

A JOYFUL NOISE ONE

a short overview of street bands around the world

Street bands are one of the musical wonders of the world, the sound of celebration from Brazil to New Orleans, the Balkans to Delhi. These bands flourish across the globe, strong and rhythmic bands playing for processions, outdoor dances, rituals, civic occasions dances and fairs and accompanying outdoor theatre and circus.

There are two main types, percussion bands, like samba bands so common in Britain today and dhol drummers, and reeds, brass and drums bands. Examples of these latter bands include New Orleans marching bands, Balkan brass bands and our own brass and silver band traditions. Such bands are found all over the world from Ghana to Nepal, Surinam to Columbia, Rumania to Durham.

Street music has existed for thousands of years, all over the world. Street Bands have always played an important part in community and civic celebrations and events. Over the centuries they have served a multitude of functions from village celebrants to political activists. Although many traditional bands still exist in Asia, Latin America and Africa, there has been an explosion in contemporary groups forming across Europe and the US over the last twenty-five years.

These bands are a great way of developing musical skills and an important part of many musical traditions, including our own. Street bands are excellent tools for building musical confidence, for developing ear training and ensemble playing, learning about other musical cultures and combining with other art forms.

Street bands flourish across the world, here is a brief overview of these wind, brass and percussion bands in other countries.

The USA has always had a strong street and marching band tradition. The village, town and military band was strong throughout the nineteenth century merging with minstrel, Vaudeville and circus traditions. Today you will find more sousaphone players at one college football match than in the whole of England.

“Every village had its silver cornet band and bandstand in the square, Brass bands played for circuses, carnivals, minstrel and medicine shows, political rallies, churches, picnics, dances, athletic contests, holiday gatherings. The Salvation Army employed the small brass band... and politicians and pitchmen of every stamp used brass bands for Bally Hoo. Every military troop, drill team, volunteer fire squad, lodge or social club had its auxiliary band to swell holiday pageantry”

William J Schaffer. Brass bands and New Orleans Jazz.

The New Orleans street band was one of the key influences in the birth of jazz and continued to develop its own unique tradition. St Louis, home of Lester

Bowie and his family, was also famous for its brass and marching band traditions.

In New Orleans the brass band was a powerful influence on the new jazz... Brass bands gave jazz its instrumentation, its instrumental techniques, its basic repertoire... The influence of the brass bands in early jazz was omnipresent. To understand jazz, we must begin with its roots, and the taproots of the tradition is the nineteenth century brass band" William J Schaffer. Brass Bands and New Orleans jazz

Another great brass tradition in the 'states' is the 'shout bands' of 'The United House of Prayer for all People'. Founded in 1903, the church encouraged mixed race congregations and was often in trouble, the church was closed by the supreme court of South Carolina. 'Shout Bands' are trombone bands, inspired by the King James translation Psalm 150. Five or six trombones provide a rich harmonic and rhythmic backing for the lead trombone and 'chaser'. The best example I've heard are the Graceland McCollough Tigers from South Carolina, their cd 'Heaven' is one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard. Others include Edward Babb and the McCollough Sons of Thunder from Harlem.

" it's like fire shut up in the bones."
"we play our horns more or less like we're singing them"
James Blanchard from the 'Lively Storm' band

Honk Fest, does just that, it celebrates a movement of socially active honking marching/street bands found all over the USA. Honk Fest started in Boston and now happens on both coasts

"Across the country and around the world, a new type of street band is emerging. Acoustic and mobile, borrowing repertoire and inspiration from a diverse set of folk music traditions – New Orleans second line brass bands, European Klezmer, Balkan and Romani music, Brazilian Afro Bloc and Frevo traditions, as well as the passion and spirit of Mardi Gras and Carnival– these "honkers" all share a commitment to several core principles. Metaphorically speaking, they honk their horns for the same reasons motorists honk theirs: to arouse fellow travelers, to warn of danger, to celebrate milestones, and to just plain have fun".

<http://www.honkfest.org>

The New Orleans street/marching band had a big revival from the 1980's onwards. Bands like the Dirty Dozen and Rebirth Brass Band brought the cities up to date with modern jazz, funk, soul and rap traditions. There is now a rich world of New Orleans Brass bands like the Soul Rebels Brass band and the Hot 8 Brass band, in turn inspiring new bands in Britain and Europe.. The Young Blood Brass Band take brass and drum core sounds and put a whole new radical twist on them.

Throughout Europe many villages and towns continue to have their wind band. In the Balkans, particularly Rumania and Serbia, there is a rich gypsy brass band tradition as typified by the **Boban Marković Orkestar** and **Fanfara Ciocârlia**. Other the last ten years thus has inspired a whole genre of 'Balkan Beats' dance music. Serbia has a famous festival held in Guca every

year celebrating its extra –ordinary brass bands. Film maker Emir Kusturica features these bands in such films as *Underground*, 'Black Cat White Cat' and leads his own band The No Smoking Orchestra

Fine examples of Italian street band music can be found in the film scores of Nino Rota, especially his work for Fellini (*Amacord* is a great example). Rota also wrote music for **La Banda**, a remarkable CD by Pina Minafora. On *La Banda* (Enja Records ENJ 9326) Minafora pays tribute to and updates his southern Italian band heritage with arrangements of Bizet, Verdi and Piccini plus new works by Rota, Dutch jazz maverick Willem Breuker and the French tuba player Michel Godard.

In France there are two important street band strands.

Firstly the tradition of 'Fanfare' and 'Batterie- Fanfare band's. A community/town band tradition combining reeds and brass with mobile drum/percussion.

Secondly a highly theatrical and visual tradition, beginning maybe with Urban sax. Urban Sax were an extra-ordinary saxophone and percussion ensemble founded by the [French](#) composer [Gilbert Artman](#). The group take over urban landscapes, performing on diggers, absailing down buildings, creating vast moving landscape pieces. In the eighties they frequently performed in London, I saw them in the square by the old GLC building now the London Aquarium, part of that great fit of artistic v signs to Thatcher put on by Ken Livingston and his council before their demise

Europe had a street band revival in the 60's and 70's. Inspired by this working class music making tradition and by the Brecht collaborators Eisler and Weill, radical street bands sprang up in Holland, Germany, Italy and Britain, playing for protests, street theatre and strikes. The Dutch band **Orkest de Volharding** (the word means 'perseverance') was founded in 1972 by composer Louis Andriessen and saxophonist Willem Breuker (again). In Britain the pioneering theatre company **Welfare State International** worked with musicians like Mike Westbrook, Lol Coxhill and Luke Mishalle, creating a strong, 'rough and ready' street band style out of jazz, folk music and song, Latin and South African dance music. Other examples were the **Fall Out Band** and 'The Happy End'. Yorkshires 'The Peace Artists' continue this tradition.

Brass wind feature in some of the music of Maracatu, a North Brazilian carnival tradition with strong elements of African influence, including Maracatu de Trombones. Colombia's Cumbia and Porrol traditions are brass based.

Street and brass band traditions are often inspired by and subvert colonial models. From Africa to India and the Pacific new brass band traditions thrive. In Surinam whole kazoo orchestras mimic the shapes and forms of trumpets, tubas, saxophones and trombones. **Rob Boonjaler Flaes's** documentaries and books are excellent introductions to these traditions, although from a Dutch perspective.

In many parts of the world weddings are a focus for street bands. In India the 'Barat' or wedding procession is led by a brass band, together with fireworks and dance. Dehli is the most famous location for these bands but they exist all over the country. Iraq has a similar tradition and Gabriel Marquez in 100 Hundred Years of Solitude has band and fireworks accompany weddings.

In Africa, and especially southern Africa brass and street bands are associated with the church as in the Methodist and Moravian church bands of South Africa and Namibia. This is often gentle almost meditative brass music, the Bapholoswa Brass Band is a great example.

To get a taste of these bands

www.myspace.com/youngbloodbrass

<http://www.myspace.com/brassmonkeybrassband>

www.myspace.com/fanfareciocaria

www.myspace.com/jaipurkawabrassband

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uu_NYWp6g587

www.urbansax.com

www.myspace.com/urbansaxband