

ARTIST: Peter Woolston
ALBUM TITLE: **Hope On My Horizon**

RATING: ★★★★★ (out of 5)

Although Peter Woolston has been performing for many years, he has not recorded frequently. The Auckland, New Zealand-based singer/songwriter's first album, *Dream of a Land*, came out 22 years ago back in the 1990s, and in 2015, his follow-up, **Hope on My Horizon**, is finally available. In a video that Woolston posted on his website (peterwoolston.com), he explains that his recording career was placed on hold when he got married and had a family. That type of thing is not uncommon with musicians: balancing the challenges of the music industry with family life is not easy. But it is a good thing that Woolston finally returned to recording because this is a solid outing that paints an attractive picture of his talents as a vocalist, songwriter and guitarist.

Woolston did not record this five-song EP in New Zealand but rather, ventured to Sydney, Australia (the largest city in that country) and joined forces with producer/engineer Andy Mak. Woolston specializes in melodic, guitar-powered alternative rock, and it is evident that he has a knack for memorable hooks. Woolston is as infectious on "Dead Man Walking," "Obsession" and "I Believe In You" as he is on "Better Man Someday" and the title track (all of which he wrote by himself). But saying that Woolston's material is infectious and hooky is not to say that this is a collection of party music or that his lyrics have an escapist approach. **Hope on My Horizon** is far from party music, and Woolston's lyrics are consistently introspective and serious-minded. Woolston is a deep thinker when it comes to lyrics, and when he is singing "Dead Man Walking," "Better Man Someday" or the title track, it is clear that the New Zealander is thinking hard about life. Woolston mentions his Christian faith on "Obsession," although he does not do it in a preachy fashion. Rather, "Obsession" is reflecting on his own experiences with Christianity, and it fits in with the introspection that is an integral part of **Hope on My Horizon**.

Even though Woolston examines some of the challenges he has experienced in life, this is an optimistic album overall. **Hope on My Horizon** is definitely an album that counts its blessings and sees the glass as half full rather than half empty.

Andy Mak wears more than one hat on this EP. In addition to serving as both producer and engineer, Mak plays keyboards and percussion. Mak favors a clean and polished style of production, but not to the point of making things sound overly glossy. **Hope on My Horizon**, under Mak's direction, has both polish and grit. And even though Mak does some electronic programming, this is an EP that sounds more played than programmed. Real instruments dominate **Hope on My Horizon**, and Woolston is well served by a group of participants that also includes Thom Macken on guitar, Ben Whincop on electric bass, Harrison Wood on drums and Hannah Horsfield on background vocals. The guitar playing is shared by Woolston and Macken, and both of them do their part to give **Hope on My Horizon** its decidedly guitar-based sound. So even though electronic programming is a musical ingredient that Mak includes, it is used as a side dish. And real guitar, real bass and real drums do more to shape the feel of **Hope on My Horizon**. Clearly, Woolston made a wise decision when he opted to visit Sydney and work with Mak. Having a producer and engineer who understands what Woolston is going for musically is a plus.

This enjoyable outing makes the listener hope that Woolston will record more frequently in the future and that there will not be a 22-year gap between **Hope on My Horizon** and his next release.

Alex Henderson is a veteran journalist/music critic whose work has appeared in *Billboard*, *Spin*, *The L.A. Weekly*, *Creem*, *HITS*, *Jazziz*, *JazzTimes*, *CD Review*, *Skin Two*, *Black Radio Exclusive*, *Thrash Metal* and a long list of other well known publications. Known for his eclectic tastes, Alex has contributed several thousand CD reviews to *The All Music Guide* online and series of reference books since 1996. Jello Biafra, Sonny Rollins, Megadeth, Ice Cube, Live, Chick Corea, Public Enemy, Marduk, Bobby Brown, Ra and Everlast are among the many well known artists Alex has interviewed during his long career.