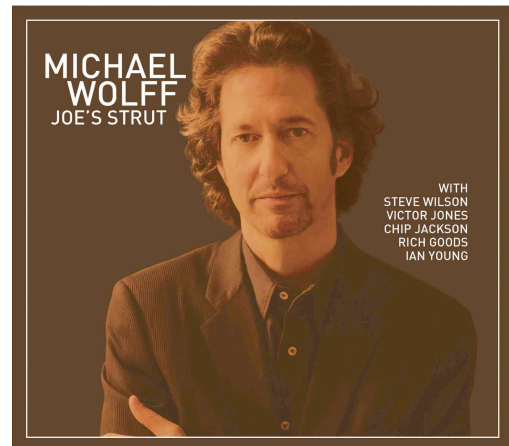


'Joe's Strut' Recalls Instrumental Jazz/Pop Radio Hits of Decades Past

Soon to be featured in DOWNBEAT, JAZZIZ, JAZZTIMES

Pianist **Michael Wolff's** upcoming 'Joe's Strut' features a catchy title track with a jazz/pop sensibility that recalls radio hits of decades past...Wolff's original, instrumental song recalls an era when **Chuck Mangione, Herbie Hancock, Cannonball Adderley, Les McCann and Eddie Harris, Ahmad Jamal, Ramsey Lewis** and others found popularity with songs that reached beyond straight-ahead jazz to embrace an expansive range of listeners. Check out the music and judge for yourself, here: <http://www.SethCohenPR.com/player/michaelwolff/>.

Wrong Records' February 10th release of 'Joe's Strut' marks Wolff's first new recording of straight-ahead, original, instrumental jazz since 2004's acclaimed 'Dangerous Vision'. Upcoming U.S. Tour dates include Feb 12 at The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library in LaJolla, CA; Feb 14 at Smothers Theatre, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA; and Feb 15 at Bach, Dancing & Dynamite Society, Half Moon Bay, CA, and at the Florence Gould Theater in San Francisco (presented by SFJazz) June 13. On **April 21-26, 2009, The Village Vanguard in NYC** will feature **Michael Wolff/Steve Wilson/Chip Jackson/Victor Lewis Quartet**. On April 30, Michael and his trio return to Gerald Veasley's Jazz Base in Reading, PA, with special guest, Steve Wilson. Additional 2009 dates will be announced soon.



MICHAEL WOLFF BIO – JOE'S STRUT

Anything can happen when pianist/composer Michael Wolff enters a studio. From the heavy grooves of his band Impure Thoughts to intimate solo and duo recitals, Wolff the recording artist is a man of many skills and moods. "It's never intellectual for me when I record," he emphasizes. "It's about what I feel."

Wolff was feeling jazz – the tradition that has nurtured him and the spirit of adventure that keeps moving the music forward – when he cut Joe's Strut, his new disc scheduled for release by Wrong Records on February 10, 2009. "Jazz is my background, it's what I grew up playing," he says. "I love Impure Thoughts, but the emphasis on percussion and the volume make it harder to deal with things like harmonic movement and my piano touch. And after my trio album Jazz, Jazz, Jazz was released in 2007 and I began performing in that format again, playing in an acoustic setting just felt right. I can retain the blues feeling underneath, while using all of the sophisticated harmonic things I've learned. As a pianist, it gives me more space."

Joe's Strut also provided the opportunity to assemble two fine ensembles, a quintet that performs four recent Wolff originals plus the Joe Zawinul classic "74 Miles Away" and a trio heard on the title track and two standards. The larger group features a rhythm section in which Wolff unites with two of his oldest associates, bassist Chip Jackson and drummer Victor Jones. "The three of us have been playing together since I moved to New York," the pianist says. "In fact, they were on my first New York gig, with Ronnie Cuber in 1975. Together we've played all the funk gigs, the rock gigs, the jazz gigs; we love Stravinsky and Country and Western music. It's all at our fingertips. But the music that we play here is our common language, our reference point, something that we never even have to talk about."

To complete the quintet, Wolff brought together Steve Wilson, one of New York's most in-demand alto and soprano saxophonists, and newcomer Ian Young on tenor sax. "Steve is just amazing, with his soulful feel and melodic creativity. And Ian is someone who I heard playing alto in a big band. When I found out that he also played tenor, I could tell just from his alto sound that he would create a great blend with Steve. There is something about two saxes together that comes closer to what I was hearing in my head than trumpet and tenor. It's a little more elastic, and it can even be a little out of tune, which I like after all of the quarter tones I've heard in Indian music. And the stylistic difference between Ian and Steve adds something else."

Wolff features the horns on four original compositions. Both the opening "Harbour Island," a straight-ahead cooker with a two-sax blend inspired by the work of James Spaulding and Wayne Shorter on classic Blue Note albums, and "The Third You," which evokes a moody foreign film score, were written during a recent visit to the Bahamas. The more open form of "Freedom" allows everyone to stretch out over a waltz tempo. "Wheel of Life," which begins as a duo for Wolff and Wilson (on soprano sax), turns in an impressionistic direction when the rhythm section enters. "I've been so busy recently that I didn't have time to write material specifically for the session," Wolff admits. "But when I looked on my piano to see what had accumulated in the past year, I realized that these pieces were just what I needed."

The album's final track, "74 Miles Away," recalls both Wolff's time in the last edition of the legendary Julian "Cannonball" Adderley Quintet and the tune's composer, Joe Zawinul. "Cannonball's greatness has gotten overlooked in a way, which is something that Joe and I used to talk about. People forget that, when they were both playing with Miles Davis, John Coltrane was afraid to follow Cannonball. When I got the gig, I used to ask Joe for advice about how to comp for Cannonball, and he'd just say, 'If you ever figure it out, call me.'"

Wolff's relationship with Zawinul, who died in 2007, also inspired the album's title track. With its mix of blues, boogaloo and New Orleans rhythms, "Joe's Strut" is a perfect tribute to the cross-cultural giant who traveled from his native Vienna to Birdland before changing the course of contemporary music through his work with Adderley, Miles Davis and Weather Report. It also reveals how the same boundary-breaking spirit informs Wolff's music. "I grew up in New Orleans, and then after my family moved I returned to spend every summer with relatives," he says. "I grew up hearing that music and playing with all of those guys. All of that is inside me."

More of the inner Wolff comes through on "If I Were a Bell," a relaxed inspection of the Frank Loesser classic that was inspired when the pianist recently shared a bandstand with the Count Basie Orchestra, and an introspective exploration of the Arlen/Mercer masterpiece "Come Rain or Come Shine." Both performances find Wolff drawing upon the examples of his keyboard idols, a group that includes Basie, Wynton Kelly, Red Garland, George Shearing and Ahmad Jamal. "When I was about to record my first album," Wolff recalls, "my piano mentor, Jerome Gray, advised me to 'let the band play you,' which is kind of what Ahmad's approach is about. That's a great lesson, to not just play notes but instead wait until you have something to say."

All three trio tracks find Wolff and Jones in the company of bass stalwart Richie Goods. "I haven't been writing music every day like I once did, and that opened up the chance to play a couple of standards with the trio," Wolff explains. "Since I've been playing a lot with both Chip and Richie and love them both, I wanted to have both of them on the album."

The sum of Joe's Strut is, in Wolff's opinion, "the best album I've made in terms of taking all of my experience and being totally creative with it. It's where I'm at right now, and now that I'm older I can appreciate all of the great things that Cannon and Sonny Rollins were doing when I played with them in the '70s. At this stage, I feel that I can play on many levels simultaneously. The rhythmic mode is jazz, but I can stretch it. I have the confidence to explore according to my own personality."

A central part of this confidence is Wolff's commitment to individuality, which is reflected in both his original music and the new spin he puts on the three non-originals. "The idea of doing a tribute album has been suggested, but why?" he insists. "It's like Cannon told me when I joined his band: 'let other people play their music. Write me some of your own.' As sensitive and vulnerable as you have to be to remain a good musician, you also have to be tough and fight to keep your own voice. So that's my tribute to Cannonball and Sonny – to keep going and be original."

Joe's Strut finds Michael Wolff realizing his goal in what is sure to be one of the most acclaimed jazz recordings of 2009. 1/09, By Bob Blumenthal

Hear a preview sampling of the album: <http://www.SethCohenPR.com/player/michaelwolff/>.
Visit www.michaelwolff.com