

Patrick Bade | Mon Apero: Drinking and Dancing in Paris in Image and Song

– Well, I'm talking tonight about the apéro. That's the tradition in Paris in the early evening of taking a relaxing alcoholic beverage before dinner. It's going on right now. I'm not sure how many Parisians are actually in Paris at the moment. Most of them are probably on holiday, but those that are here are quite likely to be sitting on the terrace or in front of a cafe. And you can see on the screen an anisette. I can't say that this is a drink that I like very much. It tastes to me like alcoholic toothpaste. But I do love this drawing. It's by an American artist who has lived most of his life in Paris. He's called Ronald Bone. It's a drawing that's made a very special technique of layers of crayon. And he gets this incredible luminosity. It's in fact on wall in front of me. And even looking at it makes me feel just a little bit cooler.

So here we are in Paris, and this is Paris in the 1930s, but it really hasn't changed very much. It's still most glamorous, exciting city in the world, I would say. And I'm going to be talking really about two quite distinct periods today. The Belle Époque which starts around 1819, and it ends with a bang in 1914. It has all these connotations of glamour, and self-indulgence, and elegance, and luxury. This is a cafe in the Bois de Boulogne and I'm going to be talking about what the French call les Années folles, The Crazy Years. The Brits and Americans might call it the Jazz Age. It's the age of cocktails. And Le Coupole of course, was the most fashionable cafe in Paris in the 1920s and 30s. So, let's start by really jumping into the Parisian atmosphere with Edith Piaf singing a slightly plaintiff song about taking her apéro in the evening. So, this is so much the sound of Paris.

♪ The song Mon apéro by Edith Piaf plays ♪

That highly distinctive voice, of course, with its rapid vibrato of Edith Piaf, accompanied by the inevitable accordions. So, I think Edith's character is likely to be drinking an anisette which is a working class drink.

But let's begin at the top with champagne. Champagne of course is the, the queen, the king or queen, queen maybe of aperitifs. Always a very luxurious drink. It was invented in the 17th century by a Benedictine monk called Dom Perignon. Of course he's given his name to a particular brand of champagne. And champagne is usually drunk in one of two types of glasses, the flute and the coupe. Here is the coupe, and on the left a poster of a very Art Nouveau lady holding a coupe of champagne. The traditional story is that the shallow bowl of the coupe was inspired by the shape of Marie Antoinette's breasts. I don't how

truthful that story is. But here is Marie Antoinette kneeling on her own tomb in Saint Denis. This is a rather old photograph. And you can see that generations of Frenchmen passing by had fondled her breast, the one on the right hand side with grubby, tobacco stained fingers. I'm glad to say that now she has been fully cleaned up. They've got rid of the tobacco stains on her breast, and she's now behind bars and well out of the reach of grubby fingers. So, champagne has a very special reputation, doesn't it? For kind of elegant naughtiness. Miss Tallulah Bankhead pulling a publicity stunt on a visit to London, drinking champagne out of a slipper. So, it's very much a drink that has always been associated with seduction.

So, my next musical example for you is actually Viennese, although it became a huge international hit of the Belle Époque. And it's in a kind of mixture of German and French, the text says Im Chambre Separee. Chambre separee, a little side private room in a restaurant where a wealthy gentleman would take a young lady for the purposes of seduction that inevitably involved plying her with champagne.

♪ The song Im Chambre Separee plays ♪

So, this is De Geschieden Frau, was an operetta that was launched in Vienna in 1908 and it hit Paris in 1911. It became a huge, huge international success in London, New York, everywhere. And the whole plot hinges, it takes place in a divorce court. And the plot hinges around the fact that the husband, who's been divorced by his wife, has spent a night in a couchette between Vienna and Amsterdam with a beautiful woman and a bottle of champagne. And the argument they bring in various learned people to discuss, would that be possible for any normal red-blooded man to spend a night alone with a beautiful woman in a couchette and a bottle of champagne without committing adultery? Two more posters for this operetta. De Gescheiden Frau, La Divorcée when it hit Paris.

Now I'm going to move on to another example of champagne being used as a weapon of seduction. In fact, not initially very successfully. This is a play which was a huge hit in the 1920s called Mariette. And it was a vehicle for the golden couple of French theatre in the 1920s. That's Sacha Guitry, and the second of his five wives, that's Yvonne Printemps. And in the scene I'm going to play you, he plays Louis Napoleon, incognito he visits the theatre and he falls for a very beautiful actress. And in the interval he goes to her dressing room, and he tries to persuade her to leave after performance with him for a restaurant with a chambre separee. And she says, no, no, she's not interested. Actually, I think today, this rather the extended scene in this play would probably be seen as sexual harassment 'cause he's not taking no for an answer. And he keeps on persuading her, trying to persuade her and says, "No, no, no, no." And then he says to her, "Well, if you won't come for dinner with me, will you sing for me?" And she says, "Well, what shall I sing for you?" And he says, "Sing

the song for the last act. She said against it, "There's an orchestra in the background." He said, "Well, just improvise something." And she sort of sings la la la, And then he resumes his attack on it. He says, "Oh, please, please come to dinner with me, come to dinner with me." And she says, "No, no, no." He says, "I'll offer you champagne." And she says, "I don't like champagne." I don't think I believe her in that actually. And then he pulls his last trick. He pulls out a little portrait of himself to show her with his name underneath. So, he's revealing his identity, and she's obviously amazed by this. She does a wonderful series of gallic gurgles, but I'm not going to tell you what happens at the end. I'm going to leave it as a surprise for you. I'm not going to do a spoiler. You'll have to wait for the end of this to see whether his trick works or not, and whether she succumbs to his evil intentions or not.

♪ Song from Mariette plays ♪

♪ No, no, no ♪ ♪ No, no, no ♪ ♪ No, no, no ♪ ♪ No, no, no, no ♪ ♪ No, no, no ♪ So yes, I'm afraid he does get his evil way with her.

Next we come across a lady who's had a little bit too much champagne at a wedding party. And this is the great Yvette Guilbert. She was often said to be the voice of Paris. Nowadays, I suppose she'd be remembered because she was one of the great inspirations for Toulouse-Lautrec. She was one of his favourite models. She wasn't thrilled, understandably, 'cause actually she was a very rather attractive woman and he hardly flattered her in his drawing her. But here she is drunkenly singing of the joys of a particular brand of champagne, Moët & Chandon, which of course also still exists.

♪ The song Paroles de la chanson je suis pocharde by Yvette Gilbert plays ♪

And my next thing I'm afraid has gone a lot further down that path of inebriation by mixing champagne with cocaine and morphine. Sounds a pretty deadly cocktail to me. This is Friel, and she belongs to both the periods I'm talking about today. In the Belle Époque before the First World War. As you can see, she was gorgeous. She was a real babe, and she was very popular singer in Paris. She had a brief affair with Maurice Chevalier. When he dumped her for Mistinguett she turned violent and she tried to stab them both. And she had to flee from France. And she went off to Romania where she was taken up by the Queen of Romania. Then she fled from Romania to Turkey, and eventually came back to France a very different woman. As you can see on the right hand side, obviously. I think she embodied quite a lot of these drinks herself in the meantime. Anyway, this song is called Le Coco, which is cocaine. And in the song, she's a prostitute whose gigolo has dumped her for another woman. And she goes out in the evening with her friends, and she says, like her friends, she takes champagne and

cocaine, she shoots up with morphine. And then you can see in the refrain, "When I'm drunk I do very silly things."

Later in song, you know, she sees her gigolo with his new friend, and she sees a knife on the table, and she picks it up and she plunges it into the heart of her faithless gigolo. And she artist the immoral line (speaks French), "I really was tipsy." "I did a very silly thing." I've killed my gigolo.

♪ The song Le Coco by Friel plays ♪

I hope she got off with a light sentence because it was a (speaks French).

So, here we are now at Le Cafe Concert. Actually, I suppose is more likely to be post-dinner than pre-dinner where you go and you can smoke if you want to, of course in those days. And you can have your champagne or whatever you want to drink. And you're listening to the popular songs of the day. So, what I want to explore in this talk is the relationship between the songs, between the drinks, and between the graphic art, the posters and illustrations on the (speaks French). The scores of the songs that everybody bought. You can find mountains of them in the flea market. I saw great many of them this morning. So, the poster, there is a really symbiotic relationship I would say between these three things: drink, song, poster. Poster was a new art form in the 1880s, and 90s. On the left we see a photograph of a European city in, well must be English 'cause I can see, it must be London, I suppose. You can see all the posters are just writing, There are no images on them. But the development of colour lithography led to the birth of the poster of course, an art form. And it reached it's in the 1890s. Lithography, a new form of printing that was invented just before 1800 in Bavaria by a man called Aloise Zena Felder. But the techniques were developed quite slowly. Certainly by the 1890s, well I suppose we're still in London here, aren't we? On the right hand side. The streets of the great cities of the western world had become open air art galleries with these wonderful posters. This is a little track which shows another of his favourite models, Shanna Ville, a dancer. Looking at a lithographic print that's come straight off the lithographic press, which you see on the left hand side. Lithography, you could have colour prints, and it was a very cheap method of printing. Unlike wood cuts and etchings it didn't wear out. You could have as many images as you wanted, could go into thousands or even millions. The first great poster artists was Jules Chéret, starting in the 1880s. Very prolific, he produced thousands of these images. Always gorgeous, blonde or redheads. Rather ditsy blondes and redheads with hourglass figures, very jolly, very Belle Époque. And other artists joined in very soon. This is a Bonnard poster for champagne on the left hand side, and another little track showing his two favourite models actually, that you can see Yvette Gilbert on

stage with her trademark black gloves. And you can see the dancer in the foreground. Luca was also in the second half of the 1890s of course. He really did represent the Parisian Art Nouveau and Belle Époque, and he made quite a number of posters and advertisements for drink, for beers, wines, and as you can see here, for Moët et Chandon champagne. And this is Leonetta Cappiello and another leading poster artists of the turn of the century. And there were certain drink firms that actually became very important patrons of poster artists and graphic art, particularly Dubonnet, that actually produced not just the drink we know as the Dubonnet, but a whole range of different alcoholic drinks. These two images rank again very much Art Nouveau the hourglass shaped women, the undulating curves. Dubonnet kept up with the times, and it continued to course into the second period that I'm going to talk about shortly, les Années folles. So, you've got two Dubonnet posters here, one very Belle Époque and the other very sort of Jazz Age, I would say on the right hand side. And again, Cinzano, I think these are actually made for Dubonnet, these Cinzano posters. The one on the left hand side, and a rather surreal interwar on the right hand side. And the drinks firm Nicolas also commissioned. Very clever, very witty, wonderful advertisements. These are delightful things to collect. Again, in flea markets you can pick up these sorts of things for a tiny amount of money. And Nicolas posters are characterised by a sly sense of humour. On the left hand side, you can see the obsequious waiter. He's offering a very expensive bottle of wine to the customer. And he's saying (speaks French). Of course it's (speaks French). Is masculine. But he's presenting the bottle of wine as a woman, elle, (speaks French). And on the right hand side you can see a young wife, this says Barbe Bleud. She's got a rather elderly husband you could just see in the bottom right hand corner. And she has discovered his deep dark secret, his wine cellar. This is a very typical Cubist picture, Picasso around, this would be 1910, '11. And when Picasso and Braque are really developing Cubism between 1908 and the first World War, a very large part of their subject matter was drinks. They're painting these pictures in their studios and very often they're painting wine glasses, alcoholic bottles, cigarettes, newspapers, you know, everyday things. And what is interesting is with the development of the poster, the commercial art in Paris, is leading French poster artist Cassandre in the interwar period, how the poster artists are looking at the Avant Garde fine artists. So this is a synthetic Cubism picture on right hand side by Juan Gris, which is basically conceived as a collage. And you can see how Cassandre with this cigarette poster is using techniques that he's borrowed from synthetic Cubism. Again, this is Cassandre on the left, and a Gris collage on the right hand side. And Serialism too lent itself very well to being used for commercial purposes. These are paintings by René Magritte on the left hand side. And Cassandre, which uses similar trompe l'oeil tricky techniques. And two more Cassandre drinks posters. And as well as the posters, the drinks were promoted by a whole range of, I suppose you can call them accessories. And again, these are things that you can pick up very, very cheaply on the pavement at the flea markets. I saw

tonnes of these things this morning. Ricard, of course produces anisette. You can find flasks, you find ashtrays, which are promoting particular drink Pernod and Ricard. And these delightful bottles of liquores. The Eiffel Tower one I actually have my house in London. And the (speaks French), very naughty course in a period where a lady's ankle was an exciting thing, to have a liqueur bottle in the form of a lady's leg.

Now onto the les Années folles, the Jazz Age. La Coupole was opened in the 1920s and it became, it's huge. It's still there actually but this year, I think for the first time ever, it was actually closed in August. I was going to meet a friend there yesterday and she said, "No, no, it's closed." But it's a very nice place to go. I mean, you can eat quite cheaply and reasonably there, but it's a really nice place to go for your apero. And as you can see, it has a bar Americans. Americans flooding to Paris in the Jazz Age, it was a paradise for them. Partly because the dollar was very strong, the French franc was very weak. So, they could live very well, much better than they could in America. And of course, they could get a drink. This is the period of prohibition from 1918 to 1926. So, amongst the many distinguished Americans who came to Paris in the 1920s, in Jazz Age was of course George Gershwin, you see him here on the left. And that visit he made in 1926 inspired what I think is his greatest orchestral masterpiece, which is "An American in Paris." And for that of course, he used Parisian taxi cab horns. You can see him with some of these honking horns that he bought in the first recording made of it in New York in 1926, actually used those horns. So, Americans had a big influence on Paris in this period, and not least in drinking habits, and introducing the cocktail. You can say the cocktail is one of America's great contributions to Western civilisation. So, if you really want to be chic in Paris in 1920s, how about this cocktail bar by Charlotte Perriault. There was a wonderful exhibition on her work just before the pandemic in Paris. She was a sidekick to Le Corbusier. In fact, he took the credit I think for a lot of her very original work. So, this is a cocktail bar designed by Charlotte Perriault. This is the interior of a flat with restricted space. But you can see in the restricted space of a flat, pride of place goes to the cocktail bar in the corner. And if you were really wealthy in chic, of course you could have these fabulously elegant art deco cocktail bars. And the one on the left you can see is actually on skis. So, the idea of that is that skiing is a new fad of the Jazz Age. And women in the Jazz Age now, of course have talked about this before, they had to exercise, and diet, and be slender. The voluptuous hourglass look has gone, they have to have boyish figures. So, they go on skiing holidays, and if you are very wealthy, you take your butler with you and poor man has to drag the cocktail bar on the skis to the top of the mountain, and it follows you down the mountain to offer you high balls at regular intervals.

So, my next song is actually originally an American song, but this is

a very charming French version, Cocktails for Two. In this version is sung by Henry Cocktails pour deux.

♪ The song Cocktails pour deux by Henry Garat plays ♪

Now I'm going to devote the rest of this talk to the Chanson réaliste. This was a particular tradition of Peruvian song. It begins at the end of the 19th century, and it continues up to the Second World War, for a little bit afterwards, I suppose the last great exponent of the was Edith Piaf, but she was the inheritor of a great tradition. So, a realist song. Realism is of course a movement in art and in literature of the mid to late 19th century. The great realist as far as literature was concerned was Emile Zola. And one of his most popular and influential novels was L'Assommoir that came out in 1876. And the harrowing, or if you could call her that, she's hardly very heroic. She's a working class woman, she's a laundress, she's called Gervaise. And we meet her at the beginning of the book sitting alone, rather depressed in a cafe. And she is consuming a . This is a painting by Manet, which is clearly inspired by that opening, that's actually quite alcoholic. And through the novel, Gervaise, she sinks into degradation through alcoholic consumption of various kinds of alcohol. So, the is usually sung by a woman. Deals with kind of gritty subject, urban subjects, poverty, prostitution, and very often substance abuse of one kind and or another, but usually alcoholic. And there are a lot of paintings of this period, of this kind of subject matter from Degas through to Picasso. This is Casas, artist on left hand side. Bero, this is a young woman, very elegant looking young woman actually with her corsetted waist, who's drinking, we can see what she's drinking, she's drinking absinthe. The first great exponent of the was where you see on the left hand side. I mean she was a superstar, so she was actually a very, very wealthy woman from as a star of the musical theatre. But her persona on stage was always an impoverished, working class woman, usually a prostitute. And on the right hand side is the biggest, greatest exponent of the of the interwar period, this is Damia. She was just known by that one name. And she was always dubbed (speaks French). Though most of her songs are absolutely wrist slashingly depressing. And as I said, they very often involved prostitution and substance abuse. Here she is the great Damia. She's very much the model for Edith Piaf. She normally, is she wearing one there? No, there she is. She wore a little black simple dress, which was of course also became the trademark of Piaf. And here she is saying, "No, I'm not drunk despite the fact that I'm rolling around in the nightclubs searching for drunkenness."

♪ The song J'ai l'cafard by Dame plays ♪

J'ai l'cafard, cafard is a cockroach, literally, but J'ai l'cafard means I'm depressed. So, in fact she's always depressed in her songs. Somebody the other day when I was talking about asked about his version of Gloomy Sunday, also known as the Hungarian Suicide Song. It

was actually banned by the BBC because every time they played Robeson singing that there would be a wave of suicides. Well she did a wonderful French version of it called Sombre Dimanche.

Another great specialist in the is Nitta Jo. And she's a bit of a mystery. I mean, she is always singing about very degraded women out on the streets, nowhere to sleep, and prostitution of the lowest level. I mean, she's a bit of mystery 'cause she had quite a substantial career. She was a big success, and then she disappeared. And nobody to this day knows what happened to her. We have no date of death. You know, from the songs you think, "Oh, my God, she must have been found somewhere in the gutter face down." Here she is in this song, the title is J'ai Soif, I'm Thirsty. And this is her line. She in the song, she's a prostitute of the lowest level. And this is how she approaches men in bars. She goes up, and she says j'ai soif. And if they buy her drink, she'll sleep with them.

♪ The song J'ai soif by Nitta Jo plays ♪

This is Annette Lajon, and she's I'm afraid, another very depressing woman sitting all alone at the bar. But she's not a prostitute, she's just a lonely woman looking for love. And her particular tippie is a gin and tonic. Not a very French drink. I think that must have been a new thing in this period in the 1930s.

♪ Song by Annette Lajon plays ♪

I'm going to play you a pair of happy drunks. This is Andrée Turcy, and she's drinking, she's very happy sitting at the bar tipping her anisette. So, she doesn't want jewels or wealth, she's very happy with her little anisette.

♪ The song Mon anisette by Andrée Turcy plays ♪

And here is another rather jolly lady. When I'm a Bit Drunk. This is Marie DeValle and I find this a hilarious record, her simulation of drunkenness is really brilliant.

♪ The song Quand j'suis paf by Marie DeValle plays ♪

And now we have the wonderful Marie Dubas. She was the biggest female star in France in the 1930s. She was the French equivalent of Gracie Fields. And she was considered to be the funniest woman in France. And she was the top earning female entertainer in France. She was of Polish-Jewish origin. So, during the Second World War, she fled to Switzerland and she survived the war there. She actually got fined because when the news came over the radio that Paris had been liberated, she flung open her windows and she switched her her radio to maximum volume because she wanted all her neighbours to know that Paris had been liberated. And in fact they just called the cops, and

they came round to find her. It was strange, she had a comeback in Paris after the war, but never achieved the enormous popularity she had in the thirties. And she is a strangely forgotten figure. I'm always saying to people who I think should know, I say, "What about Marie Dubas?" And very often they've never heard of her. It's funny that you can be so famous, and so loved, and so popular, and almost disappear without trace. But her records, I just adore her records. They're so funny and so exuberant. And this record it's called Le Tango Stupefiant. She's actually mocking this whole tradition of the Chanson réaliste with all this. In a song she's boasting about having snorted naphthalene and smoked eucalyptus, and tried every possible form of substance abuse with hilarious results.

♪ A song from Le Tango Stupefiant by Marie Dubas plays ♪

I rather worried having led you, I didn't know how many drunken you are going to accuse me of being very sexist. I had to really search for an appropriate record of the period of a drunken man. But here is a rather depressed drunken man, George Ulmer. This is an immediately postwar record. And I think it's, in a way, it belongs to another tradition. You'll hear it sounds much more American really than it does French. As you heard, he was drinking whiskey and gin. So, not very French beverages.

♪ A song by George Ulmer plays ♪

Let's see what you've got to say.

Q & A and Comments

Oh, Merna, lovely Merna. She was with me in Luca last week. So, thank you Merna.

This is Hannah, "Missed a few but hopefully you're better." Champagne's your favourite drink but always special the flute for you. Well I didn't know about that, we should have a tasting sometime in a flute and a coupe and see which is the best. Dom Perignon, thank you for your advice on this matter.

Q: "When did flirt originate?"

A: I think it's quite, it certainly goes back, I think to the 19th century. Cause flirt nowadays, you know, it's a dangerous word, isn't it? I mean, flirt in the past was an innocent thing. I think nowadays flirting will be taken as sexual harassment.

Says Marian, with this fabulous music. I'm glad you you are too 'cause I've already had my first apero of the evening. Your father always brought 'cause he felt, aw, felt sorry for the widow.

Nicola , Elle could refer to the bottle. That's true. It could, but I think there is definitely a double entendre there. The way to refer to butler saying he's been waiting...

Q: Did Black Americans influenced Jazz in France?

A: They did, absolutely. It caused the very famous that came over in 1925. But there were also individual black musicians who came over, and it was much better to be black in Paris than it was in America though. And of course, there was racism every everywhere. The racism in France towards blacks, in fact black Josephine Baker was adored, she was practically queen or Paris. Blacks could feel much freer and have a much better time in France than they could in America. Thank you Lorna.

Piaf, yes Piaf, she's just amazing. Especially those early records. I really love the early Piaf. Thank you Nicky.

Mistangett, yes, I mean I couldn't include everybody. Mistangett is certainly not somebody who did, she didn't belong to the at all. That wasn't her thing really. She's always rather jolly. I'd have to think if there were good Mistangett songs about drinks. Thank you Carla.

Me Lord, that could have gone in. Yes, well there are quite a lot of songs that could have gone into the lecture. I have come across Le Petomane. Le Petomane, it's a bit rude for me to explain what he did. He made music in a very original way. There are records actually, Le Petomane made records and had a huge career, and you know, was a massive success in Paris. But I don't think I could really included Le Petomane in this lecture. Yes, wonderful singer, but doesn't really fit into the time period.

All right, thank you all very much, and I'll be continuing in a fairly frivolous vein for my next lecture in a week's time. Bye-bye everybody.