Songs of French Canada

Recorded by Laura Boulton, Samuel Gesser and Carmen Roy

Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4482
SONGS of FRENCH CANADA
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INTRODUCTION
by MARIUS BARBEAU

The folklore of French Canada is better preserved than that of the motherland in Europe. It has survived in comparatively isolation, among the early colonists of New France, of the Missouri and the Mississippi; and particularly among their descendants, in the St. Lawrence watershed, who in time have multiplied into millions.

From the days of Champlain, who founded Quebec in 1608, the French rural settlers called themselves habitants (dwellers on homesteads) rather than paysans, because the paysans were oppressed like serfs in medieval France, and the settlers had loosened the bonds of feudalism in their new-world habitat. They succeeded in their ambition to possess the land, to conserve whatever was their own, then to reach out for more on a continent that had only begun to yield its bounties. In the spheres of discovery, pioneering, and conservation, the French in North America have left their mark deep and far afield.

Yet the yeares have wrought many changes on this continent. The early racial strats - Indian, Spanish, French - have been swamped in most places by English-speaking populations, and industrial progress has obscured the heirlooms of the past. It is only retrospectively that folklorists can now appraise these ancient possessions wherever they have been retrieved from discred or oblivion - in French Canada no less than elsewhere.

The downfall of the ancient ways of life in Canada has urged on a very few of us, in the past forty years, to collect, under museum auspices, whatever French traditions might be salvaged from the wreckage. As a result, we have amassed a multitude of folk-songs of all kinds - a real treasure of melodic and rhythmic art, of poetry and inspiration, and of varied historical features. The actual items of this hoard, preserved at the National Museum of Canada, cover nearly 13,000 songs texts and over 8,000 melodies, mostly recorded on the Edison phonograph, and the unrecorded materials are still incalculable.

Typical samples of Canadian folk-songs are: "Le Mariage Anglais" ("The English Wedding"), going back to a historical event of the 15th century - the marriage of a French princess to an English prince; "Dame Lombarde" from an episode belonging to the Lombard invasion of Northern Italy; "Le Docteur qui vend son âme au démon", dealing with the legend of Dr. Faustus; "Le Martyre de Sainte-Catherine" ("The Martyrdom of St. Catherine") within the margin of the official church tradition; "La Perdriole" (perdriole is the poetic name for partridge), an archaic rigmarole, believed to be Celtic; "Apprendre-moi ton langage" ("Teach Me Your Language"), a love song, in which the nightingale is dispatched as a messenger of love - this piece represents a few groups of French troubadour-like songs, including shepherd songs, nocturnes and aubades, all of which are of southern inspiration; "Les Roses blanches" ("The White Roses"), a lilting work song, used as a paddling song by the northeastern Voyageurs; "La ligtouil", a dance song with a rolling refrain; and, last, "La Plante du cour- debois" ("The Wood-ranger's Lament"), the only example in this collection of a song actually composed in colonial times by the French folk in America.

This list is far from being sufficiently representative; for instance, we can include no example of the lengthy songs, mostly in narrative form, once imported on broadsheets, like "Perrémé et Thimé", a ballad of the type of "Aucassin et Nicolette"; or of medieval balls and tragic stories, or songs meant to teach morality, of satiric songs, nursery songs, game and round-dance songs, sea chants and other songs narrating mariners' adventures, war and marching songs, wonder and lying songs, work songs -- more numerous than any other -- and drinking songs, of which last our files already hold more than 500 distinct items.

The most interesting aspect of the French Canadian folk-songs, from the musical standpoint, is their modal and rhythmical texture, of which the songs given above may serve as examples; it is archaic, varied, and colorful, and far better preserved than anything recorded in France itself. Mme, Marguerite Béclard-d'Harcourt, well-known French musicologist, summed up the modal characteristics of fifty of them, included in my "Romancero du Canada" (of which she analyzed the melodies), as follows: 21 tunes belong to the classical mode of C (major and minor), 15 to that of D, 1 to that of F, 4 each to those of G and A, while 6 have passages in more than a single mode (not necessarily one of the modes just mentioned).

Among the Chansons populaires du Vieux Quebec (published by Pierre Schneider, Paris), of which I provided the songs and Mme, d'Harcourt the accompaniments, the modes of some of the melodies stand thus: 5 in that of C, 2 each in those of D, A and G, 1 pentatonic.

Concluding a preface on Canadian folk-songs, Mme, d'Harcourt has written this passage: "The treasure that has been saved for us is a splendid restoration for which we no longer had any reason to hope ... These songs fill us with joy because of their expressive beauty, their ornate flexibility, their rhythmic and modal variety, and make us realize the musical impoverishment that France has undergone since it gave birth to this amazing New World expansion." And Gabriel Marcel, a French commentator, added: "One feels that this music, which originated in our land long ago, has been saved all the while as if under a protective blanket of snow."

The songs reproduced on this record here consist of three groups: the first, 14 songs collected by Mrs. Laura Boulton, when guided by Marius Barbeau, mostly in three counties of the lower St. Lawrence, in 1941; the second, 8 songs recorded by Samuel Gesser, in 1955, in the Laurentian hills north of Montreal; and third, 2 songs recorded in Gaspé, in recent years, by Miss Carmen Roy; 1 song recorded with Dr. Marius Barbeau by Moses Asch in New York City.

Song transcriptions by Jacques Labrecque

Except for: SIDE I, Band 3 (Marius Barbeau) SIDE II, Band 9 (Marius Barbeau)

Notes on songs by Marius Barbeau

SIDE I, Band 1: LE MIRACLE DU NOUVEAU-NE
The Miracle Of The New Born: Singer, Mme, Cleophas Charlebois, of Orleons, near Ottawa, 1941.

Y'a trois faucheurs dedans les prés
Il ya trois filles pour le faner

(bis)

REFRAIN:
Je suis jeune,
J'entends le bois retentir,
Je suis jeune et jolie.

Il ya trois filles pour le faner

(bis)

Y'en a une qu'accouche d'un p'tit enfant

(REFRAIN)

I n'a une qu'accouche d'un p'tit enfant
Dans la rivière ell' i'a jeté.

(bis)
To go to Paris, I wondered through cities, But when he got at sea, Looked from behind, He saw 20 men, Happy the days, His worst enemies, All hail the "Fleur de Lys".

There's three girls making hay Chorus: I am young I hear the woods ringing I am young and pretty There's three girls making hay One giving birth to a wee baby One giving birth to a wee baby In the river she threw it away In the river she threw it away And the wee baby sang away.

SIDE I, Band 2: BIDOU.

A dance song. Singer, Wilbrod Lavoie, St. Hilairion, Charlevoix County, 1941. (Metronome: = 118)

Le jour que Bidou vint au monde, Il était déjà ratoureux De son bord il vola it des mondes, Il avait déjà le nom d'voleur.

REFRAIN: SI VOUS CONNAISSEZ BIDOU, I'est pas fin, j'est pas fou,

Mais pour fair' un mauvais coup, Y'en a pas deux comm' Bidou,

The Day Bidou was born He was already marked Before the World he was a thief,

If you knew Bidou "He not smart, he not crazy" But to play a trick

There aren't two like Bidou,

SIDE I, Band 3: PRINCE EUGENE.


Ah! dis-moi, prince Eugene, qu'as-tu fait dans ta vit'?

I'ai parcouru les villes... Vive le jour!

Pour aller à Paris... Vive la fleur de li'!

I'ai parcouru les villes pour aller à Paris Mais quand il fut au large... Vive le jour! Regarde derrière lui... Vive la fleur de li'!

Mais quand il fut au large regarde derrière lui, Il vit venir vingt hommes... Vive le jour! Ses plus grands ennemis... Vive la fleur de li'!

Ah! do tell Prince Eugene, What have you done with your life, I wondered through cities, Happy the days, To go to Paris All hail the "Fleur de Lys"

I wondered through cities, To go to Paris, But when he got at sea, Happy the days, Looked from behind, All hail the "Fleur de Lys"

Do you know what there is in Paris? (repeat) I'll tell you... there's a little love tree! ...

Do you know what there is on that little tree (repeat) I'll tell you... there's a little love nest!

......... un p'tit oeuf...........

...... un p'tit jaune d'amour......

En belle robe de soie, mon père, pensez-y donc, Croyez-vous que j'vas y'ach'ter des p'tites robes de coton, comme ya qui font, Non bédame, non.

....ment la couche'ras-tu, Jean Royal David, Comment la couche'ras-tu, Jean, mon ami.

Ah! avec un beau chapeau d'plumes, mon père, pensez-y donc, Croyez-vous que vos y'ach'ter un vieux chapeau d'poche (?, comme ya qui font, Non, bédame, non.

A......ment la chausse'ras-tu, Jean Royal David, Comment la chausse'ras-tu, Jean, mon ami.

En beau soulier d'cur à patin (patente), mon père, pensez-y donc, Croyez-vous que vos y'ach'ter des bottines de vacht's, comme ya qui font, Non, bédame, non.

A......ment la couche'ras-tu, Jean Royal David, Comment la couche'ras-tu, Jean, mon ami.

Dans un beau lit blanc, mon père, pensez-y donc, Croyez-vous j'vas la couche' sur un lit d'paille............. (?) Non, bédame, non.

1. When will you marry Jean Royal David When will you marry Jean my pal?

At Spring Father, just think of it, You don't suppose I'd stay a bachelor as some do, no Damn it no.

2. How will you dress Jean Royal David, How will you dress Jean my pal?

With a fine silk frock, father, just think of it. You don't suppose I'd buy a little cotton one, as some do, no Damn it no.

3. How will you cover your head Jean Royal David, How will you cover your head Jean my pal?

With a fine feather hat, just think of it, You don't suppose I'd buy a burlap one, as some do, no Damn it no.

4. How will you shoe yourself Jean Royal David, How will you shoe yourself Jean my pal?

With patent leather shoes, father, just think of it You don't suppose I'd buy a cotton one , as some do, no Damn it no.

5. How will you bed her Jean Royal David, How will you bed her Jean my pal?

At Spring Father, just think of it. You don't suppose I'd put her down on a straw one, as some do, no Damn it no.

6. How will you dress Jean Royal David, How will you dress Jean my pal?

With a fine silk frock, father, just think of it. You don't suppose I'd buy a burlap one, as some do, no Damn it no.

7. How will you cover your head Jean Royal David, How will you cover your head Jean my pal?

With a fine feather hat, just think of it, You don't suppose I'd buy a burlap one, as some do, no Damn it no.

8. How will you bed her Jean Royal David, How will you bed her Jean my pal?

At Spring Father, just think of it. You don't suppose I'd put her down on a straw one, as some do, no Damn it no.

SIDE I, Band 8: BELLE, TU N'AS PLUS D'AMITIE POUR MOI.

The complaint of a rejected lover. Singer Joseph Ouellet, La Tourelle, Gaspé, 1918 (Metronome: = 70)

Je lui yai dit; Charmante bella, 

Tu n'as plus d'amitié pour moi. 

Tu n'as plus d'amitié pour moi. 

Z'apres m'avoir tant fait de promessa.

Tu n'as plus d'amitié pour moi, (z'apres m'avoir promis la foi,

La belle qui n'avait le coeur tendra,

Les larmes lui coulèrent des yeux, Moi qui es un garçon généreux,

Tout doucement je m'approchis d'elle,

Je mis la main sur son genou;

Petit coeur doux, consolez-vous!

SIDE I, Band 7: ROYAL DAVID

A debate between father and son, as to whether the son should get married, Singers, Omer and David Ouellet, St. Paul de la Croix, Rimouski County, 1941.

Quand est-ce te marieras-tu, Jean Royal David, Quand est-ce te marieras-tu, Jean, mon ami.

A......ment la couche'ras-tu, Jean Royal David, Comment la couche'ras-tu, Jean, mon ami.

Ah! dis-moi, prince Eugene, qu'as-tu fait dans ta vit '?

J'ai parcouru les villes... Vive le jour!

Pour aller à Paris... Vive la fleur de li'!

J'ai parcouru les villes pour aller à Paris Mais quand il fut au large... Vive le jour! Regarde derrière lui... Vive la fleur de li'!

Mais quand il fut au large regarde derrière lui, Il vit venir vingt hommes... Vive le jour! Ses plus grands ennemis... Vive la fleur de li'!

Ah! do tell Prince Eugene, What have you done with your life, I wondered through cities, Happy the days, To go to Paris All hail the "Fleur de Lys"

I wondered through cities, To go to Paris, But when he got at sea, Happy the days, Looked from behind, All hail the "Fleur de Lys"

A......ment la couche'ras-tu, Jean Royal David, Comment la couche'ras-tu, Jean, mon ami.

Ah! dis-moi, prince Eugene, qu'as-tu fait dans ta vit' ?

J'ai parcouru les villes... Vive le jour!

Pour aller à Paris... Vive la fleur de li'! 

J'ai parcouru les villes pour aller à Paris Mais quand il fut au large... Vive le jour! Regarde derrière lui... Vive la fleur de li'!

Mais quand il fut au large regarde derrière lui, Il vit venir vingt hommes... Vive le jour! Ses plus grands ennemis... Vive la fleur de li'!

Ah! do tell Prince Eugene, What have you done with your life, I wondered through cities, Happy the days, To go to Paris All hail the "Fleur de Lys" 

I wondered through cities, To go to Paris, But when he got at sea, Happy the days, Looked from behind, All hail the "Fleur de Lys"
My goodness, my husband, The King's horses did, 
Oh darn, My little one, Who disturbed the Fountain, 
Oh darn, Who disturbed the Fountain, 
My goodness, my husband, The King's horses did, 
Oh darn, My little one, Who slept in my bed last night, 
Oh darn, Who slept in my bed last night, 
J'en ceullie deux, j'en mange trois 
(REFRAIN)
J'ai 'te malade au lit trois mois, 
Tous mes parents venaient me voir. 
Behind our house, there's a field of peas I pick two and I eat three's 
CHORUS: 
Touch high 
Touch low 
Touch it 
Don't touch it, 
Mama says no ... 
Leave it alone ... 
Hide your hide, 
When it rains - it rains. 
Hide your hide, 
When it'll rain. 
I pick two and I eat three, 
I was sick in bed 3 months, 
All the relations came to call, 
"St. Paul de la Croix, Rimouski, 1941." 
Singer, Mrs. Beavan 
C'était une jeune fille qui n'avait que 16 ans (bis) 
Elle s'est endormie sous un beau rosier blanc 
(REFRAIN)
Son voile par ici, 
Son voile par là, 
Son voile qui volait, qui volait, 
Son voile qui volait au vent. 
Le vent soul'vant 
La jolie mer 
la bella 
la fontain 
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Si j'avais t'un amant, qui m'aimerait tendrement (bis)
Je lui ferai pour certain,
Son bonheur et son bonheur,
Je lui ferai pour certain,
Son bonheur, mais aussi le mien.

Un' bouteille vermeille sur la table qui nous révèle
Prenons-la, oui, par le cou,
Faites-lui faire et faites-lui faire,
Et prenons-la, oui, par le cou,
Faites-lui faire un p'tit glou-glu.

All the people of pleasure are here, here they are,
They have hearts oh so happy,
I want to drink and I want to drink,
They have hearts so oh happy,
I want to drink with all my friends,
With a well laid table, well granish or well dressed,
Around these two drinkers,
These drunkers, oh the drunkers,
I'm surrounded by these two drunkers,
These drunkers and singers.

If only I had a friend, that half cared for me,
I would make him walk the water,
The River, oh the river,
I would make him walk the water,
The river, oh yes without a boat.

If I had a lover that would love me tenderly,
I would make him for certain,
His happiness and also mine.
I would make him walk the water,
And make him walk the water,
His happiness oh his happiness,
I would make him for certain,
His happiness and also mine.

A green bottle on the table to wake us up,
Let us take it yes by the neck,
Get her to make a little gurgle.
Let us take it yes by the neck
Get her to make a little gurgle.

SIDE II, Band 4: JE SUIS AMOUREUX
(Work song. Singer, Mrs. Beavan)
Je suis amoureux depuis quelques temps (bis)
D'un' jolie brunelette et agée de quinze ans

REFRAIN:
Brunette, allons, gai gai gai,
Brunette, allons, gai gai gai, (bis)

Mais je vais la voir que de temps en temps
J'en ai fait la d'mand' devant tous ses parents,
Ils m'ont dit d'attendre, d'attendre encore un an.
Un an c'est bien long pour un tendre amant.
C'est bien long pour un tendre amant.
Oh, tenez mad'moiselle, serrez-moi mes gants.
Je les metterai que trois fois dans l'an.
Une à la Saint-Pierre, l'autre à la Saint-Jean,
Et l'autre le jour de mai. Non! c'est le plus beau
de l'an.

I'M IN LOVE
I've been in love for a little while
With a pretty Brunette of fifteen.

CHORUS:
Brunette, gay, gay, gay,
Brunette, let's be gay.

With a pretty Brunette of fifteen,
But I see her only now and then,
But I see her only now and then,
Of her folks I've asked for her hand.
Of her folks I've asked for her hand,
They told me to wait, wait for a year.
They told me to wait, wait for a year,
A year's a long time for a tender lover.

A year's a long time for a tender lover,
Here mad'moiselle put away my gloves,
Here mad'moiselle put away my gloves,
I'll only wear them three times this year.
I'll only wear them three times this year,
Once on St. Pierre's, the other on St. John's.
Once on St. Pierre's, the other on St. John's
And last but least, on May Day, Oh! it's the best
of the year.

SIDE II, Band 5: REEL
A reel played on mouth organ by Robert Beavan, with
hand clapping and spoons by the family.

SIDE II, Band 6: C'ETAIT UNE VIELLE SALOPE
(See Was An Old Slop). A dance song. Singer, Miss
Monique Beauchamp and friend.
C'était une vieille slope (bis)
Qui allait tirer ses vaches Qui allait tirer ses vaches
Dans un pot (é) à pisser.

REFRAIN:
Marie Castille domine,
Marie Castille domine,
Eli' n'avait pas d'couloir
Pour ecouler son lait.

Eli' prit au queue d'chemise
Pour eayer de l'couler.
Sa queue d'chemise était trop sale
Le lait voulait pas passer.
Eli' s'en va l'a marche
Pour eayer de l'passer.
Moniteur l'cure est là,
Est là pour le marchander.

There was an old slop
That was going to Milk her cow
That was going to Milk her cow
In a chamber pot.

CHORUS:
Marie Castille domine,
Marie Castille domine
She didn't have a strainer,
To strain her milk.
She took the tail end of her shirt
To try to strain it.
The tail end of her shirt was too dirty,
The milk wouldn't go through.
She went out to market,
To try and sell it any way.

SIDE II, Band 7: PIS OTE-TOE DONC!
(Married To A Lawyer). A work song.
Singer, Mrs. Beavan.
Mon père me maria avec un avocat.
Le premier soir des noces, avec lui je coucha.

REFRAIN:
Pis éte-tot donc,
Pais donc pas ça,
Pis óte-tot donc de là.
Il me serra si fort qu'a couchette en éraqua.
La bonne" femme qu'est aux écoutes, qu'entend tout ce bruit-la.

Al' dit: "endure", ma fille, de d'où on n'en meurt pas.

En tout cas, si tu mesurs mais on t'enterrera.

On mettra sur ta tombe qu't'es morte en faisant ça.

En faisant ta prière au fils Saint-Nicolas!

My father married me off to a lawyer.
The first night of our wedding with him I slept.

CHORUS:
Get out.
Don't do that.
Get out of there.

The old lady listening in, heard all the noise.

She said, patience my girl of that no one dies.

In all cases, if you should die we'll bury you.

On your grave we'll put: She died doing it.

Doing her prayer to St. Nicholas.

(See Folkways Recorde FA 2016 "Seeds of Love"
sung by Andrew Rovan Summers.)

SIDE II, Band 8: REEL WITH HARMONICA
AND SPOON

(No Robert Beavan and spoons.)

SDF: II, Band 8: LE MARIAGE ANGLAIS

(The English Wedding). A ballad on a historic theme
going back to the XVth century. Sung by Dr. Marius
Barbeau.)

This song of old France goes back to the late
Middle Ages, and tells of a young English king
marrying a French princess of royal blood.
The story in a few stanzas shows the bride's dis-

The rejoicing is great.

Our Lord told St. John
The treason is great.

Before Friday Eve
You'll see my body taken, Sinner!
You'll see my body taken.

You'll see my 2 feet nailed
And my two arms stretched, Sinner!
And my two arms stretched.

You'll see my head crowned
Of large white thorns, Sinner!
Of large white thorns.

You'll see my side pierced
With iron or with a lance, Sinner!
With iron or with a lance.

You'll see my blood run
All along my body, Sinner!
All along my body.

SIDE II, Band 11: JE M'AI FAIT UNE JOLIE
MATTREUSE

(I have now a pretty sweetheart. Lyric love song,
Singer, Mme. Zephirin Dorion, Port-Daniel,
Gaspé, 1951. Phonog. 6652.)

Je m'ai fait une jolie mattresse
Trois jours, y'a pas longtemps.
Elle est si belle, elle est si blanche
Que sa beauté surpasse les cieux.

La je t'ai prise par sa main blanche
Sur mon cheval je la fis monter
Tout droit au logis de mon père
Je m'en ai 'tée la reposer.

Oh! tiens, mon père, voilà sa cella
La celle que mon cœur o's toujours aimée.
Si je savais que ça a s'il elle
Dans ma colère je la turrais.

Il dô (g) aim sa époque claire
Tout droit au cœur là plantée.
La belle tente là et la rentre.
Le beau galant tomba s'au.

Oh! tiens, mon fils, elle est pas encore morte
T'as encore le temps d la reconoler.
-Oui elle est morte, oui s'il elle est morta
Tout's ses couleurs, ils sont changées.

I O T MYSELF & A PRETTY MISTRESS

I got myself a mistress,
Three days not so long ago.
She's so pretty, she's so fair,
That her beauty surpasses the heavens.

There I took her by her white hand,
On my horse I got her to mount,
Straight to my father's lodging
I got her to rest.

Her father, here she is,
The one my heart has always loved,
If I knew I couldn't keep her,
In my anger I would kill her,
He released his sword
Straight to his heart he pushed it,
The bella fell wounded,
The handsome lover fell too,

Oh my son, she isn't dead yet,
You've got time to console yourself,
Yes she's dead, yes she's dead.
All her colors, they are changed.

The Passion of Jesus-Christ
Is sad and mournful, Sinner!
It is sad and mournful.

He fasted for forty days
Without taking sustenance, Sinner!
Without taking sustenance.

At the end of these days
He took sustenance, Sinner!
He took sustenance.

He took a drop of wine
An orange apple, Sinner!
An orange apple.

St. John told Our Lord
The rejoicing is great, Sinner!
The rejoicing is great.

Our Lord told St. John
The treason is great, Sinner!
The treason is great.

Before Friday Eve
You'll see my body taken, Sinner!
You'll see my body taken.

You'll see my feet nailed
And my two arms stretched, Sinner!
And my two arms stretched.

You'll see my head crowned
Of large white thorns, Sinner!
Of large white thorns.

You'll see my side pierced
With iron or with a lance, Sinner!
With iron or with a lance.

You'll see my blood run
All along my body, Sinner!
All along my body.

SIDE II, Band 10: LA PASSION DE JESUS-CHRIST

(A religious song, or canticle for the Good Friday.
Singer, Mrs Zephirin Dorion, Port-Daniel,
Boucheventure. )

La Passion de Jesus-Christ
(bis)
Eli était triste et dolente, pêcheur.
Eli était triste et dolente.
Dieu s'a jeté quarante jours
Sans prendre sustenance, pêcheur.
Sans prendre sustenance.
As about de ces quarante jours
Il a pris sustenance, pêcheur.
Il a pris sustenance.

La reposition est grande.
Notre Seigneur dit à Saint-Jean
La reposition est grande.
Notre Seigneur dit à Saint-Jean
La reposition est grande.

La trezason est grande.
San pera.
San pera.
San pera.
San pera.
San pera.
San pera.
San pera.
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