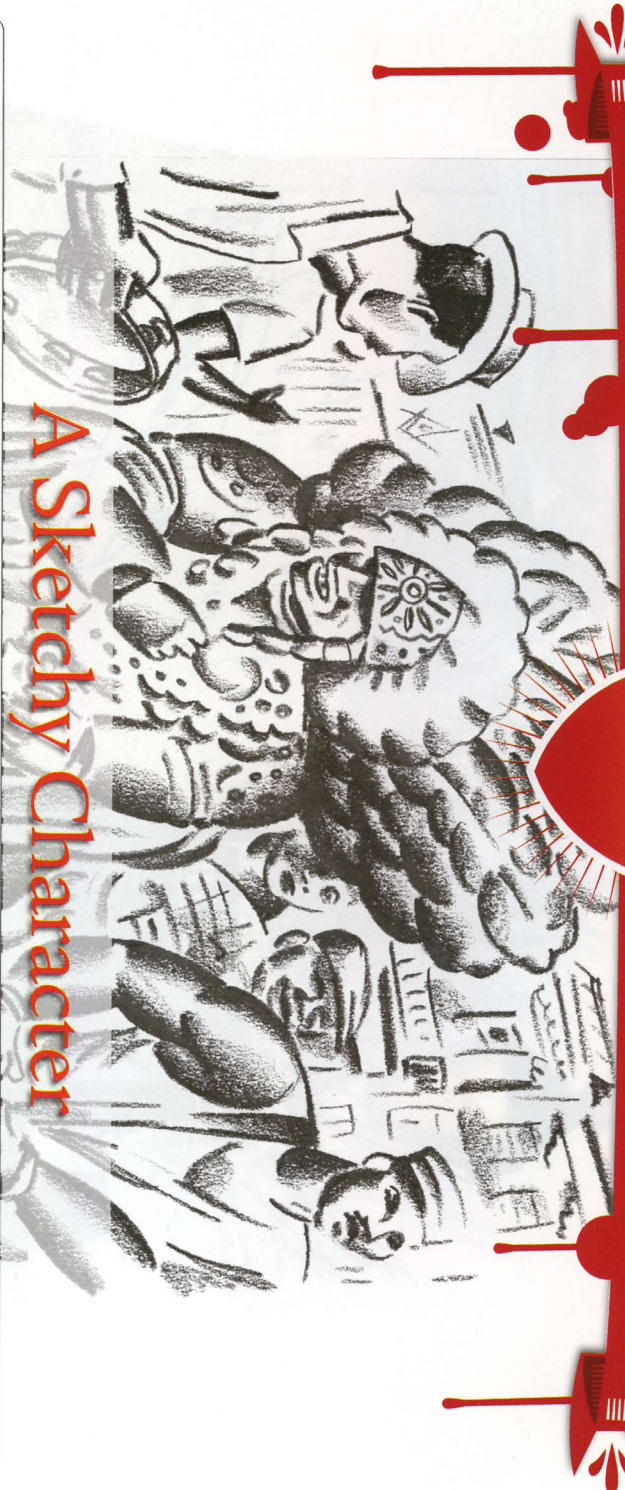


FRESH



A Sketchy Character

Mark Andresen's sketches of New Orleans ripple with energy. Quick pencil lines catch a trumpet player strutting with his chest held high while a young kid saunters along beside. A Ninth Ward preacher gushes sweat, his face tight with intensity. A cluster of people begs for beads, their outstretched arms unnaturally elongated as they desperately reach for plastic trinkets.

From 1988 until Hurricane Katrina, Andresen filled two-dozen notebooks with over 1,000 sketches of everything from ravishing Creole beauties to the maze-like vents on French Quarter buildings. The Mardi Gras Indians, however, truly captivated the New Jersey-born artist. "That kind of culture just blew me away," Andresen says. "the fact that there is an area of the country that's just not bought and paid for by corporations." Shortly after the storm, he selected roughly 125 of his sketches for *New Orleans As It Was* (Gingko Press), which he calls "not a eulogy for the great city of New Orleans" but rather "a celebration of what it was."

Andresen, who illustrated this year's Jazz Fest Bible cover for *OffBeat*, arrived in New Orleans in 1987 to design *New Orleans Magazine*. "I got a lucky break," Andresen says. "I was fired from that." He began freelancing as an illustrator, and often walked the street sketching what he saw. "You can just stand on any corner and wait. You get a guy in a gorilla suit coming by with a tuba. It's like nowhere else in the world that I've ever seen."

He soon became friends with several Mardi Gras Indians, especially Big Chief Larry Bannock, and began designing patches for their elaborate suits. When the Indians paraded, he often ran beside them and quickly sketched a small gesture, a kid on the sidewalk, or a lady whacking a Wild Man for scaring her children.

"I'd be sitting around with the Mardi Gras Indians, and these guys would be talking about the color pink," Andresen says. "They're really into it. You realize that

intensity of feeling, and this artistic thing that requires no ego, no galleries, no nothing. It's all on the streets." The example of the Indians and other New Orleans artists influenced Andresen's own art, even his commercial work for advertisements. "There is a sort of primitivism in a lot of New Orleans art because it's so immediately expressive," he says. "My sense of color changed. My sense of expression changed."

Andresen evacuated to Atlanta, and family and professional reasons have kept him in a city that he calls "a big, fast, soulless place compared to New Orleans." Whenever possible, he continues to work pro bono for New Orleans organizations. The Tipitina's Foundation will receive \$10 for every copy sold of *New Orleans As It Was*. Andresen has been giving his own royalties to Big Chief Larry Bannock, who lost his home in Gert Town.

"In due time I'm coming back," Andresen says. "There's nothing that can stop me."

—Todd A. Price