

# CAJUN STRING BANDS

## The 1930s: "Cajun Breakdown"

ARHOOLE  
FOLKLYRIC CD 7014

### LEO SOILEAU & His Aces:

1. Ma Jolie Petite Fille (*My Dear Little Girl*)
2. La Bonne Valse (*Good Time Waltz*)
3. La Blues de Port Arthur
4. Quand Je Suis Bleu (*When I'm Away From Home*)

### J.B. FUSELIER (*with Miller's Merry-makers*):

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6. Round-up Hop
7. Anna Mae Waltz
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9. Ma Julie Noir So (*My Pretty Black Eyes*)

### (*with His Merry-makers*):

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15. Gueydan Two-Step

### CLIFFORD BREAUX:

Probably Clifford Breaux - fiddle and vocals,

Cleoma Falcon - dobro guitar.

16. Pourquoi Que Tu Laise Moi  
(*Why Are You Leaving Me?*)
17. Continuez De Sonner  
(*Keep A Knockin' But You Can't Come In*)

### DIXIE RAMBLERS:

Hector Dubon & Hector Stutes - fiddles; Jesse  
Dubon - guitar; Willie Vincent - bass:

18. Dixie's Hottest (High Society)

### LUDERIN DARBONE

& The Hackberry Ramblers:

19. Ma Chere Belle
20. Shreve Breakdown
21. Rambling
22. Oh Josephine, My Josephine
23. Se Pas La Pan (*It's No Use*)
24. French Two-Step
25. My Little Girl

Edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover by Wayne Pope

On the cover : J.B. Fuselier

Original 78s from the collection of Chris  
Strachwitz.

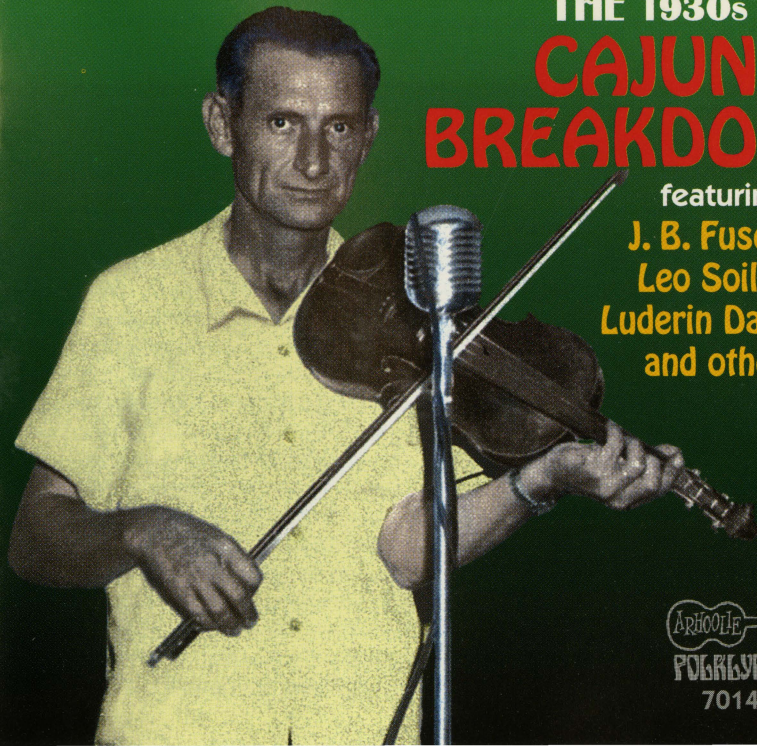
Sound restoration by George Morrow using  
the NoNoise System.

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# CAJUN STRING BANDS

## THE 1930s CAJUN BREAKDOWN

featuring  
**J. B. Fuselier**  
**Leo Soileau**  
**Luderin Darbone**  
and others



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# CAJUN STRING BANDS

## *The 1930s: "Cajun Breakdown"*

Although today we think of the accordion as an integral part of any Cajun band, that instrument was actually a late-comer introduced to Louisiana only in the latter part of the 19th century. Prior to the introduction of that noisy but sturdy "squeezebox," the fiddle was the Cajun's band. By the late 1920s when the first Cajun records were made, the accordion was king and most fiddlers, with few exceptions, were playing only a subordinate or "bassing" role. With the development of oil and the opening up of southwest Louisiana to outside cultural influences such as the radio, juke boxes, jazz, swing, blues, pop, and hillbilly music, the pressure to play American music—especially country or hillbilly (as it was known then)—became very strong. By the mid-1930s, this trend resulted in most accordion players retiring or returning to the few isolated communities where the old traditions were still appreciated,

while at the same time giving fiddlers a renewed lease on life and even wide popularity. Some quickly and joyfully adapted to the new demand for smooth, pop and western music. Others, like traditionalist Dennis McGee, sort of retired until after World War II, when the region saw a dramatic revival of pure, old time Cajun music, including the much maligned accordion.

From the mid-1930s to the late 1940s, however, the modern string bands prevailed and some of the fiddlers like Leo Soileau easily changed to the new sound with drums and even piano accompaniment. Young up-starts like Luderin Darbone and his Hackberry Ramblers enjoyed playing the modern western and swing style from the start and all of them introduced many English language pop, western, blues, and jazz selections into their otherwise largely Cajun repertoire. On this CD you will hear some of the finest Cajun fiddlers who recorded during

this transitional period when you couldn't survive as a musician unless you kept up with public taste which demanded "western" music. And remember, playing music was a much easier and

more rewarding job than working out in the fields from sun to sun in the heat and in the mud—another incentive to try and please the dancing public.

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### LEO SOILEAU (1904-1980)

Leo Soileau made some of the first, pure, authentic Cajun recordings in October of 1928 with accordionist Mayuse Lafleur. These songs were magnificently recorded with the bass part of the accordion sounding like a bowed bass, giving the records a gorgeous sonority. (Several selections are available on the CMF CDs). During the next two years, Leo recorded more old time Cajun songs with Moise Robin replacing the unfortunately murdered Lafleur on accordion, until the Great Depression hit in 1930 and recording of regional musicians came to a halt.

By early 1935 however, with the introduction of cheap, half-price, 35 cent 78 rpm records, the recording of regional vernacular music gradually resumed. In those five years however, Cajun music had changed a lot. The introduction of the musical instrument amplifier, the juke box, radio, and the rising popu-

larity of jazz, swing, blues, and especially western or hillbilly music dramatically left their mark. With the advent of the amplifier and the resulting increased volume of the music at the dance halls, drums soon became part of Cajun bands and with the popularity of what became known as Western Swing, the fiddle returned to its former lead role. The accordion, on the other hand, was pushed back into the bayous and was considered low class!

Leo Soileau, a professional musician by this time, noticed the change in public taste and adapted his style accordingly. He soon used a drummer in his band and even added a piano, although they were not always used for recording. Yet Leo retained some lovely older, traditional Cajun pieces along with a lot of pop and western songs. I have included on this CD four older Cajun selections from his last two recording sessions in the mid-1930s.



### **J.B. FUSELIER (1901 - 1976)**

The featured artist on this album is really Jean Batiste Fuselier, always known as just J.B. Fuselier never gained the wide popularity of Leo Soileau or Luderin Darbone (of the Hackberry Ramblers) but his classic way of playing Cajun fiddle and his emotional singing style made him locally well liked.

J.B. was a slender and probably fairly shy man, who had joined young guitarist, Beethoven Miller by the mid-1930s, in the band known as Miller's Merrymakers. About half the sides heard here are by Miller's Merrymakers while the rest were recorded as by J.B. Fuselier and his Merrymakers. Apparently J.B. was the first to record the popular tune "Chere Tu Tu" and his best seller is said to have been "Ma Chere Basett". J.B. Fuselier influenced many of the musicians who followed him and he continued to play and record until after World War II.

### **CLIFFORD BREAUX**

Another name among pioneering Cajun recording artists is that of Breaux—the Breaux Brothers (or Breaux Freres in French). Today a

Breaux plays accordion in the world's best known Cajun band: BeauSoleil, but back in the late 1920s the Breaux Brothers (Amede on accordion, Ophy on fiddle, and Clifford on guitar) made the first recording of what became known as "Jole Blonde" (heard on Col. CD 46784). Their sister, Cleoma, married Joe Falcon and all of them made a number of incredible records. The brothers were known for their rough and rowdy ways and most of their records reflect this wild spirit. The two sides heard here are billed as by Clifford Breaux (vocal and guitar) on the record label, and it probably is Clifford who does the wild vocal but I believe he also plays the blues drenched fiddle while the guitarist is probably his sister Cleoma Falcon since the previous 78 record matrix numbers are by her. Clifford probably went to Dallas with his sister Cleoma and his brother-in-law, Joe Falcon (whose session he followed) and was probably asked to record some blues since that genre was very popular at the time. If you have heard the late, great Creole fiddler Canray Fontenot, you can well imagine how and where Clifford Breaux got his inspiration.

### **HECTOR DUHON**

Fiddler Hector Duhon became well known in the 1980s as the fiddler with the fine accordionist and singer Octa Clark & The Dixie Ramblers. Their friendship and musical association however, went back to the 1930s when they both played house dances together. As the string bands became popular again in the mid-1930s, Hector became one of the fiddlers in the popular Dixie Ramblers and the selection heard here, entitled "Dixie's Hottest" on the label, is actually a Cajun interpretation of the New Orleans jazz standard "High Society." It is generally acknowledged that Alphonse Picou developed the famous clarinet solo for this tune which of course is played here on the fiddle by Hector Duhon.

### **LUDERIN DARBONE**

Last but by no means least is Luderin Darbone, as of this writing the last still active fiddler from the era of the string bands of the 1930s. He and his Hackberry Ramblers along with Leo Soileau were the most popular exponents in the 30s of the western influenced string bands. Luderin has made a bunch of fine recordings over the years beginning in the mid-1930s. The seven cuts heard on this album have not been available since the original 78s were issued between 1935 and 1938. They represent a typical Hackberry Rambler mix of old Cajun numbers like "Ma Chere Belle" and "Se Pas La Pan" sung by that inimitable high pitched Cajun voice of Lennis Sonnier, some fine fiddle numbers by Luderin as well as several English language pop and western hits like "Rambling" (sung by Floyd Rainwater), "Oh Josephine" (sung liltily by Luderin Darbone), and ending with the widely popular "My Little Girl" sung by the whole gang.

*(Chris Strachwitz - 1997)*



I recommend the following CDs for your further listening pleasure and enlightenment about the early history of recorded Cajun music. (*None of the selections on this CD "Cajun Breakdown" are duplicated on any of the CDs below.*)

Arhoolie CD 7007: AMEDE ARDOIN - "I'm Never Coming Back" (Pioneer Of French Blues 1930-34 - The Roots of Zydeco): 26 selections by this historic figure who's songs constitute the basis for much of present day Cajun and Zydeco music.

Arhoolie CD 399: THE HACKBERRY RAMBLERS—"Jolie Blonde" 26 selections recorded in 1963 with Luderin Darbone in top form and the fantastic voice of Lennis Sonnier of the original group.

CMF CD 013: LE GRAND MAMOU: A Cajun Music Anthology - The Historic Victor & Bluebird Sessions 1928-1941; Vol. I: 25 selections by Leo Soileau, Joe Falcon, Hackberry Ramblers, J.B. Fuselier, etc.

CMF CD 017: RAISE YOUR WINDOW: A Cajun Music Anthology - Vol. II: 20 more superb sides from Leo Soileau, Miller's Merrymakers, Joe Falcon, Rayne-Bo Ramblers, Percy Babineaux, Thibodeaux Boys, etc.

CMF CD 018: GRAND PRAIRIE: A Cajun Music Anthology - Vol. III: 21 more fine sides by Nathan Abshire, Hackberry Ramblers, J.B. Fuselier, Happy Fats, Miller's Merrymakers, Rayne-Bo Ramblers, etc.

Columbia CD CK 46220: CAJUN VOL. I: "Abbeville Breakdown" (1929-1939): 22 selections by the Breaux Brothers, Joe & Cleoma Falcon, and all 12 known cuts by the Alley Boys of Abbeville.

Columbia CD CK 46784: CAJUN DANCE PARTY (Vol. II) "Fais Do Do" 23 superb cuts by Amede Breaux, Breaux Brothers, Cleoma Breaux, Dewey Segura, and all 6 titles recorded by Amede Ardoin & Dennis McGee for Columbia (and not on Arhoolie CD 7007).

The one truly indispensable book about Cajun and Zydeco music is:  
CAJUN MUSIC - A Reflection Of A People - Vol. I. Compiled and Edited by Ann Allen Savoy (Bluebird Press).

All above noted CDs and books are available from DOWN HOME MUSIC STORE.  
(Telephone: 510-525-2129). Send \$3.00 for the complete, illustrated, 120-page ARHOOLIE CATALOG - 10341 SAN PABLO AVENUE - EL CERRITO, CA. 94530 USA



Photo courtesy Luderin Darbone

Luderin Darbone, ca. 1935



Photo courtesy Crawford Vincent

Leo Soileau, 1934

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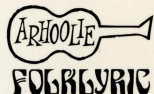
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