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A flood of music on tap for World Wetlands Day in Crescent City

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Thursday, February 2, is annually recognized around the globe as World Wetlands Day. Pianist and vocalist Henry Butler will help this noble cause by performing that night at the People Health New Orleans Jazz Market, 1436 Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, for an event entitled Save Our Sponge. The rather quirky name refers to the importance of forested wetlands to provide absorption of water and thus protection of locales, including New Orleans, from intrusion and devastation.

“I mean we don’t have a lot of time to play with this stuff,” says Henry Butler speaking about the many environmental issues effecting the globe. Butler, a brilliant New Orleans native who presently resides in New York, says he’s increasingly become aware of the results of things like pollution and water contamination.

“Just in the last 10 years of my life, I’ve seen the weather change a lot. And I know, and especially by reading people who study this stuff — those who do all of the valid research — if the earth continues to warm up one or two degrees, we’ll be in serious trouble.”

“I’ve been very conscious of it,” Butler continues, “and I try to do what I can in my own personal life – recycle, not use as much plastic. His awareness has also become more acute since being diagnosed with metastatic colon cancer that has spread to his liver. “In terms of my own health, especially now, I try to eat more organically. My physical energy is still good. My mental energy gets a little frayed sometime just thinking about the unknown – like what might happen next. Will I be able to overcome the condition? Any type of therapy that one takes, whether it’s conventional or alternative, as I’ve chosen, is a gamble. You don’t know, nobody knows.” Later in February, he will head to Germany for a combination of hyperthermia (heat) and IPT, a lower-dose form of chemotherapy, therapies.

Despite his illness, Butler has continued to work with the Butler, Bernstein and the Hot 8 ensemble as well as continuing with other projects. “I’m still writing and have a lot of new material.” At the Save Our Sponge benefit, he’ll be performing solo doing the same stream of consciousness style – moving from New Orleans rhythm and blues, to jazz, to blues, to classical, to gospel — that audiences expect from his genius.

“I’m always happy when I get called to come back to play in New Orleans and I hope to see some of my friends,” declares Butler who will perform at Jazz Fest 2017 with his new quartet Jambalaya. “I love that city — I love being there. Sooner or later I’ll wind up being there.”

Nicholas Payton — Continuing the Lineage

Trumpeter and keyboardist Nicholas Payton travels the world yet still digs sharing his knowledge with younger musicians here at home in New Orleans. On Thursday, February 2, he’ll lead a trio at the Prime Example that includes 20-something bassist Amina Scott and drummer Brian Richburg who is in his senior year of high school.



NICHOLAS PAYTON

“It’s a part of giving back,” Payton explains. “I’ve been on the scene since I was their age and have certainly been the beneficiary of older cats taking me under their wings and giving me their time and giving me gigs when I might not have been the best trumpet player for the gig. They certainly afforded me the opportunity to learn and serve under their tutelage.”

It’s also a two-way situation,” he continues. “Whatever they are, perhaps, gaining from me, I also get fed by their youth and their creativity and their fresh ideas. Much in the same way, I am inspired by my son and what he’s connected to. Children are the most direct way of tapping into the pulse of what’s happening now. As creative as I try to be as an artist, I don’t want to get stuck in any type of ruts or any kind of bags. I think playing with youngsters like Amina and Brian is the most tried and true way of doing that. It serves several purposes — you’re mentoring them and they are also invigorating you.”

Payton met both of the young musicians at the Prime Example when they were playing with pianist Jesse McBride presents the Next Generation group at its regular Wednesday night show.

“The Prime, for me, is pretty much the premier club in New Orleans,” Payton declares. “There are obviously more reputable clubs in terms of name and recognition. But just in terms of the feel and its inter-connectedness to the community and the diversity of the people who come out, to me, Julius’ club (owner Julius Kimbrough) and the vibe he brings to the Prime is most like what I associate a New Orleans club to be. It’s not only, for me, the best club in the city but one of my favorite places to play in the world.”

It seemed unlikely that Payton would be featuring any of the material from his soon-to-be released album, Afro-Caribbean Mixtape, as the instrumentation on the two-disc CD is quite expansive and at the Prime Example he’ll be working with a trio.

“At the end of the day, it’s just music,” Payton says adding that the trio will definitely do tunes from the new album and from older albums as well as perform some standards. “The style of writing that I’ve developed since the era beginning with (2003’s) Sonic Trance, is that I write moods. I don’t really write songs. It’s not really about instrumentation or how many musicians are on stage with me but that the cats get it and then we can take that ride and take the audience along with us.”

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