

Nine Below Zero: After Hours – 13 Shades Of Blue (Zed ZCD 1011)
Review by Norman Darwen

It is strange to think of NBZ as veterans, but indeed they are, with an almost 40 year history now.

They can still surprise though, as with this set, which finds the original four members augmented by keyboards, a horn section and occasionally strings, and tackling a baker's dozen of cover songs designed to show off the breadth of the blues, from Senor Soul's funky opener to Boozoo Chavis's zydeco styled closer. In between there are plenty of rocking numbers and soulful selections, and of course, plenty of Mark Feltham's harmonica playing, more varied than many of his peers. The numbers are lesser-known gems; for example, there is a Little Walter cover, but it is *The Toddle*, not one of his more obvious instrumentals. All in all, the CD is definitely more than worth a listen.

Sorarmonica: *In the World of Classics* SORM CD 001
by David Beer (contest adjudicator)

If classical music is your passion, or if you would just like to hear a unique harmonica ensemble playing well, then you will not be disappointed by the musicianship and sophisticated arrangements of classical pieces by the Slovenian group Sorarmonica, who delighted us at the 2015 Festival in Bristol.

This collection has music ranging from the 16th to the 20th century, sequenced in chronological order.

In the piece by Petelin, the ensemble cleverly replicates the renaissance style of playing, with its sharp attack and staccato articulation, capturing the sound of the bombard and shawm and other instruments of the period.

2 popular pieces by Bach follow, and the legato playing and careful balance is very impressive on the popular Air ("on a G string") from the Suite in D major. The group's skill in maintaining a tight rhythmic ensemble is well demonstrated in four anonymous 18th century minuets.

Then the tone and approach changes again when we reach the Classical period, and the ensemble give the Mozart Serenade a lovely delicacy and lightness of tone.

The pièce de resistance has to be the very impressive performance of Ravel's Bolero, where the eight players, led here by the consistent rhythmic ostinato of Simona Perme - demonstrating some excellent diaphragmatic breathing and stamina - make a surprisingly full ensemble sound, with impressive dynamic control. It is a rare treat to hear this impressive classical ensemble so well recorded.

The CD is available from
vladimir.hrovat1@gmail.com