

## The Karl Denson KD-3 Live!

by Skoot Larson

Versatile reed man Karl Denson brought his KD-3 trio to The Murrieta Valley High School Performing Arts Center (Murrieta, California) last Saturday, performing a pair of benefit concerts supporting the school's Crimson Cadet Band and Pageantry and other music programs. The world-renowned jazz saxophonist and flautist's trio featured Karl, along with band mates Anthony Smith on the Hammond B-3 organ and electric piano, and Brett Sanders at the drums. This solid trio wowed a select audience with both an afternoon matinee and a more formal evening concert.

Denson kicked off the performance with, "That Ain't It," a composition in his trademark "Funk" style performed on the alto sax. Denson's bopped to a heavy back-beat from drummer Sanders, painting lively audio pictures while putting just a touch of "hot sauce" into his alto's warm, buttery tone. In a nod to his straight-ahead background, Denson's solo opened with a quote from Dizzy Gillespie's famous "Manteca."

Denson performed the program of his own compositions, primarily on the tenor sax, but employing his alto and flute as well. Two of *this writer's* favorites of the evening were "Reminded of Sunshine" and "Into the Bell," both of which Denson played on flute with a enchanting, rich-sounding tone all his own.

"Into the Bell" is an up-tempo cooker employing some Eastern tonality and supported by Anthony Smith's fast-walking left-handed organ bass. The hard-bop drive of "Bell" proved a nice compliment to the heavy funk numbers on the program.

Karl Denson is a fine and precise flautist, with a mellow tone and a butterfly touch. His high register flute work on "Reminded of Sunshine" moved out at a moderate pace driven by a strong bass drum from Sanders.

The trio's finest Funk number, "So-Cal-itis," put the Hammond organ and tenor sax head to head in an intricately structured line riffing through some tight unison runs. Anthony's organ took off flying from the head with a tasty dive into the changes. His solo, unfortunately, ran far too short. Whether by design or for time constraints, Smith passed the baton to Karl leaving things unsaid, his ideas crying out for more space.

Denson's tenor caught fire from Smith's burning B-3, as Karl took some brilliant choruses of his own before spreading the flames to Drummer Sanders. Brett Sanders burned up his drum kit with the same heat using syncopated snare drum licks juxtaposed with a smart rally around his other drums and cymbals.

The tune "Dark Chocolate," Denson announced, "I wrote for myself!" Here, his alto sax rode the crest of a slow and **BAD** strut that could have been a New Orleans funeral band of one-hundred-years ago... although laced with a Hip Hop undercurrent. Sax and organ moved the melody ahead together in a simpatico stop and go rhythm, then Karl's alto took off, firing bursts of brilliance punctuated by some sharp staccato notes slap-tongued through an airless horn. Denson's sax went on to scream across lengthy drawn out phrases filled by cascades of intricate chord runs and a few notes that rose beyond the horn's normal top end.

Inspired by his band mate, Anthony Smith struts his organ up to the plate on this one with some amazing ideas of his own. At one point Smith's organ offers jazz variations J. S. Bach might have played after drinking too much coffee. Smith's Hammond settled down into a solid groove for some eight or ten choruses, showing just what the B-3 organ can do with skilled hands on the keyboard.

Throughout it all, Karl Denson is a smiling imp with a mischievous glint in his eye, bouncing on his feet to the beat, and showing a strong pride and trust in his musicians. Drummer Brett Sanders solos on a couple other numbers aptly demonstrated speed and skill in putting forth his own ideas. The audience didn't get to hear enough of Sanders, whose travels around the tom-toms in his kit, coupled with very tasty snare drum work, proved a delight.

Karl Denson's saxophone first captured the music world's attention in the late 1980s when he toured and recorded with rocker Lenny Kravitz. He garnered further popularity across Europe when his collaboration with DJ Greyboy, "Unwind Your Mind," became the most popular dance track on that continent. Denson is currently touring the country with the acid-jazz ensemble, "Greyboy's Allstars", as well as leading two groups of his own, Karl Denson's Tiny Universe and the KD-3 Trio.

The evening's proceeds went entirely to Murrieta Valley High School's music programs including the Award Winning, Open Class Marching Band, Wind Ensemble, Wind

Symphony, and Concert Band as well as a year round Jazz program and Drum Line. A special thanks to Karl, Anthony and Brett for helping this fine education program, and to all the many others in Jazz Music who care about the generations of artists to come.

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