

TREME

**HBO Continuing Series
Pilot Episode**

**Written by
David Simon & Eric Overmyer**

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WHITE ON BLACK CARD:

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Words fade, a moment more of black, then:

THREE MONTHS AFTER

Words fade again, and we:

FADE IN:

EXT. SOCIAL AID & PLEASURE CLUB/6TH WARD/NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Amid the background CLATTER, LAUGHTER and MURMURS of a CROWD gathering and waiting, the following MONTAGE of bits and pieces: A trumpet mouthpiece being greased and fingered by black hands. A bass drum being hoisted against a heavy-set torso. Roasting pork loins being turned on a smoking barbecue. Black hands passing mixed drinks from atop a plank-wood bar on the back of a pickup bed to other hands, white, who pass back dollars. A homegoing flyer of a Katrina victim tacked to a gilded fan that flaps softly against the grizzled face of a male DANCER, his eyes shielded by the brim of his fedora. A plastic water cooler, wheeled, being tugged past the assorted footwear of the crowd. The hands of a TROMBONIST, black, fitting the slide of his instrument and testing its action. The tailored, sequined shoulder of another costumed DANCER of the pleasure club, leaning against a cinder-block wall, as the camera PANS DOWN to catch a last Newport burning in his brown fingers. A snare drum being tested for a measure or two with the drag of a second-line beat, and then the hands of the DRUMMER tightening the drumhead on the side.

The CROWD becomes more restive, the LAUGHTER louder, the SHOUTS more resonant, and the snatches of MUSICAL TUNE-UP more distinct. And the MONTAGE expands from fragments of humanity to visions of WHOLE PEOPLE, beginning with: A nine-year-old URCHIN, black, throwing himself into a short string of Funky Butt second-line moves. He comes out of his glide, turns, smiling as the LAUGHTER of others envelopes him; A SOUSAPHONE PLAYER hopping from a battered van and lugging his massive instrument over his shoulder, smiling with gold-toothed grill at the greeting he receives from others; a HEAVY-SET WOMAN pouring gin and juice, vodka tonics, rum and colas from that makeshift bar on the back of a pickup, handing off drinks for cash; the TRUMPETER, pointing his horn upward and launching the turnaround riff of "Treme Second Line," then pausing, shaking his head at a tone that seems warm and sharp, adjusting his mouthpiece -- not yet, not until the dancers are ready. A solitary helmeted MOTORCYCLE COP, black, leans against a New Orleans police cruiser, eyeing the growing cluster of BODIES wearily. A few WHITE COLLEGE KIDS, waiting with Tulane sweatshirts and open beers at one fringe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A copse of BLACK TEENAGERS watch, waiting, passing a joint. The SOUSAPHONE PLAYER hoists his instrument, pumping out a bit of bassline, and then downing a bottled water in one long gulp. And finally, as the moment builds, a roll-by of Ninth Ward GANGSTAS in a tricked-out SUV, hardcore coke rap -- a snatch of Cheeky Blakk, local legend -- pumping a bassline over the scene; and, of course, a full contingent of New Orleans uniformed POLICE OFFICERS and SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES, some in good spirits, some eyefucking the SUV as it passes, then turning their attention, eyes veiled with vague contempt, to the rest of the CROWD, which now numbers a couple hundred. The GATHERING is mostly black but with a number of white BOHEMIANS in the mix. They have gathered around a battered cinder-block edifice in the wreckage of a post-Katrina street in the Upper Sixth Ward. Vacant, ruined buildings in every direction. Cars roll up, edging through the knots of BYSTANDERS, depositing more SOULS into the cluster of humanity that waits outside the building, which is adorned with a hand-painted banner on a sheet pinioned to a water-warped second-floor balcony. It reads: The Money Wasters Social Aid & Pleasure Club, Est. 1906, Autumn Second Line & Parade, November 12, 2005, In Honor of Fallen Members. LAUGHTER, SHOUTS, the MURMUR of growing anticipation and snatches of horn riffs and drum fills are HEARD as more and more BODIES cluster in a semicircle around the front door of the club, waiting for The Money Wasters, fully adorned, to come out, one behind the other. On their anticipation,

CUT TO:

INT. SOCIAL AID & PLEASURE CLUB/6TH WARD - DAY

Decked out for their fall parade, THE MONEY WASTERS are pristine in purple suits, each with matching fedoras. Their cuffs and collars are carefully sequined and each carries a matching fan that features a photograph and memorial to a fallen club member. The MEN primp and adjust themselves and try not to sweat in the tight, broken room as one of them argues with the SNARE DRUMMER over cash money.

MONEY WASTER #1

...Naw, see, the twelve hunnert was for eight pieces. An' you said Shorty was gonna be steppin' with y'all.

The SNARE DRUMMER, Keith Frazier of the Rebirth Brass Band, nods his head, affirming.

FRAZIER

Shorty gonna make it.

MONEY WASTER #1

He ain't here now. I seen you only got the one bone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRAZIER

Shorty had a funeral this morning.
His aunt, I think.

MONEY WASTER #1

Be that as it may...

FRAZIER

Naw, look we already cut our price.
An' we got seven now to step off
with.

MONEY WASTER #1

Seven don't get twelve. Seven get
ten, seem to me.

MURMURS of affirmation and true-dats from the other MONEY WASTERS, who are sweating, impatient to get started. FRAZIER shakes his head, feeling taken. They're already parading for less than \$200 a man.

FRAZIER

Shit ain't right. Shorty gonna come.

FRAZIER looks at MONEY WASTER #1, who seems to back down, nodding agreement.

MONEY WASTER #1

Yeah. Shit definitely ain't right.
(softly)
I mean, look around you. Look at
this damn place.

The MUSICIAN looks around at a wrecked club, watermarks halfway up walls still unrepaired from mold damage. Broken, warped furniture gathered against a wall. Windows on the side of the building still boarded months later.

MONEY WASTER #1 (CONT'D)

We ain't even got money enough to
turn the electric back up in here.
(shakes head, laughs)

We had to shake out the last scratch
to get this year's costumes off
layaway. Shit definitely not right.

MONEY WASTER #2

Still owe Meyer for the fedoras,
man. Ain't paid but half.

FRAZIER takes this in: The club decked out for their parade, not a dime left after getting themselves costumed.

FRAZIER

Y'all do look correct.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MONEY WASTER #1

Got to.

FRAZIER nods, surrenders. MONEY WASTER #1 smiles.

MONEY WASTER #1 (CONT'D)

My man.

As he slaps the thousand into FRAZIER's hand to the general APPROVAL of the entire club,

CUT TO:

EXT. SOCIAL AID & PLEASURE CLUB/6TH WARD - DAY

CROWD is now fat, happy, half-drunk outside the club, impatient to roll, as FRAZIER steps out, meets eyes with his brother, PHIL FRAZIER, the sousaphonist.

PHIL

Twelve, right?

FRAZIER sighs and PHIL looks at him wearily.

FRAZIER

Yeah, well. We in Nawlins, dawg.
Money hard to come by for some folks.
Least that's what I hear.

PHIL grunts a laugh, licks his lips, and addresses his instrument. The bassline to "Feel Like Funkin' It Up" emerges. FRAZIER kicks up his snare and the rest of the band responds. The CROWD begins to dance as the club door flies open and MONEY WASTER #1 makes his entrance to CHEERS and SHOUTS. He works his best moves for a long minute, then makes way for MONEY WASTER #2 and so forth, each working either an umbrella or fan, each dazzling the CROWD with second-line steps. As the BAND hits the chorus and sings:

SECOND-LINE BAND

*I feel like funk'in' it up, feel like
funk'in' it up. I feel like...*

As THE MONEY WASTERS begin their autumnal parade,

CUT TO:

INT. TAXICAB/STREET NEAR THE CLUB/6TH WARD - DAY

A musician, moderately heavy-set, grasping a trombone, call him ANTOINE BATISTE, is in the backseat of a cab, the rear door flung open, arguing with the DRIVER, a white "yat" -- from the phrase "where y'at?" -- who delivers his words in the strangely Brooklynese accent that calls to mind Louis Prima.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATISTE

No, see, I'm short, I know. But you went down St. Claude. If you turn on Gentilly, it woulda been less.

DRIVER

You wanted to go out Gentilly, you shoulda done told me.

BATISTE

I woulda but I thought you knew...

DRIVER

You done told me dat, I'da done dat, no problem.

DRIVER sees WOMAN in crowd, shouts out.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Hey, baby, where y'at?

(to BATISTE)

I know that Geraldine.

As they argue, LATECOMERS are stepping past the cab toward the parade, which has started down the street, THE MONEY WASTERS followed by the BAND followed by the CROWD itself, step-dancing down the street, then followed by the POLICE ESCORT. BATISTE looks at his parade leaving without him, turns back to DRIVER in exasperation.

BATISTE

Look, man, I ain't got but seven. When I get up there with them and play the parade, I'll have it. Aight? I'll find you. I will.

DRIVER

You'll find me?

BATISTE

Yeah, you know...

DRIVER smiles, shakes his head, laughs, takes cash.

BATISTE (CONT'D)

Thanks, brother. I owe you.

DRIVER

Yeah, you right.

As BATISTE jumps out of the cab, begins jogging after parade,

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET/UPPER 6TH WARD - DAY

"Feel Like Funkin' It Up" going full bore. THE MONEY WASTERS grinding, sweating. The second-line CROWD flowing out behind and beside the MUSICIANS, a wave of dancing, LAUGHING, drinking, dope-smoking humanity. Some DANCERS jump on derelict cars, on warped porches, on vacant store steps, highlighting their best moves. Others smack traffic signs for percussion, the COPS roll slowly behind, paid to escort this mess, but with no love for it, and siren WHOOPS oddly punctuating the MUSIC. BATISTE comes running, already in a sweat, wailing in with his trombone to steal a solo.

TRUMPETER

Aw shit. Lookit who came.

The rest of the BAND reacts with mild surprise.

FRAZIER

Thought you had downtown gigs.

BATISTE keeps playing, building his solo.

BASS DRUMMER

Look out.

FRAZIER

When the last time you saw this motherfucker second-line?

(to BATISTE)

First thing to go is them legs, ol' man.

BATISTE builds his solo on a last chorus.

TROMBONIST

He stole that from Tyrus, man. Tyrus use that riff to death.

BATISTE eyefucks the other TROMBONIST over the last notes of his solo, hits a last, long note and lowers his instrument.

BATISTE

Negro, if you are referring to Mr. Chapman, the fact is he appropriated that particular musical ornamentation from my personage.

TRUMPETER

Damn. Nigga been playin' downtown.

LAUGHTER from the BAND, as the SAXOPHONIST solos.

FRAZIER

Shorty ain't gonna make it, huh?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATISTE

Shorty sent me. Said to show you
all how to play this here music.

MOANS, more LAUGHTER. BATISTE throws a sharp lick over the
top of the sax for emphasis.

BATISTE (CONT'D)

You hear? That's the sound of the
Sixth Ward in my bone. Ya'll don't
know nothin' 'bout that.

TRUMPETER

Shit. Let's see how you sound six
or seven miles from now.

BATISTE

Blow your horn, fool.

LAUGHTER. TRUMPETER smiles, joins the chorus. BATISTE winks
at the other MUSICIANS as he nears the bone to his lips.

BATISTE (CONT'D)

Play for that money, boys. Play for
that motherfuckin' money.

BATISTE plays. PULL BACK on the PARADE marching through the
battered Upper Sixth, a procession of joy amid wrecked houses,
boarded-up storefronts and white FEMA trailers. The band
hits the chorus again, SINGS, with BATISTE joining. The
CROWD sings along, embracing a moment as this city can.

BAND & CROWD

*I feel like funkin' it up, feel like
funkin' it up. I feel like funkin'
it up, feel like funkin' it...*

On what is left of the soul of New Orleans, Louisiana, trying
to find its way,

FADE TO:

MAIN TITLES: "TREME SONG," BY JOHN BOUTTE

FADE IN:

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM/GOVERNOR NICHOLLS STREET/TREME - DAY

Second-floor room of a Treme neighborhood wood-frame in
considerable disarray. Clothes, dishes, vinyl record albums
and CDs everywhere, books, magazines, an upright piano against
one wall. Windows open to a side balcony. The sound of THE
MONEY WASTERS' parade slowly wafts over two FORMS nestled
under a tangle of sheets. FORM #1, male, begins to hum the
tune: "It's All Over Now."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FORM #2 female, shushes him, irritated. Suddenly, FORM #1 bolts upright in bed, revealing DAVIS ROGAN, white, thirties, gangly, with wayward hair and a soul patch, listening intently for a moment.

FORM #2

I thought you were hungover.

ROGAN reaches over to the nightstand, knocking a stack of CDs before he finds his wire-rims. He puts them on, gets up, walks out nude onto his balcony, squints down the street. Then he staggers back to the bed.

ROGAN

The Money Wasters. Their autumn
second line coming down Esplanade.

FORM #2

Hmmm.

ROGAN

Sounds like they got Rebirth on it.

ROGAN begins to hum again, sliding into a lyric:

ROGAN (CONT'D)

*...Made me cry, she done me wrong.
Had my nose open, that's no lie...*

FORM #2 emerges to reveal JANETTE DESAUTEL, twenties, white, tousled yet attractive, an improbable catch for ROGAN and for this rather disordered environment. Before ROGAN can get an arm around her, she is out of bed making a beeline for the hallway and the bathroom.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

First shower is me.

DESAUTEL

I have to get to the restaurant.

She exits to the hallway. Conversation becomes SHOUTS.

ROGAN

I have to get to the second-line.

DESAUTEL

Whatever hot water you have in here
is for me. Not you. Me.

We hear the SHOWER. ROGAN smiles at that, leans over, hits the CD player on his nightstand. The HORNS and RAPS of the Soul Rebels fill the room as DESAUTEL emerges, frowning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN

I paid the water bill. In full.

DESAUTEL

Gas and electric, not so much.

ROGAN

I'm a musician. It's bad form for me to pay all my bills at once.

DESAUTEL

You're a disc jockey. And I can't believe I didn't go home last night when I had the chance.

DESAUTEL grabs her jeans, begins to dress.

ROGAN

No cold shower for you, huh?

ROGAN is up, moving toward the bathroom.

DESAUTEL

You are a cold shower.

ROGAN

Last night, not so much...

He kisses her on the forehead, keeps going. On DESAUTEL, dressing quickly, checking herself in the mirror and doing what she can, hoping to rush home and clean up before work,

CUT TO:

EXT. TREME STREET/TREME - DAY

THE MONEY WASTERS are bringing it through the heart of the Treme, breaking out their best moves as the parade lurches past St. Augustine's, the REBIRTH BRASS BAND still pumping "It's All Over Now," behind the costumed DANCERS and behind the BAND, the vast tail of SECOND-LINERS, all breaking moves, LAUGHING, SINGING, GREETING people unseen since the last second line, or in some cases, unseen since before the hurricane. Some slap stop signs and a few of the smaller KIDS jump on parked cars to bust a move. A shout goes up from some of the DANCERS.

DANCERS

Spiderman! Spiderman!

Up on the St. Augustine's roof peak, a lone DANCER, black, twenties, male -- famous for finding an aerie to show his stuff during second-line parades, then disappearing only to reveal himself on some other rooftop or highway overpass blocks later -- is breaking it down to the CHEERS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dressed in dirty, torn jeans, Converse and a vintage All That tee-shirt, ROGAN bounds into the CROWD of second-liners, throwing a few moves to some SHOUTS and then greeting the other DANCERS, including a black dread-locked forty-something named REESE and a thirty-something whiteboy with an improbable red Afro, known to the black dancers as SIMPLY REDS, or since he cut his hair back to shoulder-length, SIMPLY.

ROGAN

Gentlemen, three of the Furious Five on duty and on call. I salute you.

REESE

Thought you weren't gonna make it.

ROGAN

You mock me, sir. If you persist in doing so, I will have satisfaction.

REESE

Be satisfied. It's all good.

REESE goes to a KID towing a cooler on wheels, offers a buck, pulls an Abita from the ice, tosses it to ROGAN. SIMPLY comes out of a move, nods at the BAND.

SIMPLY

Most of the Rebirth, some of the Hot Eight. And Antoine Batiste on the bone today. See? I can't remember when I seen him play a second-line.

ROGAN

(popping beer top)
Yeah, money is tight.

REESE

Back to broke, it ain't no joke.

At that lyric, ROGAN and REESE rap a bit of the All That tune. REESE nods at the beer.

REESE (CONT'D)

You satisfied now?

ROGAN

No, dawg. I was playin' with you. I was saying, I will have satisfaction. That's what a gentlemen says when he wishes to duel. Ya feel? Like pistols at ten paces.

REESE

(trying it out)
I will have satisfaction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN

Yeah, you say that shit and then you slap the bitch across the face with a glove.

REESE

You go 'round slappin' motherfuckers you gonna get got by some nigga ready to do his thirty over the Parish.

ROGAN

A figure of speech, my man. Figure of speech.

SIMPLY

Reesie, show him the new move.

REESE cuts an improbable, outrageous move. A couple GIRLS nearby CHEER at the novelty of it.

GIRL

Furious Five bustin' moves. Where the rest of y'all at?

REESE

Gibb in Atlanta. Can't get home.

SIMPLY

Mason's in Houston.

ROGAN

Furious Three today, ma'am. At your service and duly committed.

ROGAN throws a move. The GIRL laughs again.

REESE

All good. It's all good.

As the BAND plays, and they dance, and the parade wheels its way deeper into the broken neighborhoods of New Orleans,

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - DAY

Gleaming, but cramped. DESAUTEL breezes in. The sous-chef, JACQUES VAZ, tall, black, bald, elegant, with a French-Senegalese accent, is prepping.

DESAUTEL

Jacques.

She whips through to the changing room/office. JACQUES continues his prep, calm, unruffled.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DESAUTEL is back in a moment, tying on a chef's apron.

DESAUTEL (CONT'D)

So quiet around here. How can you work?

She flicks the radio on -- WWOZ, the sound of Nawlins, now playing Tom McDermott's piano -- and gets down to business, throwing open a cooler, checking a delivery, etc.

DESAUTEL (CONT'D)

Where is everybody?

JACQUES

Pedro's running late...

DESAUTEL

Wardell?

JACQUES

He got a job at Irene's. Ten an hour.

DESAUTEL

Dishwashing? Damn. Things are all outa whack. What's your cousin doing? Raymond?

JACQUES

I could call him.

DESAUTEL

If you wouldn't mind.

JACQUES

No problem. What about Pedro?

DESAUTEL

I'm so over Pedro.

(reading bill of laden)

Ah, crawfish, excellent. See? Things are getting better. It's crawfish season, how bad could life be?

JACQUES

It's half.

DESAUTEL

That's not gonna get me through tonight.

JACQUES

We could get frozen from Langenstein's.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DESAUTEL

We could parade naked down Prytania Street, too. I'm not gonna do it. No fucking frozen Chinese crawfish in my kitchen. I get my strawberries?

JACQUES

Other cooler.

DESAUTEL

Ponchatoula strawberries, Atchafalaya crawfish, life is good in Louisiana'. Where are my oysters?

JACQUES

They said sorry, not today.

DESAUTEL

Shit.

(closing cooler)

Charmaine, she should be setting up.

SHE turns on her heel, exits to:

INT. DINING ROOM/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - DAY

The dining room is not set up. It's empty. In fact, it's not even fully cleaned up and bussed from the night before. DESAUTEL chews her lip.

DESAUTEL

Fuck me.

She turns on her heel and walks back into:

INT. KITCHEN/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - DAY

DESAUTEL stalks to center of her kitchen, looks at JACQUES.

JACQUES

I was about to say, she called.

DESAUTEL

And what'd she say?

JACQUES

She's not coming in. Don't feel well. Had a fender bender on Canal. Says she was distracted.

DESAUTEL

We're all distracted.

She fires up a saucepan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACQUES

How's your house?

DESAUTEL

Don't ask me about my house.

On the stove flame, angry,

CUT TO:

INT. CAR/EASTBOUND I-10/MISSISSIPPI BRIDGE - DAY

ALBERT LAMBREAUX, black, fifty-five, sits in the passenger seat of an old, battered sedan, the seat behind him stuffed with cases, bags, large garment bags and notably, an upright bass -- so big and awkward that the neck extends out the right rear window. LAMBREAUX watches through the windshield as the car arcs around the last curve and the bridge over the Mississippi River comes into view. As the car rises across the span, he takes in New Orleans. The voice of the DRIVER, female, is heard, breaking into his thoughts.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Never thought I'd come back to even see this much of it.

LAMBREAUX looks over, sees his daughter, DAVINA, twenty-seven, behind the wheel, frowning. He says nothing, returns his gaze to the skyline of the city.

DAVINA

Hard enough getting across this bridge the last time. Gretna police pointing their damn guns at us, making us walk the hell back.

(pause, head shake)

An' now here I am drivin' back the other way like it never happened.

LAMBREAUX

You don't have to stay. Just drop me and turn around, go on home. I'll be fine.

DAVINA

Drop you where exactly?

LAMBREAUX thinks on that a moment, nods to himself: Point taken. As DAVINA shakes her head and drives off the bridge:

EXT. INTERSTATE I-10/NEW ORLEANS - DAY

As the sedan wipes frame, revealing the New Orleans skyline that awaits yet another prodigal refugee,

CUT TO:

EXT. GIGI'S PLACE/ST. BERNARD AVENUE - DAY

THE MONEY WASTERS, looking weary but determined to finish strong, cakewalk their way up one final block toward a corner tavern where the doors are open and a CROWD has gathered to greet them. The BAND is bringing it home with "I'll Fly Away," and the SECOND-LINERS are SINGING the chorus and throwing a few last moves, among them ROGAN, REESE and SIMPLY. Among the MUSICIANS, a clearly exhausted BATISTE, by now a ball of sweat, is pumping out a last chorus, but he's clearly had enough. Clapping her hands and singing along with the rest is the bar owner, LADONNA BATISTE, who shows some surprise to see her ex-husband in the middle of a second-line. BATISTE catches her gaze, rolls his eyes, throws a bad note or two, embarrassed to be so seen by his ex. The other PLAYERS, enjoying his struggle, trade looks and throw up yet another chorus and PHIL nods for BATISTE to take another solo. BATISTE waves him off, wipes his brow, but the OTHERS only LAUGH and, yes, plow through another chorus. BATISTE has had enough, lowering his bone, wiping his face on the sleeve of his shirt and staggering into the tavern. As he does, he passes LADONNA.

BATISTE

Beer.

LADONNA

Nice to see you too.

BATISTE limps into:

INT. GIGI'S PLACE/ST. BERNARD AVE - DAY

A Nawlins bar like every Nawlins bar, lived-in and with no luxuries and every practical necessity. BATISTE staggers to a stool as the BAND is HEARD finishing the last song and completing its second line. MONEY WASTERS, MUSICIANS and SECOND-LINERS begin crowding inside. The TRUMPETER slides next to BATISTE, who is pulling his shoes off, rubbing his swollen feet. LADONNA maneuvers behind the bar, begins to tap beers and pour drinks.

BATISTE

Amputate these bitches.

TRUMPETER

Man, you think we want to smell your dawgs. Put the nasty away, homes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATISTE

I'm like to die here, fool.

TRUMPETER

Thought you could hang. Thought you was gonna show us younguns somethin'.

LADONNA laughs, puts a beer in front of BATISTE, as PHIL comes up, stretching, freed from his drum. PHIL pulls out a cellphone, pretends to talk on it.

PHIL

...oh yeah, oh hell yeah, that note he was looking for on the last key change. That was a D-flat... right... exactly... D-flat is the note he wanted.

(to BATISTE)

What note was it that you played, maestro? What the fuck was that come out your horn?

BATISTE

(smiling)

Fuck you, man.

PHIL

(into phone)

B-flat... that's right. He dropped an E-natural on that chorus. Just dropped that motherfucker on us, he did.

LAUGHTER all around.

LADONNA

Was definitely a clam I heard.

BATISTE

Now see here. I only hit that note 'cause you all ended the damn parade at my ex-wife's joint. You can't expect a man to take shit like that in stride.

TRUMPETER

Ho, shit. You two was married?

LADONNA

Long time ago.

BATISTE

Not so long as that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRUMPETER

(to LADONNA)

Damn. He let you slip?

LADONNA

Let me? Sheeeet. I busted outta that marriage, no problem.

TRUMPETER

What went wrong? He wasn't treatin' you like I would be treatin' you?

LADONNA

You wanna know what went wrong?

TRUMPETER

Tell it to me, darlin'. Tell it to Jerome.

LADONNA

I married a got-damn musician. That's what went wrong with that shit.

LADONNA gives them all a look, then struts down the bar. They watch her go, all of them a little bit wounded.

PHIL

Damn.

TRUMPETER

Yeah.

On BATISTE, sipping his beer, watching the one that got away,

CUT TO:

EXT. VACANT HOUSE/RESIDENTIAL AREA/EAST NEW ORLEANS - DAY

LAMBREAUX and DAVINA stand in the driveway of a rancher, with boarded windows, rescuer's graffiti marring the walls, and high weeds where the lawn used to be. The rest of the block is in the same condition, save for a couple houses where there are FEMA trailers in the driveways and cut lawns in front of the vacants. LAMBREAUX exhales, walks to the door. His daughter watches him go inside, shakes her head, follows him into:

INT. VACANT HOUSE/RESIDENTIAL AREA/EAST NEW ORLEANS - DAY

LAMBREAUX walks the front hall, passing through the debris, the rot, the mold and wreckage. He stands in the middle of his former life. DAVINA joins him, arms crossed.

DAVINA

You can't stay here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAMBREAUX thinks a moment, nods.

DAVINA (CONT'D)

I hate this. Why did we even...

LAMBREAUX

Twelve hundred dollars.

She looks at him.

LAMBREAUX (CONT'D)

That's what the insurance company paid on this.

DAVINA

I know, Daddy.

LAMBREAUX

Thirty four years of premiums. Twelve hundred dollars.

They fall silent. LAMBREAUX walks into the kitchen, reaches down into the debris on the floor, finds a small photograph, pockets it almost without looking. A moment more of silence.

LAMBREAUX (CONT'D)

Take me to Dryades.

DAVINA

The bar?

LAMBREAUX nods, exits. On DAVINA, thinking this trip is going from bad to worse,

CUT TO:

EXT. GOVERNOR NICHOLLS STREET/TREME - DAY

A sweat-drenched, weary but otherwise sated ROGAN walks the last block toward his house, humming a chorus of "I'll Fly Away." He crosses with an incredibly well-endowed BLONDE, early twenties, white, shorts and tank top, walking a tiny RAT-DOG. She ignores his stare, glides past him to the corner mart. She pulls on the door. Locked. The BLONDE frowns.

ROGAN

Still closed. Chachi and his people were in Baton Rouge, last I heard.

The BLONDE looks over for a beat. ROGAN smiles.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Perhaps I can be of some small assistance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The BLONDE gathers her leash and walks the RAT-DOG toward Esplanade. ROGAN watches her for a long beat, rubs his soul patch, then makes for his front door, catty-corner from the store. We take in the exterior of Chez Rogan. Battered by the storm, with waterlines in the paint that are a foot and a half off the ground, but otherwise a sturdy structure. ROGAN crosses the street, takes in the sight of his neighbors, a GAY MALE COUPLE, late thirties, Daisy Duke shorts and brimmed beach hats, gardening in a magnificent flowerbed that fronts an exquisitely maintained, vibrantly painted Victorian. ROGAN gives the COUPLE a cursory nod and they barely acknowledge him in return. He uses key, enters:

INT. STAIRWELL/CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

ROGAN climbs the stairs. The interior is unfinished, with exposed brick and wood framing, with occasional All That posters and hand-painted, folk-art renderings of the great brass bands adorning one wall: The Hot Eight, The Little Rascals, Rebirth, New Birth, the Dirty Dozen. ROGAN takes the stairs two at a time, arriving at:

INT. HALLWAY/SECOND FLOOR/CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

A landing cluttered with flotsam and jetsam of musicality -- part of a PA system, a broken bass drum, an electronic keyboard, broken, more vinyl, cassettes in boxes, CDs on a shelf in no order. He begins shedding clothes as he moves into the adjacent bathroom. He turns on the shower, finishes undressing, walks back into:

INT. BEDROOM/SECOND FLOOR/CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

He passes the piano -- and an unfinished wall that is filled with scrawled, half-thought song lyrics -- drops a bar or two of Fess Longhair's "Big Chief," then moves to the CD player, flicking it on and dropping a CD of Cheeky Blakk. Nawlins gangsta RAP pours out a pair of oversized speakers. ROGAN cranks the VOLUME ridiculously loud, mouths the lyrics along with Cheeky. On the way back to the window, he stops, noticing the GAY COUPLE glaring up at him. ROGAN hesitates only a moment before dragging a speaker out onto the balcony and aiming it at his NEIGHBORS. As ROGAN pulls a half-spent joint from atop the piano, relights it, and returns to:

INT. HALLWAY/SECOND FLOOR/CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

ROGAN traverses the hallway into the bathroom and from the hallway we watch as he steps into his cold shower, head turned so as to keep his joint dry and make it glow. On ROGAN reaching for the soap and exhaling smoke,

CUT TO:

EXT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - DAY

LAMBREAUX and DAVINA pull up outside a wrecked tavern on a street where all but a handful of wood-frame shotgun houses are boarded up and adorned with the spray-painted coding of the would-be rescue teams who moved house-to-house in the aftermath of the storm. The waterlines on these structures are two-and-a-half-feet high. The tavern itself is wrecked, its door standing open. LAMBREAUX shares a look with his DAUGHTER before they get out of the car, and LAMBREAUX walks tentatively toward the entrance. DAVINA watches him, dubious, as he pauses at the door, then:

INT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - DAY

LAMBREAUX enters the neighborhood bar that was once the home of his Uptown tribe of Mardi Gras Indians, the Black Cherokee Nation. The bar is decimated. Broken furniture stacked to the side, a pool table -- with slate broken and felt torn -- on its side against one wall. Smashed glass and ruined, mud-caked linoleum. Nothing left to salvage but the roof and walls, perhaps, adorned as they are by photographs and posters of the Uptown tribes, including a good many of LAMBREAUX in full regalia, some with his son, some with him as young as his son, standing next to the big chief who was his father. Trail chiefs, flag boys, spy boys are at odd angles on a long wall, caught in time in black and white and fading color shots, some framed, some not, with some of the frames on the linoleum, broken and muddied. LAMBREAUX reaches into the pocket, pulls the photo he rescued from his East New Orleans rancher. C.U. on a shot of LAMBREAUX coming through the Battlefront under the I-10 Expressway, leading his tribe on Mardi Gras Day 2002. LAMBREAUX in all his Indian splendor. He sticks the loose photo atop a frame of another big chief caught at a similar moment of glory, Mardi Gras, 1977. He turns to DAVINA.

LAMBREAUX

Home.

On his youngest CHILD, clearly unconvinced,

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM/SECOND FLOOR/CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

Now dressed, ROGAN moves across the bedroom, gathering keys, wallet. Cheeky Blakk is still kicking it at high volume, though there is some COUNTER-SOUND fighting against the beats. He reaches to turn the CD player off, looks over his shoulder at the window, hesitates, then leaves the room, speakers still blaring.

EXT. CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

ROGAN exits, walks past the GAY COUPLE, who glare at him. From a speaker, dragged onto their front porch, Streisand is fighting a battle of attrition against the hip-hop spilling across the street. ROGAN smiles, nods, keeps walking. GAY NEIGHBOR #1, let's call him ALAN, shows his exasperation, turning to his partner, DONALD, and shaking his head. As DONALD wearily walks to their stereo speaker, and pulls the cord from the back, conceding the street to the sounds of one musical styling only,

CUT TO:

INT. GIGI'S PLACE/ST. BERNARD AVENUE - DUSK

The place has emptied out. BATISTE at the bar, nursing a drink. LADONNA drops a paper plate of beans and rice in front of him.

BATISTE

Hallelujah. Red beans and rice.
Ain't even Monday. Thank you, baby.

LADONNA

You welcome.

She slides the Tabasco down to him. He doses it liberally.

BATISTE

How's the good dentist?

LADONNA

He good.

BATISTE

(digging in)

He comin' down here, or you goin' up there?

LADONNA

Most weekends he comes down.

BATISTE

That's smart. Goin' against traffic.
Bumper to bumper leavin' town Friday
night and comin' back Monday morn.

LADONNA

Mmm. Traffic in Baton Rouge is
insane. Anytime.

BATISTE

They burstin' at the seams. His
practice goin' okay up there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LADONNA

Got a lot of his old customers.

BATISTE

He gonna come back?

LADONNA

Eventually, maybe. I don't know.
Wait and see.

BATISTE

That's right. Wait and see. Wait
and see.

LADONNA

Wouldn't be Gentilly again, he does.
That building's a tear-down, for
sure.

(changing subject)

How're your mama and them?

BATISTE

Good. Marcelle's still in Houston,
but the rest of 'em are all back.

LADONNA

How your girl, doin'?

BATISTE

Charlette. She good.

LADONNA

She back teachin' yet?

BATISTE

Not yet. She got a line on some
kinda charter school, uptown. But
not for this term.

LADONNA

Just as well with the little one.

BATISTE

Gettin' bigger every day. Fifteen
months now. Eats every damn thing.

LADONNA

Fifteen months? Bless his heart.
Where do the time go?

BATISTE

My daddy used to say that, I'd think,
what's he talking about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LADONNA

Now you know.

BATISTE

I do.

(then)

Talked to Alcide the other night.

LADONNA

You could come see them.

BATISTE

Said he got a B on his algebra.

LADONNA

He's doing alright. Randall too...

BATISTE

I got no wheels, LaDonna.

LADONNA

What's wrong with the bus?

BATISTE

You know I got gigs on the weekends.
What gigs there are...

LADONNA

Go see 'em in the middle of the week.

BATISTE

When they comin' down next?

LADONNA

Jeffrey's gonna bring 'em down in a
couple weeks.

BATISTE

I'll get over and see 'em then.

LADONNA

They miss you. Especially since I'm
down here so much -- the both of us
not bein' 'round, you know?

BATISTE

I miss them. I miss our routine.

LADONNA

Don't mope.

BATISTE

Not...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LADONNA

Batiste...

BATISTE

I'm just sayin'...

LADONNA

I know.

A pause as he finishes, pushes back his plate.

BATISTE

That was fine.

LADONNA

There's more.

BATISTE

(beat)

I gotta go.

LADONNA

Anytime. You know that.

BATISTE

I know.

(beat)

I'm sorry I haven't...

LADONNA

It's alright. You'll get up to Baton Rouge, visit when you can. When things pick up...

He nods, slips off his stool.

BATISTE

Tell the kids I'll call 'em.

(pause)

Tell 'em daddy's playin' his horn again. Tell 'em...

LADONNA

I will.

He heads for the door. As SHE watches him,

CUT TO:

EXT. GIGI'S PLACE/ST. BERNARD AVENUE - DUSK

BATISTE steps outside, holding his horn, looks up a battered New Orleans street, the parade now just a memory. He spots a taxi gunning it over a cross street a block away and he waves his trombone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATISTE

Hey, cabbie...

The HACK sees BATISTE, but doesn't stop -- maybe he's already been stiffed of a few dollars. BATISTE lowers his horn, looks around a moment more, and realizes, that despite his aching feet, he's walking for the moment. As BATISTE pulls the slide from his trombone, gathers both pieces under his arm, and begins the journey home,

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWER RECORDS/DECATUR STREET/FRENCH QUARTER - DUSK

Carrying a Cafe du Monde coffee, ROGAN walks down the sidewalk, heading to his gig, throwing a scowling eyefuck into the closed and padlocked chain record store to his left. He pulls up short, having seen what looks like movement inside. He walks to the door, peers into the darkness and sure enough, sees a couple MEN in the rear of the store, having a conversation amid the half-dark aisles and still-full CD bins. ROGAN begins BANGING on the door and the MEN look over for a brief instant.

ROGAN

Open up.

He BANGS again, then peers in to see the MEN walking out of eyeshot, moving into a rear office. ROGAN BANGS again, then peers a last time in frustration.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Fuck.

On ROGAN, reluctantly walking on,

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - NIGHT

DESAUTEL pours coffees as JACQUES does his thing, and his cousin RAYMOND washes dishes. A harried young waitress, LOUISE, cruises in to pick up a dessert order.

LOUISE

I had two strawberry tarts.

DESAUTEL

We ran out.

LOUISE

What's left?

DESAUTEL

Lemon ice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOUISE

And if they don't want lemon ice?

LOUISE frowns, starts to pick up her desserts as DESAUTEL exits with her tray of coffees to:

INT. DINING ROOM/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA ST. - NIGHT

The dining room is full, with most of the customers finishing or moving on to dessert. DESAUTEL delivers coffees to a couple, TOM and MARY.

DESAUTEL

(serving)

Here we are.

MARY

You're busy tonight.

DESAUTEL

Every night.

TOM

What do people want in this town now? Good food, companionship...

DESAUTEL

I could stay open 'til midnight if I could find the staff.

TOM

What's for dessert?

DESAUTEL

We've run out of everything except lemon ice.

TOM

I can't eat lemon ice.

DESAUTEL

It's homemade.

TOM

It would be disloyal.

MARY

He's holding out, waiting for Angelo Brocato's to come back.

DESAUTEL

I understand that.

(a thought)

How about a Hubig's?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TOM
(brightening)
Hubig's? What flavor?

DESAUTEL
Apple, for sure. Maybe a sweet
potato.

TOM
Sweet potato if you have it, apple
if you don't.

DESAUTEL
You got it.

MARY
How's your house?

DESAUTEL
(grins, rueful)
Don't ask me about my fucking house.

They LAUGH, understanding. SHE exits to:

INT. KITCHEN/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - NIGHT

DESAUTEL goes to cooler, pulls out a Hubig's sweet potato
pie, still in its waxed paper wrapper, slaps it in front of
JACQUES.

JACQUES
Hubig's?

DESAUTEL
Dress it up, baby. Drizzle something
on it...

She goes about her business. As JACQUES, dubious that it
has come to this, slides the Hubig's out of its wrapper and
onto a plate,

CUT TO:

INT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - NIGHT

Amid the glow of a kerosene lantern, LAMBREAUX works amid
the wreckage of the bar, tossing pieces of broken furniture
and shattered glass into a pile, then sweeping the dirt from
the linoleum floor. He puts his broom down, shoves an old
jukebox from its moorings, then sweeps the empty spot
dutifully. On LAMBREAUX, working late into the night,

CUT TO:

INT. CAMILLA GRILL/CARROLLTON AVENUE/UPTOWN - NIGHT

DAVINA sits at the counter, picking at her cheeseburger and shake, talking on her cellphone. A working jukebox is playing the original "Jock-a-mo" by Sugarboy Crawford, as she talks.

DAVINA

He all up in there right now, tossin' shit around and actin' like he's gonna stay...

(pause)

You don't think I told him that?
You don't think I been tellin' him that since before we left Houston?

On DAVINA, listening,

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BLUE NOTE/GREENWICH VILLAGE/NEW YORK - NIGHT

A nattily attired DELMOND LAMBREAUX talks on his cellphone, smokes, as New York City club-goers glide past. He is listening to his sister lay it out.

DAVINA (O.S.)

I got to be at work in the morning, Delmond. I can't be sittin' here waiting for him to come to his senses.

DELMOND

I hear you. I know.

DAVINA (O.S.)

You need to come down here and talk some sense into him. I know I can't.

DELMOND drags the end of his cigarette, tosses it.

DELMOND

I got gigs. I'm in Boston on Tuesday.

As DELMOND listens to his sister:

INT. CAMILLA GRILL/CARROLLTON AVENUE/UPTOWN - NIGHT

Frowning, the COUNTERMAN takes away DAVINA's barely touched burger as she rails at her brother.

DAVINA

We all got gigs, Delmond. Life is a got-damn gig. Look, I tried to talk him out of this, but he wasn't having it and now, I got to go home.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVINA (CONT'D)

As it is, I ain't gonna get back
'til damn near two in the morning.

DELMOND (O.S.)

Why you even drive him there, Dav?

DAVINA

You think I didn't try to get out of
it? Damn, boy, this our father we
talkin' about. When anybody ever
get him to change his mind about any
damn thing?

On DAVINA, being handed the check, listening:

EXT. THE BLUE NOTE/GREENWICH VILLAGE/NEW YORK - NIGHT

STAGE MANAGER comes out of the club, noting his watch for
DELMOND, who nods, in mid-sentence:

DELMOND

...A-ight. I'll be down.

DAVINA (O.S.)

When?

DELMOND

Soon as I can. Swear.

DAVINA (O.S.)

He at the bar, Del. He livin' in
the damn bar.

DELMOND

I'll be down. Tomorrow or the next
day. Soon as I can get free.

(pause)

Yeah. Love you too.

DELMOND follows STAGE MANAGER into a packed jazz club.
Onstage, the other three members of his QUARTET notice his
reentrance and the drummer counts it down silently. They
launch into Coltrane's Giant Steps as DELMOND, to the applause
of New York's cultural elite, joins them on stage, sounds
the theme and begins to solo. On DELMOND LAMBREAUX, a long
way from home and yet, at home nonetheless,

CUT TO:

INT. CAMILLA GRILL/CARROLLTON AVENUE/UPTOWN - NIGHT

DAVINA is counting out her money, leaving her tip and heading
to the register with her check.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COUNTERMAN

Ma'am.

She turns. He's holding up her burger, bagged for carryout.

COUNTERMAN (CONT'D)

No one leaves a burger behind at the Camilla. It just ain't done.

DAVINA smiles, nods, takes the burger and goes to the register. She pays, pockets her change and walks out into the night. On the COUNTERMAN, prideful, watching her go,

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO/WWOZ RADIO/NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

ROGAN enters, carrying a stack of CDs, encounters EVENING D.J., white, who is sitting, feet on console, listening to the late, great ERNIE "K-DOE" KADOR, of "Mother-in-Law" fame, doing one of his legendary taped rants.

ROGAN

Jeffy Jeff. What up, my Negro?

EVENING D.J.

Hey, Davis.

ROGAN

"K-Doe" rides again, huh?

EVENING D.J.

Nothing like an Ernie rant to finish out a show, ya feel?

ROGAN

Master of the universe.

(off the CDs)

So, dig. I'm not hungover and I'm all psyched because a post-sex, post-marijuana dream had me talking to the ghost of Earl King, who gave me the exact theme for my next show.

(aside)

Earl's doing good by the way. In heaven, the horn players don't make him tune down to E-flat to play Big Chief, so he's got that going for him. Anyway, Earl comes at me with some serious political relevance, which is weird 'cause he wasn't that way in life, but hey, it's my dream, right? And Earl, he brings it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EVENING D.J.

(almost scared to ask)

Brings what?

ROGAN

The Mafia.

EVENING D.J.

The Mafia. That's your theme?

ROGAN

Bro, the Mafia has done a great fucking job of running the entertainment business. A better job, in fact, than any of the governing bodies at work in this fucking city could do. The Mafia is way better equipped to run Nawlins than the United States government. Seriously. Do you really think The Mob would have dragged ass the way FEMA did? Left little old ladies to rot on rooftops? Look at how good Carlos Marcello ran things when city government was in his pocket. Look at the Lafitte projects, with their beautiful Sicilian roof slate. Did they fall over? Did they flood? The Mob is a bunch of out-and-out crooks and freely admit it, unlike, say, the Bush people. Heck of a job, Brownie. Fuck that. Brownie woulda been fitted for cement shoes and planted out in Bayou Teche somewheres.

EVENING D.J.

(willing to bite)

But musically...

ROGAN

Musically I start where it all starts, with Pops, right? Louis Armstrong was managed by Joe Glazer, but he had to pair up with the mob. And from there, I segue into Louis Prima, who was managed by the Segretto family, after which I'm close enough to old school R and B to get up in Cosimo's shop and start spinning all that old Ray Charles and...

EVENING D.J. hands ROGAN a single sheet of paper. A station play-list directive. ROGAN reads it quickly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding. One in every three songs from a pledge drive compilation?

EVENING D.J.

That time of the year, dude.

EVENING D.J. tosses him the compilation CD.

ROGAN

Here we are, supposedly the greatest alternative radio station in the greatest musical city in the sad, failed history of the planet, and what are we doing? We're playing the same admittedly great twenty Nawlins tunes that everyone always hears on every fucking compilation ever released. Fuck me.

(reading CD tracks)

Iko, Tipitina, All Asked For You, yeah, yeah, fucking yeah...

EVENING D.J.

And you need to push the CD between every set. Dwayne said so.

ROGAN

Fuck Dwayne and his fucking pledge drive. For the love of God already.

(off the console)

So how're you playing a K-Doe rant?

EVENING D.J. nods at compilation CD still in ROGAN's hand.

EVENING D.J.

Second disc.

ROGAN

(seeing it)

Track fourteen. Lovely. A rant is now on a pledge drive compilation. The one fucking thing of K-Doe's that Allen Toussaint doesn't own the publishing on and Antoinette's still never gonna see a nickel off it.

EVENING D.J. gets up, clears out for ROGAN, who drops his stack of CDs and assumes the chair at the console.

EVENING D.J.

Later, Davis. I'm out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN

Later.

EVENING D.J. exits. On ROGAN, settling in, sorting CDs, then picking up the station memo again, reading it with a frown,

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

Establishing, as MONTAGE. To the opening strains of Louis Prima's "Buono Sera" we get glimpses of a city that is falling down, yet still somehow manages to fall down so beautifully. The wrecked empty homes of Gentilly, the darkened streets of the Sixth Ward, the half-empty suburban wards of East Orleans, with FEMA trailers parked in every third yard and weeds growing in front of every other wrecked home.

PRIMA (O.S.)

...it is time to say good-night to Napoli...

On the Mississippi River, rolling past our city, the music flips tempo and Prima begins to bop and we,

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - NIGHT

Song CONTINUES. As Prima swings from the kitchen radio, DESAUTEL is cooking up a storm, always late, always shortchanged on help and fresh food. As she and JACQUES struggle to maintain their equilibrium, JACQUES rushing a sauce over to what will become crawfish etouffee, while DESAUTEL rechecks an order and argues with a WAITER for whom nothing is going according to plan,

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM/GARDEN APARTMENT/JEFFERSON PARISH - NIGHT

Song CONTINUES, reaches horn solo, as BABY BATISTE, fifteen months, is shoveled Gerbers by Batiste's live-in girlfriend, call her CHARLETTE, late twenties, who is coaxing the toddler with each mouthful. BABY BATISTE looks up, his face a Gerber mess, and laughs. PULL BACK to reveal the source of his mirth, with BATISTE mugging wildly on his trombone to the solo, the radio blaring behind him. On a small, familial moment in a spare, barely furnished apartment of Katrina refugees who lost near everything and are paying rent on a sad, empty flat twelve miles down the Airline Highway,

CUT TO:

EXT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - NIGHT

Song CONTINUES. LAMBREAUX carries more junk from the bar, dumps it on the side of the curb, wipes sweat from his brow. PULL BACK to reveal DAVINA, standing beside her car, arms crossed, car door splayed open, radio playing, engine idling. On LAMBREAUX managing a smile, and a kiss of his DAUGHTER's forehead as he tells her yet again to go home, that he will be fine. As DAVINA, clearly upset, gets into the car and drives down Dryades and as LAMBREAUX watches her go before turning back to his task,

CUT TO:

INT. GIGI'S PLACE/ST. BERNARD AVENUE - NIGHT

Song CONTINUES, as LADONNA tends bar at her joint, serving beers and mixed set-ups and running tabs. A fight breaks out at a front table and two MALE PATRONS begin knocking each other around. On tiny LADONNA, taking no shit, grabbing a night stick from below the bar, stalking around and smacking both MEN hard -- one each -- to end the fight. On LADONNA, cussing the men and returning to her post,

CUT TO:

EXT. ROYAL STREET/FRENCH QUARTER - NIGHT

Song CONTINUES. A small gathering of TOURISTS and PASSERSBY watch as REESE dances, though the song is being played by copse of young, white STREET MUSICIANS -- BOBBY MAC, NEW PETE and ANNIE, on accordion, guitar and violin, respectively. On REESE, cutting moves and gleaning APPLAUSE, LAUGHTER,

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO/WWOZ RADIO/NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

Song CONTINUES. On ROGAN, deep in thought, reading the backs of CDs and scratching his soul patch as his tunes spin. On the light of the studio phone flashing, as ROGAN turns, acknowledges the interruption, and then, ignoring the irate call of his station manager, returns to the business at hand, singing a stanza with Prima for good measure,

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM/GARDEN APARTMENT/JEFFERSON PARISH - NIGHT

Song SLOWS at its end, PRIMA croons:

PRIMA (O.S.)

...In the meantime let me tell you
that I love you, bona sera, signorina,
kiss me good-night...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

With CHARLETTE walking down the hall behind him, BABY BATISTE on her shoulder, BATISTE settles in a worn chair, licks the edge of a rolled joint and lights it, tokes deep and leans back, his eyes narrowing. On BATISTE, exhausted, as the SONG has its rush to the end, and he exhales smoke, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. ROYAL STREET/FRENCH QUARTER - NIGHT

As the TOURISTS evaporate into the night, REESE and the MUSICIANS squat by the accordion case, counting up the take, most of it coinage, but with a few bills.

BOBBY MAC

Eighteen forty.

NEW PETE

Divided five ways...

A moment, before ANNIE says:

ANNIE

Three each. Give the extra to Reesie.

ANNIE smiles at REESE.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Lookit. He's the one sweatin'.

BOBBY MAC smiles, hands REESE six forty.

REESE

Hey, it's all good.

On REESE, nodding gratefully, as NEW PETE glides his bow over the strings of his violin. A snatch of "I'll Fly Away." On the STREET PERFORMERS, along on their corner amid a mostly empty Royal Street, waiting for another chance to play for that money in a city of music,

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM/GARDEN APARTMENT/JEFFERSON PARISH - DAY

BATISTE wakes on a floored mattress in an unadorned bedroom, stacks of boxed clothes against a wall that lacks a dresser. He opens one eye, closes it, then opens again, thinking for a long beat. Then he rushes to a seated position, finds yesterday's pants beside the bed. He fishes frantically for his wallet, finds nothing. As he rises, sensing a modest disaster, and walks, in his underwear into:

INT. LIVING ROOM/GARDEN APARTMENT/JEFFERSON PARISH - DAY

BATISTE stands in the door, cocks his head, staring at a black square on the table, atop a slip of lined notebook paper. RACK FOCUS to reveal his wallet and a scrawled note.

BATISTE

Damn, girl.

BATISTE crosses, picks up wallet, checks it. Empty of what little cash he brought in from the parade. He snatches the note, it reads, simply: Groceries.

BATISTE (CONT'D)

Charlette. Got-dammit.

On BATISTE, without even the money to get back downtown,

CUT TO:

EXT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - DAY

Still in the same clothes, sweating, up all night, LAMBREAUX carries the last broken, mildewed table out of the bar and dumps it curbside with the rest of the ruined jetsam. He breathes deeply, winces as he stretches his back, then walks back into:

INT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - DAY

Save for some ruined wallboard, the bar is spotless, the linoleum floor worn but clean, with only LAMBREAUX's own gear collected demurely in one corner: Two suitcases, his upright bass, and the massive, wedding-dress sized garment bags seen earlier. LAMBREAUX takes a look around, satisfied, then goes to his gear. He opens a suitcase, pulls out a change of clothes, his bathroom gear and exits:

EXT. FRONT PORCH/SHOTGUN HOUSE/GENERAL PERSHING STREET - DAY

A black MAN, late 40s, stands on his porch listening to gospel music -- the ZION HARMONIZERS -- on a radio within the house. He is sipping Abita, watching as LAMBREAUX, carrying his change of clothes, walks up the block past houses, most of them still vacant. In front of the man's house is a flatbed with sides, adorned with a handwritten "ROBINETTE HAULING, 504-625-0195."

ROBINETTE

Knew you would come back.

LAMBREAUX

Knew you would never leave.

ROBINETTE smiles at that, nods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBINETTE

Beer? Gin? Juice? Whatchu need.

LAMBREAUX

Water, son.

ROBINETTE frowns at the thought.

LAMBREAUX (CONT'D)

I could use a bath.

ROBINETTE

Where you staying that you ain't got
no runnin' water?

LAMBREAUX

'Round the corner.

ROBINETTE

You up in the bar.

LAMBREAUX nods. ROBINETTE laughs, shakes his head, turns
and opens the door to his home. LAMBREAUX steps up on the
porch to follow him inside.

ROBINETTE (CONT'D)

Why you ain't home?

LAMBREAUX

Nothing left of home.

(pause)

The bar is home now.

ROBINETTE

Sheet. You talkin' like an Injun.

LAMBREAUX

That I am.

As THEY leave the porch and go inside,

CUT TO:

EXT. DECATUR STREET/FRENCH QUARTER - DAY

ROGAN is across the street, walking with SIMPLY, describing
his heroism of the night before.

ROGAN

...So finally I pick up the phone,
right?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN (CONT'D)

It's been ringing off and on for the first two hours of the show, and the bitch-ass motherfucker is all, "Davis, didn't you get the memo about the pledge-drive playlist," and I'm all, "Yes, I did receive your correspondence, sir, but I felt compelled to regard it as musically and creatively invalid."

SIMPLY

You told him that?

ROGAN

"Musically and creatively invalid."

SIMPLY

What'd he say to that...

But ROGAN is now staring across the street at Tower Records, where the doors are open and STORE PERSONNEL are clearly visible inside the bankrupt retailer.

ROGAN

Cocksuckers.

ROGAN breaks into a run across the monument of Bienville, darting through traffic to reach the entrance to Tower Records:

INT. TOWER RECORDS/DECATUR STREET/FRENCH QUARTER - DAY

ROGAN glides by the GUARD at the door, moving inside, demanding to speak to the power.

ROGAN

Who is in charge here?

GUARD

Sir, we're closed for business. You can't come in...

ROGAN

I want to speak to who's in charge.

GUARD

Sir.

ROGAN moves down an aisle still stocked with CDs, GUARD following him. He encounters two EMPLOYEES carting boxes of tunes toward the front door. ROGAN knows one:

ROGAN

Tony, what's up?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TONY

Hey, D. They're liquidating.
Everything's going on the truck out
back and they're outta here.

ROGAN

They're paying you?

TONY

Two more days and that's it.

GUARD

(grabbing ROGAN)
You can't be in here.

ROGAN

Get the fuck off me.

A brief tussle until two MANAGERS come up.

MANAGER #1

What's the problem?

GUARD

He pushed past me and...

ROGAN

You have my music.

MANAGER #1

'Scuse me?

ROGAN

You have my music. My old band.
All That. Brass 'n' funk. You have
six copies of each of the two CDs
here on consignment. Either that or
you have the money you made when you
sold them.

MANAGER #2

Fella, this store is out of business.

ROGAN

I want my music.

MANAGER #1

Look, there's nothing we can do.
The storm wiped us out. The inventory --
whatever's left -- get sold to pay
creditors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN

Let us pause, sir, to define the word 'consignment.' Consignment means shit be's mine and if y'all sell it, y'all break me off something and you don't you give it back.

MANAGER #1

Sorry, but we're out of business.

ROGAN

You gonna jack my shit 'cause you can't handle your business?

MANAGER #1 nods to GUARD, who grabs ROGAN by the arm. ROGAN fights to get free and MANAGER #2 joins the fray as they crash into the CD stacks and ROGAN is forced -- literally kicking and screaming -- toward the door. ROGAN rants in between moments of abject physical struggle.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

You motherfuckers. You pussy motherfuckers. You come down here with your fucking chain-store shit and think you fuckin' rate? Fuck you for running away at the first fucking hurricane, you pussy fucks. Louisiana Music Factory is gonna make every fucking dollar that you'll never see you fucking fucks.

As ROGAN is dragged, in a headlock, past TONY and the other EMPLOYEE and we HARD CUT to:

EXT. TOWER RECORDS/DECATUR STREET/FRENCH QUARTER - DAY

GUARD, MANAGER #2 toss ROGAN out on the sidewalk, ass first. Then they slam the doors. ROGAN turns to see an open truck at curbside, with THREE WORKERS in the rear stacking crates of compact discs -- all to be shipped out.

ROGAN

Motherfuckers.

WORKERS ignore him, keep stacking. The GUARD gives him the finger from the other side of the glass doors.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

I will have satisfaction.

On ROGAN, storming away,

CUT TO:

EXT. BARTHOLOMEW STREET/THE BYWATER - DAY

A taxicab idles and we hear BATISTE arguing from the backseat:

BATISTE (O.S.)

No, see, I ain't runnin' out on you here. Your money's inside.

CABBIE (O.S.)

(angry, Yat accent)

Twenty four, goddammit. Right now.

BATISTE (O.S.)

I got you. I got you covered.

PICK UP from the other side of the cab as BATISTE pops the back door, takes a step to get out, but points to his trombone, in two pieces on the backseat.

BATISTE (CONT'D)

I'm leavin' my bone, man. You know I ain't gonna leave my bone in your damn cab if I'm runnin' out on ya?

CABBIE

Twenty four.

BATISTE gets out, starts toward a house, turns on his heel.

BATISTE

And listen, I'm not so sure about twenty-four dollars from Mid-City. I mean, you coulda taken Orleans down to St. Claude and...

CABBIE

Twenty four or I call a cop.

BATISTE turns back to the house, muttering, RAPS on the door.

INT. RESTORED SHOTGUN HOUSE/BYWATER/UPPER NINTH WARD - DAY

RAPPING on the door, progressively LOUDER. We hear a black woman's voice, shouting over a recording of Louis Armstrong, playing "West End Blues" somewhere in the house:

JUICIE

Kermit. KERMIT.

More RAPPING.

JUICIE (CONT'D)

Kermit, where are you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

No reply. More RAPPING, and JUICIE, late thirties, appears at the door, opening to reveal a worried BATISTE.

JUICIE (CONT'D)

Hey now.

BATISTE

Hey, darlin'. You had me worried y'all wadn't home.

He steps inside, kisses JUICIE on the cheek.

JUICIE

I was upstairs. Kermit must be outback. Where you been at, Antoine?

BATISTE

Livin' out of town. Halfway to Mandeville.

JUICIE

(so sad)

Mm. Mm. Mm.

BATISTE

Yeah.

(nod toward back door)

Listen, I got a cab outside...

JUICIE

Yeah, go on. He out there, doin' what he do.

BATISTE smiles, heads for the back door:

EXT. REAR YARD/SHOTGUN HOUSE/BYWATER/UPPER 9TH WARD - DAY

KERMIT RUFFINS stands over a flaming BBQ grill, making some squab and sausage perfect. There is a joint in his mouth, and he is intent on his labors as BATISTE steps out of the house. RUFFINS looks up and beams.

RUFFINS

Uh oh. Look who's downtown.

BATISTE

Hey, hey.

They dap hands, HUG warmly. BATISTE nods at the grill.

BATISTE (CONT'D)

You firin' it up early.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUFFINS
(nodding, proud)
Hope you came hungry.

BATISTE
I did. I did. Man, you live to
barbecue, don't you?

RUFFINS
Shit, I just play the trumpet for
money.

They LAUGH easily. Old friends.

RUFFINS (CONT'D)
Well go in an' get a plate, 'cause
we just about ready here.

BATISTE
New house looks great.

RUFFINS
Got moved in jus' this month, you
know. Can't even say what we're
gonna do with the family place on
Jordan, wrecked like it is.

BATISTE
Yeah, yeah. Listen, Kermit. You
got your gig at Vaughn's tonight,
right? You got that goin'?

RUFFINS
Every Thursday.

BATISTE
How that workin' out lately? Crowds
comin' back?

RUFFINS
Reopened a few weeks back. Been
slow, but it's pickin' up a bit.

BATISTE nods at this, hesitates to ask. RUFFINS realizes,
makes it easy on a friend.

RUFFINS (CONT'D)
You lookin' for something, ain't
you?

BATISTE
Brother, I'm hand to mouth.

RUFFINS nods, turns a squab.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUFFINS

A-ight then. Bring your horn.

BATISTE

Thanks, man. I do need it.

RUFFINS

All good. Get a plate.

BATISTE nods, hesitates again, but in for a pound...

BATISTE

Thing is, can I get thirty straight-up on it.

(embarrassed shrug)

Taxi outside got my bone in it.

RUFFINS pauses only a moment before he bursts out, LAUGHING, then puts down the BBQ tongs, and walks inside, followed by a sheepish BATISTE. As the squab and sausage sizzle,

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT PORCH/SHOTGUN HOUSE/GENERAL PERSHING STREET - DAY

LAMBREAUX emerges from ROBINETTE's house clean, holding an Abita. ROBINETTE follows him out and they stare down the block.

LAMBREAUX

Not so many are back over here.

ROBINETTE

Water was up to your waist. Most of these shotgun's is ruined. Walls all mildew and mud.

LAMBREAUX nods over his shoulder at ROBINETTE's abode.

LAMBREAUX

You got yours squared away.

ROBINETTE

Me? I'm making money. Six hundred dollars for every one hundred feet of debris I clear off them East Orleans Streets. FEMA contract.

LAMBREAUX

FEMA, huh?

ROBINETTE

They ain't good for most. But if you got a haulin' business, they good enough.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAMBREAUX smiles at that.

LAMBREAUX

Speaking of which, I got a good ton of muddy shit I hauled outta that barroom, needs be dumped.

ROBINETTE stares at him a beat, shakes his head.

LAMBREAUX (CONT'D)

I'm askin' as a chief, here.

ROBINETTE

You ain't my chief. My chief is Monk Boudreaux and I been a Golden Eagle all my life. You know that.

LAMBREAUX

I need the bar for practice.

ROBINETTE

Shit. Ain't none of your tribe around. Ain't gonna be no practice.

LAMBREAUX

Practice is Tuesday.

ROBINETTE

Albert, you out your damn mind.

LAMBREAUX

Injun to injun.

ROBINETTE shakes his head again, starts back inside.

ROBINETTE

Every day I ain't over East Orleans on that government contract I'm losin' two or three large. Can't help you.

(pause at door)

Sorry, homes.

ROBINETTE enters his house. On LAMBREAUX, sipping his beer and unwilling to accept the verdict,

CUT TO:

EXT. CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

His elbow skinned by his encounter with the sidewalk, ROGAN turns the corner of Governor Nicholls, examines his wound with a frown, and from behind him on Treme, watches as the same WELL-ENDOWED BLONDE with the same RAT-DOG on a leash crosses the street, heading toward Esplanade. This time she has a similarly WELL-ENDOWED FRIEND accompanying her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN squints, wondering what hath God wrought, then continues on toward his front door, opens the lock and goes inside,

CUT TO:

INT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - DAY

LAMBREAUX squats in the middle of the linoleum floor, opening the big garment bags, removing the beautiful, majestic pieces of his Mardi Gras costume, the beaded and feathered wonder of a big chief's raiment: head piece, breastplate, leggings, fanpiece. A slow PAN over the intricate, handmade beadwork, the ostrich features, the very glory of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian culture. On LAMBREAUX, taking it in alone, in an empty bar, in bittersweet fashion,

CUT TO:

EXT. CHEZ ROGAN/TREME - DAY

Brass band music blares -- the Rebirth banging "Talk That Shit Now" -- from the second floor of his home as ROGAN locks his door and leaves for the evening. He gets across the street before ALAN, his gay neighbor, exits to confront him, arms folded in righteous fury.

ALAN

Mr. Rogan.

ROGAN waves benignly, tries to walk past.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Rogan, please.

ROGAN wheels, stalks over to his neighbor.

ALAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to have to insist that you show some regard for the city restrictions regarding loud music. What you're doing is unacceptable.

ROGAN nods, seemingly agreeable, turns, keeps walking.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Why are you so nasty about this?
We're your neighbors.

ROGAN wheels back, takes a breath, lets fly:

ROGAN

Why am I nasty?

ALAN

You seem to go out of your way...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN

No, dude. This is my way. This is the only fucking way in this neighborhood, feel me?

ALAN

This is because we're gay, isn't it.

ROGAN

I don't give a fuck. You suck dick? So what? It's all good. As far as I'm concerned, the more dicksucking in this world the better. Thinking globally, I would have to say that the more we suck and are sucked, the happier a planet we become.

ALAN has to smile at this, despite himself.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

So no, I don't give a fuck you're gay, dude. I give a fuck because you moved into the Treme a month after the storm and you've tarted your new place up and put in your porch swing and your flower gardens and your Amish-ass two-story birdhouse and you fucking don't have a clue about where the fuck you are living.

ALAN

Excuse me?

ROGAN

This is the Treme, dude. This is where the music comes from. The Rebirth went to high school right up the fucking block. Did you know that? And that house around the corner, the grey one that needs paint? That's where Shannon Powell lives. Shannon fucking Powell. Do you know how many great New Orleans songs have Shannon Powell playing drums? And you know who lived right there, right next door to where you moved in? The very fucking man who wrote "Ooo Ooo Pah Doo."

ALAN looks at him from a different planet.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

"Ooo Poo Pah Doo," motherfucker. Jesse Hill. You do know what I'm talking about...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALAN

Sorry, no.

ROGAN

Listen, you guys not only moved into a black neighborhood, which is cool, because hey, I'm a little lacking for melanin, too. But you moved into the most musically important black neighborhood in the United States and what do you do every day but complain that someone's radio is too loud. Or that someone is practicing their horn too loud. Or that whatever pickup band is down at Little People's is doing a set without a fucking permit.

ROGAN puts his hands on ALAN's shoulders, mock sincere.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Dude, you live in the Treme. Deal with that shit.

ROGAN turns on his heel, walks away, leaving ALAN enveloped in the noise from the open, second-floor window of Chez Rogan. ALAN watches him go, then walks back toward his own porch where DONALD is waiting, worried and disturbed.

DONALD

What did he say?

ALAN

Do you know a song called "Ooo Ooo Doo Poo."

DONALD

God no. But if it's as bad as what's coming out his window, there's no reason why I should.

On ALAN, trying to make sense of his neighbor, as he comforts his partner and they head toward their porch,

CUT TO:

EXT. VAUGHN'S BAR/LESSEPS STREET/BYWATER - NIGHT

A crowd mills outside the club, drinking and smoking on the sidewalk, waiting for the set to begin. Allen Toussaint's "Whirlaway" bangs on the jukebox inside:

INT. VAUGHN'S BAR/LESSEPS STREET/BYWATER - NIGHT

A crowded joint, with Abita beers and mixed drinks passing over the counter. RUFFINS is holding court in one corner, fully accustomed in his trademark fedora with the bandanna beneath. BLACK and WHITE patrons mix easily, make connections, greet each other. A heavysset black PATRON is greeted by RUFFINS.

RUFFINS

Big Man, you home? Say you home.

PATRON shakes his head, smiles.

PATRON

Still in Beaumont, man. I'm just down to settle some shit on my momma's place.

RUFFINS

You need to come home, Big Man.

PATRON

I know it.

It is a local crowd, only a handful of tourists know about Vaughn's in the Bywater, and as the jukebox plays, we pan the faces lining the bar and packing the dance floor -- black, white, brown, some back home, some just visiting. The camera glides by a familiar face -- ELVIS COSTELLO -- though it hesitates not in the slightest before moving onward to pick up REGULARS, some of them the same faces seen at the second-line parade, most of them new. The PAN ends finally on ROGAN, sipping a bourbon and eyeing COSTELLO across the bar. He leans over to SIMPLY, who is beside him.

ROGAN

Thing is, he's not playing anywhere nearby. I checked.

SIMPLY

He's on tour, though.

ROGAN

Memphis, Houston...

SIMPLY

So he took a day, came down. Cool.

ROGAN

I wanna talk to the guy.

SIMPLY

Davis, don't fuck with him, man. He's just here for some music.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN

Dude, he's in Vaughn's for Kermit.
This needs to be acknowledged.

ROGAN sees RUFFINS and the rest of his QUARTET moving toward the bandstand. BATISTE, too, is lubricating his mouthpiece and moving toward a microphone. ROGAN intercepts RUFFINS.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Kermit.

RUFFINS

Ho, D.J. Davis.

ROGAN

Yeah, hey. Kermit, you know who that geeky lookin' white guy is? The one at the bar?

RUFFINS

Where at?

ROGAN

One with the glasses.

RUFFINS eyes ELVIS COSTELLO.

RUFFINS

He the man writes for the Picayune?

ROGAN

What? No. That's Elvis Costello, man. That's him.

RUFFINS

Elvis.

ROGAN

Costello. He's a star, Kermit.
He's a fuckin' rock 'n' roll legend.

RUFFINS is clearly oblivious to the celebrity visitation. He smiles at ROGAN, shakes his head, sheepishly, moves on to the bandstand. RUFFINS picks up his trumpet off a speaker, goes to his mike, plays the opening riff of "Second Line" and the crowd SHOUTS the "Ho," response.

RUFFINS

A-ight then. Thursday night at Vaughn's with the Barbecue Swingers.

APPLAUSE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUFFINS (CONT'D)

An' we got the Sixth Ward stylings
of the legendary Antoine Batiste
workin' with us tonight.

Additional APPLAUSE. BATISTE hits an acknowledging riff.

RUFFINS (CONT'D)

One, two, y'all know how we do.

The bassline to "Skokiaan" kicks off and KERMIT begins to play, taking one alone. Then BATISTE follows him, mimicking the opening refrain and then KERMIT is on the vocals. The CROWD begins to sway, dance, LAUGH, sweat. The dance floor fills. New Orleans in full effect. We follow ROGAN, drink in hand, as he moves across the dance floor in a second-line samba and comes to rest against the bar, adjacent to COSTELLO, who watches from a bar stool. Sensing an intruding presence beside him, the celebrity turns and ROGAN nods. COSTELLO nods back, sips his beer. On ROGAN, contemplating his next move, as we pull back and take in KERMIT RUFFINS and the BBQ SWINGERS PLUS ONE on a Thursday at Vaughn's,

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT PORCH/SHOTGUN HOUSE/GENERAL PERSHING ST. - NIGHT

LAMBREAUX strides down the street in the full regalia of a Big Chief of a Mardi Gras Indian tribe, the costume as resplendent as it was on the Mardi Gras before the storm. He is a study in carnival magnificence, carrying a tambourine in one hand and his tribal staff in the other. Reaching ROBINETTE's house, he shouts:

LAMBREAUX

Mighty kootie fiyo!

(tambourine rattle)

Mighty kottie fiyo! Hey na...

(more rattle)

It's the big chief of the nation. A
wild, wild creation.

(more rattle)

He don't bow. He don't know how.

ROBINETTE steps out of his house to take this in.

LAMBREAUX (CONT'D)

Spit lightnin' and shout thunder,
walk through the graveyard kickin'
down tombstones...

LAMBREAUX begins to fire out traditional Mardi Gras Indian bluster and chant, challenging all in his path, talking of exploits, of fearlessness, of easy and sudden death. Robinette's WIFE joins him on the porch, hands him a beer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAMBREAUX (CONT'D)
(rattling tambourine)
...and where is my Indian red?

ROBINETTE
You sure purty.

The standard compliment for a New Orleans Indian. LAMBREAUX acknowledges this with the slightest of nods.

ROBINETTE (CONT'D)
But got-dammit, you ain't even my
tribe, Albert. Told you I'm a Golden
Eagle. Third generation.

LAMBREAUX
Indian red. Hear the call.

ROBINETTE
You gonna clean out that bar for
practice and nary one of your braves
is even around for it.
(shakes his head)
You crazy.

LAMBREAUX
Big chief of the nation at your door,
calling for a warrior.

ROBINETTE
Albert...

He RATTLES the tambourine, dances in the street, then stands
off, firm, as he would if confronted by another chief.
ROBINETTE turns to his WIFE, shakes his head.

ROBINETTE (CONT'D)
This crazy mother....

LAMBREAUX
Don't bow. Don't know how.

ROBINETTE
Alright, already. You crazy
motherfucker, put your got-damn Injun
suit away. I'll be down the bar
tomorrow afternoon.

ROBINETTE finishes his beer, tosses it off the porch, goes
inside disgusted, followed by his WIFE, who smiles at
LAMBREAUX, if only in delight at seeing an Indian again. On
LAMBREAUX, having won the point, pulling off his headdress
and going home, as if it's all business as usual,

CUT TO:

INT. VAUGHN'S BAR/LESSEPS STREET/BYWATER - NIGHT

Late set, but the joint is even more crowded in a city that often goes late. BATISTE is building a solo atop Kermit's swing version of "Ding, Dong, The Witch Is Dead." RUFFINS stands beside him, admiring, nodding for him to take one more chorus. BATISTE finishes with a flourish to APPLAUSE and SHOUTS and RUFFINS follows by SINGING another verse, then a chorus, then beginning his own solo. PULL BACK to reveal, among a rapt crowd, DAVIS ROGAN still affixed to the bar near ELVIS COSTELLO. ROGAN looks over for maybe the two hundredth time, and COSTELLO sensing it, looks back, nods politely. ROGAN looks away, then bolts his drink, goes for it at last.

ROGAN

Kermit, man. He's rare.

COSTELLO

He is.

ROGAN

A national treasure.

COSTELLO

If the nation only knew.

Good one. ROGAN nods at this, signals the bartender.

ROGAN

We, ah, we used to play together.

COSTELLO looks at him. ROGAN points to RUFFINS, then back to himself, nods, affirming, as the BARTENDER arrives.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Makers. Three cubes.

BARTENDER exits.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Early on, Kermit and me were in a band together. I play piano.

COSTELLO doesn't react. What can one say, after all. Long pause before BARTENDER arrives with drink, takes a fiver from ROGAN, who bangs half the drink down, and without taking his eyes off RUFFINS and his ascending solo, declaims:

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Taught him everything he knows...

COSTELLO turns slowly, eyes ROGAN, who breaks it with:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN (CONT'D)
...about Keynesian economics.

COSTELLO manages a slight smile. As they resume watching RUFFINS and the BAND play,

CUT TO:

INT. GIGI'S PLACE/ST. BERNARD AVENUE - NIGHT

Crowded bar, evening rush. LADONNA is on the bar phone, cupping her free ear, trying to concentrate on the conversation.

LADONNA
...Randall, when you're as old as your brother, you can stay up as late as your brother. But it's not fair for you to act out this way when you know I'm all the way down here and for you to put this on Jeffrey.

(listens)

He is not being unfair. He's making you abide by the rules and you know what the rules are and just because I'm down here in New Orleans is no reason for you to think you can get away behaving this way.

(listens)

Randall... Randall...

(listens)

Please don't cry. Mama's gonna see you on the weekend and you know Jeffrey loves you too. Please don't cry, okay?

There is some COMMOTION behind her and she turns.

BARTENDER

Tap's out. We gotta change the amber.

LADONNA

(to BARTENDER)

We just changed that keg twenty minutes ago, there's something wrong with the line.

BARTENDER shrugs.

LADONNA (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Honey, I gotta go. Mama's gotta go. I love you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She hangs up the phone and stands there for a long moment, wondering whether or not to drive to Baton Rouge, then goes to deal with the problem. On LADONNA, back at work,

CUT TO:

EXT. VAUGHN'S/LESSEPS STREET/BYWATER - NIGHT

After the set, PATRONS mill outside the bar, drinking and smoking. ROGAN passes a joint to BATISTE, who tokes, passes it on to SIMPLY. RUFFINS comes out of the bar, walks over, gets his turn at the joint...

RUFFINS

So Davis, man. That boy named Elvis?

SIMPLY

Elvis Costello.

RUFFINS

He a rock star?

ROGAN

A real one. He's real.

(incredulous)

Kermit, you're gonna tell me you never heard of Elvis Costello.

RUFFINS thinks on it, exhales, passes joint to ROGAN, shakes his head, sheepish and mock-embarrassed.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

For the love of God, Kermit. Are you kidding me? Alison? Pump It Up? Everyday I Write The Book?

SIMPLY

He toured with Allen Toussaint.

RUFFINS

Yeah?

RUFFINS looks over to where COSTELLO is coming out of the bar with a small ENTOURAGE, preparing to head off.

ROGAN

Jesus, brother. You should go talk to him before he leaves.

RUFFINS

What 'bout?

ROGAN

Music. Make a friend.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Make a contact. Kermit Ruffins opening for Elvis Costello on his American tour. Who knows?

RUFFINS laughs at that, looks at BATISTE.

RUFFINS

You know this here Elvis.

BATISTE

(nodding)

He's real.

RUFFINS shrugs, unable to imagine how the conversation might go. He stays put, hits the joint. COSTELLO is getting into a car that has pulled up for him. The brake lights flicker and the car drives off.

ROGAN

Got-damn, Kermit. Don't you wanna get famous? You deserve to be famous.

RUFFINS laughs.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

America needs it some Kermit.

RUFFINS nods, amused.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

So go for it. Are you standing there telling me that all you wanna do is get high, play some trumpet and eat barbecue in New Orleans your whole damn life?

RUFFINS, BATISTE share a look. As he reaches for the joint, RUFFINS winks to let BATISTE know he's pulling Rogan's leg.

RUFFINS

That'll work, yeah.

As even ROGAN has to join in the LAUGHTER,

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM/GARDEN APARTMENT/JEFFERSON PARISH - NIGHT

BATISTE enters his dull, empty apartment, flicks on the light. He takes the pieces of his trombone, places them carefully on the dining room table, then drops his fedora, house keys, then walks into:

INT. BEDROOM/GARDEN APARTMENT/JEFFERSON PARISH - NIGHT

CHARLETTE is enveloped in the blue glow of an old, portable television, watching broadcast on rabbit ears -- not even a cable hookup. A sitcom, long forgotten.

CHARLETTE
Your son called for you.

BATISTE
Which one?

CHARLETTE
Big one, I think. Alcide.

BATISTE
He called? From Baton Rouge?

CHARLETTE nods.

BATISTE (CONT'D)
What he want?

CHARLETTE
Talk to you, I s'pose.

BATISTE pulls out his tie, unbuttons his shirt, sits guiltily on the edge of the bed. CHARLETTE frowns at him.

CHARLETTE (CONT'D)
Told him you had a gig.

BATISTE hears the accusation in her voice. He turns, stares at her, then pulls his wallet, counts out five twenties and tosses it on the bed between them.

BATISTE
Backed up Kermit at Vaughn's tonight.

CHARLETTE
You played with Kermit?

BATISTE
He asked me. Yeah.

He turns away, not even enjoying the lie. Then, thinking of that very morning, he turns back, waves his wallet at her.

BATISTE (CONT'D)
I'm leavin' this right here, girl.
Knowing that the last fitty is mine.
I can't be takin' no bus into town
from Jefferson Parish.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLETTE gathers up the twenties, pouts. BATISTE slips off his trousers, slides into bed.

CHARLETTE

This'll cover the gas an' lectric.

(pause)

Another thirty gets our cable turned back on, though.

On BATISTE, wearily turning out the light,

CUT TO:

EXT. DECATUR STREET/FRENCH QUARTER - DAY

Early morning, with SEAGULLS and DRUNKS staggering about the French Quarter. ROGAN walks with TONY, who he knew at Tower Records. ROGAN is determined; TONY, nervous.

TONY

How, exactly, are you talking me into this? Just for the record.

ROGAN

You want to be talked into it. You want to strike a blow for liberty.

TONY

I don't give a fuck actually.

ROGAN

Then you're doing it for McDonough School. Because we went there together, because we played J.V. soccer together, because I went out with your sister for three months.

TONY

My sister says you're an asshole.

They reach the rear doors of the defunct Tower. TONY looks around, worried.

ROGAN

C'mon. This is only fair. If the police come, we can explain it.

TONY

If the police come, we're going to the House of fucking D.

ROGAN

Okay, but this New Orleans.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN (CONT'D)

The police never come, and if they do, they'll shove us out of the way and start looting their ownelves. This town has traditions.

Reluctantly, TONY pulls a ring of keys, unlocks the rear door, holds it open and lectures:

TONY

Three minutes, Davis. No fucking around. They're gonna be back here with the truck before eight and...

But ROGAN is already inside. On TONY, rushing in after,

CUT TO:

INT. TOWER RECORDS/DECATUR STREET - DAY

C.U. on the compact disc divider labeled "All That" in the section reserved for New Orleans/Louisiana. PULL BACK as ROGAN snatches all of the discs of his old band and stuffs them into a plastic bag. TONY looks around, tweaking.

TONY

C'mon, c'mon. Let's go.

ROGAN

Cool.

They start toward the door, moving down bin after bin of music discs, some of them already bare from the removal of inventory. ROGAN stops abruptly.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Hold up.

(grabs disc)

The Pinstripe Brass Band Live at Donna's. This goes with me 'cause, swear to God, I played piano on track seven, uncredited, and never got a copy. "Closer Walk With Thee..."

(points to CD cover)

...check it out....

TONY

Whatever, man. C'mon.

ROGAN tosses the CD into the bag, keeps moving, but at the end of the aisle, again:

ROGAN

Oh, fuck me, no.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN grabs another fat double-CD and holds it up.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

"The Genius of Dave Bartholomew."
All of his Imperial recordings in a
single set, totally out of print.
Dude, justice aside this shit's
karmatically mine 'cause my copy got
stolen out of my car.

As TONY grabs ROGAN and fairly drags him toward the back
door of the record store,

CUT TO:

EXT. POKE'S TAVERN/2ND & DRYADES/UPTOWN - DAY

LAMBREAUX, ROBINETTE and two of ROBINETTE'S EMPLOYEES, both
black, twenties, are filling one of his trucks with the debris
from the bar. LAMBREAUX wears a self-satisfied expression,
while ROBINETTE is still incredulous at having been roped
into it all. As they work to clear the pile, a taxi pulls
up, and out steps LAMBREAUX's son, DELMOND, carrying a small
suitcase and his sax case. He is not smiling.

LAMBREAUX

Welcome...
(half-smile)
...to the city that care forgot.

ROBINETTE curses at that old saw. DELMOND pays the CAB DRIVER
and the taxi departs, leaving him and his gear curbside.

DELMOND

I had to cancel a gig in Boston.
Fly down here instead.

LAMBREAUX

Why?

DELMOND

'Cause my Daddy done lost his mind.

ROBINETTE

True dat.

LAMBREAUX

Ain't nobody call for you to do
anything of the sort.

DELMOND

So you think you stayin', huh?

LAMBREAUX

I know I am.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DELMOND

In the bar?

LAMBREAUX

For now.

DELMOND

You don't even own the bar. You don't own the house no more neither, for what it's worth.

LAMBREAUX

Still and all, nobody 'round here seem to mind where I stay, 'cept for you and your sister.

DELMOND

Daddy...

LAMBREAUX

Daddy, shit. If you ain't gonna help us fill this damn truck, then make yourself useful and go pay the water bill and get the pipes turned back on in there.

(nod at the bar)

Mister Robinette here don't want me in his bath every damn morning.

DELMOND

Let me understand: You thinkin' I cancelled gigs, changed plans and flew all the way down here from New York City to pay the water bill on a bar we don't even own? Is that what you're thinkin', Daddy?

LAMBREAUX stops working long enough to assess his son. After a long moment, he nods, affirming.

DELMOND (CONT'D)

Okay. Just checking.

DELMOND picks up his bags, walks down the street. LAMBREAUX goes back to work as ROBINETTE eyes him.

ROBINETTE

Where he goin' at?

LAMBREAUX

Municipal building, I expect. Pay the water on this here.

ROBINETTE stares at him for a long moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAMBREAUX (CONT'D)
(with some pride)
That's my son. An' he home, too.

As LAMBREAUX keeps working,

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - DAY

DESAUTEL is counting asparagus bundles, worried that she has been shorted. JACQUES enters from the dining room and she turns, sees something in his face.

DESAUTEL
What now?

JACQUES gives a slight laugh, gestures out to the dining area. As DESAUTEL gets up, exits to:

INT. BAR/LOWERLINE RESTAURANT/PRYTANIA STREET - DAY

ROGAN is at the bar, an open bottle of Neuf du Pape, nicely aged. He is reading an Offbeat Magazine.

ROGAN
Hey, darlin'.

DESAUTEL
What are you doing here?

ROGAN
Celebrating victory over the forces of corporate arrogance and turpitude. The running pig-dog capitalists have tasted the steely edge of my blood-flecked bayonet this very day.

DESAUTEL takes in the label on the wine.

DESAUTEL
You opened a Neuf du Pape? Vintage?

ROGAN
I can pay for it.

DESAUTEL
With what?

ROGAN bolts his glass, gives a one-moment gesture, and then reaches down to produce the plastic bag. He rummages around, produces the Dave Bartholomew CD. JACQUES walks up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGAN

That's out of print and a sacred relic in any religious construct. But I offer to you freely as barter for this drink and the fine repast that must surely accompany it. As you know, I am deeply partial to your etouffee.

DESAUTEL turns calmly to JACQUES.

DESAUTEL

Throw him out.

ROGAN

You can't throw me out. I'm your boyfriend, kind of, though not specifically or on a consistent basis. Still, I am a very close friend. With benefits. You find me charming.

DESAUTEL grabs bottle off the bar, eyes it wearily, and on the way back into the kitchen, bolts a shot or two straight from the source. She disappears behind the kitchen doors, leaving ROGAN and a smiling, what-can-I-tell-you JACQUES.

ROGAN (CONT'D)

Plays hard, but she wants to be soft.

JACQUES nods general agreement as ROGAN rises, grabs his bag, and rolls toward the exit, with JACQUES trailing,

CUT TO:

EXT. CALLIOPE STREET/UPTOWN - DAY

Another parked taxi, back door splayed open, another argument with another HACK. BATISTE has on a black suit, dapper.

BATISTE

Now see, I told you I ain't have but the twenty.

HACK

Twenty-six on the meter.

BATISTE

You shoulda let me out when it got to twenty. That's on you.

HACK

Get outta the cab, you cheap sumbitch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATISTE

Ain't no need to be like that. You gimme a card or something, an' I'll mail you the six. I will.

HACK

Aw gwan.

BATISTE exits, closes the taxi door. As the HACK gives a last curse and drives off, BATISTE turns to see a group of musicians, the OLYMPIA BRASS BAND, gathered in the street outside a black funeral parlor. A horse-and-hearse is curbside, the coffin being loaded by PALLBEARERS as maybe a hundred MOURNERS and NEIGHBORHOOD FOLK wait to march to St. Louis Cemetery. BATISTE hustles over to the rest of the BAND and is presented with a sash by the BASS DRUMMER.

BATISTE

Uncle Remmie. How you been?

DRUMMER

Jus' tryin' to get from this world into the next, son.

BATISTE puts on the sash to match the others.

DRUMMER (CONT'D)

Thanks for comin' on short notice. Aaron took sick this morning.

BATISTE

Glad for the gig.
(nod at coffin)
Who goin' home?

TRUMPET MAN

Bojack.

BATISTE

Beau Jacque? From Algiers?

TRUMPET MAN

Naw, man. Bojack from Gert Town.

BATISTE

One who played sax for Huey Smith.

DRUMMER

Naw. One who stole cars for them motherfuckers down St. Bernard Parish. Miss Hannie's nephew. The ugly one with the lazy eye.

BATISTE

Oh, him. I thought he been dead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRUMPET MAN

Uh uh, son. Went to Houston after the storm, came back long enough to get hisself shot to death comin' out the One Spot. You ain't heard?

BATISTE

I heard now.

(to TRUMPET MAN)

Forty to the graveyard, forty to cakewalk back, right?

TRUMPET MAN

(nodding agreement)

Slow march to start. I'm callin' "Closer Walk" in any key you might feel comfortable, youngun.

BATISTE

Flat that B. An' play for that money, my brothers. Play for it.

As the band kicks into "Closer Walk With Thee," ANTOINE BATISTE, of the Sixth Ward of New Orleans Parish, does the slow step toward a graveyard, and a Nawlins funeral procession breaks out. On BATISTE, stepping with the rest, playing,

FADE OUT:

THE END

END CREDITS: "MY DARLING NEW ORLEANS," by LITTLE QUEENIE