Steve Wilson Injects Some Funk with ‘Super Band’ Tour in April; Four Nights at Jazz Standard are Confirmed, as are Shows in D.C. and VA

Wilson Hits His Stride, Builds New Collaborations for 2012

Acclaimed jazz saxophonist Steve Wilson aims to ‘get funky’ with his Super Band tour, set for April. The Steve Wilson Super Band features Patrice Rushen on piano and keyboard, James Genus on bass and Billy Kilson on drums. The tour will begin with a four-night visit to New York City, as Wilson returns to Jazz Standard April 12th-15th. On April 17th, the band will perform at Capital Ale House in Richmond, VA presented by The Richmond Jazz Society. April 18th will see them at Blues Alley in Washington, D.C., and the 19th will feature a workshop at Virginia Commonwealth University. The April tour wraps up with a performance in Steve’s home town of Hampton, VA, with an April 20th concert at the American Theater.

Each of the April events has personal significance for Wilson: his return to Jazz Standard follows his hugely successful 50th birthday celebration in 2010 (featured in The Wall Street Journal, NY Times and numerous other A-level outlets). The concert at Capital Ale house and the workshop at VCU are "second home" comings for Wilson. An alum of VCU, he has been in residence there several times and has a rewarding history of working with their students. Wilson is a long-time member of the RJS family and they have been presenting him in performance since the 1980’s. Finally, Wilson returns to the American Theater in his native Hampton, VA since his last appearance there in November 2004.

(** Note re Jazz Standard shows -- Kenny Davis replaces James Genus on Saturday, April 14th.)
More about the Steve Wilson Super Band:
Steve Wilson Super Band is a reflection of Wilson’s multifaceted artistry and versatility. Throughout his career Wilson’s bands have featured some of the most highly regarded musicians on the scene, and Super Band is just that. Pianist Patrice Rushen (hit recording artist, composer, arranger, producer, Grammy and Emmy Awards musical director, film and television scores), bassist James Genus (w/Herbie Hancock, Saturday Night Live, Bob James, Whitney Houston), and drummer Billy Kilson (w/George Duke, Chris Botti, Michael Franks, Dianne Reeves) are three of the most accomplished and creative talents in music today. Wilson asserts, “These are artists of the highest caliber, and with their collective resumes this is indeed is real “super band”. This very special project was assembled especially for Wilson’s homecoming concert at American Theater in his native Hampton, VA. The band’s collective experience encompasses jazz, funk, R & B, pop, classical, and more. He and Patrice Rushen have been band mates in Buster Williams’ quartet “Something More” for the several years. Wilson recorded Rushen’s tune “Wishful Thinking” on his 2003 Max Jazz release Soulful Song (that actually features Kilson and Genus). Says Wilson, “I’ve been a fan of her work for many years, and it’s a thrill to have her on this project.” James Genus is also a Hampton native. Having known each other since their teens, Genus and Wilson are both alums of Virginia Commonwealth University and the band Out of the Blue. Last year they performed and recorded with Jeff “Tain” Watts’ acclaimed Family project. Billy Kilson and Wilson met in the early 80’s, and subsequently toured and recorded together with the acclaimed Dave Holland Quintet in the late 90’s. Wilson was featured on Kilson's recent BK Groove DVD and CD release. “This tour was the perfect opportunity to collaborate with special friends who are very exciting and dynamic artists”, says Wilson. “Each of them are the very best at what they do, and they are all masters of varied styles of music- this quartet can travel any musical territory. As a musician you’re always aiming for the next plateau, and I’m sure that we’ll reach new heights on this musical adventure”. Expect the unexpected with this band.

Late last year, Wilson opened the 2011/2012 season at Kennedy Center Jazz Club with four sold-out sets, live coverage by NPR, rave previews & reviews and more. Wilson continues to sculpt an impressive career as a headliner, sideman, educator and jazz historian, and remains one of the most well-liked, in-demand and respected figures in jazz. Standing ovations greeted Wilson’s sets at the Kennedy Center, and shows were recorded for broadcast on NPR’s JazzSet with Dee Dee Bridgewater, adding to Wilson’s extensive NPR presence, as outlined below. While in Washington D.C., Wilson showed his ongoing dedication as an educator
and mentor, with a workshop at the Ellington School and a sold-out clinic for middle school students at the KC Jazz Club with his quartet, discussing the evolution of jazz from swing to be-bop, and Charlie Parker's influence in that movement.

As always, Wilson's diversity of projects, his commitment to education, and his respect for the legacy of jazz shine through in the ways he chooses to spend his time. Wilson is on faculty at three of the most highly regarded institutions – Juilliard, Manhattan School of Music, and SUNY Purchase. Here is an overview of recent or upcoming events:

*In addition to the workshop at VCU, Steve just completed a four-day residency at the University of NC at Chapel Hill where he guest soloist with the UNC Big Band and small ensembles, and guest adjudicator and clinician for the Carolina Jazz Festival which is a part of Jazz @ Lincoln Center's Essentially Ellington Program. Immediately following his visit, Jim Ketch, Director of Jazz Studies wrote, "You are the ideal clinician for our festival. Your musicianship and artistry is of the highest level. Students can be inspired by your sound, your technical facility, and your personal way of exploring melody, harmony, and rhythm. You are an articulate speaker; my students raved about the clarity of your ideas in the masterclass. You help us all understand the art form in a way that opens doors for students rather than closes them."
* On March 4, Wilson also visited William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ (where he was previously on faculty) as a featured artist for their 34 years running Jazz Room Series. He was guest soloist with the WPU Jazz Orchestra, directed by Pete McGuiness. Under the guidance of McGuiness and nine-time Grammy-nominee Jim McNeely, WPU students arranged several of Wilson's compositions for big band especially for this performance.
* He will be in residence at Bowling Green State University (OH) March 21 - 23. In addition to conducting several workshops, he will also perform with a faculty ensemble, student vocal jazz choir and the university big band.
* May 2 - 4, Wilson can be found in residence at City College of New York in Harlem, which will culminate with a performance by his Wilsonian's Grain quartet.

Looking ahead, Steve is very excited about a new co-led trio with long-time friends pianist Rene Rosnes and bassist Peter Washington. After a two-night engagement at The Kitano in NYC that was overwhelmingly received by sold-out audiences, they enthusiastically decided to extend the project. They will be appearing at the Village Vanguard December 4 - 9, and more dates will be announced soon.
Living up to the moniker "The Quintessential Sideman," Steve will be appearing with The Billy Childs Quartet at Disney Hall (performing a piece that Childs wrote for his quartet and the Kronos String Quartet), and then they fly to Japan to perform at the Blue Note in Tokyo. He continues his work with Christian McBride and Inside Straight at Birdland in NYC Marc 27-31 and he will perform at Jazz Standard May 17-20 with Ryan Truesdell's Gill Evans Centennial Project.

Diversity has become synonymous with Steve Wilson. Over the course of just the last year, he's had several well received ensembles: Steve Wilson with Strings, featuring music from Charlie Parker's Bird With Strings, Wilsonian's Grain with Orrin Evans, Ugonna Okegwo and Bill Stewart (or Clarence Penn), he continues to work in three different duo settings: with Billy Childs, Bruce Barth, and Lewis Nash, The Renee Rosnes/Steve Wilson/Peter Washington Trio, as well as putting together special bands with some of the biggest names in the business, including his star-studded 50th birthday week. Continually creating new projects and striving to expand his musical horizons, Wilson always keeps things fresh!

Recent coverage:

A Conversation with Steve Wilson - The saxophonist revisits a jazz classic this weekend at the Kennedy Center

In 1950, jazz icon Charlie Parker, better known to contemporaries as Bird, released a pair of albums collectively titled Bird with Strings, Vols. I and II. At the time, he encountered some criticism for choosing not to play the bebop compositions that had made him famous. Instead, Parker brought his innovations to orchestrated renditions of the Great American Songbook—the pop tunes of the day. Despite initial controversy, the recordings were among Parker’s favorite projects, and milestones that went on to serve as a template for future orchestral jazz by luminaries such as trumpeter Clifford Brown, saxophonist Stan Getz and vocalist Billie Holiday.

Steve Wilson, one of the today's most acclaimed saxophonists, will re-visit this seminal recording this weekend at the Kennedy Center. Though Wilson and his ensemble will be using many of the original arrangements from Bird with Strings, he's quick to note that the group isn't attempting to replicate the original experience. "Charlie Parker is one of the greatest geniuses we've had in this art form, or any art form," says Wilson. "Simply, there's no one that can recreate that level of creativity."

While Wilson was very familiar with Parker’s original recordings, he didn’t know that the arrangements from the sessions were available until three years ago, when he performed a few that had been compiled by composer/arranger Robert Sadin. The two collaborators went on to acquire other arrangements that Parker used during live engagements at Carnegie Hall and the Apollo Theatre, which featured pianist Billy Taylor, the Kennedy Center's late artistic director for jazz. In addition to this material, which can be heard on various Parker compilations, this weekend’s program will include orchestrations that were prepared for a third Strings session that never took place due to Bird's untimely passing in 1955. Playing all of these scores, familiar or not, has been an engaging and ear-opening experience for Wilson. "The sensation of playing with a string section just can’t be equaled, whether it's a quartet, quintet or an orchestra. It's one of the most exhilarating experiences that one can have as a soloist," Wilson explains. "For myself, I'm actually trying to shape my solo within the context of the string sound."
Performing with Wilson on his alto and soprano saxophones are Bruce Barth at the piano, Michael Bowie on bass and Lewis Nash at the drums. The string section will be anchored by Diane Monroe on the violin, with other violinists, Cleveland Chandler and Naira Underwood. Dawn Smith will perform on the viola with Troy Stuart playing cello. Many of these musicians are based in D.C.

Of the combined sound, Wilson noted, "This is a beautiful balance of a lush background of strings and the finest jazz improvisation."

Washington Examiner –
Preview Feature. By Marie Gullard, 10/6/11

Jazz trio with strings attached opens KC Jazz Club season
When the acclaimed bandleader, songwriter and jazz saxophonist, Steve Wilson opens the season at the Kennedy Center Jazz Club, he will bring along a trio of performers. This characteristic arrangement will present the original band arrangements from the seminal 1950 recording of the "Charlie Parker with Strings" album.

A compilation album, released in 1995 by Verve Records, originated from two recordings put out in 1950 by the late saxophonist -- one of the most influential improvising soloists in jazz. Instead of using his standard quintet, Parker's recording sessions featured a classical string section and a jazz rhythm section.

"This [album] was one of the first successful collaborations of a jazz soloist with strings," Wilson said. "It brought Charlie Parker, who was considered the innovator of bebop, into a large public forum and actually made him a star."

In fact those two releases became Parker's most popular sellers during his lifetime, and were admitted to the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1988.

In addition to playing songs from the 1995 "Strings" album, Wilson notes that the band will perform tunes that were written for Parker but never recorded because of his untimely death. Mercer Ellington and George Russell wrote the songs "Moon Mist" and "Ezz-theric," respectively, which were only recently discovered and made available to the public.

"What we'll be doing differently with these pieces that were not on Charlie Parker's recordings is improvising in the string section. We will open up the string ensemble to get their turn at improvisation, as well as myself and the rhythm section," Wilson explained. "The rest of the music will come from the Great American Songbook and will include 'Easy to Love' and 'April in Paris.'"

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JAZZTIMES MAGAZINE –
Preview News Column, by Jeff Tamarkin

Steve Wilson to Open Kennedy Center Jazz Club’s 2011/12 Season Saxophonist will perform string concerts and lead student workshop
Jazz saxophonist Steve Wilson has announced that on October 7 and 8, he will open the 2011/2012 season at Washington, D.C.’s Kennedy Center Jazz Club, with a special “Strings” performance featuring Bruce Barth, Michael Bowie, Lewis Nash, Diane Monroe and Troy Stuart. Wilson will also conduct a workshop for middle school students at the Kennedy Center Jazz Club, on October 7. As an educator and mentor, Wilson has played a major role in two of his students’ burgeoning careers, as they recorded new albums: Last October, Wilson produced his student Janelle Reichman’s first album, Middleground. Wilson is also featured prominently as performer on Youngjoo Song’s Tale of a City.
DETROIT FREE PRESS
BY MARK STRYKER 9/11

Best set (outdoor division): Everybody’s favorite sideman, alto saxophonist Steve Wilson, made his local debut as a leader fronting Wilsonian’s Grain, a post-bop quartet that channeled the saxophonist’s best qualities — selflessness, a fresh and well-made take on the tradition, and the ability to reference a broad spectrum of strategies and styles without falling prey to pastiche or sacrificing an original voice. (Sunday, Absopure Pyramid Stage.)

CONCERT REVIEW:
Alto saxophonist Steve Wilson has played frequently in metro Detroit with everyone from Chick Corea to Maria Schneider. But Sunday night at the 32nd annual Detroit Jazz Festival marked his local debut as a leader.
His post-bop quartet, Wilsonian’s Grain, channeled the saxophonist’s best qualities — selflessness, a fresh and well-made take on the tradition, and the ability to reference a broad spectrum of strategies and styles without falling prey to pastiche or sacrificing an original voice. Musicians known for their versatility like Wilson sometimes lack a strong enough point of view to put their own stamp on a group. Or they’re so intent on putting a stake in the ground that they force the action.
But Wilson, pianist Orrin Evans, bassist Ugonna Okegwo and Detroit-born drummer Clarence Penn let the music come to them in unpretentious, charismatic fashion at the Pyramid Stage at Hart Plaza. The four players sounded completely comfortable in their own skins. They play what they know, and their best music Sunday showed they know a lot.
Wilson, 50, played with a tart sound that radiated warmth but also the blues. He had a way of phrasing in-the-moment that avoided clichés and kept his agile mind alive to true improvisation rather than paint-by-numbers soloing. The whole group sounded smart but not prone to overly intellectualizing the music, preferring to speak to and from the soul.
On Wilson’s arrangement of Thelonious Monk’s “Well You Needn’t,” which used a funky vamp to disguise the beat and played clever tricks with the form, the saxophonist got underneath the skin of the rhythmic displacements in his solo; serpentine phrases cut by sharply articulated riffs told a story. The rhythm section, focused and frisky, fed him ideas; Wilson and Evans, an unpredictable player, especially seemed to be listening to the same internal song.
Okegwo’s precious waltz “For You” found Wilson playing the spare melody in his balcony register with a sound shorn of vibrato and perfectly in tune, capturing the purity of the line. He followed with a solo that downplayed technique for melody. The quartet drew on Ellington, bebop and modal ideas on a lickety-split, swinging version of the standard “Perdido.”
A Wilson original inspired by the New York City subway was a nutty, herky-jerky ride, morphing in and out of free time and swing passages at varying tempos. Wilson improvised squiggly melodies that winked at Ornette Coleman. The trio -- Evans’ jabbing chords, Okegwo’s brawny counterpoint and walk and Penn’s rhythmic sparring -- came and went as it pleased. The music sounded both fun to play and fun to listen to: Those are goals and results worth applauding.

MD THEATRE GUIDE - Review
Steve Wilson: Bird With Strings at The Kennedy Center
By Elliot Lanes - October 9, 2011

2011/2012 jazz season opened with a big splash as saxophonist Steve Wilson presented his authentic recreation of the 1950 jazz classic album Charlie Parker With Strings, Some people say Parker sold out when he made this album. I think he was just trying to push the envelope with a richer sound for a jazz recording. The original Joe Lipman and Jimmy Carroll arrangements are reconstructed to a “T” by David O’Rourke.
Starting off with “East of The Sun” which featured an improv violin solo by Diane Monroe – the evening just got better and better with every song. “What is This Thing Called Love” featured another great violinist, Matvei Sigalov, as well as bassist Michael Bowie, pianist Bruce Barth, and drummer Lewis Nash.
There are also some pieces that Parker was in the midst of recording when he passed away. One of them is a wonderful Mercer Ellington tune called “Moon Mist” and Neal Hefti’s “Repetition” gave everyone in the band a nice feature solo. Steve Wilson referred to the string section as Jewels and indeed they are.
Diane Monroe, Matvei Sigalov and Naira Underwood (Violins), Dawn Michelle Johnson (Viola) and Troy
Kenneth Stuart's (Cello) musicianship all complimented Mr. Wilson and his trio. Steve Wilson does not profess to be Charlie Parker – but his playing and musicianship are up there with some of the greats. If you can find the original recording of this album I urge you to give it a listen. If you get to see this concert somewhere I urge you to go. Steve Wilson and company did a Yeoman’s job of paying tribute to a jazz great. The place was jumpin’!

Capitolbop preview
http://www.capitalbop.com/tag/steve-wilson/
“Steve Wilson – quite possibly the best contemporary saxophonist you’ve never heard of (well, unless you have)”

More about Steve Wilson –
As an educator and mentor, Wilson has taken the support of his students’ development to the next level, and has played a major role in two of their burgeoning careers, as they recorded new albums: Last October, Wilson produced his student Janelle Reichman’s first album, ‘Middleground’. Wilson is also featured prominently as performer on Youngjoo Song’s ‘Tale of a City’.

**BASS SUPERSTAR PROJECTS:** Steve Wilson will be a featured performer on upcoming big band releases by two of the preeminent bassists of our time: Ron Carter – ‘Ron Carter's Great Big Band' (Sunnyside) and Christian McBride Big Band – ‘The Good Feeling' (Mack Avenue).

Wilson continues his education work, teaching again at both Manhattan School of Music and at SUNY Purchase. In addition to his recent workshops at the Kennedy Center, he'll be leading similar events at the Southern AZ Arts & Culture Alliance this fall.

Wilson’s career shifted to the next level following saturation media coverage of his 50th Birthday at New York’s Jazz Standard. Wilson featured six different bands over six nights, and each set during the birthday week saw lines out the door. The diverse shows each reflected a different stage of Wilson’s evolution into what NPR describes as “one of the finest saxophonists in the business.”

In addition to a major feature in The Wall Street Journal (link below,) Wilson was the sole Pop/Jazz event previewed in The New York Times’ Arts and Leisure section’s ‘The Week Ahead’ page; The New York Times also ran two Friday Weekend Arts preview columns; Wilson received a WNYC Radio ‘Gig Alert’; Time Out NY gave his shows a ‘Critic’s Pick’; the Village Voice ran a ‘Voice Choice’ preview and photo; Jazziz Magazine ran a feature preview in their February Digital Edition; HotHouse Magazine ran a cover story interview; The New Yorker ran a ‘Goings On About Town’ preview, JazzPolice ran a preview, and more.

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

NY CULTURE - FEBRUARY 7, 2011 - By LARRY BLUMENFELD
http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702036084576119950902333990.html?mod=WSJ_NY_Culture_LEFTTopStories

Wilson previewed the appearance with a terrific interview about the state of jazz on WBGO's ‘The Checkout’ with Josh Jackson: http://www.wbgo.org/thecheckout/?p=2154. While at the Vanguard, Wilson and his band Wilsonian’s Grain were filmed for inclusion in an MSNBC-TV segment of "Your Business" on the historic venue and its proprietor, Lorraine Gordon.

Wilson, described as “an endlessly adaptable alto and soprano saxophonist, at home in myriad settings,” by The NY Times’ Nate Chinen, and as a “stellar altoist” by Time Out NY, continues to generate rave coverage for his eclectic activities. In addition to an appearance at The Kennedy Center (broadcast on NPR,) Wilson recently appeared live on nationwide television, with a multi-song performance on The CW Network. Watch clips of his performance here: http://www.wgntv.com/news/liveperformances/wgntv-live-music-steve-wilson,0,672046.story

JAZZIZ.com called him “an especially skilled and sensitive saxophonist...” JAZZIZ followed up with news of Wilson’stributes to jazz greats Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Joe Zawinul. See the article, here: http://www.jazziz.com/events/2009/12/03/steve-wilson-to-honor-davis.
NPR featured Steve Wilson on JazzSet: Steve Wilson: A First-Call Saxophonist

In addition to the airing of his 2009 Kennedy Center event and his 2010 Village Vanguard show, NPR has featured Wilson in a live recording with the Blue Note 7. He was also recorded with Christian McBride and Inside Straight at the Detroit Jazz Festival, and was featured as a Special Guest with the Michael Wolff Trio at the Kennedy Center last year.

Wilson’s multiple roles as a band leader, sideman, educator and jazz historian have lead journalists to praise him as “a dynamic improviser,” “a musician’s musician,” “one of the finest saxophone players today,” and more. DC's Express (A publication of The Washington Post,) described his recordings as “captivating.” John Murph’s interview with Steve may be seen here:
http://www.expressnightout.com/content/2009/03/finances_and_all_that_jazz_steve_wilson.php

Wilson’s performance at the Kennedy Center, heard on NPR JazzSet (click NPR link, above,) was also previewed in the DCist:
http://dcist.com/2008/10/16-preview_steve_wilson_the_kc_jazz_cl.php

JAZZIZ.com featured Wilson in a NEWS column timed to his ‘09 Orchestral debut: STEVE WILSON - A TOUCH OF CLASSICAL

In a live review in ALL ABOUT JAZZ – NY, Wilson's performance at the Rubin Museum in New York was described as follows: "Wilson wove his sound through the music in a manner that was spellbinding in its nuance and attentiveness to dynamics." http://www.allaboutjazz.com/newyork/aaaj_ny_200809.pdf

Nominated once as Alto Player of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association (and this year for Soprano Saxophone Player of the year,) and profiled in ALL ABOUT JAZZ, Wilson is known for his modest, warm personality...and for his in-depth knowledge of all-things-jazz. Read the major 'career' feature on Steve Wilson, from ALL ABOUT JAZZ, here:

At http://www.stevewilsonmusic.com/, visitors can sample new tunes and see performance footage. The site, part of the Jazz Corner family, also includes a streaming audio player, details of Wilson's numerous band configurations, and more.

For more information about Steve Wilson, or to set up an interview, please contact SethCohenPR@earthlink.net or 212-873-1011.