

SKIP WILKINS BIOGRAPHY (Full Length)

Skip Wilkins was born and raised in eastern Massachusetts. He grew up in a musical home and began listening to jazz at a very early age. His father played drums locally, so Skip was able to interact with professional musicians as a small child. He first found his way to the stage in kindergarten and has not left the stage since. In many ways his earliest experiences have proved the most enduring. He learned to love singing and listening to subtle harmonies before entering school, taking particular delight in the Great American songbook repertoire of such composers as Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin and others of the first half of the twentieth century. Also drawn to syncopated rhythms and polyrhythms of jazz recordings that he heard at home, it is readily apparent that the seeds of his future style were already planted in pre-school. Many years later, a seasoned professional pianist, Skip is noted for his lyricism, fascination with harmonic color, boundless rhythmic energy, and interest in exploring songs from the Great American Songbook.

Skip has been fortunate to play with luminaries and un-sung local players wherever he has lived. As he was coming up in Boston, he worked with drummers Joe Hunt and Bob Moses and with saxophonists Jimmy Mosher and John LaPorta. In Denver, where he established his style, Skip was a well-known figure regionally, and often performed with marquee players when they visited the area. These included saxophonist Plas Johnson, vocalists Mark Murphy and Darmon Meader, trumpeter Conte Candoli, bassist Milt Hinton, and drummer Peter Erskine. He also made his first recording, *Two Much Fun!*, on Eaglear Records, as co-leader with flutist Jill Allen. While in the Rocky Mountain region, he toured the West with various groups and performed regularly at all the established jazz clubs, including the famous El Chapultepec. He also performed countless times at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, where he taught during his eight years in Colorado.

Relocated to eastern Pennsylvania in 1995, Skip resumed his performing career on the east coast with the Wilkins & Allen Quartet. In 2001 on Cathexis Records, Skip and Jill Allen released *Petty Theft*, which featured guest performances by Grammy-nominated saxophonist David Liebman. He also continued to perform in concert with all-stars, including saxophonists David Sánchez, Stanley Turrentine and Bobby Watson, trumpeter Clark Terry, trombonist Al

Grey, and drummer T.S. Monk. Of course, right in his backyard Skip periodically performs with Philadelphia legends Mickey Roker, Larry McKenna and John Swana, among many others. Skip plays all of the great regional jazz venues, including Ortlieb's Jazzhaus and Chris's Jazz Café, both in Philadelphia, and Delaware Water Gap's Deer Head Inn.

In 2005, Skip formed a new working ensemble, Skip Wilkins Quintet. Together they recorded eighteen of his original compositions, for release on two CDs. The first, Skip Wilkins Quintet: *Volume I*, was released in September of 2006 on Dreambox Media (DMJ-1101).

They followed up, in April 2007, with the release of *Volume II* on Dreambox Media (DMJ-1104). Group members include bassist Tony Marino and drummer Gary Rissmiller, with whom he has been performing and touring for over a decade; guitarist Tom Kozic, with whom he has given concerts for twelve years; and relative newcomer tenor saxophonist Paul Kendall. Skip is a prolific composer and he has been on a tear with CD releases in 2006, 2007 and 2008, 2010 and 2011.

Dreambox Media released *Skip Wilkins Solo--Live at Lafayette* (DMJ-1109) on August 14, 2007. Skip had been thinking about recording some solo piano music. While considering repertoire, he came across an archival live concert recording from a performance he gave at Lafayette College on September 16, 2000. There was no need to record right away – this one was already in the can! The recording features some of Skip's compositions and also pieces by Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, George Gershwin and Frederic Chopin. As ever, his playing ranges from lyrical to edgy, often turning unexpectedly. No wonder his music is playing on the airwaves, coast-to-coast.

Skip's next Dreambox Media project, *The Paint-Peeler* (DMJ-1117), was released in August 2008, and features the Skip Wilkins Quintet. For this outing, the band returned to the Williams Center for the Arts at Lafayette College for another live-remote recording. Engineer Jim McGee captured a new set of pieces written expressly for members of

the ensemble. Whereas *Volume I* and *Volume II* featured pieces that were adapted for the group, Skip wrote all the music on *The Paint-Peeler* for Paul Kendall, Tom Kozic, Tony Marino and Gary Rissmiller—and Skip Wilkins. It is an especially edgy recording. While Skip doesn't discard his lyrical voice, numerous pieces emphasize the rumbling musical interaction Skip has with Marino and Rissmiller, with great solos from every member of the ensemble. John Vanore's mixing and mastering touch is unmistakable, as is Kathy Ridl's production design.

In August 2009, Skip recorded *Frýdlant Nights* with the Rostislav Fraš – Skip Wilkins Quintet. Released on CD in 2010 on the Czech Radio Prague label (CR0473-2), the quintet features Wilkins with Americans Neil Wetzel (alto saxophone) and Gary Rissmiller (drums), with Czech musicians Fraš (tenor saxophone) and Josef Fečo (bass). Wilkins's compositions are featured prominently, ranging from edgy to lyrical. The quintet, which sometimes performs under the moniker "International Quintet," has toured in the Czech Republic eight times and completed their first US tour together in February 2010, in conjunction with the release of *Frýdlant Nights*. Just in 2010 alone, the group completed three European tours. They headlined at major festivals in Přeřov and Vsetín and gave a live radio broadcast performance from Prague's famous jazz club, Jazz Dock.

Since Skip relocated to the east coast, he has continued to tour around the United States and in Italy, Germany and the Czech and Slovak Republics as a soloist and as part of various groups. Some noteworthy European performances have included the Karel Velebny Summer Jazz Workshop in Frýdlant, Czech Republic; as soloist with the Big Band Českého Rozhlasu (Czech Radio) at the International Prazke Jaro (Prague Spring) Music Festival; Prague jazz clubs, including Agatha Jazz Centrum, Jazz Dock, U Malého Gléna and U Stare Paní; Czech Republic concert venues in Frýdlant, Přeřov, Vsetín, Kyjov, Plzen, Cesky Krumlov, Pardubice, Brno, and Ostrava; and television and radio broadcasts in the Czech Republic. He performs on and is interviewed prominently in two Czech Television documentaries filmed in Frýdlant. In Berlin he has headlined at Schlot and at Jazz im CoffeeArt. In the United States, performances include Bethlehem, PA's Musikfest; NYC's Tavern on the Green and Cleopatra's Needle; The Wichita Jazz Festival, where the Wilkins & Allen Quartet served as Artists-in-Residence; and The Blue Room at the Kansas City Jazz Museum. Skip also gave performances at the University of North Texas, Williams College, and the Rochester Institute of Technology, and at other

venues in Arizona, Colorado, New York, Pennsylvania and North Carolina. Nearer to his home, Skip has performed often at Muhlenberg College, Moravian College and at Lafayette College, where he is Associate Professor of Music.

Skip's recordings and performances have always received critical acclaim. In 2001 he received a fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He was given the award for excellence in jazz composition. Many of the compositions for which he was recognized were included on *Petty Theft*.

Skip also has numerous other associations. Recently, he has been recording and performing with the newest version of the Skip Wilkins Trio – a New York trio – with Scott Lee (bass) and Jeff Hirshfield (drums). Skip has two new Dreambox Media releases with the Trio in 2011! The first is *I Concentrate on You* (DMJ-1133), a set of standards, including some well-known pieces and some less often played gems. The second is *After* (DMJ-1135), a set of new compositions by Skip Wilkins, including some of the most varied writing he has issued to date. The Trio also becomes a Quartet, adding Skip's son, Daniel Wilkins, a tenor saxophonist who has toured internationally with his father and who is performing regularly in New York City, while attending Manhattan School of Music. The Skip Wilkins Quartet recorded a new set of Skip's compositions in January 2011 for another forthcoming CD release, one with the working title, *Father & Son*. Additionally, the Wilkins Family performs together with Skip's daughter Emily, a wonderful vocalist.

Skip is a charter member of the Tony Gairo-Gary Rissmiller Jazz Orchestra and is prominently featured on the Orchestra's 2006 release, *Treacherous*, on Seabreeze Jazz Records. He has also performed and recorded with The Trio, an ensemble featuring bassist Roy Cumming and drummer Glenn Davis. For fourteen years, Skip gave a monthly salon performance at Blue Orchid Inn in nearby Mertztown, Pennsylvania. For most performances, he invited a guest to perform with him, but occasionally performed solo. Blue Orchid Inn is an exceptional, intimate spot to see and hear jazz, with exquisite food and a loyal clientele that returns for the experience each month.

The series continues now, periodically.

Skip studied jazz composition and arranging with Herb Pomeroy at Berklee College of Music in Boston, and is a former faculty member at Berklee. He also studied and taught under Gene Aitken at the University of Northern Colorado.

Skip is taking a sabbatical from his position at Lafayette College and is living in Prague, Czech Republic, between June 2011 and the end of August 2012. During his 15-month residency, he will perform throughout Europe, focusing first on the Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia and Poland in the summer months of 2011. He will also perform occasionally in the United States when he makes short return visits.