



The French House Party workshops are serious endeavors but without pressure to perform.

Dean Friedman

in Carcassonne: Songs in the Air

By Marc d'Etremont

"I'm not sure if I really know how to write a song" is not what a guest at a songwriting workshop would expect to hear from acclaimed New York writer/performer Dean Friedman. At this moment who cares? A few miles outside Carcassonne one of Regine Thuillet's exquisite lunches is laid out on the poolside table at Domaine St. Raymond, home to the French House Party. To start, pate, flaky yet buttery brie tart and a chilled glass of crisp local Domaine Le Fort Gewurztraminer paired perfectly with convivial conversation, a shockingly blue sky and the yellow sunflower fields of Provence to make you believe songs are just in the air.

The creative process is nebulous. It has always been a balance of inspiration and technical skill. Moira Martingale provides the atmosphere for discovering this balance at her villa, Domaine St. Raymond. British born Moira, Ph.D. in gothic literature, author, and devotee of French cuisine, created The French House Party. The early 19th century stone farmhouse – restored into a spacious villa with eight individually decorated en-suite bedrooms – becomes a salon for like-minded guests who delve into residential workshops focused on creative writing, graphic arts, digital media, songwriting with Dean Friedman, or gastronomy with Michelin starred chefs. The French House Party workshops are serious endeavors but without pressure to perform. And although the pool is inviting, it's the lack of pressure that energizes participation.

Dean Friedman's four-day July singer/songwriter workshop at the French House Party provides a stimulating opportunity to discover, or rediscover, internal creative skills. Like all good teachers, Dean wants to draw out these skills from each participant. "I don't profess to be able to write other people's songs," he simply states. Individuality is important.



Moira Martingale, founder of The French House Party.

*Photo: Dean Friedman at The French House Party concert (top of page).
Photography by Marc d'Etremont.*



Carcassonne, France

“The sooner I know what the song is about the clearer the task to get there becomes.” Dean encourages everyone to “get over fear.” He usually has a rough outline for the first stanza, and then starts asking a lot of internal questions that will help define the song’s tone, style, lyrical voice (the voice of the song) and rhyme scheme. “If I’m (asks the lyrical voice) in this scene, what am I seeing, doing, thinking and sensing at this moment.”

Then again, “A song doesn’t have to be about anything,” but needs to create a balance between the obvious and what “makes the listener lean in to hear the difference.” Dean expresses the freedom songwriting provides in that all poetic devices are game – alliteration, puns, internal rhymes. “At the end of the day you have to trust your own ear,” Dean concludes, yet, still, “rejection letters cover my walls.”

Born in Paramus, NJ, into a family that appreciated music – Dean's mom is a singer – the pop music of the 1960s with jazz underpinnings played on his transistor radio as a kid. Story telling songwriters were major influences: Joni Mitchell, James Taylor and Stevie Wonder. As a teenager he started getting local paid gigs, then attended City College of New York as a jazz major.

Success came early in his 20s with his first hit, “Thank Your Lucky Stars,” especially in the UK and Europe. “Ariel” followed reaching the Top 20 in USA. Then just like in a good ballad, disaster fell. England banned the delightful “I’m in Love With a McDonald’s Girl” in the 1980s because it mentioned a brand name and therefore was deemed akin to an advertorial. Dean was dropped by his recording label. In an ironic twist, “I’m in Love With a McDonald’s Girl” remains a huge cult hit. The current West End musical, "The Commitments," licensed a cut of the song. Yet at the time, the record label drop resulted in a major recording slump.

Undaunted, Dean turned to other creative ventures, and in the late 1980s he wrote his first



Regine Thuillet, chef at The French House Party

“A song doesn’t
have to be about
anything.”
~ Dean Friedman



Moira Martingale, The French House Party, Domaine St. Raymond, 11150 Pexiora, Languedoc, France.
Tel: +33 4 68 94 98 16
enquiries@frenchhouseparty.co.uk

The 2014 Dean Friedman singer/songwriter workshop will be July 25 - 28. See The French House Party for a complete and detailed 2014 schedule of workshops.

Transportation is provided for guests arriving by air or train from either Toulouse or Carcassonne.

video game, Eat-a-Bug. Picked up by Nickelodeon TV, it launched a career in virtual reality. With Internet stability by the late 1990s, Dean was able to restart his music career by creating his own label, Real Life Records.

Besides writing and recording, he maintains a busy touring schedule – Dean performed at a public concert held on the lawn of Domaine St. Raymond – especially during the summer months in Europe and the United Kingdom. After the workshop at the French House Party, he and his wife Alison – zoologist, college instructor and award winning nature photographer – were headed for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the world premiere of his children’s musical "Smelly Feet." Dean quoted Miles Davis to make a musical point, but it could sum up his own career, “There are no wrong notes in jazz; it’s what comes next that’s important.”

French House Party residential workshops attract an eclectic and international clientele with many repeat guests. Dean’s workshop balanced theory and time for individual or collaborative song writing yet when not engaged in activities, food at the French House Party became a favored topic. Whether it’s the superb cooking of Regine Thuillet or, for those attending the culinary workshops, Michelin starred chefs, the French House Party defines Provencal cuisine. Hands-on experiences, classic southern French rural scenery, a luxury villa, ancient medieval Carcassonne close by and sitting down to sumptuous and leisurely repasts create the reality of a genuine country house party. The peace and quiet at Domaine St. Raymond, and birds chirping at dawn, are gifts of nature. ■

Disclaimer: the author has been a guest of the French House Party for two separate workshops – Dean Friedman and Advanced Cookery.