



Dennis Stroughmatt et l'Esprit Creole

"An energetic and driving combination of Celtic, Canadian, and Old-Time styles ... enjoy this infectious music!"

—Sing Out! Magazine

Fingers and bow flying, Dennis Stroughmatt takes listeners on a musical odyssey. This is the story of the French Creoles who founded the Illinois-Missouri Country near the Ozark foothills, more than 300 years ago. Their songs, stories, and language remain largely intact and true to the traditions that have been passed down for generations. L'Esprit Creole's music bridges the gap between contemporary Canadian and Louisiana Cajun styles.

Originally from southeastern Illinois, Dennis Stroughmatt was taught to play fiddle by Missouri Creole fiddlers Roy Boyer and Charlie Pashia in the tradition of their fathers. He became an adopted son of the French Midwest Creoles who settled near St Louis, playing at weekly house parties or "bouillons." As a result of physical journeys that also included French studies in Louisiana and Quebec, Dennis finds himself in a unique position as one who can speak knowledgeably and play in a variety of French styles. He has an innate sense of what is needed to get an audience on their feet, and keep a band on its toes.

Dennis Stroughmatt et l'Esprit Creole are passionate ambassadors of Creole music and traditions, expanding interest and excitement in a region that has been long ignored by the history books. As they say in the hills, "On est toujours icitte: We are still here!"

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Dennis Stroughmatt - lead vocals and fiddle

Dennis Stroughmatt is an authority on French Creole music, traditions, and heritage of the Illinois Country/Upper Louisiana region. First introduced to local French music as a teenager in Indiana, Dennis later moved to southeast Missouri and spent more than three years studying and learning to speak Illinois Creole French, play the fiddle, and sing many of the traditional songs that have permeated the region. He would go on to live, work, and play music in Louisiana's "Cajun country" and study in Quebec, thus completing the circle of French culture in North America.

A seasoned educator, Dennis is in high demand for school assemblies K-12 and college, French and history seminars, music workshops and master classes. He has been prominently featured in media coverage worldwide, in two languages, and on NPR's "All Things Considered."

Dennis is the founder of the blues/swamp pop dance band Creole Stomp, and is also highly regarded in the traditional country music world. A staff fiddle player on the Steel Guitar Show circuit, and recent host of The Ernest Tubb Midnite Jamboree on AM 650-WSM, the home of The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, TN.

About the Band

Doug Hawf - guitar

From southeastern Illinois—near the Wabash River in a region known for its rich French heritage—Doug Hawf has played music all of his life and is a wizard of stringed instruments. Besides performing with l'Esprit Creole, Doug also performs with his family bluegrass band as well as the Vincennes University String Ensemble. When he's not out playing music, he enjoys working in his music store and sharing the joy of music with his many students.

Jim Willgoose - upright bass

A long-time, experienced musician originally from Boston, MA, Jim Willgoose came to Illinois in search of a PhD in Philosophy and graduated from SIU Carbondale. He has played with a variety of groups ranging from country to rock, and he once toured with members of the famed rock band NRBQ. Jim has accompanied Dennis for many years, in l'Esprit Creole and often in the Creole Stomp band as well. He also teaches at the Kaskaskia Community College in Centralia, IL.

Highlights

- The Homegrown Concert Series (American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress)
- The Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington, DC
- St Louis Arch National Park, Missouri
- Old Songs Festival, New York
- Lancaster Festival, Ohio
- New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Louisiana
- Ozark Folk Center, Arkansas
- The Kennedy Center Millennium Stage, Washington, DC
- Lotus Festival in Schools, Indiana
- Fort Kaskaskia, Illinois
- Missouri Folklore Society
- Grouseland Vincennes, Indiana
- Alliance Francaise, Missouri, Illinois
- Keynote: AATF American Association of Teachers of French, National Conference

See the Kennedy Center performance video:

<http://www.kennedy-center.org/explorer/videos/?id=M5070>

Educational Presentations

- All-School Assemblies and Convocations
- University and Library Programs
- French Classes and Colonial French Heritage
- Master Classes in Fiddle and Creole Music

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