

# Terrance Simien

& The Zydeco Experience

## Creole for Kidz

and

## The History of ZYDECO



Art by Vergie Banks

**The indigenous music of the black  
and multiracial French speaking  
Creoles of South Louisiana**

*"This project addresses a long standing need in Louisiana's educational system which has regrettably ignored the critically important historical, cultural, and linguistic contributions of the states large Creole community."*

Dr. Carl Brasseaux, Professor of Louisiana History , UL Lafayette



# 2 The Roots of Zydeco

## the past and the present



Amede Ardoin 1898-1942

**Z**ydeco is the indigenous music of the French speaking Creoles of south central and south west Louisiana. Not all agree as to the origin of the word, but **popular folklore** finds its origin in the phrase "*les haricot sont pas salé*" that translates to the "**snapbeans are not salty**", describing a time when things were so hard for the rural Creoles they could not afford seasoning for their food. The first part of this phrase (les haricot) spoken very quickly would sound like the word Zydeco: "*lezadico*". **The academic interpretation and the one we favor** finds the word rooted in the **African words**, "*zai'co laga laga, zari'ko, zari*" meaning dance or to dance.

**T**his *traditional* world music genre is an exotic blend of many sounds and cultural influences. A multicultural roots music that originally blended rural blues with jazz using religious and secular lyrics and sung only in French. There are also traces of Native American rhythms. However this indigenous music is **anchored by the essential Afro-Creole rhythms of the frottoir** and the melody of the accordion, an instrument found in folk and nativ music genres all over the world. The music that was once just a form of storytelling with few or no instruments has evolved into a powerful sound that now has its own Grammy category!

Clifton Chenier, 1983



The Zydeco music of today **fuses** many **contemporary** sounds with the traditional: like rock n' roll, R&B, reggae, funk, soul, blues and other urban styles of music that vary from artist to artist. Zydeco is heard in major motion films\* and on television advertising everything from toothpaste and automobiles to light-bulbs, pizza and candy bars! A music performed for Presidents at Olympic Games and for millions of people worldwide who find it absolutely impossible to sit still while listening!

**T**he **earliest form of Creole music** is called **juré**. All music began in a more basic form and evolves and Zydeco is no different. **Juré translates into jury**, whereas the Creole singer would **testify** to their audience about the hardships of their day, how much they loved their mother or God or even how their heart had been broken. Many times people would sing the **juré** gathered in a circle, which was very common in many forms of roots music here and in other countries. Parents would also sing juré style to their children, making up songs and clapping to entertain them. The **juré** music was performed with only clapping hands, stomping feet and French lyrics.

There is no real documentation as to when juré first emerged, but it is **clearly descended from the African and Native American heritage of the Creole people**. In the 1930's the great folklorist, Alan Lomax recorded this music for The Library of Congress and said it "**was the most African sound he'd found in America.**"

**O**ne of the most famous Creole musicians and one of the first to ever record Creole music (1934 in New York City) was **Amédé Ardoin, born March 11, 1898 and died Nov. 3, 1942**. Amede played accordion, wrote many songs and of course sang only in French. The music was simply called

**Creole, French Music or La-La**. In those early days the Creoles would have what they called a "**house dance**", where the furniture would be moved outside into the yard so there would be enough room inside to have a band perform for a dance. The Creoles work hard, go to church and dance to Zydeco and they have been doing it this way for decades!

**A**fter the days of the house dance of the early 1900's the music took a radical turn when a young **Clifton Chenier, born June 25, 1925 in Opelousas, LA (The World Capital of Zydeco Music)** would change the identity and the future of zydeco music forever! This "**architect**" of modern Zydeco who in the 1950's and 60's was the first to incorporate blues and rock and roll with his indigenous Creole Zydeco music. He created his **own** style of contemporary zydeco music. **He blended the old with the new**, singing in both French and English. Clifton was **also one of the first zydeco artists to play amplified** with an entire band: drums, bass, guitar, keyboards and even horns. He was honored with a **Grammy award in 1983, for "I'm Here"** on **Alligator Records**. **Queen Ida Guillory and Rockin Sidney Simien** both from **Lake Charles**, also won **Grammy Awards in 1982 and 1984**. Clifton followed his artistic vision and he inspired generations of others to also follow theirs.

In 2008 Terrance Simien who did stay true to his artistic vision as Clifton advised him to, won a Grammy award for his recording excellence. He has "created a sound that seamlessly blends the exotic sounds of the past with the contemporary music of today. Some say he has become the symbol of the future for the culturally rich sound of Zydeco music." \* \*House of Blues

## Their Music Lives On

Rockin' (Alton Rubin) Dopsie 1932-1993 ■ Clifton Chenier 1925-1987 ■ John Delafosse 1939-1994  
Rockin' Sidney Simien 1938-1998 ■ Boozoo Chavis 1930-2001 ■ Beau Jocque 1952-1999  
Canray Fontenot 1922-1995 ■ Amede Ardoin 1898-1942



# Creole Heritage & History

## multiracial and multicultural

**T**he Creoles of South central and Southwest Louisiana are part of one of the most “complex rural sub-cultures in North America”. Our mixed race or multiracial, multicultural Creoles are born natives of Louisiana. They have lived on the prairies west of the Mississippi River for over 300 hundred years and are some of the first families of Louisiana. Official records indicate the Simien’s were amongst the first to settle the area in the mid 1700’s.

The multiracial and multicultural tapestry of the Creoles is an exotic blend of African, French, Spanish, and Native American heritage whose first language is French. It is nothing short of phenomenal how so many different cultures converged to create this diverse identity. An identity that no other place on the planet shares. One that developed from old world and new world ingredients to create a new culture. A culture that has created authentic cuisine, an indigenous language and music tradition which gives Louisiana an international reputation. Our Creoles have made very important and specific contributions to the cultural and racial identity and history of Louisiana. They shared a unique history unlike any other

blacks or free people of color did in the United States.

First of all we know that it was the **Native Americans who inhabited all of North America** before any of the Europeans discovered the New World. In Louisiana we have several sizable tribes: the **Chitimacha, Coushatta, Houma & Tunica-Biloxi. Enter the French** who controlled the Louisiana colony during most of the 18th century until **Spain took over in 1762**. Actually they shared it with the British. Spain got Louisiana west of the Mississippi and the British got all of it east of the river. Prior to that the Africans had already been here for awhile, for as we know the unfortunate reason why: **slavery. Under Spanish and French rule though, the culture of the African slaves was applauded** for its uniqueness. As a result, West African dance, gatherings, music and cuisine continued to survive openly without the relentless oppression of the British who controlled many of the early colonies in other parts of the U.S. **This is a pivotal point in the history of the Creoles, Louisiana and our country. Racial co-habitation existed** in this state in a way it did not in any other part of the country.

**This tolerance of cultural diver-**

**sity contributed greatly to how the Creoles later thrived as a strong and unique multicultural presence in Louisiana.**

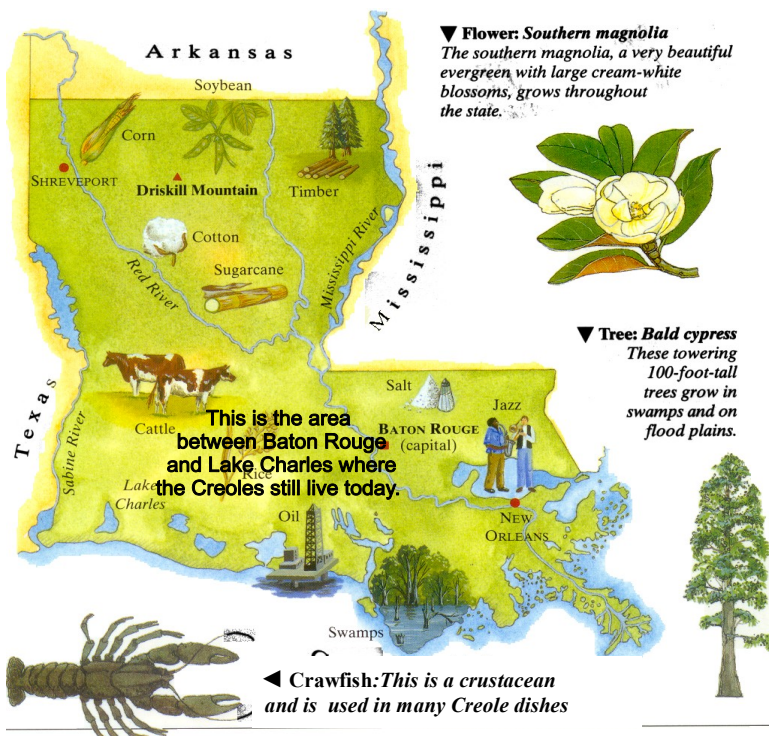
However with all this racial and cultural diversity it was also difficult to classify the Creoles into the standard categories of European immigrants or African slaves. They were neither black nor white. They existed during the colonial and antebellum periods as a **separate class**, distinct from the dominant white

or the enslaved black Africans.

By the early 18th century there were enough Creoles, or free men of color (gen de couleur libres), as they were also called, the French decided they needed special laws for them. **In 1724 the Code Noir was established.** It had many restrictions, but gave Creoles one important privilege enslaved Africans did not have: **the right to own land.** They took full advantage and began to establish their communities that gained strength, prospered and functioned as a self reliant, self contained society that in some ways still exists today.

We are now in the early 19th century when Thomas Jefferson was President. The U.S. finally got control of Louisiana by buying from France, everything from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico from the Mississippi to the Rockies: **The Louisiana Purchase (1803).** Things changed radically for the Creoles at this time. Until the Civil War ended in 1865, the **Creoles enjoyed their separate status for nearly 150 years.** When Union officials resisted their distinctions they were forced to deny their French, Spanish and Native American lineage and give up their status in the “3- tiered” society that had defined their identity for so long. It was during this time that the US government racially identified all persons with any African ancestry as black. **This is another pivotal point in the history of Louisiana Creoles.** The Creoles accepted this reality and during **Reconstruction became the leaders of their community** as they had experienced the problems of being free in a white mans world, were better educated, were property owners and postured to be leaders of their new community.

Today though, with all that we now know about **the history of the Creoles, the scope and definition of both the word and the concept has evolved even further.** In Louisiana, **Creole is defined as an ethnicity and culture.** Culture has no color, but as an ethnic group with multiracial distinctions, the color palette of our Creoles range from white to black and all shades in between! Our Creoles have helped shape the cultural identity of this state and **we are very proud of our unique heritage!**



# Fact Sheet

you will become more aware

Did you know? Did you know? Did you know?

This about the rubboard? That Creoles have?

Their own Creole Heritage Day

Frottoir is the French word for the Zydeco Rubboard that was designed especially for this genre of music and it means "*friction strip*"

In 2002 this unique percussion instrument was entered into the permanent collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, DC

The Frottoir is now regarded as one of the first percussion instruments created in the U.S, as most instruments originally came from other countries.

In addition to all the zydeco bands using the rubboard to provide rhythm, several popular rock and country bands like ZZ Top, Paul Simon & Bruce Springsteen have also used it



In 1991 Governor Buddy Roemer proclaimed January 22nd as Creole Heritage Day in Louisiana. Since then 22 other states and 36 cities have also proclaimed this date Creole Heritage Day

Their own Creole Heritage Center

Established in 1998, the Louisiana Creole Heritage Center at Northwestern University in Natchitoches has a partnership with Tulane University in New Orleans. They are one of the most respected leaders of the Creole preservation effort in this state and in the country. Visit them at [www.nsula.edu/creole](http://www.nsula.edu/creole)

Gumbo is a world famous Creole dish. It comes from the African word for okra

They have their own flag



## The Creole Flag

The fleur de lis represents the French heritage. The lower and upper right both represent the African heritage of Creoles with the flag of Mali and the star of Senegal. The Spanish Heritage is represented by the Tower of Castille all connected by a cross signifies their deep Christian faith

Mardi Gras is French for "Fat Tuesday"  
Mardi=Tuesday  
Gras=Fat

In medieval France a fatted bull was butchered the day before Lent, a period in which eating meat was forbidden.

Today many Creoles still make this sacrifice for Lent. They may also give up other things as well.

Some of the children give up candy for the Lenten period that lasts 40 days from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday

The Couleurs of Mardi Gras  
Purple=Justice  
Green=Faith  
Gold=Power



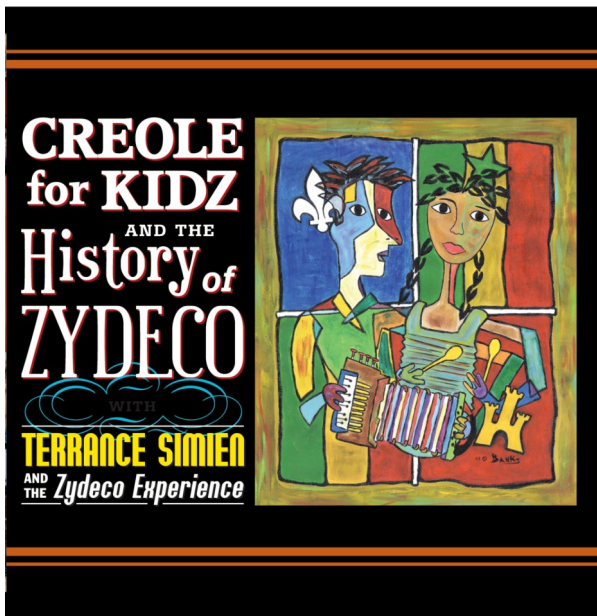
The accordion provides the melody in zydeco music. It was brought to America by the Germans and sold to the Creole after the Civil War. In Zydeco music the chromatic and diatonic button accordions, as well as the piano key are all commonly played in zydeco. The accordion is an old world instrument that is played in folk and roots music all over the world: Russia, Germany, Italy, Poland, Brazil (Forro) and in the Cajun and Cajun music of the US

Or this about the accordion?



# Resource and Activities

## for teachers, parents and students



### Creole for Kidz and The History of Zydeco CD

Available at [terrancesimien.com](http://terrancesimien.com)

**The reference** materials used for this study guide were very carefully selected. There has been little written specifically on the subject of Louisiana Creole culture. We urge you to exercise caution as well when researching these subjects because as you know there is a lot of questionable material out there on the information highway barreling at us at mind blowing speed! We do however, **sincerely** appreciate your interest and your enthusiasm for the music, culture and the upcoming "informance" (informational performance). If we can be of further assistance in helping you prepare for the performance please do contact us.

### Recommended reading

***Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country***  
Dr. Carl Brasseaux,  
University Press of Mississippi, 1994

***Africans in Colonial Louisiana***  
Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Louisiana  
State University Press, 1992

## Design a Flag

If your family or community had a flag that represented them, like the Creoles do, how do you think yours would look? Would there possibly be a cow or a horse if you came from a family that raised cattle? Or another animal, bird or fish that was important to your family or community in some way? Would there be a mountain, forest or lake depending on where your family lived?

Would there be a musical instrument indigenous to your culture. Get creative and really think about those things that represent your family, your history and your heritage!

## Write a Review

Imagine you are the music critic for your local or school newspaper. You have been assigned to review this concert or the CD if your class has one. You have brushed up on the career of Terrance Simien and know more than you ever did about Zydeco music! In fact you have an advantage because you know a little something about Creole heritage as well. Be very honest as you write your opinions about the concert or the CD. Let the reader know about the instruments that were played or what the song lyrics meant to you. How did the show make you feel? Which songs were your favorite?

# A Glossary of Creole & Zydeco Terms

**Accordion:** The accordion was invented in 1829 and the word is derived from the German word "akkord" which means "agreement or harmony." The button (diatonic and chromatic) and the piano key accordions are both used in zydeco music to provide the melody. The accordion is an old world instrument and used in native, indigenous and folk music all over the globe. The German settlers introduced it to the Creoles in Louisiana after the Civil War. Terrance likes to play Hohner accordions and has an artist endorsement with the Hohner USA. Our friends at Hohner love zydeco music and they have been very good to Louisiana. Terrance has an endorsement with Hohner in which they support him and he supports them by playing their instruments and talking about how much he loves the product and the company!

**Creole:** A native Creole of Louisiana is considered a multicultural and multiracial African American. The term "mixed race" is now commonly used to describe people who are black and white and/or other racial ethnicities. Louisiana Creole heritage is a rich tapestry of African, French, Spanish, German and Native American ancestry. The word Creole is French and it was borrowed from the Spanish word Criollo that was taken from the Portuguese word Crioulo. Experts say the Creoles are part of one of "the most complex rural sub-cultures in North America". During the Code Noir period (1724-1865) they were called "gens de couleur libres" meaning "free people of color". The Creole culture of Louisiana shares an important and proud history with the west African countries of Mali and Senegal as shown on the Creole Fla. Research has indicated that the majority of the Africans who settled Louisiana were from Senegal and Mali. Many refer to Creole Louisiana as the "Northern Rim of the Caribbean" because of our cultural and historical connections to Haiti as well. Terms like Afro-Creole have also been used to describe Louisiana Creole.

**Zydeco:** The indigenous music of the black and multiracial French speaking Creoles of Louisiana. The origin of the word is African. Zari, zariko, zodico and zai'co laga laga all meaning "dance" or "to dance." There are 1000 different African languages, so there are many different words similar to our Zydeco word. Common folklore in Louisiana tells the tale that the word is a language corruption of the phrase "les haricot sont pas sale", meaning "the snap beans are not salty", describing the hardships of the rural Creoles during the early 1900's when they were economically oppressed and couldn't afford salt for their food. Spoken very quickly, "les haricot" could sound like the word zydeco. We favor the academic language interpretation! Opelousas, Louisiana is the "World Capital of Zydeco".

**Zydeco Rubboard (also known as a frottoir)** This percussion instrument is the second main instrument, next to the accordion, in zydeco. It was designed and created in 1946 specifically for Zydeco music. It is fashioned after the washboard that was used to wash clothing and then later used in early American roots music. The Zydeco Rubboard is part of the percussion collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, DC as one of the few percussion instruments that originate in the United States as most musical (especially percussion) instruments originate in other countries. The French word for rubboard is frottoir. It means m means *friction strip*, like on a box of matches.

**Creole Flag of South Louisiana:** Designed in 1981 the West African heritage of the Creoles is represented by the Star of Senegal flag and the Mali Republic tri colored flag. The French heritage of the Creoles is indicated by the Fleur De Lis and the Spanish Colonial heritage is represented by The Tower of Castille.

**Gumbo:** This comes from the African word for "okra". It is a stew that was once thickened by only using okra by the Africans who settled in Louisiana. It is a world famous Creole culinary favorite and is also thickened with "roux", a flour and oil mixture.

**Mardi Gras:** This is a holiday that is celebrated before Ash Wednesday and Lent by Catholics mainly in Brazil and Louisiana. It is a French phrase and translates to "Fat Tuesday" in English. Mardi: Tuesday and Gras: Fat. The traditional colours of Mardi Gras are purple, green and gold. They symbolize justice (purple), faith (green) and power. (gold). The reason it is called Fat Tuesday is because in medieval France a fattened bull was butchered the day before Lent for the people to feast on one last time before Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent, when eating meat was forbidden.

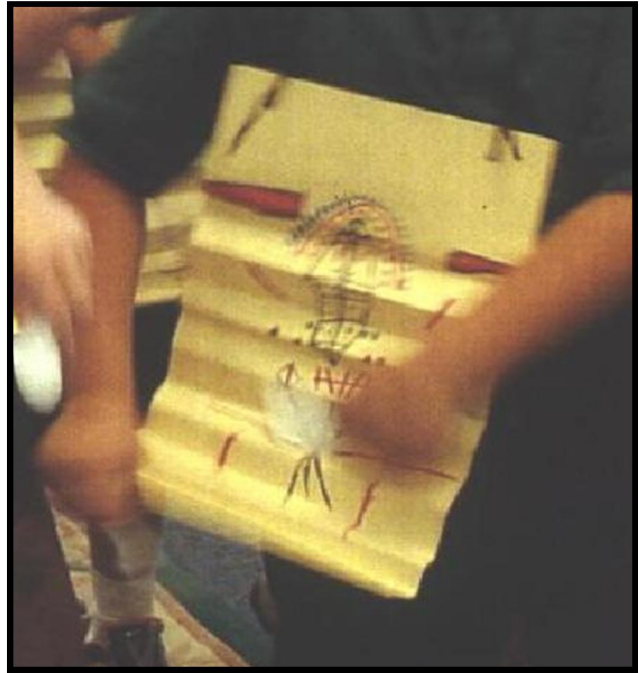
**Louisiana:** Nickname, The Pelican State, is the 18th state to enter the Union in 1812. It became an organized territory in 1804 after the Louisiana Purchase (from France) in 1803. It is located in the "Deep South" of the United States and it borders the Gulf of Mexico, Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi. The capital is Baton Rouge. Top industries are natural gas, salt, petroleum and sulfur production. Louisiana produces sweet potatoes, sugar cane, rice, crawfish and pecans. Tourism is the second largest industry and millions visit us each year for our Creole cuisine, our zydeco, funk, gospel, jazz and blues music. All are important southern black music traditions that have helped shape the musical landscape of this state and our country!

# How to make a “File Folder Frottoir” (aka Zydeco Rubboard)

*Frottoir*. French for “friction strip”

## Materials:

Legal size file folders  
Markers, ribbon, crayons,  
glitter/metallic markers  
Ribbon, yarn, heavy string  
Hole punch  
Plastic spoons



## Directions:

Cut legal folder in half long ways creating two long pieces  
Decorate and embellish as much or as little as you want  
Write your name on the front right at the top OR write your dog or  
cats name OR the Zydeco name!  
Starting at the bottom pleat the piece of file folder making 5-6 pleats  
Punch holes at the top and thread with yard or ribbon to hang around  
the neck  
Play the File Folder Frottoir with the handles of your plastic spoons  
For extra fun play along to the Creole for Kidz & The History of Zydeco  
CD by Terrance Simien .

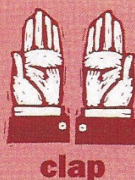
You can also bring it to a live performance!




# BEING A PART OF THE AUDIENCE

You are a very important part of a live performance!

**Directions:** Use this key to read about going to a concert.



When you  and  to a concert,


you are part of the .


The  is an important

part of the concert.

To hear all the ,

 must  carefully!

If you talk, people in the 

will not be able to .

When the  ends, 

to show you  the .