

GOVERNOR'S INTERNATIONAL ARTS EXCHANGE
FINAL REPORT by Claudia Hommel
“CHICAGO'S JAZZ FAURÉ PROJECT COMES HOME to PARIS”

From April 22 to 28, 2008, Chicago's *Jazz Fauré Project* went to Paris to give several concerts and join an educational conference sponsored by the University of Chicago Paris Center. We took four of the eight Illinois-based Jazz Fauré Project musicians: myself as singer and tour manager, singer Sean Harris, music director, arranger and pianist Bobby Schiff, and reeds player Jerry DiMuzio.

We brought into the Project four French players: bassists Jean-Pierre Rebilliard and Lahcène Larbi, drummer Jean-Marie Virginie, and pianist Agnès Gorda. The public concerts and conference were organized by Donald James (PhD candidate in ethnomusicology) and academically sponsored by the Center's director, Dr. Jan Goldstein (cultural historian).

Program:

The conference, inspired by the Project's theme of “French impressionism meets American jazz” was called “Les Rencontres jazzistiques / Jazz Encounters” and was attended by a panel of speakers from France, Italy, Denmark and the UK. They spoke of parallel developments between artist Mark Rothko and jazz composer Gil Evans, of jazz in 1920s Britain, of the integration of Neopolitan song and early jazz in Naples, of “transversality” challenges for students preparing a professional jazz career, of the social role of theatrical-visual elements in the contemporary club scene. We participated with a lecture-demonstration comparing our jazz arrangements of Gabriel Fauré's song to his 19th century originals, underscoring the French “impressionist” elements that have informed jazz over the decades.

Three public concerts originally scheduled for the club La Nouvelle Athènes were canceled by its closure barely three weeks before our arrival, and a new venue, La Halle St. Pierre, had to be quickly secured in order to go forward with a public program featuring the entire ensemble. (Consequently, our expenses rose considerably and our promotion was delayed but the show went on!) As planned, we also performed at the Musée de Montmartre (without drums). Unexpectedly and quite happily, a private soirée was organized for us at her home by Renée Johnson, president of the Paris committee for the Chicago-Paris Sister Cities.

Objectives met:

We wanted to explore with French counterparts the relationship (historic and current) between French arts (in this case, “impressionism” and classic art song) with an American art form (jazz). We got that and much more: we met and worked with French jazz musicians whose fluency with the “groove” and whose grasp of the Project's concept were enormously impressive. (I'd bring Jean-Marie and Jean-Pierre to perform in Chicago in a heartbeat.) We learned of the challenges facing European musicians not unlike the ones we face – the “industrialization” of music, the diminishing financial support and lack of adequate venues available to individual musicians, the irony of better paying gigs outside the central cities, the struggle to promote jazz (and classical) genres to a broader public.

We wanted to serve as catalyst for institutional collaborations between the University of Chicago Paris Center and others in Paris like the jazz department of the Conservatoire de

Paris*, and to enhance future collaboration between Illinoisan musicians and their French counterparts—and that we did.

The unanticipated encounters were equally exciting: I was introduced to two organizations whose missions parallel Chicago groups. Both the Union of Jazz Musicians (UMJ) and the Centre de la Chanson (the Center for Song) are musician-driven advocacy associations who make resources (guides, rehearsal studios, databases, promotion) available to working musicians. Both invite further correspondence and I would like to explore with the Chicago Music Commission and the Chicago Cabaret Professionals (of which I'm a Board member) ways to formalize "sister-city" connections with these two Paris organizations.

We also made a lot of new fans and musical friends. Our visit fell unfortunately right in the middle of the school holidays, considerably reducing attendance at the conference and public performances. But our audiences were rapt and excited. The verdict was unanimously "magnifique". Children were dancing. Youth for whom this kind of music isn't "their style" were surprised to like it a lot. A famous French rapper was mesmerized. A Councilor of State called our performance a wonderful *mélange* that could serve as a model for French-American relations—"the best of French charm and go-getter American spirit".

I stayed for another ten days during which I was joined by Chicago pianist-singer Elizabeth Doyle. Elizabeth played at Swan Bar (a "New York style jazz club"). We gave a concert in homage to the *chanteuses de Paris* at the Musée de Montmartre, after which the administrative staff offers "the room is yours whenever you want".

Future opportunities:

During my three-week stay in Paris, I continued making new connections for future concerts and exchanges. The public relations officer for the Musée d'Orsay opened its door to us; the director of CulturesFrance (the French "NEA" as he puts it) is intrigued; the administrator of the Musée d'art américain (of Chicago's Terra Foundation) wants to find an opportunity to bring us to Giverny; the director of the École du Spectacle and his students of theatre-dance-and-song want to exchange with us again; the owners of the Château de Milandes invite us to sing in Josephine Baker's formal dining room; the producer Pascale Forté looks forward to booking us at jazz venues like the Swan Bar and concerts in the Paris periphery; at the Mouffetard sing-along I meet a wonderful jazz clarinetist and singer Annie Terramorsi who wants to play with me in the future, our drummer Jean-Marie Virginie and his colleague Raphael (of the Oniris Ensemble) want to bring us to the Ville d'Orsay performing arts center. And, turning tables, I am able to bring singer-songwriter Eric Vincent to Chicago's newly renovated Morse Theatre this coming October.

The historic conduit of music between Chicago and Paris is definitely "open" to the flow. I believe the Jazz Fauré exchange has made the conduit a bit wider.

For the near future, I will continue to "market" the Jazz Fauré Project to stateside festivals and performing arts centers. Hopefully the success of our trip to Paris will encourage broader interest. And now that we have working relations with fabulous musicians in Paris, prospects for returning to France are all the more realizable. Stay tuned for more!

* The Conservatoire de Paris, a national institution of higher education, has played an important role in the development of music in France and Western Europe since its founding in 1795. The music and dance component is called La Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris (CNSMDP).

Afterword:

While I am the instigator of the Jazz Fauré Project, this work of art has been much more than mine alone. Taking the Project to Paris has equally relied on the enormous collective effort of dozens of people. In addition to those named in the narrative, I thank the individual donors, mentors and institutions without whom this project could not have succeeded.

Thirty individuals donated a total of \$3541. In addition, Robert Kendrick, chair of the U of C Department of Music, funded \$2000 from a donation by T. Parker Hall; \$1500 was donated by the France Chicago Center led by Dan Bertsche, and the Paris Center directed by Dr. Jan Goldstein contributed over \$2700 to conference and concert costs. Finally, the Illinois Arts Council “Governor’s International Arts Exchange” granted us \$5,000 to match a portion of our collection.

* Daniel T. Allen
Rosi & Brian Amador
Anonymous fan
Brett August
Dan Bertsche
Jim Carson
Nanci Chesek
Jim Cimino
* Jean-Baptiste Main de Boissiere
King DeSeve
Robert Edison
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* signers of the appeal letter