

"There is a family of musicians in Charlottesville unlike any place I have ever been. It's people like Michael Sokolowski who make it so special. He's world class."

-- Dave Matthews, RCA Recording Artist

Michael has been performing, composing and producing music professionally for more than 30 years. After studying philosophy and music composition in college, he abandoned a graduate school academic path to spend time collaborating with some of the leading lights of Virginia's improvisational music scene in the 1980s (including modern guitar legend, Tim Reynolds; Chapman Stick master, Greg Howard; jazz trumpet great, John D'Earth; Dave Matthews Band saxophonist, Leroi Moore; and pianist Don Pullen's favorite bassist, Lenny Martin). Michael's love of free improvisation manifested in a duet album with Tim Reynolds and the formation of Offering (a multi-instrumentalist trio with Tim and Worth Proffitt). Offering released two CDs, including a live recording from New York's Knitting Factory in 2001. In 1985, he toured Europe as pianist with Lexington's Tim Eddy Trio, settling into an extended performance residency in Paris, France—most notably appearing in legendary film director Frederic Rossif's loving portrait of the French music scene, *Coeur des Musiciens*. Sokolowski's instrumental trio (with master funk bassist Houston Ross and late drummer extraordinaire Johnny Gilmore), Soko (now Sokoband), was a vital part of Charlottesville's musical landscape for most of the '90s and Sokolowski's most important musical project.

Formed in 1990 as a piano/bass/drum trio playing Michael's compositions, Soko was, in a sense, a proto jam band, exploring far-flung improvisation via jazz-influenced rock instrumentals. The band worked relentlessly, honing a sophisticated ensemble rapport where set lists and stock arrangements weren't needed and the trio felt free to disappear into the rabbit hole of the moment—musically reinventing itself every night, and developing a strong relationship with its audience. In 1997, the band released its debut CD, *In November Sunlight*, featuring guest appearances by members of Dave Matthews Band (Dave, Leroi Moore, and Tim Reynolds)—friends of the band and fellow Charlottesville musicians. Because of this association, the disc achieved high sales numbers for an instrumental record. But from a performance and production standpoint, Sokolowski believed that the recording failed to capture the band at its best.

The band disbanded in 1998, though Sokolowski and Ross remained close friends and musical partners. In 2000, the two began work on their follow-up recording, *Two*—enlisting the help of many studio musicians to flesh out the textures and arrangements. Whereas Soko's music had previously been exclusively about Michael's tunes, now Houston Ross began to collaborate as a writer, arranger, and singer. It took a long time, but in 2005, the CD was released. Two years later, two of its tracks—"Storyteller" and "Stella: Reflections"—were featured in LA filmmaker Jon Ezrine's dark and comic documentary, *Son of a Bitch!* At about that time, Michael and Houston teamed up with formidable drummer, Nir Z (Genesis, John Mayer, Chris Cornell, Joss Stone and many others) to work on a re-recording of *In November Sunlight* in an effort to render more definitive versions of their early material. *Sokoband* was released in 2010, and included a bonus track of material from the *Two* sessions. The album features exciting and beautiful collaborations with jam band guitarist extraordinaire, Steve Kimock; Grammy-winning cellist and composer, David Darling; Tower of Power saxophonist, George Brooks; and other musical luminaries—in addition to friends from Dave Matthews Band—reprising their roles.

Over the last ten years or so, Michael put his musical projects on the back burner in order to focus on his e-commerce career and devote more time to family. Now that the kids are grown, he's jumping back into musical creativity in a big way. He's working with Houston on writing and recording a new Sokoband record; playing in a rehearsal jazz trio with Offering drummer Worth Proffitt; and recording an assortment of near-to-his-heart cover tunes. In addition, Tim Reynolds and Mike plan a follow-up to *Common Margins*.

And in an exciting new development, 2018 will see the launch of Sokolowski's local music interview podcast, *Hometown Fliers*, a show where Michael and the stars of local music scenes will explore the relationship between art and place.

Selected bands

Blank Frank (prog rock cover band, 1978)
4:05 (original instrumental fusion, 1979-81)
Hi-Fly (jazz quartet, 1983-85)
Tim Eddy Quartet (1984-85)
The Scoop (classic rock/R&B, 1986)
The Stains (blues/rock, 1987-89)
The Basics (Leroi Moore's improvised funk ensemble, 1991-92)
Offering (1990-2001)
Soko/Sokoband (1990-present)
MixoMatic (cover song mashup band, 2007)
The Electricians (improvisation-oriented Grateful Dead tribute band, 2010-present)

Selected discography

Michael Sokolowski & Tim Reynolds, *Common Margins, Improvisations for piano and guitar* (Breezeway, 1992)
Soko, *In November Sunlight* (Breezeway, 1996)
Worth Proffitt, Tim Reynolds & Michael Sokolowski, *Offering* (Breezeway, 2000)
Michael Sokolowski, *Monday* (Breezeway, 2001) solo piano
Proffitt/Reynolds/Sokolowski, Knitting Factory, NYC, 6/24/01, *Live Offering* (BreezewayArchives, 2004)
Shannon Mier, *On the Failure of Science to Understand My Spirit* (2003)
Soko, *Two* (Breezeway, 2005)
Earth Bombs Mars, *Earth Bombs Mars* (2008)
Sokoband, *Sokoband*, 2010
Voodoo Loons, *Euphobia* (2007)
Voodoo Loons, *The Criminal Ear* (2014)
Triple Fret, *Fall Risk* (2016)