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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Hi, Sheryl! Nice work. Please note spellings — Ramsay Thomas, Allen Toussaint.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 'A burst of the harmonizing of two cultures'

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####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 A Mardi Gras party in Keene brings together two local

3 New Orleans-style brass bands

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4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 Mardi Gras, the last time to enjoy good food and drink  
6 before the 40 days of Lent, falls on Tuesday, Feb. 17.

7 You don't have to go to New Orleans to enjoy the city's  
8 joyful music as The Celebration Brass Band of VT and Folksoul  
9 Band will bring the spirit of the Crescent City to New England  
10 with a Mardi Gras party at Nova Arts, 48 Emerald St., Saturday,  
11 Feb. 14, at 7:30 p.m.

12 Eric Gagne, the programming director at Nova Arts, says  
13 the venue has hosted Mardi Gras parties for the past four years.  
14 The Folksoul Band, a six-piece group from Greenfield, New  
15 Hampshire, have played every year. They shared the stage with  
16 the Celebration Brass Band from Brattleboro last year and will do  
17 so again on Saturday.

18 Both bands celebrate the music of the Big Easy; music  
19 that has been called “a joyful noise with history in every note.”

## 20 **A celebration and a dirge**

21 True to its name, the Celebration Brass Band has brought  
22 its high-energy sounds to Brattleboro’s events and parades since  
23 founder and leader Peter Simoneaux started the group in 2009.

24 Simoneaux, who plays bass drum and sings with the  
25 band, grew up in New Orleans. This gives him a real connection  
26 to brass band music, which is a mainstay in New Orleans and  
27 has been featured in street parades and jazz funerals since the  
28 1800s.

29 Surprisingly, Simoneaux did not get involved in music  
30 until after he left New Orleans in 1997.

31 “I started the brass band on the cusp of the Obama  
32 administration,” Simoneaux said. “It started as a workshop that  
33 went on for a couple of years, and that was the genesis for the  
34 band. It’s evolved over the years and continues to do so.”

35 Simoneaux and some of his band members also play in  
36 the People’s Resistance Band, which has performed at various  
37 street protests in Brattleboro over the past year. So many  
38 musicians have come out to participate in the protests,  
39 Simoneaux has once again started workshops similar to the one  
40 that led to the formation of the Brass Band.

41 He leads a New Orleans music session on the second  
42 Tuesday of each month, and then there is The Resistance Band  
43 session on the fourth Tuesday, led by Dan DeWalt, who also  
44 leads the People’s Resistance Band. Workshops take place at the  
45 118 Elliot gallery in Brattleboro at 7:30 p.m.

46 As for the Celebration Brass Band, its members look  
47 forward to playing at Nova Arts, with Simoneaux noting that last  
48 year’s performance was “a blast” and the first time playing Keene  
49 in his almost-20-year career.

50 The number of musicians in the group varies depending  
51 on the event.

52 “There will be nine of us on Feb. 14 for this Mardi Gras  
53 Party at Nova Arts — myself and Josh Francis on bass drum and  
54 snare and full drum kit,” he said. “My wife, Linda Simoneaux,  
55 and Tim Ellis will be on sousaphones with Dan DeWalt and  
56 Bobby Thies on trombones, Scott Sizer and Samuel Garcia on  
57 trumpets, and Ron Kelley on tenor saxophone.”

58 The event will start with the band parading through the  
59 crowd. Tim Ellis will be parade marshal.

60 “We’ll be playing a traditional New Orleans dirge in  
61 memory of those who’ve lost their lives to agents of the current  
62 ‘Random Deportation Administration,’” Simoneaux said. “A New  
63 Orleans dirge is very slow and powerful. We did this last year,  
64 and it really blew people away.”

65 The musicians will then kick off the celebration with a  
66 rousing set of New Orleans brass band music, which will range  
67 from old spirituals to modern jazz and tunes from the swing era.  
68 The Celebration Brass Band will close with a second line out into  
69 the audience with Linda Simoneaux as parade marshal.

## 70 **‘A root culture for the entire** 71 **country’**

72 The Folksoul Band will then take over, with a set of  
73 spirited and danceable music from New Orleans.

74 Fred Simmons, trombone player of the band, founded the  
75 Folksoul Band in 2007 as an offshoot of his American roots group  
76 Tattoo.

77 “The Folksoul band came together to play for Mardi Gras  
78 because I was getting inspired by my connection to New Orleans

79 music,” said Simmons. “I’ve been down there three times with my  
80 trombone.”

81 The band played its first show at a Mardi Gras party in  
82 Peterborough, New Hampshire, and has since provided the  
83 soundtrack to many Mardi Gras celebrations. The group includes  
84 Tara Greenblatt on drums, Ramsay Thomas on bass, Leslie Vogel  
85 on piano and accordion, and Walden Whitham on saxophone  
86 and flute.

87 “We try to maintain a positive spirit,” Simmons said. “A  
88 lot of our tunes are by folks who grew out of that culture like Fats  
89 Domino, Dr. John, Allen Toussaint, and the Neville Brothers. I  
90 have been writing throughout my career, so we have some  
91 originals.

92 Simmons said the musicians are looking forward to  
93 returning to what has become an annual gig at Nova Arts and  
94 encourage all to come out.

95 “We are a great dance band, and so is the Celebration  
96 Brass Band,” he said.

97 He also stressed that “it is important that we bring New  
98 Orleans culture to New England, because it’s a root culture for  
99 the entire country.”

100 “America has pretty much based its music on New  
101 Orleans music, which grows out of the uniting of Black American  
102 culture with white American culture,” Simmons said. “In the  
103 1950s, when rock ‘n’ roll was born, it was a burst of the  
104 harmonizing of the two cultures.

105 “It was a great thing and an antidote to the politics that  
106 are going on now and trying to divide us again,” he said.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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107 This is an all-ages show, and advance tickets are  
108 available at [novaarts.org](http://novaarts.org). If you can’t afford to pay, there is an  
109 Access For All option as a ticket purchase option. Doors open at

110 7 p.m., and the music starts at 7:30. Seating is limited. For more  
111 information on the workshops, contact Peter Simoneaux at  
112 [peter.simoneaux@gmail.com](mailto:peter.simoneaux@gmail.com).

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