

'The Hour Of The Blackbird' by Ninebarrow

Reviewed by Carl Filby (Sept 2025)



My first introduction to Ninebarrow was back in 2023 when I heard their album ***The Colour Of The Night*** which was quite wonderful but I was not aware of their back catalogue which to some extent is what this album is all about.

Ninebarrow are Jon Whitley and Jay LaBouchardiere a former teacher and GP respectively before they decided to become full time musicians in 2016. They are also well known for hosting walking holidays in the beautiful county of their native Dorset.

Jon plays piano, ukelele and mandolas, and both he and Jay share the vocals and the highly distinctive reed organ. Even before they turned professional Ninebarrow had brought out their first album in 2014 and another 4 have followed since plus several collaborations. This latest album, their sixth, is itself a collaboration with Hart Voices and the Chantry Singers a fusion of 40 voices from two choirs from Hampshire and Surrey respectively under the musical direction of Roy Rashbrook. However, the sound is distinctly that of Ninebarrow in what is a showcase of some of their best songs enhanced by the ethereal sound of the choirs.

As someone who is not familiar with their back catalogue apart from ***The Colour of The Night*** my immediate thought was to go back and listen to the songs on this album as they were originally performed by Ninebarrow on previous albums. The majority of the tracks come originally from their fourth album ***A Pocket Full Of Acorns*** which came out in 2021 and the other credited musicians on that are the same as for the latest album – John Parker on double bass, Evan Carson and Mark Tucker on percussion with the latter credited once again as the producer.

Although, I happen to particularly like the cello as an instrument and despite the fact that the closing section of ***Teignmouth*** on the original album is played on the cello and replaced by the choir on the latest album, I think it true to say that the choral additions work for literally every song. This may have something to do with the fact that Ninebarrow as a duo are something of a mini heavenly choir and with the addition of Hart Voices and the Chantry Singers it is their unique sound that is enhanced to provide the listener with the fuller heavenly Ninebarrow sound.

Perhaps it is also not surprising that the addition of the choral sounds has a more marked effect on tracks from their first album ***While The Blackthorn Burns***. Both ***The Sea*** and ***Summer Fires*** appear on this new album in extended slowed down versions and the latter also benefits from a longer introduction. Whilst ***The Weeds*** is sung at more or less the same tempo the choirs lift the song into a new dimension of shared jollity and consequently it is possibly my favourite song on the album.

Now that they have gone down the choral route it will be interesting to see what approach Jon and Jay take on their next album and whether they dare go back to recording with just their two voices. In the meantime, this is a wonderful album which crosses the musical boundaries between

folk and choral music in so far as anyone has ever bothered to define any! I try and tell people to forget about boundaries in music and that these days 'folk' is a very broad church and this is certainly an album that demonstrates that in a very good way. Being released on October 3rd I guess this will also have an appeal to the Christmas market and if I hadn't been so lucky as to receive a review copy I would have been delighted to receive this album as a Christmas present.

The new album is released on Friday October 3rd and Ninebarrow will embark on a tour to support the new album starting on Saturday October 4th in Northwich Cheshire and you can find a link to their website with all the dates [HERE](#) or you can find a link in the 'Gigs & Tours' Listing on Unicorn Folk as you are already on site.
