

## Portico Quartet - Portico Quartet (2012)

Written by bluesever

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*01 – Window Seat 02 – Ruins 03 – Spinner 04 – Rubidium 05 – Export for Hot Climates  
06 – Lacker Boo 07 – Steepleless 08 – 4096 Colours 09 – City of Glass 10 – Trace* Jack  
Wyllie (saxophone) Milo Fitzpatrick (contrabass) Duncan Bellamy (drums) Nick Mulvey (Hang)

Portico Quartet remain famous for two things: busking lucratively on London's South Bank and employing the lilting gong of their UFO-like hang drum. But things have changed for this four-piece. The band's wages are no longer thrown into open instrument cases, thanks in part to a profile-raising Mercury nomination in 2008 for their debut *Knee-Deep in the North Sea*. And last year their man on the hang departed: "I've always felt like a fraud at the hang drum," said Nick Mulvey.

It's no biggie, though. This time out, the pretty, steely sound of the hang – taken up by new keysman Kier Vine – is set further back than on 2009's *Isla*, just one sound among many. What this band should be acclaimed for instead is barrelling through time and genres to make bewitching mood music that's on a par with *Jaga Jazzist*. Much like that Norwegian ensemble's last effort, *Portico Quartet* (the album) is a mazy, fluid, ethereal suite of chamber jazz to get properly lost in.

Whereas *Portico's* previous (second) album *Isla* was in thrall to Steve Reich and his ripple-effect minimalism, it seems Brian Eno, *Four Tet* and the *Brainfeeder* crew are touchstones on songs inspired by train journeys, on-tour blues and the soul-quieting effect of dramatic architecture. Jack Wyllie's sax and Vine's keys weave dark, mournful tapestries around electronic drums and gadget-enabled bleeps and twitches, while the hang presents itself in ghostly samples and squawks and squeaks serve as on-the-road sound effects.

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Everything still sounds familiarly Portico Quartet, only fresh, forward-thinking and a little bit tougher. Their arrangements and wide-open ambience remain sparse, but, on InterRailing-inspired *Window Seat*, are paired with the sort of drifting synths Oneohtrix Point Never is adored for. *Ruins and Steeple* – the latter featuring London-based Swedish singer Cornelia – carry the Radiohead gene always present in their improbably tuneful experiments. Ravey nightsongs such as *Lacker Boo* crackle with the electric, ominous energy of *Flying Lotus*, while *Rubidium* and *4096 Colours* are bleary-eyed, melancholy and shot through with wintry mid-morning light. As journeys go, this one's endlessly absorbing. ---Chris Parkin, BBC Review

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