

John McLaughlin – Hearts Of Things – Live In Paris (2000)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Seven Sisters* 2. *Mother Tongues* 3. *Fallen Angels* 4. *The Divide* 5. *Tony* 6. *Acid Jazz*
Lineup: John McLaughlin, guitar Gary Thomas, sax Dennis Chambers, drums Matthew Garrison, bass Otmaro Ruiz, keyboards Victor Williams, percussion

On the self-titled 1997 studio record from his electric fusion band *The Heart of Things*, John McLaughlin's songwriting ranged from pensive ebb to wild clamor, played with melody and passion by the five piece band, while McLaughlin assumed the background role of a mentor. Some McLaughlin fans maligned the music as sterile and dry, lacking the spark found in his classic electric work like *Mahavishnu Orchestra*. However, *The Heart of Things - Live in Paris* shows this band with considerable creativity and interaction as they reinterpret some of the studio record songs and other material on stage. The live lineup includes McLaughlin on guitar, Gary Thomas on sax, Dennis Chambers on drums, Matthew Garrison on bass, Otmaro Ruiz replacing Jim Beard on keyboards, and Victor Williams on percussion.

McLaughlin's songwriting shifts through smooth odd meter grooves with angular melodic lines, not unlike the basic framework of early *Mahavishnu*, but the smoother instrumentation and execution of *The Heart of Things* band gives the music a wider dynamic range and a seasoned maturity. Guitar and sax play most of the melody lines in unison, further reinforcing the group approach. In "Tony," a moving and musically ideal tribute to Tony Williams, Chambers perfectly and appropriately executes the drum solo. Dynamics range skillfully in "Seven Sisters," despite a truncated feel at under 9 minutes. "Acid Jazz" triumphantly closes the live set and the album, surging from a quiet opening to a raucous guitar and drum duet.

Matthew Garrison's snappy yet supportive bass work impresses, perhaps highlighted by the strong low sound of the mix. Chambers as always is a master on the drums, from barely audible cymbal work to pounding double bass, and William's percussion thankfully does not drown out

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Chambers' subtleties. Ruiz's minimalist solo in "The Divide" grows tiresome quickly, but McLaughlin's playing shows supreme maturity and restraint as he cedes center stage to the younger players. But when he does take the spotlight, like the frantic guitar and drum duet in "Acid Jazz," he shows that the fire of his previous electric days remains.

The track selection highlights songs that were played live but aren't on The Heart of Things studio record, such as "Mother Tongues," "Tony," and the Gary Thomas tune "The Divide." Live in Paris clocks in over 77 minutes, so they couldn't have added anything more, but still a few omissions are noticeable, including "Mr. D.C.," a live powerhouse, and "Jazz Jungle," a staple of the Heart of Things European set.

Live in Paris is an excellent, single CD excerpt of the Heart of Things live European show that captures almost all of the live magic of this band, including subtleties and extremes beyond their studio recording. This CD has not been released in the US yet, but it has been released in Canada and the UK and is available mail order through various Internet retailers. ---Scott Andrews, allaboutjazz.com

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