

From Old Creole Days: Sampling the Afro-Creole Folk Song of Louisiana in the Late Nineteenth through the Mid-Twentieth Centuries

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INTRODUCTION

THE AFRO-CREOLE FOLK SONG DEVELOPED under the same conditions as did the Negro spiritual on the Louisiana plantations of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Unlike the spiritual, however, this folk treasure has barely survived and has yet to be widely explored. These little known folk songs, sung in the Afro-Creole slaves' orally constructed language, or *patois*, employ a unique blend of Afro-Caribbean and European cultures and reveal the environmental situations that necessitated and influenced their creation. Many of these dance songs, lullabies, satires, and romantic ballads employ attractive melodies and exotic rhythms evocative of the *habanera* and other related dances, elements that make the songs appealing and rewarding to broad audiences and to singers eager to expand their repertoire beyond the familiar Afro-American spiritual song tradition.

This article introduces and discusses critically a selection of rarely performed Afro-Creole folk songs from Louisiana of the late 19th through the mid-20th centuries, as arranged for solo voice and piano. The endeavor rests chiefly, first, in providing background information about the Louisiana Afro-Creole culture, *patois*, and folk song; second, in comparing the musical settings of four such songs as disseminated in concert adaptations by four arrangers. The discussion isolates distinctive musical characteristics typical of the genre and highlights challenges presented by the *patois* text in comparison with standard French, all while acknowledging the responses of the individual arrangers in bringing this music to light.

SOME FACTS ABOUT LOUISIANA CREOLE HISTORY

There is evidence that both French and Spanish Colonial Louisiana identified as Creole all people (white, black, and mixed), whether free or enslaved, born in the new world of old world stock.¹ This broad definition would have included the offspring of Europeans (predominantly French and Spanish), Africans, and a mixture of both, including Native Americans as well. Within the context of Louisiana as an American territory or state, the term refers mainly to French-

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APPENDIX

Catalog Listing of Afro-Creole Folk Song Arrangements for Voice and Piano

Song Title	Arranger	Publisher	Location(s) and/or Research Call Number
<i>Five Creole Songs</i> Chère, Mo Lemmé Toi Lizette, Ma Chère Amie Michieu Banjo Fais Do Do Dansé, Conni, Conné	Camille Nickerson	Boston Music Co.	New York Public Library—JMG 98-212 Arkansas Public Library—M1668.8 .F58 1942 v.1 Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center—DCLV96-A913
Gué, Gué, Solingaie Mam'zelle Zizi	Camille Nickerson	Unpublished	Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research, Papers, 1927-1970s
<i>Chansons nègres</i> Aurore Bradère Compère Lapin	Julien Tiersot	Paris: Heugel	Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University
<i>4 Creole Songs</i> Belle Layotte Mamselle Zizi Michié Preval Michié Banjo	Efrem Zimablist, Sr.	W. Schott & Co.	University of Rochester, Digital Collections
Zozo Mokeur	W. T. Francis	L. Grunewald	The Henry P. Wehrmann Papers, Manuscripts Collection 873, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University
<i>Creole Songs of the Deep South</i> Ah! Melanie Aurore Bradaire Belle Layotte Caroline	Henri Wehrmann	Philip Werlein ltd.	Louisiana State University, Carter Music Resources Center, 202 Middleton M1668.8 .W45 C7
<i>Creole Songs of the Deep South</i> Cher, Mo L'aime Toi Compèr Lapin Dan' Gran' Chimin En Avan, Grénadié La Maison Denise Lolotte Milatrés' Cou'ri Dan' Bal Musieu Bainjo Po' Pitie Mamzé Zizi Quand Mo Té Jeune Rémon Salangadou Tan Patate-là Tchuite Tan' Siro' É Dou' Valsez, Valsez Zelim, To Quitte' La Plaine	Henri Wehrmann	Philip Werlein ltd.	Louisiana State University, Carter Music Resources Center, 202 Middleton M1668.8 .W45 C7

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Song Title	Arranger	Publisher	Location(s) and/or Research Call Number
<i>Bayou Ballads</i> Ah, Suzette, chère Clémentine Dansez Codaine Gardez piti milatte-là Gué-Gué Solingaie Michié Préval Pauv' piti Mom'zelle Zizi Z'Amours Marianne En avant, Grénadiers Suzanne, Suzanne, jolie femme Vous t'é in Morico Michié Préval	Mina Monroe	G. Schirmer, Inc.	University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, Sibley Music Library 39087011974245score.pdf The University of Mississippi Libraries, Media Music, M1668.8 .B3
<i>Louisiana French Folk Songs</i> Chapter on Creole Folk Songs	Irène Thérèse Whitfield	LSU Press	The University of Mississippi Libraries, Media Music, M1629.W584 L6
<i>La Libération des Antilles</i> Bonjour Messieurs Trois Ans De Souffrances	Darius Milhaud	Leeds Music Corp.	University of Toronto, Stacks, M1621 .M55 L5
<i>Six Creole Folk-Songs</i> Aurore Pradère Gardé piti mulet là Belle Layotte Quand Mo-tè jeune Aine, dè, trois, Caroline Dialogue d'Amour	Maud Cuney Hare	Carl Fischer	IMSLP University of Rochester, https://urresearch.rochester.edu/fileDownload Tulane University, Howard-Tilton Stacks, M 1668.8 .H37 C7 1921
Mo Aimé Toué	Gregorio Curto		Tulane University Digital Library, Louisiana Sheet Music
<i>Creole Songs from New Orleans in Negro-Dialect</i> Quan' mo té dan' gran' chimain Mouché Mazireau Po' pitie Mamzé Zizi Zélim to quitté la plaine En avan' grénadié Ou Som Souroucou Salangadou Quan' patate la cuite Une deusse troisse Gardé piti milat' la Neg' pa' capab' marché Papa va a la rivière	Clara Gottschalk Peterson	L. Grunewald	IMSLP