§1 Les Inrockuptibles, or Les Inrocks as it is popularly known, was launched by Christian Fevret and a group of collaborators in March 1986 as a bimonthly magazine with an initial print-run of 3,000 copies. The magazine takes its name, a spoonerism/contrepèterie on the title of the US television series The Untouchables (Les Incorruptibles), from a rock programme broadcast during the early 1980s on CVS Versailles, one of the pirate radio stations (“radios libres”) which were legalised following François Mitterrand’s presidential victory in 1981. A key aim of the new publication was to provide coverage of rock groups not dealt with by the established music press in France, namely Best and Rock&Folk. Following a revamp in 1988, Les Inrockuptibles increasingly covered other cultural forms such as cinema, literature and photography, particularly in interviews with prominent figures. Having achieved a circulation of 50,000, the magazine began to appear monthly in 1992. By 1995, it was felt that the magazine was starting to “tourner en rond”, so the “indé-chic” monthly was transformed into a cultural weekly alongside Technikart and the long-established Télérama. A major development was the inclusion of a section on contemporary politics and society: the former Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard was the magazine’s first political cover star in May 1995. The magazine’s social and political activism was highlighted by the 2004 publication of a high-profile petition, “Appel contre la guerre à l’intelligence”, targeting the “anti-intellectualisme d’État” of the Raffarin government. Within the context of a challenging magazine market, the title was acquired by the banker Matthieu Pigasse in 2009. While developing its online offering, in September 2010 shortly before its twenty-fifth anniversary, Les Inrockuptibles launched a new-look print version / “nouvelle formule”, aiming to make inroads on the French news magazine market and attract more readers in their thirties.

§2 Where music and cultural coverage is concerned, existing accounts of Les Inrockuptibles have highlighted the ways in which the magazine subverted the traditional high / popular culture dichotomy. According to former deputy editor Sylvain Bourmeau, the magazine adopted an “attitude mélioriste” which sought to “appliquer aux formes non légitimes socialement ou esthétiquement d’art, les outils de la critique noble exactement de la même manière que si c’était du grand art”. Matthieu Dalle also highlights how, in its early years, the magazine was already combining the popular music genres of rock, chanson française and a form of pop, exemplified by Étienne Daho, which emphasized the values of l’écriture, la mélodie and l’enthousiasme.

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As Barbara Lebrun observes, music journalism in France has in recent years become less compartmentalised where forms and genres are concerned, favouring greater plurality\(^8\). While *Chorus (Les Cahiers de la chanson)*, strongly associated with the defence of French and Francophone *chanson*, closed in 2009\(^9\), the following year saw the launch of the short-lived magazine *Serge*, a title which, as Lebrun points out, effectively cast Serge Gainsbourg as a consensual emblematic figure within French popular music (IPP). The magazine’s subtitle, “là où les chansons se rencontrent”, also emphasised the inclusion of a wide variety of musical genres\(^10\). *Les Inrockuptibles* seems also to have moved towards a more “open-plan” view of the popular music field. For example, the music section in the new-look magazine launched on 15 September 2010 features section headings such as “Mur du son”, “Albums”, “Interview”, “Morceaux choisis” and “Concerts”, whereas the previous version of the magazine included specific generic section headings or categories, albeit at times amalgamated, such as “Rock Electro Rap” and “World Jazz Chanson”. Although the category of *chanson* might be used less explicitly as a presentational, framing or classificatory device in *Les Inrockuptibles*, this article will show the extent to which *chanson* and certain associated core values have continued to be mobilised discursively in interviews with French-speaking singer-songwriters and album reviews published over the last five years (2007-2011).

The term *chanson* is often used in a very loose, general sense in France as the word “song” is in the English-speaking world\(^11\). However, academic and journalistic accounts of *chanson* in the French context have highlighted a particular national “mythic form” (PM 67-68), often referred to as the “chanson à texte(s)”, which focuses on the solo singer-songwriter figure (*auteur-compositeur-interprète* or *ACI*), and particularly the “trinity” of Georges Brassens, Jacques Brel and Léo Ferré who represent a “pre-industrial, cottage-industry ideal”\(^12\). Commentaries have emphasised long-standing male-domination within this mythical form of *chanson* and the idea of the “female *chanson* star” as the “performer of work written by men”, while highlighting exceptions to the rule such as Barbara, Véronique Sanson and Anne Sylvestre, and pointing towards an increasing number of successful female singer-songwriters\(^13\). The *ACI* has also been regarded as a “lone artist in the Romantic mould”\(^14\), providing his/her own personal “world-view” (CF 5) and demonstrating “all-in-one mastery” (PMF 5), capable of accompanying him / herself, for example, on a guitar or piano (PM 78-79), but also working with and dependent on a team of collaborators (CF 4-5). Emphasis has also been placed on the “foregrounding” of lyrics, often compared to poetry\(^15\), as well as the potential for emotional honesty and intensity\(^16\). The *ACI* has also been cast as a politically conscious writer and performer of *chansons* that are “typically marginal, non-conformist and often dissident”\(^17\). In sum, *chanson* has consequently been viewed as a mark of quality, authenticity and superiority, especially when compared with “lower” forms of popular music particularly “*variété*”, which has been regarded as “highly mediatized, commercially successful, and intellectually unchallenging”\(^18\). As Looseley observes, drawing on Simon Frith’s discussion of taste groups, *chanson* has been “deliberately kept apart from commercial values”, “represented as having features of art music, being produced by skilled, creative individuals and providing the audience with a transcendent experience”, and “having what Frith describes as ‘the folk value of the natural, the spontaneous and the immediate’”\(^19\). While the mythical form of French *chanson* has been widely recognised as a distinct,
national cultural form, David Looseley points out that, like other music genres, it has nonetheless been subject over time to various forms of influence, “métissage” and “cross-fertilisation” (PM 37-39).

**Distinguishing Chanson**

§5 Certainly, *Les Inrockuptibles* contributes towards maintaining the view of *chanson* as a distinct genre, one which is associated with quality and deemed worthy of development. We are informed that Julien Doré, a winner of the television reality / talent show *Nouvelle Star* “agrandit la chanson française”20, while he and his fellow singer-songwriter Alex Beaupain are said to have restored faith in French *chanson* as well as *variétés*21. Philippe Katerine and Dominique A are credited with being “dynamiteurs de la chanson française”22, effectively reinforcing and helping to reinvent the genre. At times, shame in or dissatisfaction with the genre as a whole is expressed as a means of highlighting particular examples of excellence. The singer-songwriter Benjamin Biolay recalls in an interview a headline on the cover of the magazine (10-16 May 1995), which identified Dominique A as an exceptional figure within an otherwise embarrassing domestic *chanson* scene, embodying “la chanson française dont vous n’aurez pas honte”23. Doré’s celebrated 2011 album *Bichon* is viewed as a clear departure from what is perceived as *chanson*’s unappealing public image: “Bichon (oui, c’est le titre, on y reviendra) est peut-être ce que le genre, sur le papier jamais totalement sexy (en dépit de nombreuses exceptions), de la *chanson française* peut produire, aujourd’hui, au printemps 2011, de plus original, pertinent et abouti” (*JD*).

§6 While a distinct, quality *chanson* identity is promoted, this is also questioned in coverage of artists who do not easily relate to the genre. Christophe Miossec, often classed as a *chanson* artist, is represented as difficult to categorize, moving between different genres over the course of an evolving career. Moreover, in discussion of his album *Chansons ordinaries* (2001), he is identified firmly as a rock artist who gives “un joli pied de nez” to *chanson* by using the term to introduce the title of each of the tracks e.g. “Chanson que personne n’écoute”, “Chanson pour les amis”, “Chanson d’un fait divers”24. Miossec considers *chanson* to be a homogenising term and expresses anxiety at being pigeonholed within the category, given his general concerns at how the genre is developing. In particular, Miossec resists well-established regional stereotypes of *chanson*: “J’en avais un peu marre de l’image du chanteur éthylico-bretonno-gaucho à fleur de peau. J’avais envie de creuser l’écriture, d’aller plus loin dans l’économie de mots” (*ibid.*).

§7 Coverage of Philippe Katerine also effectively challenges the idea of *chanson* as a distinct form with its own rules. He is “enfin libre de martyriser les conventions cireuses de la Chanson Française, devenu l’objet de tant d’experts-comptables chantants”25. Benjamin Biolay also distances himself from and makes fun of the realist *nouvelle chanson française* generation of singer-songwriters with which the media has associated him, by describing how he and Jeanne Cherhal wrote “Brandt Rhapsodie”, which tells the story of a couple’s relationship through a series of notes that they post on the fridge for each other (*BJ*). Discussion of Daphné also explicitly situates the singer-songwriter outside the *nouvelle scène française* strand of *chanson*. Moreover, her album *Carmin* (2007) is thought to
question the notion of chanson as a clear, unproblematic genre: “troubler les eaux un peu trop limpides de la chanson française”\textsuperscript{26}.

### Emotionalising Chanson

**§8** The potentially intense emotional qualities of chanson are highlighted in coverage of certain artists. Daphné’s album Carmin is regarded as “charnel, ardent, flamboyant, incarné dans le sens le plus précis du terme” and characterised by “couleur passionnelle” (ibid.). Moreover, Daphné regards the act of singing as a form of physical survival, preferring artists who strive to “repousser la mort” over those performers who approach it like any other everyday activity such as going to the supermarket\textsuperscript{27}. Similarly, Camille is represented as expressing emotion in strong, palpable terms: “Sensuel, explosif, ludique, physique, formidably riche vocalement comme musicalement, le troisième album de Camille est un grand copier-coller d’émotion”\textsuperscript{28}. Philippe Katerine also views his songs as a form of emotional catharsis and relief from the self-restraint that he exercises in everyday life. Indeed, a clear identification is drawn between himself and the narrative voices in his songs:

\begin{quote}
Avec ce disque, j’avais besoin de faire ressortir des émotions primaires. Ça fait dix ans que je n’ai pas pleuré, je ne me mets jamais en colère mais quand je fais des chansons, j’ai besoin de transgresser les choses, de créer des situations de colère, de l’émotion, du désir cru, autant de sentiments que je réfrène dans la vie parce que je suis bien élevé.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

**§9** Charlotte Gainsbourg identifies her mother Jane Birkin as an emotional performer who develops a sense of intimacy between herself and her audiences. In contrast, Gainsbourg regards herself as more focused on the music itself and absorbed in performing\textsuperscript{29}.

**§10** Self-other relationships, romantic and sexual, are viewed as an ongoing emotional preoccupation for certain artists such as Étienne Daho, who comments, following the release of his album L’Invitation (2007), “La musique est une dope, on le sait c’est connu. L’état amoureux aussi est une dope. Alors les deux vont plutôt bien ensemble”\textsuperscript{30}. Julien Doré also presents his album Bichon (2011) as “une demande d’amour, un pur besoin affectif” (JD). Furthermore, Benjamin Biolay’s output is viewed in terms of his growing interest in sexual intimacy as one particular form of escapism, amongst others, from political life, which he regards as “épouvantable” (BJ).

**§11** Others singer-songwriters are associated more strongly with a tradition in chanson of humour and laughter\textsuperscript{31}. While Johanna Seban regards the universe created in Keren Ann’s album 101 as “noir et joueur”\textsuperscript{32}, Katerine is situated within a specifically French tradition of the “fou chantant”, the nickname given to Charles Trenet, but also applied here to other forerunners of Katerine such as Richard Gotainer and Brigitte Fontaine (KPK). Sébastien Tellier is also referred to in similar terms as “le grand dément de la chanson française”\textsuperscript{33}.

**§12** In interviews certain singer-songwriters discuss the emotional dimensions of their relationships with those closest to them. For example, Philippe Katerine evokes his reconciliation with his parents (KPK), while Catherine Ringer describes losing the ability to sing following the death of Fred Chichin, her long-time collaborator in Rita Mitsouko\textsuperscript{34}. In discussing their personal relationships, certain singer-songwriters identify themselves explicitly with the narrative
voices in their songs, a phenomenon highlighted by Dalle in his analysis of the magazine’s early years (1986-1992) (LSMF 41). Such identification contributes effectively towards creating a sense of the artist’s “emotional authenticity.” For example, Étienne Daho recounts the history behind his song “Boulevard des Capucines”, inspired by a letter which his father sent to him before his death (ED). Keren Ann, who regards herself as a “une vraie fille à papa”, highlights the effect of her father’s terminal illness on her songwriting (KA). Benjamin Biolay also writes *Ton héritage* for his daughter as “le vrai bilan de ce que je suis” (BJ).

§13 In contrast, Mathieu Chédid makes a clearer distinction between his on-stage and off-stage persona, describing himself as more “multiple” that his “personnage léger” known as “M”36. Keren Ann also links her own emotions with her music but maintains the notion of a separate personal and private life: “Je préserve ma vie privée. Je dévoile des émotions et des fantasmes dans ma musique, mais ça ne dit rien d’officiel sur ma vie personnelle. Je pense que ça n’a d’intérêt pour personne” (KA).

**Politicising Chanson**

§14 Coverage in *Les Inrockuptibles* maintains a longstanding and widely recognised tradition within French chanson of social and political awareness, engagement, contestation and anti-conformism. Interviews provide artists with a forum in which to discuss the political content or implications of their songwriting and to voice their own personal concerns. For example, Alain Bashung discusses a passage from his song “Résidents de la République”, written by Gaëten Roussel, which “signifie qu’on a plus que jamais besoin d’une vraie...”37. This in turn leads him to express his negative perceptions of the Sarkozy presidency: “Sarkozy invente un truc nouveau qu’il entre le lendemain, mais dont il subsiste des choses néfastes dans l’air ambiant. Quand je vais à l’étranger et que je reviens, j’éprouve une espèce de sentiment de gâchis” (ibid.). Bashung also affirms the potential of pop music to address pressing social concerns as it did in the 1960s and 70s (“l’écologie, de la dégradation de certaines choses”, ibid.), regretting the current gulf between young people and politicians as well as the way in which the legacy of the May 1968 movement has been abandoned. In stronger terms, coverage of Brigitte Fontaine conveys her rejection of “la France hygiéniste et flicarde de Sarko et Hortefeux, n’hésitant pas à descendre dans l’arène des kékés et à jeter son grain de sel et de folie sur les plaies d’une société effrayée par la différence”. Indeed, Fontaine tells readers that “depuis les dernières élections, j’ai ressorti mes griffes”, expressing “sans tabou” in her new album *Prohibition* (2009) her “colère contre cette société liberticide que l’on nous impose de plus en plus”: “c’est devenu de plus en plus difficile de fumer, de boire, de parler aussi.” Fontaine incites “rébellion” with her “chansons révolutionnaires”, citing the plight of the sans-papiers as well as poor conditions in French prisons and cases of inmate suicide. Fontaine rejects, however, the status of an “intellectual” songwriter expressing suspicion of new “ideas”: “Quand je vois une idée, je change de trottoir”36.

§15 In contrast, coverage of other singer-songwriters expresses unease at or rejection of social activism and protest. Benjamin Biolay comments that his role is not to maintain the French artistic tradition - “choquer le bourgeois” (BJ). Furthermore, while Katerine is represented within a broad chanson tradition of
anarchy popularised in the post-war era by figures such as Georges Brassens and Léo Ferré, in an interview he resists activism ("Quand quelqu’un prend position contre quelque chose, c’est souvent contre lui-même qu’il lutte"), fears taking himself seriously, and questions the extent to which a given song can convey an unequivocal message: “Une chanson comme Liberté (mon cul) reste ambiguë, on pourrait la chanter dans la rue, mais Sarkozy pourrait aussi la chanter dans son bureau à l’Élysée” (KPK). Moreover, the satirical cartoonist Luz, author of a bande dessinée album J’aime pas la chanson française (Paris, Hoëbeke 2007), which, as its title suggests, is critical of the contemporary chanson scene in France, rejects those songs that deal with social and political issues such as Bénabar’s “L’Effet papillon” (2008), which includes reference to environmental damage and the ongoing financial crisis. Moreover, while anti-Sarkozy lyrics are reportedly a turn-off for Luz, he identifies love songs, a popular staple of the chanson tradition, as a preferable alternative (DAL).

Regenerating Chanson

§16 Les Inrockuptibles reinforces the notion of a distinct French chanson heritage through reverential coverage of longstanding figures of the contemporary French popular music scene. Étienne Daho and Philippe Katerine are, for example, regarded by the generations of artists that follow them as “grand frères” of the French pop world as well as “maîtres chanteurs”. The thirtieth anniversary of Daho’s career is celebrated through coverage of CD reissues and compilations. Indeed, the first set of reissues (a four-CD box set) is granted the status of a literary "Pliade".

§17 Certain articles view singer-songwriters as a force for cross-generational continuity. While Daho is viewed as youthful during middle age, an “éternel adolescent” (CA), Christophe is said to attract the adulation of younger generations including artists as diverse as Sébastien Tellier, Daft Punk and Camille. Cyril Mokaiesh is also viewed in intergenerational and generically hybrid terms as attempting a “dialogue” between Léo Ferré, a key figure of post-war chanson and Noir Désir, the French rock group who came to prominence during the 1980s (CA). Mokaiesh also describes how he became “bloqué sur les grand noms de la chanson française et j’assume cet heritage, sans trop la ramener non plus.” Other artists are granted the status of “parrain” inspiring, mentoring and helping new generations of chanson talent. Benjamin Biolay highlights Alain Bashung’s generosity towards “les jeunes” (BJ), while Philippe Katerine modestly rejects his “parrain” status with characteristic humour (KPK).

§18 Of all the French singer-songwriters who are no longer living, Serge Gainsbourg attracted particularly significant levels of coverage following the 2010 release of Joann Sfar’s biopic Gainsbourg (vie héroïque) as well as during 2011, the twentieth anniversary of his death, which saw the re-release of his collected songs along with the “albums romans” Histoire de Melody Nelson (1971) and L’Homme à la tête de chou (1976). In an interview Gainsbourg’s daughter Charlotte is gratified to witness the current wave of interest in her father, mentioning a 2008-09 Gainsbourg exhibition at the Cité de la musique in Paris. Gainsbourg’s son Lulu also describes his role in producing a Gainsbourg tribute album involving a variety of guest artists (“artistes rock, des Gitans, des actrices”), aimed at increasing his father’s profile around the world (ELC).
Additionally, coverage of Serge Gainsbourg emphasises his influence on new generations of artists including his own daughter, Charlotte, who views her father as a kind of “idéal” (ibid.). In a joint interview Adrien Gallo of the band BB Brunes (a name inspired by Gainsbourg’s song “Initials B.B.”) seeks actively to understand Gainsbourg’s evolution, while Benjamin Biolay regards him as a genius and recounts his own experiences of listening to his music. Lulu Gainsbourg also highlights Gainsbourg’s very capacity to remain ahead of his own time, which is, in itself, inspirational: “Mon impression, c’est que mon père avait toujours un train d’avance. La vraie relève, ce serait de perpétuer cette démarche plutôt que de s’inspirer de ce qu’il a fait.” Coverage views Gainsbourg as popular not only in France but also as receiving recognition in the USA. Lulu Gainsbourg describes the positive reaction that he received when he used a credit card bearing his surname in a record shop in Los Angeles, along with a similar story of recognition and admiration when he met Bootsy Collins “bassiste légendaire de James Brown” (ibid.) : “J’ai compris que l’aura de mon père avait dépassé les frontières” (ibid. & ELC).

§19 The notion of a distinct French chanson heritage unquestioningly worthy of preservation is challenged on one particular occasion, when the cartoonist Luz rejects the Brassens-Brel-Ferré “trinity” captured in Jean-Pierre Leloir’s famous black-and-white photograph taken during their 1969 radio interview, which continues to this day be sold in French postcard and poster shops. For Luz, Leloir’s photograph gave rise to “le christianisme de la chanson française”, which has effectively relegated other artists to the sidelines (DAL). However, while Luz expresses a clear rejection of the well-established Brassens-Brel-Ferré trinity, the magazine elevates further Gainsbourg’s individual status within the broader historiography of post-war French chanson, as seen in the launch of Serge magazine (IPP).

Networking Chanson

§20 While chanson continues to be identified as a distinct form, it is also situated in relation to the broader cultural field. Individual artists are viewed as integrated within and subject to the influence of the wider French and international chanson, music and cultural contexts within which they operate. Musical influences on individual artists are at times represented in particularly eclectic terms. Bertrand Belin is said to be behind “une bien curieuse chanson française, aux textes magnifiques et aux origines nomades. Entre Brassens et Johnny Cash”47. Daphné’s output is reportedly influenced by folk music, and specific Anglophone singer-songwriters such as Jimmy Webb and Kate Bush. An explicit parallel is drawn between the US singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens and Florent Marchet, both of whom produced albums of Christmas songs (in 2006 and 2010 respectively)48. Cyril Mokaiesh is also compared to Brel and Scott Walker, the US singer-songwriter and former lead singer of Walker Brothers (CM).

§21 Camille in particular is extensively referred to in eclectic terms. She describes her approach to music as “trans-genres”49, while a review sees her 2008 album Music Hole as the product of a variety of creative influences and comparisons, “un album-ménagerie” combining elements of “Beyoncé avec Kate Bush, Cindy Lauper avec Gainsbourg, Boney M avec une Björk en claquettes”50. Camille is also identified as “Björk à la française” (CMH), although Johanna Seban is at
pains to point out that she also has her own originality. Three years later her 2011 album is once again described in terms of eclecticism and hybridity: “des chansons folk traditionnelles (Le Berger) y côtoient des comptines enfantines (Message), du r’n'b (My Man Is Married but Not to Me) cohabite avec des ballades pop (Wet Boy)”.

While musical parallels and comparisons abound in *Les Inrockuptibles*, the literary quality of lyrics (also highlighted by Dalle with reference to the magazine’s early music coverage, 1986-1992) is also conveyed (*LSMF* 41). Maintaining the long-standing and widely recognised connection between *chanson* and poetry, an interview with Charlotte Gainsbourg discusses the inclusion of verses by Appollinaire in her 2009 song “The Collector”.

Daphné’s “distance timide” is said to be reminiscent of that displayed by heroines in French, British and Russian novels (Emma Bovary and Lady Chatterley are mentioned by name, *RD* 46). Benjamin Biolay also describes his sense of identification with the F. Scott Fitzgerald’s character the Great Gatsby (*BJ*).

Furthermore, a review of Étienne Daho’s song *Les Fleurs de l’interdit* from his 2007 album *L’Invitation* draws a connection between music and literature, highlighting resonances of sixteenth-century French poetry and 1960s and 70s American alternative and experimental rock (“qui éclaire Ronsard à la lumière électrique du Velvet [Underground]... “, *ED* 35).

While Peter Hawkins observes how “in most instances a *chanson* is the product of the collaboration of a team of people, not an individual” (“for every star in the *chanson* business, there is always a team of obscure workers preparing the terrain”, *CF* 4-5), album reviews in *Les Inrockuptibles* often consider the collaboration of the singer-songwriter with other individuals in its widest sense, listing a whole range of creative partners, French and international, both within and beyond the popular music sphere. Enumeration and repeated use of parentheses emphasise, for example, the network of individuals involved in the production of Émilie Simon’s album:

Mark Plati (producteur pour Bashung, Bowie, The Cure, Louise Attack), Jeremy Gara ou Kelly Pratt (membres d’Arcade Fire), Teitur, l’écrivain anglais Graham Joyce (qui a co-écrit une partie des textes de l’album) ont ainsi chacun eu un rôle primordial à jouer, des idées à apporter, des directions à exploiter dès les premières prises de son [...]*

While debates continue concerning the influence of the Anglophone world on French culture and specifically the maintenance of the 40% quota of *chanson française* broadcast on French radio, as introduced by 1994 Pelchat amendment, the notion of a linguistically pure *chanson française* is effectively challenged in *Les Inrockuptibles* through particular reference to writing in English, which is identified as a valid occupation and aspiration for French-speaking singer-songwriters. We are informed that Emilie Simon’s album *The Big Machine* (2009), heavily influenced by Kate Bush, is almost entirely sung in English, Camille’s album *Music Hole* (2008) is identified as bilingual (*CMH*), while Daniel Darc is able to express through the medium of English ideas that he could not articulate in French.

Moreover, Dominique A observes how new generations of singer-songwriters are less embarrassed about writing and performing in English than he was when he was a new, up-and-coming artist (*DAL*).
On occasion, however, coverage expresses a resistance to writing or performing in English. Philippe Katerine discusses his attempts to pen lyrics in English, but given his difficulties and dissatisfaction with the results, returns to writing in French (KPK). The cartoonist Luz also evokes the controversy caused by the selection of Sébastien Tellier as France’s 2008 Eurovision entry with “Divine”, a song performed largely in English (the choice of this song was indeed debated in the National Assembly) (DAL).

Mediatising Chanson

Coverage also views chanson in relation to the music industry, as certain artists are seen to work outside its more traditional structures, embracing a more cottage-industry / artisanal / DIY approach to production, which, has long been associated with the French singer-songwriter57. Keren Ann is presented as self-sufficient and independent: the DIY side (running her own business and record label; planning and budgeting a tour; writing musical arrangements etc.) is considered a necessity and common practice in countries which she knows well (France, Iceland and the USA). Keren Ann is also singled out as an artist who aims to preserve her private life away from the media gaze and public eye (KA).

In stronger terms, Kim is presented as “un musicien contre le système”, admired for successfully releasing music on independent labels as well as via the internet (“Un exemple réjouissant de microéconomie parallèle qui marche”)58. Also represented are artists who have parted company with record labels, for example, Biolay who is returning with his sixth album as an “homme libre”59, and Florent Marchet, who describes setting up his own studio as his “renaissance” (a new album Courchevel and a 120-date tour)48.

The role of the singer-songwriter is considered not only in relation to the music industry but also the mass media. While commentators have regarded television talent shows such as Star Academy (TF1) and Nouvelle Star (M6) as incompatible with the “quality” French singer-songwriter tradition60, one particular article in Les Inrockuptibles views the discovery of Julien Doré by the television talent show Nouvelle Star in positive terms. The show is credited with attracting performers who are increasingly “singuliers”61 and considers the relationship between Doré and producers to be productive and mutually beneficial: “Chacun connaîtra son quart d’heure de manipulation aurait pu prédire Andy Warhol. Julien Doré a servi M6, s’est servi de M6 et a réussi, sans même beaucoup d’efforts, dit-il, à livrer un album pop-folk tout à fait personnel” (ibid.). However, in certain cases the mass media is held responsible for hampering artists and their careers. Cyril Mokaiesh’s communist sympathises are considered a reason why he receives relatively little air-play: “la peur du bolchevique semble avoir refroidi les ardeurs des programmateurs radio, pour qui un bon chanteur communiste est un chanteur communiste mort”62. Benjamin Biolay also regards himself as misunderstood following media attention focusing on his private life and the mishaps in his professional life, rather than on his work itself (BJ).
Conclusion

§28 As Les Inrockuptibles has moved increasingly from cultural to news magazine, it appears to have maintained the values of a mythical French form of song/chanson, based on quality and innovation, as well as the skill and creativity associated with art music, without resorting to the longstanding discursive division between, on the one hand, chanson as quality, authentic and superior, and on the other, variété as inferior, unchallenging, as well as overly commercialised and mediatised. On occasion certain artists are distanced from a homogenising, collective notion of chanson. Coverage of singer-songwriters emphasises the emotional power long associated with chanson, particularly where love and laughter are concerned, along with its well-recognised potential for social and political commitment (as well as disengagement and disillusion). Although certain singer-songwriters are identified with the narrative voices in their chansons, which contributes to a sense of the artist as authentic, other singer-songwriters make a clearer distinction between their public and private personae. The notion of a distinctive chanson enduring across the generations is supported via coverage of long-established living artists, notably Daho, inspiring and nurturing new talent, and through the promotion of Gainsbourg twenty years after his death, as a signifier of continuing innovation, rather than the well-established “trinity” of Brassens, Brel and Ferré. While the articles considered in the foregoing discussion may generally convey an impression of gender parity, those identified as leading figures, whether living and dead, tend to be male. Singer-songwriters are less likely to be viewed in isolation or in terms of “all-in-one-mastery”, but as developing within a wider musical and cultural network, collaborating with diverse practitioners while interacting and cross-fertilising with a variety of cultural/musical forms, whether in “le champ de grande production” or “le champ de production restreinte”, to use Bourdieu’s terms. Coverage also suggests the increasing ease of artists in working with the English language in addition to or instead of French, while nonetheless expressing residual reticence or resistance to such developments. Finally, chanson is also situated in terms of the current context of music and media production: certain artists embrace a DIY approach to music production either from the outset or following a split from a record company, potentially bringing them closer to “the folk value of the natural, the spontaneous and the immediate”, while, in contrast, the téléréalité talent show in its Nouvelle Star form is viewed in positive terms as a forum for nurturing new talent.

§29 The coverage discussed in this article emphasises certain aspects of what Serge Kaganski perceives as the enduring “esprit Inrocks”: “qualité d’écriture”, “souci de la nouveauté mais respect des brands anciens” (including a particular attachment to Gainsbourg), “prenant pour l’artisanal” and a “méfiance de ce qui est massif, industriel” (although discussion of Doré and the television talent show might suggest otherwise). The closest that discussion of chanson comes to engaging in a “guerre du goût”, the remaining feature of the “esprit Inrocks”, is via the frank views of singer-songwriters such as Biolay, Katerine, Miossec and particularly the satirical cartoonist Luz. Otherwise, the tone of the articles examined in this study appears rather consensual.

§30 In sum, while Les Inrockuptibles supports and at times questions the “mythical” chanson values such as quality, emotion, as well as social and political commitment, the magazine also shows how music journalism in France may
contribute discursively towards the regeneration and mediatisation of French chanson more generally while integrating it into the wider national and international music and cultural field.

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NOTES
1 For further discussion, see Chris Andrews, “The social ageing of Les Inrockuptibles”, French Cultural Studies, 11 (32), June 2000, p. 235, henceforth SAI.
4 Bernard Zekri, “Nouvelle formule, nous voici!”, Les Inrockuptibles, 14 September 2010. Henceforth LI will refer to the print magazine.
10 “À propos de Serge”.
11 Barbara Lebrun, Protest Music in France: Production, Identity and Audiences, Farnham/Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2009, p. 5; henceforth PMF.
12 PM 78. This close association has also been interrogated by Adeline Cordier, The Mediating of chanson: French identity and the myth Brel-Brassens-Ferré, PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 2008; henceforth MC.
13 PM 68-69. See also Peter Hawkins, Chanson: The French singer-songwriter from Aristeide Bruant to the present Day, Aldershot/Burlington VT, Ashgate, 2000, p. 17-18; 35-45; henceforth CF.
15 See, for example, CF 4; 23-27; 54.
17 CF 6. See also Adeline Cordier on how Brassens’ poeticism and anticonformism, amongst other qualities, may be applied to today’s popular music scene. “Thirty Years after Brassens: la chanson today”, Continuities and Discontinuities? France Across the Generations, ASMCF annual conference, University of Stirling, 1-3 September 2011.
18 PMF 2; see also 7-8; and PM 75, 81, 83-84.
20 Jean-Marc Lalanne, “Julien Doré : portrait de l’artiste en bichon”, LI, 28 March 2011; henceforth JD.
23 “Biplay : Je ne suis pas là pour choquer le bourgeois”, LI, 29 October 2009; henceforth BJ.
24 Pierre Siankowski, “Miossec : chansons (pas vraiment) ordinaires”, LI, 13 September 2011; henceforth MC.
25 Christophe Conte, “Katerine – Philippe Katerine”, LI, 29 September 2010; henceforth KPK.
27 Christophe Conte, “Rencontre: Daphné”, LI, 22-28 May 2007, p. 46; henceforth RD.
his communist sympathies, who came to prominence in France at the turn of the 1960s. An allusion to Jean Ferrat (1930–2010).


See, for example, Johanna Seban, “


Pierre Siankowski and Jean-Marc Lalanne, “Christophe - Aimer ce que nous sommes”, LI, 18 September 2008; henceforth CA.

Christophe Conte, “Cyril Mokaïesh: étoile rouge de la chanson”, LI, 10 June 2011; henceforth CM.

Johanna Seban and Christophe Conte, “Entretien avec Lulu et Charlotte : Gainsbourg next generation”, LI, 29 November 2011; henceforth ELC.


Jean-Daniel Beauvallet and Johanna Seban, “La Musicale”, LI, 1 April 2008, p. 47.

Ibid. 44.


For further discussion of the poetic tradition, see, for example, CF 4; 23-27.

See, for example, CA for a review of Christophe’s 2008 album Aimer ce que nous sommes.


Ibid. 44.


An allusion to Jean Ferrat (1930-2010), a commercially successful singer-songwriter well known for his communist sympathies, who came to prominence in France at the turn of the 1960s. See CM.