



THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

Colors of the East

Sirius Quartet (Autentico Music/Naxos)

Reviewed by Terrell Holmes | June 2015

Violinists Gregor Huebner and Fung Chern Hwei, violist Ron Lawrence and cellist Jeremy Harman are the Sirius Quartet, a stellar ensemble that transforms standard chamber music frameworks with exceptional playing, writing and arranging. Its new album, *Colors of the East*, composed by Huebner, is challenging and vivid, with expanded instrumentation that enhances the music's texture.

The album's evocative nature surfaces in the title suite, whose opening movement, "Balkan Dance", encapsulates a balkanized conflict. The strings pulse with tension, brooding and forbidding, but the gallant voice of an accordion, played brilliantly by Peter Stan, greets them and engenders a festive dance. His growling and barking gives the accordion an organ-like sound that recalls Jimmy Smith instead of Lawrence Welk. The beautiful "Andante" seamlessly incorporates chamber elements with avant garde jazz; Stan's lovely prelude on "Out of Belgrade" leads to some vigorous plucking by bassist Pascal Niggenkemper.

Cellist Mike Block sits in on *String Quartet #3*, "New York Suite", which perfectly captures the pace and diversity of this cauldron. Each movement has a story: lane-changing pizzicato of "G.W. Bridge"; sleek "125th Street"; rusty gate in the wind desolation of "Underground Summer"; call-to-prayer majesty of "Redhook"; poignancy of "Ground Zero" and "For John"; chaos of "JFK"; and the frenetic last stop at the crossroads of the world, "Times Square, 7p.m."



Bassist Veit Huebner adds color and depth to the striking landscapes of *String Quintet No. 1*, a piece defined by the urgent pizzicato and soaring lines of “Allegro Georgina”, adagio “Shalom”, well-organized cacophony of “Confusion” and energetic “Presto”, a splendid conclusion to a stunning album.

The Sirius Quartet showcased *Colors of the East* at ShapeShifter Lab in late April and the joy and energy with which they play was palpable. It was also clear that they make chamber music swing. Hwei dazzled on his tune “Spidey Falls!” and Harman’s “Paths Become Lines” was intricate and lovely. They stretched out on selections from “New York Suite”, then Stan and bassist Jeff Carney joined the group for “Colors of the East”. Huebner and Stan replicated their outstanding performances on “Balkan Dance” and, in a truly memorable moment, Carney, spurred by Huebner’s relentless bow against violin body percussion on “Out of Belgrade”, plucked a note with so much force that it startled the audience.