A “Free Artist of Color” in Late-Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue: The Life and Times of Minette

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Abstract

This article sets forth, for the first time in detail, the life and career of Minette, who was the main female opera singer in Port-au-Prince at the end of the eighteenth century. The city was the capital of the thriving and wealthy French colony of Saint-Domingue (which, upon gaining independence in 1804, took the name Haïti). Theatrical activity in Port-au-Prince was comparable to what one could find in any large provincial city, and the success that Minette gained was all the more remarkable for her being categorized as colored (*mestive*). The details of Minette’s origins, life, and career and of the social world around her allow us to understand better her extraordinary story. New facts presented here—including a full listing of her known performances and a detailed genealogy—correct and enrich the account of Minette that Jean Fouchard sketched in the 1950s and reveal how complex the trajectory of one individual could be in a society that was based on slavery and on deeply held prejudices about race and color.

Keywords: opera; women; vocal music; singers; singing; females; race

Childhood and Family

When a girl named Elisabeth Alexandrine Louise was born in Port-au-Prince on July 4, 1767, no one could imagine that she would become a coloratura soprano and one of the best musicians in Saint-Domingue, the wealthiest Western-controlled colony of that era. (Saint- Domingue was the

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The present article is a fuller version of my French-language article “Elisabeth Alexandrine Louise Ferrand dite Minette: Trajectoire d’une artiste métisse à Saint-Domingue à la fin du xviiième siècle,” in *Revue de la société haïtienne d’Histoire et de Géographie*, nos. 259–62 (2016): 214–36. It appears in *IJSMMP* by kind permission of the *Revue*. The translation has been worked on by many hands, including the author, David Colman (Eton College, UK), and—for final revisions—Ralph P. Locke.

The city that is here called Le Cap or Le Cap-Français was the capital of Saint-Domingue until 1770; it is today known as Le Cap-Haïtien. Port-au-Prince, the colony’s capital in 1770–1804 (and capital of Haïti since 1804) is abbreviated PaP in Appendix 1. An important source, the newspaper entitled *Affiches Américaines*, is here referred to as *AA* in the notes (see n. 11) and in Appendix 1. The Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer is here abbreviated as ANOM (http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/anom/fr/). The Centre d’Accueil et de Recherche des Archives Nationales is here referred to as CARAN.

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French colonial name of the western half of the island of Hispaniola. The country took its modern name of Haïti after gaining its independence in 1804.) But all present knew she already enjoyed a privileged position. Her father, though not named in the parish registry, was a Frenchman and thus a "white," in the language of the day.[1] As treasurer of the Intendance (the economic administration of the colony), he was responsible for the districts of the West and the South, which made him the third or fourth most important person in the paymaster's office.[2] Her mother—a quadroon, i.e. a person who had a single African grandparent—belonged to a well-to-do family related to a member of the Privy Council.[3] However, the priest mentioned no surname for the mother but just her Christian name and nickname. Elisabeth Alexandrine Louise received, along with her Christian name, the qualification of *mestive*, which assigned her place as a "free person of color" (the so-called *gens de couleur libres* or *libres de couleur*, sometimes now referred to as the "free colored class") in Saint-Domingue as well as in the entire French colonial society.[4]

> Today August the eleventh 1767 I have baptized Alexandrine Louise free *mestive* born July the fourth of this year, natural daughter of Élisabeth known as Fillette, a free quadroon resident of this town, and of an unknown father. The godfather was Alexandre Saint-Martin esq. merchant of this town, the godmother was Élisabeth Dougé wife of Aguin [or Daguin], a free mulatto woman residing in this town in witness whereof I have signed with the godfather and godmother [in the margin is written: Élisabeth Alexandrine Louise mistive][5]

> ce jourd'hui onze août mil sept cent soixante sept j'ai baptisé alexandrine louise mestive libre née le quatre juillet de la présente année fille naturelle d'elisabeth ditte [*sic*] fillette carteronne libre résidant en cette ville et d'un père inconnu. Le parrain a été le sieur alexandre saint-martin négociant en cette ville, la marraine elisabeth dougé femme d'aguin [i.e., d'Aguin ou Daguin] mulatresse libre résidant en cette ville en foi de quoi j'ai signé avec le parain et la marraine [écrit dans la marge de l'acte: elisabeth alexandrine louise mistive (*sic*)]

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1. For strong evidence suggesting that Marin Ferrand was the father of Minette, see my two prior articles: "Minette, Situation sociale d'une artiste de couleur à Saint-Domingue," *Généalogie et histoire de la Caraïbe* (GHC) 185 (2005): 4638–40; and "Minette artiste de couleur à Saint-Domingue," *Revue de la société haïtienne d'histoire et de géographie,* no. 205 (October–December 2000), 1–11. A recent work suggests that Minette was not Minette Ferrand, who died in New Orleans in 1807, and that Minette's father was not Marin Ferrand, but does not provide any specific new information to support this conclusion: David M. Powers, *From Plantation to Paradise, Cultural Politics and Musical Theater in French Slave Colonies, 1764–1789* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 120–21.

2. Dossier Ferrand, Colonies, E 182, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence.

3. Duvivier de la Mahaultière. Appendix 2 (a simplified family tree for Minette) reflects my most recent genealogical research about Minette and her sister Lise. I summarize this research in two separate entries at the online site *Généalogie et histoire de la Caraïbe*: http://www.ghcaraibe.org/articles/2018-art43.pdf (for Minette Ferrand) and http://www.ghcaraibe.org/articles/2018-art49.pdf (for Jeanne dite Lise, demi-sœur de MInette).

4. A *mestif* or a *mestive* was a man or a woman whose parents were a white and a quadroon, in the racial terminology of Saint-Domingue.

5. Incorrect spelling of *mestive*. For ease in reading, capitalization has been standardized in the translated versions of the documents here, and punctuation has sometimes been added.

In the context of the time, being a free person of color—whether free by birth or emancipated—meant that Alexandrine Louise could be reminded of her slave origins and the second-class freedom she enjoyed (hence the mention "free *mestive*"). Besides, that quality had what we might call a contagious impurity about it; any white man who married a free woman of color was deprived of part of his rights, as though he himself had become "a person of color."[6] Perhaps Marin Ferrand, Minette's father, preferred not to take the risk of attending the christening. Still, he was present by proxy because the godfather was white and was part of Ferrand's inner circle.

At the time of her birth, the situation of free persons of color was deteriorating significantly. Numerous decrees, either local or emanating from Paris, sought to restrict their rights at all levels (freedom of movement, choice of profession, dress, name, etc.). Family events were to provide cruel reminders. In 1770 Marin Ferrand went back to France after achieving relative financial prosperity. His life companion and the mother of Minette, Elisabeth (known as Fillette), joined him secretly. But no one could leave the colony without giving due notice to the authorities:

> A mulatto woman [in the margin: *mestive*] who had been denied the right to leave the colony has embarked illegally. She was in France with her lover who wanted to have her by his side. The woman's name is Fillette, and she currently lives with Ferrand esq., former crown treasurer at Port-au-Prince and now a clerk working for Monsieur de Vaudésir.
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> Embarquement furtif d'une mulâtresse [porté dans la marge: mestive] à qui il avait été refusé le permis de sortir de la colonie. Elle a été en France chez son amant qui a voulu l'attirer auprès de lui. La femme se prénomme Fillette elle est chez le Sr Ferrand ancien trésorier du Port-au-Prince et maintenant commis chez M. de Vaudésir.[7]

Elisabeth was soon arrested, locked up, and sent back to Saint-Domingue under armed guard. Adding insult to injury, she was said to be a negress (actually she was a quadroon: light-skinned and higher in the racial hierarchy) and the "property" of Ferrand, esq. (even though her family had been free for at least three generations).

> Le Havre October 5, 1770
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> In compliance with your orders as given to Mr Glier in your dispatch of this past August 24, on board the ship la concorde captained by Charles François Le Couvreur which sailed yesterday from this port to Saint-Domingue, I have put in the place of an indentured sailor the negress fillette who belongs to Ferrand esq., a clerk with Monsieur de Vaudésir, and who, in accordance with your orders, had been held prisoner in this arsenal. I have ordered the captain to deliver this negress into the sole custody of Monsieur le Comte de Nolivos and President of Bongars.

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6. See Dominique Rogers, "Les libres de couleur dans les capitales de Saint-Domingue: fortunes, mentalités et intégration à la fin de l'ancien régime (1776–1789)" (doctoral thesis, Université de Bordeaux III, 1999).

7. Correspondance Nolivos-Bongars (29 May 1770), Correspondance à l'arrivée C9A, ANOM.

> Au Havre le 5 octobre 1770.
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> D'après les ordres dont vous avez honoré M. Glier par votre dépêche du 24 août dernier j'ai fait embarquer à la place d'un engagé sur le navire la concorde capitaine charles françois le couvreur qui partit hier de ce port pour Saint-Domingue la négresse nommée fillette appartenant au sieur Ferrand commis de M. de Vaudésir qui par vos ordres avoit été traduite dans les prisons de cet arsenal. J'ay ordonné à ce capitaine de ne remettre cette négresse qu'aux ordres de Monsieur le Comte de Nolivos et Président de Bongars.[8]

Meanwhile, an earthquake devastated Port-au-Prince and destroyed Ferrand's properties, who returned to the colony to take charge of matters again:

> He left to return to the shelter of his family, but the earthquake of June 3, 1770 did not allow him to enjoy for very long the modest wealth he had accumulated during fifteen years of service. This disastrous event having caused him to lose three quarters of the property he owned, principally houses in Port-au-Prince. As he was forced to spend time in Saint-Domingue to sort out his affairs, he was fortunate to enter service with Monsieur de Montarcher, who had just been appointed the colony paymaster and for whom he filled the role of first secretary.
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> Il est parti pour se retirer dans le sein de sa famille mais le tremblement de terre du trois juin mil sept cent soixante dix ne l'a pas laissé jouir longtemps de la médiocre aisance qu'il s'était acquise pendant quinze ans de service. Ce funeste évènement lui ayant fait perdre les trois quart de son bien qui consistait principalement en maisons au Port-au-Prince. Obligé de repasser à Saint-Domingue pour y rétablir ses affaires il fut assez heureux en mars mil sept cent soixante et onze de voir agréer ses services par monsieur de Montarcher qui venoit d'être nommé à l'intendance de cette colonie et il partit avec lui en qualité de premier secrétaire.[9]

These events inform us both about the changes taking place and about Minette's parents, who seem to have been a close-knit couple: it was to join her partner that Elisabeth set out to sail across the Atlantic and when she was sent back from France, it is probable that the loss of his property was not the only cause for Marin Ferrand's return to Saint-Domingue.[10]

We have little information about Minette's childhood but we may suppose it went off without major difficulties. Her mother lived in a family home near the "administrative district" in Port-au-Prince, a house she left at the beginning of the 1780s.[11] It is very likely that her father played a

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8. Dossier Fillette, Colonies, E 184, ANOM.

9. Dossier Ferrand, Colonies, E 182, ANOM.

10. Minette's parents had also a son, Louis Joseph Marin Ferrand, born in Port-au-Prince. See Charles Nolan ed., *Sacramental Records of the Archdiocese of New Orleans* 9: 1807–9 (New Orleans: Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1994), 144.

11. Notaire Guieu, acte 364, December 13, 1782, Dépôt des Papiers Publics des Colonies (DPPC), ANOM. Information kindly provided by Dominique Rogers. That Minette was financially comfortable can be seen in the fact that she was a slaveholder. More precisely: she was offered two slaves as a gesture of gratitude by le sieur Longuet (ANOM, DPPC, Notaire Guieu, acte 1415, ''Testament du Sr Longuet du 6 avril 1786, déposé le 20 avril 1786'') and there survives a document about an imprisoned runaway slave ("esclave marron") who belonged to ''Demoiselle

part in her musical development because he owned several instruments that he put up for sale in 1780.[12] Similarly, we may guess, from what she said later, that she received support from the Port-au-Prince musical scene, especially the singer madame Acquaire, one of those French musicians who chose to pursue a career in the colony.[13] In the early 1780s, musical activity in Saint-Domingue had gained enough momentum to attract well-known artists and large audiences. It was a lively scene: there were five active theaters, each complete with its own company and orchestra. The number of live performances was far higher than in any theater in provincial France because the wealth of the colonies made it possible to attract artists from France who were lured by the high fees. A few would take root and remain on the island, some till the end of the Ancien Régime. Such was the case with Mme Acquaire, whose husband, himself a singer, was, moreover, a first-generation Creole, born in Port-au-Prince to French parents.[14]

Career

It also happened that an actor-singer-cum-theater manager, one François Saint-Martin, was to get her started on what turned out to be a brilliant career. What we know about this man is worth mentioning, for it sums up many aspects of the musical life in Saint-Domingue.

François Victor Saint-Martin was born in the ancient town of Auch (in southern France) and arrived in Saint-Domingue in the late 1760s, at which time he was about twenty years of age.[15] He seems to have started a career as an instrumentalist. Yet it was as a singer, under the stage name La Claverie, that he first showed up in advertisements for local musical performances. In the early ’70s he moved to the town of Léogane, where he attracted notice in a bizarre case in which he posed as the posthumous advocate of a deceased actress: a priest had denied her a religious burial and had fled the cemetery. In front of the open tomb, Saint-Martin improvised the ritual gestures and got the nearby church bell to toll. The actors were then forced to leave in a hurry to escape prosecution, and Saint-Martin seized the opportunity to leave Léogane and abandon his stage name and to go to Port-au-Prince. Moreau de Saint-Méry, who relates the anecdote, seems to share the common opinion, which held that the priest’s attitude was

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Minette” (*Affiches Américaines*, henceforth abbreviated *AA,* Port-au-Prince, 4 février 1790). These references were kindly communicated to me by Dominique Rogers and Julia Prest.

12. “mise en vente d’un piano et d’une harpe par le sieur Ferrand secrétaire de l’Intendance” (a piano and a harp to be sold by Sr Ferrand secretary of the Intendance), *AA*, Le Cap-Français, May 9, 1780.

13. In an announcement published in the press, Minette thanks the woman who has guided her in the profession. And, in fact, only Mme Acquaire seems to correspond to the artist mentioned herein, considering the dates provided (*AA,* May 3, 1787).

14. Baptême de Jacques François Acquaire agé de cinq mois (Baptism of Jacques François Acquaire, 5 months of age), May 5, 1754, parish registers of Port-au-Prince ANOM. We can ensure that it is the artist indeed by comparing this certificate with later certificates, in particular that of his mother’s death.

15. First mention of an artist named La Claverie in Saint-Marc (*AA,* Port-au-Prince, September 30, 1769), confirmed by Médéric Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique, et historique de la partie française de l’isle de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Société française d’histoire d’Outre-mer, 2004) 3:883 (originally published Philadelphia, 1797). The presence of La Claverie in Léogane was confirmed by the press (*AA,* Port-au-Prince, December 13, 1772) and by Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description*, 1099–1110. See also, the arrival correspondence (Correspondance à l’arrivée, C9-142, ANOM) regarding the episode of Père Nicholson’s refusal to carry out the burial, a refusal that was later repudiated by his superiors.

scandalous. Actually, no other such incident has come down to us, and we may suppose that all opera singers in Saint-Domingue were granted religious burials. But at least this little story portrays Saint-Martin as a bold character who held undeniable sway over some of his fellow-artists. It tallies with what we know about the man, who not only secured for himself the exclusive right to put on shows in Port-au-Prince in 1778 but merged the Saint-Marc and Port-au-Prince theater troupes in 1783 and also asked for the exclusive right to perform in Les Cayes.[16] He died soon after, in 1784.[17] Had he lived longer, he would no doubt have succeeded in establishing a large-scale entertainment company operating in three different parishes located dozens of miles apart. (It is today about 120 miles by road from Port-au-Prince to les Cayes, and about 60 miles from the capital to Saint-Marc.) Such was the busy man that Minette was to meet, probably in the late '70s. In this instance, the story of an individual and the colony's musical history are inextricably linked.

Saint-Martin took what was indeed a bold initiative and hired the "young person" (a name Minette was to go by in newspaper announcements for the next four years):

> On February 13th 1781, Mr Saint-Martin, the then-director, agreed to allow prejudice to vie with pleasure by allowing for the first time, a 14-year-old "young person," a Creole born in Port-au-Prince, to make her debut in this theater playing Isabelle in the opera *Isabelle et Gertrude*. Her talent and enthusiasm, which continue to be applauded even today, were on her side right from the start of her career, protecting her from colonial prejudice, which all sensitive and fair-minded people are glad she could overcome. It is enough that politics [or: public policy] should make concessions to pride, without the fine arts [also] having to yield to its power.
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> Le 13 février 1781, M. Saint-Martin, alors directeur, consentit à voir mettre le préjugé aux prises avec le plaisir, en laissant débuter sur ce théâtre, pour la première fois, une *jeune personne* de 14 ans, créole du Port-au-Prince, dans le rôle d'*Isabelle* de l'opéra d'Isabelle et Gertrude. Ses talen[t]s et son zèle, auxquels on accorde encore chaque jour de justes applaudissements, la soutinrent dès son entrée dans la carrière, contre les préventions coloniales dont tout être sensible est charmé qu'elle ait triomphé. C'est assez, sans doute, de ce que la politique a concédé à l'orgueil; sans qu'il faille encore que les Beaux-Arts reconnaissent son empire.[18]

Colored woman and opera singer, the combination of the two phrases may come as a shock, especially if one remembers that the world of theater—and opera was no exception—not only was a place of entertainment but was also meant to improve public morality. Saint-Martin knew he was playing for high stakes. His boldness paid off, and Moreau de Saint-Méry voiced the

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16. See the September 16, 1777, issue of *AA*, Port-au-Prince (privilege for theater performances in Port-au-Prince); Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description*, 883–84 (fusion of the actors' companies in Port-au-Prince and Saint-Marc), 1308–9 (Les Cayes), and 985–87 (Port-au-Prince and Saint-Marc).

17. June 18, 1784, Registres paroissiaux de Port-au-Prince, ANOM. Saint-Martin was born in Auch in the province of Gascogne.

18. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description*, 989.

general opinion when he rejoiced that such a thing had been made possible. Of course, Minette had to be equal to the task of proving by example that free colored citizens were also capable of carrying out brilliantly this heavy responsibility. The reader discovers as he proceeds that Minette and Saint-Martin were not only professional associates but, despite the age difference (20 years), were also associates in their private life. This is what Mme Des Rouaudières wrote to her daughter in France:

> Your cousin Saint-Martin has just been struck down by a bilious attack, but he is doing even better, he is very much in love with a delightful young lady who, although she has never left the country, is very talented and is a great musician. Her mother has consented to the marriage but she is still young, which has your cousin chomping at the bit.
>
> Ton cousin Saint-Martin vient d'être très malade d'un épanchement de bile, mais il fait mieux, il est très amoureux d'une fort aimable demoiselle qui sans avoir quitté le pays a beaucoup de talents et est grande musicienne. Sa maman a consenti à son mariage mais elle est encore jeune, ce qui impatiente un peu ton cousin.[19]

This liaison probably dated back several years, for Minette gave birth to her first child in 1782; he was to be christened, but not until seven years later, in 1789.[20] His Christian name was François. The similarity of names, the late christening, and Mme Des Rouaudières's letter support the view that the child was Saint-Martin's. But illness was soon to strike the father down, and Saint Martin died in June 1784. In his last will, he insisted that his companion be paid what he owed her (actually, four years' wages!). It is the first time Minette's name appears in a written document.

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19. Diary of Mme Des Rouaudières, July 22, 1784, in Gabriel Debien, *Lettres de colons*, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, Publications de la section d'histoire (Laval, Québec: Imprimerie Madiot, 1965), 155. Actually, news could travel slowly within the colony, at the time when Saint-Martin died, and his death did not appear in this diary until the following year (Debien, *Lettres*, 176). In 1791 Mme Des Rouaudières mentioned the visit of Minette to her home in the south, at Fond de l'Isle à Vache, near Les Cayes (Debien, *Lettres*, 295).

20. Registres paroissiaux de Port-au-Prince, ANOM, January 5, 1789: "l'an mil sept cent quatre vingt neuf le cinq janvier a été baptisé françois charles denis mestif né le premier novembre mil sept cent quatre vingt deux fils naturel de la nommée elisabeth alexandrine louise mistive libre comme il const par son acte de baptême aux registres de cette ville en date du onze août mil sept cent soixante sept le parrain a été denis cottineau lieutenant de vaisseau du roi et la marraine dme marie charlotte poinsu épouse de michel bernard dartis." (On the fifth day of january of the year seventeen hundred and ninety, françois charles denis half-caste, born on the first day of November of the year seventeen hundred and eighty-two, was christened, legitimate son of elisabeth alexandrine louise, mestiza and free, according to her baptism certificate filed in the registers of this town on the eleventh day of august seventeen hundred and sixty-seven, the godfather was denis cottineau lieutenant of the king's vessel and the godmother was dame marie charlotte poinsu, spouse of michel bernard dartis.) Minette was to have two other children in Port-au-Prince. The certificate of baptism of Minette's third child, Louise Françoise Théodore, is particularly welcome, in that it bears the baptismal name of the mother (Elisabeth Alexandrine Louise) and her signature, using her professional name (Minette). Parish registers of Port-au-Prince, ANOM, 19 February 1790. In 1799, Minette stated in writing that she had three other children, who had been born outside of Saint-Domingue: Charles (Baltimore, 28 August 1794), Charlotte (Philadelphia, 2 September 1796), and Benjamin (at sea, 21 August 1798), and she signed using her full name, "Minette Ferrand"—ANOM, État civil de Port Républicain (Port-au-Prince), 18 ventose An VII (1799).

> I hereby declare by private deed drawn up on 18 November 1781 that I hired the free colored girl Minette residing in this town for a duration of three full consecutive years as of the 23rd of this month at the rate of £8,000 a year, that I have not paid any monies due to her by way of salary and that I owe her that sum in entirety. I therefore wish for this money to be paid from my estate.
>
> Je déclare que par acte sous signature privée en date du 18 novembre 1781 j'ai engagé la demoiselle Minette mestive libre demeurant en cette ville pour trois années entières et consécutives qui ont commencé à courir du 23 de ce mois à raison de 8 000 £ pour chaque année. . . . que depuis ce temps je ne lui ai pas payé un sol à valloir [*sic*] sur ses appointements lesquels lui sont par moi dûs en entier. Pourquoi je veux que cette somme soit prélevée sur le plus clair et le plus net de ma succession.[21]

From then on she would be known by that name (Minette) in all publicity material for more than twenty years. She was certainly paying tribute to the man she had lost. She was to couple it with her father's name much later when shortly before her death she appeared in a final advertisement in New Orleans under her true name: Minette Ferrand.

After the death of Saint-Martin her course was set and she was to become, right up until the revolution, the star of Port-au-Prince's theaters. She went on to a brilliant career that would end with the demise of shows in Port-au-Prince after the revolution. Meanwhile, the official position of free colored citizens continued to deteriorate. In spite of that fact, Minette vindicated her rights by going to court and winning two cases, one of them a collective lawsuit.[22] It is worth mentioning that a white man, after he lost a case against her, took his revenge by belittling her, insisting on her legal (racial) status, since as a renowned artist she was never referred to as "the so-called Minette," and even less as FM (short for "free mulatto"), in the press reports of her performances.

> Ayat, known as Périgord, a ladies' hairdresser, lets it be known to the public that he had lost his action against the woman called Minette (Free Colored), formerly a performing-show artist in the city.
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> Ayat dit Périgord coéffeur [*sic*] pour femmes prévient le public qu'il a perdu son procès en reconvention contre la nommée Minette ML ci-devant attachée au spectacle de la ville.[23]

Her last appearance is worth mentioning. She played her own character in Mozard's play *La répétition interrompue* (The Interrupted Rehearsal).[24] This performance in a play within a play

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21. Minute du notaire Michel, June 9, 1784, DPPC, ANOM.

22. "Affaire Daubagna et Parizet contre Mozard, Dlle Marthe, Dlle Minette, Sr Simon. Plainte déposée le 25–27 novembre 1789, sentence prononcée le 15 décembre 1789" (The case of Daubagna and Parizet against Mozard, Dlle Marthe, Dlle Minette, Sr Simon. Complaint registered on November 25–27, 1789; judgment delivered on December 15, 1789). Greffe de Port-au-Prince (gr 31 fols. 94–96), DPPC, ANOM.

23. *AA*, Port-au-Prince, July 1, 1790.

24. Mozard, *La répétition interrompue : divertissement national en un acte* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'auteur, 1789).

reveals the hierarchy that existed in the Dominguan world of theater at the time of the revolution. Minette was the only one not to have any lines to speak. She sang no solo piece and only appeared as part of a trio.

Then all trace of her is lost until the early nineteenth century. A little later she is spotted in New Orleans trying to re-establish herself as a performer. The announcement that she issued at the time is quite revealing:

> November 29, 1806: *Euphrosine ou le Tyran corrigé*, being for the benefit of Miss Minette Ferrand, a former artist with a large family to support, whose reappearance has been delayed by a protracted illness which has put her in a very difficult situation.

> 29 novembre 1806: *Euphrosine ou le Tyran corrigé*,[25] au bénéfice de Mlle Minette Ferrand, ancienne artiste et chargée d'une nombreuse famille, dont les débuts ont été et sont encore retardés par l'état de la maladie où elle se trouve depuis très longtemps et qui rend sa position des plus fâcheuses.[26]

Unfortunately, illness did not allow her time to resume her place on stage and she passed away on January 2, 1807, in New Orleans. Her Christian name and stage name as well as her father's name were mentioned in the register of the Saint-Louis cathedral, and the register of deaths was not the one reserved for free colored citizens.[27]

A Coloratura "Young Person"

Minette's astonishing vocal ability was evidenced right from the start of her career.[28] She was first mentioned in concert programs in December 1780 and reappeared the following April in the virtuoso aria from Grétry's *L'amant jaloux*, "Je romps la chaîne qui m'engage." Her repertory was almost exclusively vocal; only rarely did she appear as an actress (that is, in spoken roles).[29]

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25. Music by Étienne-Nicolas Méhul, libretto by François-Benoît Hoffman (1790).

26. November 19, 1806, *Moniteur de Louisiane*. Information kindly provided by Laurent Dubois (Duke University).

27. "Ferrand, Luisa Isavel Alexandrina Minette (Marin and Isavel Mathotière), native of Puerto Principe [Port-au-Prince] on the island of Santo Domingo, resident of this city, cir. 38 yr., I. Jan. 2, 1807," Nolan, *Sacramental Records*, 144. The register where we can find Minette's name is register F6, not F8, which was for slaves and free persons of color (see Nolan, *Sacramental Records*, xii).

28. The range of her voice was C4–D6 (i.e., from middle C to the D above high C).

29. We know of only five spoken roles played by Minette, according to press advertisements. Except for the first of them, they are revealing ones: Criseis in *Démocrite amoureux* by Regnard (May 1, 1781, *AA*, Port-au-Prince), Galathée in *Pygmalion* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (September 11 1781, *AA,* Port-au-Prince), Finette in *La nouvelle école des femmes* by de Moissy (January 5 1781, *AA,* Port-au-Prince), Toinette in *Jérome Pointu* by Mme de Beaunoir (January 26, 1782, *AA,* Port-au-Prince; "Mme de Beaunoir" was a pseudonym frequently used by Alexandre-Louis-Bertrand Robineau), and Chérubin in *Le mariage de Figaro* by Beaumarchais (October 24 1786, *AA,* Port-au-Prince). Criseis (Chryséis) is a princess, but the other four parts were a statue, a companion, a cook, and a teenaged boy. The first two parts given to Minette date back to before her agreement, and probably depended on the good will of Saint-Martin. Was he disowned afterwards? It is tempting to add, with some irony, that the synthesis of the spoken roles played by Minette (such as if one combined the traits of a maid and of an adolescent, i.e., a person who is not yet fully mature) might give some idea of the personal traits that French colonists at the time

This may have been a constraint imposed by Dominguan society. Her later career would indicate that was indeed the case.

Minette's repertory included most of the novelties of the time and a few older pieces. Her selections were largely determined by popular taste in France (see Appendix 1). As is evident more generally in the operatic life of Saint-Domingue, many of the works that she chose to sing were very recent. Only a year elapsed between the French premiere of *Blaise et Babet* (Dezède) and the version put on in Saint-Domingue. *L'épreuve villageoise* (Grétry), *Nina, ou la folle par amour* (Dalayrac), and *L'infante de Zamora* (Frameri) were all performed in the same year in the two lands.[30] It is worthy of note that Minette was not the first in Saint-Domingue to sing her roles in the works just mentioned. She was actually following the trends rather than anticipating them. Yet she made her preferences clear by introducing personal changes in program announcements. Thus we hear about her refusal to perform local pieces. She never sang in creole, unlike her sister Lise, who would make a brief career in Port-au-Prince, Saint-Marc, and Léogane.[31] Minette expressed her own point of view in the local press, emphasising the rationale that lay behind her selections:

> On Tuesday 28th of this month, the Port-au-Prince theater company will put on, *for the benefit of the young person*, a performance of *L'infante de Zamora*, an operatic fairy-tale in three acts, with all the accompanying theatrical effects. The young person, ever keen to inspire the goodwill of the public, thought that this opera was best calculated to achieve that end: whatever praise she could offer would not do justice to the reputation and fame of its author. This is not a short-lived local production that, so to speak, contaminates and debases the operatic stage and whose subject-matter is very often limited to everyday events in ordinary people's lives. The proposed opera is in good taste and will be an unfailing source of joy to lovers of beauty.
>
> Le[s] Comédiens du Port-au-Prince, donneront Mardi 28 de ce mois, au bénéfice de la jeune Personne, une représentation de *L'infante de Zamora*, Opéra-Féérie en trois actes, orné de tout son spectacle. La jeune personne, toujours jalouse de mériter la bienveillance du Public, a cru ne pouvoir mieux choisir qu'en lui donnant cet Opéra: tous les éloges qu'elle pourrait en faire seraient bien au dessous de la réputation & de la célébrité de son Auteur; ce n'est pas une de ces productions éphémères qui abâtardissent, dégradent pour ainsi dire la scène lyrique, qui ne sont que locales, et qui très-souvent [*sic*] ne tiennent qu'aux événements

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attributed to women of color. In short: reality is stubborn, and Minette rarely was called upon to *act* on stage; she was "merely" called upon to *sing*. This is not an innocuous distinction.

30. See Appendix 1 for Minette's career.

31. Lise's career is not well known. It is briefly described in Jean Fouchard, *Le théâtre à Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1988; 1st ed. 1955). Lise's known repertory consists of four theater works: *Les amours de Mirebalais* (another name for Clément's Creole play *Jeannot et Thérèse*), *Le tonnelier* (Grétry), *Le faux lord* (Piccini) and probably an aria from Grétry's *Zémire et Azor* ("La fauvette"). See Bernard Camier, "Musique coloniale et société à Saint-Domingue à la fin du XVIIIème" (thèse de doctorat, Université des Antilles-Guyane, 2004), 16, 28, 120, 267, and (in the Répertoires section) 807–8.

journaliers de la société privée; c'est un Opéra approuvé du bon goût, & les Amateurs du beau le reverront toujours avec plaisir.[32]

If we are now to understand the place this artist occupied in the Saint-Domingue colony, we ought to say more about Minette's social identity. Minette was an artist, a woman, and a free colored citizen. It was the interplay between these three identities that created the specific place that she held in the musical and theatrical life of her day. Yet, is not the place she occupied in society and the way it impacted on her musical practice closely linked with these complex identities? Were those really the reasons she was the object of discrimination? The answers are far from obvious. This remainder of the present paper aims to try to clarify the issues at stake.

Woman on a West-Indian Stage in the Eighteenth Century

A female musician, specifically a singer, Minette was one of the many female performers whose presence in Saint-Domingue is attested over a period of some 50 years.[33] Close to half of all the artists who came from France were women. (We know the names of 88 names out of 201, amounting to 43 per cent of the total number.) Women were in the majority in Le Cap (45 names, representing 56 per cent of all known artists in the city) and in Port-au-Prince (22 names, 33 per cent of the total), and in both of those parishes half of the women in question were likely to have been single (34 had the title *demoiselle* and 33 *dame*). At the end of the period studied here, some women signed contracts with companies before leaving for the Americas. None of these were married, and one of the women, a *demoiselle* Talon, had two children, for the benefit of whom she had secured a "life insurance policy" in her contract.[34] This marginal marital status corresponded to that of Minette and many actresses/singers, whose personal lives were subjected to much public mistrust and often thought to be immoral. A poem which appeared in the press at the beginning of Minette's career said as much without beating about the bush:

And fame and games will thy career fill;
Often from Parnassus to Cythera you'll go.
Twenty Midases seek to win your heart,
But let it not by an unworthy incense be won;
Do not make pleasure something that is bought and sold.

32. *AA*, Port-au-Prince, October 17, 1783.

33. Camier, "Musique coloniale": Répertoires.

34. "Société entre les Srs Ribié, Talon, Jaymond, Varennes et Mayeur et les Dlles Talon et Dutacq," June 19, 1790, Notaire Bertels, Centre d'Accueil et de Recherche des Archives Nationales (hereafter CARAN), Paris. Information kindly provided by Pierre Bardin. Most of these performers can be identified as living in Saint-Domingue in 1791. But they did not end up staying there, probably because of the tumultuous events (the Haitian Revolution, which began in August 1791 and finally resulted, in 1804, in independence from France).

Et la gloire et les jeux rempliront ta carrière
Tu passeras souvent du Parnasse à Cythère
Déjà par vingt Midas ton cœur est recherché;
Mais d'un indigne encens, qu'il ne soit pas touché;
Ne fait point du plaisir un trafic mercenaire.[35]

As far as the careers and treatment of male and female artists respectively were concerned, one difference is immediately apparent to the eye: whereas one male musician out of three played an instrument, the number of female instrumentalists was ridiculously low (2 pianists to 86 singers). On the other hand, if we consider the case of singers, there was practically no difference between men and women. Women benefited from arrangements that included a share of the profits.[36] This is shown by specific contracts with entertainment producers. The women even seem to have had higher salaries than men according to Moreau de Saint-Méry.[37] Minette's activities support this conclusion. Her salary, as mentioned by Saint-Martin in his will, compared well with those of her peers from France. But it is difficult to say whether she was paid at the same level throughout the 1780s. One other indication may be worth mentioning: the high proportion of "benefit performances" that she was granted. These brought the honored artist real financial profit. Minette had one of these a year, the same as any other opera performer in the city.

Moreover, women were involved in the management of theaters in at least one instance. The *demoiselles* Francheville and Marthe directed first the theater of Saint-Marc and then that of Cayes in the years 1770–71.[38] Similarly, it appears that a free colored woman helped Fontaine, the manager of the theater in Le Cap, fund the city's theater.[39] This involvement of women in theater management did not differ from what was done in France at the time, as illustrated by the case of Mme Montansier. If we add to this female involvement the fact that several operatic works composed by Frenchwomen were performed on Saint-Domingue stages, we will have a fairly complete picture of the role played by women in the musical life of the colony.[40] Despite

35. "Conseils à une jeune debutante." *Supplément aux Affiches Américaines*, Port-au-Prince, February 27, 1781.

36. 88% of the women and 81% of the men had benefit representations in Saint–Domingue between 1764 and 1791.

37. Mss Marsan and Clairville, the best-paid artists in Le Cap's theater each earned £12,000 a year (F3 160, fols. 17–18, Colonies, ANOM). In fact, Minette had the same wages as the average actors. See Camier, "Musique coloniale," partie 3: "Spectacles et vie sociale."

38. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description,* 880–81 and 1308–9.

39. Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 82. It seems that Zabeau Bellanton, the famous free colored woman, had loaned money to Fontaine the director of the theater. Stewart King puts forward the hypothesis that Bellanton was a "secret business partner" for Fontaine. At this time (beginning of the 1780s), Fontaine's business was, according to our current knowledge, essentially related to running his theater.

40. See Jacqueline Letzer and Robert Adelson, *Women Writing Opera: Creativity and Controversy in the Age of the French Revolution* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). In Saint-Domingue, operas by the following women composers were played: Mme Favart (*Annette et Lubin, La fille mal gardée, Lucas et Collinette*, and *Les ensorcelés*), Caroline Wuiet (*Le trompeur trompé*), Marie-Emmanuelle Bayon-Louis (*Fleur d'épine*), and Lucile Grétry (*Le mariage d'Antonio*).

much prejudice against women, and the near-total exclusion of women from the realm of instrumental performance, the artistic profession was not particularly guilty of discrimination against women. It will be recalled that Saint-Martin had actually functioned as a priest at the funeral on the occasion of one of his female colleagues' funeral.

The Status of a Free Colored Singer

The other facet of Minette's identity was linked to her status as "free colored citizen." The social life of such a person was controlled by the law.[41] Was this really the case as far as the realm of music was concerned?

As soon as theaters came into being where people had to pay to watch a show, that is to say theaters that were open to all members of the public, restrictions were imposed as to the number of free colored spectators allowed in. But, as example 1 shows, the restrictions were not enforced uniformly. Initially confined to Le Cap (the first city with a theater in the colony), the restrictions became more and more widespread as new theaters were opened.

THEATER NAME	THEATER SEATS	NUMBER OF FREE COLORED ADMITTED	PROPORTION
Le Cap (1760s)	1,500	60–80	4–5%
Port-au-Prince (1770s)	750	90–120	12–16%
Léogane (1780s)	400	70	17.5%

Example 1. Proportion of free colored people admitted to the performance (from Camier, "Musique coloniale," pt. 5: "Fonction sociale des spectacles").

A similar phenomenon: All free colored people were formally excluded by the rules adopted by the shareholders of the Le Cap theater company in 1771.[42] Yet a free colored man was manager of the theater in Léogane during the late 1780s. This Jean-Louis Labbé was owner, manager, and chief of guards all rolled into one. He also had a cabinet-making business.[43]

These decisions emanating from the creators of the shows themselves were accompanied by a parallel movement evident among theatergoers. In Le Cap-Français, black women demanded the right to be admitted that was already granted to mulatto women.[44] We can also catch a glimpse of the presence of blacks in the front boxes, from which they were supposed to be excluded, with the following announcement:

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41. See Dominique Rogers, "Raciser la société: un projet administrative pour une société dominguoise complexe (1760–1791)," *Journal de la société des américanistes* (2009): 235–60.

42. "Traité et accords entre les actionnaires du spectacle du Cap" (1774), F3 184, Colonies, ANOM: "Article 5 les actionnaires auront la faculté de céder . . . leurs actions, . . . les dittes [*sic*] cessions ne pourront être faites aux gens de couleur. . . . Article 7[:] . . . seront compris au nombre des personnes désignées comme gens de couleur les blancs qui seront mesalliés." (Article 5 shareholders shall have the power to transfer . . . their shares, . . . said transfers shall not be made to colored people. . . . Article 7[:] . . . Misallied white people shall be included in the number of people referred to as colored people.)

43. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description,* 1100–1101.

44. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description,* 362.

> The right honorable Romainville noticed the keen interest the public showed in his performance which was due to take place on Saturday August 28th but which had to be postponed to Monday the 30th due to the unfortunate circumstances occasioned by the Negroes in the front rows misbehaving.
>
> Le Sr Romainville s'est aperçu du vif intérêt que le public a voulu prendre pour lui au sujet de sa représentation qui devait se donner samedi 28 août et qu'il avait remise au lundi 30 vu la circonstance fâcheuse du Dimanche attribuée à l'inconduite des nègres qui étaient aux premières loges.[45]

That free colored women were eager to be accepted in public places where people socialized is evidenced also by their arrival in large numbers, after the revolution, on the dance floors of strongholds from which they had hitherto been excluded. All the signs are that that free colored people had become aware of the political importance of the public musical scene (dance being an essential component of that scene).

Free colored artists were, however, very much the exception to the rule. The only notable instrumental performers were Rivière, a violin and mandolin player as well as composer, and Joseph César, a violin player. César is the only one about anything is known in detail. He had a well-paying position and seems to have benefited from serious training as a pupil of Viotti.[46] But he was practically the only free colored person in a profession which seems to have employed a good number of slaves.[47] Two singers made names for themselves as such through press announcements (Minette, plus her half-sister Lise, about whom, as mentioned above, we have very little information), but in fact they were probably more called upon when needed. They were mentioned in a chance remark by Laujon who seems to have attended a performance by Minette of which he retained a fond memory.

> The actors had me laughing a lot. A mistress was of yellow skin, a lover white, and some blacks played parts as courtesans. You had to focus on the stage not to hear prejudices being voiced aloud. It was particularly difficult not to laugh at the choruses when they came on. I could see in the faces a whole range of different shades that varied from face to face; it was enough to confuse the eye. Yet I heard several voices that pleasantly surprised me, and I didn't think that the play was poorly performed.
>
> Les acteurs me faisaient beaucoup rire. Une maîtresse était jaune, un amant était blanc, et quelques noirs jouaient le rôle de courtisans. Il fallait se reporter sur scène pour ne pas entendre parler de préjugés. Ce fut surtout à l'apparition des chœurs que j'eu de la peine à me contenir. Je voyais dans l'ensemble des figures un mélange de couleurs dont les nuances

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45. *AA*, Le Cap, September 1, 1784.

46. See Oscar Sonneck, *Early Concert Life in America* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1907), 137. In an ad for a concert published in Philadelphia (*Federal Gazette*, May 29, 1792), Joseph César introduces himself as a "former pupil of Viotti" and "first violin of the theater of Le Cap Français."

47. Camier, "Musique coloniale," partie 5: "Fonction sociale des spectacles."

étaient différentes entre elles, et les yeux se perdaient. Avec cela j'entendis plusieurs voix qui me surprirent, et je ne trouvais pas que la pièce fût mal représentée.[48]

These artists do not seem to have been targeted (whether by audiences, officials, or colleagues) either on the basis of their right to be in the companies or on the basis of the quality of their performances. Nevertheless, one can't but wonder at the high number of pleas on Minette's behalf in the press.[49] It would seem that there was a need for frequent self-justification behind all the *pro domo* announcements. Similarly, the accounts by Mozard, the author of the *Affiches américaines*, in which Minette comes across entirely favorably, seem to reveal that the young woman was overdoing it in her quest for distinction:

It is fitting that we should applaud the soulfulness, the intelligence, the finesse, the kindness, and the easy and proper composure of a young Creole artist, which would be appreciated even in Paris, in various parts in plays with ariettas [i.e., substantial arias with composed music, not sung to well-known tunes]; however, we would ask her to make less of a show of declaiming the spoken lines and of ensuring that her enunciation is perfect.

Nous avons à applaudir à l'âme, à l'intelligence, à la finesse, à la gentillesse, au maintien aisé et décent d'une jeune Actrice Créole, qui serait goûtée même à Paris, dans plusieurs rôles des pièces à ariettes; nous l'inviterions cependant à moins déclamer le dialogue, à se moins fatiguer pour prononcer purement.[50]

As to her status as a free colored woman, Minette did not experience rejection and probably became, without setting out to do so, the voice of a significant portion of the Port-au-Prince audiences. Her interpretation of her various roles was partly her personal choice, and partly the response to a collective demand. Evidence for this comes from the fact that, when she could choose the program for a performance to benefit herself, she selected a work likely to fill the hall. That she should have chosen Grétry's *Zémire et Azor*, in 1783, showed clearly that, in a society where the color of one's skin was a source of discrimination, the audience was ready to hear a libretto asserting that appearance counts for nothing when it comes to love.[51] Indeed, *Zémire et Azor*, a version of *Beauty and the Beast* that is set in Persia, ends with a scene whose symbolism is very clear in the context of social life on Saint-Domingue:

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48. See Alfred de Laujon, *Souvenirs et voyages* (Paris: Verret, 1835), 166. "A mistress could be yellow" refers to a colored woman, and Minette was at the time (1786) the only one corresponding to this description. This rare eyewitness account of Minette on stage and the passage's concluding remarks are all the more precious since de Laujon had just arrived from Paris and is, in a way, reliable evidence of the high quality of what was done in Saint-Domingue.

49. Between 1783 and 1787, no fewer than four comments of Minette about the plays she was to sing were found, whereas the other artists would very seldom express themselves in print.

50. *AA*, Port-au-Prince, June 25, 1786.

51. *AA*, Port-au-Prince, January 11, 1783.

ZÉMIRE

Azor, is that you ?
Oh ! Heaven, should I believe mine eyes?

AZOR

Yes indeed, I am that frightful monster
You betrayed not, despite its ugliness.

ZÉMIRE

Azor; est-ce vous?
Oh! ciel, est-ce croyable?

AZOR

Oui, je suis ce monstre effroyable
Que malgré sa laideur vous n'avez point trahi.[52]

Such a scene would certainly not have gone unnoticed by audiences of the day. The challenging of prevailing prejudice on the operatic stage in lyrical art surfaced in many different ways at the time, and some of the productions in which this happened were performed in Saint-Domingue. *La négresse*, *ou le pouvoir de la reconnaissance* (The Negress, or the Power of Recognition), by Barré and Radet (and using a variety of existing tunes) was performed in 1788.[53] Grétry's *La nouvelle amitié à l'épreuve* (New Friendship Put to the Test) was performed on three occasions between 1789 and 1791.[54] These two works actually featured cases of "mixed love," a black woman and a white man in the former work, and the opposite in the latter.

52. *Zémire et Azor,* libretto by Jean-François Marmontel, music by André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry (1771), act 2, scene 5.

53. *AA,* Port-au-Prince, January 24, 1788. *La négresse ou le pouvoir de la reconnaissance,* "comédie en vaudeville mêlée de divertissements, musique parodiée de divers compositeurs arrangée par François Lescot, texte de Pierre-Yvon Barré et Jean-Baptiste Radet," 1787. It should be noted that in Saint-Domingue the title was changed to *Créoles africaines* [*sic*] *ou les effets de l'amour* (literal translation: *African Creoles or the Effects of Love*). The names of the authors and of one of the characters have made it possible to identify the work as based on *La négresse*. The performance was preceded by an "ouverture en airs créoles" (overture using creole tunes), which is unfortunately lost.

54. *AA,* Le Cap, July 4, 1789; *Gazette du jour,* Le Cap, December 16, 1790; and *Gazette de Saint-Domingue,* Le Cap, January 1, 1791. The 1786 revised version of *L'amitié à l'épreuve*, retitled *Les vrais amis, ou l'amitié à l'épreuve* (music by André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry, libretto by Charles-Simon Favart and Claude-Henri Fusée de Voisenon) put on stage a black man, Hamilcar, whose "Noir mais pas si diable" aria ("Black, yes, but not so devilish") was to enter the repertoire of arias and vaudevilles of the time. The lyrics are crystal clear: "when two hearts like each other / color does not count. . . . Ivory and ebony / make two beautiful jewels" (Quand deux coeurs s'aiment bien / couleur ne faire rien. . . . L'ivoire avec l'ébène / fonts deux jolis bijoux).

Colonial Music and Hegemony

Let us now shift the focus to the relationship between the world of entertainment, the sociology of performing artists, and what one might call anthropological considerations. The presence of free colored artists on Saint-Domingue stages went far beyond their social status. In the case made during the same period for the creation of shows in Saint-Pierre in Martinique, we see the emergence of the same anthropological concept seeking to leave its mark on the meeting between different musical civilizations as seen from the colonial viewpoint:

> The influence of the world of entertainment on social mores is well-known. . . . Free colored people are no longer barbaric; they have grown more polished and refined.
>
> On sait quelle est l'influence du spectacle sur les mœurs. . . . Les hommes de couleur libres ont perdu de la barbarie de leur origine, se polissent et prennent des mœurs.[55]

When the revolution broke out, some free colored people felt an urge to distance themselves from their origins as evidenced in the following text published in Saint-Domingue:

> Letter written by the free colored people of the Caïemites [two small islands off the coast of Saint-Domingue, today spelled Les Cayemites]:
>
> It is in vain that some ill-intentioned people would have us believe that we still have some feelings for the peoples of Africa. The blood that flows in our veins is that of peoples from Europe who were resettled in America. We are very proud to be descended from the earth's dominant caste, too bent on imitating some of the virtues of our forefathers to dream of sinking lower than what nature intended.
>
> Lettre des gens de couleur libres des Caïemites.
>
> En vain des mal-intentionnés voudraient faire croire qu'il nous reste de l'inclination pour les peuples de l'Afrique. Le sang qui coule dans nos veines est le sang des peuples de l'Europe transplantés en Amérique. . . . Nous sommes très glorieux de tenir à la caste dominatrice de la terre, trop jaloux d'imiter nos pères dans quelques unes de leurs vertus, pour songer à descendre plus bas que la nature l'a voulu.[56]

The presence of free colored people in the musical sphere (regardless of how distant their individual African origin was) was one sign among others that the "servile stain" was not enforced in a coherent manner when it came to colonial music.[57] That free colored people were

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55. "Mémoire de M. De Saint-Val pour la création du théâtre de Saint-Pierre de la Martinique," Correspondance à l'arrivée, C8B 15, ANOM.

56. *Gazette de Saint-Domingue*, Port-au-Prince, September 28, 1791. Since it was written a bit more than a month after the beginning of the slave insurrection which started the Haitian Revolution (August 22, 1791), this letter may well have been written instead by white colonists (pretending to speak for people of color). Nonetheless, it conveys a state of mind that was widespread.

57. The "servile stain" (*macule servile*) was one of the two primary concepts supporting the "racial" politics in the colony. This "servile stain" was understood to be a kind of original sin (that could never been blotted out). Like the "color line" which (according to accepted doctrine) could not be crossed, the servile stain was understood to be

capable of *distinction*, as shown by the case of Minette, and that they were able to move a discerning public, was testament to the ways in which the supposedly impassable color line could indeed be crossed in the musical world of Saint-Domingue.[58] It is not by chance that Michel-Paul de Chabanon, a Saint-Domingue-born contemporary author, dared to make a comparison between Italian music and Arada music (in the modern-day Benin) in an attempt to demonstrate the universality of musical principles.[59] All of this confirms the fact that a new level of intellectual expectations was emerging that went far beyond the rigidity of social structures as theorized since 1764.[60] But it would be wrong to assume that a move toward challenging the foundations of a system based on slavery was under way. On the contrary, the liberalization supported by some of the more enlightened settlers sought to reinforce the slave system by buttressing it as the royal administration proposed at the time in a statement intended to guide the local officials:

> Free colored people however far removed they may be from their origins will always keep the stain of their enslavement and are therefore declared incapable of holding public office. . . . However, the most thoughtful people see free colored people as the most efficient way of containing trouble-making slaves. . . . It would be appropriate to allow them all the advantages already granted to all other citizens and to mingle them with the Europeans and Creoles.
>
> Les gens de couleur libres à quelques distance qu'ils soient de leur origine [ils] conserveront toujours la tache de leur esclavage et sont déclarés incapables de toutes fonctions publiques. . . . les personnes les plus réfléchies considèrent cependant aujourd'hui les gens de couleur comme la barrière la plus forte à opposer à tout trouble de la part des esclaves. . . . il serait juste de les faire jouir de tous les avantages attribués à tous les autres citoyens et de les confondre avec les européens et le créoles.[61]

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passed on endlessly to all African descendants, whatever their degree of mixing. See the memo from the royal administration (n. 61 below).

58. The reception of Gluck operas in Saint-Domingue and Minette's involvement therein are explored in Julia Prest, "*Iphigénie en Haïti*, Performing Gluck's Paris Opera in the French Colonial Caribbean," *Eighteenth–Century Music* 14 (2017): 13–29; see also Prest, "Parisian Palimpsests and Creole Creations: Mme Marsan and Dlle Minette Play *Nina* on the Caribbean Stage," *Early Modern French Studies* 41 (2019): https://doi.org/10.1080/20563035.2019.1592813 and Pedro Memelsdorff, "*L'amant statue*: Staging Slavery in Pre-Revolutionary Haiti," in Kate van Orden, ed., *Music in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

59. See the essay by Chabanon (first published anonymously), *De la musique considérée en elle-même et dans ses rapports avec la parole, les langues, la poésie et le théâtre* (Paris: Pissot, 1785), 93–95. For a discussion of Chabanon's work on this particular subject, see Bernard Camier, "Musique et société coloniale, Saint-Domingue à l'époque de Chabanon," in *Musicorum: Michel Paul Guy de Chabanon et ses contemporains*, ed. Laurine Quetin and Ghyslaine Guertin (Tours: Université François–Rabelais, 2007–2008), 13–34.

60. See John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

61. "Mémoire du Roy pour servir à l'instruction de Duchilleau et Barbe de Marbois, 1er août 1788," Correspondance à l'arrivée, C9A 160, ANOM.

If the question raised above is ever to be settled, it is clear that Minette's being a woman probably played a part in her being accepted in the world of theatrical entertainment in Saint-Domingue. All contemporary female singers were viewed with the same contempt that was evidenced in the poem written about Minette. Admitting a free colored woman to that group probably did not raise problems of conscience, all the more so as colored women were subject to the same prejudice concerning their supposed sexual (im)morality.[62]

Nevertheless, this point was not of paramount importance in Minette's case. Her presence on stage as a free colored person certainly had a deeper meaning. If we keep in mind the preceding remarks about the link between music, color, and colonial society, two key aspects stand out. There is, on one side, the "social" question of access to all rights for all people. From that standpoint, the arrival of Minette was a strong symbol; it was underpinned by a demand for equality on the part of free colored people. It should be mentioned that her arrival on stage seems to have resulted from the boldness of a white man and not on pressure from free colored people themselves. Yet this is only a detail, since it is an established fact that pressure was brought to bear by various other means.

The second more fundamental, although hidden, aspect which emerges from the relationship between music and color is political and ideological (or, as I put it earlier, anthropological). Minette's position was, whether she liked it or not, caught in an intractable contradiction, for she probably did not have a choice. Launching into opera as she did, she chose, in her own words, what had "passed the test of good taste" and not what was "local." Behind this reach for something universal, according to the standards of beauty of her time (cf. her above-mentioned choice to cater for the "lovers of the beautiful"), there was a tremendous aspiration for real equality, not simply token equality.

Yet a price was paid, namely by what Gramsci calls a "social utopia": the utopian concept, widespread in the musical community, of a self-organized body of musicians that rises above social and economic infrastructures.[63] Indeed, behind this decontextualized, universal beauty, Minette was actually playing a truly important role. Through her artistic position, from which, be it said again, she could hardly escape, and over and beyond anything she herself declared in word or writing, her repertory shows that she actually acted as an "intellectual" (in the Gramscian sense) serving the interests of the dominant group. Her function, similar to that of her colleagues on the Saint-Domingue colonial stage, was to "fabricate consensus." A consensus that Moreau de Saint-Méry called for in his long descriptions of the shows performed in the colony and summarized as follows: "We were together, if not united."[64]

This role was of paramount importance in a colony that was prey to numerous splits and tensions within the dominant group of colonists. Behaving as she did, she not only took part in a collective endeavour, but also provided it with an extra legitimacy and, far from challenging the colonists' hegemony, she bolstered it, exactly as was indicated in the royal pronouncement cited earlier (n. 62).

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62. See Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), and Deborah Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), chap. 8.

63. Antonio Gramsci, *Carnets de prison: tome III, cahiers 10 à 13* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 311.

64. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description*, 367.

In this respect, Minette stood at the heart of a deep contradiction. That hegemony, whose codes she, as an artist, made her own, the better to embody the aspiration to equality, actually mirrored a social domination of which she was very much a victim as a free colored citizen. Her destiny was, in fact, as tragic as that of the characters whom, in her career, she so magnificently brought to life.

Appendix 1. Minette's Career

Port-au-Prince (hereafter PaP)

Concerts (showing excerpts from the works performed)

December 25, 1780, Concert spirituel: "plusieurs ariettes dans le grand genre et plusieurs duos" (*AA*, PaP, i.e., *Affiches Américaines*, Port-au-Prince, December 19, 1780).

April 15, 1781 (Easter), "Grand Concert vocal et instrumental" for the benefit of Macarty: Ariette des *Femmes vengées* (Philidor), ariette from *L'amant jaloux*, "Je romps la chaîne qui m'engage" (*AA,* PaP, April 10, 1780).

December 25, 1782, "Grand concert instrumental et vocal en trois actes": Duet from *L'olympiade* by Sacchini, with the director (Saint-Martin), "ariette" from *L'olympiade*, grande ariette (unknown composer), "ariette de la Fauvette" from *Zémire et Azor* by Grétry (*AA,* PaP, December 21, 1782).

April 11, 1784 (Easter), "Grand concert instrumental et vocal en deux actes" for the benefit of Durand: "Ariette à grand orchestre" (unknown composer), trio from *Félix* (Monsigny) with the director (Saint-Martin) and Durand, duet from *Céphale et Procris* (Grétry) with Durand, trio from *L'union de l'amour et des arts* (Floquet) with the director (Saint-Martin) and Durand (*AA*, PaP, April 10, 1784).

Operatic performances (underlined dates indicate a performance for the benefit of Minette)

N.B.: The "saison" for the theaters generally began the day after Quasimodo Sunday (the Sunday after Easter) and ended the next year on the day before Palm Sunday.

1780–81

March 6, 1781: *Sylvain* (Lucette),[65] Grétry (*AA,* PaP, February 27, 1781).
March 20, 1781: *Isabelle et Gertrude* (Isabelle); Blaise, *Le maître en droit* (Lise), Monsigny (*AA,* PaP, March 13, 1781).

1781–82

May 1, 1781: *On ne s'avise jamais de tout* (Lise), Monsigny (*AA,* PaP, 24 April 1781).
June 12, 1781: *Zémire et Azor*, Grétry (*AA,* PaP, June 5, 1781).
August 14, 1781: *La belle Arsène* (Miris), Monsigny (*AA,* PaP, July 31, 1781).
September 11, 1781: *Le fée Urgèle* (Robinette), Duni; *Pygmalion* (Galathée), Rousseau (*AA,* PaP, September 4, 1781).
<u>October 2, 1781</u>: *L'amoureux de quinze ans* (Amoureux), Martini (*AA,* PaP, September 25, 1781).
October 23, 1781: *Toinon et Toinette* (Toinette), Gossec (*AA,* PaP, October 16, 1781).

65. When a character's name is given between quotation marks, it indicates the role performed by Minette, as attested in the sources. Presumably she took the leading female role in most or all of the other opera performances as well.

November 20, 1781: *Sara ou la fermière écossaise* (Fanni), Vachon (*AA,* PaP, November 13, 1781).
December 4, 1781: *La fée Urgèle* (Robinette), Duni (*AA,* PaP, November 20, 1781).
December 18, 1781: *Le jugement de Midas* (Chloé), Grétry (*AA,* PaP, December 11, 1781).
January 5, 1782: *Les trois fermiers* (Babet), Dezède (*AA,* PaP, December 29, 1781).
March 19, 1782: *Orphée et Euridyce* (l'Amour, i.e., Cupid), Gluck (*AA,* PaP, March 9, 1782).

1782–83
September 3, 1782: *La belle Arsène* (ariettes), Monsigny (*AA,* PaP, August 31, 1782).
November 26, 1782: *L'isle des fous* (Nicette), Duni (*AA,* PaP, December 21, 1782).
January 14, 1783: *Zémire et Azor*, Grétry (*AA,* PaP, January 11, 1783).

1783–84
October 28, 1783: *L'infante de Zamora*, Frameri (*AA*, PaP, October 18, 1783).
November 4, 1783: *La fille mal gardée* (Nicolette), Duni (*AA,* PaP, October 22, 1783).
November 18, 1783: *Les raccoleurs,* Vadé (*AA,* PaP, November 1, 1783).
November 25, 1783: *Aucassin et Nicolette*, Grétry (*AA,* PaP, November 15, 1783).

1784–85
December 7, 1784: *Accajou* (Zirphile), Moulinghem (*AA,* PaP, December 4, 1784).
December 21, 1784: *Blaise et Babet,* Dezède (*AA,* PaP, December 11, 1784).
January 18, 1785: *Iphigénie* (duet), Gluck (*AA,* PaP, January 15, 1784).
February 22, 1785: "Ariette à grand orchestre" (*AA,* PaP, February 19, 1785).

1785–86
October 11, 1785: *L'épreuve villageoise* (Denise), Grétry (*AA,* PaP, October 1, 1785).
January 17, 1786: *Les vendangeurs* (Lucette), Piis and Barré (*AA,* PaP, January 7, 1786).
January 31, 1786: *L'infante de Zamora* (Juliette), Frameri (*AA,* PaP, January 25, 1786).

1786–87
August 1, 1786: *Les deux tuteurs* (Pauline), Dalayrac (*AA,* PaP, July 22, 1786).
October 10, 1786: *L'amant statue*, Dalayrac (*AA,* PaP, October 7, 1786).
November 21, 1786: *Alexis et Justine* (Justine), Dezède (*AA,* PaP, November 18, 1786).
January 5, 1787: *Orphée et Eurydice*, Gluck (*AA,* PaP, December 30, 1787).
March 4, 1787: *Nina, ou la folle par amour,* Dalayrac (*AA*, PaP, March 1, 1787).

1787–88
May 5, 1787: *La belle Arsène*, Monsigny (*AA,* PaP, May 3, 1787).
May 12, 1787: *Le mariage d'Antonio* (Colette), Lucile Grétry (*AA,* PaP, May 3, 1787).[66]

66. Lucile Grétry (1772–90) was the daughter of the well-known opera composer André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry. A gifted composer, she composed two comic operas that were performed in Paris, but she died a few months before turning 18.

1788–89

January 31, 1789: *L'olympiade* (ariette), Sacchini (*AA,* PaP, January 29, 1789).

1789–90

September 12, 1789: *Renaud d'Ast,* Dalayrac (*AA*, PaP, September 5, 1789).
October 4, 1789: *La répétition interrompue*, Mozard (*AA*, PaP, October 7, 1789).

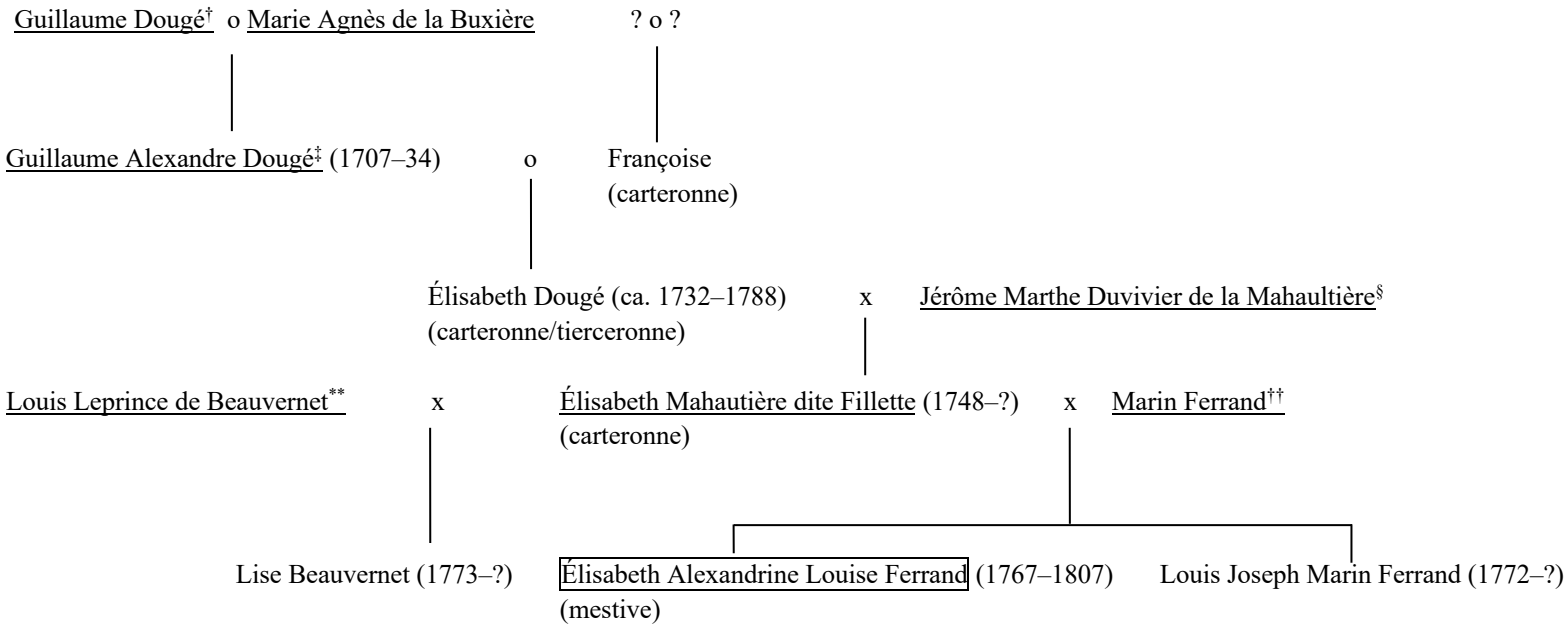
New Orleans (in French-owned Louisiana)

1806

November 29, 1806: *Euphrosine, ou le tyran corrigé* (Méhul) "au bénéfice de Mlle Minette Ferrand, ancienne artiste et chargée d'une nombreuse famille, dont les débuts ont été et sont encore retardés par l'état de la maladie où elle se trouve depuis très longtemps et qui rend sa position des plus fâcheuses" (*Moniteur de la Louisiane,* no city named, November 19, 1806).[67]

67. Méhul's *Euphrosine, or the Tyrant Reformed*, "being for the benefit of Mademoiselle Minette Ferrand, a former artist, carrying the responsibilities of a large family; her new beginnings have been and continue to be delayed by a longstanding illness that has made her [financial] situation extremely precarious."

Appendix 2. Simplified Family Tree for Elisabeth Alexandrine Louis Ferrand, Known as Minette*



* For more details, see n. 3 within the article. "o" = legal union, "x" = illegitimate union. Underlining indicates that the individual was white. The terms used for the various free people of color are those found in the official documents: mulâtre(sse) = mulatto, i.e., child of a white and a black, *tierceron(ne)* = rare term found mainly in the legal registers and apparently indicating an individual who is lighter than a mulatto but darker than a quadroon; *carteron(ne)* = quadroon, i.e., one-quarter black; *mestif/mestive* = one-eighth black or, more generally, mixed-race but light-skinned.

† Born in Ancenis (near Nantes). Served as *conseiller au Conseil supérieur*, first in Léogane and then in Petit Goave.

‡ A white creole (i.e., he was born in the West Indies). Owner of a sugar refinery in Jacmel. The brother of Guillaume Dougé, Mathieu Dougé, in 1735, married Marie Anne Françoise Duvivier de la Mahautière, sister of Marthe Jerôme Duvivier de la Mahaultière, who (despite the rearranged order of his names) is the same man who would become Minette's grandfather.

§ A white creole, served as *conseiller au Conseil supérieur de Port-au-Prince*.

** Born in Paris, served as *ingénieur du Roi*.

†† Born in France, served as *trésorier à l'Intendance*.

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