Wavelength (May 1981)

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YEAH?! BUT YA CAN'T BRING IN NO ICECHESTS DIS YEAR!!
Wavelength
May 1981 Volume 1 Number 7

Features
New Orleans Now __________________ 4
Neville Brothers __________________ 5
New Leviathan __________________ 7
Dave Bartholomew __________________ 9
Ron Cuccia ____________________ 11
Ramsey McLean 13
The Producers 15
New Orleans for Beginners 17
Jazz Fest Recommended 22
Walter Washington 24

Departments
Rare Records ____________________________ 28
May ____________________________ 29
Reviews ____________________________ 31
Last Page ____________________________ 38

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WAVELENGTH/MAY 1981
New Orleans is a city famous for its strong musical past. From the beginning of jazz to the city's successful R&B years in the Fifties and Sixties, the city of New Orleans has been synonymous with good music.

At no time is this more evident than during the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage festival. Each year, the festival is a celebration of our local music heritage. Though the festival continues to showcase more and more national acts, the main reason for its national and international acceptance is that it features the music of New Orleans.

In recent years, however, the success of the city's artists has been minimal on a national level, despite a growth and solidification of the local music scene. As fewer of our local hits reached the national charts, more and more the citizens of New Orleans have come to appreciate their rich musical heritage.

But there is activity in the New Orleans community today, as well as excitement, anticipation, and a renewed confidence in success. New Orleans is ready to take a step into the present. Our city is not only the home of some of the greatest musicians of the past, but also the home of new, innovative artists, building on their musical roots, yet refining the sound to make it uniquely their own.

In this issue, we proudly present five examples of New Orleans today, each from a different area of music, each with a brand new album to present to the country. For all of you who loved the New Orleans music of the past, we cordially invite you to get ready for New Orleans Now.

Patrick Berry
Publisher
At tempted to define the New Orleans idea of culture, a National Geographic reporter once proposed as an example thereof the case of a "famous French Quarter restaurant" (presumably Galatoire's) that had originally housed a barber shop. When the restaurant was destroyed by fire, claimed the writer, it was rebuilt not as a restaurant but as a barber shop converted into a restaurant. Culture and nothing but, the scribe pronounced.

True to this peculiar scheme (and certainly as beneficial to local culture as Galatoire's) are the Neville Brothers—Art, Aaron, Charles and Cyril. On June 24, A&M Records will release internationally the Nevilles' second album, which according to manager Bill Johnston will most likely be called Fire On The Bayou.

Wait a minute! Wasn't there a Meters album featuring a couple of these very same brothers, shown on the cover amidst a selection of burning palmetto bushes? And wasn't this album called Fire On The Bayou?

Yeah and so what? The Meters disc sold in the thousands—A&M has platinum things in mind for this one. Art Neville is only half-joking when he says "I'm already rich and I'm already famous. This one's gonna make me money."

Recorded at Studio In The Country in Bogalusa (with additional work done at Sea-Saint in New Orleans and Atlantic in New York), the record certainly seems a highly marketable commodity. There's Aaron Neville doing a stunning reprise of Nat "King" Cole's "Mona Lisa"; new and appropriately volatile versions of "Fire On The Bayou," "Hey Pocky-Way" and "Brother John"; a modernized "Run Joe" (first recorded by Louis Jordan) and a Neville-ized "Sitting In Limbo" (previously the property of Jimmy Cliff).

Joel Dorn was enlisted as producer for this project with engineering handled by Gene Paul, son of the man who lent his name to what is perhaps the most desirable electric guitar in the world. Wardell Quezergue contributed his usual exemplary charts and a basic rhythm section of Leo Nocentelli (guitar), David Barard (bass) and Herman Ernest (drums) was augmented by such heavyweights as saxophonist David "Fathead" Newman, vocalist Cissy Houston (accompanied by her daughter), percussionist Ralph McDonald, the acapella Persuasions and old friend Dr. John.

A future issue of Wavelength will be devoted to the Neville clan—in the meantime, you won't want to miss the group's live debut of their album material, in person at the Civic Theatre May 8 and 9. This will be the Neville's first local appearance in several weeks (a blitzkrieg of the Lone Star State, among other things, has been keeping them away) and as might be expected, it will not be the most sedate of affairs.

Also on the bill will be the Wild Tchoupitoulas, Ivan Neville and the Uptown All-Stars, Ron Cuccia and the Big Tomato Band featuring the Mystics and Fort Worth's Juke Jumpers with Johnny Reno, perhaps the sharpest dresser that side of the Red River, on saxophone. A visit to New Orleans without an evening devoted to the Neville Brothers is like um, Gretna without the jet fighter monument or McKenzie's commercials without Dick Bruce chewing on a hunk of lethal "Black-Out" cake. Enough talk—let's dance!
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The Plaza in Lake Forest
New Leviathan Oriental Foxtrot Orchestra

By Yorke Corbin

O, New Orleans is a Great big old Southern town Where hospitality You will surely find. The population there Is very, very fair, With everything to do— White folks do it too.

—G. W. Thomas

"New Orleans Hop Scotch Blues"

Garden District matrons step lively to the music, swirl to brisk and airy tunes, sporting cocktail party finery and caring not one whit if the ceiling fans overhead or the heady pace of the dance muss their elegant coiffures. Their husbands, freshened up after a Friday at the law firm or the brokerage house, act stiffer, box-step gamely amid the giddy whirl. Younger couples—the kind that advertising twerps call "upscale"—drain their glasses of Chablis and join their elders on the floor. A sprinkling of hipper types is also in evidence and—surprise!—they aren't all young: a white-bearded gent, natty as can be, cutting a dashing figure, leads his partner in a saucy step as the orchestra sails into a jaunty rag.

The orchestra: decked out in formal attire, engrossed in their playing, they call up simultaneously two moments in time: Thirtyish baby-boomers (most of them) with whiskers and mutton-chops and gold-rimmed glasses, they have the look of a society band photographed in the early part of this century—1918 and 1981 join hands and dance. All New Orleans loves a time warp, and the New Leviathan Oriental Foxtrot Orchestra stands ready to provide one.

With the release of a new album, I Didn't Mean To Say Goodbye, set for early May, the orchestra should be heard well beyond the bounds of the Garden District, and the New Leviathan's links to the musical tradition of New Orleans will be readily apparent. The album (on the orchestra's own Camel Race label) presents music by New Orleans songwriters who were contemporaries of the early jazzmen. It's the orchestra's fourth album since its inception in 1972, and a more serious musical effort than the campy hijinks of the first three. Based on reconstructions of original scores—most of which were turned up through the researches of Jack Stewart, a woodwind player and founding member—I Didn't Mean To Say Goodbye documents a style of popular music that has almost dropped out of the historical record, but which helped shape the seminal period of New Orleans music. In its own eccentric way, the album joins the others discussed in this issue in redefining the musical tradition of this city.

The record is a zesty romp as well, a quality that comes across clearly in the conversation of the New Leviathan's most visible member—singer and banjoist George Schmidt, also well known as a New Orleans painter and gadabout. He plays, however, with some serious ideas. "The album," Schmidt begins, "is a collection of songs that were written in New Orleans by a group of very obscure songwriters. The way we've handled it before—on the Old King Tut record and From New Orleans to Constantinople on the S.S. Leviathan—we played a sort of pseudo-musicological game; the orchestra thought of playing the music with a tongue-in-cheek attitude of reviving music that you would not consider worth reviving: the oriental fox-trot. The new record is closer to home. You couldn't find anything to kid about.

"It's a local record. The songwriters on it never really made it to the success they deserved; they had a group existence from about 1910 to 1923. What they represent was a New Orleans contribution to popular music. At that time New Orleans had a viable popular music community—it's beginning to have it again—of nationally known songwriters, around the time of World War I. It was at that same time that the particular music called jazz music was flourishing in the city.

"These people associated with it in a sort of a peripheral way—songwriters like Nick Clelli and Irwin LeClair, some of whom were white and some of whom were black. The main black composer on this record is a man named Armand Piron, who shows up in relation to black music also in a peripheral way. What we're dealing with is people who never really made it."

"Do you kid these people? Do you make fun of them? Because there really is kind of a tragedy involved in their obscurity. But in a way, their music kids itself.
"These people had their toe in the door of commercial success. Their music wasn’t jazz—it wasn’t the earthy jazz music; it was more like popular music, but within it, it held a kind of New Orleans sound. If you listen to these orchestrations—there’s something there. There’s a certain swing to it that even Irving Berlin didn’t have. Even the lyrics, which are a kind of extra-musical thing—they’re all about the bitterness of love. And the song titles: ‘Someday You’ll Want Me and I Won’t Want You,’ ‘I Didn’t Mean to Say Goodbye.’ A real melancholy approach, and a very sophisticated approach. Maybe you could say it was a product of the war-time, but I don’t think so; I think it had to do with the cynical or laissez-faire attitude in New Orleans.

Putting his finger on the musical pulse of New Orleans, Schmidt takes a cultural reading that parallels a theory proposed by another student of the city, the surrealist photographer Clarence John Laughlin. Laughlin speculates that the beauty of New Orleans flowers in the face of death; he contends that the city, surrounded by a pestilential swamp, knew the fact of death on intimate terms, and evolved a culture of peculiar beauty in order to deal with that fact. Fever could sweep the city, strewing bodies in the streets; because of the swampiness of the soil, dead bodies had to be intered in tombs above the ground. The physical presence of death was inescapable—and so was the cultural imperative to transmute that presence into art. Laughlin has devoted many years of work to photographing the art of tombs.

Music is the lifeblood of New Orleans. The archetypal New Orleans song, “When the Saints Go Marchin’ In,” stands in just the relation to death that Laughlin attributes to New Orleans culture in general; so does the practice of secondlining, in the original sense of the term: once the fact of death has been acknowledged in the burial rites, the band that led the funeral procession breaks into a joyous march, and the “second line” of mourners behind it begins to dance. To take a phrase from the poet Yeats, it’s “gaiety transfiguring all that dread.”

Schmidt offers another explanation of the “sinister sound or intention” of the music, not incompatible with Laughlin’s view of the culture. “It's possible that it was the linkage with the Red Light District, which had an enormous effect not just on the jazz, but on the songwriters. There was money to be made, because of the district and because of the vaudeville theaters. You could walk out of Lulu White’s, for instance, and it was only a hop, skip and a jump to the Orpheum or the Dauphine.

“This place really was a center of music. It wasn’t just whorehouse music or underground music; the music did surface here. The whites weren’t playing Irving Berlin—they were playing Nick Clessi.”

Music, like corpses, just won’t rest underground in this town. More than that, the whorehouses of Storyville fed off not only the traditional decadence of New Orleans—part of what Laughlin sees as the death cultures—but also the presence of the U.S. Navy, part of the national military build-up of the World War I era, another possible explanation for the “melancholy approach” that Schmidt discerns in the music on the album. As all the scholarly diddling over the birth of jazz has demonstrated, there is no single explanation for the musical force that emanated from this city in the early part of this century; by recording some of the peripheral music of the period (and appending carefully researched historical liner notes) the New Leviathan has brought the contributions of some talented songwriters, mostly white ones, into focus, adding new detail to the historical picture. One point that emerges is that cultural transactions between blacks and whites took place all along the line, as many forces came together here to produce a musical explosion that made history.

The New Leviathan presents a new generation with an album of music for celebration, songs from a great period in New Orleans history. "You realize," George Schmidt exclaims, "what a fabulous city this was! My God, it was an exotic phenomenon! Like Florence, it came all together and produced something. There was a unity of experience that produces art. There was a permissiveness in the air that allowed things to happen. It was the Belle Epoque!" I Didn’t Mean to Say Goodbye recalls New Orleans then, and its spirit of cultural communion provides a healthy lesson for New Orleans now.
For Dave Bartholomew, who has stared in the face of both musical and commercial success for over three decades, the business at hand is one of packaging familiar tunes in the style that spawned him—traditional jazz.

Because he has accomplished virtually everything he ever set out to do in the music business, Bartholomew has no reason to aim for the stars. With more production credits under his belt than any other local recording figure, plus a song catalog that numbers in the thousands, he can afford to limit his work load to spending a few weeks out of the year with Fats Domino, whose band he still leads, and infrequently issuing a record of his own, currently *Dave Bartholomew and His New Orleans Jazz Band*.

"We're not working too hard, and that's one of the reasons I like it," says the man whose productions for the Imperial label reputedly sold in the neighborhood of 100 million records. It is easy to understand why, after spending nearly half his life in the recording studio, he has little desire to return to the constant toil that resulted in the most definitive rock 'n' roll sound ever captured in a studio.

But it doesn't mean that he shies away from reflecting on those years. "At one time," he says, "I produced for three different labels. I produced 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy' for Specialty. I did 'I'm Gone' by Shirley & Lee for Aladdin. and I did my own tune, 'Country Boy,' for DeLuxe.

"But we were satisfied with Imperial. We were making millions of dollars, so we didn't branch out much.

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**Dave Bartholomew**

*By Vincent Fumar*

We had as much as we could handle. We had a one-man operation at the time, in that Lew Chudd owned the label himself and didn't want to expand. But he believed in me. I didn't know back then that I had the talent to produce all of those big sellers.

"I remember once when Ahmet Ertegun from Atlantic came into town and he heard 'Hook, Line and Sinker' by Smiley Lewis. Ertegun was a good friend of Chudd's, but he said, 'Why don't you let me have the publishing on that tune?' I said, 'Ain't no way. I work for Lew Chudd.' I ran the record company for him, and I wouldn't do anything wrong. I ran the company like it was my own money."
Sitting in his Galvez Street office, he seems thankful that his studio trips are now rare ones, and that recording technology has changed things.

"All of the extra tracks are very good for the musicians. Don't forget that all of Fats' big hits were made on two tracks. Years ago at Cosimo's old place, the J&M Music Shop, we'd sometimes go into the studio at nine or ten in the morning and we wouldn't get out until midnight, because we couldn't get a sound, the board wasn't right or the musicians weren't right. Or we'd have to tell the drummer to bear down more.

"As for the things I did under my own name, I wouldn't necessarily do extra takes on my own vocals because I felt I couldn't do it any better. I've had tunes I've done 30 takes on, my own tunes. The takes I would send to the company in Los Angeles weren't always like the takes I'd keep for myself."

As for those who copied his band sound and production style, he recalls "They would all come down here. Sometimes I'd leave the studio and come back to find somebody saying to Cosimo, 'Let me hear what Bartholomew did.' I knew they were listening to this material and getting ideas. I'd never object to it as long as they didn't steal anything. I knew that I was original. I was just lucky to have such a good band that I could pass my ideas on to."

Bartholomew today maintains a low profile, except for his performances with Domino and an occasional gig with his own band. His new album continues to illustrate the direct link between traditional jazz and rock 'n' roll.

"Music has changed," he says, "But basically I'm playing the same thing. Actually, what defines a tune is the background. I could play one thing with a band riff behind me and it's dixieland. But if I got a swinging drummer or a swinging piano player doing different-type chords, then it's swinging jazz.

"The new album is just a dixieland thing we did. We're just going to sell it mainly in these shops around town. We do a couple of traditional things on it. We also do things like 'Blueberry Hill,' 'I'm Walking' and 'Let the Four Winds Blow.' For me right now, dixieland is it. Also swinging jazz. I'll be between the two."
Ron Cuccia

By Yorke Corbin

A song can be seen,
A song can be felt,
A good song can make that ol' Devil's heart melt.

So roll back the rock,
I'm ready to ring.
Whistlin' thru the graveyard
Just a tryin' to sing.

—Ron Cuccia
"Tryin' To Sing"

Easter Sunday of last year saw Ron Cuccia step forth onto the stage of the Contemporary Arts Center with the earliest versions of the songs and poems that appear, polished to a high gloss, on his new album, Music From The Big Tomato; accompanying him were most of the musicians who come together to form his Big Tomato Band (names like Vidacovich, Singleton, Sieberth, which appear in other contexts in this issue), as well as the Youth Inspirational Choir, the gospel ensemble led by Lois Dejean. The evening was electric; the performance, inspired. The concert was a glorious mess—hundreds of things went wrong, a hundred more went right.

Flashing gaudy finery to set off his swarthy, satanic look, Cuccia could have been one of Jean Lafitte's pirates, fresh in from Barataria for some New Orleans action. The action that Easter was up on stage, as Cuccia and his cohorts delivered a performance that, in a media center like New York, would likely have sent the critics reeling. At the climax of the show, Cuccia grasped the microphone, began a speech about bringing God's music and the devil's music together. Lois Dejean, never one to be upstaged, responded. "Ron," she sweetly instructed him, "it's all God's music."

Sober reflection finds that a dubious proposition, and a reliable observer recovers from reeling. Yet this point remains clear after a year's passage: the essence of Cuccia's art involves bringing disparate elements into the cultural gumbo. The second side of his new album presents his "creation suite," which comprises a jazz poem and two songs. A soaring gospel number, "Create Yourself" (on which the Youth In-
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spirational Choir makes its presence felt), leads into a long, ambitious poem, "Enter: The Dream." Backed by the most sustained jazz blowing on the album, Cuccia steals a line from Whitman, then whips out a Ginsbergenic string of images depicting the no-call values of a bankrupt society. Against moral bankruptcy, Cuccia invokes imaginative freedom, which he fleshes out in starkly threatening form:

"Behind this charming rogue,
Center to this illusive romancer
is a high
and haughty master, and
When the mask comes down, the
whip goes up.

Fear of freedom resolves itself in the jaunty "Tryin' To Sing," which recapitulates, in pop terms, his struggle to transform himself into an effective singer as well as public poet. (He shares lead vocals on the album with Lise Cousineau, John Magnie, and Lois Dejean.)

A paradigmatic Orleanian both in his sense of style and in his propensity to mix stylistic influences, Ron Cuccia shows how deep his roots go in a third trait: he just may be the most sophisticated lyricist to emerge in New Orleans since the World War I era that George Schmidt of the New Leviathan talks about somewhere in this issue, the years characterized by, among other things, classy songwriter bandleaders with names like Nick Clessi.

New Orleans music seems more sophisticated now than it has for quite some time. Cuccia's work reflects that sophistication, and in fact shapes some of it. No one else is doing what Ron Cuccia does. Comparisons can be made—black New Orleans poets like Kalamu ya Salaam sometimes perform with jazz musicians, as have bohemians like Kenneth Patchen and Lawrence Ferlinghetti in New York or San Francisco; but Cuccia's style is unique.

He has also learned to portray himself as a character, a trickster out of pop mythology; and with meticulous egotism, he creates himself as an artist. Fusing those modes, Cuccia confides that "I used to shoot dope better than anybody, cleaner and quicker. It was how I defined myself; it was a particular art. The way that I fold handkerchiefs, when I take them out of the dryer, is a Zen art. Art is transformation.”
Ramsey McLean
By Yorke Corbin

Jazz composer and bassist Ramsey McLean recorded most of his new album live at the Faubourg, the classy Marigny club where he and his band, the Lifers, have blazed every Saturday night for the past year. Over that period the band—which comprises the driving drummer Al Fielder, synthesizer and piano professor Larry Sieberth, and saxophone hero Tony Dagradi—has fused into a consistent exciting ensemble, and the four players have refined their music in the fire. Ramsey produced the record himself, in association with Al Fielder. It's the first Lifers album, and it represents years of musical evolution as well as months of careful planning. Working on a stringent budget, Ramsey and the band thought their music through, put together a set of experimental jazz that presents a concise artistic statement, walked onto the stage of the Faubourg and cut the album.

Once they'd set their music down on tape, they relaxed, improvised a final piece for the fun of it. Going over the tape, Ramsey found that, with the excision of some preliminary noodling, the spontaneous piece emerged as a beautifully balanced composition—totally improvised, spectacularly weird. It's the final number on the record, and the circumstances of its composition exemplify Ramsey McLean's esthetic as perfectly as the title of the album expresses his artistic credo: History's Made Every Moment.

Ramsey made up that title on the spot, in response to a listener's question between taping sessions at the Faubourg. His original title was New Orleans Now, which Wavelength appropriated as the banner for this issue. Bassist, bandleader, composer and statesman of jazz, Ramsey McLean steps forth as an exemplary artist. The way to take Ramsey is straight, which is the way the second part of this article presents him.

What's intended is a journalistic equivalent for the new musical style that Ramsey has initiated to supplant secondlining. It's called hardlining. Here's Ramsey:

I look to this record to communicate to as many people as possible, to put the music that we've been doing in a codified form that can be heard and understood. You can tell somebody about it, or deal with it in the privacy of your own home—where you don't have distractions and you can concentrate and you can hear it. It'll really be enjoyable and will help your understanding of everything you do in life. That's why it was recorded, as a registration of what we're doing right now.

We could have done this at any time in the last, say, five years. One thing I want to say is that because Alvin Fielder was willing to be of help and assistance, it happened. I was ready to do it, but I didn't think I could do it by myself, and Alvin said he'd help me. I was wanting—I wasn't waiting, I was wanting; I've been waiting too long.

It was always there; I always wanted to do it. I talked to Anthony Braxton, and he told me that the wisest thing I could do was to make a record myself, instead of sitting around trying to get a deal with a record company, for the simple reason that they're into squandering millions of dollars on flop acts for the sake of getting one act that sells 25 million records. The direction of the industry at this point is to spend untold amounts of money on just bullshit in hopes of getting one thing out of that bullshit that connects. Whereas, even though jazz records sell less in volume, you can still actually make money; you're just not looking at such-and-such an investment and such-and-such a profit, which is what the industry is geared to. That's why the quality has gone down so much: the quality of the players and the quality of the concept of music.

To just cop to the lowest common denominator—hey, that's what's retarding the growth of the universe. It's not a question of art; it's about your responsibilities as the person you're claiming to be. If you're just claiming to be an asshole or a fool, well, I guess that lets you off of a lot of the responsibilities. People who feel somewhere in their soul or their body or their head that they've seen the light, that they have to face up to the responsibility that goes with it: to share the light, or to give it away. The light's
not something you take and run off into a little corner with and hold and then put it in your pants. Put your hand in there, too. That ain't what the light is about.

Everything should be approached from the creative standpoint, because that's going to benefit everybody the most. Creativity's the most fruitful thing I can think of; it just keeps begetting. You'll go to write a tune, and out of that one, four or five will spin right off. Or you'll go into one, and you'll be punching at it, hitting it, trying to get it, and all of a sudden it'll take a complete 180-degree turn and it'll be the missing, negative part of another two or three things over there. For people to deal with commerciality as opposed to creativity is really a sign that they're foolish. Sure, commerciality has generated millions and billions of fast bucks, but creativity has generated millions and billions of bucks too. Self-expansion is the only way to get anything for yourself and not be greedy.

It's not competition; competition is just another "get over" situation: the concept of putting something on that's good enough that it won't be rejected. That's an awfully weak way to look at things. You want to talk about the musical problem in this community? It's working together—or working independently as interchangeable parts. It's a really American idea. If we're not going to work with a little more contact and a lot more respect between the people here, the only possible way for any success and any glory—that's the wrong word—any light, is interchangeable parts. It's like having an engine made by Lockheed that can work with a body by Boeing; it all has to work together.

It's not working together now. It's all independent forays into the enemy camp. Knock off a couple of dudes. Big deal. What are you going to do? Cut off their ears and send them to your mother? That's not even a guerilla action.

At the meeting points, at the points of greatest benefit—like, say, a Jazz Festival situation—there's going to have to be a median between the forces and the powers that be. Otherwise, it's going to be a waste of time to be a performer around here. A lot of the musicians I know, who I feel are the most hard-playing people in town, are starting to think some other thoughts about doing some other things. The hip people are going to split. Because they know.

My goal when I moved back here from New York was to try to get the music happening. But I feel like I'm still far, far away from it, and the amount of time that's been invested is really enough. That's all I have, man. Why subject yourself? You got it. You know how to play music. You know how to deal with life, and you see it for what it is. But you have a real desire to swing.

There's just three styles of music, I finally figured out: past, present, and future. All other styles have dropped away from me. History is those three tied together; it's not just something that can't be changed. It can't be changed—but it can be made. You can put it out in front of you. That's why history's made every moment.

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**Afterword...**

Ramsey's right. This issue of *Wavelength* embodies his idea of interchangeable parts. The five new albums featured here were conceived and recorded independently. What they share is a moment in time. To imagine how they might fit together is to see that moment consciously as part of history.

The concept of New Orleans music that dominates the Jazz Festival and its ancillary events is a traditional one. To its glory, New Orleans does have a rich musical tradition. The album by the New Leviathan brings a forgotten part of that tradition to light. Dave Bartholomew, in his work with Fats Domino, was the last New Orleans musician to achieve a major impact on the musical consciousness of the nation; on his new record, he brings the Dixieland tradition into a new alignment. Both these records take up the musical past of New Orleans and make it new.

The Neville Brothers and Ron Cuccia present the music of New Orleans now. The rest of the country may not know it yet, but New Orleans music is alive in the present. The Neville Brothers have finally found their sound, and have a clear shot at a national audience. Ron Cuccia has put together a sophisticated synthesis of the jazz, gospel and rhythm & blues traditions, and has added a lyric of undeniable power.

And then comes Ramsey. To say that History's Made Every Moment presents the music of the future would be arrogant. Who could know? But the album looks toward the future, and in so doing it elucidates the present. Like Dave Bartholomew, Ramsey McLean has recognized that he must direct his own destiny as a musician. Bartholomew controlled his own recordings, ran Imperial Records in New Orleans for 19 years; he was, in effect, the lightweight champion of the recording industry—not a giant to match, say, Columbia Records by himself, but a force to reckon with on his own terms, in business as in music.

Putting out his own album, Ramsey McLean emerges as a hard-hitting New Orleans lightweight himself. Giants like Columbia are a hell of a lot bigger today—"Forget about chopping down the beanstalk," Ramsey admonishes—but the lightweight category still exists. It includes top jazzmen like Anthony Braxton and Sam Rivers, moving forces on the scene at large as well as world-class musical talents; these men were Ramsey's teachers. He knows the moves.

So do other thinking people on the New Orleans music scene. Some of them work together—the concept beyond that of interchangeable parts. The goal in such endeavor must be for the artists to take the lead, to direct the musical consciousness of New Orleans, rather than reflect it. The Jazz and Heritage Festival reflects our musical consciousness, and that reflection demonstrates many strengths in both the artists and the audience. The example of Ramsey McLean suggests the next move.

Are we going to try to focus the musical energy now burning through this city? And if so, how? Those are the questions that the New Orleans music community must now confront.
"To me, the festival is a family, and it’s a family on two levels,” says New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival producer-director Quint Davis.

“To relate it to the street, there’s a first line and a second line. Okay, the first line is the musicians, the food people, the crafts people—people who really are a part of the family...and then there’s the next line which is the people who come. All the people who came out to the mud and didn’t ask for their money back, and went ahead with it, and endured...that’s a real act of some kind of faith, and that’s a positive act of the family.”

Davis is sitting in his slightly peeling pale blue corner office at the Jazz Fest’s Rampart Street headquarters. He is talking across a leather-topped wooden desk—littered with the odds and ends of doing business: a tiny calculator and notebook, large shell ashtray, current Billboard, legal pad, miniature religious statue mounted on a crab-claw-shaped objet d’art, and lots of pink telephone message slips.

It is an early evening just a few weeks before the festival opens, and Davis’ pace is already stepping up. There’s a press release to be checked (“Say something about his gold records”), telephone deals to be closed (“Last year he got $300, $400 sounds about right”), and a cryptic bulletin from a staffer who announces that she’s just been offered a specially designed festival crossword puzzle for the printed program book. (Chuck Berry, 27 down; Omar the Pie Man, 18 across?)

This year’s musical program will have a number of big names and new names at the night concerts and at the Fair Grounds, but when asked, Davis insists the spotlight is still on local talent.

“The effort to try to feature New Orleans talent as the number one focus—even to the big names—is very strong, as strong if not stronger than ever. Pete Fountain’s playing the fair for the first time, Dr. John is playing the fair for the first time, Doug Kershaw is coming back. The reason that it might look different, and look a little fresh, which I hope it does, is because most of the people that are playing or a lot of the people that are headliners in the nighttime concerts are new people.”

Eyes closed, he rattles off a partial list of some newcomers: “Hugh Masekela, Jimmy Cliff, Cab Calloway, Mongo Santamaria, Nancy Wilson, Chicago Art Ensemble, Cecil Tylor, Little Milton, James Cotton...These are all people who’ve never played the festival before.

“But the local talent that’s on the shows is as strong as ever. There is local talent on every single one of the nighttime shows...”

Executive Producer George Wein also insists that the focus of the festival is not shifting away from local groups. “If you check the lineup at the fair, I think you’ll find there are fewer non-local names.”

Wein is head of the New-York-based Festival Productions Inc., and organizes more than 30 festivals a year, including Newport, Nice and the Kool festivals.

In a telephone interview from his New York office, a harried Wein said he was originally approached to do a New Orleans festival in the 1960’s. “That was before the Civil Rights bill was passed and they couldn’t do it because there was no integration allowed...After I’d been there once, I always wanted to go back.”

Wein, himself a jazz pianist who once ran a Boston nightclub called Storyville, did come back to produce the first 1970 festival at Congo Square. “We had fewer people than we did performers the first year,” he recalls.

It has grown considerably to become what Wein says is the world’s largest such gathering in terms of presentations. “New Orleans is different from any city in the world. There’s a community psyche that you don’t have anywhere else...It’s difficult to describe, but when you’re in New Orleans you know what it is.”

This year, that community psyche will get a chance to work out with some 40 food vendors, 200 craft booths, and about 3,000 musicians.

But how do all those musical acts get chosen in a state where there is music seemingly everywhere?

Davis explains, “You have to remember there’s about 16 different categories of music. Each category of music has maybe 10,15,20 groups out of that kind of music that are going to play the festival.

“So it’s not just that you pick the top 300 groups. Each category of music has to compete against itself. There are some categories of music such as country-western and bluegrass which are not so prominent here, so there are fewer overall groups and somewhat less competition. Then there are other areas like rhythm and blues, or gospel, where there’s millions of ‘em here...Now you always have this incredibly excruciating process; certain people who’ve played every year cannot play every year in order to have other people who’ve never been able to play.”

Got that?

Anyway, Davis says each category has its own criteria, but generally festival staffers look at: “Is the band working, is it a group that’s out there paying its dues, and are they working on a regular basis, or is it something that someone’s just cooking up for a gig at the festival? Number two, what kind of music is it, so who is it competing against?” Third, “How good is it? What’s the level of musicianship, and how unique is it, how important is it?”

“There are a lot of groups in each
GAMBIT PRESENTS
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Produced By: Bill Johnston

Schedule:
9:00 p.m.—
Juice Jumpers
9:45 p.m.—
Ron Cuccia & the Big Tomato Band
including The Mystics
10:30 p.m.—
The Neville Brothers Album Debut
Aaron, Art, Charles, Cyril
Wardell Quezergue
(Band Leader)
Leo Nocentelli (Guitar)
David Barard (Bass)
Herman Ernest (Drums)
Two additional keyboard
players, 5 horn players and
3 female background
vocalists.
The Wild Tchoupitoulas
12:30 a.m.—
Ivan Neville & the Uptown All Stars
Gerald Tillman, Willie
Green, Nick Daniels &
Renard Poche.

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category of music that are not necessarily worse than the groups that
group have on. It’s just there’s a finite
number.

“In the area of rhythm and blues in
particular, I’ve tried to include a lot of
groups that haven’t been on before,”
groups like Willie West and South-
bound Transit, Bobby Powell, Desire,
Bobby Marchan and Higher Ground,
Margie Joseph, Ivan Neville and the
Uptown Allstars.

Also some “more commercially suc-
cessful oriented” groups seek out
festival gigs. “We’ll have them send us
a cassette of what they sound like
live,” Davis says. But in the case of
blues or Cajun music, festival staffers
sometimes have to go out looking for
new talent.

The budget for musicians this year
is about $350,000. Davis says there
will be more Cajun and Latin music,
plus additions in the reggae and Carib-
bean sound.

Because of the Fair Ground’s recent
landscaping work, most tents and
stages will be set up in a different con-
figuration. Davis says some resurfac-
ing will reduce the amount of mud in
case of rain and adds there will be
“zillions of square yards” of grassy
area.

Also this year, ice chests will not be
allowed inside the Fair Grounds. Fest
spokesman Anna Zimmerman says the
Fair Grounds gets no rent but does
receive revenue from beer and soft
drinks. She says the Fair Grounds has
ruled no ice chests, and the festival has
no say in the matter.

Despite this, there should be plenty
left to occupy festivalgoers, especially	hose to whom the music is still the
main attraction. Davis, who also pro-
duces similar festivals in Memphis and
England, has a vast range of musical
recommendations, from Little Milton,
Jimmy Cliff, and Betty Carter,
Sun Ra, James Booker, and Earl Turbin-
ton, to the White Eagles street practice
and more “and that’s just the first two
days.”

“That feeling—like the first time
Fats Domino played, the first time
that Pete Fountain plays out there in
front of all those thousands of people,
like that first time that Toussaint
played on the boat, it’s just this great,
incredible feeling and that’s what the
festival is all about. You know, a
family of people embracing their own,
and feeling really good about their
own.”
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO NEW ORLEANS

This comfortable Ninth Ward home is

☐ New Orleans' answer to Graceland
☐ located behind Puglia's Supermarket
☐ the residence of Antoine 'Fats' Domino
☐ all of the above

If you checked "all of the above," then skip ahead a few pages because obviously you've got the Crescent City covered. The rest of our readers—particularly those innocent of the vices and virtues of New Orleans—are advised to read on.

How to Eat a Crawfish in One Sentence:

Holding the crawfish's tail with the thumb and index finger of the right hand and the crawfish's other half with the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, break in half (the crawfish—not your left hand or thumb or forefinger) and suck the brain juices and vital fluids from the front half while removing the shell from the rear half after which you may or may not remove the lower half of the crawfish's intestines (some consider the "black tube" a delicacy) but you will doubtlessly have little trouble deciding what to do with the unclad and glistening crawfish tail—a culinary delight surpassed only by fresh crab fat.
Tuesdays
James Booker
"The Piano Prince of New Orleans"

Wednesdays
Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble

Thursdays
Bourré Cajun Band

Saturdays
Society Jazz Band
Sundays
John Rankin Eclectic Guitarmen

Fri., May 1
The Louisiana Aces
Cajun Music from Eunice, La.

Fri., May 8
Kurt Rossen &
the Wild Accusations

Fri., May 15
The Sunset Bluegrass Band

Fri., May 22
The Radiators

Fri., May 29
The Nighthawks

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Divine Light, 3318 Magazine
Reverend James, 545 S. Rampart

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Our Favorite Cabbie:
Jessie Hill, operator of Poo Cabs. Jessie utilizes Cadillacs only.

The City’s Two Best Jazz Spots:
1. Tyler’s, 5234 Magazine
2. Faubourg, 636 Frenchmen
Three Things to Do Instead of Going to the Jazz Festival:
1. A picnic at Lincoln Beach, the deserted amusement park along Hayne Boulevard.
2. A surfing safari to Grand Isle.
3. A pilgrimage to Jackson, Mississippi, and the former headquarters of Ace Records. Johnny Vincent is the proprietor.

Specialty Nightspots:
Country & Western — Bronco’s, Whitney & Romain, Gretna; Branding Iron, 6011 Jefferson Hwy.
Dixieland — Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter
Rock — Ole Man River’s, 2125 Hwy. 90 W., Avondale; Sir John’s, 3232 Edenborn
R & B — Prout’s Club Alhambra, 728 N. Claiborne Ave.
Jug Band Music — Le Bon Temps Roulé, 4801 Magazine
Cajun — The Cajun Bandstand, 1822 Airline Hwy.

The City’s Ten Best Dancehalls:
1. Tipitina’s, 501 Napoleon
2. The Maple Leaf, 8316 Oak
3. Dream Palace, 534 Frenchmen
4. Dorothy’s Medallion Lounge, 3232 Orleans
5. Jimmy’s, 8200 Willow
6. Jed’s, 8301 Oak
7. Munster’s, 627 Lyons
8. The Steamer President, Canal at the River
9. Freddie Domino’s Swan Room 1030 Reins
10. Crash Landing, Causeway & I-10

Where to Buy Old Smiley Lewis Records:
Jim Russell, 1837 Magazine
Memory Lane, 6417 Airline Hwy.
The Gold Mine, 6469 Jefferson Hwy.

Hot French Quarter Spots:
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Old Absinthe Bar, 400 Bourbon
Blues Saloon, 942 Conti
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACTS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun 3</td>
<td>Blues Revue opening act Chris Smithers</td>
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<td>Mon 4</td>
<td>Clifton Chenier opening act Chris Smithers</td>
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<td>Tue 5</td>
<td>Huey Smith &amp; the Clowns opening act Al Johnson &amp; David Lastie</td>
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<td>Wed 6</td>
<td>Marcia Ball with John Mooney</td>
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<td>Thu 7</td>
<td>Gatemouth Brown opening act John Mooney</td>
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<td>Fri 8</td>
<td>The Radiators opening act John Mooney</td>
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<td>Sat 9</td>
<td>The Chris Barber Band with Al Johnson &amp; John Mooney</td>
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</tbody>
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Tipitina's
501 Napoleon
corner Tchoupitoulas
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10</th>
<th>Lil' Queenie and the Percolators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>THE CATFISH HODGE BAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>RAMSEY MCLEAN and the Lifers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>THE CATFISH HODGE BAND</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Jasmine</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>SPENCER BOHREN</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>GILBERT HEATHERWICK</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ron Cuccia and the Big Tomato Band</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>THE BATISTE BROTHERS BAND</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>THE BLASTERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>THE RADATORS</td>
</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>SPENCER BOHREN</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>SPENCER BOHREN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>REMEDY with LADY B.J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>THE COLDCUTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>SPECTRUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>THE BLASTERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Lil Queenie and The Percolators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>SPENCER BOHREN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>STEVIE VAUGHN and DOUBLE TROUBLE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wavelength Recommends

With all the musical goodies to choose from at the Jazz Fest, here are some of our favorites of the not-so-well-known not-to-be-missed.

Buckwheat Zydeco

If you like Clifton Chenier or Rockin' Dopsie, you'll love Stanley “Buckwheat” Duval and his seven-piece Zydeco band. Buckwheat is the 33-year-old heir apparent to Chenier's legacy and even spent three years on organ with Clifton's band. Buck now has two albums to his credit and will soon be appearing in Europe and Jamaica so catch a rising star of Zydeco and blues accordion. After all, this is where the dancing will be. (Saturday, May 2)

Irving McLean

You won't get many opportunities to hear music of the Caribbean at the Jazz Fest this year, so one you shouldn't miss is the steel drum playing of the great Irving McLean of Trinidad. Irving usually brings a single melody pan which he plays with two sticks in each hand, and it's a wonder to hear what he accomplishes with the drum and it's infectious watching him move with the rhythm as he plays around the pan. Irving will be accompanied by a band of N.O. musicians consisting of Keith Cole on bass, Glenn Sears on congas, Jimmy Hymel on keyboards, Bruce MacDonald on guitar, and Gene Scaramuzzo on drums. The music will range from calypso to reggae to traditional Trinidad folk songs, and many will be Irving's original compositions. Don't miss it!

Coteau

Polish up your brogans. Coteau is coming back. The quintessential Cajun band will reunite for one performance only at the Jazz Fest, Saturday, May 2, says drummer Kenneth Blevins (now with Li'l Queenie and The Percolators). The Lafayette-based group includes Gary Newman, bass; Dana Breaux, guitar; Bruce Macdonald, guitar (now with Joyride); Bessy! Duhon, accordion and violin (now with the Jimmy C. Newman—Gary’s father’s—band); Michael Doucet, violin (Beausoleil); and Tommy Comeaux, mandolin (now a doctor). Everyone who used to wile away the late night hours two-stepping to “Cajun Stripper” and other classics and originals was sorry to see them go, and so was Blevins. “It’s...never been duplicated...what we did was, we took the tradition of Cajun music and played it our own way—the way we feel today, not a hundred years ago.” (Saturday, May 2)

Sun Ra Solar Arkestra

Sun Ra is in a class by himself. He and his Solar Arkestra, a sizeable troupe of musicians, vocalists, and dancers, portray themselves as extraterrestrial visitors who have come to bring us earthlings into the twenty-first century. To this end, he has released countless records and toured continuously, bringing his idiosyncratic brand of eclectic, electric music (Saturday, May 2)

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Wavelength / May 1981
Roy Brown

This performance promises to be a high point of the festival this year for it will be the return of one of New Orleans' earliest rhythm & blues stars. Roy B. is best known for his hit from the 1940s "Good Rockin' Tonight!" as well as a score of other blues hits recorded in New Orleans which became national hits. Roy Brown, it should be added, has been claimed by B.B. King as his main vocal influence. Roy makes his home in California now, so catch him while you can. (Saturday, May 9)

James Cotton Blues Band

Your second chance to see this exceptional Chicago blues harmonica player if you missed him on the blues show on the President. James Cotton is one of the greatest masters of blues harmonica and should have a strong band. In fact, Matt "Guitar" Murphy, who played Aretha Franklin's husband in the Blues Brothers movie, was a ten-year sideman with Cotton's band much in the same manner that Cotton was featured harmonica player with the Muddy Waters blues band for many years. (Saturday, May 2)

Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future

Although the people at the Jazz Fest are dedicated to showcasing traditional musical forms, in the past few years they have also begun to give New Orleanians the occasion to hear some of the country's leading avant-gardists. Last year there was the excellent concert at the CAC by Old and New Dreams (Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and Ed Blackwell); this year's event will be a late night show at the Municipal Auditorium Concert Hall entitled "Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future." Featured on the bill will be the masters of collective improvisation, the Art Ensemble of Chicago (Lester Bowie, Joseph Jarman, Roscoe Mitchell, Malachi Favors Maghostut, and Famoudou Don Moye), solo pianist Cecil Taylor, one of the giants of modern jazz, and New Orleans' own Kidd Jordan with the Improvisational Arts Co. This is a rare opportunity for local jazz fans and should not be missed. (Friday May, 8)
I first met Walter Washington nine years ago when he asked me to give him a ride to pick up his guitar one night at Mason's Merciana before it became Mason's Las Vegas Strip. Walter was called upon to perform solo as a replacement for a band that night. After that initial exposure to Walter's music, even without his band, I was converted. I began to show up at all the small black clubs where Walter performed. Most of the time I would stay until daylight. Normally I would not mention my many years of interest and involvement with blues artists and my long association with Clarence "Gate-mouth" Brown as his manager if it were not to lend credibility to my opinion of Walter Washington as a performer. My studied opinion is that Washington ranks as both guitarist and singer with the very top echelon of blues performers. At the risk of sounding arrogant, I will also add that most of the white audiences who have seen Walter perform have never seen the real Walter Washington.

Washington has never been the same at Tipitina's or even at the Jazz Festival as he is at the many small black clubs he plays. At most of these engagements Washington would perform other people's material, or play whatever his back up band wanted to play, which was usually disco or maybe some Grover Washington material.

It was always personally frustrating to me to have people believe this was the Walter Washington I bragged about for seven years before he was even featured at a white club. I was frustrated because my introduction to Washington was through his original material and favorable circumstances.

Now comes the impending release of Walter Washington's first album featuring his original compositions and his recent booking on the Blues Boat Boogie on the S.S. President for the 1981 New Orleans Jazz Festival. It appears conditions are finally such that he will have an opportunity to be recognized for his true talent.
heretofore hidden to much of his potential audience by the many performing problems caused by not having a big enough name with the public to maintain a permanent, well-rehearsed band.

I might add that I’ve always found Walter Washington to be an interesting person to talk to once his shyness is overcome and there is much for rising musicians to learn from this 37-year-old performer who has worked with Gatemouth Brown, Lee Dorsey, Johnny Adams, Little Willie John among others. So, here is Walter Washington in his own words:

Now that you are gaining wider recognition for your singers and playing, what direction do you plan to go musically?

I won’t be in the rock ‘n’ roll field much longer. I feel the spirit in many ways—it really gets next to me. It becomes more and more important to play my feelings rather than something false. To me it’s an art. The blues is really the foundation of everything. It is very deep when you are really interested in it...you just can’t help but let the everyday life come out. Most of your disco, rock and pop music is just dreams, they are not reality. When you play blues, you are talking about everyday life; you can’t dramatize that or fake it.

Which came first, the singing or the playing?

The singing, from my days singing in church as you probably guessed. I began singing in my church’s choir with Ernie-K-Doe. We were the lead singers at the New Home Missionary Baptist Church which is still around today, even though it’s moved to a bigger church house today.

My mama tried to start me on the piano, but I found it confusing at that time. Once I got into high school I started a gospel group called Four Guys and a Doll around 1959. We did doo-wop material like the Platters. Then I met these older guys around the neighborhood and they offered to buy me lunch. They always had a big roll of money and I asked them where they got all that. They said they played music at night and they both played guitar and like the way I sang. I’m speaking of Erving Charles and Erving Williams, you probably know of them. I started going to their practice with them and I liked the way they moved their fingers...
and those knobs. So, I got a cigar box and pasted a ruler and rubber bands to it, but I couldn't get it together. My mama decided to get me a guitar and an old man named Uncle D brought it to me. I started playing in open tunings instead of standard tuning. Erving and Erving decided to play guitar and bass behind my group. Then for a while I went into gospel singing. I ran across this guy that played guitar for the Zion Harmonizers. He was really great and caused me to work at switching over to standard tuning. Then I got used to playing the right way.

*Your guitar style is so distinctive and tasteful, I would be interested to know your approach to guitar playing.*

I mainly went for chordal knowledge first. So many young cats make the mistake of wanting to pick lead guitar right away and don't learn them chords. With a strong knowledge of chords you can create so many more things. You can do a whole lot of picking within the chords themselves, more than you could do just picking. You begin to hear a lot of things in chords and can figure a lot of routes to take. If you really learn the chords, the picking is going to come naturally to you. By listening to chords you have a chance to really listen to what you are going to play in a solo before you play it. To be a really good guitar player, your solos must really blend with the chords you are playing. Many guitar players I hear soloing don't make the changes with the chords.

Besides, I always did like to hit a groove. Today so many cats when they solo, they're just playing scales, just fast scales, or exercises they've practiced. I can't see nothing in it. By being in the chorus, I knew about scales already. It helps you to know what you're doing, but to just sit around and play scales for solos is mindless. It seems that type guitarist thinks a good guitar man is the one who can squeeze the most notes into a bar of music. I call that a show-off, and playing scales, he ain't playing nothing anyway. He's certainly not playing his soul, just a technical exercise. You can't express yourself that way. You are not venturing into your mind when you play like that. Sit down and play like that for someone by yourself and you'll put them to
sleep. If you play your ideas and something soulful, the people will tell you they like it, that you're playing right because they can feel it.

This sort of relates to the Albert Collins record I played for you—you guessed right the first time when you said he is a Libra based on his guitar playing. How did you guess that?

I didn't guess. I could tell he was a Libra by listening to his guitar and I never heard him until you played him on that record. I could tell by the way he expresses himself. A soulful guitar player will always reveal his personality traits in his playing. Let me explain: You could say he is telling a story. It's like if people are walking, they can express in their walk. But if they are just playing the scales, they are not expressing how they smiled, what their eyes said, were they happy. If you just play scales you're just saying, "There was people walking down the street." And you may not even complete that. But if you express how it looks to you, that's where the feeling comes in...the art, as they say. It's not like you're on the outside looking in; you are on the inside looking on everything. Technique is a means to an end but the soul is what you're really after. I'll take "ragged but right" over "polite" if it's the difference between soul or technique.

If you're interested in what you are doing it's going to show. More musicians need to take the time to wonder why they are in this business. I hope it's not for girls or money. It's a message. I still haven't quite figured it out. God works in many ways. Some people never need to go to church. I feel God has given me the ability to have a message in my performing. I feel I am meant to do what I do, that's why I feel I must play the truth and nothing false or fake. I try to figure how to get closer to God. The closer I get the more I can feel...not something that is false, but something real. That's the feeling of God. The blues and gospel music are real. So much music represents a false world. Music is a real means to achieve peace. Music is a religion to me and sometimes I think playing the blues is leading my mind to the ministry. As I said, the spirit gets next to me in strange ways.

Who were your main musical influences?

My models were Wes Montgomery,
Rare Records

The Fat Man's First is Fine

BY ALMOST SLIM

Here Stands Fats Domino
Fats Domino
Imperial LP 9038

This was "The Fat Man's" third album, released in early 1958. Since the album market was at its fledgling stage, many so-called rock 'n' roll albums were a hodge-podge of various 45 and/or 78 releases. This is the perfect example.

The most familiar track on the album is "I'm Walkin'". No doubt this was the selling point Imperial had in mind when it threw this one together. The teenagers were familiar with it, since it was a hit the previous year, and they just might be expected to shell out $3.29 for it. After all, singles got to be tedious, you had to keep getting up to change them during make-out sessions, didn't you?

Well, the real treat on Here Stands is the inclusion of Fats' first recording session from 1949, nearly a decade earlier. Fats' crooning absolutely sounds adolescent on versions of "Little Bee," "Hideaway Blues" and his first-ever recording, "Detroit City"—a stunning blues performance. Produced by Dave Bartholemew, "The Domino" sound is already fully developed even in 1949—the 6/8 piano over Bartholemew's mellow horn arrangement.

The album's rarity is reflected in its value to collectors. Good copies, if you can find them, sell in the $30 range. This is my favorite Domino album.

Continued from previous page

Johnny "Guitar" Watson, Kenny Burrell, B.B. King, Now, B.B. King, Archie Lee Brown, Bobby "Blue" Bland and Little Willie John were my idols. I traveled with Little Willie John and he's the one that taught me how to fight.

That little shrimp taught you to fight?

That man could use knives like I don't know what. That cat always carried two knives on him. He would draw one in each hand and he was so fast. He taught me how to work knives fast and accurate. We both were small, you see. I saw him fight one time, and that man could move. A woman tried to pull him off stage and her boyfriend got jealous and began to pull a gun. Before he got to the gun Willie had cut his shirt off and opened his pants without cutting his skin, then the management threw the man out.

In conclusion, how did you like working with Senator Jones on your new album?

He was a real help. He's smart enough and trusts you enough to listen to your ideas. He realizes he might learn something from you, yet there are many things you can learn from him. I wrote the tunes and performed with my own band and that's the first time I have ever been allowed to do that, so what else can I say? The man gets results. I hope my appearance on the Blues Boat Boogie on the President during the Jazz Festival will bring interest in the record because I really feel quite satisfied with the record. And I'm sure most people will like the record, especially if you like my guitar style and singing style.
It all started innocently enough. A few of the creative geniuses hanging about Wavelength headquarters came upon the bright idea of producing a radio commercial (or "spot," as they are called). No ordinary spot, mind you, but a full-blown production featuring Ernie K-Doe and Barbara Menendez, leading lady of the Cold.

The spot, recorded in February of this year at WRNO's studios in Metairie, commences with a bit of Ernie's "Mother-In-Law"...

Ernie: "Hello, New Orleans, I'm Ernie K-Doe."

Barbara: "And I'm Barbara Menendez of the Cold. Ernie and I are two New Orleans musicians who believe in New Orleans music."

Ernie: "Yeah, we love it. And we love the new music magazine Wavelength."

Barbara: "Wavelength covers r&b, jazz, rock, new wave...all the sounds that make New Orleans music the best in the world. And it's free, all over town. Say, Ernie, have you heard our new record?"

(The Cold's "Mesmerized" begins playing)

Ernie: "Barbara, if it's New Orleans music, I'm for it."

Certainly seemed innocent. But then before it was aired twice on WRNO, the spot was pulled—never to be heard again.

What happened? Well, things get more and more mysterious but it appears that this whole predicament stems from a Christmas card sent to WRNO's owner, Joseph Costello.

Who sent the card is not clear. Costello believes that it came from someone directly involved with the Cold. The Cold's manager, Bruce Spizer, denies this and by his best reckoning, the greeting came from one of the thousands of teenage (and preferably in a uniform from one of the more notorious Catholic girls' schools) groupies who have devoted at least the next six months of their life to worshipping Bert and Kevin and Barbara and Vance and Chris.

The card looked cheery enough on the outside but the message to Costello on the inside was not quite sugar and spice and everything nice. "The Cold are on every radio station in New Orleans," the message declared, "we don't need you. Bah! Humbug!"

Costello was not amused. As he explains it, commercial radio is essentially a game of one-upsmanship. "One-upsmanship is what it's all about," Costello explained in a recent interview, "It is superfluous for us to give away tickets to a Rush concert and for B-97 [WEZB] to do the same thing. You want your listeners to know that you are the only place in town where they can get Rush tickets. It's the same with the Cold."

In other words, since B-97 plays the Cold's records (both of them) and the Cold does promotional concerts sponsored by the radio station and especially since Joe Costello got that offensive Christmas card, the Cold are "combo non grata" as far as WRNO is concerned.

You will not hear "Mesmerized" broadcast over "The Rock of New Orleans" and you will not hear radio spots featuring the Cold (or members thereof) and you will not hear spots advertising the Cold's recordings and you will not hear Barbara Menendez hamming it up with Ernie K-Doe. This seems unfortunate.

The Cold, who currently garner a $2,000 minimum per appearance and can afford the luxury of spending a grand or so on advertising each month (many bands don't earn that much in four weeks), are allowed to buy airtime on WRNO but there are strict rules. According to Spizer: "We are allowed to advertise on WRNO as long as we do not hype the records or the band. We can advertise the actual place where we're playing. That's about it."

Costello points out that he had offered the Cold airplay—on the condition that WRNO get the exclusive local airplay on Cold records. Spizer refused because he felt that the Cold owed allegiance to those stations (WTUL, B-97, WQUE and WTIX) that first broke the band's music in New Orleans.

So be it, declareth Costello. Perhaps he was being overly generous in the first place: "We don't play local records. Two guys could get together.
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in a bar and spend $500 and make a record. We don't consider anything that is not nationally-distributed.'"

Of course, that rules out practically any New Orleans musician or band that we can think of. It's one thing to play at the Jazz and Heritage Festival but quite another (and quite a profitable one) to have your record played by a radio station that will eventually have the power to span the globe. It's the difference between being on display in a museum and owning the place. Think about it, be-boppers.

Jazz Greats Reassemble

Jazz buffs, grab your tape recorders and head to Municipal Auditorium on Thursday evening, May 7, at 6 p.m.,

Organized by archive curator Curtis Jerde, more than 200 musicians who played in New Orleans prior to 1940 have been invited to a seven-hour long celebration of jazz with such Dixieland greats as “Kid” Thomas Valentine, Nappy Lamar, Cie Frazier, Raymond Burke and Willie and Percy Humphrey.
Reviews

Steel Pulse
Ole Man Rivers
March 25, 1981

There is a musical struggle going on in England and Steel Pulse is caught in the middle. British reggae bands, like Steel Pulse, address themselves to the black situation in England rather than voting for the Rastafarian Culture from Jamaica. Reggae is a vital component of the black people's cause in fighting racism in both countries and Steel Pulse provides all blacks with a universal theme to raise that consciousness. What Bob Marley is to the states, Steel Pulse is to Europe, yet both sing of a troubled society.

"Rock against racism" is a main theme in British music, white and black. The National Front, a right-wing movement in England, is reggae's main political opposition, and advocates for apartheid, institutionalized segregation in South Africa. Reggae music in England is less a religion than it is an outlet for black pride and a tool for blacks to learn of their heritage and suffering.

"Rock against Racism, smash it Rock against Fascism, smash it Rock against Nazism, we say smash it ... the National Front, cause they believe in apartheid For that, we're gonna whip their hides.

Just as the color of their skin made blacks the target of the National Front, the dreadlocks so many people don became another symbol to attack. Blacks were forced to hide their proud history and use reggae as their outlet.

The I Three, Bob Marley's most gracious female vocalists, proudly drape themselves on stage with black, gold, green and red, the national colors. For the cover of their latest album, Reggae Fever, as well as on stage, Steel Pulse also selects these Rastafarian colors. The costumes Steel Pulse wore on the album and for the show at Ole Man River's enhance their thoroughly dynamic appearance.

The show began with many songs that got the crowd to its feet. To those familiar with Steel Pulse's music, as well as those having no idea of the roots of this reggae, Steel Pulse has an outstanding presence on stage. To an accurate rhythmic section and two versatile percussionists add strong vocal leads which carry the lyrics with great conviction and strength. David Hinds, lead vocalist, and Basil Gabbidon, lead guitarist, exchanged chords and riffs with ease and precision. Together, the band interlocked rhythms to produce sharp, concise sound. These rhythms were imitated by the audience throughout the show, leaving most people exhausted.

To date, Steel Pulse has released four albums in the States. Handsworth Revolution, their first album, reflects the struggle reggae confronts in the band's native town in England. This theme is carried through to their latest endeavor, Reggae Fever, with such songs as "Harrassment," "Drug Squad," and "Heart of Stone."

The struggle of the black continues, and Steel Pulse continues to record such repression. The songs may seem revolutionary to some, but in essence Steel Pulse is merely advocating humanity.

—Barbara DeMauro

The Big Leg Beat
Omar and the Howlers
Amazing 1003

When I heard that Omar and the Howlers was putting out its first album, I awaited its arrival with some trepidation. I've been a fan of the
band for five or six years, having seen them through personnel changes (Kent "Omar" Dykes is the only remaining member of the group I first saw), three different cities, and some major format shifts. I’ve always felt that they were one of the best club bands around. But often a band can be great in a barroom setting then fall flat in a studio with no dancing, sweating audience to draw upon. A great message but the wrong medium. Not so in this case.

While the album doesn’t quite capture all the power of the band live, it comes close and gives a good sampling of the range of these talented musicians. The cut that best symbolizes the heart of the Howlers and the standard bearer of the album title Big Leg Beat is ”Big Brown Shoes,” an original Kent Dykes tune. If you’ve never seen Omar live, the term “Big Leg” warrants an explanation. Dykes has a propensity for pants that maintain their waist size down each leg. When he “big legs,” the pants legs shake like he’s holding a jackhammer instead of a guitar. It’s fun music that’s great to dance to.

There are three other original songs on the album, my favorite of which is “St. Louis Bound,” a bluesy tune with a honky-tonk piano backdrop. The piano is strictly studio as this is now a four-man band with guitar, bass, drums, and sax, with Dykes and Richard Price (sax) both doubling on harmonica. “Someday Baby” is the purest blues of the originals and “Diesel Don Juan” is a real upbeat rocker, another good dance tune.

Picking my favorite of the interpreted material is tough. Since I’ve had the album, I’ve listened to “Everybody Knows About My Good Thing” the most. It’s a great format for Omar to be his most suggestively raunchy. “I Don’t Know Why” is a fast-paced version of the old Willie Dixon piece that shows some of Dykes’ versatility on the guitar as well as on vocals. “Blues Parcel Post” and “Caledonia” are two more high energy renditions of blues numbers fitting into the category described on the album jacket as “Blue Wave.” This term refers to the predominantly white, small band style of doing old blues whiles showing their rock influences.

When Omar and the Howlers first started playing in New Orleans, they
were heavy on stage theatrics and humor. They sold Howler’s Fried Chicken (“tastes just like grandma”) and featured the Six Dollar Man who did Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash impressions. Humor had an equal footing with the music. Most of this is gone; one of its last vestiges is the record label, Amazing Records, with the motto “If it’s a hit, it’s Amazing”. — Joe Bucher

Shangri-la
Blues Saloon
February 18, 1981

“Shangri-la,” the musical play written and directed by Dalt Wonk with music composed and arranged by Charles Neville, recently closed its appearance at the Blues Saloon. Let’s hope like the players in Shangri-la whose lives are scattered about by the closing of the Shangri-la night club, that there will be a future reunion. Because the music created by Charles Neville and company is music to be heard.

There are twelve songs and twelve musicians and singers interspersed throughout the script of “Shangri-la.” Included are fast dance beats, slow soulful blues, and Latin-sounding, mamba-type beats. All, excepting one instrumental, are accompanied by some hot singing, related for the most part to love and love’s traumas.

Most of the powerful singing is done by Lady BJ (as Fern Foster) as she belts out such notable numbers as “Burning Up,” “Slow and Easy,” “You Used To Be My Baby,” and “How To Say ‘Until We Meet Again’.” When BJ curls her lips and brings out from the deep of the deeps “Your fire down in my soul will always burn sooo...” and “Slow and easy, that’s the way I like things done” you will be convinced that this is a woman who knows what she is talking about.

Frozine “Jo” Thomas (as Cecile Le Day) also puts some serious moves in her numbers “Sands of Time” and “Hot Mama.” She does a lot of shubbie-dup-dupin’, too. Nothing is left hiding on “Hot Mama” where Frozine “struts as smooth as butter and rocks until the preacher gets enough.” Most
dresses would exceed their tensile stress factor under these performance circumstances. Turning her back to the audience, Frozine starts shaking and quivering and steaming her body into a dancing fit. Waves of hip-power ripple through the dress, crashing at the hemline and the neck collar, and fall off on the floor, to move out into the audience.

The excitement does not stop here but continues with the Shangri-la House Band, which consists of Charles Neville on sax and flute with additional sax (and some fine melody solos) by David Lastie; Terry Manuel on piano; “Hutch” Hutchison on bass; and Stanley Stephens on drums. Charles Neville’s sax is featured on the instrumental number for the leopard-skin-clad Shangri-la Dancers, Lula Elzy and Mitchell McCarthy.

The music of Shangri-la is inspiring and heartfelt. The weakness, however, is in its brevity. As Lady BJ said on “Burning Up,” “Please don’t finish, we’ve just begun.”

—Ben Funderburk

Bobby Bland, B.B. King
Millie Jackson
Saenger Theatre
March 27, 1981

New Orleans has long been a very special blues town. Today it remains so even while the rest of the country finds syrupy disco-oriented music more appealing than the real thing. The blues still enjoys immense popularity with both the white and black populus of our city. This was evident when perhaps the three biggest names in earthy R&B joined forces to sell out the Saenger Theatre for two shows recently.

Oddly, Mr Bland was chosen as the opening act. Ambling to the microphone sporting a shiny silver three-piece suit with a matching derby, set off with a stunning diamond ring, Bobby had the women shouting from the opening strains of “Ain’t Nothin’ You Can Do.” His nine-piece orchestra fell in perfectly behind him through versions of “I Pity the Fool,” a stupendous “I’ll Take Care of You,” and the latest “Soon as the Weather Breaks.”

“Stormy Monday” appropriately closed the Bobby Bland proceedings,
with guitarists Wayne Bennett and Mel Jackson trading jagged riffs, to the delight of Bland himself. A few strains of "That's the Way Love Is," a wave, shake a few hands and he was gone.

Millie Jackson, a self-proclaimed "Nasty Bitch," buffered the two blues powerhouses. Ms. Jackson took the stage fronting a 12-piece "funk orchestra," two vocalists and a 4-by-12 electric sign that had her name in lights. Attired in a silver Spandex suit that showed off her more than ample hip dimensions, Millie was as nasty as she pleased. Her delivery was subtle as a kick in the groin.

B.B. left the blocks fast with a storming "Everyday I Have the Blues." He hasn't opened with the tune for a while, but I think with the older audience "old B" thought he'd lead with his ace. It worked: the audience was fractured, the King of the Blues was holding court. B.B. featured some material from his newest release There Must Be A Better World Somewhere. It seemed like the whole house had a copy because they almost drowned out B.B. on "More, More, More." It was the first time I've heard the version live and it will surely be a B.B. King standard. My back still quivers thinking about it. It was hitsville from then on as the band rocked through "Never Make My Move Too Soon" before B.B. laid the audience to rest with the inevitable, "The Thrill Is Gone." B.B. does it every time. —Almost Slim

Mose Allison
Faubourg Restaurant
April 9, 1981

Mose Allison was a shrewd choice to open the series of concerts by nationally known jazz artists that local promoter Jonathan Rome is producing at the Faubourg. Allison's music offers many of the readily accessible pleasures that one expects from a sophisticated nightclub entertainer, yet the inspired quirkiness of his art leads his listeners toward the essence of jazz improvisation.

Accompanied by the crack New Orleans rhythm section of John Vidacovich on drums and James Singleton on bass, Allison held forth on Frenchman Street for a three-night stand (April 8-10), performing three sets a night; I caught the first two sets of the second night. Many of the tunes

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he performed have been part of his repertoire for years, and his music is not as close to the cutting edge of jazz as the music Singleton and Vidacovich play as members of Astral Project, to cite the example nearest to hand. Rather, it reflects his own highly idiosyncratic vision, with darting glances at blues and nightclub pop styles as well as jazz.

Allison plays off his pianistic technique against his singing, often for surprising and witty effect. Vocally, his characteristic tone is one of ultra sophistication attenuated to the point of nonchalance, as he breezily throws away line after line. His keyboard work, however, sweeps off at odd junctures into frenetic flourishes of notes, bluesy beats near to primal in their rhythmic appeal, or fluttery passages as close to vibrato as a pianist can get. His treatment of Willie Dixon's "Seventh Son," for example, pitted the mad, passionate energy of Allison's playing against a mannered vocal delivery; the latter undermined the emotional power of Dixon's blues lyrics while the former amplified it. The effect Allison achieved by this singular method is one that eludes nearly all white blues singers: finding an equivalent for the force that a bluesman like Muddy Waters, the classic Willie Dixon interpreter, communicates by sheer presence, without lapsing into white-boy braggadocio.

Allison, though, is prone to some lapses of his own, occasionally seeming merely mannered, a prisoner of his own style. His treatment of "You are My Sunshine," the tempo of which he slowed considerably, strained for poignance but settled for affectation. And in general, I thought his performance at the Faubourg lacked some of the electricity of his gig at Tyler's last fall.

Quibbles, quibbles—none of which should obscure the fact that the performance was, on the whole, excellent. So was the production, which could stand as a model for jazz club presentations (and Jonathan Rome and the Faubourg should continue to set the standard, with Dave Liebman scheduled during the Jazz Fest). Finally, the remarkable Faubourg waitresses deserve a bow; they're both efficient and unobtrusive—a real nightclub rarity. Like Mose Allison, James Singleton and John Vidacovich, they're a class act. —Yorke Corbin
Sammy Davis Jr. paid a visit to Knight's recording studio recently and owner Traci Borges' father paid Sammy a little kiss. Davis recorded some sound tracks at Knight a while back and returned to visit his old friends. The Hetherwick Band will be at Tipitina's May 12; no cover will be charged, so according to Mr. Hetherwick: "There is no longer any excuse."

The rumor mill tells us that Marshall Sehorn has purchased a record pressing plant in Jackson, Mississippi, and he plans to move to Covington. Johnny Vincent plans to reissue an entire Huey Smith album of unreleased material recorded in the Fifties and early Sixties.

Whispering Smith, Baton Rouge harp player, is in the hospital and is reportedly very ill...Mrs. James Moore, Slim Harpo's widow, lives on 19th St. and plans to assist on a future story on her late husband.

Ultrasonic Studio has been booked by Alligator Records for 10 days in May. Plans are to record material for a three-album set entitled New Orleans R&B Anthology...Three excellent albums from the bayou are now on the scene. Arhoolie has released King of Zydeco by Clifton Chenier, recorded live at the Montreux Jazz Fest. Their other release features John Delafose, Zydeco Man, an excellent singer-accordion player from Eunice employing some fine older style zydeco rhythms. Maison de Soul has released Louisiana Explosive Blues, a collection of Texas and Louisiana blues recorded between 1958 and 1975.

Casablanca, a music club in the Quarter that featured new wave, has recently closed its doors...Al Farrell's been holding down the piano at Clarity, every second Monday.

Seattle's T.J. Wheeler, who mixes his blues with jazz, will be at Clarity's May 10...Satisfaction, named by Billboard Magazine as a "Louisiana rock/rhythm band to watch," will be appearing at the Old Absinthe Bar for the first time during Jazz Fest. Julie Didier, singer/songwriter who has written songs for the Neville Brothers, Kenny Rogers, America and others, will appear with them...The Sunbelt Bluegrass Review reports that the Five Lakes Festival will be held May 22-24 (Five Lakes is just east of Folsom, LA). Sunbelt, Jimmy Martin, Bluegrass Cardinals, the Sullivan Family and many more will be there. Ya'll come.

Ricky Cortes, bass player for the Percolators, had his bass stolen from his apartment recently. If anyone hears of the whereabouts of a Fender Precision bass with a walnut body, EMG pickups, and a worn spot where his fingers come off the strings, give us a call at Wavelength. Ask for the vigilante department.
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