

Kesaj challenge: Rennes-Kežmarok by bike.

A challenge launched by the association YEPCE in support of the group KESAJ TCHAVE

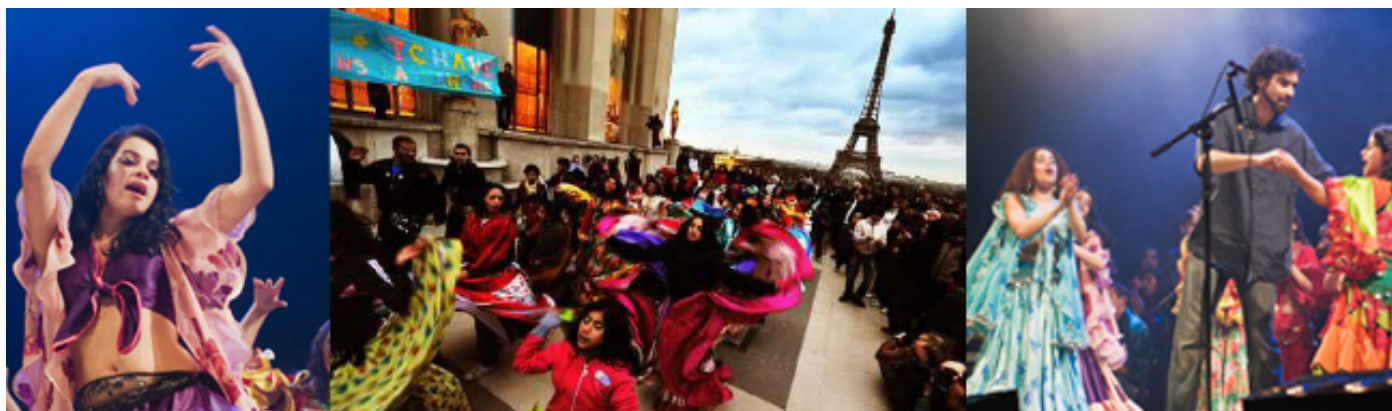


Photo captions (left to right):

- Kesaj Tchavé perform at the closing of the festival "**Migrant'scène**" festival, **La CIMADE**, Montreuil, (2009)
- "Noël tzigane, Noël d'espoir" (A Gypsy Christmas, a Christmas of Hope), Parvis des Droits de l'Homme, Esplanade du Trocadéro, Paris (2009)
- Performing at the **Zénith** in Paris with **Les Ogres de Barback**.

BACKGROUND

Yepce and Kesaj Tchavé meet

In 2004, the members of the association YEPCE met the group KESAJ TCHAVE, who were performing in France for the very first time, in Nancy. Attracted by the socio-cultural dimension that the association could offer the group in assisting its development, YEPCE soon decided to lend its support to this musical initiative.

KESAJ TCHAVE means «Children's Fairy»

Kesaj is a gypsy fairy who preaches that to receive love, you first have to be able to give it to others. It is on this wonderful principle of brotherhood that in the year 2000, the story of a group came to life – a group combining Gypsy music, dance and song and made up entirely of young Rom children living in camps on the fringes of society in Eastern Slovakia.

Ivan Akimov, a professional musician, and Helena Akimova, a street worker, use music as a dynamic springboard for the development and integration of young Roms. These young people, bursting with joy, energy and talent, seize this opportunity to cross a bridge to another kind of life, and in doing so, have created an exceptional artistic work and won over audience after audience in Europe.

In 2004, an initial meeting in Slovakia enabled YEPCE to begin to build up communications tools with which to promote the group and thus envisage new concert tours on French soil. Photo and video reports of the first meetings on-site in Slovakia are available on the following sites: (YEPCE website: <http://yepce.fr/kesaj>, myspace: <http://myspace.com/kesajtchave>)

New volunteers, attracted by the initiative of supporting this group of Gypsy dance and song, soon joined the association YEPCE. This increase in numbers has enabled the association to increase its support of the group Kesaj Tchavé.

Each member helps out in different ways: making costumes for the group, designing new promotional tools, organising supporting concerts, helping out at jumble sales, translating documents (press reports, etc.), and more.

The productive work and commitment of its volunteers has enabled YEPCE to successfully organise and coordinate the entire Brittany tour of Kesaj Tchavé – not just once, but twice – in 2006 and 2008.

The members of the association are also involved in organising international concert tours and festivals for the group (tours in Denmark and Italy in 2009, Sziget festival in Hungary in 2008, Akaname festival in Slovakia since 2007, to mention but a few) and they play an active role in supporting and accompanying the group whenever possible (Poland 2007, festivals in France since 2007).

Each time the group goes on tour, it meets a wide variety of audiences throughout Europe, thus enabling it to gain recognition and build up a network with a diverse range of partners: artists, associative bodies, etc.

It's in this spirit that our association invited the French band Les Ogres de Barback to play at the «Akaname» festival in 2008 (see annex 1), a cultural inter-camp gathering organised yearly in association with Kesaj Tchavé. In return, Les Ogres de Barback invited KESAJ TCHAVE to join them on stage during their concert at the Zénith in Paris on World Rom Day, where they performed alongside such well-known artists as Pierre Perret.

These meetings have also led to a fruitful collaboration with Rom communities and camps in the Paris region, where dozens of young Romanian migrants are experiencing unbearable living conditions right here in France. Thanks to this collaboration, these young people take part in the artistic endeavours of Kesaj Tchavé when on tour on French soil.

PRESENTATION and AIM

A fight against the discrimination faced by the Gypsy community



For ten years now, the collective group Kesaj Tchavé has combined artistic and social action in an approach where sharing is the key word. The dedicated activists at the helm of the project have developed a rare dynamism to respond to the hardships and precariousness of life in a very delicate context in order to give a kind of dignity and a positive image to young Roms concentrated in slums in Europe.

In transforming each of their shows into a rare, unique and fairylike moment, the members of the group place young Gypsy people in a beautiful light, far from the images imposed on them by society. Kesaj Tchavé fights against discrimination by offering an insight into the cultural diversity of European society – a stepping stone towards tolerance and a wonderful way to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts.

The main aim of the association Yepce is to promote and support European cultural exchanges. Our commitment as a partner to the group Kesaj Tchavé can be described as being an approach aimed at promoting and furthering knowledge of the Rom culture.

As the principal representative of KESAJ TCHAVE in France, our association deploys all of its resources in an effort to support this artistic ensemble and enable it to continue operating in the long term.

The objectives of the cycling challenge are as follows:

- To enable a wide number of audiences to benefit from the enriching experience of coming into contact with the group KESAJ TCHAVE, and more generally, furthering contact with the Gypsy culture.
- To renew our support in helping to organise the inter-slum festival “Akaname”

A CYCLING CHALLENGE IN SUPPORT OF THE CHILDREN of the group KESAJ TCHAVE



In preparing a cycling trip from Rennes to Slovakia, YEPCE intends to draw attention in an original way to its actions in support of KESAJ TCHAVE, a group of Rom children in Slovakia.

Since it was founded in 2003, the association YEPCE has sought to develop its activities in order to support European cultural exchanges. 2010 is an opportunity for us to further knowledge of our actions and commitments.

As part of the initiative we will cycle from Rennes, the seat of the association, to Kezmarok, in Eastern Slovakia, covering a distance of over 2,000 kilometres, in order to join up with the group Kesaj Tchavé and help set up the new edition of the inter-slum festival Akaname. (see annex 1)

The website we have developed for the project <http://www.yepce.fr/rennes-kezmarok> means that our actions can be viewed and followed by a wide-ranging audience.

This interactive tool will enable schools, private individuals, sponsors and local, departmental, regional and European institutions to join us in this adventure of international solidarity and raise the funds necessary to enable the festival Akaname to take place.

This initiative is also an excellent way to prepare the group's upcoming tours through the production of new communications tools.

Lastly, this adventure will be an opportunity to reach new audiences and strengthen existing partnerships in order to propose concrete solutions to the fight against the discrimination faced by the Gypsy community.

Annex 1: AKANAME FESTIVAL

The purpose of this event is to serve as a springboard for creativity within the Gypsy community, to strengthen the position of KESAJ TCHAVE within this community, and to gather the communications material which will serve to organise concert tours abroad in the future.

YEPCE has lent its support to the inter-slum festival AKANAME every year since 2006.



AKANAME FESTIVAL

Every year, in late May or early June, at the foot of the Slovakian Tatra mountains, the inter-slum festival Akaname! takes place. «Akana me!» means «Now it's my turn!» in the Romany language. This illustrates that even in the unattractive exterior of Rom camps and slums, there can still be a time and place where everyone can get up in front of their families and friends and take part in a cultural and social programme which is far removed from the ordinary everyday life which is not conducive to this type of event. That is not to say that culture is something that is absent from these places outside the majority society – in fact, quite the opposite is true. The slums, so destitute as to be almost regarded as picturesque in appearance, are often a source of immense creativity, where moments without music are practically inexistent. Music constantly resounds from all directions – it is everywhere, omnipresent, and created and consumed without moderation, far from the conventions of concert halls.

The festival «Akana me!» provides a platform for the inhabitants of these «zones outside the influence of the majority» to play and develop their music in their usual surroundings, yet in an unusual context – that of a cultural event designed and organised for the good of all. Its key purpose is to ensure all participants have a festive time together and to attract as many people as possible from the area and neighbouring areas.

Such a festive atmosphere can also be found at parties and in Gypsy discos, but here, priority is given to those who do not necessarily have access to the latter places. Discos are expensive and younger people are not allowed entry.

The festival focuses primarily on children and young people, but also gives older people the chance to display their talent, skill and courage in front of their people.

It is also an artistic platform for soloists and bands which do not often have the opportunity to play in front of audiences. The group Kesaj Tchavé not only takes part in the festival as an organiser, but is also one of the main performers. Hotly awaited by an impatient audience full of highly critical spectators, each show they perform in front of their own people is such a test that there is no room for error – it must be perfect.

Popular culture goes hand in hand with sport, and football is a key part of that. So from now on, before the artists gather in the afternoon, football-related events are held in the morning – a wonderful introduction to the cultural festivities which make up the bulk of the festival.

In 2010, the fifth edition of the festival will take place. Apart from the group Kesaj Tchavé, many other local Gypsy bands have performed at the event and several foreign bands have also played there since 2008. The event is organised by the group Kesaj Tchavé and its foreign partners, primarily YEPCE. Up to now, the Department for Culture of the Slovak Republic has also lent its financial support to the project.

Annex 2: Provisional calendar of the cycling challenge

Preparation for the trip:

January

- Writing a summary of the project
- Putting the website in place

February

- Finding various partners for funding
- Making contact with schools/sending off a summary of the project

March/April

- Speaking about the challenge in schools (Rennes, Longnes, Nanterre, Paris)
- Communicating about the project, updating the website
- Launching an appeal for funds from private individuals
- Preparing bikes

Bike trip: Cycling challenge from France to Slovakia

The trip in detail

In **May/June 2010**, the two founding members of the association Yepce – Sébastien Fraboulet (video artist) and Johann Le Berre (illustrator) – will travel by bike from Rennes (France) to Kezmarok (Slovakia), the village of KESAJ TCHAVE.

During this 2,000-kilometre journey, they will stop in the following towns in order to present in the project in different schools:

- Rennes – town where the association has been headquartered since 2005
- Longnes
- Nanterre
- Paris
- Nancy – town where the association YEPCE was founded in 2003
- Tomblaine – partner town of Kesaj Tchavé since 2003
- Strasbourg – media coverage of the event due to take place on 1 June, in front of the European Parliament

They will also stop in schools in two of Rennes' twin towns:

- Erlangen (Germany)
- Brno (Czech Republic)

In each town where they stop, they will give a conference in which they will present the group KESAJ TCHAVE, and the association's support of them since 2004 (making promotional videos, a website, a comic, photo reports, tour, meetings).

Each audience they speak to will be invited to take part in the blog, which will provide them with information on the progress made by the two project leaders on their way to Slovakia.

The two cyclists will also update the blog regularly so that different people can follow them on their travels – school-children and teachers, private individuals, institutional and media partners, members of the group KESAJ TCHAVE, etc.

Final stage of the cycling trip to Slovakia and AKANAME festival

The end of the trip, taking place from **1 to 3 June**, will involve the participation of a wide range of people: the French group (10 persons) and the Slovakian group Kesaj Tchavé (20 persons).

They will be joined at the end of the trip by other members of the association who will help out with the second part of the journey – setting up the fourth edition of the Gypsy inter-slum festival AKANAME.

For the final stage of the journey, bikes and a bus will be hired, which will enable the YEPCE association members and KESAJ TCHAVE to arrive at the Gypsy village together.

Friday 4, Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 June: AKANAME festival:

- YEPCE lends its support in terms of material and human resources to help set up the festival.

Communicating on the project on returning to France, via a photo exhibition and documentary film. Organising the return of the group Kesaj Tchavé to France.

When the association members return to France after the cycling challenge, they will organise a photo exhibition, produce a documentary film and make a comic book recounting this adventure, thus offering the public tools to help them learn about the richness of Gypsy culture. This will also enable the association to organise the return of Kesaj Tchavé to France.



Association YEPCE

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