

## SPOTLIGHT



## SPECTRUM ROAD

Jack Bruce and friends pay tribute to one of fusion's founding fathers

John Medeski, Cindy Blackman Santana, Vernon Reid, Jack Bruce

THE WORD "SUPERGROUP" GETS tossed around a lot, but Spectrum Road makes an impressive case for itself. Each member of the quartet comes with a wildly impressive résumé. Guitarist Vernon Reid is the prime mover behind Living Colour, the juggernaut that helped define rock-funk in the '80s. Keyboardist John Medeski, one-third of Medeski Martin & Wood, has been an innovator for nearly three decades. Powerhouse drummer Cindy Blackman Santana is best known for her years playing behind Lenny Kravitz as well as dozens of rock and jazz artists (including husband Carlos). And then there's Jack Bruce—as bassist, vocalist and chief songwriter for the legendary Cream, he knows a thing or two about supergroups. "Spectrum Road happened in the same way that Cream happened," says Bruce, 69. "It was just

instant chemistry. It would have been very churlish indeed to say we're not going to play together."

In a sense, there's a fifth member of Spectrum Road: late drummer Tony Williams, the onetime Miles Davis sideman who helped to create jazz fusion with his own Tony Williams Lifetime. Bruce spent a couple of years as a member of Lifetime after Cream split, and nine of the 11 tracks on Spectrum Road's self-titled debut are culled from that pioneering outfit's catalogue.

"There was an aura about Tony when he first came around, sort of the same as when Jimi Hendrix appeared," says Bruce. "There was a rumor about this new guy. At the time it seemed to be a big statement about the direction of jazz and of jazz drumming. Tony revolutionized that. So part of the point of Spectrum Road is to turn people on to

Tony Williams and the music of Lifetime. But we're not trying to duplicate it, we're just improvising on it. It's a starting point."

The blueprint for Spectrum Road first came up in a discussion between Bruce and Reid in 2001, four years after Williams' death from a heart attack at age 51. "He had the idea of doing a tribute concert or a record to keep Tony's name alive," Bruce recalls. "I said, 'Any time.'" A full decade passed before Reid assembled the crew he wanted. After a series of successful concerts in Japan, they headed into the studio. "There was that feeling of idealism," says Bruce, who will be touring with Spectrum Road this summer. "Like Cream, and like Lifetime itself, it's extremely addictive. Once it takes off it grabs you by the throat. I've got no idea where it's going, but I'm looking forward to finding out."

—Jeff Tamarkin

