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Lookin' for a Change

Joe McBride | Heads Up International (2009)

By Woodrow Wilkins

There is The Great American Songbook, that vast repertoire of songs culled from musicals, vintage jazz and early rock—songs that have been tapped dozens of times by artists young and old. It gets to the point that whenever the word "cover" is mentioned, eyes roll and stomachs begin to turn. So it's a pleasant change of pace when an artist picks songs that aren't on everybody else's radar. Joe McBride takes that approach with *Lookin' for a Change*.



McBride, a vocalist and keyboardist originally from Fulton, Missouri, lost his vision when he contracted an eye disease as a teenager. That didn't stop him, though, as he studied at the Missouri School for the Blind and later enrolled at North Texas State University, where he pursued jazz and performance. His experiences over the years include work with Grover Washington Jr., Peter White, Dave Koz, Rick Braun, Larry Carlton and many others. Singing lead and playing the acoustic piano, McBride is accompanied by guitarist Dan Wilson, bassist Roger Hines and drummer Elijah Gilmore.

Gilmore's hi-hats and rim shots help punctuate Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy." McBride plugs in quite a few wordless ad-libs as he sings. The arrangement includes a piano solo, while Hines and Wilson's contributions are subtle but effective. McBride closes the piece with an Al Jarreau-like scat on the fade.

Vanessa Carlton's "1000 Miles" is given a straightforward jazz treatment. This is perhaps the most old-school arrangement of the set, yet it's faithful enough to the original. McBride's transition successfully bridges pop and jazz and the result is a song that expresses romantic longing while wearing a smile.

Some songs are not so easily translated into jazz, and when they are, the results can be amusing. This is the case with the carefree rendition of Cameo's "Word Up." McBride gives the song a playful, swinging feel and has a way with both lyrics and the keys, putting together a dance-inspiring groove.

Whether upbeat or laidback, McBride mixes genres well. The cover selections—McBride composed three of the twelve tracks—aren't necessarily better than the originals, but are refreshingly different. It also helps that these aren't songs that have been covered dozens of times already.

Track listing: Crazy; 1000 Miles; The Scientist; Word Up; It's Over Now; This Is How a Heart Breaks; Kiss From a Rose; Like a Star; Secret Rendezvous; I Don't Wanna Be; Say; Lookin' for a Change.

Personnel: Joe McBride: piano, vocals; Elijah Gilmore: drums; Roger Hines: upright bass; Dan Wilson: guitar.

Style: Contemporary/Smooth
Published: July 20, 2009