

Francophone Song in Quebec and Ontario

Although Canadian francophone song may present something of a challenge for non-bilingual students, it is much too important to ignore. Quebec has a strong and rich vernacular song culture. Nor is the heritage of old songs limited to that province. We have already recognized the Acadian tradition of francophone song in the Maritimes, but French-language songs are found across the whole of Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia. Ontario, however, is the province where francophone traditional music is most easily found outside Quebec and the Maritimes.

A sensible way to commence a brief exploration of Franco-Canadian songs is with two introductory articles by Conrad Laforte, one of the most prominent and well-respected folk-song scholars in Quebec. His brief survey of Franco-Canadian folk music for the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* is available in the *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*,¹ and his masterly discussion of “French Songs in North American Oral Tradition” features in an issue of *Canadian Folk Music*.²

Quebec folksong goes a long way back, with roots in songs carried with them by early generations of settlers from France. The first major attempt to record these musical traditions in print was made by Ernest Gagnon, whose *Chansons populaires du Canada* was published in six installments in 1865.³ Gagnon’s collecting had been stimulated by a pioneering article by his friend F.-A.-H. LaRue titled “Les chansons populaires et historiques du Canada.”⁴ It was supplemented in 1893 by Achille Fortier’s *20 Chansons Populaires du Canada*.⁵ Interest in Quebec folksong’s undoubted debt to French vernacular music was stimulated in 1910 by Julien Tiersot’s *Forty-Four French Folksongs and Variants from Canada, Normandy, and Brittany*.⁶ However, it was Marius Barbeau who most consistently and energetically took up the cause of collecting the traditional music of Quebec and making at least some of it known to English Canadians.

Barbeau began his quest in 1919 with a long article in the *Journal of American Folklore* titled “Chants populaires du Canada” that is still worth reading today as a general introduction to Canadian francophone song.⁷ During the 1920s and 1930s he edited, often with one or more collaborators, several different selections of Quebec folksongs. The first, *Chansons of Old French Canada*, was published in 1920,⁸ followed by a similar collection intended for a francophone audience, *Viellies chansons françaises du Canada*.⁹ Barbeau wanted to publicize Quebec

song beyond the borders of Canada, and his next edited selection, *Folk Songs of French Canada*, was a collaboration with Edward Sapir aimed at an American audience and published by Yale University Press.¹⁰ In 1927 his attention turned to England, with *Twelve Ancient French-Canadian Folk Songs* printed in London by the leading British music publisher Boosey.¹¹ Still not satisfied, two years later he edited with composer Healey Willan a larger, two-volume selection intended for English Canada titled *Chansons canadiennes (French-Canadian Folk Songs)*.¹²

Barbeau continued his work of collecting and publicizing francophone folk songs in the 1930s. In 1935 he persuaded the National Museum to publish *Folk-songs of Old Quebec*, which he edited with Regina Shoolman,¹³ and two years later he found a prestigious commercial publisher in Toronto for his celebrated *Romancero du Canada*, the book for which he is probably best known.¹⁴ Although he had many other interests as a folklorist — most notably his work on First Nations culture in coastal British Columbia — Barbeau doggedly continued to collect Quebecois folksongs whenever he had an opportunity, and by the end of the 1950s he had amassed a huge collection. In 1962 he found an American academic publisher for his *Jongleur Songs of Old Quebec*¹⁵ and the same year he collaborated with H  l  ne Baillargeon on a publication aimed at a more popular market. This was one of his contributions to the developing postwar folk revival in Canada, and it was called *Vive la Canadienne: 77 belles chansons du Canada fran  ais*.¹⁶ It was, however, just another selection of favourites, and Barbeau was now intent on publishing the whole of his collection in a scholarly format.

This was a formidable project, and it has yet to be completed, but the first instalment was published in 1962 by the National Museum of Canada as *Le rossignol y chante: Premi  re partie du r  pertoire de la chanson folklorique fran  aise au Canada*.¹⁷ It would be twenty years before the second volume appeared, jointly edited with Lucien Ouellet and published by the renamed National Museum of Man, as *En roulant ma boule: Deuxi  me partie du r  pertoire de la chanson folklorique fran  aise au Canada*.¹⁸ Five years later came *Le Roi boit: Troisi  me partie du r  pertoire de la chanson folklorique fran  aise au Canada*, also co-edited with Lucien Ouellet; by now the publishing institution was called the Canadian Museum of Civilization.¹⁹ Barbeau’s retirement and subsequent death might have brought an end to the project, but his disciple Lucien Ouellet is apparently still working on the unorganized remainder of Bar-

beau's huge collection of francophone song. The three volumes in print are magnificent, the best place to go to explore Quebecois traditional song in depth, while Barbeau's early publications remain useful introductions to the field.

Barbeau was not the only person interested in promoting the heritage of Quebecois song. Back in 1928, for example, composer Sir Ernest MacMillan edited *Vingt-et-une chansons canadiennes/Twenty-One Folk Songs of French Canada*.²⁰ During the post-war folk music revival Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston put together a collection titled *Chansons de Québec/Folk Songs of Québec*.²¹ And in 1977-79 Maurice Carrier and Monique Vachon brought out the two volumes of their impressive *Chansons politiques du Québec*, which together covered the years 1763 to 1838.²²

This is far from exhausting the published collections of Quebec vernacular songs, but we need to turn our attention first to the collectors and then to studies of the songs. There are short articles on Ernest Gagnon and Marius Barbeau written for the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*.²³ On Gagnon, there is one article by Jay Rahn and two by Gordon Smith. Rahn's, written for *Canadian Folk Music Journal* in 1976, is titled "Text Underlay in Gagnon's Collection of French-Canadian Folk Songs."²⁴ Smith's piece, titled "Ernest Gagnon's 'Chansons populaires du Canada': An Argument for Plainchant and Folksong," was printed in *Canadian Folk Music Journal* for 1987.²⁵ He followed it two years later with "Ernest Gagnon on Nationalism and Canadian Music: Folk and Native Sources" in the same journal.²⁶ Gordon Smith has also written an interesting and wide-ranging survey of folksong collecting in the post-Gagnon era titled "The Cult of the Folk: Collecting Strategies after Ernest Gagnon."²⁷

No one has yet written a satisfactory book-length account of Barbeau's work as a collector of francophone and aboriginal vernacular song. There are some useful short accounts of his life and work, for example Kenneth Peacock's "Marius Barbeau (1883-1969)" in the 1984 issue of *Canadian Folk Music Journal*²⁸ and Tim Rogers' "Marius Barbeau" in a previous year's issue of *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin*.²⁹ Perhaps the most systematic obituary was that by Israel Katz in a 1970 issue of *Ethnomusicology*.³⁰ Going beyond obituaries and brief appreciations, a book-length survey of Barbeau's career as a folklorist—which, of course, also included a large amount of fieldwork collecting and studying Amerindian songs and artifacts—can be found in Lawrence Nowry's biography, *Marius Barbeau: Man of Mana*, although this tends to focus more on Barbeau as anthropologist and as employee of the National Museum than on the details of his francophone song-collecting.³¹ It can

be supplemented with the essays in *Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-Century Culture*,³² of which the most useful for understanding Barbeau's relationship to Quebecois culture is Elaine Keillor's "Marius Barbeau As a Promoter of Folk Music Performance and Composition."³³ More specialized, but also worth reading, is Marius McNaughton's "C. Marius Barbeau and the Origins Controversy" in the 1984 issue of *Canadian Folk Music Journal*.³⁴

Since Barbeau's death the big names in Quebecois folksong scholarship have been Conrad Laforte and Luc Lacourcière. As usual we can obtain an introductory account to the work of each of these men from the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*,³⁵ but we need to delve a little deeper. We can do so by means of three articles: François Brassard's very useful survey of French-Canadian folk music scholarship,³⁶ Sandria Bouliane's overview of Conrad Laforte's publications,³⁷ and Robert Bouthillier's review of Laforte's great academic project, that of building a complete catalogue of all francophone folk songs.³⁸ Lacourcière's work is difficult for anglophones to study: a series of scholarly articles in French-language periodicals that analyzed different types of Quebecois folksongs and the transformations that they went through in oral tradition. Laforte completed five volumes of *Le Catalogue de la chanson folklorique française*, with the subtitles *Tome I: Chansons en laisse*, *Tome II: Chansons strophiques*, *Tome III: Chansons en forme de dialogue*, *Tome IV: Chansons énumératives*, and *Tome V: Chansons sur les timbres*.³⁹ We have already noted that Laforte wrote the excellent "French Songs in North American Oral Tradition," which may be found in a 2006 issue of *Canadian Folk Music*.⁴⁰

Before we leave Quebec for francophone song elsewhere, a few other interesting articles in CSTM periodicals should be mentioned. Lisa Ornstein wrote a useful survey titled "Instrumental Folk Music of Quebec: An Introduction" in the 1982 issue of *Canadian Folk Music Journal*.⁴¹ Donald Deschênes wrote about the "Répertoire d'une chanteuse traditionnelle gaspésienne" in the 1981 issue.⁴² Jay Rahn contributed "'M'en revenant de la joli' Rochelle': A Song from ca. 1500 in the Current French-Canadian Repertoire" to the same journal in 1988.⁴³ And back in 1974 François Brassard examined "Le Voyageur," also in the same periodical.⁴⁴ Last but not least, the continued vibrancy of the francophone song tradition in rural Quebec is explored by Rika Ruebsaat in "Pourquoi Chanter? An Experiential Look at the Québecois Relationship to Singing" in a 2005 issue of *Canadian Folk Music*.⁴⁵

And now on to francophone folksong in Ontario. Two communities have been studied thoroughly,

sufficient for us to recognize that there has been a wealth of francophone song in Ontario. The pioneering work in this field was done in northern Ontario by Germain Lemieux, mainly in the Sudbury area. His major publications were *Chanteurs franco-ontariens et leur chansons*,⁴⁶ and the two volumes of *Chansonnier franco-ontarien*.⁴⁷ However, Jean-Pierre Pichette's article on Lemieux and his collection, which is housed at an archive in Sudbury, is the best way of quickly obtaining a sense of the Laurentian region's francophone song culture. It is titled "Germain Lemieux and the Transmission of Collective Memory in French Ontario" and appeared in a 2007 issue of *Canadian Folk Music*.⁴⁸

Southern Ontario, too, has a legacy of francophone song reflecting early settlement in the Detroit river valley near Windsor, and the scholar who has explored and saved this from oblivion is Marcel Bénéteau. Bénéteau contributed two excellent articles on francophone folksong in Ontario to *Canadian Folk Music* in 2007. One was an account of the fruits of his song collecting in the area just north of Detroit and Windsor.⁴⁹ The other, titled "Ontario's French Musical Heritage," was a more general survey of Ontario's French musical heritage.⁵⁰ Bénéteau, incidentally, has recorded a three-CD set of songs that he collected in southern Ontario, titled *Vieilles chansons du Détroit*.⁵¹ Mention of Bénéteau's recordings brings to mind another CD that provides an aural introduction to some of the songs collected by Marius Barbeau in rural Quebec. Titled *Hommage à Marius Barbeau*, it is performed by six Quebecois musicians, led by Danielle Martineau, and comprises twenty-eight items, mainly songs, of which Martineau says, "This selection of songs taken from the collecting of Marius Barbeau permits the public to recognize the richness, the variety and the timeless beauty of our singing traditions."⁵² It couldn't be said better.

Notes

¹Laforte, Conrad. "Folk Music, Franco-Canadian," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.

²Laforte, Conrad. "French Songs in North American Oral Tradition," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter 2006-07), 1-11.

³Gagnon, Ernest, ed. *Chansons populaires du Canada* (6 installments). Québec : Bureaux du "Foyer canadien," 1865. 2nd Edit., Québec: Robert Morgan, 1880. Reprint: Montréal: Beauchemin, 1947.

⁴LaRue, F.-A.-H. "Les chansons populaires et historiques du Canada," *Foyer canadien* 1 (1863), 321-384 & 3 (1865), 5-72.

⁵Fortier, Achille. *20 Chansons Populaires du Canada*. Montreal: E. Hardy, 1893.

⁶Tiersot, Julien. *Forty-Four French Folksongs and Variants from Canada, Normandy, and Brittany*. New York: Schirmer, 1910.

⁷Barbeau, Marius. "Chants populaires du Canada," *Journal of American Folklore* 32 (1919), 1-89.

⁸Barbeau, Marius; Margaret Gascoigne, James Kennedy and Ethel Seath, eds. *Chansons of Old French Canada*. Quebec: Chateau Frontenac, 1920.

⁹Barbeau, Marius; Margaret Gascoigne and Ethel Seath, eds. *Vieilles chansons françaises du Canada*. [Québec]: La Cie du Chemin de Fer Canadian Pacifique, 1923.

¹⁰Barbeau, Marius and Edward Sapir, eds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925.

¹¹Barbeau, Marius; Harold Boulton and Arthur Somervell, eds. *Twelve Ancient French-Canadian Folk Songs*. London: Boosey & Co., 1927.

¹²Barbeau, Marius and Healey Willan, eds. *Chansons canadiennes (French-Canadian Folk Songs)*, 2 Vols. Oakville, Ont.: Frederick Harris Music Co., 1929.

¹³Barbeau, Marius and Regina Lenore Shoolman, eds. *Folk-songs of Old Quebec*. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin 75, 1935.

¹⁴Barbeau, Marius, ed. *Romancero du Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada/Montréal: Editions Beauchemin, 1937.

¹⁵Barbeau, Marius, ed. *Jongleur Songs of Old Quebec*. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press/Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962.

¹⁶Baillargeon, Hélène and Marius Barbeau., eds. *Vive la Canadienne: 77 belles chansons du Canada français*. Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1962.

¹⁷Barbeau, Marius, ed. *Le rossignol y chante: Première partie du répertoire de la chanson folklorique française au Canada*. Ottawa: Musée National du Canada, Bulletin 175, 1962.

¹⁸Barbeau, Marius and Lucien Ouellet, eds. *En roulant ma boule: Deuxième partie du répertoire de la chanson folklorique française au Canada*. Ottawa: Musée national de l'Homme, 1982.

¹⁹Barbeau, Marius and Lucien Ouellet, eds. *Le Roi boit: Troisième partie du répertoire de la chanson folklorique française au Canada*. Ottawa: Musée canadien des civilisations, 1987.

²⁰MacMillan, Sir Ernest, et al. *Vingt-et-une chansons canadiennes/Twenty-One Folk Songs of French Canada*. Oakville: Frederick Harris, 1928.

²¹Fowke, Edith and Richard Johnston, eds. *Chansons du Québec/Folk songs of Quebec*. Waterloo: Waterloo Music Co., 1957.

- ²²Carrier, Maurice and Monique Vachon, eds. *Chansons politiques du Québec, Tome I: 1765-1833*. Montréal: Leméac, 1977. *Chansons politiques du Québec, Tome II: 1834-1838*. Montréal: Leméac, 1979.
- ²³"Ernest Gagnon" and "Marius Barbeau," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.
- ²⁴Rahn, Jay. "Text Underlay in Gagnon's Collection of French-Canadian Folk Songs," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 4 (1976), 3-14.
- ²⁵Smith, Gordon E. "Ernest Gagnon's 'Chansons populaires du Canada': An Argument for Plainchant and Folksong," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 15 (1987), 3-11.
- ²⁶Smith, Gordon E. "Ernest Gagnon on Nationalism and Canadian Music: Folk and Native Sources," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 17 (1989), 32-39.
- ²⁷Smith, Gordon E. "The Cult of the Folk: Collecting Strategies after Ernest Gagnon," *Canadian Universities Music Review/Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 19: 2 (1999), 16-26.
- ²⁸Peacock, Kenneth. "Marius Barbeau (1883-1969)," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 12 (1984), 44-48.
- ²⁹Rogers, Tim B. "Marius Barbeau," *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne* 17: 3 (July 1983), 17-21.
- ³⁰Katz, Israel J. "Marius Barbeau 1883-1969," *Ethnomusicology* 14 (1970), 129-142.
- ³¹Nowry, Lawrence. *Marius Barbeau, Man of Mana: A Biography*. Toronto: NC Press, 1995.
- ³²Jessup, Lynda; Andrew Nurse and Gordon E. Smith, eds. *Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-Century Culture*. Gatineau, Québec: Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation, 2008.
- ³³Keillor, Elaine. "Marius Barbeau As a Promoter of Folk Music Performance and Composition," in *Around and About Marius Barbeau*, 137-155.
- ³⁴McNaughton, C. Marius. "C. Marius Barbeau and the Origins Controversy," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 12 (1984), 60-64.
- ³⁵"Luc Lacourcière" and "Conrad Laforte," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.
- ³⁶Brassard, François. "French-Canadian Folk Music Studies: A Survey," *Ethnomusicology* 16 (1972), 351-359.
- ³⁷Bouliane, Sandria P. "Conrad Laforte: bibliographie sélective," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Winter 2004-05), 5-8.
- ³⁸Bouthillier, Robert. "Le catalogue de la chanson folklorique française," *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, 6 (1978), 38-39.
- ³⁹Laforte, Conrad. *Le Catalogue de la chanson folklorique française, Tomes I-V: Tome I: Chansons en laisse (Nouvelle édition. Préface de Luc Lacourcière); Tome II: Chansons strophiques; Tome III: Chansons en forme de dialogue; Tome IV: Chansons énumératives; Tome V: Chansons sur les timbres*. Québec: Presses Universitaires Laval, 1977-84.
- ⁴⁰See note 2 above.
- ⁴¹Ornstein, Lisa. "Instrumental Folk Music of Quebec: An Introduction," *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, 10 (1982), 3-11
- ⁴²Deschênes, Donald. "Répertoire d'une chanteuse traditionnelle gaspésienne," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 9 (1981), 59-60.
- ⁴³Rahn, Jay. "'M'en revenant de la joli' Rochelle': A Song from ca. 1500 in the Current French-Canadian Repertoire," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 16 (1988), 16-31.
- ⁴⁴Brassard, François. "Le Voyageur," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 2 (1974), 13-18.
- ⁴⁵Ruebsaat, Rika. "Pourquoi Chanter? An Experiential Look at the Québécois Relationship to Singing," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Fall 2005), 11-14.
- ⁴⁶Lemieux, Germain. *Chanteurs franco-ontariens et leur chansons*. Sudbury: La Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario, 1963-64.
- ⁴⁷Lemieux, Germain. *Chansonnier franco-ontarien*, 2 Vols. Sudbury: Centre franco-ontarien de folklore, 1974 and 1975.
- ⁴⁸Pichette, Jean-Pierre. "Germain Lemieux and the Transmission of Collective Memory in French Ontario," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne* 41:3 (Fall 2007), 3-10.
- ⁴⁹Bénéteau, Marcel. "Collecting French Folk Songs in the Shadow of Motor City," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Fall 2007), 11-18.
- ⁵⁰Bénéteau, Marcel. "Ontario's French Musical Heritage," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Fall 2007), 1-2.
- ⁵¹Bénéteau, Marcel. *Vieilles chansons du Québec* CDs. Disques Petite Côte, 2001.
- ⁵²Martineau, Danielle, et al. *Hommage à Marius Barbeau*. CD. Les disques SRC, 2003.