

"ANOTHER SIDE"

**Leo Nocentelli
envisions new
musical ventures
following
enthusiastic
response to
his solo CD**

**By Dean M. Shapiro
Senior Editor**

When a quarter-inch audio tape reel recorded in the early 1970s in a New Orleans studio that was believed to have been destroyed during Hurricane Katrina unexpectedly surfaced 2,000 miles away, nobody could have been more surprised than Leo Nocentelli, guitarist for the world-renowned soul/funk group, The Meters.



One of the many tapes in a group of boxes that were purchased in 2018 at a Los Angeles-area auction contained a collection of ten acoustic songs recorded by Leo and a backup group during a session at Cosimo Matassa's Jazz City studio. Leo played guitar and sang lead on all the cuts. His backup group included fellow Meters, George Porter Jr. on bass and Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste on drums, along with James Black also on drums, and Allen Toussaint on occasional piano. They taped nine original tunes plus a cover of Elton John's "Your Song."

The songs on the tape were slated for an album but the album was never pressed. The tape ended up at Toussaint's and Marshall Sehorn's Sea-Saint Studio where it sat in a box gathering dust. However, the discovery of this 50-year-old treasure trove of unreleased material has sparked a sensation in the music world and cast Leo into an unaccustomed role as a solo artist in his own right.

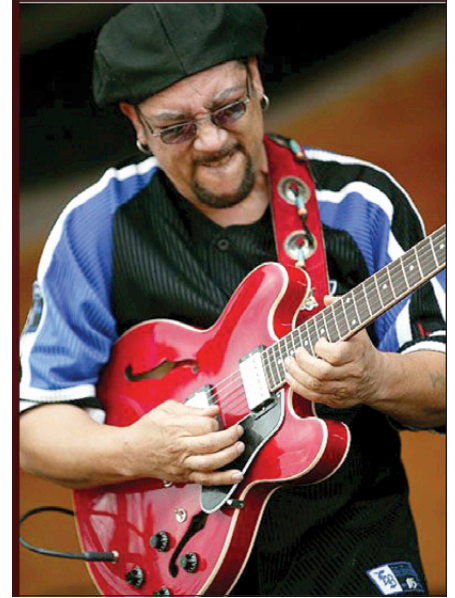
The Cinderella story behind Leo's recently released vinyl and CD recording from this half-century-old tape titled "Another Side" has been globally reported, thanks to dozens of articles in such prestigious publications as the New York Times, the (Manchester, U.K.-based) Guardian, Rolling Stone magazine and many other print media, including several in New Orleans. He has been interviewed on radio and TV and for popularly viewed podcasts as sales of the new release have spiked in recent months. Hardly a day goes by when Leo is not besieged with requests to speak about what the experience has been like for him.

So what has the experience of such a sudden, unexpected burst of additional fame been like for Leo Nocentelli? Breakthru Media magazine recently caught up with him during one of his rare free moments and asked how he is handling his recent unanticipated popularity which, he said, goes beyond the attention he received at the height of The Meters' heyday. Here is what he had to say, leading off the interview:

"Man, it's been like a whirlwind: a whirlwind that's been happening to me now, within the last three to four months. It's been a bit overwhelming and a bit challenging because I've never gone through anything like this before by myself. I went through something like this with the Meters but I had Art (Neville), George and Zig to fall back on. This here is all me. Just me. So it's really a different feeling and something that I'm not used to feeling as an individual, especially when it comes down to having a record out there as the main artist."

So despite a stellar, 50-plus-year musical career during which he played guitar on hit songs by top-selling artists on major labels (Lee Dorsey, Robert Palmer, Dr. John, Labelle and many others); a career during which he comprised one-fourth of one of the world's premiere jazz/funk groups and won numerous honors including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Grammy organization, nothing fully prepared Leo for the celebrity status he's now experiencing as a solo recording artist. In addition to being humbled and awed by it, he is also preparing to capitalize on it and move up to the next level: assembling a first-rate backup group and performing the newly discovered songs live before large gatherings.

The first of these large mainstage performances – unless a new opportunity arises before then – will be on May 5, 2022 on the Gentilly Stage at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. He will, at that time, be



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performing the songs on “Another Side” with the group he hopes to assemble between now and then. He will also be appearing on the Acura Stage on another JazzFest date with a different band performing the soul/funk/jazz tunes for which he is best known.

“This has all been challenging but I’m willing to face that challenge,” Leo confidently stated. “I’ve been thinking about presenting an acoustic show with acoustic players. It’s kind of in the early stages now but I might try to use some of the guys in my funk band and I’m still lining up our players. It’s another way of thinking from the normal way that I do and how I get

the players that I normally get. What I’m trying to do is organize an ensemble that’s for the long term.”

And once he gets his new acoustic band organized and acclimated, Leo has big plans for the direction in which he envisions himself and the band members going. “It’s not going to be in Joe’s Corner Bar or anything small like that,” he emphatically stated. “I want it to be top of the line when I do it. I don’t have to go through the changes of starting from the bottom. I don’t need to be doing that. I’ve done all that already and I’m trying to get away from it. I don’t want to go back and start playing those small venues because playing ‘Another Side’ is worthy of a bigger stage.”

He did, however, appear to make an exception for live performances at smaller venues where his records are being sold. These include stores like Euclid Records in the city’s Bywater neighborhood where he appeared at a live taping and record-signing event in early December, and he is in discussions

with the Louisiana Music Factory for a possible date this spring when an abundant supply of the vinyl records and CDs is anticipated.

As for a name for the new band he is assembling, “I’m going to keep it simple,” Leo responded. “Once I get the players together I’d like to say ‘Leo

Nocentelli’s Another Side.’ Or ‘Leo Nocentelli performs Another Side.’ And the players that I hire will have their names mentioned,” he added.

And so on it goes into the next chapter of the eventful life and musical career of a well-loved and multitalented native son. Reflecting on the astounding reception his new release is getting and the flood of publicity that has accompanied it, Leo’s modest answer is “I’m happy that this is happening to me. It’s a godsend. I think it’s spiritual. I think it’s something that was supposed to happen and now it’s happening at the right time. Maybe it just wasn’t supposed to happen until now even though it was recorded 50 years ago.”

So what lies ahead for a healthy, robust 75-year-old musical legend who confidently feels that some of his best years may be still to come? For one thing, there is a possibility of newer material along the acoustic lines of the work that recently and miraculously rose to the surface from a long-ago era. “You never know,” he said, adding, “If this record gets big enough and large enough I probably would.”

Then, adding another element to the mix, he hinted at possibly releasing a collection of duets on which he has master copies: collaborations with such jazz legends as George Duke, Kirk Whalum, Stanley Clarke and Harry Connick Jr., as well as pop icon Peter Gabriel. “They’re really great sounds. All these guys I mentioned gave their blessing on it. I’ve got so much material it’s unbelievable. All that has yet to be heard.”

When told at the conclusion of the interview, “You really need to start getting that good stuff out there. Time’s a wasting,” Leo laughed and replied, “If I do I’ll tell the world that Dean Shapiro told me to do that.”

Leo Nocentelli’s “Another Side” is available on CD in local record stores. Additional copies of the vinyl release on the Light in the Attic label are expected to be available in April 2022.



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