



A Night In Treme January 2011

KERMIT RUFFINS

Ruffins first gained recognition with the ReBirth Brass Band, one of New Orleans' hot young ensembles that helped shake up the traditional music. He and high school classmate, tuba player Philip Frazier co-founded the group in 1982. Ruffins' strong musical presence and warm personality soon made him a crowd favorite. It was with ReBirth that Ruffins' talents as a composer emerged, contributing what would become brass band classics "Do Whatcha Wanna" and "Put Your Right Foot Forward." Like so many New Orleans trumpet players before him, Ruffins the musician also became Ruffins the vocalist. "Every trumpeter player I saw was singing," explains Ruffins of adding vocals to his musical repertoire. "I guess it's because of Louis Armstrong. So I thought I'd better start singing."

Ten years of blowing on the streets and around the globe and recording seven albums with the ReBirth honed Ruffins' chops and style for his future solo career. Because of his ever-growing popularity, he had also established a ready-made audience of fans who followed him on his new venture. In 1992, Ruffins made his recording debut as leader with *World on a String* on the Justice label. For this important first album, the trumpeter put together an all-star cast of New Orleans musicians including pianist Ellis Marsalis. In Ruffins' creative hands, classics like "Rosetta" found new young audiences while receiving approving nods from his elders. While there was only one original on the debut, Ruffins' fluid pen was in greater evidence on his sophomore disc for the label, 1994's *The Big Butter & Egg Man*. Songs like his "I'll Drink Ta Dat" and "The Undertaker Man" stood with distinction alongside Louis Armstrong's "Struttin' with Some Barbecue." Sporting just the right attitude, Ruffins made Stuff Smith's "If You're a Viper" his own and audiences continue to demand it at all of Ruffins' shows. Following up on the popularity of the tune, he wisely revamped the classic "Light Up" on his 1996 release *Hold On Tight* (Justice).

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Finding success leading his own swinging combo, Ruffins had another dream to fulfill. After seeing a video of Cab Calloway's big band, Ruffins' vision was to someday stand in front of an orchestra. "It brought tears to my eyes," remembers Ruffins, "and I said, I wanna do that, I wanna swing with a big band!"

On October 28, 1995, Ruffins' 17-piece ensemble made its debut at a big band festival held in a church auditorium. Filled with young talented musicians from New Orleans, the orchestra was impressive with its tight arrangements and, of course, its sense of swing. In the Jazz Tent at the 1996 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, Ruffins and his big band knocked out what could be perceived as a tough audience. Ruffins' huge talent and natural charisma as a bandleader quickly won over any potential cynics in the crowd.

Ruffins is an eager player and active in the New Orleans music community. If he isn't gigging with his Barbecue Swingers, he'll often pop up at local clubs to sit-in with friends. When a fellow musician passes, Ruffins is there in his "black and whites" blowing in tribute as part of a traditional jazz funeral procession. It's not unusual to find Ruffins hanging out with the older musicians he respects so much seeking their guidance and soaking up their stories.

<http://www.basinstreetrecords.com/artists/kermit-ruffins.html>

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