

RECORD REVIEW

Cahier de Musique Traditionnelle no.2--Pays de Lorient-Hennebont. Dastum: Magnétothèque Nationale Breton. 18 selections, vocal and instrumental, mono, 80 page booklet by Dastum. Dastum, Magnétothèque Nationale Breton, Cahier no.2, Ti Digemer Mad, 6 rue du dispensaire, 29213 Plougastel Daoulaz, France, 1974.

Cahier de Musique Traditionnelle no.3--Pays Pagan. Dastum: Magnétothèque Nationale Breton. 20 selections, vocal and instrumental, mono, 70 page booklet by the group Gaed Sænadurel Bro Bagan, and Dastum. Dastum, Magnétothèque Nationale Breton, Cahier no.3, Ti Digemer Mad, 6 rue du dispensaire, 29213 Plougastel Daoulaz, France, 1975.

Cahier de Musique Traditionnelle no.4--Pays de Loudeac. Dastum: Magnétothèque Nationale Breton. 21 selections, vocal and instrumental, mono, 95 page booklet by M. le Bris, M. le Noac'h, Mme and M. Bourel, and Dastum. Dastum, Magnétothèque Nationale Breton, Cahier no.4, Ti Digemer Mad, 6 rue du dispensaire, 29213 Plougastel Daoulaz, France, 1976.

Reviewed by Lois Kuter.

Brittany is the northwestern peninsula that juts off France. It is the size of Belgium with a population of approximately three million. Although well known to French and European tourists who have become familiar with its scenic beauty and distinctive music and dances during the summer vacation months, most Americans seem only capable of vaguely placing Brittany on a fuzzy map of Europe. A few may have heard Alan Stivell on the radio, but Alan Stivell is a very special Breton musician whose relation to Breton traditional music could be compared to that of the Chieftains or Planxty to Irish traditional music. The traditional music of Brittany is generally unknown to Americans, just as it has become unknown to many Bretons. The recordings of Dastum have grown from this loss of knowledge.

Dastum, a Breton word for "collection," was established about five years ago by Patrick Malrieu and Michel Premorvan who currently coordinate the collection activity and the archives. In French

translation, Dastum is called the *Magnetothèque Nationale Breton* (Breton national archives), and in its short life it has collected over 2,500 recordings. Dastum is both blessed and cursed in being run entirely by volunteer labor of people throughout Brittany. While MMs. Malrieu and Premorvan oversee the total operation of Dastum, any individual in Brittany concerned with and knowledgeable about Breton traditional music is encouraged to participate in the collection and preparation of published recordings. The fact that Dastum is run entirely through the initiative of Bretons on their own free time usually after a full work-day poses problems in the speed of organizing and annotating the collection, but Dastum's flexible and open encouragement of "amateur" collectors has allowed for the participation of local experts on Breton music and dance who are often discouraged or intimidated in more "professional" collection enterprises which tend to look for "star" performers.

In order to understand the recordings and publications of Dastum it is necessary to know just what Dastum is, besides an archives of recordings of traditional Breton music collected and used by people in Brittany. The goal of Dastum is perhaps a bit unusual from the perspective of American scholars of traditional musics. The collection has not been made for use by music historians, folklorists, or ethnomusicologists (although they are certainly welcomed to use it), but primarily for Bretons who are interested in perpetuating their own musical traditions. The tapes and publications are used to learn music and to familiarize people with the traditional music of Brittany. Traditional Breton music is very much alive today, but being lost more and more by the younger generations due to a variety of political, economic, and social reasons--not the least of which has been pressure to make Bretons more French. Although space does not permit a full explication of what Brittany is, an understanding of the problems of being Breton in France is necessary for a full understanding of organizations such as Dastum in Brittany today. Dastum's existence is partly the outgrowth of recognition by the younger (and older) generation of the value and beauty of traditional forms of music and their desire to make this music a part of their lives.

So far Dastum has produced four 33-rpm records representing different stylistic areas of Brittany. Each LP includes about 20 selections and is accompanied by a booklet (in French) of between 70 and 100 pages. Cahier no. 1 is presently sold out and includes a sampling from all over Brittany. Cahier no. 2 features the Pays de Lorient-Hennebont on the southern coast of Brittany. Cahier no. 3 features the Pays Pagan which is located along the northwestern coast of Brittany. This recording and its annotation was the work of the group Oaled Sevendurel Bro

Bagan, which has worked in that area with musical traditions. Cahier no. 4 features the Pays de Loudeac, an inland area in eastern Brittany which is traditionally French-speaking. This recording is primarily the work of two collectors, M. le Bris and M. le Noac'h, who have been active in this area for ten years.

The recordings of Dastum vary greatly in quality depending on the skill and equipment of individual collectors. Although recordings are in some cases distorted or badly started or ended, for the most part, the quality is very good and selections are given in their entirety as performed at public events or in people's homes. A strong feature of the recordings is a refreshing human quality. People make mistakes, run out of breath, laugh, and perform as themselves. Not all performers are virtuosos although many are locally renowned.

The cahiers accompanying each record include a wealth of information on the performers and other distinctive traditions of the area recorded, as well as on the music. Maps and drawings, photographs of performers, and reprints of old postcards and photographs are especially well used. Each musical selection is transcribed with a brief explanation of the relation of the transcription to variations in the performance. For songs, the words are given as sung--in Breton or French as in the case of the Loudeac recordings where the dialect of the area is carefully noted.¹ French translations are given when necessary and for many songs, versions found in other published collections are included or cited. Most outstanding in the cahiers is the detailed attention to linguistic features of the areas covered. Because the recordings are for the purpose of learning music, pronunciation is carefully detailed. In the Loudeac cahier a twenty-nine page study and lexography of the French dialect is included along with notes for particular songs. Also included in the selection annotations are notes on the performers and performance situation and sometimes more extensive explanation of musical instruments, song types, or particularly illustrative performers.

Besides the annotation of each individual selection on the recordings, the cahiers include a general introduction section dealing with language, costume,² dance types,³ song styles, musical instruments, musical instrument makers, and notable performers. Cahier no. 2 includes in addition a summary of the activity and goals of Dastum for 1973-74. Cahier no. 3 includes a summary of work done by Donatien Laurent on the nineteenth-century collector La Villemarqué.⁴

While the recordings and annotations can be criticized for a lack of detailed information which enables one to grasp the social context of the music and how it fits into the lives of the performers, it is important to remember that Dastum has not published material for the benefit of

scholarly research but for the benefit of the Bretons. Some information of value to American scholars is likely to be left out because it is redundant or unnecessary for an understanding of the music by Bretons. However, even though the recordings are of an "applied" nature, the accompanying booklets of 70 to 100 pages of annotation and transcription makes them of far more value to scholars of traditional music than the few recordings of French folk music so far available.⁵

The fact that the work of Dastum is intended for Bretons does not decrease its value or importance for American scholars. Although Dastum has grown as a result of the hard work of Breton people in the interest of Breton music and its development in Brittany, these well documented field recordings are valuable to anyone interested in the music of Brittany and France. Inquiries or orders for recordings and cahiers should be sent to the following address:

DASTUM
Ti Digemer Mad
6 rue du dispensaire
29213 Plougastel Daoulaz
France

Expectations for cost should be estimated as follows:

- no. 1--not at this time available
- no. 2--34 francs
- no. 3--34 francs
- no. 4--38 francs

For surface mailing an additional 8 francs per record, and for airmail an additional 22 francs per record should be added. (A franc is worth approximately 25¢.)

NOTES

¹ Brittany is divided into two major linguistic regions--Haute and Basse-Bretagne--which roughly correspond to the eastern and western halves of Brittany. Basse Bretagne is traditionally Breton speaking. The Breton language is a Celtic language (similar to Welsh) and is the preferred language of this area although French is also spoken and usually spoken to outsiders. Within Basse Bretagne there are distinctive dialects of Breton. The eastern part of Brittany, Haute Bretagne, is traditionally French speaking and also subdivided as to dialect variations. Because language is closely tied to song, and also to instrumental music in Brittany, Dastum has paid close attention to local distinctions in language which are important to the richness of the musical traditions of Brittany.

2 Much of the work on costume in the cahiers is drawn from the work of M. Creston: "Costumes des populations bretonnes" (CNRS, Laboratoire d'anthropologie générale, faculté de Rennes, 1953).

3 The most complete treatment of traditional dance styles of western Brittany is found in the work of Jean Michel Guilcher, La Tradition Populaire de Danse en Basse Bretagne (Paris: Mouton and Co., 1963).

4 This particular inclusion stems from a long-term controversy over the authenticity of the best known and most frequently cited collection of traditional Breton music, the Barzaz Breiz by Vicomte Hersart de la Villemarqué (Paris: Perrin), originally collected in 1841 and reprinted in 1963 from the 1867 edition. Villemarqué's work has been largely thought to be the product of his own literary efforts rather than the collection of Breton performers, but the recent research of Donatien Laurent based on his unearthing of some of Villemarqué's private documents has shown the book to be more creditable than previously believed. Dastum has included part of Laurent's defense of his research dissertation which has resolved some of the controversy concerning this collection.

5 The two best known and most available commercial recordings of French folk music are:
The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music: France, 91 A-02003, edited by Claudie Marcel Dubois and Maguy Andral from the collection of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, Paris; and Folk Music of France, Ethnic Folkways FE 4414, notes by Paul Arma, 1951. Also from Folkways is a recording of Breton music: Songs and Dances of Brittany, recorded by Sam Gesser, FE 4014, 1957, featuring the Conan family of Perros Guirec, on the north coast of Brittany.

Recordings of traditional Breton music by Breton-based record companies are plentiful, but of difficult access in this country. The most important Breton label for traditional music is Mouez Breiz. Catalogues of Breton recordings and distribution can be handled through the following two addresses: Breiz; 9 Avenue de Gaulle, 44500 La Baule, France; and Diffusion Bretonne; 110 rue de Saint Malo, 35000 Rennes, France.