

## Acadiana Roots

DVD captures Zydeco's rich history

**A** NEW DVD THAT TRACES THE evolution of Creole and Zydeco music has been released, but don't look for it in stores.

It's not for sale. Instead, about 1,000 copies of "From La La to Zydeco: Creole and Zydeco Music from Louisiana" have been donated to public libraries and cultural agencies throughout Louisiana.

The DVD is the brainchild of Dr. Robert Willey, an assistant professor who teaches music media and theory at UL Lafayette. It was produced with the help of students at UL Lafayette and Southwest Louisiana Community College, and a long list of other people and organizations interested in preserving part of Acadiana's culture.

"From La La to Zydeco" features Zydeco pioneers such as Clifton Chenier, Boozoo Chavis and Carlton Frank. Other performers include Rosie Ledet, Keith Frank, Zydeco Joe, Nathan Williams, Geno Delafosse, BeauSoleil and Chris Ardoin.

"We wouldn't have been able to have completed the project in this form without the generosity of the performers and publishers who donated their work for educational purposes," Willey said.

In addition to musical performances, "From La La to Zydeco" offers interviews of Boozoo Chavis and Anthony Chavis, who discuss the origins of zydeco and the use of a rub board as an

instrument; Canray Fontenot, who talks about the meaning of Zydeco; Chris Strachwitz, founder of Arhoolie Records, speaking about recording Clifton Chenier; John Delafosse; and Alphonse "Bois Sec" Ardoin.

Lafayette artist Francis X. Pavy, who *Rolling Stone* magazine once referred to as "the Picasso of Zydeco," donated the use of some of his artwork for the DVD.

The term "La La" has two meanings.

"In the early 1900s, these black Creoles, former slaves and descendants of slaves, escaped the troubles of the day with a 'La La,' rural house parties when furniture was placed outside so music and dancing could take place inside.

"In the 1950s, when those acoustic sounds of the accordion, fiddle and washboard were combined with the electric rhythm and blues creeping in from the radio and jukeboxes, zydeco was born," wrote Herman Fuselier, entertainment editor of *The Advertiser* newspaper in Lafayette, in the liner notes.

When Willey began working on the DVD, he planned to use recordings he had made of various Zydeco musicians performing in their homes or at festivals. But the project shifted a bit



**The term "La La" has two meanings. It refers to "pre-zydeco" music performed by black Creoles. Also, in the early 1900s, a "La La" was a party held in a house that had been emptied of furniture to make room for musicians and dancers.**

COVER PAINTING BY FRANCIS X. PAVY



when he searched through the archives of KRVS 88.7 radio station on campus.

"I found so much great material that I decided to make a compilation of old and new, rather than using only the pieces I

ing at the 1995, 1996 and 1999 Southwest Louisiana Zydeco Music Festivals . . ." Willey states in producer's notes on "From La La to Zydeco."

The tapes had started to deteriorate, he said, so, "I transferred about twenty of them to DVD, which were placed, along with the master tapes, in the growing archives of Cajun and Creole folklore in UL Lafayette's Dupré Library where they will remain available to researchers."

After the material was collected, production work began.

"Students in the School of Music's Media Department helped record and mix the material from 2001 to the present. Students in the music industry class this semester are helping to promote the DVD and will be doing research to find a commercial outlet to get the material to national and international audiences. Jiro Hatano, a visitor from Japan who is finishing a general studies degree at UL Lafayette, helped with the video



MARIA ONEIDE WILLEY

**Buckwheat Zydeco**

had recorded," he said. "I was able to get multitrack recordings off their remote broadcast setup, which we later mixed down to stereo and surround sound in our studio at the School of Music and combined with the video we captured with little video cameras."

Karl Fontenot, chief engineer at KRVS, had kept videotapes he produced for Acadiana Open Channel of Southwest Louisiana Zydeco Music Festivals.

"One day, Karl opened up the closet at KRVS and pulled out five three-fourth-inch video tapes recorded by (filmmaker) Dan Hildenbrant in 1987 and about forty S-VHS tapes he had produced of groups perform-



JIRO HATANO

**Corey Ledet**



LES BLANC

**Clifton Chenier from Les Blanc's film 'Hot Pepper'**

recording and photography," Willey said.

Fontenot and Dan Hildenbrant assisted with production. Ivan Klisanin, a former graduate student at UL Lafayette, supervised and mastered the audio.

Although the DVD has been released, Willey and some of the students are continuing to preserve Zydeco music.

"Since finishing this disk we have



KARL FONTENOT

**Boozoo Chavis**

made recordings of Nathan Williams Jr. and Keith Frank," Willey said. "We will be working with Paul Scott of the Zydeco Festival to make music videos of Zydeco songs, a project that will involve story-writing, directing, and camera crews from the community college." ■

 <http://willshare.com/zydeco>