The Sax Pack – Jeff Kashiwa, Kim Waters & Steve Cole (2008)

1. Fallin' For You 3:33
2. The Sax Pack 3:36
3. All I Really Want 4:26
4. The World Is A Ghetto
5:28 5. Tequilla 6:17
6. You Are My Starship 4:47
7. A Little Bit Closer 4:40
8. Maceo 5:59
9. Goin' Home 5:31
Kim Waters - alto and soprano sax Steve Cole - tenor sax Jeff Kashiwa -tenor sax David Mann: -synths, drum and bass programming Bernd Schoenhart – guitar Wayne Bruce - guitar (4) Chris "Big Dog" Davis - keyboards (4, 6) Jeff Golub - guitar (5) Randy Bowland - guitar (6) Gerey Johnson - guitar (8) Mike Ricchiuti - keyboard (9)

"The Sax Pack," huh? Wonder how long it took to dream up that name?

As soon as you see who The Sax Pack is you're either interested or you're not. Between Kim Waters, Jeff Kashiwa and Steve Cole, you have three guys who have been staples of smooth jazz radio for years. They're all seasoned veterans who can be expected to deliver the goods if your idea of "good" is bland background music that isn't going to challenge, surprise or require anything from you.

Let's face it: You're not exactly getting A Love Supreme (Impulse!, 1965) out of these guys.

The album starts off with "Fallin' For You," a pleasantly bland offering that is probably getting more airplay than it deserves, and ends with an original called "Goin' Home." Sandwiched in between are seven other tunes that neither excite nor offend. The music of The Sax Pack is the sonic equivalent of the carpet in your dentist's waiting room. You know it's there, but you have no particular reason to pay any attention to it.

Cole and Kashiwa trade off tenor sax toots while Waters noodles along on his alto and soprano saxophones. Every so often a guitarist plays a little riff, but otherwise this is pretty much painting-by-numbers stuff. There isn't a single spontaneous or ad-libbed moment on this album. These guys are too much the consummate pros to have an unplanned incident.

You could go to your record collection---not your CD collection---and pull out some dusty old album from 25 years ago and it would still be hotter and hipper than The Sax Pack. This is a collaboration born of calculation, not inspiration.

Trying to blame Waters, Cole and Kashiwa for cold proficiency is like blaming Domino's for bland pizza. The job is not to raise the art form. It's to move product and product is what The Sax Pack is. ---Jeff Winbush, allaboutjazz.com

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