

# Clifton Chenier

# Black Snake Blues

ARHOOIE 1038  
STEREO



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Clifton Chenier is no doubt the most popular regional performer in Southern Louisiana and South-East Texas and the audience for his fantastic blues-accordion sound is constantly growing. There are many accordion players in Louisiana but none are as dynamic and inventive as Clifton Chenier who has successfully blended the old Cajun music of earlier generations with modern Rhythm and Blues and has come up with a very unique and distinct sound all his own. Clifton's sound is remarkably full considering he often only uses his brother on rubboard and a drummer to back him (as is the case on most of the selections on this LP). Jazz critic Russ Wilson wrote: "Chenier is an adept instrumentalist and the riffs he sets up in the bass while playing solo line in the treble at times sound like a miniature Basie band" in his review of Clifton Chenier's performance at the Berkeley Blues Festival some years ago. Of the same performance critic Ralph Gleason said: "(Chenier) . . . is one of the most surprising musicians I have heard in some time, with a marvelously moving style of playing the accordion in which he combines a strong rhythmic drive with interesting harmonies and runs."

Unlike many regional artists who have grown up with a particular type of music, Clifton Chenier has gone beyond the limits of the traditional Cajun-French and Zodico music with which he grew up, and has expanded his repertoire and style to include contemporary rhythm and blues material, older blues, some country and western songs, and

almost anything which strikes his fancy giving each song or tune his very personal interpretation. An important member of his band is his brother Cleveland Chenier who is recognized as one of the very best rubboard players—not really a washboard but a custom-made corrugated steel board which he beats and scrapes with beer can openers to obtain the delightful rasping sound to compliment the drummer. Usually Clifton has a guitar and bass in his group in order to accomodate the public's requests for current juke-box hits, but his most requested and successful performances are his interpretations of old French numbers and his fantastic blues with only the rubboard and drums as accompaniment.

Cajun music has been heard in South-West Louisiana ever since the Acadians came down from Canada to find a new home. During the 1930's just as the younger white Cajuns were incorporating Western and Hillbilly music into their new brand of Cajun music, so were the blues introduced to the music of the French speaking Negroes and the resultant mixture has become generally known as Zodico. The name Zodico is apparently derived from the title of an old French-Cajun dance number entitled: "L'Haricots son pas sale" which is generally translated as: "Snap beans—not salty" (heard on LP 1024 by Clifton Chenier and on LP 1009 by Sidney Babineaux) but since the language is an oral one, a phonetic spelling of "Zydeco" for "L'Haricots" was used by Mack McCormick. In recent years however, I have seen the word

spelled "Zodico" on most posters and even in the local press. It's blues influenced dance music and the term itself often implies more than just the music—it refers to the entire social affair which goes with it!

Born on a farm near Opelousas, La. on June 25, 1925, Clifton recalls hearing his father Joseph Chenier play accordion at many a dance. He would play two-steps, waltzes, and many of the traditional Acadian tunes. But Clifton also heard other players and records—especially those by Amade Ardoin who was "the first colored man to play blues on the accordion" at least he was the first to make a record! (Two of his numbers can be heard on Arhoolie LP 1009: "Zydeco"). In 1946 Clifton left the cane fields and went to Lake Charles where he played occasional gigs and was exposed to the rapidly developing R & B sound heard on all the juke boxes. Clifton went to work for various oil companies until 1954. During this time he made his first records (Heard on Arhoolie LP 1009: "Zydeco"). Then he moved to Houston, Texas and since 1956 he has been a professional musician playing all over the South and occasionally touring across the country. This is Clifton Chenier's third LP record (earlier ones are Arhoolie 1024: "Louisiana Blues and Zydeco" and Arhoolie 1031: "Bon Ton Roulet") and was recorded while he was touring on the West Coast playing such locations as the Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco and the Ashgrove in Los Angeles.

—Chris Strachwitz

**Clifton Chenier – vocals and accordion**  
**Cleveland Chenier – rubboard**  
**Robert St. Judy – drums**  
**Felix James Benoit – guitar**  
**Joe Morris – bass**

**BLACK SNAKE BLUES**  
**LET'S TALK IT OVER**  
**WALKING TO LOUISIANA**  
**THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE**  
**WRAP IT UP**

**MONIFIQUE**  
**JOHNNY CAN'T DANCE**  
**I LOST MY BABY (In French)**  
**CAN'T GO HOME NO MORE**  
**I GOT A LITTLE GIRL**

Recorded at Sierra Sound Laboratories in Berkeley, Calif. on October 10, 1967  
Bob DeSusa – engineer  
Produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover Photo by Chris Strachwitz

Cover: Wayne Pope

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CLIFTON CHENIER

"BLACK SNAKE BLUES"

ST 1038  
Side 1



All songs by  
Clifton Chenier  
© by Tradition  
Music Co. - BMI

1. BLACK SNAKE BLUES
2. LET'S TALK IT OVER
3. WALKING TO LOUISIANA
4. THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE
5. WRAP IT UP

Produced by Chris Strachwitz

STEREO



**CLIFTON CHENIER**

"BLACK SNAKE BLUES"

ST 1038  
Side 2

All songs by  
Clifton Chenier  
© by Tradition  
Music Co. - BMI

1. MONIFIQUE
2. JOHNNY CAN'T DANCE
3. I LOST MY BABY (In French)
4. CAN'T GO HOME NO MORE
5. I GOT A LITTLE GIRL

Produced by Chris Strachwitz

STEREO