Sorce Keller, Marcello, & Barwick, Linda. (2012). Thoughts on Music and Migration. In L. Barwick & M. Sorce Keller (Eds.), *Italy in Australia's Musical Landscape* (pp. 225–231). Melbourne: Lyrebird.

This is a postprint version (author's accepted manuscript), with page numbers altered to match the published version.

THIRTEEN

Thoughts on Music and Migration

Marcello Sorce Keller and Linda Barwick

Music is always significant to human beings everywhere.[1] It is one of the most evocative elements of any culture; it is a social lubricant, a sort of enzyme. When we study such diverse social phenomena as religion, power structure, class structure or family relations without considering music, we are doing a disservice to the cause of knowledge. That is because so much about these social phenomena is in some way or other expressed, mirrored, reinforced, exhibited—or even flaunted—through the social use of sound. And just like all these other social phenomena, music is always in a state of flux, with new generations of music-makers, audiences, technologies and social contexts spurring new musical creations and forms, and adapting or supplanting old ones.

Migration is a similarly universal phenomenon (although, unlike music, the majority of people would probably avoid it if they could). The history of humanity is a history of migrations: from when our distant ancestors began to travel through Africa and beyond some 150,000 years ago,[2] through to the population movements that led to the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"[3] 1500 years ago and the mass labour migrations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries endured by millions and encouraged by such "New World" nations as the United States of America, Australia, Argentina, Brazil and Canada. Migratory peoples tend to take their music along with them, especially if there are sufficient numbers of them to sustain its practice in a social context, and even if they do not (as in the case of the Garfagnino *maggio* tradition discussed in by Barwick in chapter 9), that fact in itself can help us to understand some important features of the originating and host societies, and the role of the migrants in relation to them.

---

[1] With the exception of those very few affected by "amusia", who are nonetheless seldom indifferent to it, and often find it a disturbance. Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia. Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008) 98–119. On the evolutionary importance of music in human culture see Ian Cross, "Musicality and the Human Capacity for Culture", *Musicae Scientiae* 12.1 (Special issue on Narrative and Music in Interaction) (2008): 147–67.
[2] Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples and Languages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Ian Goldin, Geoffrey Cameron, and Meera Balajaran, *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped Our World and Will define Our Future* (New Haven CT: Princeton University Press, 2011).
[3] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Falcon Press, 1953).

The study of music in migratory contexts may be even more crucial to the study of musical cultures in general than is usually realised. The experience of migration does not make music any less relevant in the lives of the emigrants, and the study of musical attitudes, tastes, practices (and their progressive reshaping over time) may help us to understand how easy or difficult it is for migrants to strike a balance between assimilation, co-habitation (with other groups) and the maintenance of distinctive cultural traits that may make their national origin still significant and worth remembering.

A person's musical horizon (what a human being remembers of the past, what music he or she forgets, what other music progressively enters his or her horizon) is an intimate biography that is hardly ever obvious or openly revealed in its entirety. Through music, without any need to articulate it in words, we make it clear to ourselves as well as to others who we are, or think we are, or would like to be, or think we should be. The story of how we progressively define ourselves in relation to others, of all the painful negotiations we go through to keep our balance, is a difficult one to tell and not always experienced entirely at a conscious level. Music may tell us precisely that part of our story that lies in the shadows, without our even knowing it.

As we travel or migrate, we all carry along a virtual handbag with our personal collection of music: a fundamental layer of our memory, and a valuable element of our sense of identity. Antonio Comin's musical biography (chapter 3) discusses some of the components of traditional music and Italian opera that his family brought along with them from the Veneto to Griffith in the 1930s. In the case of migrants, there is likely to be a disjuncture in musical lives pre- and post-emigration, especially in the case of emigration to a host country speaking a different language. Musical memories may be a key to how people feel about their present self in relation to their past, as demonstrated by those who, having been poor, destitute or persecuted in their country of origin, do not wish now to remember traditional songs reminiscent of such experiences.[4] Just as frequently, people wishing to integrate may decide to reframe their identities, or even abandon their native language and their music along with it. Lee Christofis remembered how once Australian Greeks "…tended to do only two or three dances from Greece, and spent much more time being 'European'. The tango and fox trot, waltz, rhumba, samba and quickstep were more to their taste".[5] As discussed by Comin (in reference to his theatre productions) and by Barwick (chapter 4), when the intention is to make one's music accessible to outsiders (for example, when the music of one's immigrant group is taken to the stage

---

[4] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Music and Tradition: From Native to Adopted Land through the Refugee Experience", *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 21 (1989): 25–35.
[5] Lee Christofis, "Why Can't the 'English' Teach their Children How to Dance?", *Dance Research* 26.1 (2008): 70–72.

and literally exhibited in a festival, as happens so frequently in Australia), one may more or less consciously transform it, out of a desire to make it palatable to those with no previous taste for it.[6]

Music's capacity to evoke emotional identification and group synchrony is recognised and exploited through official as well as commercial and personal channels.[7] National governments support musical activities (mostly high culture) through sponsorship of national arts organisations and activities at home and abroad that are seen as ceremonially representing the national identity.[8] Dreyfus and Murphy (chapter 2) discuss the enthusiastic sponsorship of events for touring Italian opera companies by local Italian Australian Fascist groups, which formed part of a strategy by the Italian Fascist government to recruit allegiance from Italians in the diaspora.

However universal the practice of music may be, its forms and practices are ever diversifying. Despite the dangerous but long-lived fallacy that music is a "universal language", no music enjoys universal appeal, nor was it ever intended to.[9] If it does not exist simply for the private use of an individual or a small group, music often separates, is often partisan, meant to please some in opposition to others. When we do not like somebody else's music, it is almost always because we are simply not supposed to like it.[10] Sonic behaviour is frequently meant to be intrusive, to be exhibited, always suggesting that a choice needs to be made: that you either belong, or you don't. That is why the social use of sound has so much to do with identity (if anybody could identify with any music, music could not have this function of defining or representing a social group). Changed social configurations in relations between groups in emigrant contexts may radically change the traditional associations of particular musical forms. For example, Sorce Keller recounts (chapter 5) the use in Daylesford of German-Swiss music to represent Australians of Italian-Swiss descent, even though "in Italian-speaking Switzerland, … such Germanic sounds are generally disliked."

---

[6] Michelle Duffy, "Performing Identity Within a Multicultural Framework", *Social & Cultural Geography* 6.5 (Special Issue: Music and Place) (2005): 677–92.

[7] Linda Barwick, "Including Music and the Temporal Arts in Language Documentation", in *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork*, ed. Nicholas Thieberger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 166–79; Marcello Sorce Keller, *What Makes Music European* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011).

[8] In Australia, we might think of the long history of performances by Indigenous Australians at official events to welcome foreign dignitaries—even though in other circumstances there may be little or no interest or understanding of such performances in their own terms.

[9] Patricia Shehan Campbell, "Music, the Universal Language: Fact or Fallacy?", *International Journal of Music Education* 29 (1997): 32–39.

[10] Sorce Keller, *What Makes Music European* 159–90.

It goes without saying that established forms of musical behaviour may be strongly challenged even in their original habitat; for instance, when processes of modernisation or culture contact significantly affect the *status quo*. In extreme circumstances an entire society may even go as far as replace one musical system with another (the wholesale adoption of Western music by most of the population of Korea and other Asian countries may be a case in point).**[11]** European teen-agers, who are often politically on the left and vehemently anti-American, provide another seeming anomaly, when so much of their musical consciousness is occupied not by their national traditions but rather by American popular music genres such as rock, pop, hip hop, grunge, and so on. That probably means these teenagers have made American music part of their own identity, and no longer perceive it as somebody else's or even as "American music".

An important counter-history to this volume's focus on twentieth century Italian migrants to Australia is provided by Fabbri's piece (chapter 11) on some of the musical dimensions of the reversal of the migratory flow from the 1970s, when the Italian "economic miracle"[12] not only reversed the traditional flow of Italian labour abroad, but also attracted new immigration to Italy from elsewhere, so that Italy is now a nation that imports labour and people, rather than exporting them. Fabbri draws attention to the ways in which Italians in Italy have struggled to come to terms with the new conception of themselves as a host society to immigrants (as opposed to their previous role of more or less oppressed minority in numerous foreign destinations), and how the rich strand of Italian popular songs on the theme of emigration has been used to build solidarity with Italy's immigrants and counter xenophobia.

It is usually abroad, amongst immigrants, that the challenge of adaptation has to be grappled with on a daily basis, musically as well as in every other realm of human behaviour. We suggested above that the study of music and migration, as well as of migrant musics, is even more important and crucial to the study of musical cultures at large than usually realised. That is because it is one thing to study traditions in the very territory in which they developed and reside, but quite another to observe how they react to transplantation. That is where aspects of a culture that would not be visible in its land of origin may become noticeable: if you are an Italian living in Italy you do not need to make it obvious that you are "Italian", and nothing pushes you to reflect on what it is that makes you such. But if you are an immigrant, you have to decide which elements of your original culture are essential to your sense of self. It could be argued that

---

[11] Alfred Louis Kroeber was one of the first anthropologists to consider processes of loss and substitution resulting from cultural contact. Alfred Louis Kroeber, *Anthropology: Culture Patterns and Processes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963).

[12] Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 164.

just as we do not know the real character of a person until he or she comes into confrontation with others representing conflicting interests, or outsiders to his or her social group, similarly we do not really know a culture until we see it challenged, whether the source of that challenge be disregard, disrespect or even hostility and discrimination. Without denying that a musical culture should be investigated in its home territory, in the surroundings in which it first developed, some of its more deep-seated attitudes or principles may only become obvious in observing how its people react to displacement and transplantation. Immigrants are likely to find their traditional forms of behaviour (musical and non musical) challenged by the new environment, at which point they are faced with the choice of abandonment on the one hand, or adaptation on the other. In situations such as these, people become aware of which values they regard as essential, or "central" (that is, not amenable to compromise), and which are, on the contrary, "peripheral" and therefore open for negotiation. It is clear that different individuals and immigrant groups in Australia (as well as in other countries) have adapted at different speeds and to different degrees, but a serious and systematic investigation of these phenomena and the reasons for them has only just begun.

One of the most fascinating examples of adaptive musical behaviour is discussed in John Whiteoak's contribution regarding the piano-accordion in Australia (chapter 6). The versatility of this highly portable instrument since its invention in the nineteenth century has proved extraordinary. Originally perceived as aristocratic and technological, in a matter of a few decades it became "traditional", soon replacing bagpipes, hurdy-gurdies, and other instruments. Indeed, countless national and regional traditions of accordion playing exist across the world, in genres as diverse as the Italian "liscio", the Serbian "izvorna" and "starogradska musizika", American Tex-Mex and Cajun music and the Argentinian "tango", to name but a few. Accordionists who travel and migrate never lack opportunities to use their skills in the new context; and never seem to experience difficulty in finding a point of balance between their original repertoire and the new ones they are exposed to, or even applying their skills to an entirely new style or repertoire. One fundamental trait remains throughout–a penchant for virtuosity. Everywhere accordion playing seems to be inherently competitive.

Research in language acquisition has often revealed that a new language is more easily accepted and learnt when there is not only a strong need to learn it, but also a desire to become part of and adapt to a new language environment.[13]

---

[13] J Amati Mehler, S Argentieri, and J Canestri, *La babele dell'inconscio: Lingua madre e lingue straniere nella dimensione psicoanalitica* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1990); Diego Marani, *Come ho imparato le lingue* (Milano: Bompiani, 2005) 18–19; François Grosjean, *Bilingual: Life and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

In any country, it is not uncommon to meet immigrants who, after years and years, have not learned the local language, and probably never will. Something similar may happen with music, and ethnomusicological literature dealing with "music and identity" suggests that many social and psychological factors may affect the degree to which music in a new country becomes accepted and familiar.[14] Similarly complex processes underlie the extent to which immigrants retain and keep alive what their musical memory absorbed in their native environment. When remembered musical traditions (or other behaviour patterns such as language, cuisine etc.) are strongly retained and do not undergo the evolutionary processes taking place in their land of origin (as discussed by Prato in chapter 12), then we may speak of "marginal survival." Of course, every case is a little different and there is a substantial body of literature dealing with such questions in ethnomusicology, sociology, immigration studies and other disciplines.[15]

The two processes at play are to a certain extent interdependent: on the one hand, adaptation (musical and otherwise) to the new home; and on the other, memory and attachment to experiences collected in the land of origin. They can be looked at, as anthropologists and folklorists have done, from various angles, and readers of the chapters in this volume may find it stimulating to do so as well. Adaptation to the musical climate of the new country can result in "fusion" and "hybridising" between the musics originally carried and those found in Australia; such fusion or hybridising in some cases can be understood as a form of "modernisation". For example, Prato (chapter 12) regards the Italian *canzone* tradition

---

[14] Sarosi, *Gypsy Music* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1978); Ronald M. Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Raymond A. R. MacDonald, David J. Hargreaves, and Dorothy Miell, eds., *Musical Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); John Connell and Chris Gibson, eds., *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place* (London: Routledge, 2003); Philip V. Bohlman, *Jüdische Volksmusik – eine mitteleuropäische Geistesgeschichte* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2005); Thomas Turino and James Lea, *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2004).

[15] There are countless examples of studies dealing with marginal survival in music in different culture areas. A few especially interesting ones are: Cecil J. Sharp and O.D. Campbell, *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians* (1932); Bruno Nettl, "The Hymns of the Amish: an Example of Marginal Survival", *Journal of American Folklore* 70.278 (1957): 323–28; Ruth Katz, "The Singing of the Baqqashot by Aleppo Jews. A Study in Musical Acculturation", *Acta Musicologica* 60 (1968): 65–85; Lazlo Vikár and G. Bereczi, *Cheremis Folksongs* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971); Carla Bianco, *The Two Rosetos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974); John Lorne Campbell, *Music Remembered in Exile* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1990); Thomas Turino, *Moving Away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experience of Urban Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

in Australia, as discussed by Aline Scott-Maxwell (chapter 7) as an instance of hybridisation rather than transplantation (as might be thought by some, including perhaps some of its practitioners). In other cases of hybridisation, segments (and functions) of traditional repertoires may be simply replaced by new elements. When strong forms of marginal survival occur, on the contrary, memory may be emphasised through the effort of "remembering" and the result may be "mannerism" (larger than life reproduction of what are thought to be the essential characteristics of the original tradition). The remembered traditions may continue to exist side by side with the new ones learnt in their new country–what is called "compartmentalisation". The participation by the Viggianese harpists discussed by Frances Thiele (chapter 8) in their traditional folk genres alongside classical music repertoires are a good example. Such categories, difficult as they may be to measure in quantitative terms, help us nonetheless to perceive shadings in forms of behavior that are always extremely rich and complex.

Conclusion

Many previous studies of music and migration have tended to focus either on geographically defined communities or on single genres and repertoires across time and space.[16] This volume has taken a different and broader approach to the topic. In our multidimensional study of one significant group in multicultural nation, we have investigated Italian Australians' "musical horizons" (the variety of their musical practices, memories and attitudes), as well as the perception of their impact by Australians of other national origins. The collection shows how multifaceted the study of such national groups can be. There can be little doubt that the landscape of musical practices, memories and attitudes amongst Greek or Chinese or any other immigrant group of Australians is no less rich or fascinating and, therefore, just as deserving of future attention. In such a varied human and cultural landscape as Australia's we feel that there is much more to be said on this topic, and we hope to see similar books devoted to other groups resettled in Australia. The musical landscape of the immigrant is perhaps more complex than we can ever imagine.

---

[16]A good example of the geographically defined community approach is 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). Some examples of the second approach, the study of single genres and repertoires across time and space, are Gerd Baumann, "The Re-Invention of Bhangra: Social Change and Aesthetic Shifts in a Punjabi Music in Britain", *The World of Music* 22.2 (1990): 81–97; Mauro Abbühl, Chudi Bürgi, and Dagmar Kopse, *Soukous, Kathak und Bachata: Musik und Tanz aus Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika in der Schweiz* (Zürich: Limmat Verlag, 2004); Turino and Lea, *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*.