

News

Fats

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he lost three pianos and dozens of gold and platinum records, along with other memorabilia.

Many wondered if he would ever return to the stage.

But in May 2007, he was back, performing at Tipitina's music club in New Orleans. Fans cheered — and some cried — as Domino played “I’m Walkin’,” “Ain’t It a Shame,” “Shake, Rattle and Roll,” “Blueberry Hill” and a host of other hits.

That performance was a highlight during several rough years. After losing their home and almost all their belongings to the floods, his wife of more than 50 years, Rosemary, died in April 2008.

Domino moved to the New Orleans suburb of Harvey after the storm but would often visit his publishing house, an extension of his old home in the Lower 9th Ward, inspiring many with his determination to stay in the city he loved.

“Fats embodies everything good about New Orleans,” his friend David Lind said in a 2008 interview. “He’s warm, fun-loving, spiritual, creative and humble. You don’t get more New Orleans than that.”

The son of a violin player, Antoine Domi-



PHOTO: HAYDEE ELLIS

Fats Domino at home, 2012.

no Jr. was born on Feb. 26, 1928, to a family that grew to include nine children. As a youth, he taught himself popular piano styles — ragtime, blues and boogie-woogie. Fats Waller and Albert Ammons were early influences.

He quit school at age 14, and worked days in a factory while playing and singing in local juke joints at night. In 1949, Domino was playing at the Hideaway Club for \$3 a week when he was signed by Imperial record company.

He recorded his first song, “The Fat Man,” in the back of a tiny French Quarter recording stu-

dio. “They call me the Fat Man, because I weigh 200 pounds,” he sang. “All the girls, they love me, ‘cause I know my way around.”

In 1955, he broke into the white pop charts with “Ain’t it a Shame,” covered blandly by Pat Boone as “Ain’t That a Shame” and rocked out decades later under that title by Cheap Trick and others. Domino enjoyed a parade of successes through the early 1960s, including “Be My Guest” and “I’m Ready.” Another hit, “I’m Walkin’,” became the debut single for Ricky Nelson.

Domino appeared in the rock ‘n’ roll film “The Girl Can’t Help It” and was among the first black performers to be featured in popular music shows, starring with Buddy Holly and the Everly Brothers. He also helped bridge rock ‘n’ roll and other styles — even country/western, recording Hank Williams’ “Jambalaya” and Bobby Charles’ “Walkin’ to New Orleans.”

Like many of his peers, Domino’s popularity tapered off in the 1960s as British and psychedelic rock held sway.

“I refused to change,” he told Ebony magazine. “I had to stick to my own style that I’ve always used or it just wouldn’t be me.”

Antoine and Rosemary Domino raised eight children in the same ramshackle neighborhood

where he grew up, but they did it in style — in a white mansion, trimmed in pink, yellow and lavender.

In 1988, all of New Orleans seemed to be talking about him after he reportedly paid cash for two Cadillacs and a \$130,000 Rolls-Royce. When the salesman asked if he wanted to call his bank about financing, Domino smiled and said, “I am the bank.”

In 1998, he became the first purely rock ‘n’ roll musician to be awarded the National Medal for the Arts. But he cited his age and didn’t make the trip to the White House to get the medal from President Clinton.

That was typical. Aside from rare appearances in New Orleans, including a 2012 cameo spot in the HBO series “Treme,” he dodged the spotlight

in his later years, refusing to appear in public or even to give interviews.

Associated Press writer Hillel Italie in New York City contributed to this story.

“Fats Domino and The Birth of Rock ‘n’ Roll,” which premiered in February 2016 on PBS, will re-air Oct. 29. The one-hour documentary traces how Fats Domino’s brand of New Orleans rhythm and blues morphed into rock and roll, appealing to black and white audiences alike. Actor Clarke Peters narrates. The episode is also available streaming at www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/fats-domino-full-episode/6753.

Puerto Rico cont'd from pg 8

and castigated Trump for his constant congratulatory comments to first responders, FEMA, and others in his administration.

“He’s patting himself on the back. [Trump found time] to put down Black athletes over the weekend and not once did he say anything about Puerto Rico,” she said. We’ve been shunned, pushed to side. We don’t need any more excuses. Puerto Rico needs help right now. You don’t do this to other Americans. We need the federal government to come to the rescue. We need compassion and leadership to come together. We’ve fought for and bled for this country. We’re part of America.”

Critics have chided Trump for ignoring the crisis for the first week after Hurricane Maria

slammed into the island. He spent more time tweeting to demand that NFL players kneel for the anthem than expressing any compassion or concern for Puerto Rico’s plight. And to add insult to injury, Elaine Duke, acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security crowed at the end of the first week that the federal efforts on the island as a “good news” story.

Trump’s nonchalance has angered Puerto Ricans and a raft of other critics, including singer Marc Anthony and San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz.

“Mr. President, shut the f*** up about the NFL. Do something about our people in need in #PuertoRico. We are American citizens, too,” the singer tweeted on September 25.

During a recent interview on CNN, Yulín Cruz lambasted attempts by the White House to spin the situation in Puerto Rico as a “good news story.”

“When you’re drinking from a creek, it’s not a ‘good news story.’ When you don’t have food for a baby, it’s not a ‘good news story,’” she said. “When you have to pull people down from their buildings because—you know, I’m sorry, but that really upsets me and frustrates me.”

Yulín Cruz continued: “This is—damn it, this is not a ‘good news’ story. This is a ‘people-are-dying’ story. This is a ‘life-or-death’ story. This is a ‘there’s-a-truckload-of-stuff-that-cannot-be-taken-to-people’ story. This is a story of a devastation that continues to worsen.”

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