

Simon interviewing Coline again, this time on bagpipes

Simon: So, welcome back Coline. It's lovely to see you again. The last time we spoke we were discussing, amongst a million other things, the bagpipes, and you offered to come back and talk to us some more about the origins, the history and the international connections of the bagpipes.

Coline: Hello. Yes, absolutely.

Simon: So, where do we start. Bagpipes. I mean to most people I imagine most people think of the bagpipes or certainly most British people they think of Scotland, they think of men in kilts and a big wailing sound working its way through the mist to scare all-comers away.

Coline: Well, this is actually a very romantic image of the bagpipes that developed mainly in the 19th century, I would say. But the bagpipe actually comes from we think, the Mediterranean. It's a very ancient instrument. However, musical archeology is a very tricky field because it is very hard to find artifacts that have survived to this day knowing that a lot of instruments are made of wood and skin, and or leather, for instance. But we do have sometimes mentions of those instruments either in writing or in pictures, but for the bagpipe this is very ... we don't, we do not know exactly where it came from, which particular place it came from and when it was created. But, usually we tend to think that it came from the eastern Mediterranean and that it spread through the Greek and the Roman empires through the east, so up to today, at present day India and Pakistan, the whole of the Middle East, northern Africa and Europe. Actually, every single, almost every single European country has a bagpipe. Sweden has the säckpipa for instance, Spain has the gaita, and I believe that France and I am not being chauvinistic here but France is the country with the largest number of bagpipes. We have I believe about 16 or 17 different types of it. The cabretas and the musettes. The centre of France is actually a very important region for bagpiping. This being said, these bagpipes and a lot of the bagpipes in the regions that I mentioned do not have as strong a sound as the great Highland bagpipe which is the Scottish bagpipe that you are thinking about, I believe, and so there is a particularity about the great Highland bagpipe which is that it was developed for a martial purpose. That it was developed so it could be played standing outside and so it is much louder but you have different drone.

Simon: Drone.

Coline: Yeah, so the great Highland bagpipe has a certain number of drones whereas the other bagpipes, for instance, the bagpipe that is used in southern Iran does



not have one, so the sounds would be different, the volume, the power of the instrument would be different. And in that regard the great Highland bagpipe is, er stands out from the rest which also I believe explains its appeal along with this whole fantasy that also developed around the image of the Highland warrior. In Brittany we have different, I mean two main different bagpipes. You have the biniou koz which is the small one that is used traditionally for dancing, and to entertain dancers along with the bombarde which is also a double-reed instrument but with a bag and a very high pitched, actually a lower pitched sound than the biniou koz which is very, very high pitched. And then you have the biniou bras which is actually the great Highland bagpipe. But this being said, also in Scotland and in the north of England you have bagpipes, others than the great Highland one. You have the Northumbria, or Northumberland bagpipe, and you also have another one whose name escapes me again today, but it's a bit similar to the biniou. It's one that would be used also for parties and usually the player would be seated and it would be performed inside for dancing and ceilidh and other things. But what interested me about the great Highland bagpipe is how it came to be associated with the British empire in the 19th, mainly in the 17th, 18th sorry and 19th century, up to World War II, and also how somehow it came back to regions that already had this experience with bagpipes through British imperialism mainly in the art world, so that was the subject of my research.

Simon: So, let's go back through that in a bit more detail. So what exactly are you saying there, that the bagpipe reappears in the Arab countries as a result of the British colonialism?

Coline: Yeah, absolutely and what I found fascinating was that basically after the Battle of Culloden in 1746, lots of elements of traditional Highland culture were banned, forbidden, so the tartan, the clan system, the political system and the bagpipe and also the language was restricted or banned according to the context. And both the tartan and the bagpipes were, while being banned in civil life were integrated into some regiments, newly created regiments, the Highlanders and so on and so forth in the British Army. And those regiments, who were composed partly or mainly of Highland warriors who had survived the Battle of Culloden and who were considered as very, very brave, they were all these regiments where very important parts of the colonial battles and expeditions that took place in Canada, northern Africa and northern America but also the Middle East and India and it was also a way for the British authorities to make sure that, you know they were away and they wouldn't make trouble. So, they would use them because they thought that they were fiery and very brave. But also, they were very keen on making sure for instance that they wouldn't be accosted, in Scotland obviously but also in Wales or in Ireland because there

were probably fears that there might be alliances and then maybe the Highlanders would have sided with let's say the Irish so which is also that why the Highlanders were part of all those colonial expeditions. And which is why also they became associated with British Imperialism. So, it became part of the folklore also and obviously a lot of people fought British Imperialism but there was also a fascination for all the military pageantry and the bagpipes the tattoos and the Tartans were a very big part of it.

Simon: That's fascinating. So, in terms of where the instruments developed in the Arab world and in Mediterranean countries was there a time when the bagpipe in one shape or form, disappeared? Or was it just, it was re-established because of the invasions of British soil?

Coline: Well, it was, what happened was that two different strains of bagpipe use developed in the art world, particularly in the Middle East so the traditional bagpipe, does, that is so not as loud as the Great Highland one, would still be used for weddings, for celebrations but it is usually it is very much part of Bedouin culture. So, throughout time it may have been looked down upon as well as being just Bedouin so even like within Arab societies that kind of bagpipe might have been considered something folkloric or something that was not proper. It was definitely not part of the proper, urban learned music.

Simon: Music culture.

Coline: Of the maqam and of the very learned, very sophisticated classical Arab music.

Simon: Right.

Coline: It was more something to entertain people in the countryside, basically. In the deserts and so when the British settled in the Middle East some people were very much impressed also by the bagpipe and what happened is that after the independence of these countries British soft power remained among other things through the development of pipe bands for, either for the military or for the police, or for sometimes paramilitary groups. And again, there was this fascination also for a fantasised image of the British soldier and for the Highland soldier. What is also extremely interesting is that in some countries also there is a clear identification between the local political codes and also the codes of the, of Scotland. And Palestine for instance, you have lots of pipe bands with the Scouts movement and also with paramilitary groups such as Hamas, even Hezbollah in Lebanon so the Lebanese, Lebanese paramilitary group. And so they integrated the bagpipes because for them this is also part of a vocabulary

of resistance and so it is part of the resistance military pageantry because also it has clear associations with Scotland.

Simon: Yeah.

Coline: And, for instance the film such as 'Braveheart' that is I think was released in 1994 with Mel Gibson proved to be extremely popular in Palestine for instance because people really clearly identified with the codes for ...

Simon: The struggling.

Coline: ... their struggles to keep their language, their freedom, their country, their land. So somehow it was really the making of a myth, of a western myth in the Arab world through music and for instance when the PLO, so, the Palestinian, the Palestine Liberation Organisation left Beirut during the civil war in 1982 they left accompanied by pipers.

Simon: Oh really, yes.

Coline: And you had, given that this is a bit of an anecdote but at that time, you obviously had some Scots and I believe a former member of the IRA who went to train the Palestinian pipers.

Simon: Yeah.

Coline: So this is how, yeah and in all these instances the, the bagpipe that is used is the Great Highland bagpipe.

Simon: Yeah.

Coline: It's not the local bagpipe.

Simon: Right.

Coline: Because again, it's louder and for people it, it looks better.

Simon: Yeah.

Coline: It looks more chic, it's ...

Simon: Chic. I mean, the idea of a Scottish bagpipe being chic but I think I know what you mean.



Coline: But what is also very interesting is that when you put together one on top of the other a map of users of bagpipes in the world, and the former British Empire, you will see that the bagpipe after the independence, the bagpipes remained, the British, the Great Highland bagpipe remained on in the regions that had a previous use of the bagpipes. For instance, in eastern Africa there was no previous use of the bagpipes and the only pipe band that I could find was in Mombasa, it was an Indian one.

Simon: Right.

Coline: So I wouldn't say this is a legacy of the British Empire at all because it only remained in the countries that were used to that sound.

Simon: Right.

Coline: And as you said, this is a very peculiar sound. The other places that didn't have a pre-existing use of the bagpipes that used the bagpipes were ruthless dictators who just used the bagpipes as well as parts of some fantasy of you know what a dictator should be. So I am thinking about Idi Amin. In Uganda he had his own bagpipers as well.

Simon: Yes.

Coline: Because again, he was fascinated and this is something you find in a lot of dictators, particularly in like, in the post-independence context, that you have a lot of dictators who came to power following their independence.

Simon: Yeah.

Coline: So, he clearly adopted an anti-Imperialism stance, Imperialist stance, but at the same time still fascinated by the whole pageantry.

Simon: Yeah.

Coline: And decorum.

Simon: Yes because the aura of power that it represents is I imagine quite appealing to a dictator. Well, that is fantastic. Thank you so much, Coline. It has been a very interesting conversation about bagpipes and I hope, I hope people who have been wary of listening to bagpipes might actually explore a little more because there is some incredibly lovely music on bagpipes, of all types. From all different parts of the world. Thank you again.



Coline: Thank you very much, and for those who are interested there is a very good documentary called, in French it is called 'L'or des Mac Crimmon.' It portrays Patrick Molard who is a famous Breton bagpiper. He specialises in Piobaireachd, and Ceòl Mòr so very solemn bagpiping with a Great Highland bagpipe. He's a master, he was taught by masters from the Isle of Skye mainly, I believe and this is a very interesting, it's like, it's like played poetry in a way and so I would encourage people to have, to have a look. It's available on the internet for free.

Simon: Great.

Coline: It's 'L'or des Mac Crimmon.'

Simon: We'll look that up and put a link in the, on the website. Thank you very much indeed.

Coline: Thank you very much.