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# Review: Let the Games Begin... by Derek Frank

by Phil Wain Tuesday, February 23rd, 2010



*Let the Games Begin...* is one funky record! It sounds like it was fun to play this music and it's definitely fun to listen to. It's a playful, funky, groove-driven, mostly instrumental record that reminds me a little of those 70s jazz-funk records that recorded when the session superstars got together to have fun. **Derek Frank** is an in-demand bassist in Los Angeles where he's played with the likes of Brian Auger and Jonatha Brooke alongside a large number of TV performances and sessions. He was also part of the band Upper Structure with Katisse Buckingham, whose impressive flute playing is well utilized on this record.

*Let the Games Begin...* features a combination of wah-wah guitar, soaring flute, tight grooving bass and drums, neat arrangements, washes of organ and some tasty soloing. It's a mix of funky originals and bass-led instrumental covers of tunes by Hall and Oates, Soundgarden, Curtis Mayfield and even Sesame Street.

“**Breakout**” is a funky, bass-driven opener with Derek Frank's Paul Jackson-inspired fingerstyle, lively

drums with a bouncing snare, expansive flute and Rhodes and 70s cop-show horns. Frank plays some intensely funky bass under Katisse Buckingham's lithe flute solo and funky Rhodes solo from Jeff Babko.

**"Keep it Fresh"** enters disco territory and features a sweet guitar solo from Brett Farkas and a seriously dirty effected bass solo played with what sounds like a mischievous glint in Frank's eye. There's a light, breezy rap, a gorgeous muted fingerstyle bass and a Sanborn-esque alto solo to round things off.

**"I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)"** is a greatly enjoyable bass cover. The cheesily-styled Hall and Oates wrote great songs, and Derek Franks does a great job with the melody rendering it thumb style, a la Marcus Miller. The tune escapes the 80s overproduction of the original to prove itself a masterpiece. There are some tight horns and gorgeous Wah Wah Watson style guitar. Frank's phrasing of the melody carries us along with him throughout. Yarone Levy plays a short, spiky guitar solo before the slap bass feature played with style, panache and a lovely sense of dynamics and playful use of motifs. Tune!

The first of the short **"Interludes"** follows **"Shake It (Don't Break It)"**, which is a short section of Brand New Heavies-inspired groove.

**"Lunchbox"** swiftly follows featuring an catchy ascending bass figure, swingbeat drums, darkly melodic guitar from Farkas and suspenseful electric piano from Rohde. It's a tour de force for Donald Barrett on drums and Frank's bass reminds of Paul Jackson again – no bad thing indeed! Farkas plays an acerbic guitar solo with a hint of mystery and funky use of space amid chordal melody phrases before Rohde romps at length over brooding bass and drums that sound like Barrett is having the most fun possible behind a kit.

**"Pusherman"** is the Curtis Mayfield classic and featured UK jazz-rock legend Brian Auger on Hammond organ whose band Frank has been part of for a while. All the 70s soul elements are here: the original's spacious bass line, the driving soul drumbeat by the legendary Steve Ferrone, the organ washes and the insistent congas. Auger on organ and Levy on guitar take turns with the theme, Levy adopting a light chordal guitar sound. Auger solos playfully over a throbbing, pulsating rhythm section. Frank himself takes a tasty Willie Weeks-style bass solo that builds well – indeed the band's performance is redolent of Donny Hathaway's famous live recording.

**"Smack Dab"** is rather onomatopoeic and begins with a very different bass sound – most of the record has dark toned, fat bass and this features a 80s pop funk bass sound which makes for a neat contrast. It reminds me of the bass tone on Glide by Pleasure. The excellent rhythmic horn arrangement is a treat. Solos begin over a sparser rhythmic mood and Dan Boissy pays tribute to Grover Washington in a soulful tenor solo. It's head-nod time as Frank grooves with a Meshell-style space-funk bassline with gorgeous sliding fills leading into a well constructed, witty bass solo with envelope filter.

Another short **"Interlude: Trigger Happy"** – a vamping snippet of groove leads into the classic Funky Drummer groove.

**"Off The Top"** with its jigsaw interlocking horn, guitar, bass and organ riffs. I'm just imaging how much fun this band must be live as a more open section introduces the Milesian wah-wahed trumpet of Larry Williams over a seriously funky 16th note bass followed by a swashing, swirling organ solo over an intense groove.

**"Black Hole Sun"** is a change of pace and a fabulous take on the Soundgarden classic. The opening creates a Siouxsie and the Banshees mood, and Frank plays the melody with an effected bass sound that takes the archetypical fretless ballad tone and makes something extreme and beautiful out of it. It's a masterful take on the melody and it's a feature for Frank's sonic experimentation and freewheeling soloing as the bass tone takes on immense proportions. Frank's soloing is intense over a fabulous backing of chiming guitar, solid drums and a strange chirping keyboard. There's a Jan Hammer-like 9/8 synth solo section for Jeff Babko and a crunching guitar lead from Yogi. This is a track you'll return to again and again.

“**Pinball Number Count**” was written for Sesame Street by Walt Kramer and was part of our generation’s funk indoctrination. Here, after the funky horn-driven melody, breathy tenor sax leaps all beboppish and blustery over a drum and bass texture with octave pedal bass, double time drums and washes of rhodes. Bluesy guitar solos soulfully; monstrous bass spurs Farkas on to climax his superb short solo before Barrett enjoys a rolling spotlight on the drums over underwater bass and guitar. The melody featuring between each solo in a great arrangement of the memorable theme. Classic!

“**Postlude: Balance**” is almost elevator-ish in contrast – like the chill out tune at the end of a night club set with Frank’s huge bass tone exploring the laid-back groove and making great use of the notes below the E.

Highly recommended to fans of funky music, this is a record that’s a real pleasure to listen to and hard to sit still to. The arrangements are great and if you like 70s funk music, this CD is for you. Derek Frank is a funky bass player with an endearing approach to his highly musical phrasing and this band is one who really know how to have fun.

## Preview and download *Let the Games Begin...*

### The line up:

- Derek Frank: bass guitars, synth basses, programming additional keys
- Donald Barrett, Steve Ferrone, Shay Godwin, Chad Wright: drums
- Brian Auger, Jeff Babko, Michael Bluestein, Matt Rohde, Zoux: keys
- Brett Farkas, Yarone Levy, Yogi: guitar
- Dan Boissy: saxophone, Katisse Buckingham: flute, Alvin Walker: trombone, Larry Williams: trumpet
- Joel Alpers: percussion
- Robert Anderson: string arrangements, violin, viola, Jacob Szekely: cello
- Kosha Dillz: rap on ‘Keep It Fresh’

For more, check out [Frank’s web site](#). The CD is available from [CD Baby](#), [iTunes](#) and [DigStation](#).

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