

Michael Wolff Family Feature in JAZZIZ Magazine

Wolff Gang

AS THE MUSIC DIRECTOR FOR *The Arsenio Hall Show*, keyboardist **Michael Wolff** had the chance to play with a wide variety of performers — from classical musicians to pop stars to country singers to rappers. But it was the jazz greats that most held his attention. “We had Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea. I’d grab them after the show and ask them how they played certain things,” Wolff recalls, speaking by phone from his house in Southern California.



Wolff had served previously as Nancy Wilson’s musical director and had performed with numerous jazz artists over the years, including Cal Tjader and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. So his new disc, the straightahead *Joe’s Strut (Wrong)*, comes as no surprise. It features five Wolff originals alongside tunes by Frank Loesser and Harold Arlen. Wolff is joined by his regular trio — drummer Victor Jones and bassists Chip Jackson and Rich Goods — throughout, and by saxophonist Steve Wilson and Ian Young on several cuts.

The title tune alludes to Joe Zawinul, Wolff’s predecessor in Cannonball Adderley’s band. “He was so important to me,” Wolff says of the late keyboardist/composer. “Whenever I was having trouble in the band, I’d call him. I told him I had Nat [Adderley] figured out, but I couldn’t figure out Cannonball. He said, ‘When you figure him out, you let me know.’”

The new album isn’t the only thing keeping Wolff in the spotlight. On Nickelodeon’s *The Naked Brothers Band*, he

plays the goofy accordion-playing Dad to the eponymous Naked Brothers, his real-life sons Alex and Nat. The show was the brainchild of his wife, Polly Draper, an actress/writer/producer whom he met when she was a guest on Arsenio Hall’s show.

“When Nat was 3 or 4, he started writing songs out of thin air,” Wolff says. “His brother, Alex, saw Ringo Starr on a DVD when he was 2 or 3, and he started playing drums. Polly wrote this mockumentary about a band, and had real kids from Nat’s preschool and other friends.”

The resulting independent film led to a show on Nickelodeon and two subsequent albums, on which Wolff served as arranger and producer.

He’s proud of his sons and wife, and enjoys the show, but keeps that project separate from his jazz projects. “I’m not trying to cross over,” he says. “I do this for the people who love this music.” —**Ross Boissoneau**