

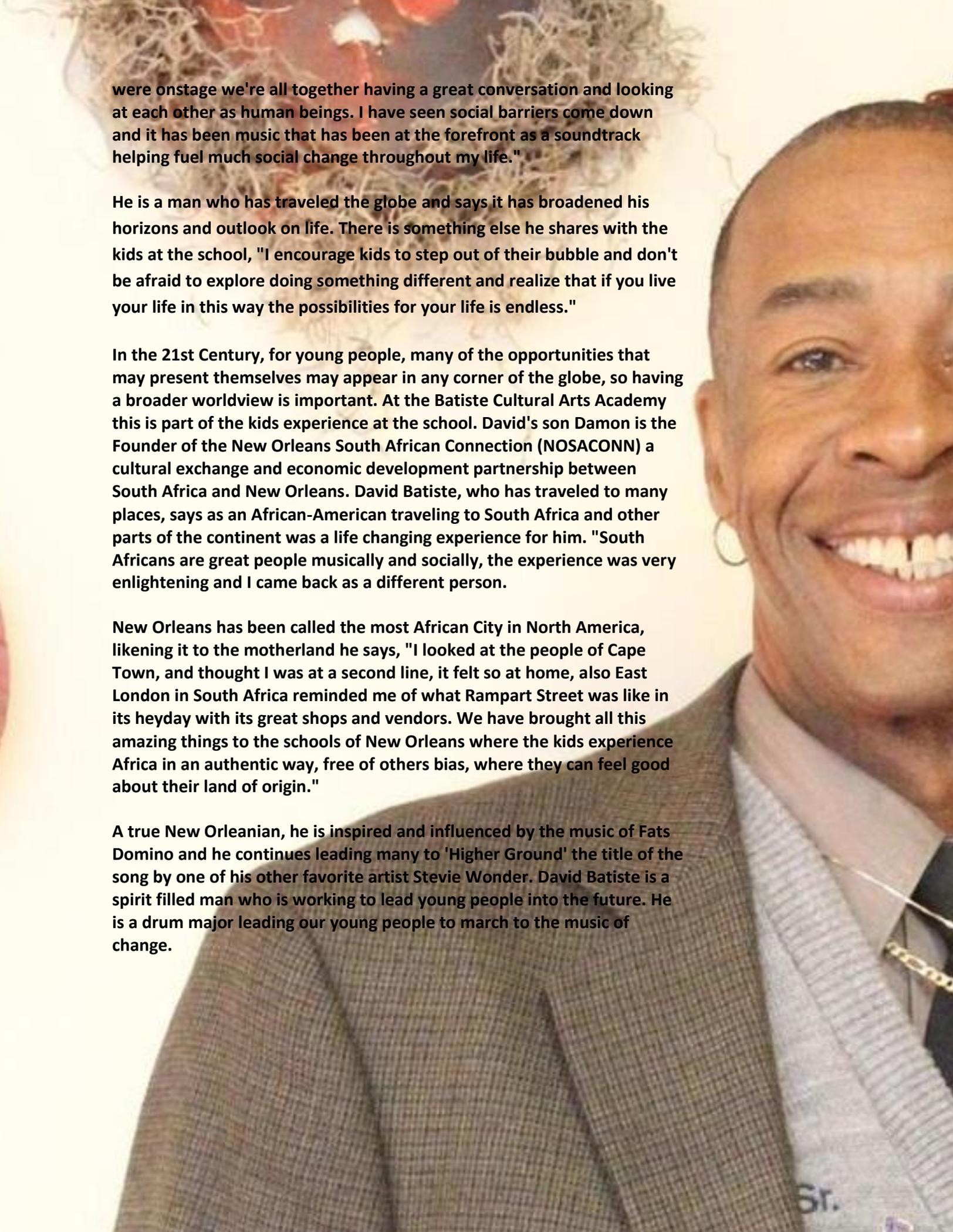
David Batiste: Marching to the Music of Change

By Edwin Buggage

David Batiste is a legend in the field of music as Founder and Bandleader of David Batiste and the Gladiators. He is most notably known for his soul classic 'Funky Soul Part 1 and 2.' Today he continues to be in demand internationally as a pioneer of New Orleans funk music. Also these days, he is giving back to the next generation. When speaking with him he is a fountain of wisdom and positivity. As we talked about his spirit of benevolence, he credits his parents John and Estella Batiste as the source of his wanting to serve his community, "My dad John Batiste Sr. had a grocery and hardware store; he was the first African-American to own a hardware store in Jefferson Parish," Continuing speaking highly of his father Batiste says, "He was also a general contractor and was involved in the community. I watched him as he sometimes gave people food that didn't have the money to pay for it; and he also taught me a valuable lesson I try to pass on and that is it is good to give and expect nothing in return."

On any given day you can see Mr. Batiste engaging young people at the Batiste Cultural Arts Academy, a Pre-k thru 8th Grade School started by one of his sons Damon Batiste. The school was one of eight schools across the nation that won the President's Art Initiative Award through the President Obama's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. "I feel blessed to have this amazing opportunity working with kids, when I see how they light up when we help them there is no dollar amount that can compensate for seeing children being given the tools to be successful in life." Continuing he says, "I try to tell young people to learn to think for themselves, and to push themselves to be their best. I am glad to see these young kids go on to do great things with their lives. We have children this year that will graduate and go on to Benjamin Franklin, New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) and so many other schools around the City and it feels good that we played a part in these kids' lives and encouraged them to strive for excellence."

In a world full of strife and people divided it seems many times there are two things that bring people together from different backgrounds and they are sports and music. Batiste, who has lived to see society change, travels the globe and sees that music strikes a chord that connects people, and he has a spiritual connection to people's souls that can bring about social change. "Music is a universal language that all people can relate to, and even when times were bad I remember 50 years ago when I first started performing music, we would enter in the back, but when we



were onstage we're all together having a great conversation and looking at each other as human beings. I have seen social barriers come down and it has been music that has been at the forefront as a soundtrack helping fuel much social change throughout my life."

He is a man who has traveled the globe and says it has broadened his horizons and outlook on life. There is something else he shares with the kids at the school, "I encourage kids to step out of their bubble and don't be afraid to explore doing something different and realize that if you live your life in this way the possibilities for your life is endless."

In the 21st Century, for young people, many of the opportunities that may present themselves may appear in any corner of the globe, so having a broader worldview is important. At the Batiste Cultural Arts Academy this is part of the kids experience at the school. David's son Damon is the Founder of the New Orleans South African Connection (NOSACONN) a cultural exchange and economic development partnership between South Africa and New Orleans. David Batiste, who has traveled to many places, says as an African-American traveling to South Africa and other parts of the continent was a life changing experience for him. "South Africans are great people musically and socially, the experience was very enlightening and I came back as a different person.

New Orleans has been called the most African City in North America, likening it to the motherland he says, "I looked at the people of Cape Town, and thought I was at a second line, it felt so at home, also East London in South Africa reminded me of what Rampart Street was like in its heyday with its great shops and vendors. We have brought all this amazing things to the schools of New Orleans where the kids experience Africa in an authentic way, free of others bias, where they can feel good about their land of origin."

A true New Orleanian, he is inspired and influenced by the music of Fats Domino and he continues leading many to 'Higher Ground' the title of the song by one of his other favorite artist Stevie Wonder. David Batiste is a spirit filled man who is working to lead young people into the future. He is a drum major leading our young people to march to the music of change.