

Mp3 Neil Zaza - Staring At The Sun



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Guitar master Neil Zaza combines lush melodies and guitar wizardry with electronic elements to create a passionate, modern tapestry of sonic bliss. 13 MP3 Songs ROCK: Instrumental Rock, POP: with Live-band Production Details: I'll let you in on a little secret: Out of all of my CDs, this one will always be the standard to which I compare all my latest works. You might even say that Staring at the Sun marks the beginning of my "modern era" direction. Most of the ideas for Staring were written while I was out on a marathon tour in '97 with Bobby Rock and Bill "The Buddha" Dickens, and I can still remember exactly where I wrote each tune. "Lost in Your Dream" was demoed in Florida, "Fargo" was written in (appropriately enough) Fargo, North Dakota, "Every Thought" was Houston, Texas, "I Spy" was back home in Cleveland, Ohio, and "New, New Math" was somewhere in New England during the World Series. In fact, I recall walking over to Bobby Rock's hotel room and asking him about the time signature for the main riff of that tune. This project would solidify how keyboardist/arranger Tim Bradford and I work together. Once I demoed something, I would send it to Tim, who would then "Bradfordize" it and take it to the next level. Then he would ping-pong it back to me and I would produce it to completion. Working in this capacity has really served us well through the years. And since we seldom ever work together in the same room, I always joke that we are like the Elton John/Bernie Taupin of instrumental guitar music! I was very fortunate to have somewhat of an all-star line-up on Staring at the Sun...beginning with the great Steve Smith on drums. Once Steve agreed to do the project, I sent him a rough demo of the arrangements so he could get a basic feel for the tunes. A few weeks later, I got a call from him while I was in Montreal and we talked about how he had assumed the CD was going to be heavier and more "chopsy" than the demo I had just sent him. (I'm sure this impression was formed when he had recently heard me on tour at a gig in Oregon with Bobby and The Buddha where it was shred heaven!) While he

had no issue with the material, we did agree that he should "play all that he can and then throw in the kitchen sink." This was a mantra that we followed to great success on this recording. The only thing more incredible than Steve's blistering, unedited performances on *Staring at the Sun* is the fact that they were all captured in only one or two takes! Rounding out the rhythm section chores for most of the disc was Steve's partner in crime from the Journey days, Ross Valory. He definitely laid it down thick, as did my other "dream team" rhythm section of Stu Hamm (bass) and Robin DiMaggio (drums), who both were featured on "Purple Rain" and "Rain." As for the recording process, we wound up taking an approach similar to the one used for *Two Hands, One Heart*. We would record drums and bass at a proper studio, and then bring the tracks back to my home studio to cut guitars and everything else. So, with Joe Viers engineering, we recorded most of the basic tracks with Steve and Ross at Steve's home studio in California, then returned to John Schwab Recording in Columbus to cut Stu and Robin's basics. This was also the first project that I used Pro Tools (a Session 8 configuration for you geeks out there) and a Macintosh computer. All the overdubs were done in 16 bit on a whopping 4 GB hard drive, while the basic tracks were recorded on rented black face ADATs. After all of the standard tracking was complete, the real craziness began. It was time for strings and horns, and who better to bring all that together than Bruce Walker? On two separate tracking days at Neon Cactus Studios in Akron, Bruce directed an eclectic group of top-flight regional musicians to absolute perfection. Day one was the "NZB Horns," a smokin' horn section I had assembled for a few select shows from the *Thrills Chills* era. Day two was The Summit Strings, a renowned classical string ensemble that didn't quite know what to make of us rock and roll "degenerates," but who showed up and flawlessly sight-read everything in single takes! It was these production elements that, in my mind, really made the tunes come to life. Having real horns and strings in "I Spy" gave Tim's arrangement a searing authenticity, much like you would hear in a James Bond movie. And the center pizzicato bridge section in "Lost in Your Dream" or the lone cello in "Rain" gave these songs a depth and richness that mere samples could have never duplicated. For all of these reasons, each track has a special story and history to me. In fact, I remember a very strange feeling driving back to Cleveland after completing the mixes with Joe. I truly felt that I had given everything to *Staring at the Sun* and wondered if the end result could ever truly reflect how much soul I tried to breathe into these compositions. While *Thrills Chills* remains my favorite overall recording experience, *Staring at the Sun* remains my favorite body of compositions from start to finish. This one still stands up against time for me. Neil Zaza 2005

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