

# The chansons of Basiron's youth and the dating of the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers

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# The chansons of Basiron's youth and the dating of the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers

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The songs by Philippe Basiron have become a key piece in the puzzle surrounding the dating of the whole complex of sources known as the "Loire Valley Chansonniers".<sup>1</sup> Paula Higgins used the four chansons by Basiron found in the Laborde chansonnier in combination with his age at the time of their creation as an argument in favour of an early dating of the Nivelles chansonnier. Some traces might indicate that Nivelles chansonnier originated in precisely the musical milieu in which Basiron served throughout his youth; and Nivelles does not contain a single one of his chansons. Assuming a dating of the manuscript to the period 1460-1465, Basiron would have been too young, still a choirboy, for his first attempts at composition to be included in a prestigious collection such as this chansonnier.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Jane Alden argues in her recent book on the chansonniers that the total absence of any chanson by the local talent Basiron, also among the later added repertoire in Nivelles, indicates that Nivelles probably was not compiled in Bourges, where Basiron spent all the known parts of his life. Furthermore, Alden uses the same four chansons by Basiron in her building of a case for a slightly later dating of the whole 'Loire Valley' complex including the Nivelles chansonnier. She finds that the quality and "innovative style" of Basiron's songs suggest a composer of more advanced experiences than a mere choirboy.<sup>3</sup>

This is more than enough reason to submit these songs to a closer inspection accompanied by new editions of the music. This will be attempted in the following paragraphs and the attached editions. The study of the songs' surroundings provoked as a spinoff a commented edition of the songs by Basiron's near contemporary Mureau, which to my knowledge never have been discussed as an entity – neither in connection with Basiron's songs. See further this author's *The Complete Works of Gilles Mureau (c1442-1512) – poet-musician of Chartres*.<sup>4</sup>

1 Copenhagen, The Royal Library, MS Thott 291 8° (Copenhagen); Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 517 (Dijon); Washington D.C., Library of Congress, MS M2.1 L25 Case (Laborde chansonnier – Laborde); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Rés. Vmc. ms. 57 (Chansonnier Nivelles de la Chaussée – Nivelles); Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Codex Guelf. 287 Extravag. (Wolfenbüttel); see further in my edition, *An Open Access Edition of The Copenhagen Chansonnier and the related 'Loire Valley' chansonniers*, at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/>.

2 Paula Higgins (ed.), *Chansonnier Nivelles de la Chaussée (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Rés. Vmc. ms. 57, ca. 1460)*, Genève 1984, (Higgins 1984), p. x: "Negative evidence can be misleading, but the absence in Nivelles of pieces attributed to Basiron could further sustain its dating of 1460-1465 since Basiron was still a choirboy during those years."

3 Jane Alden, *Songs, Scribes, and Society. The History and Reception of the Loire Valley Chansonniers*. New York 2010, pp. 120-21 and 126.

4 <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/Mureau/o1Start.html> (PDF- and html-format).

*Basiron's date of birth and his career*

All the currently known facts concerning Basiron's life were unearthed from the archives by Paula Higgins and published in an article in 1990, and she definitively resolved the questions surrounding the different forms of his name in the sources (P. Basiron, Phelippon, Philippon de Bourges).<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of the present study, we only need to summarize the central facts of the information presented by Higgins:

Lack of sources prevents us from knowing anything of Basiron's whereabouts and activities during the years between 1474 and c1487. At the end of the 1480s Basiron appears as occupying a house and garden in Bourges, which he possessed as part of his vicariate in the church Saint-Pierre-le-Guillard, a position affiliated with the Sainte-Chapelle of Bourges. He died just before the end of May 1491, and his position and house was transferred to his younger brother Johannes, *capellanus* at the Sainte-Chapelle. Likewise, we do not know anything about where he was born and of his earliest years, but his early musical career took place at the Sainte-Chapelle. The Sainte-Chapelle of the Bourges Palace was constructed between 1392 and 1405 as the private chapel of the duke Jean de Berry. Its personnel included 13 canons, headed by the treasurer and the cantor, 13 chaplains, 13 vicars, and 6 choirboys.<sup>6</sup> This quite tight organization had according to its statutes wide-ranging musical duties in performing polyphony on a daily basis, with important roles bestowed on the organ and the organist. After the death of Jean de Berry in 1416, the title in 1417 was transferred to the crown prince who succeeded his father as king in 1422 (Charles VII) and moved important functions of the royal administration to Bourges during the English occupation of Northern France. This meant that the area and the city for the rest of the century *de facto* belonged to the king, except for a few years 1461-1465 when the younger brother of Louis XI, Charles de Valois, held the duchy as his *appanage*.

Philippe Basiron was in October 1458 admitted as a choirboy along with his younger brother Pierron (Pierre Basiron, died 1529). The reception of two choirboys at the same time must have been an event of some importance to the daily musical work. The chapter bought a keyboard instrument, a *manichordum*, in 1463 for Philippe, still a choirboy, in order to further his studies of counterpoint and his ability to play the organ; this occurred shortly after the composer Guillaume Faugues' three-months stint in 1462 as master of the choirboys. Starting in 1464 Basiron began to assist in the teaching of the younger choirboys, and gradually he took over a greater share of the master's duties. He obtained the rank of *vicarius* in 1467, and finally, after some complications he was in 1469 elected to the position of *magister puerum*, which the chapter had promised him at an earlier date. In January 1474 a new *magister puerum* was installed.

In view of the crucial role that Basiron's songs have played in the dating of the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers, it becomes important to reach a realistic assessment of Basiron's year of birth. The current estimates, Higgins offers c1450 and Dean c1449, cannot be far off. They build on his presumed age when his voice changed and his age at his entrance in the Bourges chapel, but if one takes recent literature on the topics in account, such evaluations may fluctuate in contradictory ways.

5 Paula Higgins, 'Tracing the Careers of Late Medieval Composers. The Case of Philippe Basiron of Bourges', *Acta musicologica* 62 (1990), pp. 1-28; for a summary of these findings, a worklist and bibliography, see Jeffrey Dean, 'Philippe Basiron', Grove Music Online (accessed November 2009). For a biography and discussion based on the knowledge then available, see Glenn Leon Gore, *The Works of Philippe Basiron (Philippon?): Transcription and Commentary*. Ph.D.-diss., West Virginia University, 1978, pp. 1-11.

6 Higgins 1990, p. 43.

Late in 1462 or in the beginning of 1463 the chapter assigned Basiron a *manichordum*. This is a sure sign that he had shown such talent for music that the church undertook the expenses for his continued education, surely expecting to exploit his abilities in some function as adult singer, assistant master of the boys or organist. This investment in the future was probably decided when his voice began to show signs of changing and the end of his service as a boy singer was predictable. The time for boys' voice mutation of course depended on individual conditions, but we may assume that Basiron was around 15 when the signs of the change began to show in earnest.

Modern data concerning the onset of puberty are not applicable for the 15th century. Children in the Western world enter puberty at a still earlier age during the last decades of the 20th century owing to the vastly improved conditions of nourishment and health, while the average height is increasing. In an article on the voice types in the age of Josquin Rebecca Stewart refers to research, which shows that the voice mutation during the first part of the 19th century could occur as late as the age of 18 and that it proceeded more slowly.<sup>7</sup> This late mutation, she claims, helped to increase the level of education and virtuosity in singing among the boy singers as well as among the adult singers: "When thought of in terms of retained flexibility, the formerly greater 'life' span (between two and three years) of a trained boy singer, must have played a significant role."<sup>8</sup> Data from before 1800 are difficult to obtain, but as also Herbert Moller has discussed there is a close connection between the general health of a population, its access to food, children's exposure to infectious diseases during childhood and the exploitation of children as a labour force, and the age of the onset of puberty and the subsequent voice change in boys.<sup>9</sup> The same relationship can be observed in the fluctuation of the population's average bodily height through time, and it is easier to find statistic evidence for this parameter by measuring skeletons preserved from the Middle Ages until modern times. Such studies show that exactly the period c1600-1800 in Europe represents a low point for the average tallness as a result of urbanization, climatic changes, shortness of food, wars, epidemics, generally deteriorated conditions for children etc. Richard H. Steckel has demonstrated that the average tallness of men in Northern Europe in the Middle Ages before the end of the 14th century was comparable to the average during the second part of the 20th century. The decline (caused by plague, war, colder climate) started during the 15th century, and around 1800 the average man was 6-7 cm shorter. The development in skeleton data draws a shallow U-curve.<sup>10</sup> The fact that Basiron's childhood must be placed in time at a point on the descending curve, which corresponds to a point on the ascending curve at around 1930-40, is of relevance to our discussion. Therefore it is more realistic to estimate Basiron's age at 15-16 years when his voice began to change in 1462-63,<sup>11</sup> in stead of reckoning

7 Rebecca Stewart, 'In principio erat verbum. A Physiological and Linguistic Study of Male Vocal Types, Timbres and Techniques in the Music of Josquin des Prez', *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 35 (1985) pp. 97-193, at p. 104. Other studies show that the voice mutation could occur at an even later age in the middle of the 18th century, see Herbert Moller, 'Voice Change in Human Biological Development', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (1985), pp. 239-253, at p. 240.

8 Stewart, *ibid.*

9 Moller, p. 247; see also Warren Joseph, 'A Summation of the Research Pertaining to Vocal Growth', *Journal of Research in Music Education* 13 (1965), pp. 93-100.

10 Richard H. Steckel, 'New Light on the "Dark Ages": The Remarkably Tall Stature of Northern European Men during the Medieval Era', *Social Science History* 28 (2004), pp. 211-228.

11 Roger Bowers reached a similar conclusion concerning the question of voice change for English choirboys

backwards linearly from information originating around the year 1800, as Rebecca Stewart and Herbert Moller seem to do, and which produces misleading results.<sup>12</sup>

This means that Basiron was 10-11 years of age when he in 1458 entered the Sainte-Chapelle in Bourges as a choirboy – and that he was born 1447-48. The usual age for the recruitment of boys for the *maîtrise* was seven or eight,<sup>13</sup> so Basiron was at a rather advanced age, if he started his education as boy singer in Bourges. It may not have been the case. A possible explanation could be that the Sainte-Chapelle was offered the chance to recruit two gifted choirboys from a similar institution, that their qualifications were well established before entering, and that the chapter expected to take advantage of their talents. The chapter was not disappointed: Pierre Basiron was in March 1469 while still a clerk in the boys choir named prior of a convent in Bourges, and the education of Philippe was put to good use in his assisting the choirmaster, playing the organs, and finally – also in 1469 – obtaining the post of *magister puerum*. A third brother, Jean (Johannes) Basiron entered the *maîtrise* as a chorister at some time during the 1460s. He was recommended to step into the position left vacant when Philippe died in 1491.<sup>14</sup>

#### *The sources for Basiron's early chansons*

The number of musical sources containing the four three-part songs by Basiron is, as this list shows, limited:

- ▷ “Nul ne l'a telle, sa maistresse” 3v, Laborde ff. 13<sup>v</sup>-15; P. Baziron; Wolfenbüttel ff. 15<sup>v</sup>-17; Copenhagen ff. 9<sup>v</sup>-11.
- ▷ “Je le scay bien ce qui m'avint” 3v, Laborde ff. 16<sup>v</sup>-17; P. Baziron; Wolfenbüttel ff. 20<sup>v</sup>-22.
- ▷ “De m'esjouir plus n'ay puissance” 3v, Laborde f. 21<sup>v</sup> (S only): P. Baziron; Wolfenbüttel ff. 13<sup>v</sup>-15; Florence 2794 ff. 56<sup>v</sup>-57.
- ▷ “Tant fort me tarde ta venue” 3v, Laborde ff. 34<sup>v</sup>-35; Paris 4379 (IV) ff. 73<sup>v</sup>-74; Rome 2856 ff. 3<sup>v</sup>-4; Phelippon.

To this number we can add two four-part settings of the superius voice from Ockeghem's “D'un aultre amer”, which are preserved in later Italian sources, and some additional songs, which possibly might be ascribed to Basiron. We shall return to these songs later on.

All four three-part songs can be found in the Laborde chansonnier, where they were entered by the main scribe - and all originally without any composer attributions. The first three songs appear anonymously in the Wolfenbüttel chansonnier, and one of them, “Nul ne l'a telle”, is also found in the somewhat younger Copenhagen chansonnier, copied by the so-called ‘Dijon-scribe’. In Laborde, a later scribe (the ‘Index-Scribe II’) recognized three chansons as the work of Basiron and added the ascription “P. Baziron” on top of the

in ‘The Vocal Scoring, Choral Balance and Performing Pitch of Latin Church Polyphony in England, c. 1500-58’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 112 (1987), pp. 38-76 (see p. 48).

12 Also Richard Rastall, ‘Choirboys in Early English Religious Drama’, in Susan Boynton and Eric Rice (eds.): *Young Choristers 650-1700*. Woolbridge 2008, pp. 68-85, depends on 18th century data and gets a higher age frame for the voice change.

13 Cf. Susan Boynton and Eric Rice, ‘Introduction’, in *idem*, *Young Choristers*, pp.1-18, at p. 9; and Craig Wright: *Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris, 500-1550*. Cambridge 1989, p. 170.

14 Higgins 1990, p. 21.

verso pages carrying the superius parts.<sup>15</sup> This probably happened when the manuscript was finished and prepared for a final customer around 1480 in the atelier of the scribe of Florence 2794 and his successors, a workshop with close connections with the French court chapel.<sup>16</sup> The fourth chanson was entered as the first piece of music in the Ferrarese music manuscript, Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2856 (Rome 2856) from the early 1480s; here it carries the composer attribution “Phelippon”. “De mèsjour plus n’ay puisance” is also found anonymously in the French chansonnier, Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 2794 (Florence 2794), where it belongs to the original scribe’s contribution, which may be dated in the late 1470s.<sup>17</sup>

A careful analysis of details in the songs’ transmission in the different sources shows that the songs had reached some circulation in Central France even before they were copied into the ‘Loire Valley’ chansonniers (for documentation, see the comments on the individual chansons).<sup>18</sup> Although the exemplars used as models for the earliest preserved copies, which were made by the Laborde and Wolfenbüttel scribes, were closely related, it is however apparent that different exemplars were consulted in every single case, exemplars in which discrepancies in the words of the texts or musical details have crept in. Moreover, when the Dijon scribe entered “Nul ne l’a telle” in the Copenhagen chansonnier, he did not use the version he must have known from the Laborde chansonnier, which he had worked on a short time earlier, but he worked from an exemplar closer to the one used by the Wolfenbüttel scribe. “De mèsjour” in Florence 2794 only tells us that a slightly later French source still transmitted the chanson in a virtually identical version. Only “Tant fort me tarde”, Basiron’s most successful song, surfaces in an Italian source transmission. A manuscript containing a version of “Tant fort me tarde” very similar to the one in Laborde may have formed the model for the textless entries in Rome 2856 and the later fragment Paris, BN, nouv. acq. fr. 4379 (IV).<sup>19</sup>

When discussing the sources, it is worth noticing that the Wolfenbüttel scribe must have had a keen interest in Basiron: In the planning of the chansonnier he had first to make the initial letters of the first 13 songs (12 plus Frye’s “Ave regina celerum”, added as the opening piece) spell out the name of the receiver in the form of an acrostic, “A Estiene Petit”. This forced him to insert among the well-known songs some songs of quite restricted circulation (unica in the MS).<sup>20</sup> As soon as he had finished this closely defined job, he entered two songs by Basiron (ff. 13<sup>v</sup>-17) followed a few pages later on by a third

15 Cf. Jane Alden, *Makers of a Songbook: The Scribes of the Laborde Chansonnier*. Ph.d.-diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1999, p. 80.

16 Cf. my article ‘The French musical manuscript in Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 2794, and the ‘Loire Valley’ chansonniers’, available at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/NOTES/Flo2794art.html>.

17 *Ibid.*

18 All the songs mentioned in the present article can be found in editions including discussions of the sources, text and music, and translations of the poems, on the website <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/>.

19 Paris 4397 is a collection of fragments of manuscripts from the Biblioteca Colombina in Seville, and its fourth section probably originally belonged at the end of the Spanish chansonnier in Sevilla, Biblioteca Capitulare y Colombina, MS 7-1-28 from the 1490s, cf. David Fallows, ‘I fogli parigi del “Concionero Musical” e del Manoscritto teorico della Biblioteca Colombina’, *Rivista italiana di musicologica* 27 (1992), pp. 25-40.

20 Cf. David Fallows, “Trained and immersed in all musical delights: Towards a New Picture of Busnoys’ in Paula Higgins (ed.), *Antoine Busnoys. Method, Meaning, and Context in Late Medieval Music*. Oxford 1999, pp. 21-50 (at pp. 41-43 and 49-50); Alden 2010, pp. 188-206; *idem*, ‘Ung Petit cadeau: Verbal and Visual Play in the Wolfenbüttel Chansonnier’, in Fabrice Fitch and Jacobijn Kiel (eds.), *Essays on Renaissance Music in Honour of David Fallows: “Bon jour, bon mois et bonne estrenne”*, Woodbridge 2011, pp. 33-43.

one (ff. 20<sup>v</sup>-22)<sup>21</sup> and thus displayed a striking interest in his music. Furthermore, it is conceivable that some of the songs placed in between or after the songs by Basiron might be ascribed to him as well. The same songs appear close to Basiron's music in the Laborde chansonnier, and it is possible that they formed a special group of works in circulating exemplars too (see further on this below). How the Wolfenbüttel scribe's knowledge of or connection with Basiron came about, is difficult to know; it could be based on geographical proximity, they may have met on some occasion, or they had common acquaintances, and so on. The interests of the Dijon scribe were different. None of Basiron's songs were included in the Dijon chansonnier, not even those that might be ascribed to him. Only in the later Copenhagen chansonnier did he take up this sort of repertory.

*Nul ne l'a telle and De m'esjouir*

"Nul ne l'a telle, sa maistresse" is the only song firmly ascribed to Basiron, which the Dijon scribe copied into the Copenhagen chansonnier. It is a charming bergerette, exuberant in its adoration of the "maistresse". Its theme and its music as well have been developed from a direct quote of the widely circulated rondeau "Je ne vis oncques la pareille", which was performed at the famous *Banquet de Faisan* hosted by the Burgundian duke Philippe le Bon in Lille in 1454. It appears with an ascription to Binchois in the Nivelles chansonnier (anonymous in Laborde and Wolfenbüttel), while it is ascribed to Du Fay in the Italian manuscript, Montecassino, Biblioteca dell'Abbazia, MS 871. The ascription to the Burgundian musician Binchois seems correct, and it was apparently under his name that the song circulated in the Loire Valley.<sup>22</sup>

The citation of both text and music from Binchois' opening line occurs in the second line of the bergerette's first *couplet* (line 6). In addition, the poet carefully paraphrased the first line of Binchois' first *couplet*, which is sung to the same music as the opening line, as his second line in the second *couplet* (line 8). In this way, both times the musical citation are sung, it is with words identical to or very close to the words belonging with Binchois' music (see the lines in bold in the poems below). For the remaining lines in the *couplets* he has found rimes of the same quality as heard in Binchois, *rime équivoque*, "me semble / ensemble"; and the same quality is maintained in the refrain and *tierce* with *rimes léonines*. The concept of an "I" and his heart who together praise the lady is clearly adopted from "Je ne vis oncques la pareille". Its tone is possibly a bit more secular than the obvious allusions to the Virgin Mary in Binchois' song; but maybe the musical quote should convey a remembrance of the spiritual tone of Binchois' song.

Nul ne l'a telle, sa maistresse,  
mon cuer, que vous et moy avons,  
se bien considerer savons  
les biens dont elle a grant largesse.

Au vray dire ce qu'il me semble,  
**je ne viz oncquez la pareille.**

Tant belle et tant bonne est ensemble  
**que plus la voiz, plus me merveille.**

**Je ne vis oncques la pareille**  
de vous, ma gracieuse dame,  
car vo beaulté est, sur mon ame,  
sur toutes aultres nonparaille.

**En vous regardant m'esmerveille**  
et dis: "Qu'est cecy Nostre Dame?"

Je ne vis *oncques la pareille*  
*de vous, ma gracieuse dame.*

21 Cf. the list of contents at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/LISTS/WolfCont.html>.

22 Cf. the discussion of the sources at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH189.html>.

De son maintien regardons qu'esse,  
affin que nous parachevons  
cest bruit si grant que nous devons  
dire en tous lieux sans point de cesse:

Nul ne l'a telle, sa maistresse,  
mon cueur, que vous et moy avons,  
se bien considerer savons  
les biens dont elle a grant largesse.  
(after Laborde)

Vostre tresgrant douceur esveille  
mon esperit et mon oeil entame,  
mon cueur donc puet dire sans blasme,  
puis qu'à vous servir s'apareille.

Je ne vis oncques la pareille  
de vous, ma gracieuse dame,  
car vo beaulté est, sur mon ame,  
sur toutes aultres nonparaille.  
(after Nivelles)

There cannot be any doubt that the poem was created by the composer, and that the music already then was at its planning stage. The musical quote is placed with great care in order to give it maximum effect. The *couplets* open in a subdued homorhythmic declamation of “Au vray dire ce qu’il me semble” (To tell in truth what appears to me), which is brought to a cadence on F (bb. 29-40). Here the contratenor drops out and intones Binchois’ ear-catching opening line from the note *d*: “je ne viz oncquez la pareille” (I have never seen her equal), which is then imitated in unison and at the octave by tenor and superius – the only three-part imitation in the song (bb. 40-44). The continuation of the musical quote in the upper voice is supported by *fauxbourdon*-like movement in the tenor and the high contratenor, the last singing in parallel fourths below the superius. This is quickly replaced by staggered descending triads in all voices; as we shall see, this is something of a trademark for Basiron.<sup>23</sup> At the *clos* ending of the *couplets*, we hear an ascending sequence, in which the canonic imitation at the octave of the upper voices is complemented by the contratenor alternating between the fifth and the octave below the superius (in hidden parallels but not causing dissonances).<sup>24</sup>

Otherwise, the setting of the quatrain *bergerette* is varied with extensive melismas at the end of lines, there is not much further imitation, only between tenor and superius in bars 15-17 (a sort of octave canon), and *fauxbourdon* progressions seem to be the composer’s favourite way of cadencing; accordingly the song’s contratenor lies above the tenor in many passages. The song’s formal layout conforms perfectly to the conventions of *bergerette*-settings in the Busnoys generation. It shows the clear contrast between the *refrain/tierce* section and the *couplets* by means of mensuration, namely *tempus perfectum* followed by *tempus imperfectum diminutum*, and the composer may also have intended a contrast between a tenor b-flat in the first section and none in the second, even if this will be obscured by the rules of performing the musical lines (it is more of a visual contrast than a contrast in sound). Furthermore, the *seconda volta* of the *couplets* ends in a glittering flourish like many other songs of this type from the 1460s. While the form seems up-to-date, the sound and technique of the song appear a bit dated. In this song, we discover that a young composer in the 1460s still found the techniques of the Binchois generation attractive and useful. However, in comparison with his admired model, the

23 Cf. also the comparative music example at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH009.html>.

24 The French-Italian chansonnier in Sevilla, Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, MS 5-1-43, transmits an anonymous *bergerette* with text incipits only, “Le bien fet”, which is an exact parallel to “Nul ne l’a telle” as regards the use of a quotation of all three voices from the first line of “Je ne vis oncques” as its second line of music in the *couplets* (see further <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH556.html>). This song could be an early attempt at the theme of “Nul ne l’a telle” by Basiron. A more credible explanation may be that the relative success of “Nul ne l’a telle” inspired a colleague to try his hand at something similar.



rondeau by Binchois, his effort fades somewhat; it seems far from Binchois' technical maturity and precision of expression.

Some of the same poetic ambition characterizes the text of "De mèsjour plus n'ay puissance", a sad rondeau cinquain in rich rimes (*rimes léonines*), but otherwise quite ordinary in content. Its setting may be an attempt to write in a more 'modern' style involving extended imitation and a low contratenor from the hand of a young and quite inexperienced composer. This song is in low range (*E-c''*) and longwinded. The composer has invested effort in varying the setting by alternating declamation and lively imitative sections, where canonic imitation plays a major role. In spite of the good intentions it seems rather monotonous with endings on *finalis* and the fifth only and a repetitive upper voice, which in the last line appears, its great range notwithstanding, to knock its head against the note *g'*.

Basiron's name was added above this song in the Laborde chansonnier. In truth, the most exciting point about "De mèsjour" is its relation to the preceding song in this manuscript. "De mèsjour" is on folio 21<sup>v</sup> (the superius only, the next pages in the manuscript have disappeared), and just ahead of it stands the happy rondeau cinquain "Puis que si bien m'est advenu" (ff. 20<sup>v</sup>-21), which appears in three later sources of wide-ranging geographic origin: from Italy in the late 1480s, from Spain around 1500, and from provincial France around 1510.<sup>25</sup> In the Segovia manuscript it was ascribed to Loyset Compere. The credibility of this ascription, however, is weakened by the fact that the song in this source has the character of a clumsy revision, which destroys the original ideas of the music and causes new contrapuntal knots.<sup>26</sup> The song's position in the Laborde chansonnier alongside "De mèsjour" seems to be of greater weight. The two songs have so many traits in common that they must have been copied after the same collection of exemplars and originate from the same composer.<sup>27</sup> "Puis que si bien" may be composed as a lighter counterpart to the heavy "De mèsjour" – of a brighter sound, but in reality keeping within the same voice ranges. It develops a similar opening motive into a three-part imitation, follows the exactly same layout in the alternation of imitative and declamatory lines, expands the sequential passages in canonic imitation, and the animated motive at the start of the third line of "De mèsjour" is reworked into an exciting rising sequence covering the complete third line of the much more concentrated "Puis que si bien" (see *Example 1*).

Much of the effect of "Puis que si bien" depends on its play of being off the beat – with offbeat internal cadences in both sections of the rondeau –, which, however, lands firmly on the beat in the medial as well as in the final cadence. This is clearly intended by the composer, also the 'warped' accents in the declamatory passages. It puts a new light on the happiness of the poem; the impression of the song performed in a brisk tempo becomes rather ironic than happy. This original idea probably confused later copyists. The song remained in the repertory in the 16th century, its popularity probably founded on its ear-catching sequences.

25 Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, MS Q16 (Bologna Q16), ff. 22<sup>v</sup>-23 "Aime la plus bella" (text incipit only; Naples, 1487), Segovia, Archivio Capitular de la Catedral, MS s.s. (Segovia), f. 184<sup>v</sup> "Puisque" (text incipit only; Spain, c1500) with the ascription "Loysette Compere"; and Uppsala, Universitetsbiblioteket, Musik i Handskrift 76a (Uppsala 76a), ff. 12<sup>v</sup>-13 "Puis que si bien m'est advenu" (Lyon, c1508).

26 For a discussion of the sources and the changes to the music (including musical examples) see the commentary to the edition at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH178.html>.

27 This was first proposed by Clemens Goldberg in his *Das Chansonnier Laborde: Studien zur Intertextualität einer Liederhandschrift des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Quellen und Studien zur Musikgeschichte von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart. Bd. 36) Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 97.

Ex. 1a, Basiron, "De mèsjour plus n'ay puissance" (Laborde f. 21<sup>v</sup>), bars 28-35

28

l'es - poir de - ja - maiz n'a -  
 dont j'ay re - ceu dieu soit -  
 l'es - poir de - ja - maiz n'a -  
 dont j'ay re - ceu dieu soit -  
 l'es - poir de - ja - maiz n'a -  
 dont j'ay re - ceu dieu soit -

Ex. 1b, [Compere/Basiron?], "Puis que si bien m'est advenu" (Laborde ff. 20<sup>v</sup>-21), bars 31-37

31

nu pour son bon et loy en - al ser -  
 me de la la ser - vir en - tie - re -  
 pour son la bon et loy en - al ser -  
 de la la ser - vir en - tie - re -  
 pour son la bon et loy en - al ser -  
 de la la ser - vir en - tie - re -

Ex. 2a, Basiron, "De mèsjour plus n'ay puissance" (Laborde f. 21<sup>v</sup>), bars 46-49

46

n'ay rien sous - tient rien tient  
 - - - - -  
 - - - - -  
 - - - - -

Ex. 2b, [Compere/Basiron?], "Puis que si bien m'est advenu" (Laborde ff. 20<sup>v</sup>-21), bars 39-42

39

vant, je puis di - re  
 ment; ja n'au - ray aul -  
 je puis di - re  
 ja n'au - ray aul -  
 je puis di - re  
 ja n'au - ray aul -

The limping rhythm of “Puis que si bien” may be a singular experiment from the side of the composer, but other traits are quite ordinary. For example, it seems stuck on the same motive when many imitations use a stock phrase descending from *c'* and *c''*, which is also found in “De mèsjouis” (see *Example 2*) – similar to the way in which the upper voice in “De mèsjouis” hammered on the note *g'*. Finally, the flashy sequence, which ends “Puis que si bien”, consists of slightly camouflaged parallel octaves between tenor and superius, less accomplished than the one crowning the second *couplet* of the *bergerette* “Nul ne l'a telle”.

To sum up: “Puis que si bien” accords with everything we know about the style of the songs, which the so-called Index-scribe II recognized as being by Basiron. On the other hand, nobody knows what Compere did in his early years, where he worked etc. Presumably, he was of the same age as Basiron, and his early style may have been like his, original, bold, and occasionally immature in mastering contrapuntal and formal difficulties. Thus, if Segovia might be proved right, it could happen that both chansons ought to be ascribed to the young Compere.

*Je le scay bien and Tant fort me tarde*

The poetic text of “Je le scay bien ce qui m'avint”, a *rondeau quatrain*, was created as a response to or a continuation of the *rondeau cinquain* “Tant fort me tarde ta venue”. Both songs are found in the Laborde chansonnier, “Je le scay bien” with an ascription to Basiron (Index scribe II), while “Tant fort me tarde” is anonymous and only ascribed to “Phelippon” in the textless version in the slightly later Ferrarese chansonnier, Roma, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2856.<sup>28</sup> Both poems use the highly literary form of *rimes équivoques* (or try to). “Je le scay bien” not only reuses one of the rime words, “ame”, of “Tant fort me tarde” (highlighted in bold in the poems below), the opening words of the first *couplet* (“De joye”), and the crucial formulations of the *tierce* (“soubz la lame; / je suis mort” – “car il est mort soubz la lame”, all in bold), but it also transforms the other rime word “venue” (accentuated in italics below) into compounds of “-vint” and thereby moves the situation from something happening or about to happen into a contemplation of the past.

Tant fort me tarde ta *venue*  
pour compter ma desconvenue,  
mon plus qu'**ame**, que sur mon **ame**  
je ne prens plaisir en nul **ame**  
qui soit aujourduy soubz *la nue*.

**De joye** mon plaisir se *desnue*,  
si douleur t'est puis souvenue;  
mille foiz le jour te re**clame**:

Tant fort me tarde *ta venue*.

Or est ma sante certes *nue*,  
je ne scay quel est devenue,  
desconfort m'assault que point n'**ame**  
et me veult mectre **soubz la lame**;  
**je suis mort**, s'il me *continue*.

Je le scay bien ce qui m'avint;  
dernier jour que vous vy, **madame**,  
je eu tant de dueil que, par mon **ame**,  
je ne sceus que mon cueur *devint*.

**De joye** onc puis ne me souvint  
et n'ay pas tort, par Nostre **Dame**:

Je le scay bien *ce qui m'avint*  
*dernier jour que vous vy, madame*.

Oncques puis a moy ne revint  
se ne l'avez, Dieu en ait l'**ame**,  
car **il est mort soubz la lame**,  
il estoit bon des ans a *vingt*.

<sup>28</sup> Paula Higgins has commented on the relations between the poems and the identity of Phelippon with Philippe Basiron in Higgins 1990 pp. 18-21.

Tant fort me tarde ta venue  
pour compter ma desconvenue,  
mon plus qu'ame, que sur mon ame  
je ne prens plaisir en nul ame  
qui soit aujourduy soubz la nue.

Je le scay bien ce qui m'avint;  
dernier jour que vous vy, madame,  
je eu tant de dueil que, par mon ame,  
je ne sceus que mon cueur devint.

The poetic voice of “Tant fort me tarde” fears for its mental health, and feels that the beloved will put it “below the tombstone”, that it shall die, if the situation remains unchanged (as far as I can understand this opaque poem). In “Je le scay bien”, the poet’s heart is dead and lies “below the tombstone”; it had only twenty years of good life. Basiron was young when he wrote this poem, but we probably should not put too much weight on the “twenty years”, as the number was produced by the rime structure.<sup>29</sup> The connections between the two poems are clear enough, but the differences in attitude are just as striking. The poet of “Tant fort me tarde” is bold, takes on a persona who addresses the beloved as “tu / ta” and “mon plus qu’ame”, which signal an equal social standing and an intimate relationship, and the persona is *female*. In sharp contrast, the voice of “Je le scay bien” is conventionally *male* and uses the standard courtly addresses of “vous” and “madame”, and in line 6 slides into the invocation of “Nostre Dame” (Our Lady – a reminiscence of Binchois’ “Je ne vis oncques la pareille”?). In “Tant fort me tarde” the sense of the refrain does not permit a repeat of the first three lines as a unit; the first line alone constitutes a satisfactory ‘short refrain’ after the *couplet*. Contrariwise, the normal procedure in musical settings of repeating the first half of the refrain after the short *couplet* works very well in “Je le scay bien” with an elegant change of meaning when the two lines are heard after the *couplet*.

While we can be quite sure that Basiron wrote the text as well as the music of “Je le scay bien”, he was probably not the author of the poem “Tant fort me tarde ta venue”, which he also set to music. This poem exists in a setting by Basiron’s slightly older colleague, Gilles Mureau, and this *chanson* may have been the inspiration for both songs by Basiron.

Gilles Mureau (c1442-1512) spent his long career in the service of the Chartres Cathedral.<sup>30</sup> He, like Basiron, probably started as a choirboy; in 1462 he was mentioned among the adult singers as *heurier*, in 1467 he was appointed *maître de grammaire* at the *maîtrise*, and before 1472 he was installed as a canon at the cathedral. He kept these posts for the remainder of his life, occasionally sharing the teaching of the boys with other musicians and for short periods functioning as the cathedral’s organist, but his role as administrator of the *maîtrise* seems to have been permanent. His position in the clerical world apparently was very secure, and at an early date he appears to have become quite affluent with extensive land holdings in the areas near Blois and Bourges. He supplemented his income by educating private pupils from the nobility in grammar and in the singing of polyphony. This busy life did not offer much incentive to compose new music after the early years of his career (for example, no sacred music is preserved from his hand), and music formed only a part of his professional life. His talents apparently unfolded just as much in the arts of language and words, and in connection with his administrative capacities as a canon of the cathedral. His reputation as a musician may have depended more on his skills as a

29 Complete translations of the poems can be found with the editions of the songs.

30 A more detailed discussion of Mureau and his music can be found in my edition, *The Complete Works of Gilles Mureau (c1442-1512) – poet-musician of Chartres*, cf. note 4.

Ex. 3, Gilles Mureau, "Tant fort me tarde ta venue" (Florence 176 ff. 71<sup>v</sup>-73), bars 13-21

13  
 pour comp - ter ma des - con - ve - nu - e,  
 je ne scay quel est de - ve - nu - e,  
 comp - ter ma des - con - ve - nu - e, mon  
 ne scay quel est de - ve - nu - e, des -

Ex. 4, Basiron, "Je le scay bien ce qui m'avint" (Laborde, ff. 16<sup>v</sup>-17), bars 40-48

40  
 me, je ne sceuz que bon mon cueur  
 me, il es - toit toit ans  
 je il ne sceuz que bon mon cueur  
 il es - toit toit ans

performer and as a teacher, as a man knowledgeable in music and poetry, than as a composer. The texts of his chansons, not least the artful "Grace attendant ou la mort pour tous mes" on his own name, show him as a competent follower of the literary *l'art de rhétorique*, of the skills of poetic role play and of complicated rules of versification cultivated in courtly and clerical circles. Notwithstanding that Mureau's setting of "Tant fort me tarde" is preserved exclusively in an Italian source (Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Ms. Magl. xix.176), which must be dated later than the 'Loire Valley' complex, it is most likely the original setting, and most likely Mureau authored the artful poem as well as the music.

As described above Basiron modelled the text of "Je le scay bien" on Mureau's "Tant fort me tarde". His setting or rather his general style may also show some affinity with Mureau's music. Basiron uses the same disposition of voices and ranges (superius and tenor an octave apart within a range of *Bb-d*"; Mureau: *B-c*"). However, there is no trace of Mureau's trademark, the use of the tension of cadential figuration at the beginning of phrases or along the road to push the music forward, neither do we at any substantial degree meet Mureau's care for adjusting the lower voices to the text. Mureau contrasts the declamation of the opening with canonic imitation of short sequential motives in the second line (see *Example 3*). This device is often met in Basiron's music, but it is more relevant to compare this example from Mureau's music with Basiron's "De mèsjouir" (or "Puis que si bien") in *Example 1*.

The aesthetic ideals of composing with stretches of canonic imitation and cadences in *faulxbourdon*-style are common to both musicians, but Basiron uses them to expand his phrases over longer stretches. His setting of the 4th line in "Je le scay bien" is characteristic; it goes on for 22 *brevis*-bars and really draws out the words in a straight octave canon between tenor and superius. An ear-catching feature is the staggered play with *brevis*-values

in triadic formations (see *Example 4*), which then are elaborated with the help of stepwise motion and shorter and longer note values, and end up getting chopped up in shorter segments (bb. 48-58).

Quite satisfied with his efforts in matching Mureau's chanson with his own words and music, Basiron apparently found that the ideas laid down in "Je le scay bien" could be reused to much greater effect in a setting of Mureau's original poem.

Basiron's "Tant fort me tarde ta venue" uses the same voice disposition and overall range as "Je le scay bien", but the ranges of the upper voices have been restricted to eight and nine tones respectively, and the mensuration is now *tempus imperfectum* without diminution. The elements from "Je le scay bien" that he develops are primarily the use of canonic imitation, the passage in staggered descending thirds and fifths, and the drawn out ending in short segments. Basiron has made it possible to respect Mureau's formal layout of the poem and to perform his own setting with a short one-line second *couplet*. But this is as far as his respecting the intended meaning of the poem reaches; his setting seems rather like a travesty of a lovesick courtly song.

The octave canon between the upper voices is explored to a much higher degree in "Tant fort me tarde". It covers most of the song except for the run-ups to the cadences. The canon is flexible, the distance between the voices are fluctuating between a *semibrevis* and a *brevis*. It starts with the tenor in the lead, but this is reversed in the third line, placing the upper voice in the lead until the end. The basic material of the song is presented in the first line: A triad on G is 'chopped up' with rests, and the resulting single notes and short segments sound in alternation or staggered and are followed by conjunct motion up and down (see *Example 5*).

This idea dominates the setting; four out of the five verse lines are set in this 'chopped' fashion. The second line (bb. 11-23) starts like the first, but then prolongs the *semibreves* with dots, which have the effect of displacing the feeling of a steady beat. This effect is strongly supported by the contratenor, which enters in *minima*-syncopation already in bar 14 (see *Example 6*). The displacement of the beat and the staggered descending thirds create a floating 'kaleidoscopic' passage, which is even more effective than the related passage in "Je le scay bien" (compare *Example 4*). And it contrasts with the following third verse line (bb. 24-32) – the only one without 'chopping'.

The rondeau's second section starts as a variation of the song's opening, now with the superius in lead. A lively canon in complementary rhythms leads to a cadence on A, which connects directly to the fifth and last line, in which the idea of 'chopping' is developed into a sort of antiphony between the upper voices on a F-triad (bb. 42 ff – see *Example 7*). Here the contratenor has to function as structural counter voice to the resulting monophony of the upper voices.

The canon technique displayed in this setting is extremely simple. Basiron has discovered that everything works out painlessly if he keeps the canonic voices within the range of a fifth (occasionally a sixth) and lets the contratenor take care of everything else below or in between the canonic duet. Passages in *fauxbourdon*-style, which characterized the sound in "Je le scay bien", are mostly absent, and the single *fauxbourdon*-cadence to A in bar 40-41 is gracefully handled with the contratenor in dotted *minimae* (cf. *Example 7*).

The setting was made with close attention to the text. The 'chopping' patterns are made to fit the words: "Tant / fort / me tarde" (cf. *Example 5*) or "pour / compter / ma / desconfort" etc. The resulting effect of stammering and word repetitions can only have been

Ex. 5, Basiron, "Tant fort me tarde ta venue" (Laborde, ff. 34<sup>v</sup>-35), bars 1-6

1.4. Tant fort me tar - de ta ve -  
3. Or est ma san - te cer - tes

1.4. Tant fort est ma san - te cer - tes nu -  
3. Or est ma san - te cer - tes

1.4. Tant fort est ma san - te cer - tes

Ex. 6, Basiron, "Tant fort me tarde ta venue" (Laborde, ff. 34<sup>v</sup>-35), bars 14-20

14 ter ma des - - con - - ve - nu -  
scay quel est - - de - - ve - nu -

ma quel est - - con - - ve - nu -  
14 ter ma des - con - - ve - nu -  
scay quel est de - - ve - nu -

Ex. 7, Basiron, "Tant fort me tarde ta venue" (Laborde, ff. 34<sup>v</sup>-35), bars 40-45

40 a - - me qui soit  
la - - me; je suis mort,

a - - me qui soit  
la - - me; je suis

nul a - - me qui soit  
la la - - me; je suis mort,

Ex. 8, Caron, "Helas m'amour, ma tresparfaicte amy" (Laborde, ff. 12<sup>v</sup>-13), bars 30-38

30 ce, je ne re - quier heu - re, temps, lieu,  
ce; et si Pi - tie ma grant dou - leur

ce, je ne re - quier heu - re, temps, lieu,  
ce; et si Pi - tie ma grant dou - leur

je ne re - quier heu - re, temps, lieu,  
et si Pi - tie ma grant dou - leur n'ef-

Ex. 9, Tinctoris, “Helas, le bon temps que j’avoie” [with text reconstructed as “Helas m’amour, ma tresparfaicte amyé”] (Sevilla 5-I-43, ff. 44<sup>v</sup>-45), bars 17-23

The image shows a musical score for three voices. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle in alto clef, and the bottom in bass clef. The lyrics are written below the notes. The lyrics are: 'e, si ne vous plaist m'es - train - dre / e si grief - ve - ment que je ne / si ne vous plaist m'es - train - dre / si grief - ve - ment que je ne'. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many dotted notes and rests.

designed to make fun of Mureau’s sincere love poem, turning it into a travesty of courtly affectation.

The stimulus to develop the techniques already explored in “Je le scay bien” was with great probability proffered by a highly successful song by an older composer, Caron’s “Helas, que pourra devenir”, or maybe propagated through another song by Johannes Tinctoris, “Helas, le bon temps que j’avoie”. Caron was active during the period 1455-75 in Northern France,<sup>31</sup> and his “Helas” was well known in Basiron’s region as is confirmed by its appearance in the Dijon and Wolfenbüttel chansonniers. In the Laborde chansonnier Caron’s setting appears with the rondeau quatrain poem “Helas m’amour, ma tresparfaicte amyé”, which probably was the original text. Caron’s music shows the same exploration of canon technique and has a spectacular passage in staggered descending thirds and triads in dotted values sung by all voices (see *Example 8*), and Caron’s setting might likewise treat the poem ironically. However, in terms of the use of canon at the fifth, rhythmical flexibility and sheer craftsmanship, Caron’s song is much more accomplished than the one by the young Basiron.

The same could be said of the relation between Basiron’s song and an alternative source of inspiration for the use of canon and the ear-catching passage, namely a song “Helas, le bon temps que j’avoie” by Johannes Tinctoris (c 1435-1511). This song, too, was clearly modelled on Caron’s “Helas”. It uses the same technical elements (see *Example 9*), and it is possibly also composed with the poem “Helas m’amour, ma tresparfaicte amyé” as its original text. Basiron follows Tinctoris in placing the rhythmical disruptive passage in the rondeau’s first section, which weakens the impact of the overall formal layout.<sup>32</sup>

While the two songs by the older composers, Caron and Tinctoris, both are technical complex and skilful, but exhibiting a weak coordination between poetic text and music (this could, however, be an ironic stance), Basiron’s simplification of the technical parameters enables him to coordinate the music with the words, and this makes it considerably easier to hear what is happening in the song – and why it is funny. An examination of the examples 4, 6, 8, and 9 makes it evident that Basiron and Tinctoris are indebted to Caron who made this effect popular. Of course, the idea of staggered triads are quite obvious in

31 Cf. Rob C. Wegman, ‘Fremin le Caron at Amiens: New Documents’ in Fabrice Fitch and Jacobijn Kiel (eds.), *Bon jour, bon mois et bonne estrenne: Essays on Renaissance Music in Honour of David Fallows*, Woodbridge 2011, pp. 10–32.

32 Cf. the comments on Caron’s and Tinctoris’ settings at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH092.html> and [http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH\\_X/Sev5-I-43\\_60.html](http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH_X/Sev5-I-43_60.html).



canons in unison or at the octave, and possibly their use was en route to become clichés,<sup>33</sup> but the effective rhythmical disruptions and the placement of the passages in the rondeau form make the inspirational and competitive threads between the songs and their composers credible.

#### *The four-part songs*

The two last songs firmly ascribed to Basiron are arrangements or double chansons for four voices based on the rondeau “D’un autre amer mon cuer s’abesseroit” by Ockeghem. They appear in a Florentine manuscript from the 1490s, Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, MS Q17. One of them has the text incipit “D’ung aultre amer” only and appears on ff. 55<sup>v</sup>-56 with the ascription “philipon”; the other, “D’ung aultre amer / L’homme armé”, can be found anonymously a couple of pages later on in the manuscript, on ff. 57<sup>v</sup>-58, but it appears with an ascription to “Basiron” in another Florentine manuscript of the early 1490s, Rome, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Cappella Giulia, XIII.27. The extant sources for these settings were made after the death of Basiron, but there cannot be much doubt that they were composed during his early years in Bourges.

In the repertory of the ‘Loire Valley’ chansonniers, we do not find an example of a combination chanson, which is based on a voice part from a courtly chanson, taking it over virtually unchanged as it is the case in these two “D’ung aultre amer” settings. Yet Basiron’s four-part chansons are not much different in style from the double chansons of the Busnoys generation. The challenge of composing double chansons is to combine the setting of a poem in *forme fixe*, usually a rondeau, with one or two pre-existent popular tunes and their texts. In the first “D’ung aultre amer” setting in Bologna Q17, Basiron has exchanged this challenge with a combination of citing the upper voice of Ockeghem’s famous rondeau straight in his superius and a strict canon in the tenor (at the upper fourth; only three voices are notated). The lower voices do not appear to build on a pre-existent tune; possibly the canon in the tenors was created for a poem, which paraphrased “D’ung aultre amer”. In the other setting, he has combined Ockeghem’s superius with a popular song, the well-known “L’homme armé”. Basiron has transformed the popular tune into *tempus imperfectum diminutum*, but keeps traces of its original rhythm in triple time. The two contratenors relate primarily to the tenor tune, supporting and imitating it, but at the same time, they allow the phrasing of the superius *c.p.f.* to come forward and compete with the tenor tune as the principal formal element. It is quite ingenious made. It is possible to perform both songs as complete rondeaux.

We have already noticed Basiron’s fascination with the reworking of elements and stylistic traits from existent text and music, so it is not surprising that a young composer might want to test his powers on music by the dominating figure of the ‘Loire Valley’ musical milieu, Johannes Ockeghem. The somewhat schematic settings uses the double chanson format to try out working with predefined elements in four parts, an experience that came in useful in, for example, his *Missa L’homme armé*, which in addition to the popular tune also exhibits sections in canon, and which must have been composed during the early 1470s.

33 Cf. Jenny Hodgson, ‘The Illusion of Allusion’, in Honey Meconi (ed.), *Early Musical Borrowing*. New York & London 2004, pp. 65-89, and John Milsom, ‘Imitatio’, ‘Intertextuality’, and Early Music’, in Suzannah Clark & Elizabeth Eva Leach (eds.), *Citation and Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Musical Culture. Learning from the Learned*. (Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music 4), Woodbridge 2005, pp. 141-151.

In between the two four-part songs by Basiron in Bologna Q17, we find a third reworking of Ockeghem's "D'ung aultre amer", now for three voices (ff. 56<sup>v</sup>-57).<sup>34</sup> Below Ockeghem's upper voice is placed a tenor in the same range as Ockeghem's original tenor part, and a low contratenor. It is possible to put the rondeau text under both the new voices and perform the song as a rondeau. However, the way in which they in spurts recite the poem in fast note repetitions is very different from Ockeghem's melodic arches, and they effectively undermine the model's courtly style. Stylistically nothing hinders this setting in being an experimental work by Basiron. The hasty recitation of the lines of the "D'ung aultre amer"-poem suggested by the lower voices might be viewed as a precursor for his four-part double chanson with canon.

*A look on some possible additional songs from the hand of Basiron*

The placement of the anonymous three-part "D'ung aultre amer"-setting close to the four-part songs on the same theme makes us, justified or not, speculate if the song could be ascribed to Basiron. We can establish that it does not seem improbable, but is impossible to prove. This whets the appetite for searching the sources for other candidates for an ascription to the hand of the young Basiron. There are many possibilities. Let us, however, keep to the songs transmitted anonymously in Wolfenbüttel and Laborde and placed close to the songs, which with some credibility can be ascribed to Basiron.<sup>35</sup> The Wolfenbüttel scribe's interest in Basiron has been mentioned already. As soon as he had finished with the songs spelling out the dedicatee of the manuscript in the form of an acrostic, he turned to the music of Basiron. Between "De m'esjourir", "Nul ne l'a telle", nos. 14-15 in the manuscript, and no. 18 "Je le scay bien", we find two anonymous three-part songs, which both also can be found in the Laborde and Copenhagen chansonniers. They seem worth a closer look:

- ▷ "Je ne requiers que vostre bien vueillance" 3v, Wolfenbüttel ff. 17<sup>v</sup>-18; Laborde ff. 39<sup>v</sup>-40; Copenhagen ff. 19<sup>v</sup>-20.
- ▷ "Le joli tetin de ma dame" 3v, Wolfenbüttel ff. 18<sup>v</sup>-20; Laborde in the index as "Le jolis tetin de ma dame"; Copenhagen ff. 21<sup>v</sup>-23.

For both of them applies that they could have been copied into the three chansonniers by the three different scribes using the same or closely related exemplars.<sup>36</sup> "Le joli tetin" is missing in Laborde. It was originally on pages torn out between f. 21<sup>v</sup> and f. 22. There is no reason to believe that it differed substantially from the version in Wolfenbüttel. In fact, it was placed just after Basiron's "De m'esjourir".

"Je ne requiers" sets a conventional rondeau cinquain poem, a compilation of courtly stock phrases, and the music is not much better when heard in the vicinity of composers like Busnoys and his kind. It has the same voice disposition with a high contratenor as in

34 Cf. the editions of the three songs from Bologna Q17 at [http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH\\_X/BolQ17\\_050.html](http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH_X/BolQ17_050.html), ... /[BolQ17\\_051.html](http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH_X/BolQ17_051.html), and ... /[BolQ17\\_052.html](http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH_X/BolQ17_052.html).

35 Martella Gutiérrez-Denhoff has made similar observations concerning the placements of Basiron's songs in the sources (cf. *Der Wolfenbütteler Chansonier. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Codex Guelf. 287 Extrav. Untersuchungen zu Repertoire und Überlieferung einer Musikhandschrift des 15. Jahrhunderts und ihres Umkreises.* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 29) Wiesbaden 1985, pp. 111-113) without, however, entering into a discussion of musical style.

36 See also the editions of the songs at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH015.html> and ... /[CH017.html](http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH017.html).



at, "Puis que si bien" (ff. 20<sup>v</sup>-21) and "De mèsjourir" (ff. 21<sup>v</sup>-21a), followed by two songs now completely missing, "Ce qu'on fait a catimini" (ff. 21a<sup>v</sup>-21b) and "Le joli tetin" (ff. 21b<sup>v</sup>-21d); next comes another fragmentary song, "Je n'ay pover de vivre" (f. 22) before we meet an attributed song, Du Fay's "Vostre bruit et vostre grant fame" (ff. 22<sup>v</sup>-23). Considering that "Puis que si bien", "De mèsjourir" (both probably by Basiron), and "Le joli tetin" could all have been copied from the same exemplar, we must include "Ce qu'on fait a catimini" among the candidates for an ascription to Basiron, especially as it is present also in the Wolfenbüttel chansonnier (ff. 48<sup>v</sup>-49).

It is a setting of a macaronic poem, which mixes French with Latin. It is blatantly erotic and much more cynic than the happy "Le joli tetin". "Ce qu'on fait a catimini" was also set by the older composer Gilles Joye (c1425-1483) in a different version. This song is preserved in the Mellon chansonnier, New Haven, Yale University, Beineke Library, MS 91, ff. 10<sup>v</sup>-11 and three later sources.<sup>37</sup> The poem in Wolfenbüttel could very well have been revised by the composer with Joye's setting as his model. He has only reworded the lines without Latin words (shown in Italics in the example below), and he reused words from the older version in some places (shown in bold); all in order to get a more effective and richer rime word, "-ement" in stead of just "-é", and one which contrasts stronger with the first rime "-mini". Not much is changed in the meaning of the poem.

Ce qu'on fait a catimini touchant multiplicamini, <b>maiz qu'il soit fait secretement,</b> <i>est excuse legerement</i> in conspectu Altissimi.	Ce qu'on fait a quatimini touchant multiplicamini, <b>mais qu'il soit bien tenu secre,</b> <i>sera tenu pour excuse</i> in conspectu Altissimi.
Et pourtant operamini, mez filles, et letamini, <b>ce n'est que tout esbatement</b>	Et pourtant operamini, mes fillez, et letaimini, <b>car jamais n'est revele</b>
ce qu'on fait ...	ce qu'on fait ...
Et se vous ingrossamini, soit in nomine Domini; <i>endurez le tout doucement,</i> <i>ja n'en perdrez vo saulvement,</i> maiz que vous confitemini.	Et se vous ingrossemini, soit in nomine Domini; <i>vous aves a proufit ouvre,</i> <i>qui vous sera tout pardonne,</i> mais que vous confitemini.
Ce qu'on fait ... (after Wolfenbüttel)	Ce qu'on fait ... (after New Haven 91)

The setting is light-hearted – and much funnier than the quite pedestrian setting by Joye. It uses a structural duet of superius and tenor an octave apart complemented by a contratenor, which for much of the time keeps below the tenor, but rises above it in the first line. The song opens in what sounds like a three-part imitation, but soon after the entry of the last voice, the tenor, it turns into an extended passage in *fauxbourdon*-style that

<sup>37</sup> Edited in Leeman L. Perkins and H. Garey (eds.), *The Mellon Chansonnier I-II*. New Haven 1979, no. 9. The anonymous setting is edited in Martella Gutiérrez-Denhoff (ed.), *Der Wolfenbütteler Chansonnier. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Codex Guelf. 287 Extrav.* (Musikalischer Denkmäler X), Mainz 1988, no. 39, and at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH237.html>.

underscores the words “fait a catimini” (do covertly) with striking clarity. The rest of the words are set tongue-in-cheek using flexible canonic imitation on triadic motives and chasing descending thirds with lots of syncopation, which disturbs the steady beat. The second section of the rondeau runs the lines together and accumulates the syncopation, so that the last line of the refrain and of the *tierce* are performed by the upper voice off-beat all the way through: the assurances to the young girls, “in conspectu Altissimi” and “maiz que vous confitemini”, are apparently not quite trustworthy.

This song in many ways fits into our picture of Basiron, not least in view of his interest in the poetic side of creating songs and in designing his own texts with older or contemporary poems as models. The last song in the series of unattributed songs in Laborde is probably different. So much has disappeared of “Je n'ay povoir de vivre” with the loss of its upper voice and text that is hard to know precisely what it was. An analysis of the remaining text incipits, the tenor and contratenor, shows that it probably sets a rondeau quatrain by the star-poet of the preceding generations, Alain Chartier (c1385-1430), “Je n'ay povoir de vivre en joie”, and that it was composed for three equal low voices, which is a combination quite rare in this repertory. It could very well have been an experimental song by the young Basiron.

If we assign the experimental stance as a characteristic of Basiron, then the Laborde chansonnier offers many possibilities among the unique songs entered close to the ones ascribed to Basiron. For example, between “Nul ne l'a telle” on ff. 13<sup>v</sup>-15 and “Je le scay bien” on ff. 16<sup>v</sup>-17 we find the unique “Recours d'onneur et de liesse”, ff. 15<sup>v</sup>-16, which sets a sarcastic rondeau quatrain addressed to the personified Low Tide of honour and delight, which anybody can happen to meet. The irony is stressed by the jolly triple time in the rondeau's second section, where the poet names this Ebb in Fortune as his mistress, the whole section is in coloured notation. “Tant fort me tarde”, ff. 34<sup>v</sup>-35, and “Je ne requier”, ff. 39<sup>v</sup>-40, are situated in a part of the manuscripts abounding with unique chansons, many of them exhibiting similar interesting traits, but we have to stop the hunt here for lack of confirmation.

This search has revealed at least three good candidates, “Je ne requiers”, “Le joli tetin” and “Ce qu'on fait”, for enrolment into the secular oeuvre of Basiron in addition to “Puis que si bien”. In a way they are confirmed by their inclusion in the chansonnier made by the Wolfenbüttel scribe who did show an active interest in Basiron's music, as well as in the Laborde chansonnier, and in two cases, “Je ne requiers” and “Le joli tetin”, they were taken up by the Dijon scribe in the Copenhagen chansonnier. In Laborde we may find in addition a host of equally interesting candidates, but as they are unique, no such confirmation can be established. Concerning the question of authorship, we have to remember that all the songs here mentioned were entered without any composer attribution in the ‘Loire Valley’ chansonniers. They would have remained anonymous, if not the so-called ‘Index-Scribe II’ had recognized three chansons as Basiron's works and added his name during the finishing of Laborde in the atelier of the scribe of Florence 2794 and his successors.

#### *Basiron and the ‘Loire Valley’ chansonniers*

Let us now – as a conclusion to the review of Basiron's songs – try to outline a profile of the young Basiron with a view of discussing when his songs might have been able to reach the compilers of the earliest of the ‘Loire Valley’ chansonniers.

The few years older Gilles Mureau was by the end of the 1460s well under way of building a career, which might have served as a role model for Basiron who followed a similar track up through the ecclesiastical hierarchy. But while Mureau obtained great security in his lifelong work for the Chartres cathedral as a singer, choirmaster, teacher and canon, Basiron apparently never obtained similar security. His recorded career ended when a new *magister puerum* was appointed at the Sainte-Chapelle in January 1474, and he disappeared from our view only to resurface a few years before his death in a modest position in a church affiliated with Sainte-Chapelle. However, given the usual fast change of personnel in the vulnerable position of the choirmaster, his more than four years on the post was a respectable feat.

As we have seen, Basiron was from the beginning able to write his own texts using the poetic tools and mannerisms of the contemporary school of *rhétoriciens*. In this matter he was completely in line with Mureau. Both of them probably saw the possibilities in improving their social standings and cultural capital by their display of capabilities in music as well as poetry. The targets of Basiron's efforts were probably to be found in courtly circles, and Mureau's were his patrons in the Chartres area.<sup>38</sup> Basiron apparently had great success in his relations with the court. Already during the process leading to his instalment as *magister puerum* in February 1469, he was able to invoke influential connections with leading ecclesiastics such as the cardinal of Angers and the archbishop of Bourges. Later on, in June and July 1471, in a controversy with the chapter concerning a benefice, king Louis XI intervened rather heavy-handed in favour of "our beloved Philippe Basiron".<sup>39</sup> This support from the king and the aristocracy in career matters could be an indicator that his services at the Bourges palace included other facets than the strictly ecclesiastical. Another element furthering Basiron's career during these years was his studies in canon law at the university of Bourges.

The drive to develop musical and poetical material borrowed from colleagues – or looking for further possibilities in his own music – is a prominent characteristic of Basiron's profile. Maybe it simply was typical of the young composers during these years. The whole idea of learning from predecessors, of composing standing on the shoulders of masters, is characteristic of the time, and it is clearly stated in the theoretical works of Johannes Tinctoris. These writings belong to Tinctoris' Italian period in the 1470s, but his ideas were surely taking shape during his years in Orléans and Chartres, where Basiron would have had rich opportunities to become acquainted with his way of thinking.<sup>40</sup>

In the music of Basiron we meet this tendency in its initial stages. He uses techniques and themes or a short quote from existing music and poetry and does not ordinarily adhere to the practise of using a complete voice part as the structural skeleton for a new

38 For a more detailed discussion, see my article 'Music, Competition and *l'Art de Seconde Rhétorique*: The Youthful Chansons of Gilles Mureau and Philippe Basiron' (forthcoming).

39 Higgins 1990, pp. 7-9 and Documents 13 and 18-19.

40 Cf. Paula Higgins, 'Musical "Parents" and Their "Progeny": The Discourse of Creative Patriarchy in Early Modern Europe', in J.A. Owens & A. Cummings (eds.), *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Studies in Honor of Lewis Lockwood* (Detroit Monographs in Musicology/Studies in Music, No. 18) Warren, MI, 1996, pp. 169-186; Reinhard Strohm, 'Music, Humanism, and the Idea of a 'Rebirth' of the Arts' in Reinhard Strohm & Bonnie J. Blackburn (eds.), *Music as Concept and Practise in the Late Middle Ages* (The New Oxford History of Music. New Edition, Vol. III.1) Oxford 2001, pp. 344-405 (at pp. 395-399); and for a list and datings of Tinctoris' works, see *The Theoretical Works of JOHANNES TINCTORIS – a new online edition edited by Ronald Woodley* (<http://www.stoa.org/tinctoris/tinctoris.html>).

composition. We find indeed this procedure in the his four-part reworkings of Ockeghem's "D'ung aultre amer", which unlike his three-part chansons use an established compositional model known from the combination chansons. Instead of quoting a popular song in combination with a courtly poem, he here cites a complete voice part from an art song. In his three-part chansons Basiron is completely in line with examples from contemporary sources: His use of a quote from Binchois in "Nul ne l'a telle", his reuse of Mureau's poem in "Je le scay bien" and his new disrespectful setting of "Tant fort me tarde" (and his eventual revision of "Ce qu'on fait a catimini"), the reuse of techniques and motives in "De mèsjour" and "Puis que si bien", the same relationship between "Je le scay bien" and "Tant fort me tarde" – and their dependency on ideas inherited from Caron or Tinctoris –, all this can be compared with for example, the anonymous reworkings and travesties of the widely circulated rondeau "J'ay prins amours a ma devise". "J'ay pris ung poul a ma chemise" is preserved in the chansonniers Florence 176 and Paris 4379, which record a repertory contemporary with the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers. This song quotes the beginning of the upper voice of "J'ay prins amours" and twists its meaning. "J'ay prins deux pouls a ma chemise" in the Dijon chansonnier is a more elegant rondeau, which parodies its model.<sup>41</sup> Or the reworking of motives and ideas from Busnoys' "Ja que lui ne s'i actende" in the three-part rondeau cinquain "La pourveance de mon cuer", which the Dijon scribe entered in Laborde.<sup>42</sup> This type of chanson reacts to a well-known model by quoting, by developing techniques or motives or by caricature, and it is quite different from the technique of using a complete voice part from a courtly chanson as a point of departure for a new secular composition. The last-mentioned technique seems to belong to the decades after the genesis of the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers; possibly the popularity of this procedure (and its inherent competitive stance) was initiated by Ockeghem himself in his reworkings of his own "Fors seulement l'attente que je meure".<sup>43</sup>

Another conspicuous side of Basiron's profile must be his wish for trying out and developing certain procedures, a sort of joy in musical experimentation introduced into quite traditional frameworks with high contratenors and reliance on old-fashioned cadence patterns. On the one hand we find the overly long developments of musical lines, often in canonical imitation, and an insistent use of short motives in sequential canonic imitation; on the other hand we also meet the stimulating use of rhythmical displacement and the chopping up of lines in short segments fashioned to the words. These traits all appear to a greater or lesser degree in his songs – and some of them to a remarkable degree in the songs, which we have tentatively ascribed to Basiron. The many candidates for ascriptions to Basiron among the unique chansons in Laborde, which show a remarkable stylistic originality, suggest that Basiron was not at all alone in experimenting with and wishing to develop the chanson formats during this period, even if many of these songs sound backward looking heard alongside songs by Busnoys and his equals.

Here we learn that for young composers of this period a complex of technical devices, which include a high contratenor often crossing above the tenor, *fauxbourdon*-like passages and cadences with a leap of an octave in the contratenor, still was highly relevant. Historians of musical style have seen these traits as markers of songs of an older date, more belonging to the generation of Binchois than to that of Busnoys. But in this repertory

41 Cf. <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH036.html>, ... /CH555.html and ... /CH117.html.

42 Cf. <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH032.html> and ... /CH215.html.

43 Cf. Meconi 1990 p. 15 and pp. 30-31.

they often appear in the music of composers born later than Busnoys and whose music only appears in the sources around 1470 or later. Therefore we have to recognize that not everybody had the capabilities of a Busnoys, and that the older stylistic ideals were not exhausted – not even for adventurous songs. This furthermore weakens the use of this style ideal as an argument for the dating of songs of this period.

To sum up: Given his estimated date of birth in c1447-48, Basiron was a young and able composer at the end of the 1460s. He was probably self-assured, adventurous and familiar with the music and procedures of some of his predecessors; he was aware of the possibilities of furthering his career by participation in the competitive craze for poetry by learning the craft of the *rhétoriqueurs*, he had a wide support from leading circles, and his music was quite early accepted into the repertoires of Wolfenbüttel and Laborde. The problem is to pin down when this happened.

The key dates are Basiron's promotion to the rank of *vicarius* in 1467, his election as *magister puerum* in 1469, his attested support from the crown in 1471, and of course his disappearance from our view in January 1474. His reputation as a musician and as a person worthy of serving the highest nobility was in ascendance early in 1469 when he in his application to the chapter invoked the support of Jean Balue and Jean Cueur and presented himself as a man with responsibilities towards his family.<sup>44</sup> He would never have dared to implicate such ecclesiastical dignitaries in front of the well-informed collegium of canons, if this was not the case. Likewise, the king's pressure on the chapter in support of Basiron designates the highpoint of Basiron's standing. It is hardly credible that he reached this privileged position in his early twenties just by virtue of his qualities as a singer or as leader and instructor of the boys of the Sainte Chapelle. His talent in creating music and poetry must have manifested itself years before. It is possible that he started to make a name for himself during the years before his instalment as *magister puerum* and that his renown spread in the years around 1470 in order to achieve royal recognition.

This means that the songs in the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers may have been composed during the second half of the 1460s, not by a choirboy, but by a young composer of an age around twenty – and in this way the investigation of Basiron's chansons supports Jane Alden's revised datings of the sources.<sup>45</sup> Basiron must have produced a substantial portfolio of musical works, sacred as well as secular, in order to achieve such a prominent position, and the songs must have had a quite wide circulation in Central France in order to reach more or less simultaneously the Laborde and the Wolfenbüttel chansonniers, where they were copied after clearly related, but different exemplars. As described above the Wolfenbüttel scribe was fascinated by the music of Basiron, and this may indicate that they both moved among the same circles. Unfortunately, this does not tell us much about the location of the copying. That Basiron enjoyed high standing at the French court centred at the royal dwellings near Tours would certainly mean that his songs also would be known to influential circles in Paris, among wealthy businessmen and royal notaries and secretaries, customers for the elegant, small-format chansonniers.<sup>46</sup>

All in all, these circumstances make it realistic to presume that the two sources, in spite of the fact that we can establish that the songs had already obtained a certain circulation, came in existence quite close to the time of their composition. Therefore we may

44 Higgins 1990, p. 24 (document 13).

45 Cf. note 3.

46 Cf. Alden 2010, pp. 178-206.



estimate that the Wolfenbüttel and Laborde scribes entered Basiron's songs while his fame was in ascendancy, namely in the years 1470-71. At the same time, the investigation has made it clear that the Dijon scribe had no interest in – or no knowledge of – the music of Basiron during these years when he was working on his 'own' chansonnier. This triggers the question about the Dijon scribe's location or his relations to the same circles as the original Laborde scribe and the Wolfenbüttel scribe during the period before he took over the work on the Laborde chansonnier. This might have been a question about different institutional affiliations. Unlike his not knowing about Basiron, he deemed it important to mention the name of Tinctoris both times he copied his song "Vostre regart si tresfort m'a feru" into the Dijon and the Laborde chansonniers.<sup>47</sup>

Dating the copying of Basiron's songs to 1470-71 furthermore leaves him more than time enough to assimilate the different influences, which the analysis has called attention to. There is no reason to believe that a young assistant or even an incumbent choirmaster was locked down in Bourges. The demanding work as choirmaster included relations with his colleagues at other big institutions and journeys to acquire new talented boys. Even if his duties for long stretches of time kept him at the Sainte Chapelle, Bourges had close connections to the royal court and administration in nearby Tours, where also the royal chapel resided most of the time, and to the greater administrative body in Paris. Bourges was integrated in the cultural sphere of the Loire Valley with Orléans and Blois within close reach. Ockeghem and other members of the royal chapel visited Bourges,<sup>48</sup> Gilles Mureau probably was often in the area to look after his interests, and Tinctoris worked in Orléans as *succentor* at the cathedral and studied canon law at the university in the early 1460s, and according to his own account in *De inventione et usu musicae*, he spent some time in the 1460s as teacher of music to the choirboys at the Chartres Cathedral, probably teaching side by side with Mureau.<sup>49</sup> In 1469 Basiron did journey to Paris to be approved in his new position as *magister puerum* by the treasurer of the Sainte-Chapelle who resided in Paris.<sup>50</sup> En route it would be natural to stop over in Orléans or Chartres. To become personally acquainted with his somewhat older colleagues, Mureau and Tinctoris, could evidently mean a lot to the young Basiron. On the other hand, Basiron's music does not testify that he had any deeper knowledge of the chansons by one of the leading composers, Antoine Busnoys. Busnoys had left the royal lands already by 1467.

47 Cf. <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CHO55.html>.

48 Cf. Higgins 1990, p. 15.

49 Cf. Ronald Woodley, 'Johannes Tinctoris: A Review of the Documentary Biographical Evidence', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34 (1981), pp. 217-248 (at p. 229), and Tinctoris' text at [http://www.chmtl.indiana.edu/tml/15th/TININV\\_TEXT.html](http://www.chmtl.indiana.edu/tml/15th/TININV_TEXT.html).

50 Higgins 1990, p. 7.