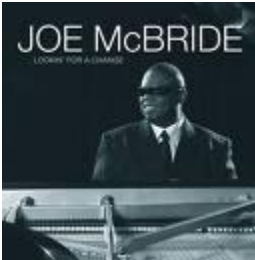


<http://www.soultracks.com/joe-mcbride-looking-for-a-change>



Joe McBride - Looking for a Change

I like Joe McBride's *Looking for a Change* because I think the record helps me win a debate I've had with jazz purists and R&B fans for several years. The debate boils down to this: contemporary musical styles like R&B, pop and hip hop doesn't translate well in the straight ahead jazz idiom. The purists say that R&B is too unmelodic. The R&B people say jazz can't keep up with the beat. I never bought either argument, and that was before Herbie Hancock smashed it to bits by sweeping to Grammy victories with an acoustic jazz record comprised of Joni Mitchell songs.

Records like *Looking for a Change* are important for the future of jazz because the music depends on artists being able to interpret the popular music of the day in a jazz idiom in order to remain vibrant and relevant. Many of the tunes that are considered as a part of the jazz canon didn't start out as jazz songs at all. A song such as "Embraceable You" started out as a Broadway show tune. That's how songs became popular back in the day. They either got performed in Broadway musicals or people bought the sheet music and played them on their home pianos. So, by the time Charlie Parker dropped his divine be-bop version of "Embraceable You," the song had been a part of the popular conscious for years. His lovely version of the song introduced bop fans to Gershwin and turned Gershwin fans and Broadway fans on to jazz, and enlivened both.

Once the rock era started, the public decided they'd rather hear Elvis, Motown and the Beatles. Jazz musicians either said that if you can't beat them, join them -- and that's how you got The Funk Brothers -- or they declared war on popular culture. Jazz purists built their version of the great wall, and for a lot of "serious players" not named Miles Davis, the jazz clock stopped at around 1964. The fusion/contemporary/smooth jazz guys could electrify and do remakes of John Legend songs, but the purists weren't having any of that.

That's where the discussion stood until - heck, that's still where it stands for a lot of people. And frankly, I don't know if an album that is as soulful, creative, funky, bluesy and swings as much as *Looking for a Change* can alter the situation. But let me just say this: McBride took "Crazy," by Gnarls Barkley, and tuned it into a straight up jazz song. McBride's arrangement manages to turn the propulsive Gnarls Barkley version on its head while remaining true to the songs melody and attitude. Then, there is the wonderful version of Corinne Bailey Rae's "Like a Star." McBride's arrangement opens with a upright bass that is joined by his piano on the first verse. McBride then

changes the song's tempo on the second verse - giving it a Latin feel complete with a nice guitar solo.

Those two songs are among the many highlights on this album. His choice of songs is nothing short of inspiring. After all, it is true that not every pop tune lends itself to a jazz treatment, and people will go back and forth on whether McBride's cover of Cameo's "Word Up" works. Everything else - from Seal's "Kiss From a Rose" to John Meyer's "Say" shines. The songs work because melodically each possesses the one quality that all great jazz tunes have - a melody that gives the players room to create, improvise and solo. Players and singers as good as McBride don't need much more than that to create great jazz. Now to be fair, a generation of younger jazz players have joined the venerable Hancock in chipping away at the wall for years. And with ***Looking for a Change***, McBride is wielding a pretty big hammer. ***Highly Recommended.***

Howard Dukes