Fred Charlie: Ville Platte native promotes Cajun culture

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There is a very significant effort underfoot to emphasize the Cajun culture, and Fred Charlie of Eunice is a proud member of that movement.

Charlie is a musician who does just about everything. He plays music, writes songs, and sings.

In addition, every Saturday morning, he plays Cajun music for five hours over radio station KBAZ FM.

Fred Charlie

102.1, and talks French with folks throughout the rather wide area reached by the radio station. He is not only heard in Louisiana, but also in parts of East Texas and Western Mississippi. He's getting good reviews from all of those locations.

The Ville Platte native lives in Eunice, and delights in promoting the Cajun Culture. Actually, he is a man with a mission when it comes to the subject of preserving the folkways that made life worth living for many generations of people who lived here before us.

He fears it may already be too late for his own children just as it is for many of the young people of Acadiana. "I'm Cajun," he said, "but my kids are American because I didn't teach them to speak French."

"Today," he continued, "we're trying to emphasize the culture and turn the clock back so that hopefully one day, the young people here will speak French." His goal is to achieve a bilingual society in which people speak and understand both languages comfortably.

The Cajun musician takes great pride in the songs that he writes and the music that he shares. "It's real," he said. "I'm a pure Cajun. I write from experience that I have lived through. I was born and raised in L'Anse aux Pailles. I wasn't transplanted here."

He travels with his band, The Acadiana Cajuns, which he formed five years ago. "Our band speaks French," he said demonstrating the commitment to the continuation of the Cajun language.

This means, he explains, that the band members can hold conversations in French with the people who attend their performances. There are some bands, he explained, where the singers learn only the Cajun words of each song, and are unable to speak the language.

The entire band has Cajun roots that run deep. "The Cajun roots are obvious when they perform their music," Charlie said proudly.

Members include Elridge Aguillard, Gerald Miller, Randy Bellard, and Bernard Brown. Gerald Miller, an Iota resident, is a master accordionist, but also plays drums, fiddle and guitar at a professional level.

Charlie describes Aguillard as "one of the finest (fiddle players) in Southwest Louisiana."

Randy Bellard is another gifted musician with multiple talents. He plays drums, guitar, and accordion all professionally and was the featured accordion player for one of the recent singles, "You Never Stopped Loving Me."

Bernard Brown is a drummer of great expertise, and he is the newest member of the band. All, with the exception of Miller, are from Eunice.

The leader of the band is a singer-songwriter and acoustic guitar player who has been playing Cajun music for many years.

He has 25 releases which include 19 original songs to his credit. He has eight singles and two cassette albums to his credit.

Next weekend, Charlie and the Acadiana Cajuns are scheduled to play the Liberty Theater.

Fred Charlie tries to capture the essence of the Cajun life and spirit in his songs. Some time ago he memorialized Johnny Janot in a tune he wrote about him.

The late Janot, a disc jockey from here, did much prior to his untimely death, to spread the word about Cajun music in East Texas and Louisiana with his popular Sunday morning radio show which aired over a Port Arthur radio station.

It is almost ironic that Fred Charlie is now filling the void created by the death of Janot.

His tunes deals with all aspects of life. They celebrate new love and outline the sadness of love gone sour.

His original song titles include "Mom Tell Me," "Take My Hand," "Long Ago Waltz," and "Wedding Waltz."

"You Never Stopped Loving Me," "Merry Christmas to a Cajun," and "I Used to Look into her Eyes."

One of his tune, "Ki-yet," is a novelty tune which recalls the disasters or near disasters which can accompany the chore of milking the family milk cow.

Folks around here used to do that, and Fred Charlie's Cajun roots go that deep.