

# The cornet madam and the trombonist actress – two extraordinary women at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Gavin Holman, May 2020

## Antonia P. Gonzales

Antonia was a famous cornetist, vocalist, opera singer, entrepreneur and brothel madam in New Orleans, Louisiana, particularly between 1895 and 1906. Originally her brothel was located at 217 Basin Street, from 1895 to 1900, then she occupied a larger establishment at 1535 Customhouse, on the corner of Customhouse (Iberville) and Villere.

This was a huge four-storey house, with multiple galleries, and it was clearly one of the higher-class brothels in Storyville, the most notorious red-light district in the U.S., and unique in that it was established not only through informal channels, but by a series of city ordinances. While prostitution was no more legal in Storyville than it was anywhere else in the country, it was treated as such between 1897 and 1917.

That Miss Tonia's status as a cornetist was emphasized, not only on her door, but in advertisements in the notorious *Blue Books* (which were contemporary guidebooks to the Storyville brothels), is a testament both to the importance of having a memorable special feature to attract customers in such a highly concentrated marketplace, and of the value placed on music in the sex industry in turn of the century New Orleans.



Antonia Gonzales advertised herself as an octoroon - creoles of colour in New Orleans had a higher economic and social status than many others. She often played naked for her customers in her bordello.

Other madams also advertised music (though not their own cornet skills). The presence of piano professors - such as Jelly Roll Morton and Tony Jackson heightened the status of a house, and increased the price, since these pianists received, and expected, large tips. Having procured the talents of Tony "Dago" Jackson, an extraordinary pianist and songwriter, who was the king of New Orleans sporting house piano players, the man who "knew a million songs" – Antonia often performed duets with him. An article from a local newspaper states:

*"Among the swell houses in the district there is none more popular or attractive than the one which is operated by Miss Antonia Gonzales, on Customhouse Street corner of Villere. All summer this resort has done good business notwithstanding*

*the prevailing dull times. This place is filled with beautiful young women all the time, and a visit to the tenderloin is incomplete without enjoying a good time here. This place is what we might properly term a modern music casino”.*



*Antonia Gonzales performing in her bordello to appreciative customers*

Another report/advertisement ran:

*“The above party has always been a head-liner among those who keep first-class Octoroons. She has also has the distinction of being the only Singer of Opera and Female Cornetist in the Tenderloin. She has had offers after offers to leave her present vocation and take to the stage, but her vast business has kept her among her friends. Any person out for fun among a lot of pretty Creole damsels, here is the place to have it. For ragtime singing and clever dancing and fun generally, Antonia stands in a class all alone”.*

Tony Jackson was still playing honky-tonk piano in Antonia’s bordello in October 1917 when Storyville, the red light district, was shut down. Civic leaders had crusaded for suppression of the district and Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy under President Wilson, urged all large cities to curb all forms of vice – the authorities in New Orleans used this “request” to effect a local ordinance closing the brothels, effectively removing their legal status, driving prostitution underground once more.

See also: Tucker, Sherrie – *A Feminist Perspective on New Orleans Jazzwomen* – New Orleans Jazz National Park, 2004

## Marguerite Dufay

This trombonist was among the *comique excentrique* entertainers of the popular Parisian music cafés in France in the 1890's and into the early 1900's. She started her career in the early 1880's and went on to perform throughout Paris at its many music halls and theatres, playing her trombone in concerts and acting on stage in comic roles, musical theatre, operetta and revues.



A lithograph by Louis Anquetin, a respected anti-Impressionist artist, 1899

Not much evidence remains of her musical performances – she is featured in a few concert programmes – but her stage career is well documented in the variety, vaudeville and theatre press of the time. Here are a few selected acting appearances -in which she tended to play comic parts with some singing, in revues and operetta:

- 1883, November - performed in a *Concert Spectacle* at La Scala
- 1893, April – in *Fille du Marin* at the Eldorado theatre
- 1899, April – in *La Dernière Soirée de Brummel* at the Nouveau Théâtre
- 1900, November – in *Les Petites Vestales*, at the Théâtre de la Renaissance
- 1901, May – in *La Pipe*, at the Théâtre de la Renaissance



- 1903, January – in *Le Voyage avant la Noce* at the Théâtre Trianon
- 1903, October – in *La Fille de la Mère Michel*, at the Bouffes-Parisiens theatre – this was a three-act operette dealing with “freaks” in a Barnum show who go on strike, and for whom substitutions have to be found at short notice.
- 1905, August - in *l'Amour à Credit* at the Cirque d'Hiver theatre
- 1906, April – in *Mamzelle Pantalon* at the Parisiana theatre, playing Véronique
- 1910, September – in *Le Lieutenant Cupidon* at the Ba-Ta-Clan theatre
- 1912, December – in *Un Ménage à Troyes*, at La Scala, Paris
- 1913, March – in *La Belle Cigarière* at the Moulin Rouge
- 1914, April – in *Baluchard* at the Eldorado theatre, with the Dranem troupe
- 1916, February - in *Enlevez ça* at the Théâtre des Gobelins, Paris



*At her debut in the 1880's*



*In 1926*

She also played a part in the short film *La chatte métamorphosée en femme* (1910) directed by Michel Carré and starring Amélie Diéterlé

She was still on the stage in 1926, appearing in *Le Crime du Bouit* at the Eldorado, when she suffered a serious fall and was unable to walk for months afterwards.

Some works that she created the roles for included:

- *La botte de Cresson*, at l'Horloge (lyrics Ant. Queyriaux, music Emile Duhem);
- *Ah! Constant! T'es Rien Sciant!!*, at Pavillon l'Horloge (lyrics Ant. Queyriaux, music Emile Spencer);
- *Ah! Polycarpe!*, at l'Alcazar d'Été (lyrics Delormel & Laroche, music Ch. Pourny);
- *Autour de mon Bidon*, at l'Alcazar d'Été (lyrics St. Prest & G. Laure, music E. Spencer);
- *La Belle Fruitière* at l'Alcazar d'Été (lyrics Léon Laroche, music Emile Duhem).



*As Véronique in 1906*



*With H. Dany in 1910*

Here are a few of the song sheets from revues that Marguerite Dufay created the roles for in various Paris venues:

à M<sup>me</sup> ALBAUD

# Les Belles Mamans

Créée par M<sup>me</sup> DUFAY à l'Eldorado & M<sup>me</sup> DE FRASNES au Casino de Paris

Piano: 3<sup>f</sup> P<sup>r</sup>Format: 1<sup>f</sup>

Paroles de **FÉLIX MORTREUIL & E. RIFFEY** 1887  
Musique de **VICTOR MORTREUIL**

Paris. P. DOMMANGET, Editeur, Passage Bourg l'Abbé, 1012

A M<sup>lle</sup> Jeanne FRÉVAL

# LE CAVALIER

Chansonnette  
Créée par ABADIE à la Scala  
Créée par DUFAY à l'Alcazar

Prix: 3<sup>f</sup>

Paroles de **BÉNÉDICT D'ARSAY** 1887  
Musique de **LOUIS BYREC**

Au Métropole, Paris Emile BENOIT, Editeur, 13 Faub<sup>g</sup> St Martin  
V. n<sup>o</sup> 4535

A M<sup>mes</sup> COLETTE & DE FRASNES

# LA BOTTE DE CRESSON

Créée par M<sup>lle</sup> DUFAY à l'Horloge  
Chansonnette  
Créée par M<sup>me</sup> DUFRESNY aux Ambassadeurs

Piano: 3<sup>f</sup> P<sup>r</sup>Format: 1<sup>f</sup>

Paroles de **ANT. QUEYRIAUX & CHICOT**  
Musique de **Emile DUHEM**

Paris, Au Métropole, Emile BENOIT, Editeur, 13, Faub<sup>g</sup> St Martin

à M<sup>lle</sup> RAYMONDE de la Scala

# La belle Fruitière

Chansonnette Comique  
Créée par M<sup>lle</sup> HÉLÈNE FAURE à l'Horloge  
et par MARGUERITE DUFAY à l'Alcazar

Piano: 3<sup>f</sup> P<sup>r</sup>Format: 1<sup>f</sup>

Paroles de **LÉON LAROCHE** 1885  
Musique de **ÉMILE DUHEM**

Paris, Ph FEUCHOT Editeur, 2 Boulev<sup>g</sup> de Strasbourg, 2  
Droits d'Union, de Reproduction, de Traduction et d'Arrangement réservés (4035)  
Propriété pour tous pays

à M<sup>lle</sup> DUFAY de l'Alcazar d'Été

# C'EST UN THOMAS!

Créée par M<sup>lle</sup> ELISE FAURE  
aux Ambassadeurs

Piano: 3<sup>f</sup>

Paroles de 1845 **DELOMEL & LAROCHE** Musique de **ALBERT PETIT**

Paris, Ph FEUCHOT, Editeur, 2, Boul<sup>e</sup> de Strasbourg, 2  
Droits d'Auteurs de Reproduction de Traduction et d'Arrangement réservés (Propriété 2<sup>e</sup> page 438)

à M<sup>lle</sup> Marguerite DUFAY de la Scala

# Ça m'gratt' dans l'cervelet

Parodie de - Raide comme un Pique!

Créée par Cécile DUMONT au G<sup>o</sup> C<sup>o</sup> Parisien. Créée par ABADIE, à l'Éden-Concert

Tr. n<sup>o</sup> 4088

Paroles de **A. GRAMET et SÉRARD** Musique de **E. SPENCER**

au Metronome, Paris Émile BENOIT, Editeur, Faub<sup>e</sup> S<sup>t</sup> Martin, 13

# Autour de mon Bidon

Chansonnette

Créée par DEFRANE à l'Éldorado Créée par DUFAY à l'Alcazar

Prix: 3<sup>f</sup>

Paroles de **S<sup>t</sup>PREST et G. LAURE** Musique de **E. SPENCER**

au Metronome, Paris Émile BENOIT, Editeur, 13, Faub<sup>e</sup> S<sup>t</sup> Martin

A notre Amie M<sup>lle</sup> BELLONI

# AH! POLYCARPE!

Chansonnette Comique

Créée par M<sup>lle</sup> BONNAIRE à l'Éldorado M<sup>lle</sup> J. BLOCK à la Scala et M<sup>lle</sup> DUFAY à l'Alcazar d'Été

ano 3<sup>e</sup>

Tr. n<sup>o</sup> 758

Paroles de **DELOMEL & LAROCHE** Musique de **CH. POURNY**

Paris PH FEUCHOT, Editeur, 2, Boul<sup>e</sup> de Strasbourg, 2  
Droits d'Auteurs de Reproduction de Traduction et d'Arrangement réservés (Propriété 2<sup>e</sup> page 438)

à Mesdames **DUFAY** et **REINE CLEMENT**

# A JOINVILLE-LE-PONT

Créée par **CHEVIN** à l'Alcazar d'été  
**FARVILLE** au Concert Parisien

Chanson

**FERNAND KELM** à l'Eden Concert  
**HENRIQUET** à la-la-clan.



Vm. 28.103

Paroles de **ANT. QUEYRIAUX** 1884

Musique de **CHAUDOIR**

Prix: 3!

Paris, Au Métrognome, Emile BENOIT, Editeur, 13, Faub. St Martin

# ADÉLAÏDE!

Créée par M<sup>lle</sup> **ÉLISE FAURE** aux Amb.

Chansonnette Comique et par M<sup>lle</sup> **MARGUERITE DUFAY** à l'Alcazar d'été



MASSEURE DES INNOCENTS  
S<sup>te</sup> LA BILLE

Piano: 3!  
Pt Format: 1!

Vm. 473. Paroles de **DELORMEL & LAROCHE**

Musique de **ALBERT PETIT** 1884

Paris, Ph. FEUCHOT Editeur, 2, B<sup>is</sup> de Strasbourg  
Droits d'Auteur, de Reproduction de Traduction et d'Arrangements réservés (A.S.R.)  
Progress pour tous pays

# AH! CONSTANT!

T'ES RIEN SCIANT!!!

CHANSONNETTE

Créée par M<sup>lle</sup> **DUFAY** au Pavillon de l'Horloge - Créée par M<sup>lle</sup> **TABER** aux Ambassadeurs



Piano: 3!  
Pt format: 1!

Paroles de M<sup>lle</sup> **ÉLISE FAURE**

Musique de **ANT. QUEYRIAUX** & **EMILE SPENCER**

Paris, Au Métrognome, Emile BENOIT, Editeur, 13, P<sup>is</sup> St Martin, 13