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Artist: McNeil, John
Title of CD: This Way Out
Record Label: Omnitone

Reviewed by David Adler in the *Brass Tracks* section of the January/February 2004 issue.

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John McNeil, a revered New England Conservatory faculty member, has recorded only intermittently since the early '80s. The swinging, left-leaning trumpeter (a forbearer of Dave Douglas, you might say) makes his OmniTone debut with *This Way Out*, an extraordinary disc recorded in Barcelona with Gorka Benítez on tenor sax, Giulia Valle on bass and Joe Smith on drums—all of whom populate the Fresh Sound New Talent roster. That McNeil's writing is enormously sophisticated and a bit warped is clear from the first several bars of "Mi Tío," a flamenco-influenced theme in a bright, polyrhythmic-sounding 3/4. McNeil and Benítez make for a powerful and freewheeling front line, and Benítez leaves his mark as a composer as well: first with the staccato interlude "Picasso View," then the unapologetically goofy "Because of You" and finally the Mexican-tinged folk ballad "Flor de Viento." The remaining tracks, aside from Art Lande's fast free-bop piece "Skeeter," are McNeil originals, full of conceptual surprises—especially the oddly orchestrated ballad "What Comes After" and the bitonal African groove excursion "My Taxi."