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Reviews

DEREK FRANK - Let The Games Begin



Derek Frank is an up and coming bass player who hails from Cleveland, Ohio. Now, however, he works out of L.A. where he's quickly become an in-demand sideman - constantly busy working with artists as diverse as Todd Rundgren and Joe Sample. 'Let The Games Begin' is Derek's first solo album and it's clear where his musical sympathies lie. The LP's main musical thrust will recall vintage Tower Of Power (Frank uses a tight seven-piece brass section) while his own playing has the strength and distinctiveness of Marcus Miller. Miller, realized, early in his career that a solo set led by a bassist is a difficult project to carry off. He succeeded through the inventiveness of his own playing and by ensuring real variety in the material. Here Derek Frank does much the same thing - offering a dozen cuts of which eight are originals and four covers; between them, though, there's enough variety to ensure focus throughout. Of the originals the opener, 'Keep It Fresh', is particularly strong with the duelling between drummer Donald Barrett and the bass lines a highlight. 'Lunchbox' offers more of the same while 'Smack Dab' is another very tight groove. It's on this one that the brass section really shines. For variety, 'Keep It Fresh' is a rap featuring Kosha Dillz (great horns here too) while 'Postlude, Balance' is a gentle affair that might recall John Klemmer. Then the covers. Frank has made an eclectic choice - Soundgarden's 'Black Hole Sun' and Sesame Street's 'Pinball Number Count' for starters. The former is slow and moody and the latter, well, surprising. That leaves the two outstanding cuts. First, a take on Hall and Oates' 'I Can't Go For That'. It's a great take on a great tune - with Derek's bass taking the lead melody line against a swinging brass section. Then, there's a truly energized version of Curtis Mayfield's 'Pusherman'... a tune that lends itself perfectly to the Derek Frank treatment. Brian Auger guests on Hammond and he really makes it feel that time has stood still and we're back in the days of real music. That one cut alone is well worth investigating and you can do just that at www.dfrank.net

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