

Spring 5-13-2016

Picturing the Cajun Revival: Swallow Records, Album Art, and Marketing an Identity of South Louisiana, 1960s-1970s

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Picturing the Cajun Revival: Swallow Records, Album Art, and Marketing an Identity of South
Louisiana, 1960s-1970s

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History
with a concentration in Public History

by

Jessica Anne Dauterive

B.A., University of New Orleans, 2013

May 2016

Acknowledgments

There are several people I'd like to thank who helped to make this project possible. To John Sharp at the Cajun and Creole Music Collection at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette who provided the oral histories that kick started this research, and whose work I admire. To Sanda Himel at the Cajun and Creole Music Collection at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette who gave me access to the Swallow LPs used in this paper and made this analysis possible. To Rachel Lyons and Dolores Hooper at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation Archive who welcomed me as an intern, and supported my oral history work as a Jazz and Heritage fellowship recipient. To Floyd Soileau for lending me his time and his story, and to Benny Graeff, Barry Ancelet, Christine Balfa, and David Doucet for the same. To John Broven for his knowledge, generosity, and guidance throughout this project. To my committee members Mary Niall Mitchell and Charles Chamberlain, and to my chair Connie Atkinson for reading countless drafts and helping me find my voice. And to my parents for constant support, and for enriching each research trip to Lafayette with a home-cooked meal.

Finally, this paper is dedicated to the memory of Michael Mizell-Nelson, with whom I wish I could share this work.

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Abstract

In South Louisiana in the late 1950s, Ville Platte native Floyd Soileau joined a network of independent recording companies across the United States that provided an opportunity for local entrepreneurs and artists to profit from the global music industry. This paper analyzes the album covers of Floyd Soileau's Cajun recording label, Swallow Records, during the 1960s-1970s. This period overlaps with a movement to subvert a negative regional identity of Louisiana Cajuns, often referred to as the Cajun revival. Through a consideration of album covers as objects of business strategy and creative expression, as well as oral histories with individuals who worked with Swallow Records, this paper argues that Floyd Soileau shaped the perception of Cajun music and people through the channels of the global music industry. On the album covers of Swallow Records, Floyd Soileau marketed a Cajun identity that was rural, white, masculine, and French-speaking, and became an accidental facilitator of the social and political goals of leaders in the Cajun revival.

Keywords: Swallow Records; Cajun history; Louisiana history; music history

Introduction

For over 50 years, Floyd Soileau has operated Flat Town Music Company from Main Street in the small Cajun town of Ville Platte, Louisiana. At various points in time, this independent music company included a record store, recording studios, several recording labels, a music publishing company, and a pressing plant. Soileau recalls that his record store in Ville Platte at one time drew international crowds as a popular stop for tourists passing through on Highway 167: “Whether it was a pack of cigarettes, a Coca-Cola, or buy a gallon of gasoline, or hamburger, or whatever, or stop at Floyd's Record Shop, it was new money that was circulating in our area. We don't have that anymore. We're gonna be like Route 66.” In its heyday, patrons of Floyd’s Record Shop could browse through the stacks of records that filled the local shop. As they moved from Soileau’s extensive inventory of pop and oldies records, customers could also thumb through the Cajun section that featured album covers depicting a region and its people. As is the case with many local music scenes from areas as disparate as Jamaica, Indonesia, and Denmark, the music industry in Louisiana provided Cajun communities the tools to reinforce ideas of local distinctiveness and value within a global marketplace. With the loss of Floyd’s Record Shop, then, came not only the loss of capital for Soileau and his hometown, but also the ability for customers from across the world to be introduced to Cajun identity as a series of albums neatly filed into a section of a record shop.

Writers, filmmakers, and other producers of text have often portrayed the rural, French-speaking Cajun communities of South Louisiana as isolated and primitive settlements.¹ For example, in 1939, an employee of the Federal Writers Project described Cajuns as a “simple,

¹ The Cajun community was created through the expulsion of the Acadians from Acadia (present-day Canadian maritime provinces) to Louisiana in 1755. The French-speaking Acadians settled in Louisiana and became Cajuns (the Anglicized form of Acadians) through a series of cultural exchanges with various other groups in Louisiana. Although Cajuns are strictly defined as the descendants of these Acadian ancestors, the term is often widely applied to include anyone born and raised in the modern-day Cajun communities in Southwest Louisiana.

uneducated, uncultured, yet intrinsically genuine and lovable people.”² However, after WWII, two major events challenged this patronizing attitude towards Cajun communities. First, the postwar period saw a rise in the popularity of American roots music, a phenomenon Stephen R. Tucker attributes to “the immediate decentralization of the recording industry which helped spawn a bewildering number of new companies...and the thoroughgoing re-examination of America's traditional cultures...by entrepreneurs, scholars, and audiences.”³ Second, beginning in the mid-1960s, Cajun entrepreneurs, artists, and activists in South Louisiana worked to shape a new Cajun identity that subverted negative stereotypes while celebrating the group’s resilience against the forces of Americanization. The importance of music in the redefinition of Cajun identity, and the proliferation of recording labels in Louisiana after WWII, transformed the local music industry into an avenue for both economic opportunity and social uplift.

The album covers of Swallow Records, the Cajun music label owned by Floyd Soileau, provided a space where the music industry’s commercialization of ethnic and roots music also aided the goals of the Cajun revival.⁴ As Chris Gibson and John Connell note, LP album covers are “largely ignored popular cultural artefacts” in music history that reveal much about business strategy and creative expression.⁵ This thesis considers the ways that album covers communicated a visual identity of Cajun music by analyzing the catalog of long-playing records, or LPs, produced by Swallow Records in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ Oral histories conducted with

² The Federal Writers’ Project, a division of the Works Progress Administration, employed writers with various backgrounds to document the cultural landscape of the United States. William Faulkner Rushton, *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 5-6.

³ Stephen R. Tucker, “Louisiana Folk and Regional Popular Music Traditions on Records and the Radio: An Historical Overview with Suggestions for Future Research,” in *Folklife in Louisiana: A Guide to the State*. Baton Rouge, LA: Office of Cultural Development, 1985.

⁴ The French last name “Soileau” is pronounced like the English word “swallow.”

⁵ John Connell and Chris Gibson, “‘No Passport Necessary’: Music, Record Covers and Vicarious Tourism in Post-war Hawai’i,” *The Journal of Pacific History*, 43, no. 1 (June 2008), 52.

⁶ The majority of the Swallow Records catalog can be found in the Cajun and Creole Music Collection in the Dupré Library at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Floyd Soileau, as well as men and women who worked with him, are also used in this paper to understand the process of designing and producing LPs at an independent label. This thesis argues that Floyd Soileau used the album covers of Swallow Records to market a Cajun identity that was rural, white, masculine, and French-speaking, and, in the process, became an accidental facilitator of the social and political goals of leaders in the Cajun revival.

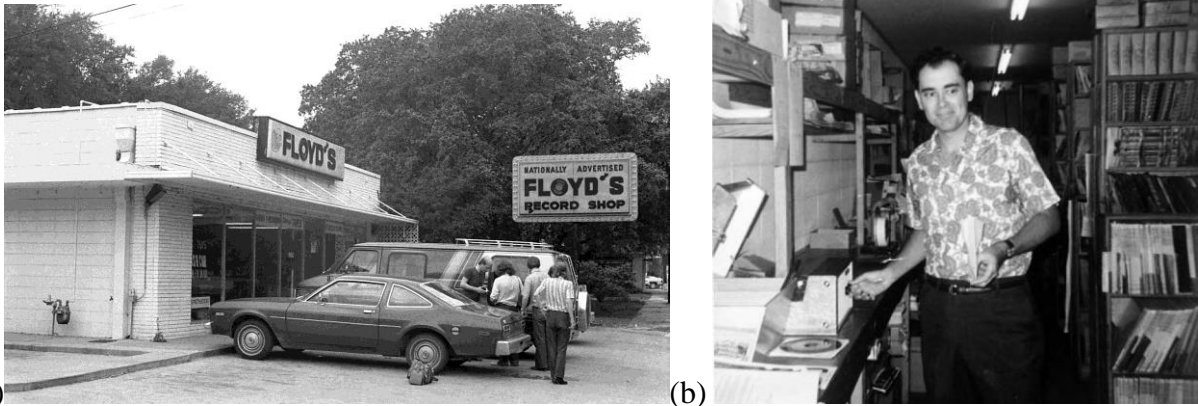


FIGURE 1: (a) Floyd's Record Shop storefront, 1979. ©Paul Harris, used with permission. (b) Floyd Soileau in the stockroom of Floyd's Record Shop, Ville Platte, Louisiana, 1967. Photo by Mike Leadbitter, courtesy John Broven Collection, Library of Congress.

Historiography

This work on Swallow Records lies at the intersection of popular music studies and Louisiana studies. Neither Swallow Records, nor its proprietor, Floyd Soileau, has ever been given a full-length study in either of these disciplines. This thesis not only draws from the work of leading scholars in these fields, but also suggests the usefulness of foregrounding Louisiana recording studios and album covers into those conversations.

The relatively new field of popular music studies uses an interdisciplinary approach to explore the ways that various peoples use music for social, cultural, and economic benefit. Some work in popular music studies calls for academics to change the way we choose how and what music to study. In this vein, Sarah Thornton uses her research on discotheques to discuss the complications of studying genres of popular music that are not heavily reflected in “sales figures,

biographical interest, critical acclaim or amount of media coverage,” and are therefore left out of the mainstream historiography of popular music.⁷ Simon Frith furthers this critique of what is included in what he calls the “rock canon” of popular music studies in his essay “The Academic Elvis,” which argues that scholarship must see beyond traditional conceptions of high and low culture when choosing musical subjects for research.⁸ Although Cajun music is certainly considered an expression of “low” culture, the centrality of the French language to both the culture and the music sets it apart from other genres that have received scholarly attention, such as blues or country music, rendering Cajun music an overlooked genre in popular music studies. By grounding this study on the decisions of a local record label rather than on reviews in trade magazines or media coverage, as Thornton and Frith advise, this paper offers South Louisiana as an overlooked location of music production.

Other popular music scholars focus on the ways that music can be used to create a sense of identity and place for particular ethnic groups. Martin Stokes asserts that thinking about the relationships between music and identity allows scholars to ask “how music is used by social actors in specific local situations to erect boundaries, to maintain distinctions between us and them, and how terms such as ‘authenticity’ are used to justify these boundaries.”⁹ Sara Cohen applies this theory to the context of the Jewish community in Liverpool to argue that music can not only produce a sense of place, but may also rouse contested feelings of place and local identity among individual listeners.¹⁰ The work of Roger Wallis and Krister Malm considers how the presence of the music industry in twelve small countries might disrupt a sense of identity and

⁷ Sarah Thornton, “Strategies for Reconstructing the Popular Past,” *Popular Music* 9, no. 1 (January 1990): 87.

⁸ Simon Frith, “The Academic Elvis,” in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures*, ed. Richard H. King and Helen Taylor (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 99-114.

⁹ Martin Stokes, “Introduction,” in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 6.

¹⁰ Sara Cohen, “Sounding the City: Music and the Sensuous Production of Place,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 4 (1995): 434-446.

place among local music scenes, and ultimately finds that many of these groups maintain a significant amount of autonomy in their music production.¹¹ Tony Mitchell and Jocelyne Guilbaut have both contributed work that analyzes the ways that local music scenes function within the global music industry, and particularly in the context of the world music genre.¹² None of this work considers the Cajun music scene in terms of local music and global industry, although the case of Swallow Records reveals many parallel conclusions.

This thesis also owes much to the historiography of Cajun music and culture. The work done on Cajun studies has largely straddled the line between folklore and historical analysis, and has received a more critical focus since the 1980s. Many of the early works on Cajun music often serve as ethnographic sketches that, in the words of William Faulkner Rushton, study Cajuns as a “living repository of a unique set of pre-industrial agrarian values.”¹³ In the 1980s, Ann Allen Savoy and Barry Jean Ancelet published seminal texts on Cajun music that reflect their deep involvement with the Cajun revival.¹⁴ Despite their thorough and valuable contributions to Cajun literature, and the Cajun revival, these books continue a tradition of looking at Cajuns through a folkloric lens.

In the late 1980s, a group of scholars began to focus on a more historical approach to studying Cajun communities. A major conversation in this body of work focuses on the process of Americanization. Carl A. Brasseaux became the first Cajun historian to consider

¹¹ Roger Wallis and Krister Malm, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1984).

¹² Tony Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop, and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Jocelyne Guilbaut, “On Redefining the ‘Local’ through World Music,” in *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Jennifer Post (New York: Routledge, 2006), 137-146.

¹³ Rushton, *The Cajuns*, 5. Many men and women have contributed to this body of work. For an extensive historiography of these early Cajun texts see, Carl A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot, ed., *Accordions, Fiddles, Two Step & Swing: A Cajun Music Reader* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006).

¹⁴ Ann Allen Savoy, *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People* (Eunice: Bluebird Press, 1984). Barry Jean Ancelet, *Cajun Music: Its Origins and Development* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1989).

Americanization by examining the ways in which Acadian settlers in Louisiana adapted to their new surroundings and transitioned into “Cajuns,” the Anglicized form of the term “Acadian.”¹⁵ Brasseaux’s work disrupted the emphasis of folklore in Cajun studies by using historical records to construct an early history of the Acadian people, and his work has influenced much of Cajun scholarship since. Ryan Andre Brasseaux picked up where his father left off, examining the process of Americanization through the evolution of music in Cajun communities until WWII.¹⁶ R. Brasseaux examines Cajun music within the context of American popular music, and effectively disputes the myth of Cajun isolation while also asserting the agency of Cajun people to actively participate in this larger soundscape. Shane K. Bernard’s approach to Americanization provides a broad discussion of the social, cultural, and economic changes in postwar Cajun communities, and remains the most extensive work on the history of Cajuns in the postwar period.¹⁷ This thesis, drawing from the work of these three scholars, examines Americanization in Cajun communities through the lens of the album cover and the recording industry.¹⁸

Music historian John Broven’s detailed exploration of Louisiana music is the only text to foreground the men and women who built the independent recording industry, and bridges Cajun studies with popular music history. Although Shane Bernard’s work on swamp pop, a style of south Louisiana rock and roll music, discusses various record labels in Louisiana, his book

¹⁵ Carl A. Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992).

¹⁶ Ryan Andre Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown: The Emergence of an American-Made Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Shane K. Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003).

¹⁸ Many article-length works have been written about Cajuns in the postwar period that deserve mention here, including Robert Lewis, “L’Acadie Retrouvée: The Re-making of Cajun Identity in Southwestern Louisiana, 1968-1994,” in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures*, ed. Richard H. King and Helen Taylor (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 67-84; Rocky L. Sexton, “Too Loud, Too Wild? Negotiating Cajun Cultural Representations,” *Ethnology* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 117-134; and Jacques Henry, “From ‘Acadien’ to ‘Cajun’ to ‘Cadien’: Ethnic Labelization and Construction of Identity,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1998), 29-62.

primarily focuses on the musicians rather than the producers.¹⁹ In comparison, Broven's work relies on oral histories with those involved in the Cajun recording industry, including Floyd Soileau, to discuss four distinct music traditions in south Louisiana—Cajun, zydeco, swamp pop, and swamp blues. By emphasizing the role of Cajun record makers as agents of their own industry and commercialization, Broven presents them as objects of further study.²⁰ Broven's third book goes one step further by placing the record makers of south Louisiana squarely within his discussion of the postwar American recording industry.²¹ This thesis follows John Broven's lead by discussing Swallow Records as a trace of Americanization in Cajun communities, while also foregrounding the ways that Floyd Soileau used the tools of the global music industry to market Cajun identity during the Cajun revival.

Founding Swallow Records

The development of Floyd Soileau's Flat Town Music Company follows the growth of mass media in postwar Louisiana, as Cajuns found ways to modernize their communities while also reinforcing local distinctiveness. After WWII, new occupational opportunities and a large shift from rural to urban areas resulted in a new Cajun middle class. Like the growing middle class across America, disposable incomes changed the ways that Cajuns used their leisure time. During the 1950s, homes with electricity in south Louisiana jumped from 15%-94%, and by the end of the decade 85% of homes had radios and 80% had televisions.²² These new technologies broadcasted American culture into the homes of Cajun families, and, in many cases, replaced

¹⁹ Shane K. Bernard, *Swamp Pop: Cajun and Creole Rhythm and Blues*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996).

²⁰ John Broven, *South to Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Press, 1984).

²¹ John Broven, *Record Makers and Breakers: Voices of the Independent Rock 'n' Roll Scene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

²² Bernard, *The Cajuns*, 39-40.

traditional gatherings such as the *fais-do-do* and the *viellee*.²³ However, local television and radio stations also created programming that showcased regional talent and products. For instance, Cajun musicians Aldus Roger and Happy Fats LeBlanc both hosted local television shows featuring Cajun musicians, inviting families to gather around the television to listen to Cajun music rather than gathering with extended family and friends. Accordionist Belton Richard also hosted a local television program called *Cajun Bandstand*, providing a clear Cajun analog to the popular American broadcast Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*.²⁴

Like television, radio stations provided a similar way for Cajuns to embrace mass media while still promoting local identity. Radio KVPI in Ville Platte, where Soileau first became involved with the music industry, played popular rhythm and blues artists like Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Little Richard, while also broadcasting local French-speaking records and radio shows.²⁵ Despite the limited reach of local stations like KVPI, some regional stations attained an influential voice in the music industry. Most famously, from the 1940s to the 1960s, the radio show *Louisiana Hayride*, broadcast from Shreveport, Louisiana, helped to launch the careers of several popular musicians, including Elvis Presley and Hank Williams.²⁶ However, hearing Cajun musicians on the same airwaves as popular artists, whether on a major show like the *Hayride* or a local show on KVPI, influenced the way Cajuns perceived the value of their own culture. Soileau believes: "I think that it really...helped to keep the pride in our culture, in our language alive, the fact that...these songs...were being played on radio." In addition to radio, jukeboxes allowed patrons at local bars and restaurants to choose Cajun songs among a selection

²³ The *fais-do-do* and the *viellee* were gatherings of family and friends that typically included food, music, and dancing.

²⁴ Interview, Belton Richard, April 25, 2003, 001.2003.008, Allison Miner Music Heritage Collection, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation Archive, New Orleans, LA.

²⁵ Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 192.

²⁶ For more on the Louisiana Hayride see, Tracey E.W. Laird, *Louisiana Hayride: Radio and Roots Music along the Red River* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

of popular hits. Soileau explains that jukeboxes also played an integral role for independent record makers like himself: “When you had a hit record...there were 1,300,000 jukeboxes in this country. You could automatically have a million seller...”²⁷ Throughout his career, Floyd Soileau benefitted from keeping the radio and jukebox industry central to his business model.

While working as a disc jockey at KVPI, Floyd Soileau opened a record store and capitalized his time on the air to advertise his inventory. By 1957, the success of his retail business distracted Soileau from his duties at the radio station, and he left KVPI to focus full-time on Floyd’s Record Shop.²⁸ The record store allowed Soileau to track steady consumer demand for Cajun music as the supply of Cajun records from distributors dwindled. By 1957, Soileau realized the profitability of filling this gap and released his first Cajun record with the investment of jukebox operator Ed Manuel. The production of this first record, released on the short-lived VeePee label, demonstrates Soileau’s propensity for business strategy. The record featured two tracks, the “Manuel Bar Waltz” and the “Midway Two-Step,” whose titles represented the two major dance styles in Cajun communities as well as the names of dancehalls that operated Ed Manuel’s jukeboxes.²⁹ Not only did the record provide new inventory for Soileau to sell in his store and distribute to other retailers, but it also became available in jukeboxes, bolstered Manuel’s relationship with the clients whose dancehalls were featured on the record, and brought new customers from the dancehalls to Floyd’s Record Shop.

²⁷ Floyd Soileau, interview conducted by Jessica Dauterive, March 18, 2015, in Ville Platte, Louisiana; digital audio file, part two, 1:27:49. Segment 46:07.

²⁸ Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 192-3.

²⁹ By the postwar period, dancehalls replaced the earlier Cajun tradition of house dances. These were large, unassuming spaces where the community would gather to eat, drink and dance to live Cajun bands. Dancehalls were found across Louisiana, and created a sense of professionalism for some Cajun musicians who performed on the regional dancehall circuit. For more on the history of dancehalls see, Malcolm L. Comeaux, “The Cajun Dancehall,” in *Accordions, Fiddles, Two-Step, and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*, ed. Ryan A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006), 139-151.

With the release of this first record, Floyd Soileau became part of a decades-long tradition of recording Cajun music. Ryan Brasseaux argues that Cajuns have engaged with American culture since their earliest settlements in ways that allowed the group to “reconcile both their French Catholic ethnicity and their place in the American national project.”³⁰ The recording industry is one site of this interplay. Barry Ancelet notes that there are two distinct groups of recorded Cajun music—folklore and commercial. The role of folklorists in the history of recorded Cajun music should not be overlooked, but this paper focuses on the tradition of commercial music, which began in 1928 when Joe and Cléoma Falcon recorded “Allons à Lafayette” for Columbia Records.³¹ Ancelet explains that during the 1930s, “national companies sort of created a stock of regional music recordings, some of which ended up becoming national...like Jimmie Rodgers and The Carter Family...[but] Cajun music was in French and so that wasn’t gonna happen.”³² By the end of WWII, major record companies lost interest in recording Louisiana music and were replaced by a network of independent recording studios across the state, paving the way for Floyd Soileau to found Swallow Records in the late 1950s.³³

Floyd Soileau’s first major success in the independent record industry, however, was not a Cajun record, but rather Rod Bernard’s swamp pop single, “This Should Go On Forever.” Swamp pop music deviated from traditional Cajun arrangements, as Cajun teenagers emulated the sound of 1950s rock and roll, particularly the music of Fats Domino.³⁴ Some swamp pop musicians, including Rod Bernard, Johnnie Allan, and the duo Dale and Grace, earned airplay on popular radio, were written up in trade magazines, and even appeared on Dick Clark’s *American*

³⁰ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, xi.

³¹ For more on the role of the Lomaxes in Louisiana see, Joshua Clegg Caffery, *Traditional Music in Coastal Louisiana: The 1934 Lomax Recordings* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

³² Barry Ancelet, interview conducted by Jessica Dauterive, June 23, 2015, in Lafayette, LA; digital audio file, 50:24. Segment 4:15.

³³ These other Louisiana labels include J.D. Miller’s Fais Do Do in Crowley, Eddie Shuler’s Goldband in Lake Charles, Lee Lavergne’s Lanor in Churchpoint, and Carl Rachou’s La Louisiane in Lafayette.

³⁴ For more on the composition of swamp pop music see, Bernard, *Swamp Pop*, 24-39.

Bandstand. In fact, the term “swamp pop” was not coined in South Louisiana, but rather by a group of British record collectors and music writers, including John Broven, who became fans of these artists before realizing their records were produced in Louisiana.³⁵ To reach wider audiences, Soileau used the same distributing strategy as many independent labels: “We were a small label, we had limited distribution within the immediate area, and if we got something that became a regional hit we looked to license it to a major corporation.”³⁶ By connecting to major distribution networks, Soileau profited from the popularity of swamp pop until the British Invasion of the mid-1960s overshadowed the popularity of American rock and roll.

Even during the peak of swamp pop’s popularity during the 1950s and early 1960s, Floyd Soileau continued to release Cajun music on Swallow Records. These Cajun records appealed to older, French-speaking consumers who were generationally disinterested in the rock and roll sounds of swamp pop music, and also allowed Soileau to avoid financial pitfalls by falling back on Cajun music when swamp pop lost its international appeal. Most of these early Cajun records gained regional airplay on radio stations and jukeboxes. However, because of his experience with swamp pop music, Soileau ensured that his Cajun records would be ready to distribute to a wider audience should one become a hit. This preparation for wider distribution is reflected in the name *Swallow Records* itself. The label is named for Floyd Soileau’s family, but he also realized that consumers outside of Louisiana would not know how to pronounce the French surname. He compromised by using the phonetic English spelling of his last name—Swallow. However, Soileau also admits that he chose Swallow hoping that people might associate his label

³⁵ This group of British record collectors included Mike Leadbitter, Simon A. Napier, and John Broven, and published a magazine called *Blues Unlimited* from the 1960s-1980s. In fact, Leadbitter’s column “Cajun Corner,” in the 1960s introduced Cajun music to British audiences for the first time.

³⁶ Soileau, interview, part one, 26:14.

with RCA's budget jazz and blues label, Bluebird Records.³⁷ Despite Soileau's desire to connect with his local community, his business acumen led to decisions that ultimately positioned Swallow Records within the global music industry. As historian John Broven notes, "Floyd was such a good businessman, you know, that's obviously why he's still in business today, but that's also good for Cajun music."³⁸ By releasing records on Swallow, Soileau revived interest in recording commercial Cajun music, and influenced other record makers throughout the region to do the same.

South Louisiana is just one of several small countries and ethnic subcultures across the world to use the music industry to assert local identity. As Roger Wallis and Krister Malm demonstrate, ethnic recordings arise partly as a reaction to the threat of cultural homogenization, and partly because recording technology is available and easy to use.³⁹ Once recorded, marketing local music often relies on particular motifs that conflate musical genre with a regional or ethnic identity. For instance, Benjamin Filene considers how the notion of a shared history is used in the music industry to construct group identity. He argues that the scouts and producers of American folk music effectively "shape[d] our nation's sense of its musical heritage" through marketing.⁴⁰ In another example, Richard A. Peterson explores the way country music is marketed with the assumption of authenticity, which he defines as "being believable...and at the same time being original."⁴¹ On the album covers of Swallow LPs, these marketing strategies created a simplified representation of Cajun culture that promised an authentic musical experience before the consumer ever heard a single note.

³⁷ Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 195.

³⁸ Broven, interview, 21:16.

³⁹ Wallis and Malm, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples*, xiv.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 5.

⁴¹ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 290.

However, the depiction of Cajun identity on Swallow LPs was complicated by the varying groups involved in the Cajun revival. Shane Bernard describes the growth of the Cajun revival as, “two parallel ethnic pride movements, one organized, autocratic, elitist and the other, nebulous, egalitarian, grassroots.”⁴² The first group referred to by Bernard is the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, or CODOFIL. Formed in 1968, this government organization promoted bilingual education in Louisiana and exchange programs with other Francophone regions as a way to promote French in an increasingly English-speaking Louisiana. The second group, described by Bernard as grassroots, involved a less organized group of musicians, artists, scholars, and activists who looked to music as a way to encourage Cajuns to not only speak French, but also to participate in a living cultural exchange by reviving Cajun lifeways and traditions. Despite valuing distinct aspects of Cajun identity, CODOFIL and the grassroots movement both found ways to modify the marketing strategies on Swallow album covers to communicate their social and political goals.

Designing the Album Cover

Floyd Soileau first started to release LPs in the mid-1960s. These early albums were primarily compilations of previously released singles to capitalize on the popularity of golden oldies records. Louisiana artist Jessie Gary designed some of these early album covers, which were typically printed with a plain typeface and block coloring and redesigned with more dynamic cover art for later pressings (see fig. 2).⁴³ Waiting for records to be pressed and sent back to Ville Platte for distribution frustrated Soileau, especially when he lost sales to a popular album selling out before a new shipment came in. Floyd remembers one such occasion when he was using an RCA Victor pressing plant in Indianapolis: “So I called RCA and I said please rush

⁴² Bernard, *The Cajuns*, 88.

⁴³ Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 195.

them through, and that was, like, almost asking the impossible. I couldn't wait to go down to the train station to pick 'em up and run down to the bus station to put them on the bus to get them down to New Orleans.”⁴⁴ In later years, a pressing plant opened up in Houston that pressed albums for many Louisiana labels, but became unable to keep up with the volume of orders. Soileau then decided to open his own pressing plant, hoping to gain the business of other regional labels, but viewing it as a lucrative venture nonetheless: “The freight for vinyl, for vinyl albums especially, even from Houston, was quite a bit high. So I said, if I don't make any money on it, at least I save the freight.”⁴⁵ In 1974, Soileau opened the plant with his brother, and it soon became a lucrative part of his music company.

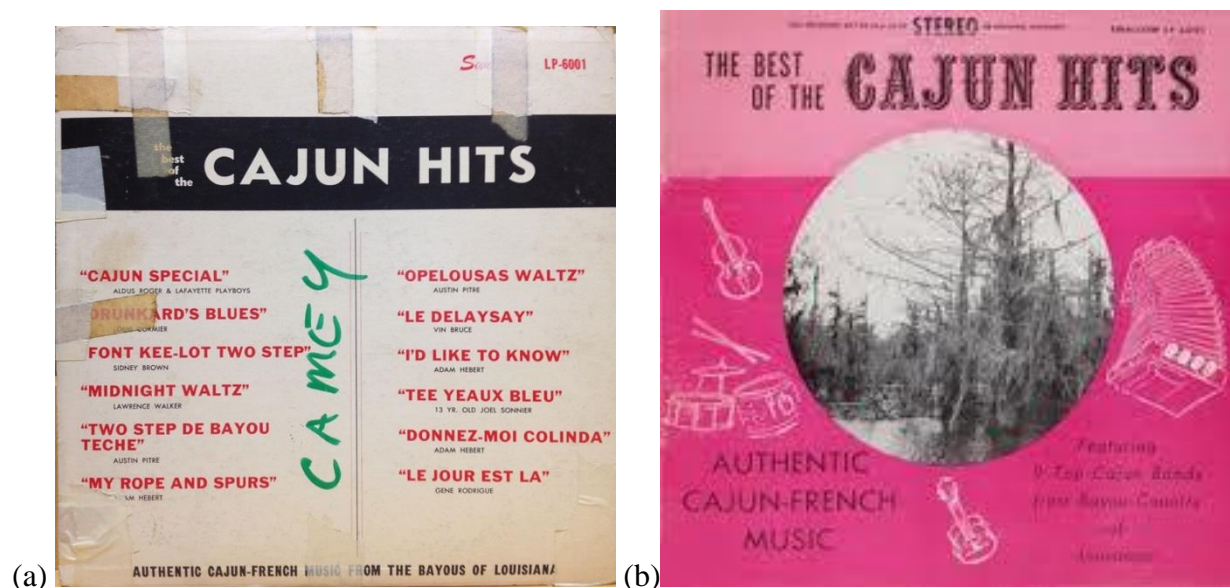


FIGURE 2: An early (a) and a later (b) pressing of *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 1*, Swallow 6001, LP.

Floyd Soileau’s pressing plant separates his business from many other independent record producers in the country. His plant gained the pressing business of many regional labels and also became a valuable place of employment for residents of Ville Platte. Soileau remembers,

⁴⁴ Interview, Floyd Soileau conducted by John Broven, 1970, BR2.021.1, Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Lafayette, Louisiana.

⁴⁵ Floyd Soileau, interview conducted by Jessica Dauterive, October 21, 2015, in Ville Platte, Louisiana; digital audio file, 40:12. Segment 0:17:04.

I had about thirty, thirty-five, thirty-six people working for me at one time, just at the pressing plant. Because we had, you know, we had the printing, we had the gluing of the jackets, we had the pressing of the records, and then the packaging and the artwork and all kinds of stuff...⁴⁶

Benny Graeff, a college-aged student and musician, started working for Floyd Soileau in the late 1960s as a general right-hand-man. Graeff remembers that the plant had a positive impact on the employees: “they'd leave everyday proud of where they worked. You know, we were something. We were doing something.”⁴⁷ Even though Swallow remained a small label, Graeff emphasizes that quality was paramount for Soileau, and remembers a conversation with his boss who decided: “We're gonna use nothing but grade-A vinyl for everything. We don't care whose record it is. We never want to have to worry that it's our vinyl, our machinery. It's never gonna be the excuse.”⁴⁸

With the introduction of the LP by Columbia Records in 1948, and its slow growth to wide popularity among youthful consumers by the 1970s, the album cover became a powerful marketing tool.⁴⁹ To utilize this resource, major record companies established art departments to design covers that would sell the enclosed record, and also created visual identities for musicians and music scenes. In comparison, cover design at independent labels, many of which lacked art departments, often depended on the available budget, resources, and staff. Among his many other duties at Flat Town Music, Benny Graeff took on the role of art director throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Working for the company allowed Graeff to apply and sharpen the skills he was learning in design school, and also provided Soileau with a younger perspective for his

⁴⁶ Soileau, interview, October 21, 2015, 19:47.

⁴⁷ Graeff, interview, 1:16:27.

⁴⁸ Graeff, interview, 1:11:30.

⁴⁹ For more on the history of the LP album see, Broven, *Record Makers and Breakers*, 73-90.

label. Graeff recounts: “The hair that I had was growing out and I was wearing a blue jean shirt and blue jeans. I wasn't wearing slacks and a golf shirt, you know. I was the next generation.”⁵⁰

Despite his experience in design, Graeff asserts that designing the album covers of Swallow Records was a group effort: “Everybody realized we'll take our different skills together...it's us doing it...let's do this as well as we can.”⁵¹ The collaboration within the company and its connection to the Cajun community resulted in the kinds of album covers that Nicholas de Ville describes as “pictorial representations of the self-consciously adopted aesthetic values and worldly interests of specific, identifiable lifestyles, subcultures, urban tribes and other self-determined communities.”⁵²

To Floyd Soileau, quality was central to the design of the album covers in order to create a product that could compete in the global music industry. In order to print the covers, Floyd Soileau first sent images and other materials to a Nashville company that created negatives. Once the negatives arrived in Ville Platte, Soileau's team did their best with the tools they had at their disposal. Floyd proudly recalls: “We were printing the jackets for the albums, and we were doing full color work on a single color press.”⁵³ This process could be difficult because the negatives had to line up exactly with the presses, but Benny Graeff remembers: “There was quality control everywhere...I could send something to a printer, and...he could come right to my desk, he'd call me Benny, and he knew I'd call him Mike, and he'd come right to the desk and go, ‘What do you think about this?’”⁵⁴ Moreover, Graeff also asserts that the team at the pressing plant strived to emulate the quality of the major labels in all the work they produced:

⁵⁰ Benny Graeff, interview conducted by Jessica Dauterive, November 30, 2015, in Baton Rouge, LA; digital audio file, 1:46:26. Segment 02:47.

⁵¹ Graeff, interview, 19:05.

⁵² de Ville, *Album*, 8.

⁵³ Soileau, interview, part one, 19:02.

⁵⁴ Graeff, interview, 1:16:27.

I used Columbia Records as a reference every once in awhile and Deutsche Grammophon, you know, out of Europe, we would use them as examples and we'd take something...and put it on the wall and say, 'This is how colors need to look,' and the printers would be in there going, 'This is my goal.'⁵⁵

Even though Flat Town Music never attained the equipment and resources of major labels, the Swallow team managed to release LPs that combined industry standards with local aesthetics.

Of course, the main job of an album cover is to market the music on the enclosed record. Graeff asserts: "That's the most visible thing on it and before they get to the record...[the cover is] what is in their hands."⁵⁶ This visibility is particularly important when marketing a regional genre for wider distribution. Graeff explains, "You're introducing a music to people that don't know...and, you know, there's a dozen different kinds of accordions in the world...You showing exactly what it is."⁵⁷ Instruments symbolic of Cajun arrangements—fiddles, accordions, and t-fers—appear on the covers of many Swallow album covers.⁵⁸ These symbols distinguished Cajun music from other musical styles, but also referenced a growing interest to revive traditional Cajun songs and instrumentation, particularly after the decline of swamp pop in the mid-1960s.

Floyd Soileau left most of the artistic design of the album covers to Swallow's musicians under the direction of Benny Graeff. Soileau remembers that the design process differed for each album. Occasionally Soileau bought and reprinted original artwork by local artists as a way to cross-promote local music with local art. However, the bulk of Swallow's album covers feature photographs. Soileau remembers: "I didn't take very much pictures, but the artist themselves

⁵⁵ Graeff, interview, 1:11:30.

⁵⁶ Graeff, interview, 32:42.

⁵⁷ Graeff, interview, 1:37:49.

⁵⁸ The t-fer is a traditional percussion instrument in Cajun arrangement, also known as the triangle.

sometimes had pictures that they took...because they had to send some kind of portfolio to the folk festivals and stuff like that.”⁵⁹ Soileau recalls that other times, “their wives [or]...somebody else might have taken some pictures of them...A few we did take into a professional studio.”⁶⁰ In any case, the musicians typically provided the materials that were used on the album cover. Benny Graeff recognized the importance of letting Swallow’s musicians have a say in their representation, but also filtered each idea through a design philosophy he calls “open mind with standards.”⁶¹ Graeff and his team tried to incorporate the musicians’ design ideas, but shaped the final product to appear professional and reflect a positive image of South Louisiana. Graeff explains: “They’d come in...sometimes it was the minimum you could even try to get out of people, but we would work with them, from the minute they came in, to steer them.”⁶² The open mind with standards strategy in many ways mirrored the strides taken during the Cajun revival to subvert historically negative assumptions of Cajun communities by repackaging those aesthetics in a positive way.

In addition to visual design, liner notes were another vital component of the album cover. In the context of the overall cover design, Graeff remembers this as a challenge: “The hardest thing to design is something that’s simple and functional so it doesn’t look like junk [mail].”⁶³ The Swallow design team worked hard to make sure they used the liner notes to appropriately describe both the company and the artist. Graeff maintains that liner notes were strategically crafted for each album, ensuring that they marketed the music with Swallow’s wide-reaching distribution networks in mind. Graeff remembers one of his earliest decisions for Swallow Records was to include clear contact information for the record store, even including “USA” in

⁵⁹ Soileau, interview, part one, 52:24.

⁶⁰ Soileau, interview, part one, 14:41.

⁶¹ Graeff, interview, 55:48.

⁶² Graeff, interview, 08:31.

⁶³ Graeff, interview, 19:05.

the address line in case the record made it into the hands of an international consumer.⁶⁴ When introducing an artist, Graeff kept in mind that the consumers “didn't want to know everything about what was going on, they wanted to know a little bit. And [the liner notes] would come from what was needed.”⁶⁵ Liner notes were often written by popular disc jockeys in the area such as Revon Reed, Leroy Martin, or Jim Soileau, who would have been familiar and trustworthy voices to local consumers. Towards the end of the 1970s, members of a new generation of grassroots revivalists like scholar Barry Ancelet and musician Michael Doucet fully utilized the possibilities of the LP album cover by creating more elaborate designs and writing liner notes that explicitly integrated the album cover with the goals of the Cajun revival.⁶⁶

Marketing Cajun Identity

While the Swallow Records team kept an eye towards potential international sales, the company's connection to the Cajun community in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in album covers that illustrated various depictions of Cajun identity. In the liner notes of Swallow's first LP, *Best of the Cajun Hits*, the radio disc jockey Revon Reed promoted Cajun music as a genre that is “expressing a way of life that refuses to bow to modernistic trends.”⁶⁷ The liner notes on *Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 2* express a similar sentiment, declaring that “Cajun life paces forward with the traditions and customs of yester-year.”⁶⁸ These statements suggest a particular authenticity in Cajun communities while masking the growth of the Cajun middle class in modernized, urban areas. However, Benny Graeff insists that these album covers accurately

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Graeff, interview, 1:28:23.

⁶⁶ Chris Strachwitz's Arhoolie label released albums that showcased vernacular American music, and was a source of competition and influence for Swallow Records. Although based in California, Strachwitz was very involved with Louisiana and its music, and released many Cajun albums throughout the 1960s and 1970s. His graphic designer, Wayne Pope, utilized a more documentary-style of cover design that people like Ancelet and Doucet brought to Swallow in the late 1970s.

⁶⁷ Various artists, *Best of the Cajun Hits*, Swallow 6001, LP, c. 1960s.

⁶⁸ Various artists, *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 2*, Swallow 6003, LP, c. 1960s.

represented the values of the musicians, who were still tied to rural communities: “These guys all live in the country...they're all Cajuns, you know, and they all dress the same way. They're not professional musicians.”⁶⁹ However, as Shane Bernard contends, “Ironically, by packaging their culture for mass consumption, the Cajuns further demonstrated their adoption of mainstream American values.”⁷⁰

Although this paper considers the ways that leaders of the Cajun revival illustrated various Cajun identities, it is first useful to recognize the ways that the catalog as a whole illustrated Cajun identity as rural, white, masculine, and French speaking. This depiction of the residents of South Louisiana has remained a powerful image, and reflected an overarching mission during the Cajun revival to subvert and reclaim historically negative connotations to that identity. Benny Graeff recognized that his work with Swallow Records could aid in the resurgence of pride in Cajun identity, especially as the markets for Cajun music stretched beyond regional boundaries: “this can't be anymore roll up your blue jeans and be a coonass. We got our foot in the door, you know, we're not taking our foot out of the door.”⁷¹ With a careful interplay between marketing the music and marketing regional distinctiveness, the album covers of Swallow Records distilled Cajun identity into a commodity for sale in the global music industry.

First, the use of rural imagery on Swallow LPs effectively framed Cajun music as an authentic ethnic expression and worked to ground the genre as an indigenous American music. Many Swallow LPs used photographs or drawings to connect the consumer to the landscape of Louisiana, and some also positioned the musicians within these rural, almost pastoral, settings (see fig. 3). In the liner notes of one album, Revon Reed describes “moss covered Evangeline oaks” and “winding picturesque bayous,” framing Cajun music within an exotic, mysterious, and

⁶⁹ Graeff, interview, 1:39:06.

⁷⁰ Bernard, *The Cajuns*, 78.

⁷¹ Graeff, interview, 1:36:43.

feminized setting.⁷² This illusion of a rural paradise worked to distinguish Cajun country from major urban areas and played on long-held notions of Cajun isolation. The rural image also extended to Cajuns themselves, who were often depicted or described as honest and hard-working people. For example, members of Jambalaya Cajun Band are introduced on their first album by their “day jobs.” The liner notes explain to the consumer that one was the “manager of Picard’s Auto Parts” while another worked towards “a career as an automobile mechanic.”⁷³ Graeff suggests that emphasizing rural settings and identity communicated an authenticity in the music that he believes separated Cajun musicians from more urban, professional musicians: “They were real people. Their music was real because they had jobs. They were in the real world.”⁷⁴

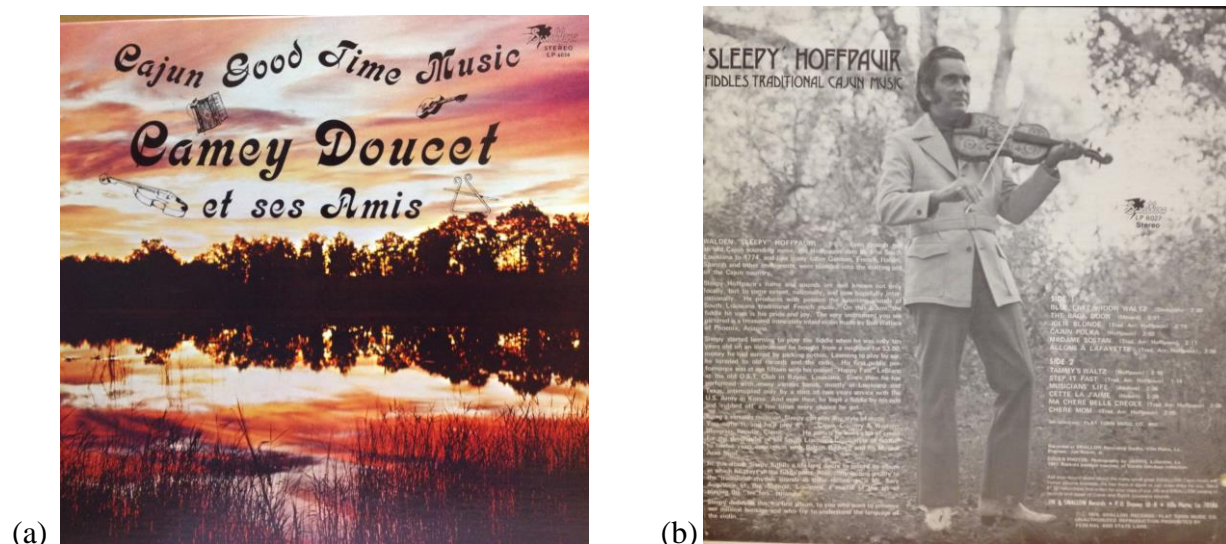


FIGURE 3: (a) Camey Doucet et ses Amis, *Cajun Good Time Music*, Swallow 6034, 1979. (b) Sleepy Hoffpauir, *Sleepy Haufpauir Fiddles Traditional Cajun Music*, Swallow 6027, 1976.

Second, the overwhelming number of men on the covers of Swallow LPs in the 1960s and 1970s reflects the predominance of men in Cajun music. As Lisa E. Richardson notes, Cajun women historically played music and sang songs at home that reflected musical traditions from

⁷² Various artists, *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 2*, Swallow 6003, LP, c. 1960s.

⁷³ Jambalaya Cajun Band, *Buggy Full of Cajun Music*, Swallow 6035, LP, 1979.

⁷⁴ Graeff, interview, 1:39:06.

the original Acadian settlements, a separate repertoire from the Cajun music performed at house dances and dancehalls. The home was often the only space in which a woman could play music and still remain respectable.⁷⁵ The rural, hardworking image of Cajun musicians discussed previously reinforces a masculine idea of Cajun identity, particularly in Cajun music. Only two women appear in the catalog during the 1960s and 1970s to challenge this characterization. On the cover of *Vin Bruce Sings Jole Blon and Other Cajun Classics*, four men sit on the porch of an Acadian-style home and play to a young, blonde-haired woman. It appears that she is not part of the band, but rather represents the Cajun folk symbol *Jole Blon*, or “pretty blonde (see fig. 4a).”⁷⁶ Although Nancy Tabb Marcantel is featured as an artist on the three LPs she recorded for Swallow Records, she, too, is represented as an object of fantasy. The album art suggests Marcantel as a modern-day Evangeline, another Cajun folk symbol from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem (see fig. 4b).⁷⁷ Although more women appeared in the catalog of Swallow Records starting in the 1980s, the depiction of Cajun identity throughout the 1960s and 1970s uses feminine aesthetics to connect the Acadian past to the landscape of Louisiana and future of the Cajun revival, while masculine images are reserved to depict the living, present-day Cajun community.

⁷⁵ Lisa E. Richardson, “The Public and Private Domains of Cajun Women Musicians in Southwest Louisiana,” in *Accordions, Fiddles, Two-Step, and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*, ed. Ryan A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006), 80.

⁷⁶ The song “Jole Blon” is often referred to as the Cajun national anthem. The earliest recorded version of this song dates to 1929, but was widely popularized by Cajun musician Harry Choates in the 1940s. The romantic myth of Jole Blon, as a woman who abandoned her lover while he sits in prison, has been recycled by other recording artists outside of the Cajun genre, and was embodied most famously through the artwork of the late Cajun painter George Rodrigue.

⁷⁷ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* tells the story of Evangeline, an Acadian woman who was separated from her lover during the expulsion of the Acadians from present-day Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. The figure of Evangeline, as a woman who spends her whole life searching for her lost love, stands in some juxtaposition to the figure of Jole Blon. Evangeline has remained a popular symbol in Louisiana since the 1950s. To read more see, Barry Jean Ancelet, “From Evangeline Hot Sauce to Cajun Ice: Signs of Ethnicity in South Louisiana,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany* 12 (1997).



FIGURE 4: (a) Vin Bruce, *Vin Bruce Sings “Jole Blon” and Other Cajun Classics*, Swallow 6002, c. 1965; (b) Nancy Tabb Marcantel, *Ma Louisiane*, Swallow 6022, 1975.

Third, the album covers of Swallow LPs feature only white musicians. During the Cajun revival, the line hardened that separated white Cajuns from black Creoles, despite a shared social and musical history. Although South Louisiana was not a center of radical civil rights activism, black Louisiana residents did participate in the national struggle for racial equality.⁷⁸ For example, activist Wilbert Guillory used the Cajun dancehall as a site to force integration, and zydeco musician Geno Delafosse relates that Guillory’s efforts were met with resistance that often erupted into violence.⁷⁹ Mark Mattern argues that the whiteness of the Cajun revival aroused resentment among black residents of Louisiana who felt that the movement erased black contributions to Louisiana culture.⁸⁰ The whiteness of Swallow album covers also reflects the use

⁷⁸ The historical relationship between Cajuns and Creoles in South Louisiana is deserving of further study. It is important to note that the distinctions between white and black residents of Louisiana became increasingly defined in terms of Cajun and Creole, respectively, during the Cajun revival. The Civil Rights Movement is cited as an inspiration for activism by both groups, but is especially problematic in the context of defining Cajuns as a white ethnic group. In the context of the music industry, Cajun music became synonymous with white Louisiana music influenced by country or pop sounds, while creole or zydeco music signified black musicians who were more influenced by rhythm and blues.

⁷⁹ Interview, Geno Delafosse, Christine Balfa, and Ann Savoy, May 5, 2001, 001.2001.017, Allison Miner Music Heritage Collection, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation Archive, New Orleans, LA.

⁸⁰ Mark Mattern, “Let the Good Times Unroll: Music and Race Relations in Southwest Louisiana,” *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 159-168. Also see, Bernard, *The Cajuns*, 53-57.

of racial segregation as a marketing strategy to appeal to particular consumer bases, a process that was common in the recording industry during the Jim Crow era.⁸¹ In the case of Flat Town Music, Floyd Soileau recorded black artists on his Maison de Soul label, black or white swamp pop artists on Jin, and white artists on Swallow. In the 1980s, Swallow released a double-album of recordings of Louisiana artists made by folklorist Alan Lomax in the 1930s, and is the only instance of a black musician on the cover of a Swallow LP (see fig. 5). However, this album still reinforces the whiteness of Cajun identity by exhibiting a photograph of black musicians on the Creole side and a photograph of white musicians on the Cajun side.

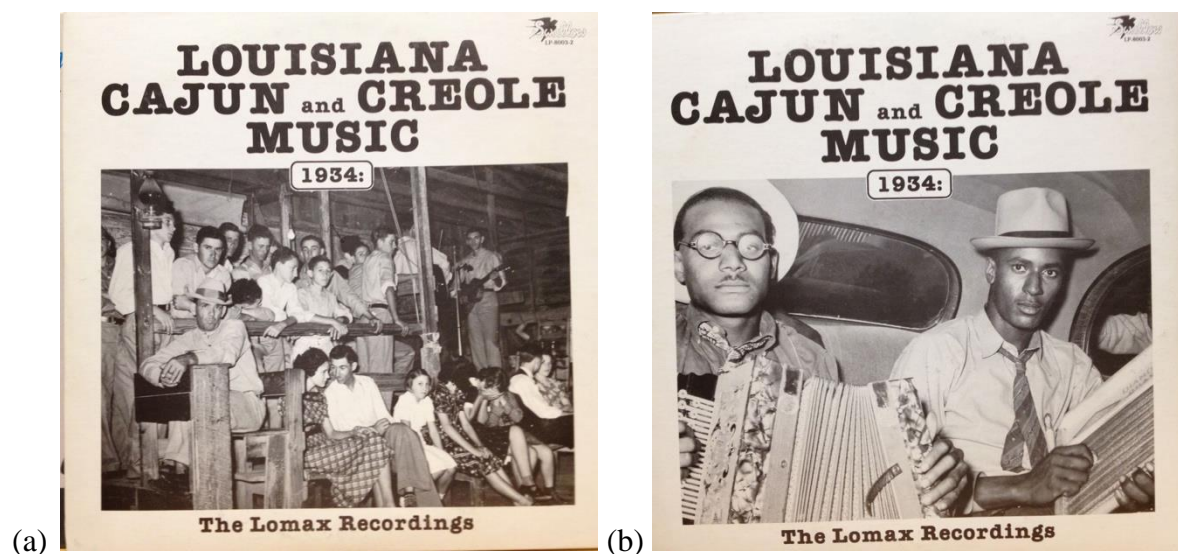


FIGURE 5: The Cajun (a) and Creole (b) sides of *Louisiana Cajun and Creole Music 1934: The Lomax Recordings*, Swallow 8003-2, 1987.

Finally, references to Cajun-French is used on the covers of Swallow LPs which helped to distinguish Cajun music from other kinds of Southern musical traditions that are also marketed as white, rural and masculine. Liner notes on *Best of the Cajun Hits* foregrounded French language as central to Cajun identity and the revival: “Cajun Music is definitely enjoying a renaissance or comeback in South Louisiana; and it is indeed gratifying to see that the French-

⁸¹ Karl Hagstrom Miller discusses this process in depth, particularly in the ways that blues became conflated with black musicians while folk or country became conflated with white musicians. Miller, *Segregating Sound*.

cajun language itself is no longer considered a degrading ‘jargon’”⁸² Despite the importance of French language to Cajun identity, the liner notes of Swallow LPs are not written in French, and many of the song titles provide English translations, or simply leave out the French title completely. By the late 1970s, the liner notes on Swallow LPs condensed Cajun culture into a set of easily digestible colloquialisms either translated into English or defined for the consumer. For instance, the liner notes on the *The Best of the Cajun Hits Volume 3* invite the consumer to “pass a good time” and even refers to the album as a “fais do-do instant mix,” revealing the increasing commodification of Cajun identity.⁸³ The overwhelming use of English on Swallow album covers catered to the growing number of English-speaking Cajuns in Louisiana following patterns of urbanization after WWII, and also to potential consumers outside of the region. However, Graeff made sure that any French that did appear on an album cover was spelled correctly and consistently, recognizing, “If you don't want to be cartoony, you know, you need to make that stuff [right], cause nobody's sitting there with that person in Detroit who starts reading this and is going look at this stupid stuff!”⁸⁴ Although Swallow album covers were never exclusively in French, the depiction of the group as French-speaking, coupled with the French lyrics in the music, became a way to market Cajun distinctiveness from other American roots genres, and reflected a renewed value on French in Louisiana during the Cajun revival.

Floyd Soileau used this simplified identity of Cajuns as rural, white, masculine, and French-speaking to market Cajun music on the shelves of his and other record shops. However, a close look at the catalog reveals the ways that leaders of two main groups during the Cajun revival, CODOFIL and the grassroots revivalists, nuanced these aesthetics to promote various economic, political, and cultural goals. As Peterson notes, the perception of identity in music is

⁸² Various artists, *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 1*, Swallow 6001, LP, c. 1960s.

⁸³ Various artists, *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 3*, Swallow 6033, LP, 1978.

⁸⁴ Graeff, interview, 13:12.

“renegotiated in a continual political struggle in which the goal of each contending interest is to naturalize a particular construction of authenticity.”⁸⁵ To explore the ways that this played out on the covers of Swallow Records, it is helpful to consider the Swallow catalog in three distinct, yet overlapping, groups: albums that represented Floyd Soileau’s business model, albums that represented the political goals of the CODOFIL organization, and albums that represented the social goals of grassroots activists. Viewed in this way, the catalog of Swallow LPs provides a new vantage point through which to view the uneven and sometimes contested process of defining ethnic identity during a period like the Cajun revival.

First, the album covers that represent the goals of Swallow Records blended rural aesthetics with contemporary influences. These albums featured musicians who played Cajun music that was popular in the dancehall circuit, or what Floyd Soileau calls the “now sound” of Cajun music.⁸⁶ Swallow’s now sound artists sang in French and often played Cajun instruments, but were also heavily influenced by mainstream pop or country music. Before Soileau decided to record a musician, he would listen for a single that he believed would gain the record popularity through radio and jukebox play. Floyd remembers that the best singles were songs that either “tickled their funny bone or hit ‘em in the heart,” meaning they were either novelty songs or emotional songs with the chance to become Cajun classics.⁸⁷ Vin Bruce recorded the first now sound album for Swallow Records, and Soileau remembers that Bruce “sort of opened the door a little bit...That was the first album, entire album, of a Cajun artist doing Cajun music.”⁸⁸ Bruce spent his early career as a French-singing country artist for Columbia Records in Nashville, and

⁸⁵ Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 290.

⁸⁶ Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 242.

⁸⁷ Soileau, interview, part one, 1:17:56.

⁸⁸ Soileau, interview, part two, 17:40.

he brought that country style to his Cajun recordings for Swallow.⁸⁹ Bruce recorded four LPs for Swallow, but Soileau remembers Bruce's third album most clearly, titled *Vin Bruce's Cajun Country*. With this album, Soileau attempted an unsuccessful marketing strategy to bridge one consumer base that liked the "country, fiddle-guitar type of thing" with another who "wanted [a Cajun] accordion in there" by recording a side in each style.⁹⁰ This LP also features an album cover that encapsulates the now sound marketing strategy.

In the liner notes of *Vin Bruce's Cajun Country*, Leroy Martin explains that Bruce "combines the old and new styles of Cajun music," and that same mix of old and new is visible in the cover design.⁹¹ In the cover photograph, Bruce stands at the base of a tree wearing a red shirt with white slacks, while his band mates, all in matching outfits of ruffled blue shirts and black slacks, are positioned in and around a tree. The band's urban clothing suggests the growing professionalism among dancehall musicians. A fishing boat docked along the side of a bayou is visible behind the tree, framing the otherwise modern group in the distinctive landscape of Louisiana, and suggesting that the fiddle held by one of member of the band might play a Cajun tune (see fig. 6a). In a similar style, the cover of Joe Bonsall and the Orange Playboys' *Cajun Jamboree* features the band in a line, tallest to shortest, wearing smart outfits of matching vests, slacks, and ties. The only indication that this is a Cajun record, besides the title, is the position of the bandleader Joe Bonsall standing in front, showcasing his accordion.⁹²

Belton Richard is another now sound artist known for his modern approach to Cajun accordion, a style that Barry Ancelet describes as "basically swamp pop but in French."⁹³

⁸⁹ Michael Hurtt, "Vin Bruce," in *Accordions, Fiddles, Two-Step, and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*, ed. Ryan A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006), 443.

⁹⁰ Soileau, interview, part two, 50:50.

⁹¹ Vin Bruce, *Vin Bruce's Cajun Country*, Swallow 6015, LP, c. 1970s.

⁹² Joe Bonsall and the Orange Playboys, *Cajun Jamboree*, Swallow 6008, LP, 1968.

⁹³ Barry Ancelet, "Cajun Music," in *Accordions, Fiddles, Two-Step, and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*, ed. Ryan A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006), 203.

Richard revolutionized the way that the accordion could be played in Cajun music by fusing his background in rock and roll with the Cajun accordion and Cajun-French lyrics. The cover design of Belton Richard's *Modern Sounds in Cajun Music* also exhibited a strategy to market Cajun music with modern aesthetics. As Nicholas de Ville notes, record designers in the 1960s began to use photography that portrayed the musicians as "jovial, jokey, or casual, and certainly never sullen."⁹⁴ The cover design of this album is certainly not sullen, featuring Richard superimposed onto a playing card, accordion in hand, while the musicians who make up his "musical aces" appear on playing cards fanned out below (see fig. 6b).⁹⁵

The playful style of Richard's album cover was often used by Swallow Records, particularly when releasing novelty records in which popular American songs were recreated with Cajun instrumentation and sung in French, such as Belton Richard's "The Cajun Streak" or Joe Bonsall's version of "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown." On a later Richard album, *Good 'n' Cajun*, the liner notes referred to these novelty songs as "Cajunized versions of other top selling records."⁹⁶ These "Cajunized" songs became another way that Cajun musicians expressed their involvement in mainstream American culture while still projecting regional distinctiveness. By not performing these pop covers in English, these artists were also able to retain the French-speaking consumer base that was disinterested in swamp pop's earlier involvement in mainstream rock and roll. As radio disc jockey Jim Soileau attests in the liner notes to *Modern Sounds in Cajun Music*: "No Cajun French D.J. program is complete without at least one Belton Richard record." With nods to rural settings and traditional Cajun instrumentation, the cover design of now sound LPs ultimately framed a Cajun identity that embraced the postwar modernization of South Louisiana's Cajun communities.

⁹⁴ de Ville, *Album*, 79-80.

⁹⁵ Belton Richard, *Modern Sounds in Cajun Music*, Swallow 6010, 1972.

⁹⁶ Belton Richard, *Good 'n' Cajun*, Swallow 6021, LP, 1974.

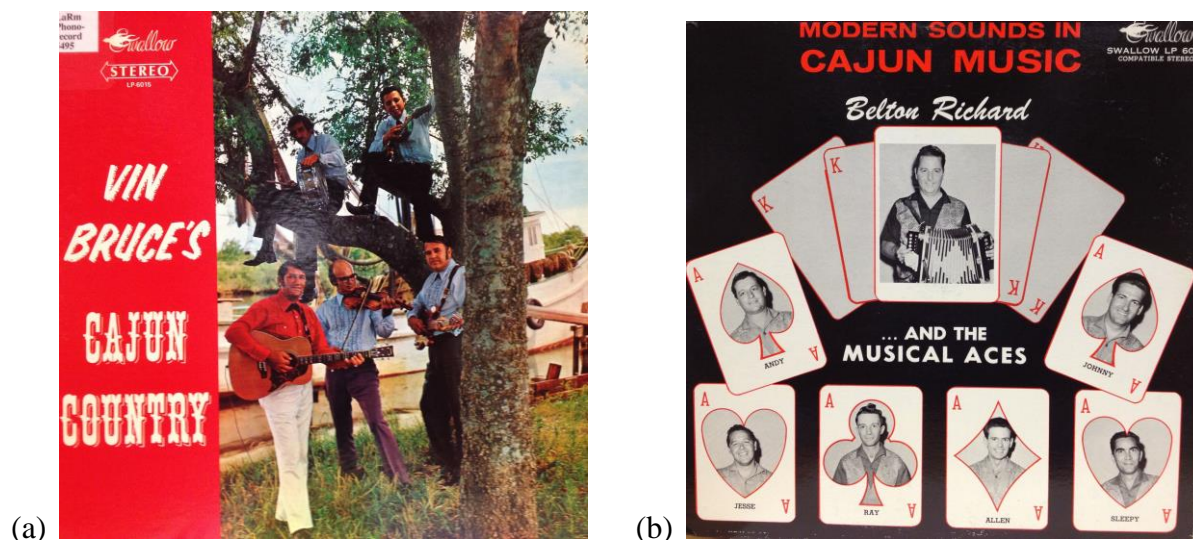


FIGURE 6: (a) Vin Bruce, *Vin Bruce's Cajun Country*, Swallow 6015, LP, c. 1970; (b) Belton Richard, *Modern Sounds in Cajun Music*, Swallow 6010, 1972.

In contrast, the LPs affiliated with the CODOFIL organization featured album art that sought to attract and educate young Cajuns, and export a respectable Cajun identity to the rest of the world. Shane Bernard refers to members of CODOFIL as “genteel Cajuns” who perceived themselves to have more in common with their Acadian ancestors than with rural communities in South Louisiana.⁹⁷ CODOFIL fought against what they considered lowbrow forms of Cajun expression, such as Cajun humorists, the slang term “coonass,” and even traditional Cajun music. It is somewhat surprising, then, that CODOFIL decided to get involved with Swallow Records given Soileau’s emphasis on recording Cajun music that was popular in dancehalls. Soileau also released Cajun humor albums by Marion Marcotte and Revon Reed, the latter of which was originally called *For Koonasses Only*, and featured an array of what Soileau refers to as “salty tales.”⁹⁸ Despite these discrepancies, CODOFIL collaborated with Soileau, using the album covers of singer Nancy Tabb Marcantel to promote their own idealized version of Cajun identity.

⁹⁷ Bernard, *The Cajuns*, 50.

⁹⁸ Floyd Soileau argues that Cajun humor is just as central to Cajun identity as music, although he has removed the word “coonass” from the album in response to wide criticism against this denigrating term for Cajuns. Soileau, interview, part one, 0:00.

The release of Marcantel's first album a year after the 1974 Tribute to Cajun Music, despite CODOFIL's initial reluctance to accept music as a proper tool of cultural revival, suggests that the group recognized the effectiveness of music to reach a wide audience.⁹⁹ James Domengeaux, the first president of CODOFIL, wrote the liner notes for Marcantel's debut album, calling Louisiana "a liaison between [French speaking] countries and the United States." On this record, Domengeaux also wrote that "the common denominator of Cajun music is the French language and not the particular instruments used," distancing the group from what CODOFIL perceived as the lowbrow sounds of traditional Cajun artists.¹⁰⁰ The title track of Marcantel's first album, "Ma Louisiane," was a Cajunized version of the popular John Denver song "Take Me Home, Country Roads," that Floyd Soileau explained "transposed the rice fields of Louisiana into the scenic place he was talking about in his song."¹⁰¹ Nancy Tabb Marcantel's LPs used a cover design that emphasized her youth and beauty to connect with the recent purchasing power of young, mostly English-speaking Cajuns. Brown-haired and brown-eyed, Marcantel playfully posed in various Louisiana landscapes, wearing the clothing of youth fashion in the 1970s (see fig. 7a). CODOFIL and earlier elite groups often used the refined images of Evangeline and the Acadians to connect Louisiana residents around a shared history, and Marcantel appears to be offered as a living model of this more polite Cajun identity.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ The 1974 Tribute to Cajun Music was an event co-sponsored by CODOFIL and members of the grassroots movement during which local Cajuns overcrowded a stadium to enjoy live performances that represented the history of Cajun music. This event grew to become the annual *Festivals Acadiens et Créoles*, still celebrated in Louisiana today. Barry Jean Ancelet et al., *One Generation at a Time: Biography of a Cajun and Creole Music Festival*, (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2007). For more on the impact of festivals on the Cajun revival, see Marjorie R. Esman, "Festivals, Change, and Unity: The Celebration of Ethnic Identity among Louisiana Cajuns," *Anthropological Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (Oct. 1982): 199-210; Dianne Guenin-Lelle and Alison Harris, "The Role of Music Festivals in the Cultural Renaissance of Southwest Louisiana in the Late Twentieth Century," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 50, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 461-472.

¹⁰⁰ Nancy Tabb Marcantel, *Ma Louisiane*, Swallow 6022, LP, 1975.

¹⁰¹ Soileau, interview, part one, 6:56.

¹⁰² W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Le Reveil Acadien: Memory and Acadian Identity, 1920-1960," in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory and Southern Identity*, edited by W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 274.

In addition to the organization's intention to frame a respectable Cajun identity, the cover design of Swallow LPs also worked to promote CODOFIL's educational mission. CODOFIL instituted French immersion programs in Louisiana schools and established exchange programs with other French-speaking regions in the world. Nancy Tabb Marcantel's albums, the first entirely in French and the second bilingual, appealed to what Floyd Soileau calls "closet Cajuns" who wouldn't normally purchase Cajun music, but would buy Marcantel's albums because they sounded like popular songs on the radio.¹⁰³ Marcantel's third album, *Saute Crapeaud: Chansons Acadiennes et Creoles pour Enfants* (Jump Frog: Acadian and Creole Songs for Children), featured collaborations with other Louisiana musicians, including Benny Graeff, and had a clear educational audience in mind (see fig. 7b). As the graphic designer, Graeff remembers that the cover design was shaped for an educational rather than a popular audience, and that French teachers in Louisiana purchased the majority of these albums. As a performer, Graeff remembers that instead of touring the festival or dancehall circuit, Marcantel and her band performed these songs at CODOFIL's French immersion programs across the state. The album design was meant to serve as a companion to the enclosed record, and potential live performances, featuring illustrations for the children's songs and an insert with the French lyrics so children could follow along.¹⁰⁴

CODOFIL's relationship with Swallow Records was short-lived, but the utility of the LP album helped the group to communicate and distribute its cultural and political goals to a wide audience. Associating themselves with Soileau and the LPs of Marcantel can be viewed as an attempt for the government organization to popularize its image in the region by appealing to a younger generation. At the same time, the LP provided an avenue for CODOFIL to connect

¹⁰³ Soileau, interview, part one, 6:56.

¹⁰⁴ Nancy Tabb Marcantel and Bill Russell, *Saute Crapeaud: Chansons Acadiennes et Creoles pour Enfants*, Swallow 6029, 1977.

French music with younger consumers who wanted a more mainstream sound in order to inspire interest in learning the language. Also, by inscribing their ideas about Cajun identity onto album covers, CODOFIL created a product that could be distributed throughout their Francophone networks to shape the perception of South Louisiana. As the 1970s came to a close, however, the strategies of CODOFIL to further the French language in Louisiana were increasingly viewed as elitist and ineffective, and the grassroots activists, the third group reflected in Swallow's catalog, grew to become the leaders of the cultural revival. The influence of CODOFIL in the Swallow catalog faded out with the organization's influence in the community.

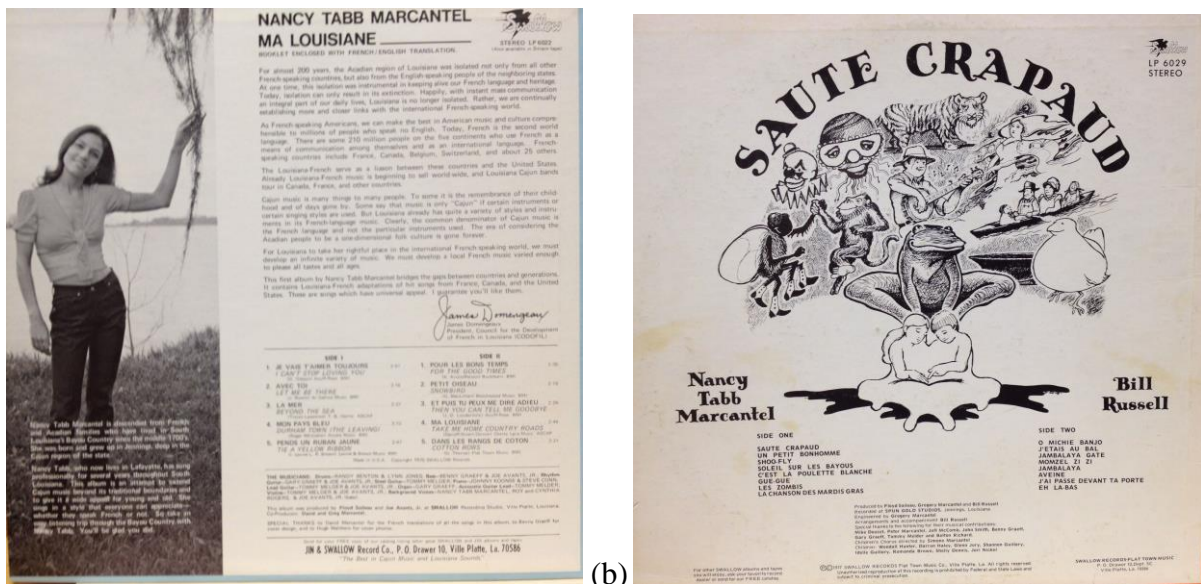


FIGURE 7: (a) Nancy Tabb Marcantel, *Ma Louisiane*, Swallow 6022, LP, 1975; (b) Nancy Tabb Marcantel and Bill Russell, *Saute Crapeaud: Chansons Acadiennes et Creoles pour Enfants*, Swallow 6029, 1977.

Unlike the “now sound” or CODOFIL LPs, the cover design for grassroots albums emphasized rural aesthetics and visually grounded Cajun identity in local tradition. Compared to CODOFIL, the grassroots activists were a less centralized, although influential, group of artists, scholars and musicians who foregrounded Cajun music as a strategy for cultural revival. Many grassroots artists on Swallow played traditional Cajun music that differed from “now sound” and the CODOFIL artists by prioritizing traditional Cajun arrangements, lyrics, and repertoires. After

his celebrated appearance at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964, Cajun musician Dewey Balfa became one of the earliest grassroots activists in Louisiana, and just one year later, Swallow Records released The Balfa Brothers' first album, *The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music*.¹⁰⁵ Floyd Soileau rejected Balfa's offer to record three times before finally agreeing. Soileau admits: "I kept thinking that that would never sell. I was thinking jukebox sales first and as far as album sales, I wasn't even thinking about albums at the time."¹⁰⁶ When Soileau heard the group perform the traditional Cajun song "La Valse de Bambocheurs" (Drunkard's Sorrow Waltz), he saw the opportunity for a successful single, sure that the song would appeal to older French-speaking customers. After the success of this single, Swallow Records released the full album *Traditional Cajun Music*, prompting a new recording philosophy for Swallow Records that balanced potential profit with cultural preservation.

The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music has remained one of the best-selling and most influential albums in Cajun music for its masterful renditions of traditional Cajun songs, and its equally influential illustration of Cajun identity. The cover of the album portrays the band on the porch of a traditional Acadian home with an antique buggy parked in front. On the back of the album cover, Dewey Balfa poses in front of a cooking fireplace hung with cast iron pots, his fiddle raised in mid-note, while the rest of the band sits in rocking chairs with several antique clocks in the background. The only indications that these images did not come from a family photo album or folklorists' collection are the modern black suits worn by each musician (see fig. 8a). Soileau remembers that Dewey Balfa "had the picture of it and he brought it in and I said, yeah, we can use that, that's definitely what we want...That's a perfect cover for

¹⁰⁵ The Balfa Brothers, *The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music*, Swallow 6011, 1965.

¹⁰⁶ Soileau, interview, part one, 50:21.

that music, especially.”¹⁰⁷ The Balfa Brothers’ popularity at home and on the folk festival circuit provided an effective way to present the aesthetics of the Cajun revival to the outside world.¹⁰⁸ Soileau remembers that Balfa would “come by and pick up a whole bunch of cassettes to sell [at festivals] and he’d probably sell out and Monday morning he would come in to settle up with me and he’d have a cup of coffee or two and he’d tell me all about the festival....”¹⁰⁹ The same album art from the original LP was replicated on cassettes and CDs, and, for decades, reinforced the image of Cajuns as a timeless ethnic group. This album also continued to influence younger bands in Louisiana, as can be seen on Jambalaya’s 1979 album *Buggy Full of Cajun Music*, whose cover design—young men dressed in bellbottoms posing in front of an old-time buggy—clearly pays homage to the aesthetics of that first Balfa Brothers album.¹¹⁰

Nathan Abshire, another artist who fits within the grassroots group, is admired for his masterful and unassuming approach to playing the accordion. Abshire was not an activist, but a pioneering accordion player who inspired many in the grassroots movement, and did not embody the professionalism of “now sound” artists or share the pop sensibilities of Nancy Tabb Marcantel. Floyd Soileau sent Benny Graeff to Basile, Louisiana, to take the photographs for one of Abshire’s albums, and Graeff remembers his shyness at meeting the Cajun legend: “Floyd kind of sent me...and [Nathan Abshire] looks at me and says ‘you’re Floyd’s boy?’ And I said, “yeah, you can call me Floyd’s boy.’ I’m kind of doing the “aw, shucks,” you know. And it was real—he was Nathan Abshire.”¹¹¹ Graeff remembered that Abshire was reluctant to be photographed at first, but the young photographer insisted that he was there to take

¹⁰⁷ Soileau, interview, part one, 52:24.

¹⁰⁸ Dewey Balfa maintained relationships with national organizations like the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress and served as a cultural ambassador throughout much of the late twentieth century.

¹⁰⁹ Soileau, interview, part one, 53:15.

¹¹⁰ Jambalaya Cajun Band, *Buggy Full of Cajun Music*, Swallow 6035, LP, 1979.

¹¹¹ Graeff, interview, 55:48.

photographs with the input of Abshire that would reflect the musicians' values and approach to playing. After some convincing, Graeff recalled the moment that Abshire agreed: "He said, 'stay out here, I'll be right back.' He went and he got his hat and his vest and he put his stuff on, he brought his accordion out, he says, 'what you want me to do? Where you want me to go?' I said, 'get comfortable.'"¹¹² Once Graeff's initial shyness and Abshire's initial reluctance wore off, the two collaborated on composing the photographs that were used on the album cover (see fig. 8b). The images used on Abshire's *The Good Times are Killing Me* reinforces the authenticity of Cajun music in the marketplace by providing a real-world analog to the more curated images on the covers of The Balfa Brothers or Jambalaya's albums, blurring the line between fact and fiction in Cajun music marketing.



FIGURE 8: (a) The Balfa Brothers, *The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music*, Swallow 6011, 1965; (b) Nathan Abshire, *The Good Times Are Killing Me*, Swallow 6023, c.1975.

In the 1970s, two design changes reflected a new grassroots-influenced strategy at Swallow Records to document and preserve Cajun culture through LP albums. First, Floyd Soileau commissioned the design of a new Swallow logo. Not only did the original logo feature a

¹¹² Ibid.

mockingbird rather than a swallow, but Soileau also remembers getting a call from a friend that alerted him to another design flaw.¹¹³ His friend joked, “...we got drunk last night watching your bird fly backwards on that jukebox playing that song!”¹¹⁴ Floyd Soileau hired his early graphic designer Jessie Gary to redesign the logo so that the correct bird flew in the correct direction. Soileau sometimes regrets changing the logo because he feels it detracted from the small-town feel of the original logo (see fig. 9).¹¹⁵ Despite the modern appearance of the new logo, this change marked a symbolic moment when Swallow began releasing traditional Cajun music in hopes that the culture would continue to fly forward into the future.

Also in the 1970s, at the suggestion of University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL) professor Evelyn Goller, Soileau adopted the new slogan “*Nous gardons notre langue Francais vivant avec notre musique Cadien*” to be included on his records, which translates to, “We keep our language alive with our music.” Soileau explains that at first, “I wasn’t thinking I was doing this to help the language, I was doing this to make a living...” but he started to realize that Cajun music “really, in some way, maybe helped to keep the pride in our culture.”¹¹⁶ Soileau echoes this sentiment when discussing his decision to produce a record of traditional Cajun and Acadian folksongs by Ed and Bee Deshotels. Soileau remembers, “[The album] didn’t sell all that much, but I said to hell with it. Some of it you not gonna sell that much of, but you had to put it out.”¹¹⁷ By the late 1970s, it seems that Floyd Soileau had begun to embrace his position as not only a record maker, but also as a Cajun cultural broker.

¹¹³ Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 195.

¹¹⁴ Soileau, interview, part two, 27:55.

¹¹⁵ Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 195.

¹¹⁶ Soileau, interview, part one, 5:25.

¹¹⁷ Soileau, interview, part two, 53:04.

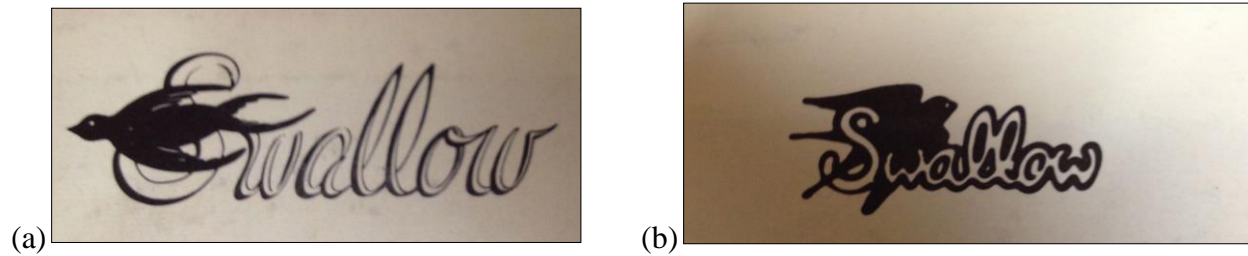


Figure 9: Because the album rotates clockwise, the bird in the original logo appeared to fly backwards. (a) Original Swallow logo; (b) Forward-flying Swallow logo.

At the same time that Floyd Soileau claims he began to grasp his role as both an entrepreneur and a preservationist, the band Beausoleil approached him to record a concept album that explicitly used the album cover as a tool to express its cultural goals. In the same way that The Balfa Brothers marked the first grassroots-style album on Swallow, Beausoleil's album *The Spirit of Cajun Music* symbolized a new generation of Cajuns who embraced the social activism of American youth culture since the 1960s, including a new appreciation of roots culture and roots music. Michael Doucet, the lead fiddler and founding member of Beausoleil, lived on communal farms, spent time in San Francisco, and even worked for Columbia Records before coming home to play Cajun music. Others leaders of this movement such as scholar-activist Barry Ancelet and musician-activist Zachary Richard were inspired by travels to French-speaking areas where they witnessed other ethnic revivals.¹¹⁸ Like the rest of the nation, Doucet remembers the year 1969 as a turning point: "It was the end of an era. We were graduating from high school, you had all the heroes who were assassinated. The Kennedys were assassinated, Martin Luther King was assassinated, on and on. So we looked into our own culture at the heroes. And the heroes were part of our grandparents' generation."¹¹⁹ Turning inward, these

¹¹⁸ Barry Ancelet, "The Cajun Music Festival: Genesis and Legacy," in *Accordions, Fiddles, Two-Step, and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*, ed. Ryan A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006), 201-202.

¹¹⁹ Interview, Michael Doucet, May 3, 1996, 001.1996.023, Allison Miner Music Heritage Collection, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation Archive, New Orleans, LA.

young Cajuns transferred from the radicalism of various American social movements to the goals of grassroots Cajun revival.

Throughout the 1970s, Cajun music and more mainstream genres continued to interact through the channels of the music industry. Major recording artists like Credence Clearwater Revival, Linda Ronstadt, and Leon Russell used Cajun settings in their music to play out fantasies of a rural paradise. Popular music, in turn, provided a set of devices for young Cajuns to imagine Cajun music as part of the popular youth culture, like radio had done decades before. For instance, Barry Ancelet observes that the album released by Goldband Records in Lake Charles of fiddler Iry LeJeune “ended up, you know, in a funny way getting compared to The Beatles’ *White Album*,” not only because of its white cover, but also because of the album’s importance in the history of Cajun music. In a play on this same idea, many people also refer to the first Balfa Brothers album as the “yellow album.”¹²⁰ Although these younger Cajuns were turning inward for inspiration, Zachary Richard describes how deeply popular music also inspired that generation: “I grew up in the ‘60s. I came of age listening to “Blowing in the Wind” by Bob Dylan and the notion of protest songs, the notion that music could reinforce political struggle, is something that I appreciated at a young age.” This new generation of Cajun activists used the spirit of protest songs in their music and events to empower Cajuns throughout the 1970s.

When Beausoleil came to Floyd Soileau to record its first album in the late 1970s, the band used the album cover as a tool to further combine the goals of the Cajun revival with their embrace of mainstream music culture.¹²¹ By the 1970s, popular artists like Bob Dylan and The Beatles had developed the concept album, transforming the LP from a group of unrelated songs

¹²⁰ Ancelet, interview, 18:36.

¹²¹ Beausoleil, *The Spirit of Cajun Music*, Swallow 6031, c. 1978.

into a total product—music and cover design—that addressed one main theme or story.¹²²

Drawing from these developments in popular album design, Beausoleil produced the first Cajun concept album on Swallow Records. David Doucet, guitarist for Beausoleil, recalls:

Michael, my brother, approached Floyd Soileau and he wanted to do a history kind of record where you'd have something that no one has ever done—have the old stuff, even medieval French things all the way to modern...Modern for us was like 1930.¹²³

The cover design of Beausoleil's *The Spirit of Cajun Music* suggested that the Cajun spirit was an optimistic one. The band chose to accompany the cover art, a hopeful illustration of a rainbow beaming over a photograph of Louisiana farmland, with a fifteen-page insert. Each page of the insert provided the lyrics and a brief history for each song on the album, complete with either hand-drawn sketches or photographs of Cajun musicians and landscapes (see fig. 10). As Barry Ancelet notes: "The early liner notes were sort of produced in-house, you know, by the people at [Swallow Records.] Then they started getting the idea that maybe they could ask somebody who'd kind of been studying this...or somebody who might have something pithy to say about it."¹²⁴ This album, similar to the 1974 Tribute to Cajun Music festival that many of the young grassroots activists helped to organize, told the history of the Cajun community through music. In many ways, then, the design of *The Spirit of Cajun Music* represented the culmination of two decades of both a marketing strategy and a movement.

¹²² de Ville, *Album*, 119.

¹²³ Doucet, interview, 00:25.

¹²⁴ Ancelet, interview, 33:28.

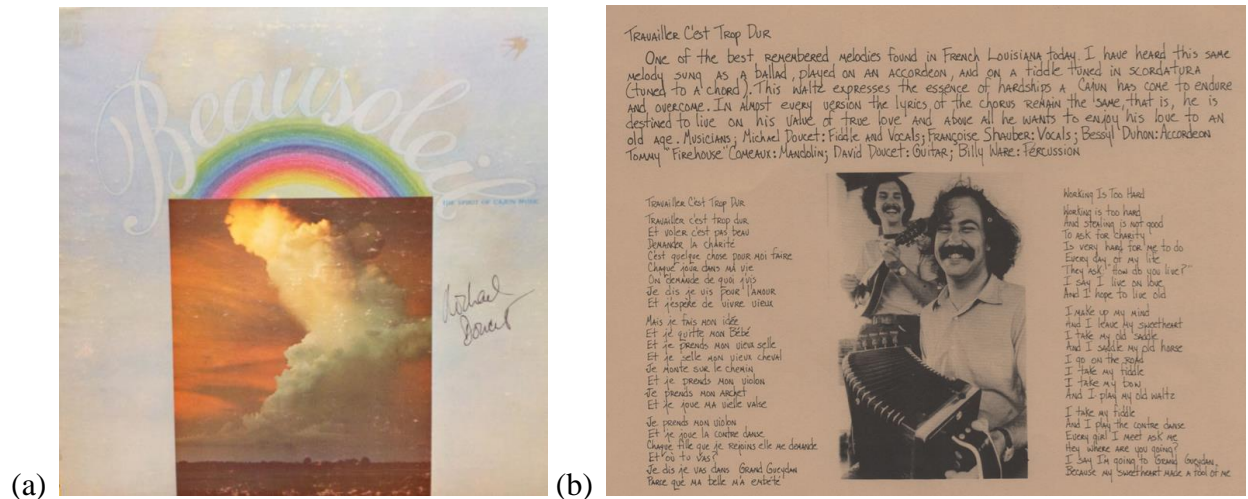


FIGURE 10: (a) Beausoleil, *The Spirit of Cajun Music*, Swallow 6031, c. 1978; (b) Example of page from album booklet.

By the end of the 1970s, the process of designing Swallow album covers had transformed Cajuns with various economic, social, and political goals into marketers and consumers of their own culture. As Wallis and Malm note, “The seventies have taught us that music industry technology penetrates faster than any other technological development in the history of mankind.”¹²⁵ However, the albums released by Swallow Records in the 1960s and 1970s simply paved the way for the Cajun explosion that began in the 1980s. Young Cajun musicians like Wayne Toups and Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys continued to express Cajun pride in a process that Barry Ancelet calls “creating within tradition,” or adding to the Cajun repertoire while respecting the contributions of earlier musicians.¹²⁶ At the same time, companies from outside Louisiana began to market their products as Cajun, capitalizing on the commodified Cajun identity that Swallow Records helped to shape. In the music industry, however, album art began to fade out just as the Cajun pride movement grew beyond regional boundaries. By the end of the 1980s, the CD had replaced the LP, shrinking the size and importance of the artwork

¹²⁵ Wallis and Malm, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples*, xiv.

¹²⁶ Ryan A. Brasseaux and Eric Charpentier, “Cajun Renaissance and Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys,” in *Accordions, Fiddles, Two-Step, and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*, ed. Ryan A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006), 489.

for marketing records on the shelves of record stores like Floyd's Record Shop. In the twenty-first century, the decline of the CD first to MP3s and then to streaming services has essentially rendered album cover design a lost art. However, during the first two decades of the Cajun revival, the process of designing album covers at Swallow Records provided a space for entrepreneurs, artists, and activists to frame particular depictions of Cajun identity and reinforce local pride in that identity.

Conclusion

Floyd Soileau still operates Flat Town Music Company from Ville Platte, mostly profiting from the income he receives from his music publishing division. Floyd Soileau owns the copyrights to many of the most important Cajun recordings, and, by providing these rights for movies, television and advertisements, still acts as a kind of gatekeeper between the Cajun community and the outside world. All that remains of Floyd's Record Shop is a small sign on the northbound side of Highway 167, directing people to a now-defunct haunt that at one time helped to introduce Louisiana music to the rest of the world. In fact, Floyd Soileau warned the record store's new tenants:

“...don't be surprised during the day if you hear sounds of some music coming into this office...Right where you're standing...I recorded some of my best records.”¹²⁷

The album covers of Swallow LPs from the 1960s and 1970s that once filled the shelves of Floyd's Record Shop reveal more than just a depiction of a musical genre poised for mass consumption. Analyzing these album covers as material objects of creative expression and business strategy reveal the ways that ethnic subcultures have used the music industry to express regional distinctiveness, particularly during a period of ethnic consciousness like the Cajun

¹²⁷ Soileau, interview, part two, 39:47.

revival. Not only did the music industry provide economic opportunities for Swallow Records and his artists, but it also provided a way to reinforce the value of local Cajun identity through the channels of the global music industry. However, after more than fifty years of recording and distributing Cajun music, Floyd Soileau still does not see himself as part of the Cajun revival:

I was over here in the countryside. I was glad they were doing this movement to try to get people shaken up to try to, you know, hang on to the language and whatnot, but I wasn't involved in it.¹²⁸

Despite his protests, Floyd Soileau played an integral role in the Cajun revival. As an entrepreneur, Soileau not only distributed Cajun music within the global music industry, but also provided a canvas upon which artists and activists depicted the ways that Cajuns perceived themselves, and influenced the ways that Cajuns were perceived by the outside world.

¹²⁸ Soileau, interview, part one, 58:08.

Discography

Various artists. *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 1*. Swallow 6001, LP. Released early 1960s.

Vin Bruce. *Vin Bruce Sings "Jole Blon" and Other Cajun Classics*. Swallow 6002, LP. Released c. 1962.

Various artists. *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 2*. Swallow 6003, LP. Released early 1960s.

Marion Marcotte. *Favorite Cajun Tales by Marion Marcotte*. Swallow 6004, LP. Released early 1960s.

Happy Fats, Alex Broussard and the Bayou Buckaroos. *Cajun and Country Songs*. Swallow 6005, LP. Released early 1960s.

Vin Bruce. *Vin Bruce's Greatest Hits*. Swallow 6006, LP. Released 1964.

Various artists. *Cajun Rendezvous*. Swallow 6007, LP. Released 1964.

Joe Bonsall and the Orange Playboys. *Cajun Jamboree*. Swallow 6008, LP. Released early 1960s.

Various artists. *Allons au Fais-do-do*. Swallow 6009, LP. Released 1964.

Belton Richard. *Modern Sounds in Cajun Music*. Swallow 6010, LP. Released 1964.

The Balfa Brothers. *The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music*. Swallow 6011, LP. Released 1965.

Joe Bonsall and the Orange Playboys. *Cajun Jamboree, Volume 2*. Swallow 6012, LP. Released late 1960s.

Belton Richard. *Modern Sounds of Cajun Music, Volume 2*. Swallow 6013, LP. Released late 1960s.

Nathan Abshire. *Pine Grove Blues*. Swallow 6014, LP. Released 1974.

Vin Bruce. *Vin Bruce's Cajun Country*. Swallow 6015, LP. Released 1974.

Vin Bruce. *Vin Bruce Sings Country*. Swallow 6016, LP. Released 1974.

Ed and Bee Deshotels. *Chantent la vie des Cajuns*. Swallow 6017, LP. Released 1974.

Marion Marcotte. *The Cajun French Humor of Marion Marcotte*. Swallow 6018, LP. Released 1974.

The Balfa Brothers. *The Balfa Brothers Play More Traditional Cajun Music*. Swallow 6019, LP. Released 1974.

Various artists. *J'étais au Bal*. Swallow 6020, LP. Released 1974.

Belton Richard. *Good 'n' Cajun*. Swallow 6021, LP. Released 1974.

Nancy Tabb Marcantel. *Ma Louisiane*. Swallow 6022, LP. Released 1975.

Nathan Abshire. *The Good Times Are Killing Me*. Swallow 6023, LP. Released 1975.

Camey Doucet, Jimmy Thibodeaux, et Musique. *Camey Doucet, Jimmy Thibodeaux, et Musique*. Swallow 6024, LP. Released 1975.

Ed and Bee Deshotels. *Cajun Troubadours*. Swallow 6025, LP. Released 1976.

Nancy Tabb Marcantel. *Lagniappe*. Swallow 6026, LP. Released 1976.

Sleepy Hoffpauir. *Sleepy Haufpauir Fiddles Traditional Cajun Music*. Swallow 6027, LP. Released 1976.

Camey Doucet. *Cajun Goodies*. Swallow 6028, LP. Released 1977.

Nancy Tabb Marcantel and Bill Russell. *Saute Crapeaud: Chansons Acadiennes et Creoles pour Enfants*. Swallow 6029, LP. Released 1977.

Dennis McGee and Sady Courville. *La Vielle Musique Acadienne*. Swallow 6030, LP. Released 1977.

Beausoleil. *The Spirit of Cajun Music*. Swallow 6031, LP. Released 1977.

Belton Richard and the Musical Aces. *Louisiana Cajun Music*. Swallow 6032, LP. Released 1977.

Various artists. *The Best of the Cajun Hits, Volume 3*. Swallow 6033, LP. Released 1978.

Camey Doucet et ses Amis. *Cajun Good Time Music*. Swallow 6034, LP. Released 1979.

Jambalaya Cajun Band. *Buggy Full of Cajun Music*. Swallow 6035, LP. Released 1979.

Various artists. *Merry Cajun Christmas, Volume 1*. Swallow 6036, LP. Released 1978.

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Vita

Jessica Dauterive was born and raised in Lafayette, Louisiana, the hub city of Acadiana. After finishing high school, she quickly moved to New Orleans in August 2009 to start her Bachelor's Degree in History at the University of New Orleans. Almost seven years later, she's finishing her time at UNO with a Master's Degree in History. If she had any free time, she would be traveling and indulging in international libations. However, she currently spends most of her time at her home on Bayou St. John, and sees more alligators there than she ever did in Cajun country. Ultimately, this paper is the culmination of growing up and realizing that your hometown was never really as boring as you thought it was.