

# New Orleans Magazine

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## One more time

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The title of the CD to my left this morning is quite a run-on, but in the interest of accuracy here goes: Preservation Hall Jazz Band: New Orleans Preservations, Volume 1. If you don't have enough preservation in your cultural food chain, this one delivers a feast. This is a superb recording of old songs from the New Orleans Style canon that shimmers with a fine instrumental attack.

More is the pity that executive producer Ben Jaffe released it without liner notes to give a sense of why certain songs made the cut and their provenance. The third cut, "El Manicero," is a wonderful version of "The Peanut Vendor," albeit without the sweetly swinging scat-vocals we remember from Louis Armstrong's take. The instrumental paean to a street salesman at his peanut cart carries a habañera feel and features a flowing interplay by trumpeter Mark Braud, clarinetist Charlie Gabriel's dancing lines and Clint Maedgen humming along with his tenor sax. I don't remember the last time I saw a jazz ensemble play this song from the bandstand; it was probably at Palm Court back during the first Clinton Administration.

The first cut of this grand record, "Short Dressed Gal," has reedman Maedgen singing the story of a country woman who has to get across a river, rents a horse for \$5 and, because of her short dress, sets off a riverbank scandal as the farming folk stand around trying to get a peek at her drawers. How tame the standards of salacious material when compared to hardcore rap or Chaucer's

chapter on the “Wife of Bath.” The song was also popular in Cajun country far back in the mists of time (Alida Viator, gone to Austin since Hurricane Katrina, did a stellar version on Songs from the Canary Islands). Freddie Lonzo’s joco-swinging trombone lines serve as a solid foil to Maedgen’s vocals.

The range of styles in the canon of early jazz gets a good display. “Westlawn Dirge,” is a beautiful song, here in a slow tender rendition that echoes the Eureka Brass Band recording of 1951. “Westlawn Dirge” is a standard that somehow disappeared from the repertoire of street funerals as the years passed. Most of the young brass bands don’t play it because the musicians never heard it in school. There is no jazz education system in most of the public schools.

I know you don’t want a 30-second public service spot hammering home the message that The City Where Jazz Began doesn’t teach the story of America’s native art form to its young students, but it needs to be said. Dr. Michael White, among other exponents of New Orleans Style, has often remarked that music students in Japanese universities come to New Orleans with a better grounding in the jazz fundamentals form than most young players here. Teach the music and its history to students here and the homicide count will go down, and test scores go up.

“Tiger Rag” gets a first-class workout on this recording with Mark Braud and pianist Rickie Monie building the tempo on the vocals in a way you don’t hear at Louisiana State University football games. The Tigers marching band has polished this standard to a diamond’s gleam over the years; but when a small jazz ensemble uncorks the melody with those repetitions “Hold that tiger! Hold that tiger!” sung in climb, going faster and faster, you realize how important it is for the guys to have good chops. Joe Lastie’s drumming and Jaffe’s full-throttle thrumming on string bass create a surge of power to make any cheerleader jump.

Walter Payton's sturdy rhythms on string bass serve as an anchor on "Tailgate Ramble" to Lonzo's propulsions on trombone. Even nicer are Payton's gravelly vocals on "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate."

Listening to Rickie Monie's keyboard work and his vocals on this CD reminded me of the role he played over the years with the late Harold Dejan of Olympia Brass Band when variations of the group played at Preservation Hall. Most of the Olympia members have followed Dejan to fields of brass bands in the sky. The 20th-century brass bands best known for forging the repertoire, the Eureka and Olympia, no longer parade. Preservations makes you realize what a solid groove they left.