

Wolff Calls Knickerbocker 'Home' for February & March; NYU Master Class Confirmed as Well

Wolff Experimenting With New Style of Improvisation, with Bigger Arpeggios, "A Saxophone Approach to Piano"

Acclaimed jazz pianist **Michael Wolff** follows his triumphant appearance at **The Kennedy Center** in Washington, D.C. (*a performance that will soon be broadcast on **NPR**,*) with a return to his hometown of New York City and a multi-show stand at his beloved Knickerbocker club in lower Manhattan. Wolff has a great affinity for the room, which he describes as the "*only venerable restaurant/jazz joint left in NYC.*" See his warm and detailed recollection of the Knickerbocker, below.

Prior to the kick-off of shows at Knickerbocker, Wolff and his trio will conduct a Master Class at NYU, for their jazz department, February 24th at 2pm. On January 29th, Wolff is stepping in to teach two Ensemble classes at NYU as well.

Here is a breakdown of the Knickerbocker dates/musicians:

Feb 26 and 27: Wolff with Victor Lewis, drums and Chip Jackson, bass

March 5, 6: Wolff with Victor Lewis, drums and Ugonna Okegwo, bass

March 12, 13: Wolff with Mike Clark, drums and Chip Jackson, bass

March 19, 20: Wolff with Mike Clark, drums and Rich Goods, bass

Knickerbocker Bar & Grill - 33 University Place, NYC - 212-228-8490

<http://www.knickerbockerbarandgrill.com/music.html>

Wolff will play multiple sets each night, delivering a mix from his catalogue of CDs, from 'Joe's Strut' to 'Impure Thoughts' to 'Dangerous Vision' to 'Jazz Jazz Jazz', as well as some new music and jazz favorites (likely some Monk, and Wes Montgomery). Wolff's live shows have become known for their unpredictability, humor and high-octane punch. In fact, in a live review of a Wolff concert this summer, **The San Jose Mercury News** raved, "*all of the music felt very full and passionately alive.*"

Wolff is also expected to introduce a new approach to playing he's taken in recent months: "I discovered a new way of improvising on chords that is actually very simple, but sounds very fresh to me, and, incorporated with my other tools, is exciting to me. I was practicing on one of my older songs, Little M, from my Jumpstart CD, and just outlining the chords and arpeggiating them, and I found a really great way to connect them together and stagger them rhythmically. I don't hear pianists do

this much, and it helps to break me away from playing scales, which feel over used, at least by me. So, I'm having fun playing with this new improvisational material, which is not harmonically dissonant, but seems unique. I don't think it's anything earthshaking in and of itself, except as it applies to piano. It's more of a saxophone approach to piano, which is bigger arpeggios. I'm also combining that with something I discovered and clarified about my own playing and approach when I gave a short lecture/demonstration on Jazz and Tourette's syndrome last fall at a Lincoln Center conference on music and the brain. It was how I use my physical impulsiveness in my playing, putting a certain energy into the musical ideas. It's abstract, but demonstrable."

Michael Wolff's thoughts on the Knickerbocker:

"I LOVE TO PERFORM AT KNICKERBOCKER. IT'S THE ONLY VENERABLE RESTAURANT/JAZZ JOINT LEFT IN NYC. WHEN I CAME TO NYC IN THE MID SEVENTIES, BRADLEY'S AND KNICKERBOCKER WERE THE TWO HAPPENING PIANO BARS/RESTAURANT HANGS ON UNIVERSITY AVE IN THE VILLAGE. (BRADLEY'S CLOSED DOWN AROUND 10 YEARS AGO, A HUGE LOSS TO THE JAZZ COMMUNITY THAT HAS NOT YET BEEN CORRECTED.)

THERE WERE MANY GREAT JAZZ CLUBS, LIKE THE VILLAGE VANGUARD, WHICH IS STILL THE GREATEST JAZZ CLUB IN THE WORLD, AND THERE WAS BOOMER'S, THE VILLAGE GATE, STRYKER'S, MIKELL'S, SEVENTH AVE SOUTH, SWEET BASIL, AND MORE.

BUT AT KNICKERBOCKER, PEOPLE CAME FOR THE WHOLE HANG: THE MUSIC, THE FOOD, THE GREAT DRINKS, THE BAR, THE OTHER LIKE MINDED LATE NIGHT PEOPLE. THE WHOLE ATMOSPHERE WAS THICK WITH SMOKE, MUSIC, ALCOHOL, AND EXCITEMENT. LATE NIGHT, NIGHT TIME, GROWN UP, ADULT, RHYTHMIC, JUICY, SLIGHTLY SCARY, SOULFUL, FAMILIAL, SEXY, DRUGGY, SWINGING, SWAYING, GROOVING, LUSH, HARSH, BURNING, PULSING, DRAGGING, RUSHING, LOUD, SOFT, CONVERSATIONAL, CONFRONTATIONAL, EMOTIONAL, INTELLECTUAL, HABITUAL, THE WHOLE NIGHT WAS JAZZ.

I LIKE THE FACT THAT MUSIC IS A PART OF THE FABRIC OF THE WHOLE AT KNICKERBOCKER. THERE USED TO BE MUSIC SIX NIGHTS A WEEK. NOW IT'S ONLY ON THE WEEKENDS. DURING THE WEEK, WHEN THE TOP OF THE PIANO IS DOWN, IT IS LITERALLY FILLED WITH LARGE BOTTLES OF ALCOHOL. A LITERAL PIANO BAR. THERE IS NO SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE AT KNICKERBOCKER-DINERS, LISTENERS, DRINKERS, ALL HANG TOGETHER ON FRIDAY AND SATURDAY NIGHTS FROM 9:45PM UNTIL 2:00AM.

THE MUSIC RISES OUT OF THE WONDERFUL STEINWAY PIANO THAT HAS BEEN THERE FOR YEARS. I GENERALLY PLAY WITH A TRIO, BASS, TUCKED IN THE CORNER NEXT TO MY LEFT HAND, AND DRUMS, TUCKED INSIDE THE CURVE OF THE PIANO. ON THE FIRST SET IT'S LIKE PLAYING TO A CROWD OF LOUD PEACOCKS. IT'S THE FINAL BIG DINNER HOUR, BETWEEN 9:45 AND 10:30 OR 11 OR SO...STARTING AT THE 11PM SET IT BECOMES A MUCH MORE DRINKING AND LISTENING CROWD, AND FOR THE MIDNIGHT SET I OFTEN HAVE OTHER MUSICIANS DROPPING BY TO SIT IN FOR THE ATTENTIVE LATE NIGHT JAZZ FANS.

WE PLAY 45 MINUTES ON, AND 30 MINUTES OFF. BESIDES GETTING PAID, WE'RE GIVEN A DELICIOUS DINNER. I GENERALLY JUST GET A BUNCH OF AMAZING APPETIZERS-CREAMED SPINACH, BAKED POTATO, CAESAR SALAD, AND BREAD AND BUTTER, AND A SHOT OF SOMETHING GOOD, LIKE AN 18 YEAR OLD SINGLE MALT SCOTCH, OR MAYBE A VODKA MARTINI.

I LOVE PLAYING 3 AND 1/2 SETS OF MUSIC A NIGHT. IT CREATES A RELAXED, LONG FORM EVENING OF MUSIC. NOT TRYING TO BLAST IT ALL IN A ONE HOUR SET. ALLOWING THE MUSIC TO COME OUT OF ITS OWN ACCORD. THE MUSIC SNAKES UP INTO THE ROOM FROM THE HEARTS AND SOULS OF THE MUSICIANS ON THE BANDSTAND. I CAN TRY THE LATEST THING I'M WORKING ON OR

THINKING ABOUT MUSICALLY, AND THE MUSICIANS AND I CAN EXPERIMENT WITH WHATEVER WE FEEL AND ARE INTERESTED IN EXPRESSING AT THAT MOMENT. LOTS OF FOREPLAY, LOTS OF LONG SEARCHING AND PLAYING AND DISCOVERING NEW AND FORGOTTEN MUSICAL IDEAS. AS WE'RE NOT THE COMPLETE FOCUS, THERE IS NOT THE PRESSURE TO "PERFORM". WE JUST "PLAY". WE CONCENTRATE ON THE MUSIC, COMMUNICATING WITH OUR INSTRUMENTS BETWEEN OURSELVES, LEAVING OURSELVES OPEN FOR THE AFICIONADO TO DIVE INTO OUR PROCESS AND FEEL HIS OR HER WAY THROUGH THE EVENING WITH US.

THIS IS THE WAY I IMAGINE JAZZ TO HAVE BEEN PLAYED IN NEW ORLEANS WHEN IT WAS BEING INVENTED BY ORIGINAL MUSICIANS. SUCH AS LOUIS ARMSTRONG. IT WAS PART OF THE MUSIC IN THE WHORE HOUSE, IN THE SPEAKEASY, IN THE ROAD HOUSE, IN THE TAVERN, AND IN THE MARCHING BAND THAT PLAYED FOR FUNERALS, WEDDINGS, AND HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS.

ANOTHER FANTASTIC THING ABOUT KNICKERBOCKER-THERE'S NO BIG MUSIC CHARGE. JUST A FEW BUCKS AT THE TABLE FOR THE MUSIC, AND THE REST IS THE MONEY YOU SPEND ON DRINKS AND FOOD. AND THE FOOD IS DELICIOUS-GOOD OLD NY STEAK, CHICKEN, PASTA, SALADS, FISH, AMAZING SIDE ORDERS OF MUSSELS, OYSTERS. GREAT NEW YORK WHEN NEW YORK IS BEING NEW YORK.

I LOVE TO PLAY CARNEGIE HALL (I'VE PLAYED THERE 8 TIMES). I LOVE TO PLAY AT ROYAL ALBERT HALL IN LONDON, (PLAYED THERE A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO WITH MY BAND AND THE AFRICAN CHILDREN'S CHOIR AND BOBBY MCFERRIN.) I LOVE TO PLAY THE VANGUARD (I PLAYED THERE LAST APRIL WITH THE DOWNTOWN QUARTET), I LOVE PLAYING THE JAZZ STANDARD, THE BLUE NOTE, CONCERTS AND CLUBS ACROSS THE US, AND EUROPE AND ASIA.

BUT THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME. HOME IS WHERE YOU CAN JUST BE YOURSELF, AND SAY WHATEVER'S ON YOUR MIND. AND TO ME, KNICKERBOCKER IS HOME."

MICHAEL WOLFF
JAN 18, 2010

In advance of Wolff's appearance at The Kennedy Center late last year, **The Washington Post** Express chatted with him. Read the article here: [A Rootsy Ramble: Michael Wolff Gets Back to His Southern Roots](http://www.expressnightout.com/content/2009/10/michael-wolff-kennedy-center-joes-strut.php)
<http://www.expressnightout.com/content/2009/10/michael-wolff-kennedy-center-joes-strut.php>

Wolff's latest CD 'Joe's Strut' was the 35th most played record of 2009, according to **JAZZWEEK**. The album has garnered substantial national and regional press coverage since its release, and critics appear to have coalesced around a common theme: ***This CD is funky!*** In **The New York Times**, Nate Chinen noted that Strut ***"throws in a few hints of funk,"*** and that sentiment appears again and again reviews of the album. In fact, **All About Jazz-NY** said the CD was ***"funky as hell."*** Other notable coverage includes a recent 'Prelude' feature in **JAZZIZ**, and multi-page 'Before & After' interview feature **JAZZTIMES Magazine**, which praised Wolff as ***"a musical renaissance man."*** A terrific CD review in **ALLMUSIC** noted ***"the opening track finds Wolff, a master of harmonics with an assured quick-mindedness, full of surprises, tossing around choppy discordant post-bop chords like confetti and alternately unreeling no-nonsense bluesy flurries, the saxes and rhythm section maintaining a solid soulful block as he goes on his merry way."*** In Jazztimes' CD review, they comment: ***"Wolff's joy in playing***

piano is unmistakable and infectious." DOWNBEAT says: "***Joe's Strut delivers, smoothly and seamlessly,"*** and adds, "***his uptempo solos can swing hard, and he has the temperament to leave space where it belongs on the ballads."*** The **San Jose Mercury News** called Wolff "***A commanding jazz presence."***

Hear a sampling of the Michael Wolff's 'Joe's Strut':
<http://www.SethCohenPR.com/player/michaelwolff/>.

Visit www.michaelwolff.com

For more information about Michael Wolff, or to request an interview, please contact
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