

## **RAVEL: String Quartet in F Major; ADES: Arcadania; MOZART: String Quartet in F Major, K. 590 - The Calder Quartet - The Calder Quartet**

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July 09, 2008

By Gary Lemco



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Quartet - The Calder Quartet, 72:10 [www.calderquartet.com]**

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The Calder Quartet is an ensemble in residence at The Colburn School, and they made these recordings at Zipper Hall there in June 2007. This disc itself looks like vanity-press production, with neither timings nor a record "label" as such. While the names of the Calder Quartet are listed, there are no biographies provided.

I must say I find the Ravel Quartet a compelling realization, expansive, lingering over hazy harmonies and the interior colorations that make the piece unique. The group articulates Ravel's curious demands--like *sur tanto*, from the bridge--with care, molding the melodies that recur throughout the composition with a delicacy likely borrowed from Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

The curio is the 1994 *Arcadiana* of Thomas Ades, a seven-movement set of miniatures, in what some would politely call an "eclectic" style. Behind the ethos of the work are musical allusions from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Watteau's *The Embarkation from the Island of Cythera*, or what Debussy called *The Isle of Joy*. The odd-numbered

sections are intended as watercolors, the third titled after Schubert's song about singing waters. Whether the various pluckings, cluckings, whizzings, and bangings at certain moments makes for aquatic listening is up to you.

Mozart's last quartet, his K. 590, dedicated to the King of Prussia, basks in its cello part, presumably written to accommodate the King's own talents. The cello leads immediately in the first movement, a real choice exercise for Eric Byers, cello. The operatic, expressive writing finds good balances in the Calder distribution of voice parts. Engineer Matt Snyder focuses on those audacious bass harmonies that make the late Mozart style a world unto itself. Violin Benjamin Jacobson relishes his concertante part, and the second movement vibrates with bucolic energy. One can only speculate what a violin concerto from this period of Mozart's development might have been. The *Menuet*, one of the more Haydnesque moments in Mozart, quite jars us with passing dissonances and urgent *sforzati*. Nice viola work from Jonathan Moerschel in the last movement, a sarcastic rondo with virtuosic writing in each part, as each "soloist" competes for the principal leading voice.