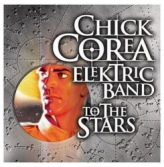
Chick Corea Electric Band - To The Stars (2004)



01 - Check Blast [3:39]
02 - Port View 1 [0:55]
03 - Mistress Luck - A Portrait [5:32]
04 - Mistress Luck - The Party [3:24]
05 - Port View 2 [1:10]
06 - Johnny's Landing [10:39]
07 - Port View 3 [2:30]
08 - Alan Corday [7:09]
09 - Port View 4 [1:38]
10 - Hound Of Heaven [6:16]
11 - Port View 5 [1:15]
12 - The Long Passage [10:47]
13 - Port View 6 [1:35]
14 - Jocelyn - The Commander [5:02]
15 - Port View 7 [2:32]
16 - Captain Jocelyn - Tribute By His Crew [2:03]
17 - Captain Jocelyn - The Pianist [2:13]
Chick Corea - keyboards Frank Gambale - guitar Eric Marienthal - saxophones John Patitucci - bass Dave Weckl - drums

Normally it's nice to hear progression in an artist's work, but in this case an exception is warranted.

Pianist Chick Corea returns to some of his better days with his Elektric Band of the late 1980s and early 1990s on To The Stars , a reunion with the original five members of the group. They pick up pretty much where they left off, even though some of the players have progressed well beyond the familiar roles they return to here. Fans of the Elektric Band will likely rank it among

their upper-tier efforts, if not quite equal to their best moments.

The album and some song titles are from a fiction story by L. Ron Hubbard, foremost author of the scientology faith Corea has lengthy ties to. There's also an ambient spacey theme to some of the compositions, mostly in a series of short interludes between various pieces and in some of the electronic keyboard voicings Corea chooses.

The quintet recorded To The Stars several months after launching a reunion tour during the summer of 2003 and they clearly grew more comfortable with each other during that span. The strength of this album is mostly in composition and their group collages; the disappointment is the soloing, which has too much of a been-there-done-that feel and seldom sees anyone approaching their considerable abilities.

The opening "Check Blast" is a group jam with a rather noticeable resemblance to 1991's Inside Out , as is the case with various other passages. This is not necessarily a bad thing since that album is easily their best and most adventurous, but in dredging up memories of that standard there is a faint let-down that they don't quite achieve it.

All five players are established lead artists—some due to this association—but giving them an individual audition here is a hunt-and-choose affair. Bassist John Patitucci proves he can still fit brainy lines into fusion mayhem on "Mistress Luck." Saxophonist Eric Marienthal and guitarist Frank Gambale still deliver crowd-pleasing rock riffs on songs like "Johnny's Landing" and "The Long Passage." Corea's always colorful and somewhat Latin-tinged playing is scattered throughout, but doesn't equal the strong compositional efforts he brings to the session. A bigger disappointment is not hearing more of drummer Dave Weckl, who carries the group nicely with his trademark grooves that are both helter-skelter and stunningly precise, but gets few solo opportunities.

To The Stars is akin to a very good popcorn movie sequel, offering an enjoyable, accessible and comfortingly familiar listen, but not necessarily one to linger in the consciousness or the CD player for an extended period of time. Corea fans will no doubt want to check it out, and those wanting to acquaint themselves with the Elektric Band could do worse, but better choices might be Inside Out or the harder-to-find double-CD GRP Super Live In Concert , half of which features a strong full-length performance by Corea's band. ---Mark Sabbatini, allaboutjazz.com

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