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THE EVOLUTION OF THE FRENCH CHANSON DURING THE RENAISSANCE: FROM THE *PARISIAN CHANSON* TO THE *PLÉIADE* CHANSONS, AND THE *AIR DU COUR*

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SUMMARY. The present article traces the evolution and development of the French chanson, focusing on the Parisian chanson and the changes underwent by the genre under the influence of the group *La Pléiade*. One of the most important contributions France has made to the music of the Renaissance, the *chanson* embodies the endeavors that guided French artists of the Renaissance to prove that the French language possessed all the necessary qualities for becoming a poetic language. Relinquishing the sobriety of the Franco-Flemish school, Renaissance composers turned to a simpler, more melodious expression in their works, striving to place the text at the forefront. The 1520's witnessed the emergence of a new type of chanson, generally known as the *Parisian chanson*, with its lyrical and narrative versions, exemplified by the works of such composers as Claudin de Sermisy or Clément Janequin. From the complex polyphonic works, composers turned to more transparent textures, characterized by homorhythm and homophony. The chanson was also influenced by the ideals proposed by the *Pléiade* group, which placed poetry at the forefront, the music following the metric and rhythmic patterns of the declamation – a practice that became known as *musique mesurée* and was represented by the works of Claude Le Jeune. Finally, the end of the 16th century brought about the gradual replacement of the genre with the *air du cour*, which would gain popularity in the 17th century. Nonetheless, the particularities of the *musique mesurée* would have a great influence on declamation and the importance of the accents in song – concepts that lies at the core of French vocal music of the following centuries. The analysis proposed by the authors presents pieces that are representative for the evolution of the genre, striving to reveal the particularities of each period in the development of the chanson.

Keywords: chanson, French, Renaissance, La Pléiade, musique mesurée

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Introduction – The French Renaissance

French Renaissance is traditionally associated with the period between the reigns of Charles VIII (1483–1498) and Henri IV (1589–1610), nonetheless the high point of this artistic epoch could be considered the timeframe encompassing the reign of François I (1515–1547) and that of his son, Henri II (1547–1559). During this era, the French court enjoyed an unprecedented brilliance. Enthusiastic patron of the arts, king François I supported the blossoming of French Renaissance, inviting numerous Italian artists to his court (among these was also Leonardo da Vinci). Although certain innovations and ideas commonly associated with the Renaissance (artistic, literary, or technological innovations) had arrived in France earlier than this period, Paris reached its peak as one of the great centers of art and philosophy during the reign of François I. France will experience important cultural, political, or religious transformations, such as the diffusion of Renaissance Humanism, the Protestant Religion, or the commencement of the voyages to the New World (which opened the pathway for the future French Colonial Empire).

In addition to his role as patron of the arts, François I supported the development of the French language and encouraged its use as official language. Thus, in 1539 he signed the *Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts*, an extensive legislative edict, the Article 111 of which stated that the French language should be used in all legal matters: *CXI. De prononcer & expedier tous actes en langage francoys.* Because of his contribution to the French language, the king became known as *le Père et Restaurateur des Lettres.*[3]

Following the reign of François I, French artists continued their endeavors which aimed to prove that the French language possessed all the required qualities for becoming a poetic language. Their activities had a great influence on the relationship between music and poetry, as well as on the evolution of this connection, as far as the 17th century.

The French *chanson* in the Early and Mid-Renaissance

One of the most important contributions France has made to the music of the Renaissance is the *chanson*, a polyphonic secular song, of varied character, usually composed for three or four voices, without instrumental accompaniment. The chanson*s* of the late Medieval and early Renaissance period belonged to one of the *formes fixes* (*ballade*, *rondeau*, *bergerette* or *virelai*), but after 1500, according to Lütteken beginning with the chansons of

[3] Knecht, R.J. *Francis I*. Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 1–2.

Josquin des Pres, the forms gradually became unconfined, and the chansons were written for five and six voices.[4]

The *forms fixes* consisted of strophes and refrain, two musically different parts that repeated according to certain patterns. Even though the form of the chanson would gradually relinquish these fixed forms, to reflect the meaning of the poetic text, nonetheless chansons that retained the strophe and refrain structure would still be composed even during the time of the *Pléiade*. In certain instances, the voices could be accompanied by instruments.

The relationship between form, music, and poetic message gradually led to the transgression of boundaries between various genres, leading to a differentiation of musical language that previously did not exist.[5] The first decades of the 15th century already offer examples for this overlapping of genres, which will be clearly visible regarding the chanson as well.

The Franco-Flemish (or Burgundian) School of composition had an important impact on the evolution of European music, Haar emphasizing the contribution of this school to the Italian Quattrocento[6]. The style of composition and techniques employed by the Franco-Flemish musicians dominated European music during the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, permanently undergoing transformations and evolving in the works of composers associated with this School: Guillaume Du Fay and Gilles Binchois (First generation, 1420–1450), Johannes Ockeghem (Second generation, 1450–1485), Jean Mouton and Josquin des Prez (Third generation, 1480–1520). Franco-Flemish composers Guillaume Du Fay and Gilles Binchois wrote *Burgundian chansons*, simpler in style, usually for three voices: an upper voice (discantus) and lower voices (tenor and altus). The chansons of Johannes Ockeghem and Josquin des Prez were no longer restricted to the limitations of the *form's fixes*, instead the composers choosing to employ *imitation*.

The use of certain musical modes and harmonic progressions within the chansons served to emphasize the meaning of the text, elevating the possibilities of expression. At the end of the 16th century, Thomas Morley observed that certain emotions must be expressed using precise means: "*...when you would express a lamentable passion, then you must use motions proceeding by half notes, flat thirds and flat sixths, which of their nature are sweet..."*[7].

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[4] Lütteken, Laurenz. *Music of the Renaissance - Imagination and Reality of a Cultural Practice*. California: University of California Press, 2019, p. 192.

[5] Idem, p. 99-101.

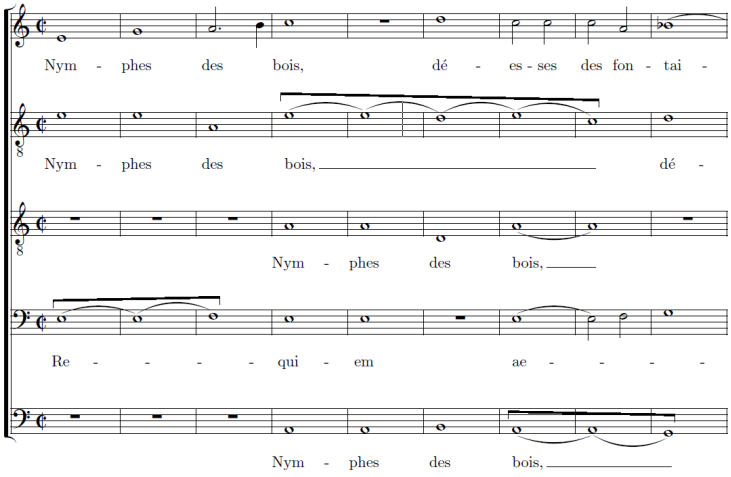
[6] Haar, James. *The Concept of the Renaissance* in *Medieval and Renaissance Music 5 – European Music 1520–1640*, edited by James Haar. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2006, p. 22-23.

[7] Morley, Thomas. *Plaine and Easy Introduction (1597),* edited by Alec Harman, London 1952, p. 290.

In a study regarding the use of the *mode e* in 16th century French chansons, Ouvrard observes that Josquin des Prez employed the *e modes* (with a final on *e* or *a)* when setting melancholy texts to music, in such chansons as *Regrets sans fin, Douleur me bat*, or the the famous „déploration sur la mort d'Ockeghem" *Nymphe des bois*.[8]

Nymphe des bois is scored for five voices: superius, altus, quintus, tenor, and bass. The chanson can be divided into two parts. The first part is inspired by the introit of the Gregorian Mass for the Dead and the polyphonic texture suggests the influence of Ockeghem – as a tribute to the older composer. Elders affirms that the first four measures of the superius evoke the head-motif of Ockeghem'*s Missa Cuiusvis toni.*[9]

E.g. 1



Josquin des Prez: *Nymphe des bois*
(Excerpt – the opening of the chanson)

The second section of the chanson (*Accoutrez vous d'habitz de deuil*) has a rather chordal texture, which contributes to a better understanding of the text.

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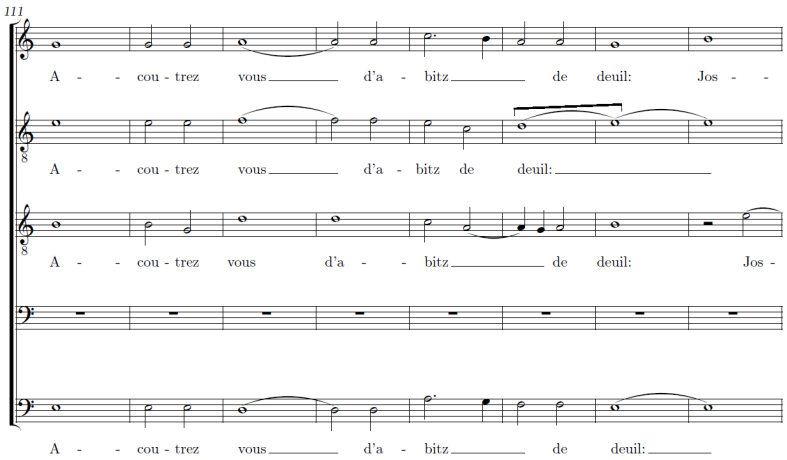
[8] Ouvrard, Jean-Pierre. *Modality and text expression in 16th-century French chansons: remarks concerning the e mode* in *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis: eine Veröffentlichung der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Lehr- und Forschungsinstitut für Alte Musik an der Musik* – Akademie der Stadt Basel, Amadeus Verlag, 16 (1992), (pp.89-116), p. 96.

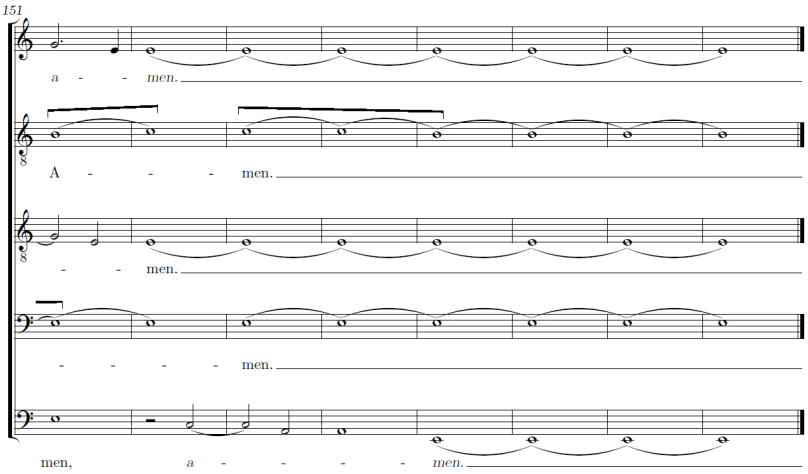
[9] Elders, Willem. *Josquin des Prez and His Musical Legacy. An Introductory Guide*. Leuven University Press, Belgium, 2013, p. 210.

E.g. 2



Josquin des Prez: *Nymphe des bois*
(Excerpt – the opening of the second section)

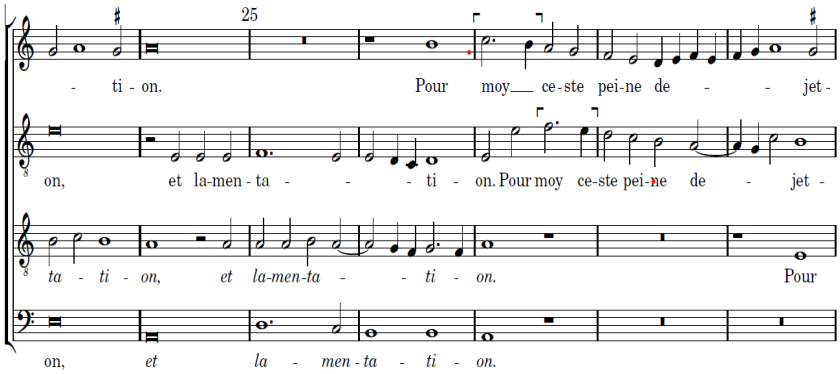
E.g. 3



Josquin des Prez: *Nymphe des bois* (Excerpt – the concluding bars: the final on *e* and the falling third that is characteristic for the composer's style)

In certain chansons, such as *Cueurs désolés,* half-step intervals are employed as rhetorical means for emphasizing the idea of sadness and lament (E.g.4). *Cueurs désolés* is attributes to Josquin des Prez, as mentioned in Attaignant's *Trente sixiesme livre* published in 1549, however certain researchers doubt the authorship of Josquin des Prez, owing to the fact that the harmonic rhythm is more alert than the composer would have employed in his laments, and the two top parts have a similar range, which is another aspect that make Des Prez's authorship doubtful.[10] Nonetheless, the work reflects the practice of employing certain rhetoric figures in order to emphasize the meaning of the poetic text.

E.g. 4



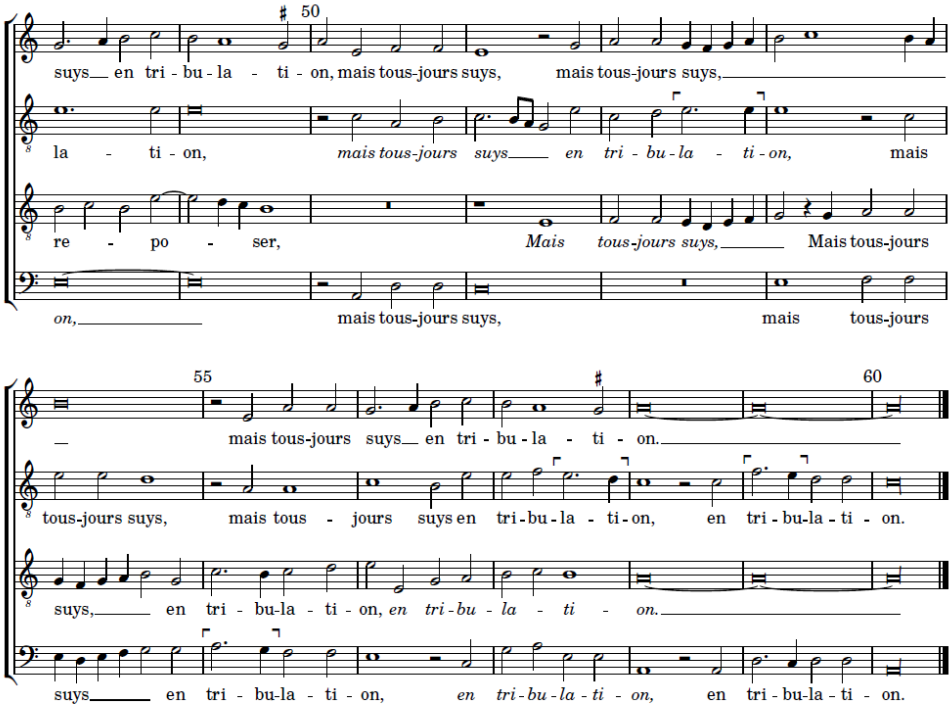
***Cueurs désolés* (Excerpt)**

In the example above, one may observe the half-step interval employed on the words *peine* (in the superius – the descending f-e interval) and *lamentation* (in the contra tenor), or the descending tetrachord in the bass (again on the word *lamentation*).

In measure 51 of the following example from the same chanson (E.g. 5), in the contra tenor the composer employs a descending tetrachord followed by an ascending sixth. The final (on a in the present transcription), again suggests and reinforces the melancholy nature of the text. The use of the Aeolian Mode is suitable for expressing such emotions as those mentioned in the text: desolation, pain, lament. Regarding the form of the chanson, it may be observed that the composer relinquishes the fixed forms, preferring an imitative treatment of the voices.

[10] Elders, Willem. *Op. Cit.,* 2013, p. 60.

E.g. 5



***Cueurs désolés* (Excerpt)**

During the mid- and late Renaissance, composers gradually relinquished the sobriety of the Franco-Flemish school, preferring a more simple, melodious, and elegant expression in their works.

The French Chanson during the reign of François I

François I ascended the throne in 1515, when Renaissance was already in bloom in France. Franco-Flemish and Italian art influenced the artistic and musical works of the French Renaissance. During the reign of François I, visual arts were influenced by a new style, that was present in European art in the years of the Italian High Renaissance: Mannerism. Mannerism emerged in Italian art around 1520, gradually spreading all over Europe, and lasted until the end of the 16th century, opening the way for the Baroque style. Encompassing various artistic perspectives, Mannerism exaggerates the

Renaissance emphasis on proportion and balance, producing works that are asymmetrical and filled with tension, the artists relying on visual rhetoric when devising their depictions (Mannerism can be recognized in the works of Michelangelo or Parmigianino, or in the works of artists belonging to the School of Fontainebleau, for example). The influence of Mannerism in music resulted in a highly florid style of composition.

Beginning in the 1520's a new type of *chanson* emerged: the *Parisian chanson*. These were homophonic compositions, simpler in style, which also renounced the fixed forms. The chansons of Claudin de Sermisy, Clément Janequin, or Pierre Verdelot are known as Parisian chansons, a denomination that nonetheless fails to encompass the stylistic diversity of the chansons composed in this period. Van Orden considers that the appellation *Parisian chanson* may serves as means *"to distinguish the lighter and more homophonic chansons printed in France, from the more imitative "Netherlandish" chansons written by contemporary composers (...) such as Clemens non Papa (c.1510/15–1555/6), Nicholas Gombert (c.1495–c.1560), and Thomas Crecquillon (before 1500–1557?)".*[11] Parisian chansons often evoked certain images, such as scenes from the war, nature, the marketplace, the urban or rural life. A great number of these works were published by Pierre Attaignant. The transmission of chansons through manuscripts was gradually replaced by their collection in *chansonniers* (song books) and in printed editions (individual chansons or collections), such as those published by Attaignant.

In his study regarding the origin of the Parisian chanson, Bernstein observes the traditional division of the genre into the Parisian and Franco-Flemish repertory.[12] Certain theories assert that the Parisian chanson was strongly influenced by Italian music (the frottola of the late 15th and early 16th centuries), while others believe that the genre was influenced by the music that was played at the French court during that period.

A common practice of the period was the fitting of new poetry to known dance tunes or popular melodies, which produced a genre rooted in urban minstrelsy and related to the Italian villanella: the *voix de ville.* [13] If the 15th century witnessed the circulation of French chansons throughout Europe, during the 16th century their presence was predominant mostly in French regions.

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[11] Van Orden, Kate. *Chanson and Air* in *Studies in* Medieval and Renaissance Music 5 – *European Music 1520–1640*, edited by James Haar. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2006, p. 205.

[12] Bernstein, Lawrence F. *Notes on the Origin of the Parisian Chanson* in *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Jul. 1982, pp. 275-326), p. 275.

[13] Van Orden, Kate. *Op. Cit*. 2006, p. 205.

Referring to the studies of Howard Mayer Brown on the Parisian chanson, Bernstein mentions the division of the genre into the following categories: *lyrical* and *narrative* chansons[14]. The lyrical chanson often has a homophonic or homorhythmic texture, with phrases that are long and arched, and (often) a dactylic opening. In the medial section the rhythmic dimension is more dominant, followed by a cadence. Regarding the voices, the *superius* seems to detach as dominant voice, bearing the important melody, followed by the *tenor*, while the *bass* represents the harmonic support, and the *alto* enriches the harmonic construction created by the voices.

The Attaignant collections of chansons were organized according to the order of the eight ecclesiastical modes. Thus, certain collections were distinguished by the absence of the *e mode*, more appropriate for solemn themes, while volumes such as *Tresiesme livre contenant xix. chansons nouvelles a quatre parties* (1543), for example, contained rather narrative chansons in a light and lively tone.[15]

Several traits of the lyrical Parisian chanson may be observed in Claudin de Sermisy's (ca.1490–1562) chanson *Tant que vivray*, on the verses of Clément Marot (1496–1544), published in Paris around 1528 by Pierre Attaignant in the collection *Trente et sept chansons musicales a quatre parties.* The chanson is written for four parts: superious, contratenor, tenor, and bass.

Tant que vivray has a dactylic opening, that introduces long phrases and broad rhythm. The phrases are decasyllabic in this section of the chanson (the first two tercets of the poem): the first two phrases end on inner cadences on C, while the third phrase ends on a strong cadence on F (**E.g. 6**). The musical structure follows the poem, the cadences emphasizing the poetic and formal division:

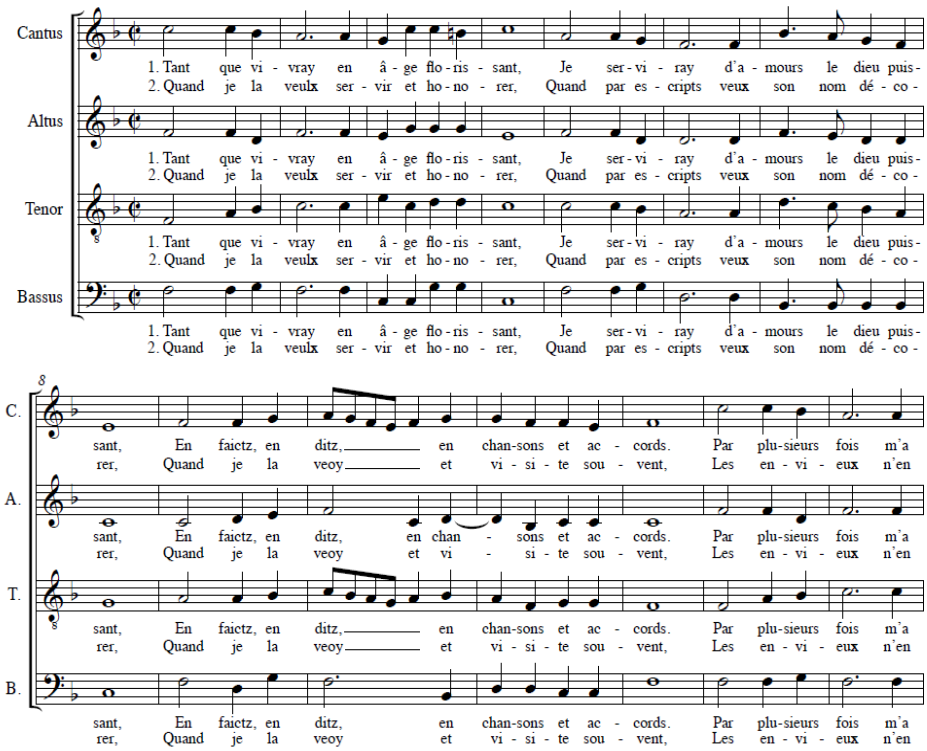
Tant que vivray en aage florissant,
Je serviray d'Amour le roy puissant,
En faict, et dictz, en chansons, et accords.

The same structure is repeated on the following stanzas (second tercet) of the poem:

Par plusieurs fois m'a tenu languissant,
E puis apres m'a faict resjouyssant,
Car j'ay l'amour de la belle au gent corps.

[14] Bernstein, Lawrence F. *Op. Cit.,* 1982, p. 278.
[15] Ouvrard, Jean-Pierre. *Op. Cit.,* 1992, p. 91-92.

E.g. 6



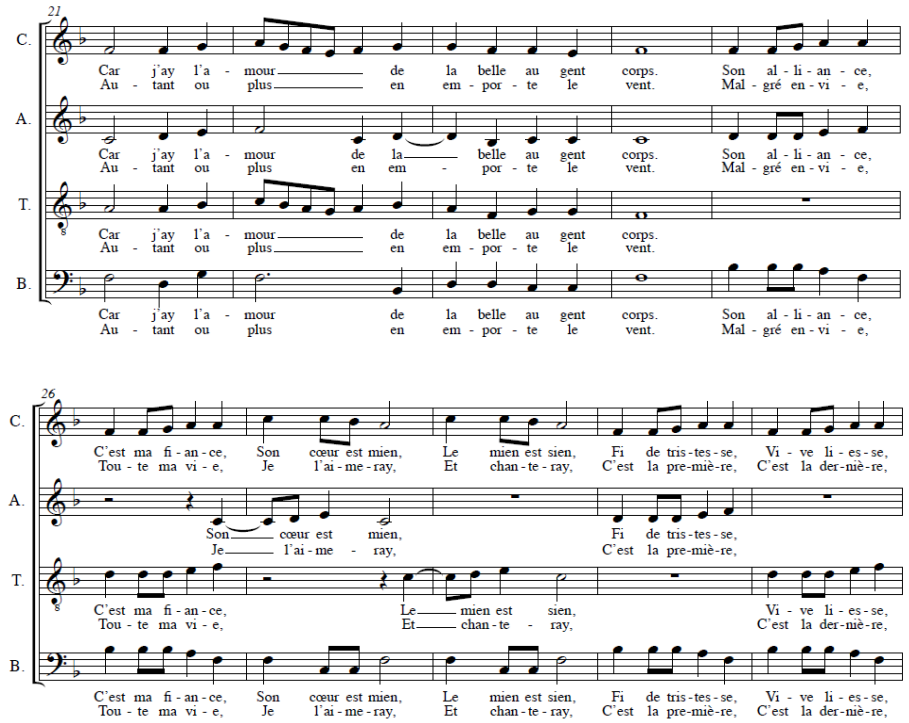
Claudin de Sermisy: *Tant que vivray*
First tercet of the poem (m. 1-12 of the example)

The second half of the chanson is based on two stanzas, that have the same musical construction, apart from the closure of the second one. The first two lines of each of these stanzas have a five-syllable structure, while the two lines that finish the stanza have four syllables. These short lines are marked by the superiority of the rhythm on the other components of the musical discourse, the overall effects suggesting the idea of declamation (E.g. 7):

Son alliance
C'est ma fiance:
Son cueur est mien,
Le mien est sien:

Fy de tristesse,
Vive lyesse,
Puis qu'en Amours
a tant de biens.

E.g. 7



Claudin de Sermisy: *Tant que vivray*
(The seconf half of the chanson, beginning with m. 25)

This section of the chanson slightly alludes to the *narrative type* of Parisian chanson,[16] due to its animated character and light imitative devices employed by the composer (between the countertenor – or alto in this version of the score – and tenor voices, in m. 26-30 for example).

Regarding the melodic dimension, it may be observed that the chanson opens with all the voices singing together in homophonic script, with a descending third (in the superius and alto), respectively an ascending third (tenor and bass). The descending third is a motif that will be transposed down in the second phrase, and inverted in the third, where the composer chooses to employ an ascending third (E.g. 6). In the second part of the chanson (E.g. 7),

[16] Bernstein, Lawrence F. *Op. Cit.,* 1982, p. 281-282.

the ascending and descending thirds are repeated in quick successions. Cadence defines every musical phrase. According to Brown, the resemblance of the superius to a monophonic melody in the conclusion indicates that Sermisy's chanson was also influenced by the *chanson rustique*.[17]

Typical traits of the lyrical Parisian chanson, that are discernible in Claudin de Sermisy's chanson are the placement of the melody in the superius voice, with the bass providing the harmonic pillars, the dacylic beginning of each section, the parallel imperfect consonance that occurs between the superios and tenor, and homorythm.

The *narrative chanson*, on the other hand relies more on animated rhythms and imitative devices, as well as homorhythm[18] - these features mirror the fact that in this instance the poem that is set to music is not of lyrical character but is rather narrative or descriptive. Even though he was not Parisian and only moved to Paris later, numerous songs of Clement Janequin represent this type of Parisian chanson. With their imitative constructions and animated rhythms, such onomatopoeic songs as the famous *La Guerre* or the *Chant des oyseaux* can be considered descriptive or narrative chansons.

Psalms* and *chansons spirituelles

The religious tensions between 1560-1598 (when the Edict of Nantes was issued) involved composers as well and contributed to the evolution of such genres as the motet or mass, as well as the genesis of new ones, such as the *psalms* and the *chansons spirituelles.*

The most widespread French translation of the Psalms belongs to Clement Marot and Theodore de Beze, enjoyed by Protestants and Catholics alike and sung by courtiers to popular tunes during the 1540's. The translations were finished in Geneva and were often associated with melodies from Genevan publications. After numerous versions, in 1562 the *Geneva Psalter* was published. After 1560, the Psalms were preferred by Protestant composers, while Catholic composers chose other texts for their music. Claude Goudimel composed two settings of the complete psalms, in a style that differed from the Genevan versions.

Other genres inspired by religious themes are the *airs* and *chansons spirituelles,* that closely resemble the secular *airs* and *chansons*: often religious poems or devotional words were adapted to existing secular chansons of other composers, or new texts (French translations or paraphrases of Latin religious texts) were set to music.

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[17] Brown, Howard M. *The Chanson Rustique: Popular Elements in the 15th- 16th Century Chanson* in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 12 (1959), p. 16-26.

[18] Bernstein, Lawrence F. *Op. Cit.,* 1982, p. 281-282.

The psalms and the chansons spirituelle alike were mainly intended for household or private performances, unlike the mass and motet, that were used during religious and state ceremonies.

La Pléiade

The French artistic and literary atmosphere of the mid-16th century was marked by the dispute between the ancient and modern, that also impacted the evolution of arts in other regions of Europe. In the France of the 1550's two groups confronted each other: the first, represented by Thomas Sébillet, supported the older artistic views and traditions, while the other, represented by a group of French poets bearing the name *La Pléiade*, encouraged the revitalization and development of the French language. Among the members of this group were Pierre Ronsard, Joachim Du Bellay, and Jean-Antoine de Baïf.

As response to the work *Art poétique*, published by Sébillet in 1548, the members of the group *La Pléiade* elaborated a literary theory text entitled Défense *et illustration de la langue française*, which announced the dawn of a new phase in the evolution of French literature. Their aim was to prove that French was an elegant language, that could express poetic ideas. At the same time, with this text, published ten years after the *Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts*, the group desired to express their gratitude to François I, whose legislative edict imposed the French language as official language in legal matters.

La Pléiade drew a clear distinction between two genres favored by the musicians of the epoch: the *chanson* and the *epigram*. Du Bellay condemned *the popular chansons* of the period, considering these were vulgar, and instead urged the poets and musicians to imitate the style of the classical odes, thus contributing to the reinvention of the *chanson*. When Ronsard began writing *chansons,* composers became more interested in the type of poetry proposed by the *Pléiade*. The language of these poems was easy, resembling the poetry of Clement Marot, while the strophic texts appealed to the composers due to their form.

A collection that contained numerous chansons of Ronsard was Nicolas de La Grotte's *Chansons de Pierre de Ronsard*, published in 1569 in Paris. The collection contains many chansons in triple meter, resembling galliards.

Du Bellay also proposed epigrams to be replaced with the sonnet, a poetic form made up of fourteen lines, with a strict structure (two quatrains and two tercets) and rhyme scheme. Ronsard published his first sonnet cycle, *Les Amours*, in 1552. His sonnets were set to music in the style of earlier chansons by composers such as Clément Janequin or Claude Goudimel: the pieces were written for four voices, blending homophony with contrapuntal

writing. According to Van Orden these are typical chansons, not madrigals: *"The settings follow the rhyme scheme of the poetry, repeating the music of the first quatrain for the second (AA) and providing new music for the tercets that is either repeated or through-composed to produce the overall forms AABB or AABC."*[19]

The desire of composers, poets, and artists to revive ancient art, led to the establishing of the *Académie de poésie et de musique* (with its roots in the activity of the *Pléiade*), founded in 1571 by the poet Jean-Antoine de Baïf and the composer Joachim Thibault de Courville, under the patronage of Charles IX of France. The institution attracted numerous composers, among them Claude Le Jeune (1528/1530–1600) or Jacques Mauduit (1557-1627). Aiming to revive Classical Greek and Latin poetry and music, the Académie also intended to revitalize French poetry by imposing the meters of classical poetry on French poems (*vers mesuré à l'antique*).

Greek and Latin patterns served as models for Baïf, according to which the poet devised precise rules that could help in the classification of long and short syllables and their combination. This gave birth to the *vers mesuré à l'antique.* Furthermore, the goal was to set this poetry to music in such a manner as to reflect the poetry's metric pattern, which eventually gave birth to the *musique mesurée*. When set to music, the long syllables of these poems would receive twice the duration of the short ones, thus producing groups of asymmetric rhythmic formulae, recognized as the hallmark of *musique mesurée.*[20]

The *chansons* composed under the influence of the ideals proposed by the *Pléiade*, place poetry at the forefront, music carefully following the metric and rhythmic patterns of the declamation, *musique mesurée* evoking the *recitar cantando* and the principles which guided the Italian Camerata de' Bardi: *prima le parole, dopo la musica*.

The *Académie* became less active after the death of King Charles IX (1574), shifting its attention from the revival of Antique poetry and music to oratory and debate. After 1574 works that strive to attain the ideal of *musique mesurée* were published, such as Mauduit's *Chansonnettes mesurees de Jan-Antoine de Baïf* (Paris, 1586) and Le Jeune's *Le Printans* (1601), a collection of *musique mesurée* (airs and chansons), all to the poems of Baïf. Most of these were works for four voices, their transparent texture owing much to the homophonic constructions employed by the composers in their aim to emphasize the accents and cadence of the words through music.

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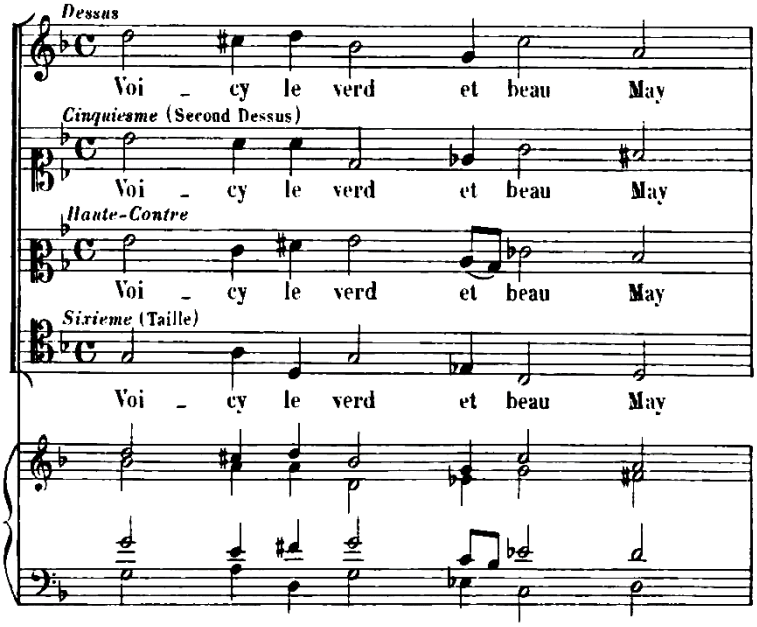
[19] Van Orden, Kate. *Op. Cit*. 2006, p. 208.

[20] Brooks, Jeanice. *France, ii: 1560–1600* in *Studies in* Medieval and Renaissance Music 5 – *European Music 1520–1640*, edited by James Haar. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2006, p. 179-180.

The composers pay special attention to the syllables, pairing long notes to the long syllables, and short notes to the short syllables, which produces an interesting effect: despite the fact that the accents of the words are clearly discernible and the music seems measured, bar lines cannot be applied and the music seems to have changing meters, as exemplified in Claude Le Jeune's *Voicy le verd et beau May* (E.g. 8).

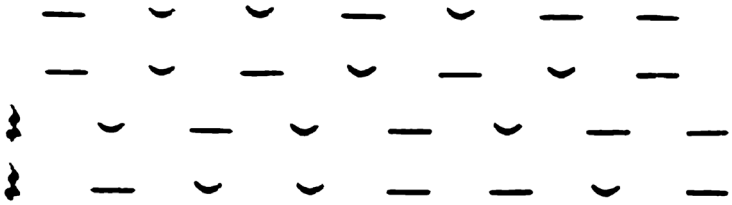
E.g. 8



Claude Le Jeune: *Voicy le verd et beau May* (excerpt)

The rhythmic pattern of the poem (E.g. 9) is reflected by the music (rhythm and note values).

E.g. 9

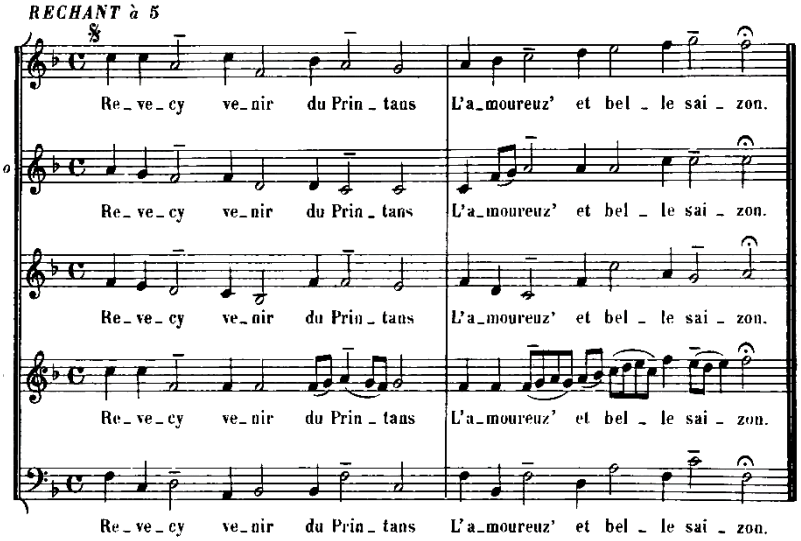


Rhythmic pattern of the strophes of the poem written by Jean-Antoine de Baïf. *Voici le vert et beau Mai/ conviant à tout soulas/ tout est riant, tout est gai/ roses et lis vont fleurir.*

The strophe is followed by a refrain, referred to as *rechant*, to which a similar pattern is attached. This structure is repeated three times more.

In another well-known Claude Le Jeune composition, *Revoicy venir du printans* (E.g. 10), the composer subordinates' poetry and music to the rhythm of the galliard:

E.g. 10



Claude Le Jeune: *Revoicy venir du printans* (excerpt)

The structure of the chanson is different from the previously presented song: the *rechant* is first presented by all five voices, always followed by the strophes of the poem, with the strophes first sung by two, three, four, and finally all five voices. The musical setting of the poem creates the illusion of rapidly alternating meters.

A surprising feature of these chansons is their homophonic texture and homorhythm, which ensures that the words and metric patterns are intelligible and follow the natural accent of the declamation. Brooks observed that dance-like chansonettes resemble the the *voix de ville* and the Italian *villanella,* the latter a genre that inspired the form and tone of several songs of Baïf.[21]

[21] Brooks, Jeanice. *Courtly Song in Late Sixteenth-Century France.* Chicago, 2000, p. 293–315.

Owing to the harmonious union they strove to obtain between poetry and music (through rhythm and declamation), the chansons composed under the influence of the *Pléiade* group will ultimately have an important influence on the development and evolution of the French recitative.[22]

Conclusions: from *chanson* to the ascendancy of the *air du cour*

16th century chansons attest the influence of the Italian madrigal and are characterized by the contrapuntal style that will be used in the Italian canzona. Nonetheless, gradually a typical French style was formed, that bears the influences of the various styles that were fashionable with 16th century chanson composers. These composers were not all Parisian, some represented other regions, displaying traits that are typical for the Franco-Flemish school of composition. These affluences of style contributed to the development of the chanson.

By the end of the 16th century, the chanson was gradually replaced by another genre that would gain popularity in the 17th century, *air du cour.* The air de cour was usually a strophic composition, for one or two voices and lute or keyboard, or for four or five unaccompanied voices. There were often two sections that were repeated, along with a refrain, which the singers would enrich with ornaments. In addition to religious themes and other subjects, the texts were mostly stylized love poems, sometimes written in *vers mesuré*, the quantitative verse composed in imitation of the poetry of classical antiquity. The earliest examples of the genre are written for solo voice and accompaniment, but by the end of the 16th century one can encounter examples of polyphonic airs written for four or five voices. What set the air du cour apart from the fashionable chansons of the period was their lack of contrapuntal complexity, as well as the fact that the melody is dominant in these works. The label *air* may have appeared in the 1570's, when pieces bearing this title began to exhibit different features than the *voix de ville* or *frottole*: poetry was important, and the text was set according to precise metric rules. Nonetheless, the differences between genres were not notable.

The airs du cour from the 17th century gradually were again written for solo voices. The music allowed for the text to be clearly declaimed, with special attention given to the accents of the words and the rhetorical gestures that would accompany the rendition of these arias. The music often conveys the impression that is has no meter, the syllabical declamation, with its irregular rhythmic patterns that strove to convey the metre of the vers suggesting the influence of the *musique mesurée*.

[22] Van Orden, Kate. *Op. Cit*. 2006, p. 215.

The purpose of the present study was to offer a clear picture regarding the evolution of a genre that is associated with the French Renaissance. The authors presented several important points in the evolution and development of chanson, highlighting the main stylistic changes, as these were reflected in the works of several renown composers of the period. The proposed examples aimed to present these musical and stylistic developments, refraining from a deeper analytical approach. The complexity and number of compositions in this genre is considerable, paving the way for further analytical and comparative researches that can focus on particular periods or composers.

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