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REVIEWS / CDS

RUEHR String Quartets nos.1, 3 & 4 **Cypress Quartet**

CYPRESS QUARTET (WWW.CYPRESSQUARTET.COM)

It's a brave move by the San Francisco-based Cypress Quartet to devote its new disc entirely to a contemporary composer,

and a little-known name at that. But the music of Elena Ruehr, raised in Michigan and now teaching at MIT, is so appealing, and the performances by the Cypress players so persuasive, that the project brings rich rewards.

Ruehr's music hovers between a resonant neo-Romanticism and more cerebral contrapuntal techniques, and it's full of rhythm, life and colour, immediately accessible to the listener but rich enough to repay repeated listenings. It's hard to imagine it being given more committed

performances than these by the Cypress players, who have clearly lived with the music for a long time and understand its byways and intricacies. Ruehr seems particularly keen to spotlight the viola and cello: violist Ethan Filner delivers some wonderfully effective soft playing, full of subtle vibrato and graceful ornamentation, in the second movement of Quartet no.4 (2005), and cellist Jennifer Kloetzel is passionate, if at times a little domineering, in some of the same work's climaxes. As befits the music, the players' performances are generally on the restrained side, precise, poised and graceful, and aside

from some seething moments in the First Quartet (1991), they rarely give way to stridency. The recording is full and generous, adding richness to the two lower instruments but at times making the two violins sound a little reedy.

DAVID KETTLE