

September 20, 2010

Pop

THE ESSENTIALS

Nothing But Blue (www.essentialsmusic.com)

★★★★ (out of 4)

This talented a cappella quartet — originally from London, Ont., but now based in Toronto — has snuck up to the top of the local charts with its latest album. The appeal is immediate, as they open the 12-track CD with a very slick, *Glee*-like arrangement of Johnny Nash's classical "I Can See Clearly Now." Unlike most a cappella groups, the Essentials aren't shy about augmenting their voices with real percussion, giving the music an extra punch of groove and drive. Thom and Dan Speck, Joe Oliva and recent arrival Janet Turner have been produced to the nines, but the raw talent is all there. Dan Speck is the star vocalist, while Turner contributes two great songs of her creation: love ballad "Invisible," and self-empowerment anthem, "Reality." These four turn the world into a sunnier place, and who can't use a bit of that? **Top track:** Energetic, R&B-infused "Feelin' Alright," with Thom Speck on lead vocals.

John Terauds



From left: Jo3 Oliva, Dan Speck, Janet Turner and Thom Speck are the Essentials.