

LES QUATRE VIEUX GARÇONS



DEWEY & TONY BALFA

TRACY & PETER SCHWARZ

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Easy Rider
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Wedding March

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Muddy Waters
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Mon Neg' est pas Rive

THE ARTISTS AND THEIR MUSIC

DEWEY BALFA is well known for his work with the Balfa Brothers, and for his continuation of that work as a spokesman for the revival of traditional music of his own people in particular, and for the music of all Americans and French-speaking people in general. It must be pointed out that this role as a cultural voice was not one for which Dewey ever asked. Circumstances directed the attention of researchers from Washington to Dewey, and the influential (if sometimes politically responsive) climates of CODOFIL, (an acronym for the Counsel for the Development of French in Louisiana) the National Folk Heritage Foundation, et cetera, seconded this nomination. Although Dewey felt that there were better fiddlers, better spokesmen, and better cultural politicians than himself, he acknowledged

that he combines these attributes as well as anyone and set to work. He has been active with the Louisiana State Arts Commission, a panelist with the Folk Arts division of the NEA, and most importantly, the visionary and chief executant of the traditional music appreciation program which he directs in Louisiana's public schools.

TRACY SCHWARZ has achieved international recognition for his work with the New Lost City Ramblers, Tracy's Family Band, The Strange Creek Singers, and for his appearances as a soloist. His freindship with Dewey Balfa and with Dewey's late brothers Will and Rodney dates from their meeting at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964. Their musical association deepened with Tracy's visits to Louisiana: Tracy and Dewey produced two Cajun fiddle instruction records at this time, both for FOLKWAYS. Between these trips and intervals of study at home, Tracy led the life of a professional folk musician and a farmer through the late sixties, the entire 1970's, and the 1980's to date. Some personal recollections may illustrate the tone of those years. I can remember Tracy now as I often saw him at home: returning from his collecting trips in Louisiana to resume round-the-clock work on his quintessentially Pennsylvania-Dutch farm. His career even survived the slump of popular interest in folk music and the point during which funded festivals decided it was no longer expedient to book the talents of "revivalists", as we came to be called. None of these ironies was lost on Tracy. It is true that a great deal of nonsense was passed off as "folk music" during the last twenty years: but musicians of Tracy's class, instructed for more than half their adult lives by traditional masters, are not well-served by being dismissed as "revivalists". On the contrary, musicians of Tracy's class embody, in fact, the music itself; well-schooled, dedicated to an almost obsessive degree, and (as always) in flux.

TONY BALFA is the son of the late Rodney Balfa, and the heir to a rich and immediate tradition of music. Such a tradition is not handed to its recipient on a platter, however: Tony worked hard from childhood to absorb the music of his father, and of his uncles [the late] Will Balfa and Dewey. Since his father's death, Tony has recommitted himself to the music of his ancestors and his hometown of Mamou. Here Tony today is raising his own family, from whom, if the indications of the past are any guide, we may expect some musical talent as well.

PETER SCHWARZ is the son of Tracy and Eloise Schwarz. Born in Pennsylvania, he was brought up in an atmosphere of respect and appreciation for folk music. By his early teens Peter was an accomplished multi-instrumentalist and singer, with a long string of touring and performing credits after his work with Tracy's Family Band. The present writer can name no musician of Peter's generation more informed and dedicated to folk music. His work with Cajun music was recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts with an Apprentice Grant to study with Dewey Balfa in 1984.

All four artists assembled for these sessions as LES QUATRE VIEUX GARCONS. Dewey describes the album as a twenty-year project and the sense of a labor of love is clear throughout both sides. We are fortunate to have such an album, rare in that two overlapping generations are combining their skills and various influences. We may be grateful for their taste and musicianship as well. These are original and carefully conceived arrangements in the best traditional style, free of both studied "old-timeyness" and modernity for novelty's sake. Now we can look forward to future collaborations by LES QUATRE VIEUX GARCONS, as they have planned a forthcoming disc of material written by Dewey and Rodney before Rodney's death.

SIDE ONE

MARDI GRAS JIG

[Traditional: arranged by Dewey Balfa and Tracy Schwarz
Source: Aldus Roger, also Marc Savoy. Dewey – fiddle, Tracy –
accordion, Tony – fiddlesticks, Peter – guitar]. This is thought
to be one of the older Cajun instrumental tunes. Musicians
alive around St. Landry Parish as of this writing remember
it being played before 1900. The sense in which this tune
is a “jig” is open to question. There are several Cajun 6/8
dances such as SAUTE GRAPAUD and various “contradances”.
On the other hand the MARDI GRAS JIG is in fast 4/4, perhaps
a reel. The D-major one-row diatonic accordion is played in
the subdominant key of G.

DANS LA COEUR DE LA VILLE

[Gene Rodrigue. Learned by the Vieux Garçons from the singing of Vin Bruce. Dewey – 1st fiddle & vocal, Peter – 2nd fiddle, Tracy – tenor fiddle, Tony – guitar]. This is a contemporary lyric and tune. The violin trio arrangement blends traditional "straight-bass" and "octave" seconding with a modern tenor harmony, while Dewey develops his vocal line into a tense melodic solo. This interplay between voice and instrument is a hallmark of the greatest Cajun fiddlers. Dewey has added some lyrics here.

EASY RIDER

[Traditional: the source here is Leo Soileau, who is credited with the first recording of Cajun fiddle music, (his 1928 "CHERE MOM"). Tracy — 1st fiddle & vocal, Dewey — 2nd fiddle, Peter — accordion, Tony — bass.] Leo Soileau may have absorbed these lyrics from other-than-Cajun blues traditions and blended them with a treble blues violent style, similar to the "slow drags" of Dennis McGee and Amédé Ardoin. Tracy acknowledges further vocal influence from his friend and mentor, the late Kentucky singer Roscoe Holcomb.

CHERE ALICE

[Lawrence Walker, Tracy — accordion & vocal, Dewey — 1st fiddle, Peter — 2nd fiddle, Tony — guitar.] Tracy has found the work of Lawrence Walker to be a major influence on his own singing and accordion playing. This arrangement follows the original recording so closely that one may be aware of Tracy and Dewey's respect for the deeply-felt Walker version, a widely loved classic. Considerable folklore surrounds this tune, according to Ann Allen Savoy, who has researched much of it in her forthcoming historical anthology of Cajun folk songs.

QUOI FAIRE DONC?

[Adapted from E. Shuler's "Traveler Playboy Special." Source: Sydney Brown. Tracy – accordion & vocal, Dewey – 1st fiddle, Peter – 2nd fiddle, Tony – guitar.] Dewey knows this tune as the "TWO-STEP DU FORGERON" (recorded by Andrew Doucet in the same studio where these sessions were held). The tune has another close rhythmic cousin in the well-known "ATTRAP' MON CHAPEAU."

WEDDING MARCH

[Traditional: Arranged by Dewey Balfa & Tracy Schwarz
Dewey - 1st fiddle & vocal, Peter - 2nd fiddle, Tracy -

accordion, Tony — guitar.] Tracy purchased Austin Pitre's recording of this song from a discount bin at the Ashgrove Coffeehouse in Los Angeles in the early 1960's. His accordion arrangement uses techniques learned from Joel Sonnier; treble reeds only, playing harmony above the violins. Dewey's lyrics are in part original, in part learned from his family.

SIDE TWO

MARDI GRAS SONG

[Dewey Balfa. Dewey — triangle & high fiddle, Tracy — fiddle & vocal, Tony — guitar, Peter — spoons & accordion. A complex and individual arrangement of a traditional favorite. Parts of this arrangement were worked out between Dewey and the late Nathan Abshire, others in Tracy's Family Band. This is a classic, remembered by generations of musicians during the lapse in Mardi Gras traditions. The homemade instruments — spoons and triangle — underscore the older character of this tune.

DIRT FARMER

[Tracy Schwarz, copyright by Coal Creek Music. Tracy – vocal & fiddle in low D tuning, Tony – guitar, Peter – bass.] Tracy composed this song in 1966, while farming through a drought in Pennsylvania which saw only an inch of rain from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The sardonic lyrics are reflected in the modal and dissonant fiddle solo, which includes parallel octaves and fourths. The melody is derived from both RYE WHISKEY and Dewey's father's ONCLE BOB.

15 YEARS

[Dennis McGee. Dewey — 1st fiddle & vocal, Peter — 2nd fiddle, Tony — guitar.] Dennis McGee learned this song at the age of ten years in 1903 from the singing of his cousin, Miss Dina La Fleur. Peter's "figure-eight seconding" is akin to that of Dennis' long-time partner, Ernest Fruge.

MUDDY WATERS

[Joseph Babcock, copyright Mariposa Music. Peter – vocal & 2nd fiddle, Dewey – 1st fiddle, Tracy – lead guitar, Tony – guitar.] A hit from Stonewall Jackson, convincingly dressed in Cajun attire. Peter has been singing this song for several years now. Tony presents his late father's guitar style at its best on this track.

DYING IN MISERY

[Dewey Balfa, copyright Flatwood Music. Tracy – accordion & vocal, Dewey – 1st fiddle, Peter – 2nd fiddle, Tony – guitar.] A simple and deeply emotional waltz in C major. Dewey first recorded this with the Pine Grove Boys for Nathan Abshire.

MON NEG EST PAS 'RIVE

[Traditional. Source: Inez Catalon, also Jeanie McClerie and Joel Sonnier. Tracy – accordion & vocal; Dewey – 1st fiddle, Peter – 2nd fiddle, Tony – guitar.] This tune reminds Tracy of the Balta's PARLEZ NOUS A BOIRE. The arrangement presented here tends almost toward a two-step, showing Zydeco influence in the treble reed selection halfway through.



LES QUATRES VIEUX GARÇONS Dewey Balfa, Tracy Schwarz, Tony Balfa, Peter Schwarz

"The Four Bachelors would like to express their gratitude to Will Spires for his guidance, advise, and writing expertise."

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