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Music Criticism as Salon Culture: France in the (Very) Long Nineteenth Century

Through the lens of France, this paper focuses as much on the press itself as on its criticism and its critics, and asks what characterises a local, or regional, musical press in contradistinction to that of the capital. After a general mapping of French music journals between the 1830s and the 1930s, I ask what papers from provincial France tell us about regional power-bases, critical networks, community and camaraderie, readerships, and relationships not only with Paris but with other Francophone centres, notably Brussels. The idea of the journalistic ‘salon’—familiar from work on the Parisian press—is explored anew through case-studies centring on Étienne Destranges (Nantes), Léon Vallas (Lyon) and Jean Nattiez (Amiens).

Where the French capital offered innumerable professional openings and a Babel of conflicting opinions expressed in the papers, in smaller urban centres with a handful of outlets for music criticism, ‘linchpin’ critics and ‘insider’ journals were clearly evident, with all the responsibility that entailed for musical education and advocacy—alongside the elegant art of reviewing friends in public.