

BY DANNY O'BRYAN

## NIGHTLIFE

### Louisville jazzman Mike Tracy is always teaching it or playing it

Remember the old 1950s stereotype of a jazz musician?

He was the guy who hung out in bars getting strung out on a reefer — or worse — while playing his instrument, usually a saxophone, and grooving to its sensuous, sinful sounds.

Over the last 20 years, that hedonistic image has been shattered by a new breed of jazzmen (and women) who have been coming out of our nation's colleges and music schools with a serious and dedicated commitment to their art.

A case in point is saxophonist Mike Tracy, 33, who is now appearing with the jazz band Chameleon at Howard Johnson's Greenstreet Tavern, 100 E. Jefferson St.

Tracy, unlike the '50s stereotype, neither smokes nor drinks, and his goal in life is to become "a better person." He hopes to achieve that goal through playing jazz.

Tracy, who holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Louisville School of Music, has been playing jazz and teaching jazz theory in local high schools and colleges for more than 10 years. Besides being an artist in residence for the Jefferson County school system, Tracy is teaching jazz classes at both the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky.

And he does this while holding down a four-night-a-week gig at the Greenstreet Tavern.

Tracy said his love of music developed early in life. "When I was a kid, my parents kept the stereo on all the time the way most people do the television. We listened to all kinds of music, from classical to big bands."

When he was in the fourth grade, Tracy began playing the saxophone. Later, while he was attending Seneca High School, he played in a number of all-state and all-county bands, plus stage bands.

But it wasn't until 1970 when he was a student at the University of Louisville School of Music that his jazz mania began. That year he met his mentor, New Albany jazz educator Jamey Aebersold, who was then teaching at U of L.



Staff photo by Michael Coers

When Mike Tracy (center, on sax) isn't teaching, he's playing — usually with Chameleon, made up of pianist Glen Fisher, drummer Daryl Cotten and bassist Tyrone Wheeler.

"Before I met Jamey, I never really thought about jazz and improvising — but after we met, I knew that's what I wanted to do," he said.

In 1974, when Tracy graduated from college, Aebersold quit teaching full-time in order to devote more time to his mail-order record business. "I thought that was a perfect opportunity for me to jump in and start teaching because Jamey and I are a lot alike. We both like to teach jazz and be around young people," he said.

Tracy said a lot of people have made comparisons between him and Aebersold because they are both thin and have a lot of energy. "But basically we just enjoy doing the same things. I enjoy giving and getting from my students. And I was fortunate that Jamey saw something in me that he could use," Tracy said.

Over the last 10 years, Tracy has traveled to Nova Scotia, New Zealand and Europe teaching at Aebersold's jazz camps. "It's been great and I've learned a lot and had the opportunity to teach with great jazz saxophonists like Joe Henderson and Dave Leibmann," he said.

Tracy is very excited about his new job at the Greenstreet Tavern. "The Howard

Johnson's food and beverage manager, Allen Cosgriff, asked me to put together the best band I could find for the job.

"I think Chameleon (which includes pianist Glen Fisher, bassist Tyrone Wheeler and drummer Daryl Cotten.) has the best rhythm section in town. Our goal is to play good jazz with a lot of variety, everything from fusion to bebop," he said.

Tracy and Chameleon are currently playing at Greenstreet Tavern four nights a week, Wednesday through Saturday, but starting Nov. 6 Everette Hoffman's Jazz Showcase will be presented at the Tavern on Wednesdays.

"Everette plans to bring in a lot of different jazz entertainers around town, both singers and instrumentalists," Tracy said.

In the meantime, Tracy, who also manages to perform with a pop band on Saturdays, plans to continue his mad marathon of teaching and playing jazz.

"Jazz requires you to search within yourself and be inquisitive about things. I'm very busy, but jazz has given me the freedom to look deep within myself and become a better person, a better teacher and a better musician."