

Using the Music of Carole Fredericks in the French classroom

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Imagine having a local woman emigrate overseas 25 years ago to pursue a singing career and rise to the top of the hit parade in France, Europe and Africa. Imagine also that this African American woman left the United States knowing only a few words in French and adopted France and Senegal, the people, and the language with gusto and perfection, as evidenced in her brilliant singing and popularity with the masses. Imagine one more thing – this woman tirelessly supporting charity efforts wherever she went, particularly *Restos du Cœur*, *les Enfoirés*, and *Amnesty International*, movements to provide services to the hungry, the homeless and those in need.

That role model was Carole Fredericks, sister of the great bluesman, Taj Mahal, for whom she sang in her younger days. Carole, of the famed trio Fredericks Goldman Jones, died suddenly in 2001 at the age of 49. Carole left a wealth of pedagogical possibilities for the teacher of French who wants a vibrant classroom where the French language is reflected through her pop rock, soul and gospel music. She collaborated with many artists, including Céline Dion, Julien Clerc, Patricia Kass, Patrick Bruel and Mylène Farmer.

Carole's sister, Connie Fredericks-Malone, who on occasion accompanied her on recordings, and the Fredericks family have spearheaded an effort to bring Carole's songs and music videos to the United States. Carole's solo albums and the Fredericks Goldman Jones debut album are available on www.cdbaby.com, www.amazon.com, www.amazon.fr, and Apple i-Tunes. Amazon France, www.amazon.fr, also has the full catalog of Fredericks Goldman Jones albums including the compilation CD, *Pluriel: The Best of Fredericks Goldman Jones 1990 – 1996*. Search by artist name, Jean Jacques Goldman, or album title.

I've used Carole's music in class since the late 1990's after I discovered her by accident in 1996 while overseas with a group of teens. The students wore school jackets bearing the name "Springfield, MA". Wherever we went locals and tourists would ask if we were "truly from that city." We assumed, incorrectly, that France and its visitors knew that our city was home to the Basketball Hall of Fame, thus explaining their interest. Unknown to any of us, *Un Deux Trois* (where Carole mentions her roots in Springfield, MA) from the album *Fredericks Goldman Jones* was at the top of the music charts and almost impossible to purchase according to FNAC representatives. Jean-Jacques Goldman had asked her to join him and Michael Jones in the late 1980's and from that moment her popularity was assured in the francophone world. I did manage to buy the last cassette available in Paris and that is when the pedagogical journey began.

The trio's love of rock and roll and its idols, including Aretha Franklin and Jimi Hendrix, is the theme of the song. But it is the catchy tune and bilingual use of numbers from 1 to 12 that make the song an instant hit with students. Working with *Un Deux Trois* in class requires some simple preparation, depending on the level of French and the age of the learner. At the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) conference in Boston, FLES teachers from New York State to Pennsylvania shared with me that they use the song regularly when teaching numbers because of the rhyme scheme, melody, and the use of numbers in both French and English. I use *Un Deux Trois* in all levels of high school French and vary the tasks accordingly. A review of certain vocabulary terms facilitates learning.

Another favorite song from the same album, *Né en 17à Leidenstadt*, discusses choices in life and what might have happened if a challenge arose in our lives anywhere in the world. The song references Germany, Northern Ireland and South Africa. *Leidenstadt* is the allegorical name in German for *village de douleur*. The theme appeals to students who face choices daily about politics, righteousness and humanity.

Pedagogically speaking, *Leidenstadt* is a powerful way to introduce and develop 'si' clause sentences in an intermediate or advanced level class. My students prefer the honest discussion devoted to difficult questions about 'following the crowd' and having the ability to stand firm in the face of opposing views on racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Using Carole's music in French class incorporates several goal areas of the Standard for Learning Foreign Languages in the 21st Century, particularly Communications, Connections and Communities. When students listen to Francophone music and/or read song lyrics in French, Standard 1.2 Interpretive Communication is involved. If students express to each other their understanding of a song's theme and include their emotions after studying the lyrics, Standard 1.1 Interpersonal Communication may occur. Standard 1.3 the Presentational mode is evidenced when students formally explain to the class their reactions to a theme.

The research involved in the theme inherent in *Leidenstadt* furthers the historical knowledge under the Connections goal, Standard 3.1. Jean-Jacques Goldman shares his thoughts about life and its challenges and choices in a *Parler d'sa vie* interview that is available online at <http://www.parler-de-sa-vie.net/ecrits/interviews/1994xx03.txt>. His viewpoint in the target language addresses Standard 3.2 as the student acquires information from the French perspective.

Standard 5 Communities can be achieved within the school setting. When students share what they have learned about French music and Carole Fredericks with other classes of French in and outside the classroom the benefit is to the community of French learners. Carole Fredericks' official web site (<http://www.carolefredericks.net>) is in French only and will be my next target of study. Note the international, but mostly Francophone, contributors to the *Livre d'or* who have been affected by her music and personality. As I write this 168 online pages of notes have been sent to her family and

friends. The message in French from Carole's family to readers is simple: "Tant Qu'Elle Chante Elle Vit! ... As Long As She Sings, She Lives!"

To learn more about Carole Fredericks visit these websites: www.cdfmusiclegacy.com,
www.carolefredericksfoundation.org; www.shine.fr.st;
www.jjgoldmanetlespauliniens.com/carole.htm

Note: Some dates and information that appear in this article have been updated from the original. CFM 11/10/06