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JOHN TROPEA

Tropea 10: The Time is Right (VideoArts)

The Time is Right finds veteran guitarist and session-player John Tropea looking back at several notable collaborations he's had over the years with Paul Simon, Laura Nyro, Spyro Gyra, Steve Cropper and Deodato. Small wonder it sounds radio-ready from start to finish. Toss in a few other tunes that illustrate Tropea's flair for devising smooth-jazz updates of standards—from "Body and Soul" to "Giant Steps"—along with numerous reminders of the lasting influence of Wes Montgomery and George Benson, and you have a disc that's about as accessible as smooth-jazz gets.

It's also a recording, however, that won't be shrugged off by a lot of mainstream jazz and R&B fans, thanks to a lineup that includes baritone saxist Ronnie Cuber, bassist Anthony Jackson, drummer Steve Gadd and keyboardists Chris Palmaro and Leon Pendarvis. True to form, Cuber adds both bite and ballast to "Mambo Inn" and "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover," while Palmaro and Pendarvis jack up the funk and blues quotient whenever they take a seat at the Hammond B3 organ. The arrangements make good use of the talent assembled, and Tropea never sounds more at ease than when he's slyly saluting Cropper on the self-penned, horn-powered "The Cropper Way," or when "Super Strut" inspires a similar soul excursion. The only sustained lull, not surprisingly, is triggered by a performance with a vocal track—a listless reworking of "La La Means I Love You."

-Mike Joyce

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