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Rhythms roll on the river

Grammy winner Terrance Simien opens spring series

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Grammy winner Terrance Simien has always had a thing for mixing and matching sounds. Before he even learned how to play the accordion, a teenaged-Simien tried his trumpet at a zydeco jam session in his hometown of Mallet, a village between Eunice and Lawtell in St. Landry Parish.

"I brought my trumpet to Mr. Louis Fruge's house just down the road from where I lived," said Simien, who now lives in Lafayette. "I didn't know what I was doing and was trying to figure out what they were doing.

"Mr. Goldman (Thibodeaux) just let me play anyway and didn't tell me to stop."

More than 30 years later, Simien and his eclectic mix of zydeco, rock, jazz, reggae and other sounds have made him a Grammy winner. Simien shares that Grammy-winning sound at the season opener for Rhythms on the River Thursday at the River Ranch Town Square.

Since 2002, the free concert series has featured live music on Thursdays in the spring and fall. Candace Greer, director of the River Ranch Institute, said attendance has grown from 400 in the early days to as many as 3,000 for last year's Irma Thomas concert.

"It started as a grass roots thing, to get people here to see the neighborhood and help the merchants out," said Greer. "It's a very family-oriented atmosphere.

"A lot of people bring their kids and they're running around the square. People usually just set up lawn chairs in the square to watch the band. Everybody just floats around, visits and has a good time."

Bands play in the gazebo in the Town Square, which is surrounded by shops, offering everything from jewelry to tropical smoothies.

"There's definitely shopping and browsing," said Greer. "All the merchants stay open late so people can come in and out."

Shoppers can browse to the beat of Simien and Zydeco Experience, a band that made history Feb. 10,

when their CD, *Live! Worldwide*, won the first Grammy for Best Zydeco or Cajun Music Album. A touring musician for the past 27 years, Simien has had a career of firsts, including first zydeco musician to perform in Cuba and first to play in Paraguay, Egypt, Mali West Africa and other distant places.

Through the years, Simien has shared the stage and studio with Paul Simon, Robert Palmer, Dave Matthews, Robert Cray and other stars.

Rhythms on the River continues April 3 with the variety band Nik-L-Beer, followed by the Red Stick Ramblers, The Iguanas, Louisiana Red, Sonny Landreth and Michael Juan Nunez and Marcia Ball.

The Ramblers are a young band specializing in traditional Cajun, western swing, blues and old-school jazz. Their locally-produced, *Made in the Shade* video has been airing on the Great American Country channel.

Landreth, who lives in Breaux Bridge, is a global guitar guru whose fans include Eric Clapton. Clapton has called Landreth "probably the most underrated musician on the planet and probably one of the most advanced."
