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Players ▶



Tom Tallitsch ▶ *Dual Loyalties*

Tom Tallitsch knows how hard it is to be in two places at once. For a dozen years the tenor player has lived in central New Jersey so he can have access to both New York and Philadelphia. He's trying to establish a presence in the former while picking up gigs in the latter.

"It's hard," he said. "You have to be on the scene. So you have to spend your time, just going back and forth. People are more likely to call people who are there all the time. Just back and forth and back and forth, putting hundreds of thousands of miles on my car."

He added, "Every time we would say we're going to move up to New York, I get a flood of work and I'm down in Philly four or five days in a week. If I was living in New York, I would be coming down to Philly to work more than I was in New York."

Tallitsch has played with alto player Richie Cole in Trenton, N.J., and sat in with Pat Martino and Mickey Roker in Philadelphia. He prefers New York, though.

"Up there you can explore anything," Tallitsch said, "and be more open to playing new compositions. I like to write. One thing that's set my hands apart is that we always come out with new compositions."

Tallitsch's third album, *Perspective* (OAA/Origin), provides a showcase for eight new pieces. Tallitsch's music resists the uniformity of bop in favor of the influences of McCoy Tyner and Wayne Shorter. "Propellerhead" and "Slippery Rock" feature bass vamps. "Conscious Contact" and "Tall Order" mark the recorded debut of Tallitsch's soprano.

"I think it's a great time," Tallitsch said. "We're a hundred years since Sidney Bechet, and there's been a lot of history. And everything's built on that

and everybody's going in different directions."

That dual perspective is reflective in Tallitsch's own music, according to his colleagues.

"A guy like Tom is very much rooted in the past, but he's still very modern," said Philadelphia bassist Madison Rast, who has worked with Tallitsch for more than 10 years. "I think that's a hard line to straddle, and I think he does it very well. Because he doesn't sound dated, but at the same time you can see a lot of his influences."

Tallitsch, 36, grew up in Cleveland and attended the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. He moved to Philadelphia in 1996, where he carved out a niche performing at weddings, lounges and other commercial bookings throughout the metropolitan area.

"You know, just grinding away," Tallitsch said, "working anything that I could." But as Tallitsch picked up more jazz gigs, he found himself at a crossroads. "Even though I did like the money from the commercial gigs," he said, "they would cut into these other dates that I was getting. I decided, OK, I'm just going to focus on my own bands and focus on my own stuff, and really hustle that thing as much as possible."

After Tallitsch's wife, Carrie Ellmore-Tallitsch, had become one of the principal dancers with the Martha Graham dance company in New York, the couple moved to the Trenton area, roughly halfway between Philadelphia and New York.

Tallitsch recouped some of the lost income through teaching, notably at a school for students with autism. "It's taken me a long time to become a good teacher," he said. "You have to listen to what the students want—you have to listen to what they need. Not every student is the same, just like not every gig is the same."

—Eric Fine