

A story
in cafe at
the Turn
of the
Twentieth
Century in
Grasse

2
july

6
november

2016

EXPOSITION

From watering hole to boudoir

Museum of the Art and History of Provence – Grasse

2 rue Mirabeau, Grasse - 04 93 36 80 20 - www.museesdegrasse.com

Press Release



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EDITORIAL

In 2015, the Museum of the Art and History of Provence received the donation of a Nallino cylinder-based player piano, made in 1923 and engraved with the name of «Raineri Alexandre – Grasse». It is an exceptional addition in several ways: as a well-preserved and rare object, this monumental instrument, by its sole presence, brings to life a society of popular amusement in the Third Republic.

By highlighting this acquisition, which was the forerunner of the juke box and a typical source of entertainment in cabarets and cafés, the 2016 temporary summer exhibition entitled *De l'Assommoir au boudoir, une histoire des cafés à Grasse dans les années 1900* (From Watering-Hole to Boudoir: a History of Cafés in Grasse in the 1900s) invites visitors to discover the city of Grasse in the early twentieth century from another angle: French-style sociability in «café-bar-restaurants». Echoing the International Perfume Museum's summer exhibition on the period from the Belle Epoque to the Roaring Twenties, we propose plunging headlong into a world of festivity, working-class amusements and conviviality, to the sound of a Java or a Charleston echoing in the turn-of-the-century streets and boulevards of Grasse.

The liberalisation of drinking establishments in 1880 – there were around 480,000 of them in 1912 in France – provoked a specifically French phenomenon by creating inescapable places for sociability and entertainment, where all levels of society came together to eat, drink and have fun. Not always erroneously, these vital centres were also considered to be dens of perdition. Delineating an ill-assumed paradox, the history of these cafés, where prostitution was frequent, reveals the contradictions of society at the time.

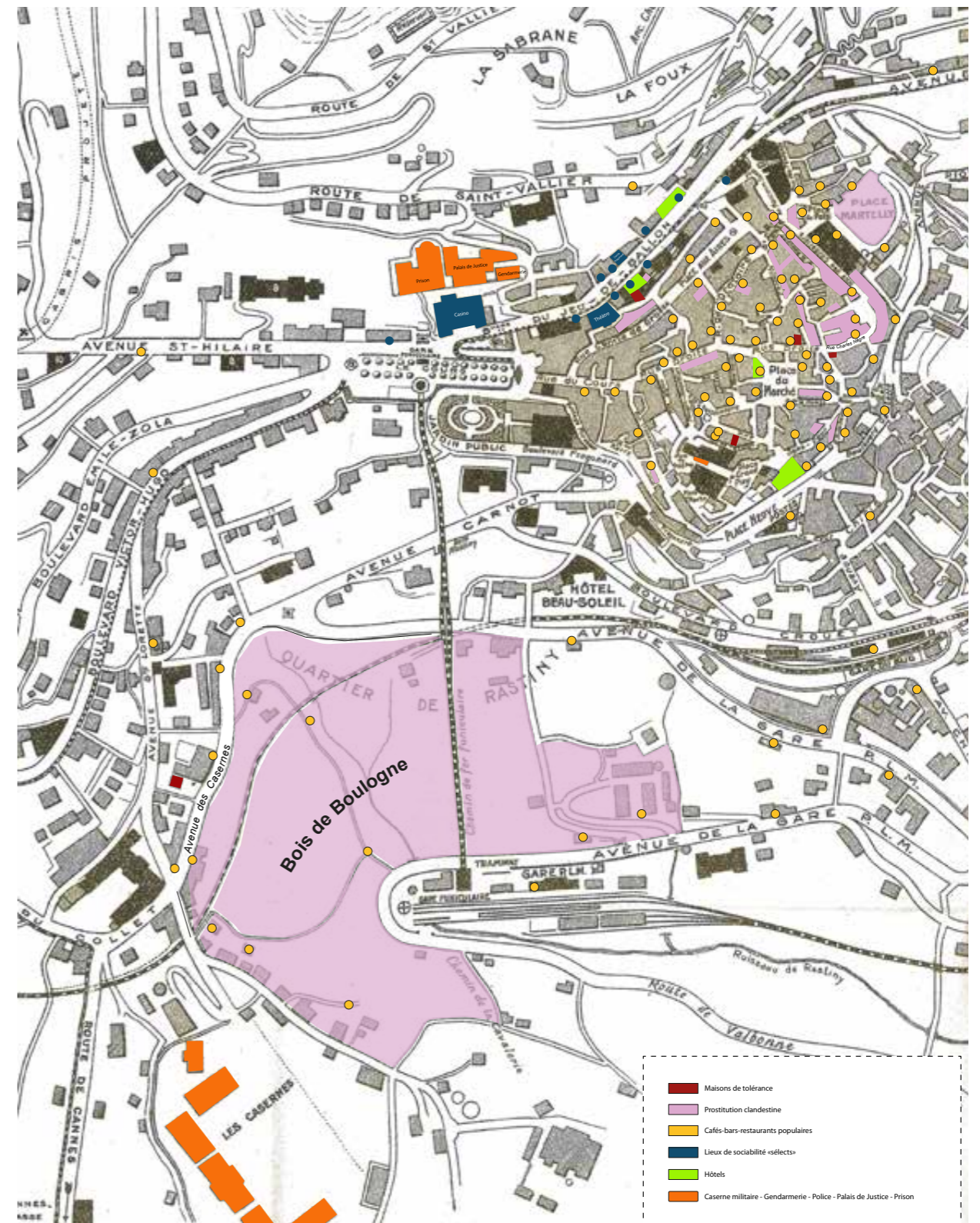
The vanished witnesses of a world where television, computers and sometimes even electricity were not yet found in homes and the symbols of living together at a time when cultural isolationism had no meaning, the café-restaurants of the Third Republic should represent more to us than mere nostalgia-tinged memories of the good old days. They should make us think about the basis of society and how its appearance can enlighten us. In this respect, leisure activities, however futile they may be, are often an indication of the real status of a civilisation.

Olivier Quiquempois
Curator of the Museums of Grasse
Director of the Museums of Grasse

The theme of this exhibition reflects two aims:

1 - Highlight a recent acquisition of the Museum of the Art and History of Provence: a cylinder-based player piano, known as a *virole* in Occitan. Made by *Nallino*, the oldest manufacturer of player pianos in Nice (1872), this *virole* was patented as an industrial arts invention and most probably dates from 1924. This invention, which required the removal of certain hammers, allowed placing the orchestral instruments above the wind chest: «Through this positioning, the front of the wind chest can be accessed without difficulty, and the piano can be easily tuned. It is also possible to place an unlimited number of orchestra percussion instruments on the wind chest. The rhythm is clearer and the instrumental playing is reproduced much more faithfully.»¹ According to Marcel Mino², this *virole* was manufactured in a very limited number of copies and is a rare and precious instrument.

2 - Ensure scientific and touristic coherence among the museums of Grasse when the Museum of the Art and History of Provence and the International Perfume Museum organise temporary exhibitions on the same chronological period with different thematic approaches, in this case the Belle Epoque and the Roaring Twenties.



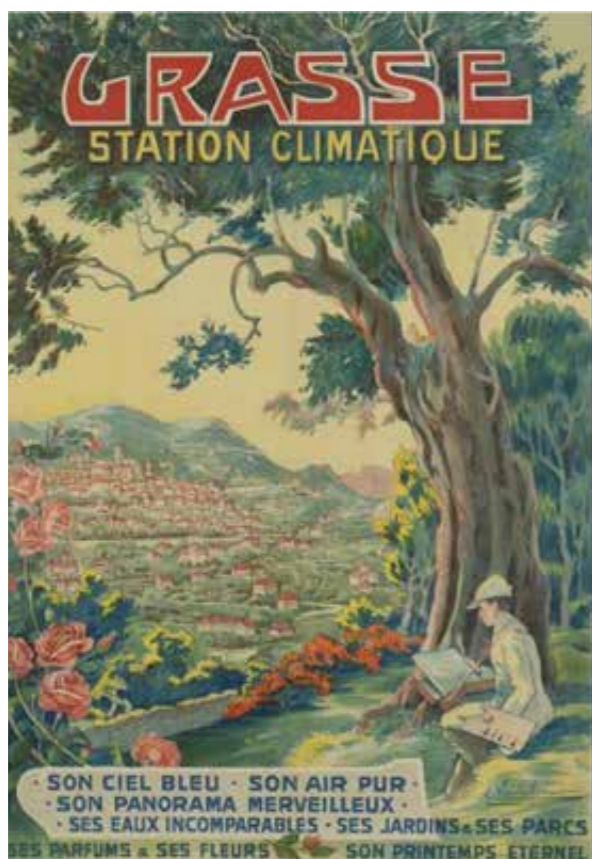
¹ Musiques mécaniques. Catalogue from the Musée Savoisien de Chambéry exhibition, December 1, 1988 - March 1, 1989, p. 164

² Specialist in automatic and player pianos and guide-lecturer at the Espace Musique Mécanique de Oingt in the Beaujolais region

2016 Exhibition

To spotlight a recent acquisition, a magnificent donation from Madam Blanche Raineri, the summer exhibition at the Museum of the Art and History of Provence invites you to discover the city of Grasse from an original point of view, that of *French-style* sociability at a *café-bar-restaurant* during the Third Republic. This donation – a 1923 Nallino player piano using cylinders to produce music and engraved with the name «*Raineri Alexandre - Grasse*» – transports us to the setting of a friendly and festive history of society in Grasse and on the Côte d'Azur. A veritable mechanical orchestra and the forerunner of the juke box, this *viola* (the Provençal name for a player piano) was typically found in the cabarets, neighbourhood cafés and hotels of the *Belle Epoque* and the *Roaring Twenties*.

Thus, without glossing over a Third Republic history that was sometimes disturbing and/or disconcerting, the Museum of the Art and History of Provence wanted to open the door to these lively places resounding with the sounds of a Java or a Charleston along the streets and boulevards of Grasse in former times. The Museum of the Art and History of Provence invites you to immerse yourself in the animated atmosphere of these social gathering points.



France in the Third Republic

Traditionally divided into five phases, the Third Republic (1870-1940) was a parliamentary regime that held sway in France for seventy years. It included a period of vague monarchical restoration from 1870 to 1879, the *Belle Epoque* from 1879 to 1914, World War I from 1914 to 1918, the Roaring Twenties from 1919 to 1929, and the international financial crisis of the thirties.

Although it still incarnates Republican and democratic ideals combined with economic liberalism, it was nonetheless a period of violent contrasts, where the best was found along with the worst. The two World Wars bear witness to this.

Thus, parliamentary regimes confronted cries for nationalistic revenge, terrorist anarchism and, later, extreme radicalism; triumphant positivism and scientism were met with colonialism and xenophobia; industrial and financial progress clashed with frequently inhuman working conditions and terrifying economic and social crises.

Nonetheless, the Third Republic also included the *Belle Epoque* and the *Roaring Twenties*. Economic, technological and social progress brought about a real improvement in living conditions. Rights and freedoms were no longer marginal, cities modernised, arts and letters flourished worldwide, education became public and mandatory and the notion of the individual within a democracy gradually emerged.

Sociability venues on the French Riviera during the Third Republic

With holiday and health resorts, prestigious hotels, casinos, sports and leisure activities, the French Riviera was at the height of its glory in the *Belle Epoque*.

Winter in the south of France attracted all the European elites. These «*winter swallows*» came initially for their health but soon «descended» to the Côte d'Azur for more trivial reasons: to have fun or even go «slumming». A combination of several factors in the region made certain contemporaries say that the coast was being perverted. Take as your base the cream of European aristocracy, add the elite of the upper classes, militarise the French-Italian border with thousands of soldiers living in barracks, liberalise bars (1880), tolerate prostitution, sprinkle it all with luxury, gambling and debauchery, and you will have an idea of why the French Riviera was so attractive at this time.

With incredible variety and density, the «*café-bar-restaurant*» became the lifeblood of the city. From boudoir to watering-hole, this centre of sociability and entertainment was the personification of «getting together». From the most refined political philosophy to the vilest rumours, from a simple, friendly distraction to less respectable activities, tongues loosened there and bodies gave in to temptation. It was a place to eat, drink, have fun...and live.

Types of café-restaurants from this period, from national to Provençal

During the Third Republic, drinking establishments were liberalised (1880) and their number literally exploded: by 1912, there were 480,000, representing one bar for every 80 inhabitants (as compared to one for every 248 people in Germany and one for every 430 in England). This was a French specificity of the Belle Époque, and its pernicious corollaries – alcoholism, prostitution and gambling – were a major concern of Republican authorities. A place of deprivation for some and a place of life for others, the café-bar-restaurant was both at the same time, a very French paradox.

The men and women of the café-restaurants

During the Third Republic, every man was a frequent café visitor. As the nerve centre of information concerning the nation and the neighbourhood and a hotbed of rumour, the café was a crucible for the complex chemistry of social life. In villages, the doctor met the farmer and the mayor met the local citizens. In cities, social segregation held sway. People from higher society avoided low-class dives, and workers would never dream of setting foot inside the posh cafés along prestigious boulevards. But even though they were very different from each other, these men had the same activities. They talked, drank, ate, smoked, gambled and more, depending on their mood.

Prostitution in the Third Republic

The Third Republic is considered to be the «Golden Age of Prostitution». Prostitution was tolerated, and even legal; it was seen as a «*necessary evil*», an essential condition for the proper functioning of a patriarchal society in the midst of economic and social change. From the brothel, which had been legalised in 1804 and was closely supervised, to clandestine prostitution, which by its very nature is wildly uncontrollable, the nineteenth century witnessed a radical transformation in contemporary sexuality.



Focus of the exhibition: the player piano

Short history of the « café-restaurant P.L.M. » and the *viole* belonging to Alexandre and Marguerite Raineri (grandparents of Madam Roudière)

This donation by *Madam Blanche Rollin*³ was motivated by obvious affection. *Madam Roudière* was the descendent of immigrants from the Piedmont region and was a third-generation member of a family of restaurant owners who settled in Grasse at the turn of the twentieth century. These three generations were front-row spectators of sociability in Grasse throughout this century.

Around 1920, at the very beginning of the Roaring Twenties, *Madame Roudière's* grandparents, *Alexandre* and *Marguerite Raineri*, known as *Margot*, decided to take over an establishment with a colourful history. Built at the very end of the nineteenth century by an uncle (*Tonton Minetti*), it was sold around 1914 to «outsiders», who transformed it into a bordello. It was later repurchased by another uncle (*Tonton Flayol*) right after the war. Like many other establishments in Grasse during the Third Republic, this was a sort of bar whose main attractiveness was perhaps more closely tied to carnal pleasures than to a need for sociability. It was ideally located between the P.L.M. train station (inaugurated in 1871), the Collet barracks that housed the 211th B.C.A. (in Grasse since 1888), the appropriately named «Bois de Boulogne» (a name dating from 1893 at the latest), the funicular railway (inaugurated in 1909) and the perfume factories south of the city centre. This bar would gradually be replaced by an authentic, friendly, family-style café-restaurant through the firm determination of *Margot* and her husband. Since they most certainly enjoyed the community support that characterises new Italian immigrants in Provence – the *Raineri* and *Nallino* families were both from Piedmont – *Alexandre Raineri* would soon acquire, at least by 1924, one of the latest innovations from the *Nallino* player piano factory. He had his name and adopted town engraved on it: *Raineri Alexandre – Grasse*.



Marguerite Raineri



Piano mechanics cylinder, called *De violates* Nallino mark 1924.



³Through her daughter, *Danielle Roudière*, and her brothers, former owners of the «Le Richelieu» restaurant (Traverse Sidi-Brahim next to the former P.L.M. train station).

Request institutions

Communal Archives, Grasse
Patrimonial Library, Villa Saint-Hilaire, Grasse
Alpes-Maritimes Department Archives, Nice
Grasse Institute of Perfume (GIP)
And private collectors

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USEFUL INFORMATIONS

MUSEUM OF THE ART AND HISTORY OF PROVENCE

The Provence art and history museum (M.A.H.P.) brings together, in the hotel Clapiers-Cabris, large collections devoted to both everyday life in Eastern Provence since prehistoric times, and Fine Arts and Decorative Arts from the 17th century to the first half of the 20th century.

This regional museum is the work of François Carnot (1872-1960), son of the former President of the Republic married, in Grasse, to Valentine Chiris, daughter of a perfume industrialist who was at the origin of solvent extraction. The creation of this museum quickly gathered together the local elite and a number of French and foreign donors. It is based on a large group of friends of the museum, owners of the collections, which today supports the museum's development and activities.

Based around regional archaeology and popular arts and traditions, a selection of paintings, sculpture, graphic art, furniture, ceramics, glassware, textiles, jewellery and weapons, the museum tells the history of the Eastern Provence whose traditions, firmly rooted in everyday life, favoured the emergence of strong local identities.

In this mansion, which has retained its original distribution of staterooms and private spaces, reconstructions of rooms where he would have lived and didactic exhibitions coexist harmoniously on three levels opening onto the south side, to the garden.

Access

MAHP

2 rue Mirabeau, 06130 Grasse - Tel. +33 (0) 4 93 36 80 20

Parking : Cours Honoré Cresp, Notre Dame des Fleurs, La Foux

Bus: towards Grasse Gare Routière – Thouron stop Sillages lines/SNCF Train Station: A, B, C, D, 5, 6, 20, 40

Train: SNCF terminal at Grasse, then shuttle towards Grasse Gare Routière – Thouron stop

OPENING HOURS 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m

Regular price : 2 €

Free (upon presentation of supporting document) for: under 18,unemployed, disabled, students

Guided Tours

All year long, our tour guides propose free guided visits (ninety minutes long). Warning, there is a specific programme for Winter, Easter, and Summer holidays (zone A,B and C), the visits guided are on several sites: <http://www.museesdegrasse.fr/activite/atelier-vacances>

