13 Popular music

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Introduction

For the English speaker especially, understanding French popular music means engaging with the problem of naming it. In French the term *populaire* in *la musique populaire* or its plural *les musiques populaires* has traditionally denoted not 'popular' in the sense of enjoyed by a large, sociologically diverse audience, but 'folk': the untutored, unwritten, supposedly spontaneous music of the rural and urban working classes. It is only fairly recently, after urbanisation and industrialisation turned French entertainments into commodities disseminated by the mass media, that the English sense of the word has begun to contaminate the French, though the two meanings still exist side by side. This chapter will use 'popular' in the English sense and will focus on the development of urban music, in particular song, after very briefly sketching its folk roots.

For centuries, and especially since the Revolution of 1789, there has been a common myth in France that it is not a musical nation. While the present Companion might suggest that this is inaccurate, the myth does at least highlight an inadequacy in French musical culture. While the republican education system set up in the 1880s privileged reason, science, philosophy and the written word over the creative arts, conservatoires were characterised by a deep-seated conservatism and an overemphasis on theory until well after the Second World War.[1] To this extent, then, the myth contains a truth. French popular music, however, offers an essential corrective to it, for it has arguably helped foster what has been called a 'musicalisation' of French culture.[2] With illiteracy endemic in the early nineteenth century, and still at 43.4 per cent of the over-twenties as late as 1872,[3] in practice the written word counted for relatively little, whereas singing or the untrained playing of instruments had been virtually universal for untold centuries. It was only as peasants relocated to towns in the nineteenth century that a separation evolved between producers of music (composers, lyricists, singers, musicians, publishers, impresarios) and

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consumers. It is with this specialisation that French popular music in the modern English sense really begins, though again a different taxonomy has developed in French, at the centre of which lies *la chanson*, a polysemic category whose meanings are complex, having developed by accretion.

Inventing chanson: from amateur to *auteur*

The ancient roots of French song are discussed in more detail elsewhere. Briefly, its story begins with the troubadours and trouvères of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who wrote for the aristocracy, and with vernacular, itinerant street singers called jongleurs. According to Calvet, the term *chanson* became mainly identified with the latter, that is, with the street.[4] Popular song in fact remained a largely anonymous, collective form until the fifteenth century, which saw a burst of creativity in the *chanson populaire*.[5] By this time, the transcribing and anthologising of songs (most famously in the *manuscrit de Bayeux*) had begun and their forms had become established (lai, rondeau, ballade, etc.). Such works then achieved greater permanence with the invention of printing, which allowed popular lyrics sung to existing melodies (*timbres*) to be anthologised. This means of circulation remained largely intact until the late nineteenth century, when a number of social, institutional and technological changes professionalised and commodified the chanson.

The Revolution of 1789 is a useful starting point for understanding these changes. In its wake came a concern to foster national unity and educate the people, with the result that the organic growth of popular culture becomes entangled with its ideological manipulation by political and cultural elites. The rediscovery of folk music and the encouragement of amateur music-making throughout the nineteenth century by both religious and secular authorities are cases in point. After the Revolution, regional cultures were despised as repositories of particularism and ignorance. But the Romantic movement's interest in a rural idyll produced an intellectual and literary concern to preserve folksongs. After Napoleon III seized power in December 1851, he furthered this endeavour by ordering the ministry of *instruction publique* to survey and collect France's 'popular poetry'. Since the songs collected were redrafted in standard grammar and notation to remove all local colour and form a common treasury for educational purposes, these initiatives began a process of transforming an oral tradition into a homogenous written culture.[6] One outcome was a new consciousness of song's place in national cultural memory.

Another important form of voluntarism in popular music was the *orphéons*. Invented in the 1820s to educate, socialise and improve the

morals of the people by offering them a musical apprenticeship and an outlet for collective endeavour, *orphéons* were initially choral societies of schoolchildren and workers; but increasingly from the mid nineteenth century the term came to mean brass bands (*fanfares*) or wind bands (*harmonies*). Although they were primarily individual initiatives by a school, factory or ex-army musician, the *orphéons* were usually supported by the local mayor, who would authorise outdoor public performances. They were also facilitated from the 1850s by the setting up of outdoor bandstands (*kiosques*).[7] This public support can be explained by the perceived civic and ideological benefits of the *orphéons* in politically turbulent times. As the official organ of the movement, 'L'Orphéon', put it: 'hearts come very close to agreeing when voices have fraternised'.[8]

The *orphéons* were also seen as ramparts against the potentially subversive pursuits that the 'people' traditionally engaged in when left to their own devices. In the seventeenth century, the oldest bridge in Paris, the Pont-Neuf, had become notorious for popular songs of sedition, but by the Revolution such dissent was moving indoors. Middle-class singing clubs (*sociétés chantantes*) had in fact been growing up in Parisian 'cabarets' (bars) and comfortable restaurants since the early eighteenth century, being associated especially with topical satire. The first such venture in Paris was Les Dîners du Caveau, set up around 1734. Modelled upon it, *caveaux* (literally 'vaults', but in this context 'clubs') sprang up across France, where groups of well-heeled songwriters (known at the time as chansonniers) and other artists would meet to carouse and hear each other's compositions. These crafted, witty songs were usually more epicurean than subversive; but when the Napoleonic Empire fell and monarchy was restored in 1815, less exclusive, working-class counterparts to the *caveaux*, known as *goguettes*, appeared. These were closed, even semi-secret clubs whose members would meet weekly or monthly in a cabaret or wine shop, paying a small subscription to drink heavily and sing their own compositions or the songs of the moment. Although bawdy drinking songs were probably more common there, some *goguettes* became centres of political opposition, being associated initially with Bonapartism or freemasonry and later with republicanism.[9] Flourishing during the July Monarchy (1830–48), over 480 such clubs existed in Paris by 1845.[10] Two songwriters were strongly identified with *caveaux* and *goguettes*: Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780–1857), who was famous in both, and the less renowned Émile Debraux (1796–1831), known as the 'Béranger of the rabble'.[11] Both were imprisoned for the politically or morally subversive content of their work.

This dissident, urban subculture was one among several factors in the eventual emergence of a distinctive chanson tradition. In the short term,

however, with political tensions following the revolution of 1848 and the start of the Second Empire (1851–70), censorship attempted to restrict the ideas that urban workers had access to. A decree of November 1849 prohibited song performances in cafes without a visa from the ministry of education; another, of March 1852, banned public meetings without police authorisation. As a result, both *caveaux* and *goguettes* were effectively closed down, which helped bring about a shift in French popular music from amateur social engagement to professional entertainment.[12]

Professionalisation was triggered by a legal dispute over songs performed without the composers' consent in 1850 at the Café des Ambassadeurs near the Place de la Concorde in Paris. The case led to the setting up of the performing rights organisation, the Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique (SACEM), the following year. Henceforth, songwriters could contemplate making a living from their work. Indeed, despite the disappearance of the *goguettes*, demand for songs in cafes remained high. One kind of institution that satisfied it were the intimate cabarets on the outskirts of the city, notably Montmartre. The most illustrious of the Montmartre cabarets was Le Chat Noir (1881), which was frequented by artists, writers and inquisitive bourgeois.[13] It was here that the singer-songwriter Aristide Bruant (1851–1925), immortalised by Toulouse-Lautrec, first made his name, before setting up his own establishment on the same premises in 1885, Le Mirliton, when Le Chat moved elsewhere.[14] With his characteristic Parisian accent and slang, working-class themes and declamatory delivery (a necessity before the microphone if singers were to be heard above the hubbub of the cabaret), Bruant developed what has become known as the 'realist song' (*chanson réaliste*): a melodramatic narrative of Parisian low life in keeping with the marginality of Montmartre. Like their audiences, cabaret songs were generally more literary than those of the *goguettes*. This, together with the Toulouse-Lautrec poster and the existence of early recordings of Bruant's voice on cylinder from 1909, would transform him into a formative legend for twentieth-century chanson.[15]

Another response to the demand for live music took chanson closer to massification. Street singers, who had traditionally made their living by passing the hat and selling simple sheet music (called *petits formats*) of the songs they sang, had by the 1840s taken to working outside cafes to maximise income. These establishments, called *cafés chantants* after a formula dating back to the 1790s but banned under Napoleon, became favourite places of entertainment during the summer months. In 1848, the owner of the Café des Ambassadeurs (where the SACEM was shortly to be conceived) took the arrangements a momentous step forward by hiring singers and musicians, setting up outdoor and indoor stages for the

purpose.[16] This initiative gave birth to the *cafés-concerts* of the Second Empire and the *Belle Époque*, a period of cultural extravagance running from the last decades of the nineteenth century to 1914. Often rather sordid, rowdy locations in the early days, where sailors drank and prostitutes plied their trade,[17] the *cafés-concerts* steadily became 'the people's opera house'. Certainly, they were the main form of mass entertainment for urban workers, artisans and *petits-bourgeois* before cinema.

The part played by the *café-concert* in the development and commercialisation of French popular music and mass culture is hard to exaggerate. In the *goguettes* the entertainment had been free of charge (aside from the small membership fee), amateur and participative. But with the hiring of singers and musicians by the *cafés-concerts*, followed in 1867 by the legalisation of performance in costume in drinking houses, cafes became venues, singing became spectacle, and the population became spectators.[18] Commercialisation could only mean depoliticisation if proprietors were to please audiences wanting easy entertainment and the censors at the Inspection des Théâtres, who vetted all songs for performance.[19] Jobbing composers, now remunerated by the SACEM, began producing specific repertoires for a range of stock characters, which had become a *café-concert* convention: *comiques-troupiers, diseuses, réalistes-pierreuses* and others.[20] These repertoires were designed to elicit two principal emotions: laughter and tears.[21] Many of the soon-to-be iconic nightspots of Paris like Le Moulin Rouge (1889) began life as *cafés-concerts*; and the evolution there of public singing as a commodity would in turn give birth to the highly paid national celebrity, starting with Thérésa (1837–1913) and Paulus (1845–1908). Some of their successors would also become France's first international stars: Yvette Guilbert (1867–1944), another singer immortalised by Toulouse-Lautrec; Mistinguett (1875–1956), whose song 'Mon homme' became the model for the American torch song 'My Man'; and Maurice Chevalier (1888–1972), Mistinguett's lover on stage as in life and later the professional Frenchman of Hollywood.

Another defining element in urban popular music at the start of the twentieth century was the *bal musette*. Originally a village dance featuring bagpipes known as a musette, in its modern form it allowed working-class city-dwellers to gather in unsophisticated suburban venues and dance in couples to the accordion. Hollywood was soon to latch onto the accordion as a metonym of Frenchness, though it had in fact originated in Austria, Germany and England before being brought to Paris by migrant Italian musicians. Its portability, its cheapness and the fact that it was always in tune made it the ideal popular instrument for dancing, although – ironically given the iconic status it was to acquire – its arrival in France was resisted by both the church and folk purists, who

saw it as a barbarous import.[22] But outside influences of far greater magnitude were on the way.

Between approximately 1890 and 1914, the English-style music hall took the France of the *café-concert* and the *bal musette* into the modern age. By 1927 there were fifteen halls in Paris alone,[23] including the Folies Bergères, Moulin Rouge, Bobino and Olympia. Music hall dispensed with the cafe setting, separated stage and audience, and demoted singers in favour of more varied forms of visual entertainment, from circus to ballet and the saucy, spectacular 'revues', which today have become a tourist cliché. Hence the term *spectacle de variétés* (variety show), which dates from this period and which, reduced to *les variétés*, has become a synonym for lightweight, commercial forms of chanson.[24]

A further component in the music-hall mix consisted of exotic dance musics. The tango reached France from South America shortly before the First World War. The cakewalk had arrived at the turn of the century, prefiguring the African-American jazz bands of the American Expeditionary Force in 1917.[25] Still absorbing the shock of jazz, French audiences were even more astonished by the black dancer Josephine Baker, who appeared at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in *La revue nègre* of 1925. Virtually naked on stage, she exploited and subverted the perceived otherness of black America, simultaneously scandalising and arousing male critics.[26] Soon, however, she would shape-shift into a more conventional chanson and revue artist, learning French and adopting the conventions of white music hall. Jazz itself, in both its American and Gallicised forms, in fact acquired a special status in France, as successive African-American musicians worked and even settled there (most notably Sidney Bechet) and white French singers and touring bands (Johnny Hess, Ray Ventura and his Collégiens, Grégor and his Grégoriens) appropriated swing in the 1930s. An association of jazz enthusiasts, Le Hot Club de France, was formed in 1932, and its journal *Jazz hot*, launched in 1935 (and still published on the Web in 2014), became a forum for expert jazz criticism under Hugues Panassié and Charles Delaunay. With their support, the celebrated Quintette du Hot Club de France, featuring Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli, also evolved its own style of French jazz.[27]

With the music hall of the 1920s showcasing *variétés*, spectacle and brashly cosmopolitan dance rhythms like jazz, some wondered whether there was any place there for chanson in its accepted form.[28] By the late 1930s, however, singers had largely supplanted revue as the main attraction in the halls. As this suggests, a strategy of distinction was emerging which, in opposition to 'variety' (*variétés*), forged an identity for chanson drawing on the older, supposedly more authentically French culture of the *goguettes*, cabarets and *cafés-concerts*. Pivotal in this evolution were two historic but

very different singers, Édith Piaf and Charles Trenet. Both borrowed from past conventions but, by example, helped shape the future of chanson and indeed its myth: the myth of song as a popular art at which the French excel and which thereby expresses an ineffable Frenchness; the myth in fact of *la chanson française*.

Singers, songwriters and *la chanson française*

With a career extending from the 1930s to the 1960s, Piaf (1915–63) was probably the most important product of the new age of mechanical reproduction, symbolising the seismic shift from the humble street singer of the mid-nineteenth century to the superstar of the mid-twentieth. Her early style had developed during a childhood spent working the streets with her father, a circus contortionist, and it was already nostalgic by the mid-1930s. It was a self-conscious throwback to the urban folklore of nineteenth-century Paris: an intertextual composite of the 'realism' of Bruant, the melodrama of *La dame aux camélias* and the 'tears' function of the *café-concert*, later commercialised by Damia (Marie-Louise Damien, 1892–1978), Fréhel (1891–1951) and Marie Dubas (1894–1972) – all Piaf's models. Like them she sang of the hapless young girl or hard-nosed streetwalker abandoned by a temporary lover and dragging herself fatalistically towards a sordid end. At first she deployed the familiar waltz time of the *bal musette*, accompanied by an accordion or small band in a plaintive voice, marked by the working-class Parisian accent already familiar as a caricature from Chevalier and Mistinguett. Yet the 'grain' of her voice and its immensity and depth, coupled with the crucial reflection in her songs of the circumstances of her own young life, which her writers skilfully played up, transcended these generic conventions and gave her work something ineffable and triumphant. After the war, once her career took off in New York, her repertoire moved closer to the lingua franca of the torch song, losing much of its local specificity. The accompaniments too were more orchestral, and the voice, which lost most of its youthful Parisian accent, seemed stronger, more assertive, yet more tragic. Still hinging on female suffering and dependency, and still autobiographical, her songs nevertheless acquired an 'I will survive' quality, embodied in one of her last successes, 'Non, je ne regrette rien' (1960).[29]

The career of the second influential figure of the interwar period, Trenet (1913–2001), composer of the international hits 'Boum' (1938) and 'La mer' (1945), began in 1933 in a duo with Johnny Hess. A solo singer-songwriter from 1937, Trenet reinvigorated and modernised French popular song by coaxing it away from the realist tradition. As

nostalgic as Piaf for an older France ('Douce France', 1943; 'Mes jeunes années', 1947), his stage persona was much less gloomy. His jovial body language, battered straw hat and comically popping eyes were all nods to the comic conventions of *café-concert* and earned him the nickname 'the Singing Fool' ('le Fou Chantant'). But he innovated far beyond what this might suggest: musically by adapting the syncopation and orchestration of American swing; lyrically by learning from French surrealism to invest the lyric with stunning new imagery, onomatopoeia and word-play. As a result, chanson artists from the Liberation to the present have cited him as an inspiration.[30]

His main legacy in the immediate post-war period can be found in a new generation of remarkably talented singer-songwriters (*auteurs-compositeurs-interprètes*) who developed a 'poetic' sub-genre of chanson from Trenet's signposting of its literary possibilities. Even so, these performers were different from him in a number of ways. Unlike him, they accompanied themselves on guitar or piano, largely because of the physical constraints imposed by the intimate Left Bank cellar bars where their careers began, home to the jazz scene and the smoke-wreathed philosophising of the Existentialists. They also had a post-holocaust, post-Hiroshima darkness or inwardness that Trenet lacked (at least on the surface), and which was a long way from his beloved music hall ('Moi, j'aime le music-hall', 1955). They are more *auteur* than entertainer.[31]

A constellation of singer-songwriters represent this Left Bank auteurist model, including Francis Lemarque, Guy Béart, Jean Ferrat and Serge Gainsbourg (to whom I shall return). But its three canonical figures are Georges Brassens (1921–81), Jacques Brel (1929–78, a Belgian who made his career in Paris) and Léo Ferré (1916–93). As this list suggests, the singer-songwriter is an essentially male trope. Even though equally talented women emerged at the same time (Nicole Louvier, Marie-José Neuville, Anne Sylvestre and – most accomplished of all – Barbara, 1930–97), variety's conservatism could not yet accept women as more than muse or interpreter of men, all the more so as many of the songs of the big three were distinctly phallocentric.

Ferré, the eldest of the three, began performing in 1946, accompanying himself on the piano in Saint-Germain-des-Prés cabarets. Brel and Brassens followed in the early 1950s and, like many of this and subsequent generations, preferred the guitar. Brassens never abandoned it, though both Brel's and Ferré's later work was often lavishly orchestrated. Brel stands out from the other two by the theatricality of his delivery, both comic and tragic. Brassens, on the other hand, was the least comfortable on stage, clutching his guitar for dear life with one foot on a chair as if rooted to the spot. Ferré eventually moved out from behind his piano, but

would stand virtually motionless at the microphone, spitting out his angry diatribes, dressed in black with a mane of white hair surrounding his bald pate, like a psychotic clown. His complex lyrics, surreal and violent, mixing intense lyricism with the scatology of the street, were set to minor chords and descending, liturgical cadences. He was also the most experimental of the three musically and the only one to flirt with rock after 1968.[32]

Finally, it is the imagery, wit and intelligence of their lyrics – redolent of a Béranger, Debraux or Bruant – that mark them out as a triumvirate. They wrote polished songs of love and hate, tradition and iconoclasm, laced with wry, sometimes ribald social observations and, in the case of Brel and Ferré, personal emotion. All three liked to see themselves as bohemians or anarchists. This was fashionable politics by the late 1960s, and it allowed them to disguise a certain conservatism, especially regarding gender. Brassens and to a lesser extent Ferré also fell foul of the censor on grounds of morality and politics, which contributed usefully to their iconoclastic self-image.

The post-war singer-songwriter paradigm condensed *la chanson française* into the *chanson d'auteur* (author song) or *chanson à texte* (text song). It is important, however, to avoid drawing too simple a distinction between those singers who wrote and those who did not, between *auteur* and entertainer. Piaf, for example, cannot be so easily disqualified as an *auteur*. This is not simply because she too wrote lyrics and occasional melodies, but because she employed gifted lyricists (Raymond Asso, Michel Emer, Charles Aznavour, Michel Vaucaire) and composers (most consistently Marguerite Monnot and Charles Dumont) who, as we have seen, helped her construct a narrative of the indivisibility of her life and work, which brings her close to the singer-songwriter mode. The Left Bank tradition similarly includes singers – Juliette Gréco, Yves Montand, Mouloudji, Catherine Sauvage – who did not write but nevertheless acquired a vicarious 'auteurist' prestige by developing a repertoire generated by the new singer-songwriters or by poets and novelists like Boris Vian, Raymond Queneau and Jacques Prévert. Less classifiable still is the supercharged Gilbert Bécaud (1927–2001), who wrote his own melodies ('The Day the Rains Came', 'What Now My Love?' and 'Let It Be Me' are all his) but turned to others (notably Pierre Delanoé) for lyrics. More useful, then, as a historiographical principle for understanding chanson from around 1860 to 1960 is a different opposition: on the one hand, a perception of song as 'light entertainment', looking back to the element of spectacle and variety in the music hall; on the other, a more specific, narrower though plural notion of *la chanson française* in which song is valued nationally for its literariness and authenticity. These related

but conflicting conceptions developed and shifted after 1960 with the burgeoning audiovisual media and the coming of rock'n'roll.

Records, media and pop

At the start of the twentieth century, despite the marketing of the gramophone from the mid-1890s, the dominant figures in song production were still the publisher and those remunerated by the SACEM. Until 1905 singers were not even credited on a record and received only a flat fee for recorded work. However, once music hall turned singers into stars, this hierarchy was reversed. Talking cinema, which took over from the waning music hall in providing spectacle, reinforced the personalisation of the singing star, since it was common for films to feature singers and songs, and even lovingly to reproduce the sounds and atmosphere of the street-music tradition (René Clair's film of 1930, *Sous les toits de Paris*, is an early instance). *Petit-format* and record sales were also boosted by film. Equally transformative technologies were the radio and the microphone, both of which domesticated the public's relationship with song and singer, making it more intimate. Developments in the record industry then took this intimacy further.

Records were already being retailed in large numbers in the United States well before the 1920s; by the 1940s, over 150 million were being sold annually. The industry was much slower taking off in France, owing to the First World War, overseas competition and the economic crisis that caused France's major record company Pathé to be taken over by Columbia in 1929 and thence by EMI two years later.[33] Even in the early 1950s, sales of *petits formats* were still the principal measure of success, though not for much longer. The vinyl disc was more durable than its shellac 78 rpm predecessor, had better sound quality and made the long-playing album possible. On the consumption side, the portable record player (notably the Teppaz in France, first produced in 1945) brought recorded music into French homes on a mass scale, allowing for repeated plays and a further individualisation of listening. The small transistor radio and a number of music stations broadcasting from outside France had a similar impact, especially the new Europe No. 1, launched in 1955. It was young people who were most affected by these developments, particularly when two jazz disc jockeys on Europe No. 1, Frank Ténot and Daniel Filipacchi, created a new youth-music show in 1959 entitled 'Salut les copains' (roughly translatable as 'Hi you guys'). The youth market was in fact the big discovery of the 1950s. In France the post-war baby-boom, the consumer society, the raising of the school-leaving age to sixteen with effect

from 1967 and the expansion of higher education all helped create the teenager;[34] and vinyl, the Teppaz and the transistor gave this new socio-economic category a cultural identity based on music.

Youth-orientated rock'n'roll first reached France in 1956, though it was not taken seriously by either parents or *variétés* moguls, who assumed it was another imported dance craze like the tango or charleston. Yet by 1961, the wild, sexualised stage antics of Elvis impersonators like Johnny Hallyday (b. 1943), along with the 'Salut les copains' phenomenon and a few concerts where fans lost control, had revealed that a distinct youth culture had evolved with radically different codes. In reality, by 1963 French rock'n'roll had already been diluted into an innocuous, derivative form of pop called *yéyé*. The problem for the first French rock groups had been that their rudimentary self-accompaniment on amplified guitars broke with the French music-hall custom of having a house orchestra.[35] Conformity with this practice had therefore to be swiftly restored by the launch of solo teen stars like Claude François, Françoise Hardy and Sylvie Vartan, who targeted a younger version of the standard *variétés* audience, while the early rockers – Hallyday, Dick Rivers, Eddy Mitchell – also switched to solo careers. The rock band therefore vanished virtually overnight. French television played its part here by developing a style of vacuous variety programme, updating the old music hall, where clean-cut young *yéyé* stars mimed to their records.[36]

Home-made pop and rock therefore did not acquire the same socio-cultural meanings in the early 1960s as in the United Kingdom and United States.[37] Discerning fans in search of a more authentic youth culture turned inevitably to the Anglo-American originals as overseas records began to be distributed in France and the Beatles and Bob Dylan appeared live in Paris (in 1964 and 1966 respectively). In some cases, such fans would also look to *la chanson française*, even though its stars were considerably older. Rather than being sidelined by *yéyé*, the careers of Brel, Brassens and Ferré actually blossomed in the 1960s. Neither Anglo-American acts nor French stars singing in broken English could be readily understood by audiences brought up on the lyric-centred chanson, whereas the singer-songwriter offered literate, imaginative lyrics in their native tongue. During this period, *la chanson française* thus began to be legitimised as a distinctively 'French' popular art, defined against Americanised pop. As in the nineteenth century, the anthology became an instrument of this nationalisation. Ferré's lyrics were published without music in book form in the respected 'Poets of Today' series, followed by those of Brassens, Brel, Aznavour, Trenet, Anne Sylvestre and others. Brassens was also awarded the Académie Française's poetry prize in 1967, and Parisian arts establishments began to make room for chanson in their programming.

In spite of this, the heyday of the pre-rock *chanson française*, sustained by the collective memory of Bruant and the *café-concert*, the waltz and the 'java', and a vanishing Paris, was clearly over. The death of Piaf in 1963 aged only forty-seven symbolised this, and Chevalier's in 1972 severed the last ties with the nineteenth century. Brel gave up performing in 1967 and died in 1978, also in his late forties; Brassens was not far behind (1981). In their place came an ever more segmented supply of popular styles which, in one form or another, was marked by the youth culture of the 1960s and, in many cases, the student uprising of May 1968.

1968 and its aftermath: the age of fusions

Pop was of little interest to the New Left leaders of the May movement, who dismissed mass culture as a weapon of capitalist hegemony. 1968 nevertheless began clearing the creative blockage that had afflicted early French pop, even though the change did not properly bear fruit until a decade later. Beneath the Leftist rhetoric, May was essentially about personal liberation and the right to self-expression; and it was the music of the United Kingdom and United States that seemed to articulate those values for many young French. So, although the successive waves of pop, rock, folk-rock and disco were viewed by French adults at the time as the latest avatars of cultural Americanisation, by the 1980s they had helped produce a cultural rebirthing akin to what the Beatles had triggered in Britain two decades before. French pop music finally came of age and entered the postmodern era, embracing a new, postcolonial playfulness about French cultural identity.

One instance of this, dubbed 'the new French song' (*la nouvelle chanson française*), was represented by a cluster of young singer-songwriters who had grown up under the combined influences of chanson and pop and who saw no conflict between the two. This greater openness was assisted by two revered precursors: Ferré, who had undertaken a short-lived experiment with a jazz-rock band, Zoo; and Serge Gainsbourg (1928–91), who more voraciously embraced *yéyé* in the mid-1960s. By 1965, Gainsbourg had acquired a modest reputation as a Left Bank singer-songwriter, with songs like 'Le poinçonneur des lilas' (1958) and 'La javanaise' (1963). But he began supplementing his income by composing in the new *yéyé* idiom for the young France Gall, who won the Eurovision Song Contest that year with his song 'Poupée de cire, poupée de son' ('Wax doll, rag doll'). From the late 1960s, he worked more substantially in the pop idiom, both for himself and for others, including Brigitte Bardot, with whom he first recorded 'Je t'aime, moi non plus' (literally, 'I love you,

neither do I') before re-recording it with Jane Birkin, to worldwide acclaim. His career was then characterised through the next two decades by a series of innovative albums, which experimented with fusions of witty, punning, often salacious lyrics with a range of pop styles, most notably reggae. By his death in 1991, he had become an icon of a new brand of ironic, politically incorrect Frenchness. He remains so today for many French youths and adults, and even internationally.

Nouvelle chanson française stars – Renaud (b. 1952), Jean-Jacques Goldman (b. 1951), Francis Cabrel (b. 1953), Alain Souchon (b. 1944), Bernard Lavilliers (b. 1946), all still prominent today – echoed these experiments, though less iconoclastically. In different ways, all of them hybridised chanson by fusing winsome vocals, easy melodies and poetic self-exploration or social commentary with electric instrumentation and with blues, rock or folk rhythms and harmonies. Renaud is a particularly interesting case because of the reflexivity with which he has used this hybrid as a signifier of cultural malaise. Drawing as Piaf did on the *chanson réaliste* repertoire, though at a remove, he began in the early 1970s as the kind of semi-ironic busker common in French tourist spots today, dressed in the butcher's boy cap and red spotted neckerchief of the early twentieth-century Parisian urchin and accompanied by an accordionist. He also started writing his own material. Inspired as much by Dylan as by Bruant or Piaf, he knowingly and wittily fused American folk or country (acoustic guitar, harmonica, Jew's harp) with melodic, instrumental and lyrical allusions to the marginal Paris of the *Belle Époque*, using this *bricolage* to address serious topical themes of urban alienation. After his first hit single, 'Laisse béton' (1978), he deftly added pastiche rock rhythms and instrumentation, so that his combined chanson-pop arrangements parodied each other ad infinitum. This allowed him to create a recurrent tragi-comic protagonist with which to sympathetically depict disadvantaged youths in the increasingly problematised suburbs of Paris, who were caught between a French cultural identity that they rejected and an American mass culture they barely understood. By the early 1980s he was a major chanson star and he remains so today.

Like Renaud, all of these singer-songwriters and those who have come after (Étienne Daho, Dominique A, Bénabar, etc.) have continued the chanson tradition of the solo singer. But in the late 1970s the rock band began a new trajectory founded on a punk aesthetic that was the antithesis of the gentle sensitivity and hippy politics of *la nouvelle chanson française*. The bands themselves were not often punk acts in the British sense, but their punk credentials came from a do-it-yourself approach to music production which had emerged from post-1968 libertarianism, disdain for the major record companies and possibly even the self-sufficiency of

the singer-songwriter. Outside the established industry structures which, as we have seen, had pushed new artists towards a containable variety model of solo performance, independent studios sprang up and bands began to produce their own work. Independent labels were also cobbled together to support the new music, often in squats. Functioning as cooperatives or voluntary associations, most made only a short-term living through mail-order,[38] though some, like Bondage and Boucherie Productions, proved more enduring. At stake here was a reconfiguration of French authenticity in both economic and musical terms. The do-it-yourself ethos involved a new self-confidence, a reclaiming of national independence after years of colonisation by Anglo-American models; and it prompted bands to write and sing in French just as British punk had legitimated regional accents. Some (Téléphone, Trust, Starshooter) produced what was called 'un rock français' modelled on the Rolling Stones or Led Zeppelin; others saw themselves as 'New Wave' (Indochine, Taxi Girl). More pioneering, however, is what has become imprecisely known as 'alternative rock': eclectic fusions of punk (thrashing guitars, accelerated vocals), pop or rock with a much wider range of influences.[39]

At this juncture it becomes impossible to track these constant stylistic changes and exchanges any further other than in the broadest of terms. One strong agent of growth over the last thirty to forty years has been the involvement of women since 1968: sometimes in 'alternative' bands (Catherine Ringer of Rita Mitsouko, Muriel Moreno of Niagara, the all-female line-up of Les Elles), but also as more mainstream solo singers and singer-songwriters (Patricia Kaas, Mylène Farmer, Vanessa Paradis, Axelle Red, Zazie, Carla Bruni and others). Another has been the absorption of rhythms from Latin America, the Caribbean and north and sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Kassav', Khaled, Faudel, Youssou N'Dour). France has in fact become a centre for world music, though multicultural hybrid bands like Négresses Vertes and Mano Negra in the 1980s, and Zebda in the 1990s, defy classification. The term *chanson néo-réaliste* is sometimes used, albeit inadequately, to cover bands like Louise Attaque, Pigalle and Les Têtes Raides, who variously combine chanson, musette and Parisian slang (old and new) with rock, rap or 'chorizo spirit' as Manu Chao put it.[40] But 'crossover', or *le métissage* (cross-fertilisation), is probably the closest one comes to a generic term designating such experiments.

Since 1968 there has also been a rediscovery of France's own folk heritage, though 'crossover' is again often the operative word. The Celtic harpist Alain Stivell (b. 1946), for example, has blended Breton and Irish folk tunes with electric rock, also discovering electronically generated sounds in his later career. The Fabulous Trobadors, Occitan activists, produce a form of rapping in their native southern accents. Such

cross-fertilisation has gone hand in hand with a degree of decentralisation in the music industry, particularly with the aid of home studios and digital technologies. By the late 1980s, deejay-based hip-hop and reggae had reached France, rap in particular becoming a hugely successful French genre of the 1990s as inventive rap lyricists appeared (MC Solaar, IAM and more recently the female rapper Diam's), giving a new twist to the singer-songwriter trope. Today, France has the second largest market for rap in the world after the United States. The hip-hop explosion was soon followed by electronic dance music, also produced by creative deejays, some finding international success in the late 1990s (e.g. Laurent Garnier, Air, Daft Punk).[41]

What characterises new French music since the 1980s, then, is above all diversity and experiment. After a derivative first phase in the early 1960s, what the coming of Anglo-American pop and rock seems ultimately to have done for France is to release it from too exclusive a reliance on *variétés* on the one hand and a national chanson tradition on the other. The postmodern propensity to mix and match has encouraged a new confidence, dynamism and openness. Some old stagers remain, of course, though often they too have evolved. The ex-rocker Johnny Hallyday has now metamorphosed into a chanson perennial as iconic as Piaf, his place in the national pantheon guaranteed. *Nouvelle chanson française* artists are now well into middle age but still best-sellers, especially Cabrel, Goldman and a new Renaud. Reborn after marriage breakdown, alcoholism and writer's block in the 1990s, Renaud produced a comeback album *Boucan d'enfer* in 2002, which sold over two million copies, and then another, *Rouge sang*, in 2006. French variety, too, continues to thrive, though the line between it and the *chanson d'auteur* is more porous than it was. Young female solo artists (Lorie, Alizée, Jenifer, Nolwenn Leroy) and the occasional boy band have also rejuvenated the variety model. But the real force for change in *variétés*, as in other countries, has been reality TV, especially the private channel TF1's talent show, 'Star Academy', of which both Jenifer and Nolwenn Leroy were winning contestants.[42]

'Star Academy' and popular music in the twenty-first century

Completing its ninth series in 2013 on the channel NRJ 12, 'Star Academy' is in a sense a reflexive representation of French popular music as traced throughout this chapter. First, it performs in celebratory mode the 'musicalisation' of contemporary France, the new enthusiasm for music that belies its persistent self-image as a non-musical nation. Second, the show

dramatises the French industry's determination to transmute all popular music into variety, since its explicit purpose is to allow us to witness, over sixteen weeks of 'training' in a château, young people being taught to translate whatever talent they have into the conventional idiom of the TV spectacular. Third, this staging of an accelerated apprenticeship both highlights and perpetuates the perennial inadequacy of formal musical education in France. The 'academy', tricked out as an educational establishment with rigorous standards, uncompromising teachers, an exacting curriculum and a firm head-teacher, is an industry-generated caricature of the musical training that French young people still need.[43]

Today's music industry is largely concentrated in five multinational major record companies accounting for 80 per cent of turnover.[44] Independent labels tend to launch new creative artists only to have them snapped up by majors once they are successful. Concentration similarly prevails in record distribution and retail. There has been a sharp fall in the number of independent record stores in response to competition not only from nationwide specialist chains like FNAC but also from supermarkets. The latter alone accounted for almost half of all sales of singles in 2001, against the independent stores' 4 per cent; virtually a third of record sales take place in only 2 per cent of outlets.[45] More serious still is the explosion of downloading. The ministry of culture's most recent nationwide survey of French cultural practices (2009) shows that, while only 5 per cent of baby-boomers (aged 55–64) had downloaded music in 2008, 48 per cent of people aged 20–4 and over half (56 per cent) of people aged 15–19 had done so.[46] And unlawful file-sharing in France is twenty times more common than legal downloading.[47]

Against this background, one distinctively French feature of today's popular-music landscape is the part played by government policy. In 1973, the ministry of culture's first survey of cultural practices demonstrated the importance that listening to popular music was assuming in French people's daily lives. Subsequent editions of the survey have shown this growth to be exponential, amounting to what the surveys call a 'music boom'. Part of this boom was the result of the ministry of culture's 'Landowski Plan', an ambitious ten-year programme for transforming national music provision. Although popular music was not included, the plan did help music in all its forms become a significant cultural activity for the French, and a surge in popular-music practices was one of its unintended outcomes. A more direct contribution was the ministry's subsequent music policy from 1981, with the coming of a Socialist government under President Mitterrand. His dynamic new minister of culture, Jack Lang, initiated a series of policies over the next twelve years that responded to French popular music's structural problems and helped it

move from margin to mainstream. Independent radio was authorised for the first time in 1981, leading to a plethora of new stations devoted to popular music (NRJ, Skyrock, Fun, etc.). New live venues, large and small, were created for youth music, independent labels were assisted, and quotas of French music were imposed on radio stations in 1994. Controversial though the quotas have been, they have engendered new opportunities for French musicians and boosted their sales, despite the fact that those who sing in English or whose work is instrumental feel disadvantaged. State voluntarism, then, is generally thought to have created a constructive environment in which the music boom can continue and grow, though the 2009 Hadopi law regulating creative works on the Internet, voted through under President Sarkozy, has proved controversial.

Conclusion

As this suggests, the musicalisation of French culture with which this chapter began continues apace. In contrast with forty years ago, France's population now listens to the radio in order to hear music rather than news bulletins;[48] and of course music equipment is present in multiple forms in the vast majority of homes. The peer-to-peer exchange of downloaded music files has also taken off in the last few years, to the consternation of policy makers, who have had difficulty designing appropriate legislation to protect copyright. French popular music today is also much more segmented, diverse and legitimate than in the past. One consequence of its diversity that has not changed, however, is the difficulty that the French language has in naming it. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, some observers are still not comfortable with the term *musiques populaires* in the English sense, though the alternatives are no more widely accepted. As we have seen, *variétés*, still common in record stores, is a devalued term for dedicated music fans. Chanson is often still distinguished from *le rock* and *le rap*, even though the successive fusions are making the distinction all but meaningless. Electronic dance music has long been referred to confusingly as *la techno*. Meanwhile, policy makers since 1981 have tried to find their own linguistic trails through the minefield of naming: 'amplified musics', 'musics of today' or 'present-day musics', none of which is universally accepted.[49]

The problem of naming possibly indicates a lingering uncertainty in the cultural establishment, including the music industry, about how to respond to the paradox of imported Anglo-American music, which has acted as a vital leaven while also undermining local traditions. Even so, this uncertainty contrasts markedly with the metamorphoses that have

come about at grass-roots level in the production and consumption of the music itself since the 1960s. These changes defy the outdated, ethnicised caricatures of French popular music that are still common in English-speaking countries. Indeed, some *néo-réaliste* bands, rappers and techno artists actively appropriate and subvert such caricatures to produce further innovations. French music is in fact much more creatively self-conscious than in the 1960s, more aware of its cultural heritage, its multiple influences and its international standing. Some bands performing in English or instrumentally are also building careers in English-speaking countries, in a few cases signing to British labels. Although its sales are dropping,[50] French rap too continues to evolve new hybrids, while hip-hop generally, including deejaying, graffiti art and dance, has largely been accepted into the legitimate visual arts and contemporary dance. The national and international meanings of French popular music today are, then, constantly in the making. This suggests that despite the usual products of unambitious commercialism that characterise Western pop generally, popular music in twenty-first-century France is one of its more dynamic and fertile cultures.

Notes

1 Mary Breatnach and Eric Sterenfeld, 'From Messiaen to MC Solaar: music in France in the second half of the twentieth century', in William Kidd and Siân Reynolds (eds), *Contemporary French Cultural Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000), 247.
2 The term 'musicalisation' is borrowed from Marc Touché. See David Looseley, *Popular Music in Contemporary France: Authenticity, Politics, Debate* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 3, 205.
3 Jean-Yves Mollier, 'Un parfum de la Belle Époque', in Jean Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (eds), *La culture de masse en France de la Belle Époque à aujourd'hui* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 77.
4 Louis Jean Calvet, *Chanson et société* (Paris: Payot, 1981), 66.
5 Claude Duneton, *Histoire de la chanson française*, 2 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1998), vol. I, 221–70.
6 Ibid., vol. II, 904–15.
7 Philippe Gumplowicz, 'L'harmonie est-elle municipale? Cliques, orphéons et fanfares dans la ville du XIXe siècle', in Philippe Poirrier and Vincent Dubois (eds), *Les collectivités locales et la culture: les formes de l'institutionnalisation, XIX^e–XX^e siècles* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2002), 330–3; Gérôme Guibert, *La production de la culture: le cas des musiques amplifiées: genèse, structurations, industries, alternatives* (Paris: IRMA, 2006), 60–2.
8 Gumplowicz, 'L'harmonie est-elle municipale?', 328.
9 Duneton, *Histoire*, vol. II, 431, 436, 453.
10 Serge Dillaz, *La chanson française de contestation: de la Commune à mai 68* (Paris: Seghers, 1973), 12.
11 Duneton, *Histoire*, vol. II, 521.
12 See Dillaz, *La chanson française de contestation*, 11–17; Duneton, *Histoire*, vol. II, 399–479; and for a synthesis in English, Looseley, *Popular Music*, 11–14.
13 Lionel Richard, *Cabaret, cabarets: origines et décadence* (Paris: Plon, 1991), 63–87, 89–113.
14 For significant dates from the mid-nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, I refer the reader to the chronology included in Looseley, *Popular Music*, 215–22.
15 On Bruant's influence, see Peter Hawkins, *Chanson: The French Singer-Songwriter from Aristide Bruant to the Present Day* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), particularly 67–73.
16 Duneton, *Histoire*, vol. II, 922–3.
17 Larry Portis, *French Frenzies: A Social History of Popular Music in France* (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm, 2004), 22–3.
18 Serge Dillaz, *La chanson sous la III^e République, 1870–1940* (Paris: Tallandier, 1991), 33.
19 Ibid., 36.
20 Ibid., 246.

21 Georges Coulonges, *La chanson en son temps de Béranger au juke-box* (Paris: Les Éditeurs Français Réunis, 1969), 29–32.
22 Guibert, *La production*, 54–5, 60.
23 Ibid., 80.
24 See '*variétés*' in Looseley, *Popular Music*, index.
25 On the arrival and influence of jazz in France, see Ludovic Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine: histoire du jazz en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); and in English: Jeffrey H. Jackson, 'Making enemies: jazz in inter-war Paris', *French Cultural Studies*, 10 (1999), 179–99; and Matthew F. Jordan, *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).
26 Among the significant number of books on Baker's career in France, see Ean Wood, *The Josephine Baker Story* (London: Sanctuary, 2000), 84–102; and Lynn Haney, *Naked at the Feast: A Biography of Josephine Baker* (London: Robson Books, 2002), 49–73.
27 Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine*, 33–58; Jordan, *Le Jazz*, 141–84.
28 Guibert, *La production*, 80–1.
29 There is a voluminous literature on Piaf, of variable quality. For the most recent biography in English, see Carolyn Burke, *No Regrets: The Life of Edith Piaf* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).
30 On Trenet's influence, see Hawkins, *Chanson*, 85–94.
31 See Hawkins, *Chanson*; and Looseley, *Popular Music*, chapter 4, 63–86.
32 Hawkins, *Chanson*, 104–23.
33 Guibert, *La production*, 90–1.
34 Looseley, *Popular Music*, 23.
35 Guibert, *La production*, 100–1, 124–5.
36 Ibid., 124–7.
37 Breatnach and Sterenfeld, 'From Messiaen', 251; Portis, *French Frenzies*, 123.
38 Guibert, *La production*, 153.
39 For a detailed analysis of the independent movement and *le rock alternatif*, see Barbara Lebrun, *Protest Music in France: Production, Identity and Audiences* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
40 Benoît Sabatier, *Nous sommes jeunes, nous sommes fiers: la culture jeune d'Elvis à Myspace* (Paris: Hachette, 2007), 397. On *chanson néo-réaliste*, see Lebrun, *Protest Music*, 41–63.
41 Looseley, *Popular Music*, 87–109, 183–202.
42 On 'Star Academy' and the chanson tradition, see David Looseley, 'Making history: French popular music and the notion of the popular', in Barbara Lebrun and Jill Lovecy (eds), *Une et indivisible? Plural Identities in Modern France* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 127–40.
43 Ibid., 136–8.
44 Guibert, *La production*, 45.
45 French Music Bureau, *The British Music Market in Comparison with the French Music Industry* (London: French Music Export Office, 2003), 35; Guibert, *La production*, 45.
46 Olivier Donnat, *Les pratiques culturelles des Français à l'ère numérique: enquête 2008* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 127.
47 See David Looseley and Pierre-Alexis Mével, 'News from the Ministry of Culture', *French Cultural Studies*, 22 (2011), 173–4.
48 Breatnach and Sterenfeld, 'From Messiaen', 251.
49 See Looseley, *Popular Music*, 208.
50 Sabatier, *Nous sommes jeunes*, 510.