



Rob interviewing Sam Hutchings, musician and banjo maker

Sam: I started out making guitars, and then I got more interested in folk music, I was making some mandolins and a lot of ukuleles. And I actually got interested in playing the banjo so my musician side became interested in playing the banjo and then I just started making them. I thought oh yeh, I'm on to something here. And its um snow-balled a bit. I just had orders for banjos so I stopped making anything else. And now I am the banjo specialist.

Rob: The banjo specialist in Brittany but probably in France as well? There can't be many of you?

Sam: There's I think there's certainly one other, the only professional I think there's other luthiers, other guitar-makers that sort of dabble a bit, but, but yeh it's pretty niche.

Rob: We're sitting in a room here with some of your banjos displayed. It represents a lot of work I imagine.

Sam: Yeh, there is yeh, especially all the inlays in particular, it's takes a lot of work, hours hunched over a bench.

Rob: I can see there are other banjos which don't have your particular logo which is a snail. Does that reflect anything about the speed of your work or what?

Sam: It's more about the speed of banjo players it sort of started out as a bit of a joke because banjo players they tend to like playing extremely quickly. So I thought it would be funny to put snail on and people like the snail; you don't have to have the snail it's an option but it's a popular option.

Rob: Your banjo playing has led to monthly jam sessions, not just banjo but blue-grass music. How's that come about?

Sam: People just want to get together and play music. You know its all vey well playing music at home on your own, it's great but it really comes to life when you're actually playing with other people, especially like blue-grass music.

Rob: You started this thing once a month. You meet in the cafe Ch'ty Coz in Bulat Pestivien and the last one I went to there were a lot of musicians.

Sam: I think we had 30 musicians and a lot of people just came to watch as well, to soak up the atmosphere and listen to the music.

Rob: There was a whole orchestra there wasn't there?

Sam: There was, yeh..

Rob: And they come from everywhere, I met somebody who came from Triguier.

Sam: Yeh, we had some people from St Malo, some people from Pont Aven down in Finistere. We also had a band from Toulouse who were on tour in Brittany and they just came for



the jam session. Yeh, it's been good we just started it at the end of last year. We thought well, if it's only me and some other guy then that'll be ok, but 20 people turned up, in January, so it's good.

Rob: And its led to this first time round there's going to be a blue-grass festival that you're organising now over easter.

Sam: There is blue-grass old time festival. I keep saying old time as well because just been a technical detail. Old time music is the kind of music that was the pre-cursor to blue-grass so its more of the traditional sounding stuff from the US.

Rob: Same instruments?

Sam: Same instruments, but a different feel. And the people who are really passionate about old time music will be annoyed if I don't mention it.

Rob: Old time music came before blue-grass, is that what you're saying?

Sam: It is, yeh

Rob: Okay, and what happened that made it into blue-grass? Was it more instruments or more complicated music?

Sam: Blue-grass music is sort of like a hot rodded type of old time music

Rob: More energetic?

Sam: More energetic, more intense, more energetic and more commercial as well. That was probably the driving force for it in the 1940s, old time music was like an amalgamation between folk music brought over with the settlers that came over from England and Ireland and Scotland, they brought their folk music there, and then the slaves that unfortunately had to be there and they brought over their music as well, and that's where the actual banjo was developed. It has its roots in Africa the banjo as we know it came about in the Caribbean amongst the slaves and then it was brought to the Americas and then developed from then on yeh.

Rob: So, were going back to the blue-grass festival. What's going to happen during the festival? It's not just playing music is it?

Sam: It's mostly yeh, playing music, it's like a giant jam weekend. We also have some ateliers, some workshops, so we've got some teachers who are coming to give lessons on various instruments.

Rob: Not just the banjo?.

Sam: Not just the banjo, no. It's like for people who can probably play an instrument already, for example a guitar player or a mandolin player, plenty of guitar players around, in Brittany there are plenty of mandolin players around that play celtic style maybe they wanna get into blue-grass music, it's the same instrument but it's not exactly the same playing style so this is the opportunity for them to broaden their repertoire.



We've got 2 kinds of banjo. We have got old time banjo and blue-grass banjo. We've got a singing class, we have dobro which is an instrument kind of resinated guitar that you play flat on your lap that's got its roots in Hawaiian music, that's another interesting thing there, we've got guitar, we've got mandolin, we've got violin, there's a lot of fiddle playing involved in blue-grass music and we've also got a it's called technique de jam blue-grass, its not one specific instrument so you can go with any instrument but it's how you place yourself in a blue-grass jam which is pretty interesting really because you see like 30 musicians all playing at once they can be a bit of a racket so you know it's good to know like an etiquette.

Rob: Okay. Is this taking place at the Ch'ty Coz?

Sam: It is taking place at the Ch'ty Coz, but also the mairie of Bulat has very kindly offered us use of some rooms and some buildings around the borg, so we've got plenty of space for jamming and the teaching and the learning and .

Rob: And it's the first time for Central Brittany?

Sam: It's the first time for Central Brittany. It's the first time for Bulat. I used to be involved in organising a very similar event down in the Morbihan, that was a very similar sort of thing but we're trying to sort of amp it up a little bit for this time. I always wanted to have a festival 3 kilometres from my house so that's what we've done. There's more information on our website Bulatbluegrass.com

Rob: And that's in English and in French?

Sam: Yes. Yeh, yeh, English and French language website.

Rob: Okay. Well, can I ask you to play us a little bit just to see us out?

Sam: Okay.

Rob: Tell me what you've picked up.

Sam: I've picked up a banjo, this is one of the banjos that I make. Err, this is a 5 string open back banjo which would mainly be used for old time music. Maybe I'll tune it, what about that... This is a sound that you hear quite a lot at blue-grass jams, the sound of a banjo tuning up. So there are different ways of playing the banjo, this is my, I'm playing the clawhammer style, that is the um, down strokes.

Rob: Thank you very much indeed Sam.

Sam: Thank you.