

SMOOTH JAZZ THERAPY

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Michael J Thomas - City Beat

Raised in Cecilia, Kentucky and now domiciled in Destin, Florida, sax player Michael J Thomas may yet turn out to be the smooth jazz find of 2010. His debut CD, 'City Beat', which hits the streets on March 2, is a tremendously accomplished piece of work and, given that Thomas writes or co-writes all but one of ten choice tracks, proves also to be a wonderful showcase for his art. Thomas's writing partner is guitarist Shannon Wallace who co-produces and performs with him throughout. Together, with a tight group of backing musicians, they deliver a tremendously commercial collection that has every prospect of doing very well.

The album opens with the sophisticatedly cool 'Midtown Manhattan'. With an enticing mid tempo groove it is an early indication of the accessibility that Thomas routinely builds into his music and more of the delicious same comes in the form of 'Cali Trippin' which has a brassy, easy paced swagger and features moody trumpet from Paul Scurto. In fact whether the pace be relaxed or intense the smooth jazz essentials of rhythm and melody are never too far away. This is demonstrated by the urban tinged 'Mind Your Step' which balances Thomas's cool playing with an underlying horn infused urgency and when he cranks up the tempo even further for the feel good title cut the result has 'radio ready' written all over it.

'Wedding Song' shows off a more sensitive side to Thomas's musical persona and in similar vein is the contemplative 'Back Home' that benefits from the enchanting synthesised strings of Diki Ross and excellent soprano sax from Thomas. Elsewhere Jonathan Davies on drums and Eric Lampley on bass lay a funky foundation for Thomas's restrained yet compelling rendition of '30-A Degrees' while in terms of personal favourites there is much to commend the Michael J Thomas - Shannon Wallace arrangement of Michael Jackson's seminal 'Billie Jean'. Starting out slowly and quickly hitting a familiar beat this could well be one of the best covers of the year whilst just as good is the original composition 'Amante Del Vino'. This easy paced gem checks every contemporary jazz box imaginable but just shading it as Smooth Jazz Therapy top track is the tranquil 'Pretty Skin'. With Ross sublime on keys and Thomas at his delightfully melodic best this is one that will play and play.

For more on Michael J Thomas go to www.michaeljthomas.net

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