

## ENTERTAINMENT

# Review: Group keeps jazz tradition alive

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By Andrea Blum

Outside, it was a cold and windy Detroit night, but the Preservation Hall Jazz Band made it seem like a hot, steamy day down in New Orleans.

The venerable Big Easy jazz group made a stop at the Max M. Fisher Music Center on Dec. 15 to give music lovers a taste of a “Creole Christmas.”

Since opening its doors in the historic French Quarter to the public in 1961, Preservation Hall’s goal has been to keep traditional New Orleans jazz in the spotlight. And the band is doing just that under the auspices of current director Ben Jaffe, the son of founders Allan and Sandra Jaffe.

Boasting a long, proud tradition of some of New Orleans’ most talented jazz musicians, the group’s founding members played with jazz pioneers from Jelly Roll Morton to Louis Armstrong. The Preservation Hall Jazz Band has toured the country for more than 25 years to bring the distinctly American form of music to contemporary audiences. And that they did during the roughly two-hour show, incorporating tried-and-true Crescent City standards such as “Basin Street Blues” and “Go to the Mardi Gras” with jazzy takes on some traditional Christmas favorites. Trumpeter Mark Braud, nephew of the group’s former leaders Wendall and John Brunious Jr., started things off with his smooth,

soulful voice and seasoned rhythmic brass stylings. Drummer Joe Lastie Jr. broke the ice with the initially reserved crowd with a light-hearted vocal romp through “I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate” as he did just that across the stage.

The legendary Charlie Gabriel, a transplanted New Orleanian, was a familiar face to the Detroit crowd as and proved that, at age 76, the heart and soul of New Orleans jazz still runs deep in his veins. Gabriel, who came to Detroit at age 14, joined the Lionel Hampton Band just two years later and was a member of Aretha Franklin’s orchestra in the early 1970s. His effortless turn on the clarinet and gritty vocals on numbers, including “Sweet Substitute,” made for some of the night’s most authentic New Orleans moments. Pianist Rickie Monie was in the spotlight twice with amazing medleys that combined classical, jazz and Christmas songs with finesse. Vocally, some of the most thrilling moments came from saxophonist Clint Maedgen as he writhed on soulful melodies such as “Short Dress” and “Shake That Thing.” His eclectic style and experimental approach lends a breath of fresh air to the band’s historic underpinnings. Trombonist Frank Demond and bassist Walter Payton rounded out the stellar eight-man ensemble, and special guest, Detroit trumpeter Marcus Belgrave, joined in with some of his trademark sumptuous melodies.

Ending the evening in true New Orleans spirit, the band mimicked a Bourbon Street-style parade with its classic finale “When the Saints Go Marching In.” Starting off in darkness with a slow, methodic dirge typically heard at jazz funerals, the entire auditorium soon came alive as the group exploded into the swinging standard. Making the traditional march down the aisle behind a flower-covered parasol, the band soon was joined by audience members in a time-honored New Orleans-inspired second line. And, for a few precious moments, the “Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler” attitude of America’s most unique cities didn’t seem so far away.