

the last valse musette

Freight & Salvage

Berkeley, California, Saturday September 21, 2013

Odile LAVAULT ACCORDION, VOCALS

Rachel DURLING VIOLIN

John SCHOTT GUITAR

Rich TREVOR BASS

Special guests

Olivier ZYNGIER MANDOLIN, GUITAR

Big Lou ACCORDION

*Baguette Quartette 5 recordings
are available*

L’Air de Paris

Rendez-vous

Chez Moi

Toujours

A la Noce

Thanks to all of you
who encouraged us at
the beginning, supported us
through the years, danced,
laughed, cried, ate, drank, got
married and celebrated life on
our music. You talked about
the Baguette Quartette
to your friends. You carried
our recordings through
the world and even
to France

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BAGUETTE QUARTETTE

La musique de Paris



Valentine

(1925) A. Willemetz / H. Christiné

Valse chinoise

(1947) J. Colombo, G. Ghestem

Chez moi

(1935) J. Féline / P. Misraki

Le plus beau tango du monde

(1935) R. Sarvil, V. Scotto

La maussade

(1997) R. Durling

Autour d’Alger

(1935) J. Peyronnin

La confiture

(1973) R. Martino

Matelotte

(1934) G. Viseur

Sous les toits de Paris

(1930) Nazelles / R. Moretti

La guinguette a ferme ses volets

(1934) G. Twingel / L. Montagne

En douce

(1922) J. Charles / A. Willemetz

Sevilla en fiesta

(1933) G. Andolfi



Fleur de Paris

(1944) H. Bourtayre, M. Vandair

Valse des niglos

(1939) G. Malla, J. Davon

Rose blanche

(1911) A. Bruant

Pouèt! Pouèt!

(1929) M. Yvain / A. Barde

Le chemin des forains

(1945) H. Sauguet

Madame Arthur

(1890) P. de Kock, Y. Guilbert

Jalousie

(1925) J. Gade

Ça Gaze

(1930) V. Marceau

Que reste-t-il de nos amours?

(1942) Ch. Trenet / L. Chauliac

Nuits de Chine

(1922) E. Dumont / F. L. Benech

Passion

(1936) T. Murena, J. Colombo

Valentine

Maurice Chevalier created it. No connection with Valentine day. In France we call that day “La Saint Valentin.” It is a male saint. No idea what he got famous for, but the celebration is exclusively for fresh lovers, not married couples or any relationship that has proven stable. This song dates from the time of my grandparents but most of the French of my generation are able to hum “She had teeny tiny fee-feet Valentine, Valentine, she had teeny tiny tit-tits that I was grogro-pingping, tigidit, tagadat...”

This is danced as a one-step. I discovered the one-step thanks to Stanford Dance Department and its Chair, Richard Power. Power brought 10 dancers to The Baltic, in Point Richmond, for the first Baguette Quartette dinner-dance. I cried when I saw these young American dancing like aging Parisian. We have done so many events together. They taught me a lot about dance.

Valse chinoise / Nuits de Chine

Like “Madama Butterfly” or the Silk Road Project, here are two Asian flavored musical creations meant to bring some fresh harmonies to the musicians and exotic dreams to the audience. Those special qualities have allowed Valse chinoise to stay “hip” when a lot of regular valse musette are considered too homey.

Nuits de Chine was a summer camp classic in the 1970s. Its nocturnal tales of secret lovers dancing aboard flowered junks, prostitution and opium clouds, places Saigon in China! (Yes, the foreigners travel to forget.)

“China nights, cuddling nights, nights of love / Drunken nights, tender nights, dream and illusion until dawn...”



Chez Moi

Title track of the third album of Baguette Quartette; our only CD cover designed by a professional turned out great. The drawing is inspired from a postcard I bought at The Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, in Paris, a forgotten museum, near the Bois de Boulogne. Dancers are partial to this recording, I am not sure why. When I sing this song I see the typical Parisian “chambre de bonne”, with barely enough room for a one-person bed, tucked under a sloped ceiling. A small single skylight (called vasistas) opens onto the grey patchwork of sky and zinc roofs. These minuscule top floor rooms were, and still are, synonym with freedom for the young adults. As the song rightly tells, this is where love is dreamed and experienced.

Le plus beau tango du monde

A typical French tango by a typical French composer, Vincent Scotto. Born in Marseille, “Le Père Scotto” became famous in post-WWI Paris, for his talent to crank up memorable ditties upon request.

In 1993, I introduced myself to Rachel Durling at the end of a tango concert. During the whole performance I had admired her white T-shirt and her virtuosity. I asked her if she wanted to play with me. In her charming manner she answered: “Yes, It’s my dream to play with an accordion player.” That night, at La Peña, she was sitting in with “New York-Buenos Aires Connection” a gathering of brilliant South American musicians, based in New York. This was my first approach to contemporary Argentine tango. There has been a tango revival in Paris, since the late 70s. Political exiles settled in Europe mixing traditional repertoire with their own angry and raw songs. The Cuarteto Cedron, an Argentine family, became a fixture at left political rallies. In more than a century, an infinite number of tango styles have flourished all over the world. Jalousie comes from Denmark!

La maussade

“Maussade” can be translated by surly and gloom. All adjectives unfit to describe its composer, the ebullient Monsieur Durling, father of Rachel our violinist. Bob Durling, and his wife Nancy, always attend our performances, when in town. Both Francophiles, and fluent speakers, they wait for us at the end to share their joy. They spend 3-4 months in Paris every year. Once we bumped into each other’s near the Marché d’Aligre, in the 12th arrondissement. I told them to visit my cousin’s bookstore around the corner. Why did I not accompany them? I don’t know. I am always in a hurry when I visit Paris. They met my cousins Alain and Kyoko and quickly became friends. I am delighted of this connection between my 2 universes. Also, this is very convenient because I now get regular updates on my cousins multiple creative projects.

Bob offered many compositions to us. I selected only La maussade. The others were equally well-crafted but Baguette Quartette was conceived as an historical band. I like stories. We play used melodies, second-hand. They have been worn, cried, danced and forgotten before. This is not the way to get rich. Along the years we have received many exciting licensing requests. Few went through. I remember a call from Greek advertisers in a hurry to license a song for a car ad. When I explained to them that they would have to deal with the French copyright bureaucracy they vanished.

La confiture

Jam is important in my life. My mother and my grandmother have been making jam. I follow. On one of her visits, my mother brought us the real copper “basin” from France. It sits on top of our fridge all year long, ready for the summer crops.

This year I made raspberries, the easy way, I leave the seeds, and Santa Rosa plum chutney. This song belongs to the repertoire of “Les Frères Jacques” (a pun

on the famous “Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques...” a barber shop quartet of my youth. As a kid, I discovered their songs at the Chaumié household, a brood of 8 red-haired neighbors. They were sometimes putting up family shows. They were also eating only plain rice for a day, from time to time, saving the food money for charities. The humorous mix of song and gestures by the 4 performers, dressed in leotards and bowler hats, was easy to emulate. In the 1960s, one of my relatives ferried the “Frères Jacques” in his vintage car, after their performance, to invite them for a night cap at his Paris apartment.

Matelotte

It makes me giggle. Giggling is something Baguette Quartette does well. It usually starts in Rich’s van, our main way of transportation. Innocently I say something weird and Rachel giggles explode, the boys follow and I am happy to jump into that moment of joy. Thanks Rich for decades of taxiing the quartet around. Rich says that he needs company or he will fall asleep. Happy to oblige: Rich IS good company.

Matelotte was included in Baguette Quartette musical accompaniment of the “Much Ado about Nothing” CalShakes production, years ago. Each night we went out, on the real grass covered stage (really slippery when wet), providing the French atmosphere imagined by the director. We can play Matelotte in our sleep, remembering its composer, Gus Viseur. He fell in love with jazz in the 1930s. For an accordion player, it was 50 years too early. The dance halls were not looking for his subtle creations. He moved to Canada, missing the fame that his recordings are now enjoying.

La guinguette a fermé ses volets

Visual illustrations for this song can be found in the films La Belle Equipe (1935) and Casque d’or (1952), both set outside Paris in a dive/dance hall powered by accordion, romance and crime. Contrary

to symphony musicians who benefit from the security of a roof, solid ground and a temperate atmosphere, musette artists often perform under challenging conditions. The danger used to come from the underworld frequenting the dark and crowded dance halls. Playing in cafés and restaurants, today's accordion players favored spots, is a science. While you are strolling around, keep an eye on the waiter's ballet, to avoid poking your elbow in the sauce. If stationed near the bar, notice how the loudest customers always position themselves in your immediate vicinity. I learned to watch my colleague's fingers. I can "read" what they play, when I cannot hear it. As the guests get dangerously close we stretch our legs out to gently hit their calves. Baguette Quartette plays up and down Napa and Sonoma Valleys. The wineries love us because we are portable. It means that we bake in the sun, bend in the wind, drip in the fog, freeze after sunset. Once, near St Luis Obispo, the September evening was so cold that Rachel and I asked the hostess for a comforter. Our legs wrapped in that heavy cover, we played side by side like 2 Siamese sisters, until the guests discreetly took refuge inside the perfectly habitable mansion.

Speaking about Siamese sisters, Big Lou and I have followed parallel paths. Soon after my arrival, Lou introduced me to the, already rich and now richer, Bay Area accordion world. After leaving the intense multi-accordions ensemble "Those Darn Accordions" Lou was dreaming of a real Polka band. I was dreaming of a real musette band. We both succeeded. On top of her busy schedule, especially in October, with her "Polka Casserole" Lou has a charming trio focused on Edith Piaf songs. Lou has visited Paris many times, quiz her (not me) about fancy restaurants. This summer, she started to play with my 3 colleagues. She is now ready to hit the party and wedding circuit under the Baguette Quartette banner. "You go Lou!"

En Douce

An old fashion expression that I can explain by saying that the other members of the quartet prevented me from slipping out "en douce." They insisted for an official announcement and termination ritual in concert shape. In that song, from a 1920s musical, *Mistinguette*, an extremely popular performer, is enumerating all the life events accomplished "en douce" by her character. From cradle to grave, it is an ode to the non-ritual. But we are not in the free-Berkeley of the Sixties. We are in poverty stricken/abused female Paris. There is no joy. Only the humble testimony of a life not lived, not chosen, not celebrated and forgotten, were it not for that song. This is the favorite song of Will Bernard, who played guitar with us for years, before moving to a more glamorous life in New York. A long time ago, Will lived with a French girl in Montrouge, right outside Paris. Will's French became quickly good enough to understand that his name sounded like oil (*huile*). To the locals, he started introducing himself as Willy, less oily.

Sevilla en Fiesta

Chantal contacted us years ago to play for her association "L'Ile de France" I like the name. This is the appellation of Paris geographical region but it seems also very appropriate for one of those Bay Area Francophile groups. They gather to eat, French-chat, dance and feel good about their birth or chosen identity. Baguette Quartette rarely performs for these social clubs because they are picky and demanding. Their familiarity with the French repertoire allows them to make constant requests often out of our boundaries: *yé-yé* songs, twist or even rock and roll (French people's favorite dance!) "L'Ile de France" is not like that, they make us feel at home. They appreciate old fashion dances. We make sure that Chantal and her husband get an opportunity to demonstrate their smooth *paso doble* skills.

Fleur de Paris

John Schott wrote the tiny introduction to this song. John is our 4th guitar player. For some reason (me?) the guitar player seat is a hot one. It seems that covering styles as diverse as tango, swing and waltz with 6 strings is a challenge. Olivier Zyngier, our first guitar player, agrees. He confessed having looked for years for the perfect second guitar to partner with, and being again and again disappointed. The result is that each of our guitar players had some of the required talents, but not all (does this sound like...) John has the highest level of musicianship. He is a musical encyclopedia and has taken up the, sorely needed, task, to clean our hand written/scratched charts. My motto: "a good chart fits on a metro ticket" has its limits as our repertoire has grown and our commitments force us to hire extra help. Like the famous Autumn Leaves, this is a WWII symbolic song. It celebrates Paris Liberation. Opening a drawer, shut since 4 years, we discover a never wilted flower. Guess what color it is? Blue, white and red!

Rose Blanche

Aristide Bruant perfected his sober chansonnier craftsmanship by performing regularly at the first Parisian cabaret "Le chat noir" in Montmartre. There, the audience was smaller and quieter than in the singing-cafes. It came for stories and emotions. Our interpretation pays homage to silent movies. I started attending the Cinémathèque de Paris as a teenager. It was still at the original location, in the severe Art-Deco Trocadéro building, on the hill, across the river from the Eiffel Tower. I used to lock my bicycle to the railing, and get in the long line along the downward staircase. This was a solitary pleasure. Nobody I knew would have spent their free time watching unknown black and white reels. I liked the discovery, the surprise, the uniqueness.

I have not spent much time on top of Montmartre, the setting of the song. This is where the tourists go, not the Parisian, unless you were born in the charming houses up there. But we use to shop at the bottom of the hill, in the "Marché Saint Pierre": the place to go for bargains on fabric and notions. The 4 floors were crowded with housewives, seamstresses, designers, artists and brides. Across the narrow cobblestone street stood a similar store "La Petite Marthe". This was our second stop when the "Marché Saint Pierre" search had proven unsuccessful. All this happened next to the now famous café featured in the "Amélie" movie. Pierre Carré, the lift operator at "La petite Marthe" was a singer. Under a deep black pompadour, he was performing weekly at "Les Noctambules" a gloomy café-dance-hall on the Place Pigalle. His bald accompanist was playing accordion with one hand and drums with the rest of his limbs. Pierre Carré had a remarkable wide and straight chest contained into a powder blue satin suit. He mechanically blurted out the crowd-pleasing lyrics, his burn-out fake enthusiasm adding to the sadness of the place.

Pouèt! Pouèt!

This is the sound made by vintage car horns "Honk, honk." The famous chorus goes: "I make pouèt, pouèt to her, she makes pouèt, pouèt to me, we make pouèt, pouèt to each other, and that's it." It was still heard a lot when I was growing up. Kids would innocently shout it in the streets and parents would hum it with a knowing half-smile.



Madame Arthur

This song is dedicated to my husband and my father! My husband told me:” For this show, you have to sing the old songs: Madame Arthur, Du Gris. These were the great songs at the start of the Baguette Quartette.” Of course I replied: “No way, I am not singing those anymore.” I did sing Du Gris again 5 or 6 years ago and it did not fly that well. I have breathed too long in a no-smoking atmosphere. I could not get into the emphysema big final. But, when I tried Madame Arthur, in a lower key than 20 years ago, I enjoyed it. I can see her dancing at a Baguette Quartette MOULIN ROUGE ball, surrounded by the Bay Area scholars who regularly travel to Europe to learn steps from the last bal musette masters. They trade costumes on ebay, frequent Lacis Museum and the Dickens Fair.

My father told anecdotes about Madame Arthur. She was a regular on the Friday evening train to Burgundy that my parents, with many other Parisians, were taking each weekend to escape the city. She had a strong personality, that’s what my father noticed. My father liked strong women. That’s why he married my mother. My father would give nicknames to women he admired. “Madame Arthur” from the train, “My daughter-in-law” was the appetizing Boulevard Saint Germain baker, and others that he would not share with his family...

Ça gaze

Our only java tonight; few dancers still know the steps. Luckily teachers like Richard Power & Karen Tierney hold reminder courses before our public dances. The Java is a Parisian adaptation of the mazurka. Both styles look right with the music, but, please, don’t start waltzing. The name comes from the long gone Belleville Café LE ÇA GAZE. “Ça Gaze?” was a popular greeting equivalent to “Doing well?” Gas lighting installation, in the second half of the nineteenth century, inspired many linguistic expressions based on that powerful new source of energy.

Que reste-t-il de nos amours?

Again, my husband told me: “You should have some kind of good bye song. Will you do “Non Je ne regrette rien” or “Que reste-t-il...?” I never sing «No regrets» It is too dramatic. Sometimes we play it at birthday parties, more like a joke. I avoid regrets. Everything counts in our life. You cannot pull a piece out. You don’t know what this piece created. It can take a very long time to understand something, someone’s role. We have played “Que reste-t-il...?” a lot. Like all Charles Trenet songs, it stays fresh. I am still moved by his choice of images like the dried flower popping out between the pages of a book. Sometime, I discover dried vegetation deep in the folds of my accordion’s bellows. We play outside so much. For the old bell tower I see the one from my mother’s village in Burgundy, still ringing every fifteen minutes, day and night. How do they sleep?

Passion

Rich said: “I want to end with Passion.” It is customary for waltz musette to bear emotional names like Indifference, Convoitise, Reproche. Is it the Italian blood flowing inside many French accordion players? Murena and Colombo, 1930s French elite players, composed such eternal little gems. Rich has Italian blood too, ask him about Christmas raviolis.

Program notes by Odile Lavault

