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THE GENRE OF OPERA AND THE DISAFFECTION OF FRENCH COMPOSERS IN FAVOR OF THE EMERGING GENRES: THE CASE OF RADIO IN THE THIRTIES

by Christophe BENNET

Despite the huge contribution of European composers at the beginning of the 20th century to the genre of opera, one can't deny the fact that, apart from Germanic countries, the decline and erosion of the genre started in the twenties. In the wake of the genres recently inspired from the naturalistic and symbolist theatre, new means of musical dramaturgy however emerge owing to new initiatives and experiences born from the voluntarism of some pioneer musicians. More out of conviction than financial interest, those involved themselves in the kind of collaboration initiated by new media and cultural expressions. This approach even overtook the Germanic borders, since Dmitri Shostakovich composed the original soundtrack of the silent movie *The new Babylon* by movie makers Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg in 1928-1929. One can therefore wonder about the circumstances in which the radio, movie and theatre industries can have triggered the composers' curiosity in order to counterbalance the then obstructed sector of the opera.

As far as Radio in the thirties is concerned, some tools pride us with a few answers. In the frame of a thesis of musicology dealing with the broadcasting of music in France in the thirties, we have, on the one hand, built samplings of the musical programs, and on the other hand, monitored some 800 specialized press clippings in which the protagonists of the music and broadcasting sectors, musicians and mediators, expressed themselves on the ties between these two means of expression¹. As for the programs as such (5 360 sequences corresponding to 3 350 hours of broadcasting), we have extracted the programs of two representative stations of the double public / private network: Radio-Paris, the great cultural station which became "*Le Poste national*" in 1933, and Radio-LL, which was to be followed by the no less famous pre-war station of Radio-Cité.

Based our analysis on the data provided, we are going to detect, at first, what elements drew the composers of operas toward this medium; then, we'll be surveying the statements on the issue of a "new art"; the "[specifically] broadcasting art"; and we'll finally screen the proportion and the nature, in our samplings, of the broadcasting of some of the masters of the lyrical genre².

¹ Christophe Bennet, "*Musique et radio dans la France des années trente. La création d'un genre radiophonique*", Phd thesis in History of Music and Musicology, defended on June 13th 2007, under the guidance of Michèle Alten, Paris-Sorbonne, 2 volumes, 942 p. This thesis was published under the following references: "*La musique à la Radio dans les années trente*", Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, 314 p.

² The French version of this article can be read in: Christophe Bennet, "L'opéra et la désaffection des compositeurs français au profit de genres émergents : le cas de la radio des années trente" in "*Les Cahiers d'Histoire de la Radiodiffusion*", Cahier n°114, octobre - décembre 2012, p 31-48.: <http://cohira.fr/cahier-n-114-octobre-a-decembre-2012/>

I – BROADCASTED MUSIC AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE CRISIS OF THE OPERA?

Throughout the thirties, at the time when radio becomes a mass medium in France, the broadcasting of music absorbs 60% of the whole programs. During the decade, although this medium is becoming more professional, its audience figures keep increasing. Though it only concerns a few thousand bourgeois or technically gifted amateurs at the dawn of the thirties, one Frenchman out of two is considered to have access to the “fairy waves” on the verge of World War Two³.

1.1 A MEDIUM ESSENTIALLY DEDICATED TO CLASSICAL MUSIC

Copied out from the program schedules of the decade, our targeted samplings (every month of June of the whole decade) show that most of the musical programs are classically oriented. In order to clarify the programs published in the weeklies of the specialized press, their list led us to classifying the musical types into four great categories: targeted music, entertaining music, “in-between” music (especially including the operetta and the connected genres), and classical music. The latter gets the lion share. Over the whole decade, considering every station monitored, the broadcasting of classical music absorbs 36% of the some 3,300 musical sequences and 46% of their length⁴ in our samplings. This predominance of classical music is even more obvious at the very beginning of the thirties, and especially in 1930, when the levels reach nearly 65% of the program figures and 73% of their length. One of the features of the radio of the thirties, however, is to mix the genres within the programs themselves⁵. In order to sharpen the analysis, we have filtered the data through the names of the mentioned composers (2,185 in total) and of the performers (2,014). Under these two angles, classical music is still the most frequently broadcasted one. As for the corpus of the programs, we have introduced sub-categories in order to classify the authors and performers mentioned in those programs. Over the whole decade, the authors of classical music are the ones who are the most often broadcasted. We can count at least 8,600 mentions, that is to say 81% of the 10,656 total references⁶. As far as the performers mentioned are concerned, they also act in a big majority the field of classical music, at a level of 70% of the whole 5,218 references⁷. As for the composers and the performers that we have classified as mostly belonging in majority to the lyrical sector, they are at the top of our tables. With 1,112 references, the 70 authors listed gathered more than 10% of the whole occurrences. The three most cited composers witness the French tradition dominating the programs: “Jules

³ Cécile Méadel, “*Programmes en masse, programmes de masse*”, in Régine Robin “*Masse et culture de masse dans les années trente*”, Paris, Les éditions ouvrières, 1991 p. 56. By including the mass of the supposed listeners those who eschewed the broadcasting tax, Cécile Méadel put forward the hypothesis that more than 56% of the inhabitants were within reach of a radio set at the end of the thirties.

⁴ In decreasing order, we also have: entertainment music (23% of the programs and 21% of their durations); “in-between music” (19% and 18%); targeted or undetermined music (21% and 14%).

⁵ Some of the observers have classified these programs as “rubbish concerts”.

⁶ This figure is the result of the sum of the categories called “*musique savante*” (71%) and “*vocal savant*” (10%).

⁷ And more precisely 2,084 mentions for the performers of “*musique savante*” and 1,562 for those of the “*vocal savant*” genre.

Massenet (101 references), Charles Gounod (101) and Georges Bizet (74). As for the list of the 272 lyrical performers, led by Ninon Vallin and Georges Thill, those confirm the significant role of lyrical art on the waves with 14% of the artists broadcasted. Though the genres of opera and opera-comique are well broadcasted, this is mainly because they belong to the styles of classical music, which is itself at the core of the policy of broadcasting concerts and musical programs.

By globalizing the statements from the broadcasting press of the thirties on the musical issue, one can see the central and leading action of a minority. This minority is intellectually demanding and sensitive to the music then called “serious music”, and seems to be motivated by a purpose of musical acculturation of the masses. Those who may be called an “elite” oppose a majority of listeners, who are, if not increasing, anyway composed of very critical consumers, less and less reserved about the expression of their (dis) tastes. Although they admit the legitimacy of the use of the medium for educational purposes, they however reject this principle when they listen to it! A little more numerous every year, they are joining to condemn an excess of “*grande musique*” (i.e. classical music).

From the origins of broadcasting, the leaders of the public and commercial stations have appointed well-known musicians, who then find themselves at the heart of the broadcasting project as managers of the musical services of the stations. They will consequently be particularly involved in terms of experimentation and innovation.

1.2 COMPOSERS AT THE COMMANDS AND AT THE MICROPHONES OF THE STATIONS

At both national and stations levels, managers recruit some of the greatest personalities of the artistic sector, including renowned composers. At the very beginning of the thirties, Henri Büsser is appointed as the manager of the musical programs of Radio-Paris; Victor Charpentier, who was the artistic manager of the first hours, is entrusted in 1933 with the artistic management of Paris-PTT, and also becomes deputy chairman of the Board of the General Society of TSF Listeners; Gustave Charpentier succeeds Paul Dukas in 1935 as member of the literary and artistic section of “*Conseil Supérieur de la radiodiffusion*”; composer Jacques de la Presle is artistic manager of Radio-Paris for many years and from 1927 onward, Louis Aubert sits on the Council of the Programs of the station.

Abroad, the radio also seeks the collaboration of musicians. According to “*Le Radiogramme de Toulouse*”, this is why “*every artist is entering Radio*”, such as “Pietro Mascagni, the great Italian composer, [who is in 1930] the artistic manager of the Rome station.”⁸ In Germany, Paul Hindemith, Edmund Eisler and Kurt Weill have already been backing the new medium, to which they devote some works, for several years. A usual associate of the weekly radio newspaper “*Der Deutsche Rundfunk*” between 1924 and 1926, the composer of “*The Three-Penny Opera*” publishes some articles on broadcasted music⁹ in this organ in 1926. At the beginning of 1932, the Reich’s government auditor states that the Radio must “shape the artistic taste of the listeners and make it grow according to well established rules.”¹⁰

This purpose of educating the crowds is a phenomenon common to the countries and the stations. Musicians are therefore also solicited by the stations as educators. The “*causeries*

⁸ “*Le Radiogramme de Toulouse*” #285 of April 13th 1930, article entitled “De la musique”.

⁹ “Pascal Huyn, “*Kurt Weill de Berlin à Broadway*”, Éditions Plume, Paris, 1993.

¹⁰ “*Le Petit Radio*” #253 of February 13th 1932, p. 4: “*La radio et la vulgarisation de l’art*”.

musicales” (musical lectures), a concept from the thirties, will enable them to “promote” their art.

Inspired by the “*Comité de propagande pour la rénovation et le développement de la musique*”, and broadcasted since the very beginning of the thirties on Radio-Paris, the “*Causeries avec audition de disques*” are a genuine model of the genre. Every week, a celebrity comes to the studio and speaks, bringing with mandatory financial disinterest, their knowledge “to any audience” by summarizing an issue and presenting it in a simple way. Among those lecturers, one can find many composers: Louis Aubert, Pierre-Octave Ferroud, Jean Roger-Ducasse, Gustave Samazeuilh, Emile Vuillermoz, Stan Golestan, Maurice Emmanuel, and many others.

When composers play at giving guidelines to the listeners, the magic seems to be present. In 1938, one of the columnists of the weekly *Radio-Magazine* underlines the *savoir-faire* of the composer of *Ciboulette*:

“*Last year, Reynaldo Hahn oen evening explained ‘Die Entführung aus dem Seraglio’ with the help of records. For someone like Reynaldo Hahn, who embodies taste, knowledge and civilization under all its shapes, how many poor people, miserable oafs, and sinister drags have been speaking in front of the microphone and never leave it?*”¹¹”

We can also notice that during the second half of the decade, a long series of 91 talks on “*Le Théâtre lyrique en France depuis les origines à nos jours*” comes and completes the list of the “*conférences sur la musique*” that Radio-Paris usually proposes to its listeners.

Composers also enter the sphere of the stations as performers or orchestra conductors. In the stations myriads of little symphony orchestras are cropping up and all day long performing concerts of music qualified as “light and varied” where opera overtures often coexist with current musicals. Besides, the symphonic concert is really the prince of the broadcasting programs. As far as polyvalent composers are concerned, one could for instance mention Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, who appeared in our programs as performers as well as authors. We can also come back on the case of Henri Tomasi, a talented orchestra conductor and composer who also gave musical lectures. Following a program of Corsican folklore that he hosted in September 1936, the “listening notes” of the weekly “*Choisir*” use glowing terms:

“*Henri Tomasi, who so far was known as an excellent composer and orchestra conductor, hadn’t told us that he also was a perfect narrator. His explanation perfectly well connected every work performed by Miss Angelici.*”¹²”

Strongly oriented toward classical music, the artistic sections of the French stations therefore give the opportunity of valuating the multiple aspects of their art and their knowledge to already renowned composers. If composers, however, are interested in this young media, this is also due to the crisis of the lyrical theatres in France. This crisis particularly appears through the difficult relations between the subsidized theatres and the broadcasting sector.

¹¹ “*Radio-Magazine*” #749 of February 20th 1938, p. 2-3: “Bureau des réclamations”.

¹² “*Choisir*” #210 of October 4th 1936, p. 2: “Notes d’écoute”.

1.3 RADIO AND OPERA: A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

In May 1930, the Parisian musicians' trade union is buzzing. The minority reproaches the majority with their lack of energy in the fight against the competition of mechanized music. The first fear that this music "*blocks the musicians' carriers [and that radio] enhances a selection of musicians to the detriment of their number.*"¹³ Six months later, though great symphonic orchestras have increased their requirements in the matter of broadcasting rights, large French stations face the repercussions of the world's financial crisis. Between broadcasters and broadcasted artists the agreement seems to be less easy. At the Opéra-Comique, performers also demand an increase of their fees if the work is broadcasted. The two managers of the Opéra-Comique, Louis Masson and Georges Ricou, say they're not hostile to the broadcasting of their repertoire. They even declare to be "*friends of radio*" in front of the microphone of Paris-PTT¹⁴. Being "*modern men*", they understand that the radio will serve their interests more than it will harm them. Legitimate as the artists' salary requirements are, they lead the managers of Salle Favart to face "*a tricky financial situation*". As for the station managers, they give up when they have to face the expenses of the broadcasting of a lyrical drama. It's clearly time to end the negotiation time, since the dissatisfaction is spreading to the listeners. In the readers' section of *L'Antenne* of May 24th 1931, a listener protests:

*"We're never being broadcasted operas from Paris! This is a shame! Subsidized as they are by all the taxpayers, our theatres give us nothing back in exchange. Many radio listeners can't afford to go out in the evening, and the population deserves to listen to the artists that live on their dear money."*¹⁵

Fortunately for this complainer, the situation was about to be cleared.

In the summer 1931, the star columnist of the weekly *Radio-Magazine* is pleased at the thought that the broadcasting tax, that ought to amount to 70 to 80 million, will soon enable the Opéra-Comique "*to make ends meet*". According to him, this is the only means of rounding up subsidies without abusively requesting the tax-payers who dislike Euterpe's art¹⁶. Since the law on the broadcasting tax still took time to be voted, it eventually was Radio-Paris, the then major private station of the capital, that signed the first agreement with *Salle Favart* in November 1931: ten shows relayed every year. "*This decision will mute the usual argument of the Parliament that the subsidized theatres only target a minority of fortunate travelers interested in 'Orpheus's woes'*", as expressed in the November 29th 1931 issue of the newspaper *Radio-Magazine*.¹⁷

From 1932 onward, subsidized theatres also begin to struggle with the economic crisis. This situation is going to compel the administrators of the lyrical theatres to come closer to radio. With a deficit reaching the tidy sum of 250,000 francs a month, the manager of the Opera, Jacques Rouché, resigns in November 1932¹⁸. On the occasion, he declares:

¹³ *La Parole libre* TSF #107 of May 18th 1930 : "La querelle des musiciens".

¹⁴ *La Parole libre* TSF #138 of December 21st 1930 : "Vers la diffusion de l'Opéra-Comique".

¹⁵ *L'Antenne* #426 of May 24th 1931: "On réclame de beaux concerts".

¹⁶ *Radio-Magazine* #410 of August 23rd 1931, p. 2: "Radio-chronique", by Clément Vautel.

¹⁷ *Radio-Magazine* #424 of November 29th 1931, p. 3: "En marge des émissions".

¹⁸ *Le Petit Radio* #259 of March 26th 1936, p. 2: "Échos et informations". This excellent administrator eventually remains in charge until 1936, when he is even appointed General Manager of the National Lyrical Theatres. Cf., among others, Sandrine Grandgambe, "La politique musicale du Front populaire", in *Musique et musiciens de Paris pendant les années trente*, p. 28.

“I cannot see any other solution than asking the Parliament for a rise of the subsidy to the Opéra, provided several performances are broadcasted through the year, which would both enable to promote them and satisfy the legitimate request of provincial listeners.”¹⁹”

In March 1933, the press salutes an improvement in the relations between “*les subventionnés*” (the subsidized theatres) and the Posts and Telephones ministry: a 10-relay lease is renewed between the Opéra and the stations of the government network, while eight comic-operas or operettas will be broadcasted from *Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin*. Though the latter is granted 3,000 francs per relay and 25% extra fees for the musicians, the Opéra-Comique, which gets 18,000 francs and 40% of further fees, struggles to reach an agreement²⁰. In any case, it is the one subsidized theatre which gives succeeding PTT ministers the hardest time: in April 1933 Jean Mistler refuses to “*become the banker of Pierre-Barthélémy Gheusi*”, the manager of the Opéra-Comique. The latter wanted to set two million francs aside as the TSF’s offering²¹... Public radio, which is regarded by certain people as a means of financing the lyrical theatres, finds its best defense in the increasing dissatisfaction of its listeners. Though six works had been broadcasted in 1933, the twelve relays realized since February 1934 propose: “*an almost worn out repertoire*”: *Manon, Tosca, Les Contes d'Hoffmann, La Vie de Bohème, Paillasse, Werther, les Pêcheurs de Perles*, etc.

Through the months, the listeners are becoming more ever tired to “*share the boring unsuccessful pieces*” at a rhythm of twice a month. “This is no longer an aid, but a tax”, a columnist of the weekly *TSF Programme* states. His statement is even approved by *Le Petit Radio*, the official press organ of the public stations²².

Through the prism of the broadcasting press of the first half of the thirties, one can see that well beyond the financial crisis, a deeper crisis is striking opera. The latter struggles to find its audience. Both an enemy and an ally, radio provides jobs and brings possible alternatives to the composers. Most of the music broadcasted doesn’t however belongs to the medium and is already spread through records. Released at the middle of the decade, the statistics of a regional station are indeed significant:

“From November 1931 to November 1934, Radio-Strasbourg broadcasted 8,568 hours of music, including 4,912 hours of light music and 1,560 hours of serious [meaning classical] music. The total of the broadcasted concerts amounts to 2,096 hours. Spoken programs absorbed 2,043 hours and theatre programs 212.”²³”

What those figures don’t reveal, however, is the proportion of the music strictly composed or arranged for the radio; the proportion of creations gathering theatre and music does not appear either. The issue of “radiogenic” music is however at the heart of the questions agitating the small world of broadcasting. This at least is suggested by the debates cropping up in the specialized press in the first half of the decade.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *L’Antenne* #522 of March 26th 1933, p. 3: “Échos de partout.”

²¹ *Le Petit Radio* #369 of May 5th 1934, p. 6: “En lisant nos confrères: du *Haut-Parleur*”

²² *Le Petit Radio* #377 of June 30th 1934, p. 5: “La Radio et les théâtres subventionnés.”

²³ *L’Antenne* #624 of March 10th 1935, p. 2: “Échos de partout.”

II – TOWARDS A BROADCASTING ART OR A GO-BETWEEN?

In a newspaper column entitled “*Autre chose que les disques*” (Something else than records), Paul Dermée, surrealist poet and radio promoter, estimates in November 1930 that the most remarkable programs are the works written for the radio and performed live²⁴. Far away from those qualitative requirements, radio critic Clément Vautel, who calls himself an “*eminent representative of the general listener*”, rejects the “*élites’ aesthetic demands*”, by arguing that radio “*is not an applied art but a go-between.*”²⁵ Actually, behind this stance a rivalry between technicians and musicians is also hidden.

Whereas columnist Maurice Bex in April 1930 recommended a close understanding between acousticians and musicians²⁶, the article that Paul Berché, a technician, publishes on the front page of newspaper *L’Antenne* of July 13th 1930 strongly underlines the gap between the “*users of flat pliers and soldering irons*” and the “*artists and other novelists.*” He strongly vituperates Pierre Descaves and André Cœuroy for statements that aim, he says, at considering “*the brave brute of a technician*” as unfit to appreciate beautiful words and the sciences of the mind²⁷. Without entering this kind of argument, Paul Dermée enjoys the arrangements of classical music by arranger Mouton²⁸. In the weekly *La Parole libre TSF*, he calls for the arrangement of any type of music for the microphone:

“The list of composers who especially write for the microphone is anyway becoming longer every day and we’ll only mention Hindemith, Goehr, Eisler, Martinu and... our Ravel, whose Çançunik only made noise here when it was performed during one of our grand symphonic concerts²⁹. The microphone therefore requires special features, and what is called “radio music” is the one that matches this fact. [...] The cause then appears to be heard, and it is certain that henceforth the music of tomorrow will be, for a strong part, “radio music”. What, however, will the considerable work of the classical composers unfortunately born before the invention and triumph of radio become? Their works don’t suit the radio features, of course, but one can’t blame them for it, and furthermore one can’t disregard the work of Beethoven or Johan-Sebastian Bach, or Berlioz and one hundred others. Shall we thus continue to hear the masterpieces altered by radio broadcasting? Asking the question in these terms is solving it. We are obviously led to arrange them for radio.³⁰”

In the monthly *Lumière et Radio*, observer Jean Antoine also pleads in favour of a “*musique radiogénique*” (a music specifically designed for radio). The one who will become the General Manager of Radio-Cité estimates that: “*parallel to the education of the masses,*

²⁴ *La Parole libre TSF* #135 of November 30th 1930, p. 3: “Autre chose que des disques.”

²⁵ *Radio-Magazine* #465 of September 11th 1932, p. 2: “Radio-chronique”, by Clément Vautel.

²⁶ *Ibid* #339 of April 13th 1930,: “Enquête.”

²⁷ *L’Antenne* #381 of July 13th 1930, p. 2: “Permettez”, by Paul Berché.

²⁸ *La Parole libre TSF* #105 of May 4th 1930: “Adaptions la musique au micro.”

²⁹ Paul Dermée is mistaken when he attributes the work *Çançunik* to Maurice Ravel, since it is was composed by Florent Schmitt.

³⁰ *Le Radiogramme de Toulouse* #288 of May 11th 1930: “Paul Dermée, de *La Parole libre TSF*.”

*the managers of French broadcasting have the duty to impose strong sacrifices in order to hasten the coming out of a French music broadcasting school*³¹.” Still, the most passionate defender of a specific music is the audacious Paul Deharme. Paul Deharme, the author of the essay “*Pour un art radiophonique*³²” (for a broadcasting art), pleads during his short lifetime for the necessary attention to two modes of listening to the radio: an inattentive and a concentrated way. Like movie creation, he claims that the radio is more than just a go-between: “*We call for ‘broadcasting’ programs, instead of [...] public concert sneakers.*”³³ Although Deharme states that broadcasting means creation, many are really opposed to this principle.

First, some musical critics preach for a go-between role. Though he respects Paul Deharme’s stances, Francis Dorset, a columnist of *Radio-Magazine*, estimates that, apart from broadcasting theatre, radio “*must call for what does exist.*”³⁴ Musicians also hold a similar view, like Louis Aubert. Contrary to his counterpart and theatre specialist Lugué-Poe, he “*rebels against the dogma of broadcasting.*”³⁵ In the same vein, Jacques de la Presle, the manager of the great Parisian station, hits at those who:

“in the name of a blind belief in what they call the ‘broadcasting art’ (whose bases are not defined or principles yet set), would like to ban the masterpieces of human spirit from the microphone. [...] The radio is first a go-between, a system that enables to delete distances, to listen in Beziers or Brest a concert given in Paris. As for the music thus carried over, it must remain what it is. [...] Since the microphone of tomorrow won’t be that of today, creators don’t have to focus on its characteristics and become the slaves of its temporary infirmities.”³⁶

While *Le Radiogramme de Toulouse* states that there is no need to worry about creating broadcasting music, but that one should rather take care of constantly improving the means of transmission³⁷, *Le Petit Radio* itself doesn’t hesitate to relay the idea that “*listeners almost unanimously think that there is no need for a broadcasting art.*” And in the same magazine, Fernand Divoire firmly denounces “*the ‘decadentism’ of a new species of literati wishing to create a special ‘genre’ for themselves.*”³⁸

These arguments and controversies are instructive and sometimes even puzzling. Therefore, matching music and radio appears, for some aesthetes, to reach its most accomplishment in the realization of specifically broadcasted creations. But these considered pedantic by other observers, hark back to the already mentioned duality between elites and a mass that could be called a mainstream audience. Beyond this split, anyhow, some protagonists of the radio, including musicians in the first place, surprisingly contest the legitimacy of a broadcasting art because the technical imperfections of the broadcasting

³¹ *Lumière et radio* #8 of April 1st 1930, p. 18 et 19, “La musique et la TSF”, by Jean Antoine and *Le Radiogramme de Toulouse* #288 of May 11th 1930: “Revue de presse ».

³² Paul Deharme, *Pour un art radiophonique*, Paris, Le Rouge et le noir, 1930. A producer at the advertisement department of Radio-Paris, Deharme realized some broadcasted fictions, including the famous “Pont du hibou” (Owlbridge). As a supporter of psychoanalysis, the publicist there creates a moon of semi-sleeping.

³³ Interview by Karl Hamerlinck published in *Comœdia* at the beginning of 1933.

³⁴ *Le Petit Radio* #260 of April 2nd 1932, p. 6 “En lisant nos confrères : l’art radiophonique”.

³⁵ *Radio-Magazine* #405 of July 19th 1931, p. 3: “Radio-Paris 1931”.

³⁶ *Radio-Magazine* #404 of July 12th 1931, p. 4: “Radio-Paris 1931”.

³⁷ *Le Radiogramme de Toulouse* #290 of May 25th 1930 : “La valeur musicale des émissions”.

³⁸ *Le Petit Radio* #258 of March 19th 1932, p. 5: “Un art radiophonique (M. Fernand Divoire)”.

conditions, the would-be fuel of creation, are only temporary! Throughout the thirties, the implicit point is who does radio belongs to, and how could it be used.

III – FRENCH AND CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS FUEL FRENCH STATIONS

In these debates, there is no doubt that opera composers, at the margin of the opportunities brought by the medium, plead for a broadcasting art, which promotes a fresh arrangement between speech and music. But how can they find their way? What do the samplings of musical programs tell us about that?

3.1 COMPOSERS MOSTLY MENTIONED IN RECORDS CONCERTS AND RECITALS

The monitoring of lyrical productions was not very fruitful. Though none of the mentions concerns renowned authors such as Wolfgang Komgold, Paul Dessau, Hanns Eisler, or Karl Orff, the single mention of Paul Hindemith is a “causerie musicale” (musical lecture) on Radio-Paris in 1939³⁹. As for Kurt Weill, he’s mentioned only once, on Radio-Paris on Sunday June 25th 1933, on the occasion of a broadcasting of an extract of *The Three-Penny Opera*. In this program entitled “records concert”, a genre that often consist of absurd mixings, the work is squeezed between Józef Zygmunt Szulc’s *Sidonie Panache* and Schumann’s *Rêverie*.

Georges Auric’s name, for instance, appears at the end of the decade in the programs of Radio-Paris. He is mentioned three times, during a vocal recital (including *Fête galante*), a piano recital (including *Two pastorals*) and a symphonic program of music said to be “light and varied”, like very often broadcasted through records, and interspersed with some vocal pieces such as *Fête galante*. Arthur Honegger is mentioned 27 times and almost every year, including 22 times on Radio-Paris. His most often broadcasted works are *Les Aventures du roi Pausole*, *La Pastorale d’été* and *Le Roi David*. We should mention that on Monday June 20th 1938, the private station Radio-Cité proposes a program entitled “Honegger Festival”, which includes the broadcasting of a recording of *Rugby* conducted by the author. Darius Milhaud, also present every year in our sampling, is mentioned 34 times as a composer⁴⁰ (including 28 times on Radio-Paris), once as a conductor and once as a pianist⁴¹. A very rare fact in our corpus, his piece *Saudade do Brazil* is broadcasted the same day (Thursday June 15th 1939, both on Radio-Cité and Radio-Paris. Francis Poulenc, finally, who also appears almost every year, is broadcasted 19 times on Radio-Paris and once on Radio-LL, in programs of symphonic concerts, recitals and chamber music. Although his orchestral piece from 1923 entitled *Les Biches* is the most repeated work, one can find a rather wide and diversified spectrum of his production. We should mention that works by the last three composers are gathered during a *causerie musicale* entitled “*Histoire de la Mélodie française, par Gustave*

³⁹ Causerie musicale, by A. Huth : "Hindemith". On Monday June 12th 1939 on Radio-Paris.

⁴⁰ During the program of Tuesday June 15th 1937 on Radio-Paris entitled “*Œuvres dirigées par leurs auteurs*” where one could hear after Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht’ *Nurseries* (under his conduction) his work *Les Songes*.

⁴¹ Radio-Paris on Thursday September 3rd 1937 : Works by Darius Milhaud : "a) *Chant de délivrance* ; b) *Les amours de Ronsard* ; *Printemps*, piano par l’auteur ; *Les songes*."

Samazeuilh, avec Germaine Lubin” with, among other pieces explained and performed: *Chant de la nourrice* (Milhaud) ; *Au vif* (Poulenc) ; *Chanson de fol* (Honegger).

In our computation of broadcasting programs, the only contribution that we could link to a specific broadcasting purpose is that of a certain Maurice Franck (1897-1983). On Saturday June 13th 1931, within the frame of the weekly program “*Les Ondes Infantines*”, subtitled that day: “Second visit to the colonial exhibition”, the program mentions: “*Les 6000 aïeux de la princesse Parfum-du-Ciel, pièce en un acte de Mme Blanc Péridier, musique de Maurice Franck*”. This is the only mention of this composer, whose celebrity will probably not have overspanned his lifetime and the broadcasting sector. Moreover, he isn’t an exception in the matter, since 1,168 out of the 1,752 authors of our general index, often unknown of the public and musicologists appear, like him, only once in the sampling of the decade.

This is why a very small part of scenarised or at least musically illustrated works could be pointed out in our program schedules. The quasi absence of specifically broadcasting pieces can, however, be explained by two reasons. On the one hand, without any genuine visibility on the contents of the works, we estimated that it wasn’t relevant to enter theatre works, some of which combine texts and music, into the totals of the musical programs. On the other hand, over the number of titles mentioned in the programs, some could belong to those specific works. This is especially the case of the excerpt from the play *Tam-tam*, whose music was written by Henri Tomasi. Mentioned on Tuesday June 29th 1937 in a program of Radio-Paris and entitled “*musique coloniale*”, the piece entitled *Tam-tam* is in fact issued from one of the broadcasting creations that we are interested in.

3.2 HENRI TOMASI AND THE BROADCASTING OF TAM-TAM

On June 13th 1933, the *Radiodiffusion* network produces the very first federal broadcasting creation (that is to say simultaneously on part of or on the whole of the government stations) of *Tam-tam*,” by Julien Maigret. In *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* of July 8th 1933, critic Pierre Descaves declares that he is sure that this work, whose action is located in the heart of Africa “*is going to mark the annals of French broadcasting [with] its demoniac cannibals, its stabbing dances, its heavy atmosphere, and its mysterious grandeur.*”

It all had begun with the creation, in January 1931, of *Le Poste Colonial* (1931 – 1935), a government station on short waves inspired by Maréchal Lyautey, which was to be inaugurated the same year within the frame of the *Exposition coloniale*⁴². Julien Maigret, a former broadcasting reporter who had a long African experience, was the first manager. Beside the programs dedicated to French expatriates in Asia, Africa and South America, Julien Maigret particularly targets the quality of two other elements of the programs: concerts and theatre, both broadcasted weekly. For the concerts, he appointed conductor and composer Henri Tomasi (1901 – 1971), “*Premier Prix du Conservatoire de Paris*” and “*Second Grand Prix de Rome*”. A Corsican by origin, a Mediterranean in his soul, he could adapt to any style and was to compose broadcasting works. The band, which totalized 35 musicians, was flexible, from a quintet to a whole grand orchestra.

⁴² It was transferred after the exhibition held in the *Bois de Vincennes*, to 98bis Bld Haussmann. Concerning the *Poste colonial* as a whole, one can read the report dedicated to this station in *Les Cahiers d’Histoire de la Radiodiffusion*, juillet 1991, p. 11-56.

From the moment Radio-Paris, renamed “*Le Poste national*”, entered the network of the government stations, Tomasi appeared in our computation not only as a composer, but also as a conductor. For example, on Monday June 1st 1936, he conducts a concert of *Orchestre symphonique de Paris* relayed from the TSF exhibition, including one of his own pieces entitled *Ô Ciuciarella*.

By the diversity of his works, and the diversity of the repertoire that he conducted, we placed him among the “cultural passers” in our index of authors and performers, that is to say at the intersection of several aesthetics, sometimes midway between sophisticated and popular cultures. As an example, his *Ô Ciuciarella*, inspired from a Corsican melody, which appears to have been very often broadcasted during the decade, was even performed by Tino Rossi. As a conductor, he conducted Aubert, Saint-Saëns, Gluck, Massenet, Wagner, as well as Vincent Scotto (the friend with whom he was to compose the music of the movie *Colomba* which offered José Luccioni a great role) and his own works. This activity as orchestra conductor was to take him round everywhere in Europe.

According to the site of the friends of Henri Tomasi, he was a “*composer abundantly performed and broadcasted when he was alive and unfairly forgotten, at least in France.*”⁴³ Like Jules Verne, a motionless traveler (if possible), Tomasi was a master in the art of those imaginary voyages so well described by critic and musicologist José Bruyr:

“*Twenty bars are enough for me to land in Brazil, Cambodia, Japan, on an African vermillion beach, or in a lunar clearing with tam-tam beating all around.*”⁴⁴”

Speaking of tam-tam, the piece that we are interested in is mentioned among those which testify, in their inspiration, of the “*encounter of other beings, diverse and yet alike in their interrogation face to life and death, face to their human condition.*” Curiously, the “*sketch lyrique en deux actes*” *Tam-tam* is not listed among the seven broadcasting pieces of the catalogue, which are all qualified as: “*conceived for musically accompanying radio productions that are not dedicated to concert.*”⁴⁵”

Anyway, this drama, the arrangement of a novel that Julien Maigret had published in 1927, was therefore created on June 13th 1933 on Radio-Paris and *Le Poste Colonial* in a technical transmission by the author. Composed by Henri Tomasi, the music is used in narrow association with the text. Many years later, the argument may appear to be a little melodramatic. Here is a brief summary: a black common-law wife, conceited, awkwardly hurt by her white partner, a brutal post manager at Ubangi, asks her tribe for a revenge. The convicted man hears the approaching tam-tam without understanding that it announces his imminent murder by cannibals. All the interest seems to hinge on the increase of the dramatic tension and the strangeness of the atmosphere, served by the suggestive strength of the broadcasting technique. According to Pierre Descaves, this was a genuine “classic” of broadcasted drama. The work was to be broadcasted twice during the following years (Radio-Paris on October 21st 1936, and Radiodiffusion Nationale on January 5th 1942). On announcing a new broadcasting on Radio-Paris on October 18th 1936 *Radio Magazine* will write:

⁴³ <http://www.henri-tomasi.asso.fr>, consultation of August 2011.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

“*M. Henri Tomasi’s score is hugely adapted to the cruel mood of [the evocation of the imminent killing of a convicted man by the cannibals]. In this way it has already been all over Europe. On a background of strange soundings where the rhythm of the tam-tamis progressively amplified, one can hear worrying calls. The principal episodes of the play are fortunately marked by a nostalgic tango, ‘Disillusion’, a foxtrot ‘Whisky’, and a ‘Song of the sands’ full of highly credible exoticism.*”

As a conclusion, we can say that the survey of the broadcasting of the thirties, carried out under the angle of a sampling of musical programs, proves the strong presence on the waves of the works of contemporary composers. This is also the case of the lyrical genre, as an element of classical music, a hegemonic style, omnipresent all over the decade. Still, this computation hardly unveils which musical collaborations were brought about by the medium. On the contrary, the talks that the specialized press reports underline the controversies sparked off by a music strictly tailored for the radio. Those productions are emerging on a background of underlying debates, among which the crises of the lyrical theatres and the purpose of an acculturation of masses through the radio. We however shouldn’t conclude that broadcasting music (“*musique radiogénique*”) or any type of broadcasting creation were marginal in the musical broadcasting of the thirties. In our quest of a better understanding of what were the musical partnerships born in the mass media, we simply suggest to enter the survey through the catalogue of the composers and their biographies, such as what we did about Henri Tomasi and his contribution to the broadcasting work *Tam-tam*. We feel anyway that researches should be oriented toward the composers who, particularly from the fifties onward, dedicated all or part of their career to radio, following the tracks of *Le Club d’Essai*. We obviously think of Pierre Schaeffer, but also of Henry Dutilleux, who (this is less known) spent about ten years in the musical illustration department of Radio Nationale⁴⁶.

Many thanks to Gérard Hocmard for his help with the language issues.

⁴⁶ Christophe Bennet, “*La musique à la RTF : Henri Dutilleux et le service des illustrations musicales*”, in *Les Cahiers d’Histoire de la Radiodiffusion*, #89, l’année radiophonique 1956, juillet-septembre 2006, p. 157-161.