



BASQUE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, A RICH PAST AND A BRIGHT FUTURE

Euskal musika euskal kulturaren ardatzetariko bat da eta musikaren barruan, jakina denez, musika tresnek garrantzi handia dute. Euskal musika tradizionala eta bere tresnak bizirik diraute egungo gizartearen ohiko bizitzan eta batez ere ospakizunetan. Euskal musika tresnak gaur egungo garaietara egokitu dira, batez ere trikitixa.

In spite of having their own special character, Basque music and instruments have enjoyed a long history of intermingling with other musical cultures. The Way of Saint James, which runs through the Basque region, brought other cultures to the area and led to the exchange of rhythms and instruments. This is one of the many reasons why some types of Basque music, rhythms and instruments share a very close

similarity with other parts of Europe. Musical similarities can be seen between the western part of Euskal Herria and Portugal, Ireland, Scotland and Brittany, or between the eastern Basque Country and the music of Italy, Catalonia or Sardinia.

Perhaps one of the most interesting types of music is that associated with Basque dances, or *euskal dantzak*. The evolution of Basque music has followed the same pace as the dances.

In other words, the music accompanying ancient traditional dances has changed very little, if any, over time, the dances still accompanied by simple "orchestras" (usually a single person playing the *txistu* and the *danbolin*). In contrast, the dances that have had more social exposure have evolved the most in terms of the music itself as well as the instruments. Nevertheless, the traditional duos are still alive and well:



the *dultzaina* and the *atabal*; the *trikitixa* and the *pandero*...

TXISTU, A LONG-STANDING TRADITION. The *trikitixa* and the *txistu* are two of the best known Basque instruments. However, in recent years they have grown in opposite directions. The *txistu* has evolved while remaining faithful to its traditional formula. The *trikitixa*, on the other hand, has experienced a veritable revolution, casting all the traditional formulas aside.

The *txistu* is accompanied by the *danbolin*. The combination consists of a one-handed, vertical nose flute with three holes, and a small closed drum played with a single mallet. This duo is played throughout the Basque region, the only exception being in Zuberoa. Here we find a variation

called the *txirula-txuntxun*, which consists of a smaller flute from the same family and a long, thin psaltery for rhythmic accompaniment.

The Basque enlightenment of the eighteenth century was a cornerstone in the expansion of the *txistu*. With the Enlightenment in full swing, rural instruments in Provence were introduced into aristocratic environments. The close relationships between French encyclopedists and the Sociedad Vascongada de Amigos del País prompted some of the society's members to take interest in the phenomenon. Thus, the Conde de Peñaflores, Ignacio Manuel Altuna, and a number of others, including musicians, went to work renovating both the instruments and the songs, creating the instrumental duo we know today.

«Trikitixa eta txistua euskal musika tresna ezagunenak dira. Baina azkeneko garaietan kontrako bideak jarraitu dituzte.»



«90. hamarkadaren
erdialdean jaiotako
musika talde berriek,
soinu tradizionalak
baztertu zituzten eta beste
musika tresna batzuekin
nahastu zituzten.»

But in the nineteenth century the *txistu-danbolin* duo was in a crisis. The social breakdown between liberals and conservatives drove the *txistuto* to be associated with conservatism and later with nationalism. The resurgence began in 1928. That year the Euskal Herriko Txistularien Elkarte was created in Arrate (Eibar), an organization that has done much to promote the interests of the *txistu*.

Today it is common to find *txistularis* providing the musical accompaniment for the numerous groups of *euskal dantzak* and performing in chamber concerts.

TRIKITIXA, THE REVOLUTION OF TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS. The *trikitixa* is a diatonic accordion that is usually accompanied by a *pandero*, a small hand-held drum much like a tambourine but without metal jingles or bells. In very few years the *trikitixa* has experienced a huge revolution. The new bands that came along during the '90s decided to set aside

musical purism to create a fusion of traditional and modern musical instruments, including electric bass, drums, sample and others. Tapia ta Leturia, Kepa Junkera, Alaitz eta Maider, Etzakit, Gozategi and Gose all contributed to this change.

With this transformation the *trikitixa* started being heard in new places and environments. The sounds of the *trikitixa* could now be heard on city stages and at any virtually any dance hall or bar in Euskadi.

Many musicians specializing in this type of music, including Kepa Juntera and Maixa, are known around the world and now share billings with some of the top names in international folk music.

Traditional *trikitixa* music, on which this new movement is founded, is still very much alive and thriving. The new panorama has served to pack music schools, encourage instructors to continue teaching the basics, and in this way keep the sounds of this traditional instrument alive.