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NEWS RELEASE

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COMPOSER-TRUMPETER SARAH WILSON'S UNIQUE JOURNEY TO JAZZ YIELDS A SOPHISTICATED & ACCESSIBLE ALBUM THAT DEFIES CATEGORY

* All-star quintet includes clarinetist Ben Goldberg, pianist Myra Melford, bassist Jerome Harris, and drummer Scott Amendola *

"Sarah has developed a new music all her own."

— Dave Douglas, jazz trumpeter-composer

Sarah has a gift for creating fresh, idiosyncratic and complex music that sounds completely natural."

— Myra Melford, jazz pianist-composer

Composer/trumpeter **Sarah Wilson** has emerged as "one of the most intriguing and promising composers and trumpeters on the contemporary music scene" (Derk Richardson, *San Francisco Chronicle*). Her original work has earned numerous commissions and premiered internationally and she earned wide acclaim for her 2006 Evander Music debut, *Music for an Imaginary Play*. Her new CD **Trapeze Project** — with clarinetist **Ben Goldberg**, pianist **Myra Melford**, bassist **Jerome Harris**, and drummer **Scott Amendola** — showcases her danceable, visually evocative, and melodic music that is both sophisticated and accessible. **Trapeze Project** will be available September 28, 2010 on Brass Tonic Records.

Wilson didn't come to music through the usual channels. As an undergraduate anthropology major at the University of California, Berkeley, Wilson, a lapsed high school trumpet player, took a strong interest in theater. A visiting artist from Vermont's globe-trotting Bread and Puppet Theater inspired her to move east to work on their spectacular giant-puppet productions after graduation. She spent two years as a member of the troupe, increasingly conducting, arranging and performing music for their shows. In 1993, she moved to New York to concentrate on music, studying with trumpeters John McNeil and Laurie Frink. Through her affiliation with Bread and Puppet Theater, she soon found herself musical director and composer of Lincoln Center's Out of Doors Festival's annual puppet program. "At the time, I didn't really have any formal training or experience composing," Wilson says. "I didn't know much harmony, so I would just write these melodic bass lines and layer contrapuntal melodies on top of them. I was really into Afro-Cuban music and Henry Threadgill and Steve Coleman, so everything had a really strong rhythmic base, sometimes with odd meters. I've formally studied music since then, but my basic composing approach hasn't changed much."

"Because I started writing for puppet theater, there is a strong visual reference to my music, a kind of music to image to movement concept," she continues. "When I compose I imagine myself in the music, picturing the image it evokes. It is also a visceral, physical feeling. Composing can be a kind of ecstatic experience for me, it's like finding the right movement for a puppet on stage, and by puppet I don't mean hand puppet, but the kind of big puppet we used in Bread and Puppet Theater, that requires use of your entire body. On a basic level, it's music you can dance to. That kind of a pulse is always there because that's where I get my inspiration."

Wilson absorbed other sources of inspiration from the eclectic downtown New York new music scene of the 1990s into her compositions, and found plenty of open-minded musicians willing to play them. "I was fortunate to find these amazing musicians, like Kenny Wollesen, and Peck Allmond, Tony Scherr, and others," she says, "who liked my work precisely because it was different and original."

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To further blur stylistic boundaries, Wilson began singing and writing her own songs in 2000. “My mom died that year, and I gave up the trumpet. I listened to the radio a lot and I started writing songs. It was distracting, soothing as I was dealing with this terrible loss in my life. Finally, I put together some songs, borrowed a microphone from Norah Jones (this was before she became famous, we were all scuffling then) and performed at Performance Space 122. I realized afterwards that singing gave me this intimate connection with the audience and I felt relaxed doing it. It is another avenue for my music to travel down. I don’t feel like I have any direct influences as a singer. It’s very pure.”

Trapeze Project brings together all the disparate elements of her career. “The title reflects how I felt moving from coast to coast,” says Wilson, who left New York in 2005 and moved back to California, “and also the way my music can swing back and forth between genres.” Indeed, the CD shows how she has absorbed and personalized many influences—American, Balkan, and Persian folk music; New Orleans jazz; marching bands; the blues; pop music; and other far-flung sources. For example, “Blessing” is a joyful multilayered composition with echoes of Americana. It is a dedication to musicians who played at The Blackhawk jazz club, such as Ahmad Jamal and John Handy, whom Wilson interviewed for an oral history project. “Fall Has Arrived” builds off a Persian song, while “Love Will Tear Us Apart” is Wilson’s arrangement of a Joy Division song. “Melancholy for Place” and “From the River,” which Wilson sings with a gentle, unaffected, and translucent voice, also reflect the influence of pop music. “To New Orleans” is a 21st century Crescent City blues. “It captures the moment in my life when I was leaving New York and my brother was in New Orleans,” she explains. “It was very emotional for me to move after 12 years in New York. At the same time, my brother was dealing with the impact of Katrina.”

Other tunes simply defy category. “Himalayas” is a touchingly lyrical piece with a lovely bass line anchoring the tune’s pulse. It is dedicated to Kenny Wollesen’s avant-brass band of the same name, for which Wilson was at one time the primary composer. “In Resonance Light Takes Place,” which takes its name from a Pablo Neruda poem, is a beautifully orchestrated and layered composition using different instrumental combinations and several themes. The pensive “She Stands in a Room,” inspired by a glass sculpture by Nicolas Africano, slowly grows more dense as instruments enter and builds to a powerful climax led by Wilson’s wordless vocal.

Wilson’s all-star quintet relishes the challenge of playing these pieces, rich in rhythm and stylistic references as they are. They bring an obvious enthusiasm to the music and open up many of them with solos that take the music to different places while honoring the composition. Clarinetist Goldberg rides the twisting current of the rhythm section in a breezy solo on “At Zebulon.” Melford and Harris display a telepathic empathy as they move from defined beat to energized pulse and back on “Possibility.” Wilson takes an expressive, poised solo on “She Stands in a Room,” using timbre, melody, and space to excellent effect. Drummer Amendola is supportive of the soloists, flexible enough to flow with the wide-ranging compositions, and he solos imaginatively on “In Resonance Light Takes Place.”

Sarah Wilson didn’t follow the path to creative music that most improvisers and composers take. But for her, that’s an asset. “My music is different because of how it was initially created,” she says. “People who play jazz or know jazz, often say that what I do isn’t jazz. Then other people say it sounds like jazz to them. I actually like being in this in-between space where I can do whatever I want.”

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