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JE NE VAIS PAS PARLER FRANÇAIS À L'ÉCOLE:
PRESERVATION OF CAJUN CULTURE THROUGH SONG

by

Nancy Carey

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Doctor of Musical Arts

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify gaps in existing literature and records of Cajun folksongs, and to validate art song arrangements of this repertoire as a significant contribution to the canon of Cajun music. Though it continues to evolve and thrive as a commercial music genre, Cajun folk music is underrepresented in notated form. Transcription is vital to the preservation of folk music; however, previously published collections of these folksongs offer incomplete analysis. Composer Costas Dafnis' arrangements of these songs for voice and piano have the potential to increase their exposure with classical musicians in professional and academic settings, and also to ameliorate existing collections of these songs.

Art songs serve as ideal vessels for disseminating folk music. Through the arranging process, a strict lens of analysis isolates rhythmic structure, individual components of melody, and harmonic function in a manner which may illuminate previously unexamined style traits. This process of analysis is its own contribution to the literature of folk traditions, and offers a further contribution by introducing this rich song tradition to a new audience of performers and scholars who are custodians of historical music.

The title of this dissertation makes reference to the eradication of the French language from Louisiana schools during the 20th century. Students who used French in spoken or written form were sternly punished and famously asked to write one hundred lines of: "I will not speak French in school." Songs became the primary vehicle for oral tradition during and following this French language moratorium.

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Introduction

A particular sound comes to mind at the mention of Cajun music— one often described as *chanky-chank, pitchy, twangy*. Perhaps this sound is accompanied by images of crowded dance halls and front porch jam sessions, but this imagery is merely a caricature of Cajun music.

According to Cajun musician and historian Ann Savoy in *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People*:

Describing Cajun music would be like summarizing one hundred years of the evolution of a people. Surely the music is different things to different people. It is a lone ballad singer singing song stories as remembered from French and Acadian ancestors; it's the acoustic wail of an accordion heard echoing for miles from the porch of an isolated house on the prairie; it's the music played by friends crowded together in a kitchen corner playing music and drinking beer while spicy odors of a sauce piquante fill the room. Cajun music is also the slick, electric band with accordion, steel guitar, and twin fiddles in the dim, smoke filled club, filled with gliding dancers; it's the rubboard and the triple row accordion driving to the beat of an electric bass in a black club in a creole community; it's a lonely song with a fiddle seconding the beat, while the lead fiddle plays it's heart out.¹

At the core of this cultural practice is an oral tradition, perhaps the most enduring European oral tradition in North America, with roots dating back as far as the twelfth century. It has survived multiple trans-Atlantic displacements, a nineteenth century cultural metamorphosis, anti-francophone legislation, and continues to live and evolve today.

¹ Savoy, Ann Allen. 1984. *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People*. (Eunice: Bluebird Press, 1984), xi.

Chapter 1: Le Grand Dérangement

Fifteen years before the Pilgrims docked off the coast of Plymouth, Massachusetts, the first French nationals settled what was to become *Acadia*. The early colony, Port Royal, was established in what is now Nova Scotia. Within eight years, in 1613, the Acadian presence in the region had begun to be perceived by British shipping captains as formidable, precipitating what would be the first of many attacks on the Acadian population.¹ The destruction of Port Royal left Acadia under English control until 1632, but did not deter the French colonial agenda to establish a viable settlement in the region.² On April 1, 1636, the first French pioneer families boarded the *Saint-Jehan* and crossed the Atlantic for the resettled Port Royal in Acadia. The majority of these early pioneers originated from Loudon in the Poitou region of southwestern France,³ but an increased number of French provinces were represented in the Acadian colony as relocation from France to Acadia continued until 1714.⁴

Citizens of Acadia did not have to pay taxes, but colonial directives for labor, provisions, and military service went far beyond what was asked of French citizens who resided in France. Acadian colonists lacked state-sanctioned security, administrative, legal, and infrastructural benefits which would have been extended to them in France.⁵ A primary motivation of relocation from Poitou to Acadia was hope of escaping the military conflict with Britain which had plagued

¹ Perrin, Warren A. "The Birth of a People – 1604 to 1755," in *Acadia: Then and Now: A People's History*, ed. Mary Broussard Perrin and Phil Comeau (Opelousas: Andrepont Publishing, 2014), 5.

² Ibid.

³ Kennedy, Gregory, *Something of a Peasant Paradise?: Comparing Rural Societies in Acadia and the Loudunais, 1604-1755*. (Mcgill: Queen's University Press, 2014), 11.

⁴ Perrin, "The Birth of a People – 1604 to 1755," 6.

⁵ Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise*, 48.

France for many years.⁶ This hope was soon squelched as Acadia became a primary theatre of operation in the conflict between England and France from 1605 and 1763. Acadia changed hands no fewer than ten times as a result of this ongoing military discord.⁷

An additional complicating factor was the Acadian relationship with the neighboring indigenous population. The First Nations peoples who inhabited the maritime region of New France are now recognized as the Wabanaki Confederacy—a coalition which includes Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Abenaki, and Penobscot nations. Of these five groups, the Mi'kmaq interacted most closely with the Acadians. This alliance was forged during the earliest years of Acadian settlement when the Mi'kmaq introduced Acadians to the resources necessary for surviving harsh winters and English assaults. The cultural interaction between Acadians and their indigenous neighbors eventually became reciprocal. Most of the Mi'kmaq adopted Catholicism, and marriage between the Acadians and neighboring indigenous groups was not uncommon. There are accounts of one early Acadian settler marrying the daughter of an Abenaki chief, eventually assuming leadership of the entire tribe.⁸

Acadian settlers adopted new farming, trapping, and hunting methods from their indigenous counterparts, which resulted in a coinciding cultural shift. A new patois of French emerged as Acadians embraced the Mi'kmaq language. Some linguists even suggest that *Acadia* comes from the Mi'kmaq word for abundance.⁹ This linguistic blending became the common

⁶ Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise*, 49.

⁷ *Ibid*, 48.

⁸ Rushton, William Faulkner. *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana*. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979), 41.

⁹ Rushton, 41.

tongue in Acadia, and was eventually codified as “Acadian.”¹⁰ This increased cultural enmeshment between the Acadians and Mi’kmaq heightened the cultural estrangement Acadians felt from France and Britain.

¹⁰ MacLeod, Katie K. “Displaced Mixed-Blood: An Ethnographic Exploration of Métis Identities in Nova Scotia.” Master’s thesis, Carleton University, 2013. Academia.edu.

Table 1: Mi'kmaq derived Acadian Terms

Acadien	Français	English
Na	Voilà	That's it
Mam	Mère	Mother
Nanane	Norriture pour bébé	Baby food
Kokiches	Premières dents	First teeth
Caristeaux	Bottes de peau	Hide boots
Babiche	Tissage de peau	Raw hide weaving
Tobagane	Traineau	Sleigh
Tomahawk	Hache	Ax
Wisinne	Baton	Stick
Mêmetchais	Marécages	Swamps
Tamaracks	Mélèzes "violin"	Larch trees
Caribou	Reene du Canada	Reindeer
Beauwiche	Perdrix	Partridge
Kaekagougie	Corneille	Crow
Coucougouèche	Hibou	Owl
Titigris	Grand-duc	Great-horned owl
Machequoui	Écorce de bouleau	Birch bark
madouesse	Porc-épic	Porcupine
Cawidges	Aiguilles de porc-épic	Porcupine quills
Boucane	Fumée	Smoke
Sissiboo	Grande rivière	Great river
Bonhomme couèche	Marmotte	Woodchuck
Mascouèche	Raton laveur	Raccoon
Chebec	Lieu étroit	Narrow place
Gwégusse	passage étroit	Narrow passage
Ouaouarons	Grenouilles	Frogs
Picogies	Nénuphars	Water lilies
Nigogue	Lance à anguille	Eel spear
Nijagan	Enclos pour prendre le poisson	Fish weir
Moiacs	Eiders	Eiders
Couimoux	Huards	Common loons
Mawgouèches	Huards à gorge rousse	Red-throated loons
Quiggueniche	Havre à deux entrées	Harbour with two entrances
Canot	Canoe	Canoe
Pagayes	Avirons	Paddles
Gaspareaux	Sorte de hareng	Alewives
Poulamons	Poisson des chenaux	Frost fish "tomcod"
Tenoine	Tendon	Tendon
Chicabennes	Patates savages	Artichokes
Souriquois	Les homes de l'eau salée	Salt water men

Source: MacLeod, Katie K. "Displaced Mixed-Blood: An Ethnographic Exploration of Métis Identities in Nova Scotia." Master's thesis, Carleton University, 2013. Academia.edu.

Britain increasingly pressured Acadians for an official proclamation of allegiance following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Acadians feared that an oath of allegiance to Great Britain would eventually require that they be called upon to bear arms against their French relatives in the

future wars.¹¹ The Acadians also refused to take an oath of allegiance to Britain without a clause exempting them from being forced to bear arms against the Mi'kmaq. The Acadians feared deterioration of their relations with the Mi'kmaq, whom they perceived as “blood brothers.”¹² Interactions between French settlers and the Mi'kmaq forged Acadian identity and culture, and had facilitated Acadian prosperity and security in New France. Furthermore, it was understood that the Mi'kmaq would undoubtedly perceive Acadian loyalty to Britain as a threat to their own independence, which could potentially subject the Acadians to physical threats from the Mi'kmaq.¹³

In response to mounting pressure from British government officials, Mi'kmaq chiefs sent an incendiary letter to the British government which stated, “We are masters, and dependents of no one.”¹⁴ As Governor Richard Philipps continued to press the Acadians for their loyalty, the Acadians asserted their *right* to be there. In a demonstration of their espousal of Mi'kmaq philosophy, the Acadians asserted that they were their own masters and possessed inherent rights which entitled them to habitation of the land they had developed in Acadia, as well as exemption from providing an explicit statement of political allegiance to Britain.¹⁵

The provenance of Cajun culture is an event most commonly referred to as *Le Grand Dérangement*. This “Great Upheaval” was a mass-displacement of Acadians from the Maritime provinces of Canada, then Acadia, which began in 1755 when British authorities ousted the Acadians by military force. *Le Grand Dérangement* persisted until the end of the Seven Years

¹¹ Perrin, “The Birth of a People – 1604 to 1755,” 7.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ William Faulkner Rushton, *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979), 42.

¹⁴ Perrin, “The Birth of a People – 1604 to 1755,” 7.

¹⁵ Ibid.

War in 1763. In the end, the siege and expulsion precipitated the deaths of more than half of the Acadian population, constituting a near-eradication of Acadian people and culture.¹⁶

¹⁶ Faragher, John M. *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland*. (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2005), xvii-xviii.

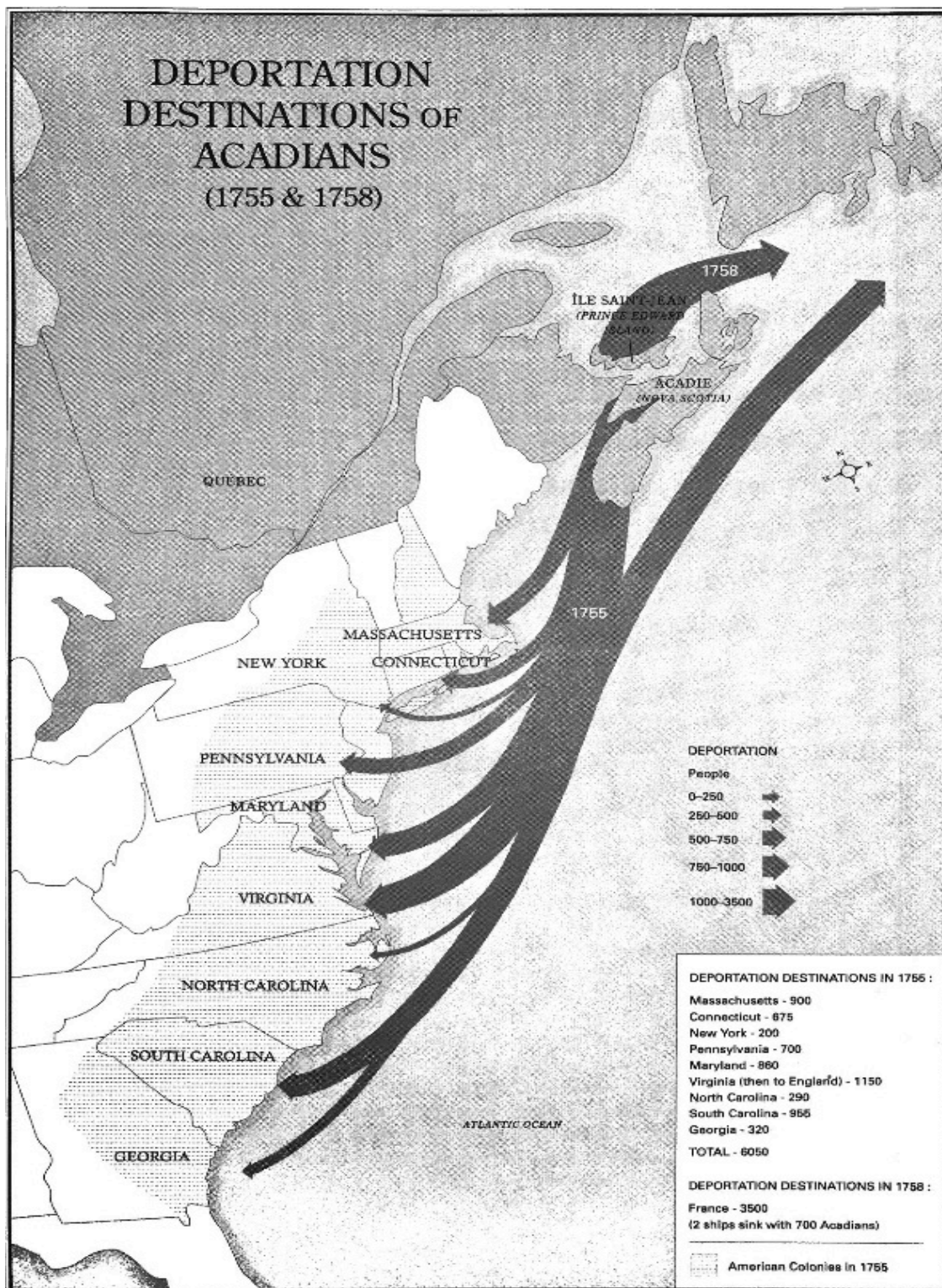


Figure 1: Deportation Destinations of Acadians; Source—Phil Comeau-Warren Perrin-Mary Perrin, *Acadia: Then and Now: A People's History*. (Opelousas, LA: Andrepont Publishing, 2014) 15.

Some survivors escaped westward to New France, now Québec. Those who did not escape were sent to British colonies, where they were met with tremendous hostility. Upon arrival in Maryland, the Acadian colonists found the colony inflamed by anti-Catholic agitation, and rampant francophobia spawned from the military conflict between Great Britain and France.¹⁷ Acadians who were banished to Pennsylvania faced social ostracism, governmental oppression, and economic deprivation.¹⁸ Survival in the British colonies would require assimilation, which the Acadians resisted.

Acadians who were not sent southward to British colonies were sent across the Atlantic, directly to Britain, and were ultimately “repatriated” to France in 1759.¹⁹ Arrival in France was not a return home for the Acadians, all of whom were members of one of the oldest colonial settlements in North America, thus no longer identifying as French.²⁰ Documentation conveys that in France, the circumstances of the Acadians were no more favorable than in Britain:

France’s prevailing social and economic systems, like those in the Middle Atlantic colonies, were anathema to the expatriates. As frontiersmen out of step and time with the motherland’s feudal society, trapped by their destitution in the slums of the Atlantic ports in which they arrived, the immigrants faced a bleak future. Unable to compete in the urban job market and unwilling to renounce their traditional independence for denigrating employment as peasants in rural areas, the Acadians in France consistently found themselves on the royal dole. The native Frenchmen, already overburdened by taxes, soon resented the apparently indolent exiles they were now compelled to support. The resulting ethnic friction underscored sociocultural differences between the rival groups, Frenchmen, for their part, usually attempted to treat the exiles as peasants and were dumbfounded when their condescension was greeted with “insolence.” Acadians, on the other hand, found little

¹⁷ Brasseaux, Carl A. *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803*. (Baton Rouge, La: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 55.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

acceptance of their ethnicity and even less appreciation for their insistence upon resettlement in a rural setting, which they believed would restore their sense of personal dignity and independence.²¹

Resettlement of seventy-seven Acadian families was initiated within France in 1765. The chosen site was Belle-Ile-en-Mer, a windswept island off Brittany. Drought, crop failure, livestock epidemics, and tax inflation plagued the new settlement for a number of years until it was entirely abandoned in 1772. Failure of this site necessitated that the Acadians abandon it and resume unfavorable residency in French seaport communities.²²

The first Acadian settlers to arrive in Louisiana were initially exiled to Georgia. This group of four interrelated families reached the lower Mississippi in 1764. They were followed by Joseph “Beausoleil” Broussard, the famed renegade who guided 192 Acadians from Halifax to New Orleans in 1765. Dozens of Acadian survivors of *Le Grand Dérangement* who had first sought refuge in the French colony of Saint Domingue, but sought a more temperate climate, settled in Louisiana later that year. By 1767, several hundred Acadians had arrived from Pennsylvania and Maryland.²³

Considerable interest on relocation to Louisiana developed as word of successful resettlement began to spread throughout Acadian refugee communities of France. No clear strategy for relocation to Louisiana was presented until 1783, when the Spanish government offered to subsidize the emigration of hundreds of Acadians who resided in French in an effort to strengthen

²¹ Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia*, 55.

²² Ibid.

²³ Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 198.

the Spanish colony against the newly independent United States.²⁴ In 1785, seven expeditions of Acadians left Nantes, France to journey again across the Atlantic, this time for Louisiana.²⁵ The migration, which relocated 1,596 Acadians, constituted the largest to that colony during the eighteenth century. The new arrivals were welcomed by Spanish officials in New Orleans with medical assistance and provision, and were allowed the freedom to choose where they would settle.²⁶ Some joined relatives along the Mississippi, but the vast majority settled near Bayou Lafourche, a newly opened district west of the Mississippi River. Faragher remarks in *A Great and Noble Scheme*:

With this mass movement from France, the Acadians established themselves as one of the largest and most distinct groups in Louisiana. By the end of the eighteenth century there were some four thousand of them in the *nouvelle l'Acadia* of the South.²⁷

The Acadians were met with extraordinary cultural diversity upon their arrival in Louisiana, even among the many other Francophone settlers to the region.²⁸ Home to former residents of European cities, Caribbean and South American tropics, and the farms of western France, Louisiana's Acadian settlements ranked among the most cosmopolitan of North America.²⁹ Surprisingly, despite circumstances of displacement which pressured the Acadians to abandon their culture, the Acadians preserved their cultural integrity during *Le Grand*

²⁴ Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 435.

²⁵ Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia*, 72.

²⁶ Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 436.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Ancelet, Barry. *Cajun Music: Its Origins and Development* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1989), 1.

²⁹ Hodson, Christopher. *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) 198.

Dérangement.³⁰ As Acadian culture converged with the existing cultural milieu of Louisiana, a new identity emerged. This new identity was rooted in French oral tradition and the inclusive social ideologies Acadians adopted from the Mi'kmaq, enriched by exposure to a diverse palate of new musics, languages, and traditions. This was the transformation from *Acadian* to *Cajun*.

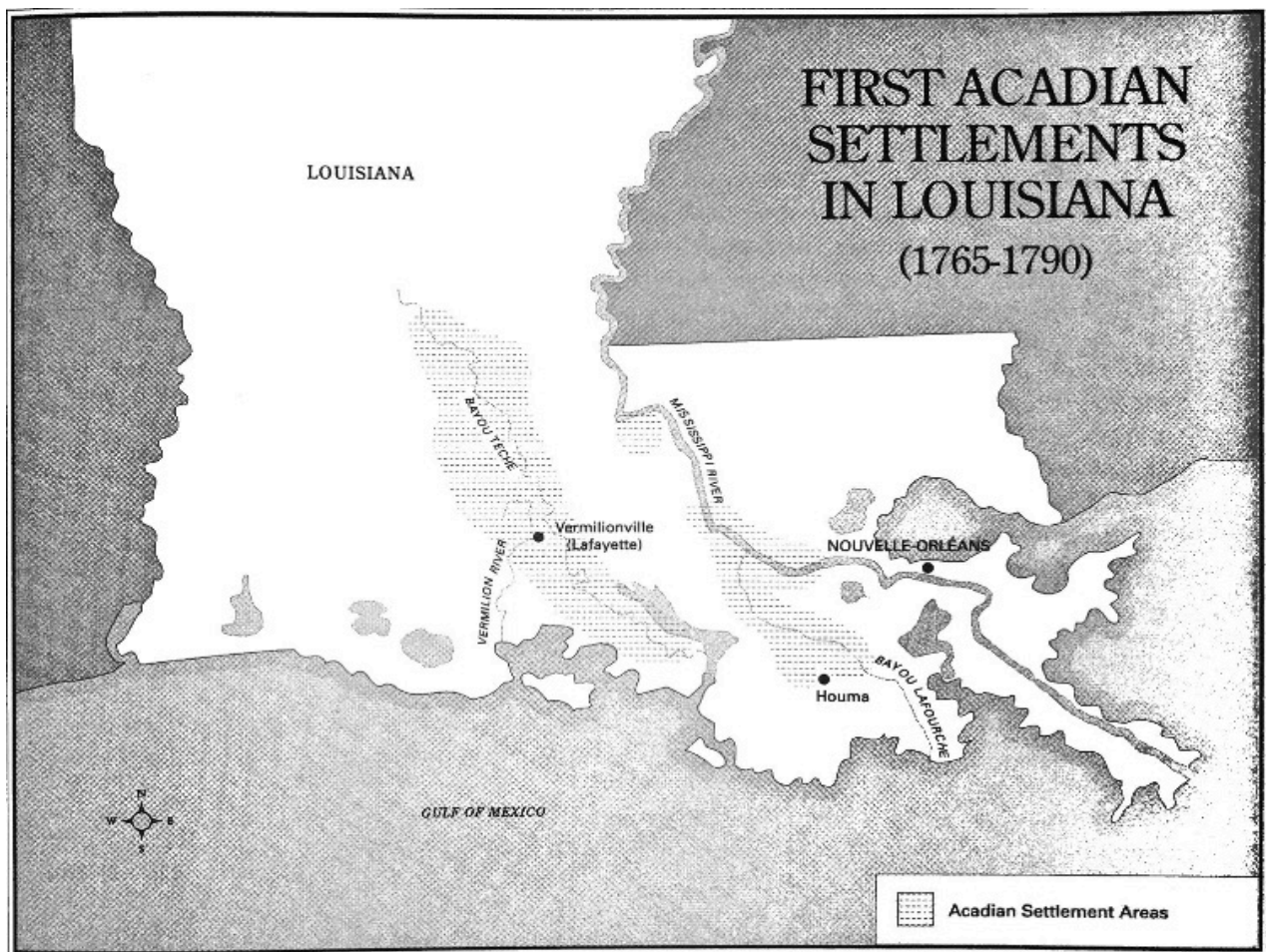


Figure 2: Map of First Acadian Settlements in Louisiana; Source—Perrin, Warren A. "The Birth of a People – 1604 to 1755." *In Acadia Then and Now: A People's History*. (Opelousas: Andreont Publishing, 2014) 299.

³⁰ Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia*, 47.

Table 2: Timeline of Acadian Diaspora and Resettlement in Louisiana

1604	Pierre Du Gua de Monts leads the failed first attempt to settle lands in New France, now known as Acadia.
1632	Settlement of Acadia begins with families from western France. French colonialism continues in the region until 1714.
1682	La Salle claims the vast Louisiana territory for France.
1713	France loses Acadia under the Treaty of Utrecht.
1715	France founds Natchitoches, Louisiana to defend its frontier against Spain.
1718	Port of New Orleans is established.
1755	<i>Le Grande Dérangement</i> —Acadian expulsion from Nova Scotia to British colonies.
1759	Acadians arrive in France.
1763	End of French and Indian War. 800 Acadians who were held prisoner for seven years in Britain are returned to French ports in Brittany.
1775	1,300 Acadians reunite in Nantes, France and request permission to emigrate to Louisiana.
1785	1,600 Acadians leave Nantes in seven convoys from May to October, bound for New Orleans.
1803	Louisiana Purchase; Louisiana is transferred from France to the United States.
1812	Louisiana becomes the 18 th state of the United States.

Chapter 2: Transculturation from Acadian to Cajun

Napoleon Bonaparte took Louisiana from Spain in 1800 and sold it to the fledgling United States in 1803, qualifying Louisiana as the first true “melting pot” in North America. In the midst of diaspora, Acadians adamantly resisted assimilation. They had retained their idiosyncratic culture, refusing to adopt the beliefs, practices, and identities they encountered during *Le Grand Dérangement*.¹ However, this long-held ideology changed as Acadians were immersed in Louisiana’s cultural diversity.

The Acadian influx into Louisiana was substantial enough that it engulfed not only many colonists who were already in Louisiana when Acadians arrived, but also later arrivals. Spanish colonists never constituted a large enough population to effectively retain a separate ethnic identity, and eventually began intermarrying with the Acadians. The same was true of French, German, and French Créoles, as well as later arrivals from France—referred to as “Foreign French” —Ireland, Scotland, upper Louisiana, and other parts of the United States.² These cultural interchanges transformed the Acadian community and produced a new people—the Cajuns. The Cajuns perpetuated a cultural synthesis based on traditional Acadian values, but which included cultural, linguistic, and musical elements of the group’s non-Acadian members.³

The Acadians were participants in a process of transculturation described by folklorist Barry Ancelet as a blend of German, Spanish, Scottish, Irish, Anglo-American, Afro-Caribbean, and American Indian influences with a base of Western French and French Acadian folk

¹ Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora*, 198.

² Perrin, 307.

³ Brasseaux, Carl A., *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1992) xiv.

traditions.⁴ This event of transculturation coalesced between 1803 and 1877, changing the group's identification from Acadians to Cajuns. Cajun music historian Ryan Brasseaux explains:

Cajun' demarcates the exiles' departure from predispersed Acadian culture, a metamorphosis that differentiated south Louisiana Acadians from exiles who sought refuge in other parts of the world... 'Cajun', then, is a synthetic New World product—an amalgamation of the cultural influences that converged to varying degree in south Louisiana.⁵

Since its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century, the ethnonym “Cajun” has been used as a label for individuals of francophone origins, as well as other immigrant groups that settled in Louisiana.⁶ The term itself is representative of the experience of transculturation which differentiated Louisiana's Cajuns from their Acadian ancestors. As Louisiana Acadians engaged with non-francophone cultures, or cultures which spoke differing dialects of French, the French pronunciation of “Acadian” became “'cadien,” and eventually “Cajun”.

A commonly embraced historical appraisal is that all Acadians who came to Louisiana eventually became Cajuns, as did anyone having at least one Acadian ancestor.⁷ However, this analysis omits significant other criteria. Recent scholarship calls attention to the fact that Acadians in Louisiana underwent a cultural metamorphosis which resulted not only from increased cultural exposure, but also from socio-economic fragmentation within the Acadian population itself.⁸ Acadian socioeconomic classes emerged during the antebellum period, likely resulting from newfound economic opportunity in Louisiana following generations of poverty

⁴ Ancelet, Barry. *Cajun Music: Its Origins and Development* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1989), 1.

⁵ Brasseaux, Ryan André. *Cajun Breakdown*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) viii.

⁶ Le Menstrel, Sara. *Negotiating Difference in French Louisiana Music: Categories, Stereotypes, and Identifications* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2015) 17.

⁷ Perrin, 307.

⁸ Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun*, 3.

during the years of displacement and migration from Acadia.⁹ With economic stability came access to education, and more affluent Acadians began to model their lifestyles after the Louisiana's respected Créole planter class. Division arose between the educated minority and the majority demographic of *petits habitants*, who were small-scale farmers.¹⁰ Aside from their biological ties to the Acadian community, upwardly mobile Acadians had increasingly little contact with their ancestral culture. Eventually, this Acadian planter class began to consciously avoid affiliation with *les petits habitants*, instead choosing to adopt the more mainstream Anglo-American culture and identify as Créole.¹¹

Newcomers to Louisiana who were outsiders to the wealthy Créole social strata quickly came to identify downwardly mobile elements of other white ethnic groups with the dominant ethnic group in their socioeconomic niche—the Cajuns. These newcomers were inducted into the Cajun community. The resulting cross-cultural marriages, particularly in the early years of the post-antebellum era, influenced the Cajun community tremendously. As these non-Acadians began to identify as Cajun, their ancestral cultures became as influential to Cajun culture as much as Acadian culture had on the smaller groups that were absorbed.¹²

Sugar cane became a profitable commodity in the nineteenth century, resulting in the abandonment of farming in favor of occupation in the sugar industry. The expansion of the sugar cane industry precipitated further complexity of class distinction. Sara Le Menstrel explains the social impact of the sugar cane industry within Cajun communities:

⁹ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰ Le Menstrel, 12.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun*, xiv.

...after the Civil War, the political turbulence of the Reconstruction combined with social and economic changes accelerated class distinctions, and frames them within a binary opposition between the acculturated Acadian educated elite and indigenous Louisiana Cajuns abandoned by their antebellum leadership and reduced to tenantry and poverty by the end of the nineteenth century. The “Cajun” and “Acadian” labels are thus situated within a narrative of social stratification that has shaped the current registers of identification.¹³

From the beginning of Louisiana’s statehood in 1812, the United States government enforced legal requirements that it conform to the language and culture of the rest of the United States. The Enabling Act of 1811 dictated that Louisiana, upon receiving statehood, was required to conduct its judicial and legislative written proceedings in English. Louisiana was functionally bilingual for most of the nineteenth century, and its judicial and legislative documents were published in both French and English. However, this policy was abandoned in 1867 when the Louisiana legislature ceased publishing its session laws in French.

In the years following the Civil War, the affluent population of Louisiana recognized that their future economic prosperity would require that they increasingly identify as English-speaking Americans. As a result, they began sending their children to English-language schools. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt declared an official language of the United States: English.¹⁴ The French language became the object of increasing deprecation when it was banned from classrooms by the Louisiana State Board of Education in 1916, and was later banned in the state constitution of 1921.¹⁵

¹³ Le Menstrel, 12.

¹⁴ Perrin, 309

¹⁵ Le Menstrel, 12.

Chapter 3: Origins of Cajun Music

Within the details of the process of transculturation from Acadian to Cajun lies the origin story of Cajun music. Cajun music is the product of creolization, and differs significantly from the traditional musics of other North American francophone cultures. It is also disparate from the seemingly adjacent American folk music traditions found in Appalachia.¹ While still in Acadia, the French folk music of the Acadians was altered through the New World influences of British settlers and Native Americans. Upon arrival in Louisiana, Acadian music was transformed stylistically, while Acadian songs themselves were preserved to a surprising and unparalleled extent. These songs sampled melodies and forms of long-existing folk tunes, with lyrics edited to reflect new life in Louisiana.²

Though there are few liturgical references found in published documentation of Cajun songs, Catholicism was a defining aspect of Acadian culture. Prior to the departure of French citizens for Acadia in the seventeenth century, the families which would eventually be known as Acadians lived alongside Huguenot communities during the violence of the Protestant Reformation. While in Acadia, the Catholic Acadians were continually pawns of the protestant British government. During the displacement of *Le Grand Dérangement*, Acadians exiled to British colonies were persecuted as much for their Catholic religion as they were for their French language and ancestry. Catholic faith was the cornerstone of Acadian culture, and was a priority as refugees sought friendly territories for resettlement. Though Cajun songs are virtually devoid of religious references, ties to Catholicism are evident in an overwhelming majority of Cajun melodies which date back to the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Modality is a

¹ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 1.

² Ibid.

defining characteristic of Cajun music, and a large number of melodies reflect the modes used in liturgical chant.

Cajun music historian Ryan Brasseaux divides the evolution of Cajun music into two broad categories—the precommercial era (1764–1927) and the commercial era (1928–present). He further identifies three distinct phases during the precommercial era—phase I (1764–1830), phase II (1830–1880), and phase III (1880–1927). The precommercial era encompasses Cajun music’s formative years, and the least documented and least understood period in its development. In *Cajun Breakdown: The Emergence of an American-Made Music* he postulates, “Empire sewed the seeds of Cajun music. New France clashed with New England and wrestled with New Spain in a geopolitical contest for territorial control in North America. Positioned at the crossroads of empire, Acadia and, later, Louisiana buffered the French interest on the continent.”³

The gestational stage of Cajun music—phase I—began when Acadian exiles reached the shores of Louisiana. The refugees who established the initial Acadian settlements of the territory presumably sang unaccompanied songs for their musical entertainment. The only substantiated documentation regarding Acadian music in colonial Louisiana makes only obscure reference to the preferred instrumentation.⁴ Field work conducted by folklorists during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries suggest that the Acadians brought songs which reflected their recent history in Acadia as well as their pre-Acadian French ancestry.

During phase I, affluent Acadian planters joined Louisiana’s nouveau bourgeoisie and sought formal musical training as a means of further associating with white Créoles and French upper classes. As new musical tastes developed among members of this demographic, they became

³ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 8.

⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

increasingly removed from their ancestral songs, and music became another distinguishing factor in the growing socioeconomic gap between Acadian planters and their counterparts, *les petits habitants*.⁵

The music we now recognize as Cajun music, and the songs which have been fostered for centuries as part of the tradition, is the music of the Cajun working class. Whereas Acadian members of the *nouvelle bourgeoisie* were introduced to the conventions of functional harmony through formal musical training and the opportunity to attend professional opera performances in New Orleans, the poorer class was Bayou-bound and derived their understanding of tonality from French folk songs and the only formal setting in which they encountered music, Catholic mass. *Les petits habitants* maintained a separate and distinct dance culture from the wealthier planter class, and venues for social dances were dubbed *bals de maison*, or house balls. The first descriptions of *bals de maison* date from 1803 when French immigrant and writer C. C. Robin witnessed such a gathering along Bayou Lafourche.⁶

During phase II of the precommercial era (1830–1880), Americanization became a significant cultural influence. This period was transformational for the Acadian population as they were social and economic participants in antebellum Louisiana, and later experienced the ravages of the Civil War and the virtual collapse of the American South's economy. Their agricultural involvement continued during the rise of sharecropping, which increased interaction with black neighbors. These events altered the course of the Acadian sociocultural and musical landscapes.⁷

⁵ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

Increased contact between the Acadians—whose appellation “Cajun” had by that time been codified as a pejorative term—and their black neighbors altered the attitude and feel of Cajun music.⁸ After the Civil War, when poor whites worked alongside black sharecroppers, new musical elements were adopted. Syncopation, call-and-response, and emotive vocals became essential components of Cajun dance music.⁹ These influences also elevated the Cajun harmonic repertoire in pivotal ways, facilitating more felicitous settings of a number of texts whose optimistic, playful melodies in major keys defied their somber, introspective lyrics. An entertaining event of this apt harmonic reassignment occurred with “Mon petit mari,” which originated in France and whose narrative is rather gruesome. The Acadian version sets the story of a husband being devoured by a housecat to a dancelike, joyous tune. The Cajun version is a vast improvement upon the Acadian setting, and is even more germane and plaintive than its French origins, resulting from the inclusion of dominant seventh chords. Furthermore, credit is likely owed to Cajun music’s African influences for contributing new ideas about song accompaniment.¹⁰

Songs and instrumental music typically served different purposes until the late 19th century. Ballads and folksongs were most often used for the purposes of storytelling, and were generally performed unaccompanied. With the exception of *danse rondes*, which were sung dance turns with no instrumental accompaniment, dance music was almost entirely instrumental. Exposure to African dance traditions—in which music, singing, and dancing were interwoven as a single practice—uprooted the European distinctions drawn between storytelling and dance music.¹¹

⁸ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁰ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 19.

Other ethnic groups impacted Cajun music during the transformational period of the nineteenth century. American Indians, who made massive contributions to Acadian language prior to *Le Grand Dérangement*, introduced a style of terraced singing which continues to be found in the heterophonic texture of Cajun music today. Jewish German neighbors imported diatonic accordions. Spanish colonists contributed new melodies, which continue to be recognizable in contemporary settings of Cajun music, including one of the best-known Cajun songs of the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, “J’ai passé devant la porte.”¹²

The years between 1880 and 1927 constituted phase III of the precommercial era. During this period, new technologies facilitated the Cajun population’s exposure to outside cultural influences. With the development of railroads and steamboats during the late-nineteenth century, followed by the inception of a national communications network and the rise of the automobile in the twentieth century, American popular entertainment became increasingly available in Bayou Country.¹³ As the twentieth century progressed, stylistic changes occurred more frequently. The use of the accordion in recordings of Cajun songs fell out of vogue during the 1940s. Though a corpus of existing songs had remained in circulation for the first decades of the recording era, original songs and reimagined instrumentation contributed to a minor Cajun music renaissance during the 1950s.¹⁴ Likewise, the effects of Americanization became increasingly apparent throughout the twentieth century. The popularity of rock and roll became influential to Cajun musicians in the 1950s and 1960s. Louisiana boasted a number of notable natives among rock and roll’s most revered musicians, among them Jerry Lee Lewis and Antoine “Fats” Domino. The

¹² Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 17.

¹³ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 12.

¹⁴ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 31.

result was an exchange between Cajun and rock and roll musicians which generated a new genre—*swamp pop*. As Cajun-adjacent genres gained popularity and more original songs were written and recorded, Cajun music drifted from its origins. With this realization, respected Cajun musicians were called to action, and strategic efforts were made to preserve traditional Cajun songs.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 36-37.

Chapter 4: Instrumentation Associated with Cajun Music

Of all the varying images of Cajun music, one of the least likely is that of one person, alone with a guitar, singing and playing a Cajun song. This is because the music is most often used as a focal point of social gatherings, and is usually played by an ensemble.¹ Prior to settlement in Acadia, western French instrumental tradition had included brass and reed instruments, but these instruments fell into disuse in the New World, but effective substitutions were found.² Barry Ancelet elaborates:

Tunes were transferred to string instruments, yet retained a distinctive drone. The French *vielle à route*, within its characteristic *bourdon* drone, was too complicated and delicate to survive frontier conditions, but early fiddlers playing in open tuning achieved a similar effect. By the time of the exile, English and Scots-Irish reels, jogs, hornpipes, and *contredanses* had already enriched the Acadians' repertoire of dance music.³

During Lent, when instruments were unavailable and music was forbidden, Acadians produced music with their voices, and incorporated clapping and stomping as percussion. This improvisational nature extended further if round dances ever became stale, at which time they supplemented instrumentation with their voices to produce dance tunes called *reels à bouche*.⁴ French colonists in Louisiana, contemporaries of the first wave of Acadian settlers to the region, incorporated use of the fiddle as instrumentation. The earliest documented reference to Cajun instrumentation dates back to 1782, and alludes to the popularity of the fiddle and clarinet among Acadian colonist in Louisiana. However, it is assumed, based on the limited resources available to the Acadians during their displacement and resettlements, that performances of songs were

¹ Savoy, *Cajun Music*, 13.

² Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 15.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

generally unaccompanied during the infancy of Cajun music, which Ryan Brasseaux labels “phase I.”⁵

Early Cajun songs were most often performed unaccompanied for small social gatherings in homes or were accompanied by fiddle for larger social gatherings and dances, with percussion provided by clapping and stomping.⁶ Bustling social gatherings necessitated louder instrumentation that could carry sound over the noise of a crowd, which led to the introduction of the portable, and relatively affordable, accordion to Cajun music. The accordion was brought to Louisiana in the late 19th century by German immigrants whose communities neighbored those of the Cajuns. The small range and key restrictions of the accordion moderated its use in Cajun music until the eventual introduction of accordions tuned in C and D. This contribution enabled the accordion to be used more broadly, thus indelibly shaping Cajun music. However, even with an increase in available keys, an accordion is more limited in its range than a fiddle, which resulted in melody changes of many commonly known Cajun songs.⁷

Lacking amplification and microphones until the mid-twentieth century, crowded dancehalls required that singers sing high and loud in order to be heard.⁸ The style of singing most often associated with Cajun music arose out of acoustic necessity. Furthermore, keys C and D are the keys most common to the accordions used by Cajun musicians, and are particularly restrictive for male singers.⁹ The idiosyncratic timbre heard in recordings of both male and female Cajun singers is a product of the wailing approach to singing in tune with limited instrumentation.

⁵ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 9.

⁶ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 8.

⁷ Savoy, *Cajun Music*, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁹ *Ibid.*

As technology changed, instrumentation changed. This, of course, resulted in a change in singing style. Ann Savoy comments, “During the string band era, the singer didn’t have to compete with the voluminous accordion, so the singing had a more relaxed, happy-go-lucky sound. Today, the modern bands seek a smooth melodious singer.”¹⁰

Sometimes called a “squeeze box” or a “Cajun accordion,” the diatonic accordion, which came to Louisiana from Germany, has become a vital part of Cajun music. These instruments are structurally small, which defies their capacity for producing unamplified *fortissimo* dynamics. The highest quality diatonic accordions have 46 reeds, which facilitate vastly more sound power than can be achieved with the much-larger piano accordion. Melodies are played on the right side of the diatonic accordion. The left side, called the “bass,” provides accompaniment.¹¹

As mentioned previously, the diatonic accordion is restrictive in its range, despite its many reeds. Though a major scale can only be played in one key, skilled accordionists can play in as many as three additional keys by sampling a limited number of common tones.¹² The limited diatonic accordion demands that playing be innovative, and these innovative techniques have contributed to many of Cajun music’s defining qualities. Table 3 details the common techniques used.

¹⁰ Savoy, xiii

¹¹ Ibid, 2.

¹² Ibid, xiii.

Table 3: Common Cajun Accordion Techniques¹³

Double-timing	This technique would be referred to as <i>sub-dividing</i> in other styles of music, and describes the playing of two notes per beat. For example, a typical waltz style is played as <i>1-2-3, 1-2-3</i> , but a Cajun waltz is played as <i>1 and-2 and-3 and, 1 and-2 and-3 and</i> .
Octave with a harmonized interior third	The practice of playing open octave is common in Cajun music. The primary technique for accordion harmonization is to double the melody an octave down, and add the chordal third within that octave sonority. This typically occurs at the down beat of each phrase and increases volume as well as harmonic complexity.
Octave jump	On one side of the accordion, the melody is played in a high octave, and the opposing hand will immediately echo in a lower octave. This generates a sense of buoyancy and reinforces rhythmic structure in the absence of percussion.
Triplets and embellishments	Heterophonic texture is common characteristic of Cajun music. Heterophony occurs when the melody is doubled, and embellishments are added between notes in one voice. It is difficult to achieve this effect solely with accordion, but heterophonic texture can be synthesized when the melody is embellished on the melody side of the accordion while chords are played on strong beats on the bass side.
Using only the melody side	For example, a C accordion cannot provide bass accompaniment for an F chord. To facilitate harmonic variety despite this limitation, chords are played on the melody side to compensate for missing chords on the bass side.

¹³ Savoy, 2.

Louisiana is not the cradle of American fiddle tradition, but the first recordings of American fiddle music in the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress were made in Louisiana in 1934. The fiddle came to Louisiana with the Acadians, thus qualifying it as the earliest instrument to be used in Cajun music, and early Cajun fiddle style developed alongside now-defunct instrumentation. Folklorist Joshua Caffery describes an unexpected early accompaniment to the fiddle:

Although fiddle-accompanied clarinet music may seem like a musical oddity, Louisiana quadrille bands of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often featured twin fiddle (one which played rhythm, or “seconded”) and clarinet, among other wind instruments. This, a clarinet seconded by a fiddle would have been a perfectly normal instrumental combination in nineteenth-century Louisiana.¹⁴

The diatonic accordion, guitar, and drums were not entirely standard until the 1920s. Cajun music was shaped, in part, by the evolution of fiddling style through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. As new instruments were added to the Cajun ensemble, the fiddling style adapted to accommodate or supplement the changing instrumentation, and exposure to the musics of outside cultures illuminated new possibilities in fiddle playing. These stylistic changes contributed to alterations of melodies, and provides textural and harmonic variety.¹⁵ A description of common Cajun fiddle techniques can be found in Table 4.

¹⁴ Caffery, Joshua Clegg. *Traditional Music in Coastal Louisiana: The 1934 Lomax Recordings*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013) 35-36.

¹⁵ Savoy, Ann Allen. 1984. *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People*. (Eunice: Bluebird Press, 1984) 4.

Table 4: Common Cajun Fiddle Practices and Techniques¹⁶

Tuning	If a D accordion is used, the fiddle is tuned to standard pitch: EADG, with G being the lowest bass string. If a C accordion is used, the fiddle is usually tuned down a whole tone to DGCF. This allows for easier playing and creates a sweeter timbre.
Constant use of two strings	Constant playing of two strings elevates the performance of Cajun music in the following ways: 1. The humming of an open string in the background of the melody results in a rhythmic drone effect. 2. Double stops provide harmonic complexity. 3. The playing of two strings in unison is a method of increasing volume when louder dynamics are needed.
Bowing	In Cajun music, the beat is strongly accented with the bow. Usually all beats are actually played instead of using a long bow stroke through several beats. A particular bowing technique is reserved for dance tunes. This “shuffle” bowing method incorporates a sustained down-bow for every other down-bow gesture.
Embellishments	Slides and trills are sometimes used to add variety to a tune.
Playing second fiddle	The second fiddle can either play the melody in a lower octave on the bass strings, or it can provide continuo at downbeats. The second fiddle is the primary source of source of heterophony when it doubles the melody with embellishments between notes.

¹⁶ Savoy, 4-5.

Chapter 5: The Role of Ethnography in Cajun Music

Much of what is known about the history and lineage of Cajun music is a product of field research conducted by ethnomusicologists John and Alan Lomax. In 1934, John Lomax and his son, Alan, traveled to Louisiana to document Cajun culture through music, tasked with cataloging American folk music for the Library of Congress. The resulting collection constitutes the foundational record of the folk music of Coastal Louisiana.¹ Alan Lomax once remarked, “The Cajun country is one of the richest and at the same time least known folk music and literature in North America.”²

The Lomax collection continues to provide the most comprehensive understanding of the anatomy and genesis of South Louisiana’s vernacular musical culture. Aiding the Lomaxes with their project was Irene Thérèse Whitfield, whose book *Louisiana French Folk Songs* remains the most comprehensive monograph of Cajun folk music. Transporting a three hundred-pound recording device across the state, as this project was undertaken early in the era of recorded sound, these song hunters curated the canon of Cajun folk songs still performed as commercial Cajun music today.

Collaboration between Whitfield and the Lomaxes illuminates the fascinating history surrounding otherwise pedestrian songs. A prime example is “Cadet Roussel,” which reflects both European origins and the circumstances of new life in Louisiana. First written in France in 1792, “Cadet Roussel” was arranged for orchestra by Eugene Goossens in 1930, and continues to be a

¹ Caffery, Joshua, “Traditional Music in Coastal Louisiana: The 1934 Lomax Recordings” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2013), 1.

² “Cajun Music”, *Weekly Iberian*, April 28, 1938.

commonly sung children’s nurse rhyme in France.³ Acadians who arrived in Louisiana during the final waves of settlement in Louisiana brought the song with them. Interestingly, the earliest documented version of this song, transcribed in the 1930s, departs from the original French text and describes *poteaux-en-terre* (post-in-earth) architecture—the most common eighteenth century architectural technique used in Acadia, in which the frame of a building is secured by wooden posts placed directly into the ground.⁴ More recently documented versions omit this architectural reference. In reference to a more recent version collected in the early 1960s, Barry Ancelet remarks on the creolization of its text and grammar and also speculates, “There is no verse concerning his house in the entire text of this version, perhaps indicating that *poteaux-en-terre* proved to be a disastrous building practice in humid, termite-infested South Louisiana.”⁵

The timeline demonstrated by these differing transcriptions is a bit confounding, since even the latest Acadians to arrive in Louisiana would have been divorced from both French and Acadian traditions for many generations by the 1930s. Undoubtedly, there was no linear relationship between the two transcriptions. The most likely explanation is that the latter version was passed down from someone who was so removed from their Acadian ancestry that they did not recognize this reference, thereby electing to omit it.

Other song cataloging projects followed the Lomaxes’, including work by Catherine Blanchet in the 1940s and Harry Oster in the 1950s. Oster, a professor of English at Louisiana State University, was influenced by Blanchet’s ethnographic work a decade earlier and recorded

³ A.H.W. (Mrs. Edmond Wodehouse). “Song: France.” *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians (A.D. 1450-1889)*. Edited by Sir George Grove, John Alexander Fuller-Maitland (London: Macmillan, 1908) Vol. 4, 544.

⁴ Whitfield, Irene. *Louisiana French Folk Songs*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), 46.

⁵ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 8.

a vast spectrum of Cajun songs and dance tunes. His work, along with the Lomax catalog, was brought to the attention of the Newport group in the 1960s, and Cajun music became part of the folk revival movement when Gladius Thibodeaux, Louis LeJeune, and Dewey Balfa were invited to play the Newport Folk Festival in 1964.⁶ Participation in the Newport Folk Festival gave Cajun music proximity to nationally known folk revivalists, and this high-profile recognition planted seeds which would eventually launch the Cajun revival of the 1970s.

Blanchet and Oster have separately gained recognition in recent years as a new generation of song scholars has combed each of their archives. The discoveries have been major contributions to existing folk song collections, and have illuminated previously uncertain aspects of this song tradition. Additionally, the recently-uncovered Blanchet and Oster field recordings have provided new resources for musicians, and have spawned new commercial recordings of otherwise lost songs⁷, including a celebrated collaborative album of songs from Oster's field recordings of Caesar Vincent.

Vincent was an obscure figure in Cajun music until recent years, but his repertoire is represented in forty-four unique field recordings— thirty-seven by Oster and twenty-three by Blanchet.⁸ He was not a trained musician. He didn't play dancehalls, and never recorded an album. He didn't know how to drive and never owned a television. However, Caesar Vincent was a singer who sang while he walked, while he farmed, and while he shared company with family and friends. However, Caesar Vincent did not write his own songs. Instead, he sang old

⁶Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 37.

⁷ "Pioneering Folklorist's Work Finds a Home at Center for Louisiana Studies." Louisiana.edu. November 11, 2018. Accessed April 15, 2019. <https://louisiana.edu/news-events/news/20181126/pioneering-folklorist's-work-finds-home-center-louisiana-studies>.

⁸ Willing, Dan. "Getting His Due: The Legacy of Caesar Vincent." offbeat.com. <http://www.offbeat.com/articles/getting-due-legacy-caesar-vincent/> (accessed May 3, 2019).

songs—songs his ancestors had sung before he was born, songs that predated the Civil War, the Acadian diaspora, and the Protestant Reformation. Caesar Vincent was a human song vault with an encyclopedic memory which continues to provide researchers with a broader understanding of the origins, and structural and stylistic idiosyncrasies of Cajun music.⁹

⁹ Ancelet, Barry, “Travailler, C’est Trop Dur: Caesar Vincent’s Iconic Song,” (lecture presented at *Festivals Acadiens et Créoles*, Lafayette, Louisiana, October 13, 2018).

Chapter 6: Cultural Sustainability Through the Preservation of Songs

A published account of a traveler to Louisiana during the early nineteenth century illustrates the role of music in Cajun social settings:

[Acadians] love to dance most of all; more than any other people in the colony. At one time during the year, they give balls for travelers and will go ten or fifteen leagues to attend one. Everyone dances, even grandmère and grandpère, no matter what the difficulties they must bear. There may be only a couple fiddles to play for the crowd, there may be only four candles for light, placed on wooden arms attached to the wall; nothing but long wooden benches to sit on and only exceptionally a few bottles of tafia [rum] diluted with water for refreshment; no matter, everyone dances.¹

Cajun music reflects the cultural philosophies, resourcefulness, and adaptability necessary for survival during *Le Grand Dérangement* and resettlement in the unforgiving Louisiana landscape. Ryan Brasseaux remarks:

Cajun musical ethos is characterized by the group's ability to interpret and selectively adapt specific cultural information- a French North American survival scheme rooted in pragmatism and openness to change...Cajun musical ethos also refers to the emotional qualities of compositions born of grinding poverty and an agrarian, working-class lifestyle.²

Music continues to be omnipresent in Cajun social traditions, but ubiquity once nearly contributed to its loss. Ann Savoy explains, "In the past, Cajun music was looked upon with, at best, a certain apathy by the middle classes. The music was so alive, so constantly present on the radio and on the dancehall scene, that it was simply taken for granted. It was just a part of life intricately interwoven with farming, feasting, and entertainment. It was not an endangered species crying out for the help of preservationists; it was not elite; it was not noticed."³ An

¹ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 16.

² Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, ix.

³ Savoy, xi.

additional threat posed by radio was exposure to new music genres whose novelty may very well have shifted tastes irrevocably away from traditional music.

However, radio was not the death of Cajun culture. It instead offered a new and vital platform for Cajun culture through its traditional music. The first documented attempts to commercialize Cajun music occurred as early as the mid-1920s and came to fruition in 1928 with the first recording of a Cajun song, “Allons à Lafayette.”⁴ Suddenly, a largely illiterate culture which relied on oral tradition to preserve its rich music traditions, was granted the widespread ability to document its centuries-old songs and share them on a large scale.⁵

In the decades that followed, Cajun music underwent a series of commercial transformations. As each genre *à la mode* rose to popularity through the twentieth century, an incarnation of Cajun music accompanied. During the swing era, recently recorded Cajun dance tunes filled dance halls. As Country music developed increasing notoriety the Cajun Country genre emerged. While Cajun musicians popularized traditional Cajun songs performed in Country style, mainstream Country’s biggest stars recorded *swamp pop* songs which incorporated Cajun French lyrics and depicted Cajun life. The most notable among these swamp pop hits is Hank Williams’ “Jambalaya.”

Upon listening, one might be surprised to learn that “Jambalaya” is not merely a song written in the style of Cajun music. Its tune dates back many decades, as illustrated in Table 5. Ray Abshire relayed the origin story of this Cajun crossover hit to Ryan Brasseaux:

On a Saturday night, a group of well-dressed strangers, led by a conspicuous gentleman dressed in all white, entered the club and sat together at a table adjacent to the bandstand. The accordionist gazed curiously at the dapper, ivory-clad interloper—who ignored local custom by wearing his cowboy hat indoors—then continued the dance with his

⁴ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 57-58.

⁵ *Ibid*, 59.

interpretation of “Grand Texas,” a Western swing-tinged French composition about Cajuns living in the Lone Star State.

At performance’s conclusion, a member of the entourage approached the bandleader and declared, “Mr. Hank would like you to play that song again.”⁶ The story continues with the band playing “Grand Texas” a second time, per the request, never realizing that the request came from *Louisiana Hayride* personality and country music recording artist Hank Williams. Eight months later, the band’s accordionist, Nathan Abshire, tuned his radio and heard a broadcast of “Jambalaya” by Hank Williams—with English lyrics set to the “Grand Texas” melody.⁷

Table 5 illustrates the endurance of the Cajun song tradition through the evolution of “Grand Texas.” Within this tradition, songs are not merely “covered” or replicated, they are repurposed. The tune may be slightly redeveloped, the text might be altered—but themes are retained, as is the recognizability of the melody.

⁶ Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 179.

⁷ *Ibid*, 179-180.

Table 5: Evolution of the “Grand Texas” Melody

Year of Recording	Song Title	Artist
1929	<i>Le Garçon Negligent</i>	The Guidry Brothers
1935	<i>La Valse de Bayou Plaquemine</i>	The Breaux Brothers
1936	<i>Pin Solitaire</i>	Cleoma Breaux
1936	<i>Lake Arthur Waltz</i>	J.B. Fusilier
1936	<i>Pine Island</i>	J.B. Fusilier
1937	<i>Abbeville</i>	Jolly Boys
1937	<i>Allons Kooche Kooche</i>	Louisiana Rounders
1940	<i>Grand Prairie</i>	Happy Fats
1948	<i>Grand Texas</i>	Chuck Guillory
1949	<i>Grand Texas #2</i>	Papa Cairo
1951	<i>Big Texas (English)</i>	Papa Cairo
1952	<i>Jambalaya</i>	Hank Williams
1960	<i>Quel Etoile</i>	Shirley Bergeron

Source: ¹ Brasseaux, Ryan André. *Cajun Breakdown: The Emergence of an American-Made Music*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 200-201.

With the folk revival of the 1960s came a renewed appreciation for Cajun folk songs performed in the traditional style following the Balfa Brothers appearance at the Newport Folk festival. This folk renaissance inspired artists with no prior relationship with Cajun music and culture to record centuries old Cajun folk songs, including Emmylou Harris’ rendition of the Cajun national anthem, “Jolie Blonde.”

As preservation of French language has been prioritized in Louisiana’s schools and communities, a new generation of musicians has begun to follow the same pattern within the

Indie music genre. The Lost Bayou Ramblers, Feufollet, and Sweet Crude, contemporary bands with many Grammy awards and nominations between them, tour globally alongside the today's most popular and well-known commercial musicians. These bands write original songs with French lyrics, but much of their creative output is innovative arrangements of Cajun folksongs, many of them the same as those performed by the band members' Acadian ancestors following *Le Grand Dérangement*.

While basic structures of melodies and texts are generally retained, Ann Savoy remarks in *Cajun Music: A Reflection of A People*:

The music is changing as the world is changing. The people's spirit is not the same so the interpretation of the music is not the same. In twentieth century Louisiana, it would be hard to recreate the music that came from extreme isolation, from daily dealings with the many diseases for which there were no cures. The early music came from people who dealt day by day with the problems of living in a nearly tropical, inhospitable insect ridden land. The work was hard and play was intense and liberating—a way to get away from the toils and difficulties of farming in the hot sun where the insects ate the plants as fast as a man could plant them. The music was loud, the food spicy and heavy enough to fill up a hardworking appetite. Today Louisiana has the advantages of any modern country. The pain expressed in the music today comes from different types of hardships than those that existed in the past. The experiences of living in the past in Louisiana cannot be duplicated, and Cajun music today is about this new and different world, changed by the people who are living in it and by the products of this new world.⁸

A universal trait of folk music is retention of defining characteristics, despite being in a constant state of change.⁹ Adaptability to change facilitates the timelessness of the songs within this oral tradition. Significant alterations can be made to melodies, rhythmic and harmonic structures, and text without obscuring recognizability. Original themes can persist even as individual words are exchanged. Or, as Savoy implies, all of these elements can be retained, and

⁸ Savoy, xiii.

⁹ Ibid.

a song can be transformed by the tone of the performer, which projects their personal narrative, and emotional and cultural experiences.

As is true of most traditional music, Cajun songs are in a constant state of change.¹⁰ With this knowledge, lauded Cajun musicians and Cajun music historians have made efforts since the 1980s to preserve the timelessness of centuries-old songs while embracing new elements. Cajun music traditionalist Michael Doucet, of the band Beausoleil, was among the first Cajun musicians to infuse traditional songs with rock and roll style traits, and this practice has persisted for several decades. This merging of genres has also occurred inversely with Cajun covers of classic rock songs by the bands Cajun Brew¹¹, and Feufollet.

Even staunch Cajun music traditionalists, like the legendary Dewey Balfa, insists that tradition is not a product, but a process.¹² He explained this ideology while performing at the 1985 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife:

Cajun music is like a tree. Its roots have to be watered or it will die. But watering the roots is not all. If a tree is alive, it will grow, but that growth is important, too. Most of the songs I play are about a hundred years old. I'm interested in preserving Cajun music. I've dedicated my life to try to assure that there will be lots of Cajun musicians in another hundred years. But that's not enough. Someone has to provide them with songs to play that will be about a hundred years old then, so I've composed a few that I hope will still be around. ¹³

Predictions that Cajun culture would fade as a result of the recording industry and exposure to outside cultures has proved false. Alternately, it has become one of America's most distinguished and cherished regional cultures. As Savoy further explains, "Cajun music, once

¹⁰Savoy, xiii.

¹¹ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*,49-50.

¹² Ibid, 50.

¹³ Ibid.

found only in the backwoods of Louisiana, has now made a prominent place for itself in America. Music is a major life force of the Cajun culture. It is vital to the continuation of that culture and by continuing to live, it serves to bond together the generations. Those who can identify with this music can identify with the people because the music is a reflection, of the lives, strengths, sorrows, and joys of the people.”¹⁴ The appreciation for Cajun culture in America, and throughout the world, is grounded in its music, and the foundation of Cajun music’s resilience and longevity is the direct result of the preservation of traditional Cajun songs.

¹⁴ Savoy, xi.

Chapter 7: Analysis of *Je ne vais pas parler français à l'école*—
A Collection of Cajun Songs Arranged by Costas Dafnis

Characteristics of Traditional Cajun Songs

Cajun songs are strophic, often without a refrain, and do not follow specific prosodic patterns. A typical Cajun tune is eight measures in length, with a ninth measure added as a transition to the *tourne*. The *tourne* is an extended bridge providing a contrast for the tune in lieu of a sung refrain. It can function as a development section, or may merely provide melodic contrast to repetitions of sung melody and text. The length of the *tourne* varies, and often cadences twice before the primary, sung theme returns.¹

Modality is a common feature of Cajun songs, though little has been published specifically regarding modality in Cajun music. However, Cajun music's origins in the French folk song tradition, as well as the survival of centuries-old French folk songs in twentieth-century Louisiana, supports the idea that theories pertaining to the modality of French folk songs, particularly the French folk songs of Maritime Canada and Québec, can be applied similarly to Cajun folk songs. Renowned Canadian musicologist Marius Barbeau comments, "The most interesting aspect of the French-Canadian folk-songs, from the musical standpoint, is their modal and rhythmic texture."² Barbeau also calls attention to the mixed modality of songs represented in the songs cataloged by well-known French musicologist Marguirite Bécclard-d'Harcourt.³

It seems the most likely explanation lies in continuation of French folk song tradition through Cajun music, as well as Cajun culture's ties to Catholicism. In addition to continued

¹ François, Raymond E. *Ye Yaille, Chère!*. (Lafayette: Thunderstone Press, 1990) 4.

² Barbeau, Marius. Liner notes to *Songs of French Canada*, FE4482, LP, 1959.

³ Ibid.

evolution of French folk songs in Louisiana, Catholic Cajuns of the nineteenth century, and their French and Acadian ancestors of prior centuries, were regularly exposed to modality through the liturgical music of the Catholic church.

Within an impoverished, displaced population, exposure to new melodies was likely limited to those heard during mass. A logical assumption can be made that church music influenced what was the popular music of nineteenth century Cajuns, and is now recognized as Cajun folk music. This theory is rooted in an understanding of the folk music traditions of France. As is explained in “Song: France”, published in *A Dictionary Of Music And Musicians (A.D. 1450-1889)*: “It is necessary to emphasize the close connection which has ever existed—and perhaps in France more than in any other country—between the folk-song and the Church...And it will be seen that this practice of intermixing sacred and secular music has continued from those early centuries to this present day.”⁴

Researches have sought to ratify this idea as it pertains to French and French-Canadian folk songs since the nineteenth century. Conrad Laforte, Québécois ethnomusicologist and creator of the 80,000-entry *Catalogue de la Chanson Folklorique Française*, tells of efforts made by French and Quebecois folklorists in the 1860s to uphold a thesis on French folk music compared to Gregorian chant. Laforte cites the preface of Ernest Gagnon’s *Chanson populaires du Canada*, which argues that French-Canadian folk songs were not “vestiges of barbarism and ignorance, but perpetuation of one of the noblest genres of musical art, Gregorian tonality, with its modal scales and particular rhythm.”⁵

⁴ A.H.W. (Mrs. Edmond Wodehouse). “Song: France.” *A Dictionary Of Music And Musicians (A.D. 1450-1889)*. Edited by Sir George Grove, John Alexander Fuller-Maitland (London: Macmillan, 1908) Vol. 4, 537-539.

⁵ Laforte, Conrad. “Franco-Canadian Folk Music,” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Historical Canada*. Article published February 07, 2006; last modified January 20, 2014. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/franco-canadian-folk-music-emc>.

Though modality is a common feature of Cajun songs, many recent incarnations of centuries-old songs are altered from their earlier forms to be tonal in order to appeal to modern tastes. This trend echoes the bias toward tonality by folklorists and ethnographers. On the topic of modality in the French folk music of Canada, Canadian musicologist Yves Chartier remarked, “The problem of the modality of this archaic repertoire deserves, in particular, to be re-examined in its entirety in the light of the most recent works of ethnomusicology and historical musicology.”⁶

For the purposes of this paper, Roger Mason’s 2019 publication of Cajun song transcriptions will provide evidence of modality in Cajun folk songs. Modal labels are not assigned to these songs based on their ambitus or finalis, but rather by what would be interpreted as altered scale degrees if these songs were analyzed within diatonic parameters. Prior to Mason’s recent contribution, the majority of published Cajun song transcriptions were derived from commercial recordings, and were collected and transcribed by folklorists, or by researchers whose backgrounds were in Cajun music performance—as opposed to Musicology or Ethnomusicology. The Whitfield collection is comprehensive, but contains hand-written transcriptions based on field recordings made on primitive recording equipment. Furthermore, Whitfield possessed little musical training, resulting in transcriptions which defy what can now be heard in re-mastery of the recordings she referenced. Therefore, a sound assumption can be made that the modality heard in recordings of Cajun music was dismissed by previous transcribers as a result of a paradigm identified by E.F. Jacques in “Modal Survivals in Folk-Song”:

⁶ Chartier, Yves. “Situation de la recherche sur la musique au Canada français.” *Newsletter of the Research Center in French-Canadian Civilization*, no. 19. (University of Ottawa, 1979), 4.

No one interested in Folk-Song can afford to be without a fairly accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the nature and peculiarities of these old modes; for many of their characteristics are so alien to modern ideas of tonality that, to the uninformed, they ‘sound wrong.’ ...Their ears are not prepared for its modal peculiarities, and, without such preparation those called upon either to play, sing, or edit music so conceived are inclined to spoil it by altering or ‘correcting’ what they suppose to be wrong. This has been done more than once—and by persons of eminence...With ears accustomed solely to the tonal relationships furnished by the modern major and minor modes, it is not surprising that such persons should regard these as perfect systems from which other tonalities were by eccentric deviations.⁷

In 1852 the French Minister for Public Education, Hyppolyte Fortoul, launched an official campaign to collect French folk songs. The detailed guidelines agreed upon by various members of the research committee are discussed in Michèle Simonsen’s “Poesies Populaires de la France: The Fortoul Collection of French Folk Songs (1853-1855).” Even during this early era of folk song collection, members of the committee were aware of the difficulty in maintaining melodic accuracy and integrity of research while undertaking such a project. One committee member, who is only recorded as M. Vincent, warned against biased methods in the collection of French folk songs, as Simonsen details:

Vincent states that there is in any French village at least one person able to write down a melody in musical notation. And he warns all correspondents of a mistake to be avoided, that could easily be made by collectors, especially because they are musical. Ancient melodies differ considerably and in several ways from the melodies of classical music which the learned correspondents of the *Comité* might be expected to be familiar with... They do not always have a leading tone, that is to say the tone just below the ground tone [tonic] is often at a whole tone distance from it. It is essential that these three characteristics (which M. Vincent assigns to old age and which according to him relates traditional melodies to chanting and to plainsong) should not be lost in transcription...This is of course easier said than done! Modern ethnomusicologists know that the intervals of traditional, modal music are very tricky to transcribe into classical notation.⁸

⁷ Jacques, E. F. and J. A. Fuller-Maitland. “Modal Survivals in Folk-Song.” *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 1, no. 1 (1899): 4-5. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.memphis.edu/stable/4433849>.

⁸ Simonsen, Michèle. “Poesies Populaires De La France: The Fortoul Collection Of French Folk Fongs (1853-1855)”, *E.L.O.: Estudos De Literatura Oral*, no. 11-122005-2006 (2005): 259-260, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/61503357.pdf>.

Simonsen further relays that Vincent asked his correspondents not to harmonize the melodies they recorded, as that further imposes the conventions of functional tonality onto what should be modal concepts.⁹

It should be noted that the Mason transcriptions provided within this paper do feature tablature—which has been omitted within the examples used in this document—for the purposes of playing these songs in a modern setting. However, the melodies within the Mason collection do represent the modal landscape from which Cajun songs are derived, with the least degree of bias that has yet been published. A question of whether a melody is pentatonic instead of modal can occur with melodies in which only five tones are present. However, modality can be ascribed to songs containing seven tones. Evidence of modality in Cajun folk songs is illustrated in Figures 3.1–3.4.

E.F. Jacques contends that Mixolydian mode is the second most common mode used in European folk music, while frequency of Lydian mode is distributed regionally. Jacques does not account for the occurrence of Lydian mode in French folk songs, but explains that there is a dearth of songs in Lydian mode in English and Scottish folk music, while it is common in the folk musics of Italy and Spain.¹⁰ Mixolydian mode is common in European folk music,¹¹ and is likewise prevalent in Cajun folk music. Lydian, Aeolian, and Hypomixolydian modes are also represented.

⁹ Simonsen, Michèle. “Poesies Populares De La France: The Fortoul Collection Of French Folk Fongs (1853-1855)”, *E.L.O.: Estudos De Literatura Oral*, no. 11-122005-2006 (2005): 259-260, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/61503357.pdf>.

¹⁰ Jacques, “Modal Survivals in Folk-Song.”

¹¹ Jacques, “Modal Survivals in Folk-Song.”

The melody presented in Figure 3.1 exhibits characteristics which provide modern understanding of the pitfalls early-twentieth century catalogers of Cajun songs encountered during transcription. Here, unique occurrences of C# and G# emphasize the pentatonic palate implied by multiple reiterations of all other pitches contained within this melody. Pitches heard only once are easily mistaken as merely out of tune, or perhaps altogether incorrect, and the song's modality is obfuscated by an overriding pentatonic concept. If one were operating outside an understanding of the relationship between modality and the French folk song tradition, an assumption would not likely be made that such a melody was modal.

Si j'avais des ailes

Oh, si j'a- vais des ailes comme toutes ces hi - ron delles, au -
 près de toi la belle, j'i - rais me re - po - ser, à te con-ter mes peines, ain -
 si q'mes a - mi - tiés.

Figure 3.1: The presence of seven tones with a raised fourth scale degree indicates that this melody is in Lydian mode.¹²

¹² Mason, Roger. *Jolie Blonde et Aimable Brune*. (Shreveport, LA: Éditions Tintamarre, 2019), 51.

Le mariage anglais

C'é-tait la fille d'un roi fran - çais, son père vou - lait la ma - ri -
er, c'é-tait la er. — Son père vou - lait la ma - ri - er a - vec un bon An - glais. "Mais
moi, j'm'es - time une bonne Fran - çaise et toi, mau - dit — An - glais!"

Figure 3.2: The presence of seven tones with a lowered seventh scale degree indicates that this melody is in Mixolydian mode.¹³

Mariez-vous jamais!

Jeunes filles de la cam - pagne, ma - riez - vous - au - tres ja - mais. Re -
garde comme moi j'ai fait, mis une femme dans les mi - sères.

Figure 3.3: The presence of seven tones with a lowered seventh scale degree indicates that this melody is in Mixolydian mode.¹⁴

The prevalence of modality in European folk music has led some scholars to believe that the styles of European folk music actually originated in the chants of the church.¹⁵

Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl asserts the significance of church music to folk tunes in his

¹³ Mason, 123.

¹⁴ Ibid, 133.

¹⁵ Nettl, Bruno. *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 38.

assessment of the “wandering melody” phenomenon, in which a single melody is represented in folk music of distant regions and cultures:

The existence of these melodies, or melody types, is also proof of the close relationship of art, church, and folk music. Melody types found in European folk music are also frequently found in hymns and art songs, particularly of the periods before 1700. They are probably not simply quotations of folk songs, in the sense of “quoting” something strange or exotic, as in nineteenth-and-twentieth-century art music, but part and parcel of the basic material of art music.¹⁶

Evidence of the stylistic influence of church music on Cajun folksongs is found in Figure 3.4. This “Parlez-nous à boire” melody possesses qualities of both Mixolydian and Dorian modes, as qualified by the inclusion of lowered scale degree seven in the first three verses, and lowered scale degrees seven and three in the song’s final verse. Shifting between two modes within a single melody has further been identified by musicologist and folk music scholar Annabel Morris Buchanan as a common characteristic of Anglo-American folk music. Buchanan recognizes the pairing of Dorian mode with Mixolydian mode as being pervasive enough to merit a new label: the neutral mode. Buchanan explains, “It is the neutral or natural mode which I believe is preeminently the mode of the folk—whether purely neutral or varying to Dorian or, less often, Mixolydian.”¹⁷ Though the Buchanan survey exclusively considers the characteristics of Anglo-American folk songs, the Mason transcription of “Parlez-nous à boire” (Figure 3.4) substantiates that this interchange of Dorian and Mixolydian modes is also represented in Franco-American folk music.

¹⁶ Nettl, 45-46.

¹⁷ Buchanan, Annabel Morris. “Modal and Melodic Structure in Anglo-American Folk Music: A Neutral Mode.” *Papers Read by Members of the American Musicological Society at the Annual Meeting, September 11th to 16th, 1939* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1939) 90.

Parlez-nous à boire

Oh! Par - lez - nous à boi - re, non pas du mar - riage. Tou - jours en re - gret -

Fine

6 tant nos jo - lis temps pas - sés. 1.Si que tu't ma - ries a - vec une jo - lie
2.Si que tu't ma - ries a - vec une vi - laine
3.Si que tu't ma - ries a - vec une fille qui'est
4.Si que tu't ma - ries a - vec une fille qui'a'de

12 fille, t'es dans le grand dan - ger on va te la vo - ler. Va
fille, t'es dans le grand dan - ger tu vas pas - ser ta vie a - vec.
pauvre t'es dans le grand dan - ger tu vas tra - vai - ler toute ta vie.
quoi, t'es dans le grand dan - ger on va te faire des grandes re - proches.

18 t'en grand bon - à - rien, - t'as tout gas - pil - lé mon bien! Va - t'en grand bon - à rien - t'as

D.C. al Fine

24 tout gas - pil - lé mon bien

Figure 3.4: Mixolydian mode shifts to Dorian mode in the final verse of this melody, with a return to Mixolydian mode in m.19.¹⁸ Buchanan recognizes this marriage of Mixolydian and Dorian characteristics as a “neutral mode.”¹⁹

Three classifications of Western folk songs are commonly recognized: the ballad, the lyric, and the dialogue song.²⁰ The omnipresence of dancing during performances of Cajun music, as well as the equal prevalence of both two-step dancing and waltzes, inclines these three categories to be performed interchangeably for the purposes of intimate gatherings and social

¹⁸ Mason, 135.

¹⁹ Buchanan, 90.

²⁰ Mills, Isabelle. "The Heart of the Folk Song" *MUSICultures* [Online], Volume 2 (1 June 1974).

dances. Ballads are narratives, story-telling songs in which action predominates. Ballad themes vary broadly, but are organized around a specific event which can be discussed in terms of action.²¹ By contrast, a lyric song emphasizes the emotions of an individual rather than the actions of a group of people, and is expressed through first-person perspective.

As the label implies, a dialogue song depicts an exchange of dialogue—often a dramatic confrontation—between two characters.²² Examples of Cajun dialogue songs are “La marche des mariés cadienne”, “Le papier d’épingles”, and “Le vieux soûlard et sa femme”. Cajun dialogues are anomalies within Cajun traditional music, and perhaps among all of American folk musics. Cajun dialogue songs were brought to South Louisiana by Protestant Appalachian settlers who eventually translated the songs into French. Of “Le papier d’épingles,” ethnomusicologist Roger Mason remarks, “The feeling of the song ‘Paper of Pins’ is different from anything to be found in continental French folk music. Songs like this one explain why Cajuns are French-speaking Americans and no longer French colonists.”²³

Cajun songs are typically sung in first-person, thereby qualifying the majority of Cajun story songs as lyrics by this rubric. Though ballads are widely represented among Canadian and French folk songs, representations of ballads in Cajun music are few. Of the songs retained within traditional Cajun music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, few are ballads. Field recordings exist of Louisiana singers performing ballads which originated in France during the Middle Ages. Among their small number are “La fille qui s’habille en page,”²⁴ “Le mariage

²¹ Mills.

²² Ibid.

²³ Mason, 124-125.

²⁴ Mason, 100-101.

anglais,”²⁵ and “Les anneaux de Marianson.”²⁶ Of the three, only “Les anneaux de Marianson” is represented beyond a single known field recording.

Of French songs which survived in Canada, third-person and action-based narratives persisted.²⁷ Ballads often relay untimely tragedies, as “Chanson sur la mort de la Dauphine”, “Chanson de Biron”, and “La belle s’est endormie”—Canadian ballads with French origins—demonstrate.²⁸ Though there are a number of Cajun songs which communicate similar themes and stories, the narrator is most frequently an agent within the narrative. “La mort de la belle Irène”, for example, tells of the premeditated murder of a young woman.²⁹ Though its story aligns with the aforementioned Canadian ballads, the perspective from which the story is told distinguishes it as a Cajun lyric song. The tragedy is told in first person from the perspective of Irène’s lover, who is also her murderer.

Researchers have organized subcategories of Cajun songs by varying criteria. Roger Mason has published a collection of Cajun songs about love catalogued under such labels as *Idyllic Love*, *Bittersweet Love*, *Tragic Love*, and *Love and Marriage*.³⁰ Irène Whitfield also catalogs a set of songs as *Songs of Love and Marriage*, but extends her collection to broader classifications: *Comic Songs About Little Men*, *Drinking Songs*, *Songs Mentioning “la djog au*

²⁵ Mason, 116-117.

²⁶ Ibid, 122-123.

²⁷ Ibid, 100-101.

²⁸ Creighton, Helen. *Chansons Folklorique D’Acadia: La Fleur du Rosier*. (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia: University of Cape Breton Press, 1988), 126-134.

²⁹ Mason, 98-99.

³⁰ Ibid, 7-8.

plombeau” (the jug on the pommel of a saddle), and *Songs in Which the Lover Goes to Texas*.³¹ Ann Savoy, whose transcriptions are sourced from commercial recordings rather than field recordings, organizes transcriptions by the singers and musicians to which they are attributed. Savoy suggests a binary categorization of Cajun songs which reflects the scarcity of ballads and dialogue songs in commercial recordings of Cajun music. She comments, “The lyrics of the songs are repeated vocalizations of suffering and loneliness rather than a story, or the lyrics are rhythmic, nonsensical rhymes to tease and have fun.”³²

Compositional Traits

This collection of arrangements is based on a variety of transcription methods. The first two songs, “Si j’aurais des ailes” and “J’ai passé devant la porte,” are abundantly represented in commercial recordings. Source materials include published transcriptions of songs collected by Irene Whitfield during her field work in the late 1920s and early 1930s, transcriptions published by Ann Savoy in the 1980s—which are primarily based on early commercial recordings by revered musicians, and my own transcription of “Si j’aurais des ailes.” Source materials included early field recordings, well-known commercial recordings of the mid-twentieth century, and contemporary commercial recordings.

Composer Costas Dafnis’ approach to text-setting aligns with the themes identified by folklorist Carolyn Ware in her analysis of Cajun poetry:

One common image is that of the house, often mentioned in relation to its opposition—the road or street. *La maison* represents all of the stable attributes of home, community, morality, and fidelity, which are important in traditional Cajun culture. The house is frequently used as a metaphor for love or marriage, so that leaving the house becomes a highly symbolic action in these songs...In the blues, the road—especially the railroad—is

³¹ Whitfield, xi-xiv.

³² Savoy, 13.

often understood as a route to adventure and new beginnings. In Cajun music, the road is generally portrayed negatively, as the opposite of what is traditionally valued in Cajun society: marriage, family, and community. Close ties with family, home, and friends, symbolized by the house, represent happiness, while the isolation and disconnectedness of the road brings mainly unhappiness...These images of *la maison* and *le chemin* have then become metaphors which have meaning far beyond their literal definitions.³³

The Acadian diasporic experience is virtually unmentioned in the lyrics of traditional Cajun songs. References to life in France and Acadia are made in early versions of songs which continue to be commonly performed, but explicit reference to the events of *Le Grand Dérangement*, the Acadian diaspora, and resettlement in Louisiana are absent. However, the themes of home and wandering, and the psychological conditions these symbols represent, reflect the sentiments of fear and suffering experienced by Acadians during the expulsion, the frustration and hopelessness during their years as foreign refugees, and the happiness and comfort of secure resettlement. Though mention of home and wandering may seem to be passive, incongruent references to a culture-shaping event of such magnitude, this subtext is mightily pervasive in Cajun music.

Dafnis utilizes modulation and tonal ambiguity as methods of exploring the Cajun themes of home and wandering, and employs these themes to impart emotional tone. In correspondence, Dafnis' chosen nomenclature for communicating the concept of tonic, whether in reference to a single pitch within a scale or a harmonic function, was *home*.³⁴ Within this collection, tonic represents *la maison* (the home), which equates with happiness, stability, and certainty. Harmonic development which creates distance from or occurs beyond the tonic represents *le chemin* (the path). This distancing represents struggle, pain, and uncertainty.

³³ Ware, Carolyn. "Cajun Music as Oral Poetry," *Folklife in Louisiana: Louisiana's Living Tradition* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990) http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/creole_art_oral_poetry_caj.html (accessed June 9, 2019).

³⁴ Dafnis, Costas (composer, arranger), interviewed by Nancy Carey, phone interview, April 10, 2019.

Characteristics shared by the songs in this collection are harmonic concepts which reference modality, harmonic blurring, and an emphasis placed on the whole-tone relationship between subtonic, tonic, and supertonic. The transcriptions on which these song arrangements are based did not demonstrate overt modality. Among them, only the transcribed melody of “Chanson Triste” featured flat scale degrees three and seven—non-diatonic traits which qualify it as modal. However, upon listening to a variety of recordings, Dafnis detected what published transcriptions of these melodies neglected or dismissed as error—melodic contour which implied modal origins. Taking a cue from the modal features of “Chanson Triste,” Dafnis develops his arrangements around this subtonic-tonic concept, reinforcing the attributes of modality within each song to provide stylistic continuity within the collection.

Instead of altering the published melodies used as source material for these arrangements, Dafnis leaves them unchanged—with the exception of “Je vais mourir,” in which Dafnis reiterates one pitch on a weak beat for the purpose of improved text setting—and acknowledges the modal origins of these songs solely through the piano accompaniment. Scale degrees are altered in the accompaniment to establish subtonic-tonic harmonic relationships, as well as to facilitate modal shifting—an allusion to the aforementioned theme of home versus wandering. Dafnis alludes to this same theme through harmonic blurring, which he primarily accomplishes by tying of notes over bar lines in one hand of the piano as a different sonority is played at the next down beat in the opposite hand. According to the composer, a challenge in arranging these melodies was the avoidance of creating texture which bordered on homophony. In addition to synthesizing tonal ambiguity, Dafnis’ tied-note technique is an effective system of creating and

resolving dissonance without being strictly “chordal.”³⁵ Figures 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate each of Dafnis’ methods.

Figure 4.1 shows mm. 1–3 of “Si j’aurais des ailes,” which begins with a rolled tonic chord. This tonic occurrence is reinforced by a second iteration of tonic in the right hand on beat two, and is followed by a dominant chord in first inversion on beat three. This dominant sonority is then tied over the bar line, causing it to be juxtaposed over a subdominant sonority in the left hand at the downbeat of m.2. The same technique is used in mm. 2–3, where brief consonance of the supertonic chord, E flat minor, is disrupted by reintroduction of the tonic pitch in the right hand. This ii₇ chord is tied over the bar line, where we find that the tied tonic sonority establishes a diatonic platform for the first sung pitch of this song—scale degree five. The phrasing of this initial vocal line then ascends to and descends from the dominant, which strengthens the idea that this tonic-dominant relationship is a deliberate technique for the coexistence of tonic and supertonic.

Figure 4.1: mm. 1-3 of “Si j’aurais des ailes”

Figure 4.2 again illustrates the use of tied notes as a mechanism for harmonic blurring in mm. 1-3 of “Je vais mourir.” Here, the tied bass note serves as a tonic pedal point, above which

³⁵ Dafnis, Costas (composer, arranger), interviewed by Nancy Carey, phone interview, April 10, 2019.

pandiatonicism persists. This tonic pedal begins on the anacrusis, and is further realized at the downbeat of m.1 with the completion of the tonic chord in the right hand—but with the inclusion of dissonant scale degree four. If analyzed in isolation, this chord would most likely be interpreted as a I_{11} chord—an odd inclusion of quartal harmony, even while operating within a pandiatonic landscape. However, the sonorities presented by the chord which follows in beat two suggest that the inclusion of scale degree four in beat one serves as an anticipatory tone for the chord introduced in beat two. Furthermore, the tonic chord is reiterated in the upper voices of beat two, presenting curious contrast. This chord provides evidence of Dafnis’ deliberate incorporation of modal concepts within the harmonic structure of the accompaniment. The lowered scale degree seven on beat two establishes a major triad—the subtonic—in the left hand of the piano, placed beneath a second-inversion tonic chord in the right hand.

The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of the song "Je vais mourir". The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked "Andante" with a metronome marking of 50. The vocal line is in the upper staff, starting with a rest on the anacrusis and then singing "Je - vais mou - rir" in measure 1. The piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The right hand starts with a second-inversion tonic chord (F#-C#-G#) in measure 1, followed by a chord with a dissonant fourth (F#-C#-G#-C) in measure 2. The left hand starts with a major triad (F#-C#-G#) in measure 1, followed by a major triad (F#-C#-G#) in measure 2. The score includes dynamic markings of *p* (piano) and a tempo marking of "Andante" with a metronome marking of 50.

Figure 4.2: mm. 1-3 of “Je vais mourir”

Dafnis does not sample modality because modality is presented overtly in traditional Cajun music. Instead, he delves into modal concepts as unexpected, unexamined lesser characteristics of these songs, and explores the potential for modal harmony alongside tunefulness. Beyond this exploration of modality within the piano accompaniment, Dafnis relates

modal traits, modal shifting, and harmonic blurring to the aforementioned Cajun narrative themes and symbolism relating to home and wandering. He references these attributes because they are relevant, unexplored aspects of Cajun song tradition which are apt for development within a twenty-first century art song form.

Dafnis generally avoids mimicry of the instrumentation associated with the Cajun music sound. Accordion and fiddle are not parodied in his instrumentation, though a “second fiddle” effect arises in the piano accompaniment of “Les Maringouins.” As previously mentioned, Cajun music is not a single sound or performance style. It is the adaptation of this song tradition in any setting, out of the joy of sharing music and storytelling. Taking a cue from that idea, Dafnis lets the melodies and text guide his arrangements. The songs within this collection are not intended as re-creations of the performances heard in commercial and field recordings, but rather as re-imaginings of the melodies and texts of Cajun songs.

Remarkably, these melodies lend themselves effectively to innovative arranging without mirroring existing Cajun songs. It seems they possess a malleability, an adaptability, that allows for their reconstitution as art songs which are quite different in style, instrumentation, ornamentation, timbre, and texture from what is typically associated with Cajun music. In the process of working with these songs, Dafnis discovered that it is that very adaptability that defines these traditional songs and has facilitated their survival for hundreds of years, and serves as a metaphor for the Acadian diasporic experience:

It’s almost Darwinian; these songs are like organisms that have evolved over time. They live through this oral tradition, but they’re not immortalized. They change and adapt, but they survive.³⁶

³⁶ Dafnis, Costas (composer, arranger), interviewed by Nancy Carey, phone interview, April 10, 2019.

Text and Diction Guide

Though the songs referenced within this paper qualify exclusively as Cajun songs, guidelines for text and diction will refer to “Louisiana French,” as opposed to “Cajun French,” in differentiating the dialectical differences these songs exhibit in comparison to standard French. Whereas a variety of French dialects once coexisted in Louisiana, convergence of these dialects occurred over time. The French language spoken in Louisiana today is not strictly Cajun, nor is it Creole. Therefore, “Louisiana French” is the most precise label for the content presented in this diction guide, and is consistent with the idea that these songs continue to evolve alongside the contemporary dialect of French spoken in Louisiana.

Text setting in Cajun music typically adheres to the conventions of grammar, pronunciation, and inflection used in spoken Louisiana French. Likewise, these arrangements generally avoid the conventions of lyric French diction, most notably the voicing of *mute e*. It is not uncommon to hear Cajun singers use *uvular r* in recent recordings, but *flipped r* is characteristic of Louisiana French. The practice of using *uvular r* is a product of language preservation initiatives which have placed Quebecois and European teachers in French immersion schools in Louisiana, as well as initiatives which offer Louisiana students opportunities to participate in French immersion programs abroad. The result has been a renaissance of French language fluency in Louisiana, but a gradual loss of the Cajun patois. The practice of using *uvular r* in Cajun songs is not stylistically wrong, since the songs and singers themselves are involved in a living, evolving cultural tradition. However, retention of appropriate, region-specific pronunciation when performing these songs is important in distinguishing them stylistically from other francophone song traditions, including *mélodie*.

Guidelines for Louisiana French Diction:

1. The vowel sound used in standard French which would most often be described as a closed nasal “o”: / ɔ̃ / is open in Louisiana French, more accurately described by the IPA symbol / ɔ̃ /.³⁷
2. An “open e” /ɛ/ is used for the possessive plural pronouns—*les, des, mes*, etc.—in Lyric French, but a closed /e/ vowel is used in Cajun French.³⁸
3. /r / should be rolled, as in spoken Louisiana French.
4. The English words interspersed throughout these songs should be pronounced with vowel placement and consonant articulation which are relative to the French text surrounding them. For example, “bye-bye” should be pronounced as [ba baj] instead of the American English pronunciation, [bai bai], and “automobile” begins with a closed / o / vowel in lieu of the open / ɑ / heard in English.

“Si j’aurais des ailes”

O, ouais partout ayoù j’vas, mais ça me convient pas.

[o wɛ par tu juʒ va mɛ sa mɑ kɔ̃ vj pa]

O, yes, all over where I go [everywhere where I go], but that does not suit me (does not agree with me).

O, si j’aurais des aîles, comme toutes ces hirondelles, j’irais me reposer.

[o si ʒo rɛ de zɛl kɑm tu tse zi rɔ̃ dɛl ʒi rɛ mɑ rɑ po ze]

O, if I were to have wings, like all these swallows, I would go to repose.

J’irais me reposer, auprès de toi la belle; te raconter mes peines et ensuite mes amitiés.

[ʒi rɛ mɑ rɑ po ze o pre dɑ twa la bɛl tɑ ra kɔ̃ te mɛ pɛn e ɑ swit mɛ za mi tje]

I would go to repose near to you, beautiful one; to recount my pains and then my friendships.

Allons à la cantine, o boire et bien rire, et bien se divertir,

[a lɔ̃ za la kan tin o bwa re bjɛ rir e bjɛ sɑ di vɛr tir]

Let’s go to the canteen to drink and to laugh well, and to amuse oneself.

O, nous et nos amis.

[o nu e no za miz]

O, us and our friends.

³⁷ Savoy, 17.

³⁸ Ibid.

Notes on This Text:

1. ouais: “yes”, informal
2. ayoù: “where”
3. The first-person conjugation of *aller*, meaning “to go”, is not *je vais* in Cajun French as it is in standard French. Instead, both first and second person are conjugated as *vas*; *je vas* and *tu vas*. Here, this dialectical difference is further accentuated by the contraction, *j’vas*.

“J’ai passé devant la porte”

J’ai passé devant la porte.
[ʒɛ pa se də vɑ̃ la pɔʁt]
I passed in front of the door.

J’ai crié, “Bye-bye, la belle.”
[ʒɛ kʁie ba baj la bɛl]
I shouted, “Bye-bye, beautiful one.”

Il’ya personne qui m’a répondu.
[lja pɛr son ki ma re pɔ̃ dy]
There was no one who answered me.

O yéyaïe mon cœur me fait mal.
[o je jaj mɔ̃ kœr mə fɛ mal]
O ouch, my heart is broken.

Je m’ai donc mis à observer.
[ʒə mɛ dɔ̃k mi za ob sɛr vɛ]
I placed myself watching.

Moi, j’ai vu une lumière allumée.
[mwa ʒɛ vy yn lu mjɛ ra ly me]
Me, I saw a light on.

‘ya que’que chose qui disait j’aurais pleurer.
[ja kɛ kə ʃoz ki di sɛ ʒo rɛ plu re]
There was something that said I was going to cry.
O yéyaïe mon cœur me fait mal.
[o je jaj mɔ̃ kœr mə fɛ mal]
O ouch, my heart is broken.

Moi, j'ai été cogner à la porte,
[mwa ʒɛ e et kɔ ɲe a la pɔrt]
Me, I knocked on the door.

Quand ils m'ont ouvert la porte,
[kɑ̃ dil mɔ̃ tu vɛr la pɔrt]
When they opened the door to me.

J'ai vu des chandelles allumées
[ʒɛ vy de ʃɑ̃ dɛ la ly me]
I saw some lighted candles

Tout le tour de son cercueil.
[tu lə tur də sɔ̃ sɛr kɔʒ]
All around her coffin.

Quand je pense, je pense qu'à toi.
[kɑ̃ ʒə pɑ̃s ʒə pɑ̃s ka twa]
When I think, I think of you.

Quand je rêve, je rêve qu'à toi.
[kɑ̃ ʒə rɛv ʒə rɛv ka twa]
When I dream, I dream of you.

Tant qu'à pour moi, je vis que pour toi.
[tɑ̃ ka pur mwa ʒə vi kə pur twa]
As for me, I live for you.

O yéyaïe mon cœur est malade.
[o je jaj mɔ̃ kœ ɛ ma lad]
O ouch, my heart is sick.

Notes on This Text:

1. bye-bye, la belle: This is an example of English words being interspersed within Cajun French phrases. For example, when asked where someone is, a common response might be, "Il est gone. Je crois il est up town." Nor would it be unusual to offer directions by saying, "Vous go ahead au coin. Là, vous turn à droit, et la maison est droit in front."³⁹
2. yéyaïe: Is a word that does not translate easily. It is adopted from the Spanish phrase "ah yai yai" loosely meaning "Oh! Wow!" Sometimes it comes out as an exuberant yell.

³⁹ Whitfield, 13.

Other times, it conveys a mixture of surprise, reproach, and resignation. In this context, it is a cry of sorrow.⁴⁰

3. que'que: truncation of “quelque”
4. pleurer: Though Whitfield's transcriptions indicate the same closed mixed vowel found in standard French,⁴¹ the standard Cajun French pronunciation of “pleurer” is a pure, closed [u] vowel.⁴²
5. j'ai été cogner: Use of past perfect progressive tense is grammatically common in Cajun French.
6. cercueil: The mixed vowel found in the second syllable is more closed than it would typically be in standard French, and is communicated by use of the symbol [ø] instead of [œ].⁴³

“Chanson Triste”

Je m'ai fait une maîtresse trois jours, il n'ya pas longs temps.
[ʒə mɛ fɛ ty nə mɛ trɛ sə twa ʒur il nja pa lɔ̃ tãz]
I made myself a sweetheart three days ago, there is not much time.

J'ai reçu une lettre, en guerre il faut aller.
[ʒɛ rə syn lɛt ɛ̃ gɛ ril fo ta le]
I received a letter, it is necessary that I go to war.

Ma chère petite maîtresse ne fait que te pleurer.
[ma ʃɛr pə ti mɛ trɛ sə nə fɛ kə tə plu re]
My dear little sweetheart does nothing but cry to me.

J'ai reçu une lettre, en guerre il faut aller.
[ʒɛ rə syn lɛt ɛ̃ gɛ ril fo ta le]
I received a letter, it is necessary that I go to war.

⁴⁰ Falcon, Wade. ““Mama Where Are You At’ -Leo Soileau and Mayuse LaFleur.” [earlycajunmusic.blogspot.com](http://earlycajunmusic.blogspot.com/2014/10/mama-where-you-at-leo-soileau-mayuse.html). <http://earlycajunmusic.blogspot.com/2014/10/mama-where-you-at-leo-soileau-mayuse.html> (accessed April 12, 2019).

⁴¹ Whitfield, 88.

⁴² Savoy, 105.

⁴³ Whitfield, 88.

Ne pleurez pas la belle. Je reviendrai un jour, un jour dans la semaine,
[nə plu re pa la bɛ lə ʒə rə vjɛ̃d drɛ jɔ̃ ʒur œ̃ ʒur dɑ̃ la sɛ mɛn]
Don't cry beautiful one. I will return one day, one day during the week.

accomplir nos amours.
[a kɔ̃ plir no za mur]
to fulfill our loves.

Notes on This Text:

1. Though the typical Cajun pronunciation of “chère” is [ʃa], Whitfield’s transcription indicates the standard [ʃɛr].⁴⁴
2. This is the only song in the collection in which *mute e* is voiced, though only on the words “une maîtresse” and “belle.” Elsewhere, including other instances of “une” in this song, /e/ is unvoiced as in spoken French.

“Je vais mourir”

Je vais mourir sans revoir à mes vieux pères,
[ʒə vɛ mu rir sɑ̃ rə vwa ra me vjø pɛr]
I am going to die without seeing my old fathers,

sans revoir à mes premier amours.
[sɑ̃ rə vwa ra me prɛ mjɛr za mur]
without seeing my first love again

Le pays qu'était en l'assurance,
[lə pe i ke te tɛ̃ la sy rɑ̃s]
The country that was an assurance,

le voilà en divorce.
[lə vwa la ɛ̃ di vɔrs]
it is in divorce.

⁴⁴ Whitfield, 116.

“Les Maringouins”

Les maringouins ont tout mangé ma belle.

[le ma rɛ̃ gwɛ̃ zɔ̃ tu mɑ̃ ʒe ma bɛl]

The mosquitos ate up (ate all of) my sweetheart.

Ils ont laissé juste les gros orteils.

[il zɔ̃ lɛ se jyst le gr zɔr tɛj]

They’ve left only the big toes.

C’est pour faire des bouchons de liège,

[se pur fɛr de bu ʃɔ̃ dɑ̃ ljɛʒ]

This is for making corks.

c’est pour boucher mes demi-bouteilles.

[se pur bu ʃe me dɛ mi bu tɛj]

This is for plugging my half-bottles.

Ton papa semble un automobile, et ta maman semble un éléphant,

[tɔ̃ pa pa sɑ̃ blɑ̃ no to mo bil e ta ma mɑ̃ sɑ̃ blɑ̃ ne le fɑ̃]

Your father looks like a car, and your mother looks like an elephant,

et ton ‘tit frère semble un ouaouaron, et ta ‘tit soeur semble un coin de banquette.

[e tɔ̃ ti frɛr sɑ̃ blɑ̃ wa wa rɔ̃ e ta ti sœr sɑ̃ blɑ̃ kwɛ̃ dɑ̃ bɑ̃ kɛt]

And your little brother looks like a bullfrog, and your little sister looks like a bench seat.

Notes on This Text:

1. Maringouins: This is a colloquialism for a large swamp mosquito. Etymology is uncertain⁴⁵, but the term is most likely adopted from the Mi’kmaq indigenous people of Acadia.⁴⁶ Use of “maringouin” for “mosquito” is found almost exclusively in Québec and southern Louisiana.
2. bouchons de liège: “plugs of cork”
3. demi-bouteille: a small whiskey bottle, similar to a flask⁴⁷
4. automobile: Use of “automobile” instead of “voiture” when referencing a car is standard practice in Cajun French. A “voiture” refers to a horse-drawn wagon in Cajun French.

⁴⁵ Brachet, Auguste. *An Etymological Dictionary of the French Language*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1870) 225.

⁴⁶ Elliott, A. M. "Speech Mixture in French Canada." *The American Journal of Philology* 8, no. 2 (1887): 149.

⁴⁷ Falcon, ““A Mosquito Ate Up My Sweetheart’-Segura Brothers.”

5. 'tit: Cajun French abbreviation of *petit* or *petite*, meaning “small.”
6. ouaouaron: “Ouaouaron” is the Cajun French term for bullfrog. Various sources assert that it is derived from the Iroquoian Wyandot language.⁴⁸
7. coin de banquette: The comparison of this sister to a “coin de banquette” is a Cajun colloquialism implying that she is angular in appearance, to the point of being unattractive.⁴⁹

“Saute Crapaud”

Saute, crapaud, ta queue va brûler,
 [sɔt kra po ta kø va bry le]
 Jump, toad, your tail will burn.

Prends courage, une autre va pousser.
 [prã ku raʒ y nɔt va pu se]
 Take courage, another one will push [grow].

Notes on This Text:

1. Saute: Pronunciation of /au/ differs from the standard French [o]. In “saute” and “autre” the vowel is [ɔ]. However, /au/ is closed [o] in “crapaud”.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Elliott, 149.

⁴⁹ François, Raymond E. *Ye Yaille, Chère!*. (Lafayette: Thunderstone Press, 1990) 230.

⁵⁰ Whitfield, 101.

Part I: Songs Represented in Commercial Recordings

The first two songs in this collection can be found in a multitude of commercial recordings. They are represented in field recordings, early commercial recordings, recordings of the Folk Revival era, and have become standard repertoire for twenty-first century Cajun musicians.

Si j'aurais des ailes

“Si j'aurais des ailes” is unrepresented in Whitfield’s transcriptions, but it is represented in the Lomax field recording with debated credit given to singer Luneda Comeaux.⁵¹ A later notable field recording of singer Edius Naquin, made in the 1960s by Ralph Rinzler of the Newport Folk Society, has become more influential than the Comeaux version and is the source material for the version of “Si j'aurais des ailes” found in Ann Savoy’s collection of Cajun song transcriptions, as well as the melody I personally transcribed and provided for Dafnis’ arrangement.⁵² This song has been recorded by an array of notable Cajun bands and musicians, and was featured on a Grammy Award-winning album by Lost Bayou Ramblers in 2017.⁵³

“Si j'aurais des ailes” has been adapted as a drinking song, a dance tune, and as a lyric. It features themes found in most Cajun drinking songs: weariness from work, reluctance to marry, and desire to drink. *Hirondelles* are frequently referenced in Cajun songs, as well as songs of Acadian-influenced regions of western France and Canada. This lyrical commonality highlights the endurance of Acadian oral tradition, as well as a cultural emphasis placed on freedom and

⁵¹ Lomax, John Avery, and Luneda Commeaux. *Si J'aurais Des Ailes Comme Des Hirondelles*. New Iberia, Louisiana, 1934.

⁵² Savoy, 17-18.

⁵³ Lost Bayou Ramblers, "Si j'aurais des ailes," track 7 on *Kalenda*, Rice Pump Records, 2017, digital album.

autonomy– ideology that would inspire the population’s survival through war, poverty, and diasporic upheaval.

The earliest known published transcription of song text which mentions transformation of the singer into *une hirondelle*, with hopes of flying to repose with a lover, is found in Joseph Daymard’s *Vieux chants populaires recueillis en Quercy: profanes et religieux, en français et en patois*, published in 1889.⁵⁴ The opening verse of “Si j’étais hirondelle,” which was collected in Sérignac, France during the nineteenth century, is shown in Figure 5.1.

<p><i>Si j’étais hirondelle, que je puisse voler, [If I was a swallow, that I might fly Sure le sein de ma belle, j’irai me reposer. On the bosom of my belle I would repose.]</i></p>
--

Figure 5.1: Text and translation of “Si j’étais hirondelle”⁵⁵

In *Traditional Music in Coastal Louisiana*, folklorist Joshua Caffery compares five versions of “Si j’aurais des ailes” which differ from the field recording on which the Dafnis arrangement is based. Caffery does not provide transcriptions of the music heard in the field recordings he references, but does provide texts, translations, and analysis. Information regarding the origins and lineage of “Si j’aurais des ailes” reveals overarching evolutionary tendencies of Cajun folk songs. The phrase *les ailes d’hirondelles* is distinctive enough that its repeated inclusion in songs points to a common point of origin. Use of this “sparrows’ wings” motif alongside other tropes of Cajun music elucidates the origins of these tropes and the themes which accompany them.

⁵⁴ Caffery, 22-23.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The first of these alternate versions of “Si j’aurais des ailes” is not attributed by Caffery to any particular singer or ethnographer, but is textually similar to what is commonly heard in commercial recordings, as well as what is presented in the Dafnis arrangement. In this short lyric, initially from the perspective of a young man—as use of *la belle* in second person suggests—the speaker daydreams about being a swallow, thereby being able to fly to his beloved and recount his sorrows. Only the final verse of this version, presented in Figure 5.2, is anomalous. Here, use of *belle* instead of *beau* explicitly communicates that the speaker is female, an idea which is reinforced by other statements in this verse. The crown mentioned is a likely reference to French tradition of brides wearing floral crowns, which is echoed by mention of marriage at the song’s conclusion. The conflicting perspectives represented in this version of “Si j’aurais des ailes” suggest that it was once a dialogue.

O si j’aurais des ailes,	[If I had wings
Comme ils ont, ces hirondelles,	Like the swallows,
Auprès de toi la belle,	Beside you, my dear,
Que j’irai me reposer.	I would repose.
Ça serait pour te conter,	It would be to recount
Mes peines et mes tourments,	My sadness and my sufferings,
Mes peines et mes tourments,	My sadness and my sufferings,
Ainsi que mes amitiés.	As well as my affections.
Portez-moi la couronne,	I’ll wear the crown,
Ainsi que les cheveux bouclés.	As well as the curling hair,
Que je paraîtrais la plus belle,	That I might appear most beautiful
Aux yeux du marié.	In the bridegroom’s eyes.]

Figure 5.2: Text and translation for “O si j’aurais des ailes”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Caffery, 22.

Caffery hypothesizes that more recent versions of “Si j’aurais des ailes” developed from the coalescence of older song forms into a new type. He references a 1965 field recording of Mathias Rodrige of Saint Germaine, Québec singing “Le Jeune voyageur inconsolable” as evidence of theory. Transcribed text from this recording is shown in Figure 5.3. In “Le Jeune voyageur inconsolable,” the speaker addresses a swallow and adjures it to donate its wings so that the speaker might fly to their beloved. Again, reunion with the speaker’s lover concludes with reposal and a cathartic confession of sadness and torments.⁵⁷

Ah! toi, belle hirondelle, Porte-moi sur tes ailes; Porte-moi sur tes ailes Que je puiss’ m’envoler. Sur les genoux d’la belle J’irai me reposer.	[Ah! You, lovely swallow, Bring me on your wings; Bring me on your wings That I might fly; On the lap of the belle, I will repose.
Si j’étais hirondelle, Si je savais voler, Auprès de ma bien-aimée J’irais me reposer; Je lui conteras mes peines Et mes tourments.	If I was a swallow, If I knew how to fly, Near my dearly beloved, I would repose, I would tell her of my sadness And my torments.]

Figure 5.3: Text and translation for “Le Jeune voyageur inconsolable”⁵⁸

In Louisiana, the narrative becomes less specific, and is most often a contemplative drinking song. Examples of this thematic shift are shown in Figure 5.4—recorded by Gaston-

⁵⁷ Caffery, 22.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 22-23.

Eugène Adam in the 1940s and credited to a “G. Simon of Maurice” from St. Tammany Parish—and Figure 5.5, credited to Lorica Guillory as collected by Gerard Dôle in 1977.⁵⁹

Si j'aurais des ailes	[If I had wings,
Comme toutes les belles hirondelles	Like all the lovely swallows,
Auprès de toi ma belle	Next to you, my belle,
J'irais me reposer.	I would repose.
Oh passez-moi les verres	Oh, pass me the glasses,
Pour que je boive pour la santé.	That I might drink to my health.
Oh passez-moi les verres	Oh, pass me the glass,
Pour que je boive pour la santé.	That I might drink to my health.
Oh il y en a qui aiment les brunes;	Oh, there are those who love the brunettes,
Il y en a qui aiment les blondes;	And those who love the blondes.
Mais moi ça me fait pas rien,	But it doesn't matter to me,
Je vais prendre n'importe laquelle.	I'll take any which one I can.]

Figure 5.4: Text and translation for “Si j’aurais des ailes—Adam recording⁶⁰

Mention of *les brunes* and *les blondes* in the final verse of the Adam recording, Figure 5.4, is a common trope within Cajun folk songs. Physical descriptions of women rarely venture beyond hair color, which is generally limited to either brunette or blonde. Whitfield list “Songs about pretty blondes” among the categories in her collection, and there are numerous references to these attributes, even within song titles. Among the songs in this category are “Aimable brune,” “Ma Blonde est parti,” and “Jolie blonde”—which is generally regarded as the “Cajun national anthem.”

⁵⁹ Caffery, 23-24.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Y en a qui aiment la blonde	[There are those who like the blonde,
Et y en a d'aut' qui aiment la brune	And there are others who like the brunette;
Et moi j'en suis de même	And me, I'm indifferent,
Moi j'aime que ma bouteille.	I like nothing but my bottle.
Oh parlez-nous t'à boire,	Oh, speak to us of drinking,
À boire et riboter	Of drinking and carousing,
Non pas d'une pauvre femme	Not about a poor women
Qui se r'proche sons temps passé.	Who regrets her days gone by.]

Figure 5.5: Text and translation for “Si j’aurais des ailes—Dôle recording⁶¹

The version of “Si j’aurais des ailes” shown in Figure 5.5 contains the text *Oh parlez-nous t’à boire*, which draws correlation between “Si j’aurais des ailes” and another commonly recorded Cajun drinking song, “Parlez-nous à boire.” Reinforcing this overlap, *les ailes hirondelles* are commonly included in the “Parlez-nous à boire” text, and field recordings exist in which remarkable similarities between the “Si j’aurais des ailes” and “Parlez-nous à boire” melodies can be heard.

Caffery charts the developmental course “Si j’aurais ailes” has taken and calls attention to its evolving cultural significance:

In essence as series of verse fragments from older French songs appear to have coalesced into the Louisiana type *Si j’avais des ailes*, which, in turn, morphed into the Cajun two-step...Ironically, what began as a song of lost love and desired reunion became perhaps the best-known anti-marriage anthem in the more contemporary tradition.⁶²

Though this is an often-recorded song, a common melody has been retained. Dafnis adheres to convention in his treatment of the melody, but reimagines “Si j’aurais des ailes” as a nostalgic ballad which pays homage to the familiarity of the song itself as a favorite within the

⁶¹ Caffery, 24.

⁶² Ibid.

genre. The harmonic landscape is warm and sweet, evoking reflections on old friendships tinged with mild homesickness. Dafnis creates a harmonic atmosphere that is appropriately bucolic without being “country” by conveying images of wide, expansive fields through the use of open 5ths and octaves in the piano.⁶³ Figures 5.6 and 5.7 highlight the use of this technique in mm. 4-7. Dafnis chose the key, D flat, for its inherent warmth, which allows for openness while avoiding austerity.⁶⁴ Harmonic blurring is employed throughout “Si j’aurais des ailes,” and is facilitated through the use of tied chords.

4

The image shows a musical score for the song "Si j'aurais des ailes". It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a measure of rest followed by the lyrics "mais ça me con-vien pas...". The second staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a melodic line with an 8va marking and a bass line with a long tied chord. The score includes time signature changes from 3/4 to 2/4 and a key signature of two flats (D-flat major/C minor).

— mais ça me con-vien pas... Oh si j'au-rai-s des ailes comme tout ces hi-ron

Figure 5.6: Use of open fifths and octaves in mm. 4-6 of “Si j’aurais des ailes”

⁶³ Dafnis, Costas (composer, arranger), interviewed by Nancy Carey, phone interview, April 10, 2019.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

13

J'i - rais J'i-rai s me re-po ser_____ J'i- rais J'i-

f *p* *sub. p*

Figure 5.7: Use of open fifths and octaves in mm. 13-16 of “Si j’aurais des ailes”

J’ai passé devant la porte

“J’ai passé devant la porte,” also known as “Mon coeur t’appelle,” is another widely recorded Cajun song.⁶⁵ Song historian Raymond François remarks that his father remembered “J’ai passé devant la porte” being played at the time the Titanic sank, and comments that the tune itself predates the version of the song which has been performed since the early 20th century.⁶⁶ As previously mentioned, other sources list this melody among those shared by Spanish settlers during the 19th century.⁶⁷ This first-person narrative about a lover’s discovery that his sweetheart has died is thematically and structurally similar to another well-known Cajun ballad, “Au Natchitoches.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Savoy, 105.

⁶⁶ François, *Ye Yaille, Chère!*, 167.

⁶⁷ Ancelet, *Cajun Music*, 17.

⁶⁸ Savoy, 24.

While *j'ai passé devant ta/la porte* is a phrase commonly used in Cajun folk songs, as is the general mention of walking past a door, “J’ai passé devant la porte” is specifically categorized by French folk song collectors as a *chanson à porte*, or door song.⁶⁹ *Chansons à porte* are often dialogue songs in which a man seeks entry into his lover’s home. Among Cajun *chansons à porte* are “Dans mon chemin rencontre,” “Ouvre la porte,” and “J’ai passé devant la porte.” The former two songs are dialogues, each with many strophes. “J’ai passé devant la porte” does not adhere to the convention of *chansons à porte* being structured as dialogues, but is similar to “Ouvre la porte” in both theme and narrative. In “Ouvre la porte,” a man passes by his lover’s door and calls out for her to let him enter, to which she responds that she is sick in bed and is too ill to open it. A dialogue unfolds between the two and a doctor is called. The doctor is unable to cure the woman, and the song concludes with the woman’s death.⁷⁰

The dialogue is not a common Cajun song structure, though numerous lengthy dialogue songs have been documented within the song traditions of France and Canada. Though “J’ai passé devant la porte” is a *chanson à porte* restructured as a more popular Cajun song form of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the lyric—published transcriptions of “Ouvre la porte” which mention that the doctor is called from Nantes draw attention to the French origins of “J’ai passé devant la porte.”⁷¹

Despite its tragic story, “J’ai passé devant la porte” is most frequently heard as a dance tune. Dafnis’ tempo markings—“Bright, cheerful”—acknowledge this irony. As mentioned in reference to “Si j’aurais des ailes,” Cajun songs are often bereft of the narrative

⁶⁹ Caffery, 179.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 141-142.

⁷¹ Ibid.

detail found in other francophone song traditions. This is also true of “J’ai passé devant la porte,” though it does not lack gravitas. In response, Dafnis’ arrangement of “J’ai passé devant la porte” intensifies the complexity of the narrative provided in text. A heartbroken lover begins the song with a sense of resignation, which transforms into hope at the sight of a light in his lover’s window. Knocks on the piano are composed in mm. 38-47, increasing in number with each iteration, as the speaker excitedly knocks on the door and anticipates being reunited with their love. As the door opens, the singer sees sad expressions on the faces of other visitors to the home, after which he devastated by the image of his lover’s coffin surrounded by candles in the center of the room.

Dafnis’ arrangement samples Mixolydian mode with the inclusion of flat scale degree seven, and Lydian mode with raised scale degree four, within the song’s harmonic content. This technique is illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Flat scale degree seven and raised scale degree four used to synthesize modal shifting, Mixolydian and Lydian, in mm. 1-4 of “J’ai passé devant la porte.”

The tonic-supertonic relationship is emphasized in the melody of “J’ai passé devant la porte”, and is represented on a macro-scale by the modulation from G flat to A flat in m. 48

(Figure 6.2). The modulation occurs through a leading tone concept in the left hand of the piano, which coincides with a half-step descent in the right hand of the piano, as well as the vocal line. The key of A flat is anticipated by the E flat sonority which sounds through m. 46. The minor quality of the chords here suggests submediant function in the key of G flat, but the tripling of the root within the chord and the E flat major chord at the downbeat of m. 47 implies dominant function in the key of A flat. A narrative pivot occurs with the key change in m. 38 as the speaker enters his lover's home to find that his lover has died.

The image shows a musical score for the song "J'ai passé devant la porte". It consists of three staves: a vocal line at the top, a piano right-hand part in the middle, and a piano left-hand part at the bottom. The music starts at measure 46. The key signature is G flat (three flats). The vocal line has the lyrics "Moi, j'ai été cogner à la porte". The piano accompaniment features a descending line in the left hand and a more active line in the right hand. There are triplets in the right hand of the piano in measures 46 and 47. The score shows a modulation from G flat to A flat (two flats) between measures 48 and 49. The piece ends in measure 50 with a final chord in A flat.

Figure 6.2: Modulation from key of G flat to A flat in m. 46-50 of “J’ai passé devant la porte”

G flat is referenced once again in mm. 62-64, shown in Figure 6.3. Here, the speaker sees his lover's coffin, at which point all hope is truly lost. The oscillation between the keys of G flat and A flat facilitates Dafnis' text painting throughout this song, but most poignantly during its conclusion. As the word *cercueil* (coffin) is sung, the piano introduces G flat within the key of A flat. The ambiguous interjection of G flat here evokes simultaneous sentiments of nostalgia and confusion as it seems to foreshadow a return to the key of G flat. However, the possibility of

return to G flat—which serves as the speaker’s key of hopefulness within this song—is squelched when G natural is reintroduced as the leading tone to A flat in m. 65. Resolution in the key of A flat codifies this as the speaker’s key of truth.

62

cueil. _____

Quand je pense je pense qu'a

Gently, as a dream (♩ = 120)

mp

Figure 6.3: Reference to key of G flat in mm. 62-64 of “J’ai passé devant la porte.”

Part II: Songs of War

Helen Creighton's *Chansons Folklorique D'Acadia: La Fleur du Rosier*, which contains over one hundred transcriptions of Acadian folk songs of Canada, provides a catalog of songs which are apt for comparison to Irene Whitfield's *Louisiana French Folk Songs*. The two collections possess overlapping material, but also a fascinating dissimilarity in their labeling of songs associated with war. Songs which make reference to war are widespread in the Creighton collection, and fall under an array of categories: "Songs With A Military Theme," "Epic and Tragic Songs," and "Military Songs." To the contrary, The Whitfield collection lists only three songs which make references to war, and they all fall under the category "Songs from the Civil War." Various theories about the historical reasons for this incongruity can be posed. However, it seems likely that this is a result of the rapid musical evolution spurred by Louisiana's cultural diversity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in comparison to the francophone region of Canada.

Songs with war themes do not typically make direct reference to the military conflicts themselves. There is generally no specificity regarding battles won or lost. Instead, songs of war are vehicles for telling stories of love and loss, reunions between lovers, or the tragedies of young love. Many traditional songs begin with a soldier saying farewell to his sweetheart, but the conclusions of these songs vary more widely. Some tell of the soldier's return home, in which case the soldier sometimes arrives just as his sweetheart is to be married to another man, or finds that his wife has long since remarried. Some versions are reflections on loss, some are warnings against misjudgment, and others are reflections on the fickleness of young love.⁷²

⁷² Creighton, Helen. *Chansons Folklorique D'Acadia: La Fleur du Rosier*. (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia: University of Cape Breton Press, 1988), 57.

While this pattern persisted in Canada, other cultural influences provided new conduits for these same themes. Songs which would have been listed under Creighton's heading "Epic and Tragic Songs" find new niches within Whitfield's "Songs of Love and Marriage" and "Songs in Which a Love Goes to Texas." Furthermore, the Whitfield collection presents evidence that these themes found a new platform with the emergence of the blues,⁷³ which allowed various aspects of the tragedies of love to be addressed more directly, and within a harmonic context that suited the sentiments more acutely.

Chanson Triste

Whitfield labels "Chanson Triste" as a Civil War era song, but also remarks that the melody bears great similarity to chant melodies used in requiem masses. She also comments that the opening lines are exactly those found in a number of old French folk songs. It shares thematic material with "Le Retour du Mari Soldat", and "Le Retour Funeste".⁷⁴ Its nearest textual relative is the Acadian folk song "J'ai fait une maîtresse," whose opening line of text parallels that of "Chanson Triste."⁷⁵ Table 6 illustrates the lyrical and thematic parallels between "J'ai fait une maîtresse" and "Chanson Triste."

⁷³ Whitfield, 94-101.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁵ Creighton, 56-57.

Table 6: Text Comparison of *J'ai fait une maîtresse* and *Chanson Triste*

<u><i>J'ai fait une maîtresse</i></u>	<u><i>Chanson Triste</i></u>
<p>J'ai fait une maîtresse, trois jours, n'y a pas longtemps. J'en ai fait la demande à tous ses parents Pour nous unir ensemble comme deux amants.</p> <p>Le premier soir de noces, il m'y vient une letter. Il m'y vient un lettr' pour aller au combat. A fallu predre les arm'pour m'en aller soldat.</p> <p>Ma très jolie maîtresse ne faisait que pleurer. "Non n'y pleurez pas tant, la belle, n'y pleurez donc plus. Dans un mois ou six semain' je serai revenue."</p>	<p>Je m'ai fait une maîtresse trois jours, il n'y a pas longtemps.</p> <p>J'ai reçu une letter, en guerre il faut aller.</p> <p>Ma chère petite maîtresse ne fait que te pleurer. Ne pleurez pas la belle. Je reviendrai un jour, un jour dans la semaine,</p>

Sources: Creighton, Helen. *Chansons Folklorique D'Acadia: La Fleur du Rosier*. (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia: University of Cape Breton Press, 1988) 56-57. Whitfield, Irene T. *Louisiana French Folk Songs*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939) 118.

In *Traditonal Music in Coastal Louisiana*, Joshua Caffery cites two twentieth century field recordings of songs which begin, “Je m’ai fait une maîtresse. Trois jour, il n’ya pas longtemps,” and explains that this particular opening line is common to a family of anecdotal songs dealing with the misadventures of an overeager suitor. Caffery does not reference the Whitfield and Creighton transcriptions, and neither of songs he mentions as having the opening line *Je m’ai fait une maîtresse* allude to war. Rather, in each of the songs presented by Caffery, a suitor is denied marriage to his lover by her father and departs from his lover’s home heartbroken, and presumably never to return.⁷⁶ Lack of melody transcriptions within the Caffery collection make it difficult to ascertain the degree of relationship between the two versions of “Je m’ai fait une maîtresse” he mentions, the one included in the Creighton collection (Table 6), and “Chanson Triste.” Perhaps a broader category applies —songs which begin, “Je m’ai fait une

⁷⁶ Caffery, 164, 277.

maîtresse. Trois jour, il n’ya pas longtemps,” tell of devastating separation between lovers under circumstances in which the lovers have no agency in determining their own fate, concluding with a pending departure or journey.

Though the “Chanson Triste” melody is hexatonic, and thus limited in its full demonstration of modality, the arranger interprets it as modal.⁷⁷ Reiterations of the subtonic and tonic alongside the minor V chords indicate that the harmonic concept can be examined through an Aeolian modal lens. The text delivers only one side of dialogue, and the narrative unfolds almost entirely within the piano. The song opens with a reluctant, plodding device created by overlapping tied rhythms on accented beats in the piano. Following a resolute *en guerre il faut aller* in mm. 21, an ostinato pattern emerges with pointillistic interjections of melodic material (Figure 7.1). The gradual melodic ascension rising above this inert ostinato conveys the physical and emotional exhaustion of marching soldiers.

⁷⁷ Dafnis, Costas (composer, arranger), interviewed by Nancy Carey, phone interview, April 10, 2019.

20

guerre il faut al - ler, en guerre il faut al - ler.

23

Figure 7.1: Oscillations between mm. 20-24 of “Chanson Triste”

An abrupt common tone modulation occurs at m. 40 (Figure 7.2). The new key, C minor, only persists for eight measures. This interlude is emotionally heightened, and feigns development. However, nothing new is created and no true development occurs, recalling the idea that the opposite of war is not peace, but creation.

37 *ff*

maine

Più mosso

ff

3

3

3

3

43

8^{va}

7

47 *poco accel.* *Grave* *p*

poco accel. *Grave* ac-

(8)

p

Figure 7.2: mm. 37-49 of “Chanson Triste”

A cascading finale of this interlude lands with another common tone pivot back to E flat minor, illustrating the speaker’s swift return (Figure 7.3). The conclusion of “Chanson Triste” is pandiatonic, but consideration of Dafnis’ intent to create a harmonic palate which references modality though whole-tone relationships related to subtonic–tonic–supertonic scale degrees calls into question the harmonic structure of the final two measures. The presence of six scale degrees of the E flat minor scale within the final chord would be aurally perceived as a tone cluster. However, absence of scale degree seven from this final sonority, in conjunction with the Dafnis’ compositional emphasis of subtonic–tonic–supertonic elsewhere in this collection, leads to the conclusion that this final chord is a deliberate combination of two separate triads: E flat minor and F diminished. Dafnis’ “home” concept is communicated through reiteration of tonic in the outer voices, while the juxtaposed supertonic chord—F diminished—represents “wandering.



Figure 7.3: mm. 54-57 of “Chanson Triste”

Je vais mourir

The transcription for “Je vais mourir sans revoir à mes vieux pères” was found within the Whitfield collection, though no information regarding its origins was provided. Whitfield merely indicated that it may have been a composed song, but she was unable to find any record of it as a published work. Whitfield lists “Je vais mourir” among “Songs from the Civil War.” Within this collection, the “Je vais mourir” text is most explicit in its reference to the Civil War itself.

Furthermore, it seems to recall sentiments of earlier periods of tragedy and unrest.

The phrase *en l'assurance* within the text does not communicate a desire for unity or justice. It communicates a desire for stability. The subtle language here seems to reflect remembrance of the upheaval which led to the Acadians' departure from Ludon in France following the Protestant Reformation, and later from Acadia during Le Grand Dérangement. It reflects the remembrance of a time without citizenship, and the weariness of being victim of a war in which you have no stake.

In the opening phrase of “Je vais mourir,” Dafnis employs modal mixing above tonic and dominant pedals to establish a sense of calm resignation, and acceptance of fate in the midst of chaos and the throes of sorrow. By mixing tonic with dominant, and mixing of dominant with submediant—which is tonic of the relative minor—grasp of a tonic “home” is lost. This is harmonic blurring is an effective device for conveying the loss of home elicited by both the phrase *le voilà en divorce* and the profound loss and displacement associated with the Civil War.

The song begins with modal shifting in the piano from E major to E Mixolydian, which is implied by the subtonic chord placed between a tonic pedal in the left hand and an open tonic chord in the right hand. A similar sonority is played in m. 3, but with a sharped D replacing the lowered scale degree seven played in m.1. Here, dominant merges with a submediant chord in E

major, which is the tonic of the relative minor key of C sharp minor. The same Mixolydian borrowing used in m.1. is found again at mm. 20 and again in the final chord, shown in Figure 8.1 and 8.2.

Figure 8.1 shows the musical score for measures 18-20 of the song "Je vais mourir". The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature changes from 3/2 to 4/4. The lyrics are: "pères, san re - voir à mes pre-miers a - mours." The score features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. A large bracket under the piano accompaniment in measures 18-20 highlights the modal shifting, showing the transition from a major mode to a minor mode.

Figure 8.1: Modal shifting in mm. 18-20 of *Je vais mourir*

Figure 8.2 shows the musical score for measures 28-31 of the song "Je vais mourir". The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "là en di - vorce." The score features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. A large bracket under the piano accompaniment in measures 28-31 highlights the modal shifting, showing the transition from a major mode to a minor mode. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mp*.

Figure 8.2: Modal shifting in mm. 28-31 of *Je vais mourir*

The melody of “Je vais mourir” is the same as the melody Caesar Vincent sang in his rendition of another war song, “Les anneaux de Marianson,” of which a field recording was only recently discovered in 2017.⁷⁸ In this story, which originated in Normandy during the Middle

⁷⁸ Ancelet, Barry, “Travailler, C’est Trop Dur: Caesar Vincent’s Iconic Song,” (lecture presented at *Festivals Acadians et Créoles*, Lafayette, Louisiana, October 13, 2018).

Ages, a husband leaves his wife and home for war. A knight arrives at the home following the husband's departure and flatters Marianson in an attempt to seduce her. She doesn't succumb, so the knight takes Marianson's wedding rings and has exact replicas made by a blacksmith without her knowledge. The stolen rings are returned, and the knight also departs for war. While at war, the knight eventually encounters Marianson's husband and uses the replicated rings to convince him of her infidelity. The husband leaves the battlefield and returns home immediately. When he arrives, he grabs Marianson, ties her to his horse by her hair, and drags her around the city of Paris for three days without ever looking at her or speaking to her. When she is on the brink of death, he finally asks her, "Marianson, where are the rings I gave you?" She responds that they're in a chest at the foot of the bed. The husband unlocks the chest and discovers the rings and his own tragic mistake, at which point it is too late to save his wife.⁷⁹

"Les anneaux de Marianson" is one of the oldest pieces of French folk repertoire to have survived beyond France.⁸⁰ Melody and text setting vary greatly among the many versions of this song, and field recordings exist of other Louisiana francophone singers performing this sit, each with their own melody. In keeping with the song's origins, modality is a characteristic of most documented melodies associated with "Les anneaux de Marianson." It's uncertain whether Caesar Vincent's melody was derived from "Je vais mourir" or if his was a popular rendition of "Les anneaux de Marianson" at the time "Je vais mourir" was written, but there certainly appears to be a correlation between the songs' overlapping themes of war, death, and broken

⁷⁹ Massignon, Geneviève and Georges Delarue. *Trésors de la chanson populaire française. Autour de 50 chansons recueillies en Acadia.* (Paris: Éditions de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1994), 15-21. <https://books.openedition.org/editionsbnf/456?lang=en>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

relationships. The Dafnis arrangement of this melody contains a slight rhythmic difference from the Whitfield transcription, which was made for the purposes of improved text setting.

Table 7: Comparison of melodies used in “Je vais mourir” and “Les anneaux de Marianson”

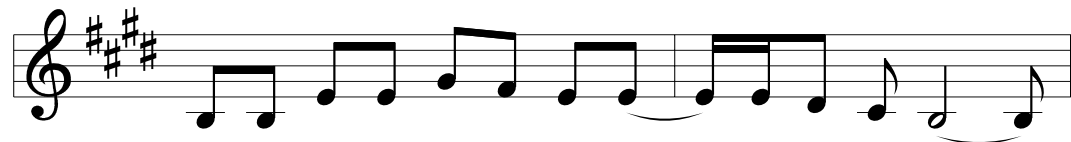
Melody of “Les anneaux de Marianson” as performed by Caesar Vincent⁸¹:



Melody of “Je vais mourir” as published in the Whitfield collection⁸²:



Melody of “Je vais mourir” used in the Costas Dafnis arrangement:



Part III: Miscellaneous Songs

Les Maringouins

⁸¹ Ancelet, Barry, “Travailler, C’est Trop Dur: Caesar Vincent’s Iconic Song.”

⁸² Whitfield, 116.

Though “Les Maringouins” is a well-known song, very little has been published regarding its origins. The published research regarding this song primarily focuses on the etymology of various words within its text. On the contrary, anecdotes referencing “Saute crapaud” have been published in abundance. This is likely a product of the same phenomenon Whitfield encountered during her field work. Of “Saute crapaud” Whitfield comments:

While “Saute crapaud” is not found in many variations in Louisiana, it is undoubtedly one of the best known of the French folk songs of our state. Almost every person who contributed any song to this collection first offered “Saute crapaud,” and snickered and shrugged his shoulders as he did so...I should like to know just where this pathetic story began, but I know only where I learned it.” Whitfield proceeds to offer a story from her own childhood, of spending the night with a friend and toasting pecans over an open fire. “Occasionally we put too near the fire either a toe or the hand with the pecan, and we shrieked. Then our hostess [the friend’s mother] told us that if we did not mend our ways, the first thing we knew we would be like the little toad, and she proceeded to sing “Saute crapaud.”⁸³

The exact origins of this song are unconfirmed, but a majority of sources assume from its prevalence in southeast Louisiana, that it must have originated in Acadia or France. Once source, a transcription by Raymond François, merely remarks, “This is a very old song.”⁸⁴

Accompanying François’ own brief commentary is an anecdote he relays from musician Moïse Robin:

Me and Boy Frugé went to Memphis, TN to make some records. Boy had no musicians with him. When we arrived there, he found a pop bottle case made of wood and turned it upside down and stomped on that for his drum effect while recording. The first song he recorded was “Saute crapaud.”⁸⁵

From its first measure, the Dafnis arrangement of “Les Maringouins” is whimsical and innovative. The opening measure introduces a mixed modal mosquito motif heard throughout the

⁸³ Whitfield, I101-102.

⁸⁴ François, *Ye Yaille, Chère!*, 273.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

song. This buzzing septuplet gesture features a raised scale degree four and lowered scale degree seven, suggesting a combination of Lydian and Mixolydian modal ideas (Figure 9.1). The first interval of the melody, a major second, is rhythmically exaggerated for the purposes of reinforcing the melodic and harmonic significance of subtonic and supertonic functions. Modality persists until the *colla voce* section at m.16, at which point a rolled dominant seventh chord is played, followed by a major four seventh chord, and finally a tonic chord in second inversion (Figure 9.2).

The musical score for Figure 9.1 consists of three staves. The top staff is empty. The middle staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 6/8 time signature. It features a septuplet melody starting on a dotted quarter note, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 65. The notes are G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The first interval is a major second. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It provides accompaniment for the melody, with the instruction '(let notes ring)' written below the first two notes.

Figure 9.1: Modal mixing in the mosquito motif of “Les Marignouins,” mm. 1-2

The musical score for Figure 9.2 consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 6/8 time signature. It contains a vocal line starting at measure 15, marked 'Colla voce'. The lyrics are 'Ils ont laiss - sé juste les gros or- teils...'. The middle staff is in treble clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features a septuplet melody starting on a dotted quarter note, with notes G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It provides accompaniment for the melody, with a rolled dominant seventh chord indicated by a vertical wavy line.

18

C'est pour faire des bou-chons de liège, c'est pour bou-cher mes de-mi-bou - teilles...

Figure 9.2: The *colla voce* section of “Les Maringouins,” mm. 15-22

The chantlike melody emphasizes the tonic triad, and the final fermata on scale degree five in the vocal line serves as a cadential transition into the more predictable functionality of the *a tempo* section which begins at m. 23. This transitional piano interlude which outlines the tonic triad is a sampling of the “Saute crapaud” melody, the preamble to a nearly-heterophonic, pattering rendition of “Les Maringouins” with realization of the song’s complete text (Figure 9.3). This pattering event occurs identically twice in the song, and is presented as a deconstructed coda in septuple meter during the song’s final measures.

23 *A tempo* ♩. = 66

Les ma-rin -

pp *f*

Figure 9.3: Sampling of the “Saute Crapaud” melody in “Les Maringouins,” mm. 23-26

“Saute crapaud” is sung above frog-like preparatory trills and leaping gestures in the piano in mm. 35-42 (Figure 9.4). Similar text painting occurs in m. 58, where the word *automobile* cues a car horn in the piano, m. 59, which parodies an elephant trumpet, and in m. 60, where a descending octave leap on the final syllable of *ouaouaron* creates double onomatopoeia (Figure 9.5).

35

Saute cra-paud, ta queue va brû-ler, prends cou-rage, une autre va pous-ser.

39

Saute cra-paud, ta queue va brû - ler, prends cou-rage, une autre va pous

Figure 9.4: Leaping gestures in mm. 35-42 of “Les Maringouins”

57

Ton pa - pa semble un au-to-mo-bile et ta ma-

59

man semble un é - lé-phant et ton pe tit frère semble un oua-oua ron,

ff

p *f* *mf pesante*

Figure 9.5: Onomatopoeia in mm. 57-60 of “Les Maringouins”

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Cajun culture is defined the resiliency which brought the Acadians to Louisiana following their expulsion from Acadia, and by the diversity of influences which forged Cajun identity by differentiating it from its French and Acadian origins. The retention of this amalgamized identity is at the core of the preservation of Cajun culture. In acting as an agent for preservation, the nature of this identity must be examined. Ethnomusicologist Adelaida Reyes contends that identity should be examined in terms of its basic components: human agency and a medium for transmission.

Identity requires a minimal pair—a self and an *other* (whether an individual or a group)—because identity is not only a statement of who a group *is* and what it identifies itself *as*, it is also a statement that expresses *to* someone an identification *with* and difference *from* an *other* on some grounds...Identity is conveyed through something perceivable: an object, an act, a music, an art, a language, a banner that serves as a label, insignia, diacritic, or emblem. These tag a human group and, in the literal sense of identity as sameness or oneness, they in turn assume the identity of the group.¹

Cajun culture boasts an ample array of identity-transmitting mediums—cuisine, language, storytelling, ceremony, and song. Of the numerous vehicles for communicating Cajun cultural identity, song is paramount. Song, which combines an array of mediums simultaneously—language, narrative, and music—is, perhaps, the most complex and precise conduit through which identity can be communicated. Furthermore, the marrying of melody and harmony with story provides an effective emotional context for one to empathize with an “other” whose identity is different from theirs, but whose human experience is quite similar to their own.

Cajun culture is marked by its inclusivity, an attribute adopted from the Mi’kmaq of Acadia. This receptive ideology encouraged the Acadians to embrace neighboring cultures in

¹ Reyes, Adelaida. *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: United States and Canada*, 1st ed., s.v. “Identity, Diversity, and Interaction.” New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 2001.

Louisiana, as evidenced by the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and instrumental enrichment of centuries-old French songs and their evolution as the Cajun folksongs sung in Louisiana today. Capacity for evolution distinguishes Cajun songs from other North American folksong traditions, and parallels the determined survivalism which transformed French colonists into Acadians and Acadians into Cajuns.

The songs arranged by Costas Dafnis in *Je ne vais pas parler français à l'école* illuminate previously unexplored aspects of their source materials. Through his lens, the origins of these songs are honored alongside their universality. Similarities shared by “Chanson Triste” and “J’ai fait une maîtresse,” as well as retention of Mi’kmaq language in “Les Maringouins”—recorded in Louisiana more than a century after the singer’s ancestors were expelled from Acadia—affix Cajun song tradition to Acadian song tradition. Textual elements of “Si j’aurais des ailes” and “J’ai passé devant la porte” emerged from phrases and themes common in French folk song tradition, and “Je vais mourir” displays surprising melodic similarity to a Cajun adaptation of a medieval French ballad.

Work of folklorists and ethnomusicologists has provided the platform for my own research. Clues provided by one source have been tied to clues provided by others, and a more thorough origin story has arisen for each song featured in *Je ne vais pas parler français à l'école*. Just as existing research has informed my understanding of these songs, the accompanying supplemental information I have encountered illuminates previously unexplored or misunderstood aspects of the Cajun song tradition, as well as the social and cultural impact of folksongs on francophone cultures.

Composer Costas Dafnis has taken a remarkably inventive, historically informed compositional approach which first required that melodic qualities of these songs be isolated

from the harmonic and instrumental frameworks which accompany them in commercial recordings. Field recordings reconcile what is provided in published transcriptions with what is understood about the origins of Cajun songs, and Dafnis avoids parody by emphasizing more obscure components of these melodies and lesser-understood aspects of their musical ancestry. The processes of compiling, arranging, and editing each song in *Je ne vais pas parler français à l'école* have required thoughtful handling. The desired outcome is that these songs provide a new lens for the exploration and appreciation of Cajun culture. This collection of arrangements for voice and piano provides a conduit for engagement with Cajun culture through song—one which allows musicians, who were formerly mere observers and admirers of Cajun music, an opportunity to become participants in this cherished song tradition. Furthermore, my hope is that this collection serves to elevate and enrich artistic interaction with folksongs, which provide unparalleled socio-cultural and historical context for interpretation in performance.

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JE NE VAIS PAS PARLER FRANÇAIS À L'ÉCOLE

A Collection of Cajun Songs Arranged by Costas Dafnis
For High Voice and Piano

1. Si j'aurais des ailes
2. J'ai passé devant la porte
3. Chanson Triste
4. Je vais mourir
5. Les Maringouins

This collection of songs was commissioned in 2018 by Nancy Carey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Musical Arts in Performance
University of Memphis

© 2019 Costas Dafnis/ Noisi Painttr Music (ASCAP)

commissioned in 2018 by soprano, Nancy Carey

Si j'aurais des ailes

COSTAS DAFNIS

Ballad ♩ = 60

Soprano Solo

Piano

mp

mp molto sost.

Oh ouais par-tout àyou j'vas_

4

S. Solo

Pno.

— mais ça me con-vien pas.— Oh si j'au-rais des ailes comme tout ces hi-ron

8va

8

S. Solo

Pno.

delles_

(whistle)

p *mp*

pp

8va

13

S. Solo *f* *p*

Ji - rais J'i-rais me re-po ser J'i- rais J'i-

Pno. *f* *sub. p*

17

S. Solo *mf*

rais me re-po- ser Au - près de toi la belle. te

Pno. *p* *mf*

22

S. Solo

ra - con - ter mes peines, de ra - con - ter mes peines et en-

Pno. *mf*

26

S. Solo

suite mes a - mi - ties Al-lons à la can - tine À

Pno.

pesante 3 *p* *mf* *f*

29

S. Solo

boire_ et bon rire, Et

Pno.

fp *f* *p*

3 7 7

32

S. Solo

bien se di-ver- tir_ Oh! nous et nos a- mis.

Pno.

p *rit.* (whistle) *richly*

rit.

commissioned in 2018 by soprano, Nancy Carey

J'ai passé devant la porte

COSTAS DAFNIS

Bright, Cheerful ($\text{♩} = 180$)

Soprano

p

J'ai pas - sé de - vant la porte.

Piano

p *f* *p*

8

S.

J'ai cri - é, "Bye - bye, ma belle." — Ilya personne qui m'a ré pon - du. —

Pno.

16

S.

— O yé - yaïe mon cœur me fait mal. Je m'ai donc mis à

Pno.

p *f* *mf*

22

S. ob - ser - ver, moi j'ai vu un lu - mière al - lu - mée.

Pno.

28

S. 'ya que-qu' chose qui di-sait j'au - rais pleu - ré. O yé - yaie mon

Pno.

34

S. cœur me fait mal.

Pno.

* SOPRANO "knocks" on
body of piano with knuckles

41 *mf*

S.

Pno.

46 *f*

S.

Moi, jai é - té cog - ner à la porte

Pno.

51

S.

Quands ils m'ont ou - vert la porte, j'ai vu

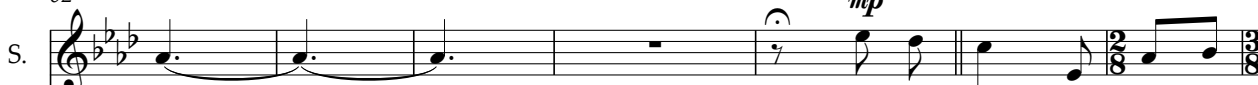
Pno.

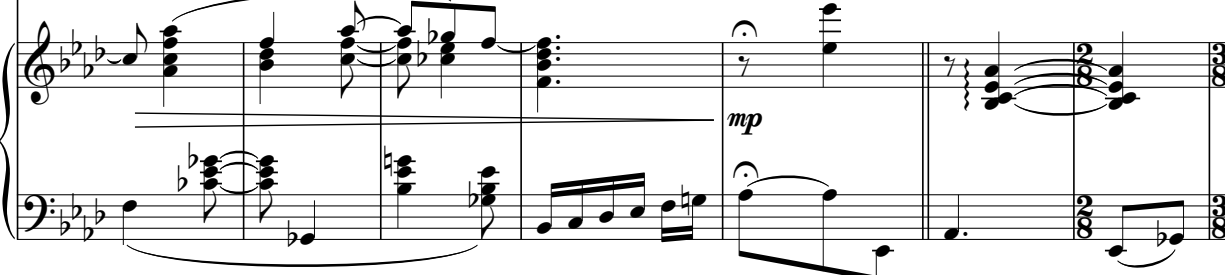
56 rit.

S.  des chan - delles a - lu - meés _____ Tout de tour de ton cer -

Pno. 

62 Gently, as a dream (♩ = 120)
mp

S.  cueil. _____ Quand je pense je pense qu'a

Pno. Gently, as a dream (♩ = 120)
mp 

69

S.  toi, quand je rêve je rêve qu'a toi. _____ Et pour

Pno. 

75

S. *p*

moi, je vis que pour toi,

Pno.

80

S. *f* *p*

O yé - yaïe mon cœur est ma - lade.

Pno. *f* *ppp*

molto rit.

commissioned in 2018 by soprano, Nancy Carey

Chanson Triste

COSTAS DAFNIS

Wistful, hypnotic (♩ = 65)

Soprano Solo *p* Je m'ai fait u-ne maî - tres - se

Piano *p*

7 *poco rall.*

S. Solo *mf* trois jours il n'ya pas long temps. J'ai re - çu une lettre, j'ai re çu une lettre, en guerre il faut al -

Pno. *mf*

12 **A tempo** (♩ = 65)

S. Solo ler. Ma chère pe-tite maî tres - se

Pno. *p* **A tempo** (♩ = 65)

15

S. Solo

ne fait que te pleu - rer. J'ai re - çu une lettre, j'ai re-çu une lettre, en

mf

Pno.

sim.

mf

20

S. Solo

guerre il faut al - ler, en guerre il faut al - ler.

p

Pno.

23

S. Solo

Pno.

25 *poco accel.* *poco rit.* *Meno mosso*
p
 S. Solo
 Ne pleu-rez pas ma
 Pno.
f *p* *sim.*

29
 S. Solo
 belle je re-vien-drai un jour, un jour dans la se-maine, un jour dans la se
 Pno.

34
 S. Solo
 maine, un jour dans la se-maine, un jour dans la se
 Pno.
f *f*

37 *Più mosso*
ff

S. Solo

maine

Pno.

Più mosso
ff

43

S. Solo

Pno.

47 *poco accel.* *Grave*
p

S. Solo

poco accel. *Grave* ac-

(8)-----1

Pno.

p

50 **A tempo** ♩ = 65

S. Solo

com - plir nos a - mours.

A tempo ♩ = 65

Pno. *mp molto espr.*

54 **rit.**

S. Solo

rit.

Pno.

commissioned in 2018 by soprano, Nancy Carey

Je vais mourir sans revoir à mes vieux pères

DRAFT APRIL 2019

COSTAS DAFNIS

Andante ♩ = 50

Soprano Solo

p

Je-vais mou - rir sans re-voir à mes vieux

Piano

p

5

S. Solo

pères, sans re - voir à mes pre-miers a - mours. Le pa

Pno.

9

S. Solo

ys qu'é-tait en l'as-su-rance, le voi - là en di vorce.

Pno.

pp

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For more information and recordings, go to www.CostasDafnis.com

14

S. Solo *mf*

Je-vais mou - rir sans re - voir à mes vieux

Pno. *mf*

18

S. Solo

pères, san re - voir _____ à mes pre-miers a - mours.

Pno.

21

S. Solo

Le pa - ys qu'é-tait en l'as-su rance, le voi - là en di-

Pno.

25

S. Solo

voce, le voi-la en di-voce, le voi-

Pno.

f

mp

3

3

28

S. Solo

là en di-voce.

Pno.

mp

commissioned in 2018 by soprano, Nancy Carey

Les Maringouins

DRAFT APRIL 2019

COSTAS DAFNIS

♩ = 65

Soprano Solo

Piano

mf (let notes ring)

3

S. Solo

Pno.

mf

Les ma-rin gouins

trm

f

6

S. Solo

Pno.

poco rall.

Les ma-rin-gouins ont tout man-gé ma belle.

(let notes ring)

pp

mf

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10 **Colla voce** **molto rall.** . . . **A tempo** ♩ = 65

S. Solo

Ils ont lais - sé juste les gros or - teils.

Pno.

Colla voce **molto rall.** . . . **A tempo** ♩ = 65

p *mf*

15 **Colla voce**

S. Solo

Ils ont lais - sé juste les gros or - teils...

Pno.

Colla voce

18

S. Solo

C'est pourfaire des bou-chons de liège, c'est pour bou-cher mes de-mi-bou - teilles...

Pno.

p

23 **A tempo** ♩. = 66 *mf*

S. Solo 

Les ma-rin-

Pno. **A tempo** ♩. = 66

pp *f*



27

S. Solo 

gouins ont tout man-gé ma belle. Ils ont lais - sé juste les gros or-teils. C'est pour

Pno. *mf*



29

S. Solo 

faire des bou-chons de liège, c'est pour bou-cher mes de-mi bou - teilles. Ton pa-

Pno.



31

S. Solo 

pa semble un au-to-mo-bile et ta ma-man semble un é - lé phant et ton pe tit

Pno.



33

S. Solo

frère semble un oua-oua-ron, et ta pe-tite sœur semble un coin de ban-quette,

Pno.

35

S. Solo

Saute cra-paud, ta queue va brû-ler, prends cou-rage, une autre va pous-ser.

Pno.

mf *giocoso*

p *mf*

tr

39

S. Solo

Saute cra-paud, ta queue va brû - ler, prends cou-rage, une autre va pous

Pno.

15^{ma} 7

8^{vb} 1

42

S. Solo

ser. Les ma-rin-

Pno.

p

mf

44

S. Solo

gouins ont tout man-gé ma belle. Ils ont lais - sé juste les gros or - teils. C'est pour

Pno.

mf

46

S. Solo

faire des bou-chons de liège, c'est pour bou-cher mes de-mi bou-teilles. Ton pa-

Pno.

48

S. Solo

pa semble un au-to-mo-bile et ta ma-man semble un é-lé - phant et ton pe tit

Pno.

ff

50

S. Solo

frère semble un oua-oua-ron, et ta pe tite sœur semble un coin de ban-quette,

Pno.

p

6 53 *mf*

S. Solo

Les ma-rin gouins. Les ma - rin - gouins.

Pno.

(black notes)

f

gliss.

3 3

57

S. Solo

Ton pa - pa semble un au-to-mo-bile et ta ma-

Pno.

ff

59

S. Solo

man semble un é - lé-phant et ton pe tit frère semble un oua-oua ron,

Pno.

p *f* *mf pesante*

3 3

61

S. Solo

et ta pe tite sœur

Pno.

f *p delicato*

64 *mf* *whistle*

S. Solo et ta pe tite sœur semble un coin de banquette.

Pno.

68 *p* *mf*

S. Solo Les ma-rin - gouins Les ma-ringouins Les ma-rin - gouins Les ma-rin

Pno. *cresc. poco a poco*

72 *f*

S. Solo gouins ont tout man - ge ma belle!

Pno. *tr* *tr* *ff*

