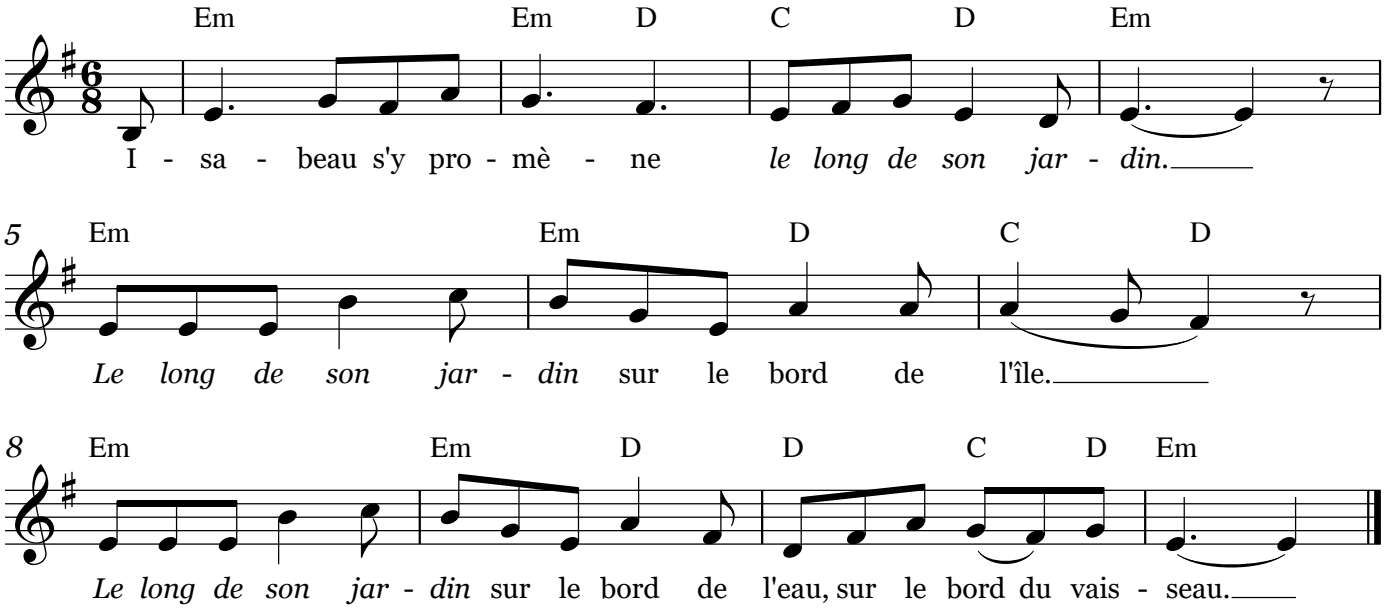
Isabeau s'y Promène
(Isabel Went Walking)

Traditional French and
French-Canadian Maritime



Isabeau s'y Promène is a ballad which is thought to have originated in the French province of Normandy, and which traveled with settlers in the early 17th century to the areas along the St. Lawrence waterway. It subsequently became popular in Canada, and followed French-Canadian singers as far as Louisiana. The structure and rhythm of the song hints at a possible history as a maritime work song (rowing or hauling); note the call-and-response structure (as in sea chanteys) and the prominent first beats.

Some arrangements of this song repeat the first line, and add a bar's rest to the end of the second line, so that the form matches the more familiar 8-bar structure. However, the uneven three-line version, presented here, is both unique and beautiful.

The French lyrics and a non-singable English translation are provided below. The phrase shown in *italic type* in each verse line will be repeated twice in the chorus; the other chorus phrases remain the same throughout the entire song.

Verse: Isabeau s'y promène *le long de son jardin*.	Isabel went walking along in her garden.
Chorus: *Le long de son jardin* sur la bord de l'îsle, *Le long de son jardin* sur le bord de l'eaux, sur la bord du vaisseau.	Along in her garden by the edge of the island, Along in her garden by the edge of the water, beside the ships.
Elle fit un rencontre, *de trente matelots*.	She happened to meet with thirty sailors.
Le plus jeune des trente, *il se mit* à *chanter*.	The youngest of the thirty began to sing.
La chanson que tu chantes, *je voudrais la savoir*.	The song that you are singing, I would like to know it.
Embarquez dans mon barque, *je te la chanterai*.	Come aboard my boat, I will sing it to you.
Quand elle fut dans la barque, *elle se mit* à *pleurer*.	When she got on the boat, she began to weep.
Qu'avez vous donc, la belle, *qu'*à *vous* à *tant pleurer*.	What's wrong, my beauty, that you should weep so.
Je pleure mon anneau d'or, *dans l'eau il est tombé*.	I weep for my golden ring, it has fallen in the water.
Ne pleurez point, la belle, *je vous le plongerai*.	Weep no more, my beauty, I will dive for it.
De la première plonge, *il n'a rien ramené*.	On the first dive, he brought up nothing.
De la seconde plonge, *l'anneau s'a voltagé*.	On the second dive, the ring slipped away.
De la troisième plonge, *le galant s'est noyé*.	On the third dive, the gallant lad was drowned.