

***The Path of Memories*** • <sup>6</sup>Jennifer Slowik (ob); <sup>1,3,5,6</sup>Ethan Wood (vn); <sup>1,3,6</sup>Laura Krentzman (va), <sup>1,3</sup>Sebastian Baverstam, <sup>6</sup>Phoebe Lin (vc); <sup>6</sup>Aaron Trant (vib); <sup>6</sup>Yuko Yoshikawa (mar); <sup>1,3,6</sup>Marissa Licata, <sup>1,2,4-6</sup>Alla Elana Cohen, <sup>4</sup>Yoshiko Hiramatzu (pn)  
• CENTAUR 4044 (59:31)

**COHEN** *Hoffmanniana*, series 1, *Johannes Kreisler-Cat Murr Quintet*<sup>1</sup>. *Sephardic Romancero*<sup>2</sup>. *Querying the Silence*, series 8<sup>3</sup>. *Querying the Silence*, series 14. *Watercolors of the Master Who is Accustomed to Paint Oils*<sup>5</sup>. *Inner Temple*, vol. 1, series 3, *The Day of Atonement*<sup>6</sup>

In a 2019 Fanfare interview with David Canfield, composer and performer Alla Elana Cohen speaks of herself as “merely a channel through which something is sent.” Her communing and prayer via the receiving of musical composition continues with this new collection of her vastly varied but ever-unified chamber music.

Unity is both the operative word and the music’s compelling conundrum. The opening six-movement *Hoffmanniana*, its first series which is composed for piano and string quintet, is almost superhumanly coherent from moment to moment but travels far and wide, even within movements. The reiterated, nearly barked, string chords pervading the first movement are complemented by what sound like post-Messiaenic birdcalls throughout the second, but of course, the levels of motivic and sonority narrative do not stop there. Those birdcalls are transfigured in the lush and rapturous final movement, with its exquisite string writing and foundational piano chords, and even the initial string exhortations from the first movement make a final appearance in an entirely different context. The set is a revelation of emerging centers, modal and otherwise.

Cohen’s miniatures, of which there are a daunting number, function as pivots in the series they inhabit, no matter how small. The two contributions here from *Querying the Silence* nest and interact with similarly intricate dialogic rhythmic and melodic vitalities that may very well speak to Cohen’s compositional heritage. If the first two movements don’t implicitly reference Shostakovich’s seminal body of quartets in a kind of cross-section, they at least pay homage to string quartet writing of a bygone age even as timbral and tonal updates are obvious. The same holds true for the two-piano interaction of the first series, in which Cohen herself takes part. It seems as if the four movements share something akin to a tonality, though of course not in any traditional sense, one that shifts in and out of focus with the same ease and fluidity as rhythms are transformed and registers leaped. The series’ thunderous conclusion, with its stark but somehow serene note repetitions, brings the whole into focus as only the master miniaturist can.

True to the album’s title, Cohen’s is music that points toward the place where various phases of recall converge. The finest music seems to inhabit a space just outside but conjoining to notions of naming, as Cohen’s certainly does. Beyond all matters of system and category, the universes she creates are both inviting and miles deep, aiding and encouraging the felicities of repeated exploration. The performances are as committed as the compositions. There is something direct about this music, devoid of artifice and enigmatically exciting as it creates its own paths of memory. **Marc Medwin**

Five stars: Chamber music at its finest