

Stalwart bassist Ben Wolfe is proud to announce the August 30th release of his new album, *Fatherhood* - a heartfelt body of work which pays tribute to the bassist's father, Dan Wolfe who passed away in 2018. This ten-track collection of nine originals and one cover also serves as a meditation on what it means for Ben to be a father to his own son, Milo. With *Fatherhood*, the bassist and composer made a conscious decision to step off the fast lane for a moment and make music of introspection and mourning. "I made this record in ways I knew my father would have encouraged" - that meant choosing the best studio, the best musicians, self-funding the entire project, and making wise decisions throughout. Ben is thrilled to have this record brought to fruition by a collection of both familiar collaborators and young phenoms - the bassist is joined by trumpeter Giveton Gelin, saxophonists Immanuel Wilkins, Ruben Fox, JD Allen, trombonist Steve Davis, pianists Luis Perdomo and Orrin Evans, vibraphonist Joel Ross and drummer Donald Edwards. As on two previous recording sessions, Ben drafted the Grammy-nominated violinist Jesse Mills to put together a stellar string quartet, which features Mills alongside Goergy Valtchev on violin, Kenji Bunch on viola and Wolfram Koessel on cello. Mindful of his father's judicious approach to performance, Ben surmises that "this record is about the overall sound of the ensemble."

Ben and his dad experienced the customary roller coaster ride typical of father-son relationships, but in music they forged their deepest bonds. A former violinist who spent a season with the San Antonio Symphony, Dan Wolfe raised his son to love all sorts of music. "He introduced me to jazz," Wolfe explains. "He loved Monk. He loved Lester Young and Billie Holiday. And he taught me a lot about music...he was not into showing off or playing extra notes for no apparent reason".

Wolfe's use of strings on seven of the ten tracks beautifully unites the jazz and classical worlds that father and son revelled in. This is not the first time the Baltimore-native augmented his ensemble with a quartet of strings, but as a tribute to his father it takes on a new significance. During the recording process of *Fatherhood*, Wolfe made the unorthodox decision to record without headphones and insisted that the band play together in the same room. As a result, the recording sounds rich and warm.

Fatherhood opens with "Blind Seven," a track which features two brilliant young cats barely in their '20s—Immanuel Wilkins on alto saxophone and Joel Ross on vibraphone. Rounding out the rhythm section is Venezuelan pianist/composer Luis Perdomo and drummer Donald Edwards, who has been a regular collaborating partner of Wolfe's for at least 25 years now. "Blind Seven," (a reference to the card game "spades,") is a classic from the Ben Wolfe songbook first recorded in 1996. This arrangement only bears a passing resemblance to its earlier bopp-ish version - the melody doesn't come in until two minutes into the tune, as Wilkins and Ross trade complex angular phrases against the string quartet, which plays contrapuntally against the uptempo rhythm section and horn lines. The composition then moves into a short, unaccompanied piece based on an eleven-note motive. This "Blind Seven" diverges so radically from the original that fans may think of it as a new composition.

The album moves forward with “Gone Now” - a ballad which reflects on what is lost when relationships end. While the lush string arrangement conjures a sense of nostalgia, young British tenor player, Ruben Fox, channels Lester Young with his light airy tone, slight vibrato, and elegant lyricism. Another stand-out track from the album is “Uncle Leslie,” which pays tribute to the composer’s son Milo and to the people that have become significant figures in the youngster’s life. Ben introduced everyone around Milo, especially fellow musicians, as “uncle,” and the circle included a female neighbor of theirs named Leslie whom he dubbed “Uncle Leslie.” This tune is an exquisite slow-medium waltz featuring Gelin, Ross, Evans, and a solo by Wolfe. “The Kora La” is a mesmerizing piece of music. Kora La refers to the mountain pass through the Himalayas linking China and Nepal. The piece was originally commissioned by the National Jazz Museum in Harlem for the Harlem in the Himalayas Jazz Series and premiered at the Rubin Museum of Art. The string quartet’s opening reminded Wolfe of mountains, and the grooves that follow as the road through those mountains. However the real inspiration for the music can be traced back to Alex Ross’s *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* - a book which tells the history of modern and experimental music.

“First Things First” slows down the tempo to the kind of fox trot cadence, reminiscent of those penned by Thelonious Monk. Trombonist Steve Davis joins Ross on the front line, backed by Perdomo, Edwards, Wolfe, and strings. Fatherhood closes with “What’s New” - the album’s sole cover track. On this 1939 standard composed by fellow bassist Bob Haggart with lyrics by Johnny Burke, while Wolfe remains loyal to the song’s roots as a slow, romantic ballad, he succeeds in re-harmonizing and rearranging the song in ways consistent with his generation. Wolfe knows his father would have loved the band’s reinterpretation of this classic gem, and so its position as album closer truly encompasses the thoughtful homage Ben envisioned Fatherhood achieving.

Derived from liner notes by Robin D. G. Kelley

MORE ABOUT BEN WOLFE

As Wynton Marsalis said, “Ben Wolfe swings with authority.” Bassist-composer Ben Wolfe has released eight albums as a composer. Of the music on his MAXJAZZ debut “No Strangers Here” The New York Times says, “In this music Mingus and Miles Davis meet Bartok and Bernard Herrmann”. Chamber Music America awarded him the 2004 New Works: Creation and Presentation Program Grant, funded through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. As a result of this award, Wolfe was able to compose his extended composition *Contradiction: Music for Sextet*. Wolfe also recently made his mark as a film composer, working with Matthew Modine on the film short, *I Think I Thought*. At the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival, The New York Sun reviewed his work on this film as, “a standout music score.” Born in Baltimore, Maryland and raised in Portland, Oregon, Wolfe has gained a large following from his performances with Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., and Diana Krall. Early on in his career, he formed a Duo with Harry Connick Jr. and went on to record over a dozen albums and soundtracks. During his years with Connick, he performed on numerous world tours as musical director. He then joined the Wynton Marsalis Septet and remained until it disbanded. Wolfe

also became an integral part of Diana Krall's touring band and played on many of her recordings, including the Grammy Award winning CD, "When I Look In Your Eyes."

When a member of The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (JLCO), Wolfe performed with Joe Henderson, Doc Cheatham, Jon Hendricks, Harry "Sweets" Edison, and Billy Higgins, among others. Other artists he has also recorded with include Branford Marsalis, Orrin Evans, James Moody, Eric Reed, and Benny Green. In addition to the CDs mentioned, Ben's other recordings as a leader include "13 Sketches" (1996) and "Bagdad Theater" (1997), both released on Mons Records; "Murray's Cadillac" (2000) on Amosaya Music; "My Kinda Beautiful" (2004) on Planet Arts Records; "Ben Wolfe Quintet: Live at Smalls" (2011); and "From Here I See" (2013) Maxjazz.

Ben is currently on the teaching faculty at The Juilliard School: Jazz Division.