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For more information, please contact:

Mike Wilpizeski at 718-459-2117

email: mikew@headsup.com

Tour Publicity: **Kelly Johans-DiCillo** at 216-464-2313 (ext. 247)

email: kjohans@headsup.com

Electronic Media Kit

<http://www.headsup.com/mediakit/32030/industry.html>

**FOURPLAY REACHES HIGHER
ON NEW HEADS UP RECORDING**

***Let's Touch The Sky* welcomes Guitarist Chuck Loeb to the fold;
Guest Vocalists include Anita Baker and Ruben Studdard**

Sometimes you have to shake things up, push a little farther, reach a little higher – even when you're a contemporary jazz foursome that's been operating at the top of its collective game for two decades.

After twenty years and a dozen albums, in an industry that has undergone sweeping transformations in the past decade, Fourplay knows that the only thing that's certain, in music or any other business, is change. The latest proof of that axiom is the new face in their lineup – that of guitarist Chuck Loeb, who makes his compelling debut with the quartet on *Let's Touch The Sky*, the band's new recording scheduled for release on October 26, 2010, on Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group.

Loeb completes the four-man crew that also includes the band's founding members: keyboardist Bob James, bassist/vocalist Nathan East and drummer/percussionist Harvey Mason. *Let's Touch The Sky* also includes stirring performances by guest vocalists Anita Baker and Ruben Studdard.

The infusion of new blood into the Fourplay lineup creates an opportunity to bring an even newer level of energy and inspiration into a band that is already known for taking chances and pushing the limits of contemporary jazz. "All four of us have been in this business long enough to know that there's always pressure to compromise, and we don't want to do that," says James. "We don't want to end up in the middle of the pack. We always aim to be leaders, and take the music to another level and raise the standards higher. I think the music on this new record, thanks in large part to Chuck's early contributions – and to the ongoing team spirit of the band as a whole – is very much a reflection of that philosophy."

Loeb, who openly admits to being a fan of Fourplay since their earliest recordings, sees his new membership status as the opportunity of a lifetime. "I want to be a part of the legacy they've built, going all the way back to their first recording and right up to their most recent one," he says. "There's been an incredible level of quality in the musicianship, the writing, the whole sonic palette that they're famous for. I'm excited to be a part of the next step in the evolution of all that."

The sense of romanticism combined with optimism defining the project makes the rhythmic and exotic title track the fitting opener to the set. Written by James, the song sits atop a comfortable Latin groove and showcases the interplay between the keyboardist and his new band mate on acoustic guitar. The follow-up track, Loeb's driving and intense "3rd Degree" is a reference to his role as the third guitarist in the

Fourplay saga (the original lineup included Lee Ritenour, who was later replaced by Larry Carlton in the late '90s). The track is built on a syncopated rhythm that allows plenty of room for everyone on hand to stretch out and demonstrate their virtuosity.

Mason contributes back-to-back compositions "More Than a Dream" and "Pineapple Getaway," which together exemplify his versatility as a composer. The latter is lighthearted and infectious, while the former is built around a gorgeous romantic melody. "Often, drummers are narrowly defined just by virtue of the fact that rhythm and groove are very much what the drummer is all about," says Mason. "I prefer to add color, dynamics and mix it up whenever possible. As a composer, I try to take advantage of the limitless canvas available with Fourplay by using as broad a spectrum as possible."

Mining his experience as a collaborator with the likes of Phil Collins and Eric Clapton, East weighs in with the plush sophisticated pop vocal "I'll Still Be Lovin' You." Nate's vocals have become a popular feature on the recent Fourplay albums, and as Bob points out, he finds himself in heady company here. "We're very excited about this song," says James, "and the confidence that Nathan had to jump into the mix between two other superstar vocalists and hold his own was quite impressive."

The poignant "Gentle Giant" is James' tribute to the late Hank Jones, the jazz pianist who passed away in May 2010, just as James was assembling his share of material for the new record. "The news of his passing sent me to the piano to see if I could figure out a way to pay my respects to his memory and what he meant to me musically," says James. "I certainly didn't try to write a song in Hank's style. It would have been impossible to do that. But I hope the relaxed feel of the song is a fitting tribute to him."

East's evocative & funky "A Night In Rio," Loeb's aural landscape "Above and Beyond", and the cool swing of James' "Golden Faders" (a tip of the hat to long time Fourplay engineer Ken Freeman) add three more glimpses of the new direction the group is heading in its 20th year.

Guest vocalists Ruben Studdard and Anita Baker appear on the soulful "Love TKO" and the dreamlike "You're My Thrill," respectively. Studdard was recruited by East, after the two had appeared together in a live performance in Washington, DC. "They were filming a television special," East recalls. "There was a break to reload the cameras, and I just started playing the bass line of 'Love TKO.' Ruben stepped up to the microphone to sing, and everyone in the room just stopped. I knew right then that we needed to have him sing this song on a Fourplay record, and when we asked him, he was very much up for it. The whole thing just came together so easily."

Baker joined Fourplay in the studio for "You're My Thrill," the closing track, after sharing the stage with the band at the JVC Jazz Festival in Oakland in late 2009. "We didn't know when we'd have the chance to get Anita into the studio," says James, "so we just put together an arrangement for the song with no input from her at all. When she got to the studio, we didn't know if she'd like it, but after one listen, we knew she was intrigued. We recorded it within a day or two."

Mason, who has held down the groove for Fourplay since the very beginning, says time has done nothing to dull the edge. The band continues to explore new ways to reach for the next level of musicianship and creativity. "***Let's Touch The Sky*** is the perfect title for where we are right now," he says. "In some ways, bringing someone new into the fold has made us a new band. It opens up new opportunities and new potential, and we want to see how high we can take it."

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