



Well. Exactly 16 years after Katrina my family and I once again find our lives upended overnight. I, my spouse, our two teens and my dad are now living in a small condo in St. Augustine Beach, FL until further notice. The pets are staying with a kindly Quaker couple nearby. And for the first time your song-of-the-month comes in a little late! But I know you'll understand given the circumstances.

With "[Week 23](#)," our "Valse Triste," we finally acknowledge the stress, uncertainty, anxiety and grief we've all been living with. Meant to reflect that moment last year when you realized COVID wasn't going away, the piece begins with a mournful

accordion introduction to set the tone. The whole story unfolds over a spooky repeating pattern played with mallets by Doug Garrison on the snare drum (snare off). You'll hear good performances from all involved, especially the pensive lead from saxophone badass, Aurora Nealand. Dig also Mark Rubin on tenor guitar and Lu Rojas's mix, a stereo image that allows you to hear every instrument, no matter how softly played, from start to final crescendo.

I remember hearing news on the radio in November of 2019 about a mysterious virus showing up in China and thinking, "huh..."

There were those cruise ships with dozens of people dying from crazy lung infections and everybody else having to wait on board while authorities figured out what to do.

In the brass band we started Carnival season 2020 with our annual rambles for the Krewe du Jieux and Ti Rex, making a party and high-fiving people along the parade route. A week later I came down with some kind of flu that knocked me out for 4 or 5 days. High fever, chills, aches but no respiratory symptoms or loss of smell or taste. I was back with the band the next Saturday for Krewe of EndymiUS, the weekly Jazz Band set at the Spotted Cat, the Brass Band's late night "Fat Saturday" throwdown at the Allways Lounge and then (after a brief nap) the Okeanos Parade Sunday morning with a smaller cadre of the band dubbed "Krewe of Fresh."

Box of Wine, Dead Beans and St Anthony Ramblers... the rest of Carnival was beautiful. When the Brass Band played "Nearer My God To Thee" in front of St Louis Cathedral on Mardi Gras day there were tears, a sense of weight, of depth.

Although COVID news kept getting worse, Panorama's gig calendar was packed: Purim, private parties, weddings, French Quarter Fest, Jazz Fest and of course the Spotted Cat and Dos Jefes. It was looking like a good year. On Saturday, March 14th, the Brass Band had a wedding and the Jazz Band played our weekly set at the Spotted Cat.

And then everything stopped.

Long walks. Whole family at home day after day. Afternoons on the back porch talking on the phone having the same conversation over and over. "What's going on? What are we gonna do? Nobody knows. Just have to wait and see."

At first most people I was talking to felt like the pandemic would probably run its course in a few weeks, a couple months. But there came a moment for me around the 23rd week when it finally sank in: this is the new normal, this is our life now. That heavy feeling in my stomach...

I also passed the time writing music. You've already heard "[New Banjo Thing](#)," "[Why Not](#)," and "[Sudoku](#)" (Jun-Aug 2020) "[Party on the Levee](#)" (May 2021) and "[Peace Anthem](#)" (Jul 2021) all written and recorded during the pandemic. You hear various tones in this set: cheerful, silly, aggressive, fun, reverent. "Week 23" is more of an elegy, giving voice to the hard feelings.

Thanks for listening and for your continued support.

At your service,



Ben Schenck
Clarinetist / Leader
Panorama Jazz Band
Panorama BRASS Band
New Orleans, LA

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Credits

Panorama Jazz Band
Ben Schenck - Clarinet
Aurora Nealand - Alto Saxophone
Charlie Halloran - Trombone
Michael Ward-Bergeman - Accordion
Mark Rubin - Tenor Guitar
Matt Perrine - Tuba
Doug Garrison - Snare drum, cymbals, gong
Composer - Ben Schenck
Publisher - Snack Daddy Music
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Mixed and mastered by Lu Rojas
Photo by Greg Miles
Graphic design by Ben Schenck