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The Impossible Gentlemen: The Impossible Gentlemen

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How can you not love this hands-across-the-sea Anglo-American jazz group—at least a little anyway?

Especially when its first uptempo quartet burner “Laugh Lines” ends with the band, quite literally, laughing (with pleasure at its own virtuosity no doubt)? And its liner notes include this pro forma declaration of intent: “This recording was made after the four of us had sat together in countless vehicles, had eaten mounds of pub food at myriad scarred tables and had wished each other a good night’s sleep in the lobbies of endless hotels, both swank and seedy. We’d come to talk easily with one another and this ease was in the music as well.”

You can say that again.

In its completely unassuming and unpretentious way, this is one of the happiest guitar-piano-bass-drum quartets to come along in a long while.

Guitarist Mike Walker’s tune “When You Hold Her” is as unabashedly romantic as “Laugh Lines” is as unabashedly giddy showing off.

What’s so merry about this disc for American jazz hardcores is that these seem to be the best and most relaxed circumstances we’ve heard drummer Adam Nussbaum and bassist Steve Swallow—bulwarks of the jazz intelligentsia for 30 years—in a very long time.

Pianist Gwilym Simcock is the baby of the group. Guitarist Walker, too, is of a different jazz generation than Nussbaum and Swallow.

It’s an ancient jazz cliché that all generational and cultural differences vanish when like-minded musicians get together. You’ll seldom hear it proven more breezily than it is here.

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