



The 1970s were a time of social upheaval in French Canada, and also a time of cultural awakening. Young people began to take an interest in traditional songs and music, a fact which helped bring about the healthy folk scene of today; groups like La Bottine Souriante and Le Rêve Du Diable began their explorations of Québec music at that time. But one band shied away from the largely acoustic, fiddle-and-accordion orientation of the folk scene to bring traditional songs to a rock audience. That band was Garolou.

Garolou was rooted in explorations by the brothers Marc and Michel Lalonde. Although originally Ontarians, by 1974 the brothers were living a hippie lifestyle with a Prince Edward Island theater troupe. They began singing folk songs as a duo, and were quickly in enough demand to expand their act. Over the next 18 months, they recruited three fellow musicians: first, keyboard player Steve Naylor, then drummer Michel "Stan" Deguire, and finally guitarist George Antoniak. With Marc on bass and Michel on guitar, the group played rock music inspired by traditional French Canadian culture. They chose a name with resonances for both folk and rock audiences: Lougarou, a contraction of loup-garou, or "wolfman." Under this first moniker, they moved to Montreal and released their first album, *Lougarou* (1976).

*Lougarou* was well-received by critics and audiences alike, and its very fame caused the group trouble. First, a pre-existing folk dance troupe, les Loups-Garous, sued the rock band's record company for exclusive use of the name. The result: a legal injunction against the use of the name Lougarou, and a hasty change to Garolou (a nonsense word that could be considered a contraction of "Gare au loup," or "Beware of the Wolf.") Second, Naylor and Antoniak decided to return to P.E.I., and were replaced by Régi-

nald Guay and Gaston Gagnon. After these changes, however, the lineup stabilized and the band recorded three more albums, *Garolou* (1978), *Romancero* (1980), and *Centre-Ville* (1982), before breaking up in 1983.

Most of the material on the band's four original LPs has been reissued on two CDs, *Tableaux D'Hier Volume 1* [Francor FK-2706] and *Tableaux D'Hier Volume 2* [Francor FK2707]. Strangely, the first of these CDs contains *Lougarou* and *Romancero* (the band's first and third LPs), while the second contains *Garolou* and *Centre-Ville* (the second and fourth). For my money (and I did drop some loonies on these), Volume 1 is far more desirable. *Lougarou* was the band's debut, and therefore a historically crucial release, while *Romancero* was the culmination of its efforts to create a French-Canadian folk rock. These were also the two albums that featured a guest fiddler, Bobby Lalonde, whose playing helped the band strike a nice balance between traditional music and rock; on quick dance songs like "Dis-Moi Charles" and "La Vendée," they play with the unmistakable sound of Québec folk, but on ballads like "La Belle Française" and "La Partance" it sounds like a cross between English rockers Steeleye Span and seminal French ensemble Malicorne. Touches of classical and medieval music peep through the arrangements of old ballads like "Le Mariage Anglais," while an epic art-rock sound suffuses the seven-minute "A la Claire Fontaine," mixed by King Crimson/Moody Blues/Deep Purple producer Nick Bagona. "Quand J'Étais Garçon" recalls Figgy Duff's classic arrangement of the same song, which was evidently Garolou's source — but Garolou executes it with a far harder edge, opening with a blast of crunchy electric guitar and following up with wailing lead guitar and pounding drums and bass. Many of the tracks here are classic French folk songs, including versions of "Le Conseil de

Guerre," "J'Entends le Loup, le Renard et la Belette," and "Derrière Chez Nous Il y a Un Etang," and hearing them dressed up in rock 'n' roll raiment is an enjoyable novelty — in fact, the overall quality of this CD makes me wish they didn't have to leave off three songs to keep it under 74 minutes in length.

Volume 2 also has its charms, principally in the material from *Garolou*. "La Retraite de Bonaparte," for example, is a great Cajun-rock rendition of the American fiddle tune "Bonaparte's Retreat" (featuring uncredited musicians on Cajun fiddle and accordion) with the added attraction of facetious lyrics about Napoleon written by the band. More epic ballads, including "Aux Illinois," "Le Complainte de Maréchal Biron," and the 10-minute medieval-sounding opus "Germaine" rub shoulders with the a cappella love lyric "Wing Tra La," and the upbeat songs "Je Me Suis Habillé en Plumes" and "Victoria" to make another enjoyable listen. Unfortunately, the album *Centre-Ville* took the band away from its policy of arranging traditional songs, and turned them into a purely original rock band. They were fairly unremarkable in this latter guise, and the tracks from this album — which make up half the CD — are less interesting than its arrangements of folksongs. It's no coincidence, I think, that Garolou called it quits the year after *Centre-Ville* was released.

If Figgy Duff and Malicorne were the band's musical inspiration, its career seems to follow in the footsteps of Fairport Convention. Ten years after breaking up, in 1993, the band reformed for a reunion tour. In 1994 it released a live CD, *Réunion* [Francor FK-2701]. It continued to play and tour occasionally, performing the same repertoire, for five years. Finally, in 2000, it released a disc of all-new material, *Mémoire Vive* [Francor FK-2705]. Of all Garolou CDs, the best buy is probably *Réunion*. Essentially a

greatest hits album, it brings together 15 of the most successful traditional songs from the first three LPs, including "Wing Tra La," "Germaine," "Dis-Moi Charles," "La Belle Française," and "Victoria," in arrangements close to their studio versions. The extensive booklet of notes, photos, and lyrics makes this more of a keepsake than the cheaply-packaged *Tableaux D'Hier* volumes, and the music's lost nothing in the 14 years between *Romancero* and this live show.

*Mémoire Vive* shows the band back at work adapting traditional material into rock songs. There are fewer folk flourishes in the arrangements — no fiddles or accordions here — so the sound is of a pretty straightforward rock band with some country touches, some nice, fluid guitar playing on both acoustic and electric instruments, and a good, bouncy rhythm section. The songs include inspired nonsense like "Mes Souliers Sont Ronds," tragic ballads like "Délina" (in which a young man returns from war to find his sweetheart dead and buried), and more upbeat old songs like "La Fille Soldat de Montcontour" (in which a young woman dresses as a man and follows her lover into the army, only to marry him in the end — much like the English "Jackie Monroe"). Classic and well-known ballads like "Blanche Comme La Neige" stand alongside more obscure and cryptic songs, like "Cherchant ses Amours," in which a king throws his daughter into the sea rather than let her marry a sea captain; the captain, however, swims like a fish to retrieve her and takes her off to be married. While some of the folk instruments that enlivened earlier Garolou records would have been nice on this one (especially on "Nanon," where the keyboards do a bad accordion imitation), *Mémoire Vive* is for the most part a welcome return to arranging traditional material for one of French Canada's premier folk-rock bands.

