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SPYRO GYRA TAKES ANOTHER STEP ON THE WIRE ON NEW HEADS UP RELEASE

***Down the Wire* set for worldwide release on April 28, 2009**

"Life is being on the wire, everything else is just waiting." - Karl Wallenda

The patriarch of the famous aerialist family certainly knew what he was talking about after a lifetime of thrilling, edge-of-the-seat performances for his audiences. While the stakes might not be as high for a jazz band improvising in a recording studio or in front of a live audience, **Spyro Gyra's** leader and saxophonist Jay Beckenstein understands the passion that drives a person and makes "life on the wire" so appealing.

"This music is what I've done for most of my life. I very much define who I am by the music I make." He allows, "Traveling to the shows is definitely about waiting. But even when I'm home, I have the same kinds of concerns as everyone else. My life becomes about my family, my home, just the basic everyday navigating and problem solving that we all do. But when I'm making music with the band and things are going well, I leave the anxiety behind. I escape that part of me that's just trying to survive in the world and I'm able to get in touch with that part of me that has nothing to do with practicality. It's something that's kind of divine, and I don't normally think in those terms, but it's as close as I can get to that ideal. I really do get swept away in it and it's a marvelous, spiritual, therapeutic thing."

Their new album, ***Down the Wire*** (HUCD 3154), is set for worldwide release on Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group. Due in stores April 28, 2009, ***Down the Wire*** is a snapshot of Spyro Gyra's enduring dedication to that walk down the wire.

For more than three decades, they have maintained a position at the forefront of modern jazz by successfully managing not just one, but several feats of creative dexterity. "That's what has kept this band going," says Beckenstein. "There are always balances to be found – between the individual player and the group, between the songwriter and the player. It's about both satisfying yourself and satisfying your audience. And when you're improvising

in front of a crowd, you're really walking down that wire. There are always surprises that way, but our openness to those surprises is what makes this band what it is. We just happen to be walking on a slightly more forgiving tightrope."

Down the Wire opens with the title track, a piece propelled by an upbeat and semi-funky undercurrent established by bassist Scott Ambush and drummer Bonny B. The more laid back followup track, "Unspoken," is a reunion of sorts, as percussionist Gerardo Velez – a charter member of the Spyro Gyra lineup who left the band in the mid 80's – makes a guest appearance. Velez reappears a few tracks later in the shimmering mid-tempo piece, "A Flower for Annie Jeanette," which also includes some intricate fretwork by Ambush and lush keyboards by Tom Schuman.

"The Tippin' Point," a collaborative piece co-written by Beckenstein and Schuman, takes a traditional swing-jazz turn. A couple improvisational interludes along the way open up plenty of space for both the saxophonist and pianist to roam before bringing it back to the main theme and the eventual coda. "La Zona Rosa" is a high-energy Latin piece written by Beckenstein which showcases former member and current Allman Brothers band member, Marc Quiñones, as well as the three-piece horn section of trumpeter Don Harris, trombonist Ozzie Melendez and tenor saxophonist/flutist Bill Harris. From the opening measures and throughout the track, "Rosa" also spotlights Julio Fernandez's edgy virtuosity on electric guitar.

"Make It Mine" closes the album in much the same way it started, with a funky backbeat driven by Ambush and Bonny B (who also handles the vocals). Their unwavering bedrock is augmented by the solo work of Beckenstein, Schuman and Fernandez – all of whom tie up the track in a tight package that adheres to the groove and never wavers.

Although often still pegged as being from Buffalo, NY, this is the first Spyro Gyra recording to come out of Buffalo in thirty years, when they recorded their landmark classic, *Morning Dance*. "Recording in Buffalo was more relaxed than when we record in New York. There were fewer distractions. Particularly for Tom Schuman and I, who came out of the Buffalo scene, it always feels really good to go back there. It touches on a time in our life that – although we didn't know it then – was supremely magical. For as long as I've been away from the city, I've never personally stopped feeling that part of me is a Buffalonian."

So what place does the listener have in this group's balancing act? "My hope is that it has the same effect on the audience that it does on me. I've always felt that music, and particularly instrumental music, has this non-literal quality that lets people travel to a place where there are no words. Whether it's touching their emotions or connecting them to something that reminds them of something much bigger than themselves, there's this beauty in music that's not connected to sentences. It's very transportive. I would hope that when people hear our music or come to see us, they're able to share that with us. That's the truly

glorious part of being a musician.”

Asked where *Down The Wire* belongs in Spyro Gyra’s substantial legacy, Beckenstein is quick to reply. “You know, everybody up on the wire knows one thing for sure,” Beckenstein laughs. “The real trouble comes if you start looking behind you. The future’s in front of you.”

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