

# Happy International Jazz Day from New Orleans with Herbie Hancock!

Only in New Orleans could you get hundreds of people to wake up early on a Monday morning for a jazz concert - especially after three days of intense music and partying for the first weekend of the 2012 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Well, sort of. As Mayor Mitch Landrieu said in his brief remarks opening this sunrise concert kicking off the first-ever UNESCO International Jazz Day, people kept telling him that they couldn't believe all these folks woke up for this.

"I say, 'We never went to bed!'" he quipped, only half-kidding.

You can watch video of the entire event on the [International Jazz Day site here](#).

The day started at 6:30 a.m. with drummers and dancers on the cobbled ground of Congo Square in what is now Louis Armstrong Park, the very spot where drummers and dancers gathered generations ago, slaves on their day off, free people of color and others drawing on the African and Haitian traditions they'd brought along the way. Over time, that developed into more elaborate musical forms, taken up by the pianists entertaining in the brothels and parlors of the neighboring Storyville development around the turn of the 20th century, and then out to the streets with the brass bands. That became jazz, and this very spot was its birthplace.

The full evolution of the form played out in the course of the next hour. [The Tremé Brass Band](#), with clarinetist [Dr. Michael White](#) and trumpeter [Kermit Ruffins](#) (who embraces Armstrong's spirit with gusto and a wink or two) guesting, took the stage set up above the drummers to get the official concert started with a rousing "Basin Street Blues" and a quick round of "When the Saints Go Marching In" as they marched off. Harry Shearer, serving as MC, introduced the Mayor and UNESCO director general Irina Bokova, who told the crowd that today a full 190 countries were celebrating jazz and that with satellite hook-ups musicians around the world were jamming with this event.

"China, Algeria, Brazil..." she listed a handful of participating nations. "Every one will tell you jazz is theirs. Jazz was born here, but now it belongs to the world."

And with that she introduced jazz great Herbie Hancock, who in his capacities as UNESCO goodwill ambassador and chairman of the [Thelonious Monk Jazz Institute](#), spearheaded this global event. Hancock sat at the piano, leading a group of student musicians in a spirited version of his classic "Watermelon Man." He was then joined by a true all-start group - Dr. White, New Orleans trumpeter Terence Blanchard, bassist Roland Guerin, drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts and Hancock's former *Headhunters* colleague, percussionist Bill Summers - for a run through Dizzy Gillespie's "Night in Tunisia" that itself nearly encapsulated the whole evolution of jazz, from White's traditional groundings to Blanchard's modern colors to Summers' Afro-Caribbean rhythms and, of course, Hancock's imaginative facilities with all of the above and more.

That was followed by a few numbers anchored by local pianist-educator Ellis Marsalis, patriarch of that famed jazz clan, with Ruffins, White, singer [Stephanie Jordan](#) among those joining in. Then the Tremé Brass Band closed with the theme song from the HBO series "Treme" (its composer and original singer [John Boutte](#) watching from the audience) to honor this spot, on the edge of that titular neighborhood just across Rampart St. from the French Quarter.

With that, Hancock, who had previewed this with a show in Paris two days earlier, rushed to a car

taking him to Louis Armstrong International Airport to fly to New York, where he was to do a sunset concert at the UN, as the drummers and dancers started up again with the heartbeat of this resilient city that's gone around the world as jazz. And Hancock will be back - he's one of the headliners Saturday at JazzFest's second weekend. Most likely these people will have gotten some sleep before then, though it's not a given.