While shopping in her favorite clothing store during a visit to her former hometown of Woodstock, NY several years ago, Maria Muldaur experienced a vibe that originated 1,500 miles away and it immediately grabbed her attention.
As she described it, “I heard this wonderful vintage, old-timey jazz coming out of the speakers in the shop and I remarked to the shopkeeper that I didn’t know the local radio station was playing such cool old jazz. She said ‘That’s not the radio. It’s a CD.’”

Intrigued and impressed by what she was hearing, Muldaur asked who was performing on the CD and was told it was a New Orleans band called Tuba Skinny, a group of eight young musicians who’d recorded several other CDs and often perform for tips on Royal Street in the French Quarter.

“Their music sounded so authentic that I didn’t believe her when she said it was a bunch of young players until she showed me the CD cover. I was amazed that these kids would be channeling this old music so soulfully and authentically. I just fell in love with their music.”

World-renowned for her sultry singing style, especially on her 1973 million-seller, “Midnight at the Oasis,” and widely regarded as a preeminent interpreter of American roots music, Muldaur said, “I’ve been an aficionado and scholar of that kind of 1920s and early ‘30s jazz all my musical life and I never heard it played better!”

After hearing the other Tuba Skinny records, she was determined to meet them and finally did when she was in New Orleans to record a Blue Lu Barker tribute album in 2018.

While enjoying one of their Royal Street performances she was recognized by the band’s washboard player, Robin Rapuzzi. “He introduced me to the rest of the band and they asked me to sit in for a few songs, which was a very pleasurable experience for me,” Muldaur said.

Shortly after that, Muldaur was back in New Orleans to do a showcase at an International Folk Alliance convention where she would be receiving an award. Invited to perform, she asked Tuba Skinny to accompany her onstage. They did and “Everybody loved it,” Muldaur recalled.

“It was like a marriage made in musical heaven,” she added. “Our musical sensibilities are virtually identical. They already knew a lot of the obscure blues and jazz tunes that I’d previously recorded.”

Also at the convention was Holger Petersen, the former owner of Stony Plain, a Canadian roots music label on which Muldaur had previously recorded. Petersen suggested that she team up with Tuba Skinny and record an album with them and she jumped at the chance. “That would be my dream come true,” she told him.

Petersen convinced the current owner of the label to make the CD and the result was the May 2021 release of “Let’s Get Happy Together,” a 12-track collaborative effort between Muldaur and Tuba Skinny. The title track came from a song written by pianist/vocalist Lil Hardin Armstrong, Louis Armstrong’s second wife.

“I tried to highlight, not just my singing, but also the band’s wonderful playing on the album.” Muldaur said. “Everyone who’s heard it just loves it! We’ve received stacks of killer reviews and we were just nominated for a Blues Music Award for ‘Best Acoustic Blues Album of the Year’ by the Blues Foundation.”

Prior to her hookup with Tuba Skinny,
Muldaur had already experienced an eventful career stretching back six decades and encompassing collaborations with such musical luminaries as Bob Dylan, John Sebastian, Paul Butterfield, Bonnie Raitt, Mavis Staples, Aaron Neville, Jerry Garcia and many other top-name recording artists.

Born into a Sicilian-American family as Maria Grazia Rosa Dominica D’Amato in New York City’s Greenwich Village, she came of age during an era when “The Village” was a mecca for writers, poets, artists, musicians and other creative individuals. Quoting her longtime friend and collaborator, Dr. John, while imitating his gravelly voice, she said “I was in the right place at the right time.”

As a teenager, Muldaur formed an all-girl a cappella group called The Cashmeres that was offered a recording contract with a label in New York’s famous Brill Building. However, her strict parents put a stop to it, citing their daughter’s young age.

Soon afterward she ran away from home, but already living in the hippest of neighborhoods, she landed just six blocks away and soon found herself hanging out on the emerging folk music scene, discovering and exploring all varieties of American roots music. These included Old-Time-y Appalachian, Bluegrass, Blues and even Jug Band Music. Hooking up with John Sebastian, David Grisman and a handful of other young musicians, they formed the Even Dozen Jug Band and performed throughout the New York area.

After hearing the Jim Kweskin Jug Band in a Greenwich Village café, she connected with their vocalist/guitarist Geoff Muldaur and went to Boston to visit. They ended up getting married and soon thereafter she was invited to join the Boston-based band. Singing and playing fiddle for the band and touring widely, including appearances on nationally televised variety shows, she stayed with the group until they disbanded in 1969, performing on five of the band’s albums.

After the Kweskin group broke up, the Muldaurs produced two albums together and she began her solo career when their marriage ended in 1972. A year later her first solo album, the self-titled “Maria Muldaur,” was released and it broke out her monster hit single, “Midnight at the Oasis.” Crooned in her trademark sweet, sultry voice and hinting at a steamy love affair, the tune skyrocketed up to #6 on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart in early 1974 and was ranked #13 for the year. It became a gold record and was nominated for two Grammy Awards. Over the past 48 years it has been covered or sampled by more than a dozen other artists and groups.

However, her accomplishments don’t stop there. Over the years she has released an astounding total of 43 albums, including her latest with Tuba Skinny. She has toured the world and been nominated for six Grammys and she has won other musical awards as well.

Today Muldaur is justifiably proud of her daughter, Jenni Muldaur, a talented singer whose career her mom encouraged and supported. Successful in her own right, Jenni has toured worldwide with Lou Reed, David Byrne of The Talking Heads, Ronnie Spector & The Ronettes, and had several recordings released, including pairings with her famous mother.

“She’s beautiful and has a great voice,” Muldaur said. “This is her very biased mom saying this, but I think most people would agree.”

Muldaur’s connections to New Orleans run deep, dating back to her first stop here with Geoff while traveling cross-country with the Kweskin band in 1964. They dined at Tujague’s and visited Preservation Hall and she “just loved it.”

Muldaur has returned to New Orleans many times to record and visit friends, especially Dr. John, with whom she often recorded and toured as a duet in the 1980s. Other local luminary friends included Danny and Blue Lu Barker whose sensuous ditty, “Don’t You Feel My Leg,” became another of Muldaur’s most popular songs and the title track of her Grammy-nominated 42nd album in 2018.

When asked if anyone has ever attempted to do so, Muldaur laughed and replied, “They’ve tried but if they’re not invited, I remind them that the song is “DON’T You Feel My Leg.”

In recent years she has returned to perform at JazzFest and the annual Danny Barker Banjo & Guitar Festival.

A longtime resident of the San Francisco Bay Area, Muldaur still touts New Orleans as “my second home. What I tell people is, ‘My furniture is still in California but my heart is in New Orleans’ and I go back every chance I get.”

“Let’s Get Happy Together” can be purchased at local record stores or ordered online from https://stonyplain.labelstore.ca/