

**Nomination form**  
**International Memory of the World Register**

**TRANSCULTURAL TRACES AND MEMORIES FROM THE CONTINENTS**

**Le Son des Français d'Amérique** (The sounds of French Americans)

(Nanouk films, 1974-1989, a series of 27 films, 30 mins ea. 16mm)

Co-directed by Michel Brault and André Gladu

2016-09

This submission of documentary heritage to UNESCO's international Memory of the World Register, which consists of a series of films entitled *Le Son des Français d'Amérique*, represents a compelling example of transatlantic cultural fusion and hybridisation. It preserves the traces, and is a record of, successive migrations occurring on the peripheries of the Atlantic Ocean; it bears witness to the cultural exchanges between the Caribbean (and by extension Africa), Europe and North America. *Le Son des Français d'Amérique* is dedicated to the heritage of music and song of the Francophone cultures of North America; it is a repository of French, Irish, Breton, Scottish, West Indian, African, mixed heritage and indigenous memories. The creators of *Le Son des Français d'Amérique* were clear about its importance:

'From the moment that André [Gladu] thought of making this series of films about the various traditional Francophone cultures of north America, I realized that it had never been done before. We also wanted the series to have an additional dimension to that of music. We tried to present the historical, economic, social and political [...] context. By making this series, we are bearing witness to the rich diversity of the world and, in doing so, fighting against cultural imperialism and the bulldozers of cultural diversity. When a person is named, when a type of music is named, it becomes more difficult to make them disappear and I believe that the world's beauty lies in the great abundance of its differences. The purpose of the series was also "to make heard those whose speech is vanishing" and to make visible those whose gestures are dying out.'<sup>1</sup>

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**2.1 Name of nominator (person or organisation)**

Cinémathèque québécoise with André Gladu

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**2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage**

The Cinémathèque québécoise is the owner and custodian of the documentary materials. André Gladu is creator and co-director with Michel Brault of the series *Le Son des Français d'Amérique*.

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**2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)**

Jean Gagnon, Director of preservation and access to collections, Cinémathèque québécoise

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**2.4 Contact details**

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Michel Brault, *Copie Zéro*, No 5, Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1980. Accessed 18 September 2015: <<http://collections.cinematheque.qc.ca/articles/entretien-4/>>.

<i>Name:</i> Jean Gagnon	<i>Address:</i> Cinémathèque québécoise, 335, boul. de Maisonneuve Est, Montréal. Québec, H2X 1K1 Canada
<i>Tel:</i> 514 842 9763	<i>Email:</i> <a href="mailto:jgagnon@cinematheque.qc.ca">jgagnon@cinematheque.qc.ca</a>

### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

***Le Son des Français d'Amérique*** (Nanouk Films, 1974 -1980, series of 27 films, 30 min ea.). Original materials given to the Cinémathèque québécoise, the Michel Brault collection donated by Michel Brault. The series, shot in 16mm, has deteriorated over time (see point 8 below regarding state of conservation) and our plan is to digitize and restore all the original materials and make them available once again both to researchers and the general public.

The original series of ***Le Son des Français d'Amérique*** comprises 27 episodes each lasting 30 minutes, filmed by André Gladu and Michel Brault between 1974 and 1980, with traditional musicians, singers, and dancers of Quebec, Acadia, Louisiana, Newfoundland, New England, Northern Ontario, the Canadian Prairies and the American Mid-west. Five pieces were made in France, Brittany and Ireland in order to retrace the origins of these songs and dances. This unique collection contains evidence of the last generations and bearers of cultural tradition to have acquired their knowledge, styles and repertoires within family and community contexts, before the steamroller of the mass media brought about cultural standardisation. This legacy, which reached the four corners of the continent, bears witness to the diverse cultural strands woven together by history. It also accounts for the diplomacy rituals used by the French and native Americans (the violin as instrument of 'fiddle diplomacy', which Howard Wight Marshall wrote about in relation to Pierre Cruzatte, the guide-interpret and fiddler for the Lewis and Clark expedition - Wight Marshall, 2013) and the imprint of colonialism, the traces of which can still be found today in the songs, dances and accents of oral culture.

### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Cinémathèque québécoise	Cinémathèque québécoise, 335, boul. de Maisonneuve Est, Montréal. Québec, H2X 1K1 Canada	
Telephone 514-842-9763	Fax	<b>Email address</b> <a href="mailto:jgagnon@cinematheque.qc.ca">jgagnon@cinematheque.qc.ca</a>

### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	
Telephone	Fax	Email address

### 4.3 Legal Status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

The Cinémathèque québécoise is a non-profit organisation founded in 1963. Its mission is to acquire, document and safeguard the audio-visual heritage of Quebec as well as international animated film, and to collect important works of Canadian and world cinema to promote them for cultural and educational purposes. It has been a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) since 1966. It is recognized as a museum by the Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications. It is considered a 'category A' heritage institution by the Department of Canadian Heritage; this means that it has expertise in receiving and preserving cultural property.

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#### **4.4 Accessibility**

Describe how the items/collections can be accessed. All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below.

The series can be viewed in a collection of DVDs available to buy from the producer. It is owned by the Cinémathèque québécoise Médiathèque (media library) and can be viewed on site. However, the process for digitizing the films, using telecine technology, does not produce very high picture quality and has not produced any improvements in picture or sound. The original materials presented on film are not available for preservation reasons, except in the case of a genuine digitization or restoration project which conforms to the ethical rules of the Cinémathèque québécoise with regard to restoration.

Should the restoration project with *Éléphant* (a record of Quebec cinema – see below for details), go ahead, this project also has a component aimed at broadcasting the series with VOD software and similar on demand platforms (iTunes, etc.) and producing a DVD box set with a special booklet.

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#### **4.5 Copyright status**

Describe the copyright status of the items/collections

The copyright is held entirely and jointly by Nanouk films and Mr André Gladu.

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#### **5.1 Authenticity**

*Le Son des Français d'Amérique* is a very powerful documentary presenting the real lives of the tradition bearers of an inter-continental, hybrid and living culture; these films present authentic faces and words in real time in kitchens and houses, community halls and other busy cultural locations; they includes working songs, call and response songs, drinking songs, laments, nursery rhymes, stories, folk songs, warbling tunes, rhythmic traditional music originally performed for dancing, all remembered by the films' protagonists. The documentary material is presented without any artifice or film direction according to the direct cinema approaches and methods practiced by Michel Brault and André Gladu (see below, section 5.3, subsection 5). The depth of this documentary collection comes from the way in which it does not simply present an inventory of the existence of a living Francophone culture in America; it authenticates this culture by tracing its various sources to France, Brittany and Ireland, while also presenting the cultural contribution made by the West Indies and the First Nations.

Charles J. Stivale writes: 'The music [cajun music] is a blend of German, Spanish, Scottish, Irish, Anglo-American, African-Caribbean, and native American influences with a base of French and French Acadian folk traditions' (Stivale, 2003, 15). Carl Brasseaux, a historian at

the Center of Cultural and Eco-Tourism, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, talks keenly of a 'cross-cultural' current and of 'transculturation' when referring to this type of music with multiple influences (Brasseaux, 2009).

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## 5.2 World importance

This documentary collection is irreplaceable because it contains the record of a phenomenon of cultural hybridisation involving the whole of the Atlantic basin from Europe, through the West Indies, to America; these memories of the mixed cultures of the Francophone people of America are also charged with the history of voluntary or enforced migrations of various communities (e.g. African slavery, deportation of the Acadians, enforced exile of the Métis people, etc.). These cultural exchanges created a new culture, still alive today, expressed through the songs and dances presented in this documentary series. This series of documents is an illustration of interculturality and presents a methodology which can be applied to other parts of the world; it is an approach which uses oral accounts and the traditions of song and dance as a rich sedimentary source of history and cultural diversity.

This documentary heritage is both unique and rare and cannot be recreated because the historical conditions have changed so significantly since the series was filmed. Due to the prosperity of the 60's and the effects of the development of education, writing and the media, most minority peoples in America have now moved into the modern world; added to this is the fact that North-American media is predominantly English-speaking, to the detriment of minority cultures, particularly Francophone ones. One consequence is that the experience of Francophone people on this continent are not passed on through oral tradition. Writing, but above all radio, television and now social media have, for better or worse, taken over.

For want of sufficient political power to defend their interests, people managed over the centuries to develop a strong folk culture which was driven by oral tradition, by the spoken word. Traditionally, it was kept separate from education and learning which was the preserve of religious communities and the wealthier classes, the *notables* (elite) as they were called at one time. At the same time, the educated and religious world scorned and despised the most potent manifestations of this popular culture. Until the 60's, the fiddlers and those who sang bawdy and socially unacceptable, etc. songs, were denounced from the pulpit by village priests and sometimes excommunicated in Quebec, Acadia and in other Francophone communities. This contempt of the wealthier classes for popular culture is unfortunately very common. Revaluing and reclaiming this wonderful joie de vivre, a tangible trait of Francophone populations on the American continent, this was Brault and Gladu's shared goal. They knew intuitively that the instinct for survival which affirms itself through music and song had enabled our ancestors to get through difficult experiences, injustices at work, social discrimination, political inequality and sometimes racism.

Filming coincided in some regions with a period of renewal and the reclaiming of personal Francophone identities, particularly in Quebec, Acadia and Louisiana. In the 70's, when creating the series of films that make up this piece of documentary heritage, the producers, André Gladu and Michel Brault, contributed to this renaissance movement. For example:

'In 1975, a group which included André Gladu and Michel Brault, the film-makers who were producing the series *Le Son des Français d'Amérique* (1976), helped to organize a concert entitled 'La Veillée des Veillées' and which brought together musicians and singers from various Francophone areas in Montreal. Joining the Québécois, the Bretons, the French and

the maritime Acadians, were Zachary Richard, Marc Savoy, D.L. Menard, Lionel Leleux and Dieudonné Montoucet from Louisiana. This gathering triggered a series of exchanges between several generations of Francophone musicians. The contact between Gladu and Revon Reed also produced the first book written in cajun French, 'Lâche pas la patate', published in Montreal by Parti Pris in 1976 and originally conceived as a series of letters between these two correspondents...' (Ancelet, 2010, 22).

This heritage provides a picture of the circumstances leading to the Acadian and Louisiana revival, not to mention the emergence of a significant group of Francophones in North America. We believe that this constitutes an important example with global significance for other minority peoples.

This documentary heritage also brings an understanding of the problems, in this case linguistic but also ethnocultural, experienced by minority peoples in large confederacies like the Canadian Confederation and the United States of America, where the majority tend to want to eliminate historical and socio-historical differences in favour of a homogenous nation-state. *Le Son des Français d'Amérique* therefore promotes an understanding of the heterogeneity of the New World and North America and provides a map of the continent which includes the diversity of cultures in play between the native Americans, the first inhabitants of the territory, the French, the English, and the slaves who came from Africa via the West Indies. Through the music of its people, their songs and dances, it is a continent emerging in relief, outside official (Canadian or American) history. It also shows us what this 'New World' owes to the 'Old Worlds' of the native Americans, the African-Caribbeans and the Europeans.

Communities create and sustain music and dance to survive and to give themselves an identity; this is true of the tango for Argentinians and Uruguayans, and of the blues for African Americans. It is also interesting to note, that in the cradle of blues and jazz music, there is a filial connection between traditional cajun music from Louisiana and the music of black Creole peoples created by Haitian slaves. In one episode, *Fred's Lounge*, we hear a song performed by cajun musicians which is undoubtedly a blues song sung in French: *Ma négresse/Pine Grove Blues* by Nathan Abshire, an accordionist of dual cajun and Cherokee heritage. Robert Sacré writes that 'the Creole people' [black Francophone people from Louisiana] played a 'crucial role in the genesis and development of the musical styles' of Louisiana (Sacré, 1995, 13). And so a particular relationship emerges between cajun, jazz and blues music; he also mentions several pioneers of these types of music with French-sounding names, in particular, Antoine Fats Domino in rhythm and blues, Ferdinand Lamothe (Jelly Roll Morton), a pioneer of ragtime, or Clifton Chier, the inventor of zydeco music. It is also historically proven that the black musician Amédée Ardoin (c.1896-1941), who barely spoke any English, like others whose names history has forgotten, played a hybrid mix of cajun and blues music. He, along with Adam Fontenot 'introduced syncopation to the accordion', which was an African Caribbean influence (Ancelet, 1984, 32). Although it is difficult to define the historical influence of one style of music over another, song testifies to a cross-fertilisation between the traditional music of the Cajun people and that of their African Creole neighbours in historical Louisiana. Lamenting communities recognize themselves in these songs, whether the songs come from France or the heartlands of America, when they become a vehicle for the pain and joy, the loves and losses, for the plight of men and women that creates a living culture. In a note, Sacré talks of the similarity between the melody of the song *J'ai passé devant ta porte*, a cajun classic, and that of a Spanish guitar concerto by Fernando Sor (1778-1839) (Sacré, 1995, 20). 'In *La valse du vacher*, Ancelet writes, Dennis McGee sings about a Cajun cowherd's solitude to an old mazurka tune which is tinged with blues as well as Irish, French and native American influences' (Ancelet, 1984, 22).

There is also a community of instruments: the violin (France), the guitar (Spain), and lastly the diatonic accordion (German) (see Stivale, 2003). As regards dances taking place in dance halls and *Fais-Dodos* (dance halls where tunes were played at the start to send the children to sleep), filial connections can also be traced back to European dances from different eras: the *rondes* and *contredanses* (both traditional French dances), jigs, polkas, mazurkas, waltzes, one-step and two-step dances.

Whatever the influences and provenance of the tunes, musicians and singers belong to particular cultures which determine their choices, tastes and memory. In the world of oral tradition, everybody knows that the music and songs belong to those who play and sing them! This is evident in the fact that each community of musicians performs and names the tunes they appropriate. For example, one dance tune, originally from the British Isles, called *La Grande gigue simple* (solo performance jig) by Quebec fiddlers, and brought to the Western Prairies by 19<sup>th</sup> Century 'voyageurs canayens' (Canadian travellers), was adopted by the Métis people who renamed it *La gigue de la Rivière rouge/ Red River Jig*. While all these groups claim to know the original version, what really matters is that this jig has survived thanks to its appropriation by each of these groups. They are particular variations on a common theme.

In Quebec, as well as in Acadia, a *veillée* (literally 'wake' or 'vigil') is a gathering of musicians, singers, story-tellers and dancers from the same location, at the house of a family who usually has the resources to accommodate large numbers and maintain a certain level of social harmony. These gatherings played a major role as social safety valves and a means of creating social cohesion. For many isolated and deprived communities in Acadia and Quebec in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the need to organize a social meeting place, where dances, dance tunes and stories from the Old World were 'replayed' in the present, was stronger than the threat of punishment from the clergy or civil authorities. The need for people to maintain morale and share aspirations prevailed.

In these illicit *veillées*, family solidarity and the performers' ingenuity made up for a lack of resources. Everything was invested in the dance which ensured the common good. Musicians were chosen and known for their ability to make people dance: *contredanses*, jigs, cotillions, *quadrilles*, reels of four, *brandy*, etc. The characteristic tapping of Quebec and Acadian fiddlers' feet resulted from the need for a strong, emphatic beat, which the strings could not achieve on their own, so that it could be heard all over the house, enabling dancers to carry out their moves. Often one or two fiddlers stood up on a table to amplify the sound. In Acadia, if they were unable to get hold of musical instruments, some families were renowned for making guests dance late into the night by 'reelant à bouche' (warbling) the tunes for *quadrilles* and square dances. At the end of these gatherings, the singers of call and response songs took over and sometimes the story-tellers and those performing laments.

For centuries, the voice and the sound of the violin have helped to maintain, by integrating outside influences, a mindset which has enabled generations of Francophone people from working-class backgrounds to sustain their unique *joie de vivre* and culture on this continent.

To our knowledge, there are no other audio-visual materials of this quality documenting American Francophone traditions, for which some communities (particularly in Missouri) have most likely since disappeared. This documentary heritage is a cultural map which bears witness to the influences and the unique and specific hybridisation which created some of the important communities which historically made up the North American continent. Moreover, this music, and these songs and dances are like sedimentary layers, produced by the

voluntary or enforced migrations of populations over several centuries and which have formed this seemingly monolithic but actually very diverse continent, which is North America.

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### 5.3 Comparative Criteria:

#### 1 Time

The series, *Le Son des Français d'Amérique*, operates on two intersecting temporal levels. Firstly, it is representative of its time at the moment of filming because it documents the traces of an ongoing heritage. It is also representative of North America's vibrant cultural context, particularly in Quebec where this type of initiative, favouring the diversity and richness of cultural expression over a predominant homogenisation, is promoted. The second temporal aspect consists of a sedimentary accumulation over time, which is expressed in the cultural forms, the songs and dances presented in the films; it is a historical collecting of songs and dances, of living memory and also of forgetting, which is evident in the films, for example, when a protagonist cannot remember all the words to an old song: 'I've forgotten the words...' Charles Pagé says, the fiddler of Vieille Mine in Missouri after playing the tune to the song *C'est la belle Française*. This series brings us an understanding that while cultural transmission is collective, it nevertheless relies on individual memory for its survival. It is the dialectic relationship between these two temporal aspects that defines the state of the intangible heritage and its fragility.

At one temporal level, that of renaissance, we must include the long chain of participants with an understanding of this type of cultural heritage, beginning with the film-makers themselves. Nor can we ignore the important influence of Luc Lacourcière and his wonderful team of researchers, at the Folklore Archives at Laval University in Quebec, who produced a very scholarly documentation and publication of all the elements of this patrimonial legacy initially from France. It is impossible to imagine this series without the precious advice of folklorists, ethnologists and ethnomusicologists such as Jean Duberger from Laval University, Charlotte Cormier, ethnomusicologist from the Acadian folklore archives at Moncton University, folklorist Barry Ancelet from the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the anthropologist Nick Spitzer, associate researcher at the Smithsonian Institute, the ethnologist Michel Valière of the Union for Popular Culture in Poitou-Charentes (UPCP), the Dastum research team in Rennes, Brittany, and the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin.

The other temporal level, that of a historical sedimentary accumulation, which is inscribed directly in the material of song and dance, is recorded in this documentary series at a critical moment in its evolution. As mentioned above, the culture it presents has, until recently, been transmitted orally. However, changes brought about by mass culture and the channels of modern media threaten this word-of-mouth transmission, yet also provide it with new opportunities. The face-to-face passing on of traditional practices has now been succeeded by media and virtual transmission. It is perhaps ironic that this series has been broadcast on the national network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Yet at the same time, this medium might in turn also be strongly influenced by the new orality which Marshall McLuhan spoke about. Indeed, we see a young Zachary Richard in this series in his native Louisiana, who eventually uses modern media to promote the cultural renaissance in Louisiana and Acadia and so becomes a passionate advocate for this culture in Europe and also one of the most eloquent spokes-persons for Franco-America.

## 2 Place

'From 1974 to 1980 [André] Gladu and [Michel] Brault work on the series, *Le Son des Français d'Amérique*, which claims to be an inventory of a North American tradition previously very little documented. The first part of the collection, made in the mid-70's, comprises about twelve mid-length films [...]. Five of these films are made in the United States, four of them in Louisiana. The rest focus on Quebec and Acadia. All these documentaries emphasize the significance of French culture in America and the need to preserve, at all costs, this unique Americanness expressed through music – the custodian of oral tradition. The second part of the collection, including some fifteen films made between 1977 and 1980, adds France, [Brittany] and Ireland as the cradles of musical traditions from French America' (Loiselle, 2005, p. 217).

This collection constitutes a true map of French North American culture, and shows how some of the unique communities in America, resulting from French colonialism in the New World, were formed outside the United States and Canada's political boundaries. The voices and music of the Québécois, Acadian, Métis and Creole people and their diasporas, bear witness, on the one hand, to a time when French influence extended from the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, through Acadia, the Great Lakes, the Prairies, the Mississippi Valley, Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico. On the other hand, and more importantly, they testify to the presence and vitality of indigenous cultures, the bearers of the experience of a mosaic of unknown communities which established themselves throughout the continent. Their cultures and living traditions are continental and not provincial. Through the vagaries of history, the wars and conquests, through the negotiations and treaties by which territories were exchanged, these communities were shunted around and often left to fend for themselves. When this collection was produced, only memories, some still keen, some precarious, survived. This is why these audio-visual documents are so precious for the memory of the world and as a potential instrument for the survival and actualisation of minority cultures.

'While participating in discussions about the Francophone minority communities of America, Gladu refuses to discuss the matter in general terms. His cinematographic discourse does not present an omniscient and homogeneous view of reality, but rather a compilation of accounts about the minority Francophone cultures of America. While promoting the campaign for and preservation of cultural and linguistic practices, he also fights against cultural 'folklorisation' and museification. He refuses to celebrate a culture that has disappeared, preferring to concentrate on those still fighting for their existence' (Bouchard, 2010).

Each of the episodes in the collection focuses on a particular place or people; the two that follow are representative examples of the collection.

In the episode 'C'est pu comme ça anymore' (*It's not like that anymore*), which was filmed in the areas of Vieille Mines and Ste-Geneviève in Missouri, "we are introduced to poor people with names like Boyer, Duquette, Robert, Pagé, etc. [...]. In 1920, in this corner of the world, schooling in English was made compulsory for all. [...]. In 1934, there were over six hundred families who spoke French very well. In 1976, the year the film was made, it is hard to find more than thirty elderly people who still speak the language of their grandparents. This stark fact echoes throughout the film, which strives to record what little remains here of French culture, which hangs on a few pieces of music and song [...]. This past, which is expressed more through the forgetting of a song title, or a tune, or words that can no longer be found" (*Nouveau cinéma canadien/New Canadian Film*, 1977, 40-41).

'Les Créoles' is about the black people and people of mixed cultural heritage from south-west Louisiana who speak French and play cajun and zydeco music. "Descended from the slaves brought from the French West Indies, they were disadvantaged, not only because they spoke French, but also because they were black! Because of their parallel fate, slaves and deportees [Acadians/Cajuns] developed a shared music. And so, after they were freed, many black people adopted cajun names, such as Fontenot, Ardoin, Guidry, Carrière, etc. The Cajun people, in contrast with their Yankee neighbours, always understood the suffering of the black people they mixed with. This can be seen in the significant influence of Creole music on the cajun sound. Iry Lejeune, the 'father' of cajun music, was influenced throughout his life by the song style of Amédee Ardoin, a black Creole who was also his neighbour" (Nouveau cinema canadien/New Canadian Film, 1977, 41).

In appendix 3 we have included the complete article from Nouveau cinema canadien/New Canadian Film., Vol VIII, no 4, September 1977, which also describes other episodes. It highlights in this series both an image of decline and of the will to survive; nostalgia as well as the rage to continue existing and resisting.

### **3 People**

As well as showing us a place, each episode presents people, the tradition bearers – musicians, singers and dancers. It is never, without exception, about professional artists; it is through ordinary people that the tradition lives on. In each episode we see faces and hear voices and different accents. These accents alone testify to the diversity and authenticity of the accounts; accents from Quebec, Acadia, Louisiana, but also from Brittany and Ireland mixed with Breton and Gaelic. These are the audible signs of the historical migrations and intermingling which create cultural identity. It is for this reason that the dimension of sound is the most important aspect of the films because it is an expression of the real lives of these people and their music. So the account in this collection is not simply anecdotal, it is rooted in the authenticity of the portraits of people and in the 'grain of the voice' of those it presents.

*Le Son des Français d'Amérique* has in places captured the only existing accounts on film of very prominent figures of oral tradition, such as Majorique Duguay, singer and lumberjack from Petite Lamèque (Acadia), Louis Boudreault, joiner and fiddler from Chicoutimi (Quebec), Philippe Bruneau, accordionist from Montreal (Quebec), Inez Catalon, domestic servant and Creole singer from Guédan (Louisiana), Emile Benoît, Acadian fisherman, healer and fiddler from Port-au-Port (Newfoundland), Dennis McGhee, barber and cajun fiddler, Eunice (Louisiana), Emmanuel Kerjean, farmer and *kan ha diskan* (call and response) singer from Poulauouen (Brittany), Junior Creehan, farmer and fiddler from County Clare (Ireland).

### **4 Subject and Theme**

Throughout the 70's, the release of the films in *Le Son des Français d'Amérique* in Quebec, Louisiana and France had a cascade effect on the emergence of movements in traditional music. Several well-known feeder groups sometimes took their inspiration from the films in the series.

Also at this time, Gladu, in collaboration with the Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM), organized a series of prominent traditional music festivals inspired directly by his first film *Le Reel du pendu* (ONF/National Film Board of Canada, 1972, 56 mins) and his work on this series. The first festival of traditional music in Quebec (Dec 1973), *Le Son des Français*

*d'Amérique* – Acadia, Louisiana, Quebec (Oct 1974), *Les Veillées d'automne – La Veillée des Veillées* (Nov 1975) and *La Veillée à Jean-Baptiste* (June 1977) enables a whole generation of young Montrealers, cut off from their roots, to discover a wealth of unknown and forgotten cultural heritage. The group of film-makers, to which Michel Brault belonged, directed by Bernard Gosselin, shot the film, *La Veillée des Veillées* (ONF, 1975, 95 mins), creating a record of this major event which was at the heart of the revival of traditional music in Quebec, together with the series *Le Son des Français d'Amérique*.

'Director Pat Mire reminded the audience of the urgent nature of his work which documents some of the very last Francophone accounts of a rich traditional culture that is in the process of transformation.

We remember the unforgettable images, recorded first by Michel Brault and then by Martin Leclerc, Philippe Lavalette and Alex Margineau, of some of the prominent figures, such as Nathan Abshire, Alphonse Ardoin, Dennis McGhee, Inez Catalon, Canry Fontenot, Zydeco Joe, not to mention the young poets and musicians, Debbie Clifton, Zachary Richard, Michael Doucet and Cedric Watson. Pat Mire recalled those years in the 70's when Gladu was filming in the area with his crews as an inspirational time for filmmakers.'

(Press release, 5<sup>th</sup> Cinema on the Bayou Film Festival, January 27<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>, Retrospective of the Louisiana films of Québécois film maker André Gladu, produced between 1975 and 2005, Cité des Arts, Lafayette, Louisiana).

## 5. Form and style

This documentary series was co-directed by André Gladu and Michel Brault (1923-2013). While Gladu is a well-known expert in the history of traditional music of Francophone America, Brault is one of the crucial players of what is known as 'direct cinema', a specialist approach originating in Quebec and a variant of an approach used in America, called *cinéma vérité* or 'candid-eye'. It is important to highlight the contribution made by Michel Brault as co-creator but also as cameraman during the filming of the series. While André Gladu, through his contacts and expertise, was present on site and lay the groundwork, Michel Brault arrived at filming locations 'at the last minute' and shot the films according to the methods and ethics of direct cinema. This approach probably had underlying financial motivations as they could not afford to film non-stop and waste costly film reel. But it was also an approach that was very highly valued by Brault, which he been testing frequently since the 60's, such as in his master piece *Pour la suite du monde* (1962), made by Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault.

### THE DOCUMENTARY PROJECT

Direct cinema affects every aspect of a cinematographic intervention, including research and work on scenario, as well as the planning of camera shots, sound recording and editing. It is an all-encompassing approach, requiring teamwork and a high level of collaboration. Mastery of the tools, good preparation (research), known circumstances, trust in the participants and cooperation between team members make it possible to adapt to the unexpected and to focus on the moment when the musicians and singers take the floor.

This choice of documentary method determines how a subject is perceived. The watching and listening come from a consciousness which is shared by the whole team and from a common awareness resulting from our own culture. Cinema and music are art forms of duration. For them (the musicians) and us (the film crew) nothing is taken for granted as every time is different. An accordionist like Philippe Bruneau or a cameraman like Michel Brault, even if they

have a long history of experience, rarely produce the same thing twice. It is the encounter which makes all the difference. A kind of cinematographic jam session. After which, the art of the documentary film editor consists in making a faithful reconstruction, using their own perceptions, of the unique character of the exchange between the visual and musical artists. The project works because it gives everyone the opportunity to make a contribution to a shared memory.

## RESEARCH AND LOCATION RECONNAISSANCE

Responsibilities were shared by the team. André Gladu was responsible for research and people-resources (researchers, specialists in the field), for the choice of participants, musicians, singers, for location scouting and planning the shoots. Gladu was influenced by his film teachers at Columbia University in New York, among them Paul Byers, photographer and assistant to Margaret Mead, the famous American anthropologist trained by Franz Boas, the father of cultural anthropology. On his return to Quebec in 1968, Gladu created, for the Students Association of the Université de Montréal, the first closed circuit student television network (IETV – Televised student information), which became the main news outlet for the student movement of that time. Equipped with lightweight mobile units, the IETV teams used portable video kit (Sony Porta-Pak units) to create an account of the vibrant student environment of the late 60's, under the supervision of some engineers from the utility company Hydro-Québec (audiovisual department) and film-makers from the ONF, among them Pierre Perrault.

Later on Gladu submitted his first film to the ONF, *Le Reel du pendu* (ONF, 1972, 56 mins), which enabled him to discover the historical links between the traditional music of Quebec, Acadia and Louisiana. As a result of this experience he acquired the rudiments of his profession as a documentary maker, along with artisans of the direct approach such as the cameraman Alain Dostie, the sound recordist serge Beauchemin, etc. This first production gave him the idea for a series dedicated to the sounds of French Americans and showed him that traditional musical heritage of Francophone groups was the bearer of a historical North American and transatlantic experience and resonated with marginalized minority peoples such as the Franco-Americans, Métis people, French Newfoundlanders, Creoles, etc.

## SOUND RECORDING

The sound recorder Claude Beaugrand transported his Nagra mono recorder, 2 cordless Canon microphones, an electronic clapper board and his sound boom. 'Claude, glue yourself to the camera...' Brault said from the beginning. 'If I move backwards, you guide me, you push my back, gently, left side I avoid the left, right side, I avoid the right...'<sup>2</sup> The result – what you see in the picture, you can also hear, even at a *veillée* or in a group of dancers. Claude Beaugrand, in his own way, embodied the qualities of direct cinema documentary making. He had an extraordinary facility for adapting to situations, a great ability to plan camera shots. He had ears for everyone and a great capacity for listening which he used during outdoor sessions.

## CAMERA ASSISTANT

Brault could always rely on his assistant Andy Chmura who was everywhere at once and invisible. He set everything up, including Brault's *tours de force* in which the latter, seated on

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<sup>2</sup> All quotes in this section come from André Gladu, unless otherwise stated.

the bonnet of our car, would follow a passer-by in the middle of Rue de Mamou into a bar where a radio programme with musicians was taking place. Michel would slide fluidly from the car bonnet and continue walking, camera on shoulder, a continuous tracking shot into Fred's Lounge, adjusting the shutter on the way to the darkness inside and finishing with a close-up of the singer Nathan Abshire. Chmura stuck to him like glue, holding onto his belt and guiding him around obstacles. A sequence-shot which highlights all of Brault's skill, and facilitated by his assistant Chmura. He could find imaginative technical solutions and even modify the equipment to create tools needed by Brault and Beaugrand in situations that were difficult to film.

## EDITING

Brault stresses, 'I shoot for the editor, not just to make beautiful images...'. Afterwards, the picture and sound editor, André Corriveau, reworks the captured material, recomposing the reality of an encounter, a moment of grace infused with the best of what the singers, fiddlers, dancers have to offer. These popular artists, often anonymous, instinctively understand the nature of our work, just as we understand the value of what they give us. It was a true exchange. Corriveau edited the material on his editing table, with five hours to make a 30-minute film. Gladu helped him at the beginning and he and Brault returned to the editing room at key stages. Corriveau had a sixth sense for understanding the material recorded by Brault and Beaugrand. He refused to be present during filming and remained faithful to his role of first viewer. He was the custodian of cinematographic truth which has to see beyond feelings, conviviality, the pleasure experienced in filming, in order to remain faithful to the work of transposing the material into film, a crucial aspect to providing an account of complex realities.

## FILMING CONDITIONS

We had 7 days of location scouting, 3 days of shooting per film, 10 16mm reels, 20 ¼" reels of audio tape and 5 days editing. The allocation of these resources was made according to the problems encountered; it was not systematic. Sometimes a film was made in one day and another time it could take five. This approach to the documentary was founded on some basic principles shared by the whole team. The first and most important of these was trust between ourselves and between us and the participants. There was also the optimal use of resources (money, equipment, power, travel, etc.), given our slim budget allocation, which forced us to make the best of what little we had. And finally, each one of us believed profoundly in the need to make heard and seen those individuals and communities without a voice but with important things to say and to pass on.

This unprecedented collaboration worked smoothly when filming in the field. Over the years we developed a very effective method of working that enabled us to integrate quickly into the lives of the people we were filming. The whole film crew embraced a kind of choreography of the present moment. One day, Brault confided in André Gladu, 'André, in filming, all the camera shots, all the decisions made by the sound recorder, all your interventions, all our actions must work together to the same end...'. With each shoot, as a result of our approach, a momentum between us and the musicians grew from one shoot to the next, building up to a sense of urgency.

Everyone contributed to the success of this pooling of resources. The fiddler Louis Pitou Boudreault, from Chicoutimi in Quebec summed this up best after filming with the *brandy* (old dance from Saguenay) dancers: 'It's good to say. When I'm gone, I will still be in their company ...'

## A PIONEER OF DIRECT CINEMA

Michel Brault occupied a special place in our team because he came from a generation of pioneers in direct cinema. The approach of direct cinema explains the aesthetics, as well as the ethics of *Le Son des Français d'Amérique*. Brault is considered by many to be not only the most important cameraman in Quebec but also one of the most respected exponents at the advent of direct cinema and as one of the most authentic film-makers. Jean Rouch said of Brault 'that everything that has been done in France in the field of documentary making since 1960 springs, in part, from the influence of the Québécois Michel Brault' (quoted in Loiselle, 2005, 9).

Direct cinema has been the subject of much research and is defined by an approach of filmed reality, in which the film-maker's intervention aims to not influence the subject of the film. In a paper written in 1962 by Louis Marcorelles on behalf of UNESCO, the author attempts to define this 'direct cinema style':

'Firstly, the question of definition: why 'direct cinema'? Mario Ruspoli was the first to insist on the definitive adoption of this term in preference to *cinéma-vérité* which was the term Edgar Morin adopted when *Chronique d'un été* [for which Michel Brault was the cameraman] was released, after the famous film maker Dziga-Vertov, who created the genre during the silent film era' (Marcorelles, 1962, 3).

In his paper, the author discusses the works of the American Leacock brothers and Canadians, Perrault and Brault, as the most advanced examples not of *cinéma vérité* but of direct cinema, meaning 'concerned rather with the capturing the event as it happens and showing lives as they are being lived, rather than interrogating the basis of these lives' (Marcorelles, 1962, 3), which is a criticism he aims at Morin's film making approach. While Vertov used hidden cameras, the Americans and Canadians do not conceal themselves when filming in line with their ethical approach. However, contrary to the claims of 'direct truth' by one of the Leacock brothers, Perrault and Brault (in *Pour la suite du monde*) are more cautious about the 'truth' of direct cinema. Their films therefore present the facts, actions and people without the artifice of fiction, but they also create situations which, while not fictional, might be artificial (like repeating the beluga fishing in the above film...). This idea that the act of observing can never be entirely objective is enshrined in the design of the films. All film is, in the end, an artifice of editing; this constitutes the second ethic of the direct approach as demonstrated by Brault in his famous *Les Ordres* (1974), a film which mixes a direct style with a story that includes real events and political facts.

Cinema direct has come about thanks to technical improvements made by Brault during his visit to France at the beginning of the 60's; the improvements to the Éclair 16mm camera. Brault recounts:

'The battle against the old cameras, but with new camera manufacturers like Coutant and Kudelski for the Nagra [a portable tape recorder]. And there, we were really happy you see, really at home. Very often we would go the Mr Coutant's workshop and get him to do this or that. Not only were new cameras being made, but the type of film used also had to be made more sensitive. We had that here, long before they did. I can't say enough about the important part played by guys like José Ména from the Mont-Royal laboratories, and others I don't know. José Ména agreed to experiment with the development of baths for developing 400 ASA, and then 800 ASA films. So we were doing things that no other country had done

before. It was this work that made it possible to make films free of technical constraints, and enabled us to go anywhere, thanks to the high sensitivity of the film used' (Pierre Jutras and Michel Brault, 'Interview with Michel Brault', *Copie Zéro*, No 5, 1980).

So these technical improvements and the use of short-focus lenses made it possible to get close to subjects, to be in amongst them, almost a protagonist in the action and events taking place; it has been said that Brault filmed while walking, that a biped camera is better than a tripod camera (Claude Jutra, *Copie Zéro*, No 5, 1980). And so the film maker gained mobility, versatility and flexibility when filming and was able to film in varied conditions of light without the need for cumbersome spotlights.

Returning now to *Le Son des Français d'Amérique*, the aesthetics of the series are clearly characterized by this direct approach. Several critics have noted the sequence-shots in which we move, while walking, from outside into a house to meet one of the protagonists and come out again afterwards to end the scene. Inside the dimly-lit house, the protagonist's words, singing or music are the first things we see and hear, and the faces, dance steps or the intonations of the songs carry the history of memory, of the pain or joy of the French people of America.

## **6. Social/spiritual/community importance**

This documentary series has been recognized by many for its value as a memory and as a unique representation. The Canadian anthropologist, Gerald L. Gold described the four films about the sounds of the Cajun people of Louisiana as the most perceptive audio-visual documents about the culture of the Francophone people of Louisiana (Gerald L. Gold 1978, p. 760).

'André Gladu took on a huge challenge. That of finally establishing the link between the reclaiming of age-old traditions, limited to Quebec, and a great American adventure, to which all French-speaking peoples of this continent are the heirs and witnesses. More ambitious still, he has achieved a transatlantic celebration of a 'popular genius' that unites both the sound and the soul of the 'working people' from the margins of the Old and New Worlds. And, in so doing, he has highlighted the primordial link between culture and politics' (Louder, Morisset, Waddell, 2001, 144).

But beyond the American Francophone communities, the significance of this heritage lies in its account of the power of endurance and historical possibilities which it owes to the migrations and transcultural mixing between the African and European continents, and also in its account of the human capacity for invention and creation. It shows the human aspect, sometimes painful, of a culture of displacement which bears the scars of its excesses. This documentary series will also have contributed to a movement of acceleration from survival to renaissance while serving as a tool in various broadcasting contexts, for learning and teaching. And so this series is available in many university libraries or music departments such as the Université du Québec à Montréal, the Université de Montréal, Laval University, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, etc. The account that it presents also enables us to see Francophone people as being part of a wider community beyond the continents which shares not only a language but also songs, music and dances.

### **6.1 Rarity**

This cultural heritage is unique and could not be recreated today. As explained previously, the period in which this work was made – the 70's – is one which has seen parallel situations

arise: on one hand, the renaissance of minority Francophone communities of America – a renaissance of identity as well as a revival of the language – and on the other hand, the transition to a society where oral transmission is being replaced progressively by technological means of communication, agents of cultural homogenisation.

This documentary heritage, which comprises unrefined elements of filming (images and sounds) as well as edited films (some print elements) is unique and is not protected or safeguarded. Its inclusion in the international Memory of the World Register will help it to be preserved and capture the attention of the public and decision-makers with regard to its value and the need to intervene for digitisation and restoration.

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## **6.2 Integrity**

All elements of the work required for its preservation and restoration are still available (see section 9 below). The Cinémathèque québécoise guarantees the integrity of the documentary heritage of *Le Son des Français d'Amçais d'Amérique*.