



# Drummer glad to be member of Grammy-nominated band

## Q&A

BY BILL BUELL  
Gazette Reporter

David Macejka says he doesn't prefer one musical style over another, but if you pin him down sometime over the next month and a half, he might admit to being a bit partial to zydeco.

That's because on Feb. 12 he will be in Los Angeles at the Grammy Awards ceremony as a member of C.J. Chenier's Red Hot Louisiana Band. The group is nominated for a Grammy in the Best Regional Roots Album category, and Macejka, a life-long Rotterdam resident, is the band's percussionist.

He had been playing with Chenier on a part-time basis for nearly six years, and a year and a half ago he became a permanent member of the group. Earlier this year he was with Chenier and the Red Hot Louisiana Band when they recorded the album, "Can't Sit Down," in a Houston studio. He was also with Chenier in October when the band played before 6,000 people in Poland at the Rawa Blues Festival.

While zydeco music — a blend of Creole and Cajun rhythms with roots in Louisiana from as far back as the early 1800s — currently commands most of Macejka's attention, he's also playing regularly with Cu Dubh, a Celtic band based in Boston.

He has been a full-time musician for more than 10 years now, and he has produced four CDs under his own label, Rishi Records. "Hunto," "Sookh Tan," "Gongs" and "Poi for Gadje" are all examples of Macejka's diverse tastes, and each "is inspired by and combines a variety of traditional styles of music from around the world with a heavy focus on percussion," according to his Web site, davidmacejka.com.

A graduate of Mohonasen, Macejka took private lessons

from local jazz drummer Michael Girardi. He spent two years in the U.S. Air Force and then 10 years as a residential counselor for people with disabilities. For about the past 10 years, he's made his living strictly as a musician.

Macejka, a single dad with a 4-year-old son, continues to live in Rotterdam, but will head back out on the road to begin touring with Chenier and the band in February.

**Q:** When did you begin playing the drums?

**A:** Back in elementary school. There are photos of me with pots and pans, anything I could get my hands on, because absolutely, I wanted to make noise. My son does the same thing, and it's real fun to watch him. Mr. [Anthony] Cuda got me started back in the day, and then in high school the guy who helped me a lot was Mr. [David] Bournazian. He was a really good guy, and he was actually a musician who toured back in the be-bop days. He'd teach us about music in the classroom, but he also gave us practical information about the way things work with real bands out on the road. He was a great guy and I owe a lot to him.

**Q:** How did you get the opportunity to start playing with C.J. Chenier?

**A:** About seven years ago I was playing with a local band, Jocamo, and we opened for C.J. at Alive at Five [in downtown Albany]. He heard me play, and asked me to keep my drums up on stage and to play with him, so I did. Things went really well, so if I had an opening and he wanted me to play with him, well, I was always available. I was touring with another band at the time, but I quit them.

**Q:** Is zydeco your favorite musical style?

**A:** That's a real difficult ques-

tion. I enjoy any kind of music, whatever the gig happens to call for. With C.J., it's always a lot of fun because we're always pushing the envelope. His father [Clifton Chenier] is almost credited with coming up with zydeco, that form of music, and like his father, C.J. really likes to push the envelope. But I'm also playing with a Celtic group, so I really enjoy all kinds of music. Whatever the gig is, I really enjoy it.

**Q:** How is it that you came to enjoy so many different kinds of music?

**A:** In high school I was in every kind of band there was: the jazz band, the orchestra, the marching band. All the different kinds of bands you could think of, I was in. So I got exposure to orchestral music, to be-bop, to jazz, all the way to marching band stuff.

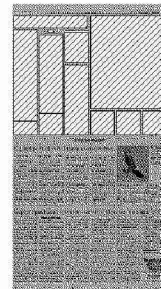
Then, in the military I was in the Air Force Drum and Bugle Corps. Obviously, I was into a lot of rock in the 1990s, and played with a lot of different local bands. I was playing funk, punk, rock and then I started getting into world music. I got into the rhythms of African-American music, Latin American, Middle Eastern, Iranian; anything that involved the heritage of different cultures.

**Q:** Is your music all connected?

**A:** Once you start getting into all these different forms, you figure out that at some point, that coiled ball of music is made up of a lot of different stuff, but they all have a connection. North African and Egyptian music can be tied together, and I really enjoy gypsy music. Because of their landless culture, they gathered musical influence from everywhere.

**Q:** What do you do to keep busy when you're not touring?

**A:** I teach and I really enjoy it.





In fact, I like the word “facilitate” better than teach because I’ve learned it works both ways. I also gain knowledge, so, I get a lot out of turning people on to different kinds of drumming. I’m doing workshops on Sundays in January at The Yoga Spa in Ballston Spa, and I’ll be doing a lot of different styles, but hand drumming for the most part.

**Q:** Did you have a favorite drummer?

**A:** When I was young I was really into Neil Peart of Rush; all the kids at Mohonasen were. He was considered one of the best rock drummers, and if you really wanted to learn how to play the drums, you watched him.

**Q:** What was your experience like recording the album with Chenier and the band in Houston?

**A:** C.J. hadn’t come out with anything in more than five years. It was his first album since [Hurricane] Katrina, so we kind of figured it might get some attention.

We did a Tom Waits cover; a zydeco version of one of his songs, and then, like I said, we pushed the envelope. It wasn’t just traditional zydeco. It was very exciting, and I played the congas, timbales and kalimba. People were saying how I was nominated for a Grammy. Well, it’s not me, but it’s this wonderful thing that I’m a part of.

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*Reach Gazette reporter Bill Buell at 395-3190 or [www.bbuell@dailygazette.com](http://www.bbuell@dailygazette.com).*

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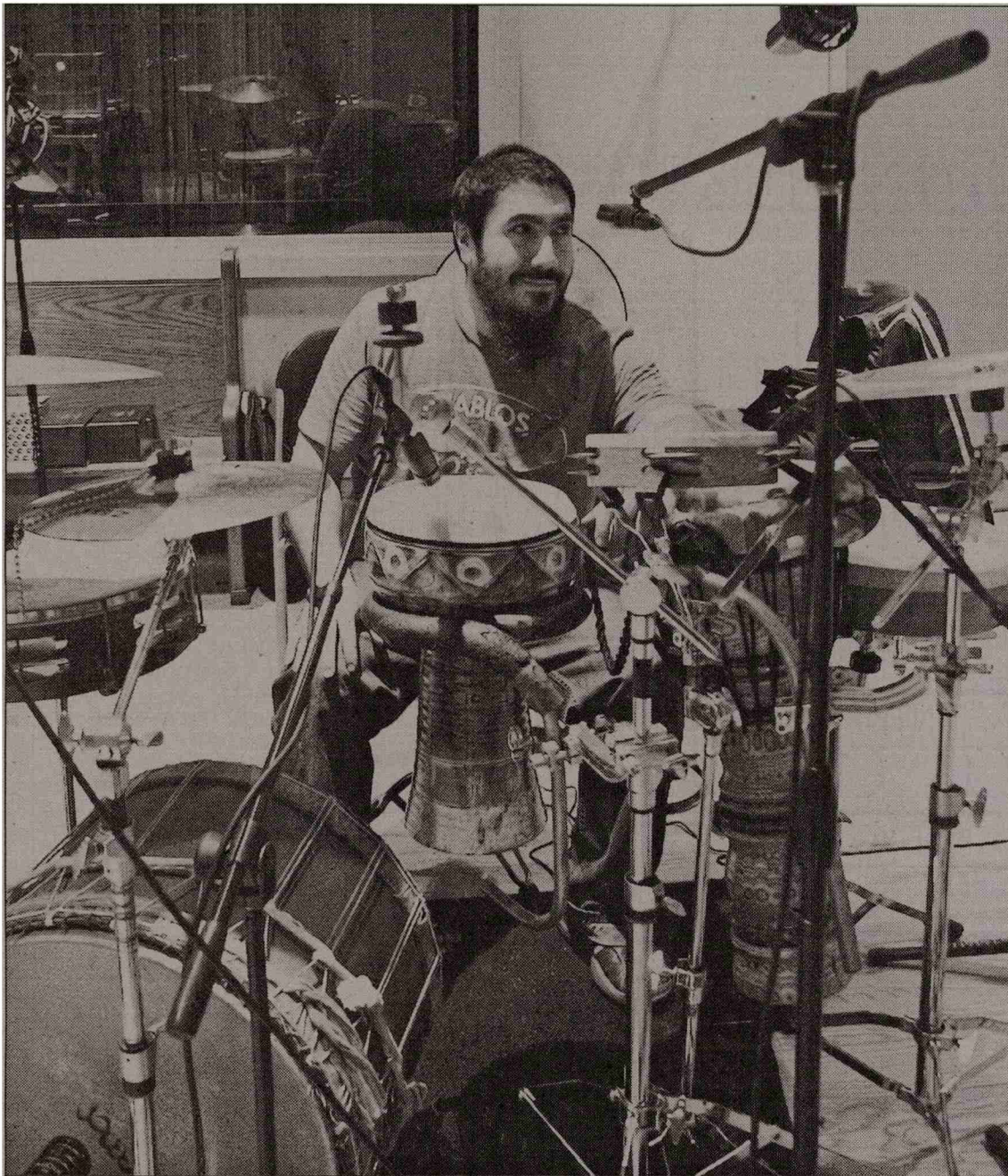


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David Macejka of Rotterdam is the drummer for C.J. Chenier's Red Hot Louisiana Band, which has been nominated for a Grammy.