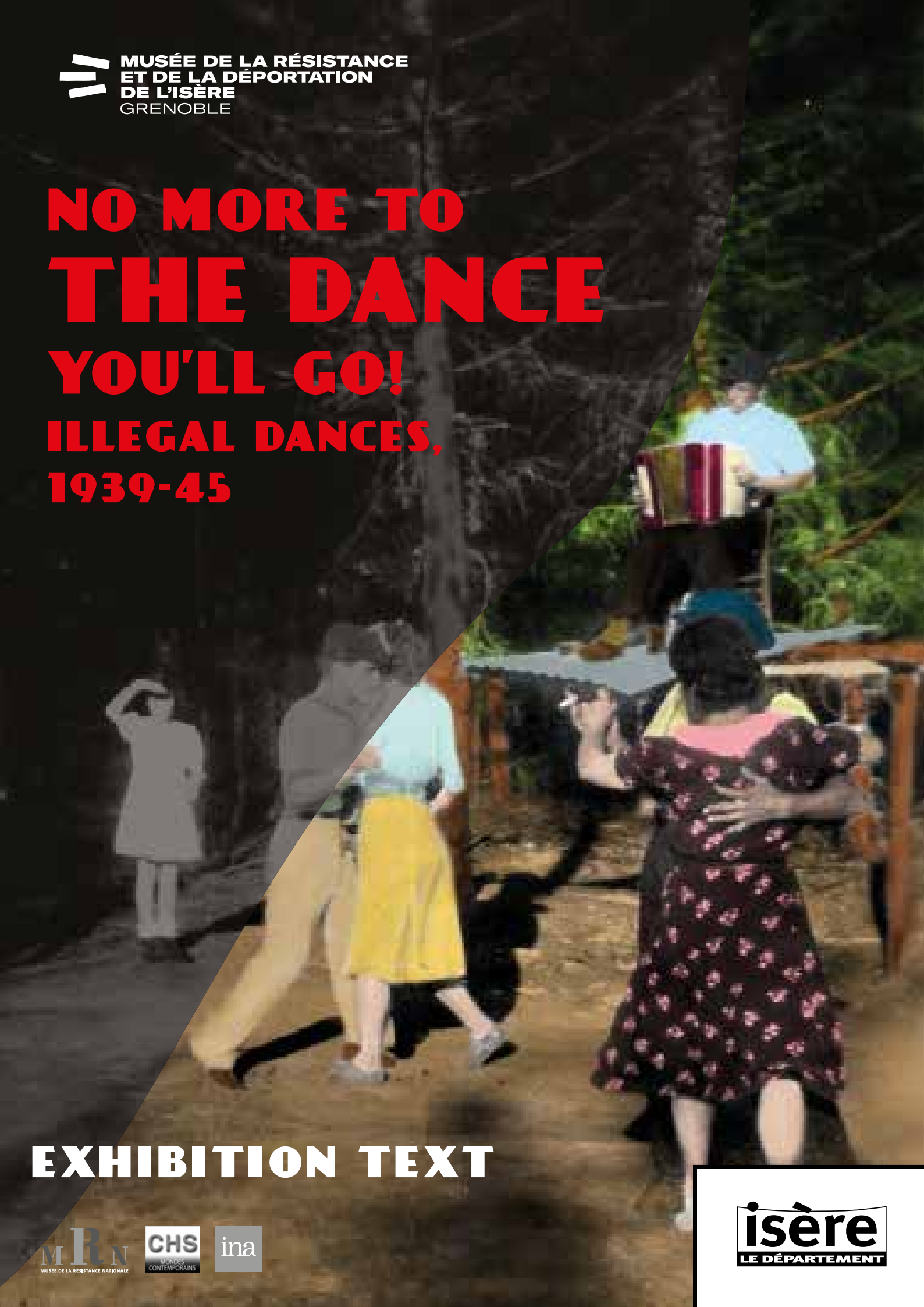
MUSÉE DE LA RÉSISTANCE
ET DE LA DÉPORTATION
DE L'ISÈRE
GRENOBLE

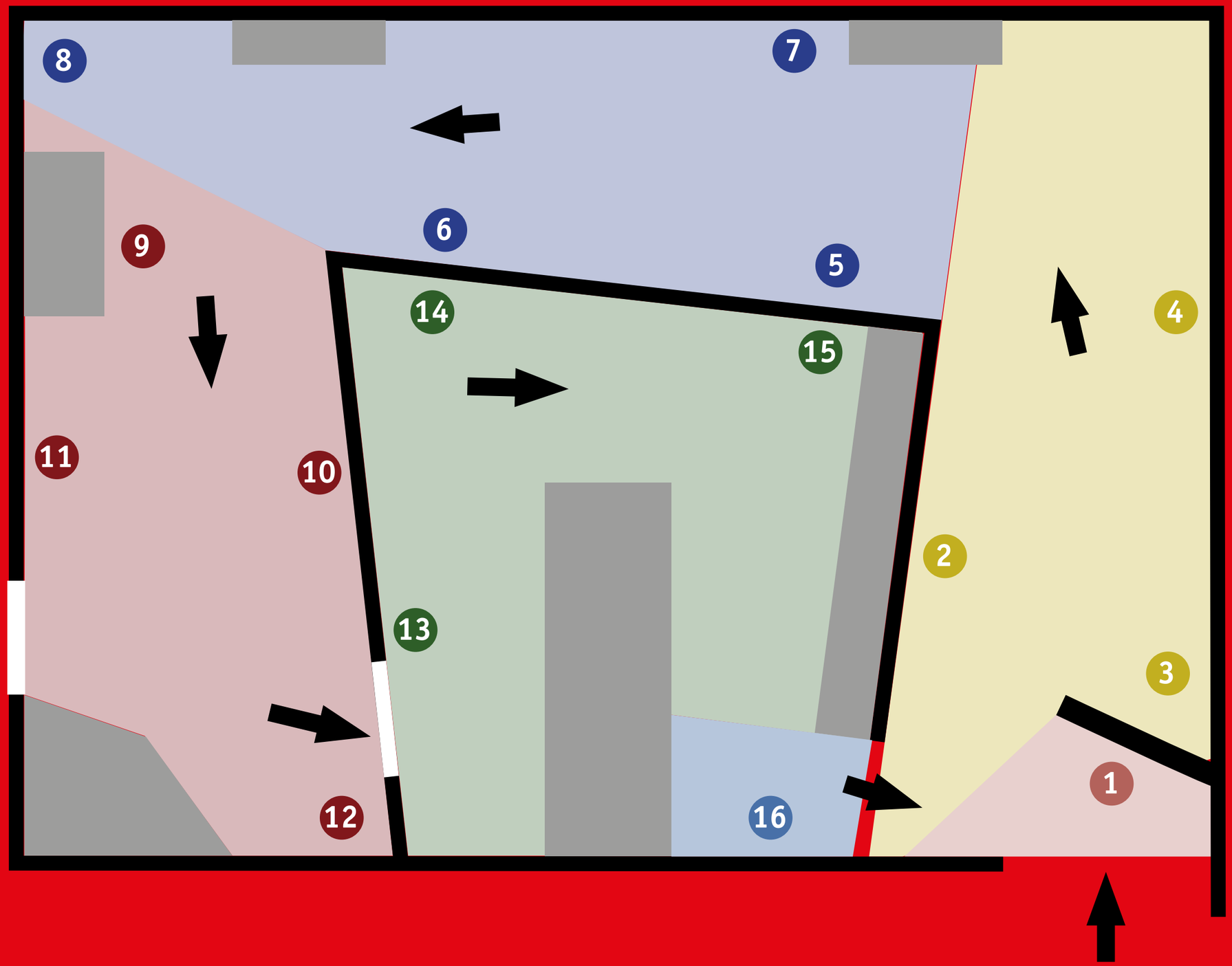
NO MORE TO THE DANCE YOU'LL GO!

ILLEGAL DANCES, 1939-45



EXHIBITION TEXT

MRN MUSÉE DE LA RÉSISTANCE NATIONALE
CHS MONDES CONTEMPORAINS
ina
isère LE DÉPARTEMENT


8
7
9
6
5
4
14
15
11
10
2
13
3
1
12
16

EXHIBITION TEXT

NO MORE TO THE DANCE YOU'LL GO!
ILLEGAL DANCES, 1939-45

1 ILLEGAL DANCES, 1939-45

From May 1940 to April 1945 any form of collective dancing was prohibited all over mainland France. Dancing, an essential leisure activity for French youth between the wars, was suddenly stopped. The Vichy regime prevented, repressed and punished dances, on the grounds that they were immoral and socially pernicious. So they simply went 'underground'.

How then did unofficial dances avoid detection? What music was played and which dance steps were in vogue? But above all what values and social bonds made dancing irresistible?

This exhibition is the result of new research carried out by the Centre d'Histoire Sociale des Mondes Contemporains (Paris 1 University), Musée de la Résistance Nationale, Champigny, and Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation de l'Isère. Now showing for the first time in Grenoble it takes us back into atmosphere of illegal dances and their history.

So step out and come dancing!

BETWEEN THE WARS

2 DANCE, DANCE, DANCE

Dances were organized on any occasion and pretty well anywhere. Private gatherings were staged for key family events such as weddings, but friends often just got together on a Sunday for some fun. They were also a regular feature of any public celebration, particularly Bastille Day. Dances coinciding with religious feasts and public holidays were extremely popular, but also occasions such as village parties, Christmas, New Years, Mardi Gras and the feast of Assumption.

In the country a host of small contractors organized balls, supplying both a band and a temporary dance hall. In towns cafes would set up a stage, sometimes even private boxes, often as permanent fixtures.

Some venues specialized in particular dance steps or styles of music, such as the tango or jazz. Others such as the Bal Antillais, on Rue Blomet, Paris, or the Bal de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, a gay venue in the Quartier Latin, became an essential part of the capital's nightlife.

Extracts from films from between the wars.
Rights reserved
July 14, René Clair, 1933
Sous les Toits de Paris, René Clair, 1930
Hôtel du Nord, Marcel Carné, 1938
Dainah la Métisse, Jean Grémillon, 1932
They Were Five, Julien Duvivier, 1936

Traité de Danse, by Lussan-Borel, published by Albin Michel, Paris, 1936.
Sophie Jacotot collection

Toutes les Danses Modernes et leurs Théories Complètes, a dance manual by Professor D. Charles, published by S. Bornemann, Paris, late-1920s.
Sophie Jacotot collection

La Ronde de Nuit, a history of dancing illustrated by SEM, published by Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1923.
Sophie Jacotot collection

Music of La Rumba au Rhum, published by Martin Cayla, 1930s.
Sophie Jacotot collection
The rumba caught on in France in the early-1930s. This dance for two partners originated in Cuba, where it was known as 'son'. The term rumba was probably used because it sounded more exotic. Conservatives were quick to condemn its slow tempo and lascivious movements. Oscar Calle's Cuban band led the way at Le Melody, which soon became THE place for rumba in Paris.

Music of Le Fox-Frott, published by Olivier & Cie, 1920s.
Sophie Jacotot collection
The Fox Trot was the top jazz dance style between the wars. More straightforward than the Shimmy or the Charleston, it was danced all through the interwar years to the sound of jazz music imported by American troops stationed in France after the first world war. With the tango it was the dance music most commonly played in dance halls. It was one of the first steps to feature on the repertoire of musette dance venues.

Music of Je ne Sais, published by Julio Garzon, 1930s.
Sophie Jacotot collection
The tango originated in the poor quarters of Buenos Aires and Montevideo towards the end of the 19th century. It was first seen in Paris shortly before the first world war and became a great success in ballrooms and dances between the wars. It is danced in a close embrace with the legs relaxed and slightly bent. It features a sequence of steps, of varying complexity, leaving plenty of scope for improvisation.

78 RPM record of 1920-30s songs and dance music.
Guillaume Veillet collection

A wireless manufactured by Ergos, c.1936.
Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation collection, Département de l'Isère, 91.06.61

3 DANCING MANIA

Dancing took off between the wars as a collective leisure activity. It was a golden age for dance halls, often in the grip of what became known as 'dancing mania'. People of all classes would dance anywhere, at any time. Dance halls and ball rooms started all over the place, often staying open till the early hours. This in turn led to the start of night clubs.

The middle classes danced in private rooms in hotels and luxury ball rooms; during the strikes of 1936 the working classes were happy to dance a few steps to the sound of an accordion, and flocked to *bal musette* dance halls or *guinguette* open-air cafes on Sundays.

The introduction of a 40-hour working week contributed to this trend, marking the beginnings of a leisure culture. New dance steps imported from the US – tango, fox trot, samba and Charleston – spread across the French capital and out into the countryside. The 1930s witnessed the start of dance marathons, during which couples would compete, attempting to waltz for several days at a stretch.

Fresnoy dance hall, Tourcoing (Nord), 1930s.
Roubaix media library collection

Headlines of the Miroir du Monde newspaper, n°327, 6 June 1936.
Sophie Jacotot collection
In spring 1936, when the Popular Front coalition of left-wing parties came to power, workers tested a new form of strike action, occupying factories. Usually associated with discipline and hierarchy, the workplace suddenly became an arena for debate, celebration and sharing, if only for a few weeks. Music and dance played a key part in the strikes which left a lasting mark on the labour movement.

4 A CHANGE OF REPERTOIRE

The repertoire in vogue at the start of the 20th century already included dances for two partners such as the waltz, java, one-step or *paso doble*, but the 1920s and 1930s witnessed the arrival of new styles from the across the Atlantic. The tango, fox trot, rumba, swing and samba first appeared in Paris but soon spread to the rest of France. These new dances were a product of the American melting pot in which European and African cultures mingled. They owed their growing popularity to music broadcasts on the wireless, sheet music that changed hands quickly and dance masters who picked up new rhythms in the capital.
But not everyone was happy about their hybrid roots. Conservatives, and particularly Christians, thought them immoral, disgusted by the close physical contact they encouraged.
However the new styles ultimately became part of the classical repertoire, alongside older, more traditional steps such as the Auvergne *bourrée* and the Landes *rondeau*.

Le Pigall's restaurant, Paris, 1925, photograph by the Séeberger brothers.
Ministère de la Culture collection - Architecture and heritage media library - RMN-GP
In 1919 the term *dancing* appeared in French to refer to a new type of dance venue, where new styles of music, imported from the US, were played – tango, jazz, samba, rhumba, beguine and such. Some places sought to outdo the competition by lavishing extra care on the front entrance, sign, interior décor, lighting or the dance floor itself, witness this picture of an elegant Montmartre dance hall.

First dance marathon in Nice, November 1931, photograph by Arax.
Musée Nicéphore-Niepce, Chalon sur Saône, © Adapg RMN-GP
Coinciding with the growing popularity of dance halls, dance marathons became commonplace in France in the 1930s. In these contests of endurance imported from the US couples danced almost non-stop for days, or even weeks, on end. The photographer Arax took thousands of pictures of these events, all over the country, immortalizing them and the hordes of spectators who came to watch the pairs competing for first prize.

Flyer for the Bal Blomet, Paris, 1936.
Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris collection / Roger-Viollet
The dance hall on Rue Blomet, in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, started life as a meeting place for the city's West Indian community. In the 1930s it became a favourite night spot. At a time when Guadeloupe and Martinique were still under colonial rule, it was known as the Bal Nègre or indeed the Bal Colonial Blomet. The band led by clarinettist Ernest Léardée played here and helped make Antillean beguine popular in Paris.

Flyer for the Bal de la Grande Roue, Paris, 1933.
Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris collection / Roger-Viollet
By the 1930s there were ball rooms and dance halls all over the capital. Some districts, such as Montmartre (the streets adjoining Place Pigalle) and Montparnasse, were well known for their nightlife. In the musette dance halls people danced to the sound of the accordion playing a varied repertoire featuring styles from well before the first world war, such as the waltz and java, but also more recent additions such as the fox trot, tango and beguine.

A batch of dance tokens.
Serge and Josseline Bertin collection
Metal or cardboard dance tokens were used all through the 19th century and on until 1940 at neighbourhood dances. Entrance to these musette dances was free and drinks were cheap. Punters could purchase tokens at the ticket office, then the proprietor would collect one from each person before the start of the next dance. In this way dancers could easily move from one venue to the next in the course of an evening.

Programme for the Sarthe Stenographers Friendly.
Association dance, Le Mans, 4 November 1933.
Serge and Josseline Bertin collection

Dancers at the Cabane Cubaine, 1931, © Gyula Halász (1899-1984), or Brassaï.
RMN-GP / Jean-Gilles Berizzi, © Brassaï estate / RMN-GP

Chevalier-Le Saux jazz-musette band, Paimpol (Côtes d'Armor), c.1940.
Bernard Lasbleiz collection

Bastille Day public dance, Paris, 1932, © Mondial Photo-Presse agency.
Bibliothèque nationale de France collection

At the Lac Bleu, on the banks of the river Marne, © Gyula Halász (1899-1984) or Brassaï.
RMN-GP collection / Jean-Gilles Berizzi, © Brassaï estate / RMN-GP

Between the wars the guinguette cafes on the banks of the river Marne, in the eastern suburbs of Paris, became a big attraction for the capital's working class. Here was an opportunity to bathe and dance. Measures introduced by the Popular Front government in June 1936, in particular the 40-hour working week and paid holidays (a fortnight a year), created more scope for leisure activities. Dancing was at the top of the list.

Extracts of dance music from between the wars.
Private collection
À la Varenne, Albert Carrara, 1933
Ça Vaut Mieux que d'Attraper la Scarlatine, Ray Ventura et Ses Collégiens, 1936
Minor Swing, Hot Club France quintet, 1937
Doin' the Rhumba, Cab Calloway, 1931
La Cumparsita, Bianco-Bachicha Argentine band, 1930s
Ma pomme, Maurice Chevalier, 1936
Mado, Emile Vacher, 1931
Ninfa de Ojos Brujos, Pedro Via y su Orquestra, 1930s
Serpent Maigre, L'Orchestre Antillais, 1930s
Serait-ce un Rêve?, Les Vagabonds Mélomanes, 1931

THE BAN ON DANCING

5 NO MORE TO THE DANCE

The declaration of war on 3 September 1939 had little immediate impact on dance halls. The first bans in the Paris area were imposed locally by the *préfet*. But with the phoney war and no sign of any fighting the bans were temporarily lifted, in particular for the traditional singles dances, for Saint Catherine's day, on 25 November.
But the launch of the German offensive in western Europe on 10 May 1940 prompted interior minister Georges Mandel to ban dance 10 days later. This rule, combined with a curfew, remained in force almost until Germany finally capitulated, even in the part of France not initially occupied by enemy forces.
Addressing the nation on 20 June 1940 Marshal Pétain condemned the 'pleasure-seeking' that had led to defeat, by corrupting youth and society at large. Dances were banned throughout mainland France. In July 1943 prime minister Pierre Laval ordered préfets (local representatives of central government) to tighten up the rules, closing public venues and arresting anyone who organized entertainment of this sort.
But to no avail, with a record-breaking number of illegal dances in 1943.

Announcement of the closure of dance halls outside Paris, Le Petit Parisien daily, 24 May 1940.
Bibliothèque nationale de France collection

Announcement of the closure of dance halls in Paris, Le Figaro daily, 20 May 1940.
Bibliothèque nationale de France collection

Article in Le Lannionais newspaper, dated 1 June 1941, reporting that the ban on illegal dances was still in force.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection

Article in Le Lannionais newspaper, dated 17 August 1941, reminding readers that the proprietors of bars were not allowed to let customers dance.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection

Article in Le Lannionais newspaper, dated 13 June 1942, reporting sentences handed down by the magistrates court in Lannion, including two 60-franc fines for organizing an illegal dance.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection

Poster, Message to youth, 29 December 1940.
Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation collection, Ain

Wireless broadcast by Marshal Pétain to French youth, 29 December 1940.
Institut national de l'audiovisuel collection
The Vichy regime used every means at its disposal to spread its propaganda. Pétain's message to French youth, broadcast on the wireless on 29 December 1940, subsequently appeared on posters and flyers. In this text he again blamed the French – who had 'lost their way on the flower-strewn paths of pleasure' – for the debacle. He went on to attempt to recruit young people to serve the new authoritarian regime, which had committed itself to collaborating with the Nazis.

German decree, dated 2 May 1941, Kommandantur, Paris.
Archives nationales collection
'The German military government has no concern for the organization of fairs, local celebrations or similar festivities. Furthermore such festivities are not a problem [underlined]. Consequently the organization of such festivities can be delegated to the relevant French authorities which are free to do as they see fit. However, in so far as this type of event always leads to crowds, of varying size, gathering in a relatively small space, it may, depending on the location and out of a concern for air defence, be subject to reservations. The commander of [German] anti-aircraft defence must consequently be informed in good time. Feldkommandantur officers [at district level] must consequently check that préfets provide adequate notice of any plans for such events and inform the commander of anti-aircraft defence via the head of military government in the relevant district. Should the commander of anti-aircraft defence have any objection to the staging of an event, the latter will inform the head of military government who will, in turn, issue orders for the Feldkommandantur to ban the event. The staff officers of the heads of district and their counterparts at the Feldkommandantur will draft the relevant decree and determine the modalities of its application. The heads of district of the military government will inform the commanders of anti-aircraft defence. Feldkommandantur officers will inform the préfets of this ruling.

Prefectural decree, dated 22 May 1940, banning dances in the Var department.
Archives Nationales collection

German decree, dated 28 August 1940 and published on 16 September 1940 in issue n° 7 of the Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Frankreich (VOBIF), the official journal containing decrees issued by the German military government in France's [northern] occupied zone.
Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (IHTP) collection

Circular, dated 25 June 1941, issued by the French government representative in the occupied zone, translating the German decree of 2 May 1941.
Archives Nationales collection

6 PROSECUTING DANCES

During the German occupation most of the illegal dances were held in the country, so it was the *gendarmes* [as opposed to the urban *police*] who had the job of stopping them. Doing the rounds of country villages on foot or by bicycle they happened on festivities, alerted by the sound of accordion music or youths in large numbers heading for a barn. Sometimes they received letters of betrayal or followed up rumours. They would stop the party and book offenders, for trial by the local magistrate's court, where they could be fined up to 200 francs or imprisoned for up to three days. In practice the average fine for organizing a dance was 60 francs, plus legal expenses of a comparable amount. This was equivalent to roughly to two days' pay for an unskilled labourer.
Sentences mainly concerned the organizers: musicians, whose instruments were confiscated, and the proprietors of bars and hotels. In the latter case the courts could shut down their business temporarily. Repeat offenders could be sentenced to prison, subject to a decision by the regional préfet. Such sentences were published in the local press to serve as an example.

Court order closing a cafe in Saint Brieuc, 14 January 1944.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection

Court order closing a cafe at Grand Chalet Maroué, Lamballe, 18 January 1944.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection

Prison sentence for a farmer at La Chapelle Saint Aubin, Sarthe, 9 January 1945.
Archives départementales de la Sarthe collection
After repeatedly organizing dances this farmer was sentenced to two weeks imprisonment at the internment camp at Le Mans.

Report by the Renseignements Généraux (police intelligence) on Cafe Desmet, suspected of hosting Communists, 31 July 1942.
Archives départementales du Nord collection

Letter to Marshal Pétain from the owner of Cafe du Textile, asking to be allowed to re-open, 14 August 1942.
Archives départementales du Nord collection

Petition in support of re-opening Cafe Le Mexico 16 March 1943.
Archives départementales du Nord collection

Batch of tickets issued by gendarmes and police in 1941-45 connected to the organization of illegal dances.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor, Archives départementales du Morbihan, and Archives départementales de l'Isère collections

7 A QUESTION OF MORALS?

Efforts to ban dances were rooted in longstanding condemnation, by the religious and civic authorities, of dancing on moral grounds. Dances were purportedly a cause of public disorder, a morally reprehensible threat to the virtue of young unmarried women. But the message from advocates of repression was far from clear: most parish priests allowed Sunday dances and the authorities agreed that 'as long as the poor dance, they won't conspire'.
By the early-1900s dancing had become almost untouchable, thanks in particular to the press. But although law and order took little interest in dances they were banned occasionally during the first world war.
The Vichy regime clamped down on such entertainment because it was determined to moralize public life. There was to be no more of the pleasure-seeking associated with the Popular Front, with its paid holidays and 40-hour week.

Letter from a musician to the Préfet of Côtes du Nord, 2 November 1943.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection
The musician, deprived of the right to play by the ban on dancing, complained that a fellow musician was dodging the ban.

Letter from the parish priest at La Méaugon to the Préfet of Côtes du Nord reporting an illegal dance venue, 22 March 1943.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection

Letter from the parish priest at Lavaldens to the Préfet of Isère reporting illegal dances, 31 July 1942.
Archives départementales de l'Isère collection

Anonymous letter to the Préfet of Côtes du Nord, 7 December 1941.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection

Le Bal, Antichambre de l'Enfer!, picture taken from Le Grand Catéchisme en Images, published by La Bonne Presse, 1893, colour lithography.
Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée collection, 1984.40.43

Music of Le Bal Défendu, published by Les Éditions Réunies, 1944.
Centre d'histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation de Lyon collection

Music of Aujourd'hui, Bal de Nuit, published by Chappell, 1942.
Centre d'histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation de Lyon collection

Music of Depuis que les Bals sont Fermés ..., published by Paul Beuscher, 1943.
Centre d'histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation de Lyon collection

Music of Quand les Guinguettes Rouvriront, published by E. Robert-Trebor, 1944.
Centre d'histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation de Lyon collection

Music of Le Retour des Guinguettes, published by Société d'Editions Musicales Paris-Monde, 1945.
Centre d'histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation de Lyon collection

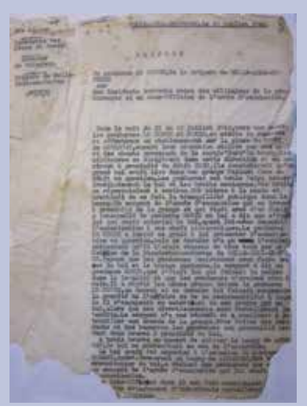
These songs, written between 1942 and 1945, are testimony to how the ban on dancing affected public opinion, to the hopes that venues would re-open, and the delight when the ban was lifted. Designed to be danced, all these songs were composed by well-known musicians, such as Vincent Scotto, and performed by leading stars such as the singer Damia or accordion player Émile Prud'homme, one of Edith Piaf's favourite accompanists. They were all published in 'petit' (small) format, already

in use for at least a century: illustrated cover – in this case with photographs of the artists – with the words and music on the inside pages, arranged on three staves, one for the voice and two for the piano or accordion. They would have been published in large volumes, then sold very cheaply by travelling salesmen, often themselves street-singers.

8 ATTITUDE OF GERMAN OCCUPATION FORCES

On 2 May 1941, in the occupied zone, the German authorities handed back control and supervision of public celebrations to their French counterparts. They took little interest in illegal dances. Indeed the only related matter for which they put any pressure on the Vichy regime was dancing lessons, demanding the introduction of a test for professional dance instructors. Those who failed the test could no longer give lessons.
The attitude of German occupation forces to illegal dances varied from one place to the next, largely indifferent at times, brutal at others, depending on whether or not their interests were at stake. They certainly reacted harshly to dances suspected of welcoming Resistance members, as was the case at Château d'Habère-Lullin, Haute Savoie, or youths dodging Compulsory Work Service (STO), notably at Decize, Nièvre.
On occasion they intervened to prevent legal action against cafes they used, or indeed stopped for a few dances while on patrol.

Ruins of Château d'Habère-Lullin (Haute Savoie) burned down following an SS raid on the night of 25-26 December 1943.
Demolis collection, mémoire-alpine.com, Ecomusée Paysalp
The Germans became convinced that guests at the Christmas dance at the castle included members of the Chablais maquis. They killed 23 youths, imprisoned 19 women and 17 boys, and set light to the building. Fifteen people were deported, six of whom never returned, raising the death toll to 31.



Report on a quarrel between French gendarmes and German soldiers about an illegal dance, 16 July 1941.
Archives départementales des Côtes d'Armor collection
The soldiers prevented the gendarmes from stopping the dance.

ILLEGAL DANCES

9 TO THE DANCE WE SHALL GO!

Most of the dancers at these illegal gatherings were young, some aged little more than 14, and of working class origin. News of when a dance was to be staged travelled round a village by word of mouth. Having put on their Sunday best – or what remained of it in those days of scarcity – they would set off by bicycle or on foot.
Dances were often held on Sunday afternoon or in the evening, ending in the early hours. Much as before the war, men were in great demand, so the women might dance with each another. Their ultimate aim was not quite the same: the men were looking to meet a sweetheart, whereas the women claimed just to enjoy the dancing. But for all parties a dance was an opportunity to flirt, pair up and even marry.
Leaving well after the curfew, they cautiously made their way home.

Testimony of various dancers and musicians who took part in illegal dances.
Musée de Tulle, Institut national de l'audiovisuel, and Alain Quillévéré collections
In order of appearance:
Germaine Ollivier
François Miginiac and André Salles
Germaine Cadiou
Ernest Roussel
Jeannine Picard
Marcel Azzola

10 PUTTING ON A DANCE

Henri Valade and a group of youths dancing, 1940s, published by Musée de Tulle.
Jeanine Picard collection
Valade was deported for Resistance activities in 1944 but to judge by this photograph, from before he was deported, he must also have taken part in an illegal dance.

Family on the way to a dance (?), July 1943, Seilhac (Corrèze), published by Musée de Tulle.
Gustave Bacquart collection

Young woman posing beside her bicycle, 1940s, published by Musée de Tulle.
Monédière family collection

Illegal dances were held away from prying eyes, in barns, empty houses or even more unusual venues such as cinemas, tunnels, schools or boxing rings. They were often organized by women, particularly the owners of bars, but also by the all-important musician in person.
The first step when organizing a dance was to decide who did what, then persuade the village accordion player to perform on the following Sunday evening, as well as getting permission to use an old barn from its owner, without explaining the real reason. This done the venue needed to be decorated so that couples could dance in complete safety. If no indoor venue was forthcoming then dances were sometimes held in the open air.
Admission was often free, but sometimes a small charge was made. Or there was a whip-round to pay the musician.
The choice of tunes was much the same as before the war.
Private dances were also staged for family events, such as weddings, and to keep the young people occupied on a Sunday. But they too fell foul of the authorities.

Dance in Saffré woods, Loire Atlantique, 4 June 1944, picture by Michel Pichot.
Dominique Bloyet collection
These two photographs of an illegal dance, fuzzy but nevertheless valuable, show a large number of youths in a clearing surrounded by on-lookers. On 28 June 1944 German troops and French militia broke up the maquis that was forming in the woods.

Dance in a farmyard, Gosné, Ille et Vilaine, summer 1944.
Jean Couennault collection

11 DANCE CLASSES

The Vichy regime was afraid that dance classes, which were mainly on offer in towns, might turn into illegal dance venues. On the other hand it was keen to maintain the classes to educate French youth and encouraged the teaching of certain styles, in particular traditional country dances.
In January 1941 new rules were introduced under which only dance classes that had opened before the war were allowed to continue, on a subscription basis. Numbers were limited to no more than 15 couples at any one time. In 1942 permission from the préfet was needed to open or continue running a dance class. In practice most dance classes in Paris became a front for illegal dancing.
The Vichy press condemned many dance classes, asserting that they contributed to the 'zazou' trend. Some far-right groups went so far as to wreck their premises.
Unlike dances, dance classes resumed immediately after the Liberation of France, but the rules enforced during German Occupation were upheld. To this day the approval of the préfet is needed to open a dance class!

Music of Y'a des Zazous, published by Les Éditions réunies, 1945.
Musée Hector-Berlioz collection, Département de l'Isère

Y'a des Zazous.
first performed by Andrex, re-arranged by Matthieu Chedid aka M, and now performed by Brigitte Fontaine, Kékéland, 2001.

Jean Huguet dancing the swing, Paris, 1944, photograph by Albert Harlingue.
Roger-Viollet collection
Jean Huguet (1923-2007), a sales representative, was a zazou. This largely urban youth movement was a reaction to German occupation and the Vichy regime. Youths advocated dancing to jazz music, let their hair grow long at the back, and wore garish clothing with white socks and heavy shoes.

Interior ministry circular, dated 21 October 1941, setting forth rules for opening a dance class.
Archives Nationales collection

Findings of the investigation of the Ménétrier dance class, summer 1943.
Archives Nationales collection

Article in Le Petit Parisien, dated 26 July 1943, demanding the closure of illegal dance venues posing as dance classes.
Bibliothèque nationale de France collection

Article in Paris-Soir, dated 17 November 1943, suggesting that musical instruments confiscated at illegal dances should be sent to French prisoners of war in Germany.
Bibliothèque nationale de France collection

Report on attacks on dance halls by Vichy sympathisers, 21 February 1944.
Archives de la préfecture de police de Paris collection

12 DANCING IN THE FRENCH ALPS

Much as elsewhere illegal dances were held in the French Alps, culminating in 1943. In Isère they mainly occurred in small industrial towns and mountain villages. There is no record of any dances being interrupted in large towns in the area.
The working classes accounted for the majority of participants, particularly among the musicians. Otherwise many were immigrants, primarily from Italy.
Regarding the music itself, accordions were the key instrument, produced in the Marche region and imported by Italians. But the violin, an essential part of local musical traditions for many years, was still to be heard on occasion, particularly to accompany a Dauphiné *rigodon*, or rigadoon.

Testimony of participants in illegal dances in the French Alps, recorded by Pascal Lamige in 2009-10 for the Rave-Musette show.

Summons served on Italian musicians on the Matheysin plateau, Isère, 1940s.
Archives départementales de l'Isère collection

Violin with carved backplane, made by Paul Beuscher, 20th century.
Département de la Haute-Savoie collection, 2009.2.476
This violin is more remarkable for the carving on the back than for its age. It was probably never even played by a village violinist. But it is a reminder that for hundreds of years country folk would dance to the sound of more rustic violins played by members of the community, repeating the steps they had learned from their elders and neighbours: quadrilles and rigadoons, maybe a polka or mazurka picked up in a nearby town, during their military service, or taught by some passing peddler. During the war a violin could come in handy to replace a confiscated accordion.

Chromatic accordion, made by Paolo Soprani, 20th century.
Département de la Haute-Savoie collection, 2009.2.160
The first accordions appeared in Germany in the early-1800s, soon spreading to towns all over Europe. The little town of Castelfidardo, in the Marche region of Italy, where this instrument was made, became a reputed source. Once in Paris, travelling musicians, perhaps equipped with a Castelfidardo accordion, would join musette, or bagpipe, players from Auvergne to accompany dances. This was the start of what became known as the musette style of dancing. Between the wars accordions became more sophisticated – larger, heavier, louder and with more buttons. Accordionists led the dancing. The war, with its illegal dances, confirmed this trend.

Testimony of Félicien Philippe and Jean Ceinturier, violin players in Hautes-Alpes, recorded by Alain Marcellin-Gros, collector.
Musée dauphinois collection, Département de l'Isère, SON 73.21.1
Duration: 19 minutes, 44 seconds

Rigadoon in the meadow belonging to the Corréard family, for Assumption Day, 15 August 1934, Pellafol, Isère.
Musée dauphinois collection, Département de l'Isère, VI 95.16/1
Duration: 30 seconds

13 ILLEGAL DANCES AND THE RESISTANCE

The French Resistance had an ambivalent relationship with illegal dances. They became a key issue in 1943 when maquis groups were established in the main mountain massifs of the southern zone, not occupied by the Germans until November 1942.

Dances were mainly held in the country, often in areas close to maquis strongholds, and could serve for recruiting and passing on intelligence. In some cases Resistance combatants organized a whip-round, providing a welcome source of funds. At Vourey, Isère, members of the Combat movement collected 400 francs to fund the Vercors maquis. There were also instances of the Resistance forcibly seizing the takings from a dance.

But dances also attracted young combatants keen to meet women of their own age. Maquis leaders were against this, for security reasons. In the excitement of the festivities they might be tempted to give away information to prying ears. Combatants nevertheless did go dancing, at the risk of serious punishment on returning to their base.

Men's bicycle, made by Adolphe Clément and Co., c.1898.
Musée dauphinois collection, Département de l'Isère, 80.1.1

Accordion players with the Corrèze maquis, 1943-44.
Musée de Tulle collection

14 LIBERATION DANCES

Between the landing of Allied forces in June and August 1944 and Germany's unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945, many celebrations occurred and the people of French towns and villages danced. But, once the provisional government led by General de Gaulle was established, it upheld the ban on dancing.
Allied troops were often greeted by all sorts of festive behaviour unrelated to dancing: laughter, flowers thrown into the air, applause and waving arms. Church bells rang out and sirens hooted; military music drowned out the sound of the accordion.
The days following liberation also witnessed less joyful events: armed men paraded, women were shorn, collaborators were outed and some were summarily executed.
Once the ban had been lifted in 1945 the official ceremonies saw much more dancing, in particular on 1 May, 8 May, and of course the Bastille Day balls, on 14 July, all over France, with the traditional fireworks display.

Music from 1944,
Fifi la Reine du Maquis
La Marche des Alliés
La Java de la Libération
Là où y'a Plus d'Fritz
Musée Hector Berlioz collection, Département de l'Isère, 2007.06.498, 2007.06.530, 2007.06.534 and 2007.06.495

Dancing after the liberation of Saint Briac, Ille et Vilaine, 15 August 1944, photograph by Tony Vaccaro.
Archives départementales d'Ille et Vilaine collection
Tony Vaccaro, an Italian-American, was 22 when he landed in Normandy in June 1944. A keen photographer he took pictures as his unit advanced, through France, Belgium and Germany. After the war he gained international fame as a fashion photographer.

15 THE RIGHT TO DANCE RESTORED

France's provisional government was established in liberated Paris in August 1944 and it soon addressed the question of illegal dances.
The socialist interior minister Adrien Tixier issued a circular in October 1944 reminding préfets that dances were still banned. The nation had suffered a great deal and was still at war, so there was no question of dancing, although other collective leisure activities were still allowed, or had recently become so.
But it became increasingly difficult to enforce this rule and, while upholding a blanket ban, the government was forced to tolerate countless exceptions: charity dances to raise money for prisoners of war, deportees, civilian war casualties and their families; traditional festivities at a national or local level; dances staged by Resistance organizations.
The préfets were overwhelmed with applications for exceptional treatment, but only on 30 April 1945 was the 'freedom to dance' finally restored.

Music of Ah! Le Petit Vin Blanc, composed by Charles Borel-Clerc, 1944.
Musée Hector Berlioz collection, Département de l'Isère - 2012.04.58
This song was first performed by Lina Margy in 1943, quickly becoming a big success. We owe the words to Jean Dréjac (born in Grenoble, 1921; died in Paris, 2003), who had a long career in entertainment. Sales of the music for this song reached a million copies in 1943, a record in France, testimony to how popular it was as a dance-hall song.

Circular issued by Adrien Tixier, the socialist interior minister of the provisional government, on 6 October 1944, announcing that the ban on dancing was still in force.
Archives Nationales collection

Circular issued by Adrien Tixier, the socialist interior minister of the provisional government, on 2 January 1945, providing for exceptional circumstances under which dances could, after all, be held.
Archives Nationales collection

Circular issued by Adrien Tixier, the socialist interior minister of the provisional government, on 30 May 1945, restoring the freedom to dance.
Archives Nationales collection

Portrait of Georges Grellier (born 1926), a veteran of the Ri Jo Jaz club, Aix les Bains, 2018, photograph by Guillaume Veillet.
Testimony of Georges Grellier on the return of dances in 1945, recorded by Guillaume Veillet in 2018.
Guillaume Veillet collection, Association Terres d'Empreintes
Duration: 1 minute, 6 seconds

PODIUM

Hit parade
Batch of 78 rpm records, 1940s.
Guillaume Veillet collection

Snare drum and brushes, 20th century.
Département de la Haute-Savoie collection, 2009.2.183, 2009.2.184 and 2009.2.185

Extracts of 1940s music.
Private collection.
The present selection features the main songs in fashion during the German occupation and following the Liberation of France:
On Ira Pendre Notre Linge sur la Ligne Siegfried (We're Gonna Hang Out the Washing on the Siegfried Line), performed by Ray Ventura and his orchestra, 1940
Je Suis Swing, performed by the Swing Royal musette band, 1940
Mon Amant de Saint-Jean, performed by Lucienne Delyle, accompanied by the Jacques Methenen orchestra, 1942
Ah! Le Petit Vin Blanc performed by Émile Prud'homme and his band, 1943.
Depuis que les Bals sont Fermés, performed by Médard Ferrero and the Rawson orchestra, 1943.
Indifférence, performed by Tony Murena and his Swing band, 30 May 1942.
In the Mood, performed by Glenn Miller and his orchestra, 1944.
Ah! Le Petit Vin Blanc performed by Roberte Marna, accompanied by Pierre Chagnon and his orchestra, 1945.

Dedenis chromatic accordion belonging to Ernest Roussel.
Bernard Lasbleiz collection
The accordion was invented in the mid-19th century and by the 1900s it had become the predominant instrument in popular music in France. It could be heard at musette dances in working class neighbourhoods of big towns and at village banquets. François Dedenis started making accordions in Brive in 1913. With the success of Maugein, a firm established in Tulle in 1919, Corrèze became a key source of good quality accordions. The present instrument, which belonged to Ernest Roussel, was confiscated on 3 December 1943 at an illegal dance.

Dancing gear for men and women.
Jeremi Kostiou collection, Centre de recherche historique du Léon, Brest, Finistère

Gramophone and case of records, 1930s.
Musée dauphinois collection, Département de l'Isère, 97.58.23 and 97.58.24
Electrically powered gramophones were direct descendants of the phonograph but produced a better quality sound. In 1940 they were still expensive and only found in wealthy homes, hotels and a few cafes. But dancing could be organized without musicians so they were used for some illegal dances. The gendarmes treated them as musical instruments and confiscated them, just like accordions. A case protected the apparatus for transport as well as carrying 78 RPM records, aka 78s.

16 MAY WE STILL DANCE?

The blanket ban on dancing in mainland France was lifted in the spring of 1945, but some localities particularly hard hit by the fighting maintained the ban, sometimes for as long as a year.
In fact the freedom to dance has repeatedly been questioned and remains a bone of contention between generations.
On 22 June 1963 the Night of the Nation brought together some 150,000 people, prompting a massive scare. The youth of the day, known as *blousons noirs*, on account of their black leather biker jackets, was purportedly out of control. Young people's relationship to music and dancing encouraged crazy behaviour. Some sort of mob madness had taken hold of them.
Pop festivals in the 1970s were also portrayed as an opportunity for excess and political unrest, inspired by Maoists or anarchists. Twenty years later the appearance of rave parties caused further concern. After starting in Britain they became a social phenomenon in France, and being largely illicit, raves of course gave rise to comparison with the illegal dances of the war years.
And so to 2020 and a pandemic, with an explicit return to illegal festivities of this sort. A government decree published in the Journal Officiel on 15 March closed dance halls and banned gatherings of more than 100 people. At a local level préfets extended and often toughened up such bans.
There is once more talk of illegal dances, reminding us yet again of our irrepressible need to dance.

'The right to dance, from 1945 to the present day', a montage by Justine Decool with the assistance of Antoine Musy and the Bals Clandestins working group at the Centre d'Histoire Sociale (Paris 1 University).


HOTEL DES