Musical Culture and Society in Paris, 1830-1900

G46.2530

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This course explores the diversity of musical life in Paris from the end of the Restoration through the turn of the 20th century. It examines the social and historical contexts that affected musical performance, musical repertory and musical thought from the July Monarchy to the turn of the twentieth century. The professional culture of art music is foregrounded, but there are also sessions on working-class music and amateur music-making. Seminars early in the course focus on the structures of musical life and on specific repertories (opera, piano music and instrumental music, for instance). Later seminars broaden into discussions of some of the most important themes which characterise this musical period: issues of nationalism, heritage/identity, gender and the formation of a canon of ‘masterworks’. Two seminars act as historical reference points: the first on the Romantic generation, and a second on musical life around 1900. A central paradox emerges from the course: given that Paris was one, if not the centre of musical activity throughout the century, why did the Parisian intelligentsia suffer a severe lack of confidence in their own culture?

Students do not need to have a university-level training in Music to follow this course successfully, since it centres on the importance of institutions and ideas in the shaping of a musical culture. Very few of the required readings contain music examples. Nevertheless, an active interest in music of the Western classical tradition (and not necessarily French music of the nineteenth century) will be an advantage to students. Secondary source readings as outlined below will be supplemented by primary materials discussed in seminars. During the course we will focus on the importance of close reading of these primary documents, to extract as much evidence as possible about what they reveal of attitudes towards musical culture.

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In the lists of reading that follow, asterisked items are required reading for each seminar (and have been provided as photocopied offprints); other items are complementary material to which I shall sometimes refer in seminars, and which may be useful to you in the preparation of two written assignments, details of which will be made available at the start of the course.

Seminar 1 10 September Nineteenth-century Paris as a cultural centre
This seminar sets the scene, explaining the ‘map’ of musical activity in Western Europe during the period, and the map of musical Paris. It also explores the various regimes under which musicians worked, and introduces the issues that will characterise the course.
Seminar 2 17 September The structures (and strictures) of musical life
This seminar addresses a central question: what factors shaped musical life and/or constrained musical entrepreneurs? Some originated with the State (France was an extremely bureaucratic society); others were financial, social or aesthetic.

Seminar 3 24 September Opera and the national theatres
Despite increasing concert activity during the period, opera remained the central focus of professional musical life in Paris. This seminar focuses on its function within Parisian society, analysing the nature of its repertories and its audiences, and seeking to explain its dominant place in the minds of aspirant composers.
Macdonald, Hugh: ‘From opéra-comique to opéra-sérieux’, Rivista di musicologià, 16 (1993), 1-9
Patureau, Frédérique: La palais Garnier dans la société parisienne, 1875-1914 (Sprimont: Pierre Mardaga, 1991)

Seminar 4 1 October Concert life
Concert life embraced wealthy amateur and professional traditions alike. In this seminar we consider the evolution of concert life throughout the period, and its contribution to the establishment of a canon of ‘master’ musicians.
Seminar 5 8 October Virtuosity and domesticity: the centrality of the piano

The piano represented the height of instrument technology in a field where the French were pre-eminent (until 1867). It was central to the definition of the ‘virtuoso’ recitalist during the period, but also functioned in the domestic sphere as a medium for the expression of female social accomplishments.


Seminar 6 15 October The Romantic generation

This seminar focuses on the inter-relations between artists, musicians and novelists during the 1830s and ‘40s, Romantic images of the artist in French writings, and music’s close relationship with other arts.


Seminar 7 22 October Critics and the shaping of musical taste

The 1830s saw the first signs of a healthy market for a specifically musical press. Critics working for newspapers and specialist journals alike had considerable influence on musical tastes, irrespective of whether they set out to ‘educate’ the public or not. This seminar analyses the fraught, politically-charged and sometimes corrupt relationship between composers, performers and the press.

*Spies, André Michael: Opera, State and Society in the Third Republic, 1875-1914 (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 139-64

Seminar 8 29 October Music for the masses

Wealthy amateurs had their choral societies and Sociétés Philharmoniques; the equivalent, for men of the artisan and working classes, was the ‘orphéon’ society. This seminar explores how a culture was created for the lower classes by their social superiors, as an attempt both to civilise and control them.

Seminar 9 5 November Women as professional musicians
Women faced particular obstacles when they left the amateur arena to follow careers in music. Social convention limited the instruments they could play, and their work was publicly judged almost exclusively by men. This seminar explores the implications of a woman’s decision to become a professional musician in nineteenth-century Paris.

Seminar 10 12 November Nationalism
Nationalisms of different hues were particularly apparent in Paris after the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune. This seminar concentrates on the post-war period, analysing several cases of nationalist activity aimed at promoting/elevating the status of French musical culture in the eyes of the French themselves, and the outside world.
*Duchesneau, Michel: L’avant-garde musicale à Paris de 1871 à 1939 (Sprimont: Pierre Mardaga, 1997), 15-30

Seminar 11 19 November Wagnerism
Wagner, who never had an operatic success in Paris during his lifetime, nevertheless became an icon after his death. In this seminar we trace the history of Wagnerian (and anti-Wagnerian) activity during the period, focusing especially on the 1880s, when Wagnerism was at its height.

Seminar 12 26 November Early Music, Heritage and Identity
This seminar discusses the return to early French music as a nationalist phenomenon which took place partly in reaction to perceptions of German domination after 1870.

Seminar 13 3 December Snapshot: c1900
This seminar examines the diversity of musical life around the year 1900 (when Paris staged another Exposition Universelle). At this point in the course its role is to help illuminate the continuities and contrasts between musical culture (and attitudes) of the 1830s and those of the fin de siècle.


Seminar 14 10 December Conclusion: explaining continuity and change, 1830-1900
Student position statements and general discussion. No required reading.

Select Bibliography

Secondary Sources (general)
Citron, Marcia J.: Gender and the Musical Canon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
Mussat, Marie-Claire, Jean Mongrédien & Jean-Michel Nectou (eds.): Échos de France & d’Italie: liber amicorum
Yves Gérard, ed. (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1997)
Sabatier, François: Miroirs de la musique: la musique et ses correspondances avec la littérature et les beaux-arts. XIXe-
XXe siècles, vol. 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1995)
Schneider, Herbert, & Nicole Wild (eds.): Die Opera Comique und ihr Einfluss auf das Europaïsche Musiktheater im 19.
Jahrhundert (Hildesheim, Zürich & New York: Georg Olms, 1997)
Books, 1986)
Williams, Adrian: Portrait of Liszt by Himself and his Contemporaries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

Secondary Sources (1830-1870)
Atwood, William G.: The Parisian Worlds of Frédéric Chopin (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999 [to be
used extra sceptically])
Bloom, Peter (ed.): Music in Paris in the 1830s (Stuyvesant: Pendragon, 1987)
Bloom, Peter (ed.): The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
Campos, Rémy: La renaissance introuvable? Entre curiosité et militantisme: la Société des concerts de musique vocale
religieuse et classique du prince de la Moskowa (1843-1846) (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000)
Press, 1983)
Dale, Catherine: ‘The Mirror of Romanticism: Images of Music, Religion, and Art Criticism in George Sand’s
Donakowski, Conrad: A Muse for the Masses: Ritual and Music in an Age of Democratic Revolution, 1770-1870
(Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1972)
Ellis, Katharine: Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: ‘La revue et gazette musicale de Paris’ 1834-1880
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
Musicological Society, 50 (1997), 353-85
Musical Association, 124 (2009), 226-54
Haar, James: ‘Berlioz and the “First Opera”’, 19th Century Music, 3 (1979-80)


Secondary Sources (post-1870)
Duchesneau, Michel: L’avant-garde musicale à Paris de 1871 à 1939 (Sprimont: Pierre Mardaga, 1997)
& Harry White (Cork: Cork University Press, forthcoming [typescript])


Patureau, Frédérique: La palais Garnier dans la société parisienne, 1875-1914 (Sprimont: Pierre Mardaga, 1991)


