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Le Chat Noir and the Musical Mainstream in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

CALGARY, ALBERTA

NOVEMBER, 2001

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the nineteenth century, musical culture in Paris underwent an enormous transformation. Historically, one of the most significant developments was the dissolution of mainstream musical culture. The emerging cabaret culture of Montmartre in the 1880s, most notably the Chat Noir cabaret, exemplifies this splintering of musical mainstream. The Chat Noir provides a well-documented porthole to the ideologies of the artists that met in Montmartre, and reveals shifting relationships between performers and audiences, new notions of success, and can also be identified as an early example of an artistic movement driven more by theory than by tradition. All of these elements support a fragmented culture and position the cabaret artists and musicians as informed and sympathetic commentators, capitalizing with unparalleled insight upon the large-scale paradigm shift that occurred at this time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must begin by thanking Professor Victor Coelho, my advisor, for his continued support. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to have worked with him. His wisdom, generosity, perspective, and sense of humour have provided me with tremendous inspiration. My sincere appreciation goes to Professor Brita Heimarck for her original ideas and ongoing feedback.

I would also like to thank my parents, Bill and Arlene Brand, and my sisters, Patricia and Meredith Brand, for their unfailing love and support. Finally, thank you to Peter James Paulson for always reminding me to smile.

For my parents

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INTRODUCTION

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Parisian musical culture splintered during the last two decades of the nineteenth century when notions of “mainstream” compositional culture were redefined. Cabaret culture in Montmartre, a right-bank district of Paris, exemplifies this splintering, particularly during the cabaret’s formative years of 1881-1885. The cabaret can also be seen as an antithesis to the mid-century musical mainstream without being a result of it, or of its dissolution. Central to this thesis is the Chat Noir cabaret, which existed in Montmartre from 1881 to 1897. It was the first and historically most important of the Parisian *cabarets artistiques*, and provides a well-documented porthole to the ideologies of the musicians that met there for private intellectual meetings. It also reflects the shifting relationship of the performer to the audience, changing notions of success, and can be identified as an early example of an artistic movement driven more by theory than by tradition. Most importantly, an analysis of music and culture at the Chat Noir suggests possible reasons for a large-scale paradigm shift that occurred at this time and endured into the twentieth century.

Chapter One will provide a review of the literature that contributed to this study. In Chapter Two, characteristics that indicate the existence of a mainstream compositional culture in the mid-century will be identified through an analysis of music producing normative procedures and expectations, music education, concert programming, and contemporaneous music criticism. Existing tensions between mainstream and “fringe” activities will be explored and will be used to further emphasize the validity of such categories. The discussion of patronage, schools of

thought, and differing interests of composers, performers, and audiences will reveal conflicting views, but in the end, all activity can basically be gauged with respect to a central current of musical culture.

This “mainstream” will then be shown to have fractured into many equal and essentially non-overlapping strands. While there was a mass musical public being nurtured at this time, compositional mainstream had disintegrated by the end of the 1880s. This will be shown to be partly due to the canonization of the “great classics” and to the establishment of normative styles and procedures governing the expectations of the new paying public that appeared during the Romantic period. Previous to the 1880s, certain established “virtues” governed music composition. Though the Classical elements of style, form, and function were expanded and rethought by Romantic composers, these elements continued to regulate composition in the nineteenth century. Towards the turn of the century, composers began to address these traditional elements, and a variety of unique and individual movements appeared. Many of these were manifestorial in nature, and had theoretical beginnings that composers were trying to propagate.¹ Initially, the intended audiences for these intellectual movements were members of an artistic community, not a paying audience, suggesting a new notion of success was developing. Surprisingly, the Parisian public accepted these avant-garde movements with a general acceptance and enthusiasm. The result of these tumultuous final decades of the century was the

¹ Such manifestos were more common in art, such as *Die Brücke*, *Der Blaue Reiter*, Fauvism, and Cubism, but many modernist composers also supplied theoretical justification for their works. These include Wagner’s *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849), Schoenberg’s “*Harmonielehre*” (1911), the Italian Futurist manifestos “*Sketch for a New Aesthetic of Music*” (Ferruccio Busoni, 1916),

establishment of Paris both as a receptive site for a flourishing avant-garde, and the cultural capital of Europe, with hardly a rival for nearly a century.

The Parisian *cabarets artistiques* of the 1880s and 1890s have been cited by many composers and historians as bearing the seed of the musical avant-garde, and will be the focus of Chapter Three. Usually these references are brief and non-specific; music in the *cabarets artistiques* has only been seriously investigated by a few scholars, and the interest has usually been in terms of the influence that cabaret culture has had on major composers, Erik Satie in particular.² This thesis seeks to uncover elements of a fractured culture present in the Chat Noir cabaret, and the role of the Chat Noir artists in allowing a musical culture devoid of a unifying idiom to endure. Indeed, musicians at the Chat Noir were becoming increasingly aware of their position in history and their influence on the future. The most revealing and tangible chronicle of the intentions and developments of the Chat Noir artists was their journal, *Le Chat Noir*, which appeared weekly from 1882 to 1895.

In Chapter Four, I will discuss the music at the Chat Noir, the role of chanson, and elements of musical genre, form, function, and performance practice. There have been no major studies that address specific elements of music and musical style at the Chat Noir between 1881 and 1885, and very few scores exist. This is due in part to the largely parodied, pastiche, and improvised practices followed by the singers who were often poets and not composers. Nonetheless, representative musical examples of

“Manifesto dei musicisti futuristi” (Pratella, 1910-11), and “L’art dei rumori” (Russolo, 1917), and even Erik Satie’s “Musique de l’ameublement” (1920).

² Even major studies of Erik Satie, such as Robert Orledge, *Satie Remembered* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1995) only offer cursory gestures towards the cabaret environment that influenced him in his youth. Steven Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford

the most important contributors will be analyzed and shown to advance the concept of a fragmented musical aesthetic at this time.

The historical importance of the hypothesis put forward in this thesis is that after the *fin-de-siècle*, positions of insider/outsider, mainstream/periphery, center/margin, and even proper/improper must be revisited. The view that the many cultures that existed at the turn-of-the-century were subcultures to a greater whole will be shown to be incomplete, and inquiry into musical developments of this period should be revised, if necessary, to accept this plurality.

University Press, 1999), was the first historian to address specific aspects of the influence of cabaret culture on Satie's career.

CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study is inspired by methodologies from a variety of nineteenth-century fields including musicology, European history, sociology, anthropology, and cultural and intellectual history. Recent studies concerning musical culture in Paris from the mid-nineteenth century to the turn-of-the-century and the Belle Époque have helped to identify the presence and dissolution of mainstream compositional culture and to establish parameters within which to interpret cabaret culture.

Secondary Sources

An important and classic monograph dealing with French history is Theodore Zeldin's two-volume study *France: 1848-1945*.¹ In the first volume he addresses French intellectual life and the propagation of intellectual ideals. Political and social struggle were central to much French public and private life during the century considered. While more traditional histories deal with these issues exclusively, Zeldin's approach is analytical and attempts to disentangle individual aspects of French life, drawing attention to those who created French history and how their ideals have shaped the wider culture. The second volume considers the history of psychology and behaviour, the advent of alcoholism and mental lunacy, and the decay of political and ecclesiastical institutions. These topics have received great attention in the past twenty years, and are useful in understanding the concept of artistic

¹ Theodore Zeldin, *France: 1848-1945*, vol. 1, *Ambition, Love, and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), and *France: 1848-1945*, vol. 2, *Intellect, Taste, and Anxiety* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

Bohemia, even though Zeldin does not address this specifically. He also considers the relationship between Paris and the provinces, as well as foreign relations.

Eugen Weber's *France: Fin de siècle* takes the reader through a virtual tour of everyday Parisian life as he envisions it, during the approximate decade of 1895-1905, evoking smells, sounds, and sights. In this study, the concept of change is always central: "reaction to change set the character of the period."² He addresses the increasing influence of policy and polity on the general public, including street beggars, the bourgeoisie, and the aristocracy. This book characterizes the *fin-de-siècle* as the decade or so preceding the Belle Époque as a time of economic and moral depression, with evidence of a fundamental, yet chaotically realized realignment of roles and responsibilities of the masses due to unprecedented technological advancements, material progress, opportunity, and political disarray.

Robert Nye's classic study *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France* deals with social pathologies in Paris in the 1880s and 1890s.³ The preoccupation of educated people in France following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 with crime, alcoholism, prostitution, and insanity is more the focus of this work than the evidence of these deviances themselves. Interestingly, the Montmartre cabarets were one of the first public venues where crime, degeneracy, and decrepitude were witnessed and discursively considered. Nye's discussion of the allure of this underworld for France's intelligentsia is central to the establishment of cabaret culture.

² Eugen Weber, *France: Fin de siècle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.

³ Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Particularly relevant to this thesis is that of Bohemia, because so many of the cabaret collaborators came out of this environment of artistic freedom. The term “bohemian” is often used to describe artistic life in Paris, usually referring to the culture surrounding the Latin Quarter between 1850 and 1880, and often extended to include the Montmartre artists of the turn-of-the-century. Jerrold Seigel’s *Bohemian Paris* examines Bohemia as a pervasive middle class consciousness, not merely as a part of artistic and literary life.⁴ He characterizes the mid-nineteenth century as a time of bourgeois ambivalence, especially towards the social identities that they fought for many years to create. After the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, citizens were increasingly considered as “individuals,” not classes or groups, and this new found power and freedom resulted in a spirit of creativity and recklessness that Seigel associates with Henri Murger (1822-1861), the great Bohemian.⁵

While Seigel always maintains a focus on the avant-garde, another important general treatment of the Bohemian period, Charles Rearick’s *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France*, focuses on pleasure and consumption beginning in the 1880s and including the Belle Époque.⁶ These sources are important to this study as they attest to intellectual currents present in Paris at large, albeit in different forms and to varying degrees, that are central to the cabaret.

⁴ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York: Penguin, 1987).

⁵ Seigel frequently refers to Murger’s autobiography, *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1909).

⁶ Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment and Festivity in the Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University, Press, 1985).

One of the most durable histories of this period is of course Roger Shattuck's *The Banquet Years: The Origin of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*, which treats four case studies: Henri Rousseau, Alfred Jarry, Erik Satie, and Guillaume Apollinaire.⁷ This is one of the first and most important studies that demonstrate that the spirit of the age is embodied by artists not initially accepted by the establishment, and that the four chosen artists represent this spirit better than any one individual figure. He also helps to clarify "how the fluid state known as Bohemia, a cultural underground smacking of failure and fraud, crystallized for a few decades into a self-conscious avant-garde that carried the arts into a period of astonishingly varied renewal and accomplishment."⁸

A number of musicological studies in the last twenty years have addressed the crisis of mainstream culture that this thesis attempts to investigate. Joseph Kerman has addressed the dynamics of canonicity and the development of concert repertory. Most relevant to this thesis are his articles "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out" and "A Few Canonic Variations,"⁹ which deal with historiography, repertory and canon, the ideologies behind early criticism and analysis, and the history of the discipline of musicology. Kerman also addresses the changing tradition of art-music in the nineteenth century, and the gradual incorporation of music of past generations in concert programming. These writings have been especially useful in defining and identifying a mainstream musical culture in Paris.

⁷ Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁹ Joseph Kerman, "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 311-331, and "A Few Canonic Variations," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 107-125.

Similarly, Peter J. Burkholder identifies the fragmentation of the compositional mainstream around 1900, and focuses on the “historicist mainstream” in the twentieth century.¹⁰ He declares that the most important aspect of twentieth-century music is not its progressiveness in terms of techniques, but its role in the museum and its relationship with the past. Joseph Straus deals with the increasing reverence and anxiety towards the past that twentieth-century composers faced as they searched for an audience and an identity.¹¹ Many of his ideas can be extended to the composers working in late-nineteenth century Paris, and the historical awareness that their music reflects.

Fin-de-siècle culture has been considered extensively by Jann Pasler.¹² Her work reveals how the many conflicting positions regarding progress and change are politically motivated. To Pasler, musical works reflect a social or political perspective, and the success of those works would depend on the interest of an appropriate public, whether they be republicans, *ancien régime* supporters, Catholics, anarchists, nationalists, or Dreyfusards.

Glenn Watkins’ ambitious *Pyramids at the Louvre* documents the great diversity of artistic movements and their possible influences in Paris during the early twentieth

¹⁰ Peter J. Burkholder, “Museum Pieces: The Historicist Mainstream in the Music of the Last Hundred Years,” *Journal of Musicology* 2 (1983): 115-134.

¹¹ Joseph N. Straus, “The ‘Anxiety of Influence’ in Twentieth-Century Music,” *Journal of Musicology* 4 (1991): 431-447.

¹² Jann Pasler, “Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress,” *Music and Society: The Late Romantic Era, from Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991): 389-416, and “*Pelléas* and Power: Forces Behind the Reception of Debussy’s Opera,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10 (1987): 243-264, and “The *chanson populaire* as a Malleable Symbol in Turn-of-the-Century France,” in *Tradition and its Future in Music: Report of Fourth Symposium of the International Musicological Society in Osaka, Japan, July 22-25, 1990*, ed. Y. Tokumary, M. Ohmiya, M. Kanazawa, O. Yamaguti, T. Tukitani, A. Takamatsy, M. Shimosako (Tokyo and Osaka: Mita Press, 1991): 203-209.

century.¹³ His theme of collage and the re-contextualizing and assemblage of diverse elements represents the philosophical underpinning of Paris at large during these decades of transition and exploration, which support a fragmented culture.

Elaine Brody's *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870-1925* shows how Paris emerged as the musical capital of Europe through the impact of Wagner, the World Expositions, the growth of French musical nationalism, and increased creativity of individual composers and performers that took place between the death of Berlioz and the death of Satie.¹⁴ The book was seriously criticized as consisting of amusing anecdotes but of little insight.¹⁵ William Weber has considered the rise of mass musical culture and the role of the new middle class as patrons.¹⁶ Most important to this thesis is his documentation of the rise of mass printing and concert culture.¹⁷ Concentrating on the three most important cities in Europe, Paris, Vienna, and London, he refers to concert programming of important orchestras to show the establishment of the "great masters" in the musical canon as well as the presence of an elitist, objective, and impersonal aspect of symphonic music that was present since the inception of mass public concert series.

Several general studies have been useful regarding the musical institutions in operation in Paris at this time. James Harding has outlined the role of the Paris Opera

¹³ Glenn Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Post-Modernists* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Elaine Brody, *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870-1925* (New York: Braziller, 1987).

¹⁵ For example, Richard Langham Smith, *Music and Letters* 70 (1989): 276-77.

¹⁶ Including, William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Holmes and Meier: 1975), and William Weber, "Eighteenth-Century Origins of the Musical Canon," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 141 (1989): 6-17.

¹⁷ William Weber, "Mass Culture and the Reshaping of European Musical Taste, 1770-1870," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8 (1977): 5-22.

in consolidating musical tradition and also as a venue for Romantic exploration.¹⁸ David Tunley emphasizes the intimacy of the salon, the increasing role played by music, and the acceptance of composers and performers as equals. Katherine Ellis' *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France* is a study of the weekly journal *Le Gazette et revue musicale de Paris* (1834-1880).¹⁹ She addresses readership and content, emphasizing the journal's support for Beethoven, its usefulness in tracing the development of the canon, and as a reflection of public interests. These studies have confirmed the existence of a mainstream musical culture in the nineteenth century, and they help to define the cultural and intellectual environment that accepted the cabaret in the 1880s.

The first book-length study in English of the cabaret and its emergence as an institution in Europe is Lisa Appignanesi's *The Cabaret*.²⁰ Dealing briefly with many characters and cabarets, this study documents the arrival of cabaret culture in Paris with the Chat Noir, and its spread to Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and eventually to Poland, and it identifies the most important proponents of each. More academic and thorough is Harold Segel's *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret*, a detailed chronicle of the spread of the cabaret phenomenon through Europe.²¹ Beginning with the Chat Noir in Paris, then working his way through the most important cabarets in Europe, and finally to the founding of Dadaism in Zurich in 1917, Segel argues that the cabaret's

¹⁸ James Harding, "Paris: Opera Reigns Supreme," in *Music and Society: The Late Romantic Era, from Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991): 99-125.

¹⁹ Katherine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret* (London: Studia Vista, 1975).

²¹ Harold Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret: Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Cracow, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Zurich* (New York: Columbia University, 1987).

status as a distinct cultural phenomenon rests on its tendency to emphasize minor art forms. This study provides useful background information on the individuals involved and the intellectual atmosphere of the cabarets.

An essential collection of essays published by the Zimmerli Museum of Art, *The Spirit of Montmartre*, examines the intellectual climate surrounding cabaret culture focussing on Chat Noir and the Cabaret des Quat'z-Arts.²² It includes a discussion of the Hydropathes, the Bon Bock dinners, literature, music in Montmartre,²³ and wordplay and parody. The cabaret is identified as the catalyst, and often the site, for collaboration of artists, writers, composers, and performers in the production of a variety of artworks and new ideologies. The study reveals the essence of Montmartre's intellectual and artistic environment, analyses the artwork and music it produced, and identifies the ideologies behind the movement as well as its influence on twentieth-century works.

Several other studies have appeared since the centennial anniversary of the Chat Noir in 1981. Mariel Oberthür, the curator of the Musée de Vieux Montmartre, has compiled a very useful introduction to the cafés and cabarets of Montmartre, which was based on her thesis, in her short book by the same title.²⁴ More detailed is her longer study *Le Chat Noir*.²⁵ As with Oberthür, the beautiful illustrations and the

²² Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, ed., *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabaret, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (Rutgers: State University of New Jersey, 1996).

²³ Steven Moore Whiting, "Music on Montmartre" in *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabaret, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*, ed. Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (Rutgers: State University of New Jersey, 1996): 159-198.

²⁴ Mariel Oberthür, *Cafés and Cabarets of Montmartre*, trans. Sheila Azoulay (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1984).

²⁵ Mariel Oberthür, *Le Chat Noir: 1881-1897* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992).

discussion in Armond Field's *Le Chat Noir: A Montmartre Cabaret and its Artists in Turn-of-the-Century Paris* effectively illuminates the spirit of this time.²⁶

Rae Beth Gordon's recent study of early French cinema, *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis*, supports many of the hypotheses advanced in this thesis.²⁷ Drawing on the pioneering work of Robert Nye, she discusses comedy, hysteria, and nervous disorders as unifying elements in cabaret culture and as central elements in the interpretation of early French cinema. A lengthy chapter is devoted to cabarets in Montmartre, performance practices, and in-depth discussions of some of the most popular cabaret performers of the time. This study amounts to a serious inquiry into the splintering culture that occurred at this time, and in many ways is a parallel to this thesis.

While the cabaret has been a topic of great interest since its inception in Paris in 1881, discussions of musical styles and analysis of the cabaret chansons have appeared only recently. Mary Ellen Poole's dissertation *Chanson and Chansonnier in Parisian Cabarets Artistiques, 1881-1914* defines the extent of the cabaret's due association with the artistic avant-garde, and examines the unique blend of high and low culture that characterizes the *cabaret artistique*.²⁸ The prime focus of her study was to address musical style and analyse chanson normatives, and she chose as a case study the career of the unique and eccentric Chat Noir *chansonnier* Marcel Legay (1851-1915).

²⁶ Armond Fields, *Le Chat Noir: A Montmartre Cabaret and its Artists in Turn-of-the-Century Paris* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1993).

²⁷ Rae Beth Gordon, *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis: From Cabaret to Early Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

Musicological studies of the most important composers in this milieu, especially Erik Satie, often underscore the influence of café culture on their works. The most thorough is Steven Whiting's *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall*, which traces the development of popular music in Paris from the eighteenth-century Caveau through café concert and music hall to *cabaret artistique*.²⁹ His book chronicles Satie's involvement within these milieux, and shows how this involvement influenced his later works. Satie was involved in several of the Montmartre cabarets as a pianist, including the Chat Noir.

Primary Sources

It has been a long-standing tradition in Paris for artistic and political institutions to publish their positions in a weekly or bi-weekly periodical. Cabaret habitués were no exception; the rise of cabaret culture in the last two decades of the nineteenth century stimulated many publications of this type. The most important of the many journals produced by Montmartre cabarets was *Le Chat Noir*. It appeared weekly between January 1882 and March 1895, with the exception of a two-month hiatus in 1885 when the owner, Rodolphe Salis, temporarily sold the rights to the journal. With contributions from many of the Chat Noir habitués, the poetry, satirical reviews, and caricatures helped to define and publicize the goals of Salis and the artists at the cabaret.

The chansons that will be considered in this study are of a considerably different nature than the concert hall repertory of the period. Many of these pieces were

²⁸ Mary Ellen Poole, *Chanson and Chansonnier in Parisian Cabarets Artistiques, 1881-1914* (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1994).

improvised or parodied, and therefore do not exist in authentic printed scores.

Unique performance practices at the cabaret are, in fact, more important as signifiers of culture than the songs are themselves. Fortunately, many accounts of performance practice exist in autobiographies, interviews, and essays. Emile Goudeau's *Dix ans de bohème* has been the most useful in this thesis.³⁰

Only four scores appeared in *Le Chat Noir* between 1882 and 1885. Tending to emphasize illustrations and usually including only the unharmonized melody, the journal is not a good source for musical scores. Two of the scores that were printed in the journal, "Le Ballade du Chat Noir" by Aristide Bruant, and an untitled chanson by Emile Goudeau, will be analyzed in Chapter Four to demonstrate the ideologies and aesthetics endorsed by Chat Noir artists.

Marcel Legay's chanson "Le Cochon," which will also be analyzed, appeared in his collection *Toute la gamme* in 1886.³¹ Legay's commitment to producing a written score is unique in the cabaret tradition; many chansonniers improvised their musical accompaniments and even their melodies. Nevertheless, many chanson collections were published, often years after the chansons were performed, though very often no harmonies are provided and the accuracy of reproduction is questionable.³²

²⁹ Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁰ Emile Goudeau, *Dix ans de bohème*, (Paris: Librairie Illustrée, 1888).

³¹ Marcel Legay, *Toute la gamme: Quinze chansons illustrées et lettres autographes*, (Paris: Brandus et Cie, 1886).

³² Aristide Bruant, *Dans la rue*, 4th ed. *Les Introuvables* (Paris: Editions d'aujourd'hui, 1976); Paul Delmet, *Les plus jolies chansons de Paul Delmet, pour chant et paroles* (Paris: Enoch et Cie, n.d.); Maurice Mac-Nab, *Chansons du Chat Noir* (Paris: Au Ménestrel, 1891); Victor Meusy, *Chansons Modernes* (Paris: J. B. Ferreyrol, 1891); Léon Xanrof, *Chansons sans-gêne* (Paris: G. Ondet, 1890); Marcel Legay, *Toute la gamme: Quinze chansons illustrées et lettres autographes* (Paris: Brandus et Cie, 1886). Many chansons were also printed in *petits formats* in the 1890s and sold in at Montmartre cabarets and by street vendors.

CHAPTER 2

FRAGMENTATION OF MAINSTREAM MUSICAL CULTURE

In order to understand cabaret culture, it is necessary to consider the wider context of Parisian musical and artistic life in the late-nineteenth century. This chapter will examine many issues contributing to musical life in Paris, but its main purpose is to identify the presence of a musical mainstream in the mid-nineteenth century and its fragmentation in the 1880s. This will then provide a backdrop for the emerging cabaret culture, which will be shown to exemplify the splintering of mainstream culture and the fundamental paradigm shift that occurred between 1880 and 1900.

Several elements can be shown to unify musical composition and consumption during this period. During the nineteenth century music attained a wide public audience and achieved the status of high art worthy of praise and commentary. The most important development in support of the hypothesized “splintering” and dissolution of mainstream musical culture was that music acquired an historical dimension. Music of past generations was revived and deemed valuable by musicians and audiences, reinforcing the role of the musical canon and the concert hall as protectors of a venerable high-art tradition.

“Mainstream”

The term “mainstream” is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the prevailing direction of opinion, fashion, society.”¹ In terms of musical mainstream, Donald Francis Tovey has provided a more suitable definition in his essay “The Main

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Main stream.”

Stream of Music”² as “what we all think we know.”³ He uses the analogy of a stream, beginning with a “spring” that:

...becomes navigable at the end of the fifteenth century with such composers as Josquin des Prés, and remains smoothly navigable throughout the sixteenth century. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, it enters into regions partly mountainous and partly desert, and becomes choked with weeds. In the eighteenth century, it is drastically cleared up by Bach and Handel, and drained off into various smaller channels by other composers. In the middle of the century these channels reunite and carry the main stream in another direction, represented by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. In the nineteenth century there emerges the facile, half-literary distinction between the classical and the romantic which has been used with vital efficiency in tracing the obvious and obliterating the essential.⁴

For Tovey, the term is useful “as a term of reference by which to distinguish the kind of art that has branched away from it or been diverted to backwater.”⁵ It is worth noting that the decades surrounding 1600, those “choked with weeds” where the mainstream is difficult to “navigate,” have often been likened to the decades surrounding 1900.⁶ Tovey employs the concept of mainstream as the “acceptable” style of the great masters to whom others must be compared, and does not address their intentions or ideologies. He promotes the deterministic approach common in early twentieth-century musicology that supports the idea of forward progress towards perfection in music, and his mainstream is linked to that idea of progress.

² Donald Francis Tovey, “The Main Stream of Music,” in *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949): 330-352.

³ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The most obvious similarities in music composition between 1600 and 1900 were the developments in tonality, drastic changes in performance practice, musical styles, the deliberate retention of older styles, the emergence of distinct national musical identities, fluidity of genre, and redefinitions of function.

In another study cited earlier, Peter Burkholder addresses the issue of mainstream in the twentieth century, and identifies a notorious difficulty: “in no other period has it seemed so impossible to locate a mainstream, a central line of development or a common conceptual tradition, which can provide a framework for understanding the contributions of individual composers.”⁷ He does claim that there was a compositional mainstream between the 1880s and 1918, but it was a *historicist mainstream*, “not of shared styles, but of shared concerns, an intellectual tradition in the widest sense rather than a stylistic tradition.”⁸ He is referring to a “compositional” mainstream, which is a more specific designation than the more general “musical” mainstream: composers were writing to gain a position in a museum. My concept of splintering mainstream refers more to compositional elements than a musical mainstream dictated by mass public consumption. The impetus for the fragmentation came fundamentally from composers and not the audience, as might be expected in a commercial music business. While Burkholder’s concept of historicist mainstream is useful when approaching the music of the twentieth century, it is an *historicist observation* – an attempt by historians to classify this many-faceted culture. The relevance of his concept of mainstream, then, is limited to the composers and the works accepted as canonical, and does not address the many other strands of compositional culture that contributed.

William Weber speaks of “mass culture” in the nineteenth century, a concept that is similar to that of mainstream. Writing that “mass culture should be conceived as performance or dissemination of music which does not rest upon personal

⁷ Peter J. Burkholder, “Museum Pieces: The Historicist Mainstream in Music of the Last Hundred Years,” *Journal of Musicology* 2 (1983): 115-134.

relationships between musicians and the public for which obtaining – indeed, manipulating – a wide public is a primary goal,” he emphasizes the “impersonality of relationships between listener and performer and the active exploitation of a broad public by the music business.”⁹ Here, then, are the seeds of the oft-cited “elitist” nature of concert music.¹⁰ These factors contributed to the existence of mainstream, especially due to similarities in concert programming in Paris and the increasing reverence for dead composers.

Clearly, the definition of mainstream is a difficult project, subject to anachronistic qualifications, and quite possibly (as in Tovey’s case) biased ones as well. Nevertheless, it appears that the clearest evidence of a mainstream musical culture in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century was the unique phenomenon of *a musical work entering the performing repertory and the canon simultaneously*. Whether the work was a revival of a “classic” instrumental work, a performance of an early opera or a contemporary opera, program music, or Baroque sacred music, musical works were accepted simultaneously by performers, composers, musical institutions, and the mass public. This reinforced the audience’s expectations, the models of musical taste, and the work’s influence on posterity. In previous generations, a piece of music would have earned a position in the performing repertory before entering the canon (if indeed a canon existed before the nineteenth century). In the twentieth century, a musical work would most often enter the canon before it entered the repertory, if ever

⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁹ William Weber, “Mass Culture and the Reshaping of European Musical Taste, 1770-1870,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8 (1977): 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

it did.¹¹ After the 1880s, composers were creating the canon, and according to Burkholder, writing explicitly for it, thus enforcing their ideals rather than supporting a style already accepted by their audiences.

The concept of a splintered mainstream must also be clarified. The mainstream that guided composition, formed by accepted elements of form, style, harmony, and function, eventually reached a crisis that composers confronted in a variety of independent ways. This produced a fragmented mainstream, leaving no central current. The many styles that emerged at the *fin-de-siècle* were unrelated; if there was overlap in technique and style it was coincidental (or explicitly intentional), and the many currents were so far removed from each other that no central ideology was present or should be sought by musicologists. Composers provided the impetus for a fractured culture: musical style was no longer dictated by patron or public interests. Composers were actively attempting to assert their interests and set their own standards, which can be seen as one of the most significant and empowering developments in all of music history.

Avant-garde and revolt are only incidentally attached to the fragmentation of mainstream, and should not be considered synonymous with it. The avant-garde constitutes component strands of the musical/compositional culture but is not a defining characteristic of fragmentation. Techniques themselves did not have to be new to support the changing ideology that progress that was no longer moving towards a universal ideal of perfection in music. In fact, Burkholder says that the avant-garde, the radical wing of progressivism, is not part of the “historicist

¹¹ Canon formation will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, the ideas suggested presently are borrowed from Joseph Kerman, “A Few Canonic Variations,” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 107-125.

mainstream” because avant-garde composers rejected the music of the past and the musical museum. He also claims that “the closer the models an historicist composer of any nation chooses are themselves to the central, mostly German tradition of the 18th and 19th centuries, the closer his own works will be to the central tradition of the 20th.”¹² Historicist mainstream composition involves building on established models and reinterpreting functional elements, especially form.

Revolt is not a new concept in music composition either. Even the most eccentric gestures and ideas present in cabaret culture of the 1880s have roots in earlier generations. These gestures, including insulting clientele, mimicking physical deformity and contortions, and purporting subversive ideals, sought to redefine the notions of art and public expectations, but the revolutionary aspect was not new to Parisian audiences. At some point it became true that intense controversy becomes a *succès de scandale*. This underscored the difference between the old and new guard. Many works of art and literature from the Romantic era show disregard for conventions of classical aesthetics, and if this brought negative attention to the creator so much the better. Victor Hugo’s *Hernani* (1830), one of the first in a long line of artistic scandals, explicitly undermined the principles of classical literature.¹³ In 1855, Gustave Courbet exhibited his *The Studio of the Painter, a Real Allegory*, a visual manifesto of the Realist movement, and other works outside of the international exhibition in protest to the oppressive values and censorship of the Academy. Its sombre tones, enormous scale, acceptance of the urban tradition, and roughness in

¹² Burkholder, 122.

¹³ James Harding, “Paris: Opera Reigns Supreme,” in *Music and Society: The Late-Romantic Era, from Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991): 101.

execution reflect the diversity of the Realist movement.¹⁴ In 1863, Edouard Manet (1833-1883) officially acknowledged a crisis in the hegemony of the official art institutions by exhibiting his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and other works rejected from the Salon of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in the "Salon des Refusés." Two years later his *Olympia* would prove to be almost equally scandalous.¹⁵ Before the famous reception of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* in 1913, the opera house also served

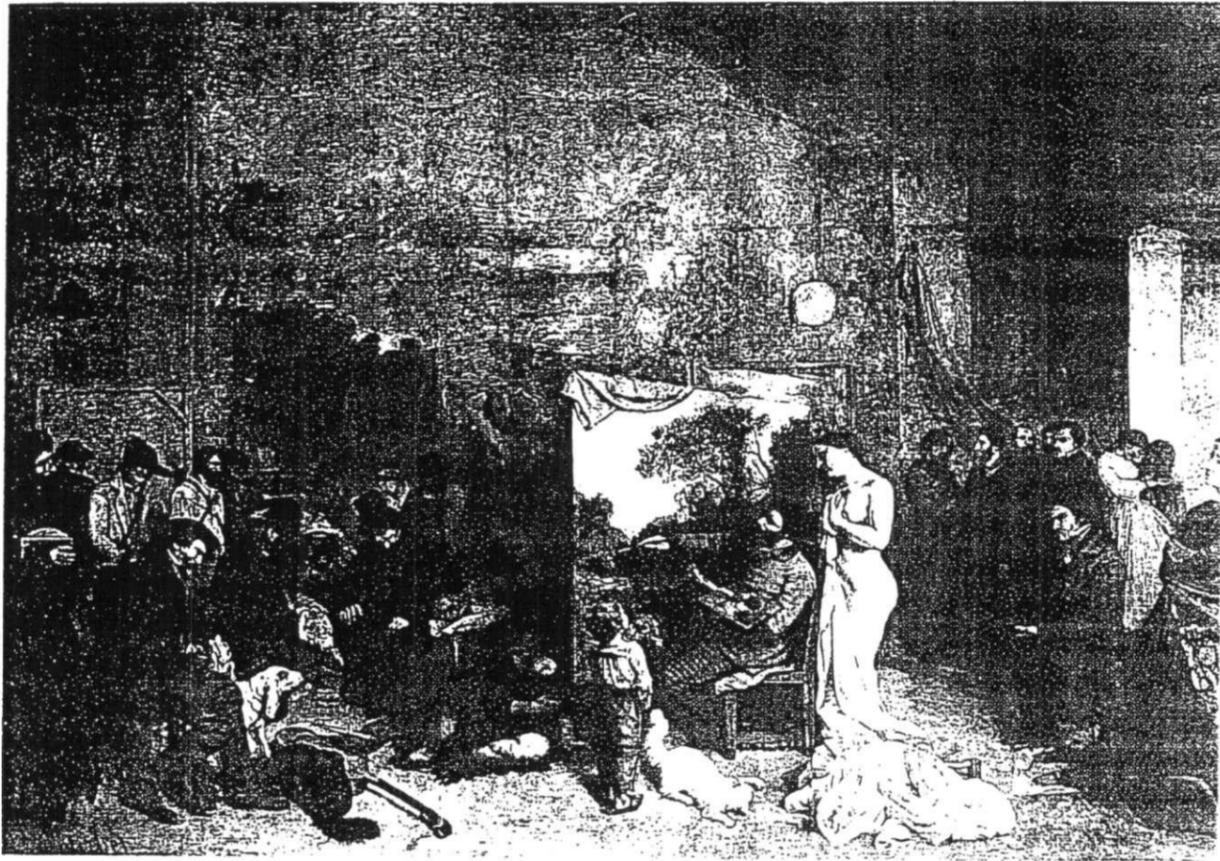


Figure 1: Gustave Courbet, *The Studio of the Painter, A Real Allegory Concerning Seven Years of My Artistic Life*, oil on canvas (1854-1855), Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

¹⁴ Richard R. Brettell, *Modern Art 1851-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13-14.

¹⁵ See figures 1 and 2. In these paintings Courbet and Manet brought the female nude out of the allegorical and religious realms and into clearly contemporary contexts.

as an arena for society to work out political and social differences. *Lohengrin* (1887) and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) both met with extreme criticism and public condemnation, but were performed repeatedly and eventually accepted.¹⁶

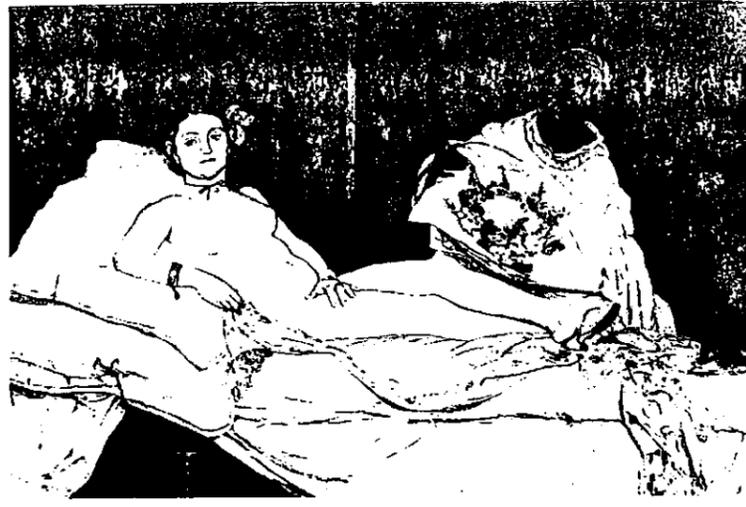


Figure 2: Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, oil on canvas (1863), Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

A growing crisis in music became evident in Germany as early as Schumann's writings in 1835 in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, and Wagner's *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* in 1849. Naturally, new aesthetic and technical features were introduced into music composition throughout the nineteenth century; this crisis reached an unprecedented climax around 1900 when composers pushed musical language to the outer edges of tonality. Despite Burkholder's claim that "the twentieth century appears to present the longest sustained period of chaos in the history of Western art

¹⁶ Jann Pasler, "Pelléas and Power: Forces Behind the Reception of Debussy's Opera," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10 (1987): 129-132.

music,”¹⁷ most of the musical innovations after 1900 were rooted in aesthetic assumptions inherited from the past, yet a unifying rhetoric was no longer present.

Changes in Society

In *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), Charles Baudelaire described modernity as “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent.” He refers to modernity as “being in the present,” and complains that by the mid-nineteenth century art had lost the ability to capture the fleeting and “accidental” beauties of reality and thus had “tumble[d] into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty.”¹⁸ Baudelaire associates this with a lack of ability or perseverance on the part of artists, but perhaps it was rather that artists in the mid-century were having difficulty defining “reality” and therefore could not express it through the same forms and genres as their predecessors.

Baudelaire’s statement should not be taken out of context; he is not describing the 1860s as the only period where the present is “ephemeral,” but it was true that by the late-nineteenth century multi-faceted change was understood and reality was a process of transformation and evolution.¹⁹ The political upheavals that Paris endured between the French Revolution and the Commune Insurrection of 1871 following the Franco-Prussian war divided society into many conflicting ideological positions and into many segments with the means and aspirations to patronize music.²⁰ New

¹⁷ Burkholder, 115.

¹⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 13.

¹⁹ Jann Pasler, “Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress,” in *Music and Society: The Late-Romantic Era, from Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991): 389-416.

²⁰ The following is a brief summary of French history from the French Revolution (1789-1799) to the Third Republic (1870-1944): The overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy in 1789 united French citizens against the feudal structure of the state. Beginning with the storming of the Bastille prison in July 1789, the French Revolution became a ruthless and radical fight for democracy, dominated by the Jacobins and Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794). Louis XVI was executed in 1793, beginning

ideas of patriotism and democracy emerged in the 1890s after the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs, and growing fears of anarchy and genocide that some felt after the Communard Insurrection were amplified.²¹ Change, however, was not limited to the political arena, there were also many technological developments, medical advancements, and cultural changes which further divided society.

Robespierre's Reign of Terror (September 1793 – July 1794). The Revolution failed to produce a stable Republican government. The First Republic was founded during the revolutionary decade in 1792, its slogan being "Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité," but was overthrown in 1799 when Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) seized control of France. He proclaimed himself Emperor in 1804, creating the First Empire, which would stretch from Poland to Spain, but Napoleon was unable to conquer Russia (1812). Napoleon was forced into exile to Elba in 1814, and the Bourbon dynasty was restored (1814-1830). Napoleon returned briefly to power in 1815 but was defeated at Waterloo. Louis XVIII was king until his death in 1824, and Charles X ascended (r. 1824-1830), also of the Bourbon family. Louis-Philippe, Duke of Orleans, claimed the throne in 1830; he was overthrown in 1848, and would be the last king of France. The period of 1830-1848 is known as the July or Bourgeois Monarchy. The February revolution of 1848 established the Second Republic. Louis Napoleon (Napoleon III) was elected president, and declared himself Emperor in 1852. He remained Emperor of the Second Empire until he abdicated in 1870, and the Third Republic was established. The Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) would be the demise of the Second Empire. France was easily defeated by the larger and far more efficient Prussian army of Otto von Bismarck at Sedan. The Prussian army, still at war with France, advanced to Paris and laid siege for many months. In January of 1871, the president of the Third Republic, Adolphe Thiers, yielded, and was forced to pay heavy restitutions, including the Alsace and Lorraine regions. Parisians rebelled by establishing the Paris Commune. For four months, a committee of leftist politicians, mostly from Montmartre, assumed power and refused the Thiers government. They threw up barricades and declared Paris a free commune. When the city was invaded by thousands of French troops, the *communards* burnt the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais Royal, and Catherine de Medici's Tuileries Palace, and then retreated to the Père Lachaise cemetery. On 21 May, 1871, all remaining *communards* were shot at the cemetery against the *mur des fédérés*. An estimated 20,000 Parisians were killed by their compatriots in this final week of the civil insurrection, over ten times as many as were beheaded in the French Revolution nearly a century earlier.

²¹ The Boulanger Affair was one of the first scandals of the early Third Republic. Georges Boulanger (1837-1891) was the French general and minister of war 1886-1887. In January 1887, the government tried to rid themselves of Boulanger, whom they considered a demagogue and national embarrassment, but most importantly a threat to the Republic, by giving him a provincial post. Boulanger was enormously popular with the public, his supporters and politicians alike expected a *coup d'état*. He was accused of treason in 1888 and was relieved of his command. He gathered support and but instead of conquering Paris, he fled to Belgium where he committed suicide after the death of his mistress.

Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935), a Jewish army officer, was falsely accused of espionage and imprisoned at Devil's Island in 1894, but was later exonerated (1904). The controversy caused by the army's attempt to cover up his innocence divided French society and revealed anti-militaristic and anti-Semitic attitudes. Zola's *J'accuse*, a dramatic diatribe, condemned the army, the government, and society for corruption.

The Panama Affair (1889-1893) also exposed corruption in the government and furthered anti-Semitic resentment. Prominent politicians were revealed to have accepted bribes from Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez canal, and his two Jewish cohorts who wanted hastened permission to hold a lottery to raise money for his new project, the Panama canal.

For people in France, life was made easier by the new technology of the mid-nineteenth century, and with the introduction of many new products and services, the French became an increasingly material and consumer culture.²² The most rapid change in consumer patterns began in the 1860s with the advent of mass consumption.²³ Luxurious department stores, such as the Bon Marché and the Bazaar de l'Hôtel de Ville, supermarkets, and mass advertising in newspapers and magazines prompted mass production and consumption by an increasingly uniform market. Foreign trade was increased by the international Expositions of 1878, 1889, and 1900. What resulted was an emphasis on merchandise and commodities as a signifier of personal and social identity. A steady increase in purchasing power between 1850 and World War I further contributed to this commercial seduction, and Parisians were faced with the moral dilemma of choosing how to spend their "disposable" income, resulting in complexities of greed, guilt, and altered social consciousness. Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, expounded in *The Origin of the Species* (1859), equated moral and material progress and further emphasized this social quandary. The French "were witnessing an historical collision as longstanding cultural traditions of enlightened consumption slammed into material and social changes that directly challenges those traditions."²⁴ Mass consumption led to identity issues that had never

²² These new commodities included the internal combustion engine and electricity as power sources which were more efficient and easier to transport to a mass public, gas lighting, the creation of the metro, the bicycle, and the automobile for transport, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's (1809-1891) rebuilding of Paris in the 1860s, the invention of the photograph, phonograph, and telephone for communication, chemical dyes, the silk-weaving loom, toilets in private homes and a mass sewage system in Paris, the building of the Eiffel Tower in 1889 etc.

²³ Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

before been a part of urban life, and new opportunities allowed for the blurring of boundaries between real life and the imaginary world of dreams.²⁵

Many believed that technological developments led to disintegration of character, ethic, and even mental stability.²⁶ As Michael Marrus has written: “Severe changes forced upon society by the beginnings of industrialization are thought to have provided a conjuncture of excessive drinking and popular distress more unhealthy than any time before or since.”²⁷ The term “alcoholism” was coined in 1852 by the Swedish physician Magnus Huss.²⁸ A major extension of social drinking occurred in the 1870s and 1880s and reached a climax around the turn-of-the-century. After the Commune, alcohol consumption had reached the point that a law repressing public drunkenness had to be imposed in 1873, and alcoholism became a major social concern for the Republican government. Alcohol consumption was central in the emerging social and popular culture; it provided subject matter for Montmartre musicians and artists but was also the main activity of the audience.²⁹ In the 1870s, aperitifs entered the common fare of many Parisians, and alcohol became a daily luxury. After 1880, absinthe became the most popular drink in cafés and public drinking establishments, a craze that reached its peak around 1900. Absinthe was known to be toxic as early as 1872, and was banned in 1915 because its

²⁵ Ibid., 4

²⁶ This idea is supported in most major works on the history of France, including: Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945*, vol. 2, *Intellect, Taste, and Anxiety* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); and Rae Beth Gordon, *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis: From Cabaret to Early Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Michael Marrus, “Social Drinking in the *Belle Époque*,” *Journal of Social History* 7 (1974): 116.

²⁸ Nye, 155. He was awarded a major prize from the Academy of Science for his discovery of alcoholism and its negative effects.

²⁹ Ibid., 155.

THE GOOD DAUGHTER



"Young and pretty as you are, you ought to be ashamed to leave your old mother without a drop to drink."



"Ah, parents don't know the sacrifices one makes for them."



"Saved! Thank God! My mother will have some wine!"

Figure 3: Jehan Testevuide, "The Good Daughter," from *Gil blas*, 28 February, 1902.

allegedly hallucinogenic qualities caused permanent mental lunacy.³⁰ The lasting importance of the “green fairy” and the degeneration brought about by alcoholism is evident in the many works of art and literature.³¹

The genres of the idiot comic and epileptic singers seen in the cabarets of Montmartre symbolize the intersection between medicine and popular culture that was discernibly present in Paris at this time. A fascination with hysteria and other psychological automatisms beginning in the 1880s is evident from the hundreds of contemporary newspaper and magazine articles that deal with those subjects, such as the *Nouvelle revue* and *Le Figaro*.³² The public curiosity in hysteria and lunacy was enforced by the popular superstition that physical states could be transferred between people from a distance.³³ The French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) established links between various neurological conditions and lesions in the central nervous system, and worked extensively on hysteria. This work was taken up later by his pupil Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Charcot’s lectures at the Salpêtrière Hospital and school were attended by Parisians of many backgrounds, including Maurice Rollinat (1846-1903), who would become well-known as a Chat Noir *chansonnier*.

Public and professional thought link hysteria with alcoholism:

Degeneration was supposedly a product of alcoholism, heredity, and mental insufficiencies such as imbecility and idiocy, which were an indication of the failure to genetically ascend the evolutionary ladder. The number of degenerates in France was, in fact, a clear indication

³⁰ Mary Ellen Poole, “Chansonnier and Chanson in Parisian *cabarets artistiques*, 1881-1914” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1994), 67.

³¹ For example, *The Glass of Absinthe* (Edgar Degas, 1876), and Emile Zola’s *L’Assommoir* (1877) recounts the story of a working class family brought to devastation from alcoholism.

³² Gordon, ii.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

that evolution had already reached its pinnacle and that there was no direction to go but downwards.³⁴

Rae Beth Gordon also claims that “it is perhaps no coincidence that the 1880s were both the golden age of hysteria in Paris and the golden age of Parisian cabaret and café-concert.”³⁵

At this time, France also witnessed drastic changes in sexual behaviour and public sexual comportment. Not surprisingly, the last quarter of the century was also the “golden age of venereal peril”³⁶ due to rampant prostitution spreading syphilis. Paris had been producing most of Europe’s pornography for many generations, and writers such as Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) produced much erotic literature for profit.³⁷ Other writers also reflected this corruption of bourgeois “virtues”³⁸ but the relevance here is that, yet again, the middle class were willingly guided through the strange and unexplored underworld. Often, this underworld was characterized by the darkest, bleakest, and even macabre matters of the human condition.

It should be noted that while sex and prostitution have often been associated with cabaret culture this was not so at the Chat Noir between 1881 and 1885. The few women that were involved at the Chat Noir, Marie Krysinka in particular, were respected as composers, not as sex objects.³⁹ The waiters were men, dancing ladies were not part of the spectacle, and there were no prostitutes inside the cabaret;

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁶ Nye, 137.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ For example, the novels of Joris Carl Huysmans (1848-1907) and the later plays of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906).

³⁹ Phillip Dennis Cate, “The Spirit of Montmartre,” in *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*, ed. Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey, 1996): 32.

although Boulevard Rochechouart and its environs were among the shadiest districts in Paris at the time. The bourgeoisie coming from Paris proper would have been exposed to the uncontrolled sex trade and street life, which was likely unfamiliar to them, and they would possibly have associated all Montmartre cabarets with crime and filth. Women performers were more common at dance halls and music halls, such as the *Moulin Rouge*.⁴⁰

For fashionable society and the large student population alike, over-education, over-ambition, and large-scale decadence resulted in an attraction to the widest reaching social “malaise” of the time: Bohemia. The term “bohemian” first appeared in 1830s, meaning “gypsy” from Bohemia, but usually refers to the semi-educated and semi-idle youth population lacking common interests in society and believing that they held a unique artistic “vision,” that gathered in the mid-century, and generally behaved unrespectably.⁴¹ Mediocrity, boredom, and spleen plagued Parisians like no time before, and a search for “identity” led many Parisians, especially the wealthier classes, to appropriate marginal lifestyles. Due to all of the opportunities and experiences available, Parisians were disenchanted with their daily lives, and sought novel forms of escape and strong sensations, yet felt uneasy about this unnecessary materialism. Boredom may well be the symptom of a proliferation of choices and the seemingly directionless society that was being created by consumerism. Romanticized artistic bohemians from a range of social classes were

⁴⁰ So well known from Toulouse-Lautrec paintings, for example, *La Goulue* (1891) and *At the Moulin Rouge* (1892). Toulouse-Lautrec also produced many portraits of Aristide Bruant, whose cabaret *Le Mirliton* was the chief competitor of the Chat Noir.

⁴¹ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 5.

drawn to the café culture of the Latin Quarter in the 1850s.⁴² Before the cabaret in the 1880s, cafés provided suitable meeting places for artists. The Impressionists were renowned for meeting at the Café des Nouvelles Athènes, and theirs was the first major “movement” in art that was completely organized in this sort of an informal environment. Bohemian life was transplanted from the Latin Quarter to Montmartre after 1871, similar to the migration of café culture from Montmartre to Montparnasse during World War I.

The Expanding Musical Public

Musicians had been expanding the traditional boundaries of musical aesthetics for several generations before the 1880s, but artistic innovation requires a willing public. This public was in place by the 1890s, and in this, the role of the cabaret was far-reaching. The initial intention of the Chat Noir was to create a forum for artists to communicate privately and explore new opportunities, but a wide public was soon attracted to the Chat Noir and other Montmartre cabarets. The anti-utopian, highly satirical, and blatantly sarcastic antics that they witnessed not only reflected large-scale fragmentation of mainstream culture, but also primed Parisian audiences for a new notion of entertainment where “anything goes.”

Under the *ancien régime*, the interests of aristocratic patrons were upheld by the composers who served them. The opera house and the public concert in the nineteenth century performed for a wide bourgeois audience who were moderately disconcerted

⁴² Henri Murger’s autobiography, *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Paris, 1908) portrays bohemian life in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. This was also the source for Giacomo Puccini’s opera *La bohème* (1896).

by novelty, but rarely paid serious attention to the performances anyway.⁴³ As the end of the century advanced, audiences represented more specific bourgeois interests until composers were able to create works that only a specialized and educated audience could understand. At first this shift was coming from the public and the commercial interests of the music business who wanted to please the masses. But after 1890, composers were finally able to find a foothold in the “kaleidoscopic” society, and had an unprecedented freedom to explore their artistic interests.

The Republican government also had a vested interest in the music business. The Third Republic (1870-1944) was committed to maintaining stability, since it was the longest lasting government since the French Revolution, and was weary of subversion. The Republicans felt that music helped support the “moral character” of the people, and they wanted to restore confidence in the nation’s post-war regeneration by providing cultural opportunities to the under-privileged masses and supporting a unified mainstream culture. They wanted the state to represent popular sovereignty, and aimed to make music accessible to a maximum number of listeners, as well as promote new works of French composers. State funding began on a large scale in 1879, with most of the money going to the opera.⁴⁴ To a degree, the cultural mainstream in the mid-century was a diplomatic enterprise, seeking conformity and stability, and was instituted by the government – an important contrast with Chat Noir artists who prided themselves on being anti-establishment and deliberately “unregulated.”

⁴³ James Harding, “Paris: Opera Reigns Supreme,” in *Music and Society: The Late-Romantic Era, from Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991): 106-108.

⁴⁴ Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Paris,” 114.

The most important and the widest-reaching musical institution was the opera, but public concert series, music printing, amateur music societies, and criticism also contributed to standardization of musical style before 1880.⁴⁵ Success in the theatre was important for composers, as many works were commissioned, but commercial patrons could not allow conflict of taste, hence they supported traditional virtues and styles. The Opéra, also called the Académie Royale de Musique, promoted an impersonal and elitist art, intending to please a mass audience. French Grand Opera was established as the leading style of opera in Paris with Daniel-François-Esprit Auber's (1802-1871) *La Muette de Portici* (1828). Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864) championed Grand Opera in mid-century with such blockbusters as *Robert le diable* (1831) and *Le prophète* (1849). Meyerbeer was exalted as the greatest composer of his day – *Les Huguenots* (1836) had received 1000 performances by 1893⁴⁶ – but he is now largely overlooked. His operas were large sumptuous displays that subordinated all elements to spectacle and were written for an audience that no longer exists: they were only ever intended to be a diversion.⁴⁷ His operas were the very definition of musical mainstream in Paris.

The Théâtre National de l'Opéra Comique performed operas that were frivolous and deliberately sentimental, and was also a largely conservative institution. When its reputation faltered in the 1860s, it was revived by performances of the sure-fire hits of Meyerbeer, Auber, Jacques Halévy, and Ambroise Thomas. New talents were

⁴⁵ The musical salon also provided an important opportunity for professional musicians, but since it did not shape mass public taste it will not be considered here. For discussion of salon music, see David Tunley, *Music of the Nineteenth-Century Parisian Salon*, Thirteenth Gordon Athol Anderson Memorial Lecture (Armidale: University of New England, 1997).

⁴⁶ *New Grove*, 114.

⁴⁷ Harding, 106.

slowly introduced during the 1870s including Jules Massenet (1842-1912), and a new look was established with Bizet's *Carmen* (1875). This opera deals with scandal, murder, and lower class values, and was not wholeheartedly accepted at first. The Opéra Comique was the earliest large institution that made acceptable misery, vice, and decrepitude, but it created scandal not subversion.

Exoticism in opera and the appropriation of non-Western cultures was noticeably present at the respectable Théâtre Lyrique (1851-1885). This theatre established Charles Gounod (1818-1893) as an important public figure, performing *Le médecin malgré lui* (1858), *Faust* (1859), and *Romeo et Juliette* (1867). "Exotic" works by Georges Bizet, *Les Pêcheurs de perles* (1863), *La Jolie fille de Perth* (1867), and Berlioz' *Les Troyens* (1863) were premiered there. A taste for the exotic was not limited to music: imports of Japanese goods had been available in Paris since 1862.⁴⁸ New musics heard at the Expositions of 1878, 1889, and 1900 provided creative possibilities for young composers and opened a realm of the imagination beyond the Western world.⁴⁹

An interesting point is that the director of the Théâtre Lyrique, Léon Carvalho, freely edited works to suit his taste. This also occurred at the Opéra where French adaptations of German and Italian operas were common and selections were inserted or removed, for example a ballet was added to the Parisian premiere of *Tannhäuser*, and the first "authentic" performance of Weber's *Der Freischütz* was in French with

⁴⁸ Ibid, 496.

⁴⁹ Most important was the Exposition of 1889. Music of the Russian Mighty Five, Javanese gamelan, Hungarian and Rumanian gypsies was heard as well as music from Spain, Islamic North Africa, and Annam (Vietnam). Discussed in James Briscoe, "Asian Music at the 1889 Paris Exposition," in *Tradition and its Future in Music: Report of the Fourth Symposium of the International Musicological Society in Osaka, Japan, July 22-25, 1990*, ed. Y. Tokumaru, M. Ohmiya, M. Kanazawa, O.

librettos by Berlioz. Symphonic music, and especially “early music” of the seventeenth-century, was also treated rather freely and “Frenchified” to suit the tastes of the audiences or musicians.

Several large concert series were created in the mid-century, the most important being by Charles Lamoureux, Jules Pasdeloup, and Edouard Colonne, all promoting different interests. The increase of symphonic concerts imposed the need for a good conductor,⁵⁰ and raised performance standards. In turn, these concerts made music accessible to many new listeners. Most importantly, directors had some authority to choose the music that they performed and consequently to shape audience tastes. While most orchestras were well within the mainstream, they did introduce new styles to the public, which provided the initial stirrings for fragmentation. The many revivals of “old masters” contributed to the elitist and impersonal nature of “learned” music in mass concert culture, and created a division within mainstream.⁵¹

While the opera continued to entertain the general public, by the 1870s composers could finally write symphonic music and have it premiered.⁵² Ironically, there was also a suspicion of new music in concert life developing at this time.⁵³ In 1887, the conductor of the Société des concerts reflected upon the function of orchestral music:

Can it not today conserve its title of glory, follow the mission of the last fifty years; can it not continue to devote itself to the cult of the

Yamaguti, T. Tukitani, A. Takamatsu, and M. Shimosako (Tokyo and Osaka: Mita Press, 1991): 495-501.

⁵⁰ Kern Holoman discusses the role of the virtuoso conductor in 1830s, re-creative artistry, and the need for a central authority figure in “The Emergence of the Orchestral Conductor in the 1830s,” in *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties/La Musique à Paris dans les années mil huit cent trente*, vol. 4, *Musical Life in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Peter Bloom (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1982), 387-430.

⁵¹ William Weber, “Mass Culture and the Reshaping of European Musical Taste, 1770-1870,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8 (1977): 5-22.

⁵² Harding, 121.

⁵³ William Weber (1977): 20.

great art, to the masters of the masters, without excluding the moderns, the contemporary members of the young school?⁵⁴

This aversion was not because the public disliked the music, but because the very definition of musical culture now acted against it: the public did not want to learn, but to be entertained. Music was becoming “something to be understood,” another rupture in mainstream.

The Société des concerts du Conservatoire (now the Orchestre de Paris), formed by François-Antoine Habaneck (1781-1849), played some music of young Conservatory students but was mostly interested in promoting Beethoven.⁵⁵ The orchestra was later led by Charles Lamoureux, who played music that only he liked. He performed works repeatedly until audiences accepted them, editing freely to appease the public. For example, in the 1870s he would perform revised versions of Bach’s *St. Matthew’s Passion* with large sections removed, so as to not bore the public on their first exposure. He repeated it at many concerts, gradually introducing the entire work.⁵⁶ In his smaller *Concerts Lamoureux* and his many chamber ensembles, he organized the performance of new French music by Edouard Lalo, César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns, Vincent d’Indy, and Emmanuel Chabrier.

Another important concert series was Jules Pasdeloup’s Société des Jeunes artistes, founded in 1852. He played exclusively German classics, including the works of Mendelssohn and Schumann. The only contemporary French music included was an occasional symphony by Charles Gounod or Jules Massenet. The series garnered a

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶ Katherine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La revue et Gazette musical de Paris, 1834-80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 70.

financial and popular success until the war of 1870. The cheap seats offered by this concert series allowed the German masterworks to reach a wide public and influence concert programming in Paris, thus supporting an increasingly stable tradition.

The two concert series that focussed on modern music were considerably smaller and less influential. Edouard Colonne wanted to educate the public and provide a “complete history of music.”⁵⁷ His Association Artistique des Concerts gave early performances of works by Massenet and Lalo, and premiered works of Wagner, Berlioz, Ravel, and Debussy. The prestigious Société nationale de musique was formed largely in reaction to the absence of modern music in Parisian concert life. Led by the Conservatory teacher César Franck (1822-1890), it was dedicated to performing the music of French composers and premiered works by Debussy, Ravel, Chabrier, Gabriel Fauré, and Paul Dukas. They depended on Pleyel and Erard piano manufacturers for a venue and never attained a wide public following due to their limited funding.⁵⁸

The most influential institution supporting the hardening conservatism of musical culture was the Paris Conservatory. The prestigious conservatory admitted only the

⁵⁷ *New Grove*, 113.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting at this point that a distinguishing characteristic of “new” instrumental works was the reliance on a program or extramusical association. The allegiance of composers to either program or absolute music represents a major division within mainstream and fuelled many two-sided debates, the most famous, of course concerning the music of Johannes Brahms and Edouard Hanslick’s model of “sounding form.” Ironically, Brahms was criticized during his lifetime as being excessively conservative, but more recently has been credited as a progressive composer, his extensive use of motivic variation making him the “first” of the modernist tradition. See Arnold Schoenberg, “Brahms the Progressive,” in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975): 398-441; and Peter J. Burkholder, “Museum Pieces: The Historicist Mainstream in Music of the Last Hundred Years,” *Journal of Musicology* 2 (1983): 115-134. Granted, many debates within musical culture existed in the nineteenth century, usually consisting of an attack on a composer or style of music due to its “deficiencies” in upholding an accepted ideology. An interesting difference after 1900 was that criticism of a musical style would come from *within* a sub-group: the many strains of musical culture after 1900 were not in competition with one another and no central “accepted ideology” existed.

best students for training in performance or composition, offering no historical study until after mid-century. The tastes and abilities of many generations of composers were directly shaped by the outwardly traditional ideals of the Conservatory curriculum.⁵⁹ Composers, who were taught compositional techniques through traditional harmony, counterpoint, and fugue, competed annually for the Prix de Rome.⁶⁰ Awarded by the prestigious Institut de France, the Prix de Rome brought success to composers but did not support innovation.⁶¹

A final contribution to the mainstream of the mid-century was a sudden expansion of the musical press in Paris in the 1830s. Music journals appeared in abundance bringing informed opinions about music and musical aesthetics to a wide public,⁶² and criticism began to be practiced by trained musicians, not by literary critics.⁶³ The *Revue et Gazette musicale* (1827-1881) was the most important and widely read journal of the nineteenth century, and it is characterized by its devout allegiance to Beethoven, especially in its early years.⁶⁴ Most articles in the *Gazette* were concert reviews that are important for tracing the development of the musical canon, but the journal also included an historical column, biographies, source studies, and articles on

⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Conservatoire was ruled by composers for the theatre, arguably the most traditional musical genre at the time. During the mid-nineteenth century, the music directors were Luigi Cherubini and Daniel-François Auber, and the teachers included Massenet, Delibes, and Franck.

⁶⁰ Other important prizes were Prix Crescent (opera or opera Comique), Prix Rossini (lyrical or sacred composition), Prix Mombine (opera-comique), Prix de Saussay (libretto), Prix Nicolo (vocal compositions), Prix Chartier (chamber music), *New Grove*, 101.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶² This also created a division within musical culture, as many professional musicians, including Claude Debussy, felt that an educated public would be injurious to the music business and musical expression would be stifled.

⁶³ Ellis, 7.

⁶⁴ The *Revue musicale* (1827-1835) joined with the *Gazette musicale* (1845-1935) to form the *Revue et Gazette musicale* in 1835.

music theory. The critics of the *Gazette* elevated music to a high art and endowed it with a history, luxuries previously reserved for literature and visual art.⁶⁵

Before the nineteenth century, orchestral music did not have a clear history. According to Joseph Kerman, “in previous centuries the repertory consisted of music of the present generation and one or two preceding generations; it was continuously turning over.”⁶⁶ Beginning with Beethoven between 1800 and 1820, composers began to preserve their music for posterity by including more rigorous notation, written-out cadenzas, detailed markings of tempo, dynamics, and expression, and the inclusion of opus numbers. In addition to the composer’s desire for preservation, the practice of revivals and musicological interest in music of the past contributed to this new historical dimension. The most important musical revivals in France included the Solesmes purification of Medieval liturgical chants, Saint-Saëns’ editions of the works of Rameau and Mozart, and Gounod’s editions of Bach and Palestrina. For the first time, music did not disappear from the performing repertory when its composer and his disciples passed on:

The musical tradition has changed diametrically, both in the music played and listened to and in the social conditions under which playing and listening take place. At first the repertory was nearly all contemporary. Then it extended from some point in the past up to and including the present. Now it seems to hang suspended like a historical clothesline between two fixed points in the past.⁶⁷

By the mid-nineteenth century, then, all elements were in place for a widespread reverence of music, past and present. This naturally brings up canon formation, which is essential to mainstream and its fragmentation. Each element discussed in this

⁶⁵ Ellis, 5.

⁶⁶ Kerman (1983): 110.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

chapter as a contributing factor to mainstream culture also contributed to canon formation, as the two are closely related. As stated previously, my definition of mainstream is that *a musical work entered the performing repertory and the canon simultaneously*. Upon closer consideration, then, the mainstream only existed in France for the few decades surrounding 1850.

The definition of canon is obviously as complicated as the definition of mainstream. Kerman defines the canon as “an enduring collection of books, buildings, and paintings authorized in some way for contemplation, admiration, interpretation, and the determination of value.”⁶⁸ He also claims that the canon requires written records: “in the nineteenth century, musicians operated more or less as they always had, relying primarily on the internal dynamic of tradition rather than on the external authority of composers’ ideal texts.”⁶⁹ The impact of the objectified written score and the proliferation of printed music on an eager amateur public were substantial. This applies equally to composers and professional musicians.

Technological advancements inspired a society nourished by mass-produced and increasingly homogenous commodities. Frivolous consumption and decadence was becoming a *raison d’être* for at least a portion of society. Whether the “public” that constituted the musical audience had serious allegiances to any faction of musical expression is largely incidental. What matters is that musical activity had assumed enormous public attention and loyalty, in whatever form.

⁶⁸ Joseph Kerman, “A Few Canonic Variations,” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 107.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

John Guillory promotes the idea that the literary canon was formed fundamentally through a teaching repertory.⁷⁰ Assuming that this is valid, to a certain degree, for music, the Conservatory curriculum, especially the practice of analysis, had an essential role in solidifying the canon, and by extension, the mainstream.

Analysis, however, inevitably results in the imposition of value judgements and is notoriously obsessed with demonstrating unity – a concept fashioned by analysts, usually of the German masterworks, and virtually inseparable from “greatness.” Speaking of analysis in the twentieth century, Kerman identifies a paradox that had its roots in the 1880s:

... as the years and decades go by, the predominant position of analysis grows more and more paradoxical; paradoxical, because the great German tradition of instrumental music, which analysis supports, no longer enjoys the unique status it did for the generation of Schenker and Tovey and Schoenberg. There is no need to enlarge on the various factors that have so drastically changed the climate for the consumption and appreciation of music today. They include the wide variety of music made available by musicological unearthings on the one hand and recording technology and marketry on the other; the public’s seemingly insatiable hunger for opera of all sorts; the growing involvement with non-Western music, popular music, and quasi-popular music; and also a pervasive general disbelief in hierarchies of value. It is not that we see less, now, in the German masters. But they no longer shut out our perspective on great bodies of other music, new and old.⁷¹

It seems natural that musicians would identify the recycling of genres, forms, and styles, and desire to supplement the traditional fare with new ideas. One could argue that the sheer stability of the institutionalized musical culture of mid-nineteenth century France, coupled with the restrictive capacities of the tonal system and

⁷⁰ John Guillory, “Canon,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2nd ed., ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995): 233-249.

⁷¹ Joseph Kerman, “How We Got Into Analysis, and How to Get Out,” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 317-318.

traditional forms, caused the rupture of mainstream in the 1880s to be so drastic that it completely annihilated the existence of any unifying elements in music composition.

Fragmentation

Twentieth-century music has universally assumed a movement-based history. The proliferation of countless influences and “-isms” with no obvious common denominator has produced a data-glut of unprecedented proportions. This in itself testifies to fragmentation, but there are other important characteristics.

Since the 1880s, there has been no single “great figure.” Composers have overcome the need for public validation, animosity and rivalry rarely permeate stylistic boundaries, traditional hierarchy has been recast in countless formats, “conformity” has not only become optional, but has become a defining characteristic of a composer’s identity, and the idea of forward progress has been abandoned. The blurring of all manners of boundaries has been so complete that boundaries and compartmentalization are no longer desired or relevant.

That compositional culture realized the dimension of self-reflection at this time empowered composers significantly. To varying degrees, musicians capitalized upon the potential that this delineation of one’s identity permits – but none more effectively than the artists of the Montmartre cabarets.

CHAPTER 3
THE CHAT NOIR

Ah! messeigneurs, gentilshommes de la Butte, manants
de la plaine, croquants et tenanciers, arbalétriers,
cranequiniers et tout autres, ah! quel cabaret ce fut dès
le début, que celui que fonda Rodolphe Salis!! Tудieu!
ventre-saint-gris! palsambleu!¹

Origins of Cabaret

The first, greatest, and longest lasting of the Parisian *cabarets artistiques* was the Chat Noir, founded in 1881 by Rodolphe Salis.² The Chat Noir, and many of its derivative cabarets, retained elements of the literary café and of public and private singing societies. The first private singing society was the prestigious Caveau (established 1733), whose members were professional and civil workers and exclusively male, though women were allowed to attend as visitors when accompanied by a member. Jean-Philippe Rameau attended and, despite the generally apolitical nature of the group, he found support there in his debate against Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his “querelle des bouffons.”³ They would meet once a week and share chansons and verses composed by the members. Political subjects were addressed in the songs at the more informal working-class *goguettes*. Both of these singing societies often followed the tradition of the parodied chanson that continued to be

¹ Emile Goudeau, *Dix ans de bohème* (Paris: Librairie Illustrée, 1888), 253.

² The term cabaret was first used as early as the thirteenth century meaning a drinking establishment, tavern, or wine cellar. At the end of the nineteenth century the term was largely synonymous with the more accurate term *cabaret artistique*.

³ Mary Ellen Poole, “Chanson and Chansonnier in Parisian *cabarets artistiques*, 1881-1914” (Ph. D. diss., University of Illinois, 1994), 29.

practiced amongst the cabaret chansonniers at the Chat Noir, where the poet or chansonnier would insert his own verses into a well-known melody. In the 1830s, the Café des Ambassadeurs and the Chalet Morel became the first café-concerts in Paris, located near the place de la Concorde in the 2^{ième} arrondissement.⁴ The café-concert did not restrict admittance to the public, and therefore it became extremely popular by the mid-nineteenth century. Patrons were allowed to drink and smoke, rarely paying serious attention to performances. The subject matter of the *chansonniers* often approached the blatantly licentious, and many comic genres flourished including the *pochard*, the *gommeux*, and the *excentrique*.⁵ The café-concerts resembled the *cabarets artistiques* only in that there was singing by a performer alongside consumption of food and drink. There were no pretensions to cultivate serious art music at the café-concert; patrons wanted only to be entertained while they socialized.

The artistic cabarets that sprung up in Montmartre were different from other singing and drinking establishments, but they did retain elements of the *café littéraire* of the Latin Quarter that were used as meeting places for artists. Among the most well-known were the Café des Nouvelles Athènes, where Manet and his followers developed the “Impressionist” movement, and the Café Momus, which appeared in the second act of Puccini’s *La Bohème*.

The cabaret, then, besides offering song and drink, also provided a convivial

⁴ Steven Whiting Moore, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14-22. Book-length studies devoted to the café-concert include François Caradec and Alain Weill, *Le Café-concert* (Paris: Atelier Hachette/Massin, 1980); and, André Sallée and Philippe Chauveau, *Music-hall et Café-concert* (Paris: Bordas, 1985).

⁵ Chanson genre was determined by subject matter not by style. Many of the café-concert genres would surface at the *cabarets artistiques*, but with the intention of communicating with an audience, not of entertainment. The genres and their characteristics will be discussed in Chapter 4.

meeting place and an intellectual atmosphere for an informal grouping of artists away from public scrutiny. Initially, the atmosphere was small and intimate, and participants were free to drink, smoke, converse, and improvise. France's humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune not only provided an impetus for the migration of artists from the Latin Quarter to the distant Butte de Montmartre in the 1870s, north of Paris, where the floundering artist Rodolphe Salis was planning to open his "cabaret," but also presented poets and chansonniers with a wealth of new subject matter. Yet before Salis was able to ensure success in his new venture, he had to find a group of followers. He discovered this final and most vital ingredient when he met Émile Goudeau (1849-1906) at the Café de la Grande Pinte in November of 1881.⁶

Goudeau was the leader of a literary circle of artists, mostly poets, who called themselves the *Hydropathes*. This group met regularly in the Latin Quarter between 1878 and 1879, yet due to dangerous antics by the *fumistes*, who were essential in securing the renown of the group, a schism developed and the meetings ended after less than two years.⁷ Goudeau, however, kept close contact with many of the old *Hydropathes* and accepted when Salis invited him to resume activities at his new cabaret.⁸ The *Hydropathes* had a heterogeneous, albeit mostly male, membership. One of the few female participants was the composer Marie Krysinka.⁹ The etymology of

⁶ Goudeau, 252.

⁷ *Fumistes* were pranksters with the sole goal of laughter at any price, and usually did not use intellectual means to arrive there. Often the jokes resorted to sheer idiocy and slapstick buffoonerie. The most important *fumistes* were Alphonse Allais and Sapeck. Despite the incident that they initiated involving firecrackers that caused the decline of the *Hydropathes*, both would follow Goudeau to the Chat Noir.

⁸ Goudeau, 254.

⁹ Marie Krysinka would be the only woman seriously involved with the Chat Noir also. Women did not participate in the cabaret milieu until the cabaret spread to Germany in the 1910s. Women that

the term “Hydropathes” is particularly interesting because it illustrates one of many similarities between the group and the Chat Noir, and it was one of its most striking and pervasive characteristics: deliberate mystification and obscurity of intention. Literally, Hydropathe means “one who suffers the ingestion of water,” but it is also a pun on Goudeau’s name *gout d’eau*, taste or drop of water, and “The Water Drinkers” was a well known story in Henri Murger’s *Scènes de la vie de bohème*. Goudeau first encountered the word in the waltz tune *Die Hydropaten* by the Berlin waltz composer Joseph Gungl.¹⁰ The group generally shared a spirit of childishness and of egalitarian and antibourgeois unconventionality. They expressed contempt towards the establishment, and the poems that they recited addressed issues of high and low culture, political turmoil, oppression, and human decrepitude. All of these issues became central to the Chat Noir.

The poem “Le Harang Saur” (The Pickled Herring, 1867) by Charles Cros (1842-1888) is representative of the Hydropathes’ approach to life, art, and humour. Cros was well-known as the inventor of the comic monologue (and the phonograph).¹¹ His poetry often addressed issues of injustice, especially to children or animals. The verbal tic of repeating nonsense syllables at the end of each line, known as echolalia,¹² is often found in Hydropathe poetry, and may have prompted audience participation:

“Le Harang Saur”

Il était un grand mur – nu, nu, nu,

were involved in popular chanson, such as Yvette Guilbert and Louise France, were singing in café-concerts or music halls.

¹⁰ Whiting, 35.

¹¹ Gordon, 85-86.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

Contre le mur une échelle – haute, haute, haute,
Et, par terre, un harang saur – sec, sec, sec.

Il vient, tenant dans ses mains – sales, sales, sales,
Un marteau lourd, un grand clou – toc, toc, toc,
Un peloton de ficelle – nu, nu, nu.

Alors il monte à l'échelle – haute, haute, haute,
Et plante le clou pointu – toc, toc, toc,
Tout en haut du grand mur blanc – nu, nu, nu.

Il laisse aller le marteau – qui tombe, qui tombe, qui tombe,
Attache au clou la ficelle – longue, longue, longue,
Et, au bout, le harang saur – sec, sec, sec.

Il redescend de l'échelle – haute, haute, haute,
L'importe avec le marteau – lourd, lourd, lourd,
Et puis, il s'en va ailleurs – loin, loin, loin.

Et depuis, le harang saur – sec, sec, sec,
Au bout de cette ficelle – longue, longue, longue,
Très lentement se balance – toujours, toujours, toujours.

J'ai composé cette histoire – simple, simple, simple,
Pour mettre en fureur les gens – graves, graves, graves,
Et amuser les enfants – petits, petits, petits.¹³

The First Chat Noir

Salis and the Hydropathe alumni set up in Montmartre, their new haunt the now-legendary Chat Noir cabaret at 84 boulevard Rochechouart. Its fame was almost

¹³ Quoted in Harold Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret: Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Cracow, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Zurich* (New York: Columbia University, 1987), 8-9. The following translation is by George Moore: He came along holding his hands – dirty, dirty, dirty/A big nail – pointed, pointed, pointed/And a hammer – heavy, heavy, heavy/He propped the ladder – high, high, high/Against the wall – white, white, white/He went up the ladder – high, high, high/Placed the nail – pointed, pointed, pointed/Against the wall – toc, toc, toc!/He tied the nail to a string – long, long, long/And at the end a salt herring – heavy, heavy, heavy/He got down from the ladder – high, high, high/Picked up the hammer and went – away, away, away/Since then at the end of a string – long, long, long/A salt herring – dry, dry, dry/Has swung – slowly, slowly, slowly/ Now I have composed this story – simple, simple, simple/To make all serious men – mad, mad, mad/And to amuse children – tiny, tiny, tiny.

instantaneous and the faddish aspect of an energetic youth culture was established immediately. Yet the original Chat Noir in its initial “splendour” did not last long, and after it received enormous public attention, many of its initial supporters were replaced by an increasingly commercial audience. This commercially-driven homogenization was supported by Salis, despite his initial intention of providing an intimate sanctuary for artists to fulfill their vision.¹⁴ The physical and intellectual distance he established from Paris had a symbolic significance. The art of Paris had lost its relevance to the Chat Noir habitués, who sought to redefine their boundaries and intentions.¹⁵ The seminal years at the first location (1881-1885) witnessed a flourishing of innovative artistic and musical culture and a redefinition of the artistic search for validation. These years further attest to the fragmentation visible in mainstream Parisian culture.

The name of the cabaret itself is but one of many intentional ambiguities on the part of Salis and his followers. Besides the black cat as a symbol for artistic freedom and sexuality,¹⁶ there is the connection to Edgar Allan Poe’s macabre story, “The Black Cat.” It is unknown whether Salis knew this story, although it is likely that, being a literary society, the members of the Hydropathes might have been familiar with Baudelaire’s translations of Poe’s work.¹⁷ The cat also appears in a well-known fairy

¹⁴ The Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerke* (Total Work of Art) was also an informing vision for Salis. He desired to establish a venue where all arts could intertwine as brothers. Described in Goudeau, 256.

¹⁵ The importance of the migration from the Latin Quarter is described by Goudeau, 254.

¹⁶ Phillip Dennis Cate, “The Spirit of Montmartre,” in *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabaret, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*, ed. Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey, 1996), 37.

¹⁷ Poe, Edgar Allan, “Le Chat Noir” in *Oeuvres en prose*, trans. Charles Baudelaire (Paris: Gallimard, 1983). The story is a psychological study of alcoholism and violence. The narrator, drunk, has gouged out the eye of his beloved pet cat. Several weeks later, disturbed by the cat’s maimed appearance, he kills it, and then his house burns down. One night, after the narrator and his wife



Figure 4: Henri Rivière, "L'Ancien Chat Noir," from *Le Chat Noir*, 13 June, 1885.

have moved to a new house, he returns home drunk with a new cat. He raises his axe to kill the cat after the animal accidentally caused him to trip, but murders his wife instead. The story is told on the eve of the narrator's execution. That the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé learned English in order to read the works of Poe indicates a wide enough interest to suppose that Poe was probably known to the Chat Noir group. Karen E. Petersen, "Music of the Chat Noir" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1989), 13.

tale by the French writer Charles Perrault (1628-1703). “Puss in Boots” tells of a cunning cat with quasi-magical powers, willing to outwit and deceive in order to reach his end.¹⁸ However, Salis claimed that he named the cabaret after a cat that he found on the street and brought home.¹⁹

The décor of the Chat Noir was a mixture of past and present, cluttered with antique bric-a-brac, and artifacts either authentic or fashioned after the times of François Villon (1431- c.1463) and François Rabelais (1494-1553), and with paintings made by the habitués completely covering the walls. The first Chat Noir had two rooms. The larger could comfortably seat thirty people at most and was open to non-regulars. But Salis would often admit more than 100, thrusting performers and audiences upon each other like “oiled sardines.”²⁰ This room was decorated in the style of Louis XIII, including tapestries hung on the walls, heavy walnut tables with high back chairs, a clutter of copper objects, pewter mugs, and antique pitchers strewn upon the mantelpiece over a huge fireplace. A crow named Bazouge perched atop pot hangers, but he quickly died from absinthe consumption.²¹ Cat forms and fixtures were scattered all over the cabaret, representing every pose and mood.

The largest and most celebrated painting was Adolphe Willette’s (1857-1926) *Parce Domine* (Figure 5). Willette’s drawings were a regular feature in the *Chat Noir* paper, and his favourite subject was the *commedia del’arte* character Pierrot, who became his alter ego. The enormous and magnificent painting, which was created

¹⁸ Charles Perrault, “Puss in Boots” in *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, trans. Geoffrey Brereton (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957), 37-45.

¹⁹ Segel, 17.

²⁰ Goudeau, 262.



Figure 5: Adolphe Willette, *Parce Domine*, woodbury type (1884).

to fill the wall after the Chat Noir expanded in May 1885 (shortly before Salis decided to move to a new location), features Pierrot, waving a revolver and leading a phantasmagorical parade of followers away from Montmartre and seemingly towards suicide. As the procession continues, the followers appear mad and demented. The twin towers of Notre Dame appear amidst this overall tone of death and destruction, while the wings of the Moulin de la Galette, a famous music hall that turns up very frequently in Montmartre art, represent musical staves. One arm bears the folk-song “Au clair de la lune,” which makes a reference to Willette’s signature, Pierrot, and on the other arm the medieval Requiem chant “Parce Domine” in square notation.²²

Parce Domine was only one of Willette’s many artworks for the Chat Noir. As Goudeau describes him, Willette contributed with an always imaginative, insightful,

²¹ Segel, 21.

²² Whiting (1999), 60.

and poignant pen: “Willette, avant tout, veut penser et faire penser. Il est mélancholique le plus souvent, ironiquement triste; mais parfois un gaieté bouffonne s’empare de lui, ou un verve satirique impitoyable, et alors un maître de rire. Il s’appelle Will, comme Shakespeare.”²³

The second, inner room was small and dark, separated from the larger room by a curtain and was known as “l’Institut,” a mockery of the prestigious French Academy. Entrance to the “exclusive” Institut was restricted to the regular artists. Inside, they discussed their artistic ideas and planned the weekly journal published by the cabaret, *Le Chat Noir*. However, this grouping of “artists” was a rather loosely defined association and rarely excluded anyone willing to contribute for free. Theirs was not a closed circle, but the pretension of exclusivity, however, was strongly enforced.

Initially, the Chat Noir attracted only a regular group of artists, mostly ex-Hydropathes, but other artists were soon admitted and eventually a curious public of statesmen, foreign dignitaries, and fashionable bourgeois also appeared. The waiters, dressed in the élite outfits of the French Academy, served increasingly expensive drinks to the paying public, but no food, as the Chat Noir had no kitchen. Salis’ wife, however, tried to feed those artists most needy of food, as Salis refused to pay his artists and often even had them buy their own drinks.²⁴

At first, a soirée at the Chat Noir was spontaneous and improvisatory, consisting of a usually unplanned series of chansons and poetry recitations. Whoever was called upon would perform or improvise, even passers-by off the street. A piano was

²³ Goudeau, 258.

²⁴ Poole, 54.

acquired a few months after opening, largely because the public demanded Maurice Rollinat, who would not sing without one, but with considerable difficulty because of laws that forbade the unauthorized use of a piano. Singers were then able to accompany themselves, and the *chanson* became the central mode of expression.

The programming became less extemporaneous with the semi-organized *séances de vendredis*, or Friday soirées, that drew large crowds of peers. Soon, Wednesdays also featured *chansons* with an audience of artists and some curious bourgeois, and eventually *chansonniers* sang every night to a paying public. Even at this point, the *chansons* were not finished products – the atmosphere was more like a “jam” or workshop than an organized performance.

Salis then took on the role of *conférencier* or *bonimenteur*, creating a cabaret tradition that continued into the twentieth century. He announced his performers, glamourizing them with lofty terms:

Messeigneurs, du silence, le célèbre poète X... va nous faire entendre un de ces poèmes pour lesquels les couronnes ont été tressées par des nymphes dans les grottes... dans les grottes du Montmartre, la ville sainte.²⁵

He also addressed his guests with such glorious and exaggerated politeness, bringing them into the spectacle, and neutralizing the audience/performer distance. The audience members became the subject matter for his improvisations, he would insult them in a manner of courtly pomposity, often disguised as high, frivolous praise. Salis' sense of humour was biting and sarcastic but never malicious; he poked fun at all classes of society, purposefully including the audience in his oration, while maintaining

²⁵ Goudeau, 259-260.

the lofty tone of the swanky public and the private Academy he was spoofing.²⁶

At one point, his improvisations were accompanied on the piano by “Esoterik” Satie, who appeared at the cabaret briefly in 1887 until he and Salis had a quarrel and Satie went to Auberge du Clou.²⁷ Between 1888 and 1891, Satie would accompany the parodist Vincent Hyspa at the Auberge du Clou. The regular pianists at the Chat Noir were Albert Tinchant and Charles de Sivry.

The bourgeois public enjoyed being the butt of the performers’ humour as it pleased them to be “slumming” with the artists and to have an active role in the spectacle. As Steven Whiting put it, Salis “packaged bohemia for bourgeois consumption.”²⁸ He offered a participatory opportunity to a class of people, who were already frustrated by an increasingly homogenous cosmopolitan culture, and largely familiar only with the predictable traditions of the concert hall. The new role of the audience and the changing role of the performer then, empowered artists and allowed them to create an artistic movement completely on their own terms. Furthermore, only they could provide the means to interpret it. Essentially, the “mainstream,” meaning the Parisian bourgeois now seeking a new diversion and a foothold in a fragmented and unstable culture, came to patronize the cabaret.

The chansonniers at the first Chat Noir were an eclectic group comprised largely of *fumistes* and Hydropathes. Talent and ability were idiosyncratically irrelevant; those

²⁶ Armand Fields, *Le Chat Noir: A Montmartre Cabaret and its Artists in Turn-of-the-Century Paris* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1993), 12.

²⁷ Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret* (London: Studia Vista, 1975), 11. Many Chat Noir refugees went to the Auberge du Clou because of Salis’ cheap and abrasive character, including Adolphe Willette, Marcel Legay, Paul Delmet, and Vincent Hyspa.

²⁸ Whiting (1999), 46.

that had no skill would adapt their performances accordingly. All manner of “artists” were welcome, and the only central figure was the illusory black cat: jack-of-all-trades, mastermind of the operation, and always present in some form or another.

The artists expressed a populist view of art and music, always siding with the unfortunate underdog. They ridiculed the values of a society they denounced as hopelessly philistine, and rejected Paris and university culture, although many of the artists were university-educated Parisians. There was an élitist character to the rantings of the Chat Noir artists, which was paralleled by their physical perch atop the distant Butte de Montmartre and their exclusive private meetings at the “Institut.” Although the character of the Chat Noir gatherings changed over its sixteen-year existence, it always remained elitist in some way.

Despite their pretensions of exclusivity, the artists at the Chat Noir did not abandon the hope of communicating with a large public audience. Here, perhaps, it is easier to define what they were not: the Chat Noir artists were not merely chronic outsiders searching for validation; they did not seek entrance into the high culture of Paris; and they were not searching for public acclaim. Rather, they sought to establish a venue where such notions of “validation” were irrelevant and where all perspectives could collaborate in an artistic brotherhood untainted by the “academy.” To a large degree, this was attained for the four years that the Chat Noir was at Boulevard Rochechouart.

Decline

As the flocks of curious onlookers increased outside the cabaret, the tightfisted

Salis did not hesitate to admit a larger public audience. Some of the artists, already displeased with his cheap and abrasive character, searched out new venues for their novel artistic experimentations.²⁹ Those who remained began to perform more for the sake of performing for a paying audience than for the sharing of ideas with their colleagues, and the spectacle became homogeneous. The exclusivity and artistic zeal of the first generation of Chat Noir habitués diminished when the cabaret had attracted so much attention that it had to change locations in 1885.

A rowdy midnight convoy to the Chat Noir's new location took place the night of 10 June 1885, less than a month after Salis expanded the initial location into a vacant neighbouring lot. Aside from a need to expand his quarters, the move was prompted by a riot where Salis accidentally killed one of his waiters. This incident further aggravated the neighbours and the police who were already pressuring Salis to take his intrusive business elsewhere. The parade was a huge publicity stunt that took on a grandeur similar to the mammoth funeral procession of Victor Hugo earlier that year. The parade symbolizes Salis' interest in publicity, even at the expense of the artistic integrity that he so vehemently supported.³⁰ Over sixty marchers led by two Swiss guards marched flamboyantly to the new location at 12 rue Laval (now rue Victor Massé) singing the *Marseillaise* while accompanied by a small orchestra led by a devil who was also directing traffic. Four children carried the enormous *Parce Domine*, and the regulars transported the furniture and art.

At the new Chat Noir, the tradition of the chansonnier was soon replaced by the

²⁹ Including Willette, Goudeau, and most of the Hydropathes. Poole, 70.

³⁰ Described in Goudeau, 255-56.

théâtre d'ombres (shadow theater), resulting in far more rigorous programming, a less knowledgeable audience, and a loss of originality. Henri Rivière was responsible for the creation and production of many early shadow plays. These quickly became nightly events and one of the most sought-after tourist attractions in Paris.

After the Chat Noir, the cabaret phenomenon spread quickly. Soon after Salis vacated, the premises on boulevard Rochechouart became home to a new cabaret. The swashbuckling *chansonnier* Aristide Bruant (1857-1925), made famous by many Toulouse-Lautrec paintings, set up a new cabaret called Le Mirliton. This was only one of the many cabarets that soon appeared across Montmartre, but it was unique in character and is the most well-known of the Parisian cabarets after the Chat Noir.

Bruant was already known through his involvement with the Chat Noir and with café-concerts. He was that master of the *genre réaliste*, and his *tours de chants* addressed only the most squalid lives. He used street slang that he learnt upon coming to Paris from his upper-class home in provincial France,³¹ and he was successfully branded the “barde du pavé.” He brought Salis’ tradition of insulting his clientele to new heights: he would mercilessly gutterize them using street *argot* while they drank his enormously expensive *bibine* (swill). At Le Mirliton, patrons were sometimes required to buy *petits formats* as well as recycled beer, but his excesses brought him enormous attention.³² By the 1890s, Montmartre cabarets had lost their Bohemian freshness and originality. In short, the cabaret had become a “safe” commercial venture that imitated whatever appeared profitable.

³¹ Bruant compiled a dictionary of argot: Aristide Bruant, *L'argot aux XX^e siècle*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1905).

The Chat Noir Journal

The publication of a weekly journal provided a conceptual framework for a conscious secular movement and was effective in extending the Chat Noir membership to provincial France. Allowing the habitués to clearly distance themselves from the mundane “real world” of Paris, the journal was a forum to promote life at the Chat Noir and in Montmartre on their own terms. When reality did not suit them, they freely fabricated and exaggerated events and created myths.

Le Chat Noir appeared weekly between January 1882 and March 1895. It had a large four-page format and sold for fifteen centimes. Initially published at a print run of 12,000 copies, by 1889 its circulation was up to 20,000. A typical issue contained literary compositions of contemporary writers and those kindred spirits of past generations such as Baudelaire. The journal proclaimed itself to be the “Organe des intérêts de Montmartre” although it dropped the presumptuous title after the first seven issues. Goudeau was the editor-in-chief until February of 1884, at which time he resigned and was replaced by Alphonse Allais. Just as inside the cabaret, there was cat paraphernalia everywhere: practically every drawing had a black cat in it, whether it was singing, dancing, reciting, traveling, dying, or writing.

As a performance at the Chat Noir was a rite of passage for young chansonniers, so was publication in the journal for writers, whether they were already established or still unknown. Many different writers contributed to the journal including Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) who sent manuscripts from his hospital bed. Goudeau (1849-1906) wrote a great deal of work, often under the pseudonym A’Kempis, or A’K for

³² Poole, 134.

short. The first page was usually an editorial column or news bulletin. The second page was a domain for writers, and included a multiplicity of poems, sketches, and farces. Most articles began with large illuminations similar to Medieval manuscripts, recalling the medieval décor of the cabaret.

There is other “evidence” in the journal that illuminates the cabarets’ distant origins. The Chat Noir was frequently advertised in the journal as “cabaret Louis XIII, fondé en 1114, par un fumiste.” In the following caption, we can see how the artists placed themselves in history:

84, boulevard Rochechouart

Justice a été rendu
Par une majorité énorme, la Chambre des deutes à déclaré

La Cabaret du CHAT NOIR

d'utilité publique et l'a classé au nombre des monuments
historiques de la France. Cette unique chose au monde ne
souffrira donc pas des injures du temps. Le préfet de la Seine
a reçu l'ordre de faire isoler ce cabaret au milieu d'un
Square planté d'arbres exotiques, où les poètes pourront sus-
pendre leurs lyres.

CE CABARET
est la plus, Etonnante, Merveilleuse, Bizarre, Grandiose,
Stupéfiante, Vibrante Création des siècles écroulés sous la
Faux du Temps,

Fondé sous Jules César

On y voit les verres dont se servaient Charlemagne, Villon,
Rabelais, le cardinal Richelieu, la duchesse de Che-
vreuse, Mme de Rambouillet, Mlle de Scudry, Louis XIV,
Mme de la Vallière, Voltaire, Diderot, Robespierre, Bona-
parte, Mme de Staël et Mme Récamier, Baudelaire, Braou-
lormian, Georges Sand, Sapeck, Goudeau.
Demandez à contempler la lyre de Victor Hugo et le luth

sonore de Charles Pitou et de Clovis Hugues, poète grêlé.

The Chat Noir also claimed ancient Sanskrit writings as its lineage. It was announced on 30 June 1883 that the “Chanson des Hydropathes” was “discovered” by Charles Cros under the title “Udadushkhînam-Çruti” in the Sanskrit *Rig Veda*. It was offered as a hymn to the Chat Noir.³³

Semi-serious and semi-dangerous antics were not limited to the stage inside the cabaret. Salis ran for municipal election for the Montmartre district of Paris in May 1884. He sought independence of Montmartre as a free city and separation from the state. His slogan was:

Qu’est-ce que Montmartre – Rien!
Que doit-il être – tout!³⁴

The most celebrated example of Chatnoiresque antics was Salis’ premature obituary that appeared in the journal on 22 April 1882. Salis supposedly died due to a depression because Emile Zola, no stranger to the Chat Noir, had stolen his literary ideas and published them in his novel *Pot-Bouille*.³⁵ Mourners arrived at the appointed time for the service at the cabaret. After several speeches in his honour, Salis emerged from behind the piano to a *Dies irae* medley sung on cue by his loyal choristers. Salis then proclaimed himself king of Montmartre, and dressed in gold robes he led a parade to reclaim the Moulin de la Galette, rightly his, with poets carrying halberds and crying

³³ *Le Chat Noir*, 30 June, 1882.

³⁴ Goudeau, 274-276. It was also suggested in the Chat Noir journal that electoral divisions be delineated by height rather than by geographical district.

³⁵ Cate, 28.

“Vive le roi”³⁶ – seemingly a parody of a medieval courtly procession.

The third page of the journal usually displayed artwork, most often by Willette or Théophile Steinlen (1859-1923). Initially most of the drawings were political caricature, but Willette also produced several “Pierrot” series. Often, these were uncaptioned drawings, similar to modern comic-strip format, that zig-zagged around, and were not intended to be understood. To be misunderstood was “a point of pride” for many Chat Noir artists.³⁷

Reinforcing this notion of deliberate obscurity and mystification is the typically sarcastic “Concert Européen.” Le Concert Européen was a popular music hall in Montmartre, with well-understood intentions and glamorous displays spoon-fed to wealthy patrons. Salis sneered at those for whom cabaret humour was too subtle, yet he was careful not to be too pretentious to exclude the public on whom he depended financially. The total freedom proclaimed by the Chat Noir artists was thus rather narrowly circumscribed.

References to music abound, including many printed poems, advertisements for concerts, and drawings of musical activity. Though it is not a good source for scores; only four scores appeared in the first four years that were complete with music and words. Even then, the emphasis was usually on the artwork.³⁸

The drawing “L’ancien Chat Noir” by Henri Rivière appeared 13 June 1885 immediately after the move.³⁹ It shows the old Chat Noir crowded and bustling with

³⁶ Goudeau, 256.

³⁷ Poole, 63.

³⁸ Two of these will be discussed in Chapter 4, see Figures 8 and 9.

³⁹ See Figure 4, p. 50.



Figure 6: “Le Concert Européen,” from *Le Chat Noir*, 8 July, 1882.

activity, fascinated spectators are looking in every direction, and many people are waiting in the rain on the boulevard trying to get in. Meanwhile, Willette is painting his *Parce Domine*, Salis is at the bar, Rollinat is singing his macabre chansons at the piano, Goudeau presides over the evening from his throne, and of course there are cats everywhere. The sketchiness of this drawing is typical of Chat Noir *croquis*. Deep iconographical meaning is likely not present: most illuminating is the tongue-in-cheek “fun” spirit.

Finally, “Ne bougeons plus” (Figure 7) from the first issue of the journal, 14 January, 1882, stunningly encapsulates the essence of Montmartre of the early 1880s.

Readers of the first issue of the journal would surely have detected the parodical tone of this illustration. The reference to André Gill's painting *Le lapin à Gill* (c. 1880) is clear.⁴⁰ Gill's painting shows a rabbit jumping out of a saucepan with a bottle of wine on paw, in precisely the same pose as Salis' black cat who is holding a camera lens in lieu of the wine, and the Moulin de la Galette is placed similarly in both paintings.

Salis has placed Montmartre at the center of the world, and history is unfolding around it. Armed with a quill, a bottle of ink, and a camera, the Chat Noir is in control and is writing history. His mock-serious pose, his halo, his diverse group of followers comprised of scavengers, fowl, and a donkey indicate that this is no ordinary cat. The caption "Ne bougeons plus! Tout le monde y passera!" implies that he has exposed Paris as a stagnating culture and is prepared for an invasion of colonizers seeking inspiration in Montmartre.

⁴⁰ The Cabaret des Assassins, where the painting was made, was later bought by André Gill and renamed the Lapin à Gill. It is still open on rue des Saules.



Figure 7: Rodolphe Salis, "Ne Bougeons Plus," from *Le Chat Noir*, 14 January, 1882.

CHAPTER 4

MUSIC AT THE CHAT NOIR

The music at the Chat Noir testifies to the splintering of culture as much as do the eclectic assortment of individuals, their antics, and their contributions to the Chat Noir journal. As with the art in the journal, one should not search for deep iconographical meaning in the Chat Noir chansons. Performance practice and basic features of form and style are the most illuminating in identifying a fragmented culture, and practically any arbitrary sampling of music from the Chat Noir could, arguably, serve this purpose. Since complete musical sources are rare, the four musical examples that will be discussed in this chapter are contributions from the most important chansonniers gathered from the journal and published collections, chosen for their diversity of styles and genres. Just as “Ne bougeons plus” encapsulates the spirit of the Chat Noir, so does the chanson “Le Cochon” by Marcel Legay with its characteristic eclecticism, subtleties of intention and humour, emotional mobility, and blurring of stylistic boundaries.

All of the criteria established in Chapter Two that attest to a fragmented culture – the lack of a central figure, fraternal acceptance of diverse experimental styles, blurred boundaries of genre and style, shifting roles and relationships, new notions of success, and obscurity of intention – are present in the music of the first Chat Noir. The most important characteristics for the present purpose are the contrast of high and low art, and of seriousness and buffoonery: the Chat Noir was a venue where “all walks of life” were equally welcome.

Chansonnier, chanson, and genre

The most important musical activity at the first Chat Noir was the singing of chansons. After the move to the cabaret's second location and the advent of the shadow theater, the chansonniers were relegated to the entr'acte and the intermission. Due to the high quality of lyrics and the wide public audience, the Chat Noir's contribution to the revitalization of the French chanson in the 1880s was significant.¹

A note on the terms used for singers and reciters of poetry. A *chansonnier* refers to a poet who performs his own works though he might not have been involved in composing the music. A *chanteur* was someone who sang the poetry of another. A *diseuse* was a person who declaimed poetry to musical accompaniment, the most famous being Yvette Guilbert who performed the songs of Aristide Bruant at music halls and café-concerts. Rarely was there mention of a *compositeur*. For most of the chansons performed in the cabarets, the composer of the music was of little importance, and composers were rarely recognized unless their contribution was exceptional.² Very often parody technique was used, where a new text would be fitted to a familiar strophic accompaniment, subverting and often ridiculing the original chanson. This reduction of the role of the composer is a significant deviation from the concert hall and its almost ritualistic custom of elevating the composer to the elitist and distant stature of "genius." The fraternal and democratic notion of authorship at the Chat Noir reverses this elitist hierarchy, which was a defining characteristic of mainstream art-music in the nineteenth century.

The French chanson has always been an important aspect of French participatory

¹ Poole, 102.

² *Ibid.*, 98.

national culture. Since the fourteenth century the topical chanson has been an essential vehicle for entertainment, communication, and promotion of courtly ideals.³ By the 1880s, after a half-century of pandering at the café-concert, many felt that the chansonnier tradition was stagnating and were eager to restore the French chanson to its “former glory.”⁴ Somewhat paradoxically, the proliferation of opinions and information in the 1880s brought about by the free press, granted in 1881, reinforced the importance of the chanson as a means of communication. Despite a loosening of censorship on published material, the bourgeois still had the means to control most of the press. This large-scale proliferation of bourgeois ideals inflamed the anti-bourgeois and anti-establishment sensibilities of many Montmartre chansonniers, and inspired many satirical reviews in chanson form. Thus, the chanson became a news bulletin representing the “other side” of life. As a public establishment, the Chat Noir was unique in its relative freedom from censorship. Unlike the café-concerts of the Latin Quarter, attempts to regulate activities at the Chat Noir were unsuccessful as it was “supported energetically by numerous persons of note in politics, letters, and the arts.”⁵

The music that was eventually printed was not necessarily representative of performance practice, but it does represent the variety of genres and basic elements of form and musical language that characterize the music heard at the Chat Noir. In the cabaret, performance practice was more representative as a signifier of culture than

³ Ralph P. Locke, “The Music of the French Chanson, 1810-1850,” in *Music in Paris in the Eighteenth-Thirties/La Musique Paris à Paris dans les années mil huit cent trente*, vol. 4, *Musical Life in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Peter Bloom (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1982), 432. Locke begins his discussion of the role of the chanson and its importance with the sixteenth-century chanson.

⁴ Poole, 94.

⁵ Whiting (1996), 160.

the purely musical characteristics of the chansons themselves, and fortunately many testimonies of performance practice exist and allow us to approach the music through practice and culture, rather than being limited to a printed score.⁶

The chansonniers were a diverse assortment of poets, singers, and composers representing a wide range of musical training. Among those trained in “high art” music were Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, Gustave Charpentier, Ernest Chausson, Jules Massenet, and Charles Gounod. They mingled with the Chat Noir *Kleinmeisters* including Emile Goudeau, Georges Fragerolle, Charles de Sivry, Maurice Rollinat, Jules Jouy, and Marcel Legay to name but a few. Of this latter faction, some had substantial musical ability such as Fragerolle, who practiced singing four hours a day, and was one of the first to accompany himself on the piano.⁷ He studied at the Conservatoire and likely attended the same composition classes as Satie and Debussy. Fragerolle and de Sivry devoted considerable energy to arranging folk songs though, in general, the Chat Noir chansons contained very little folk elements. Some singers, such as Maurice MacNab, who was described as a “seal with a head cold,”⁸ had little or no musical ability but never lacked poetic inspiration.

The music performed during the first few years of the Chat Noir was purposely unregulated and deliberately unrehearsed. Anonymous passers-by often strolled in from the Boulevard and improvised. However, this quality of impulsive musical inspiration quickly became a defining characteristic of cabaret entertainment. Mary Ellen Poole suggests that by 1889, the chanson had become a highly polished art

⁶ Such testimonies appear in auto-biographies, such as Goudeau (1888), interviews, and journal articles. Detailed elements of performance practice will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁷ Petersen, 78.

⁸ Whiting (1996), 183.

created to give the effect of being improvised.⁹ This underscores the commercialization and homogenization of cabaret entertainment after regular programming began and the “private” venue became unabashedly public after 1885.

The *chanson chatnoiresque* embodied juxtapositions of bitter gaiety and macabre tragedy, of carefree frivolity and wretched injustice, but the best chansonniers at the Chat Noir never strayed far from conventional musical techniques. The harmonies used were often extremely simple and diatonic, and strophic forms were typical, as the main emphasis was usually on the text.

The program at the Chat Noir contained many genres,¹⁰ but was dominated by the ironic, the macabre, and the sentimental.¹¹ Chanson genre was always categorized by content not by style and each had its appropriate persona. Many of the early chansonniers scrambled to “invent” a genre and thus acquire immortality as the founder of a soon-to-be-ageless tradition, as the famous quote by Lucien Boyer indicates:

... well, well, if you want to succeed, pick a genre...: the realist genre, with boots and red scarf, is all over; Bruant remains inimitable. For the *socialo* genre, you need a filthy mug, and that's not your style. For the open-air chanson, you have to be bald in front and long-haired in the back, like Legay. For the Breton genre, we've got Botrel. For the satirical genre, you've got to be mean, and you look like you still love your mommy. For the romance, here's Delmet, and for the *genre idiot*, I've already got more than enough.¹²

By the 1890s “phenomena” became a genre, capitalizing on physical deformity. The

⁹ Poole, 105.

¹⁰ Other Montmartre genres included the monologist, realist, patriot, idiot comic, alcoholic, eccentric gommeux, scieur (inept, nonsensical), and the epileptic.

¹¹ Ibid., 106.

¹² Lucien Boyer, *Qu'il était beau mon village* (Paris: Baudinière, 1934), 42, quoted in Whiting (1996), 162.

“Homme-Aquarim” who could swallow liters of water including the fish and frogs was one of the less obscene of the “phenomena.”¹³

Ironic

Jules Jouy (1855-1897) was the most prolific and one of the most important exponents of the ironic chanson.¹⁴ He was a central figure of the first Chat Noir and responsible for much organization of the early *goguette*-type atmosphere.¹⁵ Jouy published a new song almost everyday in the socialist journals *Cri du peuple* or *Paris*, which attests to the prominence of his chansons at the Chat Noir and later in greater Montmartre as an enduring source for parodies.¹⁶

Disconcerted by the Republican government and social institutions at large, Jouy’s poetry was often sardonic and seething with resentment. One of his most well-known poems, “Le Petit Martyr,” addresses the injustice and cruelty that plagued society. It tells of a terrible case of child abuse that results in the death of the child. Unlike many other chansonniers, Jouy’s is usually quite clear in his intention. For Jouy, more than any other poet at the Chat Noir, the music, or at least the technical components of the music, was of little importance. His focus was entirely on text declamation:

...with Jules Jouy, the new chanson found its uncontested master – he of the curious accents, the unwritten pauses, the felicitous rhythms. Everyday, this marvelously productive chansonnier launched a new work which he interpreted at the piano. He accompanied himself nervously, spitting out the words in a staccato voice through clenched teeth.¹⁷

¹³ Gordon, 62.

¹⁴ Léon Xanrof (1867-1953) was also very important contributor of the ironic genre, but he did not appear at the Chat Noir until after 1886.

¹⁵ Poole, 108.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Léon Xanrof, “Cabarets de Montmartre,” *Figaro Illustrée* (August, 1929), 113; quoted in Poole 108-

Jouy's performance practice reflects a diametric opposition to the view of composer as "fountain origin of art." His style was described by Dominique Bonnaud, another Chat Noir poet:

[he was] deliberately on bad terms with the music. He always used the same simple procedure to accompany himself: with one hand, he played two chords *do-mi-sol*, *si-ré-sol* [I - V⁶] over and over in the top octave of the keyboard, always the same one. They fell at random, usually creating a dissonance and always off the beat.¹⁸

Macabre

Maurice Rollinat (1846-1903) and Maurice Mac-Nab (1856-1889), both members of the Hydropathes, wrote the darkest poems of the Chat Noir. Influenced by Baudelaire and Poe, they brought the macabre genre to new heights. Their "vulgar" entertainment released composers' narrow views about music and art, but was also a response to the misery and misfortune so common in poor districts such as Montmartre.¹⁹

Maurice Rollinat was perhaps the single most important figure in drawing a fascinated public to the Chat Noir. He was one of the first original habitués to leave the cabaret in 1883, but his unique performance practices and intense stage persona earned him a reputation that long outlasted his presence there. He can be seen in an otherworldly pose, singing to the moon in the upper right corner of Henri Rivière's drawing, "L'ancien Chat Noir."²⁰

For Rollinat, the music was as important as the text, but he could neither read nor

109.

¹⁸ Dominique Bonnaud, "La fin du Chat Noir ou les derniers Mohicans de la Butte," *Les Annales* (22 March-5 July, 1925), 330; quoted in Poole, 108.

¹⁹ Charles Rearick, "Song and Society in Turn-of-the-Century France," *Journal of Social History* 22 (1988): 47.

²⁰ See Figure 4, page 50.

write music. He was a good pianist and he improvised his own melodies but hired others to transcribe and harmonize them.²¹ He sang his macabre poetry with a “jerky staccato voice [that] got into your bone marrow [and] literally bewitched the public.”²² His most celebrated collection of poetry was the deeply pessimistic *Les Névroses* (1883).

Maurice MacNab is the premier example that vocal shortcomings were idiosyncratic at the Chat Noir. His singing style was raucous and his voice was intentionally out-of-tune with the music, as is clear from the following oft-cited account, taken from his collection *Chansons du Chat Noir*:

[MacNab] possessed the harshest, most out-of-tune voice one could possibly imagine; he sounded like a seal with a head cold. But that worried him little. He sang in spite of it all, unconcerned by the despairing gestures of Albert Tinchant, his regular pianist.²³ He had only three gestures, just as he had only three notes in his voice; but what gestures and what notes! The effect was irresistible, though without a trace of self-derision. Every time he opened his mouth to recite his verse, he seemed to pronounce a funeral oration.²⁴

His chanson “Le Pendu” is typical of MacNab’s *oeuvre*, and also illustrates many similarities in Chat Noir chansons.²⁵ Typical of much Chat Noir music, the harmonies in this song are simple and the form is a lyric-form strophic. Actually, in this case it is

²¹ Whiting (1996), 181.

²² Horace Valbel, *Les chansonniers et les cabarets artistiques* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1885), 87.

²³ Albert Tinchant was the regular pianist at the Chat Noir and accompanied anyone unwilling or unable to accompany themselves. His style was unconventional, and he was often too intoxicated to perform accurately. One well-known tale tells of Tinchant crawling under the piano searching for a spittoon while continuing to play with one hand.

²⁴ Maurice MacNab *Chansons du Chat Noir* (Paris: Au Ménestrel, 1891), preface; quoted in Whiting (1996), 183-184.

²⁵ For complete scores and texts of the chansons discussed in this chapter, see Appendix.

LE PENDU

Moderato.

CHANT.

PIANO.

Un gar - çon ve - nait de se pen - dre, Daus la fo - rêt, de Saint Ger -
 main, — Pour u - ne fil - lette au cœur ten - dre Dont on lui re - fu - sait la
 main. — Un pas - saut, le cœur plein d'a - lar - mes, En voy - ant qu'il soufflait en
 - cor, — Dit: « Al - lons cher - cher les gen - dar - mes, Peut - è - tre bien qu'il n'est pas
 mort! — Dit: « Al - lons chercher les gen - dar - mes, Peut - è - tre bien qu'il n'est pas mort! » Le Bri -

Figure 8: Maurice MacNab, "Le Pendu."

lyric form with the last phrase repeated, or AABAA. The only deviation from tonic and dominant harmonies is the B section, with a brief modulation and cadence in V. The eight phrases of each strophe are all four measures long, and the melodies are purely diatonic with a clear arch and climax in the third measure. Ironically, the most

macabre poetry tended towards the most nonchalant and syllabically set melodies, as is the case in “Le Pendu.”

The poem tells of a rejected lover who has hung himself but refuses to die. Many onlookers gather around, preoccupied with the strangeness of the event, but they do not help him. Every strophe ends with a variant of “Peut-être qu’il n’est pas mort!” which is repeated for emphasis. The emphasis, however, is not on the hopefulness of saving the young man’s life, but on the futility of the matter. The dissociated bystanders merely observe that he still breathes.

Although most MacNab chansons are obsessed with death, not all are. “Vae soli” is pure folly. It is a celebration of the pleasures of love and companionship. In a lilting duple meter with simple chord progressions, graceful ornaments, and only slightly more chromatic than “Le Pendu,” it is a simple ternary form in E-flat major. The B section is a slower and more dramatic declamation, rejoicing in “le plaisir d’être deux!” The exaggerated idyllic mood is only undermined in the last phrase after a *fortissimo* tremolo on the dominant seventh. Marked *large et sonore*, a slow B-flat (the dominant), repeated for four measures over the sweet lilting accompaniment of the A section, announces that “(... the most pitiable being is...) the lonely tapeworm!”

Sentimental Romance

Paul Delmet (1820-1904), who did not arrive at the Chat Noir until 1886, was the most renowned singer of the sentimental romance. One of the few musicians at the Chat Noir who had formal musical training, he was somewhat unique in his emphasis of music over words. He sang his beautifully crafted melodies in a warm, almost

over-sincere, baritone and did not share the robust conviction of the chansonniers who could “sing” their texts in all manners of hissing and spitting. As he stood motionless and poised, he sang in a style well-suited to the sentimental *romance*. A typical Delmet romance ambles leisurely, in a pastoral usually compound meter, with largely syllabic text declamation supported by simple harmonies.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the song "Le Vieux Mendiant" by Paul Delmet. The score is in French and includes a piano introduction, a vocal line with lyrics, and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics describe an old man begging for alms. The score is divided into sections: "Introduction", "Largement", "Largement", and "CORSET". The piano part features a simple harmonic accompaniment with a steady rhythm.

Figure 9: Paul Delmet, “Le Vieux Mendiant,” from *Les Chansonniers de Montmartre*, 25 March 1906.

“Le Vieux Mendiant” is more rigorous rhythmically than many of his other chansons, and is in duple meter. The clear four-measure phrases only deviate from a

regular pattern in the seventeenth measure when the vocal line, unaccompanied and marked *ad libitum*, staggers up an eleventh, to reflect the old beggar's squandering of his wealth.

Parody

Parody technique was practiced widely at the Chat Noir, but more so at other Montmartre cabarets. The boundaries of this category are quite generous, but parody typically falls into one of three groups: parody of a well-known contemporaneous operatic piece; parody of a cabaret chanson; or troping of a familiar melody whose origins are forgotten, which is not truly parody. Most prominent at the first Chat Noir was operatic parody. The number of cabaret chansons that were parodied increased as the chanson repertory expanded and chansonniers became clearly established, and therefore this type of parody was more important at the second Chat Noir and at other cabarets.

Sentimental singers such as Paul Delmet, with their schmaltzy melodies and relatively banal poetry were the most suitable subjects for parody. The parodist Vincent Hyspa developed the practice of parodying the singer before or after him, which coincidentally or not was often Delmet.²⁶ He re-worked Delmet's chansons so frequently that the two were often hired as a duo.²⁷ Théodore Botrel describes the comic effect of this routine, speaking first of Paul Delmet:

What an admirable voice and what diction! We could have listened to him the whole night without tiring, so effortlessly did he seem to sing; he sang as one breathes.

Then, Vincent Hyspa took the stage...and it was delirium. He

²⁶ The next most notable parodist was Pierre Trimouillat, best known for his parodies of Massenet *mélodies*.

²⁷ Whiting (1996), 167.

customarily began his *tour de chant* with a parody of the last song interpreted by Delmet... By holding in his hand a minuscule piece of paper [usually a cigarette paper], Hyspa already parodied his colleague, who always leafed through thick scores to give himself airs. Then he announced, with a lugubrious voice, "Le Vieux Mendigot."²⁸

The source of the parody was not always present, of course, and parodies of this type depended on an audience familiar with the original. The self-referential nature of this sort of parody, then, supported the *chansonniers'* tradition but was also ephemeral.

By 1885 many songs had established a "classic" status and were performed, or "covered," by younger musicians, though usually attributed to the original chansonnier. Typically poets accepted this practice, though this was not always the case.²⁹ Also, melodies were regularly recycled, or troped, and in this musical borrowing chansonniers shared a democratic notion of authorship. Since the words generally addressed immediate concerns, even functioning as an opinionated news bulletin, they quickly went out of fashion but the music continued to serve its purpose and good tunes endured. In fact, the number of parodies that a melody acquired was a measure of its success. Poole has suggested that the achievement of anonymity endorsed the music with the veneration associated with long-lasting masterpieces or the enduring unquestioned value of a folk-song.³⁰

Chanson by Emile Goudeau

One of the few chansons that appeared in the Chat Noir journal was by Emile

²⁸ Théodore Botrel, *Les Mémoires d'un Breton* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1933), 179; quoted in Whiting (1996), 167.

²⁹ Maurice Rollinat was one of the few who vehemently refused to be exploited, which was why he left the Chat Noir in 1883. He allowed others to use his chansons, but only if they acknowledged him as the creator; Poole, 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

Goudeau with music by Léo Montacey.³¹ It is possible that Léo Montacey was a pseudonym for Goudeau, as he used several in his contributions to the journal. The illustration by Adolphe Willette shows a young Venus-type figure, attended to by her maidservant as she rises leisurely. The text of this chanson addresses the impermanence of youth and the cruelty of the fate awaiting the beautiful young woman, who is yet unaware of the transience of her beauty.

The music, again a strophic form with refrain, is more dramatic than the other examples cited thus far, with tremolos, more daring chord progressions, and some chromaticism. The galloping piano accompaniment at “Oh! Pourquoi détournant les yeux” and again at “Et pourtant vous me refusez” is followed by a dramatic tremolo on an A-flat seventh chord in third inversion (which is V⁷ of the Neapolitan of C major, and is respelled the second time as a German augmented sixth chord of C major in third inversion) that resolves to a lengthy cadential appoggiatura.

“Le Ballade du Chat Noir”

Another important genre that was cultivated in Montmartre, though not central at the Chat Noir, drew on the indigent and the criminal as a source of novelty. Known as *réaliste*, after Emile Zola, its forerunners were Jules Jouy and Maurice MacNab, and its loudest advocate in the 1880s was Aristide Bruant. His subjects were the slums, the poor, prostitutes and pimps, criminals and thieves. His melodies were usually simple recitation formulas with much repetition – like the people he was depicting – moving with stepwise motion similar to psalm-tones.³² When Bruant was not raving about the street filth of Paris, he would verbally assault his bourgeois clientele,

³¹ The chanson seems to be titled “P.P.C.” though it is unclear what or whom this is a reference to.

³² Whiting, 160.

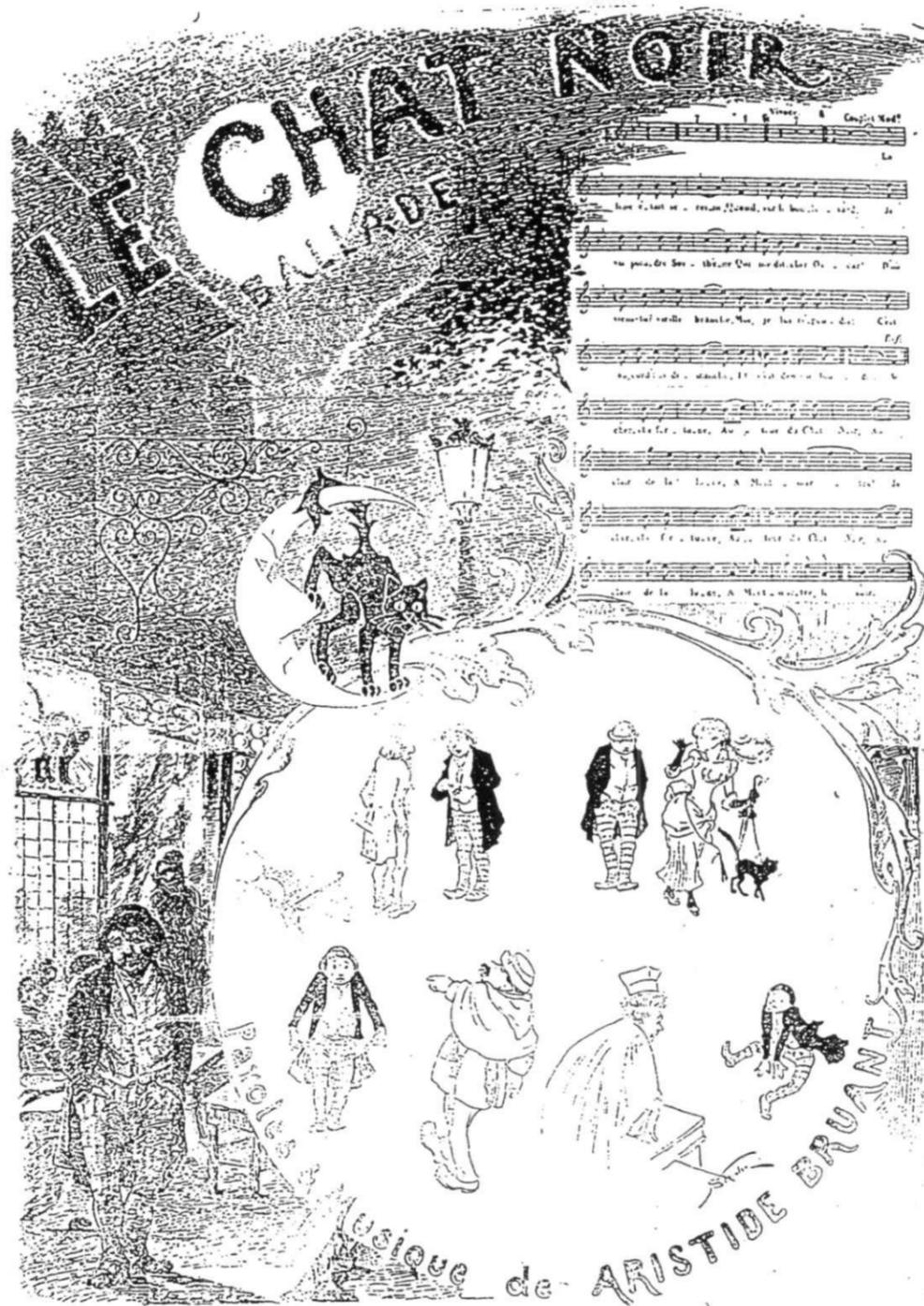


Figure 11: A. Bruant, "Le Ballade du Chat Noir," from *Le Chat Noir*, 9 August, 1884.

especially if a well-known figure was present. Bruant's artificial realism has earned him the label of "poseur."³³ He enjoyed his material success and eventually retired to a ranch in the countryside and hunted.

Ironically, it was Bruant, Salis' arch-rival, who composed the "Ballade du Chat Noir." It first appeared in an 1884 issue of *Le Chat Noir*, illustrated by Théophile Steinlen. It later turned up sarcastically in Bruant's journal, *Le Mirliton*, appropriately named after his cabaret. The text is a song lyric rather than a poetic ode and implies a participatory performance. While the song might well summon participation and enthusiasm, it is really "about" nothing. Its "Once upon a time..." gambit inspires a curiosity which is deflated by the meandering "vielle branche's" quip: "C'est aujourd'hui dimanche, et c'est demain lundi." Nonetheless, the refrain is charming in its folk-like simplicity:

Je cherche fortune
Autour du Chat Noir
Au clair de la lune
A Montmartre, le soir.

"Le Cochon"

Marcel Legay, another member of the Hydropathes, appeared at the Chat Noir between 1881 and 1885. He was extremely prolific and composed in a variety of styles, including *mélodies*, art songs with multiple contrasting sections, street ballads, sentimental romances, and political satire. Legay had a good musical education and was able to harmonize his own melodies, and also had a captivating stage presence, ensuring his success in the cabaret milieu.

³³ Poole, 121.

“Le Cochon” is from Legay’s album of chansons titled *Toute la gamme*, published in 1883.³⁴ Strophic songs are always populist, and one remarkable aspect about this pig’s song is that it is not strophic. When Mozart’s peasants sing, their songs are always strophic, unlike the aristocratic characters whose melodies are crafted into a complex sonata structure. *Brindisi*, vaudevilles, and other songs of “normal people” always tend towards the simple strophic forms. By contrast “Le Cochon” is a through-composed mini-operatic scene with recitatives and arias.

The tempo, style, and mood change with almost every phrase. The poem is a lyric sonnet, a highly cultured genre of poetry, but is not truly dramatic. Rather it enumerates the pig’s countless virtues. It opens with a slow trill marked “grognement,” (grunting), followed by a snorting sound (measure 2), and a dramatic ascent to a tonic (G major) cadence. In the first quatrain, the setting shifts from recitative to a *cantabile* arioso, to an aria-like section marked *religioso* (“ton pied, dont une sainte a consacré le type”), and ends with an unaccompanied *recitative ad libitum*. The first poetic quatrain actually ends in the middle of this section without a cadence. A pause in measure 24 is marked “cortège,” meaning parade, and is probably a performance direction. The third verse is set to dreamy harp-like figuration, and the final verse shifts from *mordante* through *largo*, *salutando*, *amoroso*, and finally ends with a *grandioso* piano postlude.

The harmonies are much freer than in a typical Chat Noir chanson, modulating from G major to C major and E major (measure 43), and the cadences are slightly

³⁴ Marcel Legay, *Toute la gamme: Quinze compositions illustrées et lettres autographes* (Paris: Brandus et Cie, 1886). This collection is a limited edition, imitating a presentation copy, collector’s item complete with gold paint and calligraphy. The fifteen chansons are on poems by five different poets and illustrated by eight different artists, all from the original Chat Noir circle.

ambiguous. The chanson stops and starts abruptly, juxtaposing bombastic comedy with solemn religious gestures. It is an outright debasing of high culture disguised as a love aria.

CONCLUSION

Speaking of the café-concert and the cabaret as reflections of hysteria in the 1880s, Rae Beth Gordon asks this fundamental question:

[I]s the café-concert hysterical because hysteria is everywhere in the period, or does it offer itself up as a model to potential hysterics who couldn't resist the grimaces and convulsive movements [of the hysterics at the Salpêtrière hospital]?

The same can be asked of a fragmented culture: was the diversity of artistic gestures, the denial of hierarchy, and the avoidance of compartmentalization a symptom of, or a model for, a fragmented society?

By lowering the wall between the audience and performer and usurping symphonic protocol, Salis and his followers stripped their clientele of their protective armour and launched them into foreign territory: a territory understood, if not explicitly manufactured, by the Chat Noir. Artists were then able to harness the new public towards new venues and styles and essentially to create a new genre. This would not have been possible were it not for the noted shattering of mainstream culture, fuelled by many diverse factors, and recognized by the Chat Noir artists.

One notable exclusion from the many definitions of mainstream cited in Chapter Two is Roger Shattuck. In *The Banquet Years*, Shattuck suggests that large-scale changes in culture are more perceptible in regions distant from the central "mainstream" and at places where the arts meet, such as the cabaret.¹ The fact that cabaret artists have been marginalized in the historiography of the period not only

¹ Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*

calls for a re-evaluation of more “comprehensible” masters, such as Debussy and Ravel, but also suggests an alternate framework through which to gauge other artistic movements, both “revolutionary” and “reactionary,” both before the *fin-de-siècle* and since.

A final point concerns the Chat Noir obsession with medieval iconography. The many references to Rabelais and Villon, the medieval décor, not to mention the *fumisterie*, *Parce Domine*, the cryptic, subversive, and anonymous chansons, parodies of courtly processions, the *Rig Veda*, references to Julius Caesar – all self-aggrandizing antics with an ancient or medieval theme. This is more than a romanticized Victorian sensibility. The Chat Noir modelled itself after a cult. Anti-institutional, anti-mainstream, and perhaps even anti-history, the Chat Noir placed itself as a distinct institution, on the edge of a world that the members denounced as morally bankrupt and hopelessly philistine. They endorsed themselves with myth-like proportions and created their own history.

This thesis has offered the Chat Noir cabaret as a movement and a genre fuelled by widespread disenchantment, both of the artists involved and of the public. Cabaret culture was sensitively aware of the dissolution of the institution of mainstream culture and capitalized upon it. This was, arguably, its most significant contribution to history.

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APPENDIX: Texts and Musical Scores

"Le Pendu" by Maurice MacNab

Un garçon venait de se pendre,
 Dans la forêt de Saint-Germain,
 Pour une fillette au coeur tendre,
 Dont on lui refusait la main.
 Un passant, le coeur plein d'alarmes,
 En voyant qu'il soufflait encor,
 Dit: "Allons chercher les gendarmes,
 Peut-être bien qu'il n'est pas mort!"

Le brigadier, sans perdre haleine,
 Enfourcha son grand cheval blanc.
 Arrivé chez le capitaine,
 Il conta la chose entremblant:
 "Un jeune homme vient se pendre,
 A son âge, quelle triste sort!
 Faut-il qu'on aille le dépendre?
 Peut-être bien qu'il n'est pas mort!"

L'officier, frisant sa moustache,
 Se redresse et répond soudain:
 "Vraiment, c'est une noble tâche
 Que de soulager son prochain;
 Cependant, je n'y puis rien faire,
 Ça n'est pas de notre ressort.
 Courez donc chez le commissaire,
 Le pendu vit peut-être endor!"

Le commissaire sur la place
 Descendit, c'était son devoir.
 D'un coup d'oeil embrassant l'espace,
 Il cria de tout son pouvoir:
 "Un jeune homme vient de se pendre.
 Villageois, debout, courez fort,
 Emportons de quoi le dépendre,
 Peut-être bien qu'il n'est pas mort!"

Vers le bois on arrive en troupe,
 On s'arrête en soufflant un peu,
 On saisit la corde, on la coupe.
 Le cadavre était déjà bleu!
 Sur l'herbe foulée on le couche.

Un vieux s'approche et dit: "D'abord
Soufflez-lui de l'air dans la bouche,
C'est pas possible qu'il soit mort!"

Les amis pensaient: "Est-ce drôle
De se faire périr ainsi!"
La fillette comme une folle,
Criait: "Je veux mourir aussi!"
Mais les parents, miséricorde,
Disaient en guise d'oraison:
"Partageons-nous toujours la corde,
C'est du bonheur pour la maison!"

LE PENDU

Moderato.

CHANT

PIANO

Un gar . çon ve . nait de se pen . dre, Dans la fu . rêt, de Saint Ger .
main, — Pour u ne fil . lette au cœur ten . dre Dont on lui re . fu . sait la
maï . — Un pas . saut, le cœur plein d'a . lar . mes, En voy . ant qu'il soufflait en
cor, — Dit: «Al . lons cher . cher les gen . dar . mes, Peut - ê . tre bien qu'il n'est pas
mort!» — Dit: «Al . lons cher . cher les gen . dar . mes, Peut - ê . tre bien qu'il n'est pas mort!» — Le Bri .

dc

“Vae soli” by Maurice MacNab

Qu'il est doux d'être deux, de sentir dans sa main
Frissonner une main que l'amour a bénie!
Qu'il est doux d'être deux, deux hier, deux demain,
Deux toujours au banquet d'amour et d'harmonie!

S'il est vrai qu'ici-bas l'on ne puisse être heureux
Sans qu'on se soit donné le plaisir d'être deux,
Il faut bien l'avouer, dans la nature entière,
L'être le plus a plaindre est... le ver solitaire.

VAE SOLI!

Andantino.

PIANO. *p* *leger*

CHANT *p*

Qu'il est doux d'être deux, de sentir dans sa main frissonner une main que l'amour a bénie!

pp

ritent *a Tempo.*

Qu'il est doux d'être deux, deux hier, deux demain, deux toujours au banquet d'amour et d'harmonie!

ritent *allargando*

allargando

ritent un peu

ff *pp*

S'il est vrai qu'ici-bas l'on ne puisse être heureux sans qu'on se soit donné le plaisir d'être deux, il faut bien l'avouer, dans la nature entière, l'être le plus a plaindre est... le ver solitaire.

- reux — Sans qu'on se soit don - né le plai - sir d'ê - tre

f Adagio. *mezza voce.*
Deux I Deux III
rallent. *ppp*

Tempo 1^o
mezza voce.
Il faut bien l'a - vou - er, dans la na - ture eu - tiè - re,
una corda

rallent. molto. *ppp*
L'ê - tre le plus à plai - dre est... est...
ritret. *ff*

ff Largo et sonore. *perendosi.*

"Le Ballade du Chat Noir" by Aristide Bruant

La lune était sereine
Quand, sur le boulevard,
Je vis poindre Sosthène
Qui me dit: cher Oscar!

D'où viens-tu? vielle branche,
Moi, je lui répondis:
C'est aujourd'hui dimanche,
Et c'est demain lundi.

Je cherche fortune
Autour du Chat Noir
Au clair de la lune
A Montmartre.

Je cherche fortune
Autour du Chat Noir
Au clair de la lune
A Montmartre, le soir.

Untitled chanson by Emile Goudeau

Nous n'avons, o mon cher amour,
qu'un seul jour
Pour goûter la joie infinie;
Et tu sais bien que t'es vingt ans
n'ont qu'un temps
Et qu'après la fête est fini.

Oh! Pourquoi détournant les yeux,
Garder une lèvre farouche
A l'essaim de l'amour joyeux
Qui voudrait butiner ta bouche

Et pourtant vous me refusez
Et me frappez de vos mains frêles.
Ils sont en cage mes baisers
Vous leurs avez coupé les ailes!

J'ai voulu me mettre à genoux devant vous
Pour jurer amour immortelle
Mais, hélas! votre air offensé m'a glacé
Une autre sera moins cruelle!

“Le Cochon” poem by Charles Monselet, music by Marcel Legay

Car tout est bon en toi, chair, graisse, muscle, tripe!
 On t’aime galantine, on t’adore boudin.
 Ton pied, dont une sainte a consacré le type,
 Empruntant son arôme au sol Périgourdin,

Eut réconcilié Socrate avec Xantippe.
 Ton filet, qu’embellit le cornichon badin,
 Forme le déjeuner de l’humble citadin,
 Et tu passes avant l’oie au frère Philippe.

Mérites précieux et de tous reconnus!
 Morceaux marqués d’avance, innombrables, charnus!
 Philosophe indolent qui mange et que l’on mange!

Comme, dans notre orgueil, nous sommes bien venus
 A vouloir, n’est-ce pas, te reprocher ta fange?
 Adorable cochon, animal roi, – cher ange!

LE COCHON

Poésie de CHARLES MONSELET

Allegretto

PIANO (leggero)

Récitatif

Car tout est bon en toi, chair, graisse, muscle,

Cantabile

tri - pe! On t'ai - me ga - lan - ti - ne, on t'a -

Religioso

- da - re bon - din, Ton pied, dant u - ne

Rit. Récit. ad lib

sain - te a con - sa - cré le ty - pe, Empruntant son a -

Rit.

- rière au sol Pé - ti - gour - din, Ent ré - cou - ri - li - é So -

più f. rall. En mesure

- crate a - vec Xau - tip - pe. Tou fi - let, qu'emhel - lit le cor -

Rit.

- ni - chon ba - din, Fur - me le dé - jeu - ner de l'humble ci - ta -

(Cantato) Allegro

- din, Et tu pas - ses a - vant l'air au frè -

- re Phi - lip - pe.

Flics

Andante

Mé -

ri - les pré - ci - eux et de

loys ré - cou - nus! Mor -

affettuoso

ceux mar - qués d'a - van - ce, in - nom -

bra - bles, char - nus! Phi - losophe in - do - lent qui mange et que l'on

rull.

segue

Mordante

mau - ge! Coni - me, dans notre or - gueil, nous som - mes bien se -

mus A sou - luir, n'est - ce pas, te re - pro - cher la fau -

ff

Largo *solitudo* *amatus*

ge? A - do - ra - ble ro - cheau, a - ni, mal roi, - cher

Ped. + Ped. + Ped. +

an - ke!

Grandioso

pp *cresc.* *ff*

Ped. +

CHAPTER 1. BASIC PROPERTIES OF BIOLOGICAL MEMBRANE CHANNELS

Ion channels are large protein molecules incorporated into the cellular membrane [Hiller, 1992], which consists of a bimolecular layer (bilayer) of lipid molecules (Fig.1.1, [Doyle et al., 1998]).

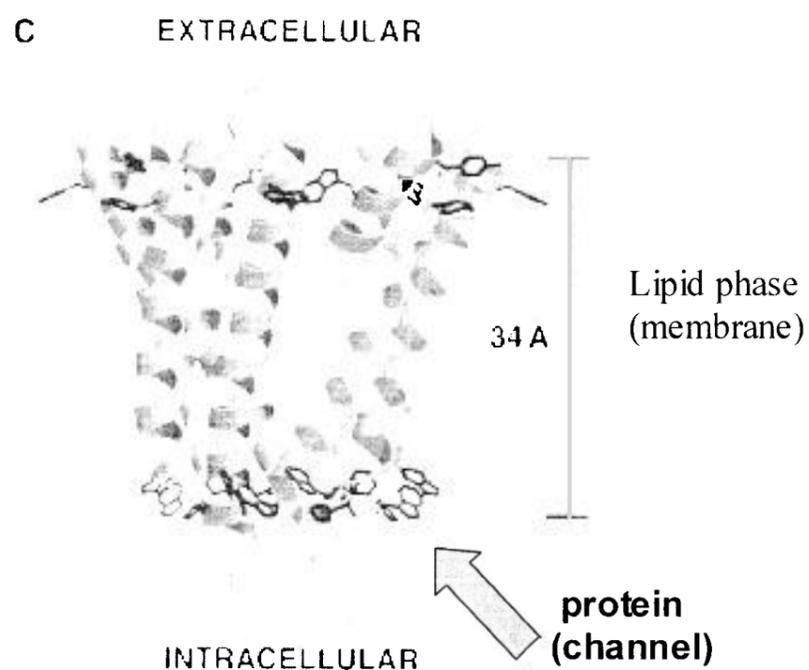


Fig.1.1. Structure of a bacterial potassium channel (ribbon representation of protein backbone).

The membrane is surrounded by a water solution of different ions, Na^+ , K^+ , Ca^+ , Mg^+ etc. Ion channels are highly permeable to some but not to all ions. Thus sodium channels are very permeable to Na^+ ions and less permeable to K^+ , while potassium channels are very permeable to K^+ ions but not to Na^+ . Ions from the surrounding solutions (intracellular or extracellular) flow through the central narrow part of the protein, or pore, carrying an electric current through the channel, the magnitude and the direction of which depends on the applied external voltage across the membrane and the concentrations of the ions in the solution. By measuring the channel current in different

physical conditions it is possible to investigate the properties of the channel and obtain some information about its structure. In this chapter we will discuss two key properties of the channel, gating and blocking.

1.1. Gating

1.1.1. Stochastic nature of gating

For most ion channels the current I fluctuates with time between two discrete levels, the open level ($I \neq 0$) and the closed level ($I = 0$). This stochastic process of opening and closing is called gating. Fig.1.2 [French et al., 1986] shows an example of a current recording from a single ion channel. One notes that current fluctuations are essentially rectangular in shape (\sim several ms) with extremely small transition times between open (O) and closed (C) states. The transitions are so rapid (< 1 ns) that the observed transition times are limited by the response time recording instruments. According to a common physiological convention, voltage V is defined as voltage inside the cell with respect to outside.

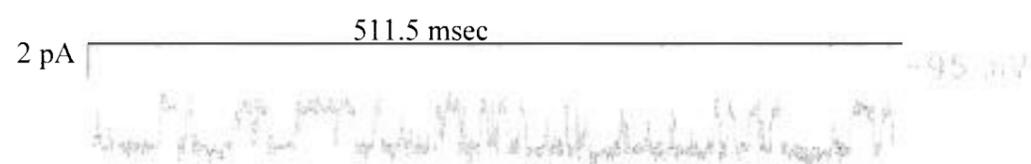


Fig.1.2. Single-sodium-channel current fluctuations, taken at -95 mV. Upper level is closed in this trace. Vertical scale, 2 pA; horizontal scale, 511.5 msec. From [French et al., 1986]

Gating results from changes in the conformation or structure of the channel protein, but the detailed mechanism, on the molecular level, is unknown. Gating can be treated within statistical mechanics as a stochastic Markov process (Horn, 1984). In essence, the channel has no memory, such that the probability of a transition between conformational states does not depend on the sequence of previous states of the channel.