concerning the origins of bluegrass, Cajun music originated in the Acadia and Nova Scotia sections in Canada in the seventeenth century. Musicologists agree that the hearth of bluegrass is in the Upland South folklife region. Chapter 11 lends credibility to this thesis; however, it pinpoints western North Carolina as the specific origin in the Upland South. Regardless of origin, the diffusion of Cajun and bluegrass music has occurred throughout the twentieth century to become national and international in scope.

The theme of *folklife ecology* is approached in several ways for music. First is that these music genres may be performed in a natural setting, such as outdoor festivals featuring bluegrass and Cajun music. Second is that the natural environment provides materials used in the production of folk music instruments from various types of woods ranging from cedarwood for American Indian flutes to walnut and spruce for Appalachian dulcimers. Finally, the natural environment (climate and landforms) provides the basis for lyrics in folk music, such as "Stormy Weather" (jazz) and "Going Back to the Blue Ridge Mountains" (bluegrass).

Folklife integration examples are drawn from the interaction between music and religion as well as music and ethnicity. The folk melodies expressed in the Black and White spirituals of the Upland and Lowland South have exercised important influences in religious services. Bluegrass musicians, including Bill Monroe, the "father of bluegrass," began their musical careers singing gospel music in church. Many ethnic-based folk groups have generated their own folk music, including African Americans (blues and jazz) and German Americans (polka).

Many *folk landscapes* have been shaped by the presence of folk music. The impact of folk music in the landscape is seen in the emergence of folk music festivals ranging from blues festivals in Mississippi to Cajun music festivals in Louisiana. Facilities on the landscape are devoted entirely to folk music performances, including Cajun nightclubs in Mamou, Louisiana; Preservation Jazz Hall in New Orleans, Louisiana; and the New Ulm, Minnesota, Ballroom, specializing in old-time polka music.

The future of folk music in America in an authentic and unadulterated form is in question. Because of continued "crossovers" in the music field, pure folk music is constantly under pressure to retain its authenticity. It will only remain as a folklife trait if there are those rural and urban musicians who are willing to preserve the traditional melodies and lyrics from the past.

10

The Cajun Accordion

Malcolm L. Comeaux

The accordion has special meaning to the Cajuns of southwest Louisiana, and in this region it is the accordion that identifies the "Cajun" band. This was not always so. The fiddle was the traditional folk instrument of the Acadians in Canada, and it remained their main folk instrument for many years after their arrival in Louisiana. The accordion, therefore, is not an old traditional instrument with Cajuns, but it is now so widely accepted that it seems to have been always a part of Cajun music.

Acceptance of the accordion greatly changed Cajun music. Prior to the introduction of the accordion, there was much variety in the traditional music and dances of the Acadians, such as reels, jigs, polkas, mazurkas, contredanses, cotillions, quadrilles, and the like. These, however, were very difficult for the accordion player, though more easily done by the fiddler. With the accordion as the major instrument, many of these old songs and dance steps were no longer played, and they are remembered only by the oldest of musicians. Cajun music thus evolved around the accordion, and waltzes and two-steps were the major tunes played. Much, however, was lost to Cajun music.[1]

The basic idea behind the accordion is the concept of the "free reed." The free reed is a metal tongue almost exactly the same width as the slot in which it fits. It is fixed on one end, while the rest of it is free to vibrate to and fro through the slot. This is quite different from the typical European reed instrument, which has a "beating reed," as, for example, the

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clarinet. The Chinese invented the concept of the free reed, and the first mention of a free reed instrument was in 1100 B. C.[2]

Instruments with free reeds began to make their appearance in Europe soon after European contact with the Far East. There is a report, for example, that a Persian mouth organ was played for King Louis XIV in 1648.[3] The popularity of free reed instruments, however, really began with the invention of the mouth organ and the accordion in the 1820s.

The accordion was invented in Berlin by Friedrich Buschmann in 1822, and the name for the instrument was patented in Vienna in 1829.[4] Throughout the 1800s, the principle of the free reed was used in Europe in the development of many new musical instruments. These instruments, however, were not entirely successful and created no lasting interest. The only instrument that was moderately successful was the accordion, and it is still commonly heard in the world of popular folk entertainment.

Popularity of the accordion has varied greatly since its introduction into Cajun Louisiana. The accordion was first brought into south Louisiana sometime in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is not known exactly by whom, or when, why, or where it was introduced; but it was probably first brought to the Cajun area by German immigrants settling the prairie of southwest Louisiana in the 1880s.[5] Cajun musicians at first were not particularly attracted to the accordion, because the first accordions imported were in the keys of A and F. The fiddle, the traditional folk instrument of the Cajuns, could not be tuned to those keys.[6] Thus, the accordion could be played only as a solo instrument, and it did not receive much attention. Accordions in the keys of C and D began to be imported into south Louisiana from Germany about 1925. This permitted the coupling of the fiddle and the accordion, resulting in increased popularity of the accordion. In the 1930s, for some unexplained reason, the accordion declined in popularity, but this decline was short-lived; for, soon after World War II, it developed into the major folk instrument of the Cajun people. It is now an integral part of all Cajun bands in southwest Louisiana: no Cajun band is complete without one.

The type of accordion used in Cajun music is a variation of the diatonic accordion of the German style. This style differs from the Italian or Vienna-style accordion in that it is equipped with two bass keys; one or two rows of buttons on the treble side; and one, two, three, or four pull stops. The Italian or Vienna models have four or more bass buttons and one, two, or three rows of button keys on the treble side. The Cajun accordion used today has two bass keys, one row of buttons on the treble side, and four pull stops.

Cajun accordions have only one row of ten keys, and are in only one key.[7]

The most common key is that of C, although the keys of D, G, F, and A are sometimes found. The key of C is well suited to the tuning of the fiddle and guitar and often well suited to the range of a singer's voice. Each button has, like the harmonica, two tones of different pitch, one that will sound when the bellows is extended—draw tones—and the other when air is blown out of the bellows—blow tones. Each button admits wind to a reed assembly with two tongues, one mounted to sound when the bellows is pressed, and the other when the bellows is drawn. Blow tones produce the notes that make a C chord (C, E, and G in the key of C), while draw tones produce the intervening tones (D, F, A, and B in the key of C). Together the ten buttons suffice for a range of over two octaves.

In a Cajun accordion, the scale is tuned equal temperament with the exception of the thirds (in the key of C this is the E, and in the G scale it is the B). These two notes, E and B, are tuned to pure temperament, which in this case is 3.5 cycles per second less than equal temperament.[8] This works well in Cajun music because, for all practical purposes, there are no B and E chords when playing in C, F, and G. However, many persons, particularly older musicians, like the F note tuned to pure temperament (3.5 cycles per second sharp), but this is not advisable because F is a principal chord in the key of C, and a fundamental chord in the key of F.[9]

A unique feature of the accordion made for Cajun music is that the valve keys are exposed. Valve keys are arms that are connected to the buttons and allow air to enter or exit the bellows on the treble side. Being attached at the base, the valve keys open in such a way as to produce a wide angle at the top when the corresponding buttons are pressed. They are made of five-eighths-inch oak dowels that are cut in half, or simply purchased in that shape. Each valve key is either painted, as was done in earlier days, or decorated with metalic gold contact paper. These keys are connected to the key frame by small rods about an eighth of an inch thick. The rods are made of wire, often electrical motor wire, and are hammered into shape over a mold. The valve keys pivot on a thin wire, usually a bicycle spoke, that runs through the wood holding the buttons.

Most accordions used by Cajuns have four stops. These stops are on the top of the frame attached to the bellows on the treble side, and each is responsible for a type of sound produced by the instrument. For instance, when all stops are pushed in, no reeds will sound. The first two stops control middle octave reeds that are tuned identically, and this is called a "dry tune." This is different from imported accordions, which have the first two stops tuned slightly in variance to produce a vibrato effect, called a "wet tune." The third stop operates a set of reeds tuned one octave lower than that of one and two. The fourth stop operates another set of reeds tuned

one octave higher than the set operated by the first two. Although described in seemingly technical terms, the use of these stops lends a variety to the accordion that could not otherwise be produced. With different combinations, a full rich sound, or a high or low tone, can be achieved. Cajun musicians usually play their instruments with all stops open.

Although the accordion manufactured in Germany has bass keys of the spoon variety, locally made ones are simply buttons. These two bass keys are responsible for sounding the chordal accompaniment. The lower key produces the fundamental bass tone (a C in a C chord), and the upper key the tonic major chord (a C chord in the key of C). Two different chords may be produced, the tonic or I chord (corresponding to a C chord in the key of C), and the dominant or V chord (corresponding to a G chord in the key of C). The former is produced when blowing air out of the bellows, and the latter when drawing air into the bellows.

This limitation of only two chords on the accordion fits in well with Cajun folk tunes. A C accordion can only produce a C and a G chord. If a song contains a C, F, and G chord progression, the G chord will have to be substituted for the F chord. This gives Cajun music its particular flavor—the discordant, sorrowful sound.

Another button found on the bass side, opposite the bass keys, is that of the "lung" button. When depressed it enables the player to quickly, easily, and silently draw air into the bellows.

Cajuns began repairing accordions during World War II when they were cut off from their suppliers of accordions and accordion parts. Broken accordions had to be repaired, and several musicians from necessity took it upon themselves to repair them. Most did it only as a hobby in their spare time, but for a few it grew to be a business. These craftsmen became very good at repairing accordions, and they soon began making the entire instrument. Locally made accordions were quickly recognized as superior to the imported models, and an industry had begun.

Sidney Brown, an accomplished musician from Lake Charles, was the first person to start repairing and making accordions, and he is still active in this business. When Cajuns began making accordions, they copied the old "Sterling" and "Monarch" brands. These were the two most popular makes in southwest Louisiana prior to World War II.[10] Cajun accordions still physically resemble the old German ones, but are very different from modern German diatonic accordions.

Almost all accordions used in Cajun country are today made by local artisans. The average locally made accordion costs about three times as much as an imported one, and the two usually have the same reeds and bellows; but no Cajun musician would choose to play an imported accordion, as locally made ones are better. One of the main advantages of the local accordion is its durability. As one Cajun musician said in a moment of exaggeration: "I can throw my accordion against a wall all day and still play for a dance that night." Locally made accordions are heavier than imported ones, but they are also quicker to respond, and consequently are easier to play. They are also more beautiful instruments, as they are handcrafted. In the past, Cajun craftsmen sometimes made the entire instrument, and can still do so today; however, at present the bellows and reeds are usually not made, but are taken from new instruments imported from Germany. A few other parts of the German accordion may also be salvaged, depending on the accordion maker. For example, one maker also uses the buttons on the treble side and the knobs for the stops, another uses some of the wooden parts, and a third will also use the metal slides used for the stops. Most accordion makers, however, use only bellows and reeds, and discard the rest of the German accordion. The reeds and bellows taken from these inexpensive German accordions are not very good, and today a few high-quality reeds and bellows are being imported from Italy. One Cajun craftsman is now in the process of acquiring the equipment to produce good-quality reeds, so south Louisiana may soon be self-sufficient in the production of quality reeds.

The bellows are made of treated cardboard attached at the corners by sheepskin. The hide adds to the durability of the bellows in places in which they receive the most stress. Bellows can be patched, but most are simply discarded along with the locally made frames and replaced with new ones. The bellows are usually decorated with plastic tape to make a pretty design.

The interior of the accordion contains the sound producing reeds. Each note receives its sound from four reeds, providing that all stops are pulled. The material used for the reeds is tempered steel. Many musicians say the reeds made many years ago are better than modern ones, and therefore old reeds are used time and time again until they are broken. As a consequence, some new instruments will have old reeds in them. The reed assemblies are held in place with an airtight seal made of beeswax, or sometimes of beeswax mixed with wood resin. The finest Cajun accordions, however, have the reed assemblies screwed to the frame. The make of the reed is usually engraved in the form of letters or numbers on the frame holding it.

Tuning of the reeds is one of the more important processes in making an accordion. While some accordion makers tune by ear, others find that using a tuning machine makes the task easier and less nerve-racking. Most accordion makers testify that tuning was the hardest thing to learn about accordion making.[11] The actual process of tuning, the altering of the pitch of the reed, is accomplished in two ways. To make the pitch higher, the outer end

of the reed is filed down a slight bit; while to lower the pitch, the inner half of the reed, that part near the fixed end, is filed down a slight bit.[12]

The wooden part through which the sound flows after it is made by the reed requires precision work. Two identical pieces of wood (often birch), each about one-sixteenth of an inch in thickness, are cut, the outer one usually having round holes, the other square holes. Both are cut from a pattern with a jigsaw. They are placed adjacent to each other with about a sixteenth of an inch between them. The space between the pieces is the place in which the slats for the stops fit. These three pieces must fit snugly enough to allow the stop slats to slide with only little resistance, and yet must be tight enough to prevent air leakage.

The wooden parts of the exterior of the accordion are of very high-quality wood. A hard wood, such as maple or gum, is used for the key mount due to its resistance to damage from fingernails. Many types of woods are used for the frames to which the bellows are attached, such as birch, magnolia, pine, and sometimes mahogany. These wooden parts, if made of particularly good wood, are stained and varnished or lacquered. Most, however, are simply painted with black enamel, and then decaled with floral designs and/or the maker's name.

The buttons for keys are usually made from plastic dowels, though they can be salvaged from German accordions. The finest accordions have the buttons made of 45-caliber bullet jackets that are chromed locally. The bass buttons are made of chair glides.[13]

Many accordion makers are older men who enjoy making accordions and talking to customers. This business provides them a little extra money to supplement retirement incomes and, at the same time, affords pleasant visits with musicians. At present there is only one younger man making accordions as a serious business. These craftsmen are not found throughout the state, nor even throughout French Louisiana. They are concentrated in the prairie district of southwest Louisiana, with one in southeast Texas. This is the very area in which the accordion is popular (fig. 10.1). There are four major producers of accordions, each making twenty-five or more every year. The other accordion makers work only part time at this job, and each produces from three or four to perhaps twenty accordions a year. There are also two accordion makers in Canada, but they are only beginning.

Accordion makers cannot supply the demand for accordions, and are always turning away business. The demand is not just local, and most of the finest and most expensive accordions are sold to persons living elsewhere, especially in Canada. Accordions are not sold to the Acadians of Canada, for they, like their relatives along Bayou Lafourche, have not accepted that instrument in their folk music. Rather, they are sold to the French speakers

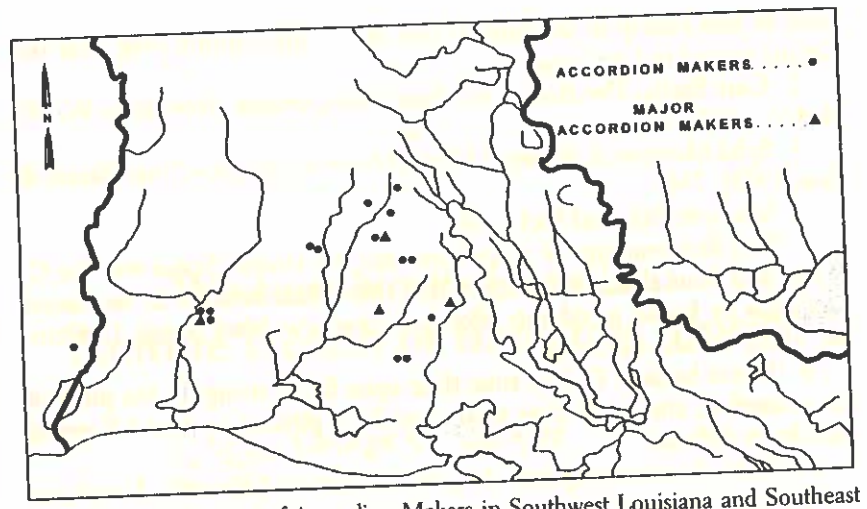

Fig. 10.1. Distribution of Accordion Makers in Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas

around Quebec and some to English speakers in the western provinces of Canada.

The price of the Cajun accordion varies greatly. The least expensive of the locally made ones today sells for about $350, and the most expensive for about $750. The average price is about $400. Accordions imported from Germany, the "Hohner" brand, retail for about $125, and they furnish parts for most Cajun accordions. Local musicians, however, are willing to pay the higher price of Cajun accordions to get what they consider the superior instrument.

In southwest Louisiana, accordion making is developing into an important industry, a dynamic and changing industry. In the future, better quality reeds and bellows will be imported or made locally, and there will be less use for parts taken from inexpensive new accordions. Local accordion makers fabricate a quality product, and the reputation of their instruments has spread greatly, resulting in many sales outside French Louisiana. French music is currently undergoing a strong revival, particularly on the prairies of southwest Louisiana, the very area where the accordion is popular. The accordion is now an integral part of Cajun music in southwest Louisiana, and the demand for this instrument will continue to grow.

Notes

1. Gretchen Dewailly, "Mark Savoy: Skilled Craftsman Spends Time Manufacturing Accordions," *Opelousas Daily World* (16 March, 1976).

Most of this variety in the music came into Cajun culture long after the Cajuns arrived in Louisiana.

2. Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1940), 184.

3. Sybil Marcuse, *A Survey of Musical Instruments* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 734.

4. Marcuse, 742, and Sachs, 466.

5. The first importer of accordions into the United States was the C. Bruno and Sons Company of New York. Most were retailed in southwest Louisiana by Jewish merchants (Personal interview, Mark Savoy, 17 October, 1976, Eunice, Louisiana).

6. This is because Cajuns tune their open fiddle strings to the pitch of the accordion, and to do thus with accordions pitched in A and F would have been difficult.

7. There is one exception. John E. Hébert of Lafayette, Louisiana, makes his accordions with only nine keys. He omits the top button, an E and G, because he says it is rarely used, and only when a musician is "showing off," so he feels it is not needed.

8. Equal temperament is the tuning system used for a piano, as opposed to pure temperament, which is accoustically pure or more simply, tuning by ear. See Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1969).

9. Personal interview, Mark Savoy, 15 October 1976, Eunice, Louisiana.

10. These brands have not been sold in Louisiana since World War II. The Sterling Company was ruined by Allied bombing and was never rebuilt.

11. John Hébert, the Lafayette accordion maker, said the man who taught him to tune the accordion did it by ear, and he ended up in a mental institution, supposedly driven to insanity from listening so intently while tuning.

12. Many Cajuns, to lower the pitch, add a bit of metal to the outer top end of the reed.

13. These are button-shaped pieces of chromed metal that have a screw or nail underneath. They are intended for use under chair legs so that they slide better.

11

Western North Carolina: Culture Hearth of Bluegrass Music

George O. Carney

Much has been written about the characteristics of bluegrass music and its historic origins, but, according to Bill C. Malone, noted country music historian, "few people know where it came from."[1] Most scholars indicate it originated somewhere in Appalachia as a form of mountain music, however, none have identified a particular source area. Others claim that it is rooted in the Pennyroyal Basin of western Kentucky, where Bill Monroe, the acknowledged "father of bluegrass," was born.[2] While in the 1950s, when bluegrass was named and recognized as a unique genre of American music, Ralph Rinzler, eminent folklorist, traced its geographic origins to the Bluegrass Region of central Kentucky.[3] Because of the unclear nature of its spatial origins, this overlooked and neglected aspect of bluegrass music bears examination from a cultural geography perspective.

Introduced by Carl Sauer and the Berkeley School, the culture hearth approach provides a useful conceptual framework for investigation of the source area for the bluegrass sound.[4] In defining culture hearth, Sauer explained that it is "the inquiry into the localization of culture origins."[5] This study contends that the culture hearth of the bluegrass sound was the mountain and piedmont sections of western North Carolina (fig. 11.1). Within this area were the bands and individual musicians who created and shaped the bluegrass sound and spawned a local music infrastructure. This network cultivated the exchange of music ideas and repertoires, generated

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and Olney Hall Whitlow (1890–1968),
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