

Chris Standring – Electric Wonderland (2012)

Written by bluesever

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01 – Pandora's Box 02 – Almost September 03 – All That Glitters 04 – Oliver's Twist 05 – Wishful Thinking 06 – Heart Of The Matter 07 – Escapade [play](#) 08 – Merry Go Round 09 – Castle In The Sky 10 – Nightingale's Bridge

Personnel: Chris Standring: guitars, keyboards, vocals, programming, guitarlele, talk box; Rodney Lee: Fender Rhodes solo (1); Jimmy Earl: electric bass (1, 4); Nikki Garcia: violin (1-3, 6-9); Barbra Porter: violin (1-3, 6-9); Tom Tally: viola (1-3, 6-9); Cameron Stone: cello (1-3, 6-9); Rick Braun: trumpet, flugelhorn (2); Mitchel Forman: acoustic piano (2, 3, 6, 8-10); Dan Lutz: acoustic bass (2, 8, 9); Larry Steen: acoustic bass (3, 6, 10); David Karasony: drums (3, 6-8, 10); Andre Berry: bass (5); Oscar Seaton: drums (5, 9); Dino Soldo: saxophones, clarinet and EWI (8).

At some point during every artist's career, if they truly consider themselves as artists, they must ask themselves a question of truth. This question is not so much, "Am I following the truth?" but rather "Am I following my truth?"

The answer to this question goes a long way in determining whether the artist plays it safe and stays in their comfort zone, or takes the bolder, but potentially more interesting and satisfying course of following their muse wherever it takes them. For multi-instrumentalist Chris Standring, the answer seems to be to make only the music that moves him. It's a smart choice.

Standring is a skilled guitarist who understands that what you don't play matters as much as what you do. Standring's Blue Bolero (Ultimate Vibe, 2010) marked a radical departure for him as he decided to finally make the guitar-and-strings themed record he had long aspired to do. Bolero won him the best reviews of his career and Electric Wonderland should do likewise. The native son of England carries on with the string quartet, but sets aside his jazz guitar for a Fender Stratocaster because, as he explains, "The Fender strat gives you an electric quality."

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His newfound fondness for the string quartet—this one featuring Nikki Garcia and Barbra Porter on violin, Tom Tally on viola, and Cameron Steele on cello—indicates Standring shift away from keyboards as his primary accompanying instrument, though the playing of Rodney Lee's Fender Rhodes on "Pandora's Box" and Mitchel Forman's piano is stellar.

Standring's preferred style is playing within the parameters of the band and avoiding showy guitar pyrotechnics. On "Almost September" Standring gently riffs on guitar and guitarlele (similar to a ukelele) as Rick Braun grooves on trumpet and flugelhorn. "All That Glitters" benefits immensely from the efficacy of Larry Steen's acoustic bass and Dave Karsony on drums. "Merry Go Round" is simply grand as Standring and the string section play off of each other beautifully and Forman's graceful piano solo is delightful. "Oliver's Twist" is an arresting, danceable shuffle that sneaks into the ears and sets the toes tapping.

Electric Wonderland doesn't push the envelope in quite the way Blue Bolero did, but that is a minor quibble. It's still a terrific album and Standring fans should be pleased. For new fans, this is an excellent jumping off point. ---Jeff Winbush, allaboutjazz.com

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