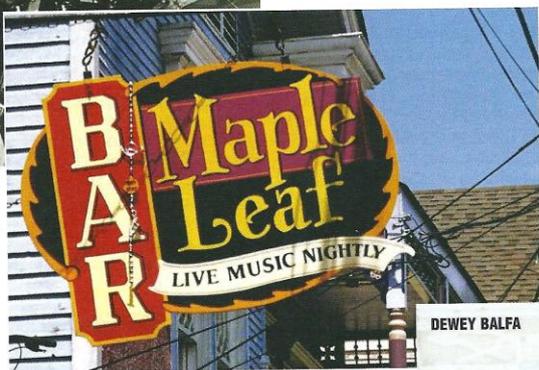


his wife Artile, Canray had six children, all of whom were well educated but none of whom became musicians. However, his nephew Warren Caesar was at one time a trumpeter in Clifton Chenier's Red Hot Louisiana Band.

DEATH OF A LOUISIANA TREASURE

As time went on Canray's talent was given recognition and he became a Louisiana treasure. In 1986 he won a National Heritage fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. The following year Canray and Dewey Balfa were appointed adjunct professors at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Canray's face beamed out from festival posters, travel brochures, even in *Newsweek*. He was featured in documentaries on Cajun and Creole culture including the 1989



DEWEY BALFA



Canray and Bois Sec went on to play and record with the Cajun fiddle star Dewey Balfa

time Canray was painfully thin and suffering from cancer. This was to result in his death on 29 July 1995. At that time recording sessions were scheduled with both Filé and zydeco artist Geno Delafosse. At the funeral which was held at Welsh, Louisiana, Canray's fiddle was displayed by his coffin. A recording of the blues waltz 'Bonsoir Moreau' was played during the service which was followed by his burial in the St Augustine Cemetery in Basile, the same location where his friend Dewey Balfa, the Cajun fiddle superstar, is also buried.

TRIBUTES

Finally, it is worth reproducing a heartfelt tribute to Canray Fontenot specially written for this article by musicologist Robert Sacré, and some notes published by the man behind Arhoolie Records, Chris Strachwitz.

disappeared during spells of disillusionment. He once said, 'I like to fish better than I like to play dances'. But normally he demonstrated his ability to make his fiddle laugh or cry like a human voice and he was renowned for his virtuosity and for his amazing memory, apparently knowing hundreds of tunes by heart. With

film 'J'ai Été Au Bal' and PBS's American Patchwork 'Don't Drop The Potato'.

In his later years Canray made several appearances at the Maple Leaf Bar in New Orleans and in 1993, by then in his seventies, he toured Europe with the Cajun band Filé. Indeed, I attended a great gig at Brighton, England, by which

broad grin of his, a grin that never vanished during the whole meeting. When he heard I lived in a French speaking country [Belgium] he started joking in Creole French that I was not familiar with as he immediately noticed. He switched quickly to Cajun French, duelling with my standard French, and told me how proud he was to be able to do it and to worship the old time traditions. He recounted fond memories of the concert at Newport in 1966, the warm response they had received, and the tours and appearances at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival which followed thereafter.

'Thanks to God, Canray had his fiddle with him. Bois Sec took his accordion and Paul and I were treated to an impromptu mini recital including a few tunes I recognized like 'Les Barres De La Prison', 'Les Blues Du Voyageur', 'Bonsoir Moreau' and some one-steps, two-steps and waltzes that I could not put a name to. This was my first ever live set in Louisiana — and what a set it was! There was Canray singing and making his violin laugh or cry, speaking and joking between the tunes, and Alphonse pumping his diatonic accordion, settling the tempos, and occasionally taking the vocals, with both men tapping their feet on the ground — what a party!

'Paul and I had to leave much too soon, with promises to meet again. That happened with Alphonse some days later but not with Canray at that time, though we did meet again in Louisiana in 1981 and in 1991, and then in Belgium in 1993 — and would you believe it, Canray's memory was so large (he said he knew thousands of tunes) that he always recognized me from a distance, greeted me with his usual big smile and hugged me. He had an endless supply of stories to tell me, in French, about how good life — and food — were in Louisiana, how nice the people were he was meeting during the tour and the musicians he played with. He also had lots of questions like where in Belgium he could eat gumbo and jambalaya. Alas, I could not help him out on that one.

'I miss you Canray.'

● Chris Strachwitz

— as printed in the booklet in the box set entitled 'Arhoolie Records 40th Anniversary Collection 1960–2000: The Journey Of Chris Strachwitz'.

'I loved Canray, he was an absolutely extraordinary man. The first few times I met him, he was always drunk, so I only got to know him very slowly, but in later years I realised what a troubled and serious man he was. When I

● Robert Sacré

'Meeting Canray Fontenot on his own turf, for the first time, was one of the biggest thrills I ever experienced in music. This happened in 1978 when I was a guest of Paul Tate, the lawyer in Mamou and a member of the Louisiana Folk Society who, with James Domengeaux and the auspices of CODOFIL, was so instrumental in the promotion of Cajun, Creole and zydeco music both in Louisiana and worldwide. Paul showed me around and that's how we visited Alphonse 'Bois Sec' Ardoin at his home near Mamou.

'Alphonse summoned his friend Canray and I'll never forget his storming entrance — with that