

"Creole Soul," A Photo Exhibit by Gary Samson, Opens at Seacoast African American Cultural Center

On May 4, the UNH Center for the Humanities will host a reception to honor the last book by longtime center director Burt Feintuch

Thursday, April 13, 2023



A photo exhibit by New Hampshire's seventh Artist Laureate, Gary Samson, is now on display at the The Seacoast African American Cultural Center (SAACC), showcasing photos from *Creole Soul: Zydeco Lives*. The book, released in November 2022 by [University Press of Mississippi](#) as part of its [American Made Music](#)

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[Series](#), features interviews with zydeco musicians in Texas and Louisiana conducted by Burt Feintuch, a folklorist, music ethnographer, professor at UNH (in English), founder of the Ghana study abroad program and longtime director of the UNH Center for the Humanities, who passed away in 2018. Samson's accompanying photos, a selection of which are part of this exhibit, capture the lively and eclectic music scene and offer intimate portraits of the featured musicians.

On Thursday, May 4, from 6 to 8 p.m., SAACC will host a reception, open to the public, to celebrate the book and the exhibit.

Founded by a former Portsmouth teacher, Vernis M. Jackson, [The Seacoast African American Cultural Center](#) is located at 10 Middle Street in the Discover Portsmouth Building. With concerts, educational programs, exhibits from notable artists, an active book group and valuable collections of African artifacts, SAACC makes it its mission to showcase the contributions of individuals of African descent in the seacoast community.

The celebration on May 4 will feature food and drinks, zydeco music, a conversation with the book's editor and a chance for guests to view the photo exhibit. Copies of *Creole Soul* will be available for purchase. The suggested donation is \$15. **Those interested in attending are encouraged to [RSVP](#), as space and food are limited.**

According to its write-up in University Press of Mississippi's catalog, "*Creole Soul: Zydeco Lives* is an exquisitely photographed volume of interviews with contemporary zydeco musicians. Featuring the voices of zydeco's venerable senior generation and its current agents of change, this book celebrates a musical world full of passion, energy, cowboy hats and boots, banging bass, horse trailers, joy, and dazzling dance moves. Author Burt Feintuch captures an important American music in the

process of significant—and sometimes controversial—change....

“...The musicians speak freely, whether discussing the death of a famed musician or describing a memorable performance, such as when Boozoo Chavis played the accordion while dripping blood on stage shortly after a freak barbecue-building accident that sliced off parts of two of his fingers. They address the influence of rap on today’s zydeco music and discuss how to pass music along to a younger generation — and how not to. They weigh the merits of the old-time zydeco clubs versus today’s casinos and African American trailrides, which come complete with horses and the loudest zydeco bands you can imagine. In *Creole Soul*, zydeco musicians give an unprecedented look into their lives, their music, and their culture.”

The book caps a long career during which Feintuch published widely and conducted ethnographic field research in roots music cultures in Great Britain, the United States and Canada. He also produced documentary sound recordings for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings and the Rounder label and a video documentary about African American gospel music that had a national airing on PBS. He is the author or editor of more than seven books, including *Kentucky Folkmusic: An Annotated Bibliography*; *In the Blood: Cape Breton Conversations on Culture*; and *Talking New Orleans Music: Crescent City Musicians Talk about Their Lives, Their Music, and Their City*.

This year, Portsmouth is celebrating its 400th anniversary, and [Portsmouth NH 400th](#) will “bring the community together to create opportunities to celebrate and tell our stories through programs, events, exhibits, and legacy projects.” Though he came to New England by way of Kentucky, Feintuch lived in New Hampshire for many years and was deeply connected to both the UNH community and to Portsmouth, where he lived. His scholarship frequently focused on the region. In 2005, with David Watters, he

published *The Encyclopedia of New England* (Yale University Press). Of the book, then-director of the National Endowment for the Humanities William Ferris said, "I am especially pleased that [the] encyclopedia carefully explore[s] both the older Yankee culture and the more recent ethnic and black traditions that have shaped New England life. These diverse, complex worlds will offer an important new understanding of New England."

Feintuch passed away in 2018, while still working on his book of interviews with zydeco musicians. His long-time partner, Jeannie Banks Thomas, who often accompanied him during his fieldwork, completed and edited the book. Banks Thomas is a folklorist, a Fellow of the American Folklore Society, and a Professor of English at Utah State University. She is the author or co-author of several books, including *Putting the Supernatural in Its Place* (2015); *Haunting Experiences* (2007); *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, and Other Forms of Visible Gender* (2003); and *Featherless Chickens, Laughing Women, and Serious Stories* (1997).

According to Dan Willging of *Offbeat*, "[Gary] Samson's stunning 58-color photographs of the subjects, spectators, trailrides, performances, and action-packed dancing are a huge part of [*Creole Soul*] and its take-you-there appeal."

Gary Samson is a fine art photographer and photo educator who has received numerous awards, grants and fellowships for his work over the past 45 years. Samson has taught photography courses and workshops regionally and internationally since 1981. In 2001 he was appointed chair of the photography department at the New Hampshire Institute of Art, Manchester, where he taught both digital and traditional film based photography courses. In 2017, Governor Chris Sununu appointed Samson the seventh Artist Laureate of New Hampshire. Some of Samson's subjects include Donald Hall, Jon Brooks, Elizabeth Yates, Dudley Laufman, Lotte Jacobi, Richard Whitney, James Aponovich, and

David Lamb. His photographs are included in the permanent collections of the Currier Museum of Art, the New Hampshire Institute of Art, the state of New Hampshire, the University of New Hampshire Art Museum, and the Library of Congress, as well as private collections. Samson has produced documentary films that have been aired locally, regionally, and nationally and has organized and curated exhibits in the U.S. and abroad.

Collaborating with Feintuch, Samson photographically illustrated the books *In the Blood: Conversations on Culture*; *Talking New Orleans Music*; and now *Creole Soul: Zydeco Lives*.

His *Creole Soul* photos will remain up — and open to the public — at SAACC until June 10.



October 23, 2015: Burt Feintuch interviews Irma Thomas at her home in New Orleans

for his previous book, *Talking New Orleans Music*. Photo by Gary Samson.

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