

KEPA JUNKERA, Musician

Azken edizioko Grammy saria irabazi baino lehen ere ezaguna zen Kepa Junkera. Ez bakarrik Euskal Herrian baizik eta munduko beste zenbait lekutan ere. Azken urteotan euskal musikak eman duen artistarik sarituena da bizkaitarra,

trikitixari kutsu modernoa eman diona eta euskal soinuak mugaz kanpokoentzat ulerkorrak egin dituena. 25 urte daramatza musikan, eta kulturen arteko komunikazioaren aldekoa azaltzen zaigu elkarrizketa honetan.

The sounds of the past reach out to the future

Winner of the Latin Grammy award for the Best Folk Album, a CD titled "K," Kepa Junkera has been taking the sound of trikitixa, or diatonic accordion, around the globe, playing traditional tunes and fusing them with music from other countries. He likes being a standard bearer for Basque musical heritage but also sets his sights on the future.

His grandfather and mother were key figures in awakening his interest in the world of music. What do you remember about your early years in music?

When I was young my family lived in Recalde, a working class neighborhood of Bilbao, and although the seventies

were a cultural wasteland, I was lucky enough to have contact with the countryside. The rural world captivated me. My *aitite*, Román Urraza, played the pandereta (tambourine). He used to play with a *trikitilari* named Salvador Ugarte, and my ama was the dance partner of Txilibrín. I didn't like playing scales and studying music theory, but my mother made sure her three sons took music theory, accordion and piano classes. What I really loved was the lively, happy sound of the trikitixa and the look of satisfaction on my *aitite*'s face when he'd come home after a performance. I started out playing the txistu, the alboka and the pandereta. One day when I was around ten years old a friend let me use an old trikitixa that belonged to his uncle. So I taught myself how to play

the accordion. Oskorri, Pantxoa eta Peio, Enrike Zelaya and Benito Lertxundi were giving their first recitals at the time, so they became my first musical influences.

Then everything just took off?

Well, no, it wasn't all that fast. It's been a long journey. People who don't know me might think that I haven't been involved in music all that long, but I'm about to turn 40 and have been exploring this world for 25 years now. Early on I played music while going to primary and secondary school. I began to meet some of the last of Bizkaia's trikitilaris, including Rufino, Faxio and León Bilbao, and in Gipuzkoa I met Laja, Epelde, Sakabi, Auntxa and Tapia. I entered competitions, recorded a few songs on cassette, enrolled in university and then quit after studying Economics for two years.

Did the trikitilari purists consider you a colleague or more like an intruder?

They were a bit taken aback. First of all, they weren't familiar with the name Junkera. They thought it was strange that someone could play the trikitixa and not speak Euskara. It was also odd to them that I had my own ideas and played my own songs, but they respected me. They've always been very competitive, connected to rural sports, betting . . . They saw that I was familiar with that world, even though I wasn't brought up in a farmhouse, and that I had chosen a path that was different from theirs. 1986 was a landmark year. There was a competition and I entered one of my songs. It was one that I'd written with the idea of combining traditional music with newer sounds. It broke away from tradition in terms of melody, harmony and rhythm. Some people criticized me, saying it wasn't danceable and that it wasn't really trikitixa. As time went by people started accepting me because they understood I was adding to traditional sounds without detracting from anyone.

Is your music a way of embracing a world without borders?

To me music is way of expressing myself, a way of getting my ideas across. I'm not interested in being better than anyone else. What I like is

to move people. I see it as a tool for evoking feelings. If you listen to a trikitixa player in Reno, for example, the music conjures up other images for you. It's even more exciting than hearing it in Euskadi. It brings to mind smells, feelings, situations, a local procession, your family . . . experiences from the past. When I was on tour in the United States a lot of Basques living there came to my concerts. I noticed that I became a vehicle for them to remember the past. The thing is, I'm interested in the past but I also like to look to the future. There's another part of the audience that doesn't have that cultural baggage so I like to play for them too.

Is Basque music becoming international?

It's beginning to open up. Until recently there very few people here took their music outside Euskadi, and we're a pretty small country. It's not like Brazil, with its celebrated musical heritage, or the Irish, whose music is known all over the world, or flamenco, tango and jazz. We still need to take that step, and make sure our younger musicians are ready to explore new ideas and excite audiences beyond our borders. I think we need to reinforce the musical talent of our young people. We need to be courageous, explore our own personality and place in the world, and then work hard to keep it. But this kind of thing doesn't happen in five months. It takes years. I've decided to work on joint projects with other musicians and cultures, but there's still a long road ahead.

Does music as special as yours do well in the company of a multinational like EMI?

I feel like I've grown professionally during this period. It's opened up doors on the

international level, although it may have also closed others for me. I managed to make "Maren" and my live CD "K" and I'm pleased with the experience. My time with Resistencia, a record company based in Madrid, was a giant step forward, since they work with world music. There I played on several recordings and saw the release of a double CD. I'm very grateful to Elkar for believing in me and producing my first records. The contract with EMI was for two CDs, which have already been released, so now I'll be looking into new offers.



«Bestea baino hobea izatea ez da nere helburua. Ni emozio bila nabil eta musika erabiltzen dut horretarako. Musika ebokazioa lortzen duen tresna egokiena dela uste dut»