

Discoveries

by BRUCE HODGES



## 2 Composers of Today, Drawing Inspiration From the Past

Christopher Rouse: *Transfiguration. The Calder Quartet (El Music, KIC-CD-7757)*

In another, even more direct homage, Juilliard composition professor Christopher Rouse wrote his first string quartet in 1981, the centenary of Bartok's birth. Equally interesting to Rouse, that year witnessed the assassination of Anwar el-Sadat, whose initials formed the basis of the quartet's sixth movement epilogue. Movements one, three, and five each have three variations, with each variation further split into two parts—a section of repeated notes followed by one more spasmodic—whereas movements two and four are more freely structured. At the end, listeners may be surprised by the sorrowful tone of the finale, a brooding coda in contrast with the brutality of the earlier material. The Calder Quartet, Juilliard's graduate quartet in residence from 2005 to 2007, digs into this gritty score with zest, and although Rouse is his own man, those who wish Bartok had written a seventh quartet won't be disappointed.



Rouse's String Quartet No. 2 was written in 1987, after his visit to the Soviet Union, and uses D, E-flat, C, and B (Shostakovich's famous "DSCI" motif), beginning with a piercing *Adagio* marked *doloroso*. The middle movement, *agitato*, reminded me of someone dropping a huge tray of marbles all over the floor and watching them roll off in all directions. The final movement, marked *lamentoso*, uses material from the first two movements in a sorrowful descent that slowly winds down to a hush.

The program closes with *Compôse* (1989), which gets its energy from the composer's trip to Rome, where he took in the somber elements of the city's history while observing the playfulness of its tourists. Using the same instrumentation as that of Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, the Calder crew is joined by flutist Daniel Alexander, clarinetist Alicia Lee, who studied with Ayako Oshima and Juilliard's Charles Neidich, and harpist Sivan Magen, who received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the School.

Engineer Silas Brown, working at the Performing Arts Center in Purchase, N.Y., has been especially careful to capture Rouse's quieter moments, as well as the captivating bursts of adrenaline. All are hauntingly done by the Calder, and the composer clearly approves: he wrote his forthcoming Third String Quartet for the group.