

## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

# Local francophone band hope to share weird songs

By Genesee Keevil  
News Reporter

**F**unky bass lines, hard-strumming acoustic guitar, the breathy moan of an accordion, lilting flute melodies, poignant French lyrics and a general sense of fun — these are the only musical requirements of Whitehorse francophone band, Soir de Semaine.

Next week, the trio will travel to Winnipeg to perform at western Canada's largest winter festival, Le Festival du Voyageur; a national showcase of French-Canadian talent.

Arriving in Whitehorse independently, the band members met roughly two years ago through Folk Society gatherings.

"We decided to jam, just to have fun, and soon Soir de Semaine was born," said Pascal St-Laurent, guitarist and singer.

All teachers, they could only practice during weekday evenings, spawning their name, which translates as 'evening of the week.'

As they gradually became more serious about their music, they decided to record a demo. Using only an eight-track with a small built-in computer, they made their own recording at bassist Alain Desrochers' cabin, affectionately deemed the "cheesy studio."

With this demo, they applied to some of the North's many summer music festivals last year, and consequently played at the Watson Lake Music Festival, Solstice in Whitehorse, Faro's Farrago Music Festival and Atlin's Arts and Music Festival.

"At the festivals, the people were dancing, they didn't understand what we said, but they feel the energy and just dance and have fun — it's cool," said St-Laurent.

"There was a native lady who reacted after one of our shows and said she wanted to hear music in her native language too, and in my heart, I said, 'just go ahead,'" added Marie-Maud Allard, the accordion player and flutist.

"If we can be an example for a different culture to express itself, then just go ahead."

"Maybe this woman saw we were French and a bit different and that we feel good expressing ourselves in this way, and maybe this is what she



photo submitted

**ON THE ROAD... Whitehorse francophone band Soir de Semaine will perform at a winter festival in Winnipeg.**

wanted to do as well."

Often inciting the audience to dance, their music, a self-defined mixture of funk, folk, roots and gypsy, has a fun, positive spin.

"We have become addicted to the stage," Allard and St-Laurent admitted.

"We love to share our music and have fun and it the best gift in return to have people dancing in front of us. It gives us lots of energy."

When Allard and St-Laurent first began playing together at the Folk Society Coffee Houses, before they met Desrochers, they performed French cover songs from both Quebec and France.

Now Soir de Semaine refuses to perform any songs it has not written.

"We really have fun playing music together and to compose and do some new songs. The songs are very weird, I think they are very weird," said St-Laurent.

"We want to express ourselves with what we have to say, with our music and our words, in our language, it is important."

But, he countered, it is hard to create original compositions, and it takes time.

**This is why they refuse offers to play at local bars. They do not have enough original material to fill a whole evening and they do not want to compromise the quality of their music by forcing its development.**

"Basically our songs are very positive, they talk a lot about time. It is a big subject for us here. We are always talking about time, I don't know why, maybe because we just hit Yukon time. We just realized it is very important to take our time to do something and enjoy life," said Allard and St-Laurent.

Before moving to the Yukon, Allard played flute in a traditional French-Canadian band. She is also a traveller at heart, and decided to stop in

the Yukon while exploring Canada. Once here, she felt she'd found a permanent home.

"Last year I went to Europe and stopped in Quebec on my way back, but did not feel at home until I returned to the Yukon," she said.

"The call of the Yukon," St-Laurent concurred.

All the band members live in small cabins scattered from the Takhini Hot Springs Road to the South Klondike Highway.

"When we are practicing, we are just practicing close to the wood stove, it is like old-style. We are usually playing acoustic, with a tiny amp for the bass," said St-Laurent.

Two percussionists, jokingly called, Les Soeurs Piocheuses (roughly translated as, 'the sisters who are banging things'), often join Soir de Semaine during their performances and practices.

This addition of hand drums, castanets and egg shakers, further facilitates the catchy, danceable rhythms their music demands.

These rhythms will be broadcast nationally by Radio Canada's Télé-Relais next week, with live footage from their upcoming performance at Winnipeg's Festival du Voyageur.

Contact West, an organization that promotes and assists French-Canadian artists, sponsors their trip.

They have also received a great deal of support and promotion from L'Association Franco-Yukonnaise.

In future, Soir de Semaine hopes to share their fun-filled, funky, groovy, gypsy folk music with many other French and English communities.

"Next summer we plan to do some festivals, we are going to play again at Atlin. Last year when we played there, people were dancing like a big wave.

"We really enjoy playing here in the Yukon, but we also want to play outside the Yukon, to share our principle message of enjoying this time of life, and taking time," said St-Laurent and Allard.

Their Winnipeg performance will be televised nationally on February 14. Check TV listings for details.