MUSIC IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY. 1968-2018

This gallery is devoted to the production and publication of music made by Basque artists over the last five decades. The show primarily compiles phonographic devices, with a special focus on records because of their proven ability to recount the aesthetic, technical, and discursive evolution of musical expression and their therefore hegemony as a dissemination device, at least during the period represented. The selection criteria were based not only on the social relevancy that each of them had or might have had during that time, but also on their ability to open up new pathways and forms of artistic expression, at times by expanding the very concept of music to other artistic genres based on the use of sound, such as phonetic poetry or sound art.

More than a compilation of major commercial hits, we are offering a journey through time to discover the pathways—some of them twisted and unknown—that the music made in the Basque Country has taken to become what it is today: a rich, broad creative sector which may not be experiencing its peak in terms of social penetration but does represent how or what the country sounds like with astounding precision, as well as what it is in cultural terms. Therefore, this is an invitation to grasp how our musical tastes have evolved, while also somehow shedding light in a more oral, chaotic and immediate way, if you will, on the sociocultural evolution of Basque society itself during the past fifty years.

The French economist and writer Jacques Attali says that “each society should be judged by its noises,” and even though judging is neither our job nor our aim, it is certainly worthwhile to listen to part of this collage-portrait through that prism to perhaps hear ourselves reflected in its/our music.

1968-1977

With the impetus of the social movements that are shaking up several countries around the world, and dovetailing with the increasingly obvious decline of the Franco regime, the process of the modernisation of Basque culture takes a giant step forward. In line with the new times, music gains a great deal of social value, becoming the voice-expression of that change. Dodging the limits of institutional censorship, modern euskaldun music is born, first in its folk and pop versions, which soon mutate into new artistic forms such as sound poetry, jazz, electronic experimentation, and, in its more popular guises, rock or progressive rock. In parallel, as the classical works which have been buried and silenced for decades—“for being suspicious”—are being rediscovered, another ageing world plagued with stars crooning “acceptable” songs with slight pop tinges which try to piggyback onto fashions is disappearing. At this juncture, artists like Mikel Laboa and Josean Artze become benchmarks by constructing new languages which draw equally from tradition and the most radical avant-garde, and they will go on to last for decades and influence several generations of musicians and artists from the Basque Country.

The show Baga, Biga, Higa by Ez dok amairu is launched. (1970)

Pamplona Encounters. (1972)

First avant-garde music festival at the Museo San Telmo in San Sebastián. (1973)

Mocedades participates in Eurovision. (1973)

The San Sebastián Jazz Festival, later renamed Jazzaldia, is modernized. (1977)

The Enkoari association holds the Sound Encounters, which are ultimately cancelled. (1977)

First Musikaste festival in Errenteria (Gipuzkoa). (1973)
1978-1987
After the end of the dictatorship, yet still in the midst of the political, social, and economic instability characteristic of the Transition, Basque musical production swiftly expands. The driving force of the avant-garde bands from the 1960’s bifurcates towards the revival of traditional songs on the one hand and a more radical aesthetic tendency on the other, based on the reinterpretation of Basque identity and largely influenced by the ideas of Jorge Oteiza. Both facets coexist in a curious political and commercial relation that gradually begins to lose influence until the punk movement storms onto the scene at the start of the 1980’s. It is a new scene of wilder, more rebellious music befitting the rawness of the times. Punk is predominantly urban and laden with nihilistic messages, and it explodes in the big cities and then expands and creates a new musical hegemony in record time. Punk brings Basque society up-to-date with a noisy slap, but it also quickly fades, although its aftereffects are still felt today. However, the door opened by Rock Radikal Vasco (abbreviated RRV) launches a process of a multiplication of styles, influences, discourses, and—why not?—musical desires which will become definitively audible one decade later.

1988-1997
As the punk movement, known for posterity as Rock Radikal Vasco, begins to fade (and many of its members along the way), Basque rock stylistically mutates and adapts its musical discourse to the new times. As anti-virtuoso sound becomes the canon, punk loses its pull, so the more nonconformist music has to take on new guises, ranging from hardcore (the natural successor to punk) to metal (with stronger sounds parallel to the improvement in materials, techniques, and instruments), not to mention post-punk, pop with English, American and French influences, and even the more radical case of rap, which curiously seems to want to resonate in the rebellious message of punk. The more traditional expressions are also transformed, thus kicking off the commercial boom of trikitixa and pop music sung in Basque. In the early 1990’s, there is a new burst of music, which is more visible in San Sebastián and Getxo, and more discreet but no less productive in Tolosa, Andoain, Hondarribia, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Eibar, and Lapurdi. It is a musical multiplication and diversification never before heard within Basque musical production.
1998-2007
Basque music continues to be produced intensely. Record numbers of albums are issued, and concerts abound all over the region. Several provincial capitals embark upon risky commercial ventures by organising festivals and macro-festivals which prioritise the presence of international artists. The goal is to foster models that showcase all kinds of music and frame musical consumption within the logic of tourism. In an attempt to offer a stable alternative for the local scene, small and medium-sized venues emerge, such as the one proposed by Kafe Antzokia in Bilbao, which within a few years become a network of auditoriums that take over where the gaztetxes (autonomous centres) left off and become the backbone of the web of music venues. Yet the gaztetxes are not left behind and, in cases like Bonberenea (Tolosa) and Matadeixe (Azkoitia), they become production spaces. In parallel, new sites of musical experimentation are formalised, including the one proposed by the Arteleku center of San Sebastián, which provides an unexpectedly strong impetus to lesser-known and riskier musical practices.

2008-2018
Fully immersed in the globalising maelstrom, which in the Basque Country is culturally characterised by a certain social stability since ETA stopped its actions and, in consequence, by the success of models based on attracting massive numbers of tourists, the Basque musical scene is in sound health, albeit not without a touch of nostalgia. Orphaned of any powerful musical movement that taps into a collective feeling and shakes up the region as happened in the 1960’s, 1980’s, and 1990’s, the current scene vacillates between complacency and a strong external aesthetic influence which conditions each step taken in the sphere of musical production and exhibition. Macro-models, which are now fully integrated into the cultural reality, coexist alongside tiny venues, a few hardy surviving gaztetxes, and an extensive network of culture centres. The range of music is so varied that any minor inklings of movements, scenes, or styles fade away. The acceleration driven by online consumption makes it difficult to identify and promotes ephemeral consumption, so even though more music is actually being consumed than ever, it has less of an influence on society. The exponential increase in the presence of females brings a breath of fresh air to the music scene.

First edition of the MEM Festival, Bilbao. (2002)
Audiolab, the sound laboratory of Arteleku, San Sebastián. (2002-2014)
Digital technology colonizes all music production.
Two years before his death, Mikel Laboa opens for Bob Dylan in the San Sebastián Concert for Peace. (2006)

Many artists record and publish with international producers, which changes their sound.
The era of generational anthems comes to an end.
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The advent of the Internet begins the digital distribution of music.

The era of macro-festivals gets underway: EH zuzenean, BBK Live, Jazzaldia (updated version), Azkena Rock, Kobetasonik, Hatortxu, etc.

Ertz, the Festival of Other Musics, is founded, Bera (Navarra). (2000)

Vinyl reemerges just when the format was about to disappear.

Rock loses ground in favour of lighter forms of music.
**Glossary**

**Txalaparta**
A percussion instrument from the traditional rural Basque world which was revived in the 1960’s. Largely thanks to Oteiza, it symbolizes the Basque musical essence. It is a peculiar, unique instrument because of its special inharmonious sound and its extraordinary dynamic. Associated names: *Arza anaia*, *Juan Mari Beltrán*, *Andoni Aleman*, *Oreka TX*, *Kepa Junkera*.

**Ez dok amairu**
A cultural movement, primarily musical, which was founded in Gipuzkoa in the 1960’s. It called for the presence of the Basque language and imaginary in contemporary culture. It brought together classic singer-songwriters, innovative artists, and revivers of the musical traditions, which gave it a unique personality and deep social roots. Associated names: *Mikel Laboa*, *Benito Lertxundi*, *Xabier Lete*, *Lourdes Iriondo*.

**Rock Radikal Vasco**
A label that encompasses the majority of the punk rock and hard rock bands that emerged all over the Basque Country in the 1980’s. Its main hallmarks are a powerful sound, a provocative message and a “DIY” philosophy. Its impact was cathartic albeit brief, and it was vitally important to open up new forms of expression and to embrace foreign music styles. Associated names: *Pablo Cabeza*, *Vulpess*, *Fermin Muguruza*, *Hertzainak*, *Eskorbuto*, *La Polla Records*.

**Donosti Sound**
A music scene which was launched in the mid-1980’s in the capital of Gipuzkoa. Today it is still a label, although it is much more eclectic. At first, in the midst of the punk onslaught, it included bands that suggested a radically opposite sound based on influences from English, American, and French pop with a kind of indie attitude. Associated names: *Duncan Dhu*, *Puskerra*, *La Buena Vida*, *Ibon Errazkin*, *La Oreja de Van Gogh*.

**Triki-pop**
This musical style emerged in the 1990’s and mixed the traditional music played with *trikutxas* (diatonic accordions) with pop music. Its success helped modernize the sounds of festivals and town celebrations, especially in areas located far from the large cities. Associated names: *Joseba Tapia*, *Maixa eta Ixiar*, *Alaitz eta Maider*, *Iker Goenaga*, *Gozategi*.

**Getxo Sound**
This music movement brought together bands from Vizcaya from the right bank of the Nervión River, which were strongly influenced by US noise-rock from the 1990’s. Its sound is melodic but noisy. Associated names: *Los Clavos*, *El Inquilino Comunista*, *Lord Sickness*, *Cancer Moon*.

**Bidasoa Sound**
A style similar to Getxo Sound but which emerged from the corners of the Basque Country, especially in Irun, Hondarribia, and Bera. It encompassed artists with curious sounds influenced by US alternative rock. The music, which is apparently difficult at first, came to affect the way rock was understood by later generations. Associated names: *Dut*, *Lisabö*, *Borrokan*, *Noise Hole*, *Petti*, *Beti Mugan*, *Orgasmic Toothpicks*.

**Record labels**
Their work was fundamental in organizing Basque music production until the late 1990’s. Associated names: *Elkar*, *Herri Gogoa*, *Esan Ozenki*, *Gor*, *Discos Suicidas*, *Bidehuts*.

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