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SONGS OF THE SOUTH

► DANCING THROUGH LOUISIANA'S CAJUN AND CREOLE COUNTRY

THERE'S A SOUNDTRACK to the rich culture of **Acadiana**. This area of southwestern Louisiana sings with the lively music of the bayou—Creole zydeco, Cajun two-steps and country waltzes. It is the lilt of fiddles, the tempo of rub-boards, the percussion of foot stomping dancers and always, the lively accordions that figure front and center at any musical gathering. In Acadiana, the music takes the slow drawl of Southern life—the sultry bayou nights, the scent of magnolia blossoms and the taste of crawfish boils—and infuses it with an abundance

of swing and spice in an up-tempo gumbo. Here, no matter the holiday, celebration, family occasion or night out, music always surrounds you. It's the *joie de vivre* that transcends the generations, whether at house parties known as *fais dos dos*, or in the clubs and dance halls, where partners hold each other and move in joyous coordination together.

For those unacquainted with the genre, Cajun music—and the culture it epitomizes—has its roots in the traditions of the French Acadians (aka Cajuns), who settled in southwest Louisiana after their ouster

← Louisiana's famed live oaks

from Nova Scotia (Acadie) in the mid-1700s. Zydeco is the wilder, looser sister to Cajun music, with more funk in the beat and swivel in the dancers' hips. Having originated with the mixed-race Creole people, who added their ancestors' African, Caribbean and Native American influences to what was called "French music," the result is a wonderfully contagious, heavily syncopated sound. Whether Cajun or zydeco, it's impossible to listen to the highly infectious music and not want to dance for joy. Although the music is now featured at many festivals all around the country, the best place to experience it is at its source in southwest Louisiana.

Comprised of 22 parishes (counties), Acadiana stretches along the bayous and prairies west of New Orleans to the Texas state line, but the epicenter is the city and environs of Lafayette. Here the inhabitants keep the Cajun-French language and traditions alive on a daily basis, in a spicy jambalaya of warm and friendly people, rollicking music, zesty cuisine, and a strong sense of place and purpose.

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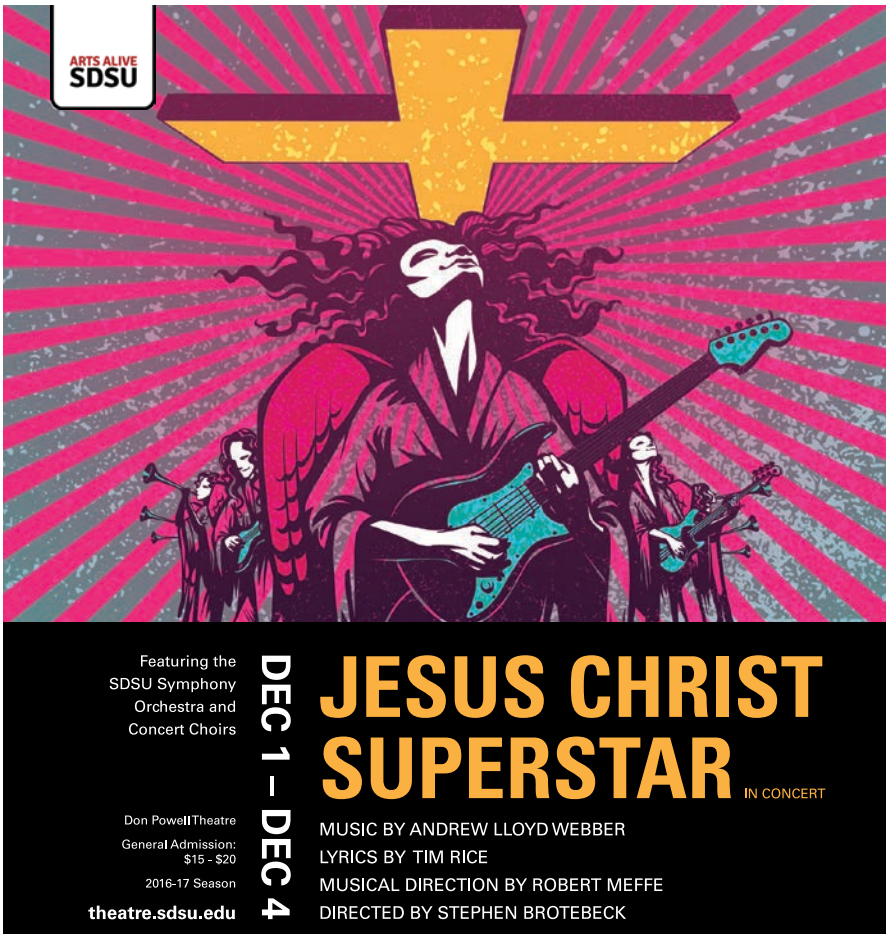
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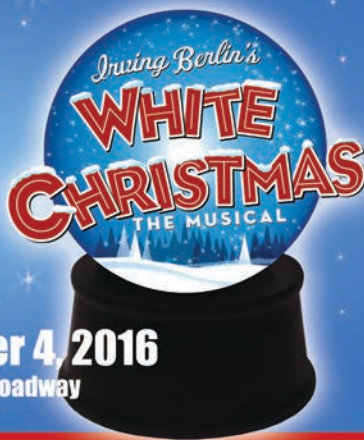
the city of about 100,000 has amassed numerous awards and accolades in the last few years, including being included in TravelChannel.com's "Best All American Vacations 2015."

Any visit to Acadiana is a celebration, but to truly experience the nuances of Cajun and Creole culture, as well as getting your fill of nonstop music and dancing, come for one of the many festivals that take place throughout the year. There's Mardi Gras in February; Festival International in April; Crawfish Festival and Zydeco Extravaganza, both in May; Southwest Louisiana Zydeco Music Festival in September; and Festival Acadiens et Creoles and Blackpot Festival, both in October. All will give you a memorable taste of what makes Acadians so happy (lafayettetravel.com).

Festival or not, you can "pass a good time," as they say there, at such popular dance venues as Blue Moon Saloon, Artmosphere, Randol's, and Feed and Seed, just to name a few in Lafayette; Pat's Atchafalaya Club and Whiskey River Landing in Hendersonville; and La Poussiere in Breaux Bridge. On Saturday mornings, enjoy your eggs and mimosas with a side of zydeco at the Zydeco

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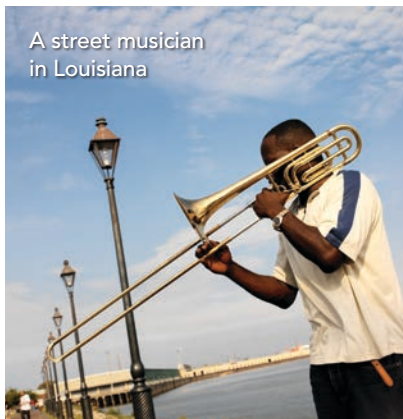
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A street musician
in Louisiana



Breakfast at Café des Amis in Breaux Bridge, about 10 miles east of Lafayette. Long before the live band starts up at 8:30 a.m., there's a line to get in the door, and the packed-in dancers don't start drifting away until after the music ends at 11:30 a.m. It's a must for visitors and locals, and after you've indulged in everything from beignets to boudin, you can work it off with more dancing.

For a local bite of the bayou, San Diego-style, the annual Gator By the Bay Festival (gatorbythebay.com), held the second weekend of every May, brings the best Cajun and zydeco music, food and culture straight from Louisiana to San Diego Bay. Save the dates: May 11-14, 2017. In addition, The Bon Temps Social Club holds zydeco dances and free dance lessons on the second Saturday of almost every month, featuring live bands from Louisiana and California (icajunzydeco.com).

—Wendy Lemlin

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