



PRESERVATION HALL HOT 4

St. Peter Street Serenade (Preservation Hall)

01 January 2010 — by [Alex Rawls](#)

This iTunes-only music-and-video release is the clearest document of Ben Jaffe’s vision for the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. The band, like the building, is an institution, and members may change, configurations may change, but it’s clearly intended to straddle the line between yesteryear and tomorrow, illustrating how traditional jazz has a place in the modern world. The set—five songs and three videos—is built around singer Clint Maedgen, as he and the Preservation Hall Band remake the Kinks’ “Complicated Life” and he croons on video “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love.” While his presence and more stylized vocals tend to pull the band in a modern direction, many of the musical tracks integrate him into the music the band’s known for, including a very credible version of “I’ll Fly Away.”

The showstopper, though, is the version of “St. James Infirmary.” The audio is remixed by Philadelphia DJ King Britt, who loops the banjo into a furious,

driving force. If not for that and looped percussion, though, it's not immediately obvious that this isn't the Hall Band kicking out the jams. The remix doesn't sell out the band, but it does play a support role to Maedgen's dramatic presentation of the song. The video is a cartoon that emulates the Fleischer Brothers cartoons (particularly the style of "Betty Boop"), and it literally mixes eras as Sweet Emma and John Brunious appear in the cartoon band with Maedgen and King Britt, and it embraces a New Orleans full of magic and possibility, down to an appealing shell of Pontchartrain Beach. The video uses a classic New Orleans song to celebrate the city as it is, was and never was, crossing eras, truths and myths for a place wild enough to bear such a treatment.

As progressive as all of this is, *St. Peter Street Serenade* also invites us to wonder if the Hall bands in the past weren't just as progressive in their ways.