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FOUR

Italian Traditional Music in Adelaide in the 1970s and 1980s

Linda Barwick

To begin, I'd like to raise a few issues that I hope will be clarified by this paper.¹ They relate to the general theme under which this paper was requested for the Second National Folklore Conference in Sydney in October 1986: "multicultural influences upon the Australian folk heritage". The questions I want to raise are these:

- In what sense it is useful to talk about "the Australian folk heritage" in the singular?
- In what avenues might any "multicultural" influences operate?
- How would it be possible to identify such influences after the event?

In the interests of decentring the debate a little, I'd like to turn the theme around and consider instead the Australian influence on Italian traditional culture in Adelaide. But in order to do that, we need to ask: what is Italian traditional culture?

Italy has a number of historical and geographical features that make its traditional popular culture extremely diverse. Political unification did not occur until 1861, and the national language remained largely literary and bureaucratic in use until the twentieth century.² Because of this relatively recent political and linguistic unification of the country, regional cultures characterised by diverse dialects³ and rich oral traditions thrived until quite recently, when the impact of mass media began increasingly to overwhelm the underlying cultural diversity. Some aspects of these traditions have survived more strongly in Australia than

¹ This is an updated version of an article originally published in *Australian Folklore* 1, which is now hard to find. It is reprinted here by request of various scholars, and with permission of the original editor, Graham Seal (Curtin University). Linda Barwick, "Italian Traditional Music in Adelaide", *Australian Folklore* 1 (1987): 44–67, <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/7711>. I have edited the title to include the time period of my closest engagement with Italian music in Adelaide, 1969–1987, and added commentary and additional references in the footnotes.

² Bruno Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana, Biblioteca di grandi saggi*, 5th ed. (Firenze: Sansoni, 1978).

³ Giacomo Devoto and Gabriella Giacomelli, *I dialetti delle regioni d'Italia* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972).

in Italy because of lack of competition from the national language, while others have died out due to changes in social structures in Australia.⁴ Before going on to discuss the Australian situation, it will be helpful to illustrate the diversity of regional cultures by considering some examples of traditional musical styles.⁵

In the south of Italy there has been extensive contact with Greek and Arab traders and settlers over many centuries, and this can be heard in the Islamic features of their traditional music, as in the text of a cartdriver's song, "canzone", recorded by Elsa Guggino at Capaci, Palermo (Sicily), in 1964:

Maiden you came to me in my sleep
three sweet words and you went away
and when I woke in the morning
and felt that you were at my side
I turn towards you and see no-one;
cry, my wife, for your lost husband.⁶

⁴ Camilla Bettoni, "L'italiano in Australia: trasformazioni di una lingua o trasferimenti linguistici?", in *L'Australia, gli australiani e la migrazione italiana*, ed. Gianfranco Cresciani (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1984); Camilla Bettoni and John Gibbons, "Linguistic Purism and Language Shift: A Guise-Voice Study of the Italian Community in Sydney", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 72 (1988): 15–36; Linda Barwick, "Australia: Music of Immigrants: Italians", in *Encyclopedia of World Music (Oceania Volume)*, ed. Adrienne Kaeppler and J. Wainwright Love (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998) 79–82.

⁵ Full versions of the song texts quoted here are available on various published recordings with textual transcriptions in accompanying booklets, or in many cases with musical transcriptions in the principal reference for Italian traditional musical styles, Roberto Leydi, *I canti popolari italiani: 120 testi e musiche* (Milano: Mondadori, 1973). Another illustrated summary, in English, of the diversity of Italian traditional music can be found in Marcello Sorce Keller, "Reflections of Continental and Mediterranean Tradition in Italian Folk Music", in *Music Cultures in Contact: Convergences and Collisions*, ed. Margaret Kartomi and Steven Blum (Sydney: Currency Press, 1994) 40–47. Although the examples are mentioned here primarily for their musical characteristics, I hope that something of the flavour of their subject matter and poetic structures are conveyed by the English translations. The original texts, in various dialects, and often a translation into standard Italian, are included in the cited sources, but for reasons of copyright, only English translations of the song texts are reproduced here (unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are my own).

⁶ Recording published in Roberto Leydi, *Italia, volume 3: il canto lirico e satirico, la polivocalità* (Milano: Vedette-Albatros, VPA8126, 1971), 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes. Text and music in Leydi, *I canti popolari italiani* 187–89.

Along the Adriatic coast, there are vocal styles that show affinities with those from Balkan countries. One such style is called in Umbria and Le Marche *canto a vatoccu* “bell-clapper song”, in which two voices move more or less in contrary motion, finishing an octave apart. Related styles are found in Romagna in Italian-dialect speaking areas of Dalmatia (Croatia). An Umbrian example of this style is a diaphonic *canto a vatoccu* recorded by L. Gennero at Pretola, Perugia (Umbria), in 1969.

With you my sweet I have never sung before
and for the first time I greet you.
We have arrived at the very top
my love, if you love me tell me first.
My love, don't sing me so many verses
I am still young and can't remember them all.
Let this lovely couple keep singing
they remind me of two frogs.
If the lady of the house doesn't bring us wine
tomorrow we'll go somewhere else.
Sing, all you over there, because we are singing
if you don't we'll make fun of you.⁷

Because the north of the country was traversed by major trade and pilgrimage routes, there was considerable interaction in this area with mainland European traditions, a factor reflected in dialect as well as in traditional culture. In the north of Italy, there is a varied repertoire that includes many of the pan-European ballads as well as other ballads that are unique to Italy. Choral performance style predominates. An Italian version of *Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight* (Child 4), “El fiol del signor conte”, performed in Alpine choral style by the “Gruppo di Santa Croce”, was recorded by Roberto Leydi and Alberto Fumagalli at Santa Croce di San Pellegrino, Bergamo (Lombardia), in 1966.

The son of the count wanted to take a wife
he wanted to marry the Englishwoman, the daughter of a knight.
In the evening he proposed and in the night he married her
and early in the morning he set off for France.
He covered thirty miles and the Englishwoman never spoke
he covered thirty more and she begins to sigh.
Why do you sigh Englishwoman whyever do you sigh?
I sigh for my mother for I'll never see her again.

⁷ Recording published in Leydi, *Italia, volume 3*; text and music in Leydi, *I canti popolari italiani* 199–200.

If you sigh for that there's no harm in it
but if you sigh for anything else the knife is ready.
I pray you sir count to lend me your sword
I want to cut a branch to shade my horse.
When she had his sword she plunged it into his heart
and then mounted her horse and returned home.⁸

In many parts of the North, the popular tradition has seen the development of Alpine choirs that compete in festivals rather like the Welsh eisteddfod. In Genova, in the north-east, teams were formed in taverns to compete in the local style of “trallallero” singing, an example of which, “Ea m'ou dixeva unna votta me nonna”, was recorded in a Genoa tavern by Edward Neill in 1968, performed in a simplified form by three male singers: Puexellu, Geppe and Bacellà.

My grandmother once told me
while she was lighting the fire
if you want to find a wife here
make sure she doesn't speak Latin.
Make sure she doesn't have a man's voice
or eyebrows joined together
or two points on her nose
and make sure she hasn't lost her mind.
Make sure she's not bowed down with age
and that she doesn't bind her breasts.⁹

The existence of related vocal styles in other parts of the country including Tuscany and Sardinia, and outside Italy in Georgia and Brittany, has led some musicologists to suggest that these styles may be remnants of an archaic polyvocal singing practice that predated the development of diatonic harmony in art music.¹⁰

⁸ The recording is published in Alberto Fumagalli and Roberto Leydi, *Montanari di Val Brembana. Il gruppo di Santa Croce*, 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes (Milano: Vedette Albatros, VPA 8428 RL, 1978). Text and music in Leydi, *I canti popolari italiani* 262–64.

⁹ The recording is published in Edward Neill, *Canti popolari di Liguria vol. 2: La polivocalità valligiana, il trallalero*, 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes (Milano: Vedette-Albatros, VPA 8313, 1976). See also “Me dixeva ‘na votta me nonna”, track 6 of *La Squadra* (compagnia del trallalero), *Italie: polyphonie genoise*, compact disc (Paris: Buda musique, 92514-2, n.d.).

¹⁰ Leydi, *I canti popolari italiani* 26.

The song “Passu torrau”, an example of the Sardinian Barbagia tenor style (used in this case for dance music), was recorded by Diego Carpitella in Orgosolo (Nuoro). The four male voices in this style are known as *bassu*, *contra*, *boghe* and *mesa 'oche*. The leading voice, the *boghe*, sings the text in free rhythm, and the other three voices join in after a few moments with a rhythmic refrain based on traditional nonsense syllables, such as *bim-ba-rim*, *bim-bo* or *bar-ril-là*.

Today, the twentieth of May in my village
you can feel the spring has really arrived
the shepherds who passed the winter in Baronia
along the coast and in Campidano
return with their sacks and mantles
following the flock to their home country.

(chorus)

They do the milking not far from the village
and put aside the milk for gifts
and they are asked from all sides
how things have gone during the winter
they answer sadly in a tired voice

(chorus)

We barely managed to save
the rent for the grazing grounds
the profits have all gone to the landlord
(chorus)¹¹

Since all these examples come from more or less public genres, let's finish this whirlwind tour of Italy with a solo lullaby, “Fatte la nanna”, performed by Italia Ranaldi of Poggio Moiano, Rieti, in the central region of Lazio.

Go to sleep my child it's night-time
the sheep have all come home
they've come in, the little ones and the big ones
lullaby.

Mummy's darling, lovely jasmine vine
don't cry my child here is the breast
you can draw out the inside of my heart
your mother loves you so.

¹¹ The recording is published in Diego Carpitella, Pietro Sassu and Leonardo Sole, *Musica sarda vol. 3: Canti polivocali e musica strumentale—gli strumenti musicali*, 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes (Milano: Vedette-Albatros, VPA 8152, 1973). The above details and translation are adapted from the information given in the booklet attached to the record.

Go to sleep my sweet child
I've made you a bed of violets
for a coverlet the clear sky
and for a pillow I give you my heart
lullaby.¹²

These examples represent only a tiny part of the great diversity of Italian traditional music—in fact, I have devoted an 1100-page doctoral thesis to the study of about 500 variants of just one song.¹³ The point that I'd like to stress here is the independence of each of these traditions, to clarify that when I am talking about “Italian music in Adelaide”, I am referring to the music of the Calabresi, the Furlani, the Veneti, the Marchigiani and all the rest who came to Australia, each individual, each family with its own cultural baggage.

It may certainly be useful to use the term “Italian traditional music” if one wants to distinguish it from Vietnamese or Argentinian or Irish traditional music, but on the other hand one would be seriously misled to imagine that Italian traditional music can be encapsulated in “O sole mio” (Di Capua, 1898) and “Funiculi funiculà” (Turco/Denza, 1880)—in fact neither of these famous and venerable Neapolitan songs are performed by Italian people of my acquaintance (although recordings of them can certainly be heard played at Italian clubs and festivals).¹⁴ Perhaps it is not coincidental that such songs fit a peculiarly Anglo-Australian sentimental stereotype of the sunny Mediterranean, populated by emotional, good-humoured, romantic and fundamentally contented people. Italian traditional songs address the very serious questions of poverty and war and sexual politics; they are far more often angry or sad than cheerful and carefree. And yet in my experience performing with Adelaide's Italian Folk Ensemble in the 1970s and 1980s, many non-Italian Australians became almost angry when Italian songs were presented that did not fit the stereotype.¹⁵

¹² The recording is published in Roberto Leydi and Fulvio Montobbio, eds., *Canti popolari del Lazio dal repertorio di Italia Ranaldi di Poggio Moiano (Sabina)*, 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes (Vedette-Albatros, VPA 8185, 1974). Text in Giuseppe Vettori, ed., *Canti popolari italiani, paperbacks poeti* (Roma: Newton Compton Editori, 1974) 59–60.

¹³ Linda Barwick, “Critical Perspectives on Oral Song in Performance: The Case of *Donna lombarda*” (PhD, Flinders University of South Australia, 1986).

¹⁴ For more information about the significance of Neapolitan songs in Australia, see Sorce Keller's article in this volume.

¹⁵ See Comin and Barwick's article in this volume for more detail on the activities and reception of the Italian Folk Ensemble.

One reason for this attitude may be that the Anglo-Australians of the 1970s and 1980s were generally one or two generations removed from a living orally-transmitted singing tradition of their own, so that much of what we knew of our own folk heritage was taught in schools, with all depressing and really vital issues weeded out in the name of moral upliftment or the peculiar concept of “entertainment”. In 1983 I witnessed a similar process going on in the incorporation into the Italian language curriculum for South Australian primary schools of material originally recorded in oral tradition: one Tuscan lullaby¹⁶ that included references to wanting to give the baby away and to not having enough money to pay the rent was reduced to a simple list of all the relatives who wanted to look after the baby.

This brings me to my next main point: the inherent changeability of the oral tradition. Although the well-meaning teacher who changed the words of that lullaby was distorting it in a way that needs to be understood in the context of the Western literary establishment, the willingness to adapt the text to fit a new function is certainly not alien to the oral tradition. In the written tradition, tampering with a text may be an act of gross disrespect of the author and to Art, but in the case of the oral traditional forms such as this lullaby, the anonymity of the author (which is really the lack of an author in the strict sense) may give the teacher a sense of licence to change the song. I daresay that little or no deviation was allowed on the part of the teachers and children who used the supposedly authentic folksong as part of the creative and fun side of the Italian language curriculum.

Changeability is part of what keeps an oral tradition alive: variation occurs in a number of non-random ways that serve to keep the songs and music performable, rather than to impress the audience with a display of virtuosity of the performer (which is how improvisation is frequently regarded in the practice of art music). Inevitably the processes of variation are affected by transplantation of the tradition to a new environment, and I’ll illustrate this briefly in the next part of the paper.

I grew up in Campbelltown, an Italian suburb of Adelaide, where we listened to Umberto Tozzi on the jukeboxes in the local pizza parlour and where on Saturday afternoons the streets resounded to the band practice that was an institution for the many Italian boys of my acquaintance involved in either rock and roll or 60/40 bands.¹⁷ Most of the Italian families I knew were from the Le Marche, Campania and Calabria and had emigrated to Australia in the 1950s and

¹⁶ “I’ bambino è della mamma”, part of the repertory of the Italian Folk Ensemble learned from the album

¹⁷ “60/40” bands play sixty per cent of one sort of music and forty per cent of another. Typically in my youth in Adelaide in the 1960s this meant sixty per cent danceable pop or country music tunes and forty per cent rock and roll.

1960s. As an atheist and (at that stage of my life) a non-Italian speaker, I was excluded from religious venues and from the domestic sphere, where mothers of my friends rarely spoke English. Despite living in the midst of a thriving community of expatriate Marchigiani, I only had access to popular recorded music (in the pizza parlour or other public venues frequented by Italians). The only music I heard actually performed by Italians was “acculturated” music, mainly in English, based on American popular musical models. The barrier was not caused by conscious prejudice on either side, but rather by the lack of common language and social structures.

Learning to speak Italian (at Flinders University) gave me the possibility of entering into Italian-speaking social circles. Like most Anglo-Australians, I had previously been unaware of the extent of the Italian Australian social network, which for many Italians in my area of Adelaide revolved around the regional clubs such as the Marche Club and the Fogolar Furlan. As well as providing meeting and drinking places and bocce rinks, these clubs had varying degrees of commitment to the preservation of traditional culture, and sometimes sponsored folkloric dance groups or alpine choirs. My experience in 1970s Adelaide was that the lack of reinforcement for regionally specific traditional musical practices outside the extended family, together with the language barrier that often developed between the first and second generations in migrant families meant that, in the absence of a conscious effort, traditional music was generally not performed by younger people, even though they might be present on occasions such as weddings or religious feasts when there might have been group performance of relevant songs by first generation people.

However, beginning in the mid-1970s, that conscious effort, in the shape of study and performance of traditional songs, was promoted by a number of people, most notably Professor Tony Comin of the Italian Discipline at Flinders University, who taught courses in Italian popular culture as part of the undergraduate and honours programmes at the university.¹⁸ Partly as a result of the interest generated by these courses, traditional songs came to be included in Italian language courses at both primary and secondary level, and the high school music curriculum included a section on Italian traditional music. Honours and doctoral theses on Italian traditional song were produced at Flinders University and at the University of Adelaide,¹⁹ and the collection of oral traditional material formed part of some undergraduate projects by students at Flinders Italian Discipline.

¹⁸ For further information, see Comin and Barwick’s article in this volume.

¹⁹ Students completing major studies of aspects of Italian traditional song included Barwick, Diana Busolin, Piera Carroli, Diana Cavuoto, Teresa Cirillo and Anna Salini.

However, apart from personal holdings by Comin and some students, the state of documentation of traditional songs of Italian immigrants is as fragmentary in Adelaide as in the rest of Australia. The cessation of the large-scale inflow of immigrants from Italy by 1970,²⁰ together with the ageing of the first generation and the previously mentioned lack of interest and engagement with traditional regional dialects and traditions by the second and subsequent generations born in Australia, means that it is unlikely that a great deal of traditional knowledge of regional Italian traditions remains to be documented here.²¹ A community music project sponsored from within the Adelaide Italian community in 1985 resulted in collection of some material, but unfortunately the recordings were of poor technical quality, although some song texts were published.²² Fieldworkers in non-English-speaking communities must have extensive knowledge of the popular tradition, as well as a good command of the language and all the usual technical skills and social sensitivity required in such situations.

In Adelaide during the 1970s and 1980s a number of performing groups, often including students or ex-students of Comin's popular song courses, had the aim of presenting Italian traditional song in original style: "Compagnia Folk", "Due Voci", "La Lega" and "Terra Mia" are included in this list, all of which have had some links with the Italian Folk Ensemble, which was initially formed in 1976 to present theatrical works in Italian, many of which incorporated traditional songs and music in community theatre.²³ There was so much demand for separate performance of the songs that the Ensemble later tended to perform more music than theatre. I was a member of the Ensemble from 1977 to 1984, and I'll draw on this experience to illustrate a few points about the Australian influence on Italian traditional music.

²⁰ Stephen Castles, "Italian Migration and Settlement since 1945", in *Australia's Italians: Culture and Community in a Changing Society*, ed. Stephen Castles et al. (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1992) 35–55.

²¹ Documentation projects by Bannister in Griffith, NSW, and Garigliano in Sydney have shown that knowledge of the traditional verbal repertory remains confined to the upper generations and to certain ritual occasions. See Roland Bannister, *Music and Love: Music in the Lives of Italian Australians in Griffith, New South Wales* (Melbourne: Italian Australian Institute, La Trobe University, 2007). Cristoforo Garigliano, "L'ottava isola": Studies on Music, Heritage and Cultural Identity between Sicily and Sydney" (PhD, Macquarie University, 2009). See further discussion in Marcello Sorce Keller's article in this volume.

²² Texts of some songs from this documentation were published as Terra Mia (musical group), *A Collection of Poems and Songs by Italians of South Australia* (Adelaide: Federazione Italiana di Lavoratori Emigrati e Famiglie [FILEF], 1989).

²³ For background and listings of productions and performances, see Comin and Barwick's article in this volume.

Although the group was in the main successful in its aim of maintaining fidelity to the spirit of the popular tradition, the practice of learning songs from a set text or from published recordings, and the very setting off of a group of specialist performers, was in some sense contrary to that tradition, and inevitably led to performance situations that would never occur in the context of a purely oral tradition. Furthermore, since the group was made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, there were real problems in agreeing on appropriate performance standards: for example, southerners tended to prefer faster tempos than northerners, whose preference for harmonisation often was at odds with the southern idioms of highly decorated solo lines. These problems were overcome to some extent when performing to Italian audiences, partly because of audience participation fostered by the popular tradition of inclusive performance and the Ensemble's practice of choosing material from the regional tradition relevant to a particular audience. In such contexts, questions of professionalism and standards were less important.

But with non-Italian audiences, problems in deciding appropriate performance standards and repertoire were exacerbated. The most important single factor, in my opinion, was the audience's lack of understanding of the language, which meant that performers felt they had to be even more entertaining, which in turn led to axing or abridgement of long songs, an increase in tempo, and the elaboration of vocal lines and instrumental accompaniment—in short, an increasing approximation to the parameters of the three-and-a-half-minute pop song. Once more, audiences outside the tradition tended to be presented with those aspects of Italian traditions that most resembled the mainstream Australian (American?) idiom.

Performance conditions in Australia also affected musical styles and structures. The Ensemble often performed in low-ceilinged rooms with sound-absorbent ceiling tiles, or even outdoors: such poor acoustic environments have an especially detrimental effect on polyvocalic songs, which in Italy may rather have been performed in resonant high-ceilinged rooms in stone buildings; this resonance not only lent a richer timbre to the vocal tone, but was also important for pitch placement, especially in the more complex harmonic arrangements. The Ensemble tended to rely on instrumental accompaniment and, occasionally, electronic amplification to offset these factors. Traditional instruments, more widely used in the central and southern regions than in the North, are neither readily available nor adapted to Australian conditions, so have been replaced by standard folk guitars and percussion instruments, although musicians in the Ensemble have incorporated use of some traditional instruments, such as the accordion and *zampogna* (bagpipe), when appropriate.

The most obvious way in which the Italian Folk Ensemble demonstrated its Australian Italian context was in its selection and adaptation of a repertoire of migration songs. Over the last century, literally millions of Italians, mostly from

the poor rural classes, have left their homes to make new lives abroad, in northern Europe and the Americas as well as in Australia. Old songs were adapted to incorporate this experience, and many new songs were created, and the Ensemble continued this tradition. In many cases, emigration songs could be adapted by replacing “America” with “Australia”, but in other cases more extensive adaptation has taken place. The Ensemble’s song “Stornelli dell’emigrante” is adapted from a dance song from Lazio, “Stornelli a ‘ntuzzà”, performed by Graziella Prospero on the LP *La donna nella tradizione popolare*.²⁴ The text was developed by Comin, maintaining the original chorus in its entirety and inserting various references to emigration into the text of the stanzas (Example 1).

Verse 1

E lo me amore se chiama Costante

lo tengo rinchiuso dietro a due battenti (bis)

così non va più a fare l’emigrante

[My lover’s name is Constant I keep him shut up behind double doors (x2) so he can’t go off and emigrate again]

Chorus

Nai nai na chi ‘n a té la pozza fà

ne pozza fà cinquanta poi se pozza stumacà

Lessa lessa lessa quatt’a Mammata cinch’a dessa

e se dessa nun s’accorda quatt’a Mammata cinch’a sorda

turulalla, turulalla, morirai senz’assaggiàlla

Macché macché macché

La pizza cor zibibbo calla calla

ammassata colle mani de la mia bella

Nai nai na zompa ‘l foss’e passa de qua

se te romp’er noce der collo ianne da me che me t’encollo

[Nai nai na, without it you can’t make it! You can make 50 and make yourself sick.

Quick quick quick, four to your mother and five to her, and if she won’t be in it, four to Mum and five to your sister. Turulalla, turulalla, you’ll die without having a taste.

What’s up? What’s up? What’s up? A raisin cake, nice and hot, kneaded by my girl’s hands. Nai nai na, jump the ditch and come over here. If you break your neck come to me and I’ll carry you.]

²⁴ Gruppo di lavoro sulle tradizioni popolari and Sergio Boldini, *La donna nella tradizione popolare* (Milano: Vedette-Dischi dello zodiaco, ZD 4116, 1971), 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes.

Verse 2

*O mamma mamma
non mi dà l'emigrante ch'è vergogna (bis)
damme lu buttarretto de campagna
(coro)*

[Oh mother, mother! Don't marry me off to an emigrant, it's shameful (x2). Just give me some country boy! (chorus)]

Verse 3

*O mamma mamma
non me lo dire più piglialo figlia (bis)
chi piglia l'emigrante è poverella
(coro)*

[Oh mother, mother! Don't keep on insisting that I accept him (x2). Whoever marries a migrant is destined to be poor. (chorus)]

Verse 4

*E lu me amor vuò andà in Australia
non c'è più 'na ragazza che lo piglia (bis)
così dovrà restar con me in Italia
(coro)*

[My man wants to go to Australia. There isn't a girl who'll have him (x2). So he'll have to stay with me in Italy! (chorus)]²⁵

²⁵ Text and translation of “Stornelli dell'emigrante” as performed by “Gruppo la Questua”, Adelaide, 2006 (used by permission of Antonio Comin).

M.M. ♩ = c. 120

(Verse 1) E lo me a-mo-re se chia-ma Co-stan-te _____ lo ten-go rin-chiu-so die-tro a due batten - ti _____
 lo ten-go rin-chiu-so die-tro a due batten - ti _____ co-sì non va più a fa-re l'e-mi-gran - te _____

(Chorus)
 Nai nai na chi 'n a té la poz-za fà ne poz-za fà cin-quan-ta poi se poz-za stu-ma-cà _____
 Les-sa les-sa les-sa quatt' a Mam-me-ta cin-ch'a des-sa e se des-sa nun s'ac-cor-da quatt' a
 Mam-me-ta cin-ch'a sor-da tu-ru-lal-la tu-ru-lal-la mo-ri-rai sen-za as-sag-gial-la _____
 Mac-ché mac-ché mac-ché _____ la piz-za cor zi-bib-bo cal-la cal-la am-mas-
 sa-ta col-le ma-ni de la mia bel-la _____ Nai nai na zom-pa'l foss' e pas-sa de
 qua se te rom-p'er no-ce-der col-lo ian-ne da me che me t'en-col-lo _____

(Verse 2) O mam-ma mam-ma _____ non mi dà l'e-mi-gran-te ch'è ver-go-gna _____
 (Verse 3) O mam-ma mam-ma _____ non me lo di-re più pi-glia-lo fi-glia _____
 _____ non mi dà l'e-mi-gran-te ch'è ver-go-gna _____ dam-me lu but-ta-ret-to de cam-pa-gna _____
 _____ non me lo di-re più pi-glia-lo fi-glia _____ chi pi-glia l'e-mi-gran-te è po-ve-rel-la _____

(Verse 4)
 E lu me a-mor vuò an-dà in Au-stra-lia - - non c'è più 'na ra-gaz-za che lo pi-glia _____ non
 c'è più 'na ra-gaz-za che lo pi-glia _____ co-sì dov-rà re-star con me in I-ta-lia _____

Example 4.1. Musical notation of “Stornelli dell’emigrante”, as performed by the Italian Folk Ensemble, 1982. Transcription by Linda Barwick, 1986.

Other Italian political and protest songs have been adapted to deal with such specifically Australian issues as exploitation of migrant workers, federal elections and uranium mining.²⁶ Some attempts have been made to translate songs or to write English words to fit Italian musical models, but because of the difficulty of situating these in an appropriate performance context, while I was with the Ensemble these songs were only performed as part of theatrical production.²⁷

It is worth exploring some of the reasons why non-Italian-speaking audiences are not receptive to English versions of Italian songs. Most performances to such audiences were in the context of “multicultural” festivals, usually sponsored by local or state government, in which performers of different immigrant backgrounds were encouraged to display their differences from mainstream anglophone Australian culture as colourfully and as entertainingly as possible. But colourfulness and entertainment may be effectively contradictory for the group selecting its repertory for such an audience. Colourfulness ideally requires exaggeration of those aspects of the performance that characterise the public image of the group and distinguish it from others. Therefore, Italians must sing in Italian, and preferably in the lively and/or emotional fashion that fits the stereotype. Entertainment, on the other hand, means that the audience must not be required to work too hard: therefore, as already mentioned, nothing too far removed from the parameters of mainstream popular music should be performed, and attempts by groups to give background to the material or to challenge the audience’s preconceptions are not welcomed by organisers. Italians

²⁶ “Vedrai com’è bello”, based on an original song of the same title by Gualtiero Bertelli, with additional text by Antonio Comin, performed as part of the Italian Folk Ensemble theatre production *Padrone mio, ti voglio arricchire* (1979). See Gualtiero Bertelli, *Nina*, 12-inch 33rpm disc (Milano: Dischi del Sole, 1977). “Vi ricordate di quel dodici dicembre (di aver votato pe’ i liberali)” based on the Giovanna Daffini song “Vi ricordate di quel dodici aprile”. Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano and Dario Fo, *Ci ragiono e canto*, 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes (Milano: Dischi del Sole, 1966). “L’uranio” based on “La miseria l’è un gran malanno” (adapted by Flavio Verlato and Antonio Comin). See Dodi Moscati, *La miseria l’è un gran malanno*, 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes (Milano: Cetra, LPP 265, 1974). All three songs were performed at the South Australian State Folk Festival, Mannum, 1980.

²⁷ As explained in Comin and Barwick’s article in this volume, English translations of Italian traditional songs were included in the Adelaide Theatre Guild’s production of *Mistero buffo/The Fool’s Mystery Play* (directed by Comin, performed in Adelaide, 1987) and in Troupe Theatre’s production of Dario Fo’s *We Can’t Pay? We Won’t Pay!* (directed by Comin, performed in Adelaide, 1981).

are not alone in perceiving the doctrine of multiculturalism as running the risk of trivialisation and constriction of their popular tradition in a state-defined pigeonhole.²⁸ Multicultural concerts have certainly not been the avenue for any real interaction between the musical traditions of different cultures.

How, then could such interaction take place? One possibility is suggested by the activities of the Adelaide folk/rock group “Local Import”, whose membership included a number of Italian Australians as well as performers of Anglo-Celtic background. In addition to politically oriented songs in English, this group also performed Italian traditional material in a folk/rock style, sometimes in the form of instrumentals, sometimes in Italian. Examples 4.2 and 4.3 document one such example, a medley performed by Local Import in 1984, the first part an instrumental version of the Tuscan song “Mamma mamma mi sento un gran male” (Example 4.2),²⁹ followed by singing of “Bella ciao”, (Example 4.3),³⁰ the most famous song of the Italian resistance in World War II.³¹

Local Import’s medley is particularly interesting, because the group did not perform as an Italian group (although it was associated with political moves to increase the participation of non-English-speaking cultures in mainstream Australian society). Even though, for those in the know, various musical features of the melody of “Mamma mamma” in the instrumental section of the piece mark it as probably Italian (and probably Tuscan), the piece is not initially presented as such. It is not until the end of the song, when Italian language appears in the performance of “Bella ciao”, that its Italian origin is declared.³²

²⁸ Ellie Vasta and Stephen Castles, *The Teeth Are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

²⁹ English translation of the song text of Figure 2: “Mamma mamma I am suffering / The cure is in the garden. / In the garden there are violets, if you like I will send for them to be picked. / Oh how stupid is my mother! she doesn’t recognise the illness”.

³⁰ English translation of the song text of Figure 3: “This morning I got up (o bella ciao bella ciao bella ciao ciao ciao) / This morning I got up and found the invader”.

³¹ A revival version of “Bella ciao” was performed in the play of the same name produced in 1964 for the Spoleto Festival, and is reproduced on the LP by the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano, *Le canzoni di "Bella Ciao"* (Milano: Dischi del Sole, DS 101/3, 1964), 12-inch 33rpm disc, with notes. Text and music are in Leydi, *I canti popolari italiani* 374–76.

³² The song has a long and contested history. In recent years, it has emerged that while the text undoubtedly derives from the northern Italian ballad tradition, the melody is actually that of a Yiddish song, “Koilen”, recorded in New York in 1919 by Mishka Ziganoff and perhaps brought back to northern Italy by a returning emigrant. Jenner Meletti, “Da ballata yiddish a inno partigiano: il lungo viaggio di Bella ciao [From Yiddish Ballad to Partisan Hymn: The Long Voyage of ‘Bella ciao’]”, *La Repubblica* 12 April 2008, http://www.repubblica.it/2008/04/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/ballata-bella/ballata-bella/ballata-bella.html (10 October 2011).

Mam-ma mam-ma mi sen-to un gran ma-le nel giar - di-no il ri-me-dio ci sta

Nel giar - di - no ci stan - no le vio-le se le vuo - i le man-do a pi - glià

O quan-t'è stu - pi-da la mam-ma mi - a la non co - no - sce la ma-lat - ti - a

Detailed description: This block contains three staves of musical notation in 6/8 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 6/8 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The second and third staves continue the melody with similar rhythmic patterns. The lyrics are written below each staff, with hyphens indicating syllables across notes.

Example 4.2. Musical notation of the song “Mamma mamma mi sento un gran male”, whose melody was performed as the first part of an instrumental medley by Local Import, 1985. Transcription by Linda Barwick, 1986.

E stamat - ti - na mi so-no al - za - to o bel-la ciao, bel-la ciao, bel-la ciao, ciao, ciao.

Sta mat ti - na mi so-no al - za - to e ho tro - va - to l'in - va - sor.

Detailed description: This block contains two staves of musical notation in 6/8 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff starts with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 6/8 time signature. The melody features eighth and quarter notes, ending with a fermata over the final note. The second staff continues the melody with similar rhythmic patterns. The lyrics are written below each staff, with hyphens indicating syllables across notes.

Example 4.3. Musical notation of the first stanza of “Bella ciao”, as performed by the Italian Folk Ensemble, whose melody was performed as the second part of an instrumental medley by Local Import, 1985. Musical transcription by Linda Barwick, 1987.

Can one describe Local Import's medley as an example of Italian influence on the Australian folk heritage? Only, I think, if it were taken up and performed by other non-Italian groups; in the meantime, through the many Anglo-Australian folk features in its instrumentation and musical structure, it may be cited as yet another example of the Australian influence on the Italian tradition. Yet one should not underestimate the importance of conscious individual efforts such as these; it is the aggregation of any number of casual individual histories that forms the mass movements that are commonly the subject of folklorists. Nevertheless, given that all popular traditions are in a constant state of change (and, indeed, that this is a necessary condition of their existence), how could one identify "multicultural" influences, especially musical ones, after the event? Clearly, only from the perspective of a profound knowledge of the original highly diversified regional and local traditions.

For Italian traditional music at least, that knowledge is increasingly difficult to obtain first-hand in Australia, because of the demographic and cultural change that has seen knowledge of such tokens of traditional peasant culture confined to a now ageing first generation of immigrants. Any interaction between the many regional Italian musical traditions and musical genres of other social groups in Australia is unlikely to take place in public situations that are easily monitored, and the resultant music may not be explicitly labelled with details of its provenance. Italian popular musical traditions have interacted with mainstream Western music for centuries: from musical evidence alone, how could one possibly separate out the specifically Australian phase of this interaction?

Such knowledge can only be made available through documentation and analysis of traditions in process: what is actually going on in specific situations in Australia? In the absence of such research, the original musical traditions of non-English-speaking Australians, and therefore the mode and the extent of their interaction with each other and with mainstream Anglo-Australian culture, would be likely to go undocumented, and therefore be effectively lost to future generations.

I'd like to return now to the questions raised in the introduction to this paper: in particular, I think we can clarify how the theme "multicultural influences on the Australian folk heritage", while perhaps unproblematic from the Anglo-Australian perspective, embodies profound contradictions from the perspective of those non-dominant "multicultural" immigrant traditions.³³ If, for convenience's sake, we wish to refer to the conglomeration of the multiplicity of independent musical traditions currently performed in Australia as "the Australian folk heritage", then "multicultural influences" do not act upon it from the outside; the domain

³³ The term "multicultural" is generally used in Australia to embrace non-English-speaking immigrant groups, excluding indigenous non-English-speaking groups. See Vasta and Castles, *The Teeth Are Smiling*.

of inquiry might better be conceived as “multicultural strands in the fabric of Australian folklife” or some such similar metaphor emphasising the diversity and coexistence of the relevant traditions. On the other hand, if we read “multicultural” in opposition to “Australian”, as I think is suggested by the terms of the statement, then the theme is recast as “effects of non-English-speaking immigrant traditions on Anglophone Australian folk heritage”. I suggest that the linguistic barrier, if nothing else, has acted as an all but impermeable insulator separating one cultural tradition from another; much as we might like to believe in the possibility of the melting-pot, all the evidence points in the opposite direction, and indeed the maintenance of that myth serves no-one’s interests but the dominant culture’s. What multicultural influences there may be on the Anglophone Australian folk heritage are likely to operate subtly and anonymously. I believe they can only be adequately accounted for by decentring our critical perspective and placing non-English-speaking Australian cultures centre-stage.