

Return To Forever - Returns (2008)

Written by bluesever

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(Disc 1) 1. *Opening Prayer* (2:02) 2. *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy* (3:44) 3. *Vulcan Worlds* (13:45) 4. *Sorceress* (11:24) 5. *Song to the Pharaoh Kings* (27:17) 6. *Al's Solo, including: Children's Song #3 Passion Grace & Fire Mediterranean Sundance Cafe 1930 Spain* (8:56) 7. *No Mystery* (8:53) (Disc 2) 1. *Friendship Chick's Solo, including Solar* (8:54) 2. *Romantic Warrior* (7:20) 3. *El Bayo de Negro (Stanley's Solo)* (11:25) 4. *Lineage (Lenny's Solo)* (7:39) 5. *Romantic Warrior (Continued)* (3:06) 6. *Duel of the Jester and the Tyrant* (14:10) (Bonus Tracks) 7. *500 Miles High* (12:54) 8. *BBC Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Sir George Martin; live performance of Romantic Warrior* (8:21)
- Chick Corea - keyboards - Stanley Clarke - bass - Al Di Meola - guitar - Lenny White- drums

When Chick Corea reassembled the members of the most commercially successful version of his Return to Forever ensemble in 2008 and embarked on an extensive tour, it was the jazz fusion event of the year. Younger fans barely born when the ensemble's high watermark, *Romantic Warrior*, was released in 1976 could finally see the group in the flesh. Based on this sizzling double-CD document culled from the tour's highlights, 32 years didn't dim the quartet's enthusiasm or uncanny instrumental precision and interplay. It includes extended versions of half the tunes on *Romantic Warrior*, the title cut from *No Mystery*, and three selections from *Where Have I Known You Before*, with that disc's "Song to the Pharaoh Kings" clocking in at a whopping 27 minutes. Corea keeps his synths reproducing the '70s sounds of the original recordings, which is great for those who want to relive the albums, but brings a somewhat dated touch to much of this. In reality, there are very few bands in 2008 creating this space-progressive jazz-rock fusion, and certainly none with the fine-tuned talents of these guys. Those chops are displayed early on a 13-minute version of "Vulcan Worlds" that can only be described as explosive -- so much so that it elicits multiple rounds of rapturous applause as each member takes his turn in the spotlight. It's especially exciting to hear guitarist Al di Meola once again shredding with his old band, since much of his recent material has been acoustic and world music-oriented. Stanley Clarke remains one of jazz's finest bassists, grounding the sound but also taking dynamic solos that place his instrument in a lead guitar position. Hearing him trading frenzied, electrified licks with di Meola is one of the many pleasures of this reunion.

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But the band is intent on showing its quieter side too, with individual and duo collaborations that are predominantly unplugged. First up, Corea and di Meola join forces on "Children's Song #3," then the guitarist romps on acoustic as the piece ends with Corea returning to join in on his famed "Spain." Disc two tamps down the fireworks by featuring lengthy acoustic improvisational work from Corea, Clarke, and drummer Lenny White in that order, that provides a contrast, some might say breathing room, to the fiery group compositions, but also drag down the energy and slow the show's momentum. For jazz students, this is a mini master class for each instrument, yet how often others will return to these sections that comprise nearly half an hour of the second platter's running time is questionable. A 12-minute "bonus track" of "500 Miles High," a song from Light as a Feather, the RTF album with an earlier version of the band that did not include di Meola or White, is tacked on to the second disc. The set closes with producer Sir George Martin presenting the BBC Lifetime Achievement Award to the band, Corea's brief acceptance speech, and a short acoustic performance of "Romantic Warrior." It should be noted that this album's sleeve photos are from the associated DVD of the band's Montreux 2008 set, but only one tune here was recorded at that performance. ---Hal Horowitz, Rovi

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