

RESEARCHING NEW ORLEANS RHYTHM AND BLUES

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Although New Orleans is most often identified as the birthplace of jazz, its musical background is as rich and varied as its justly famous cuisine. And while the city's heritage is most commonly considered to be French, the arrival of many different national and ethnic groups throughout the years has made New Orleans and its surrounding region a gumbo of diversity.

It is the very complexity of the musical life of New Orleans, both past and present, that has interested scholars in exploring the city's cultural and musical roots. Whereas most serious musical research concerning New Orleans music has in the past focused on early jazz, several studies in the last decade have concentrated on the area's non-jazz musical culture (inasmuch as it can be separated)—principally, rhythm and blues.

Rhythm and Blues in New Orleans

Most authorities cite New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago as three of the main areas in which R&B began; Cincinnati is often regarded as an important national center as well. Smaller cities, principally in the South, also became known as R&B centers—Memphis, Houston, and New Orleans (Witmer and Marks 1986, 36). How did the New Orleans version fit into R&B's development nationally, and in what ways did this local manifestation differ, if indeed it did, from the national rhythm-and-blues phenomenon? Perhaps a more difficult question to answer is the following: Why did the city not become more important on the national scene, given the tremendous pool of local talent available?

Some authorities on the history of New Orleans popular music trace rhythm and blues locally to Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight," recorded with Bob Ogden's band at Cosimo Matassa's studio on Rampart

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Street in the summer of 1947: "[I]t would be two years before even the term 'rhythm and blues' was invented. All they (the musicians) knew was that their mixture of jazz, boogie, blues and gospel felt good" (Coleman 1985, 3). Another version of "Good Rockin' Tonight" was recorded by Wynonie Harris the next year and ranked as the number one "race" hit of 1948; it later became an early success for Elvis Presley (Berry, Foose, and Jones 1986, 68).

The history of R&B in New Orleans, as in other cities, is tied inextricably to the rise and success (or failure) of local indies such as those mentioned above. In New Orleans it was the recording studio of Cosimo Matassa that stands as most prominent in R&B's development. Beginning in the mid-forties as an appliance and jukebox salesman, Matassa "backed into the record business" by establishing a small record store on North Rampart and Dumaine, the J & M Music Shop. He soon realized the need for an outlet through which local musicians could record. In 1946 Matassa started the first of what would be a series of recording ventures lasting for more than twenty-five years. As Jeff Hannusch reports, "virtually every R&B record made in New Orleans between the late Forties and the early Seventies was engineered by Cosimo Matassa, and recorded in one of his four studios" (Hannusch 1985, 107). Crude though those one-track recordings may seem to us today, they represent the result of Matassa's constant efforts to promote local talent in the city.

As Matassa's recording expertise grew, record companies from other cities sought out his services, and his studio became a popular recording location for such labels as Chess, Aladdin, Atlantic, Savoy, and Specialty. Little Richard recorded at Matassa's studio for Specialty; "Tutti Frutti" is among the hits he recorded here. Big Joe Turner and Ray Charles also spent time at Matassa's cutting records. Cosimo Matassa is still active in promoting New Orleans music in various capacities; his reminiscences are a rich source for information on the national rhythm-and-blues scene as well as on postwar music in New Orleans.

Joe Banashak was another prominent local music promoter. Banashak, a native of Baltimore, was active in New Orleans for more than thirty years as an independent record distributor, entrepreneur, and producer of recording reissues (Hannusch 1985, 135). Other indie record producers who were responsible for the promotion of New Orleans rhythm and blues included Marshall Sehorn of New Orleans, Johnny Vincent of Ace Records in Jackson, Mississippi, and Lew Chudd of Los Angeles, whose Imperial label recorded some of the most important R&B and rock-and-roll stars of the fifties, including Fats Domino and Ricky Nelson.

Identifying the New Orleans R&B Sound

Modern popular music is primarily urban in its provenance; its various manifestations are often defined by the particular city or region with which each is primarily associated. Just as musicologists speak of the Notre Dame or Second Viennese schools, popular music critics refer to West Coast jazz, the Chicago blues, or the Detroit sound.

So too, does New Orleans have a "sound." This basic sound can be found in different styles of music from different periods: Dixieland jazz, barrelhouse blues, Mardi Gras Indian music, rock, funk, or contemporary jazz. The sound has been discussed often; John Broven in his book *Rhythm and Blues in New Orleans* traces it to the old parade bands of the nineteenth century:

Whether it's rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, soul, or modern jazz, the parade beat is the ubiquitous common factor, the foundation if you like. The music has changed, it's progressed, it's still moving. Whatever ephemeral sounds there have been, they have represented a kind of dressing up process which has mirrored the general fashions of the mercurial American music trends at any one time. New Orleans has followed the overriding patterns to keep up with the crowd, yet in doing so has managed to keep much of its own identity (Broven 1978, xx).

The New Orleans sound, then, is actually based on a particular rhythmic feeling, a certain syncopation or "backbeat" that seems to have been infused into the city's collective unconscious and which, no doubt, can be traced beyond parade music to slaves dancing in Congo Square. Broven cites local songwriter Earl King on the importance of rhythm in New Orleans music:

I think in New Orleans the thing is the rhythm in the tune. The individuals, the bands who never rehearse, can perform together because they have adjusted themselves to a certain mental tune, rhythmically. People may think of New Orleans just being a mass of sound but we have general rhythm attitudes that the people can play. It's an attitude, they feel like that when they're fixing to play the riff, it's the second line or something like that. And this thing, that the people adjust to, it just falls into place (Broven 1978, xxi).

New Orleans Piano Players

While such a rhythmic kernel may be traced through New Orleans's parade or "second-line" tradition back to African or West Indian origins, in the New Orleans version of R&B its fullest expression may perhaps be found in the piano's versatility in providing the harmony, melody, and percussion simultaneously, which has enabled musicians to replicate the

sounds heard on the street. Its ability to accompany other instruments or singers has only further increased its usefulness and its popularity.

Jeff Hannusch divides the city's early twentieth-century pianists into two distinct categories: (1) the "schooled," more sophisticated musicians or "professors" who played in the Storyville brothels in society jazz bands and who were capable of performing in a variety of styles, and (2) the largely self-taught "barrelhouse" pianists who most often played the blues, usually in barrooms in exchange for drinks (Hannusch 1985, 3). Despite the fact that many of these musicians were never recorded, their talent and their influence on later pianists should not be overlooked. Some of those later piano players—such as Isidore "Tuts" Washington (1907–1984), who was generally regarded as among the best New Orleans pianists—were discovered or recorded only late in their careers. Through Washington's reminiscences and through interviews by various researchers, including Hannusch and Tad Jones, we are fortunate today to have a better insight into the musical life of black New Orleanians in the first part of this century (Hannusch 1985, 5–14; Berry, Foose, and Jones 1986, 72).

To discuss every piano player who contributed to New Orleans rhythm and blues is outside the scope of this paper. It is necessary, however, to cite a few of the most influential and commercially successful pianists in order to gain a better insight into the music itself. Among the most important figures in the city's postwar musical life was Professor Longhair, the *nom de disque* of pianist Henry Roland Byrd (1918–1980). Byrd, or "Fess" as he was affectionately known by his admirers, typifies the New Orleans sound perhaps more than any other R&B artist. His own original style infused Caribbean syncopation into the boogie-woogie piano rhythms of the period; it served as a major influence on other local pianists and helped give New Orleans R&B its distinctive piquancy. Longhair's musical style usually employed the traditional harmonic and structural formulae of rhythm and blues. What distinguished it from the style of most pianists was the complex polyrhythms he used—often two or more intricate syncopations in counterpoint to the melody, which he sang or whistled as often as played. Longhair often stated that he invented this style, which he called "Calypso" (Palfi 1981). (Although his claims of originality are certainly valid, his use of the term "calypso" should not obscure the fact that the influence of the West Indies has been present in New Orleans music since black people first came to the city.) While Longhair never had a national hit, his importance has been cited by other important New Orleans musicians, among them Huey "Piano" Smith, Dr. John (Mac Rebennack), and Allen Toussaint. Toussaint has

called Longhair the "Bach of Rock." Professor Longhair achieved widespread fame only late in his career; it is unfortunate that he died just as he was finally gaining the recognition he had merited for so long.

If Longhair represents the chief noncommercial influence on rhythm and blues in the area, surely its main commercial influence is Antoine "Fats" Domino (b. 1928). Domino, whose driving piano rhythms and distinctively New Orleans-accented voice led the way for the national emergence of rock and roll, still lives in the Ninth Ward of the city where he grew up and continues a busy touring and concert schedule. It was Domino who put New Orleans on the rock-and-roll map with such hits as "Walkin' to New Orleans," "Ain't It a Shame," and "Blueberry Hill"; his influence may be heard in musicians from around the country, many of whom at some point in their careers went through what Tad Jones has called their "Fats Domino periods" (Jones 1987).

Of the younger musicians who absorbed the music of Longhair and Domino and went on to successful careers of their own, Mac Rebennack (b. 1941) and Allen Toussaint (b. 1938) are among the most significant. Each of these musicians found success in different ways: Rebennack as a studio musician, then later as his wild alter ego, "Dr. John"; and Toussaint as a record producer, arranger, and performer.

The pianists discussed above represent the best-known, most influential New Orleans R&B players. There were, and are, many others. Some of them, like James Booker (1939–1983), proved unable to handle their early fame and succumbed to the ravages of drugs and alcohol at an early age. Others, such as Huey Smith (b. 1934), best known for his hit "Rockin' Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu," were unable to sustain their early successes and retired completely from performing (Hannusch 1985, 44).

R&B Vocalists

One factor in the development of modern popular music was the increasing prominence of vocalists after World War II. Until the late 1940s the stars of the big bands were their conductors: Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Glen Miller, and others. Except for such superstars as Frank Sinatra, singers with the big bands received secondary billing. Today, of course, vocalists most often lead their own groups, usually while playing an instrument as well. Perhaps it was the influence of gospel music and the blues—historically primarily vocal expressions—that contributed to the predominance of the singer in R&B, rock, and later, pop music.

New Orleans has produced its share of successful rhythm-and-blues

singers, beginning in the late 1940s with Roy Brown. According to Dr. Daddy-O (Vernon Winslow), a local disc jockey of the period:

If I had to put my finger on an exact moment when rhythm and blues started in New Orleans, I'd have to say it was when Roy Brown came out with "Good Rockin' Tonight." That really turned things around for music in New Orleans. "Good Rockin' Tonight" was the first instance where New Orleans felt there was such a thing as black music (Hannusch 1985, 71).

While Brown's vocal style seminally influenced the development of R&B, today his early cuts still sound very much rooted in the big-band sound from which he came. The dominance of the saxophones and brasses and the crooning vocal style Brown often employed are much in evidence in his records from the late forties and early fifties.

Many New Orleans rhythm-and-blues singers produced hits during the fifties. Shirley and Lee, Smiley Lewis, Chris Kenner, Frankie Ford, Jessie Hill, the Dixie-Cups, Ernie K-Doe, Lee Dorsey, Clarence "Frogman" Henry, Irma Thomas, and the Neville Brothers represent a few of the best New Orleans singers from the period. The fact that many of the songs they recorded (and often wrote) are better known today to the general public than the singers themselves is probably due to the fact that those songs were often covered by white artists. "I Hear You Knockin'" was a successful hit for Smiley Lewis in 1955 (number two on the R&B charts); white audiences are probably more likely to remember Gale Storm's rather bland version, which rose to number two on *Billboard's* "Hot 100" (Broven 1978, 34).

Many of the singers who gained fame in the fifties were unable to hold onto it, for various reasons. Some of them were ill-equipped to handle financial success and soon spent what money they had earned, while failing to produce any further hits. Others lost interest in performing for various reasons and went on to other occupations. A few, like Frankie Ford, Irma Thomas, and the Nevilles, continue to perform locally and regionally, having earned respectable livings through their music careers. Many, however, still hope for the "big break" that will assure them national fame and fortune.

Sources for Researching New Orleans Rhythm and Blues

New Orleans has frequently attracted outsiders interested in its indigenous music, from tourists who come to the city to hear Pete Fountain and jazz at Preservation Hall to musicologists researching Louis Moreau Gottschalk, Jelly Roll Morton, or Creole folksongs. Although the role of

New Orleans in the development of early jazz has long been thoroughly researched and documented, only in the past decade and a half has there appeared much serious interest in the city's R&B tradition.

The increased attention to popular culture in this country has spawned several currently available books that chronicle the history of blues, R&B, and rock. However, surprisingly little information on most New Orleans artists is available in the majority of books on the nationwide R&B and rock scenes. New Orleans was influential, but of only secondary importance to the industry's major commercial centers—New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Researchers therefore must consult a wide variety of sources in researching New Orleans rhythm and blues.

*Basic Methodology and General Reference Sources*¹

The recently published *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* is a good starting place for persons who want general background information on topics in American popular music, including blues, rhythm and blues, jazz, and rock. In addition to articles on various popular styles, "Amerigrove" includes separate entries on major New Orleans rhythm-and-blues figures. However, the article on music in New Orleans only briefly mentions rhythm and blues.

Several specialized reference works on American popular music have appeared recently. Among those that include information on New Orleans artists, especially valuable sources are the *Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll* (Pareles 1983), *Blues Who's Who* by Sheldon Harris (1979), and the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Rock*, compiled by Nick Logan and Bob Woffinden (1978).

To find locations of archival and special collections of any material relating to American music, one should search *Resources of American Music History (RAMH)*, edited by D. W. Krummel, et al. (1981). *RAMH* offers a comprehensive list of sources, both private and public, and may be easily accessed through a detailed index.

In 1985 the state of Louisiana published a resource guide to the state's folk and ethnic cultures. Edited by Nicholas R. Spitzer, *Louisiana Folklife: A Guide to the State* (1985) presents articles by various authors on all aspects of Louisiana's diverse cultural heritage.

Bibliographic Sources

Such a multifaceted topic as rhythm and blues may be approached

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from a number of perspectives. One may find information on New Orleans R&B artists in reference works that focus on black music and musicians, both classical and popular, or in tools that cover the fields of popular or rock music in general and include both black and white artists. Three bibliographic tools relating to black music in this country deserve the researcher's attention. *Black Music in America: A Bibliography* by JoAnn Skowronski (1981) includes unannotated lists of works on selected, mostly major, black American musicians and references pertaining to general developments in black music, divided chronologically by decade. Less information is found here than in Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., and Marsha J. Reisser's *Black Music in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Reference and Research Sources* (1983). Like Skowronski's work, it contains bibliographic information on black American musicians from all fields of music—classical and jazz as well as popular. Floyd and Reisser discuss basic research methodology and list a wide variety of materials, including print sources as well as repositories and archives. They have also provided a thorough index. A complement to their bibliography is Dominique-René de Lerma's four-volume *Bibliography of Black Music*, the second of which, "Afro-American Idioms" (1981), contains 779 entries on "rhythm and blues and other popular music." Although unannotated, de Lerma's project is the most comprehensive and ambitious of the three works cited here in its coverage of black music.

Sources of information on R&B artists are also available in popular-music bibliographies. Two such works that cover rhythm and blues are *The Literature of Rock, 1954–1978* by Frank Hoffman (1981) and Paul Taylor's *Popular Music Since 1955: A Critical Guide to the Literature* (1985). Although much of the development of rhythm and blues precedes the period of time covered in both works, each contains separate sections devoted to R&B as an antecedent to rock. Both are annotated and list references to general topics as well as to specific artists. Taylor's work, the more comprehensive, divides its subject by type of tool (lives and works, fiction, periodicals, social aspects, etc.).

Historical and Biographical Works

Of the recently published books that chronicle the history of popular music in this country, a few stand out as important in their coverage of New Orleans music. Charlie Gillett's *The Sound of the City* (1983) presents one of the clearest and most comprehensive surveys of the history of popular music in this country through the 1960s. The coverage of New Orleans artists in this work is limited to the major commercial successes: Fats Domino, Allen Toussaint, Dr. John, Professor Longhair, and Roy

Brown. Some local groups of lesser national importance (e.g., the Dixie-Cups and Art and Aaron Neville) are mentioned in passing. Gillett's book is well indexed (with separate name, song, and label indexes) and includes an extensive bibliography and a "play list" of the author's choice for each year's most influential records, from 1946 to 1971.

Arnold Shaw has also written extensively on black popular music in this country. From his vantage point as a record producer and contributor to *Billboard*, Shaw presents an inside, impressionistic picture of R&B's heyday. Two of his most important books on the subject are *The World of Soul* (1971) and *Honkers and Shouters: The Golden Years of Rhythm and Blues* (1978). Shaw's book on soul music is actually more comprehensive than the title implies; it includes the 1950s in some detail and, like Gillett's work, discusses most major New Orleans musicians from the period. *Honkers and Shouters* is more specialized in its coverage of R&B than Shaw's earlier work; it presents a fair assessment of important New Orleans artists in the context of the national R&B scene.

A different approach to rock history is found in *First Pressings: Rock History as Chronicled in Billboard Magazine*, edited by Galen Gart (1986-). Gart has extracted and compiled all articles on rhythm and blues from *Billboard* beginning with the year 1948. Published thus far in two volumes (1948-1950) and (1951-1952), Gart's work includes news items, editorials, and reviews of recordings and live concerts. Easy access is provided by separate name and subject indexes.

For researchers who want to trace R&B's blues antecedents, Paul Oliver's various works on that subject are invaluable. They include *Aspects of the Blues Tradition* (1968), *Screening the Blues* (1968), and a photographic essay, *The Story of the Blues* (1969).

Three books are available that specifically cover New Orleans rhythm and blues, each from a different perspective. *Rhythm and Blues in New Orleans* by English writer John Broven (1978) is a reprint of his earlier work, published in England as *Walking to New Orleans* (Blues Unlimited, 1973). While containing a fair amount of biographical information, Broven's book is primarily a discographical study. He chronicles the careers of various New Orleans artists, both major and minor, through their recording endeavors. There is much information about virtually all record companies that had New Orleans connections in the fifties and early sixties, including larger, out-of-town firms and local recording enterprises. Broven's useful appendices include a bibliography of books and articles, an album discography, a list of biographical data giving dates and places of birth for fifty-two New Orleans artists, a personnel roster of major New Orleans R&B bands, and a list of the bestselling New Orleans

singles from 1946 to 1972 (from *Billboard's* R&B and later "Top 100" charts); the latter list includes record label, highest position reached, and first month of entry.

Jeff Hannusch's *I Hear You Knockin': The Sound of New Orleans Rhythm and Blues* (1985) is in many ways a complementary work to Broven's earlier book. Hannusch, a free-lance author and critic living in New Orleans, writes frequently for the local music magazine *Wavelength* under the pseudonym "Almost Slim." In *I Hear You Knockin'* he presents the history of New Orleans R&B through a series of short biographical portraits of the most influential and successful New Orleans R&B musicians. Hannusch's book is the result of many personal interviews with area musicians. It portrays a vivid account of black musicians in New Orleans during the past forty years. Like Broven's book, *I Hear You Knockin'* is well illustrated with period photographs, but also like the earlier work, it suffers from poor editing. Hannusch also includes in his appendices a list of New Orleans R&B singles that appeared on *Billboard's* charts (1949–1971) with date of first appearance, highest position reached, number of weeks on the list, and label number. Another valuable appendix is Hannusch's list of important R&B clubs in New Orleans, giving the period when each club featured live music. More than eighty clubs are listed; it is sad to note that fewer than ten were still active when the book was published in 1985. Hannusch's final appendix is an album discography of currently available reissues and anthologies of New Orleans artists.

The third and most recent book dealing specifically with New Orleans rhythm and blues is *Up from the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II*, by Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones (1986). Although presented from a basically historical perspective, the scope of *Up from the Cradle of Jazz* differs from the works of both Broven and Hannusch in its attention to cultural factors that have influenced New Orleans music during the last forty years. As Jason Berry writes in the book's prologue:

From the outset, then, the idea behind *Up from the Cradle of Jazz* was twofold; to extend the historical terrain of rhythm-and-blues by charting parallel courses of modern jazz and the Mardi Gras Indians; and to portray within this narrative the rise of postwar music in New Orleans amid the transformation of a long-segregated society (Berry, Foose, and Jones 1986, xiii).

Like the other works, *Up from the Cradle* is well illustrated and includes in its appendices a bibliography and discography of recent recordings and reissues. The presence of references in the text also makes the work more

useful to scholars who need further documentation, although it is not written as a scholarly work.

Discographical Information

Although nearly all New Orleans R&B artists performed live at concerts, clubs, and dances, it is through their recordings that they were best known during the period as well as today. Those who collect and disseminate discographical information on R&B music, whether they be discophiles, professional discographers, or simply record hounds, have contributed perhaps more than anyone else to our understanding of R&B's "golden period," since the artists' careers are most vividly chronicled through their recordings.

An abundance and variety of information on R&B recordings may be found, if one knows where to look. Most of the books about the period contain discographies. In addition, separately published, specialized discographies on popular music topics should also be consulted. Among the most important of these are *Brian Rust's Guide to Discography* (1980), which also includes a bibliography of booklength discographies and discographical magazines and a glossary of terms, and Fernando Gonzales's *Disco-file: The Discographical Catalog of American Rock & Roll and Rhythm & Blues, 1902-1976* (1977), in which one can find information on vintage 45s. The third volume of the *Bibliography of Discographies* (Popular Music) by Michael Gray (1983) includes groups and individuals as well as record labels. Its general scope, however, provides little information on all but the most successful New Orleans R&B artists. Dean Tudor has two important books on popular music recordings: *Black Music* (1979), an annotated guide to recorded black popular music, including blues, R&B, gospel, soul, and reggae; and *Popular Music: An Annotated Guide to Recordings* (1983), which contains a separate subsection on rhythm and blues in its section on black music.

Other sources of R&B recordings include *The Directory of American 45 R.P.M. Records* by Ken Clee (1981-1985), "Big Al" Pavlow's *The R&B Book: A Disc History of Rhythm and Blues* (1983), and two books by Joel Whitburn, *Top Pop Records, 1955-1972* (1973) and *Top Rhythm and Blues Records, 1949-1971* (1973). Whitburn's works list the top records from *Billboard's* charts. Frank Hoffmann has published a similar work taken from *Cash Box* magazine: *The Cash Box Singles Charts, 1950-1981* (1983). Finally, *New Rock Record* by Terry Hounsome and Tim Chambre (1981) contains recording information on a wide variety of musicians, including session details on those who functioned both as sidemen and as top performers.

Hounscome and Chambre's computer-generated work is both extensively cross-indexed and thorough in its coverage of major New Orleans artists.

Books dealing with specific record labels include two works on Atlantic Records: Charlie Gillett's *Making Tracks* (1974) and *Atlantic Records: A Discography*, volumes 1–4 by Michel Ruppli (1979). Ruppli has also issued similar volumes on the Savoy (1980) and Prestige labels (1980). *Specialty Labels Singles Listing, 1946–64: 500 & 300 Series* by Mike Leadbitter (n.d.) lists titles issued on Specialty 45s.

Two self-published discographies cited by Taylor (1985) that have eluded this writer are possible sources for discographical information on New Orleans musicians: *A Discography of Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll Vocal Groups, 1945–65* by Robert D. Ferlingere (1976) and Albert Leichter's *A Discography of Rhythm & Blues and Rock & Roll Circa 1946–1964: A Reference Manual* (1975).

Indexes and Periodicals

Newspapers and periodicals often provide researchers with the most timely and valuable information on any given topic, particularly in such ephemeral areas as popular music, which many other contemporary sources may ignore. At the same time such information can be difficult to locate. Unfortunately, very few tools exist for finding information on popular music topics in magazines and newspapers, especially on such specialized topics as New Orleans rhythm and blues. The *Music Index* is the only currently published index relating to music that covers the popular idiom. Subject headings one should consult, in addition to individual names, include "Popular Music," "Blues," and "Festivals." *Popular Music Periodicals Index*, an apparently defunct publication, was published annually between 1973 and 1976. *The Arts and Humanities Citation Index* also includes popular-music articles from journals in a variety of disciplines.

Most major daily newspapers in this country publish their own indexes; two of those most important to the present study are the *New York Times* and the *New Orleans Times Picayune* (formerly the *Times-Picayune States-Item*).

Magazine Index and *Info-Trac* are two "high-tech" tools that include popular-music publications. *Magazine Index* is published in a COM format (Computer Output Microfilm); *Info-Trac* offers information displayed on a microcomputer screen and accessed through a CD-ROM (Compact-Disc Read-Only Memory) machine.

An irony soon becomes apparent to anyone researching American popular music: more interest in our indigenous forms of music is displayed

by foreigners than by Americans themselves. This is especially true of older styles, such as blues and R&B, which are no longer in the mainstream of current popular music. There are several foreign periodicals that are devoted to American popular music, especially jazz, rhythm and blues, and blues. None of these magazines can be considered "scholarly"; rather they represent the efforts of impassioned fans dedicated to preserving popular American music of the past. Because most of these foreign periodicals lie outside the realm of mainstream popular music, they are sometimes hard to obtain. Only a few libraries or archives collect them, and since most facilities will not lend complete volumes of periodicals, their access is difficult. The Appendix contains a listing of several leading foreign publications devoted to blues and R&B which contain information on New Orleans artists.

American periodicals containing articles on rhythm and blues range from small special-interest newsletters to scholarly publications. Of the latter, *Living Blues*, published by the University of Mississippi's Center for Southern Culture, perhaps most thoroughly covers New Orleans rhythm-and-blues artists. *American Music*, published by the Sonneck Society and the University of Illinois Press, has not yet published any articles specifically dealing with New Orleans R&B musicians, but does include book and record reviews of all aspects of American music and should be a source to consider when submitting articles for publication. Scholarly interest in popular-music topics is represented by Bowling Green University's *Popular Music and Society*, also a potential source for publishing R&B articles. The *JEMF Quarterly*, formerly published by the John Edwards Memorial Foundation at UCLA and now by the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University at Murfreesboro, includes scholarly articles on American folk and popular music. Journals specializing in black music studies include the present publication as well as *The Black Perspective in Music* and *Black Music Research Bulletin* (formerly *Black Music Research Newsletter*).

Local or regional publications often offer the most current, "near-primary" sources for researching topics in popular culture. One publication from New Orleans that provides heavy coverage of local R&B is the monthly music-news magazine, *Wavelength*. This publication features articles by area free-lance writers on the current pop scene as well as reviews of concerts and recordings and occasional historical or anecdotal pieces. The weekly, tabloid-size, alternative newspapers *Gambit*, from New Orleans, and *Gris Gris* from Baton Rouge also include area popular music in their coverage. Two defunct publications of similar scope and

format which frequently included articles on New Orleans artists are the *Vieux Carré Courier* and *Figaro*.

While the *Times Picayune* has in the past few years featured frequent articles on New Orleans rhythm-and-blues performers (principally in its Friday entertainment section, "Lagniappe"), R&B was virtually excluded from coverage by the city's dailies during its heyday in the fifties and sixties. The best source for learning what was happening in black music circles during this period is the black newspaper *The Louisiana Weekly*. The *Weekly* frequently published news on the Dew Drop Inn and other prominent black clubs. While no formal reviews or serious discussions of the music were ever printed, the *Louisiana Weekly* offered a lively, vivid picture of a large segment of the New Orleans population ignored by the white press of the time.

Other U.S. periodicals that should be considered in researching New Orleans R&B include *Billboard* and *Cash Box*, especially for discographical and other recording information. *Goldmine* is an extremely valuable source for locating vintage and out-of-print recordings from the period. *Rolling Stone*, *Village Voice*, and *Downbeat* are other magazines with national coverage which occasionally will include articles on area artists.

A smaller, specialized American publication devoted to rhythm and blues/rock and roll is *Whiskey, Women, and . . .* Infrequent articles on blues and R&B may sometimes be found in *Second Line*, a New Orleans publication that covers the city's jazz past.

Sound Recordings

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a revival of interest in New Orleans rhythm and blues. Many artists from the 1950s, enjoying renewed popularity, again found themselves performing and recording. Older cuts were reissued on LPs, either by the original companies or by new, often foreign record firms catering to overseas interest in older American popular music. The English label Charly has been responsible for issuing much New Orleans music on such albums as *Sehorn's Soul Farm* (CRB 1032) and Roy Brown's *Boogie at Midnight* (CRB 1093). Mr. R&B's Route 66 label from Sweden has also put out reissues of several early New Orleans R&B artists, including Roy Brown, Paul Gayten, and Annie Laurie. Informative and extensive program notes are a feature of this label.

Many records from the Ace label, so prominent in recording 1950s New Orleans artists, have been reissued in anthologies. These include *Ace of New Orleans Sound* on Ace/Vivid Sound from Japan (VS 1013), *Ace Story: Vols. 1-3* on the English label Chiswich (CH 11, 12, and 55), and *Ace*

Records Presents the History of New Orleans Rock 'n' Roll, distributed in four volumes for the 1984 New Orleans World's Fair by Avanti Records from Dallas, Texas (7184, 7284, 7384, and 7484).

Other record companies currently active in issuing New Orleans artists include Chess Records (now distributed by MCA), the English label Crazy Kat, Pathé Marconi/EMI from France, Rounder Records, Arhoolie, Alligator Records, and Bandy. A fourteen-disc set from Atlantic, *Atlantic Rhythm and Blues, 1947–1974*, released in 1985 (81293-1-F–81299-1-F), also includes several New Orleans performers who recorded for that label—Dr. John, Professor Longhair, Irma Thomas, and the Neville's. Local and regional record labels that have promoted interest in New Orleans rhythm and blues include Dese Days and Hep Me Records from New Orleans and Swallow Records from Ville Platte, Louisiana.

Persons interested in collecting vintage recordings of rhythm and blues in New Orleans may locate such items at various local record shops, including Record Ron's Good & Plenty Records, 1129 Decatur Street; Rock 'n' Roll Records and Collectibles, 533 St. Philip Street; and Gold Mine Rare Records, Comics and Cards, 6469 Jefferson Highway, Harahan.

Film, Documentaries, and Interviews

At least two video documentaries have been made dealing with New Orleans rhythm and blues. "Up from the Cradle of Jazz," by Jason Berry and Jonathan Foose, is a sociological portrait of such New Orleans musical families as the Lasties and Neville's; it was later expanded and written as a book with the same title (discussed above). Although the video is no longer commercially available, a copy may be obtained from Berry (Jason Berry, 4404 South Liberty, New Orleans, LA 70115). "Piano Players Seldom Play Together," produced by Stevenson J. Palfi (1981), presents interviews with Tuts Washington, Professor Longhair, and Allen Toussaint. It includes footage of all three performing together in a rare studio session. The fact that Professor Longhair died while the documentary was being produced makes this program especially poignant and memorable.

A thirty-minute program featuring highlights of the 1987 Jazz and Heritage Festival has recently been produced for the cable network Showtime's "Coast to Coast." The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation has plans for producing a series of programs from future festivals.

Information gleaned from interviews with performers is essential, whether the interviewer is writing a book or an article or is producing a radio program, television, or motion picture documentary. Experienced researchers recognize, however, that the recollections of some interviewees are not always reliable or accurate. The prudent interviewer

must always verify, when possible, information given during interviews with other sources. Consultation with experienced local interviewers is encouraged; many of them can corroborate facts or verify the accuracy of performers' memories. With recent improvements in portable video-recording equipment, taped oral interviews may soon be replaced with videotaped interviews; however, many musicians may demand a higher fee for such interviews than they would for tape-recorded conversations (Jones 1987).

Archives, Repositories, and Research Centers

Recent interest in popular American culture has spawned the creation of several specialized centers for the preservation of various kinds of popular music. Because of its importance in the development of jazz, New Orleans has long been an important center for jazz scholars. Tulane University's William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive and the New Orleans Jazz Club's Jazz Museum (the latter located at the Old U.S. Mint, a branch of the Louisiana State Museum) are two major centers that collect material related to early jazz in the city. Unfortunately, no similar center exists for the preservation of the city's rhythm-and-blues tradition. The Tulane Jazz Archive does contain a small amount of material on R&B artists, including some material gathered by Berry, Foose, and Jones in their book *Up from the Cradle of Jazz*. In addition to the vertical file index of persons, researchers should consult the files "Rhythm and Blues," "Blues," "Soul," and "Festivals."

Although not an archive, the Music Library of Loyola University in New Orleans has in the past three years begun a systematic effort at collecting New Orleans rhythm and blues as a part of a larger collection of non-jazz Louisiana folk and popular music. The collection of more than three hundred LPs consists primarily of reissues of older recordings as well as new recordings by original R&B artists currently performing. While comparatively small, it is still the most comprehensive collection of recordings by postwar New Orleans musicians in the city. Music Librarian Laura Dankner has compiled guides to the library's popular music holdings, including a discography of recordings of Jazz and Heritage Festival performers that may be found in the library and a bibliographic guide to the collection.

While the Historic New Orleans Collection contains nothing directly related to New Orleans rhythm-and-blues music, it is still an essential source of information for researchers interested in any aspect of New Orleans history and culture, including, for example, city directories, census records, old newspapers, pictures and photographs, and material on the

historical development of city neighborhoods and different cultural and ethnic groups.

WWOZ, a publicly supported radio station in New Orleans specializing in local and regional music, has a collection of more than one hundred R&B recordings and approximately twenty tapes of previously aired interviews with various rhythm-and-blues performers.

The University of Mississippi is home to the Center for Southern Culture and the Blues Archive. The latter is strongest in its collection of country and Delta blues; although weaker in its R&B holdings, it maintains an active run of many of the foreign blues and R&B periodicals listed in the Appendix.

A major sound recording archive for all forms of twentieth century popular music is located at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. The Sound Recording Archives, housed in the Music Library, contains more than 400,000 popular recordings and associated print documentation. Librarians at the Archives have greatly aided scholars in their research by providing access to cataloged song titles through the nationwide OCLC library computer database. The Archives support Bowling Green's popular culture curriculum directed by the Center for Popular Culture.

A similar research facility recently formed at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro is the Center for Popular Music. Less than a year old, the center is presently in the midst of organizing its holdings. A major collection at the Center is the Ray Avery Collection, which contains a large number of 78 rpm, 45 rpm, and LP recordings of black popular music of all styles; it also contains posters, pictures, and other ephemera. The Center also publishes the *JEMF Quarterly* (see above). When the Center for Popular Music has begun full-scale operation and collecting, it should become a primary center for researching R&B in this country.

The Southern Folklife Collection of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill contains more than 33,000 sound recordings of all types of southern folk and popular music, including country and western, hillbilly, bluegrass, Cajun, gospel, "race," rhythm and blues, soul, and folk rock. Letters and photographs are also found in the collection, which is under the aegis of the manuscripts department of the University's Wilson Library. Currently in the process of organizing the collection, a portion of which was formerly located at the John Edwards Memorial Collection at UCLA, the archivist in charge, Mike Casey, hopes to have it available for researchers to use by the beginning of 1988.

Miscellaneous, Ephemeral, and Peripheral Sources

Although books, periodicals, sound recordings, and such primary

documents as letters and manuscripts provide music researchers with necessary substantive information, it is those ephemeral sources one often discovers serendipitously that add pleasure and personal satisfaction to one's research. Such sources allow researchers to share small but interesting bits of information about a subject that help flesh it out and that otherwise might have remained unnoticed. Knowing where to find such items is often difficult, but it is the kind of investigative sleuthing that makes research rewarding.

Among the several categories of ephemera, pictures and posters are the most essential and yet often the most difficult to obtain. The three books on New Orleans R&B mentioned above (Broven, Hannusch, and Berry, et al.) are all amply illustrated with photographs that add interest and meaning to their texts. Unfortunately there exists no repository for these photos, most of which remain in the hands of the researchers or their sources; this fact makes it difficult for others to obtain copies of them and also means that many items are stored in less than ideal conditions and are rapidly deteriorating. During his performing career, musician Tommy Ridgeley assembled a large collection of photos of various artists which are found in Broven's *New Orleans Rhythm and Blues*. Rick Coleman, an avid photographer and music buff, supplied many photographs for *Up from the Cradle of Jazz*. Some area musicians are no doubt able to provide photos, clippings, and perhaps scrapbooks in various states of organization or disorganization.

Most posters of New Orleans-area concerts were (and still are) printed by Gosserand's Superior Printers on Claiborne Avenue in New Orleans. Mr. Gosserand still possesses many of the metal plates of the posters, which often included photographs of the performers. Posters are also a collectible item; New Orleanian Dave Wright possesses a large collection of late R&B posters. Vintage posters from R&B's heyday are extremely rare and hence highly valued.

One of the chief forces in the revival of New Orleans rhythm and blues has been the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, which produces each year the Jazz Festival and the Heritage Fair during April and May. Located at the New Orleans Fairgrounds, the Heritage Fair showcases international styles such as reggae and salsa and all varieties of indigenous music, from zydeco and Cajun to gospel, Dixieland jazz, rhythm and blues, and string band music. The Festival Foundation publishes for the fair each year a program book that includes articles on various artists performing at the festival. The Foundation has a limited number of program books from past years at its offices (1205 North Rampart Street); they are available for perusal, but not for sale. The Festival also

features a book and record booth which sells items of local and regional interest.

Summary

The sources for investigating New Orleans rhythm and blues are both profuse and varied, evident and elusive. Attempts at capturing and preserving R&B on paper, tape, and film have risen in direct proportion to current interest displayed in its revival by enthusiasts. That such interest is likely to continue may be seen in the fact that Liverpool, England, and New Orleans have become sister cities, in recognition of the influence of local R&B artists on the Beatles (Atkinson 1987).

While each of the books on New Orleans rhythm and blues has its strengths, none presents nor attempts to portray the complete picture. What is needed is a critical, scholarly work written from an objective frame of reference, accurately chronicling the complete history of the city's postwar music tradition. Also needed are more audio and video interviews with the city's R&B pioneers, many of whom are approaching middle age and beyond. As more and more interest continues to be expressed in New Orleans music, and as long as artists keep performing, the final chapter of the story of New Orleans rhythm and blues has yet to be written.

APPENDIX

Foreign Blues and R&B Serials²

Block Magazine
Rien & Marion Wisse
Postbus 244
7600 Ae Almelo
The Netherlands

Il blues
Edizioni Blues e Dintorni Srl.
Piazza Grandi, 12
20135 Milano
Italy

Blues & Rhythm
Attn: Tony Burke
16 Bank Street
Cheadle, Cheshire SK3 2AZ
England

Blues & Soul
Napfield Ltd.
153 Praed Street
London W2
England

² This list was compiled with the aid of Walter Liniger, Blues Archive, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi.

Blues Forum
c/o Thomas Gutberlet
Glogauerstrasse 22
D-1000 Berlin 36
West Germany

Blues Life
Fritz & Franzisk Svacina
Kegelstrasse 40/17
A-1030 Vienna
Austria

Blues News Magazine
Attn: Pertti Nurmi
PL 257
00531 Helsinki 53
SF Finland

Blues Unlimited, Ltd.
Attn.: Mike Rowe
36 Belmont Park
Lewisham, London SE13 5DB
England

Coda Publications
Box 87, Station J
Toronto, Ontario M4J 4X8
Canada

Footnote
Flat 3, 37 High Street
Cherry Hinton CB1 4HX
Cambridge
England

Feelin' Good
c/o Tano Ro
via Maniago 2
20134 Milano
Italy

German Blues Circle
Attn: Walter F. Heinze
Postfach 180212
D-6000 Frankfurt 18
West Germany

The Gospel Truth
Attn.: Paul Vernon
18 Maxwelton Close, Mill Hill
London NW7 3NA
England

Jefferson Magazine
c/o Tommy Lofgren
Zetterlunds VAG 90 B
S-186 00 Vallentuna
Sweden

Juke Blues
Attn.: Bez Turner
15, Shakespeare Road
Herne Hill, London SE240 LA
England

Juke Magazine
c/o Hideki Soeda
37-5 Nishikamata 7-chome
Ohta-ku, Tokyo 144
Japan

Solo Blues
Attn: Francisco J. Rodriguez
c/o Jose Arcones Gil, 54
28017 Madrid
Spain

Soul Bag
Attn: Jacques Perin
25 rue Trezel
92300 Levallois-Perret
France

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