

# HISTORY AND HIGHLIGHTS

## *THIS TIME THE DREAM'S ON ME*

When Kenny Burrell joined the bustling American jazz scene in the fifties, he was already a rising star among the cognoscenti. Through apprenticeships and sideman stints with Dizzy Gillespie and Oscar Peterson, he developed fluency with the emerging bebop language and attained an enviable reputation outside of the confines of his native Detroit area. By the time Burrell relocated to New York City in 1956 at age 24, he was poised and fully equipped to become one of the genre's premier guitarists.

Burrell made his first important recordings as a leader in the mid-fifties for Alfred Lion's Blue Note label. "This Time the Dream's on Me," a Harold Arlen standard made popular in jazz circles by Charlie Parker, is among the master's favorite tracks and hails from his earliest Blue Note sessions. Burrell's rendition serves as an auspicious introduction, notifying the jazz world—in no uncertain terms—that he had arrived. His quintet reading was recorded on May 29, 1956, with luminaries Tommy Flanagan (piano), Paul Chambers (bass), Louis Hayes (drums), and Candido Camero (congas) in the lineup.

This is bebop, pure and simple. While most guitarists of the day were still clinging to the earlier swing-based lexicon created by Charlie Christian, Burrell was looking forward to the future. He anticipated a new epoch where guitarists would emulate the harmonically rich and technically complex horn lines of Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and Clifford Brown—a trend that continues to the present. It has been postulated that Burrell was arguably the first true bebop guitarist, a case made convincingly with pioneering tracks like "This Time the Dream's on Me."

## **K.B. BLUES**

Kenny Burrell is one of the greatest exponents of the blues in jazz. He has been since the earliest days of his career. Beyond a stylistic identifier, it is a central credo and an innate part of his musical psyche. Alongside the many original bebop compositions and venerable standards he recorded in the fifties are numerous blues pieces he contributed to these historic sessions. Of these, "K.B. Blues" is among the most notable. Burrell's eponymous original composition is a definitive hard-bop blues from the third album of his Blue Note period. As such, it sums up much about the artist in ascendance, exemplifying his thoughtful balance of modern, bebop jazz elements tempered by time-honored blues aesthetics. The track was recorded on February 10, 1957, with a stellar and sympathetic quintet of Horace Silver (piano), Hank Mobley (tenor sax), Doug Watkins (bass), and Louis Hayes (drums).

## **ALL OF YOU**

By the time Kenny Burrell began recording as a leader for Prestige Records, he seemed to be everywhere on the new jazz scene. He had already recorded several notable sessions for the Blue Note and Savoy labels, and was one of the most sought-after sidemen in the hard bop genre. *Kenny Burrell* was a definitive all-standards set recorded just as Burrell's career was really catching fire. This superb Prestige date found him again in the company of his frequent cohort Tommy Flanagan (piano), plus baritone saxophonist Cecil Payne, the ubiquitous Doug Watkins (bass), and a relative newcomer, Elvin Jones (drums).

## LYRESTO

Kenny Burrell was the only guitarist to record with saxophone giant John Coltrane. The relationship began in 1951 when the two worked as sidemen and became friends in the Dizzy Gillespie band. An early Prestige album found the two, now important emerging modern jazzmen, sharing the leader role and turning in one of the most spirited and historically significant hard bop dates of the era. This is what Burrell has called a “blowing session”—an impromptu recording relying heavily on the improvisational prowess of all concerned. In this format, tunes are vehicles for informal jam sessions with the tapes rolling. As they rolled at Rudy Van Gelder’s Hackensack studios on May 7, 1958, they caught Burrell and Trane in peak form backed by Tommy Flanagan (piano), Paul Chambers (bass), and Jimmy Cobb (drums)—all of whom, by the way, collectively formed half of the upcoming epic Miles Davis *Kind of Blue* band of 1959–1960.

“Lyresto” is a hardy Burrell composition that captures the spirit and intent of hard bop music at the height of its popularity. This durable piece has remained in the guitarist’s repertory over the years and has been heard as recently as December 2, 2006, at his 75th birthday concert, when he performed it with a larger four-piece winds and brass ensemble.

## ALL NIGHT LONG

Originally released as *A Night at the Vanguard*, *All Night Long* documents the first working guitar-bass-drums trio in jazz. From this point on, Burrell’s guitar-centered ensemble replaced the previously more common guitar-bass-piano format for live performance. The earlier trio form, popularized by the Nat King Cole trio with Oscar Moore, the Oscar Peterson trio with Herb Ellis and Tal Farlow’s Verve-era groups, was the de facto standard for three-piece jazz bands with guitar in the fifties—until Burrell changed the paradigm. Though earlier trios of this type had been used in the studio by guitarists Barney Kessel and Johnny Smith—1957’s *Poll Winners* and 1958’s *Easy Listening* respectively—they were not the norm for concert work. After Burrell made his historic live recording at the Village Vanguard in 1959, the guitar-bass-drums ensemble eclipsed all earlier guitar-led trio efforts and afforded enumerable future guitarists a powerful and flexible medium for self-expression.

The Kenny Burrell Trio of 1959 boasted a stellar lineup with Richard Davis and Roy Haynes on bass and drums. A supportive and sympathetic rhythm section, the two men are exceptional instrumentalists and have credentials that read like a who’s who in jazz. Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Earl Hines, Bud Powell, Stan Getz, Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, George Shearing, Ahmad Jamal, Eric Dolphy, Gary Burton, Art Pepper, Pat Martino, Thad Jones, Joe Henderson, Chick Corea, Hank Jones, Billy Cobham, and Pat Metheny are just a few of the names on their collective resume.

## MY FAVORITE THINGS

Kenny Burrell’s Christmas album was his yuletide gift to the world. A classic date of the mid-sixties, *Have Yourself a Soulful Little Christmas* comes from his Cadet period, which also saw the release of *Tender Gender* and *Ode to 52nd Street*. The music he recorded for the small Chicago-based label is among his most ambitious and representative of his ever-widening artistic perspectives. At this stage of his career, Burrell began to experiment regularly with varied orchestral settings and produced such definitive and satisfying works as *Suite for Guitar and Orchestra*, *Asphalt Canyon Suite*, and the immortal classic *Guitar Forms*.

Among the familiar seasonal chestnuts gathered on *Have Yourself a Soulful Little Christmas* was Burrell's reappraisal of the newly inducted holiday standard "My Favorite Things" from *The Sound of Music*. Here an orchestral underpinning in the form of arranger Richard Evans' supportive horn chart is used to good advantage, bolstering Burrell's fluid blues-based guitar playing and supplying effective counterpoint in the arrangement. The session took place at Tel-Mar Studios in Chicago in October, 1966, with an un-credited rhythm section and anonymous horn players.

## **WHOLLY CATS**

Kenny Burrell honored his deepest roots in the appropriately named Verve album *A Generation Ago Today*. Reissued with a more specific title *For Charlie Christian and Benny Goodman*, the mid-sixties session leaves no doubt about exactly who those influential forebears were. This program reintroduced a handful of emblematic Goodman pieces that originally featured the then-newcomer Charlie Christian, acknowledged ever since as the founding father of electric jazz guitar and one of its most influential and prodigious soloists. It goes without saying that Christian was also a tremendous influence on Burrell, as a guitarist and innovator.

Burrell's tribute to Christian and Goodman was undertaken with the idea of recapturing the musical mood of the era while maintaining his own identity. As if to foreshadow his upcoming landmark record *Blues: The Common Ground*, Burrell underscored the universality of the blues with an energized reading of Benny Goodman's classic "Wholly Cats."

## **SOULFUL BROTHERS**

While some immovable purists may quibble with the lofty bebop and jazz interpretations of the blues in Kenny Burrell's repertory, none can dispute the authenticity and sheer down-home content of "Soulful Brothers." This is a blues one could easily imagine John Lee Hooker, Buddy Guy, Albert King, Eric Clapton, or Stevie Ray Vaughan performing. A leading track on the important late-sixties Burrell set *Blues: the Common Ground*, "Soulful Brothers" is as basic, earthy, and definitive as it gets. And it is another clear indicator of the breadth of Burrell's artistic vision, or perhaps put better, another glimpse of the infinite shades of blues in his musical spectrum. Accompanying Burrell in realizing his bluest blues was a stellar ensemble featuring Herbie Hancock (piano), Ron Carter (bass), and Grady Tate (drums). The landmark track was recorded on February 19, 1968, at A & R Studios in New York City.

## **DO WHAT YOU GOTTA DO**

Kenny Burrell's one-off recording session for CTI, *God Bless the Child* ushered in the seventies on an auspicious note. The album's large-scale arrangements featured a core jazz combo of Burrell leading Richard Wyands (piano), Ron Carter (bass), and Billy Cobham (drums) augmented by special guests Freddie Hubbard (trumpet) and Hubert Laws (flute), and enhanced with tasteful arrangements from Don Sebesky. Nowhere in the CTI sessions is the array of colors and textures more effective and compelling than on "Do What You Gotta Do," one of Burrell's greatest riff-based compositions.

"Do What You Gotta Do" is a stand-out track of the program and a signature Burrell tune which now spans three and a half decades. In fact, he recently performed it in his historic 75th anniversary concert at UCLA, complete with orchestral trappings.

## **SINCE I FELL FOR YOU**

Over the years, as the jazz genre has evolved, Kenny Burrell has displayed a knack for finding his individual voice, and indeed making it resound powerfully within a variety of settings. In the sixties and seventies he explored large-scale orchestral arrangements as well as lean jazz combos. *'Round Midnight* is a case in point of the latter. Recorded on the heels of his grandiose *God Bless the Child*, Burrell's first album for Fantasy found him scaling back his orchestral designs to lead a tight modern quartet ensemble distinguished by electric piano timbres. Richard Wyands (electric piano), Reggie Johnson (bass), and Lenny McBrowne (drums) joined Burrell for the 1972 session.

"Since I Fell for You" seems tailor-made for Burrell's guitar conception and touch. This is the same bluesy ballad, which was a Top Ten hit for Lenny Welch a decade earlier, rapidly became a modern standard. Despite the arrangement's contemporary trappings, Burrell remains true to his mainstream nature and distinctive guitar voice. Accordingly, his magical combination of blues, bebop, and ballad converge and coalesce in this soulful rendition.

## **GROOVIN' HIGH**

In the eighties, Kenny Burrell recorded for a number of labels—among them AudioSource, Blue Note, Contemporary, and Muse. Of these, his work with Muse is definitive and contains some of his finest small group sessions of the decade, notably his duets with bassist Rufus Reid and trio dates like *Handcrafted*, *Listen to the Dawn*, *Live at the Village Vanguard* and *Groovin' High*. The latter album is of particular significance to fans of Burrell and bebop. The title alone celebrates and underscores the connection between one of the founding fathers and earliest exponents of bebop, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and Burrell, the seminal bebop guitarist. Moreover, Gillespie was the leader of the band when Burrell made his professional debut in 1951. That said, *Groovin' High* comes off like a joyous revisit and the musical closing of a circle. Accompanying Burrell for the straight-ahead, bop-oriented session was Larry Ridley (bass) and Ben Riley (drums).

## **MOMENT'S NOTICE**

"Moment's Notice" stands as a glowing tribute to Kenny Burrell's one-time Prestige stable mate John Coltrane and a nod to the late-fifties hard bop genre. Burrell and Trane, both young and promising new exponents, worked together on several Prestige sessions of 1957, including the momentous shared date *Kenny Burrell with John Coltrane* and the stellar Tommy Flanagan record appropriately titled *The Cats*. In this milieu, when hard bop was in full flower, Coltrane produced one of his all-time greatest works, *Blue Train*, a one-off for Blue Note—coincidentally Burrell's "home label" at the time. Its effect and influence on jazz, and on the future of the evolving bop genre, remains undiminished, unsurpassed, and indeed central. Among the many notable tracks produced at the historic session were some of the greatest and most durable pieces of hard bop, all Coltrane originals: "Blue Train," "Locomotion," "Lazy Bird," and the towering masterpiece "Moment's Notice." Three decades later "Moment's Notice" received a solid and inspired reading on Burrell's first album of the nineties *Guiding Spirit*.

*Guiding Spirit* is a live recording captured at New York's Village Vanguard during a return engagement in August, 1989—almost 30 years to the day from Burrell's *All Night Long* session in the same nightclub. This album celebrated 54 years of music made at the Vanguard and Burrell's connection to the famed jazz venue. *Guiding Spirit* also celebrated Burrell's musical longevity and his continuing growth as a leader and player. The program was distinguished by a superior selection of tunes, exemplified by the inclusion of "Moment's Notice," and fine performances from the personnel. Burrell used a different ensemble for this date, expanding his customary guitar trio into a quartet with a vibraphone. Joining him were Jay Hoggard (vibraphone), Marcus McLaurine (bass), and Yoron Israel (drums).

## AUTUMN LEAVES

The nineties saw Kenny Burrell ascending to the hierarchy of America's musical arts and assuming the role of jazz guitar's senior ambassador world-wide. The genre lost several important voices in the decade—Howard Roberts, Joe Pass, Tal Farlow, Jimmy Raney, Chuck Wayne, George Van Eps, Attila Zoller, Emily Remler, Sonny Sharrock, Sal Salvador, Laurindo Almeida, Charlie Byrd, and Mary Osborne were among the most prominent—underscoring Burrell's timeless significance and continuing relevance. He was now a national treasure.

Burrell expanded his academic horizons in the nineties. He undertook graduate studies at Union Graduate School in 1991, was named eminent scholar by the University of Florida in 1994, received an honorary doctorate from Paterson University in 1995, was awarded the Ellington Fellowship from Yale in 1997, and received the Los Angeles Jazz Society's Tribute Award and the Alumni Achievement Award from Wayne University in 1999. Arguably most important, in 1996 Burrell became a Professor of Music and Ethnology and was named Chair of the Jazz Studies at UCLA where he resides and enlightens today.

In the midst of his scholarly pursuits, Burrell remained an active and productive jazz performer on stage and in the studio. He released landmark albums like *Sunup to Sundown*, *Lotus Blossom*, *Gifts*, *Then Came Kenny*, and *Midnight at the Village Vanguard*, wrote a commissioned opus *Love Suite for the Boy's Choir of Harlem*, received a Grammy in 1998 for his composition "Dear Ella" (Dee Dee Bridgewater), collaborated with Lamont Johnson and Shirley Horn, and recorded live with B.B. King at the Apollo. Moreover, he won the first place award for jazz guitar from Downbeat and in the Jazz Times Readers Poll and was named to KLON's Jazz Hall of fame.

Burrell's playing had attained classic status by the nineties. The point is made unerringly with his first album of the decade *Sunup to Sundown*, a superb mixed set of perennial standards, lovely reinterpreted obscurities, and a Cedar Walton original complete with liner notes by enthusiastic fan Tony Bennett. The session took place in New York City in June, 1991, and caught Burrell on both electric and acoustic guitars accompanied by the supportive combo of Cedar Walton (piano), Rufus Reid (bass), Lewis Nash (drums), and Ray Mantilla (percussion).

## IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD

Duke Ellington and Kenny Burrell share a unique and transcendent musical relationship in history. Burrell has long held a profound admiration for and connection with the man and his music throughout his five-decade career, evidenced by such early classics as "Caravan" (on his 1958 *Blue Lights* sessions), "Just a Sittin' and a Rockin'" (on *All Night Long*), and "Love You Madly" (on 1968's *Night Song*), his appearance on the TV show *We Love You Madly* with the Duke in 1973, milestones like the towering two-volume *Ellington is Forever* recordings of the seventies and *For Duke* in 1981, his producer's role in the Duke Ellington Centennial Festival in 1999, and his own professorial discourse in the "Ellingtonia" classes he currently conducts at UCLA. And remember, Kenny Burrell was Duke Ellington's favorite guitarist—but why not? Burrell's blend of blues, bebop, and ballads reflects the Duke's own kaleidoscopic musical vision. And, perhaps more importantly, conveys the same sort of deep blues-based feeling and spiritual content.

Burrell ushered in the new millennium and another decade of productivity with a beautiful, articulate, and harmonically rich rendition of the Duke's memorable blues-laced ballad, "In a Sentimental Mood," on *Lucky So and So*. His heartfelt performance of this immortal standard embodies all the mastery, experience, and refinements implicit in fifty-plus years of professional jazz playing. Joining Burrell on the September, 2000, quartet date was pianist Onaje Allan Gumbs, drummer Akira Tana, and frequent collaborator bassist Rufus Reid.