



MUSIC

Bennie Pete, Co-Founder of New Orleans Greats Hot 8 Brass Band, Dead at 45

Sousaphone player died from complications from sarcoidosis and Covid-19

BY JON BLISTEIN

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Bennie Pete performs with the Hot 8 Brass Band in 2014. EDU HAWKINS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

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BENNIE PETE, CO-FOUNDER and sousaphone player for the celebrated New Orleans outfit the Hot 8 Brass Band, died from complications from sarcoidosis and Covid-19, [Nola.com](https://www.nola.com) reports. He was 45.

Pete died Monday at New Orleans East Hospital, his wife, Lameka Pete, confirmed. Lameka said her husband fainted at home on August 18th then later tested positive for Covid-19 at the hospital (Lameka and two of the couple's children also tested positive). Pete had initially been reluctant to get the Covid-19 vaccine due to his underlying health conditions — he was diagnosed with sarcoidosis in 2015 and underwent surgery for advanced prostate cancer in 2018 — and although he eventually changed his mind, he contracted Covid-19 before he was able to get the shot.

Still, Pete's sarcoidosis (an incurable inflammatory condition) had been wreaking havoc on his body for years. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, he'd been unable to regularly perform with the Hot 8 Brass Band due to his health. Over the past year, Lameka said, Pete suffered massive weight loss, severe seizures, and reduced heart capacity. The disease, she added, "was eating away at his main organs. Once we all got Covid, it finished off what the sarcoidosis started. Bennie had been through a lot."

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In a [statement](#), the Hot 8 Brass Band said of Pete: "He was more than just our leader; he was a constant galvanizing force within our own family of fellow musicians and beyond. Bennie was a rock in our lives. Yes, he was a leader, a teacher, and a mentor. More than that, Bennie was an inspiration to our band and to many other musicians, and the entire musical and cultural community."

The band went on to remember how Pete “emerged as a symbol of perseverance and hope for all of New Orleans” after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the failure of the levees. “His commitment to ensuring the cultural continuity of New Orleans’s most authentic, unique and deeply rooted cultural traditions, rituals and practices was unwavering,” the group continued. “Bennie’s greatest wish was that New Orleans culture live on for future generations, and that the brass tradition continue to be a model of strength and a barometer of a healthy New Orleans cultural ecosystem.”

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The Hot 8 Brass Band also established a [GoFundMe page](#) in honor of Pete. All donations will help support Pete’s family.

Hot 8 Brass Band - Celebrating the Life of Bennie Pet...



Pete co-founded the Hot 8 Brass Band in 1996 when he brought together two student groups at Fortier High School in New Orleans. Per a bio on the [group's website](#), the Hot 8 Brass Band drew on contemporary brass band traditions, although expanded their sound with elements of funk, R&B, rap, and the New Orleans hip-hop style bounce. Pete's sousaphone often played a crucial role in the group's music, serving as both rhythmic and melodic core.

The Hot 8 Brass Band were a New Orleans live staple, frequently performing in second line parades and other community functions. The group has also collaborated with artists like Lauryn Hill, Yasiin Bey (Mos Def), and the Blind Boys of Alabama, while their LP *The Life & Times of... the Hot 8 Brass Band*, earned a Grammy nomination for Best Regional Roots Music Album in 2013.

The Hot 8 Brass Band has also endured more than its fair share of tragedies. Their 17-year-old trumpet player, Jacob Johnson, was killed in a 1996 home invasion; in 2004, trombonist Joseph "Shotgun Joe" Williams was shot and killed by the police, while his fellow trombonist, Demond Dorsey, died of a heart attack; and in 2006 snare drummer Dinerral Shavers was killed by a stray bullet.

"In life, we're going to have something that will always affect us," Pete said in a 2017 interview. "Something will always try to stop us from achieving our goals and accomplishing greater goals. But I don't want to carry and drag those tragedies around in a bag, ready to pull it out for anybody. I don't want the Hot 8 to just go down as that band. It's about new music, new members, new goals."