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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**JOHN ELLIS & DOUBLE-WIDE SECOND BAND ALBUM,  
"PUPPET MISCHIEF," TO BE RELEASED ON OBLIQSOUND FEBRUARY 23**

NEW YORK - "It's hard to say those two words next to each other and not smile," says John Ellis about *Puppet Mischief*, the title of the saxophonist's latest album with his band Double-Wide, to be released Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup> on ObliqSound. That statement – and the images conveyed by the album's intriguing title – applies equally to the music within. *Puppet Mischief*, which draws its inspiration from the rich vein of music the city of New Orleans has given the world, exudes an air of delight and exhilaration.

Another considerable chunk of the music's inspiration, confirms Ellis, comes from "carnivals, state fairs, children laughing, clowns and dancing." But that's not to imply that the album is one big Big Easy grin – some of the tracks, in fact, mine emotions at the opposite end of the feel-good spectrum, and there are moments when somber solidly trumps giddy. But listening to Ellis and his superb cast of musicians there's never any doubt that this band reveled in the experience of creating this music. Just as New Orleanians don't mourn death so much as celebrate a life – with brass bands that take to the streets and blow – *Puppet Mischief* is all about affirmation and rejoice. "This band is serious," Ellis says, who also produced the recording, "but serious fun."

That sheer collective elation and Double-Wide's extraordinary connectedness are what allows *Puppet Mischief* to swing through such a vast range of moods and rhythms over the course of its nine Ellis-composed tracks. Consisting of Ellis on tenor saxophone and bass clarinet, Jason Marsalis on drums, Matt Perrine on sousaphone and Brian Coogan on organ, Double-Wide has its roots in a gig Ellis played in the 1990s with Perrine. "I knew right away that I wanted to make a record one day with Matt playing sousaphone," says Ellis. "I built the concept for the band around him." Jason Marsalis, the drumming member of the famous NOLA clan, has appeared on three of Ellis' five previous albums and organist Coogan is new to the band. Guests Gregoire Maret on harmonica and Alan Ferber on trombone add "the perfect colors to blend with the already unusual orchestration of the group," Ellis says.

The album's uniqueness is made evident from its very first funky moments. The leadoff track, "Okra & Tomatoes," takes its title from a phrase that represents life's perfect pairings. It builds to a boil quickly and never again simmers. That's followed by "Fauxfessor," a tightly synced, off-kilter New Orleans romp full of surprising twists. The elegiac "Dewey Dah" displays each instrument's individual colorings beautifully, particularly Perrine's sousaphone, and reaffirms Ellis' penchant for compositions that are never static, always morphing.

Among the other highlights of *Puppet Mischief* are its wild, teasing title track, featuring a stunning harmonica solo by Maret, and the back-to-back "Carousel" and "Dubinland Carnival." The former, which Ellis calls a "wistful circus tune," takes on a bluesy patina and incorporates several dramatic transitions, while its companion piece, which Ellis likens to the feel of a Fellini film, features an epic sax-trombone conversation and some of Marsalis' most fired-up drumming of the set. "Chorale" speaks for itself – written originally with string quartet in mind, it instead became a beautiful showcase for the four horns. "Héroes de Acción" is Ellis' idea of soundtrack music for a Spanish cartoon crime-fighting hero while the album's closing track, "This Too Shall Pass," is the perfect sendoff, a calming, almost whimsical paean to the acceptance of flux as the one constant in our lives.

The release of *Puppet Mischief* follows up one of the busiest years in Ellis' career, one that saw him accompanying a diverse array of musicians ranging from Sting to Mos Def to the Cuban drummer Ignacio Berroa, touring Europe with the John Patitucci Trio and other artists and, most significantly, the debut of *The Ice Siren*, Ellis' hour-long through-composed narrative composition for string quartet,

tuba, percussion, guitar, vibes, winds and two singers. The piece, a collaborative effort with playwright Andy Bragen, debuted at the Jazz Gallery in New York in May 2009. The prior year, Ellis made his first ObliqSound guest appearance, on Lionel Loueke, Massimo Biolcati and Ferenc Nemeth's collaborative album *Giffema + 2*, and in the new year, shortly before *Puppet Mischief* hits, he also glimmers as a special guest on Olivier Manchon's debut *Orchestre de Chambre Miniature – Volume 1*.

Ellis, now 35, has never been an artist who stays in one artistic place very long. Born in North Carolina, he took piano lessons as a child, soon switched to clarinet, and first became seriously drawn to music when he heard the music of legendary ragtime composer Scott Joplin. After moving to New Orleans, Ellis' jazz chops improved radically as he gigged with the likes of Ellis Marsalis and Walter Payton. After three years in the Big Easy – which retains its indelible hold on his muse and where the other core members of Double-Wide still reside – he then went north to New York City, graduating from the New School and settling into the city's thriving jazz scene. Along the way, Ellis spent six years as a member of jazz guitarist Charlie Hunter's group, cutting four albums with them while also developing his own sound. He cut his debut as a leader, *The Language of Love*, in 1996, then didn't record under his own name again until 2002, when he released the critically acclaimed *Roots, Branches and Leaves*. That was followed by *One Foot in the Swamp* (2005), *By a Thread* (2006), and 2008's *Dance Like There's No Tomorrow*, with John Ellis & Double-Wide.

Writing in *The New York Times*, critic Ben Ratliff once said that Ellis "has the knack for writing catchy, fluid, optimistic songs, but he is also fascinated by the ways musicians can break down structure and create it on the fly." Those qualities are more evident than ever on *Puppet Mischief*, which raises Ellis' artistry to a whole new level. But Ellis himself is reluctant to spend much time analyzing his own evolution.

"Like most young artists, I used to be more self conscious about my influences," he says. "Now I spend more time pursuing my own musical happiness, and I've been much more interested in writing, storytelling and metaphor. I envisioned the idea of this band, wrote all the music, hired the band, booked the studio, and produced the record. However, I feel strongly that my job as a leader is to create environments where musicians can contribute their own voices. Most of the things I'm happiest about on my albums were things I didn't make happen or plan for, they're things I watched happen. I love dreaming about a project and then carrying it through to its logical conclusion."

*Puppet Mischief* is a classic example of one man's dream, taken from conception to fruition, with some of the finest musicians on the scene – John Ellis & Double-Wide –pulling the strings.

**For more info:**

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