



Cliff Carnahan
Bluegrass Fiddler and Songwriter

Mr. Cliff Carnahan, bluegrass fiddler and songwriter, was a lifelong resident of the Emmanuel community, which lies just west of the town of Cloutierville, Louisiana. Now deceased, Mr. Carnahan's first job when he left home was as a painter for the Texas and Pacific Railroad. He later worked as a pipefitter in Louisiana, in Texas on the King Ranch, and at Johnson Space Center.

Mr. Carnahan never had a formal music lesson. The music he played was a rich blend of various influences. The old melodies of Ireland came from his family, the Cajun music comes from an old accordion player he knew, a one-eyed African-American child taught him the blues, and from a cherished radio, he learned the new songs from the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Carnahan noted that his first music instructors were his father and an uncle, Thomas Coutee. Both Coutee and the elder Carnahan played the fiddle, and young Cliff played the rhythm guitar for them. Under their tutelage, Carnahan learned Irish jigs, waltzes and "old hoedowns" which "all go right back to Belfast..." says Carnahan. Although Cliff's introduction to fiddling came from his family, landing his first job away from home near Lebeau, Louisiana, also affected his music. Here he met and played with the late Cajun musician, Joe Falcon. In the late 30s and early 40s, he performed in Lake Charles and hearing the Hackberry Ramblers added a little more French to the Carnahan sound. Additionally, Carnahan tells of hearing an isolated old swamp-dweller play his accordion through long, hot nights, and of the one-eyed black child who played harmonica at the depot-these also added their flavor to Carnahan's music. This "fiddlin'" mixture still pleases the ear and tantalizes dancing feet as it has done since the 30s and 40s.

In addition to playing the fiddle, Mr. Carnahan has composed more than 200 songs, but these melodies are not actually written down. Carnahan says, "I keep all of them in my head." A number of these songs have been recorded by Jimmy Martin and the Sunny Mountain Boys, the late Hank Williams, and the Whitstein Brothers.

One of Mr. Carnahan's songs, "Oceans of Diamonds," made it to the Top Ten list. He performed to great audience acclaim for the Natchitoches/NSU Folk Festival and for the Cloutierville Heritage Festival. Inducted in 1992 into the Louisiana Hall of Master Folk Artists, Mr. Carnahan is recognized as one of the finest musical artists of our state. More importantly, however, is that if you ask almost anyone in Cloutierville about music, you will hear Emmanuel or the Hill section and Mr. Cliff Carnahan. Both the area and the man are integral parts of the rich musical heritage of the Cloutierville area; both are inseparable parts of the fabric of local lives. Mr. Carnahan passed away April 22, 2001 leaving behind his great joy of music and its tune for others to enjoy decades after his passing.

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