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(short title: Early musicians' unions)

Abstract

The end of the nineteenth century marks the beginnings of the popular music industry. Although the symbolic figures of this period are undoubtedly the decadent music-hall stars, the situation for the majority of musicians was all but glamorous. As their working conditions ineluctably deteriorated from the 1870s onwards, many started to consider the possible benefits of unionization.

In this context, modest instrumentalists often chose to leave their country of origin in search of better opportunities abroad, while music-hall singers were touring the world in the hope of increasing their audience. This

international professional mobility lead to numerous artistic exchanges. It also facilitated militant transfers between the newly formed musicians' unions.

This paper examines the progress of the music industry and its impact on the conditions of performing musicians in Britain, France and the United-States from the 1870s to the 1920s. Keeping in mind the wider evolution of the traditional labour movement, we study the emergence of musicians' unions in these international circumstances and analyze the transnational relations between the French, British and American associations, which culminated in the creation of the 1904 International Confederation of Musicians. Finally, as unions were exchanging ideas and ultimately influencing each other, we consider the possibilities and impossibilities of transnational militant transfers in an industry where the attitude towards art and labour was essential and ultimately so rooted in national identity.

Introduction

At the end of the year 1893, tensions had arisen in New York between the conductor Walter Damrosch and the American National League of Musicians founded in 1886. Against the union's persistent demands, the conductor was employing a non-unionist Danish cellist in his orchestra. Damrosch was himself a member of the union and knew its rules all too well as he had already been fined for a similar offence. Spectacularly, during a representation at the Carnegie Hall on the seventeenth of December 1893, as Damrosch raised his baton to

signal the start of the concert, not one musician moved, leaving the room filled with an uncomfortable silence. Though the audience protested and even sided with the conductor, this demonstration of power was the only entertainment they would witness that night, as the concert was ultimately cancelled. More importantly, the conductor was fined once again and the Danish musician was dismissed. The power of the union had been established.

Whether it was praised or criticized, this act of resistance on the part of American artists had a resounding effect on professional musicians around the world. After all this was the first time that musicians had so publicly stepped out of their artistic role to become for a moment simple workers. The impact of the event was particularly strong in France and Britain where, in 1893, the future of musicians' unionization was still uncertain. Admittedly, since 1890 a French *Syndicat des Artistes Dramatiques, Lyriques et Musiciens* had achieved some success. It was predominantly active on the judiciary field and notably obtained the first legislations on health and safety in secondary theatres in 1893 and on artistic agencies in 1894.¹ But it could only dream of leading such a concerted action when, until its disbanding in 1895, its principal struggle was to make its members pay their fees.²

In Britain, the Amalgamated Musicians' Union (AMU) was formed only seven months prior to the Damrosch incident. It was thus received as an encouraging omen, the confirmation that the tools of traditional unionism were perfectly

applicable to the musical field. Enthused by the achievement of their American colleagues, AMU musicians from Liverpool refused to play, in June 1894, when their manager suggested he could open his theatre for three extra weeks if they agreed a cut in their wages. The quarrel resulted in full wages for all the musicians except the horn players. This first success attracted new members to the union across the whole of Britain.³

For more conservative professionals, the Carnegie Hall episode was a most shocking account, unworthy of musicians' respectability. Amongst others, the London Orchestral Association, which emerged in 1893 too, was quite embarrassed by this display of public hostility. In fact, it felt comforted by the notion that musicians could only improve their situation by keeping a low profile. In January 1894 it thus felt ready to unconditionally declare its moderate aims: 'This Association was established essentially for defence, and it must be borne in mind that when the Association is well armed for defence it must not become its purpose to be aggressive. The Executive Committee must at all times be calm and proof against any instigation to precipitate acts'.⁴

The circumstances of the American conflict are symptomatic of the developing concert industry with its large audiences and cosmopolitan orchestras. Its resonance on French and British musicians is indicative of the international dimension taken by the music domain in the last third of the nineteenth century. At a time when the advance of the press and transport drastically increased global communication, transnational

musical relations were remarkably intense and played a crucial role in the growing success of popular music worldwide. As we will see, many artists, singers and instrumentalists were in effect touring the globe, making compulsory stops in France, Britain and the United States, which remained the three main centres of Western musical life until after the end of the First World War.

This unprecedented situation facilitated the exchange of moderate and conservative ideas between the most skilled musicians. But as the music milieu was democratising, it also created the perfect conditions for more radical militant dialogues and transfers between British, French and American professional musicians who were starting to organize themselves into unions.

It is obvious that the history of musicians' unions has to be put into the broader perspective of the history of traditional labour organizations, and we will refer to this from time to time. Characteristically, they follow a similar pattern: the evolution from mutual protective associations to closed elitist craft unions then to more opened industrial groups and finally confederations. But in many respects these evolutions are the direct consequences of the emerging musical industry and of the changes it creates for the artistic profession. Musicians appear to be doing all they can to distinguish themselves from mainstream workers and, perhaps in some ways, rightly so.

The opposition between art and labour is central to the way they think about themselves. This attitude is quite

unique, even within the artistic field. Music, unlike painting for instance, is originally immaterial and thus historically it did not have a value. Court musicians would receive a pension to allow them create freely. It was never a payment in exchange for a production.⁵ Only the vulgar street musician was paid for his song. It may seem to be a rhetorical subtlety but the distinction is in fact essential. The industrialization of music shook these long established truths and forced musicians not only to put a value on their work, but to fight for it. The accent put on art by late-nineteenth-century performers was a way of resisting these changes; it was also a response to their low symbolic status, at a time when only composers were respected. By reclaiming their artistic nature musicians were trying to gain a lost legitimacy.

The study of early musicians' organizations presents some obstacles. At the end of the nineteenth century, the musical milieu was extremely divided and this impacted directly on the development of unions. Performers and teachers, skilled and unskilled musicians, instrumentalists and singers, instrumentalists from legitimate and secondary theatres, music-hall instrumentalists and music-hall singers, army orchestras and civil orchestras, etc. etc., would rarely join forces, so drastically opposed was the nature of their work, their artistic and economic status.

The best illustration of this phenomenon was the fact that singers, be they lyrical or popular, traditionally enrolled in associations formed by actors rather than musicians. Singers, like actors, were indeed stage artists, reaping most of the

audience's interest and recognition as well as the performance fees. Meanwhile, instrumentalists were, for the most part hidden from the public eye and existed only as part of another anonymous performing ensemble. Whereas they enjoyed strong group socialization, singers mainly worked on their own. In the end the two groups had very little working experience in common, except of course for the performance of music itself.

Therefore, until the 1890s, musicians formed multiple small associations whose influence was originally limited to a town or a region. By definition they had very little power and were doomed to be short-lived. The body of sources available to the researcher is thus vast and scattered and so attempting to draw an absolute chronology of musicians' unions is an arduous endeavour.

In this article we will mostly be concerned with two types of professional musicians: instrumentalists and music-hall singers. As we will soon observe, they represented both ends of the nineteenth-century music industry. They were also the most mobile and the most active in terms of unionization. As music turned into a popular leisure activity and the ability to play a musical instrument became a requisite of any respectable Victorian education (for young women in particular), teachers formed the majority of the music contingent at the turn of the century.⁶ But in many respects the domestic nature of their activity and its relative immobility protected them from the radical changes experienced by performing artists.

This paper aims to examine the changing state of the music trade from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1920s and the conditions of performing musicians during this period in France, Britain and the United States. We will study how these circumstances lead to the unionization of musicians and will consider the ways in which the industrialization of music impacted on the nature of musicians' unions in the three countries at stake. We will then analyze the transnational relations between early French, British and American musicians' unions and we will try to determine how these interactions shaped the development of these organizations both nationally and internationally. This study will not be fully tripartite though, as the American venture will be principally considered through its influence on French and British unions.

A fourth influential territory could have been included in this cross-national landscape: Germany. The case of skilled German instrumentalists is especially interesting as many played in British, French and American orchestras at the turn of the nineteenth century and notably, their presence was predominant in every early American musicians' association.⁷ Typically, Walter Damrosch's orchestra was composed of many German nationals not to mention Damrosch himself.⁸ We will touch on this side of the story sporadically but for reasons of time mainly we are consciously, though not without any regret, consigning most of this aspect to further research.

The entertainment industry

Musicians' unions, like most traditional labour movements, emerged in the dual context of an ever expanding industry and ever degrading working conditions. The second half of the nineteenth century marked the birth of the 'entertainment industry' in Europe and the United States. It then relied essentially on the development of popular public concerts. The success of recorded music, which we still today associate with the concept of a music industry (for how long though?), only started in the 1910s with the invention of the record and triumphed at the end of the 1940s with the introduction of the microgroove. True, the Edison wax cylinder had made the recording of music available to the public since 1889. But if this technology was revolutionary, it never became a household device. The expansion of the nineteenth-century music industry changed the life and work of musicians once and for all and from its very start it exposed all the challenges lying ahead for artists.

The conditions of performing musicians

British Victorian and Edwardian popular entertainment will forever be associated with the fame of the first music-hall stars such as Marie Lloyd, Albert Chevalier or Harry Lauder. Yet, the reality for most musicians, and especially secondary orchestral instrumentalists, could not have been further from this picture postcard imagery. The fates of music-hall stars, like those of the privileged musicians of legitimate theatres, were in fact the exceptions in a profession where struggle and destitution dominated.

As the success of popular concerts grew, competition within the music professional market soared. Encouraged by the development of music publishing and cheaper musical instruments, many amateurs saw in musicianship an easy way to make money in a booming industry. Thus, when the British population almost doubled between 1879 and 1930, the number of musicians (including music teachers) is thought to have multiplied by seven, jumping from seven thousands to fifty thousand.⁹ Prior to this, academies, conservatoires and traditional professional associations could, to some extent, control the access to the profession. Now they found themselves incapable of channelling this new mass of self-proclaimed musicians and daunted by the challenges of a capitalist musical industry.

Many newcomers were highly unqualified and ready to accept any position at any condition. As with any other trade, the competition between skilled and unskilled musicians efficiently eroded the profession's wages. In addition, numerous publicans realized they could increase their clientèle by providing music and entertainment. More and more taverns were thus converted into music and theatre rooms. But the welfare of employees was the least of their concerns and acceptable security and hygiene standards were rarely met.

Before the 1870s, some regulations did attempt to control the development of these places of entertainment. However, they mostly aimed at protecting moral values and preserving the privileges of legitimate theatres rather than attempting to regulate the working conditions of musicians. Thus, until

1867, French cafés wishing to provide entertainment for their patrons were not allowed to display artists in costume. Décor other than a fixed curtain were strictly forbidden and, behind the performers, elegantly dressed women had to sit in a semi-circle called 'la corbeille' ('the basket'), to convey a sense of respectability to the establishment.¹⁰ Aside from this last Gallic eccentricity, the British 1737 *Theatre Act* imposed some similar restrictions on unlicensed theatres.¹¹

Yet no general legislation on the working status of musicians was passed before the beginning of the twentieth century. As the industrialization of music drastically changed the nature of musicians' occupation, the very definition of musicianship became a problem for the legislator. Even if musicians could be considered to be employees of a theatre: who was to determine the length of working days or the remuneration of working hours? This resounding lack of regulation resulted in ruthless management, especially for instrumentalists performing in music halls and secondary theatres.

Contracts depended wholly on the goodwill of directors whose entrepreneurial thirst was rarely tainted by humanist feelings. Musicians who were absent through illness often returned to work to find that someone else had replaced them for good. Amongst other things, rehearsals, which took several hours of the day, went for a long time unpaid. Of course, if musicians dared to protest against their treatment they were happily shown the door where many anxious candidates were waiting to replace them.

Pushed to the limit by their meagre salaries, artists often multiplied simultaneous contracts inside or outside the music trade. From the mid-1890s onwards, a system of 'twice-nightly' performances was further introduced, extending the length of working days that little bit more. Finally engagements were mostly short-term, ranging from weekly to seasonal. Musicians were thus perpetually forced into unemployment and, so as to find work more efficiently, registered with an agency which could ciphers up to twenty-five-per-cent off their salaries. The expression 'orchestra pit' suddenly seemed to take on a whole new meaning.

The mobility of performing musicians

In this context, mobility became, more than ever, an essential feature of musicians' lives. Of course, from the Renaissance onwards, it was common for street musicians to travel from town to town in order not to saturate their audience and to earn sufficient money to get by. In fact 'immobility' has always been something of a historical anomaly, the privilege of a handful of musicians attached to a Church, a court or later a national orchestra. Until the 1850s though, musicians' peregrinations were mainly regional. With the industrialization of music and the progress in transport and communication in the last third of the century, they embraced a larger national and soon international dimension.

Typically, most musicians spent the winter months in the large urban centres where all the work was then concentrated. Later, during the summer season, they were obliged to change

scene and gravitated to the seaside resorts, temples of the new holidaymakers. According to the 1871 census, the population of Blackpool then varied from 6,000 inhabitants in winter to 600,000 in summer. Musicians logically followed their audience wherever they went and tried to earn wages in hotels and casinos.

A growing number of musicians also performed abroad. In the case of music hall this type of itinerancy was often extremely organized and artistes were rarely left to themselves. Impresarios travelled around Europe and the United States in the hope to find the new talents that would delight their public back home. A year after the *Entente Cordiale* between France and Great Britain was signed, the entrepreneur Thomas Barrasford even set up an Anglo-French company of performers who successively toured in his halls in France and Britain.¹² Joining such a troupe meant not having to worry about the next contract or the next season.

Amongst others, Harry Fragson, a London born singer who was French on his father's side, enjoyed a dual career in France and Britain, switching languages, accents and repertoires as he criss-crossed the Channel.¹³ A success in 'Gay Paree' for a British singer was equivalent to a success in London for a French singer: the first step towards international recognition. In both cases, a breakthrough in the United States represented the ultimate international consecration, enhancing in return any national career. The French singer Anna Held luckily took this path. After one of her performance in London in 1896 she was approached by the

American producer Florenz Ziegfeld. She soon became his wife, moved to New York and became one of Broadway's favourite stars of the 1910s and 1920s.¹⁴ Although the American public adopted her, she always remained the exotic French artist she had been when she first set foot in the United States.

Admittedly a few orchestras such as the French Les Concerts Lamoureux, The British Hallé Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic earned a fame of their own and toured the world like any other renowned solo artist would. But for most orchestral musicians, performing abroad was first and foremost a question of survival. At a time when the London stage was booming in the 1870s and 1880s, European instrumentalists perceived the British capital as their best chance to make a living in music. Some, more adventurous, even crossed the Atlantic.¹⁵ The earlier centralization of French and German musical education meant that Britain and the United States were comparatively late in implementing a high quality music instruction. They were thus generally less qualified than their European colleagues.¹⁶ But this situation began to change at the end of the 1880s. The French musical paper *L'Europe Artiste* described in February 1894 how 'boatloads' of 'ravenous' continental musicians arrived every day in London, imagining the city 'paved with gold' only to find their illusions quickly shattered.¹⁷ As more influential music institutions were created, the skills of British and American musicians were improving; they were also protecting themselves from foreign competition by forming new professional organizations.

The mobility of musicians also greatly facilitated transnational artistic exchanges. As artists and directors exported their acts and skills aboard and imported some back home in return, internationalism often became interculturalism. The French revue format was, for instance, a major source of inspiration for both British variety and American vaudeville in the early days of the twentieth century. The presence of ballet dancers within French and American light entertainment of the 1910s was a direct importation of a long established British tradition. Finally the success of Foxtrot songs in the European popular repertoire of the time was a distinctly American influence. Many French artists took English sounding names: Max Dearly, Alice Delysia, William Burtey, Little Chrysia, Louise Daisy, amongst others.¹⁸ Many British and American female singers insisted on having their name preceded by a glamorous *Mademoiselle*.

Musicians' unions: a transnational awakening

In some respects the itinerancy of musicians put a brake on the emergence of much needed unions. The wandering musician was rarely able to sign in and defend his rights in the long term. Which local union should he join anyway when he did not even work in the same region all through the year? And how could conflicts with a theatrical director be efficiently solved if the personnel were constantly changing? Nevertheless these circumstances also helped unify the musical milieu and spread the unionist word. As they changed employers and

colleagues on a regular basis, musicians realized that their situation was not unique and that others shared similar difficulties. In this way national and transnational dialogues between artists and their associations were greatly facilitated.

Musicians organize themselves

Not differing from traditional Labour History, numerous musical professional organizations anticipated in the UK, France and the United States the establishment of unions as such. On the one hand, there were many mutual benefit societies that tried to help musicians and their families through sickness, unemployment, retirement and death. Many of these did not disappear with the emergence of unions. Amongst others were The Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain instituted in 1780, the French *Association des Artistes Musiciens* (AAM) created in 1848 and the American Musical Fund Society of 1849. These were high-profile associations that were open to artists who could prove their musicianship. Paradoxically, their respectable veneer sometimes allowed them to act beyond the traditional roles of mutual insurance. For instance the AAM, headed by the reputable Baron Taylor, opened a powerful judiciary bureau. It sued many directors who had litigiously fired an artist or refused to pay the wages stated in the contract, etc.¹⁹ Laws as such were rarely disputed though; it was their application that was called into question.

A second strain of pre-union societies aimed primarily at protecting the artistic status of the profession by restraining its access. This is typical of the closed craft unions. In this way, it was thought, the social recognition of musicians could be fair and justified. By means of strict examinations and recommendations by peers, only skilled artists were allowed to join. This form of control was mostly relevant to teachers and legitimate theatre instrumentalists who experienced privileged working conditions.

In France, the *Académie Royale de Musique* founded in 1669 and its nineteenth-century follower, the *Conservatoire*, played this role. In Britain, the schools of music present in every major university fulfilled a comparable position; the Royal Academy of Music created in 1822 was indeed far less powerful than its French counterpart. Later, the more centralized National Society of Professional Musicians of 1882, the Incorporated Society of Musicians of 1892 and the Union of Graduates in Music of 1893 followed similar elitist goals. One of the limitations of these movements was that not only did they impose professional canons, they also favoured very specific forms of music. As the popular music industry became the largest employers of musicians, their restrained definition of the professional and his art suddenly appeared obsolete.

Musicians' unions

Many musicians' associations, which were in effect 'unions', were often reluctant to adopt the name for fear it would

tarnish the respectability of their members, this is a common feature of traditional labour group of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the case of musicians, the artistic nature of their occupation made this positioning even more problematic and determining. Musicians recognized the necessity of improving their conditions and they were starting to acknowledge that musicianship was changing. But the conflating of interests of art and labour, implied by the use of the word 'union', was simply unbearable to most of them. This is why some associations studied here neither bear the name nor declare themselves 'union'.

The American National Musical Association, founded in 1871, may well have been the first veritable union to emerge from the three countries under consideration. Although its influence remained limited during its ten years of activity, it opened seventeen local branches and remarkably, its scope was already national when, on the other side of the Atlantic, musicians were struggling to unite at all. In the 1870s, France and Britain had some success in doing so only locally. In 1872, a short-lived *Chambre Syndicale des Choristes*, gathering members of the chorus, was registered in Paris. 1874 saw the creation of the Manchester Musical Artists' Protective Association and the Birmingham Orchestral Association in Britain. Two years later, in 1876, the *Syndicat des Artistes Instrumentistes de Paris* (SAIP) was created in France.²⁰ The organization, which lasted until 1882, was in fact very weak. It was torn between the necessity to improve the fate of instrumentalists, the will to promote the musical

art and to set musicians apart in the world of labour. The title of its official journal exemplified this dilemma very well: *Le Progrès Artistique* (literally 'artistic progress').

Interestingly, the use of the word 'syndicat' did not seem as problematic to French musicians as that of 'union' to their Anglophone colleagues. As the mildness of these first French associations' actions suggests, this Gallic particularity had more to do with the specific nature of politics and legislation in France than to the stronger militant inclinations of its musical professionals.

Larger and better-structured unions emerged during the two following decades. Modern militant labour organizations were making the most of the failures of traditional protective artistic societies. Supplanting the 1886 American National League of Musicians, the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), which still exists today, was founded in 1896. It was a huge movement, one of its New York subdivision representing more than ten thousand members alone. From the very start, it joined the American Federation of Labor; a controversial decision that proved decisive for its future accomplishments.²¹ At its peak, the 1890 *Syndicat des Artistes Dramatiques, Lyriques et Musiciens* (SADLM), mentioned in the introduction, gathered nearly seven thousand members.²² Even if we suppose that only half of these were actually paying their fees, the *syndicat* was still significantly bigger than its predecessors the AAM and the SAIP, which at their most hardly reached two thousand members. The larger scale of the association was due to the fact that it welcomed not only instrumentalists and

singers but also actors. One of its major pleas was the recognition of musicians as workers - a measure which would have allowed them to appeal to industrial tribunals.²³ Although the unions disbanded ten years before the status was finally granted in 1905, this demand marked a decisive turn for French unions.

In 1893 the Amalgamated Musicians' Union (AMU) was the first British musicians' organization to assume the 'U-word' unlike the London Orchestral Association (later National Orchestral Association - NOA) established the same year.²⁴ As we will see in the next part, the AMU originated some very radical directives which brought it many industrial victories. According to J.B. Williams, founder and General Secretary of the AMU, 'the snobbish pride of many musicians who considered they would lower their dignity and prestige if they joined other wage-earners in the Trade Union Movement' was the biggest difficulty the union encountered.²⁵ After years of conflicts with the NOA, both associations merged in 1921 and formed the powerful British Musicians' Union which still thrives today. It originally united around twenty-two thousand musicians, merely a tenth of which were former NOA members. Snobbishness seemed to have reached its limits. In the meantime many more French unions were founded and almost immediately dissolved. In 1901, the *Syndicat des Artistes Musiciens de Paris* joined forces with other local associations to form the *Fédération des Artistes Musiciens de France* in 1902 - the first real French national musicians' union. By 1912 it included forty-two local unions and ten thousand

members, more than any previous French musicians' organization and approximately the same of the British AMU.

From correspondents to transnational combination
If the chronology varies slightly, the creation of musicians' unions in Britain, France and the United States was greatly motivated by the successes and failures of unionization in each respective country. Encouraged by their international mobility, there was a strong feeling amongst artists that any achievement abroad was a potential victory at home and that ultimately they were all fighting together.

Unions' journals from the time make a very interesting case study in that respect. Instrumentalists working abroad sent articles back to their union. They often gave news about the musical life of the country where they were working. They also sent reports on the actions undertaken by foreign musicians' associations. Some unionists became official 'correspondents'. They coordinated the selling of militant literature to their fellow expatriates. They met local unions' representatives and occasionally acted as delegates for their country in meetings with foreign associations. Sometimes, like one correspondent of the AMU in Johannesburg, they even helped set up a union from scratch.²⁶ Journals were also filled with foreign work advertisements. They would offer special deals to musicians wishing to cross the Channel; even on occasion going so far as providing the timetables for the ferries.

In the 1890s, the progress of American musicians was particularly admired, as their force and unity was envied by

both British and French unionists. This is what we observed with the Carnegie Hall incident. The American example was unashamedly instrumentalized to help debunk the harshest criticisms. Hence when the creation of the AMU faced strong opposition in the British musical press in 1893, the union retorted by publishing in its official organ a long address from the President of the Musical Mutual Protective Union of New York (part of the National League of Musicians), relating the advance of his association. 'The beneficial influence of our Union was felt in other directions,' he declared. 'With the demand for higher wages came a demand for better performers, ability began to assert itself, the chaff was sifted from the wheat and the standard of our profession was gradually raised'.²⁷ This was a direct answer to those professionals who believed that the elevation of musicians' teaching and image was the key to better wages and that on the contrary unions could only deteriorate their status and consequently their working conditions. The following year the journal *La France Théâtrale*, organ of the SADLM, printed over two issues a history of the American National League of Musicians, presenting at length its status and its aims.²⁸ The subtitle to the article clearly stated the purpose of reporting the American endeavours: the 'improvement of the position of musicians in France'.²⁹

By inviting foreign unionists to official meetings and by reporting in the professional press what was happening for musicians abroad, unions were trying to instil motivation and faith in professionals who, for the most part, remained

reluctant to join a labour affiliated association. They were also looking for inspiration.

Militant exchanges and transfers

The difficulties that musicians had to face in Britain, France and the United States were very similar: the perverse system of agencies, the absence of a minimum wage, the absence of a standard contract, the difficult relationship with conductors and theatre directors, the competition from military and foreign musicians, the treatment of so-called 'amateur' musicians, etc. In this unified international context it then seemed logical for unionists to try and import any successful solution implemented by their foreign counterparts. The form of organization to adopt and the types of actions to lead were distinctively well observed.

Amateurs, women and popular musicians

The attitude of unions towards amateurs was a crucial question that divided musicians. Untrained musicians were invading the musical market and, though merely a cog in the music industry machine, they were held responsible for most of the economic problems then facing musicians. Their growing number and meagre art had to be tackled. Unskilled workers constituted a problem across the entire trade union movement. The specificity with musicians was that amongst these so-called amateurs were in fact numerous part-time skilled professionals. In order to supplement their insufficient artistic salary, many were indeed forced to find another

source of income in a traditional trade. The most high-qualified musicians felt that the inclusion of amateurs and semi-professionals was totally unsustainable, as it represented a threat to their symbolic status. To them, 'real' musicians could only be full-time learned musicians. In terms of union efficiency, the inclusion of both amateurs and semi-professionals was of course the best solution. This classically new unionist choice increased the membership of the organizations and thus provided a robust stature for future conflicts. Importantly, it diminished the risks of unfair competition and, in this way, enforced the establishment of a minimum wage, which had always been the principle demand of unions.

The British AMU was the first union to make a positive statement on that matter. Its status clearly specified: 'anyone practising the art of music' could join.³⁰ This implied amateurs as well women whose access to most professional associations was equally under dispute. It also meant that musicians of all specialities could join: theatre as well as music halls instrumentalists. 'There is no bad music', the General Secretary said. 'All music is good' and 'good music does not mean classical music'.³¹ With the same progressive fervour the union denied access to conductors and army bands with whom they often had a conflict of interest. It had also become affiliated to the Trade Union Congress as early as May 1894.

The 1902 *Fédération des Artistes Musiciens* (FAM) was clearly inspired by the statutory system of the AMU. Its

founders understood that openness would increase their power and influence. 'Anyone declaring themselves musicians' could be admitted 'without any restrictions'.³² This was a groundbreaking stance for French musicians. Local unions registered at their *Bourse du Travail*, officializing their links with traditional trades. Interestingly, following a more conservative line, the federation also sought legitimate support. The renowned composers Gustave Charpentier and Alfred Bruneau accepted the joint presidency of honour of the association. As we have seen earlier with the 1876 *Association Syndicale de Artistes-Musiciens Instrumentistes de Paris*, artistic respectability was vital for French unions. It seemed extremely difficult for most unionists to unconditionally assert, like the American National League of Musicians did in 1887, that musicians were 'laborers in the field of music'.³³ Labour actions always had to be validated by an additional artistic discourse if not by legitimate figures of the musical domain. This is still the case for contemporary French unions.

Industrial alliances

Another subject of exchanges concerned the confederative system. The British AMU admired the French example. In 1919 the French FAM was disbanded so that every one of its unions could directly adhere to the *Fédération du Spectacle CGT*, the art division of the French general trade confederation. This meant that instrumentalists could now team up with lyrical singers, chorus singers, actors, writers and also theatrical employees.³⁴ Thus, a trade federation gave way to an industrial

confederation. This form of grouping made complete sense in the case of theatre where instrumentalists, singers and non-musicians shared the same employer. In the event of conflicts with a director and even more so during a strike, the different unions represented within the confederation could stand together and thus have more chance to see their demands satisfied.

As a British delegate wrote in 1919, 'the success attained by the French Society brings to the front again the suggestion put forward in this country for a society to amalgamate the Actors' Association, The Variety Artistes' Federation, the National Association of Theatrical Employees, and the Musicians' Union'.³⁵ In the end this amalgamation was never achieved but the motivation was there. From 1900 onwards, the AMU had managed to establish this type of vertical cooperation by signing alliances with the Society of Waiters, the Theatrical and Music-hall Workers' Union and later, the National Association of Theatrical Employees. Typically, they regularly protested as one to oppose to renewal of the licences of unscrupulous theatre or music-hall directors.

In the early days of the twentieth century the AMU was also becoming more and more vocal within the Trade Union Congress, tying stronger links at the political level. Many problems faced by musicians were discussed at the annual sessions of the TUC from 1907 onwards, especially the soaring competition of army and navy bands.³⁶ From this date, which corresponds to the first general strike lead by British musicians, J.B. Williams, Chairman of the AMU, became a member

of the TUC Parliamentary Committee. He even had the honour of appearing on the group photos published in the first pages of the TUC reports for the year 1909.

Direct Action

In case of conflicts, the dilemma of whether or not to use strike or any form of direct action was as palpable for musicians as it was for other workers. The British AMU and the NOA were fundamentally opposed on this point. Disagreements within the American National League of Musicians on this matter resulted in the emergence of the American Federation of Musicians. Once more the cherished respectability of musicians and the reluctance to use working men's methods often stopped them from implementing what a conservative musical observer described as 'violence in pursuit of [...] illegal objects'.³⁷ The public dimension of performers' occupation also meant that not only did they have to justify any direct action to themselves, they also had to face the opinion of the audience who were literally 'watching' them. The choices made by foreign musicians were here again studied closely.

The 1893 Damrosch incident was a turning point. The American union had sabotaged a performance. They had also challenged the directorship of the almighty conductor in view of the public and for many, musicians and theatre goers, this was simply unthinkable. Hierarchy was extremely codified and respected amongst orchestras. Conductors were at the summit of this pyramidal system but they were also in charge of the orchestra's fee and decided which musicians could stay and

which should go. To the more radical-thinking unions they were the closest collaborators of theatre directors and were thus partially culpable for the exploitation of musicians. For the most moderate organizations, the stage was simply not the place for protest. 'To strike upon the platform, in full view of the audience, is, no doubt, going very far,' the LOA wrote in its *Gazette*. 'As things go here, we believe that orchestral players will say that the concert platform is not the place for a strike,' the article concluded.³⁸ The impact of the event was thus considerable as it forced musicians' associations to take side and, for some of them, to radicalize their discourse and actions.

Although the AMU and the SADLM waved their unionist flag high, until the early twentieth century, British and French unions limited most of their actions to the judiciary field, patching, where possible, the lack of regulations on the work of musicians and the abuse this situation implied. To my knowledge too, they never protested directly on the stage, preferring to boycott theatres and demonstrate on the street with the common worker. In October 1902 French musicians launched their first general strike in Paris, to obtain better wages. The *Fédération des Artistes Musiciens*, responsible for the action, received encouragements from the American Federation of Musicians who called for the solidarity of European musicians. And this is exactly what happened. Amongst others, the AMU wrote a letter to the *Fédération* asking for a list of the composers who opposed them. Their branch in Hull having heard that Mr Saint-Saëns was opposing

the strike unanimously voted to refuse to play his work.³⁹ British artistes followed the French initiative in 1907, in what became known as 'the music-hall war'.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the success of the French movement was mainly due to the large participation of respectable and qualified instrumentalists. In fact, the strike struggled to catch on in the popular music halls and *cafés-concerts*. On the contrary, the success of the British action was due to the unions' strength within the popular music domain.

The AMU closely collaborated with the Variety Artistes' Federation and the National Association of Theatrical Employees, which meant that instrumentalists, as well as performers and theatre workers were united. They drafted a common 'Charter of the National Alliance', asking for better wages and working conditions, and decided on the boycott of any theatre that refused to comply with their demands.⁴¹ In London, twenty-two theatres were forced to close down in result of the strike. It lasted one month with mass pickets and celebrity speaking tours. Indeed, the 'vocal' support of many music-hall stars such as Marie Lloyd, Little Tich or Gus Elen was a deciding factor. Their fame helped publicize the movement and bring the support of the public who realized, perhaps for the first time, that musicians did not all enjoy a wealthy and glamorous life. A union's poster could read: 'Support the Stars who are supporting their less fortunate Fellow-Artistes'.

The International Confederation of Musicians

Not satisfied with influencing one another, French, British and American musicians' unions sought to establish strong international connections with each other. The type of informal dialogues described previously turned into official transnational cooperation in the early years of the twentieth century. In 1901, the International Artistes' Lodge (IAL) was formed. It gathered stage artistes' associations representing the interest not only of singers but also actors, comedians, acrobats, animal tamers, etc. Three years later the International Confederation of Musicians (ICM) was founded in France and this time it mainly grouped unions representing instrumentalists. J.B. Williams of the British AMU made an enthusiastic speech in Paris on this subject. As many musicians went to work abroad, he explained, cooperation on an international level was essential in order to create peaceful relations between musicians and thus contribute to the advancement of their condition. 'Musicians cannot and mustn't think about borders,' he claimed. 'The interests of each musician, whatever his nationality, must be the common interests of every musicians'.⁴²

The competition of foreign musicians was as problematic for unions as that of amateur musicians. International alliances could only be beneficial for all. The possibility of imposing a standard European wage via the International Confederation was investigated thoroughly but ultimately turned out to be a dead end. Nevertheless, the ICM and the IAL made it possible for musicians to consult the rates offered in the country they were travelling to. In this manner they could

ensure that their employer paid them correctly and that they were not unfairly contending with local professionals.

Only a few months after the creation of the ICM, the American Federation of Musicians wrote an open letter to European musicians via the Confederation's bureau. Following a conflict in New York, the city's directors were threatening to employ European musicians if American musicians did not accept the conditions they were offered. The AFM asked European musicians to put into practice their solidarity and refuse any offer coming from New York. The AFM's letter and the directors' ultimatum were fully reproduced in French and British unions' journals and the dispute ended favourably for American musicians.⁴³

Conclusion

The industrialization of music created problematic working conditions for musicians. Paradoxically, it also provided the tools to tackle those changes. The musical milieu was a world of extremes. Famous music-hall singers toured the world and made a fortune whilst anonymous orchestral musicians struggled to make a living from their art. Nevertheless the internationalized nature of the music industry meant that despite specific cultural contexts, the musical domain was experiencing similar challenges and ultimately, it was unifying. In particular, the mobility of performing musicians allowed them to develop a greater sense of belonging, beyond traditional national borders. It was then that transnational

militant interactions and cooperation became possible. For the same reasons, transnational artistic exchanges also increased.

Militant transfers, like musical transfers, can sometimes be clearly analysed. The rules of admission of the 1901 Parisian *Chambre Syndicale des Artistes Musiciens* were thus overtly based on the status of the 1893 Amalgamated Musicians Unions. In other instances, the line between inspiration and additional encouragements is very slim. The varying natures of industrial relations at a national level, and the relative sizes of musicians' unions, also meant that not every system, not every solution could be strictly applicable. Thus, British and American musicians attempted to solve conflicts theatre by theatre, forging alliances locally where they were needed. On the contrary, French unions attempted to gain legal recognition on a national level and for this reason joined a national industrial confederation. But whereas the British Musicians' Union founded in 1921 united all musicians, from the classically trained singer to the self-taught instrumentalists, French artistic unions have, until this day, always preferred to stay divided. We observed further differences with the case of direct action. French musicians sought the support of respectable composers when British musicians instrumentalized the role of music-hall celebrities. The opposite would have been extremely unlikely and certainly totally inefficient.

In any case, through their journals, unions were able at least to bring enthusiasm and hope to their members. The advancement of American musicians, in particular, was a

constant source of motivation for British and French unions. The creation of the International Confederation of Musicians in 1904 proved that the interest of musicians for their foreign colleagues was not just a passing phase and that, in an industry characterized by strong transnational relations, an international confederation represented the ultimate militant tool. According to Serge Wolikow and Michel Cordillot, 'internationalism far from being the simple negative consequence of nationalism,' is in fact 'present from the very origin of national organisation'.⁴⁴ As we have demonstrated this is certainly true of early musicians' unions.

¹ See *La France Théâtrale*, 1893 and 1894.

² *La France Théâtrale*, 1 January 1894.

³ Mike Jempson, *The Musicians' Union: A Centenary Celebration* (London: The Musicians' Union, 1993), p. 8.

⁴ *The Orchestral Association Gazette*, January 1894.

⁵ See for instance Marcelle Benoit, *Versailles et les musiciens du Roi 1661-1733: étude institutionnelle et sociale* (Paris: Picard, 1971).

⁶ See Cyril Ehrlich, *Social Emulation and Industrial Progress – The Victorian Piano* (Belfast: The Queen's University of Belfast, 1975).

- ⁷ Robert D. Leiter, *The Musicians and Petrillo* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953), p. 12.
- ⁸ A list of the orchestra's members is provided in *The British Musician*, January 1894.
- ⁹ Figures obtained from the official censuses. See Table II in Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 236.
- ¹⁰ Alain Hardel, Strass, *En remontant les bas résille du music-hall* (Paris: Editions Jean-Claude Simoen, 1997), p. 17.
- ¹¹ Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Second Edition, vol. 17 (London: Macmillan, 2001), p. 484.
- ¹² See Angèle David-Guillou, 'L'entente cordiale au music-hall', in *Cordiale Angleterre. Regards trans-Manche à la Belle Epoque*, ed. by François Poirier (Paris: Ophrys, 2004).
- ¹³ On the life of the artist see Andrew Lamb and Julian Myerscough, *Fragson. The Triumph and the Tragedy* (London: Fullers Wood Press and Music Hall Masters, 2004).
- ¹⁴ See Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
- ¹⁵ On this subject see *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840- 1900*, ed. by John Graziano (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 342 p.
- ¹⁶ Dave Russel, *Popular Music in England 1840-1914. A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 52-53.
- ¹⁷ *L'Europe Artiste*, 11 February 1894. Original quotation: 'Avis donc aux musiciens du continent qui s'imaginent Londres pavé d'or, à ces cargaisons d'affamés qui débarquent chaque matin avec un encombrant bagage d'illusions toujours vite déçues'.
- ¹⁸ From the 1905 directory of the French *Société de Secours Mutuels des Artistes Lyriques, Dramatiques et Musiciens*.
- ¹⁹ See Angèle David-Guillou, 'Fonctionnement et Action de l'Association des Artistes Musiciens : vers une organisation syndicale du milieu musical français ?' (Paris: CNRS and Institut de Recherche sur le Patrimoine Musical Français, to be published in 2009).
- ²⁰ On this subject see Joël-Marie Fauquet, 'Les débuts du syndicalisme musical en France. L'art et l'action', pp. 219-59 in *La Musique du théorique au politique*, ed. By Hugues Dufourt and Joël-Marie Fauquet (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1990), 399p.
- ²¹ See for instance George Seltzer, *Music Matters. The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians* (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1989), 343 p.
- ²² *La France Théâtrale*, 1 August 1890.
- ²³ I am referring here to the French system of *prud'homme*.
- ²⁴ Originally the *London Orchestral Association*.
- ²⁵ *Labour Magazine*, November 1922.
- ²⁶ See *Rapport du Troisième Congrès de la Fédération des Artistes Musiciens de France (deuxième congrès international)*, Paris, 9-11 May 1904, p. 86.
- ²⁷ *The British Musicians*, December 1893.
- ²⁸ See *La France Théâtrale*, 1 and 15 March 1894.
- ²⁹ 'Etude sur la situation de musiciens aux Etats-Unis et exposé d'un projet de règlement destiné à améliorer la position des musiciens en France'.
- ³⁰ *The British Musician*, January 1894.
- ³¹ *Labour Magazine*, November 1922.
- ³² 'Admission a priori, sans restrictions, de quiconque se déclarait musicien'. See *Revue Musicale S.I.M.*, January 1914.
- ³³ Quoted by Robert D. Leiter, *The Musicians and Petrillo...*, *Op. cit.*, p. 14.
- ³⁴ Archives of the *Fédération du Spectacle*. 65 J 168.
- ³⁵ *Musicians' Report and Journal*, November 1919.
- ³⁶ See for instance Report of the Proceedings at the Forty-Fourth Annual Trade Union Congress, 4-9 September 1911, pp. 19-22.
- ³⁷ *Musical News*, 4 November 1893.
- ³⁸ See *The Orchestral Association Gazette*, 5 February 1894.
- ³⁹ Letters reproduced in the *Courier de l'Orchestre*, 1 December 1902.
- ⁴⁰ See Peter Honri, *Music Hall Warriors. A History of the Variety Artistes Federation, 1906-1967* (London: Greenwich Exchange, 1997), 147 p.
- ⁴¹ The Charter is fully reproduced in *The Performer*, 31 January 1907.
- ⁴² *Rapport du Troisième Congrès de la Fédération...*, *Op. cit.*, p. 87. 'Les musiciens ne peuvent pas, ne doivent pas s'occuper des frontières. Les intérêts de chaque musicien, quelque soit sa nationalité, doivent être les intérêts communs de tous les musiciens'.

⁴³ See for instance *Courrier de l'Orchestre*, 1 July 1904.

⁴⁴ *Prolétaire de tous les pays, unissez-vous ? Les difficiles chemins de l'internationalisme (1848-1956)*, ed. By Serge Wolikow and Michel Cordillot (Dijon: EUD, 1993), p. 12. Original quotation: '*L'internationalisme loin d'être un simple dérivé négatif du nationalisme est présent dès l'origine de la formation nationale*'.