Constructing a TIMBRE Database: Handling the Reuse of Popular Tunes

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Abstract

More than 3000 tune names have been collected in order to build the TIMBRE database from a corpus combining French vaudevilles (short plays interspersed with sung parts) and French songs by Béranger and Jouy printed in the 19th century. These tunes have the particularity of being popular tunes reused to set new texts to music, and therefore have a particular name in French: *"timbre"*. This paper aims to trace the construction of the database and to study the use of these *timbres*, their composer, original genre and vitality, by alternating close and distant reading methods. One of our major results pertains, for instance, to the identification of the important role played by new tunes composed for vaudeville in the establishment of new *timbres* in the first part of the 19th century. Nevertheless, the reuse of these new tunes composed for vaudeville seems to decrease considerably at the end of the 19th century, as shown by the study of Jules Jouy's song production.

1 Introduction

The practice of so-called *timbre* in French consists in reusing a well-known tune to set new texts to music. It is a centuries-old strategy that helps the memorisation of new songs and their diffusion. It is particularly characteristic of the French vaudeville plays of the 18th century and the first part of the 19th century, when the vaudeville was a popular dramatic genre combining prose and sung verse, the latter called *"couplets"* (Gidel 1986). *Timbres* could also be found in French popular songs frequently sung to well-known tunes. In the second half of the 19th century, however, the practice of *timbre* in songs gradually disappeared and was replaced by compositions based on original music (Cheyronnaud 2009, p. 4). The use of *timbres* is almost always indicated in the printed versions of vaudevilles or songs with the word *"Air"*, located above each versified section meant to be sung.

This tradition of naming the tunes lends itself to the gathering of a large and consistent dataset, which can be organised in a database. Although specialists

know the phenomenon of singing to well-known tunes, corpus mining on a large scale, using statistical methods, is yet to be made. In this paper, we shall describe first the building of a database called TIMBRE, based on two different corpora that were chosen because of their emblematic use of *timbre* and therefore strongly linked; one corpus of vaudevilles from 1830 to 1832, and one corpus of songs, itself separated into two sub-corpora: songs of Pierre-Jean de Béranger from the first half of the 19th century, and songs written by Jules Jouy in 1887.[1] Secondly, we shall compare these corpora through a mix of distant and close reading. The selected periods bring insight into two significant moments in the history of *timbre*: a period of massive use (the first half of the 19th century) and a period of gradual disappearance (the last quarter of the 19th century). As a prominent song-writing figure who greatly influenced the popular music in the 19th century, Béranger serves us here as a bridge connecting the vaudeville genre with the work of another significant songwriter from the end of the century, Jules Jouy. The latter is representative of the song tradition of café-concert[2] and cabaret at the end of the century. The study of Jules Jouy's works allows us to observe the later use of certain tunes, their survival in a different production framework and thus serves as the final chronological marker in our study. This article aims to acquire a precise knowledge of the tunes in our corpora (earliest names, composers) and to explore how these tunes are reused and imported through different sung genres over a long period of time.

2   Constitution of our Digital Corpora, Tune Listings and Standardisation

For the vaudeville corpus, we selected 124 printed plays first performed in Paris between 1830 and 1832 (as indicated by the original editions), adding up to around 2,600 couplets.[3] For the song corpus, we chose a collection of Jouy's songs titled *Les Chansons de l'année 1887* (Songs of Year 1887) and published in 1888 by Bourbier and Lamoureux, containing about 200 songs, and two volumes of Béranger's songs (*Oeuvres de P. J. De Béranger*; The Works of P. J. De Béranger) published by Perrotin in 1867 comprising a little more than 300 songs. The digital versions of these vaudeville acts and songs mainly come from the online library Google Books, as well as from Gallica.[4] Their content was stored in plain text, corrected, and then tagged using XML.[5] The tag <stage

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[1] The vaudeville corpus is part of the corpus created by Lara Nugues for her PhD research. The song corpus was compiled by Dr Nils Couturier. Both corpora were built in the framework of the SNSF PRIMA project, *Le Rire des Vers* / Mining the Comic Verse, directed by Professor Dr Anne-Sophie Bories.

[2] "A place of entertainment, serving food and drink, where songs were performed by professional musicians. The term came to encompass a whole style of French popular song" (O'Connor 2001).

[3] It would be tedious to list all vaudeville plays included in the corpus. However, it should be noted that they are mainly plays written by Brazier, Bayard, the Cogniard brothers, Desvergers, Dumersan, Duvert, Mélesville, Masson, Saintine, Scribe, Simonnin or Vanderburch.

[4] Gallica is the Digital library of the French National Library (https://gallica.bnf.fr/).

[5] Our corpus was tagged according to the standards defined for the SNSF PRIMA project *Le Rire des vers* / Mining the Comic Verse. For each work, a header was created, including notably the name(s) and surname(s) of the author(s) and the title of the work. As for the body of the texts,

type="tune"> was defined to mark tune names, which were then extracted and converted into Excel lists. For the Jules Jouy corpus, only the songs whose tune is indicated in the collection were processed.[6] For the vaudeville, all the tunes accompanying the sung text were tagged. We did not tag, for instance, the tunes that accompanied character actions or scene changes. According to this methodology, the vaudeville corpus thus contains 2612 "tune" tags, the Jouy corpus 144, and the Béranger corpus 335. Once this listing had been carried out, assigning a standard tune name to the various namings of the same tune proved necessary. Indeed, the same tune names occur to be spelled in different ways, present printing errors, slight variations in its denomination or even be known under several different names. Standardising these tune names is therefore a crucial step in ensuring the interoperability of our corpora.

The fact that a tune changes its name in the course of its history is a relatively common phenomenon which requires special investigative work. Indeed, an original tune, also called in French *"timbre primitif"* (earliest *timbre*) or *"vrai timbre"* (true *timbre*), when employed several times, can change its designation by adopting as a new name the first line of its new text. In this case, the tune is called a *"faux timbre"* (false *timbre*). A true *timbre* can thus have multiple false *timbres* depending on the history of its reuse and its successive renamings.[7] Our main source to carry out this genealogy was a book well known to tune specialists, *La Clé du Caveau* (literally The Key to the Vault) by Pierre Capelle, whose title refers to *"Le Caveau"* (The Vault), a famous French singing society. This printed publication consists in a tune's collection structured like a database and featuring multiple entries. Thus, it enables the tracing of various potential names associated with a tune, allowing us then to determine its earliest name and access its corresponding score. *La Clé du Caveau* gained significant popularity upon its first release[8] and expanded its collection of tunes from 891 to 2,390 in subsequent editions (Benini 2021, p. 269).[9] The fourth edition introduced a composers' table, providing details about the genre, composer, and sometimes the titles of the works from which the earliest tunes originated. However, not all tunes used in vaudevilles or songs are included in *La Clé du Caveau*. To complete our inventory, we consulted other materials such as *Le Catalogue de la chanson folklorique française* (The Catalogue of French Folk Song) by Conrad Laforte (1983), specifically volume 6, which focuses on songs sung to *timbres*.

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only the elements that interested us, namely the tunes and the verses, were marked. The tags used generally follow the XML-TEI naming conventions. The web application xml-generator, created by Petr Plecháč, was used for tagging. For the vaudeville corpus, this work was carried out with the help of Pascaline Loricourt and Timothy Klaffke, and to a lesser extent with the help of Louis-Geoffrey Gousset.

[6] Though the songs in this collection were indeed published, the exact conditions of their vocal performance remain difficult to establish. As concerns the songs without *timbre* indicated, it is difficult to know to which music they were sung, if they were sung at all.

[7] All these concepts were developed by Pierre Capelle in *La Clé du Caveau* (Capelle 1848, pp. xii–xiii).

[8] We can explain this success by the fact that *La Clé du Caveau* was a useful tool for songwriters and playwrights to compose songs. Furthermore, as Capelle explains, it enabled composers and playwrights from the rest of France to keep up to date with the tunes in fashion in Paris, without having to be in the capital (Capelle 1848, pp. xii, xiv).

[9] However, these additions are accompanied by deletions of tunes. See for example the foreword of the fourth edition, Pierre Capelle deletes 150 tunes and adds 470 (Capelle 1848, p. xv).

3   Difficulties of Standardisation

Tunes are usually named after the first line of their original lyrics, either completely or partially. Occasionally the name comes from a refrain line and in very rare cases from the character singing. *La Clé du Caveau* helps trace back the tunes concerned to their "earliest *timbre*" in most cases. However, there are challenging instances, for instance *"Air de Lantara"* (Air from *Lantara*). This tune refers to a tune from the vaudeville play *Lantara, ou Le Peintre au cabaret* (*Lantara, or the Painter at the Cabaret*), but it's quite difficult to determine the specific tune being referred to according that there are multiple tunes in this vaudeville play.

Furthermore, there is a series of tunes that are impossible to identify by name, partly because their designation is vague: *"air connu"* (Known Air), *"air suisse"* (Swiss Air), etc. There are also cases where a tune lacks a name and is simply labelled with the French term *"Air"* or has no mention at all, despite being sung. To account for these particular cases in our corpora, we introduced a second attribute to the <stage> tag (<stage type="tune" id="">), assigning the first verse of the unnamed couplet or the first line of the refrain (where applicable) as the value for this second attribute (id).[10] This approach allows us to identify these unnamed tunes, and sometimes reveals connections with other tunes. We applied the same process to newly composed tunes (i.e., those created specifically for the occasion). This method enables us, for example, to keep separate record for the different instances of *"AIR nouveau de Doche"* (New Air by Doche), each designating a distinct tune, and to trace their subsequent reuse.[11]

4   Metadata, Bias and Data Control

We associated two types of metadata to our standardised tune names: the original genre of the tune (such as romance[12] or drinking song) and the composers' surnames and first names, when available. We obtained this information primarily from the fourth edition of *La Clé du Caveau*, but we also consulted other sources to establish attribution (Baudouin 1884; Choron and Fayolle 1817; Doche 1822; Fétis 1866–1868, 1878–1880; *Revue musicale / Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* 1827–1880; Halévy 1861; Quérard 1842–1857), as well as data from the catalogue of the French National Library (BnF). When sources provided contradictory information regarding the original genre or the composer, we refrained

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[10] For the Jouy corpus, a different methodology was adopted, see Section 2.

[11] It should be pointed out here that, contrary to its common definition, vaudeville is not a play containing exclusively verses sung to already known popular tunes—even if it does contain most of them. Sometimes vaudeville also contains couplets sung to new music created especially for the occasion. However, the expression *"air nouveau"* (New Air), which appears in vaudeville editions, is sometimes misleading. It does not necessarily mean that the tune has been composed for the occasion, but it may also refer to a recent and trendy tune composed by a well-known composer such as Amédée de Beauplan or Pauline Duchambge for example.

[12] "In France and Germany the term came to indicate an extravagant, sentimental or 'romantic' tale in either prose or strophic verse. Since the 18th century vocal and instrumental settings entitled 'romance' have continued to express these 'romantic' and lyrical qualities [...]" (Sage et al. 2001).

from making a decision and did not include it in the metadata. Regarding genre metadata, we categorised anything related to plays that combined songs and were predominantly sung to well-known tunes as "vaudeville". For the remaining genres, we have generally followed the classifications given in the period editions.

A significant portion of tunes names in the vaudeville corpus (30.3%), Béranger corpus (28.36%) and Jouy corpus (18.06%) remains without an assigned composer. Likewise, a portion of the data in the vaudeville corpus (28.12%), Béranger corpus (8.96%) and Jouy corpus (5.56%) do not have an assigned genre. These figures should be considered when analysing our results. To ensure the interoperability of data and metadata, we used the Levenshtein 0.20.8 library in Python (Bachmann n.d.), which measures the similarity between strings through operations such as deletion, insertion and substitution. This allowed us to compare standardised tune names within and between our corpora, minimising inaccuracies and oversights. Another script was used to verify the consistency of associated metadata for each identical tune occurrence. These verification measures were crucial for enhancing the quality and validity of our data.

5   Overlap of Corpora and Influences

After completing the standardisation process, we measured the number of unique tunes in our different corpora.[13] The song corpus contains 276 unique tunes, with 81 from the Jouy sub-corpus and 195 from the Béranger sub-corpus. In the vaudeville corpus, there are 1,081 unique tunes.[14] We then compared the lists of unique tunes from the different corpora and sub-corpora. Between Béranger's and Jouy's song corpus, there are only a few shared tunes with just 8 unique tunes overlapping. This lack of continuity can be attributed to the smaller size of Jouy's corpus and the significant time gap between the composition dates of Béranger's successful songs and Jouy's cabaret songs in 1887. However, some tunes have remained in use, and their names indicate that the connection between the two songwriters is not coincidental. For instance, Jouy's song *"Les vieux"* (The Old People) has a false *timbre* titled *"Les gueux"* (The Beggars), named after Béranger's eponymous song originally composed on the earliest *timbre "Première ronde du Départ de Saint Malo"* (First *Ronde* from The Departure From Saint Malo). Béranger's song provides Jouy with a tune, but it also becomes a target. Jouy modifies Béranger's lyrics and uses them to criticise the old songwriters, transforming the hypocritical celebration of the

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[13] An "unique tune" is to be understood as a "type" in opposition to the notion of "token".

[14] Herbert Schneider counted 220 tunes for Béranger corpus, but he used the edition of *Musique des chansons de Béranger*. He used exactly two versions of this edition, that of 1845 and that of 1856. It should be noted that from one edition to the next the number of tunes given for the same song varies. Thus, in the Perrotin edition (*Oeuvres de P. J. De Béranger*), which we use, only one tune is given for the song "Rosette" (*"Air nouveau par M. de Beauplan"* / New Air by Mr de Beauplan), whereas in the *Musique des chansons de Béranger* edition three tunes are given for this same song (*"Musique de M. Amédée de Beauplan"* / Music by Mr Amédée de Beauplan, *"Musique de M. Guichard Printemps"* / Music by Mr Guichard Printemps, *"Musique de M. Charles Maurice"* / Music by Mr Charles Maurice).

lower social classes (*"vive les gueux"*, long live the beggars), into a denunciation of its authors (*"à bas les vieux"*, down with the old people). He also criticises the type of song that promotes them. The songwriters of the *Caveau* are portrayed as *"rabâcheurs"* (wastrels), while Désaugiers is caricatured as a *"bourgeois"* incapable of understanding the true misery of the people. The migration of tunes is employed for irreverent parody and as an aesthetic-political statement: Jules Jouy promotes the "modern" song, even if he employs the same techniques as his predecessors, including the use of *timbre*. Despite the temporal distance and the ironic relationship involved, Béranger remains a reference diluted with Jules Jouy's eclectic borrowings.

Regarding the Jules Jouy corpus and the vaudeville corpus, they share a small number of unique tunes, specifically only 10. Moreover, unlike the connection observed between Jules Jouy and Béranger, this association seems rather co-incidental. These shared tunes are well-known songs such as revolutionary songs ("The *Carmagnole*", "The *Marseillaise*") which are present in the Jouy corpus due to its political nature. There is also an old but widely known tune *"J'ai du bon tabac"* (I Have Good Tobacco), as well as vaudeville tunes that Jules Jouy did not directly borrow. For instance, the tune *"Le choix que fait tout le village"* (The Choice That the Whole Village Makes), composed by Joseph-Denis Doche originally came from a vaudeville written by Favart. However, Jules Jouy borrowed it from a later song by Paul Émile Debraux, known for its refrain *"T'en souviens-tu?"* (Do You Remember?). Jouy used this tune under the name *"Air : T'en souviens-tu ?"* (Air: Do You Remember?) in the collection *Les Chansons de l'année 1887*.

The vaudeville corpus and Béranger corpus share a significant connection. Béranger shares 72 unique tunes with the vaudeville corpus, which can be attributed to his immense popularity during the July Monarchy. While paying tribute to Béranger, vaudeville writers, often also driven by financial considerations, capitalised on his popularity by incorporating his songs and their tunes into their plays (see *Le Tailleur et la Fée* (The Tailor and the Fairy) (1831)) or by creating couplets based on Béranger's songs. For instance in the vaudeville play *Une nuit au Palais-Royal* (A Night at the Palais-Royal) (1830), the tune of *"La Sabotière"* (The Clog Dance) is used to compose a song whose metrical structure and the onomatopoeia (*"pan, pan"*) of the refrain are the same to Béranger's song *"La Fortune"* (Fortune), which is also sung to the tune of *"La Sabotière"*. The parody is obvious, as the edition of the vaudeville explicitly mentions the tune as *"Air : De la Sabotiére* [sic] *(Fortune de Béranger)"* (Air: The Clog Dance (Béranger's Fortune). Overall, vaudeville writers aimed to capitalise on popular tunes to ensure the success of their productions and Béranger did the same. However, popularity was not the only criterion for Béranger and the vaudeville writers. Strategic choices were also made on the basis of the song's form and themes (Leterrier 2013, pp. 49–50). Béranger was inspired by the same sources as the vaudeville writers, participated in the same singing societies and shared a common culture with them. This proximity led him to use tunes originally composed for vaudeville, such as Tourterelle's *"Il me faudra quitter l'empire"* (I Will Have to Leave the Empire) or *"À soixante ans, on ne doit pas remettre"* (At Sixty, One Should Not Put Off). The influence between the vaudeville genre and

Béranger seems reciprocal, each borrowing from and drawing inspiration from the other.

6   Origin of the Tunes and Key Composers

Regarding the classification of tunes according to their original genre, we established five main categories. The first category, called "vaudeville", encompasses tunes originally created for vaudeville. The second category, "song", includes all tunes composed specifically as standalone songs. By song we mean any text set to music in a non-dramatic, non-sacred setting. This category covers a wide range of genres such as romance, the drinking song and the political song. The third category, *"art lyrique"*, consists of tunes performed on stage with operatic voices. This category includes opera tunes, *opéra-bouffon* tunes, *opéra-féérie* tunes, *tragédie-lyrique* tunes and *opéra-comique* tunes. The fourth category, "others", comprises tunes that are difficult to classify or whose exact nature is often unknown, such as *"air anglais"* (English Air), *"air populaire"* (Popular Air), as well as tunes that don't fit into any other category like *"air de valse"* (Waltz Air), *"air de carillon"* (Carillon Air), *"air d'hymne religieux"* (Religious Hymn Air). Finally, the fifth category, "genres not assigned", groups tunes for which we don't have information about their original genre.[15]

Béranger's selection of tunes demonstrates his ability to transcend genre boundaries, as he draws inspiration from both the song genre and the vaudeville and *art lyrique* genres.[16] However the song genre serves as the primary source of tunes, as Béranger borrows from *Caveau* songwriters such as Laujon and Désaugiers, from composers of fashionable romances such as Beauplan, Romagnési, and Vimeux, as well as contemporary political "hits" such as Adolphe Vogel's *"Air des Trois Couleurs"* (The Air of Three Colours). It is worth noting that a significant portion of the song genre is also comprised of newly composed tunes specifically for Béranger's songs by composers such as Wilhem, Meissonier, Bérat and Karr. Furthermore, the data presented in Figure 1[17] confirm our assumption that Béranger relies heavily on vaudeville tunes as well. Approximately 27.16% of the tunes in the Béranger corpus are sourced from vaudeville, emphasising the strong connection between song and popular theatre (Schneider 1998, p. 114). These borrowings include tunes from vaudeville composers such as Doche, Tourterelle, Darondeau. On the other hand, *Art lyrique* plays a relatively smaller role, accounting for only 16.12% of the borrowings. Nonetheless, these tunes were created by renowned composers from the previous century such as Grétry, Dezède, and Méhul, as well as more contemporary and fashionable composers such as Boieldieu.

In contrast to Béranger, Jules Jouy's work exhibits an unbalanced distribution across genres (Figure 2). More than three quarters of tune names in

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[15] See Section 4

[16] This is also a phenomenon that can be observed in the genre choices of the texts themselves, which borrow as much from the ode as from the romance or the drinking song (Leterrier 2013, p. 42).

[17] The graph, and all those that follow, were made using the Python Matplotlib library (Hunter and Team n.d.).
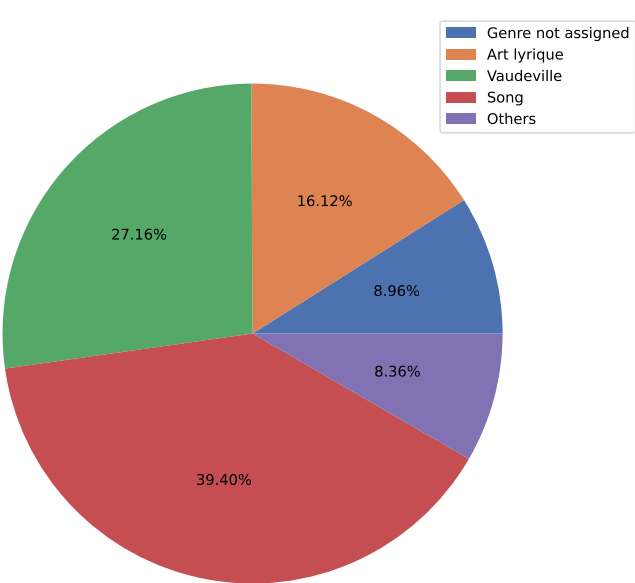
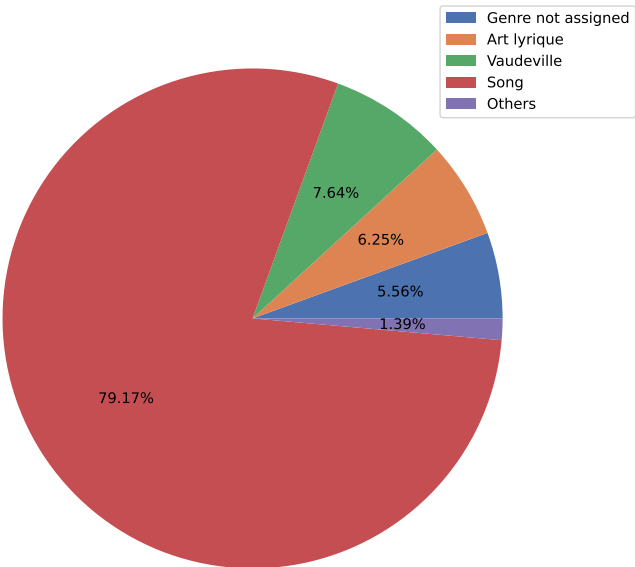Figure 1: Original tune genres in the Béranger subcorpus of the song corpus

Figure 2: Original tune genres in the Jouy subcorpus of the song corpus

Jouy's work originate from the song repertoire. Jouy heavily relied on popular *café-concert* songs for his choices, drawing from successful composers such as Doria, Planquette and Pourny, as well as more traditional songwriters such as Colmance and Désaugiers. Interestingly, some of *café-concert* tunes come also from songs for which Jouy provided the lyrics, such as the tune by J. M. Rouvier composed for Jule Jouy's song *"Le bureau de placement"* (The Employment Office). Regarding vaudeville, there are some enduring classics by Joseph-Denis Doche that survived until the end of the century. However, as the genre of vaudeville with couplets had fallen out of fashion and gradually disappeared by the 1860s (Gidel 1986, p. 50), it no longer served as a primary source of cabaret production by the end of the 19th century. Borrowings from the *art lyrique* genre are even more limited, but one notable figure stands out: Jacques Offenbach. Jouy incorporated tunes from Offenbach's works such as *"La ronde du Brésilien"* (The *Ronde* of the Brazilian) from *La Vie Parisienne* (Parisian Life) and *"Air des deux hommes d'armes"* (Gendarmes' Duet) from *Geneviève de Brabant* (Genevieve of Brabant). The latter tune, added in the play's second version in 1867, achieved tremendous international success and was later adapted by the US Marine Corps as its official anthem (Raph 1986, p. 357).

When examining the vaudeville corpus in contrast to the Béranger and Jouy sub-corpora, we observe a significant borrowing from the *art lyrique* genre with 24.66% of the tunes coming from this repertoire.[18] This relatively high percentage can be attributed to the close relationship between vaudeville and *opéra-comique*, as both genres originated in the *"théâtres de la foire"* (fairground theatres). In the case of opera, there was a particular fascination with internationally renowned composers such as Rossini. A "Rossinimania" swept through Paris in the 1820s when the composer settled in the city and became the director of the *Théâtre Italien*, and this influence continued to affect vaudeville production in the 1830s.[19] Moreover, the tradition of opera parody, which had been prominent in the 17th and 18th centuries, remained widespread in the early 19th century. As a result, the vaudeville predominantly includes tunes from highly successful operas such as *La gazza ladra* (The Thieving Magpie) (Rossini), *Freischütz* (The Freeshooter) (Weber) and *Robert-le-Diable* (Robert the Devil) (Meyerbeer).[20]

The insightful information presented in Figure 3 highlights the significant presence of tunes composed specifically for vaudeville, accounting for 26.84% of the corpus. This suggests that vaudeville tunes may even be the primary source of tunes. However, since the percentages for *art lyrique* and vaudeville are very

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[18] Literary and musical research generally agrees that *art lyrique*, and more precisely opera and *opéra-comique*, constitutes a significant reservoir of *timbre* for the production of vaudeville. The merit of our survey is, however, to evaluate this borrowing precisely, based on a sample of 124 plays.

[19] It is also called in French *"rossinisme"*. Catherine Authier studied this phenomenon in her 2007 contribution to the third congress of the *Société des études romantiques et dix-neuviémistes entitled "Le rossinisme : une composante italienne de la vie parisienne"* (see https://serd.hypotheses.org/la-vie-parisienne).

[20] The word "parody" is being taken in a broad sense (Le Blanc 2014, pp. 21–22, 547ff.). It should be noted that there is also a practice of opera and *opéra-comique* fragments in vaudeville, a rather rare phenomenon in our corpus but one which exists and which differs from the practice of *timbre* since there is an exact repetition of an extract of opera or *opéra-comique*.
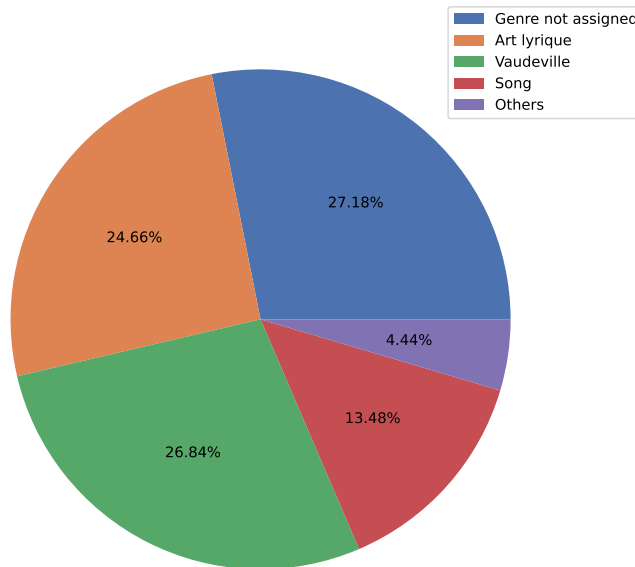
Figure 3: Original tune genres in the vaudeville corpus[21]

close (24.66% and 26.84%, respectively), and a relatively high percentage of tunes remains unassigned to a specific genre (27.18%), it is more appropriate to acknowledge both *art lyrique* and vaudeville as equally important sources for the vaudeville genre. These findings underscore the significance of these new tunes created exclusively for vaudeville; an aspect that has been largely overlooked in scientific research. The limited number of new tunes per play or their absence may explain the lack of interest in this area. But who composes these new tunes, and how can their use be explained? The main composer responsible for creating new tunes for vaudeville is Joseph-Denis Doche, a prominent figure in the world of song and theatre. Joseph-Denis Doche was a member of the *Caveau* and serves as a conductor at the *Théâtre du Vaudeville*. Other composers involved in crafting new tunes include Blanchard, Heudier, Piccini, Darondeau and Adam. All of them had roles as conductors, arrangers, or musicians in vaudeville theatres. Their close association with theatre directors, vaudeville writers, and their expertise in vaudeville music likely led to their involvement in composing new music for vaudeville productions.

In contrast, the song genre takes a clear third place as a source of tunes, contributing only 13.48% of the corpus, following *art lyrique* and vaudeville. Given that tunes from *art lyrique* or vaudeville were composed specifically for the stage, it can be assumed that certain of these tunes are more suitable for reuse in vaudeville than song tunes. This hypothesis finds support in Capelle's

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[21] When the same tune was used several times in a vaudeville play, either for instance to repeat a refrain already heard, or to set new verses to music, it has been taken into account only once, so that it is not over-represented.

foreword to the fourth edition of *La Clé du Caveau* (Capelle 1848, p. xiv), where he explains that vaudeville writers, conductors and theatre directors requested additional tunes for choruses and to accompany the entry and exit of the characters in their dramatic productions. Unsurprisingly, the majority of tunes added by Capelle in response to their request were opera, *opéra-comique* and vaudeville tunes, rather than song tunes (Capelle 1848, pp. 193–208, VI & VII Division).

7   Tune Reuse and Hits

Not all tunes enjoyed the same popularity. Consequently, we were intrigued by the potential existence of "hits" within our corpus, referring to tunes that have achieved great success and have been reused extensively. The histogram depicted below illustrates the number of reuses on the x-axis (indicating the frequency of reuse, for example, once, twice, etc.), and the number of reused tunes on the y-axis (denoting the count of tunes are reused once, twice, etc.).

Figure 4 reveals that the majority of the surveyed tunes appear only once. The overall pattern indicates a declining trend, suggesting that very few tunes have attained widespread reuse to the point of becoming hits. However, within the vaudeville corpus, three tunes clearly stand out, having been reused in 26, 28, and 31 plays, respectively.[22] Let's focus on the tune that appears in 31 plays: *"J'en guette un petit de mon âge"* (I'm Looking Out for a Little One My Own Age). This composition by Joseph-Denis Doche was originally created for the vaudeville play *Les Amazones et les Scythes* (The Amazons and the Scythians) written by Barré, Desfontaines and Radet. Although the vaudeville itself was only moderately successful, the tune *"J'en guette un petit de mon âge"* proved very popular. Newspapers often highlighted it as an emblematic vaudeville tune (*Le Charivari* 1862, November 12, p. 2; *Le Journal amusant* 1874, September 26, p. 2). This success can be attributed partly to the popularity of its composer, Joseph-Denis Doche, within the song and vaudeville milieu. But the tune's intrinsic qualities also played a role. It is a cheerful and lively tune composed in major key and performed *allegro*. Additionally, it follows one of the common metrical patterns employed by songwriters and vaudeville writers, featuring an eight-line stanza with eight syllables per line—a formal characteristic that probably contributed to its frequent reuse.[23] It should be emphasised that the vaudeville tune encompasses not only its musical aspects, but also significant textual features. The tune is closely linked to a specific verse structure and to a particular text and its meaning. In the case of the tune *"J'en guette un petit de mon âge"*, the original lyrics seem to have played a key role in its popularity. The lyrics describe a young Amazon dreaming of love in a conquering way—a scene

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[22] For the vaudeville corpus, we did not take into account the repetition of the same tune into one single play, but only counted the reused tunes from play to play.

[23] The strophic scheme for a given tune is called a *"coupe"* in French. For example, the tune *"Où vont tous ces preux chevaliers"* (Where Are All These Brave Knights Going) is suitable for a stanza of 12 lines of 8 syllables each (Capelle 1848, p. 61). According to Capelle, the 8-verse *coupe* is the most common, and, according to the Gidel study, the 8-syllable line is the most common in vaudeville (Capelle 1848, p. 70; Gidel 1986, p. 12).
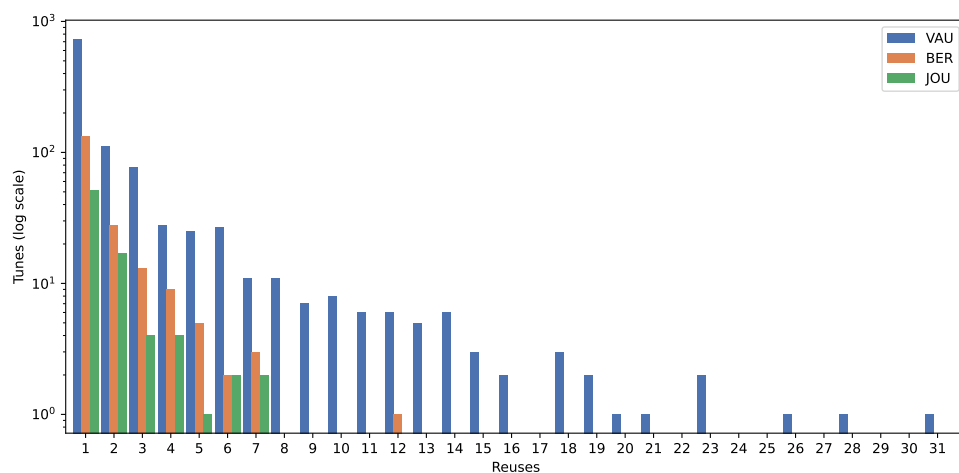
Figure 4: Tune reuse

that embraces an upside-down worldview much to the audience's amusement.[24] Because of this passage, the tune became associated with love scenes and was therefore widely used in these contexts (*Le Monde illustré* 1857, April 18, p. 16).

   The Béranger corpus has a remarkable hit that has been reused twelve times: the *"Air du Vaudeville de la Robe et les Bottes"* (Vaudeville Air From The Dress and the Boots), also known as *"Air de la Robe et des bottes"* (Air From The Dress and the Boots), or *"Air du vaudeville de la petite gouvernante"* (Vaudeville Air From The Little Governess).[25] Originally composed as the closing tune for *La Robe et les Bottes* (The Dress and the Boots) in 1810, it was reused in the play *La Petite Gouvernante* (The Little Governess) in 1811. Like the tune *"J'en guette un petit de mon âge"*, its metrical pattern consists of a stanza of eight lines, each comprising eight syllables. Its composer is none other than Joseph-Denis Doche, who can be considered a master of hit production. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, Doche played a leading role as a vaudeville composer. Notably, he was one of the few composers to publish his vaudeville music in a dedicated collection, *La Musette du vaudeville* (1822). Interestingly, the popularity of the vaudeville air from The Dress and the Boots does not seem to derive primarily from its original lyrics, but rather from its musical qualities alone. The press referred to it as late as the 1890s, acknowledging it as a typical vaudeville tune (*Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 1894, March 24, p. 1).

   In the case of Jules Jouy, the number of tune reuses is often lower compared to vaudeville (probably due to the smaller size of the corpus). The maximum number of uses for a single tune reaches seven, indicating a relatively limited

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[24] At the time, the motif of reversing roles between men and women was often mocked for its supposed absurdity but also sometimes appreciated or criticised for its erotic potential. Regarding the play *Les Amazones et les Scythes*, see the article dedicated to it in *L'Esprit des journaux français et étrangers*, vol. 2 (1812).

[25] Jean Touchard and Herbert Schneider make the same point (Touchard 1968, p. 135; Schneider 1998, p. 123).

range. Upon examining the specific tunes involved, we find that they are indeed notable "hits" from the *café-concert* scene, such as *"En revenant de la r'vue"* (On the Way Back From the Military Review) and *"Le bureau de placement"*. Moreover, a distinctive aspect of Jouy's work is his tendency to reuse successful tunes that he co-composed with Aristide Bruant. These tunes, in particular, are employed multiple times, with *"Mad'moiselle, écoutez-moi donc!"* (Miss, Listen to Me, Please!) being reused six times and *"L'Enterrement"* (The Funeral) being reused three times. These repetitions generate an autotextual use of the tune, producing familiar comic or quotational effects that can be observed throughout the Jouy corpus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the TIMBRE database provides a valuable tool for the comparison and statistical exploration of a vast data set, enabling us to uncover patterns and phenomena that would remain hidden if we were content to analyse individual cases. By adopting a global approach, we were able to identify important aspects such as the distribution of song genres and the extent of their popularity, which would be overlooked in a song-by-song or couplet-by-couplet analysis. Therefore, this database makes it possible to study the cultural history of performing arts and leads to a fruitful dialogue between distant reading and close reading, as illustrated in particular by the analysis of parodic uses of Beranger's song in the Jules Jouy's corpus (see Section 5). It is also worth emphasising that tunes are complex entities, as they are dynamic in nature, circulating and undergoing name changes. Many aspects of tunes remain unclear and require further clarification. Consequently, this first systematic approach needs to be expanded by increasing the amount of data and refining the methodology. The inclusion of musical scores to complement and enrich existing information is a potential means of improving the data. In addition, we also plan to further explore, using static means, the formal aspects of tune reuse, such as the utilisation of metrical patterns.

Acknowledgments

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