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PERSPECTIVES ON A 21st CENTURY
COMPARATIVE MUSICOLOGY:
ETHNOMUSICOLOGY OR
TRANSCULTURAL MUSICOLOGY?



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On the front cover:

details of Paolo Angeli prepared Sardinian guitar (photo: Nanni Angeli)

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Current Research in the
Salentine Area: an Introduction

This section contains two papers on performance practices and the experience of studies concerning the Salentine area, the easternmost region of the Italian peninsula. The analysis and considerations are focused mainly on local music traditions and their influence on contemporary music making. The following specific aspects are examined:

The music sources acquired thanks to the commitment of leading personalities in research, beginning in the mid-1950s: since those sources concern many music practices that have now waned, the documents and 'texts' preserved in the sound recordings have also taken on considerable historical-cultural significance.

The very lively development of the 'neo-folk' movement of Salentine origin: this recent revival has led to many, varied results, which have emerged from the return to and adoption of musical material belonging to rural traditions. Local musicians' sensibility towards their own social and cultural past and the music making of the previous generations (grandparents), as well as a respect for historic sound documentation.

The effects on the perception of musicians and audiences of important programmes of live performances over the last two decades, systematically dedicated to local music traditions, and the possible results of heritagisation.

Memories of tarantism and the related music therapy in the available sources – some dating back as far as the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern era – in the local perception of the phenomenon and in the imagination of musicians today.

As Francesco Giannattasio argues, numerous texts and music practices today cannot be effectively processed using methods of analysis from the past because of the sweeping changes in many social contexts and cultural customs. They have also produced the overlapping and combining of practices from the oral tradition of rural society with new modes of performance and new uses. This trend has seen the proliferation of multiple 'hybridisations' and has further encouraged researchers to develop the enquiry and survey tools of ethnomusicology. The critical prospects of a 'transcultural musicology', as proposed and called for by Giannattasio, may enable us to analyse multiform practices so as to obtain greater insights into the complexity of contemporary musical processes, the dense, intricate stylistic stratifications and numerous cultural derivations that influence contemporary music making, spread by the ever wider reach of the media system – from radio to the web. From this point of view, the Salentine area seems to be a particularly fertile terrain.

The availability of many sound sources collected by authoritative scholars,

such as Alan Lomax, Diego Carpitella and Ernesto de Martino, and begun over sixty years ago, has led some ethnomusicological studies to emphasise aspects of historical awareness with frequent recourse to philological-type methods and practices. This requires them to compare and cross check very different sources and texts when preparing for the possible publication of a 'critical edition' of those remote music sources.

The arrival of many international musicians as guests and leading figures at festivals held in the area, especially in the summer, and their joint performances on stage with local musicians, has led to a frenetic flow of heterogeneous musical material, widely influencing the production, aims and stylistic choices of Salentine-origin musicians, constantly exposed to very different instruments, techniques, practices and styles. This has yielded enduring or ephemeral 'hybrid' products of lesser or greater musical interest, which nonetheless have enabled some musicians to acquire a considerable standing on the international 'world music' circuit. The experiments at hybridisation pursued by the Salentine neo-folk movement starting from local musical traditions have been influenced by very varied scenes, ranging from pop, world music or jazz to music of African or Asian origin, and even contemporary art music of Euro-American derivation.

There has also been an interesting recent enquiry focused on the imagination of local musicians, who draw on very different symbolic motifs, often far from the local rural origins: the analysis of some attempts at 'self-narration' and the replies from selected samples of local musicians have made it possible to highlight several contradictions and 'mystifications'. However, when filtered in a fluid, mobile sensibility, such problematic heterogeneous motifs and references can make a valid contribution to 'ennobling' and 'founding' contemporary music making, at least according to the intentions of some leading musicians. This has also led to the construction of an increasingly lively 'public discourse' on the subject of 'tradition' and the stylistic features of the local music customs. In the same context of this discourse we find the widespread aspiration to original writing and a recognisable image of music production as 'authorial', combined with the tendency to construct a possible contemporary Salentine identity. The appeal of the great figures from the local past also reflects this trend. Their musical practice is preserved in the sound sources and some young Salentine musicians have adopted them as stylistic models and tend to emulate their 'old-style' and 'auratic' way of performing with multiform and at times controversial results. For all of them, the singers and instrumentalists of the past are a guarantee of continuity and 'authenticity': the 'legendary' and 'poetic' attraction shrouding their performances enhances very varied new musical experiments.