



Signature summer event takes Lowell stages for three days

Folk-fueled fun

BY TERRY DATE
Staff writer

Last time C.J. Chenier took a stage at the Lowell Folk Festival, it was the early 1990s and his zydeco music and its jambalaya of bayou influences left some listeners at sixes and sevens. “The crowd was OK,” Chenier said in an interview on a cellphone struggling for connection on a mountain highway in Virginia. “They didn’t understand what was going on. We are going to make sure they know where it is at (this time).”

Chenier, son of the legendary Clifton Chenier — aka the King of Zydeco — and the Red Hot Louisiana Band will play their rollicking Creole and rhythm-and-blues spiced songs all three days at this weekend’s festival.

“We have bad intentions — happy feet and big smiles,” C.J. Chenier said.

The downtown festival’s five

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stages — all within two blocks of the other — will serve more than a dozen kinds of folk music to some 200,000 visitors from Friday through Sunday.

You’ll hear bluegrass, you’ll hear gospel, Chicago blues and Western swing. You’ll hear country, you’ll hear Syrian oud, Irish and conjunto Tejano. You’ll hear Acadian, you’ll hear

Crimean Tartar, Afro-Venezuelan and Polish polka.

Not to mention Appalachian song, Tibetan opera, Memphis soul and big band free jazz. And Zimbabwe, Cuban son and Moroccan Gnawa music.

“A big block party,” is how event organizer Phil Lupiewicz of the National Park Service describes it.

No party is complete without food, and the fest will serve an array of ethnic dishes — befitting Lowell’s melting-pot makeup.

Pancit — rice noodles, vegetables and chicken — and barbecue cooked fresh at the Filipino food station on French Street by Boarding House Park attracts a faithful following.

“We get people who say we have waited all year to come back,” said Erica Stearns, a liaison for the station, operated by Iskwelahang Pilipino school students and volunteers.

But the festival’s meat and potatoes — or rice and beans — is music.

Lena Mae Perry, 79, the remaining original member of The Branchettes, has been singing joy-powered spirituals since she was a child, joining family singing groups at small churches in her native North Carolina.

The Branchettes will sing gospel, contemporary

and hymns, accompanied by Miss Angela Kent on keyboard — sitting in for Mr. Wilbur Tharpe, known locally as “Black Liberace,” who for 40-plus years has played with Perry.

Perry, a retired restaurant owner, still loves cooking collards, turnip greens and butter beans for her children and grandchildren. She sings at concerts most weekends, and she’s looking forward to Lowell.

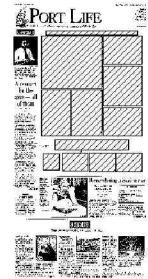
“Meeting some new folks, making new friends and having a good time singing gospel,” she said.

ShadowGrass, three teens and one 12-year-old from the Appalachian region of Virginia and North Carolina, play bluegrass in the Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs tradition, and some originals — “15 Miles for Galax” and “Further Down the Line.”

The boys are playing in the shadow of bluegrass legends and will bring fire and melody to the audience’s ears.

IF YOU GO

- **What:** Lowell Folk Festival
- **When:** Friday through Sunday
- **Where:** Downtown Lowell
- **How much:** Free
- **More information:** www.lowellfolkfestival.org



HERE TO ENTERTAIN YOU

- **Betsayda Machado y La Parranda El Clavo** – Afro-Venezuelan
- **The Branchettes** – African-American gospel
- **Chaksam-pa** – Tibetan opera, folk song and dance
- **C.J. Chenier & The Red Hot Louisiana Band** – zydeco
- **Dori Freeman** – Appalachian song
- **Eastern Sound Orchestra** – Polish polka
- **El Septeto Santiaguero** – Cuban son
- **Innov Gnawa** – Moroccan Gnawa
- **Kenan Adnawi** – Syrian oud
- **Los Texmaniacs** – conjunto Tejano
- **Marcus Santos & aNova Brazil** – Brazilian percussion
- **Mokoomba** – Zimbabwean music
- **The New York Crimean Tatar Ensemble** – Crimean Tatar music
- **Ongwehonwe Singers & Dancers** – Haudenosaunee song and dance
- **Puppeteers Cooperative** – giant puppets, pageants and parades
- **Robert Clark** – Magic, juggling and comedy
- **Seamus Egan Project** – Irish music
- **ShadowGrass** – bluegrass
- **Stax Music Academy Alumni Band** – Memphis soul
- **Sun Ra Arkestra** – big band free jazz
- **Toronzo Cannon** – Chicago blues
- **Vishten** – Acadian, Irish and Scottish music
- **The Western Flyers** – Western swing



Toronzo Cannon will bring Chicago blues to the stage.



The Seamus Egan Project will play Irish music.



Dori Freeman is an Appalachian musician from Galax, Virginia.



Vishten is a group from Canada that mixes Acadian, Irish and Scottish styles.



Showstopper C.J. Chenier, son of the King of Zydeco, Clifton Chenier, will perform with The Red Hot Louisiana Band.



Courtesy photos

Innov Gnawa will entertain with a style of music called Moroccan Gnawa.