



Pianist and writer Chuck Leavell has had a long and versatile career, including a stint with the Allman Brothers Band, his own jazz fusion band, Sea Level, and has toured and done session work with the likes of Eric Clapton, George Harrison, and Aretha Franklin, not to mention his long-standing arrangement with the Rolling Stones. He has also written a couple of books, including an influential book on forestry and stewardship, and recorded his own solo albums, of which ***Southscape*** is the third (if you count his Christmas album). A light sort of jazz- rock affair, ***Southscape*** is intended to be a musical portrait of the American South, and while it isn't exactly a *tour de force* that makes you smell the kudzu or make you want to eat a peach, it has a pleasant flow and feels comfortably familiar, even on first listen. Working with a rhythm section of Chad Cromwell on drums and Michael Rhodes on bass, and getting added support from sax players Tim Ries and Randall Bramblett (as well as guitarist Larry Carlton on two tracks), Leavell plays strong, anthemic piano that brims with joyful certainty. Highlights include the elegant "Savannah" and the magnificent, soaring "Jessica," which Leavell originally co-wrote with guitarist Dickey Betts for the Allman Brothers in the early 1970s. It's a little odd at first to hear "Jessica"'s familiar lead lines done on piano rather than on electric guitars, but it remains a beautiful composition in any fashion, and it conjures the South, and Georgia, in particular, as well as any melody in recent memory. ~ Steve Leggett, All Music Guide