Licorice Stick Gumbo: The New Orleans Clarinet Style

As a young jazz musician aspiring to the title of "clarinetist in the New Orleans style," I realized that the first priority was to discover precisely what that style was—to attempt to identify its elusive elements. To pursue this was no easy task since, with the passing of clarinetist Willie Humphrey only months before my arrival in New Orleans in 1994, there was none to learn from firsthand. The best second-hand resource, I decided, was the extensive oral history collection at Tulane University's Hogan Jazz Archive.

Seeking out the interviews with New Orleans clarinetists, I traveled back in time, "took lessons" with musical ghosts, and was gradually able to discern a "clarinet family" in the musical genealogy of the Crescent City. The voices of yesterday's New Orleans told me in their own words why they played the way they did and how they learned their craft. They explained what motivated them, as legitimately trained clarinetists, to adopt an impromptu approach to playing—embellishing popular songs and spontaneously...
re-writing arrangements. From their collective comments it became clear that improvisation in early jazz was born out of purpose, not whim, function, not fancy. Most of all, through their recordings, they displayed a remarkable integration of disciplined musicianship and stylistic individuality that clearly set the New Orleans clarinetists apart.

An initial stumbling block in my attempt to delineate the features of a New Orleans clarinet style was the distinctive *personal* style of individual players. Although they shared the same techniques and function in the ensemble, as individuals they seemed too remarkably unique to form a stylistic family. But, from the interviews, photos, and recordings in the Archive I began to perceive a broader common ground that bound these individualistic clarinetists together. A common shaping force was the remarkable diversity of roles of New Orleans clarinetists in the city’s musical landscape. Often it was a function of class or social status that affected a musician’s access to specific musical venues. Other times, it was merely a function of preference. What jobs they chose and for whom they performed were primary factors in shaping their individual development and style. Often times performance locales were simply based on which jobs paid better or were more secure, which jobs tipped better or allowed more social interaction with the customers, or which jobs had longer breaks or shorter hours. If the accompaniment was an out-of-tune piano or a dance orchestra, the musician approached his work and his instrument differently. Uptown or downtown, music for dancing or dining, indoors or outdoors, spot jobs or steady engagements, all influenced a player’s style. A key common denominator in the careers of early New Orleans clarinetists, then, was an unusually broad spectrum of performance contexts. Some musicians chose reading jobs, some chose jobs that required “faking,” some worked strictly with brass bands while others worked strictly with dance bands, some chose steady jobs while others “played the field,” and some traveled while others never left New Orleans. Some held steady jobs with larger groups while others played in duos or trios. There were many niches to be filled, and the music was constructed differently in each situation.

To return to the question, was there stylistic unity to be found in this diversity? I decided that the most prudent approach was to focus on a handful of the most distinguished clarinet stylists in the early jazz period
and attempt to find the common denominators in their work. This required that I look for clues in not only their recordings but in their education, equipment, and playing careers. It also required a closer look at the social and economic history of New Orleans to gain a better understanding of the changing demands on the musicians and the evolving functions of their musical activity. Of particular interest was the transitional period of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

In no other United States city are music and dance so intertwined in the community’s lifeblood and history as New Orleans. New Orleans life and culture has always been synthesized through its music. For social, celebratory, and ceremonial functions, the early popular music of the city served to create a certain type of energy. The social and commercial function of this energy was primarily to make people want to celebrate, want to dance, want to drink, want to love. When written music became inadequate to the flexible needs of the dancing public and of the dance instrumentalists, musical performance became freer and more improvisatory, which, in turn, changed the technique and expressive devices of the individual instruments. The music became more elastic as it absorbed non-European influences, especially the rhythmically buoyant blend of Afro-Caribbean musical idioms brought about by the institution of slavery. The freer movements of social dance also encouraged a more flexible approach to musical accompaniment, particularly in terms of rhythmic variation. The expanded musical language, in turn, allowed instrumentalists to add an extra dimension to their competitive edge: individual style and sound. As with the dancing, the hallmarks of the New Orleans musical style came to be precisely those musical features that departed from the conventions of a European classical concept. For the clarinet this is certainly true.

Clarinet always had a significant role in New Orleans music. Although in the 19th century the tradition of parades and presence of military bands established brass instruments as the dominant sound of New Orleans street music, clarinets were by no means absent from this forum. The flexibility of the instrument in terms of dynamics and range made it ideal for a variety of other performance contexts, including, besides parades, balls, concerts, parlor music, parties in indoor halls, and picnics outdoors.

In all of these varied forums, however, the clarinet’s function in the ensemble
remained fairly fixed. In examining old stock arrangements, for example, I found that in the early 1900’s, band music as well as dance arrangements used the instrument in a similar way. In general, the clarinet provided counterpoint to the lead, carried usually by trumpet or violin. Sometimes the clarinet played a rhythmically synchronized harmonic line above or below the lead. In ragtime orchestrations it was often used to double the melody an octave above the violin lead. Just as frequently, the clarinet traced an embellishing countermelody above the lead, outlining harmonic changes in the spaces around the lead. This latter function—an obbligato accompaniment—came to define the role of the clarinet in the improvised ensembles of early jazz groups. For “ad-libbed” or “faked” music, obbligato was the best way to not be in conflict with the other instruments. Where situations with limited space, limited economic resources, or volume restrictions called for smaller groups, the clarinet proved effective as the lead melody instrument. So, work was good for a clarinetist in New Orleans in the early jazz era. Piano and clarinet duos were heard in the Storyville District (Picou), string bands sometimes added clarinet to their texture (Tio-Doublet), parade bands often used Eb clarinet, and in bars and smaller dance halls trios and quartets often included the instrument. Later, with the addition of saxophone to the dance orchestrations, woodwind doubles became the norm. Most importantly, the great demand for the instrument provided a fertile competitive environment among New Orleans clarinet players. This, perhaps above all other factors, promoted the development of both the virtuosity and individuality that so distinguished the local clarinet tradition.

The variety of performance opportunities was also a reflection of the many distinct cultural communities within New Orleans society. All proudly maintained their separate identities through music and dance, but none were so insular or independent that they were immune to their neighbor’s influence. In the hotly competitive market for social dance music in turn-of-the-century New Orleans it was versatility and adaptability that helped to insure success for a musician or musical group.

This adaptability revealed itself most strongly within the black Creole community. In the years before the Civil War, racial tensions had already begun to challenge the independent social status of the colored Creoles. After Reconstruction, social pressures and repressive legislation further curbed their ability to maintain their unique identity. Creole musicians displayed great resiliency and resourcefulness in adapting to the more informal styles of musical expression required for the new ragtime and jazz dance musics. In spite of this, they retained certain cultural values, such as the encouraged tradition of European classical training. This training insured technical proficiency and the ability to read music, skills needed for playing at more formal society functions; but when situations arose to play music that relied increasingly on the skill of faking, they were able to flex. An increasingly blurred color line toward the close of the nineteenth century allowed the Creole musicians easy access to black musical influences and less formalized means of instruction. Young musicians followed the brass bands, sat behind their mentors
on the bandstand, and practiced together to learn new songs and techniques. It is very interesting to note that these learning models bear marked similarities to West-African pedagogy. The opportunity--and even necessity--to work across the whole spectrum of "high-toned" to "common" situations was a major factor in the dominance of Creole-of-color musicians, and especially clarinetists, in early jazz.

The New Orleans musicians who were interviewed in the 1950s and 1960s remembered well this transitional period when the skills of reading and faking were of equal importance. There were several Creole clarinetists who were universally regarded as the greatest technicians and stylists, among them Charles McCurdy (sometimes McCurtis), Lorenzo Tio, Jr., Alphonse Picou, and George Baquet. McCurdy, who never recorded, was reputed to be a fine reading musician with a beautiful sound in the low register. He had a steady job with John Robichaux's dance band performing "society music" and is said to have been an influence on Johnny Dodds. Picou, because of his good reading, also worked in "society" situations but faked and played "hot" as well. His early work was with brass bands such as the Excelsior and the Onward but he played with dance bands, as well. George Baquet had considerable influence as a teacher on many younger clarinetists, including Sidney Bechet. Baquet also was admired as both an excellent reading musician and a hot "faker." He left New Orleans for Chicago with Freddie Keppard's band, toured some, and eventually settled into a theater job in the East. Lorenzo Tio, Jr. deserves special attention. He seems to have been among the most talented and versatile of Creole clarinetists. In an interview, his brother noted that music came to him as easily as drinking water. He read and transposed-at-sight so well, that A-clarinet parts on Bb-clarinet were easy for him. In his recordings, primarily with A.J. Piron's society band, he displays a fluid combination of reading and faking. But it is his role as a teacher of many of the greatest New Orleans clarinetists that is of particular interest. Tio came from a tradition of clarinet teachers. His father, Lorenzo "Old Man" Tio and uncle, Louis "Papa" Tio, both taught classical clarinet. With three generations of musicians going back into the early 19th century, the family, originally from New Orleans, spent 1859-1877 in Mexico. It was there that Lorenzo Sr. and Louis were born and began music studies. Upon the family's return to New Orleans, the Tio brothers became the very model of Creole versatility, working steadily in many different musical situations and

Big Eye Louis and Bechet (foreground) with Picou, Manny Perez and Willie Santiago (1944)
maintaining "legitimate" musical standards by teaching. Their teaching methods emphasized reading, ear-training, instrument maintenance, harmony, and other skills basic to the training of classical musicians. They discouraged their students from following the trend toward learning to "fake" music. Lorenzo Tio, Jr. followed in their footsteps as a teacher and even though his career included situations with improvisation, he did not teach it as a skill. As a teacher, he was rigorous, yet flexible. His students were allowed to find their own way, and he did not force them to adopt a certain embouchure or equipment. I was struck by the remarkable similarities between Tio and his best students. Based on the evidence of their recorded work and statements they made about their own studies with Tio, certain consistencies surface. Though each of his best pupils had personal, distinctive styles, the common elements among them are strong enough to support the notion of a New Orleans clarinet style.

The list of Tio progeny is long and distinguished. Among them are: Louis Nelson DeLisle (“Big Eye” Louis Nelson), a member of Buddy Bolden’s band noted for his precise rhythmic articulation; Alphonse Picou, famous for his clarinet obbligato on “High Society,” also with a highly articulated style, but with a hint of vibrato; George Baquet, a member of the Onward Brass Band and a master of arpeggiated obbligato; Sidney Bechet, a mediocre pupil but undoubtedly the most famous disciple of Tio, noted for his brilliant technique and rapid vibrato; Jimmy Noone, known for lyrical obbligato and low register work; Albert Nicholas, brilliant in all registers of the clarinet and with a florid rhythmic style; Omer Simeon, Morton’s favorite clarinetist, with a brilliant technique in all registers and with perfectly constructed improvisations; Barney Bigard, a younger disciple who worked with Nicholas to improve his improvising and who went on to become famous as the resident clarinetist with Duke Ellington; Johnny Dodds, though he repeatedly missed opportunities to study with Tio, is undeniably influenced by him as evidenced by his high-profile playing with Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band and Armstrong’s Hot 5 and Hot 7 groups. These similarities, to be heard among all these players (most of their recorded work is available on reissued CD’s), are the beginning of an understanding of the New Orleans clarinet style.

Flexible articulation, which refers to how the notes are connected or "placed"
in the beat or the larger melodic phrase, was one of the most important hallmarks of the style because it was the key to “time” and “swing.” African influences on dance created a more fluid approach to motion and, consequently, rhythm. New Orleans players, responding to the dancers, adopted a less rigid phrasing of the fundamental subdivision, the eighth note. Not only did the relative placement of the two eighth notes within the beat change—from even to uneven—but the rhythmic stress was displaced from the first to the second eighth note, on the weaker part of the beat. This produced a more propulsive, forward moving rhythmic energy (reflecting the fluid, uninhibited movement of the dancers) that set New Orleans clarinetists apart and was to make a powerful impression on “outside” players. It was later to be dubbed “swing” rhythm.

Another distinctive element found in varying degrees with these players is tonal vibrato. This was a deviation from the “straight” tone used by symphonic clarinetists and was probably adapted by the Creole clarinetists from the vibrato of singers in the French opera, which was a part of their musical background. It also may have some relation to violin playing, an instrument present in most of the early dance bands. Vibrato was also a way to mask intonation problems, as when players were subjected to accompanying pianos that were poorly tuned—a by no means uncommon problem in the early jazz period. Volume considerations and instruments pitched differently also affected a
player’s intonation. Tio can be heard playing with Jelly Roll Morton using a subtle vibrato, also heard in the woodwind section work of A.J. Piron’s band, and he seems to have passed this on to his students.

A third important component of the local clarinet style was the use of blues effects to color both melody and tone. Such effects as melodic slides, bent notes, flutter tonguing, growl tones, imitations of animal sounds, for better or worse, became part of the instrument’s language. Omer Simeon’s elegant clarinet lines with Morton’s Red Hot Peppers epitomizes the Creole style, as does Sidney Bechet’s work with different groups; the latter gives us fine examples of what are called false fingerings.

The foregoing discussion of the New Orleans clarinet style is, at best, preliminary. But I have outlined what I consider to be the salient features of that style, all of which represent departures from a European classical approach to clarinet playing. The paradigm for the style is revealed most clearly in the playing of the Creole musicians, who functioned as versatile links between the polished and rough schools of New Orleans clarinet playing. It was their imposing of schooled virtuosity onto the looser, intuitive style of black popular music that distinguishes their style—a blend of elegance and sensuality. Here was the essence of the New Orleans clarinet sound, certainly not to be found in clarinet playing in other parts of the country at the time. Non-Creole musicians,
through direct or indirect instruction, recognized this sound and adapted to it as well. Johnny Dodds, Tony Parenti, Darnell Howard, Leon Roppolo, Raymond Burke, and the Shields brothers are some of the best examples. Today this style is all but lost: its blend of rigorous technique and individual style required great professional discipline. The New Orleans Revival found and recorded players of less ability and embraced their contributions to the service of nostalgia and poignancy. Similarly, today’s Traditional Jazz scene embraces and records less competent players in the service of “Funkiness.” Regardless, the true standard is well represented and permanently documented in recordings. I would urge the reader to explore them.

Evan Christopher

Indian Rulers:
Mardi Gras Indians and New Orleans Funk

On November 1, 1970, The Wild Magnolias and their chief Bo Dollis made the first commercial recording of Mardi Gras Indian music with a group of New Orleans funk musicians. The 45rpm disc of “Handa Wanda, Pt. I & II” transformed the traditional sound of black Indian chants into an electrified dance anthem. The song continues to be heard on local jukeboxes and radio stations in New Orleans, usually during the two month period leading up to Mardi Gras. New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival co-founder Quint Davis produced and financed the release, hand picking a band to accompany the Indians in the studio. The Wild Magnolias went on to record several LPs in the same vein, and they continue to record and perform around the world. Their success also inspired several other New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian tribes to update their sound, paving the way for critically acclaimed recordings by The Wild Tchoupitoulas and The Guardians of the Flame. Though many consider the modernization of street chants a blasphemous disregard of tradition, the music has actually been in a constant state of change since its genesis.

The music of the Mardi Gras Indians has often been neglected by writers who have focused on the spirituality of the men, the sociological aspects of the gatherings, and the laborious art form of designing and sewing the elaborate costumes. There are, however, a handful of notable sources that touch on the music. In the early 1970s, David Draper conducted some fascinating research for his doctoral dissertation at Tulane University. Photographers Michael P. Smith, who began documenting Indian parades and rehearsals in 1970 for the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, includes a very brief chapter on the music in Mardi Gras Indians. New Orleans music writer Jason Berry comments extensively on the music of The Wild Magnolias and The Wild Tchoupitoulas in his survey.

1 Quint Davis, interview with author, November 2001 (Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University).
More recently, George Lipsitz, a professor of American studies at the University of Minnesota, has viewed the music and culture as a collective memory of African and African-American shared stories.\(^5\)

Several other articles and books include information on Mardi Gras Indian music, but a comprehensive study has yet to be published. No one from within the Mardi Gras Indian community has attempted any formal research on their own often insular activities, and outside researchers face a difficult challenge in documenting them. Though the Indian parades are safer now than they have ever been, on occasion they reach a fever pitch, inciting explosive behavior. Injury and death due to accident or acts of violence occur often enough to remain a deterrent.

Possibly the most difficult obstacle in researching the Indians is receiving their cooperation. Many Indians feel they should be compensated by those who profit from images and descriptions of them. There are dues to be paid to the Indian associations for burial insurance and other assistance, and the costumes often cost thousands of dollars to sew, with no public or private monetary support. In the foreword to Smith’s *Mardi Gras Indians*, folklorist Alan Govenar commented on the conundrum. While the tradition should be documented and promoted by researchers, who naturally should be paid for their work, it also seems logical that Indians deserve compensation for what amounts to public displays of folk art. At this time, there is no compromise in sight and few members are able to survive on their Indian activities alone.

Formal associations of Mardi Gras Indians, organized in “tribes,” have been traced back to the post-Reconstruction period of the 1880s in New Orleans.\(^6\) A full history of this cultural tradition is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth noting that Native Americans and slaves had been mingling over 100 years earlier in a public marketplace.\(^7\) Later known as Congo Square, the spot was considered sacred ground by several Indian tribes, such as the Houma and Chitimacha, who


performed ritual corn dances on the site. Indians were congregating on the space to sell their wares when groups of slaves were permitted to do the same around 1750. A collegial relationship existed between the two oppressed cultures, and many descendants from this period in New Orleans claim mixed parentage of black and Indian. “Because most African slaves brought to Louisiana were males, great numbers married Indian women,” wrote historian Jerah Johnson. The slaves came principally from the Bambara culture of Senegal, with a history of masking in ornamental costumes not too different from traditional Native American garb. On Sundays in the early 1800s, African ring dances were recreated in the open plaza, using percussion instruments similar to those Mardi Gras Indians play today.9

At the end of the 19th century, the “Wild West” shows of Buffalo Bill Cody and others, which often played to mixed audiences in New Orleans, most certainly influenced the development of black Indian tribes.10 In the harsh climate of post-Reconstruction, the image of the Indian recalled the initial genocide carried out by white Americans and stood as a symbol of courage to working-class blacks. A tradition emerged that continues every Mardi Gras day, when fifteen to thirty men parade in Indian costume, using music and dance to attract a “second line” of followers that become active participants in the music, beating on bottles and tambourines through the city’s back streets.

The first recording related to Mardi Gras Indians came in 1927 from a traditional New Orleans jazz group, Louis Dumaine’s Jazzola Eight. The title of Dumaine’s instrumental “To-Wa-Bac-A-Wa” is taken from one of the oldest Indian songs, “Two-Way-Pockey-Way,” but there is no audible connection to the music of the Indians.

In his historic Library of Congress sessions with Alan Lomax in 1938, Jelly Roll Morton referred to the tribal gatherings on Mardi Gras day and actually did sing a bit of the traditional chant, transcribed as “Touwais, bas Q’ouwa.” New Orleans jazz guitarist and singer Danny Barker recorded four Indian songs, including “Indian Red” and “Corinne Died on the Battlefield,” for his King Zulu label around 1949. “Indian Red” is given a brass band

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8 Ibid.


10 Berry, 1986; Govenor, in Smith, Mardi Gras; and Lipsitz.
treatment, but the other three songs favor the emerging style of rhythm & blues, setting the tone for the next 20 years as various R&B singers recorded material with Mardi Gras Indian themes. In 1953, Professor Longhair spiced up his song “Tipitina” with the lyric “Ooda Malla Walla Halla,” and R&B singer James “Sugarboy” Crawford had a local hit with the old chant “Jock-A-Mo.” Eleven years later, The Dixie Cups re-cut the tune as “Iko, Iko,” and Longhair recorded “Big Chief,” an original song written by guitarist Earl King that utilized Mardi Gras Indian colloquialisms.

These songs reveal two patterns that evolved in the use of Mardi Gras Indian vernacular in popular forms. Indian chants transferred literally to R&B (as recorded by Crawford and The Dixie Cups) or phrases and themes borrowed from the Mardi Gras Indian vernacular to create new compositions (as written by Earl King, Longhair and others). But with the exception of field recordings made of members from various tribes by folklorist Samuel Charters in 1956, all Indian-flavored music released before 1970 was performed by “non-Indians.”

In 1944, Theodore Emile “Bo” Dollis was born in the 1900 block of Jackson Avenue in the Central City section of New Orleans. One of the most fertile neighborhoods in the history of black music, jazzmen like Buddy Bolden, Kid Ory, and the Dodds brothers had made their home there in prior generations. It was also a hotbed for “uptown” Mardi Gras Indian tribes, who often clashed with “downtown” tribes on the “battlefield.” The location has been variously described as “at Perdido St.”

11 “around Earhart,” 12 “near Magnolia and Melpomene,” 13 and at “Claiborne and Poydras Streets.” 14 Plotting these intersections on an early 20th century street map of New Orleans reveals their proximity to the New Basin Canal. On Mardi Gras morning in the 1920s and 1930s, the spot also served as the point of debarkation for the city’s premier black Mardi Gras krewe, the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club. In the early 1950s, the canal was drained and destroyed, and the surrounding area has changed drastically over the years with the construction of an Interstate in the 1960s and the Louisiana Superdome in the 1970s.

The New Basin Canal acted as a line of demarcation between the uptown and downtown tribes, where many men lost their lives fighting in turf wars known as “humbugs” on Mardi Gras day. The most feared chief in the neighborhood during Dollis’ youth was Brother Timber of the Creole Wild West (also referred to as Brother Tillman in several sources). “When I heard an Indian gang coming, I thought it was Brother Timer and I used to shoot inside,” says Dollis. “He was one of the most dangerous.” Bo eventually began following his neighbors Joe and George King, who paraded in costume, or “masked,” with the Creole Wild West.

11 Theodore Emile “Bo” Dollis. Interview with author, November, 2001 (Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University).
12 Davis.
“All my fear just went away about Indians. I just wanted to be like them,” he says.  

Bo’s father, James Dollis, Sr., was an upstanding cabinetmaker and forbade his son to mask with the Indians because of their violent nature. But on Mardi Gras morning 1957, Bo left home and headed straight for his friend’s house where he had been sewing a costume in secret for months. Later in the day, James spotted Bo with The Wild Magnolias, one of the more recently formed tribes, but never spoke of the incident. His son continued masking and was voted chief in 1964.

James may well have realized that the worst of the battles were over. As early as the 1930s, the focus of the tribal face-offs had shifted from the toughest man to the prettiest costume. For the 1945 collection *Gumbo Ya Ya* Robert McKinney noted of the Golden Blades, “ten years ago the various tribes actually fought when they met... today the tribes are all friendly.” He even transcribed a song that signaled the change, with the repeated phrase “shootin’ don’t make it, no no no.” The next round of chiefs, like Bo and his downtown peer Allison “Tootie” Montana, promoted unity among the various factions. The emergence of this new spirit may also have been a reaction to increased law enforcement, as police began to crack down on the battles. But the competitive nature of the Indians did not simply dry up like the canal, it was redirected to other activities. “Oh yeah, we [still] fight,” says Dollis, but

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15 Dollis.


17 Lipsitz.
“with a needle and thread.” Modern day Indians also use street dancing as a symbolic form of combat. This change in attitudes may represent the most important transformation the Indians made in the 20th century, but it is by no means the only one.

On his initiation in 1957, Bo was faced with the task of learning the fifteen or twenty songs in the Wild Magnolias repertoire. Starting out with the repetitive response choruses, he was soon taking the lead, improvising long, spiraling lines in songs that lasted up to an hour.

*Well the funniest thing that I ever seen*
*It was an Indian hollering at the sewing machine*
*Oh the only thing make the white folks mad*
*People we got some that they wish they had.*

In the communal spirit of the music, the call-and-response singing of the chief and his tribe has always been accompanied by a wide array of percussion instruments. Since the earliest documented gatherings, tambourines have been the driving rhythmic force, with cowbells, bottles, sticks and other improvised instruments adding the accents. In the 1960s, conga drums made their first appearance and the bass drum soon followed, igniting a backlash from traditional chiefs. While the instruments were always percussive, the only constant appears to be the presence of the tambourine. Other instruments, like the jawbones and gourds of yesterday or the once-controversial congas and bass drums, have come and gone depending on availability, the preferences of the time, and economic limitations.

Many of the songs performed today pre-date documentation of Indian music, possibly going back as far as the 1800s. Every Indian has come to know “Two-Way-Pocky-Way” and “Indian Red.” Other songs, such as “Shallow Water” and “Fire Water,” can be dated to the 1960s as extensions of the tradition.

Draper commented on the constantly shifting repertoire of several tribes, eventually concluding that “the musical repertoire does not represent a static set of songs. New pieces are occasionally added, using older examples as their models on a formal level. A differing set of words, for example, creates a totally new song for the Indian. New additions appear to have a replacive, rather than additive function in terms of total repertoire.”

Though the actual number may vary over time, and different tribes prefer different songs, it is clear that material comes and goes. “Most all the songs is similar,” says Dollis. “You could take ‘Ooh Na Ney,’ ‘Two-Way-Pocky-Way’ or ‘Meet the Boys on the Battlefront,’ ‘Big Chief Got a Golden Crown’ – all of ‘em, you just take and put a new label on it... the beat is almost the same. If you ever come to Indian practice, it’s that same type of beat.”

An example can be made with the song “Cora Died on the Battlefield.” First recorded in the late 1940s (as “Corrine Died...”), the song stretches

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20 Davis.

21 Draper; Dollis.
back even further. Paul Longpre of the Golden Blades tribe said the song referred to a woman, Cora Anne, who masked as a queen with the Battlefield Hunters and was killed in a crossfire with the Wild S'quatoelas.\textsuperscript{22} Passed down through the generations, "Cora Died on the Battlefield" was updated and modified by Dollis during the funeral procession for John "Scarface" Williams, an Indian who was stabbed and killed in Dollis' neighborhood on March 3, 1972.\textsuperscript{23} "[Williams] had the first, that I knew of. Mardi Gras Indian jazz funeral when Indians came out and dressed and had Mardi Gras Indian music," says original Wild Magnolias producer and manager Quint Davis. "Bo started singing about John Williams and he said, 'Brother John is gone.' He created a new song right there."\textsuperscript{24}

Dollis, who would record "Corey Died on the Battlefield" on his debut LP a few years later, never recorded "Brother John" but the song was further modified and released as "Brother John is Gone" by The Wild Tchoupitoulas in 1976. Vocalist Cyril Neville received the composer credit, exemplifying the difficulty involved in tracking down the sources of Mardi Gras Indian music. Nearly every recorded Indian song from Danny Barker to The Dixie Cups to The Meters is credited to the performer with little regard to its actual origins. Until there were financial considerations, authorship simply wasn't an issue. As Lipsitz states, "unlike the Euro-American musical tradition which places a premium on individual authorship of finite texts, the African tradition, manifest in Mardi Gras Indian music, values dialogue and conversation between artists and audiences in order to adapt old texts to new situations."\textsuperscript{25}

In a conversation with author Jason Berry, Bo stressed the importance of music as a tool in continuing the "mythic tradition" of the Indians. Commentary on current events is placed side by side with the shared memories of ancestors who beat handmade drums at Congo Square, or died on the battlefield on a Mardi Gras morning long ago. The interpretive experience of the chiefs and their songs has never focused on preserving the literature, but extending it. "There's a lot of old traditional music that came down, but everybody - the only thing they do is put their experience in it. They put what they feel into it," says Dollis. "I just made mine commercial and just put a lot of electronic instruments - guitar, piano, whatever - and that's how you have it."

Dollis is referring to the groundbreaking turn of events that occurred in 1970, when one of the last traditional elements to yield to progress - the musical accompaniment - finally gave way. The impetus of the change came in the form of a white college student from uptown New Orleans. Quint Davis, the son of a prominent architect and philanthropist, was a student at Tulane University who worked at the Hogan Jazz Archive when he attended his first Mardi Gras Indian practice in the late 1960s. The Sunday rehearsals leading up to Mardi Gras were restricted to tribal members, and membership was historically limited to African-American men. Davis was

\textsuperscript{22} Berry, 1986.

\textsuperscript{23} "Woman Is Shot to Death..." New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 5, 1972, p. 2 (includes death of John Williams).

\textsuperscript{24} Davis.

\textsuperscript{25} Lipsitz.
introduced to the secretive culture by Jules Cahn, an elderly Jewish real estate magnate who had a passion for the street life of New Orleans and filmed many parades and events with his own movie camera. Cahn and Davis were among a handful of whites that gained admittance into the groups as the humbugs dwindled and the Indians became respected citizens in the community. The men were also part of a long line of white New Orleanians attempting to document and promote local black music and culture, as Richard Allen and William Russell had previously done with traditional jazz for the Hogan Jazz Archive.

When Davis wasn’t bringing his reel-to-reel tape recorder to Wild Magnolias rehearsals or searching for the mythical pianist Professor Longhair, he was laying the groundwork for the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, which he co-founded in 1970. (It was Richard Allen who put Davis and co-founder Alison Miner in contact with George Wein, the promoter of the prestigious Newport Jazz Festival, to launch what is now a New Orleans institution.) A preliminary concert was given at Tulane University in the spring of 1970, featuring Bo Dollis’ Wild Magnolias and a band led by Wilson Turbinton, known as Willie Tee. Tee was a top New Orleans funk musician with a background in modern jazz, bringing in musicians like Rahsaan Roland Kirk and Gerry Mulligan for performances at his Jazz Workshop throughout the 1960s. “Willie had a trio, he was playing an upright piano,” says Davis. “The Indians then came on and were wailing and Willie got up and started playing with them and was just able to improvise his sort of band of New Orleans R&B, jazz flavored funk… that was the creation of some modern form of music that matched instruments and Mardi Gras Indian music. It just happened improvisationally and it was phenomenal.”

Since his first encounter with Mardi Gras Indians, Davis had dreamed
of finding a way to capture the music and present it to the public. “Every Indian practice is in a bar with a jukebox. The jukebox always played until it’s time to jam. Then you unplug the juke box and you have Indian music and then you plug it back in while they were breaking and it plays, then you unplug it, then they jam again, then you plug it back in. My idea was to bridge that gap.” The serendipitous meeting of Dollis’ street chants and Turbinton’s modern, melodic funk was the catalyst Davis had been waiting for. Using the same formula local R&B artists had tried for years, the Indians were finally making an attempt to enter the commercial marketplace. Previously, they had no avenues to earn a living with their craft or even recoup a portion of the money spent on costumes.

Davis assembled a band and rented out a rehearsal space for a few practice sessions. Willie Tee stayed on piano and organ while Joseph “Zigaboo” Modeliste, the renowned drummer from The Meters, followed the beat set out by the hand percussion. Zigaboo came from uptown New Orleans and had an innate connection to the rhythms of the street. Bassist George French was raised in the jazz tradition by his father, Papa Albert French of the Original Tuxedo Jazz Band, and played jazz and R&B with his brother, drummer Bob French.

Among the handful of Indians playing and singing was Bo Dollis’ childhood friend, Monk Boudreaux. Boudreaux was a chief of another uptown tribe, The Golden Eagles, and still sings with The Wild Magnolias today. Dollis and Davis settled on a song, “Handa Wanda,” and the disparate group of men headed to a modest Baton Rouge recording studio.

When Modeliste, Tee, French, and the Indians all assembled together in the studio, Dollis began with a typical stop-time introduction, flailing his tambourine and shouting:

**Indians! (Yeah!)**

*Indians from Wild Magnolia won’t bow
Said uptown rulers and downtown too
Well the Wild Magnolias got Indian blue
Said Handa Wanda you han on day*

With a smack of Zigaboo’s snare drum, the band entered with a relentless one-chord vamp driven by the percussion battery of Dollis, Boudreaux, and a handful of tribesmen. At the end of the song, the band dropped out as the Indians continued to chant and beat their instruments, recreating the authentic sounds heard in the street. Davis was content with the first attempt, but the take was over seven minutes, far too long to fit on one side of a 45 record. He called for another take, but Zigaboo – a local legend, used to star treatment - had already packed up his drums and headed out the door. At a mixing session a month later, the song was split into two parts, one on each side. A piano was added to the mix and the record came out on Davis’ own Crescent City Records in time for Mardi Gras, 1971.

No one involved with The Wild Magnolias could claim that the release of “Handa Wanda” set the world on fire. But the record soon earned a reputation for filling the dance floor at clubs and parties in the tight-knit New Orleans musical community.26 White musicians and scenesters picked up on the tune, many becoming aware of the Indians for the first time. The black community also

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responded, as David Draper commented in 1973. "For the last couple of years, this record has been prominent on the black radio programs in New Orleans, and is a popular song on the jukeboxes in black bars... the prospects of commercialism of the Indian songs seems imminent." Indeed, the seed had been planted for the public's acceptance of Mardi Gras Indian chants and The Wild Magnolias were at the forefront.

If the first commercial recording by Mardi Gras Indians was indicative of the constant evolution of their tradition, the mere existence of the song "Handa Wanda" is yet another example. Conceived by Dollis himself, the melody and meter are essentially borrowed from the chant "Shallow Water," with new words added. Though Finn Wilhelmsen wrote that "Handa wanda o mambo" meant "I ain't lookin' for no trouble but I ain't gonna run,"27 Dollis said the words ("Handa Wanda oh mama") simply sounded good together.28 The language the Indians use in their chants - a hybrid mix of Creole French, English, and nonsense phrases - is worthy of a complete and careful study on its own. Wilhelmsen's reading of the lyrics indicates a scholarly desire to extract a specific meaning from his subject, when words and phrases are chosen, rather, for their impact, effect, or alliterative qualities. As Lipsitz states, "to search for a static and literal meaning for each Mardi Gras Indian phrase is to misread gravely their playful and deliberately ambiguous language."29

An interesting comparison can be made between the "Handa Wanda" single, a 1990 recording of "Shallow Water" by the Magnolias, and another version of "Shallow Water" recorded by Monk Boudreaux and his Golden Eagles in 1988. Each song sounds rooted in tradition, but remains unique in emphasis, instrumentation, and lyrical content. All songs are in 4/4 meter, but each accents different beats in different ways. The first recording of "Handa Wanda" is an extension of traditional Mardi Gras Indian street rhythms with added emphasis on beats 2 and 4 by Zigaboo's bass drum. The rhythm section is straightforward and simple and follows the rhythms of the tambourines and chants. "Shallow Water, Oh Mama," recorded by Dollis and the Magnolias 20 years later, features the Rebirth Brass Band and their funky adaptation of the New Orleans "parade beat." The accented beat is played on the snare drum, falling on the upbeat of "4." Overall, the piece has the lilting Caribbean feel that brass bands often incorporate. Though the meter of Dollis' phrasing is similar to "Handa Wanda," he's often behind the beat, in keeping with the "lazy" cadence of bass drum, snare drum, and tuba.

The Golden Eagles recording was made in the H&R bar, a Central City rehearsal spot for many tribes, and was the first commercial recording produced specifically to duplicate the traditional street chants. After a long introduction typical of Indian rehearsals and parades, "Shallow Water" begins at an accelerated tempo, faster than the Magnolias' versions but still appropriate for marching. The beat is held down by the bass drum, with the emphasis spread across all four downbeats, slightly


28 Dollis.

29 Lipsitz.
favoring the “1” and “3.” Tambourines, cowbells, and bottles fill in the gaps, with a Latin-flavored clave rhythm occasionally emerging. By the end of the song, the bass drum has begun to emphasize the upbeat of “4,” in the style of the New Orleans parade beat.

The three versions of this song show the versatility of Mardi Gras Indian music. While the Golden Eagles’ version is purposefully the most authentic in instrumentation, as bass drum has been added and the words have clearly changed, it differs greatly from transcriptions made by Draper in the early 1970s. Of course “Shallow Water” already represents an extension of tradition, as it was written in the 1960s, over 40 years after the first reference to an Indian song on record. Field recordings made by Draper and Davis prior to the commercial success of “Handa Wanda” would undoubtedly reveal further variances but, again, it is clear that precise preservation of the tradition is not a top priority for the Indians.

By 1973 a burgeoning interest in Mardi Gras Indians was underway in pockets around the country and beyond. The Wild Magnolias and their music had sparked much of the curiosity, and Davis was able to secure a record contract with the French label Barclay, distributed in the U.S. by Polydor. At Studio in the Country in rural Bogalusa, Louisiana - the state’s first world-class studio - French producer Philippe Rault met with a band assembled by Willie Tee, who was appointed as musical director for the LP. There was a lot of money at stake for this virtually untested form of music, and the pressure to make the music more commercial was high. Tee says Davis and Rault were “thinking in terms of making them a commercial act and not to just keeping it in the vein of people seeing it as a Mardi Gras thing. I think that’s what they wanted us to do.”

In order to perfect every detail of the musical accompaniment, the backing tracks were recorded first, without the input of Dollis or his men. “Willie put it together, the music,” says Dollis. “I would go in and sing after Willie put the music down.” The 45 of “Handa Wanda” had essentially placed a rhythm section behind the traditional chant, but the LP sessions featured complex arrangements and chord changes played on synthesizers, saxophones, and wah-wah guitars. “Handa Wanda” was recorded in this new format and the difference is immediately noticeable. After an introduction that is nearly identical to the first recording, sessionman Alfred “Uganda” Roberts taps out a new beat on the congas. When Tee’s regular drummer Larry Panna enters, the bass drum falls squarely on the “1,” not on “2” and “4.” The sixteenth-notes played by the tambourine on the 45 have shifted to “straight-time” eighth notes on the hi-hat. Along with the effected guitars, the beat suggests James Brown-style funk, and the tambourines and Indian hand percussion are completely absent.

Other songs performed on the record include inherited material like “Two-Way-Pocky-Way” and “Golden Crown,” as well as an original composition by Willie Tee, “Smoke My Peace Pipe.” Chosen as the first single, the song uses chord changes far outside the realm of traditional Indian chants, laid over a drum pattern that is closer to disco than funk or R&B. The lyrics, with

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30 Wilson Turbinton interview with Jason Berry. March, 1982 (Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University).
the combined cliches of the Native American peace pipe and marijuana smoking, have nothing to do with authentic Mardi Gras Indian themes.

The resulting LP, *The Wild Magnolias*, is simultaneously exciting and disturbing, depending on the threshold of the listener. In order to get the Indians’ music across to a broader public, the local instrumental and rhythmic elements associated with them were removed. Yet the team was marching through uncharted territory — creating a completely new sound that displaced the traditional chants from their natural environment, resulting in a hybrid mix of styles. From a commercial standpoint, the recording makes perfect sense. There is a long history in the music business of “dressing up” or “watering down” artists to make their music more palatable to the broader public. While traditionalists may cry foul, Dollis doesn’t seem to mind. “[Tee] was always the leader of the band because I didn’t know nothing about no music. I couldn’t tell a B flat or an E minor,” he says. Asked if he saw himself as a professional musician, Dollis replied “nah, I never thought I could be recording, I always thought me as like a street singer. Oh, I could do that ‘Two-Way-Pockey-Way.’” but Quint Davis heard me sing one night at Indian practice. He said, ‘you have a distinguished voice’... next thing I know he got Willie Tee to put a band together and we went to the studio.”

The release of *The Wild Magnolias* also coincided with a movement in the record industry away from the single format and Top 40 radio, and towards LPs and Album Oriented Radio, or AOR. New, free-form FM stations were taking more chances, and Polydor hoped the Indian music would catch on. Though it was never a big seller, the LP essentially fulfilled the group’s commercial goals and got them some notoriety. The Wild Magnolias, with Willie Tee’s band billed as The New Orleans Project, toured Europe and the U.S. 31 opening for Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, and jazz organist Jimmy Smith at Carnegie Hall. Positive reviews appeared in New Orleans periodicals as well as the *New York Times*, which, in 48 words, summed up the group. “Backed by an electrified rock and blues quintet called The New Orleans Project, the Wild Magnolias mixed chants and dances that are alleged to have their roots in the African dances held in Congo Square before the Civil War with contemporary rhythms and sounds of the five instrumentalists.” 32

The change in audience came with a change in attitudes for Dollis and the Magnolias. Accustomed to the second line followers playing and dancing along to the rhythms in the street, the musicians expected active involvement from the crowds, which were often seated or too shocked to participate. “I thought, ‘this is the wrong type of crowd here for our music,’” said Dollis of the Carnegie Hall concert. He warmed up after noticing “about two or three rows back from the stage. I seen them tapping their feet. I figured the people I couldn’t see, they might be tapping their feet too.” 33

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33 Dollis.
In 1975, The Wild Magnolias and The New Orleans Project recorded a second album, *They Call Us Wild*, which wasn’t released in the U.S. until 1994 due to contractual problems. The group reduced their activities to local performances until 1990, when the album *I’m Back at Carnival Time* arrived. Billed as Bo Dollis and The Wild Magnolias, with a different backing band, the group has recorded and toured extensively ever since.

Equally important as the relatively consistent output of The Wild Magnolias is the trend they instigated with the help of Quint Davis, Willie Tee, and others. In 1976, Island Records released a benchmark album by another Indian tribe, The Wild Tchoupitoulas. Retired merchant marine George Landry had masked with Dollis and The Wild Magnolias for several years, eventually deciding to lead his own tribe as Chief Jolly. Jolly was the uncle of the musical brothers Art, Charles, Aaron, and Cyril Neville, and had always encouraged the boys to form a group together. The *Wild Tchoupitoulas*, recorded at New Orleans’ SeaSaint studios with producer Allen Toussaint, marked the first occasion that all four brothers recorded together, with Jolly handling most of the lead vocals.

Organist and pianist Art Neville’s group, The Meters, served as the house band for the session, with Zigaboo on drums, George Porter on bass, and guitarist Leo Nocentelli. Similar in organization to Willie Tee’s band, The Meters were much more rooted in New Orleans R&B, soul, and funk styles and were able to redirect some of the innovative aspects of The Wild Magnolias towards a more organic sound. Accompanied by members of the Wild Tchoupitoulas tribe, the session captured the best elements of both the street parades and the initial “Handa Wanda” recording. The kinship of the family mirrored the communal relationship of the tribes, while the stacked harmonies sung by the brothers extended the typical unison response calls.

*The Wild Tchoupitoulas* record received universal acclaim inside and outside the city and remains a Mardi Gras classic. Many of the arrangements and altered melodies have filtered down into the street, where the traditional songs are now sung in the style heard on the LP. Though chief Jolly died in 1980 and The Wild Tchoupitoulas never recorded again, the Neville Brothers formed a permanent band, keeping much of the Indian material in their repertoire to this day. The legacy is evident in two

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video documentaries featuring The Wild Tchoupitoulas and the Nevilles. *Always For Pleasure*\(^{35}\) and *Up From the Cradle of Jazz*.\(^{36}\)

In 1992, the innovative qualities of the Wild Magnolias and Wild Tchoupitoulas recordings were taken in a different direction by jazz saxophonist Donald Harrison, Jr. and his father, the chief of The Guardians of the Flame. Their collaboration on *Indian Blues* alternated between jazz-inflected Indian songs and more traditional chants, sometimes within the same song. On the traditional side, Harrison, Sr., who had been masking since 1949,\(^{37}\) handled lead vocals on “Shallow Water” and “Two-Way-Pocky-Way.” Pianist Dr. John, who had been featuring Indian songs in his repertoire since the early 1970s, sang and played on jazz arrangements of “Ja-Ki-Mo-Fi-Na-Hay” and Professor Longhair’s “Big Chief.” Harrison, Jr. stretched out on instrumental versions of the standards “Indian Red” and “Iko, Iko” with jazzmen Cyrus Chestnut – piano, Phil Bowler – bass, and Carl Allen – drums. But on “Hu-Ta-Nay” the father and son, jazz band, and Dr. John came together to form a glorious melting pot of New Orleans influences.

The term melting pot has always been used to describe New Orleans music. From the ring dances of slaves to society dance bands, through jazz and R&B, stylistic cross-fertilization has always been present. Just as jazz scholars have argued about what ingredients are needed for an antique recording to qualify as “traditional” New Orleans jazz, issues of authenticity abound in discussions of modern Mardi Gras Indian recordings. Though the presence of melodic instruments and drum sets did alter the presumably purer sound of Mardi Gras Indian music, it is not so much an abandonment of the tradition as an inevitable updating of it. The addition of saxophones in brass band parades or the Afro-Latin influence in early jazz rhythms can be seen as a parallel to the introduction of the piano, guitar, and drums, and the shift to popular dance beats in Mardi Gras Indian music.

As long as it has been documented, Mardi Gras Indian music and culture has evolved as consistently as any other American vernacular tradition. Even the handmade suits are refashioned every year - the same color or design is never worn two years in a row. Ephemeralism is thus endemic to the tradition. In the 1920s and 1930s, the movement away from humbugs and towards pride in the costumes led to a gradual acceptance of Indians by the community. The consistent evolution of musical repertoire has always been evident, as noted by McKinney\(^{38}\) and Draper.\(^ {39}\) The adaptation of lyrics to reflect current events is inherently tied to the changing repertoire, as is the improvisation or composition of new material, including “Handa Wanda.” Musically, the addition of the conga and bass drums in the 1960s illustrates the changing backdrop of percussion instruments that began with the movement from handmade gourds and jawbones to


\(^{36}\) Berry, 1980.


\(^{38}\) Saxon and Tallant.

\(^{39}\) Draper.
tambourines and cowbells. Finally, the controversial inclusion of melodic and electric instruments in Mardi Gras Indian recordings not only changed the texture of the music, but also increased the visibility of the tribes, drawing interest from outside the working-class black community. Within the community, the popularity of the music has helped elevate the image of Mardi Gras Indian culture. There has been a proliferation of new tribes and increased membership in existing tribes, while the once-feared parades have become celebrated events.

The public ritual of Mardi Gras Indian ceremonies is over 100 years old, and to some extent the chanting and dancing represents an ancient African memory that has made many twists and turns but remains unbroken. The music associated with the Indians has, it seems, changed over the years, from the traditional jazz of the 1920’s, through the rhythm and blues of the 1950’s, up to the New Orleans funk of the 1970’s and after. But, if one wishes to hear Mardi Gras Indian music in its initial format, the tribes still gather with tambourines, bottles, and sticks every Mardi Gras morning.

Matt Sakakeeny

Select Listening Examples:

The initial version of “Handa Wanda,” released as Crescent City #25, is currently only available on the CD Mardi Gras in New Orleans from Mardi Gras Records #MG1001, 1987.


*They Call us Wild* (Barclay, France, 1975) the second Wild Magnolias is available through Polydor as Barclay, France #314-519 419-2, 1994.


78 rpm recordings by Danny Barker on the Zulu label (1949) are housed at the Tulane University Hogan Jazz Archive and have been reissued on *Jazz a la Creole*, GHB Records #BCD-50, 2000.


Professor Longhair’s recordings have been collected as *Fess Anthology* on Rhino Records #71502, 1993.

*The Wild Tchoupitoulas*, (Island #9630, 1976) has been reissued on Island’s Mango division #1625399082, 1991.


Donald Harrison’s *Indian Blues* was released by Candid, #CCD 79514, 1992.

Resources not cited in this article:

The Mardi Gras Indian Council of New Orleans: Larry Bannock, director.

The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation Archives.

Shephard Samuels: WTUL-FM deejay.

Tad Jones collection of New Orleans R&B, soul, and funk music at the Hogan Jazz Archive.

http://www.wildmagnolias.net

Photo credits: Bo Dollis images courtesy of Bo Dollis; vintage Mardi Gras Indians shots from Harry Souchon Collection; photo of The Meters from Tad Jones Collection.
Revisiting the Raymond Burke Collection

Raymond Burke (1904-1986) was one of New Orleans’ great jazz clarinetists. He was also an inveterate junk collector with an eagle eye for old phonograph records. During the 1950s and 1960s, Burke ran a memorable second-hand store at 906 Bourbon Street. Racks full of pulp literature guarded the entrance to this wondrous little shop. Just inside the doorway lay stacks of tattered sheet music, an array of musical instruments in various states of disrepair, and a giant clutter of records. After visiting the shop one afternoon in 1960, Doc Souchon made note of “innumerable old ‘78’ records piled one upon the another in a teetering 6-foot ‘Leaning Tower of Pisa.’”¹ [photo top right] Burke’s leaning tower of 78s is rumored to have peaked at more than 30,000 discs.

During his later years, Burke reportedly gave away most of his “best” records to friends, acquaintances and hard-to-say-no-to collector types. After his death in 1986, the remains of his collection - some 10,000 78s - were donated to the Hogan Jazz Archive. They cover a wide range of artists, from Enrico Caruso to Hambone Willie Newbern; from Alma Gluck to Sister Rosetta Tharpe; from the Victor Military Band to the Leake County Revelers. If they represent the “dregs” of a once incredible collection, they still offer up some luminous aural artifacts. We recently revisited the Burke 78s and culled out about 500 discs to add to our shelves. Sampling the broad spectrum of represented styles, we managed to hone in on some exemplary documents of Louisiana history and lore.

During the course of his forty-year career as an itinerant musical evangelist for the Church of God in Christ, Shreveport native Utah Smith (1906-1965) [photo bottom right] emerged as an important grassroots pioneer electric guitar player. His “crip” song was “I Got Two Wings,” which he transformed from a traditional folk refrain into an intense, personal testament of faith. Elder Smith became so wholly and singularly identified with his apocalyptic interpretation of “Two Wings” that he had a large pair of seraphim’s wings fashioned to wear while he was “performing.” In 1945 Elder Smith settled in New Orleans and founded the Two Wing Temple Church of God in Christ at 1328 South Tonti Street, adjacent to the Calliope Housing Project. In 1947 he recorded a version of “I Got Two Wings” on his own Two Wing Temple label, which survives to demonstrate his completely abandoned approach to the electric guitar.² Elder Smith had always made a point to advertise that the Two Wing Temple was open to “white friends.” Among those who tarried there during the late-1940s was jazz cornet legend Johnny Wiggs, who later opined that Elder Smith “sang almost identical to Louis [Armstrong!].”³ Wiggs was inspired to capture his Two Wing Temple

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² Elder Smith’s entire recorded output is reissued on Document DOCD-5222.

experience in an original composition that he recorded in 1949 under the title "Two Wing Temple in the Sky." He dedicated it to guitarist-friend Snoozer Quinn. Played in the traditional "New Orleans style," it is a candid reflection of Wiggs' respect for his source of inspiration.

Born in Bastrop, Louisiana, in 1880, W.K. "Old Man" Henderson was a highly controversial radio broadcasting pioneer: "For almost a decade in the 1920s and 1930s an unvarying formula – 'Hello, world, doggone you. This is KWKH in Shreveport, Lou-ee-istiana, and it's W.K. Henderson talkin' to you...' – introduced him to a daily radio audience that stretched across the United States." Dating from circa 1930, Henderson's "Hello World" recording is a unique document of early radio history, a personal appeal to his radio audience, via phonograph record, to petition the Federal Radio Commission to prevent northern "chain outfits" from hogging his airspace. As Henderson explains, "I am having this record made in order that the people throughout the United States may know conditions when they cannot hear us on radio." The "B" side of the record reiterates Henderson's appeal in a "Hello World Song" sung by Andrew "Blind Andy" Jenkins, a prolific composer and popular country recording artist of the time, who specialized in topical ballads. Backed by a fiddle, guitar, and harmonica, Blind Andy sings, in part:

Now let us write to Congress, my good friends everywhere.
To the Radio Commission, tell them to clear the air.
Friend Henderson has a message that everyone should know.
There's no better way to tell the world than by old radio.

The Sextetto Nacional was a traditional Cuban string-and-percussion

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ensemble that helped shape the modern evolution of the Cuban son. Their 1927 Columbia label recording of "Mama Inez" is the oldest of several versions listed in Richard Spottswood's voluminous discography, Ethnic Music on Records. Loosely referred to as a rumba, but technically classified as a "tango conga," "Mama Inez" experienced great resonance in the United States, and particularly in New Orleans, where it has mingled with kindred "street beats." Perhaps the definitive New Orleans version is Kid Thomas Valentine's 1959 recording for the British "77" label. More recent versions include clarinetist Michael White's 1996 waxing for another intrepid British label, "504." In a less likely reflection of the "Latin tinge," this infectious Cuban classic infiltrated the Louisian Cajun dance band repertoire after French accordion great Nathan Abshire recorded it in the early-1950s, complete with Cajunized lyrics sung by one Little Yvonne LeBlanc, under the title, "Mama Rosin."9

On January 23, 1935, Victor Record Company representatives wrapped up a six-day field trip to New Orleans that captured artists ranging from Charlie Barnet to Bo Carter, Uncle Dave Macon, Lawrence Walker, and the Mississippi Mud Mashers. Their final day's session netted two Huey P. Long "campaign songs"—"Every Man a King" and "Follow Long"—by The Louisiana Boys, a male vocal trio accompanied by violin, piano, bass and parade snare drum. The names of the singers and players who comprised the Louisiana Boys are apparently lost to history, and the identity of the

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7 Kid Thomas Valentine's Creole Jazz Band, 77 LA 12/9, 1959, reissued on American Music AMCD-49.


9 Little Yvonne LeBlanc with Abshire Band, "Mama Rosin," Khoury's 652, reissued on Arhoolie CD 373.
composers of the numbers they recorded can still be called into question.

The label of the popular “A” side, “Every Man a King,” gives composer credit to Governor Long and his “musical companion and colleague” Castro Carazo, leader of the Hotel Roosevelt Orchestra and director of the band at LSU. The less-remembered “B” side, “Follow Long,” is credited to local composers Frank Arena and Chris Yacich. Descended from Croatian immigrants who worked as oyster rakers in lower Plaquemines Parish before gravitating to New Orleans, Chris Yacich (1901-1967) may be best remembered for his 1936 composition, “I Like Bananas Because They Have No Bones,” which was recorded by the Hoosier Hot Shots, Willie Bryant, and perhaps others. Yacich was a long-time affiliate of radio station WWL, where he collaborated with Pinky Vidacovich on material for the popular early morning show, “Dawnbusters.” A 1959 newspaper article, based on an interview with Yacich, noted:

“It was in the 1930s that he sat down with Huey Long to compose what was to become the governor’s political battle hymn. ‘Long called Frank Arena, then a singer employed by the station,’ Yacich [sic] remembers. ‘Arena called me and we met with Long at Frank’s home to write “Every Man a King.”’ The three, along with Castro Carazo, began work at 8 p.m. and by 3 a.m. it was finished. At 8 a.m., Arena sang it for the first time on a special radio show. ‘Long supplied the title and the first four lines to the song,’ Yacich said. After that, Yacich did other work for Long, once supplying words for a song in a matter of three minutes.”

Perhaps the song that Chris Yacich supplied lyrics for “in a matter of three minutes” was “Follow Long,” which glowingly assured that, “Huey Long will be our one salvation,” and that, among other things, “He will tax the millionaires, give the poor their rightful share.” Nine months after the Louisiana Boys recorded “Follow Long,” Huey P. Long was assassinated, and Chris Yacich commemorated the event in a final ode to the Kingfish, “With a Sigh We Say Goodbye.”

Thanks to Kevin Fontenot, Bruce Boyd Raeburn, Tom Stagg and Paul Yacich for invaluable assistance.

Lynn Abbott


CURATOR’S COMMENTARY

Business before pleasure. Therefore, I am reminding our readership that $25 dues for the Friends of the Jazz Archive for 2002 are now being gratefully accepted to help in underwriting the cost of producing this newsletter. This is our sixteenth year for *The Jazz Archivist*, and because it has been such a busy year, we are a bit late getting this one out to you. Better late than never! So send dues in, payable to Hogan Jazz Archive.

You will note the reappearance in this issue of an author who has made significant past contributions to not only this newsletter but also publications such as *American Music* and *78 Quarterly*: Lynn Abbott joined the staff of the Hogan Jazz Archive in July, following the departure of Dr. Charles Chamberlain. Charlie took a job as historian at the Louisiana State Museum, and we look forward to collaborating with him on numerous projects relating to Louisiana music and culture in the future. Meanwhile, Lynn’s work on black vaudeville, jazz, blues, and sacred music, as well as his experience as a New Orleans musician, playing drums with Bruce Daigrepong’s band, make him a notable addition to the Archive staff. His contribution to this issue derives from initial exploration of the Raymond Burke record collection, which contains an interesting assortment of diverse materials, some of which are discussed in his article. Lynn is also active as an oral historian, and he and Alma Williams Freeman recently interviewed Warren Smith, historian of the Church of God in Christ. Lynn’s presence at the Hogan Jazz Archive bodes well for increased activity in the collection and preservation of materials related to the region’s sacred music traditions especially.

Clarinetist Evan Christopher has been making quite a name for himself in traditional jazz circles from New York, to New Orleans, to San Antonio, and throughout Europe. In this issue, he offers a personal perspective on the Creole clarinet heritage of New Orleans, providing insights as a player and a researcher in the idiom. Evan’s presence at the Archive in the conduct of his research has been fortuitous for many of the students seeking to get a handle on New Orleans jazz traditions. He has made himself available for tutorials on several occasions, generously sharing his expertise, and he demonstrates how to identify “weak” spots on an Albert system, or how vibrato can be used to cover a player’s limitations on some occasions or to wobble within range of an out of tune piano on others.

One of the students who benefited directly from Evan’s insights was Matt Sakakeeny, a graduate student in Tulane’s Masters in New Orleans Music Studies program. You may have seen him on ABC’s “Nightline” last July, as part of a profile on Nick Spitzer’s “American Routes” radio series. Matt is a producer with the series and has a voracious appetite when it comes to New Orleans music. His contribution to the newsletter, an essay exploring the transitions of Mardi Gras Indian music from the streets to the recording studios in the 1970s, concentrates particularly on collaborations with jazz and funk musicians involving Bo Dollis of the Wild Magnolias. Generic boundaries have a tendency to be rather porous in New Orleans, with styles bleeding into each other almost randomly at times. The fusion of jazz, funk, and Mardi Gras Indian chants in recording studios raises
issues of authenticity among scholars, but for the participants in such activities, ephemeral street music is meant to be just that, and traditions change accordingly.

We hope you will enjoy this issue. Regarding the last one, we did receive a message from Dan Morgenstern, Director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, clarifying a point in Jack Stewart’s essay on Nick LaRocca and Jelly Roll Morton. Dan sent this comment via e-mail: “…Just got latest Jazz Archivist; very interesting, as usual, and noted reference to our IJS founder, Marshall Stearns (p. 31). Jack, to whom my best regards, ought to know that LaRocca was, typically, way off in left field in thinking (?) that Stearns was Jewish—Marsh was descended from an old New England family of judges and lawyers and his family was aghast that he chose literature rather than the law and even more aghast when he publicly associated himself with jazz and its makers….Guess LaRocca figured that ‘Stearns’ was an Anglicization of ‘Stern’….” Interestingly enough, LaRocca himself provides some insight via scribbled annotations on the back of Stearns’s letter, referring to him as a “young Jewish scholar, not out of school.” One can speculate that the key element may have been the Yale Hot Club stationery that Stearns used in his January 11, 1937 correspondence with LaRocca, which bore an inscription “charter unit of the U.H.C.A.” Quite possibly, the “H” was construed by LaRocca to stand for “Hebrew,” leading him to presume that Stearns must be Jewish. Also of interest is the reply that LaRocca wrote to Stearns on January 13, in which he proclaims that “while I was still in New Orleans, with no idea of returning to the Music Business, your writings [Stearns’s serial history of jazz in Down Beat, beginning in June 1936] made me feel that you had a personal antipathy toward me, and this in fact drove me out of retirement and back in the game to reclaim my proper place and fame in the dance music history. For this I offer my heartfelt thanks to you, for by the reception we are receiving everywhere I am positive I made the right move, and have not done as you evidently felt, dug something out of the grave, and should have remained there buried.” Thus, along with his seminal text, The Story of Jazz, and numerous other contributions to jazz studies, one must also recognize Marshall Stearns’s role in the ODJB’s comeback—a credit that he might well have wished to defer, but a wonderful example nonetheless of how much can be accomplished through miscommunication in the jazz world.

Finally, we have good news to report regarding collection development. During 2001-2002 the Archive received a number of notable donations. In the spring of 2001, the venerable New Orleans radio pioneer and renowned master of ceremonies George W. “Tex” Stephens gave 385 LPs, mostly of modern jazz and contemporary New Orleans music, which added significantly to the recorded sound collection, filling many gaps. In December 2001, Sylvia Barker, the daughter of famed New Orleans guitarist and raconteur Danny Barker and singer Louise “Blue Lu” Barker, generously donated her father’s record collection, consisting of 832 LPs, 302 78s, and 102 45 rpm singles, as well as various jazz books, union directories, and a scrapbook containing clippings, matchbook covers, and correspondence. Mr. Barker’s collection was comprised primarily of rhythm and blues and jazz
recordings, but it also included a number of sacred music and comedy records. The Donald Hirshberg collection of phonodiscs was received in March 2002 and included 700 78s, 156 LPs, and three books on jazz. Mr. Hirshberg grew up in Boston, where his father had a hardware store where records were sold. His interest in jazz came with the first releases of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. He later married a woman from New Orleans, and after relocating there, began to collect George Lewis, Bunk Johnson, and the like, adding to abiding interests in stride and blues. This diverse collection is in excellent condition and will also fill many gaps. Archive founder and former Curator Richard B. Allen has for many years generously made elements of his personal recorded sound collection available on loan at the Archive, but this past spring he decided to donate the entirety of his personal collection, including books, correspondence, awards, photography, memorabilia, and realia (such as Jack Laine’s fireman’s hat, for example) to the Archive coinciding with a move to a new residence in the French Quarter. The richness of this collection, representing as it does Dick’s many years of service to the Jazz Archive, will enhance the collection immeasurably and serve as a testament to his many contributions and a spirit that, we hope, still resides here. Additional acquisitions include a ten-year (1930-1940) run of the National edition of the Chicago Defender on microfilm, made possible by a subvention from the Collection Development group of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library and Dean Lance Query. Barry Martyn donated a scrapbook which had been compiled by Mona MacMurray with more than five hundred color snap shots of New Orleans jazz musicians from the 1960s forward, a veritable compendium of players and fans in various musical and social situations. Photographer Eric Waters generously provided three images from his collection of works, including this portrait of the Original Liberty Brass Band (see below). The generosity of such patrons accounts for the vibrancy of the collection, and it serves as a fitting testament to the power of jazz to bring people together in the cause of understanding. Our thanks to all the donors whose gifts have enriched the holdings of the Hogan Jazz Archive, and a special salute in memory of Tex Stephens, Danny and Lu Barker, and Mona MacMurray, whose contributions to New Orleans jazz can be counted on so many levels.

Bruce Boyd Raeburn

[Image: Michael White's Liberty Brass Band by Eric Waters]