

La Vraie Musique Française: Folk Song Sources in Joseph Canteloube's Rustiques Jeffrey Lyman

In 1947, at the end of the concert that included the premier of *Rustiques*¹, a trio for oboe, clarinet and bassoon by Joseph Canteloube, the composer was stopped and congratulated by a number of audience members who felt he had composed “a truly French music.”² The sentiments expressed by these audience members are shared as much today as then, but just how deeply French a work this is may be difficult for anyone but a native of France to realize. If you compare a Frenchman’s experience of hearing this work with that of an American hearing the music of Charles Ives, or of a Russian hearing the ballet *Petrushka*, you begin to get a sense of why the audience members came to congratulate the composer in those particular terms.

Joseph Canteloube used French folk music in his compositions as freely and as interchangeably with his original music as did Béla Bartók with Hungarian sources or Aaron Copland with American cowboy tunes, but as Canteloube is known today almost exclusively for one work, the exquisite collection known as the *Chants d’Auvergne*, his career as a folk song collector and even more his work as a composer of great talent and range have been eclipsed by the fame of this single opus. If the average listener had a sense of just how many folk songs and dances Canteloube collected, assembled and published during his lifetime, they’d have to wonder how he had time to compose anything of his own at all.

The wind trio *Rustiques*, arguably his second most popular work, was commissioned by the French state in 1946.³ It is his only chamber work for winds, which is surprising considering the obvious facility in writing for woodwinds he demonstrated in his orchestral works. In Canteloube’s own words, chamber music is “the most elevated of genres, that which shows the rarest of qualities. Here the execution is simple and there must be a complete accord between thought and form, as both are deprived of the transformative aspect of the stage and the seduction – so often false! – of the timbres and colors of the orchestra. It is therefore imperative, in order for it to be a true masterpiece, that the author really has something to say and that he knows how to say it in the most appropriate way.”⁴

Many French composers had plenty to say in 1946. They had just passed through the trial of World War II, which saw France divided by the German Occupation and the Vichy government. They had witnessed music being variously used as a rallying force for national pride, a propaganda tool of the Nazis, and even as part of an escape plan to keep French music students safe from the *Service du Travail Obligatoire*.⁵ After the war, things were consequently very different in the musical establishment, and a new generation of composers put aside conservatism in favor of the *avant-garde*. Personalities ranging from Olivier Messiaen and Pierre Boulez through Pierre Schaeffer and Henri Dutilleux more frequently took center stage than did their elder colleagues. Yet just as Aaron Copland managed in the age of modernism to touch the heartstrings of the American public with his ballets and orchestral music that mixed age-old folk materials and contemporary forms, so Joseph Canteloube was able to speak directly to his fatigued countrymen by continuing to base his music on what they could commonly call their own: the folk songs they had known, sang and loved together as a people.

Rustiques is a curious work in that on first hearing one might have a difficult time separating the old from the new, especially if you are not French and have not known these tunes all your life. Canteloube published many volumes of French folk music and dances, some in formal collections for musicologists and some as sheet music to be enjoyed at home by amateurs. Yet he rarely specified any relationships between what he collected and what he composed outright, unless of course those correlations were apparent from the title of the piece. The *Chants d'Auvergne* openly declare their ancestry at the top of each score page, but in *Rustiques* there is no obvious pedigree to trace from folk song to wind trio, as the movement titles are non-specific: *Pastorale*, *Rêverie* and *Rondeau à la française*.

A careful review of almost 1500 songs collected in the five-volume *Anthologie des Chants Populaires Français groupés et présentés par Pays ou Provinces*⁶ uncovered many of the songs that helped to inspire and guide the composer in this instance. The odd thing about identifying these sources was that once found, they seemed glaringly obvious, and it is only in the clever and expert harmonization, combination and adaptation of these tunes that we see the craft of the composer most clearly.

Anyone who has had the pleasure of playing this work knows that many of its themes are shared among the movements, and so as a point of organization, the author has decided to list the sources in this article in the order they appear in Canteloube's anthology, not necessarily in the order they are heard in the trio. The tunes are then identified relative to their first appearances in the work, or in their most literal quotation from the anthology, and may appear at numerous other unspecified times in the piece.

Before the identification begins, however, it is necessary to note that a few themes in the work remain unidentified by this author, and are of course either the original work of Canteloube or are yet to be located in other sources. Perhaps it's better that some of the sources remain a mystery, as the seamless integration of original and borrowed material is what makes this and any number of similar works so successful and so satisfying. Take for example the opening of the first movement, a florid and wandering oboe line over a bagpipe drone in the clarinet and the bassoon. While a direct source for this melody was not found in the research for this article, the line is so typical of pastoral woodwind music that finding its origin is less important than observing how well it fits with the material that follows, both old and new. Contrast this opening with the oboe melody between 15 and 16 in the second movement, accompanied by the longest passages of chromatic harmonic motion in the entire piece. This section must surely be an original line by Canteloube and not a quotation. Look also at the spare bassoon melody that begins the second movement. There is nothing terribly complex about it, so it might be an old folk melody, but at the same time it has a wider range and an entirely different shape from the other tunes identified below, so how can anyone be sure unless its source shows up in some other collection? Besides these three examples there are several other moments when it is not so clear what is new and what is old, and that is exactly what makes this work so engaging.

The Sources

Joseph Canteloube *Anthologie des Chants Populaires Français groupés et présentés par Pays ou Provinces*

**Volume 1: Provence – Languedoc Roussillon – Comté de Foix – Béarn Gascogne –
Corse**

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Region of origin: Haut-Languedoc (Toulousain)

LA FENNO D'UN PAUR' OME (La femme d'un pauvre homme)

LA FENNO D'UN PAUR' OME **HAUT-LANQUEDOC**
La femme d'un pauvre homme (Toulousain)

Animé

La fen-no d'un paur' o-me, Se è-bo de may-ti, Se è-bo de may-ti,
Mou-dou-li, mou-dou-li, Ta mo-l de mou-li, Cou-gi, cou ça, Ti-de-ri-de-ra! Que bol-dra mol-
le mol - dra! Que bol - dra mol - le mol - dra!

This first tune is a perfect example of the way Canteloube sometimes took only a fragment or a single phrase from a folk tune if that is all he required. The refrain of this tune corresponds to the *Plus vite* in the first movement, six bars before figure 7 in the oboe part, and later in the same movement at eight bars before 13, again in the oboe. The first six bars of the tune as printed in the anthology are not used at all. Instead he took only what he needed to add an upbeat, major-mode ending to the rather melancholy melody (*Qui Marierons-nous?*, see below) quoted just a few bars earlier in the piece.

**Volume 2: Savoie – Dauphiné – Lyonnais – Auvergne – Guyenne – Aunis –
Saintonge – Angoumois**

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Region of origin: Bas-Quercy

LOU TRUQUET, LOU LURET (Le truquet, le luret) (*Ronde de neuf*)

LOU TRUQUET, LOU LURET

BAS-QUERCY

Le truquet, le luret

Quercy Blanc

(*Ronde de neuf*)

Montauban (Tarn-et-Garonne)

Vif

Lou tru - quet, lou lu - ret, Lou soun soun de la bar - ri - que - to, Lou tru -

5

quet, lou lu - ret, Lou soun soun del bar - ri - cou - tet. Fin

9

D.C.

Dans - en, fil - hos, dans - en náu! Dans - en, fil - hos, bint è náu!

This tune is the basis for the main theme of the last movement, the *Rondeau à la française*, and Canteloube has not only quoted the pitches but also has incorporated interesting aspects of the lyrics in his setting. The tune is a round that is repeated with the refrain “*Dansons filles, dansons neuf! Dansons, filles, vingt et neuf!*”⁷ With each repetition, the numbers in the song get smaller (nine and twenty-nine in the first stanza, eight and twenty-eight in the next, *et cetera*, until they reach the number one.) Canteloube states that the tune is usually sung by a group of girls who form a chain by holding hands, and as the stanzas repeat and the numbers reduce, the girls each detach themselves from the line until there is only one left singing. The song therefore gets softer and softer as it finishes, just as in the *diminuendo* at end of the piece, specifically at the *Encore plus vite* after 37.

Volume 3: POITU – VENDÉE – BERRY – MARCHE – LIMOUSIN – NIVERNAIS – BOURBONNAIS – BOURGOGNE – FRANCHE-COMTÉ – LORRAINE – ALSACE

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Region of origin: Poitu

MON PÈRE A FAIT BATIR MAISON

MON PÈRE A FAIT BATIR MAISON

(Ronde)

POITOU

Vif

Mon père a fait bâ-tir mai-son, Bon, bon, bon, vigne-ron! Par qua-tre vingts jo-lis ma-

6 gons, Des con-combr' et des me-lons, Des châ-taign' et des mar-rons, Des sau-ciss' et des bou-

9 dins, Des an-guill' et des mar-guins, De gen-till' guer-noi-zell' et du bon vin

11 d'An-jou, Des bou-dins et de bon vin d'An-jou!

This tune acts as the first *allegro* theme of the *Pastorale*, and has probably the oddest lyrics in the entire collection. It begins with the words “My father has had a house built” followed by the refrain “Good, good winemaker!” Whatever the nonsense of the lyrics, the three woodwinds have fun tossing this bouncy little tune around in imitative counterpoint. You can hear it first in the oboe at the *Animé* after figure 2, but Canteloube uses only the first six bars of the tune, immediately connecting and overlapping the various entries with his own music.

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Region of origin: Vendée

QUI MARIERONS-NOUS

QUI MARIERONS-NOUS

(Ronde)

VENDÉE

Très rythmé

Qui ma-ri-e-rons-nous? Qui ma-ri-e-rons-nous? Mad' moi-sell' ça se-ra

6 vous, Par ce jo-li jeu d'a-mour, Par ce jo-li jeu d'a-mour-ret-te, Par ce jo-li jeu d'a-mour!

One of the darker tunes in the piece, *Qui Marierons-nous?* (“Who will marry us?”) first appears in the *Pastorale* in the oboe melody at figure 6 over a rhythmic, almost energetic accompaniment, and again later in the clarinet at 12, accompanied this time by teary sighs in the oboe and doleful chromatics in the bassoon. Its melody resembles and complements the brighter, major-key melody of *Lou Truquet*, *Lou Luret*, cited above as

the theme of the *Rondeau à la française*. This is one of the only complete quotations of any tune collected in the anthology, and oddly enough, despite its complete state Canteloube adds the “tag” of another tune (LA FENNO D’UN PAUR’ OME, above) to bring the minor-key melody back to the major.

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Region of origin: Bourbonnais (La Palisse)

COCLICÔT MARIA SA FILLE

COCLICÔT MARIA SA FILLE **BOURBONNAIS**

Très animé (La Palisse)

Co-eli - cõt ma-ria sa fil-le Eu-me, grosse et bel-le fil-le, Pour do - te de ma-ri-

6 a - ge Qua-tre li-vres de fro - ma-ge Et du sel plein son sa - bot, Co - cli - quet-te, Et du

12 sel plein son sa - bot, Co - cli - quette et Co - eli - cõt!

Here is an example of Canteloube using a folk tune not only as a theme but also as a particularly ingenious accompaniment figure. This tune first appears as the whirling interlocking figures in the clarinet and bassoon in the second movement, beginning just before figure 17. The same pitches then turn up in augmentation over this accompaniment, sounding now as a theme played by the oboe. It’s yet another tune about getting married, and in this case the subject Coclicôt receives a fairly large measure of cheese and salt in exchange for marrying off his daughter.

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Region of origin: Bourgogne (Bresse et Bugey)

V’TIA LA SAINT-MARTIN QU’APPROUCE (V’là la Saint-Martin qui approche)

V' TIA LA SAINT-MARTIN QU' APPROUCE

BOURGOGNE
(Bresse et Bugey)

Un peu animé

V'là la Saint-Martin qui approche

V'là k Saint-Mar-tin qu'ap - prou - ce, Neu - tron vô - É va s'in al - k.

6

Sè nou par-din neu - tron vô - É, Nou par-din tout; - Nous fa - rin mau - vai men-no-zou,

12

Ma pi vou! Ti-de-ra - k, k bn k de-ri-de - ra! Ti-de-ra k k, bn k de-ri-de ra!

As he did with LA FENNO D'UN PAUR' OME above, Canteloube uses only a portion of this tune, in this case the first phrase. It corresponds to the last segment of the main *allegro* tune of the first movement, and appears first at nine measures before figure 4 in the oboe. The fragment also leads the mad dash to the finish of the first movement, in the oboe just before figure 14.

Volume 4: FLANDRE – ARTOIS – PICARDIE – CHAMPAGNE – ILE-DE-FRANCE – ORLÉANAIS – TOURAINÉ – ANJOU – MAINE – NORMANDIE – BRETAGNE

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Region of origin: Anjou (Tiercé)

J' AIME BEN MON COTILLON ROUGE

J' AIME BEN MON COTILLON ROUGE **ANJOU**

(*Quadrille chanté*) Tiercé

Animé

Jai-me ben mon co-til-lon rouge, En-cor ben mieux mon co-til-lon bku. Jai-me

5

2

bku. Mon co-til-lon rou-ge, mon co-til-lon bku, Mon co-til-lon bku, je Jai-me ben mieux!

The exuberant 6/8 section that begins near the end of the third movement is based upon this tune about a girl and her favorite dresses. You hear it first in the oboe part at 34, and the tune is quoted in its entirety, including the *crescendo* figure that ends the oboe line. This tune is also cited on page 51 of Canteloube's *Les Chants des Provinces Françaises*⁸, but is labeled not as a *quadrille chanté* but a *branle*. In this source Canteloube defines the *branle* as an instrumental dance melody without words, often

played by a fiddle, penny whistle or *cornemuse*, but instead of an unaccompanied line he quotes this very tune, words and all.

Universal vs. Regional

In final consideration of how the above quotations can act as a kind of “musical travel guide” for those who hear a performance of *Rustiques*, think again of the two comparative examples proposed at the beginning of this article. Imagine the differences between the experiences of an American hearing Charles Ives’ *Three Places in New England* as opposed to a European hearing the same work. No matter how carefully the hymn tunes are identified in context, or how accurately the clashing marching bands are described, the work will resonate more with someone who has sung the hymns, who has whistled the tunes, or who has heard an out-of-tune band in a town square on a holiday in Vermont or Massachusetts compared with someone who has not. Likewise, no matter how vivid a description one reads of the Shrovetide Fair in St. Petersburg, the depiction of that event in Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* will always mean more to a Russian than to anyone else. So in much the same way, this attempt at identification will surely fall short for most non-French readers unless those readers knew these tunes already or can recall them thanks to the hints provided above. Of course it is not the intent of this article to judge either experience, but simply to try and help all listeners to come a bit closer to understanding this “love letter” of sorts that Canteloube composed for his countrymen.

Lastly, look back over the roster of folk songs quoted in this work and note the care Canteloube took in recording the geographic origin of each tune. They come not from a single region, as those collected from his home province and used in the *Chants d’Auvergne*, but from all over France, seemingly crisscrossing the country as the movements play out. It could be argued that in sympathy for his beleaguered nation, Canteloube intentionally used tunes from around the country in thanksgiving or in celebration of all that had been saved from the tragedy of the war, a war in which they faced the real possibility of the outright loss of their culture. Could it be that, in a therapeutic sort of way, it was his intention all along to write some “truly French music,” and lucky for everyone, he did just that?

¹ Monaco: Éditions de l’Oiseau-Lyre 1984

² Jean-Bernard Cahours d’Aspry: *Joseph Canteloube (1879-1957) Chantre d’Auvergne et d’Ailleurs* (Biarritz: Séguier 2000), 104-105.

³ Cahours d’Aspry, *ibid.*

⁴ Joseph Canteloube: *Vincent d’Indy* (Paris: Laurens 1951), 74. "Ici la mise en œuvre est simple et il faut donc un accord complet entre la pensée et la forme, car l'une et l'autre sont privées de l'optique déformante de la scène et de la séduction — si souvent trompeuse! — des timbres et des couleurs de l'orchestre. Il est donc indispensable, pour qu'il y ait vraiment chef-d'œuvre, que l'auteur ait quelque chose à dire et qu'il sache le dire de la façon qui convient le mieux."

⁵ For an in-depth discussion of French musical life during World War II, see Myriam Chimènes: *La Vie musicale su Vichy* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe 2001).

⁶ Paris: Durand 1951.

⁷ Some of the songs reprinted here, as with hundreds in the anthology, are printed both in the original dialect and in modern French translations, hence the difference between the lines quoted here and the lyrics in the musical example.

⁸ Paris: Marcel Didier 1947