhythm and movement, and this serves them very well in such moments as when an irresistibly animated Polka breaks out after the solemn opening of Dumka 1. Another instance is the elegantly flowing passage in sixteenths in the violin that follows the *quasi Recitative* section of Dumka 5. The beautiful tone the Merlings cultivate throughout the Trio makes it an easy winner.

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his **Piano Trio No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 67** in 1944 at the height of World War II and between his Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. He initially began the work as a memorial to a close friend who had died in a Nazi concentration camp, and the notably Jewish sounding theme in the finale is thought to be the composer's response to the news of the first liberations of death camps by the Russian forces. Having said that, I am obliged to admit that there is an awful lot of playful, witty music in this work that does not fit the popular conception of it, and the Merlings show a quick aptitude for it. Witness the brisk peasant dance (albeit with occasional dissonances) in the Allegro and the lively character of the finale. That movement, marked Allegretto, features angular themes and strong pizzicato playing in what many critics have described as a *danse macabre*, but even here there are off-the-meter accents (at one point, a notable sigh in the violin sounds like a feline “miao”) that work against the general sense of unrelenting grimness. I had not noticed this playful element in this work in other recordings. Curiously, it makes this performance even more compelling than it might have been otherwise.