



Matt Marshak

This Time Around

(Nuance Music Group - 2004)

by Val Vaccaro

Currently, Long-Island native guitarist, vocalist, composer and producer Matt Marshak is one of the best-kept secrets in smooth jazz and in the music world - but not for long. Matt Marshak was named "Best New Smooth Jazz Artist in New York" when he won the original artist contest conducted by smooth jazz radio station CD101.9 FM and Absolut Vodka last summer. The radio station also interviewed Matt and has aired some of his tunes. Matt Marshak and his band opened for the CD101.9 FM "Guitars & Saxes" concert with Jeff Golub, Peter White, Richard Elliot and Steve Cole at Bryant Park in New York City last July. This June, guitarist Matt Marshak and his band (featuring Chris Marshak on drums, Kenny Harris on bass, and special guest Bill Heller from The Rippingtons on keyboards) was one of the opening acts for headliner Spyro Gyra at the Hilltop Jazz & Blues Fest at the Brookhaven Amphitheater in Long Island.

Matt Marshak's sophomore CD This Time Around (released in March) is outstanding - one of the best, freshest, most exciting and creative smooth jazz CDs from a new artist in many years!! This Time Around includes 14 songs that include mainly instrumentals and some vocal tunes featuring upbeat, pop-rock contemporary jazz, funky pop/jazz with background vocals, beautiful smooth jazz ballads, R & B-influenced vocal tunes, and new-age pop songs with sweet scatting.

The production is top-notch and the CD includes many wonderful players: Matt Marshak on electric guitar, acoustic guitar, vocals and scatting; on drums, the multi-talented Chris Marshak; on bass: Bakithi Kumalo (Paul Simon, Chris Botti) and Kenny Harris; on saxophones: David Mann (Chuck Loeb, Wayman Tisdale, Tower of Power), Mario Cruz (Jaco Pastorius) and Mark Gatz; on keyboards and programming: Rob Meeks (Kool and The Gang); also on keys: Dean Kraus and Tim Regusis; on flute: Dwayne Kerr (Erykah Badu); on vocals: Tanya Michelle (lead), Anastasia Rene (lead and background vocals), Arty White on wah-wah guitar (Alicia Keys) and a number of other great musicians.

This Time Around features an enjoyable variety of catchy, memorable original compositions (11 composed by Matt Marshak and 3 are co-written by him), as well as one cover tune. The CD kicks off in high spirits with "Good Evening" - a sure bet for a smooth-jazz radio hit co-produced by Matt Marshak and Robert Meeks. The exuberantly energetic "Good Evening" features Matt's warm electric guitar tone and some vocals. The song has melodic pop hooks and funky rhythms (programmed by Meeks) that get the audience up and groovin' to the music, as well as some pretty flute lines by Dwayne Kerr. "Good Evening" has an easy-breezy feel - reminiscent of smooth jazz guitarists such as Chuck Loeb and Joyce Cooling.

On "Tell Me Why" Matt delivers funky rhythms with an urban flair that creatively combine with expansive Wes-Montgomery-inspired chords on electric and rhythm guitar. Robert Meeks co-produced the track with dance-club music production special effects on keyboards, drum loops and bass programming. "Autumn Breeze" is another pretty, funky, soulful track with vocals in the chorus by Matt and features some unusual melodic twists. Matt plays lead guitar and rhythm acoustic guitar riffs that drive the tune, and is backed by Bakithi Kumalo on bass, with drum loops by Robert Meeks. There's also the sole cover tune, Eric Clapton's "Wonderful Tonight" adeptly produced by David Mann who plays saxophones, keys and did

the drum and bass programming. "Wonderful Tonight" is a moving version, with sweet notes that bend and float in the air, an intensified bridge, and upbeat, funky guitar/saxophone interplay.

Several uptempo tracks on *This Time Around* also have the potential to be popular smooth jazz radio hits and are great fun at concerts. "Shake It Again" was produced and co-written with guitarist/composer Carl Burnett (who has worked with artists such as Larry Carlton, Boney James and Paul Brown). "Shake It Again" is a catchy, upbeat tune with latin-influenced keyboards, and exciting guitar and tenor saxophone lines. "I Will Be With You" and "New Kid," are accompanied by finger-tapping, hand-clapping, danceable grooves. "I Will Be With You" has upbeat, memorable guitar and saxophone riffs (with Mario Cruz on tenor sax), with guitar sounds inspired by Larry Carlton and The Crusaders. "New Kid" - a tune co-written by Matt and Danny Powers - has received airplay on CD101.9. The song has a bluesy feel, with extended enthusiastic improvisational lines that feature Matt stretching out on guitar, supported by Tim Regusis on soulful organ and keys, Chris Marshak on drums, Bakithi Kumalo on bass, Mario Cruz on tenor sax and flute, and Fred Walcott on percussion.

"Your Name" is a fun, hard-driving, tune - a blast from the past with a modern twist. Matt is on electric guitar and lead vocals in the chorus. There is a catchy, sexy riff played partly with guitar and saxophone in unison. Mark Gatz is on tenor sax and plays a great, dark and mysterious solo. "Your Name" is driven by an exciting, brassy beat with Chris Marshak on drums, and has Robert Meeks on organ. In contrast, "Quietly" is a beautiful, dreamy, melodic instrumental tune that should also be a popular pick for smooth jazz radio with Matt on electric guitar; the song has gorgeous soprano sax solos from Mario Cruz, and includes Dean Kraus on keyboards and Chris Marshak on drums.

There are also two R & B/pop tunes with lead vocals. "Seduction," has Matt on lead and rhythm guitars and features Tanya Michelle on vocals with David Mann on a pretty soprano sax solo. "Into Darkness" features Anastasia Rene on lead vocals, and has Matt on guitars, Dean Kraus on keys, Bakithi Kumalo on bass and Chris Marshak on drums. (These two tunes are reminiscent of Jeff Golub's soulful cover with a female lead vocalist on "If I Ever Lose This Heaven" - the Average White Band tune). "Never Let You Go" is a winning smooth jazz tune with Matt on guitar, background vocals by Anastasia Rene, keyboards by Dean Kraus, Kenny Harris on bass and Rodney Harris on drums.

"Smile" and "Nu Day" have cross-cultural appeal, with Matt fusing flowing electric riffs and pop/new-age/world music acoustic sounds with his own sweet, soulful scatting. "Smile" has a pure, innocent, spiritual kind of quality that will touch the child in every listener's heart. "Nu Day" is similar in nature, but with a more upbeat tempo that is fresh, uplifting and inspirational. Both tunes have Robert Meeks on keys and Chris Marshak on brushes. "Nu Day" also includes Bakithi Kumalo on bass and Arty White on wah wah guitar. These tunes, along with the R& B-flavored songs featuring female vocalists are an indication that Matt Marshak's music has the potential to crossover into pop, R&B, and world music realms and have universal appeal (perhaps like artists such as Norah Jones). Matt Marshak's music deserves to be heard by wider audiences who are likely to become enthusiastic new fans around the world.

Without a doubt, guitarist/vocalist/composer Matt Marshak's new CD *This Time Around* is a great find to add to your smooth jazz and pop music collection that will bring you listening pleasure for a long time!

The CD is available at www.CDbaby.com/mattmarshak;
Get music clips and information on www.MattMarshak.com.