

## Roberta On The Arts

# Preservation Hall Jazz Band Brings New Orleans to Blue Note

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Some time ago, I had the distinct pleasure of visiting Preservation Hall for its Jazz Band in the French Quarter in New Orleans, on two separate visits. Tonight's effervescent performance vividly brought back those memories. Of course, some of the musicians are new to me, such as Ben Jaffe on tuba (doubling on bass, when the bassist sings and dances). Ben is the son of the founders of Preservation Hall, Allan and Sandra Jaffe, who, at the 1961 inception of this venerable venue, developed the mission to preserve the music of New Orleans and send a professional band, steeped in the genre, around the globe. Tonight's final Sunday night set, the last of the series, inspired the packed crowd to clap, stand, sway, and smile broadly in this feel-good, melodic milieu.

"Bourbon Street Parade" opened with the vibrant band taking turns standing up and playing into a retro mike. I sat quite close to the stage, and the camaraderie and chemistry in the band was on display. Musicians commented in witty fashion, New Orleans style, and we knew we were in for a wild musical ride. "Short Dressed Gal" was next, followed by "Sweet Substitute", and this all-male band loved to joke, in good humor, about wives, lovers, and wannabes. Almost every band member took a turn singing, and Walter Payton even did the Shimmy. The music was danceable and dream-able. Ben Jaffe, with electrified hair, created deep tones that equally electrified the songs. Charlie Gabriel, on clarinet, as seasoned as is Walter Payton, was a gift every time he played, so full of spunk and soaring melody. Mark Braud, on trumpet, is youthful, energized, and a great vocalist,

too. His trumpet, whether muted or explosive, filled Blue Note with flaming flourishes.

This music was sassy and sexy, and “I Wish I Could Shimmy” was followed by “I Don’t Want to Set the World On Fire”, the first playful and the second romantic. One of the finest vocalists of this genre, Clint Maedgen, doubled on saxophone. His dark hair parted and slicked back, a thin mustache and retro suit, he sang into the tall mike with persuasive passion. When he repeated “sweet” three times, as he set a woman’s heart on fire, he drew the crowd gladly into his rapturous fantasy. Frank Demond, on trombone, took a sensational solo, before Mark Braud muted his trumpet for distant, soulful effects in “Sugar Blues”, then vocalized the swinging lyrics, between trumpet riffs. Charlie Gabriel picked up the theme, throwing in a bit of “Ain’t She Sweet” for added sugar. “Ice Cream” was hot, not cold, in a Savoy swing styled romp. “Blue Yodel #9” had Mark Braud’s red mute softening his trumpet, while Ben Jaffe’s tuba boomed through the stage. Clint Maedgen sang the yodeling lyrics, and Joe Lastie, Jr. had his spotlight with a wild ride on his drums.

Tambourines and small wooden percussive extras suddenly appeared onstage, as the band loosened up even more. They paraded into the audience, like a Mardi Gras celebration, and Rickie Monie was left alone for his big surprise. Throughout the evening, Monie had been adding dynamic chords, infectious rhythms, and some of the best keyboard interpretations I’ve ever heard. But now, after the brassy parade, Monie switched to a classical solo, with impeccable quality and deft fingering. I almost did not want that moment to end, the sound was so superb, and the contrast so striking. When the band returned, they played an encore, “Tiger Rag”, with joyous jazzy swing, and the crowd broke into clapping, singing, and bouncing in their seats. A guest vocalist emerged from the audience, just to add another surprise. Kudos to the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Check [www.bluenotejazz.com](http://www.bluenotejazz.com) for future dates and artists.