

## CAJUN COMPANY - La Robe de Rosalie

I hear a lot of cajun music at dances, but i don't listen to much on albums - partly because I get my fill from live music which can rarely be bettered and partly because the repertoire is generally limited. A few albums from Louisiana and Europe break the mould, of course.

I have listened to this Cajun Company album twice in the car and twice at home so far. The cover says 'Traditional Cajun music' which is a warning to me - I have probably heard this stuff before! I have certainly heard many of these tunes before. This band is from The Netherlands (ie. not Louisiana!) so they are going to struggle to get my vote. It seems a cop out, but let me quote from the sleeve notes (which are in English - thank you, Cajun Company): "This CD is the result of our 8-year search for the essence of Cajun music. When we first started playing together, none of us could play this music. But we had one thing in common: our love for it and our willingness to go all out to get the hang of it.. Why some tunes make you happy, worked up and want to dance? Why do others bring tears in your eyes, or give you gooses bumps? . During those first years each of us focused on learning how to play our instruments.. We were especially inspired by Eddie LeJeune, Ambrose Thibodeaux and Adam and Cyprien Landreneau.. Over the years we have been lucky enough to spend time with many Cajun musicians in Louisiana. They taught us lots of important things. But the thing they all emphasized the most was the groove.. We hope you like what we've done here..You decide how far we've come."

I have news for you - you have arrived.

Everyone I have spoken to who has seen Cajun Company agrees they are one of the best traditional Cajun bands around. I have checked back Cajun Company's previous album Testing One One which is great - but La robe de Rosalie is better.

This is a superb album (of traditional Cajun music) in every respect. The album was produced by Dirk Powell, who also played back up fiddle on most tracks and it was recorded in Crowley, Louisiana. The sound is so clear you can hear every instrument but without detracting from the collective effect. And the mixing is perfect - bringing out the accordion of Bas van der Poll when it is the lead instrument, or Pauline Groenendijk's fiddle when it leads. The recording of the vocals is just right on every track - clear and strong when there is something to sing about, or part of the ensemble when the music is more important. Vera van Heeringen plays acoustic guitar and Herman van Rijn plays ti-fer, fiddle sticks and vocal harmony - lead vocal on a couple of tracks. I particularly liked the way the accordion left hand (bass/rhythm) got its place in the mix. The rhythm, or maybe it's the 'groove', is perfect for dancing and or for listening to. I could easily use its tracks for dance classes or give it to a friend who didn't know what Cajun music was and needed convincing of its merits.

All the songs are traditional with arrangements by Cajun Company. The singing is in Cajun French mostly in traditional style a little forced and high - but not falsetto and not strained. True pitch, which cannot be said of every Cajun singer! I particularly liked the slight huskiness on the vocal of Madam Sostène. I can't mention every track because I will run out of complimentary adjectives before the end. But I will mention a few. Bonsoir Moreau is a song I have heard live from time to time and I don't like it. Now I discover it is the way it has been delivered by others that is the problem! Cajun Company make it work for me. Bas does the trick. The accordion playing is just right and the left hand/bass is given good prominence, often missing in the sound mixing. (The same is true on most other tracks - the bass side is identifiable).

Bas's voice is accurate and so well paced. There are three twin fiddle tracks (Pauline and Dirk) playing together and against each other in harmony. Reel de Manuel has a slow but jumpy rhythm, particularly good. There are also a couple of fiddle tunes on which the rhythm is produced by Herman playing fiddle sticks (Herman claims they are kebab sticks) on the strings at the neck of the fiddle. This is not a twee sound or a party trick - it is great music. Jolie Bassette is a slow one-step, which as the sleeve notes say, gives the dancers the chance to do the Cajun Frieze. There are several waltzes and two steps of different types. So in 18 tracks you have a really wide variety of music. Not the sort of album where you would come to at track 15 or so, thinking it all sounds the same, Ok for dancing but not interesting enough to listen to repeatedly. There are no duff tracks. I loved it all and am thrilled to have this CD.

Ron Knowles.