

Band together

Musician Kent Terry spends his time touring wedding venues in France with his band Rip-it Encore. **Gillian Harvey** finds out how he turned his passion for music into a business

Picture a traditional French château, its light stone walls flanked with pointed turrets and a beautiful frosting of ivy climbing across its 15th-century walls. In the background, lush countryside rolls away, punctuated with ancient trees, barn roofs and scatterings of sunflowers. It is undeniable that Château de la Côte near Périgueux embodies the idea of a French wedding venue - rich in romance, history and with a beautiful rural backdrop.

What you probably don't expect to see juxtaposed with this very traditional setting is a London black cab. Least of all, one containing three seasoned musicians crowding its space with their guitars, drums and lighting equipment.

Welcome to the world of Rip-it Encore - a wedding band formed almost by accident

by Francophile and 'piano man' Kent Terry.

Having grown up in the UK, professional pianist and singer Kent, 48, spent his twenties touring far and wide. "I travelled everywhere: Chicago, Sydney, all over Europe," he says. "It was an amazing life and I met some fantastic people."

However, moving from place to place lost its lustre after a while, and, in 2001, Kent decided to return to the UK and work with another of his passions: IT. "I went from playing in piano bars to being a server technician," he says. "It was quite a change of lifestyle."

Just four years later in 2005, a restless Kent decided to opt for another lifestyle change by moving to France. "It's a bit of a cliché," he says, "but I fell in love with France after watching a property programme."

Having resolved to relax, Kent settled in



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Facing page, top to bottom: Kent Terry performs with his band Rip-it Encore at Château du Puits, Ginestas; Jake Watt is folk guitarist in the band

This page, from top: Kent Terry with his wife Stéphanie and their two children, Lou and Juno; the band comprises Kent Terry (left), Olivier Fauque (middle) and Jake Watt (right)



Pézenas, a *commune* in Hérault, where he met his French partner, fashion designer, Stéphanie, now 44. But it wasn't long before the rhythm came back to get him.

"I appreciate good wine, so I became friends with the guy who owns the bar in Pézenas," explains Kent. "I hadn't planned on performing any music, but he asked me to play in the bar, so I gave it a go.

"In the end, we came to an arrangement - I'd play every Friday night and he'd share his expertise about different wines with me while I played - with samples, of course."

As fate would have it, folk guitarist Jake Watt, 34 - originally from Scotland - lived nearby and decided to join Kent in an impromptu set one evening.

"We really hit it off - both musically and socially," says Kent. "After a while, we began playing together more regularly. Jake was working as a guitar teacher at the time, while composing his own music. We began to play together regularly, performing cover songs, from classics to more modern tunes.

"We also met a local drummer and formed a band for a while, but when he moved to the UK in 2011 Jake then introduced me to Olivier Fauque - a French drummer whom he'd worked with before."

FORMING A WEDDING BAND

Olivier, 48, was the final touch the group needed and the trio enjoyed regular practice sessions, performing a variety of music. "In 2012, we had the idea of forming a wedding band," explains Kent. "We had no idea what the demand would be like, but France is a beautiful country, with lots of great venues, so we thought we'd give it a try."

Having registered the business, Kent set up a website and Rip-it Encore was born. "We included 'keywords' to attract people having weddings anywhere in France, as well as Italy, Spain and Switzerland," explains Kent. "And as the bookings began to come in, we started to think more about transport."

This is when the trio decided to bring something a little different into the mix. "We were talking about getting some transport for us to share, and one night we came up





“My pace of life goes from one extreme to the other – it’s full on during the wedding season, but in the winter I get to be at home full-time with my family”

with the idea of buying a black cab,” says Kent. “There’s something wonderfully iconic about cabs, and the idea of driving something so authentically British to European wedding venues was too good to resist.”

NEW BAND MEMBER

It was this idea that had the friends travel to the UK in 2013 and pick up their fourth band member: Tilda. “She became a real part of the package we offered,” says Kent. “She had lots of space for our equipment, and we also offered her as a bridal car. Plus, she was a great backdrop for photos – it was a real joy to own her.”

Over the following years, the band’s popularity grew, and Rip-it Encore now perform around 50 gigs a season, covering

around 70,000km in the process. But life on the road can be tough, especially for Kent – now father to Lou, six, and Juno, two – and Olivier, who also has a young daughter. “The summer season can be hectic,” Kent admits. “I’ll be home for a couple of days here and there, but I’m on the road for a lot of the time. We all have partners, and it does put a bit of strain on your relationship when you’re away a lot.

“French weddings tend to be on Saturdays, but in Italy, they often take place on Tuesdays or Thursdays. Plus, we do destination weddings for English-speaking clients flying in from abroad. So we’re often travelling from place to place, country to country. A typical day would involve heading off to the location the night before, arriving at the venue three

hours before the guests arrive to set up our equipment.

“During our performances we play hits from Bruno Mars, Kings of Leon and The Killers, to name but a few. And we’re extremely active: we multitask on stage, so it’s almost like listening to a six-piece band! I’ll have one hand on the keyboard, the other on a piano – it’s manic, but great fun.”

Life on the road is enjoyable, but as Kent explains, it can take its toll physically. “Everyone you meet is in a party mood,” he says. “Some weekends, I’ve had around three hours sleep a night; it can feel like jetlag when I come home. It takes me a day or two to recover, then often I’m off again. It’s hard to adjust to the pace of family life when you’re so exhausted!”



Main: Rip-it Encore used to tour from gig to gig in 'Tilda', a black cab from England, but as their success grew, so did the amount of travelling and the equipment they needed to take with them. Tilda is now retired.

Top right: Most of the gigs are at weddings
Below: The band relax between gigs



JUGGLING ACT

Living life at such a pace is a million miles away from Kent's initial intention when moving to France. "I thought I'd retire, drink wine, wander around markets," he says. "You think the grass is greener and you're going to live at a gentler pace. And you do for a while. But, for me, that wore off and while I love France, I wanted to do something else.

"Now my pace of life goes from one extreme to the other - it's full on during the wedding season, but in the winter I get to be at home full-time with my family, which is something I obviously might not have had in a different profession."

While the band get a smattering of gigs through the winter months, the three use their time to rehearse, practise new material and - in Jake's case - write folk songs. "I know Jake would like to move more into writing," says Kent.

"Unfortunately, we're not really able to work any of his material into our repertoire, as people usually want music they recognise. We need to have the dance floor full from the first chord and keep it full until the end of the night. But his stuff is great, and I can see him going far with it one day."

Unfortunately, the band's success has meant that much-loved cab Tilda has now been reluctantly retired.

"Our set has grown so much - with lasers, and light equipment - that she just wasn't big enough anymore," says Kent. "Plus she was a little bit slow, and when you're travelling a lot speed is important. We have a lovely car now, but she's no Tilda - arriving at gigs in a black cab really was great fun."

PLAY IT AGAIN

Demand for the band is such that Kent is even thinking of forming another Rip-it Encore. "We're toying with the idea of auditioning talented musicians and forming another band, similar to us - just because we have to turn down gigs during our busy season," he explains. "So watch this space!"

Life in France might not be exactly as Kent had planned, but he's certainly happy with the way things have turned out. "I get to see so many beautiful locations," he says. "There's a lovely venue - Manoir de la Foulquetière in Luçay-le-Mâle, Loire Valley - owned by Rosemary Conquest, who used to run an antiques shop in Mayfair. Her furniture is eccentrically eclectic. For example, in her banqueting hall, each table has several different contrasting chairs, from different periods and with different designs. She has spent years building her collection. Another of my favourites is 16th-century Château de St-Martory, near Toulouse - a real fairy-tale château.

"Touring throughout Europe means I've seen some beautiful places I may never have visited.

"That said, my favourite time has to be when I'm at home in Pézenas with my family," adds Kent. "I get the best of both worlds. I really am very lucky."

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