



Photo/Shirley Mae Owens

Willie Panker, Lil Red and Jimmy Carpenter about to sing "It's A Wonderful World"

or bad.

Favorite Frenchmen Street nightclub?

The Apple Barrel, because of its grungy eclectic feel. They play a lot of blues there too!

Favorite nightclub off of Frenchmen Street?

The Balcony Music Club ("BMC"). Love the ambiance and my favorite bartender in the world, Melanee, works there! It's my steady gig too!

Favorite place to eat in New Orleans?

I can't answer that question! There are too many great places to eat!

Musical heroes who inspired you to get into music?

I grew up in a musical family. My older brother played guitar and sang, and my sister was married to Paul Sanchez's brother, Andy (Paul Sanchez is an original "Threadhead"). We would go to the Sanchez's Uptown home frequently. They had a huge family and there was a piano in the foyer. Everybody would be singing and jamming and I never wanted to leave! They were by biggest inspiration. I also loved going to CYO dances that had live music too. Zebra and the Cold were some of the most popular bands during that time. Zebra did lotsa Led Zeppelin.

What was your first instrument? How many do you play?

Well, being a singer, my voice was my first and only instrument. However, I love to play percussions and dance a lot on stage!!

Favorite Louisiana Fest? Why? Favorite Festival in world?

I love all the festival series that the Jazz and Heritage Foundation produce in Lafayette Square, as well as the French Quarter Fest. They are free and open to the public, so it gives everyone a chance to see and hear some exceptional music. I performed at the 2010 Blues and BBQ Fest and it was wonderful.

-What would you say or play at the Pearly gates?

"What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong, then I would beg St. Peter to let me in!

nancygros@yahoo.com
www.lilredandbigbad.com (504) 430-3890

Willie Panker Ready to Spank the Skins

Willie Panker grew up in Chicago where he began studying drums at the age of 10 and playing professionally at 14. Studying under Muddy Waters' and Little Walters' drummer, Fred Below, he developed a strong interest in jazz and blues. Below sent him to Roy C. Knapp, a world renowned percussion and music theory educator, to continue his studies. Willie became involved in the blues scene gigging with James Cotton, Junior Wells, Koko Taylor and the like.

Moving to New Orleans in the 1980s, Willie became a sought-after sideman, drumming for Earl King, Allen Toussaint and Snooks Eaglin, eventually forming his own groups: the Iguanas, and Amy and the Hank Sinatras. He's played with Ronnie Earl, Kim Wilson, John Mooney, Walter "Wolfman" Washington, Mark Hummel, Fingers Taylor, Mitch Woods, Bob Margolin, John Mayall and many more. Willie has traveled the world and performed at festivals, concerts, and shows in every juke-joint from California to Miami.

Why is New Orleans important to the world?

New Orleans is important to the world for many reasons, but mostly because of its historical and cultural value.

How is Louisiana (New Orleans) doing since Katrina?

Since Katrina, New Orleans is better in some ways and not so good in others. Much of the primary crime areas have been removed, yet rents are higher and in most cases musicians' pay has declined.

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

I like Treme, good true to life stories.

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 see Frenchmen Street as a locals' Bourbon Street with a better music selection. The locals needed an area to hang in and found it in this cool section of town. For the good. And it has gotten even better with the help of the show Treme.

Favorite Frenchmen Street nightclub?

I have several favorites for various types of music. Snug Harbor (jazz), Apple Barrel (blues, roots), Spotted Cat (trad).

Favorite nightclub off of Frenchmen Street?

I have two: BMC (variety, roots) Bootleggers on Decatur (blues).

Favorite place to eat in New Orleans?

Frankie and Johnny's and about a hundred others.

Musical heroes who inspired you to get into music?

Freddie Below and about a hundred others.

What was your first instrument? How many do you play?

Piano, drums, harmonica.

Favorite Louisiana Fest? Favorite Festival in world?

International Festival in Lafayette, LA, because it covers all music genres. Same festival, same reasons.

What would you say or play at the Pearly gates?

"Let Me In" and "A Closer Walk With Thee."
www.midnightstreetcar.com/band

Photo/Michelle Arthington

