

Gadelle

Acadian

Prince Edward Island, Canada

Literally, the word *gadelle* means “wild berries,” suggesting a sound both sweet and zesty, bursting with flavor when found somewhat off the beaten track. But the term also refers colloquially to a feisty woman, making it a perfect moniker for this vibrant four-woman ensemble of musical mischief-makers.

Traditional Acadian music is a rhythmic, high-energy sound developed and nurtured on tiny Prince Edward Island. The seeds for this style came to PEI with the first French settlers who arrived nearly 300 years ago. Over time, a distinct French-Acadian musical tradition emerged which combined swinging fiddle, driving piano, and complex beats tapped out with hard-soled shoes. The music has been lovingly passed down from generation to generation through community gatherings and dances, and especially by way of “kitchen parties” among family and friends in the island’s close-knit communities.

The band Gadelle reflects the continuing vitality of this kitchen party tradition, with a dual emphasis on both the party—making their audience feel intimately connected to the emotions and rhythms of the music—and on the intergenerational musical transmission that occurs at home in Acadian culture. Helene Bergeron and Louise Arsenault are the ensemble’s veteran performers. Helene (vocals, piano, pump organ, fiddle, foot percussion, and step dancing) began her musical career as an accompanist to her father, a renowned fiddler; Louise (on fiddle, harmonica, foot percussion, and step dancing) has been fiddling since she snuck her own father’s fiddle out of its case when she was seven years old. Together, these childhood friends spent a decade as half of the internationally-acclaimed band Barachois, which was instrumental in bringing the beauty—and humor—of Acadian music to the world’s attention. After a brief retirement from touring, these two master musicians were inspired to begin performing again through their work with “les girls,” a group of five talented young women from the next generation. Now Louise and Helene are back on the road with two of these new musical accomplices, Caroline Bernard (primary vocals, piano, pump organ, accordion, and guitar) and Samantha Gallant (fiddle, mandolin, bass, and step dancing). Both Caroline and Samantha are the descendants of noted PEI songstresses, and, though only in their 20s, are well into their second decade carrying on the musical legacy they have inherited.