

Jazz Talk

by Gene Redden



Take a nice cool autumn evening in Las Vegas, Nevada. In the middle of the Strip there stands a colossal building called Caesars Palace. Walking into the main showroom on the late show, you'll notice a driving, big band sound. I developed tunnel vision on the sax section, and a strong, forceful sound was coming from a tenor sax. The player—Charles Owens. I had the opportunity to speak with Charles, and of course, the conversation turned into an interview.

CHARLES OWENS, born May 4, 1939, grew up in San Diego, CA, and studied music at San Diego State and Berklee college of music in Boston, Mass. He toured around the globe with the Buddy Rich orchestra, Mongo Santamaria, Frank Zappa and the Gerald Wilson orchestra. He was also in the Air Force band from 1959-64.



Charles Owens

Charles Owens is what I would consider a master, meaning he is fluent on the alto, tenor and baritone saxes, as well as flute, oboe and the English horn. I must add he is rated with the greatest of reed players. His credits are many, but to name a few of the fine jazz players that have shared the stage with Charles are: Patrice Rushen, Bobby Bryant, Paul Humphrey, John Heard, Alex Acuna, Arthur Blythe

and Frank Morgan. The list is endless, and I must say that's real fine company. I must mention that Charles Owens played the baritone sax on the 1987 Grammy Award album, "Digital Duke," by Mercer Ellington. Many people remember Charles Owens as the lead sax player in "Ain't Misbehavin'."

GENE: Who influenced you the most in jazz?

CHARLES: I liked Charlie Parker, because he was a source of inspiration... also there was Wardell Gray and Tab Smith. Bird was the main man, no doubt about it... no doubt. The first jazz I was introduced to, was Erroll Garner and George Shearing... then I graduated to Oscar Peterson and McCoy Tyner.

GENE: When did you start playing clubs?

CHARLES: Around 1950, I started in a high school band

in San Diego, called the Kingsmen.

GENE: At that time, did you have the opportunity of playing with named cats?

CHARLES: Well, after a while, I had a chance to play with Eric Dolphy... they would have jazz concerts at the El Cortez Hotel. Chico Hamilton's group was there, with Eric Dolphy playing in the band. He took his solo and people were around the bandstand... He told

ALL THAT JAZZ

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SOMETHING I SAID!!

me, "You don't sound too bad, you're good"... he had a big alto sound.

GENE: Well, from there, what was your first experience on the road?

CHARLES: My first experience was with the Buddy Rich orchestra. I was moving from San Diego to Puerto Rico, then back to Texas. Then I left San Diego to join the Air Force band. I was based in Puerto Rico from 1959-64. With the Buddy Rich orchestra, we went on tour to the Far East — Hong Kong, Bangkok, Japan, and the Philippines in 1968. That was my first big time gig. In 1970 I hooked up with Mongo Santamarias' band in Chicago. I played flute, tenor and soprano sax. We played for Atlanta Records. Hubert Laws played first flute and I played second flute. I remember Hubert came in to play a session and he was in black tie. He took it off and eased into the grease.

GENE: From a technical point of view, you have this big, rounded bell tone. How did you develop this tone?

CHARLES: From eating a lot of ham hocks! No, seriously, it's old and I've played a long time. I tried to get better mouthpieces and better reeds... just playing a long time, that's what it is, just playing a long time.

GENE: Were there any tenor players that influenced you on this big bell tone, that you have?

CHARLES: Two of my favorites are John Coltrane and Paul Gonzales. I like Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins, I can go on and on, but those are the guys that are great.

GENE: Do you see yourself

ROWE

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El Sid in an exclusive club whose members are Jimmy Stewart, Elia Kazan and Sidney Lumet, former Lena Horne son-in-law. The happening takes place at the posh Waldorf Astoria Feb. 28th, the "love Month"... Michael Spinks is expected to be a knock-out, not the reverse, in his initial featured film role in "Speed-zone Fever." H'cum Prez-elect Bush is so quiet about the status of the administration's lone African American Cabinet member, Sec'y Samuel Pierce, HUD? Also, what about loyal Republican Dr. Gloria E.A. Toote, former sec'y for fair housing HUD during the Nixon Administration? He would gain many ethnic points should she be

as a role model for the youth?

CHARLES: In some ways, I do. I'm a family man, and I don't use drugs. You don't need drugs to play good jazz... you don't need drugs to be a good jazz musician and be dedicated to the music.

GENE: Are whites playing jazz, or are they just emulating jazz?

CHARLES: Well, I think BLACK musicians are the best jazz musicians, but there are other musicians that get by.

A Footnote: Charles Owens plays around town. Pick up the trades and find out where this fine musician is performing. You are in for a very good treat.

In A Minute...
GENE REDDEN

BY GENE REDDEN

"KNIGHTWATCH" BEGINS

"There's Calvin, Casey, Condo, Burn — actually 57 in number and still growing. They are teh 'Knights of the City,' a community watch organization made up of concerned young volunteers. Founded by ex-gang member Tony Maldonado and headquartered in the basement of St. Domonic's Church, the Knights patrol the city streets on foot, protecting innocent people from criminals and rapists, assisting in first aid and CPR and establishing a sense of safety in the area.

While preventing crime, the Knights must also fight the image of being vigilantes

added to his White House cadre... STAY LOOSE—Billy Rowe is a syndicated columnist.

which proves to be a constant battle. The peacekeeping group arms itself with nothing more than street smarts and skill in the martial arts while adhering to the code, "Break the law, you're on your own."

Benjamin Bratt, Joshua Cadman, Don Franklin, Ava Haddad, Harley Kozak, Calvin Levels, Samantha Mathis and Paris Vaughan star.

Kevin Sullivan is executive producer and creator of the series.

"Knightwatch" will air Thursday nights at 8 p.m. (ET/PT) on ABC beginning November 10 with the pilot and December 1 for the regular series run. The series is an Astor III Production in association with MGM/UA Television.

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