

## Toots Thielemans – Chez Toots (1998)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Sous Le Ciel De Paris* 2. *La Vie En Rose* 3. *Valse No* 4. *Dance For Victor (Dedicated To Victor Feldman)* 5. *Hymne A L'amour (If You Love Me, Really Love Me)* 6. *Que Reste-T'il De Nos Amours (I Wish You Love)* 7. *Old Friend* 8. *Un Jour Tu Verras* 9. *For My Lady* 10. *Ne Me Quitte Pas* [play](#) 11. *Les Moulins De Mon Coeur (The Windmills Of Your Mind)* 12. *Le Temps Des Cerises* 13. *La Valse Des Lilas (Once Upon A Summertime)* 14. *Adagio Assai From Concerto For Piano & Orchestra In G Major* 15. *Moulin Rouge*  
[play](#)

Personnel: Accordion – Marcel Azzola (tracks: 1, 15) Acoustic Guitar – Oscar Castro-Neves (tracks: 5) Bass – Hein Van De Geyn (tracks: 1 to 11, 13, 14, 15) Cello – Hubert Varron (tracks: 3, 7) Drums – André Ceccarelli (tracks: 1 to 9, 11, 13, 14, 15) Guitar – Oscar Castro-Neves (tracks: 1, 15), Philip Catherine (tracks: 4, 12) Harmonica – Toots Thielemans Piano – Bert Van Den Brink (tracks: 2 to 9, 11, 13, 14, 15) Viola – Diederik Suys (tracks: 3, 7) Violin – Alain Kouznetzoff (tracks: 3, 7), Véronique Guay (tracks: 3, 7) Vocals – Chip (tracks: 5), Diana Krall (tracks: 2), Dianne Reeves (tracks: 8), Johnny Mathis (tracks: 11), Shirley Horn (tracks: 13) Vocals [Background] – Bernard Arcadio, Claude Lombard, Laurence Saltiel, Luce Perea, Lydia Martinico, Tony Bonfils.

The harmonica can send a lyrical message as well as any singer can, if it's played right. Toots Thielemans has been sending out the right message for over 40 years. But it's his earliest years, growing up in his native Belgium, that the harmonica master reflects upon by constructing this album of torch songs with French lyrics. The arrangements are rooted in straight-ahead jazz, but with a twist. Thielemans is supported by pianist Bert van den Brink, bassist Hein Van de Geyn and drummer Andre Ceccarelli. Several of the guests were recorded with this quartet in a live setting; others were dubbed in long-distance with the aid of recorded tapes.

In Thielemans' hands the chromatic harmonica seems an extension of the human voice. His

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playing on "Ne me Quitte Pas," a dramatic duet with piano, exceeds the amount of expression conveyed by many singers. In fact, that seems to be the intention with this session; the harmonicist's increased level of expression contrasts with the singers' low-key approach.

Half of these songs include vocals. In the liner notes, Thielemans tells of his early childhood in Brussels, where his parents owned a sidewalk cafe. Recalling their Sunday entertainment and the start of his own music career at age four on the accordion, Thielemans says he designed this album in order to share visions from his earlier years. He accompanied Edit Piaf and Charles Trenet in 1946, and the guest singers on *Chez Toots* present a similar style. Dianne Reeves sings the snappy waltz "Un Jour tu Verras" in French, maintaining a blase approach toward the contents. She and Thielemans trade choruses, and it's an opportunity for the instrumental quartet to pick up the emotional level somewhat. Similarly, Diana Krall offers a cool chorus of "La Vie en Rose" with French lyrics to contrast with the harmonicist's livelier approach. Dancing lightly around the room, Shirley Horn sings "La Valse des Lilas" in a whispering manner. Philip Catherine trades melodic passages with Thielemans on "Dance for Victor." The ensemble offers this gentle tribute to Victor Feldman with an improvised swing and feel for the jazz elements. It's a vintage Johnny Mathis, with clear, accurate and articulate phrases, who adds "Les Moulins de Mon" (Michel Legrand's "The Windmills of Your Mind"). The contrast with harmonica works in reverse, as Mathis offers a more dramatic delivery for his three choruses in English while Thielemans tones it down somewhat through his portions of the arrangement. A six-member vocal ensemble performs "Que Reste - T'il de nos Amours" (the familiar "I Wish You Love") in French, and Ravel's "Adagio Assai from Concerto Piano and Orchestra in G Major." Vocalist Chip joins the harmonicist on "Hymne a L'Amour," a slow blues-drenched ballad. Her contralto voice delivers the seductive-sounding French lyrics to further the small-town informal atmosphere being presented by the harmonica master and his guests. ---Jim Santella, [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com)

On this unusual CD, the remarkable harmonica player Toots Thielemans explores a variety of mostly French melodies. The music is often nostalgic and wistful but generally swinging, with enough different tempos to hold one's interest throughout. The oddest aspect of the set is that there is an overdubbed vocal apiece by Diana Krall ("La Vie en Rose"), Dianne Reeves, Johnny Mathis, Shirley Horn, and a promising newcomer known here only as Chip; Krall, Reeves, and Chip sing in French. Thielemans plays beautifully throughout the relaxed date, which includes "I Wish You Love," "The Windmills of Your Mind," "Once Upon a Summertime," and "Moulin Rouge." Easily recommended. ---Scott Yanow

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