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FRENCH CULTURAL POLITICS & MUSIC

From the Dreyfus Affair
to the First World War

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INTRODUCTION

This book is about a phenomenon of central importance to cultural studies and, as such, to current attempts to situate musical culture within a historical landscape. Its subject is the "invasion" of one cultural area or field by another—in this case the *occupation* of French musical culture by political culture at the turn of the century.

As this volume demonstrates, the impact of the phenomenon was both broad and profound: it affected all aspects of French musical culture, which reacted back on political culture itself. Hence, as opposed to existing music histories, it argues not only that this political penetration occurred but also that perceiving it opens new perspectives on contemporary French musical semiotics and values; meanings and priorities we have previously construed as "purely aesthetic," autonomous, or related to the inner dynamics of the art and the field were, rather, freighted with ideological significance. Underlying this conviction lies the premise that in order to comprehend this fact we must reexamine the transformation of French political culture during and after the Dreyfus Affair.

Historians of France have long established the ideological roots of the Dreyfus Affair, or the enduring conflicts it articulated and that helped to imbue it with the power of myth. Extending back to the French Revolution, they lay specifically in what Timothy Tackett has referred to aptly as the "tragic flaw at the core of the first revolutionary settlement" (p. 313). Although Enlightenment ideals had tri-

umphed, they were not founded on complete consensus, especially concerning models of government or the relation between Church and State: the counterrevolution implacably kept both of these sensitive issues alive—conflicts henceforth embedded in postrevolutionary France, ready to explode in the right political compound. This occurred once again in the late nineteenth century, when the Boulanger and the Panama scandals helped incite antiparliamentary and anti-Semitic sentiments, formulating the chemistry that the affair would ignite.

Myriad histories have narrated the events that constituted the Dreyfus Affair and established their role in helping to transform contemporary political culture in France. Succinctly, in 1894 a Jewish captain in the army, Alfred Dreyfus, was summarily convicted in a court-martial of selling French military secrets to the Germans. Public opinion was at first solidly in support of the army's conclusions, but in 1896 the chief of intelligence, Colonel Picquart, discovered exculpatory evidence: it implicated not Alfred Dreyfus but rather a Major Esterhazy, who was subsequently tried but ultimately acquitted by French army authorities.

At this point, Dreyfus's brother, Mathieu, contacted Emile Zola, the prominent novelist, whose interest in Republican politics was, by now, widely known; Zola, perceiving a miscarriage of justice replete with far greater implications, determined, with the temerity of a renowned public figure, to bring the scandalous "affair" to light. In 1898, with shrewd effrontery, he published an open letter to the president of the Republic, consisting of a litany of charges, all beginning with the words "J'accuse" (I accuse). It resulted in an indictment for libel. Zola's subsequent publicized trial and conviction, while compelling him to flee for England, expanded the arena of the "Dreyfus Affair."

Now in the public sphere, it seized the attention and spurred the engagement of not only major political but intellectual and literary figures on both sides of the question. They, like Zola, recast the issues as a referendum on those that had bifurcated France since the Revolution, and particularly since the birth of the Third Republic in 1870: Did "tradition" and the rights of the State take precedence over those of the individual citizen? Did those of the army outweigh civil authority, even if the former were found in error? Two conceptions of France baldly confronted each other once more, as they had in 1789 and have periodically ever since. One maintained the incontrovertible authority of the army, the Church, and the nation, while the other implacably asserted the judicial and egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution. New tactics of political organization and direct intervention immediately spawned to mobilize individuals and groups for alignment on each side of the incendiary ideological questions: political leagues, demonstrations, and petitions now thrust their way into French public life, politicizing new social groups and rending most sectors of society in France.¹

Strenuous ideological combat did not subside with the "closure" of the Dreyfus Affair—the presidential pardon of Dreyfus in 1899, followed by his exoneration in 1906. Defeated French nationalists refused to concede and pertinaciously continued the fight through two of the leagues that survived by refocusing their aims—the Ligue de la Patrie Française and the Action Française.² These leagues did share certain features with others (of the Right) that were born of the Dreyfus

the Ligue anti-Sémitique: as opposed to political parties, which proposed a "global" program, or an ideological blueprint for society, leagues were distinguished by their strictly limited political aims. They wished to "destabilize" the government, believing the parliament to protect special interests, thus to be guilty of corruption as well as irresponsibly negligent of the French electorate. In search of a more unified society, they rejected political parties as too divisive and embraced anti-Semitism, perceiving Jews as yet another factor in the loss of community. And, finally, unlike parties, which they held were incapable of articulating public opinion or aspirations, the leagues advocated "direct action"—mobilization of the "masses," both metaphorically and in the streets.³

What distinguished the Ligue de la Patrie Française was, first, a more specific ideological goal, despite an absence of the doctrinal coherence that would appear with the Action Française.⁴ The other distinguishing factors of the league (as well as of the Action Française) were its membership, the nature of its "program," and the kind of impact it would have. Both leagues were conceived by an intellectual elite and, despite their more limited membership, acted as "zones of high ideological pressure," influential in the circulation of French nationalist ideology.⁵ But most significant here is that both now turned to the domain of culture in order, legally, to prolong the war over contestatory conceptions of essential French values. Cultural criticism thus became for them a form of political intervention and action, a means to articulate and indirectly diffuse their conceptions of the "authentic essence" of France. The Patrie Française, moreover, sought to prove that the Left had no monopoly on "intelligence" and hence recruited those brilliant intellectual personalities who seemed sympathetic to its point of view.⁶

Prominent in both leagues were writers, or those whose major concern was the arts, particularly Maurice Barrès (in the Patrie Française) and Charles Maurras (in the Action Française).⁷ Political and literary historians have amply established the conceptual connection that these thinkers and their followers helped to forge between French nationalist ideology and artistic values.⁸ Most recently, David Carroll has emphasized the central and seminal nationalist conception of the culturally unified nation as the cognate of a great work of art. For Barrès and Maurras, politics and art were to be imbued with the same "national spirit," from which each was originally born, and which inherently endowed them with an identical nature.⁹ As Carroll observes, for Maurras the strength of the nation, its fundamental unifying principle, was determined by history and supported by tradition in a manner analogous to great art. Hence, literature, for the far Right, would become "the principal model and support of politics," expressive of "the ideal form and fundamental nature of the national community and the people."¹⁰

Maurice Barrès placed consistent emphasis on the tight imbrication of nationalist politics and art, stressing in particular the role of art in "the mythologizing" of the nation. For Barrès as well as for Maurras, revolution in culture (including the arts) was no less than essential—a prerequisite for the return to an endemic state, organically at one with the nation. Both authors were henceforth to be central in what Carroll has termed the fascist "aestheticizing of politics," which would concomitantly contribute to the further politicizing of art in

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The impact of such nationalist theories was by no means limited to politics and literature in France: the two leagues strove to implement them throughout French culture, with ramifications we have not yet fully appreciated. This they were able to do through various new networks of communication and "sociability," such as journals, publishing houses, and several prestigious Parisian salons. These all facilitated the circulation of nationalist doctrine throughout the arts, as well as its common vocabulary and its distinctive set of metaphors and historical references.¹² Historians of art have recently begun to address the intriguing question of how this nationalist "campaign" helped to transform the criteria of aesthetic legitimacy and thus critical standards. As they have shown, well before World War I art critics and nationalist writers were applying such politicized conceptions, and thus subtly shaping aesthetic direction in art: throughout the decade preceding the war, the conceptual and aesthetic terrain was being prepared for a return to tradition and an elevation of classicism as the French "national style."¹³

Analysis of the impact of nationalist cultural initiatives on music is only beginning, and it is the goal of this book to reveal how profoundly the field was, in fact, affected.¹⁴ As I shall demonstrate, not only was the musical world "invaded" as a part of the cultural aggression of these two leagues after the Dreyfus Affair—the Republic "had" to respond. In this manner the field of music was penetrated by political ideology so overtly and directly that it indeed recalls the politicization of music during the French Revolution.¹⁵

Distinctive in music was the institutional dimension. To a greater extent than in other cultural fields, professional training and thus "consecration" in music was dominated by a state institution. The Conservatoire National de Musique controlled "legitimate" education in music, but it now found itself confronted by a nationalist challenger in the form of the Schola Cantorum. The latter's eventual director, Vincent d'Indy, was a prominent member of the Ligue de la Patrie Française, and through the school he set about establishing a musical culture in systematic opposition: he marshaled the prestige and resources of the league and took advantage of the widespread perception of the pedagogical limitations of the Conservatoire in order to legitimize his own school of music. The resulting institutional opposition was eventually to generate a structural opposition, at once both professional and ideological, that would gradually pervade the French musical world; each side would produce its own compositional groupings and find supporters not only in the press and salons but through the official, academic world or through the cognate nationalist "institutes."

The Schola Cantorum did not just define a specific range of musical values that it considered to be "national"; it established a "code" that associated these values with genres, styles, repertoires, and techniques. Hence, while literature diffused nationalist "ideas," as embodied creatively in fictional form, and the visual arts engaged with politically charged images, music opened up another powerful realm:¹⁶ it "manifested" nationalist values through a potent symbolism that was inherently bivocal—that is, simultaneously resonant in invoking the fields of

Music was valuable as a symbol, for these nationalist leagues were well aware of all it could evoke when framed by a discourse that imbued it with ideological meaning: it could engage the realm of what Freud refers to as "primary process thought," or what is associated with "projection, fantasy, and the incorporation of disparate ideas."¹⁷ Hence, it was particularly useful for the French nationalist Right in this period because, as such, it was inherently immune to conventional rational Republican critique. The Republic, which to this point had largely neglected to imprint its values through music, now responded in kind, making it an agent in the battle over political-symbolic domination.¹⁸ The "war" would bifurcate French music, which, far from being monolithic and dominated by "impressionism," was sundered by aesthetic-ideological disputes, a phenomenon that our histories have too often dismissed.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Part I of this study analyzes the process through which French music was pulled into the cultural war launched by these nationalist leagues as a response to their defeat in the Dreyfus Affair. Temporally, it concerns the period between 1899 and 1905, under the anticlerical ministry of Waldeck-Rousseau, a coalition of Radical-Socialists, Socialists, and Moderates.¹⁹ Its central concern is the institutional opposition, how it developed and spread throughout the French musical world, and how this structure of confrontation and the stylistic codes it created affected the music taught, supported, performed, and composed.

Chapter 1 examines the Schola, and particularly the resonant new discourse it developed, one that transcended political abstractions and evocatively conflated political, religious, and aesthetic dimensions. It reveals, in particular, not only how closely d'Indy's ideas mirrored those of Barrès but also how they generated the code that associated them with genres, styles, repertoires, and techniques. The chapter then turns to how the Republic first responded through the intermediary of the Dreyfusard composer Alfred Bruneau, who forged a Republican discourse for the musical programs of the 1900 Exposition; it traces how opposing political values thus articulated with aesthetic oppositions and analyzes the symbolic structure of this ideological confrontation, or the stylistic and formal qualities that encoded it. From here it examines the networks through which supporters on both sides of the battle disseminated the doctrines and codes of the warring institutions, affecting the musical culture at large.

Concomitantly, chapter 1 reveals that arguments over canonicity were central in these disputes, involving partisan scholars and critics in addition to institutions that were henceforth locked in battle. Moreover, in contrast to the Conservatoire, the Schola created a canon that was not just used for pedagogical study but publicly performed, framed by a discourse that explained its political significance. As this chapter demonstrates, the French university system soon responded to the Schola's challenge in music history and the canon, leading to the flourishing of musicology in France.

directly to the battle or to the growing politicization they experienced throughout French musical culture. It reveals the impact of the Dreyfus Affair on the way in which French musicians conceived their role—as engaged intellectuals—joining political parties or participating in associated projects and journals. As it further demonstrates, some reacted by consciously employing new politicized meanings; others found that their works, conceived outside these codes, were nevertheless construed within their framework.

D'Indy, in the first case, responded not only through his pedagogy at the Schola Cantorum, but also through specific compositions that were intended to encode an anti-Dreyfusard ideological message. But such was not the case with the politically active composer Gustave Charpentier, who found that the message he had intended in his earlier naturalist opera *Louise* was misconstrued in this context. Chapter 2 analyzes the gulf between his attempt in this work at a multi-layered projection of his own psychosocial condition and its interpretation as Dreyfusard, on the basis of subject and style. As it demonstrates, the work's inherent polyvalence was temporarily and unfortunately fixed and, thus, its message distorted within this framework of signification; for naturalism in opera had become associated with a Dreyfusard stance because of the operatic collaboration of Emile Zola and Alfred Bruneau.

By focusing on stylistic codes of meaning as understood within the period, this study seeks to avoid imputing political meanings on the basis of our current perceptions of political homologies or metaphors. Such an "essentialist" approach (which posits an absolute connection between style and ideology, ignoring the political valences of styles in different contexts) must be replaced by the historical and anthropological study of meaning.²⁰ We must attempt to excavate the systems of meaning in which specific works were both conceived by composers and then understood by audiences of the time—which were not necessarily identical. In the case of *Louise*, we shall find that the two were indeed substantially different; moreover, the context of performance played a central role in determining how the contemporary public and critics "read" the work. Presented with the support of the Republic, at one of its theaters shortly after the Affair, the highly personal message of *Louise* was submerged by the context, which skewed it ideologically. As this book demonstrates, although politics was not always present in the messages or modes of communication of the music, it affected conditions of both presentation and reception.

Chapter 2 further demonstrates (as does chapter 4) that the relation between music and ideological meaning was mutable—transformable through the political, intellectual context, as well as through the dynamics of performance. Not only could different systems of meaning be applied in interpretation, but the manner, venue, and political context of presentation could play a politically semantic role. This was true of contemporary French music, but also of the canon or the "classics," particularly those of Rameau and Beethoven, as we see in chapters 1 and 3. Traditional "reception history," centered on the "horizons of expectation" of a given audience, cannot account for such factors in a performing art such as music. A central goal of this book is to show how the political and cultural

nificance was constructed, on all its levels, by contemporaries. Certainly, we cannot ignore the inherent qualities of the work or text, but we must strive to understand what could credibly be done with it by different groups under certain circumstances.²¹

Chapter 2 goes on to explore the case of other composers, like Albéric Magnard, who were equally victimized by a politicized culture that misread or refused to register their message. Magnard emphatically declined to accept the dominant codes of meaning and attempted to articulate a Dreyfusard message, using what was considered an "anti-Dreyfusard style." Finally, chapter 2 examines responses to the pervasive politicization in other aspects and venues of the musical world including repertoire choices, official subventions, and musical journalism. As it shows, the same codes of meaning were at work throughout these domains: no aspect of French musical culture was spared from the battle waged by the two nationalist leagues.

Part II concerns the escalation and the further ramifications of this battle as new groupings publicly entered the political-cultural arena between 1905 and the advent of the war. Temporally it begins with the dissolution of Emile Combes' ministry and its anticlerical program, which was followed by a more conservative collaboration of Radicals and Moderates in the new government. Within this changed political context, chapter 3 explores how the existing aesthetic-political discourses were addressed by others that were tied to new French ideological positions; specifically, it examines the new musical programs that emerged with the unification of the "internationalist" French Socialist Party, as well as the points of emphasis that it introduced into the political-cultural dialogue. Just as important it considers the response of those who were dissatisfied with both Right and Left and who joined together briefly as "National-Socialists," with their own distinctive aesthetic ideals. Prominent here, too, was the Action Française, which implacably intensified its battle not only on official culture in general but specifically on the educational system, which included the Conservatoire.

Chapter 3 also examines how the government responded to this damaging assault on its legitimacy through a thorough reform of its own national conservatory of music. As we shall see, the Republic, in spite of the Conservatoire's institutional inertia, finally brought about badly needed changes because of the symbolic challenge of the Schola and its many advocates; however, its new director Gabriel Fauré, had to balance these reforms (largely drawn, if modified, from the Schola) with values that resonated symbolically with the Republic's own political ideas. Again, the translation from political concepts to musical principles is not transparent, for it had to do with opposition to the Schola, as well as with the Conservatoire's social role and traditions.

Important here were journalists and writers on music, who entered the battle of the two institutions and their associated compositional factions, now called "chappelles." As this chapter demonstrates, they perceptively analyzed the interests that lay beneath each, drawing an explicit connection, as they perceived it, between musical taste and French political ideologies: moreover they astutely

professional and political stakes were inseparable: aesthetic groupings were instinct with ideological dimensions, drawing their support from the government or its opponents, which even partisan critics could see.

Finally, as this chapter illuminates, the symbolic battle was being fought through various controversies or skirmishes between the warring compositional schools or "chapelles." These disputes, again, no longer transparent or consistent in their logic today, refracted ideological oppositions through the prism of French musical and aesthetic issues. Here it is also important to note that such altercations were closely related to, and in some cases generated by, those already rending other French cultural fields. Hence, it is within this context that disputes we have not perceived as ideologically charged emerge as fraught with value-tensions that were inseparably bound to the political world. As this study thus consistently argues, it is impossible fully to grasp this musical culture—its practices, codes, comportment, and discourses—apart from the political culture that impinged upon it.²²

Chapter 4 returns to the responses of composers, here focusing on those most prominently implicated in cultural conflicts during the period of mounting nationalist hegemony before World War I. Of central concern to this chapter is how those composers most frequently used as symbols or exemplars by the warring schools responded to the battle, and then to nationalist dominance. It examines how they lived and worked in this culture, within its codes of meaning, its professional practices, its contentiousness, and its centralized, bellicose institutions. Here the goal is to reveal how this context helped to shape not only their careers and the reception of their works but also their professional and, in the end, certain creative decisions. It returns to the complex issue, raised in chapter 2, of how composers attempted to inscribe ideology or comment on the warring factions through their style. For they could evince an awareness of the dominant ideological and stylistic orthodoxies by employing current codes creatively, in order to define their own particular stance. One goal here is thus to establish that the semiotics of French music in this period is inseparable from this context and that understanding it helps to uncover new layers to certain works.

No French composer during this period could escape awareness of these structures of meaning or of the battles and tensions that continually subtended the litigious French musical factions. Most did not or could not retreat from politics, now such an integral part of their experience: many engaged it subtly, commenting on the situation in a variety of ways. Some did so more prominently than others during the period under scrutiny here; the latter, such as Ravel and Saint-Saëns, although important, are thus examined only in passing.²³ And since some did indeed participate publicly throughout the entire period under study, and in several different contexts, they are discussed as their roles become relevant, in several of the chapters. Again, because the subject of this study is the interaction of French musical and political cultures and its many effects, now lesser-known composers (such as Magnard, Roussel, and Ropartz) are discussed at some length.

However, of particular importance are the compositional "commentaries" of

do creatively with political symbols. While Debussy, here a central figure, grew overtly sympathetic to French nationalist ideology, he refused to adopt its aesthetic orthodoxies, instead forging a unique response. Significantly, his written and verbal discourses were not transcribed through current codes in his music although the ascription of political meaning to musical styles did influence certain of his choices. Chapter 4 stresses, in particular, the original way in which Debussy, in his later works, related symbolically to the ideas of Barrès, but in a manner far different from that of d'Indy: such ideas—and especially those of the self in relation to the collective—were for him not doctrine to be translated but rather, an impetus to his creative use of the past.

This volume thus seeks to establish that awareness of Debussy's relation to the ascribed meanings of his period can enrich our understanding of these complex, multivalent works. Clearly, not only minor works were affected by the ideological context of this musical culture fraught with bivalent political-aesthetic disputes: great works responded to these tensions, with a degree of aesthetic integrity that both relates them to and helps them transcend the politicized culture in which they were born.

Another implicit argument in this chapter is that political tensions were here not simply those of class: ideology in this period transcended class divisions, particularly with the advent of a new populist Right. This book thus participates in the more recent turn within French history from a stress on class to cultural representation and language in social formation and identity.²⁴ Debussy, as Chapter 4 reveals, indeed grew confused in his class identity and, like so many others, found refuge in a nationalist ideological stance.

Erik Satie took the political path opposite to that chosen by his friend Debussy, but he also responded originally with games about current meanings in order to say something "other." This is not to claim that Satie was necessarily supported by those with the same ideological sympathies that he often ironically professed to hold: like Debussy, he consciously sought to confound those politicized critics who would impute a factional position to him on the basis of his musical style. Hence, his polyvalent compositions were used not only by the Radical Socialist Party (which he joined) but also, in the eve of the war, by the nationalist Right he opposed. Each group "constructed" the composer by emphasizing elements in his style that it perceived plausibly to accord with its own aesthetic ideological stance. Satie's style was malleable enough to be used by even politically contestatory groups, including those whose positions he protested and that appropriated it in ideologically different ways.

Not all composers responded so creatively. D'Indy and Charpentier became obsessed with political issues and musical-political programs, if from opposite sides of the French political spectrum. Others remained caught in the middle, victims of increasingly shrill and intolerant camps that were dismayed by the seeming disjunction between their political sympathies and musical style. Chapter 4 concludes by analyzing how the ideological battle continued to rage; the first skirmish before the traditionalist victory was fought over Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*. It relates the final shift in hegemony to the loss of autonomy in French musical culture, or the inability of the professional world or field to enforce

tonomous aesthetic criteria.²⁵ In this way it seeks to explain the otherwise inexplicable, and often overlooked, return to tradition in music in France well before the First World War.

As this book seeks to establish, throughout these years French music was inextricably bound to the political culture within which it was a symbol and that affected it in multifarious ways. As a result of the initiatives of two French nationalist leagues, other political groupings in France, including the parties in power, came to recognize music's potential ideological agency. Hence, music played a significant role in the ideological and symbolic battle in France before the war, one integrally important to the political combat for French nationalist hegemony.

Cultural divisions between music and politics in this period in France are not easily made; the demarcations were much less clear than today, and the boundaries were continually blurred. To cite the words of Johan Huizinga, the task of a cultural history is to "penetrate" the historical landscape, identifying areas that touched, in an historically unique terrain. This book attempts such a task, but its concern is, ultimately, the results for "meaning" within the two spheres that touched in this period for discernible reasons—those of politics and music. For the goal of cultural history, most fundamentally, is to decipher meanings, to grasp the significations invested in symbolic forms, and it is this intent that has shaped this book.²⁶

I

THE BATTLE IS ESTABLISHED

Musicians Enter, 1898–1905