



Nathan Abshire

Nathan Abshire's dynamic accordion playing spanned the history of Cajun music: he played the reels of his father's generation, the songs of the 1930s and 40s, and brought his own blues-tinged sensibilities to Cajun music of classic recordings.

Abshire was born near Gueydan, Louisiana, on June 27, 1915. His father, mother and uncle all played accordion. As an adult, Abshire recalled that his father played reels on the instrument. Abshire began playing the accordion at the age of six and was proficient enough to play at local *Bal de maison* by the time he was eight. Within a few years he was well known throughout southwest Louisiana, and in great demand on the dance hall circuit. Abshire's music was greatly influenced by the legendary Creole accordion player and singer, Amédé Ardoin. As a young man Abshire sometimes shared bandstands with Ardoin. This influence is reflected in the great infusion of blues Abshire brought to Cajun music. Many of his songs bear titles such as “Service Blues,” “French Blues,” and “Pine Grove Blues.”

Abshire was active throughout the 1930s, recording for the RCA Bluebird Company in 1935. His career was interrupted by a brief stint in the army during World War II. After the war, Abshire was a central figure in the revitalization of traditional Cajun music. His “Pine Grove Blues,” recorded in 1949 for the O. T. label, was a regional hit and an important recording in the postwar revival of the accordion. In the 1960s, he became one of the first musicians to take Cajun music beyond the borders of Louisiana, traveling with the Balfa Brothers to concerts and folk festivals throughout the United States and Canada. Abshire also hit his stride as a recording artist in the late 1960s, turning out a string of remarkable records for the Swallow label that included, “*Tramp Sur La Rue*,” the “Lemonade Song,” and “*Valse De Bayou Teche*.”

Although a highly respected and influential musician, Abshire was never able to support his family completely with his music. He was for many years employed with the town of Basile, Louisiana, where admirers from all over the world would come to see him.

Nathan Abshire died in Basile on May 13,1981.