

Pianist Marcus Roberts to perform Evolution of Blues & Swing in Mandeville Auditorium at UCSD

April 13, 1998

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PIANIST MARCUS ROBERTS TO PERFORM EVOLUTION OF BLUES & SWING IN MANDEVILLE AUDITORIUM AT UCSD

Jazz/blues pianist Marcus Roberts says jazz represents the highest level of describing what it's like to live in America: "When you hear great jazz musicians play, you're hearing a sophisticated analysis of the full range of America."

Roberts puts his own spin on that "full range of America" when he performs Jazz at Lincoln Center's Evolution of Blues & Swing at 8 p.m. May 3 in Mandeville Auditorium at the University of California, San Diego.

Roberts' program will include American piano masterworks of the 20th century by such musicians as Jelly Roll Morton (Jungle Blues), W.C. Handy (St. Louis Blues), Cole Porter (What is this Thing Called Love), George Gershwin (Someone to Watch Over Me), Duke Ellington (Shout 'Em Aunt Tillie), Scott Joplin (Maple Leaf Rag) and Fats Waller (Handful of Keys).

Roberts' May 3 performance is sponsored by the UCSD University Events Office.

At 34, Roberts' career has run the gamut from a young artists' competition winner of the International Association of Jazz Educators to piano chair in Wynton Marsalis' internationally touring septet; from a first prize at the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition to composing, performing and directing with Jazz at Lincoln Center; from numerous solo recordings to ambitious work as a music educator in seminars and clinics throughout the United States.

"You always want to share your journey and your experience with people because this is what makes it possible to ultimately have a true appreciation for what you represent," Roberts says.

Roberts was born in Jacksonville, Fla., on Aug. 7, 1963. Blind since the age five, he was first exposed to music in the church where his mother sang gospel. He started playing the piano when he was eight, and at 12 began nine years of formal piano training in the Russian classical tradition. People influencing him along the way include his teacher at Florida State University, Leonidus Lipovetsky, as well as Van Cliburn, Art Tatum, Vladimir Ashkenazy, James P. Johnson, Mary Lou Williams and Marsalis.

Mostly, however, Roberts' says his inspiration comes from the blues.

"Since I started playing piano, I have loved playing the blues," Roberts says. "For me, it's as essential to my artistic existence as air or water. I have always tried to use the fundamentals of jazz call and response, riffing, breaks, improvisation to find new ways to play the blues."

Roberts' discography includes *Gershwin for Lovers* (Columbia Jazz, 1994), *Time and Circumstance* (Columbia Jazz, 1994), *Portraits in Blue* (a 1996 recording with full orchestra that marked his debut on the Sony Classical label), and his most recent *Blues for a New Millennium* (Columbia Jazz, 1997). The latter features 12 original compositions plus new interpretations of Morton's *Jungle Blues* and Robert Johnson's *Cross Road Blues*.

In addition to his recordings and performances, Roberts' tries to instill in young people the significance of music, specifically jazz, through his seminars and clinics.

"A lot of young people don't see the importance of Duke Ellington's music in terms of their everyday life, and that's a big struggle," Roberts says. "If there was a life goal that I have, it would be to eventually help bring about a change in America where people would again find jazz music a natural part of how they live every day."

Tickets for Marcus Roberts' May 3 performance are \$16 general admission, \$14 for faculty, staff and senior citizens, and \$12 for students. Tickets are available at the UCSD Box Office, 534-8497, and at Ticketmaster outlets. For further information, call the UCSD University Events Office at 534-4090.

(April 13, 1998)