

Darek Oleszkiewicz - Like A Dream (2004)

Written by bluesever

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1. *November* (4:52) 2. *You Don't Know What Love Is* (6:38) 3. *Like A Dream* (6:52) 4. *Time Cafe* (7:41) 5. *Blues For Eden* (7:15) 6. *Precious Moments* (9:03) 7. *Before The Journey* (6:44) 8. *Gift* (4:58) 9. *That Night* (5:43) 10. *Conclusion: Part 1* (1:23) 11. *Conclusion: Part 2* (5:26) 12. *Conclusion: Part 3* (0:41) Darek Oleszkiewicz - bass Brad Mehldau - piano (1-5) Adam Benjamin - piano (8-12) Chuck Manning - saxophones (6-7) Bennie Maupin - tenor sax (11) Larry Koonse - guitar (6-7) Mark Ferber - drums (6-7) Nate Wood - drums (8-12)

Bassist Darek Oleszkiewicz, who prefers to go by the abbreviated moniker Oles, has gradually been establishing a name for himself on the West Coast scene over the past decade, playing on notable recordings by artists including Dianne Reeves, Jackie Ryan and Charles Lloyd. Now, with his Cryptogramophone d'but as a leader, *Like a Dream*, he sheds a spotlight on his compositional skills. On a programme of eleven originals and one standard, Oles demonstrates a style that crosses a number of musical boundaries much like Eric von Essen, who came before him in the LA scene and figures prominently in Oles' work.

The album presents Oles in three different and contrasting contexts. First is a series of duets with pianist Brad Mehldau. While there is the inevitable lineage to Scott LaFaro and Bill Evans, Oles also combines a certain economy of style that is reminiscent of Charlie Haden. Oles and Mehldau seamlessly shift between being drivers and passengers on what are the most mainstream compositions of the album. Oles' tone, while woody like Haden's, also has a certain Gary Peacock-like edge to it. Mehldau displays the contrapuntal style he has become known for, with left and right hands sometimes playing call-and-response, other times playing independent lines that inevitably cross paths and come together into a common theme. Oles' compositions are lyrical and immediately memorable. One wonders if his inclusion of the Raye/DePaul standard "You Don't Know What Love Is" is to simply give context to Oles' compositions, which are fresh, while at the same time oddly familiar.

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Two pieces by Oles' longstanding cooperative, the L.A. Jazz Quartet, place him in a clearly comfortable ensemble setting. Oles aside, the star of this group is guitarist Larry Koonse, who, with a warm and elegant style that is similarly spare, contributes heartfelt accompaniment and solo work on the tender ballad "Precious Moments." The folksy 5/4 "Before the Journey" is an aptly-titled, strongly visual piece that hints at Americana without being blatant. Oles' solo is remarkably singable considering the register of his instrument; a characteristic, in fact, of most of his work.

The programme closes with five tracks that feature pianist Adam Benjamin and drummer Nate Wood, with reedman Bennie Maupin guesting on "Conclusion Part Two," another folk-tinged piece that is the most outgoing piece of the album. "Conclusion Part One" and "Conclusion Part Three" are darker, more introspective pieces, as is the melancholy "That Night." Oles shows his abilities as a thoughtful accompanist who, while occasionally unpredictable, always keeps a strong pulse.

Oles may not be a secret on the LA scene, but he is less well-known on larger national and international stages. With Like a Dream he proves that he has what it takes, as a performer and composer, to reach the next level; once again the adventurous Cryptogramophone label brings a deserving artist to a broader public. ---John Kelman, allaboutjazz.com

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