



**October 2006**

**Edited by Jim Torok and Dick Parker**

*Coda* is the e-mail supplement to the Twin Cities Jazz Society *JazzNotes*. *Coda*, emailed by the first of each month, contains items too new or lengthy for the printed version of *JazzNotes*, and is available to those who choose *Jazz Notes* by email. Readers are encouraged to submit CD reviews, news items and articles to [torok001@umn.edu](mailto:torok001@umn.edu).

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## **Ron Strang: Self-made musician**

*By Dick Parker*

Ron Strang is best known these days as the pianist and leader of the Godfrey Daniel Jazz Band, which is in its fifth year of playing five-piece traditional jazz monthly at the Roseville VFW.



*Strang at the Roseville VFW*

It might be said that if the Bill Evans New Orleans Jazz Band is the son of the revered Hall Brothers band, Godfrey Daniel is its nephew.

Or maybe its uncle.

Strang and Bill Evans have been friends since the 1940s, when both were 12 and playing softball on the playground at Linwood School in St. Paul. They grew up together on the same block of Lincoln Avenue.

Strang was taking accordion lessons at age 12, and he says that laid the foundation for a lifetime of musical discovery that's still going on. But he has never been much of a student of music in the traditional way.

Early in his squeezebox studies he wanted to learn "12<sup>th</sup> Street Rag," he says, but his teacher thought he wasn't ready. So he figured it out for himself. Then he used his accordion knowledge, and the instrument itself, to start teaching himself to play the upright piano at his family's house. On the left side, a full-size accordion has 120 bass buttons and a set of chord buttons. Strang knew how chords fit into songs he'd learned, and he dissected the accordion's sounds, finding the piano keys for the notes that made up each chord. That put his left hand in play, and the right hand already knew the black-and-white keyboard, so he gradually figured out some tunes on the piano.

He says he always has been interested in jazz, initially the Dukes of Dixieland style. But for some years he was shy about playing with anyone else. "I knew that everybody -- everybody -- played the piano but me," he said. "I was the worst piano player in the world." During the teen years he listened to records, played along with them, and gradually taught himself some music theory and harmonics -- the relationships among keys and chords, the colors and voices of passing chords, different rhythms -- but no classical stuff.

Around 1956, when they were both 21, Evans and Strang formed a Dixieland band called the Mississippi Counts, with Evans on trombone and Strang on piano. Strang says the sparkplug of the band was its talented 18-year-old cornetist, George Metcalf. Another promising member was clarinetist Dick Ramberg. The Counts "fizzled out," Strang said, after Metcalf died in a car accident on a curve of Mississippi River Blvd.

That was about the time Charlie DeVore returned to the Twin Cities from Navy duty in New Orleans, where he had immersed himself in the music. Charlie and Wisconsin drummer Don (Doggie) Berg, whom he'd gotten to know in a New Orleans paddy wagon, hooked up with Stan and Russ Hall thanks to Jim McDonald's Dixieland Record Heaven store in south Minneapolis.

Strang says DeVore encouraged him and Evans to join the new Hall Brothers Band. The only catch was that Stan played piano and Russ played trombone. What the band could use were a banjo player and a bass. So Bill took up the string bass and Ron traded his accordion for a 17-fret Vega tenor banjo.

To learn banjo in a hurry, he used a self-education technique similar to his migration from accordion to piano. Once he had mastered a basic set of chord fingerings, he was able to lend the banjo's bright snap to the band's New Orleans sound, a touch Charlie liked. With Stan on piano, the banjoist didn't have to do any heavy lifting musically. Strang says he never did play a melody solo.

Dick Ramberg joined the Hall Brothers in 1959, and by that time the band was playing at Doc Evans' Rampart Club in Mendota -- the building that would become the Emporium of Jazz in 1966.

Strang eventually was succeeded by Mike Polad, but Evans stayed on in the Hall Brothers band.

Meanwhile, Strang attended the University of Minnesota for four years and went into real estate, eventually becoming a licensed appraiser. He formed the Godfrey Daniel Jazz Band, named for W.C. Fields' expression of exasperation or surprise. Other members

were Evans on trombone, cornetist Dave Braun, banjoist Joe Salter and a string bassist who sometimes used the pseudonym Moses Buzhart — Charlie DeVore.

The original Godfrey Daniel band played occasionally at the Emporium, and it was at the end of one of those nights that Joe Salter was found dead in his car, a tragedy that still haunts Strang.

Strang retired in 1994 after 37 years in real estate and appraisal, and he says today that he has made more progress as a musician in the past decade than ever before. He still eschews sheet music, but practices along with the recordings of Ralph Sutton and Fats Waller. And he says Twin Cities fans are extremely lucky to have the community of musicians we have here, and their connections with others nationally.

Our New Orleans jazz community knows that that's the legacy of Paul "Doc" Evans and the Mendota mystique created by the old Mitch's, the Rampart Club and the Emporium.

Strang's new Godfrey Daniel Jazz Band can be heard on the third Tuesday of each month, from 6 to 9 p.m., at the Roseville VFW, 1145 Woodhill Drive off Lexington north of County C). With Strang are Jim Torok, cornet and reeds; Evans, trombone; Debbie Schreyer, banjo; Tom Owens, bass and vocals, and Nancy Hite, vocals.

Torok and Hite, his wife, will be away on a trip on the October date, so DeVore is scheduled to play cornet that evening, Oct. 17.

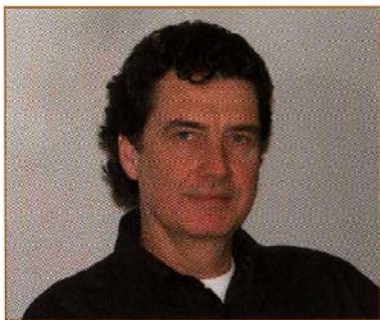
#### BOOK REVIEW:

### **Song for My Fathers** by Tom Sancton

A New Orleans Story in Black and White

*Reviewed by Jim Torok*

This is a remarkable book, an autobiographical story of a young white boy befriended by the black Preservation Hall musicians and taught to play jazz by them. Their characters, their teaching methods and how they helped him make this book really interesting.



Author Photo: Terrie L. Akers

*Tom Sancton, author of "Song for my Fathers"*

Tom Sancton first met George Lewis at Papa Celestin's jazz funeral in 1954 when Tom was only five. Eight years later, Tom's father took him to Preservation Hall, where he heard George Lewis, Jim Robinson and "Slow Drag" Pavageau. Tom was deeply impressed with Lewis' playing: "I don't know if I had ever felt passion before — that pulse-churning excitement that makes you want to possess a thing, to fuse with it and have it fuse with you, that makes that thing seem greater and more wonderful than any other thing in the world. That's what I felt for the sound of George Lewis's clarinet." Tom's father took him up to chat with George during the break... "What instrument you

play, Tommy?" I don't play anything." "Better learn one" said George. "You got music inside you." How can you tell?" The way you move when you listen. I was watchin' you. You got the beat."

Tom writes, "As much as I loved George's sound, I never thought of playing the clarinet myself. I was afraid I would just wind up sounding like the kids in the school band — shrill and squeaky and, well, white... But the magic of George's playing was in the tone and feeling, soul and rhythm. And I never thought a white boy could do it. Until Sammy Rimington showed up.

"He appeared at the gates of Preservation Hall one night in June, 1962. He was nineteen years old, with stringy black hair, a thick Cockney accent and a clarinet case in his hand." Tom's father introduced him to George, who invited him to play with him. Banjoist Creole George Guesnon, called Sammy a "clarinet wizard" and George Lewis nodded his agreement. "Yes, sir, he said, "This here boy gonna give me some trouble on that horn." Tom writes, From that night on, I wanted to get my hands on a clarinet and play like Sammy Rimington. No, not like Sammy. Better than Sammy."

When Sammy got back to England, he sent an old clarinet to Tom as a gift. George Lewis then gave Tom clarinet lessons!

"George's teaching method was hands on, master to apprentice. No scales, no theory, no fingering exercises, no sheet music. George, in fact, didn't know anything about all that. He barely knew the names of the notes. As for reading music, he said, 'There's readers, and there's spellers.' Spellers could muddle their way through a piece of sheet music, note by note, but could not just play it straightaway. And that's pretty much how I learned to read, teaching myself the notes from a method book, but never developing any great facility with written music. 'Folks don't pay nobody to read," George told me 'They pay 'em to *play*.'"

"He played the first five notes of an old blues called 'Corinna Corinna', then stopped and told me to 'make that'. I copied the phrase as best I could. Then he went on to the next phrase. Sometimes I would get a note wrong, and he would show me how he placed his fingers on his own horn. 'Make this-here note.'"

"'Now I'm gonna teach you to variate,' said George. 'You got to go in and out, low register to high, and high to low. You play the melody and I'll show you what I mean.'"

'Behind my simple statement of the tune, George started playing those beautiful phrases and embellishments that I had heard him do in the Hall or on his records. He would go up and down the horn, weaving in and out, sometimes harmonizing with the melody, sometimes leaving space and playing a counterpoint, sometimes laying down a rhythmic arpeggio. His tone was gorgeous, especially when he let his horn sing out on the long notes with his plaintive vibrato.'

As any of the readers who have taken music lessons know, this is not the way music is conventionally taught. Students are first taught to read music, to play notes written on a page. They are not taught to make up their own music until they get to college and take composition courses.

As time went on and Tom became more proficient, George had him sit in at Preservation Hall. Tom was on his way.

*After his first few lessons, George Lewis invited Tom to sit in with his quartet, backed by Joe Watkins, Papa John Joseph and Dolly Adams at Preservation Hall*



The clarinet Sammy had given him was old and out of tune. Tom needed a better clarinet, so George Lewis provided him with one! George

pulled a clarinet case out of his closet shelf. "It was tan colored and had a little brass plaque on the top with an inscription that read "To George Lewis, from the Chris Barber band, London 1959."

"Look inside," he told me.

The case contained a beautiful Selmer Albert system clarinet, polished ebony with shining silver keys. "I can't give you this horn, Tommy, 'cause it was a gift to me. But you can use it as long as you want." This was a very generous thing to do.

Tom had other teachers. Larry Borenstein paid Punch Miller to lead informal Saturday jam sessions with aspiring young musicians. "Punch's students were a mixed bag. There would usually be a couple of visiting Brits, Swedes, or Japanese. ... To my surprise, I was the only local kid, white or black who showed up regularly for those sessions. On many Saturdays, I was the only pupil who showed up at all. Even though Punch was a trumpet player, he taught me a lot about the role of the clarinet in a New Orleans band. He would write out simple parts for tunes like "Tin Roof Blues and "A Closer Walk with Thee" just about a t the limit of my reading ability, then he would show me how to "get off" — the only term he ever used for improvisation. "When you get off, see, you don't just stick on the melody. You gotta use other ideas, put in some accidentals. You can play anything you want, as long as you follow the chord changes."

Tom did find a group of friends who shared his interest in jazz, but they came from what he calls the "jazz pilgrims". New Orleans was like a Mecca of traditional jazz. Anyone who wanted to play the old style had to come drink at the source, learn first-hand from the old sages, practice the rites of initiation, and, in time pass the flame along to others. Not all the pilgrims came from across the sea. Tom Sanction mentions Butch Thompson and Charlie DeVore from Minnesota, and tells the anecdote about Charlie becoming one of the first white musicians to be arrested for playing in an integrated band.

Perhaps the strangest of Tom's teachers was a banjoist named Creole George Guesnon (pronounced Gay-no). At his first lesson, George said, "That's beautiful, man," he said. "I mean that's some pretty stuff. But let me tell you one thing, young man. You tryin' an awful lot to sound like George Lewis, am I right?"

Tom replied, "I sure hope I do. I really like the way he plays."



*Another one of Tom Sancton's teachers, Creole George Guesnon.*

"Now listen to this well," George said, leaning forward in his chair and looking at me sternly under his half-inch thick eyebrows. "George Lewis has a wonderful tone. George Lewis is a big star. But do not copy George Lewis. Hear what I'm sayin'? Do not copy George Lewis."

"Why not?" I asked.

"You got to play your own style. See, jazz is primarily a state of mind. What you make on that horn must come from *your* mind. Every jazz musician who's worth a damn has his own sound, see what I'm sayin'? So don't copy George, don't copy Louis Cottrell, don't copy Willie Humphrey."

So how am I supposed to learn?" I asked.

"You gonna learn by doin' what *I* tell you," said George, picking up his banjo and plucking a

single-note phrase. Now make that!" ....and he proceeded to teach Tom one of his banjo solos by rote!

Tom Sancton went on to graduate from Harvard in 1971 and attend Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. He worked for Time magazine for 22 years, and became a best selling novelist. He never was a full-time jazz musician, but he has appeared as a clarinetist at major jazz festivals and recorded more than a dozen albums. His experience of being taught by major jazz musicians in New Orleans makes this book unique and instructive.

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## **TCJS to host Ruben Haugen Alumni Jazz Party Oct. 15**

Ruben Haugen, one of the most influential teaching artists in Minnesota music history, will be saluted by students, friends and fans with a special TCJS "Jazz J to Z Concert" on Sunday October 15th. The event will be held from 12:30 to 5pm at Kennedy High School in Bloomington, with proceeds supporting the building fund for the new MacPhail Center for Music, where Ruben taught for 18 years.

Tickets available at the door are \$20 for general public, \$17 for TCJS members, and \$10 for students. Parking is free.

*(See the complete article in the current issue of Jazz Notes)*

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## Twin Cities Hot Club to appear at Club Underground

On October 7, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m., the Twin Cities Hot Club will perform at Club Underground at the intersection of Spring Street and Monroe Avenue in Northeast Minneapolis

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## Schreyer Banjos to perform at J-Z Concert Nov. 18



Schreyer Banjos consists of world renowned banjoist and author Lowell Schreyer and his daughter Debbie on banjos, son Ted on tuba, and son-in-law Tom Owens on washboard and vocals. They will be joined in the second set by trombonist Bill Evans and a New Orleans ensemble. The gig is "Masters of the Banjo plus Bill Evans and Friends" on Saturday, November 18, at 2:30 p.m. at the Club Underground in Minneapolis, 355 NE. Monroe Street, underneath the Spring Street Tavern. Free parking, \$10 cover, \$7 for TCJS members. 612-627-9123.

*Lowell Schreyer, daughter Debbie and son-in-law Tom Owens. Son Ted Schreyer will be on tuba in November.*

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## Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Plays Jazz

Stephen Prutsman, SPCO Artistic Partner and jazz aficionado, will perform his original composition "Jazz Fantasy on the Theme B-A-C-H" in The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra's October 13-14 program at Ordway Center. Mozart's Piano Quartet in G Minor, Milhaud's "The Creation of the World" and Ravel's Piano Concerto in G will also be performed.

Each piece on the program has its own connection to jazz. Milhaud was transfixed the first time he heard an American jazz band. Ravel developed an interest in jazz in the 1920s, and his piece on this program is one of two piano concertos written while he was

influenced by the jazz movement. But even Mozart has a connection to jazz, according to Prutsman. “The program as a whole explores jazz in concert music and explores where it all began. We wouldn't have jazz as we know it had it not been for two factors: the influence of music and rhythm from Africa and the Caribbean, and the development of Western music whereby the contributions of Bach and Mozart were pivotal.”

On the Jazzed-Up Friday performance, the featured jazz artist will be Butch Thompson, master of ragtime, stride and classic jazz piano. He is widely recognized for his 12-year stint as house pianist and bandleader on "A Prairie Home Companion" and is still a frequent guest on the show. He tours regularly with his New Orleans Jazz Originals band and produces his own weekly radio show, "Jazz Originals," on KBEM in Minneapolis.

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## **American Pianists Association to Accept Nominations and Applications for Jazz Piano Fellowship**

INDIANAPOLIS — The American Pianists Association (APA) announced that it will accept nominations Oct. 15 through Nov. 22 for the Cole Porter Fellowship in Jazz, part of the prestigious 2007 Jazz Fellowship Awards, one of the top such national contests. Some of the most promising young jazz pianists nationwide will compete for the fellowship, valued at approximately \$75,000.

The competition is open to U.S. citizens between the ages of 18 and 30 whose artistry merits international recognition. “In holding this triennial event, the APA pays tribute to one of our nation’s indigenous art forms and focuses attention on Indianapolis’ role in the evolving history of jazz, in addition to offering significant career assistance to young artists” said Joel Harrison, Artistic Director of the American Pianists Association.

Indianapolis, headquarters for the APA, will host the competition. A judging panel will select five of America’s top young jazz pianists in January 2007 to perform in the semifinal and final rounds during two days of intense competition April 27 and 28, 2007.

Five internationally renowned jazz artists will judge the semifinal competition, which will involve two sets including both solo and accompanied performances, and the finals, which will feature specially commissioned renditions of jazz standards.

The two-year fellowship includes a cash award, publicity, career assistance, and recital and concert engagement opportunities worldwide.

### **About American Pianists Association (APA)**

The mission of the American Pianists Association is to discover, promote and advance the careers of world-class, American, classical and jazz pianists who are between the ages of 18 and 30. Through competitions, fellowships and career management assistance, the Association enhances and promotes the performing artistry of American pianists, enriching their lives and the lives of audiences worldwide. In addition, the American Pianists Association assumed control of Indy Jazz Fest in 2003, which it now leads and manages. More information is available online at [www.americanpianists.org](http://www.americanpianists.org) and [www.indyjazzfest.net](http://www.indyjazzfest.net).

## Registration

Nominations may be made to Joel Harrison, artistic director, at [joel@americanpianists.org](mailto:joel@americanpianists.org), or qualified pianists may make direct application online starting October 15 at [www.americanpianists.org](http://www.americanpianists.org).

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## Christine Rosholt Appearances

Friday, October 13, 2006 **Rossi's Blue Star Room** 9:00 pm to 1:00 am Christine Rosholt-vocals, Chris Lomheim - piano, Michael O'Brien - bass, Jay Epstein - drums, Dave Karr - sax & flute

Sunday, October 29, 2006 Dance gig **Matty B's** 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm  
354 Wabasha Street, St. Paul 651-291-0404 \$15.00 cover  
Christine Rosholt - vocals, Tanner Taylor - piano, Gordy Johnson - bass,  
Mac Santiago - drums, Dave Karr - sax & flute

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## Maude Hixson Appearances

Monday, October 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30<sup>th</sup> 7:30-11:30pm **Rossi's Blue Star Room**  
"Spotlight on Cole Porter" with Arne Fogel, vocals Rick Carlson, piano Steve Pikal, bass (Gary Raynor, bass on 9/16)  
[www.bluestarjazz.com](http://www.bluestarjazz.com)

Wednesday, October 4th, 7-11pm Thursday, October 26th, 7:30-11:30pm **Rossi's Blue Star Room**  
"Jazz with a French twist" with Patrick Harison, accordion Jim Chenowith, bass

Friday, October 6th, 8pm-12am **Matty B's Supper Club**  
with Rick Carlson, piano Matt Senjem, bass Dick Bortolussi, drums Dave Karr, sax  
[www.mattybs.com](http://www.mattybs.com)

Wednesday, October 11th, 7-11pm **Rossi's Blue Star Room**  
with Tanner Taylor, piano Steve Pikal, bass

Friday, October 13th, 8:30pm-12:30am **Sophia at the River**  
with Tanner Taylor, piano Jim Bierma, bass Phil Hey, drums  
[www.sophiaattheriver.com](http://www.sophiaattheriver.com)

Saturday, October 14th, 9pm-1am **Rossi's Blue Star Room**  
with Rick Carlson, piano Keith Boyles, bass Jerry Burton, drums

Saturday, October 21st, 9:30pm-12:30am **The Times Bar and Cafe**  
with the Twin Cities Hot Club  
[www.timesbarandcafe.com](http://www.timesbarandcafe.com)

Wednesday, October 25th, 7:30-10:30pm **The Times Bar and Cafe**  
"Swingin' With the Wolves" taping with the Wolverines Trio  
for later broadcast on KBEM-FM 88.5

Tuesday, October 31<sup>st</sup> **Dakota Jazz Club and Restaurant**  
"Spooky Songs for Halloween" with Arne Fogel, vocals and the Wolverines Trio  
[www.dakotacooks.com](http://www.dakotacooks.com)

*For CDs or further information, please visit <http://www.maudhixson.com>*

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## Signe at Sophia

Saturday, October 7th     **Sophia** 65 SE. Main Street, Mpls  
Tom Pletscher - piano, Jim Bierma - bass, Nathan Norman - drums, Signe - vocals

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## Sonny Rollins concert rescheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 31

The Northrop Jazz Season regretfully announces that Sonny Rollins has the flu. The September 17th, 7:00 p.m. performance at Ted Mann Concert Hall has been postponed and rescheduled for Tuesday, October 31 (Halloween) at 8:00 p.m. Ticket holders should keep and present their original tickets for entry at this new concert date. Northrop Jazz Season sincerely apologizes for any inconvenience due to this rescheduling.



Limited tickets are still available for \$50 or \$40 at 612-624-2345. Inquire about discounts

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*The following was forwarded to us by Vicci Johnson, TCJS Education Chair:*

### **Art, culture and all that jazz**

by Sean Daly from New York Times Syndicate

Wynton Marsalis is fired up about backsides.

It's not that the legendary trumpeter doesn't like derrieres. He's just concerned that, with all the sex-driven music young people see and hear these days, it's nearly impossible to get them pumped up about jazz and other art forms.

And Marsalis, 44, the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York - not to mention jazz's greatest ambassador - sees that as a very serious problem.

"You cannot make something in the arts exciting for somebody who is raised looking at videos of the most well-buffed people in the world with their a-- hanging out," says the Pulitzer Prize-winning musician during a recent phone interview.

"You cannot make a Beethoven symphony that exciting. . . . It's very difficult for art to compete with semipornography. I'm talking about hip-hop, whatever term it goes by. It could be a truck commercial showing somebody with their a-- out."

But Marsalis, who has helped create dozens of jazz education programs for both young and old, won't be giving up any time soon.

Especially now that the New Orleans native and master drummer Yacub Addy have written one of the most important - and heartfelt - pieces of their careers: Congo Square, a Big Easy history lesson intended to educate and entertain.

"Congo Square" premiered recently in New Orleans.

In New York, Marsalis, Addy, Addy's ensemble, Odadaa!, and dozens of other musicians in the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra performed the tribute piece, which explains how African slave music helped forge New Orleans' musical identity in the 18th and 19th centuries. Congo Square, Marsalis explains, was the only place in New Orleans where slaves were allowed to play music. (Today that area is known as Louis Armstrong Park.)

Marsalis and Addy had been working on the concept of Congo Square for several years. But it wasn't until Hurricane Katrina changed his hometown forever that Marsalis started writing. "It was always intense," Marsalis says, but it also became a message of uplift.

"It's about celebration and a good time," he says about the 80-plus-minute work, which combines jazz playing and African beats.

"Our pieces are always positive. It's an affirmation of humanity."

Though Marsalis acknowledges that New Orleans still has a long way to go before it returns to normalcy, he says with vigor, "The spirit will come back. That's what people do. We're just having a hard time right now."

Marsalis knows New Orleans and its rich jazz history better than most; in fact, some detractors say Marsalis is only concerned with history.

The son of legendary jazz pianist Ellis Marsalis (not to mention brother of saxophonist Branford and trombonist Delfeayo), Wynton Marsalis' insistence on celebrating jazz's traditional past instead of welcoming abstract innovation has frustrated many practitioners.

If you want to know just how much of a purist Marsalis is, ask him what's on his iPod:

"I listen mainly to jazz music and classical music. And anything that doesn't have electronic instruments on it. I don't really like electronic instruments that much," he says.

"I'll listen to rock or whatever, as long as it doesn't have an electronic instrument on it. The sound of a machine playing music, it sounds like (Marsalis talks in a robot voice) *somebody talking like this*. And I don't like when people make music and they're not all in the room together. I don't find that music to be as compelling as people playing together. And I love symphonic music.

And I love the sophistication of an orchestra."

A jazz fan who dislikes hip-hop trying to reach hip-hop fans who know nothing about jazz is a recipe for disappointment.

But Marsalis, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his 1997 work *Blood on the Fields*, might be jazz's best hope. For he knows better than most that the only way to keep the music alive - and to make sure pieces such as Congo Square resonate for years to come - starts with young people.

And thus, it all comes back to the battle against those exposed backsides.

"We, in the United States of America, really need to revamp our education system to include the arts. The fact that we don't have a viable arts education for a majority of our kids hurts us as a free country," he says. "Meaning that we're susceptible to anything that's sold to us."