

A&M grad Karen Chavis poised for success

By Tricia Martinez
The Battalion

A sultry voice singing jazz and blues backed by a touch of Latin rock will set the mood Friday night at the Stafford Opera House.

Karen Chavis and The Brew will groove tomorrow with everything from James Brown and Anita Baker covers to George Benson and Vanessa Williams.

Chavis, a 1988 graduate of Texas A&M, said she and The Brew pride themselves on being a band that everyone can enjoy.

"We are the kind of band that if you want to go somewhere and hear good music, The Brew is that band," Chavis said. "If you want to go somewhere and dance, The Brew is also that band."

Though Chavis resides in College Station, The Brew, originally from Brownsville, live in Austin which is where the band has most of its gigs.

"We don't get booked exclusively by jazz clubs, because we are not exclusively a jazz band," Chavis said. "We play on Sixth Street and everywhere else."

The Brew consists of five members — Michael Rodriguez, guitar, Joe Rodriguez, congas and auxiliary drums, Mark Rodriguez, bass, Dexter Walker, Drums, and Russell Remington, sax and keyboard.

"Michael takes care of all the business ends of the band," said Chavis. "He's really great. All the guys are."

One of the more interesting features of The Brew is Mark Rodriguez on bass.

"He is left handed and he plays with a right handed bass turned upside down," he's very talented," Chavez said. "When The Brew began money was tight and left-handed bass guitars were more expensive than right-handed ones, so he made adjustments."

The Brew is sometimes known for its sudden argumentative outbursts on stage and Chavis said since she came on board the band has mellowed out.



Karen Chavis and The Brew.

"This past year we called 'the taming of The Brew,'" Chavis said.

"It's neat because three of the guys are brothers and they grew up fighting and yelling with one another and so it's natural," she said. "I get yelled at too, but if anyone even looks at me wrong, it's like I have five big brothers."

Chavis began singing in Texas when she was a student at Texas A&M.

"My first singing appearance was in the follies," Chavis said. "As time went on I would set goals for myself and try to accomplish them. One of my goals was to play in the Gallery Bar at the

Hilton." Chavis accomplished that goal and soon became a local favorite. Randy Elmore, assistant manager at Stafford Opera House, said the first time he heard Chavis was at the Gallery Bar.

"She was really great and I enjoyed listening to her," Elmore said. "I'm really glad she and The Brew will be playing at Stafford because separately they are both great and when you put them both together it's even better."

Chavis, originally from North Carolina, began singing when she was five-years-old.

"I couldn't carry a tune at all," Chavis said. "I would sing into a

toilet paper roll in my living room to an Ella Fitzgerald record," she said.

In addition to singing, Chavis has been in beauty pageants and even took second in the Miss North Carolina Pageant.

"My mother really wanted me to do pageants," Chavis said. "I did it because it gave me the chance to sing. My mother always encouraged me and over the years I improved."

Chavis has been flying to Nashville to work with songwriters and publishers and New York to meet with her attorney who makes sure all dealings are legitimate.

Chavis has been rising to success at what may look like a fast pace, but Chavis doesn't hesitate to make it known that she has "paid her dues."

"I live in College Station and I drive back and forth to Austin when I sing with The Brew," Chavis said. "I have a full-time job and I would work eight to five here and then drive to Austin, sing and then drive home and start all over again."

Chavis, employed by Texas A&M, said this year alone she has put 60,000 miles on her car.

"In the beginning, I was working 22 hour days six days a week and it got to exhausting," Chavis

said. "It was what I had to do because I wasn't known in Austin."

Chavis has made her mark on the Austin music scene. The 1992 Austin Music Awards ranked Chavis as one of the top ten female vocalists in Austin.

"I was astounded I made the top ten," Chavis said. "The Brew has always been ranked number one or two for jazz bands, but I really didn't think anyone knew who I was."

Musicians and club owners in Austin definitely know who Chavis is. She and The Brew were invited to play at places such as Symphony Square and South by Southwest Showcase.

Chavis attributes much of her success to her friends and family.

"They have been so supportive through it all," Chavis said. "My boyfriend has driven me many times to Austin and back, he's really encouraging and he always tells me to go for it."

"I couldn't do it without him."

When Chavis isn't working on campus, playing gigs in Austin or jetting back and forth to Nashville and New York, she sleeps.

"I don't get a lot of sleep, so when I have a spare minute that's what I do," Chavis said. "I have to make many sacrifices with my social life, but it's worth it because everything is going so smoothly right now and seem to be falling into place."

Elmore said they are expecting a good crowd for tomorrow night's show.

"We should really pull in a strong jazz crowd," he said. "Stafford is trying to be diverse in the bands that we have play."

"Karen Chavis and The Brew are great and even if they weren't playing together they each would appeal to the crowd, so together it should be a great show."

Stafford will open its doors at 8 p.m. Friday night and Karen Chavis and The Brew will perform at 9 p.m. Advanced tickets are on sale at Marooned Records in Northgate for \$5. Tickets will also be available at the door.

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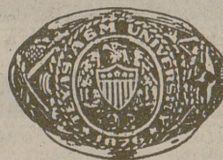
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