

Review

***Creole Soul: Zydeco Lives*. By Burt Feintuch. Edited by Jeannie Banks Thomas. With photographs by Gary Samson. Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi. 2022. 267pp. ISBN 978-1-4968-4246-6
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Burt Feintuch's *Creole Soul: Zydeco Lives* takes readers on an immersive journey into the thriving world of contemporary zydeco music in southwest Louisiana and east Texas. Through a collection of interviews with some of zydeco's leading figures this visually captivating, photographed volume provides invaluable insights into the music's history, evolution and longstanding cultural significance. *Creole Soul* is an essential contribution to a body of literature in need of platforming more Creole and African American voices.

Played predominantly on accordion and scrub-board (or *frottoir*), zydeco is a snappy dance music rooted in the Black Creole communities of Louisiana and Texas' Gulf Coast. The music has a vibrant and complex history which Feintuch traces in his introduction, carefully unpacking the term 'creole', and outlining its various definitions and cultural implications. To further immerse readers in the zydeco world, Feintuch shares some of his own ethnographic experiences in the region, transporting readers to a musical world full of energetic dancing, cowboy hats and boots, sound systems and horse trailers.

The heart of *Creole Soul* lies in the interviews themselves, which serve as windows into the lives of the 11 band leaders featured, musicians hailing from both Texas and Louisiana. Some of them, such as Ed Poullard and the late Lawrence 'Black' Ardoin, are veterans of the genre – growing up at a time when what both Cajuns and Creoles played was simply known as 'French music', thus pre-dating the racially coded commercial labels of 'Cajun music' and 'zydeco'. Others represent the more contemporary scene and have been part of a generation shaping the future of the genre. Feintuch's interviews reveal the personal stories, insights and experiences of each player. Their narratives often overlap, highlighting the interconnected nature of zydeco through familial and associative ties which span generations. Throughout the conversations, we see how zydeco is deeply woven into the cultural fabric of everyday life in the region. It is both a family and community music, and can be found wherever Creoles are – from church bazaars to cookouts, dances and beyond.

In addition to reflections on diatonic and chromatic accordions, and the profound influence of the likes of Boozoo Chavis and Beau Joque on an entire generation of players, one of the book's key themes is its exploration of the tensions that arise when traditional musical forms meet the evolving preferences of younger audiences. Zydeco's significant transformations over the last 30 years, incorporating elements of hip hop, soul and heavy bass lines, has attracted a whole new generation of dancers to the scene. Nowhere is this more evident than at the region's 'trail rides', which are discussed throughout the book. 'Trail riding' is a unique equestrian-based social

phenomenon that has become a key performance site for some of zydeco's contemporary players. The rides have grown into large scale events with late-night dancing and a crowd who like their zydeco loud and thumping.

The evolution of zydeco, along with the expanding trail ride scene has divided audiences, often along intergenerational lines. Louisiana-based player Dwayne Dopsie equates the addition of hip hop styles coupled with the fading out of French lyrics to cultural damage, while Texas-based Brian Jacks views singing in French as unnecessary for a younger audience who don't speak the language. Sean Ardoin, who has family connections back to zydeco's forefather Amédé Ardoin, understands the integration of popular music elements as something that zydeco has done throughout the ages and has applied the same sensibility to his own music career. Whatever their stance, Feintuch's interviewees do not shy away from addressing the complexities that arise when tradition and popular culture intersect. Change has always been a part of zydeco and appears to be playing a vital role in ensuring the genre remains both dynamic and current, giving young people an opportunity that is increasingly rare in the United States – dancing to live music on a regular basis. *Creole Soul* does an excellent job of capturing a rich traditional music on the move.

Despite its many merits, the book does have some limitations. The interviews, while rich in content, tend to meander, calling for a more rigorous editorial hand to tighten the narrative structure. Furthermore, *Creole Soul* assumes a certain level of familiarity with the individuals and locales mentioned in the interviews, leaving any uninitiated readers in need of a more comprehensive context. Footnotes would have been a valuable addition to provide essential background information. The glaring absence of female voices in this volume also raises important questions about the representation of women in zydeco. While the lack of any female contributors is acknowledged in the introduction (and in the eloquent preface by editor Jeannie Banks Thomas), Feintuch falls short of discussing zydeco's substantial gender gap in any of his conversations with male players. This is a missed opportunity for presenting a more inclusive portrayal of the zydeco landscape and the female musicians, promoters, trail ride club members and organisers who play key roles in shaping both the Texas and Louisiana scenes.

Creole Soul: Zydeco Lives by Burt Feintuch is an overdue contribution to the field of American music studies, offering an intimate look into the world of zydeco. The book effectively captures the complexity and spirit of this unique music, from its rich cultural heritage to its intergenerational challenges, and remains a significant resource for those seeking a deeper understanding of the genre and its cultural context.

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