

Introduction

The inspiration for this book came from a chance encounter with one four-line song, hidden within an eighteenth-century manuscript collection of thousands of songs, poems, and satirical pieces from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (fig. 1). Although the two names mentioned in the song, Chausson and Guitaut, were unfamiliar to me at the time, the sense of injustice expressed in the piece was too intriguing not to explore further.

On the eighteenth-century manuscript of the song, no musical notation accompanies the text, but the name of the melody to which it should be sung, “Réveillez-vous, belle endormie,” appears alongside the title. This song was in all probability not intended for publication or preservation but was destined for, at the most, a few performances before being forgotten. The person or people who had written it down had either happened to hear it in passing or been instructed to take note of it. Otherwise, it would have been lost.

Although the words themselves were the initial source of my interest, the idea that this was a song to be performed and heard by others began to take on particular importance in my reconsideration of assumptions I had tended to make, without necessarily even articulating those assumptions: namely, that the sounds heard in Paris at that time were off-limits precisely because they could not be recovered in the same way that a printed book could be perused and interpreted. Indeed, once I started working with a professional group of musicians with performances of many street songs from the time,¹

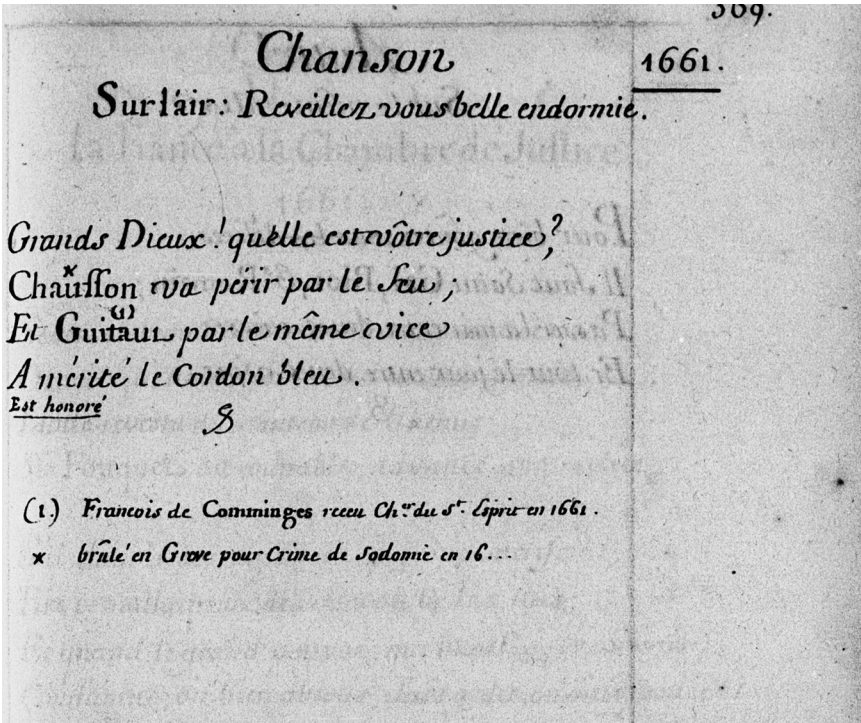


Fig. 1 Manuscript detail from *Chansonnier Maurepas*, vol. 23, fol. 369. Photo: BnF.

the experience of hearing the song, as arranged by Jonathan Rees, helped shape and change my initial interpretation of the song, as will be shown in part 2 of this book.

The transience and orality of this song, and the opportunity that my chance discovery of it gave me to examine its content and track down its melody, brought to mind the many other pieces that must have been performed on the streets of Paris and thereafter disappeared, undocumented and unrecorded for future generations. Furthermore, not only songs but also many other sounds from earlier ages have inevitably remained unrecorded. The seeming irrecoverability of such sounds might explain why, until relatively recently, scholars in the arts and humanities have tended to ignore or neglect the auditory past and have concentrated instead on the easily salvageable—printed books, paintings, prints, sculptures, monuments, buildings—or only on those aspects of music for which printed scores are readily available.²

Given that the short song I had uncovered dated from 1661, a crucial year in the history of the French *ancien régime*, when Louis XIV declared himself absolute ruler, I began to wonder how a predominantly sonic reading of such an interesting age might help us both to reconsider and to cast potentially new light on a time that is usually described in overwhelmingly visual terms. It therefore became evident that a wider consideration of sound in seventeenth-century Paris in the first part of the book would most usefully precede the extraordinary facts and circumstances surrounding the Chausson/Guitaut song in the second part.

Part 1 of this study, titled “The Power of Sound,” therefore offers a broad social, cultural, and historical context to the primacy of sound in early modern Paris. Chapter 1, “The Sounds of Paris,” concerns recent sonic theories, as applied to the early modern period, and to representations of sound in the city at the time by poets, writers, and visitors: often sounds are represented as invasive, dissonant, and dangerous, no more so than in the vicinity of the Pont Neuf, which became indelibly associated with noise and disorder. Examination of its function as the first truly communal entertainment space will lead to an analysis of the origins, practice, and purpose of songs performed on the bridge. The link between the compilation of songs and the control and policing of them brings out a theme that will recur throughout the book: crime and the attempted suppression of crime.

In chapter 2, titled “Singers and Listeners,” attention is drawn to the singers who performed songs on the Pont Neuf and to those people who came to listen to the songs, with a detailed case study provided of one singer and one listener from the time. Philippot, known as “Le Savoyard,” is both typical and atypical of street singers from the early modern period: like many other singers, he was disabled, but he was also almost unique in the fact that songs written and performed by him were published during his lifetime. These songs (and the engravings of Philippot that exist) will highlight the location where they were performed and give important clues as to how they were sung and with which musical instruments they were accompanied. Philippot constantly draws attention to his blindness and invites listeners to enter his sound world. As a listener, the immensely cultivated and aristocratic marquise de Sévigné might not seem the most obvious example of an ear-witness to street songs, but her correspondence brings out the coexistence of the literate and nonliterate in such songs and shows the many ways in which these pieces were consumed by all classes of people.

Chapter 3, “*Informé de tout: Sound and Power, 1661–1662,*” revolves around the time of Louis XIV’s appropriation of absolute control following the death of Cardinal Mazarin. As monarch, Louis is usually associated with visual spectacle, but in this chapter his relationship to sound in particular will be explored, with the theme of Louis as listener to his subjects, to preachers, to musical entertainment, and to songs about himself taking center stage. Three events in which sound or competing voices play a significant part will be discussed: the Lenten sermons preached at the Louvre by the great churchman Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet in early 1662, the lavish entertainment staged by Nicolas Fouquet at Vaux-le-Vicomte in August 1661, and the arrest and trial of Fouquet, from 1661 to 1664.

The broader brushstrokes of part 1 are replaced in part 2, “Chausson’s Song,” by detailed examination of the four-line song that was performed on the cusp of 1661 and 1662, the very time that Louis was asserting his authority. Chapter 4, “The Death and Afterlife of Jacques Chausson,” retraces the circumstances and sound world of Chausson’s death (and that of his companion Jacques Paulmier) on 29 December 1661 through analysis of trial and interrogation transcripts, manuals for confessors, street songs, and poems. The impact of Chausson’s execution (for sodomy) on a number of poets, writers, and song composers in subsequent years demonstrates the sense of outrage at the unequal treatment meted out to sodomites from different strata of society. The poet Claude Le Petit, who himself was burned at the scaffold less than a year after Chausson’s death, proves to be a particularly eloquent and combative supporter of Chausson’s cause, depicting him as not only subversive of normative practices but also courageous and heroic. Such was the impact of Chausson’s death that sodomites began to be referred to as “chaussons.”

Chapter 5, “Guitaut, Condé, and the *Cordon bleu,*” will map the very different fate of Guillaume de Comminges-Pechpeyrou, comte de Guitaut. His elevation at the end of December 1661 by Louis XIV to the rank of Chevalier de l’Ordre du Saint-Esprit, which came at the request of his master and (if the song is to be believed) lover le Grand Condé, will act as the chapter’s starting point. Not only will Guitaut’s past as a page boy in various aristocratic households be examined, but also the systems of patronage and circles of male favorites associated with Condé will be explored. An unpublished series of letters from Condé to Guitaut uncovers fascinating details of their relationship and brings out a strong awareness in the two men of the disparity between what can be written on paper and what can be expressed

verbally in person. Guitaut's later friendship with the marquise de Sévigné gives added insight into the relationship between the two men.

Chapter 6, "Different Worlds," concerns the seemingly diverse worlds in which Chausson and Guitaut lived, but it will also reveal extraordinary overlaps between the two men's lives. The question of whether Condé would have been aware of the four-line song will be raised in connection to his knowledge of the Pont Neuf song culture. Finally, three names are mentioned and debated as possible authors of the song, leading to some intriguing conclusions.

This book does not try or claim to act as a chronological survey of all possible sound worlds from the seventeenth century; rather, it aims to encourage readers to acknowledge and embrace an aural dimension that has all too often been suppressed or forgotten and to offer a sense of the possibilities offered by sound studies in recovering and rediscovering the past.

Although Chausson's song will be the piece that both drives and dominates this book, many other songs, voices, and sounds will function as aural accompaniments to each chapter. It is striking how many of the writers, political figures, and personalities that we will encounter over the course of this book interact with each other on many levels, their voices performing an intricate counterpoint to both major political events and seemingly transitory moments. By learning to listen to early modern Paris, it is hoped that we can move beyond our overreliance on the visual and better appreciate the complexity and fascination of a vibrant oral culture.