

THE IMPOSSIBLE GENTLEMEN

Gwilym Simcock, Mike Walker, Steve Swallow and Adam Nussbaum (Basho Records)

Surely one of the hidden gems of 2012, "The Impossible Gentlemen" is an awesome debut by a jazz quartet made up of four powerful musicians from the United Kingdom and North America.

At the center is pianist Gwilym Simcock of Great Britain, whose dazzling work on the keyboards was gaining a larger international following even before this project came along. Free-wheeling, intensely creative guitarist Mike Walker, who also hails from Great Britain, came up the idea for the band at the Manchester Jazz Festival in 2009. Bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Adam Nussbaum, both from America and musical partners for nearly 30 years, provide a great complement.

This is a quartet that swings and bops, but in a modern way while also maintaining a traditional feel. All eight gorgeous songs are penned by Simcock or Walker.

There are plenty of intriguing, odd time signatures and back rhythms, and there are a number of times the foursome steps back for delicate, heartfelt (but not overly sentimental) moments. The music is at times searing, complex, and lush, with go-for-the-gut, heartfelt melodies.

The Impossible Gentlemen are great individually. And they're great as a team.

-- TOM HENRY