

city that folks displaced for this long are still planning their return from exile. Life goes on here, with all its craziness; the good and the very bad stuff that makes it what it is.

The Louisiana tax breaks for movie production have been a serious boon to the city, and *Treme* from HBO has especially made a mark here. The writers have been very careful of historic detail, respectfully telling the post-Katrina story. They don't get it all right, but that would be impossible. All the lines are blurred here, and "correct" is a very subjective concept. The production has pumped millions into the economy. Nearly everyone I know has been in it one way or another, and many locals are heavily involved. They have spent millions licensing local music, exposing it to millions of people. Some of the cast hang out all the time, and are seriously into the music scene. I see Clark Peters out on Frenchmen Street all the time. He smiles and says hello, says he's out "shopping with his ears." My friends from elsewhere ask me if it's really like what they see on *Treme*; I tell them they portray it well, but only scratch the surface. It's a TV show, and a good one. New Orleans is a continuously-written multi-volume historical novel.

I think one can make a good case for Frenchmen Street being the musical center of the universe. It is certainly the most concentrated scene for all kinds of music. There are other places it happens, but on Frenchmen you can hit eight or nine clubs with totally different music, original music, modern, traditional jazz, funk, blues, whatever. I play with Walter Wolfman Washington, at DBA every Wednesday night, for over six years now, and still love going to work. It's always a little different; nearly always a crowd, and I can make the rounds on the street on break. If you're visiting you have to hit Frenchmen St., The Maple Leaf, Tipitina's...

And you have to eat. I love Coop's on Decatur for the Cajun Fried Chicken and seafood gumbo. Irene's for a truly decadent Italy-meets-NOLA meal, with my pal and Detroit exPat Marc Adams at the piano, Uppeline for eclectic, really well-prepared imaginative meals in a gallery full of great art. Parkway Bakery for PoBoys...After a few years you have to stop eating like that, but when you visit I highly suggest you suspend any notions of healthy eating and enjoy it!

It is logical for a sax player to end up in the city. I heard my father's Brubeck records with Paul Desmond, saw Boots Randolph on TV, and knew I wanted to play sax. I fell completely for it, and never seriously considered doing anything else. And this town is Mecca for horn players, drummers, pianists...It has been a great opportunity for me, I've been welcomed here, respected, grown and learned, been schooled and pushed and encouraged. Walter Washington has taught me more than I can say. I have the pleasure of working with great bands and musicians. This year at French Quarter Jazzfest, I'll get the chance to play many times at the festivals, and many gigs in between. There is nothing like it, the absolute best time of year.

This summer I will be able to travel the world to other festivals, like Moulin Blues in Holland, and the MNOP Festival in Perigeux, France, a beautiful small town that features New Orleans musicians every year. No matter where you are, people are interested in New Orleans and our music. It's the best icebreaker you could ask for, the musical center of the world, and I am proud, humbled and honored to be a part of it.

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Lil Red feeling the blues.

Photo/Rick Moore

## Nancy "Lil' Red" Gros Living in a "Wonderful World"

Growing up in New Orleans, Nancy "Lil' Red" Gros attended her first Jazz Fest in 1976. She was smitten by the stage when the Meters played "They All Asked for You." Not until 2001, after 10 years of marriage and two children, did she begin to fulfill her dream of fronting a band. Inspired by the music and culture of great New Orleans artists like Irma Thomas, King Floyd, and Dr. John, she crafted her talent for several years, then formed "Lil' Red and Big Bad" in 2005.

Because of her unique and energetic way of delivering her sultry sound, the band developed quite a following, from the North-shore of Lake Pontchartrain, to the West Bank of New Orleans. Today, Lil' Red is backed by some of the best musicians in New Orleans. In 2010 she won "Best Blues Band" in the Voodoo Blues Krewe/New Orleans Blues Society's Blues Challenge, and represented New Orleans in the International Blues Challenge in Memphis.

She performs regularly on Frenchmen Street, has toured in Colorado, and will open the 2012 French Quarter Festival main stage.

"It's never too late to fulfill your dreams" says Red. "There's nothin' better than singing the blues."

**Why is New Orleans important to the world?**

New Orleans is one of the most unique cultural gems in the world. Being one of the oldest cities in the country, its history and beauty are

like no other. If you think about it, everyone in the world benefits from its natural resources as well. I was born and raised here and wouldn't want to live anywhere else!!

**How is Louisiana (New Orleans) doing since Katrina?**

In my opinion, New Orleans is better than ever! In a weird way, Katrina put us back on the map. It's unfortunate that a natural disaster like Katrina, had to put things in perspective for our government officials.

**What do you think of HBO's *Treme*? Any funny stories you can share?**

I love *Treme*, it makes me proud to be a New Orleanian. I feel it's the best depiction of New Orleans music and culture I've seen in a long time, and it makes me happy that lot of artists have had the opportunity to showcase their stuff to the world!!

**Many people say the heart of New Orleans music has moved from Bourbon Street to Frenchmen Street. Is this right? Why has it moved? Good or bad?**

I believe there is some truth to that; however, there are some really great musicians on Bourbon. I think a lot of the music has moved because Bourbon Street has more drunken tourists who don't seem to care about the music. Frenchmen Street has its own special vibe. More locals and tourists who really want to listen to music tend to gravitate to it. I think it's just the way it is, good