

'In the Mood' for Cajun?

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Music Critic

There has been a mini quasi-French invasion of Manhattan over the past week. First it was the Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band with its French patois and last night it was Jimmy C. Newman and his Cajun French as he and the Cajun Country band parked their bus by the stage in City Park and put on quite a show.

Even though *Southern Comfort* did not quite do for Cajun music what *Deliverance* did for the popularity of bluegrass music, there has been a small and quiet growth of interest in Cajun music of late. Morning Star records, for example has been putting out a series of well-documented reissues on LP albums of authentic Cajun music recorded earlier in the century.

Even though Jimmy C. Newman's version of the music is to Cajun what a modern symphony orchestra is to Bach's music, he brings to it a charm and easygoing manner that is attractive and, backed by Cajun Country, infectious in its rhythmic vitality.

The repertoire of the group is wide: Cajun western swing, Cajun country music, even *Texacajun*...but, good grief! A Cajun *In the Mood*?

I thought I had heard everything when the Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band did a version of it last week on the steel drums that was as uninteresting as any music that I had heard that band play, but I guess if we stick around long enough we will get to hear it performed by the Greater

Delouth Rubber Band and Comb Orchestra or by a group of bell ringers.

In the Mood has now been performed three times in the last three weeks during Arts in the Park concerts. Does anyone have any explanation for its popularity with such diverse performers, other than the fact that Glenn Miller really knew how to swing that thing?

It was during the playing of *In the Mood* that fiddler Abe Manuel Jr. caught my ear with a fine Stephane Grappelli imitation on his fiddle. Throughout the evening, Mr. Manuel, a Mark Conner look-alike in his white hat, proved himself to be a versatile and talented — as well as hard working — fiddler. His playing of *Cajun Stripper* was particularly exuberant and his characterful playing of the old fiddle standby, *Cotton Eyed Joe*, made me wish for an opportunity to hear him re-tune his fiddle down, take the electronics off his instrument and really rub the rosin.

There is no doubt, but that Abe Manuel is a talented fiddler.

Much talk around the back bleachers during this season's Arts in the Park concerts has been directed at the relatively poor quality of the PA system which has marred parts of most concerts over the past several weeks...Well, now it is out in the open.

After persistent trouble with the stage monitors and feedback over the audience system during the concert and a barrage of distress signals aimed at the sound booth by the performers, Jimmy C. Newman finally

said "Folks, we're having barrels and barrels of problems up here...up here its chaos (with the sound system)...it would take ten Germans and a cross-eyed Cajun to work it out."

Whatever the reasons for the continuing problems with the system — the large turn-over in staff since last year, the stage monitors that need replacing, the humidity and fluctuating atmospheric pressure — it surely is no advertisement for our Arts in the Park series to have the situation continue as it is.

When the performers are distressed, they cannot give of their best, and it is a credit to the talent of Jimmy C. Newman and Cajun Country that they provided the large and enthusiastic audience with such an enjoyable evening of music and Cajun fun.

