



Dewey Balfa

Dewey was born in 1927 to a large musical family from Bayou Grand Louis near Mamou, Louisiana. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all fiddlers, as was his older brother, Will. Dewey began playing fiddle as a child, and as a young man started a band with his brothers: Will on fiddle and Harry, and later Rodney, on Guitar. Far material they drew on a large treasury of songs learned from their father and also composed songs of their own. Many of their songs, such as “*Pointe aux Pains*,” “*Tit Galop pour Mamou*” and “*Parlez nous à Boire*,” have become standards in the Cajun repertoire. The Balfa Brothers became known for their compelling twin fiddle sound and soulful vocals. They supplemented their sound with accordion, playing with such greats as Nathan Abshire, Hadley Fontenot, Nonc Allie Young and Marc Savoy. Like most Cajun musicians, the Balfas depended on music to supplement their incomes and support their families. Dewey Balfa worked at various times as a farmer, insurance salesman, school bus driver, disc jockey and furniture storeowner.

In 1964 Dewey performed with Gladius Thibodeaux and Louis “Vinesse” LeJeune at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island. They received a standing ovation from an audience of 17,000 people, most of whom had never heard Cajun music before. Dewey returned to Louisiana convinced of the value of his culture and its music. For the rest of his life he worked tirelessly to bring that conviction to his own people and Cajun music to audiences throughout North America, Europe and Japan. He and his brothers recorded several classic albums of traditional Cajun music for the Swallow and Rounder labels.

Dewey performed frequently through the 1960s and '70s with brothers, Rodney and Will. After Rodney and Will were killed in a tragic car accident in 1978, Dewey Balfa carried on the Balfa Brother's tradition with Rodney's son, Tony, and other musicians. In

1982 Dewey received the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship, the highest honor this country can bestow on a traditional artist. He died on June 17, 1992.