

MARSHALL, TEXAS -- BIRTHPLACE OF BOOGIE WOOGIE

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By Jack Canson

One of the most significant developments in American musical history is the invention and emergence of a style of piano playing that came to be known as "Boogie Woogie."

No one even casually acquainted with the history of American music discounts the importance of the Boogie Woogie style of playing on popular culture. The musical forms that have evolved from Boogie Woogie have spread across the world, influencing countless thousands of performers and many millions of fans. Most people are aware of the influence of Blues music on Rock and Roll. But perhaps most are unaware that the true father of rock is Boogie Woogie.

Think about Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Ray Charles -- to name but a few. Listen to their earliest recordings and you realize how much of rock and roll comes from Boogie Woogie.

And Boogie Woogie comes from Marshall, Texas.

Proof of Marshall's claim to be the birthplace of this significant musical development can be found in the historical record that has been compiled with citations and contributions going back a century.

Recently, much of this information was brought to the attention of various Marshall officials and music lovers by an amazingly accomplished performer and player of Boogie Woogie piano who calls himself "Nonjohn."

Nonjohn is the name adopted by a gifted Boogie Woogie piano player who was in Marshall earlier this week to make presentations to various City of Marshall officials, including Mayor Buddy Power and CVB Chairman Steve Carlile. He then performed at Blue Frog Grill, accompanied by two very talented drummers from Marshall. It was terrific entertainment, enjoyed by an eclectic group of people that included many couples who just happened to be in the Blue Frog to dine and had not expected live music.

Watching Nonjohn perform is an unforgettable experience. He is one of the best keyboard artists you are likely to see, and sometimes while playing Boogie Woogie he pushes away his stool and dances behind the electric piano with abandon.

Music is a tough business. Many very accomplished musicians have to rely on day jobs for survival. But it is unlikely that anyone seeing Nonjohn hammering his way through the Boogie Woogie canon would suspect that his day job places him in one of the elite wings of the medical community -- psychiatry.

Nonjohn is also known as Dr. John Tennison, a medical doctor and psychiatrist in San Antonio, Texas. In addition to being an accomplished performer, he is also a devoted and serious musicologist and one of the leading experts on Boogie Woogie.

Dr. Tennison maintains two websites that anyone interested in this fascinating chapter of American musical history -- and Marshall, Texas history -- will find as informative as delightful.

One is: <http://www.bowof.org/> a website titled "Boogie Woogie: It's Origin, Subsequent History, and Continuing Development."

The other is: <http://nonjohn.com/> and it is a more personal website that is a trove of interesting information, comments, observations and resources about Boogie Woogie, of course, but many other

facets of Dr. Tennison/Nonjohn's expansive philosophical and musical interests.

Within a few days, an extensive presentation of the historical facts that prove Marshall's claim to being the birthplace of Boogie Woogie will be presented on EastTexasTowns.com and other websites. A Facebook Page "Marshall Texas Birthplace of Boogie Woogie" is now under construction.

For now, let's just say that there has never been any argument that Boogie Woogie erupted almost spontaneously in the Piney Woods of East Texas. It has long been recognized that the genre migrated from its point of origin via the railroads. Based on its history as a railroad town, going back to one of the first railroads built in Texas from Swanson's Landing to Marshall, no community in the state has a stronger claim to be the birthplace of Boogie Woogie.

With the assistance of Dr. Tennison, great care is being taken to produce a factually accurate report that examines the chain of evidence that establishes proof that Marshall and Caddo Lake are the seminal influences on this revolutionary style of piano playing.

Stay tuned to EastTexasTowns.com for the next chapter in this exciting story.