

Spring 2017

## **Franco Memory Through Song: Les Troubadours of Lewiston, Maine**

Colby College MU493

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**Franco Memory through Song:  
Les Troubadours of Lewiston, Maine**





In the Spring 2017, the students of Colby's MU493 set out to document the repertoire performed by Les Troubadours, an all-women's Franco American choir based in Lewiston, Maine. We sought out not yet notated or less familiar repertoire that was a part of prosaic, day to day life, such as lullabies and children's songs. We were fortunate to encounter warm, vibrant women who were generous in sharing with us the songs and stories of their youth and childhood. Their stories reflect the complex and multivalent migrations and experiences of people of French descent in Maine. We hope that this songbook presents a vivid snapshot of some of the Franco songs as they are conceived by members of the choir as well as a brief introduction to three members of this vibrant group, Alette Couturier, Irene Mercier and Jeannine Doucette. We have made every attempt to make this music culture accessible and reflective of the practitioner's understanding of their tradition.

## Biographies

### Aliette Couturier



Aliette Couturier is one of the founding members of Les Troubadours. Born in Augusta, Maine, and now lives in Lewiston, though 81 years old, Aliette's passion for music and singing has never been stronger. Aside from singing a beautiful alto line at the monthly sing-along, she also plays spoons and acts on stage during Les Troubadours performances. Aliette's kindness and sweetness bring everyone in Les Troubadours closer together, ensuring that everyone feels valued and loved.

### Jeannine Doucette



Jeannine grew up in the city of Sherbrook, QC and moved to Lewiston, ME when she married her husband in 1957. She grew up in a musical family: her father was a fiddler and her mother sang and played harmonica. Her social life revolved around lively sing-along gatherings among family and friends where she learned to sing and dance at an early age. After moving to Lewiston and having three children, Jeannine learned English and took classes at the University of Maine before moving into a career managing nursing homes. She spent year sharing her warm heart with the residents in her nursing home and now shares her beautiful voice with others by singing in Les Troubadours.

### Irene Mercier



Irene is a third generation Mainer. Her grandfather and grandmother, who were French-Canadian and Polish respectfully, moved to Auburn, Maine to find work and raise their family. To hear her tell it, Irene experienced an idyllic childhood. She had loving parents, siblings, many close relatives, and of course music. Irene could hardly remember a time in her life she was not surrounded by music. Irene's childhood home was the epicenter for her extended family and her neighbors to gather. These parties always featured vocal music, fiddles, and piano. They often played the latest hits or Franco classics well into the night. Franco-American culture was solidified in her ears and in her heart through Family gatherings, a constantly buzzing radio, and one 'petit' nun who taught at Irene's parochial school.

Inspired by a childhood filled with song, Irene still makes music today. Her powerful contralto voice is a fixture within Les Troubadours, a singing group whose repertoire stems from French-Canadian, Franco-American, and Acadian music. Further, when Irene and her siblings visit they still sing the old songs. Indeed, Irene attributes the strength and resilience of her familial bonds to shared music and memories. When her memory of lyrics falters she is quick to call her sister, who is always willing to lend a hand (and a voice!). Finally, Irene also explained she uses the songs obtained in her youth to fight the normal anxieties of life, in her words "...when you're singing your heart is lighter..."

## Songs

### Ah les Crocodiles (Ah the crocodiles)

Jeannine learned this song at a summer camp, when she was 6 or 7 years old. She recalls going on outings with other children her own age where she made new friends and learned new songs. The song tells the story of a crocodile going off to war against elephants, but when the crocodile sees the elephant, he decides not to fight and jumps into a nearby river instead.

**French:**

Un crocodil' s'en allant à la guerre  
Disait au r'voir à ses petits enfants  
Traînant ses pieds, ses pieds dans la poussière  
Il s'en allait combatt' les éléphants.

Refrain:

Ah les crococo, les crococo, les crocodiles  
Ah les crococo, the crococo, the crocodiles  
Sur les bords du Nil ils sont partis n'en parlons plus  
Ah les crococo, les crococo, les crocodiles  
Sur les bords du Nil ils sont partis n'en parlons plus

Il fredonnait une marche militaire  
Dont il mâchait les mots à grosses dents,

Quand il ouvrait la gueule tout entire  
On croyait voir ses ennemis dedans.

Refrain

Un éléphant parut et sur la terre  
Se prépara ce combat de géants  
Mais près de là, courait une rivière  
Le crocodil' s'y jeta subit'ment.

**English:**

A crocodile was going off to war  
Saying goodbye to his small children  
Dragging his feet, his feet in the dust  
He was going off, off to fight the elephants.

Ah the crococo, the crococo, the crocodiles  
Ah the crococo, the crococo, the crocodiles  
On the banks of the Nile they left,  
Ah the crococo, the crococo, the crocodiles  
let's not talk about it any more.

He was humming a military march  
Whose words he was chewing with big teeth,

When he opened his maw all the way  
We believed we saw his enemies inside it

An elephant suddenly arrived  
A battle of giants began.  
But near there, a river was flowing  
The crocodile suddenly leapt into it.

# Ah les Crocodiles

Franco Children's Song Transcribed by Lauren Shirley

Un cro-co-dil' s'en all-ant à la guer-re Dis-ait aur'voir à ses pet-its en fants Train-ant ses

10  
pieds, ses pieds dans la pouss-iè-re Il s'en all-ait com-battr' les él-éph ants. Ah les cro-co

18  
co les cro-co-co les cro-co-dil-es Sur les bords du Nil ils sont part-is n'en parl-ons plus.

25  
Ah les cro-co-co les cro-co-co les cro-co-dil-es Sur les bords du Nil ils sont part

31  
is n'en parl-ons plus Il fre-don-nait une mar-che mil-i-tai-re Dont il mâch-ait les

39  
mots à gross-es dents, Quand il ouv-rait la gueu-le tout en-ti-ère On croy-ait voir ses

47  
en-nem-is de dans. Ah les cro-co-co les cro-co-co, les cro-co-dil-es Sur les bords du

54  
Nil ils sont part-is n'en parl-ons plus. Ah les cro-co-co, les cro-co-co, les cro-co-dil-es

61  
Sur les bords du Nil ils sont part-is n'en parl-ons plus. Un él-é phant par-et sur la ter-re

# Au chant de l'alouette

## (The Song of the Lark)

Au Chant de l'alouette is a bouncing call and response song that describes a young girl's encounter with an talking Lark while out picking berries. After accidentally stepping on the lark, the young girl is chastised by the bird. In our seconded interview, Irene informed me this song is a traditional French children's song she learned in parochial school.

### French:

On m'envoie au champs c'est pour y cueillir  
On m'envoie au champs c'est pour y cueillir  
Je n'ai point cueilli, j'ai cherché des nids

They send me to the field to harvest  
They send me to the field to harvest  
I didn't pick anything, I looked for nests

### Refrain:

Au chant de l'alouette je veille et je dors  
J'écoute à l'alouette et puis je m'en dors

To the songs of the lark, I awake and I sleep,  
I listened to the lark then I fell asleep,

Je n'ai point cueilli, j'ai cherché des nids  
Je n'ai point cueilli, j'ai cherché des nids  
J'ai trouvé la caille assise sur son nid

I didn't pick, I looked for nests,  
I didn't pick, I looked for nests,  
I found the quail lying in her nest.

### Refrain

J'ai trouvé la caille couchée sur son nid,  
J'ai trouvé la caille couchée sur son nid,  
J' lui marchai sur l'aile et la lui rompis.

I found the quail lying in her nest,  
I found the quail lying in her nest,  
I stepped on her wing and I broke it.

### Refrain

Lui marche sur l'aile et la lui rompit  
Lui marche sur l'aile et la lui rompit  
Elle m'a dit "Poucelle, retire-toi d'ici"

I stepped on her wing and I broke it,  
I stepped on her wing and I broke it.  
She said to me 'Virgin' go away from here.

### Refrain

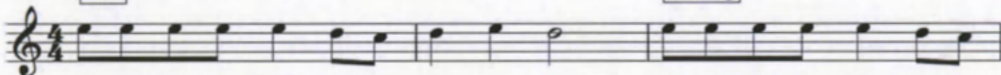
Elle m'a dit "Poucelle, retire-toi d'ici"  
Elle m'a dit "Poucelle, retire-toi d'ici"  
Je n'suis pas poucelle, que j' lui répondit

She said to me 'Virgin' go away from here,  
She said to me 'Virgin' go away from here,  
"I'm no virgin," I responded.

# Au Chant de l'alouette

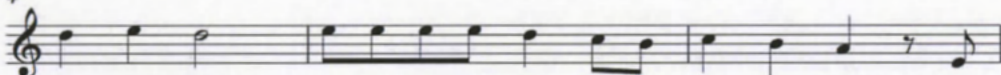
Transcribed by Thomas Webel

**Solo** **All Sing**



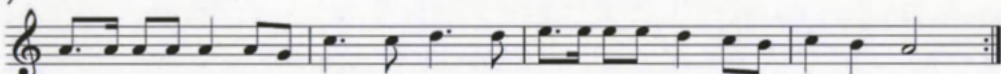
On m'e-voit au champ c'e - st pour cue - illir      On m'e-voit au champ c'e - st  
Je n'ai point cue - illi j'ai cher - che des nids      Je n'ai point cue - illi j'ai cher -  
J'ai trou - ve la caille as - sis sur son nid      J'ai trou - ve la caille as - sis  
Lui mar - che sur l'aile et la lui rom - pit      Lui mar - che sur l'aile et la  
Elle m'a dit "pou - celle, re - tire - toi d'i - ci"      Elle m'a dit "pou - celle, re - tire -

4



pour cue - illir      Je n'ai point cue - illi j'ai cher - che des nids      Au  
che des nids      J'ai trou - ve la caille as - sis sur son nid  
sur son nid      Lui mar - che sur l'aile et la lui rom - pit  
lui rom - pit      Elle m'a dit "pou - celle, re - tire - toi d'i - ci"  
toi d'i - ci"      Je n'suis pas pou - celle que j'lui re - pon - dit

7



chant de l'a lou - et je Veille et je dors j'é - cou - te l'a - lou - ette et puis je m'en - dors



# Ferme tes Jolis Yeux

## (Close Your Pretty Eyes)

This song is a common Franco lullaby that the ladies all remember from their childhood. They claim that their parents and grandparents sung it to them and they have continued to sing it to their children as well.

### French :

Ferme tes jolis yeux  
Car les heures sont brèves  
Au pays merveilleux  
Au beau pays du rêve  
Ferme tes jolis yeux  
Car tout n'est que mensonge  
Le bonheur n'est qu'un songe  
Ferme tes jolis yeux

Dans son petit lit blanc et rose  
Câline jase en souriant  
Elle babille mille choses  
A sa chère et bonne maman  
Mais, chut, il faut dormir bien vite  
Nous avons assez bavardé  
Faites dodo chère petite  
Où petit père va gronder  
Et tout en berçant la gamine  
Sa mère lui chante câline

Ferme tes jolis yeux  
Car les heures sont brèves  
Au pays merveilleux  
Au beau pays du rêve  
Ferme tes jolis yeux  
Car tout n'est que mensonge  
Le bonheur n'est qu'un songe  
Ferme tes jolis yeux

### English:

Close your pretty eyes  
because our hours are brief  
In this enchanted land  
In the beautiful land of dreams.  
Close your pretty eyes  
Because all is but a lie  
Happiness is only an illusion  
Close pretty your eyes

In her small white and pink bed  
The cuddly baby coos, smiling  
She babbles a thousand things  
To her dear, sweet mother  
But, shh, you need to fall sleep quickly  
We've chattered enough  
Go to sleep dear little one  
Or Daddy will scold you  
And while rocking the girl  
Her mother sings to her tenderly.

Close your pretty eyes  
Because the hours are brief  
In this wonderful land  
In this beautiful land of dreams  
Close your pretty eyes  
Because everything is only a lie  
Happiness is only a dream  
Close pretty your eyes.

# Ferme tes jolis yeux

♩ = 70

Fer-me tes jo-lis yeux, Car les heures sont brè-ves Au pa-ys merveil

7

leux, ve Au beau pa-ys du rê-ve Fer-me tes jo-lis yeux, Cartout n'est que men-son-ge

14

Le bonheur est un son-ge Ferme tes jo-lis yeux Dansson pe-tit lit blanc et

# La Madelon

La Madelon is a popular song of World War I originally from France. The song tells a story about soldiers flirting with a sweet young waitress in a country beer joint. It was one of the most popular songs in France during World War I and became a patriotic song as the war wore on. It remains a patriotic, well-known song in France to this day. Aliette added 'La Madelon' into Les Troubadours' regular repertoire, and the song soon became an audience favorite due to its catchy melody and interesting narrative.

## French:

Quand Madelon  
vient nous servir à boire  
Sous la tonnelle  
on frôle son jupon  
Et chacun  
lui raconte une histoire  
Une histoire à sa façon

La Madelon  
pour nous n'est pas severe  
Quand on lui prend  
la taille ou le menton  
Elle rit,  
c'est tout le mal qu'elle sait faire  
Madelon, Madelon, Madelon!

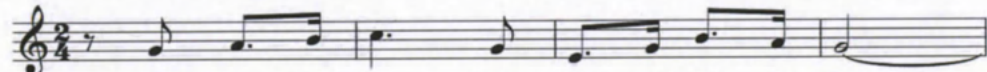
## English:

When Madelon  
comes to serves us a beer,  
Under the table,  
We played with her skirt.  
And everyone  
Tells her a story  
In his or her own way.

Madelon,  
Nothing is that serious  
When we grab her waist  
or her chin  
She laughs,  
Her laughter is all the harm that she can do!  
Madelon, Madelon, Madelon!

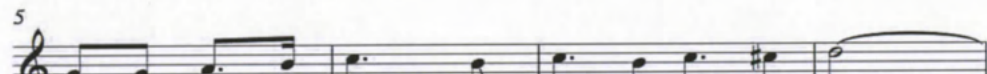
# La Madelon

Transcribed by Alexa Huang



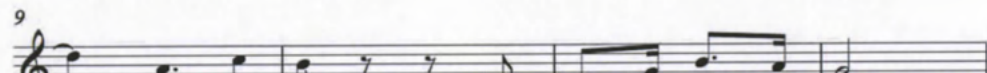
Quand Madelon vient nous ser - vir à boi -

5



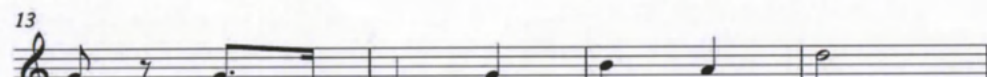
re Sous la ton - nelle on frô - le son ju - pon

9



Et cha - cun lui ra - conte une his - toi -

13



re Une histoire — à sa fa - çon

17



La Ma - de - lon pour nous n'est pas sé - vè -

21




re Quand on lui prend la taille ou le men - ton

25



E - lle rit, c'est tout le mal qu'elle sait

29



faire Ma - de - lon Ma - de - lon, Ma - de - lon!

# Quand J'étais Petit

## (When I was young, I wasn't very tall)

Aliette learned this song in primary school, when she was around 10 years old. 'Quand j'étais petit, je n'étais très pas grand' is a funny little tune in french, telling the story of a young naughty boy wanting to flirt with girls and his mother stopped him because you is too young and too small.

### French:

Quand j'étais petit, je n'étais très pas grand  
Quand j'étais petit, je n'étais très pas grand  
J'allais voir les filles, à travers les champs  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va guère  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va pas

J'allais voir les filles, à travers les champs  
J'allais voir les filles, à travers les champs  
J'voyais v'nir maman tout en chicanant  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va guère  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va pas

J'voyais v'nir maman tout en chicanant  
J'voyais v'nir maman tout en chicanant  
Marche a la maison p'tit bougon d'enfant  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va guère  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va pas

Marche a la maison p'tit bougon d'enfant  
Marche a la maison p'tit bougon  
T'iras voir les filles quand t'auras vingt ans  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va guère  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va pas

T'iras voir les filles quand t'auras vingt ans  
T'iras voir les filles quand t'auras vingt ans  
Pour les embrasser te n'auras pas p'tit banc  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va guère  
Ha ha ha Ça n'va pas

### English:

When I was young, I wasn't very tall.  
When I was young, I wasn't very tall.  
I went to see the girls, across the fields  
Ha ha ha, things are not going too well,  
Ha ha ha. Things are not working at all.

I went to see the girls, across the fields  
I went to see the girls, across the fields  
I saw mom coming here while I was joking with the girls  
Ha ha ha, things are not going too well,  
Ha ha ha. Things are not working at all.

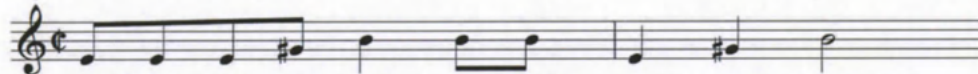
I saw mom coming while I was joking  
I saw mom coming while joking  
'Go back home, you little bugger' my mom says  
Ha ha ha, things are not going too well,  
Ha ha ha. Things are not working at all.

'Go back home, you little bugger  
'Go back home, you little bugger  
You will see the girls when you are twenty-years old  
Ha ha ha, things are not going too well,  
Ha ha ha. Things are not working at all.

You will see the girls when you are twenty-years old  
You will see the girls when you are twenty-years old  
You are too short to kiss now  
Ha ha ha, things are not going too well,  
Ha ha ha. Things are not working at all.

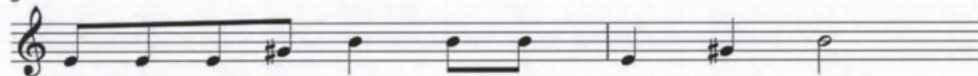
Quand j'étais petit  
When I was Little I wasn't very tall

Transcribed by Alexa Huang



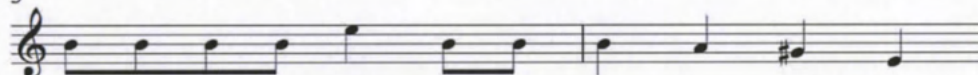
Quand j'é - tais pe - tit, je n'étais très pas grand  
J'a - llais voir les filles, à tra - vers les champs  
J'voyais v'nir ma man, tout en chi - ca - nant  
Marche a la mai - son p'tit bou - gon d'en - fant  
T'iras voir les filles, quand t' auras vingt ans

3



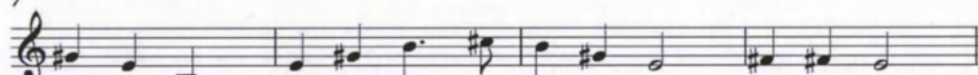
Quand j'é - tais pe - tit, je n'étais très pas grand  
J'a - llais voir les filles, à tra - vers les champs  
J'voyais v'nir ma man, tout en chi - ca - nant  
Marche a la mai - son p'tit bou - gon d'en - fant  
T'iras voir les filles, quand t' auras vingt ans

5



J'a - llais voir les filles, à tra - vers les champs  
J'voyais v'nir ma - man, tout en chi - ca - nant  
Marche a la mai - son, p'tit bou - gon d'en - fant  
T'i - ras voir les filles, quand t'au - ras vingt ans  
Pour les em - bras - ser t'au - ras pas p'tit banc

7



Ha ha ha Ça n'va guè - re Ha ha ha Ça n'va pas

# Sous les Ponts de Paris

## (Under the bridges of Paris)

Jeannine remembers hearing "Sous les Ponts de Paris" from an early age, both on the radio as a popular song and from her mother singing it to her. The song talks about young lovers finding a place to embrace under the bridges of Paris.

### French:

Sous les ponts de Paris  
Lorsque descend la nuit,  
Tous sorts de gueux se faufilent en cachette  
Et sont heureux d'trouver une couchette  
Hôtel du courant d'air,  
Où l'on ne paye pas cher,  
L'parfum et l'eau c'est pour rien, mon marquis  
Sous les ponts de Paris.

Pour aller à Suresnes,  
Ou bien à Charenton,  
Tout le long de la Seine,  
On passe sous les ponts.  
Pendant le jour, suivant son cours,  
Tout Paris en bateau défile,  
L'coeur plein d'entrain, ça va, ça vient,  
Mais l'soir, lorsque tout dort tranquille

Sous les ponts de Paris  
Lorsque descend la nuit  
Comme il n'a pas d'quoi s'payer une chambrette  
Un couple heureux vient s'aimer en cachette  
Et les yeux dans les yeux  
Faisant des rêves bleus  
Julot partage les baisers de Nini  
Sous les ponts de Paris.

### English:

Under the bridges of Paris  
When night falls,  
All kinds of beggars secretly sneak in and out  
And are happy to find a little bed.  
Hotel in the fresh air  
Where one need not pay dearly,  
Perfume and water cost nothing, my marquis  
Under the bridges of Paris.

To go to Suresnes,  
Or even Charenton,  
All along the Seine,  
You go under the bridges.  
During the day, following its course,  
All of Paris parades by in boats,  
The heart full of life, they come, they go  
But in the evening, once everyone sleeps quietly

Under the bridges of Paris  
When night falls  
If they don't have enough to pay for a small room  
A happy couple comes to embrace  
And looking into one another's eyes  
Dreaming sweet dreams  
Julot shares Nini's kisses  
Under the bridges of Paris.

# Sous les Ponts de Paris

Franco Folk Song transcribed by Lauren Shirley

6 Sous les ponts de Par - is Lors-que des-cend la nuit, Touts sorts de gueux se fau  
11 filent en chach-ette Et sont heur-eux d' trou-ver une couch-ette Hô-tel du cour-ant d'air,  
15 Où l'on ne paye pas cher, L'par-fum et l'eau c'est pour rien, mon mar-quis  
21 Sous les ponts de Pa - ris. Pour all - er à Su - res - n - es Ou bien à Char - en - ton, —  
26 Tout le long de la Sei - ne. On pas - se sous les ponts. — Pen - dant le jour, sui -  
31 vant son cours, tout Par - is en bat - eau dé - file, — L'coeurpleind'en - train, ça va, ça vient, Mais,  
36 l'soir, lors-que tout dort tran quille. — Sous les ponts de Par - is Lors-que desc - end la  
40 nuit, Comme il n'a pas d'quoi s'pay - er une chambr - ette Un couple heur - eux vient s'aim  
er en cach - ette Et les yeux dans les yeux Fais - ant des rêv - es bleus



## *Students*

### **Alexa Huang**

Alexa Huang is a senior double majoring in economics and music at Colby College. Grew up in Beijing, China, Alexa is very passionate about music. She plays guitar, drums, and trumpet and enjoys a vast variety of music. She hopes to pursue a career in artist management and consulting after graduation.



### **Lauren Shirley**

Lauren Shirley is a graduating senior at Colby College majoring in both Biology and Music. She eventually hopes to attend medical school and become a physician. Lauren was raised in a musical family plays the clarinet and piano and sings. She has enjoyed this opportunity to learn about a new musical tradition and meet Les Troubadours.



### Thomas Webel

Thomas Webel, a native of southern Maine, is a senior at Colby College majoring in Music. Thomas discovered a love for music at an early age. He has consistently participated in numerous choirs including The Boy Singers of Maine, Colby College's Collegium, and The Colby Eight, Colby's Oldest A Cappella group. Tommy aspires to one day teach music and share the joy of musical collaboration. Additionally, Tommy has expressed a desire to help spread and maintain Franco-American music and culture in Maine.



### Natalie Zelensky

Natalie Zelensky teaches courses in ethnomusicology and American music at Colby College. She has been fortunate to have been introduced to Maine's vibrant Franco American music scene through her teaching of Maine Music at Colby. She is grateful to the members of Les Troubadours for their gracious and open spirit and for sharing their stories and songs with her students and to Cindy Larock and Mary Rice De-Fosse for helping to set up and navigate these encounters.

Please visit our website ([web.colby.edu/memorythroughsong/](http://web.colby.edu/memorythroughsong/)), which includes a downloadable version of the songs as well as the students' reflections on their fieldwork process.

