



Inter-Celtic, Lorient - Breizh Amerika Collective

Thomas: Breizh Amerika is a non-profit organisation to build bridge between Brittany and the U.S.A. for culture, economy, and brother-maker (?) collective. It's to mix American musician with Breton musician to create a new sound. For this year, 2018, I met Joe one years ago and I show him some gavotte (?) some Breton tunes, and I told him, "What do you think about that?" I say, "that's really crazy -- I want to be part of that project."

Rob: I'm going to ask Joe now, what he thinks. Tell me how, tell me how it first came across when you first heard Breton music being played by Thomas.

Joe: He's a very skilled player and I was instantly drawn to the rhythms he's ... an extensive knowledge of the traditional melodies, and when I first heard him play, I had no familiarity with the music at all, but I was instantly captivated by it, because it's uh, it's complex. There are what seems to be odd meters, but they're not really odd meters, they're just placements of the chords over a, over a framework that is different than what I'm used to hearing, so it was very interesting to me.

Rob: I understand that you have a background in jazz, you play double bass?

Joe: Yeah, I'm a Jack of all trades, master of none.

Rob: But you've played with a lot of well known people in the States.

Joe: I've played with some well known bands, across many styles: jazz, blues, the country, gypsy swing music, rockabilly, R&B.

Rob: You're curious about Breton music because it's a new form?

Joe: Yeah, I heard just a little piece of it and it sounded good to me and it's, I'm always eager to find out new music and to explore, to figure out how it is to be done.

Thomas: And we had a good feeling, so it was a first take. A good feeling so we ?? , like a human feeling, before the music feeling, because that's the most important music -- an interaction between musician[s] not only the stage. For the Breton music, we have a strong connection with the dancer. People come to dance and that's pretty unique. If you can just say, "What was your feeling for your first gig in Brittany with around three or four thousand people in front of you dancing?"

Joe: Yes, there was an amazing percentage, very high percentage of the people in attendance were part of this giant, interwoven, multi-level dance phenomenon happening on stage. It was really quite impressive to see how many people were taking part of this group dance, everyone interlocked, arm-in-arm, going in every direction, concentric circles of dancers going counter clock-wise and clock-wise. It was, it was quite amazing to see.

Rob: Your group is a collective, so musicians come and go? We're also joined by Colm who has joined you for this gig in the Inter-Celtic festival in Lorient.



Colm: That's right.

Rob: What instrument do you play, Colm?

Colm: I play violin.

Rob: O.K. And how did you get involved with these guys?

Colm: I was just listening to Joe there, and I realised that I met Joe many years ago playing swing jazz in San Francisco, and Joe and I had been recently playing, over the last three or years in a band together. We play a mixture of Irish music and other sounds like jazz and swing, and Brazilian-Cuban. So, and then when Joe was playing the Breizh Amerika Collective in San Francisco, I went to the concert and I loved the music, and I met Thomas.

Rob: O.K. and there are several other musicians who can't be with us this afternoon. Who else is there in the band?

Thomas: There's a musician I play with for Breton music, like Lors Landat, one of the best singers in Brittany, Julien Le Mentec, for the collective at the keyboard, and Gweltaz Rialland, at the saxophone, on a bombard, on a ... Lionel [Prigent], at the drums. He was also like Colm the first time. He played last Sunday with the Collective, it was completely new. And I saw Simon [Creachcadec]. Simon was a part of the Collective from 2017 and he play in Louisiana. We invited him for the concert last Sunday and two nights, it was a 7-hour marathon.

Joe: Yeah,

Thomas: We discover all this sound, all the guys and that's the Collective -- just to draft people, just to have a meeting around the music, but around discussion.

Rob: If I'm not mistaken, the Collective has done an extensive tour of the States.

BA: We had a good time on stage. The audience liked in San Francisco, San Diego, California, the audience enjoyed the music. We enjoyed the time together too.

Joe: It was a good connection. You know the -- as musicians we constantly meet new people. Our extended family grows a little bit with every meeting with new people. The family gets bigger, the connections get a little stronger, and that also holds true to the Collective itself with the addition of every new person. It changes the shape of the organisation and the organism somewhat. Things will get a little more complex with addition of each musical personality and everyone's individual personality. It changes the overall sound, look, feel and shape of the thing, but that's the beauty of it for me, because it's ... the organism, when it's healthy, it's flexible, and can allow the influences of new people to come on board.

Colm: I think there's something that Joe just said that I think integrates with other aspects of what Breizh Amerika does, as well as the Collective absorbing the people. I think Breton music is also



incredibly strong and stable, and it shows the strength of the music that it can integrate with so many other styles, including jazz, and that speaks, it looks to the world and integrates with other aspects and itself and this is what music should be.

Rob: Even though it is very traditional as well in its forms.

Colm: Yes, but I think because people like Thomas have kept that tradition very strong, it seems to me that that allows it to also reach out.

Rob: We're in the centre of Lorient here. Colm, have you ever been to Lorient before?

Colm: No. About 20 I was invited to play at the festival, and I couldn't for various reasons, and I've been wanting to come here for many, many years and now I am, thanks to the Breizh Amerika Collective.

Thomas: That's really great, because I lived for one year and a half in San Francisco, thanks for that, I met all these crazy guys.

Rob: Whereabouts are you from in Brittany?

Thomas: I'm from Lorient.

Rob: Ah, from Lorient, so you're at home today.

Thomas: Yeah, at home. That's nice to be.

Rob: How does it feel for the other guys to be here?

Joe: This has been great. I had a very long and torturous travel day to get here on Sunday, and as soon as I got out of the car from the airport, I instantly felt at home and welcomed and it was, was natural. I was very glad to be here.

Colm: I also had problems coming here, as one of the unusual aspects of this Collective is that every day I get clothes from different members of the band, because I lost my baggage on the way -- thank you British Airways -- and, so, so, each day I hope maybe the baggage will come today, and I don't buy clothes and another member of the Collective says, "here's some underwear, Colm."

Rob: Well, that's brilliant, great. Thanks very much Breizh Amerika Collective, Colm, Joe, and Thomas, very much indeed, for talking to us today.

Group: Thank you.

Rob: Now we want to play a little bit of your music.

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