



20th April 2009

ERSATZMUSIKA: SONGS UNRECANTABLE

ASPHALT TANGO £13.70

THE title intrigues – songs which can't be sung again? – but it's oddly appropriate to what this very interesting group purvey. The opening number swings with an easy grace accompanied by a piano whose dark, unpedalled plangency evokes memories of the Ukrainian bandura zither; guitar and accordion provide the basis of the musical backing, but, as in their previous CD, Ersatzmusika don't like to give much away about themselves or their music's inner workings.

Apparently "eager to outwit history" (!) they say they are resurrecting melodies "from the late Soviet to the end of the Wende" (whatever that is), and these tracks really do exude a powerful nostalgia. Just as some citizens in the former Soviet states paradoxically yearn for the comforting stability of their old police state, with its pensions, health care and excellent schools, so they also think back fondly to the songs they used to sing; those dissidents who exiled themselves to Berlin or beyond also look back with longing.

But basically this music looks forward, superimposing musical sounds of the past onto a present which is in perpetual flux. The atmosphere is so smoky you can almost smell it, the cod-English lyrics come and go with a take-it-or-leave-it casualness (who cares if they only half make sense?), and you just revel in the sounds these Russian musicians conjure from the ruins, led by the melancholic sound of singer-composer-keyboardist Irina Doubrovskaya. Compelling.

MICHAEL CHURCH