

LOUISIANA MUSIC:

A PRIMER

Volume 1, No. 6: CAJUN



It's difficult to imagine how Southwest Louisiana would sound—or taste—if in 1755 the Acadians, who were exiled from their Canadian colony, hadn't found their way down to this state's bayou country. Of French origin, these refugees brought to their new home their love of ballads and the fiddle as well as their language and style of cooking.

The descendants of the original Acadians in Louisiana are now known as Cajuns and their lively music is highly regarded around the world. It still relies heavily on the fiddle and the ring of a triangle but through the years has been augmented by accordion, guitar and drums to produce the distinctive Cajun waltzes and two-steps.

The old-time Cajun style was sittin' on the porch enjoying an evening with family music. Saturday nights were the time to head to a "fais do-do"—a dance party that were often held at a neighbor's house. The phrase roughly translates to "go to sleep" as mothers, who were eager to have some fun, tried to lull their children to dreamland. Dancing by all—young, old, and everything in between—is still an integral part of Cajun music culture: the two-step and Cajun waltz endure.

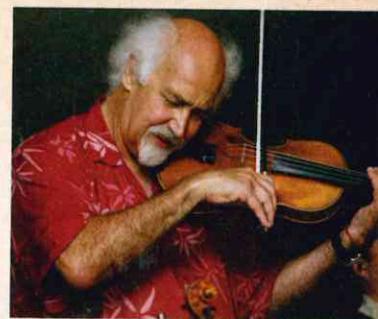


Dancing is an integral part of Cajun music culture.

Thankfully, the recording of Cajun musicians enjoyed a boom in 1946, led by fiddler Harry Choates' hit "Jole Blon," a go-to tune by players to this day.

As in other traditional music, there are Cajun artists who stick close to their roots, singing the classic tunes in Cajun French and utilizing

the basic instrumentation. Others have added to the songbook, modernizing the style a bit while not forgetting the source. With the power of his musicianship, Grammy-winning fiddler and vocalist Michael Doucet has introduced Cajun music to new audiences with his group BeauSoleil. Fiddler and vocalist Doug Kershaw



Cajun fiddler Michael Doucet.

could be credited for spreading the word on Cajun music when he released "Louisiana Man," a hit that became a classic and has been covered by numerous groups. Known for his energized performances, Kershaw also gained fans with his upbeat "Diggy Liggy Lo."

Traditionalists and modernists in the Cajun music community are equally enjoyed at regional festivals throughout the state. The largest and perhaps the most important event for lovers of two-steppin' and waltzing is the Festivals Acadiens. Since 1972, the outdoor event has been held annually in Lafayette, Louisiana, a hub of Cajun country. This year it takes place Friday, October 11 through Sunday October 12 in Girard Park. And where there is Cajun music, you know cher, there's plenty of great food.

On a weekly basis, folks living or visiting Cajun country head to spots like Lafayette's Blue Moon Saloon or swing over to Breaux Bridge to pass a good time at the original Mulate's. (There's also a Mulate's in New Orleans' Warehouse District that offers live music seven days a week.) All are welcome to the Saturday jam sessions at Marc and Ann Savoy's famous Savoy Music Center in Eunice.

Not to be missed is Saturday mornings at Fred's Lounge in Mamou. It's quite an experience to dance to a live band and belly up to the bar at 9 a.m. for the show that is broadcast live on KVPI 105 AM radio. When asked what people who've started so early do afterward, the friendly bartender with a T-shirt that read "Sue from Mamou," quickly replied, "Take a nap!"

On Saturday nights the historic Liberty Theater in Eunice also broadcasts performances live on radio station KRVS 88.7 FM. Top Cajun artists like Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys kick in at 6 p.m. and the admission price to the family-friendly venue is a low \$5.00.

Seven years ago, New Orleans jumped on the southwest Louisiana hayride by presenting the Louisiana Cajun-Zydeco Festival that takes place on Saturday June 8 and Sunday, June 9 next to the Old U.S. Mint at the bottom of the French Quarter. Favorites like accordionist Bruce Daigrepoint, who often plays the Sunday afternoon fais do-do at Tipitina's, and the rock-infused, Grammy-nominated Cajun band, the Lost Bayou Ramblers, perform on two stages from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival is also responsible for introducing many urbanites and visitors to the delights of Cajun music which are presented on the specially-appointed Fais Do-Do Stage. This year, 81-year-old guitarist and vocalist D.L. Menard, crowned the Hank Williams of Cajun Music, was one of the festival's highlights.

As the Cajuns love to say: "Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler!"—a highlight of all the many types of music that comprise "Louisiana Music."

*To learn more about
Louisiana CAJUN MUSIC
and the many more genres
that define Louisiana music, check out
LouisianaSoundtrack.com.*