

INTERVIEW WITH *MANIE MUSICALE* CREATORS

Introduction
This interview was conducted at the AATF National Convention in Trois-Rivières, Québec, July 2023 by Heather Tedder with Manie Musicale creators Michelle Fournier and Stephanie Carbonneau. Note: Manie Musicale is an energizing competition of 16 French songs set up along the lines of the NCAA March Madness basketball brackets. Students vote to predict which song will be the most popular. Interview is condensed for clarity.

Heather Tedder:
Hi! I'm so pleased to be with y'all today. Please introduce yourselves.
Stephanie Carbonneau: I teach at York Middle School in southern Maine.
Michelle Fournier: I teach at Falmouth Middle School outside of Portland, Maine.

HT: Cool. Well, y'all have a wonderful online presence now because of a really cool program that French teachers around the globe LOVE called *Manie Musicale*! Please tell us about that: how did you come up with this idea and how does it work?
SC: Well, it's not a new concept. There's a Spanish one that has been going on. I had seen something about it in an AATF group, and there was an AATF chapter that was doing something within their chapter, but it was only open to their chapter, so I thought it was really cool and said to Michelle, "Hey, I tried this with my class. Let's try our classes against each other," and it just went from there.
MF: Yes, and I was honestly jealous of the Spanish teachers because they were having so much fun with Locura de Marzo - Why doesn't that exist for French teachers? And so Stephanie had the idea and I said, "Sure, I'll try it; I'm up for anything!"

HT: I love that! What was the first year that y'all did this?
MF: 2017, just our two schools. In 2018 we presented at our state language conference, Foreign Language Association of Maine, FLAME - love FLAME! - which is now EMME - we changed our name to Educators for a Multilingual Maine. Stephanie is *Madame la Présidente*. Our conference happened to fall at the beginning of March, and we said "Join us! Here is your lesson plan for Monday. Boom! We got you covered." A few people joined, a handful of schools; it wasn't a ton. Then the following year there were a few more, and then especially during Covid, it really exploded because everything was online and it's engaging, so teachers had a way to get students to actually come to class! And so people started talking about THE *Manie Musicale* and we were like, "They mean us! OMG" and it's just gotten bigger and bigger every year.

HT: How do you pick your songs? I always love seeing the playlist every year and the kids get really excited and we do our brackets. How does that come about?
SC: Students nominate songs and it gets them involved by doing that. We have a Facebook group now where the teachers will nominate songs and help us go through each song. We just keep working to find songs that meet all of our criteria: school-appropriate videos and lyrics, the ability to reach K-through University level audience, and that they're from various parts of the Francophone world with different genres.
MF: We also consider male / female artists, LGBTQ people, inclusivity. We really try to have a mix of new artists and also some big names that students know. We try to discover new music, which is always fun, and sometimes it gives the artists a little boost, which is pretty cool.

HT: Yeah, I saw that LeFloFranco (who won *Manie Musicale* 2023) is going to be involved, and AATF New Jersey member Kristen Phillips has gotten connected with artists y'all have featured.
SC: Well, two of the artists got monetized this year on YouTube because so many kids, teachers, and classrooms were watching the videos.
MF: One of the great things about *Manie Musicale* is the community we have. A lot of teachers, they might be singletons at their school or in their program, so for those few weeks, they have a community. LeFloFranco and Missy D were so wonderful responding to students, and they made us videos and were very involved as we went through the process, and the teachers in the Facebook groups were like "Let's help them, let's promote them, everybody subscribe!" It's such a wholesome moving thing, because you make these connections. We try to balance simple vocabulary and some of the songs are just fun pop songs and some have deeper themes, like depression, environmental issues, AP themes, so we really try to have a balance. Every year it's always a little bit stressful when we release the playlist because we don't know if people will like it, but we have so much help now and people discover new music.

HT: What music do y'all love? What have you discovered that you really cannot stop listening to?
MF: *Céphaz est mon petit ami.* It's funny because all of the teachers now have their favorites. I've loved French music since I was in high school. My favorite of all time is Jean-Jacques Goldman, but he's not in Manie Musicale because he stopped doing music! But you know, I love Zaz, I love Céphaz, Missy D was great this year, so much fun, too many to name, but I discovered a lot of new artists, which is great.

pictured above: S. Carbonneau (l) and M. Fournier (r)

SC: Through *Manie Musicale,* I'm listening to more rap!

HT: How has *Manie Musicale* affected your French program?
SC: I think it has helped enrollment tremendously. I involve my 6th graders who are in an exploration where they rotate through all the languages. The kids who are with me during *Manie Musicale*, if it's a voting day, I let them vote. They get really excited to understand this program and to figure out what it is. They're sharing the music with their younger siblings, and their families, and so kids are coming up aware that we're doing this and that we have fun while learning.
MF: For me, it's a great way to hook some of the kids who were not engaged by some of the other stuff. We have a lot of little side contests where people can create videos or artwork or things like that! The memes are so much fun! They love the competition aspect of it and when they're in the 8th grade, when they come into the classroom at the beginning of the year, I tell them, "Hey, you guys have power because my friend and I, we run *Manie Musicale,* so the songs I play in class, I'm really paying attention to your reaction, and if you find a song you think is good, let me know" and they say "Oh Madame, this is ok, but it's not *Manie*-worthy, so they feel empowered to feel part of something bigger than themselves. I actually just got an email from a student while I've been at this conference who said "Madame! I was at summer camp and one of the people there does *Manie Musicale* and it's part of their curriculum, and I said you were my teacher and they were like "WHOA, that's crazy!" Students are proud that it started in our two schools. It's fun for us too because as teachers, we're tired in March, so it infuses this energy with this push to get you through the year. There are so many resources available that are amazing that I wouldn't have to create and teachers can just pick and choose.

HT: Is it expensive to be part of the program?
SC: It is free forever! We're a non-profit and we will never charge.

HT: That's wonderful. And it's open to every French teacher across the nation.
SC: And across the world! This year, in March the French Consulate did "Week of *la Francophonie*" and they contacted us. We put the voting days on their calendar of events so people could get on, watch the two videos, and vote as an activity or something that had to do with *la Francophonie*. That was great!

MF: I encourage families to get involved too: in my school, I always give parents a copy of the bracket so they can play along at home and listen to the songs and talk about them. Sometimes in Maine we have French speaking parents, so it's really fun to have them connect with that; it's a way for them to connect with their kids.
SC: We're actually working on our playlist this last year, and we went to the Burundi Café in Portland Maine. When the owner saw the list of songs, he got up and walked away, and the next thing we know, one of the songs is playing because he was familiar with it. He thought it was just awesome that we were even considering an artist from Africa.

HT: That's awesome. Let's say I'm a teacher who's never done *Manie Musicale* before. What should my first step be?
MF: Visit our website : http://www.maniemusicale.info. There's a how it all works page and tons of tutorials. Don't get overwhelmed by the amount of materials! There's also a super supportive Facebook group that you can join, so you can get information and questions answered there as well.
SC: Something very successful we tried this year was a buddy system where volunteers who have done *Manie Musicale* before were matched up with a newbie so that the newbie had one contact person and could get their questions answered. We're working on a Newbie handbook, but pretty much everything is there. You just have to decide "How do I want to do it? Do I want to do it mildly, medium, or spicy?"

HT: When does the bracket come out? Just so people can be planning ahead.
MF: We shoot for the end of January / beginning of February to give people time to get familiar with the songs before voting starts. Voting usually starts in early March because we try to do it in parallel with the NCAA basketball tournament.

HT: Well, Stephanie, Michelle, is there anything else you would like to add to this?
SC: If anyone has any connection to French basketball players who are playing during March Madness, we would love to get that aspect to help the students who are sports enthusiasts so they can see that there are athletes who are from France or other French-speaking countries playing. If the players wanted to weigh in, I would love to know what song they think is going to win!
MF: A video of players talking about why it's important to speak French, what they think of *Manie Musicale* and who their favorite musician is would be wonderful!

HT: I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me! Everyone is going to be riveted to this interview. *Tout le monde,* get involved with *Manie Musicale* 2024! It will invigorate your program and it is FUN!

- **Heather Tedder**
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AATF DOROTHY S. LUDWIG EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

The AATF invites nominations for four annual awards for outstanding teachers, one at each level: elementary school, middle school or junior high school, high school, and postsecondary (university, college, or community college). The purpose of the award is to recognize teachers who have demonstrated excellence and commitment in the teaching of the French language and French and Francophone cultures and literatures.

Each winner will receive a certificate from the AATF recognizing his or her outstanding contribution to the teaching of French and a one-year complimentary membership in the AATF for 2025. An official presentation will be made at the AATF Awards Ceremony in San Diego in July 2024.

Nominations may be made by any AATF member in good standing or by an AATF chapter. The nominee must be an active member of the AATF. All documents must be submitted by **February 1, 2024.** Please see [https://frenchteachers.org/promote-french/awards-and-grants] for additional information and the application form.

Nomination packages, which should not exceed 5 pages, will be evaluated for evidence of (1) outstanding teaching experience, (2) professional growth and development, and (3) contribution to the profession. Submit the nomination packet electronically in .pdf format (one file with the candidate's name in the file name) to [awards@frenchteachers.org].