

## Dmitri Kolesnik Quartet Dizzy's Coca Cola Club August 24th, 2010

Dmitri Kolesnik, bass; Joe Magnarelli, trumpet;  
Anthony Wonsey, piano; Jimmy Madison, drums.

By Dan Adler

One of my favorite venues for late-night jazz on the upper west side is Dizzy's Coca Cola club, which is part of the Jazz At Lincoln Center complex at Columbus Circle. The 11pm set usually features top rated performers with a very reasonable cover price, a full bar and a beautiful view of central park.

On this particular late-August night, I caught bassist and composer Dmitri Kolesnik's band playing a great set of originals. Many of the songs performed by this band were recently released on Kolesnik's "Russian Caravan" album featuring guitarist John Hart and veteran drummer Jimmy Madison, who was also part of the current gig lineup.

The set opened with "Regrets", a Kolesnik original swinger with a catchy melody line that led right into a solo trumpet break. Trumpeter Joe Magnarelli needs no introduction to NYC audiences - he is one of the best and brightest straight-ahead players who fits perfectly into any musical situation - and indeed, he was having a field day with Kolesnik's compositions. Drawing on his vast experience, his tone was full-bodied and strong and his improvisations were fresh and exciting and the audience was clearly enjoying what they heard.

Kolesnik's "Russian Caravan" slowed things down a bit, providing a hauntingly beautiful melody played in 7/4 time. Magnarelli's solo was inspired as ever, and pianist Anthony Wonsey followed with a great statement of his own. Wonsey's playing has a huge range of influences, sometimes evoking Wynton Kelly's post-bop style and sometimes quoting McCoy Tyner, but then expanding the rhythms and harmonies in new directions. His deep swing makes you feel like you could listen to him all night.

Another Kolesnik original "Five Corners" was from an album he released in 2007 with Eric Alexander, Alex Sipiagin, Andrei Kondakov and Lenny White. The group played another original from that album: Kondakov's "Song For Kenny" which he dedicated to the late Kenny Kirkland. Kolesnik's "Aniuta" was one of the many highlights of the set - a memorable and swinging melody in 5/4 which took on a slightly different character than on the album.

Drummer Jimmy Madison, whose illustrious history ranges from playing with Chet Baker to Roland Kirk, Joe Farrell and many other legends, was in great form for this set. His energetic swing always pushes the improvisers forward, and feeding them new rhythmic motifs. His solos were imaginative and impressive and left the audience cheering for more.

Besides his great skills as a composer and band leader, Kolesnik's bass solos are always a delight. With superb technique and inventiveness, each of

his solos on this set was a complete musical statement and drew extensive applause from the audience. His sound is always full with an acoustic quality to it. Like his mentor Ron Carter (to whom he dedicated "Blues for R.C."), Kolesnik's walking bass lines are always grounded rhythmically and harmonically advanced. Although the group played only one long set, everyone left feeling like they want to hear more of Kolesnik's fine compositions and this wonderful group.

## Jack Wilkins Bella Luna Restaurant, NY September 7th, 2010

Jack Wilkins, guitar; Bucky Pizzarelli, guitar

By Dan Adler

Most people are surprised to find out that one of the very best regular weekly jazz guitar gigs in New York City takes place at an Italian restaurant on Columbus Ave. between 88th and 89th called "Bella Luna". Every Tuesday night, for the past few years, guitar legend Jack Wilkins takes the stage and invites one or two of his esteemed musical friends to join him for an evening of exciting interplay. On any given Tuesday evening you might catch Wilkins trading fours with Howard Alden, Gene Bertoncini, Carl Barry, Joe Giglio, Jim Silberstein, Freddie Bryant, Dave Stryker, Steve LaSpina, John Stowell, Richard Boukas, Paul Bollenback, Sheryl Bailey, Paul Meyers, Scott DuBois and many other great players.

It's hard to imagine any jazz guitar fan in NYC who is not familiar with Jack Wilkins' name. With a career that spans several decades (and still going strong), Wilkins has played with everyone from Sarah Vaughan to Mel Torme to Phil Woods to Bob Brookmeyer to Charles Mingus to the Brecker Brothers and the list goes on and on. Jack's own al-



bums, some of which were out of print until recently, are now mostly available and can be found on his website (jackwilkins.com). His latest release *Until It's Time* has received rave reviews and continues to top radio airplay ratings.

On this post-labor-day Tuesday evening, Jack hosted another legendary guitarist: Bucky Pizzarelli, who, at the age of 84, is as energetic and creative as ever. Pizzarelli's own guitar duo with George Barnes in the early 70's, and especially their portion of the 1971 Town Hall concert album, is still on the "desert island" list of most jazz guitar fans. His chord solo on "Honeysuckle Rose" on that album is an acknowledged historical masterpiece.

On this night, almost 40 years after that legendary Town Hall concert (which also featured Jack's friend and mentor Chuck Wayne), the audience who was there at Bella Luna knew they were witnessing something just as great. Jack Wilkins is a strong and modern musical voice in his own right, but out of respect for the historic and stylistic greatness of Pizzarelli, he chose to remain faithful to the swing style this evening. Wilkins and Pizzarelli proceeded to unfold one great arrangement after another on standards such as "Pick Yourself Up", "Little White Lies", "Stomping At The Savoy", and others. Wilkins' fingers were flying at 100 miles an hour all over the guitar, surprising and delighting the audience with his unmatched technique and musicality. Bucky's chord solos were so powerful that many people got up from their dinner tables and walked up closer to make sure this was really happening live. On ballads like "Body and Soul", Bucky took the audience right back to the height of swing era, and Jack would sometimes playfully evoke the spirit of George Barnes and Django Reinhardt.

Most Tuesdays, Jack invites some of the guitarists in the audience to sit in, and on this particular night, a double surprise was in store. Bucky's son, John Pizzarelli, sat in along with the great Howard Alden. Bucky, John and Howard were all playing 7-string guitars. It's rare enough to see one 7-string guitar, but to see three of them together plus, of course, Jack Wilkins on his 6-string, you might imagine that chaos and overplaying would ensue. Not at all. These four grand masters were very respectful of each other, finding ways to blend in, to showcase their similarities and differences and to make wonderful music together. "Jitterbug Waltz" was a great vehicle for all of them to shine, as were many old standards like "Deed I Do", "Three Little Words", "How About You", etc. Each player expressed himself in his own musical way and each received roaring applause - a rare occurrence at any restaurant gig.

With no cover charge, the bar and dining area are always crammed with musicians and guitar players hoping to catch some of the musical magic unfolding just a few feet away. The tasty and reasonably-priced food also makes it a favorite stop for musicians coming from their own gigs or rehearsals, as well as many jazz fans and casual upper west side diners who prefer to have dinner at a place where world-class live music is played rather than the usual restaurant muzak. ■