The Sundogs, Howling Cajun-Style

BY LEE HILDEBRAND

Sundogs Nielsen, Russell, Politzer, Rigney and Paquin: Group has zydeco, Cajun material to rock

what we do," he added. "I realize that that was never my starting point. I like it, but it isn't my background and it isn't what really moves me."

Nielsen, a sound man at the Avalon Ballroom during the heyday of San Francisco rock and veteran of numerous local rock and r & b bands, agrees. "I never think of playing with the Sundogs as an intellectual exploration into this type of music," he said. "It's just got a good groove. It's real danceable and people love it."

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The Little Mermaid

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The Sundogs appear Friday at Slim's, 700 7th Street in San Francisco, and Saturday at the Sweetwater, 153
Throckmorton Avenue in Mill Valley.

I was up on stage with a set list of songs I'd never heard before. Rigney, 42, recalled. "I just felt my way in. I never did get around to studying any of the traditional Cajun fiddle styles. Ida's music was enough of a hybrid itself, because at the time she had just a killer rock and roll rhythm section. They were playing in the style, but they certainly weren't authentic.

"The whole rhythmic foundation was completely different from anything I'd ever played before. Back in the fiddle's rhythm had very light and swingy and more acoustic. As big a change as it was to be learning Cajun music and zydeco, it was also as big a change to be working within such a powerful rhythmic framework."

Joe Paquin, the Sundogs' principal songwriter, as well as guitarist, accordionist and rubboard player, met Rigney at a Queen Ida performance in Bellingham, Wash., and later moved to the Bay Area to collaborate with him. Born in Michigan, Paquin knew little about Cajun music. But when he heard it, it made a strong connection to his distant French Canadian roots.

"Our family didn't get any farther than the Great Lakes, but a lot of ancestors ended up in Louisiana," he said, referring to the wholesale deportation of French-speaking Acadians from Nova Scotia by the British in 1755. "I'm sure I have some distant Paquins down there in Louisiana."

"I had uncles and ancestors who played the fiddle and accordion and played Cajun-type music. Before it was corrupted into the Cajun genre, it was French Canadian music."

After leaving Queen Ida, Rigney formed the Sundogs with Paquin, singer-guitarist T.J. Politzer, bassist Dana Russell and drummer Nielsen. They worked for a year before Rigney's brother, accordionist-guitarist Al Rapone, then moved out on their own, remaining booked on Louisiana music.

"I realized just what an amazing effect that kind of syncopation, upbeat, powerful rhythm can have on people's bodies and minds and attitudes. I just thought it was too much fun to stop after leaving Ida's band."

"When I hear the real traditional Cajun music, it's sometimes a shock to me how little that is like..."