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Gender, Identity and Performance in the Trallalero Genovese

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**‘Qualcosa che si deve sentire’: Gender, Identity and
Performance in the *Trallalero Genovese***

Thomas Proudfoot

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the
requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty
of Arts**

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Abstract

The *trallalero genovese* is a variety of polyphonic folk music, traditionally sung exclusively by men, which originates from Genoa in northern Italy. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the number of active singing groups in this tradition has fallen dramatically, and now only a handful remain. This thesis will examine modern practices in the *trallalero genovese* through testimonies gathered from current singers, and will address the impact that the decline in the practice has had on the identity of these groups and their communities. Through discussing the role of the imaginary, nostalgia, and the use of symbols, the thesis will assess claims made by narrators that the tradition can be considered to be uniquely *genovese*.

The recent inclusion of women in some of these groups has caused significant controversy. Narrators claim that the introduction of the female voice fundamentally changes the sound of the music, and this study will assess this through comparisons with western art music. This thesis will also provide comparisons with other gendered singing practices, such as 'trouser-roles' in Baroque opera and the founding of girls' choirs in English cathedrals. This study concludes by examining the role of masculinity in the *trallalero*, and how this has shaped singers' expectations of the tradition on a social level.

Dedications and Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest thanks to my supervisors Professor John Foot and Professor Pauline Fairclough for their considerable support and guidance throughout this project, especially during the late flurry of activity over the last few months.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Thomas Proudfoot

DATE: 20/09/22

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Introduction

The *Trallalero* is a form of polyphonic folk music originating from Genoa, traditionally performed exclusively by men. Typical singing groups, referred to as *squadre di canto*, consist of around a dozen vocalists or *canterini*, although historically some groups were much larger. These squads are divided into five principal voices: a contralto, tenor, baritone, *la chitarra* (a voice that imitates the sound of a guitar), and a number of basses.¹ Due to the historical exclusion of women from these squads, the part of the contralto, a term typically used to refer to the lowest female singing voice, is performed by a male vocalist who sings in falsetto. The striking, almost artificial, timbre of this voice is considered to be a particularly characteristic element of the *trallalero* and attempts to include women in this role have been met with controversy, an issue which will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

The term *trallalero* is thought to derive from a feature of some of the older songs in the repertoire, in which short verses are interspersed with sections without lyrics, where the melody is sung over nonsense syllables such as *tra-la-le-ro*.² This practice imbues the music with a rhythmic quality that distinguishes it from other polyphonic music traditions such as the Sardinian *Cantu a tenore*, for example, where singers follow blocks of chords which are interspersed by periods of silence. The exact origins of the *trallalero* remain a matter of debate, and it seems unlikely that a definitive answer to this question will ever be reached, as ethnomusicologist and historian Mauro Balma rather poetically explains:

¹ In dialect these voices are: ‘*o contrato*’, ‘*o primmo*’, ‘*o controbasso*’, ‘*a chitâra*’ and ‘*i bassi*’, respectively.

² An example of this can be found in the second of the three videos linked above, starting at around 4:27.

As in many fields of knowledge, and more so for orally transmitted sources, where written documents are so rare, the life-boat of the lost historian staggers in the dark, and no-one can assume to have the truth in his pocket.³

There are three main theories as to where the *trallalero* originated from. The first, which has been largely discredited, is that the *trallalero* has Genoa's former position as a powerful maritime republic to thank for its existence. It supposes that the music was born at sea, with the ship's cabin boy, as a soprano, taking on the role of the contralto.⁴ The second hypothesis is that the *trallalero* evolved from the practice of using all male choirs in religious settings, where male contraltos, or sometimes castrati were commonplace. Both theories lose much of their credibility upon closer examination of the modern repertoire of the *squadre*. Traditions such as the *trallalero* do not develop in a socio-cultural vacuum, so one would reasonably expect that, if it had come from either of these two sources, there would be a degree of maritime or religious influence reflected in the music itself. This is decidedly not the case, so these two arguments seem implausible. The theory that appears to be the most credible is that the *trallalero* developed in the *osterie*, as a spontaneous form of *canto per svago* where friends would sit around a table to eat, drink, and sing together. Indeed, this exact behaviour is still common in the *trallalero* today. Although this is worth acknowledging for the purpose of providing some context, examining the history and origins of the *trallalero* is not the focus of this project. Mauro Balma and Giuliano D'Angiolini's recent work, *Alle Origini del Trallalero Genovese*, examines this in far greater detail than there is space for here, and provides a convincing and well-reasoned argument for the origin of the tradition as a form of *canto d'osteria*.⁵

³ Mauro Balma, *Pocket Guide to Trallalero* (2016), Trans. By Anita D'Arrigo, < https://issuu.com/lasquadradigenova/docs/pockettrallalero_en_web > [Accessed 16 September 2022] p.23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁵ Mauro Balma, *Alle Origini del Trallalero Genovese* (Udine: Luce, 2018).

Since the middle of the twentieth century the number of squads has fallen considerably, and only a handful are still actively rehearsing and performing today. This is partly due to the fact that in the years since the ‘golden-age’ of the *trallalero* during the inter-war period, Genoa has changed dramatically from a socio-economic and demographic standpoint. According to ISTAT, even in the past twenty years, the percentage of the foreign-born population of the city has risen from 3% to almost 11%.⁶ It is well established that Genoa is now Italy’s *città degli anziani*, and recent studies have found that the region of Liguria has the oldest population in the whole of Italy in terms of average age.⁷ Yet perhaps the biggest impact of this change on the *trallalero* has been that many of the spaces in the city where *canterini* used to gather to sing and drink have since disappeared. Notable here is the legendary *Latteria du “Tugni”*, now sadly closed, which stood for many years on Via Canneto il lungo in the historic centre of the city. It was a meeting place for generations of *canterini* and was where squads such as *Il gruppo canterini Valbisagno* were founded.⁸ For the majority of its existence, the *trallalero* was largely sustained by the exposure generated by this more informal manner of singing. These gatherings, referred to as *rebeuggeitti*, were often composed of singers who all belonged to different squads, or perhaps none at all, and held a vital role in attracting new members. Many narratives explain how you could be walking through the city in the evening and be suddenly stopped in your tracks by the sound of the music emanating from a tavern or trattoria. Whilst this was how many current singers first experienced the music, this practice is becoming less and less common, and narrators state that if you want to participate in the *trallalero* in Genoa today it is best to seek out the squads directly. This thesis will examine the impact of this change on the tradition, and how it has impacted the squads’ ability to attract new members.

⁶ Tuttitalia, *Cittadini stranieri Genova 2021* (2021), <<https://www.tuttitalia.it/liguria/45-genova/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2021/>> [Accessed 13 Sep 2022].

⁷ ‘Censimento Istat, la Liguria si conferma la regione più anziana d’Italia’, *Genova Today*, 9 December 2021. <<https://www.genovatoday.it/attualita/liguria-regione-piu-vecchia.html>> [Accessed 14 Sep 2022].

⁸ *La Squadra: Storia del gruppo* <<https://www.trallalero.it/squadra>> [Accessed 14 Sep 2022].

An in-depth analysis of the social, economic, and demographic change that Genoa has undergone in the twentieth century falls regrettably outside of the scope of this study, as there is insufficient space here to address this subject with the complexity it requires without compromising the discussion of the musical form in some way. This does not mean, however, that the socio-economic context of the tradition will be entirely disregarded. This study will instead focus on the reality of the *trallalero* as it exists today, and will aim to examine the practices of modern squads through the lens of the testimonies of individual *canterini*. Through this approach, it is possible to observe the impact that this change has had on the tradition, whilst also placing the voices of practitioners at the heart of this discussion. Research into the *trallalero* is important not only because it sheds light on a cultural phenomenon that has not received a great deal of academic attention, but also because it is a valuable way of understanding matters beyond the practice itself, such as the role of gender, identity, community, and place. Although the tradition itself is specific to Genoa, what can be learnt from this research has a relevancy that extends beyond the confines of the city.

The use of oral history techniques is essential in a project of this nature. On a pragmatic level, the lack of any meaningful written tradition means that oral testimonies are the most productive way of gathering information about the *trallalero*. The interview method I used was primarily semi-structured, with the intention to avoid imposing any preconceptions of the practice onto the singers, thereby allowing them to guide the conversation. Yet this project is not just concerned with the practical aspects of how the singers meet, rehearse, and perform; it will also examine what this practice means to them, why they do it, and the relationships they form with other singers. The approach this thesis uses regarding the analysis and presentation of these testimonies is effectively a hybrid of two methods proposed by Paul Thompson in his seminal

work on oral history, *The Voices of the Past*.⁹ The first of these is presenting them as a collection of stories, grouped around a selection of common themes, in order to construct a wider social and historical narrative of the tradition. However, due to the focus of this project, an element of narrative analysis is also required. As Thompson explains, this method ‘is above all concerned with how the narrator experienced, remembered, and retold his or her life-story, and what light this may throw on the consciousness of the wider society.’¹⁰ If we want to best exploit the ability of oral history to provide us with an insight into narrators’ motivations, beliefs, and understandings of their cultural practices, then it is clear that a combined approach is most suitable here.

The interviewees chosen for this work were a collection of current and former singers, primarily belonging to the group *Il Gruppo Spontaneo Trallalero*. This was partly down to necessity, as it was only through the contralto of this squad, Laura Parodi, that I was invited to come along to a rehearsal and meet the other singers. My original intention had been to interview multiple members of various different squads, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions at the time, the concert that was scheduled to coincide with the end of my research trip was cancelled, which gave me little opportunity to meet other *canterini* beyond those introduced to me by Laura. The high average age of many of the *squadre* was likely a contributing factor here, as many stopped meeting entirely during the period to avoid putting the more vulnerable at risk. As a result, I was able to conduct five interviews in total; a full list of which can be found in the appendix.

However, this initial limitation subsequently shaped the direction of this thesis, providing an opportunity for a comparative approach to the discussion of the gendered voices in the tradition. The interviews themselves were conducted in a very informal manner, primarily in the breaks between songs during rehearsals. These time constraints were surprisingly useful in giving agency

⁹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp.265-275.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.270.

and control over the narrative to the singers themselves, as my primary focus was on allowing them to speak with only limited interruptions to ask them to expand on a particular point, or to direct them towards a key area of interest for the project.

I also want to dedicate some space here to highlight the importance of secondary research.

In this regard, there is an inherent difficulty when studying the *trallalero* as, in comparison to other areas of research, there has been comparatively little study on the subject. Works by the musicologist Mauro Balma make up the majority of contemporary scholarship on the *trallalero*, and I am most grateful to him for his assistance in gaining access to this material. Yet most of Balma's study is concerned with the history of the tradition, or in preserving and documenting the repertoire, and therefore does not entirely overlap with the research questions that this project proposes. Consequently, this thesis will also examine adjacent study to support the arguments and questions it poses, drawing upon common themes found in other music practices. In the text you will find discussions of the musical and social aspects of various music traditions, including jazz, Baroque opera, and Anglican choral singing. This comparative approach is not without precedent, as in the course of our analysis we will observe how singers often draw these comparisons themselves in their narratives.

The second chapter of this thesis will be centered around the question of gender, discussing the inclusion of women in some *squadre di canto*, and the role that masculinity plays in the tradition. As a historically male tradition, this recent innovation is matter of great contention. For some singers, replacing the characteristic sound of the male falsetto with a stronger, fuller female voice changes the sound of the music so fundamentally that they claim it is 'inascoltabile', whereas others state that involving women changes the 'feeling' of the music in some way. These narratives will be discussed in detail in the second chapter of this project, which will look to assess how the participation of women is perceived to alter the *trallalero* from a musical and social

perspective. There is also an important distinction to be made here between joining a formal *squadra titolare*, and singing informally ‘per divertimento’ in the style of the *rechenggeitti* mentioned previously. Opposition to the involvement of women in the tradition has been mainly directed at the former, and it is generally accepted that women have participated informally in the tradition throughout its history.

I was fortunate to get to know Laura Parodi, the only ‘canterina’ currently still performing, during my research trip to Genoa. It was clear to me, as her former squad mate Alessandro Guerrini states in his narrative, that she is arguably the most significant figure in the modern *trallalero*, not just as a woman, but as an advocate for the tradition on the national and international stage. I timed my trip to coincide with the *Le vie dei Canti* festival, which Laura has organised annually since 2018. The festival showcases various music traditions from around the world, as well as providing a platform for book presentations and discussions. The *trallalero* always features in the programme, as every year since its inception the festival has concluded on the first Sunday of December with a meeting of all the different *squadre* to socialise and sing together for the public. During my trip I had planned to use this event as an opportunity to meet members of different squads, but sadly this was cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Despite this, Laura went out of her way to assure that I was introduced to active singers, and I am deeply grateful to her for the generosity that helped make this project a reality.

The final question that needs answering here is why now is the right time for a project such as this. The cancellation of this concert in December is significant as it is symbolic of what has been a difficult period for the squads in recent years. The restrictions on socialising in response to the pandemic made rehearsing and performing next to impossible for these groups, as gathering together in close proximity is an essential aspect of the tradition. One squad, the same *Gruppo Canterini Val bisagno* mentioned above, has recently stopped singing, and when only a

handful of squads remain, a loss such as this is especially significant. In my view, now is the right moment to research this tradition because it is at a crucial moment in its history. There does not seem to be any concern amongst the singers themselves that the tradition is at risk of dying out, but it remains to be seen how the *trallalero* is able to recover from this challenging period. The conclusion of this thesis will provide a space to reflect on the future of the *trallalero* and the assumed role of the *canterini* as guardians of the tradition, as well as discussing what has been learnt in the course of this study.

The first chapter of this thesis will begin with an explanation of how the attitudes that singers displayed in their narratives have shaped the way this thesis has been structured, and will expand on the description provided above of my chosen theoretical and methodological approach. It will then look to examine the practice itself, and will discuss questions of genre, community, and identity, as well as some of the more practical aspects of how the music is structured, rehearsed, and performed.

It is my view that the best way to understand the *trallalero* is to see it for yourself. Although I have given an overview of the tradition and the focus of this thesis in this introductory section, I fear that it will perhaps fall short of capturing the joy that I felt when I first heard this music. For that reason, I have provided some links below to a few short videos of performances by different singing groups, and I would encourage the reader to stop at this point and take a moment to watch and listen to these performances before continuing.¹¹

¹¹ This first video is a performance of the piece ‘Baccicin vattène a cà’ by the group ‘I giovani Canterini di Sant’Olcese. Here the camera is placed in the centre of the circle formed by the singers, which I feel is a suitable approximation for my own experience of being invited to sit in the middle of the circle whilst a group performed. trallalero genova, *Trallalero “BACCICIN VÀTTÈNE A CÀ LIVE” I giovani Canterini di Sant’Olcese (Genova)*, online video recording, YouTube, 2 Apr 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHYbkHl0nD8&t=129s&ab_channel=trallalero genova> [Accessed 12 Sep 2022]; This second video is a performance of ‘Cin-ci-là’ by the group ‘il Gruppo Spontaneo Trallalero’. Laura Parodi, one of only a few female performers in the *trallalero*, features prominently in this recording, which I think also serves as a good example of the important role that community holds in the tradition. trallalero genova, *“Cin-ci-là” con il Gruppo Spontaneo Trallalero a all’Archi di Trasta Ge 19/02/2012*, online video recording, YouTube, 22 Feb 2012,

PRACTICES AND PEOPLE

Methodology and Theory

My original intention for this first section was to focus on the musical form itself. I had hoped to provide an analysis of its peculiarities, and performance and rehearsal practices, with the intention of using this as a foundation for analysing what the *trallalero* represents for its singers on a sociocultural level. Whilst you will still find discussions of all of these things here, it became clear to me that to consider the music in isolation was not just a naïve approach, but likely an impossible one. The catalyst for my change of mind came through listening back to the interviews I had conducted with the *canterini*. It emerged that one of the resounding sentiments I

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHTNiiFw5jY&t=24s&ab_channel=trallaleroGenova> [Accessed 12 Sep 2022]: In this final video, Paolo Besgano explains the role each singer has in the *trallalero*, adding each voice to the chorus one at a time. trallaleroGenova, “*il Trallalero Genovese*” spiegato da Paolo Besagno assieme ai canterini di Sant’Olcese, online video recording, YouTube, 4 Aug 2012,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IhQlfNN-eI&t=144s&ab_channel=trallaleroGenova> [Accessed 12 Sep 2022].

had gathered was that they believe that the *trallalero* is something you have to feel. Their understanding of the tradition is that it is not enough just to be a talented singer, as there is also a need to have lived and internalised the music within its cultural context.

My interpretation of this is that the intangible notions of ‘feeling’ and ‘living’, which are so often repeated by narrators, are their way of conceptualising the identity and community they find in singing. In short, when a singer states that the *trallalero* is something that ‘ci si deve sentire’, it is an indication of the considerable importance they place on the *genovesità* of the music. The implication here is that it is not only musically distinct from other ostensibly similar traditions, but that it is, in their view, a uniquely Genoese practice.

Some narrators would state this belief outright, whereas others demonstrated their feelings by fiercely defending any perceived inaccuracy or misattribution. Indeed, I experienced this first-hand when I was corrected, in a good-natured but somewhat forceful manner, by a group of singers for presenting them with a document that described the *trallalero* as originating from Liguria.¹² This prompted some discussion, the conclusion of which was that although this statement was not technically incorrect, there was clearly a concern that I was not being specific enough and that this might affect my understanding of the reality of the tradition in some way. The *genovesità* of the music is a source of pride for the singers, so for them it was vital that I recognise this.¹³ Although it is not necessarily wrong to say that the *trallalero* is a Ligurian tradition, the lack of precision in this statement could result in responsibility or credit for the music being falsely attributed elsewhere. It is not only more correct to describe it as *genovese*, but

¹² For context it is important to note here that there is plenty of ongoing discussion as to the precise origin of the *Trallalero*. Scholars and singers tend to have their own version of events, and it seems unlikely that an agreement on the matter will ever be reached. Mauro Balma writes that to ask an ethnomusicologist when the *Trallalero* began ‘è come chiedere al paleontologo l’età esatta di un fossile del paleozoico: si va a spanne’: Mauro Balma, *Nel cerchio del canto. Storia del trallalero genovese* (De Ferrari: Genova, 2001) p.11.

¹³ This is wide ranging term that describes the quality of being or feeling uniquely Genoese, originating specifically from the city of Genoa. This can be in terms of history, customs, culture, and language, and can also encompass the idea of feeling or belonging to this specific culture.

doing so also eliminates the risk of any misattribution. It seems clear to me now that this correction on the part of the singers was not out of pedantry or some other scrupulous attention for detail, but that instead this was an act of protection, or ownership, over the music and its identity. I subsequently, and somewhat sheepishly, rectified this imprecision, but from this interaction it was clear that although these narrators often attest that the *trallalero* is merely ‘un canto per svago’, a way to enjoy themselves, this does not preclude the fact that it also represents something deeper.

This is to not to suggest, however, that it is somehow insufficient for music to be solely ‘for fun’, and this is certainly not an attempt to ascribe social meaning where there is none. The intention here is to limit any confusion regarding what is primarily a question of genre. That is to say, as *trallalero* came to popularity in the *osterie* and *taverne* as a means for the singers to enjoy themselves, historically it can be considered to be *canto per svago* as opposed to, for example, a work or protest song. Whilst the intention of the singers today may still be to ‘have fun’, the *trallalero* has not developed in a cultural vacuum and, as such, it seems obvious that to attempt to isolate the *trallalero* from its sociocultural context would be reductive and a disservice to the *canterini* to whom it is so precious. It is my view that the music cannot be separated from the subjective experience of performing it, and as such any successful analysis of the musical form must first acknowledge this reciprocity between it and concept of *genovesità*.

However, here it is worth treading carefully, as there are conflicting models of analysis when it comes to the theorisation of music and sociocultural identities that are worth acknowledging at this point. Historically, a common approach was the ‘homology’ model, which proposed that music merely reflects or affirms existing social relations and identities. Whilst it could be argued that this may be true in part, it is not an especially helpful approach for complex analysis. The proposition that music merely reflects its sociocultural context has since been discredited for

being too structuralist and deterministic in its attempts to map a highly dynamic process.¹⁴ As Anthony P. Cohen points out, this way of thinking has been effectively abandoned by ethnomusicologists and anthropologists: ‘the view that any event or process or structure somehow replicates the essence of a society’s culture is now, I think, properly discredited.’¹⁵

The homology model was followed more recently by the ‘process model’, which claims that music is instrumental in the formation and negotiation of social constructs and identities.

Although this approach can elicit interesting discussion, and is certainly less problematic than its predecessor, it has also received criticism for lacking the complexity to accurately conceptualise the confluence of music and sociocultural identities.¹⁶ It seems then, given the shortcomings of these models, that some form of compromise might be necessary to pursue this appropriately.

Indeed, Georgina Born argues that we can reconcile these contrasting approaches if we choose not to view them as mutually exclusive:

There is a need to acknowledge that music can variably *both* construct new identities *and* reflect existing ones. Sociocultural identities are not simply constructed in music; there are ‘prior’ identities that come to be embodied dynamically in musical cultures, which then also form the reproduction of those identities.¹⁷

The best approach seems to be a pragmatic one, whereby each element is considered on its own terms. This is especially useful when studying the reality of a practice such as the *trallalero*, in which the absence of a written tradition means that the use of oral history techniques is

¹⁴ Georgina Born, ‘IV. Music and the Representation/Articulation of Sociocultural Identities’, in *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music*, ed. by Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) pp.29-33.

¹⁵ Anthony P. Cohen, *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982) p.8.

¹⁶ Cited in Born, pp.29-33.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.31-33.

effectively a necessity. Interviews with singers invariably produce differing accounts and interpretations of cultural practices and events, as well as providing an insight into an individual's motivations and emotions. To force these narratives to adhere to a preconceived theoretical model would be ill-judged and likely diminish that which Alessandro Portelli describes as: 'the unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure: [...] the speaker's subjectivity'.¹⁸ By allowing the narratives themselves to guide our discussion and considering them on their own merit, we do not risk imposing our preconceptions upon them, allowing our methodology and theory to work in harmony. The varied and sometimes contrasting testimonies that interviews elicit should be considered a strength, as the aim should not be to produce an objectively factual account or testimony. The value of oral history is in the meanings we are able to infer from the errors, misunderstandings and revisions of the past that often contradict objective truths. As Portelli highlights, oral history gives us an insight into 'not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.' 'There are no 'false' oral sources', he continues, 'the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'wrong' statements are still psychologically "true", and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts'.¹⁹ As we will establish later, this is particularly pertinent in the case of the *trallalero*, as *canterini* frequently present differing understandings of the tradition, especially when discussing questions of gender and the inclusion of female vocalists in established squads.

It is next to impossible to begin a discussion about music and identity without addressing the question of authenticity. The use of oral history techniques is extremely beneficial here, as by

¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes Oral History different?' in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London: Routledge, 2015) pp.50-55; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Portelli, *What makes Oral History different*, p.53.

recognising the subjectivity of our narrators and establishing that we intend to view the practice through the lens of oral history, we can avoid the often clumsy tendency to classify practices or repertoires as ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’.²⁰ Ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes makes a convincing argument for viewing authenticity as a ‘discursive trope of great persuasive power’,²¹ arguing that it focuses the language used in discussion of music and is useful in defining the significance or particularities of a given form of music. There is certainly some value in this, but this also depends on the criteria we use to define authenticity. A more static definition may be useful in evaluating some forms of music, such as those with extensive written traditions, as there is considerable material against which to compare and contrast songs and practices. It is comparatively straightforward, for example, to look at a Baroque concerto and state that it is authentic because it exhibits certain features or characteristics that we would expect to find in this type of music, but it would be unproductive to apply this framework to the *trallalero*. In the case of folk music, discussions of authenticity can often fall into the problematic mindset that something can only be considered authentic if it dates back to the origins of the practice or can otherwise be considered ancient or traditional in some way. This is unhelpful, as it presupposes that authenticity is an innate quality of music, something which Stokes argues strongly against.²² That is not to say that *canterini* do not place any value on adhering to perceived traditional practices, and on doing things ‘come si è sempre fatto’, but that this does not necessarily correspond to what they consider to be authentic. It stands to reason that as the repertoire and practices are constantly evolving, so is the concept of authenticity.

²⁰ Mauro Balma, ‘From Monody of Polyphony: A Creative Path inside the Experience of Genoese Trallalero (Italy)’ in *Local and Global Understandings of Creativities: Multipart Music Making and the Construction of Ideas, Contexts and Contents* ed. by Ardian Ahmedaja (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013) p.149.

²¹ Martin Stokes, ‘Introduction’ in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* ed. by Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994) p.7.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.6-7.

Assessing the authenticity of practices in the *trallalero* is made even more challenging by the frequent variations between squads. As we will discuss later on, each squad has their own way of performing and interpreting songs, which allows for a degree of invention and flexibility depending on the vocal abilities of its members. As a result of this, it is often difficult to determine whether a particular melody or practice can be considered authentic to the tradition as a whole, as it may be a recent invention by an individual singer and therefore unique to that squad. Consequently, it seems clear that to focus too closely on determining whether a practice is authentic or inauthentic is an unproductive process when analysing the reality of an oral tradition such as the *trallalero*.²³

Community in the Round

The deeper social meaning that many *canterini* allude to in their narratives was most cohesively summarised by Laura Parodi, one of the founders of the squad *Gruppo Spontaneo Trallalero*. Laura is arguably one of the most significant figures in the modern *trallalero*, both as a female vocalist still actively performing in a *squadra titolare*, and in her role as the organiser of the annual *Le Vie dei Canti* Festival, mentioned above, which prominently features performances of *trallalero* and other traditional music from Liguria.²⁴ She describes in her narrative how the *trallalero* is fundamental in fostering a sense of community:

²³ For more on the transformation and invention of traditions see: *The Invention of Tradition* ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁴ 'Torna il festival "Le Vie dei Canti": il programma completo', *Genova Today*, 3 September 2021. <<https://www.genovatoday.it/eventi/festival-vie-canti-2021.html>>[Accessed 17 August 2022].

Il principio è anche un altro: cantare fa bene e, secondo me, nelle varie popolazioni, abitanti di un paese, di una città, il canto è sempre stato la forma per comunicare, per provare un modo per includere e includersi, e, quindi, di trovare delle soluzioni. Non è eccessivo quello che sto dicendo perché nel momento in cui si canta insieme, si canta in cerchio oppure si fa un coro, il tentativo di creare armonia è come di fare andare d'accordo una comunità per creare azioni costruttive anche dal punto di vista sociale. (Laura Parodi, August 2022).

The analogy of the circle in this narrative is an extremely useful way to visualise the relationship between music and its social context. As is common in many folk traditions, singers in the *trallalero* form a circle when rehearsing or performing, primarily for practical reasons. The formation allows them to feel the resonance of the sound more easily, which helps them to create harmony and balance in the music as they become extremely attuned to any variations in pitch or volume. As Balma notes, by allowing all members to see each other, the circle also supports the use of visual cues that guide the performance; 'attention to the movement of the lips, a quick glance, a wave of the hand are enough to coordinate the sound'.²⁵

²⁵ Mauro Balma 'Liguria: A Multipart Song from the Alps to the Sea' in *European Voices I: Multipart Singing in the Balkans and the Mediterranean* ed. by Ardian Ahmedaja and Gerlinde Haid (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2008) pp.73-74.

However, many narrators state that singing in a circle also helps them to enter into the ‘mood’ of the music more easily. At first glance, it might seem like entering into the ‘mood’ of the music would correspond to getting into the right frame of mind to perform or rehearse, but in reality, the ‘mood’ of the music encompasses far more than just feeling ready or prepared to sing. For the *canterini* it also represents a sense of belonging to a community of singers, and of being included and participating in a shared heritage and culture. This is in direct contrast, as shown in figures 1 and 2,²⁶ to a typical SATB choir formation from a different music culture, such as

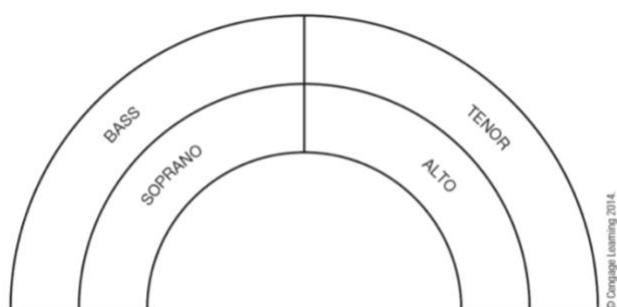


Figure 1. An example formation for a typical SATB choir, as cited in *Choral Music: Methods and Materials*



Figure 2. *Canterini* gathered in a circle to perform, taken in Piazza Luccoli in the historic centre of Genoa.

western art music. The formation depicted in figure 1 is designed to direct the sound towards a typically seated audience, with two rows of singers facing forwards. As shown in figure 2, it is easy to imagine how much more exposing it can be to sing in the round, as the circular formation positions the performers in close proximity to each other. Singing in this way allows the *canterini* to feel the music more closely, as the sound reverberates around the circle, arousing a sense of vulnerability that evokes a more emotional response from the performers.

²⁶ Figure 1. is taken from Barbara A. Brinson and Steven M. Demorest, *Choral Music: Methods and Materials* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2012) p.62. Figure 2. is the cover image from, Balma, *Alle Origini del Trallalero Genovese*.

I can attest to these narratives, as when attending a rehearsal, I was invited to stand inside the circle as the squad practiced. It was a deeply sensory experience. I felt very exposed and didn't know where to look as I felt the deep rumbling of the basses in my chest. Waves of sound crashed into me from all sides as the melody darted up and down, but I could sense immediately how in tune with each other the singers were. I could pick out all the individual voices very clearly; each one was present, but none were overpowering. The fundamental sense of balance had been found. The experience of the *canterini* in this tradition is vastly different to western art music, where performers stand in staggered rows, facing a conductor, with their backs to the other singers. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *canterini* use particularly sensory language to describe this practice, and how this particular manner of performing creates the right atmosphere to enter into the mood of the song. It is clear that to experience this once a week for decades, like many of the singers I spoke to have done, would forge an emotional connection between the members of the squad.

It is also worth highlighting how the practice of singing in the round is symbolic of a fundamental difference between the *trallalero* and choral music in terms of who the singers are performing for. A typical choral formation, such as the one pictured above in figure 1, is designed so the sound can be directed outwards towards an audience usually attending a formal, organised performance or concert. The singing style, loud and projected, has evolved to fit the expectations of the audience and to best suit this explicitly public sound. Conversely, when singing in a circle, those best placed to hear the music are the singers themselves. This is arguably representative of the *trallalero* as *canto per svago*, as it demonstrates that the intended audience is largely the singers themselves, seeing as the music was always intended to be self-gratifying. This also provides an insight into the history of the *trallalero*, as the general consensus is that the practice of singing in a circle developed fairly organically from gathering together to sit around tables in the *osterie* and sing. It is also worth noting that when modern squads perform, often in

same spaces that host choirs, they still form a circle whilst on stage. The fact that this practice hasn't been modified for contemporary performances demonstrates that it is fundamental to the identity of the music, and that it is more than just a pragmatic decision designed to make rehearsing easier for the performers.

Laura Parodi equates this process of coming together physically in a circle to create musical harmony with the creation of social harmony. For her, singing plays an important role in fostering an atmosphere of inclusion and community, acting as a foundation for constructive action and social change. Laura is certainly not alone here. A recent study of singing group facilitators in Australia shows that this sentiment is also shared by musicians from different cultures. Melissa Forbes and Irene Bartlett observe how narrators there highlight how singing acts as a front for social harmony: 'singing plays a vital role in creating an atmosphere of openness and acceptance [...]. This sense of feeling loved and cared about by people who are not family, but feel like family, appears to engender a deep feeling of belonging'.²⁷ The creation of a family-like atmosphere, in which everyone has equal status, is also replicated physically by the circle, as Forbes and Bartlett go on to state, 'Aster runs her group in the round, and finds this an important part of relationship building, because it signals "we're all equal ... there's no hierarchy"'.²⁸ It is certainly possible that this effect could be replicated in the *trallalero*, as although each squad has a maestro who nominally conducts the group, often the process of rehearsing is primarily a collaborative one.

Laura's assertion that 'cantare fa bene' is also supported by a wide range of studies; it has been argued that music can play a fundamental role in one's health and wellbeing, and musical values

²⁷ Melissa Forbes and Irene Bartlett, "This circle of joy": meaningful musicians' work and the benefits of facilitating singing groups', *Music Education Research*, 22.5 (2020), 555-68 (p.561).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.561-62.

and meanings are commonly understood as being ‘good for you’ in various personal and social ways.²⁹ The social bond created by gathering together to sing as a group is a constant throughout the difficulties of life away from the music, often providing a support structure for members during difficult periods. Forbes and Bartlett recognise that ‘when groups experience the passing of a member everyone must process this loss’, with their narrators describing how they deal with their grief through singing.³⁰ This is also a practice reflected in the *trallalero*, as Laura Parodi writes:

Era il 1984 e purtroppo in quel periodo il nostro contrabbasso Mario Caorsi aveva già manifestato i primi segni di una malattia che non gli avrebbe dato scampo. Così quando lo abbiamo accompagnato nel suo ultimo viaggio, al momento della tumulazione, abbiamo cantato per lui, come si è sempre fatto per i canterini. È stata quella la prima volta in cui ho cantato per un amico che ci aveva lasciati; ne sono seguiti altri fra cui il baritono che lo sostituì nella nostra squadra, Giovan Battista Garré, detto *Baccio*: imprenditore edile appassionatissimo di canto.³¹

Laura describes how, as a community, the singers share the burden of grief together. In coming together to sing at the burial, the music takes a key role in helping the squad to process the passing of a member of their squad, and gives the *canterini* the opportunity to pay tribute to a close friend. Using music as a way to process grief is a practice that is common to various cultures, but this case certainly holds some striking similarities with the New Orleans jazz funeral, in which the burial of the deceased is followed by a musical procession comprised of ‘a

²⁹ On the social value and benefit of music see: David J. Elliott and Marissa Silverman, 'Why Music Matters: Philosophical and Cultural Foundations', in *Music, Health, and Wellbeing* ed. by Raymond MacDonald, Gunter Kreutz, and Laura Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) pp.26-37; Martin Clayton, 'The Social and Personal Functions of Music in Cross-cultural Perspective' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology* ed. by Susan Hallam, Ian Cross and Michael Thaut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁰ Forbes and Bartlett, p.561.

³¹ Laura Parodi, *Trallalero! Il Canto di Genova: Storia e Testi* (Genova: Pentagona, 2018) pp.39-40.

small band, family members and friends of the deceased, and a “second-line” of people passing along the street, who desire to participate’.³² Marian Grey Secundy explains that, ‘New Orleans funerals were leisurely public acts, theatrical displays designed not to hide burial as a fearful obscenity, but to exhibit it as a community act, the social obligation of friends and family’.³³ We can certainly draw some comparisons between Secundy’s suggestion that jazz funerals represent a social obligation for friends and family, and Laura’s account that singing at the funerals of *canterini* is something that ‘si è sempre fatto’, as this also implies a sense of obligation and responsibility on the part of the squad.

Furthermore, both funeral traditions seem to transcend the sombre nature of such occasions by giving a central role to a typically joyful form of music. Bordere describes how in jazz funerals, ‘the band plays upbeat music, moving the crowd to a dance-like strut (e.g., jumping, hopping), as the procession passes by the home or other favorite places of the deceased (e.g., restaurant, school)’.³⁴ It seems obvious that the purpose of the music here is to bring joy to the occasion, with the aim of transforming it into a celebration of life instead of amplifying the melancholy of death. Although Laura Parodi’s description of her squad singing at the burial of one of their members certainly does not imply the same extent of joyfulness, we must recognise that the *trallalero* is an innately joyful form of music that was formed out of a desire to gather together and have fun. Neither tradition attempts to constrain the music to better fit the expected mood, but this is not intended to diminish the occasion. As Secundy notes, in New Orleans ‘Rejoicing is basic to the funeral, but it is not impromptu or undignified rejoicing. The celebration tries to

³² Tashel C Bordere, “‘To look at death another way’”: Black teenage males’ perspectives on second-lines and regular funerals in New Orleans’ *OMEGA-Journal of death and dying*, 58.3 (2009), 213-32 (p.214).

³³ Marian Gray Secundy, ‘Coping with Words and Song: The New Orleans Jazz Funeral’ in *Literature and Medicine*, 8.1 (1989), 100-105 (p.104).

³⁴ Bordere, p.214.

show that death is swallowed up in victory. The end of life is not despair but hope in resurrection'.³⁵

This is not as far-fetched a comparison as it might first seem, as the *canterini* themselves often draw comparisons to jazz music in their narratives. Yet in addition to the clear similarities in social and musical conventions, there are also some established links between the two styles of music that have been demonstrated in practice. For example, in 2004, *il Gruppo Canterini Valbisagno* collaborated with writer and artist Pierandrea Casati to produce a concert entitled 'Jazz meets Trallalero', where jazz musicians and *canterini* performed on the same stage. The programme for the concert introduced it as such:

‘Entrambi nati alla fine dell'Ottocento, cullati dalle onde incessanti che bagnano due città portuali come New Orleans e Genova, si sono sviluppati in modo completamente diverso. L'uno è diventato l'espressione del Nuovo Mondo, di un dinamismo planetario incontenibile e contagioso, l'altro un genere che sopravvive grazie a pochi appassionati, oggetto di periodiche riscoperte da parte di più generazioni di musicologi. In apparenza, si tratta del confronto tra un'espressione aperta e flessibile e una formalmente rigida e chiusa, ma le vie della musica offrono sorprese infinite!’³⁶

This reinforces Laura's earlier narrative that singing brings communities together, as it demonstrates how, in practice, two apparently vastly different traditions can be united by a shared passion. Although this project perhaps stops short of promising the '*sorprese infinite*'

³⁵ Secundy, p.102.

³⁶ JazzItalia, *Sconfinando 2004, XIII Festiva internazionale di musica e suoni dal mondo: Jazz Meets Trallalero* (2004), <<http://www.jazzitalia.net/viscomunicato.asp?ID=2730>> [Accessed 11 September 2022]

mentioned in the 'Jazz meets Trallalero' concert programme, we will explore the musical similarities between the *trallalero* and jazz music in greater detail later on in this chapter.

Laura's account of the role squads play in even the most difficult moments of their members' lives clearly demonstrates the strength of the social bonds and sense of community that develops between the singers. It is unsurprising that such strong relationships are formed, as singing together in a group, whether it is *per svago* or for any other reason, is a deeply social act. Meeting, rehearsing, and more often than not in the case of the *trallalero* sharing a drink and something to eat, brings people together and strengthens relationships. The incorporation of food and drink into the practice strengthens the sense of community on various levels, especially since it is usually provided by the singers themselves. Whilst conducting interviews, I attended a rehearsal of the squad *A Lanterna*, where the homemade delicacies ranged from *testa in cassetta*, a variety of cooked, cured meat made from pig's head and offal, to a ferociously strong *grappa* flavoured with wild sloes. The *canterini* told me that it was their Christmas party, which perhaps explained the abundance of food that lay before me. I was asked if something like this would happen back home in England. 'Maybe at Christmas, yes.' I replied. "We always have something to eat and drink when we rehearse!" was the response. There is undoubtedly an honesty and closeness in bringing something you have invested time and effort into making to share with, and feed, a group, which betrays the care the singers typically feel for each other.

It is also noteworthy that the food and drink singers bring to rehearsals is usually Genovese or Ligurian, as this imbues the practice with a broader sense of *genovesità*, because the *canterini* are not only engaging with a shared musical heritage, but also a gastronomic one. However, this is much deeper than simply highlighting that these dishes are typical of the region as, like the music, the food recalls and expresses the socioeconomic context of the city. The value the *canterini* place on this essential aspect of their culture and heritage can provide us with a

significant insight into their attitude towards what it means to be *genovese*, which is also replicated in the music. As Genoa is caught between the mountains and the sea, most traditional dishes are comprised of what the land was historically able to provide. There was little space to grow crops on a large scale, so the staples were typically fish, game, and wild, aromatic herbs and plants. Little was wasted, and this type of *cucina povera* has produced some of the most recognisable Italian dishes in the world.³⁷ Nowadays, a much wider variety of produce is available, and there are no longer the same seasonal restrictions on what you can buy.³⁸ A consumer can find almost anything all year round in the supermarket, yet the *canterini* still prepare these same traditional dishes to take to their rehearsals. This is significant, as where previously they may not have had a choice but to cook with what was available, this instead represents a decision, however conscious, to uphold a tradition. The fact that this food is a key part of the rehearsal practices demonstrates to us that the *genovesità* of the *trallalero* is crucial, as it is reflected in, and sustained by, all facets of the tradition.

There is also a comparison to be made here with the attitude that the *canterini* display towards the music. The group of narrators chosen for this project, the majority of whom are currently members of the squad *Il Gruppo Spontaneo Trallalero*, explain that the *trallalero* took the form that it currently has out of necessity, because during the first half of the twentieth century there was little other entertainment available in the *osterie*. For example:

Devi considerare che tanti anni fa c'erano in Liguria ottanta squadre. Adesso ce ne sono quattro o cinque, perciò, prima, ogni rione, ogni strada, aveva le sue squadre poi

³⁷ For more on *cucina povera* see: Massimo Montanari and Alberto Capatti, *La cucina italiana: storia di una cultura* (Roma: Laterza, 2011).

³⁸ For example, an early recipe for *pesto genovese* allows for the basil to be substituted for other herbs if it is not available, an issue which would certainly not arise nowadays: 'Prendete uno spiccino d'aglio, basilico (baxaicò), e, in mancanza di questo, maggiorana (pèrsa) e prezzemolo (pòrsemmo)': see Giovanni Battista Ratto, *La Cuciniera Genovese* (Genoa: Fratelli Pagano, 1893) p.42.

facevano le gare, chi cantava meglio [...] non c'era altro, non c'era la televisione allora, si cantava e si beveva. (Giancarlo Aimo, December 2021).

It is certainly true that Genoa has experienced considerable economic and technological change in the years since these narrators began singing, which has brought with it a vast array of options for people to entertain themselves. Indeed, current singers often cite the fact that many more forms of entertainment are available as a principal reason for the lack of interest that young people show in getting involved with the tradition. Yet, like their decision to bring local food and drink to rehearsals, despite the options available, the *canterini* choose to sing the *trallalero* as a way to entertain themselves. This places the practitioners in a more explicit role as guardians of the tradition, as it is apparent that they are more than just passive participants. Even if the singers' participation in the practice is motivated simply by a desire to gather with their friends and enjoy a shared passion, it is still a decision to maintain a tradition.

The positioning of the tradition as *canto per svago* is especially relevant with regards to this. Although in the context of the *trallalero* the term *svago* is typically understood to convey the sense of recreation or fun that largely motivates this practice, it also implies a sense of distracting oneself from normal activities and daily life. In the past, meeting in the local *osteria* to sing and drink often served as a way for *canterini* to distract themselves from work or other hardships in their lives and, although this sentiment is likely still present in the tradition, the *trallalero* exists within a vastly different socioeconomic context today. By maintaining existing traditional practices, whether social, gastronomic, or musical, squads demonstrate how a deep sense of nostalgia is integral to their identity. It could therefore be proposed that the concept of *svagarsi* has expanded to cover the desire singers have to distract themselves from the reality of modern life. Here *svago* takes on a new temporal dimension: a form of nostalgic escapism that closely

resembles an imaginary narrative that Portelli refers to as ‘uchronia’, in which the author pictures an alternative present, changed by a different unfolding of the past.³⁹

Here we can observe how this process crosses the boundary from the concrete, in the face-to-face meeting of singers, to an imagined community.⁴⁰ Naturally, some important aspects of this community are manifested physically through the music; by performing *trallaleri* in their own dialect, the squads clearly demonstrate that they possess a common linguistic and musical heritage. Yet the shared values, meanings, and motivations behind this performance exist only in the minds of the singers. The importance they place on the *genovesità* of the music exemplifies this, as it represents an accumulation of various imagined values assumed, at least to some degree, to be common to all *Genovesi*. An example of this is the perceived parsimonious nature of the *Genovesi*, which, according to some scholars, was influential in the creation of the *trallalero*. Mauro Balma explains this in the *Pocket Guide to the Trallalero*, a collaboration with the singing group *La Squadra* and the *Comune di Genova*:

The particularity is due to the fact that we, the Genovese in general are parsimonious; not stingy, but careful, we try to only use the resources that are necessary, but can also be generous. The parsimonious characteristic of the first groups of canterini is due to the fact that they didn’t have a lot of time and didn’t want to remember long lyrics: they preferred sitting around a table in a local tavern and enjoying tunes that were self-gratifying and therefore often enabled the group to distinguish themselves critically from those less gifted.⁴¹

³⁹ Alessandro Portelli, ‘Uchronic Dreams: Working Class Memory and Possible Worlds’ *Oral History*, 16.2 (1988), 46-56.

⁴⁰ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso books, 2006).

⁴¹ Balma, *Pocket guide to Trallalero*, p.11.

Whether or not this argument is factually correct is not important here, although it is certainly true that the supposed parsimony of the Genoese has become a commonly held stereotype. We don't know much about the origins of the *trallalero*, and we know even less about the motivations of the first groups of *canterini*. Yet what this interpretation does show is that an imagined community of *Genovesi*, within which the stereotypical characteristics of being parsimonious and frugal are assumed to be common to all, plays a central role in the myth of how the *trallalero* was created. The community of the tradition is constructed physically through the formation of squads and the process of gathering together to sing, but also in the imaginary through the sharing of values and beliefs. Some of these are separate from the concept of *genovesità*, such as the singers' passion for music or their desire to express their masculinity, but it is clear that the notion of feeling *genovese* is an essential part of the tradition.

The process of community building takes place over several levels, as not only do the members of the squad cohere amongst themselves but, by maintaining an active culture of performing for the public, they strengthen wider connections too. There is also a degree of inter-squad relationship building, as although in the past strong rivalries meant there were clear boundaries drawn between groups, in the modern *trallalero* there is a lot of collaboration between singers of different squads. This is supported by Mauro Bozzini's narrative:

Poi c'è il piacere di stare insieme. È molto interessante poi il rapporto con gli altri gruppi che sono pochi ormai. Però... c'è molta competitività con gli altri gruppi. Una volta pare che fosse molto forte, oggi meno. Siamo anche pochi, quindi è inutile se ci facciamo la guerra. Però è interessante, però, perché essendo che il repertorio è lo stesso per tutti [...]

è comune. Per cui poi ci si ritrova anche a mischiarci con i componenti delle altre squadre ogni tanto in certe situazioni ed è bello scoprire che c'è questa possibilità.

(Mauro Bozzini, December 2021).

It is evident that mixing with other squads is often a source of joy for singers and that the shared repertoire helps to make this a relatively simple process. Mauro also acknowledges that the significant decrease in the number of squads has somewhat curtailed the competitiveness between them. Although this element of the tradition has been weakened, this has in turn offered more opportunities for cooperation and community building. Mauro highlights the same sentiment: 'Siamo anche pochi, quindi è inutile se ci facciamo la guerra'. This is not to say that this collaboration has come at the expense of the squads' individual identities, as is evidenced in the index to Laura Parodi's work *Trallalero! Il canto di Genova*, which lists of all the members of the different squads that were active at the time of writing. In the section detailing the members of the squad *I canterini delle Quattro Valli*, it is specified: 'per concessione del Gruppo Spontaneo *Trallalero*, cantano con questa squadra Eugenio Rissotto, Cesare Campanini e Gino Cambiaso'.⁴² The suggestion here is that although collaboration is possible, a degree of loyalty to one's 'home' squad is expected, and that in some cases singing with another is only possible when explicitly permitted to do so.

The identity of each squad is also represented symbolically through the historic practice of exchanging *gagliardetti*, small flags embossed with the name and emblem of the squad. These symbols are vital in perpetuating the identities of individual squads, as the designs often situate them geographically, and evoke the history of the squad or the place it was founded. For

⁴² Parodi, pp.39-40.

example, the *gagliardetto* of the squad *I giovani Canterini di Sant'Olcese* depicts a bear, in reference to the legend that in the fifth century during the construction of the church in a small town on the outskirts of Genoa, a bear attacked and killed one of the two oxen that were pulling the wagon being used to transport the stone. The story goes that the bishop, the same Sant'Olcese after which the town has since been named, glanced at the bear and made the sign of the cross in the air, instantly taming it. It then willingly took the place of the ox it had killed in front of the wagon.⁴³ Often the spaces where squads meet will be decorated with these flags, that were typically exchanged before concerts or competitions. This reinforces the assessment that nostalgia is central to practice, as reminders of a 'golden age', or at the very least of a more fruitful past, are physically present in their rehearsals.

John Dickie proposes in *Imagined Italies* that differentiation, defining a nation by what it is not, is vital to sustaining the illusion of its realness.⁴⁴ Whilst the *trallalero* exists on a much smaller scale than the nation Dickie describes, the principle is certainly still relevant here. Given the largely common repertoire, the use of symbols is an important tool for the squads in distinguishing themselves from other groups. We can infer from Mauro Bozzini's description of the loss of a sense of rivalry between groups that the considerable decrease in the number of active squads has had a detrimental impact on the strength of the remaining squads' identities. If we understand that a crucial part of who the squads are is derived from drawing a boundary between themselves and others, then it stands to reason that if the number of other groups falls dramatically, then their identity, or at least the conviction with which they hold their sense of self, would be weakened.

⁴³ In this video Paolo Besagno and the *Canterini di Sant'olcese* welcome a young singer into their squad by presenting him with a *gagliardetto*, which is followed by an explanation of where the image of the bear originated from: *TrallaleroGenova, Leonardo Marti accolto ufficialmente nella squadra dei Giovani Canterini di Sant'Olcese a Sori*, online video recording, YouTube, 5 May 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8id44Gx6RE&ab_channel=trallaleroGenova> [Accessed 15 Sept 2022].

⁴⁴ John Dickie, 'Imagined Italies' in *Italian Cultural Studies: An introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp. 19-33 (p.22).

The *squadre* are defined both by who they include, and who they exclude. Laura's belief that 'il canto è sempre stato la forma [...] per includere e includersi' certainly rings true when we consider how the process of joining a squad worked historically, as other narrators describe:

Siccome siamo vicini io li ho ospitati, giusto, e si son messi a cantare. E io mi sono interessato, mi piaceva già, i miei zii, parenti cantavano però ero giovane e non mi interessavano queste cose. E uno di questi mi ha detto se vuoi venirci a dare una mano, vuoi imparare, vieni a martedì. Mi ha dato l'indirizzo, vieni a martedì proviamo, se ti piace rimani. Detto e fatto, sono andato, son rimasto e (sono) trent'anni che canto.
(Giancarlo Aimo, December 2021).

This narrator describes what is a relatively typical experience in his account of how he became a member of a *squadra titolare*. There is no formal audition if an individual wants to join a group, as singing ability is often considered to be secondary to the individual's ability to enter into the 'mood' of the music. As a consequence, the process is frequently informal and organic, and although there is certainly a degree of assumed knowledge that is required, the main criterion seems to be that one must be familiar with the songs or the singers themselves. Historically this was usually attained by growing up around the music or regularly attending the *osterie* where impromptu performances and rehearsals took place. As Giancarlo explains, it was often the case that if you were a known individual that had demonstrated some interest, after a while you would be invited to sing in a squad, referred to as being *chiamato nel cerchio*. This is a significant moment for many *canterini*, as it reflects musical and social approval from the squad, and is effectively a very explicit act of inclusion. The narrative that Giancarlo presents that he was asked if he would

be willing to 'dare una mano' reinforces this idea of collaboration and inclusion that other narrators recall.

However, although this is easily framed as an act of inclusion, it could also be viewed as quite a stringent form of gatekeeping. The implication in Giancarlo's narrative is that typically an individual would only be invited to join in if it was felt that they would fit in socially with the group. This is something that singers would often demonstrate passively through attending the informal gathering of *canterini* in the *osterie*. Part of the criteria for fitting in socially is needing to possess shared values and knowledge of the tradition, effectively restricting the ability of an outsider, or someone who does not belong to the imagined community of the *genovesi*, to join a formal squad. As this community is assumed to be male, this can also be applied to participation of women in the tradition. As we will explore later on, given then history of the *trallalero* as a *canto maschile*, the maleness of the tradition is vital to how *canterini* understand it, so it is often assumed that you need to be a man in order need to fit socially with the group. This is vastly different to a choir that anybody can join and demonstrates that, at least historically, there were processes in the formal tradition of *squadre titolari* that regulated and controlled participation. The importance of the social aspect of the tradition is supported by the suggestion that musical ability is very much secondary as, at least according to this narrative, those inviting Giancarlo to join had never heard him sing before.

Other narratives, however, demonstrate that the decline in the number of squads has altered this practice somewhat. As spaces such as the *latteria "Tugni"* no longer exist, the impetus falls on the aspiring singer to find a squad themselves, as there is no longer the opportunity to make oneself known to the squads passively through attending informal singing sessions. Alessandro Guerrini suggests that modern squads are much more welcoming of newer voices primarily because they need them to sustain the practice:

Non c'è più una cosa così. Adesso se un appassionato ti trova, viene a sentirti, e noi i canterini, almeno in generale, siamo ben... siamo tutti abbastanza accoglienti nel senso che ci piace questa cosa che la gente viene a cantare. Però vai direttamente dalla squadra, lì non c'è più una cosa del genere come c'era una volta. Peccato perché era una cosa molto bello [...]. Ormai le squadre siamo in pochi e hanno tutte bisogno di voci nuove, sono tutti felici di prenderle. (Alessandro Guerrini, December 2021).

Alessandro's narrative is a more explicit indication of the nostalgia that is present within the tradition, as he expresses the belief that it is a shame that aspiring singers today have to ask a squad directly if they want to participate because he preferred the old way of doing things. This is perhaps because he recognises how this new process renders it considerably more difficult for squads to find new members, as they no longer hold the same physical presence in the city so they have to rely on others seeking them out. This change in the way aspiring singers enter into the tradition arguably reduces the ability of *squadre titolari* to select who is permitted to join their ranks; the squads are grateful for any interest, as they need new voices to sustain the tradition.

There is certainly no universal experience when it comes to joining a squad. Other narrators' accounts of how they entered into the tradition more closely align with the repeated assertions by *canterini* that the *trallalero* is something that you need to feel or have internalised in some way. These singers usually describe first encountering the music in their youth, implying that it played a formative role for them growing up, for example:

In realtà, io da bambino andavo in campagna, in vacanza, nel paese del mio nonno, che è un paese del cavallo tra Liguria e Piemonte dove la sera non c'era la televisione... e dove per stare insieme la gente ossia raccontava delle storie, o mangiava insieme qualcosa e

cantava. E i canti erano canti che erano in pratica il trallalero. A volte qualcosa di vicino ...che somigliava. Ma spesso erano proprio il trallalero. Questo, quindi, è rimasta come un superstrato, come un ricordo no... una cosa che rimaneva sotto, nel profondo in qualche modo. Poi a distanza di anni, non ho mai cantato il trallalero nel corso degli anni, poi è successo...ormai circa vent'anni fa che ho incontrato un'amico di allora che ho scoperto che cantava in questa squadra... e parlando ho scoperto che continuava a cantare e gli ho chiesto 'ma si può venire a vedere' ecc. e mi sono avvicinato in questo modo. (Mauro Bozzini, December 2021).

Andavo giù a (Piazza) Caricamento. C'era un'osteria che era poi famosa. Era un ritrovo di canterini e s'incontravano normalmente il sabato pomeriggio. Andavano dentro e chi arrivava cantava e c'erano varie squadre formate da diversi alimenti. E io, essendo ragazzino dall'età otto anni, ti dico, nove, magari, i miei mi mandavano a comprare nei negozi e quando arrivavo lì sentivo cantare e mi fermavo di fuori da questa bottega...una latteria era. Mi fermavo per voglia di sentire e, piano piano, chissà perché l'ho preso...mi è piaciuto questo tipo di canto, sentirlo. (Eugenio Rissotto, December 2021).

Both narrators recall encountering the music as children, as it was physically grounded in the places they frequented. It is not clear whether Eugenio Rissotto's narrative makes reference to the *latteria* "Tugni" mentioned earlier, or if the *osteria* he refers to was another, different meeting place for *canterini*. Certainly, in terms of the geography of the city, *Piazza Caricamento* is relatively close to *Via Canneto il lungo* where the *latteria* was situated. Regardless, this demonstrates how, during that period, the historic centre of the city was teeming with singers and squads, and also supports our earlier assessment of the significant impact the loss of these spaces has had on the *trallalero*. It is especially interesting that in his narrative Mauro Bozzini describes asking a friend if

he could participate, as this shows that there is often a lot of variation in practices within the tradition.

La Daeta

As we have already established, the confluence of music and identity most typically manifests itself in the sensory language used by the *canterini* when describing the qualities required to sing the *trallalero*. Narrators often explain how the need to feel or to have lived the music takes precedence over pure singing ability, for example:

Perché il bello di questo canto, di canto tradizionale, è il modo, tra virgolette. La daeta si chiama, come lo swing del Jazz, no? Qua si chiama daeta nel trallalero. È il modo di cantare. Se un cantante della music leggera viene qua a cantare il trallalero... non dice niente. (Alessandro Guerrini, December 2021).

This speaker's suggestion that a popular music vocalist would be unable to sing the *trallalero* because they could not comprehend the intangible quality of *daeta* necessary to successfully do so typifies the interrelation between identity and music. In the narrator's view, they would fail to express the intangible, experiential quality of the music that is acquired over time through living and internalising the music and its cultural context. The comparison given to the concept of 'swing' commonly found in jazz music was also made by other *canterini*, and it is a relatively useful one in so far as *daeta* is also a similarly ambiguous term used to describe the way that a performer exploits various techniques of musical expression in order to instill feeling into the

music. Indeed, the emotive language many *canterini* use when describing the need to feel the *trallalero* is very similar in sentiment to the thoughts expressed by early jazz musicians when asked to define ‘swing’.⁴⁵ However, whilst discussions of ‘swing’ in jazz have generally focused on the rhythmic quality that it gives to the music, *daeta* combines this element with a singer’s or squad’s ability to embellish the melody and make a piece their own, uniting the music with the ‘colour given to the text by the dialectal cadence’.⁴⁶ Analysis of this definition lends credence to the narrator’s belief that a vocalist who does not belong to the tradition would be unable to successfully perform this music. Regardless of talent, the specification of this linguistic element clearly demonstrates that an intimate understanding of *genovese* is required in order to be able to sing the *trallalero*. This reinforces the sentiment expressed by other *canterini* that the *trallalero* is a uniquely *genovese* practice, as it stands to reason that one must be from the city in order to have the knowledge required to accurately recreate the linguistic nuances in performance. In effect, the *genovesità* of the music is tethered to the musical elements of the practice.

Laura Parodi describes the importance of rhythm in the *trallalero*, whilst also explaining how the *daeta* of any given squad is shaped by the vocal qualities that the members possess:

È importante perché questo, ogni squadra ha quella che si chiama *a daeta*, il proprio modo di cantare...la propria caratteristica e che magari la caratteristica anche delle voci che stanno cantando, ma è proprio il modo di quella squadra di interpretare un brano che deve essere fatto in un certo modo, però a quella squadra, a quella sonorità, quel proprio

⁴⁵ Louis Armstrong is frequently misquoted on this to the extent that it is unclear what he actually originally said, but the sentiment is usually something like: ‘if you have to ask, you’ll never know’, quoted in: Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) p. 6.

⁴⁶ Balma, *Lexicon of multipart singing*, p.377. It is also worth noting that the singers in question here are the *primi voci*: primo, contraeto, baritono and chitarra. It would be accurate to say that the concept of *la daeta* is less relevant to the basses as individual singers, as their parts are less lyrically and melodically complex. That is not to say that they do not contribute to the overall ‘mood’ of the squad’s rendition of the piece, but they are not soloist voices.

modo. E quindi l'obiettivo è anche quello... La voce chitarra e il baritono devono essere ritmicamente perfetti, perché sono quelli che danno proprio la ritmicità giusta al brano, che deve avere quella ritmicità altrimenti si dice in dialetto 'a l'è molla', è lenta, non va bene, non sa di niente. Invece caratterizzare un brano vuol dire dare la ritmicità giusta, la sonorità giusta e l'andamento giusto, che è quello che caratterizza proprio la squadra che la sta interpretando. Per esempio, noi i trallaleri li cantiamo in un modo, poi ci sono delle voci molto caratteristici che sono soprattutto quelle dei primi che danno proprio un'impronta particolare anche nel modo li cantano. (Laura Parodi, August 2022).

The suggestion that *daeta* is essentially an innate, almost instinctive quality is further compounded by the fact that Balma also notes that *daeta* is 'considered a peculiarity that cannot be taught'.⁴⁷

The reality is more likely somewhere in the middle, as although *daeta* is not explicitly taught, to say that it is an entirely innate quality would be misleading. It is better understood as something that is learnt passively through singing with the group over a period of time, but it is clear that there is a level of vocal control required, implying the need for some level of natural ability.

Giuseppe Zacchetti, maestro and *baritono*, describes this balance between acquired knowledge and natural ability:

Io penso che per fare questa cosa, mentalmente bisogna avere in qualche modo una propria dotazione, che deriva anche in parte da un'abitudine a farla, ma soprattutto da una propensione naturale verso la polifonia.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Cited in Balma, p.377.

⁴⁸ Maestro Giuseppe Zacchetti quoted in: Balma, *From Monody of Polyphony*, p.162.

Other narratives seem to support Zacchetti's suggestion that possessing a natural tendency towards polyphonic music is a vital quality in practicing and performing the *trallalero*, for example:

Le canzoni per il basso sono abbastanza facile, no. Cioè, non sono come le prime voci che devono sapere tutto a memoria [...]. Io so che quando, non so, il tenore va in alto, io devo andare in basso, però la sento con l'orecchio e non mi posso confondere. Mi rimane più facile imparare la canzone. Non devo farlo a memoria. (Giancarlo Aimò, December 2021).

Giancarlo's account that he does not need to learn his part by memory, despite the lack of scores or lyric sheets, is striking. For him there is more certainty, and less risk of confusion, in simply listening to all the other voices in the squad for cues in their melodies that he uses to inform his singing. Again, the practical element of this seems very unlikely, as although the pieces are certainly easier for the basses, it is rarely as simple as going up or down in pitch in response to the melody of the soloists. However, it is significant that this is how some singers conceptualise the process of learning in the *trallalero*. Describing the manner of singing as instinctual feeds into their understanding of the *genovesità* of the tradition, as the implication of this is that they believe some *Genovesi* are born with a natural propensity to sing this kind of music. For Giancarlo, singing feels instinctual because he has become so familiar with the repertoire and the practice over the years that he can follow the melody without much thought. His narrative here is best understood as a powerful form of imagination, which separates his experience of the music and performing it from objective truth. This understanding is made possible by the fact that songs are learnt very passively in the *trallalero*, as *canterini* are expected to pick things up orally as they go along. If lyric sheets and scores were used in rehearsals, for example, then it would be next to impossible for a singer to believably assert that they don't need to learn their part off by heart.

Tradition and Innovation

The almost entirely oral manner in which songs and melodies are learned, rehearsed, and performed renders these processes innately more dynamic and collaborative. The individual singer has considerably more responsibility for their own development, as there is no formal instruction given to newcomers as to how to sing their parts. This is partially offset by the expectation that an individual will already possess some knowledge of the songs and the tradition, but it is typically assumed that singers will improve through practice over time. As such, individual singers frequently play a fundamental role in the development and innovation of the music. Old ‘forgotten’ pieces are occasionally rediscovered and integrated into the repertoires of squads by their members, and established melodies are constantly being reworked by the more virtuosic performers, leading to a curious situation whereby different squads sing different versions of the same songs. Then eighty-year-old *chitarra* Eugenio Rissotto, introduced to me by Laura Parodi as ‘davvero un grande’,⁴⁹ describes how he has honed this ability over the years, carving out new melodies and taking possession of the repertoire:

Perché è un ruolo la chitarra, che è quasi non dico impossibile ma è difficilissimo farla imparare a qualcuno...mostrargli a farla, perché ci vuole molto, molto, molto ingegno e molto estro. E io siccome con li ... evidentemente ce l’ho e allora nel mentre che la faccio, faccio certi pezzi che me l’invento mentre li faccio, e faccio delle cose diverse che non esistono magari nelle altre squadre. Non lo fanno. Ma io ci riesco perché col mio estro faccio degli accompagnamenti delle piccole cose che nell’assieme ci stanno molto bene, e riempiono più e mi dà soddisfazione ed è con li che sono andato sempre avanti così cercando di migliorarmi sempre. (Eugenio Rissotto, December 2021).

⁴⁹ Laura Parodi goes even further in her praise of Eugenio Rissotto, referring to him as ‘il *Paganini* del trallalero’. Parodi, p.40.

In this narrative, Rissotto explains how he has taken responsibility of his own development as a singer, and it seems clear that constantly striving to improve himself is a source of personal pride. He is keen to highlight that permission to freely experiment with the melody is not something that is granted to every singer, and that it is only due to his skill and flair that he is able to do this successfully. This is notably at odds with the frequent assertion by *canterini* that singing talent is secondary to one's ability to feel the music. Rissotto continues in this vein by calling attention to the fact that this particular role, the *chitarra*, is especially difficult to teach, implying that to perform it well is partly down to some level of innate ability. However, it is worth noting that this process is less improvisational than it might first seem as, following their invention, these new melodies are rehearsed multiple times before they are performed, often over a substantial period of time. This observation is not intended to detract from the skill of the *canterini*; in fact, it shows that this is a considered, thoughtful process, more akin to composition than improvisation.

Balma describes this practice as a 'coexistence between innovation and tradition', yet it might be more accurately conceived as a form of dialogue.⁵⁰ The process is dynamic and cyclical, as traditional songs are 'rescued' by *canterini* and introduced into the common repertoire, whilst also being transformed to create new melodies that are subsequently preserved through recordings. These recordings then become part of the canon once again and the process continues. As I have already established, the music and the socio-cultural context are so closely intertwined that it stands to reason that this is not just a musical process, but is also representative of precisely the dynamic Born suggests: that 'prior' identities are both embodied and reproduced in musical

⁵⁰ Balma, *From Monody to Polyphony*, p.149.

cultures.⁵¹ The ability music has to forge and transform identities is something that Rissotto also alludes to in his account, describing how his musical inventions and ornamentations create some variation between the repertoires of different squads, rendering them distinct in both music and identity.

The individual flair and skill of the *canterini* clearly plays an important role in the *trallalero*, as it serves not only to create more elaborate performances for audiences to enjoy, but also to enrich the repertoire and identity of the squads. This is an important distinction, as there is often a degree of mistrust towards virtuosity from some musicians and scholars, depending on whether it is perceived as serving the interests of the performer themselves or of the music as whole. Anna Royce concisely expresses this debate in her summary of comments made at a panel discussion on the topic at Indiana University in 2002: ‘All agreed that virtuosity is bad when it is an end in itself and that it is good and necessary when it is a foundation for serving the art’.⁵² It is important to note that although it is useful here in analysing the role of virtuosity in the *trallalero*, this statement is somewhat contentious. Performers and audiences often enjoy virtuosity for its own sake, as it makes performances more exciting and allows skilled musicians to show off their talent. Regardless, it seems clear that in this case, although Rissotto feels a great sense of satisfaction and pride in his capacity to develop and embellish traditional melodies, he is far from a hubristic virtuosity that serves only itself. He is clear in stating that his additions fit well in the ‘assieme’, when all the different voices join together. His intention is not to stand out, but to add texture and help to provide the balance the voices need to blend together. Although the main priority is to sound good together, this does not come at the expense of individual

⁵¹ Born, *Music and the Representation/Articulation of Sociocultural Identities*, p.33.

⁵² Anna Royce, *Anthropology of the performing arts: Artistry, virtuosity, and interpretation in a cross-cultural perspective* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004) pp.18-19; see also Jane Ginsborg, “‘The brilliance of perfection’ or ‘pointless finish’? What virtuosity means to musicians’ *Musicae Scientiae* 22.4 (2018), 454-473.

expression.⁵³ As a genre, the *trallalero* provides a space for virtuosity, but it is understood that ultimately it is a form of *canto di squadra*, and this group dynamic helps to keep this in check. This is supported by other narrators, who suggest that there are effectively unwritten rules that govern what singers can or cannot do:

Non lo so, è mondo che vedo pieno di ‘io sono bravo, tu no... lui sì’, cose senza senso, no, perché ognuno canto come sa, poi se uno va fuori dei canoni, non c’è da richiamare perché è una tradizione vera e non è bello che uno faccia quello che vuole, la tradizione va mantenuta e va rispettata. (Alessandro Guerrini, December 2021).

Alessandro Guerrini is somewhat scathing here in his assessment of singers who claim to be better than others. He instead positions the tradition above the ambitions of such *canterini*, asserting that it must be maintained and respect. Other narrators echo this sentiment, repeating the belief that although an individual’s vocal ability is certainly an important element in a successful performance, one must not lose sight of the music as a whole:

Perché poi, non è importante...non è tanto importante essere bravi e cantanti, perché a volte può essere fuorviante, no, ti può buttare fuori. È importante essere dentro il modo, dentro il tipo di canto... appunto dentro il mood...il sentire di questo canto che è particolare perché cantando in cerchio tu hai una forte risonanza del suono e quindi devi riuscire a stare dentro tenendo un equilibrio, creando un equilibrio sia di volume che di suono. (Mauro Bozzini, December 2021).

⁵³ The idea of ‘sounding good’ is, of course, completely subjective. In this case most *canterini* understand it as creating a balance between all the constituent voices in the squad.

This narrative reiterates that singing ability alone is not sufficient, and that a balance of sound is created through forming the circle, which supports the singer in ‘feeling’ the music and entering into the ‘mood’ of the song. Yet this narrator goes further than others have done in this aspect, implying that the balance of the music is so delicate that if a singer is unable to stay within the mood of the song it can be misleading or off-putting for the other performers. This lends weight to the argument that singing in the round creates a more intense atmosphere and implies that as a result there is a degree of fragility and vulnerability to the ‘mood’ that the singer enters into. There is also a clear nod here to the *genovesità* of the music in emphasizing that the narrator feels that the ‘mood’ of the music is ‘particolare’ or unique to this kind of music. It is difficult to say whether this is truly the case. In my earlier assessment of how practitioners view the ‘mood’ of the music, I highlighted how it also represents a sense of belonging to a community. This is certainly a sentiment that is present in other forms of music, but every community holds different values and exists within a different cultural context, so it seems clear that the ‘mood’ of the music would reflect that.

Often, finding a balance between monody and polyphony is easier to do in theory than in practice. Balma notes that although it ought to be the soloists’ responsibility to adapt to any instructions given, it is often difficult to know whether something it is one’s own responsibility or someone else’s. Sometimes, particularly obstinate singers can even force the *meistro* to adjust their entire arrangement of a piece, as Paolo Sobrero recounts:

‘Ho provato ad un certo momento a insegnare a Luciano Quarto in una certa maniera; però poi ho visto che gli veniva meglio fare in una certa maniera, mi sono adattato io: ho iniziato a metterci le altre voci perché suonasse tutto’⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Paolo Sobrero quoted in, Balma, *From Monody of Polyphony*, p.162.

The ability to balance all the different voices of a squad is referred to as *dividere le parti* and is what separates an excellent maestro from an average one. This is the process by which new arrangements are put together, with adjustments made to suit the range of vocal ability within the squad. The maestro is tasked with unifying the voices of the squad, whilst creating an arrangement that replicates the expected sound of the *trallalero*. There is a practical side to this, as the *genovesità* of the *trallalero* is not just present in the thoughts and feelings the *canterini* detail in their narratives. There are some more tangible, concrete elements that can be identified, which render the music unique and distinct from other ostensibly similar traditions. This starts with the voices themselves. For example, Mauro Balma describes the inclusion of a male *contraeto* in the *trallalero*, singing exclusively in falsetto, as ‘praticamente un caso unico in Italia’.⁵⁵ Yet this is more than just a mere curiosity in and of itself, as he goes on to note that this also has a distinguishing effect on the music in a wider sense. Balma highlights how the extension of register that the use of falsetto creates allows the *contraeto* to break free from the musical structure common to polyphonic music found along the Appenines and Northern Italy, where this voice would typically follow the *primo* in thirds. The inclusion of the *chitarra*, a soloist voice that sings exclusively in nonsense syllables, is a similarly unique addition. The almost instrumental quality, as the name suggests, helps to imbue the music with a rhythmicity that is absent from other polyphonic music traditions. Balma contrasts this with the Sardinian tradition of *canto a tenores*, which he acknowledges bears a passing resemblance to the *trallalero* insofar as it is composed of a soloist voice accompanied by other voices that are limited to nonsense syllables. However, despite the apparent similarities, there are fundamental differences between the two forms in terms of composition. Where the *trallalero* possesses a rhythmic quality and a rarely unbroken melody line, the singers in *canto a tenores* move in blocks of chords, followed by long periods of

⁵⁵ Balma, *Alle Origini del Trallalero Genovese*, pp.5-9.

silence. Balma's argument is incredibly important here, as demonstrating that the *trallalero* is fundamentally different from other polyphonic traditions is crucial in validating the *genovesità* of the tradition.

It seems clear, therefore, that the *genovesità* of the tradition is deeply entwined with all elements of the practice. It exists physically, in the meeting places decorated with symbols and old photographs, the local food and drink that singers share at their rehearsals, and what remains of the old *latterie*. Indeed, I walked through the historic centre of the city with Laura Parodi, who pointed out to me various bars and *osterie* that used to be, or still were, meeting spots for *squadre* over the years. Yet the identity of the *trallalero* also exists in the imaginary. The singers feel a sense of belonging to a community of *Genovesi*, often with presumed shared characteristics and musical heritage. Although they are less present today, inter-squad rivalries also help to sustain this identity, allowing for variations in voice and performance that have both enriched the tradition and placed the singers in dialogue with their own repertoire. The musical form itself contributes to the creation this myth, as the concept of *la daeta* introduces an intangible prerequisite in order to participate in the tradition: the need to 'feel' the music. Lastly, through the work of Mauro Balma, it is evident that the *trallalero* can be considered to be musically distinct from other similar practices.

GENDERED VOICES

The inclusion of women in *squadre titolari*, or 'named squads', in recent years has been a point of vigorous debate for both scholars and singers. For many performers, the maleness of the tradition is fundamental to their understanding of it, and there are those that would rather see a

squad cease to exist than allow women to participate. Mauro Balma, eminent scholar and ethnomusicologist, has dedicated more than forty years to the study of folk music traditions in Liguria, and has gathered hundreds of sound recordings and conducted countless interviews with singers. In his work on the history of the tradition, *Nel cerchio del canto: storia del trallalero genovese*, he dedicates a brief section to this debate, in which he argues against the attitude that women should have no place in the *trallalero*, but also claims that this hostility towards women singers does not equate to machismo:

L'inserimento della voce femminile nella squadra di canto maschile ha suscitato reazioni di dissenso, consenso e sfumate prese di posizione: è appena il caso di precisare che l'ostilità non ha mai neppure sfiorato le canterine come persone, e che il maschilismo non c'entra per niente.⁵⁶

Balma chooses to frame the contemporary involvement of women in the tradition as an *inserimento* or inclusion, which is significant as it makes clear that, up until recently, they have been excluded from participating. Yet what Balma overlooks in his claim that 'il maschilismo non c'entra per niente' is that even if the opponents to women's participation in the squads have not always been explicitly misogynistic in their objections, something which I will examine in greater detail later on, this lack of overt misogyny does not entirely eliminate the influence that the internalised masculinity of the tradition may have had on their reasoning. The tradition takes the form that it does because of the socio-cultural context in which it developed: a patriarchal society in which certain spaces were male-dominated. To claim that opposition towards women participating in the tradition is in no way motivated by preconceived attitudes towards gender is perhaps a disservice to women such as Laura Parodi, who testifies that she has experienced

⁵⁶ Balma, *Nel cerchio del canto*, p.209.

personal attacks because of her involvement. The challenge here is the same one that I highlighted at the beginning of this project; it is impossible to consider the music in isolation. To support Balma's argument that *maschilismo* plays no part in this would be accepting that the opposition to the inclusion of women is purely musical, which is a problematic mindset not only because it directly contradicts this project's established theoretical framework, but because it ignores the history of the tradition.

It is not the purpose of this study to try and reach a moral judgement on the role of gender within the tradition. It is certainly not the responsibility of the ethnographer to judge a tradition such as the *trallalero* by their own cultural instincts and standards. To do so would mean to impose one set of values over another, which then establishes deeply problematic power relations between the scholar and their participants.⁵⁷ If, for example, a scholar who was external to the tradition were to produce a study on Welsh male voice choirs, in which they claimed that it was sexist practice and demanded that women were admitted, one can imagine that the singers and their communities would likely be rightfully affronted. Ultimately, the aim of the ethnomusicologist should be to ask questions, and to analyse why a particular cultural practice or tradition takes the form that it does.

It is evident that the contentious nature of this subject requires careful and measured thought and, as such, it seems best to divide this analysis into two parts. The first of these will be grounded in the music itself, and will look to assess the validity of claims that the addition of the female voice fundamentally changes the sound and performance of the music in some way. The

⁵⁷ It could therefore be argued that even the terms 'subject' or 'participant' could be seen as problematic, as they imply a hierarchy in which the scholar is placed above the object of their research. I prefer the term 'narrator' here, as it is comparatively neutral. In relation to this, and to the problematic relationships between scholars, proclaimed experts, and the people to whom a culture truly belongs, see Danielle Brown, *An Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies, Especially Ethnomusicology and Music Education* (2021), <www.mypeopletellstories.com/blog/open-letter> [Accessed 10 September 2022].

second will examine the *trallalero* from a sociological perspective, discussing how women have been historically excluded from participating and how the masculinity of the tradition has shaped how it is understood by its practitioners.

The *Contralto Femminile*

At this point it is important to note that whilst there are some traditionalists who are fiercely opposed to the inclusion of women in the *trallalero*, the reality is much more nuanced than this. It would perhaps be unfair to refer to a singer who displays some hesitance toward the inclusion of female voices as an opponent, and there are certainly some narrators who would reject being referred to as such. There is, however, a curious contradiction in the testimonies of some narrators who despite singing alongside women, still seem to challenge the legitimacy of their participation.

Many singers choose to rationalise their objection to the inclusion of women as being grounded in purely musical reasoning. It is important to clarify at this point that when we talk about the women participating in the *trallalero* it is solely in the role of the contralto. When performed by a man, the part is typically sung in falsetto, and as such this is effectively the only part that is possible within a typical female vocal range. The most common assertion is that when this part is sung by a woman, it completely changes the sound of the music, for example:

Il Trallalero è un canto maschile, punto. Anche perché una delle voci caratteristiche è il contralto; è fatto da un uomo ed è fatto in falsetto e da una caratteristica peculiarissima al trallalero come quella della chitarra, ad esempio, che ce l'abbiamo solo noi. Perciò le donne...cambia totalmente il suono con la donna. Sono a dirti quasi che non ha senso, cioè cambia tutto. [...]

Nonostante questo, io ti posso dire che con la Laura (Parodi) abbiamo fatto delle cose incredibili, bellissime ecc., e la Laura ti dico è 'la canterina' tra virgolette, migliore che esiste nel suo mercato, però è diversa, non è la voce maschile. Anche perché a me piace la voce maschile, ma non solo per il timbro, perché i maschi fanno... lei canta troppo bene, è piena, certe volte dico troppo piena. Lei ce l'ha le note, invece il contralto genovese, io esagero, però è molto... fa portamenti... per arrivare alle note. Cioè è un tipo di canto diverso. Poi canta sotto nei trallaleri, canta le note basse. Diciamo che con le donne cambia completamente. (Alessandro Guerrini, December 2021).

The beginning of Alessandro's narrative demonstrates a resistance to change which is shared by many other *canterini*. In his view, the maleness of the tradition forms an integral part of its identity, and this is embodied by the characteristic sound of the male falsetto. What is especially interesting in this narrative is the assertion that Laura's singing is 'too good' or 'too full' for the music. There is perhaps a degree of truth here, at least insofar as it demonstrates that the singers perceive that there is a considerable difference in sound production and tone between the voice of the female contralto, who can sing the majority of the melody comfortably in chest and head voice, and her male equivalent, who utilises falsetto in order to reach the higher notes in the melody.

The most straightforward way to assess this is to examine the vocal ranges of the contralto and countertenor and as they appear in western art music, focusing on how they overlap.⁵⁸ As we can see in figure 3, the normal range of classically trained countertenors is practically identical to that of the female contralto. These ranges are usually given as *g-d''* and *g-e''* respectively, but it is

⁵⁸ 'Countertenor' is the term used to describe the highest male voice type and is the closest approximation to the *contralto maschile* as it appears in the *trallalero*.

worth noting that these are simply the normal, working ranges of these voices, and that it is not unusual for individual singers to be able extend this range at either end.⁵⁹ Although these two ranges may seem functionally identical, there is a key difference between them in terms of how

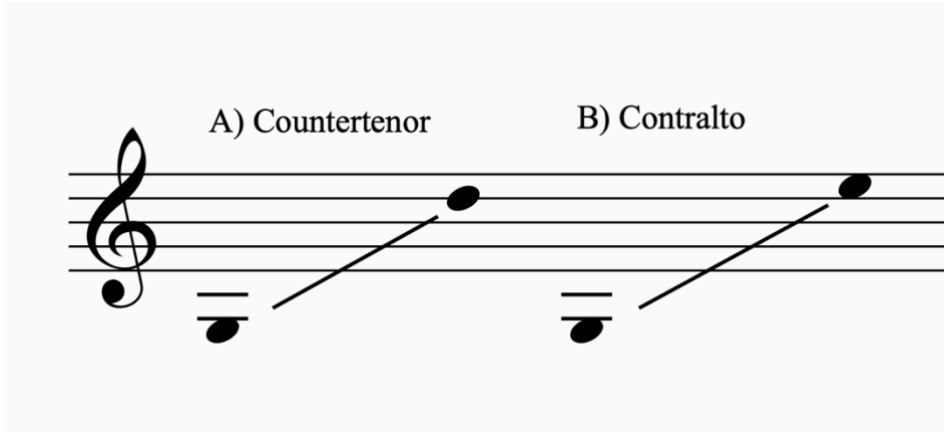


Figure 3. The normal working ranges of modern countertenors and contraltos, as cited in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* Vol.1.

the sound is produced. Whilst a detailed analysis of the mechanics of sound production is perhaps beyond the scope of this project, it is important to understand the difference between the modal voice, which we can equate to a normal, comfortable speaking voice, and falsetto, which is best understood as a higher or ‘false’ voice which is produced when only part of the vocal folds vibrate.⁶⁰ Simon Ravens provides a concise and coherent explanation of the physiological difference in sound production between these two voices in *The supernatural voice: A history of high male singing*:

In falsetto, only the edges of the vocal folds enter into vibration, while the main body of each fold is more or less relaxed. In modal voice production, the wavelike motion

⁵⁹ Normal ranges are as cited in: ‘Contralto’ and ‘Countertenor’ in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by Stanley Sadie and Christina Bashford, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Press, 1992) pp. 933, 999; From this point onwards, these vocal ranges will be using the Helmholtz system, whereby Middle C on a standard eighty-eight key piano is written as a lower case *c*, the octave above this is *c*”, then *c*”” and so on. The octave below Middle C is written as *c*, below that becomes an upper case *C*, then *C*’ and so forth. See also ‘Pitch notation’ in *The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music* ed. by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Press, 1994) p.623.

⁶⁰ I use the term normal here for the purposes of clarity, but it is worth addressing that this is often considered to be a problematic term, as it implies that any other voice is somehow *abnormal*.

involves the whole vocal cord, with the glottis opening at the bottom first and then at the top.⁶¹

Whilst the female contralto can perform within the majority of the range outlined by using her modal voice, the countertenor frequently possesses a modal voice range that is much closer to that of a tenor, *c – a'* for example, but is able to greatly extend this through the use of falsetto. Classically trained countertenors are usually such exceptional falsettists that their transition pitch, when they move from their modal voice to their falsetto voice, is often undetectable. The ability to seamlessly blend these two voices is a desirable characteristic in western art music, and in practice this can make it extremely difficult to distinguish between the male and female voice. This has led to a considerable overlap in the roles that these singers have historically performed.⁶² Ratliff writes about the use of ‘trouser-roles’ in Baroque opera, and how the male heroic parts would frequently be performed by female mezzo-sopranos or contraltos. She gives the example of Handel, for whom ‘pitch took preference over gender’, and although he sometimes employed alto or soprano castrati, this was not out of an attempt to exclude women from these roles.⁶³ However, though the low female voice may have been chosen because of its close resemblance to that of a young boy, female singers also faced the challenge of believably

⁶¹ Simon Ravens, *The Supernatural Voice: A history of high male singing* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014) p.7.

⁶² A practical example of this almost indistinguishable sound can be found in listening to, and comparing, two different performances of the same piece. I have included below two links to performances of the Johann Sebastian Bach Aria, *Erbarme dich, mein Gott, um meiner Zähren Willen*, the first by Ukrainian countertenor Viktor Andriichenko, and the second by French contralto Nathalie Stutzmann.

Viktor Andriichenko, *Bach: Erbarme dich, Mein Gott (Matthäuspassion) – Viktor Andriichenko (Countertenor)*, *LiveMozArt*, online video recording, YouTube, 24 Oct 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpRqiVvNXEY&ab_channel=ViktorAndriichenko> [Accessed 3 September 2022].

Nathalie Stutzmann, *Recording Bach Aria – “Erbarme dich”*, online video recording, YouTube, 16 Apr 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jcil9S2exIU&ab_channel=NathalieStutzmann> [Accessed 2 September 2022].

⁶³ Joy Ratliff, ‘Women in Pants: Male Roles for the Mezzo-Soprano Or Contralto’ (doctoral thesis, University of Maryland, 1997) p.1.

embodying the masculinity of these characters. Hadlock highlights the fundamental difference in audience expectations of male and female travesty practice in opera:

Trouser roles require a more elaborate scaffolding from which to suspend our disbelief, for in order to accept the character *en travesti* as *male*, we must rationalise away the evidence of both our eyes and ears. In contrast with male travesty practice, which expects the audience to see, hear, and laugh at the discrepancy between performer and role.⁶⁴

The suggestion that male vocalists performing in female roles are expected to draw their value from their evocation of the absent woman, rather than trying to believably portray a female character is certainly relevant to the *trallalero*. Although it would not be true to say that male contraltos in the *trallalero* are expected to embody a character to the same extent as performers in opera, there is clearly a degree of *fare la donna*, or playing the woman, that is integral to the role, even if this is from a purely vocal standpoint.⁶⁵ It seems clear that this is deliberate, as the alternative *genovese* term for the male contralto in the *trallalero*, *a bagascetta*, roughly translates to little girl, implying that the use of falsetto was originally intended to mimic the sound of the female voice. Indeed, Balma provides this as a potential explanation as to why some *canterini* believe that the inclusion of the female voice in the *trallalero* changes the feeling of the music, ‘Se è plausibile l’interpretazione antropologica del falsetto come evocazione della femminilità assente, è chiaro che il materializzarsi del oggetto distrugge il fantastico dell’immaginario

⁶⁴ Heather Hadlock, ‘The Career of Cherubino, or the Trouser Role Grows Up’ in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* ed. by Mary Ann Smart (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) pp.67-69.

⁶⁵ *Maestro* Paolo Besagno’s introduction to the different voices of his squad in the video linked below offers some credence to this interpretation. His description of his role as the contralto as ‘io che faccio la donna, ma la faccio solo cantando e basta’, is clearly intended to amuse the crowd, supporting Hadlock’s interpretation that audience expectations towards male performances of ‘female’ roles are vastly different to if a woman was to perform the same part: *trallalero genovese*, “*il Trallalero Genovese*” spiegato da Paolo Besagno assieme ai canterini di Sant’Olcese, online video recording, YouTube, 4 Aug 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IhQIfNN-eI&t=144s&ab_channel=trallalero genovese> [Accessed 12 Sep 2022]

maschile'.⁶⁶ I have chosen to express this as a change in the 'feeling' of the music here specifically because that is how the singers themselves understand it. They know that the music sounds different with a female vocalist because they can hear the difference in timbre and tone, but as we have highlighted, entering into the 'mood' of the music is vital part of the practice, and singers are able to perceive a change in the way that music 'feels' alongside a change in sound.

This is best conceived as a question of audience expectations. For the *canterini*, the music 'feels' wrong because it does not meet their expectations of how it should sound or should be performed, which have been shaped by their experience of the tradition. According to Balma, only two women have ever been recorded as having sung consistently in *squadre titolari*, and in terms of the history of the *trallalero* this is a relatively recent innovation, beginning only in the last forty years.⁶⁷ For that reason, especially given the advanced age of many active singers, many *canterini* formed their expectations of how the *trallalero* should sound when there were no active female vocalists at all, so the inclusion of the female voice goes against what they have always known. The description of this as a feeling as opposed to an expectation is more accurate because these singers are attached to the music emotionally, as it is tethered to their sense of identity and community. It could therefore be argued that any change in sound or performance is upsetting for them because it disrupts part of their sense of self, as well as throwing their understanding of the tradition into doubt.

The particular, strained sound of the male falsetto is integral to the tradition not only from a musical perspective, but in terms of what it represents: a form of fantasy in which the male voice conjures up an illusion of the absent woman. This illusion is shattered when an actual woman enters the circle to replace the male falsetto, which in turn throws a key performative element of

⁶⁶ Balma, *Nel cerchio del canto*, p.209.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.209.

the *trallalero* into crisis. This presents the question of whether this is something that a woman could truly recreate, as it is not a musical quality, but instead a question of audience expectation and perception. That is to say, when a male contralto sings in falsetto, there is a disconnect between what our eyes tell us and what we hear, which is not present when a woman takes up this role. The male contralto plays the part of the young woman through the use of vocal techniques that alter his voice, whereas although the female singer may be able to sing the melody, this illusory dimension is lost.

Mauro Balma supports this view, as he continues, ‘Certamente la voce femminile inserisce nel canto una concretezza che impedisce la magia dell’evocazione, il senso del meraviglioso’.⁶⁸ It can also be argued that this forms as a possible basis for Alessandro’s narrative that a female contralto can sound ‘too full’ for the *trallalero*, as Balma considers the male falsetto to be almost magical in its intangibility, something which he argues is lost in the ‘concreteness’ of the female voice. It seems that, whilst there is a degree of femininity that is implied in the male falsetto, it is essential that the ‘maleness’ of the voice is still perceptible. Consequently, a classically trained countertenor would not suit this style of singing, as the audience expect to be able to hear a distinctly ‘male sound’. When we take this into consideration, Alessandro’s seemingly obstinate narrative that, ‘Il trallalero è un canto maschile, punto’, takes on a new dimension. In his view, the maleness of the tradition is key not just to the sound of the music, but also to its identity, as these two things cannot be separated.

Whilst in Baroque opera, women may have been able to take up traditionally male roles with relative ease, this is not necessarily something that translates to all forms of music, and there are many music traditions that have remained strictly gendered, with attempts to change this causing

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.209.

significant controversy. An obvious example of this is the foundation of a girls' choir at Salisbury Cathedral in the early 1990s, which was seen as ground-breaking at the time. Up until this point cathedral choirs in the Anglican Church had almost always been made up of exclusively boys. This tradition dated back to the Middle Ages when young male novices were inducted into the monasteries where they were educated and received vocal training so they could sing the daily liturgy. The long-standing nature of the all-male choirs meant that the decision to introduce a girls' choir at Salisbury was met with considerable opposition. Graham F. Welch describes how 'the Dean of Salisbury Cathedral reported in his tenth anniversary sermon that "... we knew that there would be screams of shock horror in some places" and "... we encountered stiff, sometimes almost venomous opposition"'.⁶⁹

Like the reluctance to accept female singers in the *trallalero*, most of the opposition to the introduction of girls' choirs focused on sound, and the belief that allowing girls in would result in the loss of the 'unique' male chorister voice. There was also the view, shared by many organists and directors of music at the time, that girls simply were not capable of producing the sound required. Former Master of the Choristers at Hereford Cathedral Roy Massey argued this in 1980:

I've never seen a set of girls of under-thirteen age who make a nice noise. I've adjudicated at many festivals which have included such choirs and they sound windy and awful. After puberty, they make a very much nicer noise.⁷⁰

The use of the term 'nice noise' here does not stand up to much scrutiny from a sonic standpoint. It is evidently not an objective remark on the quality of the sound itself, as such a

⁶⁹ Graham F. Welch, 'Culture and gender in a cathedral music context: An activity theory exploration' *A cultural psychology of music education*, (2011), 225-258 (p.235).

⁷⁰ P Phillips, 'The Golden Age Regained (2)' *Early Music*, 8.2 (1981), 180-198 (p.195).

thing is arguably not even possible, but is instead a subjective view that comes from the speaker's expectations of the sound. What it does tell us, however, is that the context in which the music takes place is crucial to how it is perceived. Although at first glance Massey's claim may ostensibly read like a comment on the musical ability of girl choristers, it is also indicative of the fact that they were judged by their ability to meet the expectations of the 'cathedral sound'. Others, such as, Barry Rose, former Director of Music at St Paul's felt that girl choristers would not be able to manage the typically heavy workload that boy choristers were used to.

Yet the reality is that none of these things have since turned out to be the case. There were challenges at first, as the girls were essentially novices to a centuries-old male tradition. Even if they were talented vocalists, because they had been excluded from the tradition up until this point they were inexperienced in this style of singing. However, with time it has become clear that the 'unique' male chorister voice has not been lost, as was feared by some, and in actual fact, when instructed in the same way as boys, girl choristers have been able to recreate the expected sound so successfully that there is often no perceptible difference, as Stewart highlights:

Empirical and experimental studies have shown that boys' and girls' voices, particularly in a younger age range, can be shaped to ensure that the characteristic customary chorister sound of the Anglican cathedral choir (notwithstanding individual differences between cathedrals) can be perceived to be very similar if not identical much of the time.⁷¹

The introduction of a girls' choir at Salisbury was a success in many regards. First of all, it fulfilled a moral imperative in making a step towards addressing a gender imbalance in the

⁷¹ Claire Elizabeth Stewart, 'The impact of the introduction of girl choristers at Salisbury and its influence on other British Anglican cathedral choirs' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2021) p.4.

Church, as the Very Reverend Hugh Dickinson, Dean at the time, preached in his sermon on the tenth anniversary of the creation of the choir:

Since the beginning of recorded history, patriarchal societies have systematically, institutionally, and personally conspired to oppress women and to deny them the freedoms which are their God-given rights... It is less than a hundred years since women were given the vote or allowed to sit for degrees and less than two hundred since married women were allowed to own property. Discrimination and male chauvinism still poison many of the transactions of our public life, in politics, business, the civil service – and the Churches.⁷²

The girls' choir at Salisbury Cathedral was not just a success in its own right; it also sparked a revolution in attitudes towards all-male cathedral choirs, which was reflected in genuine, concrete action. In the six years following the creation of the girls' choir at Salisbury, 17 new girls' choirs were founded in English cathedrals,⁷³ and as of late 2020, only 3 out of 42 cathedrals in England have not instituted girls' choirs.⁷⁴ Yet what is crucial to recognise here is that this change has not come at the expense of boy choristers. Invariably boys' choirs have not been replaced, but have been complemented by additional girls' choirs, helping to reduce their traditionally heavy workload and providing girls with equal opportunities to participate in cathedral music. Although there are still individuals that are opposed to the presence of girls' choirs in these spaces, it seems clear that this change, one that thirty years ago many thought was impossible, has been mutually beneficial.

⁷² Welch, p.9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷⁴ Stewart, p.4.

Obviously, the singers in the *trallalero* are not choristers, nor are they opera singers, and although their tradition seems vastly different to either of these examples, we can learn a great deal from the way attitudes towards gender have changed and shaped music practices elsewhere. Singers in the *trallalero* are rarely, if ever, classically trained, so any difference in sound between a male and female contralto in the *trallalero* is magnified when viewed in comparison to how these voices typically sound in western art music. At the centre of this is the fact that, in the *trallalero*, the *canterini* are amateurs, so it is unreasonable to expect them to meet the vocal standards that are required in a professional music culture, such as opera.⁷⁵ We should not judge a *contralto maschile* on their ability to perfectly replicate the range, clarity and timbre of a classical countertenor, not only due to lack of training, but because this is not the style of singing that is needed for the music. The male contralto in the *trallalero* sings in a certain manner, the purpose of which, as we have established, is not to mimic the female voice exactly. The striking, piercing timbre of their falsetto is intended to be conspicuous in its uniqueness, and this highly characteristic vocal quality is considered by many to be essential to the sound of the tradition. The repertoire and performance practices have developed to best suit this particular way of singing, and arrangements focus on creating a delicate balance between the voices. It is evident, as narrators emphasise, that this sense of balance is fundamental to the sound of the music, and that any change to the vocal make-up of the squad could upset this. If we accept that the voice of a female contralto represents a fundamental change in tone and timbre when compared to a male performer in the same role, it seems clear that it could disrupt the sound of the music if suitable adjustments are not made. Establishing this also allows us to reevaluate Alessandro's assertion that the voice of a female *contralto* can sound 'too full' or 'too good', as it is clearly not directed solely at the female voice itself, but on how it fits into the balance of the music.

⁷⁵ I want to make clear that my use of the terms 'amateur' and 'professional', is not meant devalue the effort of the *canterini* in any way. Singers in the *trallalero* are often highly skilled and take their craft extremely seriously, and the use of the term *amateur* is merely intended to highlight the fact that singers in the *trallalero* perform purely out of love of the music, whereas in opera, singers perform professionally and are compensated financially for doing so.

In spite of this, there is certainly a degree of flexibility within the tradition which would allow for the introduction of female voices, both on the part of the squads, and the individual themselves. As we have already established, each squad has their own unique *daeta* or manner of singing that affects how they interpret a piece of music and allows for differences in vocal ability and tone. When arrangements are put together, which singers refer to as *dividere le parti*, accommodations are made for the members of the squad, so it stands to reason that there should be space here to build an arrangement that allows for the inclusion of a female voice. This is not just a hypothesis, as this has actually already been executed in practice. Laura Parodi's squad, *Il Gruppo Spontaneo Trallalero*, has been active for more than thirty years, and is well respected in the community. It seems clear that they have found their *daeta*, allowing them to create the right balance whilst also including a female vocalist. Although they may sound slightly different to a group with a male voice in the same role this is not unusual, as the concept of *daeta* allows for a degree of variance in sound between squads. If we use a 'normal' squad, consisting of four soloist voices and five basses, as a benchmark, the perceived difference in sound is arguably no greater here than that of a squad such as *A Lanterna*, for example, which has almost twice as many basses as some other squads.⁷⁶

There is an even greater precedent for this than may first appear, as adjusting arrangements to account for the changing profile of active singers is not an unfamiliar concept in the *trallalero*. As Laura Parodi explains, throughout the history of the tradition there have been periods of drought, where certain voice types have been difficult to find:

⁷⁶ Parodi, p.159.

Con la consapevolezza che, storicamente...nel mondo del trallalero c'è il periodo i cui mancano i contralti, oppure mancano i primi, oppure mancano i bassi, e il quel periodo contralti c'erano pochi. (Laura Parodi, August 2022).

The inclusion of the female voice is perhaps better framed as a potential solution or as a way to account for the current difficulties in finding male vocalists capable of performing this challenging role, a problem that has only been exacerbated by the ever-dwindling number of active singers. In truth, the advancing age of current performers arguably presents a much greater shift in terms of the sound of the music. Mauro Balma makes the point that although a woman's voice may be different to the traditional *contralto maschile*, it is certainly preferable to a singer who is past their best: 'molto meglio una donna che canta bene che un *contralto maschile* che non ce la fa più'.⁷⁷

Here, a return to the comparison with the introduction of girls into Cathedral choirs is especially pertinent, as just as girl choristers could not immediately produce the 'correct' Anglican church sound, it would be unreasonable to expect a woman who has had little or no prior experience of the *trallalero* to be able to meet the expectations of the tradition on their first attempt. Indeed, this is not even something that is expected of male singers in this tradition, as narrators demonstrate that the process of joining a squad is typically a gradual one. This is indicative of the extent to which expectations differ between male and female singers in the *trallalero*. Although *canterini* admire talented vocalists, the main priority when performing, as singers so often tell us in their narratives, is not to be the best singer possible. For most, 'essere bravo a cantare' is considered to be secondary, as being able to 'feel the music' and integrate successfully into the community of the tradition are considered to be more important qualities. As narratives

⁷⁷ Balma, *Nel cerchio del canto*, p.209.

demonstrate, men are often invited to join the circle because they are friendly with other singers, and it is assumed they will fit well in the group socially as well as musically. Women, however, are not granted the same assumption. In discussing female singers, the language narrators use changes, as they tend to focus on the tangible qualities they possess, for example:

Poi la donna, quando ho iniziato a cantare, cantava la Laura (Parodi), e cantava la moglie di un maestro, maestro del, non mi ricordo più, “Pistoiese” si chiamava, la moglie si chiamava Rosa, e cantava anche lei. Erano due. Poi lei ha smesso. È restata la Laura, canta sempre. La Laura è accolta sia perché Laura è una studiosa, una, per me, delle figure più importanti di questo mondo, anzi forse la più importante come al livello di conoscenze, di archivio... la figura più importante non come donna, come proprio del trallalero. Laura è una cantante incredibile, fantastica, stupenda, e riesce...cosa ce l'ha Laura? Laura ce l'ha vissuto, ce l'ha dentro e perciò riesce a cantare in una maniera, non che si assomigli ma in una maniera ha tirato fuori un canto con la sua voce piena, da donna, che si confa benissimo al trallalero. Cioè, le altre donne non sono come la Laura, non c'hanno un'intelligenza di cantare come canta la Laura. (Alessandro Guerrini, December 2021).

Although this narrative does show that some qualities are important for singers in the *trallalero*, regardless of gender, such as the need to have ‘lived’ the music, the emphasis quickly returns to Laura’s vocal ability in its description of how her lived experience has given her the knowledge required to change her singing style to suit the tradition. The suggestion that Laura was accepted because she is a scholar, who possesses a vast knowledge of the tradition and its history, implies that for women to be allowed into the circle they need to prove themselves to be exceptional in some way. This interpretation is reinforced by the closing statement that, ‘Cioè, le altre donne non sono come la Laura, non c'hanno un'intelligenza di cantare come canta la Laura’. Laura is

singled out in this narrative, according to which she is different to other female performers, who do not possess the extraordinary knowledge and skill which, the narrator feels, is required to overcome their gender. In Alessandro's view, Laura is an exceptional case. She is an outlier, which he uses to prove the rule that women are not suited to this type of music, or typically do not know how to perform it.

The need for female singers to prove themselves to convince their male counterparts that they should be afforded a place in the tradition is something that Laura herself attests to, as in her narrative she details how she 'won over' Edward Neill. Neill was a leading musicologist and a devoted scholar on the *trallalero*. His father was Irish, but he grew up in Genoa where he spent most of his life. He founded the *Società Italiana di Etnomusicologia* in Genoa in 1974, with the support of some of the greatest scholars of Italian folk music, including Roberto Leydi, Diego Carpitella, Pietro Sassu, however, despite the wealth of knowledge behind it, this initiative never really took off. He was particularly fascinated by the life and music of Paganini, about whom he published numerous works, as well as Ligurian folk music and the *trallalero*, which he first encountered in the 1960s. Like his friend and colleague Mauro Balma, with whom he frequently collaborated, he spent many years gathering songs and recording numerous interviews with singers and squads. By many accounts he was a somewhat reclusive figure, but he has since taken on almost legendary proportions.⁷⁸ In Laura's narrative, he is shown to be initially skeptical about her participation in the tradition:

Sono andata lì per registrare. Nel frattempo a Busalla ho incontrato alcuni canterini storici fra i più rappresentativi da Caorsi...Albino Corana, con cui per divertimento ho

⁷⁸ Mauro Balma's most recent work, *Edward Neill: Fra trallalero e Paganini, affascinato dai suoi nell'ombra* is semi-biographical, and talks about Neill's life through the lens of his interests and passions. Balma, Mauro, *Edward Neill. Fra trallalero e Paganini, affascinato dai suoni nell'ombra* (Udine: Nota, 2021).

cominciato a cantare, mi hanno tirata nel cerchio, mi hanno intradotta nel cerchio, ma per divertimento. È successo che abbiamo continuato a cantare sempre per stare insieme per divertimento, ma un pubblico molto molto folto ha cominciato a seguirci nei nostri spostamenti. Nel frattempo io ho continuato a registrare, a parlare e confrontarmi con il grandissimo etnomusicologo Edward Neill, irlandese di origine. E collaborare con lui per quanto riguarda il canto monovocale. Perché Lui era un, diciamo, ‘ma la donna, no, io non sono d’accordo, perché la tradizione, ok’, nel momento in cui però, ha notato quante persone seguivano la nostra squadra, il nostro gruppo, che non aveva neanche un nome, si chiamavano gli amici del trallalero... non aveva neanche un nome. Da studioso intelligente quale era ha sottolineato che un gruppo come il nostro, notando che nel momento in cui arrivava un contralto maschile, io gli dicevo ‘vieni, canta!’, quindi ha notato quel ... questo mio modo di pormi, di entrare in punta di piedi in un mondo che, virgolette, ‘non mi apparteneva’, e mi appassionava, non mi apparteneva tradizionalmente. Mi apparteneva però come origini perché questo è innegabile, io sono cresciuta con quella sonorità, e lui ha capito questa cosa perché aveva un’intelligenza acuta[...]. Ha capito questa cosa allora abbiamo cominciato ad arrangiare, a pensare ad alcune cose, alcuni modi per farlo conoscere. [...] Ci sono stati diversi attacchi nei miei confronti, mentre dai canterini, dalla maggior parte dei canterini, sono stata accolta molto molto bene, da parte del pubblico ci sono stati attacchi che però non mi hanno demotivata. Non mi hanno demotivata perché l’importante per me era che i canterini ‘mi accettassero’ fra virgolette, perché ero cosciente di questa mia atipicità in questo mondo. (Laura Parodi, August 2022).

The skepticism Neill initially shows towards Laura’s participation is especially noteworthy in hindsight. The two of them became good friends and often collaborated at festivals, although, as

Laura mentions here, this was usually in relation to other Ligurian folk music traditions and not the *trallalero* itself. It is clear that, in any case, Neill certainly appreciated her talent as a vocalist. He was also considered by many to be a spokesperson for practicing *trallalero* musicians,⁷⁹ and whilst Laura's portrayal of his hesitance towards the inclusion of women in the *squadre* perhaps betrays the fact that he undoubtedly felt some obligation to protect the tradition, he was always keen to share his knowledge. Mauro Balma's most recent work concludes with a series of testimonies from scholars and singers who knew Neill, in which Laura Parodi gives an account of his generosity of spirit, recalling how he once told her: 'Vedi Laura io sono convinto che tenere per sé ciò che si scopre, che sia una registrazione, la conoscenza di un personaggio particolare, un documento molto significativo sia come ricevere una lettera e non aprirla'.⁸⁰ It is perhaps partly due to this attitude that Neill's skepticism was softened when he saw the large audience Laura's impromptu squad had started to gather. That is to say, that she was effectively sharing her own knowledge and passion for the music with a wider community.

From this narrative it seems that another key aspect of how Laura feels she was able to gain the approval of Edward Neill and existing squads was by assuring them that she did not intend to replace the *contralto maschile*. This is supported by the fact that Laura mentions this explicitly later in her narrative, explaining that it has never been her desire to push the *contralto maschile* to one side:

⁷⁹ Relevant to this positioning of Neill as a spokesperson for *canterini* is this documentary, which originally aired on RAI in 1979. It is indicative of the authority he was considered to be that at times he almost functions as a presenter, guiding the viewer through the world of the *trallalero*.

Massimomorratti27, *Documentario Trallalero*, online video recording, YouTube, 9 Feb 2014, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2SdwrgA2zQ&ab_channel=massimomoratti27 > [Accessed 10 Sept 2022].

⁸⁰ Balma, *Fra Trallalero e Paganini*, p.127. It is clear that Laura has taken this attitude to heart, as her willingness to share her own knowledge and to invite me into the community is part of what made this project possible. We can view this, rather poetically, as a passing of the baton, although we will examine later if Laura feels the same responsibility to safeguard or speak for the tradition.

L'ho cantato, senza nulla togliere, o voler togliere, il contralto maschile ai falsetti, e ci mancano ancora. (Laura Parodi, August 2022).

Laura's depiction of Neill as a traditionalist, who was unsure about female vocalists singing this music, echoes the response towards the introduction of girls' cathedral choirs mentioned above, where it was feared that the male sound of the music would be lost if female voices were allowed into the tradition. We can infer that Neill's fear was of the same nature, given that he was apparently reassured by Laura's willingness to step back from the circle whenever a male contralto was present. This seems to have been a conscious decision on Laura's part. Having grown up with the music, she was familiar with the squads and their practices, and she recognised that her position within the tradition was unusual, what she refers to as her 'atypicality'. If she was to be *chiamata nel cerchio*, she was aware of the need not only to change her voice to sing in a manner that best suited the music, but also to behave in way that allowed her to ingratiate herself with the singers. This social aspect of the tradition is incredibly important, and Laura's narrative of how she acknowledged this and adapted her behaviour and her voice in order to win over the *canterini* offers a potential explanation for why some narrators say that she alone has been able to become a well-established member of an official squad. It is possible that although there may be musical reasons for why other women have not been able to do so, this is primarily due to that fact they haven't been able to fit into the social group in the same way. Laura's narrative lends further weight to this interpretation as it continues:

C'erano state, ci sono state, delle donne che hanno cantato, ma adesso non ce ne sono.
C'è stata Olga Barbieri, una ragazzina di tredici anni, una ostessa di un'osteria di
isoverde... io sono quella che l'ha cantato per un periodo molto lungo che sta durando

ancora adesso, che adesso sta continuando. Chiaramente ho dovuto osservare delle... mi sono data delle regole, ero una ragazza giovane in mezzo a dieci, undici uomini, quindi ho, mi sono imposta, no non imposta, ho capito che mi dovevo comportare in un certo modo, anche nel modo di rapportarmi umanamente, una ragazza giovane con uomini, e ripeto sempre in punta di piedi perché mi interessava imparare il canto, le varie sfaccettature, i vari modi e vedere chi era che dava l'impronta per creare un modo di cantare perché questo è il trallalero. (Laura Parodi, August 2022).

Here she explains how in addition to her desire to learn the many facets of this way of singing, she gave herself some rules to follow in terms of how to behave as a young girl surrounded by older men. It seems clear that she felt the impetus was on her, as an outsider who did not necessarily belong to this male tradition, to find ways to get along with the *canterini* on a social level. Given that she has established herself, as her former squadmate Alessandro Guerrini puts it, as 'la figura più importante non come donna, come proprio del trallalero', it seems obvious that this approach was a success.

As we acknowledged in the introduction to this study, Laura makes a crucial distinction here, between belonging to a formal *squadra titolare*, and singing 'per divertimento'. This is admittedly somewhat confusing, as singing 'for fun' is also the genre that members of squads provide for the *trallalero* as a style of singing. According to Laura's account there are two different levels of singing in the *trallalero*, the informal 'per divertimento' and the more formalized *squadre titolari* or named squads. It seems that opposition to the involvement of women in the tradition is primarily in relation to their inclusion in the latter, and that women are relatively free to participate in the music outside of this. The gendered separation between these two singing practices is supported by other narratives:

Credo che questo sia un po', come dire, un risultato anche della tradizione...è nato nelle osterie tra uomini. In realtà ti dico, per quella che è la mia esperienza di bambino, dei miei ricordi, la sera quando si ritrova attorno il tavolo per cantare c'era la mia zia che cantava con l'altra che faceva da prima...Le donne cantavano, cantavano, poi la squadra titolare era fatta di maschi. Poi in realtà cantavano anche le donne, ci sta, anzi c'erano delle donne che cantavano benissimo nel trallalero. Quindi il fatto che Laura canti nel trallalero è solo, come dire, perché è particolarmente brava, può entrare un una squadra titolare. (Mauro Bozzini, December 2021).

Again, this narrative focuses on how Laura's exceptional singing ability is what allowed her to be welcomed into the tradition, but this is framed within how it allowed her to cross over from singing informally 'per divertimento', to becoming part of a named squad. This reinforces the positioning of Laura as an exception to the rule, which we observed in earlier narratives. The sentiment seems to be that, yes, women can participate informally if they want, but only Laura has demonstrated that she can do so in a way that suits the formal *squadre titolari*.

Group Masculinities

The social dimension of the music is certainly worth exploring further. As I have already mentioned, the practice of standing close together and singing in a circle can be quite an exposing experience, and although the singers might be comfortable in sharing this vulnerability with other men, they may feel that the addition of a woman in the group would change the

dynamic. It is not the purpose of this thesis to pass judgement here, and it certainly seems that for the singers themselves this is an important aspect of the practice. This style of singing allows groups of men to engage with each other on a more intimate level, and such is the power of music that this can occur organically without it needing to be the explicit intention of the singers. Many *canterini* spoke to me about the how coming together to sing is a source of joy for them, a sentiment which is reflected by singers from similar all-male traditions. A clear example of this is the singing group ‘Men Folk Singing’, who meet regularly in Banff, Canada, to sing folk songs together. These two practices are remarkably similar, both groups sing, ‘for the joy of it’, are composed of exclusively men of roughly the same age demographic, and gather in a circle to rehearse and perform. One member of ‘Men Folk Singing’ describes how although the act of gathering together to sing songs can be emotionally exposing, the camaraderie that has developed between the singers has been a source of happiness and comfort for them:

No matter that I was nervous and unsure – they encouraged me to sing out, just for the joy of singing. It seemed as though I should have known these guys all my life. I’d been singing, or humming a tune under my breath, since I was little, and it was such a pleasure to find a group who share my passion. (Joel Weder, October 2013).⁸¹

Another singer highlights how, in addition to fostering a positive environment, the resonance of the sound itself has a powerful, potentially physiological effect:

Men Folk Singing sessions just leave me happier and more alive. I wonder if it is the act of singing that actually has a positive physiological effect on the body. The vibration of 30-40 men singing is an experience in itself. Of course, it’s a fun gathering too;

⁸¹ Men Folk Singing participant Joel Weder quoted in Tim Rogers, ‘For the Joy of Singing’ *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, 48.1 (2014), 1-5 (p.4).

everyone's in a good mood, and looking to have a good time. (Gary Sykes, October 2013).⁸²

Although singers in the *trallalero* do not necessarily articulate these feelings to quite the same degree, it is clear that they feel the same profound joy in sharing their passion for music with a group of other men. This sense of joy is threatened by the inclusion of women because it is grounded in an expression of masculinity; if we accept the narratives provided by *canterini* that the masculinity of the practice is an inherent, vital part of the tradition, then it is evident they are not just enjoying the music itself, but the maleness of it as well. Scholars have argued that masculinity is not an individual property, and it is instead formed and reinforced through groups and institutions.⁸³ For example, Jay C. Wade's model of male reference group identity dependence theorises that men rely on a male reference group for their gender role self-concept, or how they perceive and understand 'gender-related attributes, attitudes, and behaviours'.⁸⁴ If we accept this argument, then the concept of masculinity as it exists in the *squadre di canto* is based on values and attitudes that it is assumed all members of the group share. Masculinity is frequently defined by what it is not, which usually equates to anything feminine, so the presence of a women disrupts this identity as the dynamic of the group is fundamentally changed.

However, we can also recognise the masculinity of these groups through identifying certain behaviours that are understood to be typically 'male'. Mary Talbot argues that masculinity is something that needs to be performed, and in the case of the *trallalero* this is reflected in a degree

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁸³ See R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept' *Gender and Society*, 6 (2005), 836-842. It is important to recognise here that there is no uniform definition of masculinity. The studies referenced here theorise how masculinity is constructed in specific cultures and can help us understand how certain groups function.

⁸⁴ Jay C. Wade and Chris Brittan-Powell, 'Men's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender Equity: The Importance of Masculinity Ideology, Gender-Related Traits, and Reference Group Identity Dependence' *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 2 (2001), 42-50 (p.43).

of physicality that is often present in the practices of all-male singing groups.⁸⁵ In attending various rehearsals of *squadre* I observed instances of singers jostling each other in a playful, boisterous manner, as well as placing their hands on each other's shoulders. *Canterini* explain that the latter is a useful way for the soloist voices to stay in tune with each other by feeling the vibrations of the sound, but regardless of its musical purpose it is still a physical expression of the relationship between the singers. Sarah Powell, who observed similar behaviours in Australian all-male singing groups describes this physicality as a natural and important expression of being male,⁸⁶ and such behaviour is best framed as a form of healthy masculinity, serving as a way for singers to express their shared values and bond socially.⁸⁷ There are certainly other factors here. It not unreasonable to suggest that some opponents to the involvement of women in the *squadre titolari* feel a sense of ownership towards a tradition that they have always considered to be 'theirs'. Indeed, many theories of masculinity discuss the importance of social power, especially regarding its exertion over women in order to sustain patriarchy.⁸⁸ However, whilst these sentiments may well exist, they were not reflected in the narratives gathered for this project, and Laura Parodi was keen to stress how she has been largely accepted by the squads themselves. Whilst she may be an exceptional case, it is clear from the testimonies of her fellow *canterini* that she has become an important and well-respected figure in the *trallalero*.

As such, it is clear that although there may be some validity in the claims made by some singers and scholars that the participation of women changes the sound of the *trallalero* in some way,

⁸⁵ Mary Talbot, *Language and Gender*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020) p.315.

⁸⁶ Sarah J. Powell, 'Masculinity and choral singing: An Australian perspective', *International Journal of Music Education*, 33 (2015), 233-243 (pp.239-40).

⁸⁷ It is worth mentioning at this point that all-female music groups and women's choirs exist quite happily too, and likely wouldn't want to include men for equivalent or similar reasons to those provided here.

⁸⁸ On this, see also: J. M. O'Neil and J. Egan, 'Abuses of power against women: Sexism, gender role conflict, and psychological violence' in *Women, relationships, and power: Implications for counseling*, ed. by E. Cook (Alexandria, VA: ACA Press, 1993).

there is still space for them in the tradition. By many accounts, this has certainly been the case outside of the *squadre titolari*, where women have frequently been able to participate in the more informal practices. Comparisons with other similarly gendered music practices where female voices have been successfully introduced demonstrate that the change to the sound or balance of the music is frequently far less noticeable than what is expected, and due to the frequent variation between *squadre* in terms of repertoire, performance and structure, it stands to reason that this would likely be the case with the *trallalero*. The more significant barrier to the inclusion of female voices in this instance is the historic masculinity of the tradition, which has shaped the identity and expectations of the music. It is apparent that the success Laura Parodi has had in this regard is due to her sensitivity to this aspect of the tradition, her deference towards the *contralto maschile*, and above all, her willingness to adapt her own performance to suit the music.

Conclusion

One of the last questions I posed to Laura Parodi was whether she feels responsible in some way for the safeguarding or conservation of the tradition. Her response was typically modest: ‘Non mi ritengo responsabile la conservazione assolutamente, spero di aver dato un piccolo contributo ma così come fanno tutti i canterini, assolutamente.’

Indeed, most *canterini*, if not all, would reject the assertion that they are saving the *trallalero* in some way by maintaining the tradition. It is unclear whether this is because they do not feel that the practice is under threat, or simply that, like Laura, they see themselves as a small part of a much wider process of preserving their cultural heritage. What is obvious, as we have shown in this thesis, is that it is rarely the conscious intention of the *canterini* to act as custodians of the

tradition when they gather together to sing. Narrators define the genre as *canto per svago*, and the desire to be together and share their passion for their musical and cultural heritage is still what motivates squads to perform today.

We have established, through our analysis of the testimonies of singers, that the *trallalero* is not just a form of musical expression, but is integral to the sense of identity and community of its practitioners and audiences. The concept of *genovesità* is at the heart of this, and the *trallalero* supplies singers with an opportunity to share their musical and cultural heritage, and to become part of a community, both real and imaginary, which both reinforces and helps to construct their sense of identity. This thesis has also discussed the considerable internal divisions and debates within this community, presenting a more nuanced picture of the tradition. In this regard, we have shown how the way that practitioners understand the tradition often amounts to a blurring of the lines between reality and imagination, drawing attention to the emphasis they place on the need to innately understand and ‘feel’ the music. In that respect, it is unclear how an evolving sense of what it means to be *genovese* will impact the *trallalero* in the future, but it is apparent that the resilience of the tradition is likely going to be tested further as the city continues to change.

We have also demonstrated that what we can learn from the *trallalero* goes far beyond the practice itself in highlighting that it shares social characteristics with community practices in other music traditions, such as the New Orleans jazz funeral. In the first chapter of this thesis, we examined how the practice of singing in a circle is instrumental in the forming of social bonds and how the more exposing nature of this practice can lead to a heightened sense of vulnerability and create a more emotional environment. Performing in the round is also emblematic of the purpose of the *trallalero* in terms of who is the intended audience, if there is even one at all beyond the singers themselves, and we have shown this through comparisons with other forms of music. For many singers, the practice of gathering together to create music

is a source of great joy, and we have identified how this sense of camaraderie and community is present in gendered singing group practices in Australia and Canada.

From a musical perspective, we have shown how narrators single out the voices of the *chitarra* and *contralto maschile* as being particularly unique to the tradition and we have argued that the *trallalero* can be shown to be musically distinct from other styles of polyphonic music in terms of its rhythmicity, repertoire and manner of singing. Narratives show that the practice provides a space for innovation and individual expression, and the virtuosity of the *canterini* is a highly valued quality that allows for a constant refreshing and updating of the repertoire. The tradition is in constant dialogue with its past through this process, which allows it to maintain its identity whilst also fostering change, at least in the musical sense. Through examining how the role of the *contralto* compares to the countertenor and contralto in art music, we have been able to discern the fundamental differences in vocal tone and sound production between these styles of singing. An analysis of ‘trouser-roles’ in Baroque opera supported this discussion by allowing us to establish that the performative aspect of the male falsetto, in mimicking the female voice, is a vital aspect of the practice. Narrators therefore argue that the female voice is not suited to the *trallalero* because it is not just a question of sound, but of audience expectations, and given the history of the *trallalero* as a *canto maschile*, it is integral for some practitioners that there is a detectable ‘maleness’ to the voice of the contralto.

In the second chapter of this thesis, we considered narratives regarding the recent inclusion of women in the *squadre titolari*, exploring the musical and social reasons that the *canterini* interpret as being responsible for their historic exclusion. This was juxtaposed with the introduction of a girls’ choir at Salisbury Cathedral in the 1990s, which serves as an example of a historically all-male tradition where female voices were introduced with relative success.

It is apparent that there is clearly space in the *trallalero* for a wide range of voices, and as Laura Parodi has shown, this can include women as long as they are able to adapt their way of singing to fit within the *daeta* of the tradition. The greater challenge for female singers is in integrating socially with the *canterini*, for whom part of the joy of the practice is found in expressing their masculinity together, something which they often perceive as being ‘disrupted’ by the participation of women. Despite this, it is clear that Laura Parodi has been able to do so successfully and has since become a highly respected figure in the world of the *trallalero*. However, the considerable decrease in the number of active squads has arguably made the process of joining one much less accessible, given the need nowadays, as narratives suggest, to go directly to a group and ask to participate. It seems possible that this could make entering into the tradition more difficult for women in the future, as they will not have the same opportunity to get to know the squads in a more gradual, organic way, as prospective singers did in the past.

To conclude, I want to acknowledge that this project is intended to provide a snapshot of the *trallalero* as it exists today, and that I welcome the change in perspectives and understandings that will inevitably occur over time. In the conclusion to *Nel Cerchio del Canto*, Professor Maura Balma ends with the declaration that, ‘è solo la fine del libro, perché il canto va avanti’, and I want to echo this sentiment here.⁸⁹ Alessandro Portelli evokes a similar feeling in his description of oral history as possessing an ‘inherent incompleteness’.⁹⁰ That is to say, oral testimonies are never the same twice. They reflect the relationship between the interviewer and their subject, the approach that has been taken, and dozens of other factors. The same narrator will often provide a different account of events under different circumstances, especially when the interview is not rigorously structured. I am certain that if I were to return to Genoa to interview the *canterini* again, that, as I am no longer a complete stranger to them, the interactions I would have with them would be

⁸⁹ Balma, *Nel cerchio del canto*, p.255.

⁹⁰ Portelli, *What makes Oral History different*, p.71.

different, and that stories I would be able to gather would change as a result of this. This is not an admission of the futility of trying to map a constantly changing oral tradition, as this was never the aim of this thesis, but is instead intended to be a recognition of what, in my view, is the most valuable aspect of studying the *trallalero*. In a temporal sense, this project is limited because it only examines the testimonies gathered from a small group current singers, but that is also where its value lies. The contribution that this research project makes to the study of the *trallalero* is that it is grounded in what a selection of today's singers think and feel. The narratives that form the heart of this research will not be replicated again precisely as they appear here, and from the thoughts and feelings of the *canterini*, we are able to learn not just about the *trallalero* itself, but about attitudes towards gender, tradition, and community in much broader sense.

Looking to the future, it is clear the *trallalero* needs new voices to sustain itself as it is today. In 2001, Mauro Balma wrote that, 'si augura che qualche giovane dal forte sentire acceleri quel ricambio generazionale oggi troppo lento che [...] non è in grado di sostenere la quantità delle squadre in attività'.⁹¹ Sadly, he was largely correct, as there are certainly fewer active singers today than there were twenty years ago. There is no guarantee, however, that this decrease will continue, and initiatives such as the *Le Vie dei Canti* festival are providing the *trallalero* with the exposure it needs to attract new singers. Although the *canterini* might reject the label of 'guardians' or 'protectors' of the *trallalero*, it is clear that their passion for the tradition motivates them to promote it, both nationally and internationally. Laura Parodi perhaps sums this up best, in her response to my question, 'Is there anything else you would like to mention?':

⁹¹ Balma, *Nel cerchio del canto*, p.255.

Ritengo che sia importante perché come diceva Gramsci, una tradizione diventa tale nel momento in cui il popolo la fa propria, e per il trallalero a Genova è stato così. C'erano tantissime squadre ora sono pochissime. Ma come diceva Arnaldo Bagnasco, un altro grande intellettuale che per Genova e la Liguria ha fatto molto, 'se il trallalero c'è ancora che siano una, cinque, sei le squadre, un motivo ci sarà, si è resistito', quindi lui l'ha definita una forma di resistenza culturale, e sono d'accordo. (Laura Parodi, August 2022)

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Appendix

Oral History Interviews

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Eugenio Rissotto, interviewed by Thomas Proudfoot, Genoa 9 December 2021.

Giancarlo Aimò, interviewed by Thomas Proudfoot, Genoa, 9 December 2021.

Laura Parodi, interviewed by Thomas Proudfoot, Genoa, 4 August 2022.

Mauro Bozzini, interviewed by Thomas Proudfoot, Genoa, 9 December 2021.