



January 22, 2009

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This companion live CD to the *La Piedra del Sol* DVD from Latin jazz-rock band Azteca documents the reunion concert at Hollywood's Key Club in September of 2007. This was the first time the band had gotten back together in more than 30 years, their short lived career lasted just two albums and some touring before bad management, internal conflicts, and drug & alcohol abuse splintered the group



before they had a chance to make the big time like their contemporaries Santana. Originally formed by former Santana members Coke and Pete Escovedo, many of the surviving members were coaxed into the reunion by longtime fan Daniel E. Mesa, who produced and directed the DVD release. This is the full live show from that reunion evening in 2007, a 9 song set of Latin grooves, jazz intricacy, sweet R&B, and rock firepower. The band now comprises Pete Escovedo (timbales/vocals/percussion), Wendy Haas (vocals/percussion), Errol Knowles (vocals/percussion), Lenny White (drums), Paul Jackson (bass), Victor Pantoja (conga/vocals), Jules Rowell (valve trombone), Bill Courtail (guitar), Murray Lowe (keyboards), Melecio Magdaluyo (flute/sax), Mario Gonzalez (trumpet), and Alex Murzyn (piccolo/sax). As you can imagine it's somewhat of a 'big band' ensemble, so the sound is rich and full, lots of melody and groove, with plenty of room for solo spots.

Most of the songs here are fairly lengthy, falling into the 5-12 minute range, horns and reeds always upfront in the mix, with lots of percussion complementing the arrangements. Vocals vary from English to Spanish, and the rhythms are very rooted in the Latin tradition, which gives these songs an extra special flavor. While the band doesn't rock out as much as Santana, they have more jazz and R&B leanings, and the heavy 'groove thing' really is what propels Azteca, the myriad of percussionists, the presence of drum legend Lenny White plus the deep bass lines from Paul Jackson is what makes these guys tick. These songs were all originally written in the early 70's, so there's that vintage feel to these tunes that the band perfectly captured here in this live environment, tunes like "Mamita Linda", "Ain't Got No Special Woman", "Find Love Today",

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"Azteca", and "Someday We'll Get By" all designed to get your toes tapping, while your senses are intrigued by the soaring horn and reed arrangements (lovers of classic Chicago or Blood Sweat & Tears take note), not to mention the tasty guitar licks from Courtial. The highlight here though is the raging finale "Whatcha Gonna Do", a near 12 minute Latin jam featuring a few members of the Escovedo family, including Pete's daughter Sheila E, the famed percussionist who played with Prince for many years.

This is one of those live recordings that just gets more and more enjoyable with each listen, and overall is tons of fun from start to finish. The band has continued to play sporadic shows since this night in 2007, so hopefully we will continue to see more activity within the Azteca camp for years to come. Now, if they would only re-release their two studio albums from the early 70's on CD again, as they are currently out of print with remaining copies being quite expensive.

Track Listing

1. Mamita Linda
2. Someday We'll Get By
3. Find Love Today
4. Ain't Got No Special Woman
5. Azteca
6. Pete Introduces the Band
7. New Day On the Rise
8. Non Pacem
9. Pete Talks To the Crowd
10. Peace Everybody
11. Whatcha Gonna Do

Added: January 17th 2009

Reviewer: Pete Pardo

Score: ★★★★★

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