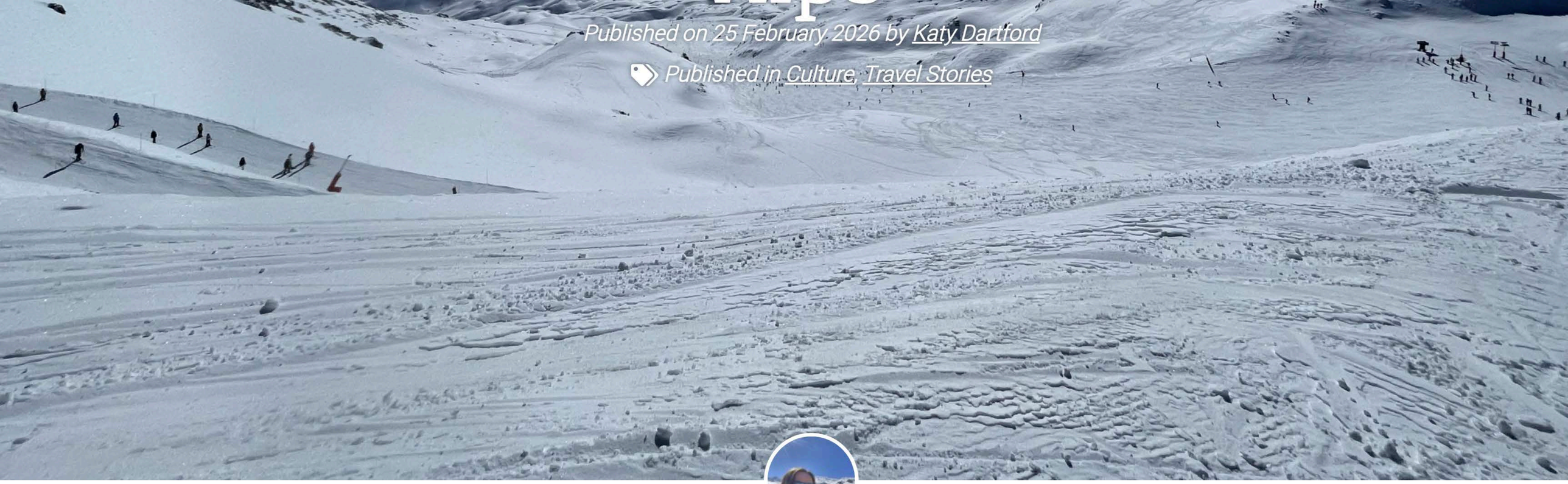


The Sound of Après: How British Bands Took Over the French Alps



Published on 25 February 2026 by Katy Dartford

Published in Culture, Travel Stories

By Katy Dartford

It's 2013, and it's après hour in Chamonix. Inside Swedish bar Chambre Neuf, windows fog with steam as bodies bounce on tabletops, ski boots stomping in time to a high-energy mix of rock and hip-hop. The crowd, mostly British and Scandinavian, chants in unison: "We are Chamonix!" to the tune of the Sugarhill Gang's Rapper's Delight.

Across the road, the local French crowd looks on, bemused but untempted. Après-ski, at least in its loudest form, has long drawn a heavily British and Nordic following.

For a while, it felt as though that scene was fading. Changing habits, rising prices and post-pandemic fatigue made high-

octane après sound like something skiers reminisced about rather than experienced.

But spend time in the French Alps now, and it becomes clear that music-led après-ski is not only alive, but it has also evolved.



Après, Alive and Kicking

In Val d’Isère, at slope-side bar Cocorico, Devon trio ‘Pattern Pusher’ are mid-set. Frontman Alex Davies belts out Cher’s Believe as the crowd, already deep into jugs of lager, roars every word. A man in his sixties strips down to his boxers and moons the terrace. Nearby, another skier downs a beer from his snowboard boot and promptly turns green.

This is après-ski at its most unfiltered: ridiculous, communal and unapologetically British.

Much of this sound has been shaped by Après Ski Bands, the agency that books thousands of live gigs across Alpine resorts each winter. Its founder, Rich Lett, describes it as creating “a festival vibe everywhere — not just on New Year’s Eve, but all season”.

Throughout the winter, the company coordinates performances from Chamonix to Val d’Isère and Méribel, matching bands, DJs, and acoustic acts to bars, hotels, and terraces.







From Terrace Chaos to Dinner Gigs

In Méribel, après begins early, usually around 4pm.

At La Terrasse du Village, The Wingmen tear through I Wanna ‘Ski’ With You Everywhere, Teenage Dirtbag and Chelsea Dagger. Skiers drift in straight off the mountain, still in their boots, some dancing, others filming from the edges of the crowd.

“It’s crowd-driven,” one of the band tells me later. “We feed off whatever energy’s in the room.”

ENLARGE





Chaotic but fun

© KATY DARTFORD

When the band finishes around six, the bar barely pauses. Upstairs, DJ-MC duo Rio & Rhymes appear in matching pink furry bodywarmers and launch into YMCA, I Can't Get No Sleep and Hot Stepper, urging the crowd to rap along to Eminem. It's loud, joyful and inclusive, high-energy chaos with a distinctly British sense of humour.

But not every night follows the same script. Earlier in the week, the same space was candle-lit and calm. Diners tucked into tartiflette and steak while acoustic artists played original material. Al Jones performed a track written for a friend's film, followed by Kyanna's soulful Piero and the Summer of Love.

"This dinner-gig thing is new," Lett explains. "We used to do drinking games. Now people want something they can enjoy, whether they're twenty or sixty."



Acoustic entertainment is on the rise

© KATY DARTFORD



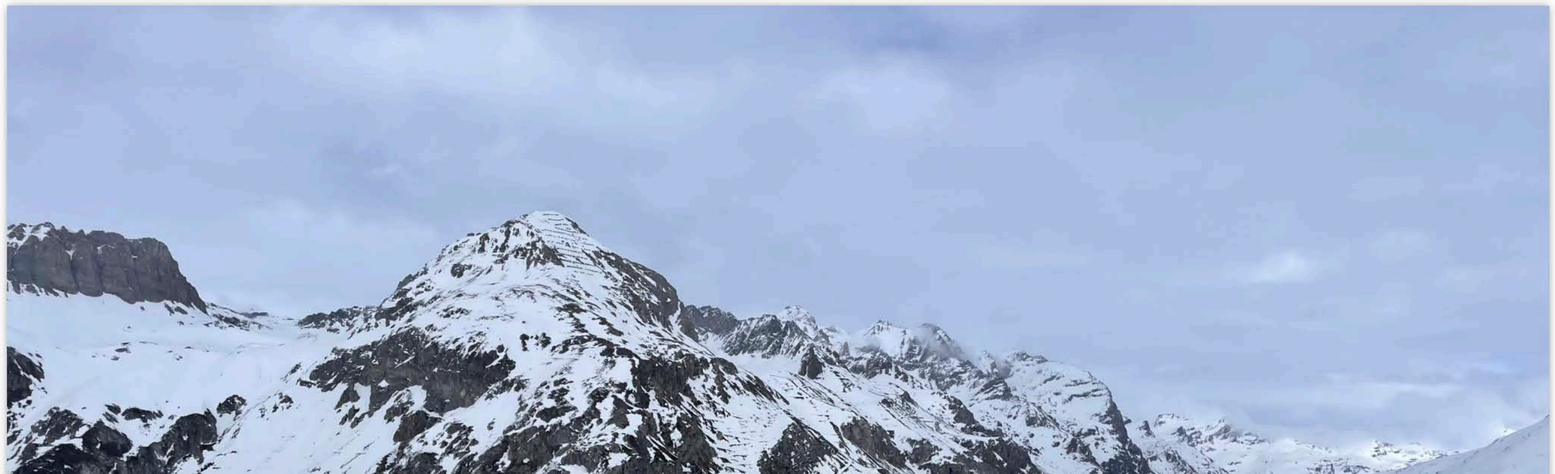
Inside the Après-Ski Bands Circuit

This variety is not accidental. Over the past fifteen years, après-ski in France has shifted from casual post-slope sing-alongs to a professionally run entertainment circuit.

Après Ski Bands sits at the centre of that ecosystem, pairing the right acts with the right venues, full-volume terrace bands, DJ-led party sets and candle-lit acoustic dinners. Musicians move between resorts, share gear and occasionally cover for one another when illness or snowstorms intervene.

“It’s a travelling circus,” Lett says. “We’ve had vans break down in blizzards, musicians ski into gigs because the roads are blocked. But that’s part of it.”

ENLARGE





Méribel

© KATY DARTFORD

The Life of an Après-Ski Musician

For musicians, a season in the Alps is no ordinary run of gigs. Playing at altitude, in unpredictable weather and to constantly changing crowds presents challenges most touring artists never face.

The payoff can be significant. A full winter can mean well over a hundred shows in five months.



Chris, a musician from Shrewsbury, tells me he has played 97 gigs in 90 days. Veteran guitarist Chris Quinn, who has played everywhere from BB King's in New York to the Royal Albert Hall, keeps returning for the atmosphere. "Waking up to that view, then playing to a crowd that's completely up for it, it never gets old," he says.

For Kyanna, a singer and guitarist blending UK garage, pop and folk, the Alps changed everything. "I quit my corporate PR job in London when I was asked to play a winter season," she says. "It was the best decision I ever made."

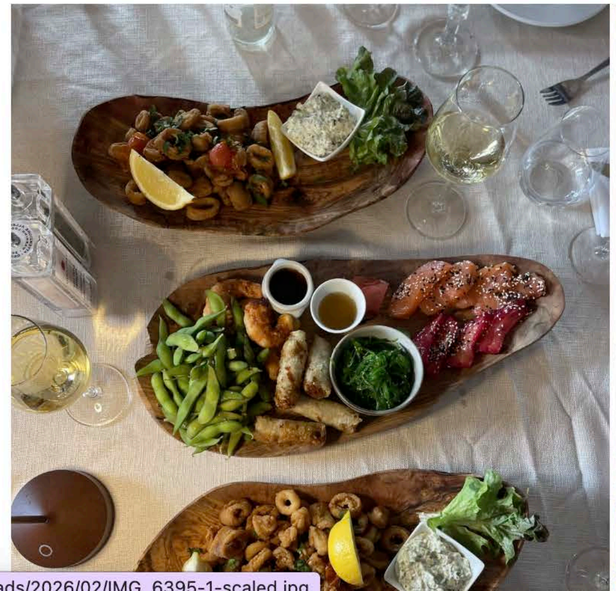
Pattern Pusher see après as a training ground. "You have to read the room, adapt constantly, keep the vibe going," Davies says. "It's made us better musicians."

What Do the French Think?

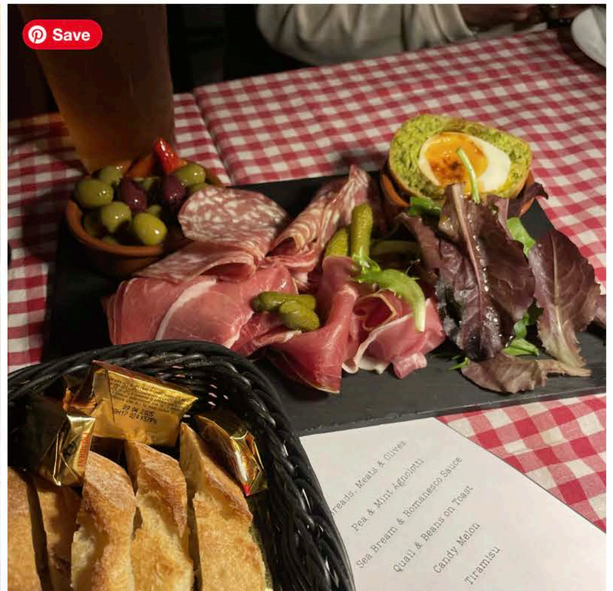
Audience mix plays a role. In major resorts, around 40% of après crowds are British, with Scandinavians and French guests alongside them, and English is quickly becoming the default language.

“The French often stop and watch first,” says La Terrasse du Village manager Jez Saunders. “Then they join in.”

British après still stands out. French skiers often favour long lunches with wine and quieter evenings at home. “They’ll pick up wine and cheese on the way back to the apartment,” Saunders says. “The Brits go straight from the slopes to the bar.”







https://stories.francetoday.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/IMG_6395-1-scaled.jpg



The French prefer dinner after a day on the slopes © Katy Dartford

That contrast is most visible at La Folie Douce, which represents a distinctly French approach to après. Here, the emphasis is on performance rather than participation: DJs on raised platforms, dancers in costume, choreographed routines and cabaret-style staging.

“The French love Folie Douce because it feels organised,” Saunders explains. “It’s a show — DJs, dancers, the whole performance. The British scene’s more chaotic. It’s about the crowd becoming part of the act.”



Still Singing

Back in Chamonix, as Pattern Pusher return to the Chambre Neuf stage, the chant rises again. Steam clouds the windows, glasses clink, boots pound the floor. Between ABBA and Queen, the band slips in one of its own tracks.

“You can sneak your songs in between the covers,” Davies says. “It’s the best kind of exposure.”

By the time the final song finishes, voices are hoarse and the floor slick with spilt beer. Après-ski was never disappearing — it was changing pace, finding new forms.

And as long as British skiers keep pouring off the slopes at four o’clock, there will be a band ready to strike the first chord — and someone, somewhere, climbing onto a table.

Be the first to leave a comment!