



### **Isabelle LeMaire Adams Cajun Ballads**

Marie Herpin Adams was born near Kaplan, Louisiana in 1922. She was the youngest of seven children. She grew up speaking Cajun French and learned English later when she began school.

Mrs. Adams, a fine singer of traditional French Louisiana ballads, came from a long line of ballad singers. Her great-grandmother, Marie Demais Trahan, came to South Louisiana from Nova Scotia at the age of 12 or 13. As a young girl, Marie Adams learned songs by listening to her one-hundred-four-year-old great-grandmother, grandparents, and parents. She says, that back then "people took such songs for granted and singing ballads were not seen as anything special but was just part of everyday life." She recalls living in the country as a child, when almost every Saturday night there was a singing party at someone's house. Lanterns were hung in the trees and people sat on the porch eating and drinking homemade wine and beer and singing songs of love stories and telling humorous tales.

The song's beauty lies in its haunting melodies, in its story lines, and rich vocabularies. The home-based, unaccompanied musical tradition of balladry has almost disappeared as instrumental dance music has gained popularity. Some singers like Marie Adams kept the ballad tradition alive, singing the stories of love and life in French Louisiana that they learned by word of mouth. Mrs. Adams knew at least eight songs, which she called by names like Wednesday Waltz and La Valse de la France. She sang one song that has been traced by folklorist Barry Ancelet to the year 1718, The Seven-Year Waltz. She called one of her songs, the Sunday Morning Song, "my daddy's song" because it was one of the first songs that she learned, and it was her father's favorite. The song tells the story of a heartbroken young man whose beloved dies. When he asks his mother to take the lace off her clothes and replace it with black, she reminds him that there are plenty of women left. He replies, "I want only my beloved."

Mrs. Adams performed many times at the Liberty Theater in Eunice and at the Louisiana Folklife Festival. One of her granddaughters has learned the songs from Mrs. Adams, ensuring that the tradition will live on in the next generation.

Mrs. Adams passed away Tuesday, December 24, 2013 at Abbeville General Hospital. She is now laid at rest within St. Paul Cemetery.

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