

# THE CARRIÈRE BROTHERS:

(Bébé & Éraсте Carrière)

## Old Time Louisiana Creole Music

(La Vieille Musique Créole de la Louisiane)

1. ZYDECO DE CARRIÈRE
2. PLANTÉ DANS LA PORTE  
DE MA MAISON (B)
3. MADAME FAIELLE (B)
4. ZYDECO SONT PAS SALE, NEG (E)
5. LA ROBE À PARASOL (E)
6. JOLIE CATIN
7. DADDY CARRIÈRE'S WALTZ
8. HEY MOM! (B)
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11. LAKE ARTHUR STOMP
12. 'TITE CANAILLE (B)
13. CARRIÈRE POLKA
14. CHÈRE CATIN BLUES (B)
15. COLINDA (B)
16. JOHNNY CAN'T DANCE (B)
17. BLUE RUNNER
18. BABY, PLEASE DON'T GO (B)
19. BÉBÉ'S STOMP
20. HOME SWEET HOME

Joseph "Bébé" Carrière – fiddle & vocals (on B)  
Éraсте "Dolan" Carrière – accordion & vocals (on E)  
Linton Broussard – drums (on # 16 – 19)

Recorded near Lawtell, La. in April 1974 by Chris Strachwitz

# 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, & 20 were previously available on Arhoolie LP 5031 – all others previously unissued

Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz; all other photos courtesy Andrew Carrière and the Carrière family. Edited and produced with the help of Suzy Rothfield Thompson, and Andrew Carrière (Bébé's son) who now resides in Oakland, CA.

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# The Carrière Brothers



Musique Creole



## THE CARRIÈRE BROTHERS: AN INTRODUCTION

by Ron and Fay Stanford

In the spring of 1974 we were already thinking about leaving Southwest Louisiana. We had been there since the summer of 1972, producing a record that covered the range of regional French music, from unaccompanied ballads through what later became known as Swamp Rock.

In 1973, trying to turn up new musicians, we went to Slim's Y-Ki-Ki Club, a tattered, low-ceilinged Quonset hut on the outskirts of Opelousas. The band that night was Delton Broussard and the Lawtell Playboys, a Zydeco band led by Delton on accordion, with Calvin Carrière on fiddle and several of Delton's sons forming the rhythm section. We liked the funky, electrified sound of the band and ended up including one of their tunes on our record. But what really intrigued us was what we learned from Calvin Carrière. He told us that his father Éraсте, was a fine accordionist who knew all the old tunes and played them in the

old-time style – together with Calvin's uncle Bébé, a fiddler.

Bébé Carrière and his brother Éraсте were unique and unlike any musicians we had met (or would meet) during our stay in Louisiana and we included two of their tunes, *Blues à Bébé* and *Robe à Parasol* in the anthology we produced with Swallow Records. Fortunately, Chris Strachwitz came to Louisiana during the end of our stay and recorded many more of the pieces in the Carrière's head-spinning repertoire. It is that excellent session that you'll find in almost its entirety on this CD.

After 30 years, memories become a bit cloudy. Fay and I (and Chris, too) have all wracked our brains to remember the exact circumstances of how Chris came to meet the Carrières. Did Fay and I take him to their house? Was it Dewey Balfa? It really doesn't matter; we're just glad he made the trip and hung on to the tapes.

(Narberth, Pennsylvania - January 2004)

## THE CARRIÈRE BROTHERS

(edited from an article by Ron & Fay Stanford which accompanied the LP "J'ETAIS AU BAL": Music From French Louisiana – Swallow Records LP 6020 - © 1974)

In the late 1920s or early 30s a talent scout for a major record company heard Bébé Carrière play some fiddle tunes in a country store near Lawtell, Louisiana, and was so impressed he made arrangements for Carrière and a band to travel to New Orleans to make several 78's. With some regret Bébé (Joseph) recalls that he never made it to New Orleans: "I was only about eighteen, you know. I just had other things on mind. Anyhow, I was a young fellow and I was playing dances most every other night and it just slip my mind."

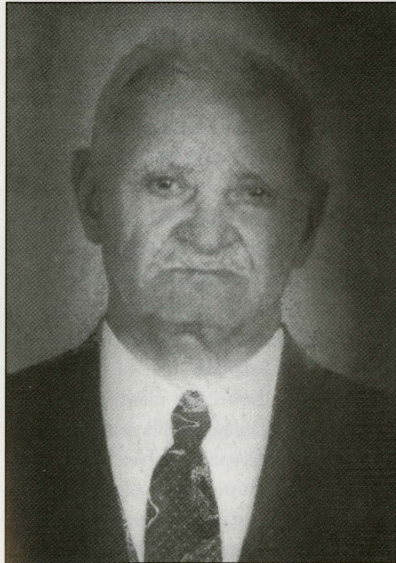
As "Bébé" and his brother "Dolon" (Éraсте) would put it, they are "agedly." Éraсте, 73, lives just outside the village of Lawtell with his wife, daughter, and a granddaughter in a house next to Highway 190, the main truck route between New Orleans and Houston. Bébé and his wife live several miles away in an extremely isolated part of the rice and soybean countryside between Lawtell and Church Point. Éraсте

rode with us to Joseph's little country house to make some recordings, and Joseph greeted us, more than a little amused by our interest in his music. "I didn't think American people was interested in this French music," he told us with shy laughter.

Until about twenty years ago, Bébé and Éraсте Carrière played house dances regularly, not just around Lawtell, but as far away as Lake Charles, sometimes together, often with other musicians, and even alone (Éraсте played many dances by himself). They have performed for countless audiences, both black and white, at innumerable, forgotten parties and dances, the likes of which are only a memory in Louisiana.

In the days before the many taverns and dance halls of today, people had dances in their homes, as Joseph describes: "They'd take out all the furniture of the biggest room - sometime you'd have to clean two rooms 'cause the crowd was too big. It was like that." He expands on his words by crossing all his

fingers together to indicate a crowded room "Sometime the people wasn't too civilized at that time," Bébé explains. Both blacks and whites will tell you that the old days were rough, even deadly, particularly in the old-time dances. Bébé goes on, "Sometime fights



Ernest Carrière (the brothers' father)

would break out - with all them people drinking whiskey like water. Once I played a dance where they stabbed a man, they cut him to death. That happen around Lake Charles years back. I came outa there, and I say, 'Well, well!' You talk about something that stay on my mind a long time!"

It was not their music that kept the Carrières alive, however, but their unrelenting work in the corn and cotton fields. Both are quick to say that they did not relish the sunup to sundown schedule of planting, hoeing, and harvesting and that they would both have given it up if they had had the chance. Érase had no schooling at all - a school had not yet been established for black children when he was a boy. Joseph went through the fifth grade, but his parents were pressured by the landlord for whom they were sharecropping to take him out of the classroom and put him back in the fields.

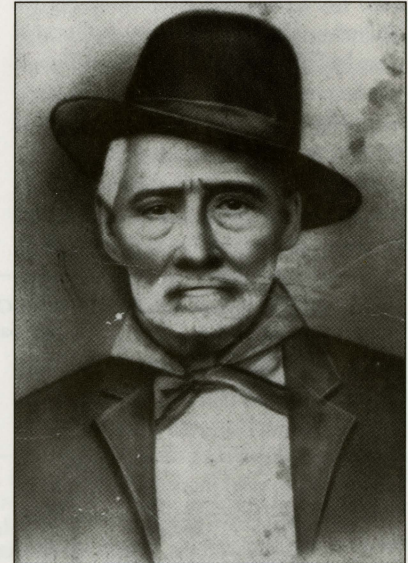
Today he reflects on the frustration that his leaving school has caused him: "If I had got more schooling, I could of got on some good job maybe. Instead I had to work all my days in the dog-gone fields mostly for

nothing. Hell, I didn't earn nothing like that. You couldn't sell your crop. They'd give you so little for it you'd come out with nothing. You had to make a little credit account through the years, and it would take mostly all your cotton to pay the dog-gone thing. You'd come out maybe with a twenty, maybe twenty-five dollars at the end of the year. Oh, I'm gonna tell you, it was really tough."

Érase and Joseph agree that times were at least as hard before they were born. For as far back as either can trace, both sides of the family lived near Lawtell. Their parents, Ernest and Edmonia Carrière, were sharecroppers; their father's parents, Cyprien and Natalie Carrière, owned their own small piece of land; Érase's and Joseph's great-grandparents, as the family history has it, were slaves.

The Carrière brothers' repertoire, a large and varied list of dance tunes and songs, reflects the music of their ancestors, as well as the popular genres which have come and gone in their own lifetimes. *La Robe à Parasol*, one of the tunes on this record, is an old-time dance tune called a *mázulka*, the local

pronunciation of *mazurka*, a dance originating in central Europe. Érase says that the tune is even older than his father and was probably popular in the time of his grandfather's youth. The lyrics describe a style of dress apparently called the "parasol," which



Cyprien Carrière (their grandfather)



according to Éraсте is a full, hoop skirt.

In addition to a large number of standard Cajun waltzes and two-steps, many of which they have learned over the years from radio broadcasts, Bébé and Éraсте know a curious potpourri of tunes including: *Baby, Please Don't Go*, a blues first recorded by Big Joe Williams; *Kentucky Waltz*, a sentimental piece by Bill Monroe, *Waiting For A Train*, a yodeling song by Jimmie Rodgers; and *Home Sweet Home*, with which they, as many other old-time musicians, ended every dance.

The musical trading between blacks (Creoles, as they call themselves) and whites (Cajuns) has gone on for so long in south

Louisiana that it is often difficult to determine the original owner of a given tune or musical quality. While the Carrières have drawn heavily on white traditions, and for that matter have played for white audiences with white musicians, their music remains, primarily because of rhythmical and vocal subtleties, unmistakably black. That, however, has never been much of a concern of Bébé or Éraсте - they have simply been playing music for people to dance to. Éraсте told me that in the old days they might play a single tune for over a half-hour without stopping, and there would be hardly any pause before they went into the next one.

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### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE CARRIÈRE BROTHERS

by Ann Savoy (1983)

Mr. Joseph "Bébé" Carrière (born 1908 – died April 22, 2001) was a slim man with traces of his Indian ancestry seen in his face. In his gentle voice he described his and his brother's music as being social music for house parties. Although their father played the accordion, most of their music was picked up from "graphophone" records and other influences

while growing up. Their music could be described as a mixture of blues, traditional Cajun, and French-American (American music translated into French) tunes. "Bébé" invented some fine fiddle tunes of his own such as "Madame Faielle" and "Blue Runner" which are blends of all the above musical influences, especially inspired by blues.

"Bébé" Carrière plays his fiddle in a raw, driving way, often double tuning his fiddle to EAEA, making it possible to repeat a tune in a low bass tone on the re-tuned lower strings. He made his first fiddle out of a cigar box which he strung up with wires from an old screen. The screen wire didn't give the sound he wanted so his father bought him a pack of fiddle strings to improve the sound. After "Bébé" could get a tune out of his cigar box fiddle, his father got him a real fiddle and at the age of 13 or 14 he was playing his music. Bébé learned much of his music from 78 rpms, and particularly admired Jimmie Rodgers and Bill Monroe. At the end of his life he moved to Port Arthur, Texas, to join the rest of his family.

Éraсте "Dolan" Carrière (born 1900 – died 1983) played a single row accordion and he knew many rare dances such as the shoe-fly, the mazurkas, the contredanses, all the

traditional Cajun tunes as well as some modern songs popular in dance halls today. Often he used his accordion as a bass section for his brother's fiddle tunes, the half notes and the slides not being available on the treble side of the relatively simplistic diatonic accordion. As a young man he was often called upon to play for white dances because there weren't many white accordion players in the area.

Their band, the "Lawtell Playboys" used to perform regularly at Slim's Y Ki Ki in Opelousas. The band consisted of Éraсте on accordion, Bébé and Calvin (Éraсте's son) on fiddles, and Beatrice (Calvin's daughter) on guitar. In the mid 1960s when the more electrified, powerful rhythm section "zydeco" bands gained popularity over the more traditional bands in local clubs, Calvin joined up with Delton and Clinton Broussard and this band became the new "Lawtell Playboys."

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## Joseph "Bébé" Carrière

fiddle & vocals (on B)

## Éraste "Dolan" Carrière

accordion & vocals (on E)

## Linton Broussard

drums (on # 16 – 19)

The Carrière Brothers have preserved for us a wide ranging repertoire of authentic African-American rural **Louisiana Creole music** ranging from old **marzurkas**, **polkas**, and **Creole songs** to more recent **blues**, **cajun**, and **zydeco** numbers. Their music is born out of these sharecropping families who worked from sunup to sundown planting, hoeing and harvesting, and then played music at house parties in the evening, usually earning barely enough to survive.

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file under: **Cajun**

