

**"I** was so fortunate," said fiddler Delilah Lee Lewis of the Bay Area ensemble **Creole Belles** (pictured above). Not many people can say that they learned firsthand from the greatest Cajun and Creole musicians, including Dennis McGee, Sady Courville, Wade Frugé, Varise Connor, Canray Fontenot, and Bois Sec Ardoin, and even performed with those musical veterans on occasion. At the ripe ol' age of 26, the adventuresome nurse picked up her first instrument, the fiddle, and began to saw away. After spending two consecutive vacations boppin' around southwest Louisiana, in 1981, she sublet her Oakland apartment with the intention of hanging out in Louisiana for a few months. "I ended up staying for three-and-a-half years," she said. She lived in an apartment above accordion maker Marc Savoy's store, assisted Savoy's wife, Ann, with her landmark book, *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People*,

and even sat in with BeauSoileil during its Thursday-night gigs at Mulate's Cajun Restaurant. "That catapulted my fiddle playing a lot," she acknowledged. Practically all the guys took her under wing and continually mentored their eager student. "They didn't care how bad I was," Lewis modestly admitted. "And I was pretty bad." But being a nurse made her popular among the geriatric crowd. "I would make my rounds and check their blood pressure," Lewis said with a laugh. And of course, that was a good excuse as any for another round of jamming. Eventually, Lewis left Louisiana and trotted around Europe for a year before returning to her native Bay Area. In 1995, the Creole Belles was formed. Thirteen years later, the group is only now releasing its long-awaited debut, *Creole Belles* [Arhoolie CD535 (2008)]. But from the sound of it, it was worth the wait. It's a highly intoxicating brew of Cajun and Creole music played

with spirit, reverence, and love and performed by some worthy ambassadors. Besides Lewis on fiddle, the rock-solid lineup includes accordionist Maureen Karpan, formerly of the Bay Area Cajun band Frog Legs, and special guest t-fer-ist/accordionist Andrew Carrière, son of legendary Creole fiddler BéBé Carrière. As a vocalist, the delightful Carrière adds a magnetizing presence with his limitless spark and vigor. At times, Lewis' high vocals sound as if she is recalling the ghost of Cleoma Breaux Falcon, wife of Joe Falcon, who made the first Cajun recording with "Allons a Lafayette" in 1928.

In addition to playing a choice collection of songs from Fontenot, Ardoin, Frugé, the Balfa family, and Lawrence Walker, the band supplies plenty of surprises. Carrière leads the way on "Medley Carrière," a collection of family tunes including "Madame Faille," while a few tunes show how the Cajun and Creole cultures borrowed heavily from each other. On McGee's "Adieu Rosa," Carrière sings a version learned from cousin John Semien, a noted Creole accordionist who relocated to Southern California. Similarly, on the Adam Hebert classic "'Tit Galop Pour La Pointe Aux Pins," Carrière croons the Creole equivalent "You Act Sick When Your Man Is Home." From the first note to the last chord played, everything here is excellently rendered, including the crystal-clear sound.

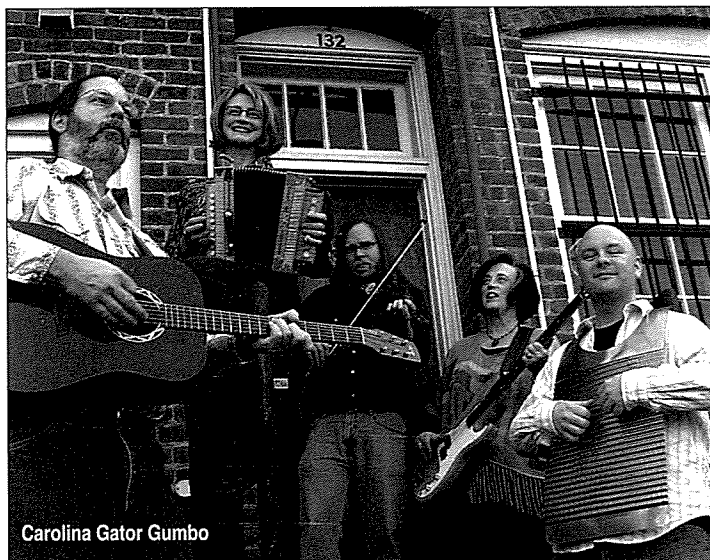
A presidential term ago, Minneapolis' **New Riverside Ramblers** released

an auspicious debut that would have set a high standard for any veteran ensemble to shoot for. Since then, the group has continued to ascend to new heights, as evidenced by its sophomore effort, *Les Grand Bois* ("Big Woods") [self-released (2007)], by refining the subtleties of the craft. "We're trying to stay within the tradition," explained bassist Doug Lohman, "but also make it interesting." One of the ways the band does that is by throwing in stops — momentary pauses in the music — before resuming again. "Dancers love 'em," Lohman noted. Sometimes the brief second of silence surprises them; other times it's signaled very clearly; while a few times it just slows down and rolls through like a recalcitrant motorist who doesn't completely stop at an intersection. Endings are another device in the group's bag of tricks. Sometimes the music is altered to end abruptly in unexpected places, as in the case of Nathan Abshire's "Blues de Tac Tac."

These subtle refinements are a sign of a band continuing to gel while capitalizing on its strengths. The song selection is smart, ranging from stalwarts Dewey Balfa, Octa Clark, and Walter Mouton, to more modern zydecajun stylists Wayne Toups and Karlo Broussard, all done in a traditional dancehall style. (Incidentally, Toups' "Mon Ami" has to be the most touching tune of the entire disc.) The Ramblers' Eric Mohring is a master at dubbing fiddle parts for a sweet, harmonizing aftertaste while accordionist Bob Nelson frequently opens up the throttle at will. But what's most







Carolina Gator Gumbo

exciting about the Ramblers? These blitzing jitterbuggers often feel like they're airborne with no chance for a crash landing.

It seems that every installment of "Beyond the Bayous" finds at least one Twin Cities band wending its way onto these pages. Indeed, Cajun/zydeco roots run deep in the Twin Cities. In the early 80s, Opelousas, Louisiana, transplant Millie Ortego recruited some musicians to play a few tunes for her dance classes. The seeds were thereby planted: Those dance lesson-gigging musicians became the Bone Tones, who would go on to be Minneapolis' flagship band. Since then, the scene has sprouted nine bands of this ilk. Ironically, the scene that's existed for roughly a quarter of a century has never been documented — at least until now, thanks to Texas fiddlin' transplant **Kevin Anthony**. "It's been referred to as the largest scene outside Southwest Louisiana," noted Anthony, who relocated to Minneapolis in 2005. "It's gotten so that you can hear a [Cajun-zydeco] band play practically every night of the week."

With all his various projects in the Twin City Playboys, Pop Wagner, and occasional guest spots with the Cajun Hot Soles, Anthony still found time to compile an 18-track recording, *Twin City Two Step: Cajun & Zydeco Music From Minneapolis/St Paul Volume 1* [409 Recordings (2008)], featuring local artists. Since three of the nine bands, the Faux Playboys, Bayou Grenouille, and Black Bear Bayou, have never recorded, Anthony either recorded them live at a gig or in his studio. Highlights include Bayou Grenouille's female harmonies,

the Faux Playboys' exhilarating energy on a three-song medley, and Daddy Squeeze's rollicking Clifton Chenier feel on "Sugar Bee."

Even with an explosive rendition of Clifton Chenier's "Party Down" and the creative "Give Uncle Bud Cornbread" that weaves together two well known zydeco tunes, don't label St. Louis, Missouri, based **Gumbohead** as a zydeco band. As its eponymously titled, self-released CD can attest, the band stirs a boiling caldron of musical influences ranging from horn-peppered swing jumpers ("Stir the Pot") and piano stompers ("Hot Sauce Boogie") to swampy funk ("Spy Boys") and trance-inducing spells ("Mojo Hand") that bubble with a Neville Brothers flavor. Whether it's the swirling B3 that hints at a Papa Grows Funk influence ("Pocket Change") or the muted-trumpet nightcap for a perfect evening ("Drunk on Love"), six of these baker's dozen selections are well done, in-the-idiom originals. Bands capitalizing on the gumbo metaphor hardly ever pull it off this well. Whatever's in the pot, you can bet that Gumbohead won't serve it until it's good and ready. Occasionally, good things do come from underneath the arch.

For **Carolina Gator Gumbo**, the love of Cajun, Creole, and zydeco music came first. But when Gumbo's accordionist Jean Prewitt figured out how to play a cheapie toy accordion (which has the same fingerings as its bigger brethren), Prewitt's husband, Don Cowan, figured they were onto something. Initially they learned the music just for kicks, but ultimately a band was born. Seventeen years

later, Carolina Gator Gumbo still shakes its tail around Charlotte, North Carolina, with an occasional trek to nearby Asheville to play for mountain hipsters and ravenous dancers. Awhile back, multi-instrumentalist/singer/songwriter Tom Eure enlisted in the Gumbos just so he could push himself on fiddle in his desire to master the instrument. When it came time to record their third album, Eure, who was also the producer, convinced his fellow Gumbos not to obsess over every note and chord, but to go by which take felt the best. The resultant *Leona Had a Party!* [self released CGG2007 (2007)] bubbles with a much looser and more comfortable sound that finds 'em holding their own. Eure complements Prewitt's accordion playing with his blossoming fiddle and brightens up other tracks on mandolin. While Prewitt leans toward the Creole side of Louisiana French music, Eure tosses in a few New Orleans and rootsy selections that mix well with Don Conlin's shuffling beat. Yet it's the last track that's the most novel: Carole Outwater plays an autoharp, of all instruments, on "Pa Janivier, Laisse-moi m'en Aller" for a haunting Carter-Family-gets-Cajun interpretation.

I'll admit that the latest from Boston's **Squeezebox Stompers** threw me for a loop. While I grasped that it was a concept album about a St. Bernard Parish roadhouse that withstood the destructive forces of Hurricane Katrina and became a symbol of community strength, it all seemed too theatrical for me when I'm expecting riveting, jolting dance music. But with all its hearty background vocals, bouncy pianos, New Orleans-style jazz, and a touch of singer/songwriter folk, that's actually the point. *Rockin' Ralph's Roadhouse* [Crystal Cove CC1102 (2008)] is the name of an upcoming play that will premiere in spring 2009 in Boston, and this

is its soundtrack companion. The Stompers' accordionist Ralph Tufo got the idea while doing volunteer work along with the North Shore Community College (NSCC), rehabbing trashed-out houses around New Orleans. In doing so, he heard about the Bourbon Street bar that stayed open during the storm, which inspired the project.

Though St. Bernard Parish was originally inhabited by the Islenos, Spanish-speaking people from the Canary Islands, Tufo takes a bit of an artistic license here and makes it a melting pot of Cajuns, Creoles, and various other groups. Through one misfortune after another with government ineptitude, looters, unscrupulous contractors, crooked politicians, and anyone else who's a Republican, the community eventually pulls through on the strength of its New Orleans cultural identity that's based on music, dance, and artery-clogging food. Judged on its own terms, it's a fun listen, full of imagery that lends itself well to a play. Half of proceeds will benefit the NSCC Katrina Relief Fund.

Accordionist Bruce Gordon and rubboardist Lloyd Meadows didn't just answer a music rag ad to assemble the tongue-twister-named, trad-zydeco-playing **Tri Tip Trio**. Instead, their partnership dates back to 1991, when they first ignited the Zydeco Flames, which is still burning in one form or another today. Though Gordon enjoyed his tenure in the Flames (1990-2004) and still does the occasional guest gig, San Francisco's smaller Tri Tip Trio is what he had always envisioned. Just as zydeco founding father Clifton Chenier often performed in small combos, Tri Tip Trio's debut disc, *3 of a Kind (A Tribute to Clifton Chenier)* [Globe GLO-034 (2007)], is a rootsy throwback to an era where super-amplified ensembles weren't necessary to get everyone shaking what their mama baked



for nine months. Three-fourths of the way through making this recording, Gordon suddenly realized that it was the 20th anniversary of Chenier's passing, a particularly personal connection, since he attended the funeral. The tribute is more symbolic of the king's vast repertoire, with its ample blues and New Orleans selections, than actual, avoiding loading up only on Chenier originals. (Only four are, including the rhythmically pulsating "Shake It, Don't Break It"). While Gordon exhibits a masterful old-style touch, Meadows' affable frontman personality oozes through; he is a natural entertainer. One song, "Ya Ya," finds Gordon tinkling the 88s in the New Orleans style for a nice change of pace. Rollicking stuff with plenty of second-line beats.

Like Tri Tip Trio, **Zydeco-a-Go-Go** from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has no problem in summoning the ghost of Chenier, as evidenced by the smashing opening track, "Zydeco Sont Pas Salé, from the group's second release, *Let the Good Times Roll* [Gumbo Music (2008)]. Roll 'em, they do — Lynn August's aptly named "Zydeco Groove," the piano-pumping title song, and a Chenier-styled original,




Pete "Gumbo" Eshelman  
of Zydeco-a-Go-Go

"Goin' to the Rock & Bowl," which honors the New Orleans funky bowling/live music institution. Perhaps what makes accordionist Pete "Gumbo" Eshelman sound so distinct is his Fantini piano accordion, atypical for this genre. Stuff like Boozoo's "Dance All Night" and Cajun hitmaker Adam Hebert's "Pine Point Trail Ride," both of which were originally recorded on

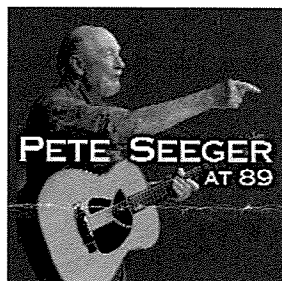
the smaller diatonic accordion and have been covered countless times with the same, sound remarkably fresh with the fat-toned Fantini. Additionally, it's not all straight-up, in-your-face zydeco, but well-executed examples of bluesy sax strolls ("Marina"), jumping swing ("Country Girl"), and classic swamp pop ("Pamela Jean") played in a riveting 6/8 time signature. If

that's not enough surprises, the last song is actually a snappy cumbia popularized by Mexican rock 'n' rollers Mike Laure y Sus Cometos in the mid-60s. Should the Philly zydeco market ever crash, it's a safe bet that Zydeco-a-Go-Go has plenty to fall back on to keep those good times rolling.

Of all the groups featured in this column, **Mama Rosin** has to be the most unusual. The Swiss trio is incredibly creative, mixing a garage-band approach, rhythms straight out of voodoo church worship service, plaintive vocals that recall the Blue-runners' Mark Meaux, and a primal, raw energy that could easily come from the Lomax Archives. It uses dirty mics, varies the distortion (doesn't use it on every track), and diversifies its instrumentation to include banjos, Dobros, and Delta blues harmonica. While various closed-minded critics may think that everything in Cajun music has been done before, the baker's dozen tracks on *Tu As Perdu Ton Chemin* [Voodoo Rhythm VRCD44 (2008)] will likely expose the error in their thinking. The truth of the matter is that the more Mama Rosin pushes the envelope, the closer to the roots they get. 

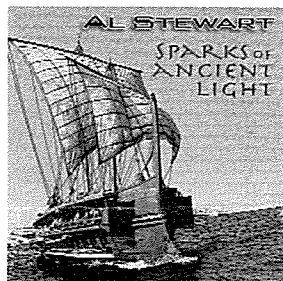
## New on Appleseed Recordings!

### Pete Seeger "At 89"



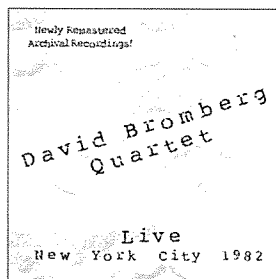
The first CD in five years from the living embodiment of folk music and activism contains 32 new tracks, 26 previously unrecorded by Pete: recent songs, old favorites, instrumentals and spoken reflections.

### Al Stewart "Sparks of Ancient Light"



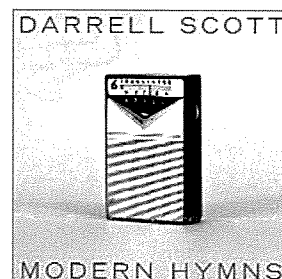
A dozen new vignettes of history and mystery elegantly intertwined by the timeless master of musical storytelling, with evocative arrangements mixing folk, rock, classical and jazz!

### David Bromberg Quartet "Live New York City 1982"



Blistering bluegrass licks, country and blues, high harmonies and high spirits are featured on this newly remastered archival recording from David's tape stash.

### Darrell Scott "Modern Hymns"



The award-winning songwriter and solo artist records formative favorites by Dylan, Kristofferson, Newbury, more! Special guests **Mary Gauthier**, **Alison Krauss**, and **Del McCoury**.

**Please visit our new website - [www.AppleseedMusic.com](http://www.AppleseedMusic.com)**

for information on these and other Appleseed releases and to take advantage of our **special website-only "summer recession sale,"** or write to: Appleseed Recordings · P.O. Box 2593 · West Chester, PA 19380 · (ph) 610-701-5755 · [info@AppleseedMusic.com](mailto:info@AppleseedMusic.com)

  
**Appleseed**  
RECORDINGS