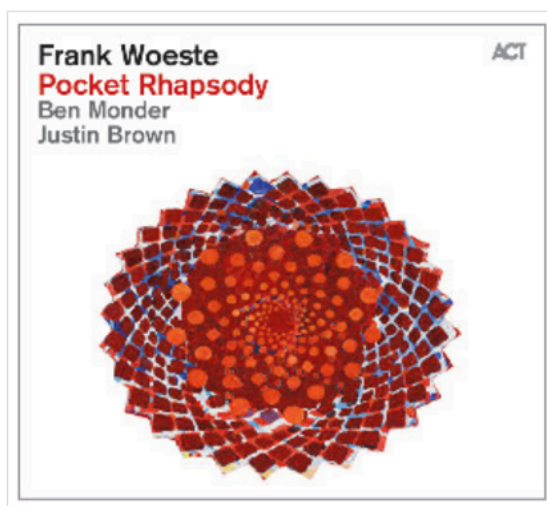


CD REVIEW: Frank Woeste - *Pocket Rhapsody*



Frank Woeste - *Pocket Rhapsody*
(ACT Records 9587-2. CD Review by Rob Mallows)

I've always wondered what the convention is for naming a jazz album. Is it about representing a mood, perhaps, or a memory triggered during the writing, or the location of the recording. It must be even more challenging when there are few if any lyrics.

In the case of **Frank Woeste's** debut recording for the ACT label - *Pocket Rhapsody* - this German pianist seems to want accuracy. Before I listened to this album I looked up the meaning of rhapsody on Wikipedia: "*episodic yet integrated, free-flowing in structure, featuring a range of highly contrasted moods, colour and tonality.*"

Damn, if he hasn't just hit the title nail on the head. *Pocket Rhapsody* contains most if not all of those elements over its ten tracks and it's all the better for it. He's clearly not content to cut off similar two-by-four shaped jazz planks to build this album. Incorporating nu-jazz, funk, free improvisation, classical and drum 'n' bass, boring it ain't. And, it fits in one's pocket, too.

First track *Terlingus* is a slow-tempo funk, book-ended by the moodiest of dischordant sounds on the piano before the keyboard bass line pumps in backed by some rat-a-tat high-hat playing by drummer **Justin Brown**. The main piano theme by Woeste is simple but catchy, but then stretches out when embellished on the Hammond organ and through direct plucking of the piano strings.

Following the title description, second track *Moving Light* is a 90-degree turn: jauntier, Major in feel, recalling perhaps a little of the Snarky Puppy recipe with strong brass sounds over bass synth and keyboards. A pleasingly accessible tune, it's still got a sufficiently knife-edge quality to ensure the listener isn't too comfortable.

This album's a bit like visiting a department store. Each floor, or track, offers a disparate range of items on offer. Up on the third floor, *The Star Gazer* is all plucked strings and moody, breathy lyrics from ACT stable-mate **Youn Sun Nah**. Avant grade and full of singer-songwriter emotion before moving into some deliciously syrupy piano improvisation, by now the listener starts to understand that West's really sticking to the album title's theme.

Best track on the album is the fourth cut, *Buzz Addict*, introduced by a simple four-chord sequence on the Hammond organ which seems to pay homage to Samuel Morse's nineteenth-century code before more conventional piano tones and drumming solos enter the picture, along with intriguing accompaniment from **Ben Monder's** guitar. It has a slightly space-adventure sort of feel, reflecting a tremendously exciting journey around the musical cosmos.

The rest of the album is like this - surprises around every corner. Like the way in which motorways are designed with gentle curves to stop drivers falling asleep, the variety in the track listing ensures the listener can't take his or her eye off the musical road. The most interesting mood is on track eight *Nouakchott*, on which trumpeter **Ibrahim Maalouf** provides a defiantly arabic sound palette that draws the reader's mind to visions of sand dunes, wadis and the hubbub of the souk, on a track written on trips to the region by Woeste funded by the Goethe Institut.

This is a fine album with a defiantly idiosyncratic sound. It doesn't sound like anyone else out there at the moment and Woeste has provided us with an album that won't necessarily be satisfied with being listed solely under jazz. It's more than that.

The whole album is packaged in one of the most beautifully simple covers I've seen for many a while, a colourful image by artist Terry Winters against a pure white background. It is very pleasing, as is the music inside.

Pocket Rhapsody is released today 29th January 2016