

JOE FIEDLER

WILL BE FIRE

MultiPhonics Music MM008

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1. **WILL BE FIRE** (4:55)
2. **HOW'S SKIPPY** (5:00)
3. **GRAFFITI'S** (4:08)
4. **MERGER** (5:07)
5. **SONG FOR COOP** (5:41)
6. **SQUIRREL HILL** (3:37)
7. **CROOKED** (7:14)
8. **W. 21st ST.** (8:13)
9. **PEEK POWER BOX** (5:14)

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MARCUS ROJAS / JOE FIEDLER / JEFF DAVIS / PETE McCANN



## Joe Fiedler New Quartet

### *Will Be Fire*

How to decipher *Will Be Fire*, the title of this exploratory, raw, practically booty-shaking release by master trombonist Joe Fiedler and his New Quartet? The phrase is broken English, from the mouth of an athlete discussing the need to step it up, to bring one's A-game. That's more easily done when your partners are electric guitar slinger Pete McCann, veteran tuba virtuoso Marcus Rojas and responsive, beat-conjuring drummer Jeff Davis. Using this instrumentation — with tuba in what is typically the bass role — Fiedler seeks to capture a spirit present in the late Arthur Blythe's Columbia releases of the late '70s and early '80s: *Lenox Avenue Breakdown*, *Illusions* and *Blythe Spirit*. "What really inspired me was the incredible elasticity of the group interplay," Fiedler says. "But most of all it's the orchestration, with drums, tuba and electric guitar as the foundation — amazing!"

Heightening the spice and bite of *Will Be Fire*, for the first time in Fiedler's recorded output, is a Line 6 effects unit on the trombone, giving melodic themes and solo lines an abiding sonic nastiness. The choice isn't out of the blue — it's a logical step for Fiedler in a long process of experimentation with timbre, mainly through varied use of mutes and multiphonic extended techniques. "On 'Squirrel Hill' I'm using multiphonics *and* effects and I love that, so to be continued," Fiedler says. "I felt it was time to push forward in finding avenues for sonic diversity. I've been struck recently by how codified the modern jazz trombone has become. I wanted something new, both for the trombone and the ensemble, something that didn't really sound like anything else. Along with the electronics, I also consciously tried to incorporate techniques and textures I've been using for years in more open settings, such as 'against the grain' playing pioneered by Roswell Rudd, into a more mainstream setting."

Marcus Rojas holds the tuba seat in Fiedler's unique low brass quartet Big Sackbut, heard on *Joe Fiedler's Big Sackbut*, *Sackbut Stomp* and *Live in Graz*. "What really makes Marcus special," Fiedler contends, "is his ability to groove, comp and solo, all with a warm and absolutely gorgeous tone." Rojas in this regard is a direct heir of Bob Stewart, who played tuba on those Arthur Blythe records and many others. Rojas also subbed for Stewart in Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy. Henry Threadgill, who employed Rojas in Very Very Circus, characterizes the tuba as follows in his memoir *Easily Slip into Another World: A Life in Music*:

"... an instrument capable of darting around among the sections and thereby linking the parts of the ensemble. The tuba has what I'd describe as a quicker response time than the bass: it can jump right into a new section and fit. It can move in and out among the other instruments like a ghost. But it can take center stage, too."

That's uncannily apt as a description of what Rojas achieves with Fiedler on *Will Be Fire*.

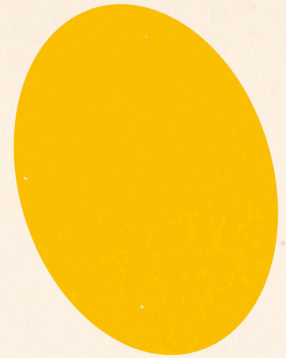
Bouncing off Rojas' multifaceted presence is Pete McCann, a close colleague of Fiedler's for some 30 years. He's cut from a different cloth than James "Blood" Ulmer, Arthur Blythe's guitarist of choice, and a hugely compelling if underrated player in his own right. Driving rhythm guitar, stylistic flourishes in the right places, the mix of wet and dry sounds, clean and dirty sounds — one can understand Fiedler declaring: "Pete is the best, period. Seriously, he should be a superstar. I don't think there's another guitarist who can cover as much musical territory. Straightahead, funk, rock, avant-garde, you name it, he is such a master soloist and accompanist in all situations. Marcus had never played with Pete before, and the day after the sessions he called to say how completely blown away he was by 'how deep Pete was in it!'"

For many years, Jeff Davis has been the first-call drum sub for Fiedler's Open Sesame band and for the longstanding trio with John Hébert and Michael Sarin. "I've been wanting to use Jeff as the primary guy on one of my projects," Fiedler says. "He has a great pocket but with an open sensibility, and as I was composing this music it just screamed, 'Hire Jeff!' He's very present but never overplays, which is critical with someone like Marcus, who needs enough space to have multiple avenues into the groove. Jeff is the perfect complement to that."

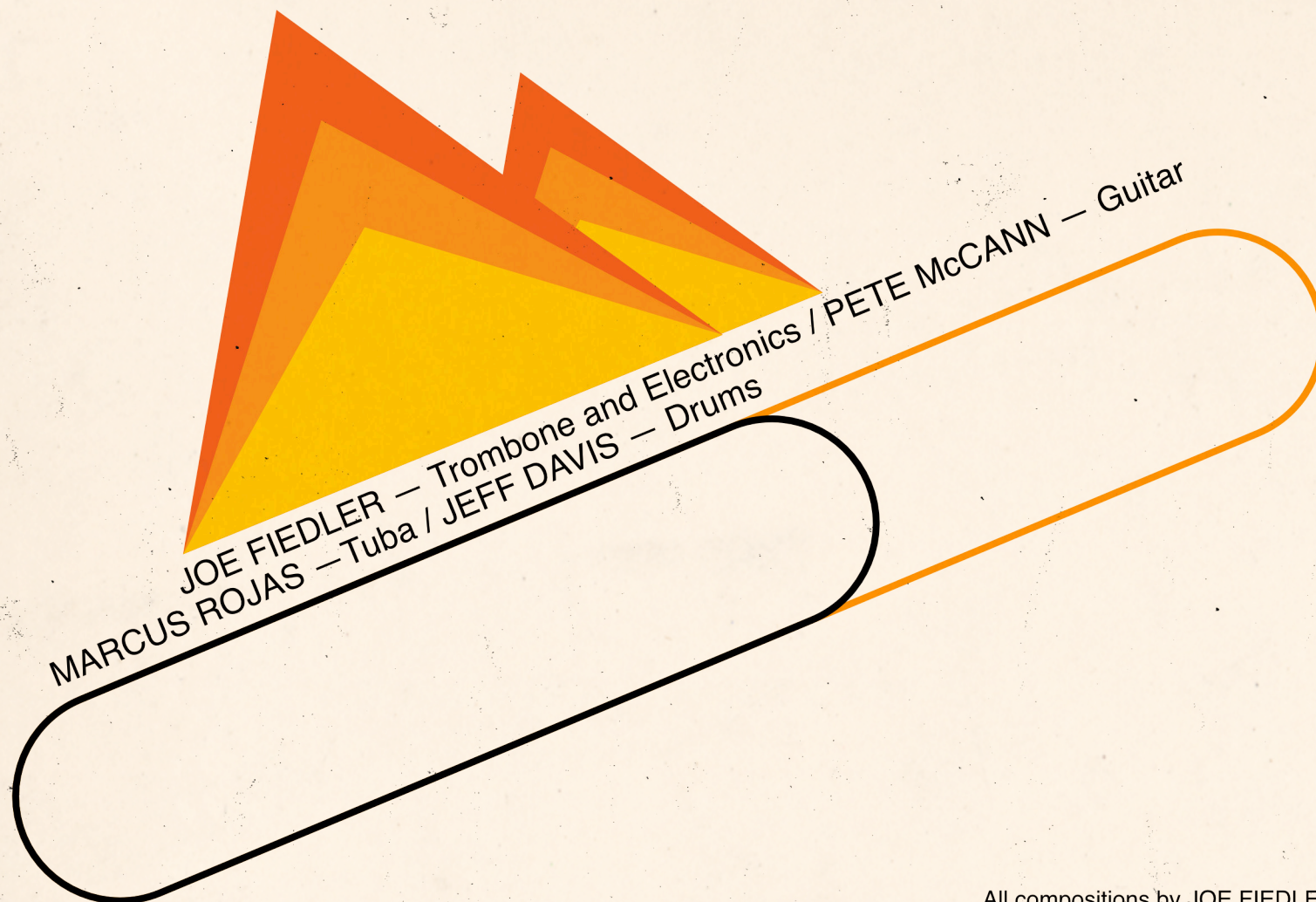
Into this sonic pool jumps Fiedler with his Line 6 Pod Go unit, creating a variety of expressive overdriven tones, consistently pushing the envelope on his horn — though in a manner completely different from his 2022 solo trombone tour de force *The Howland Sessions*. He makes use of four different effects patches: distortion with a touch of wah for "Squirrel Hill," "Graffiti's," "Crooked" and the title track; fuzz with reverb/delay and rolled-off treble for "Merger" and "How's Skippy"; phase shifter with delay on the two moodier pieces, "Song for Coop" and "W 21<sup>st</sup> St."; and distortion with modulation and reverb on "Peek Power Box."

The effects patches are a work in progress, and Fiedler readily admits being a novice in the arena. It goes to show that musical growth is constant — even for a seasoned big band section man, associate musical director of *Sesame Street*, orchestrator for Lin-Manuel Miranda's movie *In the Heights*, veteran of the salsa circuit with Celia Cruz and Eddie Palmieri and many others, pop session ace with the likes of Jennifer Lopez and Wyclef Jean, and the list goes on. Fiedler's eagerness to stretch beyond the familiar is evident throughout his catalogue, and certainly on *Will Be Fire*. At the heart of it all is fun — searching, deeply musical fun, not to mention straight-up funk. The two are closely interlinked. Here's to more of it.

David R. Adler







All compositions by JOE FIEDLER (Joe Fiedler Music, BMI)

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SHIRES TROMBONES and GREG BLACK MOUTHPIECES

**For Shari and Cleo**