

Celtic Musician Desi Wilkinson

Rob And I'm with Desi Wilkinson who's a very well known musician. Known in Brittany because you've been here quite a long time haven't you Desi?

Desi Yeah Rob, I've been coming here for about..... over, well over thirty years on and off and at one point we lived here for two years in Trégor and at that point I took an interest in Breton music and culture and dance, and subsequently even though I didn't ... hadn't decided to do it at that time did a research project on it towards a PhD and stuff like that and so I've, I've made a bit of a crusade about Breton music and culture over the last while.

Rob You're very interested in general in traditional music from Celtic countries.

Desi I, I suppose, yeah, you could say that. I mean, whatever Celtic is is up for dispute. It's one of those, it's a disputed word we can't actually we don't have the time to go into it now but my book does, I think, yeah, Celtic music by and large is my first interest. Irish traditional music and associated similar types. I'm also interested in World musics of all sorts. I'm generally interested in traditional music, World music from North Africa, India et cetera. I'm very much interested in all that type of thing. I can see there's a very vibrant scene here in the Kreiz Breizh even to do with World music which is really interesting. You've got everything. The local, the global and all.

Rob Your instrument is....?

Desi My main instrument is the flute and I play the fiddle as well and the bagpipes.

Rob Traditional instruments.

Desi Traditional instruments, yeah. A bit of clarinet. I started the clarinet here because I wanted to get into the nitty-gritty of the aesthetic of Breton music. So I wanted to play something that was played by locals you know. So I took up the clarinet.

Rob You've played with other musicians from all over the world. What kind of links have you made in traditional music? What kind of musics have you brought together?

Desi Well I mean the most recent CD, I suppose is a thing bringing together Irish traditional influences and American Old Time music and I worked with a ?? with a five-string banjo player and a good fiddle player from the Appalachian area Indiana and Martin O'Connor a very fine accordian player from Galway. We were sat around playing music, basically and discovered what the little points of interest and difference in the two musics. So It's not just the sort of similarities in music that I'm interested in, it's actually the differences and Breton music even though it's lumped together with Irish music and Scottish music as a Celtic music is aesthetically very different to both Irish and Scottish music.

Rob Can you be a bit more specific on that or anything?

Desi Oh the dance forms are different for a start and the, the way people play, the way they express the music is different . It's very tied into the Breton language and, and the way French is spoken in Brittany as well and in the Pays Gallo. So the lead.... I found it intriguing that the lead Breton dance music is the vocal. The vocal model and the instrumental music then is based on that kind of descant model and I thought that was really one of the most fascinating things about it in the beginning.

Rob You, you've played with a lot of local musicians I understand?

Desi I know a lot of people now that coming and going for years. I know Dominic Joue very well, Patrick Molar (?) Pierre Crepion Jean-Michel Veyon (?). They're all good friends of mine and I've hundreds of acquaintances all over the place in Brittany.

Rob Uh, what's your interest in Brittany in, in the first instance?

Desi I think it was just the Lorient Festival. I heard about there was a big shindig and I was doing French at school. I think I wanted to try my French out. Go to a place where you could play a few Irish tunes and people would think you were alright and so the first trip I made was in the 1970s I think the very very early days of the Lorient Festival. Took the boat to Le Havre I think and then hitchhiked down to Lorient from there. That was my first experience of Brittany and at that time I didn't know it was any different to France really except I knew it was, you know, musically different.

Rob So you've uh, brought out a publication a book with CD about Breton music.

Desi I think the most fascinating thing about life here..... cultural life here for me it's available. Sort of the regular performance of vernacular music and dance you know, in the Fest Noz and Fest Diez you know and I seen that happen, people dancing in a ring and the communal aspect and some of the dances, some of them, not all of them are accessible quite quickly if you observe, follow the rules you can get in on it. So that call to the dance is 'Appel à La Danse' in French calling people to dance and that's where two bombard and the ?? player and the two singers play slowly at the start that's to let people know that they're going

to play a gaillard, or a plin? or something or whatever it is and It's calling people to dance . So I thought that's, that sounds like a very nice title for a book in English so I just shamelessly translated 'Appel à la danse' to Call to the Dance and that's the name of the book.

Rob Your book investigate different aspects to the music or does it look for links or..... what's the themes of your book?

Desi It looks at the main sort of pan-Breton dances. The ones that I, over the last twenty years, have found to be the most popular at the Fest Noz. The plin for example, the gavotte, the Rond Loudéac. These tend to be the dances that keep recurring and I've also concentrated on round dancing because that's to my mind the most iconic form of Breton movement but, you know, there is that dancing and there is figure dancing but to my mind, what made it really different, you know and worth looking into was the fact that it was this round communal dancing in the round, in, in a circle.

Rob There's something that most of our listeners will be familiar with if they go to a Fest Noz or a Fest Diez.

Desi Of course they will but they'll also know that it's not very common throughout the rest of Europe. You may have to go to somewhere like Estonia to, to see a similar type of performance in traditional music and what's really good about it here is it's people don't necessarily and don't always get dressed up in folk lore costumes to do it, they can just come as they are wearing their ordinary everyday clothes and that means it's really embedded in popular culture and that's also a very original point about living here, about being familiar with the cultural life here.

Rob So your book is called 'Call to the Dance'. Desi Wilkinson , thank you very much and we'll have some details about how to get hold of your book just after this piece of music....

Desi No problem Rob.

