

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS

Local folk musicians Alex Kehler and Nicholas Williams warm up the Townships with their new cd *First Frost*

By Serafin Lariviere
Special to the Record

Folk music holds a special place in the artistic heart of Quebec. Its infectious blend of rhythms and storytelling are the true hallmark of a rich cultural history, and a tradition that continues to thrive throughout the province. Of course, Québécois folk music grew out of several influences, including French and Celtic, but it's met perhaps its most unusual pairing yet courtesy of local musicians Alex Kehler and Nicholas Williams.

"What I love about musical traditions is that they're all kind of related," says Williams. "Like a Scottish tune that was brought over here, playing in an area of Quebec or maybe taught to some Québécois by some Scots, then adapted into the Québécois repertoire. Scandinavian folk music actually has a lot in common with the Celtic folk traditions."

That's right, Scandinavia. And while talk of this Nordic region may conjure images of busy ski instructors or angry Vikings, it turns out the region's traditional music is a beautiful fit for our own. Kehler and Williams explore this unexpected melange with their new CD *First Frost*, which weaves tunes and songs from Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands with the more familiar Celtic-based sound to impressive – and frequently complex results.

"There are tonalities and rhythms that are completely different," says Williams. "They can sound kind of unusual to our ear. There's some approaches to scales that don't quite fit on our keyboard scale and approaches to rhythm that are really connected to Scandinavian dances, the polskas."

"There also less of a divide between Scandinavian folk and classical music. You'll find traditional music programs in universities there, and it's enabled a level of classical technique and sophistication that's interesting."

First Frost certainly highlights Kehler and Williams' own technical expertise. Both men are multi-instrumentalists, with Williams playing assorted flutes, piano, and accordion while Kehler does double duty on the Nordic version of the mandolin called a lätmandola, as well as the nyckelharpa, a traditional Swedish keyed fiddle. The resulting effort has all the joie-de-vivre of Québécois folk music, with a classical virtuosity that is frequently breathtaking.

Williams and Kehler first discovered their shared admiration for this Nordic cultural expression while teaching together at Jeunes Musiciens du Monde, a non-profit Sherbrooke music school aimed at young people with at-risk backgrounds.

"We have a social mission to make free music lessons available for kids from families that have less income," says Kehler, who became involved with the school after relocating to the Townships from Montreal a few years ago. "It's not necessarily to make students play with virtuosity. It's to get them to play together, to give a common language for all the kids to interact with."

The Sherbrooke branch of Jeunes Musiciens du Monde was launched by Williams and Christine Fortin in 2011. There are centres in Quebec City, Montreal and the Algonquin community of Kitcisakik, but the first school was actually founded in India by Quebecers Mathieu Fortier, Blaise Fortier and Agathe Meurisse-Fortier along with

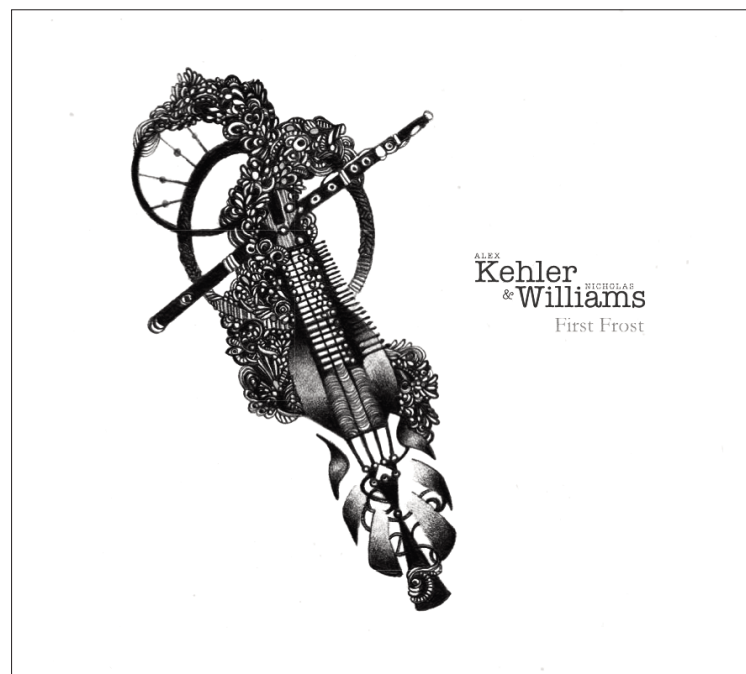
Ustad Hameed Khan for socio and economically marginalized youth. Given the organization's clients, teaching a musical instrument is just one part of the job.

"I like that it challenges me as a teacher to realize that there's more to teaching music than just making sure my students play well," Kehler says. "You have to not just be a music teachers, but also interested in social work."

"I certainly had teachers growing up that were focused on my performance and lived vicariously through that, but missed the point that music can have another function in a person's life. For me it's about the cohesion that it brings to kids and building a community around that."

It's this community focus that first inspired Williams to co-found the Sherbrooke chapter of Jeunes Musiciens du Monde. He and his wife had moved to Waterville from Montreal in search of a homier place to raise their family, and a music school for kids in need seemed the perfect fit.

"It really taps into my perspective or belief that music is an incredible social



Alex Kehler and Nicholas Williams' recent album, released in October of 2015.

tool," he says. "It's an amazing way to get people connected and provide some meaning to their lives – especially traditional music."

"I could tell you anecdotes for hours about how this program has changes some kids' lives and outlook. Maybe school isn't going great, or there's some problems at home. Or perhaps some kid of prejudices against other groups of people. But when you're on a dancefloor, playing music together, you don't think about all those things. That's what music can do."

First Frost is available at www.kehler-williams.bandcamp.com. For more information on Jeunes Musiciens du Monde, including how to donate, see www.jeunesmusiciensdumonde.org

New project targets anglophone seniors' access to health and social services

THE SCOOP



MABLE HASTINGS

People in Potton and surrounding areas may recognize Debra Harding as the long time proprietor alongside her husband, Dave Burnham, of the "Jardins de la Montagne" garden center that was in operation for over twenty years in Potton.

The Center closed a couple of years

ago and the Missisquoi North Volunteer Centre (CAB) in Potton is happy to announce the hiring of Debra as the Project Manager of the CHSSN (Community Health and Social Services Network) project aims to meet the needs of Anglophone seniors by matching them with a volunteer.

"I am proud to be the newest member of the staff team at the CAB and a part of the CAB family of services offered in the area," shared Harding.

Already, a think tank committee has been created. This committee will work with Debra to help compile the tools needed to recruit and train a volunteer base that aims to:

- To create a link between vulnerable Anglophone seniors (VAS) and the health and social services offered in the community and community activities.
- To improve the social network, the quality of life and integrate them into the community.

- To break isolation.
- To offer an individualized service and to pair them up with volunteers and/or "sentinels" always keeping in mind their culture and values.

"I am looking for anyone from the Potton, Bolton, Eastman, St.Etienne, Stukely Sud areas who might be interested in the project, either as a client or as a potential volunteer," explained Harding. "The project will officially be launched shortly."

If you or someone you know might benefit from or wish to volunteer, you are encouraged to contact Debra Harding at the volunteer centre in Mansonville at 450-292-3114.

Pictured on the right is Debra Harding, the Missisquoi North Volunteer Centre (CAB) Project Manager of the CHSSN (Community Health and Social Services Network), a project that aims to meet the needs of Anglophone seniors by matching them with a volunteer.



MABLE HASTINGS