

# CLIFTON CHENIER

## BON TON ROULET!



ARHOLLE F1031



# CLIFTON CHENIER Bon Ton Roulet



In April of 1966 Clifton Chenier appeared at the Berkeley Blues Festival on the University of California campus (Arhoolie LP F 1030) and his music caused quite a bit of excitement not only at the concert but with fans and critics afterwards who heard Clifton probably for the first time that night. San Francisco Chronicle jazz critic Ralph J. Gleason called Clifton Chenier "...one of the most surprising musicians I have heard in some time, with a marvelously moving style of playing the accordion.. blues accordion, that's right, blues accordion". Oakland Tribune jazz writer Russ Wilson said: "Chenier is an adept instrumentalist and the riffs he set up in the bass while playing a solo line in the treble at times sounded like a miniature Basie band". Although the general public seems not yet really aware of the great artistry of Clifton Chenier, I hope the release of this, his second album, will in some way remedy the situation.

Clifton Chenier has long been the most popular exponent of Zydeco music along the Louisiana-Texas Gulf Coast. Zydeco is a combination of traditional Acadian, or Cajun, music and elements of Rhythm & Blues, jazz, and Negro popular music in general. Developed in the cajun country during the 1930s, Zydeco evolved into a distinct type of music during and shortly after World War II. In some areas they call it La La music - others simply refer to it as "French Music", and it is the dance music of the Cajun speaking Negroes along the Gulf Coast.

The name Zydeco comes from the title of one of the oldest tunes played by most accordionists in the area: "L'Haricots sont pas sale", which means "Snap beans, not salty" and so the phonetic spelling of Les Haricots is simply Zydeco! This term not only refers to the music but to the whole social thing that goes with it: a big party out in the country with lots of food, drink, and good times. The Acadians called them Fais Do Dos, and although these events are becoming less frequent the music is still very popular.

The opening tune on this record is a good example of the meeting of Zydeco and Rhythm & Blues. "Bon Ton Roulet" apparently is an old song, but became very popular in the late 1940s via a number of recordings by Clarence Garlow, a guitar playing exponent of the Zydeco influence. You will perhaps recognize the song as "Let the good times roll", which in recent years has become an R&B standard. Side one also features a couple of traditional blues: "Black Gal" and "Baby, please don't go" on which Morris Chenier is heard on fiddle. "Black Gal" is one of the all-time favorites among the Zydeco fans and the cajun version of this old blues which was first recorded in the 1930s by Joe Pullum, opens side two: "Ma

Negresse". The Cajun or French version of this song was first popularized via record by Nathan Abshire (who has recently re-recorded it on Arhoolie LP F 5004) under the title "Pinegrove Blues", but perhaps Nathan learned it from some Negro performer since the song is generally associated with the blues idiom. "Jole Blonde" can perhaps be considered as the national anthem of the Cajun country, but Clifton's version is quite unique from the many recorded by white cajun artists. Clifton Chenier is not one to stand still in this fast changing world of music and he has not remained just another Cajun artist, but has incorporated many of the sounds he has heard into his music and has come up with a very unique style. Clifton is very much the entertainer along the Gulf Coast and he performs in many clubs, dance halls, and taverns where he is constantly exposed to the latest juke box hits like "Scratch my back" of a few seasons back to which he came up with his answer: "Keep on scratching!"

Amade Ardoin was the first Negro to play this type of accordion music on record, (A forthcoming LP on Arhoolie F 1009 - Zydeco; will trace the development of this music more thoroughly), and along with many others was a strong influence on Clifton. Born June 25th, 1925, on a farm near Opelousas, accordion music was all around him, and during the 1940s with the advent of the independent record companies and the boom of Rhythm & Blues music, Clifton was soon impressed by Joe Liggins, Lowell Fulson, and others and he soon was on his way to play many types of music on the accordion. He soon acquired a piano type accordion, since the old-style "French" accordion was only good for one key! Today Clifton Chenier is one of the most versatile and moving performers and is planning to tour Europe with the American Folk Blues Festival in 1967.

Chris Strachwitz - 1967

Other recordings of Louisiana music on Arhoolie:

- F 1024 - Clifton Chenier - Louisiana Blues & Zydeco
- F 5003 - The Hackberry Ramblers
- F 5004 - Cajun Fais Do Do - with Nathan Abshire, Breaux Brothers, etc.

Cover Photo: Chris Strachwitz

Cover art: Wayne Pope

Recorded by Chris Strachwitz in Houston, Texas May 10, 1966, except "Ay Ai Ai" which was recorded February 8, 1964.

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P.O. Box 9195 - Berkeley, Calif. 94719

BON TON ROULET  
FROG LEGS  
IF I EVER GET LUCKY  
BLACK GAL  
LONG TOES  
BABY PLEASE DON'T GO

MA NEGRESSE  
SWEET LITTLE DOLL  
JOLE BLONDE  
AY AI AI  
CAN'T STOP LOVING YOU  
KEEP ON SCRATCHING

## ARHOOIE RECORDS

- F 1001 - Mance Lipscomb Vol. 1
- F 1002 - Big Joe Williams
- F 1003 - Black Ace
- F 1004 - Lil' Son Jackson
- F 1005 - I Have to Paint My Face
- F 1006 - Blues N' Trouble Vol. 1
- F 1007 - Mercy Dee
- F 1008 - Alexander Moore
- F 1009 - Zydeco
- F 1010 - Texas Barrelhouse Piano  
by Robert Shaw
- F 1011 - Lightning Hopkins
- F 1012 - Blues N' Trouble Vol. 2
- F 1013 - New Orleans Jazz
- F 1014 - Rev. Overstreet
- F 1016 - Kid Thomas N.O. Band
- F 1018 - Bad Luck N' Trouble
- F 1019 - Bukka White - Vol. 1
- F 1020 - Bukka White - Vol. 2
- F 1021 - Fred McDowell Vol. 1
- F 1022 - Lightning Hopkins  
with Barbara Dane
- F 1023 - Mance Lipscomb Vol. 2
- F 1024 - Clifton Chenier
- F 1025 - John Jackson
- F 1026 - Mance Lipscomb Vol. 3
- F 1027 - Fred McDowell Vol. 2
- F 1028 - Big Mama Thornton
- F 1029 - Johnny Young Blues Band
- F 1030 - Berkeley Blues Festival

- R 2003 - Lowell Fulson
- R 2004 - Joe Turner
- R 2005 - Guitar Slim and Jelly Belly
- R 2006 - Texas Blues
- R 2007 - Lightning Hopkins

- F 4001 - Out West - Berkeley
- F 4002 - Alice Stuart

- F 5001 - Hodges Brothers
- F 5002 - J.E. Mainer's Mountaineers
- F 5003 - The Hackberry Ramblers
- F 5004 - Cajun Fais Do-Do

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**CLIFTON CHENIER**  
**"BON TON ROULET"**

All songs by Clifton Chenier  
Tradition Music Co.  
BMI

**F-1031**  
**Side 1**

1. BON TON ROULET (3:05)
2. FROG LEGS (2:10)
3. IF I EVER GET LUCKY (2:40)
4. BLACK GAL (3:00)
5. LONG TOES (2:10)
6. BABY, PLEASE  
DON'T GO (2:20)

(M-185)

M 185

Arhoolie 1031A





**CLIFTON CHENIER**  
**"BON TON ROULET"**

Songs by Clifton Chenier  
Tradition Music Co.  
BMI

**F-1031**  
**Side 2**

1. MA NEGRESSE (3:05)
2. SWEET LITTLE DOLL (1:45)
3. JOLE BLONDE (3:10)
4. AY AI AI (2:30)
5. I CAN'T STOP LOVING  
YOU (2:35) (Don Gibson)
6. KEEP ON SCRATCHING  
(2:15)

(M-186)