

When you enter the **Délia-Tétreault Museum**, you find yourself surrounded by a hundred objects and images that have crossed time and oceans. In this issue we introduce you to another item, its history and its key role in the missionary adventure in Quebec.



The Secret Life of Objects



By Alexandre Payer
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From the plucking of the strings with the nails comes a soft and strangely melancholic music that leaves something tender in the heart. You must see the instrumentalist pressing his valiha strongly against him, because the human body, it is said, reinforces the sound when the instrument is pressed against it.¹

The valiha (pronounced vali) is a plucked stringed instrument whose soundboard is made of a hollowed out segment of bamboo 60 to 120 cm long with a long vertical ear. Traditionally, the “strings” of the instrument were made of thin strips of bark incised into the trunk and gently lifted from the table by small rectangular pieces of dry pumpkin that serve as movable trebles. Note that these bands, held in place at both ends by a knotted liana, are now replaced by metal guitar strings (or sometimes even bicycle brake cables!). Pyro-engraved pastoral motifs, leather bands and chiseled elements embellish most of these instruments, emphasizing their predominantly domestic manufacture .

After ten months of teaching music in Tsaramasay school in Madagascar, Sr. Suzette Jean, M.I.C., reflects with wonder the power of music to bring minds and hearts closer together. For her, it is a privileged means of contact with the young and not so young. The community of the Missionary

Sisters of the Immaculate Conception has always promoted musical folklore among musicians and singers of all ages and levels through competitions and student exchanges in several countries such as Japan, Philippines, and Hong Kong.

In our collective imagination, few things link art, craft, tradition, everyday life, and spirituality as closely as the universal language of music. Like the valiha player who emphasizes in harmony the events that make up his life, for missionaries the power of music becomes a source of resilience and communion. Even today, the singing of the Magnificat, inspired by Mary’s Thanksgiving from the Gospel, still marks the evening prayer and the opening of important gatherings of this “singing” community.

As a national instrument, the valiha reflects the symbolic cultural heritage of Madagascar, a country that shines through the dynamism of local artists and its diaspora. Visitors to the Musée Délia-Tétreault who see the valiha for the first time are intrigued by the artisanal aspect of its making. Its rough and delicate workmanship seems to herald: I am a timeless instrument, but also an everyday one; an instrument that travels, bringing the Big Island with it. ∞

Photos:

Above:
Valiha –traditional fabrication made from local bamboo and bark strips

Below:
Valiha –modern instrument made with metal strings

Photo Credit:
Alexandre Payer

¹ LEMAIRE, Angèle, M.I.C. – *The Precursor*, Malagasy Musical Heritage: Sept-Oct. 1966, Volume XXVII, No. 5, P. 212

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