

The Dirt Red Brass Band

Trip to New Orleans

March 22nd to March 30th

Special thanks to the Dean's Fund

Dirt Red Brass Band's Trip to New Orleans

Here's a [video compilation](#) of our trip!

Background

The Dirt Red Brass Band is UChicago's New Orleans-style student jazz band, formed on campus during Fall Quarter 2012. With 22 members, including five inducted this year through auditions, Dirt Red has been performing on campus multiple times each quarter since Winter 2013, with well-attended concerts in Hutchinson Commons, Logan Arts Center, and other venues. Dirt Red has played at on-campus events for many RSOs including the Maroon's Grey City launch party, COUP's Mardi Gras party, AKPsi's Game Night, and the Summer Breeze Carnival on the Quad.

Most members of Dirt Red learned to play music by reading sheet music in school bands. However, New Orleans jazz is not usually written down: it is dispersed through listening and imitating. Dirt Red follows this tradition, as everything we play is arranged by band members who listen to recordings of well-known New Orleans musicians. However, we feel that listening to recordings can only take us so far, which is why we travelled to New Orleans as a band this Spring Break.

The band's goals with this trip were to a) experience the musical culture of New Orleans, the birthplace of the style of jazz we play, b) to grow and cohere as a band by rehearsing and playing together every day in diverse settings and c) bringing what we learned back to campus and sharing it with the student body through our performances and regular open workshops . With the financial support of the Dean's Fund, the Student Government Finance Committee, and our own funds, we achieved these goals, and had a great time!

The *Maroon* also wrote an article about this trip based on interviews with members [here](#).

Getting Started

The trip was during Spring Break, from March 22nd to March 30th. Immediately after finals week, the band hopped the *City of New Orleans* Amtrak train and headed for the Big Easy.





The band arrives in NOLA and checks into the hotel

We soon scouted out rehearsal spots and got started sharpening up our tunes.



Rehearsing in a park.

Since the band usually only rehearses once a week, rehearsing together every day was a unique opportunity to tighten up our sound and cohere as a band.

Busking Begins

Before long, we created opportunities to play on the street.



By the end of the night, our tunes had drawn up an audience!

One Thing Leads to Another

The next day, rehearsal continued in another nearby park:



We then headed back to Jackson Square for more busking to prepare for our next big gig, The House of Blues! But what better way to prepare than by learning from a real, New Orleans Brass Band, the *Young Fellaz* Brass Band?



The *Young Fellaz* brass band was a local group who really knew how to play. Having our instruments with us, we took the initiative and joined in with them. This was just the right combination of experiencing New Orleans Culture and developing our music.



Playing with the *Young Fellaz* in front of a lively crowd.

As much as we wanted to stay, it was time to leave for the House of Blues. It was a not only exciting to be up on stage, but it also allowed us to be hooked up to a sound system, which featured some of the instruments (violin, banjo) and voices that were harder to hear on the street.



Dirt Red on Stage at House of Blues

More Bands: The Dirty Dozen and Pocket Aces

But this wouldn't be the last time we would be up on stage. Later in the week, we went to a free music festival at a public park where *Dirty Dozen*, a big inspiration for our band, played. This wasn't the only reason that we went. Before the trip we had made efforts to connect with bands in New Orleans. The Pocket Aces responded and asked us to play at the *Dirty Dozen's* after show.



The *Dirty Dozen* concert also provided an opportunity for a great group shot:



One of the highlights of the night was that we didn't just walk over to the after show. We made it there the only way Nola knows how: Second lining. Marching all the way to the after party while blasting *O When the Saints*, was a familiar experience to our band, as we've done it before on our own UChicago's quad. But this was Nola. And it was a blast.



Action shot of the second line

We made it to the after party where we first watched the Pocket Aces perform their set. Then in the last half of the show, they invited us on stage to play and jam.

The End

After being inspired by the *Dirty Dozen* and *Pocket Aces*, we spent our last day rehearsing, and busked in Jackson Square once more. We then packed up and got on the train back to Chicago. There, we resumed our normal academic lives, having been educated in New Orleans in a unique, musical way!

Conclusion

Our plan while in New Orleans was to listen to as much authentic New Orleans jazz as possible, rehearse, and play in many diverse settings, and we were successful! We rehearsed every day, and it paid off in the amount of collaborations we formed and opportunities we found to play.

Overall this trip allowed the band's members to grow as musicians and the band to perform New Orleans jazz more authentically. Through this, UChicago's cultural scene, including events for

all the RSOs mentioned above, will be enriched through the songs we've learned and brought back and through the tighter cohesion and authenticity of our music.