



As a singer and clarinettist, **Erik Marchand** strikes me as one of the modern-time Breton music craftsmen whose evolution and rich musical diversity are akin to a philosophical approach.

Although he was born in Paris, part of his family came from Quelneuc, in the Gallo part of Brittany in the West of France. His childhood years were spent with a grandfather who sang and a father who played the guitar. In his teens, his taste for world music led him to dig out a fest-noz recording of his father's. This is where it all began.

He set out to collect traditional folk songs, starting with his own family and friends in Gallo country, where he would spend his holidays, before moving on to the area of Rostrenen, in Central Brittany. This was also the opportunity for him to learn Breton.

He took up the Breton bagpipe in a Celtic circle: "for me, it was a practical way of getting to know the specifics of Breton music", he says. He also sang in Gallo language at festoù-noz in Paris, before getting into kan ha diskant (chant and descant) with Erik Salaun and Yves Castel. He was eighteen when he heard Manuel Kerjean's voice for the first time at a fest-noz in Paris. Fascinated at how expressively rich and subtle the voice was, he became determined to introduce himself to Manuel and learn traditional Breton singing techniques under his guidance. Manuel put him to the test before accepting.

And that's how Erik Marchand, the baccalaureate in his pocket, left Paris for Rostrenen. He started having regular meetings with Manuel, learning not only the singing, but also the culture and language of Brittany. It was in 1975 when he settled down in Brittany for good, to work and sing there. A few months later, he accompanied Manuel Kerjean on stage for the first time. The audience liked him. In 1995, they celebrated twenty years of joint appearances on stage.

While he learnt singing, Erik also carried on practicing the Breton clarinet (Treujenn Gaol) and became passionate about gwerz, a traditional dramatic lament of rather obscure origins. In 1976 he worked for Dastum, classifying and indexing recordings. This led him to discover Madame Bertrand's voice and the wonderful melodies of gwerziou, such as Iwan Gamus. He was fascinated, and in his turn started singing this new repertoire, which had been gradually falling into oblivion since 1970.

Without even realizing it, he became one of the first professional singers of Breton folk tradition, alongside Yann-Fañch Kemener.

While singing at festoù-noz, more often than not with Manuel Kerjean, Marcel Guilloux, Yann-Fañch Kemener and others, he also recorded a portion of the Anthologie de Chants de Marins (volumes II, III, IV, and VIII) as well as boatmen songs, until 1985. This gave him the opportunity to take part in the recording of Gwerz Penmarc'h with Cabestan – Arnaud Maisonneuve's band – in 1989. He was also involved in a musical trio with Gilbert Bourdin and Christian Dautel, with whom he made two records: Chants à Danser de Haute-Bretagne (Dastum, 1982) and Chants à Répondre de Haute Bretagne (Le Chasse-Marée, 1985).

He was involved in the creation of the Gwerz band: their first album, entitled Gwerz (released by Nouvelle Musique de Bretagne) came out in 1985, followed three years later by Au-Delà, winner of the Grand Prix de l'Académie Charles CROS award, then by Gwerz Live. After working separately for a few years due to professional reasons, the band are now working on a new album and a much longed-for come back. This is very exciting.

In 1988, Erik met Thierry Robin and together, they set out to analyze and localize music in Central Brittany (which proved very close to Eastern music). This work also paved the way for two other records. The first one was a duet: An Henchoù Treuz won the Prix de l'Académie Charles CROS award. The second one was a magnificent record: the two friends made An Tri Breur (The Three Brothers) in collaboration with Hameed Khan. The newly formed Erik Marchand trio invited Yann-Fañch Kemener, among others, to share the musical experience.

Yet still Erik did not turn away from the clarinet, taking part in two clarinettists' compilations for Le Chasse-Marée as well as two records with the Quintet de Clarinet founded by Michel Aumont and of which he is a member.

Because of his passion for folk music, he was attracted rather early on to Romania and the Tarafs. He started learning Romanian and set out on a trip to the Bănăţ area. He still goes there for a few months every year. He invited the Taraf of Caransebeş to the Glomel clarinet festival in the Côtes d'Armor; together they made Sag An Tan Ell, a record that interweaves Breton and Romanian sounds with a Serbian influence.

Finally, in late 1997, he met up with Jacques Pellen and Pablo Fressu, the other members of the trio, to record an album with a distinctively Celtic tone.

But performing music is not enough for Erik. He is also involved in the Gwerz Pladenn label (Coop Breizh Edition) with which he has recorded some of his albums. He has also produced gypsy and Romani music albums and has become an artistic consultant for other albums. Finally, he played a part in the promotion of Romani traditional music.

Erik has taken part in movies ("Gwerz", JC Huitorel; Blues d'en France, and Y. De Peretti, amongst others), reports and TV programs (FR3, La sept, Arte, TV5, Planète) and

has also participated in radio shows.

He has also led traditional music workshops, especially with Marcel Guilloux. To conclude, Erik is always very pleased to help artists with constructive criticisms, but in moderation.

Jérémie Pierre Jouan.

Sources :

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