



James Andrews

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Help us understand the brass band tradition in New Orleans falling on hard times.

It was during that time, it wasn't that many people playing this music. It had died off, like, it was a lot of older musicians, like you used to catch the people at Preservation Hall was 80 and 90 years old, and they was playing brass band music. But during that time, no youngsters wasn't playing this kind of music. It was for the older, old men. So around that time, it was dying out. They only had one band left was playing that kind of music. It was the Olympia Brass Band, and then, Danny Barker came back to New Orleans, moved back from New York, and so, he started a band called The Fab-U-Brass Band and then, that's what got a lot of people involved in it, a lot of youngsters. It was people like The Dirty Dozen Band, Leroy Jones and people like that. And Michael White, Greg Stafford. So that's what he meant by it was on the hard times. It wasn't too many people involved in it and they had one band around that time playing. It wasn't that wide of, you know...

Why had the music fallen on such hard times?

'Cause it probably wasn't too many people playing it that was interested in playing this kind of music 'cause it was a old-man thing. And they, you know, it was like the modern stuff was like more for the youngsters, Sam today. But it's just like we got more; it's more lively now in New Orleans. You couldn't catch it that much; that's what hard times means for the music.

What did Danny Barker say to turn you on to this music?

Mr. Barker brought me along and then, you know, like I said, he say, "Just play the music, respect the old cats who you're learning the music from. Go 'round, listen to 'em, look at 'em. Pick all their ways and different things about the music, but always respect 'em."

What was he trying to get you guys to do?

He was trying to get us to learn the instruments. Learn the music and keep the heritage going.

Why had the music fallen out of favor and then what happened?

When you say 'hard times,' it was not too many young people was involved in it and it was one band at that time left playing this music. And then, Mr. Barker came by my house and got me and my young brother and took us to the where he was working with a lot of kids. And that was the, the Fab-U-Brass Band. Then he started another band for us; it was called The Roots of Jazz. So, what happened was, it was like all, all the young people, but in New Orleans, a lot of young people grew up in the streets, following behind the street parade in the second line. But a lot of people, a lot of people don't come out and be musicians from that. It's a certain selected few people who get it in here and it sticks with ya. And all my life, I've been playing this music. Well, since I've been thirteen, but I've been listening to it and around it and my family was musicians and so it was like, it was there for me. So, I know that this is what I want to do.

What was it like, not just born to play this instrument, but that you really loved it?

For me, it was like I used to always go hang out at the place called The Preservation Hall. A few trumpet players was in town who I idolized and I really loved and just, just used to like to watch how they, the band leaders, trumpet player, used to just watch how they used to work the crowd. And then how people used to treat the bandleader and the trumpet player and just for me, watching that, it was, you know, it was overwhelming for me. So when I come up playing the trumpet, I say, "I want to be like Milton Baptiste and Kid Chic, and people like Percy Humphrey and all them kind of guys." So, that what really inspired me to want to be a trumpet player.

Then you went ahead and gave yourself a nickname?

Oh, I call myself "Satchmo of the Ghetto." It's kind of like, it's the Trimmey, and then, I want to put the Louis Armstrong, make sure that Louis, that the people know where, which style I'm coming from and then where I'm coming from. So I put them two together and came up with "Satchmo of the Ghetto."

Did you know much about Satchmo when you started?

Oh, I've studied him a lot for a lot of times. I studied, brought a lot of records and people sent me a lot of records from all over, of Satchmo, and I watched films and I heard a lot of different people tell me things that they knowed about him personally.

Tell me about growing in Trimmey, a place where the music grew?

Right. Well, the Trimmey was world famous for a lot of musicians coming from there. People like Earl Palmer, John Boudreau, a lot of different guys came from the Trimmey, so it was like, it was always music in the clubs, in the parade passing by, so it was always the music there. So, you know, most people from Trimmey's do wind up being musicians.

As a kid you watched these bands go by?

Yeah.

Explain what the second line is.

A second line is something that people do every Sunday, just a gathering. It's a gathering of folks from all over town. You got some Creole folks, you got some dark-skinned folks, but it's just a gathering. It was something probably that came out of Congo Square. Everybody used to gather at Congo Square on Sundays and then we just took it and put it to the streets and gather round all over town.

What is the meaning of this music to you?

The meaning of the music for me, let's see... Well, one thing about it, first of all, I love it, I love to be doing this and playing this kind of music and, you know, this is my roots, in New Orleans, and my heritage in New Orleans. So the thing about it is, it's just so, it's just so joyful. That's the main thing - it's just so joyful and it feels so great to be able to pull people together every Sunday who enjoys your music. So that's a big thing for me.

You started by saying the thing jazz is...?

The thing is with jazz is, a lot of people try to portray jazz as being intellectual, on that sense, but for us in New Orleans, it's more of a down home thing. It's more of a down home feeling, you know, where we coming from. And then it's like everybody... It was the thing like everybody just jiving, musicians, you know, the cats jive and then, you know, it's something for the people and we can take it here or we can take it to the streets. You know? But it's, it's something like, it's not really intellectual. It's more of a street people thing and down home thing.

Do you listen to a lot of jazz styles?

Yeah. I listen to a lot of stuff.

Do you think some of that down home feeling has been lost?

I hear it in the Latin stuff, what they're doing. People like Tito Puente and people like Arturo Sandoval. But like she said, a lot of stuff, people try to

portray jazz as being intellectual. But I don't see it from that. I see it from the thing where just ordinary people listening to the music or you might be in a juke joint; that's the kind of feeling I get from it. I don't see the other side or the white-collared type, type jazz musicians; I look for the more extreme feeling of the jazz. That's how we play it in New Orleans. Not by a lot of notes, but strictly the feeling. That's what makes us so well known and New Orleans is so famous for that feeling, that beat, and we put the horn stuff on top of that fabulous beat, man.

Tell me about Latin things that Jelly Roll Morton talked about.

Yeah.

Tell me more about that.

My thing is when I listen to the Latin cats, it's like you can close your eyes and it's about two beats off from the New Orleans thing, 'cause I figure New Orleans stuff was in, influenced by some Latin stuff, 'cause we got a little flavor there. And then probably the Latin stuff got turned on by the New Orleans stuff. So it's really the feeling and that flavor. That's what I look for in the music: the flavor and the feeling.

You gave it a name.

"Fire on the bayou." Yeah, that's what we called it in New Orleans. That's when it's hot. Call it "fire on the bayou." It makes you want to dance; that's the kind of music, that's what it do to you. When you go listen to the other style of jazz, it's more of a set-down thing. You can set down and have your drink, but when you hear this second line and just like the Latin stuff, man, you want to dance, man. That what we do to you in New Orleans. We make you get up and dance.

Talk about this tradition and younger people coming up.

Well, the thing with the younger people coming up now, it's blooming. You got 40, you got a lot of... It's happening now. It's, it's, we got a lot of young people playing this, this old music now. We got bands everywhere in town now. But what happened was, Mr. Barker influenced some youngsters, and then, some other youngsters got inspired. It's like passing the torch down from one generation to the next generation. That what keeps it going, though.

The End