

LO COR DE LA PLANA PRESS :

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The music was equally robust and intricate, a local sound ready for export.

NEW YORK TIMES

"Their intricate, overlapping harmonies form roaming, obscure Occitan labyrinths with a humorous trail laid down for the adventurous listener to follow. The approach of Lo Còr de la Plana is complete : from their involvement with the community to their satirical CD artwork. They are not just a band, they are a philosophy."

Kershaw – FROOTS

"Fervent chants reinvested with a mad energy and a singular, heady power."

Patrick Labesse – LE MONDE

"Lo Còr de la Plana do not fantasise about an idyllic past that never existed; they are playing their part in the creation of modern Occitan music and a Mediterranean cultural heritage."

Claude Ribouillault - TRAD Magazine

"Traditional singing? No doubt about it, but frankly, much more than that. Dance songs that take you away into a smiling trance, overcoming all blockages, either corporal or mental. Virile ritornelles, sparkling with a saucy freshness. The six lads of this male choir from the district of La Plaine, in Marseilles, give the idea of tradition a salutary springiness. They revisit the occitan patrimony, they recreate it, inventing polyphony in it, and they transgress the idea you could have of it, injecting in it swing, groove and dissipated good humour.

They accompany themselves with handclapping, foot stomping, bendirs and other skins."

Patrick Labesse – LE MONDE

"The vocals of Lo Còr de la Plana are sharp and rough, with an arid beauty.

You enter into the dance and end up dumbfounded before all that controlled energy, power, sense of rhythm.

That dissonance, leading to a remarkable harmony of fragility and sensitivity."

LE POINT

"Young living icons of an Occitan culture which fiercely defends its modernity, these singers project a lively and rejuvenated image of Provence with their traditional and popular songs. Lo Còr de la Plana offers an interpretation of the Occitan repertoire based on fury, fever, and the desire to challenge the notion of vocal music".

LE PENTHIEVRE

"The entire concert (...) takes us off the beaten track. The intonations swing this way and that, the timbre of the voices deepens, and the ensemble never lets us go. To say that a Còr de la Plana performance is the most disconcerting of all Provençal song concerts today is to state the obvious..."

Pascal Jaussaud – MEDITERIA

"Although the melodies and lyrics are drawn from popular song, they are shaped into something perfectly contemporary. This is not Marseille "tradition" but a genuine reinvention, using several voices to recompose what used to be a single melody, enriching the old rhythms with new, painting (...) new colours into the songs of yore. Le Còr takes all the diversity of life and puts it into their music."

Denis-Constant Martin – POLITIS

"In the image of its leader, the Còr refuse to settle for sterile contemplation of a set form of expression: *"I do not belong to that school that separates cultural demands from the political and social context"*, stresses Manu. *"We want to be truly part of our quarter where a new awareness is emerging... And when we interpret religious songs, they tell the story of poor people standing up to the powerful. It is a struggle that never ends."*

L'HEBDO DE MARSEILLE

"Manu Théron loves criticizing the learned, the upholders of an elite for all those who deny a culture for the masses. For him, language is an awakening, a conquest. It is not the language of Napoleon but a personal adventure, an adventure that combats certitudes. "

LE PAVE

Men from Mars(eille)

Lo Còr de la Plana invade Boston

By JEFFREY GANTZ | October 2, 2008

"Un jour ou l'autre, parlera l'Europe marseillais" — "Sooner or later, Europe will speak Marseille." That might have been just a sporting-goods-company promotion, but two million Marseillais (out of a total population of 1.5 million!) take it to heart. Founded in 600 BC by Greeks from Asia Minor and subsequently dominated by Romans, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Saracens, Franks, Aragonese, Angevins, and, now, Parisians (just remember, the national anthem is not called "La Parisienne"!), France's second-largest city is a Mediterranean melting pot of people from Italy, North Africa, Spain, Greece, Corsica, Turkey, Armenia, Vietnam, and China, for starters. Marseille already speaks Europe, and much more, but these days, the city's music is turning to the Occitan language of the South of France, the language of the mediæval troubadours, and finding inspiration, as well as a cultural identity, in its dense, intricate poetry. Massilia Sound System opened the door in the '80s with their trobamuffin hip-hop, singing in both Occitan and French. Now another Marseille group, Lo Còr de la Plana, have grabbed the baton, and they'll be bringing it to the Somerville Theatre this Friday, October 3.

Like Italian, French, and Spanish, Occitan developed from Latin, but its true sibling is Catalan, as spoken in Barcelona and Valencia. (What to call this language is a very hot potato.) In the Middle Ages, it was the *lingua franca* of the Western Mediterranean, the preferred language of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Richard the Lionheart. Dante gave some thought to writing his *Commedia* in Occitan, the better to be understood outside Tuscany. (Had he done so, the history of Occitan, and of Italian literature, would have been quite different.) He settled for a brief *homage* (albeit in *Purgatorio*) to the 12th-century troubadour Arnaut Daniel, whom he called "il miglior fabbro" — "the best craftsman." (Seven centuries later, Ezra Pound called Arnaut, who's credited with the invention of the sestina, the best poet who ever lived.)

The rise of the Cathar religious movement, also in the 12th century, marked the beginning of the end of the troubadour language and culture. The French kings flew the banner of religious orthodoxy as an excuse to invade the South and extend their royal prerogative. Yet the Occitan language never completely disappeared. It's not hard to see why. Occitan is more compact than Italian, less abstract than French, grittier than Spanish — you could call it the missing center of the Romance languages. With its huge lexicon, it's a wordsmith's delight. Frédéric Mistral shared the 1904 Nobel Prize for Literature for his writing in Provençal (notably the long poem *Mirèio*). Neither is it hard to see why it's being taken up by France's current hip-hop generation, the descendants of the troubadours. Bernal de Ventadorn and Bertran de Born and Arnaut Daniel and Folquet de Marseilla didn't just revel in the adulterous fantasies of *fin' amor* — they also had the *sirventes*, a song of social or political satire, and the *tenso*, a debate between two troubadours. (Or between a troubadour and a trobairitz, for there were also women troubadours.) The legacy of those sound-system battles between Afrika Bambaataa and Kool Herc goes back beyond the cutting contests of Kansas City jazz and Harlem rent parties.

Occitan-inspired hip-hop is rampant over the South of France. In Toulouse, the watchword of Fabulous Trobadors — writer/rapper Claude Sicre plus human-beat-boxer Ange B — is "Gardarem l'accent": whatever your accent is (and they're not just talking about the way you speak), you better keep it or you're shit. Their latest, *Duels de tchatche et autres trucs de folklore loulousain*, makes reference to the *tenso*; the cover even shows Claude and Ange B going jaw to jaw. Down the road in Aude, the six trobairitz of La Mal Coiffée (loosely translatable as "Bad Hair Day") combine traditional material and folk rhythms with contemporary arrangements and original harmonies, sounding like nightingales one moment and Finland's feisty Värttinä the next. The Massilia Sound System offshoot Moussu T e lei Jovens hold forth in La Ciotat, east of Marseille; in Nice, there's Nux Vomica.

But, *mèfi* (listen up), Marseille is the focal point. In the '80s there was IAM as well as Massilia Sound System, an outfit that developed out of the Lively Crew of Akhenaton and Khéops. They played off the tendency of French highway signs to abbreviate Marseille as "Mars";

one explanation of their acronym was "Invasion Arrivée de Mars," and their first major hit was the 1991 album . . . *de planète Mars*. Marseille itself didn't object to being thought of as another planet. The city speaks two French languages (aside from all the international ones): *français marseillais* and *provençal marseillais*, the two more like each other than like French or Provençal. There's the *tchatche* in Marseille, the chat, and the tendency to exaggerate, just a little, like the time Marseille humorist Patrick Bosso identified his city as the one "where the sun shines 453 days a year."

Massilia Sound System have developed a vocabulary all their own. There's *aióll!*, no longer the garlic mayonnaise of Marseille cuisine but a way of greeting one of your own, like "Yo!"; a 1997 MSS album is titled *Aiollwood*. There's *chourmo*, a Provençal word that you could use to designate your posse; it's the title of a 1993 MSS album and also that of the second volume of novelist Jean-Claude Izzo's "Marseille Trilogy." (The title of the first volume, *Total Khéops*, was inspired by the IAM member.) There's *oai*, as in the title of MSS's latest album, *Oai e libertat*, which suggests a degree of Provençal enthusiasm and anarchy that turns into a Feast of Fools; that and *libertat* — freedom — are everybody's birthright. Everybody needs them in this city of hard knocks. Back in 50 BC, Marseille backed Pompey against Julius Caesar. (You all know how that turned out.) More recently, in 1993, Olympique de Marseille, the football club the entire city is fada (crazy) for, lifted the Champions Cup as the best club side in Europe, the only French team ever to do so. *E puèi? Par segur*, a match-fixing scandal that relegated OM to the second division.

Lo Còr de la Plana enter these lists as a male a cappella sextet who accompany themselves on bendir and tamburello and with foot stomping and hand clapping. Their name means "The Heart of La Plaine" (the bohemian quarter in Marseille), and their first album, 2003's *Es lo titre* ("It is the Title" Magritte echoes intentional), updates traditional religious music; you can hear the raucousness of the songs 15th-century pilgrims sang on their way to Montserrat and Santiago de Compostela. The title of last year's more secular follow-up, *Tant deman*, means "Maybe Tomorrow"; it's what you tell your sweetheart, or your mother, or your boss, or the Devil when he shows up at an inconvenient time. Their appearance at Globalfest 2008 caught the eye of the *New York Times* Jon Pareles, who noted their "rich chordal harmonies and joyfully ricocheting counterpoint." Their traditional dances — rigaudon, bourrée, rondeau — join hands with techno-groove and ragamuffin.

"Jorns de mai" is a troubadour-like song about the "days of May" and gathering rosebuds while you can. But the rest of *Tant deman* (whose cover depicts a two-legged chair that you can't sit on — i.e., you have to get up and dance — along with, in Occitan, the words "I have always a little felt myself the child of geometric abstraction") is more like an Izzo noir. "Nau gojatas" ("Nine Girls"), a frenzied disappearing-one-by-one folk story about girls who want to dance and boys who don't (maybe they're gay), takes on modern dress in "Condés" ("Cops"), a contemporary story of nine cops who kill each other one by one, augmented by snare drum and American-cop-show-theme brass. The mother of "Fanfarneta" wants her to marry a prince or a baron's son, but she's holding out for her friend Peire, who's about to be hanged. "La noviòta" ("The New Bride") has to improvise on her wedding night when her bridegroom falls asleep while saying his prayers — no problem, she goes off to sleep with her cousin, even as the lads serenade the newlyweds with an intense "ta-la-la-la-la-la" shivaree. "Mi parlètz pas de trabalhar" ("Don't Talk to Me About Working") speaks for itself, but the polyphonic splendor might be a surprise. Lo Còr plan to end their Somerville Theatre appearance with "La vièlha" ("The Old Woman") — okay, she's over 80, but she slides up next to our hero at a dance, and if he marries her on Monday, she'll be dead on Tuesday and he can use her money to get a 15-year-old girl. Arnaut Daniel, who wrote, "I swim against the current," would likely be down with these 21st-century troubadours. Theirs is, after all, "lo bèu pais, tot li dansa e tot li ris": "the beautiful country [where] everyone dances and everyone laughs."



LO CÒR DE LA PLANA: Rigaudon, bourrée, rondeau — meet techno-groove and ragamuffin.

Òai? Ouais!

The many tongues of Occitania

By JEFFREY GANTZ
October 2, 2008

It was Dante who distinguished the three literary languages known to his Italy by their word for "yes": "For some say 'oc,' others 'si,' and still others 'oil.'" Those who said "si" (from Latin *sic*, now *si*) were Italian; those who said "oil" (from Latin *hoc ille*, now *ou*) were French; those who said "oc" (from Latin *hoc*, now *òc*) were Occitan, and they spoke the most important European literary language of Dante's time, the language of the troubadours. English-speaking people have been accustomed to call this language Provençal, but it was, and is, spoken all over the south of France, not just in Provence, and the troubadours were not all, or even mostly, from Provence.

These days, the people who speak it can't decide on what to call it, or even whether it's one language. You could call Occitan a language family comprising Gascon, Limousin, Auvergnat, Languedocien, and Provençal; you could call Occitan a language and the others dialects. Either one will pass muster in, say, Toulouse, but not in Marseille and Nice, where the language (it's not a dialect, *gramarçh*) is Provençal and they don't much care what everybody else speaks or calls it. The Provençal view "Occitan" as a code word for Languedocien and an attempt to privilege that as *the* language of the French South. It's true that if you decide you're going to learn "Occitan" (and all of a sudden you can), what you'll be learning is Languedocien, which is the most central member of the Occitan family, the most conservative, and the most like the language of the mediæval troubadours. If you want to become a hip-hop star in Marseille, on the other hand, you need to tell the language guys to get going on *Teach Yourself Provençal*.

January 15, 2008

MUSIC REVIEW

To See (and Hear) the World in Five Hours: Unique Sounds Ripe for Import

By [JON PARELES](#)

The most striking group at Globalfest 2008 — the five-hour, 12-band showcase of world music on Sunday night at Webster Hall — was the one that traveled lightest: Lo Còr de la Plana, from Marseilles, France. It was six male singers, four of whom also played hand drums and tambourine. They sang in a disappearing language, Occitan, and in an old style that once was church music. They performed traditional and traditionalist songs that took pride in what the group's lead singer, Manu Theron, cheerfully called "filthy Marseilles."

And with just those voices and percussion, they did remarkable things. They sang rich chordal harmonies and joyfully ricocheting counterpoint. There were drones and dissonances akin to Eastern European music, sustained solo vocal lines related to Arabic music and Gregorian chant, and percussive call-and-response hinting at Africa — all the connections of a Mediterranean hub. The music was equally robust and intricate, a local sound ready for export.

That's the undercurrent of Globalfest, which runs during the annual conference of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters and doubles as an audition. Globalfest revels in the vague (or open-ended) term "world music" as it mixes local and national styles with international hybrids.

There was local pride from Puerto Plata, an 84-year-old Dominican guitarist turned singer. He holds on to vintage styles that were overpowered by modern merengue. Puerto Plata sang elegant Dominican sones and boleros in a timeworn but still courtly voice, while Pablo Rosario sent quick, staccato guitar lines darting around the melodies. When Puerto Plata wasn't singing, he demonstrated some dance steps.

Chango Spasiuk — an Argentine who has dedicated himself to chamamé, a style from northeastern Argentina — had his guitarist, Sebastián Villalba, singing about "the pride of my region." Mr. Spasiuk's version of chamamé slightly dresses up the old rural dance tunes, with chamber-music-tinged arrangements that use sighing violin lines and delicate accordion voicings, along the lines of what the towering Argentine composer [Astor Piazzolla](#) did with tango. But Mr. Spasiuk also preserves the music's six-beat bounce and vitality, with passages that huff and scurry the length of his keyboard.

Another local style — the Senegalese funk called mbalax — arrived with the singer Fallou Dieng, a protégé of the Senegalese superstar [Youssou N'Dour](#). Mr. Dieng's band, Le DLC, could rival his mentor's band with its cantering, skittering grooves and neatly placed hooks.

Traditionalism and spectacle merged in Dulsori, a South Korean group whose name means "wild beat." The group played huge drums placed overhead, along with flutes and a kotolike zither. They set up deep, pounding rhythms derived from outdoor farmers' festivals that could probably be heard in the next village. But Dulsori had

modern show-business touches, too. Its singers cued audience participation like pop stars, gesturing with wireless microphones. At one point the melody on a double-reed instrument turned into the “Olé, Olé” sports cheer.

Some of the hybrids were just as spunky. Vinicio Capossela — a playful, raspy-voiced Italian songwriter whose visionary cabaret style draws on all sorts of music — had a different mask (including Medusa), jacket and hat for nearly every song, and one of his arrangements mingled toy piano, theremin, banjo and melodica. Samarabalouf was a nimble French trio — two guitars and bass — that breezed through tunes hinting at Hot Club swing, Arabic melodies and rockabilly, making as many droll faces as possible as they played.

Nation Beat, from exotic Brooklyn, uses the maracatu beat and rabeca fiddle of northeastern Brazil, and it has a Brazilian singer, Liliana Araújo. But the band also tosses in New Orleans second-line rhythms and bluesy slide guitar.

The other American bands were less consistent. Crooked Still, a Boston band with mountain-music roots, a cellist and a breathy-voiced singer, was best when it stayed closest to eerie old fiddle tunes. Pistolera, from New York City, played accordion-pumped Mexican-style polkas and rancheras with a female perspective, but it needed more dance-floor drive. Accordion was the Hungarian element in Little Cow, a frisky band from Budapest whose songs suggest that Jamaica ska, or its new-wave revival, has just reached Eastern Europe.

Finally, there was Toumast, led by a Tuareg guitarist from Niger, Moussa Ag Keyna, who came to Paris after being wounded in battle. The Tuaregs, whose separatist rebellion was defeated by Mali and Niger, developed music that merges modal African riffs with stark electric-guitar rock. Aminatou Goumar, who usually shares lead vocals, was unable to appear, leaving Mr. Ag Keyna to lead what sounded like a power trio plus a percussionist (playing hand drums and metal castanets). The songs — about the rebels and expatriate sorrows — revolve around Mr. Ag Keyna’s high voice, starkly hypnotic riffs and snaky lead lines, working up to a trancelike momentum. They don’t need to be heard as world music. With the right bookings, Toumast could be a sensation on the stoner-rock circuit.

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At The Cor

Lo Cor De La Plana are an extraordinary group working at the heart of Occitan culture. **Hélène Rammant** discovered their satirical side.

Lo Còr de la Plana are six male polyphonic singers accompanied by nothing more than the *pica-ments* of their feet, the *bata-ments* of their hands and a *sinevy bendir* or *tumberello* which carry their extraordinary harmonies – designed to “ridicule power, wealth and privilege” – to levels which I, nor my fellow colleagues Andy Kershaw and James Birtwistle had ever heard before. The three of us had recorded the band, Radio 3 fashion (i.e. unplugged) at their *locale de répète* earlier this year in the district of la Plaine, the artists’ quarters of Marseille, for a Kershaw show special on the city’s music. Named after the band’s neighbourhood, Lo Còr de la Plana is an Occitan phrase that translates as The Heart Of The Plain. The heart of Lo Còr de la Plana however has to be satire, as we soon discovered on our way to the interview.

Busy trying to avoid almost surreal amounts of dog shit on the pavement while trying to listen to one of Andy’s “most embarrassing stories of my life”, I didn’t pay much attention to the urban layout of Rue du Jobin and stopped, in fits of giggles, in front of no. 45 where we were expecting to greet our singers at any moment. I rang the door bell – doing my best to rid myself of the image of Andy trotting dog poo all over Mark Knopfler’s white carpet

– and to my initial relief nobody opened the door. 10 minutes later I tried calling Manu, the lead singer, but he didn’t respond and I started to fear I might have messed up our dates; the giggles were beginning to subside – until James discovered there was another no. 45 a couple of houses down the same street where, sure enough, our singers were hanging out, smoking cigarettes and cracking jokes. I was introduced to Manu, the lead singer and made an attempt to resume conversation where our emails had left off. Manu looked a bit baffled and soon I was too. Again, a peal of laughter from the guys as it transpired there are two Manus in the band and I had headed for the wrong one.

The tone for the interview was set, and satire, as we would soon discover, is what drives Lo Còr de la Plana’s music, philosophy and front man Manu Théron. In Kershaw’s eyes, he was already the Che Guevara of the Occitan cause. Even before they’d said one word, Andy’s excitement was

palpable. When we finally got round to recording the ‘boys’ who were, in his words, “simply extraordinary”, I honestly think I have rarely seen Andy so excited over something.

All of the songs on *Es lo Titre* (see FR241), Còr de la Plana’s first release, are sung in Occitan, an ancient language spoken mainly in the Languedoc or Occitania region of the south of France (Provence, Drôme-Vivarais, Auvergne, Limousin, Guyenne, Gascony and Languedoc) by a mere 2 million.



Yet the area where it is historically spoken counts roughly 14 million inhabitants. The lyrical content of the songs may not be apparent to non-Occitan speakers, but the song titles and the graphics in the CD booklet strike immediate resonance: religious figures, angels holding tambourines, removed from their stained glass windows and given a new lease of life; allowed to talk nonsense, pose against red anarchic iconographies, all while Jesus is punching the money lenders from the temple. Jesus depicted on the cross asks Mary, "What day is it?" She replies, "Friday, I think".

The first song on *Es lo Titre* begins with a muffled prayer to Mary, recited by an old lady. Her plaintive, narrative voice wanders above what sounds like goats bleating but is in fact an electronically tweaked human beatbox. The singing in Occitan is guaranteed to perplex, confuse and intrigue with each listen, and as the male voices march between tableaux, they adopt age-old stories and Christian and Marxist ideologies... yet each song is a dust bowl of allusions to contemporary city life: a baby cries, surreal telephone messages are played out, a siren drifts by, a woman prays, motorcycles zoom past. Yet funny to think all of the songs, now turned into micro-plays, were once collected by studious priests... but does that mean they are religious?

Manu: "No. In fact most of the songs were not performed in church, so it's not sacred music. It's popular music with spiritual or religious themes. And the texts are not orthodox at all, they have nothing to do with the official religion. For instance, Jesus Christ is seen as a very Marxist character, rather than a religious one... so that makes him very sympathetic to us. Most of the saints are very violent; they fight against the power, against kings or the symbols of power. It's quite obvious that these texts have been written by poor people for poor people."

Lo Còr de la Plana was founded in 2001, in Marseille, and is one of the many offspring of the 80s' Occitan movement that saw Massilia Sound System launch into a systematic recreation of the popular Occitan heritage. Yet to simply associate the band with the Occitan reappropriation movement is too restrictive, as Manu points out: "The Occitan language was part of our everyday preoccupations, but not for reasons of identity or tradition... we couldn't care less. Honestly, it had more to do with the fact that at the time we were exploring our own life paths, through popular history and culture. Our concern was not to reproduce or maintain or defend a culture, it was to investigate popular culture so it could give us tools with which we could respond coherently to the political problems that we've inherited this century. All these quests for an identity were lacking political weight as their advocates didn't look in the usual places that promulgate popular culture (i.e. schools, universities, theatres, etc.) and as such they introduced a series of inadequacies in French society over the last 10 years. They created a society where political figures continue to obscure and denaturalise any form of political progress. How can a society which refuses to talk openly about the war in Algeria, or the massacres in Madagascar, pretend to live in a supposedly serene and calm environment?"

Manu clearly feels haunted by the ghosts of French colonialism and is deeply worried about the recent rise of the *Front National* in the region. For him, the only way to rid French society of the "demons of history" is to expose them, attribute them a clear place in popular culture and redress the balance in French popular culture altogether.

Manu's humanitarian and musical inspiration took root in Algeria where he grew up as a child. His father, a respected worker and trade unionist in an iron and steel factory close to Marseille, was sent to work in a gas factory in East Algiers, following protests he'd been involved in against redundancies in the work place. While his father went to work, Manu and his brother were in the care of a nanny in the popular district of Skikda, and often stayed the night there during Ramadan, the musically rich period in the Algerian calendar. Manu: "The rhythms of the Eastern Algerians have always stayed with me, and I also learned about *chaouis* rhythms and *skikdi*, and *Qancantiti* which are also present in more elaborate repertoires like the *Maaloof*. I grew up in a very composite musical landscape: there were lots of reggae bands too, rock, traditional music and more learned music such as Andalouci."

Upon his return to France, Manu started working for local radio as one of the first world music DJs in the country, and it was in the studio that he first met other Occitan activists: one of whom was Tatou, band leader of Massilia Sound System and now Moussu T e lei Jovents (see *fR269*). Yet it would take a couple more years before Manu became part of the Occitan revival movement, following a detour via Bulgaria and Italy where he absorbed a plethora of different local rhythms and repertoires.

Soon after his return from Bulgaria, Manu met Samuel, another influential figure on the Occitan scene who had had a group called Kanjar'Oc. Manu asked him for help in starting up a vocal ensemble with Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean percussion. Samuel agreed on condition that he drop Bulgarian, Corsican and Italian repertoires for Occitan only. Their newly found group – Gancha Empega – played an important role in Marseillais cultural life as it opened a way into the unexplored musical territory of Provençal polyphonic singing. Although the group didn't survive very long (its two other members being heavily involved in additional music projects), Manu's profile had been given a considerable boost and more importantly he had finally found his niche.

Soon after their split, Manu went to look for other like-minded singers on the Occitan scene. Manu: "I found five musicians who'd all been involved with different kinds of music, from reggae to techno, but all of them could sing and were involved with the rediscovery of the Occitan language."

To improve their technique and to learn how to sing in harmony and prepare for concerts, Lo Còr de la Plana enlisted the skills of a professional singing teacher, which has helped them to define their sound. Their long takes, and intricate, overlapping harmonies form roaming, obscure Occitan labyrinths with a humorous trail laid down for the adventurous listener to follow. These paths are often in the form of long songs, containing the stories and socio-political meanings which Lo Còr de la Plana make a point of exploring during workshops and educational projects, organised through a charitable organisation called La Compagnie du Lamparo. "Last year we focused on political song, this year it will be romance and love and hate songs. But we don't really teach as such. We are just transmitting what we've learned ourselves and we ask nothing more than a symbolic sort of fee for our services, because in our eyes, the Occitan repertoire belongs to everyone and shouldn't be appropriated by anyone. Occitan is a common good."

Lo Còr de la Plana almost use their music as an opportunity to challenge any misconceptions about the revival of ancient cultures and tradition. Their mission is to capture a feeling, i.e. the ridiculousness of their idiosyncratic, everyday life experience, even if it means stirring up those who would like to see these musical forms die out in chapels. They perform their music just about anywhere: in churches, factories, bars, festivals or theatres, and do not hesitate to mix disconcerting, ancient Occitan paganism with *musique concrète*. Their knowledge of France's popular Occitan culture, inherently anthropological, helped the band to create their own sonic landscape and provided them with the necessary tools to speak to an audience unschooled in the ways of the avant-garde.

"The use of electronic technologies in our artistic process constitutes a defence, a barrier against any of the more musicological attempts to 'rearrange or recompose' an ancient past, which in our minds is a pure fantasy anyway, a waste of time, utterly useless and if anything pretty mortifying." Yet they borrow their repertoire from an ancient Occitan songbook containing over 20,000 songs. For their first album, Manu made a conscious decision to sing nothing but songs with religious themes. "We are on a kind of didactic mission. We want to teach people the various functions of our popular music, one of which was to give a spiritual dimension to the lives of an entire singing community. This function still exists today and we decided to explore these possibilities in the context of our musical creations, a context in which the creative language is no longer alive and religious sentiments practically no longer exist."

The approach of Lo Còr de la Plana is complete: from their involvement with the community, their satirical CD artwork, to their anti-capitalist struggles. They are not just a band, they are a philosophy. For Manu, what counts is, "that the musician always keeps singing with the same desire and same ardour, and the listener continues to distinguish what is distinguishable so as to refine their palette". Let's hope Lo Còr de la Plana will be over here soon, refining the hungry British palette. www.troisquatre.com



LO COR DE LA PLANA PERFORMS :

DISCOGRAPHY :

« Tant Deman » (2007) – Buda Musique - Allegro
Bravos! of Trad Magazine

« Es Lo Titre » (2003) – Nord-Sud - Nocturne
Grand Prix du Disque 2003 from the Académie Charles Cros/ fff Télérama /
Bravos! of Trad Magazine / R of Répertoire

MAIN SHOWS :

GlobalFEST, New York / Womex - Sevilla / Festival Respect – Czech Republic / Babel Med Music
Festival Stimmen-Voix-Voices – Germany / Festival d'Ile de France
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De Bouche à Oreille – Parthenay / Les Méditerranéennes – Argelès / Les Suds – Arles
Chorus des Hauts de Seine / Printemps de Pérouges / La Mounède & Festival Convivencia – Toulouse
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