

Norman Lebrecht Sinfini Music | 19 May 2014

Norman Lebrecht Album of the Week 19 May



A serious string quartet tackling the Beatles. Seriously? Don't knock it till you've tried it, says Norman Lebrecht, who finds himself unexpectedly charmed by this quirky release.

Label: Nimbus Alliance

When a disc arrived of one of the world's most refined string quartets playing Beatles arrangements, it was all I could do not to exercise the left-wrist flick and send it flying unopened to the bin. Lucky I didn't. These are edgy, intelligent, genre-bending arrangements of a dozen Fab Four songs by a Czech rock composer, Luboš Krtička, who pays scant regard to nostalgia and keeps the ears alert to suggestive undercurrents.

My favourite track is a misty meditation on 'Julia', a lesser-known Lennon-McCartney number. Played at this level of intensity, over four minutes, it could easily have been a movement in a middle-period work by [Hindemith](#) or [Martinů](#). You will never hear 'Julia' again without thinking: classical, post-romantic.

At the other extreme, 'Here Comes the Sun' gets a treatment that would not have shamed Jimi Hendrix. 'Michelle' opens with [Ligeti](#)-like nocturnal rustlings. 'Blackbird' has a real blackbird carolling in the background.

Krtička is nothing if not eclectic, and the members of the Wihan Quartet treat each phrase with the respect they would accord to an unexploded piece of thorny [Ferreghetti](#). It's great music, superbly played. What more can we ask?

Artists: Wihan Quartet

Norman Lebrecht is a prolific commentator on music and cultural affairs and an award-winning novelist. See his blog [Slipped Disc](#).