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## Musical Work in the Tunisian Protectorate: Paul Frémaux, Antonin Laffage, and Evolving Colonial Identities

Jann Pasler

After the mission of discovery and the “scramble for Africa” transformed into the even greater challenge of administration and development, all of civic society in the French empire was called on to participate, including musicians.<sup>1</sup> To understand settler societies, scholars are beginning to move beyond Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism and Michel Foucault’s notion of power, increasingly coming to regard colonialism as neither monolithic nor involving simple binaries, whether self and other, “French” and “indigenous,” or even domination and resistance.<sup>2</sup> Colonial cities tended to attract many populations whose social, economic, and political relationships as well as conflicts were complicated and in flux, not always defined by racial or religious differences. Colonial culture now appears less coherent than post-colonialists might suggest, “culture” itself more complex than a fixed set of norms and values imposed on a population.<sup>3</sup> As Ann Stoler puts it, the state depended on “the calibration of sympathies and attachments, managing different degrees of subjugation both among its agents and those colonized.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, because in colonial contexts, Pierre Bourdieu’s “fields of cultural production” were in unpredictable flux, his strict class determinism in understanding taste is less relevant than Antoine Hennion’s notion of

1. Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962*, Paris: La Table ronde, 1972. Jacques Thobie and Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, vol. 2: L'Apogée, Paris: Colin, 1991.
2. Fred Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Robert Aldrich, *Greater France. A History of French Overseas Expansion*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
3. *Les empires coloniaux, XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, dir. Pierre Singaravélou, Paris: Seuil, 2013. *Tensions of Empire*, dir. Fred Cooper and Ann Stoler, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
4. Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 40.

musical tastes as performative.<sup>5</sup> In the colonies, tastes—as indicated in music by repertoire—circulated across class, ethnicity, geography, genre, and medium. Like Stoler’s “dispositions”—“habits of heart, mind, and comportment”—musical taste may be “trained and disciplined.” But it is also an “interpretation, discerned and made” and can “emerge out of a habitus that is rejected, accepted, or uneasily accommodated.”<sup>6</sup> It is time to recognize colonial cultures, including their musical contributions, as “formations historiques,” “produites par une diversité d’acteurs occupant des positions sociales très différentes” and characterized by ever-evolving repertoires, practices, and interactions.<sup>7</sup>

To get beyond the concept of colonialism and its agents as an “abstract force,”<sup>8</sup> I turn to the musical practices of one North African city, Tunis, and what its French settlers created and hoped to accomplish in imposing “l’esprit français” on the landscape.<sup>9</sup> Focus is on Tunis’s francophone musical culture and two French musicians, Antonin Laffage (1858–1926) and Paul Frémaux (1858–1931). After directing ensembles in Angers, both arrived in 1894 and devoted much of their careers to building the musical culture of Tunis, often collaborating. In 1893 Tunis, under a French protectorate since 1881, had just opened a port. Not only was the region strategically and economically important, the ruins of Carthage nearby harked back to the Roman as well as Mediterranean heritage shared with France. Despite its proximity to France, a mild climate, and rich agricultural potential (especially in olive oil and wine), Tunis’s widely diverse population, outnumbering the French as in most other colonial cities, made French emigration an ongoing priority but also a challenge.<sup>10</sup> To escape

5. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge: Polity, 1993. Antoine Hennion, “Pour une pragmatique du goût,” *Papiers de recherche du Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation*, 1, 2005: pp. 1–14. Jann Pasler, “De la ‘publicité déguisée’ à la performativité du goût: Partitions et suppléments musicaux dans la presse française à la Belle Époque,” *Revue de musicologie*, 102/1, 2016, pp. 3–61.
6. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 38.
7. Romain Bertrand, Hélène Blais and Emmanuelle Sibeud, *Cultures d’Empires*, Paris: Karthala, 2015.
8. Ann Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule,” in: *Colonialism and Culture*, dir. Nicolas Dirks, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992, p. 320. Georges Balandier, “La situation coloniale: Approche théorique,” *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 11, 1951, pp. 44–79.
9. On spectacles and concerts in Tunis, see Raoul Darmon, “Un siècle de vie musicale à Tunis,” *Bulletin économique et social de Tunisie*, 53, June 1951, pp. 61–74, based on his memories, reiterated in virtually all descriptions since then. For more depth, we turn to the press and the protectorate’s collection of documents, correspondence, and programs at the Archives nationales de Tunisie (ANT), the Centre des archives diplomatiques à Nantes (CADN), and other archives where I worked from 2009 to 2018.
10. On Tunis, see Auguste Pavy, *Histoire de la Tunisie*, Tours: Cattier, 1894. Charles-Roger Des-sort, *Histoire de la ville de Tunis*, Alger: Pfister, 1926. Paul Sebag, *Tunis. Histoire d’une ville*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998.

the feeling of isolation and create a sense of community, to establish their position as long-term residents, and to maintain their connection to the metropole, these settlers needed a cultural life that reflected their values—traditions and spaces that enacted and represented their Frenchness.<sup>11</sup> This was all the more important in Tunis, where “governance of the urban space had always been the domain of the sovereign.”<sup>12</sup> Among the first structures the French built following conquest was a bandstand for military band performances. These broadcast the sound of empire, permeating spaces as well as souls. Soon thereafter, French colonial cities, like Tunis, built not only post offices, city halls, brasseries, hotels, public parks, and train stations, but also municipal theaters, symbols of French pride and sophistication at the epicenter of new urban neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup>

Some historians root the French “imperial nation-state” in the *métropole*, even if its discourse valued imperial heterogeneity.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, music, like language, performed audible connections to the homeland. In Tunis, as in other colonial towns, one could hear waltzes and marches on Sundays in public parks, Gounod’s *Faust* et Audran’s *La Mascotte* in theaters, orchestral music at philharmonic societies, and opera fantasies performed by amateur wind bands and choruses. As in France, French song permeated popular venues, such as those with Parisian references—the Eldorado, Folies-Bergère, Alcazar, and Chat Noir—as well as casinos and later cinemas.<sup>15</sup> Giving settlers a sense of the culture they shared, music was not only a form of entertainment and distraction from the difficulties of living far from France, but also an important urban practice. It helped to establish sociability (often all-male) and relationships among “constantly improvised communities, forged from varying degrees of dislocation, habitation, and successive assimilation.”<sup>16</sup> Bringing together settlers of various nationalities, musicians moving back and forth across the Mediterranean, tourists, and elite Tunisians—essential networks in the empire—music was expected to forge a colonial culture closely tied to France, while adapted to the colonial context.

11. Likewise elsewhere: Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy abroad*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. *Britishness Abroad*, dir. Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre, Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2007.
12. Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans. North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration c.1800–1900*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, p. 135.
13. Similar municipal theaters opened in Saigon (1900), Haiphong (1900), Tananarive (1900), Sfax (1903), and Hanoi (1911).
14. Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State. Negritude and Colonial Humanism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 8–9, 24–29.
15. Jann Pasler, “Performing Frenchness: Music at the Colonial Edge,” *National Meeting of the American Musicological Society*, San Francisco (11 November 2011). Jann Pasler, “From Military Bands to Opera directed by Women: Performing Frenchness in the Colonies,” *International Conference of Nineteenth-century Music*, Edinburgh, Scotland (28 June 2012).
16. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, p. 343.

To the extent that musical practices contributed to the prosperity of these cities and to the emergence of alliances in the population, they contributed to Jules Ferry's dream of a "France en formation." Increasing the number of French citizens and French influence abroad would help guarantee her national future.<sup>17</sup> Achieving this ideal, however, was far more complicated than Ferry could have imagined.

In spite of the important role played by music in this culture, little is written on colonialism and music in France. Historians of the French empire have ignored music, except popular songs on colonial subjects.<sup>18</sup> These songs may have helped shape French perception of their colonies, as did images in the press, performances at the Jardin d'acclimatation, and the universal exhibitions.<sup>19</sup> But how were they perceived in the empire? Musicologists have long been interested in musical exoticism and composers' appropriation of non-western music in the twentieth century, especially in the British empire.<sup>20</sup> Some have begun to examine the cultural transfer of musical genres such as jazz in India and opera in Shanghai.<sup>21</sup> Study of music in the French empire offers other possibilities. In this

17. Charles-Robert Ageron, "Jules Ferry et la colonisation," in: *Jules Ferry fondateur de la République*, dir. François Furet, Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1985, pp. 194–99.
18. Alain Ruscio, *Que la France était belle au temps des colonies*, Paris: Maisonneuve, 2001. Claude and Josette Liauzu, *Quand on chantait les colonies de 1830 à nos jours*, Paris: Syllepse, 2002. Jean-Pierre Rioux, "La chanson," in: *Dictionnaire de la France coloniale*, dir. Jean-Pierre Rioux, Paris: Flammarion, 2007, pp. 727–31.
19. William Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses. The Popular Image of Africa, 1870–1900*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982, and Thomas August, *The Selling of the Empire. British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890–1940*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985, inspired my article, "The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 129/1, 2004, pp. 24–76. See also *Zoos humains. De la Vénus coloniale aux reality shows*, dir. Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch et al., Paris: La Découverte, 2004; Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, *Culture coloniale. La France conquise par son Empire, 1871–1931*, Paris: Autrement, 2003; Jann Pasler, *La République, la musique, le citoyen, 1871–1914*, Paris: Gallimard, 2015, chapter 7.
20. Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music, Britain 1876–1953*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001. Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon, *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. Bob Van der Linden, *Music and Empire in Britain and India*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Jann Pasler, "Race, Orientalism, and Distinction in the Wake of the Yellow Peril," in: *Western Music and its Others*, dir. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 86–118.
21. Bradley Shope, "Orchestras and Musical Intersections with Regimental Bands, Blackface Minstrel Troupes, and Jazz in India, 1830s–1940s," in: *Global Perspectives on Orchestras. Collective Creativity and Social Agency*, dir. Tina Ramnarine, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 226–41. Bradley Shope, *American Popular Music in Britain's Raj*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016. Yvonne Liao, "Empires in Rivalry: Opera Concerts and Foreign Territoriality in Shanghai, 1930–1945," in: *Operatic Geographies. The Place of Opera and the Opera House*, dir. Suzanne Aspden, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019, pp. 148–61. See also Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999; *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer. Paris, 1830–1914*, dir. Annegret Fauser and



article, cultural transfer refers less to “the transport of cultural materials from one domain to another” or “the migration of sets of practices from one geographical position to another” than to the re-creation and implantation of French culture.<sup>22</sup> This required adaptation and negotiation with other cultures already in place.

I begin this investigation of musical work in Tunis’s colonial history and urban culture. This calls for an in-depth study of six categories: musicians and individuals responsible for musical life, their agency and survival strategies; networks, relationships, and collaborations among individuals and ensembles; spaces for concerts and theater; musical institutions and their modes of governance; choice of repertoire and its local and imperial circulation; and identities preserved, facilitated, or transformed by musical life.<sup>23</sup> In Tunis, as elsewhere, westerners were not a unified group. Their musical practices contributed to new notions of “European” and “cosmopolitan.”<sup>24</sup>

Here I focus on the careers of Laffage and Frémaux in Tunis and their collaborations. As with the “pacific conqueror,” Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, praised for his “generous initiative and enormous courage” in the Congo, the Tunisian press gave ample reason to admire their contributions.<sup>25</sup> However, this will not be a story about heroes. Modest and dedicated, but not necessarily more talented, better prepared, or more entrepreneurial than other French with *premiers prix*, these musicians chose commitment to local work over touring, national or international fame, and fortune. While other French conductors alternated positions in France and North Africa, Laffage and Frémaux settled in Tunis.<sup>26</sup> Their lives were characterized by what Pierre-Michel Menger has called “pluriactivité,” that is, simultaneous and successive work with “rôles cumulables”

Mark Everist, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009; the international collaborative research project of Anaïs Fléchet, *Transatlantic cultures*.

22. *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer*, p. 6. For a predecessor, see Michael McClellan, “Performing Empire: Opera in Colonial Hanoi,” *Journal of Music Research*, 22/1–2, 2003, pp. 135–66.
23. This methodology is part of my ERC advanced project, “The Sound of Empire in 20th c. Colonial Cultures: Rethinking History through Music” (2019–2024).
24. Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories,” p. 321. Peter Van der Veer, “Colonial cosmopolitanism,” in: *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, dir. Steven Vertovec, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 165–79. Jann Pasler, “Camille Saint-Saëns and Stoic Cosmopolitanism: Patriotic, Moral, Cultural, and Political,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 66/2, 2013, pp. 539–45.
25. Edward Berenson, “Making Colonial Culture: Empire and the French public, 1880–1940,” *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 22/2, 2004, pp. 127–49, here p. 131. Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire. Five charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
26. See Amédée Saugey and Gaston Coste, discussed in Pasler, “Massenet en Tunisie française, italienne, et arabe,” in: *Musique, Enjeu de société*, dir. Nicolas Dufetel and Vincent Cotro, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016, pp. 219–30, and “The Making of a Franco-Mediterranean Culture: Massenet and his Students in Algeria and the Côte d’Azur,”

and “l’emploi discontinu [...] de courte durée.”<sup>27</sup> This resulted in services, cultural products, knowledge, and communication—“la vie sociale elle-même.”<sup>28</sup> After 1900 Laffage’s interest in Arabic music embodied the shift in French attitudes from asserting “Frenchness” to seeking to understand the culture of colonized peoples. Even if not recognized by posterity, their careers shed light on the musical work needed to nurture French culture in colonial cities and the roles it could play for the Protectorate.

## The Challenges of Colonialism

### *Divided Nation and the Need for Emigration*

For Jules Ferry and Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, Tunisia offered the opportunity to turn away from the errors made in Algeria and begin again, more productively. At the Congress of Nations in Berlin (1878), European powers had effectively accepted France’s ambitions in Tunisia in return for other agreements. In the early 1880s, with their power consolidated and the notion of nation being redefined, opportunist republicans were looking for territorial expansion and exploitation of colonial resources to stimulate new markets and national prosperity. Colonialism was seen as vital for economic growth, providing new jobs and aspirations for glory strong enough to replace those of the aristocratic dynasties. If France wished to remain “un grand pays,” explained Ferry in 1885, it must carry “ses mœurs, sa langue, ses armes, son drapeau, et son génie” everywhere it could. Economic competition with its rivals was at the heart of French imperial motivations, accompanied by an ideology of assimilation and its “mission civilisatrice.”<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, colonial realities seriously challenged such idealism.

Compelling objections to French colonialism came from the entire political spectrum, the monarchist Right to the radical Left. Many protested the diversion of resources away from the country’s other needs, preferring to concentrate on “la revanche” and winning back their provinces lost to Germany in 1871. After the controversial, preemptive invasion of Tunisia in 1881, Ferry was forced to resign. However, with France in an economic recession, he returned to power in 1883. When the Tunisian revolt of 1882 was quelled, the Bey accepted the protectorate

in: *Massenet and the Mediterranean World*, dir. Simone Ciolfi, Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2015, pp. 103–32.

27. Pierre-Michel Menger, *Le travail créateur. S’accomplir dans l’incertain*, Paris: Gallimard-Seuil, 2009, pp. 222–23.

28. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 290.

29. Ageron, “Jules Ferry et la colonisation.” Thobie and Meynier, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, vol. 2, p. 98. Girardet, *L’idée coloniale*, pp. 46–62. Pasler, *La République, la musique et le citoyen*, pp. 349–53.

in 1883, this relatively new and flexible structure allowing for some local autonomy.<sup>30</sup> Annam and Tonkin soon followed as protectorates in 1883. With a crisis in Tonkin, Ferry was driven out again in 1885 and dissent grew. Gustave Le Bon argued that assimilation would never be possible, especially in North Africa, given differences between the French and Arab races; Léopold de Saussure agreed. It took a while to attract a good number of civil servants to Tunisia; some came from Algeria, most from France. However, at the universal exhibitions Algeria and Tunisia maintained pride of place among French colonies.<sup>31</sup>

With Ferry's death in 1893 and the emergence of political doctrines seeking to reconcile political factions, attention turned again to the colonies. In 1892, with important monarchist participation, a group advocating colonialism was formed in the *Chambre des députés*, then in 1898 a similar one in the Senate. In 1894 the government created a *Ministère des colonies*. However, the new ministry, led by minor politicians, had few employees, leaving colonial development largely to private initiative and the settlers.<sup>32</sup>

Of increasing importance in colonial cities was the emigration of more French settlers of "quality." Instead of the "discontented and disenfranchised," colonial urban development depended on "bons colons" from the middle class with "financial means and technical know-how who would be entrepreneurs and professionals."<sup>33</sup> The *Union coloniale française* (UCF) was founded in 1893 to promote this kind of emigration through publications and lectures, 400 of them from 1893 to 1903. The *Résidence générale de France* in Tunis was among its founding members, the *Compagnie des ports de Tunis* also a member.<sup>34</sup> Increasingly, the Union also sought to attract families, youth, and women.<sup>35</sup> These arguments, particularly acute in Tunis, set the context for the emigration of Laffage and Frémaux in 1894.

30. The first French protectorate was in Cambodia (1863–1953).

31. Gustave Le Bon, *La Civilisation des arabes*, Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1884. Léopold de Saussure, *Psychologie de la colonisation française dans ses rapports avec les sociétés indigènes*, Paris: Alcan, 1899. See also Charles-Robert Ageron, *L'anticolonialisme en France de 1871 à 1914*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1973; Jean-Pierre Biondi, *Les anticolonialistes (1881–1962)*, Paris: Laffont, 1992; Ahmed Kassab, Ahmed Ounaies et al., *Histoire générale de la Tunisie*, vol. 4: *Époque contemporaine (1881–1956)*, Tunis: Sud Éditions, 2010, especially chapters 1, on the protectorate, and 8, on cultural evolution.

32. Thobie and Meynier, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, vol. 2, pp. 32, 140–44. Aldrich, *Greater France*, pp. 100–03, 106–13.

33. Marie-Paule Ha, *French Women and the Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 20–28, 45–46. Girardet, *L'idée coloniale*, p. 72–75.

34. *Rapport de l'exercice 1895–96*, Paris: Union coloniale française, 1896; *Statuts et Liste des Membres*, Apr. 1901.

35. The Société française d'émigration des femmes was created in 1897, l'Œuvre coloniale des femmes in 1900. See Ha, *French Women*.

### *Italian Rivals and Urban Entertainment*

When Laffage and Frémaux arrived, there were only 12,000 French, 600 of them farmers, and 30,000 Italians who seemed “tous ennemis acharnés de notre influence.”<sup>36</sup> As Mary Lewis has argued, signing a treaty with the Bey did not “settle the question of which European state controlled Tunisia.” Rather, “it marked the beginning of a new phase of imperial rivalry, as European powers found novel ways to compete for influence”; rivalry was a “constant undercurrent.”<sup>37</sup> Whereas Lewis examines legal disputes and social uses of the law, I consider this ongoing rivalry in musical culture. For their first two decades in Tunis, French settlers had to contend with cultural domination by Italians, their musical activities both varied and well-established. French soldiers embarking there in 1881 tell of performances by half-naked Tunisian dancers, accompanied by Jewish musicians, recalling those they had seen in Paris. Some enjoyed mixing with “les Tunisiens du peuple et des petits marchands” at the Cafés Maures. There they could listen to the “charivari endiable” of five musicians and a violinist, “un jeune Juif très-brun, aux moustaches noires,” who improvised on the same song every night. From an Orientalist perspective, Pierre Giffard found this “un sujet d’études singulier et toujours intéressant [...] qui fait rêver aux peintures de Delacroix ou de Regnault.” Out on the streets, however, one heard mostly Italian music: “les ignobles pianos-mécaniques, orgues de barbarie et autres instruments venus d’Italie, manipulés par des Italiens [...]. Il n’est pas de rue, de maison, ou l’on n’ait les oreilles échorchées, par des *Trouvère* faux [...] des *Lucie de Lammermoor* piaillardes et batardes.” For six sous, one could even hear “l’antagonisme platonique” of a violin playing *L’Inno à Garibaldi* while a mechanical piano performed *Les Cloches de Corneville*. Every Sunday, military band concerts performed as if “une succursale lointaine du Palais-Royal et du Luxembourg.” At one such concert, an Italian listener remarked to a French settler that following the *Marseillaise* with fantasies based on Verdi’s *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata* was an apt musical concession to Italy.<sup>38</sup>

Cultural life in Tunis reflected its 225,000 people of mixed origins. Muslims and indigenous Jews liked to hear their own music in cafés, gardens, and various private spaces. Before 1907, when Arabic theater from Egypt was first performed at the Théâtre municipal in Tunis, most Muslims had little interest in theater, except for the Karakouz (puppet theater), performed only during Ramadan. Because

36. “Manuel de l’émigrant en Algérie” (May 1894), in: Jules Saurin, *Le peuplement français en Tunisie*, Paris: Challamel, 1910, p. 30. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *L’Algérie et la Tunisie*, Paris: Guillaumin, 1887, pp. 36, 54, 58.

37. Mary Lewis, “Geographies of Power: The Tunisian Civic Order, Jurisdictional Politics, and Imperial Rivalry in the Mediterranean, 1881–1935,” *Journal of Modern History*, 80/4, 2008, pp. 791–830, esp. 792, 796, 803.

38. Pierre Giffard, *Les Français à Tunis*, Paris: Havard, 1881, pp. 56, 63–66.

Muslim countries forbade figurative representations, Muslims had no theaters; they preferred circus. In contrast, many Jewish Tunisians eventually westernized their habits, attending theater and musical performances in the capital.<sup>39</sup>

Whereas Anglo-Maltese outnumbered Italians in the early nineteenth century, the latter, in the majority among Europeans referred to as foreigners (“étrangers”) in 1880, had long dominated theater since 1826 when an Italian built Tunis’s first theater. Italian operas and comedies could be heard weekly in the 1830s. In 1856 the Tapia Theater, built in 1842 by a Jewish Tunisian, put on *La Traviata* only three years after its Italian premiere. Adelina Patti once performed there. Traveling Italian troops and growth of the Italian population in the wake of Italian unification led a rich Sephardic Jew, David Cohen-Tanugi, to build a new theater in 1875 with 400 seats. Here *Faust* was performed for the first time in Italian as well as Donizetti’s *La Favorita* and the first French operetta, Lecocq’s *Giroflé-Girofla* (1879). On the site of the Tapia, destroyed by fire in 1879, a Greek entrepreneur Gringa built the Politeama Paradiso in 1885 for traveling Italian companies and French operetta. Destroyed by fire in 1896, it was later replaced by the Politeama Rossini, founded by an Italian musical instrument distributor and impresario, Cesare Trionfo.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike the Maltese, who tended to accept the Protectorate, Italians in Tunis were as preoccupied by “le sentiment de l’italianité,” as French settlers were with their culture and Italy as invested in this “Italian colony” as France was in its possessions.<sup>41</sup> Whereas the indigenous and Maltese population increased little after the arrival of the French, the Italian presence grew steadily.<sup>42</sup> By 1900, those of European ancestry in Tunisia had grown to the 111,000, 71,600 of whom were Italians, 24,000 French, 12,000 Maltese, with smaller numbers of Greeks, Swiss, Austrians, Belgians, and others.<sup>43</sup>

39. Paul Sebag, *Histoire des juifs en Tunisie*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1991, p. 146. Sebag, *Tunis. Histoire d’une ville*. Hamadi Ben Halima, *Un demi-siècle de théâtre arabe en Tunisie (1907–1957)*, Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1974.
40. Moncef Charfeddine, *Deux siècles de théâtre en Tunisie*, Tunis: Ibn Charaf, n.d., pp. 19–27. Raoul Darmon, “Un Presque siècle de théâtre à Tunis,” *Bulletin économique et social de Tunisie*, May 1951, pp. 42–51. Darmon, born in the Tunisian suburb of La Goulette, was trained in Paris as a lawyer.
41. Gaston Loth, *Le peuplement italien en Tunisie et Algérie*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1905, pp. 324–25. Saurin, *Le peuplement français*, p. 228.
42. Echoing Saurin, *Le peuplement français*, pp. 62–63, Sebag, in *Tunis. Histoire d’une ville*, explains the paradox that “L’occupation française avait favorisé le développement d’une colonie italienne” (p. 316). The colony did not attract French workers who were used to earning more in France, whereas those Italians living in misery found better working conditions in Tunisia. As for landowners, few were French and none were residents: 98.5% of land owned by foreigners was held by non-French, and all lived on it.
43. Of the 152,000 emigrants of European descent in Tunisia in 1908, 105,000 were Italians, as compared with only 35,000 French. Compare this to Algeria where the 463,000 French

The Italian population in Tunisia was divided by differences of class, religion, and regional origin. Jewish bourgeois Italians from Livorno—lawyers, doctors, bankers—shared little with Italian freemasons and Catholic peasants and workers from Sicily. And if there were few Livornese in the arts, there were many Sicilian musicians and music teachers. Livornese elites mixed with other Europeans at the Société philharmonique (founded in 1872), while Sicilians formed wind bands, such as Concordia and the band Lyra Garibaldini. The philharmonic society Stella d'Italia, an “Italian patriotic association,” long directed by the Tuscan Raffaele Benvenuti (an Italian whose son went on to study at the Conservatoire de Paris), had 319 members, mostly working-class, of which 54 performers. A group of them accompanied circus performances in Tunis.<sup>44</sup> Their costume, resembling an Italian military uniform, caused great consternation among French residents.<sup>45</sup> Guy de Maupassant, who lived in Tunis for two months in 1887, found these differences also audible: the Livornese Jews, who spoke “le pur toscan,” sounded differently from Catholics in the south and could not even understand Sicilians whose “rude dialecte,” “timbre de la voix,” and “l’intonation nasale des crieurs de rues” resembled “la note aigue de l’Arabe” rather than the “dolce lingua del si.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, from the French perspective, Livornese and Sicilians had conflicting attitudes towards the Protectorate. Even though the vast majority, born in Italy, lived “italiennement,” as if in their own country, the Livornese were perceived as “irréductibles adversaires de l’influence française” and tended to “vivre à part, à ne pas être confondu[s] avec la masse inférieure des petits colons italiens.” In contrast, after Mafia-types were driven out, “la masse des travailleurs siciliens subit notre action.”<sup>47</sup>

Clashes, which went both ways, played out aurally in the streets, banquet halls, and theaters. At a gala in 1881 honoring them, French soldiers walked out when the concert began with a fantasy based on Rossini’s *L’Italienne à Alger*.<sup>48</sup> In 1885, the Italian theater was forced to close because of a quarrel between French officers and Italian residents. Typical were eruptions during local wind band and choral competitions when each group had to listen to one another, or when it was felt that advantages were given to French-run ensembles. For example, in 1891 a mixed-European band, Concordia, reorganized with only Italian members to protest a monopoly held by the municipal wind band, the Harmonie

that year doubled the number of all other foreigners, 217,000. Saurin, *Le peuplement français*, pp. 379–80.

44. Darmon, “Un siècle de vie musicale à Tunis,” p. 63.

45. Loth, *Le peuplement italien*, p. 362.

46. Guy de Maupassant, *La Vie errante* (1890), p. 64, cited in: Loth, *Le peuplement italien*, pp. 328–29.

47. Loth, *Le peuplement italien*, pp. 322, 327–28.

48. Darmon, “Un siècle de vie musicale à Tunis,” p. 67.

de la Goulette. The latter, with its international membership and French director, had exclusive permission to perform at the Place du Consulat de France. When la Concordia took to playing *fortissimo* there at 1:30 a.m., chanting “Vive l’Italie,” city officials relented and allowed the two ensembles to alternate use of the space each week.<sup>49</sup> Being seen and heard as a valued part of the Protectorate was as important to these Sicilians as to those performing under French leadership.

Hoping to appease the Italians, beginning in 1882 the Protectorate gave them special status, allowing their children to attend Italian schools. These were then subsidized by the Italian government beginning in 1888. The Protectorate also tolerated Italian institutions that developed and maintained “l’esprit de nationalité,” including the press, whose roots went back to the arrival in 1829 of an Italian Jewish political refugee from Livorno, Giulio Finzi. *L’Unione*, the newspaper expressing the views of the Italian Consulate, was started in 1886.<sup>50</sup> But if, in Algeria and among some French settlers in Tunisia, there was talk of racial “fusion” and a preoccupation with the need to assimilate “étrangers Européens” by language, school, religion, and even the arts,<sup>51</sup> the Italian community in Tunisia was determined not to assimilate, even if the Protectorate embraced a “politique de conciliation” aimed to “apaiser les luttes de nationalités.” At a Franco-Italian banquet in 1887 for French and Italian freemasons, an Italian musical ensemble played the *Marseillaise* and the editor of *L’Unione*, underlining their national affiliations, made a toast, “À la France, à l’Italie.”<sup>52</sup> Some French settlers thought that even when “les Italiens reconnaissent hautement notre domination politique et témoignent la plus grande déférence à nos administrateurs, ils font tous leurs efforts pour prendre possession du pays.”<sup>53</sup> The challenge for French musicians, like Laffage and Frémaux, was to render such nationalist oppositions less intense, work productively in this context, and promote French contributions to European culture in Tunisia.

### ***Multi-Dimensional Careers and Musical Practices integral to French Musical Culture***

Before the vigorous promotion of French emigration in the 1890s, the vast majority of newcomers were single men, mostly civil servants. Albert Canal has pointed to this as explanation for the number and prosperity of theaters. Needed was “la

49. Various letters and police reports, 31 Aug. to 7 Sept. 1891, ANT, Série E 621, 5/28.

50. “Les Européens en Tunisie” (1889), in: Saurin, *Le peuplement français*, p. 15. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, p. 136.

51. Loth et Saurin, teachers at the Lycée de Tunis c.1900, believed in the “fusion” of these populations in Tunisia. Saurin was a member of the UCF.

52. Saurin, *Le peuplement français*, p. 12.

53. Saurin, *Le peuplement français*, p. 268.



gaîté.” Café-concerts and music-halls in the 1890s, such as the Folies-Bergère, Olympia and Eldorado, appealed through satire and performers from Paris. The Théâtre Cohen and Théâtre Gringa also competed for their attendance as did, in summer, the Belvedere, Khereddine, and Hammam-Lif casinos.<sup>54</sup> Some French settlers also chose to create their own entertainment, albeit as amateurs. In addition to their regular jobs, they founded and ran musical ensembles. In 1882, Éloi Bourget, a schoolteacher in Tunis since 1884 and composer, Régis Petit, a painting entrepreneur, and two directors of *Tunis-Journal* created the choral society, La Cigale, which met at the Théâtre Cohen. Under Petit, its president for decades, in 1884 this became La Chorale de Tunis, a “Franco-Tunisienne” music society with thirty members of mixed European origins. Its purpose included teaching vocal music, singing, and solfège.<sup>55</sup> In the 1890s, this ensemble performed well enough to obtain local government subsidies to travel to compete in Bone (1890), Algiers (1892), Valetta, Malta (1893), Lyon (1894), Chambéry (1895), and Paris (1897), winning many prizes and garnering pride for Tunisia.<sup>56</sup> A local tax official and amateur singer, Alfred Grasset, served as its secretary, Alexandre Chabert, schoolteacher and piano teacher, M. Grosjean, lawyer and judge, and Raymond Valensi, as its directors until 1898. Frémaux then took over, followed in 1900 by Laffage.

Since its creation in 1887, L’Harmonie française, the municipal wind band of Tunis, subsidized by the city of Tunis, played for municipal events and alternated with the military band, the Musique des 4<sup>e</sup> Zouaves, on the Avenue de la Marine and at the Place de la Kasbah, site of the municipal government and adjacent to the medina, thus for mixed audiences. Those who ran the Harmonie française included a jeweler and journalist, a lawyer and editor of *La Dépêche tunisienne* (the mouthpiece of the Protectorate), the city’s archivist, and the former director of the local military band, Cotteaux. Its members taught music to both French and indigenous students.<sup>57</sup> Among dozens of similar ensembles in Tunis and other cities, the Anglo-Maltese philharmonic society La Valette put on its own regular concert series, often on Mondays at 4 p.m. on the Avenue de la Marine.<sup>58</sup> So too did other ensembles such as the Lyre Franco-Tunisienne, the

54. See advertisements for their productions in the local press and Albert Canal, “La société tunisienne des débuts du Protectorat à 1900,” *Tunisie*, Apr. 1939, pp. 20–23.

55. Gironce, President of La Chorale, to M. Bommard, 27 Sept. 1884, CADN, Tunisie, Box 612. By 1912 La Chorale had 57 performing members. Paul Lambert, *Dictionnaire illustré de la Tunisie*, Tunis: Saliba, 1912, p. 115.

56. CADN, Tunisie, Boxes 664 and 932; ANT Série E 621, 14/203, Correspondence, 1892 to 1908. Albert Canal, *La littérature et la presse tunisiennes de l’occupation à 1900*, Paris: Renaissance du livre, 1923, pp. 353–54.

57. The Director to the Résident général, 17 Oct. 1889, ANT, série E 621, 14/204.

58. “Société musicale ‘La Valette,’” *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 6 Apr. 1896.



Juvenes Cartaginis, and groups in Sfax, Sousse, and Bizerte. Through developing “le goût du chant et de la musique,” historians of the period have seen these activities as public instruction and a mode of assimilation, especially among Europeans.<sup>59</sup>

Ferdinand Huard, senior postal and telegraph clerk (“commis principal”), made extraordinary contributions to French cultural life in Tunis, including its music. He wrote and published poetry, created and edited the *Revue tunisienne* (1885–1889), and served as vice-president of La Cigale (1887).<sup>60</sup> In addition, Huard directed amateur theatrical spectacles and performed songs with his friends at the Caveau tunisien, which he founded in 1896 with Paul Lafitte, editor of *La Dépêche tunisienne* who had recently moved to Tunis. Huard also collaborated with composers, writing lyrics they set to music: for the inauguration of the Port of Tunis, a patriotic chorus, *À la France* (1893), by Eloi Bourget; a three-act “épisode lyrique,” *Pour la patrie!* (1901) by Victor Piétra, a lawyer from Toulon living in Tunis since 1895 and poet-composer known for his operas (see below). Huard also wrote a text praising the Bey for Laffage’s *Hymne beylicale* (1898). Before Frémaux and Laffage, many French settlers involved in musical life were amateurs.

Although a certain M. Marduel proposed bringing an opera troop to Tunis in 1881,<sup>61</sup> the most important French director to settle in Tunis was Jacob Donchet, previously artistic director of the Grand Casino of Lamalou-les-Bains, near Montpellier. News of the closing of Tunis’s Italian theater in 1885 had traveled far. In response, a theater director in Constantine, Algeria, offered to bring a French theatrical company, while recognizing that such a group “ne fait pas d’affaires à Tunis à cause de la grande quantité d’Italiens, ce qui prive les Français de toute distraction et amène des troubles comme ceux qui récemment se sont produits.” Without a hall large enough for spectators from all classes of society, the city turned him down.<sup>62</sup> However, after the Théâtre Français opened in 1886 with Offenbach’s ever-popular *La Fille du tambour-major*, attended by the Bey and local elites, the Conseil municipal of Tunis became interested in supporting French theater. The Théâtre Français’s productions, whether Italian works in Italian or French operetta, relied on touring companies and their level of competence. In 1888, the Conseil issued a call for proposals. Applicants came from Bordeaux, Vichy, Marseille, Philippeville and Milan. Approached by “des gens

59. Raoul Versini, “L’état actuel des services scientifiques et instruction publique en Tunisie,” in: *La France en Tunisie*, Paris: Carré et Naud, 1897, p. 238.

60. Lambert, *Dictionnaire illustré de la Tunisie*, pp. 33, 230.

61. Marduel from Guelma, 26 Nov. 1881, CADN, Tunisie, Box 608.

62. Marduel to the Ministre français in Tunis, 16 June 1885, ANT, Série E 621, 14/94.

notables de Tunis,” Donchet agreed to collaborate with the owner of the Italian theater, but needed a subsidy to assemble a French company.<sup>63</sup> The city turned him down. Two years later, he tried again, going around the city to the Résident général and his wife, M<sup>me</sup> Massicault. With 30 to 40 performers he promised 4 months of French opéra-comique and operetta in the Alcazar. He would keep the budget down by deriving 50% of his revenue from “un cercle et jeux de petits chevaux pendant les entr’actes.” Donchet noted that his productions would be seen as “une petite victoire patriotique sur les Italiens qui depuis plusieurs années déjà exploitent à Tunis le genre italien (dans de mauvaises conditions il est vrai).”<sup>64</sup> Those solicited for letters of reference, however, were very negative. One, from a municipal councilman in Lamalou-les-Bains, called Donchet a crook and suggested that his only purpose in such a proposal was to make money from gambling; moreover, Donchet had bad morals: he lived outside wedlock with M<sup>me</sup> Lévy who left her husband and child to run off with him. A letter from Béziers said Donchet has only “fait des dupes.”<sup>65</sup> Still, the Conseil of Tunis was sympathetic: a majority of its 6 Muslims, 1 Jew (Isaac Natal), 4 Italians, and 1 Frenchman voted in favor of Donchet’s proposal for the 1888–1889 season.<sup>66</sup> They admitted to public pressure to hear more French works and did not want to impose “des conditions trop rigoureuses.” However, their only subsidy was “l’autorisation des petits chevaux.”<sup>67</sup>

In fact, despite historians’ assumption that Tunisians were excluded from the Conseils municipaux, the Protectorate’s archives in Tunis as well as the press document that Muslims were in the majority on this Conseil through the 1920s, and until 1899, Italians outnumbered Frenchmen.<sup>68</sup> Why would they support French theater? Hamadi Ben Halima thinks that the Tunisian elite probably

63. Donchet to the Conseil municipal, 31 July 1888, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

64. Donchet to M<sup>me</sup> Massicault, 2 Aug. 1890, Donchet to the Résident, 6 Sept. 1890, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

65. Letters to the Commissaire central, 6 Sept. and 8 Nov. 1890, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

66. As Lewis points out in “Geographies of Power,” religious affiliation was used as a “proxy for nationality” in Tunisia. French authorities referred to “Muslims,” instead of “Tunisians,” since Muslims in Tunisia were subjects owing allegiance to the Bey even if they had migrated from Algeria or the Afrique-Occidentale Française where they would have been considered French nationals (pp. 815–18).

67. Procès verbaux of the Conseil municipal, 24 June and 15 Oct. 1890, ANT, Série E 621, 14/99.

68. In May 1896 the Conseil had 6 Muslims and 1 Jew—thus 50% Tunisians—plus Italians (5) and French (2). Cambiaggio, from the Chambre de commerce, and General Si Mohammed El Asfourri served as presidents from 1889 through 1899 with Muslims always at 50%. Others’ participation went from 2 Italians and 2 French in 1897 to 7 French, zero Italians in 1899, suggesting a rise in French power. ANT, Série E 621, 14/96. Moreover, Lambert, *Dictionnaire illustré de la Tunisie*, confirms this continuity in 1912, listing 9 Muslims, 1 Jew, 6 French, 2 Italians, and 2 Anglo-Maltese (p. 299).

attended European theater; many intellectual Tunisians spoke Italian or French and went to theater when in Paris.<sup>69</sup> The Tunisian majority also understood the attraction of such theater to both locals and tourists, and thus for Tunisian businesses. In 1890, Donchet again won their favor, their vote motivated by the “*désir manifesté par la population*” for a “*genre de distraction qu’elle ne cesse de réclamer.*”<sup>70</sup> Beginning in November, Donchet offered a season of opéra-comique and operettas—from *Mireille*, *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Mignon* to *M<sup>me</sup> Favart*, *Le Petit Duc*, etc.—for a minimal subsidy, lighting, and permission for “*petits chevaux.*” The following spring, the Conseil, led by Mohammed El Asfour, observed that Donchet “*s’est montré à la hauteur de la tâche malgré de grandes difficultés*”; they accepted his proposal for the following season.<sup>71</sup> In 1892, his season of mostly dramas, *comédies*, and ballet-pantomimes included a 6-week summer season of opéra-comique and operettas and in 1893, grand opera. However, he confessed to the Conseil that “*la Tunisie est loin d’offrir à un bon impresario tous les avantages.*”<sup>72</sup> With Tunis in a commercial crisis leading to huge deficits, Donchet petitioned to move from the Alcazar to the Théâtre Français. Then in 1896 he proposed to build the city its first official Théâtre municipal. Turned down, he nonetheless received a three-year contract from the city in 1897. However, increasingly Muslim members of the Conseil began to turn against him; unconvinced of its allure for tourists, 6 of the 7 Muslim members voted against his proposal to produce 45 days of operetta in 1897.<sup>73</sup> After 1900, Donchet worked mostly in local casinos.

It is difficult to know who made careers in music. M<sup>me</sup> Demay advertised her solfège classes in the 1880s. M. Dornelly, a cellist, and M<sup>lle</sup> Geuther, a pianist, put on concerts at the Café du cercle in 1892, their programs ranging from waltzes and polkas to opera fantasies. Besides regular military band performances, most other “concerts” were galas and charity benefits. An Italian composer-conductor, Henry Magnani, trained at the Conservatory in Rome, arrived in 1893 to lead the Casino orchestra in Tunis. But who performed in such orchestras where they earned so little?<sup>74</sup> Eventually, to become known for its culture, the Protectorate needed not just local amateur ensembles, hard-working instrumentalists, and the

69. Ben Halima, *Un demi-siècle de théâtre arabe*, pp. 33–34.

70. Vice-president delegate to the Secrétaire général du gouvernement, 15 Oct. 1890, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

71. Procès verbaux of the Conseil municipal, 21 Apr. 1891, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

72. Donchet to the Conseil municipal, 27 July 1893, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

73. Conseil municipal, “Extrait du registre des délibérations,” 10 Mar. 1897, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

74. According to Frémaux, his orchestra musicians were paid 8,000 francs, a modest sum for 4 months of work at the theater. Frémaux to the Ministre and Secrétaire Général du gouvernement, 2 Nov. 1896, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

occasional touring soloists and ensembles, but also professional musicians from France, capable of inspired leadership and willing to devote their energies to Tunis over the long term. As in other professions, the success of the few would encourage more musicians to come.<sup>75</sup>

When Antonin Laffage and Paul Frémaux arrived in 1894, they were the right people at the right time. Moreover, for “le véritable concert,” Raoul Darmon claims that the city had to wait until the Auditions Frémaux.<sup>76</sup> Their exemplary training, entrepreneurial skills, and integration into the professional milieu of Paris and beyond made them quintessential professionals.<sup>77</sup> Their collaborations with amateur ensembles and established theaters required an ability to work with various levels of skill and serve diverse publics. Without full-time jobs as colonial civil servants, they needed to take up many kinds of work and shoulder multiple responsibilities. Laffage engaged in a dozen music-related, part-time jobs in Tunis. Concert programs in the press document this “pluriactivité.” Because Laffage and Frémaux were independent contractors ineligible for municipal subsidies, the Protectorate’s archives reveal far less than for theater directors. Thus, their stories might seem dry and distant, mostly constructed with the facts. We can only imagine that if the risks of having no guaranteed income forced them to live in uncertainty, the benefits may have included more freedom, more autonomy, fewer competitors, and, as for other recent settlers, the possibility of *creating* work, even institutions. Their devotion to French music (from canonic repertoire to lesser-known contemporary composers)—that is, performing, conducting, and teaching it—served well the needs of Tunis’s French community. Laffage and Frémaux were pragmatic and adaptive, but also clearly felt a civic duty as music professionals.

The musical lives of Laffage and Frémaux raise many questions that we can explore, despite our dependence on the press. How to make a career in such a multi-cultural context, characterized by unstable institutions? What were the challenges and their survival strategies? With whom did they collaborate and why? What institutions did they create and what did these need to flourish? Their careers reflect sensitivity to local needs and desires—as expressed to the Conseil municipal—as well as the Protectorate’s agendas. Study of musical work

75. In 1897 Alphonse Plouchart, a former student at the Paris Conservatoire, came to conduct the 4<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs d’Afrique in Tunis; he also directed the Harmonie française and taught solfège in Tunisian schools. Jules Espitalier, first prize in violin from the Marseille Conservatory, came in 1900 to conduct the Casino orchestra of Tunis. The composer Wildred Weissen-Szumanski, who trained at the Geneva Conservatory, worked for the press beginning in 1902. Lambert, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 183, 330–31, 430.

76. Darmon, “Un siècle de vie musicale à Tunis,” p. 68.

77. Menger, *Le travail créateur*, p. 222.

in colonial culture thus encourages us to rethink how we write musical biography, from whom we will learn most, the social as well as musical importance of collaboration, and the kinds of agency musical work can perform.

### Pluriactivity and Collaboration: Laffage, Frémaux, and the Angevine heritage

Antonin Laffage and Paul Frémaux had much in common. They were born the same year, 1858, the former in Algiers, the other across the Mediterranean in Marseille. Both were trained as string players, Laffage, earning his first prize in violin from the Conservatoire de Lyon, Frémaux, from a musical family,<sup>78</sup> his first prize in cello from the Conservatoire de Paris. Before entering the Conservatoire in 1869, Paul had toured in France, Belgium, and Germany. In Paris, he played cello in the orchestras of the Concerts Padeloup, the Opéra-Comique, and, beginning in 1878 and for thirteen years, the Société des concerts du Conservatoire and the Opéra. Thanks to their talent, these two musicians succeeded in acquiring significant technical competence, their success recognized by critics and the public. Equally important, they were respected by their peers, leading to concerts with diverse colleagues in many contexts.<sup>79</sup>

But neither lived exclusively as instrumentalists. Both benefited from training in composition. Frémaux had his theatrical debut as a composer in 1878 with a one-act opéra-bouffe, *Avocat des belles-mères*, produced at a theater near Paris.<sup>80</sup> In February 1884 Laffage submitted a one-act opéra-comique to a competition of the Académie de la Province. Vincent d'Indy, the *rapporteur*, judged the score as well-made and “écrite avec une grande sûreté de main et une réelle entente du théâtre, tel que le comprenaient les Auber et les Boieldieu.”<sup>81</sup> Apparently Laffage and Frémaux were not drawn to Wagnerian and other emerging forms of musical progress.

Both soon made their living principally as conductors, even if learning by experience.<sup>82</sup> Laffage worked as second conductor at the Grand-Théâtre de Brest (1883–1884) and the Casino des Sables-d'Olonne (1884) before moving to Angers.<sup>83</sup> In June 1879, Frémaux collaborated with Alexandre Luigini,

78. His brother Albert was a violinist, his sister Jeanne a pianist, his father professor and director of the Conservatoire de Marseille.

79. Menger, in *Le travail créateur*, pp. 222, 241, 563, associates these traits with professional success.

80. *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 19 Feb. 1878. *Le Temps*, 13 Sept. 1886.

81. Antonius Adam, “Sur le dernier concours musical de la province.” Vincent d'Indy, “Rapport,” *La Province*, 15 Feb. 1884, pp. 91–94.

82. Menger, *Le travail créateur*, p. 253.

83. *L'Europe artiste*, 16 Sept. 1883, 6 Jan. 1884.

also a violinist, composer and conductor who directed an orchestra of 80 musicians at the Théâtre des nations.<sup>84</sup> In ten years, Frémaux learned his new trade in conducting the theater orchestra of the Folies-Parisiennes during the 1889 Universal Exposition and then those of the Opéra populaire and Casino de Paris (rue Blanche). In summer 1891 as conductor at the Casino de Luc-sur-Mer, near Caen, he played for the public of seaside resorts, preparing for similar work later in Tunis.<sup>85</sup>

From the beginning of his career, Frémaux also created musical institutions to promote French music. In 1880 he and three colleagues at the Société des concerts formed a quartet, the Société du quatuor moderne, to perform the works of young musicians.<sup>86</sup> Then in 1882, he became president of a new initiative, *L'Art libre* (1882–1888). Open to composers, professional or amateur, and run by a distinguished committee (Oscar Comettant, d'Indy, Antoine Marmontel, and Adolphe Sax), this society put on concerts at the Salle Pleyel. In December 1883, M<sup>me</sup> Roger-Miclos, Paul Viardot and Paul's father Louis Frémaux took part.<sup>87</sup> These experiences as entrepreneur underlined for him the importance of support from musical elites and collaboration with both professionals and amateurs.

Laffage and Frémaux most likely met in Angers in 1891. Laffage worked there from 1884 to 1891, Frémaux from 1891 to 1893. What attracted them to Angers? Job opportunities, to be sure, but perhaps also occasions to exercise their talents, far from competition and critics in Paris. Angers was blessed with having a major orchestra and theater and a public long interested in new French music.<sup>88</sup> As in other French towns, its musical life also relied on amateurs, requiring musical leaders to take on activities beyond what they were trained for and to teach the young.<sup>89</sup>

### ***Antonin Laffage's Multi-Talents and Globe-Trotting Adventures***

Laffage came to Angers as second conductor at the Grand-Théâtre for the 1884–1885 and 1885–1886 seasons. Its repertoire ranged from operettas to *Lakmé* and

84. *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 28 June 1879.

85. *Journal des débats*, 23 July 1888. *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 19 Feb. 1880, 5 Mar. 1880, 12 Mar. 1881. *Gazette artistique de Nantes*, 12 Sept. 1891, p. 4.

86. "Paul Frémaux," *Revue musicale du Maroc*, May 1931, p. 203. *Le Temps*, 19 Feb. 1880 and 6 Mar. 1880.

87. *Le Ménestrel*, 26 Nov. 1882, p. 416; 23 Dec. 1883, p. 31; 27 Jan. 1884, p. 71.

88. Yannick Simon, *L'Association artistique d'Angers, 1877–1893*, Paris: Société française de musicologie, 2006. *Angers 1877–1977. Centenaire de la Société des Concerts populaires*, Angers: Ville d'Angers, 1977.

89. As Menger points out, "les métiers d'enseignement constituent l'abri professionnel statistiquement le plus accessible et le plus sûr." *Le travail créateur*, p. 223.

*Manon*, with their composers sometimes present.<sup>90</sup> Laffage's operetta-bouffe in one act, *Les Deux Pêcheurs et la Belle-mère*, was staged there for the first time on 15 March 1887. A year later, this theater premiered his operetta in four acts in the style of a revue, *Angers par-ci par-là*.<sup>91</sup> Such performances established Laffage's compositional reputation in a conservative, but humorous genre.

If conducting a theater orchestra brought him to Angers, teaching and conducting since 1886 at the Société Sainte-Cécile, the oldest amateur music society in Angers, allowed him to stay. Laffage taught advanced solfège and violin for the Société, led their members in many Christmas celebrations, and involved them in collaborations with other ensembles for their annual banquets and balls. In October 1889, the Société joined forces with the Harmonie angevine in a concert for their honorary members, a collaboration that became frequent thereafter.<sup>92</sup> Angers also provided many occasions for Laffage to present melodies and choruses sung by the Société Sainte-Cécile and his *Hymne à Beaufort* performed by the Harmonie angevine.

It is not clear why Laffage left France for the Orient. Recent studies have focused on opera and singers in Asia, Buenos Aires, and India in the nineteenth century and in Shanghai in the 1930s, but little work has been done on the circulation of instrumentalists.<sup>93</sup> Was it the connections that Lyon had with the empire, sending so many missionaries abroad? Or the announcement in 1891 that a young singer with a first prize from its Conservatoire, whom perhaps he knew, had just left for Saigon?<sup>94</sup> Or had Laffage been attracted to a review of Louis Bourgault-Ducoudray's *Rapsodie cambodgienne* in *Angers-artiste* (31 January 1891), a local premiere at "l'un des concerts les plus intéressants de la saison"? Incorporating "des thèmes caractéristiques apportés de l'extrême Orient," the composer "a su non seulement les conduire, mais encore les développer avec une magistrale sûreté de main [...] un novateur."<sup>95</sup>

From the international press, we learn that in March 1892 he was working in Alexandria, Egypt, as second conductor for a French theatrical company.

90. Jules Breton, "Le Théâtre à Angers: Notations rétrospectives," *Angers-artiste*, 13 Feb. 1904, pp. 299–300; 20 Feb. 1904, pp. 315–16.

91. This was performed again on 25 March 1904, followed by his one-act opéra-comique, *Ruse d'amour*, first performed in Angers in 1890. "Avertissement," *Angers-artiste*, 18 Mar. 1893.

92. "Échos de l'ouest," *Angers-Artiste*, 4 Nov. 1888, p. 77, 1 Dec. 1888, p. 141, 19 Oct. 1889, p. 45. See also Jérôme Cambon, *Les trompettes de la République. Harmonies et fanfares en Anjou sous la Troisième République*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011, pp. 99, 226.

93. Aspden, *Operatic Geographies*; meLê Yamomo, *Theatre and Music in Manila and the Asia Pacific, 1869–1946*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

94. *Le Ménestrel*, 2 Aug. 1891, p. 248.

95. Louis de Romain, "Troisième concert extraordinaire (378°)," *Angers-artiste*, 31 Jan. 1891, pp. 259–60.



*L'Europe artiste* reported that, besides his musical direction of Lecocq's *Le Petit Duc* and *La Petite Mariée* and Audran's *Miss Heylett*, among others, Laffage gave "brilliant concerts" as a "violoniste de grand talent." Then from July through August 1892, Laffage enjoyed great success as principal conductor of a French operetta troop in Athens.<sup>96</sup> By January 1893, he had settled in Indochina. For the 1893–1894 theatrical season in Saigon—"Paris of the Far East" with 3,000 Europeans—Laffage worked as both second conductor and first violin solo.<sup>97</sup> Then he moved to Hanoi, perhaps as part of the visiting Saigon theater company directed by M<sup>me</sup> J. Debry. These various positions point to the popularity of French operetta at the time across the globe and the need for French expertise to produce it for diverse audiences.

From the press, we also learn that Laffage performed and composed his own music during these travels. At a benefit concert for himself in Athens, he played the xylophone "en virtuose accompli" and two of his "compositions légères."<sup>98</sup> In Saigon, Hanoi, and Phnom Penh, he also performed his music and composed a symphonic work in three parts, *Danse des congaiës*, op. 185. Already, his multiple talents as a performer, conductor, and composer were integral to his career.

### ***Paul Frémaux and New Music in Angers***

In 1891, when his predecessor left for Bordeaux, Frémaux, promoted by composers such as Massenet and d'Indy, was chosen to direct Angers' Association artistique, "le premier orchestre de province" until it folded in 1893. Soon thereafter, he was also conducting the orchestra of the city's Grand-Théâtre. Reviewers recognized that, "quoique jeune," Frémaux was "très épris de son métier," conducted "avec une grande sûreté," and had already provided "[des] états de service nombreux et sérieux."<sup>99</sup> In 1892, like Laffage earlier, Frémaux too became involved with music education.

Musical life in French provincial towns was often organized in reference to that of Paris, leading to inter-urban competition.<sup>100</sup> As conductor following the example of the Association's founders, Jules Bordier and Louis de Romain, Frémaux became known for his first performances of recent works as well as collaborations with amateur music societies. The programs of the Société des concerts du Conservatoire and the Concerts Colonne in Paris provided inspiration.

96. *L'Europe artiste*, 20 Mar. 1892, 3 July 1892.

97. *L'Europe artiste*, 7 Jan. 1893, 24 Sept. 1893.

98. *L'Europe artiste*, 28 Aug. 1892.

99. *Gazette artistique de Nantes*, 12 Sept. 1891, pp. 4–5, and *Angers-artiste*, 24 Oct. 1891, p. 41, 5 Dec. 1891, p. 132.

100. Guy Gosselin, in *La symphonie dans la cité. Lille au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris: Vrin, 2011, compares premieres in Lille and Paris from 1880 to 1905, pp. 382–83.



Directing the Société des concerts from 1885 to 1892, Jules Garcin gave at least six premieres each season, including the first French performance of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* and the world premiere of Augusta Holmès's symphonic ode, *Ludus pro patria*.<sup>101</sup> Colonne, who had no subsidy before 1900 and carefully followed the fluctuations of public taste, nonetheless put on premieres of new works on almost every concert from 1890 to 1892. On 17 of his 24 concerts in 1890–1891, he gave 29 Parisian premieres and on 18 concerts the next season, 29 more premieres.<sup>102</sup> In Angers, 1891–1893, Frémaux produced 8 world premieres, including music by Massenet and d'Indy,<sup>103</sup> 23 first performances in France,<sup>104</sup> as well as the French premiere of Dvořák's *Danse slave* and the flower-girl scene from Wagner's *Parsifal*. To perform large and complex works such as Bourgault-Ducoudray's *Thamara* and Saint-Saëns's *Déluge*, Frémaux assembled well-known soloists from Paris, including a ténor from the Opéra, the Société Sainte-Cécile, and its chorus of students from their music school where he was a professor, for a total of 150 performers. In only a week, he taught twenty girls the choruses in Act 2 of *Thamara*, "partition fort difficile, fort compliquée comme tonalité et comme rythme."<sup>105</sup>

At the end of the 1892–1893 season, the City council, complaining about low attendance, closed this Association.<sup>106</sup> Frémaux continued to conduct at the Grand-Théâtre d'Angers that produced *Werther*, *Lucie de Lammermoor* and *Sigurd*, *Manon*, *Carmen*, as well as Suppé's *Boccace* and Roger's *Les 28 jours de Clairette*. However, when its season too ended with a mixed reception, Frémaux announced on 1 April that he was leaving to conduct in Le Havre. From October 1893 to February 1894, the local press praised his Meyerbeer, Delibes, and Massenet at their theater.<sup>107</sup> These experiences—Laffage's globetrotting and Frémaux's

101. D. Kern Holoman, *The Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, 1828–1967*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, pp. 276–77.
102. Jann Pasler, "Building a Public for Orchestral Music: Les Concerts Colonne," in: *Le Concert et son public. Mutations de la vie musicale en Europe de 1780 à 1914*, dir. Hans Erich Bödeker, Patrice Veit and Michael Werner, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2002, pp. 209–40.
103. Massenet, Savard, Wormser, d'Indy, Marsick, Thomé, and L. de Romain. *Angers-artiste*, 16 Apr. 1892, p. 442.
104. In 1891–1892, works by Dvořák, Kremser, Popper, Radoux, Moskowski, Wagner, Blockx, De Vlesshouwer, Rubenstein. "Premières auditions données aux concerts de l'Association artistique d'Angers (Saison 1891–92)," *Angers-artiste*, 16 Apr. 1892, p. 442. In 1892–1893, music by Raff, Brahms, Blockx, Chevillard, Savard, Godard, Moskowski, Chausson and Lekeu.
105. J.B., "Les jeunes filles de l'École de musique," *Angers-Artiste*, 12 Mar. 1892, p. 361.
106. *Angers-Artiste*, 25 Feb. 1904, 327, and 4 Mar. 1893, pp. 348–49.
107. "Échos de Nantes et de l'ouest," *L'Ouest-artiste*, 1 Apr. 1893, p. 6. "Province," *Le Monde artiste*, 14 Jan. 1894, p. 22, and 25 Feb. 1894, p. 106.

work in France—prepared them for a long professional life in the theater and what would be expected in Tunis. Studying the careers of Laffage and Frémaux in Tunis will shed light on what musical life in French colonial cities shared with the French cities such as Angers.

## Musical Life in Tunis

In March 1894 Frémaux brought the prestige of his past and his professional experiences to Tunis. He was hired to conduct the orchestra of an Italian theater, the Politeama Paradiso, a position he kept until 1897. Laffage soon followed him there, becoming its second conductor.<sup>108</sup>

How did this come to pass? Was the conductor's interest in Tunis piqued by learning from *Angers-Artiste* (1892) that a popular French poet, Ferdinand Huard, whose sonnet had just picked up a prize in Rouen, had settled in Tunis? Or was Frémaux drawn to job possibilities in Tunis for him and his wife, M<sup>me</sup> Dario-Frémaux, an accomplished singer? Among musical emigrants to the French colonial cities, it was not uncommon for couples to come together, as director and singer. Perhaps he read about, or attended, one of the lectures the UCF was giving all over France beginning that year to promote the emigration of more women and “bons colons.” Understanding the “puissant concours que lui apportait l'initiative privée,” the Résident général of Tunisia, René Millet, a member of the UCF, granted a subsidy to its Tunisian branch to promote emigration to Tunisia.<sup>109</sup> Then how did Frémaux learn of the opening at the Paradiso? Perhaps he met Donchet who bragged to the Conseil municipal in 1893 that, to put together his next company for Tunis, he had traversed France from Paris to Bordeaux, including Nantes and thus perhaps Angers. Maybe Donchet told Frémaux about the local scandal that had led to the city's firing of the Italian opera director Ranieri Corsi for ineptitude. A former tramway driver in Tunis, Corsi had only recently transformed into an impresario to bring Italian opera to Tunis during inauguration of its port in spring 1893. The city had agreed to free lighting but “son incapacité à conduire sa troupe et des scènes parfois violentes” led to closing the doors of the theater.<sup>110</sup> For French musical culture to grow, especially in the context of Franco-Italian competition among its theaters, the

108. By fall, both were also listed as conductors at the Théâtre Français. See *Le Monde artiste*, 11 Nov. 1894, p. 628. Through 1897, they are still listed as conductors at the Politeama in the *Annuaire des artistes et de l'enseignement dramatique et musical*, 10, 1896, p. 662 and 11, 1897, p. 789.

109. Union coloniale française, *Rapport de l'exercice 1895-96*, pp. 40-41.

110. This story appears in letters from Corsi to the Résident général with marginal notes by city administrators, ANT, Série E 621, 14/94.

city needed more professionalism and French musical expertise to satisfy French settlers' desire for French theater.

However, there were many challenges. Tunis's colonial bourgeoisie was much smaller than in Paris and other French cities, much less homogeneous, and, with the frequent displacement of civil servants and business people, in constant flux. To make a life there, Laffage and Frémaux had to give up any hope of a broadly sophisticated public and accept diverse levels of musical aptitude and interest. Above all, they had to please a public full of foreigners, with Italians in the majority. With their similar backgrounds, both were prepared to take on these challenges and function as music professional leaders. Rare were those whose musical lives in the colonies would become as intertwined as those of Laffage and Frémaux.

### *Making French Culture*

Frémaux and Laffage, often in collaboration, contributed to the burgeoning of a French musical scene in Tunis in various domains: theaters, casinos, concert series and societies, music education, and music criticism. Whenever possible, they promoted contemporary French music.

When it came to theater, their choice to work in venues where most productions were in Italian for a largely Italian audience set a precedent for their multicultural musical lives. In some ways, this situation echoed the sentiment of a local critic who considered that Italian music, unlike French plays, “est comprise par tous indistinctement.”<sup>111</sup> Still, Frémaux lost no time in plotting his shift to French repertoire. In November 1894, although he had never directed a theater company, he decided to try his luck as an impresario with a proposal to the Conseil municipal. For a subsidy of 20,000 francs, he would put on five months of performances at either the Jardin d'hiver, the Théâtre Cohen or the Théâtre Français, each with a one-act operetta, a concert with orchestra and singing, and a one-act opéra-comique. His public would be able to hear 60 works, mostly unknown to the Tunisian public. More Parisian than colonial, this tactic was unprecedented in appeals to the Conseil. Frémaux promised 20 musicians, 8 chorus members, and 8 singers, including his wife.<sup>112</sup> Equally unusual was his inclusion of a concert between staged spectacles. To foreground his talent and capacity, four days before making this proposal, Frémaux put on a “premier grand concert à grand orchestre” at the Théâtre Français, followed by two other concerts featuring excerpts from operas and operettas. According to the press, his success showed

111. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 29 Mar. 1896.

112. Frémaux to the Conseil municipal, 20 Nov. 1894, ANT, Série E 621, 14/94.

that “il y a à Tunis des appréciateurs sérieux de bonne musique, comme dans les principales villes de France.”<sup>113</sup>

During this period, Frémaux and Laffage also worked at the Théâtre Français. R. Sallard’s season there had just opened, his singers presenting their “début” with *Faust*, *Mignon*, *La Mascotte*, and *Si j’étais roi!* Laffage, second conductor responsible for operetta, was praised for his “irréprochable” conducting of *La Mascotte*; Frémaux, principal conductor of opera and opéra-comique, created “une sensation” in conducting an orchestra of forty “artistes de valeur.” In Paris, *Ménestrel* praised the theater as “digne des habitants [...] et des touristes.”<sup>114</sup>

Denied a subsidy for his theatrical proposal, Frémaux soon began to work for Donchet at the first Théâtre municipal, with Laffage as “sous-chef.” In 1895 and 1896, French and Italian works there alternated: *Faust* with *La Traviata*, *Lucie de Lammermoor*, and *Cavalleria Rusticana*; *Mignon*, *Mireille*, *Lakmé*, *Werther*, *Gillette de Narbonne*, *Le Petit Duc*, *La Mascotte*, *Le Cœur et la Main*, and *Le Grand Mogol* with *Pailleasse*. The public considered Frémaux “toujours une bonne part” of these successes and his orchestra of 16 musicians “toujours excellent,” “que l’on entend toujours avec un nouveau plaisir” and “qu’on ne se lasse jamais d’applaudir.”<sup>115</sup>

The choice of such a repertoire had certain advantages. Because subsidized works had to be explicitly approved by the Conseil municipal, they necessarily had to reflect the desires of both their public and business people wanting to profit from this urban activity. Performed throughout France and its empire, these works, both French and Italian, carried few risks. Moreover, well-known works allowed listeners to vote intelligently on singers’ “début,” that is, the system whereby singers introduced their talents at the beginning of each season with what they knew best, often *Faust* or *La Mascotte*. Such repertoire also allowed conductors to demonstrate their competence and perfect their interpretations.

Building their reputations as conductors at these theaters led to other jobs and other benefits for Laffage and Frémaux. As conductor at the Folies-Bergère in 1897, Laffage put on his one-act “pochade” (burlesque sketch), *Amour guérit*.<sup>116</sup> Particularly important were jobs at casinos where the two also collaborated. These positions allowed them to remain in Tunis during the summer, rather than travel back to work in one of France’s 106 casinos.<sup>117</sup> In 1895, at the Casino

113. E. Jouanneau, “Province,” *Le Monde artiste*, 2 Dec. 1894, p. 670.

114. *Le Ménestrel*, 14 Oct. 1894, p. 327.

115. E. Jouanneau, “Province: Tunis,” *Le Monde artiste*, 11 Nov. 1894, p. 628; 18 Nov. 1894, p. 642; 2 Dec. 1894, p. 670; 26 May 1895, p. 288; 9 June 1895, p. 317. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 2 Apr., 20 Apr. and 28 Apr. 1896.

116. *Annuaire des artistes*, 11, 1897, p. 789. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 2 Apr. 1897.

117. *Annuaire des artistes*, 10, 1896, p. 665.

of Hammam-Lif, Frémaux worked as the orchestra's conductor, Laffage, as the "sous-chef pianiste accompagnateur," and M<sup>me</sup> Dario-Frémaux, as a singer. In 1896–1897 Laffage was promoted to conductor of operetta, performed every day from 2 to 5 p.m. Situated by the sea twenty kilometers south of Tunis, Hammam-Lif was the oldest Roman thermal resort in Tunisia, transposed into a palace of the Bey in the nineteenth century, the only one with a casino. Tunisian elites, European residents, and tourists enjoyed taking the waters there and playing "petits chevaux."<sup>118</sup> Laffage and Frémaux also conducted at the Hôtel-Casino of the Palais de Khéreddine north of Tunis. From late June to late September 1897, Frémaux led its orchestra of ten musicians accompanying a company from Paris. Every day from 5 to 6 p.m., they offered an instrumental concert on the terrace, every evening at 9 p.m. a "concert-théâtre" in the garden.<sup>119</sup> In summer 1898 Laffage worked alongside Frémaux in the Khéreddine casino. Then in summer 1900 Frémaux returned to conduct at the Casino of Hammam-Lif. Without a doubt, this work was facilitated by their previous experiences conducting operetta orchestras in France and abroad. If Frémaux often expressed his preference for "la belle et bonne musique,"<sup>120</sup> e.g. more serious repertoire, Laffage could here indulge in a genre that he clearly enjoyed.

At the same time, both were engaged with French contemporary music from Paris and Tunis, for both professionals and amateurs. Given Donchet's conventional tastes, Frémaux was most likely responsible for choosing to produce several new works soon after their Parisian premieres. If their production of Bruneau's *L'Attaque du moulin* in Tunis followed that of Paris by three years, Godard's *La Vivandière* came to Tunis just a year after Paris. On 12 May 1896 the Théâtre municipal advertised only one performance, conducted by Frémaux, now presented as "de l'Opéra." Attracting "un public d'élite," it received a rave review for its "musique très agréable," its orchestration "claire et facile [qui] se suit sans la moindre fatigue." *La Vivandière* was repeated on 17 May.<sup>121</sup> Very popular across the empire—Saigon had performed it multiple times in February and March 1896, Algiers and Hanoi later that year—this opera's success suggests that settlers appreciated relaxing entertainment more than education or contemplation of French progress.

118. On these seaside resorts, see Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, chapter 8. Rémy Campos, "Le 'boulevard prolongé': les casinos de la côte normande autour de 1910" and Martin Guerpin, "La vie musicale dans les stations balnéaires et thermales (1880–1960)," *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 275, 2017, pp. 15–40 and 61–84.

119. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 23 July 1897.

120. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 17 Jan. 1899, 7 June 1900.

121. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 15 May 1896.

**Spectacles & Concerts**

**Casino d'Hamam-Lif**  
Dimanche 50 août

**MATINÉE & SOIRÉE EXTRAORDINAIRES**  
entièrement au bénéfice de M. LAFFAGE  
chef d'orchestre du Casino, avec le gracieux concours  
de la *Stella d'Italia*, de M<sup>mes</sup> Pécot, Hardy ; M<sup>lles</sup>  
Maiorana, Dumonteuil, Dupeyron, Irma Delombre,  
D'Andrald, Losange, Carmen, Tolède, Charly, et de  
MM. Pécot, Hardy, Marx-Illys, Plantain et Rossi.

De trois heures à six heures, **brillante matinée.**

**Programme**

PREMIÈRE PARTIE

1. *L'Ébreo*, atto 2<sup>e</sup> (Apolloni), par *La Stella d'Italia*.
2. *Carmen*, fantaisie pour piano (R. de Vilbac), par M<sup>lle</sup> Maiorana.
3. Grand air du *Barbier de Séville* (Rossini), par M. Plantain.
4. M<sup>me</sup> Pécot, dans son répertoire.
5. M<sup>lle</sup> Dumonteuil, dans ses chansons espagnoles.
6. a) *Autour du Lac*, caprice-réverie (A. Laffage). — b) *La Noce au Village*, divertissement, pour violon seul (A. Laffage).
7. M. Marx-Illys, dans son répertoire.

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

1. *Rigoletto*, fantasia per clarino (Bassi), par *La Stella d'Italia*.
2. Symphonie brillante, pour deux violons principaux et piano, par MM. Rossi, Laffage et M<sup>lle</sup> Maiorana.
3. a) *La Cueillette du bon Dieu* (Ch. Dancla). — b) *Chanson d'Avril* (A. Laffage), par M<sup>me</sup> Pécot.
4. Chansonnette, par M<sup>lle</sup> Dupeyron.
5. *Boléro de Concert*, xilophone (A. Laffage), exécuté par l'auteur.
6. Chansonnette, par M<sup>lle</sup> Delombre.
7. M. Marx-Illys, dans son répertoire.

TROISIÈME PARTIE

**LA TACHE DE SANG**  
De six à sept heures, sur le terre-plein de la plage,  
**Concert-apéritif**, par *La Stella d'Italia*.

A huit heures et quart  
**Soirée de gala au Casino**

PREMIÈRE PARTIE

1. *Cavalleria Rusticana*, preludio siciliana e romanza (Massagni), par *La Stella d'Italia*.
2. a) *Les Plumes de Paon* ; — b) *Le Bataillon des Museaux roses* (Villemer), par M. Charly.
3. Chansonnette, par M<sup>lle</sup> D'Andra.d.
4. *Le Régisseur*, par M. Hardy.
5. Chansonnette, par M<sup>lle</sup> Delombre.
6. *La Traviata* (Verdi), par M. Pécot.
7. Immense succès et sans précédent de M. Marx-Illys, dans ses généraux.

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

1. Fantaisie de concert sur *Martha*, par l'orchestre du Casino ; solistes : MM. Rossi, Cotteau, Risuito, Canton et Martino.
2. Fantaisie de concert, par M. Laffage.
3. M<sup>lle</sup> Dumonteuil, dans ses créations et danses espagnoles.

TROISIÈME PARTIE

**LES PAPILLONS**  
opéra en un acte, de Victor Piétra, avec chœurs et grand orchestre, sous la direction de M. Laffage  
De onze heures à minuit : Tirage d'une Tombola  
monstre, comprenant cent vingt lots.

When they could, Laffage and Frémaux included not only their own music on such concerts, but also that of others living in Tunis. In a benefit concert for himself at the Khéreddine Casino in 1896, the repertoire spanned from Laffage's early works (op. 44) to more recent ones (op. 198), followed by a one-act opéra for large orchestra, *Les Papillons* (1874), by Victor Piétra, conducted by Laffage (Fig. 1).<sup>122</sup> Frémaux also collaborated with Piétra, helping with the orchestration of his opéra-comique, *À la frontière*. Perhaps hearing in it a bridge across Tunis's musical cultures, reviewers noted that it combined "à l'abondance et à la largeur de la mélodie italienne les complexes de l'instrumentation orchestrale dont s'inspirent actuellement en France Massenet, d'Indy et tous les adeptes de la nouvelle école."<sup>123</sup> With Frémaux conducting, Donchet produced it, as he had Piétra's last opera, *Un mariage à Venise*. The local success of Piétra's music suggests that settlers may have appreciated these amalgams of Italian and French influences.<sup>124</sup>

Laffage collaborated with many local amateurs. Interspersed with their poetry, comic monologues, and songs at an 1898 concert at the Théâtre municipal were collaborations with friends from the Caveau tunisien: Laffage's songs and choruses setting lyrics by Huard, Lafitte, Angelloz, Benet, and Salvador. In their concerts at the Folies-Bergère in 1899, Laffage again shared the stage with "les joyeux compagnons du Caveau

FIGURE 1 • *La Dépêche tunisienne*, Program of the benefit concert for Laffage, Casino of Hamam-Lif, 27 August 1896, © Bibliothèque nationale de France

122. "Spectacles et concerts," *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 27 Aug. 1896. E. Jouanneau, "Province: Tunis," *Le Monde artiste*, 26 Jan. 1896, p. 57.

123. *L'Unione*, 24 Jan. 1901.

124. Piétra also composed words and music for his three-act opéra-comique, *La Petite Chinoise*, on the arrival of the French in China, produced at the Théâtre municipal on 23 March 1905 and directed by Frémaux.



Tunisien.” One could hear not only his own music, but also *Patrie absente*, for violin and piano by M<sup>me</sup> Bodoy and a chanson setting poetry by Paul Lafitte.<sup>125</sup> With such efforts, Laffage and Frémaux created fruitful networks and stimulated pride in local artists. At the same time, they made theater into a space for their own creativity and self-expression, as in popular venues for sharing poetry and songs like the Caveau tunisien and the Brasserie du Phénix.

In Tunis, most likely to promote his own music, Laffage also started his own music publishing firm. While learning on the job, he could earn money and control the dissemination of his music through not only his performances, but also its publication. As editor, he also published others’ music. Unfortunately there are no archives.<sup>126</sup>

To have more freedom in the choice of repertoire than at theaters and casinos and to perform more French contemporary music, in 1895 Frémaux and Laffage organized a chamber music society, the Auditions Frémaux, renamed Auditions artistiques in 1903. It was composed of a quartet: Chabert before his death, then Louis Lefebvre, piano; Laffage, then Paul Bouchet, violin; Claes, then Laffage, viola; Frémaux, cello, with M<sup>me</sup> Dario-Frémaux, singer.<sup>127</sup> Frémaux and his theater orchestra were already performing “la vraie musique” during the intermissions of Donchet’s plays,<sup>128</sup> but professionally performed chamber music was lacking. Between April 1895 and 1900, their weekly “séances de musique classique et moderne” took place on Thursdays or Fridays at 5 p.m. in the hall of the Société La Valette, the Anglo-Maltese music society, then in the Hôtel des Sociétés Françaises. With such a contribution to a modern image of France and the Protectorate, the Résident’s wife, M<sup>me</sup> Millet, helped them financially. Their programs were reproduced in the local press and, in Paris, they received regular praise from the *Méneestrel*.

As on their program of 23 January 1896, the group’s repertoire echoed the taste in France for the juxtaposition of “la musique ancienne et moderne”—here from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, later from seventeenth-century songs, accompanied by organ and piano, to their contemporaries<sup>129</sup> (Fig. 2). Even if they often began

125. “La Fête du Caveau tunisien,” *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 5 Dec. 1898. “Le Caveau Tunisien,” *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 12 Dec. 1899.

126. Except for a few published in Paris or Leipzig, Laffage published most of his own compositions in Tunis. His opus numbers go up through at least 406. Among other music he published: M<sup>me</sup> Bodoy, *Tantum Ergo* (1899), Paul Frémaux, *Album de chansons pour piano* (1904), and Armand Abita, *Six Pièces pour piano* (1905).

127. *Le Méneestrel*, 7 Apr. 1895, p. 111.

128. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 6 Feb. 1896. Donchet to the Conseil municipal, 4 Sept. 1896, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96.

129. Pasler, *La République, la musique et le citoyen*, pp. 169–81, 550–59. “Auditions Frémaux,” *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 6 Feb. 1896.

**Auditions Frémaux.** — 6<sup>e</sup> séance jeudi 23 janvier 1896, à cinq heures très précises du soir, à la salle de la Société *La Valette*, 7, rue de la Commission.

A partir de cette semaine, les auditions Frémaux auront lieu le jeudi en place du vendredi et à la même heure que par le passé.

Programme :

1. *Petit Trio* (œuvre posthume) pour piano, violon et violoncelle, Beethoven

*Le Rosier*, romance; *Un Amoureux*, air populaire auvergnat, par M<sup>me</sup> Frémaux; J.-J.-Rousseau.

*Élégie* pour violon (1<sup>re</sup> audition), S. Rousseau.

*Sérénade l'ami Fritz*, pour violon (1<sup>re</sup> audition), H. Maréchal.

*Poème de Mai*, mélodie (1<sup>re</sup> audition); *Les Bleuets*, par M<sup>me</sup> Frémaux, Th. Dubois et S. Rousseau

*Barcarolle et Air de Ballet* pour piano, violon et violoncelle (redemandé), E. Bourgeois.

FIGURE 2 • *La Dépêche tunisienne*, Program, Auditions Frémaux, Tunis, 23 January 1896, © Bibliothèque nationale de France

local premieres of six of his vocal works, sung by M<sup>me</sup> Dario-Frémaux, including Act 3 of *Werther* (1896), the year of its staged premiere in Tunis. But, unlike in Angers, first performances by lesser known composers were as numerous as those by established ones: Maréchal (5 compositions), Wormser (5), Samuel-Rousseau (3), Vidal, Augusta Holmès and Cécile Chaminade (1) alongside Saint-Saëns (3), Widor (2), d'Indy (2), and David, Franck, Reyer, Delibes, Lalo, Godard, Hüé, Guiraud, Diémer, Thomé, Ganne and Vierne, each with one premiere. There were also a few little-known composers (Bourgeois, Schwartz, Pecskai, Marti, Popper, Leclerc and Lacombe), the latter to whom they dedicated a festival in 1899, and Frémaux (e.g. 22 December 1898).<sup>131</sup> Thanks to the Auditions Frémaux, the public could hear a rich portrait of French music from the period and, at the end of the century, also some Nordic, German, and Austrian music, including an air from *Lohengrin* (11 January 1900).

Frémaux and Laffage were also involved in music education. Singing, and sometimes solfège, had long been taught in secular and religious schools, including those of the Zaouïa and the Pères blancs. The College Sadiki trained Muslims to sing the Koran. As early as 1886, the Collège St. Charles offered instrumental music lessons to members of its fanfare and Collège Alaoui included solfège and

their concerts with Beethoven, their priority was to give recent works first performances in Tunis, while allowing for significant variety in aesthetics, generation, and genre. Earlier in Angers, Frémaux had conducted music by some of the same composers—Maréchal, Dubois, Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Duvernoy, Wagner, Godard, Thomé, d'Indy, Popper, Delibes and Lalo. In Tunis, he again prioritized that of Massenet, for whom Frémaux had special esteem.<sup>130</sup> These Auditions gave

130. Pasler, "Massenet en Tunisie," pp. 220–23.

131. Among Frémaux's compositions there performed: *Folies-Parisiennes* (1889), *Quatre pièces* for violon or cello and piano (1892), a minuet, marches, an air de ballet (1893), and a mazurka (1898).



music for future teachers.<sup>132</sup> Laffage worked at two secondary schools, the École Jules Ferry, and the Lycée Carnot.

In 1890 M. Brun, who had studied at the Conservatoire d'Avignon, proposed to the Résident Général the creation of a Conservatory of Music. However, deemed without the necessary qualities by the Commissaire central, he was turned down.<sup>133</sup> While Sfax had its own École de musique by 1893, its students good enough to participate in a 1894 competition in Lyon, Tunis had to wait for one created by Frémaux and Laffage in 1895. Theirs gave courses in vocal and instrumental music.<sup>134</sup> Frémaux was director and professor of cello; Laffage taught solfège, piano and violin, M<sup>me</sup> Frémaux preparatory piano and Chabert, director of La Chorale de Tunis, advanced piano. Recognizing its importance, the Protectorate financed the classes so they could be free.<sup>135</sup> Even if no Muslim Tunisian students entered the end-of-year competitions in June 1897, the majority of those who did were Jewish Tunisians, with far fewer Italians and French.<sup>136</sup> In May 1898 Laffage presented 21 of his students in a concert of 20 works, including his own and that of Frémaux.<sup>137</sup> He also involved his students in a concert of Saint-Saëns's music in 1899. Both Laffage and Frémaux continued to teach music and work with students for the rest of their lives. The number of music professors in Tunis grew from 5 in 1893 (3 French, 2 Italians) to 14 in 1909 (9 French, 5 Italians).<sup>138</sup> In 1931 their school became the "Conservatoire."

Laffage and Frémaux also sought to enlarge the horizons of their public with a sense of music history, not forgetting the role played by official composers. Frémaux gave "concerts-causeries" at the Auditions Frémaux and elsewhere, including one in 1896 on music inspired by Goethe's *Faust*.<sup>139</sup> Before a concert he conducted at the Institut de Carthage in March 1897—featuring the music of Lenepveu, Dubois, Paladilhe, Saint-Saëns and Massenet—he lectured on the

132. CADN, Tunisie, 1<sup>er</sup> Versement, Enseignement arabe, 21/A and Box 598, on public instruction in Tunisia in 1889.
133. A. Brun to the Résident Général, 25 Apr. 1890; Commissariat de police, "Notes de renseignements," 10 May 1890, CADN, Tunisie, Box 624.
134. "Lettre de Sfax, 28 février 1893," unidentified press clipping in ANT, Série E 621, 1111. *Revue tunisienne*, 1895, p. 608.
135. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 4 Oct. 1896.
136. Prizes were awarded to Jacob Gozlan, Salomon Coscas, Chaloum Naccache and Jacob Guetta in first-year solfège for boys; Gina Cohen, Rachel and Esther Silvera, Ida Boccara and Laetitia Lombardi in first-year solfège for girls; Auguste Cohen, Gina Cohen, and Clément Cohen in violon; Gina Cohen, Cécile Lévy and Joseph Cohen in piano. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 25 June 1897.
137. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 27 May 1898.
138. *Annuaire des artistes*, 7, 1893, p. 607; 17, 1903, p. 1046; 23, 1909, p. 1041.
139. "Institut de Carthage," *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 20 Mar. 1896.

history of music. “Contrairement aux assertions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” he explained, “il y a toujours eu et il y a maintenant encore, une musique française qui résume le génie de la race, au point de vue musical.”<sup>140</sup> Although they devoted less time to their criticism, Frémaux wrote for *L'Écho de Tunis*<sup>141</sup> and Laffage published long articles on the music of Massenet, Saint-Saëns, and Lenepveu, coinciding with local performances.<sup>142</sup> But it was through performances that they had the most impact on the musical culture of Tunisia.

### *Public Space, Collaborations, and Political Alliances*

Musical collaborations with a colonial agenda were not unusual in Tunisia, including with various Europeans with whom the French wished to work peacefully. The sound and image of the Protectorate was evolving. When the city of Sfax decided to subsidize their Société philharmonique in 1890, it transformed from one with “un caractère complètement italien” into “une vingtaine de membres exécutants appartenant aux nationalités française, maltaise et italienne.” They performed every Sunday “sur la place publique,” presenting a new kind of European identity in Tunisia characterized by assimilation.<sup>143</sup> The Anglo-Maltese philharmonic society La Valette often performed in concerts and charity benefits alongside French ensembles. Their programs projected an image of alliance. In 1896, for example, two days after the theater opened with *Faust*, they performed fantasies on this opera and *La Fille du Tambour-Major* between selections from *Cavalleria Rusticana* and by three other Italians; on another occasion they performed not only the *Marseillaise* but also the *Hymne du Bey* and *God Save the Queen*.<sup>144</sup> The Bey’s band also took part in some such concerts, in May 1896 performing an “Air turc” and an “Ali Bey, allegro à l’européenne” alongside opera fantasies by the Harmonie française and the Société La Valette.<sup>145</sup>

From the beginning, Laffage and Frémaux collaborated with diverse communities. In 1895 they gave a concert at the Résidence with M<sup>me</sup> Gillet, the wife of the Résident Général, a respected pianist,<sup>146</sup> and they played at a ceremony in honor of those who fought in 1870–1871 where “toute la colonie française” was

140. “À l’Institut de Carthage,” *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 11 Mar. 1897.

141. *Annuaire des artistes*, 11, 1897, p. 789.

142. For example, on Massenet’s *Ève*, *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 8 Apr. 1898, Saint-Saëns, 8 Dec. 1899, and the analytical brochure, *Étude sur Jeanne d’Arc*, Tunis: Imprimerie rapide, 1901 on Charles Lenepveu’s oratorio.

143. The society’s president to the Résident Général, 25 Apr. 1889, 3 May 1890, ANT, Série M 5, 12/239.

144. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 4 and 6 Apr. 1896, 29 May 1896.

145. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 12 May 1896.

146. “Derrière la toile: Tunis,” *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 27 Apr. 1896.

present.<sup>147</sup> The two also collaborated with the Harmonie française, which played Laffage's melodies, polkas, and marches. They had a particularly strong relationship with the "éminemment française" Chorale de Tunis, playing at their annual festivities, taking part in a gala at the Folies-Bergère and a concert at Khéreddine, and conducting La Chorale from 1898 to 1900. Frémaux, then Laffage, often brought them to perform in other Tunisian towns, such as Bizerte, thereby using music to reinforce social and political connections.<sup>148</sup> In 1900 Laffage led the Chorale's participation in Paris's Universal Exposition, one of the only ensembles representing the French colonies.<sup>149</sup>

Catholic Masses at the Cathédrale de Tunis and the Easter Passion in Maltese, Italian, French, and Gregorian chant also brought these populations together.<sup>150</sup> Both Frémaux and Laffage reached out to Catholics through the Catholic-inspired music they wrote and their performances.<sup>151</sup> At the Cathédrale de Tunis, Laffage conducted La Chorale in a performance of Charles Lenepveu's oratorio *Jeanne d'Arc*, along with local soloists and an orchestra composed of "des artistes du théâtre, des musiciens, des zouaves, de mes meilleures élèves et de quelques bon amateurs."<sup>152</sup> This experience set the foundation for conducting sixty musicians in performances of Félicien David's *Le Désert* and later Claude Debussy's *La Damselle élue*. Laffage and Frémaux thus used performances to enhance social, political, and religious alliances in the Protectorate.

From a political perspective, particularly important were collaborations with Italian musicians. If earlier these had undertones of national rivalry, in 1896 they took a turn in another direction. On 28 September, despite some local opposition, French leaders renewed an Italo-Tunisian treaty such that Italy would keep its favored nation status: Italian Tunisians could keep their Italian citizenship, their schools, and their commerce. However, much would be needed before "les deux 'nations soeurs' sauront s'entendre fraternellement à Tunis."<sup>153</sup> One month before the treatise, the Italian philharmonic society, Stella d'Italia, asked the president of the City for permission to perform, for the first time, on Sundays on the Avenue de la Marine, taking its turn with the Harmonie

147. E. Jouanneau, "Province: Tunis," *Le Monde artiste*, 2 Dec. 1894, p. 670; 25 Aug. 1895, p. 469; 26 Jan. 1896, p. 57.

148. Laffage to the Ministre, 22 Aug. 1900, CADN Tunisie, Box 612.

149. Henri Laffitte, "Bulletin orphéonique," *Le Petit Journal*, 13 Aug. 1900.

150. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 1 Apr. 1896.

151. For example, Frémaux, *Mater dolorosa* (1903); Laffage, *Le Sommeil du Petit Jésus* (1901) and *Ave Regina* for bass and organ (1904).

152. Laffage, *Étude sur Jeanne d'Arc*, p. 20.

153. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, from 4 March to 1 Oct. 1896. Thobie and Meynier, *Histoire*, vol. 2, p. 254.

française and La Valette.<sup>154</sup> This request to share in the auralty of public space on a major boulevard was a demand for recognition as well as inclusion. Given the “nouveaux accords italo-tunisiens actuellement soumis à la ratification du Parlement italien,” *La Dépêche tunisienne* fully approved this authorisation, une “décision conciliante.”<sup>155</sup>

Anticipating this agreement, at charity concerts in spring 1896 for which they provided music, sometimes attended by the Résident and his wife, Stella d'Italia performed the *Marseillaise* with the *Royal Italian Hymn* and alone.<sup>156</sup> In August Laffage invited Stella d'Italia to take part in his own benefit concert (Fig. 1). In addition to Laffage's music, they played excerpts from both Italian and French music—*Rigoletto* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* alternating with *Carmen*, *La Noce au village*, and popular songs. Later, at the funeral of an Italian, Frémaux and his orchestra too played with Stella d'Italia. Then his quartet, his orchestra from the Théâtre Français, and La Chorale led by Laffage participated in a benefit concert for Stella d'Italia. This sympathy and support for the Sicilian workers in Stella d'Italia undoubtedly had symbolic resonance as well as political implications in the Protectorate.

In 1897 the Conseil decided to recognize the new treaty in aural ways. For the first time, it gave Donchet 25,000 francs for an Italian opera season with singers from Italy.<sup>157</sup> The Conseil also allowed Corsi to return to the Théâtre Français with an Italian grand opera company. That year even the ultra-patriotic Harmonie française performed an air from *Aida* in the middle of a Sunday concert. Then in 1902, Stella d'Italia joined La Chorale and the Harmonie française on a committee to organize an international music competition in Tunis.<sup>158</sup>

Musical collaborations, many quite large and complex, were becoming an integral, significant part of new identities emerging in Tunisia at this crucial political transition, especially among Europeans. If some hoped for racial fusion through assimilation and the expansion of the French race, others aimed for alliances as precedents to peaceful coexistence and community. For Laffage, Frémaux, and the Conseil municipal, public concerts thus served as a kind of diplomacy aimed to reduce socio-political conflicts, especially with Italians.

154. Stella Italia's president to the president of the municipality, 5 Nov. 1896, ANT, Série E 621, 14/202.

155. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 7 Dec. 1896.

156. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 28 Feb. 1896, 29 Apr. 1896.

157. Donchet to the Ministre, 23 Jan. 1897, ANT, Série E 621, 14/94.

158. *Le Ménestrel*, 14 Dec. 1902, 397.

## Colonial Ambitions After 1902

With the construction of the Théâtre municipal (1902) and the new Italian theater, the Politeama Rossini (1903), both on major boulevards, Tunis entered a new era. The Théâtre municipal had been discussed since 1887. Donchet's proposal in 1896 to build a theater with 1,200 seats, adjoined by a hotel and an immense garden with a music bandstand, was turned down. However, after a small fire in its predecessor, the city created an exploratory committee in 1898 and began to put financing in place. In 1899 it decided on a complex of buildings with a 1000-seat theater, casino, winter garden, and spaces for gambling and "petits chevaux," to be built by a private company the city would reimburse over 30 years.<sup>159</sup> The Rossini was far larger with 2,000 seats, the capacity to hold 2,500, be turned into a circus and, with an openable roof, used all year. For the first time, the city gave a Politeama 6,000 francs in recognition of the "satisfaction" that it gave to not only "une population laborieuse" (e.g. Sicilians), but also "la population indigène" who would come for the circus. This subsidy, renewed through at least 1906, acknowledged the growing importance of these populations for the Protectorate.<sup>160</sup>

If these new institutions gave rise to even greater rivalry between French and Italian culture, they also pushed the city to new levels of local public support, achievement, and recognition in Europe. During the 1890s, the receipts declared to the Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques (SACD) in Paris placed Tunisian theatrical life on the same level as that of other small seaside towns. When Frémaux and Laffage arrived in Tunis, the annual receipts in 1893–1894 were 2,339 francs, similar to those of Saint-Malo (2,012), Trouville (2,094), Oran (2,520), Philippeville (2,056) and Saigon (2,294)—a quarter of those of Angers (8,263) and Brest (8,833) and only 17% of those earned by Le Havre's Grand-Théâtre where Frémaux had worked the year before. After the two new theaters opened, receipts quickly rose, in 1903–1904 to 60% of those of Angers (10,284) and 70% of those of Brest (8,760), in 1904–1905 to 9,305 francs, even more than those of Angers (7,730) and Brest (8,753).<sup>161</sup>

As director of the new Théâtre municipal, instead of Donchet the city hired the Italian Sammarcelli. Was the idea that he would be able to attract Italians to a space largely frequented by French audiences? The theater opened with *Manon* and later put on the Tunisian premieres of Massenet's *Griséïdis* (1903), only one

159. Donchet to the Conseil municipal, 28 Jan. 1895, 30 May 1895, ANT, Série E 621, 14/96; diverse correspondence, 1897–1899, Série M 5, 11/616.

160. Théâtre Rossini, Extrait du registre des délibérations, 25 May 1903 and 31 Dec. 1906, ANT Série M 5, 11/620; "Tunis," *Le Monde artiste*, 4 Jan. 1903, pp. 8–9; 17 May 1903, p. 314.

161. See *Annuaire de la Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques* (1893–1905, 1911).

year after Paris, then Charpentier's *Louise* (1903), two years after Paris, all well-attended and widely appreciated. The Rossini, its singers hailing from Livorno, opened with Verdi's *Rigoletto* followed by *La Traviata*, and *La Bohème*. From a French perspective, the Italian audience, preferring to hear the same works repeatedly, "unit au sens artistique le plus vibrant la routine la plus encrassée."<sup>162</sup> But the Théâtre municipal also put on *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, and *La Bohème* in its first season—throwing down the gauntlet in the musical terrain. For their part, the Rossini also gave Tunisian premieres: Puccini's *Tosca* and *Manon Lescaut*, perhaps to encourage comparison with Massenet's *Manon* at the Théâtre municipal. Moreover, the Rossini elicited comparison for the French genres it produced. Publicity and reviews in *L'Unione* and *La Dépêche tunisienne*, sometimes of the same works, document well this rivalry as well as these theaters' ferocious competition to attract a mixed public, attain unprecedented commercial success, and best represent the cultural image of the city to tourists and the world beyond.

This was not without impact on Laffage and Frémaux whose ambitions for themselves and the city would soon be surpassed. In this context, they, like Donchet, experienced a change in their perceived capacity to produce and represent the best in Tunis. As conductor at the Théâtre municipal, the city chose Gaston Coste, not Frémaux.<sup>163</sup> Coste began with a new series, "Concerts classiques de musique ancienne et moderne," performed by the theater's "grand orchestre" in its main hall on Saturday evenings. Here, for the first time in Tunis, one could hear Wagner alongside Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Rabaud, and Lalo.<sup>164</sup> However, soon Coste returned to a largely French repertoire and, when a new director was appointed, he left for France at the end of the season. Frémaux was relegated to conducting concerts in the winter garden of the adjoining Casino municipal on Thursday afternoons or evenings. As primary conductor there, he continued to indulge his taste for modern French music, but without Coste's musical and financial resources. On Saturday afternoons in this same space, Laffage conducted a second concert series of lighter works, "thés-concerts." On 23 January, for example, one could hear fantasies on the *Magic Flute* and *Le Voyage en Chine* alongside Laffage's *Jolie fleur niçoise*. From May to November, 1902 to 1906, Frémaux also conducted at the Casino du Belvédère in central Tunis.

162. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 20 Mar. 1907.

163. Gaston Coste, born in Algiers, was the son of the director of Algiers' Théâtre municipal. See note 26.

164. On 30 January, *Les Scènes alsaciennes* and *Le Rouet d'Omphale* with "Les Murmures de la forêt" from *Siegfried*; on 6 February the ballet from *Navarraise* with *Lohengrin's* introduction; on 13 February the *Erynnies* with *Lohengrin's* prélude; on 20 February Saint-Saëns, Rabaud, and Lalo with excerpts from *Maîtres chanteurs*, *Crépuscule des dieux*, and *Chevauchée des Walkyries*.

Frustrated perhaps by these limitations and recognizing the need to reach a broader public, in 1906 Frémaux and Laffage asked the city to subsidize a Société des concerts populaires for “la classe pauvre, la classe ouvrière,” in the tradition of those in “Marseille, Lyon, Nantes.” Already in 1899, Frémaux had created an Association artistique with 35 musicians to play popular (low cost) concerts.<sup>165</sup> As they envisioned it, for 19,000 francs the new Société would give daily concerts on the Avenue Jules Ferry from May through October. These concerts would also provide work for 22 musicians who otherwise would leave Tunis after the five-month opera season. The Conseil unanimously refused this proposal, siding with protesting café-owners who would lose customers and citing budget restrictions.<sup>166</sup> Despite this rejection, Frémaux remained in Tunis. He put together a new quartet, performing classical and modern works, and remained as director of the École de musique until 1913 when he left for Toulon. Not forgetting Tunis, he there conducted Huard and Piétra’s *épisode lyrique*, *Pour la Patrie*. In 1916 the Moroccan Protectorate asked Frémaux to create in Casablanca what would become in 1923 the Conservatoire du chant et de déclamation.<sup>167</sup> Frémaux, director until 1929, died there in 1931 at age 73.

### “L’Artiste Tunisien”:

#### *From Orientalism and Local Politics to Ethnomusicology*

Laffage too continued to participate in Tunis’s musical life, but in new ways. In 1906, he directed the large-scale festivities at the ancient theater of Carthage, in some ways resembling those of the Roman theater at Orange, France, but the site of a powerful empire of its own before being conquered by Rome. A hundred musicians, whom he conducted, including members of La Chorale dressed as ancient Romans, performed selections from Reyer’s *Salammô* and Act 5 of Gounod’s *Polyeucte*. This event attracted attention from across North Africa and France, contributing to new distinction for Tunisia.<sup>168</sup> In 1911, recognized for such contributions, Laffage was elected member of the Institut de Carthage, a center for local intellectuals.

Just as the French empire was evolving, so too Laffage’s identity. His compositions continued to range from humorous to religious, patriotic, and diplomatic

165. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 18 Feb. 1899.

166. Conseil municipal, Extrait du registre des délibérations, 1 May 1906, ANT, Série E 621, 14/204.

167. Its success was such that 38 violinists, 58 pianists, and 69 solfège students took part in year-end competitions in 1925. “Le mouvement musical en Province: Casablanca,” *Le Ménestrel*, 7 Aug. 1925, p. 341.

168. See the reviews in *Revue tunisienne*, 1906, pp. 391–519.



in a style accessible to the general public.<sup>169</sup> Most were tonal and easy to listen to. Beginning in 1898, Tunisian music attracted his attention. With the failure of assimilation in Indochina and wide sympathy for a policy of association, new attitudes toward indigenous people were being discussed and promoted in the press and at congresses in 1900. In North Africa, interest was turning to the art and architecture of Arabic civilization—collecting, studying, preserving, and renovating remnants of this past.<sup>170</sup> In this spirit, Laffage began to focus on local musical traditions. In Tunisia, he was the rare, if not unique, westerner to transcribe, arrange, compose, and publish music inspired by local tunes.<sup>171</sup>

One critic in 1898, calling him a “*globe-trotter émérite*,” assumed that Laffage’s motivation in working abroad had been typically orientalist: “la recherche de l’esthétique musicale et son appropriation au génie français.”<sup>172</sup> It’s true that “il a beaucoup retenu, beaucoup noté” and he wished to “faire profiter ses compatriotes de ses découvertes.” But he also wrote on commission. General Georges Boulanger, commander of the occupation troops, needed a Tunisian national anthem that could be played during official ceremonies alongside the *Marseillaise*. At his request, the assistant conductor of the 4<sup>e</sup> Zouaves’s military band in Tunis transcribed a tune from an Arabic music collection that belonged to the Tunisian Bey and would have been used by his band composed of western musical instruments.<sup>173</sup> Laffage harmonized this tune, added a French text by Ferdinand Huard, and, as music editor, published this as *Hymne beylical* in various versions (piano, piano/voice, military band). A local reviewer praised this adaptation in explicitly colonialist terms:

Qui de nous n’a souffert de cette cacophonie, douloureuse pour nos oreilles civilisées, de ce tohu-bohu de notes heurtées, grinçantes, criardes, à travers lesquelles l’esprit se perdait en vain à la recherche d’une idée introuvable ou d’un rythme musical?

Grâce à M. Laffage, ce chaos s’est débrouillé; la lumière s’est faite. Par un véritable tour de force musical [...] le distingué professeur a fixé le rythme, l’a soutenu et mis en valeur par une harmonie des plus heureuses [...]. *L’Hymne beylical* prend rang dans les œuvres que l’on peut écouter et applaudir; et ce ne

169. For example, his one-act opera, *La Sourde de Montevideo* (1905), parodying love operas, *Marche burlesque* (1906), *Te Deum grec* (1906) which ends with the Greek national hymn, *Hymne de la jeunesse à la République* (1911), and *Pro patria* (op. 448), written for his students, and a symphonic adaptation of *Le Cid* by Barbey d’Aurévilly (1925).

170. Nabila Oulebstar, *Les usages du patrimoine. Monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie (1830–1930)*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2004.

171. Earlier Salvador Daniel had published a *Mélodie de Tunis sur le mode Asbein*.

172. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 23 Mar. 1898.

173. On this ensemble, see Anis Meddeb, *Hafriyyāt fī dākirat al-musīqā al-‘askariyya al-tūnisīyya* [An Archeology in memory of Tunisian Military Music], Houmt Souk Djerba, Tunisia: Sotumediias, 2016.



sera pas la première fois que le génie français aura mis en lumière les œuvres à peine ébauchées par les civilisations rudimentaires<sup>174</sup>.

If, from a colonialist perspective, this kind of hybridity pleased because it tamed the rhythms and smoothed out the harsh elements of the original, it also served an important political function: it allowed westerners “d’écouter et d’applaudir” indigenous traditions without having to encounter them in their “formes rudimentaires.” However, this “hymne” harmonized by Laffage was ironically not that which the Bey’s band often performed, but a different one from the same collection. Thus, the “hymne beylical” which he set to music was never recognized by Tunisians and thus could not serve as a Tunisian analogue to the *Marseillaise*.<sup>175</sup> Laffage also composed and published other explicitly political music, *Redjeb-Pacha-Marche* (1907)<sup>176</sup> and *Marche militaire turque* (1908) expressing symbolic respect for other North African leaders, the ongoing importance of Turkish traditions in the region, and the diplomatic role of music.

Over time, Laffage developed a passion for Arabic music. Already on his travels eastward, he had begun collecting non-western musical instruments, 125 of them. This continued in North Africa. His first Tunisian-inspired compositions were his *Chants arabes* (1898). He transcribed the words and music of “Al Jaïch,” added piano accompaniment, and published it, de facto owning this version. In *Khadoujah* (1902), a hybrid “Rêverie traduite de l’Arabe,” the right hand of the piano doubles the vocal melody, while the left hand adds syncopated rhythms, tonal harmonies, and contrapuntal lines, a typical Orientalist expression of the power of Western thought. In *Bachraf asbain*, hybridity extends to the instrumentation: piano, violon and târ, *ad libitum*.

During this period, the Conseil municipal grew willing to support Arabic music. In 1900, and for apparently political reasons, it approved the creation of a new association, the Société Philharmonique Arabe de Sousse. As they noted, “cette réunion musicale ne pourra que fortifier l’union et l’entente entre les Israélites et les musulmans, sujets indigènes.” The Conseil also had stipulations: a former conductor of the Bey’s band must direct it and “cette société musicale doit exécuter des airs indigènes avec les instruments usités dans toutes les musiques, la *Marseillaise* et l’Hymne du Bey.”<sup>177</sup> In other words, at least in Sousse, indigenous music would have a place in the public sphere and contribute to its role in creating

174. *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 23 Mar. 1898.

175. F.-J. Cotteaux, “Causerie musicale: L’hymne au Bey (21 February 1898),” *Revue noire*, Mar. 1898, pp. 95–96.

176. This march was composed for the Sultan, dedicated to the governor of the Régence of Tripoli, and performed by the Band of the 59<sup>e</sup> Régiment of the Turkish infantry when Laffage was there in 1906.

177. Contrôle civil to the Ministre, 3 Jan. 1900, ANT, Série E 509, 8/1900–1910.

and expressing alliances, here between indigenous Muslims and Jews. Soon another Arab music society would emerge, La Naceuria. Laffage dedicated his *Marche militaire turque* to its president, Monsieur Bechir Sfar, who co-founded the nationalist group, Jeunes Tunisiens. Young, French-educated, Tunisian intellectuals proud of Arab civilization and inspired by the Young Turks of the Ottoman Empire, they sought self-determination for their country, while working within the Protectorate to promote change. In 1907 Sfar started a nationalist newspaper, *Le Tunisien*. This dedication to such a high profile Tunisian leader suggests that Laffage, like other French liberals, was supportive of the movement.<sup>178</sup>

That year *Le Tunisien* reported on a charity event at the Palmarium attended by many representatives of the Bey and featuring “des airs de musique arabe de Paul Frémaux.”<sup>179</sup> Most likely, the journalist was here confusing Frémaux for Laffage. Laffage had just written and, as editor, published his first ethnomusicological study, *La musique arabe, ses instruments et ses chants* (1905–1911).<sup>180</sup> It begins with a description of the instruments and their scales, followed by color drawings and transcriptions of characteristic tunes he had collected. Eschewing categorization of this material, Laffage ignored reductive distinctions embraced by later scholars: that Tunisian music was largely performed by “dilettantes musulmans et professionnels israélites,” the first devoted to “la musique arabo-andalouse” and the second to “chanson populaire.”<sup>181</sup> Taking its sources from Morocco, Syria, and Sudan to Turkey, volume one contains explanations and transcriptions of a *Chant du Muezzin*, belly dance tune, funeral air, popular music of the Karakouz puppets, work song by “de braves nègres aux mines” from Tchad, and Arabic air “entendu à la fête de Ramadan”—all presented as monodies with repetition at the octave. Included are also a Tunisian song, Egyptian march, and three national anthems transcribed and harmonized by Laffage—*Hymne Khédival*, *Marche Hamidié* (and one with Turkish lyrics) and *Musique Beylicale*—“enfin, tout ce qui a existé et existe comme musique des pays musulmans.” In Paris, Arthur Pougin concurred “qu’on ne s’est guère occupé jusqu’ici à la musique arabe d’une façon sérieuse et suivie, et que les documents sont rares en ce qui la concerne.”<sup>182</sup>

178. Charles-André Julien, “Colons français et Jeunes-Tunisiens (1882–1912),” *Revue française d’Histoire d’Outre-Mer*, 1967, pp. 87–150, especially pp. 123–35, 142.

179. “La Fête de charité,” *Le Tunisien*, 14 Mar. 1907.

180. Antonin Laffage, *La musique arabe, ses instruments et ses chants*, Tunis: Imprimerie Lecore-Carpentier, vol. 1, 1905, vol. 2, 1907.

181. Mohamed Garfi, *Musique et spectacle. Le théâtre lyrique arabe, 1847–1975*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009, p. 97. Garfi here refers to “chansons populaires de mauvaise facture confectionnées par les juifs autochtones” and implies narrow definitions of “dilettantes and professionals,” given the various backgrounds, classes, and occupations of both the Muslim and Jewish populations in Tunisia.

182. Arthur Pougin, “Review of Antonin Laffage, *La Musique arabe, ses instruments et ses chants*, fasc. 1, Tunis: Laffage, 1905,” *Le Ménestrel*, 2 July 1905, p. 216. In North Africa, French

Future volumes contained only melodies doubled at the octave. Noting that these can be played by western flute, clarinet, oboe, violin, or mandolin, with or without piano, he clearly wanted this music widely accessible to westerners. He also marketed it to them as subscriptions.<sup>183</sup> With its ornamental blue cover resembling a page from the Koran and pointing to its “traductions arabisantes,” he also apparently hoped to attract Arabs familiar with, and perhaps able to perform, western music (Fig. 3).

In general, the purpose of these transcriptions was conservation and dissemination, as in Jules Rouanet and Edmond Yafil’s *Répertoire de musique arabe et maure* (1904–1923). In Algiers they too sought to “sauver de l’oubli [...] une musique originale à peu près inconnue,” as did Alexis Chottin later in Morocco.<sup>184</sup> However, unlike other scholars of the period, Laffage was interested in not only “la musique véritablement indigène,” but also music which was “franchement moderne,” even “banale,” that is, transformed, often under



FIGURE 3 • Cover, Antonin Laffage, *Musique Arabe* (1906), fascicule 2. The cover of fascicule 1 is simpler, with top left, Laffage’s name as editor in a crescent moon recalling the Tunisian flag, © Bibliothèque nationale de France

scholarship on Arab music had advanced since the 1860s, but there were no major collection and transcription projects until those by Laffage in Tunisia (1905–1911) and Jules Rouanet/Edmond-Nathan Yafil in Algeria (1904–1923).

183. In his letter to Victor-Charles Mahillon, 7 July 1908, Laffage explained that he had sent his flyer to all Belgian cities inviting subscribers for *La musique arabe* and only six had not responded. Musée des instruments de musique, Brussels.
184. Jules Rouanet, “Préface”: *Répertoire de musique arabe et maure*, ed. Jules Rouanet and Edmond Nathan Yafil, Alger: Yafil, 1904–1923. For a comparative study of their ethnomusicological work, see Jann Pasler, “The Racial and Colonial Implications of Early French Music Ethnography, 1860s–1930s,” in: *Critical Music Historiography. Probing Canons, Ideologies, and Institutions*, dir. Markus Mantere and Vesa Kurkela, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015, pp. 17–43, and Pasler’s book-in-progress, *Sounding the French Empire. Colonial Ethnographies of Music and New Media, 1860–1960*.

the influence of Italian music, to adapt to the tastes of Egyptians, Turks, and Tunisians.<sup>185</sup> If Erich von Hornbostel approached Arabic music as an emblem of race, valuing above all its purity, Laffage saw it as part of culture.<sup>186</sup> With his “foi sincère d’artiste” as his guide, Laffage was open to the realities of contemporary society, including its hybridity and the impact of Italian music.<sup>187</sup> Pierre Aubry criticized the inclusion of music that was “vulgairement italienne,” but one could surmise that it was just this lack of prejudice that allowed Laffage to collect a wide range of music, including popular genres.<sup>188</sup> His openness, one might add, was also undoubtedly responsible for his professional successes, especially in Tunis.

When he sent these volumes to the *Ministre Résident Général* Stephen Pichon, it was with a request for a “mission de recherche” to extend his work into Tripoli, an Ottoman territory that would become an Italian colony in 1911. Whether or not Pichon understood this as of diplomatic interest, Laffage considered his “mission purement musicale.” He proposed to “relever pendant mes vacances le tout à mes propres frais—dessins, historique des instruments et chants, musique militaire, enfin tout ce qui a trait à la reproduction exacte de la musique Musulmane.” This granted, he returned in August 1906 with a long narrative, musical notations, photos, and seven instruments, which informed the second volume of *La musique arabe, ses instruments et ses chants* (Fasc. 2 and 3), sent to the *Ministre* in 1908.<sup>189</sup> This included a short analysis of Turkish music, its instruments, and its venues before his monodic transcriptions of military music—marches and sonneries of the garrison; Turkish “charkis,” waltzes, and mazurkas; street cries of various merchants, some accompanied by Black musicians playing the “skachek”; music for marriages and funerals; and a Turkish song he transcribed and harmonized. This was music “insuffisamment étudiée” and easily judged as “banale” and “sans intérêt d’étude.”<sup>190</sup> Such choices suggest

185. Laffage, *La musique arabe*, vol. 1, p. iv.

186. Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, “Phonographierte tunesische Melodien,” *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 8, 1906–1907, p. 3.

187. Laffage, *La musique arabe*, vol. 1, p. ii.

188. In his review in the *Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 7, 1905–1906, p. 392, Pierre Aubry “regrette de trouver quelques pages ridicules de musique vulgairement italienne transformée.”

189. CADN, Tunisia, Box 664, correspondence 1908. Letters of Laffage to the *Ministre* (unnamed), 23 June 1906 and 3 Jan. 1908.

190. Laffage, *La musique arabe*, vol. 2, p. 65. See also Antonin Laffage, “Tripoli de barbarie,” *La Tunisie illustrée*, 1910, p. 5, cited by Mohamed Garfi in his Arabic translation of Laffage’s volume on Tripoli, *Al-mūsīqā al-‘arabiyyat: ālātuhā wa uḡniyātuhā/ta’līf Anṭūnān Laffāḡ; tarḡama’ī, šarḥ wa ta’līq Muḥammad al-Qarfī*, Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat Al-Hilal, 2006, p. 5. In his introduction, Garfi assumes that Laffage’s interest in Arabic music was motivated by an Orientalist desire to “s’en servir dans ses propres compositions [...] et d’en fournir aux musiciens européens en quête de couleurs exotiques.”

that he was profoundly interested in collecting and preserving current popular genres, regardless of their insignificance or local importance.

Laffage's work attracted the attention of the Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger who moved to Sidi Bou Said in 1909. An orientalist painter and son of a German banker, born in France in 1872, and a British citizen, d'Erlanger was fascinated with Arabic music of all kinds. He looked to the influence of the Middle East and would later help organize the 1932 Congress in Cairo on Arabic music. Conceiving a research project on its origins, theory, and history, soon he hired Laffage for help. We see the first trace of their collaboration in 1911. Laffage had just published the last of his twelve issues of *La musique arabe*, with its wide range of genres, modes, subjects, and styles. Thinking about the work that lay ahead, he sent the Baron a set of questions that he proposed to ask the conductor of the Bey's band and La Naceuria. He also offered his availability for "au moins trente heures par semaine et plus s'il le fallait" in order to "revoir minutieusement tout ce que vous avez fait et le passer au crible avec toutes mes réflexions d'étonnement."<sup>191</sup> The two aimed to study all that had been written on Arabic music and make comparisons. For years thereafter Laffage did research for the Baron. He wrote detailed reports on the origins of music, the scales, intervals, rhythms and instruments of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Hebrews, pharaoh Egyptians, Turks, Persians, Moors, and Negroes. In addition to historical and analytical studies, he transcribed modes and a wide variety of Tunisian musical genres. Since the recent discovery of the Baron's archives at the Centre des musiques arabes et méditerranéennes (CMAM) in Sidi Bou Said, Tunisian scholars are beginning to recognize Laffage's considerable contributions, along with those of others, to the Baron d'Erlanger's six volumes of *La musique arabe*, the most important such study of its time.<sup>192</sup>

Although it is not clear that Laffage continued to work for the Baron after the war, he did continue to teach, compose, promote French music, and perform his own music in Tunis until his death in 1926.<sup>193</sup>

191. "Questionnaire établi par Laffage," 16 Oct. 1911, Archives of Baron d'Erlanger, Centre des musiques arabes et Méditerranéennes (CMAM), Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia.

192. Laffage, letters from Tunis to the Baron d'Erlanger in Sidi Bou Said, 9 July 1911 and 26 Mar. 1915. Archives of Baron d'Erlanger, CMAM. See his *La musique arabe*, 6 vols, Paris: Librairie orientaliste Geuthner, 1930–1959. Anas Ghrab was the first to open the Erlanger boxes and discover Laffage's work for him. See his "Le baron Rodolphe-François d'Erlanger et les débuts de la musicologie francophone en Tunisie," *Revue des traditions musicales des mondes Arabe et Méditerranéen*, 12, 2019, forthcoming. I am grateful to Anas Ghrab for our many conversations and to Anis Meddeb and the staff of CMAM for access to these archives.

193. In "Le mouvement musical en Province: Tunis," *La Ménéstrel*, 2 Feb. 1923, p. 93, Charles-Roger Dessort reports that Laffage's students had just performed Dubois's *Airs arméniens* and his own works.



This lens on urban musical culture in colonial Tunis, as examined through the contributions of Antonin Laffage and Paul Frémaux, throws new light on imperial power and its limits, arguing for what can be learned from the musical practices of one city. These tell a different story than histories that stress the need to govern by erecting and enforcing boundaries.<sup>194</sup> As shown here, musicians's performative choices embodied complex and dynamic interconnectedness, defying the binary opposition of colonizer and colonized and even national differences within Tunisia.

Even still, this article does not pretend to represent the entirety of Tunisian musical culture. For lack of sources, it must leave aside analysis of other aspects of musical life in Tunis, especially Muslim-French relationships, the intercultural transfer of music, and even public reception of these musicians' multi-faceted work, of which the press and colonial archives comment in little depth. However, it does draw attention to important aspects of colonial culture that have remained in the shadows. When it comes to the mechanisms of governance as it affected musical life, by the late 1880s and for decades thereafter, Muslims controlled the Conseil municipal of Tunis. But Europeans of diverse national origins too had representatives on the Conseil, with Italians outnumbering French representatives until 1899. None of these populations were homogeneous as to class, religion, dialect or language, ethnicity, and even attitudes toward the French. Rather than trying to explain how the colonizer "subjugated" the colonized under this Protectorate, focus on musical practices can reveal how various populations, in this study the Europeans, expressed and negotiated their multiple positions and evolving identities during the early Tunisian Protectorate, both competing and forming alliances.

As we learn from this portrait of French musical life, the first order of business after the French arrived was to create an environment hospitable for French emigration. Commerce and culture were needed to create jobs and communities strong enough to prevail. Increasingly Tunis also needed professionals, including music professionals, and women. We tend to forget that, beyond the French, others too had agency. Even if many went to French schools, Muslims, Jews, and Italians had their own and, together with the Maltese, many ways to express themselves musically. They formed and joined ensembles, performed theirs and others' music, frequented entertainment venues, sometimes mixed, and increasingly insisted on being able to claim a place, both aurally and physically, in the public sphere. In Tunisia, whereas the Maltese accepted French occupation,

194. Lewis, "Geographies of Power," pp. 798–801.



ironically the Italians—with whom the French arguably shared the most and to whom they made the most concessions—strongly resisted their presence. Like the French, Italians, regardless of their internal differences, held fast to their cultural superiority. In some ways, culture thus was a battlefield. With Italians outnumbering the French by 3 to 1 for decades, the French had no choice but to practice conciliatory politics. With the new colonial policy of association and the mandate to respect cultural differences, the Conseil municipal formally approved ensembles of Arabic music. The first wave of nationalist sentiment brought attention to trying to understand native traditions. In this context, Laffage produced ethnomusicological work on North African music (1905–1919) without ignoring Italian influence. Subsequent study needs to investigate the working conditions and careers of indigenous Tunisian musicians together with “cultural interpenetration” with and among the non-European populations in Tunis.<sup>195</sup>

This article has shown that, through concerts, collaborations, and mixed membership in their ensembles, musicians, especially of European descent, worked together across class, religion, national and regional affiliation, albeit sometimes devolving into political confrontations. Laffage and Frémaux’s concerts with La Chorale and Stella d’Italia exemplify the mutual accommodations that proved possible beginning with the treaty of 1896. Through music, they listened to one another, whether they understood or appreciated what they heard or not. Music’s ability to both express and transcend language and cultural differences was of primordial importance in this contentious “France en formation.”

With their musical “pluriactivité,” Laffage and Frémaux empowered these processes, thanks in part due to their courage and hard work. In a letter to the Ministre in 1906, Laffage described himself as an “infatigable entêté dans ce que j’entreprends, je ne connais pas la fatigue et ai du plaisir à me surmener.” This attribute also manifested in his work for Baron d’Erlanger. In addition, Laffage was “tout disposé et désigné à laisser dans le passage de ma vie des travaux jusqu’ici entrepris par personne,” content to refer to himself as simply, “l’artiste Tunisien.”<sup>196</sup> After their experiences in Angers and elsewhere, Laffage and Frémaux knew what was needed for French culture to take root and grow in Tunis—the challenges, the potential for success, as well as the inevitable failures inherent in trying to inhabit a foreign land as if one’s own.

195. See Garfi, *Musique et spectacle*, p. 95, and *Histoire générale de la Tunisie*, vol. 5, p. 204, and chapter 8, Mourad Sakli’s overview of musical traditions.

196. Laffage to the Ministre, 23 June 1906, CADN, Tunisie, Box 664, correspondence 1908.





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**RÉSUMÉ** Cet article examine la culture coloniale à travers les perspectives d'Antonin Laffage et de Paul Frémaux, les premiers musiciens formés dans les conservatoires français de Paris et Lyon à avoir émigré à Tunis et à s'y être installés. Interprètes, chefs d'orchestre et compositeurs, ils n'employèrent pas seulement leurs multiples talents pour alimenter la vie musicale française, mais aussi – en collaborant avec des amateurs et des professionnels de différentes communautés – pour créer des alliances, y compris avec leurs rivaux italiens, ce qui contribua à construire une paix durable au sein du protectorat. Leurs stratégies de survie et leur « pluriactivité » musicale viennent dévoiler les exigences de la vie coloniale et la créativité entrepreneuriale qu'elle suscitait. Ensemble, ils fondèrent un quatuor pour exécuter de la musique française contemporaine ainsi que la première école de musique à Tunis; Laffage établit une entreprise d'édition musicale pour publier des compositions locales et diffuser son étude de la musique arabe, la première entreprise d'ethnomusicologie menée à Tunis. Dans cette « France en formation » controversée, les pratiques dynamiques et complexes de Laffage et Frémaux soulignent l'action spécifique du travail musical dans un contexte colonial, depuis la remise en question de l'opposition entre les colons et les colonisés jusqu'à la promotion de nouvelles formes d'identité « européenne ».

**ABSTRACT** This article examines colonial culture from the perspective of Antonin Laffage and Paul Frémaux, the first French Conservatoire-trained musicians to emigrate and settle in Tunis. As performers, conductors, and composers, they used their multiple talents not only to nurture French musical life, but also, through collaborations with amateurs and professionals from diverse communities, to build alliances, including with rivals, the Italians, crucial for long-term peace in the protectorate. Their survival strategies and musical “pluriactivity” reveal both the demands of colonial life and the entrepreneurial creativity therein supported. Together they created a quartet to perform French contemporary music and Tunis’s first music school, Laffage a music publishing firm to publish local compositions and distribute his study of Arabic music, the first ethnomusicology in Tunis. In this contentious “France en formation,” their complex and dynamic practices point to the agency of musical work under colonialism, from breaking down the opposition of colonizer and colonized to promoting new forms of “European” identity.

