

Singing an Original Song with a National Anthem: *God Save the King des Français* by P.-A.-A. de Piis

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1. Introduction

It is commonly known that *All You Need Is Love* begins with the introduction of *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem. According to Letts, this warlike anthem is used to create a sense of contradiction and irony with the following chant “love, love, love” (11). It is one of the common act of inserting national anthems into popular songs. However, few people know of another case of this that comes from the beginning of the nineteenth century in Paris. Pierre-Antoine-Augustin de Piis (1755–1832), a French amateur *chanson* composer created a French song to honor the return of King Louis XVIII, using the melody of *God Save the King* and titled the song as *L'Arrivée de Louis XVIII à Paris, ou le God Save the King des Français* (*The Arrival of Louis XVIII in Paris, or the God Save the King of the French*). Hereafter, this *chanson* is referred to as *God Save the King des Français*.

It might be assumed what kind of *chansons* were sung and listened to. In fact, they sang a wider range of songs by anonymous songwriters printed in journals and pamphlets meant to be distributed. More recently, researchers have begun focusing on the historical aspect of popular songs, which includes Piis' attempt to honor the arrival of the new French King using the melody of the British national anthem. In this study, I will thus analyze *God Save the King des Français* to explain how a French songwriter composed and sang a new *chanson* based on the melody of a foreign national anthem.

In fact, the French already had a popular royalist song named *Vive Henri IV* (*Long Live Henri IV*). Although Piis knew this song, he intentionally opted to adopt the British national anthem's melody for composing *God Save the King des Français*. Hence, I would state that this decision was indicative of a turning point of the relationship between the United Kingdom and France.

2. Background and Process for Creation of *God Save the King des Français*

The War of the Sixth Coalition of 1814, which was arguably not truly complete until the Seventh Coalition and the Battle of Waterloo after the 100 days in 1815, restored Louis XVIII to the throne. He had been in exile in other royal countries since 1792 due to the French Revolution. Some researchers like Berthaud claim that the crowd did not welcome the new king (276). Démier, on the other hand, points out that they welcomed Louis XVIII as a symbol of peace (57–58). Several contemporary Parisian journals reported the king's return with enthusiasm.

On May 3, according to these journals, Parisians were excited to witness the return of the new royal family, who, they hoped, would bring lasting peace to France in contrast to Napoleon I, who had waged a number of wars against his neighboring countries to expand his territory. A report of the *Journal de Paris* on May 4 is as follows.

From six o'clock in the morning, the streets of the faubourg Saint-Denis, both the district and the town itself, were filled with an immense crowd from Paris and all the neighboring communes. Never had the people made such an effort to adorn themselves in their finest clothes, never had such joy been painted on every face, nor with more radiant expressions. ... At twelve thirty, the numberless and brilliant procession of His Majesty arrived from Saint-Ouen to la Chapelle, where all the houses were draped with elegant decoration.

Such enthusiasm also spread to meetings of the *Caveau moderne*, a Parisian singing society whose members gathered in a restaurant once a month to enjoy dinner and *chanson* creation. This society was active between 1806 and

1816, with a membership of twenty dramatists and men of letters. Pierre Capelle, a publisher of several songbooks and gastronomical works, called on his friends, including Piis, to propose the idea of gastronomical singing society. All the friends were in favor of his idea, and thus the *Caveau moderne* was founded with a monthly journal published by Capelle (Capelle IV-V). The society was so private that no one was allowed to participate unless one was recommended by a member and perform a good *chanson*. Works of the members were collected in the society's monthly journal and distributed to subscribers who, according to the publisher on April 1809, numbered between 1200 and 1500 (*L'Épicurien* 68). These subscribers, who included Parisians as well as people from other provinces, could not participate in the monthly dinners of the *Caveau moderne*. Instead, they were allowed to post their own *chansons* in the monthly journal; in short, the journal offered them a space for presenting their works.

It was on April 20, two weeks prior to the return of Louis XVIII, that all the *Caveau moderne* members sang in honor of the new King at a dinner meeting. The corresponding issue of the monthly journal on May 1814 says, "Everyone, inspired by the return of the Bourbons, improvised couplets in honor of the royal family... Everyone sang for peace, that daughter of the gods, so long time exiled from the earth" (*L'Épicurien* 81–82). In all, 17 *chansons* were published in the monthly journal's May issue. Piis dedicated four *chansons* to the Bourbons, including *God Save the King des Français*.

3. Characteristics of *God Save the King des Français*

Each verse of *God Save the King des Français* has ten lines, whereas each verse of the original *God Save the King* has seven because the original repeats the first three lines. It is because Piis replaced the repeated lines with different lyrics. The rhymes of the first six verses are different from those of the latter. Following is the first verse of *God Save the King des Français*:

Des BOURBONS généreux	The return of generous Bourbons
Le retour en ces lieux	to this place
Comble nos vœux,	Fulfill our wishes.
Avec eux et par eux,	With them and by them,
Ainsi que nos aïeux	As our ancestors,
Soyons heureux.	Let us be happy.
Nos yeux sont éblouis ;	Our eyes are dazzled;
Nos maux évanouis ;	Our harms are faded;
Nos cœurs épanouis.	Our hearts are lighted up.
Vive LOUIS !	Long live Louis!

(qtd. in Piis, *L'Arrivée*)

It was common for contemporaries to compose new *chansons* using melodies of existing popular songs. This custom helped songwriters create songs more easily: thanks to this approach, the songwriters of the *Caveau moderne* could create *chansons* without possessing any knowledge of musical composition. The use of popular melodies also made it easier for listeners to memorize and sing new *chansons*. Of the 1706 *chansons* published in the monthly journal of the *Caveau moderne* from January 1806 to December 1815, only 67 were composed using new melodies.

In case of *chansons* using popular melodies, only their names were mentioned at the beginning of the lyrics instead of the notation. However, *God Save the King des Français* was notated in the monthly journal, which indicates that its melody was not familiar to them. The use of this little known melody was certainly not because he could not find any royalist melodies apart from *God Save the King*. There had already been a popular royalist *chanson* titled *Vive Henri IV* in France; its lyrics are as follows:

Vive Henri Quatre !	Long live Henri IV!
Vive ce roi vaillant !	Long live the courageous king!
Ce diable à quatre	This four-fold devil
A le triple talent	Has triple talents:
De boire et de battre,	Drinking, fighting
Et d'être vert galant.	And being old charmer.

(qtd. in Montjoie 178)

At the *Caveau moderne's* dinner on April 20, some of the members borrowed the melody of *Vive Henri IV* for their own creations. Piis also recognized *Vive Henri IV* and borrowed its melody for another *chanson*, but it seems that he had an idea to compose a song with the melody of *God Save the King*. One hint was that the British national anthem's hymnic and solemn mood was more appropriate for demonstrating his respect to the Bourbons than the minor melody of *Vive Henri IV*. Another reason was the universal applicability of the British national anthem. According to the *Journal de Paris* on April 20, 1814, the anthem was not only just sung for the United Kingdom but for the new French King.

The English, as an allied force, share the joy of the French; the day when they received the news of events in Paris, they expressed the most intense enthusiasm, and the capital of England suddenly presented the same scene as that of France. Residents dressed in white [the color of the Bourbons] and started singing their national song: God Save the King, which they followed with cries of "Long live Louis XVIII! Long live the Bourbons!" A large number of distinguished people from Great Britain are intending to travel to Paris to witness the festivals and celebrations that are to be held. They also claimed that His Royal Highness the Prince Regent has expressed to the King of France the desire to attending to his coronation (1).

The following extract is from another article written on April 27 about the visit of Louis XVIII to Carlton House;

At a quarter past six [on April 21], the King of France arrived at Carlton House with a remarkable procession. The Prince of Condé and the Duke of Bourbon were in the carriage with His Majesty, which escorted a large detachment of the royal guard with horse, as is fitting for our sovereign. When the King entered the courtyard, the guard of honor presented arms to His Majesty and music was played the air: *God Save the King*. The royal prince and his court came to receive His Majesty (*Journal* 3).

These articles suggest a sense of universality associated with *God Save the King* despite the fact that it was created to honor the British royal family. It should be noted that there are no words referring to the United Kingdom or England in any of its first four verses. Its generality and use in other countries has already been recognized by scholars: "this song [*God Save the King*], seen as an expression of personal loyalty to the king, traveled beyond the boundaries of Great Britain and, for a long time, served as the national anthems of Prussia, Denmark, and Russia until 1833, when Tsar Nicholas commissioned a new version" (Hang 840). There is no evidence that Piis had read the *Journal de Paris* articles previously cited, but he was clearly aware of the universal quality of *God Save the King*, and hence, he borrowed its melody to honor his sovereign.

Moreover, these reports indicate a turning point in the relationship between France and the United Kingdom. In the Napoleonic era, the United Kingdom had been one of the main enemies of and thereat for France. In addition, Anglophobic songs had been circulated among Parisians at the time. However, as the reign of the new King began in France, these two kingdoms began making efforts to improve their relationship with the air of *God save the king*.

4. Dissemination

No one mentioned the dissemination of this song at the meeting of the *Caveau moderne*, but according to the journal on June 1814, a subscriber found *God save the king des Français* significant. He sent the publisher a letter in order to suggest a plan for an association that would hold a ball every Sunday, opening with a dance to *God save*

the king des Français (154). Such a proposition is being suggested in regards to this particular *chanson* because he considered the song's chant-like melody to be an ideal way to honor the royal family.

God save the king des Français was not just sung at dinners of the *Caveau moderne*, it had transformed from a rousing *chanson* into a widespread popular hymn known throughout the French society. On May 30, 1814, after reporting the performance of four *chansons* by Piis at the meeting, the *Journal des débats* testified that *God save the king des Français* was sung at spectacles and concerts by this time:

Mr. Chevalier de Piis has enriched this gathering with four chansons, which are touching and full of originality, entitled: ... *l'Arrivée de Louis XVIII, ou le God save the king des français* which people now sing at spectacles and concerts (3).

The *chanson* had first been performed at a closed private dinner in April 1814, but only a month later, it did not remain within the interest of only the members of the *Caveau moderne* but began to be sung by others. Piis also noticed this phenomenon and utilized it to prove his influence. When he wrote a request to Louis XVIII in order to obtain any social places, he cited this phenomenon as evidence of his status as “one of leading men of letters to proclaim the joy of the French” (Piis, *Copie de la requête*).

On May 11, the *Journal de Paris* reported that Piis had dedicated *God save the king des Français* to the Count of Artois, his former master under the *Ancien Regime*. Moreover, the author of this article recognized *God save the king des Français* as “a national anthem of his composition”:

Mr. Chevalier de Piis, general secretary of the Police Prefecture [of Paris], had the honor of presenting, on [May] 9, to His Royal Highness Monsieur, brother of the King, a national anthem of his composition, entitled *God save the King des Français* (1).

According to a footnote of this article, *God save the king des Français* was arranged by at least two composers. Jacques-Marie Beauvarlet-Charpentier, French composer and organist, published a score of *God save the king des Français* with an accompaniment for the piano or harp (Piis and Beauvarlet-Charpentier). The accompaniment was composed of simple harmonies whose fifth note had the same pitch as the melody. Furthermore, Louis Jadin, a French composer, also arranged this song for theaters. The *Journal de Paris* on May 11 mentioned the existence of this score, but unfortunately, it is not currently found in any libraries including the National library of France. On May 23, a journal named *Affiches, annonces et avis divers* discovered another arrangement of *God save the King des Français*. It announced a program for a vocal and instrumental concert at Odéon Theater that day, which was primarily devoted to artists of orchestra of Opera-Italian, and among the list of pieces to be performed was *God save the King des Français*, arranged for orchestra by Tadolini (15). The main singer was a certain Génot while students of the Conservatoire chorused. Tadolini's score has not been discovered; nonetheless, this program certainly bears out the claim of *Journal de Paris* that “people sing [*God Save the King des Français*] now in spectacles and concerts.”

5. Conclusion

The analysis of *God save the king des Français* shows that it marked a turning point in the relationship between France and the United Kingdom. As France navigated through the transition from Napoleon's Empire to the Bourbon Restoration, the British came to salute the arrival of Louis XVIII by singing their national anthem. The use of the melody of this anthem by Piis was a way of honoring not only the new sovereign but also a change in Franco-British relations, a symbol of a long-awaited peace.

Multiple articles and arrangements of *God save the king des Français* proved that Piis' attempt was widely spread. It was arranged by a variety of musicians, and played in theaters and at concerts. This widespread dissemination shows that, as the *Journal de Paris* mentioned, this *chanson* reached far beyond private dinners of the *Caveau moderne* to be “a national anthem of his composition.”

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