

Accordion

(Music playing)

Narrator: Along with the Argentinean tango, French musettes, and German polkas, the accordion is one of the defining sounds of Central Texas conjunto bands, as well as Southeast Texas Cajun and zydeco music, country, and western swing.

(Music playing)

N: With its roots dating back to China thousands of years ago, the popularity of this instrument took off in the early nineteenth century in Europe.

N: By the mid 1800s, immigrants had brought the accordion to Texas, where it became emblematic in the way different ethnic groups have shared their musical heritage and influences.

(Music playing)

N: Patented in 1829 by an Austrian named Cyrill Demian, the accordion spread quickly throughout Europe.

N: From Ireland to Russia, versatility and sheer volume of this instrument attracted folk musicians who adapted it to their own style of music.

N: However, it was the Germans, Czechs, and French who forever changed Texas music with their use of the accordion.

(Music playing)

N: German immigrants began moving to Central Texas in large numbers in the 1840s, settling in what became known as the “German Belt,” areas including New Braunfels, Fredericksburg, and Luckenbach.

N: German folk songs, with the polka, waltz, and schottische dance steps, were a fundamental part of these immigrant communities, and the accordion was essential to their music.

(Music playing)

N: By the turn-of-the-century, German Texans and Tejanos were increasingly exchanging musical influences.

N: Santiago Jiménez began playing the accordion in 1921 at the age of eight.

N: His father, Patricio, had been a successful accordion player in Eagle Pass, Texas, and he encouraged his son to play.

N: After moving to San Antonio, Santiago became one of the first accordionists to help develop a new style known as conjunto.

(Music playing)

N: It is Narciso Martínez, however, who is known as the father of conjunto music.

N: He popularized the combination of the accordion and bajo sexto, instrumentation that many believe defines the genre.

N: Velario Longoria became one of the biggest conjunto stars in the 1940s, and the tradition was carried on by the sons of Santiago Jiménez, Flaco and Santiago Jr.

N: Country music is another important part of the states musical heritage, and as it developed it absorbed to influences of the many different ethnic and immigrant groups of the Southwest.

N: Western swing in particular borrowed from these diverse cultures, including the use of the accordion.

N: Adolph Hofner, a San Antonio western swing musician of German and Czech heritage, made the accordion a featured part of his band.

N: The Port Arthur Jubileers, located deep in the heart of Texas Cajun country, did the same.

N: East Texas as Western Louisiana share a history of French immigrating dating back to colonial times.

N: A surge in 1755 following the loss of Acadia to the British established the culture now known as Cajun.

N: Another surge began in the 1850s and lasted until approximately 1930.

N: The fiddle was the primary instrument of these early French settlers, but as the German population spread east and as more Mexican Americans began incorporating the accordion, the French began to adopt it into the Cajun music as well.

(Music playing)

N: French Creole music, or la la, was a combination of both French and African musical traditions.

N: As la la began to mix with blues and R&B during the 1930s and 1940s, it evolved into zydeco, the first recordings of which were made in Texas.

N: The accordion remains a fundamental part of zydeco.

N: From cowboy songs to conjunto, from zydeco to Cajun, that accordion has helped shape the musical identity of the Lone Star State.

N: In this instrument we hear the heritage of our ancestors and a dynamic cross-cultural contribution which continues to change and develop.

(Music playing)