

Local jazz artist celebrates first anniversary on 'The Gumbo Kitchen'

Written By MARK PAVILONS

A King jazz artist has been dishing out jazz like home-made New Orleans delicacies for just over a year. And he can't be more pleased.

Ron Littlejohn of Snowball is the voice behind 'The Gumbo Kitchen' on Jazz FM 91.

He admitted he came up with the idea almost a decade ago, and the idea was rekindled in 2018 and made it to air.

Listeners have enjoyed the show so much that the station moved Littlejohn from one hour to three hours on Friday nights.

He simply loves promoting and supporting local artists -- folks that otherwise would have a hell of a time getting their music on the radio.

That, he said, is another thing that makes Jazz FM 91 so special.

'A lot of stations look at Canadian content as a cross around their neck. We embrace it. It's a true community.'

Littlejohn admitted he also loves hearing from the listeners.

'I get emails every week from people not only in Toronto but all over the globe telling me they love the show. They tell me their stories. They tell me where they are listening from. It's fantastic. Having a show on Jazz FM 91 is not like having a show on any other station. I have complete freedom and support to program the music I think people will enjoy. That is gold. You don't get that at other radio stations.'

It seems Littlejohn has taken to the airwaves like a duck to water. He's had a love affair with radio since he was a kid. He recalls going to the CNE and instead of hitting the rides, he was fascinated by an announcer doing a remote broadcast.

Over the past year, Littlejohn has been doing what works.

'In the very beginning I had it in my mind that The Gumbo Kitchen was all New Orleans and nothing else. It's about 85 per cent New Orleans music. The beauty of the show being called 'Gumbo Kitchen' is you can throw in lots of different things, as long as it feels good and is righteous. That is the beauty of gumbo!'

Listeners seem glued to the radio. For announcers, it's sometimes difficult to gauge your impact or level of enjoyment. But Littlejohn has heard from countless fans that they get wrapped up in the show.

'I don't get that many requests. It's mostly people writing in to comment on a song they had never heard before. They also comment on the interviews.'

'Jazz FM 91 has given me the freedom to reach out to some incredible artists for interviews. Everyone I have reached out to has agreed to come on the show. People like George Porter Jr. of The Meters, Cyril Neville of The Neville brothers, Irma Thomas, Terence Blanchard, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Five Blind Boys, Booker T Jones. of Booker T and the MGs.'

Littlejohn observed that the thing about New Orleans music is that it is so vibrant.

'I would argue that the New Orleans music scene is stronger than it has ever been. There is something in the city musically for

everyone ??rad Jazz, Funk, Soul, Second line brass bands, Mardi Gras Indians, zydeco, gospel, bounce.

It seems the destructive Hurricane Katrina in 2005 actually had a beneficial impact on music.

?After Katrina I remember thinking how will they ever recover from this. All these New Orleans artists were uprooted; displaced all over America after the storm. They had to make a living. So clubs in Houston and wherever folks ended up would hear that there was an artist in town from New Orleans and book him or her in their club or whatever.

?One thing about a lot of New Orleans musicians in that they are just fine with only being famous in their hometown. Hurricane Katrina, however, forced them to get out of the city and many careers exploded. Allen Toussaint called Hurricane Katrina a 'baptism' rather than drowning because of what it did to bring attention to the city and it's musicians.?

Like gumbo, Littlejohn just can't get enough of this type of music.

?To me New Orleans music has a fire that I have never heard anywhere else. I felt it the moment I arrived.?

His listeners agree.

Tune in to hear Littlejohn on Friday nights, and grab some comfort food while you're at it.