

In 1946, Harry Choates, a Cajun fiddle virtuoso, changed the course of American musical history when his recording of the so-called Cajun national anthem "Jole Blon" reached number four on the national Billboard charts. Cajun music became part of the American consciousness for the first time thanks to the unprecedented success of Choates' recording, as the French tune crossed cultural, ethnic, racial, and socio-economic boundaries. Country music stars Moon Mullican, Roy Acuff, Bob Wills, and Hank Snow rushed into the studio to record their own interpretations of the waltz—as did Waylon Jennings and Bruce Springsteen many years later. The cross-cultural musical legacy of this plaintive waltz also paved the way for Hank Williams Sr.'s Cajun-influenced hit "Jambalaya."

Choates' "Jole Blon" represents the culmination of a centuries-old dialogue between the Cajun community and the rest of America. Joining the dialogue now is Ryan André Brasseaux's *Cajun Breakdown*, the most thoroughly researched and broadly conceived history of Cajun music yet published. The book examines the social and cultural roots of Cajun music's development through 1950 by raising broad questions about the ethnic experience in America and the nature of indigenous American music. Since its inception, the Cajun community constantly re-fashioned influences from the American musical landscape despite the pressures of marginalization, denigration, and poverty. European and North American French songs, minstrel tunes, blues, jazz, hillbilly, Tin Pan Alley melodies, and western swing all became part of the Cajun musical equation. The idiom's synthetic nature suggests an extensive and intensive dialogue with popular culture, extinguishing the myth that Cajuns were an isolated folk group astray in the American South. Brasseaux's work constitutes a bold and innovative exploration of a forgotten chapter in America's musical odyssey.