
CULTURE

JOIE DE VIVRE

LES ARTISTES

save the last dance

Lafayette photographer Philip Gould examines Acadiana and the world through his images

BY WILLIAM KALEC
PORTRAIT BY ROMERO & ROMERO

PHILIP GOULD HAS PHOTOGRAPHED a bevy of distinct locales across the globe, so the fact that he's holding a camera while the guy next to him is holding a machete isn't necessarily strange.

Nor is the location, really.

Sure, it sounds like they're deep in a South American rainforest instead of a waltz away from Highway 31 in St. Landry Parish, but when it rains like it's been raining in recent months, plant life tends to grow faster than nieces and nephews you haven't seen since the last family gathering. No, what's peculiar about all of this is what Gould and Co. are hoping to find once they whack through all this thorny brush — The French Club, a dance hall that's been closed for 55 years.

"Photographically, Louisiana is an incredibly generous state," says Philip Gould.





Included in the new book, “Ghost of Good Times,” released in October, Gould’s French Club photos illuminate a place left in the dark for decades. The book is authored by local writer Herman Fuselier, whom Gould couldn’t praise enough and credited more than once for coming up with the idea. A liberal sheen of dust and dirt blanket an interior styled for a

different day. While the music played inside dared patrons not to move their feet and the pours were heavy-handed, the place was doomed before the first dance. Apparently, the French Club neighbored a church, and the priests believed a place to pray and a place to party shouldn’t coexist so closely, so the dance hall owner eventually caved to the pressure.

“And in many of these cases, they had a Last Night, they turned off the lights, and they locked the doors — that’s it,” Gould says. “It’s like nothing has happened. There are cases of JAX Beer, unopened. The liquor licenses from 1958 to 1961 hang on a bulletin board. The chairs and tables look like they haven’t moved in 50 years. It was truly this amazing

moment where you just go, ‘Holy Smokes.’”
 “Time stood still, but nature did not. Louisiana’s climate of rain, wind and pervasive humidity just marched on and left a patina of decay. What’s left is another sort of beauty.”
 Page after page validates Gould’s claim, as snapshots of rotting and rusted authenticity show just how

long ago it was when these humble establishments were the entertainment epicenter of Cajun communities, back when live music swam through a sea of cigarette smoke to our ears, not via oversized speakers in a sterile, cavernous corporately-owned casino or arena today. Though Gould was able to capture a sizeable portion of these long-forgotten

landmarks with his camera, a few of these weekend temples toppled within the last five years — missed opportunities that sparked a sense of immediacy to do this book now.
 “There is a time and a place for a project or an idea and

this project is pertinent to this moment,” Gould says. “These projects come together and almost do themselves. I just do the looking and take some photos as I go.”
 Obviously, there’s a little more to it than that. Gould’s selective

eye and talent to gain access to the places and trust amongst the folks he photographs has evolved ever since landing a job at *The Daily Iberian* in New Iberia after graduation from San Jose State in 1974. Lured away a year later by a paper with a larger



circulation in Dallas, Gould ditched all that and returned to Louisiana to document the region through pictures. Gould laughs when recalling how patrons at his first exhibit, a photo collection of Cajun people that debuted in 1979, figured the artist attached to the show must

be an old man considering the amount and diversity of images on display.

Gould was 28. "I was fortunate to photograph the Cajuns before Mulate's, before the great national discovery of the Cajun culture," he says. "There was an

interesting innocence to people back then. They were jokesters, often amusing themselves at my expense. They were welcoming. Incredibly practical. But I don't think they were aware of what was to come.

"At the core, the people are the same. The context is a bit

more contemporary now, and I think (Cajun) people are a bit more aware of what distinguishes them now as a culture from a multitude of cultures in the United States. But still, it was a different time."

Over the years, Gould's images have documented how much has

changed — from the landscape, to the landmarks, to the way of life — yet even still, there's no confusion where these photos originate, as the content in each is unmistakably Louisiana.

"Photographically, Louisiana is an incredibly generous state," Gould says. "This is an amazing

place to photograph for a whole list of reasons. One: a tremendous sense of tradition. There's a reverence for things from the past. Two: The landscape. And finally, there's a nice sense of quirkiness that emanates from Louisiana and the people here. Time and time again, amazing

things have happened and I was lucky enough to be there with my camera."

So, Gould is asked, if Louisiana has been overly giving, do you think you've said 'thank you' for its generosity?

Gould pauses for a good five seconds, laughs, and then

says, "I feel when I take a photograph and put it on my website, or Facebook, or what-have-you, in some way I'm giving it back to people here. It's my responsibility to share it....By presenting the photographs, people here get a sense of themselves." ◀



feel the heat

Pepper purveyor Troy Primeaux of Lafayette primes pump for world record

BY WILLIAM KALEC | PHOTO BY ROMERO & ROMERO



"No one is gonna die off [a pepper] from what I know of. You might think you're gonna die, but you're not gonna die," says Troy Primeaux.

PRIOR TO PICKING PUNGENT peppers, "Primo" produced popular pieces in packed places using a pick. Try saying that three times fast. Not easy, huh? Now, try saying that P-laden sentence while biting into a merciless pepper cross-bred to be 400 times hotter than a jalapeño, spice so intolerable its creator equates the sensation somewhere between "cocaine and a car wreck." No chance.

Yet, ask Lafayette musician and potent hot pepper grower Troy Primeaux (whose friends call him "Primo") and he'll tell you the line of volunteers willing to do the impossible would stretch like Gumby — to clarify, that's eat the hot pepper, not tackle the tongue twister.

"It's not unlike drugs, it's that escapism," says Primeaux, who sounds like a well-espressoed Spicoli. "I guess it's a safe drug. No one is gonna die off it from what I know of. You might think you're gonna die, but you're not gonna die. And when it's all said and done and you're done having a panic attack, it's worth the ride. It's an out of body experience. You start seeing lights and your nervous system is fully engaged.

"Just put the toilet paper in the fridge, man."

Already well-known among Indie music aficionados for playing a mean guitar in the Southern rock band Santeria, Primeaux eventually married a "good girl" and traded in groupies for a garden, growing peppers that he claims are bigger superstars than he ever was on stage. The latest legend ready to set the chili cultist circle on fire is the "Louisiana Creeper," a potentially record-setting hot pepper Primeaux created by crossbreeding two already-hot peppers, and is gently nursing through its infant generational stage.

Once the plant is stabilized — meaning the pepper seeds used to grow more peppers are plucked from the sixth to eighth generation of the pepper — Primeaux thinks the "gnarly-looking" Creeper will exceed 2 million Scoville Heat Units — the measure used to quantify culinary spice.

This new creation follows Primeaux's 1.4 SHU 7-Pot Primo pepper (a cross between a Trinidad 7-Pot pepper and a Bhut Jolokia) which stirred up a tingling sensation a decade ago among the dedicated group of tongue masochists who live to eat these edible fireballs.

"The chili cultist are obsessive," says Primeaux, who sells these peppers, seeds and sauces while his better half, Kara, makes a popular line of pepper jellies. "I get emails all the time: What's your next pepper? I want it! I want it! I want it! They're the star of the show. I'm secondary. They wanna eat them, they wanna see videos of them, they want it all, man. These are rock star peppers. Their legend will live on longer than I will. I might not carry on, but my name on that pepper will carry on."

He means that literally — 7-Pot Primo is named after Primeaux, the choice of a friend and pepper expert who kept inquiring what Primeaux was going to call this thing. The details of this whole endeavor — like what he's going to name his peppers — are sort of done on the fly, considering Primeaux fell into this professional passion only after realizing that bouncing from stage to stage every night as a rocker probably wasn't conducive to a happy marriage.

With that established, though, Primeaux takes the science of breeding peppers and the quasi-art of growing them with all sorts of seriousness.

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LES PERSONNES

"I'm paranoid about my peppers," Primeaux says. "Are people gonna jump the fence? Who knows, man? So I bug-net the plants. It's a cutthroat business. I've heard of stories about guys stealing crossing crops, and I put too much effort into this for that to happen."

Much like a thoroughbred trainer will study the bloodlines of a horse's mother and father to determine whether it's better suited for sprints or long distances, dirt or turf tracks, Primeaux looks deep into the genealogical past of peppers when determining which to crossbreed. Then, Primeaux — part Dr. Frankenstein, part Cupid in this process — manually pollinates flowers on the parent pepper plant, thus creating the edible hybrid.

So, how does Primeaux know the peppers he crosses are gonna make you wanna dunk your mouth in a tub of Ben and Jerry's? Simple science, mostly, chased with a dash of logic.

"You know there's obviously more to it than this, but 'heat' and 'heat' makes 'hot,'" he says. "But I've been fortunate. My buddy tells me, 'You either got really good luck or you're some sort of genius.'"

Whatever the secret behind Primeaux's scorching success, this much is certain: The Louisiana Creeper won't be his last manmade spicy spawn. For a while now, he's been in talks with ULL (his Monday-Friday employer) to create a bright red pepper named — what else? — the Ragin Cajun. And should the Creeper surpass the Carolina Reaper's 1.9 SHU — the current record holder for the world's hottest pepper. Primeaux knows better than anyone that sooner rather than later someone else will organically manufacture one that's more sweat-inducing.

"This is like the space program, but with peppers," Primeaux says. "Who knows how high and how far we can go? Some people say 8 million. Some say 5 million. Then there are scientists who say the pepper couldn't withstand that kind of capacitance and would just melt to mush. I don't know, man. But I'd like to find out."

"This is good for me," Primeaux says, later. "If I was growing bell peppers, I don't know if I could live with myself. It'd be like 'What happened to you?' But from rock 'n' roll to growing hot peppers, it's a little bit on the edge. So it's fitting." ◀

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WRITTEN BY
DEVIN COCHRAN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ROMERO & ROMERO

In the age of Spotify, iTunes and numerous other digital streaming platforms, the owners of Lafayette's Lagniappe Records give customers a refreshingly old-school experience when it comes to discovering new – and vintage – music.

LAGNIAPPE RECORDS

Patrick Hodgkins, formerly a bass player in the band As Fast As, met business partner Tess Brunet when she needed a bass player for a show in New Orleans. The two decided they were tired of touring as musicians and wanted to try something new.



SITTING SNUG

between Rukus and the Lafayette Center for Yoga, is an urban-like record store that offers an experience different from the shuffling through unorganized crates of vinyl in the average antique shop.

Tucked away in seafoam boxes, records rest in rows flowing to the back of the 900-square-foot building, divided by genres encompassing rock, pop, jazz and hip-hop. There is an earthy petrichor aroma, while the ears are greeted with the music of the day and the eyes fall upon the store's friendly cockatiel, Agnes.

"There's something here for everyone," boasts owner and curator Tess Brunet. "We have work that needs to be done, but it gets hard when we get swept up in talking to people about a myriad of things."

Before placing them out on display, Brunet and co-owner, Patrick Hodgkins, take on the arduous task of organizing and labeling records by their genre, quality or grade and vinyl type. They assiduously clean used vinyl to make sure it is in its best condition.

"We bust our asses," says Hodgkins. "We use our expertise to sort all of that out before we put it on the floor so you don't have to worry about that. Some people don't care or don't even know the difference, but it's there for the people that do care."

The records are graded and tagged on a scale of very good, very good+, excellent and near-mint.

"Every used record that comes in is unique because it may be a different catalog pressing or it may be a second or third



A

gnes the cockatiel

perches on owner and curator

Tess Brunet's shoulder.



pressing. Then you have to check the condition of each of them," Brunet explains. "We might have a copy of, for example, two records that look identical. One is more than the other, but the one that's more might be in a [better] condition."

Aside from antique stores and corporate entertainment stores like F.Y.E., Hodgkins says their biggest competition is the Internet.

"People can compare prices instantly with their smart phone," Hodgkins says. "We price our used stuff lower than the Internet because we're not selling to the Internet; we're selling to Lafayette."

What makes a trip to Lagniappe Records more personable than buying records online is the real-life interactions with the workers, according to Hodgkins.

"How you discover music online, they kind of base things on an algorithm of, if you like this, you might like this," he says.

"Here, it's like nobody is suggesting anything to you. You can use your sort of free will. We're here for you if you have questions."

"We suggest stuff for people all the time, but you would get a different response," Brunet says.

Lagniappe Records opened its doors last August 7, after the closing of its Baton Rouge location (which had opened in July 2013). Lagniappe Records was originally a website selling online and making appearances at record fairs. Brunet was a vocalist in the New Orleans-based indie-pop band Generational.

"I started Lagniappe Records with \$2,000 of my own publishing money from Generational," she says.

Brunet, who toured to cities such as New York and Los Angeles, was also a drummer for the indie-pop band Dead Boy and the Elephantmen, which appeared at such music festivals as Austin City Limits and Lollapalooza.

BRUNET & HODGKINS ALSO SPONSOR & SUPPORT LOCAL EVENTS SUCH AS FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL & THE MONTHLY ARTWALK.

Hodgkins was in an alternative rock band called As Fast As, in which he played bass guitar. The two met when Brunet needed a bass player for a show in New Orleans, and Hodgkins stepped in – a story Brunet says she loves telling.

Brunet says Lagniappe Records was partly born out of the tiresome life of being a touring musician.

"We were tired of selling things online, too, and trying to juggle being touring musicians, and we decided to stay in one place and have a store to sell records from," Hodgkins says.

When Brunet and Hodgkins were looking for a location to open a store, Brunet says it was a 50-50 chance whether or not the store would be in Lafayette or Baton Rouge. Once their Baton Rouge location's lease was up, the entrepreneurs moved to Lafayette.

"They were raising the rent on us by 30 percent and it was something pretty astronomical," Brunet says. "We weren't finding anything



comfortable, so it made us expand our search. Out of 30-some-odd places, I saw this place and knew instantly it was going to be our new home. It was something I knew right away."

The new venue was previously a vape shop and a newsstand. According to Brunet, it was also a "drunk tank," where police officers took inebriated bar patrons for holding if necessary.

"They had benches apparently in this back cubby hole where our electronic and Louisiana section is," Brunet says, pointing behind her. "There were benches along the wall where they would throw drunk people from the bars late at night and they'd cuff them to the benches."

Besides providing a music service for Lafayette, Brunet and Hodgkins also sponsor and support local events such as Festival International and the monthly Artwalk. They also work to bring shows to Lafayette and support local businesses.

"We do about one show a season," Brunet says. "Usually it's someone we believe in and stand behind or we're usually big fans. We want to bring this to the community because it brings something different."

"[Nearby coffee shop] Réve will have a pot of coffee in here sometimes," Hodgkins adds. "We get our shirts made at Parish Ink and we rock a lot of Genterie fashion."

The clientele of Lagniappe Records sweeps "all across the board," according to Brunet.

"Babies have portable record players in their rooms," she says. "Their parents are buying children's records. From there, we have 80-something-year-olds. It's a lot of in-between. And the younger kids are coming into the store. They're starting off with the classics like Led Zeppelin, but once they grow older, they'll start digging into the not-so-obvious, like J. Cole and Kendrick Lamar." ■



BRUNET WAS A VOCALIST IN THE BAND GENERATIONALS AND A DRUMMER FOR DEAD BOY AND THE ELEPHANTMEN