
Blumenthal Performing Arts presents



Jon Batiste and Stay Human

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McGlohon Theater
at Spirit Square

JON BATISTE AND STAY HUMAN

“I’m always about trying to fill a need with what I do in my artistry,” says Jon Batiste, an artist whose ambition is nothing less than to transform the very lives of his listeners. “There is definitely a need in the performing arts world for a movement to come along that seriously connects with a next generation audience while still maintaining the timeless artistic objectives present throughout the history of the American music tradition.” It’s a goal Batiste is steadily achieving with every performance, every interview, every song, every album.

Those two essential criteria – peerless artistry combined with all the uplifting pleasure of entertainment – exist squarely at the heart of Batiste’s musical vision. And they are both fully evident in every exultant note on “Social Music” (Razor & Tie), the new album by Batiste and his irrepressible musical collective, Stay Human. Both the title of the album and the name of the band are telling. Stay Human is now a quartet with Batiste on piano, vocals and melodica, which he has renamed the harmonboard; Eddie Barbash on alto saxophone; Ibanda Ruhumbika on tuba; and Joe Saylor on drums. The band has evolved over the past eight years, running the spectrum from a jazz trio to a quintet to a big band with horns.

“Social Music” reflects that extraordinary range. On “D-Flat Movement,” the album’s opening track, you can hear Batiste

elegantly dueting with the sounds of thunder. Meanwhile, “It’s Alright (Why You Gotta)” slinks along on a seductively funky cha-cha groove, and “Express Yourself” jitters on an angular harmonboard riff, its encouraging message balanced precariously all the while. Throughout the album, elements of jazz, classical music and Americana nuzzle up against beats that could light up a club dance floor, and standards like “St. James Infirmary” and “Naima’s Love Song” nestle in alongside spoken-word samples like “The Jazzman Speaks” (featuring the voice of jazz legend Jelly Roll Morton) and statements of spiritual yearning such as “Let God Lead.”

“This album is the latest evolution of the band,” Batiste says. In his view, however, making such distinctions among styles of music and varieties of sound is helpful but perhaps unnecessary.

“The purpose of this music is to bring people together from all walks of life by creating a montage of many different music traditions and playing it with the spirit of inclusiveness,” he says. “That intent is what gives these different styles cohesion, and that’s why I decided to call it ‘social music.’ We are in a technological age, and ‘Social Music’ aims to reflect that spirit of advancement, collaboration and connectivity while still remaining ‘human.’ And Stay Human, then, is a reminder of what connects us all. It’s our mantra. With so many ways to communicate at our disposal, we

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must not forget the transformative power of a live music experience and genuine human exchange.”

Now 26, Batiste has defined a vision based on the most profound aspects of what has already been a rich artistic journey. He was born in New Orleans into a family whose deep musical heritage is part of the inspiration for the HBO series *Treme*, in which he has appeared.

Over the last decade he has forged his own artistic path by indelibly fusing himself within the fabric of New York City culture. After attending the prestigious New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, Batiste moved to New York and graduated from the Juilliard School earning a master’s degree in jazz and classical piano.

He has collaborated with the likes of Prince, Cassandra Wilson, Lauryn Hill, Wynton Marsalis, Jimmy Buffet, Eve, Lenny Kravitz, Questlove and Asher Roth. He has also recorded extensively, most recently putting out the EP “MY NY” with Stay Human in 2011, a set that was recorded live in the Manhattan subway system.

On the rough-and-tumble polyglot streets of New Orleans and New York, Batiste absorbed a musical language that disregards genre distinctions as long as all the musicians are up to the game and everyone is locked in and feeling the inspiration of the moment. At NOCCA and Juilliard, he was solidly grounded in the importance of standards and tradition, the conviction that the best of what has

come before us must be kept living and taught to future generations. To further that lofty aim, Batiste often lectures and gives master classes, and he also serves as artistic director at large of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem in New York.

But Batiste strongly believes that people must have their minds opened in the streets as well as in schools and museums.

“Music always reflects the culture it comes from,” he says. “The world is connected more than it has ever been. In such a globally connected world, musicians now have the unique opportunity to express all of the cultural ‘mash ups’ we are experiencing these days. Akin to the blend of cultures that occurred in early 20th-century New Orleans that led to the birth of jazz, I believe that the world has reached a similar cultural turning point.”

Using Twitter and Facebook to announce their plans, Batiste and Stay Human rode the New York subways with their instruments playing music from many different music traditions and playing at the top of their talent all the while. It was a way to have some fun and to startle people out of their preconceived notions about jazz, about where it’s appropriate to listen to music, about what it might mean to hear top-notch players blasting away purely for the purpose of entertaining and connecting with you as you go about your day. Once people receive and accept that positive

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energy – and cracking the stoicism of New York subway riders is no mean feat – there's no telling what further transformations it might effect in their lives and in all of our lives. Batiste calls these spontaneous efforts to play in nontraditional places “loveriots,” and aptly so.

“If you’re going to call it social music, then you have to figure out ways to bring your music to the people,” Batiste says. “You want to play for people who might have never considered going to a concert. You want to destroy their stereotypes of what they might think a live music performance is all about. You also want to bring the music to those who might not ever hear it and share the culture with them. Ultimately it's about breaking down the walls between the musicians and the audience and showing them that we all share the same humanity.”

As strong an album as “Social Music” is, Batiste believes that live performance is where his vision can most truly be set in motion and realized. His goals are of the highest order.

“For me, what we’re doing is

a calling, bringing people to an understanding that loving one another is how we are called to be,” he says. “I want to help people find truth. I can give you a picture. When you go to a show to hear us, the venue is one way when you get there, but when you leave, it's totally transformed. It's become almost like a religious ceremony, a communal experience. People leave crying and laughing – there's a buzz. People stand around when it's done because they just don't want to go home. Hopefully this experience will bring them to a greater understanding of the truth. That response is ideal.”

Ideal and potentially there to be realized every day at every moment. It's a fully three-dimensional emotional response – the highly desirable result of staying human and allowing for the full spiritual impact of “Social Music” to settle into your soul.

– Article by Anthony DeCurtis

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www.jonbatiste.com.**

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