

FAQ: A Classical Cajun Gumbo

What kind of music does Doug Kershaw play?

Doug Kershaw celebrates and performs the indigenous music and culture of Louisiana, so his music encompasses every style associated with the state: blues, R&B, gospel, Cajun, zydeco, Afro-Caribbean, folk, Latin, rock, rap, country, bluegrass and everything in between.

Who has Kershaw worked with that I may have heard of?

It's easier to name who he has not worked with over the course of his 60-year career than it is to list everyone. Just a few of the artists Doug Kershaw has performed with include Johnny Cash, Hank Williams Jr., Eric Clapton, Wolfman Jack, Itzhak Perlman and Jean-Luc Ponty. Kershaw helped launch the careers of many of today's most popular entertainers by booking them to open his shows. Some of those performers include Jay Leno, Dolly Parton, Little Richard, Willie Nelson and Steve Martin.

So he's a big star. What sort of honors has he won?

Member, Grand Ol Opry, more than 20 years. Inducted into the Cajun Zydeco Hall of Fame in Louisiana and the Colorado Country Music Hall of Fame. Has performed at the White House.

What are his biggest hits? And where can I get recordings?

Doug Kershaw has composed thousands of songs and recorded more than 400 of them. His top hits include "Jolie Blon," "Louisiana Man," "Diggy Diggy Lo," "My Toot Toot," "Colinda," and "Cajun Baby." (His biggest hits continue in the next "answer.")

Email Doug directly on how to get recordings. DougKershaw2@aol.com

What kind of music is Kershaw doing on April 5th with the UNC Symphony?

The concert will feature 14 of Kershaw's top hits as arranged for solo fiddle, accordion, guitar and orchestra. The program will include "Diggy Diggy Lo," "Mama's Got The Know How," "Nickel in My Pocket," "Battle of New Orleans," "Colinda," "Just Like You," "Sing Along," "Jambalaya," "Mamou Two-Step," "Mon Chapeau," "Cajun Stripper," "Play Fiddle Play," "Louisiana Man," and "Orange Blossom Special." Kershaw wrote all of these tunes EXCEPT "Orange Blossom Special."

Is it true that Doug Kershaw doesn't read or write music?

How did he write so many songs then?

It's true. Kershaw is completely self-taught. He doesn't read or write music. He's able to create music because the ability to read and write music is a skill that is learned. Most people have to be taught how to do those things. The ability to make music, on the other hand, is something that comes from within. Think of it as you might a language. If you grow up hearing English, you'll learn to speak it. In time, you may learn how to read and write in it, too. Kershaw grew up in an isolated pocket of the world, in a place defined by music, food and tradition. He and his family spoke Cajun French and surrounded themselves with music. Because he didn't study either of those subjects once he went to school, Kershaw never learned how to read or write in those languages, but he can sure speak them well – as his millions of fans can attest.

Are there other established musicians who don't read or write music? Have any of them tried to play with an orchestra?

Absolutely. The most famous example of an established musician who didn't read or write music but who wanted to have his music performed by an orchestra is **Paul McCartney**. When he made his orchestral debut in 1991 with the London Symphony, he couldn't read or write music either – and yet he was enormously successful with the Beatles, Wings and as a solo performer.

So if Kershaw can't read or write music, how will the orchestra play with him? Is someone writing his music out, and if so, who's doing that and how?

Kershaw's original music is being transcribed by various faculty members at the University of Northern Colorado. Teachers are listening to recordings and to Kershaw's live demonstrations and transcribing what they hear into written notation. After the songs are written down as Kershaw and his band performed them, special arrangements are being made. It's these arrangements – for Kershaw, his band, and symphony orchestra – that will be performed on April 5 at Union Colony Civic Center in Greeley.

Kershaw's original arrangements were orchestrated by Dr. Richard Fuchs (UNC violin professor), Dr. Russell Guyver (director of orchestras), Dr. David Caffey (director of UNC School of Music) and Eric Applegate (UNC jazz professor) and David Stamps (UNC jazz arranger).

I heard this concert is a benefit – what's the story on that?

What's so special about UNC? How did this collaboration come about?

Are sponsorship opportunities available?

After one of his concerts, Kershaw met a UNC student who told him how deeply his music had touched her over the years. This young woman became a violinist after seeing him perform; she's now an accomplished player. Kershaw was impressed with this story and asked her where she was studying: she said UNC.

He asked if he could talk to her teacher, and, a deep friendship between Doug Kershaw and Richard Fuchs, UNC's violin professor, soon took root. Kershaw told Fuchs about his interest in learning to read and write music. He also told Fuchs that one of his lifelong dreams was to play a whole show with a symphony orchestra. Given Kershaw's interest in helping young musicians, Fuchs suggested Kershaw do a show with the UNC Symphony and have the proceeds from that event benefit the Western States Honors Orchestra Festival, which celebrates its 25th anniversary in November 2008. Kershaw agreed and enthusiasm for the event has grown ever since!

Proceeds from the concert will benefit the 25th Western States Honors Orchestra Festival (WSHOF) held in November 2008 at the University of Northern Colorado. This annual "weekend for strings" brings advanced high school musicians from Colorado and surrounding Western states to UNC's College of Visual and Performing Arts for intense training with UNC faculty and some of the nation's leading performers.

Music programs at the University of Northern Colorado Orchestra are among the top in the nation. Under the guidance Dr. Russell Guyver, the UNC Symphony Orchestra has received national and international recognition. The group has been awarded "Best U.S. College Orchestra" in DownBeat Magazine's Annual Student Music Awards in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2007. The orchestra represented the U.S. in The International Cycle of University Orchestras in Zaragoza, Spain, in 2003 and 2006.

Sponsorship opportunities are available. Call Kristi Helzer at 970-506-1882 or write Kristi@KristiHelzer.com for details.

Will there be more concerts like this one? Will the music be available to other groups?

That's something everyone would like to see happen. Kershaw hopes to mount a series of benefit concert with orchestras across the United States to help raise money for string music education programs and for rebuilding efforts in hurricane-hit areas of South Louisiana and the Gulf South.

The music performed at Kershaw's April 5 concert will be published by UNC Jazz Press. Parts will be available on a per-service rental basis. Revenue from music rentals benefits string education efforts at the University of Northern Colorado. To secure parts or for more information, contact David Caffey, at 970-351-2679 or write him at david.caffey@unco.edu.

Where and when will the concert take place? How much are tickets, where can I buy tickets or get more info?

Saturday, April 5, 2008 at 8 p.m.
Union Colony Civic Center
Monfort Concert Hall
701 10th Ave.
Greeley, Colo.

Tickets: Adults: \$32, \$30, \$25
Students: \$15 – student discounts are available
Group rates available. Please call 970-351-2200 for details.

Box offices: UNC Box Office, Frasier Hall, #108
University of Northern Colorado
College of Performing and Visual Arts
10th Avenue at 17th Street
Greeley, Colorado
Open Monday -Friday, 12 -5:30 pm 970-351-2200
or
Union Colony Civic Center
701 10th Avenue
Greeley, Colorado
970-356-5000 / 800-315-ARTS
www.ucstars.com

Info: 970-351-2200 or www.arts.unco.edu/news/gumbo

970-356-5000 / 800-315-ARTS or www.ucstars.com

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rntgUwH3j9U.