

BUCH *From the River Flow the Stars No.6. Acanthus Leaves No.6. Life and Opinions No.7. Landscapes No.1. Maze of Infinite Forms No.1* • Daedalus Qrt • MSR CLASSICS MS1681 (54:36)

For good or ill, we live in an era where tonality exhibits numerous layers of transcultural meaning. They do not emerge from flat-out negation, as those who remember the strict serialization of the 1960s would attest, which is as it should be, as room is left for composers such as Brian Buch. Here is a representative sample of his music for string quartet, a rich repertoire as replete with signification as the often lush and engaging sonorities comprising it. Buch composes in what he calls books, of which these miniatures form excerpts.

Buch clearly has a deep interest in, and knowledge of, literature from various geographical and historical points, and these inspire his musical creations. The titular collection emanates from Japanese poetry, and the Japanese scales forming a component of its pungent brew are evident, especially in the second movement. Bow placement and articulation are used to excellent but never pretentious effect, silence going a long way toward forming the semistatic music's narrative. Contrast these quasimodal pieces with these offerings from the much more thorny *Acanthus Leaves* to hear an entirely different facet of Buch's work, lush even to the point of being overgrown and purposely so. Buch is diving headlong into the creative spirit of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Tomcat Murr*, whose abstruse philosophizings the composer is rendering in tone and timbre. If the two entries from *Maze of Infinite Forms* conjure the elliptical tonality of Bartok's first string quartet, that too is purposeful, as the composer wishes the music to be played with intense romanticism. Again, silence is a winning partner to triads almost devoid of traditional context, all in the service of gorgeous crescendo and sustains as little motives chase their tails in semicircular near-development.

That the Daedalus quartet demonstrates such a complete understanding of the multiple and multivalent worlds Buch encapsulates and creates is to their credit. This highly dedicated new music ensemble doesn't miss a timbral or motivic trick, seeming to emphasize just the proper nuance to allow multileveled relationships to emerge. The recording itself, while slightly resonant, is still first-rate, exposing all of the contrast and cohesion demanded in the playing of such complex scores. **Marc Medwin**