



JAZZ NOTES

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One jazz journalist's ordeal

► *By Glenn Astarita*

DURING KATRINA I stayed with a single mother and her seven-year-old son. A towering pine tree crashed through the roof of her house in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Thankfully no one was injured. My home in Picayune, Mississippi (45 miles north of New Orleans and south of Hattiesburg) suffered roof damage, amid dozens of unearched pecan trees and telephone poles split in half like toothpicks. The music venue I owned, in Slidell, Louisiana, is still completely submerged in the bayou. The ensuing days brought a sense of shock and utter dismay. News organizations reported calamitous and anarchic events unfolding in New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. It became apparent that life was heading for a rather daunting transition.

A 76-year-old friend (Paul), a former road manager for Woody Herman and Mercer Ellington, realized that his neighborhood in the Gentilly area of New Orleans had

been severely flooded. The water in this area and all of eastern New Orleans took several weeks to subside. Recently I accompanied Paul to his home to assess the situation, in the hope of recovering valuables and mementos. Prior to this, I was consumed with cleanup activities and what seemed like thousands of calls to FEMA and the Red Cross for disaster assistance and displacement-related provisions. In my view the Red Cross and FEMA have performed surprisingly well on the whole, despite inconsistencies in their support structure.

Our trek to Paul's home was his first visit since the storm. The devastation was horrific and disheartening. It was hard to absorb the apocalyptic obliteration, spanning miles of residential areas. Busy streets were still, largely vacant. Power was out and rightfully so, since many folks didn't turn

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COVER PHOTO: A keyboard sinks in the mud, one of Hurricane Katrina's smaller casualties.

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