

Terrance Simien Biography & The Zydeco Experience

“A Zydeco Master”

- Rolling Stone

Terrance Simien, born Sept. 3, 1965 grew up at the crossroads of State Highway 190 and Rural Route 103 in Mallet, Louisiana in St. Landry Parish, the heart of French speaking Creole country. ***He hails from one of the earliest families documented to have settled that rural area of SW Louisiana.*** At the crossroads where he grew up sits the building that anchors the small parish community, St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church. Inside that church Terrance learned to love the spiritual side of making music. Today he still lends that soulful voice and his deep spirituality to St. Ann's for an funeral of a family member or friend from that same prairie village.

Just down from that junction sits another unassuming building, a landmark of sorts to locals and tourists alike. (Robert Duval visited there once escorted by brother Greg, who did the honors while Terrance was on tour) This legendary music room is called Richard's (pronounced Reeshard's) and is possibly the wildest of the many roadhouses in SW Louisiana. If church brought forth a sanctified sound then Richard's is where a teenage Terrance first learned about low down, tail shaking party music. Zydeco: that accordion and rubboard (frottoir) fueled stuff that could bring ecstasy to even the most dispirited Creole-a French speaking multi-culti native of mixed African, French, Spanish and Native American Heritage.

There had to be a way to combine both the sensual and spiritual sides of his musical life, but it couldn't happen in Mallet. Living at those crossroads offered Simien a means of escape. He followed Highway I-90 straight out of there. That road has brought him to us, now an insightful and experienced artist; he was only a precocious 17-year-old when he first hit the highway with his young band.

It all began for the **young Simien in the early 1980's** during a time when the indigenous music of the Creoles was really just considered the music of the "old folks", with only 2 young emerging bands performing the music of their zydeco forefathers.

The music was in great jeopardy of dying out at this pivotal point in its history. It was simply Terrance Simien and the Sam Brothers. Buckwheat had already been touring and recording. While Simien's friends were all listening to the popular music of that time, (he was as well) but he was also busy searching out his musical roots in Zydeco music: **a bold choice for any teenager.**

He left home to tour the world. In the process he has become one of the most internationally recognized artist in the genre. Now a **“Living Legend”** his conscious choice as a young artist to preserve his indigenous music makes him an important cultural asset and ambassador for the state of Louisiana. Simien has gone on to share studio stage with Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, Robert Palmer, Los Lobos and Dave Matthews Band to name a few.

He has conquered film and records with the same intensity he brings to the stage. He dots the soundtrack and appears in the film **“The Big Easy”**. Paul Simon discovered the young Simien when he came to Louisiana to research music for his “Graceland” CD. They recorded a Chenier standard with Simon harmonizing on "You Used to Call Me". It was released on a 45 in 1987 and re-released on Simien's "Across The Parish Line" CD.

A debut release, "**Zydeco on the Bayou**", hit the stores in 1990. Stunning in its clarity and energy and even more so for the presence of original songs. Terrance writes from a very different perspective than many other zydeco artists. Inspired by some of the greatest songwriters of our time: Dylan, Tom Waits and Robbie Robertson of the Band his songwriting is somewhat more complex than the "recycled vamps exalting dog hills and salty dogs." Zydeco music's own greats, Clifton Chenier, John Delafosse and Rockin Sidney all had a profound affect on him as well. On his second full release several years later, "**There's Room For Us All**", Terrance makes good on his love of all things spiritual and sensual. The project garnered significant critical acclaim with *Rolling Stone* giving it an **unprecedented 3½ star review** comparing him vocally to Sam Cooke, they said he delivered soul worthy of Stax greats, and showed crossover class.

As Simien evolves to create a fusion of sound like no other, both critics and fans agree that he is taking his beloved zydeco music to a new level and into a larger music world, **the celebrating circles of American roots music**. He continues to raise the standards for his genre by establishing himself as a formidable songwriter and an **absolutely astonishing singer**, who evokes comparisons to Sam Cooke and Aaron Neville. **He is one of the most sought after artists in roots music today.**

His musical journey continues on its own unique course with his 1999 release of "**Positively Beadhead**". He once again offers up an eclectic fusion of first class originals and diverse covers making them seem refreshingly new with his unlikely arrangements and his extraordinary vocals. His touring foundation has solidified & his fans aptly call themselves "**Beadheads**" as a reference to the highly anticipated segment of his show when he tosses out, by the fistfuls, those ever enticing, authentic, sparkling **Mardi Gras beads!**

He continues to expand his creative vision and increase the awareness of his native Creole culture with a collection of mostly original songs for family listening, "**Creole for Kidz and the History of Zydeco.**" The CD (w/5 pg. study guide is now housed in about 200 libraries around the country. Since its debut in 2001 this arts-in-education "informance" (informational performance), has reached over 200,000 K-12 students and teachers at schools and art centers in 20 states, Canada, Australia, Paraguay and Mali, West Africa. Audiences are treated to a dynamic multicultural music experience where Simien offers a bit of history recalling the early days of Zydeco music and its pioneers. The students are navigated by with stories taking the, into the rural community where the Creoles settled 300 years ago as some of the first families of Louisiana. They learn the origins of the word zydeco, the meaning of Mardi Gras and that Gumbo is Creole from the African word for okra. The audiences gain appreciation for the simplicity of life and the colorful celebrations of the Creoles who are said to be one of the *most complex rural sub-cultures in North America.*

In the spring of 2001 Simien was invited to tour with the **Dave Matthews Band** on multiple arena/shed dates. Dave introduced the band each night urging his audience to "take notice" of his friends from Louisiana and then later joined Terrance for a duet. This was yet another nod to Simien's level of artistry.

His latest release (06) "**Across The Parish Line**" once again gained accolades from music critics. Billboard, No Depression, Amazon and Blues Review all giving it high marks for outstanding vocals and diversity. Amazon declared that "**This CD cements Simien's standing as the most creative, diverse musician in modern Zydeco.**" Offbeat Magazine calls it a "crowning achievement." and voted it one of the 50 Best CD's in 2006 and The Edmonton Sun says "**Simien's biggest asset is his phenomenal set of pipes.**"

He furthers his mission with the formation of his non-profit **MusicMatters**, artist advocacy and education organization for the advancement of music artists in his community. His work emphasizes the responsibility of all to address and invest in infrastructure building, professional development and advocate for artists rights for increased economic benefits to Louisiana's indigenous music artists who are valuable cultural assets.

Simien has further dedicated himself to support the advancement of his music and fellow artists by leading the successful effort (June 2007 victory) to establish a *Zydeco and Cajun Music Grammy* voting category. He is one of Louisiana's most respected Cultural Ambassadors. In the summer of **2005** Simien made history again for his genre by being the first zydeco artist to travel to *Havana, Cuba with the US State Department* to perform for dignitaries and ambassadors. **2006** brought another touring milestone as the group traveled to Mali, West Africa with the **Carnegie Hall. Global Encounters** distance learning program. In **2007** Simien was nominated as one of 300 artists in the United States for a \$50,000 unrestricted fellowship award from **United States Artists**, Rockefeller, Ford, Prudential and Rasmuson.

Join him now at yet another crossroads where his past and present meet, where the music of body and soul, love and acceptance begin and end. Join him now and you *will* become..... **Zydeco Experienced!**

Discography

The Big Easy Soundtrack, 1987

Zydeco on the Bayou, 1990

Alligator Stomp II, 1991

Zydeco Party, 1992

There's Room For Us All, 1993

Alligator Stomp V, 1995

Live From Mountain Stage, 1996

Jam the Jazzfest, 1998

Ga Ga for Ya Ya: Zydeco Madness, 1999

Positively Beadhead, 1999

Best of Byron Bay Blues Festival, 2000

Rollin Into Memphis: The Songs of John Hiatt, 2000

The Tribute Sessions, 2001

Creole for Kidz and the History of Zydeco, 2004

Across the Parish Line, 2007

Movie Soundtracks/TV

The Ellen DeGeneres Show, 2006

Top Billing, News and Culture TV show , So. Africa

Bravo-Dancing to New Orleans, 2003

CNN Worldbeat, 2000, 2001

NHK-Japanese Network TV, 1999, 2001

Murder of Crows, 1998

VH-1 New Orleans JazzFest feature, 1995

Exit to Eden, 1995

The Lonesome Pine Special, 1992

Much Music, (Canadian VH-1) 1991

Blue Bayou, 1989

The Big Easy, 1987

Radio

World Café MountainStage E-Town House of Blues Radio Hour w/ Dan Aykroyd (co-sponsored by the Louisiana Office of Tourism) BBC(UK) CBC(Canada) WGHB(Boston) Voice of America Woodsongs Old Time Radio Hour Radio Free France Southwest Stages