

# Leading Ladies

## 6 INSPIRING CAJUN MUSICIANS

In what has become our now annual music guide, we decided to do something a little different. Rather than focus on venues, clubs and places to go, we chose to focus on faces to look for - and more importantly, voices to hear. In the music industry in general - and especially when it comes to Cajun music, women are outnumbered by men. Fortunately,

their voices have been heard and met with praise - even Grammy nominations. All six of these women are carrying on the tradition of their Cajun ancestors and bringing it into the future, and we hope that the trend of women leading their own bands will gain momentum as they continue to inspire others. That, we think, is worth singing about.

By *Michael Patrick Welch* \ \ Photos by *Romero & Romero*

# Jamie Lynn



Known for her lyricism and guitar skills, Jamie Lynn Fontenot is working on an album and performing around South Louisiana.

# Fontenot

## AT THE AGE OF 18,

musician Jamie Lynn Fontenot was overtaken by the desire to learn Cajun French. “My grandparents, Mary ‘Mimi’ Fontenot and John ‘Toe’ Fontenot, from Opelousas are great, really strong Cajun speakers,” says Fontenot from her home in Lafayette. “My siblings and I wanted them to teach us Cajun French, so she would play me all these old Cajun vinyl records, and she’d tell me the stories the singers were telling in the songs. I remember she bought me this Canray Fontenot record – a really great old-timey Cajun fiddle player – and I started learning French through the songs.”

It seemed only natural, then, for Fontenot to follow up by teaching herself to play some of the songs, or at least the traditional Cajun style, that her grandmother had exposed her to, on the guitar.

“I also play a little fiddle, but not professionally,” says humble Fontenot who, now at 29, has now been playing Cajun music to enthusiastic fans for five years. Around Acadiana she’s known primarily as a singer and guitarist in Lost Bayou Ramblers bassist Alan LaFleur’s traditional Cajun outfit, Teechaoui Social Club, which formed just a couple years ago on LaFleur’s porch during a community boucherie – an 18-hour Cajun French party with about 100 people preparing and cooking traditional food and playing music.

When not playing with the energetic, dancehall-focused Teechaoui, Fontenot

gigs as Petite et les Patates (Little and the Potatoes), a quieter three-piece traditional Cajun band.

Along with accordion player Jacques Boudreaux, Petite et les Patates also often features Fontenot’s husband, French fiddle player Samuel Giarrusso, who moved to Louisiana in 2012 from France to be near his father, also a Cajun French musician. “Petite et les Patates is actually a constantly rotating band, where I am the only constant,” says Fontenot. “I usually am playing parties, so I just pick whoever I want to bring to the party – sometimes it’s people from Teechaoui, sometimes not,” she says. “I always chose to play really Old-School stuff, so I like three-pieces a lot: accordion, fiddle and guitar – no drum and bass.”

In explaining how her personal musical vision differs from that of LaFleur’s Teechaoui, she all but says her music is more feminine. “I like the prettier lyrics, instead of the more dancehall-ish singing,” she says, careful to clarify that she loves it all. “I am really into the Touchette family and the stories they weave into their songs. In my own band I focus on the lyrics and the singing.”

The Teechaoui Social Club is currently working on recording its first album in Lafayette, playing gigs at the Blue Moon as well as in New Orleans at Fontenot’s friend Effie Michot’s Mosquito Supper Club and the Tigermen Den.

“  
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”



Christine Balfa has been Grammy-nominated.

# Balfa

## CHRISTINE BALFAS

father Dewey Balfa, who led Mamou band the Balfa Brothers, was once surprised by his 8-year-old daughter's desire to play Cajun music. "He was one of nine children, and six were boys. Five out of the six played music, and three toured as the Balfa Brothers ... playing dances, then national and international concerts to aid the revival of different types of American folk music," says Christine Balfa. "I heard it my whole life; it was a part of my upbringing. I heard such great music, not just from my family but from the people they played with: international musicians dad had met on the road, he'd invite them back home to jam ... So I was exposed to different kinds of music, people and cultures, and that really shaped my music and who I am in a lot of different ways."

All the tools and influences were already under her roof. "We had instruments everywhere, and when I was 8, I started taking my first fiddle lesson - though the guitar was much more natural to me," says Christine, who also plays accordion and sings. "My dad wanted me to play. But society in general was not as accepting as it is now. Luckily, I traveled and saw a lot of things, so I knew that things were changing."

Christine and her family started Balfa Toujours (which means "Balfa Always") in 1992, "the year that my father passed," says Christine. "These are people I've been playing music with for 25 years. My sister sometimes plays with us. We often

have my cousin from the Pine Leaf Boys, Courtney Granger. One original member was my former husband ... That's my family band and will always be a part of my life, because it's my family's music."

But she deviates from her father's path with her Grammy-nominated Cajun band, Bonsoir Catin. "My upbringing was very different from my father's; we were 50 years difference in age. Our music is very similar ... but I am writing about issues that happen in my lifetime and my perspective as a woman," says Christine, who adds, "Bonsoir Catin is a majority woman group - five women and a guy drummer. We are much more active right now than Balfa Toujours. "This is my third record with Bonsoir Catin, and our latest record has a really unique sound, with original material. Both bands are dance bands," she admits. "In Bonsoir Catin we have electric guitar and we always have bass and drums. Whereas with Balfa Toujours, we only have bass and drums at festivals - though we always have the twin fiddles..."

Though Balfa Toujours hasn't played much in recent years, Christine is still making sure the family band will have future members. "I have two daughters who play, now," she says. "They are puzzled by the idea that there are not many women in Cajun music - it's hard for them to believe because all their lives they seen me playing with Bonsoir Catin, getting together with women to make music. I am very happy that in their minds it doesn't make any difference."

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# manolinia sisters

**Jane Vidrine** is recognized around Acadiana as a musician, folklorist, cultural activist and teacher.



**Ann Savoy** wrote an award-winning book *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People Volume 1*.



**Lisa Trahan** sings, plays the accordion, bass, guitar, triangle and rubboard.



**Anya Burgess** is not only a musician, she builds and restores violins.



## LOUISIANA HISTORIAN

Ann Savoy began the Grammy-nominated Magnolia Sisters traditional Cajun singing group with partner Jane Vidrine (guitar, fiddle, vocals) specifically to explore the feminine side of Cajun music. "It had a lot to do with proving that women can play music, too," says Savoy, who has played music since the age of 10. "Cajun music and music in general is such a male-dominated field, we wanted to say 'We can play a kicking dance too!'"

Currently living in Eunice, Savoy tours the world's best musical festivals playing with her sons Joel and Wilson, plus her husband, accordion player and builder Michael Doucet (founder, in 1965, of Eunice's Savoy Music Center) in their Savoy-Doucet Family Cajun Band. Savoy's passion for Louisiana history also comes through in her work also as a photographer and writer, as evidenced in her book, *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People Volume 1*, winner of the Botkin Book award and from the American Folklore Society. When she started her own band, she knew she wanted to share the stage with other women.

"I had previously been in a Cajun band, playing guitar," Savoy remembers of how the Magnolia Sisters got together. "I wanted to play fiddle and accordion too, but the other people in that band were such virtuosos I felt intimidated. Also, I'd wanted to do some songs they didn't particularly want to do.

"Jane and I, we'd get together to take care of our kids, and while we were watching the kids we'd play music

together. We both liked the same old music and it just evolved into a band."

Her musical partner Vidrine is also a folklorist, cultural activist and teacher. "I'm the biggest historian in the band, and Jane is currently working curating museum shows at the Natural History Museum," brags Savoy of her partner's extensive knowledge of Cajun culture. "She's also a collector of historical music recordings. I first came to know her because she would book our band at a festival in Missouri, where she is originally from." Vidrine's life changed when she was given a job as director of the Louisiana Folklife Pavilion at the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans. "When she was booking the World's Fair she met a Cajun musician, John Vidrine, and married him and moved here to Louisiana," chuckles Savoy. "We Magnolia Sisters definitely like our Cajun men."

Vidrine and Savoy's other two "sisters" have, since 1992, been fiddle player Anya Burgess, of Arnaudville, who builds and restores violins and Lisa Trahan (bass vocals, percussion, accordion) of Grand Coteau.

Together, the Magnolia Sisters went out of their way to stand out this year on the Lagniappe stage at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. "We played without a drummer, just because it was a smaller situation and we thought it would make a nice contrast," explains Savoy, who says the crowd appreciated the pared down ensemble. "We thought it would bring out what we are, which is a strong band playing old-timey Cajun music."

“IT HAD A LOT TO DO WITH PROVING THAT WOMEN CAN PLAY MUSIC TOO...”

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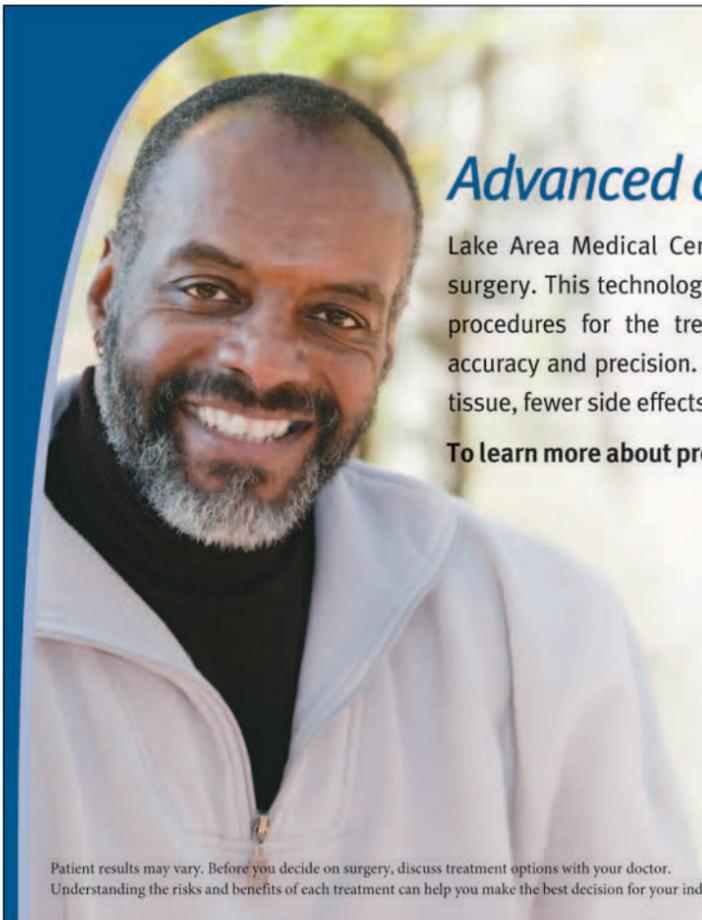
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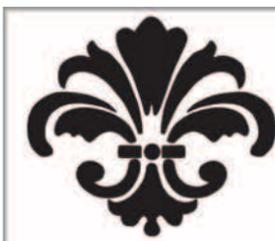
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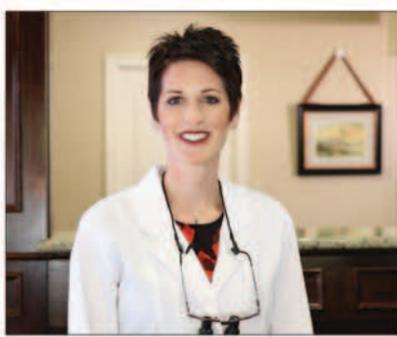
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**SELECTION PROCESS** "If you had a patient in need of a dentist, which dentist would you refer them to?"

This is the question we've asked thousands of dentists to help us determine who the topDentists should be. Dentists and specialists are asked to take into consideration years of experience, continuing education, manner with patients, use of new techniques and technologies and of course physical results.

The nomination pool of dentists consists of dentists listed online with the American Dental Association, as well as all dentists listed online with their local dental societies, thus allowing virtually every

dentist the opportunity to participate. Dentists are also given the opportunity to nominate other dentists who we have missed who they feel should be included in our list. Respondents are asked to put aside any personal bias or political motivations and to use only their knowledge of their peers' work when evaluating the other nominees.

Voters are asked to individually evaluate the practitioners on their ballots whose work they are familiar with. Once the balloting is completed, the scores are compiled and then averaged. The numerical average required for inclusion varies depending on the average for all the

nominees within the specialty and the geographic area. Borderline cases are given careful consideration by the editors. Voting characteristics and comments are taken into consideration while making decisions. Past awards a dentist has received and status in various dental academies (Academy of General Dentistry, American Academy of Periodontology, etc.) can play a factor in our decision.

Once the decisions have been finalized, the included dentists are checked against state dental boards for disciplinary actions to make sure they have an active license and are in good standing with the board. Then letters of

congratulations are sent to all the listed dentists.

Of course, there are many fine dentists who are not included in this representative list. It is intended as a sampling of the great body of talent in the field of dentistry in the United States. A dentist's inclusion on our list is based on the subjective judgments of his or her fellow dentists. While it is true that the lists may at times disproportionately reward visibility or popularity, we remain confident that our polling methodology largely corrects for any biases and that these lists continue to represent the most reliable, accurate and useful list of dentists available anywhere.

This list is excerpted from the 2015 topDentists™ list, a database that includes listings for more than 100 dentists and specialists in the Acadiana area. The Acadiana list is based on thousands of detailed evaluations of dentists and professionals by their peers. The complete database is available at [usatopdentists.com](http://usatopdentists.com). For more information, call (706) 364-0853; write P.O. Box 970, Augusta, Georgia 30903; email [info@usatopdentists.com](mailto:info@usatopdentists.com)

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## TOUGHEST CASE: UNTREATED PATIENTS

by Lauren Laborde | photos Romero & Romero

### DANIEL DOMINGUE | GENERAL DENTISTRY | LAFAYETTE | ACADIANADENTISTRY.COM

#### FOR DR. DANNY DOMINGUE,

his toughest cases as a dentist are actually the cases he hasn't tackled.

"The toughest cases for me are the patients that go untreated. It's tough to see patients leave your practice after you've just informed them that they need a crown, a root canal, an implant, or even a filling. It's not often, but occasionally I meet professionals that are busy with work or moms that are busy taking care of their kids, they both tend to put their needs on the back burner," he says, reiterating that putting off dental work – even small things – can lead to bigger problems down the road. "Later on in their life inevitably they regret not getting the work they needed done."

It makes sense that it's hard for Domingue to see patients go untreated, because he gets a tremendous amount of satisfaction in helping others. A Lafayette native, Domingue says the men in his family influenced his decisions and pushed him to work hard. While a student at St. Thomas More Catholic High School, Domingue's grandfather, Dr. W.I. Smith, a "larger-than-life" influence on Domingue, pushed him to consider dentistry instead of medicine. His father, Raymond, instilled in the young Domingue a strong work ethic. His uncle, Dr. J. Jerome Smith, whom he would eventually work for, provided the guidance he needed to get into dental school.

Domingue graduated from LSU, where he earned a bachelors of science, in 2003, and then completed dental school at LSU School of Dentistry in New Orleans in 2007. After dental school, he moved to New York for three years to pursue a residency and fellowship. At Brookdale University Hospital and Medical Center in New York City he served as Chief Resident of the Dental and Oral Surgery Department and trained in Advanced General Dentistry and

in Dental Implantology. During this time he was awarded the Certificate of Achievement from the American Academy of Implant Dentistry for outstanding leadership in Implant Dentistry, a fellowship from the International Congress of Oral Implantologists, and an associate fellowship of the American Academy of Implant Dentistry. Domingue was also awarded "diplomat" from the American Board of Oral Implantology, the highest award possible for a general dentist practicing implantology. At the time he was recognized as the youngest recipient of this award in the world.

After completing his residency, he married his wife, Megan, in Denver, Colorado. They moved back to Lafayette to start a family and practice dentistry, and soon they had their daughter, Danielle.



After practicing for three years in Lake Charles, Domingue accepted his uncle's offer to become a partner in his practice in Lafayette.

Domingue cites many things he enjoys in his work, especially the familial nature of it.

"I have enjoyed meeting so many people through my profession. I have met so many different dentists, young and old, I work daily with an incredible staff, and truly enjoy meeting new patients," he says. "I like visiting with new patients and often here how they may know my family or relatives. I enjoy working with my uncle and together being able to put patient's minds at ease after meeting for the first time."

He also enjoys the immense rewards that come with treating patients.

"I enjoy giving people the smile they've always wanted, and especially helping those who have been living with pain or missing teeth to give them their old smile back," he says.

Outside of work, Domingue enjoys spending time with his daughter and wife. He is also involved in the anti-abortion movement in Lafayette: recently he started a Right to Life Education Endowment Fund in honor of his grandfather and Dr. Zerbon Bienvenue, who Domingue says are considered to be the grandfathers of the pro-life movement in the Acadiana Parish area.

"We have seen an outpouring of praise from schools, churches, families, students and youth groups," he says. "Our efforts have grown so fast we have now been able to spend time with over 10,000 youth around our parish."

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## TOUGHEST CASE: FULL REHABILITATION

by Lauren Laborde | photos Romero & Romero

### KATIE COURVILLE ROBERTS | GENERAL DENTISTRY | LAKE CHARLES | MARYCHURCHMANDDS.COM

#### FOR DR. KATIE COURVILLE

Roberts, the toughest kind of case she deals with as a dentist is also her most rewarding: when a patient's teeth have irreparable damage that requires full mouth rehabilitation.

"In general, the most challenging case is when you get a patient that has teeth in poor working condition. Those are like a blank slate," she says.

Thanks to advances in cosmetic dentistry, Roberts says, there's hope for these patients: a patient can have a smile that is both functional and esthetic.

"It's nice not seeing people struggle as much," she says. "It's amazing what you can do with implants and dentures nowadays."

While difficult, these cases are satisfying because of the life-changing results.

"These are always the most rewarding cases. You see someone's whole life transform," she says. "They have confidence because they're able to smile."

Roberts knew she wanted to go into the field after working at a dentist's office one summer. She was a freshman at LSU where she enjoyed studying biology and chemistry and knew she wanted to work in healthcare, but wasn't sure if she wanted to pursue medicine or dentistry. After working in the office and experiencing the never-dull, people-oriented nature of the field, that informed her path.

"I absolutely loved it," she said of the summer job. "I liked that every day was different, every patient was different. You kind of never know what you were going to get."

"I liked that I could make a change in someone and get immediate results."

After graduating from LSU with a degree in biological sciences in 2008, Roberts attended LSU School of Dentistry New Orleans where she earned her doctorate in dental surgery in 2013. Now that she is a practicing dentist, working in partnership

with Dr. Mary Seale Churchman at their Lake Charles office, she's discovered more about the field, but it has proven to be the dynamic, satisfying profession she thought it would be.

"I've discovered that problems aren't always straightforward or have only one answer. Sometimes you have to take several lessons to arrive at an answer best for your patient," she says. "What keeps it exciting is sometimes you start out thinking, 'Where is this case going to go?' and when you think through it and get all the records you need to fully evaluate the patient, it comes together."

The Lake Charles native attended Barbe High School and then moved to Baton Rouge to attend LSU. She moved back to Lake Charles because she loves the small-town convenience it offers and being in close proximity to her family. Both her immediate and extended family still live in the area.

"We're always with my family," she says. It's comforting knowing you have a support system."

In 2013 she married Landon Roberts, a Shreveport native, whom she dated through college and married after he completed law school and she was done dentistry school. When they're not working their demanding jobs, the couple enjoys "normal stuff" like spending time with family, hanging out with friends, and going to restaurants to try different types of food.

Roberts and her husband seem to enjoy an ideal work-life balance.

"Dentistry is flexible, so it hasn't impeded on having fulfilling home life," she says. "When I go home, dentistry is not consuming my whole day. It's just about [my husband] and being at home."

Roberts says it's a good match because her and her husband both work in demanding, but different, fields.

"I like that we both understand each other, and each other comes first," she says. "We both love our jobs and what we do concluded we can have it all: We can have each other, have a happy home life and fulfilling careers."



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