

Welcome to AMERICAN MOSAIC in VOA Special English.

I'm June Simms.

On today's program, we tell all about the famed New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, which opens a few hours from now. Then we play music from some the artists performing at the event this year.

But first we tell about the newest presidential library in America.

President Obama and the four living former presidents were in Dallas, Texas this week for the opening of the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. Every president who served over the past 80 years has a library in his name. These buildings hold presidential records and other documents for researchers to study. They also educate people about the presidents and the issues they faced. Kelly Jean Kelly has more.

A life-like robot of former President Lyndon Johnson welcomes visitors to his library in Austin, Texas.

"It's pretty cool, a little disconcerting, but pretty cool. It's very life-like."

The Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library has spent ten million dollars to make the library more interactive. Visitors can listen to some of the more than 640 hours of telephone calls that President Johnson recorded -- like this one with Senator Everett Dirksen.

"Then I'll call you back in a little bit on this."

"You never talked that way when you were sitting in that front seat."

"Well I did, I did if my country is involved -- I voted for Ike one time..."

Mark Updegrove is director of the Johnson library. It, like other presidential libraries, is under the control of the National Archives, not the former presidents. Mr. Updegrove says that means the libraries do not tell only good things about presidents. He says they instead tell the full story of their time in office.

"It is not up to us to direct history and tell people what to think, but we do want them to know what he did and how it impacts your life. What you think about that is your own decision."

Presidential libraries make available documents for historical research. Some of the documents were once secret. Mr. Updegrove says this shows the openness of a democratic society.

"Those records belong to the people, they don't belong to that president."

A short drive from Austin, the Texas capital, is the presidential library of George Herbert Walker Bush. Warren Finch is the library's director.

"We feel like that's one of our key missions in our museums and our education programs is to talk about civics -- how the US constitution works, how the government works in practice."

Because of improving technology, libraries now have large collections of images and audio recordings. Mr. Finch says organizing all of that information is not easy. He says the library has about a million photographs and tens of thousands of videos.

Now we head to New Orleans, Louisiana, the city many consider the birthplace of jazz. It also holds one of the most famous cultural celebrations in America: The New Orleans Music and Heritage Festival.

The ten-day event opens April 26th this year. It is the 44th festival. New Orleans city officials and business leaders talked about organizing such an event for several years. They reached out to George Wein. He is a music lover as well as a musician, himself. At the time, Mr. Wein was also the producer of the Newport Jazz Fest, in Rhode Island.

The first New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival took place in the spring of 1970. About 350 people attended the five day celebration. When George Wein announced the festival he said it “could only be held in New Orleans, because here and here alone is the richest musical tradition in America.” Acts at the first festival included singing great Mahalia Jackson and Duke Ellington.

Five years later, an estimated 80,000 people attended the festival. Now attendance is measured in hundreds of thousands.

Music is performed on twelve different stages at the Fair Grounds Race Course. And jazz is just one of the many musical styles included. The New Orleans festival also celebrates rock, blues, soul, zydeco, Cajun, and world music.

So what artists are appearing at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival this year? Jim Tedder tells us about a few of them, and plays some of their music.

One of the many stars performing at the festival is the “piano man,” Billy Joel. He also appeared at the event five years ago, when some people in the crowd danced in the rain.

Fleetwood Mac will be performing at the jazz fest for the first time. The group just launched an international concert series. Fleetwood Mac was at the height of its popularity in the 1970s. Here is “The Chain” from the band’s 1977 record album “Rumours.”

Grammy-winning singer and actress Jill Scott is set to perform during the first weekend of the jazz fest. Her most recent album was released in 2011. Here is "So In Love."

New Orleans native Frank Ocean will appear at the jazz fest. He remembers attending the event when he was growing up. His first studio album, "Channel Orange," came out less than a year ago. Critics praised it wildly. The album has now sold than more a half million copies.

Blues veteran B.B. King and his guitar Lucille will play the jazz fest once again.

We leave you with music from the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. This New Orleans-based band performs around the world in an effort to teach about the art of jazz. It is always among the performers at the Jazz and Heritage Festival.