



Claude François and Charles Aznavour in April 1972

Photo: Roger-Viollet / TopFoto

to Frank Sinatra. And the rest is music history.

Since François still receives credit on Anka's interpretation, his name crops up in all sorts of places, among them the credits for *GoodFellas*, *George Of The Jungle* and *Happy Feet*, all of which feature *My Way* on their soundtracks.

Comme D'Habitude and its sister song also made François extremely rich. Having grown up penniless in Monaco after his father – a senior manager of the Suez Canal Company – was kicked out of Egypt, this new-found wealth rapidly went to his head.

His excesses included plastic surgery, which forever left his face with a certain mask-like quality, and a string of glamorous girlfriends. After divorcing British dancer Janet Woollacott in the early 1960s – a break-up that had a profound effect upon the singer – François dated fellow singers France Gall and Annie Phillips and top models Sofia Kiukkonen and Kathalyn Jones-Mann. He also spent five years with Isabelle Foret, with whom he had two children, the second of whom he insisted be kept out of the public eye for five years, so determined was CloClo to be seen as a womaniser rather than a family man.

If this last detail gives you the impression François wasn't the nicest person in the world, you won't be surprised to learn that he wasn't. Utterly self-obsessed, his sole interest was his career. Among the first musicians to grasp the importance of branding, the singer would lend his name to a perfume, a record label and an erotic magazine. Bent on eclipsing his arch rival Johnny Hallyday at every opportunity, he even faked an on-stage collapse to keep his name in the headlines.

It is impossible to understate just how much François and Hallyday detested one another. As the journalist John Lichfield remarked in the *Independent*, their enmity was all the more amusing given that Hallyday's bad boy behaviour was a part of his stage act while CloClo was less boy-next-door than *enfant terrible*.

The desire to outdo his rival also led François to ditch *le pop-rock Français* for the newly-popular sound of disco. Though cursed with bandy legs, François developed into a passable dancer; a talent

which, when combined with elaborate costumes and a troupe of backing dancers (Les Claudettes), lent his performances a look that was as unique as it was prone to dating rapidly.

Indeed, with his blowout hair and spangly, sci-fi-themed stage wear, there is no getting away from the fact that, from the vantage point of 2018, François appears impossibly naff. As hard as it is not to laugh, it is impossible not to be impressed with François' sales or the extent of his popularity – outside Europe, CloClo played to sell-out crowds in Quebec and French-speaking Africa. Equally compelling is France's affection for the singer, something that was evident from the commemorations in the country this week, on the 40th anniversary of his passing.

The last time François was in the national spotlight in such a way was in 2012, with the release of the biopic, *CloClo: La Légende De Claude François*, which was released in some English-speaking territories as *My Way*.

Co-written and directed by Florent-Emilio Siri, the film stars Jeremie Renier as François. Familiar to fans of *In Bruges*, *Brotherhood Of The Wolf* and the Dardennes brothers' *The Unknown Girl*, the Belgian-born actor makes a good fist of the title role, playing CloClo as a driven, charismatic control freak. He looks the spitting image of the singer, too – the make-up team ought to have received an Oscar, so convincing is their recreation of François' mannequin features.

A little too long at 148 minutes, Siri's movie might not skirt around François' less attractive traits but it is anything but a warts-and-all account. It also struggles to get over the fact that the singer's death, though tragic, was the furthest thing from rock'n'roll.

Noticing that a bathroom light fitting was not straight, François reached out to right it, forgetting that he was standing in a half-full tub. Little wonder then that Siri decided to close his story the same way our one began, with CloClo wowing the crowd at the Royal Albert Hall, the gig that could have been the gateway to true international success; the concert that might have seen Claude François become as famous as his most celebrated composition.

STEPPE FORWARD.. HOW LANGUAGE MOVED ON FROM ITS ROOTS

Long before the age of empire, 'European' languages had achieved a remarkable spread around the globe, as

PETER TRUDGILL
explains



The Austronesian language family is very remarkable in many ways. These languages stretch halfway across the globe, from the Malagasy language of Madagascar to Rapanui, the Polynesian language of Easter Island, in the far eastern Pacific. At the northern and southern extremities of the family's range, we also find Polynesian languages: Hawai'ian and New Zealand Maori, spoken 7,000 kilometres apart.

The Indo-European language family, which nearly all the languages of Europe belong to, is not quite so impressive in its spatial scope, but it has also been rather successful geographically.

Beginning around 1600, several European countries embarked on a period of colonial expansion which lasted well into the 20th century and, in the process, Indo-European languages were taken to all parts of the world. But even before that, Indo-European languages had reached many different areas of the globe.

The original homeland of the Indo-European language itself probably lay on the Pontic-Caspian steppe, the vast treeless plain which stretches from Moldova and Ukraine to Kazakhstan, north of the Black and Caspian Seas.

The Indo-European dialects which eventually became different languages probably started to disperse outwards from there in about 4000 BC, and by the mediaeval period they covered a more or less contiguous area with an enormous reach in all directions of the compass.

The extent of the pre-modern east-west spread of these languages was considerable. The homeland of the easternmost language lies in South Asia: Assamese, an Indo-Aryan language related to Hindi and Bengali, is spoken by 15 million people in the far northeast of India. Its nearest neighbours are mostly Tibeto-Burman languages, plus Austroasiatic languages distantly related to Cambodian and Vietnamese. Assam is situated at around 92 degrees longitude east.

Another language which used to be spoken on the far eastern edge of the Indo-European area is now extinct. This was the Tocharian language or languages, spoken in what is now Xinjiang in northwestern China, where the majority of the population today

speak the Turkic language Uighur. We know about Tocharian from documents dating from the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries AD which were discovered about a hundred years ago in oases on the edge of the Tarim Basin, located at about 90 degrees east.

The westernmost homeland of any Indo-European language is around 5,000 miles from Assam at about 22 degrees west, in Iceland.

At one time Icelandic was even spoken 900 miles further west than it is today, on the western coast of Greenland at about 52 degrees west. Greenland was settled by Nordic-language speakers from Iceland during the late 900s AD, but by 1450 the Nordic-speaking community had disappeared. The reasons for this are not fully understood, but they were probably gradually driven out by climate change.

The north-south range of the Indo-European language family is equally impressive.

Its northernmost homeland also comprises lands occupied by Nordic speakers. Western coastal areas of northern Scandinavia were settled by Norwegian speakers by 900 AD: Tromsø in northern Norway is around 70 degrees north of the equator.

The Indo-European language whose homeland lies furthest to the south is Dhivehi, the language of the Maldives Islands, which lie far out into the Indian Ocean, south of Sri Lanka. Fuvahmulah, the southernmost island in the chain, lies just to the south of the equator, about 800 miles below India. The nearest linguistic relative of Dhivehi is Sinhalese, the major language of Sri Lanka. Dhivehi and Sinhalese are both related to the Indo-Aryan languages of northern India such as Bengali, not to the Dravidian languages of southern India like Tamil, indicating an ancient migration from the northern South Asian sub-continent south into the Indian Ocean.

Fuvahmulah is about 6,500 miles from Reykjavik in Iceland. And they are both a very long way indeed from the Eurasian steppe.

ISLANDS

Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian languages are all Pacific Island members of the large Austronesian language family. These names are all derived from the Ancient Greek word *nesos*, 'island', with *poly-* being Greek for 'many', *micro-*, 'small' and *melano-*, 'black'. *Austro-* derives comes from the Latin *auster*, 'south wind'. Indonesia means 'islands of the Indies'.