CAB - CAB4 (2003)

1.- Hold On 4:37 2.- One for the Road 7:01 3.- Shizuka 5:26 4.- Tony Mac 8:33 5.- Raymond 6:31 6.- BB's Rhumba 4:53 7.- Bass Ackward 4:53 8.- Cloud 10 6:17 9.- Alphonse 6:27 10.- Jam & Toast 6:09 11.- Dede 6:14 Personnel: Tony MacAlpine, electric guitars, keyboards; Bunny Brunel, electric basses, keyboards, percussion loops; Dennis Chambers, drums; Brian Auger, B3 organ, keyboards (#1,4,9,10,11); Patrice Rushen, piano (#2,5,10), Rhodes (#4), keyboards (#7); Bernie Torelli, percussion loops (#4,5,7).

One of fusion's finest supergroups has jumped ship to Steve Vai's label and continued a steady climb to the top of the ranks. Jazz-rock veteran Brian Auger has become a regular fixture of CAB now, and the addition of guest Patrice Rushen on five tracks of this new disc only adds to the band's hot, soulful vibe.

The first couple of CAB efforts were head and shoulders above most of what was happening in fusion in the late 1990s, yet the band and its compositions sounded tentative at times. All that has been overcome in spades. This is a remarkable unit, their interplay marked by dime-turning tightness, their solos brilliantly exposed and crafted. "Hold On" is representative of all that is good and fine in CAB: a catchy tune with a bi-level structure (first mind-boggling unison lines, then key pads and guitar over tumbling rhythm), vein-melting solos by Auger on B3 and MacAlpine at his crunchy, wailing best.

Brunel does the low-note skulk on "One for the Road" as the organ and guitar blast through tense phrases. He remains a secret pleasure of many electric bassists; his unbelievable fluidity, especially on "Jam & Toast," makes one wonder why he hasn't yet reached the public profile of Jaco and Stanley. Dennis Chambers is, of course, ever-reliable as an attentive and rock-steady drummer, perhaps the band's finest overall asset. Guest Patrice Rushen has only improved since her heyday in the 1970s, becoming an astoundingly tasteful player while retaining her

fleet fingers and creative head. Her solo on “One for the Road” gives added luster to one of the album’s best grooves, and she locks in firmly on the funky “Jam & Toast.” Since she mostly contributes solos, her parts were probably overlaid after the fact. More’s the pity, as it would be excellent to hear her really trade off with Auger. They only appear together on the tenth track; perhaps a harbinger that Auger is on his way out of the group? If so, he’ll be missed but the keyboard chair will be left in good hands.

There’s usually a good variety of texture between the selections here. Bernie Torelli’s percussion loops on the discomfiting “Tony Mac” give the tune a sort of hip-hop lope that oddly meshes with the smooth fusion pace. About halfway through the selections become a bit more, well, generic in their styling, but things pick up when Bunny goes funky on “Bass Ackward.” The album notes indicate that Auger only plays B3 on the psychotically cycling theme “Dede,” so the taut piano might be a Brunel overdub. Whatever the case, it’s a hell of a way to close a singularly phenomenal album. CAB 4 is arguably the best effort yet from a group that bears further watching. ---Todd S.Jenkins, allaboutjazz

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