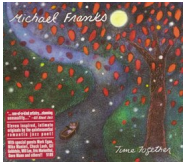


Michael Franks - Time Together (2011)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 07 July 2011 18:25 - Last Updated Saturday, 07 February 2015 14:26

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01. *Now That The Summer's Here* (5:27) 02. *One Day In St. Tropez* (5:19) 03. *Summer In New York* (5:57) 04. *Mice* (5:26) 05. *Charlie Chan In Egypt* (5:29) 06. *I'd Rather Be Happy Than Right* (4:41) 07. *Time Together* (3:37) [play](#) 08. *Samba Blue* (4:45) 09. *My Heart Said Wow* (2:47) [play](#) 10. *If I Could Make September Stay* (5:23) 11. *Feathers From An Angel's Wings* (8:01)

Personnel: Michael Franks-vocals, David Spinozza-guitar, Mike Mainieri-vibraphone, Eric Marienthal-saxophone Till Bronner-brass Alex Sipiagin -brass, Billy Kilson-drums, Romero Lubambo-guitar, Veronica Nunn-vocals

In my opinion, this is the best Michael Franks album since 1983's "Passionfruit." I am a twenty-something music enthusiast and over the years I've collected all of Michael's SEVENTEEN! proper releases, most on vinyl, which is undoubtedly the best way to experience his music. By this point in his career, Michael should really be considered a legend in the jazz pop world. Alas, he is highly underrated. This is a shame because he is the "real deal." He continues to effortlessly blend jazz, pop, and world music with stunningly brilliant lyrics to great effect. Michael is at his best when his complex melodic ideas are designed to slowly seep into your sub-conscious in such a way that one line like, "The lady wants to know..." triggers immediate auditory recall of that song's lyrics and melody. For me, the albums that do this best are Art of Tea, Sleeping Gypsy, Burchfield Nines, Tiger in the Rain, One Bad Habit, and Passionfruit. I intentionally organized those albums chronologically and omitted 1982's "Objects of Desire" which never quite clicked with me. Let me be clear -- Michael Franks has never released a "bad" album. I just happen to prefer certain production and songwriting techniques that are present on his timeless '70s and early '80s albums. To be more specific, I feel that the '80s had a slightly adverse impact on some of Michael's output. This is particularly true with the albums "Skin Dive" and "Camera Never Lies." In anticipation of this album, I read almost all of the Amazon.com reviews of Michael's back catalog, and I seem to be in the minority here. But to me, "Skin Dive" and "Camera Never Lies" sound extremely dated because of the heavy use of compression, drum machines, and special effects. Yes, these albums include some brilliant compositions, but the brilliance is overshadowed by the '80s production. I have some reservations about the '90s albums for similar reasons, but mostly because the compositions

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seem to wander and the use of saxophone is too liberal for my aesthetic.

But I digress. "Time Together" is a modern masterpiece. I have listened to it at least twelve times and the songs are already ingrained in my musical memory. It is impossible to NOT memorize the clever/cute/insightful lyrics of "Mice" or the catchy chorus to "Now That The Summer's Here." Add some of Joe Sample's Fender Rhodes and "I'd Rather Be Happy Than Right" could have easily been included on "The Art of Tea." And the brilliance doesn't end there. "Charlie Chan in Egypt" and "My Heart Said Wow" offer up a formidable dose of jazz fare with unbelievably witty lyrics.

The production here is very clean and mostly organic (e.g. classical guitars, real drums/percussion, etc.). The one notable exception is "Summer In New York" which features electronic drums and synth patches. Fortunately, it also happens to be a flawless composition that is undeniably groovy. And the drum/keyboard programming doesn't obstruct the brilliance inherent in the tune. The tasty trumpet solo also helps create a perfectly laid-back atmosphere. Finally, "Time Together" features a number of bossa-nova songs that round out the album. I am a huge fan of Michael's Brazilian leanings, and, for me, "One Day In St. Tropez" and "Samba Blue" don't disappoint!

In summation, forget all of the fodder that radio stations will try to pass off as this year's "summer anthem." This is it. A perfect summer album. Grab a good book, an ice-cold lemonade, and enjoy. Thank you, Michael, for your veritable contributions to music... --- Noah Wilson. Amazon.com

Jazz singer/songwriter Michael Franks is an artist most jazz fans feel strongly about one way or another. His unique, romantic poet-cum-laid-back hipster approach to jazz signing is breezy, light, and languid. It's also uniquely his own, though deeply influenced by Brazilian jazz, bossa, and samba. Time Together, his first recording of new material in five years -- and his debut for Shanachie -- is unlikely to change anyone's opinion of him, but that doesn't mean this is a rote recording. Time Together is an airy, groove-ridden summer travelog that ranges from St. Tropez and New York to Paris, France, and Egypt; it journeys through the nostalgic past and finds space in the present moment, with cleverly notated, languorous, ironic observations about life. Franks split the production and arranging duties between Charles Blenzig, Gil Goldstein, Chuck Loeb, Scott Petito, and Mark Egan.

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The rest of the international cast on this polished 11-song set includes old friends and new faces David Spinozza, Mike Mainieri, David Mann, Eric Marienthal, Till Brönner, Alex Spiagin, Jerry Marotta, Billy Kilson, Romero Lubambo, and backing vocalist Veronica Nunn. Time Together is wonderfully polished without being overly slick. The set opens with "Now That the Summer's Here," a samba-inspired paean to laziness with excellent solos by Bronner's trumpet and Marienthal's alto. The arrangement by Loeb includes a perfectly balanced meld of acoustic and electric guitars, with the harmony chorus between Franks and Carmen Cuesta adding an essentially restrained yet celebratory tone. "One Day in St. Tropez" is one Franks' finest reminiscence songs. Goldstein's acoustic piano, Greg Cohen's bass, and Lubambo's acoustic guitar evoke classic bossa while the singer details in exotically rich, nostalgically romantic lyrics a 1963 hitchhiking excursion through Southern France. "Mice" is a humorous, metaphorically hip irony, illustrated beautifully by Manieri's vibes, Petit's bass, and Spinozza's guitar with a backing vocal from Beth Neilsen-Chapman. "Samba Blue," another of the album's finer tracks, offers the tale of a long-ago love affair in Paris, without a hint of cloying or regret, thanks to Franks fine lyric and melody, and a jaunty Loeb arrangement featuring a beautiful alto solo by Marienthal. "My Heart Said Wow" is a straight-ahead duet with Nunn, boasting a fine trumpet solo by Spiagin's trumpet. "Feathers from an Angel's Wing," the longest and perhaps most beautiful track here is, fittingly, also the closer. Arranged by Egan, whose fretless bass introduces it, Loeb's guitars, Clifford Carter's keys, and Joe Bonadio's drums illustrate it elegantly.

The singer's use of Zen wisdom in the modern jazz lyric and melody, underscores everything fine and right in Franks' art from The Art of Tea to the present day. While his framework may be contemporary, his execution is timeless, making Time Together Franks' most consistent, graceful collection of songs in the 21st century. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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