

Occitany is globally all the south of France, from Bordeaux to Nice, including the Limoges region.

Everything began for me in 1976. I was twenty when I discovered the treasury of wind instruments of Occitany...

My first contact was with the “Limousine chabrette” when I encountered Eric Montbel at the Occitan Conservatory at Toulouse. At this period Eric played on ancient instruments that he himself had discovered thanks to the work of “collectage” accomplished in the Limousin.

The only solution that occurred to me was to reconstruct my own instrument based on that of an ancient chabrette and so, after several months, I made my first.

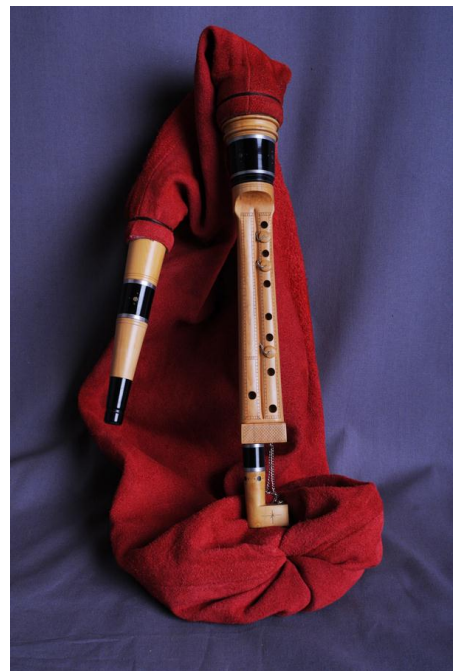
Of course it wasn't perfect but the work was begun and was never to let me go. Today I specialize in making Occitan bagpipes, essentially the Boha, the Boudègue, the Samponha and the Limousin chabrette.

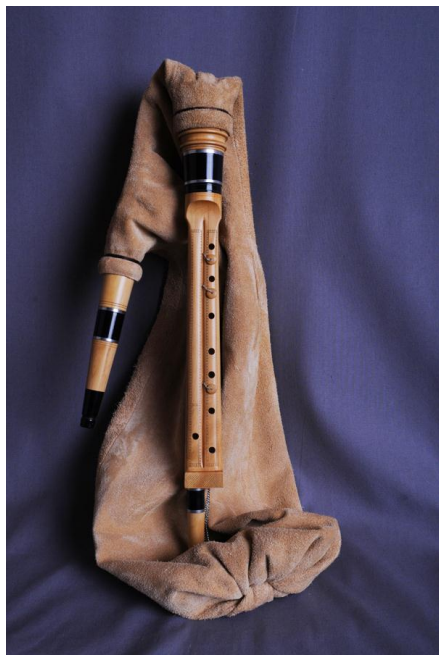
Many articles have already been written describing the Chabrette and the Boha, hence I will concentrate on presenting for you the Bohassa, the Boudègue and the Samponha.

The greatest part of my activity concerns the Boha and the innovations that I brought to it.

Originally the Boha was a small instrument with very high pitched sonority. The instrument possessed only five holes on the front face of the chanter and at present my instruments are proposed with six holes as standard, with the possibility to play in minor modes, thanks to little corks that can be moved from one hole to another. The system of reeds that I use for my “Bohas and Bohassas” are made from Plexiglas for the reed body and carbon fibre for the reed itself.

What I innovated was to extend the range of the Boha into the lower registers. I called these new instruments “Bohassas”.





Bohassas are played essentially in D and C and have a warm deep sound contrasting to the standard Boha. The possibility to mix treble Bohas with Bohassas makes me think of the mixture one finds in central France between the 16 and 20 inch Musettes. Of course the sound is dissimilar due to the reeds that are single in the case of the Bohassa. The Bohassa is an invention, but already many musicians who play medieval music have adopted it, considering it as being a period bagpipe and not a modern creation. Nonetheless the reed in carbon fibre is very modern and in no way resembles cane reeds which are typical of ancient Bohas.

One would hope that the sound of Bohassas makes one think of the Middle-Ages and the sonorities that must have reigned in the halls of medieval castles.

At present, my Bohassas are played by numerous musicians playing early music but equally by those playing traditional.

In 2002 I continued the evolution of the standard Bohassa by making it polyphonic. I gave it the name "Polyphonic Bohassa".

The idea was very simple: separate the melody in two parts. The standard Bohassa possesses two bores and in the case of the polyphonic Bohassa there are three: Four holes in the middle chanter (occupied by the right hand) and five on the left chanter (for the left hand). The right channel is still a semi-melodic drone as on the standard Bohas.

No other bagpipe resembles the Polyphonic Bohassa in its organology thanks to the two melodic chanters and its semi-melodic drone, with its specific little wooden piece called "Brunider" in Gascon. Only those bagpipes from central Europe, like the Duda, present this peculiarity.

Lately, my invention was taken over by other luthiers, without my consent. This is regrettable but proves at least that the idea was good enough to be copied.



the boudègue (bodega or Craba in Occitan)



The second type of bagpipe that I make is the Boudègue.

I began making it in the early 90's based on the work accomplished by Charles Alexandre and Claude Romero, both musicians from Southern France. The revival of the Boudègue began 1970 thanks to the Charles Alexandre collectage.

The term of "Bodega" derives directly from the Occitan "bot / bota", which signifies bag. One uses a whole goat's skin, called "oire" and it was the tradition to kill the animal during the old winter moon, choosing a

female goat rather than a male, because of the odour.

The chanter of the boudègue is called "graïle" and is equipped with a double reed, entirely cut from the body of the cane, resulting in a rather unique technique in this kind of reed-making.

The drone, called "bonda", sounds two octaves below the "graïle" and is composed of three parts, of which the last possesses a large resonator. The drone rests on the shoulder, in a very wide-spread style in Europe.

This large bagpipe closely resembles the images that one has of those of the Middle-ages. (cf. Enluminure de bréviaire d'amour d'un moine franciscain de Béziers - 1321).

We have also found an engraving, figuring in a register from the Labruguière region (Tarn), and one of the oldest written testaments mentioning the boudègue is to be found in the "Dictionari Moundi" of J. Doujat from Toulouse.

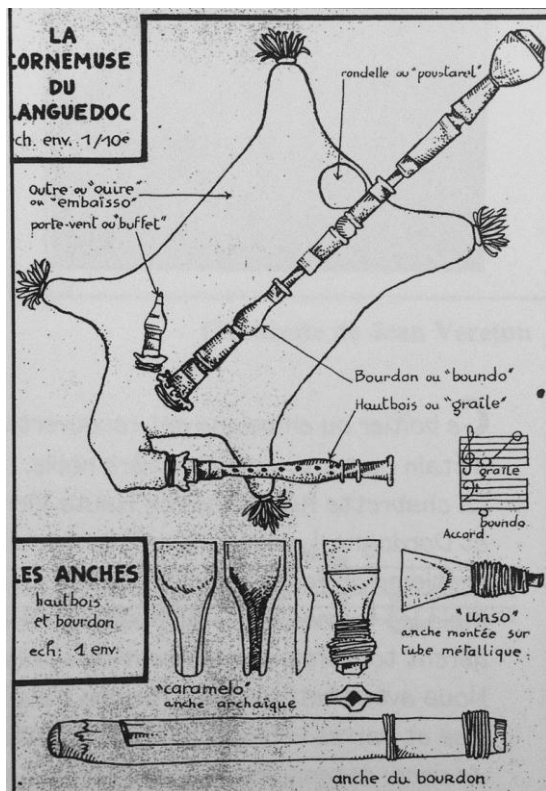
The former cites the word "boudègo", giving it the definition of bagpipe.



The playing area of the Boudègue extended over four french departments: Aude, Herault, Upper-Garonne and Tarn. At the beginning of the 20th cent. one still could count several hundred boudègue players in a zone including the Castres region, the Lacaune hills, the black mountains and the Lauragais.

Given its carnival-like character, this instrument was often used during street festivals. The musician was disguised and had as a custom to decorate the bodègue with all manner of pompoms and other knitted garlands. The colours had to be as bright and eye-catching as possible.

The boudègue was in great use for weddings and for all manner of life-pleasures. The repertory is composed of “bourrées” and numerous dances typical of the Tarn: La Bufatièra, the Buta Vam, the Branlou and the Violet.



Coming from an ageless tradition, the boudègue is, to my way of thinking, one of the most performant occitan bagpipes. Of a deep and stirring sound, they are distinct from the other european bag pipes that are generally much more strident.

Thanks to its chromatic possibilities, the Boudègue allows one to play all the styles of traditional as well as modern repertory.

The technique of the fabrication is quite exacting, and the tools used must be of great precision. For example : the chanter bore is made of four distinct

conicity, the reamer is very specialized tool, difficult to make.

Given it's over-sized dimensions, the drone with its resonator, is itself rather complicated to produce in order to have a homogenous and balanced result, as much musically as aesthetically speaking.

The boudègue is, for my taste, one of the most appealing bagpipes that I have encountered.

the samponha

(symphony in Gascon)



The last of the occitan bagpipes that I will describe is an enigma, as much for its origins as for its organology.

The “Samponha” is a polyphonic instrument but with two separate chanters both having conical bores.

This bagpipe was reconstructed from a series of iconographic representations found at Bearn and from the central Pyrenees. Several documents attest to the existence of a bagpipe in the Pyrenees but no concrete trace of such has been found.

The engraving below evokes a traditional rural scene where three musicians lead a procession, following a cart. The costumes appear to be those of the Ossau valley (near Pau). The scene is from Bearn.



The bagpipe player carries his instrument in front in order to firmly hold the two melodic chanters.

The bag is a large and no doubt comes from a whole goat. This image teaches us much concerning its existence, its form and how it was held by the musician. Here we certainly have the image of a traditional trio who played in the Pyrenees from the 18th to 19th centuries: three-hole flutes/ stringed tambourine, samponha and oboe.



The playing holes on the chanters of the samponha are arranged to recreate a complete scale, not exceeding the octave.

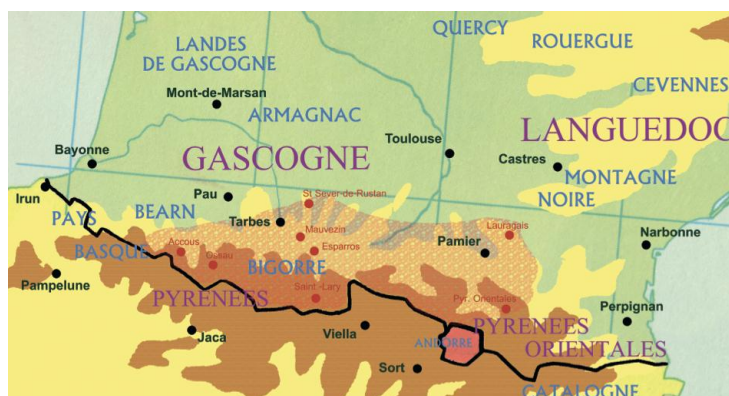
Two notes are identical on each chanter which permits more complex creations than are possible with the polyphonic bohassa. In point of fact I organized the polyphonic bohassa based on my work on the samponha ; the bohassa being rather a simplification of the organology of the samponha.

The samphona is not strictly speaking an invention but rather a reconstruction. It is my friend Bernard Blanc that in 1993 reconstructed it based on the specifications furnished by Jacques Baudouin. I discovered this instrument in an article that mr. Baudouin had written in the Pastel revue from the occitan conservatory of Toulouse of 1994 (n° 19, 1st trimestre 1994). I found this article intriguing and even if the instrument hadn't existed, I considered that his approach and analysis were very interesting.

From that day on I decided to follow up on the work of Bernard Blanc. With the accord of Jacques Baudouin I contacted Bernard Blanc and we agreed that I could continue the construction of the samponha to bring it back to life.

I can only underline my gratitude to Bernard for having given me all the useful information to undertake this task.

At the time the samponha was played in the A scale but now as well I make models in G which sound a bit deeper and allow one to accompany the gascon flute and the oboe of Couserans (a large oboe in three sections from Ariège). Finally my dream to hear the original trio playing has been realized. You can hear all of these instruments on my latest cd, recorded with Pierre Rouch, consecrated entirely to instruments of the Pyrenees.



discography

Duo Matta / Rouch

Cornemuses et Hautbois (2009)

Pireneus (2013)

TrenCaveI

Lo Pichon Trin (1997)

Al Café (2002)

Freta monilh

Tres Per Una (1992)

Freta Monih (1979)

Contact : mattarob@numericable.fr

Website : www.cornemusesoccitanes.com

Bands using my bagpipes :

La Talvera	bohassa en F
Yan Cozian	bohassa en D et boha en Bb
Arnaud Bibonne	boha en G et A, bohassa en F, Eb, D, C et samponha
Nadau	boha en G et A
Gric de Prat	boha en G et C
Clica drona	bohassa en C
Didier Oliver	boha en G, A et bohassa polyphonique en D
François Lazarevic	boha en G et bohassa en D
Mozaica (Pierre Rouch)	bohassa en D
A Cadera Coixa (espagne)	chabrette en A et boha en G
Lo Dalfin (Sergio Berardo)	boha en G
Chris Shaw (england)	boha en G

Musical notation for Bohassa

PARTITION - LA VIE DURE - CD "DES 20 ANS" BDG PISTE 10

Sébastien Lagrange - Arrangement Robert Matta - Transcription Rémy Palézis

Boha Sol

Bohassa Ré

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is labeled 'Boha Sol' and contains a vocal line with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The lower staff is labeled 'Bohassa Ré' and contains a piano accompaniment with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The music begins with a four-measure phrase.

The second system continues the piano accompaniment from the first system. It features a four-measure phrase with a treble clef and a grand staff. The melody in the right hand is more active, involving eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a steady bass line.

The third system continues the piano accompaniment. It features a four-measure phrase with a treble clef and a grand staff. The right hand has a more complex melodic line with some slurs, while the left hand maintains a consistent rhythmic pattern.

The fourth system continues the piano accompaniment. It features a four-measure phrase with a treble clef and a grand staff. The right hand has a melodic line with some slurs, and the left hand continues with a steady bass line. The system concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.