

CULTURES COLLIDE

A new century has meant a new outlook on pop music for France with many groups choosing to sing in English. Take pop TV channel MTV; it named Pony Pony Run Run for its European Music Award for best French artist-but the band sing in English. They also won the best newcomer award at France's Victoires de la Musique to set their stamp on a changing trend that was, perhaps, symbolised best in the 2008 Eurovision Song Contest, when French entrant Sébastien Tellier sang in English.

Earlier, Edith Piaf, Serge Gainsbourg and Vanessa Paradis recorded successfully in English but mostly as one-offs; today's music scene is different, with more and more French bands choosing to produce and sing all their works in English. This is done despite efforts of the Académie Française, which presides over new words and general usage of French. It has been very active in finding French equivalents for English words and a disc jockey is now an "animateur/trice".

But there is no stopping the English steamroller. Tellier's Eurovision choice was much publicised and derided, but earlier in 2008 folk rock band The Do, got to No.1 in France with their album "A Mouthful" and it is all in English. So many French artists are now following suit that, in September, a compilation album was released called "Do You Sing English?" to bring together the best of these newly-dubbed "Frenghish" artists.

The British music scene has been credited with sparking the change, as has the need to succeed internationally, but Pony Pony Run Run themselves gave a more complex answer. "To sing pop music, it was only natural to sing in English as it made our songs feel whole. In French songs, the emphasis is usually on the meaning of the words and not necessarily the music, but the UK pop scene brings the two together". PPRR said they preferred the Anglo-Saxon attitude to new music, finding it far more relaxed, enthusiastic and spontaneous than the more structured and often disinterested nature of the French public. "French pop is very philosophical, with the emphasis not necessarily being on the music. English pop music has always found a way of bringing the words and music together," they added.

The explosion of the internet and networking sites such as My Space, Facebook and You Tube has also contributed, and this is where PPRR first became known. Such technology has meant French musicians learning more English, being given the chance to discover more music and actively looking to understand what was being said, which has led to them broadening their artistic scope and experiment in a more universal language.