



(LYRCD 7432)

LA TRAVERSEE

Sandra Reid, vocals songs performed in their original languages

Traditional songs from France, Celtic Brittany, Canada and Louisiana

Featuring: Jerry O'Sullivan; uilleann pipes and penny whistle, Nilson Matta; Jared Egan; bass, Sean Harkness; guitar, Amy Platt; tenor sax, clarinets, Randy Crafton; percussion, Amit Chatterjee; tampura, Chris Cunningham; sintir, Michelle Kinney; cello, Jon Kass; fiddle, Jorge Alfano; kena, Wayne Hankin; gems horn

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, even as English-speaking settlers were moving westward into North America from the original British colonies on the Atlantic coast, the Kingdom of France was sending it's own great wave of colonists into the South and Midwest of the continent, as well as into the original New France in Canada. Trappers, traders with the Indians, small farmers, transported convicts or footloose adventurers, their settlements sprang up along the shores of the Mississippi, the Missouri and the St. Lawrence, extending the presence of French culture over a vast area. Although the Seven Years' War of the 1750's checked the presence of French political ambitions in North America and tipped the balance in favour of English-speakers, place names like Detroit, Terre Haute, Fond du Lac and Des Moines scattered across the map of the United States bear witness to the far reach of the French influence in

centuries gone by. In Quebec and Louisiana, however, and in some parts of the other Canadian provinces and of New England, French culture is still a living part of the local heritage.

The settlers brought with them songs and dances that were popular in France in the 1600's and 1700's. At the veilles in peoples' homes where communities gathered for entertainment ancient ballads, fashionable love songs and topical songs about events in the community were all standard fare. Since a high percentage of the colonists came from the western provinces of France -- especially Normandy -- the characteristic performance styles of those areas strongly flavoured the development of French folk music in the New World. Some old songs continued to be passed down among the settlers long after they had vanished from tradition on the other side of the Atlantic.

Yet while French culture in North America preserved a great deal of what had been brought over from the old country, it also interacted creatively with the other ethnic traditions on the continent. There were close relations with the Native communities in Canada, initiated both by the fur trade and by the large-scale Jesuit missionary efforts in the seventeenth century. As English-speakers grew in number and influence French musicians borrowed a great deal from their heritage -- especially from the rich dance music repertoire of Scottish and Irish fiddlers. In Louisiana French colonization followed the plantation model characteristic of the American South in general, importing African slaves who, having learned a Creolized French, created a unique Afro-French musical culture, in which African rhythms and harmonies transfigured the popular urban music of eighteenth-century France.

When Acadians from Canada's Maritime provinces came to Louisiana fleeing English encroachment on their lands, they integrated their own songs and instrumental traditions into this mix. And there was yet another ethnic tradition that found its way to North America as a part of the wave of French settlement. Just as the Celtic heritage of Ireland and Scotland brought over by British colonization put its mark on the culture of English-speaking areas, the Celtic language and lore of Brittany came in under the shadow of the French presence. In the sixteenth century Brittany had been dragged unwillingly into France's political orbit, and the harsh social and economic consequences of that event drove many Bretons to emigrate in the centuries that followed. They carried their immensely rich musical heritage with them across the French colonial empire, so that even where the Breton language failed to survive, the characteristic melodies and dance rhythms of Celtic Brittany continued to influence the repertoire of folk musicians in the French diaspora.

Sandra Reid's maternal grandmother was half Breton and bilingual, but passed very little of her heritage on to the younger generations of her family, who grew up in an Anglophone environment in western Quebec. However, because Sandra was born and raised in Ottawa, which is on the border of Quebec, she was exposed to French language and culture from an early age, and developed a special affinity for the music of French Canada. She always seemed to know more French folk songs than English ones. Yet it was only when she began exploring the song traditions of Scotland and Ireland (also a part of her ancestral heritage) and then branched out into Celtic tradition in general that she was able to discover the extraordinary beauty and variety of Breton music.

In this recording Sandra has used French and Breton songs from both the Old World and the New to evoke the journey that her ancestors made when they crossed the Atlantic to settle in an unknown land. This collection also serves to illustrate the cultural and musical contribution of the French to North America - a contribution that is too often ignored. Sandra has been exceptionally innovative and sensitive in her approach, creatively drawing upon all the resources of world music to present these tunes in a fresh and engaging light.

Notes by Alexei Kondratiev

TRACKS AND SONG SYNOPSES

1) L'Amoureux de Margot 3:14 (France)

A song in Gallo, the French dialect spoken in Eastern Brittany. A young man self-mockingly describes his unrequited love for Margot. guitar - Sean Harkness, penny whistle - Jerry O'Sullivan

2) Ar Pilhaouer (The Ragpicker) (Air PEEL-yeeow-air) 3:25 (Brittany)

A song from the west coast of Brittany to accompany the old dance called jabadao. A woman laments her marriage to a stinking, drunken ragpicker, and hopes that when Death comes to make his rounds in the area he can be persuaded to take her husband with him! uilleann pipes - Jerry O'Sullivan, bodhran - Randy Crafton

3) Blanche comme la neige (White as snow) 4:25 (Canada)

A Quebec version of a ballad also found in several areas of France. A girl is kidnapped by a young soldier, and feigns death to avoid being raped. She is buried in her father's garden, where her father, having learned of her plan, is able to rescue her. bodhran - Randy Crafton

4) Kimiad an Ene (The Soul's Farewell) (KEE-mee-ahd ahn Ay-nay)
3:12 (Brittany)

During the seventeenth century Jesuit missionaries were extremely active in Brittany, afraid that the population was becoming disaffected with the Church and slipping back towards paganism. They taught catechism with the help of colourful, often lurid pictures of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory and the fate of the soul.

Out of this a tradition of folk hymns in Breton developed, using the same vivid imagery. Here the soul of the dying person bids farewell to the body, which must await the Resurrection.

shruti boxes - Randy Crafton

5) Kostez Plouskorv (By the Side of Plouskorff)
(Kosh-tay-Ploos-KORV) 3:41 (Brittany)

Another Breton song about young women trying to get men to marry them by suggestion they would bring a considerable dowry. They parade about in their best clothes, but the boys aren't fooled.

bendir, finger cymbals - Randy Crafton, sintir - Chris Cunningham

6) Les Raftsmen (The Raftsmen) 1:51 (Canada)

A very well-known song describing the activities of the raftsmen on the Ottawa River. The inclusion of English words and expressions illustrates the contact between French and English cultures in this part of Canada. frame drum & percussion - Randy Crafton

7) Un Canadien Errant (A Wandering Canadian) 3:19 (Canada)

As a result of the English takeover many of the French settlers in the Maritime provinces were driven from their lands and faced an uncertain future until, after long and arduous wandering, some of them were able to find a new home in Louisiana. This song commemorates the period when so many dispossessed French Canadians had no land to call their own.

8) The Huron Carol (Jesous Ahatonhia) 5:20 (Canada)

Even as Jesuit missionaries were working to bring Breton peasants back into the fold of the Church, they were also actively seeking to convert the "savages" in New France. Initially the most successful mission was the one to the Hurons. The French priests tried to provide the native peoples with instruction in their own languages, and Jean de Brebeuf (1593-1649), who was to become a martyr of the Church after his death at the hands of the Iroquois, is said to have composed this Christmas carol in Huron in 1641, setting it to a melody very reminiscent of western France. The Huron mission ended tragically: it was wiped out by the Hurons' Iroquois enemies, and the Huron language and culture eventually vanished.

Sandra sings both the Huron and French words to the carol.

kena - Jorge Alfano, drum, dulcimer - Randy Crafton, cello - Michelle Kinney, gems horn - Wayne Hankin

9) Ar Vrozig Ruz (The Little Red Skirt) (Air VRO-zeeg Ruze) 1:42 (Brittany)

A breton song to accompany a round dance. A girl tries to entice a young man to marry her by regaling him with tales of her riches, but when he finally goes to her house he comes upon a less pleasant situation, and finds that her only festive clothing is a little red skirt infested with fleas.

uilleann pipes - Jerry O'Sullivan, snare drum and bass drum - Randy Crafton

10) Gwerz ar Vechantez (The Ballad of the Wicked Woman) (GWAIRZ air Ve-SHAHN-tes) 1:42 (Brittany)

The term gwerz in Breton refers to a narrative ballad, often with a dramatic or tragic theme. The story here is similar to that of the English ballad "The Cruel Mother", where a young woman murders her newborn child. But in the Breton version the child-killer suffers more than pangs of conscience: she is condemned to death and burned alive, leaving only ashes and hot glowing coals! tanpura - Amit Chatterjee

harmonium - Jorge Alfano

11) Louisiana Suite 3:58 (United States)

Four short songs to represent the variety of musical traditions in French Louisiana. "Bye Bye Fedora" and "J'ai passe devant la porte" are both Cajun (Acadian) songs describing the grief of a man who has lost his love -- married to another man in "Bye Bye Fedora", and dead in her coffin in "J'ai passe...". "Bye Bye Fedora" is said to have been composed by the accordionist Leonce Trahan when his sweetheart, Fedora Uzee, married a rival. He played the tune at her wedding, causing her to weep. "Zelim" is a Creole song in which a man laments his sweetheart's leaving the plantation where they both live. "Il a tout dit" is from the tradition of the original French settlers in Louisiana, and has counterparts in France. It tells of a woman dissatisfied with her boyfriend who tattles about everything they do together, but who happily changes his character once they get married. bass - Jered Egan, cello - Michelle Kinney, fiddle - Jon Kass

12) Vive L'Amour 4:20 (France)

A love song of a type widespread in France, where the plucking of a rose in a garden is equated with a promise of marriage.

guitar - Sean Harkness, bass - Nilson Matta, tenor sax - Amy Platt, percussion - Randy Crafton

13) La Blanche Biche (The White Doe) 4:43 (France)

A striking supernatural ballad, known in several versions from northern and western France. When Marguerite was born, her mother poured the water into a garden that belonged to the fairies, so that a spell was put on the child: she is a girl by day but a white doe by night. Her brother is avidly hunting the white doe, although the mother learns of the spell and tries to warn him, he succeeds in killing the animal. To the horror of the kitchen attendants, the doe reverts to human form as it is being skinned and cut up. Then the voice of the dead girl addresses the guests at her brother's banquet from the plate in which her flesh has been served. This version comes from the French province of Orleanais.

clarinets - Amy Platt, chimes & bells - Sandra Reid

EXTRA BONUS TRACK

14) Ma Zadig a Ma Mamm 2:25 Hal-an-tow (Brittany)

A young girl is forced into marrying a sickly, ugly old man in a marriage arranged by her parents. Fortunately for her, he dies shortly after their wedding, leaving her to inherit his sizable fortune. Although she cannot grieve for him, she decides to hire some musicians to give him a nice funeral, so she can get on with having fun.

Ma Zadig a Ma Mamm provides the subject for an award-winning music video produced and directed by the Canadian Filmmaker, Adam Reid. Sandra and Randy Crafton (bodhran, gavel & maraca) perform here under the name of Hal-An-Tow.

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