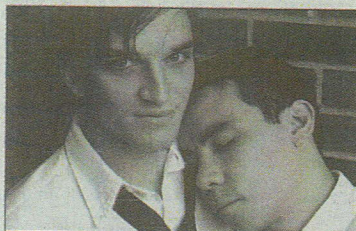


SUNDAY, AUGUST 3, 2008

A Delaware County

The Philadelphia Inquirer

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JILL McCORKEL  
Evan Jonigkait, Conrad Ricamora in the all-male adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet." They play students at a boys' school rehearsing the play.

## An 'R & J' that asks: What's in a gender?

By Toby Zinman  
FOR THE INQUIRER

"I don't like conceptual shows," playwright Joe Cialarco says of his high-concept, all-male adaptation *Shakespeare's R&J*. Mauckingbird Theatre's production of Cialarco's script is the Philadelphia premiere of a play that had long, successful runs in New York and London (not to mention Japan and Australia). Currently in previews, it opens Wednesday at the Adrienne Mauckingbird, which is dedicated to re-viewing classic drama through a gay lens, debuted in January with an all-male production of *The Misanthrope*, a surprisingly persuasive, as well as entertaining, take on the classic Moliere comedy. But an all-male *Romeo and Juliet*? The Mauckingbird cast is diverse in many ways — Caucasian, Asian

See R&J on H6



The impetuous Return to Forever reunion, "the jazz tour of the summer," comes to the Mann, along with reflections on fusion's excellence and excess.

## Forever is here

By David R. Adler  
FOR THE INQUIRER

**R**eturn to Forever, the jazz-fusion group founded in the early 1970s by master pianist Chick Corea, is in the midst of a reunion tour that few thought would ever happen.

Hard-core fusion fans will be pinching themselves when Corea, guitarist Al Di Meola, bassist Stanley Clarke, and drummer Lenny White take the stage at the Mann Center on Tuesday on what DownBeat magazine calls "the jazz tour of the summer."

How will the band's hypercomplex works and flights of daredevil virtuosity sound after such a long absence?

Reports from the road are encouraging. But beyond just giving a stiff dose of nostalgia, the Return to Forever (RTF) reunion tells us much about the legacy of fusion and the evolution of jazz aesthetics in a new century.

Clarke, born and raised in Philadelphia. See RTF on H4

■ Karl Stark reviews "Return to Forever: The Anthology." H14.

When Forever began: Top, Return to Forever on stage in Central Park, New York, 1975-76. Above, the just-released "The Anthology," a two-disc RTF retrospective, with keyboardist Chick Corea (left), bassist Stanley Clarke, drummer Lenny White and guitarist Al Di Meola. Below, RTF reunited: Al, Stanley, Chick, Lenny.

LYNN GOLDSMITH



Van Cliburn's remarkable Moscow performances are now available on DVD, after their release was delayed by the pianist himself.

## A Van Cliburn anniversary From musician to folk hero

By David Patrick Stearns  
INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC

If cultural gods tell us more about us than about themselves, Van Cliburn

Cliburn has, in the words of classical piano maven David Dubal, "written one of the most spectacular pages in the history of his instrument." Yet



# Return to Forever, here and now ...

WILL FERRELL JOHN C. REILLY

# ... reunited in 'the jazz tour of the summer'

RTF from H4

torted guitar, and flamboyant clothing were the order of the day. Stanley Clarke and Weather Report's Jaco Pastorius introduced entirely new, highly virtuosic approaches to electric bass playing.

Some heard a vital, forward-thinking language. Others heard an appalling sellout, the betrayal of jazz tradition. Peter Watrous, the former New York Times critic, took the latter view in a 1995 piece trashing Wayne Shorter's album *High Life* and assailing what he called "the Miles Davis curse."

Describing fusion as "a mule idiom, a bastardization of jazz and pop," Watrous slipped in an incisive point: that this music, in part, was a means for jazzers to reconnect with black listeners at a time of changing tastes and widespread social unrest.

The result, Watrous argued, was "shockingly ephemeral." Yet *Return to Forever* is back (playing, ironically, to heavily white audiences). Boxed-set reissues of Davis' electric music are flooding the market. Recent books on the period include Paul Tingens' *Miles Beyond* and Philip Freeman's *Running the Voodoo Down*. (And Concord has just re-

## The Best of Return to Forever

If you're new to *Return to Forever*, here's where to start:

■ *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy* (1973) — The classic, hair-raising jazz-rock edition of RTF is born. Original guitarist Bill Connors soon left to pursue solo acoustic playing, then dropped off the radar (left the galaxy?) from the late '80s until 2005.

■ *Where Have I Known You Before* (1974) — Rich textural contrasts, short acoustic piano interludes,

and an earthshaking finale in "Song to the Pharaoh Kings" make this not just a great RTF album, but one of Chick Corea's most representative works.

■ *Romantic Warrior* (1976) — RTF's defining document, a vast improvement over the preceding *No Mystery*. Al Di Meola's guitar sound reaches maturity, and the crisp, round tone of the recording frames every dazzling solo break and unison passage as never before (or since).

— David R. Adler

leased *The Anthology*, a two-disc RTF retrospective.)

On countless new jazz recordings, even in primarily acoustic environments, it is common to hear Rhodes and other keyboards, rock-inflected guitars, irregular time signatures, and other fusion hallmarks. For many of today's young jazz players, whether or not they consider them-

selves fusion artists, these inheritances are a given. Beat-makers and DJs who swoon to old Moog synthesizers and involved '70s funk grooves feel the same way.

To some, fusion will always be a synonym for adulteration, and it's fair to say that the light R&B now known as "smooth jazz" is part of the fusion legacy as well. But ar-

guably, so are the genre-defying works of guitarists Vernon Reid and Marc Ribot. "I think a particular music can be part of more than one history," Ribot says in the biographical film *Marc Ribot: The Lost String*.

Indeed, hybridization is now the norm across genres. Jazz is being bred with hip-hop and breakbeats, Balkan and Carnatic music (a style of Indian classical), indie rock, you name it. In most cases it is creative growth, not commercial calculation, driving this process.

By the early 1980s, Corea, Clarke and White were playing pure acoustic jazz with trumpeter Freddie Hubbard and tenor great Joe Henderson in a band called Griffith Park. They never burned that bridge. (Hubbard and Henderson were fusion dabblers themselves.)

The classic RTF lineup regathered for a brief tour in 1983, then fizzled for good. Clarke, White and Di Meola have pursued varied solo careers, but none come close to matching Corea's, with 45 Grammy nominations and 14 wins. It was Corea's guest appearance on Di Meola's 2006 effort, *Consequence of Chaos*,

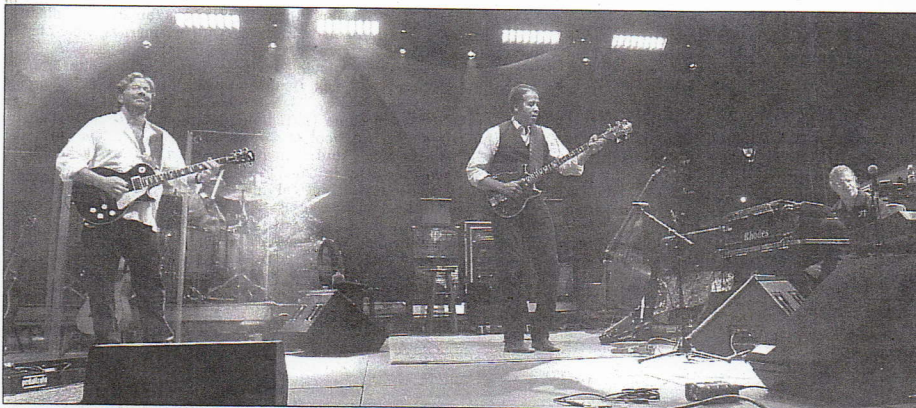
that led to plans for a reunion.

(Clarke will return to the area on Aug. 19, when he performs in the bass supergroup S.M.V. at the Keswick Theatre, with Marcus Miller, and Victor Wooten of Bela Fleck and the Flecktones, who are opening the RTF show.)

Much like Herbie Hancock, Corea has alternated freely between acoustic and electric formats for decades. His RTF recordings stand up as some of the most visceral, harmoni-

cally rich, sonically inventive work of his career. There is talk, but only talk, of keeping the band together.

All of RTF's members wrote music for the group, and not every bit of it is stellar. But if they break into the sultry, operatic funk of White's "Sorceress," or the fierce keyboard/bass dialogues of Clarke's "Vulcan Worlds," or the oddly explosive rhythms of Corea's "Medieval Overture," this writer might join the throng and get a little hysterical, too.



*Return to Forever* played the Nice Jazz Festival in southeastern France on July 23. From left are Al Di Meola, Lenny White, Stanley Clarke and Chick Corea. A Corea guest appearance on Di Meola's 2006 album led to plans for this reunion.

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