

toes. If it weren't for the instrumentation and fairly classical structures, you could at time almost imagine a jazz set.

Though not exactly mirror images, these trios commissioned by the Seattle Chamber Music Festival make perfect companions for a disc-length programme. An amazingly broad range of musical and emotional resources unfold with nearly unerring sense of balance and when to change course.

The problem is that not much of the material continues to resonate in the mind. For all the compositional craft, and the care the versatile players take, most of the music turns out to be surprisingly dispensable. Even repeated listening doesn't seem to help, however smoothly it goes down at the time.

**Ken Smith**

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## 'The American String Project'

**Atterberg** Suite<sup>3</sup> **Barber** Adagio for Strings<sup>2</sup> **Brahms** String Quartet No 1<sup>4</sup>  
**Britten** Simple Symphony – Sarabande  
**Mozart** String Quintet, K406<sup>2</sup>  
(<sup>2</sup>arr Lieberman)

## The American String Project

The American String Project © (78' • DDD)

Recorded live at Benaroya Hall, Seattle in June 2004

An outstanding group of players give new life to this sublime music



Here is another exceptional entry from The American String Project, the brainstorm of Seattle-based double-bass player Barry Lieberman. Expanding

or adapting major chamber works for small string orchestra gives Lieberman and friends the chance to join forces in sublime music minus conductor. Each piece has a different concertmaster – the British term 'leader' perhaps would be more accurate in this context – to function as chief motivator.

All of the repertoire on the Project's newest disc, recorded live, benefits from the energy and tonal depth an outstanding group of string players pour into the music. The biggest surprise is the Mozart String Quintet, originally the composer's own arrangement of his wind

serenade, K388. Lieberman's version adds immense gravity to the narratives, almost presenting the score as a newly conceived piece. The dramatic urgency is heightened; there is mystery in this incarnation that most performances of the wind serenade only suggest. Listen to how the trio 'in reverse canon' takes on a fascinating, disembodied quality (achieved by scant use of vibrato) that sheds alternate light on Mozart's vision.

If the richness of the string playing at times is a bit voluptuous for Mozart's sound world, the performances of the other pieces couldn't be more stylistically apt. Kurt Atterberg's Suite for Violin, Viola and Strings receives dignified and playful treatment, while the Sarabande from Britten's *Simple Symphony* and Barber's beloved *Adagio for Strings* unfold with all of their impassioned beauty intensely conveyed. The players breathe as a unit in Brahms's String Quartet No 1, which in this guise often verges on the symphonic.

What a joy it must be for such high-powered musicians to collaborate in a fashion that is both disciplined and liberating. **Donald Rosenberg**