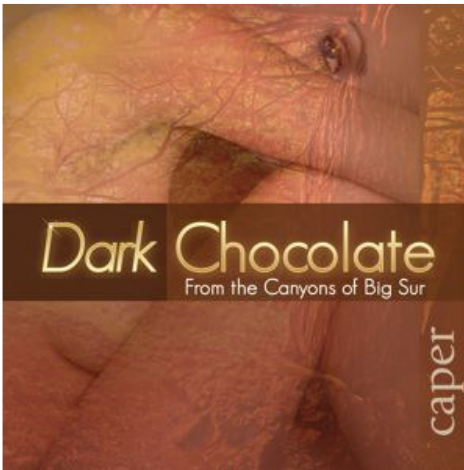


FAME Review: Dark Chocolate - Caper: From the Canyons of Big Sur


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Caper: From the Canyons of Big Sur

[Dark Chocolate](#)

Megawave Records - MEGW0382

Available from *MVD Entertainment Group*.

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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Whereas Dark Chocolate's *Unwrapped* ([here](#)) was an instrumental affair exhibiting classicalist jazz fusion ingredients, *Caper: From the Canyons of Big Sur* is another beast altogether. That alone should be of interest, that a band would change up fairly radically and feature voice so heavily, but, true to the complex nature of this ensemble, nothing's ever done simply, pedestrianly, or without a ton of thought given over to what music **can** be rather than what it is. No sooner does the first cut, *I Give my Soul*, flow through the speakers than a wealth of unusually shifting time signatures and an almost hallucinatory milieu manifest as the listener is captivated by the sultry presence of Ashley Mazanec within the cut's Annette Peacock-flavored ambience. More, elements of Robert Wyatt's processes creep subtly in, adding more spice to an already exotic opener.

Quest kicks up in a Chieli Minucci ([here](#)) vein by way of a touch of Kraftwerk in a perky mood, maybe even a trifle of Manfred Mann, orchestra gliding like a barn swallow behind it all. Piquant flavors of Latin influences make themselves known, a bit of Bonfá here, Costas there, light, bouncy, layered like a golden fog drifting through afternoon canyons (keep in mind that Big Sur is the CD's reference point, as well as, I'm willing to bet, the very trippy Julia Pfeiffer-Burns Park below it). *Chocolate Jam* is a Gayle Moran-era Return to Forever moded instrumental with Mazanec enchanting Moran/Purim melisma beside the band, keyboardist Weber lingo rolling in a cascading piano of changing hues and glinting lights amid evergreen recesses. Ah, but wait 'til you catch the sophisticated *Funko*, a blend of Wah Wah Watson, Lonnie Liston Smith, and a headily rising spiral of be-bop, scat, and atonality.

The group line-up can change radically from song to song, and Spyrogyra bassist Kim Stone, though the ensemble's founder, isn't on even half the cuts, but that's by no means a deficit and poses an interesting question: what would happen if the initiator of a project stepped out often enough to let the rest of the band go to it on its own? I suspect this accounts for the CD's unusual nature, and, being a child of the 70s, I love the continually morphing result, the sliding framework, and the expanding borders. *Caper* may be an inspiration arising from a window on the California coast, but it reaches far beyond. This is music you cannot predict, you have to let it draw your mind into the myriad exotica of the creative miasma and then to the hand sketching and painting canvases of the real and unreal, as much hedonistic gambol as intellectual exercise and narcotically enticing paradise.

Track List:

- I Give my Soul
- Gitane
- Quest
- Come Join
- Fundament
- On the Train
- Boygirl
- Funko
- Chocolate Jam
- Uncjained
- Los Tres Cajones
- The Rains Come Down

No writing credits given.

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