Dr. Michael White is among the most visible and important New Orleans musicians today. He is one of only a few of today’s native New Orleans born artists to continue the authentic traditional jazz style. Dr. White is noted for his classic New Orleans jazz clarinet sound, for leading several popular bands, and for his many efforts to preserve and extend the early jazz tradition. Dr. White is a relative of early generation jazz musicians, including bassist Papa John Joseph, clarinetist Willie Joseph, and saxophonist and clarinetist Earl Fouche.

White played in St Augustine High School’s acclaimed Marching 100 and Symphonic bands and had several years of private clarinet lessons from the band’s director, Edwin Hampton. He finished magna cum laude from Xavier University of Louisiana with a degree in foreign language education. He received a masters and a doctorate in Spanish from Tulane University. White began teaching Spanish at Xavier University in 1980 and also African American Music History since 1987. Since 2001 he has held the Charles and Rosa Keller Endowed Chair in the Humanities at Xavier. He is the founding director of Xavier’s Culture of New Orleans Series, which highlights the city’s unique culture in programs that combine scholars, authentic practitioners, and live performances. White is also a jazz historian, producer, lecturer, and consultant. He has developed and performed many jazz history themed programs. He has written and published numerous essays in books, journals, and other publications. For the last several years he has been a guest coach at the Juilliard Music School (Juilliard Jazz). He was the musical director for several Jazz at Lincoln Center concerts. He has been the traditional jazz consultant/coordinator for the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival since 1995. White has also had a long association of performing and recording with acclaimed trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

White’s professional musical career began in 1975 with a four-year tenure in Ernest “Doc” Paulin’s Brass Band - performing in dozens of social club parades (second lines), jazz funerals, and church parades. Later, White learned from performing for many years with over three dozen active early generation musicians born between the late 1890s and 1912, such as Kid Thomas Valentine, Louis Nelson, Danny Barker, Sweet Emma Barrett, Preston Jackson, Kid Sheik Colar, Percy Humphrey, Emmanuel Sayles, Chester Zardis, Louis Barbarin, Jeanette Kimball, Narvin Kimball, and Josiah “Cie” Frazier. The older musicians mentored Dr. White with musical advice and shared their many experiences from playing among their contemporaries: Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet and other early jazz legends.

Dr. White has been acclaimed for his clarinet playing, which although original, has been derived from the rich-toned rhythmic Afro-Creole clarinet styles of New Orleans legends like, Johnny Dodds, Sidney Bechet, George Lewis, Jimmy Noone, Barney Bigard, Willie Humphrey, Edmond Hall, Louis Cottrell, and Omer Simeon. In terms of repertoire, Dr. White has often drawn from the classic New Orleans jazz recordings of the 1920s, the “revival style” of Bunk Johnson and George Lewis, and the brass band repertoire: performing marches, rags, hymns, blues, old pop songs, and special jazz songs. To address the challenge of “doing something new or different” with traditional music (without altering its essence), White began to compose new
songs, to blend New Orleans jazz with other ethnic folk music styles, and to convert music from other genres into traditional New Orleans jazz. There are several groups around the world that are playing White’s original songs. Dr. White discussed his music in this way: “Traditional New Orleans jazz is much more than a limited set of familiar songs. Many obscure classic songs are still great to play. However, this is a style that can be used for fresh new ideas and endless creation. In my original songs, I combine the musical principles of the early tradition with things that have affected the world, New Orleans, and my life today. Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver never experienced the 1960s and 1970s political climate, the Civil Rights Movement, Hurricane Katrina, or the Covid pandemic; but these and other life’s issues generate a variety of emotions that are great inspiration for new traditional music for both dancing and listening.”

Dr. Michael White has performed in nearly three dozen foreign countries and across the United States with several bands, including his own Original Liberty Jazz Band, Dr. Michael White Quartet, and Liberty Brass Band. He has played in major concert facilities, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Chicago’s Symphony Hall, Boston’s Symphony Hall, Hollywood Bowl, and Wolftrap. He has also appeared at many international music festivals, theaters, and universities. He has been in over two dozen documentaries (Liberty Street Blues, Up From the Streets, Sidney Bechet: Treat it Gentle, Maroon, Blues Planet, New Orleans: The First 300 Years, New Orleans: A Living Museum of Music, When the Levees Broke, etc.), several feature films (Tune in Tomorrow, Undercover Blues, and Hobson’s Choice) numerous international television (HBOs Treme) and radio programs. White has been frequently profiled and quoted in the international news media and in the United States in publications such as the USA Today, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Boston Herald, and the Times-Picayune.

Dr. White has appeared on over eighty recordings, including seventeen under his own name. In 2000 he signed with Basin Street Records and has released eight recordings on that label. He has also recorded with other noted artists such as Wynton Marsalis, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, Paul Simon, Taj Mahal, Eric Clapton, and Marianne Faithful. Most of White’s recordings include some of his original compositions, which have been critically acclaimed. His records have made numerous jazz record charts and have been played on many jazz and folk music radio station across the nation. White produced, wrote an original composition for, and performed on the Smithsonian-Folkways recording, Through the Streets of the City: New Orleans Brass Bands.

Dr. Michael White has received numerous honors and awards, including the French Chevalier of Arts and Letters; the NEA National Heritage Fellowship Award; the LEA Louisiana Humanist of the Year Award; the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publisher’s (ASCAP) Deems-Taylor Liner Notes Award; the National Association of Jazz Journalist’s Jazz Hero Award; the Tulane University President’s Medal; the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education Distinguished Cultural Award; and the Tulane University Alumni Professional Achievement Award. He also received Gambit Magazine’s Big Easy Entertainment Traditional Jazz Artist of the Year Award twice and the Offbeat Magazine’s Best of the Beat Clarinetist of
the Year Award (twelve times). White was also selected several times in the *Downbeat Magazine’s* Critics’ and Readers’ Polls for being among the top current jazz clarinetists.

For recordings and further information got to: www.basinstreetrecords.com

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