

DR. JOHN
YOSHI'S, OAKLAND
NOVEMBER 2003



On the plane ride back from the New Orleans Zombie Fest, who should accompany us but one Mac Rebennack otherwise known as Dr. John. We thought it would be a hoot to extend our New Orleans experience by finding out where he was to play, and to our immense pleasure we discovered he was just blowing into town for a five night run at our favorite venue, Yoshi's at Jack London Square. Tix were selling out, even with no advertising, but we managed to snag the late show on Friday.

The Zombie Fest turned out to be a badly managed gathering of top-notch bands who deserved hella better than the mess they got themselves thrust into.

Talking to folks, the day portion of the celebration in the big park to the north of the 9th Ward was scalding hot, as in weather, but some tree cover, if it could be found, was helpful. The night session was a disaster as well over 40,000 folks packed into that area – which was entirely unlit save for some of the concessions.

The “volunteers” had no idea where anything was, which made navigation in the crowded darkness rather difficult. Couldn’t get to see Iggy Pop as they put his act on a stage that just happened to be on an island connected to the mainland by a narrow bridge. Always helpful, New Orleans finest remained plonked on a full sized horse at the entrance to the bridge, further bunging up the flow of thousands of people trying to funnel into – and out of – a narrow passage about eight feet wide. Really dumb.

After a couple hours, during which we heard exactly one act – other than Iggy from a distance of about a mile – by finding space behind the stage, we bagged the entire Fest and went to a club. Have to wonder about supplying unrationed alcohol to 40,000 people crammed into an open place without lights or signs or maps or useful guides who had no idea where the Red Cross tent happened to be, let alone anything else of potential use.

No in-out privileges for the 18-hour long festival day, no shuttles to this non-tourist section of town, no information supplied, no guides or signs for the entrances and no signs or guides for the exits. We say, keep well away from the Zombie Festival until the organizers learn to organize.

Dr. John helped ease the pain of the wasted \$70 Zombie ticket price.

The good Dr. has had his ups and downs over the years since coming into the world in New Orleans in 1941, but with his latest CD release, *Creole Moon*, he returns to the funk and voodoo styles that launched him in the mid-sixties, but with the musical sophistication developed by years of experience in the business. At Yoshi's we saw a master really hitting his stride at the top of his game once again, performing effortlessly and with economy of motion, simultaneously trilling the electric organ with one hand while pounding a full sized grand piano with the other.

Like his new CD, the show featured a fair number of Doc Pomus collaborations as well as some funky Caribbee and West African rhythms. The man has become such a stylized icon that he can move the entire room by shifting his eyebrows with consummate cool

Here is a shot of the good Doctor in an earlier incarnation. Would that he would have known then he would become a giant of jazz.



Once again accompanied by guitarist Renard Poche plus drummer Herman Ernest III and bassist David Barard as the band called "Lower 911", Dr. John brought the crowd to its feet and had them dancing in the aisles in true New Orleans style. He opened with a very catchy "Now that You Got Me", moved to "The Wrong Side of the Tracks" and settled down for a tender "I'll Always Love You" before getting funkified with "Boop Boop Be Do." Then followed his famous "Gris Gris" and the old standards "Right Place Wrong Time" and "Tipitina".

Dr. John, many were healed that night.