

A graphic featuring a treble clef and a musical note on a staff. The text "WHEN NOT PERFORMING" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, slanted upwards to the right. The text is positioned between the treble clef and the musical note. The staff line is a thin, light brown line that extends from the musical note to the right.

**WHEN NOT
PERFORMING**

A graphic featuring a treble clef and a musical note on a staff line, positioned above the main title. Below the title is a bass clef and another musical note on a staff line.

**WHEN NOT
PERFORMING**

New Orleans
Musicians

Photography by
David G. SPIELMAN

Text by
Fred LYON



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PREFACE

Musicians and photographers are similar in many respects. A musician will play whether or not he or she is getting paid. The music, whether from a piano, guitar, horn, or banjo, has to be expelled from the body, out from the heart and soul and into the open air. Photographers—true photographers—will go out shooting whenever time permits. There need not be an assignment. Different weather, something or someone new—just being able to shoot and the possibility of capturing that exceptional shot is what a photographer lives for. In the same way, musicians will perform for the sheer pleasure of being able to play. The music, their music, is in them and it has to be released. Some of their greatest successes happen when, through their own self-expression, they make a clear and profound statement. I'm not suggesting that musicians and photographers not get paid in order to fuel their artistic genius. Instead, what is being said is that most artists, whether they be musicians, writers, or painters, will continue to work, tune, and fine-tune their craft and talents regardless of whether any money is involved. In acknowledging that simple fact, we are all the benefactors of their devotion to their art.

A project like this one didn't come about in a flash. The project started long before the first photo was ever taken. As with musicians, writers, and other creative types, seeds and kernels are gathered along life's way. Events and occurrences happen during a lifetime that then will set the course. My course began as a little boy, hearing my father tell me that "Louis Armstrong's name and music was recognized

all around the world." Hearing and seeing the power and poise that musicians controlled had a thunderous effect. Growing up under the influences of Elvis, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Dizzy Gillespie, and Miles Davis, and then spending my senior year of college in Vienna and being exposed to Bach, Brahms, and Strauss, the seeds and kernels were planted for this project.

Throughout my formal education and evolution as a photographer, I studied the history and mastery of Walker Evans, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Arnold Newman, André Kertész, Alfred Eisenstaedt, Gordon Parks, Brassai, and Henri Cartier-Bresson and came to realize that I wanted to shoot places, spaces, and faces. I wanted to tell stories with my images. My goal was to travel, see, learn, and photograph as much as possible.

Enter New Orleans, 1973. Having never been here but thinking it was the most exotic, European city in the U.S., I was going to launch my life as a photographer. My Oklahoma upbringing and my European education did not prepare me for what I was about to find and discover. Meat and potatoes gave way to raw oysters and pinching and peeling crawfish. The sights, sounds, and smells washed over me with a life-changing effect. It was everywhere, all the time—clubs, concerts, and street parades were a common occurrence. Tyler's Beer Garden, the Maple Leaf Bar, Rosy's Jazz Hall, Tipitina's, and the Warehouse were all part of my crash course to the city, New Orleans 101. Then came more than just places, but personalities and talents as well: Pete Fountain,

Dr. John, Al Hirt, the Nevilles, Allen Toussaint, Dave Bartholomew, Fats Domino, and Frogman Henry recreated all that I knew about music. It seemed that wherever I turned, seeds and kernels kept sprouting.

As a young, struggling photographer just starting out, I wanted to decipher and photograph New Orleans but needed a plan. Partying and living the nightlife would have been easy, but my work and dreams would have suffered. Moderation had to be enforced, and all of these tidbits had to be saved, filed, and put away. Knowing that I couldn't rush into a project and that I didn't know enough, I had to continue to observe, gather information, keep field notes, and mature as a person and as a photographer. Slowly, I started to find my way to the photographic works of Clarence Laughlin, Michael A. Smith, Gordon Parks, and Walker Evans. Their images provided me with lots of information on how the South lived and honored its past. Ingesting their work and words, I was becoming a student of this cultural oasis that was right outside my front door, around the corner, or down an alley from wherever I was standing or staying at any given time. Then the works of Ralston Crawford and Lee Friedlander introduced me to the musical icons of their periods. During that segregated time, they documented and introduced the world to New Orleans Jazz. Now, all I had to do was figure out how to capture it. I didn't want to rush forward without gaining the respect and trust of the musicians. I wanted to earn both their respect and their friendship. All the while, I wanted to find my visual voice and make the images

my own. For a subject such as New Orleans music and its musicians, that was going to prove to be challenging. How do you photograph the same subject yet capture it with a different view?

Little by little, ever so slowly, I was introduced to and got to photograph some of the greats: Pete Fountain, Al Hirt, Willie and Percy Humphrey, Doc Cheatham, Danny Barker, and others. Talking with and being invited into their homes, I began to see and understand that their lives weren't all that much different from ours. The only difference was clear: they were possessed and driven by their music, not in an unhealthy way, but by something in their marrow that required—demanded—they to play and perform. Being told of and invited to several Jazz Funerals (those of Tommy Rigley, Jim Robinson, and Danny Barker), I came to realize and understand how this musical mosaic is a continuous work in progress. These men and women were and are part of something bigger than themselves, their group, or their song. With great respect and reverence for those who came before, they would come and perform to honor the passing of one of their own. Upon the death of Wardell Quezergue, Dr. John said that each one of these deaths and funerals represented the closing of another chapter in the musical history of New Orleans.

Clearly, music is vital to their lives and to the life of the city. With that knowledge, interest, and admiration, I was determined to photograph them and try to convey their stories. The musicians themselves are strikingly different. Their life stories

have been filled with the entire spectrum of trials and tribulations. Their experiences challenge the characters of some of the greatest southern novels. Poverty, abuse, drugs, fame, exploitation, love, and loss are all part of the pedigree that gives them the soul, torment, passion, and raw talent. At the same time, their stories are our stories. Their sounds and words guide and soothe us in our moments of joy and grief. Several of the subjects have suffered from different addictions, some have spent time in jail, but in all cases, when they were released or when they beat back their demons, they all returned to their music and their instruments. Most, when asked where they wanted to be photographed, had great and meaningful ideas. A very large percentage wanted to be photographed with their instrument at their side. Clearly, that instrument is an extension of their being, their soul mate and partner and not unlike what my camera is to me. Always at my side, always ready to take another picture—I am defined by my images just as they are defined by their music. They are musicians, plain and simple. Without their instruments, they are people just like you and me.

Another question that I had to face in preparing myself for this project was to consider how it is that New Orleans still remains the cog in the musical wheel. We all know the history of why most of it started and how it grew. The slave trade, the Mississippi River, and the proximity to the Caribbean Islands all contributed greatly and dearly to this musical heartland. New Orleans has been battered and beaten through the years, not only by

storms but also by economics and recessions. And yet, every time, the music and its students and fans return. Culture can't be cultivated in a classroom or taught in a workshop, it is a major component of our molecular make-up. We don't just go and listen to it in a club or concert hall, it wafts from our windows, our schools, and our cars. It surrounds us as much as the humidity does. It pours from our pores, it lingers on our breath, whether we play or don't play. Most often it is passed down the family line from parents to sons and daughters, but sometimes it travels from house to house and neighbor to neighbor. Women and men alike, from all over this country and around the world, travel here to live in and absorb it. Many come, but not so many leave. Once bitten, it is almost impossible to get New Orleans out of your bloodstream, head, and heart.

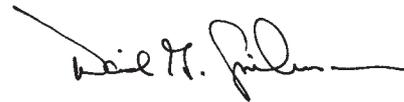
As an observer and as a photographer, I felt the time was right for this project. My education was coming to an end. The musicians and photographic mentors, alive and dead, had spoken clearly and forcefully. I hope I've earned my chops. Had I tried this in my youth, it probably would have been loud and proud, missing the subtleties and nuances that make the music universal and yet unique to the individual all at the same time. With age and experience, I've heard and seen much more. Music is a language for your ears, photography for your eyes. In an interview, Joe Walsh said, "A philosopher once said as we live life, it looks like random anarchy, one event smashing into another. But when you look back, life looks like a finely crafted novel." This

book is an uncompleted puzzle. Pieces and parts are still missing, not because Fred and I couldn't find them but because there are far too many. The border and boundaries of this puzzle haven't been defined, because new pieces are forming and being made all the time. The challenge to you as a reader is to look at our pieces, find your own, and complete your own puzzle. New influences find their way here with every plane that arrives, every ship that anchors, and every car that drives and parks in the Quarter. Our culture isn't hard and fast. It is a large sponge that will absorb any and all who get close enough.

In my years here, I have absorbed most of what New Orleans has to offer: its art, architecture, literature, food, and (of course) music. Many still consider me an interloper, someone not really from here, and I am often viewed with a weary eye. Not being able to claim a local high school or a hospital where I was born, I will always be an outsider to some. Having stayed through Katrina and published a book of photographs about southern writers, many are still skeptical. The famous photographer Ansel Adams said, "The negative is the equivalent of the

composer's score and the print the performance." I'm hoping my "performance" will put to rest any skepticism and trepidation that may still be lurking about. For a very old city, we continue to be and act very young. As in photography, painting, writing, and all other art forms, one must study the past in order to challenge and make the future. History is a great and wonderful teacher, but the main lesson should be to not be afraid to push and bump up against the status quo, stretching and pushing the boundaries as we go. Louis Armstrong said, "My whole life, my whole soul, my whole spirit is to blow that horn . . ." His words express clearly how I feel about my photography.

The seeds and kernels, sown so long ago, have been nurtured and harvested. I sincerely hope you enjoy them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David G. Spielman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David G. Spielman
New Orleans

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DAVID G. SPIELMAN

A project such as this involves so many people that it's hard to know where to start and how to stop. I am forever grateful to the musicians who so freely gave of their time and knowledge to help (and ultimately become) this project. For without them, whom would I shoot?

Fred Lyon, the writer of the text, was such an important part of the process. His research and writing rounds out the images, giving a fuller and richer view of the people captured.

The photographic process is a lesson in organization, negatives, scans, and test prints, and the juggling of dates and schedules is the critical ingredient that makes it all fit. If something is misplaced, lost, or misfiled, it becomes the proverbial needle in the haystack. Britt

Melancon was there, helping me keep it all straight and moving forward. His darkroom and digital skills added greatly to my finished product.

The inspiration comes from other photographers: Lee Friedlander, Walker Evans, Margaret Bourke-White, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bruce Davidson, and Gordon Parks, whose work inspires, challenges, and drives me to do my best. I am also indebted to Clarence Giese, a painter, the friend who in the 1970s in Vienna taught me to look, so I could see the images that I wanted and needed to take.

This is for Shelley and Sasha, my wife and son, who make me whole and exceedingly happy.

FRED LYON

I am deeply grateful to my extraordinary wife, Lynn, my creative muse and passionate partner in pursuing the many pleasures of New Orleans; to my children, whose patience and support through all of the times when "Pop is working on the book again" abounded; to my friend and talented collaborator, David Spielman, for letting me ride shotgun while we explored the streets of New Orleans on what

proved to be an amazing journey; to my friend Sonny Shields, who in the 1970s taught me what it meant to love New Orleans; to his wife, Laura, whose gracious hospitality defines the city in which her family has lived since the 1850s; and, finally, to the people and the city of New Orleans, which often engage, occasionally infuriate, and always inspire.

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTES

Here in New Orleans, music is a fabric woven into our everyday lives; it is everywhere, all the time. We watch our musicians grow up, grow old, and even die. They teach the young and leave a legacy behind for all of us. They are part of our extended families, entertaining us at sweet-sixteen parties, high school graduations, engagements, weddings, bar mitzvahs, festivals, block parties, and more. They live among us as family members and neighbors and share our good times, our food, our culture, and our love.

For years, I have photographed them at many different events and venues, always leaving the scene feeling as if there was so much more to them than their stage life. The late Michael P. Smith covered the concert and club scene from the late sixties until his death. His photographic body of work stands alone as a tribute to his dedication and devotion to the music and the musicians. He shot the first Jazz Fest and the thirty-four years after that. His body of work is unique. When I arrived in New Orleans, he was well established and I didn't think I would or could do a better job than he. I needed to do something different. I needed to find my visual voice of how to tell the musician's story. Another image of them performing wasn't enough for me and my photography. I wanted to know more about what they do when they aren't on stage, so I started getting to know them while not performing.

My interests have always leaned toward the creative processes of the artists. I enjoy looking behind the curtain, so to speak, and seeing what makes them click. Why do people write, paint, cook, or play music? Most cannot make a great living from it: long

nights, road trips, fast food, cheap hotels—but yet, the dream is there, very much alive in each and every one of them, always looking for the great audience, waiting for the perfect song, playing the coolest gig, or composing the sonic masterpiece. We are the luckier for their dream and their continuing passion to make and produce it!

Fred Lyon, who has written the text for this book, is a friend of mine. One night, while talking at a wedding reception, we discussed the depth and caliber of music in and of New Orleans. He asked me why I hadn't done a photographic book on musicians. I told him that I wanted to, but I hadn't found the right writer who matched my curiosity of a behind-the-scenes look. The one thing I knew for sure was that it would not be of them performing. These were going to be personal and private portraits, something similar to another book I had done years before, *Southern Writers*, in which I photographed authors in their workspaces. No glamour shots or over-produced glossies, but black and white portraits of them having just finished or getting ready to work. It was a treasured peek into how and why they wrote. Was it with a pencil, typewriter, or computer? Did they stand or sit, work late into the night or rise early? What was it that made them tick?

That conversation at the wedding was where this project all started. Where to begin? How to begin? We started compiling lists of musicians, types of music, and people to whom we needed to speak to give us insight to the musical community. In the end, it was the musicians themselves who helped provide many of the introductions. Once we started contacting musicians and they understood our

direction, they were all in. Each of them chose his or her own location for the shoot. In many cases, it was where they played their first gig, their childhood home, or where they found their muse—a porch, garden, kitchen, alleyway, or club entrance. It was their choice, as it spoke to them in some way and gave us that glimpse of a life rarely seen by most.

We knew we couldn't produce the anthology of New Orleans music, as the book would have to be a tome. Plus, the music and its musicians are like our food: always changing. So our goal was to provide a window to look through, showing the tone, tenor, and diversity of what New Orleans has to offer and helping to educate and stimulate interest in one of our greatest assets.

Tracking down musicians isn't easy. Many are like smoke, easy to see but hard to capture. Ever-changing schedules, late nights, frequent road trips all add to the difficult task of finding and scheduling them. Even when that had been accomplished, musicians can be and are forgetful. Herding cats or trying to pick up mercury might have been easier. Time doesn't seem to be a high priority. There were several no-shows. However, when contact was made and the appointments were met, everything became magical. Each was a treasure of personality and stories. Their musical life was usually a unique road map of experiences, with people helping or mentoring them at just the right time, reinforcing the adage that music is the universal language. Stumbling blocks littered their travel; vices and devices helped and hindered their development. Yet time and time again, they found their way back to their music and home.

The project took on the qualities of a map of hidden treasure, a scavenger hunt of sorts, always revealing yet another gem that New Orleans has to offer of a neighborhood diner, café, or joint compiled from the body of their stories. Their tales told of how the musical bloodlines run. It was an educational experience unto itself, a crash course of the genealogy of New Orleans.

Working quickly, not wanting to disrupt their lives or schedules, I shot with available light and with very little equipment. Supplemental lighting was only used to complement what was there. There was no propping or rearranging furniture. I always shoot it as I find it; I want the viewers to see it as it is. My theory is that the more gear and the more people added to the mix, the more the photographer gets steered away from the proposed goal of getting into the personal space and personality of the subject. This is truly the epitome of less is more. I'm not interested in seeing the performer. I want to see, know, and photograph the person. Doc Cheatham, the trumpeter, once said, "If you want them to hear, play loud. If you want them to listen, play soft." That is how I approach my photography. With all my personal work, I shoot with Leica rangefinder cameras—small, quiet, non-threatening pieces of the finest photographic equipment made. No motor drives, no zoom lenses, just me, my Leica and the subject! Shooting this project was a great experience and as fascinating as it was fun. My hope is that you will enjoy the photographs as much as I enjoyed capturing them. All the best!

WRITER'S NOTES

My friend David Spielman has aptly described the genesis of this book: the magic and inspiration of the city's musicians, the process of the book's creation, and the challenges it has provided. More than most other places, New Orleans defines itself through its musicians, and these musicians in turn define themselves through the special city in which they live. It is, in some ways, a closed loop—the musicians need New Orleans, and New Orleans needs the musicians. By capturing these artists when not performing, in places of their own choosing, we are attempting to show the symbiotic relationship between the performers and the city they call home.

The conversations with each artist were relaxed, not a formal interview. There were no preconceived questions, and the musicians directed the conversation. We followed along, delighted to be allowed a glimpse behind what David describes as the “creative curtain.” While we wanted to know why New Orleans is such a special place for music, it was not a question we typically had to ask.

Their answers inevitably emerged as they talked about the city's clubs, its jazz funerals and second line parades, its inter-connected families and neighborhoods, its churches, its festivals, its high school marching bands—all the elements combine to make New Orleans one of the rich musical incubators of the world.

Hurricane Katrina convinced me to move to New Orleans. In order to help preserve what was almost lost—its music, its legends—I needed to have my feet planted firmly on the city's scarred and sacred ground. I found that whatever damage had been done on the surface, the roots of the city's music were still deeply entrenched in the ground, destined to flourish as the city's musicians helped bring their community back to life.

Speaking about jazz, Louis Armstrong once said, “What we play is life.” The histories and passions of these musicians, in a city they love so much, show why they play so well. It was an honor to be able to spend time with them.

A graphic featuring a treble clef and a musical note on a staff line, positioned to the left of the text. The text is in a bold, black, sans-serif font, slanted upwards to the right. The staff line is a thin, light brown horizontal line that extends to the right of the text.

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