



an interview with

germain hébert

by Jovana

GERMAIN HEBERT, a native of St. Jean, Quebec, taught at the Canadian Federation's first Folk Dance Camp in 1960. He attended Stockton Folk Dance Camp on scholarships in '61 & '62. In 1963 a French Industrial Fair visited Quebec, bringing dance troupes from the Pryenees and from Berry, who issued an invitation for Germain to teach at their French Folk Dance Camp in Berry. There in '64 Germain and his wife, Louise, met the Bourrée; Germain wrote about it to Lawton Harris, late director of Stockton FDC. In '66, '68, & '69 the Heberts taught French folk dancing at Stockton, returning to France in '67. Then followed many institutes both in Canada and the United States. Another trip to France in March, 1972, produced more new material which Germain shared at Stockton that summer. Germain is also very involved in School Administration, which is demanding more and more of his time.

IS FOLK DANCING IN FRANCE LIMITED TO EXHIBITION GROUPS?

No, there is a lot of folk dancing going on in France. Of course, exhibition groups do much for recovering and reviving the dance, but lots of people still dance at weddings and other social gatherings. They still dance spontaneously.

HOW DID THE BOURRÉE STEP DEVELOP?

The original bourrées are unknown. (That's what they told me in Berry.) Some experts, some ethnologists think that these dances are of Greek origin. They were kept alive and then carried to the central part of France.

IS THE BOURRÉE LIMITED TO A PARTICULAR REGION OF FRANCE?

I had the impression that bourrée was strictly limited to the central part of France, which is Berry, of course, Limousin, Rouergue, and also Auvergne. But the last time we were in France we met a girl living in the southern part of France, who was doing research on Bourrée in the Pyrenees Region. So, perhaps the Bourrée steps were introduced by merchants coming from the Mediterranean Area and slowly moving up to Berry. There are no documents to back this up. But the fact that we see Bourrée in the southern part of France and also in the central part could validate this theory.

IS THERE LESS SEGREGATION OF THE SEXES IN FRENCH DANCING THAN IN THE DANCES OF OTHER NATIONS, EG., THE BALKAN STATES?

I think that whenever French girls are available, the men would rather dance with the girls. But we can find lots of dances for men only. Especially in Berry, Bourrées were done wherever you find men alone, for instance in the military. But again, I think that most French dancing is done with a partner.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS USED FOR FOLK DANCE?

Practically everywhere you will see the bagpipe. I guess this is true for many countries in Europe, but it's especially true in France. [Note: Listen to the music of *Bourrée Pastourelle*.] In Berry the bagpipe has two drones; in Brittany they have three drones. Another type of instrument which is also found in Brittany and the central part of France, especially in Auvergne and Berry, is the *vielle* (see page 13), a very intriguing stringed instrument, played with a bow. It is also called the *organistrum*, its Latin name, and came into use in the 12th or 13th century.

Another instrument, that is found in the southern part of France, is the fife. Fifer and drum usually accompany all dances from southern France and the Pyrenees.

During the last 50 years, however, the accordion has been used very frequently to replace these old instruments. They don't make *vielle* anymore in France; they just pass them on from generation to generation. Availability was a very important factor that popularized the use of the accordion.

HOW DID GAITERS BECOME PART OF THE BERRY COSTUME?

Well, the gaiters were used to work in the fields, to keep the pants close to the leg so they wouldn't get dirty. Some were

made out of leather. I imagine that people started using these things to go to church on Sunday or for special occasions. They just left their dirty gaiters at home and made new ones to go to church in the village. This is just a personal opinion.

HOW DOES DANCING IN BERRY DIFFER FROM THAT OF OTHER REGIONS IN FRANCE?

In Berry, people dance in a more restrained, a more sober, way than their neighbors of Limousin or Auvergne. For instance, they don't move their arms like they do in Auvergne. Another point is the bending of the knee. In Bourrées from Berry, they bend their knees an awful lot. These points, and the way they move toward their partner, makes the whole style very different.

Every Bourrée has basically two parts: an avant-deux, going forward and back, and crossing over with your partner. This is also true for Bourrées in other provinces, but in Berry they have a way of 'stopping the action' and crossing 'face to face' which is very special. I wish I could demonstrate this point rather than talk about it.

IS PRESERVATION OF FRENCH CULTURE MORE IMPORTANT IN QUEBEC THAN IT IS IN FRANCE?

I don't think we are more French than the French people, but there are many differences between a French Canadian and a Frenchman. The big fact is that here in Canada we have to fight maybe harder than the French people, to keep our French culture alive. We are surrounded by so many million English speaking people that we have to organize our schools and everything to make sure that our children learn French as we did. So, the preservation of French culture is very active in Quebec, as opposed to what it is in France. There they just live the accepted way of life. There's nobody trying to imply another culture.

HOW DOES THE FOLK DANCE MOVEMENT IN CANADA COMPARE WITH THE MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES?

In the English part of Canada, the situation is very similar to the United States. Here in Quebec the big difference is in the age of the participants. Most of our folkdancers are what you call 'teenagers' or young adults. Normally they are very good dancers, but on the other hand, most of their clubs are closed. You just can't drop in. They don't advertise their meetings, and so you have to know the leaders or a number of people in the group if you want to go and dance with them.

Another difference here in Quebec, is that we have a Federation that deals not only in folkdance, but also in Ballroom, Modern, and Ballet dance. It's not like your Federation in California, which deals only with Folkdance. Also, we are not as active as you are. I was always amazed at the number of meetings and gatherings and festivals and institutes that you have so regularly in California. But the past few years we have been more active; there is an institute practically every month. The youngsters are very enthusiastic about folkdance. Especially in the universities and colleges, the popularity of folkdancing is steadily increasing.