

The logo for the 2017 Mardi Gras Minicruise. It features the text "2017" in a purple, outlined font on the left, "MARDI GRAS" in a large, stylized, multi-colored font in the center, and "MINICRUISE" in a purple, outlined font on the right. The central text is decorated with Mardi Gras elements like a feathered mask, a jester's hat, and a beaded necklace.

2017 MARDI GRAS MINICRUISE

Mardi Gras Mini Cruise, P&O Ferries: Hull – Rotterdam, 31st March – 1st April 2017

Review by Alan White

Following on from the highly successful Mini Cruise in November 2016, Michael Ford (aka 'Cowling Wolf', Parchman Productions) organised a 'Mardi Gras' themed mini cruise on the Hull to Rotterdam P&O Ferry for Spring 2017, travelling to Rotterdam on the Friday night, a day in either Rotterdam or Amsterdam, then returning to Hull on the Saturday night. Wow, we were very glad he did.

On arrival at the P&O Ferry Terminal in Hull we were greeted at check-in by the sounds of pianist Nick Steed and at the top of the stairs we were treated to the New Orleans sounds of The Brass Volcanoes. On boarding the ship we were welcomed by two ladies in full Mardi Grass attire, body paint, headdress and feathers, courtesy of Transformation Station Events, a Hull based body painting and entertainment organisation. All this and the festival hadn't even started!

All aboard, anchors aweigh, we were treated to a New Orleans style traditional jazz parade marching into the lounge, led by The Brass Volcanoes, complete with enormous brass sousaphone, and followed by the Mardi Grass girls in full regalia. What a treat and a taster for what was to come.

First on stage was Dale Storr, a very fine New Orleans style pianist from Sheffield. With his devotion to the music of New Orleans, with influences such as Professor Longhair, Dr. John, Allen Toussaint, Tuts Washington and James Booker it was an excellent start. It was however rather unfortunate (for us) that Dale could only appear on the outward journey as he was starting a tour of Holland and Belgium.

Next we had Tipitina from Preston. A captivating mix of New Orleans boogie, blues, barrelhouse and gospel with the soulful voice of Debbie Jones and the piano wizardry of Justin Randell. Stunning! Such is their devotion for New Orleans music they named themselves after the song written by legendary New Orleans pianist Professor Longhair.

We were entertained by the effervescent pianist Dom Pipkin & The Ikos from London, playing music infused by the spirit and vibes of New Orleans. Known as "The best New Orleans band never to come from Louisiana" they sure lived up to their name with more references to Professor Longhair as well as Huey "Piano" Smith and Lee Dorsey.

It's important to mention here the Mardi Grass girls (and boys) who had spent many hours body painting as they joined in the dancing with their flamboyant outfits making the evening quite a spectacle.

Next on were the trio Londonola (no guesses where they are from) featuring blues/jazz pianist Paddy Milner playing New Orleans soul and funk. I hadn't seen Paddy for a while, that's because he's been touring North and South America and the Far East as Tom Jones' pianist. Fine playing indeed.

Finally we had what must be one of the hardest working bands in the UK - The Revolutionaires from Durham with their hi-energy 1950s blues, rock and roll, R&B, jump jive and swing. They pounded out the songs at a cracking pace, including 'Roll Over Beethoven' as a much appreciated tribute to the recently departed Charles "Chuck" Berry. The appreciative audience were rocking all the way back to their bunks.

So that was on the journey out to Rotterdam, For most of us we had a restful Saturday in that quiet little town called Amsterdam before getting back to the port for our overnight return to Hull with the bands performing all over again (but different sets) on the way back! Now it is said that bands love to jam, well put these like-minded bands together and sure enough the return trip almost became a continuous jam session. For one session we had four pianists on stage and later we had twelve artists on stage all playing at the same time – as I said to Michael at the time, "We're gonna need a bigger boat!"

Thank you to the sound technicians, Africa Studios from Hull, who did a marvellous job all weekend and as one of them said "At times I think to myself I'm enjoying this trip so much I'm amazed we are getting paid!" Says it all really.

Finally a big thank you to Michael Ford, Parchman Productions, for organising such a fantastic event. It was great to see everyone (including performers, technicians and the ship's crew) enjoying themselves so much. Same again next year? Now just wondering if all this paint will come off