



Látigo. Quartet San Francisco. (ViolinJazz Recordings JCCD104)

Quartet San Francisco first violinist Jeremy Cohen defines “látigo,” the title of this CD, as a performance technique in tango music in which a quick slide imitates the sound of a whip. These are certainly whip-crack performances of mostly Latin-American pieces, primarily tangos, although the quartet also proves quite adept at purring and crooning when the music calls for it. This wonderful jumble of a program surveys the tango in its many moods, from the elegant and witty tango-minuet style of Armando Pontier through the romantic effusion of Carlos Gardel to the gritty, dark-alley style of Astor Piazzolla. Quartet San Francisco—violinists Cohen and Kayo Miki, violist Emily Onderdonk, and cellist Joel Cohen—understands that each kind of tango requires a different approach. The performances breathe and sigh and sob and snarl in the manner of true tangueros, not like wary classical musicians slumming for local color. Precise rhythm and dynamic unanimity are just the beginning; there’s both poise and passion to the playing.

Now, not everything here is really a tango, nor is it always played in a strictly Argentine style. “Cachita” has a decided Afro-Cuban sound, “Felipe” could almost fit into a Texas swing competition, and Leonard Bernstein’s “Cool”—a Turtle Island String Quartet arrangement—moves into the realm of jazz. There are also witty allusions to Saint-Saëns and other unexpected sources along the way. But otherwise, this is about as authentic sounding as a string quartet tango CD can be.

—JAMES REEL

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