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‘ Boston to Beijing ’

Tonic Sol - Fa

(Vivaton Records): All grownups guilty of enjoying boy-band harmonies, take heart: Tonic Sol-Fa's version of those sweet vocal combinations subtracts the bubble-gum background noise to focus on the heart of four voices blending together. The almost a cappella group doesn't quite play by the rules: Hints of nonvocal percussion peek through the backgrounds of several songs. A few songs stick with traditional doo-wop rhythms, but more explore the influences of country, pop, gospel and blues. The album has its share of "Oh, baby, baby" lyrics, but that's not all: It includes a tribute to Dean Martin, a touching piece about an old man losing his wife and plenty of songs that blur the line between sacred and secular. Listen long enough, and you might start wondering whether there was any point inventing instruments when we already had the warm human voice.

— Margaret Quamme ‘
