Brian Culbertson – XII (2010)



01. Feelin' It (feat. Chuck Brown) (4:30)
02. Another Love (feat. Kenny Lattimore) (4:06)
03. It's Time (4:05)
04. Out On The Floor (feat. Brian McKnight) (5:04)
05. Waiting For You (4:39)
06. Stay Wit It (4:05)
07. Skies Wide Open (feat. Avant) (4:38)
08. Forever (4:27)
09. Don't U Know Me By Now (feat. Faith Evans) (4:49)
10. That's Life (feat. Earl Klugh) (4:38)
11. I Wanna Love You (feat. Ray Parker Jr.) (5:41)
12. I Don't Know (5:08)

Given the widespread critical acclaim and commercial success Brian Culbertson garnered from 2008's retro Bringing Back the Funk, it would be understandably tempting for him -- or any musician -- to revisit it wholesale. However, Culbertson throws a changeup on XII and comes up with a set of collaborative originals with stellar guests that relies more on modern adult R&B than funk, and more on sophisticated pop than it does on contemporary jazz. He's got real star power on this set; it's a groover that includes everything from club to go-go funk, up- and midtempo R&B, and polished bedroom ballads, and it all holds together seamlessly. The set opens with "Feelin' It," which features some comedy from Sinbad in the intro and outro, but more importantly, Chuck Brown's vocals are the centerpiece -- Culbertson's piano line quotes liberally from Brown's classic "Bustin' Loose" (he gets a co-write). Ray Parker, Jr.'s guitar and Alex Al's bassline turn it into a monster. Next up is a soulful stepper in "Another Love," with vocals by Kenny Lattimore. Club makes another appearance in "Out on the Floor," with Brian McKnight laying down his brand of smooth groove above a killer string arrangement and a lockstep funky backbeat. Nu-soul balladeer Avant sings on the hit single "Skies Wide Open"; with Randy Bowland's guitar playing an excellent counterpoint to his vocal, it is among the

standout cuts here. Faith Evans fronts Culbertson's band on "Don't U Know Me by Now," a midtempo attitude strutter. Parker makes a fine yet minimal vocal appearance on the simmering babymaker "I Wanna Love You," compensated for by killer guitar work and the spoken word bit from Floetry's Natalie Stewart on set closer "I Don't Know." Of the four instrumental tracks, the most notable are "It's Time" and the transcendently joyful contemporary jazz number "That's Life," co-written by Culbertson, Parker, and Earl Klugh, who also plays on it. While nothing on XII breaks new ground, one suspects that this wasn't Culbertson's intention: he was looking to write and record an album that had "quality" stamped all over it. For its diversity, imagination, and execution, he gets high marks: XII stands among his best. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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