Balfa Toujours: The stuff of which legends are made

Balfa Toujours is one of the top Cajun bands performing today. Led by Christine Balfa, youngest daughter of the legendary Dewey Balfa, the group plays traditional Cajun music, offering fresh interpretations of old favorites and also performing new songs written by the band.

The band first performed in 1993, a year after Dewey Balfa’s death. Beyond their technical skills as musicians, the members of Balfa Toujours succeed in conveying the spirit of the music played by Dewey and his brothers, giving voice to the deep emotions of happiness and sorrow that contribute to Cajun music’s universal appeal. Their performance on stage is an expression of the joie de vivre that is at the center of Cajun culture.

The membership of the group is itself a tribute to Dewey Balfa’s efforts as an ambassador of Cajun music on the national scene.

When Dirk Powell, Christine’s husband, first saw her perform with her father at the National Folk Life Festival in Washington, D.C., in 1986, he was immediately impressed, but he did not actually meet her until six years later. While they were dating, Powell drove from Maryland to Louisiana, steering with his knees so that he could practice the accordion, extending his remarkable musical talent to yet another instrument besides those he plays as part of his Appalachian heritage.

Kevin Wimmer, who was raised in New York City, learned to play the classical violin as a child, but once he attended a workshop at the Newport Festival led by Dewey Balfa, he knew he wanted to spend his life playing the Cajun fiddle. Eventually, he traveled to Basile, where he lived for several months learning from Dewey firsthand.

Dewey Balfa’s legacy now extends to a new generation of his family. Courtney Granger, the newest member of Balfa Toujours, dreamed that his grand Uncle Dewey placed his hand on Courtney’s heart the night before Courtney recorded his own CD when he was 16 years old.

Balfa Toujours has five CDs. The first CD, Pop, tu me parles toujours, released a year after Dewey Balfa’s death, features a touching tribute to Dewey in the title song, plus a mixture of traditional and original material. A similar combination of old and new songs is Continued on page 26
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Dewey Balfa (left) and his band play at a wedding during the 1980s.

(Submitted Photo)

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Balfa Toujours plays traditional music with Alphonse "Bois Sec" Ardoin, a legendary Creole accordion player from Duralde with whom Dewey Balfa performed many times. The recording was Bois Sec Ardoin's first in 20 years. Christine Balfa and Dirk Powell are among the musicians performing with Courtney Granger (lead fiddle and vocals) on his 1999 Rounder CD, Un Bal Chez Balfa.

Balfa Toujours' August 2000 release, Live at Whiskey River Landing, offers listeners the excitement, energy, and freedom of a performance at a famous Cajun club located on the levee of the Atchafalaya Basin east of Lafayette. By closing time, the crowd is still clapping for more great music from one of the best traditional Cajun bands around today, a band that keeps getting better on every recording.

The CD opens with a wonderful new tribute to the tenacity of the Cajun spirit, "La chandelle..."
est allumée," and includes other great new songs, such as "Whiskey River Special," "Le Two-Step de Bon Café" and the instrumental "Chez Geno" (Geno Delafose, whose Double D Ranch is near Eunice, plays drums on three songs, including this one). There also are live versions of two original songs from the group's first CD, an old time Dennis McGee fiddle number, "Le Reel Frugé" and classic songs from the Balfa Brothers' repertoire, including one instrumental by accordionist Hadley Fontenot that has never been recorded before.

Pete Bergeron, host of the morning Cajun music show on KRVS public radio, has praised the quality of the live recording, which he described as similar to studio quality.

Christine Balfa was presented a Le Cajun Award as Female Vocalist of the Year for 2000, given by the Cajun French Music Association at the annual awards ceremony Aug. 17, 2001. The album and the band received Le Cajun nominations.

Although Dewey Balfa is gone, his music is not forgotten, for it is breathed into the every note of Balfa Toujours' music. And the legendary musician also is honored each year with the Dewey Balfa Cajun and Creole Heritage Week, this year held at Chicot State Park April 20-26. There, one can learn first-hand from masters of Cajun and Creole music, dance, language, cuisine and culture.


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