



# A STATE OF MUSICIANS

BY MICHAEL PATRICK WELCH  
PHOTOS CHERYL GERBER

## THE TIPITINA'S FOUNDATION PROGRAMS FOSTER GROWTH IN BUDDING MUSICIANS.

**FOR OVER 10 YEARS,** New Orleans musicians both young and old have been granted access to the recording studios, classes and other musical resources of the Tipitina's Foundation. The Foundation has improved the lives and careers of local musicians, including John Michael Bradford, Joe Dicen and Trombone Shorty. In recent years, the Tipitina's Foundation has expanded its network to reach musicians and aspiring musicians in Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, Alexandria, Shreveport and Monroe.

"The expansion is the biggest thing that's happened for us in 10 years," says Tipitina's co-op manager Steve McCloud.

"We now we have the opportunity to bring instruments, performances and internship programs to cities outside of New Orleans."

The nightclub Tipitina's first opened up in New Orleans in 1977 as a permanent musical residency for pianist Professor Longhair. The club fell into financial troubles in the early 1980s and declared bankruptcy. In 1996, attorney and real estate developer Roland Von Kurnatowski, who'd had success turning the old Fontainebleau Hotel into band practice spaces, purchased and revived Tipitina's. "The club now more or less breaks even," Von Kurnatowski told *Gun* magazine.

The club is now considered but one arm of the larger Tipitina's Foundation, established by Roland Von Kurnatowski and his wife Mary in 2003. The Foundation's flagship program, Instruments A Comin' has so far contributed more than \$2.9 million worth of musical instruments to over 95 music programs throughout the state. The New Orleans Instruments A Comin' fundraising event and cultural fair, held on the first Monday night of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival in New Orleans, features a benefit concert and fundraising auction.

Jeremiah Furlow, director of bands at Green Oaks Performing Arts Academy





in Shreveport, says that in 2013, Instruments A Comin helped him start a jazz band when his school's district could not. "We were given four alto saxes, two tenors and a baritone for the jazz band, along with a trombone – that's what I was in need of to start the jazz band this year," he recalls. "These were the same instruments I requested from the district when I got here three years ago. I wouldn't have been able to start the jazz band without the Foundation's help."

On Nov. 13, 2014, the Foundation held its third annual Instruments A Comin event in Shreveport, this time to benefit Booker T. Washington High School and Huntington High School. On Dec. 4, Tipitina's Foundation presented more than \$35,000 worth of musical instruments to Bolton High School and Holy Savior Menard Central High School, both in Alexandria.

Tipitina's co-op facilities in New Orleans have established a reputation for providing the city's world-famous musical community with the tools needed to further its cause. The Foundation's first co-op at 4040 Tulane Ave. still offers Apple computers with high-speed Internet, all attached to scanners and printers and decked out with ProTools



and other recording and video software. Lawyers on hand at the co-op still provide pro-bono legal assistance, and instructional educational workshops, technical workshops, and musical workshops are offered via Tipitina's Music Business workshop series. "Pros came in and speak about how to take what you are doing to the next level, and how to work properly with venues," says

McCloud, who also helps teach co-op members how to establish as a proper business, copywrites and trademarks documents for the organization. "We were open between 2006 and 2011, but they closed the co-op for a year and a half," explains McCloud, who moved to Alexandria a year and a half ago to open that site's co-op. "They remodeled the building, which Tip's

owns, and doubled the co-op space. We now have 3,200 square feet, with three different studios for music and video editing. There's a meeting room that holds 45 people...I have been playing music for 40 years, and it would have been wonderful if they'd had an affordable place like this for me to work when I was younger." McCloud says that a \$15 annual membership to Tipitina's Co-Op gets



you up to 40 hours a week to work on your music. McCloud is especially impressed with the dynamic array of musicians among

group called When All Is Lost recorded a few months ago; they're 15-year old musicians who sound like 25-year-old musicians when they play."

school-aged students are given the chance to play with professional musicians including George Porter, Johnny Vidacovich and even

Saxophonist and Mardi Gras Indian Big Chief Donald Harrison Jr. continues as the artistic and band director at the Tipitina's Foundation's

"I HAVE BEEN PLAYING MUSIC FOR 40 YEARS, AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN WONDERFUL IF THEY'D HAD AN AFFORDABLE PLACE LIKE THIS FOR ME TO WORK WHEN I WAS YOUNGER."

the 20 musicians and digital media artists actively working on projects at the Co-Op every month. "We have had about six different CD projects completed here so far," says McCloud. "Antoine Stewart, an amazing bassist worked on his solo CD here. A young

Back in New Orleans, Tipitina's continues its Sunday Youth Music Workshop, started in the 1990s at the music club by Stanton Moore and Deborah Vidacovich. Every other Sunday afternoon from 1 to 3 p.m. in New Orleans, middle- and high-

heavy metal band Down on Stage at Tipitina's. This program, too, has grown to include Lafayette and Monroe (bring your own instrument from 2 to 4 p.m.) as well as Lake Charles (5 to 7 p.m.). In 2015, Tipitina's promises more youth music workshops in Alexandria.

free after-school jazz internship program, which he created. Each semester, 20 high school students and, on occasion, a few middle school students, take a two-hour class every Monday to learn about performance, recording, music theory and career professionalism.



“I GIVE MY STUDENTS THE HARDEST MUSIC ON THE PLANET TO UNDERSTAND, AND EVERYTHING ELSE BECOMES NOT AS HARD TO UNDERSTAND.”

Harrison stresses that the internship program is not for hobbyists, focusing as it does on bebop jazz.

“Bebop is the hardest music on the planet. If you can play bebop you can play anything,” says Harrison, who himself has played with the late Miles Davis and even mentored late rapper Notorious B.I.G. “I give my students the hardest music on the planet to understand, and everything else becomes not as hard to understand.”

The internship program and its classes have been expanded and are on their second semester in Shreveport, led by Dorsey Summerfield. More than 140 students have graduated from Harrison’s internship program so far, with more than a dozen receiving full scholarships to Berklee School of Music. “I am really happy about the enthusiasm of these students. The classes are two hours but we usually go three,” laughs Harrison. “We have to tell them to go home. That doesn’t happen much when teaching young people.

“The program’s not for every student,” Harrison adds, “but for students who want to dedicate themselves to being the best.”

