

Jazz Archive Pays Tribute to Louis Prima

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Today (Dec. 7) would have been the 100th birthday of New Orleans musician Louis Prima. The Tulane and New Orleans community is celebrating with the Louis Prima Centennial Colloquium on Saturday (Dec. 11), featuring renowned jazz historians remembering the man and musician through music and film.



The Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane will celebrate the career of Louis Prima □
bandleader, trumpet soloist and vocalist □ at a colloquium on Saturday (Dec. 11).
(Photo from Hogan Jazz Archive)

"Louis Prima was a New Orleans original," said Bruce Raeburn, curator of the [Hogan Jazz Archive](#) at Tulane University, as he recalled the career of the famed musician, who died in 1978.

"His abilities as a bandleader, trumpet soloist and vocalist were combined with a dedication to keeping audiences entertained, often with comedy as much as music," Raeburn said. "He was also one of the few jazz musicians to successfully negotiate stylistic changes from jazz, to swing, to rhythm and blues and rock in the period from the 1930s through the 1960s."

Raeburn will deliver the opening remarks at the free [colloquium](#) that will run from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. in the Freeman Auditorium at the Woldenberg Art Center on the uptown campus.

Among the presenters are Dan Morgenstern, director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, on the happy musical partnership of Prima and clarinetist Pee Wee Russell; author Will Friedwald, on Prima's role as America's first "overtly ethnic celebrity;" Grammy-winning musician and writer Elijah Wald, on how Prima straddled genres; New Orleans historian Jack Stewart, on Prima's early influences; and Marcello Piras, Italy's foremost authority on jazz, on the contributions made by Sicilians to the development of jazz.

Raeburn said that Sicilians in New Orleans were exceptionally important in the early development of jazz.

"But Louis Prima was unique among them, offering a brand of music and humor that was highly personal," said Raeburn. "He was the first Italian-American entertainer to make his ethnic heritage a badge of honor in making music.

"With this colloquium, the Hogan Jazz Archive and Tulane are emphasizing the respect that the city of New Orleans owes to one of its most prolific and interesting native musical sons."