

BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE
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KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

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Back issues of Bro Nevez can be found on the U.S. ICDBL website

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

Editorial

The last issue of Bro Nevez includes some statistics on the "state of the Breton language," but I felt it was a good time to go beyond the numbers. The following is a revision of a presentation I first prepared in 2004, and the draft for an update of information now on the ICDBL website. It skims the surface of a complex history, but I hope it will be useful – especially to American readers - in providing a basic understanding of why the Breton language is a threatened language today. And, I hope it will also show not only the challenges that remain, but also some of the extraordinary work on the part of Bretons to make the Breton language part of the future.

On the Cover

The illustration on the cover is by René-Yves Creston (1898-1964) and dates from 1928. Creston was an artist, designer and ethnographer and was one of the founders of Seiz Breur (Seven Brothers) in 1923. This group was made up of artists and designers interested in creating a distinctly Breton avant-garde style in painting, sculpture, ceramics and furniture. Creston's oils, watercolors and prints depicted maritime and everyday life in Brittany, Breton history and saints, and costume. Active with the Resistance movement during World War II, he was an ardent defender of the Breton language and culture – a Breton nationalist.

The Breton Language – Challenges and Hope

Lois Kuter

THE BRETON LANGUAGE IS A CELTIC LANGUAGE

The Breton language is one of dozens of "lesser used" languages in Europe. It is a Celtic language. There are five others: Irish Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, and Cornish (yes, it is alive contrary to many things one will read).

When you hear the word "Celtic" today in the U.S., it is mostly thrown about to sell something Irish or Scottish ... a music CD or festival. The noun "Celt" or adjective "Celtic" are more precisely used to apply to people, places or things where there is a link to a Celtic language. Many people also include Galicia and Asturias (in Spain) in the family of Celts. While these regions have a Celtic identity based on history and traditional culture, they do not have Celtic languages, although the languages spoken in those regions today are unique.



JUST HOW MANY PEOPLE SPEAK THE BRETON LANGUAGE?

The French government has not included questions about languages in its census so until recent times when some fairly reliable surveys have been taken, it has been difficult to know exactly how many people spoke Breton at any given period of history. In 1914 it is said that over 1 million people spoke Breton west of the border between Breton and Gallo-speaking regions – roughly 90% of the population of the western half of Brittany. In 1945 it was about 75%. A survey in 2013 by Bretagne Culture Diversité/Sevenadurioù showed that 6% of those surveyed said they spoke Breton (one-half “very well” and the other half “somewhat well”). An additional 22% knew some words, and 72% said they knew nothing at all. In 2014 Ofis ar Brezhoneg estimated the number of Breton speakers to be 165,000 to 170,000 with a gaining number of speakers among children and young adults. Brittany has a population of roughly 4.1 million -- if you include the department of Loire-Atlantique which the Vichy government chopped off from “official” Brittany in 1941. This would mean that an estimated 5% of people in Brittany are active Breton speakers. Roughly sixty percent of Breton speakers using Breton as an everyday language today are over the age of 60.

WHY HAVE THE NUMBERS OF BRETON SPEAKERS DWINDLED?

Image is everything, and this has to do with why Bretons at a certain period in history decided they must speak French and discourage their children from learning the Breton language.

Image No. 1: Breton is a rural, backward-looking, language fit only for the barnyard.

Fañch Elegoët, a Breton sociologist, did an extensive study of rural Breton speakers in northwestern Brittany in the 1960s and 70s – primarily through oral histories. He found that Bretons had internalized the following view of Breton:

Breton Is a peasant patois, unable to insure communication even with the neighboring village, even more incapable of expressing the modern world – the world of tractors, automobiles, airplanes and television. A language only good enough to talk to cows and pigs. From that you get the refusal to transmit this language to children – a language considered to be a burden, a handicap in social promotion, a source of humiliation and shame (Elegoët 1978)

Because Bretons learned to feel that the Breton language was vastly inferior to French, many parents in post World War II Brittany made the decision to do everything possible to ensure that their children spoke

French – that meant using French when at all possible to speak to children in the home. This resulted in households where grandparents spoke only Breton, parents spoke Breton and some French, and children spoke only French (although they could understand some Breton even if discouraged from speaking it themselves, for their own good). Thus, children were being cut off from grandparents and older relatives. Imagine a family gathering where all the adults are conversing and telling funny stories in Breton. You're 12 and you can follow a little bit of it but feel very much left out of the fun because you can't get the jokes and you can't express yourself in Breton.

But parents firmly believed that social and economic progress for their children was dependent on mastering French *and* abandoning Breton. How did that conviction come about? - The schools played a big role

In 1863, one-fifth of people of France spoke no French at all. You didn't need it. You stayed in school only a very short time and then worked on the farm and rarely traveled far enough to use anything but the local lingo. Compulsory attendance at school was introduced in 1882. Jules Ferry, the French Education Minister at the time considered Breton to be “a barbarous relic of another age.”

The impact of compulsory schooling was not immediate since in Brittany children still left school at a pretty young age to work on farms or go off to sea. But long before this, teachers had a mission which they took very seriously. In 1845 teachers in Finistère, the western department of Brittany, were reminded by the sub-prefecture: “*Above all gentlemen, remember that you have no higher purpose than to kill the Breton language.*”

Image No. 2: Breton is a hindrance to good citizenship

Not only was Breton considered a worthless language, it was also a hindrance to becoming a good citizen of France. It was the role of the teacher to turn children of France into good French citizens. That meant making them French speakers. Non-French languages were seen as a threat to national unity. There's an often quoted line from 1927 by the Minister of National Education at that time that states: “*for the linguistic unity of France, the Breton language must disappear.*”

Teachers used ridicule and humiliation and corporal punishment to convince little children that they should not use Breton at school or anywhere near the schoolyard. Breton parents who made the decision not to speak Breton to their children in the 50s and 60s often cited their memories of humiliation in school as one reason.

Image no. 3 – Breton is a language of the powerless

For men who spoke no or very little French, serving in the army was a rude awakening.

Military service for Breton speakers was a lesson in what it is like to be powerless to take charge of your own life. There are some famous stories (possibly true) of how Bretons were thought to be extremely brave because they would cry out what was heard as “à la guerre” (in French “to war”) when in Breton they were pleading “d’ar ger” (“to home”). There’s another story set in World War II where a soldier unable to speak French uses the word “Ya” (“yes” in Breton). This reinforces the idea that he must be speaking German and for his resistance he is executed. Beyond the word “ya” Breton really doesn’t sound at all like German, but it is unintelligible to a monolingual French speaker.

The army definitely made an impact on Breton speakers. Both World War I and II presented a bigger world where to be modern was to speak French. Men brought not only this idea back home, but also changes in clothing, manners and music. They also remembered that French was the language of those in charge. Sociologist Fanch Elegoet found in his oral history work that the army experience totally reinforced Bretons’ negative view of their own language. He quotes an 80-year old: *“If you cannot defend yourself in French, what can you do? You can only keep quiet and let others step all over you.”*

Image No. 4 – To get ahead in the world, you must speak French

In the post war period Breton farmers were increasingly drawn into a wider market where French was spoken. It was no longer sufficient to travel to the local market. Exposure to a wider world had been slowed in Brittany with the isolation of land travel. Railroads changed that, reaching the far west of Brittany in the 1860s and smaller rural outposts in the 1880s. While roads were poorly developed, the trains opened things up a great deal.

It is important to note that when it came to the sea, Bretons had long been world travelers as explorers and as fishermen, and as a strong component of the French Navy. Thus coastal towns were also places where French might be heard.

Getting ahead in the world meant learning French. The need to emigrate to larger cities or out of Brittany to find work or a better job required learning French ... but not necessarily abandoning Breton.

Image No. 5 – The “littleness” of Breton. Breton is not a true language

It is one thing to want to improve your life by learning another language, but it is quite another to reject the language you grew up with or that your parents and grandparents speak.

Media like books and newspapers, as well as schools and military service all brought Bretons in contact with a particular attitude about non-French languages in France. These media all gave you the message that Breton was a “patois.” Indeed the word “baragouin” which is used in French to note a jumble of incorrect or incomprehensible language is rooted in the Breton words “bara” for bread and “gwin” (wine) or “gwenn” (white). French people of any social standing looked at the Breton language as baragouin. It was (and still is) very easy for Bretons to get the idea that Breton is a “little language” of the “past,” not worth the effort of learning. In speaking of the teaching of regional languages in French schools, a Professor at the University of Paris III in 1975 questions “... *is it wise or opportune to urge little French children towards a bi- or trilingualism turned not toward the future of the planet, but towards the past of a little country?*”

Image No. 6 The grandeur of French

French has been promoted not only as the language of modernity and good citizenship for French patriots, but it alone can bring France world esteem and grandeur. French President Pompidou stated in 1972: *“There is no place for regional languages in a France destined to mark Europe with its seal.”*

French is the language of civilization itself. Here’s a wonderful quote from 1967 by Waldimir d’Ormesson, member of the Académie Française and President of the administrative council of the ORTF (Organization for French Radio and Television).

“All Frenchmen are conscious of the importance of the language that is common to them. When they remember the role it has played for ten centuries in the slow formation of the nation, they feel a great respect for it. Secondly, French is not only our language: it was, it is, and it must remain one of the instruments of civilization. In this respect it represents an international public service.” (*Haut comité pour la défense et l’expansion de la langue française 1967*)

And it was this kind of thinking that the French took to every part of the world they colonized. In a 1969 article called “Francophonie: The French and Africa” Pierre Axedandre sums it all up as follows:

“Whether in Indochina or in North Africa or anywhere else, little was left for the local languages, which were expected to be eventually as thoroughly obliterated by French as Breton, Basque or Provençal. French was taught not so much as a more efficient instrument of modern, wide-ranging communication: it was taught as the key to a new way of life, or even as a way of life itself.” (Alexandre 1969)

Image No. 7 – Breton is not legal

Making French citizens of people living within the borders of France happened on a number of levels. Language change was also required on the personal level of naming your children. A law in 1803 obliged parents to choose children’s names from one of several authorized calendars of names of Catholic saints, revolutionary heroes, or historic figures (real, not mythical) living before the Middle Ages. Thus, it was illegal to name your child Gwendal, Soazig or Erwan. People of course continued to use non-official names for each other, but these were not your official name. As a French citizen you were Maurice; among your Breton friends and family you were Morvan. In 1966 the statutes were eased up a bit and in 1987 “local custom” was taken into consideration if your local civil servant was willing to allow this. In 1993, parents were finally free to enter any name (within reason) on a birth certificate. However, just in 2017 there were two cases in which Breton names were rejected by legal authorities. In one case the tilde over the name Fañch was considered illegal, and in the other, the apostrophe in the name Derc’hen was rejected. In both cases the names were in the end allowed, but only after a fight!

Breton names have become very popular – a mark of pride in identity, but also just a choice of a nice-sounding name.

More legality issues

Article 2 of the French Constitutions states “French is the language of the Republic.” Despite numerous efforts on the part of Deputies and Senators of France (representing a number of languages) France stands firm in protecting its citizens from the chaos and disunity that might follow if a mention of regional languages of France were added to this Article to give them some official recognition. In 2008 the French National Assembly approved the idea that “The regional languages belong to its [France’s] patrimony” be added to the Constitution. Nevertheless, Article 2 is still used to block initiatives for Breton.

In 1999 France signed the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (restricting its application to 39 of 52 measures) but has not ratified the Charter.

SO WHY HASN’T BRETON BEEN OBLITERATED YET?

Bretons have fought for their language

There has long been a core of people in Brittany who have felt that Breton is as good as any other language. There has been a smaller, but important number who have actively defended and promoted the Breton language.

In the 19th century it tended to be Romanticists, aristocrats, and clergy who collected oral traditions – songs and tales, and popular theater texts. Magazines were published in Breton and by the end of the century it was not just oral literature that was promoted but social and economic topics were also being presented in Breton.

While the 19th century collectors gave Breton an image of being a bit dusty and certainly ancient, it also brought prestige to Breton as a language capable of great literature.

In the 20th century the creation of a new literature was promoted – particularly through the organization called Gwalarn. The scholars and writers associated with this were out to prove that Breton was a modern language, with an international outlook, capable of standardization and the creation of new vocabulary.

The study of Breton and the creation of teaching materials and dictionaries has tended to be primarily outside of the university – amateur scholars studying the Breton of their own neighborhood or working more widely on the problem of creating a “national” language.

Bretons have sometimes been their own worst enemy. The promotion of Breton as a language for schools and literature has suffered from factions. There are four major dialects within Breton. Local pride and identities meant that Breton speakers often chose to not understand other dialects. However, when it came to making money in the marketplace, they had no problem communicating with Breton speakers using a different dialect. And onion sellers from northwestern Brittany crossed the channel and had no problem communicating as brothers with Welsh speakers. The rift between dialect speakers has been enhanced in arguments over the formation of orthographies. How do you standardize Breton and still represent the specific nature of the dialects.

Another problem area has been a rift between “native speakers” and what are called “Neo-bretonnants” – those learning it as a second language. It is felt by those who have had the good fortune to grow up speaking Breton that those learning it as a second language can never master Breton. Second language

learners have been stereotyped as an urban elite with no interest in understanding the purer and more expressive Breton of rural Bretons – the true “people.” It is felt by some that second language learners are doomed to speak a Breton that is highly influenced by French. There has been resistance on the part of native speakers to the creation of new vocabulary – viewed as “chemical” Breton. Sadly, those who do have a richer mastery of Breton have not always been in the forefront when it comes to teaching Breton or speaking up in its defense, and have preferred to spend time criticizing and belittling second language learners who have recognized that you can’t always wait for perfect mastery to move forward. This is changing.

Some of the factioning is rooted in Brittany’s particular political history and this is very complicated. Understanding what happened during World War II in Brittany (and France more widely) is key to sorting out the factions in the Breton movement of today.

Those defending the Breton language in this period or promoting its acceptance into schools, etc. were of all political persuasions. But what is remembered are the Breton nationalists who chose to collaborate with Germany with the idea that Germany would grant Brittany independence. Those Bretons believed that Brittany and the Breton language were clearly doomed under French rule. Germany looked like a hope for Bretons to gain control of their own destiny. Once Germans realized that the Breton nationalists seeking independence were a very small minority in Brittany, they quickly lost interest in the idea of granting these allies political power. But the public presence of the Breton language did make some significant gains during the war period with publications being supported, Breton language radio broadcasts implemented, and a Celtic Institute established. Thanks to a more extreme element – some 100 Bretons who took up arms with Germany to fight the French Resistance (which was stronger in Brittany than anywhere else in France with an estimated 30,000 participants), Breton nationalists and action for the Breton language and culture as a whole became labeled as “pro-Nazi” when the war ended.

The old wounds are still there. With German occupation of Brittany, the war was on the doorstep and neighbors were fighting neighbors. It was a horrible period for France and bitter memories remain. But today this “Nazi” link is still used to discredit Breton militants. Long-dead Breton language activists cleared of collaboration charges after the war are still dragged up as examples of Breton Nazis when convenient. And today the word “terrorist” is also tagged onto political activists who want more autonomy for Brittany. And in the mid-2000s Bretons were outraged when cultural activists were hauled off in the wee hours of the

morning for questioning and stigmatized for having terrorist associations.

The link of pro-Breton language activism with Nazis or terrorists continues to be cultivated by those who do not want the Breton language to survive

IS BRETON DOOMED? – WHAT IS BEING DONE FOR ITS FUTURE?

Breton in the Schools

In the past the schools were used as an important force to discourage children from speaking Breton, but in more recent times, schools have been used to reintroduce Breton.

The first petition on the part of Bretons to get Breton into the schools dates to 1870 and petitions have continued since. But a real presence for Breton in the schools is VERY recent.

The Loi Deixonne of 1951 finally allowed Breton into the schools – if a teacher was willing to volunteer to teach it for an hour a week. The Savary law of 1982 was the first real support for Breton in the schools – still as an optional subject taught 1 to 3 hours a week, usually outside of regular class time.

The limited time Breton was allotted in school classes was clearly not going to help children master Breton – especially when the vast majority of their parents did not speak it at home. Based on the example of immersion schools elsewhere in Europe (and in Canada for French!), the Diwan schools were opened in 1977. These are schools where preschool children are immersed in Breton, and French is gradually introduced at the primary level. From one preschool in 1977 Diwan has grown to include over 4,000 children. The first of six middle schools opened in 1988 and a high school opened in 1994. The idea has always been that Diwan schools must be public schools open to all – tuition free – and Diwan has always worked to get this immersion style incorporated into the regular public school system. While Diwan schools have a contract with the National Education system where some teacher salaries are paid by the state, a school is only supported after it has operated for five years. Diwan budgets are always in crisis and parents invest heavily in fundraising. Educationally, the Diwan schools are highly successful. Children master Breton and their test scores for French and other subjects are as good, if not better, than scores for children in monolingual French schools. In 2013 the Diwan high school was ranked number one in all of France

Nevertheless, there are challenges. Diwan’s attempt to be recognized as a public school has been blocked by

the high courts of France who hold up Article 2 of the French Constitution: “French is the language of the Republic.” That means it must be used no less than half of the time as the language of instruction or lunch/recess in public schools. The immersion method of teaching Breton has been branded as anti-constitutional, giving Diwan schools a radical image of being anti-French.

But Diwan’s success sparked an interest in bilingual programs in both the public and private Catholic schools of Brittany. The first public school bilingual program opened in 1982 and the first Catholic program started in 1990 and they have grown by 10-15% each year. But these are bilingual programs – half of the teaching is in Breton and half in French, and they do not give children the same ability as the Diwan schools do to use Breton as a language for all leisure time activity.

As of the 2017 school year there are over 17,700 children in Diwan, Public and Catholic schools. This is just 2% of the children of Brittany, but the success of these programs has been key in changing the image of Breton – it’s now a language for youth.

Parents must be vigilant to insure growth of Breton language options for their children, and the opening of new schools, but support from local governments and the Region of Brittany has grown. While it did not meet its goals, the Regional Council of Brittany set a goal in 2004 to get 20,000 students enrolled in the bilingual programs by 2010. And a State-Region convention for 2015-2020 calls for a 15% and then 20% quota for teaching posts to be dedicated to bilingual teaching.

On a positive note, in recent years day care centers have been created to introduce the youngest ages to Breton. Outside of schools, summer camps – Kampoù vakañsoù – and other play activities have grown to offer leisure-time opportunities for children to use Breton.

At the university level there are four universities that offer over 400 students Breton studies: the largest being the Université de Haute Bretagne II in Rennes where all classes in the Celtic department are taught through the medium of Breton, then the Université de Bretagne Occidentale in Brest, and the Université de Bretagne Sud-Lorient, and the Université de Nantes.

Breton for Adult Learners

The growth of Breton in the schools has inspired a growing number of adults to take classes.

For a long time, the only way to learn to read and write Breton was in catechism classes of the Catholic Church. But as the church abandoned Breton, and parents in the post war period discouraged their children from learning Breton, those who wanted to

learn to read and write Breton had only a few tools to do this – one was the Skol Ober correspondence school founded in 1932. Internet resources have greatly enhanced learning opportunities for adults with “correspondence” style courses offered by Kervarker (kervarker.org) and EduBreizh (EduBreizh.com) among other resources.

For those who want a more class-like learning opportunity, Skol an Emsav has organized classes for adults (starting in the 70s and 80s), and today classes are well-organized and widely available through other organizations like Mervent and Roudour. DAO – Deskiñ d’An Oadourien – is a federation of organizations offering adult education (dao-bzh.org), and an estimated 3,000 adults are active each year in weekly classes in some 50 communities of Brittany. Some 600 adults become competent speakers each year through these classes, and others who already have a command of spoken Breton learn to read and write Breton – an option they did not have as children.

For 30 years the organization Stumdi (stumdi.com) has offered 3 and 6-month intensive courses where 300 students enroll annually and reach a mastery of Breton. This organization also assists those completing classes to find jobs where Breton is needed. Between 2006 and 2012 jobs requiring mastery of Breton rose by 405. Some 1,300 positions were identified in 2016. While most jobs have been in the schools and media, positions in social and public services where Breton competence is a desirable skill have also grown.

A Different Breton Language for the Future?

While the strongest growth in Breton speakers is found at younger ages, the opportunities for adults should not be discounted. Besides more formal classes, today there are a number of weekend workshops, camps, and activities conducted through the Breton language such as reading clubs, discussion groups, story-telling, cooking and hiking. And there are new opportunities to link learners with native speakers such as Project Hentoù Treuz which produces audiovisual presentations of native speakers and Bazvalan.bzh which produces recordings.

It is now felt that the gap between “standard” vs. “traditional” Breton may not be as big an obstacle as sometimes claimed. Schools and university studies encourage understanding of diversity within the Breton language. Learners work to understand and appreciate (and incorporate) the specific elements of the dialects of Breton. New generations coming from bilingual programs in the schools are making Breton their own – an urban language spoken with confidence and used creatively to express new lifestyles.

The Role of the Church

Brittany is a strongly Catholic area, and the Church has been mostly on the side of Breton. Indeed, many Bretons learned to read Breton through catechism classes and through the reading of tales of the saints (and there seem to be thousands of saints in Brittany). But the church has been somewhat opportunistic. When Breton has been the mainstream language of a community, Breton was used for catechism, hymns and sermons. When French began to be more widely used, Breton was abandoned. Individual priests have been strong supporters of Breton, doing scholarly studies, collecting oral literature, writing and promoting religious plays in Breton. But, depending on the period of history, Church support of Breton has also helped give it an image as a conservative, anti-Republican language. By the 1950s only exceptional church services were offered in Breton.

Media – A problem area, and an area of great promise

The growth of Breton language programs in the schools has stimulated a growth of Breton publications for children – books and magazines as well as games and pedagogical materials for school activities.

But because Breton has only been recently introduced to schools, many Breton speaking adults (the older population especially) cannot read or write Breton. The reading public is limited – estimated today to be perhaps 30 to 40,000 potential adult readers. That means that publishing is a labor of love – 1,000 to 2,000 copies of books are normally published. But as the number of learners – children and adults - continues to grow, the market for books and magazines will also grow. There is a diversity of reading materials being produced – news magazines and literary journals as well as literature of all kinds, including murder mysteries and comic books. Keit Vimp Bev is a publishing house created in 1984 with a focus of books, magazines and games in Breton for children and young people. Lenn (lenn.electre.com) aims to help people locate Breton language publishers and some 1,000 works can be accessed through its website. Kenstroll (Kenstroll.org) is an alliance of independent book stores that promote Breton literature and the Coop Breizh has long been key in making books and CDs accessible to a wide public. Besides books, Breton publishers produce a number of magazines in Breton. These include *Al Liamm*, launched in 1945; *Ya!*, a weekly magazine in Breton published since 2005; *ABER*, a magazine created in 2000 to promote Breton language literature, *Bremañ*, a 30-35 page bi-monthly magazine on all topics produced by Skol an Emsav, and *#brezhoneg*, a bi-monthly magazine with lessons built in for different levels of learners, also produced by Skol an Emsav.

The internet has offered the opportunity for Bretons to give written and audiovisual presence to the Breton language. Bretons have jumped on the opportunity to create a Breton language Wikipedia and internet sites for most Breton organizations include text in Breton if not featuring it. Of note is Agence Bretagne Presse which provides internet presence for news about what's going on in Brittany, with numerous articles and videos in Breton. Just as the Breton language was long absent in the schools, Breton history was also missing. Websites have also been developed to make Breton history accessible – to counter the Paris-Centric account presented in schools.

Radio

During World War II a weekly and then daily 1-hour broadcast in Breton was produced, but this all ended at the end of the war. However, in 1946 airwaves opened to a half-hour program on Sundays. In 1964 daily 5-minute news bulletins were added. In 1982 people in western Brittany could get 5 hours a week of Breton language programming. In the 1980s and 90s the airwaves opened up so that a number of volunteer-run radio stations could be established which broadcast all or much of their daily programming in Breton. These have limited geographic range, but are being made available via computer internet.

The federation Radio Breizh (radiobreizh.bzh/fr) has worked since 2011 to provide internet access to four Breton language radio stations: Arvorig FM, Radio Kreiz Breizh, Radio Bro Gwened, and Radio Kerne.

Television

Public television in Brittany (which does not reach all of Brittany) has provided just a few hours of Breton language programming per week.

Efforts to launch a cable channel, TV Breizh, in 2000 had lots of promise – 3 hours of Breton a day with a focus on Brittany in French programming – but efforts to get public status failed. Fees eliminated the growth of much of an audience in Brittany, so the Breton language content was trimmed back for more generic programming.

The lack of a truly Breton television channel and the very limited amount of Breton language programming on “French” TV channels has been made up for by an impressive growth of locally produced programming available on the internet. These include Tébéo (tebeo.bzh), TV Rennes 35 (tvr.bzh), Tébé Sud (tebesud.fr) and Télénantes (telenantes.com). Also on the internet are productions by Breizhoweb, Gwagenn TV and Kaouenn. Dizale was created in 1998 to dub audiovisual productions in Breton including programming for children (breizhvod.com).

Breton in public space

When traveling in Brittany, Breton language place names have always been noticeable, but many towns and even tiny villages have seen their names “Frenchified” and transformed into meaningless syllables. Seeing Breton on the street in larger cities is a new phenomenon but definitely a growth area with the establishment of Ofis ar Brezhoneg in 1999. They launched a strong campaign in 2001 called “Ya d’ar Brezhoneg” (Yes to Breton) to encourage businesses and organizations to use Breton in signage and encourage employees to learn and use it. By 2014 some 700 private companies and 167 communes in all five departments of Brittany had signed on. Bretons are finding that bilingualism is good for business and for tourism – a big industry in Brittany. Businesses often choose Breton words as part of their marketing strategy to show their roots. “Breizh” is found in some 200 uses. While some companies have been using Breton as a trade name for a long time (Traou Mad cookies), others are more recent (Armor Lux clothing). The federation of businesses called Produit en Bretagne not only promotes products and businesses of Brittany but also encourages the use of Breton in advertising.

But, there have been challenges in making Breton visible. Bilingual road signs were erected in the 1980s and 90s only after years of campaigns by Breton militants. Petitions are never enough in Brittany, so those working to get bilingual signs in the 1970s took more direct action with sticky-backed letters. More radical action was taken with tar, and this seemed to force change as signs needed to be replaced and costs got higher. Progress is slow and in 2015 Ai’ta! (ai-ta.eu) was founded to promote public use of Breton through non-violent acts of civil disobedience. This included protests of the lack of Breton in the postal service, trains, road signs, and public services.

Other action to encourage the Breton language

Bretons have been creative in creating leisure-time activities for children and adults where Breton is used as the medium of communication – hotly contested competitions to see who can take the best dictation in Breton, scrabble tournaments, haiku contests, song and story contests, and even a contest to trade insults in Breton. A number of prizes exist to recognize creativity in writing, music-making, and media in the Breton language. Priziu Dazont has been sponsored since 1993 by France Bretagne and Ofis ar Brezhoneg to award prizes for the use of Breton in businesses and organization, and in song, literature and audiovisual creations.

And less competitively, you can participate in a Breton speaking activity to make crepes, go sailing, take an

architectural tour, or go on a nature walk. Since 2008 young and old have participated in the relay “race” Ar Redadeg (ar-redadeg.bzh) which traverses all five departments of Brittany every two years. This is used not only to raise funds for Breton schools and language activities, but is also a festive occasion to give visibility to the Breton language.

While not a new tradition, Breton language theater is yet another very active area of creativity which engages a wide audience.

CAUSE FOR OPTIMISM - ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING ... THE CASE OF MUSIC AND DANCE

In stark contrast to indifference of the 1950s and 60s polls show that 90-95% of Bretons today want Breton to survive and are proud of their Breton identity. But building the number of Breton speakers is more challenging. Breton is no longer seen as a worthless language, but it is not seen by all in Brittany as a necessity. It is unlikely that Bretons (children or adults) will enroll in Breton classes on a massive scale, and the physical and financial resources that would enable this are simply not there.

The shift in Brittany from a land where one looked to Paris and aimed to become “French” to a land where people are proud to be Breton and invest in promoting their unique heritage gives cause for optimism.

Particularly spectacular as an area where a positive Breton identity has been cultivated is the practice of unique Breton music and dance traditions.

Music has not completely escaped the negative social and political stigmatization attached to the Breton language. Many Bretons believed that to get ahead in the world it was not only necessary to speak French but to be French. The old songs were all right for old people, but not to be passed on to one’s children. Fortunately many Bretons did not believe it was necessary to abandon their heritage to get ahead in a modern world. Others who had immigrated to Paris learned first-hand that “the French” were not necessarily a more civilized people. Emigrants returning to Brittany were frequently leaders in creating new contexts and institutions to foster Breton traditions. In the 1950s older performers were urged to dust off their repertoires, and young Bretons learned traditional line and circle dances in “Celtic Circles” or joined a bagad – a newly invented version of a Scottish pipe band for Brittany. You joined for purely social reasons, but left with a new knowledge of Breton culture and history hidden from you in the schools. The reinvention of the fest noz in the 1950s and its popularity ever since as a social event where multiple generations meet to dance or have a drink at the bar has been especially important as an opportunity for singers and musicians to “show

their stuff.” In 2012 UNESCO recognized the fest noz as part of the world’s immaterial cultural patrimony.

In the 1960s Bretons were also inspired by the “roots” and folk revival movements going on in the U.S. and Britain, and older melodies and rhythms were rearranged in groups that blended harps and bagpipes with electric guitars and keyboards. By the mid 70s and throughout the 80s Breton musicians were taking a closer look at traditions – collecting music directly from older masters and organizing local festivals to foster the unique traditions rooted in different areas of Brittany. Dastum, created in 1972, has played a major role as an “archives” which actively fosters performance, but there are many locally based organizations throughout Brittany that have played this role as well. This has fostered new generations of traditional singers and instrumentalists who strengthen an ongoing oral tradition by respecting the essentially social nature of learning music from older masters. While not replacing it, learning has been expanded beyond a face-to-face transmission to include use of recordings and written materials, and now the internet.

The creation of new sounds rooted in older melodies and rhythms continues, and Brittany has one of the healthiest music traditions of Europe. The transmission from one generation to the next has remained intact, but has not prevented Bretons from creating new performance contexts or composing new music with international influences. Never have so many people in Brittany been engaged in performing Breton music or dancing Breton dances. Today there are an estimated 8,000+ amateur and professional performers of Breton music - not counting the learners and people who simply perform at home. This boils down to 1 of 500 Bretons taking an active role in passing along a unique heritage. And when a hip new band uses the Breton language for its songs, that inspires a few more young Bretons to learn this language.

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March – A Month to Celebrate Breton and Gallo

While the U.S. ICDBL has as its mission the support of the Breton language, Brittany also has another unique language – Gallo. A series of events are being held during March – Mizvezh ar Brezhoneg / Maiz du Galo – to celebrate the rich heritage of both languages. Events

include workshops, conferences, exhibits, storytelling, song, radio broadcasts, language lessons, and theater. Seven themes are explored: transmission of knowledge of/through the languages, teaching of/in the languages and actions for younger children, adults and professional training, publishing, theater, audiovisual production, and internet/web development.

Begun as a weeklong event by the Region of Brittany in 2013, since 2017 the celebration now spans a month of enjoyable and educational activities.

Some More Gains for the Breton Language

Raok, Brezhoneg e Kreiz Breizh

A new Federation called *Raok, brezhoneg e Kreiz Breizh* held its first general assembly this winter gathering representatives from a number of organizations working in central western Brittany, including Emgleo Bro Karaez, Roudour, La Fisellerie, Oaled Landelo, and Bod Kelenn. From these five organizations the federation hopes to grow to include others in support of increased presence for Breton in schools, public places, and cultural events.



Ganedigezh



Ganedigezh is a new organization to promote innovative projects for the Breton language – especially those for pre-school children. It was created through the initiative of Divskouarn which fosters education for pre-schoolers and Babigoù Breizh which supports small daycares where children are immersed in the use of Breton (Ker Bihan in Vannes, Neizhig in Rennes, and Youn ha Solena in St-Herblain). To promote the development of new projects Ganedigezh has organized weekend sessions to trade ideas and develop proposals based on human and economic resources. This March a weekend was held in Brest, and one of the projects developed was a new Breton language daycare for the Leon area: Babigoù Bro Leon.

A Loss for the Breton Language

Divi Kervella (1957-2017)

Brittany mourned the loss of Divi Kervella at the end of December 2017. He was a Breton language expert with a unique range of talents which he put to use in scholarly work as well as publications for a more

general public. He was the author of several learning tools published by Assimil – *Le Breton (sans peine)*, *Parle-moi breton*, and *Le breton de poche*. He also published a lexicology of popular Breton terms, *Geriaoueg luc'hajoù ar brezhoneg*, *Vocabulaire argotique breton*. He may be best known for his translation into Breton of “bandes dessinées” (comic books) – series for *Tintin*, *Asterix*, *Le Chat*, and *Blondes*. One of his later translations of books for children was *Nikolazig e brezhoneg* (from Sempré’s *Petit Nicolas*).

Divi Kervella worked since the mid 1980s with the Ofis ar Brezhoneg as a consultant on place names, including assistance in the production of the first road map in Breton in 2003. He can be credited in enabling the production of bilingual road and place name signs as these became more common in Brittany. His interest and expertise in toponymy and Breton history and culture led to a number of scholarly articles as well as more popular books: *Emblèmes et symboles des bretons et des celtes*, *Petit guide des noms de lieux bretons*, *Légendaire celtique* (with Erwan Seure-Le Bihan), and *Guide des drapeaux bretons et celtes* and *Atlas de Bretagne / Atlas Breizh*, (both with Mikael Bodlore-Penlaez)

He was the son of Frañsez Kervella and Ivetig an Dred-Kervella, both notable in their contributions to Breton language scholarship, publication, and teaching.



Deep inside a Breton skull 55 – Memory, intelligence, culture

By Jean Pierre Le Mat

What is it that we really call “Breton culture”?

Let us begin with the word “memory”. For a few decades, it was given various, sometimes opposing, meanings. Formerly, it was a personal knowledge. Then, through studies of sociologists, psychoanalysts and mystics, the “collective memory” appeared. It matches with the fashion of commemorations. Then, to make the commemorations sacred, a “duty of memory” appeared in France.

This duty ran out of control. In order to counter aggressive reminiscences coming from wild communities like Bretons, the official history erected a triumphant statue against the memories coming from popular magma.

The computer scientists brought us back to a precise unglorified definition. Memory is a storage place for information, called data. In our society of mistrust, the accumulation of data has become a central and crucial activity. Production or consumption processes can no longer be conceived without traceability. We need countless information to ensure our safety, in cars, restaurants, buses, holidays, everywhere.

Memory is what allows an individual, a community or a machine to accumulate information, i.e. a shadowy loot. Human memory can be consulted at any time and in any place by the person who holds it. Before our times of computer science, it gave to its owner a huge benefit. Now, the memory of computer machines largely beats human performances.

A loot gets value only if it can be used or exchanged. Memory, human or mechanical, gets value only in a context of use or exchange. And we move then to the next level.

This second level is data processing. Information is analyzed, combined. It gets a meaning. Put in the proper frame, data becomes understandable. We move from memory to intelligence.

Sure, machines can be smart. Artificial intelligence comes to us in the form of robots, computer programs, expert systems. Human intelligence, linked to creativity and imagination, seems for the moment superior to artificial intelligence. But nobody can say whether, despite inevitable imperfections, the artificial intelligence will one day outclass human intelligence in all fields.

For an individual or a community, intelligence cannot exist without instruction. The issue is going from data to information. Intelligence is necessary to choose the most relevant paths. Intelligence and instruction go hand in hand to achieve understanding.

But we can go further. Rabelais reminds us of a good lesson: "Science without conscience is only ruin of the soul". This ruin of the soul is the inability to make "good" decisions. The notion of Good leads us to the third level, that of the outlook. Outlook is necessary for creative decisions. The intelligence of smart people is not enough to make a decision-maker out of him. It is the same for devices.

This third level is crucial, with a spiritual dimension. It is not the spirituality of the Gnostic, who is satisfied with the possession of hidden data. With him, we would only be at the first level. Nor is it the spirituality of the contemplative, who tries to reach understanding through its own paths. With him, we are at the second level of knowledge. The perspective of Good brings us to the third level. Vista is necessary to the man of action, to the leader, to the decision maker.

With education it is possible to reach this third degree of knowledge. Education is instruction plus a vista of oneself and of the world. This particular vista makes the difference between good education and good instruction.



Culture is a synthesis between these three levels of knowledge. Let's set a definition: "Culture is a coherent set of information, interpretations and viewpoints".

In the same approach, we can define a cultured character: "an individual who possesses a memory, an intelligence and a notion of Good".

The culture of everybody is a mix. The artist uses primary colors and secondary colors to paint. There are primary cultures and complex cultures. Primary cultures are models, archetypes. They fascinate those who dream of a mythical golden age, pure races and tight societies. These primary cultures probably never existed, but they do help to understand real cultures. They are like numbers which, through algorithms, make it possible to picture reality. Real cultures are a coherent mix of information, modes of interpretation and decision-making.

What is French culture?

What is Breton culture?

We are not talking about the culture of French guys or Breton guys, which vary greatly. We are talking about communal cultures. They are illustrated by languages, productions, behaviors, styles, decision processes, viewpoints, collective ambitions, which can be related to history and geography.

Let's go back to the first level of culture. Today, with internet and Wikipedia, the stock of information has become global. No doubt a Breton, among the data about the French Revolution of 1789, will be more

interested than another in the Protestations of the Parliament of Brittany and the story of the Battle of Kerguidu. He will be more interested in what happened near his home. He will feel closer to his ancestors than to strangers or invaders. This bias will lead to original viewpoints.

Besides Wikipedia there is a school culture ... This is where the great difference between French culture and Breton culture lies. French culture is a fascinating accumulation of intellectual productions, works of art, knowledge, myths. It has been normalized by centuries of state control. The data has been standardized. The understanding has been formalized.

Breton culture has not been polished by a political power. For this reason, it is less coherent than French culture. It has accumulated clashing information. It plunges with less restraint into the global data pool. It is less predictable. It challenges standard interpretations and official viewpoints.

Deep inside my skull, I believe that a Breton artificial intelligence would be hard to get. A machine can clone the standardized Cartesian French culture. But I cannot imagine a machine able to copy our wicked intelligence and our strange viewpoints; a machine able to take decisions like a Breton native.

Artificial Intelligence can make French culture superfluous, not Breton culture.



Celtic Music in America

Iona. *Signature*. Barnaby Productions, Inc. 2017.
www.ionamusic.com

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

Based in the Washington D.C. area, the band Iona has been performing since 1986 with its unique sound and inter-Celtic repertoire. While all four members of the group provide vocals, Barbara Tresidder Ryan is the lead vocalist, and she sings not only in English, but also Breton, French, Irish and Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Cornish (and probably other languages). She has a lovely lower and often dramatic voice. On this CD she also plays bouzouki, bodhrán and “feet” – for the traditional percussive of a Quebec tune. Bernard Argent plays wooden flute, whistles, bombard, dombek and cabasa, and leads on a song as well. Jim Queen plays fiddle, banjo, and provides vocals. Chuck Lawhorn plays bass guitar and provides vocals. Guests on the CD are Kathleen Larrick with vocals, cabasa and dombek, and – worth mentioning – Bran Ryan-Argent (a dog) adds some barking on one selection.

During their 30 plus years Iona has performed in hundreds of concerts and festivals – primarily in the Mid-Atlantic states and Virginia/DC area. Besides performing, however, they have been pioneers in organizing concerts and performance events for Celtic musicians, including the much-missed Potomac Celtic Festival which was unique in the U.S. in showcasing music from all the Celtic countries (including Asturias and Galicia) in contrast to most “Celtic festivals” in this country which rarely go beyond Scotland or Ireland.

This new CD reflects Iona’s “signature” sound and celebration of the Celtic traditions. They draw tunes and songs from a wide variety of sources, presenting compositions and a traditional repertoire in their own style. Some may find the tempo a bit “slow” for some tunes, but I found the more relaxed swing a nice change from the frantic pace many Celtic musicians favor. There is a nice mix of songs and instrumental tunes/dances from an Irish jig and song, a Cajun reel, a Victorian parlor song adapted to bluegrass, an Asturian dance and melody, a Breton lament and the dances derobée and hanter dro, a Scottish reel and Robert Burns drinking song, a song from Quebec, and Cornish tunes and songs.

This is a group that knows how to give a highly entertaining performance and they can be congratulated for their many years of work to introduce the beauty of Celtic traditional music and song to audiences here in the U.S.



Heard of, but not heard 21 New Recordings from Brittany

The following short notes are drawn from reviews in *Musique Bretonne* 253 (Oct/Nov/Dec 2017) and 254 (Jan-Feb-March 2018) and *Ar Men* 222 (Jan/Feb 2018) as well as from notes on the Coop Breizh website and Culture.celtic.fr website.



Trio Tarare. *Ventouere*.

When I noted this CD in the last issue of Bro Nevez, I lamented the fact that an internet search only came up with recipes for tartare. No wonder! As was kindly pointed out to me, I had spelled the name of the group incorrectly. The Trio Tarare has its roots in Rennes and they often play at festoù-noz, drawing inspiration from traditional Breton dances, but also composing their own tunes and melodies. The trio is made up of Nicolas Gicquel on clarinet, Manon Gicquel on accordion, and Lucie Périer on flute.



Gweltaz Adeux. *Eyjafjallajökull.*

This is the second solo CD by singer and guitarist Gweltaz Adeux who has launched a solo career after work with the ground-breaking group EV. This rock group active in the 1980s and 90s was made up of two Bretons and two Finns who sang in French, Breton and Finnish. 12 of Adeux’s song compositions in Breton are included on this CD. He is joined by Niko Guérin on bass and Anthony Fresneau on drums.



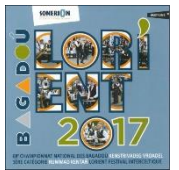
Al Leur Nevez. *Diwar an Ero.*

This CD to come out in 2018 commemorates the 10th anniversary of the death of Loeiz Ropars, a master of kan ha diskan song for dance who was instrumental in reviving the fest noz in the 1950s and in encouraging traditional singers to dust off their repertoire. He was also a founder of Al Leur Nevez which is producing this 3-CD set. This organization has worked to foster Breton dance, song and the Breton language. This set of CDs incorporates recordings made between 1949 and 1967 featuring not only Loeiz Ropars but the masters of Breton language gwerz and kan ha diskan of central western Brittany active during this period. It is a fitting tribute to Loeiz Ropars who did so much to encourage a renaissance of traditional dance and song during that period and beyond. The CDs are accompanied by a 48-page booklet with song texts and background information. (Album cover shown here is not the one for Diwar an Ero, but shows one of the early albums from which selections are drawn).



Bagad Men ha Tan. *Terre Salée.*

Led by Pierrick Tanguy, this bagad plays homage with a concert and photo exhibit to photographer Michel Thersiquel who died in 2007. The CD includes a booklet of his stunning photos with a focus on maritime Brittany. 15 compositions inspired by the photographs are included on this CD.



Bodadeg ar Sonerion. *Championnat des bagadoù – Lorient 2017.*

This is a recording of the second of two competitions for the best bagad of Brittany. This 3-CD set captures the performance of the top fifteen bagads at the Lorient Interceltic Festival. This year Bagad Cap Caval narrowly won over Bagad Kemper. This is a great set of CDs to capture the remarkable creativity of these unique Breton ‘bagpipe bands.’



Brou-Couton. *Chansons nantais.*

Singer Roland Brou pairs with guitarist Patrick Couton (who also plays autoharp on this CD) for songs drawn from the tradition as well as more newly composed focused on the city of Nantes. This includes a number evoking the historical role of this Loire port in maritime trade (including slave ships) as well as lighter aspects of city life with an ode to cuisine.



CAC Sud 22 Marc-Le-Bris. *Rencontre avec Louise Boussard.*

This new CD provides a great introduction to Brittany’s “other” unique language – Gallo. Louis Boussard interprets songs, stories and sayings in Gallo she learned as a child in Plémet (Loudéac area) where, after a lifetime elsewhere in France, she has retired and become active in local cultural activities. Interspersing the songs is conversation in which she shares memories and anecdotes.



La Cuvée de Patron. *Sans Itinéraire.*

This is a folk-rock group based in Fougères started up in 2002. The CD includes 12 songs (in French and English) on a maritime theme including classics like “Black Velvet Band,” “Leaving of Liverpool,” and “All for me grog.” The group includes Frederic Monnerie on bass, Morgan Bazinon on electric guitar, drums, accordion and flute, and Matthieu Blanchet with vocals, electric and acoustic guitar and harmonica.



Epsilon. *Live*

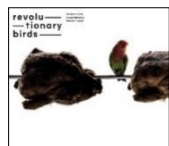
This is a recording of a live performance by this rock-Celtic group which celebrates its 10th anniversary with 18 selections on this CD. The group includes Nicolas Michon with song and guitars, Christophe Pouvreau on fiddle, veuze and accordion, Antonin Martineau on bass, Benjamin Sanchez on drums, Emmanuel Senard on electric guitar, and Benjamin Goudédranche on bombarde and clarinet.



Groupement culturel breton des pays de Vilaine. *Accordéon en Pays de Redon.*

This CD celebrates the important place of the accordion in the traditional music in the area of Redon. The accordion has been central to festivals and local fêtes, weddings, and dances and this CD presents 21 accordion players who were charged with the mission to perform a dance or melody from the traditional repertoire that is most dear to their heart. Ranging from 19 to 77 years old, a number of these musicians have performed in ensembles where jazz or other world traditions are

explored. They play both button (diatonic) and piano (chromatic) accordions, showing off a variety of technique in their interpretation of traditional music. The participants on the CD are worth noting: Yannig Noguét, Janick Martin and Ronan Robert (who spear-headed the project), Fanny Delbassée, Yves et Matthias Huguel, Fred Lambierge (Gazman), Jean-Yves Le Bot, Bertrand Cottin, Jacques Beauchamp, Jean-Sébastien Hellard, Yannick Rouxel, Tim Le Net et Julien Daniélo, Patrick Bardoul, Calixe, Alain Pennec, Thierry Crusson, Bébert Chevalier, Wenceslas Hervieux & Cyrille Thélohan, Komité KDN.

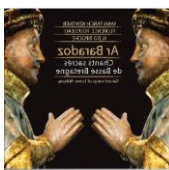


Wassim Halal, Erwan Keravec, Mounir Troudi. *Revolutionary Birds.*

Buda Musique 860314

Erwan Keravec is well known for his highly innovative use of Scottish bagpipes, but here he is in trio with

Tunesian singer Mounir Troudi and Franco-Libian percussionist Wassim Halal. Middle Eastern and North African vocal styles and rhythms are carefully interwoven with the drones and carefully selected notes of the bagpipes for a contemporary new sound with traditional roots.



Yann Fañch Kemener, Florence Rousseau, Aldo Ripoche. *Ar Baradoz – Chants sacrés de Basse Bretagne / Sacred Songs of Lower Brittany.*

This new CD features the religious cantiques traditional to central western Brittany but also songs of a more secular nature about religion – poetry by Gilles Baudy, a composition by Pierre Cholly, and selections by classical composers Paul Ladmirault (1877-1944) and Joseph-Guy Ropartz (1864-1955). A master of traditional Breton language song – gwerz and songs for dance – Yann Fañch Kemener brings out fully the emotive power and beautiful melodies of cantiques. He is accompanied by Aldo Ripoche on cello and Florence Rousseau on harmonium.



Khidou. *Los Años.*

This CD is by four musicians of Madrid who invent a new “hispano-fest-noz” musical style for 10 selections of dance sure to give a new way to hear Breton music. The group is made up

of Fernando Javiere on fiddle, Javier Chacón on bombarde, sax and vocals, José Luis Ruíz Dou on guitar, mandolin and vocals, and Vincent Diaz on gaita and button accordion.



Kreiz Breizh Akademi #6. *Pobl' d'ar machine.*

This is the sixth CD from the innovative “school of music” in central Brittany – Kreiz Breizh Akademi. With a focus on

modal music, eleven students here perform traditional Breton song with electronic and instrumental accompaniment drawn from all over the world. Directed by Erik Marchand, a list of the singers and musicians gives a good idea of the range of innovation to expect. They are: Estelle Beaugrand & Paul Salaun (vocals), Olivier Cotteau (clarinets and electronic “machines”), Grégoire Chomel Barbedour (tuba, serpent, machines), Gaspard Deloison (fretless electric guitar, oud), Bastien Fontanille (hurdy-gurdy, circuit-bending, machines), Benoît Guillemot (drums, programming), Joachim Mouflin (bouzouq, electric guitar), Antoine Peran (flute), Antony Provost (keyboard, programming), and Brian Ruellan (trumpet, bugel).



Ronan Le Gouriérec. *Little big noz.*

Saxophonist Ronan Le Gouriérec goes solo on this album of dances and compositions. He has a musical background that includes classical,

jazz, blues, and Breton traditions, with the bomarde being one of his instruments. This new CD includes selections of dance in a unique performance on baritone sax.



Eric Le Lann. *Mossy Ways.* Musique à bord MA3729BR02

Eric Le Lann is described as a trumpet player at home on an international jazz stage. He is joined here by singer Laurent Jouin, a master of the traditional

Breton language gwerz, as well as by Philippe Bussonet on bass, Patrick Manouguian on guitar, and Raphael Chassin on drums. There is a decidedly bluesy sound to this CD which explores Breton tradition in a new way.



Lune Bleue Trio. *Indigo.* Self-produced CT003

While the Celtic harp repertoire can get bogged down in a very narrow repertoire of well-known melodies, Breton musicians have never been

afraid of breaking new ground with the harp. Clotilde Trouillaud’s harp is found in trio with electric guitarist Erwan Bérenguer and drummer Jean-Marie Stéphant. While one finds a suite of tunes from eastern Brittany, the CD features compositions by Trouillaud.



Oriaz. *Oriaz*

This group of four from Nantes was created in 2015 and is made up of François Badeau on bass guitar, Gwénéolé Ayioud on oboe, Alan Vallée on guitars, and Julien Evain on button accordion. This CD includes 10 selections of traditional dance from various areas of Brittany including Laride de la Turvuie, ridée de Guillac, Rond de Sautron, Andro, Gavotte de Bas Léon, among others.



Plantec. *Live au Festival Interceltique de Lorient.*

This is a CD and DVD of the live performance of the group Plantec at the 2017 Interceltic Festival of Lorient. They present a fusion of traditional Breton

dance music, world music, and electronics. The performance draws from the best of their previous performances.



Spontus et Manu Sabaté. *Spontus et Manu Sabaté.*

Spontus has been on the fest noz scene for some 20 years and on this CD they take an improvisational approach, crossing borders to work with Manu

Sabaté, a player of the gralla – a Catalan oboe – and bass clarinet. Hugo Pottin on drums also joins as an invited guest to the four core members: Youen Paranthoën on accordion, Erwan Bérengue on guitar, Alan Paranthoën on fiddle, and Yann Le Bozec on bass.



Trio Hervieux-Mahé. *Le sauveur des âmes / Salver an Eneoù.*

This is the first CD by this trio featuring not only paired bombarde and organ, but also combining in the mix biniou koz and song. Slower melodies for the

complainte (ballad) and several cantiques (hymns) are featured with a few livelier tunes as well from the Vannetais Gallo and Breton language traditions. The mix of winds and voices adds a great deal of variety performed by three excellent singers and instrumentalists: Gilbert Hervieux on bombarde, Dominig Mahé on biniou, and Weceslas Hervieux on organ.

Brittany and Wales

Relations between Brittany and Wales date back many centuries and today there are many different types of exchanges. Students travel between the two countries to study Welsh and Breton, musicians exchange visits, sometimes settling in for long stays, and businesses explore collaborative ventures. Welsh music and culture is always represented at the Lorient Inter-Celtic Festival, and in 2018 Wales will be the featured country. Currently there are 44 twin cities linking Bretons and Welsh towns of various sizes.

March is a month when Bretons celebrate their Welsh cousins and this year for “Gouel Divi,” the celebration of Wales patron Saint David, Ti ar Vro Kemper partnered with six twin city committees to organize a conference on bilingualism in Wales. This featured Cefin Campbell of the City Council of Camarthenshire and member of

the Executive Bureau in charge of Local and Rural Affairs in Wales. He spoke about measures recently adopted by the Welsh government to reach a goal of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. There are currently some 700,000.

For more information see <http://semainesgalloises.hautefort.com>

**Wales and Brittany in 1889
A Travel Account of a Journey to Brittany by the Cambrian Archaeological Association**

Founded in 1846 the Cambrian Archaeological Association decided in August 1889 to travel to Brittany for an annual meeting – the first time it met outside of Wales. Still going strong today, the Association now travels extensively in the Celtic countries and Europe to explore. Oddly enough, the author of the travel account which follows is not identified nor is there any clear identification that the “antiquarians of Wales” of this article are a delegation from the Cambrian Archaeological Association. However, it seems more than a coincidence that the Association traveled to Brittany in 1889 visiting the same areas highlighted in this account. And the names of notable Association members at the end of the article are those of some of the leaders of the Association in the mid 19th century.

“The Cambrians in Brittany”
The Saturday Review (Volume 68, Number 1,767, September 7, 1889), pages 268-269

It was a happy thought, in the best sense of that much-abused term, that the antiquarians of Wales should have their annual campaign in Brittany this year. For Brittany is one of the most fascinating countries in Europe for antiquarians, whatever their nationality may be, and to educated Welshmen it could hardly help being doubly so. Leaving aside, however, the Breton language, which tickles the Welshman’s ear with a sort of quaint mockery of his own, one of the first things to strike him is the old-fashioned ways of the people, as compared with what he has seen in Wales or met with in England. Here he notices a method of threshing which greatly exercises him, there he comes across a plough which he cannot understand, and he constantly witnesses the prevalence of a creed which he somewhat promiscuously associates with the dark ages. For the visible symbols of Latin Christianity meet him at every point, and frequently in very crude forms. The other day we passed a roadside cross of so primitive an appearance that in one respect it reminded us of some Irish figures of the eighth or ninth century, and altogether gave us the idea of its being very old; but, on mentioning it to an authority on Breton matters and a native of the district, he assured us that, so far from the cross being some nine or ten centuries old, its

maker was still living at a neighbouring town and thriving on the profits of his pursuit of the fine arts. This crucifer of lapidary monsters had discovered, beyond all doubt, a short cut to one goal of the sculptor's ambition, the great art of concealing art. So one has to be cautioned continually against the error of regarding mere crudity as a mark of age in Brittany.

The first day of the excursion on the French side of the Channel was spent in travelling to Vannes, and a pretty long day it was, thanks to the slowness of French trains. With the next day began the real business of the Association, the inspection of the contents of the museum. There everybody naturally expects to find the archaeological spoils of the district; but few who have not been at Vannes can form any adequate idea of the wealth of prehistoric and Galloroman treasures to be seen in the museum; at any rate, that is decidedly our impression, when we call to mind, for the purposes of comparison, the contents, for example, of the barrows explored by Canon Greenwall in England. Some of the celts are unsurpassable, to say nothing of the necklaces of callaïs, the Galloroman torques, and other objects of value. The museum owes a great part of its present wealth to finds made since the year 1850, and the whole is arranged in three departments. The first of these is devoted to prehistoric objects, which are grouped, to some extent, with reference to the localities in which they were found. The next department is devoted to the bronzes and various things of Galloroman origin; while the third consists of objects belonging to the middle ages. In one respect the Cambrians were unfortunate – the finest prehistoric objects from the Tumiac had been lent to the Paris Exhibition. On the other hand, they were allowed access to private collections, such as that of M. de Limur. And that contained a house dating from about the middle of the seventeenth century, representing unchanged the dwellings of provincial gentlemen anterior to the French Revolution, and reminding one to some extent of the palaces of Florence; you missed only the powder and the elaborate dress of the period to complete the picture such as it was in the eighteenth century. Brittany is slow of change even when pushed from beyond by revolutions on the banks of the Seine.

At Vannes the visitors were successful in enlisting the able and disinterested services of a well-known Breton archaeologist, Dr. de Closmadeuc, President of the Société Polymathique, under whose auspices most of the works of search in the Morbihan were conducted. By his advice, a steamboat was secured for the excursion of the following day, which enabled the party to reach the points of interest in a most comfortable fashion. As the vessel paddled about in the gulf of the Morbihan the view changed every minute, and Dr. de Closmadeuc plied his fellow Brythons at every point with the place-names, which were in most cases such as the Kymry were at once able to equate or compare

with the same or similar names in the Principality. This was by way of amusement accompanied by an indication of the spots where the Doctor and his friends had found the objects which the party examined at Vannes. Presently some of the spots themselves were visited, and many a covered alley carefully scanned, candle in hand. The first and far the most curious of its kind was that in Gavr Inis, where the stones of the building are more elaborately and completely covered with ornamentation than any others visited in the district. Here the archaeologists wise in lapidary matters had a little discussion whether the carving had been done before or after the stones had been fixed in their places; but some tree-like ornamentation in a recess was discovered to make for the former view. Its advocates seemed also, later in the day, to score a point when one of the supports of a dolmen at Locmariaker covered a portion of the carved under-surface of the capstone. As the party included in its number several skeptical spirits, one missed the airing of wild theories usual on occasions of the kind, and even the great menhirs failed to elicit a single expression of genuine belief in phallic worship. However, the Doctor had a theory which we must not pass over in silence. Besides the dolmens and menhirs visited, a cromlech was shown on an islet called Er Lanic, opposite Gavr Inis. A part only of this cromlech is now visible, the rest being under water; nor is that all, for hard by lies another cromlech which is wholly covered by the sea. On those facts, for such they seem to be, the Breton archaeologist builds an important theory.

Before, however, we may make any further reference to it, we must explain that a cromlech in the language of French archaeology means a circle of large stones, while what is called in Wales a cromlech is in Brittany a dolmen, the latter word being interpreted to mean a stone table, in reference to the capstone supported by upright stones. The word is somewhat incorrectly formed from real Breton words of the Vannes dialect – namely *tol*, “a table” (with the article it becomes *an dol*, “the table”), and *men*, “a stone”; but those of the party who were word-wise failed to find any peasant in the habit of calling the dolmen near his dwelling *ann dol men*. The same applies to the word cromlech, the use of which may, for anything we know, be confined to archaeologists. In any case the question forces itself upon us, how the word cromlech came to differ so much in meaning in Wales and Brittany.

Now, from the submerged cromlechs of Er Lanic, Dr. de Closmadeuc argues that, since the time when the stones were set up, the island, or rather the whole neighbourhood, has subsided very considerably. In fact, he goes so far as to think that the whole archipelago of the Morbihan Gulf was then a part of the mainland, traversed by a single river and its tributaries. Thus Gavr Inis and the other islands would have no existence as

such at that time, and this theory has been accepted by such authorities as Desjardins, who would apply it to Galloroman times. But the Breton doctor refuses to have the date of the building of the cromlechs brought down to the Galloroman period, as he would rather suppose them set up an indefinite length of time anterior to Caesar's destruction of the power of the Veneti and the Armoric league. It is but right, however, to add that he not only admits that the subsidence is still going on, but that he has himself adduced facts serving to mark the more recent stages in its progress. On the other hand, the formation of the Gulf of the Morbihan since Caesar's time serves him as an explanation of the impossibility at the present day of discovering the towns and ports alluded to in Caesar's passages referring to the Veneti.

This day spent in the Morbihan was a long and busy one, which was ended by the return of the party to Auray, where a Cambrian deeply impressed with the belief in the permanence of ancient habits and customs found the prehistoric hatchet pictured on the dolmens still in use for splitting wood for fuel. We are here tempted to leave the business of the excursion for a moment in order to notice one of the other pleasures of the day, that of beholding beautiful scenery. Auray is very well situated, and the view on both sides of the river as you come up the stream is very fine. Here and there it reminded some of the party of the prettiest bits of the Menai Straits, and to its natural charms of sheets of water, green fields, and groves it added the interest attaching to antiquity, in the form of the remains of a Roman aqueduct which once crossed the river; in Wales the footprints of ancient Rome are far fewer and much harder to trace. But what one misses most in Breton scenery is mountains, and this deficiency prepares one to find the Vannetais word *mané*, "mountain," brought down to mean a mount in the sense in which that word was used by Pennant and others of his time for what is now more usually called a *mound* or *tumulus*. It is needless to say that the guide-books industriously mix up *mané* with *men*, "a stone," and that the reader would do well to make it a rule to skip the etymologies with which they are abundantly adorned.

The next day was spent in visiting Plouharnel and Carnac, together with many other places of interest on the way. The museum at Plouharnel was inspected, and the still richer one formed by James Miln at Carnac; but the new feature of the day's work was the walk to the lines of standing stones characteristic of the district. The mystery of the origin of these alignments, as they are called, is perhaps more inscrutable than that of the dolmens and cromlechs; but otherwise they are, to our thinking, far less interesting. The day after was devoted to Erdeven, Courconno, and other places rich in the same attractions as those of the two previous days. Then came Sunday, with its much-needed rest; but

some of the party, so far from resting, exerted themselves to find a church where a Breton sermon might be heard; not, as they learned, an easy matter in the month of August. Monday was spent in travelling from Auray to Morlaix, but with stoppages which admitted to one's visiting the chief points of interest at Quimper and some other places of note to Brittany. Morlaix now became the headquarters for two or three days, and from that town excursions were made to the Cathedral at St.-Pol de Léon, with its remarkable architecture and other objects of curiosity and legend; nor was Roscoff, with its enormous fig-tree, left out of the programme. The last day at Morlaix was spent in visiting the seventeenth-century church of St. Thégonnec, Guimiliau, and other points of attraction. In the Morbihan the prehistoric work of man figured so largely in the foreground that the Cambrians, while there, were comparatively little attracted by the specimens of Christian art to be found in the district; but from the moment they came to Morlaix it was otherwise, so their attention was fully directed to the architecture, the calvaries, the relics, and other things associated with the churches and shrines of the diocese.

The last working day of the Association began with the inspection of the church of Brelevenez at Lannion, of which we may briefly say that the various interests attaching to it are far greater than any one could gather from the guide-books known to us choose to tell their readers. From Lannion the excursions drove in the direction of Perros Guirec to a house called Ros-map-Amon. It was, however, not to see a stupendous dolmen or menhir, it was not to scan the successive styles of architecture in the structure of an ancient church; it was to see and hear the most famous of living Bretons. For in this pleasant retreat M. Renan loves to pass his summers in comfort and hard work. The books he requires are few, but one of them is thumbed out of all shape. In the last extremity he could spare even that, as he knows its contents by heart – it is the Bible. After he had received the party with his usual politeness and good humour, he gave them a speech of the kind which is so well known as an essential element at the Celtic dinners in Paris; but, alas! there was no reporter from Paris present. It turned partly on the nature of the objects to be inspected in the course of the afternoon, partly on the general character of the ancient saints of Brittany. Here he dwelt on the fact that Rome never thoroughly liked Celtic saints, and he related an anecdote showing how a priest in this district recently managed to get rid of the statue of an honest old Breton saint in order to set up in its place that of the Virgin of Lourdes.

Then the excursionists proceeded, led by Mme. Renan and her husband, to the old church of Perros. M. Renan himself was, however, more interested in a church reached a little later – namely, that of Notre Dame de la Clarté, which is remarkable both in itself and in its

conspicuous position. Thence he led the party towards the seashore, to feast their eyes on objects more ancient than the church, more ancient even than any prehistoric work of man to be seen in Brittany, or elsewhere - we mean the quaint and stupendous erections fringing the coast, the cheese-wrings and rocking-stones left in position by the giant forces of nature when she had nothing else for their idle hands to do. In the distance he directed our attention to Enez Aval, or the Apple Island. The makers of guide-books sometimes call it the Isle of Agalon or Avalon, which enables them to put Arthur to sleep there in security; but the Breton peasant knows nothing of his presence there, and the whole story looks suspiciously like a borrowed one suggested by the name of the island. One may be allowed to observe in this context that the stories about Arthur in Brittany have but a very precarious existence. It is true that we have known a Breton scholar to argue seriously for St.-Michel-en-Grève, a low and level site in this district, as the scene of Arthur's dispatching the giant Dinabuc, and not Mont St.-Michel in Normandy. We have never succeeded, however, in discovering much in the way of place-names commemorative of Arthur in Brittany, such as frequently occur in Wales and the North-country as far as the river Forth.

On the return of the party from the cliffs they came across a little sandy cover with a quaint shrine. This proved to contain the wooden statue of St. Guirec, and the presence of M. Renan was most fortunate, as he is never happier than when discussing a question of what we may perhaps term Christian anthropology. For St. Guirec is the object of a curious practice on the part of the maidens of the neighbourhood. Those who wish to be married pay stealthy visits to the shrine, and stick pins in the poor saint's person – that is supposed to ensure their being mated within the year. The continuance of the belief in the efficacy of the pins is attested by an artist who had the curiosity the other day to lie concealed, watching the visit of a spinster to the shrine. Little is known of the life of the saint, nor are we clear as to the psychology of the pins. A local philosopher would have it that, as pins are used by the fair sex in fastening their clothing, pins must be to women the most appropriate symbols of union possible; but this clearly failed to account for the pins being thrust into the saint's body. M. Renan was inclined to favour a more material explanation, suggested of old by a Hebrew prophet, for St. Guirec might, like Baal, happen to be abroad, or napping, or otherwise better engaged. After bidding the Renans good-bye, the party went its way, and brought to a close that evening the most pleasant and instructive excursion of the Society since the days when Longueville Jones and Barnwell, Parker and Babington, Westwood and Freeman, were wont to take the field.

A Few Notable Bretons of the 19th and 20th Century – Part 5

From : Jean-Loup Avril, *Mille Bretons – Dictionnaire Biographique*. 2nd edition. Portes du Large. 2013.

As I have done for past issues of Bro Nevez, I am continuing here to include short biographical notes from Jean-Loup Avril's dictionary. The two which follow here are both figures in the Welsh travel account above. These are my translations and I take responsibility for any misinterpretations. – Lois Kuter

Gustave Auguste de Closmadeuc

Surgeon and archeologist. Born in La Roche-Bernard (Morbihan) on November 12, 1828. Deceased in Vannes on May 7, 1918. After an internship in Paris, Gustave Auguste Thomas de Closmadeuc completed his doctorate thesis in medicine in 1855 and became a surgeon at the hospital in Vannes. His first publications earned him entrance to the Société de Chirurgie in 1862. Having successfully completed three caesarian sections, a daring surgery for the times, he was elected as a corresponding member of the Académie de Médecine in 1888.

Here is his account of his first caesarian in 1870. "It concerned a peasant woman from Elven, with her first birth, who had been in labor for forty hours. A matron of the village had tried to extract the baby in vain; it was breaching with the shoulder and the arm and umbilical cord out of their normal place. The swelling was enormous. A great quantity of blood had flowed. The retracted uterus cervix did not allow for the slightest attempt for movement. The woman was in agony and the child had ceased to live. Only the caesarian operation offered us an extreme resort. I made a decision. My young colleague, Dr. Trémant, assisted me. It was nighttime, in the depths of a Breton thatched cottage, four leagues from Vannes. For lighting we had only candles. I lit several which were held by hand by neighbors, with the advice that the light be directed as much as possible on the operating area. We laid a straw mattress in the middle of the room; that was where we laid our operation patient, prescribing they leave her there until our next visit. But, the next day we found her in her bed! She insisted absolutely on returning there; she took the path on foot held up by two people. It's thus that she climbed sideboard and into the bed. Thirty-two days after the operation the peasant went on foot into the town of Elven for the Churching ceremony" (ceremony for women recovering from childbirth).

A distinguished archeologist, he completed digs on the island of Gavrinis and described the cromlech of Er-Lannig in the gulf of Morbihan. He published the results of his numerous archeological investigations in the

journal of the Société Polymathique du Morbihan which he presided from 1884 to 1903.

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 Bulletin de la Société Polymathique du Morbihan. Vol 125, 1999. P. 249-256.

Ernest Renan

Writer and philosopher. Born in Tréguier, February 28, 1823. Deceased in Paris, October 2, 1892. Brought up by his mother, the widow of a captain in the merchant marines, he began his education at the Petit Séminaire de Tréguier. A brilliant student, he was destined for an ecclesiastical role and was sent in 1838 to the Petit Séminaire de Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet. He pursued his theology studies at the Séminaire d'Issay (1841) and then at that of Saint-Sulpice (1843). With a passion for the study of Hebraic languages and sacred texts, his scientific work led him to doubt his faith and he gave up the idea of becoming a priest. His friendship with the scholar Marcellin Berthelot contributed to his orientation to a new religion, that of science. He then devoted himself to the history of religions and philology.

In 1847 Renan was named professor of philosophy. He received a doctorate in 1852. Professor of Hebrew at the College of France, he was put in charge of an archeological mission in Syria and Libya. During these travels his sister Henriette died of malaria. Having visited Palestine, on his return he published *Vie de Jésus* (1863) which was widely recognized. Renan respected Christ not as the son of God but as the founder of a new religion and an Evangelist. In 1864 he traveled to Egypt and Greece. Renan published *Histoire des origines du christianisme* (7 volumes from 1863 to 1881) and *Histoire du peuple d'Israël* (5 volumes from 1887 to 1893). He also published *Dialogues philosophiques* (1876) and *Drames philosophiques* (1876). Renan was elected to membership in the Académie Française in 1879.

Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse (1883) in which Renan described his spiritual path and evoked his Tregor past is a work that still retains interest today and shows all the power in this spirit of research of the truth. In Paris Renan regularly presided over gatherings of Bretons for the "Dîner Celtique." He fostered a number of Tregor men, notably Luzel and de Quellien. In the summer he hosted his friends at the property of Rosmapamon in Louannec where he lived.

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