The Happy Pals -- New Orleans Jazz in Toronto

Happy Pals jazz things up

By MARY DICKIE
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Late Saturday afternoon, The Happy Pals will gather at Grossman's Tavern and play a couple of sets of New Orleans music -- just as they have nearly every Saturday for the past three decades.

In the hands of Happy Pals leader/trumpet player Patrick Tevlin and the band -- trombonist Roberta Tevlin, saxophonist Toby Hughes, pianist Roberta Hunt, banjo player Rainer Hunck, bassist Philip J. Carney and drummer Chuck Clarke, plus assorted guests -- New Orleans music is more than a stale reproduction of a bygone tradition.

It's a living, breathing entity that, like New Orleans itself, incorporates jazz, blues, gospel, rock 'n' roll, pop and Caribbean music into a rich musical gumbo driven by a characteristic relaxed rhythm.

U.K.-born trumpeter Kid Bastien, who started the band back in the late '60s or early '70s -- nobody knows for sure -- and led it until his death in 2003, called it "functional music," made to be danced, sung, clapped and even cried to.

On their latest album, New Orleans Party Orchestra, recorded live at Grossman's in May 2005, the Pals make Johnny Cash's Folsom Prison Blues and Bob Dylan's Don't Think Twice, It's Alright sound as if they came from New Orleans. And since both originated not far from the Mississippi, maybe they did.

Check out the Pals at Grossman's on Saturday. As well, their youthful friends in the Lil Blue Devils play Grossman's on Tuesday.

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