

CLIFTON CHENIER

LOUISIANA BLUES AND ZYDECO



CLIFTON CHENIER

LOUISIANA BLUES AND ZYDECO

The music on this record is a very popular dance music from the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast. They call it "Zydeco" around Houston and Clifton Chenier is the best and most popular exponent of it. The roots of Zydeco reach back into Louisiana Cajun music but since the 1930s the blues have become an increasingly important element. The accordion is the lead instrument and Clifton sings in cajun French - especially the older numbers such as the waltzes, two-steps, and "French" blues featured on side two of this album. The more modern selections on side one Clifton sings in English but even here he retains the very unique zydeco sound. Clifton Chenier enjoys current styles of rhythm and blues as well as the old French music and when you hear him in person you will notice that he gives out with whatever type his audience prefers. On this, his first LP record, we give you, the listener, the opportunity to hear the many varied types of songs Clifton Chenier does so well because his excellent voice and his expressive accordion style are well suited for the old and the new music.

"Zydeco et pas sale," opening side two, is one of the oldest tunes and apparently gave rise to the term "Zydeco" as used today. The exact origins of the phrase as applied to a musical style are a bit hazy but the original title of the old song was: "Les Haricots sont pas sale" meaning: snap beans - not salty and the phonetic spelling of the French Les Haricots has become Zydeco. Today Zydeco not only refers to this musical style but to a gumbo-like dish with many ingredients - and the music is just that! Zydeco also has a meaning similar to the Acadian term "Fais dodo" and refers to an outdoor party or country supper with dancing, drinking, eating - and good times in general, and the sound of the music reflects these happy and joyous occasions which today are becoming fewer and fewer. (At times these events have been referred to as La-Las and Zydeco has been called La-La music, but often it is simply called "French music").

(Note: For a more extensive and comprehensive documentation of Zydeco may we suggest Arhoolie LP F 1009: "Zydeco - Dance Music of the French speaking negroes in South-West Louisiana" to be released late in 1966).

Zydeco is very popular in many parts of Houston, Port Arthur, Lake Charles, Opelousas, Lafayette, and all the cajun country in between as well as across the country because Clifton Chenier became one of the best known exponents of it and has had a number of successful records. Only one other artist, Clarence Garlow, with his recording of "Bon Ton Roulet" ever succeeded in bringing this Louisiana music to the rest of the United States. With this album Clifton Chenier will carry his music to the far flung corners of the globe and I hope will bring pleasure to thousands of listeners with his unique style of Zydeco.

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 tunes like "Colinda," two-steps, waltzes, and many of the traditional Acadian tunes. Clifton grew up helping his parents work in the cotton, rice, sugar, and corn fields. He always wanted to be a musician as far back as he can recall and in 1946 he followed his older brother Cleveland to Lake Charles and began playing occasional jobs. But music was still only a side-line.

The music Clifton heard around him was mostly traditional "French" and he recalls hearing records by Amade Ardoin - "the first colored man to play blues on the accordion" - but there were others who never recorded: Jesse and Zozo Reynolds, Izeb Laza, and Sidney Babineaux. These were the best during the 1940s and Clifton learned many a tune from them. But Clifton heard other types of music too, and the first piece he recalls playing on the accordion was Joe Liggins' "The Honeydripper." Clifton's uncle Morris "Big" Chenier who plays guitar and fiddle and operates the Horseshoe Club in Lake Charles, has also been a strong influence on him.

In 1947 Clifton and his wife Margaret, whom he had met in 1945 while working as a cane cutter in New Iberia, went to Port Arthur and he worked for the Gulf and Texaco oil refineries until 1954. On weekends he would always play music and one day J.R. Fulbright, legendary record scout and producer of his own label from Los Angeles, Calif., heard Clifton out in the country and told him: "You play too much accordion to be in these woods" and recorded Clifton's first records at KAOK, a Lake Charles radio station. Although sales of these and subsequent records were largely confined to the Gulf Coast region, "It gave me a name" as Clifton put it, and in 1955 another label issued "Ay Tee Fee" which became his best seller and established Clifton Chenier as a rhythm and blues artist around the country. Clifton and his band went to Los Angeles and played the 5-4 Ballroom. Later he went on tour with various R & B acts and by 1956 he had become a full time musician. In 1958 Clifton moved to Houston, Texas and since then has played all over the South. At the time of this recording session the band had just returned from Florida and they are looking forward to coming out to California again in the not too distant future, but in the meanwhile they keep Louisiana dancing!

(Chris Strachwitz - 1965)

RECORDING DATA:

Side 1:

Clifton Chenier vocal and accordion (harmonica on tracks four and six); Elmore Nixon - piano; Cleveland Keyes - guitar; Fulton Antoine - bass; Robert St. Judy - drums. (track 5 - personnel same as for side two)

Side 2:

Clifton Chenier vocal and accordion; Cleveland Chenier - rubboard; Madison Guidry - drums (omit drums on track 4).

EH, 'TITE FILLE

BANANA MAN

HOT ROD

IT'S HARD

I CAN LOOK DOWN AT YOUR WOMAN

I CAN'T STAND

ZYDECO ET PAS SALE

LAFAYETTE WALTZ

LOUISIANA TWO STEP

CLIFTON'S WALTZ

LOUISIANA BLUES

Cover Photo: Chris Strachwitz

Cover Design: Wayne Pope

Produced by: Chris Strachwitz

Recorded at: Gold Star Studios
in Houston, Texas
on May 11, 1965
Doyle E. Jones—engineer

All Songs © by

CLIFTON CHENIER

AND TRADITION MUSIC CO.—BMI

© 1965 by

ARHOOLIE RECORDS

P.O. Box 5073, BERKELEY 5, CALIF.

OUTSTANDING FOLK ARTISTS ON ARHOOLIE RECORDS

Black Ace—Lowell Fulson—Guitar Slim—Hackberry Ramblers—Lightning Hopkins—Lil' Son Jackson—John Jackson—Mance Lipscomb—J. E. Mainer—Fred McDowell—Alex Moore—Rev. Overstreet—Robert Shaw—Alice Stuart—Johnny Young—Joe Turner—Mercy Dee Walton—Bukka White—Big Joe Williams—Clifton Chenier—Big Mama Thornton.



CLIFTON CHENIER

All songs by
Clifton Chenier
Tradition Music
BMI

F-1024-A

1. EH, 'TITE FILLE
2. BANANA MAN
3. HOT ROD
4. IT'S HARD
5. I CAN LOOK DOWN AT YOUR WOMAN
6. I CAN'T STAND
(165)

DISTRIBUTED BY FANTASY RECORDS

F-1024-A
1165



CLIFTON CHENIER

All songs by
Clifton Chenier
Tradition Music
BMI

F-1024-B

1. ZYDECO ET PAS SALE
2. LAFAYETTE WALTZ
3. LOUISIANA TWO STEP
4. CLIFTON'S WALTZ
5. LOUISIANA BLUES
(166)

DISTRIBUTED BY FANTASY RECORDS

M. 166 F-1024-B