

JOE McBRIDE

Profile

Not even blindness can stop vocalist/keyboardist Joe McBride. His status as one of today's most popular contemporary jazz musicians is rooted in a solid foundation of talent. Born in 1963 in Fulton, Missouri, he began playing piano at age four and started singing in high school. As a teenager, McBride contracted a degenerative eye disease and eventually lost his eyesight, but his passion for music was never impaired. He continued his studies at the Missouri School for the Blind and at Webster University in suburban St. Louis. McBride trekked to the sunny shores of San Diego for a while before enrolling at North Texas State University to study jazz and performance.

When McBride finally stepped out as a leader in 1992 with *Grace*, his first CD for Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group, he quickly became a favorite in the contemporary jazz genre. His next recordings – *A Gift for Tomorrow* (1994), *Keys to Your Heart* (1996) and *Double Take* (1998) – featured some of the giants of contemporary jazz, including Grover Washington Jr., Peter White, Dave Koz, Rick Braun, Larry Carlton, and others. His 2000 release, *Texas Rhythm Club*, included Dallas musicians and was a loving tribute to the Lone Star State's underappreciated jazz scene. Among McBride's many credits that year was a major supporting role in *The Riff*, a feature film about the New Orleans jazz scene (directed by Mark Allen and produced by Bernie Pollack).

Refusing to confine himself to any particular style, McBride's recordings are loaded with songs that merge his many talents and interests. "There are times when I find myself starting to float back to the old ideas," he says. "I have to tell myself, 'No, I don't want to do that again,' because I've already been there. I'm always looking for new opportunities to move forward."

On his 2002 release, *Keepin' It Real*, McBride complemented his signature keyboard sound with inspired exotic influences reflecting the many loves of his musical life, include his gospel background, Brazilian samba and the music of South Africa. In 2005, he delivered *Texas Hold 'Em*, a set of eleven, mostly original, contemporary jazz/blues-based tunes in the classic McBride style. One of his strongest overall recordings, the poker-oriented titles are as much fun as the tunes they belong to: "Big Slick," "Double Down" "Texas Hold 'Em," "In & Out," "No Limit," "All In," and "One Eyed Jack."

McBride moved north in 2005 and made Cleveland, Ohio, his home. He soon met other musicians and quickly became a fixture of that city's jazz scene.

"I have a trio with some of the finest artists in the Cleveland-Akron area," says McBride. "Guitarist Dan Wilson resides in Akron, and he's a monster – he's got the stylings of George Benson or Henry Johnson. Elijah Gilmore is a very talented drummer from the

Cleveland area. Roger Hines is an upright bass player from Columbus. He played with Ray Charles and Diane Schuur, so he's used to dealing with blind folks. It's really refreshing to work with these young cats, because they're so excited to be involved."

With the help of his new acoustic trio, McBride adds another significant title to his impressive discography with the July 2009 release of *Lookin' for a Change*. On his latest Head Up recording he features songs originally written and recorded by a range of pop luminaries, including Gnarl Barkley, Coldplay, John Mayer and Seal and reinterprets them via straightahead jazz arrangements.

"To be honest, I really wanted to try to reach a different audience with my new album," McBride says. "I'm all about growth. It's all about making the old things new. It's okay to look back for just a moment, but the more important idea is to keep our eyes on the future."

Happily living in Cleveland when he's not on tour, McBride enjoys playing locally and keeping busy in the studio. He says, "I'm grateful to God that he has given me the ability to play music and to share it with others."