Though 2014 is already in full swing, allow me to wish you a very Happy New Year from all of the French Embassy and consular staff across the United States—or, as we say in France, *Meilleurs vœux à tous!*

This year features an exceptional event between our two countries: a State visit. On February 11, French President François Hollande, at the invitation of U.S. President Barack Obama, will attend several events in Washington, D.C., including meetings and a State dinner at the White House as the evening’s guest of honor.

The goal of the visit—at a time when French-American relations have never been closer—is to discuss opportunities to further strengthen the French-American security and economic partnership. The last State visit by a French leader occurred in 1996, when President Jacques Chirac traveled to see President Bill Clinton. The encounter has provided fresh momentum across all of our common endeavors.

Since the beginning of the year, a number of French senior officials have made their way to the United States. On January 6 through 9, Fleur Pellerin, France’s Minister for the Digital Economy, visited Las Vegas for the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

Ms. Pellerin also held a conference on “La French Tech,” a new project aimed at supporting activity and partnerships in France’s growing startup scene. Her presence reinforced the activities of the 90 French companies exhibiting and doing business during the 2014 CES conference.

On January 8, Jean-Yves Le Gall, President of France’s space agency, CNES, led a half-day conference at the Embassy of France in Washington with numerous U.S. leaders in government, business, and industrial research, including NASA Administrator, Charles Bolden, and Mary Kicza, Assistant Administrator for Satellite and information Services at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Mr. Le Gall also outlined France’s new strategic framework for space policy, “Ambition 2020.”

On January 7, I had the pleasure of bestowing the Legion of Honor, France’s highest award, on Jeong Kim, President of Bell Labs, a U.S. industrial research institution with many proud and longstanding ties to France.

Across this broad gamut of projects, France continues to work with its American counterparts. May the year 2014 prove fruitful as we push toward these goals together, especially with the new energy given to French-American relations by the State visit by President Hollande.
Registration Begins for National French Contest

The American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) is preparing to hold their annual National French Contest this February. The contest is open to all students from grades 1-12.

A student may only enter through the recommendation of their teacher. The students compete in subdivisions within sections from grades 1-6 and 7-12.

The contest assesses participants in their oral and auditory skills in addition to their reading comprehension. The contest assesses participants’ proficiency in French vocabulary and grammatical structures. In addition, skills in speaking, listening, and reading comprehension are tested through the competition.

Founded in 1927, the AATF is the largest national association of French teachers. The organization seeks to promote France, its culture, and its language in education and the public sphere.

As well as the National French Contest, the AATF funds many other programs and publications such as National French Week and the French Review.

More on the contest is available at www.frenchteachers.org/concours.

Star American Violinist Performs at French Embassy

On January 24, Washington-area residents enjoyed a special concert performed by the American violinist and violist, Miranda Cuckson.

The concert took place at the Embassy of France and headlined the first edition of FUSION, a cultural exchange program created to connect new French and American musical talents and perpetuate musical dialogue between each country. The concert was co-organized by the Embassy of France and the Phillips Collection, a private Washington art museum, in partnership with France Musique.

Ms. Cuckson performed a variety of pieces during the concert, including “Sonata for Violin and Piano,” composed in 1917 by French composer Claude Debussy (1862-1918), and a more recent piece, “Anthèmes 1,” a violin solo created in 1992 by Pierre Boulez (b.1925), another French composer.

A highly acclaimed musician with a diverse repertoire, Ms. Cuckson has played in major concert halls as both a soloist and chamber musician, and has earned a reputation as among the foremost torchbearers of Western classical music.

Bordeaux and LA Celebrate 50 Years as Sister Cities

Bordeaux and Los Angeles celebrated their 50th anniversary as sister cities on January 15. Five hundred people from diverse career backgrounds attended the celebration at the Opening Night of the LA Art Show at the Los Angeles Convention Center. French and American political figures, industry workers, and other personalities made up the list of guests.

The party commenced a year of festivals and artistic and cultural exchange between the two cities.

Attendees had the chance to sample modern Latin-inspired food by Chef John Sedlar of Rivera Restaurant in Los Angeles, see work by artists in the FLARE (France Los Angeles Residency Exchange) program, and view a photographic exhibition by Gil Garcetti.

Proceeds will go to Sister Cities of Los Angeles Inc., a non-profit organization. The association will arrange cultural exchanges between Los Angeles and Bordeaux throughout the year. The launch of the cultural exchange is in celebration of the 50-year partnership between Bordeaux and Los Angeles.

The French are the fourth-largest tourist market for Los Angeles, with 340,000 French visitors to the city annually. The cities established sister status in 1964.

Los Angeles Councilmember Tom LaBonge was honored for his advocacy for the Sister Cities of Los Angeles. The host committee included French Consul General of Los Angeles Axel Cruau, Mayor of Los Angeles Eric Garcetti, and Councilmember Labonge.

Bordeaux Mayor Alain Juppé has invited Los Angeles to be the guest of honor at the Fête de Vin in June 2014.

Leaders Discuss Space Industry at Embassy Conference

On January 8, the Embassy of France gathered leaders from the French and American space sectors to advance bilateral partnership and shed light on France’s new space policy plan, “Ambition 2020.”

The half-day conference brought together top-level administrators including Jean-Yves Le Gall, the President of France’s Centre National d’Études Spatiales (CNES), as well as Charles Bolden, the Administrator of NASA. Mary Kicza, Assistant Administrator for Satellite and Information Services at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a U.S. federal agency, also participated.

In opening remarks, François Delattre, Ambassador of France to the United States, welcomed the event as the latest of a long tradition of French-American partnership in space exploration. Transatlantic space efforts “have to be one of our priorities... I hope this cooperation can continue,” Amb. Delattre said.

Mr. Le Gall followed the Ambassador with a speech outlining “Ambition 2020.” The broad strategic framework has defined the goals of French and European space capacity since its unveiling last year. The plan identifies five priority activities for CNES and its partner groups, which are space launchers, scientific research, space observation, telecommunications, and defense.

“Ambition 2020” will drive the technical excellence for which France is widely respected in the space community. The plan will also serve to create jobs in France and worldwide. CNES has 16,000 employees currently, and 40 percent of all European space industry jobs are in France.

Notable projects with French-American cooperation include the NASA-led mission for Curiosity, a “rover” currently exploring the surface of the planet Mars. The car-sized vehicle features several French-designed instruments, such as the Chemistry and Camera, or “ChemCam,” described by NASA as a “rock-zapping laser” that gathers geological data from the elements released during Curiosity’s field tests.

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Tomas Macek, Counselor for European and Eurasian Affairs at the Embassy of France

Europe is evolving, and its relations with the United States are, too. Tomas Macek is in Washington to keep tabs on the French positions within European affairs, which are increasingly followed also by the European Union’s new European External Action Service (EEAS), a joint diplomatic corps. Which makes sense, because France has helped lead the European Union’s development since its earliest days after World War II.

In the dealings between Europe and the United States—commonly called transatlantic relations—it is diplomats like Mr. Macek who assure that national interests are represented, European objectives are coordinated, and cooperation with allies like the United States stays strong.

News From France asked the diplomat about his work steering French and European diplomatic goals from the U.S. capital.

In a few words, what is your position at the Embassy of France?
I’m Counselor for European and Eurasian Affairs in the Chancery, which is the office of diplomats working closely with the Ambassador. There are six of us in addition to the Minister Counselor and the First Counselor. We split our duties along geographical and thematic lines.

My duties are Europe and Eurasia. Some issues are oriented geopolitically and include Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. Other themes are topical and linked to EU priorities, like data protection and trade negotiations. My role is both to follow the U.S. position on these issues, and to advocate for the French points of view.

How has your professional background led you to your current position in Washington?
I worked in Paris within several departments, mostly the EU Department and the Department for Continental Europe. Since these Departments cover my current portfolio, it made sense to send me here next. I was also posted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a dual-purpose EU and international office that had a European as its Chief of Mission and an American as its Deputy Chief of Mission. So, at that time, I was working on EU affairs and EU-U.S. cooperation, which I suppose is what brought me here.

Which authorities do you work with in Washington and more broadly across the United States?
My interlocutors are obviously in Washington more than anywhere else in the U.S. And there are a lot of them, because of the broad-ranging interests of European affairs. So they’re the obvious authorities: the U.S. Department of State, the National Security Council, but also Congress, and think tanks.

There’s another interlocutor I have in Washington, which is the Delegation of the European Union to the United States. The Delegation’s role has really grown in the past years. They are becoming a larger player, and we coordinate quite a lot, and hold regular briefings on issues of interest.

How have France and the U.S. been able to work together on common priorities in European and Eurasian public policy?
I think France and the U.S. have always worked together on these issues. If I go back several years on the Balkans, that’s one area where coordination among France, the United States, and the EU has always been strong. More recently, on trade and investment negotiations, we’ve decided to work very closely, and will continue to do so. I think one of the specifics for the past years is that, previously, our relations were very bilateral (country-to-country). Now, with the EU having its own diplomatic service, there’s a third actor. It’s like a three-sided game that we coordinate directly between France, the United States, and the European External Action Service, or EEAS.

In the big events taking place currently such as the development of the EEAS, how does your role play in to that today and in the future?
I think there are issues that are of EU competence and there are issues that remain of state competence. But even on those issues where it’s an EU competence, states will remain interested. So, our role is to follow what the EU delegation is doing, the same as our colleagues in Brussels will do with the European Commission, and exchange with them.

One such area is the trade and investment negotiations. That’s typically an EU competence, but states are interested. In that case, my role with the trade section from the Embassy in Washington is to be in touch with the Delegation among others, to communicate our own positions, and follow the relevant policy debates on the U.S. side.
in depth: French gastronomy

King Cake: French Tradition for New-World Tastes

News From France looked into the vaunted (and delicious) dish, and found that its history, ties to New Orleans, and longevity should keep king cakes baking for years to come.

A Galette des Rois History

Some experts say the galette des rois traces in roots as far back as the 14th century, when French households would celebrate the Epiphany, a Christian holiday, which is also known as Twelfth Night. The “king” aspect refers to the visit of the Three Wise Men to the newborn Jesus of Nazareth, described as “kings of the Orient”—and thus the notion of king cake was fostered.

More recent customs have moved toward January 6 as the date on which all celebrants can eat the dessert with friends and family. Each cake typically holds a fève, or charm, inside. Whoever receives the slice of cake with the trinket gets to play king or queen for a day, and certain participants hold that the one who finds the lucky fève is then duty-bound to host the following year’s party.

The king cake tradition spread from France to American shores during the movement of French immigrants to Louisiana. Mindful to maintain their culture in the New World, they continued to observe the Continental tradition in their new home.

Recipes differ according to the French region from which its makers hail: the Northern French bake the cake with puff pastry and frangipane, or almond-cream filling. The Southern French, who sometimes prefer the term gâteau des rois, bake theirs with brioche, laden with sugar and fruit.

Regardless of one’s religious or cultural background, the practice served as a way to ring in the New Year—and to kick off the season of Mardi Gras, French for “Fat Tuesday,” during which the Big Easy reels from non-stop festivities. The day after Mardi Gras is Ash Wednesday, when the parties cease, the parades stop marching, and observers enter the 40-day period of Lent before Easter.

But until then, indulgence in king cake and its variations powers on in full force. Such is the appeal of the festive season of which king cake has so long played a part, the custom is now enjoyed across broad swathes of the American South, from east Texas to the Florida Panhandle.

NoLA: King Cake Capital

The king cake, therefore, is inseparably tied up in the French roots of New Orleans and broader Louisiana. The city’s pastries almost always feature the trio of purple, green, and gold colors, which are said to represent justice, faith, and power. The colors have become synonymous not just with the dish, but Mardi Gras and the New Orleans metro region in general.

Donald Entringer, President of McKenzie’s Bakery Corp., which makes thousands of king cakes in the New Orleans area, describes a historic uptick in consumption around 1950.
“It’s grown into a tremendous business since then,” he said, in a 2012 interview with Louisiana newspaper, the Times-Picayune. “It’s become more of a way of life for people.”

Today, bakeries like Mr. Entringer’s compete for the title, and the profits, of selling New Orleans’s best king cake. The two-month period during which the dish is served requires a constant supply, and many local outfits specialize in it. The newer practice of shipping cakes as gifts to loved ones has spawned its own robust business, and distributors send their wares nationwide. In 1992, the U.S. Postal Service reported processing 30,000 king cakes that year alone, and the number has grown since.

For all the strictures that tradition can bring, New Orleans bakers have allowed themselves to innovate on this celebrated theme. Health-conscious customers have caused some bakeries to reduce the size of their king cakes, and individual servings can be found in the city.

Hubig’s Pies, a local institution, has started selling the dish with a dough made from yeast. The upscale Cochon Butcher (the name means “pig” in French) also sells cakes for one, and its signature charm is—what else?—a tiny piglet figurine.

**Cake for the 21st Century**

Perhaps the most buzzed-about king cake in recent years has come from Sucré, a high-end bakery in Metairie, a New Orleans suburb. Since 2006, celebrity baker Tariq Hanna has developed a king cake that has drawn worldwide attention.

His recipe is “steeped in tradition, but using our modern sensibilities,” he said, during a visit two years ago from the Times-Picayune. Born to Middle Eastern parents, Mr. Hanna, who immigrated to Detroit as a youth, makes a fresh addition to New Orleans’s famous diversity.

A signature part of his baking approach is the hot-rod finish, or “luster dust,” which he jokes was inspired by the auto shops he grew up around in the Motor City. His version involves whipped cream cheese and cinnamon, which one taster deemed “non-traditional... but that’s not a bad thing.”

Mr. Hanna’s devotion to the art of the king cake has paid off, and is stirring up a new appreciation for the regional favorite. In 2009, he won the “Ultimate Cake-Off” hosted by the cable-TV network The Learning Channel (TLC). His graduation to star-chef status has drawn hungry fans to New Orleans—and by extension, new exposure to the French dessert.

France’s cultural institutions have also sought to promote king cake. On January 16, the Alliance Française of New Orleans invited guests to “Mardi Gras Dégustation: Galette des Rois From France to New Orleans,” a lecture on the culinary treat’s history and use. The event’s sponsors included Maurice French Pastries, a French-owned bakery, and the Southern Food and Beverage Museum (SoFAB), both based in New Orleans.

From its medieval beginnings to its venerated status in the Big Easy, king cake has made a veritable tour du monde. Some say galette, some say gâteau, but with so many diverse partners working to maintain a vibrant custom, it seems that king cake has become a permanent ingredient of the American melting pot.
Bestselling U.S. Novelist Awarded France’s Légion

On January 1, bestselling U.S. novelist Danielle Steel was awarded the Legion of Honor, the highest of French awards.

Ms. Steel now joins other American figures who have previously been decorated with the Legion of Honor. This list includes iconic contributors to U.S. and world culture such as Walt Disney, Bob Dylan, and Julia Child.

This marks the second French accolade given to Ms. Steel. In 2002, she was named an Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters.

Ms. Steel has produced works in genres such as non-fiction and children’s literature; however, she is best known for her writing in the romance genre. The ‘Queen of Romance’ has sold over 600 million copies of her novels in 70 countries and 43 languages.

When asked about the inspiration for her writing, the novelist, who splits her time between San Francisco and Paris, said: “I always go back to the classics. I love French literature. Colette is a special favorite of mine.”

French Scientist Honored in States on 90th Birthday

The Salk Institute for Biological Studies (La Jolla, Calif.) held a symposium on January 13 to honor French scientist Roger Guillemin on his 90th birthday.

Dr. Guillemin is a distinguished professor at the Institute who has contributed significantly to French-American excellence in the sciences.

The symposium was titled “Hypothalamic Factors: A Trove for Novel Therapeutic and Diagnostic Applications.”

Renowned researchers presented scientific discoveries in the field of neuroendocrinology, which is the study of the interactions between the endocrine and nervous systems of the human body. Dr. Guillemin is considered to be a pioneer of this field.

Dr. Guillemin was part of a three-person team including American researcher Rosalyn Yalow that won the Nobel Prize in 1977 for discovering the production of peptide hormones in the hypothalamus. His work laid the foundation for future brain hormone research and development of treatments for a broad range of human disorders, including diabetes, infertility, thyroid diseases, and several types of tumors.

This year’s International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) took place from January 7 to January 10 with a strong showing from French companies and France.

Held annually in Las Vegas, the International CES is the largest consumer technology conference of the year. Organized by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA), the technology trade association representing the interests of the American consumer electronics industry, for more than 40 years, the conference brings together the industry with over 3,200 exhibitors and over 152,000 guests from more than 150 countries.

The event brought in almost 90 French companies and startups, in addition to Fleur Pellerin, France’s Digital Economy Minister (pictured, right).

Ubifrance, the French Trade Commission, brought 11 of the 90 French companies that attended the International CES this year. These companies included Allmyapps, the first app store for Windows, Qobuz, a Hi-Fi music service, and Kolor, a 360-degree, panoramic video software.

Minister Pellerin held a talk with over 300 business leaders to discuss the new French Tech Program, a $170 million government strategy to assist and encourage digital innovation in France. Pierre Gattaz of the Movement of the Enterprises of France, France’s largest union of employers, also attended the talk.

In addition to the conference, Minister Pellerin hosted many meetings with CEOs of high-profile companies such as Netflix. Representatives from the U.S. enterprise, an online movie and TV subscription service, met with French officials in early December of last year. Ms. Pellerin’s meeting with Netflix’s CEO, Reed Hastings, concerned the company’s potential to participate in the French market and the advantages of launching the company in France. Ms. Pellerin shared her time at the International CES with other CEOs of companies such as Zappos, Dreamworks Studios, 3D Systems, and Good Technology.

Ms. Pellerin also met with U.S. Commerce Secretary, Penny Pritzker, during the conference. The two discussed means in which bilateral commerce and affairs could be enhanced.

On January 16, teachers of French from around the United States logged on to learn new techniques and strategies for imparting French language skills in the classroom. The event marked the first of several “Webinaires Pédagogiques,” or Teaching Webinars, organized by the French Embassy’s Higher Education, Arts, and French Language department through spring 2014.

In an online session called “How to Motivate Adolescents,” French teacher Said Nourine demonstrated a handful of methods for engaging students across a range of skill levels. Co-hosted by Athanase Shungu and David Gaveau, the two-hour webinar focused on the critical component of motivating students—first to create the desire to learn French, then to deliver effective teaching once the student is receptive and eager to dig in.

Mr. Nourine mentioned the multiple factors that go into a student’s level of motivation, such as proficiency acquired before or outside a given class (for example, exposure to French through travel, or a French-speaking relative).

The talk put special attention on the importance of cultivating a learning-friendly environment. If the class is prone to misbehavior, or students feel discouraged from taking risks, the learning process may suffer from a perception among students that the endeavor of language learning is not worthwhile.

Nearly 70 education professionals signed in to follow the event. The webinar’s administrators fielded a dozens of questions after Mr. Nourine’s presentation, asking for more information on everything from methodology of grading to the benefits of team projects, like role-playing or reciting a famous work of French literature in front of the class.

The Webinaires Pédagogiques are organized in cooperation with the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) and the Center of Applied Linguistics of the University of Franche-Comté in Besançon, France. The series’ next sessions will take place on February 13, March 13, April 17, and May 5. For more information, please follow www.facebook.com/franceintheus.
**culture & society**

**An Illustration of Parisian Slang—With a U.S. Accent**

Thanks to a pair of Parisian graphic designers, Americans can learn a slew of the French capital’s slang.

This “Franco-Parisian dictionary,” illustrated by Jean-Laurent Cassely and Camille Saféris, shows how the buzzwords of Paris’s boulevards form a dialect unto itself.

More than a few terms should be familiar to Americans, which are adapted to French customs and pronunciation. Take the word “Mojito” (top left): some Parisians hail it as the “nouveau kir” for its popularity in the city.

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**New Orleans Carnival Kicks Off With Joan of Arc Parade**

New Orleans’s 2014 Carnival is in full swing. On January 6, the season started with the Joan of Arc Parade. Organized by the Krewe of Jeanne d’Arc, the spectacle returned this year for its sixth annual procession. The start of the Mardi Gras season and festivities coincided with the 602nd birthday of the patron saint of France.

The Krewe of Jeanne d’Arc, amounting to almost 200 members, is the organization that runs the Joan of Arc Parade annually. Each krewe during Carnival organizes their own unique event.

Taking place in New Orleans’s French Quarter, the parade on January 6, the season started with the Joan of Arc Parade. Organized by the Krewe of Jeanne d’Arc, the spectacle returned this year for its sixth annual procession. The start of the Mardi Gras season and festivities coincided with the 602nd birthday of the patron saint of France.

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Taking place in New Orleans’s French Quarter, the March lasts about 45 minutes and attracts a variety of spectators. Many of the spectators dress in traditional medieval garments. The procession includes knights, kings, queens, peasants, and three women, each representing a distinct stage in Joan of Arc’s life.

The krewe holds a contest annually to select the “Maid of Honor” Joan of Arc, who leads the parade. The role is open to any young woman aged 16-19 in the New Orleans area. Candidates must have proficient French-speaking abilities, and the selection process includes an interview with personnel from the Consulate General of France in New Orleans.

**Chicago Museum Presents “Interiors and Exteriors”**

The art exhibit “Interiors and Exteriors,” open now through March 16 at the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago, highlights the avant-garde and surrealist art movements in 1950s Paris.

The pieces have been curated from the Smart Museum of Art and libraries at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University.

Avant-garde and surrealist artists like Salvador Dalí and Albert Gleizes painted in Paris. The city’s Left Bank served as an inspirational ground for artists to create art based on human experiences.

This exhibit shows different artists’ interpretations of political and personal relationships in postwar France and the relationship between social interactions and psychological experiences.

During the year, a related series combining theater, film, and lectures will explore the legacies of these art movements. Among the films featured were Désordre by Jacques Baratier and Mai 68: Le Soulevement de la Jeunesse.

“Interiors and Exteriors” was curated by Jennifer Cohen, Ph.D., and Marin Sarvé-Tarr, Ph.D.

**Minneapolis Hosts Series on Avant-Garde Cinéaste**

Minneapolis and Paris’s Left Bank have never been closer. The city’s Trylon Cinema hosted “Chris Marker: Citizen of Everywhere, Citizen of Nowhere,” a film series looking back on the life of the French writer, photographer, and filmmaker, Chris Marker (1921-2012).

The artist has defied categorization since his earliest days among the artistic avant-garde based in the Left Bank of 1950’s Paris. His best-known films include “La Jetée” (1962) and “Le Joli Mai” (1963). The themes of time and memory are trademarks of his work within the Left Bank Cinema tradition he helped start.

Called “the prototype of the 21st-century man” by fellow French cinéaste Alain Resnais, Mr. Marker’s films are sometimes termed “essays” for their documentary-like approach. Many of his films bear a decided political slant. His writings include novels, poems, and reporting, and was published in outlets such as Esprit, Cahiers du Cinéma, and Editions du Seuil.

“Chris Marker: Citizen of Everywhere, Citizen of Nowhere” showed at Minneapolis’s Trylon Cinema from January 6 through 28 and featured films both made and inspired by the artist.
DJ Duo Daft Punk Triumphs at This Year’s Grammys

On January 26, at the 56th annual Grammy awards, the French dance music act Daft Punk took home five honors.

The duo, who are almost never seen without wearing their signature “robot” gear, won Best Dance/Electronica Album and Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical for their 2013 album, *Random Access Memories*, before achieving one of the night’s most coveted awards, Album of the Year. Arguably this past summer’s anthem, their single, “Get Lucky,” featuring U.S. musicians Pharrell Williams and Nile Rodgers, garnered two additional awards for the group: Best Pop Duo/Group Performance and Record of the Year.

The pair of DJs, who often appear but never speak in public, stayed true to their silent mystique even when accepting their awards. “I suppose the robots would like to thank...” said Mr. Williams, stepping in as a spokesperson for the two. When the pair didn’t approach the microphone, Mr. Williams continued, “You know honestly, I bet, France is really proud of these guys right now.”

The Record of the Year is a fresh example of French-U.S. teamwork in the music business. On their 2013 album, *Random Access Memories*, Daft Punk collaborated with Mr. Williams on two additional songs, “Lose Yourself to Dance” and “Touch.” The duo also enlisted U.S. music professionals including Panda Bear, Todd Edwards, and Julian Casablancas for the record.