

Playing Bony's Tune



Martin Hoyle

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Unashamedly full of information, *Playing Bony's Tune* has, you feel, escaped under the Radio 3 net to Radio 4. It's unashamedly erudite, bursting with analysis, names and dates. Fascinating to hear that music was the one art that Napoleon cared about, that some songs were appropriated by both sides in the French Revolution and that Bonaparte looted composers from abroad along with artworks. Paid FFr1000 a month, with a free house and carriage, the Italian Paisiello was, naturally, the "most hated musician in Paris". This is actually more serious stuff than you will find on Radio 3 and above all is not presented by any of that station's slinky Fionas, although the first instalment did boast Lady Antonia Fraser talking about Marie Antoinette.

Laurence Joyce

Radio Times

It's not so long ago that parents used Napoleon Bonaparte's name to frighten their children: "Boney'll get you!" (It certainly scared me.) Alyn Shipton explores how music adapted itself to the bloody times preceding the fall of Napoleon, beginning with the demise of the court of Louis XIV and Marie-Antoinette at Versailles. There's even one tune that began life as a Revolutionary song and ended up on banjo and fiddle in America, having got there by way of a British army march and a drawing-room piano piece. Antonia Fraser is among the experts explaining the historical background and there are some juicy French accents. Vive la France!