



tradizioni

NEWSLETTER OF THE ITALIAN FOLK ART FEDERATION OF AMERICA

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The Revolutionary Sound

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF ITALIAN FOLK MUSIC

by Anna L. Chairetakis

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Part 1 established that the aesthetic criteria by which we judge and respond to our own music do not apply to most world music; what is needed is a new frame of reference, new ways of organizing our perceptions and of making sense of the profusion of musical styles which Italy has to offer.

Part II

Let us outline the largest and most obvious contrast within Italian folk music; that between the North and the South. Southern songs are mainly performed *solo*; **where they are performed in chorus, vocal blend tends to be ragged and voices are organized in melodic and rhythmic unison, or in heterophony: the individual is always prominent. The predominant vocal presentation of the South is highpitched, narrow, nasal, sometimes harsh; the singer's vocal chords are tense. Melodies are undulating or descending in shape with narrow intervals between notes, and frequently ornamented through the use of much melisma.** (Scales and harmonies are modal; in relatively "modern" songs we find resolutions in minor keys.) Text is extremely important in the South—**most songs are lyric poems with little or no repetition. Rhythm is complex, or free (arrhythmic). The prevailing mood is one of sadness, even anguish, or (as in the tarantellas) one of joy driven by determination, or a certain hypnotic**

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RECIPIENT OF N.E.A. GRANT

The National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. has awarded I.F.A.F.A. a \$24,453.00 grant. The purpose of the grant is to produce a series of L.P. albums of Italian folk music and songs performed by first generation Italian immigrants living in the U.S. Anna Chairetakis is to supervise and direct the project. (Details in next newsletter.)

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Fourth Annual Conference and Workshop of IFAFA is planned for the weekend of October 2-4, 1981, at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. The conference, chaired by Elba F. Gurzau, Artistic Director, is co-hosted by I. Ballerini of Philadelphia and the Italian Folk Ensemble of Fort Lee, N.J.

The conference is designed to bring together folk groups and other interested parties to share their knowledge of Italian folk songs, dances, costumes and various other aspects of Italian folk art. Members and nonmembers are welcome. For additional details, write E. F. Gurzau, c/o IFAFA.

We are particularly grateful to Prof. Joseph E. Laggini of Rutgers for his enthusiasm and for his assistance with the conference. □

The Shirt of the Happy Man

FROM ITALO CALVINO'S FIABE ITALIANE

(Recently we recommended the newly released English Translation, *Italian Folk Tales* by George Martin. It has come to our attention that the first printing is sold out. While we wait for a reprint, it is our desire to share with you the charm of one of these fables as translated by Dr. Anthony F. LePera.)

A king had an only son and loved him more than himself. This prince was always unhappy and sad. He spent days staring out into space.

"What is it that you need?" the King would ask. "What is it that you feel?"

"I don't know, father, I don't know myself."

"Are you in love? If you desire a young woman, tell me, and I will see to it that you marry her, be she the daughter of the most powerful King on earth or the neediest peasant girl."

"No, father, I'm not in love."

And the King continued in every way possible to distract him! Theaters, balls, concerts; nothing worked. The Prince became paler and paler day by day. The King put forth an edict and from all corners of the world came the most learned people: philosophers, doctors, and professors. He introduced his son to them and asked them for their advice. They withdrew to think and then returned to the King. "Majesty, we have been thinking and have consulted the stars. This is what you must do. Find a man who is totally content and happy in every-

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THE REVOLUTIONARY SOUND

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pleasure. (We can only touch upon the question of instruments, noting that prior to the 19th century the bagpipe, flute and certain "primitive" percussion instruments were the principal music makers and means of accompaniment in rural areas and among the poorer classes; string and wind ensembles are associated with the artisan classes and the urbanized areas along the coasts.) Varying Mediterranean influences and stylistic genres are the most important in Southern music—depending upon locality these might be: Old Mediterranean (indigenous, montane), Classical Greek (Sicily, Reggio), Byzantine Greek (Calabria, Puglia), Arabic and North African (Sicily, Campanian littoral), Spanish (general, but especially Naples), medieval to early modern French (notable esp. in religious songs and older ballads; the troubadors were influential in medieval Naples and Sicily). The "typical" style described above is associated with and is a product of the complex world of old empires and high culture, in which natural resources were scarce, social life highly stratified, and the sexuality of women strictly controlled. The peasants and others of the poorer classes were both excoriated and stimulated by the civilization they carried.

In Northern music, choruses prevail—before the Alpine-type chorus subsumed almost everything else, there were many very beautiful and unusual varieties of polyphonic chorus all across the Northern region, from Liguria to Friuli. (The old village-style Alpine choruses have themselves been eaten up by large, highly regimented semiprofessional groups, which are part of an unfortunate trend to put the stamp of respectability on folklore, thereby cutting out the heart of its vitality and significance.) **Vocal presentation is open, relaxed and rather lowpitched. Melodies are arched, with medium width intervals between notes, and embellished only where a lead singer**

is present (a lead singer, however, will be quickly joined and submerged by the chorus), and only in certain areas of the North such as the Veneto and Liguria. **Texts are of moderate importance compared to the South, and contain many repeats and nonsense phrases, even where ballads are sung as in Piedmont and Liguria. Rhythms tend to be simple and regular. The predominant mood is one of pleasure, tempered by solemnity (in the Alps), of sweetness, and sometimes of liberating gaiety.** Musically speaking the North is part of Central Europe with its old patterns of communal land holding, work and decision-making. Modern western European harmonies and melodies came into being in the beginning of the 19th century, and it was then that the "orchestral" model of performance was introduced into Northern polyphony.

One way of summing up would be to say that the Southern style lends itself to improvisation, while Northern music is integrative and relies on a certain conformity.

Diego Carpitella has drawn attention to another important feature of Italian folk music: generally, that is the development over many centuries of two valid and divergent traditions—one peasant-worker, the other urban-artisan. (The Neopolitan popular music with which we are all familiar grew largely out of the latter, for example.) And of course, Italy gave rise early to a cultivated "great tradition" in music which has continued into modern times. For centuries there was a creative give and take between these three traditions, as well as between the South and the NorthCenter (for instance, it is believed by scholars that Sicily gave Tuscany her most important poetic and song form, the *strambotto*, in the 12th century). But over the last hundred years, owing to attempts to create a national culture, to military conscription in two wars, the spread of education and the media, the "giving" has been increasingly one-sided: **The Northern model is**

being imposed upon the Southern: the urban upon the rural; the civilized upon the agrarian and working classes. Mass media is damaging folk music/dance troupes many of which only distantly reflect the authentic local traditions, and all too frequently trivialize them.

I was a child living in Southern Italy when I first had the good fortune to hear *musica popolare* in its own social setting—the cries of street vendors, the melancholy songs of mulateers, the *ninna nanne* sung by mothers on their doorsteps, and the strange and compelling tarantelle played on jaws harp, friction drums, tamburi, rattles and scrapers, punctuated by whistling and accompanied by the mournful call of the conch shell and the improvised exchanges between singers. Now, as someone who has been working in this field, it seems to me that it is this Southern music in all of its own local variety, which is least known and appreciated—in large part because we have learned to think of Western music—Western art—as the sole correct and advanced model, and other models as deviant, primitive or exotic. Many Italians and Italian Americans are shocked, even dismayed, when they hear the Arabo-Hispanic sound of the Sicilian *strambotto* or the Neopolitan *fronne a limone*—let alone the revolutionary heterophonic choruses from Calabria or the Sardinian *muttettu*. **There are some valid historical reasons for such reactions, but perhaps this moment of self appraisal, of assertion, for Italians in America, is the right one to draw back the curtains of histories known and told, and take a fresh look at the Southern Italian genius, in music, as in other things.** □

Anna Chairetakis is an anthropologist and a doctoral candidate in Cultural Anthropology at Columbia University. Recently the Italian government bestowed upon her the title of Cavaliere for her unique and scholarly contributions to Italian folk arts.

HAPPY MAN

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thing, and exchange your son's shirt for his."

That same day, the King sent the ambassadors throughout the world to look for a happy, contented man.

They brought to him a priest. "Are you content?" asked the King.

"Oh yes, your Majesty."

"Good, would you like to be my personal bishop?"

"Oh, if it were only possible, your Majesty."

"Get out, get out of here! I am looking for a man who is happy and contented in his state of life, not one who desires to be better off than he is."

And so the King waited for someone else. There was another King, his neighbor, he was told, who was really happy and contented. He had a beautiful and good wife, many children, had conquered all his enemies in war, and the country was at peace. The King, filled with new hope, quickly sent his ambassadors to ask of him his shirt.

The neighboring King received the ambassadors and said, "Yes, yes, I'm not in need of anything; however, when one has so many things, it is too bad he must eventually die and leave everything. Because of this worry, I suffer so much that I don't sleep nights." And the ambassadors thought it best to return empty-handed.

To relieve his desperation, the King went hunting. He fired at a hare and believed he hit it, but the hare, hopping, got away. The King, however, followed her and wandered away from his group. In the open field, he heard a man's voice, singing a refrain. The King stopped suddenly. "He who sings like that must be extremely happy," and, still following the voice, through a vineyard, he saw a young man singing and pruning vines.

"Good day, Majesty," said the young man. "You are in the fields so early in the day!"

"Bless you. Would you like to come with me to the capital? You will be my friend."

"Ah, Majesty, no, I don't think



LAUNEDDAS

Ballo Sardo

by Elba F. Gurzau

Sardinia is the only region of Italy that still has a line dance similar to the ones of the Balkan countries and the Near East. It is called "Ballo Sardo," Sardinian dance, or "Ballo Tondo," round dance. We know it was danced in pre-Christian times because Homer, the Greek poet, mentions it and has Ulysses marvel at the agility of the dancers of the island.

It is often danced by couples side by side in open circle formation, or in an open circle or spiral with no partners. In olden times a man and a woman who were not married were not allowed to hold or touch hands. In some parts of the island it is danced rather sedately often to the singing of three or more people standing in the middle of the circle. In other parts of Sardinia it is very lively, and danced to the music of the "Launeddas," the goatskin bag-pipe or, more recently, the accordion; and in the absence of all of these, to the ringing of church bells.

The "Launeddas" is a primitive instrument, made of canes of varying lengths, separate one from the other, which the player interchanges depending on the sound desired. I am told that because some of the pipes are quite long, when there is much excitement, the musicians stand in a corner facing away from the dancers in order to avoid the possibility of accidents.

There is no bouncing or springing in the Ballo Sardo, it is always close to the ground, almost giving the effect of skating; however when the music becomes lively, the men will kick higher and add a little fancy footwork. The women continue to dance smoothly in a very dignified manner as becomes their regal looking costumes.

A few notes of the music of his favorite dance is all a Sardinian needs to get up and dance.

The figures follow each other according to the music and to the whim of the leading couple. However, from observing the Sardinian people dance, a pattern seems to emerge. □

Elba F. Gurzau is the artistic director of I.F.A.F.A. and also author of the forthcoming book FOLK DANCES, COSTUMES AND CUSTOMS OF ITALY. Dance steps, sheet music and records are available. Write I.F.A.F.A.

about that at all. Thank you. I would not even change places with the Pope."

"But why, such a fine young man like yourself?"

"No, I tell you. I'm happy as I am, and that's that."

Finally! A truly, happy man! thought the king. "Young man, listen, you must do me a favor."

"If I can, certainly, with all my heart, Majesty."

"Wait a minute," and the King who was so over-joyed returned to get his following.

"Come. Come. My son is saved. My son is saved," and he led them to the young man.

"Blessed man," he said, "I will give you all you want. But give me, just give me . . ."

"What, Majesy?"

"My son is about to die. Only you can save him . . . Come here," and, grabbing the young man, he begins to unbutton the youth's jacket.

Suddenly, the King stops and his arms go limp. The happy young man did not have a shirt. □

The Italian Folk Art Federation of America, Inc. is a non-profit, educational federation. Its purpose is to research, preserve and foster interest in the various aspects of Italian folklore.

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This May Be Your LAST ISSUE

We are sending this copy of our newsletter, for we want you to see what it is all about. We know you will not be disappointed in subscribing, and we are certain that you will find the range, scope and depth of the material presented to be unusual, educational, refreshing and not easily available elsewhere.

To receive future issues please mail coupon.

We wish to acknowledge and thank **Michael C. Rainone, Esq.**, for donating his invaluable assistance in the incorporation process for IFAFA. Mr. Rainone is a prominent Philadelphia attorney, active in professional, civic, cultural and community organizations in Philadelphia and in the Delaware Valley area.

Among other appointments, he is a member of the Board of Governors of the Philadelphia Bar Association and a member of the National Italian-American Foundation Development and Public Relations Committee.

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Dr. Carla Bianco, an Italian folklore scholar, is seeking information about the Abruzzesi in the U.S. Here is an excellent opportunity to participate for those whose roots are in the Abruzzi region. Data pertaining to settlement, community organizations, history of immigrating group(s) or family, survival of folklore and culture, and any references or leads would be appreciated enormously. Call or write Dr. Carla Bianco, c/o Anna Chairidakis, 3130 Albany Crescent, New York, N.Y. 10463, (212) 548-9367.

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The second edition of Folk Dances, Costumes and Customs of Italy by Elba F. Gurzau is at the publisher and will be available soon. It is the only book of its kind in English and should be in everyone's library—student, teacher, performer or anyone interested in Italian Folklore. (Write or call I.F.A.F.A. 215-324-1250.)

REFERRAL SERVICE AVAILABLE

If you are interested in having a folk group perform at any of your ethnic festivals or social affairs, contact IFAFA for the name of the group or groups nearest you.

Dressed in colorful folk costumes, each group can present a program tailored to your needs.

I Ballerini, Philadelphia, Pa.;
Balli d'Italia, Balt., Md.;
I Campagnoli, Pittsburgh, Pa.;
Gruppo Folkloristico Duroniese, USA, No. Bergen, N.J.;
Italian Folk Dancers of Padua Academy, Wilmington, Del.;
Italian Folk Ensemble (Ricordi d'Italia), Fort Lee, N.J.;
Italian Folklore Group, Montclair, N.J.;
Italian Folklore Group of Washington, D.C., Arlington, Va.;
Italian Folk Singers of the Lehigh Valley, Catasauqua, Pa.;
Ballerini Rusticani, Reading, Pa.;
St. Martha's Italian Dancers, Akron, O.;
Aventino Troupe Folklorique Italienne, Montreal, Canada.

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