

LIVE JOE ZAWINUL RECORDING MARKS JAZZ LEGEND'S FINAL BIRTHDAY

75 Due In Stores February 24, 2009

Keyboardist and composer Joe Zawinul, who succumbed to cancer September 11, 2007 at age 75, left behind a half-century legacy of brilliant music that will last for generations. Born in Austria and originally trained in classical music, Zawinul embraced the jazz tradition at a young age and eventually pushed the art form to unprecedented limits via his two most innovative projects, Weather Report and later the Zawinul Syndicate.

Despite the medical and physical challenges of his final months, Zawinul's regimen of composing and performing never let up. Indeed, one of his final performances proved to be one of his best.

The aptly titled **75** (HUCD 3162), set for release on Heads Up International on February 24, 2009, was recorded in concert at a festival date in Lugano, Switzerland, on July 7, 2007 – the last birthday Zawinul would celebrate before his death two months later. The two-disc set is a final snapshot of this brilliant and dedicated road warrior of jazz, surrounded by his revered Zawinul Syndicate, a collection of stellar collaborators hailing from every corner of the globe. In addition to the Switzerland performance, **75** also includes a track recorded on a Hungary stage, where Zawinul is joined by legendary saxophonist and Weather Report co-founder Wayne Shorter.

“For me, this recording is both sad and joyful at the same time,” says filmmaker Anthony Zawinul, Joe's son who has recorded many of the senior Zawinul's performances. “He was so full of life, so full of amazing musical ideas. He knew his illness was terminal, so maybe all the creative channels were open and operating at full capacity, and he was just expressing what he felt by doing what he did best – playing and improvising. I look at the recording as a kind of extension to what he was feeling in those last weeks and months.”

Disc one of **75** gets under way with “Orient Express,” a song first heard on Zawinul's 1996 masterpiece, *My People*. The track opens with a highly atmospheric and otherworldly introduction built upon the Middle Eastern riffs of Moroccan vocalist Aziz Sahmaoui. The intro quickly catapults into a driving, high-energy track – ten minutes in all – that resembles the legendary train from which it takes its name.

The exotic “Madagascar” (from Weather Report's 1980 recording, *Night Passage*) gets its groove from Mauritius-born bassist Linley Marthe doubling Zawinul's familiar synth line before settling into a Jaco-esque walking line, while drummer Paco Sery slams with authority and uncanny precision underneath. “Dig Joe's funky, facile electric piano solo in the middle,” says veteran jazz critic Bill Milkowski in his liner notes. “Clearly, this cat was not about to give up. The gift of music burned brightly inside him, always.”

The buoyant, African-flavored “Zansa II” (from the 1998 live recording, *World Tour*) features some marvelous kalimba work by Sery and some marimba-sounding synth accompaniment from Zawinul, while “Café Andalusia” (from *Faces & Places*, 2002) highlights the dramatic intensity of vocalist Sabine Kabongo, the Belgian singing sensation from the ranks of Zap Mama.

The second disc opens with an invigorating medley of “Fast City” and “Two Lines” (from *Night Passage* and *World Tour*, respectively). The tempo and energy here are mind-boggling, thanks in large part to Marthe’s phenomenal bass work.

Zawinul then reaches all the way back to the early and mid ‘70s with the back-to-back Weather Report compositions, “Badia” and “Boogie Woogie Waltz” (from *Tale Spinnin’* in 1975 and *Sweetnighter* in 1973). These are followed by a lighthearted moment wherein Kabongo leads the Swiss audience through a heartwarming chorus of “Happy Birthday” to the maestro.

Fittingly, the concert closes with the gentle “Hymn,” performed by Zawinul on church-like organ with accompaniment from percussionist Jorge Bezzera.

As an added treat, this collection contains a rare and beautiful moment from an August 2, 2007, concert in Veszprem, Hungary, the second to last show Zawinul ever played. He is joined onstage for an emotional reunion with his longtime musical partner and Weather Report co-founder Wayne Shorter for a moving sax-synth duet on Zawinul’s anthemic “In a Silent Way,” a piece the two recorded together on Miles Davis’ landmark 1969 album of the same name. The two musicians’ telepathic exchanges and empathetic playing over the course of the 14-minute track is pure magic.

“My dad raised the bar in the music world as a true artist to his profession,” says Anthony Zawinul. “He never compromised his art. You either liked it or you didn’t. One thing is for sure though, you always knew it was Joe Zawinul. As a bandleader, he was able to pull out performances from his bandmates and take them to heights they never knew existed.”

Seventy-five years from now, the legacy will still be very much alive.