



IRVIN MAYFIELD'S
JAZZ HOUSE

The JAZZ GOES DOWN

Story and Photos by TEN & TWO STAFF

THE DAY FOUND US SEARCHING for bull redfish in the marsh south of New Orleans. The night found us on Bourbon Street listening to music coming from all directions. A guy coming out of a bar/club looked up at no one in particular and yelled “My children, you may do what you wanna, when you wanna!” My mama never told me that. My mama was not from New Orleans.

Down a quiet empty side street and holding tight to a corner, a loner named Trooper sat on a milk crate with a beat-up guitar in hand. Trooper had an uncomfortable slump on that crate, and a stare that Vietnam vets from the 60’s called “The Thousand Yard Stare”. Perhaps all the way back to Khe Sanh. Over and over and all alone on that guitar he played a quiet and respectful cover of Led Zeppelin’s Stairway to Heaven. Well worth the listen, which we did, but we soon moved on because we were in the mood for a little trumpet to pick us up and lay us down.

The trumpet is one of the world’s oldest musical instruments. In the hands of an artist, it’s not an instrument of anything. It’s an expression of a life force. The artist [Irvin Mayfield](#) grew up in the 7th Ward in New Orleans and held his first trumpet when he was 4. The first song he learned to play was “Just A Closer Walk With Thee”, and he’s been laying down the jazz ever since. His career started in the late 1980s when he

played on the streets of New Orleans. In the 90’s as his recording career moved steadily forward, he shared a New York apartment with Wynton Marsalis. In 2002, he founded the 16-piece New Orleans Jazz Orchestra and he continues with them today as artistic director. In September of 2003, the U.S. Senate made him a Cultural Ambassador of the City of New Orleans, and at age 32, with 12 albums under his arm, Irvin Mayfield is just getting started.

In 2009, the [Royal Sonesta](#) (one of the Grand Dame Bourbon Street Hotels) teamed with Irvin Mayfield to create the [Irvin Mayfield’s Jazz Playhouse](#). New Orleans has tons of different styles of clubs. You’d be safe to call this one an uptown joint. You’d be safe to call it sleek. You’d be safe to call it sexy. Ain’t nobody here lookin’ for nothin’ but “America’s Music.” Lookin’ for Jazz. The trumpeter Irvin Mayfield says, “The Playhouse is where jazz lives and moves forward toward the future. It’s the heart-beat of the city.” The future is holding

(Right) Irvin Mayfield opened his Jazz Playhouse at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in 2009.





(Top) Irvin Mayfield grew up in the 7th Ward in New Orleans and has been playing trumpet since he was 4. (Facing page) The trombone player Michael Watson listens with reverence to the jazz trumpet of Irvin Mayfield.

court on Bourbon Street, where new acts and established talent fill the air with jazz from the Playhouse. We listened to Irvin Mayfield play with David Torkanowsky, Shannon Powell, Neal Caine and Michael Watson. These guys were all born and raised in the Brier Patch of Jazz and it would be a safe bet they'll never leave.

The music seemed to be everywhere at once. No two numbers alike and all of them jazz. Toward the end of the last set, the house turned quiet when Irvin Mayfield played an almost mournful rendition of an old New Orleans classic. It was just Irvin and his trumpet. Voices were hushed in the Playhouse. I'm a photographer, and for years I've trained myself to look in the opposite direction of what logically seems to be important at the moment. In the shadows at the

back of the stage stood the young trombone player Michael Watson. His gaze downcast as though in prayer, and his eyes gently shut. His body language was almost reverential. He pressed the trombone to his heart, and nearly glowed with a transfusion of jazz. For us, tomorrow there would be more redfish on the fly, but this night was all about the trumpet player who grew up in the 7th Ward, and always looks back.

Irvin Mayfield

<http://www.irvinmayfield.com/>

Royal Sonesta

<http://www.sonesta.com/ROYAL-NEWORLEANS/>

Jazz Playhouse

<http://www.sonesta.com/RoyalNewOrleans/index.cfm?fa=Restaurant2.home>

