

## Mp3 Neil Zaza - Melodica



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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. 15 MP3 Songs ROCK: Instrumental Rock, POP: with Electronic Production Details: As my most recent studio effort to date, I consider Melodica a culmination of everything that came before it...and then some. It merges leading-edge technology with the timeless elements of solid songs and great playing. It also represents a turn in the road for me in where I will likely be headed for future projects. Of course, it didn't start out so "visionary"... It was actually a combination of old school and new school technology that aided in the initial process of logging the tunes for Melodica. Every song started out as a "notebook" idea in one of two programs: Ableton Live and Propellerhead's Reason. The extreme ease of these applications allowed me to explore a variety of textures, grooves, and tonalities, and this really enhanced my vision for each track, even in the initial stages of composition. This was very much the new school part of the process. The old school part of it all, however, came about as the avalanche of new song ideas began to pour over me. As I would solidify some killer new riff or melody idea on the guitar and then move to the computer to demo it, by the time I would get booted up and into my program-boom-the idea would sometimes be gone. (There is little else as frustrating in this world as the spontaneous evaporation of a promising idea!) So, before stepping into demo mode on the Apple, my protocol soon became playing or humming the idea into a handheld tape recorder first. This was old school. With a slew of ideas logged and demoed, most of the final versions of the songs on Melodica were collaborations between Alan D'Entremont and myself (with an occasional hand from songwriter John Tanner). Many of these ideas were actually slated to become vocal tunes for some future project. I had basically forgotten all about them until Alan brought them over one day and refreshed my memory. I was blown away at how well these tunes held up and promptly started working up instrumental

arrangements of these rough ideas. Thankfully, they all made the transition very well. From there, it was back to the new school approach as I got into a groove of augmenting these ideas by adding additional loops, synth bass parts, melodies, and, of course, more guitar tracks. In fact, a lot of these initial guitar tracks simply could not be topped when I tried to recut them for real later. So this project taught me something else about the invaluable role of technology when doing a demo in the digital age: Make it as good as it can be sonically, because you never know when you might wind up using the demo takes for a master. Sometimes there is a certain "lightning in a bottle" kind of spontaneity to an initial performance that can never be duplicated. It may not be technically perfect, but it has the ever-coveted vibe. Examples of this on Melodica include that nasty solo in "Breadstick," certain solo and verse parts in "As I Go Before You," and various sections in "Ship of Dreams." In addition to keeping demo passes of certain things, there were other kinds of wandering experimentation that really paid off on this CD. The title track, "Melodica," is a prime example of this. One evening, I was playing around with Reason's Matrix module, trying to get a handle on its many intricacies. I was triggering a Malstrom synth and, with the click of the mouse, I stumbled across what would become the main synth arpeggio part for the tune! The most challenging aspect of this was placing something melodic over it so it made sense musically and wasn't just interesting to hear once. Which brings me to another observation that occurred to me along the way: Technology without soul (i.e., cool sounds without songs) is something to be avoided at all cost. So when I speak of the hip, modern tools I used to create the final result, understand that we did whatever it took to achieve the big picture vision for each song. To this end, a piece of software was just another part of the proverbial musical pallet, utilized to bring in more dimension and color both compositionally and production-wise. Many of the tunes on Melodica started in one direction and ended up going in another. In "Across the Sands," for instance, drummer Bill Cioce and I were previewing some loops one evening and came upon a combination that really worked well together. My initial thought was that this would make a great stand-alone interlude somewhere on the disc, and we even had a title for it ("Techno Groove 100"). But, once I laid that heavy Middle Eastern groove down as a fade out, Bill was inspired to rip it up on the drums over the top of it. Okay-so now we'll expand it to be a "drum showcase" interlude, right? Wrong. Instead, when I got together with Hammond B3 maestro Mark Leach to have him fill things out a bit, he stepped off into the cosmos (as he is often prone to do!) and took the tune in a wonderfully bizarre direction after he thought the tape had stopped rolling. This became total improvisational

madness, which inspired a Tower of Power-like outro. Our interlude had officially transformed itself into a full track. Then finally, when we were actually mixing it, Bill and I felt like it had lost a little of its techno charm somewhere along the way. So, we went to work all through the night to create the middle section, which served to reinforce the techie roots from where it started. All of these changes served the track well...and sent "Across the Sands" through a complete metamorphosis from the initial vision. For as much time as I personally invested staring bleary-eyed into a computer screen during the making of Melodica, this project could have never fully actualized without the involvement of a few truly accomplished partners in crime. In addition to the ever-present Joe Viers and his perpetual magic touch as one my favorite tracking/mixing engineers, I had some great players on board as well. Bill and Mark burned their respective musical fingerprints into this disc, track by stellar track. And honorable mention must be given to my long-time right hand man, bassist Doug Johns. He's been an integral part of almost every solo recording I've done since the first one and, I have to say, the guy just keeps on getting better. In addition to being perfectly suited for what I do specifically, he is literally one of the best funk/rock bassists on the planet. So as much as we may embrace the wonderful world of technology, it will never replace inspired performances by great musicians. Speaking of technology, one of the strangest things about the making of Melodica was the sheer diversity of production and tracking locations involved along the way. This was a luxury afforded me by my PowerBook, as it truly was a studio without walls. We cut Mark's B3 tracks in Doug John's kitchen and "Mike's Barn," a makeshift jam room/hang-out for musicians, near Cleveland. We tracked Doug in his dining room, and recorded Bill's drums back at Paul Palumbo's barn studio, but this time using my "porta-studio" instead of his in-house rig. Guitars were done anywhere I thought I could get a great tone and the rest of the production chores were handled in various hotels and airports throughout Asia while I was touring there. It was not only a fantastic way of getting things done logistically, but the flexibility to record and create on demand proved invaluable artistically. After all, this was a project that thrived off of constant infusions of fresh energy. And that's what Melodica was all about to me: merging the new school with the old and hopefully coming up with something that will prove enduring for years to come. I can't wait for the next one... Neil Zaza 2005

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