



Charles Kergaravat - Breizh Amerika

Elaine: I'm catching up once again with Charles Kergaravat, who is the president of Breizh Amerika, and the last time we met it was actually in New York at the Bistro Vendome where you were entertaining a convention from Morlaix.

Charles: Yeah, it was a great time. I remember that, so goo... good to see you again.

Elaine: So here we are, this time in Brittany, which is a slightly different setting but a beautiful hot day. So, Charles, tell me. Can you explain to people perhaps who didn't hear, perhaps, our previous broadcast with you, what is Breizh Amerika?

Charles: Sure. Well, Breizh Amerika is a non-profit organisation that builds bridges between the USA and Brittany. Those projects might be cultural, they might be economic, so throughout the year we do projects that really try to build the cooperation between these two areas getting more people to, to really know that Brittany exists, know about the culture, know about the music, know about the language. Do events on both sides of the Atlantic so sometimes in the U.S., and sometimes in Brittany.

Elaine: Is this the first time, or is it that you are actually involved with the Inter Celtic Festival.

Charles: We are doing a series of concerts this year at the Inter Celtic, but it's not the first time that we are doing something with the Inter Celtic. They were partners two years ago of the Breizh Amerika Collective when we travelled and we did a tour in the U.S.A.

Elaine: Would you say now, that is since I, since, well it's a while since I last was over, is membership growing, who does it attract?

Charles: The number of events that we do throughout the year vary in location so what's been really interesting is when we do events, sometimes in places we've never been, so Breizh Amerika has done events in over 20 U.S. cities, so that goes from New York to San Francisco, Rochester, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, a bunch of cities in Louisiana, New Mexico, we were in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, we've been in San Diego, so sort of all over. So sometimes when we go somewhere it's the first time we do an event there so it's great to get the enthusiastic welcomes that we get in new places and to see, yeah, you know, people are interested by this. They want to see greater cooperation between a place like the U.S. and a place like Brittany. They're interested in this very unique culture and music and dance, in cuisine. We have about 5,000 people that follow us actively. We have 25 active members that, that help on a day-to-day basis, so it's been great to have just different people in different areas taking part in these events, and excited about it too.

Elaine: That's amazing, isn't it. It's not necessarily attracting Breton people, or people from Brittany or French people, but others from other ethnic cultures too.

Charles: Yes, so, er, we, one of the big projects that we have each year is called the Breizh Amerika Collective where we get musicians from Brittany and musicians from the U.S. to come together and collaborate on music. So, the musicians from Brittany are traditional musicians, they might sing ??? they



might play the accordion or play some other instrument. The Americans in this are contemporary artists, they play jazz, Americana, blues, a lot of different things so it's an eclectic mix, and that mix makes some interesting sounds after they, they do, do a melange and they get together and they, you know they rehearse, and then they do concerts, and people are like, oh, that was amazing! And I have to tell people, well, they only rehearsed a few days before this concert and they kind of made a lot of stuff up. But it just shows the power of the mus..., of music to break down barriers and get people to come together. So, quite excited about this year, this summer, at the Inter Celtic we're doing two different concerts. One at the big stage at L'Espace Bretagne, so there'll be three or four thousand people for that show, so it's great to say that first time in Europe that the Breizh Amerika Collective plays after 20 different shows in the U.S. is here in Brittany in Lorient.

Elaine: That's fantastic. Moving onto the money side of things, as one has to, how are you funded. Do you get grants, or is it donations?

Charles: So it's not easy and I think all non-profits know about this that it's a daily grind and when you talk about volunteers as well, those are all difficult things to find, volunteers and money. So, you know, we have tried to be creative in the way we do this self-funded, so, uh, from the events we do, being able to make it profitable which is definitely not easy, we have partners that help us be it in the private sector, also in the public sector. One of the things that we recently did is we did a beer, we created a beer called the Breizh Amerika Beer, we've partnered with Brasserie Lancelot for this, and a small amount of the profits that the brewery makes comes back to us to help finance our cultural projects. So we really try to think outside the box when we do these things because we know it's so hard, and a lot of times people don't care about Breton language, people don't care about culture, so we are defenders of that and we try to find ways to protect it.

Elaine: Now, on a more personal level, I understand that you are now over here in Brittany.

Charles: Yeah, I live in Brittany and it's been, it's been a few years now. I grew up in New York City, I was born there, obviously my last name makes me pretty Breton, but my folks moved to the U.S. in the sixties, like so many people from Central Brittany came to Brittany from, from Brittany to America. So I was born there, I grew up my whole life there, but I got married, and I got married to a Breton woman so, from Lorient, for all you guys out there, when you marry a Breton woman you will probably end up in Brittany. So that's what happened to me.

Elaine: The family have hauled you back.

Charles: Exactly. So I have been here for a few years and the quality of life is just amazing. Just things that you probably can't duplicate within America. I would say number one, the butter here is just from another planet.

Elaine: Yes, because it's exported.

Charles: Just living in Brittany is just amazing and the quality of life is hard to match anywhere else. You've got to get used to the rhythm that, I mean that's some of the things that when I first got here I realised, oh, you know the store might not be open on a Monday morning, you really don't ask why. That's



just the way it is and you kind of plan ahead, and .. er, it's different. You march at the beat of a drum that's a little bit different. I am lucky enough with my job to travel because I work in, for a start-up here in Brittany in tech, and obviously Breizh Amerika is just, er, I'm a volunteer so it's what I do in my free time. Family first and I have my job and everything so my free time is filled up with Breizh Amerika stuff, but my job sends me to the U.S. very often for International meetings and stuff like that so I get to go back to New York a few times a year, so I don't miss is that much.

Elaine: Any future plans, ideas, with Breizh Amerika?

Charles: In our calendar we have a lot of things so the beer was just launched in August, so, we did a test run in Lorient and it kind of sold out after a week. Which, we were wondering if it was going to work or not, but the feedback has been extremely positive. People really, really enjoy it. It's a little bit different, you know, it takes Breton malt and it takes hops from the U.S. that are organic and puts it together for a, for a very unique beer so for beer lovers it's been, it's been a great experience for them to be able to taste this new beer that's made with Breton innovation because the Brasserie Lancelot is based in La Morbihan so, we sold it out after a week, so there is, there's gonna be more, more beer available so we, it's gonna be in different bars throughout Brittany in the fall so that's going to be a great experience as well to see more people getting to know this beer and this different taste of beer. For us on the cultural front, very important for us to keep on growing at the momentum we have, with the Breizh Amerika Collective, so we've done shows in the U.S., now we have finally done a show in Europe here in Lorient at the Inter-Celtic so I think there will be more stuff to talk about with the Collective as more people become fans of the band, and we continue to expand sort of the creative aspect for the musicians in getting them to perform more often together, rehearse more often together, and who knows, maybe an album and things like that will be down the road. From the economic front we've done these start up events throughout the year where we try to highlight the really great innovators of Brittany in the tech and the start up world, and young entrepreneurs who really don't get their name called out too often. So we really want to highlight them and show that Brittany is a *terre de innovation*, like we say an area, a region where there is a lot of innovative people, innovative products and innovative companies. So, we'll, we'll be doing more things around that in the year as well.

Elaine: It's very interesting. Excellent. So how can our listeners keep track of what you're up to?

Charles: Well, it's super easy. I would invite everybody to go on our website which is breizh-amerika.com. Social media is great too, we are very active there so whatever your favourite social media is, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, we're on there. Follow us, check us out, a.., a.. and send us a message.

Elaine: Indeed. Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

Charles: Thank you.