

New Orleans Music & Arts Tour

Introduction

Hey there – welcome to the Free Tours by Foot audio tour on the music and arts of New Orleans! I'm Andrew, a guide with Free Tours by Foot. I'll be taking you through some historic sites and present-day venues for New Orleans music, and we'll also get into the city's visual art, theater, literature, and a healthy dose of et cetera.

If you take this tour all in one go, it'll last about two hours. It starts on one edge of the French Quarter and finishes on another. The route can be eventful. Armstrong Park, where the tour starts, hosts festivals and other events throughout the year. You'll also pass through the heart of the French Quarter, where you'll find lots of art galleries, plus restaurants, cafes, and shops, and probably some street musicians. With all that in mind, I'd recommend giving yourself more than two hours in case you want to pause along the way. The tour finishes on Frenchmen Street, which is the most concentrated strip of local-sounding live music venues in town, so you'll have options for what to do afterwards, too. There's also one last bonus stop, optional of course, if you want to visit some of the few remaining buildings from the neighborhood where jazz began.

To get the most out of the tour, I recommend taking it in the afternoon or early in the evening. Armstrong Park, where the tour begins, closes around sunset, so you'll want to start at least an hour before that. If you want to hear street musicians, the most reliable time is late morning to early afternoon, although there's some in the evening too. For indoor music, your best option is to hit a show on Frenchmen Street after finishing the tour. There tend to be a few shows starting as early as 2:00, with a lot more getting going at 6 or 7 and continuing well into the night. Frenchmen varies hugely from day to day, but the shows that start at 7 or earlier tend to be more traditional, low-key, and jazzy, with later sets bringing in more funk, rock, blues, and general variety, with more of a party atmosphere. I'll also mention some French Quarter venues along the way; most of those get going in the evening. If you want information on specific shows, our local radio station, WWOZ, which is a great jazz and heritage station, also produces a daily music calendar, so look in the text for a link to that or download their iOS app.

Besides live shows, I'll make some other music recommendations too. In the text, you'll find links to songs that illustrate the moments and the artists you'll be hearing about. You can listen to these as you go, or get off your feet after the tour and enjoy them then.

The tour will start by the gate to Louis Armstrong Park, at the intersection of North Rampart Street and St. Ann Street at the edge of the French Quarter. There are several restaurants, bars, and cafes within a few blocks if you need to fuel up first. The entrance to the park is a huge arch that says "Armstrong," so you can't miss it.

WWOZ Livewire music calendar: <https://www.wwoz.org/calendar/livewire-music>

Louis Armstrong Park

When you're standing by the gate to Armstrong Park, you're just outside the French Quarter. Rampart Street got its name from the fact that a rampart, or a wall, ran around the original city and divided it from the woods and the swamp outside. So if you've made it to the gate, you're in the woods. It's possible from right around here to see three neighborhoods that represent New Orleans'

most important cultural ingredients. Across Rampart is the French Quarter, which speaks to the Latin legacy – the French who founded New Orleans and the Spanish who took it over from them. Off in the distance you can see skyscrapers – that’s the business district, which was the first neighborhood built and inhabited by Anglo-Americans. And where you’re standing is the Treme – the closest link New Orleans has to its West African roots. Armstrong Park commemorates that connection and the cultural traditions that come from it.

The namesake of the park is Louis Armstrong, who’s also the namesake of the airport you may have flown into. And like the airport, this land doesn’t have much direct connection with Louis Armstrong’s life. But the park does speak to the deeper reasons why jazz was possible here, and Louis Armstrong is the best-known hero of that story. We’ll get into his life, but for now, just a detail. The first time Louis Armstrong ever had his name in the newspaper, he was eleven years old – and it was for being arrested. He had shot six blanks in the air during New Year’s Eve festivities, and after his arrest, he was sent to a place called the Colored Waifs’ Home – a juvenile detention. But he arrived during the tenure of a great music teacher who became one of his mentors. And during his year and a half there, Louis made the newspaper for the second time, this time as the first cornet player and bandleader for the home’s brass band. This and other stories from Louis’ childhood in New Orleans made up a huge part of his performance character long after he moved away for good, and they’re a mixed bag of hardship, community support, and luck.

Inside the gate, you can see a monument depicting the same kind of marching brass band where Louis Armstrong got his first formal music training. If you haven’t already, pass through the gate and take a look at it.

Brass Band Monument

Direction: Inside the gate, you can see a monument depicting the same kind of marching brass band where Louis Armstrong got his first formal music training. If you haven’t already, pass through the gate and take a look at it.

The monument you see here leaves a lot to the imagination. Most importantly, you have to picture more people – maybe quite a lot more people – following the band. And those people might be anything from the attendees of a destination wedding in 2018 to a group of black Civil War veterans in 1866 protesting for voting rights. The tradition depicted here is called a second line, and they’re most famous for the part they play in New Orleans funerals. The classic jazz funeral is a slow, solemn march at the beginning and an upbeat dance at the end, both mourning and celebrating the deceased person. From their place in funerals, though, second lines have come to be a part of other major life moments, political events, holiday celebrations, and sports victories.

Besides being one of the most essential traditions in New Orleans, second lining is also one of the most African. Performance traditions in West Africa tend to blend music and dance; a second line is both. Their music includes call and response, group improvisation, and complex rhythms, all of which can be found in brass band repertoire. They don’t observe a clear distinction between performer and audience; second lines not only involve participation by everyone who’s a part of the event, but also invite passersby to join.

Music has been a thread of New Orleans life since more or less the beginning, but brass bands became the accompaniment of choice in the later part of the 19th century. Slavery had been abolished during the recent Civil War, and the newly free were banding together for mutual benefit. They formed organizations that provided everything from a social network to a burial

space in the cemetery, and many of these clubs maintained a lodge and a house band. And since a war had just ended, brass instruments were easy to find. Some of those organizations still exist in the form of what are called Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, and many of them produce a second line annually as the centerpiece of their social calendar.

Jazz also starts coming to life late in the 19th century, and it's propelled by some of the same forces that brought brass bands to popularity. For the next little while, I'll be using the word "jazz" narrowly. Jazz is a whole family of music genres, and like the members of a human family, there are traits they tend to share, but what ties them together more than anything is shared history. And part of that history is traditional New Orleans jazz – the first genre to bear the name and from which the rest of them grew. It's possible to define traditional jazz pretty simply: it's ensemble music played by New Orleans bands that took popular dance music from the turn of the 20th century and added elements of ragtime and blues. But the story is also more complicated.

We'll start with the deepest roots of what made jazz possible here.

Looking away from the gate and a little to the left, you'll see a monument that shows a group of people surrounding a dancing woman. Head for that.

Tracks to check out:

- Funeral second line, first part: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SzWx79Z9BQ>
- Funeral second line, second part: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFf0qPBcAd4>

Congo Square / Monument

Direction: Looking away from the gate and a little to the left, you'll see a monument that shows a group of people surrounding a dancing woman. Head for that.

The gathering you see in this monument is one that might have happened in 19th-century New Orleans or in western Africa. African culture of course was imported to the United States as part of the slave trade, but New Orleans is probably the place in the country where African traditions were least actively suppressed. There are a lot of reasons for that, but one of them is that New Orleans law required almost from the beginning that enslaved people have a day off on Sunday. That bit of discretionary time was often spent in gatherings like this, which maintained African traditions even into generations that were born in Louisiana. And while originally those gatherings happened in many places, in 1819 the City Council restricted them to this spot – Congo Square. The activities here would have included a market, which connects the place to civil rights history – plus religious activities, which connect it with the voodoo or vodou religion – but for our purposes, the music that happened here is key. In the monument, you can see two men playing the djembe, a drum played between the knees, and another person playing the banjo, another instrument of African origin. You can get a proper view of Congo Square if, from facing the monument, you turn to your left and proceed into the cobblestoned area ahead of you. As you enter, it's worth bearing in mind that to many people this is a sacred space – Congo Square hosts festivals, ceremonies, and even weekly drum circles, which take place most Sunday afternoons around 3:00. If you see any kind of event under way, it's best to give them some room and privacy unless they say otherwise.

One of the signatures of the music played in Congo Square is its rhythmic complexity. Singers might be on one beat while drummers play another, and the drums themselves overlay rhythms

that would have been contradictory in most European music of that time. These beats paired with specific dances – the bamboula, the calinda, and lots of others. If you watch the participants in a second line or the majorettes who dance in Mardi Gras parades or even just the crowd at a lot of New Orleans concerts, you'll see moves that come from those historic dances.

The gatherings here were interrupted by the Civil War and seem to have fallen off completely not long after – so today's use of the space is a revival. Even the name Congo Square has been revived – from 1893 to 2011, the official name was Beauregard Square, after PGT Beauregard, the Confederate General from Louisiana. Congo Square remained the spoken name of choice for the neighbors, but in 2011, the City Council officially reinstated the old name, and a few years later a red historic plaque was added.

One last detail – from Congo Square, looking away from the French Quarter, you can see a big gray building called the Municipal Auditorium. This was a space that hosted performances and Mardi Gras balls until 2005, when it was badly damaged by Hurricane Katrina. You're on the edge of the flood zone from that disaster, with the water getting gradually deeper as you go further into the Treme and away from the French Quarter. And the theater, having floors below ground level, flooded worse than the outdoors around it. As of fall 2018, the space has never reopened.

From here, go back the way you came toward the central walkway of Armstrong Park. Further in that direction, past the brass band monument, you should see another, larger monument, brightly colored, with a lot of orange. Make your way toward that.

Tracks to check out:

- Congo Square drum circle, 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMbLUDee41E>

French Opera House Monument

Directions: From here, go back the way you came toward the central walkway of Armstrong Park. Further in that direction, past the brass band monument, you should see another, larger monument, brightly colored, with a lot of orange. Make your way toward that.

Until 1919, Bourbon Street was home to the French Quarter's opera house. You can see photos of the building on the walls of this monument. It was the hub of not just the New Orleans opera scene but the American one – New Orleans was the city where many operas made their American debut. At each performance, a few seats were set aside for an honored group of volunteer firefighters, whose job was to light and extinguish any scenic fires on stage and to search the audience for discarded cigarettes afterwards. But they didn't attend rehearsals, and one night, after a rehearsal of Carmen, the place went up in flames. Nowadays, the few operas produced in New Orleans are staged at the Mahalia Jackson Theater for the Performing Arts, right here in Armstrong Park.

Opera was an obsession in 19th-century New Orleans, and not just among high society. The appeal for the wealthy was partly to see and be seen – and so you'd pay top dollar for a private box, where the awful view of the stage was made up for by the fact that the rest of the audience had a great view of you – and sometimes an opera's closing number would continue straight into a real masked ball that you could pay extra to stay and attend. But there were cheap seats, too, and part of the audience space was set aside for enslaved people to watch

from.

In 1829, a decade after Congo Square was appointed the place for the enslaved to congregate, a kid named Louis Moreau Gottschalk was born right across the street. He grew up in a mixed-race family in a mixed-music city, and when he started to compose music for piano, he pulled from everything he grew up hearing, writing material that sounds like the romantic works of Chopin, but incorporating the rhythms of the Bamboula or of banjo music. He mostly worked in Europe, but his novel and distinctly American music coincided with a huge spike in piano ownership, and home musicians across the country bought his sheet music and struggled to learn the complex beats.

Meanwhile, the same mixing of cultures was happening in other ways elsewhere in the south. African music in other parts of the country had been suppressed but not stomped out. Church was a big part of life for enslaved people, and spirituals held onto many African musical traits; the same with work songs. And music we today know as the blues was starting to develop along similar lines. At the same time, one of the most popular forms of entertainment in late 19th century America was minstrel shows, where white performers in blackface would imitate black Americans' behavior, including their music; and in turn, black performers in blackface would imitate the white performers' imitation of themselves. All very complicated, but even with a lot of malice at its heart, minstrelsy found people borrowing from each other's musical ideas. In the last few years of the 19th century, this leads to the mainstream popularity of ragtime – a genre that combines European-style dance music with what's called syncopation – rhythms that fall off the center of a beat in a way that's common in African-derived music. Ragtime comes about in St. Louis, a city just up the river from New Orleans and in close cultural exchange with us. Starting in the 1890s, sheet music for ragtime songs sells like candy all over the country for a couple of decades. And that lays the ground for jazz to come along.

We'll get into the jazz age at our next stop, which is just ahead. *If you look along the path leading away from the French Quarter from the opera house monument, you'll see a statue of a man with three heads. Pay him a visit.*

Tracks to check out:

- Louis Moreau Gottschalk, Bamboula: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOYnuC6twfI>
- Blues work songs performed by inmates at Louisiana and Mississippi State Penitentiaries: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InG7SjWKtT4>
- Ragtime – Scott Joplin performs his composition Maple Leaf Rag: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMAtL7n-rc>

Buddy Bolden

Directions: If you look along the path leading away from the French Quarter from the opera house monument, you'll see a statue of a man with three heads. Pay him a visit.

This is Buddy Bolden – our best candidate for “inventor of jazz,” if anybody can claim that title. We have no recordings of this man and only one photo, but his contemporaries put him front and center as the genre is beginning – Jelly Roll Morton called him “the blowingest man since

Gabriel.” There’s plenty of mystery around him, but it sounds for sure like Buddy Bolden stood out.

We said a minute ago that ragtime was America’s popular music at the turn of the century. Buddy Bolden was around for that – he was born in 1877, during a time when New Orleans was changing fast. The end of slavery had brought a lot of the region’s rural black population into the city, and at the time, “black” was considered quite a different thing from “Creole” – the term used for the existing French- speaking, Catholic, often mixed-race African-descended population of New Orleans. A Creole person could be white as well, but it was a clear way for the well-established urbanites to distinguish themselves from the newcomers. On one side, you’d hear clearly Anglo-derived names like Louis Armstrong and Buddy Bolden, while on the other side you might meet Isidore Barbarin or Sidney Bechet or Ferdinand Lamothe – the birth name of Jelly Roll Morton. In interviews, Jelly Roll Morton made sure to say that all of his ancestors came straight from France. Buddy Bolden’s family had been in New Orleans long before the Civil War, but these were the tensions and assumptions that would have circulated around him. Besides their many other differences, Creole and black New Orleanians had somewhat different musical tastes and lived in different parts of town. But those parts met – and so, therefore, did their music – within the boundaries of New Orleans’ legal red-light district, today known as Storyville. Storyville was made up of two areas, segregated for white and non-white clientele, and Black Storyville, as it’s known, is where some of the most important early jazz venues were. Not much is left of this area today, but the bonus piece at the end of the tour is about a few of the buildings that still stand there.

So far, the story of jazz is the story of blurring the line between European and African music, and it’s worth emphasizing that this met loud objections at every turn. The spread of jazz through America caused moral panic in the 20s, but earlier than that, Jelly Roll Morton’s family disowned him for his association with jazz; before that, the American League of Musicians banned its members from playing ragtime, claiming it was for the public good; and back when the pianist, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, was first mixing African rhythms into his music, a critic in Boston, with probably unconscious insight, tried to condemn the music by calling it “too American.” So it’s convenient that jazz grew up in a red light district. And Buddy Bolden did belong to a generation known for being, at least compared with their parents, bold and unconcerned with rules – they were the first generation born who had never known a world with slavery. But for all that, Buddy probably never played in brothels – just in dance halls that happened to be in the same neighborhood as brothels. And a lot of his musical upbringing would have been more “wholesome” – he would have grown up hearing brass bands play military marches; Creole dance bands would have played the picnics and outings of his childhood; and he would have heard the spirituals and blues of the rural south in his neighborhood, too. And his claim to fame seems to have been putting all of these things together – creating a brass-heavy dance band lineup, putting ragtime rhythms on older songs, and playing the cornet like it was the voice of a Baptist preacher – making it more about the bend, the texture, and the volume than about hitting the right notes and making it pretty. And at the heart of his music was the ensemble that would define traditional jazz – a cornet, a trombone, and a clarinet improvising together.

There’s no question, though, that the nightlife setting of this early jazz music had a cost for Buddy. Side- by-side with praising his talents, his contemporaries comment on his capacity for alcohol, and he started to have violent outbursts in what might also have been early expressions of schizophrenia. After three arrests, in 1907 he was institutionalized while the genre he helped create was still young. He spent the rest of his life in an asylum and died in 1931, just before a revival of interest started researchers interviewing some of the early figures in jazz. While he was incarcerated, the neighborhood where he worked and played was destroyed – in 1917, the US Navy commanded the closing of Storyville for the safety of the young men who would be passing through New Orleans during their tour of duty. Today, almost none of the buildings of

old Storyville still stand, and hence almost none of the early haunts of jazz.

As a last note here – across the water, you can see a few buildings that stand within the park but actually predate it. The yellow and white building is the Perseverance Masonic Lodge, the oldest Masonic Hall in Louisiana. It's one of the kind of neighborhood halls that would have supported constant music programming, and while the facility can't currently be visited, the bandstand is still there. Before Armstrong Park was a park, it was just part of the Treme, so streets ran through it. The lodge was at the intersection of St. Claude and Dumaine – a spot where New Orleans musician Professor Longhair recommends watching the Krewe of Zulu parade on Mardi Gras Day. Obviously, Professor Longhair's advice is dated because of when he recorded, and by the same token, I apologize if you find that my descriptions of any landmarks are out of date.

If you're face-to-face with Buddy Bolden, look to your left and you'll see Louis Armstrong up the stairs. Head that way when you're ready.

Tracks to check out:

- Jelly Roll Morton's New Orleans JazzMen perform Buddy Bolden's Blues, his own rendition of Bolden's signature song called Funky Butt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3Axq14wE8U>
- The New John Robichaux Society Orchestra plays classic Creole dance music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCuhE2DoWh0&list=PLF4yQF9Nv93ZMebKVMGQ27pfsjo5XjhmT>
- Professor Longhair, Go to the Mardi Gras: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUPkvv4H0V0>

Louis Armstrong

Directions: If you're face-to-face with Buddy Bolden, look to your left and you'll see Louis Armstrong up the stairs. Head that way when you're ready.

What you see here is a young Louis Armstrong just reaching the height of his abilities. His innovations would determine what the next chapter of jazz sounded like, but he would have to make them away from New Orleans.

Jazz musicians had started to leave New Orleans even before Storyville was destroyed in 1917. This had less to do with music than just life – black southerners of all kinds had heard about better opportunities and safer lives elsewhere in the country, and the promise of a middle-class audience in Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York was too good for many musicians to resist.

Louis was one of the later ones to leave. He was of the younger generation of jazz artists. Louis believed he had been born on the 4th of July, 1900; the date on his birth certificate, August 4th, 1901, is a little less romantic, but still puts him growing up at the right time to hear Buddy Bolden and his compatriots. And Louis also grew up in Storyville, where his mother lived, as did a surrogate family of his who often fed and cared for him as a child. He worked from the age of seven selling coal, a profession he returned to after his stint in juvenile detention. But he also increasingly worked as a musician. By his own account, his nickname Satchmo came from the days he spent dancing, singing, and playing the cornet on street corners for spare change – when he was thrown a coin, he'd hide it in his mouth so no one could see he had anything to steal. Apparently people noticed it enough to call him Satchelmouth, which, according to him,

became Satchmo – which is maybe what “Satchelmouth” sounds like if you say it with a mouthful of nickels.

At first, the departure of older musicians was an opportunity for Louis. When King Oliver, an older cornetist, left town to play in California and Chicago, Louis got hired to replace him. But eventually, that same cornetist, King Oliver, asked Louis to come to Chicago and join a band he’d started there. So in May of 1922, Armstrong boarded the City of New Orleans train to make the trip.

Louis had already traveled much of the route that train runs. He’d been playing on a steamboat going up and down the Mississippi. But the switch from a steamboat to a train reflected what was going on in New Orleans generally. Commercially, New Orleans had flourished in the earlier part of the 19th century in large part because the whole country needed the Mississippi for shipping. But the later 19th century brought a shift from rivers to trains. New Orleans in the early 20th century felt passe. Louisiana was just hooking up with the oil and gas industry when Louis was born, and the tourism that fuels much of the state today was still on the horizon. So giving up a steamboat for a train would have been par for the course.

His trip also would have been uncomfortable. His mother, who hadn’t left New Orleans and thought Chicago was cold all year, made him wear long underwear, no doubt resulting in a sweaty arrival on a hot May day in Chicago. In this way, too, Louis was very much of his time – barging into the unknown, unprepared in many ways, but girded by a hard childhood to do whatever it took to make things work.

The job Louis had been invited to fill was second cornet – not a job that existed in most jazz bands and not one that would do much to help a young artist shine. But Louis’ abilities were building as King Oliver’s were waning – in the coming years, Oliver would have a harder and harder time playing due to mouth issues, while Louis was able to play more loudly and more creatively than most. This promise was noticed by the pianist in the band, a woman named Lil Hardin. Lil and Louis got married in 1924. Sometime in here, Louis claimed Lil told him, “I don’t want to be married to a second cornetist.” Lil coached and encouraged him toward bigger opportunities – first to a position in another band in New York, then to a band of their own back in Chicago. The recordings they made under Louis’ direction – the Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings – stand as the first clear signs of Louis’ brilliance as a soloist, which eventually pulled the whole genre in the direction of emphasizing improvised solos alongside and often above ensemble playing. And it was this gift for solo performance that would bring him to the iconic status he occupies today.

Louis and Lil separated in 1931, and Louis would be married two more times, but their lives remained connected – after Louis’ death in 1971, Lil played in his memorial concert, where she had a heart attack in the middle of her performance and died on the way to the hospital.

There are two more important monuments in this part of the park, which you can see from near Louis or which you can go check out up close.

To Louis’ right is a large building called the Mahalia Jackson Theater for the Performing Arts. In front of it at the near end is a statue of its namesake, Mahalia Jackson. A little closer to the walk is a bust of Sidney Bechet. We’ll have some details on both of them next.

Tracks to check out:

- King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band, Dipper Mouth Blues, featuring King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Lil Hardin Armstrong: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwpriGltf9g>

- Louis Armstrong's Hot Five, Struttin' with Some Barbecue, featuring Louis Armstrong and Lil Hardin Armstrong, written by Lil Hardin
Armstrong: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gXm_xZZ3vo
- Lil Hardin Armstrong, Bluer Than Blue: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txid-Cj6Spc>

Mahalia Jackson & Sidney Bechet

Direction: To Louis' right is a large building called the Mahalia Jackson Theater for the Performing Arts. In front of it at the near end is a statue of its namesake, Mahalia Jackson. A little closer to the walk is a bust of Sidney Bechet. We'll have some details on both of them next.

This statue of Mahalia Jackson was made by Elizabeth Catlett, the same artist who made the Louis Armstrong monument you just saw. Listening to their few recordings together, it's easy to tell their shared roots, even if jazz and gospel are functionally pretty different things. And the better comparison would be with Bessie Smith or Ma Rainey, the great blues women of the era when Mahalia Jackson was growing up in the late teens and 20s. Mahalia Jackson moved to Chicago in 1927, just a few years after Louis made the same trip, and she immediately started making a reputation as a gospel singer. She became a voice of the American Civil Rights Movement and a collaborator with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She performed in Montgomery, Alabama during the bus boycotts he helped organize. She also preceded him to the stage at the March on Washington. After her own performance, she helped inspire him into one of the most famous pieces of oratory in history. In the last moments of his speech, she, having attended his services and sensing what the moment needed, called out, "Tell them about the dream, Martin!" – a reference to oratorical figures he'd used in the past. And he took the prompting and went on to say, "I still have a dream," and the subsequent words that defined the day. Mahalia Jackson died in 1972 in Chicago and was buried in New Orleans.

Sidney Bechet was a contemporary of Louis Armstrong, born to a Creole family in New Orleans. He was the model of the strange crossover that jazz represented – he grew up listening to operas and hearing stories from his grandfather about the gatherings in Congo Square, but he also took interest in the blues he heard coming from his city's nightlife. Sidney started on the clarinet when he was seven, and eventually he did for that instrument and for the soprano sax what Louis did for the cornet and the trumpet. In 1919, Sidney made the same choice so many of his peers did and moved to New York, but soon after his arrival, the band he joined went on a European tour. He and jazz both got a warm welcome that stuck in his memory, and a few years later he came back for a second tour with Josephine Baker. And like her, he would eventually move to France full-time. The bust you see here is a copy of one that stands in the French resort town of Juan-les-Pins, a place where he regularly performed and where a jazz festival was founded in his honor.

From here, head back toward the gate to Armstrong Park along the central walkway. You'll see names in the concrete of many more artists who played important roles in local jazz history. Partway along the path on the right, you'll see a statue of a man in an elaborate costume – get a look at him.

Tracks to check out:

- Mahalia Jackson, How I Got Over, one of the songs she performed at the March on Washington: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l49N8U3d0Bw>

- Mahalia Jackson and Louis Armstrong, Just a Closer Walk with Thee: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wX-YWOr8RQ&list=PLQe20yus-rUfw1PMt7ySHuhir_LsQX9XP
- Sidney Bechet, Si Tu Vois Ma Mere: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs_DD_7C8_A

Big Chief Tootie Montana

Directions: From here, head back toward the gate to Armstrong Park along the central walkway. You'll see names in the concrete of many more artists who played important roles in local jazz history. Partway along the path on the right, you'll see a statue of a man in an elaborate costume – get a look at him.

The man you see here is Big Chief Tootie Montana, a Mardi Gras Indian – part of a masking tradition that pays tribute to the Native Americans of Louisiana.

There are a lot of origin stories for the Mardi Gras Indians. What's for sure is that black and native people in Louisiana had a lot in common. Both groups were enslaved, and if a person who had been enslaved escaped, there was often a better chance of making it to safety in a Native American community than of getting all the way to distant free territories. And so African and Native families intermixed.

Sometime late in the 19th century, young men in some black neighborhoods started to dress in their own vision of Native American costumes during Mardi Gras. The people who did this may have been African- descended or mixed, and some may also have been full-blooded Native Americans passing for black within the city. The tribes around New Orleans would have been mostly Choctaw, and the suits Mardi Gras Indians made may have been based on elements of traditional Choctaw clothing. It's also possible that early Mardi Gras Indians got their idea from seeing members of the Sioux Nation as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which visited New Orleans in 1880. Some of the Sioux visitors marched in Mardi Gras parades that year – parades that black citizens were banned from participating in. Whatever the origin was, the design of the suits has evolved into an art form all its own, and each year, hundreds of people across dozens of organizations work all year long to make one. They're built of fabric, feathers and hand-sewn bead work, and they can add up to a hundred pounds or more.

The tradition requires that you make a new suit every year. You debut it on Mardi Gras Day, then you make a few edits and wear it again on St. Joseph's Day and another recently invented holiday in May called Super Sunday. They also show up at Jazz Fest or the Congo Square Rhythms Festival, but by the end of spring, the costume has seen its season – it might get stored or ceremonially burned or put on display somewhere or taken apart to provide materials for the next one. And repeat. Part of Big Chief Tootie's fame is that he repeated this process forty-nine times, made steadily bigger and more impressive suits, and set the bar higher for everyone else.

There's a performance element to the tradition, too. Just like the old Congo Square gatherings, Mardi Gras Indian tribes meet on Sunday afternoons to practice music and dances, which they'll break out as the tribe parades on Mardi Gras Day. These are totally separate events from the bigger float parades – Mardi Gras Indians go on foot through their own neighborhoods, and they improvise their route. If two tribes meet, they'll have a ritual confrontation, a battle, where members of the tribe dance against each other and show off their handiwork. No one is declared a winner, but it's absolutely a competition. That's also part of Big Chief Tootie's legacy.

Early in the life of this tradition, violence between groups of Mardi Gras Indians wasn't unheard of. Big Chief Tootie is given the credit for channeling that energy toward a competition of artistry rather than force.

He was also part of one of the defining moments of recent Mardi Gras Indian history. Even after the pattern of violence had been resolved, police still made a habit of shutting down Mardi Gras Indian gatherings, using laws that restrict wearing masks or parading without permits. This came to a head on St. Joseph's Day of 2005, when the police stopped Mardi Gras Indians at gunpoint in Central City. Big Chief Tootie, now 82 years old and retired from parading, attended a City Council meeting that June along with many other Mardi Gras Indians. He was first up to the podium, and as he spoke, he had a heart attack. His death and the massive attendance and news coverage of his funeral brought attention to the Mardi Gras Indians' claims of harassment, but all that attention got swept aside a couple of months later, when Hurricane Katrina hit the city. It was only ten years after that, when Mardi Gras Indians approached the City Council again, that liaisons were set up between them and the police department, who now often escort Indian processions as they go, and where new recruits learn about the tradition in police academy.

Mardi Gras Indian suits have to be seen in color and preferably in person to be fully appreciated. The best way to see them is to visit the Backstreet Cultural Museum in the Treme, just outside Armstrong

Park, or the House of Dance and Feathers in the Lower Ninth Ward, but you can also usually find some on display at the state museum housed in the Presbytere in Jackson Square, or at the Jazz Museum that you'll see further along our route.

From here, we'll leave Armstrong Park behind. When you pass through the gate, cross Rampart Street and make a left on the opposite side. Proceed one block to the intersection with Dumaine.

Tracks to check out:

- Interview and music sample with Big Chief Darryl Montana, son of Big Chief Tootie Montana: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNpxaJjOx_I
- Video from Super Sunday 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BePPh0k9N-0>
- 2013 St. Joseph's Day performance of Indian Red, part of the Mardi Gras Indian repertoire: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjFUblbv-hQ>

J&M Recording Studio

Directions: From here, we'll leave Armstrong Park behind. When you pass through the gate, cross Rampart Street and make a left on the opposite side. Proceed one block to the intersection with Dumaine.

The building at 840 North Rampart Street is the former home of the J&M Recording Studio, run by music producer Cosimo Matassa. The studio was here for eleven years in the 1940s and 50s, but on either side of that time, it's been much less interesting – today it's a laundromat, and before Cosimo got it, it was a warehouse for storing avocados. Cosimo was eighteen years old when he got started and he was recording musicians who weren't much older on some of the most basic equipment available. In 1949, 21-year-old Fats Domino recorded a song called "The

Fat Man.” The recording quality is not great, even for 1949, but the record sold over a million copies, the first rock and roll record ever to do so. The song was based on an older number called Junker Blues, but Fats and his producer friend Dave Bartholomew had updated it and adapted it to be more PG-rated. Later, Little Richard would record his first mega-hit, a similarly sanitized rendition of his song “Tutti Frutti,” at Cosimo’s studio. These and other recordings ended up inspiring rock, R&B, and soul artists in the US and abroad, from Tina Turner to the Beatles. Dave Bartholomew, Allen Toussaint, and Dr. John, three producers who all worked with Cosimo in this and his other recording studios, all went on to join the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, as did Cosimo himself. When Cosimo retired, it was to manage his family’s grocery store here in the French Quarter, which is around the corner at St. Philip and Dauphine and is still called Matassa’s.

From here, turn right onto Dumaine Street and go three blocks to Bourbon. You’ll be hitting the street near the end of its famous strip of bars; Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop, the last bar on the street, will be just a block to your left. At the corner of Bourbon and Dumaine, you’ll pass by Café Lafitte in Exile, a gay bar open since 1933 and a regular hangout for Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote – writers we’ll talk about later. At Bourbon, make a right and continue one block to the intersection of Bourbon and St. Ann.

Tracks to check out:

- Fats Domino, The Fat Man: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alz1cPfTRW4>
- Champion Jack Dupree, Junker Blues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXMfLfa3ZM4>
- Little Richard, Tutti Frutti: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F13JNjpNW6c>

St. Ann and Bourbon

Directions: From here, turn right onto Dumaine Street and go three blocks to Bourbon. You’ll be hitting the street near the end of its famous strip of bars; Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop, the last bar on the street, will be just a block to your left. At the corner of Bourbon and Dumaine, you’ll pass by Café Lafitte in Exile, a gay bar open since 1933 and a regular hangout for Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote – writers we’ll talk about later. At Bourbon, make a right and continue one block to the intersection of Bourbon and St. Ann.

Arriving at St. Ann and Bourbon, you’re at a key juncture. Ahead of you, going toward Canal Street and the skyscrapers in the distance, the street is zoned for entertainment, while behind you it’s zoned residentially, which puts a theoretical cap on how far the nightlife bug can spread. As you saw, there were some bars back there, but they’ve got privileged status due to their age. In 1933, when Café Lafitte in Exile opened, the couple of bars down here were far separated from the nightlife we think of as Bourbon Street today – it was in the blocks closest to Canal Street, with plenty of middle-class homes and an opera house in between. It was a quiet, respectable area, and there was even a convent around the corner. But World War II changed all that.

During that war, about a third of the US fighting forces passed through New Orleans, either on leave or shipping out. The first world war had weakened jazz in New Orleans by causing Storyville to be closed, but the second one strengthened it – not just because of the many servicemen needing entertaining, but also because they came back after the war wanting more.

From the 40s into the 60s, the two pieces of Bourbon Street nightlife gradually joined together – houses were converted into bars, the convent was sold, and you started to see fewer nuns and more burlesque dancers. Burlesque was a Bourbon Street mainstay in the 50s and early 60s. The dancers and their specialties were as colorful as the Vegas strip and very similarly purposed. You might see a woman riding a horse through the crowd to advertise her cowgirl-themed show, or you might end up watching a woman perform in an aquarium or coming out of a giant oyster shell. The bands were big and the production values were high, but their job wasn't to make the club money – it was to snag attention. Once a man went in, the next step was to take advantage of his vices and weaknesses. Gambling might be the angle, or if he was alone, a woman might try to get him to buy her an expensive drink without ever letting on that she was an employee of the venue. These and other side hustles flouted the law to various degrees, until finally the city got angry enough to elect an aggressive DA. Burlesque clubs got shut down, and a lot of the mafia-driven gambling operations got run off to Vegas.

Besides the legal situation, Bourbon's music started to change in the 50s toward rock and roll, just because of demand. As an entertainment district, Bourbon looks to meet people where they already are – and probably where they used to be. By the time traditional jazz became the featured sound of Bourbon Street, it was already the sound of nostalgia. And today, classic rock is filling that role for a new generation. In that way, Bourbon hasn't changed at all – as much as it feels like a place to cut loose, go crazy, and break rules, it has always been, at the same time, risk-averse.

Before you move on from this intersection, look for the venue called Oz on one corner. On the ground outside the door, you can see a name written in tiles – "Pete Fountain." Pete was a local clarinet player who used to operate a jazz club in this building. He was born to a white Creole family in 1930, when Creoles were increasingly Americanizing – in the course of his childhood, his name changed from Pierre Lafontaine to Pete Fountain. The clarinet may have saved his life – his family got him his first one on doctor's orders to exercise his weak lungs. As an adult, Pete played clarinet on the side while working as an exterminator, then suddenly became nationally famous when he got picked up to play on the Lawrence Welk show. He and the show's namesake didn't get along, partly because Pete liked to drink on the job, and when he left the show behind, he opened office here, where that habit is encouraged. He and his friendly rival, Al Hirt, the trumpeter who played a block away, both lasted long enough on the street to see most other jazz players leave and make way for rockers like Jimmy Buffett and funk players like the Meters and Chocolate Milk. Pete moved off the street in 1969, just in time for the Grateful Dead to visit New Orleans and get busted in a drug raid, an event they turned into their song "Truckin," which sent their fans to Bourbon in droves even as the band themselves avoided New Orleans. And even after retiring, Pete lived long enough to see his former venue become a gay dance club, which means it's switched from repping one piece of Bourbon Street history to another, even older one.

If you want to find local music styles on the street, you can reliably find traditional jazz or swing at Fritzel's European Jazz Pub, on the right side of the street as you look toward the skyscrapers in the distance. The Bourbon O Bar on the opposite side of the street is on the jazzier end, too. The Tropical Isle Bayou Club, a couple blocks further, focuses on zydeco, a genre we'll talk more about later. Further up the street, inside the Royal Sonesta Hotel, the Jazz Playhouse offers all kinds of local genres. You'll also find a few great venues within a block of the street, like the Bombay Club, the 21st Amendment, and the Starlight. And another is Preservation Hall, the place where we'll go next.

From Bourbon and St. Ann, continue along Bourbon for two more intersections, then turn left on St. Peter Street. Partway along the block, on your right side, you'll see Preservation Hall. It's a

dark little building, kind of blackish-green, and the sign hanging outside is shaped like the case for a trombone.

Tracks to check out:

- Pete Fountain, Basin Street Blues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61WTC4vTot0>

Preservation Hall

Directions: From Bourbon and St. Ann, continue along Bourbon for two more intersections, then turn left on St. Peter Street. Partway along the block, on your right side, you'll see Preservation Hall. It's a dark little building, kind of blackish-green, and the sign hanging outside is shaped like the case for a trombone.

The name "Preservation Hall" might strike a chord with the name of the former music venue you saw out in Armstrong Park – Perseverance Lodge. And in a way, this is a modern riff on the same idea. Places like Perseverance Lodge were where communities joined around common interests, and many of them supported a house band. Here, the house band is the common interest.

Preservation Hall opened officially in 1966, formalizing a project that had already been under way for six years. For reasons mentioned back at our Bourbon Street stop, local jazz musicians had fallen on hard times by 1960 as rock and roll commanded more mainstream attention and as jazz fans increasingly preferred bebop or modern jazz. One local traditional jazz fan, Larry Borenstein, reached the point where between the dearth of shows and his own work hours, he couldn't make it to hear jazz at all – so he invited traditional jazz musicians to play in the courtyard of the art gallery he ran in this building. He got to hear them and so did other fans, a couple of which, the Jaffes from Pennsylvania, ended up taking over the building as a music venue, while the gallerist moved next door. Since then, Preservation Hall has remained one of very few venues in town devoted specifically to traditional jazz, although they collaborate with other bands of all kinds, from Stevie Wonder to the Grateful Dead to Arcade Fire.

As far as attending a show here – the band is one of the best in town. But because of demand, it's one of the higher ticket prices, the wait can take a while, and since they offer shows on the hour during the evening, with turnaround the show lasts maybe forty-five minutes. It's mostly standing room and they don't sell food or drinks, though you're welcome to BYOB. And there are no restrooms or air conditioning. If none of that is a deal-breaker, then a show here is a good idea. Otherwise, there are plenty of other options.

From here, continue along St. Peter Street to the end of the block, where it meets Royal Street.

Tracks to check out:

- Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Tailgate
Ramble: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7M8ZkQma3I>
- Preservation Hall Jazz Band feat. Ernan Lopez-Nussa, El Manicero: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQExZiQnHsw>

Royal & St. Peter

Directions: From here, continue along St. Peter Street to the end of the block, where it meets Royal Street.

This part of Royal street closes to cars between 11 and 4 on weekdays and 11 and 7 on Saturday and Sunday – which makes it prime real estate for street musicians. Musicians aren't auditioned or licensed by the city, so they come out on their own time – but you're likelier to find music on weekends, and fall and spring are the prime seasons. Here, just outside the Rouse's Grocery Store on the corner, is the go-to spot for Doreen Ketchens and her family. Doreen and her husband Lawrence started playing in the French Quarter in 1987. In some places, street music has the connotation of being second-tier or worse, but Doreen is a favorite local jazz player and a yearly fixture at the very selective Jazz and Heritage Festival. This is just the venue they prefer.

The rest of the street music strip falls mostly to your right along Royal Street, between here and the Hotel Monteleone, which you should be able to see the sign for on the left side of the street in the distance. (The Monteleone has a history with local writers, who we'll be talking about soon.) Jackson Square, straight ahead, is the other spot of choice.

If you decide to stop and listen, please bear in mind that this is how these bands make their living, so you can support the vibrancy of local music by dropping a few bucks in their bucket. The more established bands will also probably have CDs to sell.

When you're ready, make a left onto Royal Street and walk just under a block until you see the back garden of St. Louis Cathedral on your right. The alley that runs along the near edge of the garden is called Pirates Alley. Pause where it meets Royal Street.

Tracks to check out:

- Doreen Ketchens, House of the Rising Sun: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjr8jZ83vic>
- Doreen Ketchens and the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Just a Closer Walk with Thee: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC8_zcGEZjc

Royal & Pirates' Alley

Directions: When you're ready, make a left onto Royal Street and walk just under a block until you see the back garden of St. Louis Cathedral on your right. The alley that runs along the near edge of the garden is called Pirates Alley. Pause where it meets Royal Street.

Art is more regulated than music in the Quarter. Artists who sell outdoors have a license to show work either on this fence or the one surrounding Jackson Square nearby, and it also requires that they sell their own work and that it all be originals. So if you're curious about anything you see, you should be able to find out just by asking. Some very successful local artists either work primarily on the street or got their start here. One famous example is James Michalopoulos, who started off sketching in the Square and gradually shifted to painting some very recognizable distorted perspectives on New Orleans architecture. Today he has a gallery in the French Quarter near Canal Street.

You may also find poets for hire near this spot, who will compose verses on any subject on

demand. So that's musicians, artists, and writers all working outdoors on a single block – right by one of the places where this whole scene first blossomed a century ago.

Step into the alley and watch on your right side for Faulkner House Books.

Faulkner House Books

Directions: Step into the alley and watch on your right side for Faulkner House Books.

Faulkner House Books is named for the novelist William Faulkner, a former resident of the building. Faulkner only lived here for a year and a half, between 1925 and 1926 – but it was a big moment both for him and for the neighborhood. He arrived as part of a wave. After the Civil War, Sicilians had started moving into the Quarter, and by the 20s, this was Little Italy. Plenty of Italians got involved in jazz – Louis Prima is probably the best-known example, but the first jazz band to ever record, which they did in 1917 in New York, was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, fronted by Nick LaRocca.

Descriptions of the neighborhood from that time are colorful. It was densely packed, poorly maintained, and barely policed. The decorative cast iron railings were used for drying laundry and ripening bananas. At the time Faulkner arrived, several years into Prohibition, dozens of bars were operating in the neighborhood. So if a New Orleanian who lived outside the Quarter came here at all, it was often to indulge in the popular crime of drinking. The neighborhood was also a mecca for gay southerners, which upped the sense of the forbidden back then. All these factors together made the French Quarter repulsive in the eyes of many of the city fathers and extremely attractive to young artists.

In terms of artists moving into the French Quarter, Faulkner was late to the party. His upstairs neighbor was William Spratling, a visual artist who would later introduce an American audience to Mexican silverworking; his landlady was a journalist and World War I hero; his other neighbors included a playwright, several painters, a photographer and inventor, a Mardi Gras float designer, an archaeologist of Mayan artifacts, a couple of decorators, and the neighborhood's first tour guide, among others. Faulkner had mostly written poetry so far, but in New Orleans, he met the famous novelist Sherwood Anderson, who advised him to try writing prose. Faulkner made good on the suggestion – he wrote two novels, *Soldier's Pay* and *Mosquitoes*, in the next year and a half, and still found time to get in trouble with friends. Favorite trouble seems to have included drinking moonshine provided by the priest of St. Louis Cathedral, who was the neighborhood bootlegger, playing tag on rooftops, and shooting a BB gun at any windows or passersby unlucky enough to come into view. In light of these shenanigans, it should be clear that the sense of mischief in the French Quarter today is just an echo of what you could get away with in the 20s, a historical artifact just as carefully preserved as any of the neighborhood's buildings.

Naturally, all this fun was against the law. And that sense of rampant if sometimes victimless crime combined with prejudices against Italians, eagerness among developers for fresh space, and real concerns about the safety of structures in the French Quarter to create a powerful movement for the neighborhood's destruction. And in 1908, a whole block was leveled to build a new state Supreme Court. Artists helped to create pushback against this movement, and they did it mostly by depicting the neighborhood with affection. Faulkner published sketches of French Quarter life in the newspaper, painters like Alberta Kinsey made impressionistic paintings of French Quarter scenery, and respectable art institutions hosted exhibits on French Quarter

architecture. All this advocacy convinced curious neighbors down to see the place for themselves, maybe by attending a play or a masked ball. They stayed for coffee, maybe even a drink – and by slow degrees, the neighborhood became commercial. The crowning victory of this movement was the Quarter’s legal designation as a historic district in 1936 – only the second one in US history.

You may recognize the phases of change the Quarter went through at this time as a classic model of gentrification, where artists move into a working-class neighborhood and are followed by art consumers, then by trend followers, and finally by well-to-do professional types who like things quiet. In this case, that process was remarkable in two ways: it probably saved the neighborhood from destruction, and the process has never finished, because the Quarter stakes its livelihood on never being quiet. But it did result in the neighborhood being priced out of the reach of both the artists and the working-class folks who preceded them here, so today, while you can still find a muffuletta sandwich or a gelato, the Italians have mostly moved out to the suburbs, and the artists who work in the Quarter today tend to commute.

If you want to get your hands on a Faulkner or Sherwood Anderson novel, or try another southern writer, Faulkner House is a small but excellently curated bookstore with knowledgeable staff.

When you’re ready to move on, continue along the alley past the Pirates Alley Café and make a right into Cabildo Alley. Continue until you reach the end of the alley at St. Peter Street.

Tracks to check out:

- Louis Prima, Buona Sera: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qr91dJvbqs>
- Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Livery Stable Blues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WojNaU4-kl>

Tennessee Williams' Residence / Le Petit Theatre

Directions: When you’re ready to move on, continue along the alley past the Pirates Alley Café and make a right into Cabildo Alley. Continue until you reach the end of the alley at St. Peter Street.

Across the street just to your right is a red building with an exposed brick third floor: 632 St. Peter Street. In the mid-40s, Tennessee Williams lived here, on the top floor, while he wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And there actually was a streetcar with the name *Desire* that went by this spot on its way down Royal toward Desire Street. But the play isn’t set in the French Quarter – it takes place down where Royal Street crosses Elysian Fields Avenue, right by where we’ll finish. Tennessee Williams had a complicated relationship with the Quarter – as a gathering place for gay men, it was a place where he could be himself, although not without risk, and there’s a version of that experience in his short play *To Tell Sad Stories of the Deaths of Queens*. But he also found the French Quarter shocking, and he said that the friction of that shock against his Puritanical upbringing was a source of inspiration for him. The annual Tennessee Williams Festival, a literary festival that also involves productions of his plays, is headquartered at the Hotel Monteleone up Royal Street, but one of the final events each year is a “Stella!” screaming contest, which takes place just to your left in Jackson Square.

In that same direction, a little before Jackson Square, is a long red building; the nearer part of it is Le Petit Theater, the city’s oldest working theater, founded in 1916 and moved here in 1922.

The theater was founded by uptown socialites and started off in a Garden District drawing room. The idea of moving to the Quarter came from a man with feet in both worlds – a writer named Lyle Saxon. Lyle was known as “Mr. New Orleans” in his day – he made his name writing nonfiction books about Louisiana, which mixed history, folklore, and his own imagination pretty indiscriminately. He exaggerated his own life story in the same way – he could play the character of old Louisiana gentry convincingly, which earned him the ear of society, and besides the relocation of the theater, he also persuaded several wealthy friends to buy and restore homes in the French Quarter. His act didn’t just fool society, either – Lyle was once tied to a chair and beaten in his home by three burglars, who mistook him for the kind of person who had something worth stealing. In 1933, Lyle’s writing and his social connections earned him the job of head of the Louisiana Writers Project, part of the WPA, the US government’s massive, nationwide employment program during the Great Depression. But Lyle’s greatest hope was to be a novelist, and all these endeavors crowded that dream onto the back burner – he once said, “I started out to be a writer and ended up as a souvenir.” By the end of his life, he could claim serious credit for the preservation of the French Quarter, a huge circle of friends and admirers, and six books to his name, one of them a novel, *Children of Strangers*, which he wrote over the course of fourteen years.

From here, make a left into Jackson Square, then another left to pass along the main buildings of the Square. Here you may find more artists and musicians to linger with, but when you’re ready, make a left turn into the alley just past St. Louis Cathedral – Pere Antoine Alley. Continue to the end of it, where it meets Royal Street, and check out the art gallery on your right side.

Rodrigue Gallery & Books

Directions: From here, make a left into Jackson Square, then another left to pass along the main buildings of the Square. Here you may find more artists and musicians to linger with, but when you’re ready, make a left turn into the alley just past St. Louis Cathedral – Pere Antoine Alley. Continue to the end of it, where it meets Royal Street, and check out the art gallery on your right side.

This gallery shows the work of the late Louisiana artist George Rodrigue, the creator of the simple and ubiquitous Blue Dog. His work is mostly the Blue Dog in various settings and with various companions, plus some moody landscapes from Acadiana, the part of the state where George grew up.

Acadiana is southwest Louisiana – home to the Cajun culture, transplanted here from eastern Canada in the later 1700s, and today best known for spicy food, zydeco music, and the oil industry. Acadiana isn’t especially known for art, but what there is tends to be self-taught – so the style, at a glimpse, can look childish. You may have noticed that a lot of the art in the French Quarter is bright, whimsical, busy – there are a lot of ways to describe a first impression of it, but if you’ve noticed anything like that, you’re picking up on the influence of self-taught or outsider artists.

George Rodrigue wasn’t self-taught – he actually went to California for a master’s degree. But he put his academic art skills toward representing Cajun cultural traditions, in a way that borrows touches from the style of self-taught artists. If you see a dark-haired woman in any of his paintings, it’s probably a mythic woman named Evangeline, the hero of a poem by Henry

Wadsworth Longfellow, which tells a story of the grand derangement, the great scattering that turned the Acadians of Canada into the Cajuns of Louisiana. The blue dog also comes from a Cajun legend – the loup garou, sort of a werewolf meets bogeyman used by Cajun parents to scare their children into behaving. He decided to make his version less scary than the stories suggest, which no doubt helped make the blue dog palatable enough to become the face of Absolut Vodka shortly after the dog's debut in the 90s. His family went on operating the gallery after his death in 2013, along with two more in Lafayette and California.

We'll get more into self-taught art at the next stop, but before we leave Acadiana behind, a note on their music. Cajun country has given us plenty of genres, from what's just called Cajun music to zydeco to swamp pop. You'll tend to hear a lot of fiddle and accordion in music from that part of the state – the fiddle from the Acadian people's French roots, the accordion from the German folks they shared territory with in Louisiana. Cajun music can be deeply traditional – plenty of it is still performed in Cajun French, a language you're more likely to hear sung than spoken today. But you can also find artists borrowing from country, or passing around solos like a jazz band, and some have found Cajun dance beats to translate well into R&B or hip-hop. You'll find a few examples in the notes.

To get back to self-taught art, look across the street for the gallery at 733 Royal with the name Bill Hemmerling on the sign.

Tracks to check out:

- Balfa Brothers, La Danse de Mardi Gras: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pr_HcNzNBXg
- Beausoleil, Valse de Grand Meche: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TY8bXh4Okjl>
- Buckwheat Zydeco, Hey Good Lookin': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRRW3aine6Y>
- Lost Bayou Ramblers, Sabine Turnaround: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13spX1L2uJ0>
- Chris Ardoin, Put 'n Work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAaQRo-XiGQ>

Hemmerling Gallery

Directions: To get back to self-taught art, look across the street for the gallery at 733 Royal with the name Bill Hemmerling on the sign.

Bill Hemmerling was a self-taught artist – he worked designing window displays for Sears and started painting after he was laid off at the age of 59. The gallery shows work other than just his, but in his paintings, you can see a lot of what makes self-taught artists distinctive – like him, a lot of them use solid colors, hard lines, two-dimensional field, and lots of text. His paintings show daily sights from Ponchatoula, the town he lived in, and many of them are made on pieces of found wood. Like a lot of self-taught painters, he didn't use the word "artist" to describe himself and he used religious subject matter based on what he saw as divine inspiration – Bill in particular is known for his story of having once had coffee and beignets with Jesus at Café du

Monde.

If you're curious to learn more about self-taught art, you can generally find examples at the Jazz Museum in the French Quarter, which falls further along our route, or at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in the business district, right by the World War II Museum. A couple of interesting examples are Sister Gertrude Morgan, who painted apocalyptic scenes and wrote original hymns, which she sang for the salvation of tourists in the French Quarter and even recorded with Preservation Hall; there's also Clementine Hunter, a plantation laborer who lived from the 1880s into the 1980s and, by chance encounter with some artists midway through her life, learned to paint and documented life in her area in thousands of paintings. Clementine Hunter's work is in such demand in Louisiana that she even had a professional forger after her death.

Ahead of you along Royal Street are a couple of blocks of galleries, mostly showing work by local artists. Other clusters of galleries in town can be found on Magazine Street, best known as a shopping and dining area uptown, or Julia Street, a contemporary art corridor in the business district, or around St. Claude Avenue, a more varied and oftentimes avant-garde area in the Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods. There's also the New Orleans Museum of Art in City Park and its neighbor, the Besthoff Sculpture Garden.

From here, go down Royal Street away from Jackson Square and the Cathedral and cross St. Ann Street. On the left at 811 Royal you'll see Funeral Gallery. Local drag artist Vinsantos shows work by himself and other artists here, and in the early 40s, the building was home to Truman Capote while he wrote his first published novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.

Further down the block on the left, you'll see the gallery of Craig Tracy, a body painter, at 827 Royal. The works in his gallery are photographs of painted people – sometimes obviously, sometimes not. Across the street at 830 Royal is Tanner Gallery, the gallery and studio of an artist who began his career on the fence in Jackson Square.

Go on until you reach the intersection with Dumaine Street.

Tracks to check out:

- Sister Gertrude Morgan, *New World in My*
View: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=StdXBSxdP0I>

900 Block of Royal Street

Directions: Go on until you reach the intersection with Dumaine Street.

Besides being one of the most photographable blocks in the Quarter, this block is also home to the gallery of photographer Frank Relle, on the right at 910 Royal. Frank is a long-exposure nighttime photographer who shoots scenery of New Orleans and the small towns and wetlands around it. Further down on the left at 927 Royal, you'll find the gallery of Chris Roberts Antieau, a self-taught fabric artist who makes tapestries and occasionally a dress or an embroidered piece of taxidermy. At the end of the block on the right at 938 Royal is Red Truck Gallery, which shows the work of various artists, including some of the neighborhood's most obvious tributes to self-taught art.

Once you cross St Philip Street, you've passed most of the galleries on Royal. When you're

ready, head about half a block further, where at 1018 Royal you'll see a red-painted building with a cast-iron gallery on the front.

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The second-floor gallery at 1018 Royal once bore the weight of Elvis Presley during the shoot of the 1958 film *King Creole*. That put Elvis just a few blocks away from the recording studio where Fats Domino, who Elvis called one of his early influences, cut his first tracks nine years earlier. *King Creole* begins with some singing food vendors – an old French Market tradition – and the song wanders through blues, taps on opera, takes a jazz break, and finally arrives in rock and roll with Elvis singing about crawfish, in a way that shows some knowledge of local music history, if not much about how crawfish are caught or prepared. We touched earlier on how in the late 50s, Bourbon Street started to transition from jazz to rock, and if there were just one reason why, this movie might be it.

Continue down Royal Street to the end of the block at the intersection with Ursulines. Make a right. A block ahead at Ursulines and Chartres, on the left side you'll see a walled garden beside a yellow and white house. This is the Beauregard-Keyes House, former home and restoration project of the novelist Francis Parkinson Keyes. Continue one more block to the intersection of Ursulines and Decatur, where you'll make a left.

Tracks to check out:

- Crawfish from *King Creole*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQOlgXaSDy8>

Lower Decatur

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As you walk down Decatur, you may be able to see a large orange building a few blocks ahead of you. That's one of the first buildings on Frenchmen Street. This portion of Decatur isn't as musical as Frenchmen, although there is some – BB King's Blues Club on your right, plus outdoor performances in the nearby French Market, others occasionally. But the two streets are easy to explore together, and both of them are reactions against the worst stereotypes of Bourbon Street. Lower Decatur is where you're most likely to catch a New Orleans local in the Quarter, and it's grungy where Bourbon is flashy, reasonable where Bourbon is overpriced, and

aloof where Bourbon is pandering. Frenchmen is a little more sleek and commercial than this part of Decatur, but only a little, and even that is fairly new. Frenchmen is a reaction against Bourbon musically, a proposal that you can have nightlife that is fun and raucous while still exposing people to music they may not have heard before.

As you cross Governor Nicholls Street going along Decatur, look right and you'll see the French Market and maybe, depending on your timing, a brass band. Just a little further on the right is the Palm Court Jazz Café, an option for traditional jazz with dinner, and on the left is Second Line Art and Antiques, which many afternoons hosts one of the neighborhood's art markets.

As you reach the next intersection with Barracks Street, you'll see the New Orleans Jazz Museum on your right, a huge red building originally built as a mint; some of the money-making operation is still on display inside. This building was designated as our Jazz Museum as part of the New Orleans tricentennial celebrations, and its installation here is in part an effort to cast a historical shadow along Frenchmen Street and encourage it to remain a local music corridor, not just a music corridor. The exhibits at the museum rotate, and the venue also hosts some excellent performances; if you want to visit, the front door is on the side of the building that faces Esplanade Avenue. Admission is \$6 and the museum is open from 10 to 4:30 every day but Monday. The grounds also host several festivals throughout the year, including Satchmo Fest, our annual August event themed around Louis Armstrong.

Continue straight ahead until you reach the intersection with Esplanade Avenue, immediately past the Jazz Museum.

Frenchmen Street

Directions: Continue straight ahead until you reach the intersection with Esplanade Avenue, immediately past the Jazz Museum.

Esplanade Avenue is a boundary of the French Quarter, so crossing this street puts you in the Marigny, the neighborhood where Frenchmen Street lives. On the near side of the street, the Balcony Music Club, or BMC, welcomes you into the music corridor, while right across the street, Checkpoint Charlie makes a friendly effort to scare you off. Checkpoint Charlie is a bar, grill, music venue, and laundromat with a name that implies that the Marigny is East Berlin. It's part of the package of conscious grunge that tried and for a while succeeded in keeping this a mostly locals' area. Into the early 2000s, very few visitors to town would have ventured this way other than to visit the French Market.

Continue across Esplanade when it's safe, past Checkpoint Charlie. You'll see Decatur meets another street that crosses at an angle; that's Frenchmen Street. The orange building straight ahead of you is Louisiana Music Factory, a music store that sometimes hosts performances; if you want to go home with recordings of New Orleans bands, especially on vinyl, this is one of your best options.

When you reach the intersection with Frenchmen, turn left. The music strip is mostly just the two blocks ahead of you, plus a couple venues behind you. The best way to explore your music

options here is to just walk and listen, since almost everything is audible from the street. In the daytime, most shows have no cover, just a one-drink minimum, and several of the bars serve food too, particularly on this first block, and it's better than your typical bar fare.

Watch on your right for a small bar and restaurant called 13, and look over your shoulder as you pass it to see a large mural by Rone, a street artist from Melbourne. Historic protections keep much street art from appearing in the French Quarter, but there's plenty here in the Marigny; there's a piece by the famous Banksy not far from here at the intersection of North Rampart and Kerlerec Streets, and a little further downtown, at the edge between the Marigny and the Bywater, is a warehouse space called Exhibit Be that shows the work of local street artist Brandan Odums or BMike.

When Frenchmen is at its most active, you might find around fifteen bands playing at the same time on these three blocks, not counting street musicians – plenty of nights there's a brass band at the intersection of Frenchmen and Chartres. And technically, these venues aren't even allowed to play recorded music. Frenchmen has a legal status as a cultural corridor since 2004 that gives it some special freedoms and restrictions. But that change in 2004 just recognized something that had already been under way since the 70s, when the Marigny started to go through some of the same changes the Quarter had seen in the 20s. Most of the businesses on Frenchmen today postdate Hurricane Katrina, but you can see a few veterans. On the left at Frenchmen and Chartres, there's Praline Connection, a Creole soul food restaurant and candy store that's been here since 1990. (The culinary arts tend to have a place right alongside all the other arts in New Orleans.) Across Chartres from that is Faubourg Marigny Art and Books, or FAB, an LGBT bookstore, the oldest one in the south, which opened in 1978. The senior music venue is Snug Harbor, open since 1981, which is most of a block down past FAB on the left side. Snug Harbor is an oddity of the street – it's a ticketed theater-style space where a band plays on a stage in a separate room from the venue's bar and restaurant, and the bands there tend more toward big names in modern jazz, like Ellis Marsalis, who usually plays two sets on Fridays. Snug Harbor's neighbors, d.b.a. next door and the Spotted Cat across the street, are also among the musical heavy hitters of the neighborhood. Snug and d.b.a. run two shows each in the evenings, but Spotted Cat starts its music at 2pm and continues until 2am, making it the most reliably active venue on the street. The lot next to the Spotted Cat hosts an art and craft market in the evenings.

Continue until you reach the intersection with Royal Street, the end of the music strip.

END

Directions: Continue until you reach the intersection with Royal Street, the end of the music strip.

On the right just after Royal Street, you have Washington Square Park, which contains the city's AIDS memorial. Just past the park to the right is Elysian Fields Avenue, where A Streetcar Named Desire is set and where you can also find a monument to the eleven people who died in the Deepwater Horizon explosion that led to the BP oil spill in 2010.

If you want to get back into the French Quarter, you can take Royal Street, or Chartres Street a block behind you, or you can follow Frenchmen back to Esplanade and take the tour route in reverse along Decatur. Decatur and Chartres lead to either side of Jackson Square, while Royal leads back to the art galleries from earlier in the tour. If it's dark, Decatur is the safest route,

since it stays busy well into the night. If you do take Chartres or Royal, bear in mind that they bend as they lead back to the Quarter, so keep an eye on the street signs to make sure you don't get disoriented.

If you want public transit, the Riverfront Streetcar and the Loyola/Rampart Streetcar are both close by and can bring you toward the opposite side of the French Quarter and the business district. The #5 and #88 buses can bring you down into the Marigny and Bywater, and the #91 bus can bring you uptown or into Mid-City.

Thank you for listening – if you pay a visit to www.freetoursbyfoot.com, you can find more information on our guided tours and recommendations for New Orleans and for lots of other cities. We hope to see you again soon!

BONUS: Little Gem Saloon

The Little Gem Saloon is one of the few surviving buildings from Black Storyville, the side of New Orleans' short-lived red light district set aside for a non-white clientele. Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong both would have spent plenty of time around here – the Eagle Saloon, at the other end of the block from the Little Gem, was one of the go-to venues for Buddy's band to perform in, and Louis lived nearby and was arrested here for firing blanks in the air. Besides being a surviving structure, the Little Gem has mostly been an operating music venue since jazz began, although not always under the same name, and it still hosts shows.

Early in the 20th century, the bars, churches, lodge halls, and theaters would have been exploding with the many genres of music that made up the ingredients of jazz. The 1930s guidebooks created by the WPA, mentioned over by Pirates Alley, referred to the area around South Rampart Street as "the Harlem of the South." You can see from the condition of the rest of this block that that vitality is a thing of the past. There are only a few music venues in the area, and plenty of historic buildings stand derelict. If you walk away from the Little Gem Saloon along Rampart, with Poydras, the wide, divided street, at your back, you'll see one such derelict building on your left.

As you pass the Little Gem, look over your shoulder at the back of the building and you'll see a mural depicting Buddy Bolden and his band, based on the one photograph that shows his face – he's the highlighted figure in the back row. The second building on the block, at 427 South Rampart, is the former home of the Karnofsky Tailor Shop, the business and home of a family of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants. Black Storyville was far from being an all-black neighborhood.

Besides the Armstrongs and Karnofskys, the area was also New Orleans' Chinatown, and Louis described meals at Chinese restaurants as a special occasion for him and his family. Before they were tailors, the Karnofskys met Louis through their first business pushing a coal and junk cart through the neighborhood; they hired him at the age of seven to play a horn to announce their coming. They also fed him after work and once gave him an advance on his pay so he could buy his first cornet from a pawn shop. So Louis came by employment, debt, and his first musical instrument all at the age of seven. The Karnofskys stayed important to Louis throughout his life. Their son and his friend, Morris Karnofsky, eventually opened a music store that was the first in the city to sell jazz albums. Other descendants went on to own the Famous Door on Bourbon Street and other music venues. And Louis wore a Star of David around his neck all through his adulthood.

Past the tailor shop, at 413 South Rampart St., is the former home of the Iroquois Theater, which offered vaudeville, concerts, and silent films during Louis' teen years. The theater was

also the location of one of Louis' first performances – a minstrel-style comedy act where Louis performed with his face covered in flour. It was part of a talent show, which he won. The next building at 401 South Rampart once housed the Eagle Saloon.

When Louis was born, this was the shared property of a Masonic lodge and another fraternal order, who let out the bottom floor to the owner of the Little Gem Saloon to open his second music venue. The Eagle Saloon was at the corner with Perdido Street, where Louis Armstrong lived, just a couple of blocks to your left, close enough for him to remember walking down the block and listening to Buddy Bolden, who was known for playing his cornet out the window to invite passersby in. While these buildings are in terrible shape, Louis' former home and everything around it are gone completely. In the middle of the century, a huge swath of the neighborhood was torn down to build a new city hall and other government buildings.

The cemetery behind it, the city's first Protestant cemetery, was deconsecrated and razed and now lies under a parking lot of the Superdome. And there are hospitals where Chinatown used to stand. So the preservation of this block, poor as it may be, stands out as an exceptional vestige of a history that is today much easier to hear than to see.