FOLK MUSIC OF FRANCE

Recorded in:
Anjou
Berry
Vendée
Corsica
Orléans
Provence
Bretagne
Normandie
Angoumois
Bourgogne
Ethnic
Folkways
Library
Folkways
Records
FE4414

Notes by Paul Arna

DESCRIPTION NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET
This collection includes recordings of folk songs and dances from France. They were selected from the archives of the Phonotheque Nationale in Paris, an institution devoted to the preservation of French folklore.

The expression "French popular songs", so frequently used, is absurd; to be sure, a few rare songs and tales and proverbs have spread throughout France and even beyond its borders, nevertheless, all French folklore remains the exact and faithful reflection of the different ethnic and language groups among which this folklore came to birth. That is why we should not say "French popular songs" but rather "popular songs from France".

Naturally we are far from agreeing with Jean-Jacques Rousseau who stated categorically that the French possessed no music and were incapable of possessing music, but we do say: "This land which we call France does not and cannot have one single folklore, it has as many folklores as it has ethnic groups which form its population."

In the course of history, France has suffered innumerable wars due to invasions from the four points of the compass, accordingly French civilization has suffered profound and successive upheavals; it has also been in intimate and almost constant contact with wholly dissimilar cultures and civilizations.

With the triumph of Christianity in the seventh century under Constantine the Great, the plainchant was established in Western Europe. Created by Saint Ambrose, it had been corrected, completed, and codified by Saint Gregory the Great, now called the Gregorian chant, throughout the Middle Ages it used draconian measures to affirm its supremacy.

It is true, of course, that the liturgical chant exercised an immense influence on the tastes of the peoples and on their music. But it is equally true that this same liturgical chant was itself influenced by the inflections of profane music which grew increasingly popular in its accents, a ceaseless and harsh struggle ensued. The bishops in their councils condemned this profane current ever more fiercely; meanwhile secular music, upheld by the people and encouraged by the king, developed apace. Thus the common folk learned new melodies from new peoples and thus the folk songs of various regions came into being.

As early as the fifth century we find traces of military songs. Sidonius Appollinaris at that period tells us that King Theodoric ordered that music should be played at his every meal. This was not Greek or Roman music "with hydraulic organs which under the baton of a conductor blended with singing, but songs and instruments of theodoric's nation which charmed the ear and appealed to the heart."

The chiefs of the peoples who inhabited Gaul exchanged both music and musicians. Clovis sent Theodoric a zither player. Theodoric replied: "In return we are sending you a harp player of consummate art. Creating music with both his mouth and his fingers, he will celebrate the glory of your power."

In 1227 Pierre de Corbeil, Archbishop of Sens near Paris, inaugurated and conducted a somewhat eccentric ceremony which later became a truly popular entertainment. It was called "la fete de l'ane - the feast of the ass" and was celebrated at Noyon, at Beauvais, at Laon and elsewhere. A girl roused upon an ass which has decked out in magnificent trappings; in her arms she held a child, for she represented the Holy Virgin. As she rode up to the portals of the church, she was led to the choir and stood to the right of the altar. The introit, the Gloria and the credo were answered by rays from the congregation; the final deo gratias also met with cries of "hee-hah, hee-hah!" The prose of the mass was devoted entirely to the donkey.

Secular expression and secular subjects gained considerable ground in public favor. Table songs, drinking songs, complaints, epic songs, epic poems, pastourelles, lays, sirventes and love songs were in every ear and on every lip thanks to the cause indicated, and thanks also to the troubadours in the south, the trouvères in the north, and minstrels everywhere.

The concerts given were numerous and very varied. Jean de Gardane has left us picturesque account of them: "in the house of wealthy men, he noted, "I have seen viols, players of lyres and flute players; I have seen vielle-players with their hurdy-gurdy and other players who performed respectively on the zither, the fiddle, the dulcimer, the hurdy-gurdy, the psaltery, the tabor and cymbals; I have even seen courtiers and ladies dance to the tune of serpent-horns."

During the succeeding centuries a new, deep and irrevocable break marked the evolution of music in France. With the Renaissance came a brutal divorce whereby on one hand scholarly polyphonic music soared to remarkable heights, and, on the other hand, monodic popular music affirmed its expression powerfully and definitively.

Now the folksongs of the peoples inhabiting France were created and have been practised monodically. It is monody which voices the innumerable wealth of song that rises from its provinces, from its varied ethnic types, from its
ENGLISH AND ITS DIALECTS, FROM ITS TRUE, SIMPLE AND HUMAN MANIFESTATIONS, ALL THE DIVERSITY OF FRANCE'S POPULAR MUSIC IS EVIDENCED BY A BRIEF VERSIFICATION AND DELICATE AND PEREMPTORY AWKWARDNESS WHICH TELL OF THE WORKS, THE THOUGHTS AND THE LOVES OF MAN. THESE REFRAIN MAY OFTEN BE UNRESTRAINED BUT THEY ARE RICH IN THE SincerITY OF THEIR INSPIRATION. Thus WITH IMMENSE CREATIVE POWER, THEY SEIZE, TRANSLATE AND UTER THE JOY OF MAN, HIS VEXATION AGAINST SUFFERING, HIS EVER-HOPE AND ALL THE GRANDEUR OF MORTAL EXISTENCE.

BRANLE CARRE (DANCE), PLAYED ON A VIELLE, FROM BOURGOGNE (AIN), ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR FRENCH DANCES, THE BRANLE, WAS ORIGINALLY ALMOST ALWAYS DANCED IN A CIRCLE BUT SOMETIMES IN TWO LINES FACING EACH OTHER. IT ALMOST ALWAYS WAS THE FIRST DANCE PERFORMED AT BALLS.

IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES, THIS VERY SPRIGHTLY DANCE TOOK ON A PARTICULARLY TUMULTUOUS PACE AND CAME TO ACQUIRE A LOCAL CHARACTER ACCORDING TO THE REGIONS WHERE IT WAS PERFORMED.

THE BRANLE EVEN SPREAD TO FOREIGN LANDS WHERE IN ITALY IT BECAME THE BRANCO, AND, IN ENGLAND, THE BRANGIL OR THE BRAWL.

The "orchestography", a manual written by Thoinot d'Arbœuf in 1550, divides the branles into four categories: the double or common branle, the simple branle, the gay branle, and the burgundy branle. These categories include twenty-six sorts of branles, named after a province or after a song.

The vielle (in English hurdy-gurdy), with strings, wheel and keyboard, is of very ancient origin. As early as the ninth century, it was known as the organistrum; it was then an instrument of three strings only and was played by two people who held it on their knees, one using his fingers to determine the sound desired, the other turning the crank. In about the thirteenth century, its name was changed to chifonie. Then, from the fourteenth century on, it was known as vielle. At that time it was played by one person only, thanks to the addition of a keyboard which served to regulate the strings to the sounds desired.

The vielle, of widespread use in the middle ages, lost its character as a popular instrument until the eighteenth century. It then came into favor among the nobility and even reached the courts of Louis XIV and Louis XV.

Under Louis XVI its vogue declined rapidly and it was banished from court usage and became the instrument of country folk in various regions of France, principally in Berry and in the central plateau regions of Morvan and Forez.

In Its final form, since 1700, the vielle consists of a belly over which are stretched six strings: for melody, two chanterelles (upper strings) tuned to SOL for the pedals, two drones in DO and SOL, one drones in SOL, and one trumpet string. On RE, a wheel which, being rosined, has the function of a violin bow, is turned by the player's right hand and passes over all six strings at once. The range of the vielle is two octaves.

The "branle carre or square brawl" which you are about to hear is from the Bresse region in eastern France, fairly close to the Swiss border. It is played by the viellist Jane Parayre, born April 2, 1925. This dance in 2/4 time is composed of two short musical phrases which are repeated without variation.

BOURREE A DEUX TEMPS (DANCE), PLAYED ON A VIELLE, FROM LOWER BERRY, THE WORD BOURREE COMES FROM A VERB MEANING "TO BEAT ONE'S WINGS." IT IS ONE OF THE MOST ANCIENT DANCES WE KNOW. VESTIGES OF THIS DANCE ARE ALSO FOUND IN ALBANIA, IN BULGARIA, IN HUNGARY, IN ROMANIA, IN SPAIN, AND IN ALL THE COUNTRIES WHICH ONCE WERE UNDER GRECIAN RULE.

This dance seems to have sprung from the sacred music of ancient Greece. It has remained popular in the central provinces of France and in the sixteenth century was favored at court.

It was then that its original rhythm was modified, and it was henceforth usually danced in triple-time.

The bourrée was also introduced in the theatre where it enjoyed little success. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it spread from province to province, undergoing transformation according to local characteristics, and re-assuming its triple-tempo rhythm. The first beat is emphasized by a stamp of the heels.

The double-tempo bourrée of southern Berry, heard in this selection, is played by the viellist George Simon. It is composed of two musical phrases, repeated without variation, and ornamented with many flourishes.

QUAND LA MAISON EST PROPRE (COURTING SONG), FROM BERRY (INDRE). THE SUITORS, FOUR BY FOUR, ENTER ANY HOUSE WHERE THERE ARE MARRIAGEABLE GIRLS - PROVIDED THAT HOUSE IS "CLEAN." AS IF BY CHANCE, THEY SIT DOWN ON THE MAIDEN'S HOPE CHEST AND KICK THEIR HEELS AGAINST IT IN ORDER TO FIND OUT IF IT IS FULL. IF THE CHEST "RINGS HOLLOW," IT MEANS IT IS EMPTY; THE WOORDS THEREFORE DO NOT SPEAK TO THE MOTHER TO ASK FOR HER DAUGHTER'S HAND.

"QUAND LA MAISON EST PROPRE - WHEN THE HOUSE IS CLEAN" COMES FROM NEAR CHATEAURoux IN BERRY. IT IS SUNG BY PIERRE Panis (BORN AT PELLEVOISIN IN 1911) IN MOCKING TONES AND WITH A COMIC LOCAL ACCENT. THE MELODIC LINE IS FA DICIÉ MAJOR; THE FORM IS BASTARD - A-A-B - WITH A SHORT CODA DRAWN FROM A; THE ENDINGS ON I, I, V, I ARE MORE COMMONPLACE.

QUAND LA MAISON EST PROPRE - LES GALANTS I (L)D Y V'NONt. I (L)D Y V'NONt QUAT'S PAR QUAT(R)e, MADAME, OUvREZ-NOUS DON(C). (BIS) LA DESTINEE, LA ROSE AU BOIS, MADAME, OUvREZ-NOUS DON(C).

I (L)D Y V'NONt QUAT'S PAR QUAT(R)e, MADAME, OUVREZ-NOUS DON(C).
I (L)D S'ABBITTON SUR(R) L'OUFFRE, EN TAPANT DU TALON. (BIS) LA DESTINEE, LA ROSE AU BOIS, EN TAPANT DU TALON.
La maison est propre

Berry (Indre).

1. Quand la maison est propre les galants s'y vont, ils s'y vont
   qu'par quart(e) Madame, ouvre-nous don(e).
   Madame ouvre-nous don(e).
   (d'o) le desti-né, la rose au bois, Madame ouvre-nous don(e).

X) ici, dans le 4° complot.

Ils s'assitont sur(l') l'coffre,
En tapant du talon.
Si l'coffre (l') fait la sourde
Les galants (l') restont. (bis)
La destinée, la rose au bois.
Les galants (l') restont.

1. l'coffre (l') fait la sourde
Les galants (l') restont.
Ils caressent la fille
A la mère, (l') causent. (bis)
La destinée, la rose au bois.
A la mère, (l') causent.

Ils caressent la fille
A la mère (l') causent,
Mais si l'coffre (l') résonne
Les galants (l') s'altont. (bis)
La destinée, la rose au bois.
Les galants (l') s'altont.

Mais si l'coffre (l') résonne
Les galants (l') s'altont.
Quand la maison est sale
Les galants (l') s'en vont. (bis)
La destinée, la rose au bois.
Les galants (l') s'en vont.

Chanson de la marieée

Berry (Indre).

1. Nous sommes venus vous voir... de dans no've vil... la... ge... C'est
   pour fêter le jour de votre mari... a... ge... A Monsieur vôtre... et...
   pour, aussi bien comme à vous... A Monsieur vôtre, é-pour aussi bien comme à vous.

Chanson de la mariée (Wedding Song). From Berry (Indre). Weddings in France have always been accompanied by song, and very few provinces are unfamiliar with this charming tradition.

As early as the fourteenth century, the provost led the horse on which the bride rode by the reins; after the wedding, the horse belonged to her. The ancient usage of placing a yoke over the necks of the betrothed couple has been perpetuated in a few regions such as that around Castres in the languedoc halfway between Toulouse and Montpellier.
In certain remote periods, serfs incurred severe punishment if they failed to obtain their master's consent to their marriage and to pay him the "mariaticum" or wedding tax. Traces of this law are still to be found. In Alsace, for instance, as the wedding procession marches to church it is halted at intervals by barriers of white ribbon held across the road by little girls. Only after the ribbon-bearers have received a few coins do they consent to lift this barrier.

Another custom, the symbolic "Unknotting of the Bride's Girdle" is still observed in certain provinces. In the province of Berry the suitors "beguiled" his betrothed a few moments before they set off for church. Later, as the banquet comes to a close, a young man slips under the table to unfasten the bride's "girdle"—which through the years has become a garter. The bride, who has been holding this symbol in her hand all the time, yields it readily to the young man, whereupon it is cut into small pieces and distributed among the guests.

"La Chanson de la Mariée—the Songs of the Bride" is one of those transition rites which, to quote Van GenneP, "accompany any change in place, in wealth, in social status, or in age."

This version comes from the Berry region. It is sung by Pierre Panié.

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Prenez donc ces treizains
Que ma main vous présente,
Chez vous, rangez-les bien
Ça vous fera comprendre
Que pour les amasser, 
} BIS
Belle, il faut épargner.

Vous n'irez plus au bal
Madam' la mariée,
Vous n'irez plus au bal,
aux fêtes, aux assemblées:
Vous garderez la maison, 
} BIS
Pendant qu'elles aut(res) iron,

Si vous avez chez vous
des bouquets, aussi des vaches,
des igneous (3), des moutons,
et d'autre breviaire,
faudra soin et matin
{ BIS
VANQUER À TOUS CES BIENS.

Vous n'êtes plus, madam',
de que vous étiez hier-e,
dans votre petit lit
Vous étiez à vous aise,
il faudra, dans ce lit,
} BIS
FAIT PLACE À VOUT(Re) MARI,

Adieu mon beau chateau,
La maison de mon père,
Les heureux jours passés
Près de ma tendre mère,
adieu plaisirs, beauté,
} BIS
Adieu, ma liberté!

Madam' la mariée,
vout(Re) mari se chagrine,
lui faudrait un baiser
Avec un doux sourire,
faud donc vous empresser,
} BIS
Pour aller vous coucher.


Branle de village (dance). From Normandie (Calvados). "Branle de village" comes from the Caen region in Normandie. The Hurdy-Gurdy is played by a young performer named Jean Trolez, born in 1930. This dance is Mixolydian in mode:

\[ \begin{align*}
    & \text{AND, IN FORM, A-A-B-B, CEASELY REPEATED WITHOUT} \\
    & \text{VARIATION OF ANY SORT.}
\end{align*} \]

La Fricassée (dance). From Provence (Var). Among many peoples we find the simultaneous use of flute and drum, the two instruments sometimes played by the same person.

In the south of France this is illustrated by the union of fluyol and tambouril among the catalanians; of chihi ou chistiak and tiun-tiun among the basques; of Galoubet and tambourin among the people of Provence.

To quote Vidal, author of the standard work on the tambourin: "The Galoubet has a clear and sharp sound which combines happily with the sonority and vibrations of the resonant tambourin, thus producing a most pleasing ensemble;