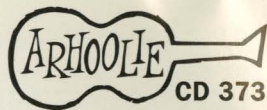


NATHAN ABSHIRE & the Pine Grove Boys "French Blues"



1. PINE GROVE BLUES (OT 102A)
2. KAPLAN WALTZ (OT 102B)
3. FRENCH BLUES (OT 110B)
4. NEW ORLEANS WALTZ (OT 110A)
5. PINE GROVE BOOGIE (OT 111A)
6. HATHAWAY WALTZ (OT 111B)
7. STEP IT FAST (OT 114)
8. JOLIE, PETITE JUILLETTE (OT 114)
9. CHOUPIQUE TWO STEP (Lyric 610B)
10. LA VALSE DE BELEZERE (Lyric 610A)
11. PINE GROVE BLUES #2 (Kh 611A)
12. LA VALSE DE HOLLY BEACH (Kh 611B)
13. IOTA TWO-STEP (Kh 612B)
14. LA VALSE DE BAYOU TECH (Kh 612A)
15. MUSICAL FIVE SPECIAL (Kh 631A)
16. AVALON WALTZ (Kh 631B)
17. TEE PER COINE (Kh 636B)
(Keep a' Knocking, But You Can't Come In)
18. THE NEW JOLIE BLON (Kh 636A)
19. POINT DE LOU TWO STEP (Kh 645B)
20. TEXAS WALTZ (Kh 645A)
21. LU LU BOOGIE (Kh 647A)
22. CAROLINA BLUES (Kh 649)
23. SHAMROCK WALTZ (Kh 652B)

24. MAMA ROSIN (Kh 652A)
25. L. S. U. FRENCH WALTZ (Kh 701)
26. CRYING PINE GROVE BLUES (Kh 701)
27. RED ROCK WALTZ (Kh 704B)
28. CANNON BALL SPECIAL (Kh 704A)

Personnel for #1 & 2; (according to Ernest Thibodeaux), May 23, 1949: Nathan Abshire - vocals and accordion; Will Kegley - fiddle; Jim Baker - bass; Ernest Thibodeaux - guitar; Oziet Kegley (Will's sister) - drums. (John Broven lists Wilson Granger as the fiddler and Earl Demarcy as guitarist.) Personnel on subsequent recordings varies and includes an unidentified steel guitarist. Information in parenthesis following the title denotes the record label and release number. OT = Oklahoma Tornadoes Recording Co.

#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 27, 28 - vocal by Nathan Abshire; #5 - vocal by Roy Broussard; #7 - vocal by Ernest Thibodeaux; #10, 14 - vocal by Will Kegley; #22, 25 - vocal by Dewey Balfa; #24 - vocal by Little Yvonne Le Blanc; #26 - vocal by Jake Miere; #23 - vocalist unidentified.

(Continued on page 11, inside back cover)

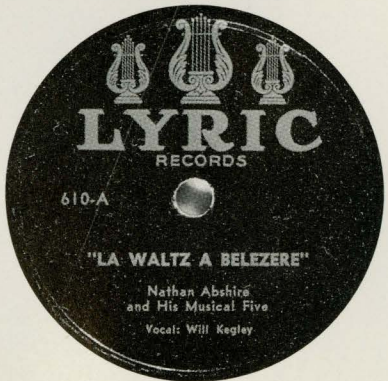


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Nathan Abshire AND HIS PINE GROVE BOYS »French Blues«

BAYOU HITS
KHOURY'S
RECORDINGS
Featuring the Original
**PINE GROVE
BLUES**





Nathan Abshire & The Pine Grove Boys – “French Blues”

Nathan Abshire was born on June 27, 1913 (some reports say 1915) near Gueydan, La., into a musical family of Cajun and Indian heritage. Both of Nathan's parents, two brothers and at least one uncle, all played accordion. “I learned to play by myself. No one taught me. I would hear and see others playing, you see. I was six years old. I started playing an accordion that cost \$3.50. It wasn't mine. It was for one of my uncles.” He was born a few years too late to be a member of the first generation of recording artists like Joe Falcon, Amedee Breaux, Lawrence Walker, Angelas Lejeune, and Amédé Ardoin, but he followed in their footsteps and was especially influenced by Amédé Ardoin, the pioneer black Creole accordionist and singer.

As a teenager, Nathan was asked by Amédé Ardoin to play during Amédé's breaks at house parties. Nathan obviously learned his blues well and his first recordings in 1935 with Happy Fats and the Rayne-Bo Ramblers included a selection simply

titled: *French Blues* (heard on *Arhoolie* CD 7007). Some years later this song became known as the *Pine Grove Blues* and became Nathan's trade mark for the rest of his life. The *Pine Grove Blues* heard on this CD became Nathan's first hit. The original acetate disc with the date written on the B side, had luckily survived when I visited George Khoury, producer of the recordings. The quality of these recordings is low-fi but authentic! I also rescued the actual converted metal masters from which the records were pressed and on the sleeve a log had been kept as to how many discs were actually pressed: 500 on June 6, 1949, 1000 more on July 6, 1000 more on August 9th, 500 more on October 14th, and a final run of 200 more on July 25, 1950, for a grand total of 3200. These production figures would be considered total failures in today's pop music market but when you consider that most Cajun records never went beyond their initial, break-even, run of 500 pressings, (the figure Mr. Khoury gave me for most of his releases), *Pine Grove Blues* was definitely

a hit! If we can sell 3200 of this CD, almost 45 years later, we will also gladly call it a success! Over the period of six years when these recordings were made, the sound quality gradually improved, (except for # 15 and 16 where the two mikes, if two mikes were indeed used, seemed to have been out of phase), and by the time the last two sides were cut around 1956, you can call the sound almost hi-fi!. The music, however, is wonderful, unadulterated, honky tonk, Cajun barroom and dance hall music of the 1950s. Emotional, perhaps basic, with a spirit and vitality seldom captured on records. These sides present Nathan Abshire and his band at their rawest and include as a bonus the first recordings by legendary Cajun fiddler, Dewey Balfa, singing *Carolina Blues* and *L.S.U. French Waltz*.

Since World War II, when many Cajuns moved to Houston and other Texas Gulf towns in search of better jobs in war-related industries, the original boundaries of the old Cajun world have expanded a bit. Before this westward movement, the old Cajun world was a triangle of sorts with one corner near Morgan City in the southeast, one near

Ville Platte in the north, and the third near Lake Charles in the west. Today the Cajun world not only reaches over to Beaumont, Orange, Galveston, and Houston, Texas, but all the way out to Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area where large colonies of transplanted Cajuns and Creoles are carrying on their rich traditions of unique food, the French language, and of course, their fantastic music !

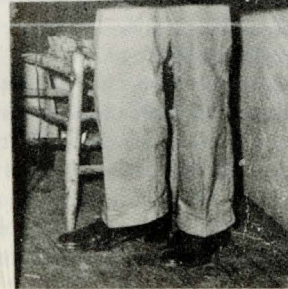
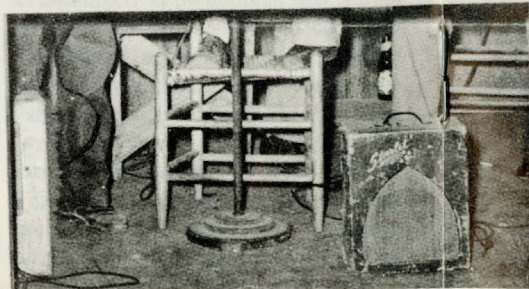
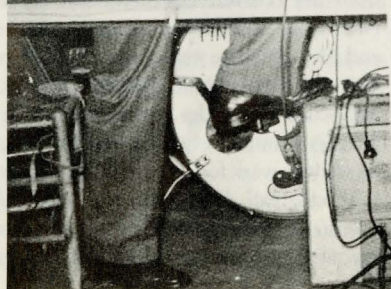
Ernest Thibodeaux is today the only member of the original Pine Grove Boys still living. In 1948 the band consisted of Will Kegley on fiddle, Ernest Thibodeaux on guitar, and Will Kegley's sister, Oziet, on drums. According to my recent conversation with Ernest, who was born October 9, 1925 and got his professional start around 1944 playing guitar in a dance hall called the Bloody Bucket in Lake Arthur, the little string band was named after the Pine Grove Club, which had hired them. Located near Jennings, La., close to the Evangeline oil fields, the club's owner, Telesfar Eshte, one day asked the boys to find an accordion player. The public seemed to have once again taken a liking to that

sound which was coming back into Cajun music primarily due to the sudden popularity of Iry LeJeune and a few others. Ernest didn't know anyone who played accordion but when he asked his father, Clobule Thibodeaux, who had been both an accordionist and a fiddler, he suggested an old friend, Nathan Abshire.

Clobule Thibodeaux, who on several occasions in his younger days, had played fiddle with Amédé Ardoin at the Avalon Club in Basile, took his son to see Nathan, who lived in Riceville, between Gueydan and Morse. Ernest vividly recalls that first meeting. Nathan was living with his wife in a shack right by the bayou, not far from a saw mill. When asked if Nathan would consider joining the Pine Grove Boys, he said he would sure like to play music again, but that he didn't have an accordion. He did, however, remember an aunt who had kept her late husband's instrument as a keepsake. When they went to see her, she unfortunately did not want to part with it, even though the old squeeze box was no longer in playable condition. Her son, however, (according to Ernest) offered to steal it from her

and then turned around and sold it to the Pine Grove Boys for \$75! It was an old single row Sterling model accordion from the 1920s, the instrument Cajun musicians have held in highest esteem over the years. Unfortunately the boys could not find anyone in Louisiana to repair the accordion and Ernest recalls finally driving all the way to Houston, Texas, to find a German repair man who put it back into playable shape at a further cost of \$150!

After a brief career with the Rayne-Bo Ramblers in the mid-1930s, Nathan Abshire had put his accordion aside and even tried to play the fiddle when western swing became the rage. During World War II he was drafted into the US army but being away from his beloved Louisiana soil caused Nathan to suffer from lasting heartaches and pain which he was soon to express very movingly in his music. Nathan's illiteracy and scant knowledge of the English language got him an early discharge after which he went to work for a saw mill located near his homestead. A serious injury at the mill eventually netted Nathan a \$500 cash damage award. He was repairing old kerosene



Nathan Abshire & The Pine Grove Boys circa early 1950s,
 left to right: Atlas Frugé – steel; Orizet Kegley – drums;
 Will Kegley – fiddle; unknown;
 Nathan Abshire – accordion; unknown;
 Harry La Fleur – guitar.

stoves when father and son Thibodeaux turned up to invite Nathan to join the Pine Grove Boys.

In 1948, under the co-leadership of Will Kegley and Nathan Abshire, the New Pine Grove Boys became one of the most popular French bands in the area. (If some of you are puzzled by the use of the word French to describe the Cajun and Creole music of Louisiana, don't be. Prior to the Cajun music revival of the 1960s, both Cajuns and Creoles referred to their music as "French music" and when you went to a record shop looking for this music you would ask for French records.) The band was soon working six or seven nights a week alternating between the Crystal Grill and the Broken Mirror in Lake Charles, both clubs owned by Quincy Davis who also owned the Avalon Club (note the *Avalon Waltz*) in Basile. Mr. Davis, according to Eddie Shuler, was a huge burly man who not only owned the various establishments, but also acted as bouncer, bartender, and overseer.

Chenault Air Force base in Lake Charles, a big army base to the north in Leesville, the gushing oil fields and general war related

industries, all contributed to a booming economy which made southwest Louisiana a "wide open" place with many honky tonks and all kinds of gambling. There was plenty of work for all kinds of musicians but the demand for Cajun bands was truly amazing. Eddie Shuler recalls how he and his band, after years of working small dance halls and joints, were finally making really good money playing dances at NCO clubs as well as for enlisted men and their relatives. During these boom days around 1948, Eddie Shuler was one of the first to get a radio program and he and his band would perform daily over KPLC in Lake Charles. From time to time Eddie would allow others to appear on the program and do a guest spots by playing a few tunes. That's how Iry LeJeune came to Eddie's attention and eventually recorded for his label.

Soon Harry Choates had a sensational hit with *Jole Blond*, Eddie Shuler was selling lots of Iry LeJeune's *Love Bridge Waltz* and landed a really well-paying job out of town which made him quit the daily radio program. By 1948 KPLC was carrying almost eight hours of French music every day,

sponsored by various local shop owners, entrepreneurs, and musicians. Employment for Cajun bands was at an all-time high and life, especially for accordion players, was pretty exiting and relatively lucrative. At most dances in the clubs and honky tonks, each member of the Pine Grove Boys would make between five and ten dollars each – much of it from the tips which customers dropped into the kitty. Nathan would go home only one night a week to be with his wife. Sometimes Ernest Thibodeaux would take off and they would hire the very young Harry La Fleur to sit in for him. Since Harry was still underage, the police had to escort him. Some weeks the band would be hired by Davis to play at his Avalon Club in Basile where the musicians were furnished cabins during their stay. All along the Pine Grove Boys were performing a daily (except Sundays) radio program broadcast live from the studios of KPLC in Lake Charles. They were obviously popular and soon caught the attention of local record producer Eddie Shuler. Since Eddie was already busy recording accordionist Iry LeJeune, he introduced the band to a fellow

from Oklahoma, Virgel Bozman, who was calling himself the Oklahoma Tornado and led a band by that name. On May 23, 1949, they persuaded the Pine Grove Boys and the radio engineer to record *Pinegrove Blues* and the *Kaplan Waltz*. The coupling was only the second release by Mr. Bozman's Oklahoma Tornadoes Recording Co. (OT Records). The first release under Mr. Bozman's own name, had been rather unsuccessful. Unfortunately Mr. Bozman had very little money and was, according to Eddie, trying to eke out a living for his wife and five kids by selling cow horns in Lake Charles.

Into the scene stepped George Khoury, merchant, entrepreneur, and friend of Eddie Shuler's. Khoury apparently decided to pay Bozman's bills at the pressing plant and thereby got himself into the record business. Today George Khoury still operates a record shop in Lake Charles on the north side near the railroad station, in a part of town which at the time of these recordings must have been a thriving business district. Today the area has unfortunately fallen onto hard times. George Khoury is a good merchant who discovered early on that his clientele wanted

records by local favorites. With the help and advice of Eddie Shuler, George Khoury was soon producing a steady stream of not only Cajun records, but also of Country, regional pop, and Rhythm and Blues material on his Lyric and Khoury labels. As OT Records vanished into oblivion after about ten 78 rpm releases, and as George Khoury became the distributor and owner of the *Pine Grove Blues*, it did not take much persuading to get Nathan Abshire to begin recording for Khoury. The Band became one of George Khoury's best selling Cajun artists and Nathan became one of the leading exponents of post-war French accordion music.

After permanently moving to Basile in 1950, Nathan Abshire continued an active musical career and played for many years for promoter Davis, who for a time also became the band's manager and bought them a brand new big 1949 Mercury. As their popularity grew, the Pine Grove Boys started playing dances over in Texas: Winnie, Beaumont, Orange, etc. with Ernest usually acting as the chauffeur. Later, the Pine Grove Boys worked for many years at the Sham-

rock Club in Lake Charles. In the early 1960s Nathan recorded for J. D. Miller in Crowley (now available on Flyright Records) and played dances steadily all over the area. By then the Pine Grove Boys often included both Dewey and Rodney Balfa, who were members of the band when I had the pleasure of hearing them in Kinder, La., and later recording them in a Basile bar in 1966 (available on Arhoolie Cassette 5004 entitled: **Cajun Fais Do Do** and with added material also available as CD 406). In the 1970s Nathan Abshire recorded for Floyd Soileau and two outstanding LPs are now available on one superb CD. As the Balfa Brothers became successful on their own, Nathan Abshire recorded with a new band for LaLousianne and Sonet Records and also began to tour a good deal. Nathan Abshire can be seen in Les Blank's film, **Spend it All** (Flower Films) and also makes an appearance in the classic film, **J'ai Ete Au Bal (I Went To The Dance)** (Brazos), a joint effort by Les Blank, Chris Strachwitz, and Maureen Gosling.

Nathan Abshire put the phrase "the good times are killing me" on the side of one

of his accordion cases towards the end of his career and that became his motto. Nathan loved to play for people and he enjoyed the public but his kind heart and open personality allowed many to wear him out or take advantage of him. Towards the end, Nathan did not want his music to outlive him. "When I die, I wish they would break all my records and not play them any more. It just doesn't feel right for the radios and everyone to keep on playing a musician's music after he's gone. When I die, I just wish everyone I know would come to my funeral and remember me as I was...and bury my music with me." On May 13, 1981, Nathan Abshire died and as per his request, a lot of his friends attended his funeral to remember him the way we had known him. Contrary to his wishes, however, Nathan's music, was not allowed to die with him and hopefully will be enjoyed by generations to come.

(Chris Strachwitz - March, 1993)



(Continued from back cover)

Also note: John Broven's **South to Louisiana** (Pelican Press); **The Makers Of Cajun Music** by Barry Jean Ancelet & Elemore Morgan Jr. (University of Texas Press) from which Nathan Abshire's quotes were taken; and a chapter will be devoted to Nathan in the second volume of Ann Savoy's **Cajun Music** (Bluebird Press).

This CD has been edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz by contractual agreement with George Khoury with additional royalties going to Nathan Abshire's family.

Sound restoration by George Morrow of Echo Productions using the No Noise Process.

Cover by Wayne Pope.

Cover photo of Nathan Abshire by Chris Strachwitz.

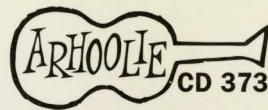
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NATHAN ABSHIRE

& the Pine Grove Boys

"French Blues"



78 Minutes of Historic CAJUN MUSIC

1. PINE GROVE BLUES (2:44)
2. KAPLAN WALTZ (2:49)
3. FRENCH BLUES (2:41)
4. NEW ORLEANS WALTZ (2:47)
5. PINE GROVE BOOGIE (2:41)
6. HATHAWAY WALTZ (2:35)
7. STEP IT FAST (2:45)
8. JOLIE, PETITE JUILLETTE (2:54)
9. CHOUPIQUE TWO STEP (2:40)
10. LA VALSE DE BELEZERE (3:10)
11. PINE GROVE BLUES #2 (2:54)
12. LA VALSE DE HOLLY BEACH (2:55)
13. IOTA TWO STEP (2:36)
14. LA VALSE DE BAYOU TECH (2:44)
15. MUSICAL FIVE SPECIAL (2:53)
16. AVALON WALTZ (2:54)
17. TEE PER COINE (2:42)
(Keep a' Knocking, But You Can't Come In)
18. THE NEW JOLIE BLON (2:45)
19. POINT DE LOU TWO-STEP (2:20)
20. TEXAS WALTZ (2:50)
21. LU LU BOOGIE (2:54)
22. CAROLINA BLUES (2:29)
23. SHAMROCK WALTZ (2:28)
24. MAMA ROSIN (2:45)



25. L. S. U. FRENCH WALTZ (2:53)
26. CRYING PINE GROVE BLUES (2:40)
27. RED ROCK WALTZ (2:31)
28. CANNON BALL SPECIAL (2:14)

Total time: 78:40

Nathan Abshire and the Pine Grove Boys became one of the most popular Cajun bands in the 1950s. These, their first recordings, were made for Khoury Records at KPLC in Lake Charles, La., and include the original 1949 version of their hit *Pine Grove Blues*.

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