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Chapter 1 : Brittany, France | Awards | LibraryThing

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Brittany has one of the richest musical heritages in Europe today--expressed both in traditional styles and less traditional electrical arrangements and compositions. Despite strong pressures from Paris for cultural standardization, Bretons have never abandoned their rich oral tradition while adapting all the tools of modern technology--tape recorders, compact discs, synthesizers and computers. If Breton music was ever in danger of disappearing, it was in the years between World War I and World War II after more than a century of brainwashing had convinced many that their culture was fit only for backward peasants. Enough Bretons recognized the timeless beauty of their native heritage to pioneer a renaissance of Breton culture in the s and s. Much of the music one hears today has grown out of the efforts of these pioneers. Traditional songs and dances were given new life in the s with the creation of festivals and contests. In the s and s the "folk revivals" of the British Isles and U. While some of the experiments of the s and s were short-lived, many musicians who rediscovered their roots during this period have continued to develop technical mastery of instruments and song, as well as to research the Breton oral tradition. The seeds planted during this period are bearing fruit today. Young and old traditional style singers and instrumentalists using bagpipes, bombardes, accordion, fiddle, clarinet and hurdy-gurdy find an appreciative audience in Brittany at annual contests and festivals, frequent concerts, and weekly dances which feature the dozens of traditional dances of Brittany. Contests, concerts and dances especially the fest noz have been important contexts for young performers who use a firm knowledge of older traditions to create newer styles. For example, the paired playing of the biniou koz the high-pitched bagpipe unique to Brittany and the bombarde an oboe-like instrument with the sound of a trumpet is now incorporated into groups alongside electric guitars, fiddles, flutes and synthesizers. While extremely protective of the beauty of their local heritage, Bretons are also very international in spirit. Young musicians take time to listen and learn from older masters who pass to them the riches of previous generations, but they also open their ears to the world around them, borrowing sounds from their Celtic neighbors in Ireland, Scotland, and Galicia in Spain , as well as Eastern European dance tunes, or American jazz and blues rhythms. The following pages are intended to be just a basic introduction-a place to get started. I have started with some fundamental descriptions of song, dance and musical instruments. Also included is a description of the work of the Dastum archives, followed by an annotated list of books and articles. Like the list of recordings which follows it, this includes just a small sample of some essential resources. Because this is a major problem for people on this continent who may have the fortune to travel to Brittany but usually have only a very short time to spend there, I have also included a guide to several book and record stores and a listing of contests and festivals for Breton music and dance. Departments Departments are government-defined administrative regions which often cut across cultural borders. In fact, the French government has defined "Bretagne" as a region which excludes the department of Loire-Atlantique. The decisions to chop off this historically important area of Brittany which includes the historical capital of independent Brittany, Nantes continues to be protested by Bretons. Upper Briitany Haute-Bretagne in French, and Breizh-Uhel in Breton is the eastern half of Brittany and the French language predominates here, with a unique French-based dialect called Gallo in the countryside. Lower Brittany Basse-Bretagne in French, Breizh Izel in Breton makes up the western half and in this area the Breton language is concentrated still spoken by approximately , people as their everyday language. Dioceses These areas were established by the 9th century as basic religious areas. Today, they are still important as major cultural areas. The four western dioceses: Leon Treger, Kernev and Gwened correspond to the four major dialects of the Breton language. Pays Called "pays" in French "country" or "bro" in Breton, these areas are marked by distinctive cultural differences in

music, dance, costume, architecture, and subtleties of language, in addition to distinctive economies. The borders are fuzzy and no definitive map has been produced since research is still underway to better define these areas. The map which follows is by no means definitive, but will place some names to help you locate places that are cited in Breton writings or on record albums. Breton dances Traditional dances of Brittany generally vary by geographical region--each place having a different dance or different variety of a more widely spread dance type. First are the oldest dances which are often performed as a three-part suite. The second category of dances is made up of more recent figure dances influenced by British dances of the 17th century or French contredances of the 18th century. Included here are the jabadao, pach-pi and bals. In the third category, one finds couple dances introduced to Brittany in the 19th and 20th century such as the polka, mazurka, and scottishes. Although of more recent introduction, these dances have been adapted by Bretons to become a unique part of the Breton heritage. Song Song remains at the heart of Breton music. In contrast to instrumental traditions, women have an equally important role in song. All song styles that are called "traditional" in Brittany are unaccompanied and unison in nature. The vast majority of ballad singing is performed solo. In both the French-language tradition of eastern Brittany and the Breton-language songs of western Brittany response style singing is very common, especially in songs for dance. It is important to keep in mind that the song repertoire and the use of song varies from one region of Brittany to another--songs for a particular dance will be found, quite naturally, in the region where that dance is traditionally found. There are several words one finds associated with Breton song that merit a brief definition. *Kan ha diskan* *Kan ha diskan* is a particular type of responsive singing found in the Breton-speaking areas of central-western Brittany. Most commonly, it is sung by two people, a *kaner* "singer" in Breton and *diskaner* "counter-singer". The *kaner* begins and the *diskaner* repeats each phrase. This pushes the music forward with a particular emphasis. *Gwerz* This Breton language term has no English translation in French it is roughly translated as "complainte". It refers to a repertoire of ballads in the Breton language in which historical, legendary, or dramatic events are recounted. *Son* This is the Breton term for all Breton language songs other than the *gwerz*. Included in this category are love songs, drinking songs, counting songs, and other "lighter" songs for dancing. Instruments *Biniou koz* *biniou bihan* The *biniou koz* "old bagpipe" in Breton or *biniou bihan* "little bagpipe" is traditionally played in pair with the *bombarde* see below. The two players are referred to as "*sonerion*" in Breton or "*sonneurs de couple*" in French. The *biniou koz* is a mouth-blown bagpipe with one drone. It is high-pitched an octave above the Scottish Highland pipes, with a range of 10 notes. Its use and its key G, A, B, or C varies from one area of Brittany to the next and research is underway to fully document the history and diverse use of this instrument in Brittany. The *bombarde* has a range of two octaves with its lower range pitched an octave below the *biniou*. The *biniou* provides a continuous sound due to the steady supply of air from the bag to both the drone and chanter. *Biniou bras* This is the name given to the Scottish style bagpipes which were introduced to Brittany in the late 18th century. These bagpipes did not attain any degree of popularity until the late 19th century when they were used in place of the *biniou koz* in pair with the *bombarde*. While still used in this pair, they are best known for their role in the *bagad*, a Breton bagpipe band developed in the 19th century which includes *bombardes* as well as a drum section. The French word "*cornemuse*" is also used to refer to this type of bagpipe, but usually refers to bagpipes more generally, or is used to refer to solo piping using this instrument. *Bombarde* The *bombarde* is a member of the oboe or shawm family. Describing it as an oboe, however, can be misleading since it has a very powerful sound, more closely resembling a trumpet. In contrast to the continuous sound of the bagpipe, the *bombarde* is capable of staccato short notes with silence between which makes it particularly effective in pair with the *biniou* or in a *bagad*. This is an instrument that has been in constant evolution with many different keys developed as well as milder versions "*lombarde*", "*piston*" developed for use in ensembles. Played alone or with the accordion or fiddle, this instrument is perhaps the oldest of the bagpipes found in Brittany and has changed very little in form since the Middle Ages. Those who are familiar with other bagpipes will find that the tone of the *veuze* is similar to that of the *gaita* of Galicia, Spain, or the *cabrette* of the Limousin and Auvergne areas of southern France. The *veuze* disappeared from

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Brittany for several dozen years before pipers began to research it and locate old instruments. It was only in the mids that the instrument saw a real revival thanks to the work of the organization "Sonneurs de Veuze".

Treujeun gaol clarinet The treujenn gaol, literally translated as "cabbage stump" is a clarinet with 4 or 5 keys, often made of boxwood. More commonly found are clarinets of 13 keys made of boxwood or ebony. The fabrication of these instruments in Brittany dates back to the 19th century and their use is concentrated in central western Brittany - Bro Fanch and Plinn and Bro Fisel. Modern clarinets of 24 keys are also used and traditional performers tend to stay within one octave. The organization Paotred an Dreujenn Gaol has been particularly active in promoting research and performance of this instrument and several excellently documented recordings are available see discography.

Violon fiddle Noted first in the 17th century in Upper Brittany, the violon has become a popular instrument again in eastern Brittany after near disappearance. It is used today for traditional dance tunes and melodies as well as in a number of innovative groups. While Irish fiddling has been a source of inspiration for many young Bretons, research and collection work has made the traditional Breton styles better known. Its period of greatest development in France seems to have been the 18th century when it was a popular instrument of the court and aristocracy. In France the areas of Bourbonnais, Berry, Auvergne and Upper Brittany have been particularly active areas for this instrument in more recent periods. A current revival began in Brittany in the s with the use of the hurdy-gurdy by Celtic Circles "cercle celtiques" of Rennes, St. This instrument remains a part of the traditions especially of northeastern Brittany where it is played for dancing, for wedding festivities and informally for local festivals.

Accordion Beginning in the early 20th century, the diatonic and later chromatic accordion gained popularity throughout Brittany, with particular use in eastern Brittany and in coastal areas where maritime traditions have had an impact. As in other countries of Europe, the accordion has often replaced bagpipes, but it has also developed a tradition all its own. Professional harpers brought the harp to the halls of noble families as well as more common folk, and historically there was a great deal of musical exchange between harpers of Brittany, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. But, combined economic, social, political and cultural changes contributed to the decline of this instrument and by the end of the 18th century harps had practically disappeared in Brittany. By the early s the popularity of the Celtic harp in Brittany started to grow--thanks in part to the example set by Alan Stivell. Today hundreds of Bretons learn harp, and annual competitions and festivals in Brittany gather an impressive number of innovative performers along with learners, harp makers, and appreciative listeners.

Dastum - Breton Traditions for the future Dastum, a Breton word meaning "to collect", has become well known in Brittany throughout Europe for its work collecting and encouraging the performance of traditional styles of Breton music. Dastum was founded in and has continued to expand not only in its collection of recordings and song texts, but also as an archive for photographs and documents related to all aspects of Breton culture. Today Dastum has over 30, recorded documents, 30, pages of manuscripts and printed materials, 18, old postcards and photographs, and over 55, press clippings in its collection. But, such figures mean little compared to the total work of this organization. Dastum has mobilized both scholars and performers who are well aware of social and economic changes which have changed the traditional culture of this distinctive area within France. Urbanization and its individualistic life style has helped undermine the communal spirit of rural Breton life. Industrialization and increased mobility, along with changes in the family unit, have affected the human contacts which make an oral transmission of culture possible and creative. And the centralization in France of education and the media has stifled the expression of unique local cultures with the diffusion of a standardized program. For centuries Bretons have been taught that their languages--Breton, a Celtic language, and Gallo, an old French dialect--are backwards and, at best, impractical in the modern world. Dastum has created the means for people in Brittany to use their traditional culture as part of modern life in stimulating a sense of cultural self-confidence and in helping local communities find the resources necessary to creatively use their rich oral traditions.

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