

Music, Identity and Gender in France in the Age of Sensibility

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In numerous descriptions of post-revolutionary social life in France the most strikingly new phenomenon—in comparison with Old-Regime sociability—is the increasingly prominent place of music. It appears that in the years following the Revolution music became a new point of cohesion for sociability, in addition to—or often instead of—polite conversation traditionally cultivated in French salons.¹ Under the Old Regime, music was a customary entertainment for the upper classes but rarely the *raison d'être* for

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¹ The use of the term “salon” as a metonym began in the early nineteenth century. It was also in the nineteenth century that various forms of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French sociability began to be collectively referred to as “salons.” This led some present-day scholars to assume—erroneously in my view—the continuity between Old-Regime and nineteenth-century salons, for example, Steven D. Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore, 2004). I discuss the changing meaning of the term “salon” and the rapport between Old-Regime and nineteenth-century salons in “Chopin and the Discourse on Salons,” in *Chopin in Paris: The 1830s* (Warsaw, 2008), 297ff, as well as in conference papers, including the International Conference on “Cultural Memory in France: Margins and Centers,” the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 2003; the 50th Annual Meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies, Paris, 2004; and the 15th George Rudé Seminar in French History and Civilization, University of Adelaide, 2006.

sociability. As I argue elsewhere, in the seventeenth century, the limited place of music was a deliberate strategy adopted by salon hostesses to avoid association with the trivial and the entertaining, and to engage instead in more prestigious literary pursuits.² Enlightenment salons followed this direction even more consistently, and a salon hostess considered herself a governess of the content and form of conversation, not a provider of entertainment. And in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries music was considered detrimental to polite conversation. As an anonymous author wrote in 1784, “a Parisian will never have the same zeal for music as an Italian or a German and so much the better. Music makes a person taciturn and destroys conversation.”³

Paradoxically, after the Revolution, music became desirable in salons precisely because it made conversation difficult. Music could be useful in situations when conversation was difficult to carry on (for example, when salon guests represented divergent political views) or when it was boring (for example, when politics was excluded from conversation) or when salon hosts or hostesses simply lacked the ability to carry a conversation (as with the *nouveaux riches* who had never been exposed to traditional polite society), or when it was otherwise unwise to spend all evening talking. With polite conversation on the decline, music could sustain salon sociability and provide salon hostesses with a purpose.⁴ Music thus became an important source of identity for these hostesses in that an ability to sing, play, or at least appreciate music was considered indispensable for their social success. Other salon occupations that replaced polite conversation, such as card playing and gambling, although popular, could hardly provide the desired aura of sophistication and exclusivity, and were far less useful as a focus for sociability than music.⁵

For all its novelty, the new feminine identity in which music occupied a prominent place had an eighteenth-century provenance. It owed its formation to Enlightenment discourse about gender and about nature, and the relegation of women to the realm of sensation, justified by arguments from sensory physiology and epistemology.⁶ This meant the dismantling of women’s intellectual capabilities granted to them by Cartesian philosophy with its belief that “the mind has no sex” and replacing

² Jolanta T. Pekacz, *Conservative Tradition in Pre-Revolutionary France: Parisian Salon Women* (New York, 1999).

³ “Le Parisien n’aura jamais pour la musique la même ardeur que l’Italien ou l’Allemand; & tant mieux. La musique rend homme taciturne, & devient la ruine des conversations.” *Paris en miniature, D’après les dessins d’un nouvel Argus* (A Londres et se trouve à Paris: chez Pichard, 1784), 46.

⁴ Steven Kale’s belief in the omnipresence of politics in the French salons in the first half of the nineteenth century derives from his understanding of the salon as a form of sociability of the aristocracy; the importance of salons diminished after 1848 as the aristocracy gradually disappeared from the scene. See Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848*. Such an understanding, however, does not account for the abundance of salons after 1848, including republican salons of the Third Republic, and assumes that middle-class sociability referred to as “salons” in the nineteenth century was an emulation of the forms of socializing developed by Old-Regime aristocracy.

⁵ According to an American visitor to the Paris of the July Monarchy, “Gambling seems to be the universal passion; the two extremes of human society are equally subject to it. ...Billiards, card, Pharaoh and other games of hazard are to be found at every hundred steps,...; and there is scarce a private ball or soirée, even to those of the court, in which immense sums are not lost and won, by gambling. The shuffling of cards or rattling of dice is a part of the music of every Parisian saloon [sic].” John Sanderson, *Sketches of Paris in Familiar Letters to his Friends by an American Gentleman* (Philadelphia, 1838), 65.

⁶ Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Women’s Nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (Oxford, 1995), 54.

them by a sex-specific definition of women as deficient men, allegedly predetermined by “nature.” A distinction between male and female rooted in “nature” separated the sexes not only biologically and physiologically, but also socially and psychologically.⁷

For example, in his *Ethnocratie* (1776), Baron d’Holbach reformulated the argument, known from the seventeenth-century *querelle des femmes*, that women were unsuited for abstract thinking but they excelled in sensibility.

Women, due to the weakness of their organs are not susceptible to abstract knowledge, profound studies and the like which are appropriate for men; but the sensibility of their souls, the liveliness of their minds, and the mobility of their imagination, makes them highly susceptible to adopt with eagerness the sentiments of the heart.⁸

It was “the sentiments of the heart” that made women react emotionally to the operas of Christoph Willibald Gluck, staged in Paris in the 1770s. Lady Jackson wrote that during the performance of his *Iphigénie en Aulide* on August 4, 1774, “Women—often in the manner of the excited bella donnas of Spanish bull-fights—threw their gloves, fans, and laced handkerchiefs on the stage. Other, in more tender emotion, sighed, sobbed, and fainted...”⁹ However, in contrast to seventeenth-century authors, the supremacy of women in the realm of feelings was not sufficient for d’Holbach (nor for other philosophes) to consider them superior, or even legitimate, arbiters of the arts. It was because women lacked the education to render proper judgment, as judgment was no longer a matter of feelings and a consensus of polite society but a matter of reason and knowledge of rules.¹⁰ And although there were voices in Enlightenment France arguing that the “inferiority” of women was a result of cultural attitudes and upbringing, rather than an inherent characteristic,¹¹ these voices did not affect much mainstream thinking. The conviction about women’s sensitivity, irrationality and susceptibility to the sphere of feelings, and their incapability of sustained intellectual effort, would become a leitmotif in the coming century. For example, Jacques-Louis Moreau (de la Sarthe) in his *Histoire naturelle de la femme* (1803) elaborated on the deficiencies of women, concluding that “women are more inclined than men to believe in ghosts and to see things; they engage all the more easily in superstitious practices as they are more prejudiced; it was largely women who made mesmerism successful.”¹²

⁷ Ibid. See also Geneviève Fraisse, *La Raison des femmes* (Paris, 1992) and Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

⁸ “Les femmes, par la foiblesse de leurs organes, ne sont pas susceptibles des connoissances abstraites, des études profondes & suivies qui conviennent aux hommes; mais la sensibilité de leurs âmes, la vivacité de leur esprit, la mobilité de leur imagination, les rend très susceptibles d’adopter avec chaleur les sentiments du cœur.” P.H.T. D’Holbach, *Ethnocratie* (Amsterdam, 1776, reprint Paris, 1967), 105.

⁹ Lady Jackson, *The Old Régime in France: the Court, Salons and Theatres* (New York, 1882), 11.

¹⁰ About women as arbiters of taste in aesthetic matters, see Jolanta T. Pekacz, “The *Salonnières* and the *Philosophes* in Old-Regime France: Authority of Aesthetic Judgement,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 2 (1999): 277-97.

¹¹ For example, Jean-Baptiste Le Rond d’Alembert, *Lettre à J.-J. Rousseau sur l’article “Geneve”* [1759].

¹² “Les femmes sont plus disposées que les hommes à croire aux esprits, et à avoir des apparitions; elles se livrent d’autant plus aisément à toutes les pratiques superstitieuses que leur préjugés sont plus nombreux; elles ont fait en grande partie la fortune de mesmérisme.” As quoted by Lynn Hunt, “Révolution française et la vie privée,” in *A History of Private Life*, vol. IV (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 50.

The Enlightenment preoccupation with “nature” and its belief in women’s susceptibility to the sphere of feelings, allegedly predetermined by nature, also paved the way for a paradigm shift in aesthetics which was responsible for making music part of feminine identity and for the gendering of certain musical genres as female. The shift occurred in France in the mid-eighteenth century as a reaction against the classical aesthetic theory based on the idea of aesthetic fiction as a privileged means of attaining truth. In his *Lettre à d’Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), Jean-Jacques Rousseau attacked the classical aesthetic theory and presented his quest for authenticity, simplicity, the natural over the artificial and content over form. Similarly, Denis Diderot argued for naturalness in his criticism of the artifice of French theatre and its lack of reality. In *Le neveu de Rameau*, he advocated a more natural declamatory style where the melody was tailored closely to the accents of speech, imitating nature and speaking to the heart. The criticism of Antoine Watteau’s style of painting that occurred at that time was indicative of the same paradigm shift. If the earlier writers had found in Watteau’s style a piquant contribution to the impact of his subjects, for the critics in the mid-eighteenth century his style had nothing to do with “seizing the mind”; it was for them “infinitely mannered.”¹³

This critique of classical aesthetic theory was extended to the realm of ethics. The new art, based on “nature”—along with related concepts of simplicity and authenticity—was to purify society’s manners and morals. The wave of *sensibilité* which reached near-epidemic proportions between the death of Rousseau (1778) and the Directory (1795-99) reflected these new aesthetic and ethical orientations. As Frank Baasner has noted, “in the course of the eighteenth century, [*sensibilité*] became an expression of the highest of all moral values” based on the new concept of human nature with its belief that we are all good by nature and capable of producing virtue or humanity.¹⁴ Further, *sensibilité* reflected the relationship between the self and the exterior world; a faculty of apprehension superior to the critical intellect. It was a reflection of the idea that the self has a role to play in the creation and appreciation of the arts.

The role of the senses in aesthetic experience was raised to a new level of importance. In 1779, there appeared a treatise *L’expression musicale mise au rang des chimères* by Pascal Boyer, an editor of the *Journal des spectacles* during the Revolution. Boyer developed a musical philosophy whose conclusion was that the purpose of music was to please the listener physically; to please one’s senses rather than one’s mind. The same year, another publication that advocated similar views on music aesthetic appeared in France, *Observations sur la musique et principalement sur la métaphysique de l’art* by Michel Paul Guy de Chabanon.¹⁵ Chabanon further developed musical sensationalism in a series of articles in the 1780s and in a book published in 1785, *De la musique considérée en elle-même et dans ses rapports avec la parole, les langues, la poésie et le théâtre*. In a similar vein, Stendhal would write in 1823 in *La vie de Rossini* that music gave him “an extremely vivid physical pleasure” (“un plaisir physique extrêmement vif”) and it was particularly the “physical” nature of music’s pleasure which made it for him an

¹³ Sarah R. Cohen, *Art, Dance, and the Body in the French Culture of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, 2000), 252.

¹⁴ Frank Baasner, “The Changing Meaning of ‘Sensibilité’: 1654 till 1704,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 15 (1986): 77.

¹⁵ For a discussion about both books see Robert M. Isherwood, “The Third War of the Musical Enlightenment,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 4 (1975): 240-41.

art form superior to poetry.¹⁶ He believed that the generic specificity of music consisted in the physical pleasure which it imparted, and that the rules of music had to take into account the physiology of the human ear and its habits.¹⁷

This new aesthetic orientation emphasized immediacy of expression and intimacy of feelings, and privileged certain musical genres, such as a vocal *romance*, a simple song with sentimental text and simple accompaniment. *Romance* as a literary genre was defined in the fourteenth volume of the *Encyclopédie*, in an entry probably written by Friederich Melchior von Grimm, as “An old narrative tale written in verse that is simple, facile, and natural.”¹⁸ *Naïveté*, according to the author, was the principal character of the romance. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the first to define *romance* in musical terms in his *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768):

ROMANCE, substantive, feminine. Air to which is sung a little poem of the same name, divided into verse, of which the subject is ordinarily some amorous tale, often tragic. As the romance should be simple, touching and somewhat archaic in style, the air should correspond to the character of the words: no ornaments, nothing mannered, the melody gentle, natural, rustic, and producing its effect by itself, independently of the manner in which it is sung. The melody need not be piquant; it suffices that it be naïve, that it does not go against the words, that it makes them easy intelligible, and that it does not demand an extended vocal compass. A well-written romance, having no salient features, makes no impression at first, but each verse adds something to the effect of the preceding verses, augmenting the interest imperceptibly, and sometimes one finds oneself moved to tears without being able to say wherein lies the charm that brought this about. It is common experience that an instrumental accompaniment weakens this impression. The only thing needed for the melody of the romance is a voice that is in tune, clear, articulating the words well and singing simply.¹⁹

Rousseau also contributed a definition of the vocal *romance* in the fourth volume of the *Supplément* of the *Encyclopédie*, published in 1777.²⁰

¹⁶ Stendhal, *La vie de Rossini*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1922), 1:19.

¹⁷ Stendhal, *Vies de Haydn, de Mozart et de Métaſtase* (Paris, 1817), 122; *La vie de Rossini*, 1:161, 165-66.

¹⁸ “Romance, *s.f.* Vieille historiſſette écrite en vers ſimple, faciles and naturels. La naïveté eſt le caractère principal de la *romance*.” *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raiſonné des ſciences, des arts at les métiers*, 17 vols. (Neuſchateſt, 1751–65), XIV, 343.

¹⁹ “Romance, *s.f.* Air ſur lequel on chante un petit poème du même nom, diviſé par couplets, duquel le ſujet eſt pour l’ordinaire quelque hiſtoire amoureuſe, et ſouvent tragique. Comme la *romance* doit être d’un ſtyle ſimple, touchant, et d’un goût un peu antique, l’air doit répondre au caractère des paroles; point d’ornement, rien de maniéré, une mélodie douce, naturelle, champêtre, et qui produiſe ſon effet par elle-même, indépendamment de la manière de la chanter: il n’eſt pas néceſſaire que le chant ſoit piquant, il ſuffit qu’il ſoit naïf, qu’il n’offuſque point la parole, qu’il la faſſe bien entendre, et qu’il n’exige pas une grande étendue de voix. Une *romance* bien faite, n’ayant rien de ſaillant, n’affecte pas d’abord; mais chaque couple y ajoute quelque choſe à l’effet des précédents, l’intérêt augmente inſenſiblement, et quelquefois on ſe trouve attendri juſqu’aux larmes, ſans pouvoir dire où eſt le charme qui a produit cet effet. C’eſt une expérience certaine que tout accompagnement d’inſtrument affoiblit cette impreſſion; il ne faut, pour le chant de la *romance*, qu’une voix juſte, nette, qui prononce bien, et qui chante ſimplement.” Jean-Jacques Rouſſeau, *Dictionnaire de muſique* in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rouſſeau*, 25 vols. (Paris, 1826), 13: 244.

²⁰ The entry was ſigned with an initial “S.”

Rousseau's stipulation that the melody of the *romance* should reflect the qualities of the poem but above all be simple, and that the instrumental accompaniment in the *romance* weakened its expressiveness and therefore should be reduced to a minimum, was not an entirely new proposition. Seventeenth-century *air de cour*— a short strophic form set to a simple homophonic accompaniment—was based on similar aesthetic principles. The idea that the accompaniment should only sustain the voice was part of the traditional French musical aesthetic, with its emphasis on literary text rather than on music, best incarnated by *tragédies lyriques* by Jean-Baptiste Lully. In these works, wrote an eighteenth-century author, “An accompaniment is made only to sustain the voice, to give it elegance and strength...an accompaniment is truly admirable only when an onlooker, without so to speak paying attention to it, is made more sensitive to the charm of the voice.”²¹ Music in this aesthetic could only touch the soul through its associations with literary text. Purely instrumental music, it was believed, did not communicate anything to its listener; it was for the ear only, not for the soul. And only a pedant or a *géometre* would produce such music deprived of sentiment and expression.

At the same time, the *romance* represented an opposite aesthetic tradition to that of the *air de cour* and the *tragédie lyrique*. As defined by Rousseau, *romance* was based on the new conception of nature and, in fact, was a reaction against the artificiality of the *tragédie lyrique* and the cult of fiction upon which the French classical aesthetic was founded. What was new and revolutionary about the *romance* was its sentimentality, intimacy of feelings and its quality to move one to tears by virtue of its simplicity. *Romance* epitomized the new ideal of music—simple, clear, devoid of complicated and artificial harmonic contrivances, capable of appealing directly to the human heart and of giving pleasure, rather than providing an intellectual experience. In the fifth letter of the *Lettres sur les ouvrages et le caractère de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1788), “Sur le goût de Rousseau pour la musique et la botanique,” Germaine de Staël praised the *romances* of Jean-Jacques for their simple and sensitive melodies, and believed they could profoundly touch the soul: “What woman, when her beauty has faded with time, can listen, without shedding tears, to a romance that her lover once sang for her; an aura of this romance, even more than its words, revives youthful movements in her heart...”²² By the 1780s, the *romance* became an aesthetic expression of *sensibilité*—a quality considered indispensable in polite society.

The implied simplicity and intimacy of the *romance* made it particularly suitable for women. In the traditional feminine education music was part of *arts d'agrément*; that is, it was meant for entertainment in a domestic setting, not as an opportunity for public display. As an aesthetic quality, sentimentality of the *romance* was considered especially appropriate for women as it corresponded with women's “natural” sensibility. Further, *romance* combined pleasure with the utilitarian goals of ameliorating morals and adding intimacy to private lives which, too, made it particularly suitable for women. In his

²¹ “L'accompagnement n'est fait que pour soutenir la voix, pour lui donner de la grâce et de la force... l'accompagnement n'est véritablement admirable que quand le spectateur, n'y faisant pour ainsi dire pas attention, en est cependant plus sensible aux charmes de la voix.” [Gabriel Bonnot de Mably]. *Lettres à Madame la marquise de P. sur l'opéra* (Paris, 1741), “Quatrième lettre,” 153.

²² “Quelle femme, lorsque le temps a flétri sa beauté, peut écouter sans verser des larmes, la romance que son amant chantait jadis pour elle; l'air de cette romance, plus encore que ses paroles, renouvelle dans son cœur les mouvements de sa jeunesse . . .” Germaine de Staël, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, ed. Simone Balayé and John Isbell (Paris, 1997), 80-81.

“Discours sur la *Romance*” published in 1776, Arnaud Berquin outlined these extra-musical dimensions of the *romance*. “A romance, maintaining a gentle connection between the spouses and between parents and children in a family, can preserve a taste for innocence and simplicity and can open a sacred refuge to good morals against pursuits of luxury and libertinage.”²³ In particular, *romance* could serve a pedagogical goal in the education of children and the formation of young girls; both much neglected—according to Berquin—by contemporary poets.²⁴ This extra-musical dimension of the *romance* came to be particularly valued in the years following the French Revolution which witnessed a regeneration of family values.

As an outlet for women’s creativity, the *romance*, too, was a perfect genre—it did not require knowledge of the rules of musical composition or advanced instrumental skills; thus, it did not challenge the gender division of labor in the field of music. Sophie Bawr—who after becoming a widow in 1812 began to earn her living by writing theatrical pieces, educational works and romances—urged prospective female composers to restrict their ambitions to “feminine” genres and “to abstain from competing against the male sex in all kinds of works that require a strength of will, an intelligence and a perseverance that nature has denied them.”²⁵ That a woman could only be superior as a “woman” was the leitmotif of the time, and what particularly pleased music critics in the *romances* written by women was that they were unpretentious and had no aspiration to higher art. In 1815, the *Journal de Paris* stated that the *romance Rendez-vous* by Marceline Desbordes was a model of charm, simplicity and conciseness, and a great success.²⁶ Her first collection of poetry appeared in 1819 and consisted of *élégies* and *romances*.

Finally, the *romance* had the making of an ideal work of art, according to the traditional salon aesthetic—one that could equally please polite society, savants and connoisseurs. *Romance* was suitable for the salon because it represented *juste-milieu*, rather than Romantic exuberance. As an art form, the *romance* perpetuated the aesthetic status quo, rather than questioned or violated it. Indeed, as some authors noted, the history of the *romance* was inseparable from the history of salons.²⁷ Virginie Ancelot, a minor literary figure and a much better known salon hostess and a self-appointed authority on post-Revolutionary salons, reported that *romances* sung by Laure Damoreau-Cinti became models of good taste in music and were widely imitated by the amateurs.²⁸ Similarly, *L’Artiste* wrote in 1833:

The *romance* is for the privacy of the salon what a letter is for the privacy of the family; it is equally misplaced in a concert [hall] or theatre as reading of a letter of love of friendship would be an academy. Letters are written with the heart: it is

²³ “La Romance entretenant dans les familles une douce correspondance de plaisirs entre les époux, et les pères et les enfans, peut y conserver le goût de l’innocence et de la simplicité, et y ouvrir une retraite sacrée aux bonnes mœurs contre les poursuites du luxe et du libertinage.” Arnaud Berquin, *Romances par Berquin* (Paris, 1776), v.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxii-xxiii.

²⁵ Sophie Bawr, *Mes souvenirs*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1853), 5.

²⁶ As quoted by Jacques Boulenger, *Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Sa vie et son secret* (Paris, 1926), 154.

²⁷ See “Romance” in Albert de Lasalle, *Dictionnaire de la Musique appliquée à l’Amour* (Paris, 1868), 227-28.

²⁸ Sophie Gay, *Salons célèbres* (Paris, 1864), 176.

the heart that dictates them, without meticulousness, without an effort, with total abandon; the *romance* also comes from the heart: it is the heart that sings...²⁹

The descriptions of social life in the Paris of the first half of the nineteenth century indicate that *romances* belonged to the favorite repertoire of music performed in salons. During the early years of the Revolution, fashionable singer of *romances* Pierre Garat, deprived of a pension granted to him by the royal court, made his living singing *romances* in salons. He continued this activity in the salons of the post-revolutionary elite.³⁰

Composing *romances* became fashionable among elite women in the years after the French Revolution.³¹ For example, Hortense de Beauharnais, “la reine Hortense” (mother of Napoleon III), published a set of *romances* in 1814 under the title *Romances mises en musique par S. M. L. R. H.*, and offered a copy to the Emperor of Russia who had just defeated Napoleon. The volume contained twelve *romances* and was illustrated by twelve engravings by Pizinger. After 1817, Hortense published another collection, *Douze romances mises en musique et dédiées au prince Eugène par sa sœur*, also illustrated with lithographs.³² One of her *romances*, *Le bon chevalier* was used by Franz Schubert for his *Variations sur un air français* dedicated to Ludwig van Beethoven.³³ The process of composing was a collective enterprise: Hortense drafted a simple tune, typically to the poetry of Alexandre Laborde, which she then presented to the guests in her salon for criticism; once the tune was approved, one of the fashionable composers, such as Charles-Henri Plantade (Hortense’s singing teacher), furnished a piano accompaniment.³⁴ Later in the century amateur musicians were offered manuals of compositions, such as *Petit traité de composition méthodique, appliqué spécialement aux valse, quadrilles et romances, op. 76* by A. Le Carpentier, published in Paris in 1843. Singing instructions were available too, such as *L’art de chanter les romances, les chansonnettes, les nocturnes et, généralement, toute la musique de salon*, by Antoine Romagnesi, a successful composer of many *romances*, published in 1846.

The production of *romances* reached its peak at the end of the Restoration and during the first decade of the July Monarchy when, according to one nineteenth-century source, an average of some 500 compositions a year were published and about 250,000 copies sold.³⁵ *Romances* appeared as inserts in major Parisian music journals, such as *La*

²⁹ “La romance est, pour l’intimité du salon, comme la lettre pour l’intimité de la famille; elle est aussi déplacée, dans un concert ou sur le théâtre, que le serait dans une académie la lecture d’une lettre d’amour ou d’amitié. Les lettres s’écrivent avec le cœur: c’est le cœur qui dicte, sans recherche, sans travail, avec un entier abandon; la romance vient aussi du cœur: c’est le cœur qui chante...” Victor Fleury, *L’Artiste*, 1833, vol. III, 188, as quoted by Léon Guichard, *La musique et les lettres au temps du romantisme* (Paris, 1955), 48.

³⁰ Paul Lafond, *Garat, 1762-1823* (Paris, n.d.), 143ff; Arsène Houssaye, *Notre-Dame de Thermidor* (Paris, 1867), 419; Henri Gougelot, *La romance française sous la Révolution et l’Empire: choix de textes musicaux* (Melun, 1943), 142-43.

³¹ See, for example, [Paul Charles Thiebaut], *Du chant, et particulièrement de la romance par **** (Paris, 1813), 90-93.

³² Théodore Fleischmann, *Napoléon et la musique* (Bruxelles et Paris, 1965), 139.

³³ Elisabeth Malfroy, “La romance de 1851 à 1858 vue à travers *Le Ménestrel*,” *Revue Internationale de musique française* 27 (November 1987): 55.

³⁴ Gougelot, *La romance française*, 176.

³⁵ Jacques-Auguste Delaire, *Histoire de la romance considérée comme œuvre littéraire et musicale* (Paris,

gazette musicale and *La France musicale*, and in sets as *albums* or *recueils*. Women contributed significantly to this production: Loïsa Puget, one of the most popular composers of *romances* during the July Monarchy, wrote about 300 of them, and Pauline Duchambge no less than 400, while other, less prolific women composers, such as Sophie Gail, contributed a “mere” 200 *romances* to posterity.

Romances were classified into categories. For example, in 1839, a music critic Henri Blanchard distinguished between the dramatic *romance* (*la romance dramatique*) from the salon *romance* (*la romance de salons*), the latter containing numerous genres. “A salon romance is a pleasant fancy of an amateur composer who is in love or who is in business of writing music”—wrote Blanchard. In contrast, “a dramatic romance is an inspiration of a great musician who poeticizes a simple melody to the point of making it the most gloomy drama by an accompaniment of murmurs of a storm, just as the author of *Otello* [Giacchino Rossini] did in his Willow Song Romance [from the final act of Rossini’s opera *Otello*] that creates an anticipation of death in the listener’s soul.”³⁶ Thus, as Léon Guichard noted, between these two types of *romances* there was a difference of talent, or the distance that separates talent from genius, an amateur from a professional, and the difference of character—one *lyrique*, the other *dramatique*. The dramatic *romance* was exceptional; it was the salon *romance* which epitomized the genre.³⁷

The genre of *romance* also had its “masculine” and “feminine” idioms. Composer Hippolyte Monpou (1804–1841), admired by the French literary Romantics, was identified with the former. His *romances* had little in common with sentimental verses with a rudimentary piano accompaniment. He chose literary texts from contemporary Romantic authors and experimented with expressive accompaniment. Musically, the most distinctive features of Monpou’s *romances* included unconventional harmonic resolutions, the use of rhythms and meter closely following the poetry, frequent use of syncopation and cross-rhythms, as well as contrasting meters in the same piece.³⁸

One of the most notorious works by Monpou was *Lénore* to the text of August Bürger’s well-known ballad of 1773. Published in 1833, *Lénore* came as an aesthetic challenge, if not a shock, for the middle-class consumers of *romances*. “Monpou”—wrote Théophile Gautier with admiration,

was considered by the middle class a crazy loon, a madman, who ought to have been muzzled instead of being permitted to sing as he pleased. Every time he sat down to the piano, his eyes blazing, his mustache bristling, a circle of apprehensive people formed respectfully around him; no sooner had he sung the few lines of “L’Andalouse” [one of the most popular romances of Monpou with the words by Musset], than the mothers posted their daughters off to bed and

1845), as quoted by Guichard, *La musique et lettre au temps du romantisme*, 43.

³⁶ “Il résulte de toute ceci que la romance de salon est l’aimable caprice d’un compositeur-amateur qui est amoureux ou qui fait la commerce des notes, et que la romance dramatique est l’inspiration d’un grand musicien qui poétise une simple mélodie au point d’un faire un drame des plus sombres en accompagnant des murmures de la tempête, comme l’auteur d’*Otello* l’a fait dans sa romance du saule qui jette comme une prévision de mort dans l’âme de l’auditeur.” Henri Blanchard, “Les deux romances,” *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, May 23, 1839, 170-71.

³⁷ Guichard, *La musique et lettre au temps du romantisme*, 47.

³⁸ See Eric Frederick Jensen, “Hippolyte Monpou and French Romanticism,” *Music Review* 45, no. 12 (1984): 122-34.

plunged their noses, colored with the flush of modest shame, into their nosegays. The music causes as much terror as the words, but little by little people got used to it. Only ‘golden skin’ was substituted for ‘golden breasts’ and ‘She is the mistress I have won’ for ‘She is my mistress, my lioness,’ which struck hearers in those days as too dreadfully bestial and monstrous.³⁹

In contrast to the “masculine” *romance* represented by Monpou, the “feminine” *romance* was epitomized by the compositions of Loïsa Puget (1810–1889), widely applauded as “bourgeois” and “domestic,” without pretense and aspiration to higher art. As one critic noted,

Mlle Loïsa Puget immediately addressed herself to a public quite different from the one which had wildly applauded the bold and innovative songs of Hippolyte Monpou. She set herself to singing of the little episodes of bourgeois life, the moderation of its desires, the contentment of the heart with its humble condition, peace, innocence, love of labor, and resignation to Providence, who watches over the children of the poor and feeds the young of the birds.⁴⁰

Romances produced by women—just as with women themselves—were supposed to be attractive but not pretentious, seductive but not corrupting, morally upright but not moralizing, pleasing but not serious. Loïsa Puget excelled in achieving these qualities. Her *romance* *La Plus Aimée* united—according to music critic Henri Blanchard—“all the prerequisites of the genre: seductive lithography, charming words, and captivating music. The voluptuous 6/8 [meter] within which it balances its six eighth-notes in the rhythm of the barcarolle cradles you with melody and love.”⁴¹ Puget’s *romance* *L’Angelus du soir*—in Blanchard’s words—“refreshes us from grand and tedious music and consoles us with a varied tune; it appeals to all classes, all ages, all purses; one need not have so much as one franc in one’s pocket ...”⁴² Puget’s collection containing these romances, believed Blanchard, “like modern civilization, admirably responds to the needs of all classes of society for whom music is a sweet distraction and not an affair of state.”⁴³ Clearly, the “feminine” *romance* was an antidote to the challenges of more elevated music.

But not all commentators shared Blanchard’s enthusiasm. George Sand, for example, believed that Puget was “a victim of facility” and was skeptical about both the prolific output of her *romances* and their musical quality. Puget was a fast learner but superficial—opined Sand in her autobiography—and, unfortunately, effectively resisted her mother’s efforts to make her study music seriously. Loïsa “was an enfant terrible.

³⁹ Théophile Gautier, *A History of Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1902), 203.

⁴⁰ Pierre Scudo, *Critique et littérature musicales*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1856-1859), 349-50, as quoted by Austin B. Caswell, “Loïsa Puget and the French *Romance*,” in *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties*, ed. Peter Bloom (Stuyvesant, NY, 1987), 101-2.

⁴¹ Henri Blanchard, *Revue et Gazette musicale*, Jan. 14, 1841, 19, as quoted by Caswell, “Loïsa Puget and the French *Romance*,” 105.

⁴² *Revue et Gazette musicale*, Oct. 17, 1841, 454, as quoted by Caswell, “Loïsa Puget and the French *Romance*,” 106.

⁴³ *Revue et Gazette musicale*, Jan. 14, 1841, 19, as quoted by Caswell, “Loïsa Puget and the French *Romance*,” 105.

...Pretty as an angel [and] full of funny banter, she knew how to corrupt everyone. I believe that she also corrupted herself by satisfying her light spirit with light ideas.”⁴⁴ Stendhal and Gerard Nerval were similarly hostile to fashionable *romances*.⁴⁵ The typical characteristics of most *romances* were far apart from what was valued in Romantic musical aesthetics. By the 1830s, the lack of originality of most *romances*, their monotonous harmony, formulaic rhythmical and melodic patterns, sentimentality, predictability and superficiality made the *romance* the epitome of bad music. While its predecessor, the seventeenth-century *air de cour*, had an aura of dignity and nobility, the *romance* had merely that of bourgeois domesticity. Formulaic, repetitive and predictable, based on a few “eternal” themes, the *romance* found itself in an aesthetic limbo—on the one hand, it lacked the originality that was now expected from a true work of art; on the other, it lacked the authenticity that characterized genuine folk music. *Romance*—along with a quickly multiplying piano repertoire for domestic music making—became a contested genre.

The criticism of *romances* intensified with the advance of German musical idealism in France, with its concept of “good” and “bad” music. Louis Spohr, a German composer visiting Paris in 1820, wrote about *airs variés*, *rondes favoris*, nocturnes, *romances* and similar trifles dominating music played in the French capital. “The singers content themselves with *romances* and little duets, and no matter how bad the music, the success is certain if only they are fluently and sweetly sung.”⁴⁶ In 1828, music critic François-Joseph Fétis was concerned with the abandonment of orchestral concerts in favor of piano-dominated *soirées*, most of which offered only poor music.⁴⁷ In 1835, Franz Liszt complained that in Paris serious composers could not obtain adequate performances of their works, especially religious and instrumental compositions.⁴⁸ Other writers expressed similar opinions.⁴⁹ *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* complained in 1838 that chamber music in Paris would be replaced by piano music and *romances*.⁵⁰ Sophie Bawr—the same who urged women to limit their aspirations as composers to the “feminine” genres—did not consider it appropriate to include *romance* in her *Histoire de la musique* published in Paris in 1823.

From 1834, the *romance* was confronted by the German *Lieder* of Franz Schubert introduced in France by Liszt and a renowned singer, Adolphe Nourrit. The first collection of Schubert’s *Lieder* (the term *mélodie* was used as a French title for Schubert’s *Lieder*) appeared in France in 1837 and the first collection of his *Lieder* translated by Emile Deschamps in 1839. Schubert’s *mélodie* revealed the mediocrity of the French *romance*, according to contemporary commentators. As one French critic noted, both belonged to the same category; the difference was that of quality. Schubert’s

⁴⁴ George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie* (Paris, 1879), 416–17, as quoted by Caswell, “Loïsa Puget and the French Romance,” 100.

⁴⁵ David Owen Evans, *Les romantiques français et la musique* (Paris, 1934; Genève, 1976), 104–05.

⁴⁶ Louis Spohr, *Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London, 1865), 2:114; *The Musical Journeys of Louis Spohr*, trans. and ed. Henry Pleasants (Norman, 1961), 233.

⁴⁷ F.-J. Fétis, “Nouvelles de Paris,” *Revue Musicale* 4 (1828–29), 516.

⁴⁸ “De la situation des artistes et de leur condition dans la société,” *Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 26 July 1835, 245–49.

⁴⁹ See, for example, François Stoepel, “La musique en France,” *Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 27 Sept. 1835, 313–17.

⁵⁰ “Musique de chambre,” *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 4 Aug. 1838, 310.

compositions were the products of a genius; the French *romances* were musical commonplaces. Ernest Legouvé wrote in the *Gazette musicale* of 15 January 1837 that the introduction of *mélodies* of Schubert in France killed the French *romance* and one should only be very pleased about it. Once exposed to Schubert's *mélodies*, the listeners—believed Legouvé—would never enjoy *romances*.⁵¹

The increasingly negative valuation of *romances* was also part of the shift in musical aesthetics that took place in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Music that appealed only to the senses was considered inferior as it lacked the dimension that would ensure a higher place in the hierarchy of the arts. The image of a musical genius, developing in the 1820s and 1830s, as an undervalued figure struggling against the traditional social hierarchy was incompatible with most composers of *romances*.

This change in musical aesthetics and the association of the *romance* with women reinforced the stereotype of women as incapable of comprehending complex music in all its richness, responding primarily to its emotional aspect. From the idea of women being incapable of comprehending complex music, it was only one step to the idea that women did not react to music but to the aura surrounding music, such as the atmosphere of the concert hall and the display of fashion. Gustave Flaubert captured this in *Madame Bovary* in his description of the different reactions of Charles and Emma Bovary to the performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti in the Théâtre des Arts in Rouen on 24 December 1839. For Emma Bovary, it was not music that mattered most, but the aura of the place—its luxury and vanity—and the opera appealed to her through the story it told and the fate of Lucia, with whom Emma identified herself.

The musical aesthetic rooted in eighteenth-century sex-specific sensationalist epistemology contributed to the idea of musical genres appropriate for private use and for women, such as the vocal *romance*. But music as a source of identity grounded in the sex-specific sensationalist epistemology turned out problematic for women. On the one hand, music offered women agency and a sense of fulfillment within a limited musical spectrum, on the other it reinforced the traditional gender norms: women occupying themselves with musical genres considered appropriate for them avoided the comparison with men and the accusation of mimicry and rivalry of the male. Further, the advance of musical idealism created a schism between “serious” and “trivial” musical genres, the latter epitomized by facile vocal and piano music for home use. By creating this schism, musical idealism effectively ousted women from the circle of those capable of creating “music of quality.” Eventually, women's involvement in music came to be considered insignificant and often detrimental to the higher artistic pursuits. And although feminine salons played an important role as sponsors of music in the first decades of the nineteenth century—supporting composers, musicians, singers, music publishers, manufacturers of musical instruments, as well as music and dance teachers—they occupied the “other,” less prestigious, side of the musical spectrum. The salon came to be equated with the trivial, the pretentious, and the artistically mediocre; a place where *Salonmusik*—the term coined by Robert Schumann in 1837—was cultivated. Women and their music became serious music's “other.”

⁵¹ See Frits Noske, *French Song from Berlioz to Duparc. The Origin and Development of the Mélodie*, trans. Rita Benson (New York, 1970), 34.