



SHEILA STROUP

## Receiving horns of plenty

Travelers at Louis Armstrong International Airport didn't know what to make of what they were seeing in front of Concourse D Thursday night.

While passengers from a late Houston flight made their way to the stairs and their luggage, a brass band started to play.

Visitors stopped and turned around with puzzled expressions, as if they thought they might be hallucinating.

The 10 musicians looked young to be playing old-time jazz.

"What's going on?" someone asked me.

People snapped pictures and swayed to the music.

Then it got better.

A couple who had come in on the plane opened their carry-on bags. The man took out a trumpet, the woman a banjo, and they played along with the band.

### Japanese flavor

This is what was going on: The TBC Brass Band was welcoming Yoshio Toyama and his wife, Keiko, who came all the way from Tokyo to play at the Satchmo Summerfest.

The Toyamas fell in love with traditional jazz when they lived in New Orleans in the '60s and have been playing it ever since. And in 1994, they started the Wonderful World of Jazz Foundation in Japan to help keep the music of Louis Armstrong alive.

I met them at Carver High School in 2003, when they presented the band with 39 shiny instruments.

"I wanted to do something symbolic, and I thought of giving instruments to the children in this birthplace of jazz that we love so much," Yoshio said.

That day, the Toyamas played with the original TBC band, made up of Carver students. Band director Wilbert Rawlins told me why he called his jazz band To Be Continued.

"It means the guys in the band will always be changing," he said. I tell my kids, "You are way too talented to just be playing your horns. Earn some money and then go to college."

### Higher education

Before the flight arrived, I talked to some of the original band members who are living up to the band's name. Although their school was lost to the storm, they got their Carver diplomas at McDonogh 35 and are leaving for college soon.

Edward Jackson has a scholarship to Miles College in Birmingham, Ala.

"I want to learn everything about music," he said. "I want to be a film scorer."

Sean Roberts is going to Miles, too. "You know why? Mr. Rawlins put this in my hand," he said, holding up his trumpet.

Like Rawlins, who is the new band director at O. Perry Walker High School in Algiers, jazz lovers in Japan understand the importance of putting horns in young musicians' hands.

After the band danced down the stairs playing "I'll Fly Away" with the Toyamas, Yoshio presented them with \$1,000 and a saxophone, two trumpets and a trombone, replacements for instruments lost in the flooding.

"These are for you," he said, handing over the foundation's gift to the band and to the future of New Orleans.

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## Donations from Japan, with love

Yoshio and Keiko Toyama want everyone to know the Crescent City hasn't been forgotten.

"If we can show the world that Japanese people try to help New Orleans, it might do something good," Yoshio said.

On Sunday, I told readers how the Toyamas had presented the young musicians in the TBC Brass Band with \$1,000 and three shiny horns to replace instruments lost to Katrina.

That was just one song in a songbook of generous acts the couple has performed since the hurricane.

When they saw the devastation here, the Toyamas started holding fund-raising concerts in Japan, asking audience members to help keep New Orleans music alive.

"So far we have raised 9 million yen," Yoshio said. "That is \$80,000."

Yoshio, 62, and Keiko, 64, fell in love with New Orleans when they moved to the French Quarter as newlyweds in 1968. They came here to study traditional jazz, and five years later they went home to play.

"People in Japan love jazz," Yoshio said.

Until recently, Yoshio Toyama and the Dixie Saints had a regular gig on New Orleans Square at Tokyo Disneyland. Now, the Toyamas are devoting much of their time to the Wonderful World of Jazz Foundation they started in 1994.

They had come for a visit and were sad to see how violent the city had become, and they wanted to put musical instruments in the hands of New Orleans children.

Every August, when they come for the Satchmo Summer Fest, they bring instruments to young musicians at various schools and outreach programs.

"We have delivered more than 500 so far," Yoshio said.

This year, they also asked jazz lovers in Japan to donate money and instruments for the professional musicians who lost so much in the storm.

"It was easy to get help because all the Japanese people worry about the musicians in New Orleans," Yoshio said.

### Great generosity

The foundation has sent sizable donations to such groups as the New Orleans Musicians Hurricane Relief Fund and Higher Ground Hurricane Relief Fund.

And on Thursday, Yoshio and Keiko gave \$10,000 to the Arat Wrecking Krewe, a group of local volunteers who have been gutting and cleaning the homes of musicians since the storm.

During their visit, the Toyamas also gave local musicians some professional-quality instruments that had been donated by families of musicians in Japan.

"They were all in mint condition," Yoshio said.

And they came with touching notes, like this one:

"My father, a bandsman, passed away last year. His saxophone and flute need to be played to be kept alive. Please play these instruments in the holy land of jazz — a place my father used to dream of."

What a wonderful world it is that holds the Toyamas and their foundation.

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