

Collet, Henri (1885-1951): Overview of his Writings

Henri Collet's catalogue of musical works contains almost 200 compositions, the vast majority of which evoke Spain and its varied regions, with a special penchant for Castile and its traditional song. His posterity, however, reposes entirely on his activities as a music critic and writer, for Collet the composer also wrote about modern and historic French and Spanish music. When it is not entirely forgotten, Collet's name is invariably associated with the group Les Six which he brought to the public eye in a lucky piece of publicity with his famous article for *Comœdia* of [16 January 1920](#) in which he established an analogy with the Russian Five. If the following issue of [23 January 1920](#) was again devoted to the "French Six," Collet would later announce the dissolution of the group in the issue of [9 January 1922](#), just two years after its "creation" with "Le Crépuscule des Six" (he returned to the subject of the group's adventures in the issue of [16 January 1922](#) with "Étude en sixte," an article often overlooked by historians of Les Six.)

Collet's writings are particularly abundant and include not only six monographs of a musicological nature, developed articles on particular musical subjects, articles of music criticism for the press, but also introductions to scores, translations from Spanish to French, pedagogical manuals, novels, and a rich correspondence.

A Hispanist by education, having studied at the Université de Bordeaux in the first decade of the twentieth century (earning diplomas at the level of the *licence*, *agrégation d'espagnol*, and then a doctorate), it was in the context of Collet's academic training that he began his career as a writer. His unpublished undergraduate thesis for his "diploma of superior studies in living languages" of June 1908 was devoted to the expressive value of sixteenth-century Spanish religious music (*La Valeur expressive de la musique religieuse espagnole au XVIe siècle*). His work in archives on the Iberian peninsula later led to the publication of his first two scientific articles on early Spanish music, "[Contribution à l'étude des Cantigas d'Alphonse le Savant \(d'après les codices de l'Escorial\)](#)" in collaboration with Luis Villalba, June 1910 (*Bulletin Hispanique*, vol. XIII, no. 3, July-September 1911, p. 270-290) and "[Contribution à l'étude des théoriciens espagnols de la musique aux XVIe siècle](#)" (*L'Année musicale*, vol. 2, 1912, p. 1-63). His doctoral thesis (*doctorat ès lettres*) defended 11 March 1913 at the Faculty of Letters of the Université de Paris, presented a detailed study of sixteenth-century Spanish musical mysticism (*Le Mysticisme musical espagnol au XVIe siècle*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1913), with a complementary thesis written in Spanish, *Un Tratado de canto de órgano (siglo xvi) manuscrito en la Biblioteca nacional de París. Edición y comentarios* (Madrid, Librería Gutenberg de José Ruiz/Ruiz hermanos, sucesores,

1913). Collet's monograph, [Victoria](#) (Paris, Félix Alcan, 1914) is a revised version of the last chapter (chapter IX) of his doctoral thesis in a less technical, more romantic literary style aiming at a broader readership.

Collet's work on "modern" Spanish music formed a second part of his musicological output, offering pioneering studies in the domain, notably in the Francophone context. It began with two long and significant articles, "[La Musique espagnole moderne](#)," published in two parts (*Bulletin français de la S.I.M.*, IV/3, 15 March 1908, p. 272-290, and IV/9, 15 September 1908, p. 951-989), and "[Espagne. Le XIXe siècle. Deuxième partie: la renaissance musicale](#)," a text dated "November 1919" for the *Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du Conservatoire* published under the direction of Albert Lavignac and Lionel de Laurencie, Paris, Delagrave, 1920, p. 2470-2484). Following the very succinct [Albéniz et Granados](#) (Paris, Félix Alcan, 1926), [L'Essor de la musique espagnole au XXe siècle](#) (Paris, Éditions Max Eschig, 1929) offers a synthetic panorama of the currents, "regional schools," aesthetics, composers, and musicians of Spain from the end of the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century. The latter work received the Institute's prize in Hispanic studies for 1929 and can be directly compared to *La Música contemporánea en España* by Collet's Spanish colleague Adolfo Salazar (Madrid, Ediciones La Nave, 1930), which also received a prize from the Institute.

Alongside his articles and monographs devoted to Spanish music, Collet wrote a book on [Saint-Saëns's Samson and Dalila](#) (Paris, Éditions Paul Mellottée, in the collection "Les chefs-d'œuvre de la musique expliqués," 1922), a short text, "[Saint-Saëns \(1835-1921\)](#)" in *Les Musiciens célèbres* directed by Jean Lacroix (Geneva and Paris, Éditions d'art Lucien Mazenod, 1946, p. 258-259), as well as a dozen introductory notes to pocket scores published by Heugel (Berlioz, *Le Carnaval romain* Overture, and the "Trois pièces d'orchestre" from *La Damnation de Faust*; Brahms, Symphonies nos. 2 and 4; Liszt, *Les Préludes*; Schumann, Symphonies nos. 1, 3, and 4; Wagner, Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Siegfried Idyll*, Overture to *Tannhäuser*, Prelude and Death of Isolde from *Tristan und Isolde*).

In his activity as a music critic Collet covered concerts of French and Spanish contemporary music given in France (Paris, specifically) and in Spain and on particular works by composers from both sides of the Pyrenees written in both French and Spanish, making him a privileged witness of the period from 1907 to 1950. Apart from numerous and more or less punctual contributions to *L'Année musicale*, the *Bulletin hispanique*, *Le Courrier des Arts et des Lettres*, *Le Courrier musical*, *L'Espagne*, *España y América*, *Europa*, *Gaceta musical*, *Le Guide du Concert*, *Hispania*, *Illusions*, *Les Langues modernes*, *Lyrice*, *Musicografía*, *Musique et Radio*, *Les Nouvelles musicales*, *Nuestro tiempo*, *L'Opinion*, the *Revista musical catalana*, the *Revista musical* (Bilbao), the *Revue de l'Enseignement français hors de France*, the *Revue du Comité France-Espagne*, the *Revue musicale*, etc., Collet principally worked as a music critic for three journals : the *Bulletin français de la S.I.M.*, which began from its issue 11 of November 1909, *S.I.M. Revue musicale mensuelle* (1908-1911); *Comœdia* (in the column "La musique chez soi" founded by Louis Laloy in 1913, from 2 October 1919 to 11 September 1921, feuilleton CXXXIII, after an initial independent article "[Ce qu'est l'Orfeo Catala](#)," in the issue

of 10 June 1914); and *Le Ménestrel* (after many articles and columns beginning 18 March 1921, Collet later became the interim columnist replacing Raoul Laparra for the column “Espagne” under “Mouvement musical à l’Étranger” from 20 April 1928 to 6 December 1929, later becoming the official columnist for this section from 13 December 1929 to 22 March 1940).

Beyond this rich output as a music writer and critic, it is also necessary to mention Collet’s publications in relation to his professional activity as a Spanish teacher (in Paris, at the École Lavoisier, and later at the Collège Chaptal, but also at the École normale supérieure of Fontenay-aux-Roses, and the H.E.C.) and translator: [*Les Auteurs espagnols du programme, Brevet Supérieur 1914-1917*](#) (Paris, Delagrave, 1914), [*Méthode active de langue espagnole*](#) (Paris, Delagrave, 1920), [*Œuvres choisies de Cervantès*](#), for which he offered his own translation and introduction (Paris, Armand Colin, 1920), as well as the French translation, with Maurice Perrin of José María de Pereda’s novel [*Dans la montagne*](#) (*Peñas arriba*) (Paris, Delagrave, 1918). Collet also translated many vocal works by Spanish composers to French, notably for the Parisian publishers Max Eschig (*Trois Chants basques*, Father Donostia; *Dos Canciones*, Ernesto Halffter; *Tres Cantigas de Alphonse X*, Antonio Martínez Palacios; *Dix Noël’s espagnols* and *Vingt Chants populaires espagnols*, the latter in two volumes, Joaquín Nin; *De Castilla*, Carlos Pedrell; *Six Mélodies populaires espagnoles*, Emiliana Zubeldia; etc.), Rouart et Lerolle (*Trois Chansons*, Joaquín Rodrigo), and E. Demets (*Rima*, Joaquín Turina). In 1929 he even published a novel, [*L’île de Barataria*](#) (Paris, Albin Michel) based on a passage from Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* which received the Prix national de littérature of 1929.

Finally, Henri Collet left behind many unpublished manuscripts and a rich correspondence (letters to and from Collet), memoirs (in two volumes), teaching notes (notably classes on Spanish “folklore” and polyphony for classes given at the Institut Hispanique de Paris in the 1930s), novels (*Un Chirurgien*, *Gazul ou la clef de Cordoue*, *La Lumière sur les tombeaux*), a *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de Henri Collet*, etc. Most of these manuscripts belong to the private archives of the Clostre-Collet family (Paris) and certain letters from the composer are held in the collections of archives and libraries like the Archivo Manuel de Falla (Grenada, Spain), the Biblioteca de Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain) or in the Music, Opera, and Manuscript Departments of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris). I edited, presented and annotated a selection of letters between Collet and his future brother-in-law Georges Baudin from 1907-1908, an exchange which offers an idea of Collet’s life as a student in Spain where he was deeply engaged in his doctoral research ([*Henri Collet, un étudiant français en Espagne*](#), letters from Henri Collet to Georges Baudin, chosen, presented and annotated by Stéphan Etcharry, Montrem, Les Amis de la musique française, 2005).

Stéphan Etcharry

08/12/2019

Trans. Christopher Murray

Further reading:

- Etcharry, Stéphan, « *Cervantes y el Quijote en la obra pedagógica, literaria y musical de Henri Collet* », dans Lolo, Begoña (dir.), *Cervantes y el Quijote en la música. Estudios sobre la recepción de un mito*, Madrid, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2007, p. 473-489.
- Etcharry, Stéphan, *Henri Collet (1885-1951), compositeur : un itinéraire singulier dans l'hispanisme musical français* (dir. Louis Jambou), Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004 (exemplaire microfiché, Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, Université de Lille III, code : 1054.42528/04.
- Etcharry, Stéphan, « Henri Collet (1885-1951) et la musique basque », *Musiker. Cuadernos de Música*, n° 14, Donostia (Saint-Sébastien), Eusko Ikaskuntza (Société d'Études Basques), 2005, p. 209-238.
- Etcharry, Stéphan, *Henri Collet, un étudiant français en Espagne*, lettres d'Henri Collet à Georges Baudin, choisies, présentées et annotées par Stéphan Etcharry, Montrem, Les Amis de la musique française, série « Correspondance », 2005, 41 p.
- Kraus, Beate, « Henri Collet et *Comœdia*. Le feuilleton musical dans une époque de bouleversements artistiques », *Revue internationale de musique française*, 10^e année, n° 29, juin 1989, p. 29-38.
- Llano, Samuel, *Whose Spain? Negotiating "Spanish Music" in Paris, 1908-1929*, Oxford (New York), Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Paolacci, Claire, *Henri Collet témoin de son temps*, mémoire de maîtrise en Histoire sous la direction de Pascal Ory, université de Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2000.
- Streletski, Gérard, « Une année de *Comœdia* 1919-1920 », *Revue internationale de musique française*, 10^e année, n° 29, juin 1989, p. 7-18.

To quote this article: Stéphan Etcharry (trans. Christopher Murray), "Collet, Henri (1885-1951): Overview of his Writings", Dictionary of Composer's Writings, Dictéco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 04/10/2021, <https://dicteco.humanum.fr/person/2358>.