Connie Atkinson

University of New Orleans

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Recommended Citation
Wavelength (February 1982) 16
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NEW ORLEANS MUSIC MAGAZINE

Wavelength

THE MARCHING BANDS
OF MARDI GRAS

ISSUE NO. 16 • FEBRUARY 1982 • $1.50 (70p U.K.)
The Alterman Audio Ninth Anniversary Sale.

The Alterman Audio Alternative. It means people who know hi-fi. People who know video, and can explain the technical jargon in easy to understand plain English.

It means honest recommendations and double-length warranties. It means no false hype about sales that end one week, only to restart the next.

It means when Alterman Audio has a sale, it really is a sale.

In February is Alterman Audio's anniversary, Alterman Audio's ninth. To celebrate, Alterman Audio is having their ninth anniversary sale, and Alterman Audio's one and only sale this year.

All the equipment on sale was a great buy at its regular price. All includes Alterman Audio's famous extended, double-length warranty program. It includes phone cartridges, tape decks, turntables, receivers, and speakers. There are even specials on a few Sony Trinitron Color TVs — including Alterman Audio's extended 2-year labor warranty.

So before you buy a hi-fi system for your home, a stereo for your car*, a personal portable stereo, or any video equipment, make sure you sound out Alterman Audio, especially during Alterman Audio's ninth anniversary sale.

* car stereos only in Metairie

7323 Freret Street
Uptown near Broadway
866-3579
10-7 Mon-Thurs, 10-6 Fri & Sat

for some Sound Advice

Alterman Audio

3213 17th Street
Behind Lakeside
834-7772
10-9:30 Mon-Thurs
10-6 Fri & Sat
It is rare for a restaurant to become a success within a year of its opening, but Vera Cruz Mexican Restaurant has become such a place. The secret of its success lies in many factors, not the least of which is its ability to consistently turn out the finest Mexican cuisine in the city. Indeed New Orleans was lacking in truly authentic Mexican cuisine until this place opened. The owner, drawing on his Mexican background and his professional Latin kitchen staff, has amazed his competitors by offering an ever-growing and improving selection of dishes at reasonable prices.

This fact has not escaped the attention of the city's smart set who flock to the restaurant seven days a week. Their loyalty has made the Vera Cruz one of the brightest night spots in the Quarter today. Connoisseurs of the good life find both good food and good friends combined in an old world atmosphere.

Vera Cruz's real forte is its large menu. The food here is delightfully fresh and prepared in a home-cooked fashion. There is no doubt that care is given each dish before the diner receives it.

From the luscious Tacos al Carbon, a generous dish made from charbroiled ribeyes, to the Botana Mexicana, an artistic blend of steak and chicken with delicious vegetables, there's attention to detail in every dish.

In addition to the regular menu offerings there are a number of specials periodically introduced to the great pleasure of the regulars whose interest never seems to wane. These dishes draw from seasonally available food and really show off the restaurant's Latin genius. Undoubtedly they offer local diners a unique opportunity to experience creative Latin dishes, a situation that has become all too rare for any cuisine.

All these factors — the genius of the food, the French Quarter surroundings and the cosmopolitan clientele — have combined to make the corner of Gov. Nicholls and Decatur the location of an extraordinary restaurant. If you are not already familiar with the Vera Cruz you should be.
SHE'S NOT A BLACK ACT.
SHE'S NOT A WHITE ACT.
SHE'S NOT A JAZZ ACT.
SHE'S NOT A DANCE ACT.
SHE IS A CLASS ACT.
ALBUM AFTER ALBUM, SHE IS THE BEST REVIEWED ACT IN THE WORLD TODAY.
MAGAZINES FROM ROLLING STONE TO PEOPLE LOVE HER MUSIC. YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE HEARD HER MUSIC BECAUSE RADIO DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH HER. SHE DOES NOT FIT INTO SOME PRECONCEIVED FORMAT. IT'S A SHAME THAT JOAN IS TOO TALENTED TO "FIT." WE THINK SHE WILL "FIT" YOUR TASTE. SO IF YOU BUY HER NEW ALBUM, "WALK UNDER LADERS," WE WILL GIVE YOU A FREE "BEST OF E.P." FEATURING SOME OF HER BEST SONGS AND REVIEWS.*
IT'S TIME TO FREE JOAN ARMATRADING.
* (WHILE SUPPLY LASTS)
Dreamland Premieres

A movie filmed entirely on location in New Orleans called "Dreamland" will be distributed around the country, and shown locally at the Prytania Theater this month.

Advertised as "a movie you can dance to," the film is also being touted as the first feature-length film based on "the new sound of gospel rock," and was made by Inter-American Productions, a New York independent.

The movie is the true story of Joanne Crayton, better known to the New Orleans music community as Lady B.J. The story line follows her career from the church out into nightclubs.

At the start of the movie, Joanne is the star of the Gospel Soul Children, and has the power to send her congregation into ecstasy. But she wants something more, a career where she can sing rock, "Wop Bob Alooh Bop." Sensing a potential hit, Blackwell sends for Dorothy LaBostrie, a local songwriter, to add some lyrics. With just 15 minutes of recording time left, the ultimate rock 'n' roll record is cut, "Tutti Frutti."

Golden Moments In New Orleans Rock 'N' Roll VI

September 1955—Little Richard arrives in New Orleans, after working at the bus station in Macon, Georgia, to cut his first session, under the direction of Specialty Records' Bumps Blackwell. A sophisticated blues set is recorded. Then, during a break, Richard begins singing some obscene lyrics, "Wop Bob Alooh Bop." Sensing a potential hit, Blackwell sends for Dorothy LaBostrie, a local songwriter, to add some lyrics. With just 15 minutes of recording time left, the ultimate rock 'n' roll record is cut, "Tutti Frutti."

Benefit For Safe Energy

On February 28, the Sunday after Mardi Gras, Third Eye Productions is presenting a benefit concert and film presentation for the Citizens for Safe Energy and the Media for Peace. Hosting the benefit will be Tiptiana's, in an interesting blend of entertainment and education, the show will include music, film, and lecture.

There are three films planned. "Diablo Is On Shaky Ground" is an inspiring documentary of the people of California's successful blockade of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, built on the San Andreas fault. This was the largest act of civil disobedience in U.S. history. "The Last Epidemic" is a stunning factual description by a number of noted physicians of the medical consequences of nuclear war. Noted Australian physician/scientist Helen Caldicott's "The Medical Consequences of Nuclear Power" forges the link between dependence on nuclear energy and the increasing production of nuclear weapons.

Several guest speakers will give brief talks on the subject of nuclear and alternative energy. Among those organizations which will be represented are Citizens for Safe Energy, the Physicians for Social Responsibility, Media for Peace, and the Social Concerns Committee of the Unitarian Church.

The films and speakers will be interspersed with music throughout the event. At press time a number of prominent local artists had been lined up, including David Torkanowsky, James Singleton and Johnny Vidacovich of Caliente; Earl Turbinbon; Angelle Trosclair; Leslie Smith; Jasmine; Woodenhead; Eddie Volker's Blind, Crippled and Crazy; and Ricky Sebastien. Ron Cuccia will emcee the program and will also perform. In all probability this list will grow between now and February 28; the concert should provide a great chance for people to get out and hear a variety of New Orleans' fine musicians and perhaps learn something in the process.

An as yet undetermined donation will be asked at the door; it will benefit continuing research on alternative and renewable energy sources and energy conservation, as well as supporting media campaigns to promote some of the fruits of these researches. Could be a fascinating experience.

— Keith Twitchell

Love A Parade!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday, Feb 12</td>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Cleopatra (W)</td>
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<td>Cleopatra (W)</td>
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<td>6:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atlas (M)</td>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Gladiators (SB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, Feb 13</td>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>Choctaw (W)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pandora (O)</td>
<td>1:00</td>
<td>Shangi-La (SB)</td>
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<td>Octavia (W)</td>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Mecca/Sparta (O)</td>
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<td>Mecca/Sparta (O)</td>
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<td>Caesar (M)</td>
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<td>Sunday, Feb 14</td>
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<td>Pontchartrain (O)</td>
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<td>Okeanos (O)</td>
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<td>Okeanos (O)</td>
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<td>Ala (W)</td>
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<td>Rhea (M)</td>
<td>1:30</td>
<td>Icarus (O)</td>
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<td>Icarus (O)</td>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>Juno (SB)</td>
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<td>Thor (M)</td>
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<td>Thor (M)</td>
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<td>Freret (O)</td>
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<td>Hercules (O)</td>
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<td>Hercules (O)</td>
<td>6:45</td>
<td>Tuesday, Feb 16</td>
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<td>Pegasus (O)</td>
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<td>Centurians (H)</td>
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<td>Babylon (O)</td>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Mardi-Gra (M)</td>
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<td>Minerva (O)</td>
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<td>Venus (O)</td>
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<td>Poseidon (W)</td>
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<td>Selena (O)</td>
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<td>Circa (W)</td>
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<td>Endymion (O)</td>
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<td>Endymion (O)</td>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>King Arthur (W)</td>
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<td>King Arthur (W)</td>
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<td>Kree of Jeff (M)</td>
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<td>Elks (M)</td>
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More and more of you are picking up Wavelength from newsstands, in night clubs, and at retail stores in New Orleans, throughout Louisiana, in other parts of the U.S., and even in selected countries outside the U.S. You're reading more and more about New Orleans music and the musicians who are responsible for that New Orleans flavor that has become renowned throughout the world. Now, we'd like to know something about you and your interests — so we can better play to our audience. Please help us by filling out the questionnaire below and returning it to us. Do not put your name or address on the questionnaire. All information will be used by Wavelength only and is strictly confidential. Thank you for your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your age?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What city do you live in (if New Orleans area, what section of town?)</td>
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<td>How long have you lived in your city?</td>
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<td>What is your job (or profession)?</td>
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<td>How long have you been at your present job?</td>
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<td>What kind of car do you drive? Year</td>
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<td>What is your monthly income?</td>
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<td>About how many times a month do you go out to listen to live music?</td>
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<td>About how many times a month do you go out to a restaurant?</td>
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<td>How many record albums and tapes do you own?</td>
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<td>How many singles (45s)?</td>
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<td>How many record albums and tapes do you buy a month?</td>
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<td>About how many times a month do you go out to a restaurant?</td>
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<td>Outside of rent, groceries, and car expenses, what is your biggest monthly expense?</td>
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<td>What is your favorite kind of music?</td>
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<td>What is your favorite New Orleans night spot?</td>
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<td>What band or musician in New Orleans is your favorite?</td>
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<td>(check one) How often do you get Wavelength? Every month</td>
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<td>How much money do you spend on music-related items such as recordings?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What band or musician in New Orleans is your favorite?</td>
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<td>How many other people will read your copy of Wavelength?</td>
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<td>What would you like more of?</td>
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<td>What would you like less of?</td>
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</table>

SEND COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO:
WAVELENGTH
P.O. Box 15667
New Orleans, LA 70175
CONCERTS

FEB. 5
Jean Armatrading; McAlister Auditorium, Tulane campus; at 9; benefit performance for WTUL.

FEB. 6
John Conlee; Hired Hand Saloon, 1100 S. Clearview Parkway, 734-0590.

Harry James and His Big Band; Hyatt Regency Hotel Grand Ballroom; at 9.

FEB. 14
Miriam Makeba; Theatre for the Performing Arts; at 2 and 7; ticket information at 529-9469.

FEB. 19
Irving McLean and Radar; Bali Hai at the Beach; 9 until 1 a.m.; reservations by Feb. 12.

Tony Dagradi with friends Kidd Jordan, Chuck Easterling, Walter Payton, Johnny Vidacovich and Mark Sanders; Jazz Factory at the Contemporary Arts Center, 900 Camp, 523-1216; at 9:30.

CLUBS

THE BEAT EXCHANGE, 2300 Chartres, 948-6456. Call for listings.

BLUE ROOM, Fairmont Hotel, University Place, 529-4744. National acts. Call for listings.


BRONCO'S, 1409 Romain, Gretna, 368-1000. Bobby Cupid, Mondays. The Louisiana Outlaws, Tuesdays through Saturdays. Vin Bruce and John Wesley Ryles, Feb. 3.

CAFE CONTI, 729 Conti, 524-4701. Rock and roll in the Quarter. Call for listings.


HAWGS, 3027 Jean Lafitte, Chalmette, 277-8245. C&W music, with dance lessons Mondays and Wednesdays 7-9 pm.


One show nightly Tuesday through Saturday at 10:00. Dark Sunday and Monday.

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Back in Town
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Many thanks to everyone who helped make our Grand Opening Party such a big success, including Mirrorz, Red Line, White Lines, Rockology Students, Joe Faiella, Crave, Odyssey and many more, too numerous to mention here.

Come out and party with us again for the Carrollton Parade, Sunday afternoon, February 14.

Musical Instrument WAREHOUSE
3941 Bienville St. 482-7894

THE PALACE SALOON

Wed, Feb. 3 - Topcats
Fri, Feb. 5 - Persia
Sat, Feb. 6 - Call Us!
Sun, Feb. 7 - Rick Deringer with 24K
Wed, Feb. 10 - Topcats
Fri, Feb. 12 - Call Us!
Sat, Feb. 13 - White Tiger
Sun, Feb. 14 - Vince Vance & the Valiants
Wed, Feb. 17 - along with the Topcats
Fri, Feb. 19 - Big Surprise
Sat & Sun, Feb. 20 & 21 - Sheiks and Heyoka
Mon, Feb. 22 - Heyoka
Wed, Feb. 24 - Topcats
Fri, Feb. 26 - Persia
Sat, Feb. 27 - White Tiger
Sun, Feb. 28 - Topcats

1928 West End Park
Next door to the Bounty Restaurant
Call 282-9440 for
Up-To-The-Minute Concert Information


TYLER'S, 5234 Magazine, 891-4989. Leslie Smith with David Torkanowsky, Zig Modeliste, and David Berard every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. Contemporary jazz every night.

WOODY HERMAN'S CLUB, Poydras Plaza Mall in the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 601 Loyola, 522-8788 or 561-1234. Woody and his Thundering Herd, Mon-Sat 10 pm.

Wavelength club and concert listings are available free of charge. Call 892-2342 for information.
“One barometer of progress in society is the use of the musical march. The Hebrews marched out of Egyptian bondage with the martial music of trumpets; the Greeks sang and danced their way to war to the sound of the aulos; and the Romans stopped them with the first brass bands to march over Europe. In the Middle Ages there was no progress—no marching, only winding processions and endless argument. But when nations began to march, in the seventeenth century, then progress did begin, in science, arts and industry. Marches were the backbone of music, from Lully's operas to Beethoven's symphonies. These marches supported a new, propulsive idea, the belief that modern man had improved upon the past and that man was going on to better conditions in the future.”

—Warren Dwight Allen, 1943
THE MARCHING BANDS OF CARNIVAL

The New Orleans Public School system provides the heartbeat of Carnival revelry—the marching music that is the basis for the unique New Orleans sound. Here's how the bands prepare for the grueling—and rewarding—Carnival parades.

At the beginning of each Carnival season, Walter Harris, band director at John F. Kennedy High School, advises his 120 band members: "Concentrate on the parade and leave the people alone. Just stay away from them, don't talk to them, and keep moving."

"Marching becomes a natural thing once you get started," Harris explains, "The concentration is not related to the marching itself but to the audience. You more or less entrance yourself with what you're doing because sometimes you have people out there with intentions of heckling and making statements. If you respond, you're engaged in something that you really can't control because they outnumber you.

"As far as marching is concerned, the bands in New Orleans tend to reach a high endurance level from doing parades in the city. When bands from out-of-town come in and they march the parades, before they get halfway through, you see kids dragging along the street and they're pooped-out. The kids from New Orleans are accustomed to these routes — they've been marching from junior high on in some cases. They know just about where they're going — it doesn't tire them as fast.

"It's a psychological thing—a lot of these bands from out of the city bring their little vans and ambulances along with them and kids look back and see that truck riding along and they decide, 'Well, it's time for me to get weak and sick!'

"One of the things that I tell the band when we start the parade season is 'Nobody's going to carry you piggyback — you're going to have to walk. If you're going to walk, you might as well march because we don't have any little trucks back there to carry the sick and wounded.'"

There are 28 Orleans Parish public school bands that participate in Carnival parades and each band, by decree of the School Board, is allowed to march in five parades. The Carnival krewes, with the assistance of Supervisor of Music Lorraine Wilson, contract the individual bands for their respective parades and pay standardized fees. A band of 70 members or less parades for $375 with the fee raised to $450 if an additional marching unit is requested. Bands of 70 or more members receive $450; $525 with marching units.

The school bands pay for their own uniforms (which cost between $200 and $300 each) and are allotted "very minimal" funds for the repair and upkeep of instruments. Money to cover band expenses is raised through a variety of endeavors, most of them under the auspices of parents' groups.
Student musicians are required to purchase their own instruments, with the exception of percussionists and those hardy players who must lug such large brass instruments as sousaphones (now usually constructed of Fiberglas) and tubas.

Donald Richardson, director of the 140-piece Andrew J. Bell Junior High band, reports that his band members' parents raised over $25,000 last year for new band uniforms, as well as additional funds which enabled the band to make history as the first junior high school band ever invited to compete in the annual Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C.

"We got a standing ovation when we performed," Richardson says. "They couldn't believe we were a junior high school band."

Next year, the Bell band will further distinguish itself as the first junior high school band to march in the Rose Bowl Parade.

The secret to Richardson's success is simple enough: "I'm a hard worker. I believe in my kids. And we've got great parents. Before I teach a note, I first teach discipline."

Richardson also teaches the "stride" style of marching, by far the most popular marching style in New Orleans. Band director Edwin Hampton of St. Augustine High School was the original popularizer of the style locally. In marching jargon, the "stride" is known as an "8 to 5" style—eight steps to every five yards. Elsewhere in the nation, the 'drum corps' style—six steps to every five yards—prevails.

Besides the unique marching style, New Orleans bands are equally renowned for an element most band directors view dimly: second-liners, the gangs of young people who accompany the bands as they march along the parade routes.

"I can't stand it," Richardson declares. "It takes away from the band's performance. I just don't like it. When I see it—if it ever gets in my way—I'll just stop the band completely."

Of course, Richardson's remarks don't exactly echo the common notion that Carnival is a wild and woolly semi-barbaric orgy where anything goes, including straggling behind your favorite high school band and beating on an empty beer bottle with a fractured drumstick. Band directors, if they had their way, would have barricades erected along the entire parade route.

"We've had things happen that mar the joy," reports Edward Sanders, director of the 175-piece John McDonogh High School band. "A couple of times we were attacked by some of the spectators." Most other band directors claim similar occurrences, the most serious being last year's fracas wherein an off-duty policeman wounded a member of St. Augustine's band. More customary is the practice of spectators attempting to toss beer cans, doubloons and beads into the tubas.

According to Walter Harris, who was a member of Mayor Morial's Task Force for Mardi Gras Safety, "In my opinion, I feel that the only way to really enjoy the parade—as far as the band's participation and the crowd's participation—is to separate the two. If you look at Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade or the Rose Bowl Parade, you just don't have people running all over the place, touching the floats, running in and out of bands and bumping into majorettes. At those parades, the streets are barricaded.

"If we separate the people from the bands and the floats, I think Mardi Gras would be a lot more fun for everybody. The throws can reach the people from ten feet just like they can from two."

"Let's face it—everything has changed. Once upon a time, when people said Mardi Gras was 'The Greatest Free Show On Earth' and people could associate with the floats, they didn't have the same problems with the bands and the police and the crowds may not have been as large. And people were more orderly."

"Now, you've got lots of problems. You've got terrorists running around. We didn't have that ten or fifteen years ago. You have various subversive organizations in this country and Mardi Gras is an excellent time..."
for them to exercise their thoughts and feelings.

"If it means inflicting harm and damage to people and property, this is a good time to do it. I kinda think that that old-fashioned concept of Mardi Gras has to change because people have changed. Traditions have changed."

Yvonne Bush, who has been instructing New Orleans music students for 31 years and has served as the director of George Washington Carver High School’s 128-member band for the past 23 years, notes yet another monumental change:

"The students years back, they didn’t play every tune that was on the radio. Students loved the marches then. Now, the students want the music that they do a lot of singing in and really, it’s not good for bands. But the people like it and this is what they want."

What they want in 1982 are contemporary pop songs like Earth, Wind and Fire’s "Let’s Groove," Kool and the Gang’s "Celebration" and Carl Carlton’s "She’s a Bad Mama Jama." As for New Orleans music, there is not an awesome amount of interest. Some bands might perform "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" or "Basin Street Blues" but that’s about the extent of it. When this writer suggested to several of the band directors that it would be wonderful if New Orleans high school bands performed selections by Fats Domino, Professor Longhair and associates, the directors unanimously objected. Walter Harris’ remarks were typical: "Well, some of them are good but the songs are not marches. You have to have something with a steady, driving quick-step kind of sound."

If one wants a "New Orleans sound," one should look to the drum sections. "The drums and the drum cadences add a peculiar New Orleans aspect," says Edward Sanders. George Bischoff, director of the 60-piece Warren Easton High School band, concurs: "The drummers hold the whole thing together. Like I try to tell my own drummers all the time, ‘Take it easy — don’t go and bang yourself out in the first mile.’ But they don’t listen. They want to try to make their little 60-piece band sound like a 200-piece band."

Yvonne Bush reveals a few secrets of parade drumming: "The students must practice together daily. By practicing together and cleaning their rudiments up, they are able to have a very crisp drum section and playing together is the secret — playing together on rudiments, using the proper sticking. That makes for a clean drum section."

And what is the very last thing a band director tells the band before they embark upon the sometimes perilous, always exhilarating parade route? Darryl Barnes, a veteran marcher himself (at St. Aloysius and Brother Martin) and currently director of the 70-piece O. Perry Walker High School band, supplies practical advice: "Eat good and go to the bathroom before you leave. You get tired physically but you don't get tired of the parades."
IN THE CARIBBEAN, IT'S JONKONNU!

The year-end Jonkonnu festivals of the English-speaking Caribbean isles bear an often striking resemblance to our own Mardi Gras. The religious connection may be different but the spirit of celebration is often the same.

By Shepard H. Samuels

The entire Caribbean shares New Orleans' penchant for masking, secret marching, societies, and street parades. Customs vary depending upon the island's colonial legacy. In the French-speaking Caribbean where the religion is nominally Catholic, Mardi Gras is celebrated on such islands as Haiti and Martinique on Fat Tuesday. However, in the English-speaking islands, where the Anglican Church served as the official religion, Mardi Gras takes place under a different guise on December 26, Britain's Boxing Day, known as Jonkonnu or John Canoe (as written in British literature). Jonkonnu celebrations appear on such islands as Barbados, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and in nearby Belize. Trinidad also celebrates on the 26th but has its own renowned steel drum festival which incorporates elements of Jonkonnu. Jonkonnu tradition provides a valuable perspective on our own Mardi Gras for purposes of both comparison and contrast.

Jamaica's Jonkonnu is at least one hundred years older than New Orleans' celebration. Edward Long, in his History of Jamaica, written in 1774, provided the first documentation of John Canoe, and found that "elaborately masked and costumed Blacks had paraded the streets since the beginning of the eighteenth century." Originally there were two parades, one consisting of troupes of players acting out scenes from English theater, the other consisting of masked performers acting in mime that was African in nature. Eventually the English element became incorporated into the African Jonkonnu ensemble, an historical irony since the festival was permitted to the slaves by the colonial planters who awarded performers with food and money. Even the name Jonkonnu, rather than the British John Canoe, has a defiant nature and history.

Although there is some argument, most historians believe that the word Jonkonnu was derived from the name of John Konny, a Black African trader who worked for the Brandenberg African Company and ruled three forts on the coast of Ghana. One fort, Pokoso, was well known as...
“Connie’s Castle,” according to a report in 1721 when John Konny was around 50 years old. In his 1774 account on Jonkonnu, Long found that the leader of the performers wore a cow tail, horns, and most impressively a visor-type mask with a mouth section that carried boar tusks. Long wrote that the parade and its central characters were a memorial to Konny. This figure survives intact today in Jamaica’s Jonkonnu groups and bears a striking resemblance to the “Wild Man” who parades in New Orleans Black Indian tribes.

In some Jonkonnu parades, the horned figure has taken a secondary role known as “Ox Head,” and has been replaced in importance by a masked dancer who wears on his head an elaborate model of a houseboat and is called “John Canoe.” The earliest depiction of this figure was by the Jamaican artist J.M. Belisario, who published a series of sketches of Jonkonnu characters in 1837. The reason behind the wearing of the houseboat headdress remains a mystery. Some say it depicts the slave boats from Africa, while others believe the houseboat derives from a pattern of Moslem tomb dances brought to Jamaica by East Indian laborers.

In her 1923 account of Jonkonnu, Martha Beckwith wrote that the houseboat was connected with myalism, Jamaica’s original version of obeah. According to her account of myalism in St. Elizabeth Parish, “on the night before it is brought out in public, it is taken to the cemetery and there songs and dances are rehearsed in order to catch the spirit of the dead which accompanies the dance until, after a few weeks of merriment during which performances are given for money at the great houses and at village crossroads, it is broken up entirely. For as long as it stays in the house the spirit will follow it.” If this seems farfetched, just listen to some of the obeah lyrics in Exuma’s Junkanoo music from the Bahamas, or consider the relationship of the Spiritualist Church figure, Blackhawk, to some of the downtown Indian tribes.

Other characters in the Jonkonnu procession are Cow Head, Horse Head, Jack in the Green, the Devil, Belly Woman,
Warrior, Red Indian, and Actor Boy. The Actor Boys who pantomime kings, queens, and princes are a carryover from the English parade of Jonkonnu that once acted out theater parts. The Actor Boys are often accompanied by men dressed in military or aristocratic attire. I can find no reason behind the inclusion of the Red Indian, sometimes called the Wild Indian, among the Jonkonnu characters. Jamaica's native Arawak Indians had been killed to the point of extinction long before the British arrived. It's a question begging to be explored. The Wild Indian carries a tall cane and bow and wears a headdress with feathers arranged vertically around the circular head section, while playing cards, newspaper cut-outs, pieces of glass, and mirrors cover the head portion of the headdress. The Wild Indian also wears a foil-covered heart on his chest and strands of beads.

Perhaps the most flamboyant members of any current Jonkonnu ensembles are the characters known as Pitchy Patchies. Looking like creatures who crawled out of a swamp, they dance with rapid small jumps forming large circular patterns as their shoulders are flexed up and down in counter tempo to their feet patterns. The shoulder movement in combination with sweeping arm extensions is accentuated by the Pitchy Patchy costume, which is made of layered strips of vegetal matter or brightly colored fabric. On top of the mesh mask and white head cloth is a brimmed cap, peaked in the front and back and adorned with tinsel paper and mirrors. Although they usually dance in pairs, a Pitchy Patchy alone will dance in a large center space, running in and out of any crowd of onlookers, confronting specific spectators with a low growl. Jamaican oral tradition claims that a Pitchy Patchy costume is based on the vegetal camouflage of the Maroons who fought the British using guerilla warfare until the colonial government gave them almost complete autonomy within Jamaica by the end of the eighteenth century.

In yet another turn of historical irony, Pitchy Patchy closely resembles the lesser known Jonkonnu figure Jack in the Green, who was a direct adaptation of England's famous May Day celebrant known for dancing after chimney sweeps. The Pitchy Patchy/Jack in the Green character may also be found in Belize where the costumes consist of alligator grass, ribbons, and cowry shell rattles. A similar type is found in Trinidad's Carnival as Pierrot Grenade. Jonkonnu music, while known as "fife and drum" music, usually consists of a bamboo fife, two drums, a banjo, and a grater. The Jonkonnu band provides special music for each individual performer and for any interaction with the other characters. It should be noted that, like krewe members in New Orleans, Jonkonnu members never remove their masks in public, and if they speak at all it is only by disguising their voices through the use of grunts, squeaks, and growls.
They Call Him 'Carnival Time'

After twenty years, Al Johnson has finally gotten control of his big hit record. This Carnival season, he can at last enjoy hearing himself sing the popular R&B Carnival song on his own Carnival Time Records.

For once, the sun does not dominate this planet. Though the sky is clear, colors at ground level are more brilliant. Eyes shine and twinkle like a cloudless night sky. The streets fill with people and their strange vehicles built to go nowhere. Everywhere buildings open their passageways to spill humanity into the naked air, humanity that knots at the street corners waiting for love juice. It feels light; the gravity of consideration has lifted, leaving pure possibility.

Even though you know the answer, you still have to wonder: Why? Just then, a music machine blasts the notes that are so right you can almost see them — Dahdada-Dah dadump, Dahdada-Dah dadump...

Soon a voice is singing out the simple answer: it’s Carnival time. Everybody’s having fun.

There are a few differences between “Carnival Time” by Al Johnson and the other two songs that comprise the Big Three of Mardi Gras Hits, “Mardi Gras Mambo” by the Hawketts and “Go To The Mardi Gras” by Professor Longhair. “Carnival Time” has more of a jump feel to it with less emphasis on the Latin side. “Carnival Time” features its horns, specifically a strong sax part played by James Rivers. And whereas the other two vocalists, Art Neville and Professor Longhair, went on to record many more sides, Al Johnson — who wrote, sang, and fought hard for his own vision in the arrangement of “Carnival Time” — has, more than twenty years later, yet to return to the studio.

The record didn’t go that far, and Johnson was disappointed. Again. But not as disappointed as the next time he saw Ruffino. “He told me he’d lost money on it, and that I missed releasing it for Carnival the first time around. In another sense, he was trying to help me as much as possible. Eventually we got it pretty close to the way I was trying to save baby’s life.

When I went out to talk to Al Johnson, I asked some folks what they might want to know. “Find out what he’s saying about throwing people out the window,” said one, and I remember the quizzical look on her face. You got another one, Al. It’s not something for NOW (National Organization of Women) or NOC (National Organization of Children) or even DA (Dollmakers Association) to get upset about. He was just trying to save baby’s life.

The Green Room and The Plaza were a couple of places down by Claiborne and Orleans. One imagines Al Johnson saying, or hearing someone on the neutral ground saying, “Well if that place is smoking this place is burning down!” In fact, he mentioned in passing, “It was Frank Miller, a buddy of mine; we were walking down the street and he was contributing a few ideas toward ‘Carnival Time.’ He was saying something about throwing somebody out the window, so I used a little bit of that. We were just walking and talking, you know.”

How did Al Johnson get in that position? In one sense, he answers, “There’s something about Carnival that’s just different. From Christmas or New Year’s or any holiday, and I just wanted to be a part of that.”

In another sense, he was trying to break back into the fold of Ric Records. In 1956, at 16 years of age, Johnson went into the studio for the first time and recorded a 45 for Aladdin Records (3333). “I never heard anything about it from either Eddie Messner or Fat Man Matthews. Never even heard the record. But I think it was pressed, people have told me they’ve heard it. Someone said it was ‘Old Time Talkin’. I thought the sides were ‘If I Done Wrong’ and ‘When The Load Gets Heavy. ’

“I remember thinking it was my big break, that I’d be all right financially from then on. Of course, it didn’t turn out that way. I wanted to quit school and do music full time, but my mother wouldn’t let me. Much later I told her, ‘Mother, I finished high school for you, but if I had a chance I’d go back and do it for me,’ this time.”

The day after he graduated from high school, Al Johnson, with his mother’s blessing, was back in the studio, this time with Joe Ruffino’s Ric Records (Ruffino had two labels, Ric and Ron). “You Done Me Wrong,” a blues, was supposed to be the A side, backed with “Lena,” featuring a Herbert Hardesty saxophone solo and Allen Toussaint’s piano foundation. “I thought it was done, but I was over by ReggiHall’s place on the Fourth of July in 1958, and I heard ‘Lena’ coming over the radio. I couldn’t believe it.”

The record didn’t go that far, and Johnson was disappointed. Again. But not as disappointed as the next time he saw Ruffino. “He told me he’d lost money on it, and that I owed him $11... but that he’d let it slide.”

When he came up with “Carnival Time” a year or so later, “I realized I was losing after the $11 ‘Lena’ thing. I knew something was wrong, but I didn’t know what.”

But Johnson was determined to get the song the way he had it in mind. “People always told me that if I go into music, make the songs different. I tried to, and it took a long time to get ‘Carnival Time’ right. We went into the studio a number of times with it, with different musicians, and I believe we missed releasing it for Carnival the first time around.

I was talking up against all those musicians about the horns — I wanted them real strong. James Rivers, who took the solo, was trying to help me as much as possible. Eventually we got it pretty close to the way I had it in mind. I wanted it a little more on the second line side, but it came out pretty
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close.”

The record ended up being released early in 1960, close to Carnival and in competition with “Ooo Poo Pa Doo,” Jessie Hill’s monster hit. “Carnival Time” was pretty much swamped by the Poo locally, and for Al Johnson, it was strike three. “I went into the service in 1961, I was so disappointed. I never even thought about the record repeating every year.”

Claiborne Street is rockin’
From one side to the other
The joints are jammin’ pack
And I’m about to smother
All because it’s carnival time
— “Carnival Time,” verse two

Claiborne and Orleans is a powerful confluence of grand boulevards. Claiborne is the only street in the city to make it from Jefferson to Plaquemines Parish, and Orleans starts and ends memorably (St. Louis Cathedral, City Park). What St. Charles and Canal is to the white Mardi Gras float rider, Claiborne and Orleans is to the black Mardi Gras pedestrian.

When Al Johnson was growing up down across the canal in the lower Ninth Ward where he still lives, Mardi Gras Day meant only one thing: “We’d get up in the morning, walk from down here to Orleans, hang around, then come back.” Over 50 blocks each way, “Everybody would do it. Still do. And they come from up Claiborne, and from out on Orleans. When you’d hit that section of bars on Claiborne, the joints would be rockin’, jammin’ pack, just like I say.”

But when Al got out of the service —
“Relatives would write me in the service and say, ‘Al, that record’s poppin’ out here, it’s a hit!’” — it was all too much for a time.

“As Carnival time would come up I would really feel bad, and a lot of Carnival times I wouldn’t go anywhere — stay in and just listen to the record — you know, I would just be out of it, because of it. But I learned to accept it, to say even though that didn’t turn out in my favor, they can’t take the record away from me; that is me. Now I accept it and go out and enjoy Carnival, but I had it rough for a while because it was so unfair.

“All the time people come up to me and say, ‘Al, it’s just not Carnival time until I hear that tune on the radio.’ Really, it’s that way for me too now.”

Al had told me that Joe Ruffino had tried to get him to change “Claiborne” to “Bourbon” in the song lyrics. “Maybe it would have helped the record, but I didn’t know nothing about Bourbon Street. Back then blacks weren’t allowed on Bourbon Street. It’s a fact.”

Some other facts. Desegregation came to New Orleans. The “LaSalle and Rampart Street” of “Mardi Gras Mambo” slipped into oblivion with the opening of Canal Street to black shoppers and the building of the Superdome. The magical corner of “St. Claude and Dumaine” in “Go To The Mardi Gras” was wiped from the face of the earth with the building of Armstrong Park and the routing of Zulu. And Claiborne, the section that once sported a neutral ground second to none in physical beauty, was covered with an interstate highway. I asked Al if he gets nostalgic for the Carnival of his youth.

“Time brings changes. Christmas used to be one thing and now it’s more or less something else... What I have to say is Time has what’s to do about that. It’s not just a case of growing up.”

If you put a nickel
Well I’ll put a dime
We’ll get together
And drink us some wine
All because it’s carnival time
— “Carnival Time,” verse three

Nicks and dimes. A phone call and a newspaper, used to be. Before that, a candy bar and a cold drink. Put a few together and you’ve got a bottle of wine. Pass the bottle around, no one cares who put which.

“I got that line from an autograph book. You remember them? See, I’d just finished high school, and some girl would write in all of them, ‘As long as a nickel equals a dime, consider yourself a friend of mine.’” A friend for the good times.

Al Johnson has never received a nickel for “Carnival Time” on Ric or later Ron Records. When he came out of the service he became a welder for some time, but eventually gave it up because he didn’t like it. Then he went to refrigeration school and started driving a cab to support that schooling. “After I got out of school, I realized I didn’t like refrigeration, ‘cause I was just too nice to be in it. When you’re dealing with people, like if their refrigerator was broken and they didn’t have any money, most likely, if it was me, I’d go ahead on and try to fix it, and... I wouldn’t have no money.”

Today he drives a cab, a nice White Fleet model with an Alvin Lee Johnson Sr. painted on the front right fender.

Al Johnson reflected on the years of struggle. “I remember when I was in the service, and this fellow was telling me, ‘Yeah, Al, I live out there in Thibodaux, and that Guitar Slim be going up to the music box, playing his records, and crying!’ I got very angry with him, because I knew what Guitar Slim was going through, and he didn’t. I really sympathize with Slim. This guy didn’t understand, didn’t realize. That’s the way the world is. But I think it’s good that people can go through the kind of disappointment they have to go through and still be able to battle on.

“After all these years, I finally get control of the record. I’m expecting a shipment of ‘Carnival Time’ 45s on the Carnival Time label this week. So if you want to buy the record, you ought to make sure to get it on this label.”

And here it is, Carnival time again. “Yeah... Carnival. I’m still trying to analyze and understand. What is it that’s so different about Carnival?”

20
WAVELENGTH/FEBRUARY 1982
Mardi Gras is the perennial flower of New Orleans culture. It blossoms each year in many colors giving off a fragrance that uplifts the human spirit in rhythms of joy! Resplendent in this garden of Carnival heritage resides the “Mardi Gras Indians” — groups of black-brown people who mask in elaborate American Indian costumes. These “living works of art” are created by the people themselves. Thousands of stones, beads, plumes, and feathers are hand sewn into the costumes. Like auras of a rainbow, Indian images reverberate in petal tones up and down the back streets of Mardi Gras as if to celebrate the reincarnation of the soul of New Orleans.

Where did it all begin? New Orleans — the melting-pot city — has always been a major “port city,” the hub of commerce and trade. Many Indian tribes, principally the Choctaw, have a long history of trips to the old French Market to trade and to sell their crops and products. The French Market was more than a marketplace. It was a social event, a moment when black slaves and servants, sent to purchase foodstuffs for the white households, could talk with each other. They bought spices, file, herbs, and other products from the Indians. No doubt, such encounters developed into friendly relationships. The forebearers of today’s Black Indian tradition were American Indians and descendents of African slaves who were forced to accept a status of being “less than a man” and a “non-person.” Socially ostracized, a secret union took place between blacks and Indians in the camelback Creole cottages and shotgun double houses along the unpaved streets of New Orleans.

Whenever a group is confronted, conquered, and oppressed by another group (a new ruling class), the members of the oppressed group react to the ruling class in three most interesting ways: overt rebellion, conformity, and ritualism. Those who rebel are usually killed, punished, or sent to

By Maurice M. Martinez, Ph.D., is an associate professor at Hunter College in New York.
prison. The second group, the conformists, try to become like members of the ruling class.

A third possible reaction to cultural genocide is ritualism. Members of an oppressed group appear to conform when watched, but never totally give up their sacred beliefs and cherished traditions. In behavior patterns ever conscious of survival, they disguise their true feelings in language, song, and images that are considered to be least offensive to the ruling class. The ritualists, as realists, recognize the suicidal danger in overt rebellion, yet refuse to acculturate to the illusion of inclusion. Such was the case of the Black Indians of New Orleans.

Africans in the New World maintained their heritage in very subtle ways, from Sunday meetings in New Orleans in Congo Square—where for a limited time they were allowed to sing and play their music—to the Catholic churches of Brazil, where statues of Catholic 'saints' were in reality African deities. In Afro-Brazilian Macumba (which originally meant a 'place where the black slaves performed their rites'), and in Condomble, blacks pretended to pray to the Catholic 'images' on the altars. Masked in ritual, Ogum (the warrior god) is associated with St. George; Xango (pronounced Shango, the god of fire and thunder, symbolizing all masculine forces) is St. Jerome; Iemanja (pronounced Yee-Mah-n-ja, goddess of salt water, Our Lady of the Sea) is associated with the Virgin Mary; Okuta (pronounced O-Sha-La, god of the sky and the universe) is associated with Jesus Christ. Also on the altar of Macumba is a statue of a Caboclo or Indian Spirit. Caboclos were originally Indian mesticos (mixed-bloods), believed to be Indian Spirits who 'work in the forest and know the secrets of plants and herbs.' One can find similar Indian statues in the Spiritualist Churches in New Orleans.

Could the original Black Indians who appeared in costume have been a re-incarnation, a 'bringing-to-life' of the Indian Spirits?

With the advent of Mardi Gras, a time when the ruling class relaxed and allowed masking in the streets, the Black Indians took advantage of the opportunity to express their culture. It mattered not so much the names they used to identify themselves: Creole Wild West, Yellow Pocahontas, Wild Squatoolas, White Eagles, Hundred 'n One, etc. Nor did it matter that census takers and city hall clerks labeled them 'Griffon' or dark griffe, terms which meant 'black indians.' What mattered was that for the first time in decades, they could openly practice their heritage in the streets of their neighborhoods with little interference from the police.

In the 1880s, a young man of African and Indian descent brought out the first tribe on Carnival Day. He was called Chief Becate, and was the great uncle of Chief Allison 'Tuddy' Montana, today's Big Chief of the Yellow Pocahontas tribe. For more than forty years, Chief Tuddy Montana has kept alive the traditions passed on to him by his father.

One must admire Chief Tuddy's original costume designs. Elaborate and enormous, his crowns make use of the feather rather than the plume. "Ideas, man," Chief Tuddy says smiling. "I'm loaded with that! I could design a costume for everybody in this house and wouldn't any of them be the same ... altogether different." Chief Tuddy adheres to the music and traditions with a seriousness of an almost religious fervor. He refuses to come out in costume except on the traditional days of Mardi Gras and St. Joseph's Day, and has not taken the Yellow Pocahontas tribe on stage at the annual Jazz and Heritage Festival.

I asked Chief Tuddy about the changes that have taken place in the music. He recalls
the old songs, and how certain chiefs today have changed them. One example is the "Indian Prayer Song." Each Sunday evening after church hours, beginning a few months before Mardi Gras Day in a designated neighborhood bar, each tribe has a rehearsal or practice. It is in these gatherings that one hears the best singing. The practice opens and ends — according to tradition — with the "Indian Prayer Song." The Big Chief slaps his tambourine a few times and sings:

Ma-Day, Cootie Fiyo
And all present answer:

Tee-Nah Aeeey,
Tee-Nah Aeeey.

It is this moment of getting the attention of members of the tribe that has inspired some other chiefs to cling to the opening words, "It's not: Ma-Day, Ma-Day, Ma-Day..." complains Chief Tuddy, "the song is Ma-Day, sung only once."

I told some of the uptown Black Indians what Chief Tuddy said, and they replied defiantly: "Well, that's the way we sing it!" What we are witnessing here is a change in New Orleans music as old as the history of jazz music. Improvisation, especially in the repetition of a delightful rhythm, has been one of the main pleasures of uptown musicians. Downtown Creole musicians "could read well" and structured their music in definitive ways.

The music of the Black Indians, as we hear it today, is distinctly African with seasoning of other elements assimilated into both lyrics and melodic line. The leader-chorus, call-response patterns in the singing are described by most observers as Afro-American, with Haitian/West Indian and African influences. In the fusion of African and Indian traditions, we find much in common. The drum used by the Choctaw Indians was very similar to that used by African slaves. Some elements from the songs of American Indians of the Southeastern region were absorbed into the music of the Black Indians.
A more in-depth study by ethnomusicologists of the "old songs" of both groups is needed to compare these elements.

There are some Black Indian songs that are no longer sung. One such example: "Xango Mongo Lo Ha," was sung sometime around or before 1915-1925. There are strong elements in the lyrics that most certainly maintain a connection with the Yoruba god Xango (Shango) mentioned earlier.

What was it like being a Black Indian in the first 25 years of this century? Chief Eddie Richardson, born in 1903, relates how he learned the Black Indian tradition:

"When I was a boy, I had a friend... we called him Mano. We used to go to the Pocahontas rehearsals. Eugene Honoré was chief of the Pocahontas tribe then. After going to the Pocahontas rehearsals, I started maskin' with the Wild Squatoolas. Later, in my ten years, I started my own tribe, the One-Eleven. We had a nice tribe. We used to meet on Jane Alley and Perdido.

"Now you see, when we'd have rehearsals, everybody'd be ready... I'd come in with my tambourine up and shake it... that drew their attention! I'd say Ha-Chi Con-Nah Fay-Ah? They'd say: Aey-Ha. I'd say: Ha-Chi Con-Nah Fay-Ah. Ooo-Pike-Ah Bid-Away? That's 'How you feeling?' When they'd say Aey-Ha, that was 'All right!' Now I may tell 'em: Ma-Hon, No Hike-Ah Me, No Hike-Ah You, No Hai, No Man-Day-Hi: 'Touch my Queen 'n my arm' I'll fight you mo-toe!' And then I'd say: No Hike-Ah Me, No Hike-Ah You, No Hike-Ah Man-Day-Ha! And they'd start to singing: Xango Mongo Lo Ha."

Members of each Black Indian tribe have titles and specific roles. The Spyboy (scout) starts the single file line of march that might extend for blocks. Next comes the Flagboy, and the Gang Flag, carrying the banner or flag on a spear, "stick," or steel rod (according to Chief Tuddy Montana: "The thickness of a pencil that was taken from the mosquito bar, a metal rod used on a four-post bed to support the mosquito netting in the days before window screens"). Next in the line of march might be the Wildman (also called "Witch Doctor" or "Medicine Man") who tries to keep the crowd's back from the second and third chiefs who follow, often with a woman "Queen." At the end of the line is the Big Chief, sometimes followed by a "Trail Chief." Non-costumed members by the dozens follow each member in costume. They form the "second line" chorus that sings and accompanies songs with tambourines and percussive instruments.

Chief Eddie Richardson recalls: "I used to travel when I was young, from one end of this city to the other end. Your Spyboy was always first. Now what we usually do, when we'd leave, I'd tell my Spyboy: Lulu Hike! and he'd run... he'll run a block... I'll tell the other Spyboy: Lulu Hike! and he'll run another block. Well, that's two blocks away from me... and I'd have already told 'em what direction to go. Spyboy'd get to the..."
corner, he'll have to turn, holding his hands up... that meant "peace"... it meant it was all right to go on. And when he'd get to a stopping place, he'd turn around and give you a sign... hold his hands up... start to hollin' and jumpin'... anytime he'd do that, everything was good, you know, it was fun! Well, he'd stay there until the Chief got there with the whole tribe [the "stop" is usually a bar or someone's house]. Now we'd go in there, give you a little drink, a little wine or sumpin' [laughter], come on out there, start to dancin'... yeah!

In the old days, the Black Indian tribes used to fight. Chief Tuddy remembers: "They used to carry hatchets, razor sharp, and real shotguns. Now it's all changed. They fight with their costumes... they try to outdress one another."

Chief Eddie Richardson agrees: "It used to be dangerous in those days... a lot of times you'd meet different tribes... they'd be shooting and fighting. What stopped me from maskin' was one year, there was another fella came with us that Carnival morning... and he wanted to run with my Spyboy. Well, I didn't pay no attention... I said: "All right!" So he runs up there, and we got around Cherokee and Ann (streets)... my Spyboy start to hollin': Uhf-Aey... Urre-Aey!... and he crossed his arms in front of him... that means trouble!

"Now, I don't like to get in trouble, but I'm always gonna try to protect myself. I had a friend of mine... he had a .45 Colt pistol... it was too heavy for me to carry... I said, 'You take it and carry it for me'... When I got in that humbug, I ran to him to get it... He say: 'No man, I ain't gon' give you this, I ain't gon' give you this pistol!'... I said, 'All right... I'm going up there by myself!'

'I ran up there... it was the Red, White and Blue tribe... and I looked at 'em... the tribe seen me... They say: 'Richardson?'... I say: 'Yeah, what y'all tryin' to do?' He say: 'We didn't know it was you all.' I say: 'Man, y'all should be careful!'
"He say: 'Awww, we didn't know it was you all.'

'You see, they all knew me at that time... and I never had any trouble. Then, we start singing, we did a lil' dance and it was all over. After that year, I said I wouldn't mask any more.'

There was no attempt by Chief Richardson to take the music of the Black Indians and "go commercial" as others have done in recent years. The uptown tribes have made commercial recordings with funk-styled, rhythm and blues bands, much to the resentment of other tribes who have kept to tradition.

Of all the commercial LPs, The Wild Tchoupitoulas is perhaps the best. I happened to catch them a few years ago on tour in concert in Carnegie Hall. Backed with a super-funk band led by Willie Tee, Chief Bo Dollis shook the cobwebs out of Carnegie Hall with a voiceful of soulful virility. The concert ended appropriately with one solo performer left on stage - Alfred "Uganda" Roberts, playing echoes of Afro-Treme conga drums.

Others, such as Chief Monk Boudreaux and the Golden Eagles, have taken Black Indian music to the concert stage, and have added calypso-styled songs to their performances.

Among the downtown tribes, the Yellow Pocahontas and the White Eagles best represent the Black Indian tradition. They can be usually found toward the end of Carnival Day at the corner of Orleans and Claiborne Avenue. Big Chief Gerald "Jake" Millon sings his heart out all day: 'We're the pretty White Eagles when we leave home!'

The tradition lives on! Its history has been documented by the "hawks" (as Chief Jake Millon calls them), oral historians who record everything in their minds. One of the most articulate oral historians on the Black Indians is Abe Sturgis of the White Eagles. In the film documentary, The Black Indians of New Orleans, he sums up the history in poignant tones: "...the Mardi Gras Indian is something that you just got to be part of the feeling of what it's all about. Everything we do in this city regardless of what we play, whether they call it "jazz," or "soul," or "gospel" or whatever you call it, it all has Two-Way Pocka-Way in it. It's something about our music, they all have that 1-2-3-4, Dun-Ta-Dun-Dunt, you know, that's always in there. It's just part of the natural rhythm that went all the way back to the Marie Laveau thing, and the voodoo thing that was going on in Congo Square years ago. It's just part of our heritage. You can be sitting down, and the tambourines start ringing... some people call it "funk," but you know it's strictly us, it's "second line." It's something to get your blood warmed up and make your feet begin to move, and you start being part of yourself, the real you. And the beautiful part about it is that no two people can express themselves the same way. Everyone is feeling what they feel, and it's all basically a proud thing, and a happy thing; it's a sad thing. It's a joyous thing... it's all these things combined!"
THE BROTHER TILLMAN STORY

By Jason Berry

The day after Carnival, they'd turn him loose, to try to get him off the street on a Carnival Day, because at Carnival — he was clean treacherous.

Now a man who is sweet through most seasons of the year, only to become treacherous at Mardi Gras, is obviously made up of complex parts. So much so that during the late Twenties a team of cops were assigned to stop him from masking. Longpre recalls three of them — Dominic, Big Blue (a mounted policeman), and Buttercup Burns, who weighed three hundred pounds.

Brother Tillman, being a treacherous Indian, would have none of this interference, and pulled Boy Blue off his horse, took his gun, and dumped him in a horse water trough one Sunday morning at Galvez and Thalia.

Tillman devised schemes to evade the law's many arms. In 1927, word of his death spread. "They waked him and everything else," the police came to the wake. "They put him in the hearse, brought him to Holt Cemetery. He got out of the casket in the hearse; when they got to the cemetery, they buried the casket, brought him back. On Carnival morning he had on an Indian suit. He had returned from the dead!"

In the 1920s, some Yellow Pocahontas braves split off and formed a new tribe, the Wild Squatoolas. Their chief was Dandy Lambert — otherwise known as Big Chief Copperwire "because," says Longpre, "one year, when he put his suit together, it fell apart on him and he hooked it up with this copper wire from a guy that was working on the telephone line and it happened that wire was on the ground. He picked it up and hooked his suit up. So the Queens then went to calling him Copperwire... everybody after that called him Big Chief Copperwire."

Queens, in this case, were female Indians. In Longpre's memory, a great many masked through the years. In fact, in 1965, when Longpre was Big Chief of the Golden Blades (a tribe founded at the bar near Third and Rocheblave in 1936), "I had some one hundred and thirty-five Indians, and about fifty Queens. I was masking up on Thalia between Dorgenois and Broad. That morning I sent my gang out. I sent my Spy Boy out, which was Harold Bourgeois. When Harold got to Louisiana Avenue and Magnolia, I was still at Thalia and Dorgenois sending out Indians. That's a distance of more than twenty blocks."

From Robert Sam Tillman Sr., to his son Brother Tillman (rising from the dead!), to Big Chief Copperwire and down through the years to Longpre's leadership of the Golden Blades, two hundred strong in the winter of '65, to latter day folk heroes like Chief Jolley and Chief Pete, the common thread coursing through the different tribes and their generations is that rare quality associated with men who display the exceptional ability to secure the devotion of large numbers of people.
1981 In Black and White
A Photographic Portfolio by Bunny Matthews

The Ditty's Cindy Chambers at Mass in St. Vincent de Paul Church

"We play soul — it's essential to any type of music." — The Ditty (left to right: Al T. Monte, Otto Pete Wolf, Cindy Chambers)
"Where I live in England is like bloody Hell, if you want to be emotional about it."
— Mark E. Smith of the Fall

David "Gooseneck" Hinds of Steel Pulse

The Mighty Charlots' 22nd Anniversary Concert at the I.L.A. Auditorium
Sam and Dave at Tiltina's

Dub Brock (a.k.a. Bobby Lounge) and hand-painted Cadillac

Slouxsie Siouxs at Ole Man River's

Stephie White Sox

The Go-Go's at a Gretna motel

The Plastics at Ole Man River's

Rev. Al Green's bus

Rev. Al Green backstage at Municipal Auditorium
Pete Fountain in his office at the Hilton

Red Rockers at Jed's

St. Roch Cemetery

Ft. Walton Beach, Florida
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SEAFOOD PLATTERS

In which the North Broad Crawfish King tries the record biz and comes up with a couple of gems, if not fame and fortune.

The glory days as far as recording activity in New Orleans were undoubtedly the early 1960s. Major companies like Imperial, Ace, Chess and Mercury were regularly scoring with hard-hitting national chart records from New Orleans. It didn’t take long for a number of small local recording concerns to spring up hoping to stake their claim in the city’s musical gold rush. Some managed to cash in, while others came up empty-handed, disappearing as suddenly as they had appeared. One of the smaller companies that grabbed a portion of the spotlight was Scram Records.

Scram was the brainchild of none other than the North Broad Street Crawfish King, Al Scramuzza, who started the label in 1962. His enthusiasm for his seafood empire was carried over into the record business. Surprised initially that anyone would be interested in his exploits as a record company owner, Al Scramuzza soon warmed to the topic during a break at his “Seafood City” store.

"The record business was kind of a pet thing for me. I didn’t even know anything about the record business, but I used to be a sponsor with Poppa Stoppa on WJMR (later WNRR). So being around the DJs I got interested in the music. Being musically inclined, coming up playing music, I got interested in the recording part of it. I got to listen to a lot of records around the station, and I got to know what the DJs would play. I picked up a few good tunes, ’cause a few people had approached me and asked me if I’d produce them, so I said, ‘Okay, let’s try and cut something.’"

Scramuzza’s initial jump into the record business was as producer on Richie Matta’s first release on Watch 6339 “I’m Just Walking” / “Since You’ve Been Gone.” Scramuzza wasn’t merely satisfied to be a financial backer or a figurehead. He wrote, produced, distributed and even set up his own publishing company, Uzza Publishing.

The Richie Matta record also appeared as the first release on Scram, according to Scramuzza. “I had good hopes for Richie, he was very talented. I cut about eighteen sides on him before he went in the Marines. When he got out he kind of shied away from recording.”

Scram’s first releases did well locally. An excellent instrumental, “Street Jam” by the Sphinxes, received heavy airplay on all three black radio stations and even graced the Top 40 of WTIX and WNOE in 1963.

Scramuzza explained how he pushed his records then. “Since I used to advertise my seafood business a lot on the radio, I’d try to get the DJs to give my stuff a complementary spin maybe late at night.” Of course, his being a sponsor might influence a jock or a programming director’s playlist decision. “We bought space in survey sheets, too.”

Scram’s release policy was to test a record’s potential before spending the time and money on promoting a single. “The public was the best judge. I’d take a consensus on a record’s potential; if I got more nos than yeses, we’d drop it and try another.”

This release practice was used on one of Scramuzza’s wildest issues, “Doin’ The Crawfish.” “That came out three times. Eddie Bo and Ray Bracken both cut it. I had 1,000 copies pressed and gave 200 away as promos. It never did anything so I gave away the other 800 to the customers at my store. Now they’re collector’s items.”

Al found that the record business wasn’t successful enough to warrant sacrificing time from his booming seafood trade, so he temporarily dropped his record label. “After a couple of years I got disinterested ’cause I wasn’t paying enough attention to my seafood business, which is my first love.”

Scramuzza picked up the bug again in 1968 and, with the help of Eddie Bo, achieved what most small companies can only dream of. Al picks up the story. “I got back in the business in ’68. We had a few little things, and then we leased Mary Jane Hooper’s ‘That’s How Strong My Love Is’ to World Pacific for $7,500, but they let the record die, and it was a great
"This writer concurs with that opinion.

"Then we had 'Hook and Sling' by Ed­die. It went as far as a record can go locally in the R&B charts, number one." According to Billboard, it went to No. 13 for eleven weeks. "I knew the record had it. I used to tell the guys around the store who unloaded the crawfish, 'Hook it, sling it.' So Bo and I got together and cut it down in Borges' basement on Metairie Road. We got a great sound out of there. The record took off immediately; we did something like 2,000 the first week and went Top 10 locally. Atlantic was interested in leasing it but I thought I'd try and distribute it myself. I had 50,000 pressed and was sending it to distributors all over the country. We had radio play all over just on our own. We weren't making much money though, because all our bread was tied up with the distributors. One guy in St. Louis ordered 2,000 one week, 3,000 the next and then another 2,000 without paying me a cent.

"We did about 100,000 before Scepter picked it up. Sam Garth called me from New York, and was head over heels over the record." Scramuzza leased the record and in return Scepter agreed to pay an initial fee and pick up all of Scram's accounts receivable. "He was down here the next day to sign the papers." The record also managed to crack the pop charts for nine weeks, peaking at 73 nationally.

AI blames himself for the demise of Scram. He simply states, "I got too greedy. I had another good record with Mary Jane Hooper, 'Teach Me.' Scepter was interested in it too but I felt they didn't offer enough money, so I tried to push it myself. Eddie and I played too hard to get and that was bad, 'cause things didn't go right after that. I might still be in the business, if I'd have went for the deal."

Scramuzza tried a few more releases but met with little success. Consequently he directed all his energy to the seafood business.

"We pressed about thirty records, but I'd only consider eight of them actual releases, because they went into the record shops. I enjoyed the record business because you met a lot of people and you got a lot of different ideas in the studios. I felt mixing a record was more important than putting it down."

Scramuzza laughs when the monetary aspect of the recording industry is brought up. "Really it was a lot of smoke and no fire. I don't think I made five cents. I fronted my people money all the time. As quick as we got money in, we spent it on recording new stuff. I was more of a friend than a manager. Hell, when Mary Jane Hooper had her baby I paid the hospital bill.

"I don't think about the record business too much now. Really, I'm afraid to because I don't want to ignore my seafood business. The record business is as addicting as gambling or drinking."
By Keith Twitchell

WINGING IT WITH LESLIE SMITH

She's a natural, and has never had to apply herself to get where she is today. Now this fledgling jazz vocalist faces a crossroads.

Leslie Smith is an impression of intense energy shooting off in a multitude of directions, like a sparkler for whom the whole year is one long Fourth of July. In between bursts of life she sings smooth, sultry blues and jazz, at Tyler's every Tuesday and elsewhere as the gigs line up. At nineteen, she has the distracted impetuosity of a creative young woman mixed with the wisdom of one who has seen the inside of reform schools and traveled large portions of the country on her own since she first left home at age nine or ten. "I feel a lot of extremes in me - the full spectrum," says Leslie, and it is indeed difficult to picture what final creative product will evolve out of this volatile mass of raw potential.

"Two years old: singing definite songs" notes the entry in Leslie's baby book, and certainly music has been a part of life as long as she can remember. But at first her desire was to be a pianist. A piano arrived in her house when she was nine; there was an aborted attempt at lessons, but mostly she played by ear. "It didn't seem fair to be able to open your mouth and sing," she says. "Guitar and piano require dedication ... I didn't respect singers." Leslie liked having an instrument between herself and the audience and felt vulnerable onstage until she recognized her vocal chords as an instrument. This came about in California when she was fifteen; at a party she was coerced into singing "Stormy Monday," and the response to this "debut" encouraged her to join a band. She often split - "never stay in one place too long, y'know" - but always returned, and got her first practical training.

She returned to New Orleans a couple years ago, but time is a vague and unimportant notion to Leslie. More important was the feeling that by then she had established some musical respect on her own, out of the shadow of her father, Michael Smith, the well-known local photographer. Now that she feels she herself is the attraction, she loves having him around: "I always tell the people at the door not to let him in for free, and they always do," she kids. The territory has been established.

One advantage of her turbulent, nomadic youth was that Leslie never listened to nor emulated any one particular singer. She still has no favorites; though she says she listens mostly to "black AM radio stuff," she likes just about anything, and this variety comes out in her shows. "I don't know the classics, it's hard for me to sit in with people, and my repertoire has a lot of off-the-wall songs," she comments, "but that makes it more interesting for me and I think for the audience, too" ... not to mention the musicians backing her up. Some interesting key changes and unusual breaks punctuate the songs, but they don't really matter. Leslie has an excellent, rich voice, which she manipulates very well for someone with no formal training. At times she can be a bit rough and melodramatic, but the beautiful, resonant fullness of her voice and the emotion she infuses it with create a fine listening pleasure.

As is the custom in the New Orleans music scene, she works with a variety of people, but her regular Tuesday Tyler's gig includes Linda Aubert on piano, George French on bass and James Black on
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drums. Her favorite accompanist is David Torkanowsky, because she feels a strong sense of musical communication with him, and to Leslie the vocal/piano interplay is the most important for a singer. Ideally she would like to become good enough on piano to perform solo if she wants; she would also like to add a guitar player at some point. Writing some music is also a goal; she is feeling more and more confident with the lyrics she has been working on for a number of years. Diversity and versatility are major musical objectives for Leslie, in terms of both instrumentation and material.

The largest obstacle Leslie Smith will have to overcome if she is to achieve major musical success is herself. First there is the lack of formal training. She would like to study with Angelle Trosclair or Germaine Bazzle, but combining performance and lessons puts a terrible strain on the vocal chords. "If I stopped for a year and studied it'd be the wisest thing I could do," she says, "but I won't. I just never worry about the future." Her non-stop, high living style takes its toll; she says she can feel the effects on her vocal chords, and she recently spent a week in the hospital coping with what amounted to a total revolt of her system. She had to be fed intravenously, and lost 25 pounds that she really didn't have to spare. "I have no intention of letting myself get that abusive again," she says.

Leslie doesn't find the local music scene conducive to big time success. She says she loves New Orleans and will always come back, but she feels musicians here are under-appreciated and underpaid, that making a musical living here is a never-ending grind that doesn't afford one the time off to work and improve; and, on the other hand, says Leslie, New Orleans musicians are lazy and complacent, seldom practicing except at gigs, and audiences are often willing to let a performer slide.

All this, she feels, is just the way the city is: "Living in New Orleans reminds me of trying to swim in molasses or ride a bicycle in the sand: you sweat a whole lot; if you work real hard you might get somewhere; but mostly you get real tired so you stop and have a drink. I wouldn't be satisfied if I let my life stop here."

But Leslie admits that this criticism is true of herself as well. "I hate having people telling me what to do, including myself, so I rebel against studying. But since I got out of the Quarter, in the last six months at Tyler's, I've started paying more attention to what I'm doing. People in the Quarter listen with their eyes, not their ears. Now I want to learn technical things, become a musician, not just a performer. I can't imagine doing anything but music — I love to sing. If I decide to get a better handle on myself I can go far; I've got the raw material but I don't make myself work."

There is a rare pause in Leslie's riptide of words. "I hope I make that decision before I fuck up what I've got." Indeed. Sparklers give off a lot of sudden, intense beauty, but they seldom last very long.
The Blue Vipers would just as soon forget about the Sixties and Seventies. They'd like to jump rock 'n' roll straight from its beginnings right into the present.

A noisy Harley-Davidson cuts through the quiet of a cool, cloudless evening. As it dies out, the strains of "Baby Let's Play House" drift down the street from a darkened bar. Outside an entirely leather clad youth with a well-oiled ducktail leans against a '53 Chevy while trying to steal a kiss from his dolly.

Interest in the activities next to the Bel Air switches to the music originating inside the club when the door swings open as if propelled by the rockabilly beat of "Flying Saucer Rock and Roll."

Suddenly, during one particularly chaotic guitar break, a skinny, greasy-haired guy in sneakers and a torn leather jacket jumps into the middle of the dance floor and performs a maniacal version of the buck and wing on one leg. He concludes his effort by yelling, "Dance, God damn it!!!"....Then, like lemmings rushing to the sea, the floor is flooded with bodies jumping to a savage version of "I'm Ready For the Hospital Now."

No, this isn't a scene from a night at Memphis's Eagle's Nest on Lamar Street during one of Charlie Feathers' regular weekend gigs during the Fifties. Nor have you been transported two decades to an evening at the Golden Cadillac on North Rampart Street. It is December 1981 inside Jimmy's on Willow Street. The group is The Blue Vipers.

The Vipers, all in their early twenties, play loud, unabashed Fifties rockabilly with wild, echoey vocals, growling, nervous guitars, insane, slapping bass and tough, metronome drumming. The Vipers look and sound as if they were transported from an era that spawned Elvis, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis and Eddie Cochran.

The Blue Vipers are Jay Beninati, Kevin Hinks, Bobby Brennan, and Nick Sanzenbach.

Jay is the songwriter in the group, and doubles as a guitarist and vocalist. Hailing from Freeport, New York, Jay began playing hard rock in his hometown before coming under the influence of Elvis, Gene Vincent and Hank Williams. "I came here about a year ago thinking I'd see guys like Lee Dorsey. But the first night I got here I went to Jimmy's and they were filming a new wave movie."

It was at Jimmy's that Jay met Kevin Hinks, another guitar player, and the nucleus of the Blue Vipers was formed. Kevin hails from South Bend, Indiana, but moved here a couple of years back, "to get out of the cold." Formerly a bassist with the Rimshots and The Del-Lords (Beninati is also a former Del-Lord), Hinks also shares the vocals.

Bobby Brennan is from New Orleans. A graduate of De La Salle, he spent his teens listening to heavy metal groups. "Then I got turned on to a Gene Vincent record and got so attached to it I wore the grooves out. It wasn't long after I found out about Elvis, Roy Orbison, Eddie Cochran and Roy Brown."

Brennan, whose upright bass is the focal point of
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the band's sound and looks, is a relative neophyte to the instrument, but you'd never imagine it from listening to his berserk slapping style. "I started playing upright because I thought I'd have a better chance to be noticed."

Drummer Nick Sanzenbach has been playing around town for a decade. He also doubles on sax. A jazz drummer throughout the Seventies, he lead his own avant-garde group Sources until three years ago when he changed gears and started playing new wave with The Sex Dogs. Why such an abrupt change? "Well, it's not all that different because both types of music are free-form. But it got to the point where a lot of the jazz guys, I'm talking about really respected jazz players, were just copying the way they played five years ago."

Although only together for a couple of months (this was their tenth gig), the Blue Vipers play with the flare of a well-rehearsed, red hot rhythm unit.

Like any new group, though, they face a lot of difficulties. Nick explains: "It's an uphill battle when any group plays obscure music like rockabilly. And when you start doing any original material it's even tougher, unless you've already got an established audience."

Hinks added, "New Orleans is really a big small town and there aren't that many clubs. The people are cliquey and follow just one band around."

"Yeah," agrees Sanzenbach, "that hurts a lot of bands because everything gets sucked up. A lot of good groups have folded because there wasn't enough money around."

The Blue Vipers have cast themselves as diehard exponents of Fifties rockabilly. "There is definitely a resurgence in R&B and rockabilly," says Beninati off-handedly.

"Rockabilly is good dance music," adds Brennan. "Kids are dancing now. During the Seventies they just sat around smoking dope. I was in a club in England that had a dance floor as big as a supermarket and it was completely covered with people doing the jitterbug to this kind of music. They just can't get enough American music or American culture. But over here everybody's concerned about what's going on over there; people just aren't satisfied."

"There are guys that are legends over there like Johnny Jano from Crowley, who has records in Melody Maker's Top 25. But nobody has ever heard of him here."

Collectively the Blue Vipers see a massive revival in rockabilly and R&B in the near future. "We want to open some eyes to make people realize music didn't start with the Beatles. Guys like Gene Vincent and Billy Lee Riley could really kick ass. We're not trying to revive the Fifties, we can push this kind of music into the Eighties."

The Vipers made a believer out of me. I caught the rockabilly fever, and there's no cure for it.
Wynton Marsalis

Just out of his teens, New Orleans' Marsalis the Younger has taken the world of jazz by storm. Already the toast of New York and honored for his work on other musicians' offerings, he now has his own album to show his many talents.

The standard of art is individual excellence. The true test of artistic purpose is signature. Jazz now signs its name Wynton Marsalis, and that name right now is everywhere that jazz is. His rep started with musicians, and that name right now is everywhere that envy of Mr. Winter himself.

Wynton Marsalis plays trumpet. He is from New Orleans. He is the son of the great jazz pianist, Ellis Marsalis. He is 20 years old. His résumé reads like a hyperactive genius ten years his senior. At 14, he won a solo competition in classical music and performed the Haydn Trumpet Concerto with the New Orleans Philharmonic. At 15, his work at the Eastern Music festival in North Carolina earned him the "Most Outstanding Musician Award." At 16, he won the competition again and performed Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 with the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra. Throughout high school, Wynton played first trumpet in the New Orleans Civic Orchestra. The summer after high school, at 17, he was allowed to enter the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood a year early. There he received the Harvey Shapiro Award for Outstanding Brass Player. At 18, Wynton entered the Julliard school of music. While there, he also performed with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, was a soloist with the Mexico City Symphony, and worked as a pit musician in the Broadway play Sweeney Todd. Before long, he took a leave of absence from Julliard to join Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, with whom he attracted the attention of the press and Columbia Records, who signed him to a contact.

Then, in the summer of last year, he took a leave of absence from Art Blakey to do a six-week festival and concert tour with the Herbie Hancock Quartet, during which and immediately after he recorded his first album. It was in the can by September 1981, and is now being released. He is presently playing with Art Blakey again, and preparing to go into the studio to record his second album, which will be classical, Haydn's Hummel Trumpet Concerto. Also, he is getting his band together because soon he will head up his own international tour of jazz festivals, including New Orleans.

At 16, he gave Wynton a trumpet when he was six, but he didn't get completely serious about it until he was 12, after which there was apparently no stopping him. When asked if he ever had to push Wynton to practice, Ellis said, "Nawh. In fact, his teacher (George Jansen) had to tell him to lay off. The human body wasn't meant to spend all that time on that iron."

Wynton's music is difficult, and he makes no apologies for that. He is quoted in the January 1982 Down Beat as saying, "I do not entertain and I will not entertain. I'm a musician. I studied the music, and my music should be presented that way. I'm serious about what I'm doing. I will not play funk. I like funk, but I am not a funk musician. Funk musicians don't pay the kind of dues that jazz musicians pay to the music."

"I'm doing what I want to do: I'm playing jazz, period. And if I get squashed—there's always that possibility—I just get squashed. But I'm functioning on the premise that this is good music and it deserves to be heard. I am a jazz musician... my father was a jazz musician. I play jazz."

What does Ellis think of his son's album? He says, "It's very good, from one end to the other." When asked to pick his favorite number, Ellis began naming one tune after another until he said, "I can't do it. There's a balance that goes in different directions. It's a total music, and the tunes are vehicles for improvisation in the purest sense."

Many different directions. And very pure. Wynton is uncompromising in his dedication to serious music. "Serious music" is generally taken to mean classical music. Wynton seems determined to have jazz accorded the same respect, a determination he carries out in detail. He says, "When you see me on the bandstand, I'm always going to look sharp. How can you get respect from an audience when you come on the bandstand looking like a bum? You're in the wrong before you play a note."

Such self-control and his classical training might be misleading. Says Wynton, "Because I've played with orchestras and all that, some people think I'm a classical musician who plays jazz. They have it backwards. I'm a jazz musician who can play classical music."

A jazz musician he is, and that's the closest one can come to pigeon-holding Wynton Marsalis. It is a great accomplishment that at 20 years old he is already being compared to the best. Miles Davis seems to be the most recurrent comparison. Wynton resists these and all comparisons. As he says about his composition "Father Time," which is the first track on side A of his album, Wynton Marsalis, "They never had a tune like that, and I have all of those albums."

When Wynton says "they," he not only means Miles, but also Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock, and Tony Williams, all of whom created a significant music with Miles, and who appear on four of the seven cuts on..."
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this album. Wynton says his only regret is
that the album jacket has the musicians
listed under each tune. That way the
reviewers jump on the big names, whereas,
the lesser knowns are playing stuff that's
"just as hip," he says, and he's right.

Jeff Watts does a hundred pounds of
drumming on "Father Time." His urgency
is enhanced by the rhythmic drama that
Wynton wrote into the song, which goes
from 4/4 to 6/8, and then is released by a
beautiful 3/4 time that sounds like a
drunken poet singing his way home.
"Father Time" is written in open har­
mionics. Wynton said he did this to show
people that harmony is relative, and has to
be expanded to include every note. Wynt­
ton's brother, Branford Marsalis, on tenor
sax, plays a perfect counterpoint in a
counter motion. This is a technique rarely
used in jazz.

The second cut on side A is Herbie Han­
cock's "I'll Be There When The Time Is
Right," a beautiful mood piece in which
Wynton's trumpet has the purity of a flute.
Wynton arranged, and added a few lines to
Hancock's work. Also, he wrote out all the
dynamics, which is unusual. Every song on
this album is different from the others, and
unusual, period. Even for jazz.

Ron Carter's "R.J.,” for example, is
written in a 19 bar form. "Hesitation" changes keys imperceptibly because the
power chord is in B and B flat at the same
time. Also, it contains a lot of odd-rhythm
trading by Wynton and Branford, which is
great, great stuff, but you'll go crazy try­
ing to count it. Tony Williams contributed
the Portuguese-sounding "Sister Cheryl," which has some very difficult chord
changes, a bass ostinato, and another
counterpoint for Branford. Even on a con­
tentional ballad like "Who Can I Turn
To," the band goes to D flat in the middle
of the song, which is pretty unconven­
tional. And finally, "Twilight" is so com­
plicated, it is almost 2 songs at once, with
Wynton playing a 14 bar blues form
over a bass ostinato, while the drummer
keeps a raised tempo, and the piano and
sax play harmonically-involved interac­
tions and interludes.

Believe me, it's all very tricky stuff, and
technically way beyond most of us, but it
feels good to the body as well as the mind,
and that's important. That means Wynton
is opening up the harmonics of the cell,
that he is playing from the knowledge
within. This is when wholeness is achieved
in music. Each song on this album is com­
plete unto itself. In fact, if I have any com­
plaints, it is that the album feels like a col­
llection of individual units. It is as though
each song is treated as a whole album,
and there's not enough flow, not enough
give-and-take from song to song. That's
the worst that I can say.

What else is there to say? Only that
Wynton Marsalis may well become New
Orleans' biggest international superstar
since Louis Armstrong. I bet he makes it,
and considering his most amazing self­
discipline and rigid integrity, I bet he
makes it intact.
Don't be deceived by the good time atmosphere at this band's engagements. Bourré is seriously and thoughtfully concerned with perpetuating Cajun music and culture.

It's Mardi Gras morning in a small town, southwest Louisiana. A final check of their wagon assures them that they've got enough beer, boudin and instruments to carry them through the journey. Donning their masks, they gallop off to bring Mardi Gras to their surrounding neighbors. Following a predetermined route, they visit farm after farm, the unmasked captain of the group asking each family if it wishes to receive Mardi Gras. Affirmations are followed by plenty of beer drinking and the donation by the family of a live chicken, or vegetables, or maybe more beer. By early evening the men return to town with their hard-earned gumbo ingredients, and the women take over. The eating, drinking and dancing will go on far into the night.

As the Bourre Cajun Band finishes the "Cajun Mardi Gras Song," few in the audience know that the band has just told the above story. But no matter. Singing in French is no barrier to communication when the music says it all. And Bourre, a four-piece band of New Orleans musicians, knows how to say it and play it.

With Cajun country (southwest Louisiana) so close to New Orleans, it seems strange that there aren't more New Orleans Cajun bands. But strange isn't the word that Bruce Daigrepont, Bourre's accordionist, would choose. He considers this fact to be alarming and a serious threat to the preservation of Cajun culture. Speaking with him, one discovers the ingredient that makes Bourre so successful beyond their competent musicianship and les bon temps attitude ... an intense love for the music and language. "I'm worried about the French language dying out in Louisiana ... it will hurt the music even if the music style is copied," says Daigrepont.

Seeing Bourre as a means for promoting Cajun French and culture, Daigrepont puts a lot of thought into the band's repertoire and style. Concerned that all the music might sound the same if not presented properly, he is careful to draw up set lists that alternate waltzes vite et waltzes douce, two-steps and zydeco.

The issue of whether or not to play the music in a strictly traditional style is also considered. ("We play the music faster than the traditional style," says Daigrepont, "especially towards the end of the evening when everybody is really into it, but we're not interested in becoming a traditional Cajun band.") In doing this, Bourre has been successful.
in attracting countless numbers of new followers to Cajun music and dancing with their blend of R&B/blues/Cajun music. After months of dancing to Bourre, the more traditional sounds of Cajun bands like Beausoleil that occasionally come to New Orleans don't sound so strange. And the people will know how to dance to it, because they certainly dance to Bourre. Thursday nights at the Maple Leaf Bar (Bourre's steady gig for the last year and a half) are always frenetic. Why Bourre attracts a collection of New Orleans' most healthy, good-looking men and women is somewhat of a mystery. But there they are, having a great time.

Up on stage, Bourre cranks it out. They appear to be very comfortable with the music, dancing around, laughing, and having as good a time as the audience. Bruce Daigrepont, on accordion and lead vocals, works the crowd between songs with jokes and inducements to dance. A musician for eighteen years, he only recently picked up the accordion. Although he is developing his own style of playing octaves and single notes, he cites the late Nathan Abshire as an inspiration. The rhythm section of Bourre consists of Mike Sipos on drums and Rick Monsour on bass. Sipos, with his metronome sense of rhythm, adds tasteful rock 'n' roll and New Orleans-style drumming to the Cajun music. In this kind of music it would be so easy for the bass and drums to play too much and clutter up the music, but Monsour and Sipos know how to keep it simple, together, yet interesting rhythmically. Filling in the gaps with clean guitar work on his beautiful old Les Paul is Mike Long.

The band has been together for almost two years now, assuming a very low-key position in town. Although they play about twelve gigs per month, their only club dates are at the Maple Leaf Bar. They have no booking agent, they don't advertise, and they don't solicit gigs. Yet their following keeps growing. Articles on the band have been appearing more and more frequently in publications from as far away as London. They've appeared on television on ABC's Good Morning America, been the guests on Robert Sullivan's The Acadian Hour on WWNO-FM, and most recently were chosen by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) and the Quebec Government to represent Louisiana at La Festival d'Ete De Quebec. Not bad for a part-time band. In order to have a presentation for the trip to Canada, the band went into the studio and recorded its first single. Although they're not totally pleased with it, it's still a good first effort. The A side, "Bayou Pom Pom," gives an excellent indication of the band's blend of Cajun music and New Orleans rhythms.

For the future, there's talk of dance contests, an album and a TV show—but whatever the band decides to do next, one thing is certain. Bourre's love for the music and for their audience will take them wherever they want to go.

-Gene Scaramuzzo
THE KILLER COMES BACK

Jerry Lee Lewis
On the Riverboat President
December 9, 1981

Jerry Lee Lewis Rocks!
By Robert Palmer
Delilah Books, $7.95

Isn't Jerry Lee Lewis country? Is he not the consummate country honky-tonker, drinking and marrying, drinking and divorcing and drinking some more, unrequited, impetuous, full of bile and proud of it, putting in all the roadwork for every Walter Mitty cowboy who ever kicked a tire?

Or, is he really rock 'n' roll, rock 'n' roll itself, the screaming extreme, the greatest balls of fire of all in the romance of self-destruction, using his piano like a battering ram to beat down the doors of death in his pilled-up and furious pursuit of the ultimate orgasm.

Either/or, he is to both musics what Darwin was to monkeys. The monkeys were already here, but no one quite understood them or their importance like the obsessed young musicologist. Besides being a musical alchemist, Jerry Lee is just naturally half-monkey, and if both these musics pass the test of natural selection, it will be because he was in the gene pool, stirring up a froth.

He probably is responsible for as many teenage pregnancies as Marconi and General Motors. He's had a couple of shotgun weddings himself. And those early participants in a whole lotto backseat shakin' turned out in force on the Riverboat President last December for Jerry Lee's dramatic return from the doctor's knife.

Some of them came as lawyers in blazers and blue jeans, bragging about their 45 collections. Some came as 45-year-old bouffant tigresses in tight sweaters who also had the look of a collector in their eyes. Many were anonymous; all were adoring. They came to see if Jerry Lee could make it back from 62 days in the hospital, and short-hair surgery on a near-fatally ruptured ulcer. The odds were against him even living.

The odds were against him even living. The odds were against him even living. It began, as it ends, with Robert Palmer's big failing is his indulgence in that contagion of indulgence of music critics who have to let the audience, "their audience," know that they are as hip as their subject matter, and that they were among the first ever to appreciate said subject. The book doesn't even begin with Jerry Lee Lewis. It begins, as it ends, with Robert Palmer. The first paragraph reads:

I knew I had to have a copy of "Whole Lotta Shakin'" the first time I heard the pummeling beat, the casual sexiness, the leering invitation. I wasn't getting enough
allowance from my parents to keep a 12-year-old aspiring punk (I was too gangly/awkward and nearsighted to be anything more (than aspiring) in Winstons, candy bars, alcoholic beverages purchased through various elaborate stratagems, movies, records, and that switchblade with the canary-yellow handle. Needs being needs, I stole my first copy of "Whole Lotta Shakin."

That's just for openers. We find out that the time is 1957, and the place is Little Rock, Arkansas. That is the time and place of the historic first attempt at integration; Central High School, Governor Faubus, the National Guard, effigies of Eisenhower, etc. Palmer says about himself, "Of course I... went around telling people at my suburban junior high school that Faubus was an asshole and that I liked niggers (sic). They said I was a nigger lover. I got beat up a couple of times but once I'd saved up enough money to buy that switchblade I mostly got left alone." For a 12 year old, that's advanced; that must be why he knows so much about the blues.

This type of self congratulation, and Palmer's case for the natural superiority of a southern heritage, which, of course, is his heritage, recurs ad nauseum throughout the book, whereas his treatment of Lewis' life is anecdoted at best, and there's not enough of that. For the die-hard Jerry Lee Lewis fan, there is reason enough to read the book. Palmer keeps a good chronology, and makes the connections between people easy to keep track of. Don't expect more than that. The book just doesn't dig, it doesn't explore, it doesn't discover.

Palmer attempts a philosophy of rock 'n' roll, the core of which is contained in "Whole Lotta Shakin." This is what "it" is all about: "I'm talking about what runs through your mind when you've been fucking for maybe a couple of days and realize you're still fucking because you're lusting after something beyond flesh, for this onrushing, supremely seductive Black Nothing. I'm talking about what runs through your mind when you've had so many drinks and taken so many pills that you start to get interested in a very methodical sort of way, in how many more drinks and how many more pills will get you to the very edge of that Black Nothing."

Robert Palmer's Black Nothing philosophy, though facile and undeveloped, does have a certain limited existential and eschatological merit, but his book, allegedly about Jerry Lee Lewis, is so steeped in self-absorption that it's hard to imagine he could have even the filmiest notion of what someone else is thinking. Rather, it is all too possible that Robert Palmer is imposing his own philosophy on the life of Jerry Lee Lewis because that is a more glamorous way of explaining the life of Robert Palmer.

It does not appear that Palmer thought about it very much. It appears that he sat down and wrote straight from the glands, which is acceptable for a rock 'n' roll song, but can never hold up for the length of a book, even one as short as this. However, the pictures are good.

— Ron Cuccia
WOODY’S FOUNDED A HOME

After years on the road, Woody Herman and his big band have established residency here, making them the nation’s only big band with its own club.

Of all the great big bands of the Forties, only those of Count Basie and Woody Herman still exist with their original leader (Ellington’s is currently led by son Mercer, and Tommy Dorsey’s has been recreated using the original arrangements). Of course the sidemen have virtually all changed, but a band’s character is determined by its leader. Until last month, none of the well-known big bands had a permanent location in a club where they could be heard six nights a week.

So the fact that Woody Herman and his Thundering Herd have as of December 27 settled here, in Herman’s own club in Poydras Plaza right behind the Hyatt, is a major event in American popular music.

But why New Orleans? Of all the major convention cities where high-quality entertainment is available — New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, New Orleans and San Francisco — New Orleans may have the smallest number of major attractions in proportion to our annual total of conventioneers and other visitors. And they are Pete Fountain and Al Hirt. Woody makes three, and he has the only big band among them — as it turns out, the only major one in the country with its own club.

How has Herman survived this long as a big band leader? As Count Basie once answered the same question: “We play four for them and one for us.” Herman not only knows that secret, he might well have written the book on keeping his musicians happy and keeping their playing vital and dynamic. His program always includes tunes that challenge his band members, making them look forward to each night’s work. Of course, he knows he must balance that with tunes which appeal to most audiences’ more conservative ears. But in matters of repertoire, Woody knows how to lead as well as to follow.

This has always been true of him. Dizzy Gillespie in his memoirs To Be or Not to Bop recounts how of all the white bands, Woody’s musicians took most eagerly to Dizzy’s stylistic innovations, which later became known as bebop (Jimmy Dorsey’s trumpet section never did get the phrasing right). So it’s really simple. Too many band leaders, once they smelled success, stuck so closely to a rigid programming formula that they lost their best musicians to boredom and eventually passed from the public taste themselves. Woody, on the other hand, has never been afraid to experiment in public, so he has always kept abreast of changing musical styles. This has enabled him to attract and hold onto some of the best musicians in the business. Saxophonists Stan Getz and Zoot Sims, and composer-arrangers Neal Hefti and Sal Nistico, among many others, worked for Herman before they became famous on their own.

Woody has brought forth generation after generation of Thundering Herds over the past three-and-a-half decades (the average age of this group is 27). His repertoire today includes arrangements of works by such giants of jazz, rock, and fusion as John Coltrane, Thad Jones, Chick Corea, Frank Zappa, Stanley Clarke and Billy Cobham, in addition to his standard big-band era repertoire, including his own famous “Woodchopper’s Ball” and the lively “Caldonia.”

The room he is in, right behind the escalators on the second floor of Poydras Plaza, is spacious and comfortable, decorated plainly in apricot and blue with pale pink lighting, “to make everyone look good,” says Woody. It generously seats 550, which is an ideal space both for Woody’s audience and for the other jazz acts which will be booked there during the summer when Woody is on the road.

The show, at $20 per person (including two free drinks), is more expensive than either Pete Fountain or Al Hirt, but it is much longer than either of their shows, offering two-and-a-quarter solid hours of music. Instead of a break, which would divide the time into two shows, Woody has put the Heritage Hall Jazz Band, led by trumpeter Teddy Riley, into a forty-minute slot between the Thundering Herd’s two...
segments. It's an excellent choice. The band plays a dynamic brand of Dixieland enriched by the contemporary stylings of Emile Vernette on piano and Herlin Riley on drums. Herman makes the transition from band to band in the middle of tunes, so we can enjoy the dramatic contrast between the plush style of the swing band and the raw, punchy style of the Dixieland band.

The program of the night I was there included an energetic "Things Ain't What They Used to Be" by Mercer Ellington; "The Four Brothers," a tune that highlighted Herman's four saxophone stars of 1947-49 (Getz, Sims, Serge Chaloff, and Herbie Steward) and remains a marvelous vehicle for his current sax section, all excellent soloists; an inspired contemporary arrangement of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which he calls "John Brown's Other Body"; a haunting big band version of Gabriel Faure's "Pavane"; and a novelty tribute to bebop, "Lemon Drops," whose lead was scat-sung by what appeared to be an impromptu vocal section whose members sprang up from all over the band. Some of the solos were also scat-sung, most impressively by trumpeter George Rabbai. Overall there was a good balance between solo and ensemble work, although I often wished the soloists stood out more audibly against the brass section's backgrounds.

Herman's sidemen are faster, more modern-sounding players than he is, but he has never claimed to be a clarinet or alto saxophone virtuoso. Instead, his forte is in his timing and tightness, so much so that his solos, against his band's section work, were always exciting, frequently thrilling.

In addition to those tunes there were the requisite big band commonplaces, tunes like "Early Autumn," "Laura," and "Mood Indigo," which, without radically new arrangements, for all their beauty are now the stuff of Muzak is made of. One tune, however, was difficult to categorize. An original composition and arrangement by pianist John Otto, Herman called it "Theme in Search of a Movie." Was it serious big band music or a spoof on the movie theme genre? It was hard to decide. Otto had played the game of combining a simple, memorable theme that includes an odd harmonic twist with a building grandiosity of scope — the formula for movie music — but all of the parts were so well conceived that it kept becoming enjoyable in itself. Then the whole thing would build to such a point of pretentiousness that it became funny.

For the show's rousing finale the Heritage Hall group joins the Herd onstage in an up-tempo blues in which everybody plays "modern." They end with a crashing drum battle that pulls you out of your seat. It's quite an evening.

Incidentally, there is a dance floor. It's in the perfect location: a rear corner. You have privacy and you don't obstruct anyone's view of the stage. But be careful: it's new and very slippery.

— Joel Simpson
IT'S ALIVE!

Hard rock is alive and flourishing in the home of the blues, despite being ignored by the media and being kicked around by the clubs.

Although much has been written and rehashed about rock 'n' roll, there is still a lot yet to be heard, especially locally. There are many local groups that are attempting to bring their own special brand of entertainment to the attention of the New Orleans public, against the odds. Despite claims that local rock is all copy music, and despite lack of support by the local press, rock 'n' roll and rock bands continue to flourish in New Orleans.

So who are these people who deny their heritage to play hard rock, and where are they? Of the more than one hundred and fifty bands listed in Wavelength's December Band Guide, only about twenty-five percent were familiar to me. Of course, considering the lack of coverage of the rock scene, that's understandable. But each of these groups, well known or unheard of, is struggling to make it in the highly competitive rock world. In the interest of the people out there who want to know what's going on, not only with the well known bands, but new groups and less well known musicians, I decided to go out and talk to some of our local bands and their views about the local scene.

I started with 24K, at Oie Man River's, a club that has been active in supporting local rock talent. "We do everything from power pop to heavy metal," Jimmy Triay, the band's bass player, informed me. Danny Duplantier, drummer, and Gary Stute, guitarist for the band, agreed that it was very hard to break in original material here. "People around here want to hear copy tunes — people in New Orleans just don't seem to want to listen to original music," Triay continued. "Most other places we go are a lot more receptive to it." Duplantier added, "Give the people what they want."

Triay described the local music scene as "a downer. A rock 'n' roll downer." Does the band feel the local press helps or hurts?

"There's not enough coverage of rock groups to hurt. Many of my associates and people who play music with us doubt that Sunny Matthews even comes to see rock 'n' roll bands in New Orleans."

Next on my agenda was Zebra, the well known but seldom written about local supergroup. I asked them why the band, one of the biggest drawing groups in New Orleans, is so often ignored by the press. Felix Hanemann, the band's bass player, speculated that "maybe it's because the writers are in the age group that's not interested in the type of thing that we're doing. But," he added "that doesn't mean it's not news."

This three-member band (Randy Jackson and Guy Gelso, guitarist and drummer, and Triay, the lead singer and band) plays a lot out of town, mostly in Long Island, where they won a "best band" award in 1980. As for the local scene, "It's very much alive," says Hanemann. "That's the problem with it — it's so evident, it is so alive. Especially within the past year, but nobody is making anyone aware of these people. The only people that are aware of [the bands] are their own audience."

Cypress (Benny Fernandez, Eric Erdal, Artie Dreslin, Bobby Bono and Duffy Metrejean) discussed the problem of working with club owners. Metrejean explained the situation: "If you play in a certain club and this guy down here finds out you're playing there, he won't hire you. So you've got to cut him off completely and then go work for the other guy — whether it works or not — and then, in turn, he won't hire you back. It's like that in a lot of places. Club owners won't work together; they try to work against each other. If we could work more easily with the club owners everybody could make money; we could get a lot more accomplished, instead of everybody trying to cut each other's throat." Although the band does mostly covers, "we don't try to Led Zeppelin you to death, or Van Halen you to death," says Metrejean, "To be a totally original band you have to go out and build a following from scratch."

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The Rebels (Johnny Collins, Bryan Ory, Steve Alexander, Peppy Ruiz) have a very appropriate name. "When we told everyone we were coming out with one hundred percent originals, most people discouraged us," said Ory, their guitarist. "They said 'It can't be done, you're not going to get any jobs that way.' But it worked." The Rebels say that it's very important to write and play your own material, even if that makes it harder for the band to gain popularity. "We have enough original music for five albums," Ory said. Alexander added, "Don't slack off, just keep pushing, writing more." "I think what's happening in the rock scene today is that popularity doesn't lie in talent," Ory continues, "It's who you know, how much money you put out."

Again, the conversation went back to the clubs. "I think the biggest problem is that a lot of bars take for granted the price that it actually costs to get a band in there," Collins commented. "They think that every band is in it for fun. There's expenses like crazy. For instance, anybody who hires a band for a wedding knows that they're going to pay anywhere from $500 on up. A bar should be the same way. It takes as much work to put the equipment up there to play for five people as it does for five thousand." And the Rebels, like the other bands I interviewed, have amassed quite a bit of equipment over the years. But, they say, all the equipment is necessary if you want to compete. "Now you have to be so high-tech just to get listened to," Ory remarked. "The audiences go for the crazy shit. It's like comedy now," said Alexander, speaking of many of the visual effects that are so widely used in rock. And, to make matters worse, there is no guarantee that any of the hard-earned money invested in equipment will eventually pay for itself, for any band. "There are no big labels and no big money, no big spenders," Collins said of the local scene. "We're looking for someone to gamble."

I sat in the den of the huge house in the suburbs where the members of the Rebels all live together, and thought about the bands I'd interviewed over the last week, and their music. I remembered sitting in Ole Man River's with a friend, a well-known musician, listening to 24K. Looking around, we noticed a lot of men with long hair, something that you really don't see that much on the street anymore. That, and the hard-hitting electric music complete with light show, made me wonder: Is this the subculture now? Could it be that, with the advent of disco and other "fad" music, rock'n'roll is being pushed more and more underground? Or has rock always been the subculture, and at 23 I'm just getting too old to remember? Nah, too far-fetched, I told myself. It's just that... At about this time, Peppy Ruiz of the Rebels came in. He had been absent for our interview, and the other guys laughed at his consternation at having missed it. Okay, I said, switching on the recorder, what do you have to say? "There's gonna come a time," he said, "when rock 'n' roll, true rock 'n' roll, is gonna come back."

— Tanya Coyle
CHARTING THE CHANTEUSE

Women have always had a special hold on the vocals, from divas to comedienne, including that most elusive category, the jazz singer.

Chanteuses have been much on my mind lately, as they often are (and who, save the most stubbornly porcine and perverse, wouldn't rather some snooded blessed-darnozel serenading them rather than a gent? This isn't to take it away from the men, for there is much to be said for Messrs. Crosby and Calloway and Cantor and Columbo and Coward and Charles King and Leroy Carr and Cliff Edwards and Nat Cole and the rest of them, but you won't read it here), and so I thought I'd devote a column or two, a small nosegay, to them. As far as specifics, I have mudwrestled with ideas as clinical and arcane as debate on just how far Rusty Warren's nasal patter and libidinous vocals (so expertly burlesqued by Catherine O'Hara on SCTV, and speaking of perverse, who would burlesque Rusty Warren in this particular time-space continuum?) anticipate the remarks of Betty Friedan and Flo Kennedy, the latter of whom in an earlier day might have been the blues-mama to end them all; and with an ethnic study to determine why Teutonic peoples favor women with baritones — Dietrich's voice is deep but Greta Keller makes Dietrich sound like a choskopran and Zarath Leander, the biggest and most sumptuous musical star of Nazi Germany, makes them both sound like members of the Sistine Chapel's former squad of eunuchs.

Singing is the one area of music that women have really cracked from the beginning — a woman nuzzling a sax or a set of drums or a trombone is still a matter for closeted laughs outside of punk bands and Ina Ray Hutton's old aggregation. And so, even discounting the much-plowed furrows of gospel and country and rock, there is still much left to consider: musical comedy stars who usually use their voices as dundum projectibles (Merman, Strisand, Vivian Blaine, Sophie Tucker, Nora Bayes, Belle Baker, Dolores Gray, Garland, Mary Martin, Jessie Matthews) and the more insinuating-insidious style of the lounge chanteuse, or song stylist (La Dietrich and La Keller and La Hildegarde and the rowdy Frances Faye, Hazel Scott and such incendiary sirens as Gertrude Niesen and Eartha Kitt, such "interpreters" as Lena Horne and Mabel Mercer, such triumphs of form over matter as Gertrude Lawrence), and the band singers and descendants in direct order (the three Helens — O'Connell and Ward and Forrest, Illin' Martha Tilton, Jo Stafford, Peggy Lee, Ella Logan, Dinah Shore, Rosemary Clooney, Ginny Simms and her nubs Miss Georgia Gibbs, Julia Lee, Frances Langford, Nell Carter) and the operetta voices (Jeanette MacDonald, Josephine Baker and Yvonne Printemps, Jane Friel and Ilona Massey) and comedienne and singers (a range from the grotesquerie of Charlotte Greenwood, Carmen Miranda, Betty Hutton, Mabel Todd, Judy Cawoya, Cass Daley, Kaye Ballard, Nancy Walker and Martha Raye to such relatively subdued comic creatures as Beatrice Lillie, Helen Gallagher, Elaine Stritch, Madeline Kahn, Betty Garrett, Ethel Shuffer, Virginia O'Brien, Tammy Grimes, Judy Holliday, Bibi Osterwald and of course Fannie Brice and Bette Midler) and torch singers (Ruth Etting, Lee Morse, Libby Holman, Helen Morgan, through Kay Starr and Nina Simone) and such uncategorizables as Kay Thompson.

These ladies may vault from category to category with the ease of steeplechasers or they may limit themselves as firmly as such blues singers as Ma Rainey and Memphis Minnie and Ida Cox and Lizzie Miles and Clara Smith and Mama Yancey, mired in an expressive but primitve form — not all blues singers did this, and some of them give indications of breaking the established pattern and trying to take a song somewhere else outside a boundary of six-
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teen bars (Alberta Hunter, Mamie Smith, Eva Taylor, Victoria Spivey, Monette Moore, Trixie Smith, Chippie Hill, Bessie Smith and their legatees like Lucille Bogam, Blue Lu Barker, Georgia White and Dinah Washington, who seemed to grown up with the music and thus grow with it).

The most fascinating and elusive are the women who sing jazz, because despite much scholarly verbal racquetball on the subject, no one has decided why Ethel Waters and Ruth Etting could use basically the same accompanists playing the same way and one of them produce jazz and one emphatically not. Since the loose counterclockwise called jazz singing covers a vast area from Pearl Bailey's (when she bothered to just sing, dammit) arched-eyebrow inflections that revealed a built-in plebeian cynicism through any number of torch-singers-on-the-rack with music-for-blowing-out-gas-jets (Carmen McRae at her best, Teddi King who always sounds on the verge of hysteria, Morgana King and June Christy and the most expressive lyric-twister of all, Chris Connor), and since the chronology runs from Ethel Waters, soon followed by Mildred Bailey, Ella Fitzgerald and the Boswell Sisters, through Betty Carter, and embraces both popular song specialists like Lee Wiley and an actual comedienne like Annie Ross whose range and rapidity are manically awe-inspiring, how is one to define it other than through the defensive I-know-it-when-I-hear-it mumbling that is usually the last refuge of experts?

What I want to do next time is discuss my two favorites, Ethel Waters and Mildred Bailey, both of whom probably weigh in at about a quarter of a ton but are still as difficult to pin down as a prize Troides paradisae — simply because they are unbound and can do anything, and did. Waters, in particular, may well be the greatest female singer of popular music in this century both for her work and for her influence and innovations. In the meantime, since I am always admonished to put something local in this column and since I am on the subject of singing, here is Jimmy Rushing in an ancient issue of Evergreen Review discussing the paucity of local blues singers:

"I never did hear any blues singers in New Orleans, and I don't know any from there that ever got any name. Bessie Smith wasn't from New Orleans, and neither was Mamie Smith. In fact the only singer they got is Louis, and he isn't a blues singer. Red Allen knows about the blues and he can play them, and he sings pretty good, but the blues really come from the Southwest. They don't get the same feeling for the blues in New Orleans, the way they do in Texas and Oklahoma. To me, the New Orleans blues sound stiffer, more like a parade beat. Our beat is even, while they play two and four, most often two. A lot of New Orleans musicians can play the blues, but I've never heard any singers from there."

— Jon Newlin
Lady BJ Sings Lady Day’  
At the Blues Saloon  
December 13, 1981

The night outside was rainy and cold, but inside the Blues Saloon this evening was another world—a spectacular show by one great lady honoring another—‘Lady BJ Sings Lady Day.’ Magic—that’s what it was. Or to paraphrase one of Lady Day’s songs, ‘Oooh, oooh, oooh, what a little magic can do!’

Lady BJ has magic. She did not imitate Lady Day. She has put together a masterful production in tribute to Billie Holiday. She sang Billie’s songs, spoke Billie’s words, and yet it was Lady BJ’s voice and style that we all enjoyed that night.

“She is the song...” said Charlie Mingus of Billie Holiday. Lady BJ, too, brought a personal touch to the music. She made Billie’s songs her own, with a clear, airy, almost transparent voice, a voice like fine china, delicate and thin, but with an enduring elegance that can only get better as the years go by.

The show was highly professional, a real treat in these days of “natural” (sometimes sloppy) night club acts. Lady BJ’s gowns were gorgeous. Her performance as a whole, while not artificial, was the slick performance one expects from a real star. The arrangements were tight, and the production moved well. The narrative bridges between songs (about Lady Day’s life) were highly entertaining, especially in a segment about a red dress. Apparently, in a Catholic home where Billie had stayed as a child, any girl who had misbehaved was forced to wear a red dress, and once Billie had been clad in a red dress and shut up in a room with a dead girl. When Lady BJ appeared in the second act in a beautiful red dress, she might have been thumbing her nose at the establishment that had destroyed Lady Day.

In the first narrative bridge (sketching in some of the early details about Billie’s life), Lady BJ seemed a little nervous. But as the evening wore on, and it became obvious that she had completely won over everyone there, she loosened up and entrusted her heart to the audience. She spoke as Lady Day with emotion, deep sorrow, anger, and humor. I'm sure I wasn't the only one there who felt the sting of tears on several occasions.

"In My Solitude" and "Strange Fruit" were particularly moving. Lady BJ communicated the feelings of heartbreak which must have been Holiday’s through most of her life. Love hurt her and racism hurt her, too. How she must have cried when her white audiences misunderstood “Strange Fruit” and thought it was a sexy song about bodies swaying!

The musicians were very capable, but not too flashy. Lady BJ was, after all, the star. On "Strange Fruit," the bass was bowed, instead of plucked, to produce a more mournful sound.

Fortunately, Lady BJ didn't keep us down in the dumps too long. She showed us Billie Holiday's fun side too, with such tunes as 'Oooh, Oooh, Oooh, What a Little Moonlight Can Do' and "Ain't Nobody's Business." After being moved to the depths of one's soul, it was refreshing to delight in these upbeat songs.

This show was a command repeat performance. Lady BJ had previously done her tribute to Lady Day in November. I'd like to see her do it again. But more than that, I'd like to see Lady BJ again—singing anything! She makes each song her own.

— Leslie Palmer

The Other Side of Town
Chuck E. Weiss
Select SEC 21611

Up until now, Chuck E. Weiss’s main claim to fame was the fact that a top forty song was written about him — he's the subject of Rickie Lee Jones’s "Chuck E.'s In Love." That may change now with the release of his first album, The Other Side of Town. Weiss, who is originally from Chicago but has lived in New Orleans on and off over the years, had the good fortune to get Mac Rebennack to play keyboards on the album. In a phone interview Weiss said that he and Rebennack are old friends from New Orleans and from the West Coast, where he spends most of his time these days. The rest of the band includes Alvin "Shine" Robinson on guitar, Freddy Stahl on drums, and Larry Taylor on bass. Weiss said, "We recorded the tracks over a year ago, but the record's been held up till now because of some contractual problems I had. But all that's over now, and I'm ready to go." It's a pity it took so long, because this is a very hot record.

The album opens with a brief spoken
YOUR ARMS TOO SHORT TO BOX WITH GOD

At the Saenger Theatre
January 5-10, 1982

It began serenely. The soft singing of the "Beatitudes" could be overheard from off stage... "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven..." Then began the peaceable procession of church members gathering into their places in brightly colored choir robes. Soon enough the mood starts to change, the beat steps up and the Preacher (sometimes played by Patti Labelle) lets us all know "We're gonna have a good time!" As for everyone this reviewer heard and overheard, the Preacher was right. We had a good time!

For everyone who gets their jollies watching the likes of good old traditional gospel music "elevated to the level of a very fine art," "Your Arms Too Short to Box With God" was a show to experience.

Thousands of New Orleanians turned out to view the eight shows running between January 5 and 10 at the Saenger. Four of the eight shows were sell-outs, according to theatre management, and the other four were near capacity. If this is any indication, the city known for its music and its own gospel talent give high ranking endorsement to
Vinnette Carroll’s presentation of Patti Labelle in her first gospel show.

The play is set in the imaginary Church of Good Faith where the Preacher delivers a sermon taken from the writing of St. Matthew. The longest part in act one deals with the acting out of the text of the sermon and dramatizes the betrayal, trial, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The final act draws the entire audience back into the church where the singing and dancing takes on the qualities of a gospel music concert with lengthy improvisations and spirited audience response.

The performance was thoroughly captivating. On a single wavelength, the play moved from sad and sublime to comic and satiric, then to celebrative and festive, while the audience went from long periods of solemn silence to outrageous laughter and finally to revivalist involvement — clapping their hands, shouting, and singing along with the cast. Actually, experiencing the audience was almost tantamount to experiencing the play. Contiguous to the encounter with the sound of traditional gospel music, “perfected” by professionals, Vinnette Carroll has done an excellent job of dramatizing the environment where that sound continues to live and grow — the black church. A large part of the audience “witnessed” recognition of familiar dance steps and rallying calls — waving their hands, shouting “Praise the Lord” and “Amen” to such evocation as the Preacher’s “Can I Get a Witness!”

The music of the late Alex Bradford is tremendous. The choreography of Talley Beatty is excellent. The interpretation produced by Vinnette Carroll is tasteful and inoffensive. The message to the audience is entertainment and it does come through.

Patti Labelle is outstanding, regardless of the character she happens to be singing — Pilate’s wife, a townswoman, the Preacher, etc. The noted disco artist sounds like she has been singing gospel music all of her career. She brings the special star quality to the play. She sings hard and obviously puts everything she’s got into her performance. She’s versatile and substantive. She also makes good transitions from the solo spot back to the group and vice versa. She’s exciting and energetic and she improvises like a pro. Her heavily improvised “I Love You So Much Jesus” sounds like professional traditional gospel — not disco or R&B.

The supporting cast is as talented as the star. Going from Labelle to another soloist — notably Nora Cole and L. Michael Gray — renders no lessening of emotional engrossment or setback to a lower level of entertainment. The timing and delivery of the whole group is impressive. Their interpretive choreography is fit and emotionally satisfying. Of exceptional quality is the frantically dance of Judas and later the heart-piercing cry and dance at the scene of Mary over the body of Jesus.

The final song, “The Band,” could have been shortened at least to half, for it was somewhat redundant and became tiresome. They simply held on a little too long. Other than this, the play was spectacular.

— J.E. Johnson
The Fabulous Thunderbirds
At Jimmy's
January 16, 1982

Just a reminder that the hottest band in the country made another, all-too-infrequent stop in New Orleans and rocked the house.

It might have been cold outside but inside the sparks were really flying. The Blue Vipers opened the evening with some stunning rockabilly that served to warm up the growing throng.

By the time the Thunderbirds took the stage, the dance floor was already jam-packed. Kim Wilson’s harp cut like a knife, opening with a driving instrumental that was propelled by Jimmy Vaughan’s singing guitar licks. The group stuck primarily to material from their three albums.

I was particularly impressed, though, with two numbers I’d never heard covered before, “You Humbuggin’ Me,” and “Date Bait.” Wilson’s soaring harp continued to amaze the audience, and it seemed to bring the best out of bassist Keith Ferguson and drummer Frank Marti.

Seeing the Thunderbirds live is as exciting as it was to see Muddy and the Howlin’ Wolf back when they were in their prime. And that’s no bull.

Of late the Thunderbirds have been working on a new album in between barnstorming the South, so we might soon have something to hold us over until they sweep back to town. —Almost Slim

Kabsha
Idris Muhammad
Theresa 110

The latest record from Idris Muhammad shows that the New Orleans drummer has reached an important point in his career. While commercial success is nothing new to Idris, it was not until the making of Kabsha that he was able to play jazz while having the creative control as group leader and producer. The result is a high energy, heavily bop influenced, polyrhythmic session with saxophonists Pharoah Sanders and George Coleman, and bassist Ray Drummond.

While it may be true that Muhammad was responsible for liberating the New Orleans rock beat from the Crescent City confines, and that Larry Williams, Dee Clark, Jerry Butler, Lou Donaldson and Emerson, Lake and Palmer have benefited from his feeling for intricate rhythms, his true element is the music on Kabsha.

The format he has chosen is noteworthy. I find records by sax, bass and drum trios compelling because the group has to work harder to make up for the absence of piano. Kabsha is no exception. The difference here is that while the sax usually picks up much of the slack on other such trio sessions, here the drums take a melodic stance as well as keeping the rhythm bouncing. Coleman and Sanders are not given complete reign of
melody on these tracks. This makes these two musicians excellent choices for Kabsha. While they are both superb improvisors, neither adheres well to restrictions of easily defined melody.

"GCCB Blues" is a straight ahead bop number featuring both saxmen playing melody in tandem, then trading solos. This and the title track are my favorites. "Kabsha" is in 6/8 meter with a swirling, circular rhythm where Idris displays ultimate prowess as a rhythm king. Coleman plays tenor on "Kabsha."

Another highlight is a soulful version of Billy Eckstine's "I Want to Talk About You." Sanders' warm tone and Drummond's rich sound are winning ingredients here.

Kabsha is a product of Theresa Records. Theresa is a young label with an impressive roster of quality jazz artists. It is one of the few West Coast labels concerned with acoustic mainstream jazz not aimed at the sleepy time set. Idris Muhammad and Theresa Records are a winning combination. Muhammad can also be heard on Lou Donaldson's recent Sweet Papa Lou in good form and in a more traditional bop mode.

—Brad Palmer

High Energy Design
New Jazz Quintet
E-WEB 0181

The first album by New Orleans' own New Jazz Quintet fits comfortably into the category of jazz-rock fusion. Immediately evident upon listening to High Energy Design is that it does not fit comfortably next to most jazz-rock fusion records released today, but rises above them. While the reasons for this are elusive, a great deal of the album's success here is due to the synthesis of fine talent and tasteful production, with an emphasis on subtlety and a high degree of sincerity. Most American fusion bands would be fortunate to have any one of these qualities.

What came to me next while listening to this music was the way electronic instrumentation is used. Electronics here are not a gimmick for making strange noises, but a way of delving into new musical experiences. While the experiences are not always new to the medium or the listener, they are obviously new to the NJQ as a unit, and the music remains enjoyable.

High Energy Design is a misleading title for these tracks. The energy throughout the album is constantly driving and well directed, but is not of a raw, relentless electrification, as might be suggested to most people by the title. The rhythms are surprisingly simple, considering the array of percussion effects used. Here is where the above mentioned subtlety is evident. The percussion tracks are mixed down so as not to be overbearing. There is also a welcome absence of handclapping. The rhythms become more complex and the energy level rises during the final three tracks on side two. This side is also characterized by uninter-
rupted flow from one selection to the next.

The most predominant rock influences are the electric guitars of George Scott and Lonnie Morris. Morris' melody notes are slurred in a style that is common to the rock idiom, as are Scott's driving rhythms. Scott also uses a 12-string acoustic to good advantage on "A Song for Nellie," and on my favorite, "Distant Horizon."

Harold Scott's bass has a clear, bold, gutsy sound that is the product of the musician in the studio and not engineers in the control room. This brings up an important point mentioned briefly above. *High Energy Design* was recorded at the Ultrasonic Studios in New Orleans. Whether intentionally or not, engineers George Hallowell and Jay Gallagher produced a clean, upfront sound that is not bigger than life. While the "bigger than life" sound may be desired at times for rock, and allowable for classical, jazz music loses its soul when it is too slick.

The liner notes say that the NJQ was formed for the pleasure of playing music other than top 40. Actually, the tunes here are quite accessible in spite of their musical merit. Several of the cuts would be welcome additions to WYLD-FM's format.

The New Jazz Quintet has much growth and exploration ahead. *High Energy Design* shows a group with great potential in the area of the recently emerging punk-jazz idiom. Punk jazz is a raw, electric jazz-rock with highly improvised melodies and a pulsating bass and rhythm. Recent work by Jaco Pastorius and Charles "Bobo" Shaw falls into this style.

*High Energy Design* is a recommended album for jazz-rock fusion fans, and particularly for those who are dissatisfied with most of the bland fusion on record today.

—Brad Palmer

**Badfinger**

**At the Third Dimension**

**December 17, 1981**

Even though it was the coldest night of the year as yet, the scene was hot at Richie's Third Dimension. They came to see and hear the living legend of Badfinger. Although there was only one original member that carries on the name, the new members did not disappoint the Badfinger fans. Joey Molland, lead guitar and vocals from Scotland; Larry Lee, bass and vocals from Los Angeles; and Bobby D. Wickland, drums, from Los Angeles, led the crowd through the legend of what was to what is now! The response to songs such as "If You Want It, Here It Is," "Day After Day," "Falling In Love," "Love Is Gonna Come At Last," "I've Got You," and "No More" was one of enthusiasm.

They are a very warm and talented group and these characteristics overflowed onto the stage. They presented not only feeling but enduring songs old and new. The delivery was one of tight arrangements and vocal continuity. I found the spirit of show-
manship and their obvious love of performing very refreshing.

Joey Mollard, founder of Badfinger, is a frequent visitor to New Orleans and says, “It’s a magic town, purely magic.” One of the things he wanted to see this trip was one of our very own pumping stations. (?) Yes, I questioned that, too.

Watch out for their new LP Say No More with featured cuts “Three-Time Loser,” “I’ve Got You,” and “No More.”

— Kathleen Austin

The King of Boogie Woogie
Albert Ammons
Blues Classics 27

This is a valuable and excellent collection put together by Chris Strachwitz. All I can say is thanks because anyone who tries to put the late Albert Ammons name into the forefront is my hero.

Here, a collection of 1939 piano solos is mixed with piano and rhythm accompaniment from 1946-1949. Ammons blends a strong left hand with a dazzling virtuoso right hand pounding out incredible things. You don’t hear runs and trills like this anymore.

Ammons was definitely an impact on the New Orleans style of piano, as Allen Toussaint admitted last month, and as anyone can gauge who compares early Domino cuts with Ammons.

This is a powerhouse from beginning to end and should be heard by anyone who likes to hear a keyboard sizzle or wants to hear the true roots of boogie-woogie. — Almost Slim

WRNO FM-100
The Rock Album
Starstream BMC-80124
B-97 FM Crescent City Jam
Pacer 8106

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that two New Orleans record stations decided to put out compilation LPs featuring local musicians, since most people agree that our area is full of talented but unrecorded bands. But, despite the fact that most of these bands are not ready to record complete albums, the effect of this kind of record is often simply that of a grab-bag of songs related only by locality. There’s also a temptation when judging a new band by just one song to make a note of their main influences and move on. Neither of these albums has completely solved these and other problems inherent in the format, and I personally find it hard to believe that these tracks were the best choices available. Still both stations deserve credit for trying, and for keeping the price low (about $4). And if your favorite band is on either record, you’ll probably want to pick one up.

The WRNO album is perhaps the more consistent of the two. If you’re like me, you were expecting to hear a whole album of heavy hard rock, the type of music that is this
station's bread and butter. There certainly is a good deal of that here, courtesy of Roulette, 24K, Persia, Bittersweet, and Diamond. The songs by Roulette, whose "Without a Second Thought" is probably the best cut on the album, and 24K even show some flair, a good sign in a genre that encourages facelessness. But there are other types of music represented, especially on the first side, where there are few interesting quieter numbers. Reunion's "Long, Long Time" is a midtempo song, a sort of throwback to the period of Gary Puckett, B.J. Thomas, or the Buchanians. That is not intended as criticism; it's just that it's the kind of thing you don't hear much of anymore. And the saxophone on Davis' ballad "The Door" and the harmonica-based arrangement of Full Contact's "Sometimes in Life" contrast nicely with the usual guitar-dominated material. Included on side two are some examples of newer styles. The Raffey's "Fat Chance" is not a bad song, but the recording makes it sound more dinky than it really is. This is the kind of sound that makes hard rockers think of pop music as a wimp-out. And Sexdogs' "I'm in Love (With the Girl Who's in Love With My Wife)" is the kind of song that would sound out of place on any album.

The overall musical impression this record leaves is fairly positive, but two things make it slightly distasteful. The first is the indiscriminate misogyny of almost all the lyrics. I know this is not really unusual and that it is accepted as the received wisdom of the rock tradition, but still it's no excuse. Second, and even worse, is the aura of self-promotion the album exudes. WRNO's purpose, stated in the liner notes, is "to give airplay and exposure to what we feel are some of the best bands in the New Orleans area." But instead of photos or information about the bands, we get a picture of program director Michael Costello. We also get a prefab opening cut called "We are the Rock" and, at the end of the record, an interminable recording of the station's disc jockey patter from 1967 to the present. Do they really think anyone wants to hear this on an album they paid money for? Give us a break.

The music on B-97's Crescent City Jam is more professional in some ways. Most of the material here is slick mainstream stuff, ranging from accomplished pop (the Topcats, Carl Michaels) through journeyman rock (The Sheiks, Next) to mindless sludge (Jessika, the Crave). Much of this is simply not very interesting. But the rest of the record consists of what are basically novelty songs: Henrietta's "Living in the Vieux Carre," the Cold's "Three Chord City," and the Lost Boys' annoying "My Name is Lance-lot." And the last two of these are already available as singles. The only thing that really stands out here is "Signal 30" by RZA, admitted one of my favorite bands, and even it soundsthin since it was recorded quickly and only intended for use as a demo.

Both stations have plans to issue follow-up albums in the future. Maybe next time they'll surprise us and tap the city's undiscovered musical talent more successfully.

- Steve Alleman
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CRAZED New Yorker lusted for a copy of the Wild Magnolias' album (the one reissued in Europe). Will pay for a new copy, a used one in good shape, or a cassette copy. Won't somebody please have mercy and give up some of that good music? Thank you. Steven Stein, 821 Union St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215. Write soon or I'll die.

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WAVELENGTH/FEBRUARY 1982
Li'l Queenie and the Percolators have unveiled a new show, with some new tunes and some of the best of the old Percolator standbys. We hear they're dedicating the show to new fans and old managers... The Raffers are scheduled to release a four-song cassette tape by late February. These cassettes are all the rage in other parts of the globe these days. They don't get you radio play, but the production cost is low and your fans can afford to hear you while they drive... The new group you saw opening for the Cold at Jimmy's last month was Hit and Run...

Channel 26's Homegrown series continues to prosper. Currently in the works are a segment on the Percolators and two country and western shows to be filmed at the Hired Hand Saloon. Washboard Leo may appear in one of the C&W programs. Check your listings... Singer-songwriter Lucinda Williams will be making an appearance at Tupelo's Tavern on February 25. She'll be performing songs from her second album on Folkways Records, Lucinda... Also on tap for the Tavern in February is Joe Ely, the wild man from Buddy Holly's hometown who on his last tour here favored the fans with several hot New Orleans rock and roll numbers. As Rhodes Spedale would say, "Recommended!"... Speaking of rock and roll, the folks at Sir John's are turning the club into a two-story rock and roll complex with live music four nights a week. The kick off for all this mayhem is Mardi Gras.

Jazz fans: tune in to WWNO on the last Friday of each month for the Musician's Hour, actually a two-hour show (but who's counting) featuring an interview with a local jazz personality in which the star spins platters of the musicians he admires and who influenced him. First up: jazz bassist Jim Singleton... Mr. Allen Fontenot, who long ago proved he could light up a dial with his Cajun radio shows, will grace WSDL in Slidell every Saturday morning 8:30-10:30 beginning Saturday, February 6.

Congratulations to pianist John Murphy, associate professor of music at Loyola, who will make his debut at Carnegie Hall February 16. Gilbert Hetherwick promises "not the same but more than ever you dreamed" with the Gilbert Hetherwick Story Part II at Tipitina's February 10.

The Old Absinthe Bar is reinstituting its open jam session policy. Musicians are invited to come down and jam anytime... New Orleans combo Chocolate Milk is getting national chart attention with their latest RCA release Blue Jeans. Billboard, Record World and Cashbox are carrying it. Shelly... Shelley Pape, a mainstay of black radio in New Orleans for the past year, has left WNNR and returned to his home in Birmingham where he first became known as Sputnik Shelley... King Floyd is back in action working the Carolinas and Kansas City. An Atlantic recording contract is in the works... There is lots of talk of recording contracts this month, two involve two of our favorite New Orleans vocalists (no, it's not who you think).

Look out, world! Mr. Zigaboo Modeliste, one of the great drummers of our (or any) time, has reorganized the Meters and might even change the name. Last time we saw them they were David Torkelson, keyboards; Gerald Tillman, keyboards; Nick Daniels, bass; Renard Poche, guitar; and Willie West, vocals, in addition to Zig's drumming and singing and all-around emceeing... The Drapes will be back in town February 9.

Mr. Joe "You Talk Too Much" Jones called from California the other day to tell us we were mistaken last month when we listed him as one of the many musicians who had worked with Allen Toussaint. Mr. Jones says it ain't so. Sorry.

Shells and Radiators were in Chicago last month in time for the coldest Chicago winter on record. When we talked to the Shells, it was 70 below with wind chill. If ever Chicago needed the Radiators!... The Red Rockers are touring again... Cafe Conti, former home of My Good Friend Rodney's and Casablanca, is now home of the Newz (formerly the Look). The band will be playing every Friday night this month and Mardi Gras weekend. Check it out... Also worth checking, Douglas Bourgeois' paintings, featuring local and national musical luminaries.

LeRoux has closed a deal with RCA. The band's in Knight Studios with Kidz, a new wave group made up of Ronnie Holly, vocals; Kenny Jay, vocals; Mark Whitaker, drums; Vincel Foli, guitar and vocal harmony, and Sammy Bardo, bass. Speaking of Knight, you can get college credit for a course in Audio Technology that's taught at the studio through Delgado. Ed Waller teaches the 95-hour course... John Rankin has decided to forgo Nashville and stay here in town... Anson Funderburgh's new album on Blacktop Records sold out in three weeks. It's being re-pressed now.

Red Beans and Rice Revue, the Lafayette band with the best logo in the state, has a new album out, Wanna Dance? The band promises to be back in town soon... Coca-Cola is promising a summer concert series this year... The fifth most requested song on WEZB these days is the Shells' "What Does It Take?" off the B-97 album. I guess you answered your own question, guys... Man about town Rick Arsenstein, formerly of WTUL and concert promoter extraordinaire, is now promotional coordinator for New Orleans Booking Agency.
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