

POST WAR CAJUN 78 RPM NUGGETS

BY LYLE FERBRACHE

The following are some very rare Cajun recordings. The labels seem almost like they are from a foreign country! This is just a small selection of post-war Cajun records which can be described as the 'real nuggets of post war Cajun 78s'.



MELADEE DB- 115-116 – JOHN OLIVER (c. 1953)*John Oliver Special / La Valse De Jennings*

A very rare and a very odd release. Why did Meladee – from New Orleans – pick John Oliver to record? Oliver was known as a 'very nice man' who always had a band, but was not as famous as other musicians around Lake Charles. A very good record, as well as rare.

O.T. (OKLAHOMA TORNAOES) 106 – NATHAN ABSHIRE & HIS FRENCH ACCORDION (c.1949)*Grand Mamou / Lake Charles Two-Step*

Until a copy turned up on eBay ten years ago, this record was thought not to exist. So why is it rare? The bass back beat is over cooked and might have had trouble with the big sixteen-inch speakers on the jukeboxes. Still, there are only one or two known copies. Great two-sided record.

HOT ROD HR-101 – VB WILSON GRANGER (c. 1953)**Bayou Chico Waltz (sic. Bayou Chicot Waltz)***(A side is by Tan Benoit 'Iowa Two Step')*

This is the only recording by the great Cajun fiddle player, Wilson Granger, which includes his name on the label; at that, he only got the B-side of Hot Rod 101 shared with Cajun accordion player Tan Benoit on the A-side. All the Hot Rods are rare however this is number one. Wilson is also the singer on Nathan Abshire's Hot Rod recording of 'Chere Te Mon' (HR-103-1) and was the fiddle player on Abshire's 'Pine Grove Blues'.

TNT 104 – LAWRENCE FRUGE & THE COUNTRY BOYS (c. 1954)*Country Boy Waltz / Te Mamou*

The Country Boys were in fact, the Fruge family. Blackie Fruge is on guitar, his sister Eula May is on bass, and his brother J.U. Fruge is singing because he was the only one able to hit the high notes. Eula May was a child prodigy and later became an in-demand steel guitar player and recorded some of the best steel guitar on Cajun recordings; she could also play bass and guitar. Blackie had a long and distinguished career. Why is the record on TNT? Seems that Eddie Shuler and Bob Tanner worked some kind of deal for Tanner to get the pressing and distribution of Eddie's recordings. It's a great two-sided record with only a few known copies.

FEATURE RECORDS 1090 – TERRY CLEMENT & HIS RHYTHMIC FIVE (c. 1954)*La Valse De Te Maurice / Diggy Liggy Lo*

This is the original recording of 'Diggy Liggy Lo'. Terry composed it when he was still a teenager. Terry's younger brother, Pervis, could not speak French very well so he would just sing 'gibberish'. Terry took note and wrote the song. By taking the song to J.D. Miller in Crowley, it became a hit. Somehow as time went by, Miller's name got on the writer's credit. When I interviewed Terry in 2009, he had no anger, saying J.D. had been good to him over the years.

KHOURY'S RECORDINGS 500 – TEXAS MELODY BOYS (VOCAL FRENCH BY PEE WEE PITRE) (c.1954)*Old Time Waltz / Ain't No More*

It seems the Texas Melody Boys were just Pee Wee singing and playing the accordion and a drum! I love the record and play it often and that's all I hear. Pee Wee was well known around Lake Charles and had many friends. He was happy go-lucky and was a very smooth dancer, drawing his friends to follow him from club to club. Pee Wee also had a record on his own Pee Wee label with fiddle player Ralph Richardson.

LYRIC 1 – AMAR DEVILLIER & THE LOUISIANA JAMBILEERS (c. 1954)*Shoe Pick Waltz (sic. Choupique) / Durald Two Step*

The rarity of this record lies in the fact that one song on one side ends before the song is finished. This record has Eddie Shuler written all over it. The title Shoe Pick is in fact 'choupique', which is a term for a type of fish. Today, Amar's son Jerry does the audio and visual recording at the Liberty theatre in Eunice. There is a rumour that Dennis McGee played fiddle on this record. Jerry says that Amar and McGee were good friends and played together often. Both sides are very good – what there is of them.

FAIS-DO-DO 1012 – VETERAN PLAYBOYS (c. 1949)*Eunice Waltz / Chinaball Special*

This is truly one of the great post war records. It was the first super group of Cajun music. Adam Herbert sings and plays fiddle with Alphee Bergeron playing the accordion. Alphee's son, Shirley Bergeron, Bill Matte and Raymond LaFleur played in this great band as well; in time, all the members went on to their own successes. The record, like most of J.D. Miller's early records, has just disappeared.

LYRIC 605 – VINCENT & CAGLEY (c.1953)*Chere Petite Brun / Lawtell Two-Step*

Crawford Vincent and Will Kegley make up the band. The record came with two different labels, the standard Lyric label used on most of the recordings (see Lyric 1), with the black for the French recordings and blue for the country releases, and then there is this wild red Lyric label. Not so rare with the standard label, but hard to find with this printing.

SOUTHERN 101 – J.B. FRUSLIERS AND HIS MERRY MAKERS (UNKNOWN)*Chere Petite File / La Vase De Iowa*

Not super rare – but who produced it? The record has a Sulphur address on the label along with a street address. That's all us Cajun collectors and historians have determined. If anyone has additional knowledge, please share. Very good two-sider.

FAIS-DO-DO 1003 – LEBLANC & ADAMS AND THE VERMILLION PLAYBOYS (c.1947)*Vermillion Two Step / Chere Petite Brun*

There are only two known copies of this record and one is cracked. This, without a doubt, is J.D. Miller's worst recording. My guess it was recorded on a wire recorder before he went to New Orleans to Cosimo Matassa's studio where he saw a record being recorded with a lathe cutter. Guitar player Jack LeBlanc says that he remembers J.D. doing some sort of recording before the New Orleans sessions. Besides the poor recording, nobody knows for sure who is in the band (maybe Happy Fats LeBlanc, as LeBlanc and a local accordion repairman and accordion player, Amadus Adams, got the writer credits). Just to make it as confusing as he could, J.D. added the name 'Abshire' as vocalist. Not Nathan, but who?

ALLIED A11 103 – HARRY CHOATES AND HIS FIDDLE (1950)*Beaumont Waltz / Five Time Loser*

Harry was nearing the end of his days when this and one other Allied record was cut. The ironic 'Five Time Loser' title has been pointed out many times. However, the real mystery is that Allied 102 has never been found. Is there one? Harry is playing on 101 and 103 but no 102 has ever turned up.

DELUXE 6042 – THE SINGING FRENCHMAN (JOHN BILLIOT) VOC. BESSIE (GRACE) BILLIOT (c.1949)*Le Grande Texas / Jay Pa Say Devout Tah Port*

After years of wondering and questioning, Cajun historian and writer, Ron Yule tracked the 'Singing Frenchman' down. It is none other than John Billiot who was quite famous around the Beaumont area and had his own radio show on KTRM, Beaumont, Texas. George Jones played and sang with the band at times, but never on the radio shows. As George became famous, they remained friends for life. Grace Billiot (whose real name was Bessie), along with Marie Falcon and Laura Broussard, was one of the few women to record Cajun music post war.

BIG MAMOU RECORDS BM-101 – MILTON MOLITOR WITH AUSTIN PITRE BAND (1957)*Midway Two-Step / Manuel Bar Waltz*

John Broven tells this story very well in his book 'South To Louisiana': Bar owner Ed Manuel taped Milton Molitor on accordion with the Austin Pitre Band. Milton had the highest pitched voice of all the Cajun singers, hitting notes that most could only dream of achieving. Ed Manuel took the tape to Floyd Soileau to see about pressing records to promote his two bars. After negotiations, Floyd bought the tapes and sent them off for pressing. Floyd told John that the pressing was 500-78s and 300-45s. And so, a new record company was in town.

VEE-PEE VP-103 – LAWRENCE WALKER AND WANDERING ACES (1958)*Ossan Two Step / Bon Ton Rouley*

After the word got around that Floyd was in the record business, Lawrence Walker came to him with a recording that he had made at a radio station. He convinced Floyd that a new song he had written, 'Bon Ton Rouley', was a hit record just waiting to be pressed. Floyd had the record pressed in quantities of 300 78s and 700 45s. There were two great sides by Walker; the record started selling and soon Floyd had a solid footing. Vee Pee (Ville Plate) became next to the last Cajun 78 pressed.

APPLE 1852 – THE SUNDOWN PLAYBOYS (1972)*Saturday Nite Special / Valse De Soleil Coucher*

This is the last Cajun 78 pressed. On a dare, Sundown Playboys' accordion player Pat Savant asked The Beatles to release the band on their Apple label. The Beatles accepted the dare and released the record on Apple. Besides the 45rpm disc, Apple pressed and released 150 78rpm pressings. All the members of the Sundown Playboys band plus a few promoters, got a free copy. Most of the band members involved in the recording still have their copies today. After the giveaway, a few were sold to the public. The record's value is not so much from Cajun collectors, but Apple / Beatle collectors. The last copy sold for \$700 – the biggest nugget of Cajun Gold to date.