**Café Concerts and Authors' Rights in Algeria**

**Overview**

These articles from Le Café-concert (June 2 and 9, 1867) document a case of tension between metropolitan French cultural institutions and colonial business interests in Algeria. They describe how Mr. Micriditz, the proprietor of a long-established café-concert called "La Perle" in Algiers (operating since 1840), was forced to close his business due to escalating fees demanded by the Society of Authors, which increased from 20 francs monthly in 1853 to an unsustainable 200 francs monthly by 1867. The correspondent, DE FLAVACOURT, criticizes the Society for crushing provincial entrepreneurs while enriching Parisian composers, contrasting their aggressive fee increases with the more moderate and stable charity taxes imposed by local authorities. The case is presented as an example of metropolitan exploitation that harms both local business and government revenue in the colony.

**From Le Café-concert, June 2, 1867**

*[Note: This article is excerpted from the Courrier de l'Algérie dated May 25]*

We extract from the Courrier de l'Algérie of the 25th current, the following article. If the facts are accurately reported, the role of the Society of Authors is at least strange and awkward; in wanting to increase its revenues, it closes an establishment and deprives itself of a reasonable collection.

Who grasps too much—holds poorly.

We will welcome explanations that may be given regarding this event; what we want to obtain is the light.

*CH. NANCEY,*  
*Secretary of the Editorial Staff.*

**Café Concerts and Authors' Rights**

There has existed in Algiers, since 1840, an establishment known by the name of café-concert of LA PERLE, and kept without interruption, since that time, by a man who has managed to create a universal name for himself, to be respected by all his fellow citizens, and to maintain an intact honorability amid the commercial reefs that could have been hidden from him by the fog of the tavern.

This man is Mr. Micriditz, whom the entire artistic world knows at least by reputation. After twenty-seven years of existence, an establishment has proven itself. So, great was our astonishment to see on all the walls and in all the newspapers the announcement of the termination of the lease of the premises occupied by La Perle, the sale of the operating equipment and furniture, and the closure of the café. What powerful motive could have pushed Mr. Micriditz to such an extreme measure, when his café was always up to its reputation; when the construction of the Boulevard de l'Impératrice allowed him to open a splendid façade on the sea, with the brilliant landscape of the Bay of Algiers as a backdrop; when everything assured him a certain success and ample compensation for the losses he had suffered during his temporary installation. Why was it that this industrialist was renouncing the future and the hopes it promised him, and courageously abandoning his past sacrifices?

Naturally, we went to get information, and here are the facts that the investigation revealed:

In 1853, during the formation of the Society of Composer Authors, the establishment of La Perle was subjected to the common law and committed to paying a monthly sum.

Nothing better so far, nothing more legal. The authors were using their privileges established by law, and no one would ever have thought of criticizing them on this point, if they had strictly kept to the terms of reason. But, alas! Ambition and misplaced zeal have ruined many men. In this very circumstance, the facts give credence to our words.

The monthly payment was only 20 francs, such a minimal sum that Mr. Micriditz did not even think to raise the slightest observation.

After this period, although no change had been made to the establishment, the fee was set at 30 francs.

One franc per day, it was, after all, two cups of coffee that Mr. Micriditz could afford to offer to the Society.

Mr. Micriditz still paid for two years without a murmur.

Suddenly, the sum was raised to 60 francs per month.

Nothing, however, had changed in the habits of the café. The premises had not been enlarged, the price of consumptions had remained stationary, no entrance fee payable in addition, no innovation, except the sudden increase in the right of exploitation.

Mr. Micriditz sold four coffees for the benefit of the authors' fund, but this time he went to open his mouth. He closed it quickly, for fear of the proverb: "Too much talking harms."

He thus paid again for two and a half years.

One day, an order arrived for him to sign a commitment to pay one hundred and fifty francs per month, EIGHTEEN HUNDRED FRANCS per year!!!

This time, Mr. Micriditz spoke; but it appears that this did not advance him much, for he was obliged to pay what was demanded of him.

Despite such an enormous disproportion in the assessment of the rights to be collected, the figure finally seemed to have reached its maximum of exigence, when, by a letter dated February 6, 1867, Mr. Rollot, general agent of the Society, invited his correspondent in Algiers, in terms whose choice could have been better, to have Mr. Micriditz sign a commitment for one year only, starting from March 1, 1867, to pay the modest sum (sic) of TWO HUNDRED FRANCS per month, masked balls apart, for authors' rights, and this, without the treaty being able to be renewed by tacit reconduction, under penalty of all damages and interest in case of violation of the clauses, etc., etc. Mr. Rollot ends his letter with threatening instructions regarding Mr. Micriditz if he refuses to sign, and leaves us no doubt about his perfect knowledge of the Press Code.

Mr. Micriditz could take no more; he signed to put his affairs in order, to continue his industry for a few more months; but at the same time, he announced the closure of his establishment, due to the burdens imposed on him by the Society of Friends of Fine Arts.

Such was the key to the enigma. Mr. Micriditz preferred to retire rather than contract a servitude that could have led him to ruin.

Here are the facts without exaggeration, and as we were able to account for them, with documents and evidence in hand.

*DE FLAVACOURT*

*(To be continued in the next issue.)*

**From Le Café-concert, June 9, 1867**

**Letter from Algeria — SINGING CAFÉS AND AUTHORS' RIGHTS (continued)**

Without entering into a series of considerations that would only lead us to incidental discussions, let's look, on the other hand, at how the city's Charity Office behaves, whose main interest is to collect a fee from entrepreneurs of public amusements, and this, not for the profit of an association whose members are above need, but for the profit of charity.

Until 1853, see the correlation of dates, the poor tax was fixed at thirty francs per month. At that time, and after meticulous verification of the business registers of Mr. Micriditz, who was at the same time paying twenty francs to the Society of Authors, it was recognized that the annual profit should amount to about 6,000 fr.

They took the tenth and adopted the figure of 50 fr. per month, plus 50 fr. per masked ball, and for fourteen years, the situation of the café not having changed, these figures have been maintained.

During this time the authors' rights increased. From which follows this simple calculation, that if, on 6,000 fr. of profits, an entrepreneur of café-concerts must deduct 2,400 fr. for authors' rights, about 1,000 francs for the Charity Office, including masked balls; if we add 500 fr. of license fees and 200 fr. of patent, privileged fees due to the State, he is left with only 1,900 fr. net, for having directed an enterprise as burdensome as those of this genre.

That the cash register of the Society of Authors seeks to enrich itself, nothing better; but should it crush provincial industrialists, to fill the pockets of these hack composers, who churn out a romance in the style of Thérésa in less time than it takes to say it. Is that a way to open a free career to the emulation of good and beautiful, to bring forth serious musicians and to produce talented imaginations? Should we, poor exiles, pay for the successes of the exhibitions of popular divas and bear the consequences of Parisian enthusiasm for fashionable songs?

What happens, on the other hand? It is that the Society causes a real prejudice to the State by depriving it of the rights that are due to it for the patent and the contributions it collects on establishments of this importance, when the merchant, unable to struggle under the charges incumbent upon him, withdraws by folding up.

Mr. Micriditz, in closing his establishment, courageously gave an example that would be desirable to see followed by the industrialists of France. Opposing force with force, that is having some chance of success; and if the directors of café-concerts would also unite in society, in order to chastise from the repertoire all these shoddy songs imposed on them, no doubt the Society of Authors itself would come to terms.

I could say a lot more about a ball given in Algiers for the benefit of the victims of the earthquake; but I think that's enough for today, and I leave it to public opinion to judge on the facts stated above.

DE FLAVACOURT.