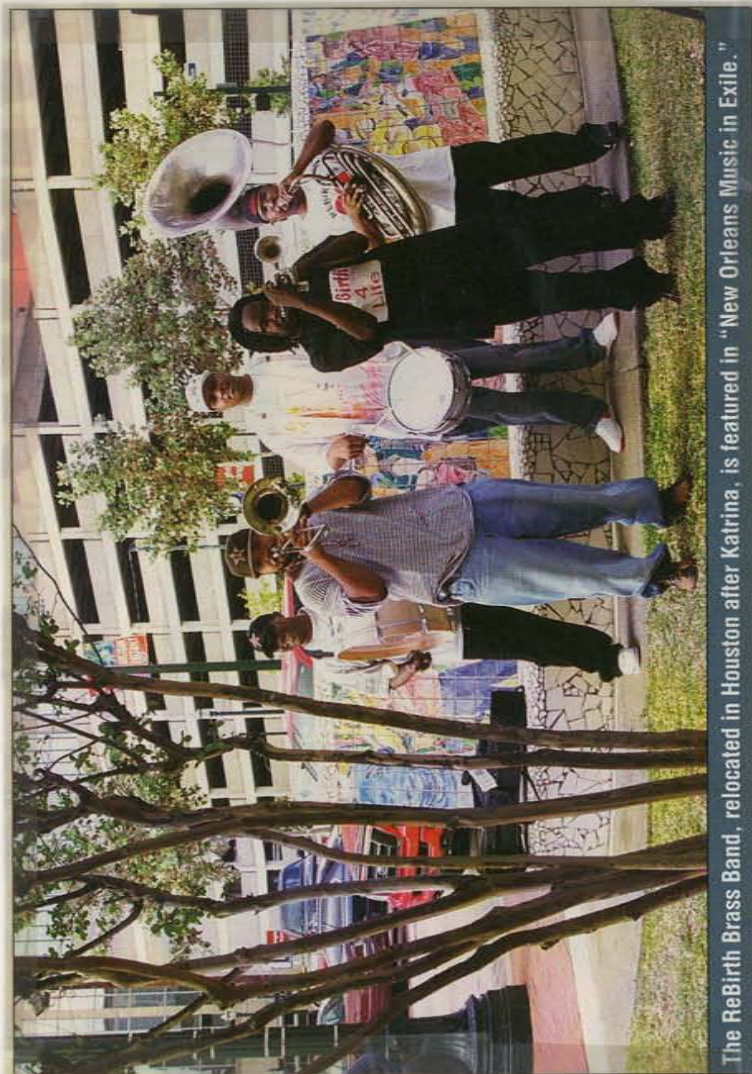


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Reviews

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The ReBirth Brass Band, relocated in Houston after Katrina, is featured in "New Orleans Music in Exile."

The Big Easy's big loss

NEW ORLEANS MUSIC IN EXILE

(DOCU)

A Starz Entertainment Group presentation of a Mug-Shot/Hope Springs production. Produced by Robert Mugge, Diana Zelman. Executive producer, Michael Ruggiero.

Directed, edited by Robert Mugge. Camera (color, HDV-to-D5), Christopher Li, David Sperling; music consultants, Mark Samuels, Michael Tisserand, Joe Mulherin; sound, Seth Tallman. Reviewed on DVD, Sydney, Australia, March 30, 2006. (In Memphis, Full Frame film festivals.) Running time: 114 MIN.

With: Theresa Andersson, Dr. John, Cyril Neville, Big Chief Monk Boudreaux, Irma Thomas, Stephen Assaf, Eddie Bo, Marcia Ball, Kermit Ruffins, ReBirth Brass Band, the Iguanas, World Leader Pretend, Cowboy Mouth, beatinpath, Jon Cleary, Papa Grows Funk.

By **EDDIE COCKRELL**

As with the vast majority of the nearly two dozen music-themed films he's made in a career now stretching back three decades, Robert Mugge's leisurely and peripatetic "New Orleans Music in Exile" is all about the music. First-out-of-the-gate feature-length docu tracing the fates of regional musicians following displacement by Hurricane Katrina will blow through regional Southern fests prior to an official cable preem on Starz InBlack series May 19, with an encore showing on Starz May 20. Following the trajectories of Mugge's historically invaluable titles, critical acclaim and fan support will spell vigorous international

tube interest and some global theatrical play, with long ancillary life assured.

By daring to largely sidestep the emotionally charged issues of government response and racism in the wake of the disaster, Mugge succeeds in refocusing the spotlight on the pressing questions of who went where, what talent was lost in transition, and the more elusive follow-up: when — and if — they'll return.

Pic is an intimate and eye-opening meditation on the resiliency of the artists and the magnitude of the loss.

This specificity may disappoint some expecting a hard-hitting critique of local and federal responsibility. Pic as a whole, however, reps an essential piece of the larger puzzle, an intimate and eye-opening meditation on the resiliency of the artists and the magnitude of the loss, informed by the helmer's familiarity and friendships with key subjects.

Ability of songs to reflect current events is established immediately, as news footage of the storm is edited to singer Theresa Andersson's haunting solo cover of Neil Young's "Like a Hurricane," with its eerily prescient lyrics "I want to love you, but I'm getting blown away."

Local icon Dr. John strolls through apt "Right Place, Wrong Time," after which singer Irma Thomas leads the camera through her waterlogged Lions' Den Lounge as 1993 footage Mugge

shot of her performing "Smoke Filled Room" in the same club is intercut. Stage is thus set for a mood of remembrance and rediscovery.

Helmer followed musicians from the chaos of post-Katrina New Orleans to temporary lives and gigs in Austin, Houston, Memphis and Lafayette. Many sing the praises of generous club owners and appreciative auds in their adoptive homes.

Closest the pic comes to political content are fleeting mentions of FEMA and New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin, as well as some general critiques from the dependably outspoken Dr. John. Cyril Neville makes key observations, calling Crescent City "a spiritless body, and that's all it's going to be without those people from the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth wards."

Rounding out interviewees are journo, merchants, club owners and music bizzers, including Basin Street records honcho Mark Samuels, one of three credited music consultants.

Tech package is crisp and vibrant, with interview and performance footage shot on Sony's new high-def vid and subsequently mastered to the high-end D5 format. Sound is clear and immediate, marred only by occasional muddiness in a mix from an outdoor show.

Overall results blur the line further between 35mm and tape, with Mugge's relaxed and unforced style belying what must have been a logistical nightmare for helmer and frosh co-producer Diana Zelman. Appropriate to the grassroots thrust of the pic, plans call for a limited theatrical engagement in New Orleans prior to its broadcast.