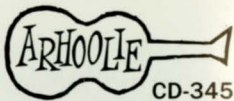


# CLIFTON CHENIER

## "Bon Ton Roulet"

Over 60 Minutes of Classic Zydeco Music



1. Bon Ton Roulet
2. Frog Legs
3. If I Ever Get Lucky
4. Black Gal
5. Long Toes
6. Baby, Please Don't Go
7. Houston Boogie (\*)
8. Blues de Ma Negresse
9. Sweet Little Doll (Cher Catin)
10. Jole Blonde
11. Ay, Ai Ai
12. French Town Waltz
13. Keep on Scratching
14. Black Snake Blues
15. Let's Talk It Over
16. Walking to Louisiana
17. Key to the Highway
18. Things Ain't Like They Used to Be
19. I Got a Little Girl
20. I'm on the Wonder (\*)
21. Jump the Boogie (\*)

Total time: 63:00

(\*) = previously unissued

All songs (except 6 & 17) by Clifton Chenier and © Tradition Music Co. (BMI)

Selections #1-6, 8-10, 12 & 13  
Clifton Chenier – vocals and accordion  
Morris Chenier – fiddle  
Elmore Nixon – piano  
Robert St. Judy – drums plus bass and guitar  
All previously released as ARH 1031  
Recorded in Houston, TX May 10, 1966

#7, 11, 20, 21  
Recorded February 8, 1964  
Bob Murphy – drums  
Elmore Nixon – piano

#14-16, 18, & 19  
Clifton Chenier – vocals and accordion  
Cleveland Chenier – rubboard  
Robert St. Judy – drums  
Felix James Benoit – guitar  
Joe Morris – bass  
All previously released as the A side of  
ARH 1038 entitled "Black Snake Blues."  
Recorded at Sierra Sound Laboratories in  
Berkeley, CA October 10, 1967.  
Bob DeSousa – engineer

#17  
Add John Hart – tenor sax  
Recorded in Ville Platte, La. in  
September 1973; previously released on  
AR 1038

Produced by Chris Strachwitz  
Cover by Wayne Pope  
All photos by Chris Strachwitz

# Clifton Chenier

## Bon Ton Roulet! & More

OVER  
**60**  
MINUTES  
OF CLASSIC  
**ZYDECO**





Clifton Chenier and his uncle, Morris Chenier

CHRIS STRACHWITZ

## Clifton Chenier

In April of 1966 Clifton Chenier appeared at the Berkeley Blues Festival on the University of California campus with just his accordion backed by drummer Francis Clay. Clifton's music caused quite a stir at the concert. No one had ever seen a black bluesman playing an accordion. For most of the fans and reviewers in attendance, Clifton's unique performance was probably their first encounter with the joyful sounds of Louisiana Zydeco music. The San Francisco Chronicle's famous music critic, Ralph J. Gleason, called Clifton Chenier "... one of the most surprising musicians I have heard in sometime, with a marvelous moving style of playing the accordion, blues accordion, that's right, blues accordion." The Oakland Tribune's jazz writer Russ Wilson said: "Chenier is an adept instrumentalist and the riffs

he set up in the bass while playing solo lines in the treble at times sounded like a miniature Basie band!"

Although that festival appearance in Berkeley, alongside Lightning Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Muddy Waters and his band, was probably Clifton Chenier's formal concert debut, although he had been a popular exponent of Zydeco music along the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast for several years. Clifton Chenier had toured with Lowell Fulson, Etta James, and others on the Rhythm and Blues circuit in the 1950's following his first hit record of "Ay Tete Fee" on the Specialty label. By the mid-1960's Chenier began to appear at concerts and clubs for largely white, blues loving audiences although he continued to play dances along the Gulf Coast and at various church halls in Los

Angeles and in the San Francisco Bay Area for the large community of Creoles who had moved to the West Coast since World War II to find better job opportunities. (A live recording of one of Chenier's dances at St. Mark's Hall in Richmond, Ca. is available on ARH CD/C 313). On the Creole circuit in Louisiana, East Texas and on the West Coast, Clifton was the King of Zydeco playing more and bigger dances for both Creole and White audiences alike.

ZYDECO is a combination of traditional Acadian/Cajun/Creole music mixed with elements of Jazz, Blues, Soul, Carribean rhythms, and black popular music in general. Some people referred to it as "La La music" – others, including Clifton Chenier, simply called it "French music" while others said it was "Creole music" or just "push and pull"! In the early 1960's Zydeco "bands" would usually consist of

one person who played the accordion and sang blues in French and English, played fast two steps, slow waltzes and various forms of shuffles and boogies. The accordionist would be accompanied by a drummer or a rub board (washboard) player. At small house parties it was usually just accordion and rubboard, while at the beer joints or dance halls a drummer would be backing the amplified accordion. Sometimes, especially in Louisiana, a fiddler might join. (For a fascinating collection documenting the formative years of Zydeco, we suggest Arhoolie CD/C 307 "Zydeco: The Early Years.")

I first met Clifton at a small beer joint in a part of Houston locally known as "French Town" where he was accompanied only by a drummer. Lightning Hopkins, a cousin to Clifton's wife, took me there. I was knocked out by the strange but

powerful blues I heard that night. I knew the Specialty record of "Eh Tite Fee" but had expected more of an R&B band sound but soon found out that although Clifton loved to play with larger groups backing him, the small beer joint he played that night could not afford a bigger group. After his first Arhoolie 45s ("Ay Ai Ai" was our first release!) got some play on the radio and juke boxes in Texas and Louisiana, Clifton always had a full rhythm section with drums, bass, and guitar. For recording, Clifton loved to add a piano, especially Elmore Nixon, who knew how to compliment Clifton's accordion. As Clifton Chenier's music again became more in demand, Cleveland Chenier, who had been working with Lightning Hopkins in beer joints, rejoined his brother on rub-board. A few years later Clifton added John Hart, the fine sax player, and keyboard player Buckwheat,

which made the sound of his music even fuller (note ARH CD/C 347 "Bogalusa Boogie").

Since these recordings were first released, Zydeco music has undergone many changes. Like all black popular musics, this regional variation has changed and evolved, yet to a remarkable degree, has continued to serve as a very popular dance music, and like its white counterpart, Cajun music, has continued to utilize older and traditional tunes and songs.

What makes this album rather unique is the addition of Clifton's uncle, Morris "Big" Chenier on fiddle. Clifton knew that I liked the old time Zydeco and Cajun sounds and told me that his uncle played not only guitar but also fiddle. So we called him in Lake Charles and a few days later he joined us in Houston for this recording session. Throughout the session Morris seemed to be having problems staying in tune

with the band but he played fine on most numbers which Clifton wanted to be in the old style. It wasn't until we were ready to leave the studio that Morris came up to me and rather apologetically pointed at the interior of the fiddle and told me that he'd just discovered that the tone bar inside had collapsed! In spite of this the wonderful blues "Black Gal" became a hit and was licensed to several other labels for wider distribution.

"*Bon Ton Roulet*" (Let The Good Times Roll), sung in French, is a unique Clifton Chenier version of an older song popularized by Louis Jordan. The song gained widespread popularity along the Gulf Coast during the late 1940's via various versions recorded by the late Clarence Garlow. "*If I Ever Get Lucky*" and "*Black Gal*" show what a fine blues singer Clifton is. "*Frog Legs*" and "*Long Toes*" are two instrumental dance numbers in the rhythm and

blues style of the period. On "*Baby Please Don't Go*" Clifton is back to the basic Zydeco rhythm of just accordion, drums and his uncle on fiddle. I heard this tune at every Zydeco dance usually played in a chant or drone-like style, repeating the title phrase over and over. When I asked Clifton for his version of this obviously popular number, he came up with this interpretation, which is closer to that originally recorded in the 30s by blues singer Big Joe Williams.

"*Blues de Ma Negresse*" has Clifton singing in French and with the fiddle and drums behind him, this is pure Creole French blues.

"*Sweet Little Doll Zydeco*" is a fine two step in the old style followed by the national anthem of French Louisiana: "*Jole Blonde*" which Clifton sings in his totally unique style. "AY, AI, AI" and the three previously unissued selections (7, 20, 21) were recorded at the first session

I had with Clifton the day after we first met. Although recorded at Bill Quinn's Gold Star studios in Houston, I probably could have done just as well with one mike and my old tape recorder! Clifton brought a "band" along for the session, but we could use neither the guitarist nor the bass player because their OD colored army surplus amplifiers were not usable. One literally started to smoke and the other produced only a loud hum! The guys in the band however did not lose their spirits and all helped out on the vocals. This version of "*I'm on the Wonder*" was also recorded at our first session but for some reason I did not release it at the time even though it was already one of Clifton's favorite numbers. We finally re-recorded it some years later when Elvin Bishop sat-in with the band for their "Out West" album.

Clifton Chenier's best recordings are available on Arhoolie CD/C 301 "Over 60 Minutes with the King

of Zydeco," CD/C 313 "Live at St. Mark's," CD/C 347 "Bogalusa Boogie," (the entire session which Rolling Stone considers Chenier's all-time best recording), CD/C 329 "Louisiana Blues and Zydeco" (which includes all of ARH 1024 and half of ARH 1038) and CD/C 355 "The King of Zydeco Live at Montreux." We hope to bring out the remaining material by Clifton Chenier shortly. Clifton Chenier and his Red Hot Louisiana Band can also be seen in the Arhoolie video "The King of Zydeco" (\$30.00) and Les Blank's "Hot Pepper." Some of the footage seen in "The King of Zydeco" video is also used in the film "J'AI ETE AU BAL" (I Went To The Dance) - The Cajun And Zydeco Music Of Louisiana, which details the full history of the music (\$40.00).

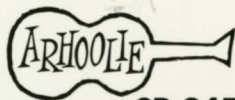
(Chris Strachwitz  
- rewritten 1990)

Copy editing by Dix Bruce



# CLIFTON CHENIER

“Bon Ton Roulet” includes the hits  
“Black Gal” & “Black Snake Blues”



CD-345

Over 60 Minutes of Classic ZYDECO

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Total time: 63:00



Clifton Chenier – vocals and accordion and his Red Hot Louisiana Band.

Produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover by Wayne Pope

All photos by Chris Strachwitz

(\*) = Selections previously unreleased

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