

Music

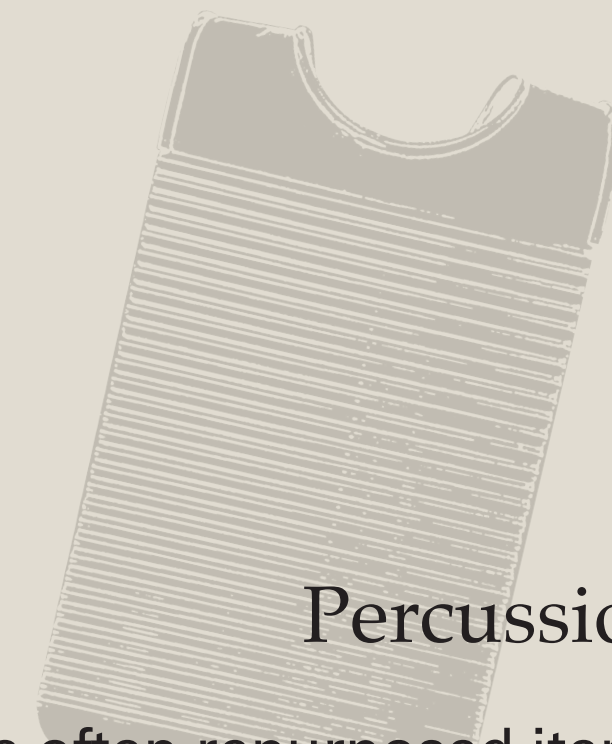
“Cajun music and Zydeco are cultural hybrids, the results of the rich blend of French, Spanish, German, Anglo-American, African, and Native American cultures that found themselves living together in south Louisiana.

“The French tradition shared by French Creoles and Acadians served as a base for Cajun music and gave a language and specific lyrics to Zydeco. The African tradition of the black Creoles served as a base for Zydeco and gave rhythm, syncopation, and improvisation to Cajun music. The Native Americans contributed a wailing, terraced singing style and a drumming tradition that overlapped with black Creole origins. The Spanish contributed the guitar and the melodies. The Germans eventually contributed the diatonic accordion, in the nineteenth century when merchants began importing the newly invented instruments from the old country. The Anglo-Americans brought lyrics that were translated into French, and jigs and reels that were adopted and adapted as tunes.”

—from *Cajun Music and Zydeco* by Barry Ancelet



The word “zydeco” is believed to originate from the French phrase “*les haricots sont pas salés*,” translating to “the snap beans aren’t salty,” an expression of lament for lean times in black Creole folk music in Louisiana.

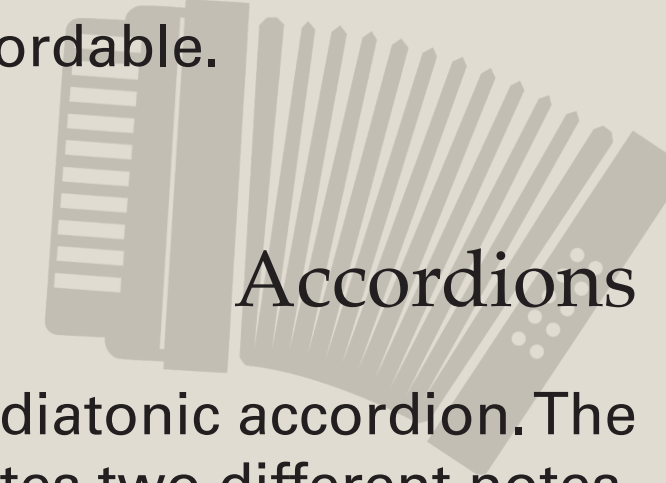


Percussion

Early percussion instruments were often repurposed items from around the homestead—washboards, spoons, bones, or a triangle crafted from a hay rake tine or other scraps of metal. Spoons and bones are rarely used these days, but the sound of triangles (t-fers) and rubboards (frottoirs) have come to define Cajun and Zydeco music.

Fiddles

Acadian settlers brought their fiddles and a rich fiddling tradition with them in memory when they arrived in south Louisiana from Nova Scotia in the 1700s. The violin was one of the first instruments they began to acquire once they became re-established enough to afford such a luxury. Rudimentary cigar-box or stick fiddles were sometimes made when “real” fiddles were unavailable or unaffordable.



Accordions

The Cajun accordion is a single-row diatonic accordion. The push and pull of a single button creates two different notes. Accordions were first manufactured in Germany and imported into south Louisiana, then sold at general stores like Mervine Kahn in Rayne, Louisiana in the late 1800s and early 1900s.