

## Introduction

We're at a crossroads now, I suppose. There's diversity, there's people ... For instance, myself, I kind of learned as I went along. At one point I wanted to go to the music academy, but it didn't work out with the school schedule I had then. So you have people who learned by themselves and now others who have studied musicology and all the rest. There are more and more directors now who'll need to be paid. They've studied too, right? So there again, you've got disparities, maybe not the same outlook on things or the same mentality. As far as concerts are concerned, it's also not the same goal. In the villages, it used to be about local entertainment – and that's slowly dying down. I have to admit, often it's parish parties in the villages, football parties, just local things really. And then on the other hand, it's really about the concert that you want to put on, to make an impression, to get involved in large-scale events. So you see there are different outlooks, different directions. So now people need to see where their interests lie, where they stand ...

(Claude, trumpet player, band director, 41,  
*France Télécom* employee, D. band)<sup>1</sup>

Wind bands<sup>2</sup> share most of the features routinely ascribed to lowbrow cultures. While members do not include as many workers as is generally assumed or as used to be the case, musicians frequently still have working-class roots. Many aspects of their functioning, such as localism and the attachment to a place, close-knit relationships and a sense of community, the integration of the music into other dimensions of social life, are typical illustrations of working-class lifestyles. Accordingly, theirs is a world that stands outside of the spheres of so-called highbrow music, or at least on their fringes, as the absence of critical consecration and their distance from major musical institutions attest. All of this feeds into the image of an old-fashioned kind of music, lacklustre or even altogether devoid of musical interest.

To some extent, these features derive from the social, musical and cultural history out of which wind bands emerged: the history of the Orphéon movement,

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<sup>1</sup> Basic information about the interviewees will be systematically provided alongside interview excerpts, unless it does not appear necessary. The appendix includes a table that provides additional information about all the musicians interviewed.

<sup>2</sup> This book focuses on *harmonies*; this term is still applied in French (and German) to refer to ensembles roughly similar to wind bands. For purposes of clarity, we have generally used the generic English term 'wind bands', except in contexts where finer distinctions between different types of bands had to be made (see explanation p. 16).

born in the nineteenth century (Gerbod 1980; Gumbrowicz 2001). This history has close ties with that of working-class cultures due to the movement's two main orientations. The first consisted in a project for spreading a musical culture among the people. This was not about furthering the cause of an 'authentically' working-class culture rooted in folk traditions; rather, the objective was to provide the underprivileged with means to discover musical practice, to get them acquainted with the key works of highbrow music, or merely to give them an opportunity to experience the pleasure of listening to music. The second orientation consisted in promoting socialization, civic-mindedness, team spirit and discipline – like the sports societies with which Orphéon societies were sometimes competing, these structures supervised working-class people, with the aim of imposing moral values, stabilizing the workforce and developing political edification.

This history has the epic quality of an early attempt at musical democratization. Yet things took a nostalgic turn fairly quickly, as people already started missing the golden age of that period in the 1900s. While signs of decline were indeed perceptible by then, the Orphéon movement thrived in France roughly from the 1850s to the First World War. Most of the research available on wind ensembles effectively focuses on that timeframe, in France (Fulcher 1979) and elsewhere (Mahling 1976, Herbert 2000, Rohrbach 2003). A few studies deal with the interwar period (Vadelorge 1997, 1999), but very little has been written about the post-Second World War period.<sup>3</sup> The dearth of academic literature on the contemporary period serves as a confirmation of the social image of a music anchored in a bygone world.

Yet, this music has far from disappeared. In France, the *Confédération Musicale de France* (CMF) is the main organization federating amateur music societies especially when it comes to wind orchestras. In 2002, it includes 2,606 wind bands, which amounts to more than 100,000 musicians for this type of band only. This figure, it should be noted, does not even include the members of societies attached to other federations, nor those with no affiliation. Innumerable percussionists and wind players, both amateur and professionals, started in a wind band and its attendant school, particularly those from rural areas and small towns, and especially in regions where wind bands are most numerous.<sup>4</sup> Despite

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<sup>3</sup> Despite its title, Philippe Gumbrowicz's aforementioned book (Gumbrowicz 2001) only includes about 50 pages on the subject. On late twentieth century France, see Bozon 1984a, Bozon 1984b and Simmoneau 2007. Among the few sociological studies available on the contemporary period, see: on recruitment problems in Switzerland, Bossard et al. 2004; on Canada and the USA, see Saint-Laurent 1991 and Hosler 1992.

<sup>4</sup> This means mostly the northern, eastern and central regions of France. The number of bands per 100,000 inhabitants, based on the CMF's 2002 lists and the results of INSEE's 1999 census, is 6.8 nationwide, but over 10 in the following regions: Alsace (16.4), Nord-Pas-de-Calais (14), Centre (13.4), Franche-Comté (10.6), Bourgogne (10.4), Picardie (10). However, disparities within the regions must also be considered – for instance, a

the decline, the wind bands and their structures endure, and in fact do better than merely survive, long after the first predictions of their imminent demise.

These first indications allow us to introduce two of the main sets of questions raised in this book: how is a form of music that is relegated to the fringes of the musical field organized? How does a cultural form live on when the social conditions that once favoured its development are, to a large extent, no longer met?

### **Between Domination and Autonomy**

Wind band music is anchored in lowbrow culture and holds a dominated position in the cultural field, with very little legitimacy. Making this general observation does not mean we should do away with nuances, which brings us back to the discussions on the theory of cultural legitimacy based mainly on research by Pierre Bourdieu, who correlated social hierarchy and cultural hierarchy and laid emphasis on the mechanisms of symbolic domination (Bourdieu 1984). Regarding lowbrow culture, this theory has been debated in particular by Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron (1989). While acknowledging its usefulness, they warned against the temptation of a heightened legitimism that might take the form of a 'miserabilist' approach to lowbrow culture, seen exclusively from the perspective of its inferiority in relation to the prevailing model. The authors raised the following question: are we doing justice to 'dominated' cultures by looking at them only from the angle of domination, denying them any possibility of an autonomous existence and ultimately forcing the dominant point of view on them?

This book intends to give a clear and accurate overview of a specific cultural universe, rather than to criticize or illustrate a given theoretical approach. Accordingly, we thought it necessary, given the defining features of wind band music, to consider its status as a dominated cultural form whilst remaining attentive to the social conditions of the effects of legitimacy that make it a dominated cultural form, as Grignon and Passeron or more recently Bernard Lahire (2004: 39 ff.) have suggested. It is worth mentioning that references to the legitimate cultural model are less systematic for music than for literary writing or theatre, where there are closer ties with the academic teaching that conveys that model. Furthermore, as far as wind bands are concerned, the quasi-absence of a professionalized sector allows amateurs to experience their activity with a distant relationship to a professional reference perceived as a yardstick, which limits the depreciative effects of the often (in other cases) recurrent comparison between amateurs and professionals (Pollak 2006: 3 ff.).

More precisely, our investigations have revealed that these musical activities jointly take place in four worlds, where exposure to cultural domination is very

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heterogeneous and highly populated region like Rhône-Alpes has many bands, but their implantation is only dense in departments such as Haute-Savoie or Isère.

unequal or where its effects are countered. We use the term *wind band worlds* to refer to these different worlds, to the relational structures, the practices and the representations that characterize them.<sup>5</sup> First, the hierarchical structure of the musical field places wind bands in a low position, as inferior to the classical music orchestras to which they are compared, among others. Secondly, the specific cultural universe that they make up, with its own references, institutions, internal competitions and types of recognition, forms an admittedly marginal pole in the musical field, but also a relatively autonomous world, one whose existence cannot be reduced to this relegated position, and that offers if not an alternative, then at least a partial escape from it. The same goes for the local networks in which most of the musical activities take place, forming a third world that is quite far removed from the structures of the musical field and their judgements. These networks of acquaintanceship and cooperation also follow their own rules. Lastly, these musical activities are embedded in lifestyles and close-knit social relationships that form part of their practical and symbolic horizon. The existence of a relatively closed, independent peer group is one of the conditions for attenuating the effects of 'legitimate' cultural judgements and, to a certain extent, 'forgetting about domination' and enjoying a relative cultural self-sufficiency.

The fact that they simultaneously belong to several spaces of reference, relationships and practices means that the effects of cultural domination are toned down for these musicians, or at least that its mechanisms are made more complex. While all the orchestras and musicians jointly belong to these different worlds, the relative significance of these forms of belonging varies. Village orchestras make up the bulk of these bands: many of them only play one or two yearly concerts outside of official celebrations, and their repertoire is a mixed bag that includes marches, popular tunes and mood pieces. But there are also bands that have professional musicians among their ranks, take part in international contests and play demanding pieces from the highbrow repertoire. Their members are often better off socially, and they have a more distant relationship to working-class lifestyles. From the small village bands that keep to their immediate surroundings to the great orchestras whose names have authority in the wind music world and may come close to highbrow music, as well as the range of positions in between, allegiances to the different wind band worlds combine in various ways. The same goes for the musicians, from the self-taught ones who cherish the sense of 'family' to those who have their sights set on musical excellence.

Showing the diversity of the wind band worlds and establishing where musicians and orchestras stand within them, how they move and build bridges between them, we will account for the diversity of the practices and relational structures within this musical universe. We will also analyse its symbolic economy,

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<sup>5</sup> The use of 'worlds' in the plural form is only distantly related to Howard Becker's concept, which refers to the networks of cooperation between the actors involved in the collective production of artworks (Becker 1982). Here, 'wind band worlds' refers to the specific cultural universe that these bands make up.

assessing the relative weight of the criteria for appreciation and judgement specific to each of these worlds on the basis of the musicians' and bands' features and of their practical situations. In the process, we will come to gauge the potency of the effects of cultural legitimacy, and gain awareness of the social differentiation of their conditions of production.

### **How a Cultural Form Lives On**

The musical universe of wind bands is historically bounded. This does not mean that it is only about the survival of a bygone era; rather, it is embedded in a historical configuration determined by the state of the musical field and the set of social conditions that favour or hinder its existence and its social value. Studying wind bands is consequently an excellent opportunity to study the way a lower cultural form endures or declines, materially and symbolically. This is the second main focus of our work. Without getting too ahead of ourselves at this point, we can say that wind bands, at least in their traditional form, are now more deprived than they have ever been of those social conditions that are conducive to their activities. This is admittedly not an entirely unprecedented situation. Early signs came in the 1970s, with the cumulative combination of a number of social transformations that each, in terms of their own temporal dynamic, contributed to chipping away at the wind bands' social foundations: the disintegration of the village communities that form the basic unit of most orchestras; the decline of working-class sociability based on close-knit relationships; the increasing number of competing leisure activities available; extended schooling and the ensuing greater physical and cultural distance of young people from the small villages where they were born; and the rise of the music schools giving aspiring musicians opportunities to do something other than joining the local wind band. More recently, cultural intermediaries have come into play: aspiring to 'open up' wind bands culturally, they increasingly confront them with the legitimate musical model. All of this contributes to weakening the protections that make it possible to 'forget about domination' or achieve a degree of symbolic autonomy. It is not only the wind bands' activities that have thus been affected by these transformations (the most tangible evidence of this being their struggle to attract new members), but also the cultural model they embody, characterized by a mix between 'sociability' and 'music', working-class roots and overtures to 'highbrow' music.

These transformations do not necessarily bring about decline, insofar as they affect orchestras and musicians very unevenly. The smaller, traditional bands and the older and less trained musicians are their main victims. Yet, those who are closer to 'pure' music than to community sociability are hardly affected, and may even sometimes come out stronger. In turn, the balance between the different polarities of the wind band world is changing, to the benefit of the most 'legitimate' and partly professionalized practices, at least as far as their management is concerned. Until now these were very much in the minority, but they now tend to prevail

within this world as the blueprint to follow in order to survive and fundamentally to evolve. As the director cited on the very first page of this book says, wind bands are indeed at a 'crossroads'.

We will begin our exploration of the wind band worlds by analysing the situation of these bands on the fringes of the musical field (Part I). After drawing a map to determine the situation of wind bands in the musical field, where they have an inferior position, we will go on to consider to what extent this cultural relegation matches the musicians' social status (Chapter 1). Then, varying the levels of analysis, we will study the varying forms of structuration that characterize this cultural universe. Outlining the space of the orchestras and identifying the ways in which references and forms of competition are unified within it, we will look at the way this universe may function as a sub-field endowed with partly distinctive rules and procedures. This approach will be complemented by an analysis of these procedures, on the double basis of a strong institutional structuring and of local relational networks. By shifting analytical levels, we will have an opportunity to show that the workings and the judgements of legitimate musical institutions are not necessarily the main practical and symbolic horizon of the orchestras and their musicians (Chapter 2).

Shifting levels yet again, we will take an even closer look at the musicians' practices, seen within their immediate environment and in the concrete relationships that shape them (Part II). These practices are firmly embedded in close-knit social relationships and in the other dimensions of social life – belonging to an orchestra acts both as an indication and as an instrument of social integration (Chapter 3). The life of these socio-musical groups cannot be reduced to their musical activities only, or to the opportunity it gives them for socializing; rather, it rests on a fragile, sometimes conflicting balance between the two registers (Chapter 4).

This will lead us to restate the double question at the heart of this book on the conditions of legitimacy effects and the way a cultural form lives on around the issue of the autonomy of wind band music (Part III). As the space of reference is locally bounded, the constraining effects related to an inferior position in the cultural field are reduced. Yet, other constraints apply whose effects are felt even in musical forms (Chapter 5). The social transformations and evolutions specific to the wind band world do not threaten its very existence, but do threaten the balances that allow it to endure as a specific cultural universe (Chapter 6).

### The survey

This research was conducted in the northeastern region of Alsace, where musical practice in general, and wind bands in particular, are very present. This focus on a single region, and on this specific one, does not result from a rational scientific choice, but from an opportunity offered by the *Fédération des sociétés musicales d'Alsace* and the *Observatoire des politiques culturelles*. A comparison between several regions would undoubtedly have allowed us to present a more thorough overview of these practices. But such an endeavour was unfortunately out of reach, due to the lack of available

research, and because we had opted for a global, empirically in-depth survey, with varied methods and levels of analysis. The region under study has specificities that cannot be ignored – yet, again, only elements of comparison would make it possible to establish the extent to which they limit the possibilities of generalizing the results obtained. Let us mention a few of these specificities here. First, compared to Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the other French region where wind bands are also very active, the bands have fewer ties with companies, and their practices are thus less directly anchored in a direct relation to the world of workers. These historically strong ties have however now greatly weakened, reducing the differences between the two regions. Secondly, Alsace is culturally very close to the Germanic world, where wind bands (*Blassmusik*) are active and numerous.<sup>6</sup> More precisely, many bands started during the 1870–1918 German annexation, leading to the creation of a dense network: nearly a third of the currently existing societies are more than 100 years old; more than 70 per cent are more than 50 years old; and many of the bands created after the First World War drew from what emerged during the preceding period. The religious factor must also be taken into account. Religious practice remains comparatively strong in Alsace, where religion is still taught in public schools. While this applies even more to choir singing, wind bands also benefit from religious networks and opportunities (parish festivals) for playing. Another factor is the joint presence of Catholicism and Protestantism. In the past, it was not rare for the same village to have one band for each of the two religions; the two then often ended up merging when the number of members decreased, so that the village would retain one band. Beyond religious celebrations, many local celebrations provide opportunities for wind band concerts in Alsace, where local traditions endure as tourism develops. Lastly, more than anywhere else, the network of music schools that developed in the 1970s retained close ties with amateur music societies, which limited competition and even arguably contributed to the recruitment of new members, especially considering that local authorities have supported this orientation.<sup>7</sup> In light of all the above, it appears clearly that we cannot generalize our empirical results without a healthy degree of caution. As for our *sociological* results – based, as in any other survey, on local and partial data – i.e., our empirically tested hypotheses that relate a number of factors and aspects to shed light on the object of our research, we hope that they form a possible basis for generalization through comparison, not only with wind bands in other regions, but more largely with other amateur practices and other forms of lower culture (Dubois 1996).

The local character of our study does not limit its orientations, methods and overall reach to that of a monograph (Champagne 2002b). Our approach, trying to account as best we could for the different dimensions of the practices we were studying, logically

<sup>6</sup> Here, comparisons are required with regions devoid of such strong cultural influences, or under other influences in the field, such as the southwest, where the Spanish model of the *bandas* prevails.

<sup>7</sup> A study on the Île-de-France region, which is experiencing a strong social disintegration in small villages and towns and where music schools are competing against each other, would certainly provide an interesting comparative counterpoint on these last two aspects. See ARIAM Ile-de-France, *Une pratique créatrice, l'orchestre d'harmonie*, 2005, pp. 49–52.

called for the use of different techniques. Let us now outline them briefly.<sup>8</sup> Wishing to systematically objectify the wind band world as a space of positions and practices, we have resorted to statistical analysis, on the basis of two questionnaires. The first one, addressed to the musicians, provided information on their social features, their tastes and practices (n = 578). Another questionnaire was also sent to the directors and presidents of music societies. It was composed of two distinct sections. The first pertained to the sociology of those who manage the societies. We could use 81 responses from directors and 125 responses from presidents of music societies. The second concerned the characteristics of these societies, and served as the basis of an analysis of the bands' features (n = 219). Being eager to reflect the concrete conditions of the practices under study and to situate them in their immediate environment, we decided to conduct an ethnographic study on the basis of three monographs on bands chosen according to the polarities they illustrated. These bands are introduced in the boxed texts that elaborate on the polarities evidenced by the correspondence analysis. In the course of this study, we have conducted 27 interviews with musicians, conductors and presidents, complementing questionnaire results, and directly observed rehearsals and concerts. This has enabled us to comprehend the local dimension of the practices, the day-to-day functioning of the bands and the characteristics of their concerts. In an effort to make sense of the institutional structure of the wind band world and its orientations, we have conducted 20 interviews with representatives of federal organizations and members of public and cultural bodies that are in contact with wind bands. Lastly, we have complimented this fieldwork with occasional direct observations – for instance during a wind band contest – and with documentary analysis, specifically on the publications specialized in this field.

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 1 for more details.