

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RBF 21

The Cajuns
Songs, Waltzes,
& Two-Steps

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY
SAMUEL CHARTERS



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Cover photo by Ann Charters

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CYLNE

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SIDE 1

- Band 1. La Two-Step A Erby - Thibodeaux Boys
- Band 2. St Tu Voudroit Marriez Avec Moi - Joe's Acadians
- Band 3. Cajun Crawl - Hackberry Ramblers
- Band 4. Te Ma Lessa Jolie Blonds - Miller's Merry-makers
- Band 5. Lafayette - Joseph F. Falcon
- Band 6. 'Rang 'Rang Bully - Joe Werner and Ramblers
- Band 7. Tu Pen Pas Ma Retter De Revere - Thibodeaux Boys

SIDE 2

- Band 1. La Two-Step A' Chachin - Joe's Acadians
- Band 2. Crap Shooters Hop - Joe Werner and Ramblers
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- Band 4. The Waltz That Carried Me To My Grave - Joseph F. Falcon
- Band 5. Jolie Petite Blonde - The Alley Boys of Abbeville
- Band 6. Tu Peu Depend Si Moi - The Alley Boys of Abbeville
- Band 7. La Breakdown A Pete - Hackberry Ramblers

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If you drive out of New Orleans, going toward Lafayette in western Louisiana, you notice after forty or fifty miles that the names on the grocery stores have started to change. Instead of the Anglo-American names that are characteristic of the South, by the time you get to New Iberia or Morgan City the names have become a kind of American French - Sonnier, or Guidry, Valentin, or Darbone. The same wooden-sided stores, the same gasoline stations with their old tires and oil cans and advertisements that you see everywhere in Louisiana, but the faces are different - thinner, the hair blacker, and if you're off the main road - back into the sugar cane fields of the bayous - there is an intent, appraising look if you have to stop for gasoline or a beer. In many of the small towns it's hard to find people who will speak English. Even if they know it there isn't much interest in strangers. These small towns were French before Louisiana was sold to the United States, and the people in them have never forgotten their past and their traditions.

The French were driven to Louisiana by the shifting violence that marked France's and England's struggle for North America. Canada was first New France, and its maritime province - what is now Nova Scotia - was called "Acadie." The first settlement was established in 1632, but there was almost continuous war between the two countries and Acadie changed hands again and again as England weakened the French position everywhere in North America. In 1754 the last struggle began, the French and Indian War, which ended France's domination of all the territory administered to the north of England's seacoast colonies. In 1755, 6000 Acadians were expelled from eastern Canada and scattered through the British colonies as far south as Virginia. In 1758, 3500 others were forced to follow them. Some from both groups struggled through British territory to the French colony to the west, Louisiana, and several hundred people reached the area where they now live. The great majority of the others returned to Canada when the war ended, and they have continued their old culture in isolated towns and villages throughout the province of New Brunswick. In Louisiana the original group was joined by others, most of them settling in St. Mary, Vermilion, and Acadia parishes.

The old settlements still have the character of their first Acadian people - and the term "Cajun" is, of course, a corruption of the original word. There is now a thin line of Cajun communities from the Texas border east to lower Mobile Bay in Alabama. The culture has now been considerably intermingled with the culture of the people who live around them, but there are still elements of language and song that are completely unique. There are strong influences from many sources, especially black music in the years before the second World War, and country and western music since the early '40's, but Cajun music has kept its distinctive nasal vocal style, its parallel harmonic structuring, and its irregular canded dance rhythms. It is still very popular in its area, and there are small bands and local musicians in every community.

SIDE A

Band 1. La Two-Step A Erby - played by the Thibodeaux Boys

Thibodeaux is a small city to the west of New Orleans, though not entirely Cajun in its population, still partly French speaking, and with a number of local musicians. This is from the 1930's, a loose, relaxed group, with fiddle lead, guitars and mandolin. It's a two-step dance rhythm, essentially a ♪♪♪♪, with an accent on the offbeat in the mandolin, and alternate measures of a straight rhythm in quarters, ♪♪♪♪. The cadence is generally extended over an extra measure, making it a nine measure musical phrase - which is one of the distinctive sounds of Cajun music.

Band 2. Si Tu Voudroit Marriez Avec Moi - played by Joe's Acadians

This has an older feeling to the melodic rhythm, and in the generally unaccented rhythm - usually ♪♪♪. The voice and the violin alternate regular phrases that seem to have a very uncertain rhythmic relation to the accompaniment instruments, as though the piece might have been an old waltz changed to a two-step. The recording is again from the 1930's.

Band 3. Cajun Crawl - played by the Hackberry Ramblers

The Ramblers were one of the most successful Cajun bands of the 1930's, and they made a number of recordings, many of them strongly influenced by early Country swing recordings, but still characteristically Cajun in rhythm and melody. The leader and founder of the band

was the fiddler, Luderin Darbone, from Evangeline, Louisiana. He moved into Hackberry, and joined with Ed Duhon, who plays guitar. The third musician in the group was Lennis Sonnier, who played guitar and sang. They were immediately popular, and for some time played regularly on a morning radio show on Station KFDM, a Beaumont, Texas, radio station broadcasting every morning from Lake Charles, Louisiana. In 1935 they moved to Crowley, Louisiana, to be more centrally located, and a few months later did their first recording in New Orleans. The group was still playing in the 1960's, and did a currently available lp for Arhoolie Records, in Berkeley, California. "Cajun Crawl" was one of their dance pieces, the fiddling with a marked country/western influence.

Band 4. Te Ma Lessa Jolie Blond - played by Miller's Merry-makers

"Jolie Blonds" - pretty blonds appear often in Cajun music, and one of the many "Jolie Blond" songs was the closest to a popular success that any Cajun recording has had outside of Louisiana. This is an older song, a heavy waltz with a beat that is slow and almost majestic. The vocal phrasing closely follows the fiddle in its extended tones, and the two alternate regularly throughout the song. The vocal is by J. B. Fuselier.

Band 5. Lafayette - played by Joseph F. Falcon

This is the first Cajun recording, done in 1928. Falcon was born in Rayne, Louisiana in 1900, and began playing the accordian and singing when he was still a young man. His recordings sold very well in their area, and he continued to play and lead an orchestra until his death in Crowley in 1965. His last recordings were done in the Triangle Dance Hall in Scott, Louisiana, on July 2, 1963, and released later on Arhoolie Records. His strongly nasal singing and simple accordian style were an important influence on later Cajun music. The instrument is actually a concertina, rather than an accordian, and it has an extremely limited harmonic range, another one of the music's familiar sounds.

Band 6. 'Rang'Tang Bully - played by Joe Werner and Ramblers

This is an example of an old Anglo-American folk song with Cajun musical elements. The song is known by many names, one of the most common "The Bully Of The Town," but this version sounds like the text has come from minstrel show sources rather than from a purer ballad tradition. As in many other Cajun recordings the melodic harmony often changes before the accompaniment harmonies, giving a feeling of harmonic uneasiness to the piece. The melody

is in unison with fiddle and harmonica, and there are two guitars and a banjo.

Band 7. Tu Pen Pas Ma Retter De Revere - played by the Thibodeaux Boys

Another two-step by the Thibodeaux group.

SIDE B

Band 1. La Two-Step A 'Chachin - played by Joe's Acadians

Again with the extended phrase lengths and delayed cadence of the older style.

Band 2. Crap Shooter's Hop - played by Joe Werner and Ramblers

The source material seems to be white country ragtime, with melodic materials from several rag and black sources. "Tain't Nobody's Business But Mine" and "Dill Pickles Rag" are suggested in the melody. There is no harmonica, just fiddle, two guitars and banjo, in a heavy, almost stiff 4/4.

Band 3. Pine Island - played by Miller's Merry-makers

Two fiddles and two guitars, with singing by J. B. Fuselier. The fiddles play in unison, or in parallel harmonies with the second violin a third below the first. It's another two-step, the rhythm generally unaccented.

Band 4. The Waltz That Carried Me To My Grave - played by Joseph F. Falcon

Similar in style to Falcon's "Lafayette."

Band 5. Jolie Petite Blonde

Band 6. Tu Peu Depend Si Moi - both played by The Alley Boys of Abbeville

Abbeville is another small city to the west of New Orleans. The band has fiddle, banjo, and electric guitar, with vocals by Murphy Guidry. This is more modern Cajun music, with a definite country swing style in the fiddle, and a more open, less nasal, vocal tone. "Jolie Petite Blonde" is in a very heavy 4/4, with considerable influence from the black blues of the period and a heavy accent on the 1st and 3rd beats of the measure.

Band 7. La Breakdown a Pete - played by the Hackberry Ramblers

An instrumental with a repetitive melody that has slight variations in embellishment to keep it from becoming monotonous. It's similar to a later popular song with the title "Dance With A dolly With A Hole In Her Stocking."