

FLOW Promise



FLOW, the much celebrated quartet of New Age and contemporary music of late returns with their adroitly created second installment, *Promise* and it certainly lives up to its title. The award winning foursome, as if you didn't know it already, consists of Australian pianist **Fiona Joy** (Hawkins), guitarist **Lawrence Blatt**, flugelhorn master **Jeff Oster**, and Grammy Award winning producer and guitarist, **Will Ackerman**. Each member has an initial in the band's name.

Hence, FLOW. Every member is a certified virtuoso of their instrument and have proven themselves time and again on solo and collaborative projects for Ackerman's brainchild, *Imaginary Road Studios*.

A little ukulele, figurative speaking, guitar, and horn open stylistically on the title tune **Promise**. I have never thought as the ukulele as a lead instrument, but under Lawrence's tender hand it becomes one. Four string do a theme make. The melodic covenant has equal contributions from everyone balanced well on a dynamic beginning.

Oster is master at his task and never fails to add an evocative, oftentimes opulent background to the songs on which he contributes. He soars on the tune, **All These Years**, adding a fluid grace to an uplifting melody. Just a whisper of voice on this one, and the guitars add polish to an otherwise sumptuous refrain.

Fresh Air allows Fiona Joy to exhibit her intuitive talent as a New Age pianist with a lush, lyrical melody. The music is a cleansing breath, as if one steps outside and draws in the soundscape. The music has that 80's Windham Hill Sampler vibe and that is most welcome.

Of all the songs on *promise*, **Nightfall** seems to stand out as the most cohesive, the most intricate of songs. The piece, with haunting horn and soulful guitar balanced by the pensive piano, has a depth and a reverberating wistfulness. For some the darkness brings on terrors, explained and unexplained, but for others, the darkness is a comfort. The distant stars have a cold light that produces a warmth deep in the soul. For half of a day, it is sanctuary.

The guitar intro glistens on the tune **Chasing Secrets**. The piano arrives like an old friend and the horn joins the mix. There is soft voice in the background while the horn takes up the chase. Doors are opened and surreptitious rooms explored all in the name of knowing. This medium tempo tune is light and not the least bit furtive. More like exciting.

Mémoire du Dome, the final cut, is a bit cryptic, but to me it is dream sequence. Oster projects strongly on this one, but the piano accompanies him well. It is haunting tune, somewhat dark in places, fluent in others. It counter balances the other tunes on the album that are lighter in nature. Still, it harbors a certain sadness, a melancholy shadow that hides from the light of day. Perhaps it is not coincidence that it followed *Chasing Secrets*.

As in their first eponymous album, there are skillful hands on deck for this prodigious blend of talents. All ten tracks had a general sense of relaxing ambience made popular by every member

of the group, which also includes Tom Eaton on bass, keyboards, and accordion and Jeff Haynes on percussion. There are elements of contemporary jazz on Promise, and chill out can only begin to describe it. Highly recommended. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews