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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **French-Born, NY-Based Saxophonist/Composer Stéphane Spira Finds Inspiration in a New Home, a New Family, and New Collaborators**

**The engineer-turned-soprano saxophonist enlists Joshua Richman, Steve Wood and Jimmy Macbride to join him on a lyrical, swinging *New Playground*, out September 21, 2018**

*"Spira is self-taught, but he's musically mature and his music is soulful... Spira's evolution is one to watch."*  
– Ken Micallef in a 4-star [DownBeat](#) review of *In Between*

*"[Spira's] comfort jazz, honestly prepared with organic ingredients in a low-key setting, invites revisiting."*  
– Fred Bouchard, [The New York City Jazz Record](#)

Saxophonist and composer **Stéphane Spira** honed his jazz chops old-school style, at late-night jams and cutting sessions. Self-taught as a musician, Spira pursued an engineering degree, did a brief stint as an engineer in Saudi Arabia, then in the 1990's headed back to his hometown of Paris to pursue music full time. After 15 years of playing in Paris clubs, woodshedding, and eventually recording two albums, Spira decided to change everything. Soprano saxophone in hand, he moved to New York City and started over. What he found was inspiration beyond his wildest dreams: a jazz career with a core group of tremendous musicians, and love with the woman who would become his wife and the mother to his young son. On ***New Playground***, Spira celebrates the creative and personal happiness he's discovered since making over his life.

"I had my first kid at 51," Spira says. "That helps to keep me young. I'm also a young musician, just not in age. But I so love the music, and I'm truly realizing my dream."

Due out on **September 21**, *New Playground* finds Spira leading an impeccably gifted quartet featuring longtime bassist **Steve Wood**, pianist and keyboardist **Joshua Richman**, and rising star drummer **Jimmy Macbride**. The band reflects the rich playground – and the wealth of talented playmates – that Spira has discovered since arriving in New York. "It's unique to have such a level of playing everywhere you look," he says. "Because there are so many great players, the criteria becomes finding human relationships that can grow. In the end, that helps the music."

Wood returns from Spira's previous album, *In Between* (2014), while Richman has newly joined the ensemble. The in-demand Macbride, who has worked with legends Herbie Hancock and Wynton Marsalis as well as being a member of the thriving young NY jazz scene alongside artists like Nir Felder, Fabian Almazan and Melissa Aldana, brings a vigorous sense of swing and a bristling energy to the proceedings.

Recorded as Spira was still finding his bearings in his newly adopted home, *In Between* captured the sense of limbo in which he was living at the time: between countries, and between one phase of life and another. Much has changed since then, making the title *New Playground* equally autobiographical given his current place in life, still fresh but offering exciting opportunities to enjoy life's playful side.

Spira discovered jazz as a teenager and got his first saxophone at the age of 22. Despite the intellectual and time demands involved in getting an engineering degree, he never stopped playing his instrument.

After returning to Paris he regularly attended jam sessions, played in clubs, woodshedded in the basement, and, at the age of 40, released his first album, the 2006 *First Page*. In 2009 came his second recording, a tribute to his late father, and the move to New York City, jazz mecca of the world.

Even with that major change, the most transformative development of Spira's life has been his marriage to classical vocalist Jessica Goldring and the birth of their son, Léo. For their wedding gift the couple received a piano, and much of *New Playground* was composed at the keyboard after Léo was put to bed. "I wrote most of the tunes at night between two bottles," Spira laughs.

Many of those tunes show off Spira's gift for lyricism and the winsome way he sings with his soprano. "I love the soprano so much because it gets back to the voice," he says. "New York is great medicine for your ego because you can see such immense and great players. But I've had time now to say this is who I am. I wanted to expose myself honestly and let my personality kick in."

Those late-night composition sessions are most vividly reflected on "Nocturne (Song For My Son)," which shows off the composer's ability to be sentimental without succumbing to mawkishness. His wife's maiden name is evoked on the classically-tinged "Gold Ring Variations," which uses a bit of Spira's cherished wordplay to wink towards the famous Bach piece. "New York Windows" was inspired by "Les fenêtres de Moscou (Moscow Windows)," a traditional Russian song that was a favorite of his father, whose 2007 passing helped spur Spira's life-changing move. "My father was really into Russian gypsy music, so by extension he loved Django Reinhardt. I was really into jazz and by extension of that, I loved Django. So he always loved when I would play that song with him. I used it as a departure for my song."

Family is also evoked in the pulse-pounding opener "Peter's Run," penned for a cousin who ran the New York Marathon – and who may be inspired to run another based on the tune's driving, hand-clapped rhythm. "Underground Ritual" surges with the hectic pace of the NYC subway, but it's a dedication to Frederic Lebayle, a mouthpiece designer whose basement workshop became a meeting place for saxophonists who ran his designs through their paces. "Ravi Coltrane, Mark Turner, even Wayne Shorter – they'd all come into his basement and play their licks, run through harmonics, go low, check the sounds," says Spira. "It was like a ritual."

The only piece on the album not written by Spira, Wood's "Kaleidoscope" features a changing melody over a repeated five-bar cycle, shifting perspective akin to the titular device. The album's closer, "Solid Wood," is a self-explanatory dedication to the rock-solid bassist.

"Life brings surprises," Spira says succinctly. "I was a late bloomer, but I'm embracing this new life. It's become a playground for me in the true sense of the term."

French-born, New York-based saxophonist **Stéphane Spira** grew up with jazz the old-school way: in late-night jams and cutting sessions. A protégé of longtime Chet Baker pianist Michel Graillier, Spira's jazz career has taken him from 4 a.m. basement sessions in the underbelly of Paris, through acclaimed collaborations with trumpeter Stéphane Belmondo and pianist Giovanni Mirabassi, to the cutting edge of New York jazz. Trained as an engineer, Stéphane sharpened his chops off the books, after hours, immersing himself in a hard-edged milieu. Perhaps since he honed his chops in the depths of the jazz underground, Spira was spared the awkwardness of growing up in public: Spira's "remarkable maturity" (Radio France) has not gone unnoticed by the critics. Prior to the 2018 *New Playground*, Spira released four critically acclaimed albums as a bandleader: *First Page*, *Spirabassi* (a duo collaboration with pianist Giovanni Mirabassi) and *Round About Jobim*, a tribute to the father of bossa nova featuring Lionel Belmondo's acclaimed Hymne au Soleil ensemble, and 2014's *In Between*.

[spirajazz.com](http://spirajazz.com)

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