

## CHAPTER 10

*Race and nation: musical acclimatisation and the chansons populaires in Third Republic France**Jann Pasler*

In 1867, soon after Egyptians, Algerians and Tunisians appeared in their first Parisian exhibition, François–Joseph Fétis began his general history of music with the widely espoused opinion that music, like other cultural products, was a key to understanding race and racial differences. In his first sentence, he asserted:

The history of music is inseparable from appreciation of the special properties belonging to races cultivating it. This essentially ideal art owes its existence to the humans who create it . . . it is the product of human faculties which are distributed unequally among people as well as individuals.<sup>1</sup>

Two beliefs underlie this history, contemporaneous with the emergence of anthropology. First, like many of his contemporaries, Fétis assumed that skull shape and size are links to older times and evidence of intellectual capacity. As he put it, sounds do not affect people the same way because ‘a feeling for music . . . is related to the shape of the brain’; for him, that shape determines a person’s capacity to understand relationships between sounds.<sup>2</sup> As for anthropologists who looked to human types as a means of measuring and comparing the parameters of a race, Fétis tied an investigation of music to a classification of peoples. He claimed that hearing the music of a people makes it easy to judge their morals, passions and other dispositions – in short, their character.<sup>3</sup> Second, Fétis saw progress, or the ability to develop progressively over time, as characteristic of the Aryan race. This idea harks back to early race theorists of the 1850s, such as Count Gobineau, who saw the white race as the model for all humanity and history (that is, progress) as the result of other races’ contact with the white race.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> François-Joseph Fétis, ‘Preface’ (26 August 1868), *Histoire générale de la musique depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1869), vol. I, p. i. Before this, Fétis had also published ‘Sur un nouveau mode de classification des races humaines d’après leurs systèmes musicaux’, *Bulletins de la Société d’Anthropologie* 2/2 (1867), 134.

<sup>2</sup> François-Joseph Fétis, ‘Avant-propos’, *Histoire générale de la musique*, vol. II p. i; p. II.

<sup>3</sup> François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, cited in Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin, *La Chanson populaire* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886), p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> Other music scholars of the period concurred. John Rowbotham began his three volume-study, *A History of Music* (London: Trübner, 1885–7), with the assertion: ‘The history of savage races is a history of arrested developments’ (p. 1).

Throughout the nineteenth century, these two attitudes toward race – the notion of racial types and evolutionary progress associated with Aryans – deeply inflected understanding of indigenous folk song throughout the world, what in France was called *chansons populaires*. Beginning in the 1860s, Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin among other folklorists distinguished art music, which he understood to be universal, from *chansons populaires*. Like the dialects of language, he saw these as specific to race and suggested there are as many varieties as there are races, tribes or peoples.

*Chansons populaires*, Weckerlin wrote, express a country's 'type, its special physiognomy, particular rhythms, and other characteristics' because they remained relatively 'stationary', while taking on 'new clothes' over time. They also document 'the memory and the history of races that have sometimes been lost or disappeared'.<sup>5</sup> As such, they could function as ethnic specimens, capable of both reflecting and producing notions of race, identity and nation.

In Weckerlin's three influential volumes of music, *Echos du temps passé* (1853–7), *chansons populaires* from Brittany, Normandy, Gascony and Alsace intersperse with those from Mexico, China, Haiti and India alongside songs by Adam de la Halle, Lully and Rameau. All are presented as shards of the past. The 'Chanson mexicaine' is typical in that the original language is maintained and a certain character and memorable distinction are suggested by a recurring rhythmic pattern (Ex. 10.1). Weckerlin begins with a short prose introduction and explains the song's bolero rhythm by noting the presence of Spanish people in Mexico. Then, perhaps remembering the five languages still spoken in France, he acknowledges twenty languages spoken in Mexico, several with distinct grammar and vocabularies. The monophonic song follows above his version for piano and voice. Weckerlin uses two tactics to highlight the original melody – a static accompaniment, alternating octave eighth notes in the left hand and a recurring triplet arpeggio in the right hand, and a piano part that does not double the voice nor offer any competing melodic contours. However, he does make some changes. To support interim harmonic cadences, he alters the end of the internal lines from a third to a falling fifth and ignores upbeat accents that upset the metric equilibrium. The inclusion of a 'Chanson indienne' that Félicien David incorporated in his *Christophe Colombe* and the reappearance of such melodies in Weckerlin's subsequent book on the *Chanson populaire* (1886) – notably those used in *Le Désert* or *Carmen* – suggests that his interest in this music is as emblems of race that composers could adapt and use as signs to exotic cultures.

After 1870 the issues raised by this 'Chanson mexicaine' – the notion of a racial stereotype in music and the argument against race and language alone as the marker of nation – became particularly important. Alsace, Weckerlin's

<sup>5</sup> Weckerlin, *Chanson populaire*, pp. 3, 188.

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№. 46.

**CHANSON MEXICAINE.**

On sait que le Mexique est en grande partie peuplé d'espagnols, il n'est donc pas étonnant que les chansons populaires de ce pays nous rappellent le caractère des boléros espagnols; nous ne prétendons pas non plus donner une traduction exacte de cette chanson mexicaine: Il paraît qu'au Mexique on parle vingt langues, dont plusieurs ont déjà des grammaires et des dictionnaires assez complets.

TEXTE ORIGINAL.

Tengo u-na china caramba por san Augustin; Tengo u-na china caramba por san Augus-tin.

Tie-ne u-na ca-ra-amba com'un se-ra-phin, Tie-ne u-na ca-ra ca-ram-ba com'un se-ra-phin, Ay ca-ra-amba co-mo un se-ra-phin, Ay ca-ra-amba co-mo un se-ra-phin.

**All.<sup>mo</sup> moderato. (♩ = 100)**

C HANT. *mf* Quand le jour fi-

PIANO. *pp*

nit que la bri-se Souf-fle sur la mer,

Dé-plo-yant ma voi-le sou-mi-se Sur le flot a-mer,

V. P.

Example 10.1: 'Chanson mexicaine' from J. B. Weckerlin, *Echos du temps passé*

home, was taken as bounty in the Franco-Prussian war and claimed as German because its people spoke mostly the German language. However, Fustel de Coulanges pointed out, 'race is history, the past' and 'language is the remains and the sign of a distant past'; what is 'living' are 'desires, ideas,

interests and feelings'. In 1882 Ernest Renan asserted similarly that a nation is 'a common will in the present . . . a solidarity made up of the feeling of sacrifices that one has made and that one is willing to make again . . . in spite of diversity in race and language'.<sup>6</sup> The challenge after France became a Republic in 1870 was to understand the French as one people, yet speaking many languages, and to construct an identity based on accommodating differences, that is, without opposing the powerful and the powerless.

The *chansons populaires* made an important contribution to this project. They provided a context for discovering similarities within the country as well as rationalising or dismissing differences. Inspired by the Germans and the English, the French had been collecting *chansons populaires* in their own provinces since the 1830s and beginning in 1854, under decree from Napoleon III, as part of building political support and social harmony in the provinces. In the 1860s republicans such as Weckerlin, in the minority during the Second Empire, looked to 'popular' (i.e. folk) poetry and music as 'the treasure-chest' of the common people around the world, a way to understand their legends and their history.<sup>7</sup> For them, *populaire* referred to a utopian sense of the lower classes developed during the Revolution and an association with what was meaningful and authentic in culture, what persevered beyond politics, not as during the Revolution when popular songs often concerned social critique or resistance.<sup>8</sup> Republicans hoped to use this repertoire as 'a rallying cry' to build support for national unity. By contrast, those nostalgic for the *ancien régime* or Empire saw the genre as a way to shift attention from the urban working class to the peasants who, like landed aristocrats, tended to be conservative and had traditionally supported monarchy. After 1879 when republicans took control of the government, this group was concerned with reviving the status of the provinces to diffuse the power of republican-controlled Paris. In the 1880s and 1890s – my focus in this chapter – racial theories were brought in to support both the utopian ideals of the republicans and the desire for distinction and difference among descendants of the *ancien régime*. In this context, the *chansons populaires* collected in France enabled the French not

<sup>6</sup> The Coulanges and Renan excerpts are reproduced in Raoul Girardet, *Le Nationalisme français* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), pp. 62–9.

<sup>7</sup> Antonin Proust, *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* (Paris: Niort, 1866), p. v. This volume of prose poems, some dating to the fifteenth century, contains historical songs, songs from the war of independence, and legends. Beginning in 1867, the republican historian Henri Martin, a disciple of Michelet, published seven volumes of his *Histoire de la France populaire*.

<sup>8</sup> *Populaire* also referred to the need in a democracy to assimilate these classes through education in order to produce informed citizens who would support the political order. In the nineteenth century, it meant not so much what was produced by the lower classes, as what was given them for their consumption to bring their ideals into conformity with those of their leaders. For additional discussion, see my 'Material Culture and Postmodern Positivism: Rethinking the "Popular" in late Nineteenth-Century French Music', in Roberta Marvin, Michael Marissen and Stephen Crist (eds.), *Historical Musicology: Sources, Methods, Interpretations* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004).

only to reflect on their own racial diversity and racial origins, but also to argue for mutually exclusive political agendas.<sup>9</sup>

#### RENDERING FRANCE AUDIBLE

The first step in understanding French heterogeneity was to collect examples of it, to render France *audible* in all its rich diversity and particularity. Both monogenists, who believed that all races descended from one, and polygenists who believed in a separate origin for each human race, agreed on the importance of collecting and classifying *chansons populaires*.<sup>10</sup> Like anthropological photographs, transcriptions objectified the collector's observations for future study, allowing for not only categorisation, an understanding of the Other as a function of pre-existent categories, but also comparison. Because of the oral tradition, both monogenists and polygenists were convinced that this music communicated unmediated truths about the past. No one seemed particularly bothered by the authority imposed on them by modern, written notation, or by the addition of piano accompaniment. Neither were they troubled by the ahistorical nature of the collections – with no consideration of the religious wars, revolution and imperial expansion affecting France over time that may have influenced this music – nor by the claims to be unveiling the racial unconscious. As with exotic products from the colonies, the point was to capture this music and make it available for new uses.

The collecting proceeded by region. Few who took to the fields were professional musicians – in 1864 Weckerlin published *chansons populaires* from the Alps and in 1883 some from Alsace. Most were literary scholars and amateurs – doctors, clerics, and anyone motivated by an interest in history and local pride. Each song thereafter became associated with the province where it was found, and assumed to convey information about the intellectual and moral life, or '*mœurs*', of the province's inhabitants. In 1885, modelling themselves on the English Folklore Society, the Société des traditions populaires was formed to promote the genre. Among its members were Ernest Renan, the poet Frédéric Mistral, Prince Roland Bonaparte and the medievalist Gaston Paris from the Collège de France. With the advent of two specialised journals, *Mélusine* (1877, 1884–1900) and the society's *La Revue des traditions populaires* (1886–1919), edited by Paris, attention turned to analysing this repertoire. While some looked to it

<sup>9</sup> For a study of the genre before 1870, see Jane Fulcher, 'The Popular Chanson of the Second Empire: "Music of the Peasants" in France', *Acta Musicologica* 52 (1980), 27–37. For how the genre served as a malleable symbol for various groups in French society up to the First World War, see my 'The Chanson Populaire as Malleable Symbol in Turn-of-the-Century France' in Yoshihiko Tokumaru et al. (eds.), *Tradition and Its Future in Music* (Tokyo: Mita Press, 1991), pp. 203–10.

<sup>10</sup> Among French monogenists were Jean-Baptiste-Pierre-Antoine de Monet de Lamarck, Jean-Louis Armand de Quatrefages and Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and among the French polygenists, Georges Cuvier, Paul Broca, André Sanson, Jean-C.-M.-F.-J. Boudin, and Gustave Le Bon.

for information about the life of the past or the 'soul' of the peasant, others found in its texts legends and myths that were common throughout the world. Most issues of *La Revue* included multiple versions of some story, such as the Medea legend recounted in Laos as well as Greece or an Iroquois fable reminiscent of certain Hindu, Greek and German tales. Such resemblances supported the monogenist project of using culture to suggest similarities among different peoples and assert universals.

The Société des traditions populaires was also interested in the music. For the first ten years their journal included vocal scores. While it had been fashionable to dismiss the aesthetic value of such music, these intellectuals saw it as capable of opening a world of 'unprecedented sensations' and inspiring a 'second youth' in contemporary poetry and music.<sup>11</sup> Along with lectures by musical folklorists, the society sponsored concerts, a 'musical geography'. In 1885, they presented two at the historical society, the Cercle Saint-Simon, introduced by Gaston Paris. In the first, they heard *chansons populaires* from throughout Europe, in the second, those from the French provinces (Figure 10.1). The programme, noting the source of each song and the collector's name, exemplifies both how collective the project of assembling these sources was and how the texts and the music, from Brittany to the Alps, became signs of regional identity. By including songs from the Flemish and Basque regions as well as Alsace, this program also shows how large they understood the country to be, with Southern Flanders extending into France's 'Nord', the northern Basque country into the south-west, and Alsace and its people, illegitimately appropriated by Germany, still part of the French nation.

When it came to understanding variants in the genre, monogenists, especially monogenist republicans, brought a distinct perspective to interpreting transformation within the genre as well as the music's meaning and value. Like Darwin, they saw variation within the human race as critical to the idea of evolution. They had faith in organisms' capacity for structural and functional adaptation and the environment's capacity to influence people as well as plants and animals. The French had a name for the method, whereby using the principles of science, humans could exploit the forces of nature to assist plants and animals to adapt to new circumstances. They called it acclimatisation. To acclimatise an individual or race of whatever species, as Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire explained it, meant to remove it from its place of origin and imprint on its organisation modifications that rendered it able to exist and perpetuate its species under these new conditions.<sup>12</sup> The French first began to experiment with trying to

<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Vicaire, 'Nos idées sur le traditionnisme', *La Revue des traditions populaires* 7 (25 July 1886), 189–90.

<sup>12</sup> Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, *Acclimatation et domestication des animaux utiles* (Paris: Librairie agricole de la Maison rustique, 1861).

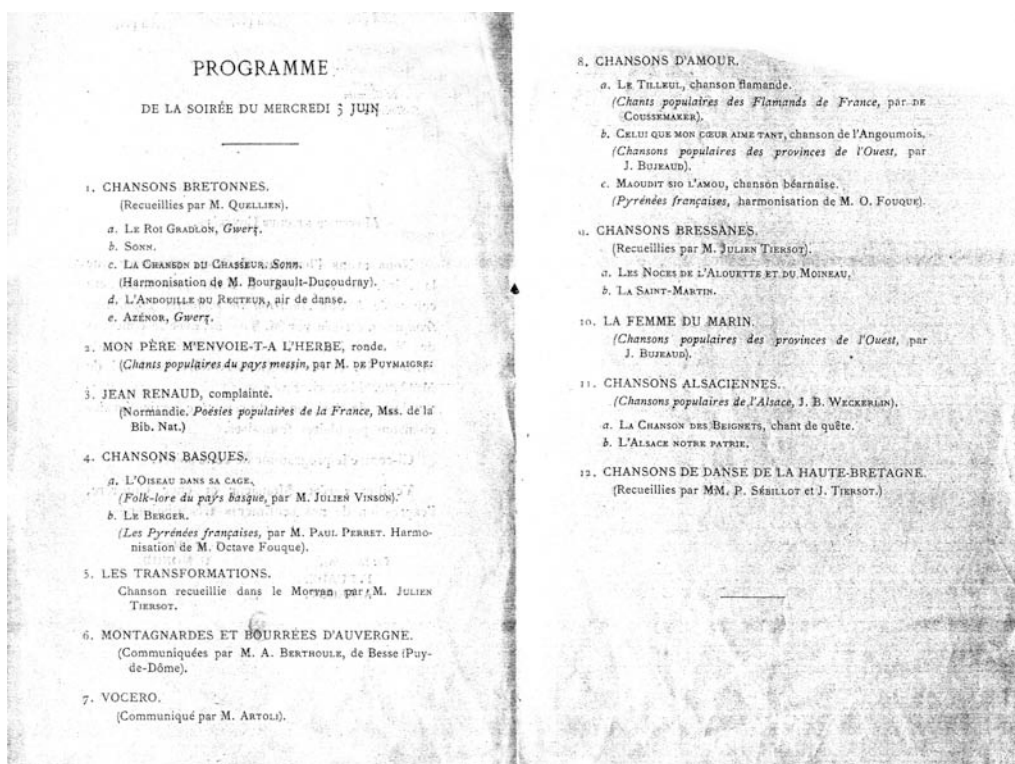


Figure 10.1: Programme of the Cercle Saint-Simon, 3 June 1885

acclimatise species foreign to France in 1848. Declaring that only half the globe had been developed for useful exploitation, in 1855 Saint-Hilaire created a zoo (distinct from the Jardin des plantes) that specialised in acclimatisation as well as the creation of racial hybrids: the Jardin zoologique d'acclimatation.

When it applied to people, acclimatisation, or the science of colonisation, made possible assimilation. Both were crucial to those promoting French imperialism. For this reason, many republicans were also monogenists. Republicans advocated foreign expansion not only to assure jobs at home, but also to provide an alternative power base and claims to grandeur strong enough to replace those of aristocratic monarchies. They saw France as the new Rome, the product of assimilating ancient Greek and Roman traditions through the Gauls and German traditions through the Franks. In his *Opuscules sur la chanson populaires* (1874), Weckerlin supported this perspective, pointing to the sun festivals of ancient Greece and the year-end festivals of the Druids as predecessors of popular festivals in the French provinces. Weckerlin also presented variants of songs such as 'Jean de

Nivelle' throughout the country in order to propose a notion of the nation as coherent despite internal differences of language.<sup>13</sup>

Other republican scholars working at the Paris Conservatoire besides Weckerlin, their librarian – his assistant Julian Tiersot and the music historian Louis Bourgault-Ducoudray – also adopted evolutionist, assimilationist perspectives when attempting to understand diversity within the French population. Bourgault-Ducoudray's understanding of *chansons populaires* came from having collected them in Greece and Asia Minor on two visits in 1874 and 1875, the second funded by the French government, and in his native Brittany for two months in summer 1881. Attempting to 'capture the authenticity', he explicitly sought to 'photograph what he heard'.<sup>14</sup> This meant not forcing the music into the conventions of western tradition, such as changing a melody to adapt to a harmony as Weckerlin had done in his 'Chanson mexicaine'. It also led him to notate not only the music and Greek lyrics of the songs, but also the names of singers and places. Those by Mme Laffon in Smyrna seemed to him particularly authentic because she had an excellent memory and was born in Cyprus, an island visited by fishermen from all the Greek provinces. Still, when Bourgault-Ducoudray performed these songs, he dropped the singers' names and melodies appeared as authorless and placeless, as if to reinforce the collective nature of their composition.

Unlike Weckerlin, Bourgault-Ducoudray's interest was not in regional or national identity. It was the musical modes and the irregular rhythms of the songs. He recognised the modes from plainchant. Yet, referring to the human mummies from the distant past being discovered and dissected in Egypt, he called those in chant musical 'mummies' compared to the 'living melodies of the Orient' with their lively rhythms.<sup>15</sup> In the accompaniment to his transcriptions, he based the harmony – what he called the 'conquest of the modern races' – on the melody's mode and imitated its rhythms and changing metres. He also added performance instructions, extensive accompaniments and sometimes interludes that made them like art songs, easily accessible to Western audiences. His goal was to show that modes were compatible with modern music and could be acclimatised in France, explored and incorporated for the sake of French musical progress. He also performed this music often and in a wide variety of contexts, whether for his colleagues at the Société des traditions populaires or in the chamber music series 'La trompette', where the songs occasionally functioned as a kind of transitional material between serious music and light

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin, *Opuscules sur la chanson populaire et sur la musique* (Paris: J. Baur, 1874).

<sup>14</sup> Cameras had long provided Europeans with the fruits of explorers' adventures. The phonograph, still in its infancy, was not yet used in fieldwork.

<sup>15</sup> The first intact burial tomb of an Egyptian king was discovered in 1827. In 1881 a French archaeologist discovered over fifty mummies of Egyptian royalty. Louis-Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray, *Trente Mélodies populaires de Grèce et d'Orient* (Paris: Lemoine, 1876), p. 7.



repertoire. After his lecture on the Greek repertoire at the 1878 Universal Exhibition, he was made professor of music history at the Conservatoire.

## EXCAVATING ARYAN MUSIC

Whereas in his Greek volume, Bourgault-Ducoudray was not troubled by whether the melodies he notated were old or not because he believed they were still 'constructed according to the principles of the ancient scales', in collecting *chansons populaires* in Brittany, he came upon the problem of hearing 'twenty versions of the same air before finding the good one'. This admission is important, for it underlines both Bourgault-Ducoudray's search for origins and a paradox at the heart of his beliefs. If, as he explains in his preface, 'In all men of the same race, there is a common heritage of feelings that are transmitted and perpetuated without being modified', then the 'spontaneous and instinctive' music expressing them should not have changed. However, in Brittany where the melody of *chansons populaires* is tightly linked to the poetry, he encountered two languages: the 'gallot', a dialect influenced by French, and 'Breton'. Not neutral about these differences nor receptive to the kind of assimilation reflected in the gallot, he criticised it for not having 'the character of a pure race' and the melodies using it for being 'half-blood'. In sounding more 'strange' with an 'exotic perfume', he found in Breton the 'character of a race' and its melodies 'pure-blood'. Searching for racial purity put him in sympathy with polygenists who were seeking to understand the origins and distinction of each race.

In the 'Breton' melodies, 'more original and colourful', Bourgault-Ducoudray found echoes of the ancient Greek modes. Refuting the common assumption that most of these were in minor mode, he points out eight diatonic modes. In the north where the 'race is more serious and more reflective', there are songs in hypodorian, associated with the 'serenity, virility and nobility' of Apollo. In the Cornouailles, where the population is 'nervous and passionate', hypophrygian, the mode of Bacchus, dominates. He also found metres used rarely in the West, such as those with five and seven beats. Comparing the fruits of his research with *chansons populaires* in Russia, Ireland, Scotland and elsewhere leads him to a sweeping conclusion. Because of the presence of 'identical characteristics in the primitive music of all Indo-European peoples', he associates them with the Aryan race and dates their origin back to the time when the Aryan race was in its infancy, before 'all the branches of this race' dispersed. Indo-European *chansons populaires* are an 'Aryan music', he asserts, that confirms the hypothesis of shared origins of the Aryan peoples.<sup>16</sup> From this

<sup>16</sup> Bourgault-Ducoudray offers an analogously racial hypothesis about the chromatic oriental scale as belonging to Arabs and people whom they've dominated. He found it in *musique populaire*

perspective, Greece was merely 'a smarter and better-situated nation' that knew how to exploit the common heritage, not the inventor of the modes. In an 1884 lecture to an Alpine club, Bourgault-Ducoudray supports this theory in his discussion of *chansons populaires* in the mountainous areas of Europe. There he again found melodies 'not constructed in the system of our modern music, but in that of ancient Greek music and plainchant that comes from it'. Since the mountains have served as 'a refuge for "primitive races"' and were long isolated from the rest of Europe, its 'primitive' music could not have been influenced by the Greeks. In this sense, 'primitive' means that its characteristics 'go back to the oldest antiquity' and is synonymous with racial origins.<sup>17</sup>

This association with the Aryan race, he argues, gives the French a kind of birthright to return to the Greek modes and rhythms as a source of renewal. Believing that the major and minor modes can lead to no further musical progress, Bourgault-Ducoudray wanted to encourage use of the Greek modes as matrices for exploring 'new harmonic formulas'. Like Glinka, he hoped they would tap into this source of Aryan music to generate new music, not unlike the plant and animal hybrids produced at the zoo.<sup>18</sup> With its two modes, hypolydian and chromatic, within the same piece, the tenth of the Greek songs must have been particularly provocative. In 1880, he congratulated his Conservatoire colleague Théodore Dubois for his 'very happy' use of the Greek modes in his song, 'La chanson lesbienne'.<sup>19</sup>

#### MUSICAL ACCLIMATISATION

Like Saint-Hilaire, who travelled in the provinces to build the acclimatisation movement and there developed first-hand information about provincial resources, Tiersot collected and classified *chansons populaires* from all the French provinces. Romain Rolland called him 'the indefatigable botanist of the *chansons populaires*'.<sup>20</sup> Tiersot's goals were ambitious. In his *Histoire de la chanson populaire en France*, he not only collected and categorised, but also analysed this repertoire. As for other contributors to *La Revue des traditions populaires*, his method was to seek analogies more

throughout Turkey, southern Russia, and southern Spain but 'never in countries where the Indo-European element has existed without mixture'. The first of his *Trente Mélodies populaires de Basse-Bretagne* (Paris: Lemoine, 1885) uses this scale. See p. 6 n. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Bourgault-Ducoudray, 'La Musique primitive conservée par les montagnes', *Annuaire du Club alpine français* (1884), 4–5, 9.

<sup>18</sup> The citations of Bourgault-Ducoudray in these paragraphs come from the introduction to his *Trente Mélodies populaires de Basse-Bretagne*, pp. 6, 9, 11–16. His attention was drawn to this repertoire by finding the hypodorian mode in Hersart de la Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz, Chants populaires de la Bretagne*, 2 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1839), reissued in 1845 and 1867. In 1882 a local Breton church organist, Charles Collins, had also published his own collection, *Chants de la Bretagne*.

<sup>19</sup> L.a. Bourgault-Ducoudray 80 (11 June 1880). Bibliothèque nationale, Music, Paris.

<sup>20</sup> Romain Rolland, *Mémoires et fragments du journal* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1956), p. 63.

than differences among the variants. His conclusions were significant. He understood these songs as reflective of the interests and style of no one class – ‘only the chronicles through which the people conserve their memory of past times’ – and as moving from one social class to the next, generally starting out in intellectual circles and gradually taken over by the lower strata. He also claimed that this music contains the seed of a musical universal: ‘[I]n whatever the tonality at hand, antique, modern, French or Chinese, all agree on one fundamental principle: the existence of a tonic and dominant in each scale.’ Except in the Basque country, he found ‘the sum total of the *chansons populaires* identical from one end of the country to the other’.<sup>21</sup> These results won Tiersot the Prix Bordin, established by the Institut de France in 1885 for the best comprehensive study of the genre in France. The notion of a shared tradition of song also intrigued republicans who were seeking ways to make the French feel unified as a nation and fed the government’s desire for a reification and codification of the French past. This led them to increase their sponsorship of travel grants [missions] to encourage the collection of *chansons populaires* at home and abroad.

Beginning with his first volume in 1888, Tiersot also published songs from the various French provinces, some of them in local dialects.<sup>22</sup> These indicate the provincial source of the version without commenting on whether Tiersot thought it the original version; singers’ names appear only in the preface. Like Bourgault-Ducoudray, Tiersot sought to understand better the origins of French music, what he called ‘the charming remaining debris of the primitive art of our race’. He pursued this not in a study of modes, but of melodic types. In some ways, this was a musical version of contemporary work on *la poésie populaire* from the middle ages, for recurring initial melodic patterns in some ways resembled the opening formulas of oral poetry. However, arguing that their ‘essences’ are more often independent than bound together, Tiersot chose to analyse this music separately from its poetry. In an 1894 essay, Tiersot called on the mechanism of racial transformation in analysing the effects of regional differences on musical production, explaining song variants as the results of ‘musical acclimatisation’. By this he meant that melodies were by nature fluid, malleable, susceptible to adapt to various circumstances (e.g. dialects), as monogenists believed about the human race. With ‘the people’ transforming a tune, modifying its character and accent as Beethoven or Wagner might in the development of a symphony or music drama, the same melodic type could change in allure and accent from one province to

<sup>21</sup> Julien Tiersot, *Histoire de la chanson populaire en France* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1889), pp. v, vi, 1, 287, 356–9. This work gave him a perspective on the exotic music he collected at the 1889 Paris Exhibition and published as *Musiques pittoresques* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1889).

<sup>22</sup> These volumes include the *chansons populaires* performed for the Société des traditions populaires on 3 June 1885.

another even as it conserved some essential elements, such as the opening notes.<sup>23</sup> In this way he explained a song originating in Auvergne that later became known as a Breton song.

As art-song examples of ‘musical acclimatisation’, Tiersot also performed *chansons populaires* frequently in Parisian concert halls. To facilitate this he ‘dressed them with the clothes of harmony’ so that in ‘transporting them into a context so different from their natural context’ they would not be too ‘*dépaysé* [like fish out of water]’ and could be admitted ‘into a world that would not accept them in their bare simplicity’.<sup>24</sup> Because he added only accompaniments, he did not call his work a ‘Suite on *chansons populaires*’ or a ‘Fantasy on *chansons populaires*’. Still, acknowledging his harmonising work and their resemblance to the texture and style of Tiersot’s own art songs, the composer-sponsored Société nationale and the Concerts Colonne presented them as premieres of new music under Tiersot’s name. Moreover, on 22 February 1900, instead of including them in the first half with other ‘*musique ancienne*’ – Mozart, Handel, and Borghi – Colonne placed them on the second half, the ‘*musique moderne*’, preceding Schumann, Liszt, Saint-Saëns, Chopin and Enesco. Such contexts raised the status of *chansons populaires* to art.

As the production of hybrids at the zoo increased through the 1880s, advocates increasingly recognised that the project of acclimatisation had problems. De Quatrefages noted that in acclimatising, a race can degenerate, that is, lose or modify the character appreciated most in it. Acclimatisation represents the victory of milieu over an organism that bends to its requirements, but this never takes place without a more or less violent struggle that necessarily leads to loss for both individuals and generations.<sup>25</sup> Emile Guimet admitted that it was almost too late to collect *chansons populaires* since there were few regions where the influence of urban popular music from Paris was not yet felt.<sup>26</sup> There were also those who were opposed to the republican project of concentrating on similarities throughout the country and wished to protect regional languages and dialects.

#### RACIAL PURITY

Anti-republican polygenists brought different racial agendas to their understanding of *chansons populaires*. Their theories returned to vogue in the 1890s when colonial efforts at assimilating the Indochinese were failing

<sup>23</sup> Julien Tiersot, *Les types mélodiques dans la chanson populaire française* (Paris: Sagot, 1894); reprinted from *La Revue des traditions populaires*, 9, 29–30.

<sup>24</sup> Julien Tiersot, *Mémoires populaires des provinces de France* vol. I (Paris: Heugel, 1888), p. 1; and vol. IV (1911), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> De Quatrefages, ‘Acclimatation des animaux et des plantes’, *Le magasin pittoresque* (1883), 373–5.

<sup>26</sup> Emile Guimet, *Chants populaires du Lyonnais; Rapport sur le concours pour le prix Christin et de Ruolz* (Lyon: Association typographique, 1882; reprinted from the *Mémoires de l’Académie des Sciences, Belles-lettres et Arts de Lyon*, vol. XXII), p. 32.

and when anarchist attacks, the Dreyfus affair, and an increasing attraction to Nordic cultures and Wagner threw into question French identity. If, as the polygenists believed, the nature of a people, its soul, is fixed, not alterable by education or environment as Gustave Le Bon argued in his *Les Lois psychologiques de l'évolution* (1894), then what constituted the essence of French identity? In music, this meant seeking the 'purest version' of a song. Acknowledging that environment had influenced the differences between the various people of France – those of Brittany, Normandy, Provence, Auvergne, etc. – Le Bon pointed to the ancient races as those responsible for racial identity, those for whom milieu had negligible influence. Looking to the distant past, polygenists were particularly interested in what resisted invasion and assimilation by the Romans and the Franks, that is, France's Celtic elements. As Edouard Schuré put it in an essay on the legends of Brittany and the Celtic genius, 'The Celtic soul is the deep, interior soul of France.'<sup>27</sup> Bourgault-Ducoudray had argued for certain old and immutable qualities in the *chansons populaires* of Brittany and in his publication was careful to notate the Breton language and vocal timbre. However, his primary purpose was to present these songs as linked to the Greek modes and as Aryan. Schuré and others saw Bretons as Celts and the Celtic tradition as informing the French character.<sup>28</sup> Like the blood of the race, responsible for its vitality, Celtic aspects in music would allow them to locate racial persistence within France.

The composer Vincent d'Indy was among those who looked to the Celts to articulate French identity. His opera *Fervaal*, begun in 1886, is set in an ancient forest of the Cévennes as the country is invaded by barbarians. Steven Huebner finds Celtism central to the meaning of this opera: 'race, nationalism, and Christian faith combine in an allegory about the founding of France out of the Celtic spirit.'<sup>29</sup> When he engaged in collecting *chansons populaires*, however, d'Indy went to his ancestors' birthplace near France's oldest mountains. Because he considered the genre the result of 'impersonal work' and 'time', his sources were not always peasant; the only singer he acknowledged was a baroness. D'Indy too came upon numerous versions of the same songs and, like Tiersot, examining their initial phrases and refrains, catalogued them according to 'type'. He also assumed that while their form might be influenced by various milieux and usages, it was possible to ascertain 'the most primitive' version. As a composer, d'Indy was drawn only to 'the most musically interesting', some of which provided clues to the origins of musical form. The *bourées* intrigued him particularly. He saw the rondo form of the

<sup>27</sup> This essay was originally published in *La Revue des deux mondes* (1891) and later appeared as part 4 of *Les grandes légendes de France*. Cited in Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 324. See also Schuré, *Les chants de la montagne* (1876).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. See also Henri Martin, *Etudes d'archéologie celtique* (Paris: Didier, 1872).

<sup>29</sup> Huebner, *French Opera*, p. 326.

fourth one as a predecessor to the cyclicity of the ‘eminently French’ instrumental suite as well as the sonata and symphony after Beethoven.<sup>30</sup> He used two of these *bourrées* in his *Fantaisie sur des thèmes populaires françaises* (1888), and textless melodies he heard sung in the distance in his *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* (1886) and Act II of *Fervaal*.

For anti-republican polygenists the subtext of this discourse may also have been political. Many were nostalgic for the *ancien régime*. When Vincent d’Indy and Maurice Denis, for example, elevate the ‘humble’ and the ‘primitive’, they wished not just to hail the French qualities of clarity and simplicity or the purported access provided by this music to races from the distant past. The primitive was also that which predated the Republic and its notions of French civilisation as a product of assimilation. It harkened back to pre-modern times. They idolised not ancient Greece, but the middle ages, the Catholic Church, and the music of Palestrina (considered the last medieval composer and often referred to as primitive). Whereas Bourgault-Ducoudray saw the modal qualities of these songs as remnants of Greek modes, d’Indy interpreted them as having religious origins and offering a way to reconnect with religious faith. After 1900, anti-republican provincials turned to the *chansons populaires* as a way to resist invasion by a more contemporary enemy, the Parisian romance, and helped turn the genre into a symbol of regional identity.

#### ANALYSING LA PERNETTE

An important example of these interpretive differences can be seen in these musicians’ analyses of the song, *La Pernette*, one of the country’s most enduring ‘melodic types’.<sup>31</sup> It concerns a woman who preferred her Pierre to a prince or baron and who went to the grave with her lover for defying her mother’s wishes. In his *Chanson populaire* (1886) – probably written for the same 1885 competition as Tiersot’s *Histoire de la chanson populaire* – Weckerlin mentions six versions of this song he found from Brittany to the Alps, comparing them to French dialects as he might have in the 1860s. He is not surprised that, ‘in its wanderings over the centuries, a *chanson populaire* acclimatises in the different provinces of a country and, with a few transformations, settles in’. However, from a republican and monogenist perspective reminding readers that racial diversity is not an impediment to national identity, he explains, ‘Even if certain dialects of our provinces diverge from French, there is at the root of these dialects, except for the Breton language, a spirit of nationality that connects and harmonises them.’<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Vincent d’Indy, *Chansons populaires du Vivarais* (Paris: Durand, 1900), p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> Tiersot, *Les types mélodiques*, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Weckerlin, *Chanson populaire*, pp. 184–5. The song was also included in his *Chansons populaires des provinces de France* (Paris: Bourdilliat, 1860) and Damase Arbaud, *Chants populaires de la Provence* (Aix: Makaire, 1862–64).

In his *Mélodies populaires des provinces de la France* (1888), Tiersot reproduces a *Pernette* from Franche-Comté, collected by a deputy from the region. He also acknowledges finding it throughout the east and south of the country. This version is interesting because, in spanning an octave, it is implicitly tonal (Ex. 10.2). In the middle of each stanza, which otherwise remains largely within the fifth, E–B, the song moves abruptly to C# and then D on ‘tra-la-la’. In his accompaniment Tiersot then adds a D# to prepare a V–I cadence in E minor just before the vocal line reaches up to E<sup>1</sup>. Elsewhere too his accompaniment includes the harmonic colours of a contemporary sensibility. Like many published by Tiersot, it is clearly a hybrid conceived for contemporary performance. His accompaniment lightly supports the vocal line, often doubling it, but the work also includes an eleven-bar piano prelude that begins in 2/4 and then shifts to 6/8, introducing the tune as if a musical theme. After the song, he reproduces the nine stanzas for voice alone, yet assumes they will be performed, calling for a different expressive style for each. In his collection of Alpine songs (1903), Tiersot harmonises another *Pernette*, opening with a shorter introduction to the tune’s incipit but with almost the same accompaniment.<sup>33</sup> This one, also in 6/8, likewise contains a ‘tra-la-la’ with a major sixth that functions as a leading tone to the seventh. However, the song never reaches up to the octave and, incorporating this major sixth in the accompaniment, Tiersot creates a modal cadence rather than a tonal one.

Six more *Pernettes* appear in the *Chansons populaires du Vivarais et du Vercors* (1892), collected and transcribed by Vincent d’Indy and annotated by Tiersot. Here Tiersot’s assertions go much further than Weckerlin’s. He introduces value judgements and suggests origins, calling *La Pernette* the most beautiful of the collection and waxing poetic about its significance. For him it represents ‘the force of tradition’ that

imposes itself so imperiously on the people’s spirit that, despite any disdain the inhabitants of a region might feel toward this old thing, they could never forget it completely. Like the old melody in Wagner’s drama, *die alte Weise*, that resonates in the ears of a wounded *Tristan* . . . it alone survives to teach successive generations what the ancestors sang.

Because the textual verses of so many versions are lost, Tiersot suggests that the melody, more than the poetry, is responsible for being remembered.<sup>34</sup> Explaining the numerous variants of this song as a product of the people’s spirit that is ‘as capricious and changeable as *l’esprit mondain*’, Tiersot isolates something he calls ‘*le vrai chant*’. This, he asserts, could not

<sup>33</sup> Julien Tiersot, *Chansons populaires recueillies dans les Alpes françaises* (Grenoble: Falque et Perrin, 1903).

<sup>34</sup> In his *Chants populaires du Lyonnais*, p. 32, Guimet agrees. This is an important assertion, for the discipline of provincial ethnography was begun and continued to be dominated by literary scholars who collected and studied *poésie populaire*.

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### LA PERNETTE

VERSION DE LA FRANCHE COMTE

CHANT. *Modéré.*

PIANO. *Modéré.*

*f*

*Un peu lent.*

*Un peu lent.*

*p*

*mf*

1<sup>er</sup> COUPLET. La Per - net.te se lè - ve Troi

Example 10.2: 'La pernette, version de la Franche Comté', from Julien Tiersot, *Mémoires populaires des provinces de France*





disappear. It is in the blood of the race. Numerous generations ‘will keep on repeating it’.

Like the literary scholar George Doncieux in his book on *La Pernelle* (1891), Tiersot also finds it to be the oldest in this collection, one version ‘belonging almost exclusively’ to France’s mountainous centre with its ‘more primitive and less civilised character’. The song’s language is not yet entirely French, and elsewhere it always appears in other forms, especially its ending and use of wide intervals. This leads him to connect racial origins to place, a primitive form of music to primitive peoples. Throughout this volume, Tiersot refers to songs from the mountains as having ‘pure inflexions’, their notes prolonged by an echo.<sup>35</sup> It is significant, therefore, that the same year d’Indy began contemplating a national French music, he incorporated into his *Symphonie a chanson populaire* from these mountains. Its ‘primitive simplicity’ serves as the basis for both thematic transformation and unity, a kind of noble savage giving birth to civilisation.<sup>36</sup>

In 1900, when d’Indy published his second collection from this region, this time funded by a regional grant, he wrote his own annotations and included texts in their original dialects as well as in French translations. As for Tiersot, his accompaniments reflect his own aesthetic inclinations, leading him to complicate the chordal texture with short contrapuntal lines. His purpose was not only to reiterate the collective nature of this genre and the repository of the past in it, but also to point to its association with regional identity – to ‘unveil the Vivaraise soul’ – and to look for the origin of ‘musical types’ in the oldest *chansons populaires*. Like Tiersot, he saw *La Pernelle* as ‘one of the rare songs that incontestably originate in our mountains’ and indeed its verses and modal character resemble more the one Tiersot collected in the Alps than those he found elsewhere.

D’Indy devotes three pages to analysing two versions he collected in the Ardèche. He argues that one was the ‘primitive’ form: it remained within the interval of a fifth except for a cadential move down a major second below the tonic. Many peasants in the Ardèche knew it and this was the only place where it could still be found. The other he considers an ornamented, more musically developed version. The second line of each verse is a refrain, ‘tra-la-la’, rising the same major sixth as in Tiersot’s versions (Ex. 10.3). D’Indy construes this as added and rendering this version not as ‘pure’ as the ‘primitive’ one. He compares the refrain to the melismas in liturgical monody, presumably added over time to pre-existing syllabic chant. In direct confrontation with his anticlerical

<sup>35</sup> Vincent d’Indy and Julien Tiersot, *Chansons populaires du Vivarais et du Vercors* (Paris: Heugel, 1892), pp. 2, 29, 32, 39.

<sup>36</sup> Julien Tiersot, ‘Une symphonie sur un thème populaire’, *Revue des traditions populaires* (25 April 1887), 181.

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### La Pernette

*Version ornée*

N° 6

**CHANT**

*Lent*

La Per - nète se lè - vo, Tra la, la la, la  
 Lu Per - net.te se lè - ve, Tra la, la la, la

**PIANO**

*Lent*  
*mf*

la, la la la; — La Per - nète se lè - vo Trèis ou - ras d'a - van  
 la, la la la; — La Per - net.te se lè - ve Trèis heur's a - vant le

dzou, Trèis ou - ras d'a - van dzou, — Trèis ou - ras d'a - van dzou.  
 jour, Trèis heur's a - vant le jour, — Trèis heur's a - vant le jour.

*crusc.* *sf*

**1.** La Pernète se lèvo  
 Tra la, la la, la la, la la la;  
 La Pernète se lèvo  
 Trèis ouras d'avan dzou. (ter)

**2.** Fiàlan sa coulougnète  
 Tra la, etc.  
 Fiàlan sa coulougnète  
 Amàï soum pèti tou. (ter)

**3.** Teasqué tour que n'èn viro,  
 Tra la, etc.  
 Teasqué tour que n'èn viro,  
 Fàï un sospir d'amou. (ter)

**4.** Sa mèiro li vèn diré:  
 Tra la, etc.  
 Sa mèiro li vèn diré:  
 -Pernetto, qu'avès vous? (ter)

**TRADUCTION**

**1.** La Pernette se lève  
 Tra la, la la, la la, la la la  
 La Pernette se lève  
 Trois heur's avant le jour. (ter)

**2.** Prenant sa quenouillette  
 Tra la, etc.  
 Prenant sa quenouillette  
 Avec son petit tour. (ter)

**3.** A chaque tour qui vire,  
 Tra la, etc.  
 A chaque tour qui vire,  
 Fait un soupir d'amour. (ter)

**4.** Sa mère lui vient dire:  
 Tra la, etc.  
 Sa mère lui vient dire:  
 -Pernette, qu'avez-vous? (ter)

### La Pernette

*Version primitive*

*Lent et solennel*

La Per - nète se lè - vo Trèis ou - ras d'avan dzou, Trèis ou - ras d'avan dzou — *long*

Example 10.3: 'La pernette, version primitive and version ornée', from Vincent d'Indy, *Chansons populaires du Vivarais*



a blood infusion, would help regenerate French music. They eventually promoted their perspectives not only with publications, but also with educational projects. With his *chansons populaires* for elementary school children (1897–1902), Tiersot aimed to induce shared experiences among the country's children, promote the French language in all regions, and help construct a shared identity for the nation. By contrast, at the Schola Cantorum, a private conservatoire after 1900, d'Indy's colleague Charles Bordes (who collected *chansons populaires* in the Basque country) taught the genre as a way to inspire love of nature, religious music and regional traditions. It is important, therefore, to understand that music in late nineteenth-century France was used to reflect not just on racialised Others, but also on the racialised Self and that this was as complex as the theories underpinning the discourse. At home or within Europe, as this study suggests, the 'primitive' was not disparaged but embraced, and the *chansons populaires* idealised to the extent that they supported racial paradigms.

The question of reconciling the French nation with its population and their many languages has never been resolved. In 1997 the Conseil de l'Europe in Strasbourg put forth a call to take measures to preserve the various languages of France that risk disappearing, such as Breton. However, in 1999 President Chirac refused to sign the document, perhaps fearing the same privilege might be argued for immigrants residing in France. Chirac's response suggests that while monogenist and polygenist theories were both used to support nation-building in the nineteenth century, they grew increasingly problematic by the late twentieth century. The possibility of assimilating people from outside the west raised the fear that their acclimatisation might carry more risks than benefits, that, as de Quatrefages predicted, it might lead to loss of identity rather than progress. France is still a nation of many races and many languages, but without the perspective of imperial expansion, race now seems a destabilising force more than a potentially unifying one, and music too mobile and deracinated to provide the glue a stable national identity would require.