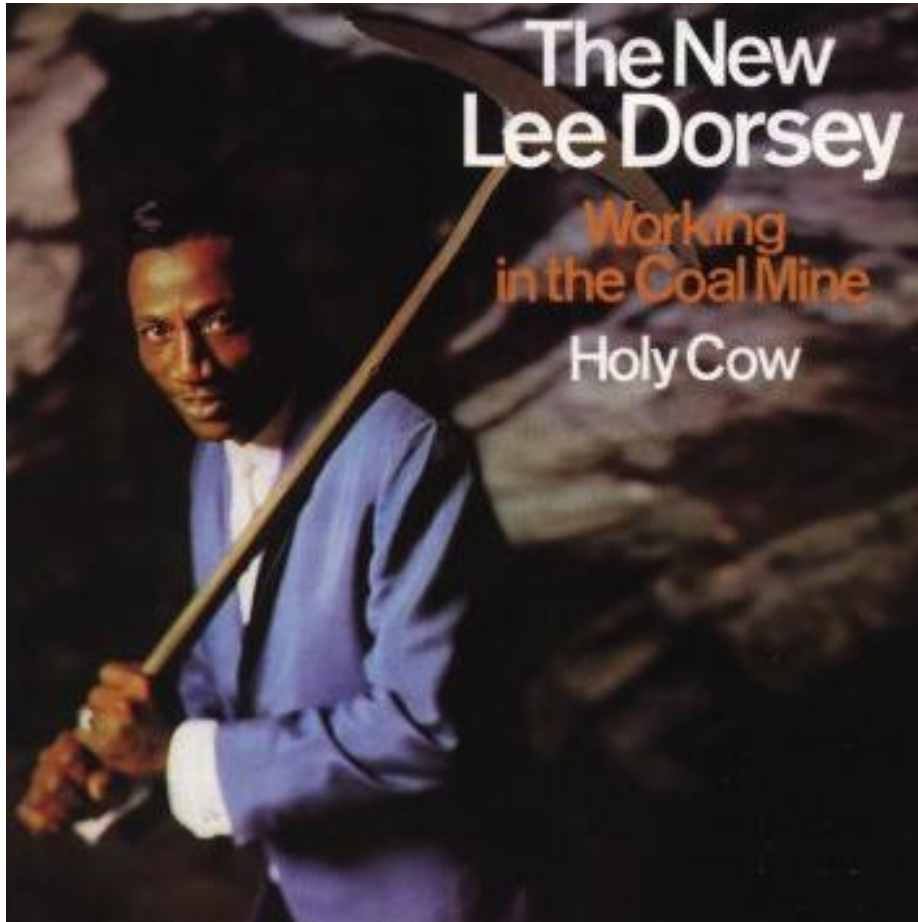


Whip It!

Only in New Orleans, where cemeteries and basements are above ground, could Allen Toussaint have written a song about “goin’ down down down” while “*Working in the Coal Mine*”. The Crescent City’s own Lee Dorsey had a big hit with that composition in 1966, and the New Wave group, Devo, did a terrific version in 1981.



Lee Dorsey, "Working in the Coal Mine"

With their red flowerpot “energy dome” hats, Devo dominated pop culture in the 1980s. Part of the Devo Manifesto was: “Wear gaudy colors or avoid display, it’s all the same. The fittest shall survive yet the unfit shall live.” The surreal humor underlying these rules (which would make great guidelines for enjoying Mardi Gras) poked fun at the industrial consumerism of the age. Devo’s *kitsch* themes were never more evident than when they scored with their greatest hit, “Whip It!”



But the Greater New Orleans area had a whip-tease artist of its own, Lash LaRue. Born in Gretna, Louisiana, on June 14, 1907, Alfred LaRue chose not to “wear gaudy colors” but a jet-black outfit. He made his mark as a Western hero in the 1940s brandishing his own signature weapon, an eighteen-foot bullwhip.



Lash LaRue

Playing the Cheyenne Kid in the 1945 movie "The Song of Old Wyoming" made him a star. He repeated that role many times more alongside comic sidekick Al "Fuzzy" St. John. Fibbing at first about his prowess with a whip to get the part, LaRue soon became an expert. "Lash" became his new first name, and he became billed as "King of the Bullwhip".



"King of the Bullwhip" in the comics

Lash toured the country performing live stunts with his whip to the great delight of his fans. Here was one cowboy who could do the same things in person that he did on the screen (like popping the cap off a Coca-Cola bottle with his whip). By 1948 matinee Westerns were on the decline and cut from the studios; but from 1949 to 1961, Lash

had his own comic book series. After his retirement from films, he continued to tour with film festivals that began in the 70s.

Three loyal fans (Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash) gave Lash a bit part in their 1986 made-for-television remake of "Stagecoach". Probably a sartorial influence on Johnny Cash, Johnny introduced Lash to his family as "the original man in black". LaRue even gave lessons to Harrison Ford on how to use the bullwhip for the "Indiana Jones" movies. And Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction" has this bit of dialogue: "How about you, Lash LaRue? Can you keep your spurs from jingling and jangling?"



Lash LaRue, "the original man in black"

LaRue was reportedly married and divorced ten or twelve times. After that many times, who's counting? All of these were enough to "whip out" the toughest hombre. On May 21, 1996, Lash died in Burbank, California. His many fans probably never realized that this famous Western star's original "West" was the Jefferson Parish Westbank.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Whip It!"
Ned Hémard
Copyright 2006 and 2014

