

PIECING TOGETHER THE "MONKEY PUZZLE"

A STUDY OF MODERN JAZZ IN NEW ORLEANS

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## **Introduction**

Modern jazz has always been artistically alive and creative in New Orleans, even if it is not as well known or commercially successful as traditional jazz. Both outsiders coming to New Orleans such as Ornette Coleman and Cannonball Adderley and locally born musicians such as Alvin Battiste, Ellis Marsalis, and James Black have contributed to this music. These musicians have influenced later players like Steve Masakowski, Shannon Powell, and Johnny Vidacovich up to more current musicians like Terence Blanchard, Donald Harrison, and Christian Scott. There are multiple reasons why New Orleans modern jazz has not had a greater profile. Some of these reasons relate to the economic considerations of modern jazz. It is difficult for anyone involved in modern jazz, whether musicians, record label owners, studio producers, or nightclub owners, to make a profit from it. There are also political explanations to account for its low profile. As a city, once the political and tourism establishment saw that music could attract visitors to New Orleans, such entities have promoted the more traditional types of jazz at the expense of the modern jazz. The traditional forms played and popularized by King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Sidney Bechet are more identified with New Orleans than the more current forms of Ed Blackwell and Alvin "Red" Tyler. In addition, there are cultural theories that illuminate these discrepancies. Whether correct or not, music in New Orleans is perceived to contain a functional element. Often it needs to entertain or allow for dancing. Again, whether correct or not, modern jazz is seen more as art music and less as dance music or entertainment.

Despite all those challenges to it, musicians in New Orleans have played it, recorded it, and nurtured it. When compared to the better known jazz artists recorded in the larger media centers such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, the modern jazz of New Orleans has a great deal in common with that music. There are certain techniques and ways of playing that are similar, but also some that are different. Where the major differences lie are in the lives and training of New Orleans musicians. Almost all of them are schooled both formally and informally. Almost all of them come up playing the more traditional musics of New Orleans whether classical, church, or traditional jazz. Some leave those traditional genres of music behind forever. Some stay with it. Some switch back and forth. However, that foundation is

always there in the music they perform.

One of the great champions of modern jazz in New Orleans has been educator/composer/saxophonist Harold Battiste and the record label All For One Records he helmed in the 1960s, and then later from the late 1980s until the present. Battiste was the first to record modern jazz in New Orleans, and the records that AFO issued are influential statements of what has distinguished and continues to distinguish modern jazz in New Orleans, as well as what made it similar to such recordings elsewhere. The history of AFO also shows how factors relating more to the business of making, distributing, and promoting records can determine the success of a record company rather than the quality of the music. Through AFO, one can see the early development of modern jazz and its shifts as time has gone on. In New Orleans, modern jazz has remained and continues to be a vital music. Modern jazz in New Orleans has a unique history and set of issues that surround it and define it. Modern jazz in New Orleans has had challenges with respect to its economics, its popularity, and its accessibility, but musicians have still played and produced it with varying degrees of success.

## Chapter 1 – Jazz and Jazz in New Orleans: A Background

In order to understand modern jazz and the issues involved with this music in New Orleans, similar issues with jazz in general and jazz in New Orleans must be discussed. Ever since jazz coalesced in the years at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in New Orleans and quickly spread to the rest of the country, its definition has been difficult to pin down. It has also changed as the music has changed over the ensuing decades. The Grove Online Dictionary of Music defines it as the following

The term [jazz] conveys different though related meanings: 1) a musical tradition rooted in performing conventions that were introduced and developed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by African Americans; 2) a set of attitudes and assumptions brought to music-making, chief among them the notion of performance as a fluid creative process involving improvisation; and 3) a style characterized by syncopation, melodic and harmonic elements derived from the blues, cyclical formal structures and a supple rhythmic approach to phrasing known as swing.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the explanation that follows, jazz is delineated into several subgroups and genres. Jazz, as it started and continues in New Orleans as traditional jazz, proves to be the following:

The process unfolded as musicians gradually developed new ways of interpreting a varied repertory that included marches, dance music (two-steps, quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, schottisches and mazurkas), popular songs, traditional hymns and spirituals. What might be called a nascent jazz sensibility arose from the loosening of performance strictures and the adoption of an individualistic, defiantly liberating attitude that has remained at the core of this musical tradition....Phrases were stretched out and either played in a more relaxed manner or syncopated more vigorously, not just in one instrumental part but in two or more simultaneously. Drummers 'jazzed up' – that is, enlivened – simple duple and triple metre by introducing syncopated patterns and phrasing over bar lines. Players began embellishing and ornamenting melodies, inventing counter melodies, weaving arpeggiated lines into the texture and enriching diatonic harmonies with blue notes...Players were guided by familiar formal plans, ordered sequences of themes and keys, specific functions of individual instruments within ensembles and common techniques of embellishment. When musicians invented new rhythmic devices and melodic patterns, these were imitated by others and repeated in different pieces, then passed on through oral tradition.

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Grove Music Online – Jazz <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/45011>

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Ibid.

As jazz continued, it kept many of the above characteristics as its base or DNA. But like any art form, it evolved and took in the ideas of the musicians who heard it and played it over the years. However, in New Orleans itself, such traditional music never lost its appeal nor musicians who would play it.

Jazz in New Orleans continues to the present time, but its history and origins go back further into the past than any other place. New Orleans has always been a city full of music. From opera to dance music to vaudeville to string bands, New Orleanians in the 1800s could chose from those types of music and many more. Given the demand for these different musics, musicians often played several types of music. In the population of New Orleans, there were a large percentage of African slaves and Free People of Color. Due to the particular nature of the slave laws (aka the *Code Noire*), former Africans were allowed to gather and practice their cultural traditions more freely than anywhere else in the South. That allowed for African music and traditions to be retained in New Orleans that were not allowed in the rest of the United States with its more restrictive laws. As various immigrant groups from Germany, Italy, and Ireland came through the Port of New Orleans and brought their music with them, they added that to jazz. Rural former slaves with their music who migrated to New Orleans after the Civil War did the same.

With all this commingling of music, the years after Plessy vs. Ferguson were integral to New Orleans music and the development of jazz. Before Plessy vs. Ferguson solidified Jim Crow laws to separate black and white, Creoles had occupied the middle ground between the two with their own culture, traditions, and music. After the Supreme Court decisions and the laws that followed, Creoles were categorized with blacks. Now “having lost their distinctive position with the legislative act of 1894, the Creoles had little choice but to move closer to the larger African American community.”<sup>3</sup> The Creole traditions of string music, “sweet” playing, and written scores mixed with the blues and improvisation of the black musicians to become one of the streams that flowed into the river that is jazz. The two communities were not completely separate. Some musicians such as Alphonse Picou moved within both circles, but on the whole they had not had a close association which changed as the century changed.

Music was still everywhere in the early 1900s. All the musicians in the city from the haughtiest Creoles to the bluesiest rural African-Americans played music in a variety of settings including picnics,

balls, bars, and brothels. All of these settings contributed to what started as ragtime and became jazz. As Samuel Chartres has detailed, the style of the early 1900s had repeated prominent melodies and no solos. To fill out the sound of small ensembles, everyone was always playing. The rhythms included a one-step, a fox-trot, and a slow fox-trot/blues that came to be known as a “slow drag”<sup>4</sup> Chartres states that “what 'went over' was a 'peppier' rhythm for dancing.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite the amount of work for musicians in New Orleans, as was stated earlier, there was a migration from New Orleans starting 1902 – 1903.<sup>6</sup> Jim Crow laws and discrimination was one reason. Another was ambition. Many musicians were “hoping for a job that paid more than \$1.50 a night, and for an audience that was larger than the neighborhood dance hall.”<sup>7</sup> Other cities also had recording opportunities as very few jazz recordings were made in New Orleans in the early days of jazz. With this continual migration, the New Orleans music scene lost many of its creators to Chicago, New York, and other cities. Music in New Orleans remained much like it had been into the 1920s until the innovations of musicians who had migrated such as King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, and others made its way back to New Orleans. This included the transition from collective improvisation to more solo and chorus-type music, and from that into big band swing. When the economy worsened in the early 1930s, that decimated the New Orleans music community and caused more musicians to leave.<sup>8</sup> It seemed that New Orleans style jazz was becoming a more rare occurrence and a neglected style of playing until two events started slowly putting this kind of jazz into the public consciousness again. One was Alan Lomax's recording of Jelly Roll Morton at the Library of Congress. The second was the publication of Fred

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4

Ibid 118-119.

5

Ibid 112.

6

Wang 101.

7

Chartres, *Trumpet*, 158.

8

Ibid 294.



Ramsey's *Jazzmen* in 1939.

*Jazzmen* strongly piqued the interest of researchers and fans of older jazz. It credited jazz to New Orleans, specifically black musicians, and traced a history of many of the early musicians such as Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, and Freddie Keppard. For such fans, the jazz in *Jazzmen* represented an alternative to the overly commercialized swing music of the day<sup>9</sup> in the same way bebop would become. Bebop became an individual-based, art-oriented form of jazz self-expression. It was comparatively more discordant, and not focused on dancing. The jazz portrayed in *Jazzmen* was a folk music that served a function, such as dancing, parade, or funeral, for example, rather than as a form of art or self-expression. *Jazzmen* moved to a previous period in time and taste. Bebop moved into the future. In the years that followed, many of these fans traveled to New Orleans to “rediscover” and record many of these musicians. New Orleans became so associated with this style that the city fathers attempted to promote New Orleans to tourists using traditional jazz as a foundation for New Orleans' identity. The economy of the Crescent City was changing as the port of New Orleans became less of an economic driver, and tourism was thought to be an economic engine that could replace it. Until the “rediscovery” of New Orleans Jazz coincided with the changing economy, most natives of New Orleans thought jazz to be nothing more than music for dances and parties. It wasn't anything special to them.<sup>10</sup>

As New Orleans became known for this kind of music, people who visited sought out this music. With its growing popularity, there were more opportunities to play it and therefore more money to be made playing it. However, some musicians were not comfortable playing old music. They identified it with the past and the Jim Crow discrimination that was prevalent, so it was not as popular in the black community. The popular music of the black community became jump blues which became rhythm and blues, and that made it difficult for musicians who wanted to play more modern jazz to find work playing that music. Rhythm and blues became very popular in the 1940s and 1950s, and New Orleans became one of the centers of it. Many jazz musicians had to make ends meet playing rhythm and blues. Jam sessions or after

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Ibid 335.

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Bruce Raeburn, Lecture on “New Orleans Styles on the Writing of American Jazz History,” (Tulane University, March 3, 2010).

hours sessions were about the extent of modern jazz in public. Charles Suhor in his book *Jazz In New Orleans: The Postwar Years Through 1970* basically agrees with this statement. It was still “a cult affair.” In New Orleans, where it was also overshadowed by old time jazz, it had even less of a presence.”<sup>11</sup>

The lack of opportunities to play music that the musicians wanted to play, and the lack of control over their own music led several forward-thinking musicians to band together to form their own label and publishing company in 1961. The musicians who formed All For One Records and At Last Publishing wanted to gain opportunities and to stop being exploited monetarily by record companies who had million-selling records yet did not share the economic bounty of these records with the musicians who had played on them. AFO recorded both rhythm and blues and modern jazz. These were the only modern jazz recordings at that time in New Orleans.

Although these were the only recordings of modern jazz in New Orleans, modern jazz was a music that was wholly present in the Crescent City. The music itself, its development, and the musicians who played it were all shaped by the history and musical traditions of New Orleans. The unfavorable economics of presenting this kind of jazz, and the civic and cultural emphasis on other forms of music more native to New Orleans all played a part in making modern jazz in New Orleans what it became. Despite such challenges, significant recordings and concerts of modern jazz were made here. The collective All For One (AFO) Records and At Last Publishing, a recording and publishing company led by Harold Battiste, had some short-term success in recording and preserving the modern jazz of the late 1950s and early 1960s before they were victimized by deceitful business practices, music industry changes, and their own naivete. This paper seeks to discuss the issues involved in the difficulty of playing and presenting this music in New Orleans. It also addresses differences in how musicians and audiences in New Orleans approach the music in New Orleans. I will argue that these differences contribute to making modern jazz here unique and of New Orleans. AFO Records will be presented as a case study for how these issues played out in the workings of the only local record company concerned with modern jazz in this time period.

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Earl Palmer and Tony Scherman, *Backbeat: Earl Palmer's Story* (Wash., D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1999) 64.

## **Chapter 2 – Economics and popularity of modern jazz in New Orleans**

The conventional wisdom is that jazz started in New Orleans at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and worked its way up the Mississippi, spreading out to the entire country. That kind of jazz – horn-led collective improvisation over syncopated rhythm which we will call traditional jazz – has become synonymous with New Orleans. However, the more recent forms of jazz, which take their cues from Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie's bebop revolution in the 1940s and 1950s as well as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Charles Mingus' innovations in the 1960s, are not as identified with New Orleans despite the heavy presence of many New Orleanians – Wynton Marsalis, Terrence Blanchard, Branford Marsalis, Nicholas Payton, Herlin Riley, Donald Harrison Jr. - at the forefront of current modern jazz.

Modern jazz is taught, played, and recorded in New Orleans almost as much as traditional jazz. The disparity is that modern jazz in New Orleans is not nearly as visible or popular as traditional jazz. And its visibility and popularity do not compare that of other forms of music played in New Orleans such as brass band, rhythm and blues, funk, and hip-hop. Currently there are four venues that program modern jazz, and two of these only on certain nights. Meanwhile, there are over a dozen that program traditional jazz and even more where rhythm and blues, rock, funk, and hip-hop can be heard. Although there have been more establishments dedicated to modern jazz over the last 60 years, there have always been fewer of them when compared to places to hear any other kind of music. And over the history of New Orleans music, musicians have struggled to build careers as modern jazz musicians. From Louis Armstrong to Kermit Ruffins, Allen Toussaint to Galactic, Master P. to Lil Wayne, Fats Domino to the Radiators, these names are better known and more identified with New Orleans than the modern jazz ensembles The AFO Executives or Astral Project. Many of the modern jazz players have had to leave New Orleans for further opportunity and recognition (Ed Blackwell, Wynton Marsalis, Christian Scott). Some become known for music that is not jazz. Examples of this include the Turbinton brothers, Wilson (aka Willie Tee) and Earl, who produced

and played on the Wild Magnolias Mardi Gras Indian recordings, and Harold Battiste, whose non-jazz accomplishments include being the music director for the Sonny and Cher show and producing the first Dr. John recording. Others are better known for teaching, such as saxophonist Kidd Jordan at Southern University of New Orleans and clarinetist Alvin Batiste at Southern University in Baton Rouge.

This chapter seeks to show reasons for this lack of recognition and its effect on the music and culture of New Orleans. One of the first explanations for the role and treatment of modern jazz in New Orleans concerns what modern jazz is and what modern jazz is not. When modern jazz, defined as the virtuosic, harmonically and rhythmically complex music that started in the Harlem neighborhood of New York in the late 1930s and early 1940s as the swing and big band era of jazz reached its peak and had started to decline, was being conceived and developed, it was a reaction to the formulaic big band and swing dance music that had been popular for the previous decade. The name of this new music was called “bop” or “bebop” and, in the words of Marshall Stearns in his book *The Story of Jazz*, “...’bop’ was a sudden eruption within jazz, a fast but logical complication of melody, harmony, and rhythm.”<sup>12</sup> As Mark Tucker and Travis A. Jackson state in the *Grove Music Online* article on jazz,

Through informal and after-hours jam sessions held in small night clubs and musicians' apartments, a process of collaborative discovery unfolded in which new ideas about harmonic substitutions, rhythmic vocabulary and melodic construction were worked out, shared and tested on the bandstand.”<sup>13</sup> They further describe it as having “The use of chromatically altered pitches within a diatonic harmonic context (e.g. flattened 5th and 9th, sharp 9th, flat 13th)” and “dissonant syntax, whole-tone runs and off-kilter rhythmic patterns.”<sup>14</sup>

Daniel Belgrad theorizes that modern jazz, specifically the influential bebop genre, “often substituted the dissonances of extended chords (notes of the harmonic overtone series beyond the perfect

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Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) 218.

13

Mark Tucker and Travis A. Jackson, *Jazz* (Oxford Music Online), accessed May 31, 2012 , <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.tulane.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/45011>

14

Tucker.

fifth) for the simple consonances of the popular standards from which they were derived.”<sup>15</sup> These substitutions continued beyond the perfect fifth and the major and minor thirds that make up the diatonic triad. Stearns states that “ninths and augmented fifths became the clichés of bop.”<sup>16</sup>

The musicians who conceived bebop were reacting to the “routine and constraints of the big bands (sections, scores, light repertoire, silly showmanship).”<sup>17</sup> In his explanation of bop, Stearns continues, “The bop stance of hunched preoccupation, of somnambulistic concentration, was based – in part – on the desire to be judged on the merits of the music alone.”<sup>18</sup> Scholar John Szwed describes bebop as “almost like chamber music in its seriousness.”<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, the traditional jazz played by such Orleanians as Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, and Sidney Bechet is a part of the very fabric of the city with its origin and development here at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. Traditional jazz, “usually a rhythm section of drums, guitar and plucked double bass [that] emphasized a continuous ensemble polyphony, in which the wind players rarely rested, [which included]...violin, cornet, clarinet, trombone, drums, double bass, guitar and sometimes piano,”<sup>20</sup> was and is a cultural phenomenon that was unique to New Orleans. Bruce

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Daniel Belgrad, “Bebop” *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (1998) 183.

16

Stearns 229.

17

Frank Bergerot, *Jazz* (Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap Publishers LTD., 2006) 109.

18

Stearns 221.

19

John Szwed, *Jazz 101 – A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Jazz* (New York: Hyperion, 2000) 160.

20

Lawrence Gushee, “New Orleans jazz.” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19830> (accessed November 4, 2011).

Raeburn affirms that “jazz channeled community life, ethnic diversity, and joie de vivre”<sup>21</sup> in a “city where music is intrinsic to the life style.”<sup>22</sup> Matt Sakakeeny concurs in his statement that even though New Orleans music is an “amorphous collection of interrelated styles...they are bound together through an association with place (New Orleans), race (African-American), and functionality (social dance)...”<sup>23</sup>

In the same way, the early rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues of Fats Domino, Smiley Lewis, Huey “Piano” Smith, and many others came into fruition here. Their music and the sound of it influenced music around the world. This music developed from the traditional jazz and jump blues in the late 1940s. It retained the rhythmic drive and horns of traditional jazz, but dropped the polyphony and collective improvisation. The horns played riffs more than individual lines, and the drummers emphasized the backbeats. Piano lines gained funky syncopation. All these changes came about in the 1950s and 1960s. New Orleans music retained this during these and following decades while absorbing trends from the rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll of other parts of the country but without losing its Crescent City attributes or essence. This music is again a phenomenon in which New Orleans takes great pride and identifies with.

Another reason that modern jazz has not been as popular as other music genres in New Orleans is that modern jazz players prioritized technical facility to a degree that traditional jazz players did not. Szwed says, “What made bebop seem even wilder was the sheer virtuosity of its players.”<sup>24</sup> With its avant garde intentions and virtuosic demands, bebop was purposefully alienating for a more general population to enjoy it and play it. Stearns states the “musicians themselves seemed to go out of their way to discourage”

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Bruce Boyd Raeburn, *New Orleans Style and the Writing of American Jazz History*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009) 5.

22

Ibid 7.

23

Matt Sakakeeny, “New Orleans Music as a Circulatory System,” *Black Music Research Journal* 31 (2) 2011, 1.

24

Szwed 166.

public interest.<sup>25</sup> He describes how a bebop player might solo with his back to the audience and then walk off the stage.<sup>26</sup> The music became something to be appreciated more for the artistic value of it, less for its social or communal values and appeal.

Another reason for the lack of popularity and recognition for modern jazz is the scarcity of venues to hear it. Over the last fifty years in New Orleans, compared to places to hear rhythm and blues or traditional jazz, there has been a dearth of places to hear modern jazz even though it has still been present via recordings and graduate programs. The list of places where one could hear rhythm and blues is lengthy and legendary. It includes The Tiajuana Club and the Robin Hood in Central City, the Hideaway and Club Desire in the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, and the Caldonia in the 1940s and 1950s to The Night Cap uptown, Dorothy's Medallion in Mid-City, and the Safari Lounge on Chef Menteur in the 1960s and 1970s to Tipitinas uptown and the Maple Leaf, Jed's, and Jimmy's in the 1970s and 1980s to the present. The legendary names from Fats Domino to James Booker to Professor Longhair to Earl King played R&B in these spots. With traditional jazz, the venues have even greater renown from the Eagle Saloon on South Rampart Street and Perserverance Hall in Treme to Economy Hall, Funky Butt Hall, and "Few Clothes." Later there was Luthjens Dance Hall and Mama Lou's and Speck's Moulin Rouge up to current times with Preservation Hall, The Palm Court, and the Spotted Cat among others. When the subject is venues that consistently featured modern jazz, the list is much smaller. Pianist Ellis Marsalis had the Haven (immortalized on the Ellis Marsalis Quartet recording "Swinging at the Haven") at his family's hotel in Shrewsbury right outside New Orleans. In Gerttown there was the Joy Tavern, and when the Playboy Club opened in the French Quarter in the 1960s, it booked modern jazz. Regular modern jazz gigs did not arise until the late 1970s and 1980s with Tyler's, Lu and Charlie's, and Snug Harbor. However, before that and to a lesser extent in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these places came and went and were far less common than clubs featuring other types of music.

Charles Suhor did an extensive study on modern jazz in New Orleans. He states, "Clearly the new

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Stearns 221.

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Ibid 221 – 222.

music was not easily found. Be-bop and other modern jazz had to be sought out at strip clubs, after-hours jam sessions, and other uncommon venues.”<sup>27</sup> He later explains further,

Playing new jazz in New Orleans during the late 1940s and 1950s typically meant jamming at someone's house or at an educational institution (usually furtively), working a strip club, playing an after-hours session where few if any musicians were paid, or having a weekend or spot job that included some jazz but emphasized hit parade or R&B tunes for dancing.<sup>28</sup>

Each of these types of venues had their drawbacks. Suhor calls the strip clubs “a sorry mess.”<sup>29</sup>

He describes them as

settings that were typically dingy and the dancing artless...B-girls and prostitutes worked the dark, ill-smelling rooms, soliciting watered down drinks and sometimes 'rolling' hapless customers (i.e. robbing them after drugging or clobbering them). Various narcotics were available...<sup>30</sup>

There were after-hours sessions in certain places in New Orleans. The Dew Drop Inn, famous for its floor show revues and rhythm and blues performers, would have jam sessions after the featured performers had finished. In an interview in 1999, Earl Palmer recalled how, after he and other musicians would get off of their other jobs, “We’d go up there after playing on our job all the time, and we’d go up there to get the opportunity to play a little be-bop, play what we want so we sit in...and jam...”<sup>31</sup> There were other jam sessions, but as Suhor writes, “Most were short lived. Club owners did not make much money by staying open after 3 a.m., and the musicians union discouraged the essentially free entertainment that jam sessions provided.”<sup>32</sup>

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Charles Suhor, *Jazz in New Orleans: The Post War Years Through 1970*, (Rutgers – State University of New Jersey: Institute of Jazz Studies, 2001) 193.

28

Suhor 203.

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Suhor 206.

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Suhor 207.

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Earl Palmer, interview with the author, 12/9/99.

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Suhor 209.



Educational institutions were another place where modern jazz musicians played. However, Suhor points out that “no local university formally embraced jazz of any kind in the postwar period.”<sup>33</sup> Xavier University graduated several musicians who went on to have careers in music, but vocal music was emphasized more than jazz. Dillard University had little modern jazz, but several of the most influential modern jazz musicians got their educations there including Harold Battiste and Ellis Marsalis. At Loyola University, the popularity of modern jazz came and went over the 1950s and 1960s before it dug its roots in by the 1970s and forward. As for Tulane, Suhor uses one word to describe the modern jazz activity there, “nil.”<sup>34</sup> In the last quarter of the 20th century, this has changed. The University of New Orleans started a jazz studies program, and Tulane University and the New Orleans Center For the Creative Arts have also added jazz courses.

There were also jam sessions in people's homes. Suhor details several accounts of jam sessions going on in the homes of pianist Ed Frank, drummer John Boudreaux, trumpeter Melvin Lastie, and drummer Ed Blackwell. Later in the 1960s and 1970s, there were workshops in the French Quarter organized by the Turbinton brothers, saxophonist Earl and pianist Wilson, whose professional name was Willie Tee. This provided a venue where people could both hear and play modern jazz.

It may seem that there were many places to hear modern jazz after reading the previous paragraphs, but Suhor calls modern jazz “essentially an underground music, an invisible art supported by the musicians themselves, a small number of serious listeners, and a few Beat Generation wannabees.”<sup>35</sup> Now this section begs the circular question: was modern jazz not popular because there were almost no places to hear it, or were there no places to hear it because it was not popular? It stands to reason that if club owners and musicians could have made enough money playing modern jazz, they would have done so and there would have been more places to hear it. Therefore it seems that there were no places to hear it

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Suhor 223.

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Suhor 225.

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Suhor 209.

because it was not popular in New Orleans.

One of the reasons that there is no money in it is that, unlike traditional New Orleans jazz or big band jazz or swing jazz, modern jazz is more of an art music and much less of an entertainment music. Modern jazz was started by African-American musicians who were not only aware of the way race worked with performance, but they didn't want showmanship to get in the way of their music. Daniel Belgrad explains that

the social meaning of the music contributed to the attitude of the bebop musicians onstage. Bebop musicians comported themselves less as entertainers and than as serious musicians and intellectuals. They followed an unwritten rule to avoid the traditional image of Negro entertainers. Dizzy Gillespie earned Charlie Parker's lasting ire for 'Tomming' or clowning at the head of his band.<sup>36</sup>

Modern jazz musicians wanted and still want to be taken seriously as artists, and the entertaining aspects of performance could get between the audience and the art. Bop was not entertainment or dance music. Szwed states that “the aim was not to play for dancers or floor shows at nightclubs only...”<sup>37</sup> Modern jazz is known for faster tempos and irregular accents. As Belgrad states, “The polyrhythmic complexity and irregular phrasing that characterized bebop jazz are signals that it is a music meant for listening and not for dancing.”<sup>38</sup> Drummers in New York such as Kenny Clarke and Max Roach started keeping time on the ride cymbal or the hi-hat “rather than, as was traditional, on the bass drum.”<sup>39</sup> This allowed for the drummers to vary the beats and complement the soloists with accents. The irregular accents make it difficult for dancers to find a constant rhythm on which to base any dancing, and the accelerated tempos make it hard for dancers to keep up. In addition, the soloists construct their themes and improvisations on irregular phrases that stand in contrast to the soloists from the swing era. Such irregular

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36

Belgrad 182.

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Szwed 161 – 162.

38

Belgrad 187.

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Belgrad 189

phrasing is a part of the DNA of modern jazz with its “larger range of tones, timbres, and rhythms.”<sup>40</sup> This made it more difficult for people who are only peripherally acquainted with it to enjoy and more difficult for those same people to understand it. Even though modern jazz is now over half a century removed from its beginnings, it is still seen as “difficult,” or at least more difficult than styles associated with social dance. The issues involving this could fill another long essay, but modern jazz's continued marginalization can be attributed to the shortened attention spans of the current population (it is easier to hear 3 minutes of a generally simpler pop tune than absorb 6 minute of a more complex jazz song), the lack of familiarity with the jazz's aspects (many people don't learn or aren't taught the basics about jazz instrumentation, rhythm, and interplay), and the stereotypes surrounding jazz as overly intellectual.

In addition there are the unique circumstances of music in New Orleans. The way that such ideas apply to bebop in and among New Orleans music and musicians is complex. The music most identified with New Orleans for the last century serves a functional role as much as if not more than it serves an aesthetic role. By functional, it means that music is used and listened to in New Orleans in order to entertain. It plays in the background at social events in order to beautify the ambiance. It serves as a catalyst for people to dance. Again, Matt Sakakeeny confirms this in his essay *New Orleans Music as a Circulatory System* when he states that an attribute of New Orleans music is “functionality (social dance).”<sup>41</sup> This is true of many places, but more in New Orleans than almost any other place. In New Orleans, music serves less as an art only to be listened to and contemplated. When the functionalism of New Orleans music is combined with the fact that modern jazz gave less value to familiar entertainment tropes and more to the complexity of the music, it stands to reason that there would be less of an audience for it, and therefore less economic reward for it. For this reason, many of the best modern jazz musicians had to find other work either in or out of the music business. R&B stars from other places hired New Orleans musicians such as pianist Ed Frank and bassist Peter Badie to go on the road with them. Drummer Earl Palmer, pianist Ed Frank, and saxophonist Alvin “Red” Tyler recorded rhythm and blues music,

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Matt Sakakeeny “Cosimo Matassa and the New Orleans Sound,” M.A. Thesis, 1.

backing up everyone from Fats Domino to Little Richard to Shirley and Lee. As Sakakeeny says in another essay,

Rhythm & blues was at its height, and compensation for sidemen provided enough to earn a steady living (approximately \$40 per session in the late 1940s and gradually increasing throughout the 1950s and 1960s). Many members of the Studio Band, like saxophonist Red Tyler, looked down upon the recordings that gave them notoriety but continued to play rhythm and blues because of the financial rewards. In an interview, Tyler said, "I prefer be-bop. That's what I do, I think, best. If I had my druthers, I'd be in the clubs playing jazz."<sup>42</sup>

Tyler eventually became a liquor salesman and did music on the side. Many musicians such as Alvin Battiste and Harold Battiste resorted to teaching both privately and for schools. Harold Battiste became the A&R man for Specialty Records. He said, "When you want to shake your body, you don't want nothing that's complicated....if you want to play [modern jazz], you can play it among your buddies and so forth, but if you want to make a living, you got to make people happy, make them forget about their troubles."<sup>43</sup> When asked about the economics of playing modern jazz in New Orleans, Battiste had a single word for it, "Terrible."<sup>44</sup> As another example, saxophonist Nat Perilliat who recorded with AFO and was a part of the pioneering Ellis Marsalis Quartet went on the road as part of Fats Domino's touring band as did guitarist Roy Montrell and drummer Smokey Johnson.

There is a possibility that modern jazz, despite its anti-entertainment and pro-musician/intellectual/black achievement leanings, could have gained in popularity if given a promotional push that traditional jazz now gets. About the time that modern jazz was becoming more popular around the country in the 1940s and 1950s, there was another strain of jazz criticism and interest based on bringing jazz back to its origins which many scholars perceived to be in New Orleans. At the same time, the New Orleans economy was slowly changing and diversifying. The port industry as an economic driver was

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Sakakeeny, 40.

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Sakakeeny, "Matassa," 41.

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Harold Battiste, interview with author, 4/6/11

changing, and the traffic to the port was lessening. The city fathers of New Orleans moved toward tourism to replace the port traffic. This coincided with the renewed interest in traditional New Orleans jazz, so the people who make such decisions combined those two and pushed traditional New Orleans jazz as an attractive factor for tourists visiting New Orleans. However, this took several decades.

In the meantime, during the 1940s, ascertains Charles Suhor, “jazz was widely regarded as lowbrow or even shameful by local leaders and many citizens....While it was acceptable to hire a jazz band for dances or other social events, quality folks simply did not take the music seriously or respect the musicians as artists.”<sup>45</sup> Suhor writes also about being offered to produce a documentary about jazz for the public television station in New Orleans in the 1960s, but he was told that he would have to emphasize white artists and de-emphasize players such as King Oliver and Louis Armstrong. He then asserts that the local newspapers “had a long history of ignoring or debasing jazz.”<sup>46</sup> But when traditional or dixieland players such as Pete Fountain, Al Hirt, and the Dukes of Dixieland gained a measure of fame, this made the powers that be realize that such jazz can be marketed to the tourists. As Marc Souther writes, in doing this, the marketing of “New Orleans” jazz to tourists

set[s] jazz apart from its cultural and temporal moorings.”<sup>47</sup> It makes it a music set in the past that remains static, or so the perception of it becomes such. The result of this was such marketing devoted attention to older musicians. However, these musicians were promoted as “presentations of black jazz that enabled [tourists] to retain their preconceived notions”<sup>48</sup> ...because tourists expect to hear an older black man, white shirt open at the collar, suspenders, simply cut trousers, plain black shoes, and legs crossed.<sup>49</sup>

The opening and growing popularity of Preservation Hall, the establishment of a New Orleans jazz

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Suhor 3.

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Suhor 12.

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J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006).

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Ibid 110.

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Ibid 109.

stage at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and assorted traditional jazz brunches that came into being solidified this over the ensuing decades. In its early years, Preservation Hall greatly benefited from this marketing emphasis. However the jazz made by modernists such as Ellis Marsalis, Harold Battiste, and others were neglected. When jazz in New Orleans was thought to be exclusively styles that were developed during the first half of the century by musicians who at that point were in their later years, any current jazz made by younger musicians would be neglected by tourists and the city promotional bodies. The traditional jazz and dixieland jazz of New Orleans was and is thought to be of New Orleans and therefore easier to promote. And it was easier to promote due to tourist expectations so it became known as the music of New Orleans. Harold Battiste also offers up this reason: “There's a fear in this society of things that should be credited to Africans who were brought here....It's an unfortunate part of the sociology here.”<sup>50</sup> If one puts the widespread fame of Fountain and Hirt as New Orleans icons in the same context as the city's neglect of black musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet until after they were deceased, Battiste has a point. Both the houses that Armstrong and Bechet lived in as children were destroyed without any thought to their preservation. And both Armstrong and Bechet played music that is thought to be “New Orleans” music. Ellis Marsalis says simply that “the city fathers don't care about modern jazz.”<sup>51</sup> The city has not promoted closed modern jazz clubs from Lu and Charlie's up through the Funky Butt in the same way it has promoted thriving traditional venues such as Preservation Hall and The Palm Court Jazz Cafe. As has been said earlier, modern jazz is subversive in that way, and it goes against the suspended-in-time jazz performed by older musicians that the city fathers of New Orleans were promoting. Seen in this light, it is not that far-fetched that the emphasis on traditional New Orleans jazz means that it becomes more difficult for modern jazz musicians to benefit economically from playing that kind of music.

The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival is an exception to this idea. The founder of the festival, George Wein, is an unabashed fan of modern jazz, and he based the NOJHF on his Newport Jazz

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Battiste interview.

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Ellis Marsalis, interview with author, 4/8/11

Festival where modern jazz is the prominent music. Modern jazz has a place at the NOJHF, but the NOJHF only happens for 7 days each year. And modern jazz, though a part of it, is only a small part when compared to the rhythm and blues, funk, or more rock-oriented fare that the NOJHF presents.

When there is that kind of widespread difficulty in playing the music that one wants, is it any wonder that many of the modern jazz musicians left? When the economic considerations are added to the racial dynamic and certain aspects of the cultural attitude, the cliché that “the road to success in New Orleans is the I-10 out of here” becomes a true statement. Many of the modern jazz musicians were and are African-American. Segregation was the law of New Orleans into the 1960s and it has been the attitude of the power structure and the police for longer than that. Musicians among others were regularly hassled and arrested. Two modern jazz musicians, drummers Earl Palmer and Ed Blackwell, were married to Caucasian-American women. Both Palmer and Blackwell regularly were stopped by the police for this violation of the New Orleans race code. In his autobiography, Palmer writes about the rigamarole he had to suffer in order to see her. These hassles include having to drop her off first and then sneak back in through the door she left open.<sup>52</sup> Finally, they decided to leave town so they wouldn't have to deal with it any more.

Such laws have been abolished, but such laws and the views behind them were more than prevalent in the time when Palmer and Blackwell were in New Orleans and the first recordings of modern jazz in New Orleans were being made. If, as it has been pointed out, New Orleans, with respect to cultural attitudes, sells itself to tourists as a place that is living in the past or as a place that occupies its own space and time, these less-than-englightened attitudes are the malevolent flip side to such cultural platitudes. In his book *Cities of the The Dead*, Joseph Roach points out that New Orleans bills itself as “The City that Care Forgot,” and then calls it a

place of memory...As a favorite tourist destination, it performs as a simulacrum of itself, apparently frozen in time, but in fact busily devoted to the ever-changing task of recreating the illusion that it is frozen in time.<sup>53</sup>

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Earl Palmer and Tony Scherman, *Backbeat: Earl Palmer's Story*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1999) 99.

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Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum Atlantic Performance*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1996) 180.

He later also notices that in promotional literature, the city is referred to as “an aging coquette.”<sup>54</sup> These attitudes and ideas show that New Orleans is most interested in asserting itself as a place that does not change. Therefore, it is not surprising that the city is most famous for a music form that started over 100 years ago. It is not a bustling, hip, cutting edge, urban environment. As a general rule, if a musician wants to be successful, he or she is usually forced to leave due to the lack of national or international attention on new aspects of the city and also the way the spotlight rarely shines on a musician here who is doing something current. Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet are the older examples of this, but it extends to musicians ranging from Wynton Marsalis to Philip Anselmo to Idris Muhammed. When these racial and cultural attitudes result in a cultural/musical milieu that ranges from difficult to dangerous for musicians to make music, musicians will migrate to places that better suit their needs.

Some of the musicians who remained also delved into free jazz or avant garde jazz. Musicians such as Edward “Kidd” Jordan and Clyde Kerr Jr. played a type of “free” jazz where everything is improvised. If there is a theme or steady pulse, most times it is short or fragmentary. When the musicians start playing, they simply start playing and continue by listening to each other or they have a certain set of directions or signals by which they know when and what to play. Despite the fact that this is closer to the essence of New Orleans traditional jazz, it has continued to be neglected in the way that modern/bebop jazz has been. Avant garde/free jazz shares with traditional jazz the technique of collective improvisation, “Simultaneous improvisation by several or all members of a group, each contributing a line of equal importance to the others.”<sup>55</sup> Collective improvisation in New Orleans goes back to the beginning of jazz and the earliest recordings of King Oliver, Sam Morgan and others. But, despite the similarities, the differences ensure that avant-garde jazz has not been accepted in New Orleans except in certain musical milieus.

Modern jazz has had a tough time in New Orleans. Its popularity has been lacking compared to

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Ibid 231.

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"Collective improvisation." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., edited by Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J095500> (accessed November 16, 2011).



the other types of music that flourish here. It is not dance music. It is generally not music for social functions. It is not music that is identified with the musical culture of New Orleans. It is intentionally a form of art music rather than entertainment. There are few places for fans or people only casually acquainted with the music to hear it. And it has not been given the respect or promotional push by the New Orleans establishment that other forms of music have. And, due to brutal racial conditions and a less-than-progressive culture, many of the best players of modern jazz have left in search of better economic and musical opportunities. Given all of this, it stretches credulity not only that there has been any modern jazz in New Orleans, but also that it has been of any quality. In the next chapter, there will be an in-depth discussion of what modern jazz there was in New Orleans, the recordings of that period, and what differentiates the modern jazz of New Orleans with the contemporaneous jazz elsewhere.

### Chapter 3 – Modern Jazz Recordings in New Orleans

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, New Orleans was not a city known for modern jazz. New Orleans was still best known for the traditional jazz of the 1920s that had undergone a revival in the 1940s and 1950s with the “re-discovery” of Bunk Johnson and other musicians who retained the style. For those New Orleans musicians who did pursue modern jazz during this time period, opportunities to play, record, and make a living were few and far between. Derek Wood writes, “Playing modern jazz in New Orleans in the 1950s was a very difficult thing to do. Actually, finding steady work at a venue and earning decent money was a nearly impossible thing to do in New Orleans. Beginning in the 1940s, there was a renewed interest in traditional New Orleans jazz, and modern jazz was often looked upon as foreign and, maybe to some, as the enemy.”<sup>56</sup> Recordings of bebop, hard bop, and cool school jazz also made their way to the Crescent City via mail order, record stores, and train porters. In an interview with this writer in 2011, Harold Battiste remembered “When Charlie Parker and them first came out, we were standing on Rampart Street trying to get the newest Charlie Parker record...”<sup>57</sup> Finally, local musicians traveled to New York and Los Angeles where they heard and interpreted the current jazz being played in those places. Ed Blackwell, Ellis Marsalis, and Harold Battiste all traveled to Los Angeles in June of 1956.<sup>58</sup> Drummer

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Derek Wood, “All For One Records and the Origin of Modern Jazz in New Orleans,” Tulane University, April 2008, 10

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Harold Battiste, interview by author April 6, 2011. hard drive recording. New Orleans, LA

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Harold Battiste, *Unfinished Blues: Memories of New Orleans Music Man*, (Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, 2010), 33.

James Black was back and forth to New York in the early 1960s for gigs with Lee Morgan, Horace Silver, Lionel Hampton, and Yusef Lateef.

Given this history, and with the goal of analyzing and explaining modern jazz in New Orleans, this gives rise to the question: have the unique circumstances of New Orleans--its history, its geography (both physical and cultural), and its musicians--made the modern jazz made here develop differently? If so, how? Does the city have its own sound? Does the modern jazz of New Orleans reflect the trends and currents of modern jazz in other larger metropolises such as Los Angeles and New York. Is there something that makes the modern jazz recorded and played here in and of New Orleans? The bulk of this chapter will entail a discussion of these issues. It will involve a close listening of modern jazz recordings to determine if any aspects and musical elements of these recordings can be identified with the New Orleans tradition. I will argue that there is really very little that distinguishes the sound of modern jazz of New Orleans from the modern jazz of other jazz centers. However, the history and biography of some of the musicians who played modern jazz will show how they developed their skills in the traditional ways.

In terms of the music, are there certain elements that the different compositions of New Orleans modern jazz composers share? Jesse McBride, a modern jazz pianist and archivist/producer for AFO Records, elucidates in an interview

There are some harmonic devices that cats use, in particular in the composing of James Black or Harold Battiste. They have certain chord voicings...they do use sus chords [chords with suspended notes in place of the regular notes in the chord]. These can also be slash chords.<sup>59</sup>

Ellis Marsalis' composition "After" has several suspended chords in the first few bars. And most of the chords in Harold Battiste's "Marzique Dancing" are slash chords. McBride also points out that several of James Black tunes have one or several bars of music in which the meter is different from the rest of the tune. In "Whistle Stop", a song where the meter is 4/4, there is a bar of ¾ after the first repeat of the A section. McBride then states that Wynton Marsalis, the son of Ellis Marsalis who played with Black for many years, has a tune called "Delfeayo's Dilemma" where there is a bar of ¾ that leads back into the theme. He also points out that drummer Herlin Riley, who was a student of Black's and played with Marsalis for over a decade, composed a piece called "New York Walk" where there is also a bar of ¾ that

leads back to the top of the piece.<sup>60</sup> So having irregular meters could be an aspect of New Orleans modern jazz.

Paul Longstreth, pianist and graduate of the University of New Orleans Jazz Studies program where he studied under Harold Battiste, said that, Battiste called improvisational music a “puzzle”:

You try to unlock answers. When the AFO composers and musicians - Ellis [Marsalis], Harold [Battiste], Red Tyler, James Black, Alvin Battiste - when they came upon a musical problem such as playing in 5/4 or how to play over a certain sound, or any of those musical puzzles, they would compose something and thereby gain insight to how you might improvise on that.<sup>61</sup>

Longstreth takes this idea further when he explains that Marsalis' composition “Twelve's It” is comparable to Miles Davis's standard “So What” in that it has open harmonies and modal improvisation. He also says that James Black's “Monkey Puzzle” is like John Coltrane's work of the same period with similar harmonies. He then says

I absolutely know that those tunes [like “Twelve's It”] came out of Ellis, like him saying, 'Why do we need to play 'So What?' I can play 'Twelve's It' with these wide open harmonic features, and we can explore modally and yet, we don't have to pay licensing to some cats in New York.<sup>62</sup>

As the modern jazz players in New Orleans were experimenting by using certain compositional concepts in their writing, one of the most renowned modern jazz innovators was also in New Orleans. Saxophonist and composer Ornette Coleman was one of the first non-natives known for modern jazz to be in New Orleans for any length of time. Coleman has become respected and celebrated for his concepts of meter and harmony and improvisation that have changed the way jazz is played and heard. Before that, he was a musician touring with assorted African-American blues, rhythm and blues, and jump bands. While in Baton Rouge in 1949 with singer Clarence Samuels, several band members objected to his playing and beat him, ruining his saxophone. Coleman left the band a week later in New Orleans and went to live with the family of his friend, musician Melvin Lastie. By his own admission, Ornette did not go out and play much

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Ibid.

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Paul Longstreth, interview by author, January 2, 2012, hard disc recording, New Orleans, LA

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Ibid.

in the six months that he was in New Orleans. He did not meet many musicians then, but he did make the friendship of drummer Edward Blackwell who would go on to be the drummer in the New Orleans group the American Jazz Quintet before becoming Ornette's regular drummer in the 1960s. Several years later, in 1956, when Coleman was in Los Angeles and Blackwell was in New Orleans, Coleman sent for Blackwell to come play with him. Blackwell drove out to Los Angeles with Harold Battiste, Alvin Battiste, and Ellis Marsalis. These musicians all played together for a couple months before the New Orleans musicians went back east to New Orleans. Within a short time of returning, these musicians recorded an album of tunes as the American Jazz Quintet. The question is whether the time that they spent with Ornette influenced their music, and any subsequent New Orleans modern jazz in any way. While the twelve sides that the AJQ recorded in November 1956 are not traditional, there is not a discernible influence of Coleman's music and musical concepts on the AJQ sessions. Those 12 compositions are modern jazz, but they do not sound anything like the radical direction of experimental collective improvisation that Coleman's music took and would continue to take in the next decade.

The American Jazz Quintet's *In The Beginning* and the 13 songs that comprise it were recorded with the personnel of Harold Battiste on alto saxophone, Alvin Battiste on clarinet, Ellis Marsalis on piano, William Swanson and Richard Payne on bass, and Edward Blackwell on drums. These musicians all came up through local traditions and, in general, there are certain traits on *In The Beginning* that mark it as a New Orleans recording and New Orleans music. The most obvious is that one of the two reed instruments is a clarinet. In 1956, clarinet was very rare in the world of modern jazz. It had been phased out for many reasons including the difficulty in playing it, the very reedy tone that it produces, and its lack of volume. In New Orleans, the clarinet has been a defining factor of traditional jazz since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his definition of New Orleans Jazz in *Grove Music Online*, Lawrence Gushee places the clarinet as an instrument present in all the varieties of ensembles in New Orleans, saying that it was the main instrument for supplying counter melodies.<sup>63</sup> The fact that the group on this recording has a clarinet helps mark it as a New Orleans recording.

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An another overall aspect of this recording that makes it of New Orleans is the role of the

drummer. In most post-swing jazz recordings at this time, the drummer generally plays a time-keeping role. In the American Jazz Quintet, drummer Edward Blackwell is an equal player in the ensemble. Almost every tune has a drum solo and there are a greater number of drum fills and features for the drummer. Blackwell is also a melodic drummer. His solos have tones and notes, and he is able to get different tones from each drum. This is a trait that characterizes New Orleans drumming. It has become a part of New Orleans music due to the deep African and Caribbean traditions that took root here as slaves and free people of color populated the city. According to Michael T. Coolen's article *Senegambian Influence on Afro American Musical Culture*, Senegambians were the largest contributor to slavery in America<sup>64</sup> and “a major part of slave society in Louisiana.”<sup>65</sup> In most parts of Senegambia, where most of the slaves originated, drums were used for communication as well as music<sup>66</sup>. Theodore Dennis Brown in his 1976 thesis *A History and Analysis of Jazz Drumming to 1942 (Volumes 1 and 2)* quotes J. H. Nketia in asserting that of the three areas of sound production with which African drummers are most concerned,

tonal manipulation is most important.”<sup>67</sup> In order to communicate via drums, people devised ways to get different tones out of the drum using different techniques such as using sticks on hands and fingers on drums.<sup>68</sup> Louisiana in general, unlike the rest of North America, was “one of the few states where African musical customs were allowed to exist.”<sup>69</sup>

Critics Harold Courlander and Rudi Blesh heard this in the drumming of New Orleanian Warren “Baby” Dodds, the influential percussionist who played and recorded with such pioneering bands as King

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Michael T. Coolen, “ Senegambian Influence on Afro American Musical Culture,” *Black Music Research Journal* (11) 1 (Spring 1991), 2.

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Ibid 17.

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Ibid 9.

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Theodore Dennis Brown “A History and Analysis of Jazz Drumming to 1942 (Volumes 1 and 2)” (Ph.d diss., University of Michigan, 1976.)

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Ibid 22.

69

Ibid 51.

Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, Louis Armstrong's Hot 5's and Hot 7's, and Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers. Courlander and Blesh pointed out about Dodds that "Different tones are produced on the woodblocks [by Dodds] by striking it in different spots and with different parts of the drumstick as in the case with the African slit log drum."<sup>70</sup> This way of playing with different tones has remained in the techniques of the drummers. Percussionist Johnny Vidacovich has said that he can identify drummers from New Orleans by the way they

mess around with that whole kind of buzzy, what I call buzzing and dragging. The sticking of things. I can notice it. I can see how the drummer might press into the snare drum and use what I call buzzing and dragging on the head of the drum. And I'll hear how he's using it rhythmically. It makes it very linear and very African. Our whole thing is very based on the African thing.<sup>71</sup>

Blackwell used these techniques in the recording of *In The Beginning*.

There are other motifs of New Orleans-identified jazz in the tunes on *In The Beginning*. In the song "Capetown," there are several passages of stop-time and several breaks in the music. "Stop time" is defined as

A technique used to focus attention on a singer or an instrumental soloist. An ensemble or pianist repeats in rhythmic unison a simple one- or two-bar pattern consisting of sharp accents and rests, while the soloist takes command. Meter and tempo remain intact; only the texture of the accompaniment changes.... The technique is common in jazz; famous examples occur during Johnny Dodds's clarinet solos on King Oliver's two recorded versions of "Dipper Mouth Blues" (1923, Gen.; OK) and Louis Armstrong's trumpet solo on "Potato Head Blues" (1927, OK).<sup>72</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, "stop time" was fundamental to traditional jazz. There are also several breaks where the rest of the band drops out and the soloists continue for a couple measures before the band comes back in. A "break" is defined as

...a brief solo passage occurring during an interruption in the accompaniment, usually lasting one or two bars and maintaining the underlying rhythm and harmony of the piece. Breaks appear most frequently at the ends of phrases, particularly the last phrase in a structural unit

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Ibid 15.

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Johnny Vidacovich, Interview with author, 12/19/12, tape recording, New Orleans, LA.

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Barry Kernfeld, "Stop-time." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26863> (accessed August 3, 2012).

(e.g. a 12-bar blues or a 32-bar song), or at the end of a 16-bar unit of a multi-thematic piece (e.g. a march or rag).<sup>73</sup>

In his epochal interview with Alan Lomax at the Library of Congress, Jelly Roll Morton states unequivocally

You may notice that in playing jazz, the breaks are one of the most essential things that you can ever do in jazz. Without breaks and without clean breaks....you don't need to even think about doing anything else. If you can't have a decent break, you haven't got a jazz band, or you can't even play jazz....without a break, you have nothing.<sup>74</sup>

Breaks and stop time are not unique to New Orleans jazz, but it is still very prominent.

Also pertaining to rhythm, both “Nigeria” and “Chatterbox” have examples of New Orleans parade and two-beat rhythms, both prevalent in New Orleans traditional jazz especially in brass bands. Parade rhythms are defined as “music in which the first and third beats of a bar in 4/4 meter are accented. It is pertinent to the marches and rags on which early jazz drew, and therefore to some pieces from the jazz repertory”<sup>75</sup>

Finally, on both “Carrie Mae” and “Ohadi,” the way the horns harmonize and play both with and against each other have common traits with New Orleans traditional jazz. The rest of the band in those tunes are playing in a modern fashion, but the horns have a distinctly New Orleans feel of collective improvisation. In Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz*, he defines improvisation as “a manner of playing extemporaneously i.e., without written music”<sup>76</sup> and collective improvisation as “The improvisation of many lines at the same time [which] is perpetuated in most forms of early jazz, a music marked above all

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Barry Kernfeld. "Break." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03897> (accessed August 3, 2012).

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Jelly Roll Morton, *Complete Library of Congress Recordings interview transcript/liner note*, (Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records, 2011.) 36.

75

"Two-beat." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., edited by Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J460000> (accessed August 3, 2012)

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Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1968) 378.



by 'collective\_improvisation.'"<sup>77</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music* entry on improvisation defines it as being "applied in contexts where some or all members of a group participate in simultaneous improvisation of equal or comparable 'weight', for example New Orleans jazz."<sup>78</sup> If one were to take the horns out of this piece and put them with a sousaphone, banjo, snare and bass drum and other instruments in traditional New Orleans jazz bands, they would fit right in.

Six years passed between the American Jazz Quintet sessions and another modern jazz recording in New Orleans. The next modern jazz recording made in New Orleans happened on May 9, 1962 under the name of the Nat Adderley Sextet. The record was called *In The Bag*. Cornetist Nat Adderley, his brother altoist Julian "Cannonball" Adderley, and bassist Sam Jones came through New Orleans on their way from California to New York and recorded at engineer Cosimo Matassa's studio.<sup>79</sup> The Adderleys were friends of several of the musicians here in New Orleans, having visited many times both before and after their moving to New York. Alvin Battiste, clarinetist for the American Jazz Quintet, had two compositions on this record, "Mozart-in" and "Chatterbox." Battiste remembered, "Cannon was just getting into producing, and he had a mission, a self appointed mission. He wanted to record all the cats from the boondocks who could play."<sup>80</sup> In his master's thesis on AFO, Derek Wood writes, "Adderley had reached a high level of popularity and success, partially due to his long involvement in Miles Davis' group, and now he wanted to help unknown musicians gain exposure."<sup>81</sup> The New Orleans musicians on this record were all associated with AFO. They include Ellis Marsalis on piano, Nat Perilliat on tenor saxophone, and James Black on

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Ibid 51.

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Bruno Nettl, et al. "Improvisation." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* , <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13738pg3> (accessed June 19, 2013)

79

Orrin Keepnews, liner notes to *In The Bag*. (Berkeley, CA: Jazzland Records, 1991).

80

Alvin Battiste, interview with author, December 12, 2003, tape recording, Baton Rouge, LA.

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Derek Wood, *All For One Records and the origins of Modern Jazz in New Orleans*, (Master's Thesis, Tulane University, 2008.)

drums. Black, Alvin Battiste, and Harold Battiste all contributed compositions that appeared on this album. This album has certain traits in and of itself that require analysis, and then the album can be compared to the albums that the Adderley Brothers made immediately before and after to ascertain whether their time in New Orleans changed their sound, and, if so, how.

*In The Bag* contains songs that have musical elements associated with New Orleans. Both Alvin Battiste's "Mozart-in" and James Black's "Sister Wilson" feature a parade rhythm. It is more pronounced in "Sister Wilson," and more subtle in "Mozart-in," but that street parade is present in both the songs. The title track has a certain behind-the-beat feel where the piano chords and snare notes come in slightly after the melody as played by the horns. This gives it a languid syncopation where the listener anticipates where the notes will fall, and then the notes don't fall where the listener would expect. This kind of groove is present in much of New Orleans music from Jelly Roll Morton up through the Meters. "Chatterbox," another Alvin Battiste composition, has a gospel shout part in the B section with "shout music's characteristic harmonic elaborations, double-time rhythms, and chromatic basslines [that] can be heard in rock 'n' roll, soul, jazz, and, especially, gospel music."<sup>82</sup> That is very indicative of music in New Orleans. Gospel and church music is another part of the music in New Orleans, birthplace of Mahalia Jackson, and many of the AFO musicians were steeped in the church, particularly the Lasties. Frank, the father of this family, played in several spiritual churches in New Orleans, as did his children Betty Ann, Walter, David, and Melvin, who was an officer in AFO Records and recorded his own album of spirituals, *That Old Time Religion*.

And then there is the waltz from the pen of James Black, "New Arrival." This tune has sophisticated rhythms characteristic of his compositions (which will be further explored below) and the through-the-bar phrasing of the melody. The way that the front line plays the head over a busy chord progression without interrupting the contour of the melody is a trait of Black's compositions. Due to the popularity of his songs among New Orleans jazz musicians Black's compositional techniques have influenced subsequent composers and become a characteristic of modern New Orleans jazz. So, although

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Will Boone, "Shout music." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2219481> (accessed August 3, 2012).

these characteristics were not indicative of New Orleans jazz before James Black started writing, they have become indicative of them since he started writing due to their popularity.

Given that *In The Bag* has certain approaches associated with New Orleans, how does it sound in relation to the records that the Adderleys recorded before and after? The album that they did before *In The Bag* is called *The Cannonball Adderley Sextet in New York*. The band recorded it on January 12 and 14, 1962. Then 5 months later half that band came through New Orleans to record *In The Bag*. The next record is *Cannonball in Europe* recorded on August 5, 1962. Of these three records, *In The Bag* is the anomaly. Both *In New York* and *In Europe* have similar song lists, including “Gemini” and “Dizzy’s Business,” but neither have any of the tunes on *In The Bag*. And both the live albums contain none of the characteristics of *In The Bag*. The tempos are faster and the rhythms are more driving. Both of the Adderleys’ solos are more intense and busier than those on *In The Bag*. The presence of Yusef Lateef on tenor and flute give both these records a more exotic sound as Lateef plays in a less conventional style. His solos and work in the ensemble have a timbre that is reedier, more overblown, and harsher on the ear with his saxophone work. There is no evidence in the music of the live records that Adderleys recorded in New Orleans, let alone had some of this music of New Orleans enter their sound. There may be many reasons for this, but it seems that the most obvious is that when the Adderleys left New Orleans and continued their career and tour schedule, they did not take any of the New Orleans musicians on the road with them. Whatever the New Orleans musicians and New Orleans itself added to their music couldn’t develop due to those musicians’ absence in a live setting.

The next major occurrence for modern jazz in New Orleans was the two week engagement of the John Coltrane Quartet at Vernon’s during the second half of 1962. This band was one of the most popular and most cutting edge of jazz groups at the time. Coltrane’s solos were becoming longer and more involved as drummer Elvin Jones’ power and use of polyrhythms were spurring him on. The Quartet played and socialized with local musicians while in New Orleans. Alvin Battiste remembers that “James [Black] heard Elvin Jones. And the next day he was playing just like Elvin Jones...Elvin Jones flipped him, real over. I don’t mean in a bad way. He absorbed the principles of drumming that Elvin was bringing to the music.”<sup>83</sup>

Battiste also said that during intermission at one of the nights at Vernon's, he gave Coltrane a ride to hear Ellis Marsalis playing with James Black at Ellis' father's club, the Music Haven. And another one of the modern jazz players also spent some time with a member of the Quartet. Harold Battiste recalls that “Nat Perilliat spent some time with him [Coltrane]. He wanted to check out all his mouth pieces...He was very much impressed with what he heard down here.”<sup>84</sup> According to saxophonist Earl Turbinton, when the Quartet was here, “That was like God was in town. The whole music community turned out.”<sup>85</sup> It seems that the presence of the John Coltrane Quartet had a great effect on the modern jazz community in New Orleans. To hear these great musicians up close influenced both the technical playing of this community, and, with the mutual interactions, was inspirational.

Some of the players mentioned in the previous paragraph – tenor saxophonist Nat Perilliat, pianist Ellis Marsalis, and drummer James Black – went into the studio with bassist Marshall Smith from January until March 1963 and recorded an album called *Monkey Puzzle*. This was the last modern jazz record to be recorded in New Orleans for several years. The playing is very contemporary and includes compositions with complex time signatures such as the 5/4 of “Magnolia Triangle” and the multiple time signatures of “Dee Wee.” “Swinging at the Haven” has a modal feel, a trend that was very popular in modern jazz at that time period, with Miles Davis' “So What” and John Coltrane's “Impressions” being the best examples. Saxophonist Perilliat sounds like John Coltrane in much of his playing here, with a similar timbre and attack, though he might have developed that sound before he heard Coltrane live. Marsalis has moments such as on “Twelve's It” where he has a shimmering, pedal-point oriented tone that sounds like Coltrane Quartet pianist McCoy Tyner. He hits loud bass notes with sparse chords in the right hand at the beginning of his solos and comping, and then plays his solos or counter-melodies on top of that harmonic base. Elsewhere, he comps like Horace Silver or Red Garland. James Black has an Elvin Jones-like groove with much use of polyrhythms and multiple grooves. He will keep one rhythm on the snare and at the same time play another rhythm on the cymbals or another part of his drum kit so that there are at least two rhythms

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H. Battiste interview.

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Berry, Foose, and Jones, 155.

going simultaneously. One aspect of the record that does make it more New Orleans-sounding is that in the music, the drummer is a full-fledged member of the band. Almost every song has a drum solo or feature. This was not common at the time, but, given that it is also true of the American Jazz Quintet recording, it seems to be a trait in New Orleans modern jazz. In an interview, pianist and scholar Jesse McBride states, “[Drummer] James Black accompanies the whole ensemble, but he's also an active participant. He's not just laying down some time.”<sup>86</sup> In “Dee Wee” and “Little Joy,” Black plays some of the march and second line rhythms that New Orleans is known for, but they are not emphasized in the same way that they are in traditional jazz. Although they are not present before in New Orleans modern jazz, the time signature changes in “Dee Wee” and also in “Whistle Stop” have a great influence in later New Orleans modern jazz. McBride points out that several decades later, Wynton Marsalis's tune “Black Codes From the Underground” and “Delfeayo's Dilemma” as well as Herlin Riley's “New York Walk” have similar time signature changes in them. As a comparison, within a few months of the recording of *Monkey Puzzle*, two other records with similar lineups were done. One comparative recording was a quartet session led by tenor saxophonist Lucky Thompson called *Happy Days* on March 8, 1963 for the Prestige label. The other was pianist Andrew Hill's quartet's *Black Fire* for the Blue Note label on November 8, 1963. Thompson's *Happy Days*, although recorded with a similar instrumentation, is not similar to *Monkey Puzzle*. It is standard, easy-going bop/swing that would have been forward looking in the mid 1940s. Thompson and his band are not pushing anything too new or different. The band plays standards with regular phrasing and meter with little intensity. There are no sounds, chord progressions, or time signatures that are outside mainstream jazz. Thompson himself has a pretty, warm tenor sound reminiscent of Coleman Hawkins. In a certain way, this recording has a timeless sound and means of expression. It could be from anytime from the 1940s up to the current day. It is tasteful, classic post World War II jazz.

In contrast, Andrew Hill's *Black Fire* sounds perhaps even more modern than *Monkey Puzzle*. The tunes are less conventional, there is less emphasis on the melody, and the chords are more open, giving the songs a more abstract sound. Also, the chords tend to avoid playing on the downbeats. There is more tension in the music and the interplay between the instruments. On tunes such as “Cantarnos” and “Tired

Trade,” tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson plays irregular phrases and alters his approach to his lines by slurring up to the notes rather than landing directly on them. Drummer Roy Haynes also makes great use of polyrhythms, but still acts more as timekeeper. He is less involved with the band than James Black on *Monkey Puzzle*. One aspect of *Black Fire* that it shares with *Monkey Puzzle* is the way some songs switch meters. “Land of Nod” and “Black Fire” both have sections of triple meter that is different from the songs’ regular meter.<sup>87</sup>

As a matter of comparison, *Monkey Puzzle* is a more melodic record. Its themes are easier to sing and more pleasing to the conventional ear than those of *Black Fire*. As modern jazz, specifically in New York, progressed in the 1960s, melody became less of a concern, and having a melody that remained in the listener’s head went the same route. Although solos had always been based on the harmonies and notes in the chord as well as melodies, Johnny King notes in *What Jazz Is*,

innovators like Charlie Parker took these principles many steps farther by incorporating the whole range of available notes into their solos, figuring out ways to make any string of notes fit rhythmically and harmonically into chord structures<sup>88</sup>

However, as evidenced by *Monkey Puzzle*, melody was still a priority for modern jazz players in New Orleans. Johnny Vidacovich notes that

guys around here are influenced by melodies...More attention is paid to melodic development rather than virtuoso development. They give themselves to the melody of the song rather than the virtuosity of being able to play fancy stuff over the song. For me, they are most dedicated to melodies on solos, rather than building up the virtuosity and doing a great player kind of solo.<sup>89</sup>

As Vidacovich asserts, this could be due to the players’ preferences and cultural norms, but it also could be that New Orleans was still a little behind what was cutting edge in New York in the same way that musicians in New Orleans took a longer to get into and start playing bebop and other forms of post swing jazz than New York.

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Where the New Orleans jazz tradition comes out most obviously is in the lives and histories of the

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Bob Blumenthal, Liner notes to *Black Fire* (New York: Blue Note Records reissue, 2003)

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Johnny King, *What Jazz Is*, (New York: Walker Publishing, 1997) 17.

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Vidacovich

players on these records. All of them came up in and with the tradition all around them. They learned it from being taught it, hearing it on the streets and in the clubs, and spending time with musicians close to them who played it. All the New Orleans musicians on these recordings had family members who played and taught them, or had teachers in school who educated multiple generations of musicians. James Black and Nat Perilliat learned from Yvonne Busch at Joseph Clark High School.<sup>90</sup> Ms. Busch also taught many other musicians from Joseph “Smokey” Johnson to James Rivers to John Boudreaux. Ed Blackwell learned from Professor Valmore Victor in grade school and Wilbur Hogan at Booker T. Washington High School.<sup>91</sup> Alvin Battiste's father was a clarinet player. The tradition of passing down the music and musical knowledge via a teacher/student relationship is at the heart of the music of New Orleans since Manuel Manetta and Alphonse Picou taught the basics of classical, Creole, and jazz to students at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This has insured that the basics of making New Orleans music is continuous and maintains its unique characteristics. And many of these musicians become educators themselves. Alvin Battiste was the Jazz Artist in Residence for the New Orleans Public Schools in 1973 before he supervised the music program at Southern University at Baton Rouge. Both Ellis Marsalis and Harold Battiste taught and ran the Jazz Program at the University of New Orleans.

Also, most of the jazz players on these records are multi-instrumentalists. Ellis Marsalis, before he took up piano, played bass and saxophone. James Black was a trumpeter as well as a drummer. Harold Battiste is a pianist as well as a saxophonist. New Orleans musicians have always played multiple instruments as that has allowed them to compete better for work. Kalamu Ya Salaam postulates that “It's hard to survive as a musician in New Orleans ...by learning to do that, it gave them a sort of breath and sort of – I guess you would say they were eclectic.”<sup>92</sup>

This eclecticism comes out not only in the variety of instruments the musicians played, but also in

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H. Battiste, Silverbook, 93.

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Geraldine Wycoff, “A Tribute to Ed Blackwell,” *Offbeat Magazine* 5 (1992), 11

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Kalamu Ya Salaam, interview by author, January 2, 2012. hard drive recording, New Orleans, La

the variety of music they played and worked with. Harold Battiste, besides being a jazzman, produced rhythm and blues hits by Jerry Byrne and Art Neville for Specialty Records. Ellis Marsalis spent several years playing with the popular Dixieland trumpeter Al Hirt. Roy Montrell was a stalwart player and arranger for countless hits and classics recorded at Cosimo Matassa's J&M Studios. Musicians such as tenor and baritone saxophonist Alvin "Red" Tyler, drummer Edward Blackwell, and bassist Peter Badie, played both modern jazz and other music. Tyler, an officer of All For One (AFO) Records and a saxophonist on their modern jazz recordings, also was a member of the J&M Studio band that backed up everyone from Little Richard to Huey Piano Smith and the Clowns. Blackwell was the original drummer for the progressive American Jazz Quintet, but he performed on recording sessions with Art Neville and toured with Ray Charles. Badie, a charter member of AFO Records, played bass in Sam Cooke's band both for concerts and studio sessions. As educator and producer Kalamu Ya Salaam comments, "One of the things noticeable about New Orleans music is that [the musicians] don't play one music...what it is is the ability to accept music as music and understand that it plays different functions."<sup>93</sup>

In addition, the street culture of New Orleans and the street music of New Orleans contributed to the development of these musicians. One of Ellis Marsalis's most famous adages is that "in New Orleans, the music bubbles up from the streets."<sup>94</sup> He means that the music that people play in the street for functions and parades is a huge influence on New Orleans music and musicians. James Black grew up on Ursuline Avenue in the Tremé neighborhood, a place where there are both planned and spontaneous street parades put on by funeral societies, social aide and pleasure clubs, and the musicians themselves. Black acknowledged that he "would follow the Yellow Pocahantas, a Mardi Gras Indian tribe, and join in in the second-line marches behind funerals." Blackwell also remembers following the street parades in his

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Ya Salaam interview

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Jay Mazza, *Up Front and Center: New Orleans Music at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. (New Orleans: Threadhead Press, 2012) 8.



youth.<sup>95</sup> Even though they did not become known for playing second-line music, the influence of it stayed in their playing their whole lives, especially Blackwell.

These musicians were immersed in both the traditional New Orleans music and the traditional ways of learning music in New Orleans. However, they were very aware of what was going on in the music world in other places. Pianist and student of Harold Battiste Paul Longstreth states, “They were trying to explore and they were obviously very soulful musicians, and they were also intellectuals.”<sup>96</sup> When they started their own bands and started hearing the revolutionary jazz of New York played by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, and many others, they took it, played it, and added their own flavors to it. Harold Battiste remembers hearing the latest modern jazz records when they came out in New Orleans, “but no matter how we imitate them, the way we play it comes out in it subtle ways. Something that we are superseded by.”<sup>97</sup> And like the creators of bebop, they wanted to do something different, something that was their own. As bebop was a reaction to the swing music that came before it, New Orleans modern jazz was a reaction to the traditional music that had been played in New Orleans since before the turn of the century.

There are few examples of recorded modern jazz in New Orleans, but of the ones that there are, some have traits that make them of New Orleans, and some do not. The American Jazz Quintet's *In The Beginning* has a clarinet as one of its lead instruments which identifies it with the New Orleans jazz idiom. Most of the modern jazz recordings from other places don't have a clarinet. Another trait that all these records have in common is that the drummer plays a bigger and more integrated role in the bands. The drummers are given more solos and fills, and they interact with the other instruments in a greater fashion. Both James Black on *Monkey Puzzle* and *In The Bag* and Ed Blackwell on *In The Beginning* are integral players in these bands. They bring their specific ways of playing that makes those bands unique due to

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Ted Panken, interview with Ed Blackwell, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/21/edward-blackwell-wkcr-may-4-1986/>

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Longstreth.

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H. Battiste intv. 4/11.

their musicianship. With the drummers getting more of an emphasis, some of the songs on these recordings have parade rhythms that are common in New Orleans, but there are many tunes that do not. The other aspect that makes these recording of New Orleans is the musicians who played them shared certain common traits of learning from teachers, mentors, and family members, being eclectic in their musical abilities and taste, and being well versed in the street music of New Orleans. Whether they played New Orleans music or not, they knew the repertoire. How those ideas of the core traits and values of modern jazz in New Orleans applied to Harold Battiste's aesthetic and economic vision of a recording company is the concern of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4 – All For One Records and Harold Battiste: A Case Study**

All For One (AFO) Records started in 1961. Conceived by producer/musician Harold Battiste and cornetist/union representative Melvin Lastie, AFO was a record company set up as a collective that recorded jazz and rhythm and blues. It had some initial success, but it failed before long due to several reasons both within and beyond the control of the members. Some of these reasons have been discussed in previous chapters such as the difficulty of making a profit with modern jazz and the emphasis in New Orleans of other types of music. Some will be analyzed here including the nature of the record business during this period and the mistakes made by the principles of AFO. In the long term, AFO, its ideals, and the music it recorded has shaped the music of New Orleans in many different ways. This chapter will detail the history of AFO and assess its impact.

When Harold Battiste came up with the idea for AFO records in 1959, he was 28 years old. Like many of the jazz musicians of that period and forward he had been a music teacher. His first job was in DeRidder, a town in Beauregard Parish close to the border between Texas and Louisiana in 1952. He taught music and band at George Washington Carver High School for two years before the racism of the school board made him move back to New Orleans where he taught and played gigs around town. As detailed in the previous chapters, Battiste accompanied the other members of the American Jazz Quintet to Los Angeles in 1956 when their drummer Ed Blackwell was sent for by saxophonist Ornette Coleman. While living in Los Angeles, Harold visited several record companies in an attempt to get a record contract for the group. When he approached Specialty Records, a label that had recorded both Little Richard and Lloyd Price in New Orleans, label head Art Rupe passed on the recording contract but offered a different job to Battiste. Battiste became Specialty's talent scout and A&R (artist and repertoire) man in New Orleans. Battiste was responsible for finding musicians, matching them with the right material, and then

recording it for Specialty. Some of the more successful sessions that Battiste produced included Jerry Byrne's "Lights Out" in February 1958, Art Neville's "Cha Dooky Doo" in April 1958, and "I Can't Stop Loving You," "Steal A Little Kiss," and "Bad Boy" with Larry Williams in the summer of 1958.<sup>98</sup> With this moderate success, Battiste began to see that, although black people created and played music that earned great wealth, those same black people did not share in that wealth that their musical labors generated. As he wrote in 1959:

To date, musicians have performed millions of dollars worth of music on records, but have they shared in the profits that that they have contributed their talents to earning? NO! Because they have performed as laborers...<sup>99</sup>

Battiste had joined the Nation of Islam in 1959, and it had helped him shape his ideas that black people should own their own businesses, including those in the music industry. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was little music business infrastructure in New Orleans. No record labels were based here. There were no major publishing companies, and very few music attorneys. With regard to recording studios, there was Cosimo Matassa's J&M Studios and several radio studios. There were a couple distribution houses and record stores that functioned as one stops (places where radio stations, smaller record stores, and jukebox operators could get records). Businesses such as these are essential for a healthy, profitable music scene in terms of economics. Without such entities, it was difficult for musicians to raise their status economically. As an example, Battiste offered that of saxophonist Lee Allen whose solos on Fats Domino, Little Richard, and Shirley and Lee records were an integral part of their selling millions of copies. He wrote

It was the black people who were reckoned to be good musicians, yet they weren't the ones who made the money. Lee Allen is an example – He played the saxophone on all the New Orleans sessions, Fats Domino and everyone. At that time, the musicians scale was \$42 per session. Now if Lee worked at worst fifty two sessions a year he could get around \$2,600 for a year which is not much when you consider that those records would sell millions of copies. So I said that instead of him taking the \$42, why can't he say, "Don't pay me anything but give me say 1 percent on anything I play." He would have been much better off that way....My theory then was that musicians who play on the session should own the session.<sup>100</sup>

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Harold Battiste, *Unfinished Blues*, (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection, 2010), 46.

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Battiste 58.

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John Broven, *Rhythm and Blues in New Orleans*, (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1974), 161.

Battiste was also dissatisfied with the current state of the music business. He saw that the men who owned many of the record labels, despite their lack of musical ability especially when compared to the musicians making the music, made lots of money without contributing to the music itself. Looking back in an interview in 1971, he told reporter Charlie Gillett

I had started thinking about it even when I was with Specialty, saying to myself, 'Do you realize, man, that here we are writing the songs, playing all the notes, doing everything, and here's some cat who probably can't even keep time with what we're doing, he's got a few dollars in his pocket, and he pays us the money, and he walks off with all the profits?'<sup>101</sup>

Battiste's ideas were a cross between the Black Nationalism that was an influential philosophy of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the ideals that had been prevalent in New Orleans Creole society since the beginning of the city. Black Nationalism principles advocated that black people had to support each other in order to rise above economic and social oppression. The Creoles of New Orleans valued craftsmanship and self-reliance. Many Creoles owned their own businesses and patronized fellow Creole businesses. As well as being a creative art, music can also be viewed as a craft, and Battiste's ideas fall into the Creole ideals and the Black Nationalist thoughts. Although Battiste had become a member of the Nation of Islam, he never changed his name or agreed with the separatist notions of the Nation. "I realized I wasn't going to adhere to the Nation's tenet...regarding White people as 'devils.' I respected the Nation's ideas as they related to uplifting the Black race, but that's as far as things went with me."<sup>102</sup> Battiste looked deeper into this idea. Derek Wood reports from a 2008 interview with Battiste

The central theme of Battiste's studies focused upon various ethnic groups which were known for certain products and services. Often it was assumed that particular businesses went hand in hand with certain people, however the black community did not have a lock on any industry.

It was just automatically assumed that these people had those things. As far as Jews with banking, Italians with produce, and the Irish with the police, various ethnic groups seemed to monopolize certain businesses.' The only thing that black people seemed to have a monopoly

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Charlie Gillett, "Harold Battiste: All For One – A Study in Frustration and Black Organisation," *Creem*, accessed March 2, 2011, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=11876>.

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Battiste 52.

over was working labor in businesses owned by others.<sup>103</sup>

The goals behind AFO were simple: the musicians should create, control, own, and profit from their music. As historians Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones write, “AFO was a simple enough idea, but the economic and political implications were staggering in light of the times. In a way, the concept is still visionary.”<sup>104</sup> However, in order to have the musicians own the company and make his concept work, Battiste had to work out an arrangement with the local musicians union. For this, he approached cornetist Melvin Lastie. Beside being a musician from a musical family, Lastie was an agent for the black musicians union local. He got along well both with the union and with the musicians whom he represented. The way Battiste structured AFO was to make it “a co-operative record label, meaning that members who recorded for the label were considered co-owners.”<sup>105</sup> Battiste came up with the idea to allow musicians to own AFO and still work with the union: “Musicians were employed to perform on recordings, and paid union scale, so that the union could subtract its two percent levy. However, with the wages, the musicians would buy stock in the company and thereby become partial owners of AFO.”<sup>106</sup> Other founding members included saxophonist Alvin “Red” Tyler, the veteran studio musician and arranger who had played on many of the New Orleans hits of the past decade, drummer John Boudreaux, guitarist Roy Montrell, and bassist Peter “Chuck” Badie. As Badie recalled in 1999,

We did something that at the time had to be done. Until then, it was the companies from out of town that came here and made most of the money. We got paid for playing on the sessions, but those companies made the real money....with Harold Battiste and Red Tyler, we had two guys that had been A&R guys for other labels, so they had some expertise. Melvin Lastie and Roy Montrell had played on a lot of sessions, so we had a lot of experience too. John Boudreaux...and myself weren't amateurs either.<sup>107</sup>

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Derek Wood, “All For One Records and the Origin of Modern Jazz in New Orleans,” Tulane University, April 2008, 7

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Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Joans, *Up From the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music since World War II*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992). 150.

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Wood 13.

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Ibid.

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Up until this point, no one else had attempted this idea. The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, a similar and more well-known organization in Chicago, had not started yet. The same with the Black Arts Group in St. Louis.

Once the label incorporated, they wasted no time in starting recording sessions. Singer and percussionist (and Melvin Lastie's uncle) Jessie Hill brought singer Barbara George to AFO. They decided to sign her. On the day she was to record, she came to the studio with another singer, Prince La La aka Lawrence Nelson whose brother Walter aka Papoose had played with Professor Longhair and Fats Domino. The producers decided to record both of them in a split session. Prince La La recorded “She Put the Hurt On Me” and Barbara George waxed “I Know.” “She Put the Hurt On Me” became a solid example of New Orleans rhythm and blues, reaching number 14 on the rhythm and blues charts.<sup>108</sup> However, “I Know” is a different story. It went to number three on the pop charts by November 1961, and has become one of New Orleans best known songs.<sup>109</sup> This blues-based song had a young and saucy vocal with Ms. George and an iconic cornet solo played by Melvin Lastie. Battiste wrote the solo for Lastie to play, and he based it on the standard “Just A Closer Walk With Thee.” As Derek Wood writes, “It was Battiste's idea to feature Lastie instead of the more common saxophone because it would make the song stand out and was a nod to the traditional music of New Orleans.”<sup>110</sup>

Sue Records owner Juggy Murray had heard about Battiste and his label via Sonny Bono, who had worked with Battiste at Specialty Records. Murray offered AFO a distribution deal that was the key to selling records and thus funding more releases. Art Rupe, owner of Specialty Records, was quoted in John Broven's *Record Makes and Breakers*, affirmed “The distributor was very important, if he was efficient –

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Jeff Hannusch, *The Soul of New Orleans: A Legacy of Rhythm and Blues*, (Ville Platte, LA: Swallow Publications, 2001), 113.

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Wood 17.

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Berry 150.

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Wood 18.

that is, getting out sample records to the key [radio disc] jockeys, getting them publicized, and getting the record heard.”<sup>111</sup> Based in New York, Murray had a national distribution network, and he was African American which was in agreement with Battiste's Black Nationalist beliefs. Battiste remembers, “We wanted a black business. Now we'd got a cat to handle our national distribution and he was black. I was blinded by that, I mean, he was just a black cat.”<sup>112</sup> Battiste's trust in Murray's skin color overruled his caution in dealing with a hustling record man. This would prove to be costly.

The money that “I Know” brought in allowed AFO to continue to record rhythm and blues music. Also, at this time the Adderley brothers session that produced the album *In The Bag* occurred. The record featured several New Orleans/AFO players and several of Battiste's, Alvin Battiste's, and James Black's compositions. As was discussed earlier, it was a solid recording, and it gave the musicians on it more recognition for both their playing and their compositions.

After the *In The Bag* recordings, dealings with Juggy Murray worsened. Barbara George went to New York to perform at the Apollo Theatre. While there, Murray asked George to record for Sue Records, and bought her assorted clothes, jewelry, and a Cadillac to convince her. Murray apparently had gotten angry that the AFO musicians had done the *Ya-Ya* record with Lee Dorsey and one of his rivals, Bobby Robinson, had released it. As Battiste analyzed it later,

His thinking was altogether different than ours. To us, it was cool for all of us black people to work together, and we thought these cats shouldn't be fighting among themselves. But they were New York record men, and they couldn't see it our way.<sup>113</sup>

Murray's ploy was successful. With his encouragement, George decided to buy out her contract with AFO, and AFO had no other choice but to go along with it. In addition, “after [Murray] convinced Barbara George to sign with him, he did not give AFO all the money owed from record sales. AFO

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John Broven, *Record Makers and Breakers: Voices of the Independent Rock 'n' Roll Pioneers*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 50.

112

Broven, *Record Makers*, 354.

113

Gillett.



canceled the distribution agreement with Sue Records and severed all ties with Murray.”<sup>114</sup> This left AFO and Battiste in particular very discouraged. He had been close to George on a personal level. Also, Battiste realized “I had entrusted my dream to a man who had a Black face on face value alone.”<sup>115</sup> And apart from everything else, I realized that a black face wasn't going to guarantee co-operation.”<sup>116</sup>

Despite the loss of George and national distribution, Battiste continued to record R&B, but he also decided that he wanted to record some of the jazz being played in town. He remembers,

As 1963 rolled in I knew I wanted to record some of the cats who were playing jazz, who would never be widely known and might soon lose that thing they had. I didn't care if these records never sold, but I thought that they should be recorded for posterity.<sup>117</sup> We had cats here that could play as good as or better than the jazz musicians of that era.<sup>118</sup>

Most if not all the musicians associated with AFO, both the musicians on the board of directors and the other musicians who recorded with and for them, played both jazz and rhythm and blues. However, the economics of playing non-traditional jazz in New Orleans were not lucrative. According to Harold Battiste, “There was no expectation of money...[You play it] because you love to play it. You just did it.”<sup>119</sup> The recordings done by AFO became the Ellis Marsalis Quartet's *Monkey Puzzle* and *The AFO Executives with Tami Lynn*. These records show the modern (modal, poly-rhythmic) yet accessible sound and compositions that James Black, Ellis Marsalis, Nat Perilliat, and the AFO Executives were playing night after night. None of these songs became a hit, but at that time hits in the jazz genre or without words were infrequent. Tunes such as Lee Morgan's “The Sidewinder” which hit the Pop 100 charts in 1964 were

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Wood 20.

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Battiste 70.

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Gillett.

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Battiste 72.

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Wood 4.

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Harold Battiste, interview with author, 4/6/11.

more of a fluke. But for such turns of luck and lack of distribution, “Olde Wyne,” “One Naughty Flat,” or “Big B.N.” might have become a hit. They were upbeat, toe-tapping numbers with bright horn work and a light, fun attitude. It is this entertainment component that connects this music with New Orleans. As has been said in previous chapters, music made in New Orleans and identified as “New Orleans” music, exhibits these characteristics.

With the lack of hits and distribution, Battiste and Lastie decided to try Los Angeles as a base of operations. They drove out to attend the National Association of Television and Radio Announcers convention in the summer of 1963 and planned to stay after that. Although the band was well received, this displacement proved to be too much for the AFO musicians. In California, Alvin “Red” Tyler recalled

We ran into problems. Basically they had so many musicians out there until they had rules which said you had to be out there for six months or a year before you could work regular. So you couldn't work out there as a group, and some guys got fed up with that fact.<sup>120</sup>

According to Battiste, due to musician union rules, they could only do one-off gigs for the first six months.<sup>121</sup> Peter Badie remembers being pulled off the bandstand during a gig by a union representative during those first 6 months. He said, “L.A. was too tough. There wasn't much work, and what work there was didn't pay enough money to raise a family. After a year, I came back to New Orleans.”<sup>122</sup> With having to wait that long, Tyler and Badie came home and took other jobs. Melvin Lastie did work for Lou Donaldson and Willie Bobo in New York. Harold got involved with Sam Cooke and then Sonny and Cher, and with that, AFO quietly went on a long hiatus.

There are many reasons for the limited success of AFO Records. One is the nature of the independent record business. Independent record labels fail at a large rate. In New Orleans, for example, labels such as Minit, Instant, Dover, Monkey Hill, and many others lasted only for a certain amount of time, and then, for many reasons, go out of business. Around the time that the AFO executives moved to Los Angeles, popular music was changing in America. Before it was rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll

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120

Broven, *Rhythm and Blues*, 163.

121

Battiste 75.

122

Hannusch 114.

from various parts of the United States. Starting in 1963 and increasing in 1964, what many critics called the British Invasion started happening. Bands from England such as the Rolling Stones, the Who, the Kinks, the Dave Clark 5, and others had put out albums and singles that became very popular. It was ironic because much of what they did was based on New Orleans music, specifically the New Orleans rhythm and blues of Fats Domino, Little Richard, and many others.

Another reason it failed was that Harold Battiste's ideal behind the label, while noble and well-meaning, were too naïve and utopian for a business as tough and shady as the independent record world. His instant trust of Juggy Murray because he was African-American was an example of this. People working in that world, whether label owners, booking agents, distributors, or producers, were hustlers who worked on both sides of the law. Despite contracts, distributors would often not pay the record companies, or record companies wouldn't pay artists or lie about sales and royalties in order to cheat an artist. It was not unheard of for record label owners such as Savoy Record's Herman Lubinsky to threaten an artist such as singer Wilbert Harrison by pulling a gun on him.<sup>123</sup> In his study of AFO, Derek Wood asserts, "The AFO Executives...were great musicians, but they were a tad unsophisticated when it came to the competitive and cut-throat music industry."<sup>124</sup> In his assessment of AFO in *Record Makers*, John Broven states, "Harold Battiste, for all his intellectual and musical talent, just did not have the ruthless streak of the old school record men to compete at the highest business level."<sup>125</sup>

However, in the long term, AFO has had a great influence. Derek Wood states

AFO recorded some of New Orleans most enduring classics, produced national hits, gave studio time to many musicians who otherwise may not have had that opportunity, made the first modern jazz recordings in New Orleans, and made the debut recordings of numerous influential and successful musicians.<sup>126</sup>

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Broven, *Record Makers*, 345.

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Wood 15.

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Broven, *Record Makers*, 356.

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Wood 2.

There were small ways that AFO has made its mark. The African influence of the Prince La La character with the rare percussion instruments and way they were recorded, the “voodoo” types clothes and subject matter, and the style of singing had a great influence on Mac Rebennack when he and Harold Battiste put together the Dr. John character and first record at the end of the 1960s. The jazz compositions from the “Monkey Puzzle” and “Compendium” recordings have become standards in New Orleans in the same way that “I’ll Remember April ” or “Cherokee ” have become for jazz players all over the world. Compositions such as “Dee Wee” and “Magnolia Triangle” are heard on bandstands and concert hall across New Orleans. The jazz programs at University of New Orleans, Loyola University, and Tulane University teach these tunes. These songs have the same kind of accessibility yet depth that the standards of traditional New Orleans music such as “Mahogany Hall Stomp,” “Basin Street Blues”, and “St. James Infirmary” have. Many of the top players in jazz across the world have come from New Orleans, and the music of AFO have informed them and influenced their own music. Branford Marsalis recorded an album with his father Ellis that contained many of these tunes. Wynton Marsalis did a PBS special where he played many of these songs. Jesse McBride and his various Next Generation Projects continues to record and play these songs in 2013.

In addition, these AFO recordings are the only record of what was being played and what that music sounded like. If Battiste had not had the foresight and wisdom to record these songs and musicians, the music, specific to that time and place, would have been lost to time.

Finally, even though as a business entity, AFO was not entirely successful, it stands as the first black and musician owned and operated collective record label. It has served as an example to musicians with similar ideas in New Orleans and beyond. Before Motown, before the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, before No Limit and Cash Money Records, There was All For One Records, an example to be followed for better or worse. Before all those companies, there was idealistic visionary impresario and musician named Harold Battiste who enlisted like-minded individuals and worked to make his dream a reality in both the long and short term. The music world in New Orleans and everywhere else is richer for his efforts.

## Conclusion

In a city full of music and musicians, modern jazz in New Orleans has never gotten its due. Despite the abundant talent involved in it, it has lacked the promotion and popularity that other forms of music, particularly traditional jazz, rhythm and blues, and hip-hop. Some of the reasons for this are common nationwide and some are only applicable to New Orleans. The explanations for this include cultural aspects, geographical location, and economic issues. The city of New Orleans is best known for more traditional jazz, and that hurts modern jazz. New Orleans, due to its spot in southern Louisiana far removed from the more cutting edge and “influential” urban centers, is not as acknowledged as being a modern cultural force and city.

Also, jazz in general and modern jazz specifically is difficult to make profitable. Despite that, modern jazz in New Orleans has developed its own history, practices, and compositions. Almost all of the musicians who make modern jazz in New Orleans have come up through the traditional ways and music of New Orleans via school music programs, common teachers, and the way that music in New Orleans is all around in clubs, marching bands, parades, and the very streets where such musicians live. Those who have written modern jazz compositions have used certain rhythmic and harmonic traits that have become prevalent. Such compositions have become standards in the music world of New Orleans. A few sessions of modern jazz were recorded here, and they have influenced and inspired those who have heard them and come after them.

Modern jazz in New Orleans has been made, and modern jazz in New Orleans has survived because of the individuals who make the music and their love for it, and these individuals have made their mark in the Crescent City and the greater United States. What Harold Battiste and the other musicians in the collective All For One Records started not only had an effect on the contemporaneous New Orleans

music world, but also has continued to influence musicians, fans, and historians to the present day.

There are many other issues that can be explored in the neglected field of New Orleans modern jazz: New Orleans modern jazz transformed between the 1970s and the present (2013); how New Orleans jazz musicians affected the greater jazz culture; how other musicians from other places affected New Orleans jazz culture. In addition, how and where modern jazz was performed after the demise of AFO in places like the Jazz Workshop, Rosy's Jazz Club, Lu and Charlie's, and Faubourg Center is a ripe subject to explore. These ideas and many more can help to flesh out and make the picture of modern jazz in New Orleans more complete.

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## **Biography**

David Kunian is a native of Boston, Massachusetts, but has made his home in New Orleans since 1992. He received a Bachelor of Arts in History from Columbia University in 1992.

He has been producing radio for the almost 20 years. His base of operations has been New Orleans since 1992, where he works with the community radio station WWOZ-FM. The producer has produced 7 documentaries about New Orleans artists. They include the Silver Reel-winning *James Carroll Booker III: The Life, Music, and Mystique of the Bayou Maharajah*; *Come On, Baby, Let the Good Time Roll: The Stories and Music of Earl King*; The Silver Reel-winning *Meet All Your Fine Friends: The Dew Drop Inn in New Orleans*; *He Was A Mess: The Short Life of New Orleans Poet Everette Maddox*; *The Things I Used To Do: The Legend Of Eddie "Guitar Slim" Jones*; *Guardian of the Groove: New Orleans Drummer and Composer James Black*; *Total Funk Shenanigans: Michael Ward*; and *Do You Know How to Pony: the Story of Chris Kenner*. These documentaries have been played by over 150 radio stations across the country. He produced 1995's *WWOZ Billy Delle Mardi Gras Show* which won a Golden Reel from the National Federation of Community Broadcasters. He also co-produced the short series *The Classic Mardi Gras Songs Profiles*. He has been awarded grants from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, the Louisiana Division of the Arts, the Louisiana Decentralized Arts Program, and the Hennessey Foundation. Mr. Kunian has won awards for his radio work from the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, the Communicator Awards, the American Association for State and Local History, and the New Orleans Press Club.

Currently David Kunian is finishing programs about Lee Dorsey and Danny Barker.

Mr. Kunian is also a freelance writer for The Oxford-American, Indy Magazine, Downbeat, Gambit Weekly, Beat Street, and Offbeat. He has also worked at the Louisiana State Museum with the GUMBO project digitizing the archive.