1965 was a memorable year in New Orleans. It was back then that I spent the last half of my sophomore year and the first segment of my junior year in high school. I wore a uniform to school, but other teens were seemingly suffering sartorial stress. On March 16, 1965, cartoonist John Chase delivered an excellent editorial cartoon for WDSU on high school fashions of that period. It was entitled “The differences between Cats and Frats”. According to Chase’s keen observations and colorful sketches, one was either an afficionado of leather and ducktails or madras and Bass Weejuns.

An unwelcome guest named Hurricane Betsy visited the city in early September of 1965. Betsy executed a hairpin loop at the end of August as it was traveling up the Florida Coast on the Atlantic Ocean side. After turning around, it touched the tip of Florida at Key Largo as a Category 3 and then entered the Gulf of Mexico restrengthened, growing into a Category 4 hurricane with winds up to 155 mph (only one mile per hour short of Category 5 status). It made its second U.S. landfall at Grand Isle, Louisiana.

The powerful hurricane slammed into New Orleans on the evening of September 9 with 110 mph winds. The eye of Betsy passed to the southwest of the city on a northwesterly track. It drove a storm surge into Lake Pontchartrain, north of the city, and the Mr. Go deep-water shipping channel to the east and south. Levees protecting parts of Gentilly and the Lower Ninth Ward failed, and some residents drowned in their attics trying to escape the rising waters. Arabi and Chalmette were inundated, as well.

Betsy was one of the nation’s most deadly (76 fatalities) and costly storms to make landfall in the United States, causing $1.42 billion in 1965 dollars (more than tenfold that amount today).

New Orleans native Shirley Ann Grau (who graduated from Newcomb College in 1950) won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1965 with *The Keepers of the House*. Her novel, set in rural Alabama, covers seven
generations of the Howland family and reflects this Southern family’s encounter with changing norms and modern values. Her body of work, usually set in the Deep South, delves into issues of gender and race. It wasn’t until 1981 that another New Orleans-born author, John Kennedy Toole, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his posthumously published *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

In 1965 John McKeithen was Governor of Louisiana and Victor H. Schiro was Mayor of New Orleans. In December, 1965, Mayor Schiro led his first cultural-trade mission to Central America and visited five nations to promote New Orleans as the headquarters for a proposed common market between Central America and the United States.

The Beatles were as popular as ever, having come to the Crescent City the year before to perform at City Park Stadium, and had multiple number one hits on the Billboard charts. So did the Supremes (including “Stop! In the Name of Love”) and the Stones, with “Satisfaction” and “Get Off My Cloud”. Also hitting number one were Petula Clark’s “Downtown”, Sonny and Cher’s “I Got You Babe”, The Temptations’ “My Girl” and “I Can’t Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch” by the Four Tops.
Locally kids were groovin’ to a pre-funk garage classic known as “Pass The Hatchet”, recorded in 1965 by Roger and the Gypsies (who were, in reality, Earl Stanley and the Stereos), with Eddie Bo spicing up the awesome instrumental with soulful grunts and whoops like “Let me chop it!” and other tree-felling interjections. The song surfaced thirty years later as part of the soundtrack to the action thriller Desperado, which sought to create a Pulp Fiction-Quentin Tarantino-meets-Ennio Morricone atmosphere.

Like other teenagers in ’65, I wanted to play electric guitar like the Beatles. After saving up my money from working during the summer, my dad took me to Werlein’s on Canal, where I purchased a red Gibson Melody Maker electric guitar. Now all I needed was an amp just like the Fab Four. I knew the Lads from Liverpool used Vox, an amplifier popularized by The Shadows and other British rock ‘n’ roll musicians. It was made by the Jennings Organ Company, founded in Dartford, Kent, England, after World War II. But how could I get my hands on a Vox?

The opportunity came from another New Orleans rock ‘n’ roll band to which a Jesuit classmate of mine belonged. The group was called The Nudeles. My classmate was Doug Goodlife and he had a Vox amp, the Berkeley Super Reverb with tubes and reverb foot pedal. Doug’s the
second guitarist from the left in the center of the photo below. In this 1965 photo of the Nudeles, the Vox amp is also visible, barely, just to the left of the drum set. The great news for me was that Doug wanted to sell his Vox in order to buy something more powerful. I got his Vox amp for $100.

Now if you look at the above photo a little more closely, the tall saxophonist for the Nudeles (in the pea coat) may look somewhat familiar. He is the multi-talented New Orleans-born star of stage, screen and television, John Larroquette.

In fact, there are two Johns to Doug’s left: The guitarist between Doug and John Larroquette is John Bezou, whom Doug met when he was 13. As a freshman at De la Salle, Bezou was walking home past Doug’s house Uptown on Pine St. when he came upon this rival Jesuit Blue Jay practicing guitar on his front porch. A friendship developed, as did a band. But what to call it? Doug came up with “The Noodles”, but John Larroquette and part of the band discussing it with Doug in his bedroom laughingly arrived at a more appropriate acronym, “The Nudeles” (which they decided would stand for “new universal development exclusively for love, ecstasy and sex”).

John Edgar Bernard Larroquette, Jr. (born in New Orleans, November 25, 1947), with his deep resonant voice, is loved for his many successful roles as the sex-obsessed, narcissistic assistant district
attorney Dan Fielding on the long-running series *Night Court*; John Hemingway on *The John Larroquette Show*; former cop-turned lawyer and compassionate curmudgeon Mike McBride on the Hallmark Channel’s *McBride*; and attorney Carl Sack on *Boston Legal*.

*John Larroquette* and his *Night Court* cast

*Night Court* aired on NBC from January 4, 1984 to May 31, 1992 and was nominated for an impressive thirty-one Emmys, winning seven times (four earned by Larroquette 1985-1988) In 1989, he asked not to be considered. His four consecutive Emmy wins were, at that time, a record. John won his fifth Emmy in 1998 as a guest star on *The Practice*, on which he portrayed a narcissistic, well-to-do and wisecracking psychopath that stabs his gay lovers to death.

Larroquette described himself as a “born and bred yat” to DJ Bob Walker (whose great local website is his “Original New Orleans Radio Shrine”). John “worked in radio during the late 60’s and early 70’s at several stations in town”: WNPS, WRNO and as “Judas” on WWOM “Mother Radio”. He observed, “FM radio was just starting to happen and it was a blast doing the late night shifts and turning the city, at
least the seven hippies in the French Quarter, on to a whole new kind of music.” The impressive thing is that John worked hard to overcome whatever Ninth Ward dialect he may have had to develop a refined form of speech so he could work in radio.

After working stints as radio disc jockey and in the Naval Reserve, John headed for the West Coast. In L.A. he saw a sign that said, “Acting lessons $10 a week”. He auditioned for *The Crucible* and landed a role. The people in that play decided to do a comedy next, *Enter Laughing*. He got a decent review, hired an agent, met his wife, Elizabeth Ann Cookson, and began his fine acting career. Early on, he delivered a notable (but uncredited) voiceover narration in the original 1974 *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. In 2003, he reprised his narration in a remake of the movie.

Larroquette made his network television debut in 1975 as Dr. Paul Herman in Doctors’ Hospital. Also that year, he appeared on *Sanford and Son* as Lamont’s counterpart in a fictitious alternate sitcom called *Steinberg and Son*. This was followed by a two-year run (1976-1978) on *Baa Baa Black Sheep* (later syndicated as *Black Sheep Squadron*), which was based on the experiences of USMC fighter pilot Pappy Boyington and his collection of screwballs and misfits that nevertheless got the job done in the South Pacific. Besides his portrayal of the boorish, sex-always-on-his-mind Dan Fielding (and other television roles previously mentioned), John Larroquette has appeared on NBC’s *The West Wing* as Lionel Tribbey, White House Counsel. He also guest starred on *House* and *CSI: NY*.

In the movies, Larroquette starred (with Bruce Willis) as Kim Basinger’s despicable suitor in Blake Edwards’ *Blind Date*; in *Richie Rich* opposite Macauley Culkin; as well as costarring roles in *Summer Rental*, *Stripes*, *Meatballs Part II*, *Altered States* and *Twilight Zone: The Movie*. Other roles include *Star Trek II: The Search for Spock*; *Second Sight* in 1989 with Bronson Pinchot; and (opposite Kirstie Alley) in the 1990 comedy film *Madhouse*. His role as a Johnny Carsonesque talk show host was omitted from the theatrical version of Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991) but restored in the video/DVD director’s cut.

Of late, John Larroquette has taken to the stage. He earned a Tony Award for his role as J. B. Biggley in the 2011 Broadway production of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. This year he appeared in a Broadway revival of Gore Vidal’s *The Best Man* with an all-star cast, for which he was nominated in the category of distinguished performance for the Drama League Awards.

Larroquette, who enjoys collecting rare first-edition books and fountain pens, and his wife Elizabeth have three children. One of his sons, Jonathan, co-hosts a clever comedy podcast called *Uhh Yeah Dude*. 
John Larroquette has and continues to enjoy a most successful career as a true voice of and for the people, the Vox Populi, since his audience identifies with the many imperfections all of us have as human beings.

“Characters with great defects ... are more interesting to play, to me anyway,” says Larroquette. “There’s more handles to grab for comedy.”

John “handles” his characters exceedingly well.

The Gibson Melody Maker guitar was first launched back in 1959 and discontinued in 1971. It consisted of a thin slab-style mahogany body and a one-piece mahogany neck. Also in 1959, with sales pressure from the more powerful Fender Twin, Vox produced an amp that was twice the power of its AC15 and named it the AC30. Its speakers, circuitry and tubes (known as valves in the UK) helped to produce the fabulous sound of the British Invasion, with amps used by The Beatles, Stones, the Nudeles and even (yours truly) this amateur guitarist.

As for my red Gibson Melody Maker electric guitar (with tremelo arm used to create a vibrato effect) and Berkeley Super Reverb Vox amp, I’ve still got them (or, should I say, my son does). They’re pictured below.
NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Vox Populi"
Ned Hémard
Copyright 2012