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# Sounding the *Tricolore*: France and the United States during World War II
# Sonner le *Tricolore* : la France et les États-Unis durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale

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Article abstract

During World War II, French music found itself in a unique position in the United States. As the sonic embodiment of an Allied nation, it was nonetheless subjected to musical identity politics that drew on stereotypes of France as an elegant, cosmopolitan, and even effeminate culture whose products needed the transformation of US reception to toughen themselves up for the global war, fought both on the battlefield and through propaganda. I focus on three aspects of this complex story of cultural mediation: the reception and adaptation of Claude Debussy's music, especially *Pelléas et Mélisande*; American cultural artifacts representing France, such as the 1943 motion picture *Casablanca*; and the role of French composers and performers in the United States during the war.

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# Sounding the *Tricolore*: France and the United States during World War II

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World War II was not only a global military conflict: it was also a globally fought cultural war in which art—music included—played an important role in positioning friendly or enemy nations in relation each to the other. In order for such an enterprise to work, however, actors on any side of this conflict depended on reductive taxonomies that distilled what was perceived as a culture's essence in, for instance, the transnational reception of its art. In the United States, this form of identity politics—musical or otherwise—was closely aligned, on the one hand, with American constructions of ethnic identities both within and outside of the nation and, on the other, with the ideology of American exceptionalism as founded on the frontier spirit, egalitarianism in the face of shared adversity, and defense of liberty.[1] This very complicated form of identity politics had a long history in the United States, where inclusion and exclusion was (and is) often based on American constructions of race and ethnicity, and where shifts in global politics can turn U.S. citizens of a particular ethnic or national origin into outsiders at the spur of a moment.[2] World War II presented one such crisis point that crystalized American musical identity politics and its relationship to ideologies of American exceptionalism by a conspicuous return to emphasizing national and ethnic origins that marked individuals either as foreigners or as Americans with so-called hyphenated identities, for instance as a Polish-American or a Mexican one.

This precarious form of identity politics has been well enough studied for some such constructions of cultural identity by way of nationality or other affinities (German or Jewish, for example) that raised obvious issues during World War II. But it also framed the performance and reception of French music and musicians in the United States in the same period. Newspapers and concert programs emphasized the nationality of the repertoire and performers, often relating musical features to national stereotypes (Fauser 2014). For their part, French musicians—whether in American exile like the composer Darius Milhaud or already in place, like the soprano Lily Pons, through their prewar career choices—were complicit in this reductionist enterprise for their own reasons, foregrounding their Frenchness in both cultural production and day-to-day performance of identity. Moreover, because World War II involved an international propaganda war, stereotyping blossomed not only in caricatures of such enemy nations as Germany or Japan but also where Allies were concerned. And while the plucky British made for easy engagement, the French situation was somewhat different.

Indeed, international politics was often a significant game changer. A review from July 1940 provides a telling example. The British-Canadian critic, Thomas Archer, reported for the illustrated magazine, *Musical America*, about the great success achieved by Claude Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) at the Montreal Music Festival that June. Not only was this very first Canadian performance attended "by an illustrious audience with the French Minister to Canada occupying the vice-regal box," but the evening's quasi-official status was also confirmed by the fact that it started with three national anthems in a row: the French, the Canadian, and the British.[3] And yet, Archer remarked rather pointedly, this première had taken place "just in time": "Had it been known that France had applied for an Armistice, the thing would undoubtedly have had to be called off" (Archer 1940, 1). This brief political aside creates a sharp dissonance in an article that otherwise celebrated the Montreal performance of *Pelléas* as a landmark event of

[1] For a general introduction to the politics of American exceptionalism, see Godfrey Hodgson's book, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (2009).

[2] For an overview of the issues, see *Race and Ethnicity in America*, edited by Ronald H. Bayor (2003). *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Jacobsen 1998) is a foundational study of ethnicity in the United States that reveals how complex and fraught identity politics were in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[3] "French Minister to Canada" refers to the René Ristelhueber (1881–1960), the French Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary ("envoyé extraordinaire et ministre plénipotentiaire") between 1940 and 1942.

francophone culture in North America. While written from a Canadian perspective for a U.S. readership during a time when the United States was not yet a combatant nation in World War II, Archer's text nonetheless encapsulated the multifaceted and often problematical intersection of music and politics in Franco-American relations during World War II.

The presence of French music and musicians in the United States during that period was, indeed, very complex, not only because of the current situation but also because of the interwar years. For sure, French music often found a warm reception during World War II itself as the sophisticated cultural production of a close ally. Whether adopted for Hollywood soundtracks or performed in concerts by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Debussy in particular was a steady presence in the soundscape of U.S. classical music, especially through two of his *Nocturnes*: "Nuages" and "Fêtes" (1899). Writers from Aaron Copland to Virgil Thomson extolled the virtues of French music past and present. French musicians active in the United States presented themselves, and were seen, as carrying the flame of French musical culture across the Atlantic. And French repertoire was a staple of the U.S. Navy Band Symphony Orchestra in its regular Washington concerts that were aimed at government workers and foreign diplomats.

Still, things were rendered complicated in this transatlantic transfer of French music not only by politics but also in terms of aesthetics. As scholars such as Jessica Gienow-Hecht and numerous others have shown, even despite the strain that World War I had placed on American-German relationships, the ideologies associated with the Austro-German canon dominated U.S. musical aesthetics throughout the interwar years (Gienow-Hecht 2009). Faced with the possibility that Beethoven, Brahms, and other concert favorites were in danger of being boycotted after the outbreak of World War II, U.S. critics worked to empty that canon of specific national associations and, instead, to cast it as universally human and therefore detached from expressing nationality. And yet, a universalized composer such as Beethoven could also be presented as an American at heart—the paradox was, inevitably, ignored—because he embodied such fundamental national values as the love of freedom or the ability to triumph over adversity (Fauser 2013, 138–141).

The U.S. reception and appropriation of French music during World War II was thus caught in an aesthetic and political double bind. On the one hand, it was celebrated as expressing national character: it ensounded Frenchness for its American audiences. On the other hand, however, it had to measure up to the ideology of aesthetic universalism now embedded in concert programming and that stood in direct opposition to the celebration of national specificity. This situation was not unique: Russian, Polish, or Italian compositions had to contend with related issues. Where French music became set apart, however, was in the horizon of expectations associated with France as a country of cultural sophistication, fashion, and elegance. Nevertheless, such refinement could be seen as a liability, especially from a perspective of American exceptionalism with its emphasis on egalitarianism. Archibald MacLeish's characterization, in 1942, made the point shockingly clear when he wrote that in "the years between the wars, and particularly during the later years between the wars, French art was not a people's art in America but a rich woman's fashion" (MacLeish 1942, 6). Moreover, Franco-American relationships had deteriorated in the interwar years, not least because of the acrimonious discourse swirling around France's war-debt (Rhodes 1969; Roger 2002). Parisian elegance might have been admired by Americans, but it was also seen as effeminate and treated with suspicion. And after the Armistice signed between France and Germany on 22 June 1940, the United States found itself confronted with two versions of France: that of collaborationist Vichy and that of resistant de Gaulle, neither of which was viewed as attractive.[4] This fraught political situation framed the reception of a culture whose music was often feminized in American eyes and thus not necessarily suited as nationalist symbol. Indeed, in the context of war—and especially after the Armistice—these stereotypes were not always an advantage and led to often problematic reconfigurations of French music and culture for American audiences.

I approach this field of cultural transfer through three connected issues.[5] Given that Debussy was the most prominent French composer in American concert life of this period, I examine strategies through which his music was rendered into a repertoire suitable for U.S. wartime concerns. Second, this matter also affected broader American representations of France and their politics, especially where the contradictory visions of cosmopolitan Paris (and its often nostalgic evocation) and the belligerent character of the *Marseillaise* were concerned. Third, these American reconfigurations of France and her culture led to complex

[4] For a discussion of Franco-American relations in World War II through the lens of exile studies, see Nettelbeck 1991; Mehlman 2000; and Loyer 2005. The situation was complicated by Roosevelt's well-known dislike for Charles de Gaulle. See, for example, Rossi 1993.

[5] Over the past twenty-five years, I have drawn on, and explored for musicological inquiry, the concept of cultural transfer as a critical tool following the publication of Espagne and Werner (1988). In the thirty years since the publication of this foundational text, the concept of cultural transfer has been critiqued, expanded, and reconfigured, including by Espagne and Werner themselves. For an informative overview of these developments in conversation with theories of transnational historiography, see Ther 2009, 90–101.

maneuvers of aesthetic justification on the part of French musicians in the United States. Throughout my discussion, I evoke questions of American identity politics as driven by agendas emerging from the nation's cultural imperialism, an aspiration sharpened in the crucible of World War II.

## Claude de France

Perhaps the most prominently discussed French composer during World War II was Claude Debussy, not only because of the presence of his music on concert programs but also given the much publicized revival of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. It had not been staged there since 1935, and the first of the two performances on 7 and 13 March 1940 attracted—as Oscar Thompson wrote in *Musical America*—"probably the largest ever" audience for the work at the Met; "Possibly it was also the most enthusiastic" (Thompson 1940, 10). Compared to other operas from that period—from Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* (1900) to Richard Strauss's *Salome* (1905)—*Pelléas* was rarely heard in the United States, although it had acquired the reputation as an exquisite French masterwork.[6] A particularly interesting aspect of Thompson's review lies in its discussion of the performers' nationalities, which was a discursive strategy usually only employed to celebrate American-born singers at the Met. Here, however, Thompson emphasized the multinational cast:

> There was but one French singer in the group, Mr. Cathelat. Mélisande was an American, as was Geneviève. Golaud was sung by an Australian, Arkel by a Russian. The Physician was a Greek, Yniold a Russian-American. The conductor was Austrian-born and, so far as the Metropolitan was concerned, had been identified solely with German opera, though he had conducted "Pelléas" in San Francisco (Thompson 1940, 10).[7]

Thompson then proceeded to stress not the French quality of the work but, rather, its universal appeal "as one of the most profoundly human of stage compositions and one of the most essentially musical" (Thompson 1940, 10).

Thompson was not alone in this turn towards universalism in order to define *Pelléas* as a timeless masterwork. Olin Downes, the long-standing music critic for *The New York Times*, shifted strategy progressively over the years of World War II. In 1940, he still drew on tropes of symbolism and medievalism when he presented Debussy's opera as "a music drama indispensable to a modern and comprehensive repertory" (Downes 1940a). Nonetheless, he inferred the work's national background not only by highlighting its "sensitivity" and "strangely delicate and mysterious sonorities" but also by criticizing Erich Leinsdorf as a conductor for whom "the opera would appear to be at present quite far outside his consciousness" (Downes 1940a). In December that same year, when *Pelléas* was revived (on the 20th), Downes still referred to it as a "master piece," but he was now writing after the German invasion of France. Thus he reverted to stressing the uniquely French nature of Debussy's music before commenting that Leinsdorf

> totally misses the quality of the score… Whether a conductor of the German school ever could feel the special sensitiveness of this music is a question not to be answered here. We never heard a conductor of such antecedents attempt it. But we have never heard such a heavy-handed, unglamorous and laborious reading of the score as Mr. Leinsdorf's (Downes, 1940b).

Not only did this remark turn Leinsdorf—known for his Wagner and Strauss interpretations—into a goose-stepping Teutonic figure, but it also characterized *Pelléas*, by contrast, as a truly Gallic work. In his zeal to claim *Pelléas* for the anti-Germanic side of the musical equation, Downes's association of Leinsdorf (born Erich Landauer) with the "German school" was all the more injurious given that the conductor was among the numerous Jewish musicians in American exile.

After a hiatus of two seasons, that production of *Pelléas* returned to the stage of the Metropolitan Opera on 26 January 1944, but with a new cast and—crucially for Downes—a Russian-born but now American conductor, Emil Cooper. This was clearly a deliberate strategy on the part of the Met, for according to Thompson, Cooper "was called in especially to conduct this revival" (Thompson 1944). In the weeks leading up to the première, Downes presented Cooper's rethinking of Debussy in an article where some missing quotation marks make it impossible to distinguish Downes's voice from the conductor's. The text offered an unabashed revision of Debussy as a Russian-inspired, masculinist composer whose dramatic vitality had been suppressed by an insipid French performance tradition (Downes 1944a). Two weeks later, Downes portrayed Cooper and his cast as successfully reconfiguring *Pelléas* for the United States. "The original traditions of the opera were principally conspicuous by absence" in a performance that "departed so strikingly from the accepted rules for the work and so stirred the public. Indeed, the reception of it was one of the most impressive testimonials we ever have

6 For a discussion of the early reception in the United States of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, see Briscoe 2011, especially pages 241 to 250; and Kahan 2013. Debussy found a fascinating reception through John Philip Sousa in the early 1920s (Fasshauer 2014).

7 The cast consisted of Georges Cathelat (Pelléas), Helen Jepson (Mélisande), John Bownlee (Golaud), Alexander Kipnis (Arkel), Doris Doe (Geneviève), Natalie Bodanya (Yniold), and Nicolo Moscona (a Physician). The performance was conducted by Erich Leinsdorf.

met with to the universality of a great work of art" (Downes 1944b).[8] Not only did Downes judge this as a performance that "affirmed," as he wrote, "where Debussy infers," but he also ascribed "complete authority" to Cooper, with the result that in this interpretation "the score of Debussy became one of compelling vitality and irresistible power" (*ibid.*).

Downes's positive response was in close alignment with most views published both by other Americans and by French musicians in exile. Ronald F. Eyer, for instance, celebrated the fact that Cooper had found "virility" in Debussy as well as "robust passion and fire and muscular forthrightness" (Eyer 1944, 15). Even Oliver J. Gingold, the theater critic for *The Wall Street Journal* who declared *Pelléas* a work for "musical pundits" rather than "very popular with the average opera goer", found that Cooper's powerful handling of the orchestra made the opera more accessible to a wider public (Gingold 1944). In the end, the conductor's success with *Pelléas* was rewarded with the assignment of the same season's performance of *Parsifal* (*The New York Times* 1944). For the Francophile Virgil Thomson, on the other hand, Cooper's approach to the score clearly posed problems; to attack the production would obviously have been counterproductive, however, and so he sidestepped the issue, in an elegant essay published in response to the 1944 performance, by focusing on a discussion of the character of Mélisande in the opera's plot development, and how Bidu Sayão, who took the role, came "nearer to making the opera her show than any singer I know of has done, excepting always Garden and Teyte" (Thomson 2014, 169).[9]

Still more fascinating is the coverage of the 1944 *Pelléas* in *Pour la victoire*—the premiere French-language newspaper, published out of New York—which dedicated two long articles to the revival (Nettelbeck 1991, 76–87). On 29 January, the newspaper's music critic, Edgard Feder, reported from the dress rehearsal, employing martial rhetoric and turning this revival into a quasi-military campaign:

> A "premiere" of such importance resembles a battle: having taken on the defense of a cause—or a work—it is now the case to render it triumphant. Like a general inspecting his forces before combat, Cooper looks after the smallest detail, corrects even the slightest imperfection, and thus assures the homogeneity of action by his troupes (Feder 1944b, 9).[10]

Here the reconfiguration of Debussy's music is unequivocally tied to the current war, a theme picked up the following week when he consigned any dispute over Cooper's Americanized version as a "Querelle d'Allemand"—a "German dispute." As a Frenchman, Feder wrote, he could only congratulate Cooper for the great service rendered to French music (Feder 1944c, 9).[11] When the Met brought this production back early in 1945 (still with Cooper conducting), Olin Downes closed the discursive circle by connecting musical universalism with world politics, describing *Pelléas* as a "universal masterpiece" that "falls on the ears in these days of turmoil and catastrophe like a blessed benediction from another world" (Downes 1945).

Just as Cooper rendered Debussy's music more muscular in his interpretation of *Pelléas*, so did other artists in the later war years. One particularly salient example is the score for *Frenchman's Creek*, a film released by Paramount in September 1944, starring Joan Fontaine and Arturo de Córdova. The movie, set on the coast of Cornwall, England, in the eighteenth century, tells the love story between a noble French pirate and an honorable English aristocrat. Produced at the time of the landing in Normandy and released less than one month after the liberation of Paris, the film's message was tailor-made for contemporary concerns, with a plot that celebrated ingenuity in the face of the enemy, and dialogue that emphasized over and over again the need to sacrifice life and happiness for the ideal of freedom.[12] The music for the film was written by Victor Young, who based his score in large part on Claude Debussy's *Clair de lune* (c. 1890), by that time perhaps Debussy's best known work in the United States, not only because it figured prominently in the amateur piano repertoire but also because such ensembles as the Philadelphia Orchestra played its orchestrated version regularly in their concerts and radio broadcasts. Even average movie-goers could not fail to make the sonic connection to Debussy and to the musical embodiment of Frenchness. Moreover, *Clair de lune* is here associated exclusively with the French pirate, his ship, and his crew. The English, including Joan Fontaine, are accompanied by a

[8] The cast consisted of Martial Singher (Pelléas), Bidu Sayão (Mélisande), Lawrence Tibbett (Golaud), Alexander Kipnis (Arkel), Margaret Harshaw (Geneviève), Lillian Raymondi (Yniold), and John Gurney (a Physician). The performance was conducted by Emil Cooper.

[9] In a later review of the Paris performance in 1945, Thomson celebrates the "complete orchestral transparency" that Roger Désormière had achieved, with strings sounding "like nothing in this world that has substance. Even the wind harmonies floated in the air like veils" (Thomson 2014, 503).

[10] "Une 'première' de cette importance ressemble à une bataille : ayant assumé la défense d'une cause — ou d'une œuvre — il s'agit de la faire triompher. Tel un général inspectant ses effectifs avant le combat, Cooper s'occupe des moindres détails, corrige les plus petites imperfections, assure l'homogénéité d'action de ses troupes." All translations by the author, unless stated otherwise.

[11] "Cooper a donc eu raison de faire ce qu'il a fait sans compter qu'il a rendu à la musique française un service insigne, en la plantant si profondément dans les cœurs de ses auditeurs."

[12] While the script dripped with these tropes, the reception of the film was prepared by a press release that presented the movie as a tale of "gallantry and chivalry" (Bell 1944). Response in the press focused on the splendid camera work and costumes and presented it as a buccaneer adventure tale. See, for example, Cassidy 1944; and Schallert 1945.

score without external sonic reference, unless music is used diegetically, as part of the film's narrative.

In the context of the perceived feminization of French music at the time, it is striking that Victor Young's adaptation of *Clair de lune* masculinized the beginning of the Debussy's famous melody by adding an upbeat that gives the motive a fanfare-like character. And while at first that motive serves as a signal between the pirate and his secret support network, it is later transformed into one for attack. The short score of the film at the Library of Congress meticulously acknowledges Debussy's authorship in each citation—ostensibly for reasons of copyright but simultaneously turning the score into a transatlantic collaboration across time and space (Young 1944).

It may not be a coincidence that both Cooper, in his 1944 *Pelléas*, and Young in his film score for *Frenchman's Creek* that same year, adapted Debussy's music for the aesthetic priorities of wartime music by changing his sound-world. The latter turned *Clair de lune*—customarily treated as a dream-like fantasy—into something approaching a military fanfare. The former broke with French performance traditions in which a "supine conception" of Debussy—as Eyer put it rather blatantly—treated the music "like a wisp of tinted chiffon—nebulous, pastel, chimerical" (Eyer 1944, 15). While in 1940, French music could still be framed as refined and even nostalgic, in the wake of the campaign in North Africa and the D-Day landings, France and her culture needed to come closer to other allies such as the Soviet Union. Yet this reconfiguration of Debussy flags up a range of issues that marked the music of France, for Americans, in a manner that made it more complicated to instrumentalize it wholesale for the war effort than in the case of, say, Poland or Russia. One particular challenge for such a propagandistic use lay with the longstanding association of French music with elegance and simplicity if not frivolity, and, still more, with the atmospheric sonorities of impressionism.

## American Representations of France

Among the many examples of such American constructions of French music is a 1944 concert review by the Chicago music critic Albert Goldberg, who had attended a performance of "French music" by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.[13] He defined it as "characterized by clarity, by economy, by precision of detail, by proportion, by perfection of form." Later in his article, Goldberg evoked also "the evanescent hues of French impressionism" (Goldberg 1944). Goldberg thus picks up on the American transfer of French aesthetic discourse, one that prizes refinement and clarity over Germany heavy-handedness. This was a trope with roots well back in the eighteenth century, and American musicians from Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson to Marion Bauer had encountered these aesthetic binaries during their student days in Paris with Nadia Boulanger.[14] In 1941, for instance, Copland played on them in *Our New Music* when he praised Debussy as the composer overcoming the vulgar sentimentality of nineteenth-century German music and, especially, that of Wagner: "Debussy's was the romanticism of an introvert" (Copland 1941, 25). The same argument could also be applied to contemporary composers, as for instance in 1941 when Donald Fuller contrasted the music of Arnold Schoenberg and Paul Hindemith with that of Milhaud in a concert review published in *Modern Music*:

> A relief from all this came at the concert and reception tendered Darius Milhaud by The League of Composers. His music has qualities which German music of today so infrequently gives us—imagination, delicacy, gayety, seriousness without heaviness, great purity and simplicity of approach and style, fine technic that never degenerates into mere display (Fuller 1941, 108).

Fuller clearly thought that Milhaud had something to teach modernist composers. But the "qualities" he identifies could easily shift from positive to negative. The dangers are apparent in Henry Cowell's dance suite, *American Melting Pot* (1940). This has seven movements, each dance drawing on stereotypical repertoire located in the region of origin, whether a rhumba for Latin America or a square dance to represent Celtic music:

1. Chorale (Teutonic-American)
2. Air (African-American)
3. Satire (French-American)
4. Alapria (Oriental-American)
5. Slavic Dance (Slavic-American)
6. Rhumba with an added eighth note (Latin-American)
7. Square Dance (Celtic-American)

The movement titles make the hyphenated construction of identity obvious. They hint at new claims about the capacity of American culture to absorb and manage diversity, though not in the sense developed during World War I when pluralism was subsumed under one national identity marker, that of

[13] The program consisted of the following works (in the order of their performance): Vincent d'Indy, *Le Camp de Wallenstein* (from *Wallenstein*, op. 12, 1881), Ernest Chausson, Symphony in B flat major, op. 20 (1890), Maurice Ravel, *Ma Mère l'Oye* (1911), Claude Debussy, *Ibéria* (1908), and Manuel de Falla, Three Dances from *El sombrero de tres picos* (1919).

[14] The musical world that these Americans encountered in interwar Paris has formed the subject of a rich body of secondary literature. See, for example, Kelly 2013. Both Carol J. Oja (2000) and Nadine Hubbs (2004) have discussed the impact of French music and aesthetics on American composers during the interwar years.

"American" (as in the famous "Hyphenated American" speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1916).[15] Rather, it speaks to a new kind of cultural imperialism that absorbed foreign cultures as part of American culture through its transfer into a new and vibrant environment, where American values could only improve a given nation's cultural production.[16] What unites these separate movements is Cowell's authorial American voice, even as he segregates different ethnic sounds that would otherwise clash rather than melt.[17] But the old tropes remain: the "Teutonic-American" is ensounded through a solemn, dignified chorale whose harmonic rhythm and melodic gesture evoke the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. By contrast, the dance representing France, called "Satire," offers a lighthearted, skipping melody that evokes Erik Satie as well as the dance music of Montmartre, rather than the jazz of New Orleans.

Indeed, here and elsewhere in the American imagination, Paris stands in for France. The city is "gay Paree," to quote Cole Porter's song: urban, cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and carefree, but hardly serious whether in military terms or in musical ones. It is a place evoked both nostalgically and imaginatively in American popular culture, be it in George Gershwin's upbeat symphonic poem, *An American in Paris* from 1928 (which was to become a staple in wartime concert programs), or in so haunting a song as "The Last Time I Saw Paris" by Jerome Kern, with lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, written in late 1940 after the fall of Paris and used in the 1941 MGM film, *Lady Be Good*. When the chorus returns at the end, Ann Sothern's screen performance of the song is overlaid with images of pre-war Paris, her sequined veil enveloping them in a dreamlike sparkle.

For Americans, one problem with "gay Paree," and with France in general, was that it had succumbed very early, and seemingly easily, to Hitler's advance through Western Europe. Moreover, it seemed to function well under German occupation: the French resistance movement needed to work hard to persuade the Allies that it had the strength of will, and the force of character, to fight.[18] Yet another problem was that the very gayness that tinged nostalgic evocations of Paris in the 1920s and '30s could be read as indicative of a moral decay that had infected Europe, leading to the rise of fascism in the first place. In effect, to some American eyes, the French—unlike the Poles and the Russians—had brought their fate upon themselves. This shows through, for instance, in the reviews of Elliot Paul's spicy memoir, *The Last Time I Saw Paris*, published in 1942, that borrowed Hammerstein's title—and thanked the author for it.[19] Hélène Harvitt, in *The French Review*, did not mince words criticizing what she called "a *pernicious* book"[20]:

> It took World War I to half dispel the false impression that most Americans had of what France stood for. "Gay Paree" was the only image that the average American had of that most beautiful, most intellectual and perhaps the most industrious city in the world. And now when France needs to be rehabilitated in the minds of those who do not know her, an author with a facile pen, who no doubt loves France, again paints a picture which will make the ignorant and unsuspecting think that Paris is a city of foul smells (which the author seems to like), brothels, "souteneurs," etc. (Harvitt 1942, 70)[21]

For supporters of France, then, the "gay Paree" of the Belle Epoque and interwar years needed to be replaced by a very different vision of the country and what it stood for.

The key issue that musicians—in contrast to other cultural actors—faced when trying to fly the musical *Tricolore*, however, was that the American public had an image of French music fostered not only through popular views of Paris but also through decades of program notes and music-appreciation books that focused on that nation's elegance and charm, most prominently associated with Debussy the impressionist.[22] Contrary to modernist music from the Soviet Union, especially that of Shostakovich, French music once again seemed to run counter to wartime needs. As is well known, Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony and the story of its composition in a besieged Leningrad—interrupted only by the composer's duties as a fireman—became a successful part of Soviet propaganda efforts during World War II (Gibbs 2004). In France, however, no such iconic composer with quasi-military credentials existed. News from occupied France were almost impossible to obtain after the Armistice, and musicians like Francis Poulenc were seen through the lens of their prewar compositions. Nor did French wartime musicians write works such as William Walton's *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* (1942) that brought the patriotism of

15 The speech was given, on 31 May 1916, in St. Louis (Roosevelt 1916).

16 A blatant example for this view can be found in Elliott Carter's and other critics' assessment of music by European composers in American exile as having developed a more powerful idiom than their original one due to their exposure to the American way (Fauser 2013, 91–92).

17 I am grateful to James Loeffler for this observation. Cowell later disowned the work, only to reconfigure it, in 1952, into a reduced and reworked sequence of movements (Lichtenwanger 1986, 213–214).

18 See, in particular, Mehlman 2000.

19 The acknowledgment on the fly leaf thanks the authors for this "song that touched men's hearts the world over" (Paul 1942).

20 Emphasis original.

21 For a similar response, see Albert Guérard's review of the book (1942). Guérard calls the book "dangerous" and reckons: "If he be a friend, God preserve France from such friends!"

22 While Debussy the impressionist filled music-appreciation texts, contemporary composers cast Debussy as a modernist. See, for example, Engel 1921, 267; and Copland 1941, 25.

the Battle of Britain onto Allied concert stages. In short, turning France into a musically belligerent ally became a strangely fraught enterprise. In the end, while the Soviet Union had Shostakovich, and Poland, for example, became ensounded through such eternal favorites as Chopin's "heroic" *Polonaise* in A flat major op. 53 (1842), the only "military" music able to represent France in this context was not a traditional concert work but the national anthem. The newspaper story that featured the encounter, in New York, of the African American contralto Marian Anderson with General Charles de Gaulle in July 1944 not only told of the singer leading a crowd of 22,000 concert goers in rendering the *Marseillaise*, but was accompanied by a photograph that captured this exact moment, a homage to the leader of the Free French when U.S. diplomatic recognition remained still elusive (Edwards 1944).[23]

The audience in the Lewisohn Stadium, like the newspaper's readers, would have had, as a point of reference, an iconic scene from the 1942 blockbuster film, *Casablanca*: the victory of the *Marseillaise* over the German soldiers' song, "Die Wacht am Rhein" ("The Watch on the Rhine"). Not only do the French guests in the nightclub owned by Rick Blaine (played by Humphrey Bogart) take the German soldiers down by way of their greater musical belligerence. The scene also ends with Yvonne (played by Madeleine Lebeau) shouting out: "Vive la France ! Vive la démocratie !" This choice of words reflects an Americanized take on the French political rhetoric by replacing the more familiar "Vive la République !" with the evocation of a core tenet of American exceptionalism: the foundational role of democracy.[24] Neither "Vive la France !" nor "Vive la démocratie !" were used in the (unproduced) 1940 stage play, *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison, on which *Casablanca* was based.[25] But these patriotic exclamations mark a crucial moment in the film.

The *Marseillaise* found its way into numerous cultural manifestations in wartime America, especially after Pearl Harbor, and it was often combined with a no less militaristic anthem, the *Star-Spangled Banner*. The opening of the 1942–43 season of the Met in November 1942 presented Gaetano Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment* (1840), with Lily Pons in the title role, wearing a red-white-and-blue costume. Olin Downes speculated that the work was chosen "because of its topical association with military tactics." He continued by pointing to "the fact that with French Africa—now, in the morning dispatches, including Dakar—gone over to the United Nations, the sight of a heroine in the Tricolor, beating a drum, marching about and chanting the glories of military life, the scene would serve as appropriate reminder of glorious events overseas" (Downes 1942). The highpoint of the performance was, of course, the opera's finale, which on opening night combined a rendering of the *Marseillaise*, with Lily Pons in the lead and carrying the fighting flag of the Free French, with that of the *Star-Spangled Banner*, sung together by the cast and a capacity audience "with rousing feeling," as Howard Taubman put it (1942). And yet, not all was well with this event. It was originally planned that an American Army color guard from Fort Jay would carry the American flag on the stage. Yet, as Taubman revealed, Lily Pons's choice to wave a Tricolor decorated with the Gaullist Cross of Lorraine raised some hackles and brought on the specter of a diplomatic incident by too close an encounter between the American flag and "the Fighting French emblem." And so the appearance, on stage, of the American military was called off.

It was newsworthy when a celebrity performed the *Marseillaise*, whether Marian Anderson and Lily Pons, or Igor Gorin, an Austrian baritone in American exile, who sang it on Bastille Day [i.e. 14 July] 1943 at a concert at the Watergate in Washington, D.C., "while the French Tricolor was saluted by a guard of marines and the thousands of auditors stood at attention" (Brown 1943). The *Marseillaise* continued its political role as sonic stand-in for all of France in American cultural productions. Not only was it part of a number of films produced by the United States Office of War Information (OWI)—including *Salute to France* (1944), with a score by Kurt Weill, and another

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[23] In an obituary of Marian Anderson, Naomi Bliven recalled the event, on 10 July 1944, from the moment Mayor Fiorella La Guardia and General Charles de Gaulle arrived during the intermission of Anderson's concert at Lewisohn Stadium: "The audience, astonished and thrilled, started cheering. We knew that de Gaulle was in the city after having visited Washington, where he had conferred with President Roosevelt, and from our cheering you could tell that we wished their talks had ended the long diplomatic dissension between FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] and the Free French leader. They hadn't; they had just settled a few issues that arose after our forces had landed in Normandy a month earlier. We couldn't accord de Gaulle formal diplomatic recognition, but we gave him an ovation. Eventually the mayor calmed the demonstration and said a few words. The conductor raised his baton, and, accompanied by the New York Philharmonic, Marian Anderson led us in singing the Marseillaise" (Bliven, 1993, 28).

[24] After the advent of Vichy, it made sense, of course, to replace the more familiar "Vive la République !" with "Vive la démocratie !," given that the former celebrated the republican, but now compromised French state. The phrase "Vive la France! Vive la République!" has a history that dates back to the Revolutionary wars (and the sinking of the French battle ship, *Vengeur*, by the English in 1794), with moments of particular prominence during the 1848 revolution and the Dreyfus Affair. Charles de Gaulle only used the phrase "Vive la République !" after World War II, but reversed the familiar order and habitually closed his public speeches celebrating the Fourth Republic with "Vive la République ! Vive la France !" I am grateful to the members of the "Francophone Music Criticism Network" listserv for tracing the history of this phrase.

[25] I am grateful to Peter Bloom for this information. A copy of the stage play is available digitally (Burnett and Alison 1940). See pp. 2–2–30 to 2–2–31 for the scene discussed here. The film also replaces the "Horst Wessel" song ("Die Fahne hoch") with the nineteenth-century song, "Die Wacht am Rhein," which has its origin in Franco-German disputes of ownership over the Rhine region.

that presented Giuseppe Verdi's *Hymn of Nations* with an appropriate American addition (1944)[26]—but it also featured in the *French American Pageant of Liberation* in February 1945, when Edgard Varèse conducted the Greater New York Chorus in what was touted as the first U.S. performance of Hector Berlioz's famous arrangement (Fauser 2013, 202).

## French Music and Musicians in the United States

Certainly, a wide range of French music was performed in the United States during World War II, often in concerts with Allied themes or for the benefit of such causes as the Fighting French Relief Committee.[27] Yet French musicians and critics in particular often wondered why it was not more present, either in the concert hall or in the public discourse and journalism, in particular when contrasted with that of Russia or Latin America. In January 1944, *Pour la victoire* included in its regular column about music a report on a survey taken at the concerts of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra concerning the audience's favorite works which they would like to hear. Not surprisingly, Beethoven and Brahms led the list, leaving the symphonists of other nations, including Sibelius and Rachmaninoff, in the dust. For Edgard Feder, the writer of the column, this posed a problem:

> And in all of this, where is the place for French music? With the exception of César Franck (who in reality is Belgian), the list does not contain the name of a single French musician. Let's leave aside Debussy and Ravel who did not write "symphonies"; let us leave aside Berlioz, whose *Fantastique* has already been played this season; but Fauré? Chausson? Dukas? Vincent d'Indy? Were there not, among the two thousand voters, even fifty to show some curiosity in getting to know works of value, great interest, and which are almost never performed? (Feder 1944a, 9)[28]

Feder's diatribe points to an idiosyncrasy of American concert life that affected the reception of French music rather dramatically: the "symphony" as a group of musicians, as the place where they performed, and as a genre dominated the U.S. musical world, reinforcing the construction of a canon of classical music that had the German symphonic repertoire at its heart. While such works as Debussy's "Nuages" or *Prélude à "L'après-midi d'un faune"* (1894) featured on a number of orchestral programs, they were overwhelmed both numerically and aesthetically by symphonies proper, a genre—so far as French music was concerned—associated mainly with one composer: César Franck. Yet Franck, as Feder pointed out, was Belgian—though American concert organizers and critics regularly counted him among the French. Nor was there an alternative to symphonic music, for example through opera: Puccini, Wagner, and Verdi were leading American taste in that genre. It did not help that the most performed French opera in the United States was *Carmen*; its subject and reception history were too fraught with issues related to race and sexuality to be easily reconfigured in support of a more positive view of France.[29] The Met made some effort in favor of French music by putting on a handful of performances of such works as Charpentier's *Louise* (1900) or Massenet's *Manon* (1884), but they were also dwarfed by the crushing presence of the German and Italian repertoire.[30] Even though French music was somewhat more present in piano recitals and chamber-music concerts, here, too, it was overshadowed, not only by German composers but also by the warhorses of the piano repertoire, from Chopin to Liszt and Rachmaninoff. Nor could Debussy's and Ravel's single string quartets make much impact on their own. French music could not easily be exoticised in ways that were becoming typical of the works of Latin American composers (in part as a consequence of President Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policies). Moreover, it could not be politicized in the manner of the Russians. And nothing new was coming out of wartime France, it seemed. It was a losing battle.[31]

One might say the same for actual French performers in a musical world dominated by American performers as well as by the likes of Eastern European virtuosos from Artur Rubinstein to Gregor Piatigorsky. Both the French government—through the Association française d'expansion et d'échanges artistiques, founded in 1922—and such individuals as E. Robert Schmitz through his Pro Musica Society worked tirelessly during the interwar years to heighten the visibility of French musicians in the United

[26] The musical work of the OWI is discussed in Fauser 2013, 77–93.

[27] See, for example, "Schmitz Aids French at Piano Recital," (R. P. 1943), which was for the benefit of the Fighting French Relief Committee, or "French Concert Colorful," (Jones 1944), a concert including "songs of the French Partisans" that were "obviously products of the war".

[28] "Et dans tout cela, où se place la musique française ? César Franck excepté (encore qu'en vérité il soit belge), la liste ne contient le nom d'aucun musicien français. Écartons Debussy et Ravel, puisqu'ils n'ont pas écrit de 'symphonies' ; écartons Berlioz, dont la 'Fantastique' a déjà été jouée cette saison ; mais Fauré ? Chausson ? Dukas ? Vincent d'Indy ? Il ne s'est donc pas trouvé, parmi les deux mille votants, une cinquantaine qui auraient eu au moins la curiosité de lier connaissance avec des œuvres de valeur, de grand intérêt et qui ne sont presque jamais jouées ?"

[29] On one important moment of American wartime engagement with *Carmen*, see Fauser 2010a. For a discussion of *Carmen* in the American imagination at the turn of the century, see Turner 2015, 349–394.

[30] For a discussion of American repertoire choice during World War II, including a list of operas performed at the Metropolitan Opera between 1941 and 1945, see Fauser 2010b.

[31] Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, perhaps the most famous French wartime composition, remained unknown in the United States until its American première, at Hunter College, New York, on 30 January 1946. See Taubman 1946.

States and, as a matter of fact, Canada. While Maurice Ravel, Nadia Boulanger, and other such musicians were garnering strong interest and support, they lacked the mass appeal of a Sergei Rachmaninoff. The issues are clear in the annual "Special Forecast" issue of *Musical America*, which was always published in February. By the late 1930s, this would contain well over one hundred pages of advertisements from the chief concert agencies of the nation.[32] Prominent artists like Lotte Lehmann or Yehudi Menuhin were featured in glamorous full-page advertisements; lesser ones were either grouped with other musicians represented by the agency or relegated to smaller-size notices later in the issue. It is indicative that during World War II, only three French musicians appeared regularly in prominent position in these pages: the pianist Robert Casadesus, the cellist Marcel Hubert, and the soprano Lily Pons. Others such as the soprano Marcelle Denya or the pianist Émile Baume were included only sporadically.[33] While this might be a somewhat crass commercial indicator, it points to the underlying issue of French presence in U.S. musical life. Many prominent French musicians had remained in Paris, and some like the soprano Germaine Lubin and the pianist Alfred Cortot (Swiss by birth) were collaborating openly with the German occupiers.[34] Among the 30,000 French in American exile, only a small number were prominent composers and performers.[35] In this regard, musicians were in a distinctly different position from sculptors and painters such as Fernand Léger who had already been highly prominent in American art circles before the war (Nettelbeck 1991, 72–73).

Despite the uphill struggle, French musicians and critics in the United States worked hard to effect as much change in American attitudes as possible, whether through lecturing and performing, or through their composing. Denya, for instance, toured American colleges with a program on French song as a deliberate gesture to strengthen the presence of French music in the United States. As she explained in a 1943 article, she realized quickly after crossing the Atlantic "that French vocal music was neglected in favor of German and Italian music, especially the first" (Denya 1943).[36] For Denya, the "relative disgrace of French music in the United States"[37] had two reasons. One was just an unfamiliarity with French music which led to self-replicating distortions: if only the American public could hear Rameau or Chausson instead of Wagner, it would clamor for more French music. Denya laid the second reason at the feet of singers: their pronunciation of French was so bad that the music's essential quality was lost. Her cause then was to champion French vocal music both through musical education and through increasing its number of performances.

The sense of urgency that, without a strong presence on American concert and opera stages, French music might be in danger of disappearing altogether interlaced other French comments, too. A short article announcing a concert by Lily Pons addressed this threat head on with the comment that "French culture could be eclipsed" (*Pour la victoire* 1943).[38] This was no idle fear. Headlines such as "'America and Russia Will Lead in Music' Says Serge Koussevitzky" reflected a widespread discourse among American composers and performers that cast their musical future as an autochthonous development measured, if at all, against the success of music in the Soviet Union.[39] This position was shared by musicians as different as Marc Blitzstein and Roy Harris. In contrast to the interwar years, when American composers had looked to Paris for their education, French music was no longer seen as the main alternative to German. Nor did it help that composers associated with cosmopolitan Paris during the interwar years—most prominently Igor Stravinsky, but also such members of the so-called School of Paris as Bohuslav Martinů and Aleksander Tansman—were now, in the United States, defined through their nationality of birth rather than through their aesthetic allegiance. In the wartime United States, they all were seen as Russian and Eastern European, even though the lion's share of their prewar careers were spent in Paris.[40]

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32 While the *Musical Courier* also carried a significant number of such advertisements, by the late 1930s it had been relegated to the position of a clear second, with increasingly fewer advertisements.

33 Similarly, only Casadesus, Hubert, and Pons found themselves featured regularly in the "pictorial pages" on the inside of the front and back covers, both in *Musical America* and the *Musical Courier*, that grouped snapshots from prominent musicians under such themes as travel or hobby.

34 Musical life in Vichy Paris has been discussed in a number of publications. Two edited volumes include essays on Cortot and Lubin, respectively: *La vie musicale sous Vichy*, edited by Myriam Chimènes (2001) and *La musique à Paris sous l'Occupation*, edited by Myriam Chimènes and Yannick Simon (2013).

35 An advertisement, on 2 January 1943, in *Pour la victoire* for a concert series titled "French Music by French Artists" and organized by the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, names the following musicians: Emil Baume, Emma Boynet, Gaby and Robert Casadesus, Zino Francescatti, Marcel Grandjany, Daniel Guilet, Marcel Hubert, Lucien Kirsch, Wanda Landowska, Lily Pons, René Le Roy, Joseph Rogatchewsky, Germaine Tailleferre, Yves Tinayre, and Jennie Tourel.

36 "Quand je suis arrivée dans ce pays hospitalier en 1939, je m'étais vite rendu compte que la musique vocale française était négligée au profit de musiques allemande et italienne, et surtout la première."

37 "la disgrâce relative de la musique vocale française aux États-Unis […]."

38 "La culture française pouvait être en éclipse."

39 This was the headline on the second page of an article spread over two pages in *Musical America* exploring the future of music in this nation. (Koussevitzky and Berezowsky 1944, 98)

40 I am discussing the position of Eastern European music in wartime America in Fauser 2016.

Contemporary French music in the United States was represented first and foremost through a single composer: Darius Milhaud. His compositions written in exile—which he spent teaching composition at Mills College in Oakland, California—reveal a heightened awareness of his position both as an ambassador of French culture and as a composer trying to break into the American market.[41] With the symphony as the musical form of choice in the United States, Milhaud turned, for the first time in decades, to the genre and produced two works for American orchestras in 1939 and 1944 respectively. But perhaps his most famous effort in musical diplomacy was (and is) his *Suite française* of 1944, written for high-school band. As Milhaud wrote in his autobiography, the suite was based on "folk melodies from Normandy, the Bretagne, the Ile de France, Alsace-Lorraine, and Provence in order to familiarize students with the folk music from the regions where the allied armies were fighting to liberate my country" (Milhaud 1973, 239).[42] Here he verbalized outright the position of cultural mediator—in his case through composition—that other musicians like Denya had taken on as performers.

Milhaud's defense of French music both to general audiences (as in the band piece) and in articles aimed at the musical establishment was all the more important as such key periodicals as the League of Composers' *Modern Music* kept a close eye on developments in Europe and were quick to expose musicians who appeared to collaborate with Nazi Germany. In early 1942, for instance, Minna Lederman wrote an article that announced the launch of *L'information musicale*, a music journal "authorized for circulation in the non-occupied zone and in foreign countries."[43] She offered a scathing assessment of the new publication's cultural politics as indicative of unacceptable compromise with the German occupier. Her final paragraph went so far as to dismiss every single musician involved in the journal, independently of whether or not he was recognized as a collaborator:

> It is not important, even significant to grade their allegiances, to point out that [Alfred] Cortot is a member of the Pétain Government, that [Serge] Lifar works for the German controlled Paris opera and [Daniel] Lesur for the Vichy radio, that [Arthur] Honegger and [Robert] Bernard, two Swiss musicians, should voluntarily attend a festival for Franco-German collaboration in Vienna, or, on the other hand, that [Henri] Sauguet and [Francis] Poulenc remained politically aloof. Aware or unwitting, eager or indifferent, collaborationist, complaisant or merely "correct," their heads are now impaled on the façade of a "French-culture-as-usual" in which frontal position they serve their conqueror well. From here the view is as disheartening as news of more remote countries left green and unscorched (Lederman 1942, 235).

Lederman's sharp words reveal how compromised French music had become in many American eyes. When Milhaud, Denya, and Feder clamored for greater attention in the United States for their art, they spoke in a context where moral binaries put French music, especially contemporary French music, on the wrong side of the equation. From the position of a nation which claimed freedom and democracy as core values to be spread to the rest of the world, French art as it existed was no longer viable. Yet the old ties remained. Only a few months after Lederman published her attack on French artists, MacLeish tried to identify a solution in an article titled "America's Duty to French Culture." The culture of America would not only give artists in exile force and direction that they had lacked thus far, but also "a purpose and a will which are in truth and in fact the purpose and the will of his own nation, of the people to which he belongs" (MacLeish 1942, 18). Just as Cooper and Young brought true masculinity to Debussy, so would a sojourn in America, "the fatherland of all in every country who place freedom first," lead to the blossoming of a French culture not compromised by wartime collaboration (MacLeish 1942, 18).

The historiographical implications in telling the story of French music and musicians in the United States during World War II reaches further than simply untangling the various strands of reception or deconstructing their intersections with American constructions of gender and ethnicity. Rather, because France was an ally and not an enemy nation, these games of identity politics open a fascinating window on American cultural translation and its parameters. It is easy to see how American imperialism shaped the nation's engagement with, for example, Japan or the Philippines during and after World War II. But such agendas, driven by the ideology of American exceptionalism, also suffused the

[41] For an extensive and document-rich discussion of Milhaud in the context of his World War II exile, see Maher 2016, especially Chapters 1 and 2.

[42] "Un éditeur m'ayant demandé un morceau facile pour 'Band' pouvant être joué dans les écoles, je fis ma *Suite française* en me servant des thèmes du folklore de Normandie, de Bretagne, de l'Ile-de-France, d'Alsace-Lorraine et de Provence pour familiariser les étudiants avec le folklore où les armées alliées se battaient pour libérer mon pays." In his note that accompanied the published score, Milhaud's comment addressed the same topics more expansively: "The five parts of this *Suite* are named after French Provinces, the very ones in which the American and Allied armies fought together with the French underground for the liberation of my country: Normandy, Bretagne, Ile-de-France (of which Paris is the center), Alsace-Lorraine, and Province. I used some folk tunes of these Provinces. I wanted the young Americans to hear the popular melodies of those parts of France where their fathers and brothers fought to defeat the German invaders, who in less than seventy years have brought war, destruction, cruelty, torture and murder, three times, to the peaceful and democratic people of France" (Milhaud 1946). For a detailed identification of the eleven folk songs in Milhaud's *Suite française*, see Garofalo 1998, 25–34.

[43] Information flyer sent to Minna Lederman, cited in Lederman 1942.

reception of French music during that period, especially when—as I have shown with Debussy—music became translated to fit local ideologies. These views of French music had long-lasting impact in American discourse and performance practice, and they forged interpretations of that nation's music in the United States that can be traced well through the Cold War into the twenty-first century.

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