

## GHOST WRITING SAMPLE: ALBUM LINER NOTES

*Following are liner notes (text included on CD/album packaging) that I wrote for—and in the voice of—then 63 year-old, African American saxophonist, Reggie Houston. The writing was included in his CD “Homage 1,” released in 2010. Any grammatical inaccuracies are stylistically intentional, and meant to mimic the speaking style and cadence of Reggie Houston.*

In its entirety this album is a humble tribute to all the brave, talented, and dedicated teachers, artists, civil rights activists, and visionaries who dared to dream into existence a better world for all of us. It is an homage to the people who brought me into this world and those who brought me up into the music and taught me to see and focus on that which is beautiful. It is a heart-felt thank you to those who created the rich heritage and culture I have been gifted with, and to those with whom I am still blessed to play and create, to learn from and to teach, and most certainly a tribute to every incredible person who contributed to this album. Specifically, each song carries its own special tributes.

I recorded, "A Dime Away from a Hot Dog," as both an homage to its writer and true renaissance man Oscar Brown Jr., and to the poetic blues at its core which are in themselves a tribute to the indomitable human spirit. Oscar Brown Jr. wrote over 1,000 songs and many thousands more poems. He was a political and civil rights activist, Broadway playwright, radio announcer for the first African American news show, a radical and brilliant thinker, and above all, an educator. For me this song evokes the voices of the Harlem Renaissance poets Langston Hughes, Jessie Redman Fauset and Countee Cullen, while conjuring images of the post-war boom to the post-boom depression roller coaster cycle of our great society.

Ironically, "Sick and Tired (Oh Baby)" couldn't be further from the truth. This song is dedicated to my great friend, and equally great drummer, Shannon Powell. The meat of this song is a duet with me and vocalist/blues harp player Curtis Salgado. Curtis is one of the most real cats I know and he makes that harp moan like it's speaking directly to your soul, like it *is* the language of the soul. Curtis has been to hell and back and you can feel that depth in his music—he can take you to the nastiest places and then wash you clean with redemption. When Curtis & I get to talking, a 30 second "can you play on this gig" phone call turns into a half hour conversation. In fact, Curtis came by the studio just to record this one track, but he ended up staying so long that his band tracked him down at the studio to drag him off to his gig! It's that camaraderie that we share that I hope comes through in this recording and that made this recording the perfect song to dedicate to Shannon.

"Sick and Tired (Oh Baby)" is also very much an ode to the harp—you know the harmonica was based on the sheng which was the very first single reed instrument and predecessor to the organ, accordion, concertina, clarinet, saxophone and every other modern single reed instrument. If Chinese Emperor Nyn-Kwya, way back in 3,000 BC hadn't ordered the creation of the sheng in an effort to impress a woman, modern music would be so different today. So in a way, I owe my very livelihood to some ancient Chinese cat's quest to get some....

On the surface, Ms. Killona Greenhill is about my great grandmother, Martha Johnson, and Greenhill Cemetery in which she's buried. I loved my great grandmother and she was a big part of my life even though she died when I was just a child. She was a proud woman and would often tell people that she was born free—I think it made her feel a little bit better than other folks she knew who were born into slavery. She chewed tobacco and smoked a pipe and lived off in this little shack with a wood stove and no electricity or running water—my parents couldn't stand it, but to me it was the hippest place in the world! My great grandmother remembered when Killona was just the most picturesque and pastoral slice of the antebellum south. On my last day in New Orleans, before moving to Portland, I drove out to see her and take some pictures of that quaint little cemetery, now wedged between dirt-gray and ugly industrial buildings and even a nuclear plant. Oh if my great grandmother could see it today, she'd wonder how this could possibly represent the great progress that had been so touted in her time. And that's what got me wanting to write a song not just about the juxtaposition of past and present, but a song that really exemplifies the merging of the old with the new. So I sat down with this talented young musician I know, Travis Hansen, and I showed him the pictures, told him about my great grandmother and asked him to write lyrics for me. Travis is a rapper, guitarist and percussionist, and he immediately understood what I wanted the lyrics to convey and wrote this great song, but I just couldn't quite get it to fit with the music... until I surprised my daughter Zena, who was visiting me in Portland. She thought I was taking her out to get something to eat but I took her to the studio and gave her Travis' lyrics and she just laid it down with her own gorgeous, modern vocal style and we ended up with this cross-generational collaboration that came together so beautifully, and to me is the perfect representation of the old married to the new. Now when I listen to the song I picture my great grandmother walking down the lane as proud as ever, but not old, naaaw.... Now she's a fox, a young 21st century woman of means, dressed to the nines with her hair all done up. Oh Miss Killona Greenhill is a fine woman indeed!

I almost titled this album "Come Laugh with Me," because anyone who knows me will tell you that I'm just a big kid who wants to spread joy and laughter to everyone! The song is written by the beautiful and talented Miss Betty Bryant who is as wonderful a singer and pianist as she is a songwriter. I first met Betty during a gig I used to hold down at Snug Harbor with The Charmaine Neville Band. One night I was playing and I noticed her in the audience. Now I didn't yet know who she was, but I could tell by her body language and the way she listened that she was a musician. Afterward, I was having my last drink at the bar and she sat down, introduced herself and told me that Earl Palmer had sent her to check out the set—and I was doubly honored that a musician of Earl Palmer's caliber would recommend my music to a musician of Betty Bryant's caliber. So this song is dedicated to both of those musicians, and to all of the other great musicians who have brought laughter and joy to their audiences like Dave Bartholomew and my good friend the late great Lee Allen.

Along with music, I have two other great loves in my life. Like many New Orleanians, one of my great passions is food (and we'll get to the third a little later on) and I wouldn't dream of making a tribute album without an ode or two to good food! In fact, the cats in Fats' band nicknamed me "Mikey" cause I'd try anything! We'd travel all over the world to these wonderful and exotic cities and Fats be cookin' on a hot plate in his hotel room—serious! There'd be a knock on your hotel door and one of the cats would poke his head in and say "Fats cookin'!" And everybody would take their plate—borrowed earlier from the hotel kitchen and kept in our rooms for just such an occasion... cause Fats can cook! But I'd also go out and explore the culinary offerings of the region and order things off the menu when I didn't even know what they were. But "Grease in My Gravy" is a song about the good Creole home cookin' I grew up on in N'Awlins. Although it was written by Doug MacLeod, my version is based on Betty Bryant's interpretation with some of my own Oregon-ized lyrics thrown in! It's an ode to all of my favorite hometown restaurants, chefs and dishes: the crab cakes in that light cream sauce that Chef Roussel (who passed away in 2005) used to make at Brennan's on Royal Street, anything at Snug Harbor by Chefs Elton, Brock and Ferdy—and Snug has the best burger in the world! And right down the block from Snug is The Praline Connection—you got to stop there if you're in town. Then there's the red beans and rice and lemon chicken at The Palm Court—and their chocolate mousse is to live and die for! The oyster casserole at Mosca's out

on Highway 90 in Avondale.... And my favorite lunch spot is Willie Mae's Scotch House—sometimes I'd take my daughter Miriam out of school early just so we could have lunch at Willie Mae's, cause eating Miss Willie Mae's red beans and rice with smothered veal chops is a special enough occasion that it warrants cutting school! Of course Miss Willie Mae has passed on, but that dish is still just as good as when she made it. And although it's not there anymore, the best gumbo in town used to be made by my Uncle Bunchie in my old neighborhood at my cousins' place, Perkins Bar & Restaurant. It was on the Chitlin' Circuit so Lloyd Price, Fats, Tommy Ridgley and all those cats used to eat there. Oh their Wednesday night crab boil was somethin'! Big Joe Williams be playin' those lowdown blues and you'd buy a quart of beer and get 3 crabs free—of course I wasn't supposed to be hanging out there, but I'd peddle my bike down and they'd wrap some crabs up in newspaper for me and I'd peddle back home before it got too late.... And Piece O'Meat's gourmet Hot Tamales were the best in the world and his Autocrat Social & Pleasure Club Friday Evening Fish Fry was the hottest ticket in town—he wouldn't start frying until 7pm but folks would show up at 4 and hang around drinking for 3 hours just to get some of his catfish! And you can't go wrong with Mandina's on Canal Street—any time I'm back home I go there for their Trout Meuniere, and my favorite, their Tuesday special, Stuffed Breast of Chicken with Oyster Dressing, Candied Yams, and String Beans—and oh they make the best Shrimp Remoulade in town and they have this other appetizer, "crab fingers" they call them, in this buttery wine sauce that you dip your French bread in... yes indeed, Mandina's on Canal Street! And two places you don't want to rush are Commander's Palace and Pascal's Manale. Even before you order your meal at Commander's you want to put in your order for their Creole bread pudding with warm whiskey cream, cause a dessert that good takes time! And you get your bib right when you hit the door at Pascal's Manale, cause you gonna splash that buttery barbecue shrimp! And then there's Hansen's snoball stand on Tchoupitoulas—oh I miss Hansen's! They been there for something like a hundred years, and they make their own cream sauce. There's another great snoball stand on Panola Street—those are both uptown. They got lots of snoball stands downtown, but you can keep 'em—Hansen's and Panola Street, those are my places.

"Before I Grow Too Old" is dedicated to all of the road musicians and crews that support them—because roadies need love too. So if you've ever ended a 24 hour long shift on the soundboard by sleeping on the stage to guard your sound gear—this song's for you. This song has special meaning to me because when I first got in Fats' band I was the youngest cat in the band and Fats used to play the song. And I remember sitting in the back of the tour bus surrounded by musicians who were my heroes, you know? Dave Bartholomew, Lee Allen, Herb Hardesty, Smokey Johnson, Ervin Charles Jr., Fred Kemp.... And I thought to myself, "man, some day I'm gonna do this song. Some day when the time is right." Well, the time is right and I'm finally doing it... before I grow too old! Recording this song was just a wonderful experience, and much of the credit for that (and for this whole CD) goes to Janice Scroggins for her perfection on the keys and also for assembling the perfect group of female vocalists for the song. It was one of those magical studio experiences where everything just clicked and everyone got exactly what I was going for without needing any direction. They came up with their own harmonies and parts and everything and everyone just flowed and worked together in truly perfect harmony.

"Waltz of the Zzzz's" is a song that, for years, I'd been trying to write for my daughters. But it just never came together right. And then my son Zaid, who already had one son, Z.J. (Zaid Junior), had twin boys that he and my daughter-in-law named Zyon and Zamyra. And it just hit me: "Waltz of the Zzzz's!" A lullaby for my boys! And after that epiphany I got together with a wonderful young pianist and composer in Portland, Andrew Oliver, and together we composed the song. So this song is dedicated to Zaid, Larobyn, and their three beautiful boys.

Although Danny Barker didn't write "Mardi Gras in New Orleans," I'm dedicating it to him because, ironically, if Danny Barker hadn't brought back the consciousness of New Orleans traditional jazz from New York to us young knucklehead musicians in New Orleans, there would not have been that great brass band scene that has become the quintessential sound of our city. Because when I was coming up, the only time you heard brass band music anymore was at a funeral or

second line. Danny came back and held classes in church basements and his own home and taught us our own history and really revived the brass band scene. Danny Barker's contribution to New Orleans music and jazz in general was so vast as to be immeasurable—and on a personal level, one of the greatest honors of my life was when I was selected to be one of the musicians in the core band to play at his funeral. We brought Danny home in the tradition that he taught us to respect. Whenever I play Danny's music I feel such deep honor and respect for the man. I don't think I could ever repay Danny Barker for all that he has given me.

Of course, being one of *the* signature Mardi Gras songs, Professor Longhair's "Mardi Gras in New Orleans" is also on this album because Mardi Gras in New Orleans is just the hippest celebration in the world y'all!

"Tafalberg Samba" was written by, who I consider to be one of the greatest composers of all time, Abdullah Ibrahim from South Africa—though many know him by the name Dollar Brand. Ibrahim is as significant a composer as Duke Ellington, and in fact the two of them worked together and shared a mutual respect and appreciation for each others' work. Though both were composers of the jazz idiom, their expression was built on the shoulders of many of the great classical composers like Stravinsky. And in fact today you find their music being studied at the university level by young composers learning their craft. Not only do I admire and cherish the music of Ibrahim, but I respect his drive and success in rising above the oppression of South Africa's apartheid, which mirrored the struggle of Blacks in our own country and many others as well. This song is dedicated not only to those who refused to accept the shackles of racism and bigotry, but who continually found and focused on the beauty in life even in the face of such unjust treatment. Those folks are some of the strongest heroes we have—folks like Oscar Brown Jr. who used humor and playfulness to inspire others to achieve great and positive things.

"Everthing Akbar" is a composition by one of my very favorite pianists, Janice Scroggins whose impeccable and beautiful playing can be heard throughout this album. I feel so blessed to be able to perform regularly with such a maestro—in New Orleans we'd call her "professor," the highest honor a musician can achieve among fellow musicians. This song is both a tribute to Janice, and to its' namesake, the legendary drummer Akbar dePriest. The song got its name from Janice's daughter, who just adored Akbar. Janice would take her to Akbar's house for rehearsals when she was just a little girl, and she'd sit in the room and point to all of Akbar's things and proclaim all of them "Akbar!" Here in Portland Akbar dePriest was an educator much like my teacher Alvin Batiste in Louisiana—both masters of their instruments who chose to teach and to help so many young musicians learn their craft. He walked the world with giants like Coltrane, Dexter Gordon, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Gene "Jug" Ammons, and many more. Yet he chose to finish out his days as a teacher, nurturing and shaping both Portland's young talent and the jazz scene itself. So "Everything Akbar" is as much a tribute to Janice and Akbar as it is to all of the great men and women who set aside their own performance careers to pursue the most noble profession of all: teaching. Men and women who kept alive the musical traditions of the past, inspired the young musicians of the future, and left their indelible stamp on the very genres they helped to create and evolve.

"Save the Bones for Henry Jones" was written by Danny Barker, one of my great mentors as I've mentioned, and again, is on this tribute album to show you just how important food is in my life! This is one of my favorite songs to play in Portland now that I live in a town with all of these health-conscious people. Portland has more vegan restaurants than N'Awlins has vegans! I can't even find pickled meat up in here to make my red beans and rice—my people back home have to airmail it to me! Although, really I jest—Portland has a wide and amazing array of restaurants from traditional to adventurous with every nationality represented. And the produce here would knock your socks off—even in the city we have so many community gardens and vegetable gardens producing such an abundance of food that folks put it out in baskets along the sidewalks with "free" signs on them. And the fruit trees hang so heavy with cherries, apples, figs and plums that you can graze through the city and never go hungry. Yes indeed, Portland may not be N'Awlins but it's

definitely my kind of town. So this song is dedicated to all the kind folks in Portland who smile at strangers on the street and who make this town feel like home to all of us refugees and transplants.

"The Dude" is another song that made it onto this album largely due to the important role arts education plays in creating the healthy and vibrant society that we all enjoy. Donald Byrd who wrote the song was arguably the finest hard bop trumpeter (alongside Clifford Brown) of all time. But more than that, Donald Byrd was a devoted and life-long educator—one of history's greatest player-educators like Jackie McLean, Alvin Thomas, Clyde Kerr Jr. & Sr., Joe Salisbury, Germaine Basile, Hurley Blanchard, and my own teachers Alvin Batiste and Kid Jordan. These are all musicians who did more than merely teach music—they gave (and in some cases still give) their students real world experience and the skills to succeed in the music business. Donald Byrd used the success of his best-selling album, *Black Byrd*, to organize and launch his students into the hit 1970's group *The Blackbyrds*. Germaine Basile is the quintessential jazz singer in New Orleans yet for years she has continued to teach music at Xavier Prep High School. My own teacher Alvin Batiste taught us the importance of business and was directly responsible for getting me a job working for *The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival*—and not as a musician, but in a capacity that gave me so many tools that I still use in business today.

Finally we come to my third great love: baseball. I played baseball when I was a kid and even dreamed of being a professional ballplayer, but I just couldn't hit a curve ball to save my life—which is still kind of painful for me to admit! So eventually I had to resign myself to just being a fan. If you come out to hear me play you'll often hear my saxophone sneak a little, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" into other songs. This song honors all baseball players and all of the ballgames I've spent so many days and hours enjoying. Truly the great American pastime!

When I first moved to Portland everybody tried to pigeon-hole the music I played and they had all these different "scenes." The jazz scene was different from the blues scene which was different from the Americana scene and rap scene and funk scene—man in New Orleans it's just one big joyful scene! So I'm gonna play a jazz tune at the Waterfront Blues Fest and I might play some blues in a jazz club, or a samba in a rock club, cause it's all my music and one style is not separate from another, they are all connected like one great river flowing through time. And that's what this album represents—there's a little bit of something for everybody. But I guess, more than that this album represents all that is important to me: the music and musicians who have shaped my life and career, my family and friends, and the places that are home to me. Education that comes from the heart. Great food. Baseball. Honor, love, joy, and respect.

An encomium from a simple man.