



The Biguine, masked musical identity of the 1930: A Creole eruption without words

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Abstract

The biguine experienced a “golden age” in Paris in the 1930s. The “identity” of this Caribbean music is not mysterious but undoubtedly underestimated. Disorganized, about the subject of media success, the thesis of this article bets that the identity of this biguine is “masked”. The mask operates on three levels: first obscured by the chimerical quest for a more authentic production *ante eruptio* (in reference to Pelee catastrophic volcano eruption of 1902). Then by the mask of the ruses/opportunities of history which allow it to express itself "outside" any institutional framework. Finally, the mask in its “twin” but untheorized relationship of the contemporary foundation of the black identity of the New Harlem Renaissance and the *Négritude* of the Nardal sisters and Aimé Césaire. At a time when musical creation found renewed interest and inspiration around this period, the functioning of these mask mechanisms gave pride of place to women laying the base for the interest of this article.

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Introduction

In recent years, important Parisian places linked to biguine¹ have been rehabilitated: “the Palais de la Porte Dorée, the site of the 1931 colonial exhibition and the Bal Blomet, a former colonial ball or “Bal Nègre. Anthénor, faced with this ally who knew how to shave his little Paris in his time, “emptied the vial of rum, which he had brought as viaticum. And [rushes]...”.

The thesis of this article somewhat contradicts this destructive or redemptive vision; it relates the volcano as a primordial and fertile source of biguine. The article, however, returns to nostalgic and unsuccessful tracks which attempted to rediscover an original biguine and its inimitable success of the Roaring Twenties. This article will also refer less to the visual arts and more to literature, and especially to music. Its hint at the Afro-diasporic imagination is essential since this thesis pioneered this concept. The biguine embodies the arts, a positive identity of the black world, a "pendant" of the nascent negritude of the salons of the Nardal sisters, Daumas, Du Bois, Césaire and Senghor. Still

¹ By convention, we will use the French Creole term “biguine”, used both in French and English, although the English translation “beguine” also exists (used, for instance, by Cole Porter). We will examine below in the article the ambiguity of the meaning of the word and the question of its etymological origins.



following this hypothesis, the particular circumstances of this fertile occurrence and the eruption caused by biguine, its unprecedented success is remarkable. Interestingly, how this situation goes under the radar or contradicts recent approaches in search of authenticity reveals the ambiguity of the biguine as a unique genre. Paradoxically, we can wonder if this movement's lack of theorisation or preparation was not precisely the spontaneous irony of its success.

Methodology

The question of the identity of the biguine leads to the scepticism of its qualification. However, the literature (Prieto, 2004; Boutant, 2019) did not involve a conflict of belonging or subgenre of biguine with a lack of an internal typology. It is rather the question of sources that is raised: what is biguine, when and where did it originate from? Indeed, belonging to the biguine genre is indisputable. This is an essential point in our approach. On the one hand, adequate sources addressing this topic have been preserved, edited and recorded.

On the other hand, the sources also refer to a sort of ghost corpus musical sources before the eruption of the Saint Pierre volcano in 1902, of which there remains no hope of finding traces in the face of an essential cataclysm which completely razed the city². However, our position is to reverse a situation that neglects the rich corpus of the 1930s while regretting a lost Eden of this West Indian creativity. The methodology, therefore, considers these two moments and their causal relationship. It re-examines the sources and re-establishes a chronology while underlining the lack of theorisation of the movement and the importance of certain subsequent re-readings. It contextualises this musical emergence with contemporary work on Afro-descendant identity from the New Harlem Renaissance and Negritude. This is to reclassify unaddressed issues about this musical movement of biguine and its success in its identification and filiation. This is intriguing compared to later intentional attempts to imitate this epic. In 2023, the fact that several musical creations are interested in this period, notably through women composers and tributes to Joséphine Baker³, deserves to expand the symbolic approach of this movement and its subsequent scope by disconnecting and reconnecting certain data associated with this musical field.

An apolitical biguine

It is not by chance that the ball at 33 Rue Blomet took a special place in the history of the biguine: the place is symbolically behind the transformation of the office from a lame political office into a place of open entertainment at All-Paris. Jean Rézard des Wouves, the owner, ultimately did not pursue a political career. He took responsibility for this artistic universe by reorienting his initial project. Certainly, the beguine of the Roaring Twenties in Paris did not bring out an anthem or a political leader. This does not mean that committed people do not frequent the places of the biguine (the Blomet ball is far from being the only centre⁴). The particularity of this movement comes with the fact that biguine bound people of all walks together. Nardal (1929) depicted the rise of the movement. Leardée,

² « Ces sanglots qui lamentent la disparition tragique de la ville anéantie sous la lave et le feu », in Robert Attuly introduction in Gabriel (1966)

³ Among them *O Madiana, in memoriam Joséphine Baker*, Leona Gabriel, Maitte Almaby et Paulette Nardal, Edouard Delale (2021), *Joséphine 2B*, de Chantal Loial- Difié Kako (2020), *Josephine*, monodrame de Tom Cipullo (2023), *Josephine Baker, a life of hot jazz* de Valerie Coleman for Imani Winds, le *Carnaval de Saint Pierre d'après Leona Gabriel* by Cyril Lehn (2021), *1 création 2024 du Consortium on Joséphine Baker's speech at the Capitole*.

⁴ Le bal glacière, Le Tagada Biguine, L'élan noir, La Jungle, La Boule Blanche, Les Antilles, Le Jockey, Le Pélican, Le Train bleu... quoted by Léardée (1989)



1989) thus described its first place of performance on rue Glacière in Paris, whose access required the blue card of the colonial centre.

In retrospect, we can find suspicious or complicit occasions which gave intense publicity to the biguine: the concerts at the Guadeloupe pavilion as part of the Colonial Exhibition of 1931. These brought busloads of visitors towards Parisian cabarets and balls. Likewise, certain biographies underline the role of witnesses, sometimes a little passive. Of the actors who went through the vagaries of these times, Léardée (Léardée, 1989) boasts about an Ausweis who saved him from trouble during a German tour at the start of the war. Then, during the occupation, Stephen, a student of the composer Victor Coridun (the first scriptwriter of West Indian melodies) Coridun (1930), crossed the eras without getting involved. At least in this first period, the biguine did not appear particularly committed. Curiously, many biguines in their post-war review or explanation - notably in *ça c'est la Martinique* (Gabriel, 1966) seemed to have a political significance through the outlet that the town of Saint Pierre represented numerous tunes which politicians taunt. In 1930, these tunes referred to a past generation that everyone had forgotten, strikingly contrasting the original meaning and reception⁵. This "golden age" of the biguine is also punctuated by multiple personalities whose relationships have not always been simple. It is shared between meteoric talents who went missing (Alexandre Stellio, Maiotte Almaby⁶), and artists, on the contrary, with a long career (Leona Gabriel, Félix Valvert, Sam Castendet, Ernest Leardée). They maintained a repertoire and delivered their vision of this history (Krief, 1986; Leardée, 1989), (Chamoiseau & Deslaurier, 2003) (Videau, 2005). All this raises the question of the corpus and the sources.

The sources

Biguine is a musical and intangible art that arises during the appearance and growth of discographic recordings. Stellio and Leardée (Léardée, 1989) established the first beguines in Paris for the Odéon label. Quickly, many recordings bore witness to this period⁷. Two phenomena gave them a second life. The first was the review work carried out by Boulanger and Cowley (1994). Due to the legislation on copyright for recordings (falling into the public domain), the intense reissue work was carried out by the Frémeaux label. This work was accompanied in the 1990s by an editorial approach notably led by Meunier (1993) and gave rise to other documentary works like Chamoiseau (2003). He encouraged biographical publications like that of Leardée (1989) in an approach to the rediscovery of this repertoire.

Alongside these relatively spaced primary sources (1930s then 1990s), there are a certain number of research articles linked to music, either as part of a general approach to Caribbean music in the French-speaking and Anglo-Saxon sphere like Prieto (2004) or Chincoli (2019), or in a genealogical, or rhizomatic approach to music, with a biguine analysed as one of the links of transmission (Boutant, 2019) and research linked to approaches to the rediscovery and traditional valorisation of the repertoire (Beroard, 2018). They used this corpus as a stepping stone to find the previous state of

⁵ Moreover, it is quite striking the lack of adaptation of such pieces at these times (a still vivid tradition today in Martinique through the "vidé" during Le Carnaval) even if we know that Baker could easily adapt her texts during her performances.

⁶ Both dead in 1939, about Almaby, see Marone (2022).

⁷ Leardée himself makes 147 recordings and 260 deposits at the SACEM and regularly complains about the spoliation of several of his pieces: he understood lately the interest of protecting his works...



biguine marked by oral tradition, supposedly less well preserved. In the sources, it is striking to find few musical elements dating from an earlier period, which would come from Martinique, Guyana, or Guadeloupe⁸. Suppose the musicians receive oral training in traditional music for most of their careers. In that case, they emphasise their self-taught career, trained with talking cinema or on the sidelines of another activity (hairdresser for Leardée), learning on the job, necessarily, new instruments. The biguine does not appear as an advertisement for a piece of music for which Martinique or Guadeloupe would have delegated to the capital of their best specialists or guardians of traditional music.

The bulky legacy of success and the “lost recipe”

There are, therefore, many sources from this period for this music with its almost instantaneous and intense influence. The artists of Montparnasse, the Bal Blomet district, led by Robert Desnos, are great ambassadors. Joséphine Baker and Cole Porter made begin the biguine an international hit, and no other Caribbean music would ever have such explosive success⁹. More than that, most music today, from Zouk to Kompas, seems to have contracted a debt or developed a facet of heritage from this biguine. Certainly, we can place this connection in a broader perspective, considering Biguine's rhythm is only a variant of the older Cuban or Dominican Tresillo (Sandroni, 2001). We can estimate that the orchestration of the biguine takes up older elements of Gwoka or Bélé. However, biguine seems to be more than that, an alchemy or a precipitate whose success has not been repeated. On the contrary, letting traditional music fall into folklore became progressively a nostalgic object and an identity defended during celebrations for tourism or commemorations compared to the specific pieces meant for the occasions. This analysis raises the hypothesis of lost adjuvants. Some of these analyses regret the loss of the true original ingredients transmitted through oral tradition (Boutant, 2010).

The problem of filiation, property and “heritage”

In this perspective, the biguine becomes a subject of study in search of fundamental musical elements. Different works study the traditional Biguine, knowing that these works look towards a period "before the golden age" for which few elements remained due to the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902. An eruption ruled out the Parisian period, which would have distorted traditional music, with, for example, the contribution of jazz drums instead of traditional percussion. The keys would be found in music to be reconstructed, more aligned with a certain identity or claimed authenticity (Beroard, 2021). This perhaps somewhat vain hypothesis¹⁰, in search of a “lack” or more authentic music, comes up against the question of the very definition of biguine.

Notably, the exclusion of this golden age, whose property or inheritance is not claimed, is done concerning a theme of destruction that emerged relatively early in this area and is quite complex. The actors talk about their candour and their lack of professionalism before knowing how to defend their rights fully. At the same time, borrowings or low blows between musicians are legions between organisers of the period who harmed their partners (deposed by the leader in his name) or, on the contrary, by providing each other with work (rotation of orchestras which quickly disband). This

⁸ About early sources of music, without mention of biguine, see Hearn (1923).

⁹ An important data is also the « naive » reaction of artists in front of the publishers. Some of them learn quickly the deposit in their own name. See Leardee (1989) about Stellio.

¹⁰ See Leardée (1989): « il est aujourd’hui impossible de discerner ce qui a été pris au folklore, de ce qui ne l’a pas été » op cit p 268.



somewhat anarchic co-organization undoubtedly contributed to the improvised and poorly constructed feeling of the period that would continue after the war. *Ça c'est la Martinique* by Gabriel (1966) was, however, spotted as a late element of identity¹¹, constructed like a curious raw team with not less than six prefaces (by men) in heterogeneous tones, with a word from the author. This introduction provokes the reader "not to expect any refinement of style in this collection". Their introductions alternated dithyramb, formal criticism (Victor Coridun), and a theme of justification and spoliation.

Definition and meaning of "biguine"

Failing to fully claim the rights to this period, freezing, fixing or defining the very object of the biguine seems a challenge by itself. However, the framework of musical training, rhythm, meaning or use quickly finds limits. The exact etymology of the word "beguine" is unclear.

There are at least five explanations or origins given to biguine. The first written mention of the term was in late 1893. Since then, many researchers have used the term for older occurrences. Two explanations are, however, linked to women. Biguine can refer to "beguines" beautiful Creole women stimulated by the passionate dance of this music, but also refers to the term "embeguiner", synonymous with seducing.

Interestingly, three refer to the English sphere (Meunier, 2014)) which occupied the island during the Revolution. Biguine also refers to "begin": either it is the injunction of the conductor who begins the piece and thus indicates the departure to his musicians, or it is the place of these dances at the football games in the rich English homes. A final etymology also evokes the taste for a Congo minuet, which the English appreciates and evokes the *béguin*, pronounced *béguine*. The formation of the "original" biguine (violin, clarinet, banjo, trombone, drum) is not a signature either, since quickly, jazz rhythm, for example, took hold. The rhythm is not invariant because the mazurka waltzes surround the beguine and draw on Cuban influences in Paris.

The very meaning of the dance is problematic. Lascivious, at the same time technical, it implies a certain virtuosity, and the dance is disconnected from a traditional social role in Paris during the golden age. Dance is devoid of any moral virtue and even effortlessly subversive¹². Even more problematic, the Creole that accompanies many titles seems completely disconnected in meaning, with an audience seemingly indifferent to the text. That is to say, Creole does not even play the role of hidden double meaning that it could have brought to the articulation of different social classes, as in tango, for example. The titles thus indiscriminately evoke the eruption of 1902, the vaudeville of a bourgeois woman, or the arrival of a seaplane without listeners seeing any break in tone. Saint Pierre's vast repertoire of traditional Creole tunes just seems like an inexhaustible source of raw materials¹³. This is useful for the public's insatiable need for novelty, relatively insensitive to the precise meaning or the nostalgic substrate of specific themes. Festively orchestrated, the biguine uses Creole more as an accent or a particular prosodic timbre.

¹¹ « Mme Leona Gabriel Solime tient toute sa place dans cette indispensable bataille contre (...) toutes les formes de désagrégation comme d'aliénation » Gabriel (1966) préface by Gibert Gratiant P 9.

¹² « Railleuse biguine » for Leardee (1989), see aussi Nardal quoted by Grollemund (2018).

¹³ See Gabriel (1966): « L'axiome qui veut que le malheur des uns fasse le bonheur des autres n'a jamais été plus véridique ! Saint Pierre était devenu une caverne d'Ali-Baba non pas avec quarante voleurs mais avec des milliers de voleurs ! C'était le pillage systématique... » Ibid. p 119



The timeline

There is no real history of the biguine nor a syncretic vision of the period. As we have seen, certain personalities disappear without having time to manage their posterity or late with the leisure to give their version of the story. The problem of synthesis is also to justify this golden parenthesis. This has a few precursor elements that suffered a rapid decline with the arrival of the war, with limited post-war recovery initiatives which encouraged or discouraged return to the country of origin. Ernest Leardée would have cruel words on Martinique, where he did not wish to return to be buried. The highly productive golden age ultimately spans a few years. The biguine did not subsequently disappear after the halt in the 1940s. Artists were encouraged to change activities temporarily, then to tour secondary networks in the provinces (resort casinos) or to return to Martinique by founding, if necessary, their orchestras (Sam Castandet or Felix Valvert) would follow this pattern. The chronology underlines the milestone of world conflicts and the initial importance of the presence of a post-war West Indian generation in Paris. She preferred making an attempt, even after the armistice of 1918, rather than returning to the islands. Weaving a story over a long and compact period is not easy.

A few milestones nonetheless:

1848: Abolition of slavery – Beginning of the classification of biguines for Boutant (2010).

1885: Birth of Alexandre Fructueux known as Stellio.

1890: Birth of Maïotte Almaby.

1891: Birth of Léona Gabriel.

1893: (seven) first written mention of the term Biguine Revue des deux mondes.

1896: (Oct 12) Birth of Paulette Nardal - (Nov 9). Birth of Ernest Léardée.

1902: (May 8): Disaster of the eruption of Mount Pelée: Saint Pierre is razed. Move from the capital to Fort-de-France.

1905: Birth of Siméon Félix Valvert.

1906: Birth of Sam Castandet - (June 3): Birth of Joséphine Baker.

1918: Cole Porter in Paris (military service). West Indians were demobilized in Paris.

1919: Arrival of Stellio in Paris.

1924: Arrival of Sam Castanet in Paris – Opening of the Bal Blomet (colonial Negro ball)

1925: Arrival of Joséphine Baker for the Revue nègre at the Théâtre des Champs Élysées

1928: Opening of Bal de la rue Glacière (Stellio)

1929: First recordings of Biguines in Paris preserved by Stellio and Leardée.

1930: Publication of the Carnaval de Saint Pierre by Victor Coridun

1931: (May 6-November 15) International Colonial Exhibition

1933: Recording of Madiana by Maiötte Almaby by Joséphine Baker

1935: Cole Porter Begin the Beguine for the Zigfeld follies – November 18, Caribbean night Opéra Garnier 300 years Martinique – December celebration Fort-de-France (Revue En Madiana c'est fou!)

1936: Joséphine Baker in New York to perform Begin the Beguine.

1939: June 17 – Death of Maiotte Almaby - July 16: death of Alexandre Fructueux dit Stellio

1966: That's Martinique, published by Leona Gabriel

1969: En direct des Antilles from Solon Goncalves, musician of Felix Valvert 1971: Disappearance of Léona Gabriel

1975: Death of Joséphine Baker

1985: Death of Paulette Nardal

1988: Death of Ernest Léardée



1991: Creation of the Frémeaux label

1993: Death of Sam Castandet – First Biguine anthology from the Frémeaux label.

1995: Death of Siméon Félix Valvert

2021: Pantheonization of Joséphine Baker¹⁴

The hypothesis of the favourable context 1

As we have said, the story of the beguine resembles more of an opportunistic adventure than a constructed and planned one. The actors' biographies seem full of conditionals. What would have happened if Stellio had been in Saint Pierre instead of Guyana? If the different actors had not met? What if Jean des Rézard des Wouwes hadn't wanted to brighten his backstage? If Joséphine Baker or Robert Desnos had not advertised La Biguine? If there had been no music at the colonial exhibition? All of these point to an improbable sequence, a "black swan", as Taleb (2008) calls it.

On the contrary, we must recall the very particular context of the time: the beguine fashion is part of the logical sequence of new dances which follow one another in Paris, such as the Charleston, the Tango or the Foxtrot with which Joséphine Baker arrived. These are not the first exotic dances. Nevertheless, the beguine artists who learned jazz when the representatives of the New Harlem Renaissance arrived with something special. Resulting from an "on-site alchemy" in the Parisian melting pot, it is not quite an exotic emanation nor a traditional demonstration.

The other important point is the Colonial Exhibition of 1931. This brings enormous publicity because there is an intense demand for musical entertainment, particularly because the Guadeloupe pavilion has a stage allowing concerts (not that of the Martinique). However, instead of Guadeloupean musicians, Martinican Parisian musicians who had already established the aspect of business, in this case, Stellio, who officiated at the Blomet ball. Jean-Pierre Meunier shared how the musicians from Guadeloupe would find the place well taken care of¹⁵, and it would not take long for them to acquire a taste for Parisian fashion, either. The concerts at the Guadeloupe pavilion had an exceptional aura. Adding to the collaboration of the stars (including Baker and Porter already mentioned), the biguine became the first mass media success.

The Martinique Hypothesis 2

Adding to this is another piece of data: the beguine has a particular connection with Martinique, particularly in the eyes of metropolitan residents who slightly distinguished it from Guadeloupe and Guyana, from which many musicians of the time came. As seen above, favourable indications accumulated, so Martinique would probably win the bet. Predominantly, themes from Saint Pierre, the Martinican capital, were aired in Beguine. More Martinicans, including established groups, seemed present in mainland France, demonstrating a certain Anglophilia. This is where a second favourable double effect undoubtedly comes into play. Martinique had two wide differences with its neighbouring regions, Guyana and Guadeloupe. Unlike the latter, Martinique was under English domination during the French Revolution. Having become French again, it only experienced a single abolition in 1848, escaping the first decree of 1794 and the numerous revolts which followed with a procession of first heroes like Louis Delgrès, which set Saint Domingue ablaze. Martinique thus only

¹⁴ Entry into the Pantheon in Paris on November 30, 2021, following a decision by the French Presidency announced in August 2021 following the initiative of the committee chaired by Laurent Kupferman (Kupferman 2022).

¹⁵ The Martial brothers will arrive from Guadeloupe at the end of the exhibition in 1931.



experienced one abolition but experienced the eruption of 1902, which instantly razed the capital, Saint Pierre, and “headed” the island of its bourgeoisie and its councillors. The eruption also encouraged more Martinicans to leave to seek their fortune or to stay after the war in mainland France. The situation was, therefore, as follows: A generation later, in the 1930s, Martinique did not inherit a generation of strong and directive city councillors. “The absence of the void” of this disappeared generation weakened the Martinican bourgeoisie who left the Parisian exhibition in 1931 in Guadeloupe, the place of inviting host. However, this same void, the lack of framework or constraints, opened a space for beguine music, which, in a certain way, emanated from a region left vacant, razed by the volcano. These artists fully seized this space. The publishing relays, “without masters”, quickly improvised “agile solutions” to produce content. In a certain way, the volcano achieved the second abolition that Martinique had not experienced. For the first time a free music arrives, which comes from nowhere, and which it is possible to fully appropriate: what does it matter somewhere that the tunes speak of Saint Pierre, since, precisely, the city doesn’t exist anymore?

This particular conjunction undoubtedly allowed the expression of black artistic identity, Afro-descendant, physically “equivalent” or expressive of nascent negritude in the same place, in the intellectual salons of Clamart (Bertin-Elisabeth, 2021). This extremely free imagination created a fundamental matrix. Like a spark in a powder keg (or a fiery cloud), it spread phenomenally in a context that would never be represented in the same way again.

Other wordless premises: Musical identity masks

This hypothesis faces two possible objections or paradoxes by examining the notion of identity associated with the biguine in this way. The first is to rule out this trace of the ancient and rooted genesis of beguine in an oral art that the eruption of Saint Pierre would have erased. Another objection would perhaps be to presume or over invest the importance of the musical field for constructing an expression of identity. After all, it is perhaps simply reserved for a collective cathartic or entertaining expression linked to Carnival. A first argument would invoke the complex processes mirroring contemporary minstrel shows being implemented in the United States. However, other elements suggest that this link between music and identity is not fortuitous or unthought-out. In the entourage of the Nardal sisters and W.E.B Du Bois, we can thus evoke the personalities of Shirley Graham Du Bois (1896-1977)¹⁶, Helen Eugenia Hagan (1891-1964)¹⁷ and for whom the stage in Paris was an important milestone. They would provide an essential element in constructing an African American musical identity.

But these milestones may have existed, just discreetly and hidden. In many biguine titles like *Serpent Maigre*, we read keys that call on self-deprecation, a process that does not seem new. The question of identity and using the name of Joseph Bologne (known as the Chevalier Saint George – 1745-1799) is a real subject (Sylvand, 2023). There are other keys among his contemporaries or followers, illustrating that beyond the “permission to amuse”, these signed pieces could be a nod to identity construction. Thus, *Mungo’s Delight* by Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780), which closes his collection of minuets from 1775, was dedicated to different Lords and Duchesses. A masked self-portrait, the last piece used the

¹⁶ Student at La Sorbonne in 1929. She composed in 1932 the first Afro-American Opera *Tom-Toms; An Epic of the Music and the Negro*.

¹⁷ Graduated from Yale and then from Schola cantorum in Paris.

name of a theatre slave (which would become Mungo Park, an illustrious name of an English explorer). This stage name gave Ignatius Sancho success in London alongside David Garrick.

Figure 1: Incipit from *Mungo's Delight* by Ignatius Sancho, the last of the 12 country dances of 1775.



We should also mention *Prométhée enchaîné* by Lucien Lambert (1858-1945), winner of the Prix Rossini, or *Mephisto masqué* by Edmond Dédé (1827-1901). These composers, who have known the Caribbean and Paris, navigate between scholarly and popular arts. They not only put forward their identity in the second degree but also managed to do so in their most successful pieces, the beginnings and fragments of this identity construction for art, which so readily forgets the eyes. The context of biguine and Paris in the 1930s simply offered a completely different change of scale.

Conclusion: Volcano, leopards and cabaret, recontextualising an imagination

If this hypothesis is correct, it poses a fundamental element of the Afro-Caribbean imagination and identity, explaining the strength of an expression far from being relegated. From this point of view, the volcano is a founding source. He also welds elements from different backgrounds. It is then illusory to look for authentic or fundamental music that its lava would have covered while lamenting that this alchemy occurred in Paris.

The first intuition of this reading came at the time of the pantheonisation of Joséphine Baker. Initially, the links between Baker and Martinique would guide an investigation. Noting strong reluctance, even jealousy about this artist, the investigation ended up renewing ties that deeply united four women who were traditionally separated or opposed: Joséphine, Paulette Nardal, whose music-loving and composer side we know less about (Boni, 2014; Marceline, 2019), Leona Gabriel and Maiotte Almaby (this forgotten queen of biguine, who died prematurely and was a composer for Baker). This would give rise to a tribute composition for the organ and the orchestra (Delale, 2021). Above all, this reconciled two areas were often presented in an antagonistic manner: the intellectualism of Paulette Nardal, and the revolution of bodies brought about by Joséphine Baker, to which sticks had the reproach of having given too much influence on the fantasy of representations of bodies or racialised caricatures.

Figure 2: *Madiana (tempo de Biguine)*, Edouard Delale, based on themes by Leona Gabriel – creation 2021. incipit

4/4 Madiana
mélodie antillaise pour orgue
Hommage à Joséphine Baker
Commande de Myrelingues

Edouard Delale

Suggestion de registration :
Grand Orgue (G.O.) : Fonds de 8'
Récit (Rec.) : Hautbois ou autre jeu solo
Pédale : Fonds 16' - 8'
Ni tirasse ni accouplement. Les nuances pour le récit sont facultatives.

Tempo de biguine (♩ = 96 environ)



This gave its title to the article, with the volcano, the lounge tables where Paulette Nardal happily came to sit and the leopard. The inverted figure of the man on a leash (or not) Joséphine took with her in the game or the inversion of gazes. In this vision, it is less an appropriation than an essential rebound that Joséphine Baker gave to the biguine by opening the doors of New York to her. Surprisingly, the numerous tributes on the occasion of her patronisation focused more on her role as a Resistance fighter or in charitable institutions after the war than on this founding musical moment of Black Identity (Gillett, 2021a, 2021b & 2022).

Perhaps it is because this movement was not premeditated and guided “without masters” that the fruit of an assembly of alchemy is difficult to define or write. But it is no less essential, free and fertile. The image of the volcano, another matrix identity of the islands, was particularly appropriate for this phenomenon. Mount Pelée, identified with the birth of modern volcanology, keeps the memory of one of the greatest known disasters. It remains quite mysteriously associated with the positive memory of joyful, unbridled achievements at Carnival. This symbol of reversal allowed this radiant, musical emanation, which has never dried up. It continues to nourish imagination and works whose biguine tempo (once again another synonym for the beginning) has been inscribed for a long time in the history of musical writing.



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