

The Music of New Orleans: Roots, Revision, and Revival Performance/Presentation

By Matty Metcalfe

New Orleans may accurately be described as the 'birthplace of jazz'--within the Bayou's cradle, American ragtime, blues, and jazz were nurtured in the early 20th century. From that wellspring, Stride Piano, Zydeco, Funk, and many other descendents spread out across America over time, like branches on a Geneological Tree.

Mr. Metcalfe's Performance/Presentation guides us through the streets of New Orleans, showing the connections between our distinctively 'American' style and those from French-Canada, Europe, and Africa. He artfully demonstrates how, with minimal rephrasing, Chopin's piano pieces were seamlessly integrated into the style and sound of early New Orleans music.

To shape the narrative, Mr. Metcalfe chronicles the progression from Ragtime to early Blues music--a time when Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton, W.C. Handy, and other black musicians (and their music) came to prominence on an international level through 'race records' and the exporting of America's music during World War One.

From there, we see how Stride Piano, that most idiomatic of New Orleans musical styles, grew from a marriage of Ragtime and Blues--wherein the pianist tries to sound like a full band by using his left hand to create 'drum-rolls' and 'walking bass' parts while the right hand imitates trumpet and vocal melodies.

Mr. Metcalfe shows how popular songs by popular groups such as the Beatles can be rearranged to sound like New Orleans pieces. He then guides us through the Gospel styles--popularized by musicians like Ray Charles in the songs 'Just a Closer Walk with Thee', 'Down by the Riverside', and 'When the Saints Go Marching In'.

The influence of 'Island Music' on New Orleans cannot be overstated--as Professor Longhair, Doctor John, and James Booker all 'riffed' off the mambo, samba, and rumba grooves from the Caribbean. Mr. Metcalfe shows us that all these styles represent the blending of many different cultures--from Creole to Cajun, French and German to Native American--forming the backdrop of our country's most distinctive music forms. Finally, we are taken back to Chopin composition, rearranged to sound like a song from a modern-day Mardi Gras parade.

The performance can be tailored to suit your venue's time constraints--from 45 minutes to 2 hours. Mr. Metcalfe travels with his own sound-system and instruments but requires adequate lighting and at least 15'x15' stage space. For a full list or stage plot, please contact metcalfemusic@yahoo.com