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The French genius: a sound idea?

*An Empirical Analysis of Music Criticism
and Politics in l'Action Française*

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1. Introduction

Paris during the Interbellum was a bustling cultural hub, widely described as the capital city of art and culture. The music halls of Paris were filled with the works of contemporary composers like Poulenc, Stravinsky, and Ravel. Their music could count on a receptive audience that appreciated these compositions as works of art. If their works received criticism, they would be based on musicality; tonality, melody, and technical dimension were at the centre of these reviews. Reviews like these were meant for a predominantly affluent and cultured audience, who would appreciate and understand such minute analyses.

Such reviews, which were legion in contemporary media like *La Revue musicale*, were relatively void of political commentary. However, the musical purism in these reviews was not meant to last. After all, the 1930s were plagued by political turbulence, as the Great Depression had reached France. A rising cost of living, increasing militarism in neighbouring countries and various leftist governments in France roused the dormant *ligues d'extrême droite* and brought them back to relevancy.

In order to disseminate their opinions, political organisations had their own newspapers. The newspapers and their vendors were the epicentre of the battle for public opinion. Newspaper hawkers for political newspapers were, more often than not, also members of their organisation's militant wing. Most notably, the Action Française-aligned *Camelots du Roi* acted as both newspaper vendor and paramilitary organisation and fought against 'un-French' elements on the streets of Paris, like the communist vendors who sold the editions of *L'Humanité*.

The streets of Paris and the political newspapers were obvious avenues for voicing political discontent. However, the Interbellum introduced a new outlet of politics: culture. Both right and left-leaning organisations set out to lay claim to culture in their newspapers. *L'Humanité*, for example, would review music in order to bring music to the workers, aiming to educate the masses. Action Française, on the other hand, reviewed music as a way of reinforcing a rigid social hierarchy, inoculating this elitist space against proletarian influence.

In order to understand why Action Française took it upon itself to take such a prominent position in the cultural sphere, one should understand the origins of this

ligue. L'Action Française was founded during the Dreyfus Affair, a political scandal during the *fin de siècle* that divided France. The Dreyfus Affair was, in essence, a question about the supposedly extranational loyalties of French Jews, which was then extrapolated to other unwanted minorities in France, like the Freemasons, Protestants, and Socialists. The affair was framed as an existential matter that threatened the very national spirit of France and therefore the social cohesion of French society. Although the palatability of antisemitism in French society had taken a dive during the 1920s, its appeal returned in the 1930s with the arrival of the Great Depression; economic hardship reinforced latent distrust of minorities.

Action Française, both the political party and its affiliated newspaper, was ideologically driven by the concept of integral nationalism, also known as Maurrassism. The ideology is named after Charles Maurras, who established a cohesive political ideology for Action Française. Under his spiritual guidance, the organisation built towards a monarchist, Catholic France that never experienced the subversive political developments of the French Revolution. However, the return to monarchism required a radical shift in culture and a redefinition of the French identity. To achieve this, Maurras concerned himself with the written arts, expounding on French culture in folklore, language, and politics. While Maurras was immensely influential within Action Française as a political party, the newspaper was decidedly a group effort, consisting of various writers that, by and large, adhered to the Maurrasian ideology.¹ The translation and implementation of integral nationalism to other (cultural) disciplines was taken up by other contributors of the newspaper.

The newspaper l'Action Française had always been an overtly politically driven medium and was tasked with the proliferation of integral nationalism.² The newspaper was aptly named *organe de nationalisme intégral*. The organisation understood the mobilizing potential of music, and saw the elitist monopoly on classical music wane, due to of the efforts of the Left, who claimed that classical music belonged to the French workers. The music scene of France had become the battleground for the various political factions, who were all aiming a creating or preserving their idealised national identity.

In the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair, the French republicans came to realise

¹ L. Joly, *Naissance de l'Action française : Maurice Barrès, Charles Maurras et l'extrême droite nationaliste au tournant du XXe siècle* (Paris, 2015).

² F. Huguenin, *L'Action française, une histoire intellectuelle* (Paris, 2011).

that they ought to combat the Right's attempts at harnessing culture and to protect the masses against the demagogic influences within the cultural sphere.³

Conversely, the Left's increasing interference in culture confirmed the fears of the Right and mobilised the *ligues*. Action Française could not let the Cartel des Gauches lay claim to French music unopposed. Enter the main subjects in this thesis: Dominique Sordet and Lucien Rebatet.

Their contributions in l'Action Française, concerning concerts, cinema, and gramophone recordings, would set out to reinforce existing ideas about the superiority of French classical music, and its connection to the French bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Although the both of them never received formal music training, they were experienced writers, true *mélomanes*, and, more importantly, well-versed in Maurrassian thought.⁴ Dominique Sordet, the son of the prominent military leader André Sordet, followed in his father's footsteps at the military academy Saint-Cyr, but realised his passion lie with music. Dominique Sordet was, as this thesis will show, a staunch conservative in the Maurrassian tradition. Lucien Rebatet, on the other hand, was an avowed fascist. Unlike many of his colleagues at l'Action Française, he expressed admiration for Hitler and Wagner. His views evidently did not always align with the Maurrassian party line, which is why he would also start writing for *Je Suis Partout*, a newspaper that was more comfortable with the fascist identity. Whenever the two of them did write in l'Action Française, which was at least weekly for a decade, they would vocally embody integral nationalism in the realm of the music reviews.

Although the contents of the newspaper were extreme, this did not mean that it was relegated to the periphery in the media landscape. It was the goal of the newspaper to make antisemitism and integral nationalism palatable to the greater public. At its height, which was around 1936 following the Stavisky Affair and the Veteran's Riot, the newspaper sold about 200.000 copies.⁵ For the first few decades of its existence, the focus lay on international and internal politics. However, the second half of the 1920s marked a significant shift in *L'Action Française's* content,

³ P. Coppola, *Dix-sept ans de musique à Paris, 1922-1939* (Geneva, 1982); R. Moore, *Performing Propaganda: Musical Life and Culture in Paris during the First World War* (Woodbridge, 2018).

⁴ Both Rebatet and Sordet referred to themselves and their audience as *mélomanes*. Usually, this is translated as a passion for music, but this translation lacks the 'mania' that is implied by Sordet and Rebatet.

⁵ R. Schor, *L'opinion française et les étrangers en France, 1919-1939* (Sorbonne 1985).

with a more cultural approach to world affairs. Undoubtedly, Action Française realised the mobilising potential of culture, as this dimension touched on people's lived experience. However, in integral nationalism, culture and the closely tied national identity, were an almost spiritual endeavour. The disconnect between the common Frenchman and his culture was at the root of society's ills.

From 1924 onwards, Dominique Sordet wrote weekly contributions in the newspaper l'Action Française, discussing the music's performed in Paris. His writings largely concern themselves with technique, harmony, and structure, following in the tradition of other music reviewers but writing in the defence of *haute culture*. Sordet's music endeavours were joined by Lucien Rebatet in 1929. The music review entries in l'Action Française are not to be read as mere music analyses. Through the lens of the Maurrassian concept of integral nationalism, the combined effort of Sordet and Rebatet reconnected French citizens with *la patrie* France, making their reviews a nationalist undertaking with a transcendental dimension.

As this thesis will show, music as an art form was understood by Action Française to build bridges between the lived experiences of Frenchmen and the idealised France that could be. The transient nature of music forced the audience to be present and to let them be transported to a purer world. Due to the supposed pureness of said music, there is also a pedagogic aspect to the consumption of music. Action Française understood music as a medium that informed the listener of the way the world could and should be, if one reconnected to the French spirit. Music was therefore an artform that was uniquely equipped to serve the purposes of Action Française's reimagining of French society.

The preferred art form of Action Française was the symphonic and chamber music instrumentaria. These were descended from music practices of the European courts and palaces of the 17th century. Its origins were evidently elitist, and it remained a favoured pastime of the aristocracy. However, the aristocratic monopoly on high art music was being challenged. The composers of the neoclassical and romantic arrangements were using increasingly more musicians in their compositions. This was a result of the Industrial Revolution, which shifted the music genre from courtly palaces to concert halls in booming cities, opening their doors to

an emerging middle class.⁶ These music halls were growing in size to accommodate the rising popularity among a significantly larger demographic, which, in turn, meant that orchestras needed to have a higher sonic output to fill the large halls.

If anything, the elitist character of the orchestra becomes glaringly clear through the lens of labour division. All members of the symphonic orchestra - which usually consists of seventy to a hundred musicians - are highly skilled performers. Orchestras are highly hierarchical organisations, with the conductor, aptly named maestro, taking the reins. The hierarchy was borne from necessity, after all, someone has to take the lead and have the other musicians play the correct notes in the correct rhythm. This necessary hierarchy was then institutionalised, with the first violins taking the crown and other instrumental sections inserting themselves within said hierarchy.

Given that Action Française's approach to music was a reinforcement of existing hierarchies, which underscores the social value of consuming music, being *seen* at music halls or concerts was just as important than the individual's experience of the performed music. Most notably, the Palais Garnier and the Opéra-Comique hosted a wide variety of compositions, symphonies, and, of course, operas. The two institutions programmed both acclaimed compositions and world premieres, thereby cementing themselves as the centre of art music in Paris.⁷

Those affiliated with l'Action Française sincerely appreciated this hierarchical space. The reviews by Sordet and Rebatet served to cement the ties between the grandiose space of classical music and the sovereign French genius. Together, Sordet and Rebatet penned down a considerable corpus of music reviews. Sordet and Rebatet contributed at least weekly to the newspaper, covering subjects from gramophone recordings, symphonic concerts, and chamber music recitals. Performers and composers were discussed separately, as their contributions to the performance were held to different standards.

Music compositions and their renditions were not only measured by their musical prowess in the writings of Sordet and Rebatet. Instead, performers were judged by their nationality, which would explain if they could truly connect to the national genius, rather than merely 'playing the notes'. Consequently, the composer

⁶ K. Ellis, *French Musical Life: Local Dynamics in the Century to World War II* (New York, 2021), G. Romy, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New Haven, 1994).

⁷ S. Wolff, *Un demi-siècle d'Opéra-Comique (1900-1950)* (Paris 1953).

was judged on his or her ability to arrange music according to their cultural background. Did they stay true to the existing music conventions of their heritage? Did they remain unique and creative, without falling for expressionism or romanticism? Cultural compatibility was regularly a point of discussion in their writings; a practice displays an increasingly cultural approach to world affairs in Action Française. Sordet and Rebatet had very clear opinions on the existence of foreign music conventions. By painting a nationalist picture of non-French music's, they also helped create a uniquely French sound. This process of exclusion, by design, informed the French people about themselves. After all, if a pure French genius was said to exist, as Maurras and his compatriots claimed, then it stands to reason that such a genius would express itself in cultural practices.

The worldview of Sordet and Rebatet, especially when it comes to cultural practices, is very black and white, almost to the point of becoming binary. Both writers were vocal in their reviews when it came to incompatible or foreign cultural practices in France. The inverse of the negative elements in non-French music's were therefore components that were suitable for the creation, or excavation, of a French sound. French music should be written, performed, and received by Frenchmen who still understood the core values of France; Catholicism, monarchy, and traditionalism. Those affiliated with Action Française were adamant that such a society did no longer - or not yet - exist. Cultural practices were influenced by the current political climate. Therefore, many of the contemporary cultural practices were unfit for the idealised France. Suitable music needed either to be created or excavated from a time when France was still a Catholic monarchy.

Action Française was very vocal about their reservations regarding modernity. They viewed modernity as immensely subversive to the true identity and structure of France. The primacy of the old order, the hierarchy that had existed when both Catholic Church and the French kings ruled France, was a central point in Maurrassian thought. Consequently, the music they appreciated reflected that envisioned elitism. The consumption of classical music, a corpus of music theory that prides itself on orderliness as a reflection of a supposedly natural order, was traditionally a favoured pastime of society's elites. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution came the elevation of the middle class (*petite bourgeoisie*), who wished

to emulate the rich.⁸ The lower class, however, also gained a foothold in this bourgeois and aristocratic space, as a result of the efforts of the Left. Sordet and Rebatet hoped to reinforce the elitist claim on classical music, with the aim of cementing the natural order of things.

The reigning music style in the concert halls of Paris around the *fin de siècle* was Romanticism. Expressive, high-energy performers played arrangements about themes like fantasy, heartbreak, the dreaming of far and exotic lands, or the supernatural. The integral nationalism of Action Française could be understood as the exact inverse of Romanticism; the primacy of reason, Church, monarchy, family, and the nation. Such an inverse found fertile ground in the nascent neoclassicism, a music tradition that existed parallel to romanticism.

As will be evident in this thesis, neoclassicism was a promising environment for the creation of a new French sound that embodied integral nationalism, due to its lyrical structure that uniquely allowed for nationalist pedagogy. Although not all composers that contributed to this genre considered themselves monarchist, or even overtly nationalist, they were, by and large, joined in the quest for the creation of a French sound, void of foreign influences. Theirs was, therefore, a journey that was overtly politically driven. When the neoclassicist arrangements were staged, it was up to reviewers like Sordet and Rebatet to judge them, based on the overarching Maurrassian tenets of integral nationalism, and to attribute it to French music. The creation of a French sound is therefore a concerted effort of a two-step verification *avant-la-lèttre*. Firstly, the composer, largely alumni from the Schola Cantorum, arranged music with ideas of Frenchness in mind. Then, the reviewers ratified the Frenchness in their commentaries.

Literature review

A central theme within Action Française is the wish that French society be returned to a monarchy. Since the French Revolution, France had become ‘orphaned’ and

⁸ D. Carew, ‘The consumption of music’ in J. Samson (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* (2001) 237–258.

leaderless. Charles Maurras claimed that the democratic efforts of the French Revolution had severed the French citizens from the 'true' France, a divide that is explained as the *pays légal* (the current state of France) and the *pays réel* (the lived experience of true Frenchmen). The reinstatement of the monarchy would ensure that France had a helmsman again, which would allow for all Frenchmen to return to their natural stations in society. Notably, reimagining society on such a scale is inherently reactionary, which seems to clash with the conservative identity that Action Française had appropriated. Consequently, a considerable share of historiography on Action Française deals with discerning its conservative legacy.

A substantial number of French historians have spent the better half of the 20th century arguing that fascism is inherently incompatible with France's liberal legacy. As Ze'ev Sternhell argues in his seminal work 'Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France', many of the foundational ideas of fascism originated within the Francophone sphere but largely failed to organise themselves into a political movement like the National Socialists. Rather, Sternhell posits that French fascism is more akin to the efforts of the Italian Futurist movement and the Italian Fascist Party, due to its focus on breaking with old notions on ethos and aesthetics.⁹ In order to bring about such change, the fascist – or those adjacent to fascism – needed to reinvent aesthetics. The visual arts – or literature, in the case of France – were therefore the obvious choice as the battleground for culture. Far less has been written on the link between manifestations of French fascism and the aesthetics of music.

A vocal opponent of Sternhell's view on fascism within Action Française is the French historian René Rémond. He postulates that Action Française and the other *ligues d'extrême droite* that were active in Interwar France could hardly be called fascist due to their nationalist and conservative nature. Fascism, according to Rémond, was decidedly revolutionary.¹⁰ This polemic is representative of the larger schism in historiography on French fascism, which is a debate between Francophone and Anglophone historians. The Italian historian Andrea Cavaletto joins the Anglophone approach and posits that the Francophone historians have exclusively employed Italian and German manifestations of fascism as comparative

⁹ Z. Sternhell, *French fascism: the first wave* (New Haven, 1986).

¹⁰ R. D. Zaretsky, Neither Left, nor Right, nor Straight Ahead: Recent Books on Fascism in France, *Journal of Modern History*, 73:1 (2001) 119.

material. Cavaletto adds that French fascism, due to different political and societal differences, would manifest itself visibly differently.¹¹

As this thesis will demonstrate, l'Action Française is characterised by the interplay between the conservative monarchists and the anti-establishment reactionaries. This dichotomy is perfectly embodied by Sordet and Rebatet, respectively. At first glance the contraposition of reactionaries and conservatives seems obvious. One group hopes to reinforce the status quo, whereas the other envisions an idealised past and a revolutionary future. However, according to some French intellectuals, this distinction is hazier than one might expect. Although both groups claimed to battle against the influences of “moloch” modernity in their own ways, they both sought to bring about a theocratic mediaeval France, claiming that this era embodied the true French genius. The revitalisation, or rather the rebirth, of France was the end goal of both the conservatives and the reactionaries within Action Française.

How then was Action Française supposed to bring about such revolutionary change while maintaining the integrity of France? Maurras believed in the transformational, almost spiritual, power of art. Music has always had the unique ability of bringing people together, which means that it lends itself perfectly to political endeavours. The politics of music is a subject that has gained traction in the last two decades. Barbara Kelly has written a seminal piece on the politics of music reviews in France.¹² In this book she expounds on the various factions within France that review music with their own political incentive. This, of course, is largely divorced from the political intentions of the composers. The politics of composers is largely left as a side issue, except for the overt politics of composers like Vincent d'Indy or Pierre De Geyter. D'Indy, who will be discussed at length later in this thesis, founded a conservatory with the purpose of producing neoclassical French music, creating a fertile space for nationalist, or sometimes integral nationalist, composers.

Jane Fulcher's *The Composer as Intellectual* deals extensively with the politicisation of music in Interwar France. She convincingly makes the argument that composers were not victims in the politicisation of music but were active participants in politics and wielded their compositions as weapons in the political arena. Although

¹¹ A. Cavaletto, 'La monarchie imaginée : sur le royalisme dans l'idéologie de l'Action Française', *Diacronie* 16 (2013) 3.

¹² Kelly, *Music criticism in France*.

Fulcher's seminal work deals primarily with the agency of composers in politics, the reviews of both sides of the political spectrum are analysed to underline the impact of said composers on the zeitgeist. Politics had shaped the music reviews of Sordet and Rebatet from the conception of the rubric *Les Spectacles* onwards. As Fulcher convincingly argues, the politics of their music reviews was always latently visible through the compositions they chose to review and what their verdicts were. Many of their positive reviews had, in their minds, ties to French culture. The reviews of both Sordet and Rebatet are analysed as reactions to the contributions of composers, whereas this thesis will analyse their reviews at large, including the contributions of the performers and a deep reading of the language used within the reviews. This way, the writings of Sordet and Rebatet are not analysed as mere reactions to compositions, but as instructions to the reader of desirable manifestations of music and to inform of an idealised France.

Many of the compositions from the Interbellum are charged with the traumatic events of the First World War. Music was understood to be the perfect medium through which people - both composer and audience - could process their grief. Jillian Rogers writes about the therapeutic role of music in Interbellum France in her seminal work *Resonant Recoveries*.¹³ She focuses on the personal trauma of prominent musicians who had lost loved ones during the First World War, like Poulenc, Stravinsky, and the Boulanger sisters. Although Rogers refrains from tying trauma to politics, her works touch upon the transcendental nature of music, which supposedly helped mend the soul and the mind. Charles Maurras often wrote of *la vieille plaie d'inquiétude*, which translates to 'the old wound of the soul'. Maurras understood this to be the divide between the lived experience of the Frenchman and the idealised French genius. Consequently, the trauma that followed from being separated from one's innate identity would explain much of society's defects.

Music allows for the combination of harmonic structure, which in itself has the ability to convey emotion and meaning, and lyrical prose. Music, in its essence, is a form of communication. The listener has to understand the intricacies of the composition in order to establish a connection. This connection transcends the individual and informs the listener about music (and therefore social) conventions. Raymond Williams posits the following: "*Human community grows by the discovery*

¹³ J. Rogers, *Resonant Recoveries, French Music and Trauma between World Wars* (Oxford 2021).

of common meanings and common means of communication ... Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change."¹⁴ However, for music to be understood as a form of communication, one needs a set of discursive themes that are understood by the creator, transmitter, and receiver to have commonalities. The subsequent step is questioning what we as listeners accept as shared narratives. Consequently, music (subconsciously) informs us about ourselves as a community.

The potential of communication through music, although that is often its intended purpose, becomes volatile as soon as it is made. The composer creates a composition with a certain idea in mind, which is then interpreted by the musician. As soon as the first notes are created on the violin strings, the music starts to live its own life. The audience will recognise the overarching theme of the music and will largely acknowledge the composer's intentions, but a significant part of the music experience will either be lost in translation or be open to interpretation.

This, of course, raises questions that are also, implicitly or not, at the heart of Rebatet's and Sordet's work: what is music? What makes it French? Where does musicality start, and where does it end? What is the purpose of music? How does one mediate the intentions of music and its reception? These questions are adjacent to the practice of sonic history, or as popularised by R. Murray Schafer, the soundscape.¹⁵ It is the acoustic environment which exists in relation to humans. It explores a new dimension in which humans interact with the world. Music, of course, being an attempt at a structuring of those sounds with the expressed intent of conveying messages or emotions to one another.

At first glance, the sonic history might seem ineffectual. However, many aspects of our lives are influenced by sounds. The blaring horn warns us of approaching traffic, an unfinished scale informs us that we're missing out on a

¹⁴ R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961) 10.

¹⁵ M.R. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, 1994).

discount¹⁶, and the squawking of the seagulls suggests you should move inside, because it might start raining. The soundscape distinguishes between natural sounds - like animal sounds, weather or other natural phenomena - and anthropophony, which are sounds created by humans. The relevant subset within anthropophony are the controlled sounds. Evidently, musical composition is controlled noise, with language being closely related. As Jacques Attali proposes in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, music is “a simulation of the social order”, whereas noise is a disturbance of that very order.¹⁷

A simulation of the social order is inherently political. Every cultural manifestation that is not compatible with the existing social order is therefore not considered suitable for society. However, Attali’s point is much more nuanced. Our brains are wired to recognise patterns. Consequently, we enjoy predictable things, because they soothe our brains. Harmony is a fantastic example of such a pattern: tonal scales are notes that are evenly distributed between two points on the Hertz frequency scale. A combination of those notes can produce a harmony if those notes are evenly distanced.

Our European ears are attuned to octaves (an interval of eight notes) on the frequency of 432 hertz. This has not always been the case, as Baroque music was attuned to a frequency of 416 hertz, which would sound out of tune to our modern ears. Other cultures, like the Vedic music traditions of the Indian subcontinent, employ intervals of twenty-two semitones within an octave. The mathematical justification is identical to the European music theory, but certain notes within the Indian music theory would not sound exactly right to our European ears. Most people have little to no knowledge of European music theory, but almost everyone can distinguish between harmony and discord within a music composition.

Our musical hearing is entirely dependent on our societal upbringing. Consequently, everything that we consider atonal is otherised. The distinction between noise and music as a simulation of an ordered society is therefore politically relevant for an organisation like Action Française. This, of course, is decidedly different from the permanence of the written arts in which Maurras participated.

¹⁶ Albert Heijn, for example, employs a distinct music scale that won’t resolve when scanning products. The unfinished music scale reminds us that we’re forgetting something, which prompts the buyer to scan their discount card.

¹⁷ J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Presse Universitaire de France, 1977) 29.

Conversely, music is much more aligned with the fascist ideals of vivaciousness, energy, transformation and national regeneration. It is an expression of self-presence that is less prominent in other art forms.

The sonic historian Adrian Rifkin takes a more decentralised approach to the consumption of music in Paris. He focuses instead on the humming of a passerby, the static sound of the radio, or the artists performing on the corners of the streets.¹⁸ These are evidently expressions of music that do not interest Sordet and Rebatet in the slightest, due to their focus on institutionalised music. However, it does set the scene of music consumption in Paris, reminding us that there are various other music dimensions consciously left out of the picture by Sordet and Rebatet.

The power of music is at the centre of this thesis. Therefore, the main research question is formulated as follows: *in what ways did l'Action Française's music criticism contribute to the construction of a "French" sound, and how did this cultural project inform its broader reimagining of French national identity?* In order to understand the motives of Action Française, this thesis will analyse music criticism as the intersection of art, politics, national identity, culture, and sociology. This thesis will rely on an empirical analysis of the newspaper *L'Action Française*. The main body of sources come from 1929 onwards, as these are the years that Rebatet and Sordet were active at the newspaper. The newspaper will be analysed until 1936, as that year marks the dissolution of Action Française as a political party.

The year 1929 marks the first entry of a weekly article on music in the newspaper *l'Action Française*, wherein the columnists Lucien Rebatet and Dominique Sordet expound upon music – primarily compositions that are understood to be high culture – hoping to find a primordial French sound. The two writers are, respectively, a fascist and an ultraconservative, but both largely adhere to the Maurrasian party line. The musical void in Maurrasian thought could be attributed to Maurras being hard of hearing since childhood.¹⁹

In order to discern the motives of Action Française (and its writers), one needs to understand the political climate in which these music reviews were written. Therefore, the first chapter will deal with an exposition on Maurrasian – or Action Française at large – ideology and the political climate of the 1930s. As mentioned

¹⁸ A. Rifkin, *Street Noises : Parisian Pleasure 1900-40* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ B. Sudlow, 'The Untameable Provence of Charles Maurras', *Nottingham French studies* 50 (2011) 27.

before, the ideology of Action Française was influenced greatly by Maurras. His worldview and politics were reactionary – but not vocally fascist – in nature. He transformed antisemitic traditions, which stemmed from his Catholicism, and combined that with integral nationalism. The latter can best be described as follows: the nation was the highest entity in the Maurrasian worldview and expressed itself within the cultural sphere. The individual could only contribute to the French corpus of art and culture if the individual possessed a French soul. Instrumental in discerning this French genius – and therefore identifying the way in which the individual and the French nation must change – was identifying and contributing to French art. The second chapter will be dedicated to manifestations of nationalism in the writings of Dominique Sordet and Lucien Rebatet. It will deal extensively with the increasing politicisation of music, whereas the third chapter will deal with the creation of a uniquely French sound.

Dominique Sordet was the first to be tasked with writing music reviews in l'Action Française. His conservative worldview is representative of the Action Française old guard – a relic of the party's origin, which aimed at unifying the various anti-Dreyfusard factions. Sordet was a staunch supporter of a uniquely French sound, which he attempted to discern in his writings on music. His politics – and therefore his preferences in music – were decidedly monarchist and integral nationalist, and he adhered to a Catholic antisemitism.

Rebatet, on the other hand, was a contrarian *pur sang*, who styled himself to be a fascist and therefore represented the reactionary avant-garde of Action Française. Unlike Sordet, who was fascinated by the supposed French genius, Rebatet looked for fascist elements in music. His preferences transcended national borders – both French and German music were deserving of his attention – although he drew a line at Jewish composers like Mendelssohn and Halévy. Rebatet did review Jewish performers, only to assert that the '*youtres*' had no way of truly understanding German or French music. Rebatet viewed the political developments in neighbouring Germany favourably and once even proclaimed himself to be a National Socialist.²⁰ Having been influenced by both Maurrasian thought and National Socialism, Rebatet set off to review music in l'Action Française with the expressed goal of revolutionising both ethics and aesthetics.

²⁰ O. Dard, *Les Idées politiques de Lucien Rebatet des années trente à 1944* (Paris, 1987) 96.

Although Rebatet and Sordet were diligently educated, they never had any music education. This did not stop them from reviewing music; on the contrary, they claimed it allowed them to experience music in a more primal way. They understood the French genius – which they hoped to discern in music – to be present in every Frenchman. Therefore, they did not need to understand the music; it needed to resonate with them. The French genius was largely an immutable and unmalleable force that transcended the individual.²¹

The French spirit was a combination of the ferocious Celts and the conquering Romans, according to Maurrasian thought. The Celtic ancestry attributed the French with a liveliness that far surpassed other European nationalities. Roman heritage uniquely enabled the French to build civilisation. The combination of these lineages explained France's prominent position on the world stage. The mixture of these two bloodlines also explained regional differences within France. Maurras, an avid supporter of decentralised regionalism and son of the Provence, understood the south of France to be haematically more Latin – therefore even more capable of building civilisation. Ergo, the north of France was understood to be more Celtic, which explained their hang for vices like drinking and brawling.²²

This internal division of who gets to be French also translates to the politics of music. To be francophone does not automatically equal Frenchness. Maurrasian thought conceptualises Frenchness as a rigid social pyramid, which will, for example, be evident in the way Sordet and Rebatet review the works of Belgian composers and performers.

In order to understand the music reviews by Sordet and Rebatet, we must first identify certain words that are used to discuss the content of music. Both reviewers never had any formal training in classical music, which is evident in their vocabulary when reviewing music. Not much of their content is in line with traditional music criticism but rather relies primarily on personal experiences. The reviews of Sordet and Rebatet rarely remark on the composition of music but tend to focus on the performers. Theatrics, national identity, and appreciation for composers are often subjects of ridicule or praise.

Some composers made music as an exercise in theory, others made music to

²¹ C. Reynaud-Paligot, 'Maurras et la notion de race', *Le maurrassisme et la culture : L'Action française, culture, société, politique (III)*, 111-119.

²² Reynaud-Paligot, *Maurras et la notion de race*, 114-116.

entertain people or as an attempt at pushing the boundaries of that which others understand to be 'proper music'. The reviews of Sordet and Rebatet often posthumously attributed politics to composers, thereby forgoing a response by the composers themselves. Composers did not only operate in the musical sphere but were usually highly educated people. Most composers practised music as a pastime or to further their social standing. Though interesting, this thesis will instead focus on the ways in which politics are attributed to these musical pieces.

The artistic practices that are reviewed by Sordet and Rebatet are usually recitals and concerts in the music halls of Paris or music recordings of art music. Both mediums of music were in this period still made for, and by, the cultured elite. What is understood to be art music? In this context it primarily refers to Western classical music. However, although the reviewers themselves claim they only review art music, some of the writings deal with jazz orchestras and other music practices that do not fall under the term 'Western classical music'. Of course, Sordet and Rebatet never intended to use 'art music' as a category but wanted to review music that was enjoyed by the cultural elite, reinforcing the 'natural order of things'.²³

²³ Kelly, *Music criticism in France*, 46.

2. Intellectual and political history of Action Française

Action Française was created in 1898 during the turmoil of the Dreyfus Affair. The supposed treason of the Jewish army captain activated latent xenophobia within French society, which prompted the creation of various *ligues d'extrême droite*. Action Française was at the forefront of antirepublican rallies and demonstrations and was protected - or rather, spearheaded - by the Camelots du Roi, which was created in 1908 as the militant branch of the Action Française. In that same year, the newspaper l'Action Française was created. The reader base of l'Action Française fluctuated greatly, usually selling 50,000 to 100,000 copies, but experiencing an immense surge in attention in 1934 due to the events of the Stavisky Affair, which doubled their sales, about which I will say more later in this chapter.²⁴ Though l'Action Française was in no way the biggest newspaper, their contributions helped keep antisemitism, monarchism and integral nationalism at the forefront of the public polemic.

The events of the thirties of the 20th century unfolded within the context of uncertainty about France's future as its backdrop. The *Popular Front* was the reigning political entity of the Third Republic in France. It consisted of a variety of left-leaning political parties that were brought into being to halt the advance of the *ligues d'extrême droite*. In order to insulate the populace against the influence of the *ligues*, the Popular Front waged a cultural war, with multidisciplinary art as its battlefield, according to Fulcher.²⁵ Architecture, music, and theatre were combined into massive *fêtes* that were meant to culturally enrich the masses. These *fêtes* were both defence and offence in the culture war for the Popular Front, as the Popular Front hoped to use culture in a way to rally the masses against demagogic influences.²⁶

The *fête* was the result of the combined effort of left-adjacent intellectuals, artists, and politicians. The spectacles instilled ideas of 'Frenchness' into the viewer, which was supposed to educate and unify the masses, in order to bolster them

²⁴ Schor, Ralph, *L'opinion française et les étrangers en France, 1919-1939* (Sorbonne 1985) 11.

²⁵ Fulcher, *The composer as intellectual : music and ideology in France 1914-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press 2005) 243.

²⁶ Fulcher, *Composer as intellectual*, 206.

against fascist influences. The *Fêtes du Peuple* of the Popular Front were in many ways like the Wagnerian *Gesamkunstwerk*, an art manifestation that employs various art disciplines all at once, although the end goal of the *fêtes* was a direct antithesis to the German totalitarian manifestations. Unlike the Nazi rallies, the cultural efforts of the Popular Front were not meant to reinforce existing hierarchies or instil militarism in its populace but hoped to connect different art forms in a way in which the masses could join in and contribute.²⁷

One of the best examples of these *fêtes* was the *Jeu de la Lumière et de l'Eau sur la Seine*. French contemporary music was ingeniously connected to architecture and lightworks. Boats on the Seine carried loudspeakers which played scores that were made for this occasion. The entire nocturnal spectacle was accompanied by elaborate light play. The events were meant to link modern music, technology, and grandeur to the Third Republic.

The efforts of the Popular Front in the mid-1930s also included the incorporation of folkloristic elements in their cultural policies.²⁸ It was a prevalent idea within leftist circles that the peasants and workers created culture, which manifested itself in folklore. This was a break with the status quo, as folklore was traditionally a Rightist endeavour, especially the forte of Maurras and his ilk. Maurras was an ardent supporter of 'essentialism', which was the idea that some regions and peoples inherently represented or embodied an authentic France. He supported and contributed to *Félibrige*, a journal that celebrated the regionalism of the Provence.²⁹

The essence of this public polemic about folklore was the question of who represented 'Frenchness' the most. Maurras' idea of essentialism was predicated on the proposed dichotomy between "pays réel" and "pays légal" – the former being the lived experience of the 'indigenous' peasants, whereas the latter represented the lived experience of the workers. From a more top-down approach, the *pays légal* was the current state of France, the post-revolutionary France that had been severed from its origins. The *pays réel*, on the other hand, was the quintessential France that combined the regional and the national. Consequently, Maurras stated that all subjects of France had two loyalties (*patries*) that worked in tandem: the rootedness

²⁷ Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 206.

²⁸ K. Ellis, *French Musical Life: Local Dynamics in the Century to World War II* (New York, 2021) 275 - 281.

²⁹ McGuinness, *Reactionary Poetics: Maurras and the Ecole Romane*, 259.

in one's region (*petite pays*) and the shared destiny of France.³⁰

It was a central idea of the Right to posit that rural peasants inherently embodied folklore and popular culture, whereas the Left envisioned the workers to represent that ideal.³¹ It was also a prevalent notion within leftist circles that art music deserved to be enjoyed by 'the masses', and they no longer wanted this art medium to be reserved for a 'cultured elite'. This, of course, was counteracted by the various *ligues d'extrême droite*, with Action Française at its forefront, who saw music as an extension to the hierarchical society they hoped to reinstate.

Catholicism

The Catholic Church was, according to Maurras, one of the two pillars that supported France. Although Maurras himself was not a practising Catholic, he maintained that France and the Catholic Church were inextricably tied due to their long-shared history. The hierarchical organisation of the Church was a blueprint for Action Française. The rigid hierarchy reflected Maurras' ideal society, an ordered nation where everyone knew their place in the world. Maurras was pessimistic about human nature, as were many other counterrevolutionaries, and believed that society needed strong moralising institutions, like the Catholic Church. However, ties to the Catholic Church soured in the 1920s. Maurras' utilitarian approach and agnostic stance appalled the Catholic Church, which led to the papal condemnation in 1926. Many of Maurras' writings were placed on the papal blacklist, with Action Française being the first ever newspaper that was prohibited by the pope.³²

Due to the large focus on Catholicism, Action Française, although in its very nature decisively a nationalist party, maintained close ties to various right-wing parties in neighbouring Latin countries. The network that came into being was driven by a concept that Maurras called *Latinité*, a common Latin ancestry which consisted of various cultural identity markers, and which uniquely enabled them to 'create' civilisation. Those that were raised within the geographical boundaries of Latin countries – primarily the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, and France – were possessed of, or

³⁰ Fulcher, *The Composer as intellectual*, 119-216.

³¹ Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 208.

³² F. Huguenin, *L'Action française, une histoire intellectuelle* (Paris, 2011)

rather, in possession of, the Latin spirit (*génie Latin*).³³ The French genius was understood to be a combination of the civilised Latin spirit and the liveliness of the Celtic ancestors. Maurras wrote: “*L’héroïsme gaulois joint au génie politique et militaire de Jules César constituent fondements de la nationalité française.*”³⁴

The creation of this pseudo-academic approach to race exists within the context of Social Darwinism that was proposed by the National Socialists in neighbouring Germany. Maurras proposed that their variant of racism was the result of Germany’s Lutheran history. Ever since Germany had severed ties with the Catholic Church and had, by and large, adopted Lutheranism, the entire region had been sent on a crash course that culminated in the Nazis’ rise to power. According to Maurras, the actions of Luther had brought about a schism that distanced Germany from both the Catholic Church and the Western genius, as evidenced by the use of non-Western insignia like the Swastika.³⁵

Nationalisme intégral

Central to Maurras’ conception of latinity was the imposition of order upon the country. Order was understood by Maurras as the cornerstone of civilisation, a hierarchy that was inherently encapsulated in the Papacy and hereditary monarchy. Traditional, or rather, conservative Catholicism and the monarchy were to give stability and direction to the masses. Maurras called this concept “*nationalisme intégral*”, a nationalism where every person has its own station and, therefore, a calling in life.³⁶

Within the framework of integral nationalism, the family is the cornerstone of society, the smallest indivisible unit within society. Maurras was of the opinion that society is merely an extension of the family. Consequently, the king is to be viewed as the nation’s patriarch, tasked with protecting and providing for his family. Many of the ideologues of Action Française, like Maurras and Bainville, were very vocal about the importance of the family. Surprisingly, both Rebatet and Sordet never had

³³ Dard, O., Charles Maurras, le fascisme, la latinité et la Méditerranée, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* (2017), 4.

³⁴ C. Maurras, *Devant l’Allemagne éternelle*, op. cit., 11, 49. [translation]: Gallic heroism combined with the military and political genius of Julius Cesar form the basis of the French nationality.

³⁵ J. Verdès-Leroux, *Refus et violences : politique et littérature à l’extrême droite des années trente aux retombées de la Libération* (Paris 1996) 52.

³⁶ M. Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France* (Paris, 1996) 21.

children, which might explain why the subject is largely absent in their works.

Integral nationalism was the answer of conservative and fascist Catholics to the Marxist conception of the class war. Rather than dissolving the bourgeoisie through revolution, which would be the Marxist solution to the woes of the world, integral nationalism proposed that the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and the peasants set aside their differences and work towards a common goal: the betterment of the kingdom of France.³⁷ This proposed economic system is, of course, a perfect example of Third Way Positionism, not unlike the systems supported by both the Nazis and the Italian Fascists. Consequently, the needs of the individual were of less importance than the needs of the community, or better yet, the state. Those that adhered to this economic blueprint saw this system as the only way to reinstate the supposed hierarchies of a monarchist France.

Integral nationalism is understood by Maurras to be a dynamic relationship between existing traditions and mores, with the proximity to the country's soil. This, of course, emphasised the importance of the peasant class as the people that most essentially represent the country's soul. The peasant did not need an extensive education to understand what it meant to be French. Likewise, Sordet and Rebatet did not need formal music education to appreciate French music.

Decentralised regionalism

Maurras' concept of latinity ties in with his idea of decentralised regionalism. Every province harboured a piece of Frenchness, and so it was the peasant who perfectly and effortlessly embodied French culture, due to his proximity to the land. However, not all regions were equally French. Brittany had, for obvious reasons, too much Celtic blood. The Walloons – or Belgians at large – were also considered to be too Celtic. Their vivaciousness, evident in their excessive drinking and eating, was also too Celtic to be considered truly French.³⁸ To be Francophone and European was therefore not enough to be considered French.

Although many other French fascist, or fascist-adjacent, ideologues

³⁷ C. Nicault, 'Les "Française israélites" et la ligue d'Action française. Des années 1900 à 1940' in Jacques Prévotat and Michel Leymarie: *L'Action française : culture, société, politique* (Presses universitaires du Septentrion 2008) 3-8.

³⁸ C. Reynaud-Paligot, 'Maurras et la notion de race', *Le maurrassisme et la culture : L'Action française, culture, société, politique (III)*, 111-119.

considered the metropolitan area of Paris to be the centre of France, Maurras favoured the Provence. Maurras himself was an avid contributor to *Félibrige*, a journal that sought to revive the Occitan language. To Maurras, a standardised French language was not the only expression of France's soul. Up until the French Revolution, all regions had their own dialects and languages, which differed so much from each other that users of these dialects struggled to understand one another. However, due to the centralising efforts of the secular French state, dialects slowly but surely fell into disuse. Maurras often used *Méditerranéité* and *Latinité* interchangeably, which, of course, belies his conception of Frenchness. For Maurras, the countryside of the south of France truly embodied the French soul. The proximity that French peasants had to the soil made sure that their identity was rooted firmly in France.³⁹

International pacifism

Unlike many other expressions of nationalism, Action Française eschewed manufacturing consent for war, especially war between European nations. Their pacifism was embedded in antisemitism: it was the stated goal of the international Jewry - earmarked as the Cabal - to undermine and weaken European states so they could infiltrate these nations and secretly rule the world.⁴⁰ Wars between European states would further weaken them, while these states were already fighting an almost spiritual battle for the perseverance of their *génies*.

The concept of Jewish world domination was exemplified by a pamphlet from Tsarist Russia called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Originally, this document was created by the Okhrana, the Tsarist secret police, hoping to ostracise Russia's Jewry, consequently weakening the communist movement, given that Russia's Jewry was over-represented in Marxist circles. The content of the propaganda piece documents the supposed minutes of a meeting of Jewish leaders who discuss undermining European states. Although Action Française acknowledged that this was likely propaganda, the party maintained their pre-existing idea that an

³⁹ A. Cavaletto, 'La monarchie imaginée : sur le royalisme dans l'idéologie de l'Action Française', *Diacronie* 16 (2013) 1 - 16.

⁴⁰ Nicault, Catherine, 'Le procès des "Protocoles des Sages de Sion"', *Vingtième siècle* (Paris. 1984) (1997) 68–84 .

international Jewry still wished for the undermining of European states.⁴¹ Ironically, the Tsarist version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion was a plagiarism of a French pamphlet called *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu*, which was written in 1864 by Maurice Joly. The document satirised Napoleon the Third did not once mention Jewry.⁴² The antisemitic character of the Protocols is attributed by Benjamin Segel to the German antisemite Hermann Goedsche in his novel Biarritz.⁴³

The supposed pacificism of Action Française might seem at odds with the overt militarist themes within the party. However, Maurras was very clear that he considered both the Catholic Church and the French army as the two pillars of France.⁴⁴ The international policy of Action Française should be described by restraint, rather than refusal to commit violence. On a micro level, this is best exemplified by the Camelots du Roi, the paramilitary wing of the party. The violence enacted by the Camelots du Roi was, according to Action Française, vital to the protection of the French soul. Those that fell victim to its violence, largely Communists and Socialists, were therefore deserving of punishment, because they stood in the way of France's liberation.

Another example of acceptable violence was the events of the Spanish Civil War. As mentioned earlier, Action Française considered Franco and his Falangism as their brothers in arms within the concept of Latinity. Although the loss of life was immeasurable, it was needed to protect the soul of Spain and the role of the Catholic Church. The importance of violence belies the fascistic elements within the political party, which is often tied to the glorification of life and the admiration for change.

Antisemitism

Antisemitism is a recurring theme within the *Ligues d'extrême droite*. Action Française was created in the hopes of uniting the various antidreyfusard factions in the *fin-de-siècle*. Although these organisations had not participated in the virulent antisemitism at the turn of the century, antisemitism ran rampant within the *ligues*. Due to the Catholic identity of Action Française, much of its antisemitism was based

⁴¹ B. de Vaulx, 'Revue des Revues', *L'Action française*, 8 november 1934.

⁴² P. Graves, 'The Truth about the Protocols: A Literary Forgery', *The Times*, 16 august 1921, 23.

⁴³ B. W. Segel, and R. S. Levy, *A Lie and a Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press 1995) 30.

⁴⁴ M. Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France* (Paris 1996) 21.

on older expressions of antisemitism, called *antijuifs*. Notable examples of these prejudices are blood libel, the killing of Jesus, and the Ahasverus myth.

The blood libel myth accuses the Jews of using the children's blood for occult or religious rituals. These ideas tend to flare up around Jewish holidays like Pesach. The death of Jesus, although prophesied and therefore an immutable outcome in Christian thought, was blamed on the Jews. Lastly, the Ahasverus myth, also known as the Wandering Jew, tells the story of the Jew who abused Jesus while he was on his way to Golgotha.⁴⁵ Ahasverus was cursed to wander the earth until Judgement Day, unable to settle down and 'take root'. This myth lent itself perfectly to nationalist ideology, as it was an explanation for the Jewish diaspora and the supposed inability of Jews to integrate in their 'host' societies. The aforementioned myths were not unique to Action Française, but they were common expressions of antisemitism in almost all parts of Europe. These concepts were already prevalent in Mediaeval society throughout Europe and became the blueprint of many modern expressions of antisemitism.

While the National Socialists in neighbouring Germany busied themselves with elevating their antisemitism to a science, Charles Maurras and his cohorts began creating a corpus of a more spiritual antisemitism. Maurras was very open about his disdain for the Nazi ideology. Although he ultimately agreed with their conclusion - Jews being a corrupting influence in the practice of nationalism and therefore the health of the nation - he firmly disagreed with their methods and end goal. The Nazi party relied on a system of Social Darwinism: the idea that the Earth is inhabited by different races that all have a different place on the hierarchical pyramid. The Aryans, understood by the Nazis as the blonde, blue-eyed, white master race, were of course at the very top of the pyramid. Within this school of thought, there was a lot of room for the pseudoscience of racial phenotypes, which gave Germany's antisemitism a veneer of credibility. Maurras disapproved of these methods. Instead, he preferred a school of thought that was less interested in the biological aspect but focussed on the national soul that inhabited every person. Of course, this still prevented Jews - and other *métèques* - from participating in Maurras' ideal society. It was the shared genius of the Jews, Freemasons,

⁴⁵ Sylvie Triaire, 'La conversion au christianisme, un mythe romantique', *Centre interdisciplinaire d'Études du Religieux* 10 (2012), 6-7.

Protestants, Republicans and other unwanted peoples that moved them to be a corrupting influence in France's society.⁴⁶

The claim that Jews could not participate in European music practices, due to their inability to take root in European soil, did not originate from the circles of Action Française. Richard Wagner published his divisive pamphlet *Das Judenthum in der Musik*. He claimed that European Jewish musicians, like Felix Mendelssohn, were incapable of participating in the German music conventions, as Jews had no ties to said culture. Their Jewishness inhibited them from truly understanding the culture, relegating Jewish musicians to emulation rather than creation of such music practices. The result is what musicologist Assaf Shelleg calls 'the Wagnerian trauma in the Ashkenazi soundscape'.⁴⁷ Wagner insisted on a binary that forced the Ashkenazim of Europe to choose between cultural self-abolition or to embrace their supposedly Semitic origins.

Such a binary also exists within the Francophone sphere. Although Wagner's culturally driven antisemitism is much more palatable to the Maurrassian integral nationalism than the emerging Social Darwinism of the neighbouring National Socialists, it is not identical to the antisemitism of Action Française. Wagner explicitly employs the term "*Judenthum*", which encompasses both the ethno-religious elements of Jewishness and the totality of Jewish cultural practices. Sordet and Rebatet, however, prefer to use *juif*, *youtre*, or *israélite*. The first two are immutable personal descriptions, without a reference to cultural practices. '*Israélite*', however, implies loyalty to the nation of Israel, which is not (yet) a geographical location but the totality of international Jewry.

Stavisky Affair

The 1920s was a period that allowed for relatively little popular support for the antisemitism expounded by Action Française. Of course, this did not stop Action Française from transmitting their ideology, but it did signify a slight decrease in antisemitic content, as the party were biding their time for public opinion to become more accepting of Action Française's antisemitism. That turning point came in 1933

⁴⁶ Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France*, 256.

⁴⁷ A. Shelleg, *Jewish contiguities and the soundtrack of Israeli history* (New York: Oxford University Press 2014), 19-21.

with the events of the Stavisky Affair.

Alexandre Stavisky was a professional con artist who was of Ukrainian and Russian descent but, more importantly, he was a Jew. He started his hustler's career as a pawnbroker but also swindled people through the sale of government bonds that held no value. Slowly but surely, he managed to build an empire that got him into contact with financiers, which, in turn, got him into contact with the civil servants and ministers of France. As expected, this did not hinder his conning activities in the slightest, and he started to defraud the upper society of Paris.⁴⁸ However, every time he got caught, an impressive nineteen times, he managed to escape any prison sentences by paying bail. It was speculated that, because he swindled so many within the French government, he was being protected by said victims, as the truth coming to light would be too damning for the establishment.⁴⁹

However, the twentieth time he got caught was the last straw for Stavisky. The situation in Paris was becoming untenable for Stavisky, and he tried to flee to Switzerland. He was found with two bullets in his head, but his death was ruled a suicide. Naturally, these events were exactly what Action Française was waiting for. In the Action Française edition of February 6, 1934, Jewish members of various ministries are accused of having protected Stavisky out of an 'extranational' loyalty toward their fellow Jew. Moreover, Stavisky represented the Jewish caricature as painted by Action Française, a subversive influence in France, who (ab)used financial power to undermine the rule of law. In addition, Stavisky was considered a foreign influence due to his Ukrainian, Russian, and Jewish heritage. To Action Française, this underlined the dangers of un-French influences upon the nation. Given that he had moved from Russia to Ukraine and then to France, it reinforced the idea that Jews were unable to take root, which is in line with the Ahasverus myth.

The rising antisemitism of the 1930s comes as no surprise. Due to the increasingly antisemitic policies of the Nazis in neighbouring Germany, many German and Eastern European Jews saw themselves forced to migrate, which resulted in a huge influx of Jews in France. This, in combination with the worsening global economy, made Jews the perfect scapegoat. However, this new group of Jews, who were culturally German or Polish, presented an opportunity to Action

⁴⁸ P. Jankowski, *Stavisky : a confidence man in the republic of virtue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2002).

⁴⁹ L. Daudet, *L'Action Française, Après les voleurs, les assassins*, 07-02-1934, p. 1.

Française: Maurras claimed that the well-born Jews of France who held respectable positions as doctors, for example, were not as bad as the Jews that were expelled by Hitler.⁵⁰

Given that Maurras claimed there were various degrees of suitability for Jewish existence in France, it is evident that the antisemitism of Action Française did not have the same biologically driven Social Darwinism and that there were some degrees of redemption of French Jews. French Jewry considered themselves French, rather than primarily Jewish. Paula Hyman posits that the Jewish identity had almost no cultural implications for French Jewry.⁵¹ The cultural element of Action Française's antisemitism has the effect that it's prominently featured in the music reviews of Sordet and Rebatet, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter. In short: the cultural incompatibility of the French Jews made them parasitic in nature, which manifested itself in all matters political and cultural.

Anti-Modernity

An overarching theme within Maurrassian thought was the aversion to modernity. Maurrassism posited that the events of the French Revolution were inherently 'un-French'. The rise in atheism, the upending of social hierarchies, the transition to a republic from a monarchy, and the emergence of a more centralised government were understood to be glaringly anti-French developments. Everyone in society had lost sight of their place, due to the supposedly collapsed hierarchy and the absence of religious guidance. These anti-French developments had resulted in a wound of the soul (*la vieille plaie d'inquiétude*)⁵² for many of Maurras' countrymen, as the connection between France's citizens and its core values had been severed. Kelly asserts that art is not made to distract or to ease superficial burdens. The arts are the expression of the national soul and give meaning to life.⁵³ Maurrassian thought posits that this resulted in an existential anxiety.

The question of Action Française's origins is still up for debate among historians. Is Maurrassian thought at its core a countermovement to cosmopolitanism

⁵⁰ C. Maurras, *L'Action Française, 01-07-1933, III. On veut caser les arrivants*, p. 1.

⁵¹ P. E. Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: the remaking of French Jewry, 1906–1939* (New York 1979) 18–49.

⁵² D. Sordet, *L'Action Française, 12-2-1934, Chronique musicale*, p. 5.

⁵³ Kelly, *Music criticism in France*, 46.

and modernity, an inversion of Romanticism, or are these characteristics secondary to its conservatism? Due to its antidreyfusard origin story, one might deduce that Action Française is characterised by its antagonisms, but Action Française managed to transcend its oppositional origins by creating a framework of an idealised world. One such element of this utopia was the transformational, and almost spiritual, endeavour of creating art. Music, poetry, and fine art were meant to bridge the void that had emerged between the individual and *la patrie*.

Dolores Buttry defines Maurras' preference for classicism as "the primacy of reason, the acceptance of laws to ensure harmony, a love of order, and the legitimate power of community and law over the individual."⁵⁴ Modernity, in the eyes of the art critics of Action Française, is embodied in the prevalent Romanticism. Maurras' classicism is a project that hopes to counteract said romanticism, the revelry of the unknown and the appreciation for the untameable wilds, whereas his classicism is an admiration for ordered society, the domination of man over nature, and the primacy of reason. Sordet writes and thinks in tandem with Maurras, given Sordet's conservative nature. Rebatet, on the other hand, is much more open-minded to the unknown, the occult, and the Other. The natural order envisioned by most within Action Française does not always apply to the revolutionary spirit of Rebatet, who values energy and vivacity above all else. Of course, one might argue that classicism, as an inverse of romanticism, is itself a continuation of the latter.

Action Française was always at the forefront of political turmoil, opposing all manifestations of *égalité*, *fraternité*, and *liberté*. Evidently, reshaping France was no easy task, and demanded a paradigm shift that began with changing the hearts and minds of Frenchmen. Action Française hoped to raise awareness to the insufficiency of life under democracy. The Frenchman needed to reconnect with the France of yore, in order to transcend the disrupted 'natural order of things'. This chapter has given us the necessary tools to understand Maurrasism and the motives of Action Française. The next chapter delves into the processes of exclusion in music criticism and the efforts of cleansing the French sonic space of foreign influences.

⁵⁴ D. Buttry, "'L'Homme du Midi et l'homme du Nord': Charles Maurras and Knut Hamsun", *South Atlantic Review* 58:2 (1993), 50.

3. Manifestations of nationalism

The newspaper *L'Action Française* was, first and foremost, a medium through which integral nationalism was disseminated. Every contribution was written with the goal of revitalising Catholicism, the return of the monarchy to France, and reconnecting the French with their national genius. Maurras and Bainville had written a large corpus of political treatises, which often included scathing condemnations of so-called *métèques*, subversive influences within the ranks of France. These processes of exclusion, as is often the case with 'hot' nationalism, informed the ingroup on desirable behaviour. Maurras had paved the way of French nationalism, and Sordet and Rebatet merely needed to follow that road. After all, it was their assignment to represent integral nationalism in the realm of classical music. This thesis will deal with the creation of a nationalism through processes of exclusion in music criticism.

The reviews in *l'Action Française* on music vary greatly. Largely, the contributions in this rubric are reviews on concerts, in which the performers usually take the limelight. The reviews, depending on the writer, follow a certain structure. The first few sentences are usually dedicated to an introduction of the performer. An incredible amount of attention is given to the performer's cultural heritage. Musicians of Latin descent are almost always reviewed positively, as long as they adhere to concepts of 'Frenchness'. The texts usually end with a verdict, telling their readers whether or not a certain performance was worthwhile. More often than not, these reviews ended with an expression of disappointment with the current state of music in France.

Sordet and Rebatet were active contributors between 1929 and 1936. Their column '*Les Spectacles*' dealt with various cultural expressions that were available to the bourgeoisie and aristocracy in Paris. Concerts and cinema were discussed at length. For those caught unaware, these reviews would be read as the musings of two writers. However, for those 'in the know', these reviews were blueprints on how to accurately analyse French culture. By reading such reviews, one was left to normalise or internalise the political subtext, depending on one's awareness of *Action Française*'s positionality.

Both Lucien Rebatet and Dominique Sordet wrote simultaneously at other newspapers while they were employed at *l'Action Française*. Rebatet was an avid

contributor to the virulently antisemitic, but notably not monarchist, *Je Suis Partout*. Sordet chose to also put his literary eggs in the basket of the newspaper *Candide*, which was more or less in line with Maurrassian thought. It stands to reason that both Sordet and Rebatet chose to also write for other newspapers, as *Action Française* did not support the whole of their ideologies. Conversely, whenever they did write for *l'Action Française*, their contributions were, by and large, in line with Maurrassian thought.

Clashing European identities

A recurring theme within these reviews is performers of a certain cultural heritage that play arrangements by composers of a different culture. Cultural incompatibility, according to Sordet and Rebatet, is a mistake that begets mistakes. The inability to truly understand the composer and to embody the composer's spirit in the arrangement is one that hinges on one's cultural background. A telling case is the review in the *Action Française* edition of December 10, 1932.⁵⁵ Rebatet writes about the Hungarian pianist Lily Krauss. Her name would suggest a German upbringing – which to any other contributor of *l'Action Française* would be cause for disdain – however, due to the recent dissolution of Austria-Hungary, the Hungarian identity had only recently become a national one.

National identity was apparently not that important to the self-proclaimed fascist Rebatet, as he lumped Krauss' Hungarian identity in with the transnational Central European, or Danubian, identity. This, of course, ties in perfectly with the Maurrassian concept of the soul of a people. National borders can change, regimes could topple, and countries could cease to exist, but a people that was brought within certain geographical boundaries and had a connection to the land – an (un)conscious rootedness – theirs was an immutable soul that transcended the individual.

Krauss performs the *Sonata Pathétique* by Beethoven. The supposed clash of cultures (German versus Hungarian) did not seem to irk Rebatet. However, he did comment on the outdatedness of performers and composers that came from Central Europe. Rebatet remarks that her excessive arm movements and theatrical way of

⁵⁵ L. Rebatet, *L'Action Française*, 10-12-1932, *La Musique - Les Concerts*, p. 4

playing would “quickly be cured by even the lowest teacher in our provinces”, which is a surprising deviation from Maurrassian thought. Reading between the lines, his comment seems to support a more centralist worldview that glorifies the metropolitan Paris, which is in stark contrast with the decentralised provincialism that is prevalent within Action Française.

Whenever a foreign musician, who happened to have studied music in France, is discussed, the reviewers choose to forgo any other comments on their nationality. It seems as though the bad habits these musicians would have picked up back home have been smoothed over by their French tutors. Rebatet wrote of Walter Giesecking, a German native, who had been able to overcome his roots by studying music in France.⁵⁶ One can only conclude that Sordet and Rebatet consider such students as acculturated, but they are very clear that they are not considered French, as they are not in possession of the French genius. The same Giesecking is labelled decidedly as a German who returned to his roots after his education. It stands to reason that Sordet and Rebatet consistently apply integral nationalism in their reviews; foreign musicians spending time in France enhanced their grasp on French music. To educate oneself on French soil by French teachers allowed a musician to take root in the culture.

Remarkably, both Rebatet and Sordet rarely, if ever, remark on French musicians performing foreign compositions. Either this underscores the superiority of French musicians, or the reviewers are more understanding that foreign arrangements cannot always be played by musicians of the appropriate culture. The answer is likely to be found between pragmatism and ideology. After all, the position of Action Française asserts that Frenchmen are uniquely imbued with the potential of civilisation. Culture is evidently a significant factor in civilisation, so Sordet and Rebatet understand Frenchmen to have the ability to comprehend foreign music.

One shining example is the review of *Tristan et Isolde*, the Wagnerian classic that was performed by the Colonne Orchestra. All the musicians and soloists that are mentioned are French citizens, but this does not stop Rebatet from praising their contribution and their phenomenal grasp of the score. However, Rebatet does remark on the inadequate performance of the conductor, blaming his youth but not his French heritage. Rebatet closes his review with the following: “*On peut encore*

⁵⁶ L. Rebatet, L’Action Française, 17-01-1934, *Les Concerts - Salle Gaveau, debut de Rudolph Serkin*, p. 4.

*jouer Wagner en France, entre Français, lorsqu'on s'en donne la peine.*⁵⁷ Even though there is a severe cultural incompatibility, Rebatet remarks that it is still possible to play Wagner in France among Frenchmen.

Nostalgia as a catalyst for political change

Many of the cultural policies that Action Française hoped to enact were fuelled by their disdain of cosmopolitanism. Due to Action Française's centring of regionalism, claiming that the provinces harboured remnants of the French genius, cosmopolitan cultural expressions, like Symbolism and Decadence, were reviled.⁵⁸ The provinces, places where 'real men' still toiled the ground, were closer to earth and therefore more rooted in the old conception of France. The alienation from the earth and France's genius lies at the heart of Action Française. The 'anxiety of the soul', as Maurras called it, could in today's terms best be explained as a deep nostalgia. This phenomenon is most clearly seen in Maurras' depictions of Provence, where he reminisces about the tranquil seas, the songs of the fishermen, and the *lumineux* firmament.⁵⁹ In this idealised past, the frequently used word *lumineux* did not only refer to a thermal source of luminosity but is to be understood in an almost religious fashion. After all, this idealised past contained a closeness to the Catholic Church, the monarchy, and a pure France, which, in Maurras' opinion, was sorely lacking in contemporary Paris.

Light is, for obvious reasons, not a dimension that is often discussed in the performance of music. However, the subtext and the implications of light in both vocal and instrumental arrangements shaped the audience's experience of the composition. We can analyse a telling example of this in the June 24, 1933, edition, wherein Sordet writes about ballets in the *Théâtre de Champs-Élysées. Les Fastes*, a ballet by Balanchine and Henri Sauguet but designed by the renowned Fauvist-turned-classicist André Derain, was a composition about the mysterious history of ancient Rome. Sordet characterises the visual arrangement as a "*beau décor simple et lumineux*", a compliment that is only given in relation to supposedly 'pure'

⁵⁷ L. Rebatet, *L'Action Française, 17-2-1934, Tristan et Isolde*, Rebatet, p. 4. ; "It is still possible to play Wagner in France, among French people, if one makes the effort."

⁵⁸ Patrick McGuinness, 'Reactionary Poetics: Maurras and the Ecole romane', *Poetry and Radical Politics in fin de siècle France: From Anarchism to Action française* (Oxford 2015) 259.

⁵⁹ B. Sudlow, 'The Untameable Provence of Charles Maurras', *Nottingham French studies* 50 (2011) 26.

manifestations of art and history.⁶⁰

Pureness, in the Maurrassian conception, does not automatically equal a connection to ancient Rome. As we can read in the April 1, 1933 edition, Sordet writes that the *Toccata et fugue en ut mineur* has the unique ability of transporting the audience to a radiant and luminous world of 'pure ideas'.⁶¹ Likewise, in the April 8, 1938 edition, Rebatet writes of the pureness of music from the provinces. The vocal group Concordia from Mulhouse staged a 'luminous' interpretation of Bach's Magnificat, bordering the perfection of Schola Cantorum de Nantes' - a music school closely tied to integral nationalism - staging of the same arrangement. It is no surprise that Rebatet greatly values the Schola Cantorum dependance in Nantes, given the connection between Action Française and the *d'Indyiste* Schola Cantorum.

A recurring theme that is adjacent to the concept of light and pureness is nostalgia. After all, one could identify Action Française as the avatar of nostalgia in the political realm. Nostalgia is an incredible catalyst for change and transformation. The prevalence of nostalgia in fascist and conservative ideology stems from the dissatisfaction and inadequacy of daily life. Sordet and Rebatet - or rather, Action Française at large - experienced an expanding corruption in France, one that threatened the natural order of things. This pollution of everyday life originated from the Fifth Column. France's soul, although supposedly immutable, was being corrupted by the Freemasons, rampant capitalism, and more importantly, the Jews.

The position of the existential threat posed by the '*anti-France*' was one that had been present throughout the lifespan of Action Française, but its prevalence in the way it was promoted in the texts changed depending on the political climate. A turning point in the history of Action Française is the papal damnation of 1926. Maurras' utilitarian approach to the Catholic Church, seeing the Church as a way of imposing order rather than appreciating the institution as a holy organisation, was not welcomed by the Catholic clergy. Furthermore, Maurras' agnostic worldview only cemented his utilitarianism, which moved Pope Pius XI to put the newspaper *l'Action Française* on the index of prohibited literature. Afterwards, the paper employed a less virulent integral nationalism and antisemitism, hoping to remain palatable to its Catholic reader base. The early 1930s marked a significant resurgence in political

⁶⁰ D. Sordet, *L'Action Française*, 24-6-1933, *Théâtre de Champs-Élysées*, Sordet, p. 4.

⁶¹ D. Sordet, *L'Action Française*, 1-4-1933, *Le Phonographe*, Sordet, p. 4.

music commentary, due to the rise of the *Cartel des Gauches* and the advent of National Socialism in Germany, which coincided with Rebatet's appointment to the newspaper.

As mentioned before, the Action Française interference in the soundscape was intended to reinforce a rigid social hierarchy and to reconnect the French with their national genius but also to counteract the cultural efforts of the *Cartel des Gauches*. Sordet considers the music policies of the Popular Front akin to the bread and games of the Roman Empire: a distraction to lull the masses into a sense of comfort and, even worse, complacency. To Action Française, art is not made as a means of distraction but to fill a spiritual void that reconnects the audience with *la patrie France*. Sordet situates civilisation as the antithesis of democracy, embodied in the battle of the arts.⁶² To him, democracy is a system of government that is inherently corrupt, as it allows non-French people to participate in politics. Monarchy is thereby united with the concept of civilisation, as only the king - possessed and guided by the French genius - would be able to adequately shepherd and protect the French people. Evidently, Sordet loyally follows the Maurrassian school of thought.

The Concept of Race

Rootedness is at the heart of the Maurrassian conception of belonging. The reviled cosmopolitanism that supposedly plagued Paris resulted in, or was created by, a melting pot that ran diametrically opposed to the decentralised regionalism that Action Française supported. The aforementioned rigid nationalism is applied to all Europeans, but what happens when non-Europeans participate in the predominantly white soundscape of France?

In the November 2nd edition of 1934, we find an interesting passage by Lucien Rebatet about belonging and rootedness.⁶³ The subject of his heated tirade is the African-American Aubrey Pankey, who sang a selection of *lieder* by Germanophone composers Schubert and Schumann. Rebatet is usually reserved about people from outside a certain culture performing arrangements from that very culture, but, in this case, Rebatet's objections were almost biologically oriented,

⁶² Kelly, *Music criticism in France*, 46.

⁶³ L. Rebatet, *L'Action Française*, 2-11-1934, Aubrey Pankey - Hélène Lampel, p.3.

signifying a surprising break with Maurrassian thought. The very idea of Black individuals participating in classical music was baffling to Rebatet.

Rebatet claims that the usual characteristics of 'Negro' singers, like a certain roughness or a 'deep velvet', have been overshadowed by Pankey's European music education. Pankey's singing had, therefore, lost any uniqueness, which relegated Pankey to a state of musical limbo. His execution of the German *lieder* was neither German nor African American. Although his version of Händel's old melodies might warm the hearts of the uncultured British, his execution of Schubert's Romanticism was found lacking by Rebatet, due to Pankey's inability to express the deep-seated anguish that only Germans know how to accurately interpret.

The most stinging criticism is focused on the crescendos in the Schumann, which are, admittedly, counter-intuitive to those versed in European classical music, sung slower than intended. It is clear that Rebatet intends to underscore Pankey's ignorance, as *crescendi* are almost exclusively sung faster, rather than slower. Rebatet remarks that the crescendos are mere *hululements*, the hooting of an owl, a term that Rebatet tends to reserve for people of African descent. These cultural practices were echoes of the Protestant chorales instilled in Pankey's ancestors on the plantations. Rebatet further muses "that it might be easier to soften a brain than to soften an exotic throat".⁶⁴ Rebatet does concede that Pankey is well versed in a spiritual education, that being the Black Spirituals, befitting an African-American, citing other notables within the African-American music community, like Kid Chocolate, Cab Calloway, and the '*anthropopithèque*' Master Al Morgan.⁶⁵ It is no wonder that it is precisely Rebatet who seems to divert from Maurrassian thought, given his fascist inclination and his fascination for the developing cultural practices of neighbouring Nazi Germany.

Sordet refrains from biologically deterministic objections for people of African descent. Although he does mention the colour of their skin in his reviews, it does not seem to impact his reviews negatively. When he reviews the performance of Joséphine Baker, an American woman of African descent, her ancestry does not influence his surprisingly positive feedback. Then again, her performance was not considered fine art, as she staged a *variété* programme, which, in the eyes of

⁶⁴ L. Rebatet, *L'Action Française*, 2-11-1934, *Aubrey Pankey - Hélène Lampel*, p.3.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

Sordet, would be culturally fitting for an African American performer.⁶⁶ This does not mean that race is not a relevant dimension for Sordet. In the November 18, 1933, edition, he characterises the African performer Féral Benga as an '*animal humain*'.⁶⁷ However, this does not negatively influence his review but only reinforces Sordet's view of the 'Black race' as physically gifted.

It is clear that both Sordet and Rebatet do not want people of African descent to contribute to the classical soundscape, as that is decidedly a European endeavour. As stated before, Rebatet is of the opinion that there are music's that are culturally, or even biologically, suitable for people of African descent, which is exemplified by the introduction of jazz in the French soundscape. The advent of this new genre shakes the foundations of music in France, as it prompts a discussion about the distinction between music and noise. In 1934 Hugues Panassié published his seminal study of jazz, called *Le Jazz hot*, which in turn influenced Léopold Sédar Senghor's conception of the term *négritude*.⁶⁸ Senghor, who later became the President of Senegal, wrote of a Black identity that was inhibited by Western imperialism and racism. Although Senghor's analysis of jazz was ahead of his time, given that he published this particular work in 1939, the decision to base much of his work on the contributions of Panassié is interesting. Panassié's politics were closely tied to Action Française, having written contributions in the Maurras-aligned newspaper *L'Insurgé*.

Remarkably, Panassié fervently endorsed jazz due to its spontaneity, vivaciousness and authenticity, which he believed could remedy the inertia of modernism and the Industrial Age. Although Action Française and its affiliated organisations promoted a hierarchical system of white superiority, Panassié claimed that *le Jazz hot* was a uniquely Black contribution. Furthermore, he proposed that jazz should be protected against European influences so not to taint this novel music style with modernist atrophy.⁶⁹ Essential in this protection against the suffocating music conventions from Europe was the focus on improvising the music and the musicians' refusal to write down their music.

⁶⁶ D. Sordet, *L'Action Française*, 7-1-1933, *Au Casino de Paris*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ D. Sordet, *L'Action Française*, 18-11-1933, *Jean Fazil - Feral Benga*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ J. F. Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism: Music, 'Race' and Intellectuals in France. 1918-1945* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2013) 90.

⁶⁹ Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism*, 91.

The surprising appreciation for Black contributions to the French soundscape is characterised by Ludovic Tournès as “an inversion of hierarchy”, in which the supposed primitive character is celebrated for its uniqueness.⁷⁰ This sudden recognition stands, of course, in stark contrast with the European supremacy that Panassié himself upheld. Gérard Régnier posits that Panassié remained a committed Maurrassian throughout his life.⁷¹ However, Panassié’s influence on Action Française policy regarding jazz is hard to measure, given that his works are mentioned only twice by Sordet and once by Rebatet.

Sordet rarely reviewed jazz, but when he did, the leader of the jazz orchestra tended to be of European descent. When he reviewed Ray Ventura’s orchestra, Sordet remarked, relieved, that the music remained “pleasant, healthy, and tonal”.⁷² Sordet expresses admiration for Ray Ventura’s ideas and innovations but warns him not to stray too far from music, implying that music is something one can distance oneself from through certain stylistic choices. When Rebatet reviewed a performance by Cab Calloway, he took the opportunity to review ‘*Le jazz hot*’ in its entirety. Rebatet proposes that *le jazz hot* is dynamic, authentic, and innovative, and yet, Rebatet is not positive. He remarks on the drunk hooting of Calloway, Al Morgan, and Louis Armstrong, as lyricisms without accompaniment are at the core of their performances. The primacy of rhythmic patterns irks Rebatet, who much prefers harmonic structure rather than undulating cadence.⁷³

Antisemitism in music

Both Rebatet and Sordet customarily choose to not review Jewish composers or performers, due to their belief that Jews had no place in European classical music. There are, of course, some exceptions where Jews are mentioned in passing, but they are rarely the main topic of a review. However, after the violent insurrection of January 6th, Jews had been perceived by Action Française as subversive elements in society. As mentioned in the first chapter, Jews were understood to be foreign anti-French elements who were hell-bent on undermining France’s politics and

⁷⁰ L. Tournès, *New Orleans sur la Seine: histoire du jazz en France* (Paris 1999), 34.

⁷¹ G. Régnier, *Jazz et société sous l’Occupation* (Paris 2009) 100.

⁷² D. Sordet, *L’Action Française, 10-12-1932, Ray Ventura et ses collégiens*, p. 4.

⁷³ L. Rebatet, *L’Action Française, 28-4-1934, Cab Calloway*, p. 6.

culture in an effort to open up countries for infiltration. Their inability to take root in foreign soil made participation in the culture of said soil impossible, which, in turn, made the Jews parasitic in nature. Participating in cultural practices that transcend the individual was considered essential to physical and spiritual survival, according to Maurrassian thought.

The *antijuif* sentiments were renewed with zeal, as is evident in the January 20th edition of 1934, which was two weeks before the Veteran's Riot. The German Jew Marianne Oswald performed *Mahogany*, which was composed by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, the latter also being a Jew of German descent. Rebatet commences his heated tirade by insulting the physical characteristics of "this little Jewess", but this "would only explain a physical repulsion", whereas his objections are largely culturally motivated. Rebatet writes the following: "She is the castaway of expressionism, fermenting with the nauseating waste of naturalism in the Jewish pot. Marianne's gesticulation materializes the latent Bolshevism of the composer Kurt. This morbid exasperation with the commonplace could not fail to be Semitic, but it was with the complicity of the Germanic spirit that it had to take shape. The Germans have disowned it and vehemently chased it away."⁷⁴

Rebatet equates expressionism, understood by Action Française as a continuation of romanticism, to Jewishness. Both romanticism and its brainchild, expressionism, were considered inherently un-French by Action Française. Rebatet continues with a rejection of the leftist influences espoused by both performer and composer. Although Kurt Weill was receptive to socialism, it was his compatriot Bertolt Brecht who was an avowed Marxist, and their political differences would ultimately lead to a falling out. The difference between being receptive of socialism and being a Marxist was lost on a political commentator like Rebatet. To him, this only reinforced his existing ideas about the subversive nature of both Jews and Marxists (Rebatet employs the geopolitically charged *bolchevisme*, insinuating the involvement of the Soviet Republics). The "*Monsieur Tout-le-Monde*" setting of Weill's composition irks Rebatet due to the Left's idealisation of the common man, and he remarks that the Germans, whose national spirit had been invoked to stage

⁷⁴ L. Rebatet, l'Action Française, 20-1-1934, "*C'est le laissé pour compte de l'expressionnisme, fermentant avec des déchets nauséabonds du naturalisme dans la marmite juive. La gesticulation de Mme Marianne Oswald matérialise le bolchevisme larvé du compositeur Kurt Weill. Cette exaspération malade du lieu commun ne pouvait manquer d'être sémitique, mais c'est avec la complicité de l'esprit germanique qu'elle devait prendre forme. Les Allemands l'ont reniée et chassée vigélementement.*"

this 'commonplace' setting, had rightly labelled this as *Entarterte Kunst*. Not surprisingly, Rebatet forgoes any examination of the musical qualities of both the performance and the composition. Instead, the focus lies on the visual aesthetics of the concert.

In the *Action Française* issue of February 2nd by Lucien Rebatet, we find another example of the antisemitism being used in the newspaper.⁷⁵ The new chamber music society "Triton"⁷⁶ performed Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, and *l'Introduction et allegro* by Igor Strawinsky. Schoenberg's arrangement, which was atonal in the context of European classical music conventions, employed a cycle of twenty-one poems by Albert Giraud that were meant to be narrated by a soprano and accompanied by a small ensemble of strings, flute and clarinet. The composition was decidedly atonal but did not yet employ the twelve-note technique, or dodecaphony, which would cement Schoenberg in the musicologists' pantheon, given that Schoenberg would develop this technique eleven years after composing *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* was usually narrated, as was the performance that Sordet attended, by Maria Freund, who was a close confidante of Schoenberg but, more importantly, a French Jew. Given that Schoenberg himself was also of Jewish descent, it only reinforced ideas within *Action Française* that Jews hoped to upend the social order, in this case represented by Schoenberg's attempt at the 'emancipation of the dissonance'. Rebatet remarks that Schoenberg's approach to music can only be considered 'gehennic', referring to the Jewish conception of a hell and a source of anarchy and monotony. Rebatet likens Schoenberg to Kurt Weill, who, in the words of Rebatet, serves the traditional role of the Jewish agitator. Rebatet proceeds by discussing Schoenberg's physiognomy and asserts that Schoenberg looks like a cabbalistic rabbi. Again, Rebatet comments on physical characteristics that he understands to be Jewish, a practice that is hardly, if ever, used by his compatriot Sordet.

The music contributions of Schoenberg and Weill revolutionised our understanding of music. However, due to the atonality of Schoenberg's work, it is no

⁷⁵ L. Rebatet, *L'Action Française*, 02-02-1934, *Pierrot Lunaire*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Triton consisted of Paris-based composers like Prokofiev, Poulenc, Milhaud, and Honegger, the latter three were also prominent members of *Les Six*; N. Simeone, *Paris - a Musical Gazetteer* (New Haven & London 2000), 185.

longer considered music by Sordet and Rebatet. Although Schoenberg employs a twelve-tone system, a continuation of existing European music conventions, he chooses to completely upend structure and hierarchy in his music. It comes as no surprise that Rebatet and Sordet consider his arrangements as noise, an overtly political label, as is suggested by Jacques Attali.⁷⁷ Consequently, such a label reinforces the antisemitic trope of the Jewish agitator. As far as Action Française is concerned, an attack on the hierarchy and order of (French) music is therefore a violation of the integrity of France's soul. The atonality of Schoenberg and Weill is closely tied to the anarchy that Jews wished upon France in order to further destabilise the country.

Veteran's Riot

The antisemitism of Action Française had been put on the backburner between 1926 and 1936 due to the papal condemnation. However, due to the events of the Great Depression, the Stavisky Affair, and a severe dissatisfaction with the policies of the Cartel des Gauches, the crescendo of discontent reached a climax in the Veteran's Riot. A collection of French *ligues d'extrême droite*, with a militant branch of Action Française, the *Camelots du Roi*, at its forefront, protested the actions of the Daladier government on the *Place de la Concorde*. Violence erupted between the *ligues* and the police force, which resulted in fifteen deaths and about fifteen hundred injuries. Shortly thereafter, Daladier resigned from office, cementing the efficacy of violence in enacting political change.⁷⁸ Although the loss of life was felt deeply by Action Française, the whole affair was celebrated as an incredible win that helped destabilise the republican democratic process.

Dominique Sordet comments on the nexus between politics and music, six days after the disconcerting events of the Veteran's Riot. Sordet claims that the martyrs of the insurrection died in the defence of 'a certain form of society and a certain form of civilisation.'⁷⁹ He asserts that secure borders, order in the city, and prosperity are admirable and reasonable goals, but these intentions would be meaningless without the presence of art, which gives meaning to life. The Popular

⁷⁷ J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 29.

⁷⁸ Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 203.

⁷⁹ D. Sordet, L'Action Française, 7-02-1936, *Les Spectacles*, p. 4.

Front, against which Action Française and the other *ligues d'extrême droite* were rioting, did not merely threaten art as a medium of pleasure but the very fabric of a meaningful life. In the view of Sordet, the Popular Front approach of empowering the masses resulted in a cultural policy that scorned the elites and satisfied the less worthy.

Sordet remarks that theatres are being closed, the sensibilities of the masses are being poisoned, and the arts are being bankrupted. While the government prevents students from ever hearing Wagner's *Tristan*, crooks like Stavisky get rich through government handouts. Sordet continues by claiming that Stavisky only ever got interested in the *beaux-arts* as an easy way of laundering money through his operetta, a sneer about the connection between commercialism of the arts and the growing influence of Jews. Although it might not be immediately clear to the demonstrators of the Veteran's Riot, Sordet claims that they too fought so that Maurice Ravel could continue his masterpieces. This is the profound meaning of the revolt of the elite, which is how Action Française stylised the events of the 6th of February. The revolt embodied the dichotomy between democracy and civilisation. Sordet adds that civilisation at first glance only represents comfort, money, and the luxuries of scientific progress, but in essence civilisation is the state where industries are born and prosper which heal the human heart, which dress what Charles Maurras calls "the old wound of anxiety", reinforcing the connection between politics and music.⁸⁰

The Veteran's Riot marks the end for Action Française as a political organisation, as the Daladier government would dissolve the *ligue* on February 13th, 1936. The newspaper would continue to exist, but no longer as the mouthpiece of the political party. This development set the newspaper on a different trajectory, as the Veteran's Riot had reinforced the idea that democracy was corrupt and the antithesis to civilisation. Although the overarching political organ no longer existed, both Sordet and Rebatet continued writing for the newspaper, furthering Maurrassism in the field of music.

Integral nationalism is at the heart of every contribution within the newspaper l'Action Française, and every article should be analysed through this lens. Conversely, the contributions of Sordet and Rebatet, at first glance reviews about

⁸⁰ D. Sordet, l'Action Française, 12-2-1934, *Chronique musicale*, p.3.

music, are primarily the manifestations of integral nationalism within classical music. Music within Action Française is used as a unifying power against foreign and impure influences. Given the lack of music education in both music reviewers, the reader is left to focus on the political implications of these columns. Action Française's integral nationalism hinges on the concept of rootedness and employs that notion within the sphere of cultural practices. All of a sudden, people who once had the ability to participate in certain cultural expressions were left out of the picture. The whole soundscape of France, and those who participated in it, was to be cleansed from foreign influence so as to protect the *génie* of France and allow the French to reconnect to their national genius.

As this chapter has shown, the processes of exclusion in the music criticism of Action Française served to inform the reader of undesirable manifestations of culture. Every musician and composer was, in varying degrees, possessed by their respective national genius. These expressions of foreign national geniuses were not inherently bad, but they were decidedly subversive to the French *génie*. After all, every nation had its proper place in the world's hierarchy, which was almost always subservient to the primacy of France. Sordet and Rebatet extrapolated existing prejudices into the realm of music, linking them to undesirable racial traits, and thereby hoped to cleanse France of foreign influences. Of course, instructions on how to not make or enjoy music might seem ineffectual, until one reads this through the eyes of Action Française. To make art is to reconnect yourself to the national genius, to transcend the individual, and find your place within the natural order. Consequently, without a link to the national genius, one is destined to live a life plagued with insufficiency. The next step after cleansing the sonic space is determining an unblemished expression of French music.

4. Finding a French sound

Cultural practices are, in part or in whole, a reflection of the political sphere. However, a considerable share of the existing music corpus did not conform to Maurrassian thought, due to the Maurrassian adherence to a monarchist, church-centred France, which had not been in existence for the past hundred and fifty years. In short, the world barely had any music that reflected the true character of France. Charles Maurras was very aware of this problem. He claimed that culture nurtured the soul, and, since France had no suitable culture anymore due to democratic influences, the country had slowly become soulless. For France's culture to have a future, it needed contemporary music that reflected the core values of France.

Suitable music for this old France needed to be either 'excavated', for lack of a better term, or created anew. Old music's were reevaluated for authentic French elements. However, both Sordet and Rebatet came to the conclusion that all these music practices were outdated. After all, the music conventions of France prior to the French Revolution fall within the confines of the middle to late Baroque period. Compositions from this time period were arranged with a significantly different tonality (415-427 hz.), which would sound 'off' to our 440 hz. trained ears.⁸¹ The music from Republican-era France was, through the lens of integral nationalism, tainted with Romanticism. Regardless, Sordet and Rebatet set off to review these compositions, hoping to find shreds of authentically French sounds, rhythms and themes.

Sordet and Rebatet were not the only people in France who were on a quest for a French sonic space that encapsulated the true essence of France. Vincent d'Indy, a vocal proponent of Maurrassian ideals, was a prolific composer who opened a new conservatory in Paris that was aligned with his own political and musical goals: reinstatement of the primacy of the Catholic Church and a cleansing of foreign influences in the cultural practices of France. His students would carry the torch and continue building a new sonic space for a Catholic, or even monarchist, France.

⁸¹ R. T. Beyer, *Sounds of our times: two hundred years of acoustics* (1999) 32.

Schola Cantorum de Paris

Those affiliated with Action Française were not alone in their quest for a uniquely French sound. The composer Vincent d'Indy had arrived at the same conclusion as Maurras: the true spirit of France lacked representation in the music scene. Vincent d'Indy was a French neoclassical composer who, at the age of 39, became the chair of the Société Nationale de Musique, succeeding his patron César Franck. D'Indy proposed rigorous changes to the Conservatoire de Paris, hoping to set the leading musical institution of Paris on a path of radical neoclassicism, a supposed return to the roots of French music. D'Indy was an enormous proponent of symphonic music, whereas the Conservatory traditionally focused on opera.⁸² Due to the disagreements over the course of the Conservatory, d'Indy decided to found a new music school: the Schola Cantorum de Paris. Unlike the Conservatory, the Schola had no restrictions on nationality or gender.⁸³ Moreover, it had a distinct Catholic character; a significant part of the curriculum was church music, which suited the devoutly Catholic d'Indy perfectly. D'Indy considered music his purpose in life and was meant to move listeners and teach them moral truth.⁸⁴ Vincent d'Indy became the Schola's director in 1900 and remained its figurehead up until his death in 1931.

D'Indy held the belief that a good composer held his predecessors in high regard, as they were the basis for good musical structure. Deviation from their contributions, as impressionists and serialists were accused of doing, was understood as a lack of musical knowledge and appreciation. D'Indy proposed that the two titans of symphonic composition, Beethoven and Wagner, were representatives of *musique pure* and *musique appliquée aux paroles*, respectively. The former was pure instrumental composition, and the latter was vocal music guided by rhythmic speech. D'Indy continued by declaring his mentor Franck as a synthesis of these two composers, which reinvigorated symphonic music, and claimed the renewed genre as a unique contribution of French music.⁸⁵ D'Indy insisted that only students of Franck continued his legacy and were therefore uniquely equipped to create worthy and French symphonic music.

⁸² B. Hart, 'Vincent D'Indy and the Development of the French Symphony', *Music & letters* 87 (2006) 239.

⁸³ V. d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, (Paris 1903).

⁸⁴ Hart, *Vincent D'Indy and the Development of the French Symphony*, 240.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 239-241.

D'Indy's interpretation of this new French sound focuses on a cyclical organisation of structure. Recalling certain *leitmotifs*, an example of the Wagnerian legacy in symphonic structure, was considered good practice by both *d'Indyistes* and *Franckists* but was eschewed by contemporaries. His innovation within the musical sphere was the inclusion of regional melodies, rhythms, and themes and expanding them to symphonic proportions. D'Indy created two distinct Gallic music models: compositions based on folklore and regionalism, and compositions that proclaimed messages. Both were uniquely equipped to instil concepts of Frenchness upon the audience.

Of course, the strict canonisation of the aforementioned composers (Beethoven, Wagner, and Franck) had a downside. Characterising both Beethoven and Wagner as the progenitors of French symphony elicited scorn from the Action Française members that were more traditionalist, like Sordet. Secondly, the canonisation of the symphonic pantheon and the proposed adherence to their contributions, opened up the genre to staleness, a proclivity to repetition, and the stunting of musical development. Conversely, the creation of a well-defined and uniquely French genre of music made the *d'Indyist* school an invaluable asset to the *ligues*.⁸⁶ After all, the new generation of composers had to be educated with the right values in mind.

D'Indy became politically involved in the Dreyfus Affair and wielded his composing skills in favour of the anti-Dreyfusards.⁸⁷ His most notably political composition was *La Légende de Saint Christophe*, in which d'Indy found a space to expound his antisemitism and disdain for democracy and the state of degeneracy and inertia that so troubled his beloved France. *La Légende de Sainte Christopher* was Vincent d'Indy's answer to what he claimed to be the '*Italo-cosmopolite-judaïque*' influence within opera, instead aiming to create a French musical mode that was void of such influence.⁸⁸

The musical schism that followed the founding of the Schola Cantorum became part of a broader culture war. The *guerre des écoles* pitted the Conservatory, which served the interests of the government and the broader Left, against the Schola Cantorum, the avatar of the *ligues d'extrême droite*. Vincent

⁸⁶ Hart, *Vincent d'Indy*, 246-251.

⁸⁷ Fulcher, *Vincent d'Indy's 'Drame Anti-Juif'*, 297.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 301.

d'Indy passed away in 1931, but the course he set for the Schola remained in place up until the 8th of December 1934, when a music revolution rocked the institution.⁸⁹ A faction within the Schola managed to divert the Schola's course to a more modern approach. Those who upheld the *d'Indyist* position founded the École César Franck, in memory of d'Indy's mentor and mecenas.⁹⁰

There was a significant overlap between the members of Action Française and those affiliated with the Schola Cantorum. Although no notable members of Action Française would rise through the ranks of the Schola, there were a myriad of *scholistes* that were receptive to Maurrassian thought. The musicologist and composer Joseph Canteloube is a prime example of such a *scholiste*. His works centred around life in the provinces, which, in his case, was the Auvergne region. The themes that were employed by him lent themselves perfectly to Maurrasian thought. It will come as no surprise that Canteloube was a contributor to l'Action Française, having written a few texts in the defence of d'Indy's Wagnerian proclivities.

The efforts of those affiliated with the Schola helped lay claim to a space for 'authentic' French music. This new sonic space was not only filled with composers and performers but also music reviewers. While the musicians and composers busied themselves with the creation of a uniquely French sonic space, it was the contributions of reviewers like Sordet and Rebatet that ratified arrangements as an expression of pure French genius. Conversely, their rejection of certain musical conventions helped steer the creation of French music towards a different track. Although the two reviewers were in no way the only ones commenting on this emerging genre, many within the Schola were ideologically aligned with Action Française, so the opinions of Sordet and Rebatet would help set the parameters of accepted manifestations of this new French soundscape.

⁸⁹ Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music : From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Presses universitaires d'Oxford, 1999), 291 p.

⁹⁰ Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 216.

Aversion to academic influences

The academic study of music theory, and the music which results from it, is beholden to the social superstructure. Action Française considers modern society to be disconnected from the church and the French genius, which manifests itself within the academic circles of musicians. Consequently, the subject of academic influences within music is one that is discussed at length within Action Française. It is primarily Rebatet who deals extensively with the subject, who considers it a telling example of the soullessness that so troubles modern music.

Take for example the edition of l'Action Française on February 18, 1933, in which Rebatet remarks that the soloist mademoiselle de la Bruchollerie has not yet freed herself from academic influences. Her technique is adequate but seems to be missing a certain quality that Rebatet refuses to divulge. The academic quality of performances seems to hinge on the ability to accurately play the score but to not truly understand and execute it. Although the academic quality seems to be largely spiritual, there is a physical component to it. Rebatet comments that the soloist simply lacks the suppleness and vigour that is essential for a long performance.⁹¹ Rebatet understands the antithesis to academism to be a certain liveliness, a vivacity that a performer displays when one transcends the musical structure of a composition.

Sordet joins Rebatet's war on academism and asserts that Saint-Saëns' *5th Concerto* is a bit too academic due to Saint-Saëns' 'stubborn' persistence in including Egyptian themes and motifs in places where they are not needed. The supposed exoticism displays Saint-Saëns' eagerness at boasting theoretic knowledge, which undermines the authenticity of the music score. The exoticism of Saint-Saëns pales the music arrangement and dulls the music experience at large.⁹² The two columnists both write about academism, but the two of them use it in a slightly different context. Rebatet remarks upon the lack of energy and music understanding of the performer, writing of the staleness which he labels 'academism', whereas Sordet writes of the excess of technical showmanship that inhibits the making of music in Saint-Saëns' work. It stands to reason that the performer ought to display a high level of technical knowledge, whereas the

⁹¹ L. Rebatet, L'Action Française, 18-2-1933, *Les Concerts*, p. 3.

⁹² D. Sordet, L'Action Française, 2-11-1934, *Lucette Descaves - Denise Soriano*, p.3.

composer is supposed to work within undefined parameters so as not to come across as too eager at showcasing their knowledge of music theory.

The creation of this new music genre, neoclassicism, seemed to be largely inoculated against allegations of academism. Although the *scholists*, who busied themselves with this genre, had need of a serious theoretical framework in order to distance themselves from existing music, their works were rarely labelled as academic by those affiliated with Action Française. Ultimately, one can infer that the label 'academic' seems to be a political one, which conveys a severe distrust of academia and the social superstructure that shapes it. Academism is therefore an expression of music that Frenchmen, who are truly attuned to their national genius, will find trouble connecting with.

It is no wonder that Action Française and its members gravitated towards this nascent neoclassicism as an expression of a purely French sound. Neoclassicism, at its core, is an attempt at returning to the roots of composition while remaining palatable to the modern ear. Such a radical approach resonated with the reactionary Action Française. Neoclassicism is a reaction to, or rather, an inversion of, late romanticism, impressionism, and the emergent atonality. Adherents of neoclassicism wished for music to return to the eras of Haydn and Mozart, but with French modes, rhythms, and melodies in mind. Moreover, neoclassicism is just as much a political ideology as it is a genre of music. Its reliance on lyricism allowed for political messaging, which, in combination with the harmonic structure, served as a pedagogy. This could also explain the various ties between the adherents of neoclassicism and the members of the *ligues d'extrême droite*.

The palatability of neoclassicism to the ideology of Action Française stems from the Maurrassian primate of order. As Fulcher puts it: "*For Maurras, beauty was dependent on order, and order on a hierarchy of values; hierarchy, in turn, depended on an authority to "define and endorse it". Since order, hierarchy, and authority in politics ought to arise from tradition, that which similarly followed this tradition in literature would be most successful.*"⁹³ What follows from this view is an absolutist approach to aesthetics. That which conforms to order and hierarchy is therefore art. The central figure of which Fulcher writes, is embodied in the Maurrassian school of thought by '*la patrie*' France, which itself is represented by the monarch.

⁹³ Fulcher, *French cultural politics*, 121.

However, the relationship between Action Française and the French claimant Jean de Guise had soured following the papal condemnation of 1926.⁹⁴ Although Jean de Guise had broken ties with Action Française, Maurrassism claimed that support for the monarch was more important than the needs of the individual or even a political organisation. Action Française needed to address the anti-French elements in society so that the claimant's position remained untainted. Monarchism remained a central tenet in the newspaper and, consequently, also in the writings of Sordet and Rebatet.

Composers that adhered to neoclassicism were to arrange music that showed restraint, order, and balance. Counterpoint, the practice of using two or more harmonic melodies that interact, was to be centred again. Unlike romantic and impressionist music, neoclassicist music did not necessarily need to have a subject or a narrative. It was supposed to be music for music's sake. Or, as Eric Satie put it, music was part of the furniture; it was to dress a room with another dimension. This is, of course, in conflict with d'Indy's conception of the uniquely French symphonic tradition, in which the conveyed message was as important as the harmonic structure.

Rootedness in French music

The idea of rootedness originated from the Barrèssian antonym *déraciné* and emphasised a person's belonging to a certain geographical space. It is characterised as the ability to take root in a place by having been raised in said environment. The aforementioned pupil of the Parisian Schola, Joseph Canteloube, wrote *Le Mas*, a great example of rootedness and the implications of being *déraciné*, as it centres its story around "*une famille de vieille souche terrienne*" (a family of old earthly stock).⁹⁵ It is the story of an uprooted young woman who manages to reconnect with her old roots, a connection that is stronger than the attraction of modernity.

Although the opera fit thematically with the ideas of Action Française, its performance did not automatically garner support from Sordet. He claimed that Canteloube knew music and composed relatively well, but his Schola upbringing, evident in the harmonic structure, had curbed his spontaneity. Canteloube's choice

⁹⁴ G. Poisson, *Les Orléans, une famille en quête d'un trône*, (Paris, 1999) 349.

⁹⁵ Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 107-109.

at centring his composition around the peasants, whom he considered closer to France than any other class, gives the arrangement an austere veneer, which, according to Sordet, simplifies the score and, even worse, makes the arrangement unimaginative.⁹⁶

As discussed before, Canteloube's conservative and reactionary leanings are very explicit in his *Le Mas*. However, his opera *Vercingetorix* harboured elements that inadvertently lent itself to leftist co-optation. The work allowed for a decentring of regionalism and national rebirth and instead focused on noble self-sacrifice, a concept that was championed by the community-oriented Left.⁹⁷ Sordet took the Left's staging of *Vercingetorix* as an opportunity to expound his own - or those of Action Française - opinions.

Sordet uses the opportunity to centre Jacques Bainville's theory on the origins of the French genius, which states that the French soul is a combination of Latin civilisation and Celtic vivacity. In the stage play, the stalwart Gaulish chief Vercingetorix from Auvergne (which is a direct tie to Canteloube's other work), loses the pivotal battle of Alesia, which is the beginning of France as a 'civilised' country. Canteloube centres the suffering and sacrifice of Vercingetorix, which, in Sordet's reading of the opera, is the tragedy at the heart of this musical story. Although Sordet appreciates the thematic setting of the opera, he, and therefore also Action Française, asserts that Vercingetorix was meant to lose; otherwise, France's national destiny as a civilisation would never have emerged from the barbarism of the Gauls.⁹⁸

The current state of French culture is something to be preserved, rather than built, according to Action Française. Interestingly, many on the conservative side of the musical sphere approached this subject as if it were a medical case. D'Indy spoke of the polluting influences from abroad, and Maurras wrote about the spiritual health of the nation.⁹⁹ Charles Maurras considered culture the very lifeblood of existence, which is why it was at the centre of this war for the French soul. Musical developments from non-French traditions, like Wagnerian themes or the Danubian harmonies of Smetana, were therefore to be avoided by young French composers,

⁹⁶ D. Sordet, *L'Action Française, Théâtre de l'Opéra*, 5-4-1929, p. 4.

⁹⁷ Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 108.

⁹⁸ D. Sordet, *L'Action Française, Théâtre National de l'Opéra: "Vercingétorix"*, 01-07-1933, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 108-113.

so as to keep the French traditions pure.¹⁰⁰ Jews, Freemasons, and Protestants, on the other hand, were considered parasites and plagues upon the purity of French music. The three groups were earmarked by Action Française as having alternate loyalties. Their identities were not in line with French tradition and were, therefore, subversive to the French genius. Of course, these groups, who often considered themselves to be wholly French, did participate in the French music traditions. The recurring theme of excising unhealthy elements within French society is one that is reminiscent of other manifestations of fascism.

Take for example the way Action Française writes about the French genius. On the one hand, it is a force that is in all ways superior to any other national geniuses. However, it is in dire need of protection from subversive elements from abroad. Likewise, Jews, Protestants and Freemasons are all inferior to the French but are still a force capable of undermining France. The enemy is both laughably weak and incredibly influential. Evidently, such thinking is also present in the writings of Sordet and Rebatet. Musical contributions by Jews are ridiculed for their ineptitude but also characterised as severely disruptive to the French genius.

In order to protect the French body, one needed to protect the proverbial limbs. After all, the French genius was secured in its provinces. A shining example of such a musical manifestation is the contributions of Déodat de Séverac. Like his contemporary Jean Canteloube, de Séverac was a student of Vincent d'Indy at the Schola. D'Indy and the Schola instilled the importance of choral music and the significance of regionalism and traditionalism into de Séverac. De Séverac was born in the Languedoc and, in line with the Action Française admiration for regionalism, chose to compose his vocal arrangements in Occitan and Catalan. One product of his Schola education and the Occitan upbringing is his masterpiece *Cerdaña*, which employs motifs from the Languedoc. Although the musical contributions of de Séverac were created a decade or two prior to the music reviews of Rebatet and Sordet. Nevertheless, his compositions were covered by Rebatet, due to its innate Frenchness and timelessness. Rebatet writes that de Séverac was a composer who remained decidedly French in his compositions, unlike his contemporaries who were too compliant with Jewish and German influences. Although his arrangements border on impressionism, de Séverac beautifully paints a musical picture of his

¹⁰⁰ Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 113.

homeland. Given that his intentions are unmistakably focused on representing the Languedoc, his compositions are therefore innately French, even when his harmonic structure employs impressionist conventions.¹⁰¹

It is clear that Action Française celebrates regionalism. However, there seems to be a clear bias; representatives from Alsace, Brittany or the north of France are evidently lacking in the music reviews of l'Action Française. Consequently, it is clear that the idealised France within Maurrassian thought, or rather, the French genius, is best represented in the areas closest to the Mediterranean. Logically following the sanguine theory of Maurrassism, the south of France would have more Latin influences rather than Celtic ones. Therefore, such areas would be better equipped to birth civilised manifestations of culture.

Where, then, are the Belgians to be situated? Through the lens of the Bainvillian sanguine theory, Belgians would have a surplus of Celtic influences and a deficit of Roman blood. This haematic composition would suggest a cultural expression that valued liveliness, energy and power but was still civilised and decent. When the Padeloup orchestra performed a concert for the centenary of Belgian independence, Sordet wrote of his disappointment.¹⁰² The Belgian composers he held in high regard were barely, or terribly, performed. He mentions the likes of Guillaume Lekeu and Victor Vreuls, who were both, not surprisingly, students of Vincent d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum de Paris. Both composers were born in Verviers, in the francophone province of Liège. Their compositions were reminiscent of one another, with notable influences from Franck, d'Indy, and Wagner.

It is clear that Sordet values Lekeu and Vreuls primarily for their association with the Schola. Their compositions are shining examples of neoclassicism and therefore lent themselves perfectly to integral nationalism. Sordet does not remark on their admiration for Wagner, a comment that he rarely forgoes. However, this is not surprising, given that Sordet considers the Belgian genius to be inherently connected to both the French and German genius. Sordet writes of his disappointment with the other composers, who are decent but boring and uninspired. He remarks on the incredible talents who come from Belgium and questions the

¹⁰¹ L. Rebatet, *L'Action Française*, 21-05-1937, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 3.

¹⁰² D. Sordet, *L'Action Française*, 02-05-1930, *Festival de musique belge*, p. 4.

programmers for the exclusion of great Belgian performers like Arthur de Greef and Fanny Helder. Sordet expresses his regret that only second-rate French musicians were tasked with this concert. The onus lies with poor organisation, but the cultural incompatibility did not help the quality of this concert.

Gramophone

Creating a new French sound also includes finding new ways to consume said compositions. A particularly groundbreaking way of music distribution was the advent of the gramophone. Due to this invention, people could experience music in the comfort of their own house at the press of a button. Listening to music in a living room was in no way a new invention, as the aristocratic and bourgeois classes had a long history of hosting ensembles in their homes, but the absence of live musicians was decidedly novel.

Dominique Sordet was the “most combative apostle of the gramophone”, according to his compatriot Rebatet, who claimed that Sordet worked with various large gramophone companies, but that said companies barely compensated him for his efforts.¹⁰³ Notably, Sordet organised the Prix Candide in the Maurrassian newspaper *Candide*, a newspaper in which both Sordet and Rebatet contributed to the music columns. Sordet organised the *Grand Prix Candide* as a concours for ‘true’ French disc music. He involved a few towering names in the music world, like Maurice Ravel and Reynaldo Hahn, who took part in a professional jury. The main focus of the concours was the appreciation for new French arrangements. Due to the limitations, which Sordet would likely consider virtues, of the gramophone, it was largely chamber music that was reviewed, which is only fitting as the living room was also likely the place where many would listen to the gramophone.

Sordet seems to prefer chamber music arrangements over symphonic compositions, as that genre lends itself better to the medium of the gramophone. Although he might have been financially motivated to highlight chamber music, given his myriads of ventures in the disc industry, his supposed preference for chamber music is evidence of an elitism that is missing in many of Rebatet’s analyses. Chamber music is meant to be enjoyed *en petit comité* due to the significantly

¹⁰³ L. Rebatet, “Dominique Sordet ou les chemins d’un politique”, *Je suis partout*, 16 october 1942.

smaller instrumentarium and can therefore not be staged in the enormous halls of Paris. Chamber music was to be enjoyed at home, which had been a recent development with the advent of the gramophone, or, more reminiscent of classical music's origins, have the chamber ensemble perform at home, which was reserved for the more affluent members of society.

Sordet writes that Fauré's composition, due to its chamber music character, is better conveyed through the gramophone rather than a concert hall. Sordet remarks that a large part of the audience nowadays no longer appreciates the tender notes of chamber music but prefers the bombastic symphonies that play ever louder. "Only the initiated appreciate the Fauréan harmony, the melody that always seems to slip away."¹⁰⁴ According to Sordet, one needs considerable music knowledge and, more importantly for the works of Fauré, a vivid attention to detail to truly understand the harmonic structures of Fauré. This, of course, stands in stark contrast with the likes of Stravinsky, who only wants to amaze, or Ravel, who exaggerates the discoveries and effects in his works. It is not surprising that Sordet likens Fauré, a true representative of French music, to two other French composers who had involved themselves with un-French music conventions. Stravinsky was at this point moving towards atonality, and Ravel's compositions were, at times, too exaggerated and Wagnerian.

Sordet is a strong believer in using the gramophone as an educational device for music teachers. In the March 11 edition of 1934, Sordet writes of the declining popularity of piano education among the younger generations of France. It was no longer part of the education of 'well-bred' youths. The music teachers blame the phonograph for the declining enthusiasm, but Sordet asserts that the phonograph could play a pivotal role in music education. After all, the device brings the work of the world's best musicians into the living room. Although Sordet stylises himself as a conservative, this does not mean that he is inherently against technological developments. On the contrary, if these devices would improve the musical sensibilities of the new generations, he would welcome it with open arms. Sordet acknowledges that the phonograph would not make the students better musicians, but it would make them more receptive and knowledgeable of music, which was

¹⁰⁴ D. Sordet, *L'Action Française*, 02-02-1934, *Le premier Quatuor de Fauré*, p. 4.

understood to be an even better character trait.¹⁰⁵

The gramophone was reserved for the well-to-do middle class, reinforcing the elitist position of Sordet and his choice of music. For example, the issue of *l'Action Française* on February 12th, 1934, had an advert for a *Radio Phono Combine*, priced at 1495 fr. for members of Action Française only. This is \$1373.74 in today's currency. A substantial investment, given that the purchasing power of the average Frenchman had dropped significantly in this time period due to the advent of the Great Depression. Workers made an average of 4 to 6 francs an hour in 1932, which would mean that an investment of 1495 francs for a luxury product would be unthinkable to many a Frenchman.¹⁰⁶

Music as a social marker

The elitist character of gramphonic music consumption touches on its more tangible counterpoint: the concerts. From time to time, both Rebatet and Sordet remark on the presence of *mélomanes* in the audience of the concert halls and music venues and even write their columns with the *mélomanes* as their audience in mind. The French word is best translated as a lover of music, but within the context of the writings in *Action Française*, it has a sociological value. The act of considering yourself a *mélomane* implies being cultured, which, in turn, displays one's innate Frenchness.

Moreover, Sordet and Rebatet write and often employ the sentence "a true *mélomane* would enjoy this arrangement", creating a corpus of music that only true (French) music enjoyers would find palatable. A prime example would be the February 3rd, 1934, edition, wherein Sordet claims that only a few thousand *mélomanes* in France truly appreciate the Fauré quartet and even fewer have had the opportunity to experience it in the right setting.¹⁰⁷ Fauré, known for his chamber music arrangements, could only be truly appreciated by the few, given that such an instrumentarium thrives in a smaller setting than conventional symphonic arrangements. Preferably, such music should be enjoyed in one's living room, either

¹⁰⁵ D. Sordet, *l'Action Française*, 11-3-1934, "*Le Clavecin bien tempéré*" la quatrième symphonie de Beethoven, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ Monthly labor review / U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics v.36:3 (March 1933) 629.

¹⁰⁷ D. Sordet, *l'Action Française*, 3-2-1934, *Le Premier Quatuor de Fauré*, p. 4.

through a gramophone or by hiring said quartet.

Conversely, there are instances wherein the palatability of an arrangement is deemed unbecoming for a mélomane. These occurrences tend to coincide with large symphonic arrangements. From time to time, Sordet and Rebatet even remark on those in the audience, claiming that ‘certain’ audiences would be receptive to a Ravel, who aims for effect and exaggerates his discoveries, or a Stravinsky, who wishes to amaze. This, of course, stands in stark contrast with the ambitions of a Fauré, who would be unpalatable to an audience that prides itself on being avant-garde.¹⁰⁸

The consumption of music befitting a mélomane therefore attributes the audience a certain cultururation. It informs the individual on accepted expressions of art, within the confines of the Action Française conception of French culture, and allows said individual to embed oneself in an elite in-group without much effort. The corpus of accepted music, created by Sordet and Rebatet, is therefore a gateway to the Action Française conceptualisation of Frenchness and reinforces the idea of a cultured elite.

The potential upward mobility of the middle class is the dangling carrot by which Action Française garnered support. Although Action Française invoked a certain air of aristocracy, given that most of its notable donors were aristocrats, their reader base was predominantly middle class.¹⁰⁹ Professions like doctors, lawyers, and businessmen were over-represented both within the members of the *ligue* and the readers of the newspaper.¹¹⁰ Whenever Sordet and Rebatet appreciate a given music composition, they propose the next step in a roadmap, wherein the reader can claim themselves to be even more cultured.

The elitist character of classical music consumption reinforced one’s status within society. To surround oneself with men and women in gowns and *cravates noires* strengthened class-consciousness among France’s elite. Sordet and Rebatet were not blind to this fact and remarked from time to time on those that attended a

¹⁰⁸ D. Sordet, *L’Action Française, 03-02-1934, Le Premier Quatuor de Fauré*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ H. Serry, *Les revues intellectuelles et l’Action française après 1918*, in: M. Leymarie & J. Prévotat (dir.), *L’Action Française; culture, société, politique*, (Villeneuve d’Ascq, Presses Universitaires Du Septentrion, 2012), 337-346.

¹¹⁰ G. Le Béguec, *Le monde des barreaux et l’Action française*, in: M. Leymarie & J. Prévotat (dir.), *L’Action Française; culture, société, politique*, (Villeneuve d’Ascq, Presses Universitaires Du Septentrion, 2012), 101-111; B. Vergez-Chaignon, *Les milieux médicaux et l’Action française*, in: M. Leymarie & J. Prévotat (dir.), *L’Action Française; culture, société, politique*, (Villeneuve d’Ascq, Presses Universitaires Du Septentrion, 2012), 113-119.

certain concert. Sporadically, they comment on the increasingly impoverished state of the audience, referring to both monetary and cultural wealth.¹¹¹ Surprisingly, they never remark on the difference between the *arrivistes* and the *ancien riches*, as it is all *bourgeois* to them. However, they do pointedly express admiration for the aristocracy, as their place in the 'natural order of things' is decidedly higher than anyone of *bourgeois* descent.

As this chapter has shown, the process of creating a uniquely French sound was an arduous endeavour. Composers, inspired by the national genius, wrote marvellous arrangements, which were then judged for their Frenchness by music critics like Sordet and Rebatet. In turn, the reader was presented with a roadmap of music's to appreciate in order to revitalise their connection to their *patrie*. Internalising this corpus of accepted expressions of French music allowed for a sense of cultural upwards mobility, as it allowed oneself to be more in touch with their national genius.

¹¹¹ D. Sordet, L'Action Française, 02-05-1930, "*Festival de musique belge*", p. 4.

5. Conclusion

Charles Maurras wrote of “the old wound of anxiety”, a disconnection between the *pays légal* and the *pays réel*. All Frenchmen felt a connection to the essence of France, represented by the *pays réel*, which is the representation of civilisation, but were held back by the current state of France (*pays légal*), dominated by the antithesis of civilisation: democracy. The democratic process allowed for alien influences within France, which explained the unfulfilled lives of Frenchmen, typified by a disconnect between reality and the idealised France. Art was one of the last dimensions wherein the Frenchman was still able to connect with the idealised France, which illustrates its importance to the revolutionary or reactionary ideology of Action Française.

The writings of Sordet and Rebatet exist within a greater Maurrassian struggle against un-French influences. Democracy, socialism, Jewishness, atheism, and romanticism were alien to France, through the eyes of Action Française. The *ligues d'extrême droite* barely held any institutional power, and saw the influence of the leftists, and the un-French ideals they represented, rise at their expense. What followed was the beginning of a culture war. Both the Cartel des Gauches and its precursors, and Action Française envisioned a new world. This clean break with current society had to start at the microlevel of the individual. The mores and rites of the French had to change, in order to rewrite what it meant to be French.

Both the Cartel des Gauches and Action Française understood the catalytic potential of art. The Leftists had begun to lay claim to France's considerable contributions in the field of classical music, by organising massive *fêtes* for the people, showcasing interdisciplinary art that was meant to educate the masses. Charles Maurras had, by the end of the 1920s, already profiled himself in the literary arts of France, having been elevated to the prestigious Académie Française. His writings were decidedly French, but incomprehensible to the majority of Frenchmen. However, the art of music and its age-old connection to aristocracy and bourgeois society was a subject that was largely unfamiliar to Maurras. The realm of art music was being swayed by the efforts of the leftist governments, who hoped to mobilise art in defence of the worker.

That the reviews by Sordet and Rebatet are overtly political, is especially evident when one also takes into consideration that both thinkers never received any formal education in music. Consequently, the reader of the reviews is left to prioritise the political implications of their writings, rather than their musical merit. Of course, the musical laymanism of Sordet and Rebatet, although reinforced by years of listening to music, is presented as a virtue rather than a vice. The both of them were, according to themselves, not beholden to academism or musical fads. Sordet and Rebatet, influenced and possessed by Maurrassian thought, understood themselves to be French, through and through. Each person was possessed - or in possession of - their national *génie*, which uniquely allowed them to connect to certain cultural practices and discern pure elements of Frenchness in these rites. Conversely, the fact that Sordet and Rebatet did not experience music education and were therefore not exposed to, and indoctrinated by, foreign influences was a remarkable quality.

Action Française was, first and foremost, a political organisation that sought to reinstate the 'natural order of things' - an integral nationalism wherein every member of society knew its fixed position within the nation - and its affiliates were always on the lookout for manifestations of a natural hierarchy. The innate French genius, which manifested itself as the unique ability to create order, and therefore civilisation, enabled Sordet and Rebatet to recognise expressions of hierarchy. The realm of classical music, with its lavish concert halls, expensive gramophone recordings, and masses of *cravates noires*, was meant to be protected and cherished for the French nationalist cause. The other half of the French sanguine abilities relates to the Celtic ancestry, which manifests itself in an undercurrent of vivaciousness and liveliness. The combination of these two forces is the foundation for the Action Française conception of the French genius and therefore its expressions of music.

In order for said cultural expression, which primarily manifested itself in classical music, to remain French, it had to be protected and inoculated against foreign influences. On the one hand, French classical music had to be cleansed of un-French elements, like the Maurrassian concept of the *métèques*, a group of subversives within French society consisting of Jews, Freemasons, Protestants, and leftists. On the other hand, after the cleansing had taken place, French classical music had to conceive of a strong enough identity as to be immune to foreign influence. Although said processes were already in existence, it fell to Rebatet and Sordet to shape and canalise it in a way that was constructive for the creation of

integral nationalism.

The processes of music review by Dominique Sordet and Lucien Rebatet were twofold, in line with the goal of protecting and inoculating French music. Firstly, as established in the second chapter, art through the Maurrassian lens was a process of exclusion, a dimension that allowed for, and strengthened, a nationalism that was distinct from the worker-oriented nationalism that was expounded by the Cartel des Gauches. Instead, it reinforced a hierarchical, aristocratic and monarchist worldview. Secondly, both writers contributed to the creation of a corpus of French music. Their reviews reinforced parameters within which composers could create a uniquely French sound but also educated their readers on acceptable expressions of French music. As mentioned in the third chapter, by consuming accepted manifestations of music, the French middle class, the large majority of Action Française readers, could then claim to be as cultured as the aristocracy, allowing for the idea of a cultural upwards mobility.

The nationalism made manifest in the reviews tended to hinge on the performer's ability to connect to the culture of the composer. The supposed dissonance that emerged from the cultural incompatibility is a recurring theme within the reviews of Sordet and Rebatet. In line with the Maurrassian primacy of hierarchy, there were varying degrees of incompatibility. A musician of Central European descent could count on small remarks about their disposition on stage, usually concerning a rigid posture or a militaristic cadence in their recitals. However, reviews about the contributions of non-Europeans, or those deemed unfit to contribute to this space, were significantly more negative. The reasoning behind the cultural compatibility revolved around the idea of rootedness. Only people of a certain ethnicity could take root in a geographical area, which in turn informed cultural practices.

Although a large part of Action Française's objections against foreign influences were culturally driven, Rebatet's reviews on Black performers usually took a more biologically deterministic route. These particular reviews are one of the few instances wherein Rebatet's discordance with Action Française is laid bare. Rebatet was an avowed fascist and was therefore more receptive to the Social Darwinism of neighbouring Germany, which signals a clean break with Maurrassian thought. Unsurprisingly, Jews were also understood to be incompatible with French culture. Rebatet was consistently very vocal in his antisemitism, unlike Sordet, who usually

reserved his antisemitic remarks for periods of heightened tensions involving rising antisemitism, like the Veteran's Riot or the Stavisky Affair.

Moreover, Rebatet's reviews tend to be more inclusive towards German contributions in the classical space. Compositions by Wagner, vilified by many within Action Française as the pinnacle of German nationalism and romanticism, were one of Rebatet's favourites. Sordet, on the other hand, was a conservative *pur sang*. His contributions represented the more traditionalist wing of Action Française and were therefore more in line with Maurrassian thought. Sordet paid significantly more attention to the Schola Cantorum de Paris and its students. Their contributions were made with the creation of a French sound in mind, lending itself perfectly to the efforts of Action Française.

Creating or (re)inventing a sonic space that was unique to French cultural practices was no easy task. Although many within the sphere of influence of the Schola Cantorum de Paris set out to make music within these parameters of that which they considered French music conventions, such contributions would only be legitimised through the writings of reviewers. Sordet and Rebatet were therefore not 'mere' *mélomanes* with a guaranteed column in a newspaper; they had become judges in the court of French music, without ever having received music training.

In order to discern uniquely French music practices, Sordet and Rebatet focused on cadences, themes, and rhythms from the provinces. Maurrassism taught that the essence of France was an amalgam of the various provincial geniuses. Compositions that employed such music conventions, like Canteloube's *Le Mas* or *Vercingetorix*, lent themselves perfectly to the overarching Maurrassian efforts and were therefore reviewed positively by Action Française. As established in the first and third chapter, the province was best represented by its peasants; those who toiled the earth innately understood their connection to the land. As discussed in the first chapter, Action Française greatly valued the peasant as the idealised French subject, creating their own parallel to the republican or communist appreciation for the worker.

What follows is a dichotomy between the urbanite worker and the rural peasant, opening up a new theatre in the culture war that would spill over to the musical realm. Connected to the appreciation for the peasant lifestyle were other cultural themes, like the primacy of the family and the realism of the land, but, most importantly, the concept of rootedness. The latter being a central tenet to

Maurrassian thought, and its cultural policies were represented by Sordet and Rebatet in the realm of music reviews. The ability to take root in a certain land, and therefore the associated culture, would form the basis for the expression of nationalism within music for Action Française.

Important themes for Action Française, like the family, are absent in the works of Sordet and Rebatet. Either this means that such themes do not translate well and are not found in music, or these themes do not resonate with Sordet and Rebatet. Given that both of them never had any children, it is likely that the primacy of the nuclear family was of less importance to them than it was to many of their Action Française compatriots. The subject of social hierarchy, however, was of paramount importance to Rebatet and Sordet. Rebatet was the son of a notary, and Sordet the son of a general. Both of them fit within the target group of Action Française: middle class, educated, but with no significant career. They would both be receptive to the proposed upwards mobility for the middle class and the inertia of the lower class that was prevalent in Action Française.

The contributions of Dominique Sordet and Lucien Rebatet were meant to protect classical music as an aristocratic and bourgeois space, inoculate said genre against foreign influences, and legitimise the efforts of musicians who composed a uniquely French sound. The new genre of French music, a combination of choral scores and symphonic arrangements, allowed for a cultural expression that ran parallel to the soundscape that was favoured by the French Republic a space wherein the Maurrassian integral nationalism could take root and come to fruition.

Evidently, the political messaging of Action Française relied heavily on the recentring of a traditional political elite. The aristocratic financial backers of both the newspaper and the political party donated significant funds, but the true political power came from the middle class. The doctors, businessmen, and lawyers saw their relatively high standing crumbling in favour of the working class. Consequently, the middle class needed to either disenfranchise the workers or connect themselves to the aristocracy. Therefore, the music reviews of Sordet and Rebatet could be seen as guiding steps towards becoming cultured. By consuming the compositions that were favoured by the reviewers, the audience could almost ingratiate themselves within the political elite. During the consumption of said arrangements, the political intentions of the composers would be instilled upon the audience, making them more receptive to Maurrassian thought.

While many of the composers of the new French music genre understood their music as a vehicle for political messaging, Rebatet and Sordet also acknowledged and valued the artistic element of music. To them, and to Action Française at large, music had the unique potential to bridge the divide between the individual Frenchman and the overarching French genius, a divide that had come into being following the French Revolution. Music had, therefore, certain qualities that do not lend themselves easily to expression in writing. It is a form of art that is uniquely ephemeral, and yet it is invaluable to the creation and maintenance of a national spirit. Music, although created and intended as a form of communication, transcended language and opened itself to interpretation. This was not an issue for those aligned with Action Française; a true Frenchman would pick up on the pure expression of the French genius. Consequently, understanding and applying the Maurrassian conception of music criticism endowed the individual with an innate Frenchness.

As this thesis has demonstrated, Action Française and its affiliates understood and mobilised both the unifying and the divisive potential of music in a way that embodied and reinforced Maurrassian integral nationalism, in a defence of the crumbling hierarchy envisioned by Action Française. The scope of this research was restricted to the music reviews in *l'Action Française* between 1929 and 1936, but further research could delve deeper into subjects like the presence of Maurrassism in the music reviews of Rebatet and Sordet in other newspapers, like the fascist *Je Suis Partout* and the Action Française-aligned *Candida*. Another interesting angle would be the continuation of Maurrassian thought after the dissolution of the political party Action Française in 1936.

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