

# Making Notes

A music tour of New Orleans.

BY SUE STRACHAN

When I visited Memphis recently, I noticed how much the city honored its music, in this case, rhythm and blues, and its musicians. OK, I know Elvis Presley put Memphis on the map, but throughout the city I was able to learn more about R&B than I've been able to learn about jazz in my years of living in New Orleans. In Memphis there's a shuttle that travels to Sun Studios, where Elvis was discovered and which still functions as a recording studio; to Graceland, Elvis' home; and to Beale Street, a watered-down Bourbon Street with lots of historical markers that include biographical information about performers such as B.B. King and other Memphis musicians.

So in a city that boasts itself to be "the birthplace of jazz," why don't we have similar landmarks? Well, that's why I've come up with a very arbitrary musical tour of New Orleans, with a little swing, rock 'n' roll and jazz thrown in.

My tour starts at Metairie Cemetery (5100 Pontchartrain Blvd.), the final resting place of many prominent New Orleanians, including jazz trumpeter/singer/Vegas lounge performer **Louis Prima**. No, it's not like going to Le Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, where you'll find backpacking post-graduate Americans sitting around Jim Morrison's grave, tripping on acid. It's a bit more sedate. The mausoleum, which also houses other family members, is well-maintained, with an angel who looks suspiciously like Prima blowing a horn on top.

Though it seems like I may be a little

morbid, my next stop is another cemetery to find the grave marker honoring **Charles Joseph "Buddy" Bolden**, the famed cornet player whose music was said to be a forerunner to New Orleans jazz. Bolden was buried in 1931 in Holt

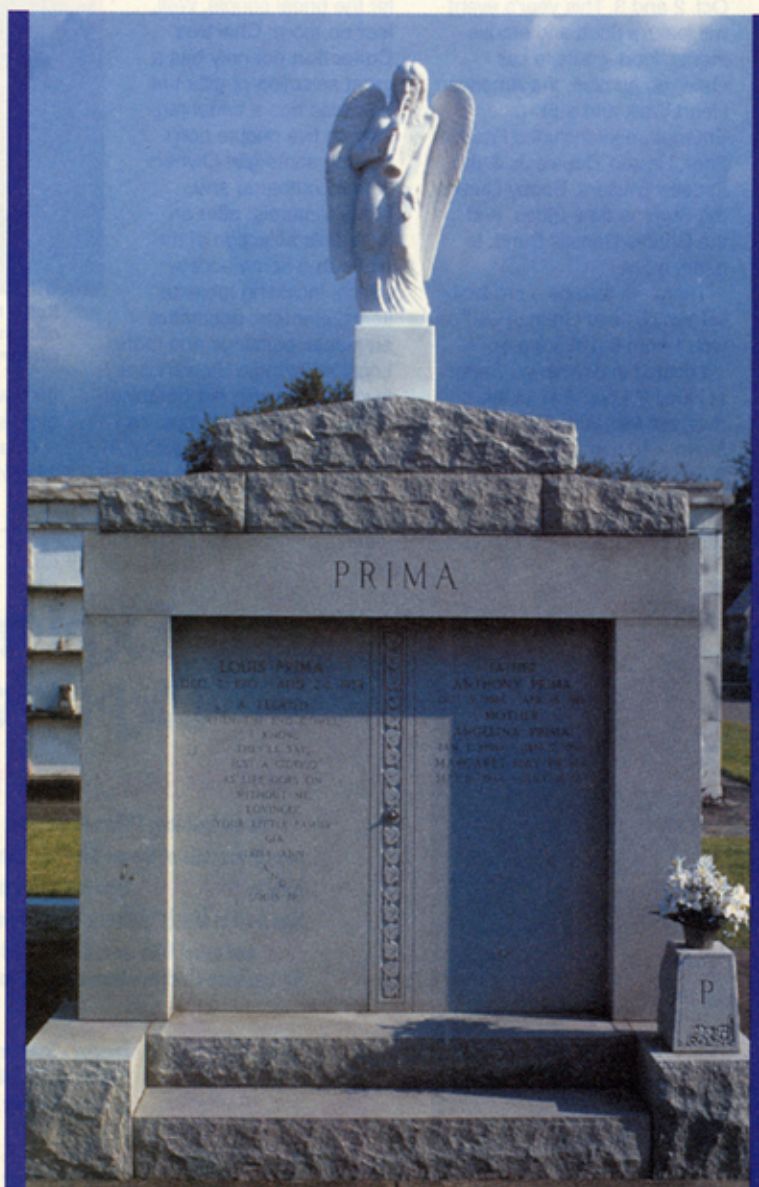
bisected by Toulouse Street.

Drive to Esplanade Avenue and take a left on North Rampart Street toward the 9th Ward. On your way, you'll pass through the 7th Ward, an area where jazz greats **Jelly Roll Morton**, pianist and composer, and **Sidney Bechet**, saxophonist, were born and raised.

As you cross the St. Claude Avenue Bridge, start looking for the dueling Popeye's and Kentucky Fried Chicken: That's the only hint you'll get on where to find the home of the man who found fame – and freedom – on "Blueberry Hill": **Fats Domino**. It's hard to miss, though, since a "Fats Domino Publications" sign hangs in front and F-A-T-S is spelled out on the front gate. And then there's the bright yellow overhang, decorated with black letters "FD."

Going back toward the French Quarter, stop at the **Old U.S. Mint** (400 Esplanade Ave.). Part of the Louisiana State Museum system, the Mint houses a New Orleans jazz exhibit that's impressive and better yet, interesting. From Oct. 23 to Jan. 16, the Smithsonian's traveling exhibit, "The Jazz Age in Paris, 1914-1940" will be on display there. For more contemporary history, head over to 1234 Chartres St., where Le Richelieu Hotel is located. In 1975, **Paul and Linda McCartney** and their children stayed there for two months when Paul and his group, Wings, recorded the album *Venus and Mars*. Today, you can book the McCartney Suite.

Get back in your car and drive down Esplanade away from the French Quarter, then make a left back onto North Rampart Street. Between St. Ann and Orleans Avenue is the entrance to **Louis Armstrong Park**. Go toward Congo Square where Perseverance Hall No. 4 stands. The second oldest Masonic lodge in the city (1812), it represents the place where the local traditions of jazz funerals and brass bands took root. You'll also see



No lounge lizards to be found at Louis Prima's grave in Metairie Cemetery.

Cemetery, a pauper's cemetery, but because of faulty record keeping, the exact location of his grave is unknown. In 1996, a group of jazz aficionados raised enough money to have a monument/grave marker erected to honor Bolden. The cemetery is behind a Delgado Community College building, off City Park Avenue,

CHERYL GERBER PHOTOGRAPH



the **Municipal Auditorium**. In 1945, Sidney Bechet and Louis Armstrong played a concert there together, which was interrupted by a fight between these two musical legends. It's small irony to note that a bust of Bechet is located in the park, since he didn't like Armstrong.

Stepping out from the park, you jump into another musical genre. On the corner of Rampart and Dumaine is **Cosimo Matassa's** first studio, where the likes of Little Richard and Fats Domino recorded some of their earlier classics.

Another good musical landmark, though not traditional, is the **Holiday Inn Downtown-Superdome** (330 Loyola Ave.). You can't miss the 150-foot clarinet painted on the side of the hotel. That mural, as well as the wonderful murals of notable jazz figures and moments in the hotel's parking overhang, were painted by Lafayette artist Robert Dafford. The hotel brochure describes each scene and is available in the lobby. Just outside the hotel, heading away from Canal Street, is a historical marker describing how influential this area was for jazz and black history. But the really important area is the **400 block of South Rampart**. Though the buildings are mostly unoccupied and in disrepair, they play an important part in jazz's evo-

lution. Start with the building at the corner of Perdido. At the turn of the last century it housed, on the first floor, a drinking establishment called the Eagle's saloon and a pawn shop. The third floor was the Odd Fellows Association ballroom, where Bunk Johnson and Buddy Bolden performed. But it's the pawn shop, owned by Jake Itzokowitz, where local lore says Louis Armstrong bought his first cornet. The next building down the block was the **Iroquois Theater**, which not only showcased vaudeville acts, but also many noted black entertainers such as Bessie Smith and Jelly Roll Morton. Its owner, musician Clarence Williams, also formed one of the first black-owned music-publishing companies. The structure at 427 S. Rampart was once the Karnofsky building. Louis Armstrong worked for the Karnofskys, immigrants who were rag pickers, tailors (look for "Model Tailors" in the tile at the front door) and entrepreneurs. They not only introduced Armstrong to the vibrancy of the city and music, but also, kosher food. The far end of the block is the site of a saloon where many musicians used to hang out.

So why, you may ask, are these historically important buildings left to decay? It's a long story. But my suggestion is that the

jazz exhibit at the Old U.S. Mint be moved and expanded into one or two of the buildings, while the other ones be converted into music studios for practice and lessons for people who can't afford them.

Find your way to the Garden District, an area noted for its beautiful homes and also the location of **Trent Reznor's** (Nine Inch Nails) abode. The Preservation Resource Center hosted a party there last year, and like most people who attended, I was expecting something more decadent, unless you consider Reznor in a tuxedo out of the ordinary. Well, his home, at least, has blended into the neighborhood and is just another one of those elegant homes you wished you lived in. Sorry, I can't divulge the address, and no Goth kids hang out outside, so you'll just have to guess which one it is.

So there it is. Far from perfect and waiting to be expanded upon. I do highly recommend the "**Cradle of Jazz**" tour by John McCusker (282-3583). Although I'm a history buff, I find reading about musical history tedious, and I learned more about jazz, local black history and much more on McCusker's tour than reading a multitude of books. McCusker has that rare talent, the ability to enliven history, not through hokey props, but by a passion for the subject.



# WALK

NO/AIDS

1999 NO/AIDS WALK

----- 10 YEARS -----

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19<sup>th</sup>  
10:30 AM - RAIN OR SHINE

AT AUDUBON PARK'S  
NEWMAN BANDSTAND  
FOR INFORMATION, PLEASE  
CALL 821-2601, EXT. 250

## MY HOME IS YOUR HOME

Voted Best Italian Restaurant by  
New Orleans Magazine Readers 1999

Come and  
Celebrate with  
Friends and Family  
for your  
Special Gatherings  
in our New  
Grand Ballroom.

Lunch & Dinner  
Sunday Brunch

Northern Italian  
Seafood Cuisine

Quality & Tradition



Make your Millennium reservations now...  
Celebrate midnite 2000-Live music & fun

*Andrea's*

Restaurant & Catering

3100 - 19th Street • North Causeway at Ridgelake • Metairie

834-8583

Ample Parking