

Music
& Nightlife

JAZZ TOWN | Chris Burnett Quintet at the Drum Room

AGE IS NO OBSTACLE FOR EMERGING JAZZMAN

Chris Burnett, 51, is just starting to find his way into public jazz world.

By JOE KLOPUS
The Kansas City Star

One of the most promising emergent jazz musicians in town isn't some kid straight out of school or still in school. But at age 51, alto saxophonist Chris Burnett is just beginning to get noticed as his own man.

So where has he been until now? A stint in the Army's music programs kept Burnett, whose group plays the Drum Room on Saturday, busy for 22 years.

"In the military you didn't have to worry about having an instrument. You just went to the supply room and got one," he says. "You had jobs — you didn't have to go out and get them. You didn't have to worry about publicity. ... And if you wanted to put out a CD, you went to the studio down the hall.

"It was a whole different thing we got accustomed to."

Burnett is the son of an Air Force man from Olathe, and military life and musical life mingled in their home. Older brother Richie Pratt, who evolved into a player good enough to work in the New York Jazz Quartet alongside Frank Wess and Roland Hanna, kept his drum set in the living room and was a mentor to his little brother.

Burnett says his original goal in volunteering for the Army was "to stay in three years. ... Play as much as I could, learn as much as I could, then use the GI Bill when I get out." But he soon found that the music program was "like going to school. You did nothing but music."

So he re-enlisted, again and again, for more of that schooling — in group leading, arranging and conducting.

He left the Army in 1996.

"You hear horror stories of people getting into the military who can't deal with the life. ... My adjustment was in getting out," he says.



Chris Burnett

saturday

The Chris Burnett Quintet appears at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Drum Room, in the President Hotel, 1329 Baltimore Ave.

At first he tried to run a music store in Waynesville, Mo., while commuting to classes at Webster University, two hours away in suburban St. Louis. Then he threw in the towel and moved closer to Kansas City about six years back. (He lives in Leavenworth now.)

He worked his way into the scene with a gentleness that shows in his subtle playing. For a long time he stayed on the edges, refining his playing and writing, and studying (always the learner) with Ahmad Alaadeen.

"Since I wasn't in the military, I've been free to express myself on a different level," Burnett says. "Mr. Alaadeen has let me find my own voice. I can take all the information I had from all that schooling and have an opin-

ion about it now."

He has been writing new music, prolifically. "I have enough music now for about five CDs," he says. He has recorded one, "Time Flies," and hopes to be back in the studio working on new material soon.

Meanwhile, his group has been working out monthly at the Drum Room for more than a year, flexing its musical muscles on standard material. This week it's a quintet with Burnett on alto sax and flute, Will Matthews on guitar, Roger Wilder on piano, Ricky Anderson on bass and Mike Shanks on drums.

"It's been good to come home," Burnett says, "and the welcome means a lot to me. I remember when I was a young man, one of my goals was to be good enough to play jazz in Kansas City. To be able to go away, grow up, be a professional musician and come back full circle to play in Kansas City — that's a big deal for me."

Noteworthy

■ The Blue Room, 1600 E. 18th St., presents the Latin jazz group Makuza at 7 tonight; it's free. The Scamps perform at 8:30 p.m. Friday, and the Jazz Disciples perform with the inspired addition of singer-pianist Pam Watson and trombonist Karita Carter at 8:30 p.m. Saturday; cover is \$10. Organist Everette DeVan is in charge of the Monday jam session at 7 p.m.; that's free, too.

■ Drummer Brandon Draper and his New Quintet appear from 8 to midnight tonight at Jardine's, 4536 Main St.

■ Speaking of drums: The Leewood Parks and Recreation jazz concert series winds down this weekend, and bandleader David Basse has promised to make it even more memorable by including a multiple-percussion tribute to the late Max Roach. The free event is at 6 p.m. Sunday at Ironwoods Park, 14701 Mission Road.

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