

March 15, 2003



Drummer Rayford Griffin sure looks cool on the cover of his first album as a leader. But it takes some nerve to sing about it. Is someone who really is cool allowed to even hint that they are? Griffin gets away with it. His playing is pretty hip and he's put in a ton of time with jazz men like Stanley Clarke and Jean-Luc Ponty. He has also backed Michael Jackson and Anita Baker, so the publicity notes come close when they say the title tune is "like a late night meeting of Miles Davis and Marvin Gaye."

The rest of the album adds to the eclecticism, making use of everything from smooth jazz to mild acid rock. The style mix is matched by the blend of guests from sax player Everette Harp to guitarist Dwight Sills. Griffin adds his soft soul-singer vocals on a few tracks. It all hangs together because of the continuity provided by his arrangements and energetic drumming.

The variety will be a selling point for some and a negative for others. Each time I thought the album might sink below the waves of smooth jazz, up bobbed a funky solo by Sills, saxophonist Branford Marsalis or trumpeter Michael "Patches" Stewart. Kenny G would probably say, "Whoa, dude, you're confusing me."

All tunes and lyrics are by Griffin and, without over doing it, he is prominent on drums throughout. He waits until "Coffee," the last track, to stretch out a bit, taking brief solo breaks with authority. "Every Time I See U" is at the other end of the jazz spectrum and has the best shot at radio play. It starts with a shimmery smooth-jazz synthesizer, then hands off to guitar, building to just a little more edge than expected.

Miles Davis released an LP called **Birth of the Cool** in 1957. Gerry Mulligan, who was on the original, redid the same tunes with a few of the same musicians and others on a 1992 recording called **Re-birth of the Cool**. I doubt Griffin had that update in mind when he recorded his album. While he pays his respects to Miles, he proposes a more modern version of "cool." It wasn't what I expected, but it works. Recommended for smooth jazz fans looking for something a touch more challenging. It's cool.

- Rambles

written by [Ron Bierman](#)
published 15 March 2003