John McLaughlin – Floating Point (2008)



1. Abbaji (for Ustad Alla Rakha); 2. Raju; 3. Maharina; 4. Off the One; 5. The Voice; 6. Inside Out; 7. 1 4 U; 8. Five Peace Band. * John McLaughlin: guitar, guitar synthesizer; * Hadrien Feraud: electric bass; * Louiz Banks: keyboards; * Ranjit Barot: drums; * Niladri Kumar: electric sitar; * Sivamani: percussion; * Shankar Mahavedan: vocals; * U Rajesh: electric mandolin; * Debashish Bhattacharya: Hindustani slide guitar; * Naveen Kumar: bamboo flute; * Shashank: bamboo flute; * George Brooks: soprano saxophone.

John McLaughlin's greatest strength, other than being the quickest ever electric guitarist in jazz, has been the ability to reinvent himself. With Floating Point, he has vastly improved the concept he originally fomented on the CD Industrial Zen, where he used a variety of different groupings. This ensemble has a relatively finite lineup, modified from the previous combo in that they play to McLaughlin's strong willed ideal of fusing his guitar synthesizer to a more contemporary sound. Where Industrial Zen was more about jamming, the band here is focused and cohesive, playing deft melodies and busy, rhythmic funk that allows the music to breathe considerably deeper. McLaughlin's impressive core sidemen include the formidable electric bass guitarist Hadrien Feraud who is retained from the prior band, and drummer Ranjit Barot. They are active players whose concentrated styles and techniques fit well with the naturally fleet guitar work of McLaughlin. What makes this recording listenable over time is the consistency of the music while avoiding being homogeneous. "Raju" has that distinctive McLaughlin signature quality, with blurring unison lines and an Eastern Indian flavor so important to the spirit of the guitarist. The darting and dancing melody of "Off the One" is also pure McLaughlin, as stated over the years. He has forged bonds of steel with this band via the busy drumming of Barot to match the pronounced zig-zag patterns, and a bamboo flute on top of it all. Scat singing during "The Voice" with gliding guitar synth from the leader sounds like musical velvet, while the Indian scat of "Inside Out," complemented by the electric mandolin of U. Rajesh, reflects McLaughlin's days with Shakti merging with Mahavishnu-type sixteenth notes in brave counterpoint. A funkier side comes out during "Abbaji (For Alla Rakha)" in the reconstructed style McLaughlin has favored since the album Belo Horizonte, with soprano sax from George Brooks, and the Hundustani slide guitar of Debashish Bhattacharya in the midst of the melody, while a slower, soulful, contemporary beat identifies the lotus flower-sweet "Maharina." Unexpected sounds are on the

tail-end of this CD, as a happy samba with bamboo flute identifies the brightest track, "1 4 U." The closer "Five Peace Band" is a fast tick-tock organ-based jam with a straighter, less processed electric guitar, and is a prelude to the all-star ensemble of the same name that McLaughlin was forming with Chick Corea. This is a surprisingly fine effort, ebbing and flowing from track to track, with McLaughlin's high-level musicianship shining through, same as it ever was. ---Michael G. Nastos, Rovi

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