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Preservation Party

By Josef Woodard, July 6, 2006

TRADITION PATROL: Tonight's **Preservation Hall Jazz Band** (PHJB) soirée at the Lobero Theatre promises to be a venue-related symbiotic love fest. The Lobero is the most beloved and historic of Santa Barbara's theaters (its roots extend back to the late 19th century). The PHJB's home venue is historic on multiple fronts. The Hall itself is a rustic fixer-upper in New Orleans's fabled French Quarter, a structure dating back to the early 19th century.

In 1961, trad jazz lover and tuba player **Allan Jaffe** and his wife, Sandra, turned the place into a band HQ, dedicated to preserving the traditional jazz style of the early 20th century, the idiomatic source from which jazz grew and became America's greatest indigenous art form. The band itself has passed through Santa Barbara countless times on their summer tours out west, but this time around, in the acoustically welcoming space of the Lobero, is special.

This year, the band is working in the wake of Katrina, finding more gigs and open ears, but is also stinging from its city's ongoing travails. Preservation Hall itself suffered only slight physical damage, but the crimped tourist flow and dislodged cultural identity is a hurting thing. Musically, the song remains the same, but five members lost their homes and now live elsewhere, and leader-bassist **Ben Jaffe** (Allan's son) has formed a fund to support Crescent City musicians.

This is a fine time to revisit the band's joyous and deep-veined musical message, and in a happy old musical home.

HAIL TO THE BAND THAT MATTERS: Did **Radiohead** really play at the Santa Barbara Bowl four years ago, or was that just a blissful dream that several thousand of us had, still reeling from the memory thereof? It was the season before they completed their most recent album, *Hail to the Thief*, and all agreed that our Bowl was an ideal spot to absorb their epic/ambient sound. We continue wishing they'll stop here again, but the band — after hatching families and tiring of the Big Road Warrior Rock Band drill — has moved to larger venues and more compact tours.

They're still one of the only bands that matter, whether or not they're riding the wave of a new album, which they weren't on their recent tour. They did play a number of new songs from a work-in-progress, and the prospects sound bright. (Meanwhile, **Thom Yorke** has released a solo album.) Radiohead is well worth driving a distance for, even to San Diego, where they played last week in the evocative waterfront setting of the Embarcadero Marina. (At one point in the show, Yorke jokingly hollered, "Hey you, in those boats — did you *pay*?")

They opened with the beguiling hit "There There" — with its delayed snare drum gratification — and ran through a hypnotic parade of songs new and old. We also got impressionistic interludes and codas, like the lingering loops after "Everything in Its Right Place."

Some have called Radiohead a latter-day extension of Pink Floyd, which makes some sense. But the band outta Oxford is less sentimental, and more sophisticated in its musical explorations, inspiring attention from observers normally indifferent about rock — like the *New Yorker's* astute

classical critic Alex Ross, who brilliantly profiled the band a few years back. They're happy to experiment with odd meters, oblique lyrics and textures, and chords you never find in the rock 'n' roll bible. That's partly why we love them. Plus, they rock live, and they sound like your dreams.

STAGESPEAK OF THE WEEK: At the Ford Amphitheater, at the Los Angeles premiere of *Leonard Cohen: I'm Your Man* (fab film: don't miss it), **Leonard Cohen** issued some Cohenesque humor and humility onstage: "I'm going to the green room to get a drink, to fortify myself for the inevitable moral pneumonia following a blizzard of praise." (Got e? *fringebeat@aol.com.*)