

Miller, Larry



Accordion and Triangle Maker

Larry and Jackie Miller were both born of predominately Cajun ancestry and have lived in Arcadia Parish all their lives. Both grew up speaking Cajun French and English. Larry is a retired school administrator from Iota, Louisiana. Mr. Miller loves to educate anyone who is interested in handmade musical instruments, about their origin, current use, and the method he uses to make them. He will also demonstrate the proper use as a musical instrument for playing Cajun or Zydeco music.

Mr. and Mrs. Miller are the owners of the Bon Cajun Instruments and Prairie Cajun Mardi Gras Costumes Company. Larry makes Cajun triangles, musical spoons, *frottoirs* or scrubboards, and accordions. As a child, Miller watched his father make triangles from the spring steel tines off old horse drawn hay rakes. When the tines would break off the rakes, the old ones would make triangles from the steel. Mr. Miller educated himself in the technique by watching four or five elders in the Acadiana area. He credits Mr. Aaron Venable of Duson as his primary instructor of making triangles. Larry remembers playing spoons in their home whenever his father played the accordion. Miller notes that it was quite difficult to hold the spoons once your hands got sweaty. His elderly aunt told him that Cajuns in some areas would take a green limb from a tree, make two slits and insert the spoon handles into the slits. They then bound them with cotton cord. This method of securing the spoons was a little better than the handheld method, but often one had to stop playing in the middle of a song to readjust the spoons. Miller and his son Eric, through trial and error, found a type of silicone filler, which will hold the spoons firmly in their red bayou cypress handles without distorting the quality of the spoons' sound.

The scrubboard is another folk instrument popular in the south. Especially when playing Zydeco music. Larry makes scrubboards of stainless steel in three different sizes. He also includes with them with two bottle openers mounted in small cypress handles to use as scratchers. They are considered lifetime instruments.

Accordion making is his primary art. Larry is among fifty hobbyists and professional crafters in South Louisiana who build fine durable accordions. His most popular is the "Bon Tee Cajun," which is popular at home as well as in Canada and Europe.

Mr. Miller works in his shop six days a week, and he attends at least twelve festivals a year to do demonstrations. He has been officially recognized as an outstanding Louisiana craftsman by the Louisiana Crafts Program, through the Louisiana Division of the Arts.