

Finding His Niche:

Sean Vappie excels in music and finance

By Anita Oubre

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEAN VAPPIE



Sean Vappie uses his love of music as a platform not only to entertain but also to pay homage to those who came before him, including his father, the legendary master banjo player Don Vappie. Along with his sister Monique, the two are excited to bring the city a venue that will not only serve as an event space but also host live music and serve as a cultural arts center to keep Creole heritage alive and well.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEAN VAPPIE

Their club, named Venue Vapaille, is located at 4201 Washington Avenue in New Orleans. Sean explained that it was important for both him and Monique to focus on a venue that could bring the love of music to its patrons and serve as a place where the community could gather to explore ideas, culture, art, and history.

"We want Venue Vapaille to be an extension of our family to yours, a place that feels comfortable, like you are at home in your living room," said Sean. "We want to bring real culture, real hospitality, and real New Orleans."

For now, the venue will host special events like repasts, baby showers, and family functions, with a music room and a banquet room. Weekends will bring live music with the feel of the old jazz clubs. In the future, they will build out the patio area for outdoor concerts in good weather. For the upstairs space, the vision is to host classes, workshops, and events under the Don Vappie Creole Cultural Arts Foundation.

'My sister and I sat down with our dad, and we discussed what his vision might be for the space. We wanted to build a legacy for our family to honor everything my dad built, but we also wanted his input," said Sean.

The legacy is rich, filled with music, food, and tradition. Growing up, Sean enjoyed attending gigs with his father, and though his father never pushed him to play music, it had a huge influence on his life.

"My parents divorced when I was young, and I spent time in two households," Sean recalled. "Understanding that nothing comes without discipline, they both added discipline and structure to my life. My father did not have to instill the music in us because it was always there," Sean added.

While attending St. Leo the Great School, Sean learned to play the trumpet by third grade, and he was very fond of his music teachers. He was the protective brother of his only sister and did what a brother had to do to stay close to her, including participating in talent shows.

"I can remember hanging out at my grandma's house and learning this dance to New Edition's kick back song to perform at a talent show. It's really great looking back and remembering all the parents who pitched in and helped us put on these shows, including my dad," Sean said.

Sean would go on to audition for the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, where he attended school half days for a few years. Even with this opportunity, a young Sean wasn't quite sure where his focus should lie.

"I was all over the place," he recalled. "I studied with the late, legendary Clyde Kerr, and I had the opportunity to jive with all the greats in music who were all students at the time, such as Walter Ramsey, Leon "Kid Chocolate" Brown, Big Sam, and Andrew Baham. Those days gave me many life lessons in music that I hold to this day," Sean reflected.

Sean was also exposed to instruments he was unfamiliar with, which gave him a well-rounded musical foundation. "We basically had an entire orchestra, with violins, violas, and cellos. It was a great experience. Our teachers gave us a great foundation not only in music but in life lessons," he said.

Sean also studied at NOCCA with Ron Benko, who played trumpet for the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. He then attended the University of New Orleans, where he studied jazz, and later went to Southern University at New Orleans, where he studied under August Fleury and Kidd Jordan. Sean was undecided about whether to teach, go into music law, or perform. As a young man, school didn't hold his attention.

"I wasn't sure how I could make a living with music. I know I probably gave my mother the blues," Sean laughed. "I ended up leaving school and taking music lessons in a more relaxed setting.

Music remained an outlet for Sean as he built a life in Maryland and later in Atlanta. He started a career in banking and played music on the side. There, Sean found his niche. Starting as a teller and learning all, he could in the financial world, Sean passed the required exams and earned his Securities Representative Licenses. He mastered how banks and lending work while building relationships with clients and helping them prepare for the future.

"It's just like a musician looking at a song," he explained. "I look at the overview and try to understand the timing,



Don and Sean Vappie



Monique (sister), Don (dad), and Sean Vappie



Sean Vappie

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEAN VAPPIE



Terrence and The Fortress Band: Louis Bloom, Jerry Cambre, Terrence Dugas, Sean Vappie, and Max Valentino

what's coming ahead. That musical thought process helps me to function in the finance world now because now I can see the big picture and can go in and fine-tune certain things."

As a successful financial advisor, Sean enjoys sitting down with his clients and helping them figure out their financial goals, whether long- or short-term. He is proud to have his own office through Edward Jones.

"After attending school all of those years and not really knowing what I would end up doing, I came upon this career that I enjoy and that I am good at. Being able to plan out and understand legacy planning, wealth transfer, and wealth building as I sit with my clients is satisfying," Sean reflected. "It's that same thought process that happened with me in music. Learning how to read music and understand its theory. What leads to what and being able to have that same view in how I do financial planning for my clients."

Sean says building relationships with clients is key, and you never know what will come of them. During a financial review, one of Sean's clients, Terrence Dugas, mentioned that she was learning to play drums. "And I thought if this woman can learn to play the drums at this stage in her life, I can certainly return to music that I had put on the back burner for many years."

Terrence and The Fortress Band was born after many jam sessions in a garage, where talented friends like Guitar Slim Junior, Noel Carter, and Percy Williams would sit in and give pointers. Sean bought a guitar and reestablished his love for his trumpet.

The band became regulars on open mic nights and established themselves well within the community. Terrence and the Fortress Band are known for their high-energy, multi-genre music that blends the New Orleans sound with funk, rock, and blues. Sean enjoys playing trumpet and guitar and singing.

The group performs original and cover songs and enjoys entertaining at festivals, private events, and restaurants such as the Blue Crab, where they regularly perform.

Sean's passion for music extends beyond performing. He also serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors for Girls Play Trumpets Too, an organization founded by New Orleans musician Troy Sawyer. The organization is dedicated to empowering young girls to pursue the trumpet, an instrument traditionally dominated by men, while fostering confidence, mentorship, and opportunities for the next generation of musicians. For Sean, supporting this mission is another meaningful way to give back to the community that helped shape his musical journey and ensure that New Orleans' rich musical heritage continues to thrive.

In his spare time, Sean enjoys exploring the New Orleans dining scene. He is a self-proclaimed foodie who enjoys trying new foods and flavors. A few years ago, Sean discovered Qigong, an ancient



Guitar Slim, Terrence, and Sean Vappie

Chinese practice that involves mediation, slow-flowing movement and deep breathing to achieve a calm state of mind.

"The practice has been very peaceful for me; learning about this ancient culture and adapting the practice in my life is a good experience for me. It's all good; the music, which is more than work, is enjoyable. Providing financial advice and helping clients is good, and now bringing Venue Vapaille into the community will also be good."



Venue Vapaille

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