

Johnson, John



Fiddler

Ten-year-old John Johnson and his father were out riding one day and they happened upon a bluegrass festival. A number of musicians were performing that day, but unbeknownst to the crowd, a significant event would take place that day off stage. While Jewel Lasyone was on the stage playing the fiddle, one member of the crowd was having a life-changing experience. John Johnson was spellbound and told his dad he wanted to learn to play the fiddle. His father was a little skeptical as fiddles are a significant investment and almost every child flirts with a musical instrument that ends up in the closet. However, John's grandfather happened to remember that he had an old beat up fiddle in a closet somewhere and he rescued it for John. The family arranged for a few private lessons by an area musician and John was on his way. These events led up to the development of one of the finest fiddlers in the state of Louisiana, as evidenced by his numerous awards.

That was in 1980 and since that time, John Johnson has won awards not only for his fiddling, but also for playing the harmonica. John Johnson won the Louisiana Harmonica Championship in 1983, and was the Louisiana Grand Champion Fiddler in 1985. The song he won with was a tune called "Black Night Rag." It was actually written by the musician John beat in the championship. John plays a few other instruments as well: the guitar, mandolin, accordion, bass, and spoons. In one song, "Rolling in My Sweet Baby's Arms," he plays all of these and even sings a verse in Cajun. John didn't stop at learning to play these instruments. He also taught his father to play the guitar so he'd have someone to accompany him.

Today, John has begun to write both Cajun and country music, and is playing for people all across the South. He has traveled to Kentucky, Texas, Iowa, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri to play for the crowds. When he was 13, John was invited to play at the Louisiana World's Fair, and he has played for Fanfare in Nashville. Presently John Johnson is attempting to "make it" in the music business. He currently lives in South Carolina and is trying to catch on as a single act. He returned to the 1995 Louisiana State Fiddling Championship and was named the Grand Champion Fiddler once again. It's safe to say that Fiddlin' John Johnson has gone from child prodigy to an accomplished musician.

Updated February 20, 2017 by Natchitoches-NSU Louisiana Folklife Center Staff