Review

The Montreal-based group Eritage were, for many people, the highlight of the Ontario festival scene this summer. Eritage is basically a traditional Quebecois dance band, but their approach to dance music is so lively and their musicianship so sophisticated that they will appeal to the most discriminating listener, whether dancer or not.

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The familiar line-up of diatonic accordion (Raynald Ouellet), fiddle (Jean-Pierre Joyal) piano (Yvan Brault) and bass (Marc Benoit) is augmented by two-handed bones player Benoit Bourque, whose Cheshire Cat grin and constant clowning makes watching a delight, as well as listening. Bourque is also the caller for the group's very popular participation dances.

It is a pity, but probably inevitable, that this type of performance is difficult to capture on record. The group's first album, simply entitled "Éritage", while it demonstrates the virtuosity of the musicians, Ouellet in particular, nevertheless falls quite a bit short of conveying the sense of fun which goes with all this superb musicianship. The selection of tunes is nicely varied and the playing difficult to fault; the arrangements, mostly by Brault, are excellent and yet something is missing. This may be due in part to poor sound production; the fiddle is often overwhelmed by the accordion, and seems to have the sound of one of the old 78 rpm fiddle records (perhaps this is intentional?). Also, the insertion of a couple of vocal tracks, ably sung by Céline Chaput but rather too pastoral in arrangement, seems to break up the continuity of the album, rather than effectively punctuating it.

It is probably unfair to make comparisons between the recorded and live performances of a group such as Éritage, but such comparisons are unfortunately inevitable. In any case, this record has a great deal to offer as an example of polished traditional Quebecois music played by a group that is certainly among the most accomplished of its type.

One last note: Éritage are interested in performing more in English Canada. Judging from their success this summer, they relate extremely well to anglophone audiences, and are highly recommended to any club or concert organizer who may stumble upon this review. For more information, contact Marc Benoit at (514) 388-3265.

- Ian A. Robb

(Ed. note: this review is also being published in Folk Music at the Cuckoo's Nest)

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