The men behind Bon Cajun Instruments

by Amanda L. Guidry

Larry Miller, 70, stood ram-rod straight, only his head slightly bent as he quickly tapped a row of silver buttons with a light hammer. He stopped, grabbed a small brush, and dusted the item, leaving a sparkling and shiny finish in his wake, before placing the item down and facing me.

"This is going to be my last accordion," he said, picking up another intricately crafted item. He gestured to the 14 karat gold-tipped edges and noted the luxurious East Indian Rosewood used on the piece. "I'll probably sell it on E-bay; see what I can get."

The last accordion made by Larry Miller probably will fetch a tidy sum, for the Iota-based craftsman is world-renowned for his skill, having instruments everywhere from Canada and Europe to Australia, New Zealand, Korea and Japan.

"Many of the Japanese love Cajun and Zydeco music," said Larry. "It's quite a culture jump for them, but when they come here, they play and sing in French. And it's a heck of a long way for them to come here."

But like his foreign customers, Larry, too, has come a long way as owner of Bon Cajun Instruments. And it all started with a family past-time: music.

"My dad was an accordion player," said Larry, straightening items throughout his shop and pausing before a radio blaring "Big Butt Women." He silently lowered the volume before continuing, "My oldest brother played guitar. I played the triangle and spoons. When my dad passed away in 1960 at age 52, my oldest brother decided to play the accordion. Then he became pretty ill. In 1978, I decided that—based upon the urging of Dewey Balfa—in order for the music not to die out with my generation, I needed to learn accordion."

Larry Miller, 70, has been building accordions more than 25 years.

(BNP/Amanda L. Guidry Photo)