Chick Corea – Chick Corea Plays (2020)

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Imagine having the opportunity to be in Chick Corea's living room. To hear him speak personally, with poignance and humor. To listen to him play, completely relaxed, as if with select family and friends. You need only close your eyes, and you are there. Corea takes you by the hand and welcomes you into an intimate gathering. He is as concerned with your comfort and ability to enjoy as he is with his nuanced note selections and seamless presentation of a legacy of piano compositions. Corea has you in the palm of his hands from the outset, leading the audience through vocal warm-ups that bring laughter and cleverly puts the listener in the proper mode to absorb the flurry of notes and improvisational bliss about to bestowed on them (you).

Aligning the perhaps previously invisible dots connecting Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and George Gershwin, Corea brings a contemporary vibe to the former's "Piano Sonata in F, KV332 (2nd Part-Adagio)," while honoring Mozart's conceptualism. Gershwin's "Someone to Watch Over Me" is branched with such subtlety it becomes an extension of one piece of music. Corea

is part of a long and storied history of compositional genius. Throughout the record he respectfully bridges time and artistry. The commonalties of such genius is examined, and engagingly brought to the twentieth first century.

Long a favorite, Corea pays tribute to Domenico Scarlatti with improvisations and sonata. This after speaking of Scarlatti, which becomes ScarLATTI in Corea's Bostonian articulation. As usual, he laughs with the audience about that and much more. Always at ease, he again creates an atmosphere of joy and comfort.

Although the music of Bill Evans and Antonio Carlos Jobim might rarely be spoken in the same breath, Corea again hears and grasps the shared sensibilities and brings them to his living room. His appreciative treatment of Evan's "Waltz for Debby" leads directly into Jobim's "Desafinado." The compositions are, once again, presented with their commonalities at the fore.

The music of Frederic Chopin and Alexander Scriabin is explored before closing the first set with a scintillating homage to Thelonious Monk. Corea's telepathic connection with Monk is well-documented. Darting and meandering through provocative images of Monk's "Pannonica," "Trinkle Tinkle," and "Blue Monk," Corea sails into intermission on a sea of high notes.

Classic Chick Corea begins the second set in welcome fashion with a calmly focused take on "Pastime Paradise." The sentimentality of the moment is broadened as Corea speaks of longtime friend Paco de Lucia. The late and legendary flamenco guitar virtuoso was an oft time collaborator of Corea. Here he is remembered with a heartfelt take on "Yellow Nimbus." The Corea composition was originally recorded as a duet with de Lucia on Corea's album Touchstone (Warner Brothers, 1982).

The intimacy tightens, or I suppose loosens up, depending on how you want to say it, as Corea plays on the spot portraits of two random members of the audience. This is followed by two duets with pianists from the audience. In this case, they were both experienced pianists who held their own in the moment. Corea has often played with beginners and children in these duets adding to the spontaneity and fun of the moment.

Corea concludes first talking about his Children's Songs before embarking on miniature versions of eight of them. There are twenty in all, recorded on Children's Songs (ECM, 1984).

The captivating free spirit of children is captured on these recordings. A fun way to conclude a wonderful evening. An evening in which he painted a deep historical canvas with a modern brushstroke.

Plays is a one-word title that speaks volumes. Yes, Corea plays brilliantly and with the gift of music in his heart. The mood is also playful. An artist with over half a century of extraordinary work under his belt, Corea continues to push it forward with seemingly more ideas in his head then there is time to accomplish them. Over the past few years Corea has sought the fun aspect more than ever. He is enjoying the ride, and joyfully taking us along with him. ---Jim Worsley, allaboutjazz.com

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