

Nate Wooley

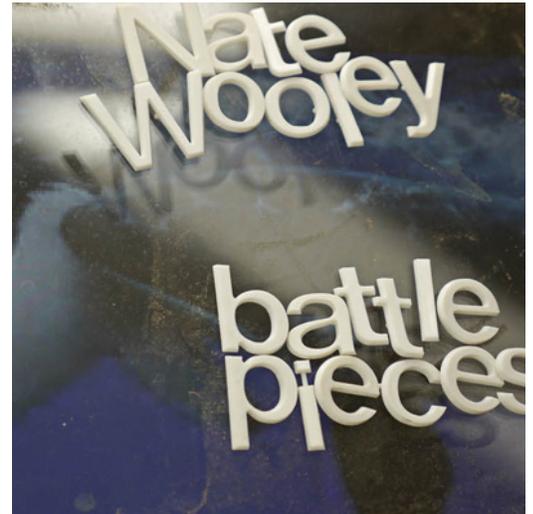
Battle Pieces II

Relative Pitch Records RPR 1058

Nate Wooley

Knknighgh (Minimal Poetry for Aram Saroyan)

Clean Feed CF 434 CD



Moving on from apprenticeship in other people's bands, American trumpeter Nate Wooley has over the past half-decade established his own musical persona constructing concept pieces whose genesis uses brief composed heads to expand players' interpretations of the themes. The concept, with its echoes of Anthony Braxton mixing and shuffling his modular compositions, doesn't sound that unique. But the execution can be intriguing as these two recent quartet sessions indicate.

With the exception of Wooley, the personnel are completely distinct on each, as is the stated aim of individual projects. Knknighgh is an attempt to onomatopoeically reflect the musical qualities implied by the minimalist verse of Aram Saroyan, known to create one word and even one letter poems. Joining the trumpeter on this quest are alto saxophonist Chris Pitsiokos, who has worked with figures such as Weasel Walter and Miya Masaoka; bassist Brandon Lopez, whose associates range from Ingrid Laubrock to Paul Lytton; and Berlin-based Slovenian drummer Dré Hočevar. Playing tenor and soprano saxophones on Battle Pieces II is German-born New York-based Laubrock. The others are Swiss pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and vibraphonist Matt Moran, leader of the Slavic Soul Party and part of many other bands.

Although the battle pieces have been stylistically linked to Braxton's series of compositions, while evolving in a particular fashion, frankly except for the instrumentation compositions on either CD don't sound that different from one another. With the tunes on both discs around the same length, the main point of contrast is that overall Knknighgh has harsher more rugged acoustics, while the presence of vibes and piano on Battle Pieces II makes them more mellow and melodic. Not that Battle Pieces II is easy listening in any way. Courvoisier adds a tougher, pedal pushing percussiveness when needed and the shambolic polyphony created by braying high-pitched brass timbres and tapered split tones from Laubrock keep most of the changes staccato and dynamic. Probably the key composition/improvisation is "Knknighgh 4". Tremolo phrasing from Wooley seasoned by measured vibraphone note splatters sets up a sort of sonic palimpsest as the warm narrative moves chromatically. Subtle piano plinks and subtle reed breaths soon move from commentary to challenge. As Laubrock's microtonal snarls and smears, speed up the program, the trumpeter responds with cries that rapidly ascend from the lowest pedal tones to the most

elevated, bugle-like spits, turning the exposition mercurial as well as memorable. As Wooley fills the remaining time with shaking theme variations, it's Moran's quivering metal bar accents which quietly return tonality. Rubato trumpet flutters are extended on "Battle Pieces 7" backed by power chords from the pianist and an evolution to first muffled than spiky trills from the saxophonist. Wooley's valve exploration alternates with reed bites until that sequences is resolved by the trumpeter repeating a phrase almost ad infinitum, Moderated keyboard and vibraphone echoes complete the transition from Wooley's dusky smears to more connective muted lines leading to a finale, with the piece finally terminated by a slick piano coda.

Knknighgh's onomatopoeic concept is somewhat lost on the other CD, since the trumpet/saxophone/bass/drum quartet has a definitive instrumental history. Hočevár's cymbal heavy and bass drum thumping backing coupled with Pitsiokos' snorts and slurs and Wooley's brassy grace notes as early as "Knknighgh 3", the first track, may suggest syllable exploration. But a series of false endings and a unison finale don't add much to the interpretation. Otherwise, like Battle Pieces, the strategy appears to revolve around theme deconstruction with contrapuntal face-offs as well as sudden individual distortion plus associated obbligatos from either of the horns in turn. Shuffling or racing to conclusions, plenty of reed peeps and capillary shading are heard, but the result is as likely to be muted and mellow as hard and unyielding. By the concluding "Knknighgh 8" it's evident that the quartet is making a conscious effort to shape minimalist sequences. Yet the necessity to extend the tune for more than a single phrase demands more variety, leading to stop-and-start motifs and a section of broken-octavo parallelism from the horns.

Sophisticated programs that bring forth strident as well as dulcet narratives, either disc can serve as a showcase for Wooley's art. Yet the necessary abstract improvisation coupled with minimalist themes makes stated concepts more theoretical than obvious. Tracks on Battle Pieces hang together with some finesse, whereas those on Knknighgh appear more in instrumental lineage than poetic, no matter how brief the verse can be.

—Ken Waxman

Track Listing: Knknighgh 1. Knknighgh 3 2. Knknighgh 4 3. Knknighgh 6 4. Knknighgh 7 5. Knknighgh 8

Personnel: Knknighgh: Nate Wooley (trumpet); Chris Pitsiokos (alto saxophone); Brandon Lopez (bass) and Dré Hočevár (drums)

Track Listing: Battle: 1. Battle Pieces 4 2. Battle Pieces 5 3. Battle Pieces 6 4. Battle Pieces 7

Personnel: Battle: Nate Wooley (trumpet); Ingrid Laubrock (tenor and soprano saxophones); Sylvie Courvoisier (piano) and Matt Moran (vibraphone)