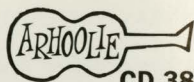


Canray Fontenot

"Louisiana Hot Sauce, Creole Style"



CD 381

1. LES BARRES DE LA PRISON
(The Prison Bars) (2:46)
2. CANRAY'S ONE STEP (1:25)
3. TES PARENTS NE VEULENT
PLUS ME VOIR (Your Folks
Don't Want to See Me No
More) (2:14)
4. JOE PITRE A DEUX FEMMES
(Joe Pitre Got Two Women)
(3:27)
5. ALLONS DANSER (2:35)
6. BERNADETTE (2:09)
7. BONSOIR, MOREAU
(Good Evening Moreau) (2:07)
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(The Table's Already Set) (2:06)
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15. LE SLOW DRAG A NONC
ADAM (1:08)
 16. LA ROBE BARRÉE (1:45)
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CHARPENTIER
(Old Carpenter's Waltz) (1:53)
 18. BEE DE LA MANCHE (2:17)
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5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 20, 22, 23 & 27: pre-
viously unissued. For recording
details, see page 11 inside.

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Canray Fontenot



OVER 60 MINUTES
OF CLASSIC
CREOLE FIDDLING



381



Canray Fontenot

"Louisiana Hot Sauce, Creole Style"

Canray Fontenot has long been hailed as the greatest Black Louisiana French fiddler of our time. His infectious smile has appeared on countless festival posters, Louisiana travel brochures, and even in *Newsweek* as the epitome of a minstrel fiddler possessed by the nebulous power of music. His saga, however, is not an easy one for him to tell. The sounds that emanate beyond his magical strings run the gamut from sadness, loss, and despair to joy, fulfillment, and wisdom – a chosen course that exposes one's most sensitive feelings to life's fullest experiences. Music has indeed been the greatest achievement and source of happiness in Canray's life, not merely for himself but for the countless thousands who have experienced his unforgettable performances.

As Chris Strachwitz and I drove up to his neat country farm house, we encountered a good-spirited but tired Canray. After a day of labor at Marcantel's Feed Store in Welsh, he was nevertheless eager to speak his mind and record a few tunes. "I want the people to hear my songs the way I play them, and my story too."

So, here they are in black and white, words and music composed, interpreted,

and performed in his home with fiddle and bare-feet percussion, the genius of Canray Fontenot. (Michael Doucet - 1981)

On this record you hear the music and songs of Canray Fontenot (born October 16, 1922) recorded over a span of 20 years. Since Michael Doucet wrote the words above and the comments to some of the songs on which he accompanies Canray, Mr. Fontenot has traveled to Europe with "Boisec" Ardoin, has appeared at Carnegie Hall, at the annual Rhode Island Cajun/Bluegrass Festival, at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and at innumerable folk festivals in the U.S. and abroad. In 1986 he received the National Heritage Award from the National Endowment for the Arts. You can see Canray in the Les Blank/Chris Strachwitz/Maureen Gosling film/video *J'ai Été Au Bal (I Went To The Dance)* - The Cajun and Zydeco Music Of Louisiana (available from Brazos Films/Arhoolie Records) and his story is well documented in two books: *CAJUN MUSIC - A Reflection Of A People* by Ann Allen Savoy (Bluebird Press, Box 941, Eunice, La. 70535) and *THE MAKERS OF CAJUN MUSIC* by Barry Jean Ancelet

& Elemore Morgan Jr. (Univ. of Texas Press). Canray Fontenot has frequently told his audiences that he does *not* play Zydeco music and his brand of Louisiana Creole music harks back to the last century, yet it is vibrant and alive today. (Chris Strachwitz - editor and producer, 1991)

1. Les Barres De La Prison (Prison Bars)

Good-bye, dear old mom,
Good-bye poor old pop,
Good-bye to my brothers,
And my dear little sisters,
Me, I've been condemned
For the rest of my life
To the prison bars.

Me, I rolled around, and got into doing
wrong,
I had a hard head, I got into trouble,
Now I'm condemned for the rest of my
life,
To the prison bars.

My poor old mama
She got down on her knees,
Her two hands on her head,
Crying for me,
She said, "Mmmmm
Dear little boy
Me, I'm never going to see you again

You've been condemned
For the balance of your life,
To the prison bars.

I say, "Dear old mother,
Don't cry for me,
You must pray for your child
To try to save his soul
From the flames of hell."

4. Joe Pitre A Deux Femmes (Joe Pete Got Two Women)

Chorus:
Don't come here, don't go over there,
Look out Joe Pitre is bad.

Joe Pitre is bad,
Joe Pitre is jealous,
Joe Pitre is bad.

Joe Pitre has two women (or wives),
Joe Pitre is bad,
Joe Pitre has two women,
Joe Pitre is jealous.

Joe Pitre has two women,
They are Rose and Nola. (2X)

9. La Valse de Mom et Pop represents a dismal period in Canray's life. Sometimes he tells a tale of an accordion player who

died while playing this tune. Canray's parents both passed away when he was barely fourteen. His father Adam chose not to record his music or leave any earthly account of his stay thus leaving his teenage son to be his only musical legacy. Canray took it upon himself to leave school to find work to support himself, put his younger sister through school and further his musical inheritance by continuing to play the French dances inspired by his father.

10. Two Step De Grand Mallet

Like the musician in this song, Canray is ready to pick up his fiddle and play for any occasion. Canray constructed his first violin at the age of nine. It was a cigar box with strings fashioned from a new screen door and a hickory branch with horse-tail hair for his bow. As Canray tells it, "Nonc Adam [Canray's father] was a hard man to please musically because you had to play everything so exact. One day I was playing my little fiddle behind the house when he turned the corner, stopped and asked me where did I get that contraption? I told him that I had made it myself. He was kind of shocked because I had always gone someplace alone when I was learning. But he assured me if I could play a tune he would get me a real fiddle. He must have

liked the sounds, although I'm sure he was real surprised hearing a melody coming out of that cigar box! Anyway, he traded three dozen eggs and one sack of flour to Deo Langley, a real fine Indian fiddler, for a bright red fiddle. After about a year, I started sitting in with my father and Alphonse Lafleur, my old pop's fiddler, who really showed me how to second the accordion."

Oh, little girl
Yeah, I'm leaving
I'm leaving dear
I'm going to Big Mallet

Eh, ye yaie
I've gone to see a girl
It hurts me, little girl
I'm going to Big Mallet.

11. Les Plats Sont Tous Mis Sur La Table

is an original waltz and story-line handed down from Canray's father Adam, remembered as Nonc Adam among his admirers and friends. Adam was a renowned accordion master and a contemporary of Amédé Ardoin, with whom he shared virtuoso accordion duties for both black and white dances in the 1920s and 30s. This waltz epitomizes the hospitality and love that is shared by Canray and his

lovely wife of more than thirty years, the former Artile Victorian. Upon entering their humble prairie home, we were greeted by an enticing aroma of freshly dripped coffee followed by a generous feast that Artile had prepared. Nodding to Chris she said, "Anyone coming all the way from California to my house has to be hungry." With this introduction, Canray began singing about such a place being frequently sought but rarely found.

Where can I go to find
A do-nothing job?
Where can I go to find
The table already set?

Where can I go to find
A woman like mine?
When I'm hungry
She gets hungry, too.

Where can I go to find
The table already set
The table already set

At my house?

14. La Coulée Rodair is a fine example of a blues-waltz similar to Canray's version of LES BARRES DE LA PRISON in feeling and tempo. Freeman Fontenot once told

me that it was on a Saturday night when Amédé, Nonc Adam, Bee Fontenot, and a young Alphonse "Bois-Sec" Ardoin went into the woods near Durald for a party. The next day they could all be heard singing and playing "le 'tit nègre a Tante Joline a tombé dans la Coulée Rodair."

Aunt Joline's boy is mighty sick
He got ready on Sunday afternoon
To go see his girl
But he fell in the Coulée Rodair

Oh, it makes me sad
Aunt Joline's boy is mighty sick.
He had gotten himself all ready to have
a good time
He had gone to see his girl
But he fell in the Coulée Rodair.

16. La Robe Barrée (The Striped Dress)

is a unique waltz styled after versions from both Nonc Adam and Amédé. When Amédé and Dennis McGee recorded their version as a duo in 1929, they titled the song Madame Atchen (Etienne). This waltz takes Canray back to his childhood home, where his father would welcome musicians and offer them his hospitality of good comradeship, food, and music. Among those frequenting the Fontenot household were the early Cajun record-

ing artists Leo Soileau and Mayeuse LaFleur. Living in close proximity to L'Anse Rougeau, they would apprentice themselves to the older master. They learned his songs and style and sometimes had their worn-out accordions repaired by Nonc Adams himself. Because of Nonc's taboo against recording, some of his songs like this one were later recorded as a tribute to Adam by both Amédé and Leo.

17. La Valse Du Vieux Charpentier (The Old Carpenter's Waltz) is an instrumental tune learned from the old-time fiddler, Artemus Rougeau. "In those days, French musicians didn't have to know too many waltzes for house-dances, usually a couple of one-steps, two-steps, contredanses, *valse à deux temps*, and a mazurka would do the job. Artemus and his friends would sometimes play four violins together and fit their experiences in the words they would sing. I remember people singing together more often in the old days, especially for special occasions like the *Veille de Christmas* and New Year's Eve. They would gather around the table with their glasses of wine and sound like those barber-shop quartets. Sometimes they would all sing: '*Bonjour, bons amis, et, bonne année, Madame, Heureuse, heureuse année, et qu'elle*

la souhaite à tous.'" (Good-day, good friends, and happy New Year, Madame, Happy, happy year, the best for all.)

18. Bee De La Manche was Canray's grandfather, Casémis Fontenot's favorite song to sing and play on the accordion. As Canray tells it "Casémis took me everywhere he went, I was kind of a pet to him, and every time he would get in the mood he would say, 'If you remember this song you'll remember me'."

Music was always a special part of the Fontenot household and, as seen through his child-eyes, always something special and worth doing right. "I can remember when my old Pop saved \$25 to buy a new accordion. The only place at that time to buy a good one was at Mervine Kahn in Rayne. So, one Saturday he went in and asked the saleslady if he could try out an accordion. She first handed him a Lester model, a big bulky thing priced at \$7.50. 'Oh, no Madame, I'd like to try one of those little black ones up on the top shelf,' he said, pointing to the best accordion made at that time, the German 'Sterling' model. After the woman handed it down to him, he asked her if he could try it out. She said she couldn't do that without the store manager present. So, Nonc Adam told her that he'd wait, and began examining the new accordion. Before too long

some customers had recognized him, and a little crowd began to gather. When the manager returned and found all these people waiting to hear the new accordion, he told my Pop, 'Sure, play as long as you want, your music is always welcome here.' So before you knew it, Nonc Adam started up and everybody in the place stopped to listen to all that music coming from such a little black box. While he was playing someone passed his hat, and before he put it back on, Nonc Adam found \$26 and a bottle of moonshine in it! So he bought the accordion and came back home with the money he had saved to buy it. I don't think I've ever seen him so happy! But my Mom was not too amused. *Chère Mom elle a faisait des hell, ouasis!* She wouldn't let my dad and his friends in the house, they were making so much noise and just carrying on like there was no tomorrow. My father was like that, if he wasn't asleep he'd be playing or whistling. I guess I took after him in that respect myself."

Bee de la Manche stole some sheep
He stole some sheep from Onesine
Vidrine
Who was the cause?
It was the widow Adelina
Who was the cause?
It was the widow Adelina

O, Bee de la Manche
He was a good worker
He worked every day
And he roamed every night

O, Bee de la Manche
He got into trouble
He got into trouble
Over the widow Adelina.

Bee de la Manche
Was sentenced
He was condemned to the penitentiary
Who was the cause?
It was the widow Adelina.

19. La Jog Au Plombeau (Jug On The Saddle Horn) is a traditional ballad that Canray adapted from Napoleon Gradney. This blues-waltz evokes mixed sentiments from both listeners and players. Canray still vividly recounts troubled images of playing this song when a woman, after hearing the beginning bluesy strains, got so upset she started a barroom brawl! Canray remembers playing twin fiddles with Joel Victorian, his mother's father, who encouraged the young fiddler to continue their family's string-music tradition. "You know, I first started my string band in the late '30s with George Lenard

and Paul Frank. We would play a lot and not just French, everything we heard like boogie-woogie, western swing, some jazz, tunes that would make everybody happy. Blues? Oh, not too much because they weren't allowed with the 'respectable' people at the house dances, but we would play a couple at the saloons."

Around this period, Canray teamed up with his longtime friend, accordionist Alphonse "Bois-Sec" Ardoin who, in his own right, had also digested the music of Nonc Adam, Amédé, and other musicians of the community. Together they put their own ingredients into the old-time music and forged their own style which was heard throughout Southwest Louisiana via their live radio broadcasts from KEUN in Eunice through the late 1950s. Many times they shared dance jobs with Zydeco musicians, Clifton and Cleveland Chenier at Freeman Fontenot's place in rural Basile. Later, through the field research done in the early sixties by Ralph Rinzler, Canray and Bois-Sec were invited to the Newport Festival in 1966 and consequently made their first recordings on their way home.

I've roamed
I've roamed the highways

A fifth in my pocket
And a jug on the saddle horn.
I've wondered
I've cried
O, little girl, your parents
Are against me.

Your daddy got mad
He told you to get rid of me
Your mama got mad
She called me a good-for-nothing.

There was worse yet
You have your daddy to thank for it
He made us part
You have your mama to thank for it
She called me a good-for-nothing.
I've rambled all around
With a jug on the saddle horn
And a fifth in my pocket.

21. Malinda is a most unique and imaginative composition by Canray: the Latin strains, Caribbean syncopation, and the name itself were inspired by the different chants of islanders that Canray had the chance to hear at some of the folk festivals for which he played. In the 1960s, Canray had begun playing dances with Bois-Sec's extraordinary accordion-playing son, Gustave, before his fatal auto crash in 1974. After that tragic incident, Canray

found his only musical relief by playing these songs in the sanctum of his own home for the enjoyment of friends and occasional small neighborhood gatherings, again with Bois-Sec Ardoin. Canray, who since the time of his parents' death, had worked hard to put his sister through school, support his wife, and send his five children to college, suddenly found himself at a loss due to the apparent lack of appreciation from those whom he had given so much.

I've found someone whom I can love
I've found someone whom I want to have
I've found someone whom I can love
She was born in Louisiana.

Hey, hey Malinda
The prettiest beauty of the bayous
Hey, hey Malinda
She will be mine for life.

She knows how to make crawfish gumbo
She knows how to cook mustard greens
She knows how to wash old dirty laundry
She uses a tub and an old washboard.

23. Shoo, Black is about a thief, Charles Hebert, who is trying to steal Salmas Bertrand's black hogs and Grandpa's billygoats.

Shoo, Black (hog)! Shoo, Black!
Shoo, Salmas Bertrand's black hog.
Be quiet, be quiet,
Be quiet with Grandpa's billygoats.

Charles Hebert is hiding in the mosquito net,
(He's) watching our stags, he's watching through the net,
Be quiet, be quiet, be quiet with Grandpa's billygoats.

25. La Table Ronde (The Round Table)
Drink three rounds around the table (2X)

Let's go find, find, find, find, find
Something to entertain ourselves with,
like old friends (2X)
Let's go find, find, find, find, find.

One of our biggest drunkards was sick in bed,
So put him under a table full of glasses
And pour him a drop from time to time.

Let's go find, find, find, find, find

A poured drop is to satisfy him. (2X)

Let's go find, find, find, find, find.

26. Les Blues A Canray (Canray's Blues)

Oh, I've only loved one little woman
Her name is Lorita
I did everything I could,
But Lorita was no good,
She made me work for years.

She got all that I had
She took me for a good car,
I bought her a new car
Then she took my automobile
And went around with one after
another,
Lorita, Lorita.

There was just one thing in the
neighborhood
She took everything I had,
She bought a donkey,
She paid fifteen dollars for a donkey,
Now Lorita is gone,
She left me with just a donkey.

She played around with all my friends,
She lied, oh how she lied!

Everyday's the same now
I'm all alone and Lorita's gone.
Hey, Lorita, there will come a day
When you're gonna cry,

You'll ask for your old man
And you, you'll be way too late.

Now me, I've met a lot of women
But the way you treated me,
I only mistrust one woman
I always think she's gonna hurt me.

In the past decade people have begun to open their eyes and ears to this giant figure so profoundly alive in the perpetuation of authentic grass-rooted Louisiana French music. Canray has performed at numerous festivals from coast to coast and in Europe, he has been the focus of many documentary films on Cajun-Creole culture, and he has signed many Cajun classics. Yet, when the dust has settled on the stage, Canray is found working his 40-hour feed-store shift in order to eat.

"My music was a gift, you know. There are people who play all their lives and can never get it, then those who have it don't want to use it. Everyone has their own style. Mine is God-given and no matter what kind of music I play, it comes out Canray."

—Canray Fontenot

CANRAY FONTENOT - vocals and fiddle with: **#1-8:**

Alphonse "Boisec" Ardoine - accordion, **Morris Ardoine** - guitar, **Lawrence Ardoine** - drums and **Gustav Ardoine** - bass.

Recorded near Mamou, La. in 1971 & 1973.

#9-21:

Michael Doucet - mandolin and fiddle. Recorded in Welch, La., May 14, 1981.

#22:

Danny Poullard - guitar and **Edward Poullard** - accordion. Recorded in Long Beach, Ca., June 2, 1991.

#23-26:

Michael Doucet - fiddle, **David Doucet** - guitar, **Sonny Landreth** - dobro guitar, **Tommy Comeaux** - mandolin & guitar, **Billy Ware** - percussion, **Tommy Alesi** - drums, **Tina Pilione** - bass. Recorded in Crowley, La. June 15, 1985.

#27:

Solo - recorded during filming of *J'ai Été Au Bal (I Went To The Dance)* in Spring of 1987 outside Canray's house.

Introduction and notes on songs by Michael Doucet. All recordings made by Chris Strachwitz except #23-26 which were produced by Michael Doucet. English translations of songs from the French by Sharon Arms Doucet, except #1 and 4 which are by Ann Allen Savoy.

Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz

Cover by Wayne Pope
Edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz
& Michael Doucet

Brazos Films Presents:

J'AI ETE AU BAL (I WENT TO THE DANCE) The Cajun and Zydeco Music of Louisiana (84 min in color) A film by Les Blank, Chris Strachwitz and Maureen Gosling.

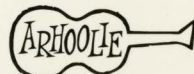
With: Michael Doucet, Clifton Chenier, Queen Ida, Wayne Toups, Rockin' Sidney, The Balfa Brothers, Marc and Ann Savoy, D. L. Menard, "Bois Sec" Ardoine, Canray Fontenot, Nathan Abshire, Chuck Guillory, The Hackberry Ramblers, Beausoleil, John Lafosse, Dennis McGee, Walter Mouton, Boozoo Chavis, Paul Daigle and Cajun Gold, and historical sequences of Amédée Ardoine, Iry Lejeune, Harry Choates, Joe & Cleoma Falcon, and others. Narration by Barry Jean Ancelet & Michael Doucet.

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