

# The story of a song.

*"La Makhnovtchina" is extracted from the record "Pour en finir avec travail" (To finish with work): released in France in 1974: a vinyl filled with songs hijacked by various authors, among which Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, to quote the most known.*

*Here is a very nice (and very instructive) interview with the producer of the LP, Jacques Le Glou, an eternal anarchist, close to the situationists, who was notably very active during the occupations movement in May 68 in France.*

JACQUES LE GLOU - When I started writing songs in 1968, it was a bit like Jules Jouy who, during the Paris Commune, had managed to write a song a day... Of course, not everything is of the same quality, some songs are magnificent and others rather "lame"! What seems to me rather normal when one writes a song per day... Jules Jouy essentially wrote "hijacked" songs.

## **Did the principle already exist?**

Oh yes, since the Canuts: "We are the Canuts / We walk naked...", it is a religious song diverted by the Canuts of Lyon. I liked this method. People have found beautiful melodies, why not put beautiful texts on them?

While doing my research, I discovered that the hijacking of songs was often practiced in a protest or revolutionary perspective. I told myself that if other people had done it before me, it was a good idea. And during the three weeks of May-June 1968, which were the most insurrectionary, I wrote 70 to 80 songs...

## **... which were not all published.**

No, there are just nine on the record. In 1969, when I started to see what I could do with these texts, I realized that there was a problem of rights: one could not publish or produce songs with music already registered at the Sacem without the authorization of their authors, composers and publishers. So I started a series of approaches to publishers, composers and authors, for the twenty-five or so songs I had selected.

## **The result?**

Basically, all the big publishers refused because they didn't like the principle. Some of them asked to see the texts but when I sent them to them, they were appalled! Trenet, for example. I had hijacked one of his songs under the title Papa s'pique et mère boit l'coup! We had a fifteen minute conversation on the phone, he was completely flabbergasted... How can you write such things, my dear friend? So Trenet refused.

As far as Brassens is concerned - I knew it afterwards - there was a kind of protective clan around him and so he never had direct access to my texts. I had a veiled return and I gave up.

Léo Ferré, whom I had known at the Fédération Anarchiste, did the blow of the scorned artist to me... I would like to remind you that when we did concerts at the Mutualité, Brassens did not get paid, Ferré did... By principle. *The anarchists paid for Léo's concerts but not for Brassens' or Nougaro's. It's interesting, isn't it?*

With Prévert, it was very simple. *When he heard Les bureaucrates se ramassent à la pelle (from Les Feuilles mortes), he laughed like crazy and told me: "I give you my consent".* With that letter, I went to the publisher Enoch who gave me permission to use the music from Dead Leaves.

The same goes for « Il est cinq heures, Paris s'éveille ». Lanzmann and Dutronc laughed when they read my text and gave me their agreement. As for La mitraille (to the tune of La bicyclette), Pierre Barouh did what was necessary to get the chords.

### **And what about the other songs on the record?**

While doing research on anti-clerical songs, I came across Le bon Dieu dans la merde, a magnificent song that had been forgotten. I found the complete text with the verse that Ravachol sang when he went to the scaffold and that had been deleted.

### **The song is credited as anonymous...**

Yes, we couldn't know who wrote the text... The second track, La java des Bons-Enfants, is an old song that Guy Debord had written. On the first edition - the 30 cm of 1974 -, I had voluntarily hidden his name, and in the notes which accompanied the disc, I put forward the hypothesis that it could be Raymond Caillemain, the famous Raymond La Science of the Bande à Bonnot... Obviously, all the journalists fell into the trap!

Guy Debord had written this song in the early 60s. The music is by Francis Lemonnier, an anarchist saxophonist who was a bit lost - he committed suicide a few years later - but a great guy and a real artist. He had the idea to turn Debord's text into a java. The result pleased Guy very much. "La vie s'écoule, la vie s'enfuit" is a text by Raoul Vaneigem, also set to music by Francis Lemonnier. I knew Debord and Vaneigem for a few years already.

### **I didn't know they wrote songs!**

Neither did I! It was when I spoke to them about my project for a record that I discovered that they both had an immoderate taste for song.

### **And "La Makhnovtchina"?**

Etienne Roda-Gil wrote it around 1966, I think, two years before he became known as Julien Clerc's lyricist. At the time, he was in the Spanish libertarian movement. Roda was in the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth and I was in the Anarchist Federation. That's when we met and started to build a good relationship. He was an ebullient person.

Two years ago, a director, Charlotte Silvera, had a film project on the life of Etienne Roda-Gil. He agreed, but he wanted this portrait to be made in the form of a conversation between him and me. We went to lunch in a brasserie behind the Pantheon with two

cameramen and the director. A whiskey lunch, as usual - in five hours, we had to "down" two bottles... Roda was well lit but already tired... He was telling me about a huge project that he had almost finished: a musical about the Commune.

**Roda-Gil's name does not appear on the 1974 edition either.**

I had "hidden" him too. At the time, we didn't see each other much anymore because he had said some not very nice things about the revolutionary movement...

**The female voice of the disc is a certain Vanessa Hachloun. In 1998, at the time of the first reissue on CD, we learn, in an article of Libération signed by Hélène Hazéra, that it is about... Jacqueline Danno! How did she get involved in the project?**

At first, I thought of Pia Colombo and Catherine Ribeiro. I had seen Pia at the TNT when she sang Brecht in a production by Vilar. She was fantastic, pathetic. We met, we talked a lot, she told me about her life... And then the disease came. Catherine Ribeiro, I had found it a little too militant. With her, there would not have been the necessary distance from the texts.

And then, one day, I went to see "Noces de sang", a show by Garcia Lorca, with Jacqueline Danno as actress and singer. She had a voice that I liked very much. I showed her my texts. Compared to her repertoire, it seemed difficult to assume. I suggested to her to take a pseudonym and she accepted. Vanessa was a fashionable name, it was the name of models and Barbie dolls. And Hachloun, it was the hard version of the word HLM... Vanessa Hachloun, Jacqueline Danno said yes.

**And Jacques Marchais?**

I had heard him sing at La Méthode and I already knew him from a magnificent album, "On a chanté les voyous". With Jacques Marchais, I also had my male voice.

**Could you also have called on someone like Marc Ogeret?**

Yes, but Ogeret was too well known, whereas Jacques Marchais was rather anonymous and he deserved to be known because he was always outdone by Ogeret, who was already in place. They had more or less the same repertoire. I liked both of them, but I wanted to give Marchais a chance, because he had a wonderful voice.

He was a very generous person who, in his last years, earned his living by lending his voice to films or commercials - he was the French voice of Captain Igloo. He died a few years ago.

**And what about the musicians?**

I found them thanks to Pierre Dutour, whom I had met on the set of the film Sweet Movie, where I had written some songs. When I told him about my project, Pierre Dutour, first trumpet player at the Paris Opera, said to me: "I will find you musicians who are all of a high level. It was Dutour who did all the musical casting for me. The arrangers were Michel Devy and Jean Morlier. On the flute, we had two musicians from the group Pachamac...

"Pour en finir avec le travail" is a record that was made with a lot of means, unlike many other "revolutionary" productions of the time... In the studio, at the time of the recording, Michel Devy, had proposed to sing the chorus of "La Makhnovtchina" in duet with Jacques Marchais, and he had a very good idea because the result is magnificent.

### **Did you produce it?**

Yes, it cost me ten grand at the time. I had just made a good deal and I invested everything on this record. For a while, we were well advanced with Musidisc for the distribution but at the last minute Musidisc withdrew. Thanks to a friend who knew an artistic director named Bob Socquet, I went to RCA, directed by François Dacla.

I made the model of the album, with the texts inside and the explanatory notes. They let me do everything and the record was released with a print run of 3500 copies.

### **And the choice of title?**

"Pour en finir avec le travail" (*To put an end to work*) was in line with my ideas and with the philosophy of May 68. For me, the most important criticism was that of work.

The record was very well received, the press was enthusiastic! Half a page in Hara-Kiri, with an article by Delfeil de Ton who said: "You can't get up in the morning without listening to *Il est cinq heures...*". A quarter page in Le Monde. One week after its release, the record is the darling of the FNAC, which places it prominently at the entrance - a pyramid of LPs! - and plays it permanently... The record must have pleased a department manager who decided to promote it. In two months, the 3500 copies were all sold! I didn't break even, but I didn't care, I wasn't there to make money.

I went to RCA to discuss a reissue and there I saw that there was a problem... In the meantime, some of the board members had listened to the record... "The Good Lord in the Shit... Cops drop dead on street corners... Do you realize what you are publishing? Let's stop this." So the life of this record stopped two months after its release and, for twenty-five years, there was no question of reissuing it!

### **What did you do then?**

In the meantime, I left France for a few years and I forgot about this record. A few years later, I contacted RCA again and made them this proposal: "Either you give me the tape back or I'll hit you, and it will cost you a lot...". They gave me back the tape and it was then that I considered a CD reissue. I stumbled upon the "Anthologie de la chanson française" published by EPM. I called the record company and was surprised to find François Dacla, the former president of RCA. "Hello François, I'm coming!"

We met again and signed within 24 hours. This 1998 CD reissue, part of the Anthologie de la Chanson Française, also did very well. There were two printings.

For this new reissue in 2008, in a new format, I revised the cover and included a "historical" document as a bonus: a large reproduction of the first poster designed by the CMDO after the occupation of the Sorbonne.

**The record was released in 1974 but when were the songs written?**

Between 68 and 69. The record was released six years after '68 because I was waiting to have the money to produce it. I didn't want to release a "cobbled together" record, I wanted it to be done in good conditions. Then I started to work on the writing of the notes with Guy Debord. After the first printing in 1974, the record was quickly unavailable. And it was when I realized that it had become a "collector's item", because it was also a beautiful object, that I decided to reissue it on CD.

**On the cover of the LP, it is written "volume 1". So a second one was planned?**

Yes, I did have other songs, some of them beautiful, that I put aside (songs from Congo, Portugal, Poland...). Lack of time, lack of money, a little laziness, it was not done.

After a short passage through the Fédération Anarchiste, Jacques Le Glou joined the Internationale Anarchiste. In 1967, he discovered the Situationists and the following year, he was found with the Enragés in Nanterre... "Then, it accelerated with the Movement. I was an agitator, an oiler... I am writing about this period, which should be published in the fall. It will be part of my memoirs.

**What was your state of mind in May 68? Did you think that "le Grand Soir" had arrived?**

I thought that it was not going to last very long and that, consequently, it was necessary to benefit from it. I was a very active cheerleader at the Sorbonne, on the first occupation committee. I was on the barricades, I was wounded, I ended up in the hospital. I fought regularly with the cops, I wasn't a nice guy... During those days of May 68, there was a great atmosphere, with wonderful dreamers... *They were magnificent days. We didn't have enough 24 hours...*

**But you thought the "dream" would have to end at some point?**

Yes, and so it had to last as long as possible... The bosses had gone green, everyone was panicking, there were no more ministers. Only the unions were left who tried to control and manipulate the wildcat strikes. They were against factory occupations, and if the conflict persisted and hardened, they were going to lose it. It was played out between Pompidou and the CGT, within a week or two. If it had gone the way of the strikers, they wouldn't have been able to catch up. So, afterwards, go figure...

**Do you think there was a pact between the government and the unions?**

I'm rereading the correspondence, the calls, the communiqués of the time... With some of my technical friends, we had managed to intercept the calls from the police, so I knew what they were doing, where they were going. I could hear the communications between the police and their superiors: "Chief, shall we shoot?" And the officials would refuse to give them the order. And fortunately, because it could have been a tragedy. When De Gaulle went to see Massu in Baden-Baden, it was to find out if the troops could shoot at the students and Massu told him no. De Gaulle was confused. The only ones who kept a cool head were Pompidou and the Paris police prefect Maurice Grimaud. He had a good

eye for the situation. His book published in 1978, "En Mai fais ce qu'il te plait", is very interesting on this subject.

All the "unionist scoundrels" were panicking, led by Georges Séguy. They knew that they had to sign the bogus Grenelle agreements quickly to stop the movement. So they lied, cheated, manipulated. At the general assemblies, they arrived with false information : "Our comrades of Sud-Aviation have resumed work...". But it was not true ! It was to weaken the movement. They used all kinds of weapons.

### **According to you, who won, who lost ?**

Nobody... In the end, the winners were the leftists, the bobos of the time, those who read Libé... They talk about '68 as if they were there, but they weren't and they got all the benefits. What there was as reforms in the customs comes from there and was recovered by the modern bourgeoisie. Just as in 1789, when it was the bourgeoisie of the time that recovered the gains of the French Revolution. It's a pattern that repeats itself, with variations, but it's always the working class that gets screwed.

The bosses got off easy, finally, when they had given up everything... They emptied the supermarkets and had stocked up for a year or a year and a half! Marcellin, the Minister of the Interior, declared: "It is Cuba that manipulates the leftists. Sartre was a pure imbecile: when he came to the Sorbonne, he understood nothing... "It was happening elsewhere. *The strength of the movement is the factory occupations. That's what paralyzes a country. If it were to come back tomorrow, it would have to start there.*

And then there was an astonishing liberation of speech: "people started to speak", as a song written later says... I would say that people found the word... Ciné Classic and Ciné Culte, two cable channels, gave me carte blanche to pay tribute to the spirit of May through cinema. Throughout the month of May 2008, I presented fifteen films, films shot before or after May 68 but which have the spirit of revolt and poetry. May 68 was a very poetic moment, we must not forget it... "It is forbidden to forbid", "Imagination in power", "Under the cobblestones, the beach", "Let's repaint the city in blue"... People tend to forget what was said and done there. We had returned to a little more humanity, in a natural way, quite inspired... People who didn't know each other were writing the same things, which corresponded to our ideas. That's what was so wonderful: there were no words of order to follow, it was each according to his inspiration, and the inspiration was very creative.

### **And 40 years later, what is your state of mind?**

40 years later, it's not brilliant. The analysis that one could make of the spectacular and commercial society could only be reinforced... We are made to eat shit, we play with our health... But this does not mean that we should give up! It's already been two generations since nothing happened. But maybe in twenty years, there will be a change of heart...

### **In 68, did you hang out with singers?**

No. We didn't have the time. We were for a more global revolution. We took the texts of Lautréamont or Rimbaud. We were still very radical and we made ourselves heard.

When I intervened here and there, I know that I was heard. We were one of the voices of May... that never gave up.

Afterwards, when it was time to leave, I went to live in Mexico for a long time. A bit like an adventurer, I had dropped out of everything else. When I came back, I started working in the film industry (I was vice-president of Unifrance). What has always preserved me is my solitude. I have always preferred to be alone than to be badly accompanied. I have organized myself to live alone, politically speaking.

*Interview by Raoul Bellaïche, March 7, 2008.*