



Rob interviews Pádraig McGovern

Rob Well the music you've just heard in the background there is the music of the Uilleann pipes and I'm with the person who's reputed to be one of the very best players in the world. I'm talking to Pádraig McGovern. Thank you for coming over to Carhaix, Pádraig.

Pádraig No problem, no problem at all.

Rob What's brought you over here?

Pádraig An Uilleann pipes association over here called Gan Ainm and they approached me a couple of times and finally I got permission to get off work and all the rest of it to get over here, so I'm over here, we're doing workshops and a wee bit of a concert tonight. It's been a really interesting couple of days. I had no idea there were so many Uilleann pipers in Brittany, there's actually 20 Uilleann pipers from Brittany at the workshops today. There were 2 teachers, Peter Merbeth living here in Brittany as well, a brilliant piper and he's been here teaching, I think he teaches a lot over here in Brittany and there's many pupils have gone through his hands.

Rob You've been leading a workshop have you?

Pádraig Yeah, I've been doing workshops. Both myself and Peter have been teaching and we divided the workshops into 2 groups of 10. It's intense, it's 4 workshops of 3 hours each, over 12 hours teaching over the 2 days. It's great fun and it's great for myself even teaching, it's a great look in the mirror, you actually analyse your own playing out of it as well and you see that, you know, when you try to teach something you really break it down and then you have to see well actually do I like it that way, you know. It's been great fun as well.

Rob Have you been doing your work in French?

Pádraig A little bit of both. I've very small French but I have a couple of I hope trust-worthy translators who are people who are bilingual in the class and they've helped me out on a number of occasions. I studied French as a youngster in school 25 years ago but I haven't used it very much, but it's funny how some of the words have come back and I've started using a few of them again, anyway, you know.

Rob How about the style of playing, is it any different in Brittany to Ireland?



Pádraig Yeah, I suppose it is, in terms of a lot of these musicians are Breton musicians and they're playing a lot of Breton music. It's similar in a lot of ways. Uilleann piping though has so many different sub-styles within it that, um, I suppose the Bretons have their own style and here in Ireland we talk about the open style and the closed styles. The open style would be where you know you play sort of note into the next note, it's sort of legato and then there's the closed style which is very staccato. I find the Breton style sort of in between and when you talk to them you know it's obvious that Leon Flynn has had a big influence over here and Paddy Keenan, they're probably 2 very famous Irish pipers that played with bands, some of the earliest I suppose you like commercial bands such as Planxty and the Bothy Band and I definitely feel that they have left a legacy over here in Brittany you know. Their style is very popular here among a lot of the pipers.

Rob You got to help people like myself who don't know much about music. Can you tell us a little bit about what these Uilleann pipes are like? It's not just a bagpipe is it? It's a little bit more sophisticated than that.

Pádraig A little bit, yeah. I suppose it's similar in that you have the chanter where the main melody is played and then you have the drums which is sort of just a sort of a one note buzz in the background. I suppose with the Uilleann pipes it's a wee bit different, it's got regulators as well as the chanter and drums. The regulators are just like chords I suppose on an organ. You hit them with your wrist as you're playing and we play with the bellows bag and chanter as well so we don't actually blow into the pipes. I suppose one of the biggest differences as well, a lot of the pipes we pitched in B or A or B flat and our pipes are pitched generally in D. You can get flat pics ??? generally are played in the pitch of D and G

Rob I heard you earlier on spending a lot of the time tuning up, so they're quite finely tuned?

Pádraig Yeah, they're very reactionary to I suppose the weather, the climate, the humidity and the temperature obviously as well, so they change quite a bit. My pipes have changed since I arrived over here yesterday, so I just need to do a wee bit of fine tuning on them. You know, the humidity is actually pretty good here, in fact in Brittany I find the humidity seems to be just perfect for my set of pipes anyway. I'm really happy with how they have settled over here. I'm getting a nice warm tone off them compared to what I've been getting in Ireland, so

Rob It's not your first visit over here to Brittany is it?

Pádraig No, I've been to Lorient twice I think.

Rob Interceltique?

Pádraig That's right, Interceltique festival, yeah. I've been here with a group called The Pipes, The Pipes. Its lovely to get a flavour of the culture, I mean where we are here it feels, you know, I'm not in a festival any more, I'm meeting with these pipers and you know we're in the middle of the country and really country feel to the whole thing, I feel like I'm getting a real taste of what Brittany is like on a day-to-day basis rather than just being at a festival like, you know.

Rob I understand that you discovered something about Carhaix before you actually came over here.

Pádraig I did. The town where I teach in Ireland, Carrickmacross, I was talking to my French friend in school and she told me that Carhaix is actually twinned with Carrickmacross so I learned that an hour before I departed. I couldn't believe it when she said it, but yeah it was brilliant, in fact I made investigations I think there was actually people from the town of Carrickmacross here about 6 weeks ago. I didn't know whether they explained they were going to Brittany and wished them well and all the rest not realising actually its the very same town.

Rob So Pádraig McGovern, thanks ever so much for spending the time to talk to us and I'm looking forward to the concert you're going to give later.

Pádraig Thank you very much, looking forward to it. Take care, merci beaucoup.