



# American Record Guide

## FESTINGER: *Tapestries*; *Trionometry*; *Quartet*; *Twinning*

Alexander Quartet; Earplay; Laurel Trio; Curtis Macomber, v; Karen Rosenak, p

CRI 832 (Koch) 64 minutes

Richard Festinger's *Serenade for Six* was the high point of a stellar program by the New Millennium Ensemble on CRI 772 (July/Aug 1999, p 237). Here now is a most welcome disc—played with superb virtuosity and unstinting commitment, with vivid, lifelike sonics—devoted entirely to the chamber music of this California-based composer born in 1948. The music—no surprise from a student of Andrew Imbrie—is complex and prismatic but transparent, fully (but not dogmatically) chromatic, unpredictable in form and phrasing but still somehow classic in outline, ever managing to find a balance between delicacy and introspection on the one hand and rhythmic vivacity (surely derived in part from Festinger's youthful experiences as a jazz performer) on the other.

All four pieces are from the 1990s; each is in three movements. *Tapestries* is a 15-minute piano trio, *Trionometry* a trio of the same length for flute, clarinet, and piano, and *Twinning* a slightly shorter duo for violin and piano. The largest work, lasting 22 minutes, is the String Quartet. A particular pleasure in all of these is the clarity and precision of Festinger's instrumental textures, which project his nervous syncopations, intricate linear interplay, and sometimes florid lyricism with a perfect blend of emphasis and interdependence. The result is music that presents memorable gestures at first hearing but gradually reveals more subtleties of fantasy, mystery, longing, joy.

In the central andantino of *Trionometry*, for instance, the flute and clarinet are paired together in gentle, wavelike, graceful overlapping phrases that annotator Michelle Dulak eloquently describes as suggesting "an object and its reflection moving together over water". These alternate with recitative-like elaborations in the piano—creating yet another "reflection" of the same drifting suspensions. It's a lovely six-minute span, idyllic yet sad, as all idylls are sad—perhaps because we know they can never last.

*Tapestries*, Festinger's piano trio, mates violin and cello devices with more intense expressivity—especially effective in the slow movement's duets of ghostly tremolos and sighing, mournful glissandos. These clouds are dispersed in the finale by yet another striking texture: skittering 16th-note roulades reeled off in bright unisons by the piano and violin.

For all his timbral variety, Festinger (unlike far too many of his contemporaries) never resorts to gimmicks, never indulges in post-modern incongruities, never strikes apocalyptic poses. His music remains unsullied and uncompromising, speaking directly to the hearts of those who care to listen.

LEHMAN