

Sax player looking forward to Greensboro gig with former 'Hootie' front man

BY S.I. LYNCH
THE CHRONICLE

As labels fight to obtain the "next big thing," Hidden Beach is setting the bar very high. Venturing into a genre that is often reserved for more aged musicians, Hidden Beach has signed saxophonist Mike Phillips, a young, hip, modern-day jazz aficionado whose debut album, "You Have Reached Mike Phillips," has garnered rave reviews all over the place.

It doesn't hurt that he has been seen as a guest performer on the Jill Scott and Stevie Wonder tours doing what he does best, shining. This sax man is equally at home in the hip-hop realm, where he's pushed auditory boundaries with the help of superstar rappers and personalities Will Smith, the late Notorious B.I.G., Nelly, DJ Premier and Gangstarr, Collio, Missy Elliot, Babyface, Brian McKnight and Boyz II Men, just to name a few. Whew, that is impressive! He has all the ingredients to foray into the visually-driven music industry from a different genre. Phillips is all ready to change the game.

During an interview, I told Phillips I had seen him perform live in a New York club, Wilson's. (His live performance was intense.)

He responded with a chuckle, "Not too many people got to see the beginning Mike, that begged to get up on stage. I'd be pleading with anybody to get me in the clubs. That Mike has evolved into this."

Phillips, still a New Yorker who has a confidence defying his years, is extremely articulate and seemingly calm. He is taking his current accolades as a bonus to his life and not for granted.

On Aug. 1 at 8 p.m., you will have the opportunity to see Phillips, with label mate Darius Rucker of Hootie & the Blowfish fame, whose solo project, "Back to Then," is on Hidden Beach Records. The Carolina Theatre in Greensboro will host this phenomenal outing for both artists. Phillips said he is looking forward to jamming with Rucker. Phillips said that Rucker represents all of the components that are important to him as far as artistry. Rucker refuses to be pigeonholed into one particular genre. More artists need to be as multifaceted as Rucker, who will show you where some of his other influences come from.

His new project isn't your Hootie & the Blowfish. It is considerably more soulful, and yet remnants of his distinct voice seem at home on this new palette. I was pleasantly surprised. (Rucker was in Europe and unavailable at press time.)

Phillips said, "Hidden Beach Records is a label that really gives me the chance to express who I am as an individual, as it pertains to the music. Within the context of signing the deal, people tell you what you're gonna be. OK, you sign and you're happy. Then you have the first marketing meeting and you leave there scratching your head, like, 'Duh, I've just signed my life away. I'm not ever gonna be myself.' They suddenly discuss you being the next Kenny G, but can you grow your hair and then maybe press it? So Hidden Beach has given me the freedom to exploit musically what Mike



Mike Phillips' debut has garnered him acclaim.

Phillips is all about. And I don't think I'll be with any other label." "You Have Reached Mike Phillips" is more than the title of his debut project. Hearing his music is like dialing the phone and getting his soul on the line. It is a pure introduction from a young man's perspective, Phillips said, "This does not neglect the consumer, but respects them. Also, I am determined to create music without parental stickers."

On "You Have Reached Mike Phillips," you are privy to a creative consortium that spans the landscape of music itself. At one end is the familiar bassist/producer Waymon Tisdale, a jazz artist (and former NBA power forward) in his own right. Producer Ivan Dupee, (an up-and-comer based in Chicago), Eric Parker, Jerry & Katreese Barnes (brother-and-sister team), Ralph Rolle and Jazmin Reddy (aka JR Swingha), albeit not household names, are on their way to greater success.

Phillips believes it is not always about having the name, but those creative forces in place that are mirror images of you. "The team understand what I want to do, and the creative integrity that needs to be in place for me to feel as if this is a Mike Phillips project," Phillips said.

Phillips acknowledges he has a responsibility to be more grassroots with his approach. Although we are in a visual age, he believes that "each music form helps the other." He said, "Sometimes hip-hop beats start flowing in different keys, and if it begins sounding too thugged-out, that's when the jazz can take over. Done the right way, they can perfectly balance each other."

The album is an incredible blend of all the years of paying attention and understanding the dynamics of music and experimenting with it. Several selections are standouts. My personal favorite is "Tonight," which is melodically comforting. He glows on "Just One Take," the first single. You see his sophistication on "Love Is a Drug" and the ever-soul-replenishing "Baby Calls." One of the premier slow jams that cradles one's heart is "When It



Rucker

Come to Loving Me." "Wonderful & Special" is a more mid-tempo romp that juxtaposes the neo-soul sound with understated hip-hop.

Although Phillips isn't heir apparent to the Michael Jordan basketball success, Nike saw that something special and Phillips is the first nonathlete to sign an endorsement deal with Brand Jordan, a division of Nike. Phillips believes it is because of the connection between the entertainment industry and athletics. Phillips said, "Nike saw a common denominator between what I do and what the Brand Jordan athlete is all about - scoring 50 points every time, whether it's on the court or on stage. The whole attitude of what Jordan's all about is my whole mind-set - hold no prisoners! If I can musically dunk on you, I will every time. I am in the field of music/jazz at the end of the day. It's that same Michael Jordan spirit. It's my life story. Sometimes, you win, and sometimes you lose, but you don't give up."

Now that you have heard Mike Phillips, you can trust that not only is he going to answer the call to respond to the consumer, but he confidently asserts, "I am changing the game plan."

Well, Mike, if there were more artists today determined to do "them," as the hip-hop artists say, we would have considerably more to brag about. You are worth the boasting! I am glad "you" answered the call!

Senate hopeful to protest President Bush's visit tonight

FROM STAFF REPORTS

The only African American running in the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Jesse Helms plans to protest, "with or without a permit," tonight outside of a fundraiser for Elizabeth Dole that is scheduled to feature President Bush.

Ada M. Fisher said she will picket outside of the Grandover Hotel tonight. She's upset that Bush has made numerous campaign appearances in support of Republican-hopeful Dole. Fisher believes she and several other



Fisher

Republicans who are seeking the nomination have been ignored by the upper echelons of the Republican Party. Tonight will make Bush's third appearance in support of Dole. Vice President Dick Cheney and former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani have also come to North Carolina to lobby for Dole.

Fisher, in a statement, said Bush's frequent visits in support of Dole are unfair and an abuse of presidential privilege - "an intrusion into the sovereignty of our state's elections by two outsiders - President Bush and Mrs. Dole."

Fisher, a Salisbury doctor, often calls herself the real candidate from Salisbury. Although Dole was born in Salisbury, she had not lived in the town for the past several decades until she moved back home to run for Helms' seat after he announced his retirement.

This will not be the first time that Fisher has protested outside of a Republican function. Earlier in the year she had strong objections when Dole was the only candidate allowed to speak at a Republican gathering. She has also criticized the news media for focusing on only a few candidates and ignoring the others.

"How long will the citizens of North Carolina and the media continue to allow only candidates with name recognition to coast in the U.S. Senate race while ignoring others on the issues important to this state?" she asked in a statement. "Why won't the press, the

League of Women Voters and others who claim to believe in democracy sponsor pre-primary debates to let the voters decide who really is going to be about serving the best interest of North Carolina in the congressional arena?"



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