

Band brings its Cajun rhythm and blues to Chapel Hill

By CARA BONNETT
Staff Writer

The boys from Mallet, La., are bringing their music to Chapel Hill tonight, and one thing's for sure: you ain't never heard it like this before.

Terrance Simien and the Mallet Playboys are on the forefront of a new generation of zydeco: regional French music, featuring accordion and frottoir (metal washboard), that was born and bred — as was the band — in the heart of Louisiana's bayou country.

Since it formed in the fall of 1983, the band has amassed an impressive set of musical credentials: it has cut a record with Paul Simon, opened shows for Los Lobos and Fats Domino, and contributed two songs to the soundtrack of the film "The Big Easy," one of which was co-written and sung by Dennis Quaid.

But its unique sound, characterized by R&B-charged Cajun rhythms, is hardly new. Zydeco has been played in southern Louisiana for generations. In fact, Simien was first

introduced to it when he was only 3 years old and beginning to attend church benefits with his parents. He was drawn to the sound immediately. "It was upbeat music you could dance to, and really do anything you wanted on the dance floor and nobody would mind," Simien, a Cajun himself, said in a telephone interview from Atlanta Thursday.

Simien has adopted the same style for his own live shows. On stage, "I want to give all I can give," he said. Then, with a laugh, he added, "Sometimes it gets kind of crazy."

The audiences have been going crazy too. After the band's first major appearance, at the World's Fair in New Orleans in 1984, its following has spread. "Everywhere we go, people are totally amazed by what we do," Simien said in his lazy Louisiana drawl. "We have an original sound, not like anything they've ever heard before. And the music can only go up from here."

In May 1985, the band was "dis-

covered" by Dickie Landry, the Louisiana-based saxophonist/composer, who was helping Paul Simon research zydeco music for his *Grace-land* album. The result was a recording session produced by Simon and a single ("You Used to Call Me") boasting Simien on backup vocals.

Then, in the fall of 1985, director Jim McBride hired the band to appear in his movie "The Big Easy." Simien recalled the experience fondly: "Onstage with the cameras, being 'big-time movie stars,' that was something else."

A long series of performances followed, including the band's first cross country tour and first trip to Europe, where it became the surprise hit of the Bern Jazz Festival in Switzerland.

However, the one show that sticks in Simien's mind was at the Lone Star Cafe in New York City, on the night before Live Aid. The band was playing on stage when "all of a sudden we started seeing all these big legends walk in — Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan

— and then the next thing you know, Keith Richards and Ron Wood (of the Rolling Stones) were up on stage with us."

The band last played in Chapel Hill at Magdalena's Dec. 3. "It was the best response we've ever had here, and the best live performance I've ever seen in a nightclub," said Mark Tharrington of Magdalena's.

The next move for Simien and the Playboys will be a national radio commercial for Miller Beer, and after that, the band plans to record its first album.

However, the 22-year-old Simien seems to be taking his rather sudden success in stride. "This is something I've always dreamed of doing but never thought I'd be able to do. It's like a dream come true."

While he hopes to widen the scope of his music to include more mainstream audiences, for the moment, he says, the band is content just to "keep playing music and travel, bringing it to the people. If it don't happen, just

playing music for the rest of our lives, and not having nobody stop us from doing that, that's enough for us."

Terrance Simien and the Mallet Playboys will be playing at Magdalena's at 10 p.m. tonight. For more information, call 967-3277.

Area artists of Dansync blend dance, music with visual art forms

By KIM DONEHOWER
Staff Writer

Music and modern dance are paired with painting and sculpture Wednesday as the Carolina Union Cabaret presents a free study break with Dansync as part of its new cabaret series.

Formed in 1982, Dansync is a Chapel Hill company that combines the talents of area dancers, choreographers, musicians and visual artists. The idea behind the multi-media productions is to explore the types of expression in music, dance, painting and sculpture, showing the relationships between the different media.

Dansync numbers may explore the relationship between painting and dance through the use of a set. In the piece "Whispering Waters," the company utilized canvas streamers to tie in with modern dance, depicting the qualities of water in both move-

ment and artwork.

Other pieces involve "living sculptures," as the dancers use various props and costumes to sculpt images with their bodies. Dinosaurs, caterpillars and other fantastic creatures are among their more notable creations.

In addition to formally choreographed pieces, Dansync also experiments with improvisation, spontaneously tying movement into music, artwork and theme. Humor is a key component in many of Dansync's works.

Besides providing entertainment, Dansync has primarily been involved in promoting the arts to area schools. The company aims to expose students to music, dance and the visual arts, encouraging creative interest.

Dansync begins at 8 p.m. tonight in the Union Cabaret.

Hoffman

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more than \$15, you are not freaking out," he said.

Students today realize that the '60s was a unique decade, he said, one they cannot understand by watching movies like "The Big Chill."

"Are the '60s coming back again?" Hoffman asked. "No, the sex will never be so free, the dope so cheap, or the rock and roll so... good.

"Weird that it's not just nostalgia for us, but for your generation, too."

But student activism is still alive at UNC, Hoffman said. This University is the most activist school in the South and is a model for smaller southern schools, he said.

But to be real activists, students have to understand how the conformity of the 1950s shaped the '60s protests, he said.

During the '50s, students were concerned with successful careers and marriage.

But students rejected this "shopping mall mentality" as spiritually unrewarding, unjust and boring, he said.

"Students said, 'My God, we're human, we're citizens, we have rights, this is a community, and we have the right to participate!'"

Students protested environmental concerns never considered in the '50s, as well as the war in Vietnam. But it was the black students' lunch

counter protest of segregation in Greensboro — not the war — that was the catalyst for the decade of protest, he said.

"The moral disgust and outrage that you feel toward apartheid in South Africa is exactly what we felt in New England toward the South... it was as scary."

But students need to continue the '60s fights, Hoffman said, because the institutions his generation fought against are now self-destructing.

"Concern is an emotion of the '80s — we had an emotion called caring," he said. "Caring means you have an analysis (of the problem); concern means you have none."

Students are the most effective protesters, he said.

"When you're young, you have energy and creativity. And you have one quality that youth brings to social change that's vitally important, and that's impatience. You want to make some changes in your lifetime."

Hoffman has continued his '60s activism by fighting for environmental concerns and against the CIA. He works now as a consultant to DEL-AWARE, a group fighting to save the Delaware River from contamination by nuclear plants. He has written nine books, including his latest, "Steal this Urine Test."

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