

New Zealand String Quartet – CD Review

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NZ String Quartet, Notes from a Journey

By [William Dart](#) - New Zealand Herald

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Verdict: "Our country's premier quartet salutes our New Zealand composers."The New

The New Zealand String Quartet's latest offering is full of resonance.

A fortnight from tonight, the New Zealand String Quartet's *Sounds of Asia* is the final classical concert of the Auckland Arts Festival (Auckland Town Hall Concert Chamber, March 19 at 7pm). In the meantime, a new Atoll release, *Notes from a Journey*, finds the NZSQ on home ground.

This celebration of the inspirational symbiosis that these four musicians share with our composer community has much going for it. If one could venture a superlative for the word immaculate, then Wayne Laird's production would deserve it; as far as visual presentation is concerned, Simon Kaan's *Untitled Waka* on the cover could not be bettered for cool elegance.

There are some old favourites here. John Psathas' *Abhisheka*, from 1996, is a work of spiritual repose with its exotic, wafting textures contrasting with what the composer jokingly calls his "ultra-caffeinated" style. This is a more leisurely reading than the NZSQ's first recording, benefiting from a more resonant soundscape.

Jack Body's *Three Transcriptions*, which first appeared on disc 10 years ago, have been spruced up for this outing.

This time around, vocalisations emerge more clearly in the first, a Chinese Jew's harp piece, while stamping feet add an infectious sense of delirium to the final Bulgarian dance.

Ross Harris' *Variation 25* has a strong personal significance for the players, being inspired by the NZSQ's 2007 performances of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

Initially, they immerse themselves in Harris' intensified counterpoint and emotions while exploring the more nervy and delicate interplay of the central section.

A new and substantial work from Wellington composer Michael Norris is a major asset, with the four movements of *Exitus* offering portraits of various afterworlds beyond the grave. Alongside the terror-inducing wildness of the Mayan's *Place of Fear*, the Norse House of Mists is a ghostly musical mezzotint of a chorale prelude.

Gareth Farr and Richard Nunns' *He Poroporoaki* might have seemed an appropriate close for the disc, yet Nunns' stirring putarara fanfare promises more than Farr's later and rather literal quotation of *Now is the hour* offers. Doubtless this was extremely moving played live at Gallipoli's Anzac Cove three years ago, but on disc, after the high-powered music that precedes it, it comes across as just a little tame.

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