

Radio Advertising: A Typical Opposition between Serious and Popular Cultures in the Music Broadcasting in France in the Thirties

Christophe Bennet

► **To cite this version:**

Christophe Bennet. Radio Advertising: A Typical Opposition between Serious and Popular Cultures in the Music Broadcasting in France in the Thirties. 2015. hal-01146826

HAL Id: hal-01146826

<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01146826>

Submitted on 29 Apr 2015

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

RADIO ADVERTISING: A TYPICAL OPPOSITION BETWEEN SERIOUS AND POPULAR CULTURES

IN THE MUSIC BROADCASTING IN FRANCE IN THE THIRTIES

Throughout the Thirties, when the Radio is becoming a mass media in France, music broadcasting accounted for 60 percent of the whole program. Along this decade, as this medium is also becoming professional, its audience kept increasing. In the situation of the coexistence of a public network with a private one (about thirty stations in total) two opposite ideas about using the medium emerged. On the one hand, a cultural scheme and on the other hand anybody's quick attraction. The first logic, more political, carried the idea of the acculturation of the population towards learned music; the second direction, more pragmatic, led to a practice of the medium as a means of immediate satisfaction by less legitimate products¹. Born with the first transmitting stations, radio advertising gradually changed, in a parallel direction to the evolution of the status and programs of the wireless. After 1935, the year of the definitive end of radio advertising on the public stations, a few publicists bought commercial stations back and deeply changed the medium. They were inspired with methods used in the United States they adapted to the French culture.

The purpose of this article is to show the combination of music and advertising on the radio waves caused as many improvisations, innovations and compromises as the broadcasting of music itself. This unexpected union generated musical works in which serious or popular extracts whose aesthetic references emphasized the advertisements. Referring to concrete examples, would be explained the process of associating music and products and how the audience at that time caught these musical advertisements.

I - Music and Radio in France in the Thirties: conflictive principles

In order to verify the hypothesis of a duality between two principles, information was collected in the specialized newspapers of the time². If there are nowadays about no archives of radio broadcasting left, however the musical programs will be reconstructed with a lot of details by comparing various newspapers. The contents of these programs will easily be found: description of the pieces, name of the authors, and name of the performers. Two stations are the major pieces of my sampling, because they are exemplary, as well for the first half of the decade as for the second: on the one side, Radio-Paris was in 1930 an important private station, and then it became from 1933 the "Poste national", the emblem of the public network. On the other side, Radio-LL was the small corporate name of the posts-manufacturer

¹ Bennet, Christophe, *Musique et Radio dans la France des années trente. La création d'un genre radiophonique*. PhD thesis in History of music and musicology, defended in University of Paris Sorbonne in June 2007, under Michele Alten's direction. This thesis was published as the following title: *La musique à la Radio dans les années trente*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010 <http://www.editions-harmattan.fr/index.asp?navig=catalogue&obj=livre&no=31655>

² *Le petit radio* (1931-1934), *Mon Programme* (1932-1960), *TSF Programme* (1930-1936), *Ici...Radio-Cité* (1938-1939), *Choisir* (1932-1937) ; *La parole libre TSF* (1928-1934) ; *Le radiogramme de Toulouse* (1925-1933) ; *L'Antenne* (1923-1930) ; *Les cahiers de Radio-Paris* (1930-1939), *Lumière et radio* (1929-1931), *TSF Revue* (1923-1935).

Lucien Levy³. Publicist Marcel Bleustein⁴ bought it in 1935 to turn it to one of the most powerful private station of the prewar period, Radio-Cité.

Copying out the programs' data, I sat up a corpus of 5,300 programs corresponding to 3,300 hours of broadcasting. Upon this base I isolated and identified some 10,000 references of musical pieces. Thanks to these pieces, I built an index of 2,000 authors. In the same way, the 5,000 references of performers I collected, produced an alphabetical listing of 2,000 names, meticulously classified according to the number of their occurrences and to their musical repertory. From this information, I conceived three typologies, each bringing together about thirty categories: I realized a programs' typology, an authors' typology, and a performers' typology. Four great musical styles make these classifications readable: the erudite music; the "middle music" (as operetta or jazz); entertainment music, and a group of diverse kinds of music.

The values coming out these three statements confirm the postulate of a duality serious/popular which would operate in parallel of an opposition between public network and private network. But this was true only for the second half of the decade, at the time when the transmitting stations represent a very commercial stake for their audience, on the one hand, and an acculturation issue, on the other hand. While the music is, until the middle of the decade, principally serious, a complete change took place from the year 1935. On the station Radio-Paris, seeking its listeners, the preeminence of erudite music has never been as evident as at the end of the decade. On the contrary, the station Radio-Cité, without necessarily becoming on populism, was as the other private radios of the prewar period: young and innovative. Its programs and its music enjoyed the most part of listeners, because it brought a new tone, a new blow, a diversity of styles and attractive entertainments.

However, on a second level of analysis, such a binary scheme appears to be fragile, in which the public network would confine itself in didacticism and classicism, and where the private network would profusely give in the easily, the superficial, the simple. Several factors induce complexity in this apparent explicit framework. Against what inspires the factual chronology, these indicators bring to light that similarities between the types of stations are finally stronger than their differences. Let's consider one of these permanent uses of the decade: the mixture of music and products advertisements on waves.

I- Persistence and coexistence of several types of radio advertising

In 1936, one of the columnists of the weekly newspaper "Radio-Magazine" was quoting three types of advertisements one of his readers had pleasantly listed. He differentiated:

- The clearly artistic advertisement: it is the skillful insertion of the product's praises that are sponsoring a concert;
- The spoken advertisement consists in the reading of a usual announcer of the station,
- The hybrid advertisement (which is to banish, according to this listener) where are praised the qualities of a product on a famous melody⁵

³Duval, René, *Histoire de la radio en France*, Paris, 1979, Alain Moreau p. 40-122, 197-201, 268-281. For a detailed presentation of these two stations, a French website could be watched: <http://web.chr2009.free.fr/?cat=7&lang=fr>

⁴ After the World War II, the manager of the firm "Publicis" was better known as Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet.

⁵ *Radio Magazine* nr 688 of November 20, 1936, p. 2-3.

Publicist and radio-programs producer Paul Deharme is one of the firsts who immersed his ads pages with artistic creativity which he would like to be used on the radio. In a sketch he realized for the station “Le Poste Parisien”, he staged a little detective story called “The mysterious disappearance of the Hélias brothers”, a fictive musicians’ family of this station. A detective asked to investigate this absence finds them very quickly:

“Taking in his car the radio-receiver Philips he had just bought, which, being perfect transmitter of the broadcast concerts, neither removes the high sounds of a flute nor the low sounds of a cello, as the bad radio-receiver of the Hélias’ family had done. This family will of course rush together to a Philips trade-mark stockist⁶.”

However, the advertising spots are not always as advised as this one. For instance, on Sunday October 12, 1930, it could be listened in Radio-Paris, between two records from Franz Lehar: “The Man is a thinking reed, said Descartes, but the Woman is a spending rose... Madame, should you buy as your make-up movers’ so-and-so⁷.”

Usually, those who defended the most firmly broadcasting publicity are those who considered, as said Paul Berché at the very beginning of the decade, “there is an art of advertisement whose rules are slowly emerging⁸”. Like him, Germaine Blondin, one of the editorial writers of the radio-press declared in 1930 that art would always be art, “as much in the celebration of a hero’s virtue as in the excellence of a make-up mover⁹”.

This example of a read advertisement is an abstract of a concert the listeners of Radio-LL could have heard one evening of December 1932. The name of the political newspaper, “Le Populaire” which sponsors this program is mentioned about ten times. Throughout the broadcasting of the musical pieces all kind of products are advertised:

“At 20.15 – “In a few minutes, you will listen to the concert offered by “Le populaire”, the great socialist daily newspaper; Director Mr. Blum”.

At 21.23 – Performed by the orchestra of Radio-LL, this is the overture of “Les Noces de Figaro” by Mozart.

At 21.53 – Publicity of cigarettes Zella – perfumed smoke. Publicity of Orient’s carpets, 5, “rue de la Boétie”; discount of 50 percent.

At 21.55 – Duet from “Le Roi d’Ys” – with Miss Donantin and Mrs Vialle.

At 21.57 – “Le Populaire” makes triumph the horse-sense.

At 22.05 – Publicity of optician Leroy.

At 22.07 – Fantasy on “Carmen” by Bizet.

At 22.18 – “Dear listeners, this opus ends the concert offered by “Le Populaire”. “Le Populaire is clear-sighted, speaks loudly and gives true information.¹⁰”

Before the World War II this association of advertisements and concerts was still present in the private stations. About the broadcasting in Radio-Cité of a concert of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Berlin, the “Figaro” of May 16, 1938 said:

⁶ Deharme, Paul « Où en est la publicité radiophonique en France », Vendre, February, 1934, p. 123, quoted by Meadel, Cecile, in *Histoire de la radio des années trente*, Paris, Anthropos / INA, 1994, p. 333-334.

⁷ *La Parole libre TSF* n°129 of October 19, 1930, p. 2 : « Trouvaille »

⁸ Paul Berché in *L’Antenne* n°447 of October 18, 1931, p. 1 : « Défense et illustration de la publicité ».

⁹ *Radio-Magazine* n°354 of July, 27, 1930, p. 3 : « Publicité ».

¹⁰ Listening Center. « Note du contrôleur à M. le Directeur du service de la Radiodiffusion » in date of December 9, 1932. Service des Archives écrites de Radio France, box nr10.

“Of course it is unpleasant to quit abruptly “Daphnis et Chloé”, listened to with a deep enthusiasm, for singing the praise of a tonifier wine or a drug for the liver. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to criticize private stations that only survive with advertisements. We ask our readers, easily roused to indignation, to think about the fact that if they could enjoy the great art of Furtwängler, this is thanks to artichoke essence”.

At the end of the decade, the serious music did not escape from the adaptation process generating most of the spots. The “Symphony of the New World” by Dvorak, for instance, accompanied the strolling of a car from Renault. The lyricist and presenter Jean Nohain was moreover touched in that point, as he told it in one of his shows “Les Potins de Paris”, produced by the station “Le Poste parisien”:

“I was the witness”, he said “of the remark of a woman. Hearing the “Musique de la Garde républicaine” playing in the honor of Mr. Lebrun the “Marche militaire” by Schubert, she protested with an obvious indignation: “What a pity! They do exaggerate ... playing an advertisement in front of the “Président de la République!¹¹”

From 1937, Radio-Cité began to organize a “competition of radio-advertising”. It took place each evening, during a few minutes in the program of 18:30¹². This idea of the private station clearly shows its willing of considering the jingles as a full-fledge kind. The principles of making are various. If they seem to replace progressively the reading messages, it’s probably because the music emphasized the advertisements.

II- Innovations and musical arrangements to serve the advertising message

First, we can find melodies belonging to the cultural patrimony of the audience, dating from the French Revolution. As an example, the musical advertisement of an optician softly sung “a capella” by the announcer Yvonne Gally on the chorus of “Cadet Roussel”, at the beginning of a song program:

*“Cadet Roussel has three big eyes, the first is one-eyed, the second is smoky;
He wears an eyeglass on the third; he says it is the best system,
And if this eye can see, it is thanks to the monocle Leroy¹³”.*

In the advertisement of Francorusse, the announcer and young singers joined forces, in a same musical fervor, showing how adults and children can taste together the cold desserts of the trademark. A simple chime supported them on a melody they all know, “Do you know how to bed cabbages?”, which ends with a spoken slogan:

*“For children and for adults, Francorusse, Francorusse,
For children and for adults, Francorusse for all of us¹⁴”.*

Publicists used also more modern songs or songs whose theme was easily comparable to the promoted article.

¹¹ *Le Petit Radio* nr 626 of April, 7, 1939, p. 3 : « Musique et publicité ».

¹² *Ici...Radio-Cité* n°73 of May 26, 1939, p. 5 : « Notre 5^e Grand Prix de la publicité radiophonique ».

¹³ Cocart, Jean, *Les radios privées d'avant-guerre*, CD 1, track 11: sung ad of monocle Leroy, 1938

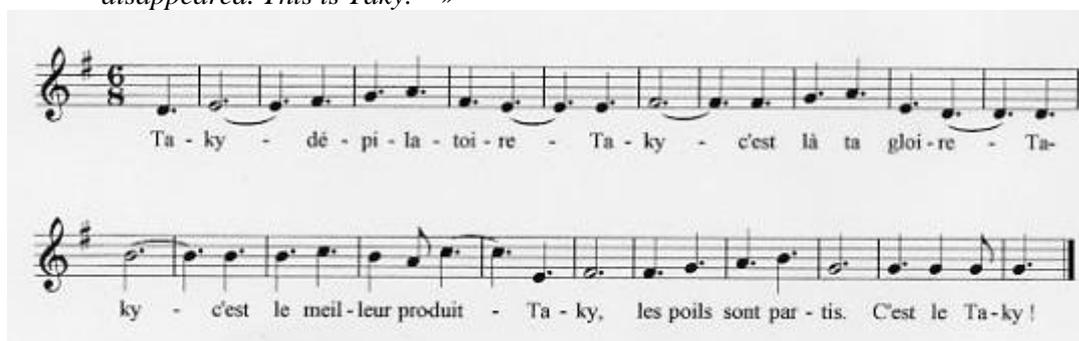
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, CD 2, track 16 : spot Francorusse, conception Circa, 1935.

The advertisement for Volvic water, produced from a French drinking song “It’s drinking we need”, associated in the unconscious of the listeners two different pleasures: the refreshing power of a mineral water and the tasting of a great wine.



The arrangement of the advertisement for the cosmetic Taky was cleverer. In order to promote the efficiency of a hair-removing cream, the agency had the good idea to use the song of Mistingett, “Ça c’est Paris”. Since 1933, the chorus-line leader used to “show her beautiful legs” in the song called “C’est vrai”. Then this star represented ideally a very smooth and well-treated feminine skin.

« Taky depilatory; Taky it is your glory! Taky, you are the best one; Taky, hairs have disappeared. This is Taky! ¹⁵ »



Musically, the arranger preferred to cut some beats, to clarify the message. Put into verse with vowels and consonants near the original song (“Paris” becomes “Taky”), the melody is characteristic enough to be modified by this alteration. It ensued however a curious musical symmetry of five bars, instead of eight.

Concerning theme tunes, adaptations may as well be targeted and referential. In the “crochet radiophonique”, an amateur competition sponsored by the soap trade-mark Monsavon, the generic is from 1936 inspired by the very emblematic and popular song “Quand Madelon”. The chorus “Madelon, Madelon, Madelon” became “Monsavon, Monsavon, Monsavon”. During the phoney war, this song acquired in France a very strong symbolic value. Indeed, this song the artist Bach sang in 1917 in front of an audience of poilus on leave, represented, since that time, the victory of the Great War.

In the case of the concerts of “The Bonhomme Ambois” sponsored by the furniture store “Les Galeries Barbès”, the adaptation was a mixture of several kinds, so as to show that this furniture seller appealed to everybody.

The theme tune is inspired by a song of the famous and popular singer Darnem, called “She had a peg leg” (a wooden leg). Upon a pun, the furniture store created an emblematic person, the “Bonhomme Ambois”, in an advertising song Dranem was the first to sing himself on the radio.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, CD 3, track 12 : ad broadcasted Tuesday, November 2, 1937 on le Poste parisien

Speaker: *“My dear listeners, this is the concert of “Bonhomme Ambois” which is often proposed in this station each week by the most important furniture store, “Les Galeries Barbès” (piano arpeggio, on which the speaker goes on) “This concert is obviously presented by our old friend, the Bonhomme Ambois”.*

Sung message on the tune of the song *She had a wooden leg*: *“I am the “Bonhomme Ambois from the famous Galeries Barbès, one likes me when one sees me, come on Boulevard Barbès, Bois! Bois! I am the Bonhomme Ambois”¹⁶”.*

The composer Igor Stravinsky had precisely given this popular theme to the trumpet in his symphonic poem “Petrouchka”, he composed in 1911.

The double reference to Dranem and to Stravinsky is not a coincidence, but a very sophisticated tactic to touch all the musical audience, from the erudite elite to the mass of listeners.

As a conclusion, we can underline the fact that throughout the Thirties, publicists and radio used to be linked, and particularly in the musical broadcasting issues. At the beginning of the decade, when advertising is present everywhere on the radio, it was an efficient benefactor. In the sponsored broadcasting concerts the advertising messages would coexist with classical works. At the end of the Thirties, only private stations considered advertising as a bad necessary solution. Various inspired, the music which accompanied slogans and emphasized them was generally in relation with the promoted product or the targeted public. But music advertising created above all the coming out of new phenomena and new concepts: the unexpected cooperation of composers in the creation of jingles and other theme tunes; the broadcasting of sponsored musical series, the appearance of programs incorporating the trademark so well with the other contents that it was hardly noticed. This sort of broadcasting, as characteristic as it is, put in the essential of the modern radio paradigms. Trying to conciliate the general and the particular, the serious and the popular, the recreation and the educative themes, the program producers launched and tested all the new schemes of the present audiovisual Media.

¹⁶ Cocart, Jean, *op. cit.*, CD 2 track 1 : « Le concert du bonhomme Ambois des Galeries Barbès », recorded at the end of 1936 and broadcasted at the beginning of 1937 on Radio-Cité