



CAJUN FIDDLE

old & new

recorded & annotated by  
tracy schwarz

with DEWEY BALFA

folkways records fm 8362

M  
1668.8  
B185  
C139  
1977  
MUS LP



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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FM 8362

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Steel Guitar—J. W. Pelisia

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**CAJUN FIDDLE**  
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COVER PHOTO OF DEWEY BALFA & RODNEY BALFA BY CAMILLA SMITH  
COVER DESIGN BY JOHN COHEN

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# CAJUN FIDDLE Old & New with Dewey Balfa

## Recorded & Annotated by Tracy Schwarz

Side A

### Introduction

This record is intended to serve both as an extension of Folkways FM 8361, "Traditional Cajun Fiddle", and also serve as an overview of traditional Cajun fiddling as performed by Dewey Balfa in various places. It is also designed to serve the curious listener and the serious learner at the same time, without going too far in either direction. Most examples are therefore played at normal speed, while on the other hand, they're shortened to allow room for the maximum amount of information possible. For more in either direction, fiddlers should go to the "Traditional Cajun Fiddle" record mentioned above, or listeners should consult various record catalogs like, Swallow, La Louisianne, and Arhoolie.

A1 through A5 are reviews of left hand techniques covered in detail in "Traditional Cajun Fiddle." These techniques are considered essential to the character of the Cajun fiddle because that is how it is always played. (Of course, bowing techniques could not be excluded, but here the emphasis is on the ways of noting the strings.)

If you intend to learn from these examples, simply listen and imitate. Written musical notation is absent here - on purpose. If you need that, you need record number 1, ("Traditional Cajun Fiddle".)

The style of the entire A side can be considered old-time Cajun.

A1 Sliding Notes: "The Port Arthur Blues"

Dewey: "At this time, I'd like to demonstrate to you a method of sliding your fingers on the strings. (Plays example.) "And also go further into this and play a couple of bars of a song titled, "The Port Arthur Blues." (Plays the "Port Arthur Blues.")

Notice how the slides go down as well as up. Little things like this give the Cajun touch. They're done in the place of merely putting the finger straight down on the note. They're an embellishment.

Fiddlers: Do these with the appropriate finger after searching out the correct strings and notes by trial and error play-by-ear methods. (For the appropriate finger, see the chart for this key in booklet for record number 1.) The fiddle is tuned to the "Lower G Standard Tuning" for the entire record here, so that the classical, (universal), key of D fingering comes out here in the key of C. (Not everybody does this, but most do to conform to the C accordions.)

Be careful with the bow. Notice how Dewey does not rush any saw strokes - everything is even and well-pace. The saw strokes give a kind of hop to the rhythm and get people dancing, which is what this music is mostly made for.

A2 Rolling Notes: "Ma Chère Maman Creole"

Dewey: "O.k., at this time, I would like to give you a demonstration of what is referred to as ROLLING NOTES, such as, (plays example). "And go a little further into it and play you a little bit of a song titled, "Ma Chère Maman Creole." (Plays example.)

Instead of sliding, a fiddler can choose to roll into a note, something that gives this fiddle style a gracefulness all its own. The song is one of the best to be heard from the repertoire of Dennis McGee, old-time singer and fiddler, par excellence. The original recording of this by Dennis, is soon to be re-released by Morning Star Records of Nutley, N.J.

Fiddlers: Use 3 or 4 fingers on one string, in quick succession: 1-2-3-4. Roll up to the heavy notes, up to the notes that fall on the heavy beat. You see, the Cajun waltz is tapped out like this:

three-ONE (two is silent) three-ONE three-ONE three-ONE etc.

A3 The Trill: "My Pretty Little Christine"

Dewey: "O.k., at this time, I'd like to introduce and demonstrate to you what is referred to as a TRILL SOUND, and it's something like this, (plays example.) "And go a little further into it and play a song that I remember Daddy used to play for us. It goes something like this." (Plays example, "My Pretty Little Christine.")

The Cajun trill is where three notes are played in the time slot where usually only one is played. Like, F-G-F, real quick. It is a thing of perfect beauty when done right, and is heard so much in Cajun fiddling that it is considered an essential technique.

Fiddlers: This is one of those things that you have to learn by out and out imitation. After you get the feel of it this way, you will notice how you start to do it automatically in certain places - then you're beginning to make music Cajun style.

A4 Blues in Cajun Fiddling: "Les Bars de la Prison" - ("Prison Bars")

Dewey does not introduce this one.

Notice that this song is in waltz time, not the usual 4/4 of the blues. The Blues sound abounds in slides and flatted thirds. A third is the E in the key of C, or B in the key of G.

Cajun music shows quite a few major influences. That of their French heritage, plus songs and tunes from the; American-Scotch-Irish, popular Country-Western, and Black, musical mainstreams. They all merge into one total Cajun sound over the years so that it's hard to tell in some cases, what the source for a particular tune might be. There even was a time, many years ago, that the dance music and singing traditions were separate, not joined as they are today.

A version of, "Les Bars de la Prison" well worth hearing is found on Melodeon MLP 7330. It is sung by Canray Fontenot. Highly recommended.

A5 Drone Sound: "Gran Mamou"

Dewey: "O.k., at this time I'd like to demonstrate to you what is known as a DRONE SOUND." (Plays some drone sounds.) "And go further into it." (Plays, "Gran Mamou.")

A drone is a string played open, (untouched), at the same time as the one next to it. This second string is where the melody is being played, while the first one, the drone, always stays the same. In Country-Western fiddle music you hear double stops that act like drones, but they seldom get spread apart more than 3 to 5 notes at the most, while Cajun music makes special use of drones spread as much as 8, (an octave), or more notes apart. This is why it sounds much different. Later on, we'll see what Dewey has to say about this.

Fiddlers: The value of just plain listening can never be overemphasized. Get ahold of as many examples as you possibly can. Repeated listening must be done to take the place of being born and raised in the tradition. If you come from Cajun country, then you already know what I'm talking about, but otherwise, you have a lot of listening to do. Hopefully this record will point you in the right direction with essentials like these drones.

In our case here, the key of D, the drones that stand out are done on the open G, (2nd string), bowed with the fretted D, (1st string). and the open C, (3rd string), bowed with the fretted G, (2nd string). "Gran Mamou" is a favorite so you'll have to learn it sooner or later anyway. No time better than now!

A6 The Old Lonesome Sound: "La Valse des Bambocheurs"

Dewey: "O.k., this next sound - I have no name for it, so I call it the OLD LONESOME SOUND, and I'd like to give you a demonstration of it by doing a song titled, "La Valse des Bambocheurs," at a very slow speed. (Plays, "La Valse des Bambocheurs", slowly). "I'd like to go into it a little further and ask the rhythm guitar to help me in a little further demonstration, at regular speed now." (Plays, "La Valse des Bambocheurs," at the regular speed.)

This is a very old tune, definitely rare in modern day Cajun music. It's rich modal notes take it even one step farther back than many Appalachian mountain melodies that have become known all over the country. The reason why a scale such as this one falls out of use is that the effect of another instrument, like the accordion, which can only play the notes built into it and nothing in between, is to flatten out the melody, so to speak. In other words, the special notes don't get played so they get forgotten. When you listen to records of the Balfa Brothers, you'll notice on numbers like these that they omit the accordion. This way they get the best of both worlds. Incidentally, Dewey says that it was this song that got them their recording contract with Swallow Records! It can be heard on, Swallow LP 6011, "The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music."

Fiddlers: Pay special attention to the in-between notes, the sharps and flats, the modal D# and G#. These last two are the real core of the sound - they're just a hair above the D and G and you'll get a better sound by sliding into them. This tune is in the key of G.

A7 "Grandpa's Waltz" - at Regular Speed

Dewey does not introduce this one.

On the "Traditional Cajun Fiddle" record, you'll find this tune broken down to its parts in detail and played slowly. Here it is the usual speed, in the key of F, (classical G position in the lower G standard tuning).

During the 1930's, a lot of music was recorded where the fiddling was done in this key. Listen for instance, to the "Old Timey" LP 110 and "Old Timey" LP 111. In present day Cajun fiddling the most popular sound seems to be that made around the open 1st and 2nd strings. In this case, the ringing is produced by unisons which are sounds made by two adjacent strings playing the same note. One of the strings is open and of course, the other, fretted to the same note as the open string. Cajun fiddling has lots of ringing, like other country styles of fiddling, but it's taken farther, sustained for a long time on the very same note to get the most tone possible.

Fiddlers: Pay special attention to the sharps and flats on this one, too. They give the tune some nice surprises. Work on the trill extra hard, and you'll get the exceptional beauty coming out of your fiddle, too.

A8 "La Valse de Gran Bois" - at Regular Speed

Dewey does not introduce this one.

This is a regular speed version of the instructional examples on "Traditional Cajun Fiddle." Dewey and Rodney learned this from their family, but Dewey has given it a special twist by setting it in the key of D, (classical E position, lower G standard tuning). Now it rings twice as much as if it were in the key of C, due again to the unisons. Listen to it also on, Swallow LP 6011.

Fiddlers: In using your classical E position, you'll get the main action of the melody around the 1st string - 1st string open and 2nd fretted up to exactly correspond with the first. But notice in the second part where Dewey holds a finger on the second string and makes a different harmony, that of F# on the 1st string and A on the 2nd, (lower G standard tuning). This key is quite unusual.

A9 "Indian on a Stump"

Also a tune that was broken down in, "Traditional Cajun Fiddle." The reason why it must also be played at regular speed is that only then, will all techniques be accurate and authentic. At an artificially slow speed, the traditional fiddler, automatically introduces other sounds to make it work right at that speed. This way we'll get to hear everything right.

"Indian on a Stump" is a very old tune, possibly coming into Cajun country with Scotch-Irish, or Southern breakdown fiddlers. It sounds something like the Black Mountain Blues and is played in the same tuning. Dewey learned it from an old man by the name of Oscar Fruge, and composed some lyrics to it, which can be heard on the Balfa Brothers Swallow LP 6011.

Fiddlers: Tune your instrument like this: G D G B. Notice the trill in there too, in the first part. Makes it sound just a bit better. Don't rush the bowing on the quick saw strokes. Think of the typical Cajun rhythm and make the saw strokes fit that. The bowing in the third part is a lot of back and forth motions, explained in detail on the first Cajun fiddle record. You could play the record here at slow speed to get a better idea, if you don't have the "Traditional Cajun Fiddle" record.

A10 Description of the Mardi Gras Ceremony and the, "Mardi Gras Song" - 2/14/75

Dewey knows a version of perhaps the oldest song in Cajun country, the Mardi Gras song. But first, in his own words, a description of the ceremony that takes place along with this song.

Q. "About the Mardi Gras song - interesting the way the verses are put together. hey're made up on the spot?"

A. Dewey: "Well, basically, it's a begging song, and see, the Catholics are the ones who brought it over from Europe, over here, it's the Tuesday just before Ash Wednesday, where everybody goes into penitance and period of praying, that's why it's called Mardi Gras, it's Fat Tuesday, so everybody would get together, make it a big feast, so you could eat and have a ball for this last day because tomorrow is Ash Wednesday. In the Catholic faith you can't eat meat, you more or less have to take penitance, fast for the next forty days. The song is a begging song. It goes on first saying about you know, the Mardi Gras are from all over, they gather together, and then later on, usually these are basic verses - the Mardi Gras aren't malfacteurs, (troublemakers), they're just Mardi Gras, you know. You may have heard the words, "tout à l'entour, l'entour du moyeu", it means it's all around, around the hub, and hub is where they started from in the morning, and they go around and round, begging for anything, to have a big feast, you know, chicken, duck, rice, or sausages, or anything to put into this big feast that they're going to have that afternoon, and usually at night they have a dance and the song goes on the then as you get to the farm, there's the captain and co-captain, on reides - the captain rides - in the front with a white flag indication that they're people of peace, and in the back, there's a co-captain and they have other officers elected just like any other organization, and they also have their by-laws, like you can cut-up to an extent, by once the captain has commanded you to quiet down, you had better obey the orders, or you'll be thrown out, and if you're thrown out, that's for all day and you have a hard time getting back in the organization.

For many years, or many times, people would not receive the Mardi Gras, for the simple reason that they will maybe destroy something around the place and if this happens, the following year for instance, the Mardi Gras association of Mamou, if they destroy your property this year or next year, you're definitely not going to receive them. So therefore, these rules are set and like you're authorized to cut up, and beg, it's a begging song, like you know, sometimes they'll even get on their knees, you know, like they're praying, but they're praying or begging with the melody. So there's basically-like the Mardi Gras aren't bad guys, they just come round once a year, begging for charity and so on and so forth. But then you have as we consider better Mardi Gras, (participants), than others, and you're judged then, on the best beggar, the best dressed Mardi Gras, the most comical one, and so on and so forth."

Q. "A'Mardi Gras'is also a person?"

A. Dewey: "Right, sure, and like you know, the New Orleans Mardi Gras is world famous, which we consider down here a very commercial thing, you know, and I was born and raised here, a couple hours, couple three hours from New Orleans, and I've never even attempted to want to go, and, but countryside people have a different thing, they gather together by maybe big groups of maybe 100 or so, 125, sometimes up to 150, horseback riders, costumed, and there's also trucks loaded with costumed people, musicians following around, and it's a big day."

Q. "The people who do the dancing - years ago, did they do as much wiggling as they do now?"

A. Dewey: " I think so, I think I was impressed with this when I was a small boy. I like the idea of Mardi Gras myself. I like to watch them for awhile, but them like some people do, follow them all day, it's just not my kind of thing."

Q. "It seems that kind of dancing is almost like rock."

A. Dewey: "They do anything and everything that they can get by with."

Q. "In many places, this kind of a loose celebration would never be allowed. It's so nice to see that this revolves around the music."

A. Dewey: "You see, this is another thing - that they have a person that governs. You know they have a pickup truck full of iced down beer, they have whiskey, and they have just about anything you want to drink, but then you can't get it when you want. There's a time limit to where you can get a beer or you can get a drink, and if you're, if at any time, you're caught with a bottle of your own, then you're thrown out. Because then you will become too intoxicated or maybe intoxicate somebody else to where you go beyond control, and, really, the idea of a Mardi Gras is for people to get together and have a good time, and if you get too intoxicated, well then, you can't be having a good time. Neither will your friends or the people that you're going around with."

Also, on the subject of verses in general:

Q. "Bluegrass,(music), is very tight - you can't make up words."

A. Dewey: "Cajun music is loose, and it's singing, and also in playing the music."

Q. "Do some singers actually improvise the verses, sort of make them up off the top of their head?"

A. Dewey: "Uh huh."

"The Mardi Gras Song"

(Français)

Les Mardi Gras ça vient de tout partout  
Tout à l'entour, l'entour du moyeu  
Ça passent une fois par an  
Demander la charité  
Quand même si c'est une poule maigre  
Et trois où quatre couton mais.  
Les Mardi Gras c'est pas des malfacteurs  
C'est juste de chemandeurs  
Capitaine Sonstin le demande au maître et la maîtresse  
La permission d' rentrer pour demander la charité.  
Capitaine, Capitaine, voyage ton flag  
Allons chez l'autre voisin  
Demander la charité et là les inviter  
Et là les inviter, que ça vient au gumbo ce soir.

(English)

The Mardi are coming from all around,  
All around, all around the hub.  
They pass once a year  
To ask for charity,  
Even if it's a skinny chicken  
Or three or four ears of corn.

The Mardi Gras are not trouble makers,  
They're just beggars,  
Captain Sostin asks the master and mistress  
For their permission to come in and ask for charity.

Captain, Captain, wave your flag,  
Let's go to the other neighbor's place  
To ask for charity and then invite them,  
And then invite them to come to the gumbo tonight.

All "Mardi Gras Song" Mamou Mardi Gras 2/14/75

One of the most picturesque celebrations that takes place in Cajun country is that of the Mamou Mardi Gras, where the participants are on horse back. Here is a live recording of the band that rode in a sound van and provided music for the Mardi Gras. It was encouraging to see that the accordion player and one of the fiddlers, were young people and that they were continuing the survival of such an old song. In the confusion of all the gaiety, the musicians were only identified as follows, by name, but unfortunately, not with corresponding instruments:

Hampton Israel Dennis Israel Michael Reed Rodney Reed Norris Fontenot

The Mamou Mardi Gras Song  
Mamou, 1975

This version has a different melody and slightly different words than Dewey's. Some years ago, Dewey recorded a 45 rpm record of the song that's quite unusual and now unavailable. The instruments were accordion, and rhythm beaten out by Dewey on some sort of pot or tub, (due to the absence of other musicians), and was a composite of the two versions on this record. The accordion took the breaks with this Mamou Mardi Gras version, and Dewey sang his melody, done here in A10! But there are more than just two versions of this song sung around Cajun country too - almost one for every singer.

The Mardi Gras Song

(Français)

Les Mardi Gras sont dessus un grand voyage  
Tout à l'entour, l'entour du moyeu  
Ça passent une fois par an pour demander la charité  
Quand même si un 'tite patate, un patate et des gratons.

Capitaine, Capitaine, voyage ton flag,  
Allons se mettre dessus le chemin  
Les Mardi Gras ça passent une fois toutes les ans  
Ça passent une fois par an, demander la charité.

Les Mardi Gras, ça devient de l'Angleterre  
Tout à l'entour, l'entour du moyeu  
Ça passent une fois par an, demander la charite  
Quand meme (si) une 'tite poule grasse et trois ou quatre coton mais.

Les Mardi Gras sont pas des malfacteurs, ils sont juste des chemandeurs  
Capitaine Sostin demande oui au maître et la maîtresse  
La permission de rentrer pour demander la charité.

Capitaine, Capitaine, voyage ton flag,  
Allons aller chez l'autre voisin  
Les Mardi Gras oui ça passent une fois toutes les ans  
Ça passent une fois par an, demander la charité  
Quand meme se ça serait un poulet pour faire un bon gumbo.

(English)

The Mardi Gras are on a long trip  
All around, all around the hub,  
They go once a year to ask for charity,  
Even if it's a potato, a potato and some cracklins.

Captain, Captain, wave your flag,  
Let's get on the road,  
The Mardi Gras go by once every year  
They go by once a year to ask for charity.

The Mardi Gras come from England  
All around, around the hub,  
They go by once a year, to ask for charity  
Even if it's a little fat hen and three or four ears of corn.

The Mardi Gras are not trouble makers, they're just beggars  
Captain Sostin asks the master and mistress  
For permission to come in to ask for charity.

Captain, Captain, wave your flag  
Let's go to the other neighbor's place  
The Mardi Gras do go by once a year, every year  
They go by once a year to ask for charity  
Even if it would be a chicken to make a good gumbo.

Side B

#### Introduction

In February, 1975, a trip to the Basile, Louisiana area was made in order to work with Dewey Balfa to produce an instructional LP especially for Cajun fiddling. In the process, much live, on-the-scene material was recorded that later proved more than adequate for a second album of examples. Furthermore, it was obvious that the second side of the LP could be made up entirely of modern Cajun dance-hall and radioshow appearances with Dewey starring on fiddle. That's what's coming now. B1 through B5 were recorded at the live radio show in Basile, and B6, 7, and 8, took place at a dance hall. The style of music is definitely modern Cajun with electrically amplified instruments and drums, yet still reminiscent of earlier years. The wide range of repertoire and musical experience of Dewey and his brother Rodney, do much to explain this. In fact, they span the gap between old-time and modern Cajun music styles quite well.

As before, these recordings are meant to serve the double purpose of providing background on the surroundings of the fiddle style and also actual examples for learners to imitate.

B1 The Basile Cajun Hour: Introductions, "La Valse de Reno," Interview

Saturday in Cajun country is traditionally very active. In 1975, Dewey had two radio shows and a dance every Saturday and by hunting over the dial one could find other shows, too. The Basile Cajun Hour is special in terms of what is to be found nowadays on the AM broadcast band in the USA - it's live, almost a thing of the past in most areas, and it takes place in a bar with a dance floor. Nothing dull about this. The establishment, C.C.'s Lounge, looks quite ordinary from the outside and at 4:45 pm was almost empty. However, at 5 pm, it was jam-packed with happy, noisy, listeners, and dancers. Most of the selections are intended to be for dancing and the band is set up that way - electric pick-ups on all instruments and drums for a heavy beat. The tempo is either waltz or two-step, and the waltzes are favored 2 to 1. Musically, the accordion is the leader of the band, taking the intro of each tune to set the time. It's here that you'll be likely to hear much Country/Western influence, and in fact, later on Rodney sang a Hank Williams song totally in English and neither he nor the band drew attention to that fact - they just threw themselves into it with the same abandon as always because they liked the song.

Here is what happens, in French and English. Special thanks to Gerard Dole, of Paris, France, for transcribing the French lyrics and announcements.

Dewey: "Cet après midi encore, le temps pour les Cajuns de Basile et à l'entour se mettre ensemble comme on fait tous les samedis après midi; et après midi, on a avec nous autres sur l'accordeon, Mr. Allie Young, dessus la guitare mon p'tit frere Rodney, dessus les drems on a mon p'tit pardnan Weston Bergeaux.

On va r'tourner avec d'aut' musique boys, qui en a qui vient?"

Allie Young: "La Valse de Reno."

Dewey: "La Valse de Reno!"

Rodney:

Oui, la place que moi j'voudrais mourir  
C'est dans les bras d'mon 'tit bébé  
Je d'mander pardon pour ça j'ai fait,  
Là j's'rais d'accord de m'en aller  
Mais pour toujours.

T'es petite, catin, et t'es mignonne  
T'es trop adorable, bébé, pour toi tu r'viens pas  
Tu r'viens pas avec moi à la maison.

Dewey: "Ça c'est beau un tas; chere belle valse de Reno!"

(English)

Dewey: "Once more this afternoon it's time for the Cajuns of Basile and surrounding areas to get together as we do each Saturday afternoon; and this afternoon, we have with us on accordion, Mr. Allie Young, on the guitar my younger brother, Rodney, on the drums we have my good partner, Weston Bergeaux. Let's return to more music, boys. What's coming up?"

Allie Young: "La Valse de Reno."

Dewey: "La Valse de Reno!"

Rodney:

Yes, the place where I'd like to die,  
It's in the arms of my little baby  
To ask forgiveness for what I did  
Then I would agree to go away forever.

You're little, honey, and you're sweet  
You're too adorable, baby, to do that  
How is it, little girl, that you won't come back  
You won't come back home with me.

Dewey: "That's real nice; the dear, beautiful Reno waltz."

On February 14, 1975, Dewey was interviewed on the subject of modern Cajun music and how it differs from old-time Cajun style. His words go a lot farther in accurately describing the scene than anything else that could be written, and therefore the whole interview is given here.

Q. "I was interested in the instruments that are used in modern Cajun music, and how they're different from what's used in the traditional Cajun or acoustic (music). Since it does make a difference in the sound modern Cajun music gets."

A. Dewey: "Well, the fiddle, there's a built-in pickup built into the bridge, and then you use an amplifier, like, you know, those big expensive amplifiers have all kinds of controls that you can change the sound of your instrument almost from one extreme to the other. This would give you a difference in a fiddle. A guitar is the same way, it being amplified rhythm guitar. You also use drums and electric steel, (guitar), and then many, many times you'll find that have electric bass guitar in the more modern stuff. You will also find that in a modern Cajun group you'll find some of them use two fiddles and second fiddle in a Cajun group is - plays a different part than he does in a traditional group, by playing on a higher or tenor part of the song. Which more like sort of blends one into the other, but the second fiddle plays higher."

Q. "How about the fiddle - the only difference is that it's got a pickup added?"

A. Dewey: "That's all."

Q. "How about the tunings - are there any different kinds of tunings?"

A. Dewey: "Well, if you used an accordion, like you use a D accordion, then you would be Standard A 440 tuning on your fiddle. Then if you use a C accordion

your fiddle is tuned down to a lower standard G. And by doing this you get the double open string effect which gives the, I think, unique sound of Cajun fiddling. In some cases, very few sases, you'll find that some of the fiddlers will play a standard A 440 tuning even though it is a C accordion. But then you have a lot of Country sound. Of course in the more modern groups you'll find some that wants this sound because these musicians, the more uptown sound, by doing this."

Q. "The guitar - is it usually a solid body guitar like Tuesday night, or does it make a difference?"

A. Dewey: "Well, it's a mixture, but I find that a box guitar, even though its amplified, gives you a more bass sound, more down to earth sound. I personally don't care for an electric solid body, it just don't give the sound quality that I like. Some people use them, not very many, at one time they used them quite a bit, but they're coming back to the box guitar."

Q. "How about the Bastrange,(triangle)?"

A. Dewey: "The Bastrange is not used in a modern Cajun group."

Q. "I wonder why?"

A. Dewey: "To me, I think when people want to do modern music they want to get away from the second fiddle bassing, they want to get away from the Bastrange, and they want to be more, like I say, more uptown, more modern, and they don't use the Bastrange, or spoons."

Q. "So, in the past, spoons were played a lot in Cajun music?"

A. Dewey: "Oh yes. Spoons and triangle, occasionally they would use a rub board. Sometime they would just use a pot or pan or a tub for rhythm, in the traditional sound, I'm talking about."

Q. "So if a band is modern, you say they want to be uptown, where do they go to find the uptown sounds to put together with the Cajun sound?"

A. Dewey: "I think it's dependent a lot on Country sound. The sounds of Country music is worked into Cajun sound, which means a combination of Cajun-Country, or maybe some Bluegrass sound, which created a modern Cajun sound. For instance, like I know, my friend Doug Kershaw, plays fiddle, he plays sort of a Nashville type of fiddling, but he fiddles Cajun music, so therefore, this would be called a more uptown fiddling, such as, Rufus Thibodeaux, and Merlin Fonteneau, those would be called more of the uptown fiddlers, just to name a few."

Q. "Do they ever use any Rock?"

A. Dewey: "I can't say that. I don't think they do."

Q. "So you mostly think of it as taking on Nashville music?"

A. Dewey: "Right. Nashville-Country. I found this. I found that when a fiddler, especially, gets to play the Cajun-Country sound then he can at no time come back to his original Cajun sound because there's a certain something that you have to do to play Country or modern Cajun. For some reason, you can't come back to the original sounds. It's beyond my knowledge of explanation, but I can hear it in those fellows' fiddling."

Q. "Well you seem to be able to bridge the gap pretty well. When you're playing with a modern band, like Tuesday night, do you consider that you're still playing traditional,(fiddle), with a pickup, or do you feel that you've changed your playing somewhat when you get on a bandstand with them?"

A. Dewey: "I still feel, and like to think, that I'm still playing traditional, rather than Country, rather than Uptown Cajun fiddling."

Q. "I was kind of thinking Tuesday night, too, it's amazing, the combination of drums, and fiddle, it, I guess in some places they survive together like that, but in a lot of places when you get a band with a drum in it and an electric guitar, well, you never see a fiddle any more. I wonder what is, why is it that the fiddle is able to survive in modern Cajun music?"

A. Dewey: "Well, to me it - if you haven't got a fiddle, you haven't got Cajun. It's - to me that's how I feel. If you were to go play a Cajun music without a fiddle, it would be like trying to swim with no water!"

Q. "Do you think that most of the people in the audience or the dancers, people dancing, feel that way about it too? Would they miss the fiddle?"

A. Dewey: "Oh yes. I think that is one of the purposes for wanting to do this album, we're working on it so bad, to try to create an interest in getting people, younger people, to learn to play the fiddle. Seems like over here, they seem to think that fiddle is so hard to do, to play, it's much easier to a hold of a guitar and once the guitar is tuned, then all you have to know is the position of a chord and you have your sound, being it's fretted. Where the fiddle is very hard to find the sounds, it's not fretted, and therefore, I think it's been pushed aside by our younger generation. I hate to see this happen because, like I said, to me, a Cajun - what you refer to as a Cajun band, wouldn't be a Cajun band, if you haven't got a fiddle in it."

Q. "What about the chords that are used - do you use more chords, in the songs for modern Cajun?"

A. Dewey: "I use chords in bassing, in playing I don't think I use more chords either one way or the other. I like to think that, when I'm playing, I like to think I'm using what scale I got. Occassionally - you were talking about if I felt if I was playing more tradition than modern when I was playing with a modern group. At a few times, I find myself maybe giving a couple of strokes on the fiddle, on the tenor part, sort of like to give a punch to the singer or maybe the other lead instrument, whenever I'm following, you know, when the steel is playing, singer's singing' or maybe when the accordion is leading, I sometimes catch myself - like, doing a little run on the tenor part, sort of like giving it punch. I don't do that often, but occassionally I do it."

Q. "How about the backup musicians - so they use more chords in the modern band-more than the usual three?"

A. Dewey: "You can. Sometimes it's done, not very often. I can think of one song that when I learned we wouldn't use a chord that we use now. We use it because we've heard the other musicians use the chord. It's sort of an unusual chord. Let me show you on the fiddle - it's a song titled, "T'es petit et t'es mignonne," and if you listen to it on our first album, you won't hear the A chord in there. (Demonstrates on fiddle, playing a relative minor chord). It wasn't originally there."

B2 Basile Cajun Hour: Commercials, Station Identification, "Madeleine"

Dewey: "... t'après écouter l'heure des cajuns de Basile, en vie et direct de Grand Basile, et tout ça après arriver ici au C.C.'s Lounge, ici à Grand Basile.

Y reste toufours une demi-heure qu'est toujours plein de temps pour venir nous rejoindre et avoir un bon temps."

"A c't'heure, les troisième quinze minutes du programme va êt' donné à vous autres par: Le Hébert's I.G. Foodstore, ici à Basile dessus le coin Stagg et Fuselier et puis le Basile State Bank, ça c'est la banque de tout le monde ici à Basile, le Oliver-Minneapolis-Moline White Farm Implement a one-oh-one East Laurel à Eunice et puis le Basile Exxon Café, a c't'heure couru et manoeuvré par Dottie et Sherman Pellocan."

On va r'tourner... ah ben ça va plus loin, j'crois, j'avais parler un 'tit brin du...non, on va jouer de la musique. Quoi ç'y en a qui vient? Un p'tit bout de 'Madeleine' qui vient, alright,on va jouer ça pour nos bons amis."

"Madeleine"

Rodney:

"Oh, Madeleine, t'as couché dehors,  
Oh, Madeleine, dehors dans l' grand brouillard  
Oh, Madeleine, quoi faire toi t'es comme ça, bébé  
Oh, Madeleine, moi j'connais tu vas m'faire mourir.  
Oh, Madeleine, t'as couché dehors  
Oh, Madeleine, dehors dans l' grand brouillard  
Oh, Madeleine, quoi faire toi tu r'viens pas bébé  
Oh ma Madeleine, moi j'connais tu casses mon coeur."

Dewey: "Alright, ça c'est bien bon cher!"

(English)

Dewey: "...you're listening to the Basile Cajun Hour, live and direct from Grand Basile, and all this is happening here at the C.C.'s Lounge, here in Grand Basile. There is still a good half an hour left which is a lot of time to come over and have a good time.

Friends, we'd like to remind you that you're listening to the brightest spot on your radio dial: 1490, KEUN, Eunice, Louisiana, and you're listening to the Basile Cajun Hour, originating here in good old Basile, Louisiana, at C.C.'s Lounge, where everybody has a great time every Saturday afternoon from 5 to 6. With yours truly, Dewey Balfa.

And now, the next fifteen minutes of the program will be given to you by: Hebert's Foodstore, herein grand Basile, on the corner of Stagg and Fuselier; and also, the Basile State Bank, everybody's bank here in Basile; the Minneapolis-Moline White Farm Implement at 101 East Laurel, in Eunice; and also, the Basile Exxon Cafe, run now by Dottie and Sherman Pellocan.

And now to go back... ah well, moving on, I think I'll talk a little bit about the... now, let's play some music. What's coming up? A little bit of 'Madeleine.' alright, we'll play this for our good friends."

" Madeleine"

Rodney:

"Oh, Madeleine, you went to bed outdoors,  
Oh, Madeleine, outdoors in a big fog  
Oh, Madeleine, why are you like that, baby  
Oh, my Madeleine, I know you're going to make me die.

Oh, Madeleine, you went to bed outdoors  
Oh, Madeleine, outdoors in a big fog  
Oh, Madeleine, why don't you come back, baby  
Oh, my Madeleine, I know you're breaking my heart."

Dewey: "Alright! that's very good, dear!"

B3 "99 Years Waltz"

A few words to the fiddlers before we get to the words of this well-known waltz; in Cajun country, fiddlers often keep a piece of string tied to the soundpost, with an end coming out of each F hole. This is so they can readjust the post should the fiddle become unbalanced. According to an interview of Dewey made by Gerard Dole of Paris, France, there is a definite method to determine when the fiddle is in balance: Play the unison on the 1st and 2nd strings, i.e., 1st string open, D on the 2nd, (lower G standard tuning). If they are of the same intensity, then they are balanced. Check this out on the 2nd and 3rd, and the 3rd and 4th strings too. You'll know if the fiddle isn't balance, if the post is too far to the right, the bass strings will be different, i.e., too weak or too loud, with the treble strings too weak. Move the post to the LEFT, (looking at the fiddle as you would be playing), until the 2nd string has the same intensity as the third. Don't move it too far, just a hair. A little goes a LONG way.

In Cajun country, the soundpost is called the, "tit bonhomme."

"The 99 years Waltz"

(French)

Dewey:

"J'suis parti, tit monde, m'en aller  
M'en aller moi tout seul à la maison  
Tu voudrais, bébé, t'en r'venir  
T'en r'venir avec moi, moi j'serais content, yeyai.

Oh, yeyai, j'suis condamné  
Condamné pour quatre vingt dix neuf ans  
C'est pas de toi, chër, que j'vas m'ennuyer  
De mes chers 'tits enfants qu'ils misèrent, oh yeyai"

Dewey: "Alright, ça c'est une jolie danse qu'on aime jouer aussi."

"The 99 Years Waltz"

(English)

Dewey:

"I'm on my way, little world, to go away  
To go away all alone back home  
(If) you'd like, baby, to come back,  
To come back with me I'd be happy, yeyai.

Oh yeyai, I have been condemned,  
Condemned for 99 years  
I'll not miss you, dear,  
It's my dear little children, who will be miserable, yeyai.

Dewey: "Alright, that's a beautiful dance that we also like to play."

B4 "The Cajun From Church Point"

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, in Cajun country, a new interest in the music sprung up, and records soon hit this local market in great numbers. Artists like, Nathan Abshire, and Iry LeJeune on accordion, and Harry Choats on fiddle became local stars with regional hits recorded in French for Cajun audiences. This recorded music reflected changes in the style and new influences, and continues to do so today. This song appealed to somebody in its original form, "Oakie From Muskogee," by Merle Haggard, but was re-written to show a strong, positive statement of self-pride in the Cajun culture with a background of the lively, typically repetitive Cajun bounce. Now it sounds just like it originated in Basile!

It definitely appealed to the people at C.C.'s lounge, for Dewey announced that they were going to do an encore of the number.

"Cajun From Church Point"

(Français)

Dewey: "Ça vient un tit repeat dessus les Cajuns de Church Point!"

Rodney:

"Moi j'suis content d'etre un cajun de Church Point. (Dewey: "De Grand Basile!")  
Et où tout l'monde mais s'amuse  
Ça mange du boudin tous les samedis,  
And love is the biggest thrill of all.

Moi j'suis content d'etre un cajun d'grand Mamou. (Dewey: "De Grand Basile!")  
Et où tout l'monde mais s'amuse  
Ça mange du boudin sur la grand rue  
And love is the biggest thrill of all."

(English)

Dewey: "Here comes a little more of the "Cajuns From Church Point"

Rodney:

"I'm glad to be a Cajun from Church Point. (Dewey: "from Grand Basile!")  
Where everybody has a good time  
They eat french sausage every Saturday  
And love is the biggest thrill of all.

I'm glad to be a Cajun from Grand Mamou. (Dewey: "from Grand Basile!")  
Where everybody has a good time  
You eat French sausage on main street  
And love is the biggest thrill of all."

B5 "Allons à Lafayette"

Dewey sings a song here that has been around Cajun country for a long time, and is known by all. In fact, the first Cajun 78 rpm record was of this song, sung and played on accordion by Joe Falcon. Allie Young's breaks sound quite a bit like the original recording. Dewey plays perhaps one of his best breaks of the day on this number. The rhythm is exactly right and his bowing and noting are very precise.



(Français)

Dewey:

"Jeunes gens de la campagne  
Suivez tous mes conseils  
Garde donc ça moi j'ai fait  
J'mis une femme dans les misères  
J'mis une femme dans les misères  
Et les enfants sont bleues  
Fait pas tout ça mon nègre\*  
R'viens dans Lafayette.

Allons à Lafayette..."

\* A few notes here -if you already have heard a good bit of Cajun music, you probably know that "mon negre", is literally "my Negro." An expression of affection, approximation the English "buddy", or "hoss", or "you old rascal," etc. Many times its function in a song is to fill in the phrasing, to make the meter of the words fit the rhythm exactly. Other words of this type are; "mais", "moi", "bebe", "'tite fille", and many others. It might help here also to understand that many, many Cajun songs are composed by putting together a series of phrases, rather than by taking the words piece by piece and fitting them into the rhythm like the pieces of a puzzle. In this way, it's possible for the singer to use almost any set of phrases, and therefore any words in any song as long as they fit the rhythm. This is why it would be false to say "these are the words to, "Allons a Lafayette." It's often true that each time a certain singer does the song he changes verses to suit himself at that moment, although something of the main theme of the song is retained. So therefore, it would be more accurate to say "these are the words that Dewey sang on the afternoon of February 15, 1975."

B6 Interview on Cajun Singing: "J'aimerais Te Pardonner"

Q. "Now about the singing - it's pretty typical of Cajun singing to sing high, kind of intense. It's a predominant sound anyway. Does that change with the modern bands? Do they want to get smooth like Jim Reeves, or something like that, or do they still keep that high singing?"

A. Dewey: "High singing is pretty much kept up. Seems like if you're singing to the people down here, if you're singing a song at a low level of voice, you're really not singing Cajun spirit, you know. And I think that, I think, I'm not telling you something that I know for certain, but I think that the idea of singing high and having a strong voice became popular during the old days when they had no amplification, and they would use a D accordion, and like you know a D accordion is on the same scale as a D ten hole harmonica, so you're limited on the keys you can play, and so therefore you're playing most of your songs in the key of A, and to sing in the key of A, you have to have good lungs and a good throat, and then when the fellows that could sing behind the D accordion, which was singing in A, meant that he had a strong voice, good throat, that his voice would carry more, and the people would refer to this guy, to this person, and say, boy!, can he sing! And then, from then on, everybody wanted to sing high, strong and loud. I think that's why the high-pitched voice in Cajun music originated."

Q. "Talking about the Cajun yell, what's it all about?"

A. Dewey: "Well, Tracy, as you know, music to us down here means a whole lot, just like I know music means to you people up in your section of the country.. To us, music will move us very, very strongly, whether you're a musician or just a person listening to music. And it affects you like, you know, both ways sometimes it can affect you as in sorrow - you know - you hear a song that really moves you and it reminds you of something - of sorrow - or it can move you in a way of joy. And I'd like to say this, that it moves you and it builds up within you, and I'd like to say if you don't let it out, it's just going to smother you! You gotta let it out, and then when you do that you relieve the pressure, whether joy, or - by listening to the sound that you like so dearly.

The song that Dewey sings a verse from here comes from the Country/

(English)

Dewey:

"Young men from the country  
Follow all my advice  
Look at what I've done  
I've put my wife in misery  
I've put my wife in misery  
And the children are blue  
Don't do that buddy\*  
Come back to Lafayette.

Let's go back to Lafayette..."

Western hit parade. It was originally, "Help Me Make It Through the Night," composed by super-star, Kris Kristofferson. The theme of the original, (and of course the language, English), has been discarded in all but a few similarities, as was also the tempo of the hit. Now we have a song in popular Cajun waltz time with the words entirely in French and entirely new. So not only is this a good example of actual Cajun dance hall music, but also, on a larger scale, a key to the process that has changed much of the outside influences coming to Cajun country from their former sound into a new expression of a tradition that is old. All the better because we're familiar with the outside source, the hit, and we can see the contrast quite well.

"J'aimerais Te Pardonner"

(Français)

Dewey:

"Viens t'assir dessus mon lit, bebe,  
Mets ta chere joue contre la mienne  
Oh, j'aim'rais passer mes mains  
Dedans tes chers grands ch'veux  
Et la, j'aimerais t'attendre, me dire,  
Que t'as du r'gret pour ça t'as fait  
La, moi, j's'rais pare pour pardonner  
Pour tout ça tu m'as fait."

(English)

Dewey:

"Come and sit on my bed, baby,  
Put your dear cheek next to mine,  
Oh, I'd love to run my hands  
Through your dear long hair  
And then, I would love to hear you tell me  
That you're sorry for what you did,  
Then I'd be ready to forgive  
All that you did to me."

Note: This was recorded at the Mardi Gras dance at Lakeview Park, Eunice, Louisiana. Tuesday, February 11, 1975. The band personnel were:

Dewey - fiddle  
J.W. Pelisia - steel guitar  
Ray Abshire - accordion

Dale Breaux - electric rhythm guitar  
Weston Bergeaux - drums

B7 Interview on Cajun Dances: "Jolie Blon"

These next two selections are both done at the same dance hall, the following Saturday, February 15, 1975, with the same personnel as in B6.

Since these last three tunes are from a dance, it would be only right to see what Dewey has to say about the different kinds of dances over the years that have done so much to continue the tradition of this kind of music.

Q. "I'm told there's a difference between 'dance' and 'Fais-do-do'."

A. Dewey: "Well Tracy, there's a difference because the occasion is different. You see, in the olden days when the hardly had any dancehalls, there would be a community dancing like where you would only go by invitation. And then there was a fais-do-do, but I want th explain the word. Fais-do-do means 'go to sleep,' The occasion of a fais-do-do was when you were invited and you could bring the childre. So while the old folks were dancing, cutting up, having a great time in the front room where they'd thaken all the furniture out, then the little ones was put to bed in the back room. So this was a fais-do-do occasion. Now, the next occasion was where the children weren't invited; in others words, you could go if you were invited, you could go to this dance, a house dance, but then if the children wasn't invited then it wasn't a fais-do-do, it was just a house dance. Then later on came the night clubs. Definatly the children aren't allowed in there. But I can remember when I was a young fellow, there were dance halls, like Saturday night dance halls, which was fais-do-do dance halls, even after the night clubs come out. And when the night clubs, what called night clubs, first were established, a person like a woman who would be a lady of respect wouldn't dare go in a night club, and in the olden days, well, it wasn't so olden days when I was still a young man, no way a girl could go out without being excorted by an older brother, or mama or daddy, or maybe an uncle, aunt, and she went to the Fais-do-do, where the children was brought, a lot of times the children was brought to the Saturday night dancehalls, the cheldren was brought, like there were benches, they were no tables then, hardly no refreshments at all, other than lemonade and stuff like that, but the ladies, they'd sit, there'd be benches built around the huge dancehall, the ladies would sit there with their children, while the men folk would be outside, maybe seeing about the little little bottle they were nursing, and there were also what they referred to as the pen. When you got to the dance hall, sometimes the weather was bad, sometimes you didn't have the dime or fifteen cents to pay fo the

entry fee. So they had a fence built where the old married people and the boys that couldn't afford or didn't have the money to go in, well then you could still be there watching the people dancing and listen to the music, but you had to be in the pen. They had a fee at the gate when you come in and most of time, like the dance would last to twelve o'clock, well, if a boy didn't have the money he'd just stand there, maybe watch his girlfriend dancing in the hall, see the ladies didn't pay to come in, and then at about 10, 10:30, quarter to eleven or 11 o'clock, they would let everybody come in, the young people, the married people; a married person wasn't allowed to dance among the young people."

"Jolie Blon"

Perhaps the most famous of the Cajun waltzes, "Jolie Blon", (or "Blonde"), has been recorded and recorded over the years, with versions like those of the Hackberry Ramblers, Leo Soileau, and more recently, Harry Choates becoming regional hits. Entertainers like Harry Choates were established in the national Country/Western field also, (a necessity for the professional), thereby carrying the tune well beyond the borders of Cajun country. Dewey plays it here with his dance band as he does every Saturday night, the same, and yet, different. He considered this song important enough to be placed as tune #2 on the "Traditional Cajun Fiddle" album. Those familiar with this first record will now have a live, on the scene, version with enough differences and contrasts to provide even more material for new ideas.

Sometimes you can take a rest and listen to these last three bands just to concentrate on what the steel guitar is doing, played by J.W. Pelisia. Much of what he does is truly Country/Western, 1950's Nashville, but only in basic licks, or techniques. The execution is without a doubt real Cajun steel guitar playing. A survey of modern Cajun records will prove this - there really exists a definite Cajun steel guitar style.

Dewey pointed out how this instrument parallels the function of the old-time Cajun second fiddle, bassing chords as a fill-in behind the singing or instrumental break of another member of the band. The steel is doing so much that it must be considered basic to this sound.

"Jolie Blon"

(Français)

Dewey:

"Jolie Blon, ma chère joues roses  
Gardez donc, ça t'après m'faire  
T'après m'quitter moi tout seul dans les miseres, bébé,  
Quel espoir et quel avenir, tu veux j'peux avoir, yai.

Joli Blon, mourir ça s'rait pas à rien  
C'est d'rester dans la terre aussi longtemps  
Moi, j'vois pas que faire donc, tu t'en r'viens pas, bébé,  
T'en'venir avec moi dans la Louisianne, yai."

(English)

Dewey:

"Pretty blonde, my dear rosy cheeks,  
Take a look at what you're doing to me,  
You're leaving me all alone and miserable, baby,  
What hope and what future do you think I can have, yai.

Pretty blonde, to die would be nothing,  
It's to stay under the ground for so long,  
I really don't see why you don't come back, baby,  
Come back with me in Louisiana, yai."

B8 "Johnny Can't Dance" (Instrumental)

The last, and perhaps the most rhythmic selection on this side of the record is an instrumental, led here by Ray Abshire on the accordion. Dewey takes his break in measured fashion, never rushing, careful to accentuate the outstanding parts of the tune totally in time with the rest of the band. Every note, every stroke is locked solidly into the rhythm so that the band can join with Dewey to give the tune and tempo the kind of power that drives people all over the dance floor.

For a contrast in accordion styles, listen to versions recorded by Aldus Roger, a modern style player, and Roy Brulé, and old-timer who recorded a long and energetic, "Johnny Can't Dance," on Folkways FE 4438.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING SOURCES

As stated in the "Traditional Cajun Fiddle" record, there is no substitute for listening, listening, listening. Here is a list of places where you can order Cajun records:

The following records can be ordered directly from Dewey at:

Dewey Balfa  
P.O. Box 575  
Basile, La., 70515

Swallow 6011 - "The Balfa Bros. Play Traditional Cajun Music"

Swallow 6019 - "The Balfa Bros. Play More Traditional Cajun Music"

Swallow 6020 - "J'etais Au Bal - Music From French Louisiana"

Many other records of Cajun music are available on the Swallow, Folkways, La Louisianne, Arhoolie, Old Timey, and Morning Star labels. Two good mail order houses recommended for these LP's are:

Round-up Record Cooperative  
Box 474  
Somerville, Mass. 02144

Country Record Sales  
Box 191  
Floyd, V.A. 24091

An excellent book all about the history and music of the people is: "Tears, Love and Laughter: The Story of the Cajuns", by Pierre V. Daigle (Rte. 3, Box 362, Church Point, La., 70525).

Any questions can be answered by writing either to Dewey at his address given above, or to:

Tracy Schwarz  
RD 1  
Brodbecks, P.A. 17308

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