

Norbert Susemihl

- Biography -



Norbert Susemihl, trumpeter, singer and drummer, has been a traveler in New Orleans music for many years, performing on international festivals and concerts. For over 4 decades he has been commuting between his second home in New Orleans, his birthplace of Hamburg, and later also Denmark. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Susemihl made extensive connections in New Orleans with the still living legends of his music, studied their style and learned their concept of music. He has become an integral part of the New Orleans music scene, where he plays about 80 concerts yearly as soloist with the local bands. As a bandleader, he lets his experience flow into numerous projects, building the bridge between traditional New Orleans Jazz, and the music of the new generation, developing it further stylistically. His improvisations and interpretations of the musical material display an ever present melodically approach. With his excellent musicality and dynamic authenticity, he is one of the leading trumpeters in the New Orleans Style. He has recorded and produced over 50 recordings both with his own bands and as soloist with others.

Norbert Susemihl, born 1956 in Hamburg, Germany, began playing at the age of 14, as the co-founder of "Papa Tom's Lamentation Jazz Band" in which he played guitar and sang Spirituals and Gospels, inspired by the Golden Gate Quartet, switching to trumpet in 1971. Later he also started using the flugelhorn to be able to use a wider spectrum of sound. Playing drums in the style of the great Louis Barbarin, Josiah "Cie" Frazier and Sammy Penn, became another aspect in his musical development.

All the early members of "Papa Tom's Lamentation Jazz Band" were still attending school, while the band started making a name for itself and played the local clubs in Hamburg and North Germany.

In the late 70s and early 80s Susemihl started to perform regularly with other local bands. There was a high demand for traditional jazz bands in the Hamburg area, not only for jazz clubs and festivals, but also for private and corporate events. This paved the way for Norbert to consider becoming a professional musician, albeit that he studied mathematics and geography at the Hamburg University.

The first tours abroad with "Papa Tom's Lamentation Jazz Band", and as a guest soloist with other bands, took him to Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium. In 1977/78 he toured with clarinettist Sammy Rimington. This collaboration inspired him to take his first trips to New Orleans in 1978 and 1979.

In 1980 Norbert Susemihl was playing in New Orleans in a stage show about Fats Waller, produced and directed by Greta Milochi. This enabled him to join the exclusive New Orleans Musicians' Union. He stayed there a year to absorb the New Orleans culture and lifestyle, and to study how it effects and produces the music. This was the turning point in his career, having an outstanding influence on his knowledge of the music and his style of playing.

Between 1981 and 1990 Susemihl has lived and performed in New Orleans every year for three to four months. He played regularly with many local musicians of all ages, covering all styles of New Orleans Music, and he came into daily contact and played with the last living old-style musicians such as Kid Thomas Valentine, Percy and Willie Humphrey, Jeanette Kimball, Narvin Kimball, Louis Nelson, Josiah "Cie" Frazier, Chester Zardis, Thomas Jefferson and Danny Barker, to name just a few. He also led his own band in New Orleans, the "Arlington Jazzband", with Raymond Burke on clarinet.

He was also a member of the "Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble", which gave him the opportunity to explore and play the repertoire of the 20s Classic jazz. Other strong influences were the gospel choirs of the African-American Baptist churches, as well as Rhythm&Blues music and the developing new style of the younger Brass Bands.

Since then, Susemihl has made recordings in New Orleans with veteran legends Willie Humphrey, Ernest Elly, Frank Fields, Father Al Lewis, CoCoMo Joe and Daniel Farrow, as well as with Wanda Rouzan, George French, Fredrick Lonzo, Herlin Riley, Kerry Lewis, Jason Marsalis, Davell Crawford, Louis Ford, Mark Brooks, Shaye Cohn, Erika Lewis, Seva Venet, Chloe Feoranzo, Roland Guerin, Gregory Agid, Harry Mayronne, Barnaby Gold, Craig Klein, Molly Reeves, and Oliver Bonie.

In 1986, together with pianist Greta Milochi, he founded his own Hamburg-based band: "Norbert Susemihl's Arlington Annex", a quintet that covers all facets of New Orleans Music. The name has its origin in the famous Arlington Annex on Basin Street, owned by Madam Josie Arlington, in the legendary Storyville red-light district. The band has been playing regularly in Hamburg and North Germany, and performing on festivals and concerts in South Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway and has also recorded. Forming a real New Orleans style marching band in Hamburg was another step: "Norbert Susemihl's Arlington Brass Band" was born, playing traditional and contemporary New Orleans Street Music.

The fabulous drummers CoCoMoe Joe and Shannon Powell, as well as Fats Domino's saxophone player Elliot Stackman Callier, and trombonist Freddie Lonzo, were New Orleans guest musicians with the band on extended tours in 1989 and 1990. Shannon Powell stayed in Hamburg and was Norbert's regular drummer for half a year in 1990, before Powell returned to the USA, joining the Harry Connick Jr. Big Band.

In 2002 "Norbert Susemihl's Joyful Gumbo" was founded, a Scandinavian based six-piece band, which evolved over the years, and since about 2010 has intensified its touring schedule and is now in high demand. The band made its first CD in 2011, and a follow up was released in 2019. This formation is now Susemihl's main band.

Susemihl's wish to bring more New Orleans musicians to Europe was made possible in 2006 by the Maribo Jazz Festival in Denmark, which gave him the possibility to present yet another new orchestra: "Norbert Susemihl's New Orleans All Stars". In the following years, this band has performed on Festivals in Denmark, Norway, Italy, Switzerland Malaysia, and at Preservation Hall in New Orleans.

On several tours with his bands, Susemihl has over the years featured New Orleans musicians Wanda Rouzan, Fredrick Lonzo, Shannon Powell, Louis Ford, Jason Marsalis, Kerry Lewis, Hermann LeBeaux, Orange Kellin, Charles Halloran, Jamison Ross, Erika Lewis, Shaye Cohn, Gregory Agid, and Chloe Feoranzo.

A very special project became the trio "Erika, Norbert & Shaye", with a repertoire of New Orleans traditional blues, with Susemihl and two very talented young ladies now based in New Orleans: Vocalist Erika Lewis and pianist Shaye Cohn. Both are also founding members of the famed "Tuba Skinny Jazzband" band where Shaye plays the cornet. Out of this collaboration, another band was specially put together for the Ascona Jazz Festival in 2012: "Night on Frenchmen Street", incorporating the Blues trio, as well as Gregory Agid (clarinet), Jason Marsalis (drums), and Kerry Lewis (bass). Both bands have recorded CDs.

Besides his own bands, Susemihl has toured as a guest, or member, with various bands, such as Lillian Boutté's Music Friends (USA), Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazzband (USA), Lars Edegran New Orleans Jazz Band (USA), Wanda Rouzan's Taste of New Orleans (USA), New Orleans Jazz Vipers (USA), Andrew Hall's Society Jazz Band (USA), Tuba Skinny (USA), Sammy Rimington Band (UK), Trevor Richards Trio (UK/D), Jazz Lips (Germany), Caledonia Jazz Band (Norway), New Orleans Delight (Denmark), Magnolia Jazz Band (Norway), Finn Burich's New Orleans Jazz Band (Denmark), Doc Houlind Jazzband (Denmark), Maryland Jazz Band (Germany), as well as with many of the new young bands in New Orleans which are very active on the Frenchmen Street Scene. He has appeared at many jazz festivals as a soloist. Since the late 1990s, Susemihl has split his time between Hamburg, Denmark and New Orleans, and tours extensively in Scandinavia with his Joyful Gumbo Jazzband.



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