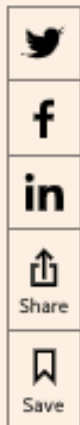




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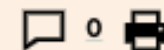
Trio SR9: Déjà Vu album review – stripped-back contemporary pop covers

The French trio deliver minimalist versions of hits by Rihanna, Billie Eilish and Ariana Grande



Trio SR9: minimal marimba style © Julien Mignot

David Honigmann 2 HOURS AGO





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The French have a weakness for high-concept cover albums: Nouvelle Vague are a band who play on the different meanings of the phrase “New Wave” across cultures — from 1960s French cinema to Brazilian bossa nova and the poppier end of UK post-punk — to recast songs from later periods as if they belonged to the earlier ones. Trio SR9 also offer a new take on a familiar songbook in their latest album, *Déjà Vu*. This time the music is mostly from the last decade and the style is minimal.

The three musicians, Paul Changarnier, Nicolas Cousin and Alexandre Esperet, are all trained percussionists, specialising in the marimba. Their first two albums consisted of arrangements of the classical repertoire, from Bach and the Baroque to Ravel, Satie and other Impressionists. For their debut with No Format, the trio have teamed up with fellow Conservatoire National Supérieur de Lyon alumnus Clément Ducol, who has stripped back contemporary pop hits to their essential rhythms and arranged them for the group.

The Cameroonian singer Blick Bassy has made his best work for No Format, interrogating the hidden secrets of his family, country and his continent’s history. Here he opens the album with a Bassa-language version of Ariana Grande’s “One Last Time”, mostly sung a cappella over the slightest angular wooden reverberations, and later mumbles through a thick, dark, hard-swinging version of Billie Eilish’s “Bad Guy”. Bassy’s fellow Cameroonian Sandra Nkaké gives a warm soulful richness to Sia’s “Chandelier”, chanting the numbers in the bridge in the manner of Philip Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach*, and closes the album with a slow, papery account of Lana Del Rey’s “Video Games” against a glass harmonica.



Malik Djoudi, formerly of underground bands Moon Pallas and Kim Tim, contributes a lush version of Frank Ocean’s “Super Rich Kids”, with thumping marimba echoing Elton John’s influence on the original and then extended passages of intricate vibraphone that make it sound like a lost Steely Dan classic.

The French-Algerian singer Camélia Jordana sings Rosalia’s “Malamente” to a ticking pulse and later deconstructs “Dance Monkey” by Tones & I (the Australian singer Toni Watson) into a whispered vocal somewhere between a prayer and an invocation, with breathy pulses and the merest tick of percussion. Camille, an endlessly inventive art-pop heroine who is an alumna of Nouvelle Vague and also Ducol’s partner, turns Rihanna’s “Don’t Stop the Music” into shiny, hollow waltz, then delivers an impeccable reading of Pharrell’s “Happy”, barely there apart from handclaps and buoyant singing.

★★★★☆

[‘Déjà Vu’](#) is released by No Format