Study day

What music for the ring?

Circus music from the 18th century to the present day

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Chaire ICiMa (innovation Chair around circus and puppet), Circus Arts Research Platform Cnac, Châlons-en-Champagne,
With the support of the CERHIC, University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne

"One wonders why the circus audience, who can hear jazz or trendy tunes at any time of the day, at home, on the radio, would ask the circus orchestra for the same versions?"
Marcel Dhenin, Le Cirque dans l’Univers, 1959

The advent of the modern circus gave music a privileged place in the composition of the show. Until the 20th century, because of its military influences, it emphasised the movement and highlighted the prowess: music seemed to be an extension of the body. This is why, for many historians and artists, the relation is one of dependence.

When the economic crisis that the circus experienced at the end of the 1970s - a period marked by the democratisation of the audio-visual sector - forced it to re-evaluate how it was operating, the orchestra became the adjustment variable, now replaceable with a soundtrack. However, about ten years later, the circus avant-garde, like Cirque Plume, reintroduced live musicians into the limelight. However, the music has changed: moving away from the canons of traditional composition in the circus, from military music to jazz and other dance music during the 20th century, it seems to have freed itself from the shackles of what might otherwise be expected. From now on, it is composed by musicians who are only rarely conducted by a conductor, formerly "stars" of the big tops, and it adapts to the aesthetics of a show conceived more as a global and coherent form.

Mostly non-verbal, the circus leaves it to the music to anchor the action in an atmosphere, in a scene or in a particular setting, to give it character, even depth. As the first accompanist in circus disciplines, it has become indispensable for the development of dramaturgical concepts. This is why the history of the circus cannot be approached without observing this major component of its evolution, as evidenced by the dossiers devoted to this subject in circus magazines, as well as the academic work dedicated to the subject. However, apart from Luc Charles-Dominique's book, Les "Bandes" de violons en Europe, cinq siècles

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1 "The circus cannot obliterate its dependence on music", Cougole, Odile, "Musique et cirque" in Arts de la piste, n°27, Paris : Hors les murs, 01/2003, p. 15. "Everything suggests that the circus and music couple have been involved with one another since prehistoric times", Van Schaijk, Loes, quoted by Ancion, Laurent, "Connait-on la chanson ?", in CIRQ EN CAPITALE : Le magazine de la vie circassienne bruxelloise, n° 15, Bruxelles : Espace Catastrophe, 2018, p. 14.

2 Cougole, Odile, "De l’orchestre à la bande-son" in Arts de la piste, n°27, op. cit., p. 18-19.

3 Among them : Raymond Brunel for Bouglione, Merle Evans for Barnum & Bailey, Carmino d’Angelo for Médano, Pinder, the Festival du Cirque de Demain et de la Première Rampe, etc.

4 See the "Cirque et musique" ("Circus and Music") bibliography developed by the Cnac resource centre.

5 See the doctoral thesis of Loes van Schaijk (professor at Codarts) in preparation at the University of Arts in Rotterdam on the contribution of music to the circus; the thesis of Kim Baston, Scoring performance: the function of music in contemporary theater and circus, submitted at La Trobe University, Australia, in 2008, etc.
de transferts culturels (Turnhout : Brépols, 2018) and the recent symposium "Les spectacles forains en Europe, identités et circulation des pratiques : musique, théatre, danse, acrobatie et marionnettes, 1660-1830" ("Fairground shows in Europe, identities and the flow of practices: music, theatre, dance, acrobatics and puppets, 1660-1830") which attempt to observe the music of acrobats and rope dancers, most of the research undertaken is devoted to the contemporary era. Historical shortcomings, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, which are seen as a blinkered perspective on the subject, hinder our understanding of the circus forms of the time. In this area, the availability and exploitation of sources is a priority project.

Faced with the considerable commitment of musical art to circus creation, and this has been the case for centuries, it is undoubtedly necessary to return to the foundations of the relationship, by examining the existence of a "circus music". Assuming that we could identify a music whose composition would be determined by its contribution to the circus, what are the specificities that technically define it? Can we recognise the invariants that would make it possible to reveal an identity characterised by its evolution in the ring? In the continuity of the "Musique et cirque" ("Music and the Circus") study day, organised by the Musicology Department of the University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne on the 3rd of December 2018, this event aims to explore musical compositions and their interpretations through the circus forms, from the emergence of the modern circus to our days. The period is deliberately extended because the ambition is to capture the changes in the circus music genre. Indeed, we suggest that its nature and representations are in fact historically developed, in direct relation with the practical and aesthetic transformations that animate the circus arts.

Therefore, we will focus on the historical approach\textsuperscript{6}. The main purpose is to make progress in defining the circus music genre, while avoiding the pitfall of essentialisation. The historical process as well as the contextual precision will highlight the place of music in the history of the circus, but also the importance of the relationship that it develops with the disciplines in the ring. Without presupposing a hierarchical relationship between the two arts, the role attributed to music, its place in composition as well as in space, its investment, the instrumental training required, its relationship to contemporary musical forms influence, or even transform, its characteristics.

If circus music reveals, at the heart of its composition, an identity brand, its musical parameters induce an equally specific direction. In the days of orchestra conductors, many stories describe them as "sideways"\textsuperscript{8} and versatile, like Merle Evans who, it is said, conducted facing the ring, with only one hand, while playing the cornet\textsuperscript{8}.

While conducting is no longer really required in contemporary creations, as musical groups are closer to the pop group, to the "hand", sometimes to the soloist, attention to the circus ring remains an essential condition for the conception of circus music. It is often a question of providing, within the musical writing itself, the spaces adapted to the uncertainty inherent in the acrobatic gesture. In this context, it would be interesting to observe, with the tools of musicology, the means used in composition or arrangement that offer a certain latitude to the circus artist, or that extend their performance.

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\textsuperscript{6} Organised as part of the CIRESPI programme (ANR 14-CE31-0017) by CERHIC (URCA) and the IGMa Chair (IIM de Charleville-Mézières), on the 19th and 20th of March 2019.

\textsuperscript{7} In addition to the conference "Musique et cirque, une relation féconde" ("Music and the circus, a fruitful relationship"), organised by the Paul Valéry University in two meetings (October 2013 and November 2014).

\textsuperscript{8} Carmino d'Angelo defines himself as a "sideways conductor ", both looking at his musicians and at the ring. See Bailly, Olivier, "Carmino d'Angelo, toujours en piste", in Arts de la piste, n°27, op. cit., p. 37.

There is a lot of evidence highlighting the ability of music to become a support that contributes to the success of the figures\textsuperscript{10}. The connection that the body develops with the musical element provides an approach regarding the practice that would benefit from observation, particularly for pedagogical reasons.

Moreover, refusing to restrict ourselves to the exclusive circus point of view over music, we will also wonder what the circus does to the musician, by giving the latter the opportunity to speak. If, for some, the circus offers a form of freedom\textsuperscript{13}, for others, it makes it possible to return to the fundamentals of musical practice\textsuperscript{12}.

The questions related to the function adopted by music, scenography, dramaturgy, decoration, etc., will make it possible to observe the different modalities of relationships that can develop between music and circus disciplines, and their effects\textsuperscript{13}. At a time when the circus is opening up to other arts, especially theatre and dance, and sometimes to storytelling, does music retain its status as the first accompanist?

These aesthetic reflections raise new questions about the musician's place in the creative process. The music occupations provide valuable opportunities to illustrate the circus context, particularly in terms of expertise, the distribution of authority and the negotiation of artistic ideas in the work\textsuperscript{14}.

The abundance of subjects that arise from the observation of music in the ring leads us to set aside certain aspects that would require a full study. Thus, the figure of the musical clown will not be addressed during this study day, nor will the pedagogical question of music learning by circus performers, which is not part of the historical approach of the meeting.

There will be four main areas of activity during the day:

- History of circus music: original music, accompaniment, improvisation
- Musicological study of the music for the ring - which may include the question of the big top, its constraints and its acoustics
- The musician's place in the circus team
- Relationship between music, body and movement

The communication proposals (French or English) may be cross-disciplinary and fall into several categories. Not exceeding 300 words in length, they should be submitted to Cyril Thomas (cyril.thomas[at]cnac.fr) and Karine Saroh (secretariatchairecima[at]cnac.fr) before November 25\textsuperscript{th} 2019, accompanied by a biography of about ten lines, mentioning the main scientific publications and/or artistic activities.

\textsuperscript{10} In 1966, Gustave Frejaville explains that "[acrobats] generally have their special score and always work on the same tune: the slightest change would be able to modify their reflexes and disturb the safety of their performance", Frejaville, Gustave, "La musique au cirque", in Le Cirque dans l'Univers, n° 61, Vincennes : Club du Cirque français.1966, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{11} "I couldn't have dreamed of a better life as a musician," said Robert Mny [Cirque Plume], "we make the music we want, under a big top, to serve a show, it's heaven", quoted by Letort, Bruno, "La musique de cirque, une écriture en mouvement", in Arts de la piste, n°27, op. cit., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{12} "They find in the circus the very essence of their art, which requires listening, risk and exchange with an audience", Guy, Jean-Michel, "Musique: simple accompagnement de numéro ou fondement esthétique? ", in Arts de la piste, n°27, op. cit., p. 26.

\textsuperscript{13} An attempt at classification is initiated by Jean-Michel Guy, in ibid., p. 26-27.

\textsuperscript{14} Marc-Antoine Boutin's PhD thesis in preparation at the Université de Montréal et Sorbonne Université focuses on the music-creation processes and the music occupations in contemporary circus. See also Boutin, Marc-Antoine, Exercer le métier de compositeur au cirque contemporain. Approches musicales et sociales du travail créateur, master's thesis presented at the Université de Montréal's Faculty of Music in 2018.
To consult the bibliography: https://icima.hypotheses.org/3630

**Organisation and scientific committee:**
Karine Saroh, Doctor of Performing Arts, Scientific Secretary ICiMa Chair
Cyril Thomas, Head of Research at Cnac
Bertrand Porot, Professor of Musicology, CERHIC, University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne
Marc-Antoine Boutin, PhD student in musicology, Université de Montréal et Sorbonne Université

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