



THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH FOLK SONGS AND THEIR CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the study of the history of the formation and the cultural foundations of French folk songs. The work highlights the origin of folk songs, their development during different historical periods, their regional and social characteristics, as well as their influence on national culture. The article analyzes the genres of folk songs, their rhythmic and melodic features, their connection with religious and secular musical traditions, and the musical reflection of the life and values of the people. It also shows the significance of French musical heritage and folk creativity in modern cultural development.

Keywords: folk songs, lyric poetry, music, folklore, traditions, rhythm, poetry, troubadours, trouvères.

Introduction

It is known from history that regional customs and dialects have been passed down from generation to generation through folk songs. For example, the unique musical forms, folk dances, and musical instruments of regions such as Brittany and Corsica have played an important role in preserving the historical and cultural identity of those areas. In this way, songs contribute to strengthening national identity, that is, the uniqueness and cultural memory of the French people.



When speaking about French folk songs, they can be seen not only as a form of musical art but also as an integral part of national culture. They reflect the emotional world of the people, their values, and their historical consciousness. Each song can be considered a musical expression of love, courage, labor, and historical events, through which generations have been able to feel and understand the experiences of the past.

One of the oldest and richest layers of cultural heritage is French national folk songs. Their roots go back to the folklore traditions of the Celtic, Gallic, and Frankish tribes. These songs occupied an important place in the daily life, work, celebrations, and religious ceremonies of people of that time. Through folk music, people expressed their emotions, their love and sorrows, and historical events; moreover, these songs also served as a means of unity and communication among people.

Although the earliest written sources date back to the 15th century, literary and visual sources show that interest in music had already been firmly established since the period of the Roman Empire. During this time, music and songs played a significant role in family and religious life.

The formation of French folk songs developed through the secular music of the Middle Ages and gradually became a distinct genre. These songs embody regional traditions (such as those of Brittany and Corsica), the polyphony characteristic of the medieval period, and the influence of court culture, creating a rich cultural heritage that combines lyric poetry, dance rhythms, and historical melodies.

The main stages of formation date back to ancient times and the Middle Ages. Their foundation is based on the folklore traditions of the Gauls and the Franks. Beginning from the 9th century, a popular form of polyphonic singing started to develop, which differed from the strict Gregorian chant of the church.

(Choir – the singing of a song by a group of people together, or the group itself.) The culture of troubadours and trouvères is characteristic of the 11th–13th centuries. It was during this period that the tradition of secular singing developed in the southern (Occitania) and northern regions of France. These songs were rich in themes of love and the spirit of chivalry. (Troubadours were poets and composers who lived in Southern France. Trouvères were similar to troubadours but were active in Northern France.)



The Renaissance period includes the 15th–16th centuries. During this time, songs became popular both among ordinary people and in royal courts, laying the foundation for the development of the chanson genre. Regional diversity has always been one of the important features. In Breton songs and in Corsican traditions, unique forms such as male polyphonic singing known as **paghjella** emerged. These folklore examples are distinguished by emotional expression, themes of love, as well as laments (complaintes) and dance rhythms (such as circle songs and branles).

French folk songs are divided into various genres: lyrical songs, songs about love and separation, lament songs called complaintes, rondes and other dance songs, *chansons de métiers* (craftsmen's songs), songs dedicated to calendar festivals such as New Year songs, as well as work songs and songs on military and historical themes.

Among ancient folk songs, there are also *chansons de geste*, which are connected with Gallic and Celtic beliefs and narrate historical events. In the lyrical genre, pastorals-songs that idealize rural life-occupy a special place. In love songs, themes of unrequited love, separation, and sorrow are often dominant. Play songs for children are also widely popular.

The music and lyrics of folk songs are closely interconnected; their melodies are delicate and flexible, and they are usually composed in a two- or three-part rhythm. Often, the melodies include repeated words that may not have a specific meaning but enhance the harmony of the tune. These songs are closely related to dances and, in ancient times, were performed together with various choral, group, and pair dances, including different dance forms such as the gigue, bourrée, rigodon, farandole, branle, and passepied.

Along with the development of these songs, church music also evolved. With the spread of Christianity, religious songs that combined local folk traditions began to appear. From the 9th century onward, Gregorian chant became widespread, and the use of polyphony through organum began to develop. At the same time, secular music-especially the creativity of traveling jongleurs and troubadours-played an important role in expressing the life of the people. Troubadours and trouvères (11th-14th centuries) combined knightly and folk music, creating a new form of secular lyric poetry in Provence and southern France.

French folk music has always been distinguished by its regional diversity. For example, the Breton people are known for their special traditional instruments such as the *biniou* (bagpipe) and the *bombarde*, while in Corsica the art of male polyphonic singing known as *paghjella* has developed. In these songs, themes often include the praise of heroes, expressions of courage, the narration of historical events, as well as satirical and mournful songs.

The following table presents the stages of the formation of folk songs, their cultural foundations, and examples related to them:

Stage	Features/ Characteristics	Cultural foundation	Song titles
Middle Ages (9th-13th centuries)	Oral creativity, court poetry	Chivalry, courtly love	Can vei la lauzeta mover (Bernart de Ventadorn), A l'entrada del temps clar
Feudal Period (13th-15th centuries)	Reflects people's everyday life	Peasantry, ceremonies	Pastourelle, Se je ch Reflects people's everyday life ant
Renaissance (16th-century)	Development of polyphonic music	Humanism, artistic development	Tant que vivray, Il est bel et bon
17th-18th centuries	Fusion of folk and court music	Dance and festival traditions	Ah! vous dirai-je, maman, Sur le pont d'Avignon
French Revolution (late 18th-century)	Patriotism, freedom	Political changes	La Marseillaise, Ça ira
19th-century	Collection and preservation of folklore	National identity	Au clair de la lune, Frère Jacques
20th-century and contemporary period	Modern interpretations	Global culture	Plaisir d'amour, La vie en rose

At the same time, folk songs also shape historical memory and social consciousness. For example, people become familiar with ideas of heroism, courage, and justice through historical songs such as *chansons de geste*. The everyday aspects of people's lives, the hardships of labor, and the value of work are reflected in the songs of the working people. In this way, songs serve not only as music but also as a moral and educational tool.

Folk music also contributes to the development of artistic aesthetics. Melodies, rhythms, and singing styles help to develop people's artistic taste and combine poetry with rhythmic thinking. Therefore, French folk songs represent a synthesis



of music, poetry, and dramaturgy and form one of the fundamental layers of national culture.

In addition, folk songs ensure social unity and cultural continuity. Songs performed during festivals, traditions, and work ceremonies have served as a means of bringing people together and strengthening their national spirit. In this way, French folk songs represent not only a historical and artistic heritage but also a center of culture that expresses social and cultural solidarity.

Folk songs are the spiritual foundation of national culture, through which history, love, labor, courage, and values are passed from generation to generation. At the same time, they promote national identity, cultural heritage, and respect for art.

In conclusion, French folk songs are not only a form of musical creativity but also a reflection of cultural heritage and historical and social life. Through songs about people's emotions, values, traditions, work and festive ceremonies, love and separation, they have been passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, these songs occupy a unique and significant place in the history of French culture and art.

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