## **Amede Ardoin**

At PD Productions it seems we spend an awful lot of time trawling through the internet, books and documents that come into our possession from sometimes the strangest resources, one such trail led us to Amédé Ardoin, a man of incredible influence in his time and a life ending in violent tragedy.



Amédé was primarily an accordionist, outstanding as a forerunner of both Zydeco and Cajun music, and as one of

the first musicians in south Louisiana whose commercial recordings have dual significance in terms of important historic folklore and the emergence of Blues. Amédé's records are in the 78 rpm format, recorded between 1930 and 1934. At that time the word Cajun appeared in some song titles, but was not applied to the Cajun genre as a whole, at the time, the music was loosely known as French blues. The word Zydeco certainly didn't widely exist at this time, the phrase, les haricots or les haricots sont pas salés appeared in some black Creole songs and would eventually become by the 1950s Zydeco as a name for black Creole dance music. In our research we have discovered that Amédé's music has been classified as Cajun, zydeco and blues to mention just a few, scholars continue to argue about his definitive classification; one such document we have read suggests his music doesn't easily fit into ANY classification. Following a late night of reading, we were to discover he was acclaimed as a major talent of two-step, blues, (Whatever they are) and waltzes, greatly influencing an exhaustive list of styles, we'll refrain from comment; indeed his work remains relevant and even influential today.

Amédé is believed to have been born in 1898. He was raised in a French-speaking black Creole farming community. He chose to reject his family's tradition of agriculture to pursue full-time musicianship. He performed at private house parties and public dances, there exists several stories of him hitchhiking with his accordion in a sack, playing whenever and wherever an opportunity arose.

In Amédé's skilled hands, the accordion and vest frottoir served as the prime instruments in the region's rich, hybrid and developing culture. His repertoire included such European song forms as the waltz and the two-step, Afro-

European song forms such as the blues, and African-rooted rhythmic approaches such as swing and syncopation. Amédé became the evolution of his blues interpretation through his original lyrics, urgent vocal style, improvisational skill, and playing which kept people dancing, all of which, as we shall see, makes his end even the more tragic. As a singer he used bluesy, elongated, high-pitched notes to great effect. Some of his songs, such as *La Valse de Chantiers Petroliperes* reflected the socio-economic changes of south Louisiana.

Ardoin's music was heard beyond his somewhat limited performance circuit due to the records he made for Columbia, a major national label, these



included Les Blues du Voyage, on this track (Still available) he was accompanied by the Cajun fiddler Dennis McGee. Considering that the two would almost surely have been barred from performing together in public, at the time, this inter-racial pairing was unusual and possibly unlawful. In addition to Amédé's broad impact on the music

scene of French-speaking Louisiana, he specifically exerted a profound influence upon two important musicians of the following generation: the Creole accordionist Clifton Chenier, and the Cajun accordionist Iry LeJeune.

Amédé's musical career was cut short by a horrific act of violence that left him severely injured. The story goes Amédé was playing at a dance, two people of such racism objected that in his temerity he asked someone to give him a rag to wipe his face. A white woman, without hesitation, opened her purse and handed him a handkerchief, that kind gesture would end his musical career. Her simple act caught the attention of two White men, who declared



that Amede would never perform again. The two men followed Ardoin home that night and beat him almost unconscious, they then drove a Model a Ford motorcar over his head and neck with the obvious intention of killing him. Incredibly, Amédé survived, but lost all ability to play, unsurprisingly, he suffered severe brain

injuries and was institutionalised at the Central Louisiana State (Mental) Hospital in Pineville, where he died a few months later. He is buried anonymously, the very idea of this genius ending up unclaimed, alone, solitary, and not being able to be in connection with anything that defined his life and a world which he so influenced is so very sad ............

David R Howard ... PD Productions.