

[http://www.theadvocate.com/new\\_orleans/entertainment\\_life/keith\\_spera/article\\_f1337090-e71e-11e6-8c68-eb2515ecc7b2.html](http://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/entertainment_life/keith_spera/article_f1337090-e71e-11e6-8c68-eb2515ecc7b2.html)

# Pianist Henry Butler to headline Woodlands Conservancy benefit before undergoing cancer treatment

BY KEITH SPERA | [KSPERA@THEADVOCATE.COM](mailto:KSPERA@THEADVOCATE.COM) JAN 31, 2017 - 9:45 AM



SCOTT THRELKELD

[Buy Now](#)

Advocate staff photo by SCOTT THRELKELD -- Henry Butler performs with Butler, Bernstein and the Hot 9 in the Blues Tent Saturday, May 3, 2014, at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival at the Fair Grounds.

Keith Spera

Keith Spera writes about music, culture and his kids.

Henry Butler ranks among the titans of the New Orleans piano tradition. Even though he has lived elsewhere since Hurricane Katrina — first Denver and, since 2009, Brooklyn — he keeps abreast of the city's music and the larger issues that affect it.

Which is why he agreed to headline Thursday's "Save Our Sponge" benefit concert for the Woodlands Conservancy, the nonprofit land trust organization that works to preserve Louisiana's coastal hardwood forest ecosystem, which, in turn, helps protect the greater New Orleans area from storm surge and wind.

Thursday's event at the People's Health New Orleans Jazz Market, 1436 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd., opens with a 6 p.m. patron party featuring the Jason Marsalis Trio. The general admission show, with tickets starting at \$25, is from 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

*Story Continued Below*

In what will be Butler's first local appearance since October, he'll perform a solo set that tilts toward the rhythm and blues end of his broad musical spectrum, which also encompasses jazz, classical music and just about everything in between.

"It will be a normal Henry Butler in New Orleans set," he said by phone from New York recently. "We're not going to do much jazz. We'll keep it toward a roots-based set."

The show comes at a challenging time for Butler personally. In 2015, he was diagnosed with colon cancer. Surgery and chemotherapy followed. In late 2016, he learned that the illness had returned, in the form of stage IV metastatic colon cancer; a scan turned up nodules on his liver.

A few days after his Woodlands Conservancy show in New Orleans, and after a concert to benefit him in New York, he'll depart for Germany. There, he is to undergo radiotherapy treatment and other alternative therapies that, he believes, will have far less serious side effects than the chemotherapy regimen his American doctors have recommended. The hospital, he's happy to report, has a piano where he can practice during the treatments.

If all goes well, he'll be back home in early March. Though he's canceled or postponed a handful of gigs because of his illness, he's optimistic that he'll be able to perform as scheduled starting again in March, including a show at the 2017 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. He just played a three-night stand at the Jazz Standard in New York with trumpeter Steven Bernstein and the Hot 9.

"It's another test," Butler said of the cancer's return. "But I'm feeling confident. I'm confident within myself and confident with what the doctors are saying. I'm feeding off their confidence. We're going to kick some ass."

Butler is well-accustomed to persevering over personal challenges. His blindness was not an impediment to building an international career or even to taking up photography as a hobby.

For the past few months, he's been writing material for his next album. "I'm going to keep working my butt off so I can keep making music in America great."

Meanwhile, the more than 500 people who contributed to a GoFundMe campaign to help with his medical and travel expenses — the amount raised surpassed the \$35,000 goal — will receive an exclusive body of material as a thank-you from Butler.

He doesn't make it down to New Orleans much these days, in part, because he no longer has a place of his own. But also, he must avoid the city's temptations. "When I come to New Orleans, I feel like I have to eat and do things that make me gain weight. Right now, I'm trying to take care of myself. My diet has changed a lot."

It's mostly vegetarian, with a little chicken and fish. No white sugar, so most desserts are out. So is red wine. "I'm feeling so good now I might not ever go back to white sugar," he said.

After undergoing treatment in Germany, he and his doctors will assess his condition. He's hoping to avoid chemotherapy, "because I don't want to beat up my body like that. If I need it after I get back from Germany, then I'll do it."

But he anticipates coming back from overseas as "a new guy."

Since his diagnosis became public, "everybody's been wonderful and very positive," he said. "I'm really optimistic about all of this."

**'Save Our Sponge' featuring Henry Butler**

**What:** A benefit for the Woodlands Conservancy

**When:** Thursday (Feb. 2), 6 p.m. patron party with the Jason Marsalis Trio, 7:30 p.m. main concert with Butler.

**Where:** Peoples Health New Orleans Jazz Market, 1436 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.

**Tickets:** \$25 general admission, \$125 patron, via EventBrite

---

FOLLOW KEITH SPERA ON TWITTER, @KEITHSPERA.

## You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

**New Orleans, Louisiana: This Brilliant Boston Company Is Disrupting a \$200 Billion Industry**

EverQuote Insurance Quotes

**2 Bites Of This (Before Bed) - Watch What Happens To Your Belly**

BIOX4 Supplement

**Banks Urge Louisiana Homeowners To Switch To A 15 Yr Fixed**

LowerMyBills

**26 Years After "Wings" Ended: The Cast Talked Behind the Scenes**

My Daily Viral

**Nancy Kerrigan Was Gorgeous In The 90s, But What She Looks Like Today Left Us Without Words**

Hyperactivz

**Try DreamWear CPAP Mask Risk Free**

Easy Breathe

**11+ Insanely Massive Animals That Actually Exist (Photos)**

Grizly