

George Porter Jr. 09-19-07

Tuesday, 15 January 2008

Last Updated Wednesday, 30 January 2008

- Every year when Jazzfest rolls around, your schedule gets crazy. How do you keep your schedule straight and your hands working?

That is the job of Ara my wife, she has done a great job of making sure that I get some rest and at least one full day off out of the city, cell phone off rest.

- You play with several different projects. What's your Gigs vs. Rehearsals Ratio •?

Well most of those gigs are with bands that don't want to rehearse, they just want to go for it, and the other few are with bands I have played with over the past years and sound check is all we need.

- Funky Meters and PBS: How does your approach to playing change when you play with an organ as opposed to without?

With Funky Meters and Art Neville, who has a very busy left hand, I tend to play a lot less; with Porter Batiste Stoltz, I have a lot more room to play more and I do.

- You also get to play with a wide variety of drummers; what do you look for and listen to when locking in with the drums?

I look for his pocket and I try very hard to set on his bass drum, if not on it then around it; I also try to stay out of the way of the back beat.

- For you, what defines the New Orleans • feel? Is there a certain drum feel, or syncopation?

Well that depends on who the drummer is, there are drummers that are very syncopated, and that means I will have to play more open and shorter notes; with a drummer that plays big back beats, I can then be the one that plays the syncopation, but keep in mind, I am playing with him, I am not trying to lead him.

- The Trio gigs; you and drummer Johnny Vidacovich enlist a third player “ sometimes a guitarist, sometimes a horn player “ and do some serious improv. How did the idea come about?

Johnny's Wife; well John had been doing a duo set with Eric Troub on sax, and Deborah Vidacovich, John's wife, gave me a call to see if I wanted to come and play with them. I said yes, I though it would be a jazz gig. I was not getting too many calls to play jazz, so I said hell yes. But it turned out to be very free and what comes off the top of their heads. I was like, Oh, I don't have to know songs, we are going to make it up as we go. • That went on for a few months, then we moved to another club, The Maple Leaf. At that point Deborah wanted to start using a new third every week. I then got worried because she started calling guitar players. Now we were dealing with cards, it was not as bad as I though it would be. Then we moved again across the river to The Old Point Bar and June Yamagishi got invited and Deborah said let's record this •. The CD was named We Came To Play •, recorded June 5, 2002. We moved again back to The Maple Leaf where we have been for 3 years, I guess. I will see if Deborah can send me the names of all the players we have used over the seven(7) years.

THE LIST: Eric Traub, Tommy Malone, Steve Masakowski, Mark Mullins, June Yamagishi, Luther Dickinson, Tony Dagradi, Anders Osborne, Brian Stoltz, Tab Benoit, Clarence Johnson, John Ellis, Wendell Brunius, Eric Lindell, Willie T, Nicholas Payton, Ivan Neville, John Gros, Rebecca Barry, David Torkanowski, Adam Levy, Theresa Andersson, Shane Theriot, Scott Bourgeois, Jason Mingledorf, Renard Poche, Robert Walter, Tony Hall, Donald Harrison, Jr., Henry Butler, Ben Ellman, Rich Vogel, Stanton Moore, Jeff Raines, Mike Dillon, Eric Krasnos, Mike Lemmler, Fred Wesley. There were more the first calendar 2000-2001 we could not find.

- You've done Trio gigs with all kinds of different people; which ones stand out as your favorite?

Oh, I knew you were going to ask that one, well the top three (3) that played outside songs, just jams: 1) June Yamagishi, 2) Nicholas Payton, 3) Tony Dagradi. Top three (3) inside songs: 1) Tab Benoit, 2) Sonny Landreth, 3) Willie T. There were a lot more great nights to remember.

- I understand you record most of these gigs. What kind of gear do you use for on-the-fly • recording, and any chance any of these recordings will ever be released?

Yes I do record every one of those gigs. I started using a Tascam DAT recorder and now am using a Marantz Recorder

DA420CDR with a Shure FP33 3-Channel Stereo Mixer, ch 1) from front of house mix, ch 2) amb L near drums, ch 3) amb R at back of stage up high. RELEASES: I don't know - a lot of this music is new, and jams; there will be a lot of work to pull that off, I will never say that it could not happen but everyone of the thirds would have to sign off, and we would need to copyright all the music as well as the gig. It is work that at this point in time no one has the time.

- On some Trio gigs, you work with horn players (including Fred Wesley!), and your Bass is the only chordal • instrument. What kind of chord shapes and forms are you most prone to play? There are some songs in some sets/gigs, that call for me to play major or minor chords and at that point, I would make that third stand out a little more from time to time.

- Listening to early Meters stuff, I notice a lot of unison lines with the guitar. Was that a conscious decision, or did it just develop that way?

Some was a conscious decision; Leo, who said he and he alone wrote all the songs always jumped on my bass lines, but before we started recording our own music, the session work we were doing with Allen Toussaint, he had Leo always doubling my bass line. Sometimes Allen would be on my line as well.

- Gear questions; do you do your own set ups and adjustments? How high is your action?

You mean on the bass; I play it the way it came and any tech that I had that messed with it got fired. My bass is long over due for a fret job. I won't let it happen - the pickups are over, well, let's say that I got that body in 1970 with a fretless neck on it. The Meters did not like it, so I put a fretted neck on it so that makes those pickups 37 years old. I know - why have I not kept it up? I like the way it plays, I like the way it sounds, and I like the way it looks, old like me. The action is high, very high to most players that have played on it.

- Do you get offered a lot of gear from manufacturers?

Yes I have been offered a lot of gear, and I only took what I would play on, I won't take gear that I won't use. I have an Ampeg SVT Pro 4 & Pro 8 heads w/2 Ampeg SVT 6x10 cabinet when my rig is on the road. I have three (3) EBS Pedals, (1) EBS UniChorus Stereo Chorus/Flanger/Pitch-Modulator, 2.) EBS Bass IQ Envelope Fi, 3.) EBS OctaBass Bass Octave Pedal. I also just started using the Lakland Bass they gave me when I was on tour with Gov Mule, it sounds really great and it plays real good also but I just can't get that old P out of my hands.

- Last year you said If I had to seriously depend on employment in the city, I'd be hurting, because there's not enough work. • Are things getting better? Can a musician make a living in New Orleans?

Yes, if you can work every night, and there are players that are working every night. I can not work every night at home because the clubs only want me to play just their room that weekend, if my name is the billing name. Now, I can play the Leaf on Thursday and maybe Rock N' Bowl with Snooks on Saturday, if my name is not the billing name. I say yes and on to things getting better, it just depends on who you are and where you want to work.

- You get a call for a gig, but you're booked. Do you have a name or two you give as subs? Anybody you trust as a back up?

Only one - Tony Hall, because I know that he will do the home work if there is some and he will show up when he needs to be there.

- Do you write music on the bass? Describe your creative method.

I have started with a bass line, but most of the time it is with a guitar rhythm groove. If the bass line is the start, by the time I get to lyrics and start singing, I sometimes have to go back and simplify the bass line so I can play and sing it. That happens a lot these days, sometimes after the CD is out.

- I read where you said The Runnin' Parners was too large a band to make it practical to tour. Any chance of seeing them outside of New Orleans?

I will never say never, but I don't think it will be in any club dates, maybe a festival.

- You live a clean and sober lifestyle now, do you have any issues dealing with musicians who aren't?

Pot smoking I am OK with, but I do have issues with the power that was my drug of choice and I don't want to be around it. Oct. 28 will be 20 years clean for me. It has not been hard because I wanted it.

- Thousands of gigs with hundreds of musicians; what memories stay with you? Favorite gigs? People and places?

Oh my lord, I don't remember dates - 1976 Europe, Stones, France, the kids were giving us a hard time and Jagger & Keith came out on stage and gave them shit back, and said that we were their friends and shut up and let them play for you, and they stayed on stage with us for I don't remember how long, and the kids let us play. The next two nights went great and we made some new friends/fans. When I have been away from home for a long time, playing anywhere in the city I am very happy. I don't have a favorite gig. I still love playing right now - Porter Batiste Stoltz is where my heart is.

- Who's still on your People I'd love to play with • list?

I don't know if I have a list, most of the people have passed away. I know that there is someone out there, I just can't think of who that would be.

- Last words; what is the definitive George Porter Jr. advice for bass players?

Pocket, - find it, get into it and have fun. (smile)

A Badass thank you to George Porter Jr., and to member Kennan Shaw for compiling the questions. For the latest on George Jr., please visit www.georgeporterjr.com