CLIFTON CHENIER
"Zydeco Sont Pas Sale" – King of the Real Creole French Zydeco

1. ZYDECO SONT PAS SALE
(Snap Beans Not Salty)
2. BLUES DE MA NEGRESSE
(Blues About My Black Gal)
3. CHER CATIN (Dear Baby)
4. GOING LA MAISON (Going To The House)
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(Every Now And Then)

Clifton Chenier – vocals and accordion;
Cleveland Chenier – rubboard; with various
members of the Red Hot Louisiana Band.
Morris Chenier – fiddle on #2 & # 6.

The late Clifton Chenier, creator and
King of the real Creole French
Zydeco, is heard here singing in Loui-
siana Creole French, his first language!

All songs by Clifton Chenier and © by Tradition
Music Co./administered by BUG Music Co. BMI

Edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz
Cover: Clifton Chenier in 1964
Cover photo © by Chris Strachwitz
Cover & photo tinting by Beth Weill
Recorded in Louisiana, Texas, and California
between 1964 and 1983.

All selections previously available on Arhoolie CD 329:
(#1); CD 313: (#3, 5, & 15); CD 339: (#4 & 7); CD 345: (#2 & 6); CD 347: (#8, 9, & 12); CD 350: (#10, 11, & 14); CD 404: (#15).

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Clifton Chenier (June 21, 1925 – December 12, 1987) invented Zydeco back in the 1950s when he began to mix the rural Creole music of his native southwest Louisiana with Blues and R&B along with some of the intricate Caribbean syncopation heard along the Gulf Coast. Born on a farm near Opelousas, La., Clifton took his accordion music from the house dances and casual parties back home to dancehalls of the Creole-speaking centers in Louisiana, southeast Texas and California on to nightclubs, concert halls and festivals around the world.

Today’s Zydeco encompasses many ever-evolving contemporary African-American musical genres while still retaining some of the essential ingredients put down by Clifton Chenier and his predecessor, Amede Ardoin, who was the first Creole accordionist to make recordings (note Arhoolie CD ‘7007’). By constantly updating its sound, Zydeco has continued to be a remarkably popular dance music not only on its home turf along the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast, but literally from coast to coast and overseas as well. At the same time however, as young people are brought up speaking only English, the Creole language has faded from general use and an ever-shrinking rural population lets it disappear from the music as well. Fortunately we can never quite predict the future but since the vast majority of Zydeco’s dance-happy audience is increasingly monolingual, the future for the Creole French patois is not exactly bright.

Clifton became known as the King of Zydeco in the 1970s and he will always hold that title in spite of the many challengers and claimants to the throne. Although Clifton was perhaps best known outside of rural Louisiana for his incredible accordion work, his hard driving dance music, and his bluesy vocals in English, this CD presents Clifton’s unique Creole French roots both in the rhythms and the French patois vocals which no one has been able to match. Although Clifton has gone on to the big dance up yonder, he has left us with a remarkable body of recorded performances.

I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to not only meet this genius of a musician but also to record him over a period of about twenty years. Lightning Hopkins introduced me to Clifton at a small beer joint in a section of Houston known as “French Town.” Clifton played his accordion with only a drummer for a band, but his blues-drenched vocals in Creole French supported by the most emotional accordion sounds I’d ever heard, made an instant fan of me!

I wish I had been able to record Clifton more regularly back in the 1960s because he was a very prolific all-around musician with new songs constantly developing in his head. Clifton would tell me that he would try new songs on his audience and watch for their reaction, but unfortunately forget many of the songs if they didn’t raise a special spark.

It was a time when a new record on the juke box and on the radio was the all important meal ticket to bring out an audience for a musician’s dances. Even the very first record we made with Clifton, “Ay, Ai, Ai,” although sung in English, had that swampy feeling and sold a few hundred in Houston and southwest Louisiana. On the next session I insisted that Clifton record some of the Creole numbers I was so captivated by the first night I heard him. “Zydeco Sont Pas Sale” was one of those gems along with “Louisiana Blues,” both sung in Creole French, and both became regional hits.

The success of those records helped to raise Clifton’s confidence in his ability to capitalize on and be proud of his unique cultural background. As increasing numbers attended his dances, Clifton finally became proud of being “A Frenchman,” as he put it, and seemed to really enjoy his own remarkable talents not only as a superb musician in any field, but as a transmitter of a truly unique culture. As Clifton’s reputation and popularity grew he quickly got his brother Cleveland back into the band since much of the incredible rhythm and syncopation was based on Cleveland’s unique rubberboard work.

Besides the other CDs we have by Clifton Chenier, you should also check out our fascinating video documentary: CLIFTON CHENIER. "The King Of Zydeco" (55 minutes in color) which includes some wonderful regional Louisiana TV appearances as well as live performances of Clifton at his best at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and at the San Francisco Blues Festival plus interviews and other surprises. (Arhoolie Video ARV 401 – only $19.98)

(Chris Strachwitz – 1997)
"The King Of Zydeco Live At Montreux"

CD 355 or CASS 355

INTRO and JAMBALAYA
- YOU'RE FUSIN' TOO MUCH
CLIFTON'S BOOGIE WOOGIE • HEY, TITE FILLE • CHER Catin • ZYDECO SONT PAS SALE • JE MARCHE LE PLANCHER • RELEASE ME • I'M A HOG FOR YOU • LOUISIANA TWO-STEP • BLACK GAL • MONEY • I'M ON THE WONDER • WOO WOO • HUSH, HUSH • CALINDA

"Live! at the Long Beach and San Francisco Blues Festivals"

CD 404 or CASS 404

INTRODUCTION and THEME • I'VE HAD MY FUN (Going Down Slow) • ZYDECO TWO-STEP • CALINDA • WHAT'D LASY • PARTY DOWN • I'M COMING HOME • PINETOP'S BOOGIE WOOGIE • THEY CALL ME CRAZY • ZYDECO CHA CHA • YOU GONNA MISS ME • CALEDONIA • NEW ORLEANS BEAT • CLIFTON'S ZYDECO • LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL • ROCK ME • LOUISIANA TWO-STEP • CHER Catin • I'M THE ZYDECO MAN

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**Clifton Chenier**

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