

NOLA Stomp Times



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW ORLEANS TRAD JAZZ CAMP

ISSUE 01 · FALL 2026 · NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA



2026 Camp · Week One



2026 Camp · Week Two

FROM THE 2026 CAMP

A Musical Celebration on Bourbon Street

Musicians from across the country and around the world returned to New Orleans this summer for two weeks of traditional jazz, learning, and friendship. As Banu writes in this issue, the camp has become a “musical Thanksgiving” for the people who gather here year after year.

That feeling runs through the stories ahead: Ed Hirsch, Camper Number One, still finding time for another rehearsal; Piper discovering the sheer joy of playing jazz; and teachers whose lessons travel home with their students. These are some of the people carrying the music forward.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Keeping the Tradition Alive

Hello!

We've just finished our Sweet 16 year of camp, and as we head into our even sweeter 17th, this seems like the perfect time to start something new—our first newsletter!

Our one-week jazz workshop has now expanded into two, and our return camper rate is an astonishing 80%! I don't know that I could ever have expected how much the New Orleans Traditional Jazz Camp would change so many lives—or how many lasting friendships it would create.

The camp began back in 2010, when Leslie Cooper, Anita Hemeter, and I came together with a shared belief that the music born here in New Orleans should be taught here, at the source, by the musicians who know it, play it, and keep it alive.

Sixteen years later, camp has become our “musical Thanksgiving”—a reunion of friends who return year after year, along with new campers from across the country and around the world. And through our scholarship program, we've been able to welcome young musicians who will carry this music into the future.

Through this newsletter, we hope to keep that feeling going throughout the year—sharing camp news, stories from our campers and faculty, music, memories, and the people who make the New Orleans Traditional Jazz Camp what it is.

And through it all, our purpose remains the same: to help keep the legacy of New Orleans traditional jazz alive and pass it along to the next generation.

Music is food for the soul, and trad jazz is a feast.

Thank you for pulling up a chair.



Banu Gibson

Banu Gibson

Founder & Executive Director

FACULTY FOCUS

Katie Cavera

A Life in Music



Katie Cavera

Katie is a multi-instrumentalist. She is a rhythm guitar specialist in the style of Freddie Green and Al Casey. She also plays hot 20's plectrum and tenor banjo, New Orleans style string bass, and sings in the 20's pop style of Helen Kane and Ruth Etting.

She currently works at Disney California Adventure as a bassist and vocalist with The Pixarmonic Orchestra which premiered at Disneyland's Pixarfest. The band plays music from Pixar films in the style of Spike Jones.

Katie is a member of ASCAP, a Loar Performing Artist, and a member of the Academy of Magical Arts.

From Banu: Remembering the First Camp

When I was figuring out how to structure the New Orleans Traditional Jazz Camp, I turned to the San Diego Jazz Camp for guidance. California had two jazz camps at the time—one in Sacramento and one in San Diego. I had talked with some of the Sacramento faculty, but decided to put boots on the ground in San Diego. On January 14, 2010, I arrived after director Alan Adams and assistant director Hal Smith convinced their board to let me observe the camp in action.

Alan worked out a clever arrangement: I could observe their camp if he could attend ours. Of course, at that point, "ours" didn't actually exist yet!

Hal was enormously helpful and recently reminded me of our extended conversation at the bar—which apparently was an important part of my research.

Katie Cavera was on the San Diego faculty that year. She supported our brand-new venture by coming to our first camp—not as faculty, but as a camper playing string bass.

Hal will interview faculty members for future issues of NOLA Stomp Times. For our first issue, I thought it would be fun to ask Katie what she remembers about that very first camp in New Orleans.

Katie's recollections continue on the next page →

FACULTY FOCUS · KATIE CAVERA

Remembering the First Camp

Katie Cavera

Banu offered to bring me and Alan Adams down to the camp that first year. I remember Banu joking with Alan that he gave her a weekend in San Diego and in return she gave him a week in New Orleans. Alan loved it, and he knew he got the better end of the deal. Many attendees at that first camp were from California, which made me happy. I think we all knew this new camp was going to be something special and wanted to be part of it.

With that first camp, NOTJC took the best concepts from both California camps and added its own ideas. The New Orleans camp was longer—six days or more—like the Sacramento camp, but held in a hotel like the San Diego camp. As Banu jokingly says, “In New Orleans our idea of camping is a four-star hotel!” Our historic hotel was smack dab in the middle of the French Quarter, so we could experience its sights and sounds alongside the camp.

The New Orleans camp offered communal meals, like Sacramento, with the bonus of after-breakfast guest lectures. As you finish

coffee with friends, you can dive into jazz history, bandstand etiquette, or other musical topics, depending on the experts there that week.

At the San Diego camp, Alan Adams came up with the idea of mixing up the bands in every session, giving everyone the chance to meet and play with different people. New Orleans expanded on this idea by offering places to jam outside camp and encouraging campers to take part in the local music scene: listening, jamming, and even marching in a second line parade.

Many of the camp’s innovations were there from the beginning. It’s been nice to see small changes continue to make it better each year. I can’t think of a better way to honor New Orleans jazz than by immersing myself in the music in the city where it all began.

I hope to see you all back there again next year!

Katie Cavera · September 16, 2026

CAMPER CORNER

Ed Hirsch Still Making Music as Camper Number One

By Joel Albert



Ed Hirsch, Camper Number One.

“Sign me up!”

That was Ed Hirsch’s response when Banu Gibson described her plans for a traditional jazz camp in New Orleans at the Sweet and Hot Jazz Festival in 2009. He needed no persuading. Camper #1 was ready.

Now 87, Ed brings a lifetime of musical detours to his trombone. He began piano at six, took up accordion at nine, and eventually found his way into the brass section.

“To this day, I have no idea why I ended up on trombone other than a desire to be in a musical group,” he says. “Maybe they were short of a trombonist.”

A music major at UCLA, Ed played trombone and the occasional accordion gig. After graduation, however, he put music aside for roughly 30 years. Work at a Los Angeles television station led to a career in film and television, including sound-effects editing at Warner Brothers. He even made a small appearance in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*: the hands breaking the pencil are his.

Retirement brought him back to the trombone. These days, his calendar includes four big bands, the Sedalia Ragtime Orchestra, the Riverboat Dixie Jazz Band, community and symphony ensembles, the UCLA Alumni Band, and a Klezmer band.

Yet camp offers something that keeps drawing him back to New Orleans.

“The most satisfying thing is the legions of friends I get to see each year,” Ed says.

For newcomers wondering whether they will fit in, he points to the welcome offered by veteran campers. His advice is direct: “Don’t assume, and don’t be afraid to ask questions.”

He also values the chance to hear musicians at work on the streets and in the clubs, and the depth of musical history the instructors bring to class. Two lessons have stayed with him: try to play what the others are not playing, and you can’t go wrong playing the melody.

More than 15 years after that first conversation with Banu, Ed still has plenty of music to make. Our interview ended for a fitting reason: Camper #1 had another rehearsal to get to.



Judy behind the camera.

Remembering Judy

For many years, Ed came to camp with his wife, Judy, an enthusiastic supporter who welcomed arriving campers at the airport, volunteered, and took photographs. Judy died in 2022 after a long battle with cancer. She had become part of the camp family, and her place in Ed’s camp story deserves remembering.

SCHOLARSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Piper Finds the Joy of Jazz at Camp

Based on an interview by Joe Murphy



Piper

Piper first heard about the New Orleans Traditional Jazz Camp from a teacher who could hardly stop talking about it. Mr. Murphy had returned from camp full of enthusiasm for the faculty, the staff, and a city where being a musician felt special. His excitement made her want to experience it herself.

She applied late and initially missed out. Then Banu Gibson called: there was still a place. Only afterward did Piper learn about the scholarship that would become part of her camp experience.

Coming from Silicon Valley, Piper was familiar with the pressures of student music programs. At other camps, she had felt campers measuring themselves against one another. In New Orleans, she found a more relaxed atmosphere and the musical quality she was looking for.

She wondered whether the difference came from learning alongside adults or from meeting people with so many different backgrounds. Whatever the reason, she felt comfortable.

The faculty made a lasting impression, especially Charlie Halloran. Piper valued his practical advice and the respect he showed her as a musician.

“He was also a pro who treated me like I knew what I was doing rather than treating me like I knew nothing,” she said. “I really loved that about him.”

Rotating among ensembles brought its own discoveries. A group that was not quite the right fit never lasted too long, she observed, though a favorite group could end all too soon. Along the way, she found friends. She has stayed in touch with several campers and hopes they will return for a reunion.

The music itself has stayed with her, too.

“I love all the soloing and the fact that you’re always composing on the spot,” Piper said. “People at camp are really passionate about this style of music and I love that.”

Since returning home, she has become more interested in traditional jazz. Its uplifting character and the enthusiasm of the people playing it gave her plenty to carry into the year ahead.

For her parents, Molly and Peter Nguyen, camp offered something especially valuable. Much of Piper’s musical experience had involved grades, auditions, and judged performances. Here, she could enjoy making music in a community eager to share what it knew.

“Trad Jazz Camp provided her a rare opportunity to play jazz just for the sheer joy and fun of it,” they said.

Their verdict was simple: “Her experience at Trad Jazz Camp was pure joy.”

Help Another Musician Find That Joy

Piper’s story shows what a welcoming musical community can mean to a young player. A contribution to the camp’s scholarship fund can help extend that opportunity to another musician.

[Learn about giving to the camp →](#)

FROM THE EDITOR

Give the Next Generation a Place in the Band

By Danny Rubio · Editor

New Orleans gave jazz a place to take shape in everyday life. Music belonged at dances and neighborhood gatherings, in parades, and at the moments when a community mourned or celebrated. Its history is inseparable from the people who made it part of those occasions.

The city of New Orleans is a gumbo pot of communities. African and Caribbean traditions, blues, ragtime, and European musical practices met in a cultural exchange that created a sound whose influence would reach far beyond New Orleans.

One of that sound's defining pleasures is collective improvisation: distinct musical lines coming together in a shared performance. The musicians have to hear one another. Melody, rhythm, and individual invention become parts of a conversation that listeners and dancers can enter, too.

For me, preserving this tradition means making that conversation available to the next generation. The recordings and the history matter. So does the chance to sit beside an experienced player, hear how a phrase



Scholarship students at camp.

feels, try it, and try again. A young musician needs room to develop a personal voice while learning to respect the voices already in the room.

Appreciation belongs in that education as well. We want young people to recognize the musicians and communities behind the music, listen with curiosity, and understand why a live ensemble is worth their attention. Some will become performers. Others will become the listeners who attend concerts, bring friends, and make it possible for musicians to keep working.

Piper's account in this issue makes the opportunity tangible. She found a community where making music could be a joy, and she came home more interested in traditional jazz. That is a beginning worth supporting.

I hope you will consider a gift to the New Orleans Traditional Jazz Camp scholarship fund. Help another young musician learn this music where it was born, alongside people who care deeply about it. The future of trad jazz depends on people having the chance to hear it, love it, and play it.

[Support the Scholarship Fund →](#)

Mark Your Calendar

2027 Camp

Registration is now open

June 13–18, 2027

Week One · Lagniappe Day June 19

June 20–25, 2027

Week Two · Lagniappe Day June 26

Session dates: [Camp's published 2027 announcement.](#)

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

Join Us in 2027

There will be two week-long sessions held in the heart of the French Quarter: June 13–18 and June 20–25, 2027.

Tuition: \$2,750

Includes six nights' housing, breakfast, lunch, and instruction.

New campers: a \$100 deposit is required. Returning campers: no deposit needed — we know where you live!

Access to the music is available when tuition is paid in full. Follow the camp's application and acceptance process.

[2027 registration information →](#)

WITH GRATITUDE

Our Donors & Sponsors

This camp runs on the generosity of people who believe traditional jazz is worth keeping alive. To every donor, sponsor, and volunteer who made this year possible — thank you. You keep the music marching.

[See the camp's supporters](#)

WAYS TO GIVE

Help the Music Continue

A gift of any size helps support the camp's work. To contribute to the scholarship fund or discuss sponsoring a camper, contact the camp for current giving instructions.

[Donation information](#)

[\(504\) 895-0037](#)

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HUMOR

A Little Good-Natured Ribbing

Q: What's the difference between a banjo and an onion?

A: Nobody cries when you chop up a banjo.

SHARE THE NEWSLETTER

Pass the Music Along

Know someone who loves trad jazz? Forward this newsletter to a friend, bandmate, or jazz club. Help our camp family grow!

Contact Us

[\(504\) 895-0037](#) · info@tradjazzcamp.com
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