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Tradition, Exoticism and Cosmopolitanism in Italian Popular Music (1950s-1980s)

Paolo Prato

INTRODUCTION

Richard Wolfe's *Professional Fake Book* (Columbia Pictures Publications, 1983), a compilation of over 1000 songs for the club pianist—Broadway's best, contemporary hits, folk songs, movie greats, classical themes, etc.—includes nine Italian pieces. There are Neapolitan evergreens (*O sole mio*, *Come Back to Sorrento* and *Malafemmena*), one a love song (*Santa Lucia*), another a Sicilian folk song (*Eh cumpari*), another an opera highlight (*La donna è mobile*) and three "modern" songs (*Volare*, *Ciao ciao bambina*, *Cara mia*) from the 1950s. The list makes up an average package of what many people outside Italy consider to be Italian popular music. The songs are part of that "knowledge at hand" (Alfred Schutz)

which is necessary to cope with what is strange within everyday life routines. Such knowledge is mostly constituted of a rule-of-thumb formula and predigested slogans. National stereotypes belong to this class and music is a basic ingredient of them. Further, it has a "diplomatic" function in that it mediates the cultural contact.

However, although stereotypes are always needed, not only their obsolescence as a matter of course but their very formation have radically changed: the breaking of many spatio-temporal barriers has brought about the expansion of all pre-packaged images and increased the difficulty in making them fit with reality. Wolfe's *Fake Book* is a telling example of a good-old-time notion of national music, when Italians would sing in Italian, the Spanish would sing in Spanish and children would sing *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. Today such divisions are no longer functional and Italians, Spanish and children of the world (unite!) are more likely to sing the same English/multinational songs of Duran Duran or Madonna. Popular music today no longer recognizes national boundaries; it has international characteristics and is produced and distributed everywhere by the same five major record companies.

This began about fifty years ago, when New Deal America set out to redefine its social and cultural identity through a massive usage of newly established media (radio, records, cinema) and a new ethic imperative founded upon consumption. Some refer to this as the beginning of "the society of the spectacle," others say that neo-capitalism started to be concerned more with its image than its substance. However, it is a fact that a certain set of aural and visual codes—together with their expected responses in terms of behaviors, beliefs, pleasures, etc.—elaborated by the U.S. entertainment machine in the thirties, spread all over Europe and the rest of the world. It was a one-way penetration at first, then it gradually shifted to a two-way relationship: a second phase featured the organization of "feedbacks," that is, domestic responses to the original invasion. In the field of popular music, the first signs of Americanization are found in Britain;¹ in the rest of Europe, Australia and Japan, we have to wait a few more years to see a mass-scale reply.

The 1980s in Italy are a time in which virtually all resistance to penetration from across the Atlantic and the Channel has been dismantled. The contraposition between national and foreign products still remains but the two live side-by-side, subsumed by patterns of consumption that have planetary characteristics. Popular music today—be it Italian, American or African—must be understood within the framework of a multinational industry which,

by definition, has to fight local cultures or repackage them according to its level of technological sophistication. The production of popular music is designed to please everybody independently of class, race, sex and age, and it is therefore inextricably intertwined with other codes of expression that interact in everyday life, such as clothing, TV, cinema and advertising. This means that not only Italian popular music as "pure object" does not exist (whereas it is still possible to isolate various Italian folk musics, for example), but also that popular music *tout court* cannot be exhaustively circumscribed and described. Its nature is more a process than an isolated object.

What are the destinies of national pop musics in the age of mechanical reproduction and under the power of a multinational market? Experience seems to tell us that the more advanced a country is (economically and technologically), the faster its national music acquires international features and forgets its "ethnic" flavors.² This applies especially to mainstream pop, less so to other genres of the rock universe.³

In this article I will focus on both mainstream and peripheral productions in their historical context. I will also try to relate them to genres, styles, moods and fads by recalling the debate accompanying their rise and fall: debates which have always been very passionate and popular, involving not only journalists and fans, but also intellectuals, academicians and public figures.

The history of more recent popular music in Italy is the history—paralleled in many other countries—of an emancipation from "local colors" to a cosmopolitan style where it is hard to tell the Italian from the English or the African. This is at least the main trend. In many cases, even the final sign of "domesticity" (i.e., national language) is abandoned for English. Classical and contemporary "serious" music have long achieved the condition of universality: there is nothing particularly "Austrian" in Mozart as there is nothing particularly "American" in Milton Babbitt. They both write in a cosmopolitan language that can be fully appreciated by a cosmopolitan public. In the same way, jazz has also accomplished this process: the opportunities for musicians to share their experiences and tour everywhere have created an international community of jazz musicians which has long included people from all continents and races, so that jazz today is no longer a particular expression of Afro-American culture but an open-ended language.⁴ This process should not be seen as inevi-

table, as there is indeed resistance, especially in the fields of rock and soul where, more than in other fields, the "social" interacts with the music.

Statistics show this trend only at a very general level. In Italy in 1986, record sales were distributed like this: 35% national pop versus 65% international, mainly Anglo-Saxon, pop, as far as LPs and cassettes are concerned; for singles, the breakdown is 20% national pop versus 80% international pop. Only ten years earlier figures clearly mirrored a more balanced market: national pop accounted for 53% (LPs) and 42% (singles).⁵ It all began in 1948, when the first foreign catalogues were launched on the home market by a couple of domestic record companies at a moment in which one-third of the record sales was shared by symphonic and operatic music. Italy is the thirteenth country in the world in terms of sales revenues (the United States is first, followed by Japan and West Germany) but only the twenty-third in individual expenditures on records and hi-fi equipment (here Sweden is first, followed by the Netherlands and West Germany; the United States is sixth).⁶

I have isolated three main areas inside Italian popular music: *tradition*, *exoticism* and *cosmopolitanism*.

TRADITION

The first area, tradition, is made up of what is generally known as *canzone all'italiana* (Italian-style song). Its roots are in the late nineteenth-century *romanza* and *aria* from operas and operettas. It is an evergreen genre, always repeating itself. From *O sole mio* (early twentieth century) to Romina and Albano's songs of today, the only remarkable difference lies in sound quality and in the orchestral arrangements, two parameters that have to do mostly with technological developments and the packaging of the song, rather than its composition. Lyricists pick up from a long established repertoire of ready-made formulas, synthesizing the symbolic universe of an "average" Italian.

Irony does not belong here, as the main functions of this music range from a Wagnerian-like effect—to create a brief moment of rapture through the beauty of the melody—to pure entertainment. The most famous voices are all here, insofar as traditional (melodic) song is a distillation of our operatic past reaching towards more modest ends. Here are some names: Beniamino

Gigli, Odoardo Spadaro, Carlo Buti, Ernesto Bonino, Luciano Tajoli, Claudio Villa, Nilla Pizzi, and Achille Togliani among the singers; Bixio-Cherubini, Giovanni D'Anzi, E. A. Mario, Libero Bovio, and Vittorio Mascheroni among the composers.

EXOTICISM

The area of exoticism involves the opening up to the "other," i.e., fashionable foreign cultures appropriated with inevitable ironic effects. The singers and composers are virtually the same ones as before, with some relevant additions, notably Renato Carosone and Fred Buscaglione in the late 1950s and Paolo Conte later (not to mention other great names halfway between song and cabaret, such as Giorgio Gaber, Dario Fo and Enzo Jannacci). Latin American soundscapes and rhythms were very popular in the 1950s, thanks to people like Xavier Cugat and Perez Prado, with the result that there were Italian songs about Brazilian beaches, Mexican calypso and Creole beauties, alongside countless songs about toreadors, pampas, Dutch tulips, Chicago gangsters and African tribes. All were composed in the spirit of the "expropriated" culture. Extremely ironical, these songs are among our finest and most original products, and worthy of extended comment.

Fred Buscaglione "played the role of a provincial Humphrey Bogart, distorting the American cliché" (Fabbri 1982: 75) in ill-fated stories of machismo and gangsters' lives that were set in a suburban environment halfway between Chicago's skid rows and Turin's industrial zone. Renato Carosone mocked traditional torch songs and ridiculed the various exotic fads arriving in Italy. His songs were populated with camels, toreadors and Saracens. Paolo Conte wrote some of the best pop songs of the 1960s, and in the 1970s he gained further fame as singer/performer, and not only in Italy. His songs are a mixture of Latin blends and swing, sung in a hoarse voice similar to Tom Waits's, with outdated night-club arrangements long before Joe Jackson and the like launched this type of challenge to rock music.

I should add Adriano Celentano to this list. In Italy he is what Frank Sinatra is (or was) in the United States, equally active in both music and cinema. Many of his songs employ nonindigenous material, though certainly Italian sounding. One in particular is worth quoting: the novelty song *Prisencolinensinainciusol* (1972),

an experiment with funky riffs and rap singing in a totally invented language sounding much like American-English, long before hip-hop culture came to light. Something similar had been attempted by Bruno Lauzi some ten years earlier: his *Frigideiru* was sung in Genoese dialect, whose sounds are very close to Portuguese, but in a Brazilian spirit just to accentuate the similarities and fake the samba. British and American influences have never really appeared as "exotic," first because they were rarely perceived as that alien even under the nationalistic fascist regime, and second because from the mid-1950s they increasingly became part of our culture. The "exotic" had to air a forbidden scent which a postcard-like Spain or a never-seen Brazil fitted perfectly, but England and America did not.

COSMOPOLITISM

With the concept of cosmopolitanism I want to refer to a music that tends to disguise its geographical origins and displays a sound able to capture audiences beyond national boundaries. To be so marketable it must meet the requirements of a state-of-the-art packaging, speak English and, of course, have the right promotion. Like many other countries such as Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Japan and France, Italy has long cultivated this cosmopolitan attitude which rejects the idea of a national music inevitably marked by ethnic stereotypes (in our case, a mandolin and a serenade in the moonlight). In the 1960s we had songs covered in English by such stars as Dusty Springfield (*You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*) and Cilla Black (*You're My World*) that were big hits in the United Kingdom, as well as Gigliola Cinquetti's Italian hits sung in English by herself, and the instrumental hits by Nini Rosso and Ennio Morricone. The pioneer had been Domenico Modugno, whose *Volare* sold more than 22 million copies worldwide, but he did it in Italian. In his tracks, Drupi and Umberto Tozzi had a certain success abroad in the 1970s (the latter's *Gloria*, covered by Laura Branigan, sold more than six million copies). It is in the 1970s, though, that we see the affirmation of a "Made in Italy" sound, exported abroad and topping the charts even in the United States. It was first disco music (Macho, Vivien Vee, D. D. Sound, Raf), a producer's music promoted by small rampant indies, then pop-rock (Franco Battiato, Lucio Dalla, Gianna Nannini and Angelo Branduardi), soul (Pino Daniele, Zucchero) and teenage pop (Eros Ramazzotti) which topped the European charts.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RECENT ITALIAN POP

The Beginnings

Where can we find the roots of the modern *canzone*, i.e., what has represented "tradition" in Italian popular music for more than a century? Some say opera, some say radio. The grammatical characteristics of the genre *canzone* come from opera, and more precisely from *romanza*. The industrial characteristics of the genre come instead from the radio (1920s), which supplanted the live music of *café-chantant*.

Popular music was born in Italy (as in most other countries) in a cultivated area from where it then reached the more illiterate strata. Unlike other nations, though, the Italian case presents some further complications in that a national language had only been institutionalized less than a century ago, after the political unification of the country (1861). Therefore, national popular music has a fairly recent tradition, whereas more deeply rooted traditions are to be found in regional music. This is why, for example, Neapolitan song was long entitled to represent Italian music abroad.

Opera and to a lesser extent operetta were among the major sources of a national-popular culture, and the country's unification had in melodrama (Verdi, Bellini, Donizetti) its musical expression. When theatre companies could not reach a town or a village to perform their latest success, brass bands would do so for an audience of enthusiastic country people. Opera contains a number of *arie* which are easy to sing, melodies which go deep inside people's memories and which nearly everybody can appropriate and reproduce in private. The *romanza* is a transitional form between the *aria* and the *canzone*: it somehow paralleled the decadent customs of the new bourgeoisie soaked with "dannunzianesimo" (Ionio 1962). Neapolitan song, an apparently more "folkish" kind of *romanza*, is actually an art song; its birthplace is the theatre, not the street.

"The *romanza* aims at the same epic grandeur as the operatic *aria* but, lacking the stage and the action, it introduces bombastic images as well as choruses and refrains which amplify the oratory and communicability of Verdi's operas with the most grotesque sentimentalism" (Ionio: 16). The first *canzoni* share with the *romanze* a lowering of musical quality and an increase in speech and rhetoric. Words, which no longer have the function of explain-

ing what is happening on stage, are loaded and dilated by the easiest and most exaggerated sentiments. One of the myths of Italian popular music, "bel canto," stems from this relationship—*opera* generates *canzone*. There are no ethnic explanations for this totally academic affair. That is why to praise the "genuineness and spontaneity" of the "Neapolitan soul" as embodied in Robert Murolo's great songs, means to praise the mastery of mass-market-oriented authors who mediated, a little like Stephen Foster in the United States, between an art music for a few and a mass quest for entertainment.

As mentioned above, the industrial origins of Italian song are to be found in the first radio transmissions. In those years (1924-25) we see the definitive decline of *café-chantant*, the delight of Belle Epoque and the craze of Humbertine Italy. The *café-chantant* was the last form of nonindustrial mass entertainment, and it died because of cinema, radio and records. In the words of a great protagonist:

Café-chantant declined when the public's taste sought only passive pleasure in it, by renouncing, with a decorum wrapped in silence and respect, that uproarious participation which started all spectacular actions, gags and enriched that form of representation with surprises and unexpected happenings. (De Angelis: 178)

Once the *café-chantant* disappeared, the songwriter-audience relationship became indirect and more vague. Previously a song was composed to be sung before an often wild gathering of spectators who sat at their tables to eat, drink, dance and interrupt with gibes and jests, manifesting their noisy enjoyment as well as, at times, their noisy disapproval, singing along with the refrain and loudly demanding the beauty on stage to display herself ("la mossa"). From this kind of song we pass to a song produced to be broadcast by metallic antennae and constructed in the studio.

Incidentally, the rock concert has reestablished such informal behavior as noisy and active participation, together with nonmusical activities (such as smoking, eating, drinking, petting and shouting) that interact with the performance. Only, it is often a dialogue between the deaf due to the great disproportion between the volume on stage and that coming from the audience. Therefore, if contemporary youth culture plus electronics have demystified the artist's role by reestablishing a face-to-face relationship, there is always a certain authoritarianism in its gestures, as beau-

tifully exemplified by the discotheque, where the interaction between the DJ and the dancers is extremely poor.

The Making of a National Business

The *Festival della Canzone Italiana* at Sanremo marks the beginning of a new attitude towards song. It was inaugurated in 1951 as a song contest with our best singers and, in a few years, through the promotion of RAI (the public television network), it became one of our most popular events, noted also abroad. Television and the record industry reshaped national musical taste by establishing a hegemonic apparatus intent on reaching all social classes. The Sanremo Festival and other successful programs such as *Canzonissima* played a pivotal role in annihilating regional cultures. The slow decline of the other big festival, that of Neapolitan song, was further evidence of this trend: the festival, which featured songs in Neapolitan dialect, no longer appealed to a more homogeneous TV audience and it was cancelled. However, in the 1970s there was a revival in folk cultures and dialects and, surprisingly enough, the Naples Festival was back again on the air in 1985, with the same old stars who had once made it famous.

Sanremo undoubtedly achieved its aim by mixing ingredients that belong to a typical Mediterranean culture: nationalism, passion, the cult of the mother and Catholicism, plus the well-known rhetoric of the love song, escapism and melancholy. If political Italy had changed after the Liberation, musical Italy and radio remained the same: only they made an industry out of old feelings.

The Song Festival of Sanremo was the climax of a policy of provincial immobilism. It was the celebration of white-haired moms, seas as cruel as love, old boots, missing mountain climbers, patriotism and weird primal imagery such as poppies and geese. (Ionio: 24)

It was designed to give luster to the national tradition and make room for the new one, by and large by expanding that tradition. Therefore it had to arrest and defeat the foreign intrusion which had been influential since the early 1940s. Only in 1964 were foreign artists admitted to the festival, and for many it was a pleasant invasion: Louis Armstrong, the Yardbirds, the Hollies, Sonny & Cher, Marianne Faithfull, Stevie Wonder, Wilson Pickett, Paul Anka, Gene Pitney, Frankie Avalon, Dionne Warwick, Connie Francis and others. They all came to sing songs in Italian that were written especially for them by Italian songwriters. A second

foreign wave began in the early 1980s, after a decade of rejecting foreign music during which the festival experienced its worst season. Now big international stars such as Duran Duran, Queen, Whitney Houston and Sade come as guests only, with their own songs, and do not take part in the contest.

In the 1950s moms and lovers were the protagonists. Here is an example:

Donne! Donne! Donne!
che l'amore trasformerà.
Mamme! Mamme! Mamme!
Questo è il dono che Dio vi fa.

. . .

Son tutte belle le mamme del mondo
quando un bambino si stringono al cuor.
Son le bellezze di un bene profondo,
fatto di sogni, rinunce ed amor.
E' tanto bello quel volto di donna
che veglia un bimbo e riposo non ha
sembra l'immagine della Madonna
sembra l'immagine della bontà

(Tutte le mamme)

(Women! Women! Women!/Love will transform them/Moms!
Moms! Moms!/This is the gift from God/. . . All moms of the world
are beautiful/When they hug their baby to their breast/They are the
beauty of a profound Good/made of dreams, renunciation and love/
It is so beautiful: a woman's face/looking after a baby, never resting/
it resembles the image of the Madonna/it resembles the image of
Goodness—*All the Moms*)

Then there was a hostile Nature: in *E la barca tornò sola* "three young creatures," sons of a "white mamma," die in their "black boat" in their attempt to rescue a "blonde woman" (foreign, certainly not worth being saved). The refrain repeats:

Mare! Mare crudele!
Come puoi cantare
nelle notti scure
quando piange il cuore?

(Sea! Cruel sea!/How can you sing/in the dark night/when the heart
is crying?)

It seems from these and many other examples that Italians were masochistically seduced by pain and did nothing but pray and beg God's grace in a rural environment dominated by churchbells, vespers and outdated jobs such as the chimney sweeper (Borgna 1980: 45). Here are some titles: *La mamma che piange di più* (The mom who cries the most), *Campanaro* (The bell-ringer), *Arrotino* (The Knife-grinder), *Buongiorno tristezza* (Good morning sadness), *Acque amare* (Bitter waters), etc. Alongside this sense-of-guilt-oppressed mainstream we find its opposite, a tradition of thoughtless, happy and meaningless songs, exalting a hedonistic worldview: *Papaveri e papere* (Poppies and geese—which sold 600,000 copies in the United States), *Casetta in Canada* (A little house in Canada), *Arrivano i nostri* (Our soldiers are here), *Arriva la corriera* (The bus is coming), *Quanto è buono il bacio con le pere* (How good is a kiss with pears), etc.

In 1958 the management of the festival was taken over by a private organization. This coincides with its new international resonance. Domenico Modugno tops the world's charts with *Volare* (real title: *Nel blu dipinto di blu*), a song covered by Ella Fitzgerald among others. Its sales—22 million—are second only to Bing Crosby's *White Christmas*. The following year Modugno repeated his success with *Piove*: 14 million sales and 132 covers. Together with the already mentioned Carosone and Buscaglione, he was one of the few innovative personalities in a climate of general mediocrity. He was, as it were, the Stanislavski of Italian popular music, creating "a personality identifiable with the song's protagonist" (Fabbri: 76)

Something was happening though, and our Messrs. Joneses didn't know what it was. The record companies did: in 1958 RCA started to distribute Elvis's records on the home market and a certain Adriano Celentano won a public competition for his imitation of Jerry Lewis. He then appeared in Fellini's *La dolce vita* to sing *Teddy Bear* and shake his hips like Elvis the Pelvis. In a few years he would become our most successful popular artist, with countless records and movies and with a three-month appearance on the Saturday night TV live show (1987) that broke almost every rule of mass entertainment.

Rock in Italy

America had occupied us, freed us and was ready to transform us according to its view, writes Alessandro Portelli (1977: 21). Suspicion on the one hand, fascination and imitation on the other:

these were the reactions to the American invasion. In the late 1930s there had already been a "swing craze" (Alberto Rabagliati, Natalino Otto, and Trio Lescano), but it was in the 1950s that American popular culture entered everybody's home via movies and rock and roll. The stereotype of the young proletarian who apes the American way of life is beautifully mocked by Renato Carosone in *Tu vo'ffa l'americano* (You want to be like an American), where Neapolitan dialect is mixed with rock and roll. Comedian Albert Sordi gave such a character a brilliant cinematographic representation in *Un americano a Roma* (An American in Rome). The Quartetto Cetra, our most successful vocal group ever and still going strong today, cut *Pummarola Boat* ("pummarola," a Neapolitan word, is tomato sauce for spaghetti), after Belafonte's hit *Banana Boat*. As somebody said in those years, "when America sneezed, Italy caught a cold."

Rock was experienced in a very particular way in Italy: we could not select among the products they sent us, and what came was Pat Boone, Frankie Laine, Paul Anka, and Neil Sedaka and not the original wave of rockers, such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Bo Diddley. The same parcel contained both pop and rock and roll, which in America are two different things, but in Italy were perceived as one, since we ignored the cultural relationships behind them (Portelli 1977: 22). Unlike previous fads, though, such as the various Latin dances that had swept over the country (cha-cha, mambo, calypso), rock and roll was not merely a dance but a whole culture, a model of consuming, a project for redefining social relations (Portelli 1977). In Italy Pat Boone had the same disruptive impact that Jack Kerouac had had on the previous generation, and his social effect was more important than the quality of his music. Finally, there was something to oppose to schmaltzy adult pop. Youths who wanted to make it in the record business had to take on English pseudonyms: a first neglected generation featured John Bolero, Piero Trombetta and the Others. Then came Ricky Gianco, Tony Renis, Joe Sentieri, Little Tony, Betty Curtis and more. If it was only an imitative wave, it was also a first step towards a deprovincialization of our musical habits. In the United States rock and roll represented partly the "norm" and partly the "transgression"; in Italy it was only "transgression," for private life, sexual behavior and language, and it was "conservative" only in its imperialistic ideology (Portelli 1977). Also, the social composition of the rock and roll audience revealed some deep differences: in the Anglo-Saxon countries rock was aimed particularly at working-class kids,

whereas in Italy it caught on in middle-class environments, because the former had less money and spare time (Portelli 1977).

Italian rock is more important from the standpoint of social rather than musical history. Our acts played mostly for a domestic audience, rarely entering the charts of other countries (*Premiata Forneria Marconi* is the only Italian group mentioned in *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*). A certain lack of originality may also be due to the different organization of the Italian music business: here groups do not get any advances to produce their records; it is their label which pays for and organizes production. This makes the artist-label relationship far less flexible than it is elsewhere, although financially less risky. Italian rock in the 1960s (beat) and part of the 1970s was controlled by the same labels that produced traditional pop, which largely accounts for its mainstream nature. For a long time rock in Italy was perceived as merely a musical genre, not as a culture or a way of life: "the only way of participating actively in this music was through the possession of records . . . rock concerts in Italy can be seen as claiming the status of a representation of a musical genre" (Fiori: 267).

In addition, neither the music nor generational identity was ever the scope of aggregation. Italian youth was not so fragmented as to turn to rock as a sheet anchor (Carrera 1980: 187). As David Bowie once said in an interview, in almost every country except for Britain and America there exist familial bonds. Only a few countries "need" rock and roll: Britain and America, Germany perhaps, but not France and Italy. Rock provides a certain type of family life and a sense of community which is missing in those countries that are characterized by a stronger individualism (Carrera 1980). Nevertheless, an important underground movement developed in Italy, with roots in a bohemian, romantic ideology, and also involving some avant-garde trends in the arts, literature, criticism and politics.

Political Song and the Singer-Songwriters

In the 1960s Italy experienced a great many changes. For a couple of years the audience was split into two: fans of the *canzone melodica* and fans of *urlatori* (shouters), as the new generation of singers whose patterns were no longer the operatic *bel canto* but the hoarse, sexy voices of Elvis, Belafonte and the Platters were called. The *urlatori*—Mina, Celentano, Tony Dallara—broke with the mellow, confidential crooning of the melodic singer, although the distinction ultimately remained internal to the same big busi-

ness/TV logic. Outside that logic was a third stream of singer-songwriters, the *cantautori*. Some of them were immediately popular, though preserving a certain nonconformism in their songs—Pino Donaggio, Edoardo Vianello and Gianni Meccia; others remained more at the margins, either for the unusual poetical quality of their lyrics—Fabrizio De André, Luigi Tenco and Gino Paoli—or for their provocative, cabaret-like gestures—Enzo Jannacci and Giorgio Gaber. The “Genoese school” and the “Milanese school” addressed a bourgeois, intellectual audience who were tired of the boy-meets-girl and broken-hearts clichés.

A more radical movement developed in the field of political song, where musicians did not speak only for themselves; they spoke also for a collectivity with which they identified and for which they served as militants. The political song of the 1960s had its roots in the socialist and anarchist repertoire of the early twentieth century and in the music of the oppressed classes, such as peasants and blue-collar workers. The movement emerged from the action of some intellectuals and musicians who formed *Cantacronache*, a group that tried to elaborate alternative styles to the mediocrity of national song as represented at Sanremo. Among those people were Italo Calvino, Franco Fortini, Michele Straniero, Sergio Liberovici, Franco Amodè and others who were closely related to the political and artistic avant-garde and the publishing house Edizioni Avanti, which issued the journal *Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano*, a basic source of information for understanding the climate of those years.

Cantacronache was an original experiment, but it remained largely an intellectual movement. The failure of its project “is understandable since it was still attached to the old conception of song as a text, independent from its musical performance and therefore documented on cheaply produced records” (Fabbri: 77). Yet *Cantacronache* played a pivotal role within the political song’s renaissance, which in Italy performed a function similar to underground rock in the United States in proposing music as a vehicle for political change. Until the struggles of the late 1960s, political song remained encapsulated within marginal circuits, for a militant public. After 1968 it was discovered by students and acquired almost a mass dimension. In the words of a young commentator who was very close to that movement, “political song is the true civil poetry of those years, a poetry addressed to the masses that can be used in a historical moment when printed poetry seems to have nothing to say to anyone but itself” (Portelli 1976: 159).

The primacy of politics over the private was best expressed by Paolo Pietrangeli's *Valle Giulia*:

E tu mi guardavi con occhi stanchi
ma c'erano cose certo più importanti

(And you looked at me with your tired eyes/but there were certainly more important things)

However, it was neither the political *cantautori* of the movement, such as Paolo Pietrangeli (who was also a film director), Giovanna Marini (a musicologist and a teacher), Ivan Della Mea, Pierangelo Bertoli, Gualtiero Bertelli, etc., nor such individualists as Gino Paoli or Luigi Tenco who broke through to a larger audience. It was a second generation, starting in the early 1970s, who mediated between the political tones of the former and the existential tones of the latter, by using a more fashionable language made up of textbookish poetry, TV, advertising slogans and New Left jargon. Francesco Guccini, Antonello Venditti, Francesco De Gregori, Edoardo Bennato and Claudio Lolli, to cite the most popular ones, were, for almost a decade, the heroes of a generation (the "post-1968 generation") in a period characterized by a return to the private sphere but with a "political consciousness." It was the moment of civil rights battles, and Italian youth also tested its civil sensibility on songs, songs that spoke of abortion, unemployment and the refusal to be mere entertainment. The optimism of the 1960s was transformed into an alert melancholy which sometimes was nothing but consolatory self-indulgence.

In the early 1970s every record is a new and uncomfortable friend entering a teenage home, not only a singer but an elder brother and advisor in a moment in which all political leaders had failed and traditional leaders (teachers, parents) were refused. (Carrera 1980: 135)

The Italian *cantautore* was another version, like the French chansonnier or the American folk singer, of the individual artist in whom art and life are one and the same thing: all sharing the myth of unconstrained freedom of expression and authenticity of intentions. Values come before facts in the land of Bohemia. The petty-bourgeois roots of Italian *cantautori* and their universe, at home in the new parlor of the contemporary age, the teenage bedroom, opened the way to their success in a country where the

petty bourgeoisie was, for Gramsci, the only truly national class, dictating behavioral rules to the working and middle classes (Pintor: 64). However, Left culture legitimated the movement of *cantautori* as something "indigenous" with which to oppose the Anglo-Saxon invasion; they became the spokespersons of a generation, adored and denigrated at the same time. Not everybody liked them: the anonymous authors of a pamphlet on "the musical colonization of a Mediterranean country" (Anonimo 1976) say that if you could laugh at phrases such as "grazie dei fior, mi han fatto male ma li ho graditi" (thanks for the flowers, they hurt me but I appreciated them), the refrain of a famous Sanremo song of the early 1950s, you could not easily mock lyrics that were just as stupid—such as "quando sei qui con me questa stanza non ha più pareti ma alberi" (when you are here by me this room has no more walls only trees), from a famous song by Gino Paoli—but "culturally legitimated."

Alessandro Carrera (1980) makes a fine comparison between *cantautori* and "commedia all'italiana" (comedy Italian style): both are deeply influenced by America, *the model*; they speak of it obsessively and utilize its ways but the result is unmistakably Italian. Sentimentalism is a common thread in our popular culture, from Edmondo De Amicis to Antonello Venditti through Vittorio De Sica: "stopping just short of the emotionally dramatic which is typical of Italian style comedy, is a feature of *canzone d'autore* too, where melancholy has the function of keeping away any dangerous intrusion into the dramatic" (Carrera: 135). Our popular culture rarely attains the dimension of tragedy; it stops at melancholy.

The enormous success of the second generation of singer-songwriters, which also contributed to a massive rediscovery of the first,⁷ can be understood better if we remember that rock bands were virtually banned from Italian concert halls for a number of years because of the riotous situations they inspired. Led Zeppelin was the last group allowed to play in Milan (1971). Then there followed an almost total blackout until the late 1970s. Impresarios were afraid to risk incidents and public administrations were afraid of granting permits.

The new *canzone d'autore* provided the repertoire for any Italian teenager able to pick the guitar and sing along. These songs were suited for socializing on the school bus, on a train ride to Florence, at beach parties before the advent of "ghetto blasters," on airplanes taking middle-class children to discover the remains of swinging London. It is our largest repertoire of songs, and a truly folk one, since young people would soon forget the original

version on record and the songs circulated orally as a sort of visiting card in the youth community. You often learned the songs from a friend, at a school party or on a parish trip: as a student you could not afford to buy many records and private radio stations had not appeared yet. On the other hand, rock culture never penetrated so deeply into teenage life. Its media were records, which are made for listening or dancing, and concerts, where at most you can vent your anguish by shouting it out with your peers. To sing a song and understand its words is a different experience, it gives a sense of accomplishment and gratification never attained by rock (it was Goethe who said that to understand art one must be able to recreate it): only a few people could sing in English and even fewer understood what they were saying. Moreover, only a limited number of rock songs were suited to the acoustic guitar. The story of rock in Italy is the story of passing passions that come and go but never remain crucial in people's likes. Rock waves agitate along the periphery, not inside life-styles that were always somewhat anticonformist. The silent majority of Italian youth are not rock-oriented, they are more attracted by a middle-of-the-road pop: that means essentially love ballads and dance music.

I would argue that the phenomenon of *canzone d'autore*, which although not extinguished is today less significant, contributed much to the process of cultural and political socialization but failed as a cultural project. Instead of renovating our musical tradition, it became an indistinguishable part of it. In doing so it increasingly appealed to a self-indulgent audience who, over the years, preferred living rooms to clubs, endless conversations on the phone to shouting at school assemblies; an audience frightened by the disco invasion and who denied a bodily participation in music. Italian youth was divided between, on the one hand, suburban kids and those in the province turned on by disco or, more rarely, heavy metal and, on the other hand, high school urbanites, often militants of the Left or Catholic youth associations, enraptured by the moralism of Venditti or by Guccini's paternalism.

Music and Youth Movements in the 1970s

The early 1970s are a time of tough clashes at concert halls, involving anarchist-like attitudes caught in slogans such as "riprendiamoci la musica" (let's take music back) and "la musica é nostra, non si paga" (the music is ours, we won't pay for it). Rock concerts become the anomalous ground of a class struggle where

students, young proletarians and the unemployed are pitted against concert promoters, co-opted stars and multinationals. Left parties were puzzled and the PCI condemned it all as hooliganism. "People go to a concert as if they were going to a demonstration against somebody and something" (Carrera 1980: 133). An example: Joan Baez is in Rome, on March 23, 1973; somebody asks her to play for free, for the proletarians of *la Magliana*, a poor Roman neighborhood. First she says yes, then no. Stampa Alternativa, a radical organization, hands out a flyer entitled "Joan Baez, Orietta Berti, Andreotti" (Orietta Berti was identified with reactionary pop and Andreotti was the Christian Democrat leader of the government). The text of the flyer read:

Joan Baez said yes to the masters, no to the proletarians! Tonight the police are going to massacre the proletarians who want to get in without paying. WE say no to Joan Baez, this Orietta Berti servant of the Yankees.

Many myths collapsed in those years, and for some hyper-radical fringes the very myth of music had to be debunked: "For us music-commodity is among the worst drugs Capital uses to narcotize and dupe us. We don't see anything funny in letting us being duped for free or at a political price" (Stampa Alternativa 1974).

The mid-70s were characterized by informal and spontaneous music festivals, organized by underground groups such as the staff of *Re Nudo*, a fanzine of pivotal importance read by many youths on the Left. The bottom line was often "we make our own music," so you are all invited to "bring your own tin whistles, bongos, guitars, etc." The following "crisis of Politics" yielded a range of interests around "new needs" such as new irrationality, alternative therapies, happiness, spirituality, etc. The debate, often enlarged to include academicians such as Agnes Heller and the Budapest School, was carried out in journals such as *Ombre Rosse*, *Aut-Aut*, *Realismo*, newspapers such as *Lotta Continua* and many private radio stations such as *Radio Popolare* (Milan), *Radio Città Futura* (Rome) and *Controradio* (Florence).

In the meantime it had become evident that rock had failed in its utopian project: it was by no means a universal language able to aggregate and give answers to the youth masses of the world, nor was it sufficient to offer the big stars as fantasy icons for youths enraged and without a future. As a consequence, many turned to other genres such as jazz, contemporary serious music (Stockhausen became a kind of star for many) and ethnic, minority music. Jazz, especially, enjoyed a great popularity thanks to fes-

tivals that attracted the world's best musicians. An independent label, *Black Saint*, received honors from *Down Beat* as the best "indie" of the year for recording many avant-garde jazz musicians. The extreme Left showed a great interest in the problem of negritude, which partially accounts for the incredible revival of blues and jazz, for many in those years a real "discovery."

Only a few musicians attempted to make a creative synthesis of the various experiences of music in Italy, and those who did had a political and cultural project behind their music. Among these were *Stormy Six*, who collaborated with Henry Cow, Eltron Fou and the organization Rock in Opposition. They mixed Brechtian flavors with Zappian structures and avant-garde techniques. They were among the founders of *L'Orchestra*, an independent label that also functioned as a music school and a publishing and distribution house, and were connected to other progressive centers such as *Il Circolo la Comune*, *Centro S. Marta* (Milan) and later with other indies such as *Cramps* and *Ultima Spiaggia*, all united in the *Consorzio di Comunicazione Sonora*. *Gruppo Folk Internazionale* was another outstanding group (later to become *Ensemble Ovadia*) at *L'Orchestra*, featuring fine research into East European folk dances, which were then relaunched employing techniques drawn both from rock and avant-garde music. Finally, there was Demetrio Stratos, an extraordinarily talented vocalist who experimented and played with John Cage and led a progressive rock-jazz group called *Area*.

The New Scene

The 1970s in Italy had starred the singer-songwriter (*cantautore*) whose ideas and values, communicated by his music, were far more important than the techniques used to communicate them. In short, it did not really matter if he could play his guitar well or not. Punk rock, which started in Italy in 1977, dealt a big blow to that sort of idealistic mannerism, since it turned it upside down: for punk, again, technical skills did not count for much; what counted were effects, appearances, surfaces, rather than intentions, propositions or projects (or better: punk had certainly a project behind itself, but it did not manifest it with the consolidated Left-wing codes of dialectics, for example). While John Belushi in America maltreated the well-bred, preppy-type, boy-with-the-guitar in a memorable scene in *Animal House*, punk rockers redimensionalized the universal appeal of the *cantautori*, opening a space for humor and self-irony and sweeping away the remains of a decadent rock with its baroque-like flavors and orientalist burdens. Punk in Italy took the form of "rock demenziale" (demen-

tial rock), characterized from its very beginnings by a great *esprit de finesse* that was often deliberately matched by very coarse results (Skiantos's first LP is titled *Inascoltabile*, i.e., Inaudible).

The "movement of '77" signalled the advent of a new generation that was still primarily concerned with politics, but in an enlarged sense, and inscribed within a nihilistic worldview. Not only politics in the traditional sense was subverted, but also language and music. Punk is neither art nor anything which "communicates" anything. That is why rock strikes back: rock has never disguised its commodity-character. Only, the rock which punk revives is not the good-vibrations-rock, but a rock deconstructed according to, as it were, a poetic of a Cubist kind, which deconstructs fragments of the collective musical memory after losing the instructions. Italian punk in its beginning was a proletarian urban music, but unlike British punk it was very intellectual too, close (at least in its original nucleus in Bologna) to the post-structuralist position of people like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. As Umberto Eco said in his introduction to his 1984 essays on Italian culture,⁸ "desire" is the catchword that best sums up these last few years' political discussion, and punks from Bologna, tied to *Collettivo A/Traverso*, *Radio Alice*, *Autonomia* and *DAMS* (Faculty of Music, Visual and Performing Arts), were the first to advertise it. It simply substituted, as it were, the outdated catchword "need."

Punk was not only an anti-politics but also a self-conscious aesthetization of everyday life under the sign of style. The notion of "styling" was applied to the "self," stylized as all the other gadgets used to adorn the body and its appendages. Maria Corti, one of our finest linguists, wrote an article on the language of demential rock (1982), where we read: "unlike traditional song, rock song makes use of perfect rhymes not to tie up but rather to break the narrative continuity." Demential groups frequently exploit the rhetorical device of *paronomasia* (the changing of a single phoneme):

Basta! Non voglio la pasta
odio la posta rifiuto la festa

It results in a weird crossing of disparate semantic fields.

Skiantos were the seminal punk band in Italy. Their songs are undoubtedly marked by the standards of international punk rock, but have roots in the national tradition of "avanspettacolo" (a

once popular form of review, now extinct) as far as the lyrics are concerned, e.g., the disenchanted idiocy of *Makaroni*:

Makaroni, sono buoni
al ragù, mi piaci tu

(Makaroni, I like them/ with meat sauce, I like you)

In their concerts they sometimes showed up on stage with pots and forks, cooked spaghetti and ate before the public who, of course, did not watch in silence but participated in the dinner by throwing all kinds of rotten vegetables at them. Food was indeed their favorite topic: Chinotto (an Italian soft drink), beans, cheese, makaroni; let's take, for example, *Fagioli* (Beans):

I fagioli non li posso mangiare
i fagioli mi fanno vomitare
i fagioli non li riesco a digerire
i fagioli mi fanno soffrire
Fagioli Fagioli Fagioli . . .

(Beans, I can't eat them/Beans, they make me throw up/Beans, I can't digest them/Beans, they make me suffer/Beans, Beans, Beans . . .)

Other bands who emerged out of the new wave were *Gaz Nevada*, *Stupid Set*, *Confusional Quartet*, *Kaos Rock* and the women groups *Kendeggina Gang*, *Clito* and *Elettricità*.

In the 1980s a major topic concerns *the renaissance of the province* in Italy, a traditionally conservative environment which instead has generated some of the most interesting experiences in recent youth music. The province, from Rimini to Pordenone, from Catania to S. Giovanni Valdarno, is linked to big cities such as New York and London in the way a terminal is. They exist within the same global village which offers the same epidermal tensions and the same existential angst. Garage bands, fanzines and indies emerge everywhere away from the downtowns, in the periphery. They frequently come to light thanks to TV and radio programs such as *Mr. Fantasy* (TV, from 1982 to 1984), *DOC* (TV, from 1987), *Un certo discorso* (radio, from 1977 to 1987), *RAI Stereonotte* (Radio, from 1981), *Stereodrome* (Radio, from 1985); all of them promoting a nonconventional musical culture. A new typology of music maker is also taking over, one no longer modelled upon a single,

influential star such as Lou Reed or Sid Vicious, but rather upon sound manipulators such as Brian Eno and his teachings about electronic gadgetry. "We have before us a generation of super-equipped mutants who are musically semi-illiterate but can all produce the same lacerating sound" (Dentice: 137). In this trend there are musicians who have worked with electronics for years and have reached a wider public by making popular music of high quality: Franco Battiato, first of all, who brought some fresh air to the pop scene, *Matia Bazar*, big stars in Japan, *Krisma* and *Righeira*. In the circuit of the hype suburban clubs in Milan, Turin and Florence, one hears and sees heavy-metal kids, rockabillies and skinheads. Then there is Naples, where funk lives. You get off at Napoli Centrale (the main railroad station) and you think you are on 14th Street in Manhattan: the same sounds from the same tower-speakers outside hi-tech stores, the same fast-food, same T-shirt stands, same smells, same cries, the same race mix. There is a tradition of "Neapolitan soul music," rooted in the 1970s, that breaks out in the 1980s: *Pino Daniele*, *Enzo Avitabile*, *Tullio De Piscopo*, *Toni Esposito*, *Bisca*, *Avion Travel* (from Caserta). *Naples like New York* is the title of a book recently published about this type of cultural syncretism. "Harlem Meets Naples" was a successful three-day event that took place at the Apollo Theatre in the Fall of 1987, including most of the abovementioned musicians and some famous black stars such as James Brown and the Temptations.

International Italy

The late 1970s not only saw a domestic rock renovated by the demential wave, it also saw the birth of a few independent labels producing a disco sound that was soon to top the charts worldwide. Among them were *Baby Records* run by Fratelli La Bionda (*D. D. Sound*) and *Goody Music*, with producer Mauro Malavasi who had international hits with *Macho* (I'm a man) and *Peter Jacques Band* (Fire night dance). Italian disco was the only genre not touched by the crisis which affected the record industry especially between 1981 and 1984. *Raf's Self-Control*, covered by Laura Branigan, sold about 12 million records and others like Mike Francis, Sandy Marton and many anonymous one-hit-wonder productions did well too.

As far as pop and soft rock are concerned, Lucio Dalla, Angelo Branduardi, Fabrizio De Andrè, Gianna Nannini, Franco Battiato, Vasco Rossi, Eros Ramazzotti, Matia Bazar are long established

chart toppers in Europe. New underground group such as *Denovo*, *Litfiba*, *Not Moving* and *CCCP* (with their statements in favor of an East European aesthetics) are being paid attention by the Anglo-Saxon critics and tour regularly in France, Spain and West Germany in the so-called independent circuit. Most of this circuit is fed by a generation of musicians who have matured in post-punk, British new wave and American funk. The gap between the majors—with their traditional approach—and the indies—bringing on new ideas and people—is far less wide than it was even five years earlier. The Italian record market is a copy of any other major market in the world: it is able to provide “international music” for export and recreate many familiar situations within subcultures.

To conclude by returning to the title of this paper, I would say that *tradition* is alive and well, covering most of home sales (also thanks to the commercial renaissance of the Sanremo Festival), *exoticism* has practically disappeared and been taken over by *cosmopolitan* trends that address a public attuned to international waves and the lingua franca of video. Mike Francis, Italian, does not sing *Together* for an Italian audience, although at the local disco they are all Italians dancing to his record. He is not interested in being recognized as Italian, nor is his public, who knows it is behaving exactly like its contemporaries on other dance floors on the other side of the globe. But in the meantime we see an opposite signal: Steven Brown, of *Tuxedomoon* (one of the major art-rock cult bands, from California) has just released an LP of Luigi Tenco covers, *sung in Italian*. Is a new poetic of *Verfremdung* taking over?

1. See I. Chambers, *Urban Rhythms; Popular Music and Popular Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

2. This should not be taken as a deterministic law: the case of Japan is a remarkable exception to it, insofar as this country (second only to the United States in terms of economy and technology) still privileges homemade music (80-85%) against English-sung/multinational products.

3. Think of Abba, for example, the Swedish group that sold millions of records everywhere: there is nothing particularly “Swedish” in their songs, or in their image. On the contrary, their style is a camp blend of evergreen pop à la Barry Manilow and teenage pop à la Bee Gees. This is what made them international stars.

4. E.g., S. Hosokawa, paraphrasing the famous last line of Carles and Comolli's book on *Free Jazz and Black Power*, "not a black problem, but a white and a yellow problem too." (Hosokawa, "Free Jazz in Giappone," in *Musica/Realtà* 9, 1983).
5. P. Prato, *Strategie della cultura di massa: il caso dell'industria fonografica*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Turin, 1987.
6. Ibidem, pp. 123-24.
7. De Andrè was the link between the two; he was very popular in the 1960s as an isolated aristocratic minstrel and he is still popular today.
8. U. Eco., *Sette anni di desiderio* (Milano: Bompiani, 1984).

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