

Trombone Shorty
Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews

WHERE Y’AT? WHERE Y’AT?

We have our own way of living down here in New Orleans, and our own way of talking, too. And that’s what we like to say when we want to tell a friend hello.

So, WHERE Y’AT?

Lots of kids have nicknames, but I want to tell you the story of how I got mine. Just like when you listen to your favorite song, let’s start at the beginning. Because this is a story about music.

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But before you can understand how much music means to me, you have to know how important it is to my hometown, my greatest inspiration.

I grew up in a neighborhood in New Orleans called Treme’ . Any time of day or night, you could hear music floating in the air.

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And there was music in my house too. My big brother, James, played the trumpet so loud you could hear him halfway across town! He was the leader of his own band, and my friends and I would pretend to be in the band, too.

“Follow me,” James would say.

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There's one time every year that's more exciting than any other: Mardi Gras! Parades fill the streets, and beaded necklaces are thrown through the air to the crowd.

I loved the brass bands, with their own trumpets, trombones, saxophones, and the biggest brass instrument of them all, the tuba—which rested over the musician's head like an elephant's trunk!

WHERE Y'AT? WHERE Y'AT? the musicians would call.

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All day long I could see brass bands parade by my house while my neighbors danced along. I loved these parades during Mardi Gras because they made everyone forget about their troubles for a little while. People didn't have a lot of money in Treme', but we always had a lot of music.

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I listened to all these sounds and mixed them together, just like how we make our food. We take one big pot and throw in sausage, crab, shrimp, chicken, vegetables, rice—whatever's in the kitchen—and stir it all together and let it cook. When it's done, it's the most delicious taste you've ever tried. We call it gumbo, and that's what I wanted my music to sound like—different styles combined to create my own *musical* gumbo.

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But first I needed an instrument. The great thing about music is that you don't even need a real instrument to play. So my friends and I decided to make our own.

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We might have sounded different from the *real* brass bands, but we felt like the greatest musicians of Treme'. We were making music, and that's all that mattered.

Then one day I found a broken trombone that looked too beaten up to make music anymore. It didn't sound perfect, but finally with a real instrument in my hand, I was ready to play.

The next time the parade went by my house, I grabbed that trombone and headed out into the street. My brother James noticed me playing along and smiled proudly.

"TROMBONE SHORTY!" he called out, because the instrument was twice my size!

WHERE Y'AT?

From that day on, everyone called me Trombone Shorty! I took that trombone everywhere I went and never stopped playing. I was so small that sometimes I fell right over to the ground because it was so heavy. But I always got back up, and I learned to hold it up high.

I listened to my brother play songs over and over, and I taught myself those songs, too. I practiced day and night, and sometimes I fell asleep with my trombone in my hands.

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One day my mom surprised me with tickets to the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, the best and biggest music festival in town. We went to see Bo Diddley, who my mom said was one of the most important musicians of all time. As I watched him onstage, I raised my trombone to my lips and started to play along. He stopped his band in the middle of the song and asked the crowd, “Who’s that playing out there?”

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Everyone started pointing, but Bo Diddley couldn’t see me because I was the smallest one in the place! So my mom held me up in the air and said, “That’s my son, Trombone Shorty!”

“Well, TROMBONE SHORTY, come on up here! Bo Diddley said.

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The crowd passed me overhead until I was standing on the stage next to Bo Diddley himself! I walked right up to the microphone and held my trombone high up in the air, ready to blow.

“What do you want to play?” Bo Diddley asked.

“FOLLOW ME,” I said.

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After I played with Bo Diddley, I knew I was ready to have my own band. I got my friends together, and we called ourselves the 5 O’Clock Band, because that was the time we went out to play each day after finishing our homework.

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We played all around New Orleans. I practiced and practiced, and soon my brother James asked me to join his band. When people wondered who the kid in his band was, he's proudly say, "That's my little brother, TROMBONE SHORTY!"

WHERE Y'AT?

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And now I have my own band, called Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue, named after a street in Treme'. I've played all around the world, but I always come back to New Orleans. And when I'm home, I make sure to keep my eyes on the younger musicians in town and help them out, just like my brother did for me.

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Today I play at the same New Orleans jazz festival where I once played with Bo Diddley. And when the performance ends, I lead a parade of musicians around, just like I used to do in the streets of Treme' with my friends.

WHERE Y'AT? WHERE Y'AT?

I still keep my trombone in my hands, and I will never let it go.