

Anna Wostenberg

AMS 214: NOLA

Dr. Sullivan

30 January 2015

A Love for Jazz

Before this trip to New Orleans, I had a mild appreciation for jazz music, but I didn't know much about it. I just knew that my dad enjoyed playing it on Pandora Radio while he cooked and that it was originally an African American music genre. I signed up for the trip so that I could learn more about it, but mostly, if I'm being honest, to explore a new city. I never expected to leave with a ravenous desire to listen to jazz music twenty-four/seven. But I did. After learning about its history and about how it has developed through time, I was fascinated and eager to join the culture.

Having the opportunity to listen to both traditional and contemporary jazz music really allowed me to understand how the music has developed and grown over the decades. I especially enjoyed hearing many different versions of the same traditional jazz songs, such as "St. James Infirmary" and "When the Saints Go Marching In." It allowed me to appreciate how each jazz group interprets music slightly differently, and to jam out with them. They pay tribute to their predecessors by performing the classic music as well as by adding their own twists and signatures to it. I also loved that nearly every singer for each band had a stellar impression of Louis Armstrong. It was always really fun to hear them honor him in such an engaging way. I loved hearing "What a Wonderful World" every single time.

That song transcends time and will always be beautiful. Shamarr Allen was my favorite performer, though. I loved his contemporary twist on traditional music. I also thought that his tiny trumpet was so cool, too! I'm definitely glad I bought his CD because I listen to it all the time.

I also loved comparing jazz music with pianos and singers to the brass band. The sounds were so different but also had a similarity to them. Even wearing earplugs, I was still able to enjoy myself at The Maple Leaf and get really into the music. I loved the energy and the vibe of the brass band. It was so positive and everyone was there to have a good time and dance. It was laid back and casual and I felt completely at ease. I found it entertaining when a group of people around me started to smoke marijuana right inside the venue!

Comparing that venue to Irvin Mayfield's is fun, though. Irvin Mayfield's appeals to a much different crowd: higher class, and the price difference for drinks shows that. Paying \$4 for a drink at The Maple Leaf was definitely preferable to a \$20 purchase minimum at Irvin Mayfield's. Although, Irvin Mayfield's did have some excellent milk and cookies to offer. I also enjoyed the calmer environment. I like sitting while listening to music so I can focus more on the music rather than the discomfort of standing for a long period of time. I think that the Palm Court is the best balance between the two venues. I felt comfortable enough to get up and dance but also comfortable enough to sit down and appreciate the music when I wanted to.

Perhaps my favorite part about the music was the fact that all the musicians are so humble and so open to talking with the patrons. They enjoy interacting with us, talking about the music and what about it moves us. For example, Richard, the

standing base player, was so friendly and so much fun to spend time with. I especially enjoyed when he appeared at Rock'n'Bowl and taught us all how to dance. It was very evident that he was having a great time interacting with us. I also enjoyed when the Zydeco band invited us up on stage to play instruments with them, allowing us to get involved in the music. The whole vibe of the Zydeco music was amazing. Partner dancing with all sorts of different people and learning different dances was so much fun. I loved dancing with people, young and old! It was such a welcoming community and I thoroughly enjoyed it. That, for me, was the highlight of the trip. I was so into the music and the dancing, and, of course, the drinking.

Jazz music in New Orleans taught me so much about life and what it means to be a part of a warm culture. Everyone we came across was so genuine and welcoming and it was so refreshing. Coming from both the San Francisco and New York areas, where people are less than kind and far too self involved, I was pleasantly surprised and enamored by a culture that doesn't hate one another, a culture that cares for others and the well being of others. It made me want to move there, to be a part of a musical and cultural movement of love and community.