

Listening Post /Brief reviews of select releases

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Elena Ruehr, How She Danced: String Quartets of Elena Ruehr performed by Cypress String Quartet (Cypress). Here is the fine young Cypress Quartet's cellist Jennifer Kloetzel explaining to Saint Paul Sunday's Bill McGlaughlin how the San Francisco Quartet's close relationship to 46-year-old MIT composer Elena Ruehr came about: "A few years ago we decided to champion the composers whose music we like— by playing their music a lot and playing a lot of their music. We commission and recommission them and really get into their world, that's become something that's very important to us— Elena's become a real part of our musical lives." Her music is "infectious," says the ensemble's violist, Ethan Filner. You can say that again many times over after hearing the Cypress Quartet's recordings of Ruehr's Quartets Nos. 1, 3 and 4. The result of the quartet's immersion in Ruehr's musical world is one of the most appealing contemporary quartet discs in a very long time.

The disc's title, "How She Danced," (Ruehr is a trained dancer as well as musician and composer) comes from the allegro third movement of Ruehr's Third Quartet and, as with so much of this, it sounds like the strongly tonal meeting point of Philip Glass' minimal-ism and the pan-ethnic folk-influenced music of the great early 20th century experimentalist Henry Cowell. In other words, it's where country reels and hoedowns and Hindu ritual and Balinese gamelan all somehow come together with the restless unison ostinatos of what was once "downtown" new music. A beautiful disc. ★★★ 1/2 (Jeff Simon)