

Review

Call to the Dance: An Experience of the Socio-Cultural World of Traditional Breton Music and Dance

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New York: Pendragon Press, 2016

ISBN: 978-1-57647-172-2

Call to the Dance is a very welcome addition to ethnomusicological and socio-cultural discourses of traditional music. It will be especially welcome to the many English-speaking enthusiasts of Breton music, of which there are many throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom, in particular. This book gives a thorough, yet concise, historical and cultural context to contemporary Breton music, the fest-noz and ideas of Bretonnitude and Celtitude, as well as giving the reader a good sense of the music, song and dance traditions themselves. Performers such as Jean Michel Veillon and Sylvain Barou, in recent times, have inspired an interest in Breton music amongst many young musicians among traditional music communities and this book will appeal to many of these performers, as well as academics with an interest in traditional musics. Wilkinson's linguistic flair adds to the journey through *Call to Dance* and his interspersed use of ethnographic vignettes is evocative throughout. His own musical and experience with Breton culture and his deep relationship with Brittany is established from the beginning of the book with a rich ethnographic introductory chapter from the 1990s. Wilkinson's reputation, as one of the significant figures in contemporary Irish traditional flute playing, also contributes significantly to the confidence he brings to thoroughly and accurately examine Breton traditions and their socio-cultural context.

In the opening chapter of the book, we find a detailed account of the concept of Celticism or Celtitude, which Wilkinson explains as "meaning ways of being or feeling Celtic". He looks at this both historically and contemporaneously while also examining the influence of Irish traditional music and Irishness in Brittany through the past few decades. In particular, he evaluates the influence of Alan Stivell and an increasing push towards a sense of Bretonnitude. It is in Chapter 2 that Wilkinson delves into Breton culture in detail, exploring aspects such as food customs and language as well as examining contemporary attitudes towards Bretonnitude and Breton identity. He paints a rich picture of Brittany through ethnographic snapshots and memories in addition to historical evidence that all give the reader a very definite sense of place and context. The social context of fest-noz, examined in detail, sets up proceeding chapters very well. Wilkinson gives the reader quite a lot of detail on Breton history and culture as well as insights into notions of identity through the first few chapters, reiterating his view that to fully understand fest-noz and Breton musical culture, one must realise the context of today's performances fully.

We get a full picture of how the fest-noz has developed as well as how dances occur and are learned in Chapter 3, where Wilkinson provides more

specific descriptions and analysis of festoù-noz (plural), such as fest-noz du Cosquer. The author guides us through the dance and social gathering in a rich, detailed and entertaining way, giving a true sense of these gatherings to the reader. This chapter also sees quite a lot of detail pertaining to the choreography of dances and highlights the significance of the dance movements and rhythms for the music performance itself. In order to truly understand the musical repertoire, Wilkinson emphasises that it is essential to understand the dances themselves and examines in detail one particular dance suite (Suite Gavotte Montagne) to illustrate the point.

The significance of Breton songs and singers is the focus Chapter 4, 'Singers and sonneurs – Music for the dance'. Wilkinson explains forms such as *Kan ha Diskan* (a call and response-type format) very clearly here. He goes on to look at traditional Breton instruments (bombarde, binioù koz, treujenn gaol) and their performance practices as well as looking at the rise of the flute within the tradition. He also includes information and transcriptions here pertaining to the accompanying CD that adds to the success of this publication significantly. The concluding chapter of the book explores teaching and learning within the Breton context and is aptly titled 'Passing it on'. Wilkinson looks at established, as well as newer forms, of learning in the region and goes on to review significant organisations and competitive platforms to give a good sense of the educational aspects of these music and dance traditions today.

This is certainly a significant piece of work and the culmination of four decades of experience and ethnographic research by Wilkinson. As well as this, the author has added considerable academic weight to the work by incorporating ethnomusicological, anthropological and socio-cultural concepts and references throughout. As someone who has an interest in Breton music and who has attended quite a few fest-noz and festivals there, this book enlightened me hugely and pieced together some of the aspects of the culture and dances that I had not fully understood. It has also opened up the musical repertoire to me in a new and inviting way. I believe that many performers with an interest in Breton music will find this work insightful and the fact that the author is a renowned performer himself will undoubtedly secure confidence in his written research.

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