

The New York Times

September 22, 2007

## Stars Join Forces to Salute (and Support) a Rock Legend

By NATE CHINEN

NEW ORLEANS — One Saturday night in May, Fats Domino took the stage before a full house at Tipitina's, the club that has become, like him, a New Orleans institution. His half-hour set made headlines for a few reasons.

It was Mr. Domino's first show since Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005. It was a benefit for the Tipitina's Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to restoring the city's musical culture and helping its musicians. Besides that, it was Fats Domino, and these days that's more than reason enough.

Mr. Domino, 79, made many of the rhythm-and-blues hits that laid the groundwork for rock 'n' roll. He's also something of a recluse, and a perfectionist known to cancel appearances without warning or cause. Yet he is still a presence in the city he has always called home.

"For lack of a better way of putting it," Irma Thomas, known as the Soul Queen of New Orleans, said recently, "he's a living, walking legend among us in New Orleans. Between him and [Louis Armstrong](#), they were the first big names to put us on the musical map."

On Sept. 25, Vanguard Records will release "Goin' Home: A Tribute to Fats Domino," making use of some other big names, including [B. B. King](#), [Paul McCartney](#), Robert Plant, Willie Nelson, [Neil Young](#) and Norah Jones. They appear alongside New Orleans heroes like Dr. John and Allen Toussaint.

The foundation will dedicate a portion of the proceeds to the renovation of Mr. Domino's publishing office, adjacent to his spacious house in the Lower Ninth

Ward, which was severely damaged by the flooding after Katrina. He had to be rescued by helicopter from his home; he lost several pianos and most of his possessions, and looters stole most of his gold records from the 1950s.

Of course, even without the flood it would not have been hard to rally support for Mr. Domino. “He’s been around all this time, and I’ve never read or heard anything bad about him,” Mr. King said recently. “And as far as I’m concerned, he’s just a great musician, and a lovable person.”

“Goin’ Home” arrives roughly one year after “Alive and Kickin’,” Mr. Domino’s first album in more than a decade, which was also released as a benefit for the Tipitina’s Foundation. “He really wanted to put it out through our organization,” said Bill Taylor, the foundation’s executive director. “He was aware of what we were doing, and he reached out to us.”

Over a bowl of gumbo at Cochon, a Cajun restaurant in the warehouse district, Mr. Taylor described the process behind “Goin’ Home,” for which he receives credit as executive producer. “The first hurdle was that I had no idea what I was doing,” he said. “I had never done anything like this.”

But Mr. Taylor set his sights high from the start: his first request was to [Yoko Ono](#), to use a version of “Ain’t That a Shame” that [John Lennon](#) recorded in 1973. “Within like a week, she gave us permission,” he said. “Then [Elton John](#) signed on next. And at that point there was enough star power behind it that the dominoes started falling pretty quick.” (His domino metaphor did not seem intended as a pun.)

With more than 30 tracks, recorded not just in New Orleans but in places like Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Kingston, Jamaica, the album presented some fearsome logistics. Further complicating matters was Mr. Taylor’s decision to

feature New Orleans musicians. In the spirit of the tribute concerts that followed Katrina, "Goin' Home" includes novel pairings like Joss Stone and Buddy Guy with the Dirty Dozen Brass Band; Mr. King with Ivan Neville's Dumpstaphunk; and Lenny Kravitz with the Rebirth Brass Band.

Mr. Taylor often paired songs with artists. Elton John is a natural on "Blueberry Hill," as are Tom Petty on "I'm Walkin' " and [Randy Newman](#) on "Blue Monday." Los Lobos offer a solid update of "The Fat Man," one of the earliest rock 'n' roll records. Mr. McCartney does his best Fats impression on "I Want to Walk You Home," backed by Mr. Toussaint on piano.

More than a few of the album's tracks came together serendipitously. Mr. Plant had agreed to record a track with the Cajun group Lil' Band o' Gold, but when he arrived in New Orleans the acclaimed Soweto Gospel Choir was headlining at Tipitina's. A meeting was arranged, and Mr. Plant also recorded "Valley of Tears" with the choir, in a hushed style that calls [Paul Simon's](#) "Graceland" to mind.

"So you have the Led Zeppelin guy with a South African gospel choir doing a Fats Domino song," Mr. Taylor said. "It's an example of what happens here musically every day."

On Sept. 29, some of the album's local luminaries, including Ms. Thomas, Dumpstaphunk and Big Chief Monk Boudreaux of the Mardi Gras Indians, will play at a release party at Tipitina's. Like the album, the show will celebrate not just Mr. Domino's legacy but also the remarkable songwriting partnership he enjoyed with the trumpeter Dave Bartholomew.

Mr. Domino, who now lives in Harvey, La., in a gated community on the west bank of the Mississippi River, rarely gives interviews, though he has said he

was honored by “Goin’ Home.”

But in one of the chance coincidences that seem to happen often in New Orleans, a reporter on his way to the airport in a taxicab lucked into what passes for an interview with Mr. Domino.

The driver, Walter Miles, turned out to be Mr. Domino’s chauffeur. “I drive him all over,” he said. “We talk to each other two or three times a day.”

With that, Mr. Miles dialed a number on his cellphone and passed the phone to the back seat. There was Mr. Domino, with his unmistakable New Orleans drawl. What followed was less an interview than genial small talk.

“Where you from?” he asked, getting right to the heart of the matter.