

**Borrowing
time with
Trey Gunn.
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Music with a message: that's Shakubuku

To many Eugene music buffs, "music with a message" has meant music with overtly political overtones — not the sort of light, danceable fare one associates with a night out on the town.

And to aficionados of rich, hearty soul and rhythm 'n' blues, the area has historically offered little — Country/Western and punk or heavy metal "driveway rock" seem to predominate.

Enter Shakubuku. Leader Willy Dee explains the five-member band's two-fold mission: "The kind of music we play — soul, rhythm 'n' blues — isn't heard around town much. We want to expose the black kids in town, and others, to it."

Story by Mike Sims

Photo courtesy of Willy Dee

Dee and Shakubuku carry a message with their music, too — a simple, universal message that's expressed in the band's very name: Shakubuku, a Japanese word expressing "a positive attitude toward life."

"Above all," Dee says, referring to the band's audiences as well as the group itself, "we're out to have a good time."

"We're recognized now as one of the few bands around Eugene with a black leader, and one that plays black-oriented music," Dee explains. "We've been playing around town quite a bit, and now we're finally getting recognition for it."

"The style of music we've chosen is one that we have to work a bit harder

for people to catch on," Dee says. "We really work hard..."

Shakubuku has to work hard if it is to maintain a standard Dee defines as "giving a full night's worth of entertainment."

"We usually lean more toward soul and reggae," Dee says, adding laughingly that "...we were sucked into reggae by popular demand."

Dee says that about 30 percent of the band's music is original material. Some original tunes have local hooks, such as "Garage People," a tribute to the "average Eugenean" written and performed by keyboardist Holly Warren.

Shakubuku performs songs by such artists and groups as Van Morrison, the Bee Gees, the Temptations and Phil Collins — "Whatever's good and has a nice message," Dee explains. "When we do 'cover' material, though, we try to put our own style to it."

"We try to cover stuff by lesser-known groups, too — things that help project where we as a band are coming from," he says.

In addition to music, a Shakubuku show features such "extras" as breakdancing exhibitions and comedy routines during band breaks. "We hope to keep the time rolling and keep peoples' interest up," Dee explains.

Lorian, a comedian from Las Vegas, acts as the band's master of ceremonies and warm-up act. Her informal style and interaction with audience helps to enhance the feeling of community that

permeates a Shakubuku evening.

Shakubuku itself resembles a small, diverse community. "We come from different backgrounds," Dee says of the band members and Shakubuku's unisexual, multicultural nature.

Dee, Shakubuku's lead vocalist, also plays rhythm guitar. He is a native of Chicago and has lived and worked in Hawaii and Seattle. He has also performed as a street musician, both alone and in a duo act.

Dee also claims a University background — he was the EMU Cultural Forum's 1983-84 folk/rhythm 'n' blues coordinator.

Lead guitarist and back-up vocalist Willie Smith, a Louisianan, brings a country-style background to Shakubuku. Smith performed in Portland, Eugene and southern Oregon, sometimes six nights a week, before joining the band.

Other band members are Warren and drummer Skip "Dr. Rhythm" Falkenbach, originally from Buffalo, N.Y.

Handyman "Karmichael," the group's lone native Oregonian, serves as bassist, back-up vocalist and electrical engineer.

"Ultimately, what we want to do is get our sound together into a recording package of original material, perhaps an opening act for a major band tour, hopefully our own tour," Dee says, in

outlining the band's hopes for the future.

"If these things don't come to pass, we'll still have plenty of self-fulfillment from playing our music," he adds.

A Shakubuku show is a fulfilling experience. The band's stage demeanor is dynamic and positive. In his leader role, Dee helps set the tone for the stage show through his on-stage expressiveness. He dances, he gestures, he croons, he shouts. Dee is a showman, but a showman with a message — in the music he plays for joy and entertainment, or to teach and enlighten.

Toward these ends, a typical Shakubuku performance (such as that held Nov. 23 at the W.O.W. Hall) might include such diverse numbers as Earth, Wind and Fire's "Keep Your Head To The Sky" and Gil-Scott Heron's post-election homily, "Mandate, My Ass."

There are few "wallflowers" at a Shakubuku performance — it's virtually impossible not to be moved by the music onto the dance floor. Children cavort about. Teenagers and adults "work out" with dance steps ranging from the jitterbugs of the 1950s, to the Mashed Potato, the Swim, the Pony and the Hustle of the '60s and '70s. A child in an electric wheelchair glides around the dance floor, circling the other dancers, smoothly and freely.

This child is a living example of what Dee says Shakubuku is all about — a positive attitude, joy, and most importantly, "Freedom for all people."

From left to right,
this is Shakubuku:
Smith, Falkenbach,
Warren, Dee and
Karmichael.

