

MICHAEL DOUCET

•DIT BEAUSOLEIL•



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"Before I could go and say that I knew Cajun music, I felt I had to know myself what Cajun music was." Michael Doucet was speaking as we sat in the dark delicious recesses of Pinetta's Restaurant in south Baton Rouge. The place has been a quasi-Bohemian watering hole since his days at nearby LSU in the early Seventies to the present. "I wanted to take the traditional sources and styles of music and do an LP that everybody could relate to... or at least relate to part of it." This LP, *Dit Beausoleil*, is a milestone on what has become a lifelong quest on Doucet's part for both the roots and branches of Cajun music. Although I was somewhat familiar with his story and its cultural setting, Mike provided an updated oral history, upon which these notes are based, about his own creative, eclectic, highly literate performances of Cajun traditional music.

Michael Doucet was born in Scott, Louisiana, near Lafayette, on St. Valentine's Day 1951. His interest in both the past and future possibilities for Cajun music and culture in modern south Louisiana is unique and important. This area is a region of the United States that is filled with contrasts between the way things were and the way things appear to be going. South Louisianans have seen their French-speaking population and cultural traditions dwindle as the vast marsh, swamp and prairie landscape is increasingly utilized—some would say brutalized—for oil and natural gas exploration and petrochemical production in lieu of the subsistence and commercial fishing and trapping and farming of the first half of the century. One is tempted to compare south Louisiana with the Brazil in *Tristes Tropiques* as described by Claude Lévi-Strauss, where the jungle and native cultures are confronted by the bulldozer and mass society. Yet, despite the new problems of boomtown economies, water and air pollution and rapid cultural change, one takes heart in little things: the fact that all 7-11's in south Louisiana seem to sell *boudin* (rice and pork sausage), French ethnicity and language are no longer universally sources of shame or insecurity, and, most relevant here, Cajun music in all forms has made a great comeback and can be widely heard in dancehalls and on the radio. It is to the latter *renaissance douce*, of which this LP is a part, that Michael Doucet has devoted his talents.

As a musician he is in a unique position as part of the first generation of Cajuns highly literate in English, yet also affected through their families by the folk tradition. Well into the twentieth century, literacy in French was available through Catholic schools to the children of planters, substantial farmers and merchants. However, rural Louisiana Cajuns and Creoles were usually not taught to read and write the language. The formalized transition to English, with corollary discouragement of oral French, reached its peak during the advent of widespread public schooling in the Twenties and Thirties and continued until the late Sixties. It is hard to find a person in the thirty and over age bracket today who does not have a horror story about being punished for speaking French on the public school grounds. Even where French was taught in schools, there was often a split between local usage and what was considered appropriate grammatical usage. Mike, who learned French from his grandmother and great aunt, commented on the problems at school. "Even in high school when we were learning Parisian French, there was always this conflict about how you said something. They were always putting you down. To me it was an oral language and not a written language. Learning to read and write is fine, but being Cajun shouldn't mean putting up walls. I'd learn one thing in school and go speak to someone at Grandmother's house and it wouldn't be the same at all."

Yet Doucet, a songwriter and an ardent fan of the poet William Blake, was brought up between the persistence of a folk culture and the growth of a literate society, and, as such, he is very different from many musicians of previous generations. Rather than being isolated in one community with access to the oral tradition of one or two master musicians or, at best, the 78's of Cajun music recorded in the Thirties, he has grown up at a time when the music has been marketed extensively on records, radio and TV in south Louisiana. Thus, he has had the opportunity to learn in person from a variety of recognized "old masters" such as Dennis McGee, Will, Rodney, and Dewey Balfa, Canray Fontenot, and Hector Duhon and "younger masters" like Marc Savoy. He has also



Left to right: Verret, Vignaud, M. Doucet, D. Doucet, & Ware

photo by Chris Strachwitz

listened to the 78's of Amédée Ardoin and Leo Soileau, among others. Perhaps most important, he has been able to seek out the relatively unknown violin masters throughout the region, such as Bé Bé and Calvin Carrière, Varise Connor, and Bradford Gordon through his own fieldwork. In addition to his research into the music, Mike also had the influence of oral folk tradition in his childhood days. For example, he heard Lawrence Walker of nearby Duson and the great Octa Clark of Judice community just south of Scott (both are accordion players).

On his mother's side of the family, he learned the classical and popular traditions of music. On his father's side, he counts Uncle T-Will Knight as a key influence. Uncle Will was a fiddler, but he encouraged Mike to play banjo and then guitar. Mike's sister Paulette was interested in the American folk music revival movement, and this had an effect as well. A particularly important friend and fellow musician for over 15 years has been Bessyl Duhon. Duhon, now an accordionist with the Jimmy C. Newman Band on the Grand Ol' Opry, played traditional Cajun music with his father, Hector, in Octa Clark's Dixie Ramblers. Bessyl also played Fifties Gulf Coast boogie with a series of bands from the Riff-Raffs to the Swing Kings and was in some ways Lafayette's first musically eclectic Cajun rocker with folk roots. It was later with Bessyl and others that Mike would play in the incredibly creative and regionally popular band, *Coteau*.

In high school, aside from playing the requisite marching band music, Mike continued to form musical ideas in collaboration and competition with Ralph Zachary Richard. Mike and Ralph had played together since age 12 and formed the Bayou Drifter Band in the early Seventies. In New York in 1974 the band recorded an LP for Electra that was not released. In the same year they went to France. Mike was particularly interested in the French folk music movement and was shocked and delighted to find various American expatriates such as Roger Mason and Steve Waring as well as French musicians like Michel Hindenoch and the group *Grandmère Funius Folk*, all with an interest in Cajun music. "At this time Louisiana was a virtual desert for young people seeking antiquarian creativeness in Cajun music, so it blew my mind to hear a band in France with six fiddles playing *Jolie Blonde*." Ralph and Mike split musically at this point, as Ralph was interested in fronting a French rock band. He later became popular in Canada as a French purveyor of rock and roll with some Louisiana trimmings and a lot of Mick Jagger influence. After further inspiration and encouragement from British traditionalists Robin and Barry Dransfield, Mike decided to go back to Louisiana. "I saw the parallel of the English-speaking peoples' folk music and realized you had to play what you want and feel and not have a complex about not playing typical American Appalachian or Western Swing." Back in Louisiana Mike joined up with Bessyl Duhon and Kenneth Richard to form *Beausoleil* and to play his own brand of revival "black and tan" Cajun music. Shortly thereafter another group also emerged, with some members from *Beausoleil*, called *Coteau*. *Beausoleil* was popular at folk festivals, in small clubs in the United States and on the Canadian and European folk scene (they went to France in 1976 as part of the *France-Louisiane Bien Aimée* cultural exchange). However, it was *Coteau*—the first "cosmic Cajun"

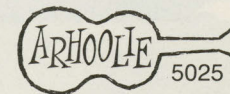
band to fuse traditional Cajun music with hardcore Gulf Coast rock—that brought the young south Louisiana crowds back into dancehalls like Boo Boo's in Breaux Bridge and Jay's Lounge in Cankton. The band was anchored to tradition by Bessyl Duhon, who played accordion and violin, as well as Mike, who sang and played violin. The other side of the group was more rock and country oriented. Drummers Danny Kimball and, later, Kenny Blevins, added a hot south Louisiana rhythm section, drawing upon New Orleans R&B and second line rhythms. Guitarists Bruce "Weasel" McDonald and Dana Breaux provided high energy twin lead guitars, while bassist Gary Newman sang Cajun country classics. In the words of one observer at the time, "*Coteau* sounds like a 17th-century band playing 21st-century music." Suddenly tradition seemed *avant-garde*. Mike Doucet adds today, "Everybody in the band stood for a certain thing, and when you finally got all the ingredients together it was like a highly seasoned jumbo gumbo. I helped compose and arrange a lot then; there were some real summits musically like the 'Mardi Gras Song', or the way we played 'Acadian Two-Step'." Despite great regional acclaim, the disappointment of uncommensurated record deals and the group's internal pressures toward musical diversity blew the lid off the pot, and *Coteau* disbanded in 1977. *Beausoleil*, however, the traditional musical alter ego of *Coteau*, persisted.

Mike has been researching and learning from traditional French fiddlers as well as presenting a folk music-in-the-schools program with Dewey Balfa since 1976. He now had a greater chance to open up to all the music of the region, joining with his friend Austin Sonnier to hear and play Creole jazz à la Bunk Johnson of New Iberia and the Martelles from Opelousas. The black Creole folk music called zydeco or *zodico* was also important. Of the black Creole fiddler, Canray Fontenot from Welsh, Mike notes, "He was my greatest black musical influence. Canray is a creative genius."

A first *Beausoleil* LP was made for *Pate Marconi* EMI in France in 1976. The second and best-known LP, called "The Spirit of Cajun Music," was on Swallow Records in Louisiana. It featured Mike with European *chanteuse* Françoise Schaubert as well as Hector Duhon and Bessyl Duhon providing a link to local Cajun traditional music. A third LP was recorded in Jennings and released in Canada as *Les Amis Cadjins*, at which point the current vocalist, Annick Colbert from Belgium, joined the group and added old French and sacred tradition influences. The band on this LP, in addition to Mike and Annick includes: Errol Verret, from Henderson in the Atchafalaya Basin, a former accordionist with the undersung Cypress Street Band; Billy Ware on percussion; Mike's brother David Doucet on guitar; Tommy Comeaux, who played mandolin with *Coteau* in its later stages; Tommy Alesi on drums and Robert Vigneaux on acoustic bass.

This fourth LP is Michael Doucet and *Beausoleil*'s best recording because they have adhered more closely to the tradition and have also developed their own style to a greater degree. If this sounds like a contradiction in terms, give a listen as they "*Dit Beausoleil*."

Nicholas R. Spitzer
Folklorist, State of Louisiana
Baton Rouge, December 1981



TWO-STEP A WILL BALFA (+)
DONNEZ MOI PAULINE (+)
LE TWO-STEP A MIDLAND (+)
LA VALSE DES JONGLEMENTS (+)
ACADIAN BLUES(+ +)
LE BAL A CHATAIGNIER (+)

ADIEU ROZA (+)
SI J'AURAIS DES AILES (+)
AWESOME OSSUN TWO-STEP (+)
MADAME SOSTAIN (*)
L'AFFAIRE DE PERRODIN (*)
LES PETITS YEUX NOIRS (*)
LE BOZO TWO-STEP (*)

Michael Doucet—fiddle & vocals (and mandolin solo on B-7)

David Doucet—guitar

John "Billy" Ware—triangle and spoons

Robert Vignaud—bass

Errol Verret—accordion

Tommy Alesi—drums (*)

Tommy Comeaux—mandolin (*)

Annick Colbert—vocal & recorder (*)

Transcriptions and translations of the songs are inside the jacket.

Produced by Chris Strachwitz & Michael Doucet
(+) recorded at St. Mary's Chapel, Lafayette, La.
May 19, 1981

(+ +) recorded at Marc Savoy's Music Center,
Eunice, La. May 20, 1981

both sessions recorded by Chris Strachwitz on a
Nagra IV-S tape recorder with two Neumann KM 861
microphones.

(*) recorded at Master Trak Sound Studios in
Crowley, La. May 26, 1981
Mike Miller—engineer.

PRODUCER'S NOTE

This album started when I asked Michael Doucet to help me record an anthology of Cajun Fiddle Styles (Arhoolie 5028) where, besides some of the best old-timers, I wanted to include several selections by Michael himself since he is one of the best contemporary Cajun fiddlers with a highly individualistic style. The focus of the Fiddle anthology is on the fiddlers and their styles with only minimum accompaniment. As we started to record at St. Mary's Chapel, where Michael works, I was absolutely knocked out by the sound of just Michael with only his brother on guitar and occasional bass, spoon, or triangle backing. We both liked the sound and kept recording quite a number of tunes. As other members of *Beausoleil* walked in that night it became obvious that we should make a full album of this remarkable aggregation and here is the result—hope you enjoy it!

(Chris Strachwitz)

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MICHAEL DOUCET



Transcriptions and Translations

by Ms. Sharon Arms

Valse a Will

Chère bébé, t'as fait du mal
O yaie, quoi t'as fait?
Tu étais la après danser
Avec un autre tu va tomber
Chere bébé, j'ai pour toi,
Toute ma vie je t'espérais
Oui, si tu veux m'aimer
O yaie, ça fait frémir.

O yé yaie, mon coeur fait mal
A cause de toi, ma chère Joline.
Pourquoi t'as, t'as fait du mal?
O yaie, fais pas ça.

O bébé, la plus jolie
Moi je voudrais juste de dire
Si tu veux danser avec moi
O bébé, c'est ça fait bien.
Hé Will!

Will's Waltz

Babe, you've done me wrong
Oh yaie, what have you done?
You were there dancing
With another, you're going to roll
Babe, I'm yours
All my life I've waited for you
Yes, if you'll love me
Oh yaie, it makes me shiver.

O yé yaie, my heart aches
Because of you, dear Joline.
Why have you done me wrong?
O yaie, don't do that.

Oh darling, the prettiest of all
I just want to tell you
If you want to dance with me
Oh babe, that makes it all right.

Pauline

O yaie, donnez-moi Pauline
O Pauline, c'est la seule que moi j'aimais.
O Pa Janvier, donnez-moi Pauline
O 'tite Pauline, elle est la plus belle.

O dis pas ça si tu va la mettre dans un couvent
Chère bébé, comment je va faire moi tout seul?
Mais dans un couvent il faudra prier au bon Dieu
Au bon Dieu ça va faire
Tous les jours et toutes les nuits.

O Pa Janvier, donnez-moi Pauline
O tu connais bien, c'est la seule que moi je peux avoir.
O dis pas ça, Pauline n'est pa là
Ouais, dans la terre, ouais trois jours, 'y a pas
longtemps.

O joline, comment je va faire tout seul?
Chère Pauline, t'es enterrée
O yé yaie, comment je va faire?
O bon soir, bon soir, chers 'tits yeux noirs
Pauline, je suis pour toi
Si enterrée, je t'aime quand même.

Pauline

O yaie, give me Pauline
O Pauline, she's the only one I've ever loved.
O Pa Janvier, give me Pauline
O Pauline, she's the most beautiful of all.

Oh, don't say that you're going to put her in a convent
Babe, what would I do all alone?
In a convent you must pray to the good Lord
Pray to the good Lord
Every day and every night.

O Pa Janvier, give me Pauline
O you well know, she's the only one for me.
Oh, don't say that, Pauline's not there
In the ground, three days isn't long.

O my beauty, how will I make it alone?
Dear Pauline, you're buried
O yé yaie, what will I do?
Good night, good night, dear little black eyes
Pauline, I'm yours
Even if you're buried, I love you anyway.

Midland Two-Step

O chère bébé, gardez-donc mais quoi tu m'as fait
T'as fait la misère, o chagrin
Ouais chagrin que moi j'ai eu
O hé 'tit coeur, 'y a pas personne qui veut les voir.
Mais moi j'ai seul à la maison
Veux t'en aller ouais avec moi?

O, mais gardez donc le chagrin que tu m'as fait
Chère bébé, mais je mérite pas ça
Oui catin malheureux
O ouais plus belle t'es plus belle
Pourquoi faire mais les misères
Mais ouais dans moi
Et moi tout seul je t'espérais.

O 'y a pas longtemps, 'y a pas longtemps
Que moi je t'ai vue, chère bébé
Mais moi t'ai donc emmenée
Pour aller ouais ensemble.

Acadian Blues

Chère bébé, tu connais
Tu m'as fait les promesses
Fait les, o les promesses
Comment je va faire, comment je va faire
Moi tout seul a la maison?

Toi, t'as fait les promesses
Chère bébé longtemps
Ouais longtemps passé
Comment je va faire, mais comment je va faire
Ouais tout seul à la maison?

Bal à Chatagnier

Chère bébé oublie ça
Tout j'ai dis asteur fâché
Oui j'ai fâché ouais après toi
Chère bébé tu maltraité
Oui t'as dansé toute la nuit
Avec un autre, pourquoi t'as fait?
Oui t'as jamais répondue
Chère bébé, je peux pas oublier.

Gardez donc, oui bébé
Ouais tout ça t'as maltraité
Si tu veux aller avec moi
Peut-être je va te pardonner
O bébé, oui bébé
Tu connais je va t'aimer toujours
Chère bébé, la plus jolie
Pourquoi t'as pas dansé avec
moi?

Midland Two-Step

O darling, look what you've done to me
You've cause me misery, oh pain
Oh, the pain that I've felt
Oh little heart, nobody knows.
I'm all alone at my house
Do you want to go with me?

Oh, look at the pain you've caused me
Babe, I don't deserve that
Heartless woman
Your beauty isn't pretty any more
Why do you make me miserable
Oh me
All alone I waited for you.

It wasn't long, it wasn't long ago
That I saw you, baby
But I'd like to take you with me
To go away together.

Acadian Blues

Babe, you know
You made promises to me
Made promises
What will I do, what will I do
All alone in the house?

You made promises
Babe, a long time ago
Yes, a long time ago
What will I do, what will I do
All alone in the house?

Chataigner Ball

Babe, don't forget
Everything I just said, angry
Yeah, I'm mad at you
Babe, you've done me wrong.
Yes, you danced all night
With someone else, why did you do it?
Yeah, you never answered me
Babe, I can't forget it.

Look, baby
How you've mistreated me
If you want to come with me
Maybe I'll forgive you
Oh babe, oh babe
You know I'll always love you
Babe, the prettiest of all
Why didn't you dance with me?

Adieu Roza

Adieu Roza, je suis content t'es pas ma belle
Adieu Roza, je suis content t'es pas ma soeur
Adieu Roza, o demain c'est pas dimanche
Juré ma Lord...

Goodbye Roza

Goodbye Roza, I'm glad you're not my girl
Goodbye Roza, I'm glad you're not my sister
Goodbye Roza, tomorrow's not Sunday
Swear, my Lord...

Si J'aurais des Ailes

Et où mais moi je va
Mais ça je conviens pas
O si j'aurais des ailes
Comme tous les hirondelles
J'irais me reposer

J'irais me reposer
O près de toi la belle
Pour raconter mes peines
Pour raconter les peines
Et ensuite des amitiés.

Allons à la cantine
Pour boire et bien rire
Et bien de se divertir
O nous et nos amis

O parlez-nous de boire
Non pas de mariage
Mais quand tu te maries
On est là de s'ennuyer
Toujours en regrettant
Ces jolis temps passés.

Quand je vois ton chère figure
O près de là la mienne
O ça me fait frémir

Apportez-li là dans la terre
O ces beaux cheveux bouclés
Tu pourrais être la plus belle
Aux yeux de si canailles.

If I had wings

Everywhere I go
Nothing suits me
If only I had wings
Like the larks
I would land

I would land
Next to you, my beauty
To tell you all my troubles
To tell you all my troubles
And then my love for you.

Let's go to the cantine
To talk and laugh
And have a good time
We and our friends

Let's talk about drinking
Not about marriage
When you get married
You get bored
And always regret
The good old days.

When I see your sweet face
Next to mine
It makes me shiver

Bring it down to earth
Oh those pretty curls
You could be the most beautiful
With your naughty eyes.

Madame Sosthène

O Madame Sosthène, mais donnez-moi Elida
C'est la seule que moi j'aime
Depuis l'âge de quatorze ans.
Si tu veux pas me la donner
On fais serment, on va la voler
On va la cacher sous mon manteau
On va l'emmenner à la maison.

O Madame Sosthène, mais donnez-moi Elida
C'est la seule que moi j'aime
Depuis l'âge de quatorze ans.
Si tu veux me la donner
On fais serment, on va la soigner
On va la ramener à la maison
Finir mes jours avec mon nègre.

Madame Sosthène

Oh Madame Sosthène, give me Elida
She's the only one I've loved
Since I was fourteen years old.
If you won't give her to me
I swear I'll steal her
I'll hide her under my coat
And take her home.

Oh Madame Sosthène, give me Elida
She's the only one I've loved
Since I was fourteen years old.
If you will give her to me
I swear I'll take care of her
I'll take her back home
And finish my days with my girl.

Les Petits Yeux Noirs

À ce matin j'étais
Assis sur mon lit
Après se pleurer avec un coeur aussi
cassé
Parce que j'avais rêvé
À mes chers 'tits yeux noirs
Qui a parti et va jamais revenir.

Cet après-midi j'étais assis
Dessus ma galerie
Après guetter le soleil après se coucher
Et je m'ennuie et j'adore
Mes chers 'tits yeux noirs
Qui a parti et va jamais revenir.

Little Black Eyes

This morning
I sat on my bed
Crying with a broken heart
Because I had dreamed
About my dear little black eyes
Who left and is never coming back.

This afternoon I sat
On my porch
Watching the sun go down
And I'm sad and I adore
My dear little black eyes
Who left and is never coming back.

THE SONGS

Two-Step à Will Balfa was learned from the late Will Balfa, a member of the well-known Balfa Brothers musical family from Basile.

Donnez-Moi Pauline is from Eunice violinist Dennis McGee. McGee, of Scotch, French, and American Indian descent, maintains a modal quality mingled with black influence in much of his music. The result here is this dirge-like blues waltz, truly a unique south Louisiana musical form.

Le Two-Step à Midland can also be heard as a 78 recording by Amédé Ardoin, the first extensively recorded black Creole recording artist (on Old Timey LP 124), who played zydeco and a variety of Cajun styles, and also recorded with Dennis McGee. Wooden spoon percussion by Billy Ware, behind Errol Verret's accordion and Doucet's violin, creates a distinctly European dancehall feeling.

La Valse des Jonglements (The Pensive Waltz) is from Varise Connor of Lake Arthur, a man of Irish and French descent with old-time Southern stringband influence in his fiddle style.

Acadian Blues is a classic synthesis of Cajun melody and blues tonality and rhythm. Mike learned the song from the recordings made in Louisiana by Alan Lomax in the late 1930's on behalf of the Library of Congress. The performer on the Lomax tape was Wayne Perry of Bayou Sauvage.

Mike says **Le Bal à Chataignier** presents the view of a musician at a dance in this settlement in Evangeline Parish watching his favorite girl from the bandstand while he must continue playing. His only recourse is to sing about the situation. Mike learned versions of the tune from both Dennis McGee and Canray Fontenot. His dramatic solo with slides, blues tone and syncopation seems particularly influenced by the latter.

Adieu Roza, from Dennis McGee, shows how strongly the latter has been influenced by black Creole zydeco. It features a

steady back beat on guitar and accordion with high-speed staccato melodic figures played and sung by Doucet. Mike also adds his own intensified jazz rhythm improvisations.

Si J'Aurais des Ailes (If I Had Wings) was learned from a recording made in the Sixties by Ralph Rinzler and singer Edius Nacquin from Reddell in Evangeline Parish (Rounder 6002 "Louisiana Cajun French Music from the Southwest Prairies, Vol. 1"). It is also known as *Parlez-Nous à Boire*, made popular by the Balfa Brothers.

Ossun Two-Step is named for a tiny town in Lafayette Parish and is humorously called "Awesome Two-Step" by the band. The shift from the traditional style, in which this was once recorded on 78 by Joe Falcon (on Old Timey LP 100), to full band Cajun improvisation reminiscent of the *Coteau* sound is evident here in the complementary drumming mixed with Cajun instrumentation and acoustic lead guitar.

Madame Sosthane features a duet vocal by Mike and Annick Colbert. The recorder played by Annick and the vocal style are more like the earlier *Beausoleil* sound with its allusions to Continental French folk revival music.

L'Affaire de Perrodin is a quick, old-time two-step with the Doucet brothers on violin and guitar, and triangle by Billy Ware.

Les Petits Yeux Noirs (Little Black Eyes), a waltz associated with accordionist Lawrence Walker, is performed here as a vocal duet. Mandolin and recorder add to a folk revival old-time sound.

Le Bozo Two-Step is actually an uptempo version of *La Dernière Valse* (The Last Waltz). The tune pulls together Cajun music, swing, bluegrass and boogie in a hot *mélange* with strong solos all around as an appropriately eclectic ending to this LP and a forecast for future tradition.

