

# Blissful Chicago Blues



## Herbie Hancock Unplugged

Chicago child prodigy Herbie Hancock, who at age 11 performed a Mozart piano concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, is a modern-day musician whose very jazz-fusion, electronic jazz-funk and "new" progressive music – hip-hop, drum-and-bass and downtempo – reflect the roots of visionary musical thought that ever since Muddy Waters & company revolutionized the blues has defined the soul of the city as the place of transcending limitations. Hugely successful Hancock – one Oscar, eight Grammys and gold records by the wall-load – epitomizes what seems to be the Chicago musical mandate: improvise, stylize, experiment, risk. What is it about Chicago-bred musicians, from Benny Goodman to Louis Armstrong, that makes them such bold statements of innovation? A quick glimpse inside the mind of Hancock, whose newest release is *FUTURE2FUTURE*, a CD of, indeed, "music of the future," may give us a hint.

**Pilot Michael:** Herbie Hancock, they call you "a true icon of modern music." Can you explain what's behind your creative process?

**Herbie Hancock:** The spirit is very much one of spontaneity and improvisation...of reexamining the conventional uses of the instruments and including new uses of those instruments. This open up possibilities [so] the music as a whole is a bold statement of creative possibilities for the 21st century.

**Pilot Michael:** It was the great Ray Charles who said, "Every music has its own soul, be true to it." As you reexamine convention in your work, blending different genres in unexpected ways, do you agree?

**Herbie Hancock:** The thing is, you're always aware of the essences of the different kinds of music, so when you combine them you still maintain what Ray was talking about. I know that sometimes jazz musicians have a tendency to be rigid about their own set of rules, but I feel fortunate that there was a point I was able to get out of the that. I look at people who seem to be stuck with those rules and I think, I'm glad I'm not there!

**Pilot Michael:** Is your music at all commercially driven?

**Herbie Hancock:** I didn't [ever] want to prostitute myself to sell albums. I always have wanted to write something that was actually authentic. I have a certain concept of freedom and at best I'd like to consider myself a free player. By freedom I mean I'd like to be able to play the music of my moods. If I want to play rhythm 'n blues all night I'm still a free player. Or if I want to play rhythm 'n blues for one number and the next number play on the strings of the piano, or even if I'm playing bebop all night, I'm still a free player. No matter what I play I just want to be able to recreate my moods or at least have my mind open enough so I can do what I want, so that I can hear or conceive of what I want, even if I can't reproduce it. That is my freedom.

**Pilot Michael:** So you don't have the music as much as it has you?

**Herbie Hancock:** Sometimes when jamming [my fellow musicians] and I get into a thing where we hit a kind of groove or rhythm that becomes so strong, so hypnotic, that it throws me off the piano. I try to stay with it, you know, just trying to stay in there, to keep my balance, but it almost throws me off – it's really strange. It's a subconscious thing. You don't try to do it. It's something that just happens. And when it does, it knocks me off my feet.

**Pilot Michael:** Us, too, Herbie, thank you.