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## Joe McBride: A Changed Man

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Shortly after the release of his first album on the Heads Up imprint in 1992, singer/pianist Joe McBride became a smooth-jazz star. Since then, McBride has gently pushed the boundaries of the genre now and then - most notably perhaps on 2000's Texas Rhythm Club - but for the most part he's remained a smooth-jazz stalwart through the years.

But now comes the July 28 release of his eighth Heads Up release, the aptly titled *Lookin' For a Change*. Here McBride utilizes his Ohio-based working trio - guitarist Dan Wilson, bassist Roger Hines and drummer Elijah Gilmore - to interpret nine contemporary pop songs and three of his own compositions in straightahead-jazz fashion. Primarily in this case, that means no beats and rhythms generated by soulless machines. Also, for the first time on an album, McBride sings on every track.

The leader and his group take on a range of songs, from Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy" and Vanessa Carlton's "1000 Miles" to Corrine Bailey Rae's "Like a Star" and Seal's "Kiss From a Rose." The results are predictably tasteful and mannered. This isn't dinner music exactly, but neither is it far removed from dinner music. McBride possesses a pleasant, edgeless voice that never noticeably wanders into previously unexplored realms. Like his

singing, his piano playing is done admirably well, but never feels all that adventurous. The thoroughly competent band follows suit.

Depending on your taste, of course, consummate professionalism all around is not necessarily a bad thing. A lot of people will enjoy this record. Certainly McBride's smooth-jazz fan base won't be offended, and in the meantime he might pick up a few more traditional-minded listeners once these tunes start hitting the airwaves. In any event, kudos to McBride for trying something a bit different this time around. From his perspective, I imagine he judges this album a success. On his terms, who could argue otherwise? - David Pulizzi