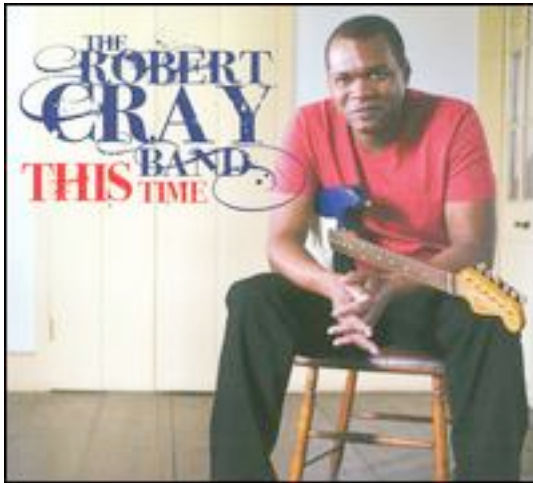


allmusic

Review - This Time (August 1, 2009)



Because of the five-year gap between studio albums and a major overhaul of his touring and recording band (only keyboardist/songwriter [Jim Pugh](#) remains from his last group), *This Time* is being touted as the beginning of a new era in soul/bluesman Robert Cray's long career. For better or worse, that's not really the case, as this is another in a long line of classy, well-produced, and immaculately played and sung releases from the always dependable Cray. The ballads, especially the slow-burning seven-minute title track, are some of the finest he has penned, although the singer/guitarist's well-worn themes of the emotional disconnects between the sexes haven't changed. Upbeat, more lighthearted material such as the opening "Chicken in the Kitchen," the organ-led jazzy "That's What Keeps Me Rockin'," and the tough Memphis groove of "Trouble and Pain," a tune that sounds like an [Otis Redding](#) outtake, alter the generally serious mood. The same holds for the jaunty Caribbean-inflected rhythms of "To Be True." But even though this isn't much different from Cray's previous 14 studio releases, it's a consistently engaging set that will please his existing fans. His expressive voice has always been the secret sauce that brought much needed spice to even ordinary material. This beautifully recorded, strong batch of songs doesn't contain any clunkers and Cray's distinctive vocals, especially on the

more heartbreaking material such as the closing "Truce," are some of his best. As usual, his staccato guitar lines enliven the proceedings, even if they are generally kept on the back burner. When all the pieces slide into place, as they do on the six-minute funk-soul ballad "Love 2009," it's obvious that Cray has locked into his groove and the occasional experimentation of his previous studio release seems somewhat superfluous. Other Cray discs have been criticized for falling on the wrong side of the sleepy/stylish tightrope. Yet this one features excellent material played and sung with a timeless sophistication and intensity that, while not pushing the artist in any new directions, show that he doesn't need to expand his lyrical or melodic boundaries to excel at his craft. His commercial radio play days might be behind him, but that doesn't stop Robert Cray from being a master of the soul-blues field where he clearly belongs.