

New Orleans praises Neville Brothers return

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Neville Brothers, who traditionally help close out the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, returned to the big stage Sunday for the first time since Hurricane Katrina flooded and wrecked their homes, along with 80 percent of the city.

The brothers — Aaron, Art, Cyril and Charles — performed on the festival's biggest stage in front of an immense crowd that appeared delighted to have them back.

"This is a family reunion," festival producer Quint Davis said in introducing them. "This is the family of New Orleans coming together with the first family of our music."

The delayed return of the group to the festival, be-moaned the past two years by fans, was celebrated as another step toward putting the devastation of the 2005 storm behind the city.

"I'm just happy they're back; that's more than I can say," said Martin Davis, a former New Orleans resident now living in Houston. "I'm back for Jazz Fest, but I don't



Aaron Neville, right, of the Neville Brothers performs with the Wild Magnolia Tchoupatoulis Mardi Gras Indians during the 2008 New-Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival at the New Orleans Fairgrounds Racetrack in New Orleans on Sunday.

know when or if I'll come back to stay. There are a lot of hard memories for a lot of us now when it comes to our hometown."

There were also a lot of good ones that the Nevilles wasted no time trotting out. They opened with songs about Mardi Gras and The Wild Tchoupitoulas, a Mardi

Gras group that danced onstage with them.

After Aaron Neville sang his hit "Tell It Like It Is," he told the crowd: "I love you." He later sang "Amazing Grace" and said, "Joel y'all," a reference to his wife, Joel Roux-Neville, who died last year.

The show went 30 min-

utes long before the Nevilles wrapped up with "Big Chief" to extended cheers.

"It was absolutely worth the wait for them," said Yvette Duperon, 53, a Philadelphia school principal. "I'm going home and play their music for the next month."

After Katrina, the

Nevilles, like most of the city's residents, were scattered — Aaron in New York, Charles in Boston, Cyril in Austin, Texas.

Aaron is the latest Neville brother to return to the area. He's buying a house in Covington, La., about 40 miles from New Orleans. Art Neville returned to New Orleans soon after the storm but still isn't back in his house.

Aaron Neville had worried that the dirt, dust and mold from the city's debris would aggravate his asthma. In addition, his wife of 49 years died, and her funeral in January 2007 became a sad and brief homecoming.

About 320,000 of the city's residents have returned since Katrina, city officials said. Before the storm, the city's population stood at 455,000.

The Jazz Fest itself offered another touchstone of recovery. For the first time since Katrina, the festival returned to a seven-day format stretched over two weekends.

Rain dampened three days of the event and kept crowds smaller than usual, but on

Sunday a bright blue sky, low humidity and temperatures in the 70s with a cool breeze helped pack the grounds.

Fans, slick with sunscreen, stretched out in front of stages or set up chairs in the shade of massive oak trees and enjoyed music from groups as diverse as Santana, The Radiators, The Pfister Sisters and Snooks Eaglin.

Irma Thomas, Marva Wright and Raychell Richard performed a tribute to Mahalia Jackson in a packed Gospel Tent that drew so many people the announcer had to threaten to stop the show if fans did not clear the aisles.

Jackson, an influential gospel singer, recorded about 30 albums and was the first singer of her genre to perform at New York's Carnegie Hall. She died in 1972.

George Wein, who founded the New Orleans Jazz Fest and the Newport Jazz Festival, had Jackson perform in both events.

"She was wonderful, very moving when she sang," Wein said Sunday after watching the tribute.

Downey cerebral, eclectic in 'Iron Man' adaptation

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Created by Stan Lee in April of 1963, Iron Man was first introduced in Marvel Comics' "Tales of Suspense" (issue #39). By the legendary animator's own admission, his crime-fighting superhero's alter ego, wealthy industrialist/inventor Tony Stark, was partially inspired by eccentric millionaire playboy Howard Hughes.

The character proved popular enough to warrant spin-offs, not only into his own comic book series but into a TV cartoon, as well. Now, with "Iron Man," the movie, the product line benefits from a further extension into the realm of cinema.

This live-action adventure features Robert Downey Jr. in the title role, with the oft-troubled star exhibiting an impressive range

in an endearing performance guaranteed to resuscitate a career once on life support. For Downey manages to humanize "Iron Man" to a degree rarely, if at all, previously witnessed in such adaptations of macho superheroes to the big screen. Considerable credit in this regard must go to unheralded director Jon Favreau whose kiddie sci-fi, "Zathura," was likewise sophisticated enough to engage the imaginations of children and adults.

"Iron Man" unfolds very much like the first installment in a pre-planned franchise, taking its own sweet time to acquaint us with the protagonist's background rather than rush headlong into elaborate fight sequences. Along the way, a few subtle hints are also dropped about what might be in store in IM2 and beyond.

It is established at the outset that Tony Stark, the CEO of Stark Industries, is a filthy rich, womanizing genius. For he is conspicuously absent from the festivities at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas where he was supposed to be receiving an award for his company's service to the Military-Industrial Complex as the country's leading weapons manufacturer.

But the AWOL bon vivant was more interested in impressing and seducing an attractive reporter (Leslie Bibb) at his sprawling, oceanfront Malibu estate. Fortunately, his faithful, frustrated woman servant and secret admirer, Pepper Potts (Gwyneth Paltrow), is always around to get her boss' nose back to the grindstone.

The plot thickens soon after he lands in Afghanistan to demonstrate his latest invention, the Jericho Missile, for the benefit of the U.S. military brass. En route, the Humvee in which he's riding is hit by a roadside bomb, and he ends up in a cave controlled by terror-



Robert Downey Jr., right, and Terrence Howard, left, star in Marvel classic "Iron Man."

ists. Tony can't help but notice that his captors are already somehow wielding weaponry produced by his company. And worse, they now want him to put his brain to work on their behalf to build the next generation missile.

What the insurgents don't know is that Stark's more worried about the life-threatening shrapnel permanently imbedded in his chest. So, instead of working for them, he secretly uses the next few months to build himself a suit of armor containing a mammoth electromagnet to prevent any metal fragments from reaching his heart. Eventually, he uses this outfit to morph into Iron Man, escape, and return to the U.S. where he makes the shocking announcement that Stark Industries will be shutting down its munitions

manufacturing division.

This decision doesn't sit with his possibly double-dealing, right hand-man, Obadiah Stane (Jeff Bridges), and it also strains his longtime liaison with Lieutenant Jim Rhodes (Terrence Howard) from the Department of Defense. But Stark remains resolute and determined to learn exactly how his guns landed in the hands of the enemy, even if that means he must reluctantly don that Iron Man suit one more time to kill in the name of peace.

A 'Marvel'-ously cerebral superhero with a functioning conscience. "Iron Man" pulled in \$98.6 million domestically in its first weekend.

Excellent (4 stars). Rated PG-13 for intense sci-fi violence, tense scenes and brief instances of suggestive content.

