

"Chick Corea - Returning to Forever"
by Toni Lester
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If there was a singular name I would put close to the top on a list of influences, it would be Chick Corea. This man so inspired me and my piano playing and music for my whole life. For hours and hours as a teenager, alone all night long while everyone else was fast asleep, I would put on one of his LPs, listening through my clunky headphones trying to copy his inspiring melodies and improvisations on songs like "Sea Journey" and "Crystal Silence".¹ His playing was a combo of Bartok, Flamenco, Chopin, Bud Powell, and Liszt - introspective, gentle, spiritual, wild, soothing, comforting, challenging, and intergalactic in its reach.

I will always remember the magical night Chick and Herbie Hancock - both Miles Davis alumni - sat attentively across from each other on two grand pianos at DC's Lisner Auditorium playing duets in the dark under one softly glowing spotlight. Or seeing him and his long time buddy, vibraphonist Gary Burton, playing a set from their "Duets" album at Boston's Regattabar like long lost lovers. Or just lying in the dark on my bedroom floor listening to Flora Purim crooning "Some Time Ago",² while Airto's and Hermeto Pascoal's percussion supplied funky sambaesque momentum to Chick and the rest of the band. And of course, who doesn't remember his virtuosic fusion riffs on "Leprechaun's Dream",³ as he accompanied the ethereal voice of his partner for life - Gayle Moran, a creative artist in her own right who made her mark with John McLaughlin and the "Mahavishnu Orchestra".⁴ Check out Gayle's vocals on Chick's "Do You Know",⁵ the latter a haunting forecast of his passing: "Do you ever think what life will be where you go after you die/Do you ever wonder why we are here why we were born, you and I."

Chick's talent was rock solid. How many artists can take credit for not just one but so many masterpieces? "Spain"⁶ and "Romantic Warrior"⁷ and "Armando's Rhumba"⁸ and "Love Castle"⁹ and "No Mystery",¹⁰ and on and on and on. Listening to Chick, I always feel like his music is a boat cradling me across a sea to safer shores. A tremendous loss among so much loss these last many months. With all the joy and abundance he bequeathed us, however, I suppose we can't ask for more.

¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnlAPR_ixo4

² www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys2wToiwKrE

³ From the album, "The Leprechaun": www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fxgq0_-QHxc

⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJM-UQ0zVUU

⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_sQkuVppdk

⁶ Al Jareau's brilliant version of "Spain": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lvpgGznFsk>

⁷ Chick's volcanic solo starts at 7 minutes. At the 9 minute marker check out how the slow funky groove builds to a crashing climax: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ETla9zs5SI

⁸ www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KE_l6d5m9E

⁹ Chick Corea and Gary Burton: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_2t-zoyEH4

¹⁰ Corea and Bassist Stanley Clark, original members of "Return To Forever": www.youtube.com/watch?v=10ib6qtpY7M