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# *Introduction*

## *The Roles of Music and Culture in National Identity Formation*

Barbara L. Kelly

A distinctive feature of the Third Republic was its constitution and dissolution in the context of war and invasion. The loss of Alsace and Lorraine was a blow to France's sense of itself, and until the territory was regained after World War I, it became a unifying focus for the nation's problematic relations with the newly formed Germany. Indeed, France was most united when threatened from outside—and also when it presented its achievements to the outside world, for instance, during the 1878, 1889, 1900, and 1937 exhibitions. At the root of much of France's disunity was the issue of identity and what constituted the true France. This tension was apparent not only between Left and Right political polarizations but also over the issue of centralization. *French Music, Culture, and National Identity* considers and questions the role and ability of music and the arts to represent the Republic and nation and to reflect particular political ideologies.

### Defining the Republic: Symbols, Festivals, and Figureheads

The Third Republic emerged out of defeat against Prussia, the loss of territory, and a great uncertainty concerning the political future of France. It was not clear until 1877 that France would remain a Republic, since the monarchists were numerous and influential, although divided in the early years following the defeat. France had also been threatened from within by the Communards' insurrection in 1871. The assembly in Versailles responded forcefully, retaking

Paris in the *semaine sanglante* of May. Chief among the challenges facing successive conservative governments was bringing about a regeneration of political, civil, and cultural life, and giving the French Republic and the nation it sought to control a renewed and strengthened sense of its identity.

Republican leaders sought to create festivals and select symbols and figure-heads to celebrate and represent the Republic. To this end they redefined existing symbols, including the idea of republicanism itself, the flag, and the *Marseillaise*, to represent the values they wanted to emphasize and to minimize less palatable associations.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the idea of republicanism was associated with revolution and unrest, an association the country's leaders wanted to change. Lehning writes about the ominous potential of the crowd to revolt and how the Third Republic sought to encourage popular participation in significant events, without endangering its political institutions.<sup>2</sup> The issue of controlling public spaces was particularly relevant for Paris, which had seen numerous revolts, including the recent uprising. The first Bastille Day of 1880 was a particularly important event to manage because of its revolutionary associations and memories of crowd violence. The celebrations were separated into two events: the military ceremonies at Longchamps and the popular festivities in Paris.<sup>3</sup> Although various factions of the press interpreted these events differently, there was general agreement that the day had passed peacefully. By 1889 confidence in the Republic had increased, so that the festivities of the Exposition universelle, which took over central Paris, included the participation of the French citizens and amounted to a display of the Republic's technological, cultural, and colonial strength to the outside world.

The only protests that occurred on the first Bastille Day amounted to the waving of unlawful flags and a few seditious songs.<sup>4</sup> These were two important symbols the Republic sought to control. The tricolor was initially associated with Louis XVI, then the National Guard, and was accepted by Napoleon (after some hesitation) and by Louis Philippe d'Orléans.<sup>5</sup> It stood in opposition to the white flag of the monarchists, which by the Third Republic had been long associated with defeat. Indeed, it was the refusal of the pretender to the French throne, the Comte de Chambord, to accept the tricolor in 1873 that lost him crucial political support.<sup>6</sup> The tricolor was also challenged by the more recent red flag of the Communards. The political aim was for the flag to be not only a symbol of the Republic but a symbol of the nation, "beyond any governments or institutions."<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the *Marseillaise* was a symbol used by the Third Republic, with its roots firmly in the French Revolution. Its significance went beyond France in that it was recognized "and even adopted by nineteenth-century liberal and national revolutionary movements around the world," and later during the Russian Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Its popularity and symbolic meaning changed many times from its composition by Joseph Rouget de Lisle in 1792 until World War II. The leaders of the Third Republic adopted it for use at public occasions, their aim being to transform it from revolutionary song of the masses into a respectable national anthem, signaling

peace, progress, and civilization.<sup>9</sup> Its association with peace was challenged by the Communards, who reassociated it, however briefly, with the idea of the people in arms.<sup>10</sup> By World War I, when Debussy buried the anthem in his *En blanc et noir* (1915), it was a symbol of the patriotism of the “union sacrée” and of the allies at war. Its overuse during this period led to a reaction in the 1920s, as the cost of France’s victory was keenly felt, and it was only rediscovered, perhaps surprisingly, by the Popular Front in 1936 and later by the Resistance. Despite efforts to tame it for its ceremonial role during the Third Republic, its meaning was felt most powerfully when France was in crisis and at war.

Marianne and Joan of Arc were two symbols in which the Third Republic took an interest but which already had strong associations with particular groups. Marianne, with her Phrygian cap, symbolized the values of the First Republic; in the Third Republic she appears increasingly without the cap, the symbol of Liberty, which had become associated with “the most fervent occasions of populist upsurge,” including the commune uprising when Marianne donned a red cap.<sup>11</sup> As Berenson remarks in chapter 1, the proliferation of statues of Marianne after 1870 was not striking enough to provide a strong symbol for the new Republic; in his view the issue of Marianne’s gender distanced her from political power. However, Joan of Arc, another strong female image in France, was appropriated by the political Right at the end of the nineteenth century and during World War II. During World War I, there was considerable unanimity about her importance to France; her appeal was heightened by a third area of interest—her origins in Lorraine. In this respect she symbolized France’s loss of territory. In 1920 the Republic introduced a national day in honor of Joan of Arc, figures of state joined in the annual Orléans processions, and she was canonized on May 16.<sup>12</sup> The number and range of French composers who have set or considered setting a Joan of Arc is striking, including Charles Gounod, Charles-Marie Widor, Max d’Ollone, Claude Debussy, Arthur Honegger, and Manuel Rosenthal. Even the left-wing Ravel planned a Joan of Arc based on Joseph Delteil’s *Jeanne d’Arc* (1925) in the final years of his life.<sup>13</sup> However, her associations beyond the apparently secular Republic with Catholic and nationalist circles limited her ability to stand for an officially secular Republic.

The Republic’s relationship to Catholicism was equally complex, despite the state’s success in separating church and state in 1905. France’s Catholicism was deep-rooted in the education of many of its citizens, as chapter 8 discusses. Debora Silverman shows how Gauguin’s Catholic education infused and inspired his abstract modernist works. Although Jolivet’s spirituality taps into the 1930s’ tendency to reclaim a spiritual identity for art (chapter 9), he substitutes Christianity for another enduring French preoccupation with the exotic and primitive. In so doing he parallels the state’s tendency to create secular alternatives to saints and religious feasts.

The Third Republic used festivals to promote a peaceful form of “popular sociability” and to project a particular image of its values.<sup>14</sup> Lehning and Ben-Amos

have shown how funerals of significant figures were important occasions to create secular saints, figureheads, or heroes around whom the nation could unite. While the Republic was wary of strong political leaders, generally favoring a ceremonial and weak presidency, it sought to promote select politicians, inventors, explorers, writers, and musicians after their deaths. The first such public funeral, for Adolphe Thiers, who died just before the elections for which he was a presidential candidate and just as the republicans were finally gaining control, took place in September 1877. Lehning shows how the funeral presented an opportunity for different factions “to shape his memory to their own advantage.”<sup>15</sup> The role of the press in reporting these public occasions was crucial. However, as Berenson argues in chapter 1, upholding politicians as heroes also had its limitations; these figures, because of their particular political biases, could not unite the entire nation. Parallels can be drawn with the Rameau festival in Dijon in 1876, where different sectors of the press sought to bestow different meanings on the event. As Ellis reveals, a national musical figurehead was not so dear in his home town.

Among the writers to be accorded a state funeral was Émile Zola (1908) and Maurice Barrès (1923); these two figures (so prominent from the time of the Dreyfus affair) from the left- and right-wing of the political spectrum represented the breadth of political and literary tendencies, and in combining an involvement with both politics and literature, they represented the “engaged intellectual,” who consciously strives to reflect his/her ideology in art.<sup>16</sup> Another of these was Victor Hugo, whose funeral and “pantheonization” in 1885 succeeded in uniting large sectors of the population, despite his Orléanist and Communard sympathies.<sup>17</sup> Two other figures united the nation for different reasons. One was the scientist Louis Pasteur, whose life-saving vaccine for rabies brought him popularity; he received a state funeral in 1895. The other figure was Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, whose peaceful colonial explorations won him support in the popular press in life and death (1905), as Berenson discusses (chapter 1). Both Pasteur and Brazza displayed coveted values associated with progress and exploration.

The choice of the three composers, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, and Fauré, for glorification by the state is interesting.<sup>18</sup> All three were active in the regeneration of French musical life in the aftermath of the defeat, in particular, in their involvement in the Société nationale, which was founded in 1871 to promote “ars gallica.”<sup>19</sup> The longevity of Gounod’s operas, in particular, *Faust*, assured his place in French music.<sup>20</sup> Saint-Saëns came to be regarded as the doyen of French music during World War I. Schmid (in chapter 4) discusses his high-profile role in calling for a ban of Wagner during the war. By the time of his death he embodied respectability, deep-rooted musical conservatism, and patriotism of a distinctly chauvinist strain. Fauré’s role as head of the Conservatoire (from 1905), the Société nationale, and the Société musicale indépendante was crucial for bridging the divide between opposing musical factions. Rather than resorting

to anti-German pronouncements, he sought, albeit unsuccessfully, unity among composers, as his “Appel aux musiciens français” testifies.<sup>21</sup> His refusal to indulge in nationalist language during this time of crisis made him stand out from most of his contemporaries (alongside Ravel). All three composers were uncontroversial figures in that they were undoubtedly part of the musical establishment and their creative output was regarded as upholding French traditions. By contrast, Debussy, who was seen as perhaps the most experimental French composer of his time, had a very different sort of funeral. His death as Paris was being bombarded resulted in a funeral procession that was very small and without state trappings. Yet, as chapter 3 argues, Debussy’s involvement in his own press campaign, his overt patriotism, and ambivalent position vis-à-vis the establishment, made him an ideal figure for canonization in the postwar period.

In public speeches at the three state funerals for composers, music was projected as an element in defining France as a nation. Ben-Amos asserts that “the desire to attain worldwide glory through cultural achievements, reinforced after the 1870 defeat, did not diminish . . . after the military victory in the Great War. It was already deeply rooted in the republican camp as one of the Enlightenment’s legacies to the Third Republic.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, on the first day of the Third Republic the Department of Fine Arts was attached to the Ministry of Public Instruction; the arts were regarded as a pedagogic tool for the glory of France. Édouard Charton, a republican deputy, justified this merging of departments: “They [the fine arts] really answer a general need through their capacity for developing in the entire country a love of the beautiful which should interest a nation, either for the progress of civilization or for its glory.”<sup>23</sup> In keeping with the state’s notion that the work of art had a job to do, the Paris Exposition universelle of 1889 displayed its artistic and technological wares as outward signs of French progress and civilization, as chapter 2 shows.

Yet there was not necessarily a consensus over what was French. Given the centralization of France, Paris was the political, intellectual, cultural, and artistic focus of the nation. Although Milhaud’s Provençal heritage colored his music and gave him the confidence to claim his French ancestry, his canon of French composers reveals his need to be part of the Parisian scene by excluding the provincial composers he admired, in particular, André Campra.<sup>24</sup> Central to his canon is Rameau who, as Ellis shows in chapter 10, was appropriated with greater enthusiasm by the center rather than by his native Dijon. Ravel’s southern French and partly Spanish heritage is generally seen as an exoticism, comparable to that of Debussy. The “internal exotic” is a useful term for musical and other products that focus on the periphery of France and attempt to capture the “otherness” of that region through language, subject matter, instrumentation, and modal writing. Francfort discusses the impact of geography on regional character and musical style. While Alsace and Lorraine were national symbols of an ideal physical France, music in Lorraine, although distinctive because of its proximity to Germany, was expected to embody French qualities.



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