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JONATHAN
FERRARA
gallery

FROM THE MIND AND HANDS OF HENRY BUTLER: The Photographs of Henry Butler

"I want to know about what's there. I also want to know how people's minds work... how they see things and how they interpret what they see. Many (seeing) people just look at things then write them off. Part of the exercise is to get people to talk about what they're looking at right now." -Henry Butler

Multi-disciplined pianist Henry Butler may be blind, but he has never allowed his lack of sight to obstruct his vision. A native New Orleanian, Henry Butler has reached for and achieved great heights in his career as a musician. As a young child, he attended the Louisiana School For The Blind where the roots of his musical career can be traced. Singing and playing piano at an early age, he began playing professionally by age 14. He attended Southern University and went onto earn a masters degree from Michigan State while developing his own mix of jazz and R&B. In his early years, Butler was mentored by jazz great Alvin Batiste and studied piano with the legendary Professor Longhair. His collaborators in the music world are numerous and his musical presence in New Orleans is significant. Henry Butler's style has earned him the praise of critics and contemporaries alike. He carries on the legacy of Professor Longhair, James

Booker and Jelly Roll Morton.

But there is another side to this virtuoso that is creating a legacy of its own. Blind since infancy, Henry Butler is an accomplished photographer. Whether it be his ethereal landscape shots, portraits of his friends, images from his teachings of blind and visually impaired children or his experimentation with double exposures, Henry Butler uses his intuition and his tremendous intellect to approach his subject. His photography has taught him to trust his instincts. It also provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss the gift of vision with his sighted friends.

In order to more fully understand the true gift Henry Butler has, seeing is believing glimpses into the life of a talented individual. The subject of his portraits include renowned sculptor/artist John Scott and the great jazz photographer Herman Leonard who contributed the invitation image in support of Henry's endeavors. His landscapes are lush in color capturing an ethereal beauty such as "Sunrise over the Mississippi" where his desire to catch the New Orleans riverfront at dawn is vividly realized. His use and intellectual understanding of the photographic proc-

ess is astonishing. Henry Butler has taken double exposure to a new level with his portraits that superimpose jazz musicians James Singleton, Wycliffe Gordon and Joe Cohn at the legendary NY jazz club, Sweet Basil, onto the New Orleans riverfront.

Even more central to Henry Butler is his work with blind and visually impaired children. Wherever he travels, Henry tries to work with local children, organizing field trips to challenge these kids to experience new things. Whether it be performing with the children or for the children, Henry demonstrates his concern for their future; for many of them the only hope in a world that traditionally is filled with low expectations. Henry Butler's ultimate goal is to set up a non-profit organization called The Inner Eye that will seek out funding and community involvement necessary to implement educational and cultural enrichment programs for blind and visually impaired students.

All of these wonderful talents blend together into a first rate photographic exhibition. "From the Mind and Hands of Henry. Butler" opens at Jonathan Ferrara gallery, 816 Baronne Street in New Orleans, Thursday April 22, 1999 with a reception to meet Henry Butler from 6-10 pm.

Allmusic.com April 2004 You kids may not be aware of this, but there was a time when the term R&B stood for rhythm and blues, and described a style of music that was readily distinguishable from the pop music mainstream. Today it seems as if R&B has become a term that describes the race of the performer more than it does the music itself. (A Britney Spears album gets filed under rock and pop, whereas if Beyonce were to make the same album it would be filed under R&B or soul/hip hop.) Henry Butler comes from a different time and place, and his music is R&B in the old sense — it rocks, it rolls, it struts, it features the piano prominently, and it's very much based in the blues and the Creole musical traditions of his native New Orleans. Despite one or two minor missteps, *Homeland* is a hoot and a joy all the way through, from the touchingly sentimental "Way We Loved" through the slightly hokey "Hey Little Girl" right up to the sweet ode to Professor Longhair that ends the program. The album's highlight is a fantastic adaptation of the New Orleans classic "Iko Iko," .Highly recommended overall.

Rick Anderson