

# The Sounds of Jelly Roll Live Again

By JOHN S. WILSON JAN. 14, 1977 ニューヨークタイムズ記事 1977年1月14日

## About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems. Please send reports of such problems to [archive\\_feedback@nytimes.com](mailto:archive_feedback@nytimes.com).



January 14, 1977, Page 52 The New York Times Archives

Jelly Roll Morton, the legendary New Orleans jazz pianist, composer of "King Porter Stomp," "Wolverine Blues" and "Doctor Jazz," band leader and raconteur, never played at Carnegie Hall. But tomorrow night his music will take over the auditorium in a program inspired by a group of Danish musicians, implemented by a Japanese cornetist on a visit to New Orleans and organized by a pianist and a onetime radio documentary writer whose life is now devoted to the study and presentation of Mr. Morton's music.

For Bob Greene, the Morton enthusiast, who has created "The World of Jelly Roll Morton, this appearance at Carnegie Hall with a seven-piece band based on Mr. Morton's Red Hot Peppers, is one more forward step in his efforts to spread Mr. Morton's music. His missionary work began when he gave his first solo piano performance at the New Orleans Jazz Festival in 1969.

But he had discovered 23 years earlier that he was unconsciously playing in the Morton style. When Bob Wilber, the clarinetist, heard Mr. Greene playing at a party on the West Side in 1946, he was struck by the similarity. He asked Mr. Greene if he had been listening to Mr. Morton.

“I had never even heard of Jelly,” Mr. Greene recalled. “But I went out and bought some of his records and—wow! I had an immediate affinity. But I couldn't really play what Jelly played.”

### **I Self - Taught Pianist**

At the time, Mr. Greene, an amateur, self - taught pianist, was a documentary writer for the Columbia Broadcasting System whom Edward R. Murrow took to Washington when Mr. Murrow became head of the United States Information Agency. After President Kennedy was assassinated, Mr. Greene moved into the Johnson Administration as a speechwriter. He had hoped to work on Robert Kennedy's Presidential campaign in 1968.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

#### ADVERTISEMENT

“But after he was shot,” Mr. Greene recalled, “I said the hell with it. I'd always wanted to be with music. So decided to devote my time to Jelly's music.”

Within a year he had built up his piano playing to a level at which he was willing to accept an offer to play at the New Orleans Jazz Festival.

“When I got to New Orleans,” Mr. Greene said, “I walked around ‘The District’ where Jelly had played and thought, ‘I've put Jelly's music back where it belongs.’ It was corny sentiment, but no one was playing his music properly in New Orleans then.”

Mr. Greene returned to the New Orleans Jazz Festival in 1971 and in 1972 he played at the Newport Jazz Festival in New York on a program with Turk Murphy's band and Kid Thomas's Preservation Hall Band. Afterwards, George Wein, producer of the festival, suggested, “Why don't you put together a Red Hot Peppers band?”

“It was a fascinating idea,” Mr. Greene agreed. “But I thought it would be impossible to recreate the Red Hot Peppers.”

Later that summer, on a visit to Copenhagen, he was invited to sit in with an amateur group, the Peruna Jazz Band, in the basement of a smorgasbord restaurant.

“They asked me what I'd like to play,” Mr. Greene recalled. “I suggested ‘Mr. Jelly Lord,’ one of Jelly's tunes. Suddenly, as we started to play, I was surrounded by the Red Hot Peppers. I'd never heard anything like it in my life. There were no scores. These people were not more musically educated than I was, but they had learned the arrangements just from listening to the Red Hot Peppers records.

“When I got back to New York, realized that it could be done—a Red Hot Peppers band could be formed. But I didn't think I could get American musicians to listen to the records with the love and determination that these Danish musicians did.”

He found an answer to that problem in New Orleans where he met Yoshio Toyama, a Japanese cornetist who, according to Mr. Greene, plays just like Bunk Johnson. Mr. Toyama offered to copy the Red Hot Peppers arrangements from the records,

“Put the record on and I'll write,” declared Mr. Toyama. “What instrument do you want to start with?”

## Assembled a Band

When he got Mr. Toyama's first four arrangements—"Sidewalk. Blues," "Smokehouse Blues," "Steamboat Stomp" and "Mr. Jelly Lord"—Mr. Greene started assembling a band: Tommy Benford, who had played drums on the original Red Hot Peppers records; Ernie Carson, a cornetist with whom Mr. Greene had Jammed in New Orleans; Danny Barker, a veteran New Orleans guitarist; Herb Hall, a New Orleans clarinetist with a typically warm, throaty tone; Ephie Resnick, an old friend of Mr. Greene who was playing in the pit band of "Hello, Dolly!" and Milt Hinton, a bassist who made his first record in 1931, the year after the Red Hot Peppers made its last record.

"At rehearsals," Mr. Greene recalled, "It was almost spooky the way Jelly was the eighth man there. When something came up that we couldn't get from Toyama's notations — a question of intonation, for example — we'd go to the final authority: Jelly and the records."

Mr. Greene's Red Hot Peppers made its debut at the Newport Jazz Festival in July 1973 to such critical acclaim that it was booked into Alice Tully Hall for a concert of its own the following February. This concert and another the following December both sold out.

## Concert With a Script

Since then, Mr. Greene has taken the band on annual fall and spring tours and the presentation has developed from a simple series of musical performances to a concert - with - script concept that, as Mr. Greene puts it, "is almost a documentary."

"When I found that the audiences were enjoying the anecdotes and program notes that I used in the early concerts," he said, "I expanded them and the program began to get into more of a dramatic format. I used to be a radio writer and I'm accustomed to using words by themselves to evoke an image.

"The script has grown and changed," he continued. "Now we're doing the funeral that Jelly never actually had. When he died in Los Angeles in 1941, he was buried in the rain in an unmarked grave with just a few musicians as pallbearers. There was no music. We started doing the funeral last year in Hillsdale, Mich., and the effect was unbelievable."

In addition, at tomorrow night's concert the Red Hot Peppers will be joined by several guests. William Russell, venerable jazz historian, record collector, violinist and supporter of New Orleans jazz, will play the violin part in Mr. Morton's arrangement of "Someday, Sweetheart." Cathy Chamberlain, who came to Mr. Greene's attention when he heard her "Rag 'n' Roll Revue" at Reno Sweeney, will sing "Mr. Jelly Lord" and play jug in a skiffle band version of "Wolverine Blues." And Eubie Blake, a contemporary of Mr. Morton, who will be 94 next month, will play with the Red Hot Peppers.

"I heard Eubie in New Orleans playing with Bill Russell's New Orleans Ragtime Orchestra," said Mr. Greene. "He sounded just like Jelly. He had that authority.

"With Eubie, who's almost 94, and Cathy, who's 28, we'll have a balance. Before Eubie, there was no jazz, there was no ragtime. And from Eubie to Cathy the music will stretch from the 19th century on up into the 21st century."