

News From Canada: AlgomaTrad Keeps Living Traditions Growing

By Julie Schryer & Pat O’Gorman

AlgomaTrad, (The Algoma Traditional Music and Dance organization www.algomatrad.ca) was founded by volunteer Artistic Directors Julie Schryer and Pat O’Gorman, with the support of a wonderful community of parents of local learners. The organization was incorporated in 2004 as a not-for-profit arts organization operating in the rural Algoma region of Northeastern Ontario, along the North Shore of Lake Huron. Julie and Pat are life-long musicians steeped in the traditional music of their youth, with over 40 years of experience each in learning, performing, recording, teaching, and organizing.

AlgomaTrad first formed to present an annual one-week immersive summer camp with a philosophy of inter- and multigenerational learning and celebration. The AlgomaTrad Family Camp brings together experienced and renowned traditional musicians, dancers, callers, and artists to provide living traditions mentorship to local and non-local learners through workshops, performances, community dances, and tune and song creation. The camp grew quickly to capacity by its second year and continues to operate annually with over 100 campers, 20–25 staff, and 30–40 volunteers. Over 16 years, AlgomaTrad has supported approximately 250 musicians, dancers, and artists as performers/teachers for the camp. With a few exceptions, these musicians and

artists are representatives of Canadian cultural traditions. Michigan dance caller and potter Dan Gorno was also an important member of the organization, as an artist and a soulful champion, until his untimely death in 2015.

Since 2004, AlgomaTrad has also organized over 300 events, concert series, workshops, in- and after-school programs, dances, and fundraisers. Over the last 16 years approximately 20,000 learners, audience members, and artists have participated in AlgomaTrad’s programs and events. Public support for all events and local awareness of the AlgomaTrad as an important local cultural organization continues to grow. In 2019, the organization had over 130 volunteers help with infrastructure building and upkeep, planting, cleaning, administration, accounting—the list is endless. AlgomaTrad events and programs are both empowering and community-building in nature, and attract families and individuals of all ages through their joyful and inclusive nature.

AlgomaTrad has accomplished this while maintaining a philosophy of economic accessibility through the needs-based Nicholas Missere Bursary Fund, which has enabled over 150 people, including entire families, to attend the camp, as well as helping to provide workshop opportunities throughout the year. AlgomaTrad fundraises through various events, including a live and silent auction during the camp and a trivia night fundraiser in the spring.

AlgomaTrad has also created partnerships with over 25 arts, cultural, service, educational, and environmental organizations, municipalities and First Nations, and industry partners. These collaborations not only allow AlgomaTrad to expand its programming, but they bring more awareness of the organization to the region while helping local community groups to host their own successful events.



Left: *New timber frame dance pavilion built on the 50-Acre site of the future AlgomaTrad Centre, St. Joseph Island. Photos by Vince Candelino.*

AlgomaTrad has been supported by numerous grants from various organizations, among them the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), Heritage Canada, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Growing New Roots

AlgomaTrad is currently developing a year-round traditional arts centre and recently completed a new timber frame dance pavilion with funding from an OTF Capital grant. Two years ago AlgomaTrad and its supporters secured a 50-acre, former Music Camp property on St. Joseph Island to develop the **AlgomaTrad Centre**. The organization is planning to launch a major crowd-sourcing campaign this spring to support the centre infrastructure. So far, AlgomaTrad has:

- created an in-depth business plan and produced designs for upgrading the infrastructure on the site, which will include winterizing the main building containing the dining hall, dorm rooms, and washrooms; upgrading the septic system; adding an up-to-date kitchen facility; building a new concert hall and studio spaces; and upgrading the grounds for accessibility;
- secured a significant funding commitment from the provincial government;
- built a magical dance pavilion and cleaned up the site enough to hold camp there;
- partnered with local schools and volunteers to revitalize the Two Tree River that flows through the property by planting over 1,700 native trees and shrubs thanks to a grant from the Ontario Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund.

Besides being a beautiful and environmentally sustainable centre where both local people and visitors to St. Joseph Island can immerse themselves in hands-on learning, the centre will benefit the Island and Algoma Region through tourism, local employment, support for local farms and businesses, and as a catalyst for new arts entrepreneurship on the Island. When complete, the centre will be a cultural legacy for the Island, the Algoma Region, and the North. If you are interested in helping to support this project, please subscribe to the AlgomaTrad Newsletter at algomatrad.ca or find us on Facebook. Think about attending an AlgomaTrad event—*we'd love to see you!*

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About AlgomaTrad's Artistic Directors

Julie Schryer's Franco-Ontarian home in Sault Ste. Marie, ON, was filled with traditional music and song. She studied piano throughout her youth but really loved playing traditional music with four of her brothers, all award-winning fiddlers. Starting in 1987, Julie focused on farming and raising her family of five children. Julie recorded and toured with her brother Pierre Schryer in the late '90s and has taught at the Goderich Celtic College, the Valley of the Moon Fiddle Camp in California, and the Northwest Fiddle Fest in Smithers, BC. For the last 18 years, Julie has played with the Brian Pickell Band.

Pat O'Gorman began playing bagpipes 53 years ago in the Ontario Highland Piping world and has studied traditional music in Ireland, Brittany, and Cape Breton. He has been playing traditional music on wooden concert (Irish) flute for 40 years and plays Uilleann pipes and tin whistle as well. He has toured throughout North America and Europe with Rare Air, has appeared on over 30 recordings, and has been recorded for numerous television and radio programs and for several films including Canadian features "Men with Brooms" and the 2009 release "One Week". Pat has taught at the Goderich Celtic College and at numerous conferences. He acted both as Chair and instructor for many years at the Chris Langan Irish Traditional Music Weekend in Toronto.



Attention Canadians!

Check out the new CDSS camp scholarship just for you on page 14.