

Jeffery Broussard & The Creole Cowboys

Zydeco music echoing its Creole past and charting its future

“Mr. Broussard and his Cowboys are fabulous: You start moving in your seat as soon as their rhythmic, rich melodies, both joyous and mournful, flood the theater.”

— New York Times

“Jeffery Broussard has long been respected as one of the greatest accordion players to ever grace our beautiful Creole culture and for that matter the world.”

— Don Cravins, Sr., Mayor of Opelousas, LA (Zydeco Capital of the World)

Across the Atchafalaya Basin — away from the jazz, blues, brass bands, second line processions, and parades of New Orleans — there exists along the bayous, crawfish ponds, and rice fields of the prairie lands of Southwest Louisiana, a uniquely Louisianan cultural area with its own music and dance traditions — that of the French-speaking Louisiana Creole people. Descendants of the mixing of free people of color, Native Americans, French and Spanish settlers, their rich culture has existed for hundreds of years.

Creole and Cajun musical traditions have diverged and evolved separately in this region. Those with Cajun background are descendants of displaced white settlers from Acadia (now Nova



photo: Philip Gould



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Scotia in Canada) who refused to take an oath of loyalty to the English king in the 1755 Grand Dérangement. While much music is shared cross-culturally, Creole is a distinct culture. Originally called Creole music, French music, or la-la music, Zydeco’s musical roots go back to European, African, and Caribbean musical traditions, with syncopated rhythms. Jeffery Broussard’s path to becoming one of the most influential accordionists and vocalists in modern Zydeco music is rich in tradition, struggle, and hard times.

Born in Lafayette, Louisiana to Ethel and Delton Broussard, Jeffery is the youngest of eleven children (with five brothers and five sisters). The family lived in Frilot Cove, Louisiana, a rural community northwest of Opelousas, on a farm where his father

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reinventing traditional artistry

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(bio continued)

was a sharecropper. His father left sharecropping to work for an oil company when Jeffery was thirteen, and his mother died of cancer two years later. Jeffery left school after seventh grade in order to farm full time (digging and sorting potatoes) to help make ends meet. He grew up fishing in the bayous, riding horses across the fields with friends, and most of all, working hard.

As is the case with many Zydeco musicians, Jeffery's career started very early in life (at the age of 8) playing drums in his father's band, the renowned Delton Broussard & The Lawtell Playboys. Whenever possible, Jeffery would sneak his daddy's accordion down from the closet where it was stored and would teach himself how to play. During his teen years, Jeffery also played drums in his oldest brother Clinton's band, Clinton Broussard & The Zydeco Machines. It was in this band that Jeffery played the accordion in public for the first time. Zydeco music is played on a variety of accordions, but most commonly the triple-row and single-row diatonic button accordions. The fiddle is essential to authentic roots Zydeco, and Jeffery is one of a handful of Creole fiddlers currently touring. He plays his own style, developed using only two fingers on the strings, sometimes a third, but never a fourth. He plays by sliding into and out of the notes.

It's quite possible that without the struggle and hard times he experienced in life, Jeffery could not sing and play with the emotion and the soul he expresses. His range, seldom seen in Zydeco, includes traditional songs of the old masters, original tunes, single-note and triple-note accordion, and fiddle. Jeffery

Broussard is one of the genre's most dynamic performers.

Whether he is playing a festival stage in front of thousands of dancers, a small theater of seated patrons, giving an interview, teaching a lesson, or playing at a trail ride, his warmth, love of the music, and talent shine. Jeffery Broussard is the real deal. Dedicated to preserving and promoting the Creole culture and traditional Zydeco music, he plays with passion and commitment. "I love my music and I love my culture," says Jeffery. "I am proud and honored to be a part of it. By playing traditional music, that is my way of giving back to my community, to my culture, and to get others interested in the music, in other parts of the country, and to fulfill my Daddy's dream."

Workshops, Master Classes, and Residency Activities

Jeffery, a completely self-taught musician, does not read music, and learns by ear. He discusses creating music by ear, focusing on rhythm and feel, improvising, how he creates new chords, and the history and oral traditions of how Zydeco music is passed on from generation to generation.

Although accordion is his main instrument, Jeffery plays guitar, bass, fiddle, and percussion instruments (drums, triangle, and scrubboard), in keeping with the traditional Zydeco style. He discusses the heart and soul of singing, call and response singing traditions — including Juré — and the Creole/Zydeco tradition of incorporating the sounds of the region (trains and barnyard animals, to name some) into the vocals and instrumentation of the songs.

Other educational offerings include dance lessons and Juré workshops. Zydeco music is traditionally dance music, and lessons typically cover the two basic dance steps in Zydeco — the two-step and the waltz. Juré (pronounced joo-RAY) is a traditional form of call-and-response style singing that originated in Southwest Louisiana. Jeffery and the band can give demonstrations and teach this technique in workshop settings.

Jeffery and the band also perform for schools and groups of children. They provide interactive presentations about Louisiana music and culture, play some songs, and teach Zydeco dance lessons, including basic steps of the waltz and two-step.

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