

Rob interviewing Patrick Molard, a virtuoso bagpipe player

Rob: And I'm at the home of Patrick Molard, who is amongst the Celtic players regarded as one of the finest bagpipe players around. And I'm very pleased to meet you.

Patrick: Thank you

Rob: Patrick

Patrick: Thank you very much

Rob: We're surrounded by pipes here. Can you tell me are these er the same as Scottish pipes?

Patrick: They are Scottish pipes. The four sets that you see over there were made in Scotland. One of them is a set of MacDougal pipes made around 1900 by er er er er Gavin MacDougal was one of the finest er bagpipe makers in Scotland and er the others are copies which were made by a friend of mine who unfortunately died two years ago and his passion was to to make replicas of old vintage bagpipes of mostly of the nineteenth century, which was the golden age of of pipe making in Scotland. You know.

Rob: And what makes them special as Scottish pipes?

Patrick: Well

Rob: As opposed to Breton pipes?

Patrick: Well well they're called Scottish Highland Bagpipes. The the word Highland is very important because as you know in Scotland you have the Highlands and the Lowlands and there are two different kinds of bagpipes. In the Lowlands it's mostly bellows blown pipes whereas on the north, the Highlands it's the the big big pipes which were a- adapted by the Breton after the Second World War and the instrument has become Breton and was christened, well a new name, the biniou, biniou braz, big biniou by opposition to the biniou kozh which was the the old traditional Breton biniou. And the main difference is the Scottish Highland bagpipe have three drones whereas the Breton biniou only had one drone. You see. And the Breton biniou's always plays with the bombard as a duet. And, well, the people who had the idea of bringing the Scottish bagpipe in Brittany their aim was to revive it because there was a danger that this instrument would disappear and they they had the idea to put bombards and bagpipes together just to imitate the Scottish pipe band, but with the additional

bombard you see. So that's the main difference but nowadays there's no difference between a set of Scottish bagpipes made in Scotland and a set of bagpipes made in Brittany. It's the same instrument. But I said the biniou as I told you is completely different.

Rob: You you have very strong links with Scotland yourself, although you are a Breton.

Patrick: Yeah I am a Breton but I've I had a yes a strong link when I was sixteen or seventeen I went to Scotland and I I used to compete in the Highland Games, you know with my kilt on and er there were very few French people at that time

Rob: Sorry, were you competing as a musician?

Patrick: A musician

Rob: Or as an athlete?

Patrick: Oh No. As a musician. I was competing in the Highland Games, er bagpipes playing marches, strathspeys, reels, jigs, and um before that I had my first training and teaching in Brittany by a guy called Jakez Pincet, who was my first teacher, and himself had been taught by one of the Queen's pipers at er Balmoral Castle and when he came back from Scotland in 1968 he gave me the address of this piper whose name was Robert Brown, Robert Hugh Brown. And as I, I was supposed to do a year as a French assistant in a college in the British Isles, I asked for Aberdeen. And I was sent right into the middle of Aberdeen which was only one hour from Balmoral. And er fortunately Pipe Major Robert Brown accepted to take me as a pupil. So I stayed with him for a year, studying with him. Unfortunately he died in March of 1972 and I went to the other Queen's piper whose name was Robert Nicol. So I had tuition from these two great pipers who were probably the best Pibroc'h (Pibroc'h) players of the twenty first century.

Rob: Now, this is a a term, that we need an explanation because I understand Pibroc'h is a particular kind of playing as a genre quite different to what we would normally associated with the military music, the military pipe bands, what the typical Scottish sound.

Patrick: Exactly. Pibroc'h in fact is a Gaelic word which means in Gaelic the act of playing the pipes. A bagpipe in Gaelic is piob, a piper is piobaire and Pibroc'h could be translated in by piping, the act of piping. But it applies now to a particular type of music which has been described as erm the classical music of the Highland bagpipe. It has nothing to do with a military march or a dance



or a reel or a jig, it's a slow piece of music with a theme and variations from that theme which get more and more complicated with a lot of grace notes. It's very very very old type of music, it goes back to the beginning of the sixteenth century. And it was supposedly composed by a family of pipers called the MacCrimmons. They were hereditary pipers to the MacLeods chiefs on the Isle of Skye. And we don't know where this music comes from. Because before the MacCrimmons we have no trace at all of that kind of music. It doesn't exist in Ireland. Doesn't exist in Brittany. It's been compared to classical music. The MacCrimmons have been compared to the the the Bach family. In fact it was at the same period that they were composing that type of music. But it was really the music of the clans. Each clan had a piper and the piper had special duties for the the life of the clan. And they had to play particular pieces at certain time of the day and after the Battle of Culloden in 1746 all the clans disappeared and the that type of music was in danger of disappearing but it was the Highland Society of London, gentlemen from Scotland living in London decided to start the first bagpipe competition where you could play. It was only Pibroch anyway that was playable in those days. It was only later that the British Army decided to form what we call now the pipe bands. In those days they didn't say pipe bands they say pipe and drums. There was maybe three pipers and one drum. You know.

Rob: To frighten the enemy.

Patrick: Yes. And they had to compose a new type of music. And that's what we hear nowadays - marches. Two four marches, six eight marches, three four marches, retreats... dun dun dadun dun dun dun de de dede de de de. Before that it was slow pieces of music and they have a power. I I've always been in love with Pibroch because it's a kind of philosophy, a kind of mental yoga.

Rob: I was interested in you mentioning that because I was thinking of the Raga

Patrick: Raga. You're right. It's been compared to Raga because the same as in Raga in Indian music they have a drone played by an instrument called a tampingura, where we have our our our own drones that provides the kind of base of sound as the Indians say, they say that it's the earth. It described the earth and the music comes from the earth. You see. As same with Pibroch you have a slow melody which in general is the my teacher used to say is the painting of feeling. It could be love, hatred, revenge, and if you're not able to to paint yourself the feeling, no problem no bother if you have good fingers, good pipe, but if you miss the feeling you better stop playing the pipes. You know.

Rob: You're responsible for bringing this er Pibroch back to Brittany, a revival a few years ago.



Patrick: Er er er, yes I was one of the first with my my teachers Jakez Pincet who was older than I am but er that was more than 50 years ago you know that I I I was there, and now in Brittany we have a lot of young players most of them are members of bagades different bagades of Brittany, but a a few of them have competed, not only in Brittany because we have a few Pibroc'h competitions in Brittany but they also have competed in Scotland and some of them got some prizes over the games. In fact it was thanks to the competitions that this music is still there because without the competitions it probably would have died out you know, because there was no opportunities to play music. Now in Scotland it they're trying to organise Pibroc'h concerts, but Pibroc'h has a reputation of being a very difficult type of music, and it's reserved to an an elite you know.

Rob: When you play it yourself, nowadays, do you play with other musicians? Or is it a solo instrument?

Patrick: Normally it's a solo instrument, but I've been involved in different project. Among them there was one project called Ceor Mor. I forgot to tell you that the other name of Pibroc'h is Ceor Mor. Ceor means music and Mor means great. Like meur in Breton. Ceor Mor. And I started a project with a few musicians and it has played in most of the big theatres in Brittany. We played in Brest, Lorient, Rennes. Even in Paris.

Rob: Played with your brother I understand

Patrick: My brother Jacky and also there was a a double bass player, a saxophone, drums, guitar. We tried to bring a new dimension to the music and to attract wider audiences you know. Because I think the reason why people don't understand Pibroc'h, first they don't understand the instrument itself, it takes time to get used to the drones and it's quite limited, we only have the nine notes and some people say oh it it's always playing the same notes, it's the same story again, you know. And I worked with jazz musicians and the jazz musicians have a fantastic power of imagination you know and bring in just the right colours around the music that I was looking for. And we we did a recording of a CD called Ceol Mor which probably is still available was produced in Langonnet by the label Innacor. In the past I have played with other musicians, Breton musicians who were themselves fascinated by Pibroc'h and I I appear on a number of CDs and LPs – Patrick Molard, bagpipes and his Pibroc'h.

Rob: Will we have an opportunity to hear you play in the autumn somewhere? It's nice to talk about it, but we've got to hear it.



Patrick: Of course. There was one competition last Monday. It was in the Lorient Festival. And next September first two weekend, sorry, second weekend of September, 9th of September, there is an event called Pibroc'h en bord de mer Pibroc'h by the sea. It is an idea of my friend Jakez Pincet who lives in Cancale near Saint Malo to attract people, not organise a competition again with judges, but just to put that kind of music in the right environment so that people can enjoy the music and the landscapes. So you have the beautiful bay with the Mont St Michel in the background, it's by the sea, and starts at half past nine in the morning and you have dozens and dozens of pipers. They come all the day, playing one piece after another with a few words of introduction of course, but no judges. You don't have to be a great player to be allowed to come and play. If you you come with your pipes and your feeling and your your level as we say

Rob: I think I'll be coming with my microphone

Patrick: Yes.

Rob: I'm really interested to hear yourself and other players as well. Presumably from Scotland and other celtic countries?

Patrick: And this year we will have a the president of the Pibroc'h Society himself, coming from Scotland. His name is Robert Wallis

Rob: I'm counting on you to introduce me

Patrick: I will

Rob: So I can interview him.

Patrick: OK. Nee bother, as they say in Scotland.

Rob: Nee bother. Even when you say the word piper you sound like a Scotsman.

Patrick: Och aye! I know. You know I stayed a year in Aberdeen. And in Aberdeen the xxxxxx in Aberdeen, it's a bonnie wee town!

Rob: OK. Well Patrick Molard it's been brilliant. I'm really much more knowledgeable about bagpipes and Pibroc'h. Thank you very much indeed.

Patrick: OK thank you.