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1873–2023: 150 YEARS OF COLONNE CONCERTS

In the early decades of the 19th century, France created many Musical Societies with a dual objective: to offer (symphonic) music to the widest possible audience, and to perform a repertoire combining new works and masterpieces of the past. The *Association artistique des Concerts Colonne* is one such Society. Founded in 1873 by Édouard Colonne (1838–1910), the group took over from the short-lived *Concert national* invented by Georges Hartmann (1843–1900), while maintaining Sunday concerts in the Théâtre du Châtelet. Colonne quickly found itself in competition with the *Concerts Lamoureux*, making artistic choices that set it apart.

Thanks to the posters and programs deposited in various repositories, we thought it would be interesting to take a sampling of these rich holdings to illustrate a history of the Ensemble that answers the following questions: what was its overall operation? How were programs and Hall Programs drawn up (e.g. by Charles Koechlin), and who were the musicians? In so doing, we will have sketched a (non-exhaustive) portrait of the *Concerts Colonne*, which will be blowing out its 150 candles in 2023. One of the longest-running concert series that brought together outstanding performers, composers, and a wide range of listeners was the Colonne Concerts series. Their leader, Édouard Colonne, has been organizing remarkable musical events that have opened up to the Parisian public both classical works by Beethoven, Mozart, Weber, and Schumann and works by contemporary composers, including Fauré, Debussy, d'Indy, Ravel, Charpentier, Widor, Chabrier, and Dukas.

Keywords: Colonne, "Colonne's Concerts", the Châtelet Theater, French music, Parisian concert series, Conductors.

Introduction. Persuaded of the social role of music, the publisher Georges Hartmann launched the *Concert National* in the spring of 1873. His aim was very clear: he wanted to organize «a series of concerts to be held each Sunday at the Théâtre de l'Odéon. The aim of these concerts (with orchestra) was to popularize classical masterpieces and the best modern productions among a public that was not naturally inclined towards intelligent entertainment¹» (*sic*). From the very first concert, held on 02 in March 1873, the par-

¹ A.l.s by Hartmann on « Maison anglaise » (Friday) letterhead to the music critic and collector Adolphe Jullien (1845–1932), asking him to insert an advertisement in his Journal. Archives of the A. Jullien collection bequeathed to the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris [8-TMS-05539, digitized since 2009 and now available online. The vast collection of programs and posters gathered by Jullien (totaling 18 volumes, 1864–1926) was preceded by that of Elwart (1808–1877) for the years 1828–1863.

ticipation of Camille Saint-Saëns and Pauline Viardot was required¹. The programs were mixing French and German works from the present and the recent past. However, this musical venture collapsed before the end of the first season. Hartmann abandoned his promising project after placing Édouard Colonne at the head of the *Concert national*, the latter having been noticed as a first violinist of the Paris Opera orchestra (from 1858 to 1867). Despite a real competition with the *Concerts Pasdeloup*, Édouard Colonne took over the Orchestra and moved it to the Théâtre du Châtelet² for a new concert series which consisted of 24 events held on Sundays (in 1873–1874). His strong personality enabled him to considerably raise the orchestra's artistic level; this is the reason why he was nicknamed the «d'Artagnan of the orchestra». It was all the more important that, eight years later (in 1881), a new competitor arrived on the market of symphony concerts societies: Charles Lamoureux, with whom Édouard Colonne had earlier tried a similar venture for chamber music, a repertoire he would remain fond of³. And for decades, these two musical societies have been concurrently offering a rich Sunday program to the Parisian public. In order to highlight their main characteristics, I am going to leaf through a few programs and posters, but first, it is worth recalling who Colonne was.

Research Results.

WHO WAS ÉDOUARD COLONNE?

Born in Bordeaux in 1838, he arrived in Paris at the age of 17 and immediately joined the orchestra of the Théâtre Lyrique. Two years later, he was a pupil at the Paris Conservatoire, where he won a prize in harmony and then in violin (in 1863). He first married the sister of the singer Célestine Galli-Marié and he was 35 when he founded the *Association artistique des Concerts Colonne*, which kept the name *Concert national* before becoming *Concerts du Châtelet* (from 1874 to 1892). Indeed, it was important to choose the right venue for Sunday concerts in order to retain the audience, particularly through subscriptions. Colonne's first choice was a concert venue inaugurated in 1862, the twin building of the current Théâtre de la Ville (formerly the Théâtre Lyrique), both having been built on the Place du Châtelet and designed by the architect Gabriel Davioud. This is why Colonne's symphony association took the name *Concerts du Châtelet*, after he succeeded Hartmann.

However, World Wars I and II provided opportunities for reconciliation between rivals, particularly between the orchestras Lamoureux and Colonne, which joined forces (between 1914 and 1919) under the dual direction of Camille Chevillard (Orchestre Lamoureux) and Gabriel Pierné, who was Colonne's assistant after he became his successor (since 1910). The former conducted the concert held on 21 November 1915, which was entirely devoted to French music. A hint of sadness is noticeable as well as his willingness to honour the bravery of soldiers at war.

¹ Indeed, it was precised: « Concerto in g minor performed by the author [Saint-Saëns] » (three movements) and « *Le Roi des Aulnes*, ballad by Schubert, sung by Pauline Viardot with the pianist Saint-Saëns ».

² Hartmann was assisted by Duquesnel, the director of the Théâtre de l'Odéon, where the *Concert national* was hosted.

³ From October 1897 onwards, Colonne also organized series of chamber music concerts, which were held at the Théâtre du Châtelet on weekdays (Thursdays).

The concerts were often featuring an unchanging program: a first part intended for classical symphonic works (Romantic or neo-classical) and a second part for «works arranged following sources of inspiration». This was how these concerts were announced, such as the one held on 09 January 1916, which put forward an «Oriental» theme made up of works by Saint-Saëns, Balakirev and Borodin¹. A few years later, an «Exoticism» theme underpinned the concert on November 20, 1920, while on February 19, 1921 and November 26, 1922, «Russian Folklore» was celebrated: the programs featured S. Liapounov's *Rapsodie on Ukrainian themes* (for piano and orchestra) in the first performance; this composer was judged to be «one of the best continuators of the trend and music of the Five» (Koechlin, program note). The Ukrainian Chapel Choir (conducted by Kochitz and Kiritchenko) will also perform choral works.

During World War II, the *Association artistique des Concerts Colonne* changed its name again. After briefly taking back the name *Concerts Colonne-Lamoureux*, each orchestra regained independence: the *Concerts Colonne* became the *Concerts Pierné* (in 1940) because of Édouard Colonne's Jewish origins (his real name was Judas Colonna); after the Liberation of Paris (in 1944), the *Concerts Pierné* becomes again the *Concerts Colonne* orchestra.

FUNCTIONING

The annual 24 concerts were covering the period from October to April (for the last concert of the season). In 1920-1921, Sunday concerts (2.30pm) were more expensive than Saturday concerts (4.45pm). But the Saturday morning's general rehearsal (9 am) was open to the public with a subscription card (sold for 200 francs) and seats could be bought in advance at a fairly wide range of prices (from the stalls to the balcony). In addition, a growing number of honorary members had a card allowing them to attend the final rehearsal. The alphabetical list from 1877 shows that the male census was distinguished from the female... As for the poster announcing the re-run of the season (in autumn), it provides, except the unit price, the list of Parisian venues where concert tickets were available.

As far as programming was concerned, the challenge was to stand out from the rival Padeloup and Lamoureux companies. The *Concerts Colonne* were therefore keen to defend contemporary composers, while leaving a place for composers, «common» to all three groups, such as Beethoven — as it still occurred in 1921 — or such as living composers to whom they wish to dedicate a Festival-tribute². However, until 1880, Colonne did not play Wagner (unlike Padeloup). He chose Berlioz as the star composer of his programs and it was he, who, in November 1875, helped an amazed 20-years-old Ernest Chausson to discover *Romeo and Juliet*. On the other hand, throughout his life, the composer Albéric Magnard would reproach Colonne for being more interested in Beethoven, Berlioz and

¹ The program was as follows: Saint-Saëns' *5th Piano Concerto*, Balakirev's *Thamar* and *Georgian Song*, and Borodin's *Prince Igor* (« Polovstian March »), conducted by Camille Chevillard. See the press release (January 1916) in *Recueil Programmes des Concerts Colonne 1915–1926*, folio 27 [8-TMS-05545 (1)].

² For example, the *Berlioz Festival* in December 1881, the *Auber Centenary* on January 29, 1882, or, in 1921, the tribute to André Gedalge (1856–1926). Pierné asked Koechlin to include « our dear Gédalge » in his next concert hall program, as a reminder that « he was the teacher of today's most famous composers » and that he was a « great artist » and a « good man » (a.l.s February 7, 1924, on *Association artistique des Concerts Colonne* letterhead).

Franck than in contemporary composers¹. However, following his desire to promote French musicians, Colonne conducted Lalo, Dubois, Massenet, Godard and above all, Franck. In 1873, the *Concert National* premiered Franck's *Rédemption* and Saint-Saëns's *Psaume 18* at a spiritual concert during Holy Week. A few months later, the printed program of 23 November 1873 was coupling Massenet along with Beethoven and Mendelssohn, while featuring the classical composer Cherubini and even the baroque Händel. In fact, Händel reappeared a few months later, again with Mendelssohn, alongside Liszt's *Mazeppa*, Haydn and the Premiere of Théodore Dubois's *Suite d'orchestre*. It should also be noted that the audience was provided with a free program explaining each work of the concerts².

HALL PROGRAMS

This type of document has been indispensable since the end of the 19th century, supporting the expansion of democratizing concerts. They bear witness to didactic intentions, and the fact that they are often written by composers makes them an invaluable medium, thanks to their contextualizing and analytical qualities, which are accessible to all. For the *Concerts Colonne*, let's take the example of the notices written by composer Charles Koechlin (1867–1950) between 1919 and 1924. The Koechlin archive³ contains a number of very interesting letters, enabling us to reconstruct the author's approach to writing notices; for example, when the scores were sent out, C. Koechlin was able to read them shortly before the concert date⁴. Very often, however, the composers themselves prepare short notes intended to enlighten Koechlin on their original intentions⁵, sometimes leaving him free to adapt them as he sees fit⁶. Composers like to talk about the genesis of their programmed work, or the reasons for Pierné's acceptance⁷, not without imposing their *desiderata* on Koechlin. Darius Milhaud, for example, told Koechlin that Pierné did not «play the small *Nocturne* because [he] finds it *too pretty* in the dreadful sense of the word [...]», adding: « I take the liberty of pointing out to you that I don't like it much when [musical] themes are reproduced on programs»⁸. Interpreter Henriette Renié was equally demanding:

¹ Claire Vlach (ed.), *Albéric Magnard. Correspondance (1888–1914)*, Paris, SFM, 1997, p.14. Note, however, the presence in the programs of little-known English composers along with minor French composers such as Paul Pierné (1874–1952), who had the privilege of being Gabriel Pierné's grand-cousin, the conductor of the Ensemble from 1910... See his symphonic poem entitled *De l'ombre à la lumière*, premiered at Colonne's on 24 November 1912.

² Each program listed the season's concert dates and the orchestra's line-up (by section).

³ Bibliothèque La Grange Fleuret (Paris), *Écrits de Koechlin* [B. 435 and [B. 436.

⁴ For example, Édouard Flament (1880–1958) sent Charles Koechlin (January 29, 1921) fragments of his symphonic entr'acte, *Rosiane*, to be performed on February 6, 1921 (concert conducted by G. Pierné).

⁵ On March 3, 1921, Armand Abita (18...–1945) sends an explanatory note for his «Arabesques» (*Tableaux tunisiens*, symphonic suite in three parts), to be performed at the concert on March 19, 1921.

⁶ See Robert Goupil (1896–1938), who wrote to Koechlin: «Perhaps you'll find a few changes to be made in the phrasing» (a.l. s. February 22, 1921), in reference to his *Symphonic Prelude* scheduled for March 5, 1921.

⁷ Cf. a.l.s of November 8, 1922 from Alexandre Georges (1850–1938) telling that *Sapho* (in one act) by Armand Silvestre had been performed at the Comédie-Française in 1893, but that the poet did not ask him for music until 1898-1899. The composer set it in music some twenty years later. Then came the war. It was only afterwards that the work was published and found favour with Gabriel Pierné.

⁸ A.l.s [October 1920] about his second *Suite symphonique*, heard on October 24, 1920.

If there are notices on the program, would you please point out that these Danses written for chromatic harp were – not transcribed! – but annotated and fingered for the pedal harp by your servant, who gave the first performance on the said harp on February 1, 1910, at the Salle Érard¹.

Indeed, Koechlin wrote a short introductory paragraph presenting the characteristics of the chromatic harp to the public, before inserting the indications requested by H. Renié. In some cases, performers do not approach the editor of the notices directly, but pass on their requirements via the conductor (Pierné) and other mediators. Such is the case with Ricardo Viñes, the famous pianist at the service of modern music:

*Ricardo Viñes rightly insists [...] that you be so kind as to put in the note that this piece [Manuel de Falla's *Nocturnes dans les jardins de l'Espagne*] is dedicated to him by the author. He is right².*

Charles Koechlin kept his sketches of the notices for the 173 works performed during the 42 concerts of the 1919–1920 season (series A and B), providing the material for an interesting genetic study of a didactic activity often overlooked by today's musicology.

About programming, it is interesting to note that the *Concerts Colonne* were part of the re-discovery of the Baroque repertoire, which was still little appreciated by the general public at the end of the nineteenth century (although it was well known). Reporting the Colonne concert of 19 October 1890, the composer Joseph-Guy Ropartz (1864–1955) expressed his delight after the success of the concert:

M. Éd[ouard] Colonne has included the Aria from Bach's Suite in D in the program of his first concert. The performance was excellent and, as it should be expected, the audience seemed to appreciate the beauties of this admirable score. Bach, moreover, ceased to be the pet peeve of this right-thinking audience. He is no longer regarded as a scholar, algebraist, dry and cold composer. People recognize his inspiration and emotion, and think his work is infused with incomparable serenity. People no longer find him boring. Bach is really going to be well known³.

Before that, it is worth noting that Colonne was chosen to conduct the concert series given during the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, making Jules Pasdeloup furiously jealous! Similarly, it was the Colonne orchestra that gave the first French performance of Dvořák's 9th *Symphony*. In addition to works by Fauré, Debussy, d'Indy, Ravel, Charpentier, Widor, Chabrier and Dukas, Colonne performed the complete version of Schumann's *Manfred* for the first time (on 6 January 1884). He conducted this work thirteen times⁴, as on 10 and 17 November 1912 (featuring Franck once again, as well as Weber and Dubois).

¹ It is the author who underlines. A.l. s [November 1921] for Debussy's *Deux Danses* («Danse sacrée» and «Danse profane») scheduled for November 12, 1921.

² It is the author who underlines. A.l.s from Enrique Fernández Arbós [?] to Koechlin, dated January 14, 1923 (on Hôtel de l'Espérance letterhead, Paris VI^e).

³ Joseph-Guy Ropartz, «Notes parisiennes», *Angers-artiste*, October 25th, 1890.

⁴ According to Georges Chauvin, «Édouard Colonne et l'Association artistique», *Revue historique de Bordeaux et du département de la Gironde*, t. 32, 1986, p. 89.

Willy gave his report on the performances of Schumann's *Manfred* at Colonne's, which took place in a climate of general hilarity, the lyrics being sung in French¹; which proves that the audience was allowed to express loud reactions, whereas the atmosphere was much quiet at the *Concerts Lamoureux* where no disruptive element was tolerated². The acerbic critic reported:

A minor incident occurred during the first part [of Manfred]. M. Manfred-Sully called an eagle (all tastes are possible in nature) screaming, like an oddball: «Arrrriveu.... aiaigggleu... arrrriveu! [Coomme... Eaeagle.... Coome!]». A frenzied scream! Then, shaking his head in pain, the tragedian added: «He can't hear me...». — Then an attendee thought aloud: «Well, old chap, he really must be deaf!»³.

Indeed, on such occasions — like in *Manfred*, which required narrators — the conductor never forgot to hire the best members of the Comédie-Française, such as Mounet-Sully (1841–1916) and Renée du Minil (1868–1941). In addition, he hired a full choir which, when added to the orchestra, reached a total number of 250 performers. This type of enlarged formation was also required for the Beethoven Festivals⁴ — held on 01 December in 1912 as well as in 14 April 1922: 250 players performed the 9th *Symphony*, again in a French version of Schiller's ode made by the musicographer Amédée Boutarel (1855–1924).

PERFORMERS & GUEST CONDUCTORS

Let's take a brief look at some of the programs which were featuring celebrated artists invited by Édouard Colonne: Jeanne Campredon (from the Opéra) and the famous mezzo Claire Croiza were the performers on 01 December 1912. Other female singers included Mrs. Mellot-Joubert and Povla Frisch, Rose Caron and Felia Litvine, to name but a few. Shortly before (on 17 November 1912), pianist Blanche Selva, a servant of young French music, or harpist-composer Henriette Renié (see *supra*), were sometimes associated with the famous Alfred Cortot (cf. on 9 November 1913); the latter also appeared in a trio with Jacques Thibaud and Pablo Casals; not to mention other performer-composers such as Marie Jaëll, Camille Saint-Saëns, Théodore Ritter, Ignaz Paderewski, Georges Enesco, Ferruccio Busoni and virtuosos Fritz Kreisler, Eugen

¹ Translation/adaptation by Émile Moreau (1852–1922), playwright and librettist.

² The programs and posters of the *Concerts Colonne*, however, bear the following note: «Please do not enter or leave during the musical performances», which can also be found on the programs of the *Société des Concerts*, for example.

³ Willy [Henry Gauthier-Villars], *Accords perdus par l'ouvreuse du Cirque d'été*, Paris, H. Simonis Empis, 1898, p. 104 (date: 15 February 1897). *Manfred* had already been performed several times: the program of November 16, 1879 even specifies «re-requested»!

⁴ However, Romain Rolland seemed disappointed by Colonne's performances of Beethoven, for example, at the concert held on 18 October 1903, with regard to the 9th *Symphony*: «Above all, I reproach the performance for lacking rhythm and unity, for being too fragmented [...] the end suffers from the limited capacities of the choral masses. There are 80 or 100 choristers, singing like 4 (actually 4 choristers who wouldn't sing well). [...] I have already commented on Monsieur Boutarel's translation of Schiller's ode. It has no accuracy and the French text doesn't sound good» («Concerts Colonne», *La Revue musicale*, no. 15, November 1, 1903, p. 609).

d'Albert, Marguerite Long and Louis Diémer from the Paris Conservatoire, Hans von Bülow or Eugène Ysaye, etc.

However, several of these illustrious performers were also conductors. This explains why Édouard Colonne started to entrust his orchestra to other conductors (in addition to Pierné and Chevillard), such as Gounod, Massenet and d'Indy, for example, while launching the custom of inviting guest conductors. One of the first conductors was Tchaikovsky in 1891, followed by Felix Mottl (1894), Winogradski for a Russian music concert (1896), Richard Strauss who conducted on three occasions (1897–1906–1908) — notably his *Till Eulenspiegel* — or Siegfried Wagner (1900). This tradition has continued over time, with relatively recent guest conductors such as Kent Nagano, Mauricio Kagel, Armin Jordan, etc.

ORGANISATION & NEWS

Evolving within an associative framework, the *Concerts Colonne* quickly provided assistance to other concert societies (such as the *Société Nationale de Musique*). Outside the Paris musical season, the orchestra toured in other French cities (Bordeaux, Lille, Marseille, Orange, etc.) and also abroad, notably in Russia on several occasions (from 1890 to 1907). It also appeared in Italy, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, London and Prague. A more recent innovation was the addition of «educational concerts» to the Sunday concerts, which aimed at making children discover works from the great repertoire with explanations provided to them¹.

Another initiative in the administrative organization was the separation between music management and musical activities, so that in Colonne's absence, Pierné took the baton (from 1904) as well as other guest conductors. This model was not perpetuated, since Pierné, Paul Paray (from 1932), Charles Münch (between 1956 and 1958) and Pierre Dervaux (until 1992) were fulfilling both activities². But with the arrival of Marcel Landowski, and then Armin Jordan, music management and artistic direction were again separated.

The Colonne orchestra currently gathers approximately one hundred professional musicians paid by a fee. Since 1982, it has also added its own choir. Laurent Petitgirard has been presiding over the destiny of this musical ensemble for thirteen years (from 2004 to 2017) and since last year, Marc Korovitch is its musical director.

Founded at the beginning of the Third Republic, the Colonne orchestra was the emblem of an active desire to share and provide musical education to the widest possible range of citizens³. Even today, orchestral experiences within the Orchestre Colonne, even

¹ Works were thematically grouped and intended for short concerts held on Sunday mornings. For example, in November-December 1956, Pierre Hegel and Jean-Jacques Brothier presented two different programs: «La musique, le monde et les hommes [Music, world and mankind]» and «Les grandes écoles créatrices [Great compositional schools]». Still performed at the Théâtre du Châtelet, these programs included works by Prokofiev, Berlioz, Ravel, Schumann, Mozart, Strauss, Grieg, Debussy, etc.

² Periods of latency regarding musical direction, however, occurred, for instance from 1997 to 2007, and from 2017 to 2022.

³ See Charles Malherbe, *Trente ans de concerts (Concerts Colonne)*, 1873-1903, Paris, Kugelmann, 1903; André Coeuroy, *Historique des Concerts Colonne*, Paris, 1929; Élisabeth Bernard, *Le concert symphonique à Paris entre 1861 et 191: Padeloup, Colonne, Lamoureux*, doctorat de 3^e cycle, Université de

occasional, remain an asset for many musicians. The many recordings — and more recently the participation in the film music for *Fauteuils d'orchestre* (2005)¹ — made it an unavoidable artistic association in the world of symphony orchestras. If, in 1923, Charles Koechlin had the task of solemnly announcing the fiftieth anniversary of the *Association artistique des Concerts Colonne*, in 2023 it's up to us to recall (on its 150th anniversary) how the continuity of its missions is decidedly not the least of its assets.

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1873–2023: 150 РОКІВ «КОНЦЕРТАМ КОЛОННА»

Актуальність дослідження. Протягом XIX століття в Європі з'явилася велика кількість нових концертних товариств і Франція не стала винятком. 1828 року за ініціативи Франсуа Габенка було засновано «Товариство консерваторських концертів», яке згодом перетворилося на Паризький оркестр (у 1967 році), цікавими музичними подіями стали концерти популярної камерної музики, організовані Шарлем Ламуре. Не менш вагомим культурним внеском були також «Народні концерти» Жуля Падлу, які з'явилися у 1861 році, з метою популяризації нового, сучасного симфонічного репертуару.

Втім, найбільш тривалою концертною серією, яка об'єднала видатних виконавців, композиторів та широкі кола слухачів, стала серія «Концерти Колонна». Їх очільник — Едуард

Paris1, 1976 as well as three radio programs (« Arabesques » by François-Xavier Szymczak) broadcasted on Radio France Musique, January 2023.

¹ The orchestra has also recorded film scores. *Fauteuils d'orchestre* [*Orchestra Seats* — UK — or *Avenue Montaigne* — USA & Canada] is a feature film shot by Danièle Thompson and produced by Thelma Films production.

Колонн, протягом майже двох десятиліть формував непересічні музичні заходи, які відкривали паризькій публіці як класичні твори (Бетховен, Моцарт, Вебер, Шуман), так і сучасних композиторів (зокрема Форе, Дебюссі, д'Енді, Равель, Шарпантьє, Відор, Шабріє, Дюка).

Мета статті — висвітлити основні аспекти творчої та просвітницької діяльності Едуарда Колонна. Оригінальний ракурс погляду на діяльність митця забезпечує **наукову новизну** публікації.

Результати дослідження. Перекоаний у соціальній ролі музики, видавець Жорж Гартман навесні 1873 року заснував «Національний концерт». Його мета була дуже чіткою: він хотів організувати «серію концертів, які відбуватимуться щонеділі в Театрі Одеон». Однак ця музична авантюра зазнала краху ще до закінчення першого сезону. Гартман відмовився від багатообіцяючого проекту, поставивши на чолі «Національного концерту» Едуарда Колонна, який був відомий у мистецьких колах як перша скрипка оркестру Паризької опери (з 1858 по 1867 рік). Едуард Колонн очолив оркестр і переніс його до Театру Шатле для нової серії концертів, яка складалася з 24 заходів, що відбувалися по неділях (з 1874 по 1892 роки). З цього моменту до історії музики вони увійдуть як «Концерти Колонна».

Щорічні 24 концерти охоплювали період з жовтня по квітень. Подані музичні заходи часто мали незмінну програму: перша частина — класичні симфонічні твори, друга частина — цікаві аранжування різних відомих композицій. Що стосується змісту програм, то «Концерти Колонна» прагнули захищати та просувати сучасних композиторів, залишаючи місце для класиків (таких як Бетховен) та живих композиторів, яким вони хотіли б присвятити фестиваль-триб'ют. Так, саме оркестр Колонна здійснив перше французьке виконання Дев'ятої симфонії Дворжака та вперше виконав повну версію «Манфреда» Шумана (6 січня 1884 року). Однак, керуючись бажанням популяризувати французьких музикантів, найчастіше Колонн диригував творами Лало, Дюбуа, Массне, Годара і перш за все, Франка.

Важливим нововведенням Колонна стала обов'язкова підготовка і друк програм (брошур) для публіки. Цей факт засвідчує просвітницькі наміри організаторів, а враховуючи те, що програми часто писали самі композитори, музика яких звучала на концертах, подані документи мають безцінну історичну вагу для сучасних дослідників.

Слід зазначити, що поза межами паризького простору оркестр часто гастролював в багатьох французьких містах, таких як Бордо, Лілль, Марсель, Оранж та ін., а також за кордоном — зокрема, в Італії, Іспанії, Бельгії, Швейцарії, Англії, Чехії. На сьогоднішній день оркестр Колонна об'єднує близько 100 професійних музикантів. З 1982 року до нього також долучився власний хор. Наразі його музичний керівник — Марк Коровіч.

Ключові слова: Колонн, «Концерти Колонна», театр Шатле, французька музика, паризькі серії концертів, диригенти.