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2012  
*The Music of America*

Traditional Ethnic and Regional Music and Dance that's "Homegrown" in Communities across the U.S.

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# Les Bon Hommes Du Nord



**Franco-American and French-Canadian  
music from New Hampshire**

**Patrick Ross and Jean Theroux  
with Dalton Binette and Bow Thayer**

**Wednesday, August 8, 2012**

**12 NOON - 1 PM**

**Coolidge Auditorium**

**Ground Floor, Thomas Jefferson Building**

**Library of Congress**

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**Washington, DC**

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# Les Bon Hommes Du Nord

Les Bon Hommes Du Nord will present a program of fiddle tunes and songs drawn from their Franco-American and French-Canadian heritage. They will be joined by Dalton Binette and Bow Thayer. All four hail from the northernmost area of New Hampshire, where living and working in the mountains and forests shape the culture and the people.

Northern New Hampshire shares a border with Canada, across which people and cultural influences have flowed steadily over the last hundred years or more. The French-Canadian presence in New Hampshire is denoted by signs as you cross into the state: Welcome to New Hampshire! Bienvenue!

In the mid-to-late 1800s, people of French descent began moving into New Hampshire from Canada. Some were from Québec and others were from eastern Canada, an area called Acadia that was settled in the early 1600s. Most of the French-speaking people who came to New Hampshire left subsistence farms in Canada to look for work and a better life for their families.

Some went to work in the rugged lumber camps of the north and others found work in the woolen mill towns of the south. Wherever they settled, French Canadians brought their language, devotion to family, a strong work ethic, and their love of making music. Many musicians of French-Canadian descent recall the soirées (house parties) when they were growing up; with fiddles and songs filling the air into the night and early morning hours.

Fiddle, accordion, and guitar are the most common instruments used in French-Canadian music. The playing style is spirited and based upon rhythmic patterns such as jigs, reels, and waltzes. The bowing style (the way the bow is drawn across the strings) has a distinctive swing in French-Canadian music. Subtle differences exist in the way tunes are ornamented (the notes that decorate the main melody) between Acadian and Québécois styles of fiddling.

Sometimes wooden or metal spoons are knocked together to create a percussive accompaniment. A style of dancing, called clogging, is done with lively skipping, stepping, and tapping movements, often with the dancer wearing leather-soled shoes and dancing on a board or hard floor to the rhythm of the music. Some fiddlers can even clog while playing a tune.

Singing in the French language with family and friends is also an important part of French-Canadian musical heritage. Many French-Canadian songs are in a musical style called "chansons à répondre" (response songs). In this style, a song leader may sing the verses and then sings a line of the chorus first, which is then repeated by the rest of the group. This style

allows a large group to join in the fun without knowing all the words of the song.

In 1937, a meeting of the French Language Congress was held in Québec City during which they emphasized the value of song as a way to preserve culture and language. In response to this, Father Charles-Emile Gadbois from St-Hyacinthe, Québec, began a publishing company focused on printing song books. Over time Gadbois published eleven song books containing 550 French and French-Canadian songs in a collection called *La Bonne Chanson* (*The Good Song*). These books are still popular with many French-Canadian families, both in Canada and in New Hampshire.

Patrick Ross, a frequent winner at fiddle contests throughout northern New England, is a fifth-generation fiddler. He received his first fiddle at age three and began playing for traditional house parties in Northern Vermont and New Hampshire with his father. After high school, he explored a variety of musical avenues in other parts of the country, including time in Nashville where he met and played for musicians including Willie Nelson, Bela Fleck, and Sheryl Crow. After living for a short time in Los Angeles and the suburbs of London, he returned to New Hampshire where he went back to his traditional musical roots, researching and recording the music of older French-Canadian fiddlers. He also teaches music and plays in a variety of bands.

Jean Nil Theroux is Patrick's stepfather and learned to play the fiddle in logging camps of northern New England as a young man. Ross and Theroux are joined by Dalton Binette and Bow Thayer. Ross and Binette received a Traditional Arts Apprenticeship grant in 2011 from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts to preserve French-Canadian fiddling. This grant program helps to ensure that traditions are passed on from master to apprentice in one-to-one sessions.

Lynn J. Martin Graton  
Acting Director & Traditional Arts Coordinator  
New Hampshire State Council on the Arts

*The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Center includes the American Folklife Center Archive of folk culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Please visit our web site <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>.*

