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Western Pyrenean multipart:
A trans-historical approach

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Pyrenees an emerging field
Multipart Music: a specific mode of musical thinking, expressive behaviour and sound
In Gascon and the Basque Pyrenees (Iparralde), multipart singing practice has existed since ‘ancient’ times and is very much alive today. In a lesser way than some others, this polyphony a numeros apertus is not – in reference to Brăiloiu – «a thing achieved » in the image of res facta of the contrapuntal intellectual culture, but a thing becoming. A work in progress that the singers construct in both profane (lay) or religious contexts. Therefore «profane polyphonies» or «religious polyphonies» are, strictly speaking, nonexistent. Only exist corresponding repertories and multi-part-part know-how. Contextual and musical analyses allow the comprehension of models and the conditions of their production, particularly the random aspect of these musical and human constructions (Castéret 2008). In spite of this strong imprint of orality, research reveals, in the lay living contemporaneous to the singers, testimonies of the relations with the written erudite culture to which the discoveries of manuscripts and printed matter from the XIXth century bear witness.

A European procedure?
Relatively isolated from the geographic aspect, the Gascon Pyrenees multipart singing is inscribed moreover in the vast archipelago of polyphonies of southern Europe. It shares common characteristics with a part of these regions, particularly a musical thought qualified by Ignazio Macchiarella for the Italian peninsula, as horizontal or melodic-linear (Macchiarella 1991). The consonant intervals are largely the same. The majority employ the third, albeit in the major, neutral or minor. Other consonant intervals: fourths, fifths, or sixths can, however, appear. In particular – and recurrently – the ambivalence of the third/fourth for the accompaniment of the second chord, as we have pointed out in the Gascon Pyrenees (Castéret 2008).

Emmanuelle Olivier has equally revealed this same ambivalence in the songs «chants en rèton» from Val d’Aosta, pointing out that the fifths are, notably employed «en des positions structurellement importantes, à la fin des segments »¹ (Olivier 1997: p. 89).

We meet up with this same logic in the majority of polyphonic practice in Italy and Austria. This is particularly the case for Corsica which presented, until the 1970s, a veritable mosaic of practices more or less close to the paghjella and even in certain cases, very different; and which mark a clean preference for the fourth in the hierarchal position. Markus Römer presents the consonant of the fourth on the second degree, which he names imperfect chord as in the characteristics of the paghjella (Römer 1996: p. 46).

¹ «In structurally important positions, at the end of segments».
The notion of the faux-bourdon in the Pyrenees

In all evidence, the recurrent use of the consonant fourth in the cadential formulas points to a system. Thus, a common origin can eventually be invoked. Markus Römer proceeding with a comparison between the orality of Corsican polyphony and manuscripts from the Franciscan tradition, finds numerous common traits re-
vealed – of which the cadential signature (Römer 1996: p. 65)\(^2\) - with the styles and forms of the XVth and XVIth centuries and notably with the technique of \textit{faux-bourdon}. So, if this association is valid, the \textit{faux-bourdon} can also be said to operate in Bearn, which is moreover a procedure largely diffused in all of Christianity by the time of the Counter Reformation.

The term of \textit{faux-bourdon} also turned up for\(^3\) Emmanuelle Lagnier (Lagnier 1989) in the oral tradition of Val d’Aosta, bearing witness to the knowledge in a recent past, of this procedure or, at the least, of the term in popular practice. Written sources from the XIXth century also give echo in the same way as regards Gascon vocality. Xavier de Cardaillac brought back the anecdote in 1903 that arose in the 1850s, and happened to the priest of Bahus-Soubiran, a small village of the Landes, on the northern frontier of Béarn:


During a Christmas hymn, collected around 1860 by the Reverend Father Abbadie (1844-1927), director of the school of Bétharram and organist for the sanctuary, the anonymous author – manifestly a well-lettered worthy person or priest, from the XVIIIth or XIXth century – welcomes the birth of Christ and gives voice to animals and insects. Moreover one of the stanzas plays on the homonymy between the name of the insect and the musical faction:

« Lou grich é tabé la cigalhe,
Las brespes é lous brouchalous,
Las mousques é la rapatalhe
Déüs mousquits, tabas, parpalhous,
Troupe lyrique
E magnifique

\(^2\) Römer seems, however, to draw an amalgam between the characteristics of « French » fauxbourdon and the « Italian » \textit{falsobordone}.

\(^3\) Ignazio Macchiarella communicated this important detail to me. With my thanks.

\(^4\) « The peasants of Bahus had acquired the habit of accompanying the priest’s chants by singing in sourdine or faburden. At the High Mass, this Sunday, from the Preface of Sanctus and the \textit{Pater} and \textit{Non sum dignus}, they had sung louder and more off-key than usually. In his last prayers, the priest, exasperated, turned around: “Habets acabat de m’accoumpagna dab boste musique, qu’en souy bellèu hart ! Have you finished accompanying me with your music, I have had enough.” (…) »
The term *sourdine* [mute, sordino], equally remarked in an oral testimony concerning the vocal practice in Salies-de-Béarn and seemingly designating in this case the bass in multipart singing, is obscure: a song in a half-voice or a musical procedure? The notion of *faux-bourdon* is, more clearly shown here as witnessed by the treatises and dictionaries of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, an improvised polyphony in the sense of the “Chant sur le Livre”, without however prejudice towards the musical forms or particular consonant systems. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1768 it is a: « Musique à plusieurs Parties, mais simple & sans mesure, dont les Notes sont presque toutes égales & dont l’Harmonie est toujours syllabique » (Rousseau 1768: p. 216).

In the popular framework of these testimonies, the term of *faux-bourdon* seems to be of a use and sense that are evident for the authors: priests, artisans or local dignitaries of the Gascon countryside, that is to say, the mediators between the popular and the erudite, the written and the oral; but also for their readers. In the case of the Mass at Bahus, the term seems to refer back to old-fashioned practices. Already in 1787, it would seem this way for the Chevalier de Meude-Monpas who described it as a: « Musique qu’on ne chante plus que dans les églises. Le faux-bourdon est simple et sans mesure marquée ; et les notes sont presque toujours syllabiques » (Meude-Monpas 1787: p. 61).

It could be this type of practice that seduced the naturalist Boudon de Saint-Amans on his travels through Gavarnie (High Pyrenees) on a Sunday morning in 1788:

« Je vais faire un tour à l’église & me félicite d’y avoir été. C’est une grand’ messe que l’on chante, ce sont des paysans qui la chantent, & qui la chantent parfaitement. Je dis parfaitement dans toute la force & l’étendue de l’expression. Jamais dans les chœurs de nos cathédrales, les voix ne sont ni plus justes, ni ne se font entendre avec plus d’ensemble, avec un accord plus soutenu, avec une mélodie plus religieuse & plus touchante » (Boudon de Saint-Amans 1979: p. 174).

5 «The cricket and the cicada / The wasps and the bumblebees / The flies and the jumble / Of mosquitos, gadflies, butterflies / Lyrical troop / And magnificent / Making music / In faburdens / Some making: boum-boum / The others: zoum-zoum ». Ms. Abbadie, f° 158, private collection.

6 «Music in several Parts, simple & without measure in which the Notes are all almost equal & in which the Harmony is always syllabical»

7 «Music that is still only sung in the churches. The faux-bourdon is simple and without marking the measure; and the notes are almost always syllabic.»

8 «I went to visit the church & congratulate myself for having been. It was a High Mass being
A trans-historical approach to multipart singing

The emergence of the notion of *fauxbourdon*, in the History of a popular vocality, leads to a systematic examination of the contemporaneous Pyrenean singers’ lexicon. In fact, if the terms high and bass (*haute* et *basse*), dominate the performances to a great extent, others appear at a turn in the conversation or under the fire of questioning, particularly from the eldest singers.

*La contra* (*« the counter »*), without more precision, literally designates, in a configuration with two parts, the voice disposed against (*« contre »*) the *cantus*, which it generally accompanies in the higher register. When a third voice sporadically appears in a polyphony already composed of a high and a bass, the counter is declined readily in *contrabanta* or, in French, *contrebante*, that is, in the highest part. It generally appears at the moment in which the group of singers tolerate that one of them breaks away in the high voice, either doubling the bass in the octave, or a counter voice putting his voice in highlight. It can also be produced, in the bass, in a counter-bass (*contrabaisha*) (contrebasse). A *bricolage*, in the anthropological sense of the term, seems to be at work, apparently borrowing from either Latin (*contratenor*) or French (*haute-contre* ou *contre-taille*) knowledgeable terminology.

*Purmèra* or, in French, *première* sometimes designates, amongst the eldest singers, the high part of the plurivocality, this term being a reference in the meridional Alps and in Savoy (Castéret 2011).

The verb *lolar* signifies ‘to flower’ or ‘to ornate’ – *fleurir, orner*. It designates, in the Bigorre, the action of ornamenting the polyphonic parts, a know-how to which the eldest singers gave particular attention and which testifies to the quality of the polyphonic performance. The noun *làla* (ornament) returns us, in Occitan, to the special lexicon of graphic arts and sculpture (Per Noste 2005 vol. 2: p. 158). This notion is therefore enrolled in a system of ancient specially referenced lexicons, widely known in France and in Europe, in particular here, the medieval musical acceptance of the verb *fleurir*. The *cantus*, the least fixed in local terminology, is sometimes designated by *plain-chant* which in this case, borrows from the church-song lexicon. Similarly, the word *taille* was used by the priest of Orincles (High Pyrenees) who had organised, during the 1930-1940 period, a group of singers for the Mass with hymns in three parts; these same singers equally using the term for their performances in a profane context in the café.

This borrowing clearly underlines the way the pre-classic erudite terminology can, long after having fallen into obsolescence – more than 150 years –, continue to circulate between the elite and the local population. It brings us, moreover, to re-

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sung, peasants were singing, & singing it perfectly. I say perfectly with the force & range of the expression. Never, in the choirs of our cathedrals, are the voices more just, nor are the voices heard with a better ensemble, with a more sustained harmony, with a more religious & more touching melody ». 

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examine the notions of high and bass (de *haute* et de *basse*) trans-historically, comparing the thought commanding the learned multipart organisation during the baroque period and that which we find in contemporaneous popular performances. A homology, rather a survivor, appears in fact as much in the system of organisation of the different polyphonic parts, as in the identity of the different vocal registers to which this terminology points. In France between the XVIth and the XVIIIth centuries, instrumental and vocal music is organised in four parts, the *taille* corresponding to the tenor voice on which the term is imposed by the end of the XVIIIth century. Moreover, each of these polyphonic parts can also be subdivided into two parts, the *taille* being a part “plus élevée, qu’on appelle Première ou haute-Taille ; l’autre plus basse, qu’on appelle Seconde ou basse-Taille” (Rousseau 1768: p. 498). The notion of First (première) is thus used in the same manner in the written baroque music as in the contemporary oral polyphony: either in the Pyrenees as elsewhere in other polyphonic spaces of the French continent. It would thus seem probable, that the very current terms of high and bass (haute et basse), implicitly point to haute-taille and basse-taille. Rousseau elsewhere defines the taille, as “La Partie qui convient le mieux à la voix d’homme et la plus commune ; ce qui fait qu’on l’appelle aussi Voix humaine par excellence” (Rousseau 1768: p. 498). Now, this voice that corresponds to the vocal register in the grave and medium of the contemporary classification of tenor voice, exactly fits the voice register of what the young generation of Pyrenean singers qualify as the normal or the middle (normale ou de moyenne). In the same way, the basse-taille, also called concordant, is according to Castil-Blaze: “L’espèce de voix qui, formée des notes basses du ténor et des sons aigus de la basse, semble les réunir l’un et l’autre (…) On l’appelle aussi bariton ou basse-taille” (Castil-Blaze 1825: p. 196). Now, the bass register developed by the Pyreneans is not, with a few rare exceptions, that of a deep bass – that one readily calls in this case contrebasse -, but rather a bass extension of the middle voice a basse-taille. Beyond what is simple terminology, the plurivocal procedures developed in the Pyrenees stem from an identical conception: a melodic-linear thought with resulting harmony according to the expression of Annie Cœurdevey (Cœurdevey 1998: p. 82) or, as Jacques Chaillley, points out the «consonant meeting of distinct melodic notes» (Chaillley 1960: p. 8) that bring us back to an era of the modal polyphony that took precedence with the apparition of the *organum* until the XVIIth century. Between these two periods, as in the meeting of hypothetical traditions, either learned or oral, the appearance of faux-bourdons, at the beginning of the XVth

9 «Higher, that is called First (Première) or upper Taille; the other lower that is called Second (Seconde) or lower Taille».

10 «The Part that best fits the man’s voice and the most common: which means that we call it the Human Voice above all».

11 «The kind of voice which, composed of the bass notes of the tenor and the high notes of the bass, seem to unite the one and the other (...) It is also called baritone or basse-taille».
century, constitutes a notable bench-mark. This procedure is in fact conceived by Dufay and the other composers of that first generation, as a composition in two parts leaving the possibility of adding a third in improvising in an inferior fourth of the déchant (Kauffman 2008: p. 69). Beyond the consonants used, this conception approaches the organisation present in the multipart vocality of the Pyrenees – and of others in France and in southern Europe as, for example, in Liguria – where unanimously, a practice in two parts was created, leaving the third part to appear as a whim of the context: « quan s’i presta ».

In the same manner, we can point to a symmetry between the most polyphonic religious repertories of the Pyrenees and the written sources of faux-bourdon in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. All seem to be particularly associated with Vespers – principally psalms and the Magnificat – although they are rare in the framework of Mass beyond the Credo or O Salutaris hostia (Kauffman 2008: p. 86).

Regarding cantoral practices in the XIXth century: the Lourau manuscript

A unique witness in the desert of public sources – and to the extent of my knowledge – also private and regional ones, is very lovely written notebook of 12 folios compiling diverse pieces of Latin music gathered together under the title Motets pour la bénédiction du Saint-Sacrement possessed by the Archives of the Department of the Atlantic Pyrenees (A.D.P.A.). This notebook came to the A.D.P.A. from a sale in 1981 and belonged to Edouard Warrant (1925-1980), a Belgian-French collector who died in Pau.12

It has the notation: «I belong to Jean Lourau of Lasseubatat», a small Béarn village on the hillsides of the vineyards of Jurançon, neighbour to Lasseube where the famous high-counter Pierre Jélyotte (1713-1797) was born. The author was probably a farmer, and landowner, born in 1772 who died a bachelor in 1838 in the house carrying the same name. His family benefited from a particular position in this community of 600 inhabitants since, Pierre Lourau, his younger married brother, lived in the same house, and was, at this date, mayor of the village.

This notebook stands out in its use of notes of neumatic squares and coloured ink to distinguish the polyphonic parts (FIG. 4). It is also decorated with a concatenation of geometrical figures and decorated letters (lettrines) such as in a naïve illumination. This notebook is decorated, «loved», as in the image of the notebooks of songs made in the XXth century by soldiers, by young men and women. The general style, as well as traces of wear and tear, point to current usage and not to a simple anthological compilation. These indications point to a distinct peasant usage, for example, of the manuscript of the « Messe Agatange » in conservation at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Toulouse.

In the same bundle of archives, a second manuscript containing eight French and

12 A.D.P.A. 44 J 52.
Fig 4

Multipart Music: a specific Mode of Musical thinking, expressive behaviour and sound
Latin motets, a rough sketch of the *Romance* of Joseph of Méhul and different points of elementary musical theory, is a work by a certain « R. Caillau, teacher ». Dates appear in different places: 13.11.1836 and 1848. Then, the author records a curious epitaph:

« Le celebre Jean Lourau [/] git en paix dans son tombeau [/] tandis qu’il vecut sur terre [/] il vecut toujours en guerre [/] chers amis on en parle, a son triste et dernier office personne ne le pleura »13.

The mention of this « last and sad office » the same as Caillau’s identity, allows us to approach the function and the profile of Jean Lourau. In fact, at this epoch, the teachers are also the church cantors of the village, recruited for their pedagogical and vocal capacity. Lourau was thus Caillau’s predecessor: at least in the function of cantor. Moreover, the use of coloured inks in Lourau’s notebook, recalls the description of another contemporary notebook, unfortunately lost. It was a notebook belonging to Laurent Arribère Gramon (1798-1870), a famous peasant-singer of Bearn who was equally the author of the very famous song *M’a prés per fantasia*. And, Gramont was also the church cantor and mayor of his village. He had been trained in the plain-chant by his teacher as witnessed by the Chanoine Jean-Baptiste Laborde:

« Son arrière petit-fils a même conservé un cahier de plain-chant copié et noté de la main de Gramon avec un goût artistique digne des vieux enlumineurs du moyen-âge ; un pittoresque mélange d’encres de diverses couleurs et de dessins variés rendent ce manuscrit plein d’intérêt »14 (Laborde 1905: p. 2).

The Lourau manuscript is an extraordinary testimony of the musical universe of a small Pyrenean village at the end of the XVIIIth century or at the beginning of the XIXth, revealing the polyphonic choral practice, at least for the great occasions, because the pieces require two to four singers. The small church has the wooden shank destined to hold the great lectern built into the ramp of the narrow men’s tribune. (FIG. 5)

These motets for the benediction of the Holy Sacrament – the identification of the sources are still to be discovered – point to a closing ceremony that follows Vespers and which was developed with the Counter-Reform. There is a notation for a solo voice or alternating sequences of solos and polyphony with two or three parts consigned on the stanzas of four notes. The musical writing is simple, homorhythmic

13 «The famous Jean Lourau [/] lies in peace in his tomb [/] while he lived on earth [/] he always lived in war [/] dear friends we can speak, for his last and sad office no one will cry».

14 «His great-grandson had even conserved a song book copied and noted in Gramon’s hand with an artistic taste worthy of the old illuminators of the Middle Ages; a picturesque mixture of diverse coloured inks and varied drawings giving this manuscript much interest». 
Lourau’s hand is neat but often approximate in the rhythm. According to the pieces, the figures are varied: awkward squares, rounds and losanges. The hesitations as to the ascenders are often noted. Certain pieces are even incomplete or sometimes, completed ‘a posteriori’.

On the level of polyphony, three pieces - Lauda Sion, O bone Jesu, O sacrum convivium - present an entirely syllabic direction in strict fifth parallels (FIG. 6): example of the survival, in the heart of the church, of the medieval forms known since the IXth century and some gradually from the XVIIIth century or, even in Franciscan manuscripts from the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, with traces found in the Bibliothèque provinciale des Franciscains de Corse in Bastia. The question arises if these pieces which are very syllabic, characteristic of the “beaten plain-chant” (plain-chant battu), as in the Lauda Sion, might have been used on the occasion of the procession of the Fête Dieu, and also sung by the faithful.

The other polyphonic pieces are clearly the field of the cantors. The Cantate domino canticum novum (FIG. 1) alternates a solo voice that opens out in a characteristic style of the XVIth and XVIIIth centuries. A duo responds: homophonic and in parallel thirds. The same for the two verses from O salutaris hostia that alternate a brief solo utterance with, this time, a three-voice polyphony. The system of consonants used in these duos or trios are very close to, or identical with contemporary models in profane performances, so well matched that in an experience of re-interpretation,
in the ANR FABRICA Programme\textsuperscript{15}, with the Bearn and Bigorre singers, their adhesion was immediate and enthusiastic.

The principal difference resides in fact in the melodic identity of the cantus of \textit{O salutaris} – a tri-chord Fa#-Sol-La extremely united in essence – that systematically solicits the leading note/subfinalis, and in which the cadential formulas are always unified at the resolution, which also leads off each polyphonic sequence of this motet. On the other hand, the use of the high fourth and/or the fifth bass as accompaniment for the second chord, notably in the open cadences, are largely in majority here.

It is also interesting to notice that the difficulties Lourau had in the notation of certain rhythmic values, did not stop him in any way from indicating the way the three voices of \textit{O salutaris} should be organised in time: entries with hesitations or anticipations and thus bringing consonants. To accomplish this he slightly stag-

\textsuperscript{15} I extend my warmest thanks to Pr. Philippe Canguilhem for hosting this work in the program FABRICA.
gered – this was a voluntary current practice – the notes on the stanza. Thus, the verse *Uni trinoque domino* is the object of particular attention: a rhetorical game in the grand baroque tradition, musically underlines the doctrine of the Saint Trinity. If the first syllable of the word ‘uni’ and the last of ‘domino’, are in unison, a second part appears on the second syllable of ‘ni’ and a third, in the bass, on the first syllable of ‘trinoque’, but delayed to be better signalled. In the same way, in the repetition of ‘trinoque’, the first syllable only appears with the high and the bass which are resolved to three voices in unison, breaking apart again into three distinct parts on the second syllable; then on the third, again in two parts with a lateness on the third bass voice. As follows, each syllable in *domino* is thus unfurled, strung out, then becomes a triad to then fall back into unison. (FIG. 4)

Generally speaking, the Lourau manuscript constitutes an interesting example of musical notation, both stylistic and rhetorical, witness to a largely-known European practice and of which the oral polyphonies of Mediterranean islands still show traces.

**Teacher or geometer?**

The Caillau manuscript marks a stylistic evolution concerning the pieces recorded by Lourau. The notations are black and white and round, presented in systems of two to four stanzas of five lines. The musical style is still simple and for the most part parallel and homorythmic but these motets for two, three and four parts are composed in the style of the choirs of the beginning of the XIXth century, the *Domine salvum fac regem « Ludovicum Philippum »* underlining the contemporary style and confirming the circulation of repertories in the Pyrenean countryside. (FIG. 5)

Another collection – a unique example in its style bought for 4.5 € on a website – again points to the polyphonic dynamics in a religious context. It concerns five masses in « *plain chant vocal et musical mesuré* » (plain song and measured music) composed by a certain « Tujague Expert-géomètre à Tarbes ». Edited by the author at an unknown date, the career of the lithographer from Tarbes, Joseph Bertrand Abadie de Sarrancolin (1824-1876) can help us to pinpoint the period between 1848 and 1854, more precisely between 1848 and 1852 as confirming the *Domine salvum fac « rem pubicam »* present in each Mass. The n° 5 and 6 Masses respectively of « Sainte-Hélène » and « Napoleonic », as well as the motets and French hymns are true Bonaparte manifests mourning Napoleon I, whose fate is compared to Christ’s sacrifice, and to whom they appeal for a new member of his family.

On the music level, the compositions are presented in square neumatic notations and measured. (FIG. 6) In major and without modulation, they use simple harmonics; in the basic Mass we find alternating solos, united-voice choirs and duos, while the more elaborate ones present quartets and quintets. Nothing indicates that these were sung, maybe being incorporated in a personal dynamic, which was at once both political and eventually touristic – Masses n°2 and 4 entitled ‘Pyrenean’ and ‘Bigourdan’ respectively. However, in the middle of the XIXth century in a small
town such as Tarbes, they point to a popular logic of composition close to what has been identified in Vesuby (Alpes-Maritimes region) (Foussard 1996). In fact, what is presented is a production by a non-specialist in an act «of ordinary writing» (Fabre 1993), something mechanical, without aims – and in any case – without artistic interest. It does, however, show a production that «sounds» and that is not without remembering the poetic style – of ‘doggerel’ «vers de mirlitons» – popular productions of circumstance.

**Paths of distribution**

These sources are enrolled in a cultural logic that is expressed between oral and written culture, learned and popular; a similar logic which musical anthropology research has revealed in instrumental practices or choreography. Ignazio Macchiarella has, in the same manner, precisely described the polyphonic practices of Sardinia, the complexity of exchanges between written and oral traditions, with a borrowing procedure back and forth, and the manner in which the usage of the falsobordone was structured by lay brotherhoods (Macchiarella 1995).

The existence of such brotherhoods was well-known in the Pyrenees until the end of the XIXth century, and they had been particularly developed in the framework of the Counter-Reform, and which then flourished again after the French Revolution (Soulet 1987: 242). In Béarn alone, 44 could be counted in the XVIIIth century, whose archives are sadly lost. Several sources, however, bear witness to their vocal and musical activities, particularly on the occasion of important manifestations: processions or pilgrimages (Desplat 1992: p. 1169). As the rules stipulate for the Compagnie des Pénitents bleus of Pau, on the occasion of the unavoidable procession of Holy Thursday, the brothers are «revêts et pieds nus… portant chacun sa torche dévote-ment et chantant choses de la Passion…» (Desplat 1992: p. 1168). The bylaws of the Confrérie de Notre Dame des Agonisants of Pau mention, in 1810, twelve chorists chanting in double choir and a choir-head, officer of the brotherhood. This latter orders «le chant et la psalmodie de l’office divin [et] doit veiller à bien connaître le talent et le savoir des divers choristes, afin de les distribuer de manière que les deux parties du chœur se correspondent bien, et qu’il y ait dans chacune des sujets capables de soutenir le ton» (Cluzeau 1810: p. 33). Others employ a cantor from the ‘outside’ for the most important ceremonies. The brotherhoods dedicated to the Holy-Sacrament, present in Bearn, are recognized

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16 The work of Luc Charles-Dominique, Lothaire Mabru, Eric Montbel and, of course, Jean-Michel Guilcher.

17 «Dressed and bare-foot... each one devotedly carrying his torch and chanting things from the Passion...».

18 «The song and the hymn of the divine office [and] should see that he well knows the talent and knowledge of the different chorists, in order to disperse them in a way so that the two parts of the choir are equally good, and that there are in each, subjects capable of keeping the key». 
Multipart Music: a specific Mode of Musical thinking, expressive behaviour and sound for the distribution in France, notably in the countryside, of motets bearing the same name (Meunier 2004: p. 145). In the Pyrenees, following the example of their Sardinian counterparts, they could also have built transfer institutions, apt for the distribution of certain musical procedures.

Institutions of transfer and mediators
The installation of certain multi-voiced forms, between the oral and the written, could also have operated in the framework of the *pastorales*. In fact, this popular form of great theatre – spoken, sung and danced – performed, already in the XIXth century, before thousands of people, is common in the Basque country, in Bearn and Bigorre in the multi-voiced space of the Pyrenees. Inheritors of the medieval Mystery, these very type-cast coded scenes echo different periods of the History of theatre, notably the Baroque. This kind of theatre, which is still very lively in the Basque province of Soule and was still active in 1946, 1959 and 1997 in the Bearn valley of Barérous, was present until 1914 throughout the whole of the Gascon Pyrenees up to the threshold of Pau and Tarbes.

Beyond a simple diversion, a *pastorale* represents a strong transfer institution. Preparations and rehearsals over several months, mobilise men – and today women - of the same generation, constituting according to Patricia Heiniger-Castéret a collective ritual of passage (Heiniger 1996). These preparations are directed by a specialist, the *regent* or “instructor” of the *pastorale*. He possesses the integral text (up to six hours of spectacle in the XIXth century) or is the author of the verses, built upon a web of prose stemming from the literature of pedlars. This ‘instructor’ also directs the actors. He schools them like circus-horses going through their paces; he controls the pace of the declamations and its co-ordination with the evolution of the play in strict choreographic and regimented tradition. He is also a dancing-master and choir-master for the group elements, the voice being central to the ensemble of the *pastorales*, either spoken, sung in solo or in groups. In the testimonies collected about this practice in the XXth century, if the group songs do not become an object of strict parameters, the personality of the ‘instructors’ captures all attention. Patricia Heiniger-Castéret has underlined their membership in a special socio-professional category: artisans or mediators belonging to the people, with no fixed landed attachments, they are seen to change villages every other or two generations, the non-possession of land being in a certain fashion, compensated by that of the Letter. Two great families particularly stand out. The Gastellu-Sabalot: woodworkers, instructors, song-writers, musicians, who deploy their talents at the edge of the Béarn and the Navarre; and the Palay family: cloth-tailors, instructors, players of musical instruments, song-writers and poets, found at the edge of Bigorre and Béarn. In this Pyrenean society, largely literate since at least the XVIIth century, these veritable *factotems* are distinguished, in fact, by the possession and use of books, moreover, treatises of versification. Therefore, why not works on musical theory, treatises on plain song or manuals of
More to the north of the Gascogne, in Roquefort-de-Marsan, in the ‘Petites Landes’, Castaing describes in *l'Illustration* from August 7, 1847, an ‘asoada’ – a raucous representation (charivarique) – a type used by popular authors:

« Le cortège ne s’arrête que devant la maison de la victime. Là, quelqu’un de la troupe prononce un superbe discours (...). Un concert de cornes, accompagné d’un roulement continu de chaudrons, célèbre la gloire de l’orateur. Des couplets, composés ad hoc par un poète du cru, sont chantés en chœur et à tue-tête, avec bourdon, fausset... »19 (Baudoin 2010).

Between the universe of theatre and that of the polyphonic vocals, a paradigm of a popular mediator is sketched where peasants and artisans meet. Profiles emerge, pointing to a certain porosity between these domains. The peasants are at once church cantors and «great singers» of the lay context, as we see in the image of Julien Cabanius, from Faget of Oloron, who, in the fifties, was an animator of dominical gatherings in the café and the artisan of the transmission of vocal practice in the direction of the younger generation. The same could be said in Bigorre for Bernard Miqueu, a cantor in his adolescence, a great singer and principal actor in the *pastorale Despourrii a St-Sabii*. In the XIXth century, Laurent Gramon d’Izeste, was a cantor and song-writer. In Bielle, in the Ossau valley, Monseigneur Paralieu’s grand-father was, in the 1850s, a cloth-tailor and cantor. Thus, the artisans could officially combine, up to the arrival of the Third Republic, the functions of school regents and cantor, and thus transmit the principals of vocality to the children. Others are artisans and creators of *pastorales* or even, in the Baretois valley, surveyors and *pastorale*-directors (Heiniger 1996). Now again, could the expert-geometer Tujague perhaps be found in this line of descendants or at least in the same trajectory?

The lexicon of the *pastorale* seems to bear an echo of this overlapping of fields. The « sujet » («subject») which indicates the voice pronouncing the theme, according to the terminology of baroque or pre-classical music, as for example, in the manuscript of the *Messe Agatange*, is equally used in the Gascon and Basque Pyrenees to designate the title-role: at once both the principal person and theme – subject – of the play.

**Conclusion**

If the polyphonic practice appears in recent history as extra-ordinary, and even
more so in its first sense, incredible, to the point that folklorists or travellers could not possible imagine this in the peasant world; its existence is imposed little by little with traces revealed by Pyrenean and beyond that, European history. It would seem to be an ordinary thing – twice over – commonly and anthropologically – in most of the countries in southern Europe. As Peter Jeffery underlines on the historical aspect, polyphony is almost as ancient as musical notation itself (Jeffery 1992), making theories of musicologists who saw an evolution of the monody relative. Similarly, Geraldus Cambrensis records that already in the XIIth century in his Description of Wales, ancient polyphonic practices existed to the point that they were perceived as having invented counterpoint (Burstyn 1983: p. 135). More recently the co-existence has been noticed, in Spain or Italy from the XVth and XVIth centuries, of learned polyphonies and those of «de poco arte» («lesser art») (Fiorentino 2008) widely supported by the peasants: co-existence mixed with mutual exchanges until the XIXth century. In the Pyrenees, just as in other oral traditions in which the polyphonic practice is mostly expressed in a profane context, if the question of exchanges eventually allows elucidation of formal relations, this will not suffice to explain the reasons for this type of vocality; that seems to stem more from the interrogations of social anthropology.
Multipart Music: a specific Mode of Musical thinking, expressive behaviour and sound