

Jeff Around Town – May 10th, 2024

Otis: KVNO, Alan Havanas from his Symphony No. 2. The Opening Movement, the symphony known as Mysterious Mountain. 7:45, yeah, quarter till eight on a Friday. Otis 12 with you here. We're looking for sunshine and 75, a mix of clouds later. Right now in Paris, oh, it's sunny and 75. Time to go about town. Yeah, around town with Jeff Koterba. Has a very special guest in our studios this morning.

Jeff: Bonjour, bonjour, Otis.

Otis: Bonjour, bonjour.

Jeff: So, indeed, Paris, we've got Charlie Whitesides here, Otis, and Charlie has a really popular YouTube channel called streetfrench.org, has about 150,000... about 150,000 subscribers, Charlie?

Otis: Street French, that's my... that's my bailiwick, to use a French word. Bailiwick.

Jeff: Bailiwick? Is that a French?

Otis: No.

Jeff: I know, Otis. So, uh... (laughter) But it's all about how people really speak the language, and it's about getting out there and actually practicing the language. So, bonjour, Charlie.

Charlie: Bonjour.

Jeff: Ça va?

Charlie: Oui, ça va très bien, merci.

Jeff: So, Charlie is here in Omaha for an event. We've had a couple events. We had one last night at the Market Basket on 90th and Center over there by the bookworm, and it was sponsored by Alliance Francaise Omaha. And, you know, Otis, we were thinking, you know, with KVNO partnering with Babbel, for those of you who took part in the fund drive and made a donation, you were able to get that free subscription to Babbel. And language learning is so good for the brain, and it's such a fun thing to do. But one of the things that's important to do when you're learning a language with Babbel or another way to do that is to actually get out there and speak the language. And, Charlie, that is something that you really believe in, to jump right in, not to worry about grammar and all the rules, right?

Charlie: Yeah, absolutely. It's language learning. It's just practice. It's all about, yeah, you want to study some grammar and some expressions and stuff like that, but you really want to put it to use in some way.

Jeff: And not to worry about making mistakes, because a lot of times, and this applies to any one of you who are learning a language or wanting to improve, it's about getting out there and being vulnerable and allowing yourself to make mistakes, but not to worry about that, right?

Charlie: Yeah, definitely. Expect to make mistakes. If it's your first time speaking a language, just expect for things to not go exactly as planned. It's just part of it, right? But as you make mistakes, that's how you learn, and then you get better and better.

Jeff: So you're originally from Los Angeles, spent many, many years in Paris, you go back and forth. But you once told me that as a young man, you were on the shy side.

Charlie: Oh, definitely. Sometimes I still am.

Jeff: But learning language sort of helped you overcome that, right?

Charlie: Yeah, definitely. I just really liked speaking French. I learned French as a hobby, and I really liked it. And the only way to get better was I had to practice it with people, and so that's what really helped me get over that.

Jeff: And you're learning Spanish and Italian and Japanese as well. So, talk a little bit about the human connection and the community building that one gets when you go out and speak the language. So, for example, last night we were at Apéro for Alliance Française. We've got an event tomorrow we'll mention in a moment. And it's about community and kindness and connectivity, right?

Charlie: Definitely. I mean, language was created for humans to connect. That's what it's all about. Especially nowadays, I just think we need more humanity, more connection, more hanging out, having a glass of wine with people. All of that.

Jeff: So, what do you tell someone who wants to get better? And they're just... Because you hear that a lot. Oh, I can't. I can't do it. I don't know all the rules. So what do you say?

Charlie: Oh, just try. Just come in and find a group and just try. Just give it a try. And I'm sure they'll find that people aren't mean.

Jeff: Right, right.

Charlie: Everyone I met last night at the event was really kind, and we had a great time sharing French together. Right?

Jeff: So, I know that there are other opportunities here if you're learning German, the German American Society. I know they have classes. And Otis, we have... So Charlie is the reason... I started learning French five years ago. I was someone who didn't think he was capable of learning a language. And I jumped in. I was working with Charlie early on. We would meet up when I was in Paris. We'd go to a bar or cafe or walk around. And then we would keep in contact through Skype. But Charlie said, Hey, Jeff, why don't you start a conversation group? I said, I don't know how to speak the language. He said, start a conversation group. And so that was five years ago. And we launched it with one person with me. We now have over 400 people in this group. And we meet weekly. It's a free event.

Otis: That's a big conversation.

Jeff: It is. Well, not everyone shows up all at once because there aren't many coffee shops.

Otis: I have those one person conversations all the time.

Jeff: Well, Charlie, just briefly touch on that. You said it's to practice even speaking by yourself.

Charlie: Oh, yeah.

Jeff: You're in the car walking around.

Charlie: Yeah, definitely. I just, you know, talk to myself sometimes. You do that as well.

Jeff: Yes, I do.

Charlie: To practice.

Jeff: So tomorrow, Café et Conversation is the group. And we're celebrating our fifth anniversary...

Otis: Where you at?

Jeff: ... at Sonny's in Aksarben. It's the outdoor by the Airstream Trailer Bar.

Otis: Zut alors.

Jeff: Zut alors. Two o'clock. Two o'clock tomorrow. It's free. Stop on by and you can meet Charlie and practice your French.

Otis: Nice to meet you, Charlie.

Charlie: Thank you for having me.

Jeff: Merci, merci.

Otis: We have been going around town with Jeff and Charlie. And it is. It's sunny and 75 in Paris right now.

Jeff: Ahhhhh.

Otis: Excusez-moi. I must go book an airline ticket.