NATIONAL MUSEUM of
AFRICAN AMERICAN
HISTORY and CULTURE

through the streets of the city
new orleans brass bands

1. **Paul Barbarin's Second Line** LIBERTY BRASS BAND **4:14**
(Paul Barbarin / Universal - Two Beat Music, BMI)

2. **The Sheik of Araby** TREME BRASS BAND **3:41** (Harry Smith - Francis Wheeler - Ted Snyder)

3. **Panama** LIBERTY BRASS BAND **5:25** (William H. Tyers)

4. **Liberty Funeral March** LIBERTY BRASS BAND **4:52** (Michael G. White / MGW Jazz Publishing, ASCAP)

5. **Steamin' Blues** HOT 8 BRASS BAND **3:35** (Joseph Williams)

6. **We Shall Walk Through the Streets of the City** TREME BRASS BAND **4:12**
(Arr. by Treme Brass Band)

7. **Keepin' It Funky** HOT 8 BRASS BAND **6:43** (Terrell Batiste - Samuel Cyrus)

8. **Old Rugged Cross** LIBERTY BRASS BAND **5:40** (George Bennard)

9. **Grazing in the Grass** TREME BRASS BAND **4:45** (Philemon Hou / Cherio Corporation, BMI)

10. **New Orleans (After the City)** HOT 8 BRASS BAND **6:48**
(Chad Honore - Alvarez Huntley - Hot 8 Brass Band)

11. **Give Me My Money Back** TREME BRASS BAND **4:09** (James Andrews / Trombone Shorty Music, BMI)

12. **Lily of the Valley** LIBERTY BRASS BAND **3:23** (William C. Fry - Ira D. Sankey)

13. **Shake It and Break It** HOT 8 BRASS BAND **4:32** (Artie Matthews)

14. **Amazing Grace** TREME BRASS BAND **3:42** (John Newton)

15. **Whoopin' Blues** LIBERTY BRASS BAND **4:02** (John Casimir)

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

This recording is part of the **African American Legacy Recordings** *series, co-produced with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.*

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"Many times in those community parades a frightening transformation would take place in which notes seemed to leap out of my clarinet and assume wildly dancing human forms; or I'd feel some second liners key in on me and their movements would suddenly convert into exciting sounds and phrases that danced through my instrument. It took several days to come down from the spiritual high that you got from the second line."

— Michael White

Through the Streets of the City: New Orleans Brass Bands

Michael G. White

Brass bands are a highly visible part of New Orleans culture—at parades, funerals, in nightclubs, and at a variety of other events. They are also fixtures at international music festivals and major concert halls, on recordings, in films, and on television. Despite the bands' widespread popularity, the history, function, and social relevance of these groups remain largely unknown or misunderstood.

History of the New Orleans Brass Band

To a segment of New Orleans' African American population, brass band–related activities have been a vital part of community life for over a century, serving as an important source of celebration, bonding, strength, pride, and both individual and collective expression. Although the bands' distinctive sound and the contexts in which they are heard could make them seem to be a completely original local black phenomenon, brass bands, of course, did not originate in New Orleans and are not exclusive to African Americans. Even such features commonly associated with this tradition, such as funerals with music, social clubs, second line dancing, and the use of umbrellas and handkerchiefs, have roots in other cultures and places.

New Orleans was founded in 1718 by the French, and later colonized by the Spanish. Though the city is a melting pot of several cultures and ethnicities, black creative involvement in a wide variety of musical activities has been the most important factor in establishing New Orleans' enduring and distinctive musical identity. One musically

influential group was the often privileged "creoles of color," many of whom during slavery were free, educated, and financially secure. Numerous creoles received a formal education in European classical music and became performers, composers, and teachers throughout the 19th century. From early on New Orleans was the only major city in North America to maintain a long tradition of authentic and transformed African music and celebration. Nearly up to the Civil War an open field known as Congo Square was a gathering place where hundreds of slaves regularly met on Sundays and drummed, danced, and chanted, in the manner of their homeland. Smaller-scale and private African-style celebrations continued throughout the city during most of the 19th century, leaving a rich legacy of transformed African rhythms, dancing, and processions that has had a profound effect on several New Orleans traditions, like jazz, brass band processions, Mardi Gras Indians, and local versions of rhythm & blues and other popular music styles.

By the 1830s the earliest brass bands appeared in New Orleans—as elsewhere—to accompany army and ethnic militia units, including some made up of free blacks. These groups played written arrangements of marches, light classical pieces, dirges, and dance music for parades, balls, funerals, and other events. The city's growing demand for theater and classical musicians led to an influx of highly trained European professionals, who also taught music and played in marching bands. The Civil War brought about a great increase in the number of brass bands, which were used to accompany both Union and Confederate troops. Many musicians continued to perform in civic bands after the war.

During the last two decades of the 19th century, when the American brass band movement consisted of over 10,000 groups, the largest number of black bands was found in New Orleans. The city's traditional obsession with music, parades, and dancing, and the rise of dozens of black benevolent organizations, helped to maintain and support brass band activities. Popular groups of the 1880s and '90s, such as the Pickwick, Excelsior, and Onward

Brass Bands, were known for a high level of musicianship and strict reading of the same standard stock arrangements used by their white counterparts across the nation.

At some point during the mid- to late 1890s, New Orleans' traditional cultural need for celebration fused with the social intensity of the local black struggle for freedom and equality in an increasingly repressive post-reconstruction-era climate. The most significant result was jazz—a revolutionary new musical approach characterized by democratic ideals such as free expression, equal participation, and the blending of diverse musical and cultural ideas. Largely resulting from a cultural merger between blacks and black creoles, jazz combined European harmonic concepts and instruments with the call-and-response, rhythms, bent tones, vibrato, and emotional effects of African American folk music. Legendary cornetist Charles Buddy Bolden and others were the first to apply a looser, improvised, and more personal approach to playing marches, blues, hymns, and popular dance songs. The new style took hold in both smaller dance ensembles and the ten- to twelve-piece brass bands.

Collective improvisation within specifically defined roles became the typical approach to New Orleans jazz playing among a growing number of trained readers and self-taught improvisers. In brass bands this collective improvisation meant several things: three trumpets maintained the melody (often in harmony); two trombones played rhythmic punctuations and sliding "tailgate" fills; a clarinet freely danced and sang above the melody; two lower brass instruments (an alto and a baritone horn) played harmonic and rhythmic phrases; a sousaphone varied the basic "oompah" rhythm around the songs' structure; a snare drum played press rolls and accents; and a bass drum carried the syncopated "New Orleans parade beat" that varied accents in unusual places. Saxophones, which played riffs and harmonies, replaced the lower brass horns by the 1930s. The competitive nature of jazz and brass bands, coupled with their functional nature and a crit-

ical public, led to a highly developed style in which many individual players and groups became legendary.

Though jazz mainly functioned as dance music, its democratic nature paralleled black aspirations—making it perfectly suitable for progressive-minded social organizations to use improvising brass bands in community parades as both a means of celebration and a show of strength and unity. As the popularity of local white brass bands slowly died out in New Orleans and nationwide, the black New Orleans brass band tradition expanded and further developed its distinctive sound through a growing number of players who came from musical families and neighborhoods, and through continuous sponsorship by social clubs.

The majority of brass band work was in community street processions, in particular social club parades, (jazz) funerals, and church parades. Dozens of benevolent societies and groups known as "social aid & pleasure clubs" sponsored annual anniversary and holiday parades. Very different from New Orleans' better known Eurocentric Mardi Gras parades, the black social club events consisted of three main parts: divisions of colorfully dressed social club members, one or more brass bands (attired in standard band uniforms or black suits and a white cap), and the second line—a crowd of up to several thousand people who follow and dance alongside the parade throughout its several-hour duration. The free-form second line dance performed by club members and the crowd, both of whom dance with umbrellas and handkerchiefs, is derived from West African processions. The intensity that builds from the constant creative interaction between hot music and improvised dancing often erupts into a euphoric dimension in which a sense of total freedom, equality, limitless power, and a spiritual redefining of earthly reality seem to overtake all of the participants.

The now virtually extinct tradition of church parades was a smaller, shorter, and more subdued practice. Throughout much of the 20th century it was common for Baptist

churches to have Sunday morning processions to celebrate religious holidays, pastors' anniversaries, or the founding of a new church. At these events conservatively dressed divisions of church members strutted gracefully to brass band music—which always consisted of improvised jazz versions of up-tempo hymns like "Over in the Glory Land" and "When the Saints Go Marching In." My first professional music job was one such parade in 1975 with Doc Paulin's Brass Band. The sound of the sweet music echoing through the nearly empty streets and the look of sheer pride and joy on the church members' faces was so spiritually fulfilling that even many years later, I would give up good-paying jobs to do a ten-dollar church parade.

Jazz funerals are among the most curious and well-known New Orleans brass band customs. Although burial processions with musical accompaniment existed in America during the 19th century, the particular form and nature of the New Orleans version parallels the development of jazz. As an exercise of the belief in "rejoicing at death," the jazz funeral juxtaposes grief and joy. Slow, sad hymns and dirges are played en route to the cemetery, followed by up-tempo songs and joyous second line dancing in a final procession away from the grave. While musicians' funerals have been more widely publicized, the majority of 20th-century jazz funerals were given for deceased benevolent and social club members. The number of such clubs began to decline during the Great Depression and later, as more social services and affordable burial insurance were opened to African Americans.

Several older brass bands continued playing into the first decades of the 20th century as newer ones, like Oscar Papa Celestine's Tuxedo Brass Band, also found regular work in community activities. Many legendary and influential musicians who would migrate from New Orleans by the 1920s and influence the direction of American music—among them King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Sidney Bechet—got some of their early training and experience in street parades and funerals.

During the early 1940s, a "revival" of outside interest in authentic New Orleans jazz led to the earliest brass band recordings. Historian William Russell's 1945 recording of Bunk Johnson's Brass Band and jazz writer Rudy Blesh's of the Original Zenith Brass Band the next year were both made by pick-up groups specially assembled for the recordings. The results were issued in limited numbers on small, independent labels. The first documentation of a true working brass band came in 1951, when college students Alden Ashforth and David Wyckoff recorded the Eureka Brass Band. Formed in 1920, the Eureka had been the most popular group and a standard-bearer for decades. Wider exposure of the genre came in 1958 when the major label Atlantic Records released *Jazz Begins*, featuring the Young Tuxedo Brass Band.

Clarinetist John Casimir founded the Young Tuxedo in the late 1930s, and the group remained among the most visible parading bands for over 40 years. Atlantic recorded the Eureka in 1962. These Eureka and Young Tuxedo recordings of blues, marches, hymns, and dirges gave the world its first authentic versions of the exciting sounds that had continued nearly underground in black processions since the early days of jazz. They also reflect a trend—even among the most conservative groups—of incorporating popular songs of the day into the traditional style. Among brass band standards the Eureka also recorded the swing era favorite, "Lady Be Good." The Young Tuxedo gave a rousing traditional jazz version of Shirley and Lee's rhythm & blues hit, "Feels So Good."

During the early 1960s, local brass bands were showcased as symbols of New Orleans' festive and unique culture as part of a focused effort to make the city a major international tourist destination. In a rather ironic move for a racially divided city in which black jazz had often been ignored, Harold Dejan's newly formed Olympia Brass Band was promoted as "cultural ambassadors" for the city—leading to previously unheard-of exposure and much work over the next two decades at large conventions, business openings, inter-

national tours, airport greetings, television commercials, promotional ads, major sports events, and feature films. As the Olympia became a brand name that defined the brass band genre, its overwhelming success in the commercial arena set the tone for major stylistic changes that were to come during the late 1970s and '80s. In the less community-connected and more economically driven business and tourist arenas, brass bands often became scaled-down showpieces with flashy colored uniforms, t-shirts, more "entertaining" behavior, and an increasingly limited repertoire of only the simplest and most familiar songs.

By the 1970s there were only about half a dozen regular brass bands and a few pick-up groups playing in community and commercial jobs. Older groups like the Eureka had stopped parading, while others disappeared altogether. The Olympia had become the most popular band at social club parades and funerals, though the ages of its members—and increasing outside work—began to limit its appearances on the streets. But as several brass band veterans died, retired, or settled into less strenuous and more lucrative work, younger generations came along to fill the void. Many youngsters got their start and early traditional jazz training in trumpeter Ernest Doc Paulin's non-union brass band. Others began as members of the Fairview Brass Band, a kids' group formed by veteran musician Danny Barker in an effort to teach young people about their jazz heritage.

Since its start in 1970, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival has presented most of the city's brass bands in small parades (on the festival grounds) as well as on stages. The Olympia, Eureka, Young Tuxedo, Onward, and other groups began to adapt the parade style to stage show and concert formats by adding vocals and featured solos to what had previously been mainly an all-instrumental and ensemble approach. Now firmly under the direction of assistant bandleader / trumpeter Milton Batiste, the Olympia began to play rhythm & blues songs in a style that departed from being predominantly traditional.

Its small-label recordings of Professor Longhair's "Mardi Gras in New Orleans," Smokey Johnson's "It Ain't My Fault," and the Dixie Cups' "Iko Iko"—all featuring Batiste's vocals—became local radio and juke box favorites, as well as new brass band standard songs.

In the mid-1970s young trumpeter Leroy Jones and several other first-generation Fairview members formed the Hurricane Brass Band, which introduced a new look, sound, and attitude. As the first truly revolutionary brass band, the Hurricane wore blue jeans, t-shirts, no band caps, and featured Jones' blazing modern jazz solos on top of riffing horns playing traditional jazz standards and contemporary radio hits like the Nite-Lighters' "K-Jee" and the Meters' "Hey Pocky Way." The Hurricane was a popular "new thing" in street parades until Jones started on a solo career soon thereafter. In 1977 drummer Benny Jones and several ex-Hurricane members formed the Dirty Dozen, the seminal group that would forever change the sound, image, and direction of New Orleans brass bands. The "Dozen" actually consisted of eight instruments: two trumpets, a trombone, two saxophones, a sousaphone, a snare drum, and a bass drum. The group's completely new sound was a modern update that resulted from blending contemporary and traditional jazz, rhythm & blues, funk, Mardi Gras Indian music, and school marching band style. Faster tempos, catchy melodies, funky riffs, swinging sousaphone lines, and modern jazz-style solos were hallmarks of the Dirty Dozen's playing. The group quickly became popular among younger generations of social club members and second liners. Its fame soon spread beyond local street parades to nightclubs, festivals, concert halls, international tours, and major label recordings. While the Dirty Dozen was known for unique versions of "Lil' Liza Jane" and "Blue Monk," it was even more successful with trademark original songs such as "Blackbird Special" and "My Feet Can't Fail Me Now."

By the early 1980s the Dirty Dozen's success began to keep them on the road, opening the door for new, young, modern-style brass bands to take their place in community

parades. There were still a few traditional bands and some older groups that were developing a more modern style of their own, but in 1982 teenagers Phillip Frazier, his brothers, and Kermit Ruffins formed the Rebirth Brass Band. Though heavily influenced by the Dozen, the Rebirth soon created a more laid-back, funky sound that eventually added influences from the emerging popular rap style. The band composed and recorded a number of original songs, such as “I Feel Like Funkin’ It Up” and “Leave That Pipe Alone.” “Do Whacha Wanna” became a major local hit and has remained a party and Mardi Gras favorite that has been adopted by school marching bands across the nation. Though the Rebirth also began a steady touring schedule, it continued to be the most popular and visible brass band in community parades and funerals for many years. The group’s success culminated in a 2011 Grammy Award for its recording, *Rebirth of New Orleans*—the first Grammy ever for a New Orleans brass band.

By the 1990s a resurgence in the number of parading social clubs, an increase in local tourism, and a renaissance of brass bands led to a flourishing of dozens of new young groups to play parades, record, tour, and perform at events of every type. While all of today’s younger bands have continued in the “funk/rap” style pioneered by the Dirty Dozen and Rebirth bands, several have evolved their own sound and repertoire, including the Soul Rebels, Coolbone, Hot 8, Lil Rascals, Stooges, Baby Boyz, and To Be Continued brass bands. The “brass band renaissance” that began in the 1980s also included other new-type groups, such as the predominantly white Storyville Stompers and the all-female Pinettes.

The devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005—during which 80% of New Orleans flooded, untold numbers died, and long-term displacement and misery affected hundreds of thousands—raised real concerns about the survival of the city and its indigenous cultural traditions. Over nine years later New Orleans remains a wounded city trying to rebuild and heal. In some ways it can never be the same place as before. The harsh realities of cli-

mate change, rising tides, a sinking city, and a future with more severe storms can no longer be ignored. Even as the city's population and neighborhoods are being re-gentrified, major social problems like crime, murder, drugs, illiteracy, poverty, and a poor education system plague the city, with little relief in sight. The traditionally masked long-term racial divide and economic imbalances continue to roll along like a Carnival parade, with general indifference on all sides.

In spite of all of the problems, the tenacious spirit of citizens who have returned is boldly evident, as traditional culture has served as an inspiration to many in their efforts to rebuild and recover. In the months following the storm there was a massive citywide second line parade in which dozens of clubs, bands, and citizens came together—many back for the first time—in a show of strength, bonding, and common understanding. Social club parades, jazz funerals, Mardi Gras Indians, jazz and brass bands are still a vital part of local life. Today there are over two dozen brass bands and more than three dozen parading social clubs in the city, so work is not lacking, but the growing number of groups and competition keep pay relatively low (as has historically been the case for many local musicians). Some groups like the Dirty Dozen, Rebirth, Hot 8, Stooges, and Soul Rebels maintain heavy touring schedules in order to make a decent living.

An encouraging development for the future has been the start of programs by the New Orleans Jazz Historical Park and the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation designed to foster both traditional- and modern-style brass band playing among youngsters: workshops, a school band competition, the forming of young bands, etc. Several members of established funk-style groups have reached out to build mentorship-type relationships with older, more traditionally oriented musicians in an effort to learn about brass band history and incorporate traditional music into their repertoires. Camaraderie

among the various musicians from different generations and stylistic orientations has been very high during these sessions. There seems to be a great common interest in recognizing the importance of our musical heritage and sharing it with the world.

In New Orleans, brass bands have always reflected the spirit and needs of the people. During the 19th century they served a military function and used music to help lead soldiers to war in the service of their country. Later in the century they became a source of pride and visibility for a people attempting to share the freedom and equality promised by the nation's founding principles. When the city's lingering African influences and black folk music traditions blended with European musical instruments and concepts paralleling the high-intensity struggle for social equality, strictly reading brass bands gradually became improvising jazz bands. New Orleans jazz—a voice of freedom and collective community celebration—remained the dominant form of brass band playing for nearly 80 years. But brass bands both preceded and survived the reign of traditional-style jazz. The need for self-expression in a changing world that followed the counterculture movement of the 1960s and '70s contributed to a modern evolution and eventual "renaissance" of brass bands. This new approach incorporated a variety of local and popular styles into a predominantly modern yet still uniquely New Orleans type of functional and community-relevant musical expression. The increasingly rare traditional style can still produce magical exciting moments, but it is uncertain if it will continue to exist in its birthplace in the next 20 or 30 years.

As in the past, social conditions, education, economics, new musical styles, and the transitioning city of New Orleans likely will influence the direction and sound of future brass bands and community parades and funerals—sharing their special yet universal expressions of the human condition with many generations to come.

The Bands on This Recording

The groups heard on this recording are representative of three dominant stylistic trends that coexist on the New Orleans brass band scene today: traditional, funk, and in-between groups that can be called "transitional." The oldest is the Liberty Brass Band, which I formed in 1985 in an effort to help keep the authentic traditional style alive.

Liberty Brass Band

Dr. Michael White, clarinet / leader; Gregory Stafford, trumpet; Wendell Brunious, trumpet; Dwayne Burns, trumpet; Lucien Barbarin, trombone; Maynard Chatters, trombone; David Harris, trombone (track 4); Roger Lewis, alto saxophone; Daniel Farrow, tenor saxophone; Dimitri Smith, sousaphone; Kerry Lewis, baritone (tracks 1 and 4); Paul Barbarin, snare drum; Cayetano Hingle, bass drum

Never intended to be a parading band, the Liberty was created to perform for festivals, private functions, and on special occasions. Over the years its membership has included veterans of several older bands and descendants of early-generation jazz families. Trumpeter Gregory Stafford has led the Young Tuxedo Brass Band since the mid-1980s and is a relative of legendary brass band leader Henry Red Allen. Wendell Brunious comes from a long line of jazz and brass band players. His father, John Brunious Sr., played trumpet on the historic 1958 Young Tuxedo recordings. I am a relative of clarinetists Willie Joseph, Earl Fouche, and bassist Papa John Joseph. Papa John was among the earliest black jazz saxophonists when he played in Professor Anthony Holmes' Brass Band of Lutcher in 1914. The most recognizable Liberty member's name is that of snare drummer Paul Barbarin. He, of course, is not the famous Paul Barbarin (1899–1969) who composed "Bourbon Street Parade," led the Onward Brass Band, and was among the all-time great jazz drummers. This Paul is his great-great-nephew and son of Liberty's Lucien

LIBERTY
Grand Marshal

Barbarin, who is one of the best and most highly sought after trombonists today.

In 1993 the group appeared in the movie *Undercover Blues.* Three years later the Liberty members were featured along with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis at the Olympic Games closing ceremony in Atlanta. The group was a regular act on the French Quarter Festival's brass band stage for many years. For the last 16 years, the Liberty Brass Band has closed out Tulane University's commencement with a number of second-lining guests ranging from President Bill Clinton to the Dalai Lama.

Songs recorded by the Liberty are almost all from the traditional repertoire of early brass bands—not as an attempt to copy or re-create a past sound, but to continue a style that was regularly being played and taught to us by active elder veterans during our younger years. Though we have continued to play in the traditional style all our lives, we try to keep the music fresh, creative, and personal.

Treme Brass Band

Benny Jones, snare drum / leader; Kenneth Terry, trumpet, vocals, tambourine; Terrence Taplin, trombone; Roger Lewis, soprano and baritone saxophones; Bruce Brackman, clarinet; Cedric Wiley, tenor saxophone; Julius McKee, sousaphone; Michael Hughes, bass drum

The Treme Brass Band is often believed to be today's "oldest and most traditional brass band," but it was actually founded in 1991 by Benny Jones. Jones' father was the Onward Brass Band's great bass drummer, Chester Jones. Benny is an important figure in brass band history as the founder of both the Treme and Dirty Dozen bands. Preferring to remain at home in the face of the Dozen's growing number of out-of-town jobs, Jones decided to start a more traditional band because work in that area remained plentiful. His band is named after one of the oldest black neighborhoods in America, Treme, which

TREME
THE
TREME
BAND

includes the site of Congo Square and has been home to scores of musicians and much musical activity.

Like the Liberty, the Treme band wears traditional black and white attire with white band caps. Jones' group has comfortably established a balance between performing in community events and outside, more commercial jobs. The Treme maintains a repertoire of both traditional and more modern songs that are played in different situations. As the featured band in the Black Men of Labor Social Aid & Pleasure Club's annual parade since 1994, the Treme has been the only traditionally oriented brass band that regularly appears in social club parades today. When a small club, Donna's, opened on Rampart Street in the late 1990s advertising itself as the "Brass Band Headquarters," Jones' Treme was the first of many groups to regularly perform there.

The Treme Brass Band received widespread recognition as a result of its appearances in Spike Lee's 2006 documentary, *When the Levees Broke*, for Darren Hoffman's *Tradition Is a Temple* from 2011, and for several appearances in HBO's television series, *Treme*. In 2006 Jones' group was presented the prestigious National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship Award. For the last several years the Treme band has had a regular Wednesday night gig in the Treme neighborhood's Candle Light Lounge, where it performs to a packed crowd of tourists and locals.

In style and instrumentation, the Treme is reminiscent of the Olympia band of the 1970s. Trumpeter Kenneth Terry's melodic lead, solos, vocals, and uncharacteristic tambourine accompaniment reflect a heavy influence from the Olympia's Milton Batiste.

As in the case of the Liberty, the Treme's personnel includes a number of regular and substitute players. The Dirty Dozen's longtime main soloist, Roger Lewis, is heard on this recording with both the Liberty (on alto saxophone) and the Treme (on soprano and baritone saxophones) bands. The Treme reflects a wide mix of generations and musical

experiences, with members' ages ranging between 36 and 72. It is unfortunate that the dapper, charismatic, and universally loved bass drummer, Uncle Lionel Batiste, died shortly before these recordings were made, at the age of 79. The Treme usually performs with the same eight-member configuration that it has on this recording. The songs recorded here are typical of those heard during the Treme's regular Candle Light engagements.

Hot 8 Brass Band

Bennie Pete, sousaphone / leader; Raymond Williams, trumpet; Alvarez Huntley, trumpet, vocals; Terrell Batiste, trumpet; Tyrus Chapman, trombone, vocals; Jerome Jones, trombone; Larry Brown, trombone; John Gilbert, tenor saxophone; Samuel Cyrus, snare drum; Harry Cook, bass drum, vocals

For over 15 years one of the most popular and visible funk-style brass bands in community parades and funerals has been the Hot 8 Brass Band. In 1996 sousaphone player Bennie Pete was instrumental in merging two former Fortier High School student groups, the High Steppers and the Looney Tunes Brass Bands, to form the Hot 8. The players grew up together and maintain strong, family-like bonds and regular membership. Most of them were born between 1975 and '87 in a generation that grew up hearing mainly modern-style brass bands in community functions. The band can be larger than many younger groups—often featuring ten members, including three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, bass drum, and snare drum. As is common among some more modern groups, the Hot 8 uses only one reed player, original Rebirth tenor saxophonist John "Prince" Gilbert. Like most of the younger bands, the Hot 8's funk style is a blend of influences from the Dirty Dozen and Rebirth, with more elements from contemporary rhythm & blues, rap, and its local variation, "bounce." The uniqueness of their sound is mainly due to a steady stream of creative original songs and ideas composed or introduced by various band members. Beginning

with the Dirty Dozen, the sousaphone has had a more prominent role in brass bands as a feature and solo instrument; it frequently sets up and maintains short rhythmic (often melodic) grooves that dominate and propel most songs in the band.

The story of the Hot 8 Brass Band has been one of tragedy and triumph. Over the years the Hot 8's ranks have been decimated by the deaths of four original members due to street violence and illness. Hurricane Katrina was a life-altering turning point; after being evacuated, displaced, and scattered across the country, the band regrouped and began touring the United States to encourage and support other displaced Katrina victims and promote New Orleans' recovery. After also performing abroad, they opened on tour for popular rhythm & blues singer Lauren Hill for six months. The Hot 8 was featured in two Spike Lee documentaries, *When the Levees Broke* (2006) and *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise* (2010), bringing them a measure of national exposure that has helped to fuel a steady touring schedule. The band has recorded two of its own CDs and one with the Blind Boys of Alabama. In 2012 the band put out an autobiographical CD, *Life and Times of the Hot 8,* and a music video over the backdrop of a Katrina-damaged city, *Ghost Town.*

Long-term displacement across the country helped members of the band realize just how unique and special New Orleans culture is, which in turn inspired their desire to learn more about the history, sound, and style of earlier brass bands. Hot 8 manager Lee Arnold and leader Bennie Pete approached me about doing a series of workshops with the band; we watched videos, listened to recordings, talked, and rehearsed. The result was a series of concerts in which the band included traditional songs and explored long-forgotten concepts like three-part trumpet harmonies and volume shifts. A continuous fraternal relationship between the Hot 8 and me has led to some members playing on traditional gigs. Our early collaborations were re-created in a third season episode of HBO's television series *Treme*, in 2012.

Track Notes

1. Paul Barbarin's Second Line

LIBERTY BRASS BAND

"Paul Barbarin's Second Line" has remained among the most popular traditional jazz songs since it was composed by the legendary drummer in the 1950s. Like some other Liberty songs, this one has been influenced by the modern stage presentation style, which can be heard in the inclusion of solos between the predominantly ensemble passages.

2. The Sheik of Araby

TREME BRASS BAND

Originally a Tin Pan Alley hit from the 1920s, inspired by Rudolph Valentino's film image, this song became a popular traditional jazz standard. Though it has not often been played by New Orleans brass bands, the song's suggestive and rather humorous lyrics are a showcase for Kenneth Terry's vocal style.

3. Panama

LIBERTY BRASS BAND

This march dates back to 1911 and was popular among reading bands throughout the country. In New Orleans it became an improvised jazz standard played by all traditional-style bands. Involved marches like "Panama"—with their characteristic introductions, numerous sections, and changes of keys and volume—were once a staple of brass band repertoire but are rarely heard today.

4. Liberty Funeral March

LIBERTY BRASS BAND

This original composition is influenced by the now-extinct practice of loosely playing dirges from written scores in jazz funerals. The intent was to "sing out" the parts in the emotional manner of wailing family members and a mournful crowd praying or offering condolences. The melody is based on variations of the rhythm that forms the main theme of Chopin's "Funeral March," which is also the standard New Orleans brass band bass drum introduction to dirges and slow hymns.

5. Steamin' Blues

HOT 8 BRASS BAND

"Steamin' Blues" was written by Hot 8 trombonist Joseph "Shotgun" Williams, who was killed by the New Orleans police under controversial circumstances in 2004. This medium-tempo 12-bar blues is a funkier, updated version of the style pioneered on the Olympia Brass Band's 1980s version of "Mardi Gras New Orleans." "Steamin' Blues" and the other two Hot 8 originals heard here are prime examples of the raw, emotional, rhythm-driven, hip-hop-influenced funk style popular in most New Orleans second line parades and funerals today.

6. We Shall Walk Through the Streets of the City

TREME BRASS BAND

This joyous hymn, which has the same melody as "Red River Valley," has been a popular standard in social club parades, church processions, and jazz funerals for many years. The common use of such traditional Baptist hymns has been one of the main features distinguishing New Orleans jazz from offshoots, like the Chicago style. Its typical stage-style presentation here includes featured solos.

7. Keepin' It Funky

HOT 8 BRASS BAND

Terrell Batiste and Samuel Cyrus wrote "Keepin' It Funky," which is a typical modern, funk-style tune. After being set up by the sousaphone and drums, the song features a call-and-response vocal before melodic horn riffs and laid-back "dancing" saxophone, trumpet, and trombone solos.

8. Old Rugged Cross

LIBERTY BRASS BAND

The most common approach to playing the slow music in jazz funerals for many decades has been to give mournful, improvised dirge-style renditions of old hymns. "Old Rugged Cross" has been among the most popular songs played by traditional-style brass bands for decades. Though less commonly heard today, it is still played for musicians' funerals— most often by one large band made up of members from several groups.

9. Grazing in the Grass

TREME BRASS BAND

Among the Treme's favorite requests is their version of Hugh Masekela's classic 1968 pop hit "Grazing in the Grass." Here the band mixes elements of the traditional brass band style, modern jazz, rhythm & blues, and school marching bands to create a contemporary sound that preceded the funk- and hip-hop-influenced style of groups like the Rebirth and Soul Rebels. This very danceable rendition is enhanced by funky saxophone and trombone solos.

10. New Orleans (After the City)

HOT 8 BRASS BAND

"New Orleans (After the City)" was introduced by ex-band member trumpeter Chad Honore and Alvarez Huntley and completed with input from other Hot 8 members. After an initial sousaphone riff and drum intro, Alvarez Huntley leads a rap-style vocal that dominates much of

the tune. The song reflects the sentiments of most locals by expressing pride about being in and from New Orleans, as it mentions unique aspects of New Orleans life and repeats: “We live down by the river / under the lake / below sea level / that’s where I stay / even though we’re always gone / there’s no place like home.”

11. Give Me My Money Back

TREME BRASS BAND

Among the more modern songs in Treme’s repertoire is “Give Me My Money Back.” Composed by a well-known Treme resident, trumpeter James “12” Andrews, the song is typical of the early modern brass band vocal songs of the 1980s and ’90s. After the tuba establishes a groove, the band launches into an infectious beat and melody line that would inspire even the dead to dance the second line. The simple, recurring vocal line is like an accent to the non-stop, euphoric pulse of the music.

12. Lily of the Valley

LIBERTY BRASS BAND

“Lily of the Valley” is an up-tempo hymn typical of those played in most social club and church parades, and during the last part of jazz funerals. The open spaces in the trumpets’ melodic line would regularly elicit a number of improvised “responses” both from other instruments and the dance movements of second liners.

13. Shake It and Break It

HOT 8 BRASS BAND

“Shake It and Break It,” virtually the same song as “Weary Blues” recorded by Louis Armstrong’s Hot Seven in 1926, has been one of the few traditional jazz standards in the Hot 8’s repertoire over the last several years. Their version here includes a harmonic vocal trio by band members Harry Cook, Alvarez Huntley, and Tyrus Chapman that is surprisingly reminiscent of the 1930s Mills Brothers’ recordings.

14. Amazing Grace

TREME BRASS BAND

The long-time favorite "Amazing Grace" has not been among the standard hymns played by most New Orleans brass bands throughout the 20th century, despite having a familiar melody and harmonic structure. The Treme presents the song here as a reflective, dirge-style tribute to Uncle Lionel Batiste, featuring a mournful clarinet solo.

15. Whoopin' Blues

LIBERTY BRASS BAND

This rousing, medium-tempo 12-bar blues has been among the favorite songs in street parades for decades and has been played by all styles of brass bands. Credited to the Young Tuxedo Brass Band's founder, clarinetist John Casimir, it was among the songs on the band's classic 1958 Atlantic label recording. The Liberty's version here has the typical bluesy break that still elicits screams of "yeah!" from audiences and jumps from second liners at the appropriate moment.

Further Reading

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Further Listening

(Currently available CD reissues of early and definitive recordings by each group)

Bunk's Brass Band:
Bunk's Brass Band and Dance Band 1945 (American Music)

Dejan's Olympia Brass Band:
The Olympia Brass Band of New Orleans (GHB)

Dirty Dozen Brass Band:
My Feet Can't Fail Me Now (Floating World)

Eureka Brass Band:
New Orleans Funeral & Parade (American Music)
The Music of New Orleans: Music of the Eureka Brass Band (Folkways Records)

Rebirth Brass Band:
I Feel Like Funkin' It Up (Rounder)
Rebirth of New Orleans (Basin Street)

Young Tuxedo Brass Band:
Jazz Begins: Sounds of New Orleans Streets
Funeral and Parade Music of the Young Tuxedo Brass Band (Collectables)

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Special thanks to God and our ancestors, and all the musicians and others who worked on this recording.

About Michael White

Michael White is a relative of first-generation New Orleans jazz musicians and has been widely acclaimed as a jazz clarinetist, composer, bandleader, writer, producer, and historian. He received a PhD in Spanish and taught Spanish and African American music at Xavier University, where he currently holds the Charles and Rosa Keller Endowed Chair in the Humanities. White has performed and toured internationally for over 35 years with numerous bands, has made over 60 recordings, and has appeared in numerous films and television shows. Many of his original songs have been included on his Basin Street Records releases since 2000. White has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the National Heritage Fellowships Award, Louisiana State Humanist of the Year, and the French Chevalier of Arts and Letters. Dr. White appears courtesy of Basin Street Records.

Hot 8 Band appears courtesy of Tru Thoughts Recordings. www.tru-thoughts.com.uk

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AFRICAN AMERICAN LEGACY RECORDINGS

through the streets of the city
new orleans brass bands

featuring

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TREME BRASS BAND
HOT 8 BRASS BAND

1. Paul Barbarin's Second Line
2. The Sheik of Araby
3. Panama
4. Liberty Funeral March
5. Steamin' Blues
6. We Shall Walk Through the Streets of the City
7. Keepin' It Funky
8. Old Rugged Cross
9. Grazing in the Grass
10. New Orleans (After the City)
11. Give Me My Money Back
12. Lily of the Valley
13. Shake It and Break It
14. Amazing Grace
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