



72 ORCHARD STREET

MAX FRANKL

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MAX FRANKL - 72 ORCHARD STREET

It's a great gift when you can just start all over again. Even more so when this beginning is already preceded by a whole catalog of personal achievements. In the past decade and a half, Zurich-based German jazz guitarist Max Frankl has already released seven albums of various stripes, won a host of awards, including the ECHO Jazz, and shared the stage or studio with a remarkable array of world-class musicians. But all of this plays no role in his eighth album, *72 Orchard Street*, because Frankl confidently goes beyond zero and starts completely new.

Together with trombonist Nils Wogram, saxophonist and clarinetist Reto Suhner, bassist and Guembri player Patrick Sommer and drummer Lionel Friedli, Frankl traverses very different states of sound on the album. The opening title track has a rocking roughness; "Clinton Avenue" seems almost like a big band arrangement; "Eiszeit" radiates an almost ambient calm; "Birds," composed by Nils Wogram, approaches new music to a certain extent; "Mr. Goodchord" is a free-flowing bow to guitarist Mick Goodrick; the timbre of "Myrtle Avenue" nestles between "Clinton Avenue" and "Eiszeit"; and the concluding "Adios Machos," penned by Reto Suhner, goes far in the direction of Americana.

The fact that all these different pieces nevertheless share a common character has several reasons. On the one hand, there is the bandleader himself, who never pushes himself into the foreground.

Nothing is further from his mind than a guitar album with accompaniment. Indeed, the five voices are woven into a closely meshed band sound. The star of the group is always the band itself; even the solos are never designed as individual performances, but always as colorings within the overall sound. Of course, this presupposes a great willingness on the part of all involved to engage with Frankl's maxims. But since these familiar personalities prefer to interact together rather than navel-gaze at their musical skills, no one demurs, which only increases their pleasure in playing together. For Frankl, a band is always and especially here more than the sum of its individual members.

Another factor is a sound philosophy that, at first glance, seems very American. The fact that Frankl's teachers included the two Americans Kurt Rosenwinkel and Ben Monder, as well as Wolfgang Muthspiel, who has been based in New York for a long time, is less of a factor than a conscious decision. "This is my first album where all the musicians are recording in one room and not stuck in cubicles," the guitarist explains. "It was important to me to capture that band sound as much as possible. You know this basic attitude from many American albums. In particular, the last two albums of Ben Wendel, which were made in this way, inspired me a lot. This interaction, this band sound, affects the feeling of playing and you just hear it differently."

Regarding the album's titles, it is noticeable that three songs refer to places in New York, while four pieces deal with other topics. In this respect, 72 Orchard Street is half a concept album. Before starting work on it, Frankl lived in New York for six months. "I know the city very well, knew exactly which places I felt comfortable in and was able to fit them into a certain sound. I lived in a typical New York apartment on Orchard Street, one that was infested with mold, and had to get out of there within three days. I felt much more comfortable on Clinton Avenue in Brooklyn because I found much more peace there than in Manhattan. And there was a coffee shop on Myrtle Avenue, where I worked quite a bit on the questions for my podcasts."

If one were to look for an equivalent to Frankl's music in the visual arts, it would surely be the American painter Mark Rothko, who was equal parts abstract expressionist and impressionist color psychologist; a large poster of Rothko's work hangs on the wall of the six-string sound painter. Similar to Rothko, Frankl layers color surfaces on top of each other, from which, as soon as one immerses oneself in them, a dynamic of subtle movement emerges. "I originally grew up listening to grunge and Nirvana," Frankl says, "but what fascinated me about jazz even back then was this colorfulness of chords and surfaces. That was later deepened by my lessons with Wolfgang Muthspiel because he also has a very exciting use of colors. I can find myself very much in the paintings of Mark Rothko. Those colors, gradients, and emotions of color textures are very much in my nature."

From all these individual personalities, attitudes, timbres, localizations, and structural approaches, a musical kaleidoscope emerges that one can listen to again and again in completely different ways, depending on the time of day and mood. Max Frankl has succeeded – almost magically – in creating a musical ambience where each participating musician can find himself with his strengths and preferences. Frankl is a reserved bandleader who nevertheless knows exactly what he wants, and has the ability to carry a heterogeneous group of people in the direction where the seeds of his ideas will best flourish. Frankl makes a generous offer to his listeners: The compositional and playful elegance with which the pieces are laid out and realized, as well as their lightness and undisguised accessibility even in complex moments, are compatible with almost any listener's musical preference.

Max Frankl belongs among the blessed musical personalities who are absolutely one with their music. However, he himself can put it into much nicer words. "As a musician, you try to reposition yourself with each album. Before 72 Orchard Street, I had recorded an album with Walrus Ghost, one that was more ambient. The dedication with which Walrus approaches his productions has subconsciously affected my approach as does the New York energy that – no matter the cost – makes your plans happen. The new record is now a return to that jazz environment I like so much. I feel like I can articulate my voice as a guitarist so clearly, like I've never felt on any album before. I hope this album will be perceived as a new step. In that sense, it has become a second debut album."

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