

BUCH *From the River Flow the Stars No. 6. Acanthus Leaves No. 6. Life & Opinions No. 7. Landscapes No. 1. Maze of Infinite Forms No. 1.* • Daedalus Q • MSR 1681 (54:46)

American composer Brian Buch is the latest in my series of “composers I’ve never heard of, but should have.” How many more such there are out there waiting for me to discover only time will tell. Of one thing I am certain: I shall not live long enough to become familiar with the music of every worthwhile composer who is writing music today. However, I am always especially happy to familiarize myself with the work of a fellow Indiana University composition graduate (although his doctorate came from Boston University, where he worked with the iconoclastic composer Alla Elena Cohen, whom I’ve interviewed for *Fanfare*.)

Born in 1984, Buch is still young, but even by now, he’s written music in many genres within the classical and jazz idioms, and some of his music has won awards, perhaps most notably from the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. The works on the present disc all focus on the composer’s writing for string quartet, and in the members of the Daedalus Quartet, Buch has found worthy and remarkable exponents for his work. All of the works heard herein were composed in 2015 and 2016, so Buch is obviously one busy fellow.

The recital’s opening work, *From the River Flow the Stars No. 6* sets the tone for Buch’s style which is freely tonal with frequent gestures and figures from the various members of the quartet interjected into an already complex harmonic tapestry. This three-movement work is based upon a book of ancient Japanese poetry. The notes aver that the “character of these pieces seeks to discover enlightenment from loss and salvation in solitude,” and even if the reader is better able to understand how the music portrays that than I am, it is fortunately not necessarily in the least to the enjoyment of the music. This is, in short, *interesting* music in the best sense of the word, as the music never becomes dull or insipid. The first two movements resemble each other stylistically to a considerable degree, but the third forges a different path in its obsessive rhythmic figuration.

The scene of the second work, *Acanthus Leaves No. 6*, shifts from Japan to Germany, as it is based upon the one of the better-known literary works of the German author (and composer) E. T. A. Hoffmann (yes, you know his *Tales*, courtesy of Jacques Offenbach). In this case, it’s the *Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*, a collection of this particular feline’s most profound thoughts. Well, as the former servant of a number of cats, I can attest that the most profound thought a feline usually has is, “Where’s dinner?” Regardless, there are some rather meow-y sounds in the second of the three movements in this rather doleful sounding work, cast in a rather more astringent style than that of the opening piece. The following *Life and Opinions No. 7* continues the Hoffmann connection as well as the tonally obscure style of *Acanthus Leaves*, but with perhaps even more interweaving of the lines than is evidenced by its disc mate. This latter work is about the same length as its predecessor, but is cast in five shorter movements instead, and explores many different advanced string techniques, such as *sul ponticello tremolo* and artificial harmonics.

Landscapes No. 1 seems to be breaking even newer ground in its episodic and adventurous nature. Like *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the work seeks to portray artwork in music, in this case the paintings of the Lithuanian composer and artist Mikalojus Čiurlionis, until now known only to me for his compositions. The music of the three movements is every bit as evocative as are the titles of the paintings (“Sparks,” “Mists,” and “Creation of the World V”) that inspired them. The technical challenges demanded in the final movement (especially) sound quite formable, but the Daedalus Quartet plays them with elan. The CD’s concluding work is *Maze of Infinite Forms*, this two-movement work inspired by the poetry of Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore. Although the tempo markings of the two movements (“Larghetto con dolore” and “Adagio con calore”) might suggest unrelenting slow music, Buch has so much going on within them that the listener’s interest level never flags. In fact, one of the most remarkable things about these five works is the consistency of Buch’s style juxtaposed with the fact that these pieces are all so different from each other. This may be something he

learned from Cohen, who exhibits the same trait in her music, but his other teachers, including Sven-David Sandström, Sam Headrick, and Richard Cornell, doubtless contributed to his compositional craft in this area as well.

In summation, Buch's music is well worth exploring by the adventurous listener who craves something both different and rewarding. The stellar performance of these works by the Daedalus Quartet adds luster to my strong recommendation of this disc. **David DeBoor Canfield**