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## Zephyr (Zephyr)

Michael Francis Hannan  
*Southern Cross University*

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## *Zephyr*

The Zephyr Quartet: Imelda Baligod (violin), Vanessa Neagle (violin), Anna Webb (viola), and Hilary Kleinig (cello)

Independent release

available through website: [www.thezephyrquartet.com](http://www.thezephyrquartet.com) or by contacting [annawebb@ozemail.com.au](mailto:annawebb@ozemail.com.au)

*Zephyr* is the work of four young Adelaide musicians and a number of guest performers and composers. Unlike the occasional popular music dabblings of string quartets such as the Kronos and the Brodsky, the Zephyr Quartet is an original band based around the string quartet combination.

The first track, “journey by night” sets the mood for this most unusual CD. A dramatic initial string quartet motif is soon replaced by a kick drum dance beat and the strings are relegated to adding sound effects to what is essentially an ambient dance music texture. After a few minutes the string quartet returns to develop its initial melodic idea over the dance beat.

Although electronic drums are only used in two of the songs, most of the tracks are based on strong rhythmic ideas constructed over fairly static harmonic frameworks. A feature of the arranging is the intricate counterpoint of ostinati, riffs, and basslines combined with solo melodic ideas produced by instruments and voices. Textural variety and development provide constant interest for the listener. Although the approach is basically tonal and modal, extended techniques are judiciously used for colour, textural layering and sometimes humour (as in the meowing imitations of “esther the cat”)

On the whole, the album demonstrates a high standard of performance, composition, improvisation, arrangement and production. Three of the members of the group (Kleinig, Baligod and Neagle) have written original works for the CD. In addition the group has employed the services of a few other composers and singer/songwriters. Most of the vocal tracks reveal the great effectiveness of the combination of voice and string quartet in popular music, first established with the iconic Beatles’ song, “Yesterday”, but rarely exploited since (the Brodsky Quartet’s 1993 collaboration with Elvis Costello [“The Juliet Letters”] is perhaps the only notable exception.).

*Zephyr* is not, however, without flaw. The weakest tracks are perhaps strategically placed at the end of the CD. The sufi song arrangement (“melvana”) suffers from limp bass recorder playing and a weak structure; the tenor saxophone solo on “it’s a simple life” (which blends surprisingly well with string quartet backing) is too conservative in its ballad harmonies to fit well into the unique approach of the album; and the last track (“nightmares lullaby”) demonstrates uncontrolled singing, tedious backing and unwieldy form.

The Zephyr Quartet is an unlikely concept for a band (the CD press release indicates they do pub gigs), but it is one that generally works very well because of the unusual sound of the instrumental and vocal combinations employed and the refreshing approaches the members bring

to songwriting and instrumental composition. Its fusion of popular, jazz and classical styles is distinctive and mostly quite delightful.