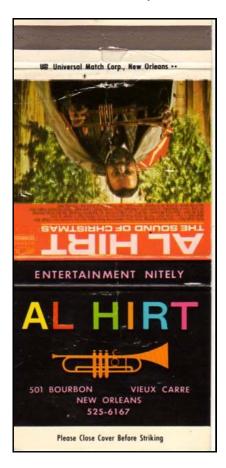# Al Hirt

Alois Maxwell November 7, 1922 – April 27, 1999) was an American trumpeter and bandleader. He is best remembered for his million-selling recordings of "Java" and the accompanying album *Honey in the Horn* (1963), and for the theme song to *The Green Hornet*. Hirt was inducted into The Louisiana Music Hall of Fame in November 2009.

Hirt was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, the son of a police officer. At the age of six, he was given his first trumpet, which had been purchased at a local pawnshop. He would play in the Junior Police Band with the children of Alcide Nunez, and by the age of 16, Hirt was playing professionally, often with his friend Pete Fountain. During this time, he was hired to play at the local horse racing track, beginning a six-decade connection to the sport.

In 1950, Hirt became first trumpet and featured soloist with Horace Heidt's Orchestra. After spending several years on the road with Heidt, Hirt returned to New Orleans working with various Dixieland groups and leading his own bands. Despite Hirt's statement years later "I'm not a jazz trumpeter and never was a jazz trumpeter", he made a few recordings where he demonstrated his ability to play in that style, during the 1950s with bandleader Monk Hazel, and a few other recordings on the local Southland Records label.

Hirt's virtuoso dexterity and fine tone on his instrument soon attracted the attention of major record labels and he signed with RCA Victor. Hirt posted twenty-two albums on the Billboard charts in the 1950s and 1960s. The albums *Honey in the Horn* and *Cotton Candy* were both in the Top 10 best sellers for 1964, the same year Hirt scored a hit single with his cover of Allen Toussaint's tune "Java" (Billboard No. 4), and later won a Grammy Award for the same recording. Both *Honey in the Horn* and "Java" sold over one million copies, and were awarded gold discs. In 1999, Hirt died, aged 76, in New Orleans of liver failure, after spending the previous year in a wheelchair due to edema in his leg.