

**MIKE BURTON**  
*in the Jazzy Limelight*

**THE Jazz In MEE** is a huge fan of the incredible sax players the world has to offer, so we follow the careers of many. There is one in particular that we have followed through numerous cities and over 1500 tweets. We have experienced his excitement and felt his frustrations in Twitter land, but one thing is a given, when he takes the stage he lights it up. Mike Burton landed in Houston, Texas January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012 with Tyler Perry's stage play "The Have and the Have Not's". Burton has played keys and sax for the Tyler Perry stage productions "Madea Goes to Jail", "What's Done in the Dark", "Why Did I Get Married", "Laugh To Keep From Crying", "Madea's Big Happy Family", and "A Madea Christmas". Burton has appeared in the Perry films "Madea's Big Happy Family", "I Can Do Bad All By Myself", "The Family That Preys" and "Madea's Family Reunion".

**T**his multi-dimensional recording artist captured us with his ability to move through music genres playing flawlessly and with such a dynamic ambiance. Burton's musical gift was trained from an early age and honed through years of commitment. He encompasses a great deal musically and is involved in every facet of music. He is both bachelor's and master's prepared in Jazz Studies; he plays saxophone and keys, song writes and produces. Burton's legacy and musical career is on a path of phenom. He agreed to meet with me for brunch at my all-time favorite eating establishment Cyclone Anaya. I picked him up and was very excited to meet the man that Kirk Whalum referred to on his Twitter as a "young lion."

Everything was going very well pre-visit, until I got into the car to head downtown and I discovered that I could not drive in the boots that I had on. I chuckled to myself as I took the right boot off and continued on my way. I finally arrived. I texted Mike to let him know that I was down in valet and he texted back, "I'm on the way". I quickly maneuvered to put my boot on before he came down, hoping I would be able to drive a few blocks without any issues. I stood outside of the car so that I was easily identifiable. When he came down the first thing I noticed was his amazing smile and welcoming demeanor. I knew it was early in musician time, but he was gracious and agreed to an early meeting. We connected right away. We talked about our Atlanta ties and what the city and people mean to us. We continued talking and literally ignored the waiter, he returned to our table five times before we stopped to order. Burton ordered the breakfast quesadillas and I had the Cyclone omelet. We also could not resist the amazing chips and salsa. It was a great jump start to brunch and the interview. I inquired to know quite a bit about this talented August born saxophonist and jumped right in to his musical biz with questions.

**Q. What inspired you to write your current CD Soulful?**

My inspiration came from many things: my family, my faith in God, my travels. These songs were written between 2006 to 2010. Sometimes my tour schedule made it difficult to finish this project. In those years, I was able to have many different experiences and see a lot of places. I got married in 2006 and we had our first child, Layla, in 2008. I definitely feel that being a husband and a father inspired me to write many of these songs. The title, "Soulful" simply describes what I want to come across in my playing — Soul! I try to play from the heart, not always concerned with how many notes that I play, or how fast I can play but I'm more concerned with trying to feel something when I play. Hoping that the listener feels something coming more so out of a Soul/ Gospel tradition. Playing melodies that the listener can sing along with is important. As a saxophonist, I think I'm just a frustrated singer, Burton said laughing. So I try to sing through my saxophone.

**Q. What defines you as an artist?**

I guess my sound and my feel. I love Jazz, but I also love Classic Soul, Hip Hop, and Gospel music. I think that comes across in my playing and my writing.

**Q. Do you have a musical inspiration?**

Whew, many, I listen to everything! Let's see, some of my favorites, Jazz: Dexter Gordon, Gene Ammons, Charlie Parker, Cannonball Adderley, Kenny Garrett, Roy Hargrove, John Scofield, Miles Davis, Soulive, Kirk Whalum, Gerald Albright, Grover Washington Jr and the list goes on. Soul/R&B/Funk: James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Donnie Hathaway, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, D'Angelo, Musiq, and definitely the artists I've toured with, Jill Scott, Mary J. Blige, Anita Baker, and PJ Morton. I love Classic Rock as well as singer-song writers: The Beatles, James Taylor, Jimi Hendrix, Paul Simon, and the list goes on. I definitely have to list some hip hop favorites: Slum Village, J Dilla, Busta Rhymes, Common, Kanye West, Mos Def, Outkast, A Tribe Called Quest and the list goes on. I also love gospel: The Canton Spirituals, The Mississippi Mass Choir, Kirk Franklin, Tye Tribett, Mali Music, Kim Burrell, The Clark Sisters. I could go on and on, but I truly believe that a good musician is a well-rounded musician. We should listen to everything.

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**Q. What does music mean to you and what do you most like about it?**

Music is like breathing. Without it, I don't know what I'd be doing. I thank God for music. Music has given me so many great opportunities. Music has taken me all over the world from Mississippi to Moscow to Monte Carlo! Music allows me to take care of my family. Music has allowed me to meet and perform with so many of my favorite artists. Music is the soundtrack to life. I guarantee you that everyone has a song that just takes them to a certain place or time in their life. As soon as they hear it, they go to that place. The fact that I'm able to help create those moods and feelings for people is nothing short of amazing. God is awesome.

**Q. What is your thought regarding the current state of the Jazz genre and what should be done to create a broader fan base/audience?**

I feel that Jazz needs to keep evolving. R&B today is different than it was just ten years ago. Hip Hop has changed many times since the 70's and 80's. Why then should Jazz or even Smooth Contemporary Jazz sound just as it did in the 60's, 70's, or 80's. Times change and so should we. As artist we have to walk the fine line of preserving the past but embracing the present and future. Miles Davis was the master of this. He remained a major figure in Jazz from the Bebop Era, to Cool Jazz, to Modal Jazz, to Jazz Fusion, to even Hip Hop-Jazz Fusion before he died. Miles was a rock star and proved that Jazz

doesn't have to be in a museum somewhere, it can be a part of the mainstream.

**Q. How did you get started with Tyler Perry productions?**

I moved to Atlanta in 2002 doing a few tours here and there and making my rounds in the local R&B/Jazz scene, paying my dues so to speak. A few years had gone by and one night I was hanging out at a jam session in Atlanta, when Mr. Perry's music director R. Garrett approached me about being an extra (playing saxophone) in the movie *Madea's Family Reunion*. A couple of days later I was on the movie set. I did the scene and between takes the band would jam. I guess I made a good impression, because after the shoot Mr. Garrett asked me to go on tour with the play *Madea Goes To Jail*. That was in 2005 and the rest is history. It has been a memorable and priceless experience. Tyler Perry and his team are true professionals.

**Q. What's on your musical horizon?**

I'll be on tour with the stage play "The Haves and The have Nots" through the end of February 2012. In March I'll be going back on tour with a new Tyler Perry Production. This summer I hope to start recording my new project. I've been writing a lot lately, so I'm looking forward to getting into the studio and laying some of this stuff down. I look forward to what the future holds for me and my music.

I could not believe that it was already close to show time check-in at the Hobby Center, so we had to wrap it up. I enjoyed our outing immensely and we agreed

to keep connected and continue to pursue our goal to help Jazz remain present. Please be on the lookout for this Jackson native! Not just on the radio, but Burton's television and studio production work extends the list. He has appeared on *The Tonight Show*, *Ellen*, *Jimmy Kimmel*, *TV One*, *BET Jazz*, and performed alongside pianist Bobby Lyle on the popular show *Studio Jams*. You just never know where this musical gem will pop up.

Thank you Mike for talking with *The Jazz In MEE*! Good luck with all of your future endeavors!

*Interviewed and written by*

—Melody Warren, Founder of *The Jazz in MEE*



**"Soulful"**

by Mike Burton

9.90 [Buy from iTunes](#)

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