

Tuning into Politics: Flora Tristan's Songs for the *Union ouvrière*

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In mid-nineteenth-century France political song composition and singing were common forms of political expression and communication: the popularity of the Marseillaise as a musical template and the published works of lyricist and poet Pierre Béranger are testimony to the prolific nature of political song writing.

There remains little evidence of the oral practices and of the lesser-known amateur songwriters or what inspired them to write but I have come across an unusual trace of how this collective activity functioned as propaganda. A network of activist-composers emerged from the formerly obscure Tristan story of feminist socialist activism but whose voice is now dim. Some of these activists were once better known and were militant over a longer political period beyond the July Monarchy whereas Tristan's very brief political career militated against her legacy.

In 1843, in her bid to increase the sales of her book *Union ouvrière* among the laboring classes, Flora Tristan included in the first edition a call for an anthem for the organization she intended to create. That summer, after the publication of the first edition of *Union ouvrière*, Tristan was clearly in harmony with the workers' customs of singing for politics when she organized a song competition to be judged by Béranger. She wanted the songs to broadcast her message of love in her call to all men and women workers to form one great union. The competition ended in acrimony but she included her preferred songs in the subsequent editions of *Union ouvrière*. Although the other proposals did not make it to print, some of them have survived. In this essay I shall examine Flora Tristan's encounters with political verse. This presents an opportunity for closer analysis of how Tristan was adjudicated by those grass-roots social activists who were tuned into politics through singing.

For those unfamiliar with Flora Tristan the following is a brief account of her life.¹ Born on 7 April 1803, Flora Tristan was of Spanish-American and French

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¹ For a recent work on Flora Tristan's political importance see Máire Cross, *The Letter in Flora Tristan's Politics* (Basingstoke, 2004).

descent and was reared by her widowed and dispossessed mother with only dim memories of her father and his aristocratic wealth. By the age of seventeen she was married to her first employer, André Chazal, a lithographic artist, but by 1825 she was separated from him and had left her three young children in care to take employment as a lady's companion. She lived at various temporary addresses in order to flee her husband's persecution, especially after she began earning from her writing that began and flourished with travel and politics. Her works are noteworthy for their mixture of an emancipatory agenda for women and the socialist perspective of her day.

Tristan wrote and published her first extensive work, *Nécessité de faire bon accueil aux femmes étrangères* in 1835 while preparing her first major work on her Peruvian voyage, *Pérégrinations d'une pariah*, published in 1838. Then followed a novel, *Méphis*, in 1839, and her London travel journal, *Promenades dans Londres*, in 1840. Her very first public political campaign had been a petition to parliament in 1837 for the restoration of divorce. When she submitted her second petition for the abolition of the death penalty in 1838 she was recovering from an attack by her husband who had shot her in September of that year. At the time of her death in Bordeaux in November 1844 while on her tour of France, Flora Tristan had become a familiar figure in the socialist intellectual milieu in Paris and had succeeded in working within the rapidly expanding workers' political networks in the provincial towns of France.

We turn now to some contextual comments on the specificity of the history of workers' songs before examining the songs composed for *Union ouvrière*. Political songwriting of the lower classes has a peculiar and unique position within the history of musicology. From among the surviving expressions of political consciousness, written evidence of oral activities is rare, but an archaeological search is vital to trace worker identity through eye-witness accounts of festival rites, pamphlets, diaries and letters.² Singing performance, however, is a particularly elusive form of political communication. The Tristan example provides a degree of visibility in the letters accompanying some of the songs in question. Where printed traces of the construction of political singing (such as these letters) survive, it is possible to examine its impact as a collective activity. Evidence from the July Monarchy and Second Republic indicates that political activities involving singing were crucial; the role of the song in fostering ideas and influencing workers' politicization was possibly as important as that of the newspaper, then in the process of rapid expansion in circulation terms and in numbers of publications.³

The actual content of a song when written for propaganda to coax into action or to induce feelings of political solidarity and well-being, in particular those of unity and harmony, is a sharp contrast to the power struggles among songwriters. The song lyrics can reveal very little about the way tensions and points of debate were negotiated. In the songs for Tristan's song contest the content is quite bland. However, the idealism is in contrast to the tensions present in the process of composition and publication. Behind the scenes of a performance the manner in which songs were proposed, accepted and negotiated with political actors is far more colorful. Even better for finding the various tensions of a group is the occasion of a

² "Le regard de l'historien sur le passé demeure assujetti aux mots de ceux qui en furent les témoins et les acteurs." Jean Claude Caron, *Été rouge. Chronique de la révolte populaire en France (1841)* (Paris, 2002), 35.

³ For studies of nineteenth-century singing activities of the popular classes see the work of Marie-Véronique Gauthier, *Chanson, sociabilité et grivoiserie au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1992); Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-wing Politics in France, 1830–1852* (Princeton, 1984).

song contest where much is at stake for the participants. Singing was a daily ritual for many and as such contained its own rules and conventions. Flora Tristan challenged some of these conventions by intruding into the space of composers.

As well as the difficulty of finding traces of an oral tradition there are two factors that reduce further historical evidence of political singing. Firstly, although we have access to some worker autobiographies, their bias towards emphasizing the world of work and their survival in the face of adversity has left little room for references to daily political-cultural activities, such as singing at work.⁴ Written evidence of political singing has emerged from an exceptional phase of enthusiasm generated for a new regime or a new idea rather than from daily rituals where singing is taken as given. This was the case for the early years of the First Republic, for Tristan's political program and for the early months of the Second Republic.⁵

Secondly, while song collection was of interest to musicologists contemporary to Flora Tristan, collecting evidence of the political and historical context of urban singing was less so. Certainly Leterrier sees the interest in folk-song tradition crowding out the history of urban social activities around singing. Neglect of urban singing can be attributed to a specific cultural context:

l'intérêt pour la musique populaire est connexe de la promotion du peuple-nation et du peuple poète, propre au romantisme. Elle exclut comme des êtres dénaturés les poètes-ouvriers trop touchés par les artifices de la civilisation.⁶

This romantic notion about rural ethnicity coincided with the expansion of music teaching and musical practice and with the development of a musical public, the emancipation of artists' careers from aristocratic patronage of the ancien régime, the dramatic transformation of musical performance and an increasing accessibility of music as part of high culture to the bourgeois masses throughout the nineteenth century.⁷

The history of popular songs under the July Monarchy with their demise during the Second Empire is one linked to political repression as well as to cultural taste. Leterrier suggests that the decision to collect the songs, freezing them out of their natural political habitat of protest and subversion, added to their neglect:

⁴ Mark Traugott, *The French Worker: Autobiographies from the Early Industrial Era* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1993), 27.

⁵ Two articles give an indication of how widespread this activity was in republican contexts. The first traces the historiographical shaping of the history of popular music activities. The second describes a song competition held during the Second Republic. Sophie-Anne Leterrier, "Du patriotisme musical. Le concours de chants nationaux de 1848," *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 15.2 (1997): 67–80; Sophie-Anne Leterrier, "Musique populaire et musique savante au XIXe siècle. Du 'peuple' au 'public,'" *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 19 (1999): 89–103.

⁶ Leterrier, "Musique populaire," 89.

⁷ Needless to say the class chasm in music performance and composition is a vast subject that is not under discussion here. Suffice it to say that as music became more and more erudite it diversified into genres and became hierarchical with its professional performance in public and different rites for amateurs, who played less and less in public but who became listeners in the expanding audience culture. Music in high culture was both scholarly and a cultural commodity: printed, published and sold as an elitist product for formal highly ritualized performances in opera and concert hall with mass audiences, thus becoming more and more distant from popular musical culture in its places of performance, composers and circulation. For recent works that include the history of French songs over a long period see Hugh Dauncey and Steve Cannon, eds., *Popular Music in France from Chanson to Techno: Culture, Identity and Society* (Aldershot, 2003); David Looseley, *Popular Music in France: Authenticity, Politics, Debate* (Oxford and New York, 2003).

L'entreprise de "patrimonialisation" de la chanson populaire avait reçu un tour officiel avec l'arrêté de Salvandy du 21 mai 1845, créant la "commission des chants religieux et historiques de la France."⁸

This consigned popular songs to a specialized educated audience so that although they were preserved to some extent, they were also cut off from their source, that of popular and spontaneous expression. Without that source they lose an essential dimension. The preservation of Tristan's songs can be appreciated in the light of the end for which they are designed: propaganda.

Where were these songs likely to have been performed? What of the lower classes' musical tastes? What was the entertainment for *le peuple*? The importance of singing and dancing in popular music was crucial. For instance, popular music was performed in the street and in drinking establishments, cafés and *limonadiers* (mentioned in one letter to Tristan) and in dance halls—all disreputable and rowdy—"dans les goguettes et guinguettes"⁹ in the work-place and at popular banquets that were to become part of the political opposition scene towards the end of the July Monarchy. At the beginning of the 1830s in Paris "la musique de rue faisait vivre 271 musiciens ambulants, 220 'saltimbiques,' 106 joueurs d'orgue de barbarie, 135 chanteurs, selon la préfecture de police."¹⁰

The police records exist as a result of surveillance policies of any meeting of the members of the *classes dangereuses* that could pose a threat to law and order. Circulation of songs in public was severely controlled and special permission was necessary to distribute any publication in large numbers. There were few crossovers from high to low culture—of them Béranger was emulated as the people's poet. Lamartine was a popular reference too. The distinctive characteristic of urban singing according to Leterrier was that the products were ephemeral, for a specific occasion and limited in circulation.

Evidence of singing in Tristan's correspondence strikes a familiar chord when comparing it with other historical moments, particularly with regard to the discrepancy between the aims and achievements of contest composition and clashes between authority of artistry and political purposes of ceremonial songs. The consequence of launching a contest and the desire to use singing for propaganda was unpredictable in Flora Tristan's experience and at other moments. There were many factors that determined the duration of a song's popularity over which the song composer had little control.

However ephemeral in popularity or in history, political songs could spread rapidly.¹¹ Music and political ideas became associated in a novel way that began in the 1789 revolution. Henceforth waves of popular political singing and songwriting coincided with waves of democratic participation in political life.¹² The First Republic used song for political propaganda in its new rituals with choral performances during public ceremonies. Indeed public singing became so frequent that Danton was reported to have complained about the "singing mania" of the Convention.¹³ The mania proved short-lived, beginning in *an II* and ending in 1798 when the practice of

⁸ Leterrier, "Musique populaire," 102.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics 1787–1799* (Ithaca, 1996).

¹³ Leterrier, "Du patriotisme musical," 67.

daily singing of civic songs decreed by the Directoire died out. Enthusiasm for singing vanished as quickly as it had appeared.¹⁴

Another similar short-lived craze for singing occurred in the spring of 1848. Songwriting asserted the deeply-held right to express a political view and in a culture with a strongly developed oral and singing tradition, the song was a logical form for voicing a new agency of citizenship participation. When Hippolyte Carnot, the Minister for Public Instruction, organized a song competition in March 1848, he was re-enacting the tactics of the First Republic to inculcate patriotism and republican virtue into its citizens through singing. He was also able to build on the further impetus that had been given to the idea of music in the service of citizenship by the Saint-Simonian movement. Music and social ideas were merged in a new dynamic during the 1820s and 1830s. Saint-Simonians attracted musicians as members or influenced their ideas.

As well as the idea of making Art more democratically accessible, the activity of singing was considered to be an important means or tool with which to convey social ideas.¹⁵ Flora Tristan's call for song compositions for her organization *Union ouvrière* emulated the work of the Saint-Simonians and that of worker-poet Agricol Perdiguier. Already in her novel *Méphis* she had experimented with the idea of using Art for a social purpose. Her evidence also matches the culture of song contests within the republican framework of 1789 and 1848 as it illustrates the characteristic of collective political singing: its ephemeral existence.

The moment of Flora Tristan's interest in political propaganda singing was a critical one as it was at the height of her involvement with worker-socialist movements between 1842 and 1844 and coincided with the publication in 1843 of her book *Union ouvrière*. The second and third editions followed in rapid succession in 1844. As well as the new prefaces added by Tristan, the major alteration to the later editions was the addition of an appendix of verse and songs composed to promote the union of working men and women that Tristan wished to create. One of these songs, *La Marseillaise de l'atelier*, with music composed by A. Thys, was cited on the front cover of these later editions of *Union ouvrière*.

The story of Flora Tristan's interest in political song begins on 23 March 1843, when she called unannounced on Pierre Béranger, whom she knew by reputation. She recorded that she was assuming she would receive a sympathetic response because of his lifelong opposition to the conservative Monarchy and his sympathies for the popular classes: Tristan wanted to commission a composition from Béranger to publicize the workers' union she was envisaging. Her account of the poet's reactions features prominently in the opening pages of her journal:

Il prit l'épreuve, regarda le titre et dit: "le titre est beau—mais ce que vous me demandez là a un caractère de grandeur, d'énergie, d'enthousiasme qui est au-dessus de mes forces." ... Je voulus insister—c'était même stupide de ma part, je le sentis après. —"Ecoutez, me dit-il avec beaucoup de bonhomie, s'il me vient quelque bonne inspiration là-dessus, je le ferai avec bien du plaisir, mais je ne vous promets rien. — Mais je dois vous le dire, depuis longtemps je n'ai plus beaucoup d'heureuses inspirations."¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵ Ralph P. Locke, *Music, Musicians and the Saint-Simonians* (Chicago and London, 1986).

¹⁶ Flora Tristan, *Le Tour de France. Etat actuel de la classe ouvrière sous l'aspect moral, intellectuel et matériel, journal inédit de Flora Tristan*, ed. Jules-L. Puech, preface by Michel Collinet (Paris, 1973), 24. See also *Le Tour de France. Etat actuel de la classe ouvrière sous l'aspect moral, intellectuel et matériel, journal inédit de Flora Tristan*, ed. Jules-L. Puech, preface by Michel Collinet, with a new

There was an interesting outcome to her call on Béranger, perhaps not quite what was anticipated. Although she realized during her visit that she would not succeed in obtaining a song from Béranger, she was heartened that he had understood the object of her request. In fact he made a contribution to her efforts in a different manner: he was to be the judge of the entries for a song composition contest that she held in the summer of 1843. The writer Eugène Sue offered to provide the gold medal.¹⁷

Tristan's call for a song with the "fine" title "Union" later brought in several compositions for the contest, both from known activists—Poncy, Carpentras, Celabon, and Langomazino—and from anonymous and unknown authors. A less comfortable outcome emerged from the song contest, for although she received an enthusiastic response from some activists she antagonized others; there ensued a blazing row over the winning song involving one songwriter, Ferrand, who signed himself as the grand master of the *Ordre des Templiers* and member of the song composers' society, *La lice chansonnière*.

The contest received adverse publicity in a leading music journal *L'echo lyrique*, which accused her of having duped the songwriters and using them as a stepping stone for her own purposes, to which Tristan replied giving her interpretation of the dispute:

Monsieur, Je vous prie, et au besoin je vous requiers, de vouloir bien insérer cette lettre dans votre prochain numéro. ... Dans l'Echo Lyrique du 3 septembre, en rendant compte du concours de l'ordre lyrique des Templiers, vous dites: "Nous serons moins indulgents à l'égard de Mme Flora Tristan, qui fait un appel à nos poètes et n'accepte leurs oeuvres que sous bénéfice d'un inventaire, se réservant le droit de juger en dernier ressort et les pièces du concours et le jury lui-même, pour sauter à pieds joints sur ce précepte de droit: Donner et retenir ne vaut." Cette phrase prouve, monsieur, que vous n'avez pas été bien informé; voici l'exacte vérité. Il avait été convenu avec le chef de l'ordre lyrique des Templiers que je jugerais les pièces sous le rapport du fond, et que Béranger les jugerait sous le rapport de la forme. Lorsque j'eus examiné les chants destinés au concours, je déclarai que pas un seul ne remplissait pas les conditions posées par le programme, et qu'en conséquence je pensais qu'ils n'étaient pas dans les conditions à pouvoir concourir. En osant me prononcer avec cette franchise sur la valeur des chants, je savais à quelle colère à quelle haine je m'exposais, car le grand-maître de l'ordre des Templiers était lui-même un concurrent.¹⁸

The most bitter opponent in this dispute was indeed this grand master, Ferrand, who tried unsuccessfully to muster support from the singing fraternity against Tristan. In her letter to the *Echo lyrique* Tristan denied interfering in the competition when she

introduction by Stéphane Michaud, 2 vols. (Paris, 1980); *Flora Tristan's Diary: The Tour of France 1843–1844*, trans, annotated and introduced by Maire Cross (Berne, 2002).

¹⁷ Flora Tristan, *Union ouvrière*, [1843, 1844, 1844] followed by *Lettres de Flora Tristan* [1844 3d ed.], introduction and notes by Daniel Armogathe and Jacques Grandjonc (Paris, 1986), 272. See also *The Workers' Union*, 1844 edition trans and with an introduction by Beverly Livingston (Chicago and London, 1983).

¹⁸ Letter from Flora Tristan to the editor of the *Echo lyrique*, 7 Sept. 1843, first published with annotations in Stéphane Michaud, *Flora Tristan. Lettres* (Paris, 1980), 188, and subsequently without annotations in Stéphane Michaud, *Flora Tristan. La paria et son rêve* (Fontenay/Saint Cloud, 1995), 179–81, but with annotations in the re-edition *Flora Tristan. La paria et son rêve*, with preface by Mario Vargas Llosa, (Paris, 2003), 216–18.

judged that none of the songs had fulfilled the requirements. Instead she justified her altruistic search for a song by putting the union first:

Il me semble, monsieur, qu'un acte semblable de ma part prouve évidemment que j'ai l'intention de servir la classe ouvrière, et non de me servir d'elle pour m'en faire un marche-pied, comme vous l'avez dit.¹⁹

This contest involved a debate with other workers, some of whom declared their support for Tristan against Ferrand as we see from the following letter from Auguste Desmoulins:

Je puis ... vous dire sans anticiper que généralement on est disposé à suivre le plan de l'union que vous avez tracé, et pour cela je me fonde sur ce fait que chaque fois qu'un mot insolent ou injurieux a été prononcé contre vous, il a été repoussé par les murmures du plus grand nombre.²⁰

The row with Ferrand quickly died down however and unlike her visit to Béranger is not mentioned in her journal. The medal provided by Sue was awarded to Thys for his musical composition and his composition duly appeared in the later editions of *Union ouvrière*; there was no agreement to award a prize for the lyrics composed. After the successful publication and distribution of the third edition of *Union ouvrière* with the winning song advertised on the front cover, the only further mention of songs in Tristan's journal that she wrote until her illness and death in November 1844 was in a performance context during the summer of 1844. The story of Tristan's interest in political song is a short one, for the actual process of composition was incidental to her great political dream of a workers' union.

Brief as it may be, the significance of Tristan's foray into songwriting is important for many reasons, three of which shall now be discussed. In the short term it provides evidence of channels of communication in political culture that otherwise would have gone unrecorded. Secondly, it is indicative of Tristan's qualities as a political negotiator when she tuned into political songwriting. Finally, it is aligned with other political moments of organized singing that are worth highlighting for the longer-term view of the development of political communications through song in spite of or as a result of changes of regime in nineteenth-century France.

Evidence of performance, composers and circulation in Tristan's work

Firstly to the historical evidence of political songs that emerges from Tristan's work: thanks to her journal and correspondence we can trace some of the background to the collection of songs for the *Union ouvrière* that have been given little attention to date by her biographers.²¹ Jules-L. Puech gave the fullest account of what he termed "the song incident."²² Tracing the network of correspondents who wrote to Tristan about the matter he regretted the breakdown in communication between Tristan and the

¹⁹ Letter from Flora Tristan to the editor of the *Echo lyrique*, 7 Sept. 1843, in Michaud, *Flora Tristan. Lettres*, 189.

²⁰ Letter from Auguste Desmoulins to Flora Tristan, 29 Aug. 1843, first published in Stéphane Michaud, *Flora Tristan. La paria et son rêve* (1995), 178–9.

²¹ For a recent bibliography on Flora Tristan biographies see Maire Cross, *The Letter in Flora Tristan's Politics*, 27.

²² Jules-L. Puech, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Flora Tristan* (Paris, 1925), 156.

militant workers. He related the competition for a song by giving prominence to the disputes it caused. More recently Dominique Desanti presented Tristan's contacts with the song composers in an embellished account of her visit to a song club reconstructed from her letters and journal:

Le fidèle docteur Evrat l'accompagne et un nouvel admirateur, un typographe juif disert, ironique et fiévreux, Rosenfeld. Nul ne semble se soucier de la Femme Messie, même après qu'elle a, timidement, dit quelques mots sur son projet: écrire un livre, une sorte de petit catéchisme exposant les lignes de "l'Union ouvrière" avec un chant, une sorte de Marseillaise du travailleur, qu'elle voudrait mettre au concours. Quelques applaudissements, des murmures, des "pourquoi pas," puis la séance continue et la présence de la dame provoque ou, au contraire, retient les refrains égrillards, selon les chanteurs. En tout cas on la regarde.²³

In fact there is very little to go on by way of concrete evidence of what happened at these meetings beyond the Tristan papers. Some of the information about Tristan's encounters with songwriters comes in a letter from Vinçard in which he provided her with practical information about the venue of workers' song groups seemingly in answer to a question she had put to him from which Desanti constructed her account:

Maintenant voici madame les renseignements que vous m'avez demandés les ouvriers ont au moins cinquante réunions de plaisir par semaine dans Paris que vous puissiez en voir et en étudier trois ou quatre cela vous suffira très certainement Je vais donc vous citer les quatre qui pourront vous servir de type la Lice chansonnière faubourg St Denis chez M. Boulanger limonadier No 23 tous les jeudis a 8 heures du soir la Pipé chez Mr Levasseur md de vin rue phélipaux tout en face la rue royale St martin tous les samedis a 8 heures 1/2 9 heures du soir les Templiers rue St martin tout en face le corps de garde de la mairie du 6me arrondissement chez un limonadier tous les lundis a 8 heures du soir les bons vivans chez Mr Charpine Limonadier boulevard du temple à l'enseigne du Capucin, presque au coin de la rue d'angoulême.²⁴

Where Puech saw the song incident as informative for an understanding of Flora Tristan's relations with the workers' milieu, Desanti emphasized this same incident as a feminist victory. She considered one of Tristan's great achievements was the breaking down of the gender, social and cultural barriers between her own and the workers' worlds. But what of the songs and the composers with whom Tristan was in contact and through whom their efforts came into print? We could see the song incident as an equally edifying moment for evidence of Tristan's understanding of composers, performance and the circulation of July Monarchy political songs. Furthermore the Tristan papers provide significant evidence of the mentality and circumstances of the production of this genre. Through Tristan's connections she had encountered the July Monarchy phenomenon of the worker-poet. Some of these young worker-activists were already active in other socialist groups and went on to play leading parts in the Second Republic and beyond.²⁵ Some on the other hand faded into obscurity.

²³ Dominique Desanti, *Flora Tristan. La femme révoltée* (1972 and 2000), 237-8.

²⁴ Castres, Fonds Puech, Unpublished letter from Vinçard to Flora Tristan, Mar. 1843. Original orthography of manuscript retained.

²⁵ Puech believes that Desmoulins composed lyrics for a song entitled, *l'Union, chant des travailleurs* that was only published subsequently in 1848. See Puech, 160.

Although her first choice in March 1843 was the most established poet Béranger—the professional poet—weeks later she had been in touch with the worker-artists. By the summer of 1843 other enthusiastic responses came from unknown amateurs. Tristan was competing for the attention of the precocious workers who could articulate working-class culture.²⁶ This was after all a particularly rich period in the growth of protest politics, social ideas and associational life that would culminate in the 1848 Revolution. Alongside the idealism of the big ideas came many bitter disputes about tactics. The same went for those who sought to articulate their ideas in song and verse. In fact the differences were as much about the competition and tensions among the songwriters as about the politics of one militant woman and her union activists, as we can see from her letter to the *Echo lyrique*.

Tristan's attention to the actual performance of political singing in her journal is scant. This silence contrasts sharply with her account of her quest for songs in her book, *Union ouvrière*. The fact that she did not mention the song dispute in her journal is all the more significant as she used her journal frequently to relate political tensions as much as successes in her campaign. In addition to the Béranger encounter mentioned earlier, two telling entries in the journal reveal Flora Tristan's thoughts about composers and more obscurely about performance.

Her critique of Poncy the worker turned poet was scathing. When a letter from Audemar arrived informing her that Poncy had left town to avoid meeting her she lamented:

Voici une lettre qui m'est précieuse, elle me confirme ce que j'avais deviné de Poncy ... Voilà les poètes. —Gens tout à fait inutiles. Dans 200 ans la mission que je remplis aujourd'hui sera le "noble sujet des chants des poètes" mais pendant que je l'aurai remplie, pas un ne m'aura aidée. —Ces gens là remplissent une place, mais certes ce n'est pas la première ! Alors ils habillent magnifiquement ces choses et les présentent au public qui les accepte avec enthousiasme ... Dans 2 ou 400 ans les poètes chanteront "Flora Tristan, la première femme qui alla par le monde" "porter la loi nouvelle" —Cet acte de Poncy et la lettre sont un événement heureux, cela me donnera l'occasion de me prononcer sur la valeur des poètes dits populaires—et des ouvriers poètes.²⁷

In this case her greatest disappointment was that "the lad was lost to the bourgeois;" he seemed unable to offer a total commitment to the union that Tristan expected.²⁸ Nonetheless it was his poem and not a song that headed the published choice in the *Union ouvrière* second and third editions. Particular performance of songs is not mentioned other than in the euphoric description of a successful workers' banquet organized on behalf of the *Union ouvrière* where she seemed delighted with the inclusion of a song—expressing regret that she had no time to give a full account of the evening's proceedings:

²⁶ For the theme of class and the snare of culture, see Neil McWilliam, *Dreams of Happiness, Social Art and the French Left, 1830–50* (Princeton, 1993), 315–333.

²⁷ *Le Tour de France*, Collinet edition, 179.

²⁸ From the evidence of her diary and comments written on letters she received, we know that she was particularly harsh in her judgment of artists whom she considered to be disloyal to their working-class origins if they did not devote themselves completely to the emancipation of their own class through their art. For a discussion of Tristan's expectations of workers' commitment to their own liberation see Susan Grogan, *Flora Tristan, Life Stories* (London and New York, 1998), 129–32.

Le 11 août nous eûmes notre banquet. —Au lieu de 40 que j’avais demandé, il y en avait 80 ou 100. ... Il y eut là un mouvement impossible à décrire! Oh! dans ce monde tout vient de l’amour! —tous s’aimaient comme de bons frères. (A faire le temps et la force me manquent.) La peine que ce pauvre Roussel se donna pour faire souscrire—le désordre que deux ou trois individus immoraux mettaient—laide qu’on peut obtenir du chant—et mille autres choses dont je me rappellerai.²⁹

We can only speculate as to how Tristan would have edited this first draft of her journal that was published posthumously. Her own publication might have included some of the “song incident” letters since they do constitute a strong theme of conflict and machinations.

Evidence of Tristan’s qualities as a political negotiator

We turn now to the second reason for the importance of the songs: evidence of Tristan’s qualities as a political negotiator when she tuned into songwriting. She had recognized that the song was an ideal propaganda machine to broadcast the essential message of union in the name of fraternity. Tristan’s journal—her private account of her political campaign—is an account of her opinions off the record. Her public record of the song contest comes in *Union ouvrière*. This is a much more formal presentation of the organization of a political campaign. A page-long explanation to her readers about the desire for inclusion of a song in an undated untitled section comes immediately after the preface, though tantalizingly there is no hint of where she found her inspiration. Out of those submitted she chose three for her appendix in *Union ouvrière*: a poem, *l’Union. Au peuple* by Poncy who insisted he was no song composer:

Voici mon travail: je suis persuadé d’avance qu’il ne vous plaira pas. Ce n’est pas un chant que vous attendiez de moi, c’était une chanson: la Marseillaise de l’union ouvrière. Je ne sais pas faire les chansons. Quand j’ai essayé, j’ai fait des vers tirailés et la chute des couplets était ridicule.³⁰

Poncy’s poem is followed by the two songs that won the most votes in the song contest, “la Marseillaise de l’atelier,” music by M.A. Thys and lyrics by Gallinove, a painter, advertised on the front cover, and “la Marseillaise de l’union ouvrière” by Leclair, a student.

The songs have the last word as they form the final section of her book. The three compositions mention the theme of unity as the most valued message above all. Fraternity follows, as do the themes of glory to labor and equality in marriage. Women as audience are mentioned in the two songs, as are the other main themes of her *Union ouvrière*, the call for a defender to represent the working class in parliament, palaces for the workers’ social needs, and equality for women. Poncy’s poem is much less politically specific with the romantic depiction of swallows braving the raging seas. His use of imagery of nature providing examples of perseverance and solidarity before danger omit specific references to the *Union ouvrière* and to women, but still contain the key themes of the call for unity of the noble “peuple.” In contrast to her scornful opinion of Poncy in her journal entry of 1844 mentioned above, Poncy’s talents are praised in the official version:

²⁹ *Le Tour de France*, Collinet edition, 200.

³⁰ *Union ouvrière*, 269.

J'avais demandé à M. Poncy un chant: il me l'envoya et la lettre qui l'accompagnait ajoute un nouveau mérite à ce précieux don. —Elle prouve que le poète est réellement un ouvrier maçon et que l'ouvrier maçon est un grand poète.³¹

His letter that she cited in full is a direct testimony to the extraordinary effort on his part to produce literary work, which ennobled him as a worker-poet:

[J]e travaille tout le jour comme un damné et que le travail des bras ne me laisse que les très courts loisirs du soir à consacrer à mes travaux littéraires, heureux que je suis lorsque le sommeil ne s'en empare pas.³²

The contrasting presentation of this particular worker-poet betrays a distortion of the voice of the worker on the part of Tristan. Like all *journaux intimes*, her diary is highly selective. In the formal discourse of *Union ouvrière* the other worker-poets' voices were silent as Tristan had made her selection from those compositions she had received using criteria that had little to do with musicality or literary values. However her song appendix in *Union ouvrière* provided a rare outlet for fellow authors who responded to Tristan and reveal how she manipulated the responses to suit her cause.

A closer reading of her correspondence permits us to read the song entries which she had rejected and examine the extent of her success in calling for a song. Other voices that did not pass her filter for publication in her book survive intact thanks to her letter writing. Within this epistolary space we see how Tristan sustained new contacts who had emerged through political singing. As we saw from the results of the song contest tuning into political communication was an unpredictable affair. New loyal friends and allies materialized; among them Louis Langomazino who corresponded with Tristan in August 1843 and sent her a song that has survived as did the draft of the banquet toast to her union.³³

A blacksmith and militant in Toulon, Langomazino became a vital contact for her propaganda tour of France: in August 1844 he was her leading contact and mediator with the Arsenal workers in Toulon during her visit. In his song there a several clues to his future political allegiances: a union of workers to end poverty, dignity and honor to workers, Christian sentiments of fraternity, pacifism, and omitted from the three chosen songs included in the song appendix of *Union ouvrière*: universal suffrage:

Sainte Union sous ta blanche bannière
Rallie enfin les pauvres ouvriers
Que l'un pour l'autre ils aient un cœur des frères,
Que désormais la hideuse misère
Déserte enfin leurs modestes foyers.
Montrons, Français, aux malheureux d'Irlande
Qui sont unis sur leur aride lande
Plus de poignard, le peuple se relève
Sommes nous point les Français doux et bons?

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Vive l'UNION OUVRIERE! Vive Mme. Flora Tristan qui l'a enfantée! Que tout noble cœur se rallie à ce cri sous la bannière de la fraternité, que tout noble cœur s'inspire de vos paroles harmonieuses et marche fièrement dans la voie de salut vers le but que vous nous faites apercevoir à l'horizon." Castres, Fonds Puech, toast by Louis Langomazino to Flora Tristan, 4 Aug. 1844.

N'avons-nous point dans notre conscience
Un long remords d'affreuse souvenance?
Laissons rouiller nos gueules de canon ...

A l'œuvre donc, marchons avec courage
Car l'avenir s'avance radieux;
Nous obtiendrons l'universel suffrage,
A l'œuvre donc. Notre immortel ouvrage
Ira s'inscrire au grand livre des cieux
Avec transports . . .

In his first letter he was enthusiastic in his response to her political message in *Union ouvrière* and wrote to invite Tristan to Toulon:

Madame, J'ai lu votre ouvrage intitulé Union Ouvrière: votre parole sympathique pour tout ce qui souffre a excité dans mon cœur une profonde émotion et dans le paroxysme de mon admiration, j'ai relu ce que je venais de lire, j'ai chanté ce que vous aviez chanté.

Langomazino was sacked for his militancy in the munitions workers' strike in 1845.³⁴ This was to be the first of many political conflicts in which he became embroiled. A proponent of universal suffrage and education for all, he was implicated in the socialist republican struggle against Louis Napoleon in 1851 and was exiled for his pains to Tahiti where he remained for the rest of his days and became a leading pillar of society serving as a high court judge. He died in Papeete in 1865. His contact with Flora Tristan was one of his first forays into writing for politics in newspapers and for clubs.³⁵

Langomazino's song was not dissimilar to many of those written in the heady days of the Second Republic and it also bears a strong resemblance to the winning songs placed in the song appendix of *Union ouvrière*. There is not enough evidence to explain why it did not win the prize. Neither do we know if it was ever performed or circulated. Langomazino's enthusiasm for her project expressed in his first letter endured beyond the initial epistolary encounter and her visit to Toulon.

This example is in sharp contrast to Ferrand's relationship with Tristan. In a sequence of six letters dating from June to September 1843 Ferrand moved from eulogy of Tristan's idea to consideration of legal action against her for breach of promise. The dispute was over authority. Ferrand felt his seniority was challenged as a senior song composer. Ironically there remains little trace of Ferrand in biographical records of worker-poets. There are several letters from him in Tristan's papers, but no song.³⁶ His skills as a songwriter were thwarted by the political communicator Flora Tristan who had her own ideas about an appropriate song.

³⁴ See Maurice Agulhon, *Une Ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme romantique. Toulon de 1815 à 1851* (Paris and The Hague, 1970, 1977), 163–77.

³⁵ See Dominique Lecoœur, *Louis Langimazino (1820–1885). Un missionnaire républicain de la Provence aux îles Marquises* (Mane, 2002), 16–40.

³⁶ Castres, Fonds Puech, see Flora Tristan correspondence.

Political and historical context of Flora Tristan's song for the *Union ouvrière*

In the wider impact of political singing of the working classes in the nineteenth century Flora Tristan's involvement was similar to other political moments of organized singing. In 1848 the time was ripe for singing for the Republic due to a number of factors: enthusiasm for the Revolution from among the musical fraternity, the spread of the practice of political singing, and singing for social purposes in the popular milieu.

In the early days of the new Republic musicians and artists found a voice to organize meetings to request an improvement in their living conditions and they also became political actors through their music teaching of patriotic songs, music events for the public ceremonies and their participation in the organization of a song contest. Carnot's patriotism was thus shared by musicians. Among the members of the jury were former Saint-Simonians but the majority were chosen for the most part from among prominent musicians rather than politicians. They included Auber, Adam, F. Halévy and Félicien David. Alfred de Musset was appointed as the sole poet. The jury choice was important for the success of the competition, something Tristan would have appreciated.

Although there was some reluctance on the part of prominent musicians and poets to take part, there was no shortage of candidate song composers. A bronze medal was the offered prize for the best entry. Unfortunately only thirty or so entries survive, but enough for Leterrier to have done an analysis of their thematic content. The most common key words in the lyrics are: the end of tyranny, glory of the Republic personified by the people, the nobility of work and workers, the arrival of the true Christian age of fraternity, and peaceful means of revolution. Three songs refer to nations by name in the way that Langomazino had invoked the example of Ireland trying to shake off its fetters of slavery. Three nations—Italy oppressed by Austria, Poland by Russia and Ireland by England—are called to free themselves from tyranny. References to Christianity are general and diverse. The First Republic and its flag are frequently mentioned. In short the songs are representative of the spirit of 1848 but they have much in common with the Tristan songs.

The form of the songs is quite conventional, written in rhyming verse. Musically the most common form used was that of an anthem "hymne" for solo voice or choral works for four-part harmony male choir, or for choir and solo. Those who only submitted lyrics often only suggested the form of anthem, prayer or song. The model of the Marseillaise was often used, as we saw in *Union ouvrière*, but classical music influence is more common than that of popular song.

The entries were from the pens of the professional classes and for this reason lacked the raw enthusiasm of militants. The most frequently cited occupation was that of education, then Law. Few were workers. One worker entrant was lauded for his efforts in the same way that Poncey was made respectable. Commercial traveler Dufiches-Desgenettes undertook to write accompanying letters providing very precious details about his education, his background and his opinions about republicanism.

Polyphonic politics and discordant harmonies

Divergent attitudes existed in 1848 about what constituted the music of the people and how it should be performed. One of the jury, Adam, lamented the lack of rhythmic

popular songs with which to accompany work or marching.³⁷ Many professional musicians did not submit the entry requested, or if they did they sent in a romantic or sentimental piece deemed unsuitable for a new national anthem for a public festival celebrating the Republic. However at least eight hundred pieces were submitted. Unfortunately the problems of the Republic overtook the song contest.³⁸ Nonetheless several prizes were given with separate prizes for music and for lyrics. According to Leterrier, “sur 3000 chansons, 150 seulement eurent une musique nouvelle.”³⁹ The most enthusiastic lyric writers were obscure, often from republican backgrounds. Many of the musicians on the other hand who lived from composition were less interested in conducting propaganda for the Republic and thus, suggests Leterrier, may well have offered their compositions to other regimes for similarly organized contests or ceremonial occasions. Musicians—in the majority on the jury—awarded prizes to fellow musicians. The exception was a special category for prizewinner Dufriche-Desgenettes, the republican commercial traveler:

[E]nfant du peuple, voyageur de l’industrie, c’est sur les grandes routes de France et de l’étranger, et souvent à bord d’un navire de commerce, que le modeste poète, songeant au pays qu’il aime, songeant à Dieu, a écrit ces poésies morales et populaires, dédiés aux marins, aux travailleurs, et qui mériteront, à tous les titres, d’exciter la verve de nos musiciens.⁴⁰

The conclusion of the jury that sought musical excellence in the musical establishment and in the heroic people’s poet was that:

Ce concours n’aura donc été stérile ni pour l’art musical, ni pour les lettres, ni pour nos fêtes nationales. A côté de noms déjà connus, il a mis en lumière des noms nouveaux. Cet appel à tous, qui laisse à chacun la liberté de l’inspiration, l’égalité de l’effort, la fraternité du but, éveille plus d’intelligence qui s’interroge et souvent révèle à lui-même le talent qui s’ignore.⁴¹

Taken from the musical establishment, the jury wished to encourage the people’s singing enthusiasm but gave the prizes to their own members, the experts. Patriotic enthusiasm without musical talent was not rewarded. There was no follow-up to this contest in 1848. The efforts of the entrants sank almost without trace. The winners had been promised a fully-financed paid public performance of their work, but this never occurred. The demise of republican aspirations of the early months put paid to that. Tristan’s brief song competition had been equally fraught with tensions that had come to the surface in the correspondence. It illustrates the conflict between musicality and the political aspirations of propaganda that Tristan discovered in the workers’ musical fraternity.

Although she had a very definite idea for the song with a fine title, “Union,” she could not control the rivalry among musicians. Yet music could indeed reach the hearts and minds of the people in a way that no other political propaganda could. Eight hundred entries for an official song contest in 1848 would suggest that there were many would-be poets in the making. That their compositions fell short of

³⁷ Leterrier, “Du patriotisme musical,” 77.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

standards set by those running contests signified a discrepancy between musicality and political propaganda.

Conclusion

The Second Republic built on the training of the July Monarchy socialists such as those of Flora Tristan's song contest. For music to reach an audience and serve a political purpose it needed composers and performers well versed in political principles.

The song incident came right in the middle of a period of Tristan's most intense political activity through meetings and correspondence with known and lesser-known worker-activists. The success of Tristan's contacts depended on her remarkable ability to organize her propaganda and meetings with key figures throughout her political campaign.

The songs are the most concrete evidence of the common terrain and barriers of political ideas: on the one hand the common ground of principles and on the other the points of disagreement over organization. She saw the idea of a song for *Union ouvrière* through to publication, no mean feat in gender terms since the vast majority of song composers and singing clubs were male dominated. The song incident is important because of the cross-section of respondents and also because of the timing of the event.

The spring and summer of 1843 saw her preparing for her propaganda tour of France. The song contest elicited a response from the provinces through letters. Songs became part of her propaganda tactics. Letters were the vehicle for songs and as such provided the background to the political song beyond lyrics and music.

It came at a critical moment in Flora Tristan's politics when she was hovering between acceptance and rejection, between political and apolitical workers, between known and unknown songwriters, between existing organizations and individuals, between bourgeois philanthropists and intellectuals and the workers' intelligentsia from Paris and those of the provinces, between an advanced organized elite and apolitical workers or isolated individuals scattered throughout France. The collection of letters by worker songwriters is testimony that they and Flora Tristan were finely tuned into the politics of communication in late July Monarchy France.