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More hip than hop, power-trio Soulive doesn't sound like your father's jazz band

Turnin' it out

By [Omar Perez](#)

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In some ways, being labeled a "jazz act" can limit an artist's scope and even their audience, yet Soulive has dodged this bullet. The New York City trio has managed to lure everyone from jazz enthusiasts, hip-hop fans and Phish heads to their live shows. Part of their success stems from the band's knack at taking an age-old form like jazz, funk, and then making it relevant with a tinge of urban flavor that's more hip than hop.

"Jazz is such a weird term," says guitarist Eric Krasno. "Our music is improvisational, but it's also groove-oriented and people can get down to it."

Ever since the late '90s, Soulive (Krasno and brothers Alan Evans on drums and Neal Evans on organ) has created music that's as challenging as it is stimulating. And this year's self-titled live effort (their fifth overall) presents a style that's articulate yet accessible, with funk that grooves and moves, and a spontaneity that recalls a jam band (minus the hallucinogens and the half-hour opuses). With Alan's beat backbone pivoting around Krasno's guitar lines and Neal's psychedelic Wurlitzer/Hammond organic soul, it's music that thrives onstage.

"It always made sense for us to make a live album, and I always felt that we should have done one," Krasno says. "Studio albums are fine, but they don't really fully represent the group."

The members of Soulive met at a music festival in Northampton, Mass., where Krasno and the Evans brothers played in their respective bands. From that show, the three developed a mutual musical admiration for one another. Four years later when Krasno's group (Lettuce) was beginning to go stale, he got a phone call from the brothers, who wanted to put together another band. "Once we got together and started playing, it clicked," Krasno says.

The first improvised session went so well that it would become their 1999 debut EP, "Get Down!," which the band recorded in one take. "That was the first spark of the whole thing," Krasno remembers. The band also self-released its 2000 sophomore full-length "Turn It Out" through its own Velour Recordings.

The band toured regularly and started branching out from the Northeast, although their following grew considerably when they landed prime opening spots for John Scofield, then arena acts like The Rolling Stones and Dave Matthews (who appears on a remake of Ani DiFranco's "Joyful Girl" found on Soulive's 2002 "Next" album).

The trio eventually drew the attention of Blue Note, who inked them and released 2001's "Doin' Something," "Next" and this year's live album.

Being in a power-trio suits Krasno.

"When we started performing, that's just how we did it because it made sense," he says. "I'm not only between these two guys [onstage] that are great musicians, but they have a deeper connection than you could image. The communication is so open in the way that they set up. They face each other, and

I'm in the middle, and I catch that communication between them. They're so connected it's like they're one being."

Even though they're signed to a prominent jazz label, the band doesn't want to be pigeonholed into the form. "If anyone wants to label us, I'm not against it," Krasno says. "But I don't like to label just because music is so broad nowadays. A lot of the stuff we're doing has elements of everything."