



Fretting with the Renegades:
Calvin Keys

Changing Keys

When Calvin Keys' *Detours Into Unconscious Rhythms* was released on SF-based Wide Hive funk guitar to the attention of a generation more familiar with Wesley Snipes than Wes Montgomery. The album featured some of the Bay Area's best young musical talent (including organist Kat Ousano, vocalist Scheherazade Stone, flutist Tim Hyland, and turntablist DJ Zeph) in addition to veterans like keyboardist Chester Thompson (Santana), drummer Ron E. Beck (Tower of Power), and vibraphonist Roger Glenn (Donald Byrd). *Detours* was the first release in seven years for Keys, a semilegendary figure on the circuit known and touring with Ahmad Jamal and Ray Charles.

"I write from experience," Keys explains. He notes that *Shanique*, his first album for Black Jazz, was named after his then-newborn niece. "I tried to capture the beauty of bringing a brand-new baby into the household. Now if that ain't love and beauty, what is?" According to Keys, "An unconscious rhythm is that

song that you hear on the radio that you like, but you don't know what it is. And you go through the house you hear it again and go, 'Oh, that's that song.' It's been embedded into your subconscious." As for the "detours" part, he adds, "We all have to take detours in our lives to get to the one."

Keys knows a thing or two about detours, having played jazz, or what he calls "American classical music," for 45 of his 60 years. He describes jazz as "one of the most powerful forces on the planet." Although he now lives in Oakland, Keys grew up in Omaha, Nebraska. He learned his craft by sitting in with older musicians, a life after a successful quadruple-bypass operation five years ago. Keys has a renewed sense of purpose. "What I'm trying to do here is to take the experience and the knowledge that I've obtained through the years and pass it on to the younger generation," he says.

For the past year and a half, Keys and his band, the Renegade Sâdomen, have been holding down a regu-

lar Monday night slot at Anna's, the Berkeley "jazz bistro" with an old-timey, speakeasy feel (1801 University). Anna's is sweeter — Anna's always-delicious desserts, or the sound of Keys playing the soul out of his guitar. In any event, to be able to hear a musician of Keys' stature in an intimate setting for a minimal cover (\$4) is just another reason to appreciate Berkeley.

A recent Monday night found Keys and friends traversing blues and jazz territory with equal finesse. At times, his fluid fingerpicking threatened to free itself completely from its rhythmic moorings and escape the building into the night sky. Though its apparent that his abilities, "I'm just another brother out here trying to share the love that I've learned to express through my music," he says. "That's where I'm at right now. I guess I always have been there, but I've never been able to express it like I'm able to now." ■

BY ERIC K. ARNOLD