

## JOHN NOVELLO: Ivory Soul (529 Music)

Written by Bill B

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Remember that infectious 90s pop hit 'Crush' by Jennifer Paige? In the Autumn of 1998 it was all over the radio and riding high in pop charts on both sides of the Atlantic. Proving that you can't keep a good tune down, 'Crush' pops up as the opening track on a lovely, new smooth jazz piano album from veteran keyboardist John Novello. Novello has chosen the tune to open with for two reasons. First it was penned by his co-producer, Andy Goldmark (whose other credits include work with the Pointer Sisters, Jeffery Osborne, the Commodores and countless more soul luminaries); and second, it sets out Novello's stall perfectly for what is to follow.... that's to say, quality smooth jazz with a soulful undertow, produced with polish and performed with flair and a consummate artistry that comes with years of industry experience. Novello's track record, you see, includes work with Taste Of Honey, Donna Summer, Manhattan Transfer and the great Ramsey Lewis. Indeed on some of the quieter cuts here you can enjoy the same lightness of touch that Lewis brought to much of his best work, though on the tougher tunes Novello's sound reminds me of the great Texas smooth jazz pianist, Joe McBride.

'Crush' is the album's lead single and it's already making inroads on the credible jazz charts. Easy to hear why. For starters it's a memorable tune and Novello lets it flow, while star guest, sax man Gerald Albright, adds just the right amount of muscle.

The set's other sax playing guests are Tom Scott, who makes 'Shuffle The Deck' swing; Jeff Nathanson who helps build the climax on the LP's title track; Eric Marienthal whose smooth

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jazz experience makes 'I Can't Stop My Heart' a future genre classic; and Donald Hayes, who features on a funky, smouldering 'Funk Shui'.

Other album highlights include a version of the Beatles' 'Blackbird' (just piano and upright bass) and a lithe look at Corinne Bailey Rae's 'Put Your Records On'. John's treatment helps remind you of what a lovely melody that song has. Indeed that's part of this album's success. Whether he's offering a cover or playing an original, John Novello knows the value of a great melody; he lets the tune do all the work. Easier said than done, but with a combination experience and artistry, John's succeeded.

(BB) 4/5