

Mp3 Gran Torino - Live At The Chameleon Club



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Rock and Soul. An 9 member band featuring a four piece horn section that cooks. 5 MP3 Songs ROCK: Funk Rock, URBAN/R&B: Soul Details: December, 1999 A BAND OF PASSION AND ENERGY Roaring out of Knoxville, Tennessee with all the force of a turbo-charged hot rod, the funk-imbued musical madmen known as Gran Torino have left a memorable mark on all who have had the pleasure of seeing them perform. A stylish, rhythmically-enhanced, spirited groove machine, this eight-member, horn-driven ensemble is clearly cruising down the right road. Ecstatically captured on their 1996 debut album, Live at the Chameleon Club, Gran Torino are a band brimming with energy, soaring with melody and completely full of da' funk. Unquestionably a sure thing when it comes to live performance, these funk-soul brothers have delighted crowds all over the East, Midwest and their home turf of the South. Together for more than four years, Gran Torino released their first studio album, One, in October, 1997 and spent the final year of the century working hard on their next studio effort. Now, as they prepare to head West to conquer new territory, the group seems to be just hitting its stride with the pending release of their second studio album, aptly titled, Two. "It's been a really busy year," says lead singer and Knoxville native Chris Ford. "We made a record, which took a long time--about a quarter of the year was spent recording. We wrote more this year than we have in past years." Ford, who writes most of the songs with horn players Dexter Murphy and P.J.Alexander, cites a wealth of influences as inspiration. "As a writer, old Springsteen and Stevie Wonder influenced me," Ford says. "As a whole, I would say the people in this band are influenced by R&B and a lot of the guys have major jazz influences. I'm a really big Stevie Wonder fan. I'm a Radiohead freak, but there's tons of new stuff. I like the Foo Fighters a lot. I like a lot of new R&B, Maxwell, I love the Lauryn Hill record. Some of the hip-hop has come a long way. I like the Roots." The band-which also features Stephen Decker on guitar, bassist Todd Overstreet, Scott Pederson on trumpet

and saxophone, Whit Pfohl on drums and Jason Thompson on sax-came together in Knoxville on and around the wily campus of the University of Tennessee. And everybody sings backup. "I played with those guys in marching band," recalls Dexter Murphy. "I'm more of an R&B guy and I've brought a lot more of the gospel and R&B thing to the band. Marvin Gaye and Tower of Power got us started in the right direction." Known for its riveting live shows, Gran Torino has attracted legions of fans from New England to Texas. "We play the South two-to-one compared to everywhere else," says Ford, "I love playing New York, though, it's my favorite city." Having sold over 15,000 copies of their two albums, mostly at their concerts, there has to be some kind of description of their magical chemistry onstage--and between band and audience. The energy is the key. "That's my number one thing," emphasizes Ford, "and I think it's our number one thing. We try really hard to convey energy and passion." While most of the band members are from Knoxville, a handful are from elsewhere, including drummer Pfohl, who is Anaheim, California. "This year, we hired a ninth guy, our second drummer, actually," explains Ford. "He has a full drum set, but he's also got a half-synthesized drum kit. There are a lot of drum loops and samples on the new record, so that's mainly his job, to sort of recreate a lot of the loops and stuff. We actually started as a nine-piece--we started with two drummers--so that's another reason why we hired another drummer." Although the group's moniker speaks of a classic automobile, the band has been hitting the road in a variety of vehicles. "We've had a school bus," relates Ford, "we've had two 15-fifteen passenger vans and three RVs. Right now, we have a big bus." What does the band look forward to for 2000? "This record that we've made," says Ford. "It's going to be out January 18th. Our whole thing for 2000 is this record. A lot of our hopes are wrapped up in this record. Obviously, we've sold a lot of records on our own and we sell out a lot of shows, but we really want to make the jump to the next level. We've worked hard and realized with this record, how fun it is to really make a record."

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