



## **Charles Kergaranvat - New York Breton Society**

- Elaine Well here I am, in the Bistro Vendôme in Manhattan in New York to talk to Charles Kergaranvat to find out more about the Breton Society in New York. Charles could you tell me a little bit about yourself, to begin with.
- Charles Well my name is Charles Kergaranvat, err, I'm President of BZH New York, the Bretons of New York. Errh the stories of the Bretons of New York is not a new one, because there's a long history that dates back to the late 1800s. A big wave of immigrants came in the 20's then, then another significant one err after World War Two in the 50's and 60's. There's around 80,000 that came err and we started our Association in 2006, we have around 225 members and 1,500 people interested by what we do. We organise around 30 to 40 events a year, some that are cultural, economics, sports, err basically a reflection of what Brittany is today. We try just to make, to federate Breton people but also get Americans aware, New Yorkers aware that Brittany exists and that it has a strong identity and culture.
- Elaine And so the main aims and objectives of the Society really is to interest New York people, or Americans, in the Breton culture.
- Charles Well, I think the first thing you have to do when you're abroad with a diaspora is to get people to come together. Breton people that come together want to do things, network, meet each other, have a drink, have a pint, but then find ways to, to work together to, to give back we'll say in some way, get, get people that are where you live aware that you exist - Brittany is not that known outside of its borders unfortunately. It has a language err that, that is very old, err that unfortunately is endangered and a lot of people don't know that story. It has a culture with amazing music and dance. Unfortunately many people don't know that, that, that exists. It has a great, a great economy that unfortunately many people don't know exists either so we actually have a lot of work to do so we federate and then we get people to learn about Brittany.
- Elaine How is it funded, the Society, is it through membership?
- Charles We have members so the 200 odd members obviously help. Err we try to find private sponsors when we can so and the events that we organise, sometimes there's a profit and that helps too.

- Elaine Erm, would you say that people, like let's say Bretons who erm emigrated here or moved here found they have been able to make successful careers in New York?
- Charles Well, New York's a special place, err, it's obviously been welcoming to I think immigrants from all over the world. Err there are 800 different languages that are spoken in New York on a daily basis so that's a whole lot of people living together, working together, err living their dreams and a lot of them are able to do that in a city like New York so it's definitely a special place and the Breton people are part of that history of immigration and success and working hard to get somewhere and luckily New Yorkers were welcoming to people from Brittany and a lot of them have been successful in, in their endeavours.
- Elaine What about actually keeping the Breton language alive or generating it because I've listened tonight and everybody is obviously here speaking French but are there classes or are there Diwan schools here?
- Charles Well, the fact that people no longer speak err Breton language or that it's an endangered language is not something new, I think everyone's aware of that in Brittany and elsewhere. It's not singular to Brittany; a lot of cultures, a lot of countries have that issue. Here in New York we try to shed light on that. I actually err spoke at a Conference this weekend at the New York Public Library to talk about that endangered status. We do initiation classes, err but at the end of the day the problem is, the problem is finding teachers and we have people that want to learn but we don't have many people that are able to teach a class, so that's, that's significant too.
- Elaine How do you maintain your links with Brittany? Are there visits and exchange visits organised, because I notice tonight there's a delegation from Morlaix?
- Charles Well the World Wide Web is, every single day we get emails from people from Brittany err trying to do something, with ideas, wanting to meet us, so err the Internet is we'll say the great connector.
- Elaine And also later this month you've got the Art Exhibition with err the artists coming, well not artists per se but people coming from Nizon en Pont Aven .
- Charles We've got a lot of things coming up err we have 50 artists coming from Nizon, to hang out, it's errr we'll say inspired by Warhol Pop Art, but a lot of great photos err transformed to, to something that's Pop Art, as we know err and there'll be about 40 paintings here err with 50, 50 of the artists, a 2 week Expo. We're doing a Cocktail on 25<sup>th</sup>, opening that and a couple of days later on

November 3rd, we're doing an Inter-Celtic, we'll say Halloween is celebrated by all Celtic people and there are so many Celts in New York we're gonna get them to come together for a night of music and dance so Irish musicians, Breton musicians, Wales, Scotland, err Cornwall, Isle of Man, some Gallicians, all together in, in one place, celebrating Celtic culture.

Elaine Thank you very much, Charles, thanks. It's been very nice.  
Merci bien pour m'inviter ce soir.

Charles Kenavo.

Elaine Vous aussi, Kenavo.

