

In the '60s, when John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman were defining the concept of a jazz avant-garde, few knowledgeable observers would have guessed that in another 30 years the music's mainstream would virtually bypass their innovations, in favor of the hard bop style that free jazz had apparently supplanted. As it turned out, many listeners who had come to love jazz as a sophisticated manifestation of popular music were unable to accept the extreme esotericism of the avant-garde; their tastes were rooted in the core elements of "swing" and "blues," characteristics found in abundance in the music of the Jazz Messengers, the quintessential hard bop ensemble led by drummer Art Blakey. In the '60s, '70s, and '80s, when artists on the cutting edge were attempting to transform the music, Blakey continued to play in more or less the same bag he had since the '40s, when his cohorts included the likes of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Fats Navarro. By the '80s, the evolving mainstream consensus had reached a point of overwhelming approval in regard to hard bop: this is what jazz is, and Art Blakey -- as its longest-lived and most eloquent exponent -- was its master.

KENNY BURRELL with ART BLAKEY



ON VIEW AT THE FIVE SPOT CAFE



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Kenny Burrell and Art Blakey played together infrequently during their careers, so this meeting of jazz minds is a welcome occasion. On View is a rather short set issued from club dates at the Five Spot Cafe in New York City. No matter the configuration, this is come-what-may jazz that has no pressurized content, and a relaxed atmosphere allowing the music to organically breathe and come alive naturally. This feeling comes to the fore right away on Dizzy Gillespie's "Birk's Works," a rather polite version as Burrell tosses out his discriminating versions of the melody. Incorrectly identified as "Lady Be Good," this is actually an adaptation reworked by Thelonious Monk titled "Hackensack." It's a fast jam kicked off by a signature Blakey solo, where the band flies by the seat of their pants, and good feelings are fostered through the simple and solid tenor work of Tina Brooks. Though not penned by Duke Ellington, the elegance he displayed and Burrell revered is quite evident during the ballad "Lover Man." Randy Weston's "Beef Stew Blues," Ray Brown's obscure "Swingin'," and the classic Tadd Dameron ballad "If You Could See Me Now" further illuminate how good this group could have been had they turned into a working

unit. As the dawn of the '60s saw new breed jazz fomenting, Burrell, Blakey, and company proved you could still swing and remain melodic while creating new sonic vistas.

One of the leading exponents of straight-ahead jazz guitar, Kenny Burrell is a highly influential artist whose understated and melodic style, grounded in bebop and blues, made him in an in-demand sideman from the mid-'50s onward and a standard by which many jazz guitarists gauge themselves to this day. Born in Detroit in 1931, Burrell grew up in a musical family in which his mother played piano and sang in the Second Baptist Church choir, while his father favored the banjo and ukulele. Burrell began playing guitar at age 12 and quickly fell under the influence of such artists as Charlie Christian, Django Reinhardt, Oscar Moore, T-Bone Walker, and Muddy Waters. Surrounded by the vibrant jazz and blues scene of Detroit, Burrell began to play gigs around town and counted among his friends and bandmates pianist Tommy Flanagan, saxophonists Pepper Adams and Yusef Lateef, drummer Elvin Jones, and others.

Kenny Burrell with Art Blakey At The Five Spot Cafe

- 1 Birks' Works 9:44**
- 2 Hallelujah 11:38**
- 3 Lady Be Good 9:55**
- 4 Lover Man 8:18**
- 5 36-23-36 3:45**

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