

SOME HISTORICAL CONTEXT TO *THE MONTMARTE INVESTIGATION*

Parisian nightlife in the 1890's

THE 1890s saw the heyday of the *cafés-concert* and nightclubs, which embodied all the modernity and daring of *belle-époque* Paris. There were many such venues, to which both Parisians and visitors to the city flocked in the evening, mostly concentrated in and around Montmartre, the hub of artistic life in the city.

Founded in 1881 by Rudolph Salis, Le Chat-Noir, the first ever cabaret, began life as an informal artistic salon. Artists, musicians and writers were invited to Salis's home to discuss their ideas and perform their work, amongst them Claude Debussy, Paul Verlaine, Erik Satie, Aristide Bruant and Caran d'Ache. It quickly became a fashionable nightspot, where the bohemian world rubbed shoulders with the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The cabaret gave rise to a journal also called Le Chat-Noir, with contributions from Salis's regulars. It was successfully published on a weekly basis for over ten years.

Aristide Bruant, immortalised in a poster by Toulouse-Lautrec, went on to open his own cabaret, Le Mirliton, which became the home of satire and was particularly famous for Bruant's songs in which he made fun of the upper class members of his clientele. Perhaps the place that most symbolises the Paris of that era is the greatest *café-concert* of them all, Le Moulin-Rouge, whose *fin-de-siècle* incarnation lives on in the art of Toulouse-Lautrec. Built in 1889 by Joseph Oller, it still stands today on Boulevard de Clichy in the neighbourhood of Pigalle. It was famed for its spectacular music hall, which included many different kinds of entertainer, including the extraordinary Pétomane who, amongst other tricks, could fart the tune of *La Marseillaise* at will. But it is as the home of the cancan for which Le Moulin-Rouge is best known. The dance had first emerged in dance halls much earlier in the nineteenth century and was originally performed by men, and then by courtesans during the Second Empire. Yet it was at Le Moulin-Rouge with a chorus line made up of professional dancers that the cancan took on the form by which it is still known today. Respectable members of society would come along to be shocked at the flying splits and extraordinary high kicks of legendary dancers such as La Goulue, Jane Avril and Nini Pattes en l'Air. And the tradition continues to this day at Le Moulin-Rouge, where visitors can still see regular performances of the outrageous cancan.