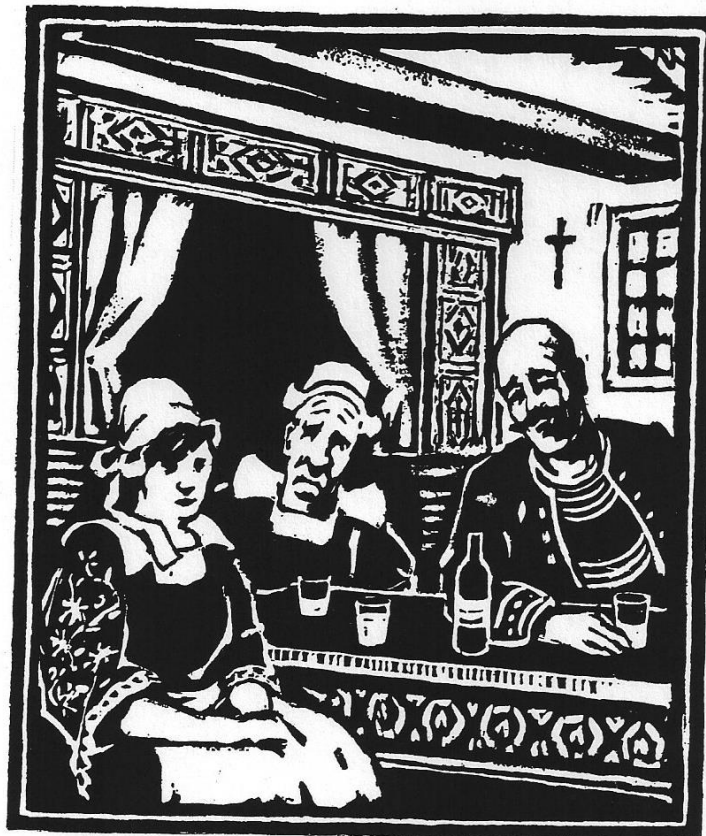


BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE
NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. BRANCH



We sat at a rough-hewn table, and the men discussed the crops.

Illustrations by Geoffrey Norman from "Bits from a Brittany Village,"
by Viola Paradise (The Forum, 1928) - see page 15

KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

No. 87

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The **U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL)** was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation on October 20, 1981. **Bro Nevez** ("new country" in the Breton language) is the newsletter produced by the U.S. ICDBL. It is published quarterly: February, May, August and November. Contributions, letters to the Editor, and ideas are welcome from all readers and will be printed at the discretion of the Editor.

The U.S. ICDBL provides Bro Nevez on a complimentary basis to a number of language and cultural organizations in Brittany to show our support for their work. Your Membership/Subscription allows us to do this. Membership (which includes subscription) for one year is \$20. Checks should be in U.S. dollars, made payable to "U.S. ICDBL" and mailed to Lois Kuter at the address above. Dues and contributions can also be sent electronically via the U.S. ICDBL web site – see below

Ideas expressed within this newsletter are those of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent ICDBL philosophy or policy.

The **Canadian Branch of the ICDBL** was relaunched January 1998. For information about the Canadian ICDBL contact: Jeffrey D. O'Neill, 1111 Broadview Ave. #205, Toronto, Ontario, M4K 2S4, CANADA (e-mail: jdkoneill@sympatico.ca). Telephone: (416) 422-0748.

U.S. ICDBL website: www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm

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## FROM THE EDITOR

As a new school year approaches, people in Brittany continue to work on dismantling the roadblocks put in place by the French government for expanded use of Breton in the schools. This will not be easy and will require a solid backing of Breton language education by Breton governmental representatives at all levels. As you will read in the pages which follow, Bretons are not afraid to take the matter of their language rights to the European Parliament and Court of Human Rights. You will also read that while the place of Breton in the schools may give one cause for pessimism, there is some positive progress in efforts to make Breton a more publicly visible and used language.

The summer is a time when Bretons demonstrate the vitality of their culture through dozens of large and small festivals where traditional dancers, singers and musicians, as well as composers and artists from all over the world present their best stuff. The celebratory air of Breton summer has been dampened this year by a strike of music industry workers (sound and light technicians, etc.) trying to protect social benefits from French government cutbacks. Striking workers have threatened some major Breton festivals with cancellation, although Bretons have been successful in keeping most lights and microphones on. Festival organizers and participants have everything to lose with cutbacks in workers benefits, so sympathy has been with the strikers. Loss of any safety nets in a job area where steady work is not secure will mean that many Bretons involved in the music industry could lose jobs. Governmental policies which threaten the health of the music and performance industry threaten both the cultural and economic health of Brittany. If France truly wanted to protect itself from American cultural imperialism, it seems as if every effort should be made to support the workers that make the performances of the musicians and actors of France possible.

# News from Brittany

Information for the following notes have been drawn from a variety of sources: notes and information sheets sent to me from Brittany, the Diwan internet site, Bretagne Hebdo (nos. 64 & 65, 25 juni-1 juillet & 2-8 juillet, 2003), Da Lenn (Summer 2003 publication of the Ofis ar Brezhoneg), Kannadig (no. 85, guere 2003, publication of the Union of Breton Teachers)

## Reunification of Brittany

On June 22, 2003, an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Bretons hit the streets of Nantes to demonstrate for the return of the Department of Loire-Atlantique to the official region of Brittany. Separated by decree of the Vichy government on June 30, 1941, Bretons have regularly demonstrated for the return of this department which is linked so closely with Brittany historically and culturally. (See the May issue of Bro Nevez for a basic introduction).

This demonstration was organized by CUAB, Comité pour l'Unité Administrative de la Bretagne, which has mobilized local government support for reunification, collecting some 4,000 signatures from local officials for this. CUAB has produced an excellent 12-page "newspaper" style supplement ("Bretagne unie") to their regular publication "Courrier de l'Unité" which I would be happy to photocopy for anyone who would like more background on this issue, or you can consult the CUAB website: [www.cuab.org](http://www.cuab.org). You can also find some very interesting coverage of the demonstration (speeches, interviews and images) on the An Tour Tan website: [www.antourtan.org/actu/manif-nantes-2003.asp](http://www.antourtan.org/actu/manif-nantes-2003.asp).

## Teachers for Bilingual Education in Brittany Exiled

Despite a shortage of teachers for bilingual programs in the public and Catholic schools of Brittany, teachers completing their training are being posted to schools far away from Brittany. This is contrary to an agreement by the Rector of the Academy of Rennes (the head of the school district encompassing much of Brittany) on a Convention on Bilingualism which as added to the "Contrat de Plan État-Région 2002-2006" that states that *the National Ministry of Education will make an effort to keep in the Academy of Rennes all teachers certified in Breton and to bring back those teachers capable of teaching their discipline in Breton or of teaching Breton, when those teachers request so.*

Despite those words expressing support for bilingual education two teachers who had been posted to schools in Versailles and Créteil (Paris region) have not been reassigned to schools in Brittany as they have requested. Three teachers who have competence to teach subjects through the medium of Breton have been named to posts

in Amiens, Martinique (a Caribbean island), and French Guyana (South America), despite their request to be part of bilingual programs in Brittany.

With growing numbers of students interested in learning Breton, sending qualified Breton teachers out of Brittany, and even out of France, to teaching positions where they will never use their language or even have the chance to speak Breton in a social setting outside of school is inexcusable.

**Note:** France has a number of territorial "possessions" throughout the world where the French flag is the official flag and Bastille Day is a national holiday. French Guyana, Martinique, Reunion and Guadeloupe are "Overseas Departments". New Caledonia and French Polynesia are perhaps the best known among a dozen tiny islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific which are called "dependent areas" or "overseas territorial collectives." They have locally elected governments but are ultimately ruled by France and the French Constitution. New Caledonia has had a simmering independence movement that makes world news from time to time. French Polynesia was in the news in the early 1990s when France was using an island there for nuclear testing.

## France: All Talk and No Action

In May 2003 French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin traveled to Quebec, Canada, and declared during his visit: "Cultural diversity is for us a political project. It is at the heart of our fight" [to combat globalization]. The Prime Minister praised Quebec on its success in protecting its values, language and culture during four centuries of Anglo-Saxon domination. Wouldn't it be nice if Mr. Raffarin was really talking about France when he talked about fighting for cultural diversity.

## France: The Land of Human Rights

France and language rights brought before the European Parliament

Nine Deputies of the European Parliament of various nationalities submitted a motion for a resolution from the Parliament denouncing France's failure to respect language rights within its borders. While it is not likely that the European Parliament will pass this motion, this act



brings the situation in France before the eyes of 624 European Deputies. The text follows:

**European Parliament – Session Documents B5-0539/2002, 19 December 2002**

**MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION**

Pursuant to Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure

By Miquel i Raynal, Carlos Bautista Ojeda, Jillian Evans, Ian Stewart Hudghton, Neil MacCormick, Nelly Maes, Camilo Nogueira Román, Josu Ortuondo Larrea and Eurig Wyn

On the failure to respect language rights in France

The European Parliament,

A. having regard to the decisions of the Council of State of the French Republic of 28 October 2002 in the cases involving the Syndicat national des enseignements du second degré *et al* and Conseil national des Groupes académiques de l'enseignement public, UNSA *et al* respectively,

B. noting that these decisions call into question, on the basis of supposed illegality, the rules that were to permit the integration of 'Diwan' Breton schools into the public education system and the perpetuation and development of immersion teaching methods for indigenous languages as well as equal-footing bilingual education using such languages,

1. Points out that human rights as conceived in Europe today include collective rights such as these, which are minority rights, and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity;
2. Calls on France, therefore, to attune its language laws to the situation in Europe;
3. Expresses its total solidarity with all the families affected by these decisions, with the teachers concerned, and with the public- and private-sector establishments that have developed these teaching methods;
4. Undertakes to bring to bear all the political means at its disposal to ensure that the various language communities of France have the legal means to facilitate the forms of education most apt to repair the damage caused by the linguicidal policy which has been pursued for many centuries by that country and to ensure the harmonious joint and several development thereof in the interests of the heritage of Europe.

## **France: The Land of Human Rights, Part 2 - France and language rights brought to the European Court of Human Rights**

Work for the Breton language continues in Brittany in the aftermath of the March rally in Rennes which gathered 15,000 demonstrators for the Breton language. At the end of May a case was brought to the European Court of Human Rights against France for its legislation which has blocked the use of regional languages in education. Those submitting the case are the Cultural Council of Brittany (a federation of some 50 cultural organizations), Diwan (the immersion Breton language schools), Calandretas (the confederation of immersion Occitan language schools in southern France), Unvaniezh ar Gelennerien Brezhoneg (Union of Breton Teachers), representatives from Diwan's staff, delegates of teachers unions and parents, and the President of Dihun (the association for parents of children in Catholic school bilingual programs). A weighty committee of supporters for the case includes writers, linguists, artists and musicians (including Alan Stivell, Gilles Servat, Denez Prigent, Robert Lafont, Eva Vetter, Joseph Martray, Louis Le Pensec, to name a few).

Underlined in the case is the fact that France's Council of State has annulled Diwan's entry into the public school system. The Council of State recognizes that France allows one to learn a regional language like Breton in the public schools, but considers an immersive style of teaching where such a language is used extensively for teaching and in the social life of the school detrimental to the place of French and not necessary to teach regional languages. Thus the State has decided that Breton and other regional languages should be taught as second languages, and should not become languages that students master for social use outside a classroom at school. In not allowing an immersive style of learning Breton in the public schools, the case argues that France violates freedom of the person and family, freedom of expression, and the freedom of thought and conscience, as well as the right to instruction which does not discriminate on the basis of language or cultural heritage.

The following is a statement given at the press conference on May 30, 2003 in Rennes when the case was submitted to the European Court of Human Rights. It was given by Bojan Brezigar, a Slovenian, and President of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL), a body created in 1982 at the initiative of members of the European Parliament. Mr. Brezigar is a member of the support committee assembled for the case.

*Many of you certainly are asking yourselves why I [as President of the EBLUL] am present at this press conference. Isn't this subject an internal problem for the French Republic: there are citizens who speak regional language who want their children to be educated in these languages. Certain representatives of the State wanted to*



*respond to this desire by giving the Diwan schools public status. In the end, the Council of State did not permit this, annulling decisions made by the National Ministry of Education. Some thus demand the modification of the Constitution so that regional languages can be recognized, but at this time there is no political will expressed in favor of such a change.*

*Let me tell you that I truly do not see why the Constitution must be modified. The protection and promotion of regional languages and even the entry of the Diwan schools into the public education system has nothing to do with the official language of the State. In Italy, a state with a judicial system based on the same principles of unity, the new law on linguistic minorities (the term used in Italy for what you call regional languages) foresees in its Article 1 that Italian is the official language of the State.*

*Nevertheless, the other languages are also promoted and protected and they represent no danger for the Italian State. I think that France must adopt the same principle: French is a great language which possesses an important cultural patrimony, centuries of written tradition and an essential international role. Can anyone seriously believe that the Breton language menaces French?*

*I insist on this point because I want to underline that I see no cultural or judicial reason to prevent the recognition of the Diwan schools or the granting of public status to them. But we affirm that these are the reasons advanced [to block Diwan from public school entry]. and I am here to support an initiative that will permit Breton children to follow their studies through the Breton language, while benefiting also from classes in French, to become perfectly bilingual.*

*Our support rests on the generally known principle that cultural diversity is part of the collective patrimony of Europe. I verify that the President of the European Convention, Mr. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, announced that linguistic diversity is inscribed in the principles of the European Constitution. We all remember equally that at the summit in Nice, in December 2000, Mr. Jacques Chirac, the French President of the Republic and President of the European Council at that time, announced with pride the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union, a charter which includes respect for linguistic diversity in its Article 22.*

*I must insist on the fact that cultural and linguistic diversity have long been a part of European values. It has been almost 25 years since the European Parliament started to work on this question which has grown in importance in parallel to the development of Europe.*

*But on the verge of the largest expansion Europe has ever known, we are on the one hand preoccupied by the future for the European Union which is divided by war and peace, and on the other, preoccupied equally by the*

*construction of this future. We want a Europe that is strong, competitive in the world, and we realize that this will only be possible if cultural and linguistic diversity are respected. This is our wealth; we must be proud of it and we must promote it.*

*The support we bring to the request brought before the European Court of Human rights by Diwan, its parents and teachers, the Cultural Council of Brittany, Union of Breton Teachers, Dihun and the Occitan Calandreas schools is tied to our profound conviction that in supporting this initiative we defend the collective patrimony of Europe as well as the process of European integration. We wish, in fact, for a Europe strong on the economic and political front and rich in its languages and cultures. France, with its wealth of regional languages, must be an important element in this.*

*It could only be people who truly understand nothing about the political challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century who would think that your action [the case presented to the court] is against democracy, liberty and against the principles of the Charter of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, a pedestal of France. I have confidence in the European Court that it will recognize the legitimacy of your course of action. I underline it because you are not fighting for yourselves, but for your children because you want them to live in a Europe whose citizens live in peace and flourish while conserving the language of their ancestors. I emphasize – this is not a combat against something or someone, but a fight for the future we construct all together.*

*Should the European Court of Human Rights accept the case, it would be at least three years before a decision is delivered. In the meantime you can be certain that Bretons will continue at all levels of government to work for the future of the Breton language.*

## **The Diwan Breton Language Schools**

*A 4.3% increase in enrollment is predicted for the fall 2003 school year despite continued financial challenges for Diwan. Currently there are 2,768 students in the Diwan schools.*

*Work has continued during the summer to raise funds and to work with local, regional and national level politicians to find ways to insure support for the expansion of schools, especially at the middle school and high school levels. Diwan representatives will also be meeting with members of the National Education system and government leaders to continue to seek public status for Diwan schools. After 25 years of success in giving children the tools to master both Breton and French as living languages for all aspects of everyday life, Diwan is not going to make any compromises on the immersion style of teaching and conducting school life through the Breton language.*

And work continues to open new classes and sites, including a Diwan school in Paris. Given the strong number of Bretons living in the Paris region, this is not at all surprising. The number necessary to open a class has been found; the fund-raising continues with hopes to open a school in September 2004. For more information you can consult the website: <http://diwanparis.free.fr>

For those who might want this information, the current leadership team of Diwan Breizh is as follows:

Anne le Corre and Patrig Hervé – Co-Presidents  
Joël le Baron, Tresorer  
François-Gaël Rios, Secretary  
Herlé Denez, Vice-President  
Fanch Langoet, Vice-President

Diwan's main office address is:

Diwan Breizh  
ZA Sant Ernel – BP 147  
29411 LANDERNE CEDEX  
FRANCE

Telephone: 02 98 21 34 95  
Website: [www.diwanbreizh.org](http://www.diwanbreizh.org)

## **“Yes to Breton”/“Ya d’ar Brezhoneg”**

In July the Ofis ar Brezhoneg (Office of the Breton Language) succeeded in getting its 500<sup>th</sup> signature in the “Yes to Breton” campaign in which companies and organizations agree to implement ways to increase Breton use in their operation. This can be through bilingual signs, publications in Breton, or in assisting employees to take Breton classes and use it in the workplace. “Gouelioù Breizh” (Breton Festivals) which include the organizers of 18 major festivals of Brittany, was the 500<sup>th</sup> signer. Ofis ar Brezhoneg is now aiming at 1,000 signatures as its campaign continues to encourage and assist businesses and organization to make Breton a part of everyday life.

## **Regional Prizes for the Future of Breton / Prizioù rannvroel dazont ar Brezhoneg**

As noted in the May issue of Bro Nevez, Ofis ar Brezhoneg organizes an annual prize ceremony to honor individuals, associations, and businesses who make Breton a part of their public life. Supported by the Regional Council of Brittany, the awarding of 4,000 Euros to the winners in each category of this “competition” took place in Treguier in May. Winners and runners up in this second year of the prizes reflect the diverse ways in which Bretons live and create in the Breton language.

Individual Category - the winner was Gérard Gilbert of Assérac who learned Breton as an adult and uses it in family life and every chance he gets in the Guérande region of southeastern Brittany (a “border” area for the Breton language historically). Runners up included Katell Chantreau of Rennes who formed the theater group Barzhanoff and has written a work in Breton on her travels to South America. Also honored were Hélène Palut from Plouvorn and Pierre Costa, an Occitan, who traveled throughout Europe on bicycle to introduce the Breton language to others and learn about other languages of Europe. And Olivier Riaudel was noted for his inclusion of Breton in his religious and spiritual life.

Associations Category – The winner was Keit Vimp Bev, a publishing house for children’s books and games. They were cited for their production of Meuriad, a monthly magazine in Breton for youth, which also serves as a medium for Breton animation artists. Runners up included Dizolo, a multimedia center linking children, their bilingual schools, and parents in leisure time activities in Breton. This is part of a federation of cultural organizations in Rennes called Skeudenn. Kentelioù an Noz offers evening Breton classes for adults. Based in Nantes, it also organizes informal evening activities where learners can practice Breton. Radio Kerne was the first all-Breton radio station in Brittany. It has pioneered Breton programs for children in its 60 hours of programming each week.

Business World Category – The winner here was CCI of Quimper Cornouaille (a sort of “chamber of commerce”) which has instituted bilingual signs, a bilingual web site and Breton classes for staff at their work site. Runners up included L’Étude Guégon Immobilier, a real estate office who offers Breton on its billing and internet site and who is creating “for sale” signs (“da werzhaf”) for its properties. Also honored was the creperie Ar Gavotenn in Nantes which has put Breton on signs and menus as well as its business vehicle. Ar Bed Keltiek is well known as a store specializing in Breton books, CDs and other goods, but the shops in Quimper and Brest also encourage the use of Breton among staff and with shop visitors.

## **An Here – A Pioneer in Breton Language Publishing Needs Help**

An Here was created in 1983 to fill a void in the publication of badly needed Breton language books for children and youth. It has published over 250 titles – original works as well as translations of classic children’s literature from around the world. Since 1994 An Here has also been publishing French language books, including one of the best sellers of Breton editions: *Mémoires d’un paysan bas-breton*, by Jean-Marie Déguignet which sold over 260,000 copies in three printings.

An Here is also responsible for the production of the first monolingual Breton dictionary in 1995 (with 10,000 entries) and a second much expanded edition in 2001 (21,300 entries). A dictionary for younger Breton learners in the schools is in the works as well. Despite assistance from the Region of Brittany and other funders, these projects have been extremely expensive, and today An Here is in trouble.

There is critical need for books for children as the bilingual and Diwan schools expand, and there is always need for well researched dictionaries and reading material for all ages of Breton readers and writers. But the market is a small one, and commercial success is not possible.

Those who would like to support the production of Breton language books and the work of An Here to provide tools for children and Breton users are invited to contribute. You can contact An Here directly at the address below..

An Here  
Toull ar ranig  
29470 Plougastell-Daoulaz  
France

tel.: 33 02 98 30 65 40  
an.here@wanadoo.fr

## A New Breton-English / English-Breton Mini-Dictionary

David ar Rouz. Geriadurig / Mini-Dictionary:  
Brezhoneg-Saozneg / English-Breton.  
Yoran Embanner/Liligast. 2003. ISBN 2-914855-03-6.

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

After the production and sales of 15,000 copies of a mini-dictionary for Breton-French/French-Breton, Yoran Embanner (Yoran Editions) has produced a mini-dictionary for French-Corsican/Corsican-French and a Breton-German, German-Breton dictionary is also now out. OK, so you don't speak French, Corsican, or German. In that case you can bite into a new Breton-English/English-Breton version which includes some 8,000 entries.

Indeed, you could swallow this tiny little book in just a few bites – see actual size below. But, it's best to keep it handy because this is not only a cute little book but a nice little resource for a Breton learner or anyone who wants to quickly find a word.

The basics of any dictionary are all there – pronunciation, grammatical information (noun, verb, masculine/feminine, etc.), plural form, and translation and a phrase or two in some cases.

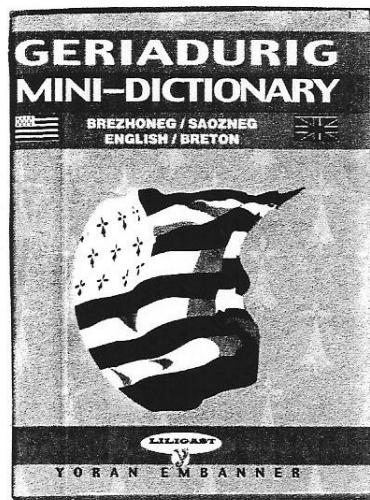
The first 30 pages of the book include an introduction to the Breton language and to the dictionary, stating clearly that "given the format, this dictionary cannot be considered as more than an instrument to discover the Breton language, since it contains only the basic vocabulary of everyday life." The introductory section also describes how each entry is set up, how to look for Breton words (given mutations of the first letters), and a pronunciation guide for both Breton and English. And there is a short bibliography and list of other Breton-English resources.

This is a truly pocket sized dictionary which might look like a novelty item, but is in fact a useful tool.

Here's some good news. I am now negotiating an order of these dictionaries to sell to U.S. ICDBL members and Bro Nevez subscribers in the U.S. and Canada. If you would be interested in purchasing this little gem, it would be helpful if you would let me know. Write to me or e-mail me at the address on the cover page of this newsletter.

## International Celtic Congress

Each year scholars and non-scholars from the Celtic countries - Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man and Cornwall - gather for the International Celtic Congress. This year the Congress took place at the end of July in Dublin, and had as its theme "The Celtic Heritage and Traditions in a Changing World." For information about next year's congress, try the e-mail address: [celtcong@bretanet.net](mailto:celtcong@bretanet.net)





## The Cultural Institute of Brittany

Skol Uhel ar Vro, the Cultural Institute of Brittany, is a group to promote Breton culture and knowledge about it. It has some 750 members who work in 17 topical sections (economy, music, literature, history, etc.) to meet to exchange ideas, organize conferences and workshops, and support publications.

In 2001 the Cultural Institute established the Maison de l'Histoire (Ti an Istor) to promote Breton history and make it more accessible to a wide public. And this organization has established a great web site with a history magazine called Dalc'homp Sonj where you can read articles and find lots of information: [www.histoire-bretagne.com](http://www.histoire-bretagne.com) for Ti an Istor, and [www.dalchompsonj.fr](http://www.dalchompsonj.fr) for the magazine

The Cultural Institute also publishes a newsletter about its activities (Lizher'Minig) and a magazine (Sterenn) about Breton culture more generally.

In recent years the Cultural Institute has stepped up its work to organize (in partnership with other associations) one-day conferences on various themes.

Here are three very interesting conferences coming up this fall:

September 27 in Saint-Malo

**"Brittany / Great Britain, 1940-1944, links of liberty"**

This explores World War II and the communication and travel between Brittany and Great Britain of people in the Resistance. The day includes films about such action, round-tables of historians and speakers who were actually active in this period as go-betweens. In the evening, four new members of the Order of the Ermine, individuals who have given exceptional service to Brittany, will be "sworn in."

October 17 in Guérande

**"Tourism and Salt Culture"**

The Guérande area of southeastern Brittany is famous for its salt marshes and centuries of salt "farming". This day of films, talks and roundtable discussions focus on this industry, wetlands and

urban development of Brittany's coasts for tourism.

November 17 in Saint-Nazaire.

**"Historical links between ship building in the Clyde (Scotland) and Loire estuaries"**

As the title describes this day includes talks on the history of ship building in both Great Britain and Brittany and the links between them, with a special focus on the shipyards of Saint Nazaire.

I would be pleased to send the flyer about these conferences to anyone interested. The Cultural Institute of Brittany hopes to have a web site up soon, so keep an eye on: [www.institut-culturel-de-bretagne.com](http://www.institut-culturel-de-bretagne.com)

## Bretagne Vivante/Living Brittany

The SEPNB – Société pour l'Étude et la Protection de la Nature en Bretagne (Society for the Study and Protection of Nature in Brittany) – was founded in 1958, well before "Earth Day" or ecology became a word school children learned. It's initial work focused on the creation of bird refuges on Brittany's coast, and has grown to include many environmental concerns in all five Breton departments.

Today the SEPNB oversees 75 natural sites and reserves in partnership with local government bodies, the regional councils of Brittany and Pays de la Loire, general councils of the five Breton departments, and many private land owners.

Twenty salaried teachers, nature reserve "rangers," and volunteers help schools and visitors with educational programs at many of the natural sites, organizing walks, conferences and workshops.

Bretagne Vivante produces four different publications. The quarterly journal called Penn ar Bed has been published for forty years and includes articles for amateur naturalists as well as biologists. Elong is a bit more specialized and geared to scientists. Members of Bretagne Vivante receive a more general newsletter on the environment called Bretagne Vivante, and a quarterly magazine called L'Hermine Vagabonde is also published for 8 to 12 year old children.

Numerous studies and inventories of species have also been completed which give key information in planning action to protect seacoasts, wetlands, and wildlife.

For more details about the work of Bretagne Vivante / SEPNB, check out their web site:  
<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/bretagne-vivante-sepnb/>

## U.S. ICDBL website – New Links

<http://www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm>

I get frequent requests from students who are researching this or that topic about the Breton language or Breton history. Trying to provide assistance without writing their term paper for them is always a challenge. More often than not I have suggested they use the links page of the U.S. ICDBL website to locate basic resources which would lead them to more in-depth information from Brittany itself. Our links page – thanks to Mary Turner – has been an excellent resource to get to basic information about Brittany and the Breton language.

As good as it already is, one of my summer projects has been to work on the links section of our website to get rid of sites with dead-end addresses and to update it to include new sites that I have found good information sources – and new sites some of you have recommended. This was a long task since I actually looked at each site we had listed – not an unpleasant task, and certainly a learning experience. I got rid of a few and added others, so that we now have a great up-to-date links section that should allow people to find some excellent sources of information about Brittany. As Mary had done in setting up the links section, there are basic topic areas to focus in on a particular subject more easily.

Breton Language  
Breton history & culture (all topics)  
Breton cultural organizations  
Media / books / publishers  
Music, dance & festivals  
Some musicians  
Bretons around the world  
Inter-Celtic organizations

Travel & tourism  
Shopping  
Other servers and search engines  
Discussion groups

I have to say that I do not spend a great deal of time on the internet. I am certain that there are other terrific web sites that we should add to our links page and would welcome suggestions.

One topic area I would like to add is “**North American Festivals with a Breton presence**” (or some such title). This would include sites for festivals in the U.S. where one can hear Breton music or where an information stand (like the one we do each year at the Potomac Inter-Celtic Festival) is present. This listing of sites would be very useful for those seeking a festival where they can hear Breton music, and it might also provide important contact information for Breton musicians who hope to travel here and perform.

Another topic area I would like to see added would be “**Celtic Creativity**” (or some such title) for sites on any topic, but Celtic in theme or origin, that are outstanding in design and imagination, or just plain fun. We could select this with a “competition” where we have a jury of “serious” U.S. ICDBL internet users to judge entries. And this could certainly include sites that are already on our links page. I propose this category because I use the internet to find facts, and judge sites by the quantity of useful information I can get. But the internet can certainly also provide entertainment and beautiful imagery.

And to keep the links page changing we could also do a **monthly feature** – a site about Brittany that a U.S. ICDBL Member or Bro Nevez reader proposes to be highlighted. This could be a site that is featured just for a short period of time, or added to the links section. Perhaps it could be a site created by Bretons which is especially strong in its inclusion of information in English.

Your ideas are welcome. So that choices do not become overwhelming, a links page should be relatively “lean and mean” but it should also change and reflect the best that is out there – great sources for information and creatively designed sites as well.

# Brittany and Music - Tunes from Lower Brittany

Polig Monjarret. Tonioù Breizh-Izel 2: Musique Populaire de Basse-Bretagne / Folk Music of Western Brittany. Bodadeg ar Sonerion & Dastum. 2003.

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

Polig Monjarret has had a hand in a number of key organizations and activities which have fostered a renaissance of Breton music. As noted in the May issue of Bro Nevez, he was a founder of the Kan ar Bobl music contest/festival in Brittany which celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. He was also in on the beginnings of the Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient and a co-founder of Bodadeg ar Sonerion, the association for pipers and bombarde players that encompasses thousands of musicians in Brittany's bagadoù ("bagpipe bands"). During its 60 years, the BAS has fostered not only a love of Breton music, but also a sense of pride in being Breton in many thousands of young people of Brittany.

Twenty years ago Polig published Tonioù Breizh-Izel, which included 2,365 tunes he collected during the 1940s and 50s from older masters of Breton instrumental music and song. In contrast, O'Neill's classic Music of Ireland has just 1,850 tunes "sketched out" in a similar manner. Monjarret's 638 page book focuses primarily on Breton dances, but also includes marches, cantiques and wedding tunes.. Both tune books give musicians the basic skeleton of the music. It's up to the performer to give it the swing, expression and grace notes that truly make it music.

The 2,365 tunes in the first Tonioù Breizh-Izel have given Breton musicians a treasure trove of material to draw from, and many have. In the days before recording equipment was available to all but a few scholars or wealthy collectors, noting tunes on paper was the only way to save many from extinction. While Breton pipers were passing their heritage along to younger generations, traditional music was not thriving in the 1940s when Polig Monjarret started collecting. Young people were for the most part not

interested in "old stuff." It was in the 1950s that the bagadoù started to take off as a new modern phenomenon, but the explosion of interest in "roots" and Breton identity would not be seen until the late 1960s and 70s on a wider scale. Thankfully, collectors of both tunes and song texts had long been busy in Brittany, and while there was a period when traditional music and song was not highly popular, there was never a gap in the transmission from one generation to the next.

Those creating new institutions like the Bodadeg ar Sonerion and occasions for performance like festivals and the fest noz which was reinvented in the 1950s can be credited with giving Breton music a huge push forward. The resources for music learners continue to grow with fine recordings and continued collection from old masters, as well as the edition of print tune collections.

Polig Monjarret had more archived away than we knew when we were awed by the publication of the first Tonioù Breizh-Izel in 1984. Thankfully he is prepared to share yet more of his precious work in the summer debut of the second volume of Tonioù Breizh-Izel, fittingly co-edited by Bodadeg ar Sonerion and Dastum, an organization which has done so much to foster the collection and transmission of traditional music since its founding in 1972. Tonioù Breizh-Izel 2 is a hefty 700 pages with another 2,000 tunes collected in the 1940s and 50s.

Thank you Polig!!

Note: This is a book I did not have to see to review, but I did glean important details from information in Ar Soner (no. 369, May/June/July 2003), the magazine of Bodadeg ar Sonerion.



# Brittany and Music - New Recordings

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

Jean Baron and Christian Anneix. Hentad / Journey. Keltia Musique KMCD 140. 2003. 73'59

This new CD is appropriately titled "Journey," and in celebration of 30 years of playing together, it takes you on a journey with Jean Baron (bombarde, veuze, and song) and Christian Anneix (biniou koz and accordion). My first longer journey to Brittany was the summer of 1975, and I recall seeing Baron and Anneix play at a competition for "sonneurs de couple" (paired bombarde and biniou koz) in a little garden next to the cathedral in Quimper during the Fêtes de Cornouaille. I have no idea if they won that competition or even if this memory is more imagination than reality. I carefully recorded my adventures in a journal that summer but failed to enter any names of the pipers I heard that afternoon. Nevertheless, as someone relatively new to Breton music who was a big fan of piping of all kinds, I was impressed. It was certainly a thrill for me to hear live what I had only heard before on rare recordings. Novice fan of the bombarde/biniou duo or not, I should have been impressed by Baron and Anneix. After forming their partnership in 1973 they won two consecutive championships for bombarde-biniou in Gourin in 1975 and 1976.

During the 1970s this duo continued to hone their skills as "sonneurs de couple" but they also formed the group "La Godinette: which featured the music of eastern Gallo Brittany (Upper Brittany). At this period of time the rich traditions of this part of Brittany were much less known, and one would have to say less valued than the traditions of Breton-speaking western Brittany. All too often in those days the Bretons of Gallo Brittany looked to Breton speakers of the west as the "true Bretons." But in the 1970s attitudes were changing and the Gallo song and dance heritage was being promoted in the creation of festivals to celebrate it. In 1976 Baron and Anneix helped launch a big one - the Monterfil festival.

As is the case for the best musicians of Brittany, Baron and Anneix collected tunes and songs from

older masters, and sought every opportunity to learn from other pipers as well as to help new generations learn through workshops, recordings and publications.

Baron and Anneix have been a premier pair on bombarde-biniou during their 30 years together, winning numerous competitions. They have also shown that the bombarde and biniou - in pair - are much more versatile than one might expect. They have used these instruments in concerts and festoù-noz with the group La Godinette in the early 1970s and the group Gwenva (with accordion player Etienne Greadjean and fiddler Pierrick Lemou) in the 1980s. But, they have also played with a symphony orchestra and choir for the composition by Breton composer Jef le Penven, "Cantate du Bout du Monde". They have played in a Renaissance music ensemble, La Compagnie Maître Guillaume, touring in France, and they have played with a three ton carillon with 50 bells. They have gone back to earlier roots of the bombarde and biniou in trio with a drum - a combo popular in Brittany in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - and they have formed a new trio, expanding the well established pairing of bombarde with big church organ to include the biniou. They have toured and performed with the best of Breton musicians and have been on stage with greats of Celtic piping, including Carlos Nuñez on gaita, Fred Morrison on Scottish Highland bagpipes, and Paddy Keenan and Liam O'Flynn on uilleann pipes.

The CD title Hentad / Journey refers not only to travel through a variety of musical encounters, but also throughout the world. Baron and Anneix have been ambassadors for the bombarde and biniou in tours throughout France, Italy, Greece, England, Ireland, (and I assume Scotland), Corsica, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Poland, Morocco, India, Canada, and the U.S. (Minnesota).

So what about this CD? This CD captures beautifully not only the traditional paired playing of bombarde-biniou, but also the other partnerships with ensembles noted above (and then some). There's a little of

everything from all periods of their 30 years, giving a good idea of their skills as musicians and their creativity in taking the bombarde and biniou into new areas of music making.

For those who have followed the 30 years of Baron and Anneix, the jacket notes are a veritable "family album" - a chronology nearly year-by-year of memorable concerts, tours and events - with some 40 photos to illustrate them (you won't believe the strange and exotic costumes these two guys wore). The 23 pages of notes also give a very good introduction to their musical evolution, as well as to their dedication to the transmission of Breton music and culture. Each of the 13 selections on the CD is well described. Notes are in French with substantial (although not total) translation in English.

In celebrating their 30 years of music and friendship, Baron and Anneix have not been stingy with this CD and you get 74 minutes of great music. The press release that came with the CD notes that these two have played at over 2,000 fest noz to over 1 million people, traveled 500,000 kilometers, winning 25 first place competitions (19 second and 9 third) and participating in over 20 recordings. Not bad for 30 years. And even if the dancing may slow down a bit, I would guess that these two will still be contributing to the Breton music scene at the end of another 30 years. We can hope so.

Check out their web site: <http://baron-anneix.ifrance.com>



**Didier Squiban. Ballades. L'OZ Production. L'OZ 42. 2002. 51'56.**

Like Baron and Anneix, pianist Didier Squiban has toured widely throughout the world with his music. Like the new CD by Baron and Anneix which evokes "voyage" through time and musical styles, Squiban's new CD also has a "travel" theme to it. And his CD does move through various styles and geographic locales.

Most of Didier Squiban's performances and CDs are solo piano (like this one), but he has been part of a

number of unusual ensembles. He has worked in pair with Yann Fañch Kemener in a surprising and innovative pairing of piano and traditional ballads and songs for dances. And in 2000 he recorded on CD his very ambitious "Symphonie Bretagne" incorporating full symphony orchestra, choir, piano, accordion bombarde, percussion and saxophones in a both classical and jazzy tribute to Brittany. Most of Didier Squiban's compositions and arrangements are based on traditional Breton melodies or are inspired by Brittany and reflect a classical training, solid experience as a jazz musician, and an understanding and love for Breton traditional music.

This newest CD includes nine selections from three to eight minutes in length which have that same reflective mood and improvisational swing that characterizes Squiban's style. The notes to the CD introduce very well the whole approach you will want to take when you sit down and enjoy this CD. And it is best listened to just sitting back and letting your imagination wander. Don't use it as background music - you'll miss the little subtle touches that make Squiban a great artist. And as you sit back with the music, enjoy the nine beautiful photographs by Michel Thersiquel which grace the CD notes - ferocious sea surf and calm inlets and low tides, an algae decorated fountain, and wetland grasses. This pairing of music and great photography of Brittany is a characteristic of Squiban's CDs.

The CD notes themselves describe best the content of this CD and give a bit of background about Didier Squiban and his travels, so I have included them here. This English translation of Squiban's French introduction was done for the CD notes by U.S. ICDBL Member Mary Turner. Good work, Mary!

The notes make a bit more sense if you know the numbers one through nine in the Breton language. These numbers are used to refer to the cuts on the CD and are not the titles of tunes. Here's a mini-lesson to guide you through the text which follows:

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| Unon = one   | C'hwech = six |
| Daou = two   | Seizh = seven |
| Tri = three  | Eizh = eight  |
| Pevar = four | Nav = nine    |
| Pemp = five  |               |

## Ballades CD Notes:

*2002 was an exceptional year for me. It began with a big tour of Asia (thanks Alain) and ended with this recording which reflects a good number of my human and musical experiences. It was a year of new encounters and discoveries, but above all a year of opening up to the world. I chose the generic term "ballades" (ballads) in homage to Frédéric Chopin and John Coltrane for my classical and jazz influences, but also for its analogy to the French word "balade", or stroll. From ballades to balades, I invite you to join me for a musical promenade:*

- *Romantic strolls from Marrakesh to Istanbul (Unan) and on the Crozon peninsula (Daou).*
- *The "Andro an Douar" (Tri), the turning of the Earth, is a journey where traditional Indonesian (Jakarta), chinese (Peking) and Breton (Auray) themes travel side by side.*
- *Return home with "L'Angelus de Noël", played as a lively gavotte, before revisiting two Celtic lands, Ireland and Scotland, with C'hwec'h and Seizh, "Eleanor" and "Flowers of Scotland", the famous popular hymn.*
- *A stroll through time with Eizh, in homage to bard Manu Lann Huel.*
- *Nav, the last ballad, inspired by a traditional Cambodian theme that reminds me of a surprising encounter with a childhood friend from Ploudalmézeau at the Russian market in Phnom Penh.*

*2002 will also remain for me a year of hope and renaissance thanks to the courage of a seven year old Breton and his mom (Pevar).*

*Didier Squiban (transl. Mary Turner)*

This CD provides a pleasant stroll, but definitely not a boring path, with its changing moods and swings through varied countries and musical countrysides. For those who already know the piano work of Didier Squiban, this CD will bring no surprises. So much the better.



## HEARD OF, BUT NOT HEARD

Notes for the following CDs are based on information found in the following Breton magazines: Musique Bretonne 178, mai-juin 2003; Ar Soner 369, mai-juin-juillet 2003; Ar Men 134, mai-juin 2003 & 135, juillet-août 2003.

### **Accordéons. Bretagne Attitude.**

Keltia Musique KMCD 141.

This CD includes 14 young accordion players of Brittany selected by Christian Anneix (best known as a binioù player, but also a button accordion master). They come from all parts of Brittany, bringing a variety of styles and repertoires.

### **Bagad ar Meilhoù Glaz [Moulin Vert].**

#### Steir'tijhenn.

Editions Pluriel PLCD 23005.

A great bagad featuring their competition (and other?) performances from recent years.

### **Bagad de Vannes-Melinerion. Dour ar velin.**

Self-produced CD, Bagad de Vannes BV01.

The bagad from the city of Vannes (Gwened) is one of the oldest of Brittany, celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004. The music on this CD is from 2000 and 2001 performances and features music from the Vannes and Guérande areas.

### **Bagad Landi. Setu.**

Bagad Landi BL 02/1.

This is the second recording by this bagad including competition performances from 2000 to 2002.

### **Bagadoù - l'Anthologie.**

Coop Breizh CD 945.

This is a two-CD collection with 34 selections by the best of Brittany's bagpipe bands. 14 are in the top level today and the CD includes a few bagads who have marked the history of this uniquely Breton bagpipe band: Bleimor, Brest Sant Marc and the Kevrenn de Rennes. A beautifully composed 50-page booklet presents 19 bagads and includes other introductory materials.



**Les Baragouineurs. BPM.**

La P'tite Merveille / Coop Breizh BB0301 - DB10.

Claude Darmor and Gilles Evilaine set well known songs of Upper Brittany to an electronic beat. Hard to tell from reviews if this is intended to be just a joke or is an unsuccessful experiment in musical mixing.

**Yann Dour & Tenzin Gönpö. Bretagne Tibet - Toenn ar Bed.**

Coop Breizh CD 934 - DB10.

Accordion player Yann Dour creates a piece where Breton and Tibetan musics meet. Is there any place on the earth that Bretons have not explored?

**Emsaverien. Seconds vendanges.**

Créon Music.

This is a group from the Nantes area with dances and melodies from their home country.

**L'Epille / Groupement Culturel Breton des Pas de Vilaine. Aux sources du patrimoine oral de Haute-Bretagne; chansons traditionnelles recueillies à Rieux - Saint-Jean-la-Poterie.**

EPL 007. Distribution by Dastum.

The title says it all for this CD: To the roots of the oral tradition of Upper Brittany - traditional songs collected in Rieux and Saint-Jean-la-Poterie (Redon area). This CD includes ballads as well as songs for dancing recorded from 1960 to 2003. The CD includes rich documentation, and is the seventh such recording by the organization L'Epille documenting the very rich song tradition of Upper Brittany.

**EV. L'essentiel.**

Créon Music & Epoque vinyl, 1983-1984.

This Breton-Finnish group from Nantes has a punk-rok style with song texts composed in both Breton and Finnish. The band has a unique sound and a very strong following in Brittany.

**Filfala. Zao.**

Coop Breizh CD 941.

This is a fest-noz "quartet" with an exotic touch of other worlds. They are especially good with dances of eastern Brittany: ridees, ronds de Loudéac and dances from the salt marsh area of southeastern Brittany.

**Youenn Gwernig. Identity.**

Coop Breizh CD 944.

Identity is a strong theme for Youenn Gwernig, a poet and sculptor who spent years in the U.S. in the 1960s. This CD is typical of other recordings by Gwernig in its strong texts (in Breton, French, English and a mix of all). Youenn Gwernig always provides interesting poetry.

**Hudel. Musiques bretonnes et d'ailleurs.**

L'Asso6 de Guémené. Keltia Musique RSCD 253.

This CD features dance music of Brittany and Ireland with musicians of the group Hudel: Hilaire Rama (bass), Nicolas Quémener (guitars), Pol Jézéquel (flute) and Laurant Dacquay (fiddle), and guest Ronan le Bars (uilleann pipes).

**Philippe Janvier. Dañs ar vuhez.**

Spectacle de la confédération War'l Leur. JP02.

This is the music composed by Philippe Janvier for a choreography created and performed in 2000. Included are a number of Breton dances in new arrangements performed by some of Brittany's best singers and musicians.

**Katé-Mé. Entrance.**

Trad'Mark Productions. CDKM01 DB5X2.

This group includes guitar, bass, bombardes, and strong vocals. This is their first recording and they perform a jazzy, funky arrangement of Breton music. The reviewer for the CD found them original in their sound and full of promise.

**Hervé Le Lu and Philippe Turbin. Dawad - Bombardes et piano.**

The improbable duo of raucous bombarde and piano becomes quite probable and successful in this CD. Not the first time it's been done, but a relatively rare combination of instruments.

**Gildas Moal and René Chaplain. Fin 'Zun.**

Coop Breizh CD 938 - DB10.

These "sonneurs de couple" are champions on the paired playing of bombarde and binioù, and hail from the Tregor region of northern Brittany. They perform a variety of melodies, marches and dances.

**Carols Nuñez. Un Galicien en Bretagne.**

Sony SAN 5110222.

Carlos Nuñez, a gaita player from Galicia, has spent a great deal of time in Brittany (and the other Celtic countries) where he has been a headliner at major Celtic festivals. In this CD he pays homage to a country he has come to love and a number of great Breton singers and musicians are invited to this very interesting collection of Breton music arrangements, from Alan Stivell and Dan ar Braz to Liam O'Flynn and Patrick Molard who join Nuñez in an uilleann pipes/Highland pipes/gaita trio - that alone seems worth the price of the CD for me.

**Red Cardell. Cardelectro.**

CD Kas Ha Bar / Avel Ouest. RK 006-DB 10.

This is the sixth recording by this "rock band" with a touch of tradition in its melodies and use of bombarde and accordion.

**Joseph-Guy Ropartz. La Chasse du Prince Arthur, Cloche des morts, Soir sur les chaumes, Odelettes, Quatre poèmes.**

Timpani Ic 1703.

Joseph-Guy Ropartz (1864-1955) is one of Brittany's classical composers. In a style reminiscent of his teacher, César Franck, these symphonic works are inspired by literature, including Brizeux's Bretons and work by Anatole Le Braz. They are performed by the Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg and singers Vincent Le Texier and Cécile Perrin.

**Gilles Servat. Escales.**

CD Columbia / Sony SAMPCD 2572.

This is a review of all styles of one of Brittany's best known "singer-songwriters" from the militant days of the 1970s to more tender songs of love, and the interpretation of a few Irish ballads.



Heard any great Breton music lately? I would love to receive CD reviews from U.S. ICDBL Members who have been listening to Breton music. Tell us about your favorite - old or new!!

**New BRO NEVEZ Index Available  
(1981 through May 2003)**

As the editor for Bro Nevez, I find myself paging through back issues to see what topic has already been covered, news released, or book or CD reviewed and noted. This can be very time consuming so to make my own life easier I have indexed all issue of Bro Nevez from the very first in 1981 through May 2003. And index already existed to cover 1981 through 1993, but for the most recent years there was little to help me relocate past articles.

The new index adds up to a hefty 113 pages. Besides a general index of topics and names, I have created a section just for books, listing those we have reviewed and those we have just noted by author. So far Bro Nevez has includes 234 book reviews and 436 brief book notes. I have also created a section on music recordings, by musician or group. This indexes 275 reviews and 299 briefly noted recordings.

I would be happy to send the index to anyone interested, but there will be fee to cover costs of photocopying and postage:

Full Index - \$15.00

Section I: Topics & Names - \$8.00

Section II: Book Reviews & Notes - \$4.00

Section III: Music Recordings - \$3.00

Please add \$2 to any of those fees if ordering from Europe.

**Special Ar Falz Issue Available:  
"Parlers de Bretagne"**

The editors of the Breton journal Ar Falz sent me extra copies of a special 110+ page issue published in May 2002 on languages. This includes excellent articles (in French) about the Breton language and Gallo, as well as articles on language policies and teaching more generally in Brittany and a special dossier on Palestine. I currently have four copies available - available free to good homes. (Although I would appreciate a small contribution to cover postage.)

## An American in Brittany, 1928

"Bits from a Brittany Village" by Viola Paradise. The Forum Vol. 80, No. 3, September 1928  
(with drawings by Geoffrey Norman)

The following travel account is set in Billiers, a small port at the mouth of the Vilaine River located just to the south of Muzillac (Morbihan). On a map of Brittany, find Vannes and head southeast towards La Roche-Bernard (located on the Vilaine River). Muzillac is about two-thirds of the distance towards La Roche-Bernard. You can also find it by locating the town of Questembert and heading south. This account is not as rich in ethnographic detail as some travel tales of Brittany, but it certainly brings the people and day-to-day life of this period to life.

For days, now, the slanting rush of rain and the clatter of wooden shoes have made my typewriter sound like a feeble chatterer, to be deserted again and again for a view, out my east window, of black-clothed figures hurrying along the village street, or out my west window, past low meadows and salt marshes, to the sea a mile beyond. But most often it is the village view which draws me. Although wooden shoes are by now an old story, I can never quite believe them, nor yet the squat, broad felt hats of the men, with their two long velvet streamers down the back, nor the black billowy nunlike clothes of the women - full skirts just escaping the ground, yoked blouses tucked in bulkily at the waist, three-cornered black shawls about their shoulders. Now in the rain, their white starched caps are covered by an extra shawl. Is there no color in the world except the green of the bent grass?

Yes, growing out of the swooping thatched roof across the way is a lovely mauve moss, but it losses itself gently in the taupe of the old wet thatching. There are places in Brittany where fishermen go gorgeously to sea in suits of strange reds or burnt orange. Here in Billiers is vividness, but little color. Only now and then a man's blue smock takes the place of the short black coat. Even the children are dressed in black aprons. It is only the fishing boats which have color - sails of orange and blue!

"At weddings, and on feast days, the women wear colored aprons and shawls," my landlady assures me. "I myself have a purple one. You will see it Sunday, in the procession."

It is out of the way, this little Billiers, on the south coast of Brittany. A gray road, flung like a slack rope from the outside world over gentle hills, divides itself suddenly into three strands to make Billiers' streets, then twists itself together again, to go down to the sea. Billiers has no grandeur, no beauty except the beauty of unspoiled simplicity and the loveliness of well-sloping roofs, no history except the uneventful passage of centuries. Out a little way, there is, to be sure, an old château and a thirteenth-century ruin\*; but these bring few visitors. And as the rain beats down day after drenching day, I wonder why I myself am here.

By magic the rain stopped, the wind fell. It would be a good hour before the tide would bring the fishing boats into the wee harbor, before the fisherman's wives would hurry down to help their husbands carry up the fish. Meanwhile I'd walk into the country a way. By

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\* The thirteenth-century ruin is that of a Cistercian Abbey founded in 1248 by Duke Jean I, according to the Hachette Guides Bleu for Brittany (1987 edition). It was destroyed during the French Revolution.



magic the roads which have been swimming wet for three weeks, have dried. So I shed my rubbers, leaving them by the roadside. By magic the sun came out just in time to set in a glory of color, making gray little Billiers seem like a Quaker lady dressed for a Spanish ball.

"Aha, madmoiselle," the blacksmith sang out as I passed, "the sun remembers how to shine."

"What have I told you?" said a peasant, who had each day promised falsely that the next would be fine. All along the road, peasants driving their cows home from the fields have a good word for the weather, and there is great gayety in their manner.

I turned back, to be in time for the fish selling. Though there are but nine fishing boats, each manned by but two men and a boy, the whole life of Billiers pivots upon the fishing industry. Some dozen men and women are fish merchants, buying from the fishermen, selling to the townspeople, or peddling to farmers round about. Nearly the whole village turns out to see the fish buying, especially if the hour is not too late. For the harbor is so tiny that boats can go in and out only at high tide. And so as like as not, the *marché aux poissons* happens in the middle of the night.

Halfway between port and village, the fishermen empty their great baskets of fish on the grass, and, with the help of wives and children, sort and arrange them - the small fish at the bottom, the big ones saved for the top. Each basket is arranged with great artistry, the alternating white bellies and dark backs of the sole making a pattern.

"You see what they do, the rogues," a merry fishwife says to me as she walks along, a gay basket nicely balanced on her head, "all the little ones at the bottom. In your country is there such deception?"

But once the market place is reached, all joking stops. Each fisherman - they take turns - places

his baskets on the ground. Then the prospective buyers, in turn, lift them, judging their weight. No scales, only their practiced arms. Then begins the bidding. If fish are scarce, buyers bite. If the catch is good, the market opens in silence. At last the fisherman names a sum, which of course no one takes up; and he drops it a franc at a time, until a sale is accomplished. But it is not the quiet bargaining this description suggests. The phrase, "language of a fishwife," takes on meaning. The air is thick. One wonders how these people can go on living together in the same town, after the names that have been called, after the fury of their quarrel. Then, suddenly, it stops. The fisherman's wife hoists a basket on her head and stalks off. Has she decided to keep the fish herself, rather than sell to the insulting merchant? No. she is amicably delivering the purchase! All is peace and amity - till tomorrow.

Monsieur and Madame of the inn invited me to drive with them to the farm, ten miles away in the country, where they buy cider. Their Ford wagon, seasoned with age and decrepitude, was shined to a glitter for the occasion. We rattled through the gently rolling country, green and bright in the sun. Once I admired some roses growing in a peasant's doorway. "Roses? Why not?" exclaimed monsieur. "But *regardez là-bas, madmoiselle*, those trees." Yes, a pleasant little grove; one knew in this country of few trees that the chateau of some rich man must be at hand. "Pines," he continued, "that is something you do not have in America, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"But yes!" I exclaimed. "But no!" his wife came to the rescue. "We have been told that America has no trees!" It distressed them to hear my account of our trees. "One never knows what to believe, these days," concluded madame.

When we reached the farm, we left the car on the highway and walked a half-mile up a lane to the house - a long, low, stone building with many arched doorways. Yet only one room in

the house was used for living purposes, for a family consisting of a man and wife, two grown sons, a shy little girl about to make her first communion, and an old grandmother who was busily sewing on a new black dress for the little girl to wear on this occasion - for in the village to which she would go for communion black was the custom. This family room was large, though at first it seemed otherwise, so crowded was it with furniture. Aside from the tables and chairs, there were five huge and handsome pieces - two great *armoires*, or wardrobes, and three Brittany beds - all of beautiful dark wood, polished to a high finish, and gleaming with brass trimmings and hinges.

The beds are difficult to describe. One would never guess at a glance what they were. They suggest, somehow, a giant upright piano, but the part which would more or less correspond to the keyboard is only a chest for storing things, and upon which to climb before inserting oneself into the opening of the bed. For the bed itself is a great box, an aperture about three feet square admitting the sleepers at night and disgorging them in the morning. Fortunately the box has no top, so some little air may seep in, despite the low-raftered ceiling. The family was proud of these beds - not old-fashioned like the carved beds they had had before, with wooden doors that slid closed. Nor yet the vulgar open beds of these sinful modern times; but a nice compromise, calico curtains covering the opening by night, and looped to the side with bows by day.

We sat at a long rough-hewn table, and the men discussed the weather and crops. Our hostess, a placid broad-browed woman with the red hair so common in Brittany, would now and then look anxiously toward her husband. Meanwhile, she asked madame of the inn questions about me, and madame of the inn felt quite safe, but the device of speeding up her sufficiently swift French and lowering her voice a trifle, in giving elaborate detail - describing every dress I had worn to date, what newspapers I took, and how many letters I had received that morning. But

most impressive of all was the revelation that I ate both butter and *confiture* for breakfast, and therefore must come of a rich family! Ah yes, the Americans are all rich and queer, agreed my host. "I have known none myself, but I saw in the papers during the war [WWI] that American soldiers ate eggs with their *petit déjeuner*!"

And that reminded madame of the inn that she wished to buy some eggs - a dozen, if they could be spared, indeed thirteen, in case one should break on the way home (which one did!). But, now the men came into the conversation. Monsieur of the inn had recently learned a new way of telling in advance whether an egg would become a hen or cock. A coin, suspended on a twisted string, was held above the egg. If it came to rest the long way of the egg, that betokened a rooster; if the short way, a pullet. Much discussion. Skepticism. Monsieur of the inn had it from a farmer that the test never failed. A nest was brought forth, the test made, the feminine probabilities separated from the masculine. Time would tell. Madame of the farm was scornful of such new-fangled ways. She preferred the good old method - holding an egg to the light. A dark yolk meant a cock; a light yolk, a hen. Of course, it didn't *always* work . . .

All this while we had been partaking of food and drink. First the hard Brittany cider, which madame of the inn whispered to me I need not feel obliged to drink, for it might not agree well with the milk they would serve next. And I was glad I had been temperate, for presently the farmer's wife went into the next room, and leaving the door open between, she milked a little milk out of one of the five cows which dwelt so chummily at hand. She returned, emptied what cider remained in our glasses upon the absorbent sod floor, and filled them with the warm milk. Meanwhile, her husband had been doing the honors with a monstrous big loaf of break (a good yard long, and a foot thick) which he held under his arm to slice, drawing the knife toward him. It looked dangerous, but apparently he knew when to stop. Next he buttered these slices thickly and

handed them about. Meanwhile, coffee was being made in the fireplace.

It was a huge fireplace, supporting above it twenty-seven ornaments, including an image of the Virgin. Within it, six persons could have stood side by side without crowding. Two seats were built within, one at each side. Yet the fire which madame built on this vast hearth was hardly bigger than a gas flame - a wee, tidy affair of pine needles and a few fagots.

After an hour of politeness and food, the party seemed to square its shoulders, and we fared forth to the cider house for purposes of commerce. On the way madame of the inn drew me aside. "Very rich, these farmers," she whispered in a broken French, which she always assumed when speaking directly to me, thinking I could understand it more easily than the unbroken. "Rich, but stingy." You will see how they will put the price of the cider up, on account of the food they have given us."

In the cider house, monsieur and madame began tasting, critically, and I fear greedily. Cask after cask was tested and rejected. Tenseness was gathering, though politeness persisted. Finally a cask was accepted. Then politeness ceased - killed outright by the single word, "*Combien?*" and the answered price.

After the first minute, I could not follow the quarrel, so swift and loud it grew. I made out a few "thiefs," "misers," and ill-natured references to past transactions. Murders must start like this, I thought, and wondered nervously when the first blow would be struck. And then, as swiftly as it had begun, the quarrel fell away. Politeness came back - almost friendliness. But not quite. For while monsieur of the inn and I went down to the car to drive to the near-by village to pay the cider tax and get the necessary stamps and paper, madame stayed with the cask - "to see that he does not change or dilute it."

In half an hour we were back not at the farmhouse, but at the road where the cask was to be brought in an ox cart. In due time it came, and with much groaning and maneuvering the empty cask was removed and the full one installed.

We had reached the farm about two o'clock. It was now approaching seven as we got settled for our homeward journey.

"How often do you have to go for cider during the summer?" I asked. "Oh, we come every three days."



*A Picturesque Breton Woman*



*Her No Less Picturesque Mate*



# The International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language Is World-Wide

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BRETON LANGUAGE

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