



SECRET FRIEND: *Sleeper*

Pop music is all about dynamics, changes in tempo, key and harmony that propel the listener onward, eager to hear the next sound. Steven Fox, the ex-pat songwriter who is behind Secret Friend, has the kind of pop dynamics as Brian Wilson or Burt Bacharach, combining Mika-like electronica and endless chord changes with inventive melody. There are more hooks in a Secret Friend song than in most albums by other groups, beginning with the stunning Kelly Jones sung "Blue Sky." Fox's songs are mini symphonies that usually run five minutes or more, giving room to each of his musical ideas. They never outstay their welcome. Linus of Hollywood weighs in on "Something's Happening," a river of A/B harmony as championed by the dB's. "I Don't Know You," sung by Wyatt Funderburk, is a power ballad of inchoate longing with more hooks than a knitting bee.

And so it goes through "Nobody Listens," a paean to pop music. Secret Friend is so good, I don't even mind the two instrumentals which sound like they were written by R2D2.

Five stars.

www.secretfriendmusic.com