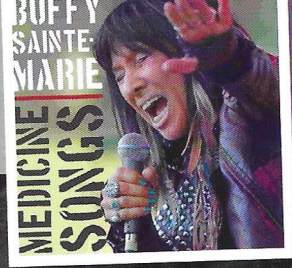


Tom Paley
1928-2017



Reviews
Buffy
Sainte-Marie
"Essential"

Canadian Folk Music Awards
Danny Michel enjoys a big night
out as he picks up two awards.



penguin eggs



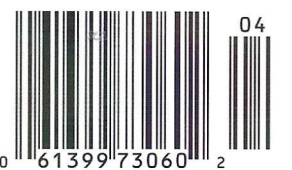
Album of the Year

RHIANNON GIDDENS
FREEDOM HIGHWAY

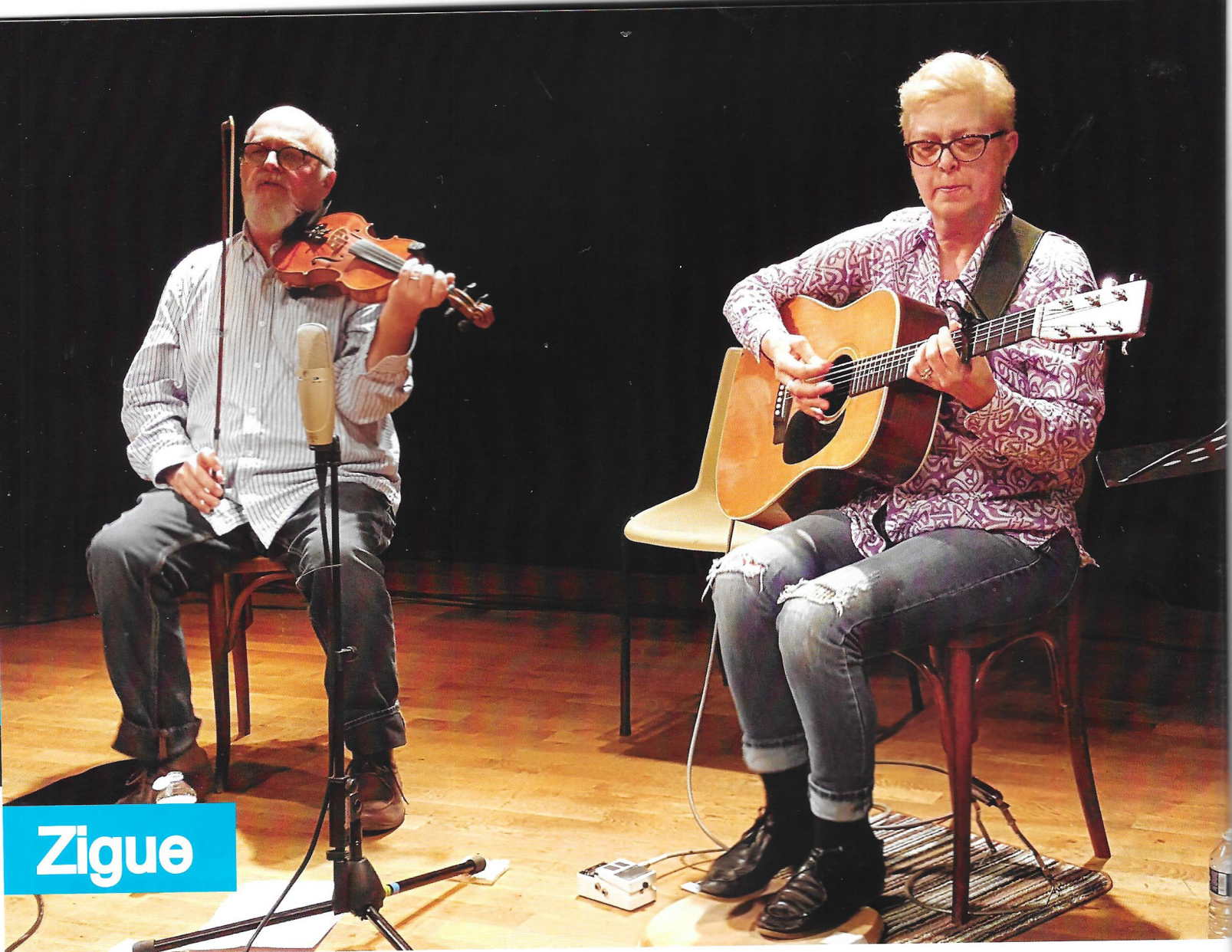


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zigue
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les poules à colin



Zigue

Their spirited traditional and original music pushes the boundaries of Quebec folk culture. By Roger Levesque

With the duo they whimsically call Zigue, Quebec-based husband and wife Claude Méthé and Dana Whittle embrace traditions much older than their origins, but they're also trying to pull the folk "tribe" forward with their new album *Musique Du Coeur (Music of the Heart)*.

"What attracts me most is the individual styles of everybody," Méthé explains. "You hear them put their heart into performing the songs in a personal way. It's about the individual within the community, like a tribal thing. That's why, much as I've always drawn influence and had respect for the tradition, I feel new tunes are important. That's how you

develop your personal style."

"The feeling has to be there," Whittle offers. "I think that's kind of what we're about. In making this album one thing I realized again, even though I've made quite a few albums, is that it's always just a snapshot, that moment in time, and our music is really live music. You don't play the same lick every time or even put tunes together the same way every time. It's always evolving."

They spoke recently from their home in Ste-Béatrix, QC, (pop. 1,500), some 90 kilometers north of Montreal, a village that Whittle jokes could be "the Nashville of Quebec". The hub of music culture has one of the only colleges left focusing on traditional music and it's centred in Quebec's Lanaudière region, which has given rise to bands such as La Bottine Souriante.

They also make a distinction between 'the tradition,' and 'folk,' being a contemporary outgrowth of that tradition. Either way, Méthé and Whittle are doing their part to further the

culture. *Musique Du Coeur* was the first album to be made in their new basement recording studio and they hope to record other artists, their contemporaries and the next generation, too.

In some project or other, they have now appeared on eight albums together, and even more apart. Their vast knowledge of old tunes comes through osmosis and research. Méthé acknowledges that much of French-Canadian music is tied to folk-dance and Celtic traditions in Scotland, Ireland, and France's Brittany region, places they tour regularly, but tracing that ancestry gets complicated.

"Sometimes it's very hard to recognize the cultural imprint because you might learn tunes from your parents and you don't know where it's from, like *St. Anne's Reel*. Today I'm still discovering the French connections and even people from my generation don't know what to believe."

Making *Musique Du Coeur* at home with a few guests gave way to casual invention. Using

quirky humour and sensitivity, they tackle everything from themes of nature to brain surgery, a protest song about banks, even a van breakdown song recorded in concert. It's a bilingual album, too, with the two sometimes alternating English and French lyrics from one line to the next, or singing together, stitching together favourite medleys, obviously having fun.

His celebrated violin and mandolin match her energetic guitars, bass, percussion, and podorythmie, or foot percussion, and their singing has a spirited sincerity.

Méthé, 64, was raised in the suburbs of Quebec City with a smattering of then-current American folk and Gilles Vigneault records at home. Growing up in the 1950s, traditional sounds in Quebec (like everywhere) were being drowned out by rock'n'roll. He took up guitar in his teens but it wasn't until the early 1970s, after he met up with guitarist/singer Gervais Lessard, that he got serious.

"I realized that this music had existed everywhere in Quebec. I was interested in the fiddle and mandolin so I taught myself how to play by ear. I'm still learning it. People would say my source for the fiddle was Aimé Gagnon but I also liked Jos Bouchard, so I'm really a mix of examples."

Lessard and Méthé formed the now-legendary band *Le Rêve du Diable* (The Devil's Dream) in 1974 to plumb their love of traditional sounds, and made their debut recording in 1976. Through duo, trio, and quartet formats, they wrote new tunes in a trad style, and made four records before Méthé left in 1986. The much-honoured group is often credited for pioneering a folk revival.

"There was almost no one else doing this. Eventually, the music caught on with the nationalist movement in Quebec because people realized, 'if we want to be nationalistic we have to have the culture that goes with it'. There were no festivals then but we would play every weekend, often in hotels in the country, all over Northern Ontario, New Brunswick, and Quebec."

Méthé continued on with bands such as *Manigance* and *Entourloupe*. He was performing at a festival in Vermont when he met Dana Whittle.

Whittle, 61, was born in the Boston suburb of Acton, MA, studied visual arts in upstate New York, and even lived in Georgia most of a decade. She took up guitar at six, joining part of a family lineage dating back several generations including her grandmother, Avilda Moore, a singer with the Metropolitan Opera in New York who recorded gospel records for the Okeh label in the 1920s.

"We always had a lot of instruments and my parents were very into music and dance and listened to everything," Whittle remembers, "so I played a lot when I was very young."

She was touring around New England by age 12 in a kids' song group put together with her parents' friends and their children, a supporting act to their adult band and dance troupe. She sang in the church choir, played in bands in high school and college, and was busy composing tunes from her teens onward, gaining experience in swing and blues, then folk and bluegrass. After she took up acoustic bass she came to see herself as "a bass player who happens to play guitar".

After leaving Georgia for Vermont in the mid-1980s, Whittle connected up with New England's folk scene, playing backup guitar for Elizabeth von Trapp (granddaughter of Maria), among others. She had been playing standup bass onstage and on record in a bluegrass duo with Franco-American singer Martha Pellerin for several years when she met Claude Méthé.

When they first met up at a folk fest in Vermont in 1991, both Méthé and Whittle were in other relationships but something clicked. By 1993, they were married. Méthé moved to Vermont for three years, they formed the band *Dentdelion* (Lion Tooth), and had two children who later joined in the music, but he missed Quebec culture too much. Everyone moved north to Ste-Béatrix in 1996.

Early on, Whittle faced a bit of culture shock, less from being anglophone and American and more from being female in a male-dominated music culture.

"There are very few women on the trad scene, of my generation, and almost no one who played guitar accompanist. You really have to work hard to get your place. There are more women in the folk culture in the U.S. and there's more open-mindedness about folk music in France."

After starting out as a duo (pre-*Dentdelion*), they returned to the duo form several years ago

and adopted the name *Zigue*, but Méthé allows you could see *Zigue* as *Dentdelion* without the kids. Flautist Denise Levac, also from *Dentdelion*, is a guest on *Musique Du Coeur* and still works with Whittle and Méthé in *Trio Mil* (or *Grain*).

Whittle sees *Zigue* mostly as their outlet for new original songs.

"My songs take it in a bit of a different direction. We've gotten a little bit more folk-trad than trad-folk, but Claude's playing style still keeps it grounded in the tradition. He's the most amazing composer, too, and a lot of people play his tunes."

He also took a relaxed approach to "re-composing" some traditional songs for the album.

"Sometimes I changed the words, or added a verse, or even changed the melody a little."

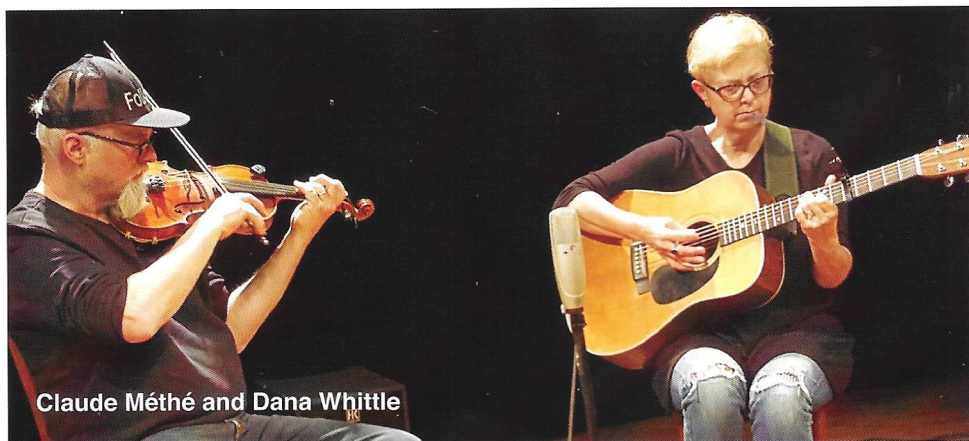
Zigue actually enjoys greater opportunities in Scotland, Brittany, and elsewhere in Europe, and holds workshops in New England. Many folk fans assume a rich music culture lives on in Quebec today, but from Méthé's angle that's "more of a perception" than reality.

"We live in a special pocket of Quebec. Groups like *Le Vent Du Nord* or my friends in *De Temps Antan* play in France, they play everywhere, but they hardly play here and you don't hear it on commercial radio or much on Radio Canada. There are hundreds of people doing it but it's a marginal part of the big picture."

He is happy with the folk jam scene for young musicians but "we still have to work on things."

They share great hope in the next generation. Following their upbringing in *Dentdelion*, Vermont-born daughter Béatrix Méthé is lead singer, alongside (Denise Levac's son) Colin Savoie-Levac, of the acclaimed, mostly female Montreal pop-folk band *Les Poules Et Colin* (The Hens and Colin).

"It's still trad," Whittle underlines. "They do their research."



Claude Méthé and Dana Whittle