French Accent
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The French Scene — Thomas Dutronc

When listening to Thomas Dutronc for the first time, you find yourself thinking that you've tuned in his father Jacques, as he resembles him a lot. But the more you listen, the more you realize that you are listening to a gifted young man who sings with a seductive voice with some slow pop and jazzy musical influences.

Thomas Dutronc is the son of two popular French singers and actors Jacques Dutronc and Françoise Hardy. You might have heard some of Jacques Dutronc's very popular songs, such as *Il est 5 heures, Paris s'éveille* (Paris awakens) or *Et moi, et moi et moi*, or you might have seen him in one of the French movies such as *Embrassez qui vous voudrez*. Françoise Hardy, Thomas' mother was also a popular singer in the sixties and is mostly known for the songs *Tous les garcons et les filles* and *Comment te dire adieu*, which was also done by the British singer Jimmy Sommerville in 1989. Jacques Dutronc and Françoise Hardy are still singing and/or acting and are very active on the French scene.

A seductive voice and jazzy influence

Thomas, who was a very gifted student in school, started early on to display his artistic talents. He began with photography and soon found that he had some writing talent. He wrote the lyrics for three of the tunes on his father's album *Brèves rencontres*. At the age of 18, he discovered the guitar and fell in love with the music of the legendary guitarist Django Reinhardt (*jazz manouche*), and thus his career in music began.

Recognized as a gifted guitarist, Thomas has performed in some well-known jazz clubs in Paris. He has a light, gypsy-jazz style inspired, as one would expect, more by Django Reinhardt than by his father. Thomas is obsessed with everything associated with Django. These last few years he has toured France with his quartet "*Thomas Dutronc et les esprits manouches"*. Finally, in October 2007, at the age of 35, he released his first album, *Comme un manouche sans guitare*. On his CD, he stays faithful to the musical style he has always loved. He was nominated as best artist at the 2008 *Victoires de la musique* (the French music awards), and his album was nominated as one of the musical revelations of the year.

The song that we reproduce on page 33, *J'aime plus Paris*, is a big success. It's an amusing song about the downside of Paris. But, of course, he finishes the song with a declaration of love for the city. The song also contains an amusing allusion to his father's very famous song, *Il est 5 heures, Paris s'éveille* (It is 5 am, Paris is awakening), when he sings, *Il est cinq heures, Paris s'endort* (It is 5 am, Paris is falling asleep).

Vincent Anthonioz

More on: www.thomasdutronc.fr.com

J'aime plus Paris

J'fais le plein d'essence
Je pense aux vacances
Je fais la gueule
Et je suis pas le seul

Le ciel est gris
Les gens aigris
Je suis pressé
Je suis stressé

J'aime plus Paris
On court partout, ça m'ennuie
J'vois trop de gens
Je me fous de leur vie
J'ai pas le temps
Je suis si bien dans mon lit

Prépare une arche
Delanoë,
Tu vois bien
Qu'on veut se barrer
Même plaqué or, Paris est mort
Il est cinq heures, Paris s'endort

Je sens qu'j'étouffe
Je manque de souffle
Je suis tout pâle
Sur un petit pouf
J'aime plus Paris
Non mais on se prend pour qui ?
J'veux voir personne
Couper mon téléphone
Vivre comme les nonnes
J'parle pas de John

J'aime plus Paris

Passé l'périph,
Les pauvres hères
N'ont pas le bon goût
D'être millionnaires

Pour ces parias, la ville lumière
C'est tout au bout du RER
Y a plus de titi mais des minets
Paris sous cloche, ça me gavroche
Il est fini l'Paris d'Audiard

Mais aujourd'hui, voir celui d'Hédiard

J'aime plus Paris
Non mais on se prend pour qui ?
Je vois trop de gens
Je me fous de leur vie
J'ai pas le temps
Je suis si bien dans mon lit
J'irais bien voir la mer
Ecouter les gens se taire
J'irais bien boire une bière
Faire le tour de la Terre

J'aime plus Paris
Non mais on se prend pour qui ?
J' vois trop de gens
Je me fous de leur vie
J'ai pas le temps
Je suis si bien dans mon lit

Pourtant Paris
C'est toute ma vie
C'est la plus belle
J'en fais le pari
Il n'y a qu'elle
C'est bien l'ennui

J'aime plus Paris

From the CD: *Comme un manouche sans guitare*

www.dailymotion.com/video/x3ofyq_thomas-dutronc-jaime-plus-paris_music%202007

*Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis!**

If you live in Pas-de-Calais or if you've just heard of the region and you've acquired a reasona-ble level of comprehension of French, then I would definitely suggest that you take a trip to the cinema and see this entertaining film that is breaking box office records all over France. So far, it has pulled in more than 17 million viewers since it was released on February 27! The thread of the story is quite simple: a post office director who lives in the south of France is forced by his company to relocate to Northern France and who finds, once he has mastered the often impenetrable accent, people who open their hearts to strangers.

The film, directed by and starring the comic Danny Boon, takes aim at the prejudices about the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region bordering Belgium to reveal the warmth of its people. The area's ill-deserved reputation involves many clichés: bad weather, far-fetched accent, the lack of education, alcoholism, high unemployment… Some might even think that those who live there have pickled their brains with too much alcohol and that they live in coal mines because it's -30°C outside! Of course, when the post office director moves there, he is very pleasantly

surprised…

Watching the movie, we pick up pointers on how to speak like a *ch'ti* – where the 's' and the 'c' are pronounced like a 'ch' - For example: *sien* (theirs) would be pronounced like *chien* (dog)… Even the French who do not live in the area would need some real *ch'ti* language training in order to understand everything. A scene that takes place in a restaurant gives a glimpse on how to order food in the *ch'ti* language.

If you want to spend an enjoyable evening where you just might find yourself laughing until you cry, go see the movie – you won't regret it! And I would advise that you go to the movie theatre very early, as you will be queuing to get a seat.

C.A.

* Welcome to the Land of the *Ch'tis* (*Chetemis, or Chtimis* – the people who live in the northern part of France).

Coq

Oiseau de fer qui dit le vent
Oiseau qui chante au jour levant
Oiseau bel oiseau querelleur
Oiseau plus fort que nos malheurs
Oiseau sur l'église et l'auvent
Oiseau de France comme avant
Oiseau de toutes les couleurs

Le nouveau crève-cœur, by Louis Aragon

Rooster

Iron bird that signals the wind
Bird that crows at the dawning day
Beautiful quarrelsome bird
Bird stronger than our misfortune
Bird perched on church and rooftop
Bird of France of yesteryear
Bird of every colour

This poem by the famous French Surrealist Poet Aragon speaks of the rich and diverse symbolism of the rooster in France. First, *le coq* is the national emblem of France. The symbol existed already in the Middle Ages, but it became more well-defined during the Renaissance, and was strongly reinforced during the French Revolution. It is supposed to refer to the proud, obstinate, courageous and fertile peasant origins of France. Second, one can see the iron rooster above many church steeples, where it represents the Christian symbol of vigilance from the New Testament story of the Passion of Christ, and not to the national emblem. And, of course, the song also refers to the actual bird, noisy, quarrelsome, very colourful, and that you can hear very early in the morning in the French countryside.
Chosen and read by Alexandra

A Selection of books

Le visuel

An English-French illustrated dictionary with detailed drawings of almost every imaginable aspect of life (insects, bricolage, transportation, etc.) Every tiny element of all kind of things is shown with it's appropriate name, something that can be indispensable for finding exactly the right term to use. A smaller version of the French-French *Le dictionnaire visuel.* These dictionaries have been a huge success and more than 7 million copies have been sold so far!

Ed. de la Martinière, 2006. 17 €.

Le fromage

This new book is an excellent introduction to the many different French cheeses. It is really a practical encyclopaedia of cheeses from all over the country, including how they are made, all the French habits linked to each of them, and how best to enjoy them. It was written by Christian Janier, who has earned the prestigious title of *Meilleur ouvrier de France* (best French worker), a title given after a rigorous competition to the very best in all the various professional categories.

Ed. Stéphane Bachès, 2008. 28 €.

Mai 68, jour et nuit

During the month of May, the French will be celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the famous student uprising of *Mai 68*, an event which is considered to be a landmark in France's recent History. For the occasion, more than 60 books have been published! Most of them are essays, picture stories, documents or various commentaries, not all of them highly interesting…

The easiest and simplest maybe for expatriates who want to understand better what happened back then is this short book, composed of documents, quotes, clear explanations of events, and tons of pictures and cartoons which are themselves an excellent way to understand better both the facts and the mood of the revolt that brought France to a standstill and nearly toppled the government.

By Christine Fauré
Ed. Gallimard Découvertes, 2008. 13,50 €.

Limbes/Limbo

A very short book (57 pages only), which has the immense advantage of being bilingual… And it is interesting to boot, as it is an homage that the well-known Canadian expatriate writer Nancy Huston pays to Samuel Beckett. It was public-shed several years ago, but is still available from amazon.fr Huston is very well-known and respected in France and writes her

novels first in French and then does her own English translation. She has won several prizes for her novels, including the *Prix Fémina 2006* for one of her best novels, *Lignes de faille* (the English version came out in 2007 under the title: “Fault lines” (McArthur & Cie).

Ed. Actes Sud, 2000. 8.99 €.

L’élégance du hérisson

Here is a book which is much, more difficult to read if you aren’t fluent in France. But we thought we had to recommend it anyway as it is a wonderful novel which has been a tremendous success. More than a million copies have been sold and it has won several prizes. The author, a very young and shy philosophy teacher, has been so overwhelmed by the media attention and insistent requests for interviews that she has now found refuge in Japan! And what is even more refreshing is that the success of the book was really through word-of-mouth recommendations by readers and not by the critics, who at first ignored it.

The novel is about a highly educated concierge, and a very intelligent little girl, both of them willing to live extremely discreetly, and observe life around them in a very clever way.

By Muriel Barbery,
Ed. Gallimard, 2006. 20 €.

Le père Achille — Second Instalment

In this issue we present the second of two parts of a short story by Alphonse Daudet from the collection of short stories known as *Lettres de mon moulin.* Expecting her husband to return from the factory for lunch, La Mère Achille has an unknown visitor who announces that he is her husband’s son from a relationship with a women he knew before he married her.

En effet, elle connaît ce nom. Dans le commencement du ménage, ça l'a même rendue bien malheureuse. On lui disait que cette Sidonie, une ancienne de son mari, était une très jolie fille et qu'à eux deux ils faisaient le plus joli couple du pays. Ces choses-là sont toujours dures à entendre.

Le garçon continue :

- Ma mère est une brave femme, allez ! D'abord, on m'avait mis aux Enfants trouvés ; mais, à dix ans, elle m'a repris. Elle a travaillé ferme pour m'élever, me faire apprendre un état... Ah ! je n'ai rien à lui reprocher, à elle ! Mon père, lui, c'est autre chose ; mais je ne suis pas venu pour cela... Je suis venu seulement pour le voir, pour le connaître. C'est vrai, ça m'a toujours taquiné, cette idée de ne pas connaître mon père. Tout petit, ça me tourmentait déjà et j'ai bien souvent fait pleurer ma mère avec mes questions : “Je n'ai donc pas de père, moi ? Où est-il ? Qu'est-ce qu'il fait ?” Enfin un jour elle m'a avoué la vérité, et tout de suite je me suis dit : Il est à Paris, eh bien ! j'irai le voir. Elle voulait m'en empêcher. “Puisque je te dis qu'il est marié, que tu ne lui es plus rien, qu'il ne s'est jamais informé de toi.” Ça n'a rien fait. Je voulais le connaître à toute force, et ma foi ! en arrivant à Paris, j'avais son adresse, et je suis venu tout droit. Il ne faut pas m'en vouloir, c'était plus fort que moi...

Oh ! non, elle ne lui en veut pas ! Mais au fond du cœur elle est jalouse. Elle pense en le regardant qu'il y a de bien mauvaises chances dans la vie ; qu'il aurait dû être pour elle, cet enfant-là. Comme elle l'aurait bien soigné, bien élevé !... C'est qu'en vérité, c'est tout le portrait d'Achille ; seulement il a en plus un air d'effronterie, et elle ne peut pas s'empêcher de penser que son fils à elle, ce fils tant désiré, aurait eu quelque chose de plus posé, de plus honnête dans le regard et dans la voix.

La situation est un peu embarrassante. Ils se taisent tous les deux. Chacun songe de son côté. Tout à coup on entend des pas dans l'escalier. C'est le père. Il entre, long, voûté, avec la démarche traînante de l'ouvrier qui a passé beaucoup de lundis à flâner par les rues.

“Tiens, Achille, dit la femme, voilà quelqu'un qui veut te parler”, et elle s'en va dans la pièce à côté, laissant son mari et le fils de la belle Sidonie en face l'un de l'autre. Au premier mot, Achille change de figure, l'enfant le rassure : “Oh ! vous savez, je ne vous demande rien ; je n'ai besoin de personne pour vivre ; je suis seulement venu vous voir, pas plus”.

Le père balbutie : “Sans doute, sans doute... Tu as... vous avez très bien fait, mon garçon.”

C'est égal, cette paternité subite le gêne un peu, surtout devant sa femme. Il regarde du côté de la cuisine, et baissant la voix : “Tenez, descendons, il y a un marchand de vin en bas, nous serons mieux pour causer... Attends-moi, la mère, je reviens.”

Ils descendent, s'attablent devant un litre, et on cause.

- Qu'est-ce que vous faites ? demande le père, moi je suis dans la charpente.

Le fils répond : “Moi dans la menuiserie.”

- Est-ce que ça va bien, chez vous, les affaires ?

- Non, pas fort.

Et la conversation continue sur ce ton. Quelques détails de métier, c'est par là seulement qu'ils se tiennent. Du reste, pas la moindre émotion de se voir. Rien à se dire, rien. Pas un souvenir commun, deux vies complètement séparées qui n'ont jamais eu la moindre influence l'une sur l'autre.

Le litre fini, le fils se lève : “Allons, mon père, je ne veux pas vous retarder davantage ; je vous ai vu, je m'en vais content. Au revoir.
- Bonne chance, mon garçon.”

Ils se serrent la main froidement, l'enfant part de son côté, le père remonte chez lui ; ils ne se reverront jamais.

Alphonse Daudet
Contes choisis : la fantaisie et l'histoire.
Paris : G. Charpentier, 1882