

# Return to Forever

## Bios and Discography

### CHICK COREA

One of the most creatively restless and indefatigably imaginative artists in jazz, Chick Corea defies categorization. He's a musical omnivore. He is equally at home in acoustic settings as in plugged-in formats. He performs sublime solo concerts and welcomes richly arranged collaborations with orchestras. In recent years, he has explored new collaborations (for example, with banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck on their duo album *The Enchantment*) as well as revisited old bands (including an extensive tour with a quartet featuring Hubert Laws, Eddie Gomez and Airto Moreira as well as the 35th anniversary celebration of his chamber jazz duo partnership with Gary Burton that resulted in this year's two-CD set *The New Crystal Silence*).

Corea broke onto the jazz scene in the early '60s, working with bands led by such stars as Mongo Santamaria, Willie Bobo, Blue Mitchell, Herbie Mann and Stan Getz. One of his significant sideman gigs was with Miles Davis' seminal electric fusion bands, from 1968-70. As a solo artist, Corea recorded his debut in 1966, *Tones for Joan's Bones*, followed by what's come to be known as a classic jazz recording, 1968's *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*, with Miroslav Vitous and Roy Haynes.

While Corea's musical career teems with significant explorations and advances, one of his highlight moments came in 1971 when he created Return to Forever, the legendary jazz-rock fusion band. While it lasted just seven years in three different editions, RTF is heralded as one of the most important and forward-looking bands in jazz history. 2008's reunion of the quartet version of the band is the most anticipated event in recent years, as the four partners in fusion revisit past material played in the present tense.

### STANLEY CLARKE

When Stanley Clarke moved to New York in 1971 from his Philadelphia hometown, he arrived at a time of major flux in the jazz world. He started out playing acoustic bass with such marquee leaders as Pharoah Sanders, Horace Silver, Art Blakey, Gil Evans, Joe Henderson and Stan Getz. But the young vet of R&B and rock bands in high school gravitated to a more expansive setting to seek beyond the jazz mainstream. He and Chick Corea bonded in their mutual desire to reach larger audiences, and he joined up with the keyboardist in his pioneering fusion band, Return to Forever, which is where his prowess on both the acoustic and electric basses was established. Clarke stayed with the band throughout its 1971-77 history.

During this time, Clarke also vaulted into a leader role, recording several mid-'70s albums, including his crossover gem, *School Days* (1976). Along with Jaco Pastorius, Clarke was acknowledged as one of the most influential and creative electric bassists in jazz. Throughout the years, Clarke recorded funk- and

R&B-styled albums (including a collaboration with keyboardist George Duke in the urban music-oriented Clarke/Duke Project) as well as composed for television and film. He has recorded film score albums as well as superb jazz albums, including 1988's *If This Bass Could Only Talk* and 2007's *The Toys of Men*.

Regarding the latter, which features music that reacts to the current chaotic state of war, Clarke said, "Bruce Springsteen has the luxury to write words about his agony over the war, but my challenge is to pull off the same effect instrumentally. I'm a film composer, and I write music to enhance the drama of a story. I approached the opening suite like film, composing the music to be picturesque." The album also features solo acoustic bass tunes, about which Clarke said, "I recorded these in my dining room at 3 in the morning while my wife was sleeping. The acoustics are great because of the high ceiling and the wood. I wanted the pieces to sound like when I practice, with the feet tapping included."

A multi-Grammy Award winner, Clarke garnered Bass Player Magazine's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.

## AL DI MEOLA

Equally as curious and adventuresome as his RTF colleagues, virtuoso guitarist Al Di Meola has explored a range of music throughout his career, including Brazilian (beginning with his well-received 1985 *Cielo e Terra* album), Argentine tango (including two tributes to bandoneón maestro Astor Piazzolla, 1990's *Plays Piazzolla* and '93's *Heart of the Immigrants*) and a brilliant three-guitar trio project alongside fellow greats John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia (beginning in 1980 and highlighted by that year's classic recording *Friday Night in San Francisco*). The group lasted until 1983 and then reunited for a new album, *Super Guitar Trio*, and world tour in 1996.

All of Di Meola's multifaceted talents can be traced back to moment he was thrust into the spotlight as a 19-year-old guitar phenom with Return to Forever in 1974. He replaced original RTF quartet guitarist Bill Connors and became an immediate star in the superstar fusion group, recording on three RTF albums through 1976.

In that same year Di Meola made his first solo recording, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, a remarkable fusion project in its own right, followed by such superb outings as *Elegant Gypsy* (1976) and *Casino* (1977).

Following RTF, DiMeola became an active leader as both an electric guitar "shredder" and, in recent years, a distinguished acoustic guitarist. Guitar historian Robert Lynch has commented on Di Meola's significance: "In the history of the electric guitar, no one figure has done more to advance the instrument in a purely technical manner than [him]. His total command of the various styles and scales is simply mind-boggling."

A sampling of Di Meola's career collaborators includes guitarist Carlos Santana, keyboardist Jan Hammer and bandoneón ace Dino Saluzzi. Di Meola's fine solo guitar outings include 1996's *Christmas: Winter Nights* and 2006's *Diabolic Inventions and Seductions for Solo Guitar*.

## LENNY WHITE

Born in New York City, drummer Lenny White entered the jazz major leagues in 1968 in saxophonist Jackie McLean's band. In 1969 Miles Davis enlisted him to participate in the groundbreaking Bitches Brew project, and the next year he was in the drum seat for Freddie Hubbard's classic *Red Clay* album. White joined the group Azteca in 1972 but let that job slide when he joined the second edition of Return to Forever the same year.

His funkified drum style energized the quartet, helping to define the RTF sound of that period. *The All Music Guide* says, "As a member of Return to Forever, White gained a strong reputation as one of the top fusion drummers, but he was always versatile enough to play in many settings."

After leaving RTF in 1976, White delved into other fusion and funk projects. His debut solo outing was 1976's *Venusian Summer* followed by *Big City* for the Nemperor imprint (Atlantic Records). He was signed by Elektra in 1978, which resulted in a string of albums, including *Best of Friends* in 1978. White worked in various groups, including Twennynine (which he founded) and the Jamaica Boys, as well as in such all-star bands as Echoes of an Era and Griffith Park.

This year Istanbul Agop will issue a Lenny White cymbal, the 22-inch Lenny White Signature Ride, developed by the drummer and master cymbal makers in Istanbul, Turkey.

## DISCOGRAPHY

Over the lifespan of Return to Forever, the band existed in three different formats: a quintet that recorded two albums (1972–73), an electric quartet that delivered four discs (1973–76) and an expanded ensemble that included a four-piece brass section and a vocalist, which recorded a studio and a live album (1977).

- *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy* (1973)—Chick Corea, keyboards; Bill Connors, guitar; Stanley Clarke, bass; Lenny White, drums
- *Where Have I Known You Before* (1974)—same personnel, except Al Di Meola replaced Connors on guitar
- *No Mystery* (1975)—same personnel (Note: winner of Grammy Award for Best Jazz Instrumental Performance, Group)
- *Romantic Warrior* (1976)—same personnel