

E. N. O. J & H Festival 1970
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News From the State of



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FROM CONGO SQUARE TO BOURBON STREET--

JAZZ FESTIVAL CELEBRATES NEW ORLEANS' MUSICAL HERITAGE

"Dansez Calinda! Badoum! Badoum!"

(Negro-Creole chant sung
at public slave dances.)

The time was the early 19th Century, the place, New Orleans, and the occasion, the weekly slave dance in Congo Square.

This was the rendezvous of New Orleans slaves gathered to perform tribal dances with strange names (bamboula, calinda)--names that smacked of Dahomey, Guinea and Senegal. Music was provided by such primitive instruments as "tam-tams," bamboulas, the semi-dried jawbone of an ass and a crudely formed banjo.

Turned on by the drums and music, the slaves stomped and chanted their songs in a Creole patois. A festive affair, it was always full of tumult, animation and hilarity. Refreshment vendors, on the sidewalks, peddled limonade (lemonade), biere douce (ginger beer) and estomac mulatre (ginger cakes).

At dusk the crowd dispersed to return to their masters. Wandering back, the slaves sang:

"Bonsoir danse, Soleil couché!"
("Goodnight dance, the sun goes to sleep!")

The Congo Square slave socials were discontinued during the Civil War but were resumed after its termination and lasted as a part of the New Orleans scene until Emancipation and Reconstruction Days.

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1970 Jazz Festival
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Before this place was Congo Square, it was Circus Square, site of visiting carnivals, and before that, it was ceremonial ground of Oumas Indians. Today, in this Space-and-Super Bowl age, it is Beauregard Square, a city block on North Rampart Street in front of the Municipal Auditorium.

Beauregard Square and the Auditorium site are hallowed grounds in the history of jazz. This spring, traditional New Orleans jazz will have really come full circle for, on April 22, a revitalized Jazz Festival will be staged on the very site where jazz had its genesis.

The Congo Square soirees were still in progress when Buddy Bolden, early jazz pioneer, was yet a teenager. Their primitive "soul" flavor had profound influence on Bolden who is credited with playing the first "hot blues." In 1894 he and Charlie Galloway parlayed several of the then-popular street songs and blues into compositions for a small instrumental group that was the first band to perform the music which eventually became jazz.

The blues grew out of slave chants like those heard in Congo Square, in grass-roots work songs heard on riverfront and plantation, sugar cane and cotton field and in spirituals sung at churches and funerals. Later they were modified by the more classical music of the "gens de couleur libre," freed men of color who absorbed not only French and Spanish surnames but the entire Creole culture, as well. As part of the Creole milieu, they lived in the French-oriented downtown sections and some, prior to Emancipation, even owned slaves. Many studied classical music and sent their children to music tutors, or even to conservatories in Paris. Thus, among the Creoles of color, a tradition was established for classical music along with a skill for following written musical notes.

For a long time New Orleans' Negro society and music was fractionalized between downtown Catholic-Creole "gens de couleur" and uptown Protestant blacks. Creoles played classics, opera, mazurkas and quadrilles while uptowners, playing by sight,

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Jazz Festival
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improvised in a rough, robust style. The two societies, parts of the once finely-drawn caste system of old New Orleans, were thrown together when, after Reconstruction Days, total segregation encompassed even those with the slightest "touch of the tar brush."

Opportunities for Negro musicians increased when New Orleans' first organized tenderloin was established. Known as Storyville, the area of some 200 or more bordellos absorbed a great number of musicians to augment their standard offering.

Here "Jelly Roll" Morton, pianist at Lulu White's pleasure palace on Basin Street (Mahogany Hall), took ragtime music and combined it with the blues. First true jazz composer, Morton, whose life spanned the jazz age itself, immortalized his talent in the popular "Jelly Roll Blues":

"In New Orleans, in New Orleans, Louisiana
There's the finest boy for miles around,
Lord, Mister Jelly Roll..."

Despite the myth that Storyville was the original source of New Orleans jazz, musicians played the new music everywhere. They performed at Milneburg on Lake Pontchartrain, Sunday afternoon concerts at Washington Park in Carrollton and at Tulane University proms uptown--plus other engagements in between.

Then, there were funerals. Marching brass bands, so ubiquitous at outdoor functions and Mardi Gras parades, were paramount at funerals. Going to the cemetery the band played, with muffled drums, such soft somber dirges as "Nearer My God to Thee." On the way back, followed by a "second line" of swaying, dancing folk, they played upbeat selections:

"Didn't he ramble?
He rambled
He rambled till the butchers cut him down."

When the Federal Government, in 1917, ordered Storyville closed, the bonanza of jobs for Negro musicians dried up. Looking for new fields of employment, many musicians joined the grand exodus to greener pastures--to Chicago, Los Angeles, New York

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1970 Jazz Festival
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and points in between. It was a dispersal of much New Orleans talent but by no means all of it. A goodly number stayed behind to carry on the old tradition where it all began.

In 1916 the Original Dixieland Jazz Band arrived in Chicago and the next year cut the first issued recording of jazz, "Livery Stable Blues" and "Original Dixieland Jazz Band One-Step." With this came a world acceptance of the music that "ran away from home." This first record spectacularly sold more than a million copies. Success behind them, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band hopped an ocean and toured a waiting Europe.

Thereafter, a whole procession of jazzmen made history--Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Sidney Bechet, Kid Ory and a long, legendary string of others. It looked then as if traditional jazz would reign supreme for a millenium.

Soon though, jazz, experimented with by newer, younger musicians, unaffected, for the most part by the New Orleans influence, took other forms--swing, bop, progressive, modern, cool, jazz-rock, etc. Loyal traditionalists stayed with jazz the way it started and told it like it was. The spotlight dimmed on the older forms as traditional jazz declined.

After World War II the pendulum swung back. The old music had never perished and was always supported by Orleanians and die-hard fans the world over. The revival of Dixieland began and continues to this day. Old jazz veterans are once again adulated and world interest is expressed in the old music and its easy style.

In New Orleans the revival has been no less spectacular--a jazz renaissance with a viable future in prospect. Today there is an active New Orleans Jazz Club; new "kitty" halls in the French Quarter (Preservation and Dixieland Halls) where jazz is dispensed with authentic style, in unembellished surroundings; piano bars with good, working jazz pianists; dance cruises on the Steamer President with

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1970 Jazz Festival
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traditional jazz bands; a jazz entertainment complex built around the new Economy Hall and the relocated Jazz Museum in the Royal Sonesta Hotel and a buzz of jazz activity along good-time Bourbon Street. Scholarly research into jazz is carried out both at the Jazz Club and in the academic milieu of Tulane University. New life has been breathed into the soul of jazz here in its mother city.

Last summer New Orleans was a proud parent as it exhibited talents of a prodigal son--traditional Dixieland jazz. It was a homecoming and reunion, and one joyous bash--JazzFest 1969. Fans from everywhere turned out to honor and to enjoy. So did musicians--local citizens and honorary Orleanians of the jazz world.

This year the festival is revitalized with a new direction and a different name--the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival--scheduled at Municipal Auditorium and Beauregard Square, April 22 through 26.

Producer of the rededicated festival is famed George Wein, founder of the Newport Jazz Festival and original creator of the jazz festival concept.

Plans call for Beauregard Square to become part of the Auditorium by being enclosed on three sides with a seven-foot canvas fence. Entrance to the square will be through the Auditorium. Visitors may stroll from area to area to sample, aurally, jazz, ragtime, blues or gospel music. Additionally, booths will feature a taste of Louisiana's unique cuisine along with exhibits of Louisiana's rich art and folklore.

To date, headliners include Mahalia Jackson, Al Hirt, Pete Fountain, the Preservation Hall Band and Duke Ellington. Others are to be announced shortly. In all, some 200 artists will perform.

Sponsor of the festival is a new group, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation. Financial support has been given to the festival by the Miller Brewing Company of Milwaukee, which has contributed more than \$20,000 to the foundation to help underwrite the event.

The unique heritage of New Orleans' music will be duly honored when the history of jazz (née jass) comes full circle--from Congo Square to Beauregard Square--at the 1970 Jazz and Heritage Festival, April 22-26.

For further information on Louisiana's colorful fairs and festivals or jazz music, write: Dept. JHF, Louisiana Tourist Commission, P.O. Box 44291, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804. ##### 3/12/70