

Though individual and guest projects clogged their calendars, the foursome decided in 2003 to challenge themselves again. Once more they opened the door, this time to Rushen, whose advanced harmonies added yet another dimension. Inspired now by their intensifying musical communion, they took the fusion pledge -- defy convention, keep standards high, and take every risk you can -- and plunged into CAB 4.

Their method was, of course, anything but predictable: Having already established themselves as a versatile live combination in the studio and in gigs, CAB tried something different on 4. This time, each track began with the writer, either MacAlpine or Brunel, creating a demo of the tune. This was then passed along to Auger and Rushen, who added their parts. Later they all went into the studio with Chambers to complete the project. Dennis unleashed rhythms that uncannily supported, interacted with, bounced through, and otherwise led to a final version as alive as any concert performance. "Theatre De Marionnettes" is the latest venture featuring The "Thunder From Down Under" Virgil Donati on drums, and also a track with Chick Corea.

Drawn from their collective history in working with an assembly of giants, from Chick Corea to Sonny Boy Williamson, Eric Clapton to Parliament/Funkadelic, and Herbie Hancock to Carlos Santana, CAB just may be the next step in the evolution of instrumental music. If you're a skeptic, give them a chance, for CAB "Theatre de Marionnettes" is ultimately about making music more than shooting off fireworks, and playing from the heart more than to some focus group's blueprint. That at least is enough to distinguish this all-star ensemble.

And if you remember when artists were interested less in echoing the past than in pointing the way toward the future, this is the band you've been waiting for.