

Chicago - Chicago XXXVI Now (2014)



(01) [chicago] *Now* (02) [chicago] *More Will Be Revealed* (03) [chicago] *America* (04) [chicago] *Crazy Happy* (05) [chicago] *Free At Last* (06) [chicago] *Love Lives On* (07) [chicago] *Something's Coming, I Know* (08) [chicago] *Watching All The Colors* (09) [chicago] *Nice Girl* (10) [chicago] *Naked In The Garden Of Allah* (11) [chicago] *Another Trippy Day* (12) [chicago] *Introduction (Live)* Lou Pardini – vocals, keyboard James Pankow - trombone Jason Scheff - bass Keith Howland - guitars Lee Loughnane - trumpet Robert Lamm – keyboards, guitar Tris Imboden – drums Walfredo Reyes Jr. - percussion Walter Parazaider – saxophone, flute

There are few bands that can claim to have actively released 36 albums and enjoyed a career that spans five decades, but with 'Chicago XXXVI: Now', Chicago does exactly that.

You would expect that after 47 years in the industry, a band will have found their winning formula; a blueprint they can rely on to please their long serving fans, and sure enough, that is the case here. The opening title track alone explores the smorgasbord of genres that Chicago has nestled into over the years, from brass-led pop rock, to a hard rock guitar solo, via jazz funk odyssey in the middle section.

'Crazy Happy' is a hugely infectious number that smacks of the late 70s and early 80s, while 'Free At Last' keeps the upbeat theme rolling with an opening guitar line that ventures into modern indie rock. Then of course, for the band best known for ballads such as 'If You Leave Me Now', there had to be a new ballad present. From the seemingly ever-present chimes down to the title itself, 'Love Lives On' delivers everything you could ever expect from a soppy ballad and then some. Elsewhere, 'Naked In the Garden of Allah' introduces an experimental element of surprise, with Middle Eastern vibes running rampant over the track.

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Besides an incredibly cheesy and overly patriotic 'America' that could serve as a new National Anthem should 'The Star Spangled Banner' falter ("America is free... America is you and me") there is however, a downside to all this. 'Chicago XXXVI: Now' represents the band's first entirely new release since 2006's 'Chicago XXX', but 'new' just doesn't feel like the appropriate term. The album is due for release on July 4th, and yet it already sounds dated.

Of course, this is the sound of Chicago, and fans from their heyday are bound to enjoy this new offering. But for an album that was recording on a high-tech, portable recording studio that has travelled everywhere with the band, allowing them to record in Nashville, Toledo, New Jersey and many more locations, it all feels somewhat superfluous. There are flashes of brilliance here and some songs really stick in the mind, but overall, one cannot shake a looming sense of redundancy. --- hitthefloor.com

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