

# Stanley Clarke, Post-Modern Man

By David Breskin

*Hail space warriors  
You have come a long way*

*Our flight for freedom has  
taken us through many arenas*

*We have weapons and vessels  
but now I choose the sound  
of a plucked string*

—Stanley Clarke

With these words, Scientologist Stan opened last year's *Modern Man* debacle. It was the album that made fusion safe for elevators and shopping centers. It was the album in which Stanley sang (!) (before Herbie Hancock!) and ended up sounding like Dan Fogelberg wrestling with Gamble and Huff. It was the sort of disaster—as a jazz, soul, rock, fusion, or pop record—that left me thankful Stanley had chosen the sound of a plucked string instead of an M-16 or a Trident sub. Things could have been worse.

And now, thanks to *I Wanna Play for You*, they most certainly are. Not that this new effort is any more floridly fatuous than *Modern Man*. It's just that by now the novelty of Clarke's bloated, cockeyed attempts at cosmic communication has long worn off, and that here he compounds the problem by providing two disks of drivel instead of just one. But it allows him to play more music for you, and Stanley Clarke wansta play for you. And you. And you. And you. . . .

The "live" half of the record gives Clarke's undistinguished touring band a chance to pump out old tunes at new prices. "School Days" and "Quiet Afternoon"—dedicated here to B. B. and Albert King, ostensibly because Stanley and guitarist Ray Gomez trade blues clichés—are dusted off from the modestly successful, energetic *School Days* LP. "Rock 'n' Roll Jelly" and "Closing" are Xeroxed from the *Modern Man* original, and "Hot Fun"—a slight, surface-tension funk ditty—is waxed here for the third consecutive time. There is one new piece, on which Stanley is accompanied solely by drummer Darryl Brown. Monomaniacally titled "My Greatest Hits," it features Stanley, string snappin' and thumb thwackin' and pet-riff runnin' his way between quotes of (you guessed it) his greatest hits: "School Days" again, "Rock 'n' Roll Jelly" again, and even "Lopsy Lu" from way back in '74. The live cuts are rowdy, but emotionally vacant; loud, but by no means intense. Even the purely technical brilliance of Clarke's electric bass is nowhere to be found—his rote, repetitive live solos are all bluster and bravado.

On the studio half, as a kind of contrast—the nice thing about Stanley is that he can be bad in so many different ways—the solos sound like afterthoughts, and the nine new tunes Stanley has written are inundated by revolving-door cameos from his buddies. Airtio, Freddie Hubbard, Jeff Beck, Steve Gadd, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and Stan Getz all get one track apiece, George Duke gets two, and Tom Scott wins with three. There's something for everyone here: one placebo reggae tune, "Jamaican Boy," a few mellow fuzak numbers, a flaccid rocker with a Gerry Rafferty saxophone hook, a few stabs at danceable funk (Clarke is no Bootsy Collins), and even an unmitigated disco attempt, "Just a Feeling," which consists largely of Stanley crooning the phrase "just a feeling" through a Framptonesque talk-box over which a tepid trio named Hot chants the magic word "DANCE" 64 times, give or take a few allowing for the fade. Never content with straight-ahead mediocrity, Stanley makes the bold leap from the innocuous to the absurd by dedicating "Just a Feeling" to Louis Armstrong.

And when he unclosets his contrabass—managing a scant two-minute "Blues for Mingus"—you can't help remembering his clean, muscular playing in the early '70s, the records with Pharoah Sanders and Joe Henderson, Dexter Gordon and Stanley Cowell, Getz and Gato, and even his own vibrant *Children of Forever*. Using a piano-bass-drums trio along with background studio chatter, mock-Mingus groans, finger snapping, and a ringing telephone, Clarke tries hard to fabricate the feeling of a cellar jazz club. But rather than a tribute to Mingus or to his own very real abilities, the effect is one of self-conscious and pathetic parody.

And when in his brief solo he falters—awkwardly muffing a line just when his bass starts singing—and then covers by jamming in a flurry of quick notes, it is embarrassing and painful. You realize where he's been, and where he's going. ■