

# BOBBY MILITELLO BRINGS HIS QUARTET TO DOWNTOWN WELLAND THIS SATURDAY AS PART OF THE DOWNTOWN SUMMER MUSIC SERIES

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TRIBUNE STAFF

What is it about jazz that makes it seem so - I don't know sincere? Here's this well-known American musician, sax player and flautist, Bobby Militello, who plays with the Dave Brubeck Quartet, no less, and has played countless years with Doc Severinson on The Tonight Show, Maynard Ferguson - all these great musicians and he's coming with his own quartet this Saturday to play the Welland Downtown Summer Music Series. It's almost unheard-of. In an interview with the Buffalo, N.Y. native, Militello is warm and personable, and no matter how big of a jazz star he is, you wouldn't know it while talking with him. When asked simply why he's coming to play in Welland this Saturday, Militello's answer is as simple as the question: Because Joe (Ruicci) called me up and asked me."

Port Colborne's own, Ruicci, is the organizer of the Niagara Blues & Jazz Society, and the former owner of Joe's Place - a nightclub on Hwy. 3 In Port Colborne that brought in fabulous talents during its years of operation. Ruicci and Militello have a history together through Joe's Place -where Militello once played years ago.

"When I hung up with Joe I had a smile on my face," Militello recalled of his recent invitation to play the Welland Summer Music Series. "That he remembered me and liked my playing ... I was kind of floored. I thought that was nice. Joe explained that they have a limited budget - he said, 'this is what I've got,' and I said, 'Fine.' It isn't always about money, it really isn't. It's about the music and having a good time and the loyalty of people like Joe who doesn't forget you. He's a cool guy."

See what I mean about sincerity? Find me a rock star of the same caliber who's going to tell me the same thing.

Militello has been touring and recording with the Dave Brubeck quartet for over 24 years, and is still working on projects with the jazz legend. "There's always big things with Dave, we're doing a new album this year, we play huge concert halls all over the world, we play with orchestras - we do the London Symphony every year - we get some real nice stuff," he admitted.

Militello described Brubeck as an "inspirational character," in his musical career, adding that the legendary jazz musician is the epitome of "never playing (a song) the same way twice in his life."

At 85 years old, he's still excited about playing every day." Militello admitted that working with Brubeck inspired him tap better resources in my mind to create good spontaneity, good feelings, and hopefully, good solos."

Militello's career is smattered with greatness, and the collective effect, Militello explained, is that it continually challenges him to become a better musician.

"You always want to play with people better than you, and people that make you rise to the challenge. The nice thing about that is that you never play it the same way twice, and with the right people around you, the inspiration happens that makes you play better. My approach is a constant challenge to assume a posture of never being satisfied with what you do."

Throughout his career, Militello has recorded almost 50 albums with Dave Brubeck, Maynard Ferguson, Chuck Mangione, and many others, and has recorded four of his own CDs, Straight Ahead, and Bobby M Blow among them. He spent four years playing tenor sax with Doc Severinson and the Tonight Show Orchestra. and as if this isn't enough, Militello is also a successful businessman, and ran the famous Tralf nightclub for eight years, until its hostile takeover, and final demise in 2004.

"The Tralf was my little music museum," he said, fondly reminiscent of its glory days.

"I knew I could create a club that was advantageous from both the audience and the musicians perspective. ... All the things that I knew were wrong with all the places I've played that were bad - I made sure when I built that room myself, that nothing was left out."

## *Playing the standards*

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"I brought in (well-known musicians) and the new guys that didn't draw well but I kept the art going. I never made money with it - it actually cost me about \$20,000 a year - but I was so proud of that room."

A good head for business runs in Militello's blood, and he and his family have been restaurateurs for over 30 years. They currently own and operate the restaurant, Bijou Grille, in the center of downtown Buffalo on Main St., across from Shea's Theatre. Militello told me that even though he's very involved in both music and business, the latter doesn't get in the way of his music career, and he often manages on the road through computer technology. "When I'm on the road with Dave there's a lot of free time when you're traveling. We stay at five-star hotels and it's not like you can do a lot of practicing when people are paying that kind of money for a room," he laughed. "But at my age, and with the amount of playing that I do ... I don't practice as much anymore because when I play songs that I'm going to do at a gig, I tend to blow the ideas out, and then I get to the gig and I don't play as well."

Militello will be playing in Welland with his quartet: Bobby Jones on keyboards, Bill Staebell on upright bass, and John Bacon Jr. on drums. He admitted that he's not really too sure what they'll be performing, as is often the case with Militello, even when he plays with the Brubeck quartet. "This is something I picked up from Brubeck, right, wrong, or indifferent, it's the way I feel, is what I'll do. I get together a list of tunes but when I get to the gig I'll call what I feel like playing. When I play with Dave, we walk out on stage and sometimes we have no idea even what our first song is, and it lends itself to being real loose and going with the flow."

"We'll probably do a lot of the standards," he said. "The last time I played Joe's club, I remember the crowd really enjoyed the standards. ... I think you'll enjoy it - I hope you'll enjoy it," he added with that modest sincerity that marked our entire interview. "Some tunes we end up playing for 10 minutes or more just because we're having such a good time with it."

The Bobby Militello Quartet will be performing at the Welland Civic Centre/City Hall on Saturday, July 22. Concert opens at 7 p.m. with the Young Performers' Series. The concert is free, sponsored by the City of Welland and music patrons are asked to bring their lawn chairs and a food donation for the Hope Centre.

[www.niagarabluesandjazz.com](http://www.niagarabluesandjazz.com)