

Universal Appeal

FUNKY MUSICIAN KARL DENSON RETURNS TO EUGENE

By Will Kennedy

Funk and soul musician Karl Denson is back home in San Diego, speaking on the phone with *Eugene Weekly* after a four-night run in New York. He had been performing with a lineup that included turntablist DJ Logic, bringing elements of hip hop and electronic music to his typical sound, heavy with horns, organ and a tight rhythm section.

Brought up on Motown and James Brown, it's this willingness to push boundaries that helped Denson make his name as a multi-instrumentalist, singer and songwriter — from early music with soul and pop rock songwriter Lenny Kravitz to time spent playing with The Greyboy Allstars, a soul and jazz band crossing over with West Coast jam rock appeal.

Featuring him on both saxophone and flute, Denson's



Photo by Robbie Jeffers

latest release, 2019's somewhat topical *Gnomes and Badgers*, includes Sly Stone-style social commentary met with the usual sharp musicianship fans expect from Denson. His best-known project, Karl Denson's Tiny Universe, returns to Eugene Jan. 19 at Sessions.

From *Gnomes*, there's acid guitars on "Change My Way," plenty of Herbie Hancock grooves, and messages of peace and solidarity on songs like "Can We Trade." According to Denson, he went into the album production feeling frustrated with current affairs, and it showed up in his music.

"I needed to speak on it a little bit," he says from Southern California, while also offering his take on what to do about it. "It's really about dialogue — truth and wisdom, getting back to that. You have to use a little intuition and wisdom to communicate with people."

Never idle, Denson, who's been playing semi-professionally since high school, has several additional projects planned for 2022 beyond his run of dates with Tiny Universe. He's pushing his songwriting with a brand-new project called Black Thor, set to release debut material sometime this year, using a series of different vocalists.

There's also Tiny Universe Presents: A Diesel Insane Tour, playing the music of David Bowie rearranged, with Rolling Stones backup singer Bernard Fowler on the mic (Denson backed up the Stones on their recent run of American dates).

Across all the different projects and styles of music Denson plays, there has to be an element of funk, he says, and digging into the work of other artists hones his own skill as a songwriter.

"In good music, there's something funky about it," he says. "That goes all the way through James Brown to Johnny Cash. That's my benchmark: Can I dance to it? Does it make me happy? I try to keep it on that level."

And referring to the Bowie project and his time playing with the Stones, he adds, "It's a chance for me and the band to learn what other great artists created, and what makes it good." That creative wisdom is reflected in Denson's own work, he says. ■

Karl Denson's *Tiny Universe* performs 8 pm Wednesday, Jan. 19, at Sessions Music Hall; \$25, 21+, proof of vaccination and masking required.

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Jonesin' Crossword

BY MATT JONES

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Across

- 1 Kerosene lantern material
- 6 Invitation's request
- 10 Current measures?
- 14 Displeased with
- 15 "A Change is Gonna Come" singer Redding
- 16 Cafe supplement
- 17 Basketball venue
- 18 Gymnastics gold medalist who made news in 2021 as the first Hmong-American Olympian
- 20 Horror movie revived in 2021 (with a script co-written by Jordan Peele)
- 22 "The ___ Ballerina" (Degas work)
- 23 Luggage checkers, for short
- 24 Crash maker
- 25 Low poker hand
- 28 Swampy land
- 32 Young ___ (small children)
- 33 British tennis star who

- won the 2021 U.S. Open, only the second Grand Slam tournament she had entered
- 37 Full of energy
- 38 Judges' gp.
- 39 Rampageous revelry
- 43 2021 documentary directed by Questlove about the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival
- 46 Dad joke, generally
- 49 Ed of "Up," "Elf," and "JFK"
- 50 Sanitizer's target
- 51 Battery poles
- 54 Occupational suffix
- 56 Prepared potatoes, as for hash browns
- 57 2021 Adele chart-topper that broke records on streaming services
- 62 2021 Netflix series that made Lee Jung-jae a star outside South Korea
- 65 Scheduled to arrive
- 66 Baseball scoreboard data

- 67 Make Kool-Aid
- 68 First class, briefly
- 69 Squirrel's home
- 70 Where a Yankee follows November?
- 71 Ford's failure

Down

- 1 Auto financing co., formerly
- 2 "Tomb Raider" protagonist Croft
- 3 Yemeni port on the Red Sea
- 4 Course hazards
- 5 Sticks around
- 6 "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" detective Diaz
- 7 Shock and amaze
- 8 Diesel in an automotive vehicle?
- 9 Pressure unit, briefly
- 10 Warning signal
- 11 California surfers' mecca
- 12 Nursery rhyme merchant
- 13 Swipes
- 19 Person with intelligence?

"The Best of 2021"

—keeping things positive.

- 21 One of the Berenstain Bears
- 24 Dance step syllable
- 25 Treat in collectible dispensers
- 26 "___ seeing things?"
- 27 Rapsallion
- 29 Surname shared by two presidents
- 30 "American Idol" winner Studdard
- 31 Sudden fright
- 34 Protagonist of the "Street Fighter" series
- 35 Bounced-check abbr.
- 36 Shipping option that skips air travel
- 40 Eggs in the water
- 41 Moldova's cont.
- 42 Shady tree
- 44 Postgrad degrees
- 45 Metal minerals
- 46 "Winter Wonderland" clergyman
- 47 Matchless
- 48 "Wait your turn!"
- 52 Jefferson, by belief
- 53 "Ed, ___ n Eddy" (Cartoon Network series)
- 55 "Blame It on the Bossa Nova" singer Gorme
- 57 Cast forth
- 58 Dynamic prefix
- 59 Court dividers
- 60 Swampland
- 61 Organic compound
- 63 Channel that aired "Lingo" (which is pretty much what all your Wordle results posts are)
- 64 ___ high level

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ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S

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