Exhibit, CD celebrate history of Cajun, Creole culture

Chris Stafford, left, and Chris Segura work on a compilation CD commemorating the recordings of Cajun musicians by Alan and John Lomax on Thursday at Stafford's studio in Lafayette. The CD will have the Lomaxes's original recordings followed by live covers from Festivals from artists like David Greely, Cedric Watson and Feufollet.

40-year-old Festivals Acadiens et Créoles awarded $25,000 grant

BY SETH DICKERSON
Special to The Advocate

LAFAYETTE — The University of Louisiana at Lafayette is joining with Festivals Acadiens et Créoles to make this year's October event at Girard Park one to remember. The 40-year-old Cajun and Creole music celebration, with the help of UL-Lafayette, received a $25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to create an accompanying art exhibit, a cultural conference and a commemorative CD.

"Festivals creates an affirmation of Cajun and Creole culture, especially music," said Michael Martin, director of the Center for Louisiana Studies. "It says, 'This stuff is cool.' It's music that not just the older generation can listen to. It can be performed and enjoyed and danced to by the younger generation as well."

Festivals officials partnered with the university to pursue the grant to honor this unique culture on the confluence of the 40th anniversary of Festivals and the 80th anniversary of Alan Lomax's visit to record south Louisiana Cajun musicians.

"It ended up making more sense for the university to apply for the grant since most of the grant-funded events are going to be on campus," said Mark DeWitt, the grant's principal investigator and...
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The CD will feature the Cajun folk songs recorded by the Lomaxes, paired with contemporary versions of those songs performed at Festivals in recent years. "They (the Lomaxes) were going around documenting what they considered to be these endangered musical art forms, things that they expected to be gone in a few years," Martin said. "It turned out they were wrong."

Cajun music has thrived, thanks in large part to Festivals. "(The festival) is a way of connecting historically with this area's culture. It's also a way of maintaining and innovating the culture," Martin said. "You see that happening during the festival, even on stage sometimes."

Musician Chris Segura, an archivist with the university's Center for Louisiana Studies, is heading up the CD's production. "What we're doing is taking the original 1934 recordings that Lomax made and finding contemporary covers that were done live at Festivals," Segura said.

The covers span from 1981 to 2013, and are performed by well-known local artists such as Cedric Watson, David Greely and Feufollet.

"A lot of the songs he recorded were standards, like 'Jolie Blon,' " DeWitt said. "But a lot of the less popular songs are still around only because Lomax recorded them."

Other events include a conference on the importance of the Lomaxes' work to Cajun music. Ancelet, Martin and NPR's "American Routes" host and Tulane University professor Nick Spitzer are scheduled to speak.

There also will be a concert, influenced by Alan Lomax's recordings, at UL-Lafayette's Angelle Hall.

An exhibit of photographs, art and archived video footage from past decades of Festivals is set to open Sept. 19 at the A. Hays Town Building, part of the Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum complex on St. Mary Boulevard.