HOST INTRO

What's that music you hear? It's the second line band, turning the corner to kick off the parade. Many people in New Orleans have heard this proud and time-honored tradition—but have they heard samba? Like second line in New Orleans, samba music is a staple of Brazilian culture. And the two genres from seemingly a world apart have a lot in common. Both samba and second line have been commercialized and exploited for tourism. Justin McGlashan, Julie Gamze, and Simon Edber investigate how the rapid change of mass media culture threatens to drown out the music.

AMBI  *Stooges Brass Band*

TRACK

Inside Dixon Hall at Tulane University’s music school building, we meet Dr. John Joyce, professor of musicology and jazz studies. He’s also a second line drummer, and he’s been playing the music since the 60s. He’s seen it change through the years. Second line is a tradition of jazz music unique to New Orleans, where energetic brass bands march through the streets.

ACT (John Joyce)

Second line, and it’s almost close to Latin rhythm, but you take that, and you loosen up the “oompa-oompa” and create a shuffle. Now, a shuffle means you’re playing the march beat, [makes march beat sounds], but you’re feeling a double pulse on each beat [more drum noises].

TRACK

Dr. Joyce speaks in “drum language” to explain just what makes second line music so unique.

ACT (John Joyce)

Under it all is chuggachuggachuggachuggachugchug. We call that the shuffle rhythm. It’s a word used for boogie too. And that’s the way the Blacks, probably from the beginning, when they heard European marches in the 19th century, they put that lilt on it.

TRACK

But, Dr. Joyce explains that second line has changed a lot in his years as a musician.
ACT (John Joyce)

Now here’s the point. When it no longer became a natural extension of the Black community, and the Tourist Commission said “wait a minute, this second line, like the Mardi Gras Indians and everything else, this is something we can promote.” They may not have put it in such blunt words, but the Tourist Commission thinks of it as a package.

TRACK

Dr. Joyce blames the New Orleans Tourist Commission for distorting authentic second line music for financial gains. And many locals aren’t happy with what’s happened to their music.

ACT (John Joyce)

New Orleanians say they’re “jerking off,” “cultural jerking off,” I mean it’s a crude image but, you know, “Oh, let’s just sell the fact that we’re backwards.”

ACT (Curtis Pierre)

O que explorou para a turista foi o governo.

The people who are exploiting samba for the tourist are the government.

TRACK

Curtis Pierre is the head of Casa Samba, New Orleans’s only samba school.

AMBI *Samba music from Casa Samba*

ACT (Curtis Pierre)

Aprende o samba no Brasil mesmo. Mas, tenho um mestre, eu já trouxe para a casa em Nova Orleans, e mas quinze anos têm passado. Ele não sabia falar inglês, eu não sabia falar português, e ele me ensinou de básico de samba, mas muitas outras coisas também. Mas eu aprendei assim. Ouvi, ouvi, ouvi, ouvi, e depois descobri que essa era meu caminho.

I learned Samba in Brazil. I had a teacher, who I brought to my home in New Orleans, more than 15 years ago. He didn’t know how to speak English, and I didn’t know how to speak Portuguese. He taught me the basics of Samba, but many other things too. But I learned this way. I listened I listened I listened and I listened, and after, I discovered that this was my path.

ACT (Leo Oliveira)

Eu sou de São Paulo, nasci na Bahia, mas fui criado em São Paulo.

I am from São Paulo, but I was born in Bahia, but I lived in São Paulo.
Leo Oliveira was born in the Brazilian state of Bahia, well known for its musical and cultural heritage. At a young age, Oliveira moved to São Paulo, and later to New Orleans. He works in customer service at a major telecommunications company, but he’s also studying Latin American studies. In the same way that second line has been commercialized in New Orleans, Leo says Samba has been commercialized in Brazil through Carnival.

ACT (Leo Oliveira)

*Com certeza. Realmente é coisa de carnaval. Do carnaval, realmente é. Esse evento é o maior que existe no Brasil. Tem se comercializado, não tem tanto como era raiz de antigamente. As pessoas faziam a música com aquela paixão para representar lugares de onde viram. Hoje em dia, é mais voltado para essa coisa comercial mesmo, eles estão fazendo isso para fazer dinheiro, para fazer profit.*

Certainly. Really, it’s a Carnival thing. Carnival is really the biggest event that exists in Brazil. It has been commercialized. It’s not as it was in the beginning. People used to play music with some great passion to represent the places that they came from. Today it’s really more about this commercialized thing. They’re doing it to make money, to make profit.

Leo explains that originally, samba music was truly from the grassroots, a movement of the masses. Samba was created by the Afro-Brazilian community, a group long marginalized in Brazil.

ACT (Leo Oliveira)

*O samba na verdade é uma representação -na minha opinião- das massas, né? Aquela questão... que foi realmente criado com influência dos africanos, que tinham uma repressão total social no país e não podiam expressar sua cultura. Mas com tempo isso acabou mudando.*

Because Samba, in reality, is a representation, in my opinion, of the masses, right? That theme really grew from influence of Africans, who were completely socially repressed in the country. They weren’t able to express their culture. Over time, this began changing.

Then, Leo says, things really started to change.

*A gente fazia grandes gravadoras... Vão encorporando outros gêneros para fazer, realmente, dinheiro disso. Então, perdimos um pouco o foco de resistência, de poesia, e de melodia que apresentava antigamente. Eu acho que agora é algo mais comercial.*
They created big record labels. They kept on incorporating other genres, really to make money from this. So then we lose the focus of resistance, of poetry, of melody that was present before. I think that now it’s something more commercial.

TRACK

Roberto Nascimento is a Brazilian exchange student here at Tulane. He is from Fortaleza, a city in the country’s Northeastern state of Ceará. Forró is a style of folk music typical in this region of Brazil. According to Roberto, forró, like Samba and second line music, has changed a lot over the years, but not for the same reasons.

ACT (Roberto Nascimento)

Eu lembro quando os meus pais tinham minha idade, o forró era mais familiar. A letra das músicas era uma coisa mais romântica. Hoje em dia, não é mais tão familiar. É mais sexual hoje em dia.

I remember that when my parents were my age forró was more familiar. The lyrics of the songs were more romantic. Nowadays, it isn’t as familiar. It’s more sexual these days.

TRACK

Despite the outside influences that have changed Brazil’s musical cultures, many Brazilians still feel that samba is a critical part of their identity.

ACT (Gabriel Pissolati)

Eu sinto orgulho do samba. Frequentemente eu escutava samba e acho que o samba é a identidade do Brasileiro. Num show de samba se consegue unir classes sociais diferentes, pessoas diferentes, porque isso é uma coisa comum em grandes partes dos Brasileiros.

It makes me proud. I used to listen to samba frequently and I believe it is the identity of the Brazilian. At a samba performance different social classes and different people are united because that is something common among Brazilians.

TRACK

Gabriel Pissolati is an exchange student from the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. Mr. Pierre from Casa Samba agrees with him on the importance of samba in Brazilian culture.

ACT (Curtis Pierre)

A pessoa tem um amor para o samba. Eles não fazem para a turista. Fazem para o coração. Eles gostam de samba! Eles gostam de fazer. É como aqui, tipo second line. Aqui mais turistas gostam de ver, mas eles fazem para outra coisa. Eles têm amor deste tipo de coisa.... Para mim, é um casamento, um casamento natural.
A person has a love for Samba. [The samba musicians] don’t do it for the tourist. They do it for their hearts. They like Samba! They like to do it. Like here, like second line. Here more tourists like to see it. But they do it for another reason. They love this kind of thing... For me, it’s a marriage, a natural marriage.

TRACK

Still, as far as second line in New Orleans is concerned, Dr. Joyce worries about the lack of authenticity in the music, and what that may mean for the future of New Orleans’s musical culture. He says the way most second line bands play today is phony.

ACT (John Joyce)

Now, it’s nothing musically, but what it is, is black street energy. They got that! Boy, that’s exciting! But it’s kind of faking. They’re playing little sharp riffs and it’s a mixture of bebop licks and rhythm and blues licks and funk, and this and that. And of course, it’s successful in the limited sense of the “tourist package” because again they go around the world. And it’s a pale rickety version of what it once was.

SEND-OFF

For WTUL, this is Simon Edber with Justin McGlashan and Julie Gamze.

AMBI *Stooges Brass Band*