

PROGRAM—LO COR DE LA PLANA NORTH AMERICAN TOUR, SPRING 2009

The French Territory can be divided into several linguistic areas: Gaelic, South German, Basque, Italic, Catalan, French and Occitan are still present on its soil. The specificity of Occitan Language is its closeness with other southern Latin languages, and the fact that it has never been an official language. It has been a written idiom for more than 10 centuries, famous for its medieval aristocratic poetry, the "trobar", the most veritable writers and composers of which were called the "troubadours". Occitan became the language of European poets during the 12th and 13th centuries, and rich noblemen and kings, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine's grand father, Guilhem, or Richard the Lion Hearted himself, wrote and composed Occitan pieces.

One of this poetry's most interesting details is the links and interactions it has developed with popular poetry, and the inventive non-written Occitan literature. Popular Occitan singing still carries testimonies of both of these elitist and popular aspects, and often inspires writers and poets by its very bright and humorous content, even when it tells about dramatic situations. Marseilles, as it is the largest southern French city, concentrates a lot of these popular Occitan characteristics. But the city's original history adds a very Mediterranean aspect in the music, by all the influences carried by the immigrants who populated the area for 26 centuries, of which the most recent are North African and Italian .

We present an anthology of traditional, but also original, songs that may give the listener a first overall view on how the Occitan spirit never fails to celebrate the vital energies of life; especially when pointed as close to its death, as the current French state likes to describe our culture.

NAU GOJATAS : NINE MAIDENS

In Castelnau (the Occitan word for Newcastle) they sing this "cançon de nau". It's an old rhythmic and poetic form composed with nine verses, describing nine items, disappearing one by one after each chorus. The number four never appears in this count down, for both superstitious and prosodic reasons. These nine girls desperately hope the boys will join them for a dance, but their suitors never show up. Some ethnomusicologists saw in this very recent lyrics (although written on an old "rondeau gascon" tune) an evocation of homosexuality. They haven't been contradicted, so far.

TANT DEMAN : MAYBE TOMORROW

This could be a mourning song, because it describes all the delayed actions and decisions we eventually postpone to an undefined term. In some countries, to say "maybe tomorrow" can mean there is no time to have these things done today, but in Marseilles "Tant Deman" means there is no way to have them done any time, and condemns them to a very close death. And in this particular song, when the singers tell Death itself "Tant Deman", it also means they think that they'll never die. Hopefully they will, but a real Marseillais always enjoys a good final joke.

LO BOSIN : THE BIG NOISE

Marseilles' people have a reputation for making unbearable noises and speaking loudly. We may find here the beginning of an explanation--and quite a Darwinist one too. The creation of the world is interpreted by many people as a struggle between joy and sadness, celebration and complaint, noise and silence; the unchanging nature of which the average Marseillais tries to reproduce here by explosive interjection and noises. This is also the only explanation that could help other people to comprehend the daily concerts of enormous insults that fill the streets at any hour.

ROMPE BASSAS : BALL BREAKER

"Lo Bosin" is immediately thus naturally followed by this recipe on how to teach all ball breakers to behave. It takes a while, because every moment of our life can turn into hell when hindered or led by a real Marseillais ball breaker. And as there is no reproach, no injunction or order that could stop them, their mysterious power to make one waste his time ends up accepted by all, and even blessed by those who truly appreciate life.

FANFARNETA :

"Fanfarneta" is the shortest nickname Occitan people could find for "Francesca". It's a really sad love story, a kind of soap opera the average medieval Occitan singer would ask a large amount of money to let you know the ending. And after the end, would have come another ending, even more catastrophic and sadder than the previous one, and more expensive too. So, in a few words, Fanfarneta's parents want her to marry the richest man in town. But the man

she really loves (whose name is Peter) waits in jail for an eventual hanging. Will Fanfarneta choose to join the man she doesn't love in a trendy 13th century castle? or will she end up in a grave with Peter ? As Occitan troubadours used to say in the Middle Ages : "durbetz la borsa, bravas gents" (open your wallets, folks)

FENIANT E GROMAND : LAZY AND GREEDY

These lyrics, written in the middle of the 19th century by a famous Marseilles plebeian poet named Victor Gelu, are still sung by many people in town. The song became a kind of anthem, because it explains why the weather is so merciful with Marseilles (compared with the rest of France). It literally says that the one who claims to not be lazy or greedy will endure a very serious divine punishment. God will send him a storm, the lightning of which will directly go to the depths of the pretentious man's rear end. As Marseillais truly admit both their natural laziness and intrinsic greediness, showers and storms rarely affect the city's climate...logical indeed.

DIEU VOS GARD': MAY GOD KEEP YOU

This is the usual sentence to say "hello" in Occitan through the 16th century. This Christmas song is interestingly contradictory, Because as God wants to keep you with him, His Son on earth tries to set you free. Is every human being a battlefield or a playground for gods of all kinds ? And is that why we so easily play with other people's feelings? A modest answer can be brought by...

LA FILHA DAU VESIN : THE NEIGHBOUR'S DAUGHTER

She became the object of the miller's desire, and got lost on her way to hell by a magic tree. She climbed it and fell down with a desperate scream. The whole city can hear it and celebrates her coming back to earth with these magic words : "let grind who wants to grind".

CONDES : THE COPS

Since Marseilles was founded 26 centuries ago, they have been its people's best friends. They have always worked together, even when not sharing the same interest in this collaboration. This "cançon de nau" is dedicated to the cops who want their weapon to be not a simple self defense instrument but also an illustration of their possible power. As only god possesses the real power, He has them killing each other. They all die in pleasant ways though, which shows us God has mercy upon our friends.

LEVA-TI DAU MITAN : GET OUT OF MY WAY

This song is a long complaint about the way some people always ask you to get out of the middle of something. From your mother's womb to the circles of Paradise, you'll be hearing this boring injunction for your whole stay in this universe, unless you decide, as this song tries to accomplish, to expel the concept of "middle" from human understanding.

LEI JORNS DE MAI : THE DAYS OF MAY

An Occitan proverb states that "love and hope have no reason and no season". This song tells us about the times where young suitors used to plant a tree to honor their fiancée's love. The tree was supposed to grow as the young woman's love grows, and expands its branches as much as both lovers hearts extend their hopes.

LA NOVIOTA : THE YOUNG BRIDE

After the engagement time comes the rough reality of marriage. Here is a song about an unfortunately married bride, whose spouse starts their wedding night by telling a good pair of prayers and falling asleep. The young woman escapes from the conjugal bed's sadness, joining her cousin in a real love party. When the husband wakes up and finds no one by his side, he desperately looks for his lost treasure. And as he opens the bedrooms shutters, the cuckoo gently reminds him his condition, by singing what nature taught it to sing : cocut, cocut (which in Occitan means either cuckold or cuckoo). Interestingly, the cuckoo is known to lay its eggs in other bird's nests.

LA VIELHA : THE OLD WOMAN

We end up the show with this song about an old hungry widow who deeply wants to marry a young man. But instead of sending her to the seventh heaven, the wedding night's working out pushes the old unhealthy bride down into her grave. Her unsuspected and happy new widower celebrates the event by spending all his inheritance looking for a younger wife.

LO CÒR DE LA PLANA

The aim is both to make the public aware of vocal music and to wake up those who fall asleep at polyphony concerts...

Lo Còr de la Plana (pronounce "Loo coahr deh la plahn") is a male ensemble from the quarter of La Plaine in Marseille. Six singers accompanied by percussions (bendirs and tamburello), "picaments" (foot stomping) and "bataments" (hand clapping).

Founded in 2001, the formation has launched into the systematic re-creation of popular Occitan heritage. With unrivalled passion they sing all repertoires, from the most religious to the most unfettered, the repetitive to the occasional (quite often at the same time !). Lo Còr has this new, definitive desire to do away with "traditional" song, to cross swords with vocal music and polyphony, even if it means stirring up those who would like to see these music forms die a death in chapels...

Our influences are everywhere : in churches, factories, bars, festivals or theatres, and do not hesitate to mix disconcerting paganism of old Occitan backgrounds with the preoccupations of Marseille musicians of today. They do not renounce any influence, from Bartok to Massilia Sound System, or any origin, from Oran to Rove, as their only ambition is to evoke and resonate in their music all that their city and the world around it has given them in terms of sounds. A police siren, a newborn baby, the remains of a paradise or a fantasyland, a drunken party, sheep, wolves... in short, the peaceful, heady passion of day-to-day life!

Their past performances include major across Europe including: Festival Respect – Czech Republic; Babel Med Music; Festival Stimmen-Voix-Voices – Germany; Festival d’Ile de France; Festival Villes des Musiques du Monde; Festival SFINKS – Belgium ; Fira de Manresa – Spain; Estivada – Rodez/ Haïfa – Israël; Tanz & Folkfest – Rudolstadt – Germany; Les Méditerranéennes – Argelès; Les Suds – Arles; Chorus des Hauts de Seine; Printemps de Pérouges; La Mounède & Festival Convivencia – Toulouse; Festival de Saint Chartier . Most recently they were featured at Globalfest in New York and hailed by the New York Times as

“The most striking group at GlobalFest. And with just those voices and percussion, they did remarkable things. They sang rich chordal harmonies and joyfully ricocheting counterpoint.”

It is with great excitement that we welcome Lo Cor on their first-ever tour of North America, and look forward to this as the beginning of many successful experiences here.

Lo Cor de la Plana are:

Sébastien Spessa : Basse

Manu Théron : Seconde, bendir

Rodin Kaufmann : Seconde bourdon rythmique

Benjamin Novarino-Giana : Seconde tierce

Manuel Barthélémy : Seconde, tamburello

Denis Sampieri : Seconde basse bourdon rythmique, bendir

Artistic Direction:

Manu Theron

North American representation:

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Management:

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