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Music school releases Zydeco DVD with concerts, interviews

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Fans of Cajun music would do well to head to a nearby library, as 1,000 copies of a DVD titled "From La La to Zydeco," which encompasses more than 30 years of concert footage of notable 'la la' and Zydeco musicians, has been produced by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's school of music and donated to libraries statewide.

"There are 22 songs by 18 groups," said Robert Willey, assistant professor in the school of music, and one of the primary forces behind the DVD's creation, which totals to 90 minutes of music, as well as interviews.

The artists included are Rosie Ledet, Creole Zydeco Farmers, Boozoo Chavis, Keith Frank, Nathan Williams, Preston and Carlton Frank, Zydeco Joe, Thomas Field, Chris Ardoin, Jude Taylor, Geno Delafosse, BeauSoleil, Corey Ledet, Curley Taylor, Dexter Ardoin, Frank Family Band and Clifton

Chenier, who Willey called the King of Zydeco. The DVD includes his last recorded performance before his death.

Most of this was recorded at area festivals over the years by Karl Fontenot of KRVS, while he worked at the Acadiana Open Channel. All of the post-2001 performances were recorded by Robert Willey and his students, who became versed in the processes of mixing, editing and recording.

Fontenot had been compiling video of festivals himself since 1987. He said the earliest recordings featured on the DVD were from the early 1990s. Most of the footage is completely unseen by the public aside from some one-time airings on the Acadiana Open Channel.

"Robert (Willey) used a lot of (this footage) to create a performance piece," said Fontenot, "which I think is incredible."

"It's better than I remember," he remarked. "We shot the original stuff on SVHS and putting it on DVD. I

think it's held up pretty well."

Aside from the bulk of the performance footage, Fontenot was behind the camera for all of the interviews as well.

"It's a great thing to have in libraries, for reference," he said. "It's been needed for a long time and we haven't had the opportunity to get it done, and Robert has gotten it done. That's a great thing."

With the cooperation of KRVS, Willey was allowed to record 20-track master recordings of recent events, which he and his students then mixed into surround sound and stereo.

According to Willey, the hardest part of the project was getting clearances from all the performers and their publishers.

"It took a long time to get it done," he said, "to get all the clearances with publishers because we didn't have a budget to pay performers and publishers, so we had to get clearances and get everyone to donate their material."

Another goal is to get commercial publishing for the project so it can move beyond library shelves. This is difficult because no one wants to donate their performances to a commercial product.

"Right now there's too much (on the DVD)," said Willey. "We would have to take the highlights."

Willey said he hopes the project will lead to being a showcase for what can be done with DVD on campus.

"There have been other DVDs made of Cajun music," he said. "But there's nobody who's really taken up where Karl (Fontenot) left off. There hasn't been a consistent recording of festivals around here."

Willey said he hopes that, through the release of the DVD, he can get support to make a team to document the local festival scene and record in high-definition video. He hopes to record entire sets of groups and make DVDs of their concerts.