

Born in the Netherlands, Bram Wijnands will be featured in concert at the Penn Wells during the Wellsboro Winter Jazz Fest.



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## Taking it in Stride

Wellsboro's Winter Jazz Fest Welcomes Back Bram Wijnands

By Karen Meyers

**B**ram Wijnands' 2010 Wellsboro debut took place on the hottest, most humid night of a very hot, humid August. A lethargic audience slumped in the non-air-conditioned seats—until Bram and his band came onstage and swung into “Top Hat.” The audience sat right up and everyone remembered how to breathe, as the band performed one movie favorite after another. Bram's arrangements showcased the group's effortless, jubilant technique as everyone forgot everything except the happiness you feel hearing great musicians play great music. People tapped their feet and swayed in the cool

breeze of jazz energy.

So, of course, he keeps getting invited back. Lots of local people have heard him now. When you ask someone about Bram, the person simply says, “Oh, he's great,” and then starts to sing.

The *Kansas City Star's* Joe Klopus writes, “He's a master of the intricate, two-fisted art of stride piano. When his right hand cascades over leaping, pumping figures in his left, this central style in the evolution of jazz comes to life once again. But without its few dedicated practitioners, such as Wijnands, the style made most famous by Fats Waller might have disappeared already.”

Born and educated in Holland, Bram got hooked on American music early. “I started piano lessons when I was three and a half years old. When I was about six, a friend of my father's brought an LP of barrelhouse blues to our house and I insisted on listening to it over and over,” he says. “Then when I was seven I saw *The Glenn Miller Story* and *Stormy Weather*. I was in love with American movie music right away, and especially when I heard Fats Waller play stride piano in *Stormy Weather*, I said, ‘This is what I've got to do.’ My left hand wasn't even big enough to play the chords, but I was determined and I practiced all the time. I listened to Champion Jack Dupree,

**Wellsboro's Winter Jazz Fest****Event:** Bram Wijnands Concert**Time:** 7:30 PM**Date:** Saturday, February 25**Location:** Penn Wells Hotel Lobby**Phone:** Call 570-787-7800**Web site:** www.endlessmountain.net

Memphis Slim and Pinetop Smith. Then when I was a teenager, my teacher was a huge Erroll Garner fan and that was very lucky for me."

He organized jazz groups and toured Europe while still in his teens. "Then I decided it was time to come to America. Twenty years ago, I decided to give Kansas City, Missouri a try because a lot of European musicians I knew had lived there and liked it a lot."

Kansas City is known for its cosmopolitan jazz scene. "After a one week gig, the entire jazz community of Kansas City knew about this extraordinary new talent," said *JAM Magazine*. Nowadays Bram teaches jazz piano at two colleges in Kansas City. He has a trio and a septet.

**Bram Wijnands fell in love with American music by the age of six. By the time he turned eight, Bram studied barrelhouse blues (boogie woogie) and stride-piano recordings of Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Meade Lux Lewis, Jack Dupree, and Memphis Slim.**

Every Friday and Saturday night, he plays at Kansas City's historic jazz house, the Majestic Restaurant. He collaborates with classical violinist Gregory Sandomirsky of the Kansas City Symphony and the Endless Mountain Music Festival. He has appeared on Wynton Marsalis' *Jazz at Lincoln Center* television series and played at Carnegie Hall, causing Kansas City's mayor to issue a proclamation declaring him Kansas City's Ambassador of Swing.

Every year he goes home to Holland for the Jazz in Duketown festival. He has played from Sacramento to St. Louis to New Orleans. The king of Ghana bought a complete set of his recordings after hearing him in Florida.

This February Bram comes to Wellsboro's Winter Jazz Fest to present the kind of elegant, earthy, rollicking, smooth evening that the Majestic patrons enjoy. "I'll play a lot of stride, of course," says Bram. "Lots of Erroll Garner, lots of blues. I'll see what the

crowd is in the mood for and select tunes off the top of my head. That's the best thing about this kind of solo concert. It's just me and the music connecting with the audience." 🎷

*Karen Meyers, a retired musician, is an occasional contributor to Mountain Home. She lives in Wellsboro, PA where she teaches taigi.*



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