

Impressum

Klaus Bung: Does French music exist? (English version)

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TECHNICAL NOTE

This paper is the text underlying a student presentation which the author gave in French as a member of a French language class at Blackburn College in 1994. The full text was distributed to all members of the class.

Title of the original essay:

La musique française, existe-t-elle?

This version contains some sections (e.g. Nationality and Literature), which have not yet been incorporated into the French version. Both versions have to be carefully compared and adjusted before publication.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Music is often popularly described in terms of nationalities, e.g. as typically French, as if 'French-ness' were an inherent feature of such music. Similarly some people make an issue of the question whether a piece of literature is English, as opposed to American, to Irish, to Indian &c. Klaus Bung investigates the general question to what extent national labels applied to works of art are significant. His is a case-study approach. He takes 'French music' as an example, extends the investigation to 'English literature', and asks how literature differs from music in respect of such labels. He concludes that in music national labels are generally not significant, but that similar labels are meaningful in literature - not in terms of nationality but in terms of language. His approach is often humorous. Since many readers will not be familiar with French music, he tabulates important names and dates (with cross-references from French to German music) and thus provides a potted history of French music.

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Klaus Bung: Does French music exist? La musique française, existe-t-elle?

An exploration of the difficulties
which arise if one tries
to associate art and style with nationality

Description of the problem

Here were are, learning the French language with great difficulty and much effort.

In the novel 'Tous les matins du monde' by Pascal Quignard, the composer Sainte Colombe says: 'La musique aussi est une langue humaine' (Music is also a human language) (p 71).

One says that music is an international language, i.e. that everybody, regardless of his country of origin, understands it like his native language. He does not have to make a special effort to learn it.

Like so many popular sayings, this is obviously not true. Indian, Arabic, Japanese and European music, to give just some examples, are decidedly different from one another, and, if you have grown up in one tradition, you cannot without an enormous effort understand and appreciate the other tradition.

Alors, tandis que la musique peut-être est une langue humaine, elle n'est point une langue internationale.

It therefore makes sense to ask whether European music is a family of related languages (like the Indo-European languages or the Romance languages), i.e. systems which are related but not mutually intelligible without special learning effort, or whether European music is one language, perhaps divided into dialects (French, German, Spanish or English, the dialect of the so-called 'country without music') which are different from one another but are mutually intelligible.

Ways of defining French music

MUSIC OF COMPOSERS BORN IN FRANCE

Let us look at some of the greatest and most typically French composers:

- Jean-Baptiste Lully
collaborator of Molière,
composer of many operas,
creator of the French national opera style, it is said.
- Jacques Offenbach
- Giacomo Meyerbeer
- César Frank
- Maurice Ravel

JEAN-BAPTISTE LULLY

Jean-Baptiste was an Italian.

JACQUES OFFENBACH

Jacques Offenbach was born plain Jakob Eberst in Cologne. His father came from the town of Offenbach, south of Frankfurt on Main, and that's how he obtained his artist's name. According to the Channel 4 Guide to Opera (p 131) his work is the 'epitome of Gay Paris'. Wagner wrote about him that his music 'was a dung heap on which all the swine of Europe wallowed' (probably alluding to Offenbach's native name "Eberst"; German "Eber" means "boar"), i.e. that it was jolly, catchy, frivolous, hummable and inconsequential - in brief the essence of French music as seen by many foreigners, except that for German observers, these features are something bad, whereas for English observers the same features often seem to be something praiseworthy, inimitable but worthy of imitation.

Here are the titles of some of the best-known operas of this exponent of French-ness:

- Les Contes d'Hoffmann
- Orphée aux Enfers
- La Belle Helène
- La Vie Parisienne

- La Péricole (1868),
which turned out to be very important for the development
of English opera (1875)

These are the five most popular works of the 102 stage works he wrote.

GIACOMO MEYERBEER

Meyerbeer's native name was Jakob Liebmann Beer. He was born in Berlin in 1791, the year of Mozart's death, and died in Paris, having also composed for the Berlin stage and worked for a time in Italy, where he turned 'Jakob' into Giacomo. He added Meyer to his surname after receiving a legacy from a relation named Meyer.

CÉSAR FRANCK

César Franck was born of German parents, accidentally born on the wrong side of the border, in Belgium, near Liège. He took French nationality in 1870 (!).

MAURICE RAVEL

Maurice Ravel was born of a Basque mother and a Swiss father, or, to be more precise, his father was a Frenchman, accidentally born on the Swiss side of the border, because the taxi taking his mother to the hospital was delayed in a snow storm. Anyway, the example goes to show, what a precarious thing it is to say even of people whether they are French or German, &c, to say nothing of making such a decision about music, in a meaningful way. Stravinski called Ravel the greatest Swiss clockmaker of all times.

Music by composers who lived and worked in France

That would make at least some of the music of Stravinski, Chopin, Gluck and Gershwin French music, and it would make Picasso's paintings French paintings.

Music which has stylistic features which are recognisably "French"

I.e. when an expert hears a piece of music without knowing it and without knowing its composer, he must be able to say: This is French music.

Now, if you play me a piece by Berlioz or by Rameau, I may well be able to recognise the composer and, since I know that both are French composers (i.e. composers born and working in France), I may say that this is French music. But that is a vicious circle. It means that I define French music as music written by composers

who were born in France, worked in France and died in France. That would be a trivial definition of French music if their music were not different from contemporary music in other countries.

Well, the music of Rameau is very different of the music of Bach and of all music written in Germany, Italy or Spain. But does that make it French? No. For it is also quite distinct of all music written by all other composers in France. Therefore if I recognise Rameau's music by listening to it, I have not recognised it as 'typically French', but as 'typically Rameau'.

We must therefore make our definition of what is French music more stringent.

French music is music which has features which occur in all or almost all French music of that time, and which do not occur in non-French music of that time.

We must now inspect music by composers generally considered French to see if we can find such features. I have recorded about 150 hours of French music from the BBC and have utilised these tapes for my investigation.

We will take two approaches to finding characteristic features:

- By features sometimes said to be typically French
- By historical periods

By features sometimes said to be typically French

When the presenters of the BBC music programme, Radio 3, introduce a piece of French music, they often add, before or after, that it is typically French and this is meant as a compliment. They justify these assertions by saying that the piece is

precise

or brilliant

or brief and compact

or that it has esprit

or that it is dancelike

or that it has exciting rhythms

or that, when you hear it, you think you are sitting in one of the cafés of the Parisian boulevards

One finds similar remarks on the sleeve-notes of records of French music. It was the abundance and obscurity of these remarks

which prompted me to write this essay. Let us now look at these features in turn and see if they are typically French.

We can only accept them as being French, if all, or almost all French music displays these features, and if non-French music does not display them.

- French music is **precise**: Non-sense. All written music is precise. When the composer writes 'c', he means 'c' and not 'd'. If he demands the duration of 1/8, that's what he means, and not 1/4. Ravel's Boléro is no more precise than Dvorak's Slavonic Dances or Brahms' variations on a theme by Haydn. French music is no more precise than other music.
- French music is **brilliant**: Non-sense. Mozart is as brilliant as Rameau or Berlioz and perhaps more brilliant than Debussy or Saint-Saëns.
- French music is **brief and compact**: Non-sense. In music of all countries there are short pieces and long pieces. Moreover silly short pieces are not better than good long pieces. Length is not a measure of quality. German composers have written long pieces, such as Bach's St Matthew Passion and Beethoven's 9th symphony, and excellent short pieces, such as some by Anton Webern (pupil of Schoenberg) which last only 60 or 90 seconds. In French music we find not only short pieces, such as some by Satie, but also long ones such as the Turanga-Lila Symphony by Messiaen, which lasts over 90 minutes.
- French music has **esprit**: God only knows what that is supposed to mean. Perhaps a certain degree of frivolity and provocativeness, as can be found in some music by Milhaud and his friends. But in Germany we also have Kurt Weill (composer of the 'Threepenny Opera'), whose music is no less provocative and racy than that of Les Six.
- French music is **dancelike**: Non-sense. Some musical historians say that, in the period of the baroque, the French were the dance masters of Europe. They point at the importance of dance and ballet in French opera until the time of Gluck, and the preponderance of dances in early French opera (Rameau) where the story of the opera served only as a pretext for presenting dance numbers.

But that does not make dance rhythms an appanage of French music. There are dances in the music of all countries and of all times, they are all rhythmic and often passionate. Think of German and Italian dances, of Hungarian and Slavonic dances, of gypsy dances and of Caribbean dances and those from the South American continent.

If I hear a baroque piece and it sounds like a gavotte, my first guess is that it is by Rameau, but it might just as

well be by Bach (namely from his Wedding Cantata).

- French music has **exciting rhythms**. All right, sometimes it has, e.g. much music by Rameau or the provocative productions of Les Six. But the composer whose music has pushed rhythm most strongly to the foreground is the German Carl Orff ('Carmina Burana').
- When you hear French music, you think you are sitting in one of the **cafés of the Parisian boulevards**. That is meant as a compliment by people who remember romantic days spent with their girlfriends in Paris while trivial French music doodled in the background, but it really is an insult to French music to assert that what is characteristic of French music is its triviality (a backhanded compliment).

In brief, the wisdom presented by the writers of record sleeve notes and presenters on the radio turns out to be quite meaningless. The intention in many cases seems to be to pretend that there is contrast between German music and French music and that German music is bombastic, heavy, deadly boring and academic, whereas French music is light, elegant and charming. The writers of the sleeve-notes thus display their own amateurish prejudices rather than saying anything of importance about French music.

I should add here that I am very fond of French music and, by now, know it well, but I am equally fond of German music. One does not have to play off one against the other.

By historical periods

We now look at French music in historical periods. I propose the following:

1. **Medieval** music: The troubadours. I do not know their music well and have not looked at them. But I do not think it likely that their music would change my conclusions.
2. Late medieval and early **renaissance** music, the music of Josquin des Prés and his contemporaries.
3. **Baroque** music: The time of Bach in Germany and of the Couperins, Rameau, Lully and many others in France.
4. While in Germany there is a period which is recognised as 'the **classical** period' (the time of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven), I have not been able to distinguish such a period in France or find composers of similar importance. The most influential composer in Paris at that time was Gluck, and he was German.
5. **Romantic** music: The time from Beethoven to Brahms, Wagner and Reger in Germany, and of Berlioz, Massenet and Saint-

Saëns, in France.

6. **Early modern** music: The time of Fauré, Debussy, Ravel, and later Les Six and their associates (Honegger, Poulenc, Milhaud, Satie).
7. **Modern** music: The time of Stockhausen, Henze in Germany, and Pierre Boulez and Edgard Varèse in France (but Edgard Varèse lives in the USA, and Pierre Boulez in England?).

WE NOW LOOK AT EACH OF THESE PERIODS IN TURN:

1. Medieval music: The troubadours

I have not looked at them.

2. Late medieval and early renaissance music

The most important composer of the time was Josquin des Prés (ca. 1450 - 1521).

Other important French or semi-French composers of that period were Guillaume Dufay and Jean Ockeghem (teacher of Josquin des Prés).

For comparison I introduce a contemporary Scottish composer, John Dunstable, and a German composer, Heinrich Isaac. **Note that,**

- like Bach and Händel, who were born in the same year, 1685,
- Josquin des Prés and Heinrich Isaac were born in the same year, 1450.

John Dunstable	ca. 1385 - 1453
Heinrich Isaac	1450 - 1517
Guillaume Dufay	1398 - 1474
Jean Ockeghem	1425 - 1495
Josquin des Prés	ca. 1450 - 1521

In his time Josquin des Prés was the most famous and influential composer in all Europe. If ever French music was powerful, if ever it gave more than it received, it was during this period. During his century, Josquin was as influential in Europe as Beethoven was in the 19th and Stravinsky in the 20th century. Therefore if we are to look for a golden age in typically French music, we might look at Josquin. But see the book by J van Ackere

quoted at the end of this essay, which bestows the gold medal or the golden apple to the music from 1870 to 1950.

I will return to Josquin later when I have some observations to make about the relationship between music and literature.

3. Baroque music

The most important French composers of that time were Couperin and Rameau:

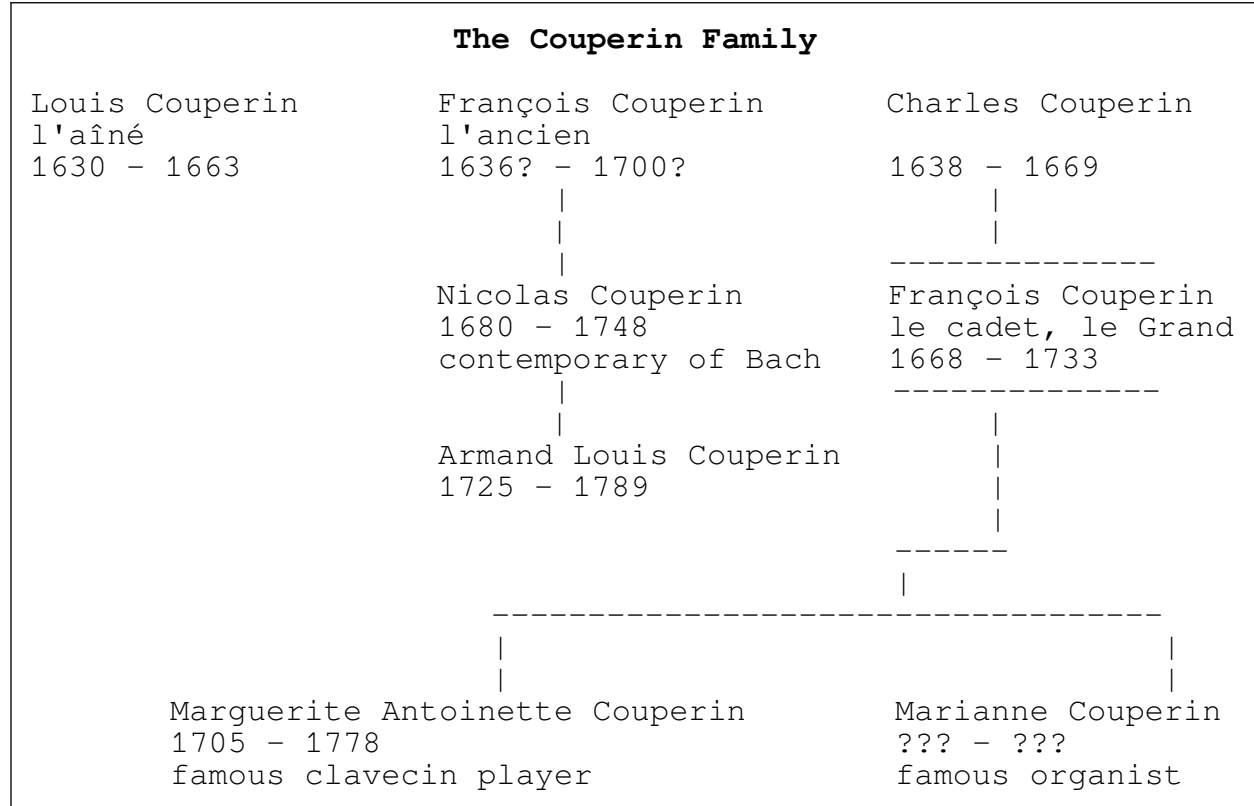
Jean-Baptiste Lully	1632 - 1687	Italian
François Couperin le Grand	1668 - 1733	
Jean Philippe Rameau	1683 - 1764	
*Jean Sébastien Bach	1685 - 1750	German
*George Frédéric Haendel (Händel)	1685 - 1759	English? German?

I added Bach and Handel so that you can compare the dates. Rameau, Bach and Handel were born almost in the same year, and the year of their birth coincides more or less with the year of Lully's death. Lully is included in the list because he is generally "considered French".

Note especially the Couperin clan which was as extensive in France as the Bach clan in Germany:

Three famous brothers Couperin founded the dynasty. All three were pupils of Jacques Champion Chambonnières, 1602-1672.

1. Louis Couperin, l'aîné	1630 - 1663
2. François Couperin, l'ancien	1636? - 1700 ?
3. Charles Couperin	1638 - 1669



The Couperins developed the art of ornamentation, and Bach adopted their technique and their notations. Many of the terms for the ornaments used in Germany at Bach's time (and today) are of French origin.

Later composers like César Franck and Ravel regarded this time as the 'golden age' of French music, i.e. the time when, as they saw it, French music was still free of German influence. When Germany and France were at war, French composers searched for independent models at that period.

For example, Ravel, who had been a soldier during the first world war, wrote, in 1917, his suite 'Le tombeau de Couperin' and dedicated each of its movements to a friend killed during the war.

I agree that this period was free of an overwhelming German influence, but I do not agree that its music was typically French. It was simply European, but all of it could also have been written in Germany or Italy.

Ravel and his contemporaries were simply reacting to the overwhelming German influence (especially that of Beethoven and Wagner) during the 19th century and turned their eyes, or rather their ears, to a time that preceded Beethoven.

4. The German classical period

We ignore the German classical period, that of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, because there was nothing comparable in France. If the French needed classical models, they took them from Beethoven, hence Beethoven's enormous influence during the 19th century.

The most important composer active in Paris at that time was Christoph Willibald Gluck, who was German but lived in Paris for a time, wrote six important French operas (as from 1772) and, together with Rameau, was an important model for later French opera composers, such as Berlioz, whose experience of Gluck's operas led him to the decision to become a composer.

One scholar says of Gluck: 'The German bear was unnoticeably transformed into a Frenchman'. (Moser, p 380).

Christoph Willibald Gluck, 1714 - 1787:
Five of the 'Paris operas':

1. Iphigénie en Aulide (après Racine) (1774)
2. Orphée
3. Alceste
4. Armide, 1777
5. Iphigénie en Tauride, 1779?

5. Romantic music

Let's say: the 19th century:

Among the most important composers in Germany are Beethoven, Wagner and Brahms.

Among the most important composers of this period in France are Berlioz, Franck and Bizet.

Here is a list of the most important German and French composers in the sequence of their year of birth.

French composers	German composers
	Beethoven, 1770 - 1827
Giacomo Meyerbeer, 1791 - 1864 Hector Berlioz, 1803 - 1869	
	Schumann, 1810 - 1856 Wagner, 1813 - 1883
Charles Gounod, 1818 - 1893 Jacques Offenbach, 1819 - 1880 César Franck, 1822 - 1890	
	Bruckner, 1824 - 1896 Brahms, 1833 - 1897
Camille Saint-Saëns, 1835 - 1921 Georges Bizet, 1838 - 1875 Jules Massenet, 1842 - 1912	

Note: Important French works by Meyerbeer:

Giacomo Meyerbeer 1791 - 1864:
Important French operas:

1. Robert le Diable 1836 ?
2. Les Huguenots 1836
3. Le Prophète 1849
4. L'Africaine 1865

This was a time when French composers admired the great German composers, especially Beethoven. Some of them developed a very distinctive style, especially Berlioz, but this style is particular to them and is not shared all over France.

One sometimes hears that Bizet or Massenet are the most typically French of all composers, but there is little in their music to justify that. Even though Massenet wrote an opera with a

completely French subject ('Manon'), many of their subjects are foreign (e.g. Bizet: Carmen, Les Pêcheurs des Perles; or: Massenet: Werther. Berlioz and Gounod both wrote a Faust opera, both wrote operas based on Shakespeare, and Massenet's 'Chérubin' is a sequel to Mozart's 'Figaro' and is set in Spain, with a generous supply of Spanish tunes.)

César Franck, sometimes called the Father of French music, was a pupil of Reicha, who was a pupil Haydn himself. Franck used the architecture of classical music, especially that of Beethoven.

In brief, there is no universal French style at this time, and German influence predominates.

6. Early modern music

I mean the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. I believe that it was the political conflicts with Germany which culminated in the Franco-Prussian war and the occupation of Paris by Prussian troops in 1871 which led to an awakening of national pride in French musicians and to the search for an independent musical language.

It was this war which inspired Rimbaud's beautiful poem 'Le dormeur du val' (dated October 1870).

In 1871, Camille Saint-Saëns (called 'chauvinist' by Moser, p 828, Debussy article) and Romain Bussine founded the 'Société nationale de musique', among whose members were Chausson, Chabrier, Fauré. But the society strangely also contained Spain-fans like Lalo and his friends.

It was the aim of this society to promote an independent development of French national music.

However, it seems that often French-ness meant only not to be German, for works which were clearly inspired by, say, Spain or by oriental themes, were happily accepted as French whereas works were regarded as imitative if they betrayed German influences.

One of the French nationalist composers of this time was Darius Milhaud. He was secretary to Paul Claudel, French ambassador in Brazil, from 1916-1918. When his piano pieces 'Saudades do Brazil' (Nostalgia for Brazil) were broadcast on the BBC, the announcer pointed out that this was 'Quintessential Milhaud'.

Chabrier is considered the leader of the rebellion against German domination in music. His most famous piece is called 'España'. Ravel and Debussy were strongly influenced by Chabrier.

During the first world war, Debussy showed his patriotic sentiments in his piece 'En blanc et noir', written in 1915. It is inspired by Villon's poem: 'Ballade contre les ennemis de la France'.

Prince, porté soit des serfs Eolus
En la forêt où domine Glaucus,
Ou privé soit de paix et d'esperance:
Car digne n'est de posseder vertus,
Qui mal voudroit au royaume de France!

It uses French folksongs to depict the happiness of a people left in peace and the threatening sounds of Luther's and Bach's chorale 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' (A mighty stronghold is our God) to depict the stamping of the approaching German war machinery, a piece which is similar in sentiment to the 'Stalingrad symphony' by Shostakovitch, written during World War II.

While the German choral was well chosen by Debussy as far as its musical style is concerned (which forms a good contrast with the French folk music representing France), the choral is not suitable as a symbol of German aggression if one considers its text and its history. It was written by Luther at the time of the reformation as a prayer by a peaceful minority (the protestants) surrounded by powerful enemies and attacked from all sides. But in spite of everything, that minority knows and believes strongly that, even if the world were full of terrible, fearful ferocious devils who want to attack, crush, swallow and devour them and finally drag them to hell, God is their strength and He will protect them. Therefore, in the situation of France in this war, in which the French lamb is attacked by the German wolf, the choral "A mighty stronghold is our God" is more suitable as a symbol of poor France than of the German hunnish hordes.

We have already mentioned Ravel's contribution to World War I, with his 'Tombeau de Couperin' in memory of his friends fallen during the war.

LES SIX

The most notable and rebellious composers of this time were a group whose literary spokesman was Jean Cocteau. Like the Pandavas and Draupadi (Mahabharata), they were five men (Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honneger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc) and one woman (Germaine Tailleferre) and they were called Les Six.

I cannot, in the context and with the deliberate slant of this essay, make a fair judgement of the quality of their music. (This can be done only by speaking exclusively of their works.) But much of it was inspired by a desire to be funny, to provoke and to shock, to refuse to be respectable. It was often wild, barbarian music, a music of protest against the German-inspired traditions. It was iconoclastic music, the punk music of its time, the music of the Angry Young Men (John Osborne) and the spray-gun artists.

We have among their works, for instance, a sonata for typewriter, hoover and orchestra (written no doubt by the woman in the group).

Such protest may be good as a first step towards liberation from oppressive parental control, typical products of teenagers and young men or women, but what is necessary for protest does not usually suffice for greatness.

Moreover I should add that there were also German composers, capable of producing provocative and frivolous sounds, e.g. Kurt Weill (Threepenny Opera, 1933).

The works of Les Six, however, are closest to a body of music which we can call 'French music', because it was largely distinct from foreign music and more than one composer was influenced by the same ideology.

(Erik Satie)* (not a member of Les Six)	1866 - 1925
Arthur Honneger	1892 - 1955
Darius Milhaud	1892 - 1974
Georges Auric	1899 - 1983
Francis Poulenc	1899 - 1963
Louis Durey	1888 - 1979
Germaine Tailleferre	1892 - 1983

* I have added here the name of Erik Satie (1866 - 1925) even though he was not a member of the group of Les Six, because he was very important and influential.

ERIK SATIE

Among his compositions are:

1. 'Deux pièces froides' (Two cold pieces) (1897)
2. 'Trois morceaux en forme de poire' (Three pear-shaped pieces) (1903)
3. 'Choses vues à droite et à gauche (sans lunette)' (Things seen at the right and at the left (without glasses)) (1912).

DEBUSSY AND RAVEL

We come closer to something truly French if we look at Ravel and Debussy, especially if we look at their vocal music.

Claude Debussy	1862 - 1918
Maurice Ravel	1875 - 1937

I will confine my observations to Debussy. Jean-Jaques Rousseau called Rameau's operas, and the many courtly dances with which they were stuffed, "stiff and artificial". According to Rousseau, they prove that the French language is not really suitable for singing. That is as silly a statement as the opinion current in Germany, that, because of the nature of its sound system, Italian is the language most suitable, or most natural, for singing.

Rousseau went back to nature, i.e. he is dead. But a few centuries later there was Debussy. His greatest model, one says, was Rameau. He set out quite deliberately to derive his sung music (songs, opera) from the rhythms and intonations of the naturally and emotionally spoken French language. He went round and took notes of the spoken French around him, tried to capture its rhythms and intonations and to catch it in musical notation. The best example for the musical result is his opera 'Pelléas et Mélisande'.

Of course, it does not follow from his work that the French language is suitable for singing. Nor does it follow that the resulting music must be beautiful. It only demonstrates that music is infinitely flexible and can imitate the rhythms of French. Janacek (from 1854-1928) made similar efforts to write Czech music which is derived from Czech language sounds. This kind of music therefore cannot possibly work in translation.

Some people have called the music of 'Pelléas et Mélisande' monotonous. But that is not a fair comment. My attitude is as follows: To understand and enjoy the vocal music of Debussy and Ravel, we have to understand and follow the French language in detail. It is necessary to prepare for such an opera or for a song recital by studying the texts. Only then can we understand the message the composer was trying to give. Without the language we understand nothing.

This is also true of Rameau or of Bach. We can only fully understand their vocal music if we understand their texts. If we do not understand their texts, we get only 20% of their meaning. But in the case of Debussy and Ravel and perhaps Fauré, without the text, we get absolutely nothing.

No wonder Debussy's music sounds monotonous to a listener who is deaf in his textual ear.

7. Modern music

The time of Stockhausen and Henze in Germany, and of Pierre Boulez and Edgard Varèse for France (but Edgard Varèse lives in the USA, and Pierre Boulez in England). I do not know this music well, but it is said to be so fragmented and individualistic that it is not possible to discern a general 'style'. Therefore we cannot search for 'typically French' music among such composers.

French organ music

French organs have a distinct sound which is quite different of that of German, Italian, Spanish or English organs. This is due to the predominance of reed stops.

In preparing this talk, I spent a day with a German organist who also sometimes plays French music in his concerts. We compared systematically French and German organ music. We found that modern French organ music, also as from about 1881, has a distinct style. Since my friend was German, his opinion of that style was not entirely favourable. He thought that much of this music lacked structure and depth. The organ is not treated like an organ (i.e. with distinct functions for each of its manuals) but like a piano (in the style of Haydn) or a harmonium. We often found 'imitations' of bell sounds in the upper registers and endings of big pieces with repeated final chords as is customary in the symphonies of Beethoven and Bruckner - in brief the organ was treated partly as a piano and partly as an orchestra.

SOME CONTEMPORARY FRENCH ORGANISTS:

Charles-Marie Widor	1844 - 1937
Marcel Dupré	1886 - 1971
Charles Tournemire	1870 - 1939
Louis Vierne	1870 - 1937
Maurice Duruflé	1902 - 1986
Olivier Messiaen	1908 - 1992

French contributions to musical hardware

1. As I mentioned before, the sound of a French organ is decidedly different from that of a North German organ (a Bach organ) or of South German, Italian or English organs.
2. In the 17th century, the century in which Bach was born, the viol player and composer Sainte Colombe invented a new way of holding the viol between the knees and he added an extra string (7th) to the existing strings, thus extending the sound range of the instrument and thus giving it a new lease of life when it was about to go out of fashion.

<p>Il trouva une façon différente de tenir la viole entre les genoux et sans la faire reposer sur le mollet. Il ajouta une corde basse [une septième corde] à l'instrument pour le doter d'une possibilité plus grave et afin de lui procurer un tour plus mélancolique. Il perfectionna la technique de l'archet en allégeant le poids de la main et en ne faisant porter la pression que sur les crins, à l'aide de l'index et du médius, ce qui'il faisait avec une virtuosité étonnante. (Pascal Quignard: 'Tous les matins du monde'. Gallimard, Paris, 1991)</p>	<p>He found a new way of holding the viol between the knees and without letting it rest on the calf. He added a low string (a 7th string) to the instrument in order to give it a graver mode and a more melancholic tone. He perfected the bowing technique by lightening the weight of the hands and ensuring that there was no pressure except on the strings, with the help of the index and middle finger, which he did with astonishing virtuosity.' (Pascal Quignard: 'Tous les matins du monde' [All mornings of the world]. Gallimard, Paris, 1991)</p>
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In a similar manner, Bach in Germany was the first to use not only the four fingers of the hand but also the thumb in playing the organ and the harpsichord and thus made it possible to play existing music more easily, or better, or make possible the creation of music which otherwise could not be played.

3. The most influential new instrument of our times was invented by a Belgian instrument maker, Adolphe Sax (1814-1894), who worked in Paris as from 1842, and was called the 'saxophone' after its inventor.

Sad to say, the French treated their geniuses no better than the Austrians treated their Mozart. In 1892, at the age of 78, two years before his death, Adolphe Sax was declared a bankrupt and therefore stripped of the Order of the Légion d'honneur.

4. Another musical instrument of French invention, which one can hear from time to time, is the Ondes Martenot, invented by Maurice Martenot in 1929. It is an electronic instrument using thermionic valve oscillators and has a piano style key-board. Unlike the piano it can produce continuous changes in pitch (like a violin) and unlike some other

electronic instruments, the player can minutely influence the character of the sound by the way in which he touches the keys. It is therefore a comparatively 'human' kind of electronic instrument. It is used in works of Arthur Honegger, Pierre Boulez and Olivier Messiaen.

Music and language

When we are told that the only typically French music is that written between, say, 1870 and 1930, it means that this is music which is comparatively difficult. To understand it, we must listen often and we must listen carefully. Most people prefer easy music which they can play in the background, and they do not like to listen carefully. They like Mozart and Tchaikovsky for their beautiful tunes, and if there are no beautiful tunes in a piece of music or if the tunes are hidden, they will at best tolerate that music.

It is therefore worthwhile for us to try to throw overboard some of our prejudices. We want to look at a different approach to music, which will help us not only with modern French music but also with the oldest.

Josquin des Prés and his contemporaries all over Europe were not primarily interested in writing beautiful music with pretty tunes which can be easily recognised. Instead they set themselves technical problems of composition and tried to solve them. We may call this the Houdini syndrome. The composer ties his hands and his feet and tries to escape.

The best-known modern example is Ravel's piano concert for left hand only.

Bach's violin suites are another example: How to produce harmonies on an instrument designed for playing melodies.

Spot the Spoof

The most provocative or limiting theme which I have ever heard was the basis of an improvisation on the organ of Altenberg Cathedral in Germany (near Cologne). It was called 'Improvisation on a Note by Handel'. (The note was in fact a middle c, taken either from the "Messiah" or from "O magnum mysterium, no, no" by Jacobus Gallus.) (everything sic!) (01)

DE-SPOOF

[1] There is in fact a hell of a spoof going on in here which I must document before I forget it myself. Neither the footnote nor the sic!s are to be published.

(1) You can hardly improvise on one note. One note does not make a theme. You need at least three.

(2) If you take only one note, it makes no difference whether it is from Handel or Wagner. You cannot attribute one note to a composer. A note is a note. Notes are the smallest building blocks (the atoms) composers use.

(3) Georg Frederick Handel and Jacob Handl (also known as Jacobus Gallus) are two different composers, but all three names mean "little cock" (South German dialect).

(4) The "O magnum mysterium" (O great mystery) has been misquoted as "O magnum mysterium" (maccaroni Latin for: o magic mystery). It ends with the Christmas shout "noe, noe", which has been misquoted as "no, no".

Josquin set himself such problems as writing a piece for three voices, where all three voices are in the same register (e.g. three tenors) (by contrast, common sense dictates that, when you have three voices, you put them into different registers, e.g. one soprano, one alto and one bass). But Josquin tried to solve the problem, how to make the music sound 'beautiful' or acceptable, in spite of the limitation he had set himself. He also (like later Jean Sébastien Bach) wrote pieces which could be played forward, or back to front, or could be turned upside down, or musical textures woven from just four or five endlessly recurring notes. Such music can only properly be understood if one has the score and follows it. Thomas Mann called this 'music for the eyes'.

The principle of setting up artificial restrictions and then creating a work of art in spite of these restrictions links music to literature, and especially poetry. The poet is not primarily concerned with putting over a message (after all, he could do that much more efficiently by writing a letter). Instead he tries to produce a linguistic texture (un toile linguistique) out of the words available, imposing not only the restrictions of grammar (as in prose) but in addition such things as rhyme,

metre, alliteration, complex strophic forms (e.g. in a sonnet) &c.

Some poets however go even further in their artistry, and some contemporaries of Josquin were among them. One of the most celebrated French poets of Josquin's time was Jean Molinet, 1435 - 1507, and Josquin set several of his poems to music.

Jean Molinet	1435 - 1507
Josquin des Prés	ca. 1450 - 1521

Jean Molinet wrote 'L'Art et Science de Rhétorique' (The Art and Science of Rhetoric) and was the theoretician of the poetry of his time. His poem 'Oraison' (Orison (02), Prayer) demonstrates a preoccupation with technical skill in the manipulation of words, which is similar to the preoccupation with technical skill in the manipulation of musical notes which characterises the music of the time.

Jean Molinet, 1435 - 1507

Oraison

Marie, **m**ère **m**erveilleuse,
Marguerite, **m**undifiie,
Mère **m**iséricordieuse,
Mansion **m**oult **m**agnifiie,
Ma **m**aistresse **m**irifiie,
Mon **m**esfait **m**aculeux **m**e **m**atte,
M'âme **m**ordant **m**ortifiie;
Mercy **m**'envoye **m**'advocate!

Ardant amour, arche aornée,
 Ancelle annoncée, acceptable,
 Arbre apportant aulbe adjournée,
 Accroissant avoir agréable
 Astriférent aigle, attraictable
 Accoeul, amorti ayemant,
 Azime aspirant, adorable,
 Ancre aigüe, âmes attirant

Rubis raiant, rose ramée,
 Rais reschauffant, raiseau rorable,
 Riche régente reclamée,
 Resjoissant, resconfortable,
 Racine récent, respirable,
 Ramolliant rigueur rebelle,
 Rigle, reduisant réceptable,
 Repentans ruyneux rapelle.

Jardin joly, joie internelle,
 Jour infini, incomparable,
 Illustre, intacte jovencelle,
 Jaspre joieux, incomprenable.
 Innocente image inspirable,
 Idolatrie interdisant,
 Implore Jhesus invocable,
 Juste Justice introduisant.

Estaille errant, encontre eueuse,
 Espine esprise, exelse eschielle,
 Ente eminente, eslute espeuse,
 Evangelisée estincelle,
 Elucente entière, éternelle,
 Enchainte, enixe et efficace,
 Espérance espirituelle,
 Envye estains, erreur efface!

The first word, 'Marie', is the seed of the poem. Each stanza elaborates one letter of this name, each word in any given stanza begins with the same letter.

In this kind of poetry what is important is not meanings and messages, which can also exist outside that poetry, but the poetical, linguistic structure itself.

In music one can make a similar observation. In most popular music today (including the popular classics), the listener expects what I would call a 'musical story line', pretty tunes, a certain musical force and development which drives the music from a starting point to a predetermined goal. Such is the music of Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky &c.

This is not so in Josquin's music (nor in most modern serious music), and the absence of such a 'musical story line' causes such music to be so difficult for the listener. What matters are the details of the music itself, the musical texture, not some extra-musical drift which is perhaps conveyed by that texture.

I have drawn attention to that link between music and poetry in Josquin's time not only because this was a time when French music was dominant in Europe, but also because one can occasionally observe similar features in **modern music and modern literature**.

As a modern example, I refer to the work of Georges Perec.

GEORGES PEREC

These are specimens from two novels by Georges Perec. The first is "La disparition", published in 1969.

This book seems to be a normal novel, but in fact it is closer to being a huge poem, and therefore also closer to a musical structure than to a novel. In this 300-page novel the letter 'e' does not occur a single time. The novel deals with a man, named Anton Voyle, who disappears, and the search for him conducted by the police and by his friends. There is a sequel to this novel, called 'Les Revenentes' (sic!) in which no vowel is used, except 'e', i.e. the 'e's which have gone into exile in the first novel, must have bred like rabbits, and their ghosts have now returned with a vengeance and have ousted all the other vowels.

This is a tour-de-force of the Josquin type, a Houdini act, where the author ties both his hands and then still tries to create a narrative.

In his following book Georges Perec set himself the even more ambitious task to write an entire novel while utilising only one letter, the **Q**. Georges Perec began to write this novel but, unfortunately, after having written the circle, **O**, of the first **Q**, he died of a heart attack before having put the little tail into the **O**. Therefore we will never know the tale (plot) of this masterpiece.

In enjoying such works of art we must look at, and enjoy, the technical details, the literary texture and not expect a conventional story, psychological information, &c.

If the preoccupation with such technical matters is a typically French (if, that is!), then we can see a link between one of the earliest and one of the latest periods in French music and French literature.

GEORGES PEREC: LA DISPARITION

(This is the first page of the novel.)

AVANT-PROPOS

Où l'on saura plus tard
qu'ici s'inaugurait la Damnation

Trois cardinaux, un rabbin, un amiral franc-maçon, un trio d'insignifiants politicards soumis au bon plaisir d'un trust anglo-saxon, ont fait savoir à la population par radio, puis par placards, qu'on risquait la mort par inanition. On crut d'abord à un faux bruit. Il s'agissait, disait-on, d'intoxication. Mais l'opinion suivit. Chacun s'arma d'un fort gourdin. «Nous voulons du pain», criaient la population, conspuant patrons, nantis, pouvoirs publics. Ça complotait, ça conspirait partout. Un flic n'osait plus sortir la nuit. A Mâcon, on attaqua un local administratif. A Rocamadour, on pillait un stock: on y trouva du thon, du lait, du chocolat par kilos, du maïs par quintaux, mais tout avait l'air pourri. A Nancy, on guillotina sur un rond-point vingt-six magistrats d'un coup, puis on brûla un journal du soir qu'on accusait d'avoir pris parti pour l'administration. Partout on prit d'assaut docks, hangars ou magasins.

Plus tard, on s'attaqua aux Nords-Africains, aux Noirs, aux juifs. On fit un pogrom à Drancy, à Livry-Gargan, à Saint-Paul, à Villacoublay, à Clignancourt. Puis on massacra d'obscurs trouffions, par plaisir. On cracha sur un sacristain qui, sur un trottoir, donnait l'absolution à un
...

GEORGES PEREC: LES REVENENTES

(These are the trailer pages
(rules of the game)
of the novel,
followed by the first three pages
of the novel itself.)

Règle

1. «Qu» s'écrit «qe, qenelle, qerelie, qelqe, desqelles, etc. (Décision de l'OuLipO, séance du 7 mars 1972.)
2. De rares (puis de moins rares) emplois du «Y» seront tolérés (New Jersey, Yes, Cheyenne, etc.)
3. Divers types de distorsions (la liste en serait fastidieuse à dresser) seront plus ou moins progressivement admis au cours du texte.

PEREC
LES REVENENTES
TEXTE

<p>E SERVEM LEX EST, LEGEMQVE TENERE NECESSE EST? SPES CERTE NEC MENS, ME REFERENTE, DEEST; SED LEGE, ET ECCE EVEN NENTEMVE GREGEMVE TENENTEM.</p> <p>PERLEGE, NEC ME RES EDERE RERE LEVES.</p>	<p>Translation: (03)</p> <p>I am to preserve the E, that is the law. But is it necessary to keep the law? I certainly lack hope but not intention in the execution. But read and see how I weave E to E (04) and keep the herd together. Read thoroughly and do not believe that I am pronouncing light matters.</p>
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EVE'S LEGEND

J'émets fermement qe
les gens de ce texte
et les réels ne présentent
de ressemblance.

PEREC

Telles des chèvres en détresse, sept Mercédès-Benz vertes, les fenêtres crêpées de reps grège, descendent lentement West End Street et prennent sénestrement Temple Street vers les vertes venelles semées de hêtres et de frênes près desquelles se dresse, svelte et empesé en même temps, l'Evêché d'Exeter. Près de l'entrée des thermes, des gens s'empressent. Quels secrets recèlent ces fenêtres scellées?

– Q'est-ce qe c'est ?

– C'est l'Excellence! C'est l'Excellence l'évêqe

– Z'êtes démente, c'est des vedettes bèle, hébétée, qelqe mémère édentée.

– Let's bet three pence! C'est Mel Ferrer! prétend qelqe benêt expert en westerns.

– Mes fesses! C'est Peter Sellers! démentent ensemble sept zèbres fervents de télé.

– Mel Ferrer! Peter Sellers! Never! jette-je, excédé, c'est Bérengère de Brémen-Brévent!

– Bérengère de Brémen-Brévent!! répètent les gens qe cette exégèse rend perplexes.

– Certes, reprends-je, Bérengère, Bérengère «The Queen», Bérengère «The Legs», celle qe Dresde et qe Leeds révèrent, celle qe vénèrent et le Rex et le Sélect et Pleyel! Bérengère, déesse éthérée des scènes, vedette d'entre les vedettes, fée des kermesses et des fêtes! Sept cent trente sept prêtres l'encensent dès q'elle entre en scène et entreprend d'enlever ses vêtements, cent mecs se pètent le cervelet!

– Et q'est-elle censée chercher chez l'Evêqe? Ces messes ne me semblent de même espèce! émet qelqe pète-sec en bérêt et en spencer.

– Ne te méprends! démens-je, qe Bérengère se rende chez l'évêqe, c'est de règle en effet, l'évêqe est le frère d'Herbert Merelbeke, le pépé de Thérèse Merelbeke, et Thérèse Merelbeke est l'élève préférée de Bérengère!

Perplexe, le pète-sec enlève et remet les verres cerclés d'ébène de ses serre-nez.

– Ce frère, ce pépé, cette élève et cette préférence me semblent extrêmement enchevêtrés!

Je sens qe l'énervement me pénètre je rejette cette qerelle d'Helvète et préfère me démettre. Les gens cessent de m'encercler. Pédestrement, je me rends chez Hélène...

Près de qelqe sente déserte et enténébrée, j'entends ces sentences qe le vent semble repêcher:

– ... L'évêché est en effervescence...

– ... Elle s'est très endettée récemment...

– ... Elle vend ses gemmes.

– ... Bézef ?

– ... Et le recel?

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: "A VOID" (LA DISPARITION)

(The English translation, by Gilbert Adair, of "La Disparition" is ambiguously entitled "A void" and was published by Harvill Press, London, in 1994. The translation, like the original, manages without the letter "e".)

INTRODUCTION

In which, as you will soon find out, Damnation has its origin

Today, by radio, and also on giant hoardings, a rabbi, an admiral notorious for his links to Masonry, a trio of cardinals, a trio, too, of insignificant politicians (bought and paid for by a rich and corrupt Anglo-Canadian banking corporation), inform us all of how our country now risks dying of starvation. A rumour, that's my initial thought as I switch off my radio, a rumour or possibly a hoax. Propaganda, I murmur anxiously – as though, just by saying so, I might allay my doubts – typical politicians' propaganda. But public opinion gradually absorbs it as a fact. Individuals start strutting around with stout clubs. "Food, glorious food!" is a common cry (occasionally sung to Bart's music), with ordinary hard-working folk harassing officials, both local and national, and cursing capitalists and captains of industry. Cops shrink from going out on night shift. In Macon a mob storms a municipal building. In Rocadamour ruffians rob a hangar full of foodstuffs, pillaging tons of tuna fish, milk and cocoa, as also a vast quantity of corn – all of it, alas, totally unfit for human consumption. Without fuss or ado, and naturally without any sort of trial, an indignant crowd hangs 26 solicitors on a hastily built scaffold in front of Nancy's law courts (this Nancy is a town, not a woman) and ransacks a local journal, a disgusting right-wing rag that is siding against it. Up and down this land of ours looting has brought docks, shops and farms to a virtual standstill.

Arabs, blacks and, as you might say, non-goyim fall victim to ...

This book seems to be a normal novel, but in fact it is closer to being a huge poem, and therefore also closer to a musical structure than to a novel. In this 300-page novel the letter 'e' does not occur a single time. The novel deals with a man, named Anton Voyle, who disappears, and the search for him conducted by the police and by his friends. There is a sequel to this novel, called 'Les Revenentes' (sic!) in which no vowel is used, except 'e', i.e. the 'e's which have gone into exile in the first novel, must have bred like rabbits, and their ghosts have now returned with a vengeance and have ousted all the other vowels.

This is a tour-de-force of the Josquin type, a Houdini act, where the author ties both his hands and then still tries to create a narrative.

In enjoying such works of art we must look at, and enjoy, the technical details, the literary texture and not expect a conventional story, psychological information, &c.

If the preoccupation with such technical matters is a typically French (if, that is!), then we can see a link between one of the

earliest and one of the latest periods in French music and French literature.

I will conclude this comparison by quoting a piece of modern music, by Henri Pousseur (born 23 June 1929 in Malmédy, Belgium), which, luckily for us, openly links literary and musical elements. If Debussy derives his music from language, in Pousseur's piece, music and language have been fused into one.

quote from Henri Pousseur:

Phonèmes pour Cathy (pour soprano et orchestre, 1966)

I have this on tape

but I believe it also exists on CD (search Internet!).

Transcription even of text is difficult; but interesting.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Pousseur

For me the most French of composers are those who are closely tied to the French language: such as Debussy and Ravel. To appreciate their music requires some effort. To understand their text-based music (e.g. their songs), one has to learn the French language, but that goes even for older text-based music and even for music from other nations.

Those who do not read German but like Bach's music think they enjoy his music, and indeed they do, because enjoyment is subjective. But they understand only 10% of that music if they do not understand every syllable of the underlying texts.

In the case of semi-modern French music, I think that enjoying that music without understanding the text is even more difficult. Listening to songs by Ravel without understanding the texts, is like listening to the news on French radio without knowing the language.

CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to identify consistently something French in so-called French music, even though radio announcers and music writers very frequently praise the 'very French character' of this piece or that. However, such utterances are usually ill-considered and emotionally coloured and quite impossible to substantiate. It is surprising how regularly music writers feel compelled to say something about the French-ness of a French composer. But their opinions are emotional and subjective and do not stand up to closer investigation.

However, if I may be equally emotional and subjective, and if I do not want to go so far as to say there is no French music but merely European music, then I would suggest the following hypothesis for further consideration:

In terms of hardware:

We can definitely see a French style in the sound of French organs. This is quite distinct from the North German organs (those for which Bach's works were written), or from the South German, Italian or English organs.

In terms of software:

We can search for very French music, either in the earliest or the latest times: In the period of Josquin des Prés because Josquin was born and died in France and because he was at his time as powerful and influential in Europe as Beethoven was in the 19th century and Stravinsky in the 20th. At Josquin's time, and only then, a 'French composer' lead the European world of music.

Or we must go to the beginning of the 20th century and look at composers who consciously tried to free themselves from the overwhelming German influence which pervaded France certainly in the 19th century.

I am thinking particularly of the composers of rebellion, such as

- Les Six: Arthur Honneger, Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, Francis Poulenc, Louis Durey, Germaine Tailleferre,
- of the school of Debussy and Ravel,
- or of some of the great modern French organists, such as Marcel Dupré, Tournemire, Widor, Duruflé, or Messiaen.

This choice of period was confirmed by the very title and table of contents of a book which came to my attention too late to be used in the preparation of this essay:

Jules van Ackere: "L'âge d'or de la musique française (1870-1950)". (Éditions Meddens, Bruxelles, 1966).

It concentrates on Debussy and Ravel, with César Franck and Gabriel Fauré as forerunners, and Milhaud, Honneger and Poulenc representing the next generation.

When we come to the most recent times, to post-serial music and to electronic music, I am not well-enough informed, but, at a time when all restraints and rules and conventions seem to have been abandoned, I cannot imagine any influence coming from one nation and going to another and being generally accepted. French post-serialists (say Edgard Varèse, Barraqué, Pousseur, or even Pierre Boulez) may pick up ideas from their German

contemporaries, say Stockhausen or Henze, but I cannot imagine them to be sufficiently constrained to form a national style.

In terms of time, let us say that there was a distinct French musical language perhaps as from the Franco-Prussian war 1871.

That war was the turning point or the birth of French music, in the same way in which the reform of spelling and of Latin pronunciation (the Carolingian reform during the years leading up to 813) was the birth of the French language. Before that date French did not exist; only Latin existed, divided into several spoken dialects.

The Carolingian reform (of Latin pronunciation) had the effect that the people could no longer understand the spoken Latin, for example in church. It was therefore necessary to prepare and write the sermons in the popular language ("the vernacular", the French of that time). Therefore, the Council of Tours of 813 demanded that the priests should speak their sermons 'in rusticam romanam linguam' (in the popular language), and in 843 we find the first written document of French, the Oaths of Strasbourg (Helmut Lüdtke: *Geschichte des romanischen Wortschatzes* [History of Romance Vocabulary], Vol. 1, p 29 et 72 ff; Bernard Cerquiglini: *La naissance du français*, p 44; Charles Camproux: *Les langues romanes*, p 68)

However, while the French language continued to exist as a distinct language, I am not sure whether today one can still speak about a 'French musical style'. If this is true, then French music was a very short-lived affair, say 50 or 70 years. The music produced by Frenchmen or produced in France or first performed in France was most of the time European in character, became national for a very short period and is now back in the home of the European community.

Nationality and literature

I have tried to show in this essay how precarious (or pointless) an enterprise it is to try to link art and style with nationality: such efforts do not tell us anything significant about the works of art themselves.

While it is impossible to give in an essay any demonstration of the beauty or greatness of a work of music, I hope that some readers will be induced to explore French music more thoroughly on their own; for it is seriously underestimated, both by the neglect or contempt which it receives from people in Germany who are hooked on Bach, Beethoven and Brahms and from people in England who esteem only the frivolous, light-hearted side of French music. Either approach is unjust.

However, I must not conclude this exploration without considering whether similar problems can arise in different arts, e.g. literature or the visual arts. I take literature as an example.

In literature it is customary to speak of "English literature", "German literature", "French literature", &c, and to have university departments dividing up world literature in similar terms or to write surveys of literature in such terms. People will also say that they have studied or have not studied "English literature", that they know or do not know "German literature" (as opposed to "Spanish literature"). The question arises what such terms mean and whether such dividing lines are necessary, useful, fair and unambiguous: is it easy to decide which authors or books belong to the domain of which "department" (I use "department" to cover not only the brief of university departments, but also the scope of a book on, e.g. German or English literature, &c.)

Conservatoires do not have departments of "French Music", "German Music", "Austrian Music", "Swiss Music". Why is it that divisions which we have rejected for music are workable or even necessary in literature?

First of all, let us simplify the argument (our line of thought) by postulating that translations are not adequate for the study of literature. They may be helpful but they are not sufficient. To read a book, the reader has to know the language in which it is written. This limits the works he can study (privately or at university) to those written in the languages he knows.

Secondly, we assume that books can travel, i.e. we can in any part of the world obtain, at least in principle, all books from any other part of the world (given money and determination).

Thirdly, when domains of study (disciplines, departments) are set up, their boundaries are drawn as wide as possible in order not to exclude unnecessarily books or information which a student or reader could easily understand.

Fourthly, in the case of music, we also simplify the argument by limiting ourselves to what is known as European music, that is the music from Gregorian chant onwards, via Josquin, Palestrina, Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Schönberg, Stockhausen, not forgetting American composers like Aaron Copland; but excluding Indian, Arabic, Japanese, African, &c. music, whose sources and traditions are entirely different, even though we are aware that borrowings and influences have occasionally occurred, especially in modern times when European music has cast off many of its traditional systematic constraints. Music, in this discussion, therefore means "European" music.

Having made these simplifying assumptions, we can proceed with the argument.

When people study music, which usually means the study of an instrument, most commonly the piano (the sine-qua-non of harmonic instruments), sometimes accompanied by the study of composition or conducting, their objects of study are not limited by national

boundaries. They will have to play, and are able to play, Beethoven, Debussy, Scriabin, Scarlatti, conduct Elgar and Britten, even though later in life they can, of course, make a speciality of certain composers which may all come from the same period of time or come from the same country, e.g. Czech baroque composers or modern composers from the Russian Federation. It also happens that some composers are not well known internationally and only the player who specialises in a certain country will get to know of them and find their scores in a local music shop. But generally nationality does not impose a restriction on the study and practice of musicians. The scores of all countries use the same system of notation and can immediately be understood and executed by a musician from any country.

It is therefore not surprising that students of literature **seldom** say (05): "I study literature", but usually "I study English literature", "I study Russian literature", "I study Spanish literature", "I study Portuguese literature", &c. What is the difference between the study of "literature" and the study of "music" which leads to this difference in approach, limitation of choice, or labelling?

At this point of our discussion, I need a definition of literature but cannot attempt so difficult a task in one paragraph of an essay that is focussed on a different issue. An ad-hoc definition will have to do:

Literature (belles lettres) is an umbrella term for the totality of texts which deal with the human condition in non-technical, often entertaining terms, in an exemplary (concrete) fashion, have an aesthetic rather than informative value, and try to appeal not only to the intellect but also to the emotions of the reader.

Since literature deals with the "human" condition as such, its endeavour is to go beyond the limits of nationalities, classes (even though at times it has been limited to the worlds of gods, heroes, aristocrats; then extended to dealing with the tragedies of the bourgeoisie, then the working classes and finally the down-and-outs). Readers often want to gain access to worlds different from their own (sometimes, of course, they insist on seeing a reflection only of their own, e.g. in "trivial literature") and writers, generally eager to learn and to be inspired, want to absorb influences from as wide a range of literature, sources, authors, territories, as possible. We may call this the "expansive trend" in literature, both as applied to readers and to writers.

In the systematic study and description of literature it is therefore reasonable to set the limits, the terms of reference, as widely as possible, in order not to deprive the student unnecessarily of books which he might legitimately wish to know about and in order not to neglect links (influences) between books and authors which would be missed if one of them were not

treated within the same "department" or "universe of discourse" as the other.

Since in the study of music no limitations are set (music is music), why are there such limitations in the study of literature, why is there German literature versus English literature versus French literature?

Because, unlike music, each book is written in a specific language, in English, Italian, Russian, &c, and only people who have learnt that language can read that book. When deciding which books a student should be lead to study (or which books a reader of an "introduction to N-ish Literature" or "History of N-ish literature" should hear about and be induced to read), we make this dependent on which language (or languages) he knows.

For example: If the student knows Portuguese, we offer him literature (books dealing in an exemplary fashion with the human condition in any country, class or time) written in Portuguese, most of which will come from Portugal (06) and Brazil; we may in fact insist that he has read some of the greatest books written by Brazilian writers if he is to merit certification, through his degree, as being "educated in Portuguese literature", capable of participating with reasonable competence in a conversation about the books which his partners are likely to know and to refer to. We will not insist on his having read James Joyce, however important his work may be for the "human condition", simply because this is too much to ask of a student who does not specialise in English and yet wants to study literature written in Portuguese.

If the student knows English, we offer him literature written in English, regardless of the nationality, country of birth, even native tongue (e.g. Joseph Conrad or Salman Rushdie), place of work of the author, place of publication of the book, i.e. literature coming from England, America, Canada, Ireland, Africa, India, Australia, and so on. We will insist, for example, that he has studied James Joyce, the great Irishman, because without this he would have missed important books in English literature and an important aspect of the human condition in our time. We can insist on the student reading James Joyce because he knows English. We insist on the student's reading as widely as possible with the linguistic tools and within the time at his disposal.

We would even want a student of German literature to have studied Sophocles, Cervantes, Pessoa, Shakespeare and James Joyce, because that student is human and as a student of literature ought to be interested in the human condition or "the state of literature" as such, but we cannot insist on this, for merely practical reasons, namely that this particular student does not know Greek, Spanish, Portuguese or English well enough.

We impose as few limitations as possible on the field of study of a student of literature, both in terms of what we permit him to do and in terms of what we require him to do. We allow him, and

want him, to access all books which his linguistic equipment enables him to understand, i.e. all books written in the languages that he knows.

It is therefore obvious that the term "English literature" (unless specifically shown to mean something else or in a very particular context) means "literature written in the English language", and not "literature written in England, as opposed to literature written in Wales, Scotland, Ireland, America, Canada, Australia".

The meaning of the term "English literature" is different, of course, if in the same university two separate departments, one of "English literature" and another of "American literature", exist side by side. The same would apply if at a Portuguese university there were both a department of "Portuguese literature" and a department of "Brazilian literature". But if the university had only a department of "Portuguese literature", in which department were Brazilian authors to be studied?

If "English literature" meant "literature related to England, in a specific indefinable way" all the absurd and insoluble problems which we have explored in our discussion of whether there is such a thing as "French music" would arise again. (Do we class the works of the American-born T S Eliot and Sylvia Plath, both of whom lived and worked in England, as American or as English? Do we include them in an anthology of English poetry? Of American poetry?). To use the term "English literature" (or Portuguese literature, Spanish literature, French literature, Russian literature) in such a sense does not imply national arrogance or "cultural imperialism" or even "cultural theft" (by an Englishman, Frenchwoman, Spaniard, Russian or Portuguese), but is merely an expression of conventions based on common sense and what we called the "expansive trend" in the study of literature, i.e. every reader or writer tries to study and assimilate as wide a variety of literature as his linguistic skills will permit.

When we contrast the labels "French music" and "French literature", we see immediately how meaningless (or difficult to define) the former and how intuitively clear the latter is. "French" is a language, but French music cannot possibly be "music written in the French language" because music is not written in any language. "French literature", by contrast, is instantly understood as literature written in the French language (which happens to be mostly used in France, but not exclusively there). As long as we are interested in "the human condition" as the object of literature, these definitions and limitations are good enough. They are imposed reluctantly, but are necessary because of the existence of a multiplicity of mutually unintelligible languages (the Babel syndrome).

If people (writers, artists, politicians, agitators) pursue more narrow interests and want to establish an artistic profile for their nation they may wish to use terms such as English, Irish, American, &c, in different and more narrow ways.

Such movements have existed at some time or other, presumably, in any nation or any nation trying to establish itself as a nation and acquire distinction and respect. The smaller and weaker the nation (and, perhaps, the smaller, at least in bulk, the artistic achievements of that nation), the greater the desire and the insistence on independent artistic recognition. That is one of the reasons why such nationalist cultural movements are not necessary, and do not exist, in respect of "English literature" and "French literature", but they do exist in relation to "Irish literature" or "Scottish literature" or "Caribbean literature" (e.g. in the Caribbean independence years around 1962). They are in fact a sign of, not literary, but "national weakness" or lack of self-confidence.

Moreover, these movements, even if promoted by great writers, are promoted by them (whatever their avowed motives) in their capacity as "nationalists, patriots, politicians" and not in their capacity as artists, or "wise" men, or "good" we-men. People of different parties or nationalities owe them no allegiance, do not have the slightest obligation to applaud them or support their aspirations, or honour the "countries which have produced" such great writers. (07) Their work belongs to mankind, and the authors will be honoured as individuals, even if they want to pass some of their glory to their countries and their less gifted compatriots. The fact that a person, group or nation, clamours for "recognition", does not mean that I or any other outsider has to grant it.

If a country wants recognition and respect from other countries, it must enforce it (or fail to do so) by use (or threat) of arms or violent rebellion, in which case it is easy to tell whether or not the country has achieved its aims. In that sense, a country which is respected is one with which no one dares to meddle. (08) It is this feeling which gives national pride, i.e. the pride of the masses, pride which is based on the achievements of other members of the same group, the same nation.

This is the pride of an English football hooligan who knocks an Indian fan senseless, shouting: "We are English, we are superior, because we produced Shakespeare, we invented the steam engine (09), and we won the war." This English barbarian did, of course, none of these things. He has to derive his pride (called "national pride") from the achievements of his group (his nation), which are in fact not his but those of a small elite, since he has no personal achievements with which he can nourish his pride. Even the efforts to establish national glory by sporting achievements (football, the Olympic Games) have something spurious about them.

The pride of artists and intellectuals should be, and usually is, of a different kind. The works of art (music and literature for example) (10) belong not to a specific country: the honour belongs to the few who produce these works (markedly different

from the masses in their countries) and the pleasure to mankind, which knows how to enjoy them.

**Appendix:
The treatment of "national literatures"
in an Encyclopaedia**

I made a spot-check in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1964 edition, to see how literatures were classified. I did not draw any conclusions, since, I think, enough has been said on the subject.

The article on "English literature" defines its scope as follows:

"The literature of England, and, if it is written in English, of the whole of the British Isles, is part of the literary heritage of the English-speaking world. Its influence lies behind the literature of all the countries which have ever formed part of the Commonwealth, and of the United States, and is intertwined not only with the literatures of other European countries, but of the emergent African nations, of India and Pakistan and of the middle east. This article is intended as a broad survey of the literature of England, from the Anglo-Saxon migrations in the 5th-6th centuries to the mid-20th century. It naturally deals with the work of many writers who were by nationality Irish, Scottish or Welsh, but whose writings form part of the main stream of English literature."

This article devotes a 35-line paragraph to the work of James Joyce.

The Encyclopaedia has a separate article on "Irish literature", with a section on "Anglo-Irish literature", which starts:

"It is impossible to dogmatise, as some have tried, about the limits of Anglo-Irish literature. It is enough to exclude on the one hand writers of Irish descent who have no direct connection with the country, such as the Brontë sisters, ..., Edgar Allan Poe, ...; and on the other, English writers domiciled in the country for a considerable time and showing decided traces of this in their work, such as Edmund Spenser and Anthony Trollope. We cannot draw hard and fast boundaries between a distinctive Irish literature in English and the contribution of Irish writers to English literature. The difference may be a real one, but it is too vague and uncertain to be taken into account here. The one type of writing merges into the other. All must count as Anglo-Irish literature, in whatever country and for whatever public it was originally produced. As to what constitutes an Irishman, one can only fall back on birth, early training and habitual residence."

By contrast with its article on "English literature", the Encyclopaedia's article on "Portuguese literature" does not deal with "Brazilian literature" and has no separate article on "Brazilian literature". (This was, of course, in 1964, but Kindlers Neues Literatur-Lexikon [published in Germany in 1996] has a long and distinct article on Brazilian Literature, where the efforts of establishing it as a "national literature, clearly distinguished from European Portuguese literature" started in, say, 1825 with José Bonifácio.

^NOTES

1. There is in fact a hell of a spoof going on in here which I must document before I forget it myself. Neither the footnote nor the sic!s are to be published.
 - (1) You can hardly improvise on one note. One note does not make a theme. You need at least three.
 - (2) If you take only one note, it makes no difference whether it is from Handel or Wagner. You cannot attribute one note to a composer. A note is a note. Notes are the smallest building blocks (the atoms) composers use.
 - (3) Georg Frederick Handel and Jacob Handl (also known as Jacobus Gallus) are two different composers, but all three names mean "little cock" (South German dialect).
 - (4) The "O magnum mysterium" (O great mystery) has been misquoted as "O magum mysterium" (maccaroni Latin for: o magic mystery). It ends with the Christmas shout "noe, noe", which has been misquoted as "no, no".
2. The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd."

(Hamlet, conclusion of "To be or not to be")
3. Translated by Jochen Waue
4. The word "even" in the Latin text has been translated as "e to e". This is pure guesswork. We have not been able to find the word EVEN in a Latin dictionary. Presumably there is a deep sense in this as well; but it remains to be discovered (MYSTERIUM FIDEI). Could there be anything in the fact that the symbol V is used in mathematical logic and set theory for "inclusive or" (either). That would leave the final letter N unexplained.
5. except in modern less exacting times, when literature is sometimes studied in translation
6. Defining the boundaries of Portuguese literature brings its own problems when one considers the many early Portuguese poets who wrote not only in Portuguese but also in Spanish.

Aber bekanntlich ist die Sprache der Literatur nicht an Sprachgrenzen gebunden. Vom 13. bis in das 17. Jahrhundert war Literatursprache zunächst

The language of literature is not tied to language boundaries. From the 13th into the 17th century Galician-Portuguese was also used as the literary

<p>in Spanien auch das Galicisch-Portugiesische, später in Portugal das Spanische. Nicht ohne weiteres läßt sich also die literarische 'Gütergemeinschaft' in 'hier spanisch und dort portugiesisch' auflösen.</p>	<p>language of Spain and later Spanish was also used as the literary language of Portugal. It is not easy to separate the joint literary possessions into Spanish on the one hand and Portuguese on the other. (Translated by Klaus Bung)</p>
<p>(Harri Meier and Ray-Güde Mertin: Die portugiesische Literatur. In: Kindlers Neues Literatur-Lexikon, ed. Walter Jens, 1996, Vol 20, p 67).</p>	

"For two centuries and more from 1450 nearly every Portuguese writer of note was bilingual and wrote also in Spanish, so that some, like Montemor and Manuel de Mello, are numbered among the classics of Spanish letters."
(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1964, "Portuguese Literature")

7. The existence of such great people within certain national boundaries is in fact quite irrelevant. "Das Land der Dichter und Denker" (the country of poets and thinkers) and of great musicians, like Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and Schumann, was not saved from falling into a moral abyss by the traditions associated with these great people. It is the mentality of the masses, their prejudices, their openness to follow false prophets, which determines the moral fate of nations.
8. At present (2000 AD) this is true of the United States of America and of the Russian Federation (during their war with Chechnya), where nobody dares to intervene, as opposed to Indonesia, Irak, the successors of Yugoslavia, African nations on whom the rest of the world happily imposes their notions of right and wrong.
9. Invented by James Watt, 1736-1819, born in Greenock, Scotland. My argument would, of course, equally apply if a Scottish football hooligan appropriated the merits of his great countryman.
10. Architecture may be an exception because it cannot be moved across national borders and often requires a national effort in financing it! Therefore works of architecture may contribute to the glory of a country.
return

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