

Fats Domino makes post-Katrina return to stage

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Friends and fans of Fats Domino were emotional as the 79-year-old rock legend took the stage before a sold-out crowd of hundreds in a New Orleans nightclub Saturday, marking Domino's first public performance since before Hurricane Katrina.

"He's been through so much, like a lot of us. It was great to see him out there. It really was," said Art Neville, one of the four original Neville Brothers, just moments after Domino performed a string of hits, including "I'm Ready," "Ain't That a Shame," "Shake, Rattle and Roll" and "Valley of Tears."

Dressed in a snappy white jacket and his signature white cap, the black grand piano, Domino was crisp and energetic as he sang and played the first hit of the night, "I'm Walkin'," and the crowd jumped and screamed when he belted out "Blueberry Hill" a few minutes later.

Still, Domino, who suffers from performance anxiety, was not without his moments of nervousness. About three or four songs in, he got up from the piano and started to leave the stage but was gently being coaxed back on by Eric Paulsen, a friend and New Orleans-area television news anchor.

The band, which included Domino's longtime friend and musical partner saxophonist Herbert Hardesty, didn't miss a beat. They began playing "Blue Monday," to which Domino sat back down at the piano and began singing. Domino and Hardesty have been playing together since the mid-1940s.

In all, Domino and company performed about a dozen hits.

"It was emotional. There



Fats Domino didn't disappoint the hundreds of fans attending one of his rare concert performances.

were a lot of people crying, people close to him," said Quint Davis, producer of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, who said he wouldn't have missed Domino's performance for anything.

"It wasn't that the music was living again for us. It wasn't about us. It was about Fats. Fats himself got to experience it again."

Domino last performed in public on Memorial Day 2004 at a casino on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. During Katrina, he lost his home, his pianos, his gold and platinum records, and much of the city he loves. He was rescued by boat from his flooded 9th Ward home after the storm struck on Aug. 29, 2005.

On May 7, 2006, Domino was slated to close the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. His nerves got the better of him and he canceled his performance just hours before he was to take the stage. With a little urging from Paulsen and others, Domino made a brief appearance on stage, tipping his hat to thousands of cheering fans, but did not perform.

"I was so sad, and worried," said Elizabeth Curren, 56, who attended last year's festival just to see Domino, but didn't get to see him perform until Saturday.

Curren was among more than 100 fans on a balcony overlooking the stage and lower floor packed with hundreds more fans. Also on the balcony was Wanda Trouillier, 53, who said Domino's songs have been a part of her life since she was 4, when her father taught her to play the piano.

"The first song I learned was 'Walking to New Orleans,'" Trouillier said. "I know every word of every Fats Domino song."

Domino turned 79 in February. In March, he walked through his flood-ravaged white brick house, which was gutted and buzzing with workers, saying repeatedly he's ready to be home.

The Tipitina's Foundation, which put on Saturday night's show, is working to get Domino back in his home. The foundation has teamed with such artists as Elton John, Tom Petty,

Bonnie Raitt, Lenny Kravitz, Willie Nelson, B.B. King, Paul McCartney and others to record a tribute album of Domino's songs.

Proceeds will benefit the foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to providing the city's public schools with instruments and helping artists recover from the hurricane. Roughly 25 percent of the proceeds will go toward the restoration of Domino's home, which is expected to cost upward of \$100,000, said Bill Taylor, the foundation's executive director.

So far, the house's interior studs and beams have been rid of mold, and workers have begun installing new drywall. The back end of a pink 1959 Cadillac that for years sat in the living area and served as a couch is being restored, and plans call for bringing back the living room's original pink wall color.

Still, Domino's house is surrounded by blocks of abandoned homes — many untouched since Katrina. For more than a year, he has been living in a gated community full of newly constructed

homes in the New Orleans suburb of Harvey.

Domino is expected to move back into his 9th Ward home this summer — a sign of hope for many in the heavily devastated neighborhood, which some have said shouldn't be rebuilt.

As for whether Domino will be performing again anytime soon: "I hope so," Taylor said.

"So long, so long, I'm goin' home," Domino sang, closing out the show. Then he picked up his hat and waved to the crowd with a smile as he walked off stage.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

CLOWNING AROUND

Mother and daughter, Norma, left, and Sandra Hernandez participated in the West Las Vegas Art Center's "Yes I Can" clown workshop on Saturday. Veteran clown Danise Payne of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey as well as UniverSoul Big Top Circus lead the workshop with inside secrets to the trade.

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