

# Harry Connick, Jr.

## *Chanson du Vieux Carré*

(*Connick on Piano, Volume 3*)



For those like Harry Connick, Jr. who grew up in New Orleans, the Crescent City has always been a constant state of mind. The love that he and the members of his band share for this birthplace of so much of America's musical culture has defined all of their performances, but never more so than on *Chanson du Vieux Carré*, the third disc in the Marsalis Music label's series *Connick on Piano*.

The album will be released in October on the same day Columbia Records issues Connick's vocal tribute *Oh My NOLA*. A portion of Connick's royalties from both discs will benefit New Orleans Habitat Musicians' Village, the project conceived by Connick and Marsalis Music founder Branford Marsalis to provide affordable housing in the city's Upper Ninth Ward for displaced musicians and other families.

*Chanson du Vieux Carré* stands out among current New Orleans tributes in that it was conceived and executed well before Hurricane Katrina. As Connick explains, "I have been writing original music about New Orleans and arranging traditional New Orleans music on my tour bus over a period of years, to hone my skills and to give the band new music to play." In May 2003, with his band assembled in Los Angeles' legendary Capitol Towers Studio A to record his hit Columbia albums *Harry for the Holidays* and *Only You*, Connick felt that the time was right to record his New Orleans music. "I always thought it would be a good idea to record after we got off the road, when everyone's chops would be strong and we'd be able to fly thought the charts – and that's what happened," he says with justifiable pride. "The band sounded great."

The plan had been to include the results in the *Connick on Piano* series after earlier volumes had allowed the omnivorously talented Connick to display his instrumental prowess in more intimate settings, a goal realized with his previous Marsalis Music releases *Other Hours*, by Connick's quartet, and *Occasion*, Connick's duo encounter with Branford Marsalis. Now the time has come for *Chanson du Vieux Carré*, a collection that makes several particularly salient points regarding Connick and the talented players who comprise his immediate musical family.

Where his previous Marsalis Music discs have generated a growing appreciation for Connick the pianist and composer, *Chanson du Vieux Carré* goes a step further by placing a spotlight on his talents as an arranger. Among the clearest indications of Connick's orchestral mastery are the playful backgrounds that support the trumpet solo on "Bourbon Street Parade," the

sultry echoes of Ellington on “Luscious” and the dark urgency and drama as the band casually mixes moods and time signatures on “Ash Wednesday”; but then every track has a moment where the writing turns the familiar into the unexpected. Add three new Connick compositions and some strong piano (in solo on such tracks as “Someday You’ll Be Sorry” and “New Orleans,” and in support throughout), and you get one of the most complete showcases to date for the leader.

Yet Connick is only one potent presence among many in his Big Band. As fans of his vocal albums and live performances do not need to be told, the big band that Connick leads includes several major talents, including trumpeters Leroy Jones, Roger Ingram and Mark Mullins, trombonists Lucien Barbarin and Craig Klein, and saxophonists Ned Goold, Jimmy Greene, Dave Schumacher and Jerry Weldon. *Chanson du Vieux Carré* provides significant space for their input, and without exception they rise to the occasion, whether instrumentally or (in the case of Jones on “Bourbon Street Parade” and Barbarin on “Luscious”) vocally.

To an even greater extent, *Chanson du Vieux Carré* allows the Big Band to shine as a unit. A rarity in both the amount of touring it has logged and the consistency of its personnel, Connick’s ensemble is as close as a contemporary big band gets to the road-tested *esprit de corps* that characterized the legendary orchestras of the ‘30s and ‘40s. The rhythm section of Connick, bassist Neal Caine and drummer Arthur Latin swings in all gears; the other sections glow or purr as the situation warrants, with a special nod to the astonishing lead trumpet of Ingram; and the common purpose shared by all of the players ensured that even the newer arrangements in the program required no more than two takes.

It all adds up to an uncommon group of artists with an uncommon affection for the music of New Orleans. Be they natives (Connick, Barbarin, Jones, Klein, Mullins), more recent residents (Caine), or homeboys by association like Goold and Weldon, every member of the Big Band displays a feeling for the city that is essential to everything that Harry Connick, Jr. is about. *Chanson du Vieux Carré* is a Crescent City love letter, recorded two years before the deluge yet never timelier than it is today.

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**MARSALIS MUSIC** is the creation of Branford Marsalis, one of the most celebrated jazz musicians of the past quarter century. Based upon his extensive experience as a saxophonist, composer and bandleader, Marsalis recognized the need to form a label that allows a diverse array of musicians to document their best efforts. Launched in 2002, Marsalis Music has focused primarily on jazz, with a roster featuring such promising new artists as Doug Wamble and Miguel Zenón as well as Marsalis himself and such established stylists as Joey Calderazzo and Harry Connick, Jr. The label receives marketing and distribution support through its partnership with Rounder Records, and also sponsors Marsalis Jams through its non-profit arm, Music Education Initiatives, Inc. Marsalis Jams has presented ensembles in performance/jam session settings on college and high school campuses around the country, featuring such leading musicians as David Sánchez and the late James Williams.

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