

Thanks to the generous funding of the Miller Arts Scholar Program, I had the opportunity to travel to New Orleans in August of 2023 to study the many cultural influences on music of this area as well as the lifestyle of professional musicians living there. Having been in a jazz combo twice while at UVA, I was excited to be exposed to the cultural epicenter of jazz music, and I worked with my faculty advisor, Kelly Sulick, on *A Night In New Orleans*, a work for solo flute by Eric Ewazen, to showcase what I had learned. The week I spent in New Orleans taught me so much about what it means to be a working musician, and a lifelong one.

From the moment I arrived in the French Quarter, it was clear how music is ingrained in the culture there. I saw 15+ bands in less than five days, and that doesn't even begin to count all of the bands I saw on street corners, heard coming out of bars as I passed, or played alongside cafes I was eating at. Within an hour of arriving, I had already had a twenty minute conversation with a semi-professional musician. He was the cashier at a used bookstore across from my hotel, and when I was checking out he asked what brought me to New Orleans. After telling him about this grant, I learned that he is a percussionist, age 66, who has been playing since he was 10. He kept saying that he didn't want to keep me from where I was going, but I assured him I was happy to hear from someone with over fifty years of musical experience. He was originally from Prince George, VA, and ended up dropping out of the music major in college because most of his peers were students from New York who were starting at a much higher level than him. He pointed out the importance of access to good teachers, which I strongly agree with. Being from a rural county myself, I've seen firsthand how access to resources or lack thereof can affect one's prospects as a professional musician. Some people don't even get the chance to start, since sometimes the instrument itself is a barrier to entry. Thus, he became an accountant, but has played percussion part time ever since he moved to New Orleans, including playing at a very high level with the New Orleans Concert Band. He talked about playing at international conferences and also talked about musicians he knew at universities all over the country. Finally, he told an anecdote about how he attended this clinic with Bill Bruford, the drummer for the band Yes. There were about eight hundred people at the workshop, and at one point Bruford asked how many of them played drums for a living. Only about 5-7 raised their hands. I think this highlights the reality of the music industry, and that not doing music as a full-time job doesn't make you a failure. This was something I took away from that conversation specifically, but also throughout the trip as I encountered hundreds of musicians. While they were all unbelievably talented performers, most had day jobs. As a double major doing the Distinguished Major Program for music and being about to graduate, this was a really important point for me to consider. My degree isn't useless if skills I gained from the music major, performance concentration, or DMP aren't my only source of income. The gig economy thrives to a truly enormous level in New Orleans, but it also thrives in Charlottesville and wherever I end up going if I am willing to look for it. I don't have to be emblematic of the "starving musician" trope.

On my first night, I took a jazz tour that went to four venues in three hours to get an idea for the music scene on Frenchman Street. The guide told us about how bands work their way up, first getting a regular spot at a bar on a Monday or Tuesday night, then eventually getting a

weekend if they gain enough traction. This is different to a place like Charlottesville, where there are no bands on Mondays and Tuesdays. But in New Orleans, it seems like everyone is a musician, and at the very least, music permeates the culture. Everywhere I went, I could hear someone playing. Even at 9am, there was a brass band playing outside the Cafe du Monde while I ate beignets. I think going into this trip, I assumed that every group I heard was going to be playing at an insanely high level, just because of the image around New Orleans. And while I did hear many acts that were at the pinnacle of musicianship, it was almost a relief to see that some of them (such as the ones playing at 7pm on a Wednesday) were just mediocre. People were just doing it because they loved it, and because there's an audience for it. The guide for that tour was a music public school teacher by day, a tour guide by night, and a bandleader by weekend, again showing the ways that professional music can take many forms. She said that in New Orleans, there is a 364 day gig economy: people are playing every day except for Christmas.

The next day, I took a music heritage tour with a guide named Keith, who had spent 40 years in the record business. He was extremely knowledgeable and wasn't afraid to shy away from the reality behind the history of New Orleans, explaining how jazz started as "jass" and literally means sex, as well as the ways slavery and oppression influenced the birth of jazz. While I was already familiar with this from my time in jazz band, it was really useful to see that applied to specific historical figures. As we went through the tour, he would play examples of what he was talking about loudly through his speakers as we walked through the French Quarter. I learned about Danny Barker, Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong, and many more. As someone interested in urban planning, I think physical places add a lot of meaning to a story, and seeing these people's homes, birthplaces, and deathbeds adds context to the music history I was familiar with. And New Orleans has more historic places than it knows what to do with. The original site of J&M Recording Studio, I found out, is now a laundromat.



The famous J&M recording studio with a snowballs sign on the left and laundry sign on the right.

That evening, I went to a show at Preservation Hall, an intimate venue dedicated to the performance of traditional jazz. I saw Wendell Brunious and the Preservation All Stars, and being in the front row even got selected by Brunious to lead some vocal calls and responses with the audience. I was somewhat relieved to see that two of the six players were women. My experiences in jazz bands (particularly in high school) as well as general knowledge of the jazz world has painted it to be a very male-dominated field. And while throughout the trip I certainly saw more male performers than female performers, I was glad to see women represented at the highest level of performance.



Myself and esteemed trumpet player Wendell Brunious at Preservation Hall

Then it was time for Satchmo Summerfest, which celebrates the birthday of Louis Armstrong with a festival every year. I saw many acts including the Shotgun Jazz Band, Yusa, solo pianist Oscar Rossignoli, Tuba Skinny, TBC Brass Band, and many more. However, a few events really stood out to me.

The festival was opened by the Roots of Music Marching Band. This is an extracurricular ensemble that has kids ranging from ages 9 to 19. It was really special to see so many people passionate about music from such a young age. I also attended a lecture entitled “Born on the Fourth of July: What Independence Day Meant to Louis Armstrong” by author Sam Irwin. It gave context of Armstrong’s life, being the grandson of enslaved people, tied it to Fredrick Douglass’ speech “What To The Slave Is the Fourth of July,” and discussed the messages he may have been trying to convey by choosing this date. I also attended a lecture about Louis Armstrong’s life during the year 1933, which provided a lot of context on his career, relationship with critics, and personal life. Finally, I loved seeing Rebirth Brass Band, the headlining act from the first day. Their energy as an ensemble was infectious, and many people were dancing in front of the stage. There is such a distinct intergenerational aspect to music in New Orleans. In some bands, there would clearly be multiple decades between various band members. Similarly with the dancers, there were teenagers, but also couples in their 50’s and 60’s swing dancing. Music brings people together.

I also had a lot of fun experiencing New Orleans outside of music, eating beignets and trying Creole and Cajun cuisine for the first time. I really love the macabre aesthetic of the city and the unique culture of voodoo and magic that they are known for.



(Left) Rebirth Brass Band with community members dancing in front of the stage.
 (Right) Beignets from the famous Cafe Du Monde

As I prepare to leave college, it was really informative to observe working musicians and the role that music-making plays in their lives. While few places are as musically intense as New Orleans, it was very encouraging to see people involved at a variety of different levels, keeping music in their lives as I am to do with the rest of mine.

Finally, for this project, over the course of the year I worked on the piece *A Night in New Orleans* by Eric Erwazen. I think my ability to play in a jazz style improved based on my time in New Orleans, with the second recording having better staccatos, accents, and ability to use rubato in some sections to improve the effect.

The final recordings can be found here:

https://soundcloud.com/cassie-lipton/sets/a-night-in-new-orleans-part-2?si=e06327b23e9943a88cd3789a4dd97e68&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

The first recordings can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTDvVm-P_iWBqE4_pEsNcDBMLfKZbkbWM

Final Budget:

Expense Type	Cost	Description/Details
Flight with Delta	\$323.40	
Hotel	\$1150	
Transport to Hotel from Airport	\$80	(And back again)
Floor Seating at Preservation	\$59	

Hall		
Sheet Music	\$18.99	<i>A Night in New Orleans</i> by Eric Ewazen
Music Heritage Tour	\$30	
Jazz Bar Tour	\$49	
Per Diem	\$434.50	
Uber to and from Tipitina's Concert Venue	\$40	
Total	\$2,144.89	