THE APPLAUSE CONTINUES:
FESTIVALS ACADIENS ET CRÉOLES
AT

By Herman Fuselier
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After March 26, 1974, south Louisiana culture was never the same. Before that date, Cajun music and zydeco had been comfortable in their cradles—honky tonks and barrooms where no one clapped for the musicians. Patrons showed their appreciation by dancing, drinking, courting and visiting.

But on that stormy March evening, local music was taken out of the dancehall and placed on a 4-foot-high concert stage. Organizers, determined to get the crowd to sit and smell the music, had even placed chairs on the dance floor.

The same organizers feared these moves would seem insane and would be greeted with an empty Blackham Coliseum. But on that night, 12,000 filled the 8,400-seat arena.

The chairs on the floor had been reserved for 150 journalists invited by the Council on Development of French in Louisiana. But the journalists weren’t even sure what to make of the strange surroundings.

“They were late getting there, because of the weather,” said Barry

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COMING MONDAY
In Monday’s Advertiser, more on Festivals Acadiens et Créoles.
Festival

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Ancelet, a professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and one of the organizers of the fledgling music festival. "These 150 seats were empty on the floor. The crowd figured something's wrong, so as soon as those seats start filling up, this thing is going to get on the road."

We escorted them through a side door and they started walking in. Everybody started clapping and thinking the show's going to start. The journalists were thinking they were claiming for them."

The hometown applause for the local musicians continues four decades later. The first Tribute to Cajun Music has grown into Festivals Acadiens et Créoles, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this week in Girard Park.

The event is now a collection of outdoor festivals, which include five stages of music, the Bayou Food Fest, the Louisiana Craft Fair, and Culture Sur La Table (cooking demonstrations). Conversations with musicians are held at Scene Atelier. A jam tent allows the public to play with some of today's top artists.

In this 40th anniversary festival, tributes to the Balfa Brothers, Clifton Cherier and other icons are on the schedule. "One Generation at a Time" performances feature musical parents, such as Christine Balfa, Travis Matte and Terry Huval, playing with their children.

More than 100 pictures, posters and other memorabilia are part of "Visions of Tradition Exhibit: 40 Years of Festivals Acadiens et Créoles," which goes until Oct. 12 at the Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum.

A special concert, "From the Field to the Stage: Songs From the Louisiana Collection," will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Hamilton Hall Auditorium on the UL campus. Grammy winner Beausoleil avec Michael Doucet, Jeffery Broussard and Parnel Feufollet and numerous special guests will perform.

"It's our most ambitious festival to date," said Pat Mould, the festival's vice president of programming and development. "We have all the additional programming with the art exhibit, a one-day symposium on the Thursday before, Thursday night concert.

"Then we added the anniversary stage at the museum. Plus people will be able to go see the exhibit. There's a lot of moving parts this year. It's been interesting."

While the festival celebrates 40 years, the event marks the 50th and 80th anniversaries of occasions that had a profound influence. In 1934, folklorists John and Alan Lomax traveled through the area and recorded local residents. In 1964, Ralph Rinzler of the Smithsonian Institution, came to Louisiana to find local musicians for the Newport Folk Festival. Rinzler recruited Dewey Balfa, Gladdy Thibodeaux and Viness Lejeune to play at the Rhode Island event.

Back in Louisiana, many predicted the musicians would be ridiculed for playing "chancy chunk." But they received a standing ovation that left a deep impression. "Dewey said there's something to this," said Ancelet. "He wanted to bring that message of acceptance and appreciation home."

"The other thing that happened is Dewey said I want to figure out how to better my chances to hear that applause. He was listening to Tommy Jarrell and other musicians and he started paying attention. The performances are tighter. They're a little fancier."

"That experience contributed to what I sometimes refer to as the festival sound. Certain things that they do illicit a response from the crowd — medleys, opening with stripped-down instrumentation and having the whole band kick in."

Balfa was among the organizers of the first Tribute to Cajun Music. Rinzler served as a consultant and was masters of ceremonies, along with then-USL French professor Hosea Phillips.

"So you can draw a straight line from Festivals Acadiens to Newport and then back to Lomax," said Ancelet. "This festival is a result of those connections and some made along the way."

Three women wear historic attire at Festivals Acadiens in 1978.

FESTIVALS ACADIENS ET CRÉOLES

- Oct. 10-12
- Girard Park, Lafayette
- Admission: Free
- Information: festivalsacadiens.com

FESTIVAL EVENTS

"VISIONS OF TRADITION EXHIBIT: 40 YEARS OF FESTIVALS ACADIENS ET CRÉOLES"

- Now through Oct. 13
- Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum, 710 E. St. Mary Blvd.
- Information: museum.louisiana.edu

"ANNIVERSARIES 40-50-80: FESTIVALS ACADIENS ET CRÉOLES, DEWEY BALFA AT NEWPORT AND ALAN LOMAX IN LOUISIANA" SYMPOSIUM

- 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday
- Hamilton Hall Auditorium, UL campus
- Admission: Free

"FROM THE FIELD TO THE STAGE: SONGS FROM THE LOMAX COLLECTION" CONCERT

- 7:30 p.m. Thursday
- Hamilton Hall Auditorium, UL campus
- Admission: $15, $12 for students with valid ID

See a video of festival memories at the advertiser.com