

Frank Wess - Magic 101 (2013)

Wpisany przez bluesever
Poniedziałek, 03 Luty 2014 16:55 -

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01. *Say It Isn't So* [07:26] 02. *The Very Thought Of You* [07:32] 03. *Pretty Lady* [08:23] 04. *Come Rain Or Come Shine* [09:02] 05. *Easy Living* [09:33] 06. *Blue Monk* [06:58] 07. *All Too Soon* [04:12] Musicians: Frank Wess - tenor sax Kenny Barron - piano Kenny Davis - bass Winard Harper – drums

Most musicians can't escape the ravages of time, but a select few seem to have taken a sip from the musical fountain of youth. The late Hank Jones, for example, played with brilliance and class until the day he died at the age of 91, and octogenarian drummer Roy Haynes continues to snap and crackle in all the right places, demonstrating unmatched originality and agility as he approaches the big nine-o. Saxophonist/flautist Frank Wess is another such figure. Wess, who made an indelible impression on the music during his tenure with the great Count Basie and went on to record with everybody from composer/arranger/saxophonist Oliver Nelson to Jones, is a living jazz legend. His legacy is written in the grooves of numerous classic recordings and, like Haynes and Jones, he refuses to let a number like his age dictate anything; *Magic 101*, recorded in 2011 when Wess was 89 years young, makes that clear.

This seven-song program, featuring a polished quartet that includes pianist Kenny Barron, bassist Kenny Davis and drummer Winard Harper, is unique for its balladic leanings and lack of flute; the elder statesman of that instrument doesn't touch it once here. Wess, instead, sticks exclusively to his tenor, while exploring the slower side of jazz.

The program begins with a swinging "Say It Isn't So," but immediately takes a turn toward the reflective with "The Very Thought Of You," which serves as the start of the ballad run. Two duets with Barron—Wess' own "Pretty Lady" and a "Come Rain Or Come Shine," that's coated with a bluesy patina—follow before the full personnel returns for a slow, twilit "Easy Living."

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The slow-and-sly "Blue Monk" that follows brings sturdy swing back into the picture, but its appearance is fleeting. The album ends with a solo saxophone take on Ellington's "All Too Soon." Wess works his way into the very heart and soul of the song, demonstrating a grasp on the art of musical alone time that few will ever possess.

Magic 101 is a top-to-bottom charmer; here's to hoping that Wess stay around for a while longer and continues to make music like this. ---Dan Bilawsky, allaboutjazz.com

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