

## **The Beaudoin Project**

*Franco American*

Burlington, Vermont

When Philo Records released two albums of French Canadian fiddle music by Louis Beaudoin and the Beaudoin Family of Burlington, Vermont in the early 1970s, there was instant recognition among aficionados of traditional music that a truly extraordinary talent had come to light. For the next few years, Louis, his brother Wilfred and other family members traveled throughout the United States playing at concerts and festivals and showing the world that the Franco American tradition of dance music was as vital and vibrant as its Cajun counterpoint in Louisiana. Other fiddlers may play more notes or fancier tunes, but no one played with more drive and passion than Louis Beaudoin and the Beaudoin family.

As with many French Canadian families, the Beaudoin's grandparents emigrated from the Laurentian region of Canada around the turn of the twentieth century in hope of work in the factories of New England. They settled in Lowell, Massachusetts, and there Louis and his four brothers were born. Both of the parents played music, and the brothers' earliest memories were of family and community musical gatherings. Louis learned to fiddle from his father, as did Willie, who began accompanying Louis on guitar when they were young. In 1937 Louis moved with his family to Burlington, Vermont and the rest of the Beaudoin clan eventually followed. Louis and his wife Julie had five daughters – Carmen, Nina, Sylvia, Louise and Lisa - and all of them became musician, singers or dancers. Willie continued to play guitar with his brother, but also branched out to learn jazz, which brought a distinctive twist to his accompaniments of traditional French music. Brothers Fred and Robert were also musicians and appeared on a Beaudoin Family recording by Philo.

Louis' untimely death in 1980 brought an end to live performances by this extraordinary family group, but other members of the family as well as friends who learned from Louis have continued carrying on the family's musical tradition. His brother Willie again began playing fiddle regularly and continued to carry on the family tradition until his health prevented him from traveling. (Willie, along with his wife Lillian and son Roger, were featured at the National Folk Festival when it came to Lowell in 1987.)

**The Beaudoin Project** was organized in 2005 by two master fiddlers, **Donna Hebert** and **George Wilson**, who knew Louis Beaudoin, learned his style, and have been playing his tunes for many years. They got in touch with members of the family and were soon joined by three generations of Beaudoins to once again share the family's rich musical heritage with New England audiences. Louis and Julie Beaudoin's daughters **Carmen Bombardier** and **Nina Lacourse Beaudoin** sing the old French ballads and *chansons à répondre* (call and response songs) that they learned from their mother. Carmen's son **Glenn Bombardier** plays his grandfather's fiddle, and is learning his repertoire of tunes. Rounding out the group are guitarist **Liza Constable** who, like Donna Hebert, is a member of the Franco American group Chanterelle, and pianist **Selma Kaplan**, who regularly performs with George Wilson for dances, concerts and festivals.

An archive of Beaudoin Family materials has been established at the Vermont Folklife Center in Middlebury so that the public may have access to the art and culture of this extraordinary family.