

Lifestyle

Accompanied by the sound of his characteristic music, Jörg Perleberg, a globetrotter from northern Germany, has become part of the community in the district

The organ grinder of El Palo

MATHIAS RAUH MALAGA

What do the following have in common? The south, the north, an organ grinder, an expert guitarist, a French priest and the views of the sea in El Palo? The answer: Jörg Perleberg.

The organ grinder is the meeting point of several different worlds. With his blue and white striped fisherman's jersey, his red scarf and his German accent, he greets his neighbours on the seafront promenade at El Palo before telling us more about his interesting past and his more than unusual present. This 67 year old organ grinder, who is originally from the Pomerania region of Germany, explains that after spending decades working as an events organiser in Scharnebeck, which is close to Lüneburg, he decided to dedicate himself to following his "muse". In the literal sense of the word.

A passionate fan of motorbikes, Jörg Perleberg, who is known as 'Perle', explored the sunniest parts of Europe on his own set of two wheels until he underwent an operation which meant that he had to give up motorbike riding for good. But he still had other interests, among them a love of travel and a fascination with organ grinders, so he decided to combine those two other passions and for the past two years he has done so by spending the winter months in Malaga. Perle doesn't consider himself to be a musician although he does admit that his original, hand-made Stüber organ "doesn't play itself".

"People here don't have easy lives but they are still happier than many German people"

It is a fact that to make the instrument play music one does need a sense of rhythm, at least, but Perle doesn't sing: "That would frighten people off!" he says with a grin. He has almost lost count of the number of places he has been with his organ and the people he has met. "Some people are scared because they think I'm a bit mad, but others are interested and they approach me and start a conversation. I have made some real friends this way" says this popular street musician.

The children of Kolo

Among others, he maintains a strong friendship with the children who live in an orphanage in the town of Kolo, in Poland. There, he played the organ in the market



MUSIC MACHINE: JÖRG PERLEBERG, KNOWN AS JORGE BY LOCAL PEOPLE, POSES WITH THE STÜBER ORGAN . JORGE MAGA

square to raise money for the institution. His straw hat, now a little frayed, was even seen by viewers on Polish television, but the mention of this almost makes him blush. "I don't play for fame or for money, just for the fun of it", he insists. The gifts which the children made for him were his greatest reward. "It makes your eyes fill with tears", he admits.

Thanks to his friendly, open personality, Perle has also been made very welcome in El Palo district

of Malaga city, where his new neighbours lost no time in giving him a Spanish version of his name and addressing him as 'Jorge'.

"This is a marvellous district and it's my favourite place to play" says this organ grinder, and it seems that his music is equally pleasurable to his neighbours because everyone who passes greets him in a friendly fashion. Although he still has a few difficulties with the Spanish language, Jorge is already accepted as being one of them.

Sometimes people living in the district give him a gift of fresh fish. Jörg Perleberg really appreciates the gesture, not just because he is a keen fisherman but also because he is aware that "people here don't have an easy life but in spite of that they are happy and they are incredibly kind".

Musical encounters

However, this "mad German", as he jokingly refers to himself, doesn't only attract local people.

One roller of music plays songs for between five and eight minutes. From German hits to Spanish coplas, the wide repertoire offers something to entertain everybody who happens to be passing by. Once the roller has finished, it has to be rewound by hand and during that interval interesting meetings often take place such as the one which Perle remembers with José d'Aragón, the composer and director of the Zaragoza orchestra. Without knowing who he was, they held "an interesting conversation about music and interpretation. What is important isn't that the person I was talking to was José d'Aragón, but that it was somebody who was very pleasant and very friendly. And for that reason, thanks to the organ grinder, great friendships are made" relates Perleberg, who agrees that he is very sociable and who says that he really enjoys personal contact

"I don't play the organ to earn money or because I want to be famous, I do it because I really love doing it"

above all else.

Leaving with the heat

When the weather changes and the hot weather sets in, Jorge returns to Germany. It is true that this globe-trotting father of two daughters is also happy in his bungalow in the Bülo am See region of Mecklenburg, but he admits that "the time I spend in Malaga already seems too short. Maybe next year I'll stay a bit longer".

His passion for El Palo and Pedregalejo is shared by a close friend, a priest called Michel Rennes, who has published a book of photos with the title 'Huellas malagueñas', (Fingerprints of Malaga) in which he declares his love for these two old fishing districts of the city. Perleberg proudly shows us a copy of the book, which has a personal dedication. In a way, it is also a book about him.

When asked why he decided on this place to spend his winters, Perle answers by describing his daily routine. "I leave my apartment, which is right on the seafront, with my organ on my back. Behind me, I have the mountains; in front of me, the sea; all around me are lovely people and, on top of all that, the sun is shining. Where could anyone be happier than here?"

Try as I may, I can't think of an answer to that.