

**«MASSIVE ATTACK MEETS  
EDITH PIAF»**

Ruth Crome  
Folk East Festival  
23.08.15

simone alves & yann gourvil  
music from beyond our world.



**Songlines (February 2014 n°106),**

*“Murky myth and misery becomes surprisingly uplifting.” (\*\*\*\*)*

**Santa Sangre (12.10.2014),**

*“Astrakan Project’s new album is the purifying fire we all must pass through at one point or another while we live; there is no light without darkness and there can be no hope if there is not first bruising and omnipotent despair.” Peter Marks*

**fRoots (July 2013 n°361),**

*“Gloriously full-throated, truly inspiring Breton singing and melodies from Simone Alves [...] roaring, intricate, fiery, imaginative accompaniments” Ian Anderson*

# Airplay, TV, presse...

- **Presse:** fRoots n°396 cover (June 2016);



- **TV shows:** **Bali Breizh**, official video release, France 3 (National tv, local branch, 01/05/2016), **Bec'h De'i**, live performance, Brezhoweb (online TV show in Breton 21/04/2016), **Bali Breizh**, interview and live performance, France 3 (National tv, local branch, 11/01/2015), **RTP**, interview (national tv, Portugal, 22/07/2014);
- **Radio Interviews:** Le Monde est un village, RTBF live show (national radio, Belgium, 31/01/14); BBC Cambridgeshire (radio, UK, 05/10/14); Terra Pura (radio, 22/04/13, broadcasted in Portugal and Brazil radio network); Radio Liban (radio, 26/04/12)
- **Major radios airplay:** Radio Canada, RTBF, France Bleu Bretagne;
- **Local radios airplay:** France, US, Israel, Lebanon, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, UK, Australia, Italy...

## fROOTS magazine

(<http://www.frootsmag.com>)

n° 396 (June 2016 issue), fRoots cover



# Songlines magazine

(<http://www.songlines.co.uk>)

n° 106 (February 2015 issue), p78, album B review

## Simone Alves & Yann Gourvil Astrakan Project B

Kargo Records (44 mins)

★★★★★

*Murky myth and misery becomes surprisingly uplifting*



The follow-up album to the pair's *Astrakan Project* features more bracing Breton gloominess by this talented couple. The disc is charming and feels like the organic product of a cottage industry. Simone Alves handles all the characterful vocals and also provides some colourful, evocative paintings in the CD booklet to illustrate each track. Yann Gourvil plays all the instruments in addition to handling the programming, engineering and mixing.

As with their previous effort, what gives an unusual flavour to the album is that Gourvil plays electric guitar as well as Turkish *saz* and *oud* and

*darbuka* drum, which gives a more universal feel to these tales, mostly of romantic tragedy. 'My beloved is dead, my faith is dead, my joy is dead and so is all my hope,' goes one verse, which makes Leonard Cohen seem upbeat. Other songs are medieval stories of girls being kidnapped by sailors and the ghosts of dead women appearing once every seven years.

But the energy of the music, notably the repeating guitar patterns, means this is more uplifting than depressing. All the songs are sung in Breton, a language the duo were not raised in. As they immerse themselves more in Breton language and its legends, the more powerful the music becomes.

PETER CULSHAW

**TRACK TO TRY** *My Beloved has Died*



## SIMONE ALVES & YANN GOURVIL

Astrakan Project B Carga 044



Let's start with Reviewer's Confession Time. The reaction on looking at the album cover and quickly perusing the brief notes was, for some reason, "I am not going to enjoy this!" After listening to the first track the opinion was, "This music deserves very careful listening." After 40-odd minutes concentration, the album has somehow gained continuous play now for a number of days.

Neither Simone nor Yann are native Breton speakers but they have an intense grounding in Breton culture. They have lived away from Brittany for some years in Istanbul, absorbing a broad range of Middle Eastern instruments and musical styles which Yann has been able to adapt skilfully to

accompany Simone's voice. It is her voice that is the most arresting aspect of this entrancing album. Listening to her passionate engagement with the gwerz (laments) it is possible to hear and trace the line that goes something like Les Sœurs Goadec – Yann-Fañch Kemener – Erik Marchand – Simone Alves. She brings the correct amount of fervour to these very old pieces and the right amount of excitement when she sings *Kan Ha Diskan* with her vocal call being answered by an instrumental response.

Yann is the master of a range of string instruments and uses acoustic and electric guitar, saz, oud, and violin as well as darbuka and programming where the human and not the technology is firmly in control.

Another favourable mention for the excellent artwork and design by Simone. Anything negative to balance this entirely favourable review? Not much. Glad to have a magnifying glass on my desk to read the interesting notes and it would have been good to hear more of the cello of *Kan Ha Diskan* that makes a real contribution to the opening track – but that is about all.

They seem fiercely determined to avoid distribution by others so you will have to go to their website for sales and for links to may have downloads. You heard a track from its predecessor on *fRoots 45*.

[astrakanproject.com](http://astrakanproject.com)

Vic Smith

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Fearless, inte [www.kateyo](http://www.kateyo)

Sarah Coxson

## NEGRO AC

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## Santa Sangre

(<http://santasangremagazine.wordpress.com>)

12/10/2014, album B review

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## ASTRAKAN PROJECT – B

12/10/2014 · by Santa Sangre · 111 reviews ·



*[Reviewed by Peter Marks]*

Brittany is a region of France which thanks to Astrakan Project, I have now researched in depth. I'll give you the bare bones description: five regions, two native dialects and more history across it's territory than my own country could ever hope to attain. Nearly everyone in the ancient world passed through, from the Romans to tribes and clans so obscure that time has erased all traces of them. Almost. For their second album, Simone Alves and Yann Gouvril have tracked down some truly remarkable songs from ages long gone, gilding them with music which only they could make. The level of accomplishment is high, the benchmarks have been exceeded and in their place new ones have been born.

This pair have, since their inception, continually striven to deliver as they say "music from beyond our world" and continue to do so on their sophomore outing. The chemistry between them has become liquid, all the live shows they have now played (they've made it as far as

# Santa Sangre

(<http://santasangremagazine.wordpress.com>)

13/10/2012, album review

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England now and I'll continue to hope) clearly have strengthened the bond between them. Many of the pieces on here have a dark, rolling undercurrent to them much like the sea which caresses and crashes into the Breton shores all around them. Do they spend much time just watching the horizon, spellbound by the endless enigma of the timeless ocean? I know I would if I lived where they did, without question.

Once again, I have to applaud how well appointed their songs are. No one instrument takes precedence, Yann's music is the perfect accompaniment to Simone's searing vocals. Their combined efforts will cut across your soul, the nature of what topics they address tend to be on the dour side but much like life itself: you will press on. No matter how overwhelming those crushing blows become, if your character is strong enough you will endure. Astrakan Project's new album is the purifying fire we all must pass through at one point or another while we live; there is no light without darkness and there can be no hope if there is not first bruising and omnipotent despair.

You've now read about them twice and hopefully this will be the grain which tips the balance. They are not known, they aren't calculating nor are they anything but artists. One glance at Simone's artwork should clear up any doubts you might have, again she proffers numerous symbols and her central character displays a determined and indomitable expression. This duo are in it for the duration and they don't care where it leads to or what the consequences are, neither should you. The visual and aural merge in a seamless blend of tradition and triumph, go on and listen to the fourth track on here to get an idea of how they have mastered the delicate art of restraint. Yann's guitar work on this one rivals the slow burning menace Andy Summers displayed during his time in The Police.

I make the comparison to demonstrate skill, Astrakan Project are in no way, shape or form a pop group whatsoever. Their detailing is on the same level as any acclaimed "professional" out there. If they made their songs any more personal you'd swear they were right in the room with you and if you two ever do make it to the west coast of America you have a standing invitation to dinner in my home any time. I'm beyond blown away by your evolution in two years... 'B' is going to become known and revered in time, you two continue to follow the path of singular excellence.

# fRoots magazine

(<http://www.frootsmag.com>)

n° 360 (june 2013 issue), album review

## SIMONE ALVES & YANN GOURVIL

**Astrakan Project** Carga 015

Sometimes I get hoist by my own prejudices and preconceived ideas. So it was that I glanced at the back of this album, noted the legend "A colourful and delicate oriental shine over wild Celtic music", and the dread vision of Loreena Newage materialised. And so it festered unplayed in the 'oh \*\*\*\* do I really have to listen to this?' pile on my desk for several weeks, until we were just about to go press with this issue.

Don't do that at home. Should a copy of this CD appear in your letterbox, hopefully because this review may have alerted you to it, seize it and put it in your player straight away. You will not be disappointed.

For 'Celtic', do not read 'wifty-watty-synthy-twee', but instead gloriously full-throated, truly inspiring Breton singing and melodies from Simone Alves. For 'a colourful and delicate oriental shine', read 'roaring, intricate, fiery, imaginative accompaniments' from multi-instrumentalist Yann Gourvil on oud, electric saz (or baglama as the Turks call it), violin and programmed percussion.

Indeed, for 'oriental', don't read 'Far East' as we Brits tend to use it, but 'from the Eastern reaches of the Mediterranean'. It's the



sort of production that wouldn't sound out of place on the better contemporary Turkish roots records – it turns out that they've lived and studied in Istanbul for the past few years – and it's obviously a close relative to what Kristi Stassinopoulou & Stathis Kalyviros did with Greekadelia. In fact I'd christen it Breton-Turkadelia if I hadn't run out of credit in the 'name a genre a day' fund.

When I hit them up for a copy of the blog that this maltreated review copy had obviously got separated from, I found that they were involved in one of the sainted Erik Marchand's inspiring projects that included Ross Daly, Thierry 'Titi' Robin and Keyvan Chemirani. That makes complete sense, and they are justifiably spoken of in the same breath as those iconic names. And if that doesn't get you people who know about that sort of thing reaching for your credit cards, I don't know what will.

A truly fabulous, spirit-raising album.  
[astrakanproject.com](http://astrakanproject.com)

Ian Anderson





## Songlines magazine

(<http://www.songlines.co.uk>)

n° 93 (July 2013 issue), p78, album review

REVIEWS

# Fusion

**Simone Alves & Yann Gourvil**  
**Astrakan Project**  
Karga Records (43 mins)  
★★★★  
*Tales of dark romance and doomed love*



This album has nothing, as far as one can tell, to do with the town on the Caspian Sea or hats. The core of this album is enjoyably gloomy traditional Breton singing, from the pure voice of Simone Alves with her partner Yann Gourvil in charge of instruments and programming. The duo's songs are peppered with Celtic myth and legend, but mainly are about doomed love and death. A sample lyric, translated from the Breton, as a lover decides to kill himself after his beloved dies: *'We'll lie in the same grave since we haven't been in the same bed; we'll be married in front of God since we haven't been by the priest.'* What is unusual, and probably unique is the 'Oriental' colours added to the songs (the duo lived in Istanbul for a while) with Gourvil playing *oud* and *daf* as well as more usual folk instruments.

Standout tracks include '1932', which is an effective evocation of the misery of a failed harvest when there's no bread, while 'Mouezhiou' sounds a little Bulgarian and is an atmospheric song about a woman who bitterly regrets marrying a drunkard. The electronics used on songs like 'Kreñv 'Veld ar Garantez' are generally subtly interwoven although at times the drum machine stands out, and not in a good way. By the end of this compelling, if at times slightly claustrophobic, record there is a slight sense that some other players would have added a more interesting and rich sonic palette. Still, there are some superb songs rendered in an original way, which suggests considerable potential. The cover artwork is intriguing, too.

🔊 **TRACK TO TRY: 1932**

*Peter Culshaw*

# fRoots magazine

(http://www.frootsmag.com)

n° 361 (july 2013 issue), fRoots Playlist



Originally from Brittany where they've collaborated with the likes of Erik Marchand, Thierry 'Titi' Robin and Ross Daly, and for the last four years in Istanbul, singer **Simone Alves** & multi-instrumentalist **Yann Gourvil** bring a fiery new edge to their blend of traditions.



# Santa Sangre

(<http://santasangremagazine.wordpress.com>)

13/10/2012, album review

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## SIMONE ALVES / YANN GOURVIL – Astrakan Project [ENG/PL]

13/10/2012

tags: [celtic](#), [Francja](#), [oriental](#), [Simone Alves](#), [Yann Gourvil](#)  
by [Santa Sangre](#)

SIMONE ALVES / YANN GOURVIL – Astrakan Project  
CD 2012  
Karga 015



*reviewed by / autor recenzji: Peter Marks*

**ENG:** This is where you read about them first, remember it well. A duo who have worked together for over ten years have begun a journey under their new heading of Astrakan Project. Be advised, if atmospheric longing isn't your bag, give this album a wide berth. There isn't much happiness to be found within the collective sound of this act nor should there be. I looked over the inner sleeve and the majority of these songs are possessed of incredible loss, the regrets of those who had their brief dalliances with love only to lose it in the whirlwind of chaotic times. Do not expect relaxation or introspection from Simone and Yann, there isn't any to be found and what is even more remarkable is that for how rough some of this material sounds, as this record plays out the concepts become very focused.

Simone's voice is very prominent in these songs and her alliterations are like a rapid fire automatic weapon spitting out fire, this lady can summon incredible emotional range with the subtle caresses her vocals drench one with. The musical arrangements are some of the strangest I've heard for some time, in fact, this pair would not have been out of place on Hyperium back in the early 90s. The fingerings for what he's playing must be arduous to undertake, I myself have to catch my breath trying to keep up with how many movements each of their tracks contain. Some begin calmly, with an almost plaintive feel to them while others just charge out of the gate like a starving tiger loosed upon unsuspecting tourists near

# Santa Sangre

(<http://santasangremagazine.wordpress.com>)

13/10/2012, album review

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the edge of the jungle. To listen to these two is to embrace frenetic perfection, the only thing they lack is a professional studio to flesh out their visions. Other than that little item, this is a solid debut from top to bottom; the thing is built like a battleship! Unsinkable.

Peruse their website, check them out, don't let them pass you by. They insisted on my attention throughout this thing and damn did they ever get it. You don't pick and choose your way through Astrakan Project, you listen all the way through and if it doesn't grab you initially then you take the plunge I did: headphones. The way this album is mixed, there are a lot of sly nuances and cunning layers which won't be audible coming out of a pair of speakers. I suspect this was intentional on the part of Yann when he produced the album and it's a very wise move to have made. If this still isn't enough to convince you, the artwork which Simone executed is a impressionistic vision of sheer majesty. Symbolism plays a big role in what they do and her paintings reflect this. So far I have picked out ten and I know that there are more, many many more.

We're in it for the long haul, this band and I. Their work has fused into my skull and will not get out or give any space back, I was at work earlier today and found myself humming one of their melodies and then whistling it out back on the loading dock while on my lunch. There is something unsettling and maddeningly familiar about what they do, I know some of these songs I have heard before even though I've never been to Brittany. A colourful and delicate oriental shine over wild Celtic music is how they describe themselves but I hear more and bloody hell do I want more.

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# Urban Kelt Channel

(<http://urbankelt.com>)

## 2015, album B review

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The band members of Astrakan Project are Simone Alves: vocals and Yann Gourvil: strings and programming.

Simone is originally from Portugal. Yann is from Brittany. They both now call Brittany their home but travel from Istanbul to Brittany. Their songs are about love, death, passion, revenge, politics and legends. Kalon ['ka:lɔn] : a beautiful Breton word meaning heart, is used in most of the songs. "Kalonad", basically means "the content of your heart". Some of the songs are really old, they can be kind of laments, and will mostly be about tragic facts and mythology. They might be a few centuries old and go back to the middle ages. Some others are more recent.

Astrakan Project have released three CD's. Their first one called 'Astrakan Project' came out in Sept. 2012. Their second one called 'Within the Circle' came out in Nov. 2013. Their latest one called 'Astrakan Project B' came out in Oct. 2014.

Simone's voice draws you into the ancient and mythological tragedies of murders and death. Follow the timeless compass of eternal laments and be enthralled.



## Unsigned & Independant

(<https://unsignedandindependent.wordpress.com/>)

December 2015, album B review

### SIMONE ALVES & YANN GOURVILL *Astrakan Project B*

This is a Breton album which means that it embraces a rich calling in folk and roots music as influences. That is certainly an evident attribute to the passivity of the first track here 'Sell Ouzh Ar Stered'. They have recorded this twice before but they seem to have a love affair with the tune. The string arrangements gathers the residual ebb and flow that is delicate, while the chant of the vocals is a careful application that resoundingly creates fluidity to mirror the resolute reach developed. Second track 'En Anv Doue Ma Mamm' is a murder ballad that sets a suitable precedent. The morose attraction is confirmed by the deeper and foreboding sound, while the patience of the tempo is unbiased in how it comfortably frames the delivery. 'Gwes Ines' captures a nuanced appreciation that furthers the appreciation for the poetry of Luis de Camoes. In how it is there by design on this one the political landscape seems to expand the impact that builds in the lyrics.

Stealing a march in a select way is 'Sekrejou Ar C'Hloareg'. That manages to sustain interest and the traditional flourishes sit where they should. Overall it is evenly balanced and the compartmented distribution gives it a grander relevance that meticulously measures things on an artistic level. Lamenting over the politics that leads to diaspora and other forms of separation



provides 'Gwers Ar Yougoslavi' with its subject material. This collects in an understated way, but it is intended to do so and it fits the context perfectly. It is a heavy listen, as should be expected, with the stark reality stared down unapologetically in the delivery. Yet they still develop a commendable sense of flight to it in the right way here. The lyrics are an unpublished work by Erik Marchand. 'Seizh Vioaz' is a traditional Breton affair that tells the classic tale of a man besieged by the loss of his beloved. The supernatural element takes the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as a source material. In the dalliance of the playing there are rich overtures which play in considerably and are beset in a magnificent way here. The sitar is a rich application here and the mysticism is secured from the Eastern influences on show.

Their measurement of the most famous sad songs in Brittany's history came next. Their version of 'Marv Eo Ma Mestre' adds their signature feel to it all while allowing a carefree consideration to accentuate the way the reach is developed in the musical sense. They leverage their Lebanese influences superbly on 'Ar C'hased Arc'hant'. The context of the song is the foreboding precognition that women would have that their husbands would die at sea. That dark substance strikes at the heart of the vocals and embraces that sullen overbearing in an admirable way. There is a lot to be said for the way the music is laid out also.

The last track here is 'Ur Plac'h Yaouank Ag An Oriant' and tells the tale of Lorient who was captured as a slave girl. The rhythm toils away smartly and brims with a spirited determination defined by the clever bounce located in the tempo. In that taut characteristic a warm conclusive texture draws you in as it admirably plays away.

## The Gladstone

(<http://www.thegladpub.com/>)

15/03/2015, concert review

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Astrakan are French duo Simone Alves and Yann Gourvil. Their music combines the Breton Celtic folk tradition with strong Arabic and Middle Eastern influences. Based predominately around Breton folk texts (some stretching back as far as the middle ages), and the Oud, a stringed instrument with roots in the Middle East, Africa and Turkey, their songs combine a deep respect for the past with a forward-looking contemporary aesthetic.

Rory Carlile (The Gladstone)

01/03/2016

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## Ancient songs from Turkey and Brittany

Tuesday, 1 March 2016 By [County Echo Reporter](#) in [Entertainment](#)

**THE ASTRAKAN Project returns to Wales as part of an intimate UK tour, including a stop at Cardigan this week.**

Arriving at The Cellar Bar in Cardigan on Friday, the Astrakan Project - who hail from France - produce music influenced by their time spent living in Brittany and Istanbul.

From their homeland, Yann Gourvil (strings, programming and loops) and Simone Alves (vocals) bring in ancient songs and legends that they blend with Turkish instruments ('ud, baglama) they discovered while living in Istanbul.

All the songs are sung in the beautiful Breton dialect of Brittany, which they both speak. It's a Celtic language that is closely related to Welsh and Cornish.

Over the course of two acclaimed albums and a nomadic international touring schedule the duo (who are named after the Breton words for clapping and singing) has cultivated an enviable reputation for mesmerising and powerful live shows, which are unlike anything you've ever heard before.





# The Cellar

(<http://www.thecellarcadigan.com>)

## Gig review

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Friday 4 March we were treated to some lovely music and songs. Intricate, moving, multi layered, sharing cultural influences from Bretton, Celtic and eastern rhythms. Folk song bang up to date delivered with passion and sensitivity. Such a big sound from just two people !

Steve / The Cellar, 04/03/2016, Cardigan, Wales, UK

## Radios & TV



18/03/2014  
Arvorig FM  
E Brezhoneg!



01/03/2015  
Radio Libertaire Paris  
Folk à Lier



20/03/2015  
BLOCK-OUT RADIO

17/10/2014  
I/O Ipswich Radio

