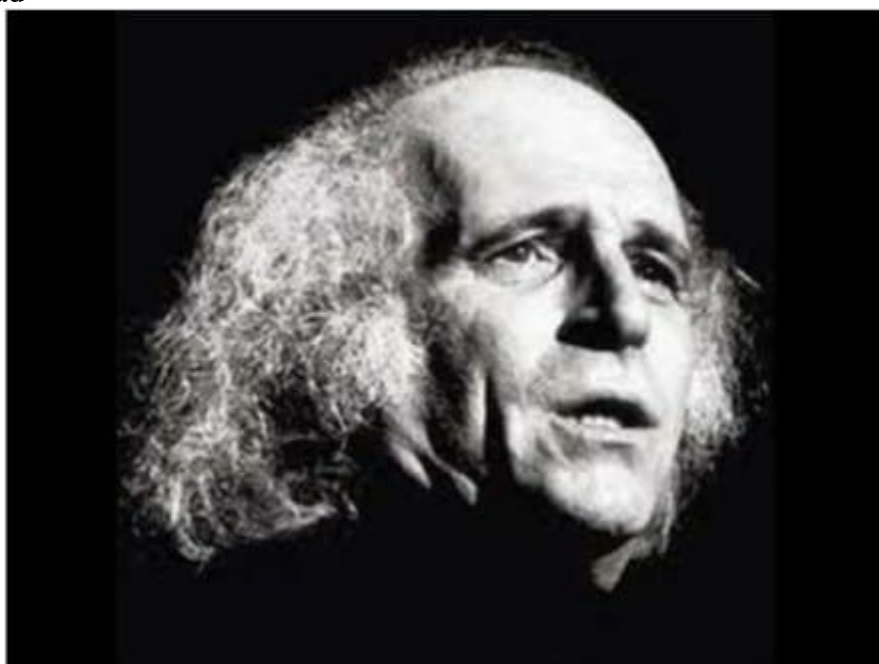


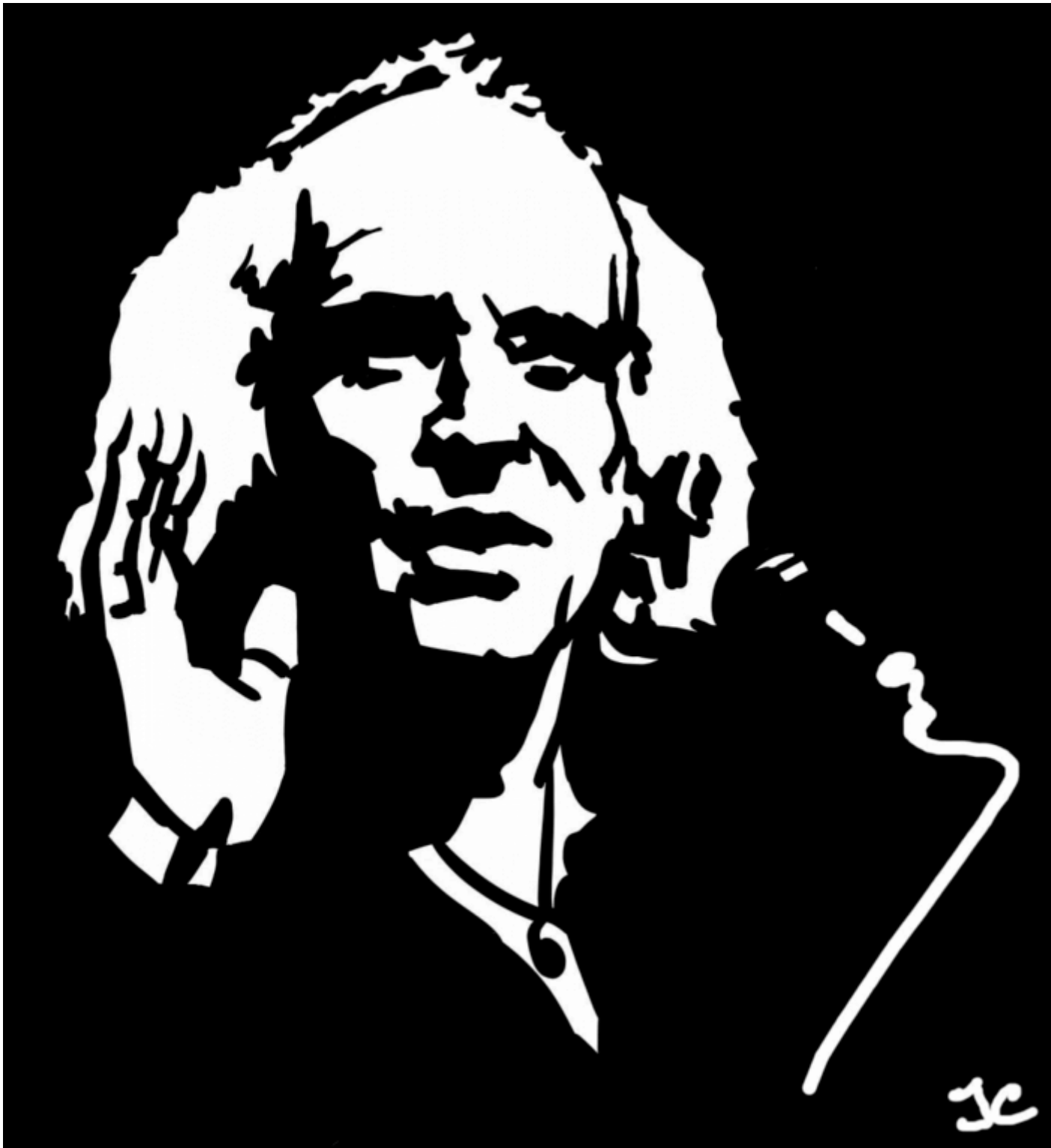
<https://www.hellomonaco.com/sightseeing/monaco-s-celebrities/leo-ferre-an-anarchist-musician-from-monaco/>

## Leo Ferre — An Anarchist Musician from Monaco

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57 3 minutes read



*A one -man orchestra, this is what the Monegasque musician Leo Ferre truly is. During his career he managed to release dozens of albums, write a novel and compose oratorios inspired by the non-trivial verses of Appolinaire and Baudelaire. Ferre considered himself an anarchist; a concept typical of his entire lifetime as a musician.*

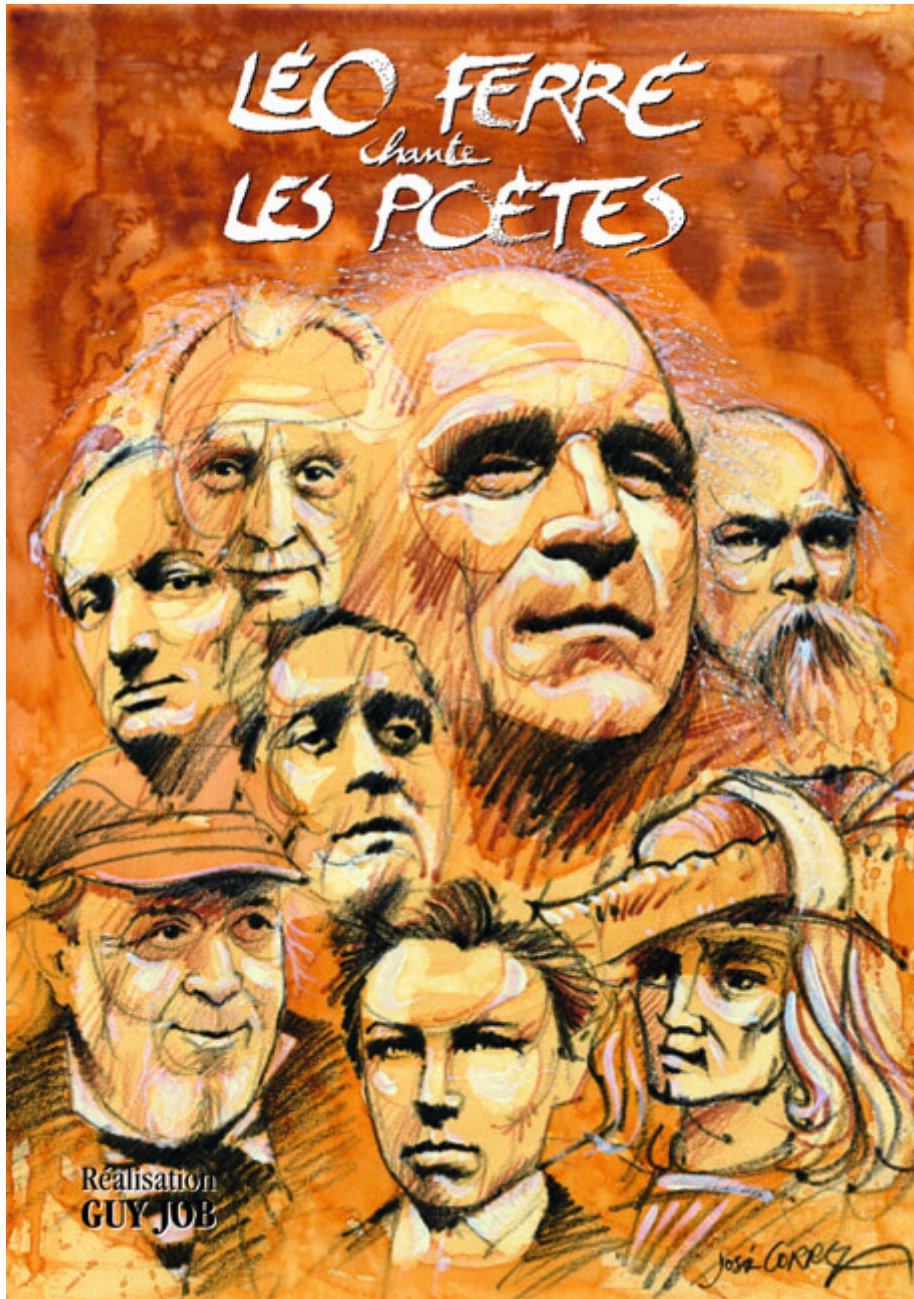


On August 24, 1916 a boy was born into the family of a Monaco casino director, on the avenue Saint-Michel. The new parents named him Leo. He lived in the Principality up to the age of 9 and was then sent to St. Charles boarding school in Bordighera (Italy). Upon his graduation in 1934, Leo asked his father for permission to enter the conservatory. The future of the young man was seen differently, however, and a year later he went to Paris to study law. Leo enrolled in the Institute of Political Sciences. At the same time, he never missed an opportunity to go to the cinema and take his piano lessons.

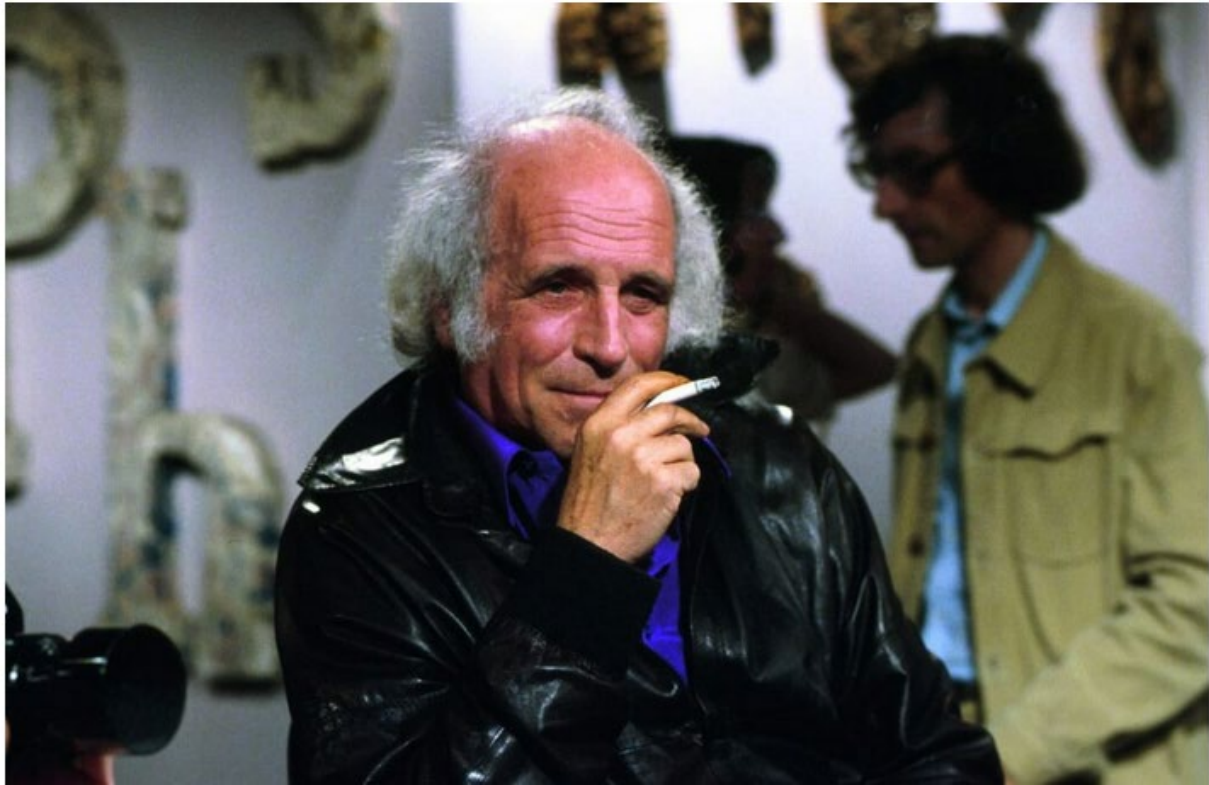


## Life in Paris

The young Leo Ferre was then called to join the army. Only in 1943 he returned back to Monaco and was employed by Radio Monte-Carlo. He thus got an opportunity to write poetry and music. At the age of thirty, he wrote his first text in prose for a Monegasque newspaper. Over this period, he met Edith Piaf who strongly recommended the young musician go to Paris and try his luck there.



Leo Ferre's path to fame was difficult and full of obstacles. For almost seven years, the musician had neither a contract nor a chance to release his album. He was living from hand to mouth and working part-time at the Saint-Germain-des-Pres cabaret. That's when he wrote his song «La vie d'artiste». As to his private life, Leo divorced Odette Shunck whom he married back in 1943. Only at the age of 37 did the musician manage to release his first album and sign a contract with the «Odeon» music company.

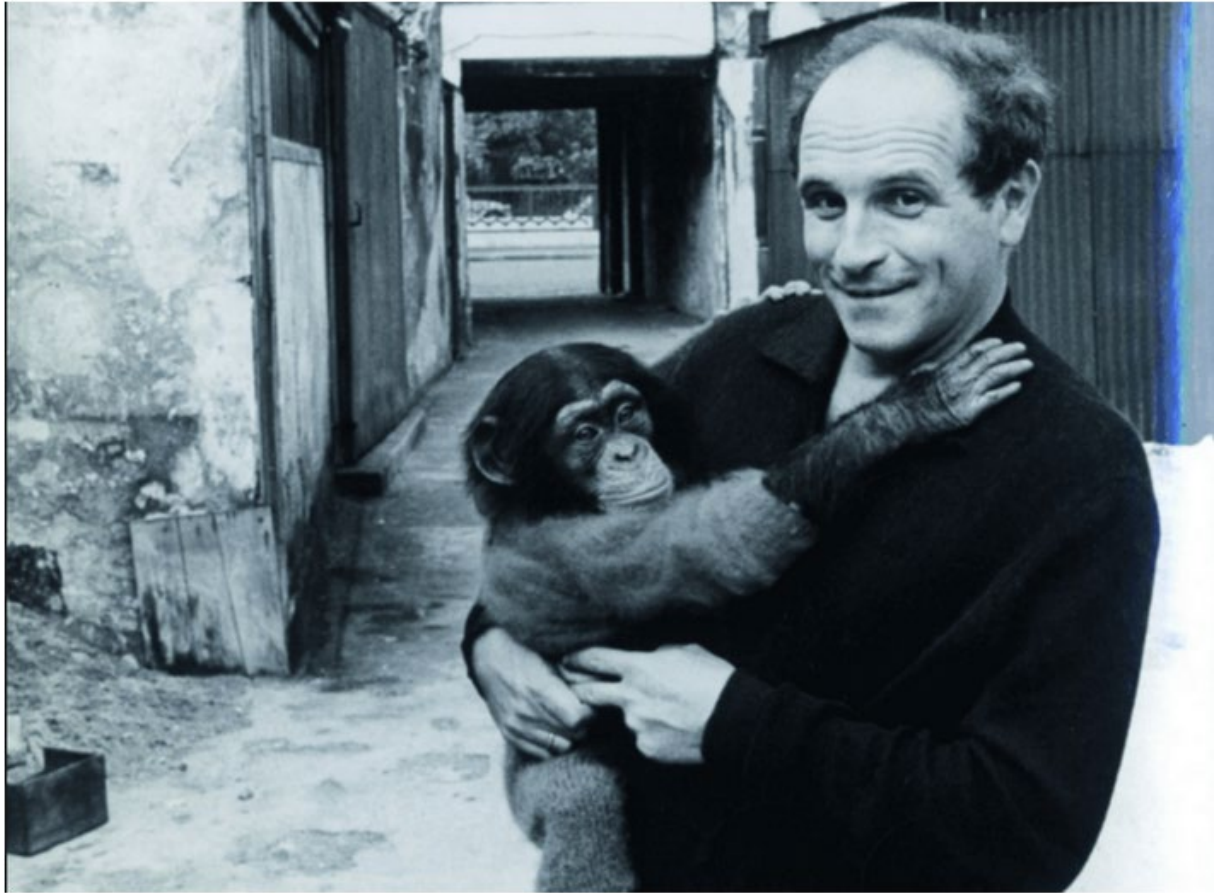


In the early 50's, the musician was finally lucky enough to sign a contract with «Le Chant du Monde» and recorded 12 tracks. The song which made the composer famous was «Paris Canaille» performed by Catherine Sauvage. It's success spread as far as the USSR where it was renamed «Under the Parisian Roofs».

In 1960, Leo began working with music producer Eddie Barclay. During this period, the popularity of Ferré increased thanks to the songs «Paname» and «Jolie môme», and a year later the musician released an album dedicated to the work of Louis Aragon, «Les Chansons d'Aragon». From then on, it seems that success pursued Leo Ferré. He gave a concert in the Grand concert hall of Alhambra; the publishing house Livre de Poche asked him to write an introduction to the «Saturnian verses» by Paul Vrehlen; the publisher Françoise Sagan showed interest in his manuscript «Benoit Misère»; and Pierre Seghers included Ferré in the famous series «Contemporary Poets».

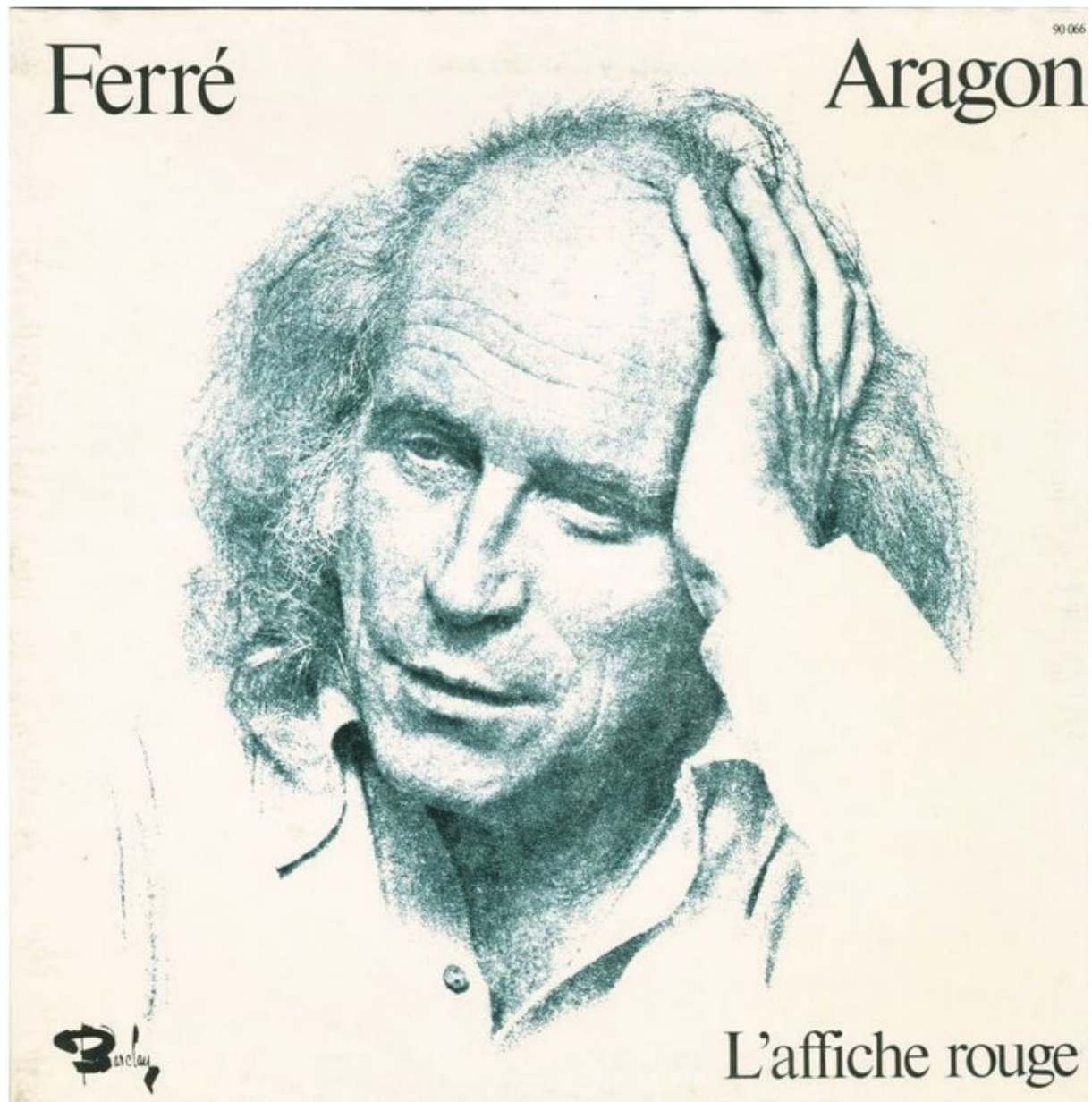


Interestingly, in 1961, Ferre and his wife took a chimpanzee named Pepee, who, according to Leo's stepdaughter, they used to cherish as their own child. In 2013, Annie Buthor, daughter of the second wife of Leo Ferre, published a book dedicated to life with a musician. In particular, Annie said that «Pepee had her own room, her own toys», and she dined with the family. In the evenings, before going to bed, Pepee «hugged» each member of the family. There are at least two songs in Leo's repertoire that were influenced by the chimpanzee: «Pepee» and «Avec le temps». During his career, Leo Ferre released 40 albums, becoming a true master of French music. The musician died in July 1993, in the town of Castellina in Tuscany, but was buried in the cemetery in Monaco.



### **Ferre and Monaco**

In April 1954, at the initiative of Prince Rainier III, Ferre gave a grandiose concert at the Monte-Carlo Opera. Accompanied by the orchestra and the choir of the Opera, the musician performed his oratorio inspired by Guillaume Appolinaire, in particular, «The Song of the Unloved». Interestingly, the album of the concert recorded by Radio Monte-Carlo, was only first released in April 2006 by «La Memoire et la Mer».



The small state of Monaco should be very proud of being the birthplace for such a famous artist. But you may think that Leo Ferré's connection to Monaco was not as strong as that to Paris, because up until 2013, only one place in Monaco was bearing the musician's name. Fortunately, four years ago, a concert hall was named in his honour on the initiative of the Municipality of Monaco. HSH [Prince Albert II](#) attended the opening of Leo Ferré Hall in person.





The apartment on Avenue Saint-Michel where the famous musician was born is another place associated with Ferre. It now sits empty, but is actually still rented by the Ferre family in hope of opening a museum about the musician. However, that initiative awaits financial backing.

Leo Ferre's son Mathieu recalls in one of his interviews that his father was very fond of Monaco. They would often come on a visit to the Principality and stroll along to [La Condamine](#) where he bought his favourite dish, socca. For Ferre, Monaco was the place of his childhood where his mother made a delicious tomato sauce and the whole family would sit down at a huge table in the living room. At the age of 5 he was listening to music, walking through the Principality streets and imagining himself a conductor of a large orchestra. The memories of Monaco, for sure, must have been some of his happiest.

Ferre considered himself an anarchist; a concept typical of his entire lifetime as a musician.

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