

Jason Neville: Following his Own Path Through the Music World

By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor

Sharing a last name with a famous New Orleans musical family that includes the Neville Brothers and other widely known first, second, and third-generation musicians can create expectations that someone from the younger generation might feel compelled to live up to.

Jason Neville is in that category, living up to expectations but not necessarily in the same way as many might think. Jason, the youngest of the three sons of five-time Grammy Award-winning vocalist, Aaron Neville, and the nephew of the other three Neville Brothers, has followed the family's musical path in a different direction.

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Lirette and Jason Neville



Lirette Neville, George Clinton, Jason Neville

As the lead singer and percussionist for his namesake group, the Jason Neville Funky Soul Band and his own separate solo act – Jason Neville Neo-Solo – he said, “I got my own thing going on” And that “thing” spans multiple musical genres ranging from their specialty – funk – to R&B, soul music (especially the Motown sound), hip hop and even some covers of popular tunes, including standards by Aaron Neville and the Neville Brothers.

“When we perform, I get asked all the time to sing ‘Tell it Like it Is’ and I do whatever I can as far as that goes,” Jason explained. “I do a few of his (Aaron’s) other songs like ‘Hercules’ and ‘Yellow Moon’ also. But I’m all my favorite singers wrapped into one. You can find a little Aaron Neville in me, a little Cyril Neville (youngest of the Neville Brothers), plus Art Neville, Ivan Neville, Michael Jackson, James Ingram, Stevie Wonder, Charlie Wilson, and a few others. And then I’ve got my own originals and my own style as well,” he continued, adding that Jackson has been his most significant influence.

The six-member Funky Soul Band, founded in 2016 and fronted by Jason and his wife of 20-plus years, Lirette Dabney Neville, regularly performs at Café Negril and the 30 by 90 Club on Frenchmen Street when they’re not on tour. For larger shows, they’ll add a three-piece horn section.

“The First Lady of Funk,” Lirette also comes from a musical household. Her father is Sullivan Dabney Jr., a renowned – now largely retired – drummer, vocalist, and arranger. In addition to being a co-lead singer with Jason’s band, she is their business manager, handling bookings, tours, and the group’s finances.

“She’s my right hand. I don’t know what I’d do without her,” Jason said.

Lirette describes the group as a “live mix band” which she defines as “a little bit of everything. Originals, live mixes, and mixed covers.” The group has released two extended play CDs with four songs each and a new EP was released in July 2023.

Over the years the Funky Soul Band has performed at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, French Quarter Festival, and recently headlined the Texas Jazz Festival and the Portland, Oregon Juneteenth Festival. In February 2022 they played onstage at the Howling Wolf with Rock & Roll Hall of Famer. George Clinton, founder, and leader of Parliament-Funkadelic, an event that Lirette said, “jump-started our careers.” They will



Jason Neville, Aaron Neville

perform again with Clinton on December 2 at the annual Improvisations Gala fundraiser for the New Orleans Jazz Museum.

Growing up in the multitalented Neville household on Valence Street in the culturally rich 13th Ward of New Orleans, one might think Jason was pressured into pursuing a musical career. However, according to him, that was not the case at all.

“It was never forced on me to go into music,” he said. He even turned down the opportunity to learn piano from the



Jason Neville

legendary James Booker, a decision he now regrets.

But the musical seed had already been planted in Jason, whether through the family genes or simply being in an environment where music was omnipresent. Rather than being coerced into a music career, Jason was strongly encouraged to pursue it, especially by his famous father.

"I started performing when they (family members) would take me to shows, like maybe when I was five or six years old," Jason recalled. "I'd start walking up on the stage by myself and grab a tambourine. Then they started giving me a mic. I would do talent shows and win first place singing Michael Jackson and James Ingram songs."

Later, Jason's oldest brother, Ivan Neville, who founded the award-winning Dumpstaphunk band in 2003, started featuring him in some of his shows. "Ivan would let me sing and he would try to record me. Eventually, I started doing my own thing," Jason said.

When he was a teenager, Jason was wounded in an accidental shooting. After recovering, he moved to California in 1986 with Ivan, who was pressing his first solo project, "If My Ancestors Could See Me Now."

"I sang background on it and while I lived out there, I got a development deal with Island Records," Jason said. But, he added, "they were looking for a rapper and I didn't know that at the time. That wasn't my thing." The deal fell through after recording a few songs, which were never released.

Jason returned to New Orleans two years later. He immediately



Jason and Lirette Neville

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~Jason Neville

formed another band: The DEF Generation, which included other members of the Neville family and two brothers, Ricky, and Norman Caesar. "We created a sound called Brass Hop in 1989: Hip Hop with a brass band," Jason said. "We recorded a bunch of stuff and then things happened to us, and we went our separate ways.

The band's horn section spun off as the Soul Rebels who are still active today as one of the most popular and widely known brass bands in New Orleans.

Over the following years, Jason performed with several other bands, including a stint as drummer Russell Batiste and Friends lead singer. But finally, he decided to go out alone as the frontman of his eponymously named group. "My wife said it was important for me to start my own band because I was singing for other people, and it wasn't putting enough food on the table. I had to do my own thing," he explained.

And that's where he is now, along with fronting a separate act with some of the same band members from Funky Soul. As Jason Neville Neo-Solo, it features a more varied repertoire.

"It's another side of me," Jason explained. "People don't understand that I don't just do funk and New Orleans music. I do music for the whole world, so the stuff I'll have on my new CD is some of my experiences and life."

A release party for Jason's newest recording with Neo-Solo has been set for Friday, October 29 at a venue to be announced. The new record will feature nine original tracks that Jason and his four-piece band will perform and will be on sale at the event. The performance will begin at 8:00 p.m. For more detailed information go to <https://jnevillefunksoulband.com>.