



Me and the Kiki song; Part A

This Whither Zither has stretched itself into a two-part travelog of an armchair journey regarding a haunting song in my life. The second half of this stirring episode will be out right here next month; don't touch that dial.

My wife, Kristi, has had the nickname Kiki for most of her life. *Aside:* Her mother told me that as a child, Kristi dropped a pair of scissors on her brother's toy train and wrecked it. He ran to their mother and said, "Kiki cut my choo choo ding dong with the ow-ow sha-shap."

This was in Appleton, Wisconsin. A few years later, in the same town, my sister Mary became hooked on a recording of a song called "Kiki" about a woman of that name. As I've mentioned previously, our mother worked for a middle-of-the-road radio station in Appleton and brought home records deemed unsuitable for their audience. This provided us kids with a stream of strange music, such as the Mad Magazine single, "Pimples and Braces," and oddities like "Kiki." I love Mary dearly but she must have played this song a thousand times. The rest of the family considered moving into the garage.

A few years after that, in high school, I began to have interest in the Dadaists and Surrealists. In reading about all those often Paris-based folks, the name "Kiki of Montparnasse" repeatedly surfaced. As I was to find out over the following years in my sporadic reading about that scene, this Kiki -- real name Alice Ernestine Prin -- was a beloved model and muse of many of the artists of the day, an artist in her own right, a cabaret singer, and eventually, for a while, the owner of a Paris cafe she called Cafe Kiki. She was famed photographer Man Ray's primary model, and they were romantically involved for several years. Now and then I found myself wondering if my sister's Kiki song was about this particular Kiki.

My to-be-wife (an Appleton High School classmate) meanwhile was pursuing an education in the languages, especially Spanish and French. She went on to major in these languages in college, and graduated with a major in Spanish and a minor in French.

A few months after Kristi and I started dating in 1979, fourteen years after our high school graduation, she traveled to Paris with her sister and fell in love with the city. In recent years she has visited Paris twice on her own, and has become more fascinated with the place each time.

Recently I found a book on the web that seemed to link our obsessions nicely. It's a large book and expensive new (\$160!), so I bought a used copy for about \$20. A glorious book full of photographs of the scene, it has the name "KiKi's Paris: Artists and Lovers 1900-1930," so you can see how I thought it would interest both of us.

This renewed my interest in the song **Kiki**. I Googled, using a line from the song ("There's nobody like Kiki.") I initially got only one relevant hit: a Japanese site, with the first verse of the lyrics of the song in English and the rest in Japanese. The page also provided some hints where I might look for the song further. The title of the song was listed as "LES LAVANDIERES DU PORTUGAL<KIKI>," with lyrics by Roger Lucchesi and composition by Andre Popp.

So I Googled "Les Lavandieres du Portugal" (The Portuguese Washerwomen) and got some weird hits. One was a YouTube clip of "Les Lavandieres du Portuguese" being sung (quite nicely!) by Jacqueline Francois (see the URL below). Exact same melody as the "Kiki" song of my sister's girlhood, but with no "Kiki" in the French lyrics. These lyrics, which I found translated poorly elsewhere, are all about Portuguese washerwomen ("Do you know washerwomen, as there are in Portugal? Especially those of the river city of Setubal?...") Another hit was a TV theme show site which listed an instrumental version of this song as being the theme song for a syndicated show called **Girl Talk** (1962-1970).

This helpful site mentioned that the song was also listed by ASCAP with the Washerwomen title for the *instrumental* but the title "Kiki" as the title for the *vocal version*, with English lyric by songwriter Charles Tobias (author of such other hits as "Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree With Anyone Else But Me"). Adding the Tobias name to my search, I found a site with a free download of the song performed by the Hugo Winterhalter and Son Orchestra, and this time with the Kiki lyrics I was looking for (URL below) Here are the lyrics of this version:

(Refrain, sung twice after each verse:)
Kiki! Kiki! There's nobody like Kiki!

1

*She was known as the girl named Kiki
She was Venus with lovin' arms
She was oo la la la and chic-y
That was Kiki with fiery charms
Every night in a small cafe
Kiki sang to the Casanovas
Till [Mo Mo who was underway]
Saw Kiki and his eyes went [big]
Kiki rolled [em] around her heart
Like roulette rolls around the table
And for [Mo Mo] of old Montmartre
He would [cry in his wine and sing]*

2

*From a farm at the edge of Paris
Came a fellow they called Rene
All he owned was the clothes he carried
On his head was an old Beret
They both met on the Eiffel Tower
Kiki's heart started doin' tricks
And it opened just like a flower
And she fell like a ton of bricks
On a quaint little farm in France
[There's a ? that's] singin' love songs
And if you drop around by chance
If you do you will hear this song*

Next Whither Zither: A third verse; how the song relates to Kiki of Montparnasse; Kiki as a singer; more about Charles Tobias; more links...

For now, have a listen to these:

Les Lavandieres du Portugal:

<http://youtu.be/G21HL0ILg4>

Les Lavandières du Portugal, Kiki:

<http://darkmp3.ru/slushat-hugo-winterhalter-et-son-orchestre.html>