



No More Kid Stuff

By Dan Willging

Though the **Grammy** infrastructure may have overlooked one of the deepest Cajun music releases of 2008—**Feufolet's** *Cow Island Hop*—the sextet of college-age, young adults aren't losing any sleep over it. And for good reason. In the last six months, no Cajun band has garnered more national exposure than Feufolet, thanks to appearances on **NPR's** *All Things Considered* and *American Routes'* 10th anniversary celebration at the **House of Blues**.

While it's too soon to ascertain the impact of *American Routes*, *All Things Considered* was huge. CD sales skyrocketed overnight, causing *Cow Island Hop* to be among the top downloads on **Amazon.com**, along side Alison Kraus and Robert Plant's *Raising Sand*. At one point, the album's surprise hit, "Femme L'a Dit," ranked No. 8 in downloads on **iTunes**.

"It definitely brought us to a larger audience than we've had before, says Feufolet's accordionist/multi-instrumentalist Chris Stafford, regarding the NPR feature.

So why, after all this time, is the whole world finally taking notice of Feufolet? Is it because the band of child prodigies formed a decade ago when Stafford was 11, Stafford's younger brother Michael (drums) was 9 and Chris Segura (fiddle) was 14, has been viewed primarily as a kid's band?

"We have been fighting that for a long time," Segura admits. "But if you consider our average age (23), we're not that much younger than the **Pine Leaf Boys** or the **Lost Bayou Ramblers**, and we've been around longer. But because we have, people just had this thing that we're a kid's band. With this CD, people are finally forgetting about that."

"Sometimes publicity in the music business is too successful," says Feufolet's guitarist Josh Caffery. "The image of them as child stars was imprinted on everyone's brain. But now they are all in college or getting out, they are beginning to create more original music, which has allowed the band to come back into its own."

Their fourth and best release yet, *Cow Island Hop*, finds the band with one foot firmly in tradition and the other in tasteful experimentation. Along with studio engineer Ivan Klisanin, they operated as a team of co-producers, making this the first time that Feufolet used a producer other than Steve Riley or Dirk Powell. Klisanin was just what they needed, an idea man with no previous history with the band.

Interestingly, keyboards played a significant role in shaping the uniqueness of *Cow Island Hop*. "Chère Bébè Créole" was already dense with the Segura-Stafford twin fiddling, but Stafford thickened it even more with layers of Mellotron strings, flutes and mandolin chanting. Other tracks feature a Vox Continental, a Wurlitzer electric piano, an air-powered reed organ and even a conventional piano, hardly the typical Cajun fare.

"Femme L'a Dit," a brilliant mix of Creole music, gypsy jazz and Dixieland horns, may be the most unusual tune ever heard on a Cajun album. Originally, Dr. Harry Oster recorded the tune first sung by Gilbert Martin, a Creole from New Roads, Louisiana, as part of his fieldwork in the 1950s. Decades later, Caffery discovered it as part of his work at the **University of Louisiana-Lafayette Archives**. "To me, it had a jazzy, swingy feel to it and it also had a different harmony. It was using a different scale than you hear in most Cajun music."

Caffery put some chords to it and soon the group had developed an arrangement. Somewhere along the line, someone proposed adding horns, tying in an additional cultural aspect since historically Creoles played trad jazz in the Crescent City.

Feufolet with horns in tow boldly debuted "Femme L'a Dit" at the 2007 **Festival Acadiens**. While most attendees were enthralled, one backstage volunteer was so upset that he accosted Dr. Barry Ancelet, the festival's music organizer. "What do they think they are doing? 'Don't they know the rules?' Stafford says, recalling the animated conversation. "But Barry just blew it off and told him, 'They can do it they want to.'"

But they do know the rules and that's the point; Feufolet playfully innovates within cultural boundaries.



"Most people wouldn't have a problem with something like Belton Richard, but do you really consider that to be traditional Cajun music?" Stafford asks rhetorically, referring to the popular Cajun hit maker who pushed the envelope in his day. "There has always been innovation. I don't think people should be worried about that at all. It has to be there."


"We certainly believe that tradition evolves," says vocalist/guitarist Anna Laura Edmiston. "We just go with whatever we feel and we don't apologize for it."

The biggest problem Feufollet has these days is finding time to play music together because school and side projects continually get in the way. Once school lets out, Feufollet will have a full schedule of folk and world music festivals. At the same time, Stafford and Segura couldn't be happier with their present line-up and the direction the band is now taking.

"The way it's going, it's going to be pretty solid for awhile, you know?" Stafford says. "Everybody is on the same page and into what we are doing. This feels like it is really going to stick. I certainly hope it does. I'm optimistic about it."

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