

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHICK COREA

CORTLAND, NEW YORK
July, 1974

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Interview with pianist and composer Chick Corea following a concert at the State University of New York at Cortland, in July 1974. The concert featured Corea's first all-electric "Return to Forever" group, consisting of Corea; bassist Stanley Clarke, guitarist Al Dimeola, and drummer Lenny White. The period of this interview was a very formative one musically for both interviewee and interviewer.

I JUST WANTED TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR MUSICIANSHIP. I'VE FOLLOWED YOU, WELL, FROM THE BEGINNING. I GUESS I SHOULD START OFF BY ASKING, WHAT KIND OF MUSIC WERE YOU PLAYING OUT THERE TONIGHT? WHAT KIND OF MUSIC IS THAT? IS THAT JAZZ, STILL, OR ROCK MUSIC?

We – neither myself nor the others in the band – make any sort of attempt to put a label on it. I think it's basic artistic integrity of any artist who's actually creating music. You create the music. We create our music with the single intention of making people feel really good and pleasurable and aesthetic and beautiful from what we do. And we don't limit it by categories.

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Because if we say 'rock' it's not that because we do so many other things. If we say 'jazz' it's not that, because we do so many other things; and so on and so forth, right? So we leave that thing generally up to people like yourself who like to talk about the music, critics and writers, musicologists, and the like. I just regard it as a thing that I'm creating to create an experience with people.

MAYBE THE POINT I'M TRYING TO GET TO, IS THAT, I THINK, YOU REALIZE YOU HAVE A DIFFERENT CROWD NOW THAN OVER A FEW YEARS AGO.YOUR CROWD HAS CHANGED AND ITS EVIDENT FROM TONIGHT THAT ITS NOT THE 'JAZZ' THAT YOU USED TO PLAY. I GUESS I'M ASKING HOW YOU SEE THE DIFFERENCE. I KNOW YOU ENJOY PLAYING. DO YOU ENJOY YOUR ROLE NOW AS MORE OF A ROCK-TYPE GROUP?

I think more the point of it is I enjoy my role now as a performer communicating to more people. Again, not labelling what we do. That's the difference to me between what I'm doing now with the group and what I used to do. It's an intended effort to reach people. Not by changing musically what I like to do, because what I like to do is what you hear, in the concert and on records. But doing it in such a way that makes it available to people, you see.

OK. WHAT'S IN THE FUTURE RIGHT NOW FOR 'RETURN TO FOREVER?'

Well, we've got short-reaching plans and middle-reaching plans and long-reaching plans, and they all involve persistence and continuance, and also expansion of what we're doing in terms of making music of a higher quality, still; reaching more people; making the form of what we do change and alter to continue to interest ourselves and the people that we're playing with. I myself have interest in

multimedia arts like film and dance, and being a composer, and writing for orchestras, and writing for movies. And all of these projects are sort of coming into the possibility of being able to be realized by this pilot project – I consider the group to be a pilot project.

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RIGHT. IT SEEMS TO BE A BRANCHING POINT. YOU STARTED TALKING ABOUT EXPANSION AND I SEE THAT THERE HAS BEEN EXPANSION. ESPECIALLY AS FAR AS STANLEY CLARK GOES. HE STARTED PRODUCING HIS OWN ALBUMS.

Right.

AND THIS HAS GIVEN YOU AN OPPORTUNITY ALSO TO GET INTO HIS KIND OF MUSIC. HOW EFFECTIVE IS THAT IN DETERMINING WHERE THE GROUP IS GOING?

Well, that's like a very valid thing. All of us in the group, and basically each artist, is an individual who has an individual creation to offer. That's one aspect of life. There's another aspect of life which is called teamwork, and cooperation. Which is a thing that we value even higher than an individual concept; because one individual can't get too far alone. You know the world is about people and about living to together and, like, pooling energies to reach a goal of some kind. And that's where our interests lie. So we have both things going on at the same time. Where each individual in the group records solo projects and has his personal musical interests, and then we pool all these energies in the group, under the coordination of myself, to come up with a real team. Which is what you observed tonight in the concert.

DO YOU PLAN ANY SOLO PROJECTS WITH ANY OTHER PEOPLE? I'M THINKING ABOUT THE ECM JAZZ CIRCLE.

Not with the ECM jazz circle, no. But I do plan to do a solo record in December, my first in 4 years. And it will be released, probably, in February.

I HAD THE PLEASURE LAST WEEK OF TALKING WITH GARY BURTON, WHO WAS AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY IN BINGHAMTON. I ASKED HIM WHERE 'JAZZ' WAS GOING. HE TALKED ABOUT THE FACT THAT 'JAZZ' HAS GONE TO THE YOUNGER MUSICIANS NOW. IT HAS CHANGED HANDS FROM THE OLDER GENERATION FROM THE EARLY '60S TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION. YOURS WAS ONE OF THE NAMES THAT CAME UP. THINKING OF THE TYPE OF MUSIC THAT YOU'RE PLAYING NOW AS 'JAZZ,' WHERE DO YOU THINK ITS GOING?

Well, I think it's going where everything will always go; it's going to go where the artists take it. Right? And that's going to be determined by how much intention, and what kind of intention, the artists continue to have. And how this intention changes. An ideal scene that I would like to see happen is to have a world and a society of people where involvement in the arts is one of the major interests which takes place in everybody's life, to varying degrees. Which, to me, would mean like more activity in creation.

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Getting people to realize their own dreams, more and more. Which is where the artist is in the vanguard, you see. And that is going to entail having artists begin to, in some kind of way, be more aware of how what they do influences the environment that they're in. Like some sort of consciousness of a society, not just of an art form. And art form in itself is just a pedantic intellectual thing, you know? You put these notes together with those notes and you come out with that sound, and isn't it beautiful. So what? What does it do to another person? What does it do to your neighborhood? What does it do to the society that we're living in? How does it relate to the relation between peace and war and all of that kind of stuff.

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And when those concepts start to get connected, and artists realize the influence that they potentially have, you see – because if you take a look at society and you look at 'Who do masses of people look up to for evaluation?' It ain't the government leaders, and it ain't your educators; it's celebrities and artists. Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Barbara Streisand, Cary Grant, when he had it happening, and so forth and so on, you know. And when somebody from the Beatles wears his hair this way, it affects the whole society, you know. When someone from some well-known group or some well-known movie star shows an interest in drugs or mysticism, there you go, the

society is into drugs and mysticism. So it's really an influence point.

And if that artist recognizes his responsibility to put truth on that communication line, and give people something that will help them, then you've got like a cleaning up of society, and a way towards a rehabilitation of the arts and a rehabilitation of people's goals and happiness in life. And to me, man, that's where it's at, you know? That's my ideal scene; that's where I would like to see it go. And if I have any power to do that, then that's where I'll make it go. And I just hope others will come along and do something similar to that. Because it's not just my goal, it's everybody's goal.

RIGHT. DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR MUSIC HAS CAUGHT ON? HAVE YOU BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING YOUR GOAL?

For sure, man. We have a very stable, ethical group of people with the musicians and our management, and all the people that work with us. And we have like a very clean scene going. And a very creative, enthusiastic scene. A lot of production and work, and enjoyment of what we're doing. And it's expanding like crazy.

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I NOTICE ON THE BACK OF EACH OF YOUR ALBUMS YOU DO HAVE YOUR ADDRESS, WHERE TO WRITE, WHERE TO CONTACT "RETURN TO FOREVER." DO A LOT OF PEOPLE CONTACT YOU?

We get like pounds and pounds of mail, and it's really great. We keep really in touch with individuals who care to communicate with us by letter or by phone. And it's our most precious line. Every letter is answered and taken care of, because that's what we're out here doing, you know.

Which, to me, is the most positive effect I can think of creating on a person.

WHAT DO THEY HAVE TO SAY?

Oh, man, it's like everything and anything. Mostly just "thank yous" in different kinds of ways, and also thank yous for getting them reinterested in their own goals and their own desire to create. Which, to me, is the most positive effect I can think of creating on a person, you know?

WELL, I THINK YOU DO A VERY FINE JOB IN TRANSMITTING YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH YOUR MUSIC. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH YOU!

Sure. A pleasure.