

**Music in France and the Popular Front (1934-1938):
Politics, Aesthetics and Reception**

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Abstract

The French Popular Front was a coalition of left-wing political parties (Communists, Socialists, and Radicals) united through a common desire to combat fascism and improve the living conditions of France's workers. Between 1935 and 1938, the ideology of the Popular Front, largely informed by that of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), exerted tremendous influence on the cultural life of the French nation. Many cultural and musical organizations heeded the Popular Front's call for broad-based anti-fascist solidarity among intellectuals, artists, and the working class. In the realm of culture, this translated into multiple initiatives designed to bring art to the masses and to encourage the proletariat to become more active in the cultural life of the nation.

Sympathetic to the Popular Front's larger political aims, a number of French musicians and composers became affiliated with the Communist-sponsored Maison de la Culture and its affiliated musical organizations, the most prominent of which was the Fédération Musicale Populaire (FMP). They participated in the administrative, cultural and intellectual life of the FMP; they took part in conferences, wrote articles on the theme of "music for the people," and were advocates for the organization within French musical life at large. Furthermore, these composers wrote works for government-commissioned events, for amateur groups, and for spectacles designed for mass audiences.

Some of the FMP's most prominent proponents (Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, and Arthur Honegger) were former members of Les Six, a group that had been particularly interested in borrowing music derived from "popular" sources like the music hall and the circus following World War I. This study argues that the aesthetic approach

of Les Six, which found support in FMP presidents Albert Roussel and Charles Koechlin, was reinvigorated during the Popular Front for a much more clearly defined political purpose. While the general interest in “popular” sources was still maintained, composers at the FMP now sought to integrate folklore and revolutionary music into their works “for the people” in an attempt to create and underline cultural links between workers and intellectuals – a compositional approach for which this dissertation coins the expression “populist modernism.”

This study, the first book-length examination of French musical culture in light of Popular Front politics, concentrates on some of the period’s most significant populist modernist works and draws upon contemporaneous journalistic coverage and archival documents that in many cases have hitherto never been the object of musicological study. The research shows that in 1936, following an initial infatuation with the genres and styles of socialist realist Soviet works, French left-wing composers developed a more inclusive view of what constituted music “for the people.” Composers continued to write music indebted to politically resonant popular sources like folklore and revolutionary songs, but they also drew upon these genres in works (like the collaborative incidental music for Romain Rolland’s *Le 14 Juillet*) that employed modernist compositional techniques. Though this approach was most obviously felt in the numerous works composed for organizations like the FMP, populist modernism also emerged in works performed at the Théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique and the 1937 Paris Exposition. By cutting across musical genres as well as institutional and social contexts, populist modernism emerges as the dominant aesthetic trend in French music during the years of the Popular Front.

Abrégé

Le Front Populaire Français consistait en une coalition de partis politiques de gauche (communistes, socialistes et radicaux) unis par un commun désir de combattre le fascisme et d'améliorer les conditions de vie de la classe ouvrière française. Entre 1935 et 1938, l'idéologie du Front populaire – inspirée par celle du Parti Communiste Français (PCF) – exerça une influence capitale sur la vie culturelle de la nation française. Plusieurs organisations culturelles et musicales répondirent à l'appel du Front Populaire, qui réclamait une solidarité généralisée parmi les intellectuels, les artistes et la classe ouvrière. Cela se traduisit dans le domaine culturel par de multiples initiatives visant à amener l'art aux masses populaires et à encourager le prolétariat à prendre une part plus active à la vie culturelle de la nation.

Favorables aux objectifs politiques du Front Populaire, nombre de musiciens et de compositeurs français s'associèrent à la Maison de la Culture (soutenue par le Parti Communiste) ainsi qu'à ses différentes organisations musicales affiliées, la plus importante étant la Fédération Musicale Populaire (FMP). Ils participèrent aux activités administratives, culturelles et intellectuelles de la FMP, prenant partie à des conférences, rédigeant des articles sur la musique populaire et préconisant une organisation généralisée de la vie musicale française. De plus, ces compositeurs écrivirent des oeuvres pour des événements commandés par le gouvernement, de même que pour des groupes amateurs et des spectacles dédiés au grand public.

Certains des défenseurs les plus connus de la FMP (Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric et Arthur Honegger) étaient d'anciens membres des Six, un groupe qui, après la

Première Guerre mondiale, s'était particulièrement intéressé à l'emprunt de musique dérivée de sources "populaires" telles le music-hall et le cirque. Cette étude soutient que l'approche esthétique des Six, qui fut aussi appuyée par les présidents de la FMP Albert Roussel et Charles Koechlin, connut sous le Front Populaire un nouvel essor à des fins politiques nettement plus définies. Si l'intérêt général pour des sources "populaires" était toujours présent, les compositeurs de la FMP souhaitaient désormais intégrer le folklore et la musique révolutionnaire à leurs oeuvres "pour le peuple", dans une tentative de susciter et de souligner des liens culturels entre ouvriers et intellectuels – une approche compositionnelle pour laquelle l'expression "modernisme populiste" a été créée ici.

Cette thèse, la première étude d'envergure de la culture musicale française à la lumière des politiques du Front Populaire, se concentre sur quelques-unes des oeuvres modernistes populistes les plus significatives de la période, et s'appuie sur une couverture journalistique contemporaine et des documents d'archives n'ayant pour la plupart fait l'objet d'aucune étude musicologique. Les recherches démontrent qu'en 1936, après l'enthousiasme initial pour les oeuvres soviétiques socialistes réalistes, les compositeurs français de gauche embrassèrent une vision moins exclusive de ce que constituait la musique "pour le peuple". Les compositeurs continuèrent d'écrire une musique redevable à des sources populaires à résonance politique telles le folklore et les chansons révolutionnaires, mais ils puisèrent aussi à ces genres "populaires" pour des oeuvres employant des techniques de composition modernistes (par exemple, la collaboration de plusieurs compositeurs à la musique de scène pour *Le 14 Juillet* de Romain Rolland). Quoique cette approche se fasse le plus évidemment sentir dans les nombreuses oeuvres composées pour des organisations telles la FMP, le modernisme populiste émergea également dans des oeuvres présentées au Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique et à l'Exposition

universelle de Paris de 1937. En incluant une variété de genres musicaux aussi bien que de contextes institutionnels et sociaux, le modernisme populiste apparaît comme étant la tendance esthétique dominante de la musique française durant les années du Front Populaire.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation was born many years ago during a moment of semantic confusion. I remember, as a seventeen-year-old piano student, reading through an English translation devoted to Debussy (the biography by Vallàs? *Debussy on Music?*) and stumbling upon a passage that evoked the composer's desire to compose truly "popular music." At that point in my life, I was in the process of learning Debussy's *Préludes* and the phrase "popular music" struck me as being positively outlandish, for I could conceive of very little that could be less "popular" than this music, with its delicate evocations of sunken cathedrals, Spanish serenades and flaxen-haired maidens. I was well aware – experience had taught me – that my love of Debussy's music, even my love of classical music *tout court*, was far from "popular," and I was amazed to think that Debussy could have ever believed his music could aspire to that quality.

Those thoughts lingered for a few days – enough to establish a memory – and life continued.

That memory was rekindled eight years later in France as I began research at the Bibliothèque Nationale on Charles Koechlin, a composer whose works were still little known to me at that time. Having been living in France for some time, Koechlin's thoughts on "popular music" seemed more plausible to me than Debussy's had years earlier. I now understood that "*populaire*," did not necessarily imply the widespread recognition expressed in the English word "popular," but rather acknowledged an explicit link with "the people" and a profound indebtedness to its collective culture and traditions. Koechlin's writings on the subject, expressed in his enthusiastic statements about Gabriel

Fauré's outdoor opera, *Prométhée*, and his evident political engagement during the Popular Front, drew me closer to committing myself to an exploration of a topic whose seed had been sown for some time.

I would like to thank my principal advisor, Professor Steven Huebner, for encouraging me to take this project on. His insights and keen critical eye were always appreciated, as was his willingness to allow me to pursue my work with relative intellectual freedom. I would also like to acknowledge the musicology and music theory faculty members of the Schulich School of Music for the faith they have shown in me over the past number of years. A special thank you to Professor Julie Cumming who has been particularly supportive on a number of fronts, and to Professor David Brackett for his advice on parts of the manuscript. I am grateful to Cynthia Leive at the music library for acquiring the complete (and expensive!) music to *Le 14 Juillet* without batting an eyelash. The folks at McGill Inter-Library Loan were equally helpful in tracking down numerous documents and scores in record times. I am equally indebted to a number of fine colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure of working with throughout the past six years and who have contributed in various ways to this dissertation: Liz Blackwood, Catrina Flint, Bruno Gingras, Erin Helyard, Adalyat Issieva, Jonathan Kwan, Nicole Labelle, Ralph Locke, Jennifer Sheppard, Marcel van Neer and Nathan Martin. I would especially like to acknowledge Andrew Deruchie for his practical help and critical insights, as well as Julie Pednault who has always been willing to go beyond the call of duty when it comes to brushing up my French. Most important, I would like to thank them all for numerous acts of friendship and camaraderie over the years.

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Paris serves as the backdrop to this document, and it is a place that wouldn't be the same for me without the presence of Alexandre Léger, *ami extraordinaire*, who over the years, and through hundreds of pages of correspondence, has given me much to think about and even more to be thankful for. Many thanks as well to the Eskicioglu family – Lale, Suat, Özlem – for their characteristic hospitality and for allowing me to share their marvellous penthouse views of the sixteenth *arrondissement* for two months in 2004.

I owe an incredible debt to my family – Taushauna, Michael, and Jim – and especially to my parents, who, as teachers, instilled in me a love of learning that has shaped my entire life. While I was in high school they liked to remind me that I shouldn't let schooling interfere with my education: advice that I took to heart when I left for

France in my early 20s to pursue a piano career. At the time I had no idea that my six years there would lead to a dissertation about music during the Popular Front, nor did I realize to what extent that experience would shape me as a person. I thank them for allowing that to happen, and for their support throughout the years. It has made all the difference.

Finally, it would take me another book-length discussion to describe how grateful I am for the unconditional love and support that Alexis Luko has granted me throughout these last number of years. Her insightfulness, imagination, intelligence, passion, *joie de vivre*, warmth and humour are just a few of the qualities that have made this process – renowned for its loneliness – a rich and rewarding one. In a gesture of thanks, which under the circumstances seems extraordinarily inadequate, I dedicate this dissertation to her.

Introduction

“Down with the thieves!” “Resign!” “Down with Daladier!” “Long live Chiappe!”

These were just a few of the slogans chanted by the angry protestors who congregated at the Place de la Concorde on February 6, 1934. Pro-fascist demonstrators (but also a smaller contingent of Communists) had assembled in the very heart of the French capital to raise their voices against the left-leaning Radical Party government led by Édouard Daladier. The list of complaints was long. Parliamentary inertia, the dismissal of hard-line Parisian chief of police Jean Chiappe, and the financial scandal surrounding Alexandre Stavisky, were the main grievances that brought an unruly mob into the streets for the second time in as many weeks.¹ As the sun went down, members of pro-fascist paramilitary groups attempted to charge the bridge leading to the left bank of the Seine.² Their alleged goal was to storm the hallowed Chambre des Députés and kill any politicians they could find inside. It was a *coup d'état* in the making. The police, badly equipped and unable to receive reinforcements, were compelled to take drastic measures. By day's end, one policeman, three by-standers and fourteen of the some 40,000 demonstrators had lost their lives by gunfire. Hundreds were wounded.³ It was the bloodiest confrontation on Parisian streets since the brutally suppressed 1871 Commune,

¹ On January 27, 1934, eighty police officers were injured in a riot sparked by the “Stavisky affair” – so called after the fraudulent dealings of notorious financier Alexandre Stavisky (1886-1934). The government of Pierre Chautemps, members of which were implicated in the scandal, resigned that same evening out of fear of popular reprisals.

² The main groups participating in the demonstration were: L'Union nationale des combattants, Croix-de-Feu, Anciens combattants communistes (all comprised of World War I veterans), Solidarité française, and Jeunesses patriotes (both extreme-right groups). The presence of the Communist group has often been overlooked, but can be explained by the Party's rabid discontent with France's parliamentary system at this point in its history. As we shall see, the Communist Party's attitude soon changed, and it did its utmost to distance itself from the event.

³ For a particularly evocative first-hand report of the riot see William Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry Into the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 213-220.

and one that held a clear message: fascism had become a volatile and rebellious political force in the country.⁴

One of the immediate effects of February 6, 1934, was the rapid resignation of the Daladier government, the second parliamentary capitulation due to popular unrest in less than two weeks. Conservative Radical Party member Gaston Doumerge took over, but this meek former President of the Republic lacked the necessary strongman qualities to assuage the tempers (and political ambitions) of the extreme right. Colonel François de La Rocque, leader of the pro-fascist Croix-de-feu, described Doumerge's appointment with typically vitriolic language, referring to the new *premier ministre* as nothing more than "a temporary bandage for gangrene."⁵

During the weeks and months following the riot, the already formidable pressure exerted upon the Republican parliamentary system by the extreme Right was exacerbated by increased left-wing demonstrations throughout the capital in response to the tactics of the fascist groups. Inevitably, tensions between the Left and Right escalated into individual acts of violence enthusiastically encouraged by influential onlookers (like Charles Maurras) who sat behind the editorial desks of the country's most prominent newspapers. The most notorious attack, instigated by Maurras in his daily column for *Action Française*, targeted Léon Blum, the Jewish leader of the Socialist Party (SFIO). Right-wing thugs carried out Maurras's "order" on February 13, 1936, intercepting Blum as his car was stalled in traffic, and inflicting a beating so brutal that it left him hospitalized for a number of days.

⁴ For an analysis of February 6 and its implications for both the Right and Left see Serge Botstein, *Le 6 février 1934* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

⁵ Cited in Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 33.

In 1935 Blum had been central in engineering an agreement between France's left-wing political parties (Communist, Socialist, Radical, and a number of smaller groups) that placed them in a coalition that unanimously advocated the defeat of fascist politics in France. On July 14, 1935 – a date rife with revolutionary symbolism – this coalition, soon to be known as the *Front populaire*, announced a common electoral platform, widely published in the left-wing press, with three main objectives: the promotion of civil liberties, the defense of peace, and the rectification of France's economic problems.⁶ Most noteworthy among these political propositions was the abolition and demilitarization of fascist groups, stricter laws to ward off defamatory attacks by the political press (aimed at individuals like Maurras), and an appeal to the French working class (in coordination with the League of Nations) to endorse an internationalist strategy for peace.

The Popular Front was successful in the double-ballot elections of April 26 and May 3, 1936, and won a majority in the *Chambre des Députés*. This led to the creation of a government headed by Blum, whose injuries at the hands of fascist extremists had made him a martyr for the cause. Blum's electoral victory was groundbreaking for a number of reasons: he became France's first Jewish Premier and found himself at the helm of a political party – the SFIO – that, for the first time ever, became the dominant voice of the French government. Taken together, the Popular Front coalition occupied approximately 345 out of the 598 seats that represented continental France in the *Chambre des Députés*.⁷

⁶ See *L'Humanité* (May 16, 1936).

⁷ There were also twenty seats reserved for overseas deputies.

The Communist Party (PCF) registered by far the most impressive gains of the election, dramatically improving its parliamentary representation from 10 to 72 seats.⁸ This success was registered primarily in the industrial suburbs surrounding Paris. Although the PCF posted a remarkable result, the Party abstained – due to its deep-rooted critique of “bourgeois” parliamentary institutions – from holding ministerial posts in the new government. Despite this, the Popular Front’s dependency on the votes of Communists in the *Chambre des Députés* meant that the PCF could exert considerable influence at the ministerial level.

This opened up the potential for important political fractures on the left wing of the coalition, and this was mirrored by similar tensions on the right. Many members of the Radical Party (a large centrist party basically opposed to left-wing reforms) only grudgingly supported the Popular Front, and the possibility that this entire Party would abandon the coalition was the source of continuous concern. With both the Communists and the Radicals holding the balance of power and representing such divergent ideological positions, it is significant and perhaps somewhat surprising that the Popular Front lasted as long as it did – from June 4, 1936, until June 21, 1937. As France’s first socialist-led government, even this limited timeframe was enough to establish an important legacy for subsequent French left-wing movements throughout the twentieth century.

The month separating the Popular Front’s electoral victory from its induction into office (May 3rd – June 4th, 1936) has been much discussed – mythologized even – in

⁸ See the chart outlining the 1936 electoral results in Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1986* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 52.

many different accounts of the period.⁹ During this time, workers in many major factories throughout the country initiated a wave of dramatic and unprecedented strikes and sit-ins. These were instigated without outside pressure or backing from their unions, or from the PCF. The workers, ecstatic about the electoral victory of the Popular Front, looked to hold the new government to its promises, particularly concerning its proposed reforms to employment laws. By the end of May, the French economic engine – still suffering from the effects of the Depression – was effectively stalled, with over 300,000 workers on strike in the region of Paris, and still many more throughout the rest of the country. Blum, conscious of the threat this posed to the Popular Front's economic and social agendas, acted swiftly upon assuming office and passed the historic Matignon Agreements, effectively reducing the workweek from 48 to 40 hours (without loss of pay) and granting full-time workers two weeks of paid holidays.

It is difficult to downplay the impact of these measures on the everyday lives of France's workers. "Spare time" instantly became a reality for millions of people, and the new government quickly set up programs designed to entice workers to make the best of their newfound freedom. During the summer holiday season of 1936, subsidized train-tickets were made available to workers and their families who wished to visit the Riviera, providing many of them with their first experience of the sea.¹⁰ To this end, Léon Blum created an innovative new government ministry, overseen by Léo Lagrange, which

⁹ The body of literature is extensive. Some important sources are Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); Jacques Kergoat, *La France du Front populaire* (Paris: La Découverte, 1986); Danielle Tartakowsky, *Des lendemains qui chantent?: La France des années folles et du Front populaire* (Paris: Messidor, 1986); Georges Lefranc, *Histoire du Front populaire, 1934-1938* (Paris: Payot, 1965); Serge Bernstein, *La France des années 30* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993).

¹⁰ Larkin reports that in the summer of 1936, "60 percent of the visitors interviewed on the Riviera admitted that they had never seen the sea in their lives before." *France Since the Popular Front*, 58.

promoted “leisure” activities (often with an overt pedagogical component) for the working class. Predictably, many of Lagrange’s programs centered upon the themes of sport and the outdoors (ironically reflecting similar government initiatives in Nazi Germany) including cycling and camping, but also less conventional activities like amateur aviation.¹¹ One of Lagrange’s most durable initiatives was the sponsorship of the youth hostelling movement, a leisure activity built upon notions of collective living, cooperation and fraternity.

In the realm of “high” culture, changes were afoot as well. Jean Zay (1904-1944) was named “Minister of National Education,” a vast mandate that oversaw the administration of the public school system and government funding for the arts.¹² Zay, of Jewish descent but baptized at birth, was the youngest person ever to be named to a ministerial post during the Third Republic, and his tenure (from June 4, 1936, until his resignation in September 1939) outlasted the Popular Front government itself. As a result of this political longevity, he was able to guide a number of projects conceived during the Popular Front through to fruition. He is remembered for tightening up France’s copyright laws (particularly in the realm of radio and cinema), for increasing the age of mandatory schooling from thirteen to fourteen, and for reorganizing the economic administration of France’s two main lyric theatres (the Opéra and Opéra-Comique), which, in 1939, were nationalized under the state-administered *Réunion des théâtres lyriques nationaux* (RTLN).

¹¹ On popular aviation and its function in preparing France for war see Siân Reynolds, *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 65-82.

¹² A brief biography of Jean Zay can be found in Pascal Ory, *La belle illusion: Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire, 1935-1938* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 145-147. For a more extensive treatment see Marcel Ruby, *Jean Zay*, (Paris: Corsaire, 1994) and Antoine Prost, ed, *Jean Zay et la gauche du radicalisme* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003). See also Zay’s memoirs, *Souvenirs et solitude* (Paris: Julliard, 1945) written during World War II while he was imprisoned in France.

Zay's ministry was also responsible for creating a program (launched in 1938) that was the first of its kind to commission musical works in traditional genres from prominent composers. According to Leslie Sprout, who has studied the program extensively, its ostensible purpose was to provide monetary assistance to composers during a period of high unemployment and financial uncertainty.¹³ These were also the reasons put forth by Communist *député* Joanny Berlioz, a supporter of the initiative who acted as the Communist budgetary secretary for the Fine Arts section of Zay's ministry. In 1938 Berlioz claimed that:

if poverty were necessary for the formation or 'elevation' of an artist [...] then our time would be particularly blessed, for it is a time of unemployment for intellectuals, of great hardship for [...] composers of music, [...] victims of economic conditions, of the failure of public powers in their role as patrons, of the indifference of a public both uneducated and preoccupied with material concerns imposed upon them.¹⁴

¹³ Leslie A. Sprout, "Music for a *New Era*: Composers and National Identity in France, 1936-1946" (PhD diss., Berkeley, 2000), 1. Sprout neglects to mention that state-funded help for artists in financial difficulty was commonly accorded throughout the Third Republic. The difference with the commissions program is that the State finally saw a return on its philanthropy in the form of musical works. For an example of the amounts accorded as "Secours aux artistes" (for 1880, 1913 and 1937) see Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix, *Art et état sous la IIIe République: Le système des Beaux-Arts, 1870-1940* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1993), 420.

¹⁴ Cited in Myriam Chimènes, "Le budget de la musique sous la IIIe République," in *La Musique: Du théorique au politique*, eds. Hugues Dufourt and Joel-Marie Fauquet, 299 (Paris: Klincksiek, 1991). "Mais alors, si la misère était nécessaire à la formation ou "l'élévation" de l'artiste [...] alors notre époque serait particulièrement bénie, car elle est celle du chômage intellectuel, de la grande détresse des [...] compositeurs de musique [...], victimes des conditions économiques, de la défaillance des pouvoirs publics dans leur rôle de mécènes, de l'indifférence d'un public inéduqué [*sic*] et pressé par des préoccupations matérialistes qui lui sont imposés."

Although it is difficult to know whether those who eventually received commissions were truly in dire financial straits, it is clear that musicians regarded this government philanthropy as something outstanding.¹⁵ Darius Milhaud, a recipient of one of the inaugural commissions, did not hide his enthusiasm in an article penned for the left-wing journal *Europe*, in which he commended the State for finally beginning to support modern music.¹⁶ Ultimately, the commissions program, though born of the Popular Front, was also attractive for the wartime Vichy regime and was continued until 1945, by which time the State had commissioned close to 200 works.¹⁷ Indeed, as historian Pascal Ory has noted, fascist Vichy later appropriated many of the programs introduced by the Popular Front, but for startlingly different political ends.¹⁸

The government programs and institutional reforms that figured within the agendas of ministries like those of Zay and Lagrange had an undeniable effect upon the French cultural landscape during the Popular Front. These initiatives were meant to prove that the State was taking a more prominent role in the cultural life of the nation. But the PCF lobbied for even greater State intervention. In his budgetary speech of 1937, Joanny Berlioz made an eloquent plea for the increased nationalization of culture:

The broad masses of the French population have come down in favour of bread, peace and liberty. Spiritual bread is also one of its fundamental demands. We

¹⁵ Virgil Thomson also wondered about the “real financial need” among the composers chosen for the commissions program in “More and More from Paris,” *Modern Music* 16 (May-June 1939): 236-237. Cited in Sprout, “Music for a *New Era*,” 35.

¹⁶ Darius Milhaud, “Considérations actuelles,” *Europe* (June 15, 1938): 163. Milhaud’s opera *Medée*, his first to be premiered at the Paris Opéra (1939), was commissioned through this program in 1938.

¹⁷ See Sprout’s “Appendix 1” for a listing of the State commissions, their dates, as well as the titles of the completed and/or extant works, “Music for a *New Era*,” 376-405.

¹⁸ Pascal Ory, “La politique culturelle de Vichy: ruptures et continuités,” in *Politiques et pratiques culturelles dans la France de Vichy*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux (Paris: Cahiers de l’IHTP, 1988), 147-156, and Leslie Sprout, “Music for a *New Era*,” 156.

must stop viewing art as something that is reserved for the upper classes, specialists, and snobs who do it dishonour. Art must be brought closer to the people. To the people who have developed intellectually at the same time as they have cleared the path towards social progress, particularly these millions of workers who have or are about to have more free time and for which agreeable activities must be found that are at once profitable to each of them and to society as a whole. Culture must become “republican” in the etymological sense of the word; that is to say, it must become an integral part of public life. [...] Why shouldn’t a theatrical performance, an art exhibit, an orchestral concert, a visit to a monument [...] be deemed genuine social services? Culture, in all its forms, can be popularized without having to lower its quality (despite the opinions of those who believe that art must remain – along with all other riches – the privilege of a minority). Whereas today it is almost completely neglected, the artistic education of the masses must be improved.¹⁹

¹⁹ Joanny Berlioz, “Rapport de Joanny Berlioz, budget de 1937,” cited in Marie-Claude Genêt-Delacroix, *Art et état sous la IIIe République: le système des Beaux-Arts 1870-1940* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1993), 421-422: “Les masses profondes de la population française se sont prononcées pour le pain, la paix et la liberté. Le pain de l’esprit est aussi une de leurs revendications fondamentales. Il faut cesser de regarder l’art comme un domaine réservé aux classes les plus aisées, aux spécialistes et aux snobs qui le déshonorent. L’art doit se rapprocher du peuple. Du peuple qui a conquis un développement intellectuel considérable en même temps qu’il se frayait la route du progrès social, en particulier de ces millions de travailleurs qui ont ou vont avoir plus de loisirs, pour lesquels il faut trouver un emploi agréable, profitable à chacun d’eux et à la société tout entière. La culture doit devenir “républicaine” au sens étymologique du mot, c’est-à-dire qu’elle doit être partie intégrante de la chose publique. [...] Pourquoi la présentation théâtrale, l’exposition de peinture, le concert symphonique, la visite d’un monument résumé d’une époque et d’un mode de vie et de pensée ne seraient-ils pas de véritables services sociaux? La culture, sous toutes ses formes, peut être popularisée, sans qu’il y ait lieu d’abaisser sa qualité, ainsi que le prétendent ceux qui estiment que l’art doit rester le privilège d’une minorité comme les autres richesses. C’est l’éducation artistique des larges masses qui doit être élevée, alors qu’elle est complètement négligée aujourd’hui.”

It was only logical that at the end of his speech Berlioz should propose the establishment of a “Ministry of French Art” through which the culture of the nation could be protected, promoted and administered by the State.²⁰ This independent ministry – which would no longer suffer from being overshadowed within the gargantuan Ministry of Education – would be more effective in establishing general education programs in the arts, and ensuring visibility for French culture throughout the world.

Although Berlioz’s 1937 proposal was not approved, the ideas it contained were a sign of things to come. Indeed, it was precisely with the intention of promoting the “right to culture” (*droit à la culture*) as proclaimed under Charles de Gaulle’s new French constitution (1958) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that France’s first “Ministère des affaires culturelles” was created in 1959 under the direction of André Malraux. Malraux drew upon his first-hand experiences with the Popular Front when he established a network of state-financed cultural centers intended to introduce diverse segments of the population to France’s artistic traditions through a combination of democratically conceived cultural activities, expositions and pedagogical programs. In fact, Malraux’s centers were a logical continuation of a network of similarly conceived “Maisons de la Culture” established during the Popular Front period. These Popular Front “Houses of Culture” were the site of intensive cultural activity during the second half of the 1930s. Run by an association in which Communist Party members figured prominently, the Maisons sought to break down the traditional barriers separating artists and intellectuals from the working class, and attempted to attract individuals who looked to reconcile “elite” and “popular” forms of artistic expression.

²⁰ Joanny Berlioz, “Rapport de Joanny Berlioz, budget de 1937,” cited in Marie-Claude Genêt-Delacroix, *Art et état sous la IIIe République*, 423-24.

Within each Maison de la Culture, the cultural agenda of the PCF – increasingly indebted to the strategies of popular frontism – loomed large. During the Popular Front, a softening of the ideological hard-line and an increased openness toward “fellow travelers” replaced the narrow sectarianism that had stymied the French Communist Party throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. In France, artists were encouraged to freely experiment with methods (both practical and stylistic) that would allow their works to be more accessible to “the people.” Prescriptive aesthetic formulas like socialist realism, though a source of interest immediately following its official endorsement by the Soviet State in 1934, were increasingly downplayed and lost prominence as the Popular Front grew larger. As a network of cultural centers that by 1937 was attracting upwards of 70,000 members (including Communists, Socialists, Radicals, fellow-travelers and the politically uncommitted), the Maisons de la Culture came to represent the cultural spirit of the Popular Front. Like the John Reed Clubs in the United States, it was here that anti-fascist intellectuals, artists, and members of the working class met, debated and became involved in creative projects that explicitly questioned the hierarchies and social privileges long associated with France’s artistic traditions. The Maison organized concerts, plays, exhibits, and invited guest-speakers (including luminaries like André Gide and André Malraux) to speak on a wide range of topics. It was also here that the discourse of anti-fascism, viewed as the defining element of popular frontism, became associated with a specifically aesthetic discourse.

Literature

This encounter between the realms of the aesthetic and the political has been a recurring theme in writings on the Popular Front since it became a subject of historical interest in France in the 1960s. At that time, French historians, led by figures like René Raymond, began investigating the political history of Third Republic's final decade while writers of Communist or Socialist persuasions evaluated the legacy of the Popular Front, particularly the strikes of 1936, in terms of the lessons it could provide for the post-war Left in France.²¹ Already at this stage, the Popular Front was being analyzed as two distinct, yet intersecting historical phenomena: as an elected coalition government with legislative power, and as a progressive working-class social movement. Given this initial bifurcation, it comes as no surprise that the Popular Front has become over the last forty years an even more fragmented object of study. It has elicited curiosity for what it can teach us about the political history of antifascism, the sociological and anthropological nature of the French labour movement, as well as the cultural history of left-wing intellectual engagement.²²

Since the collapse of Eastern-bloc Communism in the early 1990s, new trends have dominated historical analysis of the Popular Front. With the opening of important archival collections in Moscow, the role played by the Soviet Union and its international emissaries on the French Communist Party and the development of the Popular Front strategy have been scrutinized. In response to interpretations, like those of François Furet,

²¹ René Raymond, "Plaidoyer pour une histoire délaissée. La fin de la Troisième République," *Revue française de sciences politiques* 7/2 (April-June, 1957), 253-270; Daniel Guérin, *Front populaire, révolution manquée* (Paris: Julliard, 1963); Georges Lefranc, *Juin 36. L'explosion sociale du Front populaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

²² Jacques Droz, *Histoire de l'antifascisme en Europe* (Paris: La Découverte, 1985); Danielle Tartakowsky, *Les manifestations de rue en France 1918-1968* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1990); Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion*.

which have posited that the Popular Front can be reduced to Stalinist political manipulations, other historians have sought to emphasize the unique national contexts which contributed and informed the evolution of Popular Front movements throughout the 1930s.²³

In the realm of cultural history, Pascal Ory's landmark study makes a thoroughly documented claim for the considerable influence of the Popular Front on the culture of the period. In fact, he argues that the Popular Front government formulated a "cultural politics" that resonated with prominent personalities and cultural associations during this time.²⁴ But Ory's methodology, as revealed by terms such as "cultural politics," is of the "top-down" variety, in that he views the culture of the period as largely emanating from the world of official politics, as opposed to a grass-roots *zeitgeist* that developed among French supporters of the movement. He therefore falls into the trap of placing disproportionate emphasis on the direct influence of the Popular Front government on the cultural projects of the period. Moreover, his study, for all that it reveals about the myriad political and personal connections that linked prominent Popular Front personalities, says little about the substance of the culture that arose from this political climate. The works of art created during the Popular Front seem eerily mute in Ory's account: little is said about their specific formal, stylistic, and expressive qualities.²⁵

Ory's work has towered over French-language historiography of Popular Front culture since its publication in 1994. In my view, however, new methodological strategies

²³ François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion: essai sur l'idée communiste au vingtième siècle* (Paris: Laffont, 1995); Serge Wolikow, *Le front populaire en France* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1996).

²⁴ Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion*, passim.

²⁵ A recent book by Dudley Andrew and Steven Unger, on the other hand, has used the politics of the period as a methodological tool with which to focus attention on specific works of art and the creative culture of the period and its artistic legacy. See *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

in recent writings on the American Popular Front (a contemporaneous political movement with similar political and ideological underpinnings) supply a compelling framework with which to further refine our understanding of culture in France during the late 1930s. Michael Denning's revisionist history of American popular frontism has compellingly shown that the cultural action in which so many Popular Front sympathizers were engaged (what he calls the "cultural front") cannot be reduced to Communist Party directives alone. He argues that the cultural motor at the heart of the Popular Front was fuelled not by Party decrees, but by the creative energy of the movement's diverse participants. Therefore, although many fellow travelers exhibited a distinct lack of political orthodoxy, they did not constitute a marginal "periphery" of the cultural front. In fact, the fellow travelers, whose political opinions represented the entire gamut of left-wing thought, were positioned at the very heart of this cultural movement.²⁶

This was no different in France, particularly among French musicians drawn to the movement. Although active within Popular Front cultural organizations like the Maison de la Culture and the Fédération Musicale Populaire, only a tiny minority became card-carrying Communists, and even fewer responded (even in veiled fashion) to specifically political issues in their writings. Although drawn towards organizations sponsored and funded by the Communist Party, these composers seldom subscribed to the rhetoric and logic of Marxism in their writings on music during this period. Indeed, rarely do these musicians and music critics employ a discourse in which politics and aesthetics coexist in an obvious manner. In this regard, Popular Front composers appear, on the surface, to lack the vigorous political engagement that typified the works and writings of

²⁶ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), *passim*, but especially xiii-xx.

German left-wing composers like Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler throughout the 1930s. But, as we shall see, French composers still exerted a crucial influence – through their affiliations, writings, and musical works – on the politicized musical culture of the Popular Front period.

Unlike studies that have focused on Eisler and Weill in Germany, Shostakovich in the Soviet Union, or Marc Blitzstein and Aaron Copland in the United States, the literature on French composers active during the 1930s has not often dealt with the issue of politics.²⁷ Even prominent survey literature of twentieth-century music, like Arnold Whittall's *Music Since the First World War* and Richard Taruskin's *Oxford History Of Music*, while examining the influence of totalitarian regimes on music in the Soviet Union and Germany during the 1930s, do not address how ideologies derived from both fascism and communism played out on the French scene.²⁸

A recent collection of French-language essays on French music during the 1930s, while at times acknowledging the importance played by Popular Front ideology on French composers, does not expand far beyond the story told by Pascal Ory. Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix argues that during the Popular Front, government policies concerning music focused on introducing educational reforms within schools and State-

²⁷ Richard Taylor, *Kurt Weill: Composer in a Divided World* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992); Kim Kowalke, "Kurt Weill in Europe, 1900-1935: A Study of his Music and Writings," PhD. Diss (Yale University, 1977); Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Ian Macdonald, *The New Shostakovich* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990); *A Shostakovich Casebook*, Malcolm Hamrick Brown, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Eric Gordon, *Mark the Music: the Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Elizabeth Crist, *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁸ Arnold Whittall, *Music Since the First World War* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Studies of French literature, on the other hand, have not side-stepped the issue. See David Carroll's *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Leroy Géraudi and Anne Roche, *Les Écrivains et le Front Populaire* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1986).

run institutions (i.e. the Conservatoire), on combating unemployment amongst musicians by increasing subsidies and developing commissions programs, and on financing and nationalizing State-funded theatres like the Opéra and Opéra-Comique.²⁹ But, Genet-Delacroix concludes by stating that this form of cultural politics had little effect on the musical works of composers, and that, for the most part, they remained “independent” of larger political forces during the period.³⁰

In the same collection of articles, Sandrine Grandgambe claims that the government promoted a form of “musical politics” that, given the specific nature of the musical commissions contracted out to musicians and left-wing musical organizations, *did* effect musical composition. Grandgambe suggests that collective approaches to musical creation and the importance of the popular festival as a locus of creative inspiration were both key aspects of the “musical climate” of the period.³¹ Her conclusion stresses that in order to understand the musical politics of the Popular Front, one must look beyond the activities of those sections of government ministries directly implicated in artistic and musical reforms.³² Here, she opens the door to the “cultural front” methodological strategy advocated by Michael Denning, without, however, exploring it further.

In general, little work has been undertaken to examine the broader cultural and social contexts in which French composers operated throughout the 1930s. This contrasts strikingly with musicological studies concerned with French musical life of the 1920s, in which in-depth discussions of the decade’s most prominent composers (Satie, Les Six,

²⁹ Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix, “‘Musiciens officiels’ des années trente?” in *Musique et musiciens à Paris dans les années trente*, ed. Danièle Pistone, 13-16 (Paris: Champion, 2000).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11, 18-19.

³¹ Sandrine Grandgambe, “La politique musicale du Front populaire,” in *Musique et musiciens à Paris dans les années trente*, ed. Danièle Pistone, 31 (Paris: Champion, 2000).

³² *Ibid.*, 33.

Stravinsky) have increasingly benefited from historical contextualization which is sensitive to broader aesthetic, social, political, and artistic currents. Much of this research has been predictably centered on Les Six, and most of this has been limited to the period 1917-1925.³³ Following that date, we must rely on the standard biographies of these composers – studies which, almost without exception, tend to give short shrift to any broader examination of political considerations.³⁴

In North American musicological writing on the period, Jane F. Fulcher has therefore made an important contribution by placing ideology at the center of an analysis of French musical life between the two world wars.³⁵ She views French composers as “intellectuals” – a term that historians has generally reserved for writers – and claims that musicians “were aware that ideological visions were being projected onto styles.”³⁶ In essence, Fulcher argues that composers were fully conscious that musical styles carried political implications and that they “manipulated the musical meanings” in their works to political ends. She maintains that composers took political sides, and like their colleagues in the literary world, fought a battle (in music and words) that sought to condemn or endorse aesthetic directions and their associated political implications.

In her chapter on the Popular Front entitled, “The ‘Defense’ of French Culture in the Thirties,” Fulcher associates certain stylistic characteristics with Popular Front

³³ See Eveline Hurard-Viltard, *Le groupe des Six ou Le matin d'un jour de fête* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1987); Michel Faure, *Du Néoclassicisme musical dans la France du premier XX^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1997); Jean Roy, *Le Groupe des Six* (Paris: Seuil, 1994); Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

³⁴ Some exceptions, noteworthy for their desire to place composers from the 1930s within a larger cultural dimension include Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin (1867-1950): His Life and Works* (London: Harwood Academic Press, 1995) and Barbara Kelly, *Tradition and Style in the Works of Darius Milhaud, 1912-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

³⁵ Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France 1914-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁶ Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 8.

composers. “Popular,” “simple,” “direct,” “naïve,” are the contemporaneous catchwords that defined Popular Front musical style, in contrast with the “oppositional musical aesthetic” of the Right, which emphasized “spiritual,” “elevated,” and “romantic” musical traits.³⁷ Many of the composers drawn to the Popular Front, she reminds us, issued from the milieu of Les Six, and as a result of direct government sponsorship, their “aesthetic [...] now became almost *official*.”³⁸

There is no doubt that certain composers benefited momentarily from Popular Front patronage. Along with the government commissions program, prestigious appointments and contracts were given to composers by the State, a number of which will be discussed in the following chapters. But as Leslie Sprout’s research has shown, and as further commissions to musicians for events like the 1937 Exposition also reveal, the government was not overtly partisan in this regard either. Although high-profile Popular Front composers like Milhaud and Koechlin benefited the most from State patronage, so too did composers unsympathetic to its politics.

One noteworthy example may be found in the State’s relationship with composer Florent Schmitt. Schmitt sparked a mini-scandal in 1933 following a performance by Madeleine Grey (1897-1979) of three songs from Weill’s *Der Silbersee* (1932) at the Salle Pleyel. The composer greeted Grey’s rendition with cries of “Vive Hitler!” and apparently yelled (with Weill as his obvious target) “we have enough bad musicians in France that we don’t need to be sent all the Jews of Germany!”³⁹ Despite this much-publicized incident, Schmitt, who defeated Stravinsky in the latter’s bid for a seat at the

³⁷ Ibid., 199-274.

³⁸ Ibid., 223. Stressed in original.

³⁹ Paul Achar, *Comoedia*, November 27, 1933: “Vive Hitler! Vive Hitler! Nous avons assez de mauvais musiciens en France sans qu’on nous envoie tous les juifs d’Allemagne.”

Institut in 1936 (and was presumably in little need of state “employment insurance”), was successful in securing a commission from the anti-fascist Popular Front government for the 1937 exposition. The work, entitled *Lumière* was one of the state-ordered scores for the “Fêtes de la Lumière,” a “sound-and-light” show organized along the banks of the Seine. It was performed on five occasions throughout 1937, more than any of the other works written for the event. This was “official” recognition for a composer whose politics could not be further removed from the Popular Front. To claim therefore, that certain Popular Front composers became “official” simply because of their political sympathies, is an exaggeration, which (particularly in light of interpretations like Fulcher’s and others) we would do well to keep in check.

The prominence of certain members of Les Six (Milhaud, Auric, and Honegger in particular) during this period may also be attributed to the fact that their political positions prompted them to engage in a form of musical experimentation that, through its very novelty, brought them attention. Theodore Adorno, referring to a similar trend already influential in Germany, labelled it “communal music.” For him, “communal music,” involved a compositional approach born “of neoclassicism” and was represented most notably by Hindemith’s *gebrauchsmusik* and the proletarian choral works of Hanns Eisler.⁴⁰ In one of the most important of his early texts on music, he included it among a list of four “types” of compositional approaches being utilized by modern composers. These “types” also included the compositional approaches represented by Schoenberg (“modern”), Stravinsky (“objective”), and Weill (“surreal”).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Social Situation of Music (1932),” in *Essays on Music*, ed, Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 397.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 395.

French composers had become well acquainted with these last three “types” during the 1920s. Indeed, both Stravinsky’s neoclassical “objective” idiom and the aesthetic roots of Weill’s “surrealism” were indebted to developments that took place on French soil. Following the First World War, Schoenberg’s music was increasingly well known by the French avant-garde, and the circle of Les Six promoted his music at their favourite night time haunt of the early 1920s, the “American” bar “Le Boeuf sur la Toit.” Meanwhile, communal music (“class-conscious proletarian music” as Adorno described it) had remained notably absent from the agenda of French avant-garde composers (even amongst early converts to Communism like Erik Satie and Louis Durey) prior to the Popular Front.⁴²

A sudden flurry of “communal music” written by high-profile composers was therefore bound to create a journalistic buzz. Composers who set out on this aesthetic path may have enjoyed government approval, but they also had the allure of novelty on their side. This was as much a result of the critical issues that composers were now addressing forthright as with the stylistic and generic alterations that were being prompted by experimentation with this “type” of modern music. Yet, however “novel” the approach of Popular Front composers, we shall see that there was still much in the content of this “communal” music that was not new at all.

Fulcher has argued that the Popular Front was a period of legitimization for the music of Les Six; their rebellious experiments of the late 1910s and early 1920s were finally given official sanction, at the same time that their music was favourably interpreted through a left-wing perspective.⁴³ She also claims that many of the composers

⁴² Ibid., 410.

⁴³ Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*, 223.

involved “had made contacts with composers and projects in Germany during the Weimar Republic and could therefore apply lessons learned in this context to France.”⁴⁴

Chapter Outline

Chapters 1 and 2 will elaborate, and somewhat modify these two assertions. In Chapter 1 (From “Lifestyle Modernism” to “Populist Modernism”), I propose that certain aspects of the immediate post-War style of Les Six were indeed – as Fulcher rightly claims – valorized during the Popular Front. Unlike Fulcher, however, I argue that the members of Les Six who were drawn to the Popular Front made considerable modifications to their compositional aesthetic as a result of their political alignment. The influences of this aesthetic shift on composition were subtle, for even critics pointed out the stylistic continuities that existed between works composed in the early 1920s and political works of the 1930s. Still, the changes were real, and effected composers’ musical styles, genre choices and borrowing practices.

In Chapter 2 (Red Songs on French Streets), I challenge Fulcher’s assertion that the compositional strategies employed by composers during the Popular Front in France can be traced back to contact with left-wing musical activity during the Weimar Republic. Following the 1934 Writer’s Congress in Moscow, French left-wing intellectuals unquestionably referenced the aesthetic and political models being promoted by the Soviet Union. This influence gradually trickled down to the musical world when, in late 1934, post-revolutionary Soviet music was increasingly performed at high-profile concert venues in Paris. During the years directly preceding the Popular Front, the left-wing musical organizations that eventually rose to prominence closely followed the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 223-224.

developments of Soviet musical culture and even incorporated elements derived from socialist realism into their own aesthetic and political programs.

In Chapter 3 (The Fédération Musicale Populaire) I will discuss the most prominent of these organizations, the Fédération Musicale Populaire (FMP). Many of France's most prestigious composers became affiliated with the FMP following the Popular Front's electoral victory in 1936. I will reveal that despite the Fédération's vast and varied membership, it – like most successful cultural organizations – developed a consistent aesthetic vision, most clearly laid out by its second president, the composer Charles Koechlin. The FMP encouraged composers to employ avant-garde compositional techniques while writing works aimed at large, popular audiences. Advocating solidarity between workers and composers, the FMP published modern works for amateur musical ensembles and sought educational reforms in order to improve accessibility to music for all. As FMP member Henri Radiguer commented, “the Fédération Musicale Populaire could also be called Front Musical Populaire with everything that such a name can express about faith in unity, ardour in action and confidence in democracy.”⁴⁵

Chapter 4 (Popular Sources and the Musical Left) will highlight to what extent the FMP (and other left-wing musical organizations of the period) looked to folk music and music inspired by the French revolution to express a political position and to engage with the masses. By 1936, Soviet aesthetic models had been assimilated by left-wing organizations, which now looked to promote the development of indigenous folk and

⁴⁵ Henri Radiguer, “La Fédération musicale populaire,” *L'Art musical populaire* (May 1, 1937): 2: “Qu'ils viennent à la FMP qui peut aussi bien vouloir dire: Front Musical Populaire avec tout ce que cette appellation d'actualité peut exprimer de foi dans l'union, d'ardeur dans l'action, de confiance dans la démocratie.”

revolutionary music, as well as the rich heritage of French revolutionary works dating back to the late-eighteenth century.

Chapter 5 (Music for Bastille Day) will examine what is arguably the most significant work of art created – or in this case, recreated – during the Popular Front: Romain Rolland's turn-of-the-century play, *Le 14 Juillet*. A state commission through the Maison de la Culture to mark the Bastille Day celebrations of 1936, it called for an extensive musical accompaniment that was provided by seven members of the Fédération Musicale Populaire. I argue that their musical contributions faithfully represent the populist modernist aesthetic that dominated the aesthetic agenda of the FMP. Through recourse to “popular” idioms like folksong and revolutionary music, these seven composers displayed their commitment to creating a bridge between elite and popular expression in the service of political ideology.

Chapter 6 (Left-Wing Politics at the Opéra-Comique) examines the situation at the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique, a venue that did not remain immune to the political and aesthetic climate issued in by the Popular Front electoral victory. Following sit-in strikes by its personnel at the close of the 1936 season, Education Minister Jean Zay was forced to take broad-based measures to appease the workers and to help restore financial viability to a theatre that was notorious for squandering money. During a period of administrative reorganization that lasted until 1939, a group of twelve composers was handpicked by the Minister to form a committee whose function was to adjudicate incoming works and propose the most deserving among them for production within the theatre. Most of these composers were also members of the FMP. I will argue that their programming choices, while attempting to nudge the moribund genre of *opéra comique* into the modern age, were also subtly informed by left-wing aesthetic values.

Chapter 7 (Populist Modernism at the 1937 Exposition) examines several experimental works performed in the context of the 1937 *Exposition des arts et des techniques dans la vie moderne*. Though largely planned earlier in the decade, the Popular Front government attempted to make its presence felt at the Exposition through a number of last-minute commissions. This included an experimental series of comic operas as well as two experimental theatrical works that called for important musical contributions (Jean-Richard Bloch's *Naissance d'une cité* and the collective *Liberté*). Furthermore, the Popular Front sponsored a startlingly innovative series of popular, open-air *Fêtes de la lumière*, each meticulously accompanied by one of eighteen different scores.

Throughout this dissertation I reveal that musical culture in France was profoundly influenced by the prevailing political climate of the Popular Front. Unlike the analyses of Pascal Ory and Jane Fulcher, however, I suggest that the impetus for this culture, though reflected in important ways within the government and its ministries, emanated primarily from the Popular Front distinctive cultural spirit. This *esprit* was a reflection of the cultural aspirations of the working class and those intellectuals who wished to make it a reality. Unlike any other study of the music of this period, I have combined cultural and political contextualization with close readings of a significant quantity of musical works. I have done this in order to show that the left-wing music of the Popular Front is stylistically and aesthetically indebted to important aspects of the French musical tradition. Populist modernism, with its links to the 1920s aesthetic positions of Les Six, and its musical references to the French Revolution and the folk music of the nation, stands as a distinctive artistic response to both the political exigencies and the cultural spirit of the Popular Front.

Chapter 1 – From “Lifestyle Modernism” to “Populist Modernism”

In an article written for *La Revue musicale* in 1937, composer Charles Koechlin brought attention to a group of composers whom he somewhat audaciously labelled “Les Sept.”¹ These seven composers – Georges Auric, Darius Milhaud, Daniel Lazarus, Arthur Honegger, Albert Roussel, Jacques Ibert and Koechlin himself – had recently participated in the highly politicized revival of Romain Rolland’s play, *Le 14 Juillet*, a performance that was commissioned by the government to function as the apotheosis to the elaborate Bastille Day events of 1936 (see Chapter 5). Each composer had written a segment of the incidental music – a collective venture reminiscent of the collaboration practiced by Les Six (minus Louis Durey) for Jean Cocteau’s *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* of 1921. Unlike Les Six (a name established by critic Henri Collet in a group of articles that appeared in *Comoedia* in 1920) the moniker “Les Sept” never caught on.² But it easily could have. During the Popular Front, these seven composers were among the most prominent in France and benefited from extensive visibility in left-wing journals and newspapers like *L’Humanité*, *Ce Soir* and *Vendredi*. Even a cursory glance at left-wing publications from the period leaves one with the over-riding impression that during the Popular Front, “Les Sept” represented the vanguard of modernist musical developments in France.

Koechlin evidently coined “Les Sept” in order to underline strong continuities between this new group and Les Six of the 1920s. Of course, continuities were intrinsic here, as three members of Les Six (Auric, Honegger, Milhaud) were also members of

¹ Charles Koechlin, “De l’art pour l’art et de l’état des esprits à ce jour,” *La Revue musicale* (June-July 1937): 23.

² Henri Collet, “Un livre de Rimsky et un livre de Cocteau. Les cinq russes, les six français, et Erik Satie,” *Comoedia*, January 16, 1920; Henri Collet, “Les ‘Six’ français,” *Comoedia*, January 23, 1920.

“Les Sept.” In Koechlin’s view, a strong sense of stylistic continuity linked the music for *Le 14 Juillet*, written at the height of the Popular Front, with works written by these composers during the 1920s. For example, Koechlin asserted that Milhaud’s contribution to *Le 14 Juillet* was reminiscent of the composer’s 1926 opera, *Les Malheurs d’Orphée*, and that Auric’s contribution reminded him of his Diaghilev-produced ballet *Les Fâcheux*, written in 1924.³

Lifestyle Modernism

Many historians have stressed how the majority of works by the members of Les Six effected a rupture with the musical “impressionism” of Debussy and the romantic legacy of Wagner during the period directly following World War I.⁴ This was particularly true in the case of Milhaud, Auric, and Poulenc who, following the lead of Erik Satie, all found aesthetic stimulation through contact with the “everyday,” a fascination that was translated into their works through references to jazz, popular songs, American dances, and the atmosphere of the European circus. As Nancy Perloff has shown, their general approach was to fuse stylistic elements borrowed from popular sources into works that otherwise followed post-war musical developments in harmony and orchestration.⁵ Darius Milhaud’s 1921 “shimmy” entitled *Caramel mou* (Soft Caramel) provides an example of this approach. The shimmy derives its name from the French word “chemise,” because it was this piece of clothing – particularly what it

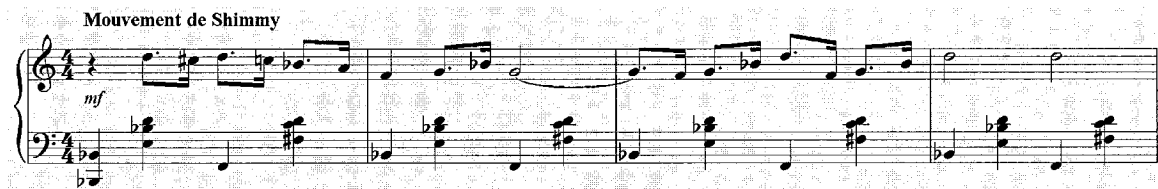
³ Charles Koechlin, “Musique savante...et populaire,” *L’Humanité*, September 6, 1936: “Les Danses d’Auric pouvaient faire parti d’un de ses ballets composés par Daghilew [sic]; la *Marche funèbre* de Milhaud n’est pas si lointaine parente de celle qu’on entendit dans les *Malheurs d’Orphée*...”

⁴ Indeed, so too did Henri Collet in the article that christened the group, “Un livre de Rimsky et un livre de Cocteau. Les cinq russes, les six français, et Erik Satie,” *Comoedia*, January 16, 1920.

⁵ Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1991), 6-7 and passim.

concealed – that its rapid to and fro shoulder movement thrusts lasciviously highlighted. It was an upbeat relative of the foxtrot and was widely popular, particularly among solo female performers during the late 1910s in both the US and Europe. Perhaps inspired by George Auric’s 1920 foxtrot, *Adieu New York!*, Milhaud’s shimmy, which he later transcribed for jazz orchestra, unmistakably conjures up the style of this popular dance (example 1.1).⁶ Although a “shimmy” by name, there is also much in Milhaud’s piece that defies the musical conventions of this staple of interwar burlesque entertainment. Most salient in this regard is the harmony, for even in the opening measures – which otherwise mimic the melodies and rhythmic profile of a conventional shimmy – Milhaud lays down an ostinato “oom-pah” accompaniment that offers a dissonant hint of what is to come.

Ex. 1.1. Darius Milhaud, *Caramel mou* (1921), mm. 4-8.



The harmonic friction introduced during the shimmy’s opening phrase (notice the chromatic movement through E-F-F# in the bass and its incorrect “cadence” to B-flat on the first beat) sets the scene for some vigorous black-note/white-note polytonal action later in the piece.⁷ By the end of the work the only shimmy-like stylistic qualities that remain consist of dotted rhythms and syncopated accents – Milhaud’s pungent polytonal

⁶ Ibid., 174-177.

⁷ As François de Médicis has noted, in the early 1920s all of the members of Les Six were seen to share a common compositional interest in polytonality. It is equally important to note that not all of the members of Les Six were equally interested in popular American idioms, although all participated – in one or another – in what Perloff has described as the “cult of the everyday.” François de Médicis, “Darius Milhaud and the Debate on Polytonality in the French Press of the 1920s,” *Music and Letters* 86 (2005): 573-591.

idiom serves to definitively distance this “shimmy” from the popular source to which it is indebted (example 1.2).

Ex. 1.2. Darius Milhaud, *Caramel mou*, mm. 72-76.



In his aesthetic pamphlet *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (1918), Jean Cocteau, acting as Les Six's self-appointed publicist, stressed the importance of such popular sources in the development of a national art that could “escape” the pernicious effects of German influence.⁸ These “everyday” stimuli informed a number of important works from the period, like *Parade* and *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, Milhaud's jazz-ballet *La Création du monde*, his Brazilian dance-pantomine *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, Poulenc's song cycle *Cocardes*, and Satie's silent film-score, *Relâche*.

Lynn Garafola, in her study of “Les Ballets russes,” was one of the first to point out that the aesthetic of the “everyday” (so prominent in ballet productions featuring the music of Satie and Les Six) catered to “the pastimes and consumer styles of France's upper class” — a segment of the population that extolled “the sophisticated commonplace.”⁹ As she comments: “where the *tout Paris* slummed, Cocteau, its self-appointed vanguardist, found the material for its rarefied entertainments.”¹⁰ Recently, Richard Taruskin, in his six-volume history of music, appropriates Garafola's concept of

⁸ Jean Cocteau, “Cock and Harlequin,” in *A Call to Order by Jean Cocteau*, trans. Rollo H. Myers (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), 3.

⁹ Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 101.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

“lifestyle modernism” to refer to the modernist aesthetic associated with Les Six.¹¹ He thus follows in the footsteps of a number of musicologists who view the general recourse to popular idioms – increasingly prominent following the 1917 performances of *Parade* – as representing a desire to cater to the new fashions and interests of France’s artistic elite. For example, Steven Whiting has referred to the attraction of Les Six to American popular music as “faddishness;” Mary C. Davis has shown how the everyday modernism of Satie reflected the fashion sense of his elite Parisian public; and Bernard Gendron has claimed that in France following World War I, “avant-garde performance was at its most fashionable.”¹² Rejecting impressionist musical “fog” and its concomitant exoticism, Cocteau summed up the spirit of the time in *Le Coq et l’arlequin* when he claimed:

Impressionist music is outdone, for example, by a certain American dance that I saw at the Casino de Paris. This was what the dance was like: the American band accompanied it on banjos and thick nickel tubes. On the right of the little black-coated group there was a barman of noises under a gilt pergola with bells, triangles, boards, and motorcycle horns. With these he fabricated cocktails, adding from time to time a dash of cymbals, all the while rising from his seat, posturing and smiling vacuously.¹³

¹¹ Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 4, *The Early Twentieth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005),

¹² Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 561; Mary C. Davis, “Modernity à la mode: Popular Culture and Avant-Gardism in Erik Satie’s *Sports et divertissements*,” *The Musical Quarterly* 83 (1999): 430-473; Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 83.

¹³ Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin*, 13.

Here music is equated with cocktail culture – artistically translated by Milhaud in his 1920 piece, *Cocktail* – and the elitist entertainments (including music-hall performances) offered in the exclusive confines of the Casino. The “everyday” aesthetic may have drawn upon “popular” sources, but this was popular culture as visited and understood by a fashionable elite. All of these lifestyle modernist works employ musical features and compositional approaches – from pentatonic, whole-tone and modal writing in Satie, to dense orchestrations and chromaticism in Auric, to bitonality in Milhaud – that distinguish them from the popular sources to which they were indebted.

French lifestyle modernism was particularly prominent between 1917 and 1924, but declining interest in the trend coincided with the performances of Satie’s *Relâche* (1924), which received mainly negative reviews even from those members of Les Six (particularly Georges Auric) previously sympathetic to the music-hall atmosphere it attempted to recreate.¹⁴ Popular sources no longer found their way easily into the works of “elite” composers due to a number of factors, the most significant of which concerned the wide-spread development of formal neoclassicism and a waning interest (amongst the composing and listening elite) in the increasingly commodified idioms of American popular music.¹⁵ A critical divide was beginning to re-emerge. To dabble in popular music was once again becoming a sign of “amateurism” – a critical slight that Satie, following a decade positioned at the apex of the avant-garde movement, was once more forced to endure.¹⁶ Though jazz and blues would make sporadic appearances throughout the remainder of the 1920s (most notably in works by Ravel like *L’Enfant et les*

¹⁴ Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 556.

¹⁵ Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 121.

¹⁶ Emile Vuillermoz, review of *Relâche*, by Erik Satie, *La Revue musicale*, February 1, 1925: 165-168.

sortilèges, the *Sonata for violin and piano*, and the *Concerto pour la main gauche*), by 1924 the larger aesthetic premise of “lifestyle modernism” had run its course.

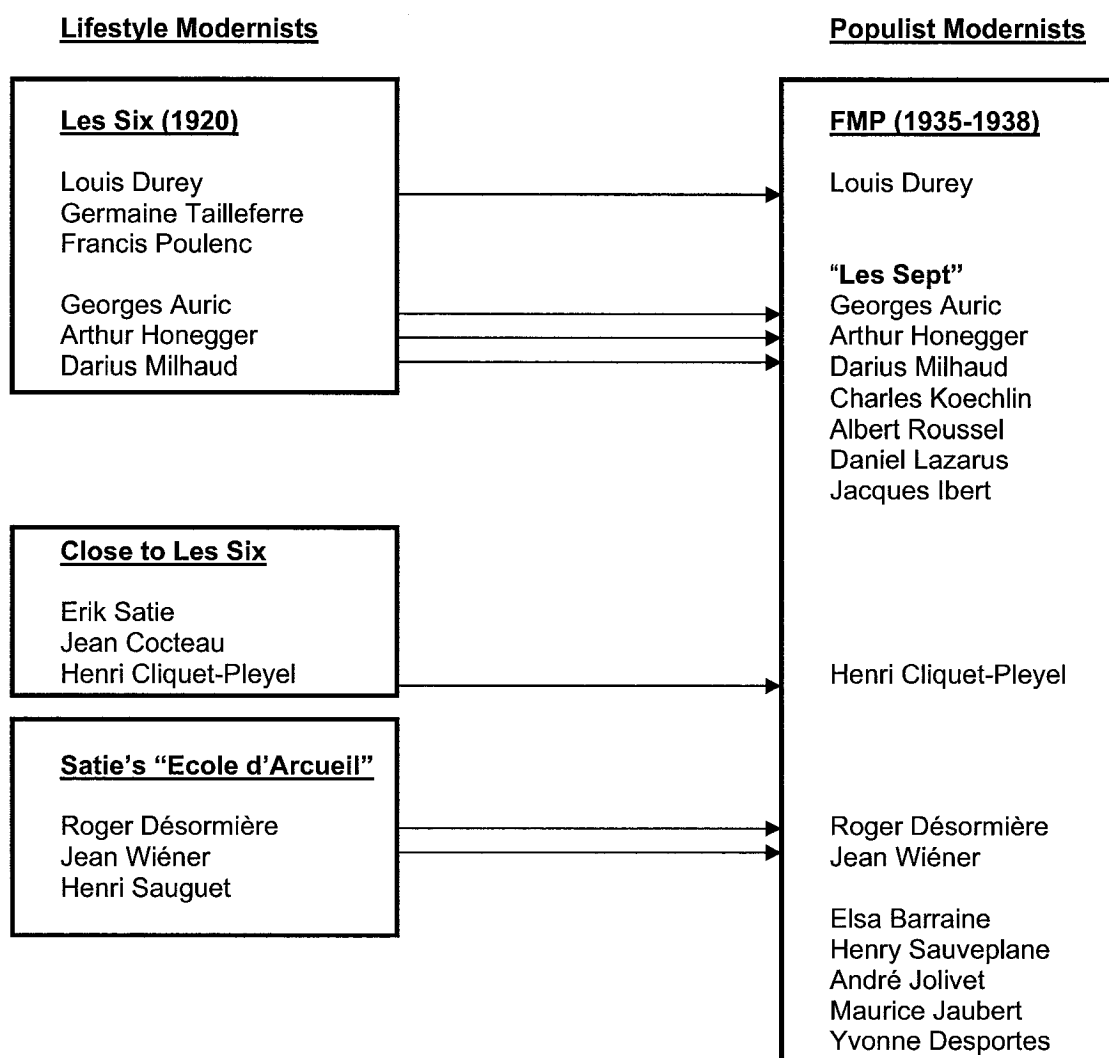
Popular music was not the only aspect of “lifestyle modernism” on the decline: the multiple references to the “everyday” that had functioned as the décor for works like *Le Train Bleu* and *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* were substituted by the austere allure of antiquity, exemplified in works like Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*. The French reception of Ernst Krenek’s “Zeitoper,” *Jonny spielt auf* (performed in Paris in 1928), is a telling example of the changing aesthetic environment. The work, which energetically engaged with the everyday, failed badly; its jazz references and topicality left Parisian audiences, who had already lived through the fad, bored and unenthusiastic.¹⁷

Populist Modernism

A remarkable development, however, occurred in the mid-1930s when many of the composers who had been involved with the lifestyle modernist aesthetic of the early 1920s became sympathetic to the left-wing politics of the Popular Front. As figure 1 reveals, by 1936 a considerable number of composers active within what Perloff calls “the circle of Erik Satie” had drawn close to the Fédération Musicale Populaire (FMP). Four members of Les Six (Auric, Milhaud, Honegger, and Durey) as well as two members of Satie’s informal École d’Arcueil (Roger Désormière and Jean Wiéner) became active within the organization, presided over by Albert Roussel (until his death in 1937) and Charles Koechlin (1937-1939; 1945-1950).

¹⁷ Susan C. Cook, *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1988), 108.

Fig. 1. Lifestyle modernists and populist modernists (1920-1938).



With the political and social demands of the masses now brought to the fore, and the incentive to build bridges between intellectual elites and the populace encouraged by political parties on the Left and their associated cultural organizations like the FMP, musicians sought once again to fuse “popular” and “elite” musical sources, but this time, for explicitly political reasons. The lifestyle modernism of the early 1920s was thereby reinvigorated, but not without significant modifications. While these works maintained essential stylistic similarities with lifestyle modernist works (articulated through similar

borrowing procedures and an anti-romantic compositional approach), the political works of the 1930s partook of a different impulse, one that I call “populist modernism.”

What is populist modernism? In contrast to lifestyle modernism, populist modernism is an aesthetico-political stance that aimed to incorporate popular sources not from American jazz and the circus grounds, but from folk music and revolutionary music. This included music written in the wake of the revolution of 1789, but also a repertory of revolutionary songs from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. When seen from the ideological viewpoint of the Popular Front, these popular sources, as well as their associated traditions, had powerful political resonance and were perceived as representing the “soul” of the French people.

Not always content to simply borrow from this established repertory, composers also wrote their own modern folk and revolutionary works in a show of solidarity with the working masses and their social and political aspirations. For example, Koechlin, Milhaud, Auric, Honegger, along with other members of the FMP wrote and published modern revolutionary songs and folk tunes that were intended to complement existing traditions and to reflect more accurately the French working classes, both rural and urban. These populist modernist works channeled communal values by self-consciously embracing collective, as opposed to individualistic, modes of artistic creation. Innovative collaborative works were now viewed as an aesthetic priority, and, as we shall see, the left-wing organizations that flourished during the Popular Front were at the vanguard of promoting exactly these specific forms of creative endeavors.

In this sense, some French populist modernist works are closely related to what Adorno categorizes “use music” or “communal music”: politically charged workers’ choruses or folk-inspired melodies intended to accompany communal life. Adorno’s

negative critique of communal music took aim at how it positioned itself vis-à-vis its ostensible public. For Adorno, the success of communal music relies upon a situation wherein the consciousness of the public is “absolutized” and in which the musical taste of the masses is the sole arbiter of a composition’s worth. In the case of class-conscious proletarian music, this demands that the composer exhibit a sympathetic understanding of the perceived musical needs of the proletariat – “singability, simplicity, collective effectiveness.” As Adorno claims, however, this is a thoroughly misguided strategy, for it neglects to acknowledge that these very “needs” (understood in terms of bourgeois practice), are the result – and therefore the reiteration – of the mechanics of class domination.¹⁸ Writing “communal music” that is characterized by “singability and simplicity” only reinforces bourgeois prejudices about what kind of music is most appropriate for “the people.” It assumes that “the people” are incapable of appreciating anything else and simultaneously ensures that they will remain ignorant of bourgeois musical styles and practices. What follows from such a Marxist-oriented analysis is that music that caters to the musical understanding of the proletariat does little more than confirm that social group’s submissiveness, or “false consciousness,” within capitalist society. Furthermore, it places grave limitations on the forms, styles, and methods that may be employed in musical composition.

Adorno’s analysis is somewhat crude, not only for its blatant social determinism, but also because his critique of class-conscious communal music is based exclusively on the example of one composer, Hanns Eisler. The situation in France during the Popular Front, combined with the attitudes of various French composers to the issues surrounding

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Social Situation of Music (1932),” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 410.

“music for the people,” further point to some of the limitations in Adorno’s discussion. After all, in France major tensions concerning which consciousness was to be “absolutized” in the writing of music “for the people” were readily apparent. As we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, although some composers adopted a position that aimed to cultivate “singability, simplicity, and collective effectiveness,” many others maintained that “communal” music should not be dictated by public demand and expectation, but rather by the individual conscience of each composer. Indeed, as I will explore in Chapter 3, some felt that the proletariat deserved and were even better equipped than the bourgeoisie to appreciate modern music and all of its attendant complexities because their social situation actually enhanced their ability to appreciate certain musical procedures that were generally denounced as incomprehensible by bourgeois audiences.

Adorno writes that “only utopian-idealistic thinking could demand [in the place of politically correct proletarian communal music] a music internally suited to the function of the proletariat, but incomprehensible to the proletariat.”¹⁹ As we shall see, such “utopian-idealistic thinking” was certainly manifest within the ranks of the FMP. In fact, works composed “for the people” that simultaneously retained modernist syntactical attributes were highly encouraged. For many, the goal was not to create “communal” music, which, through deliberately simplified musical syntax, could potentially be associated with a profoundly reactionary, or even, fascistic compositional aesthetic. Rather, a modern and “free” music (more on this adjective in Chapter 3) that was cognizant of its new social function as music “for the people” became the standard by which many composers expressed their political engagement. As future FMP president Charles Koechlin expressed in his 1936 pamphlet *La Musique et le peuple*: “We dream of

¹⁹ Ibid., 411.

a modern art, rich with all the conquests of harmony, counterpoint and orchestration (or more stripped down, if the subject calls for it) or even made of collective songs that will rise up in the air, simple and naked, unaccompanied, as it was in the past.”²⁰ This was idealistic thinking that saw well beyond musical criteria such as singability and simplicity.

The term “populist modernism” attempts to account for this aesthetic approach. The term is deliberately contradictory, for in the political context under discussion compositional choices were dominated by tensions over the perceived differences between the increasingly complex idioms of “modern” music and the immediacy necessitated by placing “the people” at the centre of its concerns. Furthermore, whereas “populism” evokes an attempt to resonate with the will, desires, or perceived essence of “the people,” modernism has often been associated with artistic movements and figures that have been notoriously incapable of arousing the interest of “the people,” and which have traditionally catered (intentionally or not) to expressing the collective identity of social elites. Understood this way, populism naturally finds itself in natural opposition to high-modernist artistic movements because it is characteristically suspicious of the elites and intellectuals who partake in them.²¹ Ultimately, the term “populist modernism” points to crucial social and cultural antinomies at the heart of the modernist movement (and by extension the Popular Front) as well as to the profound aesthetic fractures that resulted from the political engagement of artists during the interwar period. The term is useful in that it helps to locate a general form of explicitly politicized artistic activity, which, in the

²⁰ Charles Koechlin, *La Musique et le peuple* (Paris: Editions Sociales Internationales, 1936), 5. “Nous rêvons d’un art moderne, riche de toutes les conquêtes de l’harmonie, du contrepoint et de l’orchestration – ou plus dépouillé au besoin, si le sujet le comporte – ou même fait de chants collectifs qui s’élèveront dans l’air.”

²¹ For a discussion see Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000).

hands of individual artists, resulted in extremely divergent creative responses. Whereas Michael Denning's term "cultural front" reflects a movement of artists united through similar artistic and political goals, "populist modernism" provides a name for what he has called the "formal and aesthetic problem" of culture informed by Popular Front politics – that of artistically representing "the people."²²

The following chapters will discuss a number of musical works in which French composers of the mid-1930s employed a populist modernist aesthetic: the modern folksong collections compiled by members of the FMP, the repertory of the proletarian-based Chorale Populaire de Paris, the complete music for *Le 14 Juillet*, the incidental music for the experimental theatrical productions *Liberté* and *Naissance d'une cite*, and even comic operas like Roussel's *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* and Marcel Delannoy's *Philippine*. These works can all be related, either as a result of specific musical gestures they employ, or the contexts in which they were conceived and performed, to the aesthetics of populist modernism.

²² Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Labouring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1998), 125.

Chapter 2 – Red Songs on French Streets

*L'art, c'est la pensée humaine
Qui va brisant toute chaîne!
L'art, c'est le doux conquérant!
A lui le Rhin et le Tibre!
Peuple esclave, il te fait libre;
Peuple libre, il te fait grand!*

Victor Hugo, "L'art et le peuple" (1851)

In 1926, Darius Milhaud, in the company of his wife Madeleine and the composer Jean Wiéner, embarked on a tour of the Soviet Union. As Milhaud later recalled, this trip was an attempt to "resume musical ties" between France and the Soviet Union. Upon arrival, the composer was thoroughly impressed with the energy and creative vitality of Soviet artists and the responsiveness and enthusiasm of Soviet audiences.¹ During their excursions, the French trio met young Soviet composers of different aesthetic stripes, including Gavriel Popov (1904-1972), Vladimir Deshevov (1889-1955), and Dimitri Shostakovich (1906-1975).² Milhaud later commented on the "argumentative and hairsplitting" atmosphere that reigned in Moscow, where antagonisms between aesthetically opposed factions like the Association of Contemporary Music (ASM) and the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) were particularly intense.³

Milhaud's sojourn afforded him a rare glimpse at artistic and political developments in the Soviet Union, something that had been denied French composers since the outset of the First World War. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 further curtailed the rich transmission of ideas that had characterized musical relations between France and Russia at the fin-de-siècle. In the wake of these events, exiled Russian

¹ Darius Milhaud, *Ma Vie heureuse* (Paris: Belfond, 1973), 153; Maurice Parijanine "Un maître de la musique moderne, Darius Milhaud, revient de la Russie enthousiasmé," *L'Humanité*, May 17, 1926.

² Milhaud, *Ma Vie heureuse*, 155.

³ Darius Milhaud, *Notes Without Music* (New York: Knopf, 1953), 189.

composers like Stravinsky continued to develop their musical languages in Western Europe, where they were far removed from the aesthetic and political upheavals of their native land.⁴ In fact, like Stravinsky, most Russian expatriates living in the West condemned the new cultural and social developments in the Soviet Union.⁵ Artistic groups that had been prominent supporters of Russian music before World War I (like the Paris-based Ballets Russes) now did little to promote new Soviet music. During the 1920s, they threw their support behind the young French composers of Les Six, particularly Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Georges Auric.⁶ Even though Les Six had been initially compared to Russia's "Mighty Five," during this period they too showed little interest in Soviet developments and were more clearly influenced by the popular musical idioms emanating from the United States and the atonal works of Arnold Schoenberg.⁷ As a result of these attitudes, the music of a new generation of Soviet composers, despite traditional exchanges between the two countries, was rarely heard in France before the 1940s. As André Coeuroy commented following a performance of Soviet music at the Salle Pleyel in 1936: "here in Paris, we are completely and absolutely uninformed about Russian music since the Revolution."⁸

⁴ An important exception to this was Prokofiev, who continued to follow artistic events in the Soviet Union as best he could, particular during the ten years preceding his definitive return to the country in 1936.

⁵ Joseph Kiblitky, Jean-Claude Marcade, and Yevgenia Petrova, eds., *Russian Paris, 1910-1960* (Saint Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2003).

⁶ Poulenc's *Les Biches* (1924), Milhaud's *Le Train Bleu* (1924), and Auric's *Les Fâcheux* (1923) were among the works by French composers commissioned for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes during this period. See Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷ Henri Collet, "Les cinq Russes et les six Français," *Comoedia*, January 16, 1920; Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁸ André Coeuroy, "Musique soviétique – Chostakovitch – Glazunov," *Beaux-Arts*, April 3, 1936. Coeuroy never actually attended the concert. As he describes in his sarcastic review, the hall was full when he arrived and the organizers had not thought to reserve extra seats for critics. One notable exception to the general dearth of Soviet music in Western Europe was Aleksandr Mosolov's *Zavod* (The Foundry) op. 19, which was frequently performed during the late 1920s.

Ironically, Coeuroy's review appeared at a moment when performances of Soviet music were in fact on the rise in the French capital. The primary impetus behind these concerts was ideological: the mid-decade growth of European antifascism had provoked intense curiosity about Soviet culture in France. In the aftermath of the February 1934 fascist riots in Paris, support for Soviet ideology and the French Communist Party (PCF) dramatically increased.⁹ Many intellectuals became attracted to the Soviet cultural model, perceived to be founded upon egalitarian methods of production and distribution and which placed the community, rather than the individual, at the center of aesthetic concerns. This radical conceptualization, with its concomitant re-evaluation of art's social role, inspired a number of newly formed cultural organizations to adopt aesthetic positions inspired by Communist ideology.

In this chapter I will examine how post-revolutionary Soviet music was initially introduced in France and how it influenced pro-communist individuals and organizations during the years leading up to the formation of the French Popular Front in 1935. Performances of Soviet music, along with other contacts with Soviet culture during this period prompted French artists and musicians to consider how they could foster similarly motivated forms of artistic expression. I will argue that socialist realism, though benefiting from only limited support in France, nonetheless exerted an important influence upon the development of aesthetic programs within prominent left-wing cultural organizations in France. Many of these organizations (like the *Fédération Musicale Populaire* (FMP) and the *Maison de la Culture*) grew out of smaller organizations like the *Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires* (AEAR), which were highly

⁹ For a succinct analysis of the 1934 riots and its implications for both the Right and Left in France see Serge Bernstein, *Le 6 février 1934* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

implicated in the promotion of Soviet culture before the advent of the Popular Front. Soviet socialist realism, with its concentration on the artistic representation of the proletariat and the use of folk-inspired styles, would later fuse with other aesthetic programs during the Popular Front to create a distinctive musical aesthetic that I have labeled “populist modernism.” Charting the reception of socialist realism in France during these years thus allows us to better understand the unique ways that French musicians subsequently appropriated Soviet aesthetics for their own artistic and political ends.

The AEAR and Soviet Culture

One of the most influential left-wing cultural organizations in France during the 1930s was the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (AEAR), founded in 1932 by Henri Barbusse, director of the Communist daily, *Monde*, and Paul Vaillant-Couturier, a prominent Communist *député*.¹⁰ It initially comprised over five hundred intellectuals who were brought together under the ideological premise of anti-fascism. Although clearly influenced by Soviet political developments and the aesthetic implications of communism (its members included Communist intellectuals Louis Aragon and Paul Nizan), the AEAR maintained a relative degree of autonomy from the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). In this regard, the AEAR was not an exclusively partisan organization. For example, prominent interwar writers like André Gide and Romain Rolland were all actively involved in the organization despite the fact that they did not hold PCF memberships. Like so many left-wing cultural groups of the period, the

¹⁰ Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 119. Information on the organization can be found in Nicole Racine, “L’Association des Écrivains et Artistes révolutionnaires (AEAR),” *Le Mouvement social* 54 (January-March 1966), 29-47.

AEAR was an organization that welcomed political fellow travelers, and in turn promoted interest in Soviet culture and aesthetics.

In July 1933, the AEAR began issuing *Commune*, a monthly publication that combined serious essays and creative work inspired by left-wing political concerns. The first issue's lead article outlined the organization's aesthetic position in light of recent European political developments:

The economic crisis, the Fascist threat, the danger of war, the example of cultural development of the Soviet masses in the face of the regression of Western civilization provide conditions which at present are favorable to the development of proletarian and revolutionary literary and artistic activity in France.¹¹

In August 1934 a contingent of AEAR members traveled to the Soviet Union to attend the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. The Congress was a landmark affair in the world of Soviet culture. It looked to showcase the leading lights of Soviet literature and to emphasize the links that bound the works of the country's great writers with the proletariat. The Congress had a tremendous influence not only on Soviet writers and artists, but also on pro-Communist writers in the West. As Popular Front movements surfaced in France, the United States, England, and Spain, similar congresses were organized, first in Paris in 1935, then in Madrid in 1936.¹² These typically hosted a who's-who of prominent left-wing intellectuals both from the West and the Soviet Union.

¹¹ Quoted in Herbert R. Lottman, *The Left Bank: Writers, Artists, and Politics from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 59.

¹² For a vivid account of the Paris Congress see Roger Shattuck's account entitled "Having Congress: The Shame of the Thirties," in *The Innocent Eye: On Modern Literature and the Arts* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2003), 3-31.

For the French contingent, the pioneering Soviet Congress was particularly significant not only because it marked the revival of significant cultural exchanges between France and the Soviet Union, but also because the opening speech by Andrei Zhdanov introduced French intellectuals to the new, State-endorsed aesthetic of socialist realism.¹³

Numerous writers, commenting both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, have outlined that socialist realism was an aesthetic conceived largely in a retrospective fashion.¹⁴ Indebted to the ideological concerns of Soviet proletarian artist-groups of the 1920s, socialist realism was only given the official seal of approval by Stalin's cultural advisors (including Zhdanov) following the forced dissolution of every one of the country's autonomous artistic groups in 1932. As of 1934, members of the Union of Soviet Composers were expected to follow the tenets of the new aesthetic, which looked to eradicate "deviationist" bourgeois tendencies from Soviet music. As Viktor Gorodinsky, later Secretary of the Union of Soviet Composer's Party Cell, explained, "the main attention of the Soviet composer must be directed towards the victorious progressive principles of reality, towards all that is heroic, bright, and beautiful."¹⁵ This was a path that had initially been set in the 1920s by groups such as the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) – a proletarian organization that advocated a new form of musical culture with no hereditary ties to pre-revolutionary

¹³ Andrei A. Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature – The Richest in Ideas. The Most Advanced Literature," in *Problems of Soviet Literature, Reports and Speeches at the First Writers' Congress*, ed. H.G. Scott, 13-24 (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1981).

¹⁴ See in particular Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) and Caradog Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1973). A more complete bibliography on the subject can be found in Neil Edmunds, "The Ambiguous Origins of Socialist Realism and Musical Life in the Soviet Union," in *Socialist Realism and Music*, eds. Mikuláš Bek, Geoffrey Chew and Petr Macek, 115-116 (Prague: KLP, 2004).

¹⁵ Quoted in Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 114.

models.¹⁶ Up until its forced dissolution in 1932, RAPM encouraged composers to write music that was accessible to mass audiences and which was fuelled by faith in the construction of a socialist society.¹⁷ This line of thought heavily influenced Soviet socialist realist works of the 1930s, but in practice “deviations” (Shostakovich’s *Lady MacBeth* being the most notorious) were relatively common because of the ambiguous implications of socialist realism for musical language. Although not completely devoid of modernist influences during the late 1920s and early 1930s, works informed by socialist realist aesthetics generally engaged with conservative neoclassical compositional methods (differing considerably from Stravinsky’s radical approach to neoclassicism) and drew largely upon indigenous folk influences.¹⁸ The works of members of the “Mighty Five,” particularly the music of Musorgsky, as well as the “revolutionary” works of Beethoven, were seen as nineteenth-century models in which socialist realist compositions could find inspiration.¹⁹

Following the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, *Commune* began publishing articles on socialist realism that elicited a variety of responses from leading members of the AEAR.²⁰ One of its most prominent members, Louis Aragon, who had notoriously abandoned the Surrealist group to join the Communist Party in 1932, became the most

¹⁶ On RAPM and other Soviet groups that promoted proletarian music see Neil Edmunds, *The Soviet Proletarian Music Movement* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).

¹⁷ The influence of RAPM’s aesthetics on the development of Stalinist socialist realism has been challenged by Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 96. For a rebuttal, see Edmunds, “The Ambiguous Origins of Socialist Realism,” 119.

¹⁸ Marina Frolova-Walker speaks of the growing intolerance for individualistic musical styles in the Soviet Union throughout the 1930s in “Stalin and the Art of Boredom,” *Twentieth-Century Music* 1/1 (2004), 110.

¹⁹ Edmunds, *The Soviet Proletarian Music Movement*, 32.

²⁰ P. Youdine and A. Fadeev, “Le Réalisme socialiste: Méthode fondamentale de la littérature soviétique,” *Commune* (1934): 1025-1030.

zealous French advocate of socialist realism.²¹ In 1935, he published a compilation of speeches entitled *Pour un réalisme socialiste* in which he praised the Soviet aesthetic for its ability to combat introspection and pessimism – attitudes that he believed contributed to fundamental flaws in “bourgeois” literary expression:

It is time to be finished with can-you-see-my-pain style, with individual or group hallucinations, with emphasis on the subconscious regarding sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, with sexuality as system, and madness as representation; it is time to be finished with the baroque, the “modern style” and the flea-market, supreme resources of mundane boredom and of pessimistic leisure.²²

Aragon’s position, with its explicit attack on modernist approaches within bourgeois literature, is here resonant with earlier criticisms penned by Soviet proletarian cultural groups in the 1920s, like RAPM. In its ideological platform of 1929, RAPM condemned “the sensual and pathologically erotic, the exotic, the barbaric, the mystic and the naturalistic.”²³ Aragon echoed many of these pronouncements in his own critique of French literature, yet he also maintained that some “bourgeois” literature of the nineteenth century had an important role to play in the development of socialist realism in France. He believed that the modern development of French socialist realism should seek

²¹ For a discussion of the Surrealist’s relationship with Communism during this period see Robert S. Short, “The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-1936,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1/2 (1966), 3-25.

²² Louis Aragon, *Pour un réalisme socialiste* (Paris: Denoël et Steele, 1935), 81. “Il est temps d’en finir avec le genre m’as-tu-vu de la douleur, les hallucinations à un ou à plusieurs, le pas donné au subconscient sur la vue, l’ouïe, l’odorat, le goût et le toucher, la sexualité comme système et le délire comme représentation, il est temps d’en finir avec le baroque, le modern style et la foire aux puces, suprêmes ressources de l’ennui mondain et du pessimisme des loisirs.” All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

²³ Quoted in Edmunds, “The Ambiguous Origins of Socialist Realism,” 118.

its historical justification in a tradition of French realist writing that dated back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In *Pour un réalisme socialiste* he supplies a historical overview of French literature in which he praises realist elements in various works by Victor Hugo, Émile Zola and even (surprisingly) Arthur Rimbaud. Although he expresses admiration for the realist approach adopted by these writers (exemplified by their interest in characters, social situations and social critique drawn from the experiences of common people), he simultaneously condemns the self-indulgence of literary romanticism. As a result, he cannot advocate a wholesale appropriation of these nineteenth-century authors for the cause of socialist realism, but rather urges modern writers to “reclaim in the works of those men who have preceded us, precisely that which is a part of the light, and to neglect the darkness.”²⁴ As in the Soviet Union, where advocates of socialist realism looked back to nineteenth-century writers like Gogol, Pushkin and Chernyshevsky, so too did Aragon argue for the implementation of socialist realism in France through an appeal to the realist tradition practiced by a number of canonical nineteenth-century literary figures.

Other members of the AEAR, like André Gide and Romain Rolland, also applauded the socialist realist method, particularly for its ability to faithfully reflect the reality of the proletariat. They worried however, that a systematic adoption of the aesthetic, whether in the USSR or in France, could be detrimental to the growth and development of individual literary styles. In a speech entitled “Literature and Revolution,” delivered in 1934, Gide elaborated on how socialist realist methods could be adopted in France without provoking a loss of creative liberty. Gide argued that

²⁴ Aragon, *Pour un réalisme socialiste*, 74. “...il s’agit de reprendre dans les oeuvres des hommes qui nous ont précédés, précisément ce qui est la part de la lumière, et d’en négliger les ténèbres.”

literature's search for "truth" was dependent upon a realist approach, and that writers who viewed the revelation of truth as a literary goal would naturally serve the cause of the revolution in their works.

It goes without saying that literature and art can serve the cause of the Revolution; but this should not be their preoccupation. Art never serves the Revolution as well as when it is uniquely preoccupied with truth. Literature does not have to put itself in the service of the Revolution. Servile literature is debased literature no matter how noble and legitimate the cause it serves. But because the cause of truth merges in my spirit – in our spirit – with the cause of the Revolution, when art is uniquely preoccupied with truth it necessarily serves the Revolution. It doesn't follow it; it does not submit to it; it does not reflect it. It lights it up. In such a way it is essentially different from works from any country that are fascist, Hitlerian, or imperialist and which respond to orders; since the purpose of those works is not to tell the truth, but to cover it up.²⁵

In other words, Gide believed that rather than serving particular political causes, artists needed to make "truth" the guiding principle of their aesthetic method. He emphasized that it was through the revelation of these truths – whether social, political or psychological – that artists could ultimately contribute to the creation of a revolutionary

²⁵ André Gide, *Littérature engagée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 58. "Que la littérature, que l'art puissent servir la Révolution, il va sans dire; mais il n'a pas à se préoccuper de la servir. Il ne la sert jamais si bien que quand il se préoccupe uniquement du vrai. La littérature n'a pas à se mettre au service de la Révolution. Une littérature asservie est une littérature avilie, si noble et légitime que soit la cause qu'elle sert. Mais comme la cause de la vérité se confond dans mon esprit, dans notre esprit, avec celle de la révolution, l'art, en se préoccupant uniquement de vérité, sert nécessairement la Révolution. Il ne la suit pas; il ne s'y soumet pas; il ne la reflète pas. Il l'éclaire. C'est ainsi qu'il diffère essentiellement des productions fascistes, hitlériennes, impérialistes de tous pays qui, elles, répondent à un mot d'ordre; puisqu'il ne s'agit pas pour elles de dire la vérité, mais de la couvrir."

climate. Gide calls for a subversive form of realism – one that acts naturally against the status quo of bourgeois society. For Gide, truth could reveal the inherent hypocrisy and shortcomings of bourgeois society and precipitate its downfall in the revolution. But, as he readily pointed out, no matter how “socialist” this realism was, it should not follow the dictates of a political party, but rather, “the integrity of one’s own thought.”²⁶ This reveals Gide’s belief that individual liberty should always override political considerations in the creative act. The lessons Gide drew from socialist realism reflect the approach that left-wing French composers adopted in light of political developments during the Popular Front. Prior to the formation of the Popular Front in 1935 however, liberal and orthodox interpretations of Soviet culture coexisted within French society – both in literature and in music.

Songs of the Soviet People

Even if at this early juncture, concerns with socialist realism did not seem to foster debate among French musicians, there are still many indications that these new ideas were beginning to influence actual musical practice. In late 1934 a small mixed choir comprised of members of the AEAR showcased for the first time musical works explicitly linked to the aesthetic of socialist realism. Their concerts were initially held throughout Paris and its suburbs in working-class settings like political rallies and factories.

The choir most probably began in 1932 as an informal group for individuals in the AEAR interested in learning “revolutionary” workers’ choruses. Its membership included French pro-Communist sympathizers, as well as immigrants and political refugees, and

²⁶ Ibid., 50.

specialized in a repertory of choruses famous throughout French left-wing circles like “Hardi camarades,” “C’est la révolution,” “Fils du peuple,” and Hanns Eisler’s “Komintern.” The majority of the members in this working-class ensemble had no formal musical education. Though it is unclear, it is likely that the group was conducted by Peters-Rosset, a Jewish musician of Eastern European descent.

Fig. 2. The AEAR Choir in 1933 (photo Pierre Jamet).²⁷



On the back of its published edition of Eisler’s “Comintern” the choir outlined its position:

²⁷ Reproduced in Robert Brécy, *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire* (Paris: Editions Hier et Demain, 1978), 273. Suzanne Cointe is second from left, the singer Madeleine Dax fourth from left, Robert Caby is fifth from left. The man to Caby’s left is cinema director Jean Lods, and at the extreme right of the photo is Pierre Jamet.

The AEAR choir serves the proletariat. The AEAR choir distributes “red” songs. It wants to get bigger. Make it stronger. If there are comrades around you who want to sing together, we suggest that you come to the AEAR. Singing is an act of propaganda. It penetrates everywhere. It contains slogans; it is an effective means for fighting. The “red” song is international, it is the way to recognize one another....it is the way to get together...it is our rallying cry.²⁸

Following a number of appearances at left-wing rallies and street marches, the AEAR choir’s first important public concert took place at the Salle Pleyel. Inaugurated in 1927, the Salle Pleyel was one of the capital’s largest concert halls, but also an important venue for left-wing political rallies throughout the 1930s. For example, in 1933 it was the venue for the Congress of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement, an international group of pacifist left-wing intellectuals that in many respects anticipated the social and ideological concerns of the Popular Front. The AEAR’s concert at the Salle Pleyel, which took place on December 15, 1934, was organized by the pro-Soviet organization, the “Amis de l’URSS.”²⁹ It was billed as “Songs of the Soviet People” and, according to a writer for *Commune*, it attracted an audience comprised of the type of people that one would

²⁸ Reproduced in Robert Brécy, *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire* (Paris: Editions Hier et Demain, 1978), 273. “La chorale de l’AEAR est au service du prolétariat. La chorale de l’AEAR diffuse des chants rouges. Elle veut s’élargir, renforcez-la. Si autour de toi, tu connais des camarades voulant chanter en commun, adresses-toi à l’AEAR, nous te conseillerons. Le chant est un moyen de propagande. Il pénètre partout. Il porte les mots d’ordre, il est un moyen efficace de lutte. Le chant rouge est international. C’est le moyen de se reconnaître...C’est le moyen de se rassembler...C’est notre cri de ralliement.”

²⁹ The “Amis de l’URSS” published a monthly journal under the same name, which by 1935 was selling 60,000 copies per month. According to statistics published in the December 1934 issue, the readership was comprised of workers, peasants and intellectuals. At least 34% of the readership was unionized with one of France’s two large unions: the Confédération général du travail unitaire (27%) and the Confédération général du travail (7%).

frequently find at left-wing political meetings – “proletarians, shop-keepers and artisans, friends of the Soviet Union” – as well as “new music lovers [and] musicians.”³⁰

This was no regular bourgeois concert, and a pre-concert speech delivered from the stage sought to further draw attention to the special nature of the event:

You should not come to our concert in the same way that you would come to a concert given by professionals. Our choir is not a professional choir – it is an amateur choir. Not an amateur choir whose members have been recruited from the well to do, but rather amateurs who are workers and who have had neither the opportunity nor the financial means for musical self-improvement.

As a French-language workers choir, we obviously have the duty to perform music that speaks about the life, the needs and the battles of the French population.

We do it as well as we can. But, we also have other tasks, in particular to perform new Soviet music, the first proletarian music that has ever existed. In other words, proletarian music written for proletarians, inspired by their lives, their struggles and already written in part by proletarians. [...]

Our concert is devoted to the musical culture of the liberated Russian proletariat and to the national culture of the different populations that make up the Federation of Socialist Soviet Republics.³¹

³⁰ “Compte rendu du concert consacré aux Chants des Peuples Soviétiques,” *Commune* (January, 1935): 532.

³¹ “Allocution prononcée au concert du 15 décembre, Salle Pleyel,” : Vous ne devez pas venir à notre concert comme vous viendriez à un concert de professionnels. Notre chorale n’est pas une chorale de professionnels, c’est une chorale d’amateurs, mais non pas d’amateurs recrutés dans la classe aisée, des amateurs qui sont des travailleurs qui n’ont eu ni la possibilité, ni les moyens de se cultiver musicalement. En tant que chorale ouvrière de langue française nous avons évidemment le devoir de répandre une musique

In this, their first major concert, the AEAR choir presented two distinct genres of Soviet choral music: modern “mass songs” and traditional Russian folk melodies. These works were composed and arranged by an array of composers who, before Stalin’s dissolution of all independent artistic organizations in 1932, were members of rival, and often opposing musical factions. For example, two of the composers featured in the concert, Aleksandr Davidenko and Viktor Beliy, had been prominent members of RAPM, while Nikolai Miaskovski had been affiliated with the Association of Contemporary Music (ASM), a “progressive” group that consciously mirrored the stylistic developments of the West.³² Indeed, it was through the initiatives of the ASM – an organization affiliated with the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) – that prominent foreign musicians, including Milhaud and Wiéner, visited the USSR in the late 1920s.

In the pre-concert speech, Miaskovski (who was routinely criticized during the 1920s by revolutionary groups for his attachment to bourgeois musical aesthetics) was hailed as a “reformed” composer who deserved to be congratulated for having adopted a musical style inspired by the needs of the proletariat. Furthermore, it was emphasized that Miaskovski’s aesthetic evolution did not come about as a result of State pressure, but rather emanated from his own free will.

qui parle de la vie, des besoins, et des luttes de la population française. Nous le faisons dans la mesure du possible. Mais nous avons aussi d’autres devoirs, en particulier celui de faire connaître la musique nouvelle soviétique, la première musique prolétarienne qui ait jamais existé. C’est-à-dire, une musique écrite pour les prolétaires s’inspirant de leur vie, de leurs luttes, et écrite déjà en partie par des prolétaires.[...] Notre concert est consacré à la culture musicale du prolétaire russe libéré, et à la culture nationale des différents peuples qu’englobe la fédération des Républiques Socialistes Soviétiques.” My thanks to Francis Jacquet, conductor of the Chorale Populaire de Lyon, for making this document available to me. Emphasis in original.

³² Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 91- 92.

In the country of the Soviets, artists are allowed to develop freely, they are given time to adapt to the regime. For example, those composers of the preceding generation like Miaskovski and Ipolitof-Ivanov [director of the Moscow Conservatory until 1922], traditional or individualistic artists for whom it took fifteen years to adapt, but who are now, pushed by the irresistible élan of socialist construction, able to write, in the case of Miaskovski, the song *To Lenin*, and for Ipolitof-Ivanov, an opera on a Soviet subject.³³

As Boris Schwarz and Marina Frolova-Walker have noted, by the early 1930s Miaskovski had indeed moved closer toward socialist realism.³⁴ According to Schwarz he abandoned the ASM, began reading Marx and had become more attuned to contemporary political developments and their social ramifications.³⁵

An enthusiastic review of the concert, published in *Commune*, suggested that in *To Lenin*, Miaskovski had created “a synthesis between the revolutionary words and the symphonic content.”³⁶ The implications of this comment are worth exploring, for, as we shall soon see, French musicians close to the Left were also looking to compose “revolutionary” works. The question of how to create a politically charged work that “synthesized” text and music, and which also found a balance between composer and audience, was central to their aesthetic concerns.

³³ “Allocution prononcée au concert du 15 décembre, Salle Pleyel,” *Archives FMP*: “Au pays des soviets on laisse les artistes se développer librement, on leur laisse le temps de s’adapter au régime, témoins des musiciens de la génération précédente comme Miaskovski et Ipolitof-Ivano musiciens traditionalistes ou individualistes à qui il a fallu 15 ans pour s’adapter, mais qui maintenant, poussés par l’élán irrésistible de la construction socialiste en sont arrivés l’un à écrire le chant “À Lénine” [...], l’autre un opéra sur un sujet soviétique.”

³⁴ Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 78-79; Marina Frolova-Walker, “Stalin and the Art of Boredom,” 108.

³⁵ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 78-79.

³⁶ La Section “Musique” de l’AEAR, “Compte rendu du concert consacré aux *Chants des Peuples Soviétiques*,” *Commune* (Jan 1935): 533.

Composed in 1932, Miaskovski's hagiographic ode belongs to a vast corpus of Soviet musical works that extolled the Soviet leaders, Lenin and Stalin. As a somber mass song, *To Lenin* channels the mournful and funereal connotations dictated by socialist realist interpretations of Lenin's death. The text by Alexei Surkov (1899-1983), reproduced in figure 3, represents the prototypical "darkness to light" narrative on which socialist realist works were based.³⁷ It begins with a portrayal of the pre-revolutionary plight of the Russian worker and stresses how the proletariat was saved by the heroic deeds and enlightened thought of "the first leader of the new world." Lenin's death is cast in the rhetoric of sacrifice (particularly resonant in the context of Stalin's first 5-year plan), and the poem closes with a promise to continue Lenin's work of socialist construction.

Fig. 3. Alexei Surkov, *À Lenine*. French and English translations.³⁸

Dans le jour gris des champs et des usines
Ta parole nous poussait au combat
Nous animant de haine et d'espérance
Tu nous as tous entraînés sur tes pas
Et ta pensée aida les camarades
Même et jusqu'en la nuit des prisons
Toi, le premier combattant d'octobre
Et le premier chef du monde nouveau.

Donnant ton cœur et ta vie à la lutte
Tu as conduit les soviets au succès
Mais, dur hiver, par un jour de tourmente,
Tu as été emporté par la mort
Et nous t'avons suivi en silence
Tristes, groupés sous les drapeaux en deuil
Et le serment d'achever ton ouvrage
Nous l'avons fait alors sur ton cercueil.

*In the gray day of fields and factories
Your word pushed us to fight
Moving us with hate and hope
You carried us along your path
And your thought helped the comrades
Even in the prisons at night
You, the first fighter of October
The first leader of the new world.*

*Giving your heart and your life to the battle
You drove the Soviets to success
Yet, brutal winter, on a day of torment
You were swept away by death
And we followed you in silence
Sad, huddled under the flags in mourning
And the vow to complete your work
We swore upon your casket.*

³⁷ Marina Frolova-Walker has referred to the "darkness-struggle-achievement" narrative as "the expected [...] scheme for Soviet symphonic works" in "Stalin and the Art of Boredom," 110.

³⁸ The French text comes from Nikolai Miaskovski, *À Lenine* (Paris: Editions Sociales Internationales, 1936).

Miaskovski uses pseudo-organic strategies to musically reinforce the “darkness to light” trajectory of this mass song. Throughout, he juxtaposes an accompaniment replete with diminished and half-diminished harmonies with a very accessible diatonic melodic line. The opening is marked with a heavily accentuated ascending F# melodic minor scale that arrives “incorrectly” on a G minor chord (example 2.1a).

Ex. 2.1a. Nikolai Miaskovski, *À Lenine*, op. 31e, mm. 1-4 (introduction).

Allegro moderato ma energico

Chorus

Piano

Introduction of B-flat sonority

The B-flat introduced by this sonority plays a crucial role throughout the work in its function as the agent of much of the chromatic harmony throughout, particularly in the lead-up to the first F# minor cadence at measure 20 (example 2.1b).

Ex. 2.1b. Nikolai Miaskovski, *À Lenine*, op. 31e, mm. 17-20 (first cadence).

Allegro moderato ma energico

Chorus

Piano

Introduction of B-flat sonority

Tu nous as tous en train - és sur tes pas
Tu as é - té em - por - té par la mort

As the minor third to G – but also the enharmonically repelled major third to F# – B-flat plays an equally important function in expressing the text’s “darkness to light” narrative. It is only at the end of the piece that B-flat is rewritten as A# and thereby affirms not only

the F# major tonality, but also the heroism and optimism dictated by both the text and the aesthetic demands of socialist realism (example 2.1c).

Ex. 2.1c. Nikolai Miaskovski, *À Lenine*, op. 31e, mm. 33-38 (final cadence).

Chorus

Et le pre-mier chef du mon-de nou-veau!
 Nous l'a-vons fait a-lors sur-ton cer-ceuil!

Piano

ff

Transformation to A#

Going Out to Meet Life

One of the most noted and influential works performed at the AEAR concert was a small song by Shostakovich entitled *Au devant de la vie*. It was originally written for the Soviet propaganda movie, *Counterplan*, released in 1932 to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution.³⁹ Despite the deliberately naïve quality of the song, emphasized throughout by Shostakovich's use of a strictly diatonic framework, it would be incorrect to conclude that the composer invested little effort in its composition. Laurel Fay, who has studied the sketches and variants for the "Song of the Counterplan," has shown that the piece was subjected to numerous revisions, which suggests that simplicity and naivety were, here, the result of significant compositional labour.⁴⁰ Shostakovich originally composed "Song of the Counterplan" as an orchestral work, but the tune's widespread popularity prompted the addition of an inspirational text by Boris

³⁹ Solomon Volkov relates how the "Song of the *Counterplan*" may have helped save Shostakovich's life immediately following Stalin's denunciation of *Lady Macbeth* in 1936. Stalin liked the tune and may have spared the composer on this account. Kornilov, on the other hand, was arrested and executed. *Shostakovich and Stalin: The Extraordinary Relationship between the Great Composer and the Brutal Dictator*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Knopf, 2004), 132-135.

⁴⁰ Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

Kornilov shortly following the film's release. The texted version of the music from *The Counterplan* became an enormous hit and the French left-wing press lauded it as the most "popular mass song in the Soviet Union."⁴¹ It was soon well known in the West as well, inspiring different versions, the most famous being Harold G. Rome's "The United Nations" of 1942.⁴² Even if it often circulated anonymously, it seems fair to say that *Au devant de la vie* was Shostakovich's first international success, and its extraordinary popularity easily rivaled that of any other work by the composer throughout the 1930s. The AEAR choir sang a French translation by Jeanne Perret which, in its simple juxtaposition of the themes of life, love, and the factory, paints a naïve picture of a worker embracing the challenge to construct a better world (figure 4 and example 2.2).

Fig. 4. Boris Kornilov, *Au-devant de la vie* (French translation by Jeanne Perret).⁴³

Ma blonde, entends-tu dans la ville
Siffler les fabriques et les trains
Allons au devant de la vie
Allons au devant du matin

*My darling, do you hear in the city
The whistling of factories and trains
Let's go out to meet life
Let's go out to meet the morning.*

Refrain :

Debout ma blonde
Debout amie
Il va vers le soleil levant
Notre pays

*Get up, my darling
Get up, my friend
Our country is moving toward
The rising sun.*

Ex. 2.2. Dimitri Shostakovich, *Au devant de la vie*.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Au devant de la vie'. It consists of a voice part (labeled 'Voice' on the left) and a piano accompaniment. The voice part is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are in French and are written below the staff. The piano accompaniment is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 10, 18, and 26 indicated. The lyrics are: 'Ma blond', en-tends tu dans la vil - le Sif - fler les fa - briques et les trains? Al - lons au de - vant de la vi - e Al - lons au de - vant du ma - tin De - bout ma blond Chan - tons au vent! De - bout a - mie! Il va vers le so - leil le - vant No - tre pa - ys.'

⁴¹ "Compte rendu du concert consacré aux *Chants des Peuples Soviétiques*," 535.

⁴² Fay, *Shostakovich*, 72. Despite frequent assertions in the literature, this song was never the anthem for the United Nations Organization.

⁴³ Cited in *Chants des peuples soviétiques* (Paris: Editions sociales internationales, 1937).

Many historians have argued that the most significant cultural legacy of the Popular Front was its breaking down of cultural hierarchies. *Au-devant de la vie*, the “anonymous” work of a “serious” composer written in the vein of a “popular” song, is symbolically located at the heart of this movement towards egalitarian forms of musical culture in France at the end of the 1930s.⁴⁴ Although rhythmically unassuming, the recurring eighth-note anacrusis at the opening of each melodic phrase supplies the tune with a refreshing lilt. This figure is further emphasized in the second half of the song, at which point the dotted rhythms increase the illusion of flow and the idea of liberty inherent in the text. The melody, with its first unexpected leap to the octave at “Debout amie!” and the subsequent jump that engages the final, leisurely descent to the tonic, is at once naïve and enchanting.⁴⁵ It is not surprising that this little song, with its joyful faith in a better world to come, appealed to French and international audiences committed to the ideals of the Left. It subsequently evolved into an important rallying cry for Leftist sympathizers in France – a tune so significant, that historians of the period have repeatedly referred to it in their discussions of the Popular Front period.⁴⁶

For modern commentators in the West, Shostakovich’s song is undoubtedly a “minor” work, not only in scope, but also when viewed within the context of a traditional

⁴⁴ In 1950, Shostakovich announced: “Finally the melody’s author becomes anonymous, something of which he can be proud.” Quoted and translated in John Riley, “From the Factory to the Flat: Thirty Years of the *Song of the Counterplan*,” in *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, edited by Neil Edmunds (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 69.

⁴⁵ In fact, as Ralph Locke suggested to me in a personal communication, the melodic emphasis placed on the second scale degree at the word “Debout” recalls a similar strategy used by Rouget de Lisle in the middle section of *La Marseillaise*.

⁴⁶ For one example, see Brécy, *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire*, 274. The song even appears in the title of a book that examines the Popular Front’s initiatives in support of leisure programs for the workers. See Bruno Cacérès, *Allons au-devant de la vie: La naissance du temps des loisirs en 1936* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1981). Pascal Ory, citing personal communications with Paul Arma and André Chamson, claims that the song became famous during the massive left-wing demonstrations of July 14th, 1936, when the Chorale Populaire de Paris began singing it in the streets. Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 905, n. 234.

“hierarchy of genres.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, the musical material employed – unabashedly diatonic, even pedestrian – stands uneasily next to the “high-modernist” compositional developments that were taking place concurrently throughout Western Europe. Indeed, Shostakovich’s compositional approach, casually inflected by socialist realist aesthetics, smacks of musical conservatism. It is too easy, however, to allow value judgments like these to cloud our appreciation of the significance – both social and aesthetic – of this type of musical work. Richard Taruskin has been correct to emphasize that when viewed in terms of musical developments within the Soviet Union, it was actually those works influenced by the European avant-garde which were attacked as “conservative” because they were seen as upholding the politically anachronistic aesthetics of pre-revolutionary “bourgeois” music.⁴⁸ Although Shostakovich’s song can be viewed as stylistically “conservative” from our present vantage point, seen within the context of the ideological battles of the 1930s, it was in fact “progressive” precisely for its capacity to channel proletarian idealism amongst the masses.

Soviet Folksong at the AEAR

The AEAR concert also featured “new” Soviet folk songs and showcased harmonizations of Moldavian, Turkmen, and Uzbek melodies by modern Soviet composers. The organizers of the event believed that it was important to perform these works, claiming that they played “an important role in the cultural movement” of the

⁴⁷ See William Weber, “The History of Musical Canon,” in *Rethinking Music*, edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, 354 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). On the reception and subsequent re-use of the *Song of the Counterplan* (in works by Shostakovich and others) see John Riley, “From the Factory to the Flat: Thirty Years of the *Song of the Counterplan*,” in *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, edited by Neil Edmunds (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 67-80.

⁴⁸ Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 92.

Soviet Union.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it was emphasized that these folk songs expressed the positive ramifications of both Soviet unification and the Revolution on the country's musical culture. They claimed that these "modern" folk songs were examples of the blossoming artistic activity and collective cultural expression within the Soviet Union and that they were artistic proof of the success of the Revolution, because "only a revolution allowed [these peoples] to take stock of the treasures of their musical folklore which were discovered, harmonized, edited and distributed by the people themselves."⁵⁰ Of course, this rhetoric is difficult to stomach today when confronted with the historical record of Stalin's crimes and the regime's absolute contempt for indigenous traditions within the different republics. But AEAR members had a limited and profoundly idealized understanding of the inner workings of the Soviet Union which prompted them to earnestly claim that the Revolution had freed the different peoples of the Soviet Union from culturally inferior circumstances. In fact, the pre-concert speech emphasized that "before the revolution, these different ethnic groups did not have any culture of this type and were completely illiterate."⁵¹

Indeed, there can be no doubt that this new emphasis on folklore played a crucial role within the context of socialist realist musical aesthetics. In fact, it enjoyed a privileged status within the new politicized aesthetic: conceived along socialist realist lines, it was an agent for the expression of the "social realities" of the Soviet people and

⁴⁹ "Compte rendu du concert consacré aux *Chants des Peuples Soviétiques*," 535. Predictably, there was no mention of how these works also participated in the State's aggressive cultural imperialism within the Soviet Union during this period. On this topic see Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation Building in the Soviet Republics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51/2 (Summer 1998), 331-371.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 534. "Seule une révolution pouvait leur permettre de valoriser les trésors de leur folklore musical, découverts, harmonisés, édités, diffusés par leurs propres forces."

⁵¹ "Allocution prononcée au concert du 15 décembre, Salle Pleyel," *Archives FMP*: "...ces peuples qui, pour la plupart, avant la révolution, n'avaient aucune culture de ce genre et vivaient même dans l'analphabétisme."

as a result, it exerted an equally important influence on urban works.⁵² As an anonymous *Commune* reviewer stated (mimicking the words of Stalin himself) folklore was the ideal medium from which to create “a new culture [...] national in form and socialist in content.”⁵³

It must be stressed, however, that these “new” folk songs were not written by modern Soviet peasants, nor were they particularly new. Many of them were simply arrangements of traditional melodies that pre-dated the revolution and which, since the advent of Stalin, had been textually altered to incorporate Soviet images of social and economic progress. Even innocent folk songs that spoke of family life had been semantically altered to adhere to Communist ideology. For example, the AEAR choir performed a “traditional” Turkmen berceuse, harmonized by a certain Chichov, that managed to bring the political concerns of the Union all the way to the cradle:

Berçons, berçons nos enfants;	<i>Rock, rock our children;</i>
Les riches préparent un combat sanglant...	<i>The rich prepare a bloody battle...</i>
Mais dans le ciel, l'étoile sourit,	<i>But in the sky the star smiles,</i>
Car les Soviets vaincront leurs ennemis.	<i>For the Soviets will defeat their enemies.</i> ⁵⁴

These pieces, which were passed off as proof of the unproblematic receptivity of indigenous populations to the politics and aesthetics of Stalinism, were given an equally unproblematic welcome by French left-wing audiences who in no way contested the cultural authenticity of these “modern” Soviet folk melodies. Although some criticized the performance of these tunes, preferring the more overtly political works on the program, the AEAR choir felt that it was their duty not only to “perform songs that deal

⁵² Richard Taruskin has expressed this point in reference to Shostakovich’s Sixth Symphony in *Defining Russia Musically*, 52-53, n. 18.

⁵³ La Section “Musique” de l’AEAR, “Compte rendu du concert consacré aux *Chants des Peuples Soviétiques*,” 534. Stalin’s phrase (“an art national in form and socialist in content”) can be found in Iosef Viassaronovich Stalin, *Voprosi Leninizma* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1931), 137.

⁵⁴ Quoted in “Compte rendu du concert consacré aux *Chants des Peuples Soviétiques*,” 535.

with social issues, but also those inspired by everyday life as well as life of the past because they are still sung by the population and are therefore attached to the modern cultural movement.”⁵⁵ Apparently nobody recognized that there was in fact very little difference between the ideological content of Chichov’s berceuse and Miaskovski’s *To Lenin*. Indeed, the picture of Soviet musical culture presented by the AEAR was ideologically uniform, as befitting the socialist realist aesthetic to which these pieces adhered. That the choir sang these works in French translations that remained entirely faithful to the original Russian texts (and contexts), speaks volumes about the devotion the choir and the concert’s organizers felt towards the political and cultural models emanating from the Soviet Union.

We may now better understand the novelty of these examples of “communal music” (to employ Adorno’s term) for French left-wing audiences and musicians. Although the political song had long been a pervasive feature of French life, it had consistently remained on the fringes of “high-art” musical composition. Even in cases where political songs had entered into the fabric of “serious” compositions (i.e., Charpentier’s quotation of the revolutionary tune *La Carmagnole* in his turn-of-the-century opera, *Louise*, or Debussy’s use of *La Marseillaise* in works like the piano prelude *Feux d’artifice*), such examples, although they may hint at composers’ political values, are best understood as sublimated references, the political strength of which are ultimately diluted because of their ability to be read through multiple and highly contrasting political interpretations.⁵⁶ These works by Shostakovich, Davidenko, and

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Jane F. Fulcher makes this point in reference to Debussy’s wartime compositions and their subsequent “construction” following the war in *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

Miaskovski, however, boldly expressed an unambiguous political vision.⁵⁷ They were viewed by the French as stunning examples of how composers could communicate their solidarity with the proletariat through the explicit musical expression of left-wing ideals. For French composers attracted to the ideals of the Left, these works offered a glimpse of how they could bridge the gap between their increasingly alienated compositional worlds and the realities of the working masses.

The appeal of these works to left-wing sympathizers in France encouraged further performances of Soviet music in Paris during the late 1930s. Such concerts were not limited, however, to interpretations of mass songs or new harmonizations of Russian folk melodies. For example, a concert organized by the Fédération Musicale Populaire on March 28, 1936, also presented symphonic works and operatic excerpts that had never before been heard in France.⁵⁸ The FMP concert featured a *Sinfonietta* by Miaskovski, and folk-inspired rhapsodies by Leonid Polovinkin (1894-1949), Boris Shekhter (1900-1961), and Lev Knipper (1889-1974).⁵⁹ Many of these works engaged with deliberately

⁵⁷ Whether these composers fully endorsed this political vision (as expressed in the texts they set or in the compositional prescriptions necessitated by socialist realism) has been a topic of considerable debate in musicological circles, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has been widely argued that Soviet composers – particularly Shostakovich – employed ironic musical gestures to (subtly) critique the bureaucratic nature of socialist realism. French reception of Soviet music during the 1930s however, shows no signs of doubting the sincerity of socialist realist works and the composers who wrote them. On irony in Shostakovich, see David Fanning, *The Breath of the Symphonist: Shostakovich's Tenth* (London: Royal Music Association, 1989); Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Incongruities* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); Richard Taruskin, “When Serious Music Mattered: On Shostakovich and Three Recent Books,” in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 360-383.

⁵⁸ Jean Train, “Concert soviétique,” *L'Humanité*, March 22, 1936.

⁵⁹ Jean Train's account of the program is problematic. Miaskovski's work was probably the *Sinfonietta in B minor for string orchestra*, op. 32, no. 2 (1929). Train also mentions a *Lyric Suite* by Polovinkin, a *Turkmenian Suite* by Knipper, and a *Suite Isrique* Shekhter. In fact, the *Lyric Suite* was probably by Knipper (and not Polovinkin) as this work had already been performed in the West (at the ISCM Festival at Oxford) in 1931. The *Turkmenian Suite* was probably Shekhter's *Turkmeniya* (1932), one of the composer's most famous works. It is difficult to know who wrote the mysteriously titled *Suite Isrique* – “isrique” is not a French adjective – as the title does not appear in any of the readily available bibliographies of these composer's works. Perhaps “isrique” is a double typo, that created an incorrectly spelled “lyrique.” Gerald Abraham, *Eight Soviet Composers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 53.

simplified musical material that aimed for broad-based accessibility through the integration of folk-inspired tunes.⁶⁰

As we shall see, French composers sympathetic to left-wing ideals would soon follow similar paths when writing works designed “for the people.” French composers who sought to transmit left-wing ideals in their works imitated Soviet methods by experimenting with the genres and styles of Soviet socialist realism. Mass songs, folk arrangements as well as orchestral works thematically derived from folk-inspired melodies, were adopted by French composers who sought to express their solidarity with the working class (both urban and rural) and the cultural idealism of the Soviet Union. As I will show in the remainder of this chapter, this influence was particularly strong throughout 1933 and 1934 as the AEAR encouraged the development of a modern “revolutionary” culture in France. With the electoral success of the Popular Front following 1935 and the expansion of the AEAR into a broad network of cultural organizations that included the Fédération Musicale Populaire, socialist realism eventually intersected with other aesthetic tendencies and gave rise to the dominant aesthetic trend of the period: populist modernism.

Music and Ideology: The *Humanité* Song Competition

We have seen that Soviet works introduced in France by left-wing cultural organizations were stylistically conservative, and drew extensively upon folk music to express unambiguous political idealism. Mass songs and folk arrangements represented the most popular genres that were exported from the Soviet Union, whereas works like

⁶⁰ Train also writes that excerpts of Shostakovich’s *Lady MacBeth* were performed at this concert. I have not seen this information corroborated by any other source, but if it is true – and why wouldn’t it be? – this performance almost certainly marks the first time the work was heard in France.

Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth*, despite its subsequent fame, did not elicit noticeable interest among French musicians and critics (whether of the Right or Left) during the late 1930s. Despite this, the AEAR's first major concert was significant because it helped solidify a repertory of modern "revolutionary" works that could be added to the list of nineteenth and twentieth-century French revolutionary songs that the organization's choir routinely performed at various anti-fascist rallies and demonstrations. Furthermore, for French audiences close to the Left, it was an introduction to the most recent musical developments in the Soviet Union. Most important, however, this hands-on introduction to Soviet musical culture allowed the AEAR to consider how to transfer Soviet aesthetics to French musical practice. Like Louis Aragon in the realm of literature, musicians within the AEAR also sought to promote socialist realism on French soil. As we shall see, they would partly succeed in doing this by laying claim to a tradition of works from both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that resonated with the stylistic and ideological premises of socialist realism.

For the time being, however, I wish to evaluate to what extent Soviet-inspired musical aesthetics had infiltrated the musical Left in France during the years leading up to the Popular Front. To do this, I turn to a corpus of documents that I discovered among the papers of the Association des Maisons de la Culture at the Archives Nationales.⁶¹ They document a competition launched at the end of 1933 by the Communist-funded newspaper *L'Humanité*, one of the city's widest-circulating dailies. The goal of this contest was to encourage workers to write political songs in celebration of revolutionary ideals. A team of jurors, comprised of musicians in the AEAR, was invited to evaluate the submissions.

⁶¹ Archives Nationales (abbreviated hereafter as AN) 104 AS (4).

One of the jurors was the composer Robert Caby (1905-1992). Caby issued from the working class, and although he took lessons with Charles Koechlin and drew close to figures like Darius Milhaud, Henri Sauguet, Jean Wiéner and Maurice Jaubert during the 1920s, he was essentially an autodidact composer. Like many of Koechlin's students, he was also a member of Erik Satie's circle of friends. He was responsible for the posthumous publication of a number of Satie's works, including the seminal piano work, *Véxations*. Caby was (like both Koechlin and Satie) a Communist sympathizer and travelled to the Soviet Union in 1933 and later even welcomed the exiled Trotsky to his home in Paris. As well as being a member of the AEAR, Caby participated in Jacques Prévert's "Groupe Octobre," an agitprop collective that performed political satire from a left-wing perspective for factory workers throughout the 1930s. He remained highly involved in left-wing circles up until 1937, at which time he abandoned his political activities.⁶²

Caby wrote particularly detailed critiques of the songs submitted to the *L'Humanité* competition, and his remarks, informed by Marxist conceptions, point to some of the obstacles that faced the growth of revolutionary proletarian music in France. In particular, Caby believed that "revolutionary" songs that sought to mirror the modern-day revolutionary spirit could only succeed if they broke with both the formal and semantic conventions of bourgeois music of the past. Caby's critique of one of the competition submissions – N. Reznique's *L'Appel de l'AER* shown in example 5 – points to the discrepancy that existed between Caby's own aesthetic convictions and the

⁶² Following the Second World War, Caby began to identify himself with the surrealist movement. Information about his life and music has only recently begun to surface. The information for this paragraph is mainly derived from the highly informative biographical sketch by his son Frédéric Caby, as well as from articles by Olof Höjer and Robert Orledge, all of which can be found at <www.af.lu.se/~fogwall/cabyrec.html> (accessed 10 April 2005).

contrasting musical proclivities of the majority of the contest's participants. According to Caby's lengthy critique, Reznique's song was not an effective "revolutionary" work:

A worthy effort, but one that does not at all respond to the title of the piece or the goal at which it aims. Shows musical ability, but appears to be a strange mixture of formulas borrowed from musicians of the Romantic and Classical periods (Beethoven, Chopin, etc.). As a result one cannot find any life, anything specifically revolutionary, indeed any form of expression that is new or even personal – something which is to be particularly demanded of a professional who is a member of the AEAR.⁶³ Excellent example of the fact that a good "professional" (obstructed by previous musical training that renders him incapable of reproducing popular spontaneity without having to rely upon commonplace musical forms consecrated by bourgeois society – the perpetuation of which is the ultimate goal of professionalism) is unable to express himself in a politically revolutionary manner without having first felt the necessity of the formal upheavals that must take place or, at least, without having first an idea of the modern transformations of the musical experience.⁶⁴

⁶³ Reznique was already a member of the AEAR. The jurors often encouraged the authors of the submissions to join the organization.

⁶⁴ AN 104 AS (4) "Effort honorable mais ne répondant pas du tout au titre ni au but visé. Dénote des connaissances musicales mais se présente comme un amalgame de formules empruntées à des musiciens de la période classique et romantique (Beethoven, Chopin, etc.) de sorte qu'on ne trouve aucune vie, rien de spécifiquement révolutionnaire, enfin aucune expression neuve ni même personnelle ce qui est particulièrement à exiger d'un professionnel membre de l'AEAR. [...] Excellente démonstration de ce qu'un bon "professionnel," encombré par sa formation antérieure qui le rend inapte à reprendre la spontanéité populaire en dehors des formes vulgaires consacrées par l'usage dans la société bourgeoise [la perpétuation même de ces formes est l'objet même du professionnalisme], ne saurait réaliser une expression politiquement révolutionnaire dans une oeuvre personnelle sans avoir senti la nécessité des bouleversements formels à accomplir ou au moins sans avoir idée des transformations modernes de l'expérience musicale."

It is noteworthy that Caby's criticisms are launched not at Reznique's musical abilities – deemed adequate – but rather at the fact that his song is corrupted by pre-existent bourgeois musical conventions. As shown in example 2.3, the piece's obvious reference to Chopin's "military" polonaise in A major (op. 40, no. 1) and Beethoven's "revolutionary" style, do nothing to invigorate the music with revolutionary élan. Furthermore, their very presence counteracts the requisite spontaneity of effective revolutionary works. For Caby, true revolutionary works can only arise through the subjective appreciation of "the necessity of formal upheavals." In other words, musical craft – understood as a learned body of compositional conventions – should play no role in the composition of revolutionary works. On the contrary, these works should reflect a spontaneous, subjective response to social realities and avoid contamination through contact with bourgeois modes of musical expression.

Ex. 2.3. N. Reznique, *L'Appel de l'AER*, mm. 1-12.⁶⁵

The musical score for N. Reznique's *L'Appel de l'AER*, measures 1-12, is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for Soprano/Alto (Sop/Alto), the second for Tenor/Bass (Ten/Bass), the third for Piano (Piano), and the bottom for Piano (Pno.). The tempo is marked 'Modéré' and the dynamic is 'mf'. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'De - bout les ré-vol-u-tion-nair - est! Grou-pons nous au-tour de l'A. E. R.' The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

⁶⁵ AN 104 AS (4).

The *Humanité* competition, no doubt inadvertently, played into predictable antagonisms that reflected tensions between intellectuals – like Caby – and the working-class participants. The judges (who all had at least some background in the traditions of “high-art” music) were asked to evaluate pieces by amateur composers whose horizons of musical understanding were undoubtedly conditioned by their social stature, musical experience, and education. This inevitably led to disagreements between both parties concerning the style and purpose of modern “revolutionary” works. Auguste Maucherat’s response to the criticisms of the judges of the *Humanité* competition is indicative of some of these tensions. He wrote a letter to the jurors in defence of his song, *Salut à Belleville*, set to his own decidedly populist lyrics (example 2.4).

Ex. 2.4. Auguste Maucherat, *Salut à Belleville*.⁶⁶

The musical score for "Salut à Belleville" is written for a single voice part. It begins with a "Marcia" (march) tempo and key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is simple and rhythmic, typical of popular music of the era. The score includes several tempo and dynamic markings: "Rit." (Ritardando) at measures 9 and 34, "Tempo" at measures 18 and 41, "espressivo" at measure 50, and "Marciale" (martial) at measure 58. The lyrics are in French and describe a scene of social contrast in Belleville, a working-class district in Paris. The lyrics are: "Face à la mon-ta-gne my-s-ti-que Où Ge-ne-viè-ve se dres-sa", "Con-tre la horde a-si-a-ti-que Que de Lu-tèce el-le chas-sa,", "Loin de l'ap-pa-rat et du fas-te De l'o-pu-lent oi-si-vi-té, Do-mine, en vi-o-lent con-tras-te, la tra-vail-leu-se pau-vre-té", "Rem-part de la lut-té ci-vi-le, Fo-rum ar-dent des temps meil-leurs", "lut, sa-lut à Bel-le-vil-le, fier a-ven-tin des tra-vail-leurs", and "lut, sa-lut à Bel-le-vil-le, fi-er a-ven-tin, fier a-ven-tin des tra-vail-leurs". The score ends with a "cresc..." marking.

⁶⁶ AN 104 AS (4).

Though we have no record of what the judges said about this song, we can extrapolate from the content of Maucherat's letter that they were dissatisfied with the composer's poetic choices. As Maucherat's letter indicates, the AEAR judges felt that his text, which employed relatively uncommon words such as "faste" (splendour), "apparat" (pomp), and "Aventin" (Aventine Hill), were inappropriate and too "old-fashioned" for the proletarian audience to whom the music was ostensibly addressed. Maucherat, however, energetically defended his choices:

In my opinion, it is a mistake to attempt to clean one's style of any form of expression that is not entirely up to date. As soon as you write in verse (even in free verse) your thought distances itself – in a heightened manner – from the ordinary. If it speaks about the ordinary, it does so in order to transform it: a lamp seen by the eyes of even a mediocre poet is very different from a lamp made by a lamp-maker! At what moment does one become "difficult to understand?" A worker goes to school at least until the age of thirteen; sometimes he gains further instruction by looking at the schoolwork of his child, who, as it happens, owns a dictionary. Indeed, the context of a word clarifies the word. When Hugo writes about "Old Aeschylus, friend of weeping Electras," I am as ignorant as any worker who is confronted with the word "Aventin." Nonetheless, when I read I come to understand that which I imperfectly comprehend thanks to what follows and which I do understand: I understand that Aeschylus was a great poet and that he takes the defence of persecuted virtue.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Letter from Auguste Maucherat to *L'Humanité*, April 14, 1934. AN 104 AS (4): "C'est une erreur à mon avis que de vouloir dépouiller son style de toute expression qui ne soit pas absolument courante. Dès que

Maucherat's response points to essential problems between those attempting to invigorate artistic practices among the proletariat and those workers whose views on proletarian art and its purposes were, for the most part, still highly influenced by earlier, nineteenth-century modes of working-class expression. Maucherat argues that works written for the proletariat need not be stripped down to a lowest common denominator to be appreciated by the workers. Indeed, Maucherat quotes Eugène Pottier's *L'Internationale* (a work Lenin described as "the world-wide song of the proletariat") as justification for his own poetic choices.⁶⁸

Pottier himself would not have been able to convince you to accept *L'Internationale* if we stick to your arguments. Do you believe that "La raison tonne en son cratère" is concrete? Or for that matter "Du passé faisons table rase?" and even "l'éruption de la fin?"⁶⁹

Maucherat fears that if proletarian songs were to adhere to the tastes of the AEAR judges, they would be little more than banal imitations of the "sentimental insanity

vous écrivez en vers (même en vers libres), votre pensée s'éloigne – en hauteur – de l'usuel, et si elle parle de l'usuel, c'est pour la transfigurer: une lampe vue par un poète, même modeste, est bien différente de celle qui fabrique un lampiste! À partir de quand devient-on "peu compréhensible"? Cet ouvrier a bien été en classe jusqu'à l'âge de treize ans; il s'instruit parfois en regardant les devoirs de son enfant, qui possède un "dico." D'ailleurs, l'entourage du mot explique le mot. Quand Hugo me parle du vieil Eschyle, ami des plaintives Electres, je suis plus ignorant devant lui qu'un travailleur quelconque devant le mot "Aventin." Et je comprends quand même en lisant ce que je ne connais qu'imparfaitement avec ce qui suit et que je connais: je comprends qu'Eschyle est un grand poète et qu'il prend la défense de la vertu persécutée." Maucherat here cites the last stanza of "L'autre président" from the second book of Victor Hugo's *Les Châtiments*.

⁶⁸ Vladimir Lenin, "Eugene Pottier: The 25th Anniversary of his Death," in *Lenin's Collected Works*, vol. 36, ed. Yuri Sdobnikov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 223.

⁶⁹ Letter from Auguste Maucherat to *L'Humanité*, April 14, 1934. AN 104 AS (4). Here Maucherat quotes famous lines from Pottier's poem ("Reason thunders in its crater," "Of the past, make a clean slate," "The eruption of the end"). Pottier's poem was written in 1871 in response to the Paris Commune. It was set to music in 1888 by Pierre Degeyter and gradually became the anthem of international socialism.

propagated by the muse [...] of the streets.” The “sentimental insanity” that Maucherat refers to here is no doubt a reference to the *chanson réaliste*, a form of 1930s chanson made famous by performers (like Édith Piaf, Fréhel and Damia) who sang of the lives of the outcast in common language derived from popular modes of speech.⁷⁰ Evidently unimpressed with this practice, Maucherat concludes his letter with the following remarks:

The people deserve respect [...] it is also a sign of respect to avoid presenting them with social songs constructed on the model of street songs. It is with that spirit in mind that I dedicated a song to the people of Belleville – among whom I have lived for twenty years – which is at once simple and direct, but in which I wanted to avoid being banal.⁷¹

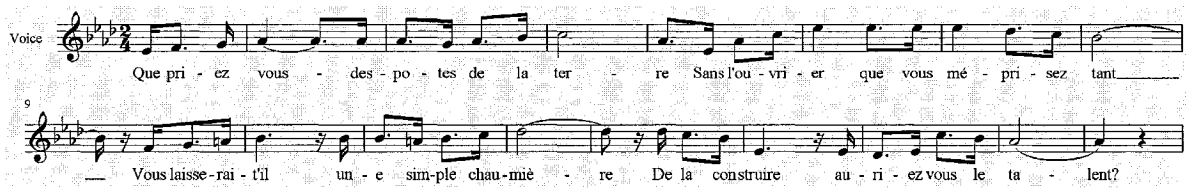
Not all submissions were met with criticism. In some cases, the judges were enthusiastic about certain songs for their value as “true document[s] of proletarian art” even though they did not consider them to be examples of “new revolutionary art.”⁷² It was precisely in these terms that Robert Caby described a submission by G. Navez, entitled *Le Jugement du gueux* (example 2.5).

⁷⁰ René Baudelaire, *La Chanson réaliste* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).

⁷¹ Ibid., “Le peuple a droit au respect [...] c’est le respecter aussi que de pas lui présenter [sic] des chants sociaux construits sur le moule de ces chansons des rues. C’est dans cet esprit que, mentalement, j’ai dédié au peuple de Belleville - au milieu de qui j’ai vécu vingt années - une chanson simple et directe de style, mais que j’ai voulue non banale.” Belleville, now a district within the city limits of Paris with a largely immigrant population, was at the time a working class suburb.

⁷² AN 104 AS (4).

Ex. 2.5. G. Navez, *Le Jugement du gueux*, mm. 1-18.⁷³



That Caby differentiated between “proletarian” and “revolutionary” as aesthetic categories is telling. It reminds us that proletarian culture in France, with its rich and varied traditions, was not a *de facto* revolutionary culture. Songs with texts that expressed the reality of the proletariat – like Navez’s piece – did not necessarily tap into the revolutionary, epoch-changing ethos that the AEAR was so anxious to cultivate. Judging by Caby’s opinion, “proletarian” works were locked in the present or in the past, but they did not point towards the future. For him, and presumably other members of the AEAR, only those works that expressed a present reality while simultaneously communicating how that reality could transform the future in a positive way could count as truly “revolutionary.” This dialectical relationship between the present and the future – already observed in Miaskovski’s *To Lenin* – was a key element in the AEAR’s appropriation of socialist realist aesthetics.⁷⁴

Reznique’s piece and Maucherat’s response to the judges’ criticisms however, show that workers were often unsympathetic (or simply uninterested) in the new cultural ideas and aesthetic concerns of the intellectual class.⁷⁵ Indeed, the works they submitted

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ On the dialectical nature of socialist realism see Mikuláš Bek and Geoffrey Chew, “Introduction: The Dialectics of Socialist Realism,” in *Socialist Realism and Music*, 9-15 (Prague: KLP, 2004).

⁷⁵ This was a frequent source of friction within the leftist movement. For one example of an artist who consciously abandoned the revolutionary aesthetic espoused by the AEAR in order to cultivate a more properly “proletarian” voice see René Garguilo ed., *Henry Poulaille et la littérature prolétarienne en France de 1920 à 1940* (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 1989).

to the competition are powerful testimonies to proletarian dependence upon bourgeois models of musical expression and nineteenth-century workers songs. In the case of works dependent upon bourgeois models, such as Reznique's *L'Appel de l'AER*, the semantics of Marxist and Communist thought are present, but accompanied by music that does not mirror the modern face of the class struggle. In the case of songs like Maucherat's, which draws upon the tradition of the worker's song with music that is tuneful, robust and naïve, the poetic texts are too outdated to function as forceful vehicles in the modern revolutionary movement. In their evaluation of these works, the AEAR jury employed what can best be understood as socialist realist aesthetic criteria. They encouraged the use of direct and realistic texts that aimed to rally the workers around the cause of the revolution. Furthermore, they looked for musical settings that broke with bourgeois stylistic conventions of the past while simultaneously shunning references to an "immature" nineteenth-century worker's culture.

None of the dozen submissions extant in the archival bundle seem to have elicited much enthusiasm from the *Humanité* jurors. We may perhaps get a better idea of what the intellectuals were looking for by pausing to examine a work by Robert Caby himself. Though many of Caby's works remain unpublished, his *La nouvelle ronde*, written in 1933 to a poem by Louis Aragon, appeared during the Popular Front period in a collection of modern "revolutionary" songs (figure 5 and example 2.6).

Fig. 5. Louis Aragon, *La nouvelle ronde*.⁷⁶

*Contre les voleurs du grand monde
Ligués pour t'arracher ton grain
Nous ferons la nouvelle ronde
Donne-nous la main camarade
Donne-nous la main!*

Against the thieves of the world,
United to snatch your grain,
We will dance the new round
Give us your hand, comrade
Give us your hand!

⁷⁶ Cited in Robert Caby, *La nouvelle ronde* (Paris: Editions sociales internationales, 1937).

*L'univers bourgeois qui vacille
Veut diviser les meurt-la-faim
Unis au marteau ta faucille*

The tottering bourgeois universe
Wants to divide the paupers:
Unite with the hammer your sickle

*Que tu travailles ou que tu chômes
Athée ou croyant c'est du pain
Qu'il te faut et non des pogroms*

Whether you work or are idle
Atheist or believer, it is bread
That you need and not pogroms

*Contre les ouvriers, l'armée
Ils ne l'enverront pas en vain
Soldats brisez la croix gammée*

Against the workers, the army
Won't send soldiers in vain
To destroy the swastika

*Pour arrêter la peste brune
Travailleurs il n'est qu'un chemin
Bâtir la nouvelle commune*

To stop the brown plague,
Workers, there is only one path:
To build the new Commune

Ex. 2.6. Robert Caby, *La nouvelle ronde*, mm. 1-6.

Chorus
Con - tre les vo - leurs du grand monde Li - gués pour l'ar - ra - cher ton grain Nous fe - rons la nou - vel - le ron - de

Piano

Caby's piece – following the cue in Aragon's title – evokes the round tradition of the late-eighteenth century, long associated with France's revolutionary heritage. Rounds conventionally derive their harmonic identity from the implications of a single canonically introduced melodic line. Caby's piece does not contain contrapuntal vocal entries, but it does reference the round tradition through its use of compound meter and a consistently diatonic framework. Furthermore, the composer embraces the implications of his melodic line within the context of his harmonic accompaniment. The “added note” harmonies derived from doubling notes in the melody – a feature already present in the first measure – create a pastoral effect that adds to the deliberate archaism of the setting. Indeed, the work steers clear of dominant seventh cadential motion until the final

measure; tonic stasis is maintained throughout the piece, and an open-fifth pedal on the tonic underpins the refrain.

The aforementioned characteristics recall stylistic idiosyncrasies found throughout the works of Erik Satie, an influence that loomed large on Caby's entire compositional output. There is an undeniable naïveté, and even a certain gaucherie in *La nouvelle ronde*, and both are attributes that he was also quick to praise in certain songs submitted to the *Humanité* competition. For example, Caby's evaluation of G. Einfeldt's "Hymne à la paix," ends with a plea to other jury members asking them to refrain from correcting the composer's awkward harmonization, because "fabricating a traditional one would destroy the freshness of this little piece" (example 2.7).⁷⁷ One is led to assume that Caby believed that "new revolutionary art" had a greater chance of being cultivated by autodidactic composers (like himself and Satie) who were untrammelled by the cultural weight of a traditional (bourgeois) musical education.

Ex. 2.7. Georges Einfeldt, *Hymne à la paix*, mm. 44-65.⁷⁸



⁷⁷ AN 104 AS (4).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

As we shall see in my discussion of the Fédération Musicale Populaire in Chapter 4, Satie's aesthetic influence upon French left-wing composers was not limited to relatively obscure figures like Robert Caby. As the Fédération Musicale Populaire gradually replaced the musical section of the AEAR in 1935, certain aspects of Satie's thought continued to circulate and inflect the FMP's aesthetic program. I will move to a discussion of Satie's aesthetic legacy within the FMP in the next chapter. At present, I wish to continue examining the influence of Soviet music on prominent French composers who drew close to the aesthetics of the left-wing during the mid-1930s.

Political Songs and "High Art"

By 1935, organizations like the AEAR (which had until then endorsed a radical and revolutionary approach to culture informed by Soviet politics and aesthetics) became less prominent as the French Communist Party and other Leftist parties espoused the political strategy of popular frontism. At the root of popular frontism figured a broad-based appeal for working class and intellectual solidarity in the face of fascism, but also a common desire for social progress represented by increased rights and greater access to education for workers and their families. Popular frontism was a movement that was much less concerned with maintaining the type of ideological orthodoxy that had been promoted throughout left-wing groups (like the AEAR) in the early 1930s. In fact, the strength of popular frontism lay in its numbers, and in order to create broad-based sympathy with its cause, the doctrinaire squabbles that had plagued the extreme left since the 1920s were (momentarily) attenuated.

The new openness of left-wing organizations to "fellow travelers" was one of the major factors that led to the dramatic growth of left-wing cultural organizations in 1935.

As I have mentioned, the Maison de la Culture, with which many AEAR members became affiliated in 1935, grew into a vast network that attracted some of the most prominent artistic personalities in the country. The effect of this influx of fellow travelers was substantial, as it had a profound influence on the direction and development of left-wing aesthetics in France. Previously confined to an elaboration of Soviet aesthetics on French soil, French left-wing cultural organizations were now compelled to integrate (or at least condone) the modern aesthetic directions that were espoused by a number of their newly recruited (and extremely prominent) artistic celebrities.

One of the first prominent recruits to the cause of “music for the people” (as it was now increasingly being called as opposed to “revolutionary music”) was Robert Caby’s former teacher, Charles Koechlin. This was a huge boost to the movement, because although Koechlin existed somewhat on the fringes of France’s musical institutions, he was still a respected authority among France’s composers, both young and old.⁷⁹ He could lay equal claim to the artistic legacy of both Fauré and Debussy, as well as to that of the younger generation of Les Six, having influenced or taught composers like Henri Sauguet, Darius Milhaud and Francis Poulenc. As early as 1934, the AEAR approached Koechlin about writing a work in protest of the Nazi imprisonment of Ernst Thaelmann (1886-1944), Secretary General of the German Communist Party.⁸⁰ Koechlin eagerly

⁷⁹ Koechlin was consistently denied an official position at the Conservatoire throughout his life. He had hoped to receive a position in 1916 through the intervention of his teacher Gabriel Fauré, and in 1926 was denied a position to replace André Gedalge as professor of counterpoint and fugue. From 1935 until 1939 he taught at the Schola Cantorum. Robert Orledge maintains that Koechlin’s independent spirit was at the root of his failure to secure a State-funded position. It seems likely, however, that his Protestant background may have also contributed to his professional difficulties. Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin (1867-1950): His Life and Works* (London: Harwood Academic Press, 1995), 12 and 16.

⁸⁰ Thaelmann was arrested by the Gestapo on March 3, 1933 and put in solitary confinement until his death at Buchenwald on August 18, 1944. Cornelius Cardew’s *Thälmann Variations* for solo piano (1974) quotes Koechlin’s composition. Cardew used it to “represent the cataclysm which overtook the German working-class movement in 1933 when Hitler came to power.” See Keith Potter, “Cornelius Cardew: Some (Postmodern?) Reflections on Experimental Music and Political Music,” in *Neue Musik, Ästhetik und*

complied and wrote a short piece that he would later describe in his memoirs as “fiercely revolutionary” (example 2.8 and figure 6).⁸¹ Entitled *Libérons Thaelmann*, the song is a strophic setting of an unambiguously anti-fascist text that makes an appeal for proletarian solidarity in the face of fascist injustice. Pierre Kaldor, music critic for *Commune*, would later claim that Koechlin’s work had shown the way for modern, revolutionary music in France.⁸²

Ex. 2.8. Charles Koechlin, *Libérons Thaelmann*, op. 138, mm. 10-19 (Verse 4).

Sourdement au début

Chorus

E -coute à Pa - ris E-coute en Pro - vance L'un - i - té d'ac - tion Mi - neurs, Pa - y - sans

Piano

p 3 3 3 3 3

parlé

Ouv - ri - ers, Sol dats Ont leur poing ten - du. Rot Front Thael mann!

ff 3 3 3 3 3

Ideologie/New Music, Aesthetics and Ideology, ed. Mark Delaere, 162-165 (Wilhelmshaven: Verlag der Heinrichshofen-Bücher, 1995).

⁸¹ Charles Koechlin, “Étude sur Charles Koechlin par lui-même,” in *Charles Koechlin (1867-1950): His Life and Works*: 313.

⁸² Pierre Kaldor, “Composition musicale et Front populaire,” *Commune* (January 1938): 631.

Fig. 6. Anonymous, *Libérons Thaelmann*, verses 1-2.

Libérons Thaelmann⁸³

*Emmuré vivant
Depuis plus d'un an
Ils torturent en toi
Le Proletariat
Dans ton cachot noir
Ne perds pas espoir
Thaelmann*

*Car les ouvriers
Sont prêts à lutter
Hitler n'aura pas
Son procès truqué
Ni pour son drapeau
Ta tête et ta peau
Thaelmann*

Free Thaelmann

*Holed-up alive
For more than a year
Through you they torture
The proletariat
In your dark dungeon
Don't lose hope
Thaelmann*

*For the workers
Are ready to fight
Hitler won't get
His rigged trial
Nor for his flag
Your head and your life
Thaelmann*

Koechlin's piece may be "fiercely revolutionary," but it still sets itself apart in important ways from the Soviet socialist realist and French proletarian songs discussed above. Most noteworthy, perhaps, is Koechlin's use of triple meter, a compositional choice that suggests that the work was conceived for concert performance rather than for performance at outdoor protests where marching rhythms were standard.⁸⁴ Furthermore, although the melodic line is relatively easy to sing and therefore suitable for amateur groups, it is not tuneful in the manner of "Au devant de la vie" or other works in a similar vein. The melody's dependence upon the immediate harmonic context, indeed, the importance of the overall harmonic movement in articulating the urgency of the text, points to the piece's strong reliance upon instrumental accompaniment. Although the spoken utterances of "Rot Front" symbolically link the work to actual protest music, the musical style of Koechlin's piece is in fact much closer to the genre of the *mélodie*. That

⁸³ Charles Koechlin, *Libérons Thaelmann pour chœur et piano* (Paris: Éditions Sociales Internationales, 1937).

⁸⁴ According to Orledge, although published in 1934, *Libérons Thaelmann* was only first performed in 1937 by the Chorale Populaire de Paris during a concert given by the Fédération Musicale Populaire at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 372-373.

said, it is a very special work indeed, for it is as strong a musical statement as Koechlin would ever write in direct sympathy for the communist cause.

In a recent overview of Koechlin's contribution to the *mélodie* repertory, Aude Caillet has suggested that the composer's interest in the "poetry of modern life" increased during the 1930s as he began to assimilate the "anti-sublime" aesthetic stance of Les Six into his own works.⁸⁵ Throughout the 1920s, Koechlin had found fault with the music-hall aesthetic adopted by his young colleagues, while remaining supportive of their musical efforts. As Caillet claims, however, during the 1930s his position evolved, and Koechlin began to recognize the contribution made by Les Six in their ability "to reconcile polytonal and free tonal languages [...] with the most traditional harmonic vocabulary."⁸⁶ Although Koechlin did not initially see the attraction of Les Six's infatuation with the "everyday" of the 1920s (represented by their interest in jazz, the circus, and the culture of nightlife) the "everyday" of the 1930s, with its strong political component, spoke strongly to the composer's long-held political convictions. *Libérons Thaelmann* can be seen as an indication of Koechlin's gradual acceptance of everyday influences in his music, which culminated in the mid-30s with his political works, but also in his sudden passion for the cinema. In *Libérons Thaelmann* we can therefore view the latent influence of the everyday aesthetics of Les Six on Koechlin's compositional approach, but also the very potent influence of the Soviet genre of mass song being promoted at the AEAR. As we shall see, it was this mixture of aesthetic elements that

⁸⁵ Aude Caillet, "La mélodie selon Charles Koechlin: Protée et l'anti-sublime," in *Francis Poulenc et la voix: texte et contexte*, ed. Alban Ramaut (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2002), 46.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

would soon come to characterize left-wing “music for the people” as the Popular Front gained in prominence.

André Gide's About-Face

I began this chapter with a discussion of French writers whose interest in Soviet culture was combined and indeed often inseparable from their faith in the positive values of Communism in the Soviet Union. The 1935 Writer's Congress in Paris and the electoral victory of the Popular Front convinced many artists that France was not impervious to this influence and that the country's collective spirit embraced the anti-fascist stance of the Left. When left-wing worker solidarity resulted in the dramatic factory occupations of May 1936, the French economy was paralysed and many felt that the Soviet revolutionary example was beginning to take root on French soil.

But the optimism was short-lived. One little book by André Gide, entitled *Retour de l'URSS*, was enough to deeply trouble the collective conscience of France's left wing. Published near the end of 1936, Gide's scathing attack on Soviet life was all the more damaging to the French Left because it came from within their ranks. Following the book's publication, Gide, who was once the feather in the cap of the intellectual coalition of the Left, was quickly ousted from these circles. His departure also provoked an exodus of fellow travelers who believed the writer's revelations about the hypocrisy of Soviet life under Stalin.

Throughout *Retour*, the depersonalization Gide encountered throughout his journey to the Soviet Union returns like a nasty leitmotif: “in order to be happy,

conform.”⁸⁷ Whether in the *kolkhozes*, the “cultural parks,” or amongst intellectuals and factory workers themselves, Gide noticed the stifling uniformity of opinion that reined in the Soviet Union. He became fully cognizant that the dictatorship of the proletariat promised by the Revolution had been supplanted by the dictatorship of Stalin: “The image of Stalin is everywhere, his name is on everybody’s lips, he is praised in every speech without exception...I don’t know if it is idolization, love or fear; always and everywhere he is there.”⁸⁸

On the subject of Soviet cultural life Gide was extremely disturbed. In *Retour* he recounts a conversation he had in a hotel lobby room with a Soviet artist that deserves to be retold here:

“You understand,” X. explained, “that was not at all what the public ask for; not at all what we want today. Previously he had written a remarkable ballet that attracted quite a lot of attention.” (“He,” was Shostakovich, who some people spoke about with the kind of praise one normally reserves for geniuses.) “But what do you want the people to do with an opera from which they can’t even hum a tune?” (What! Is that what they were concerned about! And yet X., himself an artist and very cultivated, had, up until then, always spoke with such intelligence.)

“What we need today are works that everybody can understand right away. If

⁸⁷ André Gide, *Retour de l’URSS* suivi de *Retouches à mon Retour de l’URSS* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 41.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57. “L’effigie de Staline se rencontre partout, son nom est sur toutes les bouches, sa louange revient inmanquablement dans tous les discours...Adoration, amour ou crainte, je ne sais; toujours et partout il est là.”

Shostakovich can't feel this himself, we'll really make him feel it by not listening to his works at all."⁸⁹

The opera in question was *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, and X., as Gide reveals later in his narrative, was obliged to tow the line of aesthetic conformism in light of the infamous *Pravda* article that had severely condemned Shostakovich's work.⁹⁰ Once they had left the hotel lobby and could speak in private, X., a painter, admitted to Gide that he did not really endorse what he had just said about Shostakovich. He admitted that he was obliged to say those things because "*they* were listening to us before...and my exhibition is going to open soon."⁹¹ It was this fear of punishment for transgressing aesthetic codes dictated by the State that compelled Gide to harshly criticize the USSR:

...the smallest protest, the smallest criticism can be met with the worst punishments, which, as it happens, are always kept quiet. I doubt if there is any country today, even Hitler's Germany, where the mind is less free, more skewed, more worried (terrorized), more subordinate.⁹²

Gide's about-face could not have been more dramatic, particularly considering his enthusiasm for Soviet culture and politics throughout the mid-1930s. His change of heart dismayed the Left because his criticisms simultaneously undermined both the political

⁸⁹ Ibid., 64-65.

⁹⁰ The article is reprinted under the title "Chaos Instead of Music," in *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History, revised edition*, ed. Leo Treitler, 1397-1399 (New York and London: Norton, 1998).

⁹¹ André Gide, *Retour de l'URSS*, 66.

⁹² Ibid., 55. "...la moindre protestation, la moindre critique est passible des pires peines, et du reste aussitôt étouffée. Et je doute qu'en aucun autre pays aujourd'hui, fût-ce dans l'Allemagne de Hitler, l'esprit soit moins libre, plus courbé, plus craintif (terrorisé), plus vassalisé."

position of the Communists and the anti-fascist stance of the Popular Front. Although Gide did not explicitly say so, his message was clear: if anti-fascism was inspired by faith in the political structures of the Soviet Union, the results would be no more liberating than those offered by the fascists themselves. This was damning to the French Left and radically weakened support for the Popular Front government at a time when it was confronted with its first great political challenge – the outbreak of the Spanish civil war. Gide's ideas were vastly disseminated. *Retour* was the author's greatest commercial success (the book sold 100,000 copies in two months) and was quoted or reviewed in every major left-wing publication.⁹³

In the musical world, the *Revue musicale* was one of the first to react to Gide's book. As the *Revue* had very close ties to the *Nouvelle revue française* (of which Gide was a founding member and frequent contributor), its response was somewhat predictable. But, in his review of a concert of Soviet music performed by the Orchestre Padeloup, which included works by Shostakovich, Miaskovski and Prokofiev, Robert Bernard expands upon Gide's criticism of the Soviet Union by using it to attack the new Soviet music that had recently been performed in the French capital. Bernard believed that Gide's book, while pointing out fundamental problems in Soviet society, also underscored what was delusional in French attitudes towards the Soviet Union. He argued that Gide's initial enthusiasm and ultimate rejection of the Soviet Union proved that intellectuals in France had perceived Soviet life in a skewed ("literary," "spectacular") fashion that was fuelled by "dreams" which had no basis in the reality of Soviet life.⁹⁴ Bernard could not understand how French artists could continue to be attracted to the

⁹³ David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 269.

⁹⁴ Robert Bernard, "Concert de musique soviétique," *La Revue musicale*, January 1937, 48.

cultural model being proposed by the Soviet Union. He argued that there were too many differences between artistic life in France, where “attraction to originality is the result of minds saturated with culture,” and that of the Soviet Union where artists are “forced...to act and think not out of a personal whim, but...to conform...to a common ideal.”⁹⁵ Whereas French music was concerned with “technical questions,” and “psychological expression,” Soviet music, Bernard claimed, was “standardized” and used only as a “distraction” for the people.⁹⁶ As a result, Bernard suggests, the works of Shostakovich and Miaskovski, although certainly fulfilling a social and aesthetic role in their own country could be of no use to French musicians and French society.

Despite such staunch condemnations, many left-wing sympathizers were content to hang on to their illusions about the Soviet Union and rejected Gide’s *Retour* as being symptomatic of the author’s lack of understanding and commitment to Marxist ideology. Romain Rolland, for one, called Gide’s study “extremely superficial, hasty and contradictory” and lambasted the writer in a front-page article for *L’Humanité* that bore the provocative title, “The U.S.S.R. Has Seen Others Like Him.”⁹⁷ David James Fisher has described Romain Rolland’s defense of the Soviet Union, articulated with relative disregard of mounting evidence in France of Stalin’s crimes, as “the politics of uncritical support.”⁹⁸

Pierre Kaldor, music critic for *Commune*, shared Rolland’s “uncritical support” of the Soviet Union, and simultaneously attacked Gide and Bernard in a review of the Padeloup’s Soviet concert. In it, Kaldor calls Bernard an “occupant of the ivory tower

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁷ Letter from Romain Rolland to Madeleine Rolland, 28 December 1936, *Fonds Romain Rolland*, BN Manuscrits; Romain Rolland, “L’U.R.S.S. en a vu bien d’autres. Une lettre de Romain Rolland à propos du livre d’André Gide,” *L’Humanité*, January 18, 1937.

⁹⁸ Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement*, 267-291.

and a fervent enthusiast of self-analysis.”⁹⁹ He criticizes Bernard’s condemnation of Soviet works and argues that Bernard’s conclusions are based on a fundamental miscomprehension of Soviet society and political ideology. Kaldor claims that Bernard simply did not understand that the music and aesthetics of Soviet composers had been dramatically altered as a result of the revolution. He argues that musicians like Prokofiev and Shostakovich, rather than being pawns of state-imposed aesthetics, were “animated by the combative willpower” of their revolutionary predecessors. Music, he argues, cannot exist in an autonomous space independent of the “dialectic relationships” that link art and society. Musicians who work in an ivory tower ultimately reject “the people” and prevent them from knowing and appreciating their music. Kaldor argues that the only way composers can be “appreciated and understood” is by participating in the education of the general public – by writing works the people can understand.¹⁰⁰ Kaldor’s remarks are typical of those who embraced a politics of uncritical support for the Soviet Union in the late 1930s. Rather than intellectually confronting the injustices perpetrated under Stalin, these intellectuals regularly condemned dissident opinions on the basis of inadequate understanding of Communist ideology.¹⁰¹

Although Gide’s book caused some popular support for the Communists and the Popular Front to crumble, its effect on left-wing cultural institutions was less dramatic. By the end of 1936, organizations like the Maison de la Culture and the Fédération Musicale Populaire were firmly established and continued to attract a wide-range of France’s intellectual and artistic elite. In 1937, the number of artists who identified with

⁹⁹ Pierre Kaldor, “À propos d’un article de M. Robert Bernard,” *Commune*, April 1937, 1013-1017.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1016-1017.

¹⁰¹ Two recent books continue the discussion I have begun here by scrutinizing Franco-Soviet cultural exchanges following World War II. See Michèle Alten, *Musiciens Français dans la Guerre Froide (1945-1956): L’indépendance artistique face au politique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000) and François Porcile, *Les conflits de la musique française: 1940-1965* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), especially 219-230.

the government's cultural and social aims was at an all-time high. Although founded in the context of pro-Soviet enthusiasm, organizations like the Maison de la Culture, while maintaining an anti-fascist stance, had developed a discourse that ultimately transcended slavish adherence to the Soviet cultural model or to Communist political ideology. The development of the Popular Front throughout 1935 corresponded with an increased valorization of national, as opposed to Soviet aesthetic and artistic models, exemplified, as we shall see, through the programming decisions of groups like the Chorale Populaire de Paris as well as through the Communist Party's championing of Republican symbols like *La Marseillaise* and the 14th of July. This overtly nationalist discourse had the effect of opening left-wing doors to even greater numbers of people. The influx of artists of varied political stripes into left-wing cultural organizations tended to dilute the Left's political message, while simultaneously supplying it with important cultural capital. For example, in 1938 Jean Cocteau – light-years away from endorsing a socially revolutionary aesthetic – was active both within the Maison de la Culture and as a columnist for the Communist daily, *Ce Soir*.¹⁰² Yet, as Cocteau's commentaries on politics from this period reveal, he was unable to grasp the issues and seemed to take more interest in the fact that the colors of the streamers and kerchiefs at Communist meetings were often not red, but pink, orange or violet.¹⁰³

Nowhere was the combination of nationalist discourse and Soviet musical aesthetics more pronounced than at the Fédération Musicale Populaire. As we shall see in the next chapter, many musical fellow travelers flocked to the Fédération and there, they

¹⁰² AN 104 AS 8. Cocteau signed a petition in 1938 demanding that the new government uphold the social engagements initiated by the Popular Front. He also participated in a spectacle in which he did improvised drawings at the Maison de la Culture in June of 1938. His most recent biographer, Claude Arnaud, maintains that Cocteau, despite his participation in some Popular Front events, was “at the antipodes” of the political movement. *Jean Cocteau* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 504-508.

¹⁰³ Arnaud, *Jean Cocteau*, 507.

experimented with popular Soviet genres like mass songs and folksong transcription, and participated in elaborate collective theatrical works which combined Leftist and nationalist themes. Though the FMP championed “music for the people,” it simultaneously advocated compositional freedom and independence, thus affirming its faith in musical modernity and thereby articulating its populist modernist aesthetic vision.

Chapter 3 – The Fédération Musicale Populaire

FMP Objectives

The Fédération Musicale Populaire (FMP) was officially formed on June 2, 1935. It replaced the small music section of the Association des Écrivains et des Artistes Révolutionnaires (AEAR). An internal memo written on June 21st, acknowledged the contributions of AEAR writers Jean-Richard Bloch and Paul Nizan, the musicologist Henri Radiguer, and the composer Charles Koechlin, for their roles in outlining a comprehensive program for the new organization.¹ These four founding members proposed that the FMP should pursue two main objectives within a larger mandate of bringing music closer to the people.

The first objective was to “coordinate musical efforts,” or in other words, to consolidate and centralize the activities of the different musical organizations that sought to promote the development of musical culture among the French working-class population. Through broad-based cooperation with like-minded musical groups (including amateur choral organizations, wind-bands, educational institutions, and publishing companies), the FMP hoped to publish music and present concerts, offer counsel to musical organizations, ensembles, and musicians, organize pedagogical programs (ear training and music appreciation), act as a centralized bureau for information, and participate in left-wing meetings and demonstrations.² In doing so, the FMP aimed to “form an ardent and enlightened public to whom modern musicians

¹ “La Fédération musicale populaire est constituée,” June 21, 1935, Archives Jacquet-FMP. I would like to thank Mr. Francis Jacquet, conductor of the Chorale Populaire de Lyon, for graciously allowing me access to a collection of documents relating to the FMP.

² Ibid.

[would] come with music that respond[ed] to the needs of the day.”³ The FMP believed that through involvement with the organization’s musical activities, composers would be confronted with the challenge of writing for genres (choral and band music) and venues (outdoor concerts and political rallies) with which they lacked familiarity. As prominent conductor and composer Roger Désormière (1898-1963) remarked, this new *rapprochement* between France’s musical elite and the workers could help to encourage renewal and experimentation in the world of French music.⁴

The FMP’s second objective was to “toss the vulgar, degrading music, which the bourgeoisie imposes on the people, off its throne.”⁵ Generally, the FMP aimed to challenge the widespread encroachment of unsophisticated popular music, manifest, in its view, in the ubiquitous rhythms of the tango and other popular dances. It wished to remove commodified dance music from its “throne” while simultaneously encouraging musical education and musical participation among the working-class. In order to do this, the organization had its sights set on supplying alternatives to the dance music and frivolous chansons (exemplified by popular singers like Tino Rossi) that made up the bulk of radio programming during the mid-1930s. According to the FMP, the repertory dominating the airways encouraged cultural passivity and played solely into the hands of capitalist interests. A specific solution was put forward by FMP member Louis Durey, who advocated the increased presence of “classical” music on the airwaves and suggested that the incorporation of specially designed pedagogical broadcasts could help listeners

³ Ibid., “...former un public ardent et éclairé auquel viendront les musiciens modernes avec de la musique qui réponde aux besoins du présent.”

⁴ Roger Désormière, “Le mouvement musical,” *L’Humanité*, July 14, 1936.

⁵ “La Fédération musicale populaire est constituée,” June 21, 1935, Archives Jacquet-FMP. “Il faut détrôner la musique vulgaire, avilissante que la bourgeoisie impose au peuple.”

better appreciate the works being performed.⁶ Another solution was to promote choral and band music by enticing France's elite composers to create a repertory of works "fit for the masses."⁷

Underlying all of these practical initiatives was a strong belief in anti-fascism. For the FMP, the hegemony and the ensuing limitations on individual expression inherent in the fascist political model not only presented a grave social danger, but also a *de facto* artistic one. In 1935, during the organization's infancy, there was thus one overarching goal: "to fight against fascism, to fight for a new form of culture."⁸ This slogan, with its emphasis on the "new," suggests that for the FMP anti-fascism and musical modernism could walk went hand in hand.

Membership

At its inception, the FMP was comprised of five wind-bands, four choirs, and around ten individual memberships.⁹ Throughout the following two years, buoyed by the enthusiasm surrounding the Popular Front, the organization grew rapidly to include 1220 members: twenty-four wind bands, fifteen choirs, and 102 independent individuals. In addition to this, there were over one hundred groups, though not directly affiliated, that declared themselves "sympathetic" to the organization's aims (figure 7).¹⁰

Of all these groups, the Chorale Populaire de Paris was without a doubt the most visible and dynamic. During the political apogee of the Popular Front, the Chorale was active an average of four times a week, performing at concerts and demonstrations or

⁶ Louis Durey, "La Musique et la radio," *L'Art Musical Populaire* (August-September 1937): 32.

⁷ "La Fédération musicale populaire est constituée," June 21, 1936, Archives Jacquet-FMP.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Suzanne Cointe, "Rapport général," *L'Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937): 6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

engaged in musical instruction at the Maison de la Culture.¹¹ Although grounded in the proletarian roots of the AEAR choir from which it emerged, the group's repertory gradually expanded to include works from the high-art tradition (Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*, excerpts from Handel's *Judas Maccabeus*, works by Gossec and Berlioz), as well as modern works by FMP composers.

Fig. 7. Musical groups affiliated with the FMP in May 1937.¹²

Wind bands, brass bands and jazz bands: Aix-en-Provence, Berre-l'étang, Bessancourt, Carmaux, Essonnes, Gardanne, Halluin, Hénin-Liétard, Ivry, Montigny-en-Gohelle, Belvilloise, Transports, Harmonie populaire de Paris, Métro, Paris-ville, Puteaux, Romilly, Saint-Maur, Saint-Quentin, Troyes, Villejuif, Villeneuve-St-Georges, Butte rouge, Collectif jazz.

Choirs: Chorale Populaire de Paris, Bagneux, Saint-Denis, Saint-Maur, Toulouse, Achères, Conflans, Houilles, Ivry, Nice, Chorale "Le Trait," Chorale juive, Chorale du XI^e arrondissement, Chorale du XVII^e arrondissement, Chorale de l'Université ouvrière.

Throughout 1936 and 1937 the FMP's financial situation was stable, and most of its income was derived from performances for which the Chorale Populaire de Paris had been contracted. Other income was generated through diverse concert revenues, personal and collective memberships, pedagogical instruction, and the sale of sheet music and recordings. According to a detailed financial report published in 1937 in *L'Art musical populaire*, the FMP, despite its close links to left-wing political parties, did not receive funding from the State or from the Parti Communiste.¹³

Between 1935 and 1937, the FMP succeeded in recruiting a significant number of France's most prestigious composers. Although the organization consisted primarily of composers born around 1900, it also attracted senior composers like Charles Koechlin

¹¹ Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion : Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire 1935-1938* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 301. See also the article by Juliette Pary "La musique et les ouvriers," *Regards*, September 17, 1935.

¹² Suzanne Cointe, "Rapport général," 6.

¹³ Gilbert Thomas, "Rapport financier," *L'Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937): 4-5.

(1867-1950) and Albert Roussel (1869-1937). Many different institutional and professional affiliations were represented among composers within the organization; members of the Société Internationale de Musique Contemporaine, four former members of Les Six, André Jolivet of the newly-formed “Jeune France,” professors at the Paris Conservatoire, two former members of Satie’s École d’Arcueil, former pupils and teachers from the Schola Cantorum, as well as Jacques Ibert (named director of the Villa Medici in 1937) all participated, in one way or another, in the work of the Fédération Musicale Populaire (figure 8).

Fig. 8. Administrative Organization of the FMP in May 1937.¹⁴

Honorary President: Romain Rolland

President: Albert Roussel

Executive Committee: Georges Auric, Brunot, Suzanne Cointe, Gilbert Thomas, Gruffy, Henry Sauveplane, Hanri Radiguer, Alice Pillot, Léon Moussinac, Roger Désormière, Détruit, Krob, Robert Eon.

Artistic Committee: Charles Koechlin (president), Georges Auric, Elsa Barraine, William Cantrelle, Roger Desormière, Henri-Bertrand Etcheverry, Arthur Honegger, André Jolivet, Daniel Lazarus, Locatelli, Darius Milhaud, Léon Moussinac, Marcel Moyse, Henri Radiguer, Albert Roussel, Henry Sauveplane, Devaux, Savoye, Serret, J.-C. Simon, Peters-Rosset.

Editorial Committee: Henry and Marguerite Sauveplane (director), Georges Auric, Charles Koechlin, Henri Radiguer, J.-C. Simon, Peters-Rosset.

Composers: Georges Auric, Elsa Barraine, Henri Cliquet-Pleyel, Louis Durey, Marius-François Gaillard, Jean Hubeau, André Jolivet, Michel Lévy, Marcel Landowski, Charles Koechlin, Daniel Lazarus, Henri Sauveplane, Reynold Thiel, Albert Roussel, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Jacques Ibert, Marcel Delannoy, Maurice Jaubert.

Performers, Conductors: William Cantrelle, Roger Désormière, Henri-Bertrand Etcheverry, Marinette Fenoyer, Marianne Gonitch, Mme Secondi, M. Modesti, Mme Fabrègue, M. Morot, M. Guinard.

Furthermore, the organization, which also boasted an impressive membership of factory workers and middle-class urban dwellers, attracted prominent intellectuals from

¹⁴ Suzanne Cointe, “Rapport d’organisation,” 3.

other artistic fields including the writers Louis Aragon, Jean-Richard Bloch, Romain Rolland, and Léon Moussinac. Ultimately, the FMP united composers, intellectuals, musicians, amateurs and music enthusiasts – regardless of their personal political beliefs – around a single objective: to make music more accessible to the people, particularly the working class.

Historical Antecedents

The FMP's mission to improve accessibility through performance and education programs was indebted to a long line of similar initiatives dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century. One of the earliest and most significant of these was the *orphéon* (choral singing) movement. Designed as social clubs that offered musical and artistic instruction for working-class men, the *orphéons* were organized by local municipal authorities, parish representatives and, later in the century, factory owners. The movement evolved into a huge network of choral groups, wind ensembles and brass bands. By the turn of the century, competitions and high profile concerts were regularly organized to promote the *orphéon* movement, which by then was active throughout the entire country.¹⁵

These initiatives developed in parallel with the institutionalized expansion of orchestral concerts for “popular” audiences. Françoise Andrieux has traced the growth of *concerts populaires* and has shown that these events typically featured works of an easy-listening variety (excerpts of *opéra comique*, symphonies, and virtuosic pieces from the

¹⁵ For an overview of the history of the orpheon movement see Philippe Gumpłowicz, *Les Travaux d'Orphée* (Paris: Aubier, 1987). On the political thrust of the movement during the nineteenth century, see Jane F. Fulcher, “The Orpheon Societies: *Music for the Workers* in Second-Empire France,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 10 (1979): 47-56.

Romantic period) presented to a mass audience at low cost.¹⁶ As a rule, modern works were excluded from popular concerts, and these performances, like Jules Pacheloup's *Concerts populaires* (inaugurated in 1861), took place in large concert halls like the Trocadéro or Châtelet theatres.¹⁷ In 1898 under Albert Carré, the Opéra-Comique also began presenting *spectacles populaires* that offered standards of the repertory at reduced prices. The troupe of the Opéra-Comique also performed in different theatres in working class areas of the city between 1904 and 1906, a practice which, as we shall see in Chapter 6, FMP member Daniel Lazarus attempted to revive in 1936.

A more adventurous initiative in the same vein was Victor Charpentier's *Grandes Auditions Populaires et Gratuites du Trocadéro*, which began in 1905. Indeed, by the turn of the century, the use of the word "popular" (*populaire*) implied an understanding and acknowledgment of the growing social demands of the working classes. This political aspect is reflected in many aspects of fin-de-siècle cultural life, particularly in the increased advocacy of musical education for the urban masses and the encouragement of active participation in performances of "high-art" music. Gustave Charpentier's "Conservatoire Mimi Pinson" was exemplary in this regard, for it trained working-class women for musical participation in professional productions of the composer's own works, particularly the open-air spectacle, *La Couronnement de la Muse*.¹⁸ Another important development was Albert Doyen's *Les Fêtes du Peuple*, a choir formed in 1919 that was comprised partly of workers and which performed well-known repertory of the

¹⁶ Françoise Andrieux, "Gustave Charpentier artiste social: Contribution à l'étude de l'éducation musicale populaire" (PhD diss., Université de Paris IV, 1985), 48-62.

¹⁷ On Pacheloup's concerts see Elisabeth Bernard, "Jules Pacheloup et les Concerts Populaires," *Revue de musicologie* 57 (1971): 150-178.

¹⁸ Andrieux, "Gustave Charpentier artiste social," 134. For complementary information see Mary Ellen Poole, "Gustave Charpentier and the Conservatoire populaire de Mimi Pinson," *19th-Century Music* 20 (1997): 231-52.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Berlioz, and Wagner). It was very successful throughout the 1920s and sung to large audiences, who were invited to actively participate in the group's concerts, in a "vast project of self-education."¹⁹

As Pascal Ory has suggested, the FMP represented the "third generation" in this ongoing process of musical democratization.²⁰ What set the FMP apart from earlier efforts, was the explicit politicization of its musical and pedagogical activities within the framework of contemporaneous left-wing politics. Indeed, the FMP's musical agenda, rather than being generally informed by socialist idealism, was intimately linked to the political goals and tactics of popular frontism. The musical action of the FMP was unmistakably underlined by general left-wing anti-fascist sentiment, which was combined with a call for a collaborative effort aimed at ensuring greater social equality and valorization of the working class. In short, it aimed to unlock the cultural potential of the working class, and to supply it with the keys to musical self-expression within the explicit context of Popular Front political action. It also sought to introduce and cultivate an interest in modern music among workers. By doing so, it differentiated itself from the beleaguered *orphéon* movement whose repertory remained stalled within nineteenth-century conventions.²¹ The *orphéons*, despite providing an example of working-class, "communal" musical expression, received little encouragement from the FMP or the Popular Front – both groups probably viewed them as aesthetically outdated, and (given the ascendancy of Leninist-Marxist thought in the 1930s) politically anachronistic.

¹⁹ Nancy Sloan Goldberg, "Unanimism in the Concert Hall: *Les Fêtes du Peuple*, 1919-1939," *The French Review* 65 (April 1992): 785. See also Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 126-133.

²⁰ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 296.

²¹ Henry Prunières, *La Revue musicale* (January 1935): 56.

The FMP and the Maison de la Culture

The Fédération was one of the most successful cultural groups working under the auspices of its parent organization, the Maison de la Culture. The Maison de la Culture, like the FMP, was built upon ideological and administrative foundations established by the AEAR. In fact, by mid-1935 the Maison de la Culture replaced the AEAR, a development that many members viewed as inevitable and salutary. According to left-wing writer René Blech, from the ideological standpoint of Popular Front politics, the narrowly defined and highly partisan objectives of the AEAR had come to represent “a formula that no longer corresponded to the requirements of the epoch.”²² Whereas the AEAR had advocated relatively strict emulation of Soviet cultural practices and aesthetics, the Maison sought to implement a cultural program that resonated with French artistic traditions, and which would be widely attractive for a large spectrum of the French population. As a result, the Maison successfully placed itself at the very epicenter of left-wing cultural activity in the country. In essence, it functioned as the unofficial coordinator of the vast “cultural front” that had grown up around the politics of the French Communist Party and the Popular Front. Its primary role was to encourage communication between the different artistic disciplines, and thereby promote the development of a multidisciplinary community of elite artists unified by a common desire to reach out to the masses. By facilitating broad-based solidarity among intellectuals, artists and the working class, the Maison fulfilled an indispensable role within the cultural world of the Popular Front.

The Maison’s drive for solidarity across different artistic disciplines proved extremely successful. By 1937, it could count eleven important affiliations and over

²² René Blech, *Commune*, April 1936. Quoted in Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 121.

70,000 members. These members included some of the most prominent artists and intellectuals of the time, and a large number of workers who, as a result of the forty-hour workweek, now had time to partake in its activities. The Maison attracted many artists including writers, theatre directors, actors, film directors, photographers, decorators, *metteurs-en-scène*, musicians, outdoor enthusiasts, and youth groups. It sponsored publications, including the influential journals *Commune* and *Europe* and its activities were routinely covered by the Communist dailies *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*. The Maison had branches, or “cultural circles” (*cercles culturels*) throughout France, with important centers in Lyons, Marseille, Nantes, Grenoble, Bordeaux, Nice, and Cannes. Its influence was also felt outside continental France, with centers in Tunis as well as in Algiers where the young writer, Albert Camus, took part in its activities (figure 9).²³

Fig. 9. Associations affiliated with the Maison de la Culture (1937).²⁴

L'Association française des écrivains pour la défense de la culture
 L'Union des théâtres indépendants de France
 Ciné-Liberté
 La Fédération musicale populaire
 L'Association des peintres, sculpteurs et graveurs
 La Fédération photographique du travail
 Le Mouvement d'art mural
 Les Jeunes architectes-décorateurs-urbanistes
 La Maison de la technique
 Camping et culture
 La Fédération de l'enfance

The Maison de la Culture in Paris was extremely dynamic, and it regularly called upon high-profile specialists to conduct weekly events at its headquarters in the rue de Navarin. For example, the Maison sponsored lectures by Lucien Febvre on Marxism, by

²³ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 123.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

Le Corbusier on architectural projects for the ideal city, by André Malraux on French art, and by Georges Auric on Erik Satie.²⁵ They were held in the evening to allow for the attendance of workers, and the tone of these conferences was both convivial and didactic. Periodically, rather than follow a lecture format, the Thursday evening rendezvous was dedicated to a debate, often over material published in *Commune*.²⁶

In the most important “cultural circles” of the Maison de la Culture, a “bureau de spectacles” was opened, where organizations or individuals could hire groups affiliated with the Maison for concerts, plays, the organization of galas, or public readings. During the years of the Maison’s greatest influence (1936-37), these “bureaus” were extremely active. One might say that the Maison de la Culture became the impresario of the Popular Front, using the different *bureaux de spectacles* (especially the one in Paris) to coordinate and produce many cultural events for the government, including ambitious theatrical productions like Romain Rolland’s *Le 14 Juillet* (discussed in Chapter 5) and Jean-Richard Bloch’s *Naissance d’une Cité* (discussed in Chapter 7). These events, which relied almost solely on government funding and sponsorship, were naturally intended to closely represent the Popular Front’s ideological commitments.²⁷ No doubt as a result of the Maison’s high profile for government contracts, many performers – musicians, music-hall and circus performers, *chansonniers*, comedians – independently contacted the bureaus in order to propose their services.²⁸ In this sense these *bureaux de spectacles* were an essential tool for the Maison because they functioned as an intermediary between the government and the Maison’s affiliated organizations and individuals.

²⁵ Ibid., 124; AN 104 AS 9.

²⁶ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 124.

²⁷ Ibid., 125.

²⁸ Much of this correspondence is preserved in AN 104 AS 9.

Political Neutrality?

Despite the Maison's direct lineage to the AEAR and the presence of Communist intellectuals in the highest echelons of the new organization's administration (for example, Louis Aragon and René Blech), the Maison was careful not to overtly emphasize its affiliation with this political party. Although its pedagogical efforts, indeed its entire platform, found its roots within Communist ideology, amazingly enough it actually attempted to present itself as an apolitical entity. Louis Aragon applauded this facade of political neutrality, for he understood that "all of this, which seems apolitical, is in line with the political game of exterior forces and may, as such, be used for political ends."²⁹ Indeed, organizers believed that maintaining a seemingly apolitical climate at the Maison was the best way to bring people closer to an acceptance of Communist ideology. To quote Aragon once again: "[w]hat we are most interested in are those people who are in the zone of influence of legitimate Communist supporters and who, by this very fact, can first be brought to act in the general realm of culture."³⁰

These same tactics were also employed at the Fédération Musicale Populaire. Few of the well-known members of the FMP ever became card-carrying Communists, and many, no doubt, simply joined out of sympathy for a cause that resonated with their liberal and humanist values. Others were surely attracted to the organization for reasons having little to do with political ideology: commissions, appointments, media coverage and professional contacts were just some of the possible fringe benefits of being associated with this youthful and dynamic organization. It is unlikely, however, that

²⁹ From a speech delivered by Louis Aragon on February 21, 1937. Quoted in Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 126.

³⁰ Louis Aragon, *Commune*, March 1936. Quoted in Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 126-127. "Ce qui nous intéresse le plus, ce sont ces éléments qui sont dans la zone d'influence des militants déclarés et qui, par ce fait même, peuvent être d'abord fixés sur le plan très général de la culture."

composers joined the FMP completely unaware of the political issues at stake. Most, if not all, were undoubtedly attracted by some aspects of the Communist platform – whether cultural, social, or political – without, however, necessarily endorsing it *en bloc*. Even the organization’s presidents during the Popular Front (Albert Roussel and Charles Koechlin) abstained from obtaining official Party membership.³¹ For the Popular Front, each new participant – whether Communist, Socialist, Radical, Catholic, or politically unaligned liberal thinker – strengthened the coalition’s united “front” against fascism. Even if members joined the FMP for apolitical reasons, their presence could still be manipulated (to reiterate Aragon) “for political ends.”

Education

Education was a central element of the FMP’s mandate, and both FMP presidents expounded their views on the matter during the Popular Front period. Albert Roussel, whose influence on the organization was no doubt limited as a result of his feeble health during the last years of his life, made his ideas clear in a number of articles. He was conscious that technology was making music increasingly available outside of the concert hall. Not only had music become a pervasive element of modern life, but the forms and styles of music that people could listen to were extremely varied. In an article entitled “Know how to choose,” Roussel argued that never before were people so in need of guides to be able to discern “good music” from “bad music,” a topic which, as we shall see, was also actively debated within the FMP. Roussel felt that people should be shown how modern works are indebted to masterpieces of the past, and believed that the preservation and dissemination of these works was an important factor in bringing about

³¹ The organization’s third president, Louis Durey, was a PCF member.

“serenity” in a troubled world. In Roussel’s words, “faith in spiritual values forms the basis for any civilized society, and Music, of all the arts, is the highest and most sensitive expression of these values.”³²

Other articles followed, in which Roussel argued that the national school system should make a greater commitment to music education. Here, his comments directly reflected those of many important members of the Popular Front government, in particular Georges Huisman (1899-1957) who presided over the ministry of Beaux-Arts between 1934 and 1940. Huisman pleaded for a greater democratization of music, and asked the government in 1937 whether it was possible “to treat the teaching of fine arts and music at the same level as math and geography.”³³ Roussel, like many other members of the FMP, was upset that despite its official place in primary and elementary curricula, teachers often neglected the instruction of music in favour of other subjects and activities.³⁴ Lucien Lair, a Communist implicated in music education, also expressed his worries to the FMP over the lack of musical training in school, a situation that he felt would lead to decreased participation in amateur wind-bands and choirs once children graduated.³⁵ Roussel shared his concerns, for he believed that although music was beginning to lose the stigma of being an exclusively “bourgeois” pastime in France, the country was still far behind many other European countries in ensuring that musical education was as democratic as possible.³⁶ For children coming from a proletarian

³² Albert Roussel, “Savoir choisir,” in *Lettres et écrits*, ed. Nicole Labelle, 282-283 (Paris: Flammarion, 1987).

³³ Georges Huisman, “À propos des rapports de l’art et de l’Etat (29 April, 1937),” in *Mélanges d’esthétique et de science d’art offerts Étienne Souriau, professeur à la Sorbonne*, ed. Étienne Souriau, 125-127 (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1952).

³⁴ Alice Pellet, “L’organisation actuelle de l’enseignement dans les établissements de l’État: La méthode André Gédalge,” *L’Art Musical Populaire* (August-September 1937): 22-23.

³⁵ Lucien Lair, “L’éducation musicale à l’école,” *L’Art Musical Populaire* (August-September 1937): 22.

³⁶ Albert Roussel, “La musique à l’école,” in *Lettres et écrits*, 283.

background, musical instruction could only be assured by the schools; as a result, Roussel recommended that ear-training and choral singing become a mandatory part of primary instruction.

Following Roussel's death, Charles Koechlin became the president of the FMP. As we have seen in *Libérons Thaelmann*, Koechlin's left-wing credentials were impeccable. In 1937 at the FMP's second annual congress, the musicologist Henri Radiguer even referred to Koechlin as "the Jules Guèsde of the FMP," a comparison that spoke not only to the composer's political orientation but also to his legendary flowing beard.³⁷ Like his predecessor, Koechlin outlined a program for popular musical education that was published as a series of articles for *L'Humanité*.³⁸ Koechlin's ideas mirror those of Roussel in important ways, but he was more emphatic in his primary thesis: that musical culture could not be optimally developed without a reorganization of society that allowed workers a greater amount of leisure time.³⁹ Koechlin would soon see some of this "reorganization" thanks to the initiatives of Léo Lagrange, the Minister in charge of new programs designed to promote activities as diverse as biking, camping, amateur aviation and the youth hostelling movement for workers and their families. Koechlin believed that choral singing should be more broadly encouraged as an amateur activity as well, because he was aware of the excellent results that amateur choirs (like the AEAR) were capable of producing. Along with Roussel, he believed musical literacy should be taught at school

³⁷ Henri Radiguer, *L'Art Musical Populaire* (September-October, 1937): 20. Jules Guèsde (1845-1922) helped form the Socialist Party of France in 1900. It eventually merged with the French Socialist Party under Jean Jaurès, in 1905.

³⁸ "Culture musicale de la Nation: chant choral et solfège," March 8, 1936; "Culture musicale de la Nation: petits orchestres et harmonies," March 29, 1936; "Culture musicale de la Nation: musique mécanique," April 19, 1936; "Education musicale de la Nation: concerts par audition directe," May 18, 1936; "Education musicale de la Nation: le répertoire," June 28, 1936. These articles are also included in Koechlin's book, *La musique et le peuple* (Paris: Editions Sociales Internationales, 1936).

³⁹ Charles Koechlin, "Culture musicale de la Nation: chant choral et solfège," *L'Humanité*, March 8, 1936.

and that music history should be included in general historical instruction.⁴⁰ Koechlin had mixed views about the educational role of what he called “musique mécanique” which included the radio, recorded music and film music. He worried that these forms of musical production would lessen the stature of music and turn it into an unrewarding diversion, rather than a locus of contemplation. Although he acknowledged that they could all be used to excellent ends, he felt that in order for them to be effective as a tool for mass education, workers would have to learn to listen attentively. Koechlin also worried about the programming decisions of radio executives whom he feared did not view the people’s musical education as a high priority. He conceded that the value of discs was located in their capacity to introduce workers to a variety of music, but he pleaded with city dwellers not to neglect the experience of hearing live music from which they could learn so much more.⁴¹ Koechlin felt that there should be more *concerts populaires* devoted to chamber music and complained that these forms of concerts, which typically featured traditional symphonic repertory in large halls with poor acoustics, did a disservice to the people. He also suggested that concert organizers receive tax exemptions and state subsidies in order to keep ticket prices low. Furthermore, he encouraged the development of free concerts within the school system to be given by young musicians for a small fee.⁴² Finally, Koechlin encouraged amateur musical groups to be more curious in their repertory choices. He regretted that works from earlier periods, whether Italian madrigals or eighteenth-century oratorios, rarely figured on concert programs of these organizations. He hoped that they would perform with more frequency modern

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Charles Koechlin, “Culture musicale de la Nation: musique mécanique,” *L’Humanité*, April 19, 1936.

⁴² Charles Koechlin, “Education musicale de la Nation: concerts par audition directe,” *L’Humanité*, May 18, 1936.

harmonizations of France's folklore – works by Debussy, Fauré, Maurice Emmanuel, Paul Ladmirault, and Charles Bordes.⁴³ Koechlin felt that the modern wind-band repertory was altogether insufficient and condemned the “vulgarity” often present in this music. He made it one of the FMP's mandates to promote the composition of works for these ensembles.

Venues

Music is everywhere. From the concert hall to the theatre, where it was once kept distant and revered, it has moved to the street, it mixes with the masses and, led or dragged by science, it is installed in bourgeois living-rooms, in the worker's bedroom, in the pub or in the workshop, in the cars of the express trains, and even in the taxi where it keeps a client company for a few minutes.⁴⁴

Albert Roussel's description, which depicts music's ubiquitous presence in everyday experiences of modern life, points to the multiplicity of venues and modes of musical transmission that were available to a composer during the mid-1930s. With the rapid expansion of recording and transmission technologies, the theatre and concert hall were slowly being abandoned, a characteristic of modern life that the director of the Opéra,

⁴³ Charles Koechlin, “Education musicale de la Nation: le répertoire,” June 28, 1936. That Koechlin painted a composer like Bordes (who helped found the Schola Cantorum in 1894) as an example to emulate is noteworthy in light of Jane F. Fulcher's recent claim that the Fédération Musicale Populaire “attacked” the Schola Cantorum “in unambiguously political terms.” *The Composer as Intellectual*, 221-222.

⁴⁴ Albert Roussel, “Savoir choisir,” in *Lettres et écrits*, 282. “La musique est partout. De la salle de concert, du théâtre, où elle se tenait autrefois, distante et respectée, elle est descendue dans la rue, elle s'est mêlée à la foule et, conduite ou traînée par la science, elle s'est trouvée installée dans le salon du bourgeois, dans la chambre du travailleur, à la brasserie ou à l'atelier, dans le wagon du rapide et jusque dans le taxi où elle tient compagnie au client de quelques minutes.”

Jacques Rouché, viewed as cause for concern in an article penned in 1932.⁴⁵ Arthur Honegger, writing in 1936, claimed that having a box at the Opéra “is no longer in the norms of contemporary snobbism” and that “today, the so-called ‘enlightened’ public goes from the stadium to the cinema, works the buttons on their radio set or plays a disc.”⁴⁶

The FMP was aware of these shifts and looked to capitalize upon them. They recognized that the masses had to be reached on their own turf, leading Suzanne Cointe to claim that the FMP was the “organization of the streets of Paris and the interpreter of the wishes, dreams [and] struggles of the Parisian population.”⁴⁷ An essential aspect of its musical program entailed aligning both the performances of its groups and the compositional output of its composers with those venues and modes of transmission that directly addressed the masses: stadiums, political rallies, cinemas, the radio, popular *fêtes*, and the street demonstration.

An example of this approach – many more will be discussed in the following chapters – took place during the commemoration of the centenary of Rouget de Lisle’s death, organized by the Communist Party at Choisy-Le-Roi in late June 1936. Suzanne Cointe later referred to this event, for which the FMP assembled many of its associated groups from outside Paris and at least 1200 amateur performers, as an important episode in the organization’s development.⁴⁸ The celebrations took place over four days and included two performances by the FMP: one at the Salle Pleyel (joined by, notably, Albert Doyen’s choir, *Les Fêtes du Peuple*), and one at the municipal stadium in Choisy-

⁴⁵ Jacques Rouché, “L’Opéra et les mœurs nouvelles,” *Revue des deux mondes* (July 1, 1932): 68-84.

⁴⁶ Arthur Honegger, “Autre vision,” *La page musicale*, March 20, 1936; reproduced in Arthur Honegger, *Écrits*, ed. Huguette Calmel (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1992), 144.

⁴⁷ Suzanne Cointe, “Rapport d’organisation,” *L’Art musicale populaire* (August-September, 1937): 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

Le-Roi. The works performed during these two events reflect what was gradually becoming something of a Popular Front canon of composers: Rouget de Lisle, Gossec, Beethoven, Félicien David, and Berlioz.

The political stakes surrounding the commemoration were high, for Choisy-le-Roi was one of the few suburbs in the Parisian “red belt” that had not yet voted a Communist deputy to the Chamber. In opposition to the Communist-organized celebration, the “establishment” also scheduled a commemorative event at Choisy-Le-Roi that included performances by artists from the Opéra, Opéra-Comique and the Comédie-Française.⁴⁹ The FMP’s strategy was therefore not only to strengthen its symbolic ties (and those of the Communist Party) with France’s revolutionary heritage, but also to incite the population of this suburb to understand these links as well. The Communist representative at the event, Maurice Thorez, triumphantly announced:

The workers, hearing the call of the Communist Party, have relearned *La Marseillaise*. They have given it back its significance and its revolutionary flame. Isn’t it significant that our Communist Party [...] had the initiative for these grandiose popular demonstrations to mark the centenary of the death of Rouget de Lisle?⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Sylvie Rab, “La commémoration du centenaire de la mort de Rouget de Lisle à Choisy-Le-Roi, en Juin 1936,” in *Les Usages politiques des fêtes aux XIXe-XXe siècles*, eds. Alain Corbin, Noëlle Gêrôme and Danielle Tartakowsky, 291-304 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994).

⁵⁰ Cited in Rab, “La commémoration du centenaire de la mort de Rouget de Lisle à Choisy-Le-Roi,” 301-302. Thorez’s speech was printed in *L’Humanité* on 27 June 1936. “Les travailleurs, à l’appel du Parti communiste, ont réappris *La Marseillaise*. Ils lui ont restitué sa signification et sa flamme révolutionnaire. N’est-il pas significatif que notre Parti communiste [...] ait eu l’initiative de ces grandioses manifestations populaires à l’occasion du centenaire de la mort de Rouget de Lisle?”

Ex. 3.1. Charles Koechlin, *La Victoire* – choral pour musique d'harmonie, op. 153, no. 3, mm. 1-11.

[illegible]

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Chorale, and other groups like it, brought the music of FMP composers to venues radically different from those considered standard during the 1930s. For the most part, the FMP shied away from the use of radio and cinema as a means of transmitting its message, and focused its energy on live performances that would engage the masses on their own terrain and which would actively encourage workers to partake in the organization's activities.

Fig. 10. La Chorale Populaire de Paris performing for workers at a factory in Montrouge during the 1936 strikes. (Photo Pierre Jamet)⁵¹



Musical Aesthetics at the FMP

The musical aesthetics of the FMP were largely formulated by the organization's presidents, Albert Roussel and Charles Koechlin, as well as by its numerous members: Roger Désormière, Henri-Cliquet Pleyel, André Jolivet, Maurice Jaubert and others. As members of the organization, each of these individuals wrote or spoke passionately on

⁵¹ Reproduced in Robert Brécy, *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire* (Paris: Editions Hier et Demain, 1978), 282.

topics pertaining to the intersection of music and politics during this period. They questioned the role of modern composers in contemporary society and the place of music in the lives of the French population. Within the FMP, this ongoing debate was rich and nuanced, and touched on several key topics pertaining to the composer's relationship to "the people." This included considerations about the importance of "rules" in composition as opposed to an approach informed by "instinct" and "naivety," the use of folk and popular idioms, as well as modernist and atonal idioms in modern music for the masses, and the value of *l'art pour l'art* in a political climate dominated by the social concerns of the masses.

Despite the wide diversity of FMP membership, the organization's aesthetic vision – particularly as it pertained to the composition of "music for the people" – was particularly well defined. The FMP's advocacy of what I have termed populist modernism expressed itself in many ways, whether through musical works written by its members, the organization's pedagogical efforts on behalf of the working class, or the types of musical events that it participated in.

In the summer of 1937, coinciding with the *Exposition des arts et des techniques dans la vie moderne* (discussed in Chapter 7), the FMP held its second annual congress, the complete transcript of which is reproduced in the organization's journal, *L'Art musical populaire*. This meeting helped to further consolidate the aesthetic platform of the FMP, which was increasingly dominated by the following themes: the desire for compositional "freedom," the integration of popular sources, the search for popular audiences, and musical education for the masses. As we shall see, the pronouncements of the FMP's two Popular Front presidents (Albert Roussel and Charles Koechlin), as well as those of a number of FMP members (expressed both within *L'Art Musical Populaire* or

other widely distributed sources), articulated a uniform aesthetic vision for the FMP, and one which would have profound influences on the musical efforts of the organization.

Freedom

As noted above, the FMP's membership consisted of a diverse cast of musicians who were drawn from various educational backgrounds and professional affiliations. Composers with highly developed views about the social utility of music (like Koechlin, Auric, Wiéner and Durey) cohabited in the organization alongside liberal-minded figures whose political views on art and culture, though undoubtedly sympathetic to the FMP's overall aims, were less clearly defined. In many respects, however, such inconsistencies in political opinion amongst composers did not prevent the FMP from attempting to establish a unified aesthetic approach. In fact, in terms of musical style, the FMP did advocate implicit "norms." These are so prominent that it is possible to perceive stylistic commonalities among the works produced by members of the organization. At the same time, the FMP did not advertise aesthetic formulas like "socialist realism" – viewed as being too artistically limiting – but rather promoted "freedom" (*liberté*) in musical composition and artistic expression. As Communist supporter Roger Désormière explained during the FMP's congress in 1937: "[i]t is necessary then that the goals pursued by the FMP include the struggle for modern music, which can be reduced, in a way, to freedom of thought and the freedom to express yourself in whatever language suits you and as you like."⁵² In many ways, "freedom" became an FMP catchword,

⁵² Roger Désormière, "La défense de la culture musicale," *L'Art musical populaire* (August-September, 1937): 18. "Il faut donc que dans les buts que la FMP va poursuivre, figure la lutte pour la musique moderne et ça se résume, en quelque sorte, par la liberté de penser et la liberté de s'exprimer dans le langage qui vous convient et comme vous le voulez."

carrying with it unspoken and implicit stylistic directives. In the context of the FMP, “freedom” stood for a particular type of modernism, one that rejected many aspects of the Romantic nineteenth-century musical heritage, and which embraced the confrontational modernism of the 1920s – particularly that of Les Six and Erik Satie.

Henri Cliquet-Pleyel: Good and Bad Music

To understand the type of “freedom” advocated at the FMP, we may consider what was said by composer Henri Cliquet-Pleyel at the 1937 congress. Cliquet-Pleyel, who like Désormière had been a pupil of Koechlin and later a member of Satie’s informal *École d’Arcueil*, gave a speech provocatively entitled “Good and Bad Music.” In it, he charts an aesthetic course for the FMP, one in which he envisages a “constant exchange in both directions” between the musical elite and the masses.⁵³ For Cliquet-Pleyel, the time “when we listened to music with our head in our hands” has passed. He provocatively claims that “boring” music of the grand symphonic tradition is the worst music of all.⁵⁴ He also indicts those people who have been so well “fed” by the music of nineteenth-century masters that they “look down upon works that are simpler, more direct, of a popular vein, and which because of this are seen to be in bad taste.”⁵⁵ As Jane Fulcher has remarked, Cliquet-Pleyel’s pronouncements seem to take aim at the aesthetic vision promoted by the Schola Cantorum (typified by composers like d’Indy, Ropartz and Busser), but also of the entire nineteenth-century legacy of composers “obediently in

⁵³ Henri Cliquet-Pleyel, “La bonne et la mauvaise musique,” *L’Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937): 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* “Bien des musiciens, habitués depuis longtemps à la fréquentation des grands Maîtres et ayant nourri leurs oreilles et leurs cerveau de tout ce que le génie musical a produit de plus pur et de plus sublime, sont amenés à mépriser des oeuvres plus simples, plus directes, d’une essence populaire, et qui pour cela leur semblent de mauvais goût.”

quest of the qualities of the “pure” and “sublime”.⁵⁶ Cliquet-Pleyel frowns upon certain “symphonies, in which the paucity of ideas is made even worse by vulgarity and the false grandeur of style,” and aims to remind people that such works should not be regarded as “good music” simply because they are performed in concert halls.⁵⁷

On the other hand, Cliquet-Pleyel praises modern popular music for its dynamism and melodic appeal and claims that many modern-day *chansons* possess qualities that could enable them to become classics in their own right. This is reminiscent of Jean Cocteau’s enthusiastic statements about *chanson* and jazz from the early 1920s. Yet Cliquet-Pleyel does not condone all popular music, stressing that “there are good tangos and bad, excellent foxtrots and others which are mediocre, waltzes with an admirable melodic movement, and others that are completely insipid.”⁵⁸ Clearly, however, Cliquet-Pleyel urges the FMP to embrace modern popular music because of its ubiquity within the everyday lives of the workers. He urges the FMP to be aware of “false intellectualism” and to write music that is “social above all, and more dynamic than ever.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, he stresses that the FMP should aim to eliminate in music “everything that selfish bourgeois culture has wanted [...] to inculcate the people with, in its attempt to exhaust and burden it with hardships and fascisms of all sorts.”⁶⁰ The optimism with which he ends his speech is typical of the left-wing rhetoric of the period:

⁵⁶ Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 222.

⁵⁷ Cliquet-Pleyel, “La bonne et la mauvaise musique,” 19. “Mais n’oublions pas qu’il y a des symphonies où la pauvreté des idées est encore aggravée par la vulgarité ou la fausse grandeur du style...Il ne faudrait pas prendre cela pour de la bonne musique parce qu’elle est dite “de concert” et, parfois, assez difficile à exécuter.”

⁵⁸ Ibid., 18. “Il y a de bons tangos et de mauvais, des fox-trott [*sic*] excellents et d’autres plus que médiocres, des valse d’un adorable mouvement mélodique, et d’autres parfaitement insipides.”

⁵⁹ Ibid. “Ce cabotinage de faux intellectuel doit cesser devant les temps nouveaux, et je suis persuadé que le devoir et le but de la musique, à présent, est d’être avant tout sociale et plus dynamique que jamais.”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 19. “Il faudra déraciner dans l’amour que le peuple porte actuellement à la musique tout ce que l’égoïste culture bourgeoise y a voulu, de tous temps, implanter, afin d’essayer de l’abrutir, pour l’assujettir aux servages et aux fascismes de toutes sortes.”

And this will be the conclusion of my exposé: the immense hope that I have to one day see composers preoccupied with following the liberating current of our epoch; to see them imbue their songs for the masses, each day more enlightened and sensitive to beauty, the part of the sublime which is owed to them in the universal order. One day, we will all work in this way, and then we will no longer have to anxiously ask ourselves questions about what kind of music we are writing: we will be certain that it will be “good” music!⁶¹

Charles Koechlin: True and False Music

No sooner had Cliquet-Pleyel finished exposing these views did Charles Koechlin give a similarly conceived exposé entitled, “True and False Popular Music.” Claiming that composers should remain “free” by avoiding “concessions,” he too recognizes the important role to be played by popular music in modern works intended for mass audiences. He also finds value in modern urban music (a shift in his aesthetic already noted in his 1935 work, *Libérons Thaelmann*) and admits that in certain cases there is beauty “in the little movie song” or in the popular refrains of an *opérette* composer like Maurice Yvain.⁶² Although he comes down hard on the tango, calling it “a pretext for groping,” he confesses that “it is also a form of popular art, and in some circumstances, it

⁶¹ Ibid. “Et ceci sera la conclusion de mon exposé, l’immense espoir que j’ai de voir un jour les compositeurs préoccupés avant tout de suivre le grand courant libérateur dont s’exalte notre époque, d’insuffler par leurs chants aux masses de jour en jour plus éclairées et plus sensibles à la beauté, la part sublime qui leur est dévolue dans l’ordre universel. Un jour, nous travaillerons tous dans cet esprit, et alors nous n’aurons plus besoin de nous interroger plus ou moins anxieusement sur ce que nous écrirons ; nous serons sûrs que ce sera de la bonne musique!”

⁶² Yvain (1891-1965) was the most prominent composer of *opérette* in France during the 1920s. His *Ta bouche* of 1922 was an enormous success, as was *Là-haut*, a work that featured the popular singer Maurice Chevalier. It is perhaps important to note that Yvain rarely used American dance idioms, a fact which may help explain Koechlin’s praise of his music.

even has character, even beauty, when it is stylized by a real musician. An example: the *Suadades do Brazil* by Milhaud.”⁶³ With its mixture of popular inspiration and elite compositional and harmonic procedures, the *Suadades* are typical of the aesthetic strategy that dominated the music of Les Six in the early 1920s. They represent, to quote Barbara Kelly, “the light-hearted Parisian post-war spirit,” while revealing “technical control of bitonality, texture and structure at its best.”⁶⁴ Although Koechlin never suggested that members of the FMP write tangos, fox trots, or light music in general, he did believe that these forms of popular music, when properly “stylized,” could be truly worthy of the masses.

Whereas Koechlin believed that urban “popular” music needed to be “elevated” in order to become “true popular art,” rural folk music required no such aesthetic rescue mission. In “True and False Popular Music,” he praises rural folk music and proposes that it serve as an example in the creation of modern music for the masses. Koechlin views folklore as “true” popular music as opposed to “false” commercially “popular” music, which he regularly denigrates as bourgeois products created for mass consumption. For Koechlin, folklore is the ultimate musical language of the people, for it “expresses its emotions [...], its hopes, its revolts and its political demands.”⁶⁵ Despite such statements, however, Koechlin does not advocate nineteenth-century compositional practices of appropriating folk music as compositional material for large symphonic or operatic

⁶³ Charles Koechlin, “La vraie et la fausse musique populaire,” *L’Art musical populaire* (August-September, 1937): 19. “...le *tango*, danse qui n’est qu’un prétexte à pelotage, c’est encore une forme de l’art populaire, à la rigueur, et cela peut avoir son caractère, cela même a de la beauté, quand c’est stylisé par un vrai musicien. Exemple les *Saudades da Brazil* [sic] de Milhaud.”

⁶⁴ Barbara Kelly, *Tradition and Style in the Works of Darius Milhaud 1912-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 157.

⁶⁵ Koechlin, “La vraie et la fausse musique populaire,” 19. “La *musique populaire* [...] c’est celle qui exprime les sentiments du *peuple*, ses espoirs, ses révoltes, ses revendications.”

works.⁶⁶ On the contrary, he argues that the study of folklore should permit composers to discover “clear and lively ideas, clean and significant harmonies” and music capable of expressing a “naïve soul.”⁶⁷ He places folk tunes on a pedestal equal in height to that of “sublime” nineteenth-century masterpieces, and praises their “instinctual” character, which he hopes modern composers will attempt to recapture. Ultimately, Koechlin encourages simplicity and clarity inspired by folksong in modern popular works, a position closely aligned with Cocteau's pronouncements in *Le Coq et l'arlequin*.

At first glance, Koechlin's support for an aesthetic that embraced popular song, “instinct,” and “naivety” appears incongruous with the composer's reputation as an erudite writer of groundbreaking treatises on counterpoint and harmony.⁶⁸ In fact, less-informed critics regularly complained that Koechlin's own music was comprised of “chimerical logarithms,” a recurring assessment that the composer continuously sought to debunk. But, writing in his own defense in an autobiographical portrait entitled “Charles Koechlin sur lui-même,” he noted: “Nobody is less *intellectual* in his inspiration, even in fugal form, which he imbued with sensitive life; nobody's works depend less on an *a priori* plan (a method he always opposed, the plan being for him a function of the idea, the themes, the feelings); nobody is less “scientific” in his inspiration.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Charles Koechlin, “La musique en France,” *La Revue internationale de musique* 1 (March-April 1938): 50. “Je ne dis pas qu'il s'agisse de prendre des vieux thèmes paysans pour les incorporer en des symphonies, mais je souhaite que l'on sache retrouver la *fraîcheur d'inspiration* de ces artistes ingénues, d'autrefois...”

⁶⁷ Koechlin, “La vraie et la fausse musique populaire,” 20.

⁶⁸ See Charles Koechlin, *Étude sur les notes de passage* (Paris: Eschig, 1922); *Précis des règles du contrepoint* (Paris: Huegel, 1926); *Traité de l'harmonie*, 3 vols. (Paris: Eschig, 1927-1930); *Étude sur le choral d'école* (Paris: Huegel, 1929); *Abrégé de la Théorie de la musique* (Paris: Huegel, 1935), *Traité d'orchestration*, 4 vols. (Paris: Eschig, 1954-1959).

⁶⁹ Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin (1867-1950): His Life and Works* (London: Harwood Academic Press, 1995), 301. Emphasis in original.

The Legacy of Satie

Koechlin's positive assessment of artistic "naivety," and his equally firm suspicion of musical formulas and "schools," resonates with central facets of Erik Satie's aesthetic position. Koechlin felt aesthetically close to Satie, and throughout the inter-war period, rose repeatedly to the defense of some of his most audacious works (e.g. *Parade* and *Socrate*). This esteem was no doubt mutual, because in 1918, Satie invited the fifty-one-year-old Koechlin to join a group that would eventually form the nexus of Les Six, entitled "Les nouveaux jeunes."⁷⁰

One of the documents that most clearly points to the aesthetic similarities shared by both composers is Satie's collection of aphoristic pronouncements entitled "Subject Matter (Idea) and Craftsmanship (Construction)."⁷¹ Satie's text, which was never published during his lifetime, is mainly concerned with the primacy of melody in his art as opposed to the prestige accorded to harmonic "rules" as taught at the Conservatoire. In the tradition of avant-garde figures like Debussy, Satie disparages "school rules" and believes that "school has a gymnastic aim, nothing more; composition has an aesthetic aim, in which taste alone plays a part."⁷² In Satie's view, music conceived in a manner recalling the rules of "school" remains an exercise, a gymnastic routine that falls short of what he conceived to be the true aesthetic dimension of music:

⁷⁰ Ultimately, Koechlin could not attend the short-lived group's inaugural concert, and perhaps as a result, remained on the sidelines as Les Six rose to prominence at the end of the 1910s.

⁷¹ They appear on the cover of a notebook containing material for *Mort de Socrate*. Reprinted and translated in Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 68-69.

⁷² Erik Satie, "Subject Matter (Idea) and Craftsmanship (Construction)," reprinted and translated by Orledge in *Satie the Composer*, 68. For Debussy's view on academic formulae (which he calls "dilettante traps") see especially his article "Du goût," of 1913, reprinted in Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 228-230.

Become artists unconsciously.

The Idea can do without Art.

Let us mistrust Art: it is often nothing but virtuosity.⁷³

Both Satie and Koechlin believed “unconscious” artists – those who create either through ignorance or willful “forgetting” of compositional rules – are those with the richest “ideas.” Satie even claimed that “a great many artists lack ideas in general, and even specific ideas” – an indictment against composers who wrote within accepted musical traditions rather than in search of something new.⁷⁴ As we have seen, Koechlin held the same esteem for “ideas” and believed that “clear and lively ideas” could be found in those composers possessing a “naïve soul.” In an important essay written during the Popular Front, Koechlin claimed that freedom is necessary “in order to break free of *musical dogmas* [...]. The advice and especially the rules of masters, in music, are far from being infallible: deformed by disciples they become disastrous.”⁷⁵

Koechlin’s advocacy of compositional freedom, with its concomitant criticism of the potential detriments of schooling and slavish imitation, was also a veiled attack against French composers associated with conservative compositional approaches. Koechlin claimed that he preferred “naively written, pretty music over any type of false sublime [work], even if it is renowned.”⁷⁶ Like Cliquet-Pleyel, who claimed to be “deeply shocked [...] by the famous painting in which we see students, wallowing and sobbing

⁷³ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁴ Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, 79.

⁷⁵ Charles Koechlin, “De l’Art pour l’Art et de l’état des esprits à ce jour,” *La Revue musicale* (June-July 1937): 25. “Plus généralement, la liberté est nécessaire pour se débarrasser de tous ces *dogmes musicaux* dont Jean Huré mesurait le poids écrasant, et montrait le danger. Les conseils et surtout les règles des maîtres, en musique, sont loin d’être infallibles: déformés par les disciples ils deviennent funestes.”

⁷⁶ Koechlin, *La Musique et le peuple*, 22. “...j’aime mieux une jolie musique, naïvement faite, que n’importe quel faux sublime, même réputé.”

while listening to Beethoven,” Koechlin’s criticism of “schooling” was an attack against the stylistic and formal codes officially encouraged in the pedagogical program of the Schola Cantorum.⁷⁷ In essence, Koechlin’s aesthetic of “freedom” – and here, he spoke for the FMP – was one in which the complete artistic (and social) emancipation of the individual was the key to truly modern musical expression. The close affiliation with schools, with formulas and unquestioning imitations of the “Masters” on the other hand, was artistically limiting and politically reactionary.

Unlike Satie, Koechlin developed this thesis into a more politically relevant argument. He claimed that musical naivety, when expressed through absolute freedom with regard to compositional “rules,” could be readily appreciated by uneducated (naïve) mass audiences: “At times, they will understand faster and better than the snobs, than the unimpressed, than the half-informed; better, especially, than the professionals who are nothing but pawns.”⁷⁸ In the first issue of *L’Art musical populaire* Koechlin reports, “When I wrote for [mass audiences], I introduced harmonic mistakes, fifths, etc. They understood it very well and accepted it.”⁷⁹ In fact, Koechlin outlines three reasons why uneducated audiences are better suited to an appreciation of modern works conceived in a spirit of total liberty:

- 1) Because they have not been educated on music, called “classic,” of the eighteenth century, which is so different from modern music (we know Beethoven

⁷⁷ Cliquet-Pleyel, “La bonne et la mauvaise musique, 18. “Pour ma part, le fameux tableau où l’on voit des étudiants, vautreés et sanglotants, écoutant du Beethoven, m’a toujours agacé et même scandalisé au plus haut degré.” Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 222.

⁷⁸ Koechlin, “De l’Art pour l’Art et de l’état des esprits à ce jour,” 32. “Mais, à l’occasion, il comprend plus vite et mieux que les snobs, que les blasés, que les demi-avertis; mieux, surtout, que les professionnels qui ne sont que des pions.”

⁷⁹ Charles Koechlin, “Un avis autorisé,” *L’Art musical populaire* (May 1, 1937) : 4. “Quand j’ai écrit pour elles, j’ai introduit des fautes d’harmonie, quintes, etc. Elles ont très bien compris et admis.”

enthusiasts who would never accept more recent works that have a *modal* atmosphere: they still prefer atonal works so long as they are rhythmically vigorous);

2) And because they have not studied harmony [...] they are not bothered by the so-called *infringements against the rules* not long ago held against Debussy, and then Maurice Ravel [...];

3) Finally, this audience listens with more attention and warmth (we witnessed this for the music for Romain Rolland's *Le 14 Juillet*).⁸⁰

In an article of 1937, entitled “Un avis autorisé,” Koechlin condensed these thoughts by claiming that “the absence of musical culture among the masses is [...] a guarantee that they will understand” modern music.⁸¹ For Koechlin then, “naivety” is an aesthetic link between creative individuals and the cultural aspirations of the masses. Those musicians who express themselves in a manner completely free of constraints – thereby connecting themselves to the spirit of naivety – are truly “popular.”

One cannot help but wonder how these composers – particularly the “Soviet d’Arcueil,” Erik Satie – would have felt about the social ramifications Koechlin developed out of an aesthetic credo that valorized “naivety” and “ideas.”⁸² There can be

⁸⁰ Koechlin, “De l’Art pour l’Art et de l’état des esprits à ce jour, 32. “1) Parce que non éduqué par la musique, dite classique, du XVIIIe siècle, si différente de la moderne (on sait d’enthousiastes beethovéniens qui jamais ne “marcheront” pour telles oeuvres récentes, d’atmosphère *modale*: ils préfèrent encore l’atonal si c’est vigoureusement rythmé); 2) Et parce que n’ayant pas fait d’harmonie [...] [ils] ne sont pas gênés par les prétendues *fautes contre les règles* reprochées naguère à Debussy, puis à Maurice Ravel [...]; 3) Enfin, ces auditeurs écoutent avec davantage d’attention et de sympathie (on l’a vu pour la musique du *14-Juillet* [sic] de Romain Rolland).” Emphasis in original.

⁸¹ Koechlin, “Un avis autorisé,” 4.

⁸² Satie, who became a Socialist Party member in the wake of the assassination of Jean Jaurès in 1914, joined the French Communist Party in 1921. The possible influence of Communist ideology on his works and aesthetic outlook has not yet been sufficiently explored in the literature.

little doubt, however, that Satie's legacy lived on within the FMP, whether through his former "students" Roger Désormière and Henri Cliquet-Pleyel, or through the example of Koechlin who, already in 1924, warmly referred to Satie's music as demonstrating "instinct" and "absolute independence."⁸³

Paul Dupin: Naïve Visionary

During the Popular Front, Koechlin singled out the works of French composer Paul Dupin (1865-1949) as exemplifying a musical aesthetic based on naivety. Apart from a short musical apprenticeship under Emile Durand, Dupin was entirely self-taught. He worked at a job for a French railway company until 1908 at which time he and his music were "discovered" by Romain Rolland. As a working-class musical autodidact (in a fin-de-siècle musical environment notably influenced by the innovations of the self-taught Mighty Five) Dupin became somewhat of a musical curiosity in the years preceding World War I. His time in the limelight, however, was brief, and he fell just as quickly into obscurity, unemployment, and financial difficulty.⁸⁴ By the 1920s, although rarely performed, Dupin's works were criticized for their "mistakes." Nevertheless, a few friends in the musical world (including Koechlin), supported him through positive articles and press reviews throughout the 1920s.⁸⁵

In an article from 1923, Koechlin praised Dupin's "contrapuntal *instinct*" and "naïve constructions" and suggested that the composer was to music what the former

⁸³ Charles Koechlin, "Erik Satie," *La Revue musicale* (March 1, 1924): 193.

⁸⁴ Jacques Tchamkerten, "Paul Dupin," *Grove Music On-Line*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed February 6, 2006), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

⁸⁵ Michel Fleury, "Un compositeur à redécouvrir: Paul Dupin (1865-1949)," *Revue internationale de musique française* 18 (November 1985): 115.

customs officer Henri Julien “*le Douanier*” Rousseau was to the world of painting.⁸⁶ Later, in 1937, Koechlin compared Dupin to yet another celebrated autodidact, Musorgsky, and applauded his friend as a true “popular musician” by virtue of a musical style that was not corrupted by “schooling” or overly influenced by notions of “craft.”⁸⁷

Nothing is less “literary,” or less invented. It is so direct, as if coming from a profound heart, without intermediary! Naïve and immediate, not at all “primary” either, never inane nor puerile, but on the contrary, rich in the pure beauty of childhood, the passion of adolescence and the meditation of old age.⁸⁸

For Koechlin, Dupin’s harmonically quirky *Noëls* (example 3.2) combine “the subjective expression of a poet,” with a “universal, collective character.”⁸⁹ “Grammarians” he continues, “can discuss some irregularity of his autodidactic technique, but it doesn’t matter, because it will always be “music,” and often these “irregularities” are in fact necessary discoveries.”⁹⁰ Dupin’s *Noëls* contain none of the false grandeur repudiated by FMP composers like Cliquet-Pleyel, but rather a charming awkwardness typified in numerous “irregular” examples of voice-leading and harmonic fluency (see for example measures 5-8). Perhaps these are the “subjective expressions of

⁸⁶ Charles Koechlin, “Paul Dupin,” *La Revue musicale* (January 1923): 227, 230, and 240. Henri Julien Rousseau (1844-1910) retired as customs officer in 1893 and was later celebrated by the avant-garde for his naïve yet evocative paintings.

⁸⁷ Charles Koechlin, “Salle de l’École normale de musique: concert Paul Dupin,” *La Revue musicale* (May 15, 1937): 283-284.

⁸⁸ Charles Koechlin, “Paul Dupin, musicien populaire,” *L’Humanité*, April 3, 1937. “Rien de moins “littéraire” ni de moins fabriqué. Cela est si direct, comme venu du cœur profond, sans intermédiaire! Naïf et immédiat, nullement “primaire” d’ailleurs, jamais niais ni puéril, riche au contraire de toute la pure beauté de l’enfance, de la passion de l’adolescence, de la méditation de l’âge mûr.”

⁸⁹ Ibid. “...et ses *Noëls*, sont-ils l’expression subjective du poète, ou bien gardent-ils un caractère universel, collectif? Ceci et cela tout ensemble...”

⁹⁰ Ibid. “Que les grammairiens discutent sur telle irrégularité de sa technique d’autodidacte, il n’importe, car cela reste de la musique toujours, et le plus souvent ces irrégularités sont des trouvailles nécessaires.”

a poet” that Koechlin so admired, while the melodic line (which foregoes any tonal or rhythmic complexity) represents the “universal, collective character” to which he felt all music should aspire?

Ex. 3.2. Paul Dupin, *Noël des tout petits*, mm. 1-40.⁹¹

160 = ♩

Fin Chœur à 2 voix

No - él! as - tu pris pour nous ce qu'il faut?

Fin

Rit...

Nous a - vons é - té bien sa - ges (de - man - de à ma - man)

rall.

⁹¹ Published as No. 5 in *Sept Noël's familiers* (Paris: R. Deiss, 1928).

According to Koechlin, Dupin's lack of musical education was not a prerequisite for tapping into an aesthetic of naivety. As he explained, anybody can attain that form of freedom, so long as they attempt to liberate themselves from the multiple influences facing artists, including aesthetic dogmas, fads, teachers, critics, perceived audience expectations, and money.⁹² Already in 1928, Koechlin claimed that composers should not worry about "what others will say, nor try to shock the crowd and win rapid success."

In short, the opposite of showing off, but the charming naivety of *writing that which you love*. Such liberty is the greatest strength of those who express their own feelings: it is an *individualistic* conception, but, due to the type of expansion that it encourages, results in the most radiant action: the most *collective*.⁹³

Between the Ivory Tower and the Masses

Koechlin became president of the FMP following Albert Roussel's death in the summer of 1937. His views on the social function of music were highly regarded within the organization. The speeches delivered at the 1937 FMP congress – reproduced in *L'Art Musical Populaire* – attest convincingly to this fact, as many FMP members enthusiastically referred to the points made by Koechlin throughout the proceedings. Léon Moussinac commended Koechlin for emphasizing the FMP's dedication to the creation of modern works, while André Jolivet admitted that it was difficult to add

⁹² Koechlin, "De l'Art pour l'Art et de l'état des esprits à ce jour," *passim*.

⁹³ Charles Koechlin, "De la simplicité," *La Revue musicale* (January 1928): 240. "Avant tout, absence de prétention, affranchissement du souci de l'effet. Ne pas songer à ce que diront les autres, ni ne vouloir frapper la foule et gagner le succès rapide. En un mot, le contraire du cabotinage, mais la naïveté charmante d'écrire ce qu'on aime [...] Cette liberté est la plus grande force, de qui exprime son propre sentiment: conception *individualiste*, mais, par l'expansion qu'elle favorise, aboutissant à l'action la plus rayonnante, la plus *collective*." Stressed in original.

anything further to the views laid down by Koechlin in “True and False Popular Music.”⁹⁴ Moreover, Koechlin’s ideas on freedom corresponded perfectly with the FMP’s broader agenda of using culture to combat fascism – the political force that Communism condemned precisely because of its threat to personal and artistic freedom.

Koechlin’s aesthetic position was no doubt attractive to FMP composers because it allowed for the *simultaneous* articulation of both aesthetic autonomy and political agency in modern music. Despite his obvious support for a compositional approach that was cognizant of the social demands of the masses, Koechlin was nonetheless a proponent of the aesthetic of the “ivory tower.” This may seem contradictory, but as we shall see, Koechlin was not blind to the dialectical nature of musical autonomy. He recognized that writing “that which you love,” tended to encourage “art for art’s sake.” Rather than criticize this credo however, Koechlin argued that as an aesthetic approach, it could yield valuable social, political, or even utilitarian results. He maintained that musical works – even those conceived in the ivory tower with the least regard for worldly concerns – could have a profound impact on the “real world.” Koechlin believed that if composers aimed to write “beautiful” works, they were in fact making an invaluable social (as well as artistic) contribution. Music, he claimed, “is useful when it is beautiful,” because such works contain the ability to console, and as a result, the power to provoke “noble *élans* and the rediscovery of hope.”⁹⁵ In an article published in 1949, he elaborated on the image of the ivory tower, comparing works of art to the incandescent rays of a

⁹⁴ Léon Moussinac, “Intervention de Moussinac,” *L’Art Musical Populaire* (August-September, 1937): 20; André Jolivet, “La musique d’aujourd’hui et ses tâches,” *L’Art Musical Populaire* (August-September, 1937): 31.

⁹⁵ Charles Koechlin, “Art, Liberté, Tour d’Ivoire,” *Contrepoints* (December 1949): 105. “Disons: une musique est utile quand elle est belle [...] et j’ajouterai que c’est dans ces conditions précisément qu’elle s’avère la plus sociale, se révélant alors la plus riche en consolation, auxiliaresse des nobles élans et des reprises d’espoir.”

lighthouse: “the higher the tower, the further its light illuminates the world with its salutary clarity.”⁹⁶

For Koechlin, naivety was the best link between the political realm of the “real world” and the autonomous realm of the ivory tower. By embracing naivety, he believed that composers could liberate themselves from the concessions imposed upon musicians in the “real world” (whether political, social, economic) as well as from the aesthetic restrictions (schools, fads, styles, formulas) that inevitably clutter the ivory tower. Naivety, therefore, holds intrinsic relevance to both realms: it resonates with the aesthetic horizons of the uneducated, humble, and disenfranchised of the real world, while simultaneously supplying “new and lively” ideas in the pure realm of aesthetics.⁹⁷

Koechlin’s dialectical views on the role of naivety in music are extremely nuanced. They supply a defense for both the proponents of the “ivory tower” approach, as well as to those – numerous at the time – who believed that music should embrace an explicitly social role. As Koechlin explained, “ivory tower” music can still effect social change, and “political” works should still aim for beauty in the same way that “ivory tower” works do. Indeed, during the Popular Front, Koechlin was at times obliged to defend some of his left-wing colleagues who (despite their clear political engagement) were criticized for continuing to write “ivory tower” music.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 105. “Et plus haute s’élève la Tour, plus loin son phare illumine le monde de bienfaisante clarté. Disons : une musique est utile quand elle est belle.” According to Orledge, Koechlin had first planned this article in 1930 and wrote extensive notes in view of publication already in 1933. Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 322, n. 9.

⁹⁷ This paragraph owes intellectual debt to Lydia Goehr’s philosophical discussion of the subject in “Political Music and the Politics of Music,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 99-112.

Darius Milhaud's *Quartet No. 9*

A notable example of this occurred on June 2, 1935 at the premiere of Darius Milhaud's *String Quartet no. 9*, which took place at the Hôtel Majestic. Immediately following the performance, left-wing author Jean-Richard Bloch spoke out against the work, which prompted Koechlin – though he shared Bloch's Communist-inspired views about art's social role – to energetically urge him to reconsider his evaluation. In a letter written to Bloch the next day, Koechlin stressed that despite the “ivory tower” connotations of the genre chosen by Milhaud, his music was not that of a “grammarian” nor was it one of “a technician without any humanity.” He continued:

It often happens that we call something complicated because we have not yet realized that it is simple (because we do not understand the language), and dry, because we have not yet discovered how it is sensitive. [...] That is not a reason to fear offering these masterpieces to the people. Often the people will understand better because they will listen with a more receptive soul, with more benevolence than the bourgeois snobs, who, believe me, disgust me as much as they do you.⁹⁸

Koechlin singled out the slow third movement of Milhaud's quartet (example 3.3), describing it as “bitter and painful,” while also admitting that he had not “grasped all of

⁹⁸ Letter from Charles Koechlin to Jean-Richard Bloch, June 3, 1936, Fonds Jean-Richard Bloch, Correspondance, Tome XXXIV. “Je crois que vous vous trompez de beaucoup en estimant que cela serait un jeu compliqué, oeuvre de grammairien, de technicien, et sans humanité [...]. Il arrive très bien que nous appelions compliqué ce dont nous avons pas encore perçu que cela est simple (faute d'en avoir compris le langage), et sec, ce dont nous n'avons point découvert la sensibilité [...] Ce n'est pas une raison pour craindre d'offrir ces chefs-d'œuvre au peuple, et souvent même le peuple les comprendra mieux parce qu'il les écoutera d'une âme plus émue, avec davantage de bienveillance que les bourgeois snobs dont, croyez le bien, j'ai l'horreur autant que vous l'avez vous-même.” Stressed in original.

its development” though it had “left the impression of containing touching moments of beauty.”⁹⁹

Ex. 3.3. Darius Milhaud, *Neuvième Quatuor à cordes*, Third movement, mm. 1-14.

The musical score is for the third movement of Darius Milhaud's Ninth String Quartet. It is in 4/4 time and marked "Très lent". The score consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. Measures 1-5 show the initial entry with Violin II and Viola playing a melody in *mp*. Measures 6-9 show a more complex texture with all instruments. Measures 10-14 continue the development with various dynamics including *mf* and *p*.

Koechlin’s defense of Milhaud’s work (with its astringent atonal counterpoint, abrupt registral shifts, and pungent harmonies) was audacious – one might even say

⁹⁹ Ibid. “L’Andante est âpre et douloureux ; je n’ai pas saisi tout son développement mais je garde l’impression qu’il contient d’émouvantes beautés.”

culturally naïve – in the context of the Left’s advocacy for music “for the people.” At the same time, Milhaud’s work exhibits a quasi-Stravinskian “objectivity” that eschews the same romantic and impressionistic models which were equally shunned by many members of the FMP. Due to its motivic economy, rhythmic incisiveness, and absence of sentimentality, Milhaud’s quartet could find a place under the FMP’s umbrella of “freedom,” even if it did not explicitly confront head-on the menace of fascism. That it engaged with progressive modernity was enough to guarantee (for some at least) that Milhaud’s work (and heart) belonged to the Left.¹⁰⁰

Unfortunately, we have no Popular Front-period musings that point to Milhaud’s thoughts concerning the capacity of “absolute” ivory-tower music to express a political position. In the early 1930s he did famously quip that it was absurd to think that a quartet “could be on the right or on the left.” In a separate statement, he also claimed that it was foolish to “ascribe a political colour to music” and pointed out that “in Germany, old revolutionary songs have become Nazi, just by changing the words.” As we shall see, this did not prevent Milhaud from penning his own revolutionary songs – ones in which a transparent political position jumps off the page. Furthermore, as Jane Fulcher has suggested, Milhaud’s observation concerning Nazi appropriations shows that the composer was aware of the political contingency that could potentially effect the reception of any genre of music.¹⁰¹ Indeed, judging by the reactions of Jean-Richard Bloch and Charles Koechlin just hours following the premiere of the *Ninth Quartet*, such politicized interpretations had become almost routine in France. In such a charged

¹⁰⁰ Like the *Eighth Quartet* of 1932, the *Ninth Quartet* is dedicated to “the American Maecenas,” Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, whose intervention on behalf of Milhaud – she assisted Mills College with providing a salary for the displaced composer – was crucial both during the War and after. See Cyrilla Barr, *Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge: American Patron of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1998).

¹⁰¹ Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 183.

political and intellectual climate, the fact that Milhaud offered this work to be published by the FMP through a Communist-sponsored publishing company was an obvious political statement, even if the work's "objective" content refrained from expressing an overt political message.

Atonality at the FMP

Another example of the FMP's support for experimental modern styles can be found in the music of André Jolivet. Jolivet was the only member of the group "Jeune France" (also comprised of Olivier Messiaen, Daniel-Lesur and Yves Baudrier) to have participated in the FMP.¹⁰² Thanks to the recently published research of Lucie Kayas, it is now clear that he shared important political loyalties with the organization. In fact, he had already given proof of his attraction to socialist ideas in his *Chants d'hier et de demain* (begun in 1931 and completed in 1937) set to political texts by three authors whose faith in the revolution was beyond question: Jean-Paul Marat, Maximilien de Robespierre and Jean Jaurès.¹⁰³ Indeed, Jaurès' text, entitled "Avec le socialisme...", opens with a line that traces an entire lineage of left-wing thought: "Saint-Simon, Fourier, Marx, Engels, Pressensé – everyone, they all understood that the laws of social evolution were linked to the drama of universal evolution."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² The group's first concert, which also featured a work by Germaine Tailleferre, and included the participation of Ricardo Vines, Ginette and Maurice Martenot and FMP member Roger Désormière, took place at the Salle Gaveau on 3 June 1936.

¹⁰³ Lucie Kayas, *André Jolivet* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 234.

¹⁰⁴ Jean Jaurès, "Avec le socialisme..." cited in Kayas, 234: "Saint-Simon, Fourier, Marx, Engels, Pressensé, tous, ils ont compris que les lois de l'évolution sociale étaient liées au drame du devenir universel." "Avec le socialisme..." is the third of the three *Chants d'hier et de demain*. It is preceded by "Où est la patrie?" (Jean-Paul Marat) and "L'Intérêt des faibles" (Maximilien de Robespierre). André Jolivet, *Chants d'hier et de demain* (Paris: Gérard Billaudot, 1996).

Jolivet's earliest contact with the FMP occurred in December 1936 when he was named a member of the "Bureau international de la musique," a committee associated with the Maison de la Culture, and with which Honegger and Milhaud were also affiliated. He gave lectures on Radio-Liberté in early 1937, and spoke about the influence of machinery on French and Soviet works, including Honegger's *Pacific 231*, Mosolov's *Zavod*, Prokofiev's *Le Pas d'Acier*, and Julius Meytuss' (1903-1994) *Dnieprostroi*.¹⁰⁵ Jolivet also delivered a speech at the FMP's Second Congress in 1937 entitled "Music Today and its Tasks."¹⁰⁶ In it, he proposes that the great works of art of western society, like "the Parthenon, the cathedrals [...] the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *chansons de geste*" were partly a result of the "creative enthusiasm of the masses" and partly a result of "individual conceptions" which were "brought about by the life that surrounded them and the activity of the people."¹⁰⁷ He viewed the Maisons de la Culture as "guardians of human culture and laboratories for the development of French socialist culture" and called for State patronage of the arts, which he equated with "the socialization of the means of [artistic] production."¹⁰⁸

Despite these provocative statements, the works by Jolivet that can be traced to his activities within the FMP bear little trace of aesthetic concessions towards working-class audiences. Under the editorial direction of the FMP, the Editions Sociales Internationales published two works for wind band by Jolivet in 1937. Both *Soir* and *Défilé* are

¹⁰⁵ Kayas, 231.

¹⁰⁶ André Jolivet, "La musique aujourd'hui et ses tâches," *L'Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937): 31.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. "...est-ce que la réalisation aurait pu s'en effectuer sans l'enthousiasme créateur des masses? Et la conception de l'individu n'était-elle pas engendrée elle-même par la vie qui l'entourait et l'activité populaire?"

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. "La musique aujourd'hui et ses tâches," *L'Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937), 31 : "Ces Maisons de la Culture, gardiennes de la culture humaine et laboratoires de la prochaine culture socialiste française."

orchestrated versions of two of the *Trois Croquis* for piano, written in 1932. Lucie Kayas claims that these transcriptions “reflect the concern of the Fédération Musicale Populaire to constitute a repertory for amateurs.”¹⁰⁹ Even a cursory glance at the scores, however, is enough to raise serious doubts about the suitability of Jolivet’s musical language for the use of amateur bands. *Soir*, with its unpredictable harmonic progressions, chromatically meandering melodies and pointillistic orchestration, presents a challenge even to the most capable wind ensembles and musically sophisticated audiences (example 3.4).

Ex. 3.4. André Jolivet, *Soir*, mm. 1-12 (piano reduction).

The musical score for Ex. 3.4, André Jolivet's *Soir*, measures 1-12 (piano reduction). The piece is in 4/4 time and marked 'Lent'. It consists of three staves: Treble, Middle, and Bass. The music is characterized by chromatic meandering and pointillistic textures. Dynamics include *pp*, *ppp*, and *p*. There are several triplets and slurs throughout the piece.

For example, the first four measures are comprised of ambiguous non-directional harmonies whose only syntactical logic seems to lie in the fact that, taken together, they eventually sound each note of the chromatic scale. Although not systematically

¹⁰⁹ Kayas, *André Jolivet*, 235.

dodecaphonic, Jolivet employs an uncompromising atonal idiom throughout the work, one that is unified through the recurring appearance of the tri-tone as harmonic support (see, for instance, the middle staff in measures 5-7 of example 3.4).

Works like Milhaud's *Ninth Quartet* and Jolivet's *Soir* reveal that the FMP promoted works that engaged with experimental, modernist compositional languages. Furthermore, these pieces exemplify the FMP's willingness to throw its support and financial resources behind technically complex works while simultaneously advocating that music should be brought closer to the people. Although there is no indication that any group affiliated with the FMP performed Jolivet's *Soir*, the ambitious Chorale Populaire de Paris did consider including in their repertoire compositions as technically advanced as Milhaud's *La Mort d'un tyran*, written in 1932.¹¹⁰ In general, though espousing a political ideology that had (in the Soviet Union and elsewhere) provoked a retreat away from idioms of the avant-garde, the FMP supported (through its advocacy of compositional "freedom") modernist musical developments. In this regard, the FMP continued the modernist legacy of Les Six, who, during the 1920s, were at the forefront of promoting composers like Schoenberg and Webern in France.

As we shall see in Chapter 4, the legacy of Les Six lived on in more specific aspects of the FMP's aesthetic program as well. The group's borrowing practices, which in the early 1920s involved drawing upon music of the circus, music-hall and American popular dances, were also emulated at the FMP. Unlike Les Six however, the FMP and its affiliated musical groups downplayed the role of commercial popular music and aimed to promote (through imitation and borrowing) "popular" folklore and revolutionary music.

¹¹⁰ Suzanne Cointe, "La Collaboration des compositeurs et de la FMP ne peut qu'être féconde," *L'Art musical populaire* (May 1937): 4. The work's politically relevant text, not to mention its use of a spoken chorus, certainly increased its appeal for the choir's members.

The use of these sources was politically motivated, for through contact with these “popular” sources, the “elite” composers of the FMP looked to build bridges and express their engagement with the concerns and aspirations of the masses.

Chapter 4 – Popular Sources and the Musical Left

In Chapter 2, I examined the influence of Soviet mass songs and folksongs on French left-wing cultural organizations like the AEAR. Though Soviet music and culture were held in high esteem at the AEAR between 1932 and 1934, when it came to the FMP, its influence was considerably less pronounced. This was in part a result of the strategy of feigned “political neutrality” practiced by the Maison de la Culture and its affiliated organizations, but it was also a result of a strongly articulated nationalist stance that the Left was now (paradoxically) championing. In this regard, from 1935 onward, the FMP – now gaining in stature – looked to promote French (as opposed to Soviet) folk and revolutionary sources. Perhaps this is simply a sign that the FMP had assimilated the lessons learned from the Soviet cultural model, and now looked to establish similar traditions on French soil. But, as we shall see, this change of emphasis also reflected evolving political tactics, particularly within the Parti Communiste Français, which, in the wake of the Popular Front victory, became such a dominant force in French cultural and political life.

L’Internationale Meets La Marseillaise

Julian Jackson has perceptively written that “[t]he cultural objective of the Popular Front, as defined by the Communists, was [...] to reunite the people with ‘their’ culture, ‘their’ history, ‘their’ nation, to bring together intellectuals and masses in common defense of a national cultural patrimony.”¹ This cultural approach, however, was

¹ Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 121.

almost entirely at odds with the internationalist stance that had typified the French Communist Party since its formation in 1920. Indeed, throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, French Communists routinely denounced nationalism in all its forms for the manner in which it bred capitalist competition, aggravated international tensions, and stimulated military warfare. This explains, for example, why the Communist Party viewed Rouget de Lisle's revolutionary tune, *La Marseillaise* (which the French State had adopted as its national anthem in 1879) with such ferocious contempt (figure 11).²

Fig. 11. Rouget de Lisle, *La Marseillaise* (1792)

Allons enfants de la Patrie	Arise children of the fatherland
Le jour de gloire est arrivé !	The day of glory has arrived!
Contre nous de la tyrannie	Against us tyranny's
L'étendard sanglant est levé	Bloody standard is raised
Entendez-vous dans nos campagnes	Listen to the sound in the fields
Mugir ces féroces soldats?	The howling of these fearsome soldiers
Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras.	They are coming into our midst
Égorger vos fils, vos compagnes!	To cut the throats of your sons and consorts.
Aux armes citoyens	To arms citizens
Formez vos bataillons	Form your battalions
Marchons, marchons	March, march
Qu'un sang impur	Let impure blood
Abreuve nos sillons.	Water our furrows.

Most Communists felt that the original message of *La Marseillaise* had been discredited over the years by bourgeois governments, which, the Communists claimed, had remained impervious to the ideals of true social equality. In 1935, Communist André Ribard gave voice to this long-standing critique by comparing *La Marseillaise* to the unofficial Nazi anthem, the *Horst Wessel Lied*. For Ribard, both tunes had been

² It had initially been promoted to that status on July 14, 1795, but was banned under the Empire and the Restoration.

manipulated by right-wing political forces in order to uphold oppressive political institutions:

La Marseillaise did not come from the people...it galvanized throughout the nineteenth century all of the great mass movements: a new social lie was born. The people believed fervently in a democracy in which it did not participate. The only thing that had changed for the people, were the tyrants that who ruled them.³

In 1892, the Communist International adopted Eugène Pottier's *L'Internationale* (written in 1871 following the defeat of the Paris Commune and set to music by Pierre Degeyter in 1888) as the musical anthem of the political movement. This tune, which had long eclipsed *La Marseillaise* in popularity amongst the French proletariat, eventually became the anthem of the French Communist Party (figure 12).⁴

Fig. 12. Eugène Pottier, *L'Internationale* (1871).

Debout, les damnés de la terre	Arise, the damned of the earth,
Debout ! les forçats de la faim !	Arise, prisoners of hunger,
La raison tonne en son cratère:	For reason thunders in its crater,
C'est l'éruption de la fin.	It is the eruption of the end!
Du passé faisons table rase:	Let us make a blank slate of the past,
Foule esclave, debout ! Debout !	Army of slaves, arise, arise!
Le monde va changer de base;	The world is changing at the base,
Nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout !	We who have been nothing, let's be everything!
C'est la lutte finale:	This is the final struggle
Groupons-nous, et demain,	Let us gather, and tomorrow
L'Internationale	The Internationale
Sera le genre humain.	Will be mankind!

³ André Ribard, "Le trahison de *La Marseillaise*," *Monde*, January 25, 1935. "*La Marseillaise* n'est pas issue du peuple [...] *La Marseillaise* avait galvanisé durant un siècle tous les mouvements des masses: un nouveau mensonge social était né. Le peuple crut follement à une démocratie qu'il ne partagea point. Il avait seulement changé de tyrans." The *Horst Wessel Lied* was named after the eponymous Nazi sympathizer, who was praised as a martyr by the Nazis, because of his death at the hands of a Communist.

⁴ Hervé Luxado, *Histoire de la Marseillaise* (Paris: Christian de Bartillat, 1990), 223-225.

These anthems, though both calling for united action against oppression, clearly symbolize the profound gap that separated official republican ideology from that of the Comintern. The contrast between nationalist and internationalist perspectives in their respective texts is striking, and it is not hard to understand why the Communist Party would naturally have felt uncomfortable with the bellicose nationalism expressed in Rouget de Lisle's rallying cry.

Following the formation of the Popular Front in 1935, however, the PCF aspired to a greater role in French political life, and *La Marseillaise* suddenly began to be sung at PCF rallies and meetings. Pascal Ory claims that the first joint singing of the anthems at a Communist Party meeting took place in Paris on July 13, 1935. On that evening, *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale* were chanted following renditions of the revolutionary tunes *Ça ira* and *La Carmagnole*. According to some contemporaneous accounts, many of the supporters appeared quite uncomfortable with the uncanny presence of Rouget de Lisle's tune.⁵ The date on which the two anthems were initially juxtaposed was, of course, highly symbolic, as it occurred only hours before the official announcement of the formation of the Popular Front. News of the left-wing political merger – revealed the following day during the July 14th, Bastille Day celebrations – was received by half a million jubilant supporters, who took to the streets of Paris in celebration. By appropriating this tune, the Parti Communiste Français initiated a political strategy aimed at appropriating the Republic's most resonant symbols within its own ideological mandate. What better way for the PCF to hold out its hands and calm the fears of skeptical voters who traditionally viewed the Party and its members as dangerous revolutionary agitators controlled by Moscow? Taking its cue from Popular Front tactics,

⁵ Pascal Ory, *La belle illusion*, 72; Pierre Scize in *Marianne*, July 17, 1935.

the PCF sought not only to attract disgruntled workers, but the entire French population in the fight against fascism.

These strategies also affected the cultural agenda and underlying ideology of left-wing organizations like the Maison de la Culture and the FMP. Not surprisingly, spokespeople for the FMP's musical ensembles (which were often employed to perform at PCF rallies) had a lot to say about how *La Marseillaise* could be successfully interpreted for Communist purposes. For example, in preparation for the centenary of the death of Rouget de Lisle, *L'Humanité* devoted a multi-page segment to the anthem, entitled "Gloire à *La Marseillaise*," with articles by a number of intellectuals, including the composers Koechlin and Henry Sauveplane, as well as writer Pierre Jean Jouve. Koechlin felt that the anthem should not "evoke the inevitable well-dressed dignitaries of official inaugurations," but rather that the masses should "live the song inside of them, this élan of a people towards liberty, towards a light on the horizon of the future, towards what we want to *accomplish* today."⁶ Sauveplane reminded readers "that all of the greatest revolutions were made" accompanied by the refrain of *La Marseillaise* and that the Bolsheviks sang it in Moscow in 1917.⁷ Pierre Jean Jouve believed that *La Marseillaise* was at the root of a truly French musical art that combined "dryness with greatness, tragic simplicity, natural and vehement emotion, but which is always confronted with truth."⁸

The most influential Communist commentator, however, was none other than Maurice Thorez (1900-1964), general secretary of the PCF. His speech in praise of *La*

⁶ Charles Koechlin, "Cri d'épopée," *L'Humanité*, June 27, 1936. "...il faut le vivre en soi, cet élan d'un peuple vers la liberté, vers une lumière à l'horizon de l'avenir, vers ce que nous voulons, aujourd'hui, réaliser."

⁷ Henry Sauveplane, "Musique et révolution," *L'Humanité*, June 27, 1936.

⁸ Pierre Jean Jouve, "Chants de la Révolution," *L'Humanité*, June 27, 1936.

Marseillaise pursued a logic that exemplifies the Communist Party's relationship with the political symbols situated at the very heart of the French Republic. Thorez's speech revealed that the PCF sought to downplay the nationalist content of *La Marseillaise* while simultaneously interpreting the tune in terms of an international battle that pitted the defense of liberty against the threat of fascism:

La Marseillaise is a call for unity of the nation against the *émigrés* of Koblenz, soldiers of the King of Prussia.⁹ At the same time, it is for peace in our nation, a hand held out to French people, and for peace in the world, the cry of fraternity and solidarity addressed to all those who remain enslaved. What generosity for the unconscious adversary, but what boiling indignation for foreign agents, those eternal dividers of people, in the stanza that I permit myself to cite in its entirety:

Frenchmen, as magnanimous warriors	<i>(Français, en guerriers magnanimes,</i>
Bear or hold back your blows.	<i>Portez ou retenez vos coups !</i>
Spare those sad victims	<i>Epargnez ces tristes victimes,</i>
Half-heartedly taking up arms against us,	<i>A regret s'armant contre nous.</i>
But not those bloody despots	<i>Mais ces despotes sanguinaires,</i>
Those accomplices of Bouillé	<i>Mais ces complices de Bouillé,</i>
All those tigers who pitilessly	<i>Tous ces tigres qui, sans pitié,</i>
Rip out their mothers' wombs.	<i>Déchirent le sein de leur mère!)</i>

Like in 1792, the same forces of reaction (a result of feudalism yesterday, capitalism today) attempt to block the road towards social progress, towards the happiness of mankind. Like in 1792, foreign tyrants are finding accomplices in those who "Rip out their mothers' wombs." Those who continue on French soil

⁹ Koblenz is a town in Germany close to the French border where Louis XVI's brothers had set up a military force comprised of French citizens who had fled to foreign countries (known in this context as *émigrés*) in the wake of the Revolution of 1789.

the execrable tradition of Koblenz have also sought to abduct *La Marseillaise* from the people who inspired it and spread it. They will not succeed!¹⁰

Here, Thorez's interpretation of *La Marseillaise*, and his isolation of the poem's fifth verse, exploits a strategic hermeneutics. He emphasizes the necessity of creating national "unity" (read: Popular Front) against the "eternal dividers of people" (read: fascists), and also employs the Communist catchphrase (made popular during the Popular Front) of *la main tendue* (the held-out hand). This Communist "hand" is held out to all Frenchmen, even those who had become "unconscious adversaries" of the nation through inaction and political complacency. For those who believe in the true message of *La Marseillaise*, the real fight is against those "bloody despots" from outside the country's borders, and those in France who follow their example (read: French fascists).

By formulating a modern-day Communist agenda in light of the text of *La Marseillaise*, Thorez aimed to appease the two main social groups from which his Party sought loyalty – its supporters (for whom fascism was the most pernicious example of the evils of capitalism), and the burgeoning ranks of uncommitted fellow travelers (whose love of the nation was often at odds with the internationalist ambitions of Communism). Thorez throws a bone to both groups: he is not afraid to align modern-day Communism

¹⁰ Maurice Thorez, "La Marseillaise, génie du peuple de France," *L'Humanité*, June 28, 1936. "La Marseillaise, c'est l'appel à l'Union de la Nation contre les émigrés de Coblenz, soldats du roi de Prusse. C'est en même temps, pour la paix intérieure, la main tendue aux Français et, pour la paix extérieure, le cri de fraternité et de solidarité humaine à l'adresse des peuples encore asservis. Quelle générosité pour l'adversaire inconscient mais quelle bouillante indignation pour les éternels diviseurs du peuple, agents de l'étranger, dans ce couplet que je me permets de citer entièrement [...] Comme en 1792 les mêmes forces de réaction, privilégiés féodaux hier, privilégiés capitalistes aujourd'hui, tentent de barrer la route au progrès social, au bonheur des hommes. Comme en 1792, les tyrans étrangers trouvent des complices dans ceux qui "déchirent le sein de leur mère." Ceux qui continuent sur notre sol la tradition exécration de Coblenz voulaient au surplus ravir *La Marseillaise* au peuple que l'a inspirée et propagée. Ils n'y parviendront pas!"

with the Jacobin revolutionary tradition, yet he simultaneously holds out his hand to political moderates:

With the shared accents of *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale*, under the reconciled folds of the tricolour and the red flag, together we will make a France that is free, strong, and happy!¹¹

Thorez thus equates a republican France with a communist France. In his speech he attempts to claim the pre-eminent musical symbol of the Republic by re-evaluating its social purpose and significance. As one journalist expressed in the *L'Humanité* articles devoted to Rouget de Lisle:

The French people of 1936 are not in contradiction with their glorious ancestors of 1792. They both fought, or will fight for freedom, work, and peace. The red and tricolour flags belong to them just as do *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale*.¹²

Musical Realism

The PCF's strategy, which momentarily abandoned revolutionary action predicated upon class struggle in favour of national unity in the face of fascism, had a notable effect upon left-wing cultural organizations during this period. Known as *le grand*

¹¹ Thorez, "La Marseillaise, génie du peuple de France." "Aux accents mêlés de la *Marseillaise* et de *L'Internationale*, sous les plis réconciliés du drapeau tricolore et du drapeau rouge, ensemble nous ferons une France libre, forte et heureuse!"

¹² A. Baudry, "Comment naquit l'Hymne de la Liberté," *L'Humanité*, June 27, 1936. "Le peuple de France en 1936 n'est pas en contradiction avec ses ancêtres glorieux de 1792. Les uns et les autres ont combattu et combattent pour la liberté, le travail, la paix. Les drapeaux rouges et tricolores leur appartiennent comme la *Marseillaise* et *L'Internationale* sont leur bien."

tournant, the tactical shift of the PCF encouraged organizations like the Maison de la Culture and the FMP to subtly alter their cultural mandates as well. These organizations soon began to reduce their aesthetic dependency upon Soviet culture, and actively sought to promote the development of modern French works inspired by revolutionary ideals, while simultaneously highlighting France's vibrant revolutionary past. In light of the Communist Party's re-interpretation of the political significance of *La Marseillaise*, the French revolution of 1789 (as well as those of 1830, 1849, and the Paris Commune) now became important "sites of memory" (to employ Pierre Nora's term) for the movement's cultural organizations.¹³

In 1935, the AEAR choir, which that year had been renamed the Chorale Populaire de Paris, developed a new repertory that more closely reflected French (as opposed to Soviet) revolutionary sources. One small indication of this development was the choir's practice of beginning each of its concerts with Félicien David's *La Ronde des Saint-Simoniens*.¹⁴ Even more significant, however, was its participation in a concert organized by the newly formed Fédération Musicale Populaire entitled "Chants de la liberté." Held on February 16, 1936, at the Salle Pleyel, it showcased performances of Gossec's *Marche lugubre*, the final section of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*, and Berlioz's *Apothéose de la Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*. The choir also sang arrangements of the revolutionary tunes *Ça ira*, *La Carmagnole*, and *L'Internationale*, as well as Berlioz's harmonization of Rouget de Lisle's *La Marseillaise*.

Pierre Jean Jouve, who at that time was active within left-wing circles, wrote an in-depth review of these "Chants de la liberté" for the prestigious intellectual journal, *La*

¹³ Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992).

¹⁴ Robert Brécy, *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire*, (Paris: Editions Hier et Demain, 1978), 285.

Nouvelle Revue française. In it he argued that all of the works that the choir had performed were “realist,” an aesthetic that the author associated with the artistic legacy of the French revolution:

That period produced music. What am I saying? It is probably from this period that we can locate the very source of a French music that has its own intrinsic value. Just as “realism” started to be pushed on David in French painting and developed through Delacroix to be taken up by Daumier and Courbet, the dry but profound sensibility of music found its initial form by Gossec in 1790, by Rouget de Lisle and arrived at Berlioz.¹⁵

Echoing the aesthetic pronouncements of many FMP members, Pierre Jean Jouve’s positive evaluation of musical “realism” was combined with an explicit condemnation of music from the Romantic period as well as from the *fin-de-siècle*. For example, Jouve viewed the “trifles of the French Debussyian school” as simply the latest manifestation of a form of aesthetic self-indulgence that was inherited from sentimental modes of expression made popular during the nineteenth century. Jouve believed that the popular love of reality, with its heightened awareness of the political demands of the present, had been brought to a climax during the French revolution. During the nineteenth century, however, this passion for realism had been gradually replaced by an interest in the expression of sentimentality, an aesthetic shift that lead people away from the

¹⁵ Pierre Jean Jouve, “Les Chants de la Liberté,” *La Nouvelle Revue française* (June 1936): 979. “Cet âge a produit une musique. Que dis-je? C’est probablement là que se trouve la source d’une musique française, qui ait sa valeur propre. De même que le “réel” de la peinture française commence par être appuyé sur David, et se développe à travers Delacroix jusqu’à Daumier et Courbet, de même la sensibilité à la fois sèche et profonde de la musique a sa première forme dans Gossec de 1790, dans Rouget de l’Isle, et arrive à Berlioz.”

“magical powers” of liberty.¹⁶ So thoroughly had expressions of reality been replaced by expressions of sentimentality, Jouve claims, that realism in art was rare, even “abnormal” to behold in the twentieth century.

The concert of the Chorale Populaire de Paris, however, was a manifestation of “art in its living *reality*; a native and creative reality, a reality that contains a type of beauty that is nothing other than eternal.”¹⁷ Jouve claimed that this music represented a timeless reality, because, although composed during an earlier period, it still held strong social and aesthetic relevance for the present. In fact, Jouve argued these “realist” works were comparable in style and aesthetic effect to the “objective” works certain modern composers were writing in the 1930s. Drawing an analogy from the world of the factory, he boldly claimed: “[i]t was not the smallest surprise to feel the modernity of this [musical] machinery, of which one could have almost said that it was by Stravinsky.”¹⁸ Through this statement, Jouve equates the “realist” aesthetic current born of the French revolution with modern-day musical “objectivity.” By pointing out this aesthetic lineage, he helped to historically ground the efforts of groups like the FMP, thereby validating the modern-day interest in new revolutionary works informed by the ideals of the Popular Front.

Honegger’s *Jeunesse*

It was indeed among FMP composers that experiments in new “revolutionary” works were being made, and one of the most widely successful pieces to come out of this

¹⁶ Ibid., 982.

¹⁷ Ibid., 977. “On éprouve donc aussi une satisfaction extrême et qui devient presque anormale à rencontrer, sans l’avoir voulu, sans avoir attendu de la rencontrer, cette *réalité* vivante de l’Art; réalité native et de création, réalité avec le caractère de la beauté qui n’est rien autre que l’éternel.”

¹⁸ Ibid., 981. “Ce n’était pas le moindre étonnement que de sentir le moderne de cette machinerie, dont on eût pu dire presque qu’elle était de Stravinsky.”

climate was a small song by Arthur Honegger entitled *Jeunesse*. Honegger, while a member of the FMP, was also affiliated with the Loisirs musicaux de la jeunesse, another left-wing musical group affiliated with the Maison de la Culture.¹⁹ Inspired by the group's initiatives in favour of music education for the children of urban workers, *Jeunesse*, based on a text by Paul Vaillant-Couturier, became one of the most celebrated songs of the Popular Front period. Koechlin called it a model of the genre, and Honegger's biographer Harry Halbreich has noted that even many years after the Popular Front, *Jeunesse* (like Shostakovich's *Au-devant de la vie*) had come to symbolize the spirit of the era.²⁰ Following a performance of the song by the Chorale Populaire de Paris in October 1937, Swiss journalist Fritz Hoff could hardly contain his enthusiasm:

Jeunesse by Honegger [...], easy to remember, containing great artistic and popular value, is a song that responds to everything that those who initiated the workers' musical movement have for so long wished for. Here, a great composer has discovered, through close contact with the people, new creative forces. *Jeunesse* will soon be on everybody's lips. It is predestined to be that way, not only because of the music, but also because of the words which, avoiding all excessive slogans, are made for all young workers of every political stripe.²¹

¹⁹Two prominent government members, Jean Zay and Léo Lagrange, figured on the list of committee members of the Loisirs musicaux de la jeunesse. The group was founded in January 1937. Darius Milhaud was the organization's honorary president and Paul Arma its musical director. *Mai* 36 (May 1937): 4; Ory, *La belle illusion*, 297.

²⁰ Harry Halbreich, *Arthur Honegger*, trans. Roger Nichols (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1999), 140.

²¹ Fritz Hoff in the *Schweizerische Saenger Zeitung*, cited in *L'Art musical populaire* (December 1937-January 1938): 7. "*Jeunesse*, d'Honegger [...] facile à retenir, d'une grande valeur artistique et populaire, c'est un chant qui répond à tout ce que les initiateurs du mouvement musical ouvrier souhaitaient depuis longtemps. Ici un grand compositeur a trouvé, en liaison étroite avec le peuple, des forces créatrices nouvelles. *Jeunesse* sera bientôt sur toutes les lèvres. Il y est prédestiné non seulement par sa musique mais aussi par ses paroles qui, évitant tous les mots d'ordre excessifs sont des paroles faites pour tous les jeunes travailleurs sans distinction de parti."

Like Shostakovich's *Au devant de la vie*, the most striking feature of *Jeunesse* is its simple, folk-like style, expressed through the compound rhythms and diatonic framework so typical of French folk songs (example 4.1). Arthur Hoérée commended Honegger (as well as works in the same vein by Elsa Barraine and Henry Sauveplane) for his “natural return” to the “moral and physical health” of simple expression.²² In doing so, Honegger followed a predominant trend at the FMP, one which looked, as Sauveplane eloquently said, to “drink at the limpid spring” of folklore.²³

Ex. 4.1. Arthur Honegger, *Jeunesse*, mm. 17-24 (refrain).²⁴



Another critic recognized that works like *Jeunesse* re-established an artistic exchange between composers and the masses, one that had been absent since the days of the French revolution:

These beautiful modern songs of liberty were written especially for the people: it was up to the musicians to make the first move. But what a great joy it is to suddenly see filled the gap that has separated truly beautiful music from the

²² Arthur Hoérée, “Musique moderne: retour à la simplicité,” *L’Art musical populaire* (December 1938-January 1939): 2.

²³ Henry Sauveplane in *Les cahiers du bolchévisme*, July 1936; cited in Ory, *La Belle illusion* 325.

²⁴ Louis Durey later wrote a four-part harmonization of this piece. It was published by Le chant du monde in 1966.

popular soul for over one hundred years; and what a consecration for modern music to be simultaneously assimilated by a vibrant multitude of people.²⁵

In this small piece, Honegger aligns himself closely with the political ideology of the Popular Front. The poem makes explicit reference to the ideological symbols that were now resonant, including the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, as well as the anti-fascist demonstrators of February 1934. The topical references are all French, but the social optimism expressed in phrases like “*Place, place au travail vainquer / Chantons, amis, chantons en chœur / La vie!*” (Make way for victorious labour/ Sing, friends, sing together/ To life!) closely recall the jubilatory spirit of Shostakovich’s *Au devant de la vie*.

Milhaud Holds Out His Hand

Jeunesse was not the only new “revolutionary” song to be penned by prominent FMP members. Milhaud’s *Main tendue à tous*, composed to a poem by left-wing author Charles Vildrac, is another salient example of the trend. This four-part *hymne* was first performed on September 12, 1937, by members of the FMP at a congress hosted by the *Ligue internationale contre l’antisémitisme* (example 4.2).

²⁵ Maurice Henrion in *La Wallonie*, cited in *L’Art musical populaire* (December 1937-January 1938): 7. “Ces beaux chants modernes de la liberté ont été écrits volontairement pour le peuple: les musiciens se devaient de faire le premier pas. Mais quelle joie de voir subitement comblé l’abîme qui depuis quelque cent ans séparait la vraie belle musique de l’âme populaire – et quelle consécration pour une musique moderne de se voir spontanément assimilée par une vibrante multitude.”

Ex. 4.2. Darius Milhaud, *Main tendue à tous*, mm. 1-10.

Soprano

Contralto

Tenor

Bass

En tout lieu de la terre Où monte u - ne fu - mé - e. Où tinte et bat l'en-clume Où ser-pente un che - min. Hom - me.

6

S.

A.

T.

B.

— tu trou - ve - ras d'aut-res hom - mes tes frè - res Com-me toi la-bou-rant con-strui-sant et chan-tant

Despite the theme of the congress (particularly urgent in light of the proliferation of racial injustice throughout Europe), Vildrac's text is less an indictment of anti-Semitism than an ode to Popular Front inclusiveness. The theme of *la main tendue* ("the hand held out") was, as we have learned, particularly resonant because the Communist Party had begun using it as a political slogan during 1936.

As shown in example 4.2, Milhaud's music borrows many elements from folksong. The composer even peppers individual lines with flattened sevenths and sharpened fourths, thus imbuing the work with a quasi-modal atmosphere. From a harmonic standpoint, this results in notable tri-tone dissonances and unconventional cadential arrivals that contrast with the clear diatonicism of other well known songs from the period like *Jeunesse* and *Au-devant de la vie*.

Interest in works inspired by the revolution prompted the FMP to publish a considerable quantity of both French and international “revolutionary” songs throughout 1936 and 1937. In an effort to establish a repertory of songs for its affiliated choral groups, the FMP released four volumes and a number of individual works in cooperation with the Editions Sociales Internationales (figure 13).

Fig. 13. Revolutionary songs published by Editions Sociales Internationales (1935-1937).

Vol. 1. Chants révolutionnaires français

<i>La Carmagnole/ Ça ira</i>	Anon.	<i>Les rois</i>	Jean-Claude Simon
<i>La Parisienne</i>	C. Delavigne	<i>La chanson de l'arbre</i>	Henri Sauveplane
<i>Ronde des Saint-Simoniens</i>	F. David	<i>En avant!</i>	Jean Lods
<i>Le Chant des ouvriers</i>	Pierre Dupont	<i>La nouvelle ronde</i>	Robert Caby
<i>L'Internationale</i>	Pottier/Degeyter		

Vol. 2. Chants des peuples soviétiques

<i>Au devant de la vie</i>	Shostakovich	<i>Fleur cueillie</i>	Anon.
<i>Les partisans</i>	Anon.	<i>Chantons un chant</i>	Iouachev
<i>Chant arménien</i>	Zakharian	<i>Le collectif</i>	Iouachev
<i>Chant géorgien</i>	Azmaïparachvili	<i>La Komsomole</i>	Maximov
<i>Le chant du kolkhoz</i>	Chefredinov	<i>Notre avenir</i>	Khatchatourian
<i>De ton regard</i>	Echpaï		

Vol. 3. Chants révolutionnaires de divers pays

<i>Comintern</i>	(Eisler)	<i>Bandiera rossa</i>	Italy
<i>Le chant des marais</i>	Germany	<i>Dans les rizières</i>	Japan
<i>Solidarité à jamais</i>	U.S.A.	<i>La Varsoviennne</i>	Poland
<i>Le drapeau rouge</i>	England	<i>Marche funèbre</i>	USSR
<i>L'adieu d'un soldat rouge</i>	China	<i>Marche du 5e régiment</i>	Spain
<i>Hymne de riego</i>	Spain		

Vol. 4. Chants de la révolution française

<i>Hymne à la liberté</i>	Dalayrac	<i>Hymne à la statue de la liberté</i>	Gossec
<i>La Carmagnole</i>	Anon.	<i>Ronde pour l'arbre de la liberté</i>	Grétry
<i>Le chant du départ</i>	Méhul	<i>Ça ira</i>	Anon.
<i>Hymne à la victoire</i>	Gossec	<i>Ronde nationale</i>	Gossec
<i>Hymne pour la fête de Bara et Viala</i>	Méhul	<i>La Marseillaise</i>	Rouget de Lisle

Individual publications

<i>Le Front des travailleurs</i>	Eisler	<i>Libérons Thaelmann</i>	Koechlin
<i>Lénine</i>	Miaskovski	<i>Fête de la Liberté</i>	Lazarus
<i>La chanson des loisirs</i>	Gilles et Julien	<i>Chant de l'auberge</i>	Cliquet-Pleyel
<i>Jeunesse</i>	Honegger	<i>Le Pain, la paix, la liberté</i>	J.C. Simon
<i>La marche des aviateurs</i>	Chekhter	<i>Debout les prolétaires</i>	Anon.

They included songs written by composers associated with the Revolutionary period like Gossec and Rouget de Lisle, as well as modern works like Caby's *La nouvelle ronde* (discussed in Chapter 2), and Henri Sauveplane's *La chanson de l'arbre*. The FMP also published a volume of Soviet mass songs, thereby confirming its aesthetic indebtedness to Soviet models. In this aesthetic climate, it is unsurprising that FMP members quoted both *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale* in works written throughout the Popular Front period. Daniel Lazarus's contribution to the collective work *Liberté* for the 1937 Exposition (discussed in Chapter 7) called for an off-stage chorus that hummed *L'Internationale*, while Honegger's film score for the Communist Party propaganda film, *Visages de la France*, ends with a contrapuntal presentation of both anthems.²⁶ Koechlin supplied the FMP with arrangements for chorus and band of both Rouget de Lisle's *Hymne à la raison* and *La Marseillaise*. The *Internationale*, along with Shostakovich's *Au-devant de la vie* and Beethoven's *Third Symphony*, were featured in the 1938 Communist-funded biopic of Paul Vaillant-Couturier entitled *Vie d'un homme*, a film on which Honegger, Auric and Sauveplane acted as "musical advisors."²⁷

Maurice Jaubert: The Exception to the Rule

Although the extensive use and emulation of "popular" sources like folklore and revolutionary music dominated the populist modernist approach of the FMP, some of its members looked to other popular sources, like jazz and *chanson*, to express their political commitment and to engage the masses. Such was the case of Maurice Jaubert (1900-

²⁶ Claude Chamfray, "Avant la première de *Liberté*," *Beaux-Arts*, April 23, 1937.

²⁷ I would like to thank Colin Roust for bringing this last reference to my attention. *La Vie d'un homme* was directed by Jean-Paul le Chanois (1909-1985), who had also participated in the PCF-sponsored collective film, *La vie est à nous* (1936). The FMP and the Chorale Populaire de Paris were involved in both of these films. Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 300-301.

1940), a composer who perhaps more than any of his FMP colleagues showed a life-long determination to bridge the gap separating “elite” and “popular” forms of musical expression.²⁸ Jaubert synthesized his ideas in an article written in 1934 entitled “*Préface à une musique*,” in which he reflected upon the historical and stylistic factors at the root of classical music’s failure to connect with mass audiences. Convinced that modern composers were entirely out of touch with the general public, Jaubert expressed the commonly held opinion that modern music catered almost entirely to snobs and professionals. Jaubert traces this situation back to the Romantic period, a historical epoch during which artists turned their backs on “collective art” in favour of personal and highly subjective forms of expression. In Jaubert’s view, this led the way to the metaphysical music-dramas of Wagner, and ultimately to Schoenberg – a composer Jaubert calls a “grammarian” who brought the act of composition to “the extreme limits of abstraction.”²⁹ His opinion of Stravinsky is less harsh, for Jaubert believed that Stravinsky was basically uncomfortable with seeing music placed on lofty “summits.” Jaubert claimed that to counter the effects of “abstraction,” Stravinsky had (like Les Six) introduced popular idioms such as “the waltz, polka, and popular refrains” into his works. But despite Stravinsky’s crafty efforts to combine the “elite” and the “popular” in works like *L’Histoire du soldat* and *Mavra*, he would not settle in favour of popular expression – as Jaubert laments, the Russian composer “had walked for too long on the paths of the unknown to permit himself to renounce his discoveries.”³⁰

²⁸ François Porcile, *Maurice Jaubert: musicien populaire ou maudit?* (Paris: Les Éditions françaises réunies, 1971), 194.

²⁹ Maurice Jaubert, “Préface à une musique,” *Esprit* (October 1934): 70.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 71. “...il avait marché trop loin sur les chemins de l’inconnu pour renoncer à ses découvertes.”

Jaubert argues that the approach of Stravinsky and Les Six – their lifestyle modernism – does not go far enough. He feels that in musical composition, a “total renunciation” (*renoncement totale*) of elite approaches is necessary, and praises Kurt Weill’s *Three-Penny Opera* as the “first legitimate attempt since the war to rid music of all the rhetoric and pseudo-aesthetic trash that threatens to bury it completely; the first attempt to rediscover the spontaneous virtue of popular song.”³¹ He concludes his article by calling for “the reinvention of “popular” music,” yet admits that to do so is no easy task: “for the real difficulty – and moreover the real courage – is not about hiding oneself behind the mysteries of our craft, but rather, it is about rediscovering music in its most unadorned nudity.”³²

Of course, Jaubert’s view that “craft” can be an impediment to authentic expression resonates strongly with the aesthetic espoused by other prominent musicians within the FMP. But unlike the majority of FMP composers who based their political works solely on a re-evaluation of folk and revolutionary sources, Jaubert also used jazz as one of his models:

...the only authentic “popular music” of today: that of the American Negroes [*sic*]. Thanks to jazz we have witnessed the birth and development of an art form that owes next to nothing to the individualism of a single artist but which has

³¹ Ibid., 71. “...le premier effort valable tenté depuis la guerre pour débarrasser la musique de toute la rhétorique et de tous les oripeaux pseudo-esthétiques qui menacèrent de l’ensevelir; premier effort enfin pour retrouver la vertu spontanée de la chanson populaire.”

³² Ibid., 72. “...car la vraie difficulté – et d’ailleurs le vrai courage – ne consiste pas à se dissimuler derrière les mystères de la lettre, mais à retrouver la musique dans sa plus stricte nudité. Pour s’efforcer alors de lui redonner le sens du chant humain et, si possible, collectif.”

nonetheless become the medium of expression, both personal and universal, of an entire people.³³

By defining jazz as the music of a “people,” Jaubert makes a claim for the idiom as a vibrant folk tradition with profound social relevance. This attitude contrasts notably with that of Les Six during the early 1920s, whose interest in jazz stemmed largely from the innovations it afforded, particularly its rhythmic dynamism and percussive energy. Indeed, for Jaubert, jazz is interesting less for its cultural exoticism than for its contemporary political resonance and ideological significance as the collective musical expression of African Americans.

This is apparent in one of his most noteworthy choral compositions from the period, *O mes frères perdus*, based on two poems by Paul Eluard entitled *Novembre 1936* and *Sans âge*, both of which deal with the theme of the Spanish civil war. For French Communists, the outbreak of the war in the Fall of 1936 was the beginning of a decisive battle against the forces of fascism. Many Communists were distraught when the newly elected Popular Front government under Léon Blum adopted a position of military non-intervention in Spain. For the Communists, this was the first political and ideological betrayal of the Popular Front and opened the wounds that would lead to the coalition’s disintegration in 1937. Of course, despite the government’s position, many Popular Front (and international) supporters travelled to Spain at this time to show solidarity and fight alongside Spanish republicans. In this light, Jaubert’s piece can be viewed as an example

³³ Maurice Jaubert, “Préface à une musique,” *Esprit* (October 1934): 71. “la seule musique populaire authentique d’aujourd’hui: celle des nègres d’Amérique. Grâce au jazz nous avons vu naître et se développer un art qui ne doit presque plus rien à l’individualisme du créateur mais qui – fait unique dans la musique contemporaine – est devenu le moyen d’expression à la fois personnel et universel de tout un peuple.”

of cultural and political solidarity, expressed not only through the indignant tone of Eluard's anti-fascist text, but also through the composer's choice of dedicatee, the poet Rafaël Alberti – an eminent figure in the Spanish anti-fascist movement.³⁴

Ex. 4.3. Maurice Jaubert, "Novembre 1936," from *O mes frères perdus*, mm. 7-11.

The musical score for Maurice Jaubert's "Novembre 1936" from *O mes frères perdus* (measures 7-11) is presented in a four-part setting. The vocal parts are for Tenors, Baritone, and Basses, with a Piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Agitato" and the dynamics are "ff molto marcato". The lyrics are: "Re gar-dez tra-vail - ler les bâ-tis-seurs de ru-ines Ils sont ri-ches pa tients or - don - nés noirs et bê - tes." The piano accompaniment features a prominent, rapid hammering of chords in the left hand, creating a sense of urgency and tension. The vocal lines are characterized by triplet rhythms and a strong, indignant tone.

Novembre 1936 (example 4.3) is in five main sections, dominated throughout by brisk ostinati in the piano accompaniment. The introduction presents rapid hammerings of an ambiguously voiced added-note chord, which, though outlining B-flat major, is

³⁴ On Alberti see Judith Nantell, *Rafaël Alberti's Poetry of the Thirties: The Poet's Public Voice* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

undermined by the introduction of an accentuated melody centered around D-flat in measure two. The entry of the three-part male chorus initiates a harmonic oscillation between B-flat minor and D-flat major. This recurrent minor third motion, rendered consistently unstable by the presence of D natural in the left-hand chords, is a feature highly indebted to the musical style of early jazz. In fact, heard in a B-flat major context, D-flat functions as a “blue” note, as does the flattened seventh present in the tenor line. This jazz feature – equally prominent in Milhaud’s 1923 ballet *La Création du monde* – is a striking consequence of Jaubert’s larger aesthetic and political positions.³⁵

Jaubert’s appropriation of jazz elements in this particular example is exceptional, for it does not reflect the approach generally adopted by his colleagues at the FMP. Throughout the 1930s, jazz had become more and more of a commodity in France, and with the departure of many American performers in the wake of the Depression, it was also an idiom that was increasingly altered in order to cater to French taste.³⁶ For most “elite” composers – a group with which Jaubert self-consciously identified – the compositional allure of jazz had long passed. Even Milhaud, the member of Les Six with the most sustained interest in the idiom, conceded in 1927 that jazz had “lost its charm” and its influence had “passed over like a beneficent storm.”³⁷

³⁵ On blue notes in *La Création du monde* see Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday, Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1991), 203-204.

³⁶ On the development of American jazz in France see Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), esp. 127-135 and; William Howland Kenney, “Le Hot: the Assimilation of American Jazz in France, 1917-1940,” *American Studies* (1984): 5-24.

³⁷ Darius Milhaud, *Ma Vie heureuse* (Paris: Belfond, 1973), 158. “Même à Harlem, le charme était rompu pour moi!”; Darius Milhaud, *Études* (Paris: Aveline, 1927), 22. “Mais déjà l’influence du jazz est passée comme un orage bienfaisant après lequel on retrouve un ciel plus pur, un temps plus sûr.”

Folklore at the FMP

Jaubert's use of jazz elements in *Novembre 1936* as a means to express left-wing political ideology is a special case. As I have claimed, when writing works explicitly for the people, members of the FMP generally avoided musical references to commodified genres of popular music. Rather than using jazz or other commercial dance music, the Left attempted to establish itself as a cultural mediator between the musical elite and the masses by championing revolutionary music and, as we shall now see, folksong.

Throughout the Popular Front period, the revalorization of French folk traditions was a constant preoccupation of the cultural ministries of the government. This revalorization by the Left was politically astute. As Herman Lebovics has explained in depth, over the years, the Right had promoted an image of folklore which had become inextricably associated with the peasant world as the predominant symbol of a fixed and coherent national culture.³⁸ Organizations like the Maison de la Culture sought to alter this image:

If one of our principal preoccupations is the culture of our country, we should not forget that folklore is an element that has been, unfortunately, left in the hands of the most reactionary organizations and personalities. It is our duty to recapture this folklore, to rediscover its healthy popular sap, legacy of the past, and to make it live again.³⁹

³⁸ Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars Over Cultural Identity 1900-1945* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 135-161.

³⁹ Internal memo by René Blech, secretary general of cultural affairs of the Maison de la Culture, Archives Nationales, 104 AS 1. "Si l'une de nos principales préoccupations est la culture de notre pays, nous ne devons pas oublier que le folklore est un élément qui a été, hélas, laissé dans les mains d'organisations ou de personnalités les plus réactionnaires. Il est de notre tâche de reprendre ce folklore, d'y retrouver toute la saine sève populaire, héritage du passé, de la faire revivre..."

In particular, cultural organizations attached to Popular Front ideology wished to enlarge the notion of folklore by attempting to include the traditions and interests of urban workers within their definition of folk.⁴⁰ The newly formed Leisure Ministry (under the dynamic Léo Lagrange) looked to bring depth to urban “folk” traditions through an aggressive sponsorship of such urban activities as cycling and the youth hostel movement.

The FMP’s program for revitalizing musical folk traditions was vast. During the late 1930s, it viewed folk music as the living musical expression of the French people, and actively sought to promote it in a variety of ways. Cognizant of the intellectual interest that had long surrounded folklore in traditionalist right-wing circles, organizations like the FMP were conscious that its approach needed to contrast notably from the efforts of right-wing groups. For the composers of the FMP, such “right-wing” approaches were exemplified by the musical aesthetics of the Schola Cantorum. Growing out of the tradition initiated by Vincent d’Indy’s *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* (1886), the Schola was a strong advocate of nineteenth-century musical procedures that looked to incorporate folk melodies as thematic material in large symphonic works.⁴¹ The aim of most members of the FMP, however, was not to employ folksongs so as to create romanticized and picturesque evocations of “the people” and “the land” within elite musical genres like symphonies and operas. Rather, following the aesthetic cue of composers like Charles Koechlin, many members of the FMP were

⁴⁰ Lebovics, *True France*, 160.

⁴¹ Other selected examples of Schola works inspired by folklore include D’Indy’s *Symphonie cévenole*, the *Chansons populaires du Vivarais* and the *Chants populaires français*, Déodat de Séverac’s *En Languedoc*, Canteloube’s *Le Mas* and Charles Bordes’s *Suite basque*, *Rapsodie basque* and *11 Chansons du Languedoc*.

primarily interested in how the “instinctive,” “naïve,” and “spontaneous” spirit of folklore could inform the composition of modern works.⁴²

These aesthetic considerations went hand in hand with the FMP’s practical efforts towards reinvigorating folk traditions among French people. Composer Marcel Delannoy, for one, complained that folk music was dying, and that France was “perhaps the only country where we see a people forget its folklore and, at the same time, its soul.”⁴³ Communist deputy, Paul Vaillant-Couturier, in his address to the FMP’s 1937 Congress, encouraged the organization to defend existing folk traditions rather than rely upon sterile collections of folksongs that “remain closed up in libraries.”⁴⁴ Suzanne Cointe concurred, expressing the importance of reinvigorating French folklore “of the past,” as well as its emerging traditions “in the present.”⁴⁵

This plea to revive “dried-up” folk traditions (or in some cases, to simply take into the open, songs that had been relegated to the “elite” world of library collections) was best exemplified by a project the FMP sponsored in conjunction with the recording label “Chant du monde,” financed by Communist sympathizer Renaud de Jouvenal.⁴⁶ Together, they commissioned some of the FMP’s most prominent composers to write new harmonizations of a number of well-known French folksongs (figure 14).

⁴² Charles Koechlin, “Défense de la culture: la musique populaire,” *L’Humanité*, June 26, 1936.

⁴³ Marcel Delannoy, “Les perspectives musicales de la France,” *L’Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937): 31. “La France, en effet, est peut-être le seul pays où l’on voit un peuple oublier ainsi son folklore et du même coup son âme.”

⁴⁴ Paul Vaillant-Couturier, “La musique dans la vie d’aujourd’hui,” *L’Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937), 21.

⁴⁵ Cointe, “Rapport d’organisation,” 3.

⁴⁶ Delannoy, “Les perspectives musicales de la France,” 31.

Fig. 14. Folksongs harmonized by FMP composers.

<i>Le fils du Cordonnier</i>	Auric
<i>Le roi a fait battre tambour</i>	Auric
<i>La mort de Jean Reynaud</i>	Delannoy
<i>Le condamné à mort</i>	Delannoy
<i>La femme du marin</i>	Honegger
<i>Les cloches de Nantes</i>	Jaubert
<i>Soldat par chagrin</i>	Jaubert
<i>La fille du Maréchal de France</i>	Koechlin
<i>En passant par la Lorraine</i>	Koechlin
<i>Bourrée d'Auvergne</i>	Koechlin
<i>An Hini Goz (La vieille)</i>	Koechlin
<i>Jeanne d'Aymé</i>	Koechlin
<i>Les trente voleurs de Bazoges</i>	Koechlin
<i>Le jaloux</i>	Loucheur
<i>Magali</i>	Milhaud
<i>Se canto</i>	Milhaud
<i>Le pauvre laboureur</i>	Sauveplane
<i>Mois d'août</i>	Sauveplane

In early 1939, these folksongs were recorded by the Orchestra of the FMP and the Chorale Populaire de Paris for *Chant du monde*, and published as a series of affordable discs.⁴⁷ A review by Henry Degy that appeared in *Commune* predictably lauded the venture. "All of these songs, which express all the flavour of an age, all the poetic and musical richness of a people; all of these songs, which this modern age has condemned to be forgotten and which are drowned out by a continuous flow of stupid and facile popular ditties: here [...] they are once again given life, and returned to the people from which they came."⁴⁸ Typical of left-wing opinion of the period, Degy claimed that familiarity

⁴⁷ Alban Ekstein, "Discographie: L'Édition de *Chants du monde*," *Les loisirs culturels de France* (April-May, 1939): 10-12. Yvonne Gouverné conducted the performances on these discs.

⁴⁸ Henry Degy, "Du Folklore," *Commune* (July 1938): 1396. "Toutes ces chansons, qui expriment toute la saveur d'une époque, toute la richesse poétique et musicale d'un peuple, toutes ces chansons que l'époque contemporaine condamnait à l'oubli et noyait dans un flot continu de chansonnettes à la mode, stupides et faciles, voici qu'une jeune maison tente, réussit même, à leur redonner de la vie, à les restituer au peuple dont elles sont issues."

with these folksongs could “provide an occasion for renewal” because they allowed composers to rediscover the “source of all music.”⁴⁹

The FMP also advocated the recognition and development of specifically urban “folk” idiom, particularly in association with the everyday environment and activities of the workers. Paul Vaillant-Couturier reminded the FMP that during the 1936 workers’ strikes “there was not a factory that didn’t have a song,” and that an entire body of urban folklore – theatre, *fêtes*, parades – had been created by this mass movement.⁵⁰ Hélène Abraham, reporting on the activities of the FMP’s artistic committee, called for the development of mass songs and songs of “collective life” that would musically represent the worker in his/her professional and social environment. She also encouraged the creation of mass songs to mark important events in the calendar year, particularly to celebrate significant dates in the history of the French worker’s movement. Abraham also called for songs dedicated to the “dominant preoccupations of women,” which would speak of their quotidian tasks, motherly love, and the condemnation of war. In the same vein, she stressed the importance of creating a new repertory for children – one that would increase enthusiasm for musical studies at school.⁵¹

FMP composers also wrote a series of works conceived in conjunction with the burgeoning outdoors movement. In line with Suzanne Cointe’s objectives for FMP repertory, these works, all based on texts by Vaillant-Couturier, are addressed to youth audiences and sing of the manual tasks associated with camping and hiking (figure 15).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1396-1397.

⁵⁰ Paul Vaillant-Couturier, “La musique dans la vie d’aujourd’hui,” *L’Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937): 21. “Pendant les grèves de juin, il est sorti tout un folklore que l’on a étudié aux maisons de la culture, tout un folklore musical, tout un folklore de chansons. Il n’était pas d’usine qui n’eût sa chanson; il n’était pas d’entreprise qui ne montât on ne sait quelle pièce bouffe, qui ne fit tel ou tel défilé; tout cela représente l’élan, l’espoir de notre peuple et vers le spectacle, et vers la musique.”

⁵¹ Hélène Abraham, “Rapport de la commission artistique,” *L’Art musical populaire* (August-September 1937): 12.

These activities were vigorously sponsored by the Popular Front government, through leisure programs aimed to entice urban youths (often in connection with scout or youth hostelling organizations) to discover the simple joys of the French countryside.

Fig. 15. Series of camping songs written by FMP members on texts by Paul Vaillant-Couturier

<i>La corvée de bois</i> - piano and voice	Henry Sauveplane
<i>Le sac mal fait</i> - piano and voice	Henry Sauveplane
<i>Le jeu du camp fou</i> - piano and voice	André Jolivet
<i>La corvée d'eau</i> - piano and voice	Georges Auric
<i>Le canard</i> - piano and voice	Georges Auric
<i>Le campeur en chocolat</i> - piano and voice	Georges Auric
<i>Reveil</i> - a cappella choir	Yvonne Desportes
<i>La soupe à l'ognion</i> - a cappella choir	Yvonne Desportes
<i>Pour faire un feu</i> - a cappella choir	Yvonne Desportes

Another work, written by FMP members Léon Moussinac and Georges Auric in collaboration with the Union des Jeunes filles de France, was *Chantons jeunes filles*.⁵² Auric's piece reflects the general tone and style of the FMP's "modern" folklore (example 4.4). Solidly diatonic and easy to commit to memory, these simple tunes – though written by some of the nation's most illustrious composers – are completely unpretentious. Naively joyous and optimistic, Auric's piece, like those of his colleagues, mirrors the sentiment of Moussinac's text and that of the period as a whole – "that the world will be better/ when we will have reconstructed it/ with reason and with heart."

⁵² Brécy, *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire*, 290.

Ex. 4.4. Georges Auric, *Chantons jeunes filles*.

Quand nous al-lons par les che-mins Nous te-nant tou-tes par la main, Au de-vant des sai-sons nou-vel-les,

Nous ri-ons de nous sa-voir bel-les, Quand nous al-lons par les che-mins A la ren-con-tre de de-main Car nous

ne craig-nons pas de di-re Que le mon-de se-ra meil-leur Quand nous l'au-rons pu re-cons-trui-re

Refrain

A-vec la rai-son et le coeur. O mes com-pag-nes, Chan-tons enchoeur Par les vil-les et les cam

pa-gnes Chan-tons enchoeur, O mes com-pa-gnes, Chan-tons la chan-son du bon-heur.

Roussel and the Lure of Folklore

Albert Roussel, the FMP's first president, was not insensitive to these aesthetic developments. He advocated that composers should "write modern workers' songs, write songs that express modern life," and suggested that the French were in need of a figure like Walt Whitman, who could "write simple texts, expressive texts, not sentimental nor brutal, but scientific in a way, texts that moderate a composer's inspiration and lyricism; texts that are propped up by rhythm (which is even more paramount in music meant to be heard by large numbers of people than in any other) and which allow everybody to recognize and express in song the life of all."⁵³ Although Roussel never wrote music to fit

⁵³ Ibid. "Il souhaite des textes simples, des textes expressifs, exempts de sentimentalité comme de brutalité en quelque sorte scientifique; des textes qui ménagent le champ d'inspiration et d'expression lyrique du musicien; des textes qui, étayés par le rythme musical – plus primordial encore dans une musique de grande diffusion populaire que dans toute autre – permettent à tous de reconnaître et de chanter l'expression de la vie de tous."

this evocative description, these ideas, penned three months before his death in 1937, do attest to a growing sympathy for the musical aesthetics of the Left.

Following his death, the FMP stressed Roussel's commitment to these musical ideals by constructing a posthumous image of the composer that closely mirrored the organization's ideological mandate. In her obituary of Roussel written for *L'Art Musical Populaire*, Hélène Abraham reiterated the composer's dedication to the cause of *musique populaire*, and argued that "to bring people to music, to give music back to the masses, was one of his governing ideas."⁵⁴ She also quoted comments by Georges Auric who argued that Roussel's bourgeois roots did not prevent him from writing music that still remained "generously human."⁵⁵ *L'Art Musical Populaire* lifted judiciously chosen descriptions of the composer's works from Arthur Hoérée's biography. For example, the journal singled out Hoérée's description of Roussel's *Psaume LXXX* (1928), which praised the work for its simple writing, "crude and elementary style" and the "calls of an oppressed people."⁵⁶ Even Charles Koechlin took part in the posthumous construction of Roussel as a left-wing composer. In an article drafted in 1933 (but only published in 1949) he wrote that "Roussel can only be thought of as a rebel (communist, really); his music is inseparable from this revolt and his political attitude."⁵⁷

Casting their first president in a manner that attempted to highlight his personal commitment to the cause of the organization was a strategic manoeuvre. After all, by

⁵⁴ Hélène Abraham, "Albert Roussel (1869-1937)," *L'Art Musical Populaire* (October-November, 1937): 1. "Ramener le peuple à la musique, rendre la musique aux masses, c'était l'une de ses idées maîtresses."

⁵⁵ Quoted in Abraham, "Albert Roussel (1869-1937)," 1. See also Pierre Kaldor's article in which he reiterates Roussel's left-wing engagement, "La musique française porte le deuil d'Albert Roussel," *Commune* (October 1937): 246-249.

⁵⁶ X. "Un volume sur Albert Roussel," *L'Art Musical Populaire* (October-November, 1937): 2.

⁵⁷ Charles Koechlin, "Art, Liberté, Tour d'Ivoire," *Contrepoints* (December 1949): 113. "Roussel ne se conçoit que révolté (communiste, au fond); son oeuvre est inséparable de cette révolte et de son attitude politique." In 1949 Koechlin was still president of the FMP, which had recommenced its activities in 1946.

1937, Roussel was one of the most universally celebrated living French composers; his fame was a significant factor in the establishment of the organization's overall reputation and cultural legitimacy. Not only was he the president of the FMP, he also chaired the French section of the International Society for Contemporary Music and was in charge of coordinating the musical activities for the 1937 International Exposition.⁵⁸ Despite these prestigious positions and his renown within intellectual circles, there could have been little doubt among the FMP's executive and artistic committees that the working-class readers of *L'Art Musical Populaire* would not have known even the composer's most famous works (i.e. *Le Festin de l'Arraignée* and *Padmâvatî*).⁵⁹ Indeed, Roussel probably would have been the first to admit that these works were conceived with little thought for the musical needs of the masses.

Nonetheless, I believe that, at the end of his life, Roussel's involvement with the FMP stemmed from a growing commitment towards left-wing ideals, a facet of his personality that his biographers have never examined.⁶⁰ This may be due to the fact that Roussel left no obvious record of this commitment. In fact, it appears that the composer was quite apprehensive about expressing himself publicly on this subject. When asked by a journalist to contribute an article to *L'Art Musical Populaire*, Roussel responded: "An

⁵⁸ Jane F. Fulcher claims that Roussel's activity at the Exposition was further proof of his advocacy for Popular Front musical initiatives. Her claim is undermined, however, by the fact that Roussel accepted this task in 1934, well before the Popular Front ever became involved in it. See Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 215.

⁵⁹ In October 1937, the FMP organized a concert in which two excerpts of the *Festin* were performed, as well as revolutionary songs by Koechlin, Auric, Jaubert, Milhaud and Honegger. Pierre Kaldor, "Musique," *Commune* (November 1937): 374.

⁶⁰ Norman Demuth, *Albert Roussel: A Study* (London: United Music Publishers, 1947); Basil Deane, *Albert Roussel* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961); Damien Top, *Albert Roussel, 1869-1937: Un Marin musician* (Biarritz: Séguier, 2000).

article? I'd rather not, I'm not made for that type of thing. I prefer to make a contribution by writing music."⁶¹

I propose that Roussel's commitment to left-wing ideals (already manifest by his involvement with the FMP) is revealed in the music he wrote during the last years of his life. For it was not only as an administrative figurehead that Roussel's expressed left-wing sympathies, but also in his musical choices, whether in terms of borrowing practices, genres or the narrative subjects that he became involved with during the mid-1930s.⁶² The only musical "contribution" Roussel made to the FMP was his "Prélude" to the second act of *Le 14 Juillet*, a work that I will discuss in the next chapter. Another work from this period, however, though not written for the FMP or its publishing outlets, does engage with the FMP's advocacy of folksong aesthetics. Completed in 1936 at the height of the Popular Front, Roussel's *Rapsodie flamande*, to quote Damien Top, is "the only [...] work in which Roussel employs motives that are not of his own invention."⁶³ Roussel found these motives in two collections of Flemish folksongs that he had requested from the musicologist Paul Collaer in 1935.⁶⁴ The *Rapsodie* is based on five of these folksongs, the most famous of which is the earthy and militaristic, *Het Beleg van Bergen-op-Zoom* (The Siege of Bergen op Zoom), for which Roussel supplied a fittingly robust orchestration (example 4.5).

⁶¹ Quoted in Pierre Kaldor, "La musique française porte le deuil d'Albert Roussel," *Commune* (October 1937): 249.

⁶² Both Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 299 and Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 389, n. 115 further bolster Roussel's left-wing credentials by mentioning his role as honorary president of the Fédération des Sociétés Musicales du Nord-Pas-de-Calais, an organization that comprised many orphéon choirs. However, Roussel's involvement in that organization was no doubt minimal: when asked by the FMP to supply more information about the different musical groups that comprised the Fédération, Roussel was unable to help. Letter from Albert Roussel to the Fédération Musicale Populaire, March 15, 1937, Archives Jacquet-FMP.

⁶³ Top, *Albert Roussel*, 149.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

Ex. 4.5. Albert Roussel, *Rapsodie flamande*, op. 56 (quotation of *Het Beleg van Bergen-op-Zoom*).

Allegro deciso (♩ = 132)

Violins, Violas, Cellos:
Bassoons, Horns,
Trombones, Tubas,
Timpani, Double basses:

Roussel, unlike his former Schola colleagues D'Indy, Canteloube and Ropartz, had never drawn upon folk music in his compositions. It is remarkable then, that at the end of his life his interest in this idiom became so apparent. This aesthetic revelation appears to have occurred in 1935, following a concert given by a proletarian choir comprised of miners from the Belgian region of Borinage. After the performance, Roussel decided that he wanted to integrate similar musical groups into an opera that he projected to write in collaboration with Joseph Weterings.⁶⁵ The *Rapsodie flamande* was begun shortly after this experience, and its “popular” inspiration is readily apparent, so much so in fact that Norman Demuth observed (and not without a hint of condescension), “nothing else he wrote resembles it in any way.”⁶⁶ Perhaps Roussel, sensing the Left’s new-found appreciation for folk traditions, suddenly felt warranted in using them in his own compositions, a practice over which right-wing composers (like d’Indy) had for so long claimed a monopoly. Roussel’s decision to write a folk “rhapsody” – a genre that held increasingly strong “popular” connotations – is also striking. In fact, his work is

⁶⁵ Weterings and Roussel had just teamed up for the ballet (with chorus) *Aeneas*, op. 54 (1935).

⁶⁶ Demuth, *Albert Roussel*, 63.

decidedly un-symphonic in how it treats the musical material. The Flemish folk tunes are not subject to drawn-out developments; rather, they are introduced in relatively quick succession and connected by short interludes.

Folk rhapsodies that employed similar compositional strategies had become common fare in the Soviet republics, and, as I have noted in Chapter 2, socialist realist works in this vein were beginning to be performed in Paris by the mid 1930s. This is not to suggest that Roussel's work is informed by socialist realism in any way, but simply to reveal to what extent Roussel's compositional practice – which few authors have attempted to contextualize in light of his political sympathies – reflected aesthetic practices that concurred with other left-wing composers during the Popular Front.

All of the above musical examples, from *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale* to Honegger's *Jeunesse* and Albert Roussel's *Rapsodie flamande*, attest to the importance of folklore and revolutionary music within the cultural agenda of the FMP and other left-wing musical organizations during the Popular Front. Through the creation of “new” folklore that aspired to musically depict the “everyday” lives of France's population (both at work and at play) the FMP confirmed its mission – one that sought to break down the barriers between “elite” and “popular” forms of musical expression.

In this respect, FMP composers connected with the musical legacy of Les Six, whose interest in American and European “popular” sources played such a crucial role in their “lifestyle modernist” works written in the wake of World War I. The significance and originality of the FMP's strategy was that it aimed to validate *different* “popular” sources (particularly folklore and music inspired by the revolution) and by doing so confirmed its commitment to the aesthetics of populist modernism. The FMP's attraction to “popular” sources was sparked by a desire to engage the masses of urban and rural

workers with their own musical culture. Finally, rather than integrating popular sources within an otherwise “elite” compositional framework, many FMP members tried their hand at writing unequivocally “popular” music – an aesthetic choice that demanded both an engagement with and interpretation of existing “popular” models.

Chapter 5 – Music for Bastille Day

The incidental music for Romain Rolland's *Le 14 Juillet*, written in 1936 by seven of France's most prestigious composers, is an exceptional example of the complex interaction between music and politics during the French Popular Front. *Le 14 Juillet* and its accompanying music were commissioned by the newly formed Popular Front government in an attempt to galvanize left-wing support and to solidify the growing identification of intellectuals (artists, writers, musicians) with the anti-fascist agenda of the coalition.¹ Georges Auric, Arthur Honegger, Jacques Ibert, Charles Koechlin, Daniel Lazarus, Darius Milhaud, and Albert Roussel, were commissioned to write the incidental music, while Roger Désormière was invited to conduct the Orchestre de la Fédération Musicale Populaire and the Chorale Populaire de Paris. Actors from the Comédie Française, like Marie Bell, Mary Morgan, André Bacqué, and Robert Vidalin were given leading roles, while left-wing theatrical groups affiliated with the Maison de la Culture comprised the rest of the cast. Jacques Chabannes, Sylvain Itkine and Julien Lacroix (all associated with the left-wing *Union des Théâtres indépendants de France*), oversaw the stage direction; Pablo Picasso designed the drop curtain; René Moulaert, Paul Mathos, and Nadine Landowski created the sets and costumes; and Tony Grégory choreographed the concluding "fête populaire."²

Motivated by a deep-rooted desire to bring art closer to the people, the producers of *Le 14 Juillet* employed radical strategies that demanded both technical and aesthetic re-

¹ Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion: Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire, 1935-1938* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 400-406.

² Information found in the original program for *Le 14 Juillet*. I would like to thank Craig Walker for sending me his copy of this document.

conceptualizations of art's role within society. The result was *Le 14 Juillet* – a massive collective project that Pascal Ory has called a “model” of Popular Front-inspired artistic endeavours.³ In this chapter, I will examine how the political ideology of the Popular Front helped shape the artistic and musical contributions to Romain Rolland's play.

I will reveal that through its musical and theatrical portrayal of the events of 1789, the production of *Le 14 Juillet* promoted a decidedly left-wing agenda. I will argue that the events of 1789 represented on-stage were potent symbols that the French left wing sought to appropriate for their own political purposes. I will highlight how the artists involved in *Le 14 Juillet* were both intellectually and artistically responsive to the ways the play linked France's revolutionary heritage with the left-wing struggles of the late 1930s. Furthermore, I will illustrate how the music of “Les Sept” (to use Charles Koechlin's term) can best be understood by placing it within the context of the populist modernist aesthetic of the Fédération Musicale Populaire and its highly politicized mandate to promote and establish a modern form of “people's music” in France.

1789 and 1936

As discussed in the previous chapter, throughout 1935 and 1936 the PCF moved away from a strictly Marxist-Leninist political philosophy to one that favoured national unity and anti-fascism. We have seen that as a result of these political tactics, *La Marseillaise* was favourably re-evaluated. Predictably, the same political strategy encouraged the PCF's appropriation of July 14th – the national holiday commemorating the storming of the Bastille in 1789. On this issue, the Communist Party's about-face was

³ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 328.

no less dramatic. Consider, for example, the harsh words used in 1934 by PCF deputy, Paul Vaillant-Couturier, to refer to the celebrations of that year:

Leave the 14th to the bourgeoisie; their *fête* is as dead as the Palais-Royal from where the first “To the Bastille!” was heard. For us Communists, the real celebration is the advent of the Soviet revolution.⁴

Despite this condemnatory tone, with the formation of the Popular Front a year later, the PCF, along with the rest of the coalition, aligned itself with the symbol of the Bastille. For example, Socialist leader and future prime minister Léon Blum spoke about the “transfiguration” of Bastille Day, and claimed that the Left would celebrate it in such a way that “the popular spirit gives it life, so that it represents, once again, the eternal struggle of Liberty against the forces of tyranny and oppression.”⁵

A year later, in 1936, following its victory in the general election, the Popular Front looked to ensure that Bastille Day would function as a celebration of the anti-fascist spirit that had brought it to power. Conscious of the important ties that had been formed among political parties (particularly the Communists) and members of the artistic and intellectual elite of the country, the Popular Front organized a reprise of Romain Rolland’s *Le 14 Juillet* in celebration of the ideological commitments of the new governing body.

⁴ Quoted in Hervé Luxardo, *Histoire de la Marseillaise* (Paris: Christian de Bartillat, 1990), 227. “Laissons le 14 aux bourgeois, leur fête est aussi morte (...) que le Palais-Royal d’où partaient les premiers “A la Bastille!” Notre fête à nous (...) c’est l’avènement de la révolution soviétique.”

⁵ Léon Blum, “Le 14 Juillet et La Marseillaise,” *Le Populaire*, July 16, 1935. “Mais quand l’anniversaire se transfigure, quand l’âme populaire lui rend la vie, quand il incarne à nouveau l’éternelle lutte de la Liberté contre les forces d’oppression et de tyrannie, nous en sommes.”

Le 14 Juillet, a theatrical adaptation of the historical events culminating in the storming of the Bastille, could not have been more topical than in 1936. For the Left, the modern-day political situation offered many important analogues to 1789. For example, contemporaneous writers such as Romain Rolland compared the events of the late-eighteenth century to the “revolutionary” climate of 1936.⁶ The workers’ strikes of June 1936 suggested to many that the class struggle was becoming more radical, and that the proletariat, inspired by a desire for greater social equality, would push for a revolution. Others compared the rise of fascism to the nefarious influence exerted by Austrian forces on France during the reign of Louis XVI. Many feared that as a result of European fascism, France would soon be at the mercy of foreign military power. This suspicion – soon to be validated – was at the root of the Popular Front’s desire to wage a concerted, unified battle for national unity against the forces of fascism both within and outside France’s borders.

Besides supplying a mirror to eighteenth-century events, Rolland’s drama specifically served as a commemorative work, not only of Bastille Day but also of the birth of the Popular Front itself. By celebrating both events in the same work of art, the symbolic relationship between the Popular Front and Bastille Day was solidified in the minds of political supporters and audience members alike. Given the timing of the production, organizers clearly intended to use the medium of art to link the collective memory and emotions surrounding historical and contemporary events. The critic for the Communist daily *Vendredi* suggested as much in his review of the work:

⁶ See, for example, Romain Rolland’s interpretation in “Quatorze Juillet 1936 et 1789,” *Europe* (July 15, 1936): 293-297.

On the evening of July 14th, the crowd that hurried to the Alhambra Theatre came from the Bastille. It was a small handful from the million men who had commemorated all day long, arms linked and hearts united, not only 1789, but 1935, and prepared victories to come. Having restored meaning to the 14th of July, the crowd came that evening to hear its cradlesong and to rediscover its origins.

The crowd did not come as one would go to the boulevard theatres in search of amusement; the crowd came to be exalted, in search of serious and beautiful emotion. The crowd came there to take the Bastille, to recognize its original leaders and to win liberty.⁷

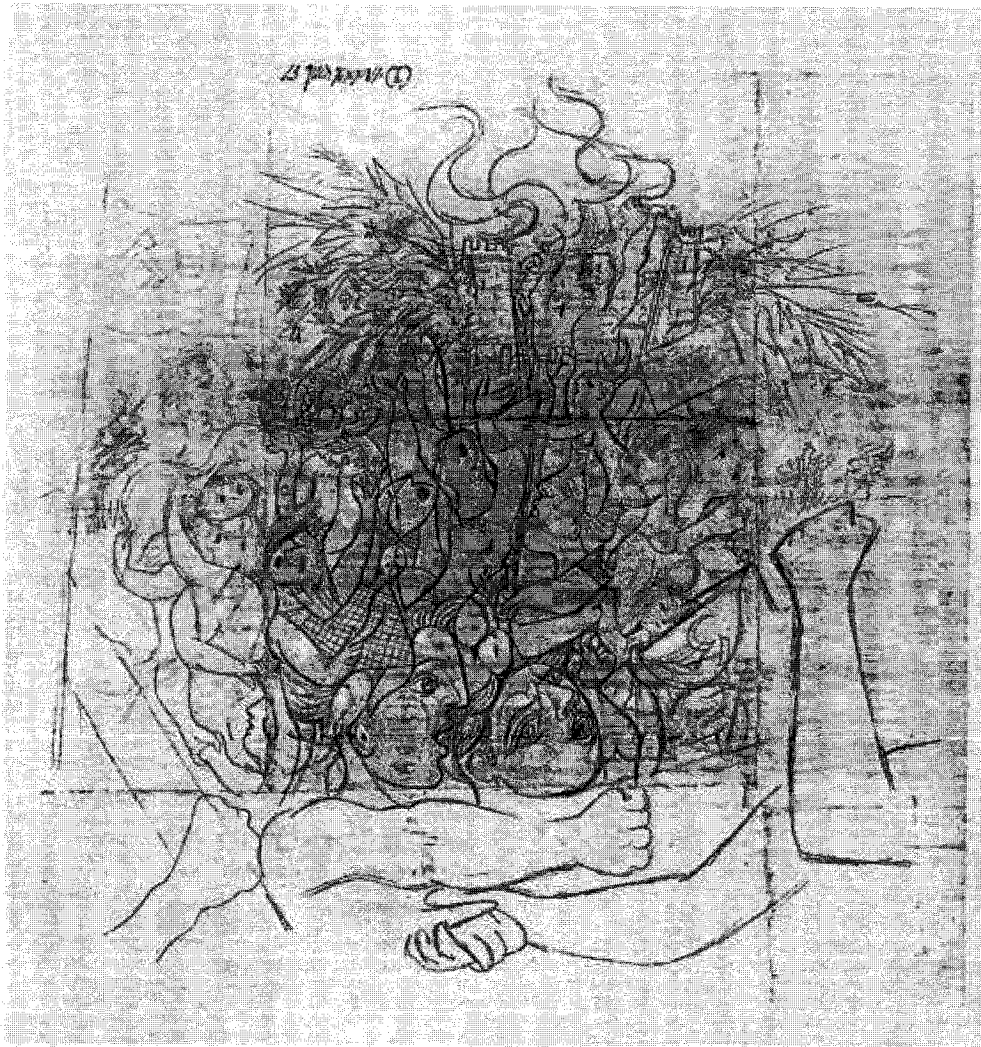
Picasso's Populist Modernism

These parallels were not lost on the many artists who collaborated on the theatrical production – least of all Pablo Picasso, who was commissioned to design the drop curtain. A large sketch, completed on June 13, 1936, reveals how vividly he perceived the ties between 1936 and 1789. As shown in figure 16, this sketch is dominated by Communist-inspired imagery and, as the burning Bastille also suggests, makes explicit reference to the 1789 revolution. The Soviet flag makes two obvious appearances; one flag is lovingly cuddled like a doll by a young girl lost in a dream, while the other, situated at the extreme left of the composition, functions as a symbolic frame to the scene. The hammer and sickle also permeate the sketch in a variety of other ways:

⁷ François Lassagne, "Le Quatorze Juillet de Romain Rolland," *Vendredi*, July 24, 1936. "Le soir du quatorze juillet, la foule qui se pressait à l'Alhambra revenait de la Bastille. Elle était une poignée sortie de ce million d'hommes qui, tout le jour, avaient commémoré, coude à coude, cœur à cœur, non seulement 1789, mais 1935, et préparé de nouvelles victoires. Ayant rendu son sens au 14 juillet, elle venait, le soir, entendre le chant du berceau et retrouver ses origines. Elle ne venait pas, comme on "va à la comédie", en quête d'un divertissement; mais pour s'exalter, à la recherche d'une émotion grave et belle... Cette foule venait là pour prendre la Bastille, reconnaître ses premiers chefs et conquérir la liberté."

arms, fists, faces, bodies, even the smoke rising from the Bastille recall the objects of the Soviet flag.

Fig. 16. Pablo Picasso, *Esquisse pour le Rideau de Scène de 14 Juillet de Romain Rolland* (1936). Pencil on paper, 67 cm x 66.5 cm, Musée Picasso (Paris).



Despite its vivid topicality, Picasso's sketch was never actually used for the play. It is, nonetheless, unique for both the force of its political iconography and the figurative style it employs. As Sidra Stich has observed, it is clearly indebted to the aesthetic of

socialist realism.⁸ Furthermore, the subject is reminiscent of photojournalism from the period, which routinely represented crowds of Popular Front supporters brandishing closed fists in the air. Created eight years before Picasso officially joined the Communist Party, this sketch reveals that he (along with many of his musical colleagues from the lifestyle modernist years) was now becoming politically engaged.⁹ Stich has shown that during the Popular Front Picasso was extremely alert to the political events of the day, and some of his sketches from 1936 were drawn directly upon left-wing newspapers like *Humanité* and *Ce Soir*.¹⁰ This newly-expressed anti-fascist engagement culminated in one of the artist's most influential and universally-praised works – *Guernica*, his powerful response to the fascist bombings of a small Spanish village in 1937.

Fig. 17. Pablo Picasso, *La Dépouille du Minotaure en costume d'Arlequin (Rideau de scène pour Le 14 Juillet de Romain Rolland)* (1936). Tempera on gray cotton canvas, 8.3 m x 13.25m. Musée "Les Abattoirs" (Toulouse).



⁸ Sidra Stich, "Picasso's Art and Politics in 1936," *Arts Magazine* 58 (1983): 116. For a sense of the debate in France surrounding socialist realism in painting see Serge Fauchereau, *La Querelle du réalisme* (Paris: Editions Cercle d'art, 1987).

⁹ Throughout the period directly following World War I, Picasso was closely linked to the circle of Erik Satie and contributed pieces to lifestyle modernist works like *Parade* and Milhaud's *Le Train bleu*.

¹⁰ Stich, "Picasso's Art and Politics in 1936," 116.

The drop-curtain that Picasso finally submitted for *Le 14 Juillet* (figure 17) employed a pictorial style that was not overtly “political.” Nonetheless, some critics still interpreted the work in light of the period’s political tensions. Writing in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, critic Jean Labasque understood Picasso’s canvas as nothing less than “a transparent allegory” that contained “explicit symbols” and a “desire for *active* signification” based upon the political situation of 1936.¹¹ That said, Labasque admitted that the workers and political supporters who had come to watch the play probably did not capture the drop-curtain’s political subtext. The critic reported the reaction of one member of the audience who was obviously confused by Picasso’s work: “Me, I’m like you. I can’t make head nor tails out of those beasts. But what about the play, eh? Now that was theatre!”¹²

On the right, a monster combining both human and avian forms holds in its massive hands the stunned body of a Minotaur dressed in the costume of a harlequin. On the left (and the spatial distinction is again, not without relevance) a modern adolescent wearing a crown of flowers is held on the shoulders of an old, bearded man who appears to be emerging from the hide of a donkey. The young boy faces the eagle-man, spreading his arms as if to block the route that leads to the calm waters on the horizon. The old bearded man – fist raised in the Popular Front salute – brandishes a rock, ready for the battle.¹³

¹¹ Jean Labasque, “Le rideau de l’Alhambra,” *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (September 1936): 571.

¹² Ibid., 569-570. “ ‘Moi je suis comme toi. J’y pige rien à ces bêtes-là. Mais la pièce, hein? Ça, c’est du théâtre!’ ”

¹³ Labasque, Pierre Lievre and Sidra Stich have mentioned the pictorial allusion to Goya in the group on the left. Stich refers to Goya’s famous painting, May 3, 1808, as a possible source of inspiration for the young man’s pose. Cf. Stich, “Picasso’s Art and Politics in 1936,” 115; Labasque, “Le rideau de l’Alhambra,” 571 and, Lievre, “Le 14 Juillet de Romain Rolland,” *Le Jour*, July 17, 1936.

It requires only a small leap of the imagination to conceive of the two groups of figures as allegorical representations of Right and Left. Although this final drop-curtain (unlike his earlier sketch) does not explicitly refer to easily recognized political symbols, it nonetheless encourages the viewer to identify with the only truly “human” figure represented: the modern, anti-fascist youth. As a result of its message of political inclusiveness, manifest through the very absence of obvious political iconography, Picasso’s curtain may be viewed as a classic example of Popular Front aesthetics. It also reveals Picasso’s own migration towards a populist modernist aesthetic stance; by situating his artwork within an explicitly political context, he too participates in the aesthetic *Zeitgeist* of the Popular Front period.

Le 14 Juillet: Theatre, Music and Emancipation

Rolland’s *Le 14 Juillet* was first performed in 1902 at the Théâtre de la Renaissance. Dedicated to the people of Paris, the play enacts the familiar events of the two days leading up to the surrender of the Bastille and culminates in a celebratory *fête de la liberté*. Rolland’s play employs an innovative narrative strategy. Rather than concentrating on the actions of revolutionary figures like Camille Desmoulins or the General Hoche, he confers the leading role of his play to an anonymous subject: “the people.”¹⁴ Throughout the drama, they are the collective embodiment of concrete decision-making and concerted action. In Rolland’s theatrical account of these historic

¹⁴ On July 12, 1789 Desmoulins announced the dismissal of reformer Jacques Necker by Louis XVI from atop a café table in the gardens of the Palais Royal, thereby instigating rioting within Paris..

days, “individuals disappear in the popular ocean [...] in order to depict a storm, one should not try to paint each wave – one must paint the churning sea.”¹⁵

The presence of the “people” dominates the play’s three acts. Act I, which takes place in the gardens of the Palais-Royal, dramatizes Camille Desmoulin’s announcement of the dismissal of reformer Jacques Necker by Louis XVI. This news instigates rioting within the capital and Rolland traces its effect (ranging from collective disbelief to concerted fury) on the crowd convened in the gardens. Act II is staged behind the barricades of the Rue du Faubourg St. Antoine, and charts the optimism, mingled with fear, of the revolutionaries waiting to launch the assault on the Bastille. Act III, portrays the attack on the Bastille, and culminates in an elaborate *fête populaire* in which spectators and actors are meant to join together in joyous apotheosis. In this work (just one portion of Rolland’s massive *Théâtre de la Révolution*) the author aimed to present the “Iliad of the people of France,” and (in line with his theoretical essay, *Le Théâtre du peuple*), to restore the theatre to its festive, popular origins.¹⁶

Following its first performance in 1902, critics condemned the play’s “screaming demagogy” and denigrated it as an example of “revolutionary propaganda.”¹⁷ Despite being a massive critical failure, however, *Le 14 Juillet* continued to fire the imagination of left-wing intellectuals – including musicians – throughout the early-twentieth century. In this original 1902 production, Julien Tiersot’s incidental music, in an attempt to conjure up the festive sounds of the French revolution, was comprised of borrowed and arranged tunes by composers like Gossec, Méhul and others. In 1913 Albert Doyen, the

¹⁵ Romain Rolland, *Théâtre de la Révolution I* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1972), 105. “Les individus disparaissent dans l’océan populaire...pour représenter une tempête, il ne s’agit pas de peindre chaque vague, il faut peindre la mer soulevée.”

¹⁶ Romain Rolland, *Le Théâtre du peuple* (Paris: Suresnes, 1903).

¹⁷ Henry Béranger, “Le théâtre et la vie,” *La Revue* (April 15, 1902): 237.

founder of *Les Fêtes du Peuple*, was inspired to write a setting of the final scene of Rolland's play. His score, entitled *Le Triomphe de la Liberté* was awarded a prize by the city of Paris that same year.¹⁸ Indeed, the subsequent interest in this final scene prompted Rolland to append a post-face to his revised 1926 edition of the play. Here he ventured his own recommendations for future musical settings of the *fête populaire*:

This music, while painting itself a little with a Cornelian (or at times Racinian) colour typical of revolutionary songs (hymns by Gossec, Méhul and Cherubini; ingenious rounds by Grétry) should be inspired by Beethoven's powerful music, which, better than all others, reflects the enthusiasm of the revolutionary period.¹⁹

Rolland hoped that the final scene could reenact the popular spirit and revolutionary fervor of 1789 and transmit it to modern audiences. In order to achieve this goal, Rolland called for "the appearance of a new force: Music [...] which stirs up passive crowds [...], which eradicates Time, and confers upon everything it touches something of the absolute."²⁰

Rolland, who was actively working on his biography of Beethoven, may have tried to emulate the revolutionary formal aspects of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* in his

¹⁸ For additional information see Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 130-133.

¹⁹ Rolland, *Théâtre de la Révolution I*, 226. "Cette musique devrait, tout en s'imprégnant un peu de la couleur cornélienne (ou parfois racinienne), des chants de la révolution – (hymnes de Gossec, de Méhul, de Cherubini; rondes ingénues de Grétry) – s'inspirer des puissantes musiques beethovéniennes, qui mieux que toutes les autres, reflètent l'enthousiasme des temps révolutionnaires."

²⁰ Rolland, *Théâtre de la Révolution I*, 225. "Il faut, pour donner à l'œuvre son couronnement logique et au fait historique sa portée universelle, l'entrée en scène d'une puissance nouvelle: la Musique, la force tyrannique des sons, qui remue les foules passives; cette illusion magique, qui supprime le Temps, et donne à ce qu'elle touche un caractère absolu."

architectural plan for *Le 14 Juillet*.²¹ Just as in Beethoven's work, where the inclusion of choir and vocal soloists broke and transformed the conventional limits of the classical symphony, so too Rolland's play aimed to challenge the conventions of spoken drama by making music – the tyrannical power of sounds – not simply the accompaniment, but the dramatic apogee of the theatrical action. Clearly, Rolland believed that the emancipation from theatrical conventions that he was aiming for in *Le 14 Juillet* was (as it had been in Beethoven's *Ninth*) a fitting allegory for the collective emancipation of mankind. In his biography of Beethoven, Rolland argues that the *Ninth Symphony* stands as a “mythical precursor” in which “the instinct of the masses confusedly perceives [...] the future.”²² Rolland's reading of Beethoven's symphony as a text that symbolically prefigures the advent of increased social and individual liberties informs his attempt to dramatize collective social desires in *Le 14 Juillet*. For Rolland, these challenges to theatrical convention were not to be limited solely to the action on the stage, but rather formed the point of departure for a larger, collective celebration of emancipation. He hoped that the music of the *fête populaire* would allow the audience to join “not only its thoughts, but also its voice to the action – the People themselves becoming actors in the *fête du peuple*.”²³ Used in such a way, music would be at the heart of a new form of popular theatre that would link the public and the work, and “create a bridge between the stage and the hall.” As Rolland claimed, this joint participation of actors and audience members

²¹ In an interview with Jacques Chabannes, Rolland stated that the first act should be “conceived like a symphony.” *Comoedia* (July 14, 1936): 1.

²² Romain Rolland, *Beethoven: Les grandes époques créatrices* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1966), 978.

²³ Rolland, *Théâtre de la Révolution I*, 226. “Car il faut arriver à ceci – [...] le public contraint de mêler non seulement sa pensée, mais [aussi] sa voix à l'action; le Peuple devenant acteur lui-même dans la fête du Peuple.”

in a musical celebration of social emancipation would “transform the dramatic action into a reality.”²⁴

Despite these revolutionary claims, it must be emphasized that, as a work written at the *fin-de-siècle*, *Le 14 Juillet* could no longer pass for cutting-edge in 1936, particularly in the milieu of the Parisian literary avant-garde. It is no wonder then that in his review of the Popular Front performance, François Porché insisted that *Le 14 Juillet* was a “weak” piece of theatre, that was “less 1789 than 1900.” He dissuaded people from introducing political sympathies into their evaluation of the work for he felt that it would obscure any attempt at critical and objective interpretation.²⁵ Porché was not the only critic who gave the play a failing grade. As the extreme-right paper, *L’Action française*, sarcastically reminded its readers: “the political friends of Romain Rolland agree that their man is not a dramatic author, and that theatre is not his *forte*. They also admit that the performance did not inspire lively enthusiasm. It did not shine with originality...”²⁶ Even the most naive observers would have had to admit that Rolland’s work was chosen for a host of reasons that were not purely literary: the play’s theme and the author’s iconic stature undoubtedly played an important role in motivating the author’s “political friends” to produce *Le 14 Juillet* in the first place.

Whatever the criticisms concerning the artistic drawbacks of *Le 14 Juillet*, the play proved effective as a political tool. Its success in this regard was the direct result of how the work was manipulated to function within the politicized context of the Popular

²⁴ Ibid., 225. “L’objet de ce tableau est de réaliser l’union du public et de l’oeuvre, de jeter un pont entre la salle et la scène. De faire d’une action dramatique réellement une action.”

²⁵ François Porché, “Le théâtre,” *Revue de Paris* (August 1, 1936): 710.

²⁶ Lucien Dubech, “La Chronique des théâtres,” *L’Action française*, August 2, 1936. “Les amis politiques de M. Rolland ont convenu que leur homme n’était point auteur dramatique, et que ce n’était point là son fort. Ils ont également avoué que le spectacle ne leur avait pas inspiré un vif enthousiasme. Il ne brillait par l’originalité, ni même par l’ordre.”

Front. Peter DiDomenico has pointed out in a recent essay on André Gide that “for the organized Left of the early thirties, both the aesthetics and the tactics of literary *engagement* underwent profound redefinition: assaults on tradition and meaning as a means of undermining social authority gave way to the strategic manipulation of classic forms for the clear transmission of revolutionary ideology.”²⁷ The success of Rolland’s play during the Popular Front was a direct result of such “strategic manipulation.” What was manipulated was not Rolland’s text, but the conditions under which it was presented to an audience. The collaboration between elite and amateur artists drawn from a variety of disciplines was highly publicized, as was the fact that every participant (actors, musicians, stage hands, extras) received the same salary. The performances began early to facilitate the attendance of working class families, and ticket costs were kept low. Furthermore, the play took place at the Alhambra Theatre, an abandoned music hall in a working-class part of the city. All of these elements, which tapped into Communist ideology concerning the rights of the workers to the nation’s cultural patrimony, put a new face on Rolland’s play. Through such a “strategic manipulation,” the Popular Front government and the Communist cultural organizations actualized and invigorated the revolutionary potential of Romain Rolland’s work.

Les Sept

The FMP was conscious of the importance of *Le 14 Juillet* as an ideological vehicle, and it was through this government commission that the organization looked to present its aesthetic and cultural platform. Populist modernism was here put on display by

²⁷ Peter F. DeDomenico, “Unfinished Business: André Gide’s Geneviève and the Constraints of Socialist Realism,” in *André Gide’s Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence*, ed. Tom Conner, 191 (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

seven of the FMP's most prominent members. The scores were commissioned through the Maison de la Culture on June 11, 1936 with the stipulation that they be completed by the 25th.²⁸ This short timeframe precluded any close collaboration between the composers, and there is little to suggest that the scores are stylistically interrelated in any way. Nonetheless, all seven works were written for the same ensemble – the wind band of the Fédération Musicale Populaire, which, through its sonic reference to the military and festive atmosphere of the Revolutionary period, provided a unifying element to the work as a whole.

Each composer was commissioned to write incidental music to accompany specific parts of the play:²⁹

Ibert – *Ouverture*
 Auric – *Palais-Royal* (beginning of Act I)
 Milhaud – *Finale* (end of Act I)³⁰
 Roussel – *Prélude* (beginning of Act II)
 Koechlin – *Liberté* (end of Act II)
 Honegger – *Marche sur la Bastille* (beginning of Act III)
 Lazarus – *Fête de la Liberté* (*fête populaire*)

Apart from the *Overture* by Ibert, which would have been heard while Picasso's curtain was still in view, each of the works functioned as an introductory or concluding element of an act. The autograph version reveals that two of the works (Koechlin's *Liberté* and

²⁸ Letter from J.P. Dreyfus (Maison de la Culture) to Charles Koechlin, June 11, 1936, Bibliothèque Gustav Mahler, fonds Charles Koechlin.

²⁹ The complete score has been published by Le Chant du Monde under the title *14 Juillet: Interludes pour la pièce de R. Rolland* (1989). Autograph versions, are located at BNF Musique (MS 15012, 1-7). For three recent general studies of the music composed for *Le 14 Juillet* see Frédéric Robert, "Introduction," in *14 Juillet: Interludes pour la pièce de R. Rolland* (Paris: Le Chant du Monde, 1989); Nicole Labelle, "Les Musiques de scène pour le Quatorze Juillet de Romain Rolland," *Colloquium AIDUF*: Paris 1989, 75–89; and Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 328–329. For discussions of individual works see (for Milhaud) Leslie A. Sprout "Muse of the Révolution française or the Révolution nationale? Music and National Celebrations in France, 1936–1944," *repercussions* (1996): 77–84; and (for Koechlin) Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin (1867–1950): His Life and Works* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1989), 174.

³⁰ Later published as *Introduction et Marche funèbre*, op. 153.

Lazarus's *Fête de la Liberté*) included segments of *mélodrame* that have not been reproduced in the recently published score.

Jacques Ibert

Jacques Ibert was one of the first musicians to benefit from the electoral victory of the Popular Front. Upon assuming office in 1936, Jean Zay appointed Ibert director of the Villa Medici in Rome. This decision was highly controversial, because in the past the Villa Medici had always been directed by a member of the Institut and had never been administered by a musician. In 1936, Ibert further affirmed his involvement with left-wing circles by taking up a position as music critic for the left-wing daily, *Marianne*.

His opera *L'Aiglon*, co-written with Arthur Honegger, was the most anticipated and successful French premiere at the Opéra during the 1937 season. Leading up to opening night, the composers created a sense of intrigue around the work by refusing to reveal to the press who had composed what. For initiates, this mystery was not difficult to unravel – Ibert wrote Acts 1, 3, and 5 while Honegger composed the music to Acts 2 and 4. Conceived in a deliberately “popular” style, *L'Aiglon* has been described by Alexandra Laederich as “both accessible enough not to deter a broad public, and at the same time sophisticated enough not to disappoint the admirers of the two composers, both of whom drew on the full resources of their technique.”³¹ These aesthetic proclivities reflect important aspects of those of the FMP outlined in the previous chapter. Ibert claimed that “the word *system* horrifies me, and I snub my nose at preconceived rules. [...] Fleeing all

³¹ Alexandra Laederich, “Ibert, Jacques,” *Grove Music On-Line*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed March 18, 2006), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

theory to which I could become enslaved, I write according to the demands of my sensibility.”³²

Ibert’s anti-fascist convictions, already highlighted through his association with the FMP, were confirmed during the Occupation. Following the fall of France in 1940, he fled to North Africa aboard the *Massila* with prominent members of parliament including Daladier and Pierre Mendès-France, both of whom were important advocates for continuing the fight against Germany.³³ France’s Vichy government subsequently removed Ibert from his post at the Villa Medici and banned performances of his music in France.³⁴

Ibert’s contribution to *Le 14 Juillet* reflects his extraordinary proficiency at writing for wind instruments, already apparent in works like *Jeux* for flute and piano (1923) and the *5 pièces en trio* for clarinet, oboe and bassoon written in 1935. His approach to the 41-piece wind ensemble is both light-handed and streamlined, particularly in the middle section, where he conjures up the *ancien régime* with a neo-classical nod to the eighteenth-century minuet (example 5.1). In doing so, Ibert aligns himself with the anti-romantic aesthetic stance of the FMP and simultaneously invokes a decidedly “1789-style” that complements the historical context of Rolland’s narrative.

³² Gérard Michel, *Jacques Ibert* (Paris: Seghers, 1967), 95. “Le mot *système* me fait horreu, et je fais le pied de nez aux règles préconcues. [...] Fuyant toute théorie don’t je pourrias devenir l’esclave, j’écris selon les exigences de ma sensibilité.”

³³ François Procile, *Les Conflits de la musique française, 1940-1965* (Paris : Fayard, 2001), 21.

³⁴ Jane F. Fulcher, “French Identity in Flux: The Triumph of Honegger’s *Antigone*,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36 (2006): 656, n. 14.

Ex. 5.1. Jacques Ibert, *Ouverture*, mm. 44-59.



Georges Auric

In the secondary literature, Auric's Leftist leanings have passed virtually without commentary, yet there can be no doubt that he was a keen and active supporter of the Popular Front.³⁵ Auric was a prominent member of the FMP and his involvement with that organization continued well into 1939.³⁶ We have already seen how Auric's work with the FMP prompted him to write a number of folk song arrangements (published and recorded by the Fédération), and individual pieces based on texts by the Communist deputy, Paul Vaillant-Couturier. Auric was active on both the executive and artistic committees of the FMP.³⁷ Even outside the confines of politicized structures like the FMP, Auric left little doubt as to where he stood in terms of his own political sympathies. At one of the most celebrated bastions of Parisian artistic snobbism, the café, "Le Boeuf

³⁵ Jane Fulcher briefly discusses his affiliation with the FMP and his use of a "more popular style" in "Musical Style, Meaning, and Politics on the Eve of the Second World War," *The Journal of Musicology* 13 (1995), 432.

³⁶ Archives de l'Association des Maisons de la Culture (AN 104AS 1). The archives of the Fédération Musicale Populaire for the years 1935-1939 are conserved under the same call number (104AS 4 – 104AS 7).

³⁷ "Elections des organismes dirigeants," *L'Art Musical Populaire* (August-September, 1937): 16.

sur la Toit,” Auric could be seen on certain occasions, surrounded by other members of Les Six “raising his (...) closed fist in honor of the Popular Front.”³⁸

In articles that he wrote for *L'Art Musical Populaire* and the left-wing weekly *Marianne*, Auric criticized traditional concert venues. For music to be *populaire*, he explained, it must be able to reach “all people who love music.”³⁹ He claimed that the social exclusivity common in opera houses and symphony concert societies was responsible for making music inaccessible to the workers. Auric commended the initiatives of the FMP, which promoted facility of access along with practical musical instruction, for providing an important boost to the cause of modern music within the working class milieu.⁴⁰

Charles Koechlin wrote that Auric’s contribution to *Le 14 Juillet*, entitled *Palais Royal*, was reminiscent of his 1923 ballet, *Les Facheux*.⁴¹ Indeed, as Jane Fulcher has also suggested, the “popular” style that Auric employed under the Popular Front grew out of his aesthetic commitments of the 1920s while a member of Les Six.⁴² *Palais Royal* continues this tradition through a display of streamlined sonorities underpinned by regular rhythmic accentuation (example 5.2). Reminiscent of the fanfares of the revolutionary period, the score is obstinately diatonic, using short melodic phrases, often subject to exact repetition, atop an obsessive march tempo. Auric supplies musical intrigue through the rapid juxtaposition of contrasting phrase groups that are upset by bold appoggiaturas in the accompanying instruments.

³⁸ Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1994), 57.

³⁹ Georges Auric, “Le Compositeur de musique en 1937,” *L'Art Musical populaire* (May 1, 1937): 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹ Koechlin, “Musique savante...et populaire,” *L'Humanité*, Sep. 6, 1936.

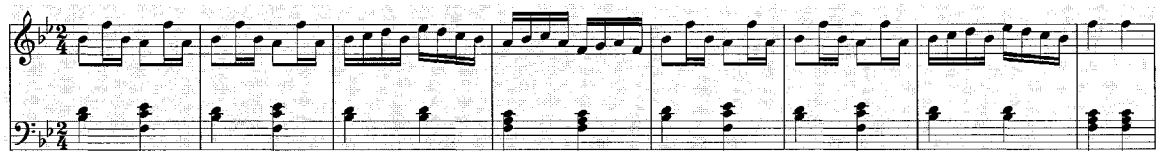
⁴² Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neo-Classicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17 (1999): 224.

Ex. 5.2. Georges Auric, *Palais Royal* (reduction), m. 25-40.



Despite these surface disruptions, the music's ubiquitously classical profile and metric regularity permits Auric to segue seamlessly into an extensive quotation of a ballet movement from Grétry's 1784 opera, *L'Epreuve villageoise*, which comprises the central section of *Palais Royal* (example 5.3).⁴³

**Ex. 5.3. Georges Auric, *Le Palais Royal*, mm. 118-125;
Grétry, *L'Epreuve villageoise*, Act II, "Entracte," mm. 1-8.**

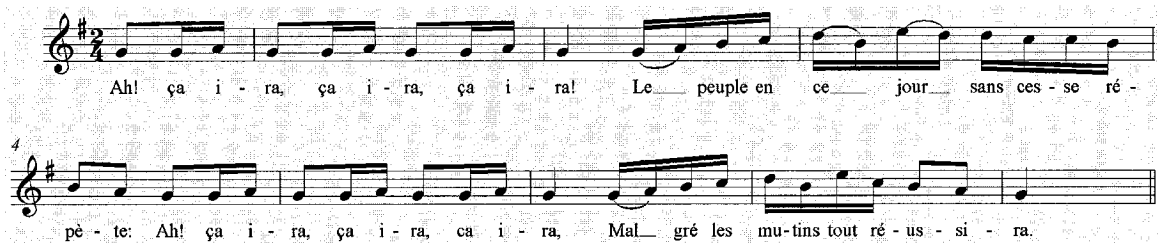


Re-orchestrated for wind-band, in its new form, Grétry's "village" dance sounds more like a military march, and Auric's emphasis on instruments like the piccolo, flute, drum and triangle inescapably conjures up the ceremonial music of the first Republic's

⁴³ Frédéric Robert first identified this source in his introductory notes to *14 Juillet: Interludes pour la pièce de Romain Rolland* (Paris: Le Chant du monde, 1989). The passage is borrowed from the first eight measures of the second act "Entr'acte" in Grétry's opera. Auric may have become familiar with the work when it was performed in Paris in 1918.

revolutionary bands. Although it may be mere coincidence, the rhythmic profile of Grétry's dance also displays an uncanny resemblance with the revolutionary tune, "Ah! Ça ira!" (example 5.4), which was still famous among the French proletariat of the 1930s.

Ex. 5.4. "Ah! Ça ira," Popular revolutionary tune, circa 1790.



Here, through its neoclassical approach, Auric's piece appropriately makes reference to the *ancien régime*, and in doing so, draws yet another parallel between the past and the contemporaneous concerns expressed in Rolland's work. What is most striking is how effortlessly the Grétry quotation embeds itself within the overall stylistic profile of Auric's composition. The musical effect emphasizes the similarities between the composer's own musical aesthetics and the "colour" of those French composers of the revolutionary period that Romain Rolland claimed should inspire the composers of the incidental music. At the same time, by focusing on both the "modern" compositional techniques that he employed in the 1920s and the music of the eighteenth century, Auric seems to suggest that the *populaire* epithet can cut across stylistic and historical differences.

Darius Milhaud

Francis Poulenc attended the premiere of *Le 14 Juillet* and was fond of both Auric's and Milhaud's contributions, but was otherwise extremely critical of the

performance. In a letter to composer Henri Sauguet, he exclaimed: “I was at the 14. The music of Darius is sublime, that of Georges very pretty, the curtain is admirable, otherwise it’s full of shit.”⁴⁴ Poulenc was not involved with the activities of the Fédération Musicale Populaire, and was obviously annoyed by the newfound prominence that his friends were enjoying as a result of their political convictions. Writing to Marie-Blanche de Polignac about *Le 14 Juillet*, Poulenc seemed to feel that by not having participated in the work he might be perceived as not having “popular penchants.” He continued: “I thought that I had long proved that I am fond of popular fronts, and I admit that what I really liked about *Le 14 Juillet* was the hall. All of this is very complicated. Marie-Blanche, tell me that you still love me...”⁴⁵

Ex. 5.5. Darius Milhaud, *Finale*, m. 1-7.

Mouvement de marche

ff

mf

Ch.: Li-ber-té

Cl.

Hns.

Tbn.

⁴⁴ Letter from Francis Poulenc to Henri Sauguet, August 5, 1936, cited in *Francis Poulenc: Correspondance 1910-1963*, ed. Myriam Chimènes (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 421, n. 10. “J’ai été à “14” [...] La musique de Darius est sublime, celle de Georges très jolie, le rideau admirable; à part cela c’est de la merde.”

⁴⁵ Letter from Francis Poulenc to Marie-Blanche de Polignac, August 15, 1936, in *Francis Poulenc: Correspondance 1910-1963*, 420. “Marie-Blanche, comme c’est mal me connaître que de croire que je n’ai pas de penchants populaires. Je croyais avoir donné depuis longtemps la preuve que les *fronts* populaires me sont chers et j’avoue que ce qui m’a plu dans *Quatorze-Juillet* c’est vraiment la *salle*. Tout cela est bien compliqué. Marie-Blanche, dites-moi que vous m’aimez encore...”

Milhaud's "sublime" score, as Leslie Sprout has noted, "reconciles his own modern style with [...] continuous references to Revolutionary marches."⁴⁶ This is exhibited from the very start of the work; the march is controlled by an obsessive "Ah! ça ira" rhythm played at an explosive *fortissimo*, which is joyously interrupted by the choir's exclamation of the word "Liberté" in the third measure (example 5.5). This "Freedom" is also apparent throughout the remainder of Milhaud's contribution, in which the composer does not shy away from indulging in polytonal combinations, and, as Léon Kochnitzky remarked, "counterpoint without tears."⁴⁷ The funeral march proper, which was meant to depict the on-stage cortège in honour of Necker, employs a hushed spoken choir and represents, according to composer Henry Sauveplane, one of the most "profound" moments of the score.⁴⁸ Here, Milhaud sets up a minor-third ostinato in the bass to accompany a simple modal melody played by the low winds (example 5.6). The effect is highly reminiscent of Musorgsky's *Bydlo* from *Pictures at an Exhibition*, a movement meant to portray an archetypical worker's scene: that of a peasant plowing dirt in the fields with his heavy oxcart (example 5.7). By drawing on this musical reference – made famous in France through Maurice Ravel's 1922 orchestration – Milhaud makes a subtle nod in the direction of the Soviet Union, as well as to those who stood to gain the most from the revolution: the workers themselves.

⁴⁶ Leslie Sprout, "Muse of the *Révolution française* or the *Révolution nationale*? Music and National Celebrations in France, 1936-1944," *repercussions* 5 (1996): 77.

⁴⁷ Léon Kochnitzky, "Le 14 Juillet," *La Revue musicale* 167 (July-August, 1936): 43.

⁴⁸ Henry Sauveplane, "Le 14 Juillet de R. Rolland," *Europe* (August 1936): 1550.

Ex. 5.6. Darius Milhaud, *Finale* (bass and main melody only), mm. 100-108.



Ex. 5.7. Modest Musorgsky, *Bydlo* from *Pictures at an Exhibition*, mm. 1-10.

Sempre moderato, pesante

ff

simile

Albert Roussel

Roussel's *Prélude* to Act II was designed to depict the atmosphere in the streets of Paris early in the morning of July 14, 1789. Crouched behind the barricades in the dark, a mass of revolutionaries awaits its call to attack the Bastille. Romain Rolland described the aural impression of this scene: "in the distance sounds the anvil of the forges and hammers, at times the tocsin of the belfry, or shots from far away."⁴⁹ Roussel later wrote that his work "evokes this fermentation of the popular spirit in which the most

⁴⁹ Rolland, *Théâtre de la Révolution I*, 186.

contradictory emotions bump against one another, but from which progressively develops a sober violence.”⁵⁰

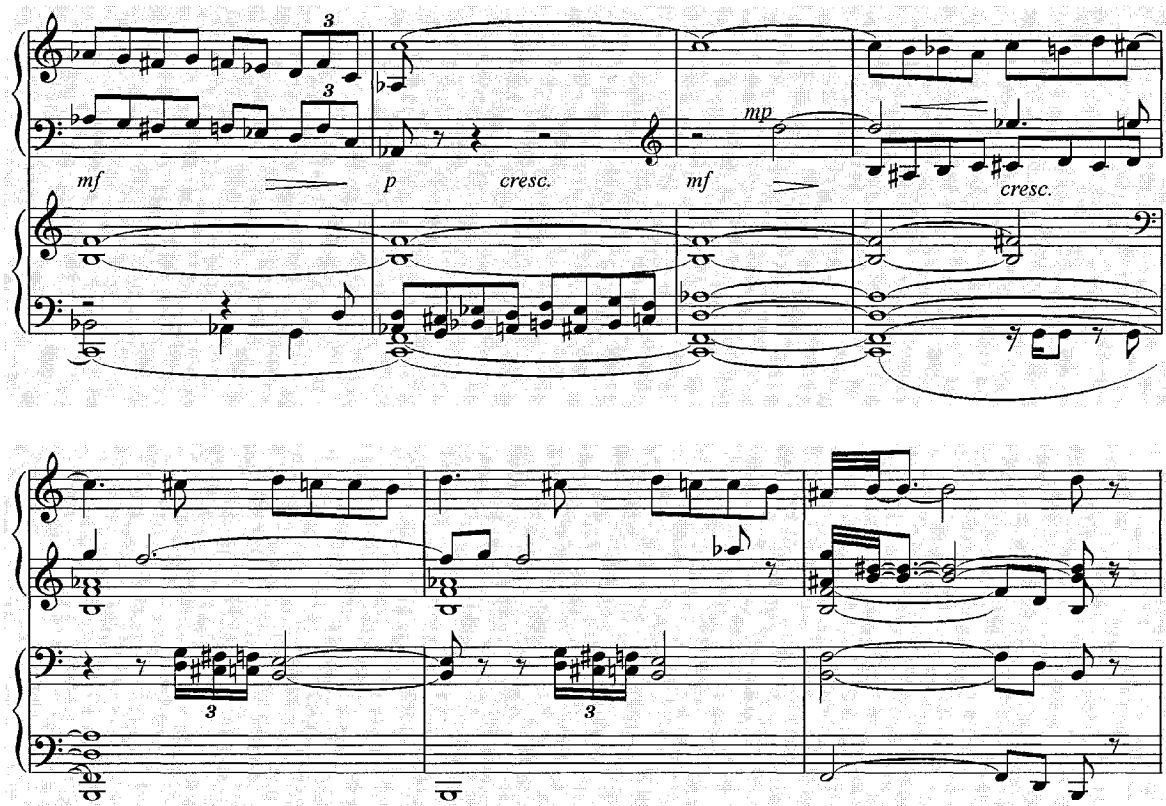
It is indeed this emotional confusion that Roussel paints in his highly descriptive work. Unlike the contributions of his colleagues, Roussel does not make any obvious use of folk music, nor does he explicitly allude to the tonal military music of the French Revolution. Rather, his piece is densely chromatic, suggesting, as Nicole Labelle has noted, “the anguish of the people” (example 5.8).⁵¹

Ex. 5.8. Albert Roussel, *Prélude*, mm. 1-15.

The musical score for Albert Roussel's *Prélude*, measures 1-15, is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 1-4, and the second system shows measures 5-8. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is written for piano (pp) and includes a variety of musical notations such as slurs, ties, and accidentals. The dynamics shift from pp to mf and then p. The melody is marked with a '3' indicating a triplet.

⁵⁰ *Catalogue de l'oeuvre d'Albert Roussel* (Paris, Bruxelles: Editor, 1947), 34: “Ce prélude du Deuxième Acte évoque cette fermentation de l’âme populaire où se bousculent les sentiments les plus contradictoires, mais où grandit progressivement une sombre violence.”

⁵¹ Labelle, “Les musiques de scène,” 86.



Roussel claimed that the *Prélude* was somewhat “improvised,” and “written in a hurry.”⁵² Despite this, critics still heard, “rumbling in the darkness, battalions marching, and the call to arms,” thereby confirming the work’s success in conveying the on-stage events.⁵³

Arthur Honegger

This was not the first time that Arthur Honegger had been asked to write incidental music for a play by Romain Rolland. In 1923 he composed two pieces for the author’s *Liluli*, a work that was staged by the left-wing collective “Art et action” in the

⁵² Cited in Labelle, “Les musiques de scène,” 87.

⁵³ Kochnitzky, “*Le 14 Juillet*,” 43.

Parisian suburb of Suresnes.⁵⁴ Although a small contribution, it included, notably, a “Worker’s Chorus” in which the composer contrapuntally combined two French folksongs: “Ah Joseph dites-nous” and “Darrié chez nous y a’t’un vert bocaige.”⁵⁵ Following the performances of *Le 14 Juillet* in 1936, Honegger wrote to Rolland to request a signed photograph, and in exchange, sent the author a compositional sketch of his contribution, *Marche sur la Bastille*. Rolland was touched by this gesture and responded; “You spoil me! Your sketch [...] has even more value for me in that it is still warm with an initial idea.”⁵⁶

“Music must change its public, and address itself to the masses.”⁵⁷ So claimed Honegger during the 1930s, and his musical affiliations during the Popualr Front prove that he took it to heart. His film score for *Visages de France* (a Communist-funded documentary that traces the history of France from a Marxist perspective), and his contribution to Jean-Richard Bloch’s *Naissance d’une cité* (examined in Chapter 7), a work equally influenced by Marxist thought, are both notable instances of the composer’s implication in the cultural projects of the Left during this period. Although “this is a far cry from making Honegger a militant Marxist” (as Harry Halbreich has stressed), the composer’s involvement with left-wing organizations and his alignment with their

⁵⁴ Harry Halbreich, *Arthur Honegger*, trans. Roger Nichols (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1999), 503. See also the letter from Romain Rolland to Arthur Honegger, October 18, 1922, in Fonds Romain Rolland – BN Manuscrits.

⁵⁵ Halbreich, *Arthur Honegger*, 503.

⁵⁶ Letter from Romain Rolland to Arthur Honegger, May 7, 1938, in Fonds Romain Rolland – BN Manuscrits. “Vous me gâtez! Votre esquisse de la musique pour *Le 14 Juillet* a encore plus de prix pour moi, d’être une première pensée, toute chaude encore.”

⁵⁷ Cited in Marcel Delannoy, *Honegger* (Geneva and Paris: Slatkine, 1986), 163. “La musique doit changer de publique et s’adresser à la masse.”

aesthetic and ideological positions during this period reveals that he was certainly sympathetic to the Left's political aims.⁵⁸

Honegger's electrifying *Marche sur la Bastille*, while foregoing obvious references to folk and revolutionary sources, employs a compositional strategy that mirrors comments made by Albert Roussel concerning the approach FMP composers should adopt when writing modern *musique populaire*. During a Popular-Front period interview, Roussel suggested that works for "popular" audiences should contain "grand, simple lines, first, rather than ones with complicated harmonies. Or, at least [they should be] works with such rhythmic strength that the harmonies – though complex – are understood by the listener as well as by the performer."⁵⁹

Honegger's *Marche*, whether intentionally or not, follows this prescription closely. While employing violently scored chromatic sequences of fortissimo chords, the composer also summons up Beethoven's "fate" motif (short-short-short-long) as a symbolic representation of the societal transformation about to be enacted on stage (example 5.9).

Ex. 5.9. Arthur Honegger, *Marche sur la Bastille*, rehearsal 2.

The musical score for 'Marche' by Arthur Honegger, rehearsal 2, is presented for three parts: Trumpets, Trombones, and Snare drum. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The Trumpets part is marked 'f sempre staccato' and features a series of chords and triplets. The Trombones part also features chords and triplets. The Snare drum part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with triplets indicated by a '3' over the notes.

⁵⁸ Halbreich, *Arthur Honegger*, 140.

⁵⁹ Hélène Abraham, "Albert Roussel nous parle du Congrès de la Fédération musicale populaire," *Ce Soir*, May 14, 1937. "Oeuvres aux grandes lignes simples, d'abord, plutôt qu'aux harmonies compliquées, où du moins, oeuvres d'une puissance rythmique telle qu'à la faveur du rythme les harmonies, même compliquées, s'imposent à l'exécutant comme à l'auditeur."



As the battle between revolutionaries and the Swiss guards protecting the Bastille intensifies, brittle nervousness (depicted by the music in example 5.9) gives way to a “grand, simple line” that expresses all the fervour and enthusiasm of this dramatic (and historic) moment (example 5.10).

Ex. 5.10. Arthur Honegger, *Marche sur la Bastille*, rehearsal 8.

Marche

Charles Koechlin

Among the composers of the FMP, Charles Koechlin was one of the most impassioned defenders of international and indigenous folk traditions, and he saw folk music as a powerful keystone for the foundation of modern *musique populaire*. He believed that,

In the past, *musique populaire*, was the song born of the people, spontaneously, like the improvisations of children who invent songs to accompany their games (I have heard them, I have written them down, I have even used them in my work). Those that sing in such a way, and compose without knowing it, they do not “know their notes,” often, they do not know the great works that have marked the history of music; but, music is within them, and out of instinct they create it. I do not want to supply a history of the origins of folklore, but I insist on the instinctual aspect of this form of musical creativity.⁶⁰

Wishing to make a distinction between *musique populaire* and music that was commercially popular, he wrote: “Real *musique populaire* is an expression of the people, as were the songs of Brittany, those of Spanish folklore, the *Complainte de la Volga*, (...), etc.”⁶¹ Koechlin was anxious to show that folk music was not a genre that was less developed or less capable of expressing profound emotion. In fact, it could stand on par with great examples of “high-art” music of the past:

⁶⁰ Charles Koechlin, “Défense de la culture: la musique populaire,” *L'Humanité*, June 26, 1937. “Ce fut, autrefois, la chanson née du peuple, spontanément, comme les improvisations d’enfants qui inventent des chants pour accompagner leurs jeux (j’en ai entendu, je les ai notés, je m’en suis même servi). Ceux qui chantent ainsi, et composent sans le savoir, ils ne connaissent pas leurs notes, souvent même ils ignorent les grandes oeuvres de l’histoire musicale; mais la musique est en eux, et d’instinct ils en créent. Je n’ai pas ici à faire une étude des origines du folklore, mais j’insiste sur le côté instinctif de cette création musicale.”

⁶¹ Charles Koechlin, “La vraie et la fausse musique populaire,” *L'Art musical populaire* (August-September, 1937): 19. “...je maintiens ma distinction entre la musique légère qui a de la popularité, et la musique vraiment populaire, expression du peuple, comme furent les Chansonnnes bretonnes, celles de l’admirable folklore espagnol, la *Complainte de la Volga*, les vastes mélopées indiennes, les airs de cornemuse d’Ecosse, les rêveries des Irlandais et des Gallois, etc....”

...in *Notre-Dame du Folgoat*, that admirable melody from Brittany, is evoked the infinity of the Sea, as in Act III of *Tristan and Isolde*; in *Les Laboureurs*, the vast horizons of the prairies, as in the last act of *Messidor* by Zola and Alfred Bruneau.⁶²

Koechlin's appreciation for folklore informs our understanding of the work he composed for *Le 14 Juillet*, entitled *Liberté*. The music begins near the end of the second act at the moment when Hoche's call to storm the Bastille is met with hesitation by the people of Paris, amassed behind the barricades in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. A young girl breaks apart from the crowd and asserts that she is willing to follow him, oblivious to the dangers that such a decision entails. Hoche hoists the child upon his shoulders, who then begins to sing a simple song. The people, moved by her bravery, begin to repeat it as a round. The song thus serves to muster the courage of the crowd as it prepares to make its way to the Bastille. Koechlin breathes life into the young girl's tune (example 5.11) endowing it with a naive rhythmic profile and modal melodic character typical of the folk melodies from Brittany that he so readily praised.⁶³

Ex. 5.11. Charles Koechlin, *Liberté*, m. 1-3.



⁶² Ibid., 19. "...dans Notre-Dame du Folgoat, cette admirable mélodie bretonne, on évoque l'infini de l'Océan, comme dans le prélude du 3^e acte de Tristan et Yseult; dans les Laboureurs, les vastes horizons des plaines, ainsi qu'au dernier acte du Messidor de Zola et Alfred Bruneau."

⁶³ Although the resemblance is difficult for me to hear, Nicole Labelle has suggested that Koechlin's tune could have been inspired by the famous French folk tune "Auprès de ma blonde." See Labelle, "Les musiques de scène," 87. Koechlin's tune – particularly the opening gesture – is also similar to "En passant par la Lorraine."

Koechlin simultaneously refers to the revolutionary period through a specific textual reference in the opening line of the piece. Here, the words “*Liberté dans ce beau jour, liberté remplis notre âme*” (Freedom on this beautiful day, freedom fill our soul) – are actually a direct quotation from a revolutionary text that Gossec originally set to music in his *Ronde Nationale* of 1792 (example 5.12).⁶⁴

Ex. 5.12. François-Joseph Gossec, *Ronde nationale* (1792).

The musical score is for a five-part setting of a revolutionary song. It includes staves for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Piano. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves. The piano part is at the bottom, featuring trills (tr.) on the first and third measures. The score is marked with a '21' at the beginning of the Soprano staff.

Koechlin’s folk-inspired tune soon develops into a complex and harmonically audacious polytonal round. Léon Kochnitzky, writing in *La Revue musicale*, particularly admired Koechlin’s musical approach:

The shrill street song that a young girl sings is taken up by the entire choir and is developed with perfect grace and assurance without ever losing its simple allure,

⁶⁴ Constant Pierre, *Musique des fêtes et ceremonies de la révolution française* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1899), 348-349.

and without affectation. This song is always recognizable, fresh and lively it is, and supported by a delicate orchestration; as it progresses it picks up exceptional harmonies, it brings about inspired passages that have an exquisite musical quality. This is music for the people.⁶⁵

As Koechlin's round becomes more complex, the overall effect not only suggests the echoing of the people's music off the buildings that line the narrow Parisian street, but also "large and enthusiastic sounds, bells that are waking up closer and closer and confused noises."⁶⁶

Ex. 5.13. Charles Koechlin, *Liberté* (reduction), m. 59-68.

The musical score for Charles Koechlin's *Liberté* (reduction), measures 59-68, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the Chorus and Orchestra parts. The Chorus part is marked 'Très Animé' and includes the lyrics 'En a - vant! Mar - chons! En a - vant! En a - vant! Mar - chons!'. The Orchestra part includes dynamic markings 'f' and 'ff'. The second system shows the continuation of the Chorus and Orchestra parts, with the Chorus part including the lyrics 'A la Li ber té!'. The score is written on two systems of staves.

⁶⁵ Léon Kochnitzky, "Le 14 Juillet," 43. La grêle chanson des rues dont une petite fille chantonne une première fois le motif, est reprise par tout le chœur, développée avec une grâce, une aisance parfaites et sans jamais perdre son allure simple, sans apprêts. Elle demeure toujours reconnaissables, franche, animée, cette chanson, et appuyée par une instrumentation délicate, elle cueille au passage des harmonies rares, elle apporte des trouvailles d'une exquise qualité musicale. La musique du peuple, c'est cela."

⁶⁶ Rolland, *Theatre et la Revolution*, 177-178: "les grandes clameurs enthousiastes, les cloches qui s'éveillent de proche en proche, et [les] bruits confus."

Koechlin paints the confusion and pandemonium of popular revolt with an astringent musical texture replete with polymodal audacities. At the words “En avant!” (example 5.13) the contrapuntal chaos gives way to a homophonic declamation that culminates in an impassioned exclamation: “Liberté!” The rhythmic contrast between this section and the bouncing 12/8 rhythms that precede it, creates a dramatic effect that is noteworthy, for, as Robert Orledge has argued, Koechlin’s compositions, despite their harmonic richness, often lack “rhythmic variety and incisiveness.”⁶⁷ Here the rhythmic transformation is arresting, and the musical setting, as well as the social demands inscribed in the text, displays a feverish intensity. Koechlin signaled out this passage in his landmark treatise on orchestration, stating that the overall harmonic effect is “naturally somewhat confused” and that it should “give the impression of a tumultuous free-for-all.”⁶⁸

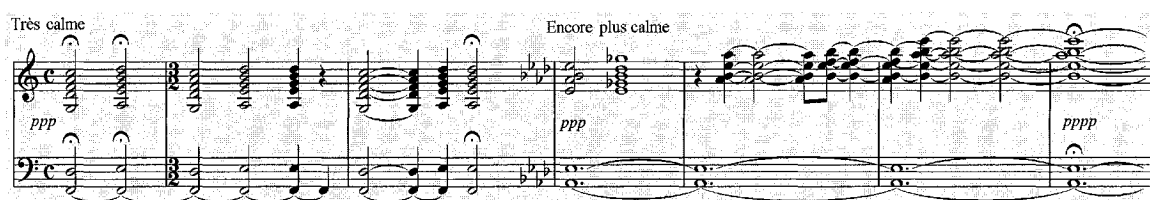
The enthralled climax of *Liberté* eventually coalesces into an orchestral postlude featuring drawn-out chords of stacked fifths that the composer, in a letter to a friend, later described as “unanalyzable” (example 5.14).⁶⁹ These enigmatic sonorities are typical of Koechlin’s contemplative, mystical style – most notably featured in symphonic poems like *La méditation de Purun Bhagat*, op. 159 and *Le buisson ardent*, op. 171. Constructed of stacked fifths in an extremely delicate scoring, their unpredictable horizontal movement could not be further removed from the naive simplicity that characterizes the work’s rambunctious opening section.

⁶⁷ Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 259.

⁶⁸ Charles Koechlin, *Traité de l’orchestration en quatre volumes*, vol. 4 (Paris: Max Eschig: 1954-1959), 281.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 174.

Ex. 5.14. Charles Koechlin, *Liberté* (reduction), m. 111-120.



In an article defending the incidental music for *Le 14 Juillet*, Koechlin pointed to the success of all of the musical contributions as being proof of a thesis that he had long defended: that music could be *populaire* as well as being “learned.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Koechlin’s employment of complex musical sonorities inspired by the simplicity of a rustic tune confirms his faith in the possible coexistence of art for art’s sake *and* art for the people.

Daniel Lazarus

Of all the composers of the group that Koechlin referred to as “Les Sept,” Daniel Lazarus is by far the least known.⁷¹ Nonetheless, he had the task of writing what was perhaps the most important musical contribution for *14 Juillet*, and as we have seen, the one for which Romain Rolland held the greatest importance – the concluding *fête populaire*. Lazarus was very active in the cultural activities of the Left and was the resident music critic at the Communist daily, *Ce Soir*. He believed that the contemporary political situation, which he viewed to be dominated by the social demands of the masses, should incite composers to reconsider the very foundations of musical composition.⁷² He

⁷⁰ Charles Koechlin, “Musique savante...et populaire,” *L’Humanité*, Sep. 6, 1936.

⁷¹ Charles Koechlin, “De l’art pour l’art et de l’état des esprits à ce jour,” *La Revue musicale* (June-July 1937): 23.

⁷² Daniel Lazarus, “La Musique,” *Ce Soir*, July 16, 1937.

called for a new, modern form of *musique populaire* that was ultra-simplified and better suited to the people's capacity for musical appreciation.

This music should not be built using an intellectual plan, nor should it have an established logic or inflexible architecture. It should have neither a beginning nor a clearly established conclusion. The repetition of a very simple motif, combined with persistent rhythms (but not very accentuated), in short, a kind of perpetual rondo which is light, bouncy, continuous and almost impalpable.⁷³

These words in favor of a form of *musique populaire* similar in conception to modern-day elevator music clearly reveal that Lazarus believed that musical simplification was a prerequisite in modern works for the masses. His contribution to *Le 14 Juillet* remains true to his word: the score is dominated by the repetition of an extremely simple motif (example 5.15) that music critic Pierre Kaldor described in the following terms:

The apotheosis fell on the shoulders of Daniel Lazarus, who knew how to make it very enjoyable. But let's tell the truth to our friends: his theme strangely combines the finale of the *Ninth Symphony* [example 5.16] and (*horresco referens*) the tune, *Avec les pompiers* [example 5.17]. The instrumentation, made up of block chords,

⁷³ Ibid. "Cette musique ne devrait être bâtie sur aucun plan intellectuel, ne comporter aucun à priori logique, aucune architecture inflexible. Elle devrait en quelque sorte n'avoir ni début ni conclusion nettement établis. La répétition à quelque distance d'un motif très simple, brochant sur des éléments rythmiques persistants, mais peu "attaquants," bref, une sorte de rondo perpétuel, léger, bondissant, continu, presque impalpable [sic]."

Ex. 5.15. Daniel Lazarus, *Fête de la Liberté*, m. 9-16.

Ex. 5.16. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony no. 9* in D minor, op. 125 (4th movement), m. 241-252.

Ex. 5.17. Henry Himmel, *Avec les pompiers* (1934).

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premiere, Lazarus's enthusiasm and faith in the aesthetic shift ushered in by these performances is clearly revealed:

As you already certainly know, the battle has been fought and won. *Le 14 Juillet* marks the beginning of people's theatre in France. All of our dreams are now permitted. It is up to all of us to stick to the task at hand and not give up in the face of the underhanded attacks that are already becoming apparent.

For me, driven for so many years by the hope – up until now always unfulfilled – to be “useful” in my music, my happiness is great. The workers, who are hard critics without pity, have “accepted” me. My music has become their music. They sing it, they dance it, it belongs to them. And I'm even happier knowing that it isn't easy to please them.⁷⁵

Rolland as Critic

Given Romain Rolland's keen interest in the musical treatment of the *fête populaire*, it is interesting at this juncture to evaluate his reaction to the work. The author was not present for the premiere, but he did hear it over the radio, and wrote to Charles Koechlin to congratulate all of the composers for this “exceptional demonstration – of the

⁷⁵ Letter from Daniel Lazarus to Jean-Richard Bloch, July 17, 1936, fonds Jean-Richard Bloch, BNF, Manuscrits. “Comme tu le sais certainement déjà, la partie est jouée et gagnée. *Le 14 Juillet* sera l'aube d'un théâtre pour le peuple en France. Tous les espoirs sont maintenant permis. A nous tous de nous atteler à la tâche et de ne pas lâcher prise devant les assauts sournois qui se dessinent déjà (voir article Madeleine Paz du *Populaire* d'aujourd'hui). Pour moi, hanté depuis tant d'années par l'espoir – toujours jusqu'à présent déçu – d'être “utile” par ma musique, ma joie est grande. Les groupes ouvriers, de dure et impitoyable critique, m'ont “admis.” Ma musique est devenue la leur. Ils la chantent, ils la dansent, elle leur appartient. Et je suis d'autant plus heureuse que leur plaisir n'est pas facile...”

Popular Front in music.”⁷⁶ At the beginning of August, Rolland visited Paris and attended two performances of *Le 14 Juillet*. He was hailed with great acclaim by both the audience and the artists participating in the work, and his presence in Paris, following a long self-imposed exile in Switzerland, made news across the country. His unpublished letters to his sister from that period reveal that, despite his earlier comments to Koechlin, he was in fact less than enthusiastic about the artistic quality of the production, and was particularly disappointed with the musical contributions.

The production did not please me at all. (But you must not tell anybody!) I make an exception for the *fête* at the end, which is admirably enlivening and spirited. But the rest is almost never in the rhythm I wanted. The music (very beautiful) ruined the rhythm and the character. As soon as the curtain goes up, it's like *opéra-comique*. One expects them to sing – “*Fils [sic] de la noble Venise, vaillants marins!*” (*Haydée*) or: “*C'est aujourd'hui, Dimanche!...*” (*Mignon*) – everything is too long, and the élan is disrupted. It needs to have a continuous fever.⁷⁷

Rather than music inspired “by Beethoven’s powerful music, which, better than all others, reflects the enthusiasm of the revolutionary period,” Rolland had to contend with

⁷⁶ Letter from Romain Rolland to Charles Koechlin, July 18, 1936, fonds Koechlin, Bibliothèque Gustav Mahler, Paris.

⁷⁷ Letter from Romain Rolland to his sister, Madeleine Rolland, August 2, 1936, fonds Romain Rolland, BNF, Manuscrits. “La représentation ne m’a pas du tout satisfait. (Mais il ne faut le dire à personne!) J’excepte la fête de la fin, qui est d’une allégresse et d’un élan admirables [...] Mais le reste n’est presque jamais dans le rythme que j’ai voulu. La musique (très belle) a faussé le mouvement et le caractère. Dès le lever de rideau, c’est de l’opéra-comique. On attend qu’ils chantent: – “Fils [sic] de la noble Venise, vaillant marins!” (*Haydée*) ou: – “C’est aujourd’hui, Dimanche!...” (*Mignon*) – tout est trop long, et le souffle est coupé. Il y faudrait une fièvre continue.” Emphasis in original.

incidental music in which he heard the echoes of Auber and Ambroise Thomas. Furthermore, the communion between the hall and the stage, for which Rolland had been hoping for since 1902, simply did not take place.

Or, at least, not in the way that he expected it would. Unexpectedly, following the applause and the “never ending” curtain calls, the audience and the actors sprang to their feet and, in a powerfully symbolic gesture, with fists raised, intoned *La Marseillaise* followed by the Communist anthem, *L’Internationale*.⁷⁸ The bridge between the stage and the hall had been built, not with the incidental music of Daniel Lazarus, but rather with two political songs that had for so long been the very symbols of the ideological divide between Right and Left in France. On July 14, 1936, those two songs were joined in a common ideal, this time stemming directly from left-wing appropriation of the legacy of the French Revolution. François Lassagne, who insisted on the fraternal and unanimous character of this mass singing, gave an enthusiastic description of the scene:

The Bastille was *really* taken, this evening of 1936. And when, at the end of the performance, actors, extras and spectators sang, with one voice, *La Marseillaise* and *L’Internationale*, there was nobody left to *hear* or to *see*, not one person who was at a show, not one actor who was playing a role.⁷⁹

The political and cultural significance of this event could not be denied, and critics from the period were at once confused and enthralled by the complex overlap and

⁷⁸ Édouard Bourdet, “Quatorze Juillet,” *Marianne*, July 22, 1936.

⁷⁹ Lassagne, “Le Quatorze Juillet,” *Vendredi*, July 24, 1936. “La Bastille fut vraiment prise, ce soir de 1936. Et quand, à la fin du spectacle, acteurs, figurants et spectateurs chantèrent, d’une même voix, la Marseillaise et L’Internationale, il n’y avait plus personne pour entendre ou pour voir, pas un homme qui fût au spectacle, pas un acteur qui tint son rôle.”

synthesis of history, politics and art that resulted from the extraordinary timing of Rolland's work. One critic even wondered aloud: "Had we gone to the theatre, or rather to the last political demonstration of the day?"⁸⁰ This is not an easy question to answer. With the production of *Le 14 Juillet*, Communist claims to one of the most glorious symbols of the Republic had been fulfilled. Not only had the Popular Front instilled one of France's great historical moments with new symbolism, it had also shown that the collaboration at the root of leftist aesthetics offered the possibility for artistic renewal.

⁸⁰ Maurice Savin, review of *Le 14 Juillet*, *Nouvelle Revue française*, August, 1936, p. 398. "Était-on venu au théâtre ou plutôt à la dernière manifestation politique de la journée?"

Chapter 6 – Left-Wing Politics at the Opéra-Comique

The previous three chapters have examined musical works explicitly influenced by Popular Front ideology: marching songs, pieces for amateur performance, and Romain Rolland's politico-theatrical celebration, *Le 14 Juillet*. In this chapter I discuss how composers sympathetic to the Popular Front looked to further legitimize their aesthetic stance at official State venues. Such initiatives were particularly conspicuous at the Salle Favart of the Opéra-Comique, which, like the more prestigious Opéra, had long benefited from State subsidies. The Left's attempt to infiltrate this venue through administrative, repertorial and stylistic modifications was in many respects a failure. Nonetheless, the story of the Opéra-Comique during this period further reinforces my claim that, even beyond the confines of left-wing organizations like the FMP, composers close to the Popular Front experimented with populist modernist approaches as a means of reaching out to larger audiences.

The administrative changes at the Opéra-Comique during the Popular Front included the establishment of an advisory committee (*comité consultatif*), a group of twelve composers appointed by the Popular Front minister, Jean Zay. Their role was to evaluate and propose amendments to the theatre's active repertory and to function as a jury that would cast judgment on new works being proposed for performance. In essence, the committee was responsible for modernizing the institution's repertory, but it simultaneously sought to reaffirm the theatre's historical links to a repertory of lighter works that upheld the spoken/sung dichotomy of the *opéra comique* tradition. In its efforts, this operatic "cultural front" attempted to "popularize" the genre, by promoting

generic and stylistic renewal and by encouraging the integration of “everyday” musical sources into modern works.¹ Taking their cue from the post-War aesthetics of Les Six, the advisory committee supported the fusion of “elite” and “popular” styles, an aesthetic choice, which in light of the positions I have traced in the preceding chapters, was resonant with the larger aesthetic program of the Left.

Raised Fists at the Opéra-Comique

The time was ripe for a huge overhaul at the Opéra-Comique. Worker dissatisfaction within the theatre had been building throughout the 1930s, and since the arrival of Pierre-Barthélémy Gheusi in 1934 for his second stint as director of the theatre the situation had continued to deteriorate.² By 1936 animosity towards the director had become widespread amongst the Opéra-Comique personnel and within press and government circles. Gheusi was criticized not only for his administrative incompetence and lack of artistic vision, but also (in some circles) for his enthusiasm for Mussolini.³ A report looking to address the administrative difficulties at the Opéra-Comique singled out Gheusi’s “tyrannical management” and his propensity to misuse funds and accept bribes from patrons.⁴ Workers were particularly angered by Gheusi’s modifications to their

¹ A similar trend occurred at the Opéra with the première of *L’Aiglon* in 1937, an opera co-written by Jacques Ibert and Arthur Honegger. Both composers viewed this work within the context of “spectacles populaires.” See “*L’Aiglon* à l’Opéra” *Le Figaro*, August 31, 1937, reprinted in Arthur Honegger, *Ecrits*, ed. Huguette Calmel (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1992), 145-147.

² Gheusi (1865-1943), the author of numerous libretti, novels and biographer of General (posthumously Marshal) Joseph Gallieni, was also director of the Opéra-Comique between 1914 and 1918. He left an account of his tenure there, entitled *L’Opéra-Comique pendant la guerre* (Paris: La Nouvelle revue, 1919).

³ Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion: Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire, 1935-1938* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 310. See also *L’Humanité*, December 23, 1935, on Gheusi’s right-wing sympathies. For criticism of his administration in 1936 see the articles by Guy de Pourtalès in *L’Echo de Paris*: “Agonie de l’Opéra-Comique,” February 29, 1936; and “L’Opéra-Comique se meurt-il?” March 4, 1936.

⁴ “Commission chargée de l’examen de la gestion administrative de l’Opéra-Comique: Rapport de M. Pierre Dornès, conseiller référendaire à la Cour des Comptes, Membre de la Commission,” May 6 1936, Pièce 84 (1): p. 13 and p. 17, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris. Gheusi denied accepting bribes in exchange

contracts, which over the course of 1934 and 1935 included a 10% reduction in pay. Furthermore, during the 1934-35 season, Gheusi “arbitrarily” amended the official *cahier de charges*, and staged 284 performances in ten months, as opposed to 208 in twelve months.⁵ This angered the workers (singers, orchestra musicians, choristers, dancers, stage hands, and electricians), who felt that they were being asked to do more for less pay. Furthermore, they were frustrated about legal wrangling over the approximately 700,000 francs that they were owed in unpaid wages resulting from Opéra-Comique performances that had been contracted out to the radio.⁶

The situation came to a head on June 25, 1936. Following the creation of an internal union to deal with workers’ demands, the personnel made their grievances public in a fittingly dramatic manner.⁷ That evening, the audience at the Opéra-Comique had settled comfortably in their seats for a performance of Offenbach’s *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* – a standard of the repertory, which, thanks to its enduring popularity helped guarantee box-office revenues for the theatre. The curtain, however, was slow to rise, and following much grumbling in the hall, a delegate for the workers appeared on stage to announce that there would be further delays as a result of long-standing administrative incompetence. After his speech he asked the orchestra to sound *La Marseillaise*, at which

for allowing singers to perform at the Opéra-Comique. See Pierre-Barthélémy Gheusi, *L’Opéra-Comique sous la haine* (Paris: 4, Rue Saint-Florentin, 1937), 10.

⁵ “Le personnel de l’Opéra-Comique demande le remplacement de M. P.-B. Gheusi,” *Comoedia*, June 21, 1936, and Gheusi’s response the next day in *Comoedia*, June 22, 1936.

⁶ The amount in question varies depending on the different sources. 600,000 is the figure given in *Comoedia*, June 27, 1936; 750,000 in Paul Gourdeux’s article in *Echo de Paris*, July 2, 1937. Gourdeux refers to other sources where the figure given was 800,000. Gheusi claimed that the workers were asking for one million francs in *Le Journal*, July 2, 1937, and that he had already paid out the 200,000 owed to them for radio contracts.

⁷ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 311.

point the curtain rose to reveal the entire troupe interspersed throughout the set of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, singing the national anthem with their fists raised in the air.⁸

This *coup de théâtre* infuriated Gheusi. His public embarrassment was only further accentuated by commentary in the press, which now charged that “all sense of order” had left the hall.⁹ Nevertheless, Gheusi launched a counterattack and insisted that the disturbances at the Opéra-Comique were caused by an isolated group of “unhappy agitators.”¹⁰ Furthermore, he maintained that he was still on good terms with the majority of the personnel, and that he had been actively working with union representatives and the Ministre de l'Éducation nationale, Jean Zay, to reach a solution.¹¹ In his press interviews from the period, Gheusi appeared less worried about the workers and their demands than by the consequences their “irresponsible” antics would have on the network of private patrons who regularly donated money to the theatre. Gheusi was extremely wary of frightening these individuals away, because, as commentators mentioned, although the State subsidized the theatre, without the backing of private patrons, it could never survive.¹² In his retrospective account of the affair, Gheusi begins his narrative with an anecdote about a rich patron who, with little ado, gave the theatre three million francs at the beginning of his tenure.¹³ He had hoped that this donation – later augmented by a million more – would convince the State of the need to increase the theatre's annual subvention.¹⁴ But increased State funding was not forthcoming, and the money of private

⁸ *Comoedia*, June 26, 1936; Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 311; Gheusi, *L'Opéra-Comique sous la haine*, 46.

⁹ *Le Journal*, June 26, 1936.

¹⁰ *Le Temps*, June 22, 1936.

¹¹ Under the Popular Front, the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale oversaw the “Section des Beaux-Arts” which was responsible for State funding for music, including the Opéra and orchestral concert organizations.

¹² A. de Montgon, “M. Gheusi y est à sa place,” *Petit bleu*, June 23, 1936.

¹³ The story is corroborated in Marcel Montarron “*Carmen sur le tas*,” *Marianne*, July 8, 1936.

¹⁴ Gheusi, *L'Opéra-Comique sous la haine*, 9.

donors, particularly when compared to the generous patronage enjoyed by Jacques Rouché at the Opéra, also dried up.¹⁵ Some cynical critics felt that it was ridiculous that private patrons bothered to throw any money at the Opéra-Comique at all, given the fact that “the reputation of the house no longer merit[ed] any attention.”¹⁶ Ultimately, Gheusi, in his efforts to keep the institution financially solvent, gave the appearance of favouring the interests of his rich patrons over those of his workers. It was this lack of administrative diplomacy that spelled his downfall.

Following the *Contes d'Hoffmann* scandal, the workers, now well organized, staged a decisive tactical battle against Gheusi. They called for his immediate resignation and even went so far as to make ominous threats, advising him that if he cared for his own safety he should avoid appearing at the theatre. Rumors surfaced that if he did not comply, he would be tied up and literally “exposed” in front of the drop-curtain.¹⁷ On June 30th, that same curtain fell on *Tosca* – the last performance of the season – and the Opéra-Comique employees, rather than making their way home, turned the theatre boxes into bunks and effectively occupied the building. Evidently, the example set by the widespread factory occupations – which were used to pressure the Popular Front to follow through on its election promises – was not lost on the personnel at the Opéra-Comique.¹⁸ For Gheusi this was simply “bad theatre,” and he quickly placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of a radical minority among the personnel, who he vindictively referred to as the “Komintern of the house” and the “Soviets of the rue Favart.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Montarron, “*Carmen* sur le tas.”

¹⁶ Dominique Sordet, *Action française*, July 3, 1937.

¹⁷ *Comoedia*, July 1, 1936.

¹⁸ The following discussion relies in part on the collection of press clippings located at BN-Arsenal, Fonds Rondel, 2126 Opéra Comique (1936), and 2127 Opéra Comique (1937).

¹⁹ *Le Journal*, July 2, 1937; and Gheusi, *L'Opéra-Comique sous la haine*, 27,

Accounts differ as to the true purpose of the occupation. Although there is little doubt that the ouster of Gheusi was a major priority, by the time the occupation had begun, his dismissal was, for all intents and purposes, a *fait accompli*. Already on June 19 and 26, the workers had convened at the Palais de la Mutualité, a large newly constructed meeting hall on the Left Bank that hosted many left-wing gatherings during the 1930s. There, the workers' recently formed "inter-union committee," which was supported by a number of important unions including the Confédération générale du travail and the Fédération nationale du spectacle, voted for the immediate departure of Gheusi.²⁰ The occupation of the theatre was no doubt a means to pressure the government into taking their demands seriously, but it appears that other ambitions were also afoot.

Gheusi, for one, believed that the theatre was under threat of immanent "bolshevization," an opinion that, though indicative of a certain degree of paranoia, was not completely unfounded. Some members of the personnel did indeed envisage a radical overhaul of the Opéra-Comique's administrative foundations. One orchestral musician, a certain Jasmin, whom Gheusi colourfully referred to as a "gut-scraper," claimed that the workers intended to hold performances throughout the month of July, to prove that "the theatre could operate without a director."²¹ Gheusi vigorously reminded the workers that any attempt to bring the theatre under collective control was illegal. He explained that the director was legally bound to the Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques for

²⁰ "Le personnel de l'Opéra-Comique demande le remplacement de M. P.-B. Gheusi," *Comoedia*, June 21, 1936; *Comoedia*, June 27, 1936.

²¹ Paul Gordeaux, "L'Opéra-Comique occupé," *L'Echo de Paris*, July 1, 1936; and Gheusi, *L'Opéra-Comique sous la haine*, 38.

the performances of all operatic works and as a result, the workers' dreams of a "ridiculously Soviet system of direct control" would never see the light of day.²²

Although the press was quick to place the situation at the Opéra-Comique in the context of the generalized strike movement, some of the workers insisted that it was not a strike at all. There was definitely some truth to this assertion, because, since the season had come to an end with the final performance of *Tosca* on June 30, the workers were not actually interrupting operatic "production."²³ Semantics aside, many saw the occupation less as a violent standoff than a good-natured sit-in (*grève de la bonne humeur*). Numerous reports substantiated this viewpoint, and described the festive mood (punctuated with dancing and theatrical skits) that prevailed inside the building. Makeshift performances of *Carmen* were presented on the theatre's exterior balconies to the delight of pedestrians who congregated in the square to throw money to the performers. Inside, the workers staged informal spoofs mocking the director. Quite predictably, the right-wing press, indignant at these antics, ridiculed the personnel. Dominique Sordet, writing in *Action française*, referred to the situation as a "histoire comique" and chastised the methods of the employees on the grounds that they were simply parroting the same tactics Renault workers had employed during the month of May.²⁴

The occupation lasted two days. During that time, Jean Zay gained the confidence of the workers, who entrusted him with the arbitration of the situation and the dismissal of Gheusi, whose resignation was tendered on July 4th. It was obvious that although Gheusi's four-year reign had come to an insurrectionary end, France's "second theatre"

²² *L'Echo de Paris*, July 2, 1937.

²³ *Le Journal*, July 2, 1936.

²⁴ *L'Action française*, July 3, 1936.

still faced many formidable obstacles. For many observers, the Opéra-Comique's financial problems went hand in hand with its acute lack of artistic vision. Ultimately the theatre's survival depended upon the enduring popularity of a dozen works, despite the fact that the *cahier des charges* called for constant renewal and the regular mounting of premières. The statistics were telling. By 1936 *Carmen* had been performed over 2000 times, *Mignon*, *Manon* and Victor Massé's *Les noces de Jeanette* over 1500 times and *Werther* and *Lakmé* over 1000 times.²⁵ Gheusi proclaimed that *Carmen*, *Manon* and "les trois Puccini" (*La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*) were alone responsible for half the income generated through ticket sales.²⁶

Immediately following the occupation of the theatre, FMP member Marcel Delannoy penned an article for *Comoedia* that raised the question of how a creative "renaissance" could be initiated at the Opéra-Comique.²⁷ Such a question was urgent, for as Dominique Sordet noted (with an apparent blind-spot for *Pelléas*) the theatre had not produced a work that was able to secure a place in the repertory since Charpentier's *Louise* of 1900.²⁸ At the same time, the costs involved with the performance of new works, which often never remained on stage for more than ten days, put great strain on the theatre's financial solvency. By 1936 the situation was truly dire. The 1935-36 season had only brought in 4,607,000 francs in ticket sales, less than half the amount generated during the 1929-1930 season.²⁹ Furthermore, under Gheusi, the theatre had lost 90,000

²⁵ Jean Gourret, *Histoire de l'Opéra-Comique* (Paris: Albatros, 1983), 200-201.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁷ *Comoedia*, July 6, 1936.

²⁸ Dominique Sordet, "La réorganisation de l'Opéra-Comique," *L'Action française*, October 2, 1936.

²⁹ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 310.

francs per month.³⁰ Quite obviously, the problem was far too endemic to be resolved by the simple removal of one man.

A Theatre in Transition

To understand the transformations that affected the Opéra-Comique between 1936 and 1938, it is necessary to briefly review the basic organization of the institution. Although both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique were heavily funded by the State and soaked up more than 75% of all State subsidies for music, the responsibility for their financial success fell on the shoulders of their respective directors. Each director, although constrained by a *cahier de charges* that set out the number and types of works to be performed in a given season, was ultimately responsible for generating the box-office sales that constituted a considerable portion of the theatre's annual revenue. It was therefore the director's task to ensure that programming remained attractive and in accord with public expectation. Furthermore, performance standards were expected to remain high, in keeping with the national (and international) profile of both the Opéra and Opéra-Comique.

In the 1930s, however, the financial responsibilities of the director at both institutions were increasingly difficult to uphold. Jacques Rouché, who had been director of the Opéra since 1914, sounded a cry of alarm in 1932 with an influential article entitled "L'Opéra et les mœurs nouvelles" in which he lamented the incompatibility of the operatic art form with a burgeoning youth culture that embraced sport, cinema and, as he put it, "the theory of the least effort" (*la théorie du moindre effort*).³¹ While lamenting the

³⁰ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 310.

³¹ Jacques Rouché, "L'Opéra et les mœurs nouvelles," *La Revue des Deux Mondes* (July 1, 1932): 68-71.

dramatic decrease in opera attendance, Rouché also observed the disturbing discrepancy between the conservative tastes of the public and the modern idioms adopted by contemporary composers. Calling for a “truce” between “enemies,” Rouché stood on the side of the composers and was critical of the public’s lack of “curiosity, knowledge or tolerance” for musical innovation.³² But, Rouché was also well aware that creating an antagonistic environment at the Opéra, provoked by unpopular repertory choices, was not good for business. He had often been obliged to support the Opéra with funds drawn both from his own pocketbook and the extraordinary fortune his wife had inherited through her father’s perfume empire. And, as was the case at the Opéra-Comique, Rouché also had to remain sensitive to the demands of wealthy patrons whose benevolent donations were integral to keeping the theatre afloat.

Backed by prestige and the extremely dexterous Rouché, the Opéra managed to navigate its way through the financially straightjacketed 1930s. The Opéra-Comique, on the other hand, remained bogged down on many fronts, and throughout the decade had become the object of no fewer than four studies that sought viable solutions to its financial and artistic woes.³³ The Campion report of 1932 put forth the idea of abolishing the Opéra-Comique altogether, but in the same breath acknowledged that the theatre’s traditional repertory, if transferred to the Opéra, would undoubtedly suffer. Abandoning this original proposal, Campion went on to recommend an administrative reorganization that would consolidate the administrative and financial responsibilities for both theatres into the hands of one director. This individual would oversee the artistic direction of either the Opéra or Opéra-Comique, and would appoint somebody under his direct control

³² Ibid., 76.

³³ The four studies (*rapports*) were conducted by Campion, Rouché, Abram and Dornès. The first three can be consulted at AN F21 5217, the fourth in Fonds Rouché BN-Opéra, Pièce 84 (1).

for the artistic administration of the other. Such a system, it was claimed, would help lower expenses by allowing the merging of the theatrical personnel, particularly if (as Campion advised) the overall number of spectacles at both theatres was reduced.³⁴

Jacques Rouché was partially in favour of these proposals, but was obviously scared off by the financial risk it presented. He did not believe that much money would actually be saved through this merger, and feared that the artistic consequences of sharing personnel between the two houses were bound to be negative.³⁵ He claimed that the only way that the Opéra and Opéra-Comique could be united was if the French State (following the German model of State funding) assumed complete fiscal responsibility for both opera houses. Furthermore, rather than impose absolute rule by one director over both theatres, Rouché proposed the formation of a an advisory committee at the Opéra-Comique, which would comprise the Director of the Conservatoire, the General Inspector for Music, a member of the government and at least three composers.³⁶ Rouché felt that this would lessen any impression of theatrical dictatorship (“particularly delicate in Paris where everything concerning the theatre causes rumours”) and would also ensure that mediators were in place to deal not only with frictions over repertorial and professional recruitment decisions but also with complaints stemming from the personnel.³⁷

In August 1936, Rouché received almost everything he had brokered for. In the wake of the occupation and Gheusi’s forced departure, the Opéra-Comique entered a new, transitional phase. During this period, the government worked on reorganizing the French operatic establishment, culminating in January 1939 with the nationalization of both the

³⁴ Campion, “Etude en vue d’une exploitation économique de l’Opéra et de l’Opéra-Comique,” in F21 5217, dossier “Reforme des théâtres nationaux,” 1-19.

³⁵ Jacques Rouché, “Note de M. Rouché sur les théâtres lyriques,” F21 5217, 2.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Ibid., 4.

Opéra and Opéra-Comique under the aegis of the “Reunion des théâtres lyriques nationaux” (RTLN). In the interim, Rouché was granted administrative control of both theatres. He remained in his position as artistic director of the Opéra, but was assisted in his administrative tasks by the advisory committee at the Opéra-Comique.

The Cultural Front at the Opéra-Comique

In creating the committee, Jean Zay followed a precedent he had recently set at the Comédie Française, where the newly-appointed director, Edouard Bourdet, was assisted by a committee comprised of four leading figures in the French theatrical world: Jacques Copeau, Gaston Baty, Charles Dullin and Louis Jouvet. These men were generally sympathetic to the Popular Front’s cultural vision, and were involved in organizations affiliated with La Maison de la Culture.³⁸ At the Opéra-Comique, Zay also created a committee that was clearly receptive to the political and artistic aims of the government. In fact, Zay initially approached only those composers who had participated in Romain Rolland’s *Le 14 Juillet*.³⁹ Evidently, it was political payback time for Les Sept for the support they had shown the Popular Front in composing the incidental music to Rolland’s play.⁴⁰ This was unsavoury politics for Rouché, who pushed for – and managed to obtain – the inclusion of four more members to counteract this left-wing monopoly. Two members of the Institut were summoned – Gabriel Pierné and Gustave Charpentier – as well as two political “conservatives,” composers Reynaldo Hahn and Max d’Ollone.⁴¹

³⁸ They were all members of the Union des Théâtre Indépendants de France, a network of avant-garde theatrical troupes, many of which had participated in *Le 14 Juillet*.

³⁹ Letter from Jean Zay, Ministère de l’Education Nationale to Auric, Honegger, Ibert, Koechlin, Lazarus, Milhaud and Roussel, 24 August 1936, F21 5260 (3).

⁴⁰ J.C., “Le nouvel Opéra-Comique,” *Courrier Royal*, October 3, 1936.

⁴¹ Two separate letters were issued, one to “Les Sept”, the other to the four other composers. Archives nationales F21 5260 (3).

As one critic sarcastically remarked, “all four are men of the Right. I am speaking of the musical Right, of course, because I flatter myself and the purity of my soul by persisting to believe that politics played no role in these nominations.”⁴²

Zay, though consenting to these new appointments, reacted by parachuting a former Scholiste, Antoine Mariotte into the committee and also conferred upon him the position of “*administrateur générale*.”⁴³ Mariotte’s *opéra comique* of the previous season, *Gargantua*, had been praised for its “popular” appeal and that, along with his longstanding position as director of the Conservatoire in Orléans (the home-town of Zay), no doubt made him an appealing candidate for this position. As general administrator, Mariotte inherited the public relations duties at which Gheusi had so dramatically failed. As for the artistic responsibilities left vacant by Gheusi’s departure, Jean Zay appointed his friend, Daniel Lazarus to the newly created position of artistic administrator. Both Mariotte and Lazarus presided over and sat on the consultative committee, which now comprised twelve men in total.

The press did not fail to comment on the political factors that had played such a crucial role in these nominations. It also heated up the debate surrounded Jean Zay, and the right-wing press was particularly unrelenting in its scorn of the obvious partisanship that informed the Minister’s decisions.⁴⁴ As one journalist wrote:

⁴² J.C. “Le nouvel Opéra-Comique,” *Courrier Royal*, October 3, 1936. “Tous quatre sont des hommes de ‘droite.’ Nous parlons de ‘droite’ musicale, évidemment, car nous nous flattons d’assez de pureté d’âme pour persister à croire que la politique n’a joué aucun rôle dans ces désignations.” It may seem surprising to see Charpentier assimilated with the Right, particularly in light of the social politics inscribed in *Louise* and his socially progressive work at the Conservatoire Mimi Pinson. But, by 1936, Charpentier’s early radicalism had, in many respects, been assimilated by the French musical establishment. Indeed, as an Institut member, Charpentier had now become a de facto representative of the status quo.

⁴³ Mariotte (1875-1944) was previously the director of the Conservatoire in Jean Zay’s hometown of Orléans. Following his nomination, Georges Finaud commended Zay’s initiatives and applauded Mariotte’s nomination, feeling that he was disinterested and “concerned only with art.” *Comoedia*, August 23, 1936.

⁴⁴ See Dominique Sordet, “La réorganisation de l’Opéra-Comique,” *L’Action française*, October 2, 1936, and the unsigned article “La question de l’Opéra-Comique reste entière,” *Juvenal*, September 12, 1936.

“[This committee] does not have a regular mandate, and the influence of Communists is undeniable, and still exists, is tolerated, and is even encouraged by the government. This committee, dictating orders, has assumed the right to pin down anybody that doesn’t appear to show total enthusiasm for Vaillant-Couturier and the Popular Front.”⁴⁵

The internal politics, however, were no doubt much more nuanced. Daniel Lazarus complained openly to Jean-Richard Bloch about the overwhelming obstacles facing any type of broad-based reform within the theatre:

“The initial misunderstanding could not have been more complete. The tranquil, opulent, bourgeois atmosphere encourages me towards common-ground solutions, but I want to break everything open. Our committee is being attacked even before it has had a chance to meet. The idea that artists – without which theatres could never exist – will have their say in the administration of lyric art in France puts those on the Right – and sometimes the Left – in a fit of rage.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Le Jour*, October 27, 1936: “...organe sans mandat régulier, où l’influence communiste est indéniable, et qui subsiste encore, toléré, sinon encouragé en haut lieu. Ce comité, dictant les ordres, s’est arrogé le droit à mettre l’index tous ceux qui ne paraissent pas témoigner d’un enthousiasme total pour Vaillant-Couturier et le Front Populaire.”

⁴⁶ Letter from Daniel Lazarus to Jean-Richard Bloch, August 21, 1936, Fonds Jean-Richard Bloch. “Le malentendu initial ne peut être plus total. L’atmosphère quiète, cossue, bourgeoise m’invite aux solutions – juste milieu, et moi j’ai envie de faire tout sauter. Notre comité est déjà attaqué avant même de s’être réuni. L’idée que des créateurs – sans qui les théâtres n’existeraient pas – auront leur mot à dire dans l’administration de l’art lyrique en France met les gens de droite – et quelquefois de gauche – en fureur.”

The composer Henri Sauguet, a royalist Catholic and right-wing sympathizer, was one of the enraged. Immediately following the announcement he wrote a scathing letter to his friend Francis Poulenc in which he unequivocally denounced the new developments:

“This jury of composers at the Opéra-Comique is an extravagance and a *humiliation*. I am certain that there is not one composer of a certain stature or nobility who would consent to present a work to be judged by such a disparate learned assembly even if it was made up of friends. Anyway! It will last as long as it lasts and doesn’t worry me much. For most of them it is a way to reach the “people” whom, I’m afraid, will still not know their works, even if now they recognize some of their mugs. And how will Georges [Auric] permit himself to be seated next to [Reynaldo] Hahn, and Hahn next to Georges! Gone with the wind!”⁴⁷

Reaching the “people,” as Sauguet notes, was definitely a priority of some members of the committee. Indeed, acting as the theatre’s new artistic administrator, Daniel Lazarus tried to “break everything open” by attempting to establish a political agenda for the Opéra-Comique that would adjust the theatre’s offerings to reach larger audiences. Such an initiative was certainly not new. Similar projects that sought to transplant the Opéra-Comique to a larger hall in Paris where ticket prices could be kept

⁴⁷ Letter from Henri Sauguet to Francis Poulenc, August 20, 1936 in Francis Poulenc, *Correspondance 1910-1963*, ed. Myriam Chimènes (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 423. “Ce jury de compositeurs à l’Opéra-Comique est une extravagance et une *humiliation*. Je suis sûr qu’il n’est pas un compositeur de certaine hauteur ou noblesse qui acceptera de présenter un ouvrage au jugement d’un aréopage aussi disparate et fût-il composé d’amis. Enfin! Cela durera ce que ça durera et ne m’inquiète pas beaucoup. Pour bien d’entre eux c’est la façon d’atteindre le “peuple” qui, j’en ai peur, ignorera toujours leurs ouvrages, si maintenant il connaît certaines de leurs trognes. Et comment Georges acceptera-t-il d’être assis auprès de Hahn et celui-ci auprès de Georges! Autant en emporte le vent!” Emphasis in original.

low had been routinely suggested since the turn of the century. For many, *opéra comique*, with its spoken dialogues, accessible subject matter and musical style, was a genre that was particularly well suited to introduce musically uneducated populations to the world of “high” art. As one critic noted, *opéra comique* had real popular appeal because “there is a melodic style that is accessible to the average listener.”⁴⁸

Lazarus’s project, outlined in a report addressed to Jean Zay in 1937, went beyond previous proposals by setting its sights on creating working class audiences for *opéra comique* in the suburbs of Paris. Lazarus wanted to export operatic productions to these areas in an attempt to assess whether such a form of entertainment would be sufficiently popular to warrant the definitive establishment of local *théâtres populaires*.⁴⁹ To test the feasibility of his plan, he intended to bring the troupe of the Opéra-Comique to the Parisian suburb of Gennevilliers to perform at its covered market, which was capable of holding six thousands spectators. These performances would be accompanied by piano and the décor would be kept at a minimum, as would the number of singers to be engaged. Lazarus suggested a programme that would include excerpts from *Manon*, *La Traviata*, and *Louise* – a musical pot-pourri of *opéra comique* “standards” which he felt would be as “untiring and as enjoyable as possible.”⁵⁰

But Lazarus’ project, indeed his administrative weight within the new operatic hierarchy, was immediately challenged by Rouché, who apparently had little interest in seeing any administrative functions, even at the Opéra-Comique, escape his grasp. Rouché reported his aversion to Lazarus’ project directly to Jean Zay, and criticized it for

⁴⁸ A. de Montgon, “L’Agonie des théâtres lyriques,” *Petit bleu*, February 8, 1938.

⁴⁹ Daniel Lazarus, “Rapport à M. le Ministre de l’Education Nationale sur l’organisation en banlieue de représentations populaires du théâtre national de l’Opéra-Comique,” Pièce 83 (2): 1, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

⁵⁰ Daniel Lazarus, “Note pour M. Rouché,” March 2, 1938, dossier d’artiste: Daniel Lazarus, BN-Opéra, Paris.

being both financially unsound and culturally unrealistic. The suburb of Gennevilliers, Rouché argued, would not be willing to pay for the requisite modifications to the marketplace, particularly when unemployed artists living there would not experience any immediate benefit from watching performances by artists from the capital.⁵¹ Furthermore, Rouché declared that the enthusiasm of the inhabitants of Gennevilliers for this type of spectacle might not be as great as Lazarus supposed. For Rouché, the creation of large popular theatres in the suburbs could not be realistically viewed as “the goal of our present activities” – a conclusion that the Minister, despite the Popular Front’s larger cultural agenda, did not contradict.⁵²

Although this outreach project was buried, the Opéra-Comique did host the Équipe Artistique Populaire, a group of actors and musicians drawn from the ranks of the Comédie-Française and the Opéra-Comique. The Équipe, comprised of a dozen or so members, looked to produce modest productions that could be exported to the suburbs and throughout the provinces in order to “give our comrades who are regularly deprived of cultural leisure, quality performances at moderate prices.”⁵³ This was identical to the logic informing Lazarus’s project, and the Équipe found a warm welcome – and a well-heeled audience – at the Opéra-Comique for its inaugural performance on April 7, 1937. State representatives were present, including the undersecretary of the Ministry for Leisure Activities, Léo Lagrange, and French Prime Minister, Léon Blum who delivered an inaugural speech. The work of the quasi-official playwright of the Popular Front,

⁵¹ On this point, see the letter from M. L’Huillier, Maire-adjoint de Gennevilliers to Lazarus, January 23, 1937, Pièce 83 (4), Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

⁵² Letter from Jacques Rouché to Jean Zay, Ministre de L’Education Nationale, April 3, 1937, Pièce 83 (1): 1-4, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

⁵³ Jean Beauchard, “Sous la présidence de M. Léon Blum L’Equipe Artistique Populaire donnera ce soir son premier spectacle,” *Ce Soir*, April 7, 1937.

Romain Rolland, was once again the centre of attention, this time through a performance of his *Le Jeu de l'amour et de la mort* set to a musical accompaniment by G. Petit.⁵⁴

Although the Opéra-Comique hosted Popular Front events such as these, Lazarus's desire to "break everything open" was far from fulfilled. For Rouché, the "goal" of the Opéra-Comique had nothing to do with the ideals of social progress advocated by his upstart artistic administrator. For him, the first and foremost priority at the troubled institution was rather financial stability – a goal he successfully fulfilled by securing over twelve million francs in State subsidies for the Opéra-Comique's 1936-37 season. This was twice as much as the theatre usually received, and it ballooned to seventeen million the following year.⁵⁵ This money was intended to resolve the long-standing grievances between the direction and the workers and to put the theatre on firm financial footing leading up to the establishment of the RTLN.⁵⁶

A Repertory in Transition

While Lazarus remained occupied with these musical outreach projects, the newly formed advisory committee was busy with decisions concerning the repertory for the first season of the Opéra-Comique under the new regime. The extra injection of cash gave the committee the opportunity to chart a new artistic mission for the theatre, one that looked to open the repertory to modern works of high quality while attempting to attract larger and more socially diverse audiences. At its first meeting, the committee expressed the desire (in line with the Lazarus's ideas) to see the construction of a large *théâtre*

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 315.

⁵⁶ It was also in line with a general increase in funding to the ensemble of State-subsidized theatres, which also included the Opéra, the Comédie-Française and the Théâtre de l'Odéon.

populaire that would be devoted to the performance of established works of the *opéra comique* repertory. The committee also recommended transforming the Salle Favart into an experimental theatre dedicated to new productions of classic works as well as modern works of *opéra comique* and *opérette*.⁵⁷

According to Georges Auric the artistic reputation of the Opéra-Comique “had fallen so low that it had become a common subject of contempt and mockery.”⁵⁸ As a result of such wide-spread disrepute, the new committee evidently wanted the first premiere under its administration to be artistically innovative, and in the context of Popular Front support, ideologically significant. In order to reveal the theatre’s new creative vitality and popular appeal, the committee first looked to stage a collective work. With the great success of *Le 14 Juillet* still fresh, they embraced the idea of a collaborative *opéra comique* that would incorporate newly-composed music by every member of the committee. In terms of the *opéra comique* genre, this was a revolutionary idea.⁵⁹ Also, the proposed use of a libretto written by two members of the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires, Jean Cassou and Paul Jamati, further emphasized the political and cultural sympathies that informed the committee’s aesthetic decisions.⁶⁰

The tactics of “collaboration” were of course reminiscent of the cultural strategy used employed at the Maison de la Culture, which viewed such forms of “revolutionary”

⁵⁷ “Procès-verbal du comité consultative,” August 25, 1936, Pièce 80 (7): 2, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

⁵⁸ “Procès-verbal du comité consultative,” April 12, 1937, Pièce 80 (15): 4, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

⁵⁹ “Procès-verbal du comité consultative,” November 9, 1936, Pièce 80 (12): 1, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris. During the late eighteenth century, the Opéra-Comique produced many musical “pastiches” – musical arrangements that parodied well-known excerpts of the repertory. Following the Revolution this practice was curtailed, although it was strategically revived at times. For example, music by Cherubini, Boieldieu, Isouard and Catel was used in the 1814 opera *Bayard à Mézières* “to revive the declining patriotism of Parisians during the difficult French campaign of 1814.” Nicole Wild and David Charlton, *Théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique. Répertoire 1762-1972* (Hayen: Mardaga, 2005), 33-70, 159.

⁶⁰ “Procès-verbal du comité consultative,” November 9, 1936, Pièce 80 (12): 1, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

artistic activity as exemplifying the intellectual solidarity that was necessary to stop the tide of fascism in France. But this brand of “cultural frontism” was also indebted to the cultural practices of “Les Six” – three members of which were now on the new committee (Auric, Milhaud, Honegger) – and therefore, also represented a resolutely “modern” development that maintained links to a tradition inaugurated in the early 1920s.

For this “revolutionary” *opéra comique*, Cassou and Jamati proposed an adaptation of Jules Verne’s 1874 story “Le Docteur Ox,” a fantastical work that plunges the reader into the realm of Quiquendone, a fictional Dutch town noteworthy for the amiability and passivity of its inhabitants. Their serene life is dramatically upset with the unexpected arrival of the daring scientist Dr. Ox, who, armed with a new invention, wishes to use the inhabitants as guinea pigs for an experiment that involves artificially increasing oxygen levels in the town. Perched on a hill overlooking Quiquendone, Ox puts his oxygen cloud machine to work and the behaviour of the townsfolk gradually transforms as they react to the increased levels of the gas. No longer good-natured, law-abiding citizens, they morph under the influence of the oxygen into a pugnacious and lascivious mob that turns violent and ultimately declares war on the neighbouring town.

“Le Docteur Ox” was never staged, and not one note of music was written to accompany the scenario. Perhaps Rouché, whose right-wing leanings were no secret, looked to block the project for being too overtly “Popular Front” in design. In early November 1936, he expressed concerns over rights to the story, reminding the committee that Offenbach had written an *opérette* based on Verne’s work in 1884.⁶¹ Whether the project was abandoned for this or other reasons remains unclear, but it is not hard to imagine how the scenario (had it been staged) could have been transformed to suit a

⁶¹ Ibid.

politically motivated interpretation. For, as with *Le 14 Juillet*, the collective approach to this work would have necessarily involved a “strategic manipulation” in light of the Popular Front sympathies present within the consultative committee. Given the political climate, one could easily imagine Dr. Ox’s oxygen being recast allegorically as a wind of fascist ideas, the deleterious effects of which bring forth civil unrest and military belligerence.

With the prospect of a collectively composed work permanently buried, the committee looked to other projects that would suggest to the public that the theatre was engaged in a process of artistic renewal. One of their first gestures was to publish an updated list of the Opéra-Comique’s repertory. What was most noteworthy about the list was that it eliminated many works deemed “incompatible” with the musical and theatrical traditions of the house. Antoine Mariotte announced to the press that the Opéra-Comique was no longer interested in “mounting severe, long or sinister works.”⁶² The principle casualties in this regard were a number of turn-of-the-century *dramas lyriques*, including Massenet’s *Werther* (1893) Paul Dukas’s *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* (1907) and even Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly* (1906), a work which, as Gheusi maintained, had become a valuable warhorse in the Opéra-Comique line-up.⁶³

Figure 18 provides a list of the works chosen by the committee to function as the repertory of the theatre.⁶⁴ It shows a definite privileging of “lighter” works and clear support for operas composed after 1918. Fifteen works from this list boasted a continuous

⁶² M.-H. Berger, “Une nouvelle opérette à l’Opéra-Comique. Son titre: Tante Caroline, Sa vedette: Suzanne Dehelly,” in Dossier d’oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra.

⁶³ Not all of these works were permanently excluded from the repertory. *Werther* and *Butterfly*, for example, were reintroduced at different periods following the demise of the consultative committee. The committee also singled out Vincent d’Indy’s *Fervaal* as being unsuitable, despite the fact that it had not been performed at the Opéra-Comique since 1898.

⁶⁴ “Le conseil des 12 de l’Opéra-Comique fixe le répertoire de ce théâtre,” *Comoedia*, November 4, 1936.

performance history at the Opéra-Comique since before World War I. Some, like *Carmen*, *Louise*, *Pelleas*, *Manon*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Mignon* were performed so frequently that they constituted the backbone of the theatre's traditional repertory. The names of these works can be found in figure 19. Figure 20 provides the names of works first performed after 1918 that were successful enough to have been granted at least one run of performances following their initial premieres. Figure 21 supplies a list of works that, despite entering the repertory in 1936, were never performed subsequent to their inclusion, and in many cases had never been performed at the house at all.⁶⁵

Fig. 18. Complete Repertory of the Opéra-Comique (1936).

Auber	<i>Le Domino noir</i>	Laparra	<i>La Habanera</i>
Aubert	<i>La Forêt bleue</i>	Lecocq	<i>La Fille de Madame Angot</i>
Bachelet	<i>Quand la cloche sonnera</i>	Letorey	<i>Le Sicilien</i>
Bizet	<i>Carmen</i>	Levadé	<i>La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque</i>
Bizet	<i>Djamileh</i>	Massenet	<i>Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame</i>
Bondeville	<i>L'Ecole des maris</i>	Massenet	<i>Manon</i>
Bruneau	<i>L'Attaque du moulin</i>	Messenger	<i>La Basoche</i>
Büsser	<i>La Pie borgne</i>	Messenger	<i>Isoline</i>
Chabrier	<i>Le Roi malgré lui</i>	Milhaud	<i>Le pauvre matelot</i>
Chabrier	<i>Une Education manquée</i>	Monsigny	<i>Le Déserteur</i>
Charpentier	<i>Louise</i>	Mozart	<i>L'Enlèvement au sérail</i>
Cimarosa	<i>Le Mariage secret</i>	Offenbach	<i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i>
Debussy	<i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i>	Offenbach	<i>La Grande Duchesse</i>
Delannoy	<i>Le Poirier de Misère</i>	Pierné	<i>Sophie Arnould</i>
Delannoy	<i>La Pantoufle de vair</i>	Puccini	<i>Gianni Schichi</i>
Délibes	<i>Lakmé</i>	Puccini	<i>La Vie de Bohème</i>
Délibes	<i>Le Roi l'a dit</i>	Puccini	<i>La Tosca</i>
Dupont	<i>La Farce du cuvier</i>	Pergolesi	<i>La Servante maîtresse</i>
Falla	<i>La Vie brève</i>	Ravel	<i>Adélaïde</i>
Fauré	<i>Masques et bergamasques</i>	Rosenthal	<i>Rayon de soieries</i>
Ganne	<i>Hans le joueur de flûte</i>	Rossini	<i>Le Barbier de Séville</i>
Grétry	<i>Richard Cœur de Lion</i>	Rossini	<i>Le Comte Ory</i>
Gounod	<i>Le Médecin malgré lui</i>	Saint-Saëns	<i>Phryné</i>
Hahn	<i>Brummel</i>	Schmitt	<i>Reflets</i>
Ibert	<i>Angélique</i>	Thomas	<i>Mignon</i>
Ibert	<i>Le Roi d'Yvetot</i>	Thomas	<i>Le Caïd</i>
Samuel-Rousseau	<i>Le Bon Roi Dagobert</i>	Tomasi	<i>La Rosière du village</i>
Lalo	<i>Le Roi d'Ys</i>		

⁶⁵ These tables rely on the information found in Charleton and Wild, *Théâtre de L'Opéra-Comique Paris*, particularly concerning the lifespan of these works at the Opéra-Comique.

Fig. 19. Repertory of the Opéra-Comique (1936): works written before 1918 with continuous performance history at the Opéra-Comique until 1936 (with year of first Opéra-Comique performance).

Bizet	<i>Carmen</i> (1875)	Laparra	<i>La Habanera</i> (1908)
Chabrier	<i>Le Roi malgré lui</i> (1887)	Massenet	<i>Manon</i> (1884)
Charpentier	<i>Louise</i> (1900)	Messager	<i>La Basoche</i> (1890)
Debussy	<i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i> (1902)	Offenbach	<i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i> (1881)
Délibes	<i>Lakmé</i> (1883)	Puccini	<i>La Vie de Bohème</i> (1898)
Délibes	<i>Le Roi l'a dit</i> (1873)	Puccini	<i>La Tosca</i> (1903)
Gounod	<i>Le Médecin malgré lui</i> (1872)	Rossini	<i>Le Barbier de Séville</i> (1884)
Lalo	<i>Le Roi d'Ys</i> (1888)	Thomas	<i>Mignon</i> (1866)

Fig. 20. Repertory of the Opéra-Comique (1936): works written after 1918 with repeat runs at the Opéra-Comique before 1936.

Bondeville	<i>L'Ecole des maris</i>	Letorey	<i>Le Sicilien</i>
Büsser	<i>La Pie borgne</i>	Levadé	<i>La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque</i>
Delannoy	<i>La Pantoufle de vair</i>	Puccini	<i>Gianni Schichi</i>
Fauré	<i>Masques et bergamasques</i>	Samuel-Rousseau	<i>Le Bon Roi Dagobert</i>
Ibert	<i>Angélique</i>	Schmitt	<i>Reflets</i>
Lecocq	<i>La Fille de Madame Angot</i>		

Fig. 21. Repertory of the Opéra-Comique (1936): works never performed at the Opéra-Comique subsequent to their inclusion or reinstatement in the repertory.

Auber	<i>Le Domino noir</i>	(last performed in 1907)
Aubert	<i>La Forêt bleue</i>	(last performed in 1925)
Bachelet	<i>Quand la cloche sonnera</i>	(last performed in early 1936)
Bruneau	<i>L'Attaque du moulin</i>	(last performed in 1923)
Delannoy	<i>Le Poirier de misère</i>	(performed 9 times in 1927)
Dupont	<i>La Farce du cuvier</i>	(never performed at O.-C.)
Ganne	<i>Hans le joueur de flûte</i>	(never performed at O.-C.)
Grétry	<i>Richard Coeur de Lion</i>	(last performed in 1873)
Hahn	<i>Brummel</i>	(never performed at O.-C.)
Ibert	<i>Le Roi d'Yvetot</i>	(performed 15 times in 1930)
Monsigny	<i>Le Déserteur</i>	(last performed in 1911)
Offenbach	<i>La Grande Duchesse</i>	(never performed at O.-C.)
Pierné	<i>Sophie Arnould</i>	(last performed in 1929)
Ravel	<i>Adélaïde</i>	(never performed at O.-C.)
Rosenthal	<i>Rayon de soieries</i>	(performed 12 times in 1930)
Saint-Saëns	<i>Phryné</i>	(last performed in 1935)
Thomas	<i>Le Caïd</i>	(last performed in 1911)

The information to be gleaned from these tables is significant. It is obvious that the committee envisaged an extensive programme of reprises and first performances under its administration. For example, five of the works in figure 21 had never before been staged at the Opéra-Comique, while a number of others – like *Le Poirier de misère*,

Le Roi d'Yvetot and *Rayon de soieries* – were modern works that the members of the committee surely felt deserved a second chance. Notable as well were the projected revivals of works by Grétry and Monsigny. Although positioned at the core of the French *opéra comique* tradition, these composers had not appeared on the Opéra-Comique's bills for decades. Although nothing came of their proposed inclusion into the active repertory, their presence on this list reveals the committee's desire to reconnect with the musical traditions of the house.

Other works that did in fact receive premieres under the new committee included Mozart's *L'Enlèvement au sérail* (1937), Monteverdi's *Le Couronnement de Poppée* (1937) and Chabrier's *Une Éducation manquée* (1938). Important reprises were also staged: Pergolesi's *La Servante maîtresse* in 1937, Gounod's ever-popular *Le Médecin malgré lui*, Marcel Samuel-Rousseau's *Le Bon Roi Dagobert* and Milhaud's *Le Pauvre matelot* in 1938. The Opéra-Comique also presented reprises of Bizet's *Djamileh* and *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* for the centenary celebrations of the composer's birth. Other works, though included in the updated repertory list, had to wait until after World War II to be premiered at the Opéra-Comique. This included Messager's *Isoline*, first performed there in 1958, and Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*, in 1968.

Coming to a consensus concerning the Opéra-Comique's repertory constituted the new advisory committee's first important administrative gesture. Throughout the remainder of its tenure it continued to hear new works and evaluate their feasibility for representation on the theatre's stage. As a result of this ongoing activity, additional premieres of modern works took place under the committee's direction: Albert Roussel's *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, Daniel Lazarus' *La Chambre bleue* and Maurice

Thiriet's *Le Bourgeois de Falaise* in 1937; Jean Dupérier's *Zadig* and Milhaud's *Esther de Carpentras* in 1938.⁶⁶

One of the key factors guiding the selection of the repertory was the committee's belief that the Opéra-Comique should reconnect with its tradition of staging lighter works, typified by a dichotomy between the spoken and sung word.⁶⁷ Here the committee was forced to combat a relatively new, but tenacious performance tradition that had taken hold within the theatre since the early 1870s. In the wake of works like Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (1873) and Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), the Opéra-Comique opened its doors to works that were increasingly tragic in character and, falling under the spell of fin-de-siècle Wagnerism, also began to stage full-scale and musically continuous *dramas lyriques*. This went against century-old traditions at the theatre, particularly in regards to its original mandate to perform operas that balanced staged vocal music (*opéra*) with spoken theatre (*comédie*).

The influence of *dramas lyriques* on the theatre's active repertory was significant. Between 1880 and 1936 the house consistently favoured new works where dialogues (if at all present) were often little more than short connecting segments that linked a succession of musical numbers. The consultative committee made an important move to counteract this trend. Very few *dramas lyriques* remained on the 1936 repertory list, and

⁶⁶ Roger Désormière, a former member of Satie's "Ecole d'Arceuil," and, as we have seen, Communist sympathizer, was named conductor at the Opéra-Comique in 1937. It was under his baton that these works were performed. Jean Wiener reminisced about the conductor's political persuasion in "Déso," *Roger Désormière et son temps*, eds. Denise Mayer and Pierre Souvtchinsky (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1966), 32-33.

⁶⁷ "Procès-verbal du comité consultative," August 25, 1936, Pièce 80 (7): 1-2, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris. Jacques Rouché reiterated the committee's commitment to promoting works in this style later in the season, "Procès-verbal du comité consultative," March 8, 1937, Pièce 80 (17): 3, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

those that did, like Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys*, were soon permanently transferred to the Opéra.⁶⁸ The emphasis was now placed on lighter works, and the committee's support for introducing Chabrier's *Une éducation manquée* is significant in this regard, particularly when we recall the stylistic indebtedness many members of Les Six felt towards his music.

For the advisory committee, the return to works that placed the spoken and sung word on equal footing (what the French call the *démi-caractère* of *opéra comique*) re-established important links to the traditions of the genre. But, such a move also harboured the potential of shifting the Opéra-Comique's repertory closer to the theatrical practices of the modern boulevard theatres. Far from having deserted Parisian stages, the use of extended sections of *parlé* between musical numbers was in fact the stylistic norm in *opérette*, and in certain genres of French musical theatre. Some critics viewed the popularity of the boulevard theatre and music-hall as a reason for the noted decline in audiences at both the Opéra and Opéra-Comique.⁶⁹ It is therefore noteworthy that at its first meeting, the committee also recommended that the Opéra-Comique should stage "masterpieces of French *opérette*."⁷⁰ But whether Viennese, American or French in style, modern-day *opérette* never acquired a foothold in the Opéra-Comique repertory (as opposed to the classic *opéras bouffes* of composers like Offenbach, Messager and Lecocq).

The risks involved in staging a modern-day *opérette* were enormous. It was first attempted in 1933 at the Salle Favart when Gheusi mounted a French version of Franz

⁶⁸ Lalo's work had its last Opéra-Comique performance in 1940.

⁶⁹ Bernard Champigneulle, "Spectacles et Spectateurs," *Mercure de France* (February 1, 1934): 569, cited in Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 106.

⁷⁰ "Procès-verbal du comité consultative," August 25, 1936, Pièce 80 (7):2, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

Lehar's Viennese operetta, *Frasquita*.⁷¹ Recognizing the audacity of his move, Gheusi insisted important changes be made to both text and music to ensure its suitability for the "austere" atmosphere of the Salle Favart.⁷² He also made an ostensibly judicious decision by casting mezzo Conchita Supervia, who had recently triumphed on the stage of the Opéra-Comique in the role of Carmen, to play the leading role in *Frasquita* – once again as a gypsy.

In *Frasquita*, young Armand Mirabeau and his friend Hippolyte arrive in a small port on the Spanish coast where they prepare to meet up with Armand's fiancée, Dolly Girot. *Frasquita*, a local gypsy, attempts to seduce Armand, but then rejects him for having accused her of stealing his cigarette case. Dolly gets wind of the story and is upset to learn that Armand did nothing to refuse *Frasquita*'s initial advances. Annoyed at Armand's fickleness, Dolly breaks with him and decides to marry Hippolyte instead. Meanwhile, *Frasquita* has realized that she is in love, and comes racing to Paris to unite with Armand, who awaits her with open arms.

As the first few measures of its overture suggest (example 6.1), *Frasquita* is full of clichéd *couleur locale*. A harmonically bland habanera and the tried and true interval of the augmented second are almost immediately combined to conjure up the enticements of the eponymous character. The wealthy Armand, on the other hand, is first accompanied by the breezy accompaniment of a foxtrot (example 6.2). Here, traditional gypsy girl meets city hipster: an implausible narrative situation that provides varied musical underpinnings over which Lehar works his melodic gift.

⁷¹ *Frasquita* received its first performance at the Theater an der Wien on May 12, 1922. The French libretto was written by Max Eddy and Jean Marietti. David Charleton and Nicole Wild, *Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique: Répertoire 1762-1972* (Paris: Mardaga, 2005), 264.

⁷² Florian Bruyas, *Histoire de l'opérette en France 1885-1965* (Lyon: Emmanuel Vitte, 1974), 526.

Ex. 6.1. Franz Lehar, *Frasquita*, Overture to Act I, mm. 1-15.

Allegro moderato

The score for Ex. 6.1 is in 2/4 time and features a piano introduction with a forte (ff) dynamic. The music is marked Allegro moderato. The score includes a section with a piano (pp) dynamic and a flute (Fl.) and clarinet (Cl.) entry. The tempo is marked Allegro moderato.

Ex. 6.2. Franz Lehar, *Frasquita*, Act I, “Grüss dich, du schönes Spanien,” mm. 1-13.

Tempo quasi Foxtrot

The score for Ex. 6.2 is in 2/4 time and features a piano introduction with a piano (pp) dynamic. The music is marked Tempo quasi Foxtrot. The score includes a section with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic.



The Opéra-Comique's audience no doubt heard *Frasquita* in relation to *Carmen*, but despite certain surface similarities, this happy-ending 1930s version was canned as unsuitable for both the venue and its patrons. Gheusi, who had undertaken the project specifically to entice *opérette* audiences to the Opéra-Comique later commented that a comic work like *Frasquita*, “even if it is inclined towards the customary sentimentalism of *opéras comiques*, would not be able to flourish” at the Salle Favart.⁷³ His experiment confirmed that the serious tone that typified the theatre's main offerings still held sway over general audience expectations. In fact, the musical and narrative legacy of the *drame lyrique* had so impregnated the Opéra-Comique that critics were quick to complain that it was an opera house where “one laughs very little.”⁷⁴ As we shall see in the following section, this was a criticism that the new advisory committee sought to counter.

The Roussel Experiment

Between September 15 and November 15, 1936, as the new administration considered which works it intended to premiere during the 36-37 season, the Opéra-Comique continued to mount staples of its repertory (*Manon*, *Lakmé*, *Mignon*, *Mireille*,

⁷³ Gheusi, *L'Opéra-Comique sous la haine*, 14. “L'événement a confirmé qu'[...]une oeuvre bouffé, même inclinée vers le sentimentalisme usuel des opéras-comiques, ne saurait s'installer et vivre.”

⁷⁴ P.V. “Après *Le Testament de Tante Caroline* on jouera d'autres opérettes à l'Opéra-Comique,” in Dossier d'oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra, Paris. “L'Opéra-Comique est une maison où l'on rit peu, c'est connu.”

Les Pêcheurs de Perles, *Werther*, *Le Roi d'Ys*), but now at reduced prices.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the consultative committee, according to the journal *Comoedia*, was “following new ideas, young ideas with a clearly progressive sense and which, without being revolutionary, will not dismiss any aesthetic direction or novelty” in its repertorial decisions.⁷⁶

Such a formulation was an invitation to just about anything, but in the end the committee's choice for the first premiere under the new regime went to Albert Roussel's *opérette*, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*. The work and its subsequent reception reveal some of the problems that faced the committee in their quest to modernize the repertory at the Opéra-Comique. As we shall see, *Le Testament* failed to win the favour of the *habitués* of the hall. Worse still, Roussel's work, along with the other premieres handpicked by the committee, refuelled tensions between the administration and the theatre's workers, who denounced the committee's artistic initiatives.

As we have seen, by the 1930s, Albert Roussel was a respected and internationally renowned composer whose name and work could only have been a credit to a theatre suffering from artistic inertia. That Roussel decided to try his hand at *opérette* is in itself atypical, and sheds some light on his compositional evolution throughout the 1930s. As a former student of d'Indy, the aesthetic imprint of the Schola Cantorum had followed Roussel throughout his career.⁷⁷ In the tradition of the Schola, the composer attached

⁷⁵ *Comoedia*, September 1, 1936.

⁷⁶ Ibid. “...suivant des vues nouvelles, des idées jeunes et dans un sens nettement progressiste qui, sans révolutionner, n'écartera, *a priori*, aucune tendance ni aucune novation.”

⁷⁷ Citing no evidence, Jane Fulcher claims that tensions between Roussel and his teacher during World War I led the composer to “dissociate himself from both d'Indy and the Schola” and that “he represented a staunch rejection of the old Scholiste ideals.” *The Composer as Intellectual*, 214. Roussel's position, however, was not so clear-cut, be it in his works or in his prose. In 1930 he wrote a glowing article about d'Indy's *Symphony in B flat* that was followed by a moving homage to his teacher on the occasion of his

great aesthetic importance to the symphony as a vehicle for sincere personal expression. Three of his four symphonies were completed during the 1920s and 1930s and all of them build upon a cyclic plan, which, as a result of Vincent d'Indy's teaching and influence, had become the trademark of Scholiste aesthetics. Unlike d'Indy, however, Roussel was more receptive to the stylistic direction instigated by Stravinsky and certain members of Les Six throughout the 1920s.⁷⁸ Writing about contemporary music in 1928, Roussel recognized the musical contribution of these composers with their "return to cleaner lines, more strongly insistent characteristics, more vigorous rhythms," and acknowledged that "harmony [was] no longer considered the dominant preoccupation of the musician."⁷⁹ Although supportive of his younger colleagues, Roussel's music from the 1920s bears little of their stylistic influence. In his symphonies and chamber works, experiments in harmonic language prevail within a rhythmic framework that owes less to the younger generation's "lifestyle modernism" than to more esoteric influences.⁸⁰ In fact, for many critics in the 1930s, Roussel's musical style could still be measured best in works that reflected a relatively conservative aesthetic stance, like the ballet *Le Festin de l'Araignée* (1913) and the exotic opera-ballet *Padmâvatî* – a work premiered in 1923, but which was mostly composed during 1914.

80th birthday that appeared in *Les Tablettes de la Schola*, April-May, 1931. See Roussel, *Lettres et écrits*, 250-254.

⁷⁸ See his letter to Milhaud, (June 24, 1924), which commends the composer's ballet *Le Train bleu* (on a scenario by Jean Cocteau) in *Lettres et écrits*, 111-112.

⁷⁹ Albert Roussel, "Réflexions sur la musique d'aujourd'hui," in *Lettres et écrits*, 270. "Un retour à des lignes plus nettes, les traits plus fortement accusés, un rythme plus vigoureux, l'harmonie cessant d'être considérée comme la préoccupation dominante du musicien..."

⁸⁰ Roussel was aware that some critics denounced the short phrase lengths that dominated the works of the younger generation of French composers during the 1920s. In a letter to Arthur Hoérée (January 6, 1929) he stressed that many of his own works, on the contrary, employed phrases that were long, particularly the *Sonata for violin, Suite in F*, and the *Adagio* from the *Piano Concerto*.

Although Roussel had been rather unreceptive to the lifestyle modernism of Les Six in the 1920s, his attitude changed somewhat during the 1930s. This was particularly true in the case of *Le Testament*, an *opérette* that Roussel admitted was inspired by “the success of Ibert and Honegger,” two composers who had made it big in the boulevard theatres with comic works like *Angélique* (1927) and *Les Aventures du roi Pausole* (1930).⁸¹ Roussel was interested in how his music could be adapted to fit the stylistic constraints imposed by the world of *opérette*. As he told an interviewer, he was “curious to hear how [his] music would sound if it were simplified to the point of becoming song-like.”⁸² As a result, in *Le Testament*, the short phrase lengths from which the composer had dissociated himself in the 1920s are pervasive. Throughout the work Roussel is particularly keen on conforming to the generic and stylistic attributes of *opérette* through frequent recourse to refrains and ensemble singing, and the presentation of a discreet and largely diatonic accompaniment confined to supporting direct, tune-like vocal expression. Yet, as one critic noted, the stamp of the composer’s personality remained, even within this ostensibly “lighter” genre. Indeed, “[i]t would not be impossible to recognize in the famous *Festin de l’Araignée* some of the discreetly picturesque, insightful and sophisticated qualities that are found in *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*.”⁸³

⁸¹ Albert Roussel, “Interview de M. Albert Roussel qui vient d’achever une opérette dont le titre serait: *Vite, un enfant!*...” in *Lettres et écrits*, 215. Ibert’s one-act “farce,” *Angélique*, was first performed at the Théâtre Fémina and was later taken up by the Opéra-Comique in 1930 and 1934. Honegger’s three-act opérette, *Les Aventures du roi Pausole*, was premiered at the Bouffes-Parisiennes and was extremely successful; the composer made almost a million francs as a result of this production, money which he later lost on bad investments. Michel Faure, *Du néoclassicisme musical dans la France du premier XXe siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), 258-259, n. 150.

⁸² Albert Roussel, “Interview de M. Albert Roussel qui vient d’achever une opérette dont le titre serait: *Vite, un enfant!*...” in *Lettres et écrits*, 215. “...j’étais curieux d’entendre ce que deviendrait ma musique, simplifiée jusqu’à être chantonnée.”

⁸³ Louis Aubert, “A l’Opéra-Comique: *Le Testament de la tante Caroline*.” *Le Journal*, March 11, 1937. “Il ne serait pas impossible de reconnaître dans le célèbre *Festin de l’Araignée* quelques unes des qualités de pittoresque discret, d’observation, de finesse par quoi se signale *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*.”

The scenario of *Le Testament* is of the farcical, kitchen-sink variety, and put Roussel's talent for humorous musical characterization to a test. Reminiscent of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and Maupassant's short story *L'Héritage*, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* focuses on the theme of avarice as represented by the heirs to the estranged Tante Caroline, who wait impatiently to learn the contents of her will.⁸⁴

Ex. 6.3. Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, Act I, "Chorus of the heirs."

Andante

Lucien: Ah! pauvre tante Caroline! Tou - jours si plei - ne de bon

Béatrice: Ah! pauvre tante Caroline! Tou - jours si plei - ne de bon

Noémie: Ah! pauvre tante Caroline! Tou - jours si plei - ne de bon

Ferdinand: Ah! pauvre tante Caroline! ah, pauvre tante, ah, pauvre tante, ah, pauvre Tante tous si plei ne de bon

Piano: (Accompaniment for the chorus)

Lucien: té et fi - ne, Elle

Béatrice: té In - tel - li - gen - te, douce, ah, pauvre tante, ah, pauvre tante Caroline, Elle

Noémie: té ah, pauvre tante, ah, pauvre tante Caroline, Elle

Piano: (Accompaniment for the chorus)

⁸⁴ Antonio Braga, "Le Testament de la Tante Caroline, opérette ou opéra bouffe?" in *Albert Roussel: Musique et esthétique, actes du colloque international Albert Roussel (1869-1937)*, ed. Manfred Kelkel, 89-90 (Paris: J. Vrin, 1989).

Allegro Vivace Ritardando

a - vait tou - tes les qua - li - tés!

a - vait tou - tes les qua - li - tés!

a - vait tou - tes les qua - li - tés!

tou - tes les qua - li - tés!

Roussel underscores their hypocrisy upon their first appearance (“Chorus of the Heirs”), set as a funeral march, the sincerity of which is abolished by a flippant C major ritornello (example 6.3). Their expectations concerning the inheritance are dashed, however, when the notary reveals that none of them will receive anything, and that the fortune will go to the first-born son of one of the heirs. Speed, however, is of the essence – the child must be born within a year or Tante Caroline’s money will be left to the SPCA.

Typical of *opérette* scenarios, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* concludes with an ironic twist. To no avail, the heirs scramble to become pregnant; though new-borns are simulated, the notary is not duped. Ultimately, it is the lowly nurse Lucine and the chauffeur Noël – with whom she is truly in love – who are rewarded. Their desire to marry, complicated as a result of financial instability, is fulfilled when it is revealed that Noël is the illegitimate son of Béatrice, one of the competing heirs. As the “first-born” son, he is the sole beneficiary of Caroline’s fortune, and the *opérette* closes with a chorus imitating the couple’s wedding bells (“*Sonnez, sonnez cloches du mariage!*”) as the other

heirs bicker in parlando, “*On m’a volé mon heritage! Ah! La canaille! Ah! Les fripons!*” (“Without a doubt a confiscation! The dirty rascals they make me fume!”).⁸⁵

Given Roussel’s reputation for weightier works, such a scenario, with its anecdotal and humorous content, certainly revealed the composer in a new, and somewhat less austere light. Even as a member of the advisory committee, Roussel was no doubt surprised to learn that the Opéra-Comique wanted to stage *Le Testament*, an *opérette* which the composer had initially intended for a smaller, less formal theatre like the Bouffes-Parisiennes.⁸⁶ The production of *Le Testament* signaled the Opéra-Comique’s recognition of the popularity and potential lessons to be learned from boulevard entertainment. Taking instruction from the debacle surrounding Gheusi’s production of *Frasquita*, however, the administration was careful about how the publicity surrounding this new *opérette* was handled. Rouché and his committee took pains to bill *Le Testament* as an *opéra bouffe*, fearing no doubt that the word *opérette* would scare faithful patrons away. Most of the press releases leading up to the premiere as well as the invitations to the dress rehearsal labeled the work as such.⁸⁷

This has subsequently led to confusion over the work’s generic status, an issue taken up by Antonio Braga in an article from 1989. Braga, who contributed the Italian translation for a posthumously edited, one-act version of *Le Testament*, claims that the work is an *opérette*, but that it also evokes aspects of the *opéra bouffe* tradition.⁸⁸ But, Braga’s attempt to distinguish between *opérette* and *opéra bouffe* elements in Roussel’s

⁸⁵ Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline, opérette en un acte* (Paris: Huegel, 1966), 144-145.

⁸⁶ M.H. Berger, “Interview de M. Albert Roussel qui vient d’achever une opérette dont le titre serait: *Vite, un enfant!*...” Dossier d’artiste : Albert Roussel, BN-Opéra, Paris; reprinted in Albert Roussel, *Lettres et écrits*, 214.

⁸⁷ Charlton and Wild, *Théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique Paris*, 419.

⁸⁸ Antonio Braga, “*Le Testament de la tante Caroline, opérette ou opéra bouffe?*” in *Albert Roussel: musique et esthétique: Actes du colloque international Albert Roussel (1869-1937)*, edited by Manfred Kelkel 85-87 (Paris; J. Vrin, 1989).

work only confuses matters further: by simply consulting the score of the original three-act version, he could have seen that Roussel had unambiguously labeled his work an *opérette*.⁸⁹ Furthermore, criticism of the premiere confirms that the generic distance separating *opéra bouffe* and *opérette* was large enough that people could tell the difference between them, and that they saw through the committee's ploy. As Boris de Schloezer commented following the premiere:

According to the program, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* is an *opéra bouffe*; but is it not referred to in this way only so that it seems at home in the rue Favart, where *opérette* was never admitted until very recently? In reality, it is neither an *opéra bouffe*, nor even less an *opéra comique*; *Le Testament* is well and truly an *opérette*.⁹⁰

In fact, there was little in the Opéra-Comique's staging that did *not* emphasize the works indebtedness to the conventions of the *opérette*. Most notably, the cast of *Le Testament* was filled with stars from the music hall and boulevard theatres of the capital. Apart from casting the "opérette diva" Fanély Revoil as Lucine, the Opéra-Comique also hired the famous comedic actress Suzanne Dehelly to play the (non-singing) role of Christine, one of the heiresses. As Roussel outlined in the *dramatis personae* for the score, Christine is the life of the spoken scenes and the agent of the humorous dialogues;

⁸⁹ Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline, opérette en trois actes* (Paris: La Sirène Musicale, 1936). I would like to thank Andrew Deruchie for tracking down this rare source for me at the BN-Musique.

⁹⁰ Boris de Schloezer, "La Musique," *Vendredi*, March 19, 1937. "Si j'en juge d'après le programme, *Le Testament de la tante Caroline* est un opéra bouffe: mais ne l'a-t-on pas dénommé ainsi pour lui donner droit de cité rue Favart, où l'opérette n'était guère admise jusqu'à ces temps derniers? En réalité, ce n'est ni un opéra bouffe, ni encore moins un opéra comique; *Le Testament* est bel et bien une opérette."

it is her responsibility to ensure that the spoken passages maintain an “accelerated rhythm.”⁹¹

Dehelly’s presence emphasized the *buffo*, light-hearted element in this new production. But, her participation also affirmed a sharp turn towards a more risqué “boulevard” atmosphere that did not always coincide with the safe “family entertainment” values that had become associated with the theatre. As Daniel Lazarus reflected years later, there was

“astonishment [among] the subscribers and their prudent families, who, [...] confident in the highly renowned austerity of Albert Roussel, didn’t worry about bringing to this show [...] young, shy and blushing girls for whom *Carmen* represented the summit of audacity.”⁹²

Even compared to *Carmen*, this *opérette* had, as one critic remarked, its fair share of “shocking situations.”⁹³ Indeed, some critics complained that Nino’s text had “fallen into a really painful vulgarity” and that it drew upon a theme “that had been used to death by vaudeville productions.”⁹⁴ Most noted at the time for its affront to bourgeois mores was the second act, set in a paediatrics ward. The *metteur-en-scène*, Russian émigré Georges Pitoëff, whose avant-garde productions had earned him great acclaim at the Théâtre des Mathurins throughout the 1930s, offended certain viewers when he dressed

⁹¹ Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline, opérette en un acte* (Paris: Huegel, 1966).

⁹² Daniel Lazarus, *Accès à la musique* (Paris: Les éditeurs français réunis, 1960), 150. “Stupeur des abonnés et de leurs prudentes familles qui, sur la foi des traités, et confiants dans le haut renom d’austérité d’Albert Roussel n’avaient pas craint d’amener à ce spectacle [...] des jeunes filles timides et rougissantes pour qui *Carmen* constituait le sommet de l’audace.”

⁹³ Th. Salignac, “Le Testament de Tante Caroline,” *Lyrica* (July, 1937).

⁹⁴ Boris de Schloezer, “La Musique.”; A.W. “*Le Testament de Tante Caroline* à l’Opéra-Comique,” *Le Figaro*, March 11, 1937.

the nurses like American show girls and directed them to prance about the stage with new-born babies in their arms. As one critic noted:

Mr. Pitoëff's decors, outrageous on the stage of the Opéra-Comique, are perhaps part of a formula that might please in a few years, but the stylization is so far from that normally used by the House that it would have been necessary for this fine artist to make concessions to the old manner. For neither the exposed safe in golden leather which appeared, during the first act, on a raised platform surrounded by three steps, nor the Exposition construction site that was supposed to resemble a paediatric ward, nor the footstool-perches of Mr. Corbeau the notary, nor the backdrop in two pieces like Eiffel Tower postcards were approved by the public, and in particular the public in the upper balconies.⁹⁵

The stylization was certainly reminiscent of the music hall, and Roussel had written music to match. This was a stunning development for a composer who had long rejected the "everyday" aesthetic of Les Six. Present at Jean Wiéner's first innovative concerts of jazz and modern music at the "Salle des Agriculteurs" in December 1921, Roussel had hastily left the room and "slammed the door" to signal his indignation.⁹⁶ Roussel excluded jazz in *Le Testament*, stating that its presence was not suggested to him

⁹⁵ Marcel Bousquet, "Chronique Théâtrale: *Le Testament de Tante Caroline*," Dossier d'oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra, Paris. "Les décors de M. Pitoëff, effarants sur la scène de l'Opéra-Comique, sont peut-être de la formule qui plaira dans quelques années, mais le stylisé est tellement loin du genre de la Maison qu'il eut fallu, de la part de ce bel artiste, des concessions à l'ancienne manière or, ni le coffre-fort exposé, en veau d'or, au premier acte, sur un plateau entouré de trois marches d'escalier, ni le chantier de travaux de l'Exposition qui veut être assimiler à une clinique d'accouchement, ni les tabourets-perchoirs de M. Corbeau, pas plus que la toile de fond en deux morceaux carte postale Toureiffesques n'ont été acceptés, et surtout, ce qui est à noter, du public des galeries. Cependant ce même public va, avec l'autre, admirer aux Mathurins, chez M. Pitoëff, les trouvailles de ce maître dans la si personnelle mise en scène...."

⁹⁶ Jean Wiéner, *Allegro appassionato* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1978), 48.

by the libretto, but his opinion had softened concerning the merits of the idiom, for, as he explained, “it has brought about too many rhythmic and instrumental innovations for me to speak about it inconsiderately.”⁹⁷

Though not jazzy, Roussel’s *opérette* contains many popular, everyday dance rhythms (polka, waltz, rumba), a feature that imbues it with a certain verve that, while being essential for boulevard success, is completely uncharacteristic of the composer’s style as a whole. The second-act nurse’s chorus, shown in example 6.4, which imitated a music-hall *défilé* of dancing boys and girls, is accompanied by an up-beat music-hall idiom in which both rhythmic bumptiousness and short phrase lengths are *de rigueur*.

Ex. 6.4. Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, Act II, “Choeur des infirmières.”

Choeur des infirmières

Soprano

Contralto

Allegro moderato

f Hal te là! fai tes pla - ce!

⁹⁷ M.H. Berger, “Interview de M. Albert Roussel qui vient d’achever une opérette dont le titre serait: “Vite, un enfant!...” in Albert Roussel, *Lettres et écrits*, 215.

C'est la gar - de qui pas - se! C'est la gar - de mon - tan - te qui

mon-te rem-pla - cer la gar-de des-cen-dan - te Re - gar-dez nous pas - ser!

p Nous som - mes les in - fir - miè - res, les in - fir - miè - res de

Rit. molto **A Tempo**
la — pou-pon-niè - re *pp* Nous pou-pon-nons nous bou-ton-nons Dé-bou-ton nons, re-bou-ton
Rit. molto **A Tempo**
pp



Renowned for his aristocratic and “extra serious” symphonic and operatic works, Roussel was here embracing a popular genre with the hope of making his music, as he claimed, “accessible to all” through “simple, happy, clear music without harmonic complications.”⁹⁸ Members of the consultative committee were quick to come to his defence. Georges Auric praised Roussel’s *opérette*, and viewed it as a salutary addition to the repertory of the theatre, which, he hastened to add, had long fallen prone to the habit of programming “mediocre or detestable *dramas lyriques*.”⁹⁹ He viewed Roussel’s work as embodying more refined characteristics, particularly emphasizing the use of a discreet orchestration and a “lively and fresh” rhythm.¹⁰⁰ Another supportive review appeared in *L’Excelsior*, which praised *Le Testament* while simultaneously critiquing the long-standing traditions of the Opéra-Comique:

⁹⁸ P.V., “Après *Le Testament de Tante Caroline* on jouera d’autres opérettes à l’Opéra-Comique,” Dossier d’oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra, Paris; M.H. Berger, “Interview de M. Albert Roussel qui vient d’achever une opérette dont le titre serait: *Vite, un enfant!*...” in Albert Roussel, *Lettres et écrits*, 214; Albert Roussel, “Comment j’ai écrit *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*,” in Albert Roussel, *Lettres et écrits*, 216.

⁹⁹ Georges Auric, “A l’Opéra-Comique: *Le Testament de Tante Caroline*,” *Paris-Soir*, March 12, 1937.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

This big farce is developed in the wittiest manner and in an atmosphere of complete freedom. The impertinence with which all of the traditions of the house were quickly overturned shocked many of the spectators. I admit that, for me, it was wonderful. This tendency to rejuvenate joyous lyricism is worthy of every encouragement. The anachronistic theatrical traditions of the Salle Favart were cruelly underlined by this performance, because the appearance of a delicious operetta diva like Fanély Revoil and a comic actress like Suzanne Dehelly victoriously proved that the atmosphere of our lyric theatres is badly in need of being oxygenated [...] We should rejoice to see the highly developed techniques of the music hall invade this respectable place.¹⁰¹

Seen in the context of Popular Front politics, one can easily see why the committee came to choose Roussel's *opérette* as the first premiere to be performed at the Opéra-Comique since the theatre's administrative overhaul during the summer of 1936. After all, the production's artistic statement was politically resonant. Not only did *Le Testament* signal an acceptance of modernity in a theatre beleaguered by the weight of contested musical traditions, it also championed the lifestyle modernism of Les Six, whose aesthetic stance was once again in vogue as a result of the political conjuncture. *Le Testament* represented a revolution within the repertory of the Opéra-Comique; it broke

101 "Théâtres: Les premières," *L'Excelsior*, March 12, 1937. "Cette grosse farce est développée dans la plus parfaite cocasserie et dans une atmosphère de liberté absolue. L'impertinence avec laquelle sont bousculées allégrement toutes les traditions de la maison a scandalisé beaucoup de spectateurs. J'avoue que, pour ma part, elle m'a enchanté. Cette tendance de rajeunissement du lyrisme gai est digne de tous les encouragements. Les traditions comiques de la salle Favart sont d'un anachronisme que cette représentation a souligné avec une certaine cruauté. Car l'entrée, dans la distribution, d'une délicieuse divette d'opérette comme Fanély Revoil et d'une fantaisiste comme Suzanne Dehelly a prouvé victorieusement que l'atmosphère de nos théâtres d'Etat a besoin d'être oxygénée [...] L'on doit se réjouir de voir la technique si riche du music-hall envahir cette respectable demeure."

the theatre's generic codes by integrating elements drawn from popular entertainment but even more important, it revealed how even the most prestigious composers of the period – cognizant of the lessons of the younger generation – sought to democratize music through the stylistic fusion of elite and popular elements.

True to the populist modernist impulse of the period, this was all aimed at bringing more people into the theatre. But despite enthusiastic reviews from committee members like Georges Auric, the general consensus surrounding the work was negative. As Daniel Lazarus reported,

“the public of the Opéra-Comique [...] believed it was a mystification, a bad farce that was destined to seriously compromise the peaceful and legendary correctness of operatic performances. One part of the audience sulked. The other got angry and a few whistles managed to completely rip the veil of illusions with which the poor Albert Roussel had clothed his score.”¹⁰²

Others believed that Roussel had failed because his music, which maintained a veneer of aristocratic reserve, did not live up to the comic situations presented in Nino's wittily concocted libretto. One insightful critic lamented:

Certainly, with all the talent that we know he possesses, his entire score maintains a very distinguished musical level, but it does not correspond for a second to what

¹⁰² Lazarus, *Accès à la musique*, 151. “Mais le public de l’Opéra-Comique, lui, crut à une mystification, à une mauvaise farce destinée à compromettre gravement la paisible et légendaire honnêteté des représentations lyriques. Une partie bouda. L’autre se fâcha et quelques sifflets achevèrent de déchirer le voile d’illusions dont le pauvre Albert Roussel avait revêtu sa partition.”

takes place on stage. Such situations demand burlesque and ill-mannered music.

One had the impression of hearing Mistinguette accompanied by an organ.¹⁰³

If Mistinguette represented the boulevard, and the organ, the Schola, it seems that the audience at the Opéra-Comique would have preferred hearing more of the latter. Only one section of the work prompted “unanimous acclaim” from all sides of the hall: Béatrice’s confession aria *C’était un gars de la Bretagne* (example 6.5), in which she reveals how, while at sea with a young fisherman, she became caught up in his amorous net.¹⁰⁴ The subject would certainly have appealed to Roussel whose irresistible attraction to the sea has been a consistently plumbed trope in most biographically informed descriptions of his music.¹⁰⁵ For Marcel Bousquet, commenting after the premiere, this aria revealed the true personality of the author of *Évocations*, *Padmâvatî* and the *Festin de l’Araignée*.¹⁰⁶ Roussel sets Béatrice’s confession as a gently rocking barcarolle in which the *chansonné* style he was aiming for is readily evident. Roussel’s sedate and somewhat sentimental setting of this text no doubt corresponded to audience expectations. This was the “aristocratic” and “reserved” music that Opéra-Comique audiences expected of their theatre, and of a composer like Albert Roussel.

Yet, despite the praise for Béatrice’s aria, Nino’s text seems to call out for musical commentary of a more bawdy nature than the one supplied by Roussel. At the lines

¹⁰³ Th. Salignac, “Le Testament de Tante Caroline,” *Lyrica*, July, 1937. “Certes, avec le talent qu’on lui connaît, toute sa partition est d’une belle tenue musicale, mais ça ne cadre pas une minute avec l’action. Il y eu fallu de la musique burlesque, inconvenante. On avait l’impression d’entendre Mistinguette accompagnée par l’orgue.”

¹⁰⁴ Marcel Bousquet, “Chronique Théâtrale: *Le Testament de Tante Caroline*,” Dossier d’oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra, Paris.

¹⁰⁵ Damien Top’s recent biography, *Albert Roussel (1869-1937): un marin musicien* (Paris: Seguir, 2000) is a typical example of this approach.

¹⁰⁶ Marcel Bousquet, “Chronique Théâtrale: *Le Testament de Tante Caroline*,” Dossier d’oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra, Paris.

“Toute la nuit, vaille que vaille, ensemble nous avons pêché” (All night, after a fashion, we were fishing together), the pun between “fishing” (*pêché*) and its close homonym “sinning” (*péché*), though obviously intended for humorous effect, is ignored by the composer (example 6.5).

Ex. 6.5. Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, “Air de Béatrice,” mm. 39-45.

Andante

Béatrice

Ten-dre-ment il me prit la tail - le, Je n'ai pas pu l'en em - pê - cher. Tou-te la

nuit, vail-le que vail - le, En - sem - ble nous a - vons pê - ché

Louis Aubert commented:

One shouldn't expect Roussel's score to contain big comic effects or refrains designed to expand the repertory of street singers. As *opérette*, even earnest *opérette*, it still remains a work of a musical aristocrat, for whom subtle irony, little witticisms, and the spirit of the farce or mystification is always stylish and

reserved. A light, spontaneous spirit is evident, without, however, containing the popular character to which the specialists of the genre have accustomed us.”¹⁰⁷

Roussel’s music, with its humorous yet reserved gestures, Pitoëff’s provocative mise-en-scène, and Nino’s vaudeville-inspired text, all resulted in a production that appeared to “hesitate between a number of genres, without choosing any one in particular.”¹⁰⁸ After only seven performances Roussel’s *opérette* disappeared from the stage of the Opéra-Comique, never to be resurrected again. As Daniel Lazarus remembered, “[t]his failure somewhat darkened [Roussel’s] final days, and weighed heavily on the serious illness that would finally triumph over his ardent interior spirit.”¹⁰⁹

Epilogue and Recapitulation

For the advisory committee, keen on modernizing the Opéra-Comique’s repertory through a move toward “lighter” works, the critical failure of *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* was a slap in the face. They had placed their bets on Albert Roussel – a winning horse if ever there was one during the mid-30s – only to see their optimism shattered by Opéra-Comique patrons who were not ready to see their opera house transformed into another boulevard theatre. Worse still was the explosion of criticism that emanated from

¹⁰⁷ Louis Aubert, “À l’Opéra-Comique: *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*,” *Le Journal*, March 11, 1937. “Car il ne faudrait pas attendre de la partition de Roussel des effets de grosse bouffonnerie ou des refrains voués à enrichir le répertoire des chanteurs de rue. Opérette, et même franche opérette, elle reste néanmoins oeuvre d’aristocrate de la musique, dont l’ironie subtile, la petite fleur bleue et l’esprit de farce ou de mystification gardent un style, une réserve. L’esprit prime-sautier, la légèreté en sont évidents, sans toutefois revêtir le caractère populaire auquel nous ont habitué les spécialistes du genre.”

¹⁰⁸ “La Musique: *Le Testament de Tante Caroline*,” *Revue Universelle* (April 15, 1937): 239. Dossier d’oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra, Paris. “Il semble qu’il hésite entre plusieurs genres sans en élire aucun de bien déterminé.”

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Lazarus, *Accès à la musique*, 151. “Cet insuccès assombrit quelque peu ses derniers jours et pesa sur la grave maladie qui devait enfin avoir raison de son ardente flamme intérieure.”

within the ranks of the theatre's personnel. A petition, signed by over thirty orchestral musicians and stage-hands was addressed to Jean Zay, and vigorously condemned Roussel's *opérette*. The workers claimed that it was inadmissible that the Opéra-Comique accept works that were intended for and inspired by boulevard theatres. Worse, the petition placed the blame squarely on the advisory committee, which "rather than improving the stature of our art, is in fact allowing it to fall further and further." It also condemned the committee for fiscal mismanagement, which it viewed as highly regrettable given the increased State subsidy to improve the fortunes of the theatre. Ultimately, the petition demanded that the minister oversee the committee with more scrutiny in order to ensure that it would "fulfill its functions correctly."¹¹⁰

Predictably, the next meeting of the consultative committee was a rowdy one. A spokesperson for the personnel was present and attacked the committee because of its preference for works that "do not have a commercial character." This was a surprising criticism, given that the committee's ostensible goal was to entice larger crowds to the theatre by staging lighter works and operettas. Obviously, the representative was already longing for the days when *Carmen* and *Manon* were enough to ensure financial prosperity. Georges Auric was infuriated by these charges, and insisted that the consultative committee had never been requested to financially administer the theatre, but rather to improve its artistic reputation by programming new works in modern productions.¹¹¹

Such attacks on the committee's artistic decisions continued throughout 1937 and 1938. A vicious, unsigned pamphlet in the Rouché files lamented the committee's misuse

¹¹⁰ Petition addressed to Jean Zay, Ministre de la Direction Générale des Beaux-Arts, March 30, 1937, in Dossier d'oeuvre: Albert Roussel, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline*, BN-Opéra, Paris.

¹¹¹ "Procès-verbal du comité consultatif," April 12, 1937, Pièce 80 (15): 4, Fonds Rouché, BN-Opéra, Paris.

of government funds. It claimed that the modern works programmed by the committee had caused the theatre's clients to vanish overnight, thereby destroying box-office revenues. The author pointed to recent performances of Milhaud's *Le Pauvre Matelot* that had brought in the lamentable sum of only 1,500 francs compared to the 60,000 it cost to perform every night. Furthermore, the writer denounced the committee's self-serving artistic agenda, and criticized the fact that all of the operas premiered since its inception had been written by committee members. This type of favouritism was rampant, and the case of Daniel Lazarus – who the right-wing press scathingly called “the great rabbi of the place” – was singled out for particularly harsh criticism:¹¹²

Lazarus (a friend of Jean Zay), who has nothing to do at the Opéra-Comique, has an office and a typewriter and walks around the corridors from time to time and makes 5000 francs a month – he has already cost tax-payers 105,000 francs. Faced with the disdain of the entire personnel, Mr. Lazarus is so aware of his complete ineptitude and of his inappropriate nomination, that he doesn't dare show up to any stage rehearsals, nor to any orchestral and studio rehearsals.¹¹³

Rouché is also criticized in this account, and accused of being a member of “*les deux cents familles*” – a pejorative phrase popularized by the Communist Party during the Popular Front to denote the social and economic injustice perpetrated by France's wealthiest families. The writer, obviously a Communist Party sympathizer, sees no salutary improvements resulting from Popular Front reforms to the theatre. What is most

¹¹² André Coeuroy, “La synagogue,” *Gringoire*, February 11, 1938.

¹¹³ “Le scandale de l'Opéra et de l'Opéra-Comique,” AN F21 5217, 10.

striking, however, is that the writer actually regrets the departure Gheusi, and backs up the former director's account, which claimed that his departure was the result of a carefully organized Communist plot.¹¹⁴

Faced with these attacks, the consultative committee became less and less effective. Following the failure of Roussel's *opérette*, it reasserted the necessity of two distinct theatres for the Opéra-Comique repertory – one much larger hall that would be devoted to playing traditional works at low cost, and the Salle Favart, which would concentrate on reinvigorating a modern conception of *opéra comique* through an experimentation with hybrid forms drawing largely on scenic and musical conventions that had been, up until then, confined to the music-hall and other boulevard theatres. But their control over the artistic destiny of the Salle Favart was undermined by Rouché's ambition, rewarded by Jean Zay, to be at the helm of both theatres under a restructured and entirely State-funded administrative organization. As a result, many composers gave up on the committee throughout 1937 – they met less frequently, and the minutes reveal that attendance steadily decreased among its members. By the beginning of the 1938 season, administrative downsizing began in preparation for the establishment of the RTLN in early 1939. Lazarus, despite a letter of protest addressed to Zay, was fired on August 29 on account of “budgetary considerations,” thereby putting an end to the composer's quest to transform the Opéra-Comique into a *théâtre populaire*.¹¹⁵ Antoine Mariotte's position was also discontinued, and in late September the consultative

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹¹⁵ Archives Nationales, F21 5260 (6B).

committee was reduced to seven members consisting of Auric, Charpentier, Honegger, Ibert, Koechlin, Milhaud and Max d'Ollone.¹¹⁶

In January 1939 the committee was abolished altogether, and its attempts at modernization were equally set aside. The irony of this short, intermediary episode in the history of the Opéra-Comique lies in the fact that although the committee looked to improve accessibility, both within the existing repertory and in new works, its efforts were marred not only because the Popular Front Minister and Rouché did not fully support their initiatives, but also because the workers in the theatre – who represented a slice of the social group to whom the cultural agenda of the Popular Front was addressed – were more concerned with their own jobs and financial welfare than with the committee's attempts at artistic innovation.

Ultimately, the saga of the Opéra-Comique under the Popular Front is yet another example of the disconnect that existed between intellectuals and workers during this period. No number of concessions towards popular forms of operatic entertainment was going to entice workers to embrace the music of France's most prestigious modern composers. Even members of the government, like Zay, were undoubtedly aware that the world of opera was unlikely to attract or accommodate the cultural aspirations of France's urban workers.

Myriam Chimènes has noted that the extra financial credits accorded to the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique during the Popular Front stemmed from the necessity of revitalizing the entire operatic establishment.¹¹⁷ Jean Zay later claimed that when he took office “the problem surrounded the lyric theatres was by far the most difficult. It was

¹¹⁶ Archives Nationales, F21 5260 (6C, D).

¹¹⁷ Myriam Chimènes, “Le budget de la musique sous la IIIe République,” in *La Musique: du théorique au politique*, eds. Hugues Dufourt and Joël-Marie Fauquet, 278 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991).

absolutely necessary to abolish the practice of private funding [in these theatres].”¹¹⁸ In 1939 Zay accorded a huge credit of 40 million francs to the Opéra and Opéra-Comique to consolidate the RTLN, and much of this money was used to reimburse everything “from the fees for the leading soprano to the salary of the last stage hand.”¹¹⁹ Rouché was the main beneficiary of the new arrangement. Named *administrateur général*, his position was guaranteed for three years and he was given complete control of all administrative decisions and nominations. He continued to be advised by a committee – this time comprised of eight members – but at the moment when he assumed the position on 1 June 1939, right-wingers were here in the majority.¹²⁰

But these administrative changes, rather than helping to further modernize the theatre’s artistic mission, had exactly the opposite effect. Works like *Madame Butterfly*, eliminated from the repertory in 1936, were re-introduced. *Carmen* and *Manon* were once again regularly scheduled and experiments in the genre of *opéra comique* were not encouraged. Status quo had reclaimed the premises, and the theatre’s vision became increasingly retrospective, culminating in the first complete recording of *Pelléas et Mélisande* during the German Occupation in 1942.¹²¹ By this time, tradition, rather than innovation, had regained its stronghold at the Opéra-Comique.

¹¹⁸ Jean Zay, *Souvenirs et solitude* (Paris: Julliard, 1945), 216. “Le problème des théâtres lyriques était de loin le plus redoutable. Il fallait avant tout mettre fin au régime de mécénat.”

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹²⁰ Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 319.

¹²¹ On this project see Leslie Sprout, “Music for a *New Era*”: Composers and National Identity in France, 1936-1946,” (PhD diss., Berkeley, 2000), 266-268.

Chapter 7 – Populist Modernism at the 1937 Exposition

Introduction

My discussion of Albert Roussel's *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* revealed how the predominantly left-wing advisory committee at the Opéra Comique endorsed the aesthetic fusion of “popular” and “elite” sources in new operas performed at the theatre between 1936 and 1938. Traditionally, the Opéra Comique staged a largely conservative and time-honoured repertory, a programming strategy that was encouraged by an audience that showed considerable animosity towards experimentation. The decision to stage Roussel's *opérette* represented a modernist departure for the Salle Favart, one that affirmed links with the musical aesthetics of Les Six and simultaneously (through the work's stylistic fusion of “elite” and “popular” idioms) resonated with the politicized aesthetics of the Popular Front.

This (temporary) aesthetic shift at the Opéra-Comique was equally present in a festival of *opéras comiques* sponsored by the Popular Front government in conjunction with the *Exposition des arts et des techniques dans la vie moderne* – held in Paris during the summer and fall of 1937. As the only “traditional” musical event to be officially programmed during the Exposition, this festival deserves consideration as it reflects the aesthetic commitments of the Left during this period.

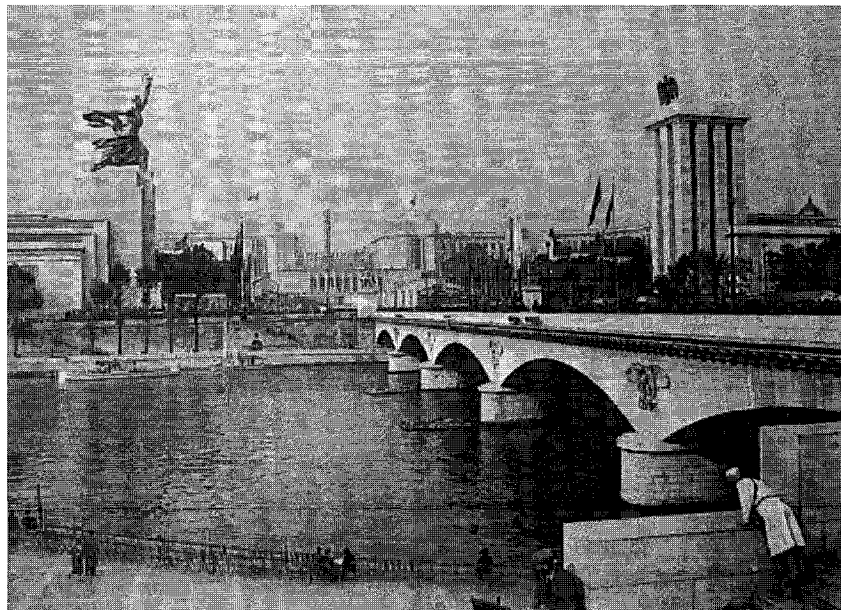
Another less traditional musical event at the Exposition, entitled *Fêtes de la lumière*, featured lavish and technologically audacious fireworks spectacles choreographed to modern musical accompaniment. These “sound and light” shows were

commissioned by the Popular Front government and constituted a timely opportunity for artists to bring modern music to the masses.

Finally, building on the success of *Le 14 Juillet*, the Popular Front also commissioned two grandiose theatrical productions to begin and close the Exposition. The collectively written play *Liberté* and Jean-Richard Bloch's experimental work, *Naissance d'une cite*, both called for extensive musical contributions. These were provided by collaborative teams of composers, many of whom were FMP members. In this chapter, I will argue that the dramatic and musical content of all of these projects attest to the aesthetic importance of populist modernism at the highly politicized 1937 Exposition.

Ideological Tensions at the Exposition

Fig. 22. The Soviet and German pavilions at the 1937 Exposition.¹



¹ Reproduced in *Cinquantenaire de l'Exposition Internationale des arts et des techniques de la vie moderne*, ed. Bertrand Lemoine and Philippe Rivoirard (Paris: Institut Français d'Architecture/Paris Musées, 1987), 18.

One striking image has come to dominate historical interpretations of Paris's 1937 *Exposition des arts et des techniques dans la vie moderne*. A small area around the Eiffel Tower – that evocative vestige of the 1889 Exposition – was transformed into a grandiose stage for the world's nations, and the ideological antagonisms dividing Europe in the late 1930s were symbolically embodied in the architecture of two temporary, yet formidable, pavilions. Below the towering gaze of the Eiffel Tower, on the opposite side of the Seine, the German and Soviet pavilions dramatically squared off in an ominous gesture of defiance – hammer and sickle versus eagle and swastika (figure 22).

Compared to the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, France's offerings at the Exposition were less clearly expressed from an ideological point of view. These ideological ambiguities resulted from the general lack of national stability and flip-flopping of political power during the planning stages of the Exposition. In 1933, the centrist Radical Party initially approved and set aside funds for the Exposition. By 1934, however, the Exposition's fate was severely threatened and it was only as a result of a change in government that planning resumed.²

Under the direction of Edmond Labbé, appointed general commissioner (*commissaire général*) of the Expo in 1934, the French contribution finally found some ideological and aesthetic direction. Labbé wanted the Exposition to promote France's artesian trades and regional cultures. He successfully campaigned for an emphasis on French regionalism throughout the Exposition site, culminating in the construction of a vast complex of buildings known as the "regional centre" (*centre régional*). It showcased traditional regional architectural structures which were constructed using modern

² Madeleine Rebérioux, "L'Exposition de 1937 et le contexte politique des années trente," in *Cinquantenaire de l'Exposition Internationale des arts et des techniques de la vie moderne*, ed. Bertrand Lemoine and Philippe Rivoirard (Paris: Institut Français d'Architecture/Paris Musées, 1987), 28.

materials and techniques.³ This centre – designed to function as a self-contained French village – was created in reaction to the left-wing “internationalist” architectural theories of Le Corbusier, a prominent member of La Maison de la Culture. These buildings were intended “to definitively sign the death notice of [...] international architecture” and looked to substitute it “with architecture that was truly French,” and that reflected different regions of the nation.⁴ As Labbé pointedly remarked, “Isn’t it necessary for a residence to be a home rather than a machine for living?”⁵

Throughout 1934 and 1935, Le Corbusier’s multiple projects for the Exposition faced considerable animosity. In fact, his project to design a huge mass-housing pavilion consisting of over one thousand apartments in the south of Paris was rejected by the organizing committee. It was only following the electoral victory of the Popular Front in 1936 that Le Corbusier was finally given the green light to design something for the Exposition. Given time constraints, his project was inevitably reduced in scale. His sole contribution was the *Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux*, a temporary structure – reminiscent of a circus tent – designed with the pedagogical goal of proposing contemporary strategies for mass, urban housing.⁶

³ On the emphasis on France’s regions at the Exposition see Shanny Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials and Folklore at the 1937 Paris World’s Fair* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁴ “L’Exposition,” *Le Batiment* (November 25, 1934) cited in Jean-François Pinchon, “La conception et l’organisation de l’Exposition,” in *Cinquantenaire de l’Exposition Internationale*, 37: “...afin de signer définitivement l’arrêt de mort de cette architecture internationale pour lui substituer une architecture bien française où l’allure moderne devra pourtant respecter chacune des caractéristiques de nos différentes régions.”

⁵ Le Corbusier was an influential advocate for functional housing that he referred to as “machines for living.” Passage cited in Jean-Claude Vigato, “Le centre regional, le centre artisanal, et le centre rural,” in *Cinquantenaire de l’Exposition Internationale*, 269.

⁶ Le Corbusier designed the pavilion so that it could be moved easily and set up in different cities throughout France. As Gilles Ragot has pointed out, this conception was indebted to “the pure Bolshevik tradition of agit’prop trains from 1919.” See Gilles Ragot, “Temps nouveaux: Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret,” *Cinquantenaire de l’Exposition Internationale*, 250. On Le Corbusier’s rejected proposals see Ragot, “Le Corbusier et l’Exposition,” 72-79.

Like many other last minute projects in the 1937 Exposition, Le Corbusier's was "rescued" thanks to the political willpower of the Popular Front. Indeed, following the coalition's electoral victory, it intervened in a number of ways to ensure that the Exposition would reflect more closely the regime's own leftist vision for the nation. Generally, the Popular Front championed pavilions dedicated to the products and activities of modern, urban life – the "Pavillon de la Radio" and the "Pavillon Photo-Ciné-Phono" representing just two evocative examples. It also created one of the most successful attractions at the Exposition – a pavilion devoted to the popularization of science called the "Palais de la Découverte." Wishing to ensure that the Exposition would be accessible to all budgets, once a week, the government offered entrance tickets at half the regular admission price.

Throughout the Exposition, there was an uneasy juxtaposition of right and left-wing perspectives. Conflicting political and artistic ideas were not only inscribed in the French pavilions, but also in the cultural and artistic activities that took place during the festivities. In 1935, Jacques Rouché, the director of the Opéra, had been placed at the head of the "*Service des fêtes, spectacles et réceptions*," which, according to Pascal Ory, proposed a program that was both "classic" and "elitist."⁷ Predictably, most of Rouché's "*réceptions*" took place at the Opéra and consisted largely of gala performances designed to entertain foreign visitors and dignitaries.⁸ In order to contrast with Rouché's more conventional offerings, the Popular Front created a new organizational body to oversee "*Fêtes, Attractions, Cortèges, Sports*."⁹ Informed by left-wing ideals, this new

⁷ Pascal Ory, "Le Front populaire et l'Exposition," *Cinquantenaire de l'Exposition Internationale*, 35.

⁸ Albert Roussel, "La musique à l'Exposition 1937," in *Lettres et écrits*, 286.

⁹ Group XIII was one of the fourteen large groups that oversaw Exposition activities. Group XIII, like all of the other groups, contained a number of smaller sections (or *classes*): Classe 70 (Décors and theatrical

administration (referred to as Group 13-Class 71) oversaw a number of important outdoor *fêtes* during the Exposition. Dedicated to the themes of “labour,” “popular arts and traditions,” “*chanson*,” and “youth hostels,” these celebratory parades were meant to reflect the Popular Front’s political mandate and ideological vision.¹⁰

In general, music remained an oversight during much of the planning for the Exposition, an understandable omission given that even some of the most important French building projects were not even ready in time for the Exposition’s grand opening. Despite this, many concerts and musical conferences were programmed to coincide with the Exposition, though they were not part of the official festivities. The most significant of these events included the International Festival of the SIMC (International Society for Contemporary Music) and the Second Annual Congress of the Fédération Musicale Populaire. Albert Roussel, president of Group I-Class 5 (which was responsible for organizing “musical and choreographic representations”), claimed that the government budget for music at the Exposition was insufficient for the performance of large-scale works such as operas and ballets.¹¹ As a result, the only event it sponsored was a festival of short *opéra-bouffes* at the Théâtre d’essai de l’Exposition, which was temporarily located within the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, in close proximity to the Exposition site.¹²

costumes); Classe 71 (Décor and material for festivities, attractions and parades, light and water shows) and Classe 72 (Games and sports, eugenics). For a complete list of the fourteen groups and seventy-five sections see *Cinquantenaire de l’Exposition Internationale*, 504-505.

¹⁰ Pascal Ory, “Le Front populaire et l’Exposition,” 35.

¹¹ Albert Roussel, “La musique à l’Exposition 1937,” in *Lettres et écrits*. 285.

¹² The “Théâtre d’essai” moved to another Exposition location in July 1937. Ory, 395.

Opera and the “Everyday” at the Expo

As its name suggests, the Théâtre d’essai was intended as an experimental laboratory for young theatrical companies, a role that it maintained throughout the Popular Front period and into the Second World War. Since 1922, when Georges Pitoëff had installed his young company at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées, the venue had been transformed into a temple for theatrical experimentation. The director of the theatre was Louis Jouvet, an experimental actor and *metteur en scène* who had been trained under seminal theatrical theorist Jacques Copeau. Copeau’s revolutionary methods, which advocated minimalist staging and greater prominence to the spoken text, had a tremendous influence on the young generation of up-and-coming directors, (including Charles Dullin and Gaston Baty). Together in 1927, Jouvet, Dullin, Baty, and Pitoëff formed a “Cartel” and expressed their theatrical aims in the first issue of *Entr’acte*, a journal that functioned as Jouvet’s official mouthpiece for the Comédie des Champs-Élysées.¹³

During the 1920s and early 1930s, the theatrical innovations of these directors were largely confined to the smaller “studio” theatres that they oversaw. For the most part, these venues (Théâtre des Mathurins, Théâtre de Montparnasse and the Théâtre des Arts) were as artistically vibrant as they were financially unstable. They represented an artistic “third-way” that opposed both the world of “official theatre” (represented by State-endorsed theatres like the Comédie-Française, the Odéon, the Opéra, and the Opéra Comique) and the boulevard theatres (where financial gain played a preponderant role in programming considerations). Under the Popular Front, these once-marginal theatre directors began to enjoy mainstream success. Their rise to prominence coincided with

¹³ Dorothy Knowles, *French Drama of the Interwar Years 1918-39* (London: Harrap, 1967), 40.

their gradual assimilation into the theatrical “establishment” under the Popular Front. Most important in this regard, was Jean Zay’s decision to name Copeau, Dullin, Jouvet and Baty the sole members of an advisory committee to help the newly named director Edouard Bourdet at the Comédie Française.

The Popular-Front-sponsored festival of *opéras-bouffes* at the 1937 Exposition looked to integrate the modern theatrical style of the “Cartel des Quatre” with operas by young composers. Albert Roussel’s Class 5 was responsible for choosing the music, whereas the newly formed Class 71 (part of the Popular Front “Group 13” which included “Cartel” member Gaston Baty), oversaw all details of staging and *mise-en-scène*. The six works performed during the festival (Louis Beydts’s *La S.A.D.M.P.*, Marcel Delannoy’s *Philippine*, Tibor Harsanyi’s *Les Invités*, Jean Rivier’s *La Vénitienne*, Manuel Rosenthal’s *La Poule noire*, and Maurice Thiriet’s *La Véridique histoire du docteur*) were all of modest dimension. As the critic José Bruyr noted in a review of this initiative, the programming efforts of the Class 5 were intended to encourage experimentation in a “genre that was allegedly 100% French” through generic mixing with lighter forms like *opérette*.¹⁴

Most of the six works performed at the “*theatre d’essai*” belonged to an intermediary genre situated somewhere between *opéra comique* and *opérette*. In this sense, they employed a stylistic strategy that was similar to that of Roussel’s *Testament de Tante Caroline*. Every opera was set in recognizable modern-day surroundings (a family living-room, a cabaret, a modern apartment, a shop) and depicted “everyday” characters with stereotypical traits (dentists, acrobats, boxers, maids, actors, sailors, businessmen, etc.) engaged in modern activities (speaking on the phone, looking for an

¹⁴ José Bruyr, “Opéras-bouffes,” *Vendredi*, November 5, 1937.

apartment with electrical heating).¹⁵ Many of the arias and recitatives in these works were infused with the jazz idioms and dance rhythms of the music hall.

Marcel's Delannoy's *opérette*, entitled *Philippine*, employed all of the popular theatrical and musical elements named above. As we have seen, Delannoy (1898-1962) had advocated a modernization of the *opéra comique* repertory following the personnel's occupation of the Opéra Comique in 1936 and, like the members of the advisory committee, wished to "explore new paths" with the genre.¹⁶ At its premiere at the Salle Favart in 1927, Delannoy's first *opéra comique*, *Le Poirier de misère*, created a scandal and was criticized for being "vulgar" and prone to "bolshevist" tendencies.¹⁷ Perhaps this scandal – "the likes of which had not been seen since *Pelléas*" – had been instrumental in convincing Jean Zay to overlook Delannoy when he formed the advisory committee at the Opéra-Comique – an omission that created ripples in the press.¹⁸ Nonetheless, in 1937 Delannoy's star was rising.¹⁹ In early 1937, before anything had even been planned for the Exposition, Delannoy had already recommended the programming of light lyric works as a way to represent modern French musical developments.²⁰ The "*saison d'opéras-bouffes*" was no doubt partly influenced by his suggestions, and ultimately, it was to his *opérette*, *Philippine*, that Classe 5 awarded a *diplôme d'honneur*.

¹⁵ In Harsanyi's work, a typewriter has a minor (mute) role.

¹⁶ Marcel Delannoy, "Un jeune compositeur envisage hardiment le problème de l'Opéra-Comique," *Comoedia*, July 6, 1936.

¹⁷ Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 107.

¹⁸ René Dumesnil, *La première moitié du vingtième siècle*, vol 5 of *Histoire de la musique: des origines à nos jours*, edited by Jules Combarieu and René Dumesnil (Paris: Armand Colin, 1960), 129. On protests over Delannoy's exclusion from the committee see Dominique Sordet, "La réorganisation de l'Opéra-Comique," *L'Action française*, October 2, 1936.

¹⁹ Delannoy was one of twelve composers to receive a lucrative state commission in 1938. Delannoy was commissioned to write a "three-act lyric work" to which he answered with his *opéra-comique*, *Ginevra*, premiered under the Vichy regime in 1942. On the commissions program see Leslie A. Sprout, "Music for a New Era: Composers and National Identity in France, 1936-1946," (PhD diss., University of California, 2000). She discusses Delannoy on pp. 59-60 and *Ginevra* on pp. 278-281.

²⁰ Marcel Delannoy, "La musique française à l'Exposition de 1937," *Le Journal*, January 17, 1937.

This eclectic and ambitious work revolves around the story of two Siamese twins, Nina and Ninette.²¹ Born into a circus family, the twins (who answer to the collective name “Philippine”) make money from their curious physical appearance by offering smiles and kisses to audience members who call out their name. They quickly become immersed in a complex love quadrangle with two sailors – an impractical situation that prompts the surgical separation of the twins by the enterprising Docteur Pierrelatte. Once separated, only a distinctive mole distinguishes Nina from Ninette, and predictably, a case of mistaken identity supplies further dramatic intrigue. Nina’s honour is in turn severely tested, and only with the final appearance of all characters on stage, are misunderstandings resolved, thus allowing the work to close, like Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, in an atmosphere of amorous reconciliation.

Beyond the somewhat conventional love intrigue, the opera’s plot offered one particularly significant feature: the audience’s first encounter with Nina and Ninette takes place at the circus-hall owned by their parents, “Le Théâtre Montefiore.” Delannoy’s score takes full advantage of the inclusion of this popular entertainment venue by evoking the activity both within and – recalling Satie’s *Parade* – outside the theatre. In a spoken “tableau,” entitled “*Le Boniment*” (Sales talk), the manager, Monsieur Montefiore, encourages the public to purchase tickets while a band warms up to perform the first circus music number. A “*Petit défilé*” (Small parade) ensues, in which the spectators prepare to enter the theatre; accompanied by marching rhythms they sing “*Vive la fête, ça va gazer!*” (Long live the party, it’s going to be great!) as they hand over their entrance fee to Montefiore. Once inside, the circus acts commence: the “*Complainte de l’Homme Serpent*” (The Lament of the Man-Snake) is accompanied by a mechanistic rumba, the

²¹ Jean Limozin and Henri Lyon wrote the libretto. The vocal score is published by Eschig (1939).

“Numéro de la Femme Aimant” (Number of the Magnet Lady) is set to a tango (example 7.1), while the duet of the Siamese twins, “Bonjour Philippine,” includes a lengthy interlude designed to function as a dance number.

Ex. 7.1. Marcel Dalannoy, *Philippine*, Act 1: Numéro de la Femme Aimant (Tango).

Tempo di tango

ff

La femme aimant

Les hom mes pre nez tous gar - de - Je suis la femme ai - mant -

Et ceux que je re - gar - de Sont pin - cés sû - re - ment!

An opera like *Philippine*, in which the circus-hall was dramatically and musically “framed” as an evocation of the “everyday,” represented a significant development for French *opéra comique*. Seen in light of the experimental direction at the Opéra Comique under the new advisory committee, Delannoy’s work once again reflects the combination

of *opéra-comique* and *opérette* – an initiative that had already been tested for the Opéra-Comique production of Roussel's *Testament de la Tante Caroline*.

Indeed, for the survival of the *opéra comique* genre, this was, as Darius Milhaud pointed out, an excellent formula, one that he personally wished to “see [...] adopted at the Opéra-Comique.”²² Milhaud was particularly enthusiastic about the fact that many of these “*théâtre d’essai*” works were presented on the same program without being sandwiched between famous works from the traditional *opéra-comique* repertory. As he explained:

It is, in fact, difficult for a modern one-act work to be successful if it is given on the same program as *Werther* or *Tosca*. The public that comes for Puccini ‘swallows’ with distaste or indifference what it considers to be a simple curtain raiser. In a spectacle composed entirely of new works, however, the public knows what to expect, and even if not all of those faithful to *Manon* show up, the public that followed Diaghilev and . . . performances of ballet at the Opéra, would be interested in this type of program.²³

Milhaud's comments imply that a commercially viable modernization of the *opéra comique* repertory was possible by applying the model of the *théâtre d’essai*. By appealing to “the public that followed Diaghilev,” however, Milhaud admits that this type

²² Darius Milhaud, “Spectacles d’opéras bouffes,” *Ce Soir*, June 10, 1937.

²³ Ibid. “Il est, en effet, difficile de faire réussir un ouvrage moderne en un acte s’il est donné avec *Werther* ou *la Tosca*. Le public qui vient pour Massenet ou pour Puccini “avale” avec mauvaise humeur ou indifférence ce qu’il considère comme un lever de rideau. Tandis que dans un spectacle coupé, composé d’œuvres nouvelles, le public sait de quoi il s’agit et si les fidèles de *Manon* ne viennent pas tous, le public qui suivait Diaghilev et que nous retrouvons nombreux aux soirées de ballets à l’Opéra, sera intéressé par un programme de ce genre.”

of modernization would actually require maintaining an “elite” role for the genre, one inherited from the modernist practices of the 1920s. In effect, Milhaud views the future of *opéra comique* as arising from rehashing the “lifestyle modernist” position of the early 1920s. By fusing popular *opérette*, music hall, and a sophisticated musical language, Milhaud felt, like many of his colleagues on the advisory committee, that *opéra comique* could find a new lease on life.

Music, Water and Fire

The “*saison d’opéras bouffes*” represented a concerted attempt to combine elite and popular sources in the world of French *opéra comique*. Although these initiatives resonated with the aesthetic direction adopted by many Popular Front supporters, they did little to further the politicized cultural agendas of groups like the FMP, who looked to forge durable links between modern composers and the workers. Modern *opéras comiques* and *opérettes*, no matter how indebted to the popular idioms of the music-hall, were still socially, financially, and as Milhaud suggested, aesthetically out of reach of the majority of France’s workers. Perhaps this explains why the Popular Front was so little inclined to sponsor this type of entertainment at the Exposition.

In any case, the Popular Front was not stingy when it came to Exposition projects conceived in a clearly populist vein. Crucial in this regard was the Group 13, which had been formed by the Popular Front to organize “celebrations, attractions, parades, and sports” (*Fêtes, Attractions, Cortèges, Sports*). Perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most innovative project conceived by this organizing committee was the *Fêtes de la Lumière*. The *Fêtes* were a series of evening spectacles, organized around the banks of the

Seine, featuring modernist fireworks displays accompanied by music that was specially commissioned for the event.²⁴

Eighteen works were commissioned to accompany eighteen different fireworks demonstrations, each with its own specific theme. The performances were spread between June 14, and December 11, 1937, and some of the works (e.g. Florent Schmitt's *Lumière*), were performed as many as five times. Not all of the composers chosen to participate were associated with the Left; indeed, many different political and aesthetic persuasions were represented.²⁵ A number of composers, like Elsa Barraine, Marcel Delannoy, Arthur Honneger, Jacques Ibert, Charles Koechlin, and Darius Milhaud were all closely associated with the politics of the Popular Front. The remaining eleven musicians however – Louis Aubert, Henri Barraud, Claude Delvincourt, Désiré-Emile Inghelbrecht, Paul Le Flem, Raymond Loucheur, Olivier Messiaen, Jean Rivier, Manuel Rosenthal, Florent Schmitt, Paul Vellones, and Maurice Yvain – belonged to various other persuasions including: extreme-right sympathies (Delvincourt), avant-garde “spiritualist” tendencies (Messiaen), and the light-hearted world of the *opérette* (Yvain).²⁶

The fireworks were designed by the architects Eugène Beaudoin and Marcel Lods, who were also responsible for the lighting installations that illuminated the Seine throughout the duration of the Exposition. Their project was extremely ambitious, and sought to draw upon numerous technological advancements in order to create an immense

²⁴ A crucial source for the *Fêtes de la Lumière* is Nigel Simeone's recent article, “Music at the 1937 Exposition: The Science of Enchantment,” *The Musical Times* 143/1878 (Spring 2002): 9-17.

²⁵ Simeone supplies a chart that lists the dates of each *Fête de la Lumière* and the featured composer. See “Music at the 1937 Exposition,” 12.

²⁶ Charles Koechlin cites Delvincourt as the author of a march for the extreme right-wing group the Croix-de-feu in “Art, liberté, tour d’ivoire,” *Contrepoints* 6 (1949): 109. Jane F. Fulcher places Messiaen's “spiritualism” and the aesthetic tendencies of the group “Jeune France” in the political context of “nonconformism” which sought to differentiate itself from traditional Right-Left tensions in France, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 291-293. On Yvain's activities, see his autobiographical account, *Ma belle opérette* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1962).

symphony of water and light accompanied by music. In fact, Beaudoin and Lods initially conceived of these sound and light shows from an internationalist perspective, claiming that the *fêtes* would be “linked to the ensemble of the Exposition under the direction of an orchestral conductor, who could direct – by wireless radio – music, light, and waterworks, from a podium in Rome, Beirut, or New York.”²⁷

Building on lessons learned during the 1925 Exposition when pre-recorded music emanating from the newly-invented “T.S.F.” (*télégraphie sans fil*) had served as a “sound-track” for visitors to the site, Beaudoin and Lods looked for innovative ways to create a sound system that could successfully encompass the entire Exposition grounds:

The sound must be audible by all the spectators, which implies an ability to regulate the volume level as required. Four different systems are envisaged: a) The sound originates at the very heart of the principle effects, that is to say, in the fountains on the Seine. This uses a special independent system intended for the *Fêtes de la Lumière*; b) Loudspeakers are placed in trees and on the ground, and they bathe the public in an ambiance of broadcast sound. This uses the exposition’s normal commercial sound system; c) In exceptional circumstances, for a very few particular cases, the sound waves come from a great height – the Eiffel Tower has been equipped with powerful batteries of loudspeakers; d)

²⁷ From the initial project by Beaudoin and Lods for the *Fêtes des Eaux et de la Lumière* for the 1937 Exposition, quoted in Danillo Udovicki, “Projets et concours,” *Cinquantenaire de l’Exposition Internationale*, 63. “On propose d’organiser chaque soir, à la nuit, des fêtes extrêmement variées dans leur succession comme dans leur ordonnance, mais toujours liées à l’ensemble de l’Exposition sous la direction d’un seul chef d’orchestre, qui pourrait commander par T.S.F., musique, lumière et mouvements d’eaux, du pupitre de Rome, Beyrouth ou New York.”

Finally, in very rare but extremely interesting cases, it will be possible to have sound emanating from the sky, using a specially equipped aeroplane.²⁸

Although option “d” was never attempted, the other three were liberally employed. Beaudoin and Lods placed their fireworks and speakers upon boats and floating pontoons that were put into correct order during the day, and then driven up the Seine and placed in their specific positions later in the evening. Submergible platforms containing elaborate fountains and mist-forming vapour ducts were also used and rose from below the surface of the Seine as the *fête* began.²⁹

Compared to other Exposition activities, like Rouché’s galas at the Opéra, or the “*saison d’opéras-bouffes*,” this was true entertainment for the masses. Both Jane F. Fulcher and Sandrine Grandegambe have stressed that the notion of popular *fête* was extremely important to the French left wing, particularly because of its strong association with popular Revolutionary celebrations. Jane Fulcher suggests that spectacles such as these are noteworthy because they play out on the boundaries “between the dramatic and the real.”³⁰ Indeed, we have seen how the notion of collective and non-hierarchical celebration was an important component in *Le 14 Juillet*, most effectively expressed through Lazarus’s conclusive, and deliberately “popular” *Fête de la Liberté*.

The *Fêtes de la Lumière* engaged with this same aesthetic premise, as here “art” and “reality” were blurred through a *mise-en-scène* that combined music, technological know-how, and an urban setting. An article in the left-wing paper, *Ce Soir*, gave a

²⁸ *Guide du concert* (Numéro spécial de l’Exposition 1937), xxviii. Quoted in and translated by Nigel Simeone, “Music at the 1937 Exposition,” 11.

²⁹ Danillo Udovicki, “Projets et concours,” *Cinquantenaire de l’Exposition Internationale*, 64.

³⁰ Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 234. See also 126-133.

detailed inventory of the engineering involved in these modern festivities: they required 190 fountains capable of casting water 30 meters into the air; 60 kilometres of wire attached to over 600 operating buttons; 100,000 cubic meters of water per hour employing a force of over 4000 horsepower – the *Fêtes* were nothing less than a modern factory of music, water and fire.³¹ The entire spectacle was directed from a centralized operating console located on a boat moored to the banks of the Seine. In fact, everyday, a lucky visitor to the site was granted the opportunity to operate this colossal mechanism *en amateur*.³² The *Fêtes* could be experienced throughout the Exposition site, whether from the café-terraces that temporarily lined the bridges spanning the Seine, from the promenades lining the riverbanks, or from atop the Eiffel Tower.

The technical feats so apparent in Beaudoin and Lods conception also extended to the musical works, which were choreographed to fit with the spectacle of light and water (and not vice versa!) in much the same way as contemporary film music. The composers worked with pre-established scenarios by Beaudoin and Lods, and their music was to follow precise, second-by-second cues that reflected changes in lighting and the play of water.³³ As Serge Vellones (the son of composer Pierre Vellones) remembered, “the plans [...] were presented in the form of a thick volume of black drawing paper. [...] On each page were brilliantly-coloured schemes, drawn in chalk, giving an impression of what the principal sequences would be.”³⁴ The works were pre-recorded in versions conducted by Désormière, Maurice Jaubert, Gustave Cloëz, and others and were re-broadcast during the

³¹ René Roy, “Sous le signe merveilleux de l’eau dans tous ces aspects, l’Exposition montrera ses fontaines jaillissantes, ses miroirs aux mystérieuses profondeurs et la douce poésie de ses plans irisées,” *Ce Soir*, May 29, 1937.

³² Ibid.

³³ Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 175.

³⁴ Serge Vellones, *Pierre Vellones, vingt années d’une vie musicale parisienne* (Geneva: Slatkin, 1981), 100. Cited and translated in Simeone, “Music at the 1937 Exposition,” 15.

Fêtes. In keeping with the important theme of electricity promoted during the Exposition, many composers of the accompanying music experimented with new instruments. For example, Koechlin, Messiaen, Loucheur, Schmitt, Barraine, Delannoy, Le Flem, Vellones, all employed the ondes martenot in their works.³⁵ Indeed, Messiaen's *Fête des belles eaux*, scored for a sextet of ondes martenot, was the composer's first experiment with this instrument, which, as Nigel Simeone has revealed, was being touted as "the most sensational musical and scientific achievement of the 1937 Exposition."³⁶

With an average everyday audience of close to 200,000 people, this was a unique opportunity (some even referred to it as a "new art form") for the avant-garde to commune with the masses.³⁷ Jean Wiéner claimed as much in a review of one of the *Fêtes*, in which he described how, when the music began, the "people, sitting wherever they liked, in groups or alone, others on their feet, hurried or hugging, young, old, entire families, suddenly fell silent and remained exceptionally attentive."³⁸ Although Wiéner did not care much for the music that was played that evening, claiming – in reference to Schmitt's *Lumière* – that "naturally, there was a good dose of Saint-Saëns," he did feel that this democratic initiative, which took full advantage of recent technological progress, was a positive step for modern music. His review implied that if composers truly wanted to attract a mass audience, they could not remain trapped within traditional modes of musical production and reception, but rather should join the masses attending the Exposition around the Eiffel Tower. He concluded his article with a pointed suggestion:

³⁵ Nigel Simeone, "Music at the 1937 Exposition," 14-15.

³⁶ *Guide du concert* (Numéro spécial de l'Exposition 1937), back cover. Quoted in Nigel Simeone, "Music at the 1937 Exposition," 13, n. 22: "la plus sensationnelle réalisation musicale et scientifique de l'exposition 1937."

³⁷ R. Poursain, "Un nouvel art, va t-il naître ce soir?" *Ce Soir*, June 12, 1937.

³⁸ Jean Wiéner, "Réflexions sous la Tour Eiffel," *Ce Soir*, July 16, 1937. "Assis n'importe où, groupés ou solitaires, d'autres debout, pressés ou enlacés, des jeunes, des vieillards, des paquets de familles entières demeurèrent soudain muets, extraordinairement attentifs."

I cannot help to think, for example, about people like Darius Milhaud, like Georges Auric, about Poulenc, or about Jean Françaix [...] who would be so much more useful and happier on the Eiffel Tower than at all of the concerts given by the SICM [International Society for Contemporary Music] put together.³⁹

Auric himself, whose name had been overlooked for the *Fêtes*, agreed with Wiéner that, compared to the “new and excellent idea” of these outdoor auditions, the concerts of the SICM, where contemporary music was reserved for “an insignificant band of pedants and aesthetes,” were a “waste of time.”⁴⁰

Unfortunately, most of the eighteen scores written for the *Fêtes* are inaccessible and the 1937 recordings have not been made commercially available.⁴¹ One notable exception is Koechlin’s *Les Eaux vives*, op. 160, which was performed four times during the Exposition.⁴² Koechlin was obviously enthusiastic about this opportunity to write outdoor “music for the people” and wrote about the project to Paul Collaer on September 14, 1936, commenting that “it would be necessary to find something transparent, easily

³⁹ Jean Wiéner, “Réflexions sous la Tour Eiffel,” *Ce Soir*, July 16, 1937. “je ne peux pas m’empêcher de penser, par exemple, à un Darius Milhaud, un Georges Auric, à un Poulenc ou à un Jean Françaix, par exemple, qui seraient tellement plus utiles et plus heureux sur la Tour Eiffel qu’aux séances de toutes les SIMC du monde.”

⁴⁰ Georges Auric, “Fêtes de la Lumière,” *Marianne*, July 28, 1937.

⁴¹ Simeone discusses the recording of Vellones *Fête fantastique* which has been reissued by the Association Pierre Vellones. “Music at the 1937 Exposition,” 14-15.

⁴² The original recording was reissued in 1993 on a compact disc entitled “Roger Désormière conducts Charles Koechlin,” *The Classical Collector*, 150142. According to Simeone, Koechlin’s piece was performed on June 20, July 18, August 29 and September 26, 1937. “Music at the 1937 Exposition,” 12. Orledge claims that the June 20 performance did not take place, but that it was performed again on October 4. *Charles Koechlin*, 184, n. 31, 382. Unfortunately, the score has not been commercially released.

acceptable and joyous, which was free-flowing, but without involving any concessions. It offers an interesting opportunity to get outdoor music heard.”⁴³

Koechlin had long been an advocate of *musique en plein air* as a means of bringing music to the masses, particularly since the “revelation” of hearing Gabriel Fauré’s opera, *Prométhée*, at the gigantic open-air arena in Béziers in 1900.⁴⁴ *Prométhée* enjoyed a privileged status in Koechlin’s personal canon of works, and his 1927 biography of Fauré dwells upon this *tragédie lyrique* at considerable length.⁴⁵ In it, Koechlin praised *Prométhée* as a “popular” work, and claimed that its purity of style (exemplified through long melodic lines, broad orchestration and modally tinged harmonies) could serve as an antidote to the “*foire sur place*” and the “screaming sounds” (*tons gueulards*) of Les Six.⁴⁶ Later, in an article for *L’Humanité* published at the height of the Popular Front, Koechlin argued that outdoor works (like *Prométhée*) contain a “powerful and social inspiration” in the face of which, “entire throngs of people should be moved.”⁴⁷ As we have seen, however, by 1937 Koechlin’s attitude towards the “screaming sounds” of Les Six had considerably evolved. He had become much more receptive to their accomplishments and began to adopt a populist modernist position that appropriated many aspects of their lifestyle modernist approach. *Les Eaux vives* is a crucial work in this regard, because it combines two ostensibly incompatible positions (that of the graceful antiquity of *Prométhée* and the *foire sur place* of Les Six) in a work designed to attract a mass audience.

⁴³ Quoted in Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 176.

⁴⁴ Charles Koechlin, “Les tendances de la musique française,” *Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du conservatoire*, part 2, volume 1, ed. Lavignac and Laurencie, 125 (Paris: Delagrave, 1925).

⁴⁵ Charles Koechlin, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Editions d’aujourd’hui, 1983), 27-29, 127-141, 211-212.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 212-216.

⁴⁷ Charles Koechlin, “Musique savante...et populaire,” *L’Humanité*, September 6, 1936. “au souffle puissant et social du *Prométhée* de Gabriel Fauré des foules entières doivent s’émouvoir.”

Another striking element in this work is the influence of American movies of the 1930s. Koechlin's interest in the cinema began in 1933, a fascination manifest in one of his most oft-performed works, *The Seven Star's Symphony* – a musical homage to seven of his favourite movie actors. In many ways, his budding interest in the film industry during this period reflects his increasing aesthetic alignment with members of Les Six like Honegger, Milhaud and Auric, who had all taken a keen interest in the art form's artistic (and financial) potential. Koechlin experimented with various film projects – at one point even devising a scenario that cast himself as the leading man next to starlet Lilian Harvey.⁴⁸ In 1938, he managed to release a film score, and one that closely reflected his political sympathies: *Victoire de la vie* – a documentary designed to bolster French aid to Spanish republicans during the Spanish Civil War.⁴⁹

Les Eaux vives also shares this fascination with the silver screen. Cinema's reigning stars had a significant influence on the content of the composer's score, for as Robert Orledge has revealed, both Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire were important inspirational forces behind the work. Koechlin's work is formally organized in three large dance-inspired sections that are framed by an introduction and a series of meditative interludes. The first part of *Les Eaux vives* is dominated by a lightly, but masterfully orchestrated "Valse des eaux," which Koechlin describes as a "Fugue à la Ginger Rogers." Furthermore, the "Scherzo de la lumière," which precedes the luxuriously scored choral finale, was sketched on November 16, 1936, immediately after Koechlin saw Rogers and Astaire perform in the movie *Swing Time*.⁵⁰ These dance-inspired sections recall the light-hearted approach found in many of his works inspired by this

⁴⁸ On Koechlin's fascinating relationship with the cinema, see Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 157-184.

⁴⁹ Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 170.

⁵⁰ Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 175-176.

medium, especially the two *Albums pour Lilian*, op. 139 and 149, and the 7 *Chansons pour Gladys*, op. 151.

It may be argued that the interludes, on the other hand, are musically indebted to the influence of *Prométhée*, a work that Koechlin admired for its evocation of Ancient Greece, and its profoundly “popular” significance as an outdoor work written for a mass audience. The stark austerity with which *Les Eaux vives* begins is reminiscent of Fauré’s opening prelude to *Prométhée*. This atmosphere of Hellenic grace – such a key element in Koechlin’s own “outdoors” aesthetic – reappears in the serene interludes where the ondes martenots (which remain absent from the central dance episodes) are prominently featured.

In essence, Koechlin’s *Les Eaux vives* reveals the composer’s reconciliation of two different forms of “popular music” – music for film and music for the outdoors. Through the collision of musical elements inspired by lifestyle modernism, with the broader social values that outdoor music represented for Koechlin, *Les Eaux vives* stands as a striking example of populist modernism. In another way, *Les Eaux* can be seen as juxtaposing the popular dance world of Ginger Rogers and the “ivory tower” approach exemplified by works like Fauré’s *Prométhée*. In this regard, *Les Eaux vives* exemplifies Koechlin’s aesthetic position as outlined in Chapter 5; in this work, his belief that the “popular” and the “learned” could musically co-exist in works for the masses, is once again manifest.

Unlike the lifestyle modernism practiced by Les Six in the 1920s, which looked to cater to an elite audience, the works designed for the *Fêtes de la Lumière* at the 1937 Exposition were intended for vast audiences without distinction of class. This corresponds with the populist modernist aesthetic of the Popular Front, and it comes as no surprise that

it was the pro-Popular Front “Group 13/Class 71” that organized this experimental and highly successful event. Through its elaborate “machinery,” the *Fêtes* also represented the urban and technologically sophisticated side of modern France, and supplied a counterweight to the emphasis on French regionalism that was promoted in the early stages of the Exposition’s planning.

Liberté ?

The 1937 Exposition was also the site of two “collective,” government-funded theatrical productions intended to draw upon the enthusiasm surrounding “popular theatre” – triggered thanks to the revival of Rolland’s *Le 14 Juillet* in 1936. In 1937, the Popular Front government had put aside 270,000 francs in its budget for the “organization of popular performances”, and much of this money went to support two particularly audacious works that resonated with the government’s ideological vision: *Liberté* and *Naissance d’une cité*.⁵¹

According to Pascal Ory, the genesis of *Liberté* can be traced to the very top of the Popular Front power structure, for it was France’s prime minister (and former literary critic) Léon Blum, who conceived its over-riding theatrical premise.⁵² The work was initially intended to function as a dramatic and festive opener to the 1937 Exposition – a theatrical celebration that would, as the journal *Commune* remarked, portray “the French people’s march towards liberty.”⁵³ The collective approach adopted was even more ambitious than that employed for *Le 14 Juillet*: no individual author, but rather, fourteen different writers were called upon to dramatize key events and figures from French

⁵¹ Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion*, 406.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 406.

⁵³ Cited in Ory, 407.

history. Twelve composers were invited to supply incidental music to link the fourteen scenes, along with at least six designers and a troupe of actors (mainly amateurs) emanating from the ranks of the left-wing cultural organization, “Mai 36.”

The over-riding logic governing the work was that of pastiche, or even, as one critic later noted, that of a “noble music-hall revue.”⁵⁴ This “nobility” was expressed through the subject matter, which attempted to do nothing less than represent the Popular Front as the logical culmination of a “slow, difficult, but obstinate forward journey of the French people towards social emancipation.”⁵⁵ The work began with a theatrical depiction of the Commune de Laon (the revolt of a medieval peasant society against a repressive clergy), then extolled exceptional individuals who had risen up from humble origins (Jeanne d’Arc, Rabelais), then described the popular revolutions (1789, 1830, 1848, the Commune), and ended with the formation of the Popular Front in 1935. In the music for the final scene, Maurice Jaubert claimed, “the artisan and the worker will appear, symbolically represented, but easily recognizable.”⁵⁶ *Liberté* was a carefully orchestrated piece of political propaganda that looked to celebrate the cultural values of the Left and legitimize the political program of the Popular Front (figure 23).

⁵⁴ Cited in Le groupe Presse de Mai 36, “Liberté! La genèse du spectacle, l’accueil de la critique et du public,” *Mai 36* (May 1937): 2.

⁵⁵ Léon Ruth, “*Liberté*,” *Ce Soir*, May 3, 1937. “...le lent, ardu, mais obstiné acheminement du peuple français vers l’émancipation sociale.”

⁵⁶ Claude Chamfray, “Avant la première de *Liberté*,” *Beaux-Arts*, April 23, 1937. According to an interview by Jaubert in the article, “...j’ai donné à la grande chanson de cette dernière scène le caractère d’une vieille chanson française. L’artisan et l’ouvrier y apparaîtront, symboliquement représentés, mais facilement reconnaissables.”

Fig. 23: Composition of *Liberté*.⁵⁷

<u>Scene</u>	<u>Period</u>	<u>Authors</u>	<u>Musicians</u> ⁵⁸
<i>La Commune de Laon</i>	1112	Henri-René Lenormand	Darius Milhaud
<i>La Cathédral</i>	1180	Charles Vildrac	Robert Siohan
<i>Jeanne d'Arc</i>	1412-1431	Edmond Fleg	Alexis Roland-Manuel
<i>Rabelais</i>	1552	Marcel Aymé	Germaine Tailleferre
<i>Descartes et Pascal</i>	1648	Paul Demasy	Germaine Tailleferre
<i>Molière</i>	1670	Jean-Jacques Bernard	Germaine Tailleferre
<i>La première du</i> <i>"Mariage de Figaro"</i>	1784	Jean-Richard Bloch	Jacques Ibert
<i>Le serment de Jeu de paume</i>	1789	Charles Méré	Marcel Delannoy
Break			
<i>1830 or La barricade</i>	1830	Yvan Noé	Marcel Landowski
<i>1848 or La révolution de 1848</i>	1848	Lucien Besnard	Manuel Rosenthal
<i>Un dialogue sous la Commune</i>	1871	Tristan Bernard	Arthur Hoérée
<i>La charte d'Amiens</i>	1906	Henri Clerc	Daniel Lazarus
<i>La mort de Jaurès</i>	1914	Maurice Rostand	Arthur Honegger
<i>Le serment du 14 juillet 1935</i>	1935	Jacques Chabannes	Maurice Jaubert

As Ory has pointed out, many of the authors – indeed, the majority of them – were not prominent supporters of the Popular Front.⁵⁹ They were, as the journal *Le Populaire* remarked, “among the most representative” of the artists of the post-World War I generation.⁶⁰ For the Maison de la Culture, which oversaw the production of *Liberté*, gathering the “most representative artists” around this work was a strategic way of politically aligning them with the cultural agenda of the government. By having control over the form and performative context of *Liberté*, the organizers could risk inviting politically uncommitted figures to participate. In doing so, the Popular Front could artificially and symbolically enlarge the “cultural front” to include artists whose political beliefs were not necessarily resonant with its own. The grand theme of *Liberté* – an epic

⁵⁷ Compiled from two separate sources: Ory, *La belle illusion*, 407 and Alexandra Laederich, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre de Jacques Ibert* (Hildesheim, New York, Zurich: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998), 159.

⁵⁸ In “Avant la première de *Liberté*,” *Beaux-Arts*, April 23, 1937, Maurice Jaubert supplies slightly different information. Roland-Manuel is named as having written both “La Cathédrale” and “Jeanne d’Arc” whereas Siohan is purported to have written “La Commune,” thereby eliminating Hoérée from the tableau of composers.

⁵⁹ Ory, 407.

⁶⁰ Cited in Ory, 407.

celebration of France's social and artistic culture – could represent, after all, an enticing artistic project regardless of one's own political pre-dispositions. Marcel Aymé admitted that he had little in common with the Popular Front or Rabelais, and it is unlikely that authors like Fleg, Clerc, Bernard and Méré – best known in the world of the boulevard theatres – were drawn to their allotted subjects for *Liberté* on the basis of intense left-wing convictions. But the benefit to be gleaned by the Popular Front for including these personalities was significant: a person on the street was probably unaware that Aymé had signed a pro-Italian manifesto in 1935, but his involvement in *Liberté* explicitly placed him (however tenuously) in the Popular Front camp.⁶¹ Such was the political strength of these government commissions: political wills could be manipulated through the lure of prestige and financial gain.

But this strategy had the potential to backfire, and in this particular case, it was exactly an overriding sense of disunity that was blamed for the work's failure. Darius Milhaud later claimed that the initial idea “was beautiful and touching, but its realization was sinister, hybrid, without unity.”⁶² Some critics denounced the work because they felt it had been “made to order” and that government intervention was too heavily apparent.⁶³ Pro-fascist writer Robert Brasillach saw the piece as a deliberate fabrication of history, and referred to its authors as “delirious pawns who use the red flag like it's a chalk eraser.”⁶⁴ Even Popular Front supporters like André Chamson felt uneasy with the values inscribed in this work, writing of his discomfort with seeing France's history presented in

⁶¹ Ory, 407.

⁶² Darius Milhaud, *Ma Vie heureuse* (Paris: Belfond, 1973), 200.

⁶³ Le groupe Presse de Mai 36, “Liberté! La genèse du spectacle, l'accueil de la critique et du public,” *Mai 36* (May 1937): 2.

⁶⁴ Robert Brasillach, “Les spectacles: théâtre de masses,” *La Revue universelle* (May 15, 1937): 508.

this manner.⁶⁵ For Henri Lenormand, the author of “La Commune de Laon,” *Liberté* laid bare the pitfalls of politically oriented theatrical production.⁶⁶

Few critics bothered to comment on the music at all. The most detailed account was written by Raoul Brunel and appeared in *L'Oeuvre*. It supplied concise descriptions of most of the contributions. Ibert's work was described as “a few lively measures, light runs in the violins and flutes, which, without falling into the trap of imitating Mozart, evoked the futile grace of that period.” Honegger's piece contained “noble and pure emotion” while Milhaud's work juxtaposed flutes and cellos accompanied by “sinister pounding on the bass drum.” Roland-Manuel's accompaniment was highly praised for being “very musical, moving and soberly orchestrated.” It contained “popular songs that were probably medieval” and was the “great success of the evening.” Other composers drew upon revolutionary sources: Delannoy combined “somewhat chaotically” the *Chant du Départ* and *La Marseillaise* while Lazarus had the *Internationale* hummed from off-stage. The finale, composed by Maurice Jaubert, included “rounds and popular songs” that had a “very gracious effect.”⁶⁷ Despite this rare and tantalizing description, none of the numerous documents relating to *Liberté* are currently available. Presumably, in light of the work's dismal failure, it was quickly forgotten and its contents relegated to the drawer. Unlike *Le 14 Juillet*, which fed off of genuine popular enthusiasm, *Liberté* was not perceived as liberating, but rather as an overt act of political propaganda.

⁶⁵ André Chamson, “Un bel effort manqué,” *Vendredi*, May 7, 1937.

⁶⁶ Henri Lenormand, *Les confessions d'un auteur dramatique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1953), 223.

⁶⁷ Raoul Brunel, “*Liberté*,” *L'Oeuvre*, May 7, 1936.

Naissance d'une cité

Liberté was not initially intended to inaugurate the 1937 Exposition. This honour had been originally reserved for Jean-Richard Bloch's play, *Naissance d'une cité*, the first performance of which was planned to take place at the Grand Palais. Programs were even printed to this effect as the performance dates of May 22nd and 29th approached.⁶⁸ Ultimately, however, the work did not receive its première until October 18th, and at a completely different venue – the “Palais des Sports” of the Exposition, familiarly known as the Vélodrome d'hiver.

Jean-Richard Bloch's work, despite its lack of popular success, exemplifies in many ways the populist modernist aesthetic that guided the artistic vision of the Popular Front. *Naissance d'une cité* dramatically engaged with the “everyday,” and these stimuli were used in the service of a coherent political message. Furthermore, the play marshalled a vast collective effort that symbolically represented a unified “cultural front,” a feature that had come to define the aesthetic strategy of the Left during this period. In *Naissance*, Bloch demonstrates his indebtedness to avant-garde theatre of the early 1920s. Here, he expands upon certain theatrical techniques introduced in the early 1920s, not only to reflect modern day technological developments – particularly in the medium of film – but also to accommodate the gigantic scope of this iconoclastic *spectacle de masse*.

Jean-Richard Bloch (1884-1947), like his close friend Romain Rolland, had been involved in the French socialist movement since the years preceding World War I. He sympathetically endorsed the failed Bolshevik revolution of 1905, and in 1910 established

⁶⁸ Jane F. Fulcher asserts that the performances at the Grand Palais actually took place (*The Composer as Intellectual*, 238). Pascal Ory's account supplies information on why those performances were postponed (*La belle illusion*, 409). The Grand Palais program may be found in the *fonds* Jean-Richard Bloch (Bibliothèque Nationale – manuscripts), microfilm 4190, ff. 138.

a journal in Poitiers, entitled *l'Effort*, in which he exposed his nascent ideas about revolutionary art. Following the First World War (in which he was injured on three separate occasions), he drew close to the French Socialist Party and ultimately voted in favour of the formation of the French Communist Party at the Congress in Tours in 1920. He was implicated throughout the interwar period in a number of important left-wing publications, including the daily *Ce Soir* (of which he was the co-director between 1937 and 1939) and the journal *Europe*. He entered the AEAR as a fellow traveler in 1935, and was an extremely prominent anti-fascist intellectual throughout the Popular Front period and during the Second World War when he lived in Moscow as a political refugee.⁶⁹

Bloch began work on *Naissance d'une cité* in 1933. Between that year and its performance in 1937, the project underwent a number of modifications and name changes ("La Journée d'un homme," "Homme 1934," "Construction d'une cité," "Construction d'un pays").⁷⁰ According to archival documents, the author had considered producing the work at the Vélodrome d'Hiver as early as 1933, and by the summer, had already initiated correspondence with Honegger and Milhaud with the intent of securing their musical participation. Milhaud was immediately enthusiastic about the project, and wrote that he was pleased "it [was] beginning with such breadth."⁷¹ During the same period, Bloch decided to label the work a "*mouvement*," as opposed to a "*mouvement dramatique*," and explained to his brother, Pierre Abraham, the advantages of this nomenclature: "It's

⁶⁹ For this paragraph I have relied on the biographical notice by Nicole Racine, *Dictionnaire bibliographique du mouvement ouvrier français*, vol. 44, edited by Claude Penetier (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 1997).

⁷⁰ See the *fonds* Jean-Richard Bloch (Bibliothèque Nationale – manuscripts), microfilm 4190, ff. 152 and in a letter to Pierre Abraham (August 3, 1933), ff. 202. The title "Construction d'une cité" and "Construction d'un pays" appeared in articles in *L'Humanité* in late 1936.

⁷¹ Letter from Darius Milhaud to Jean-Richard Bloch (August 22, 1933), *fonds* J.R. Bloch (*Correspondance*), Tome XXXIV: "Je suis ravi parce que je trouve que ça démarre avec beaucoup de largeur."

simple, it's short, it's enigmatic, it's plastic, it's promotional, it makes a poster, it doesn't mean anything, and it moves. It doesn't really mean anything, in other words, it means everything."⁷²

As Bloch explains in the "Quelques indications" which precede the definitive text of *Naissance*, the work was conceived as a "total spectacle" to be performed in a vast arena in front of a massive audience.⁷³ Bloch aimed to reflect the everyday habits, desires, and oppression of the modern masses – "dance, music, sport, competition, athletics, social life, professional activities, public meetings" – around a central dramatic (and politically didactic) theme.⁷⁴ For Bloch's project, the huge Vélodrome was not to be equipped with a fixed central stage, but rather a number of "mobile decors" containing identical sets that would be placed throughout the centre of the arena, thus allowing the action to be visible to all spectators. These mobile sets would be brought on and off the central area of the Vélodrome by a group of actors dressed in neutral colours, whom Bloch referred to as "companions" (*compagnons*). Their movements would be regulated by an artistic procedure "borrowed from Japanese *Noh* theatre and the European circus," and would constitute a "type of essential ballet," performed with "great simplicity, economy and seriousness," and with "a profound sense of the rhythm of collective effort."⁷⁵

Given the dimensions of the Vélodrome, where the actors would appear to some spectators as small as "an insect or a bean," *Naissance d'une cité* only sparingly

⁷² Letter from Jean-Richard Bloch to Pierre Abraham (August 20, 1933), *fonds* Jean-Richard Bloch (Bibliothèque Nationale – manuscripts), microfilm 4190, ff. 204: "C'est simple, c'est bref, c'est énigmatique, c'est plastique, c'est publicitaire, ça fait une affiche, ça ne veut rien dire, et ça bouge. Ça ne veut rien bien dire, c'est à dire que ça veut tout dire."

⁷³ Jean-Richard Bloch, "Quelques indications de l'auteur pour la représentation de *Naissance d'une Cité*," in Jean Albertini, *Avez-vous lu Jean-Richard Bloch?* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1981), 217.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

employed individual spoken parts.⁷⁶ Bloch claimed that “individual emotion, whether psychological or passionate, must be avoided” because it would not be easily felt or understood by the mass of spectators. Rather, choreographed pantomimes executed by large groups of actors placed on the mobile sets would illustrate the action. At times, these groups, or “choirs,” would punctuate the drama with “exclamations, cries and protestations.”⁷⁷

The main text would be communicated then, not by the actors, but by “a new force, lyric emanation of science – a being which is at once enigmatic and popular, a myth born before our eyes – the radio announcer.”⁷⁸ The voice of the announcer (or as Bloch preferred, “The Speaker” [*Le Parleur*]) was broadcast over loudspeakers and the role was fulfilled by three different vocal types, corresponding to soprano, tenor and bass. This “voice of the modern world” was only one sonic element in what the author referred to as “veritable *opéra populaire*, sportive, social, industrial, gymnastic, legendary...”

The musical contribution was also extremely important and included a sort of incidental music that was composed not only of conventional musical elements – symphonic interludes, fanfares, mimetic depictions of nature, etc. – but also of car horns, sirens, accordions, alarm clocks, electronic noises and machine-gun fire. Bloch also called for musical “numbers” – songs and dance movements – that did not fulfill an accompanimental role, but rather temporarily became the primary focus of dramatic interest.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 218.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.: “...une force nouvelle, émanation lyrique de la science, être à la fois énigmatique et populaire, mythe né sous nos yeux – le speaker de la Radio – ou, pour mieux dire, et parler français: *le Parleur*.”

Montage Theatre

Naissance d'une cité drew upon many different aspects of avant-garde European theatre, not least of all the recent experimental theatrical projects mounted at the Baden-Baden festival (like Brecht's radio-play *Der Flug der Lindberghs* (1929), with music by Hindemith and Weill) and the simultaneous use of multiple forms of media made popular by theatre directors such as Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator. Indeed, in 1933 Bloch hoped that Reinhardt would direct the Vélodrome production of *Naissance*, but when he learnt of his unavailability, asked Pierre Abraham to attempt to secure the participation of Georg Pabst (the director of the widely successful 1931 film version of the Brecht/Weill *Threepenny Opera*), or "other Central European directors that were exiled in France."⁷⁹

Although Bloch was obviously inspired by the theatrical developments (both in conventional theatre and the cinema) in Germany and the Soviet Union, *Naissance* also owes a significant debt to French theatre of the 1920s. I believe that *Naissance* represents an audacious re-interpretation of 1920's lifestyle modernism and by extension, one of the most spectacular examples of French populist modernism of the 1930s. In *Naissance*, Bloch emulates works like Cocteau's *Parade* (1917) (particularly its collage-like combination of every-day elements) by employing contemporary cinematographic montage techniques. Rather than creating a surrealist work in which a confusion of elements play out simultaneously on stage, Bloch, as we shall see below, orders his theatrical narrative with the help of cinematically-derived montage effects that involve the linear juxtaposition of disparate everyday images and sounds.

⁷⁹ Letter from Jean-Richard Bloch to Pierre Abraham (Summer solstice, 1933), *fonds* Jean-Richard Bloch (Bibliothèque Nationale – manuscripts), microfilm 4190, ff. 200.

Bloch's play depicts scenes in the life of a factory worker – from his brutal awakening at the sound of his alarm-clock in his mansard, to the café where he has his breakfast, to the subway train that he rides to the factory, and ultimately to the deadening monotony of the factory line itself. Once the workers arrive at the factory, they are split into groups of men and women. The men work together in the assembly of an automobile, while the women adorn a plastic mannequin with new clothing and accessories. Once their work is complete, the Speaker announces that the factory's production lines will cease due to the drop in prices these goods have experienced on the international market. The workers are ordered to leave their stations and the automobile and clothing that have just been manufactured are destroyed. The jobs of workers throughout the world are deemed to be in jeopardy and political tensions rise. As the workers attempt to join together in growing solidarity, battalions of police with machineguns overlook their every move. The workers decide to leave and forge a new colony on a distant island. They quickly begin to construct the perfect city, and soon discover important reserves of oil. This important news is broadcast throughout the world and the island is immediately attacked by oil-thirsty capitalist regimes. As the workers rise to defend themselves from an army of soldiers armed with machineguns, the League of Nations declares that natural resources should not be used for the profit of a few individuals, but rather should "benefit the entire community of man."⁸⁰ To this phenomenal news, an elaborate *fête populaire* erupts that integrates song and dance, trapeze artists, wrestling matches, foot and bicycle races, dancing girls, ballerinas, young athletes, clowns, and finally, music that successively accelerates so that "the *adagio* turns to *allegretto*, then *allegro* then *vivace*"

⁸⁰ Jean-Richard Bloch, *Naissance d'une Cité* in Albertini, *Avez-vous lu Jean-Richard Bloch?*, 270.

and which, when joined by an enormous popular choir, becomes “superhuman” and “triumphant.”⁸¹

Bloch was not pleased with this “happy ending.” The idea of a *fête finale* (which depended upon an implausibly optimistic turn in the scenario) was only “necessitated,” according to Bloch, by the festive mood of the Exposition.⁸² Perhaps the Popular Front government, which was single-handedly financing the project, was also keen on maintaining a celebratory atmosphere in the style of *Le 14 Juillet*.⁸³ In any case, Bloch had initially conceived of *Naissance* as “an end without hope,” and originally envisaged a pessimistic denouement: following the attack on the island, the opening scenes that illustrate the worker’s morning routine would be recapitulated, thus emphasizing the inevitable cycle of despair produced by the capitalist enslavement of the working class.⁸⁴

The cut-and-paste effect caused by the exact repetition of events in Bloch’s “end without hope” gives us a sense of the over-riding theatrical technique employed throughout *Naissance*. For despite the linear description of the scenario that I have provided above, the play’s temporal development thwarts traditional narrative strategies by adopting a mode of presentation indebted to cinematographic montage. An abridged description of the scenic and musical directions for Scene IV, which depicts the workers at their posts on the factory assembly line, supplies a vivid example of this technique (figure 24).

⁸¹ Ibid., 272.

⁸² Ibid., 221.

⁸³ As Pascal Ory reveals, citing Exposition archives, the government funding allocated to the Maison de la Culture for cultural activities during the Exposition was 600,000 francs, more than five times the amount allocated for *Le 14 Juillet* in 1936. *La belle illusion*, 932, n. 472.

⁸⁴ Jean-Richard Bloch, *Naissance d’une Cité* in Albertini, *Avez-vous lu Jean-Richard Bloch?*, 220.

Fig. 24. *Naissance d'une Cité*, Scene IV – abridged stage directions.⁸⁵

- No. 1: Siren. Workers form a line. Fanfare.
No. 2: Whistles. Workers take their spots on the construction line. Work begins.
No. 3: First “Speaker” (with a deep and calm voice, without musical accompaniment).
No. 4: Whistle. Violent music. Workers advance to the next spot on construction line.
No. 5: First “Speaker” (in the same tone as No. 3).
No. 6: Same as No. 4.
No. 7: First “Speaker” (same indication as No. 5).
No. 8: Same as No. 4.
No. 9: First “Speaker” (same indication as No. 5).
No. 10: Same as No. 4.
No. 11: First “Speaker” (same indication as No. 5).
No. 12: Second “Speaker” (with a bursting and passionate voice, accompanied by music). First “Speaker” (more animated than No. 5). Second “Speaker” (more and more passionate, accompanied by music).
No. 13: First “Speaker” (in a loud voice).
No. 14: Same as No. 4.
No. 15: Music.
No. 16: Silence. First “Speaker” (subdued). Spoken chorus. First “Speaker” (voice dies out).
No. 17: Music. Female “Speaker.” Noise of an automobile being destroyed. Spoken Chorus.
No. 18: Silence. Siren.

Scene IV draws upon two distinct forms of montage, both indebted to the techniques of Soviet montage cinema, made famous in the 1920s by directors like Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) and Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893-1953). Eisenstein’s “intellectual montage” or “discontinuity editing” is one that employs a succession of highly contrasting images, whereas Pudovkin’s relied on a form of “linkage editing” in which individual shots were used to build up coherent scenes.⁸⁶ These directors used montage techniques most explicitly in artistic propaganda films, which, like Bloch’s *Naissance*, extolled the ideals of a proletarian revolution.⁸⁷ Although montage techniques are generally more difficult to employ in traditional theatre, Bloch’s use of a sequence of theatrical “numbers” (akin to music-hall practice) in an unconventional dramatic space,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 237-242.

⁸⁶ On Eisenstein’s technique see his “The Montage of Film Attractions” in *The Eisenstein Reader*, edited by Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 35-52.

⁸⁷ Most notable among these are Eisenstein’s *Strike* (1924) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) along with Pudovkin’s *The Mother* (1926) and *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927).

lends itself to the (relatively) quick juxtaposition of precise images, in a manner reminiscent of both these techniques

The Sounds of Populist Modernism

As figure 24 illustrates, music is an essential element in Bloch's montage sequences, and emphasizes elements of discontinuity (through the rapid changes from violent music to silence) and creates a sense of large-scale continuity throughout the entire scene (through the repetition of "violent" music, as well as the strategic use of whistles and sirens). Although Milhaud and Honegger supplied "songs" for *Naissance*, the significance of which I will examine below, the incidental and ambient music featured throughout the work was the creation of Jean Wiéner and Roger Désormière. As the 1937 premiere at the Vélodrome approached, Milhaud informed Bloch that neither Honegger nor himself had time to write this score, and recommended "a film specialist familiar with these types of gymnastics," adding that they "believe[d] [that] the Wiéner-Désormière team would be excellent for this."⁸⁸

It is unfortunate that their score is not publicly available, because, as Wiéner's memoirs reveal, Bloch's play constituted a formative influence on the development of the composer's political thought.⁸⁹ Wiéner claimed that *Naissance* represented his first substantial contact with Communist intellectuals. He "was in complete accord" with their political position and recalled that the experience ultimately prompted him to begin

⁸⁸ Letter from Darius Milhaud to Jean-Richard Bloch (s.d., probably late 1936 or early 1937). *Fonds Jean-Richard Bloch, Correspondance*, Tome XXXIV. "Un spécialiste du film habitué à ces gymnastiques serait souhaitable et l'équipe Wiéner-Désormière nous paraîtrait excellente pour cela."

⁸⁹ Jean Wiéner, *Allegro appassionata* (Paris: Belfond, 1978), 148.

contributing articles to the left-wing daily, *Ce Soir*.⁹⁰ According to various accounts, Wiéner and Désormière's score represents a panoply of diverse musical effects: for composer Gabriel Grovlez, the music sounded "very Russian" at times, while at others, the duo supplied fanfares, marches, popular refrains, fragments of symphonic works, national anthems, and a profusion of different noises both natural and electronic.⁹¹

This mélange of styles and genres recalls Wiéner's own innovative "concert-salades" from the early 1920s, at a time when both he and Désormière were close to Erik Satie. Wiéner had been a prominent supporter of the "velvet gentleman," and Désormière, a former pupil of Koechlin, was a member of Satie's informal *École d'Arcueil*.⁹² These connections are noteworthy because the musical indications for *Naissance* (as established by Bloch) are reminiscent of the type of musical atmosphere created by Satie in his influential ballet, *Parade*. In that work, Satie (encouraged by Cocteau) supplied background noises (pistol shots, typewriter clicking, sirens, "sound-puddles," and even a lottery wheel) as a form of modern-day acoustical accompaniment to the rest of the traditionally orchestrated score. As we have seen, such modern-day noises also play a crucial role in *Naissance*. Unlike *Parade*, where they participated in creating (as Daniel Albright has argued) a surrealist collage of aural material, the sirens and gunshots in *Naissance* contributed to the explicitly political discourse at the heart of Bloch's work.⁹³ Wiéner and Désormière's sirens and gunshots do not serve the same aesthetic function as the "suggestive noises" did for Cocteau's scenario; rather they stand for the actual

⁹⁰ Ibid., 157.

⁹¹ Gabriel Grovlez, review of *Naissance d'une Cité*, dossier d'auteur, *fonds Rondel 52689* (II), Bibliothèque Nationale, and Ory, *La belle illusion*, 330.

⁹² Reference to Satie as the "velvet gentleman" was coined by Georges Auriol, *Revue musicale* (March 1924), 208-216.

⁹³ Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 209.

soundscape of the modern worker.⁹⁴ Here, the “everyday” was not conjured up out of faddishness for a bourgeois audience; rather it mirrored the world of the worker for an audience of workers – an aural evocation that speaks to the heart of the populist modernist aesthetic.⁹⁵

Bloch’s interest in recreating this everyday sound world is also confirmed by his revolutionary use of the human voice. Apart from his “Speakers,” which imitate the modern amplified voice of the radio announcer, Bloch employs many “spoken choirs” in his work, an important characteristic of proletarian political groups including the Groupe Octobre and the Fédération du Théâtre Ouvrier – a reference which would not have been lost on his audience.⁹⁶ For example, the second “number” in Scene V, while also constructed along the lines of cinematographic montage, employs elaborate effects of choral antiphony (figure 25).

Fig. 25. *Naissance d’une Cité*, Scene V, No. 2.⁹⁷

First Speaker:	Carpentier...
	Marcel Thil...
	Rigoulot...
	Ladoumègue...
A Voice from spoken choir:	Delgane...Borotra
First half-choir (with brilliance):	...will win...
Second half-choir (violently):	...will not win...
First half-choir:	...will win...
Second half-choir:	Lacoste...Destremeau.
First half-choir (with despair):	Davis Cup. Davis Cup!
An isolated voice:	Injustice...Injustice...
Another voice:	Cochet! Cochet!
First half-choir:	The large gears...
Second half-choir:	“Tour de France”...
First half-choir:	By teams...

⁹⁴ Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l’arlequin*, 37.

⁹⁵ Unfortunately, Wiéner and Désormière’s score remains unaccounted for, despite my ongoing research. I would like to acknowledge the enthusiastic help offered by Lisa Aguirre, grand-daughter of Jean-Richard Bloch, in attempting to locate it.

⁹⁶ These “choirs” were performed by the Chorale of the Fédération Musicale Populaire under the direction of Peters-Rosset.

⁹⁷ Jean-Richard Bloch, *Naissance d’une Cité* in Jean Albertini, *Avez-vous lu Jean-Richard Bloch?* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1981), 243.

Second half-choir:	Olympic Games...
First half-choir:	In Berlin...

Here, the references to celebrated athletes and the upcoming Olympic Games in Berlin further situate the work within the context of the everyday. Not surprisingly, this feature extended to many scenic elements, not least of which was a stylized metro car that a crowd of workers take to work, each with their favourite (left-wing) newspaper opened out in front of them. Fernand Léger, who designed these sets, explained to an interviewer that his contribution also involved creating “a tower over fourteen metres high, a veritable bistro...as well as a boat on which [the popular duettists] Gilles et Julien [would] sing.”⁹⁸

The Musical Everyday: *Chanson Realiste*

This obsession with the politicized everyday also extended to the musical contributions of Milhaud and Honegger. In a review of *Naissance*, Louis Aragon commented that in “the songs of Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, which were sung in such a poignant manner by Jeanne Pierly, there is a sort of triumph of the street song, a type of apotheosis of the refrains of the paving stone.”⁹⁹ Milhaud and Honegger composed two songs each for *Naissance*, and these were sung directly on stage – though surely amplified – and constituted theatrical “numbers” in their own right.¹⁰⁰ For these

⁹⁸ Jean-Marc Champagne, “Avec Fernand Léger,” *Marianne*, October 13, 1937. “On verra entre autres une tour de quatorze metres de haut, un véritable bistro, une course cycliste et jusqu’au métropolitain avec cent voyageurs lisant leur journal. On verra aussi une promenade dans un bateau sur lequel chanteront Gilles et Julien.” Milhaud later fondly reminisced about these scenic effects in “Mélancolie,” *Europe* 135-136 (March-April, 1957): 42.

⁹⁹ Louis Aragon, review of *Naissance d’une Cité*, Fonds Jean-Richard Bloch (Cahiers – coupures de presse, *Naissance d’une cité*, Carton II): “les chansons de Darius Milhaud et Arthur Honegger que chante d’une façon poignante Jeanne Pierly, il y a là comme un triomphe de la chanson des rues, une espèce d’apothéose des rengaines du pavé.”

¹⁰⁰ Milhaud wrote “Chanson du capitaine” and “Java de la femme”, Honegger contributed “Chanson des quatre” and “Chanson de l’émigrant.”

pieces, the two composers drew upon the vibrant popular tradition of *chanson réaliste*. Their songs were not merely imitations of popular entertainment, but rather complied with the generic expectations and the overall character of the *chanson réaliste* repertory.

As René Baudelaire has outlined, by the late 1930s, *chanson réaliste* – initially a phenomenon of the streets and the café-concert – had “graduated” to the music-hall where it was performed by celebrities like Mistinguette, Lys Gauty, Marianne Oswald and Edith Piaf.¹⁰¹ Piaf is no doubt the most famous voice of the *chanson réaliste* and her interpretations of classic songs like “Mon Légionnaire” propelled her to international stardom. Born in the working-class district of Belleville, the hardships that she endured as a child in a milieu overrun by prostitution and drug abuse shaped her public persona and her close identification with the *chanson réaliste* genre. In 1935, the “kid” Piaf was “discovered” on a Parisian sidewalk, where she sang songs about the downtrodden in return for charity from passing pedestrians. Her style of vocal delivery, as well as the themes that dominated her songs, were all part of the vibrant tradition of *chanson réaliste* popularized by stars such as Fréhel, Damia, Marie Dubas, and Yvonne George.

The *chanson réaliste* is the genre of the social outcast. Its locales are dark street corners, lonely docks, and train stations – the milieu of transitory figures like prostitutes, vagabonds, and criminals. These songs express the difficulty of life and an overwhelming despair, expressed in language that is often dark, but disarmingly sincere.¹⁰² *Chansons réalistes* adopt the idiosyncrasies of popular verbal expression, a trait that can be viewed in the opening lines to Honegger’s *Chanson des quatre* (figure 26).

¹⁰¹ René Baudelaire, *La Chanson réaliste* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 37. Lys Gauty and Marianne Oswald were also important in popularizing songs from Kurt Weill’s *Three-Penny Opera* in France during the early 1930s.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Fig. 26. *Naissance d'une Cité*, "Chanson des quatre." Scene II, No. 4.¹⁰³

Un, deux, trois et quat'...
Ils étaient trois à m'faire du plat.
L'premier était un gros costaud:
"J'suis bistro, j'vends aux mecs l'oubli,
L'espoir aux gonzesses, c'est l'boulot..."

One, two, three and four
There were three who chatted me up.
The first was a big, strapping man:
"I've got a bar, I sell guys oblivion,
Hope to chicks, that's the job..."

The elision of vowels (*l'premier, m'faire, j'vends*) as well as the use of the vocabulary of the streets (*mecs, gonzesses, boulot*) is an indispensable trait of the *chanson réaliste*. Honegger's song is found in Scene II of *Naissance* (No. 4) as the workers have their early morning breakfast at the bistrot. The "Speaker" introduces the scene:

...a human heart can not go without music. The puerile song is its cry, its prayer.

Enter the accordion; enter the naïve orchestra of the sailor, the vagabond, the men from the battery, whose spirit is the voice of our melancholy.¹⁰⁴

Reflecting *chanson réaliste* practice, Bloch indicates that the singer should have an "acidic voice" (*voix acide*) and that her pronunciation should be "hammered out" (*martelée*).¹⁰⁵ Honegger's song with its repetitive verses, memorable melody and accordion refrain atop a popular waltz rhythm (*java*), is an excellent example of the musical characteristics of the *chanson réaliste* tradition (example 7.2).

¹⁰³ Jean-Richard Bloch, *Naissance d'une Cité* in Jean Albertini, *Avez-vous lu Jean-Richard Bloch?* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1981), 228.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 228.

¹⁰⁵ This is reminiscent of the use of the voice in the important Weill/Brecht collaborations in which Lotte Lenya's voice and manner of delivery was favoured for its alienating effect.

Ex. 7.2. Arthur Honegger, *Chanson des quatre*, mm. 1-16.

Mouvement de Java

Un, deux, trois et quat'... Ils ét-aient trois à m'faire du plat.

The same can be said of Milhaud's "Chanson du Capitaine," sung by the ship captain and one of the workers as they sail towards the new colony (example 7.3).

Ex. 7.3. Darius Milhaud, *Chanson du Capitaine*, mm. 1-13.

Modéré

Ce paqu' - bot ci s'ap - pell' La Ju lie Et moi Fé lix, je vais vous
Na - yant ja-mais pu cor-ri - ger la jo-lie J'ai pris le par-ti de me pay

en dir' le pour-quoi J'y ai don - né le nom de la mi-gnon - ne Qui m'a fait en - ra -
 er sur le mond' Tant pis pour vous, fal-lait pas que jé-pous' la Ju - lie C'est ça qui m'a fait le franc sa-
 ger tou-te ma vie. Peu m'im-por - te Que m'im-por - te Ça m'est tout un
 laud que je suis.

This duet was performed by Gilles et Julien, a widely popular duo who became famous during the Popular Front for their controversial songs (like the anti-capitalist *Dollar*) which were admired by the Left for their trenchant social critique. They were affiliated with the Maison de la Culture, and performed frequently at left-wing rallies. Some of their songs, like the topical *Chanson des Loisirs*, were published by the FMP through its primary publishing house, the Editions Sociales Internationales.

Milhaud and Honegger's songs, as well as the musical contributions of Wiéner and Désormière, all partake in the aesthetic of populist modernism. Taking their cues from Bloch's explicitly political text, they experimented with the genres and sounds of the every-day. As former members of Les Six, Honegger and Milhaud were familiar with these approaches, but in the context of Bloch's play, their goal was less to assimilate aspects of "popular" expression in an "elite" musical context, than to actually write

unambiguously popular music – in this case four *chansons réalistes* – for the mass audience at the Vélodrome d’hiver.

Such an experiment did not go without its risks. The young René Leibowitz, recognizing in Désormière and Wiéner’s score the influence of the 1920s, found that it copied a style, with its noises and machines, which “was a little bit worn.”¹⁰⁶ In his adjudication of the contributions of Milhaud and Honegger, Leibowitz was appalled and disturbed:

...as for the “lyrics” of Milhaud and Honegger, I have a lot of difficulty believing that those miserable accordion interludes and the sickly sweet melodies during the scene with the boat constituted the participation of these two important musicians. How somebody like Milhaud – the author of *Choéphores* and even more recently of marvellous choral works based on texts by Ronsard – how Honegger – who with *Horace Victorieux*, *Pacifique*, etc. has risen to the top rank of today’s composers – how did these two musicians allow themselves to be carried along to write such ditties of which any boulevard composer would be capable? There is something in this that is very troubling and which seems to compromise all artistic activity of today.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ René Leibowitz, “Naissance d’une Cité,” *Esprit*, November 1, 1937. “une simple musique descriptive d’un genre quelque peu usé (bruits, machines, etc.)...”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. “. . . quant aux ‘lyrics’ de Milhaud et de Honegger, j’ai eu beaucoup de peine à croire que c’étaient ces misérables intermèdes d’accordéon et ces mélodies doucereuses de la scène du navire, qui résumaient la collaboration de ces deux grands Musiciens. Comment un Milhaud, auteur des *Choéphores* et encore tout récemment de ces merveilleux chœurs d’après Ronsard, comment Honegger, qui avec *Horace Victorieux*, *Pacifique*, etc., était monté au premier rang des compositeurs actuels, comment ces deux Musiciens ont-ils pu se laisser entraîner à écrire de semblables musiquettes, que n’importe quel compositeur de Boulevard saurait leur disputer? Il y a là un fait très troublant qui semble compromettre toute l’activité artistique de nos jours.”

Evidently for Leibowitz, there was much to be lost through a complete collapse of the ostensible boundaries separating “elite” and “popular” expression. He was not the only critic to pounce. Predictably, the Right tore into Jean-Richard Bloch, calling him “one of the rare, stupid Jews we know who thinks he can offer the people a “total” spectacle.”¹⁰⁸ The critic for *Figaro* wondered:

Is it possible that the political virus can corrupt judgment and taste to such a point? I don’t know anything more painful than this somber masquerade. It is almost offensive. When will we be spared, O Lord, this “educational” dramaturgy?¹⁰⁹

Despite criticism such as this, however, we have seen that these boundaries were consistently blurred in the artistic projects sponsored by the Popular Front at the 1937 Exposition. On an unprecedented scale, artists sympathetic to the ideals of the government, experimented with integrating modern-day elements in their music – often drawn from the everyday world of mass entertainment, like the cinema and the *chanson* – in order to express, or at least symbolically reinforce, a left-wing political position. These artistic ventures – particularly *Les Fêtes de la Lumière* and *Naissance d’une cité* – aimed to reach truly massive audiences. Whereas *Les Fêtes* were subtly inscribed by left-wing ideals through the integration of technology, urban space, and non-hierarchical modes of presentation, *Naissance d’une cité* explicitly channeled left-wing ideals through a radical *mise-en-scène* that incorporated some of the most important traits of populist modernism.

¹⁰⁸ Lucien Rebatet, *Je suis partout*, October 29, 1937. Cited in Chantal Meyer, “L’échec de *Naissance d’une cité*: les critiques d’une utopie,” *Études Jean-Richard Bloch* 2 (2005): 68-69.

¹⁰⁹ Pierre Brisson, *Le Figaro*, October 24, 1937. Cited in Meyer, “L’échec de *Naissance d’une cité*,” 69.

Here, the lifestyle modernism of the 1920s was re-cast through the lens of a coherent politicized aesthetic, one that combined “popular” sources and “avant-garde” theatrical approaches in an attempt to bring modern art into the world of the working masses. In many ways, *Naissance d'une cité* was the Popular Front's most extraordinary celebration of populist modernism. Although it suffered a fate common to many of the works discussed in this dissertation, Bloch's play was the result of a collective creative “illusion” that strove for a future based on equality and peace for humankind.

Conclusion

Historian Serge Bernstein has attributed the fall of the Popular Front government to three primary factors.¹ First, despite pleas for national unity, tensions between the Right and Left continued to escalate throughout the Popular Front period. Blum's presence at the head of the government was met with anti-Semitic criticism from within the Chambre des Députés. The right-wing press, which was particularly vitriolic in its treatment of him, helped further fuel mounting xenophobia within the country. Moreover, the Right employed fear-mongering tactics by claiming that the presence of the Communists in the government could lead to an imminent "Bolshevik" takeover of the country. Far from having disappeared from French life, the fascist leagues (such as Colonel de Rocque's Croix-de-Feu), re-organized themselves into legitimate political parties, thus consolidating their political power.

Second, Blum had trouble keeping his coalition partners happy. The Communist Party was disappointed with the moderate nature of many of the Popular Front reforms. Its main source of contention was the government's attitude towards the civil war in Spain. Blum's decision (in the face of British pressure) to forgo sending military material and personnel to assist the Spanish Popular Front in its battle against the fascist forces of General Franco angered the Communists, and created an important rift within the political coalition.

Third, the expensive social reforms ushered in by the Popular Front placed pressure on France's fragile economy. Convinced that a conflict with Germany was

¹ Serge Bernstein, *La France des années 30* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993).

inevitable, Blum was also obliged to continue making large investments aimed at rearming France.² As a result, during the Popular Front period, workers may have had to be on the job fewer hours, but the cost of living rose 46%. Predictably, the middle-class bore the brunt of these increases. During the summer of 1937, the situation compelled Blum to ask the Senate for the power to increase taxes as an initial step towards implementing broad-based economic reform. The predominantly right-wing Senate refused to grant it, and Blum's cabinet was forced to resign. A new Popular Front government, now lead by Camille Chautemps (with Blum as vice-premier) took office, but enthusiasm for the Popular Front was rapidly dwindling. Popular Front social reforms had been stalled since February 1937, when Blum had announced that "a pause" was necessary. Under Chautemps, this "pause" continued until March 1938, when his cabinet was finally disbanded. The Popular Front, for all intents and purposes, was dead. Blum's one-month repeat stint as prime minister between March and April 1938 did nothing to resurrect it.

This spotty track record has effected historical reception of the Popular Front. The title of Pascal Ory's book, *La Belle illusion* (The Beautiful Illusion), points to one characteristic and valid criticism – that the period, though dynamic and enthusiastic in its advocacy for social equality, was essentially utopian and naïve. In the end, the social and political reforms that the Popular Front aimed to implement were simply too ambitious and unrealistic in light of the extremely volatile international situation and the complex social antagonisms present within France itself. For some, like the Vichy government of German-occupied France, the Popular Front's concentration on social reform had left the

² On this topic, see Robert Frankenstein, *Le prix de réarmement français 1935-1939* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982).

country defenseless in the face of Nazi belligerence. For others more sympathetic to its political action, the Popular Front was seen as a period of “dashed hopes” that nonetheless left an indelible mark on the cultural memory of the nation.

Throughout this dissertation, we have examined groups like the AEAR and FMP – highly organized, dynamic structures that exerted a significant influence on the musical and intellectual culture of the period. As we have seen, the AEAR was an important advocate of Soviet music, and a noteworthy proponent of revolutionary music inspired by Communist ideology. Continuing in this tradition, the FMP (fueled by the electoral victory of the Popular Front) harnessed an extraordinary outburst of creative and intellectual energy. Through the efforts of the numerous composers who became allied with it, an impressive quantity of works of art came to life during this period: some small, such as the folk and revolutionary songs composed for amateur groups like the Chorale Populaire de Paris, and some large, like the ambitious incidental music for Romain Rolland’s *Le 14 Juillet*. Parallel with its advocacy of music “for the people,” the FMP also promoted modernist experimentation that led to the publication of a number of works (including Milhaud’s *Ninth Quartet* and wind-band music by Koechlin and Jolivet) through the organization’s affiliated publisher, the Éditions Sociales Internationales. Finally, the FMP situated itself at the very center of an intellectual debate that examined the role music should play in a modern-day political climate dominated by the social concerns of the masses.

A number of individual works from the period emerge as particularly significant. *Le 14 Juillet*, with its broad-based collaboration between well-known artists and amateur artistic groups, is crucial for the way it mirrored the political ideology of the Left, and consciously played with the boundaries separating art and politics. The collaborative

incidental music of “Les Sept,” with its references to folk music and revolutionary works within an “elite” compositional framework, stands as one of the clearest examples of populist modernism in France between the wars.

Other works during this period were equally pivotal: Roussel’s *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* issued in a period of experimentation with lighter genres at the Opéra-Comique, while concomitantly demonstrating Roussel’s own enthusiasm about the artistic fusion of elite and popular musical styles. The extraordinary creativity that went into the Popular Front’s cultural initiatives at the 1937 Exposition, whether in the realm of *opéra comique*, the innovative “sound and light” shows along the banks of the Seine, or Jean-Richard Bloch’s left-wing mega-production, *Naissance d’une cité*, all attest to the Popular Front’s artistic mission to bring art closer to the masses.

Despite these efforts, we have also seen how the utopianism that typified the creative and intellectual spirit of the period did not always yield intended results. Most strikingly, the broad-based solidarity between musical elites and the masses positioned at the centre of the cultural aspirations of organizations like the Maison de la Culture and the FMP, simply did not take root. Although Popular Front sympathizers *did* learn to sing songs like Honegger’s *Jeunesse* and Shostakovich’s *Au-devant de la vie*, a significant disconnect between “elite” composers and the masses remained. Nothing exemplifies this better than the lack of popular success garnered by the majority of the works I have spoken about throughout this dissertation. We have seen this trend surface many times, whether through responses to the song competition jurors at *L’Humanité*, the reaction to Picasso’s drop-curtain for *Le 14 Juillet* or the criticisms launched by the workers of the Opéra-Comique at the artistic efforts of its advisory committee. Judging from the available sources, many of the Popular Front works written “for the people,” works like

Le 14 Juillet and *Naissance d'une cité* (or less prominent works like Jaubert's *Novembre 1936* and Jolivet's *Soir*) did not find a lasting place in their hearts, nor, predictably enough, in the hearts of "elite" audiences either. Their lack of mass appeal, whether justifiable from an aesthetic viewpoint or not, must stand as the final verdict as to whether the Popular Front and its associated organizations were successful in their cultural efforts.

Does this lack of success justify relegating these works to the dustbins of history? The biographers of Les Six, with the exception of Frédéric Robert's study of Louis Durey, have certainly given us little comfort in this regard.³ Although Milhaud mentioned his involvement in creative projects informed by Popular Front politics, little has been written about them, just as even less has been written about Honegger's involvement in the movement. As stressed on a number of occasions, Roussel has fared no better, and a complete re-evaluation of his final works in light of his left-wing sympathies is in order. Koechlin's opinions on music "for the people," however, have elicited some interest in musicological circles and we can now look forward to Michel Duscheneau's forthcoming edition of the composer's texts on this subject.

This dissertation has shown that if these works are indeed relegated to the dustbins of history, significant aspects of the artistic and aesthetic development of a number of France's most prominent interwar composers will remain historically misrepresented. This examination of the politicized music of the Popular Front has revealed the existence of profound aesthetic and stylistic continuities in France between the two world wars. For example, the FMP espoused the anti-academic, anti-sublime aesthetic position of Les Six while simultaneously advocating the integration of popular sources for specifically

³ Even Eveline Hurard-Viltard, who has supplied us with the most thorough investigation of Les Six to date, does not comment on collaborative works like *Le 14 Juillet*, which seem to be so indebted to Les Six's aesthetic stance.

political purposes. I have repeatedly shown how this “populist modernist” approach, embraced by a considerable number of left-wing composers during the Popular Front, may be thought of as a logical off-shoot of the “lifestyle modernism” championed by the circle of Les Six in the wake of World War I.

This dissertation opens many avenues for future research. Though *chanson* was mainly a commodified form of expression throughout the 1930s, a number of Popular Front *chansonniers*, including the duos “Gilles et Julien,” and “Les Frères Marc” as well as soloists like Marianne Oswald and Agnès Capri, were all noted supporters of the Left, and frequently performed at left-wing political rallies. Their songs often spoke of social injustice, and thereby introduced politicized themes into the world of 1930s *chanson* repertory. Following World War II, the works of these artists were emulated by a generation of highly popular “rive-gauche” French singer-songwriters, including George Brassens and Léo Ferré. These artists continued the Popular Front tradition of left-wing political critique in their Cold-War role as modern-day troubadours.

The relationship between modern art and the politicized music of the late 1930s is another branch of research suggested by this dissertation. Affiliated with the Maison de la Culture, prominent artists like Fernand Léger and Jean Lurçat debated the place of artistic realism in modern art during the Popular Front. We have seen how critics from the period also associated the musical expression of groups like the Chorale Populaire de Paris within the aesthetic context of realism. But, to what extent was French music of this type also indebted to the practice of surrealism – an aesthetic that throughout the 1920s and 30s was closely associated with extreme left-wing political ideology in France?

Finally, the place and function of music within left-wing works for the cinema – the pre-eminent “popular” idiom of the twentieth century – awaits a detailed examination.

Many of the composers mentioned throughout these pages (Auric, Milhaud, Honegger, Koechlin, Désormière, Wiéner, Sauveplane) contributed scores for films that dealt with left-wing subjects (including such masterpieces as Jean Renoir's *La Marseillaise* and *Le Crime de M. Lange*). Indeed, throughout the decade, some of these composers, including Honegger and Auric, were best known as "film composers."⁴ To what extent did their music for these films inform their compositional work in other genres (and vice versa)? To what extent did their experiences dealing with the production exigencies associated with cinematographic collaboration make them more aware of the plight of workers and their political demands?

Seventy years ago, French workers – freshly granted two weeks of paid vacation – boarded specially subsidized trains headed for the beaches of Brittany and the Riviera. Their collective joy in the face of this newfound freedom can only now seem – in the wake of the disasters that loomed on the horizon – imprudently optimistic and, to reuse a word that has dominated this dissertation, naïve in the extreme. This optimism and naivety constitute some of the most compelling characteristics of the period, and are at the center of the period's legendary mystique that continues to inspire today. At the same time, this optimism and naivety are forever clouded by the legacy of World War II, a period that exhibited little mercy for the Popular Front's most staunch advocates.

During the Occupation, Suzanne Cointe, member of the AEAR choir and dedicated member of the FMP between 1935 and 1937, joined the Resistance as a member of the "Orchestre Rouge." Arrested by the French Milice, she was sent to

⁴ James Deaville and Simon Wood, "Synchronization By the Grace of God? The Film/Music Collaboration of Jean Cocteau and Georges Auric," *Canadian University Music Review* 22/1 (2001), 106.

Buchenwald and executed. Maurice Jaubert, whose compositional activity was devoted to the creation of modern “musique populaire,” died in 1940 defending France against the Nazi invasion. Jean Zay volunteered to go to the front, was later imprisoned, and during a transfer of prisoners, murdered by a group of men claiming to be Resistants. They threw his corpse into a well where it was discovered in 1946. The Vélodrome d’Hiver, the venue for Jean-Richard Bloch’s anti-fascist theatrical celebration, *Naissance d’une cité*, was the scene of one of the most villainous acts of the Vichy government. On July 16, 1942, the French State ordered the rounding up of over 12,000 Jewish men, women and children, who were then taken to the Vélodrome where they were temporarily sheltered before being sent to German death camps. During the Popular Front, Beaudoin and Lods (the left-wing designers of the “sound and light” shows of the Exposition), were the architects of a modern housing project being constructed in the Parisian suburb of Drancy. During the Occupation, this “Cité de la Muette” – initially designed to introduce comfort and modern amenities to factory workers – became the main holding area for Jews, “terrorists” and political prisoners before being sent to Germany to be dealt their fate.

No wonder then that a number of composers – including Milhaud, Honegger and Ibert – preferred to not reconnect with their Popular Front past following the war. But, many others did. As a result of strong political support for the PCF in the wake of the conflict, many of the institutions examined in this dissertation were successfully revived. Charles Koechlin and Louis Durey led the FMP into a new era, which, as Michèle Alten has suggested, found artists once again faced with questions concerning artistic

independence and aesthetic freedom in the face of political ideology.⁵ The Chorale Populaire de Paris survives to this day, and continues to perform the “revolutionary” repertory that made it famous during the Popular Front. A considerable body of works, composed following the War, pursued the aesthetic course initially charted under the Popular Front: Louis Durey’s numerous works for choral ensemble, Serge Nigg’s political cantatas, and Joseph Kosma’s 1959 opera, *Les Canuts* represent just a small sample of the compositional legacy of populist modernism in France. They are all poignant musical testimonies that speak not only to the inevitable role of political ideology in our everyday lives, but also to the continuing cultural legacy of the Popular Front throughout the twentieth century.

⁵ Michèle Alten, *Les Musiciens français dans la guerre froide (1945-1956): l’indépendance artistique face au politique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000).

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