

Herman Fuselier
Bayou Boogie



Chenier's love leads to Grammy nomination

In the next three months, C. J. Chenier has gigs stretching from Colorado to New York City to Denmark. He's been featured on CNN, VH1 and Entertainment Weekly.

All his travels and notoriety come from playing zydeco, music that when he first heard it, was a square peg in a round hole.

"I just didn't understand it," said C.J. in his latest CD's press release. "It all sounded the same to me. Until I started playing it. Then I was able to understand what was going on."

"But every time I heard it, my feet were tapping and my head was boppin'. It was such a fun music and the people partied so hard that I fell in love."

Twenty five years after falling in love with zydeco, C.J. has a Grammy nomination to show for it. C.J.'s "Can't Sit Down" CD, released on the World Village label, is up for a Grammy in the new Best Regional Roots Music Album category.

He's competing against discs from Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, Rebirth Brass

Band of New Orleans, Hawaiian artist George Kahumoku Jr. and polka veteran Jimmy Sturr. The winner will be announced Feb. 12 at the 54th Grammys in Los Angeles.

The prime time broadcast begins at 7 p.m. on CBS. But most of the awards, including Regional Roots, are announced in the afternoon during a pre-telecast show that is streamed live online.

Chenier, who lives in his hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, is a virtual stranger with today's young crowd in zydeco's heartland of southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas. But his roots run deep in a music that he's spent decades playing on the road.

C. J. is the son of Opelousas native and Grammy winner Clifton Chenier, the King of Zydeco. Clifton met C. J.'s mother, Mildred Bell, in the 1950s, when he worked at the Gulf Oil Refinery in Port Arthur.

C. J. grew up listening to soul and R&B while playing saxophone in his high school jazz band and a local funk group. He knew little of his dad's legendary Red Hot Louisiana Band until Clifton called in 1979, offering a job playing sax.

C. J. accepted, spending years crisscrossing the globe and eventually taking over the band in 1987, when Clifton passed away. Since then, he's shared the studio with Paul Simon and the Gin Blossoms. He enjoys regular appearances at

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the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Chicago Blues Festival and other high-profile events.

C.J.'s Grammy-nominated CD reflects the heritage and diversity of his music. The title cut is a Clifton original and "Ridin' with Uncle Cleveland" is a party tribute to his father's brother and rubboard master, Cleveland Chenier. He puts his own spin on Boozoo Chavis' "Paper in My Shoe," a 1954 recording considered zydeco's first commercial hit.

C. J. digs back in the blues box with Joe Williams' "Please Don't Go" and John Lee Hooker's "Dusty Roads." But there's also the unexpected — "Clap Hands," from Tom Waits, and Curtis Mayfield's "We Gotta Have Peace."

C. J. produced the CD himself, recording it in one, live session at Rock Romano's Red Shack Studio in Houston. He's proud that the sound and energy are all his own.

"I figured that nobody knows better what I want than I do. Nobody knows better how I want my accordion to sound. Nobody knows better how I want my band to sound. So I decided to stop going with other people's ears and start going with my own."

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