

Robert Lafont, Jan-Mari Carlotti:
Dire mis en musique
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Robert Lafont (1923-2009) was an internationally respected scholar of Occitan language and literature. A native of Nîmes, France, his teaching career was primarily at the University of Montpellier. His scholarly publications included studies of Provençal (one of the several dialects of Occitan) orthography and phonetics, as well as literary histories such as the two-volume *Nouvelle histoire de la littérature occitane*, written with Christian Anatole (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), a major contribution to our understanding of the corpus of Occitan literature from the Middle Ages to the present.

A militant Occitanist, Lafont fought for the recognition of his native language as part of the cultural heritage of France; his works to this end include titles such as *Décoloniser en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) and *À ces cons de Français et ces couillons d'Occitans* (Valence d'Albigeois: Vent Terral, 2005). He was a major force in a number of organizations devoted to the support and promotion of Occitan including the Institut d'Études Occitanes and the Association Internationale d'Études Occitanes.

He was also a talented creative writer, composing works in a variety of genres, including novels, short stories, plays, and lyric poetry; these works formed another aspect of his efforts to promote Occitan language and culture. The set of poems published as *Dire, poëmas 1945-1953* (Toulouse: Institut d'Estudis Occitans, 1957) express themes that recur in his entire oeuvre: the merits of Occitan as a literary language, issues of place, the author's love of women, the problem of oppression, whether *manu militari* or by legislative or regal decree. One of his later works, *La Gacha a la Cistèrna* (Montpeyrroux: Jorn, 1998), is an epic poem (recently translated into English by Marie-Christine Coste-Rixte [Montpeyrroux: Jorn, 2014]). Lafont continued to publish creative works to the end of his life.

Occitan musician and singer Jan-Mari Carlotti first met Robert Lafont in 1977 in preparation for a film documenting Occitan literature (*Les Troubadours*, 1979). Subsequently, Lafont remained in contact with Carlotti and his associates, musicians of the group Mont-Jòia, providing texts for performances and writing a presentation for the performance of the oratorio *Mirèio* by Patrice Conte, a Mont-Jòia member. Mont-Jòia and its lead

singer Carlotti had an established tradition of performing works by Occitan authors from the Middle Ages to the modern day (the play list ranges from Jaufre Rudel and Pistoleta to Gélou, Mistral, and Reboul, with folksongs in between).

In 1988, Lafont gave Carlotti a copy of his second collection of verse, *Dire, poëmas 1945-1953*, which Carlotti began to set to music. In 1998-99, Carlotti returned to the *Dire* project. Shortly afterwards, Robert Lafont asked him to create something for the MARPOC colloquium, “Robert Lafont: L’oeuvre littéraire,” which took place in Nîmes on May 12-13, 2000. For that event, Carlotti gave a concert entitled “Dire,” presenting his musical interpretations of Lafont’s verse.

Selections from the *Dire* concert were published as a compact disc by Carlotti (M.J 004-2005). The record notes included the long out-of-print Occitan texts accompanied by translations into French by Carlotti and English translations by William Calin and by Patrick Hutchinson. This recording, *Dire, poëmas de R. Lafont, mis en musique par Jan-Mari Carlotti*,¹ produced by the Ass. Mont-Joia, offers listeners the poetry of Lafont with the interpretations of a contemporary musician, a blending of resources that has roots in the Occitan Middle Ages. Carlotti has now retired from performing; it is unclear if he has maintained a web presence.² To inquire about the recording of *Dire*, contact the producers at mont-joia@wanadoo.fr.

1 Melodies by Jan-Mari Carlotti; performers J. M. Carlotti (vocals, guitars, psaltery), Michel Marre (trumpet, bugle, piano), Denis Fournier (drums and percussion), with the assistance of Luzmilla Carpio (vocals), Solenn Grand (cello) and Jan Carlotti.

2 For information on Carlotti’s recordings, see <http://www.paraulas.net/musical/artista.php?cl=041&PHPSESSID=f02c34f7c07f0228f4d2c7e85386678c>.

Note from *Delos*: The text by Robert Lafont and William Calin’s translations were originally published in *Tenso: Bulletin of the Société Guilhem IX 20* (2005), and also became part of the print materials accompanying the Carlotti recording discussed in this commentary by Wendy Pfeffer. Thanks are due to Wendy, who revised her original introduction for *Delos* readers, and to *Tenso*, which permits us to reprint the translations.