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Shared Imaginations: Celtic and Corsican Encounters in the Soundscape of the Soul.

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Until relatively recently, the assumption of an early Celtic presence in Corsica remained unquestioned, clear evidence appearing to be offered in the separate realms of material remains, character and behavior, and belief systems. At the most tangible level, irrefutable proof seemed to be provided by the presence of the granite dolmens, warrior-like menhirs and other megalithic structures which litter the Corsican landscape at a time when such monuments were universally believed to be the work of the Celts. (Note 1) Resonances were also found in the associated cult of the dead, which was similarly identified as 'Celtic'. With respect to character and lifestyle, the remarkable similarities between descriptions of Celts and Corsicans found in the writings of Greek and Roman chroniclers have already been remarked upon by McKechnie (1993, 121).

In our own time, the Corsican author of the recent *Histoire Secrète de la Corse* offers a list of traits attributed to the Celts, or Gauls, by the writer A. Thierry - "personal bravery, of candid spirit, impetuous, open to all impressions, eminently intelligent; besides

that an extreme mobility, a marked repugnance towards notions of discipline, a great deal of ostentation, and finally a perpetual disunity, the fruit of excessive vanity". (Note 2) In this, he proposes, one can clearly recognize the Corsican, this fact offering indisputable evidence of the presence of the Celts among Corsica's invaders (Angelini 1977, 61). In a similar spirit, on the basis of his experience of living for a number of years in Glasgow, the Corsican writer Joseph Chiari identified numerous points of contact between the Scottish and Corsican character which he attributed, apparently without hesitation, to shared Celtic roots (cited in McKechnie 1993, 122). An exploration of the substance behind such assumptions and associations inevitably involves engaging with recent developments in the Celtic debate. This, therefore, is where I begin.

Celts, Corsicans and Histories.

Accounts found in Classical sources (including Diodorus, Strabo, Livy and Tacitus) routinely present a picture of the Celts as passionate, high-spirited, erratic, boastful, and prone to drunkenness, violence and general debauchery. That we are dealing here largely with stereotypes is now widely recognized, although it is only in recent decades that anthropologists have engaged in the extensive and often controversial deconstruction of such stereotypes that has allowed Maryon McDonald to refer to the Celts as "perhaps the best-known invention of the classical imagination" (McDonald 1993, 225). (Note 3)

To both the Greeks and the Romans, the populations they referred to as Celts (or alternatively as Gauls, the two appellations being apparently undifferentiated) were in many respects simply part of the barbarian horde, together with the existing inhabitants of other lands which they saw fit to grace with their more civilized presence. At the most

basic level, we can thus see those identified as Celts as conveniently and inevitably occupying the category of 'other', their main function being - via the now familiar process of structural opposition or inversion across boundaries, together with the propensity for exaggeration to which this typically gives rise - to throw into sharper relief the more noble and civilized nature of all aspects of the Classical lifestyle, from personal behavior to government. Chapman also makes the obvious point that those resisting invasion, conquest or oppression will inevitably behave in a manner that allows their would-be vanquishers - with a certain irony - to portray them as violent, aggressive, belligerent and uncontrollable (Chapman 1992, 177). In their encounters with the Romans, the Celts, irrespective of any expansionist ambitions of their own, were inescapably forced into a position where they fell prey to the unresolvable contradiction of fighting for peace.

In the light of these considerations, it should not appear surprising that in Classical times a rather similar picture should have been painted of the indigenous peoples of Corsica. Indeed, in many cases, early characterizations of Corsicans and Celts are directly linked by their authors: in each case, Herodotus, Strabo and Diodorus of Sicily feature prominently among the most commonly cited sources. At the most obvious level, the overlap can be attributed to the fact that Celts and Corsicans were sited on the same side in the opposition civilized versus barbarian.

It has to be said, for the record, that the picture given of these early Corsicans was by no means entirely negative. Diodorus expresses great admiration for the Corsicans' pronounced respect for justice. Among themselves, he reported, they lived "lives of honor and justice, to a degree surpassing practically all other barbarians" (cited in Carrington 1984, 80). The Corsicans were, however, given ample opportunity to live up to their more

ferocious reputation in the fate accorded them by history. Like other islands in the Mediterranean, Corsica was for centuries plagued by onslaught and occupation by a succession of usually hostile forces keen to command such a strategic vantage point. Before the Romans, parts of the island had been settled by Greeks, Etruscans and Carthaginians. Following several centuries of Roman rule, it was in turn occupied or overrun by Vandals, Ostrogoths, Byzantines, Lombards and Saracens. Such a climate meant that its indigenous population was repeatedly forced into a position of defensiveness, often retreating to the relatively impenetrable mountainous regions of the interior. In view of the hostile or at the very least wary reception which they would have received, these occupying forces - whether they turned out ultimately to be a marauding or civilizing presence - could hardly have been expected to construe the island's existing inhabitants in a particularly positive light.

The characterization of Celts and Corsicans as wild and barbaric is by no means limited to classical writings. In Medieval times and later we find many records belonging to an ecclesiastical context whose authors give vent to a sense of moral outrage at the propensity of their subjects for loose-living. Gerald of Wales, despite his own Welsh blood, offers us the following characterization of the Welsh he encountered on his twelfth-century peregrinations: "involved in such an abyss of vices, perjury, theft, robbery, rapine, murders, fratricides, adultery, and incest, [they] become every day more entangled and ensnared in evil-doing" (cited in Chapman 1992, 199). In short, their behavior was no better than could be expected of the average heathen. In Corsica of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, successful evangelization was, according to the reports of a series of papal emissaries, apparently still being hindered by the resistance of the population not to

Christian dogma itself but to the suggestion that they should relinquish the very types of unchristian behavior that had so impressed Gerald (see Casanova 1931-8).

As Chapman has been keen to point out, however, the early descriptions of the Celts, as of other populations occupying the category of 'other', are likely to have been based on a mixture of empirical and conjectural ingredients. Having decided that these descriptions carry little reliable historical weight, we are not necessarily justified in going to the opposite extreme of declaring them to be entirely fictitious. Whilst some aspects of the ideas people have about others have to be consigned to the realm of surmise and often extravagant elaboration, others result from misunderstandings and misinterpretations when confronted with an alien social reality as genuinely observed and experienced (Chapman 1992, 199) - a phenomenon which has been termed by Edwin Ardener 'categorical mismatch' (see Ardener 1982). This perspective could well be applied to the vendetta which blighted Corsican society until the early decades of the present century, disputes between rival families often continuing for several generations with considerable loss of life on both sides (see, for instance, the figures from 1714 reported in Marcaggi 1926, 35).

For Continentals, such behavior was seen as proof of outright lawlessness in which the most primitive instincts were allowed free rein. In the moral landscape of the Corsicans themselves, however, the bandits who inhabited the maquis in an attempt to evade arrest and imprisonment on the one hand and to avoid themselves falling victim to the demand for revenge on the other were 'bandits of honor', often revered or at least respected, at the same time as being pitied for the heavy destiny which they had been obliged to embrace. As Carrington has pointed out, the vendetta itself was "a spectacular expression of the cult of the dead", the purpose of the bloody retribution which was unfailingly exacted being to

appease the original victim who would otherwise allow his kinsmen no peace (Carrington 1995, 8). From a more modern perspective, the system of the vendetta served as a demonstration of the islanders' refusal to be bound by state-enforced law.

Certain elements in the outsider's observations of the Celtic or Corsican character can nevertheless be directly associated with aspects of lifestyle. As Laade has pointed out, a range of features of character commonly attributed to the Corsicans, such as contempt for manual labor, frankness and openmindedness, hospitality, a natural nobility, a propensity for their honor to be easily offended, a predisposition towards blood revenge, a fondness for weapons and male adventure, loyalty without submission, and an inclination towards reflection and poetic expression, can be understood to derive from specific socio-cultural determining factors related to a pastoral lifestyle (Laade 1981 volume 1, 10). Like many of the 'modern' Celtic populations, the Corsicans have equally been associated with the unpredictability of nomadic mountain-dwellers, absorbing into themselves as if by osmosis the wildness of the landscapes they inhabit (see Chapman 1992, 187). It is interesting to note that, as early as the twelfth century, Gerald of Wales found the Irish "a rude people" essentially on the grounds that they had "not yet departed from the primitive habits of pastoral life": they were "not only barbarous in their dress, but suffering their hair and beards to grow enormously in an uncouth manner" (cited in Chapman 1992, 191). This brings to mind an occasion during my own time in Corsica when my companion (incidentally part-Irish) was greeted at a mountain fair with almost certainly misplaced deference on account of his own thick beard and flowing locks. He apparently reminded my Corsican friends of "the real Corsicans, the ancients."

Of Megaliths, Brains and Blood.

It was only in the 1940s that serious research began into the history and possible provenance of Corsica's distinctive megaliths, many of which had until then lain undiscovered in the maquis, and, with the growing acknowledgement that the case for Celtic origins so vehemently reinforced in the eighteenth century was untenable, the notion of Celtic builders was abandoned. The island's megalithic culture is now generally believed to have been introduced by settlers from Asia Minor and the Aegean in the fourth millennium, although the fact that the greatest concentration of stones is found close to the west coast of the island, together with the observation that they have no counterparts in Sardinia, the Balearics or Italy, has led Angelini to suggest that their builders must have come from the west, i.e. from the Atlantic, leaving similar traces in the Canary Isles and the Basque Country (Angelini 1977, 29). While he acknowledges that the Celts were not actually responsible for erecting Corsica's megaliths, Angelini does nevertheless continue to argue for a Celtic presence on the island, proof of which he finds in the legends associated with the stones (60). This is related to an assumption that, on their later arrival in Corsica, the Celts settled around the stones and incorporated them into their religious rites (58). Hence an association between the stones and the Celts persists.

It is perhaps because of the former unquestioned equation of the Celts with the megaliths that early historians concerned with racial origins tended to identify the Corsican population as being of Celtic, as well as Ligurian and Iberian, descent. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, Jaubert had already proposed, on the basis of cranial measurements, that the idea of Celtic and Ligurians origins should be rejected, arguing instead for descent from the Berbers - to whom he also believed the megaliths should be

attributed (see Hörstel 1908, 59; cited in Laade 1973 volume 1, 5). An equally close relationship has apparently been established with the Guanches of the Canaries, with Pierre Rocca's claims that the Corsicans are related to the Guanches on the basis of their cephalic index, their cranial capacity and their facial angle (see Angelini 1977, 32). Angelini proposes links with both the Guanches and the Basques, supported in this case by evidence both linguistic (on the basis of similarities in surviving place names, especially those with certain prefixes) and biological (in the surprisingly high incidence among each of these populations of the blood group 0). Few traces remain of the language spoken by the Corsicans in pre-Roman times. Meanwhile, the Guanche language, which became extinct in the sixteenth century, is believed to have been a Berber language.

To add to the conundrum, other studies have equally identified similarities between the Celts and the Berbers, not only in terms of physical appearance but also with respect to genetic and linguistic affinities. A correspondence between the ABO blood groups of Berber and modern 'Celtic' populations has been remarked upon, while claims have also been made for a close structural affinity between the Celtic and Berber languages. In addition, it has even been suggested that the rhythms of Irish traditional music show links with the melodies of North Africa (see Laidler 1998). Regardless of the scientific status accorded to these theories and their ability to prove the case, the very fact that they have been proposed, that they appear attractive and plausible and are given widespread credence lends them an undeniable authority.

The Megalithic Faith and the Cult of the Dead.

Even if any straightforward equation between Celts and Corsicans does not ultimately bear scrutiny, the notion of a certain shared ancestry in more remote times (not necessarily based on blood ties) nevertheless remains as more than a tantalizing possibility. Echoes of the ancient megalithic faith, now firmly recognized as pre-Celtic and whose diffusion is described by the onward march of the stones across Europe, can still be found in Corsica as well as in what we now refer to as the Celtic lands. (Note 4) In particular, striking commonalities have been observed with respect to the shamanic-like rites and beliefs associated with the cult of the dead, vestiges of which are still to be found not far beneath the surface of present-day Corsica.

Christianity was introduced into Corsica from the third century AD onwards, although in the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great condemned the Corsicans for their persistence in worshipping stones (Carrington 1995, 40). As in many other parts of Europe, Christian practices in many cases merely overlaid, rather than displaced, previous pagan customs, with the Mediterranean saints continuing to play the roles of the gods of the ancient world and the rhythms of the Catholic liturgical calendar often mirroring those of the old agrarian ritual cycles. Amongst many of the older generation in particular, Christian and pre-Christian practices still co-exist without any apparent sense of paradox. Divination is still practiced using the shoulder blades of sheep, goats and pigs, while a ritual involving the interpretation of oil droplets in water ("reading the oil") is enacted to determine the presence of the Evil Eye and drive out hostile forces. In the course of my own research, both of these practices were witnessed at the homes of singers who played leading roles in their local churches.

The tenacity of the ancient cult of the dead is reflected in the remarkable degree of veneration accorded to the ancestors, especially at All Souls', when everyone visits the family graves and candles are left burning through the night in all the tombs and roadside shrines. In some parts of the island, doors are left unlocked and food set out for the dead who will return to their homes on that night. In the Casinca, members of the *confréries* and their fellow villagers involved in a nocturnal procession from one village to the next which forms part of an elaborate Good Friday ritual - itself an intriguing reflection of the continued preoccupation with death - stop en route at the graveyard to give thanks to the ancestors for the sacred songs which they customarily sing on that night. They are then refreshed with quantities of home-made wine and cakes before setting off again into the night, their glowing torches reflecting on their white robes and lighting the way as they thread their path around the hillside. This creates a somewhat uncanny spectacle that brings to mind the tales of phantom funeral processions attested in Corsica as well as in Wales, Scotland and Brittany.

Outside the confines of religion, even more arcane aspects of the cult of the dead find expression in the shaman-like figure of the *mazzere*, who acts as a type of emissary for death, recognising in the animal he or she is compelled to kill during nocturnal hunting expeditions in the maquis the likeness of a fellow villager who is doomed to die within a short space of time - hence Carrington's description of the *mazzeri* as "night-hunters of souls" (see Carrington 1984). (Note 5) Writing as recently as the 1990s, Carrington reports that thirty *mazzeri* are still known to be in operation in the southern part of the island and that in recent years they have attracted interest from a number of young nationalists who view them as venerable representatives of the ancient indigenous culture so long neglected

and devalued (Carrington 1995, 56). Roccu Multedo sees a particularly close relationship between the phenomenon of mazzèrism and the cult of the dead in Corsica and the Welsh legends of death (Multedo 1994). Most recently, Carrington has proposed that mazzèrism possibly derives from a period which considerably predates even the arrival of the megalithic faith in Corsica (Carrington 1995, 77).

To attempt a connection between the much-vaunted Celtic 'cult of the severed head' and the Corsican flag with its Moor's Head - inherited from the kings of Aragon and declared the official emblem of an independent Corsica by Pasquale Paoli in the eighteenth century - is far-fetched but offers food for thought. Angelini does indeed go so far as to suggest a phonetic analogy between the French '*tête de Maure*' ('Moor's head') and '*tête de mort*' ('head of death'), the latter, however, reminding him not of the Celtic head but of the pirate flag and leading to the proposition that the head on the Corsican flag is a symbolic reminder of the death of the goddess Isis and her rule (Angelini 1977, 13). (Note 6) The Moor's Head continues to operate as a powerful symbol, in particular in nationalist contexts, and has been adopted as an emblem by many contemporary groups (i.e. musical ensembles).

Corsica and Scotland in the Romantic Era.

History, like everything else, has its fashions. That the facts are colored by the identity and allegiance of the author of the historical record and by the political context in which the texts were penned is now accepted. Chapman and others have shown how the 'barbaric' Celts of Classical and Medieval times underwent a remarkable change of fortune during the Romantic era, being redefined in more noble, heroic and exotic terms as the observers

of the day directed their gaze through a different colored lens. Again, not surprisingly, a similar transformation took place with respect to Corsica.

Images of Corsica in French literature over the ages have oscillated between that of a wild, impenetrable land, its barbarous inhabitants completely given over to the excesses of blood revenge and terrorized by ruthless bandits and, on the other, a paradisaical retreat, still unsullied by the more destructive forces of progress and one of the last bastions of the principles of democracy and honor - with a backlash to the former as travelers lured to the island by the more romantic images often discovered a far harsher reality (see Jeoffroy-Faggianelli 1979). Whatever the particular slant adopted, these portrayals served to reinforce a sense of otherness, constructing Corsica as the antithesis to life on the more - or less - civilized mainland.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the more romantic and heroic images gained a clear upper hand. Rousseau was sufficiently impressed by what he knew of the island and its affairs to write in his *Contrat Social* (published in 1762): "There is still in Europe one country capable of legislation, and that is the island of Corsica. The valor and constancy with which this brave people has known how to recover and defend its liberty well merits that some wise man teaches them how to preserve it. I have some presentiment that one day this little island will astonish Europe." (cited in Carrington 1984, 265-6). These oft-quoted words have left a lasting legacy and many of today's generation of Corsicans - including musicians, who have been known to include the above pronouncement in their disc notes - still strive to fulfil the philosopher's predictions.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the island also became a popular haunt of a host of British Romantic writers and artists and it was during this period that a series

of connections were made between Corsica and Scotland. The most direct, however, was that forged by the young James Boswell, who, on the advice of Rousseau himself, visited Corsica in the autumn of 1765 in the course of his 'grand tour' with the particular aim of making the acquaintance of Pasquale Paoli. In 1755, Paoli had been invited to return from exile in Italy to be elected General of the Nation and had then served the island in its fight for independence from Genoa for a period of ten years, instigating what Rousseau had identified as one of the most enlightened systems of government in the whole of Europe. Boswell - having suffered only brief trepidation following warnings, as he prepared to set sail from Livorno, that "I run the risque of my life in going among these barbarians" (Boswell 1923, 6) - was suitably in awe of what he saw and heard, and benefited from Paoli's confidences over a number of days. Having already aligned himself with other national struggles for independence, Boswell now became a lifelong friend and supporter of Paoli and was singularly responsible for a dedicated campaign which led ultimately to the short-lived Anglo-Corsican Kingdom created when the British finally came to Corsica's defense (this time against the French) in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

In 1763, the British government had proclaimed the Corsicans to be 'rebels' and had forbidden any British subject to lend support to their cause in any way. As soon as he set foot on Italian soil after his Corsican sojourn, however, Boswell immediately began to bombard the press with anonymous letters and articles speculating on the reasons for his own recent interviews with Paoli and calling for British intervention on the general's behalf. The slim volume which he published in 1768, not long after his return to Britain - *An Account of Corsica, the Journal of a Tour to that Island and Memoires of Pascal Paoli*

(Boswell 1923) - ran to three editions each in England and Ireland as well as appearing in a number of translations, and earned its author a certain notoriety.

It was followed later in the same year by the collection *British Essays in Favor of the Brave Corsicans*, edited by Boswell who was himself the author of several of the essays. He energetically set about raising funds for Paoli in Scotland and when the French invaded Corsica in 1768 he was able to assist with both money and guns. However, despite his attendance at the Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford dressed in the costume of a Corsican chief which he had had specially made for the purpose - after which several more anonymous notices found their way into London periodicals commenting on the stir his appearance had caused - Britain unfortunately failed to offer such timely intervention as Boswell had hoped for and Paoli's patriots were defeated by French forces at the Battle of Ponte Novu in May 1769. The anniversary of this date is still an important event in the Corsican calendar, when those of a nationalist bent broadly interpreted - including many of the island's intellectuals as well as young activists - gather at the bridge where the Corsicans made their final stand to celebrate a mass, throw flowers into the water in homage to the slain, and sing rousing traditional songs, including some that tell the story of the battle itself. (Note 7)

One might reasonably imagine that the way had already been paved for Scottish sympathy for, and active interest in, Corsica as a consequence of the mid-eighteenth century fervor for Scottish Highland culture. The *Ossian* poems, which had caused such a sensation when they were 'discovered' by MacPherson in 1760, fuelled enthusiasm both for the mystic Celtic past and for the continuing tenacity of aspects of the ancient way of life in the free-spirited Scottish Highlands and Islands, whose more 'barbaric' aspects could

now, following the dismantling of clan society after the 1745 Rising and the Battle of Culloden in 1746, be viewed with greater dispassion from the relative safety of the more progressive urban Lowlands (James 1999, 128). The poems had equally inspired the young Boswell, despite the early suspicions of his mentor, Samuel Johnson, concerning their authenticity. The Corsicans - with their reputation for being courageous and resilient, if somewhat hot-headed, and retaining the naturalness and innocence of a people as yet untarnished by civilization - offered a living example of just such a society without the complications of being too close for comfort. Interestingly, Corsica's most famous son, Napoleon Bonaparte (born in 1769 and enthusiastically patriotic in his youth before the turn in the family's political fortunes which forced them to flee for their lives at dead of night) also apparently became a dedicated admirer of MacPherson to the extent that he later commissioned a series of Ossian-style paintings to adorn his chambers.

During his time in Corsica, Boswell had entertained his new friends by playing "some of our beautiful old Scots tunes" on his flute, commenting on their reception: "The pathetick simplicity and pastoral gaiety of the Scots musick will always please those who have the genuine feelings of nature. The Corsicans were charmed with the specimens I gave them" (Boswell 1923, 53). The Scottish travelers who continued to be attracted to the island in the nineteenth century inevitably recognized a certain resemblance in terms of landscape which added to the sense of affinity. In particular the southern town of Ajaccio (now the administrative capital) became popular with the British in general in the second half of the century, largely due to the efforts of a Miss Thomasina Campbell, who described her peregrinations around Corsica in her book *Southward Ho!* (1868). Edward Lear's engravings in his *Journal of a Landscape Painter in Corsica*, which appeared two

years later, added a more vivid and dedicatedly romantic edge. The perceived affinity with Scotland endures. A recent article in *The Sunday Times* (13 June, 1999) concerning Caroline Cameron's attempts to buy the former Foreign Legion barracks in the southern port of Bonifacio and develop it as a center for Mediterranean culture reports that her husband initially fell in love with the island in part because "it reminded [him] of Scotland without the midges."

Shared Histories and Common Causes.

In the context of his writings on flamenco, Mitchell invokes the conclusions reached by Roosens in *Creating Ethnicity* (1989) to the effect that "beliefs and feelings are of much greater importance in self-definition than any objective cultural continuity" (Mitchell 1994, 62-3), a perspective that can usefully be applied not only to the modern Celts' conviction of their direct descent from the ancient Celts and the fundamental role that this plays in their mode of engagement with the world of today, but also to the abiding Corsican sense of kinship with the Celts, both ancient and modern. This 'quasi-kinship' (Geertz 1973, also cited in Mitchell 1994, 63) between Corsicans and Celts has been further reinforced in the present in the context of a certain degree of shared experience on the socio-political plane. One of the most conspicuous features that Corsica shares today with many of the peoples of the so-called Celtic fringe is a fervent nationalist movement. The fact that today's Celts tend to occupy a minority position in political terms accounts in large part for the ideological links which have developed between, for example, Northern Ireland, the Pays Basque and Corsica as brothers in suffering at the hands of more or less oppressive regimes.

Corsican identity has long been written between the lines, occupying a space beyond the confines of official reality. After spending several centuries in the hands of the rival republics of Pisa and Genoa, and following its brief spell as the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom between 1794 and 1796 (the securing of which cost Nelson his eye), Corsica suddenly found herself to be 'French'. (Note 8) Although a reluctant subject who continued to put up a dedicated fight against her new overlords into the early years of the nineteenth century, the island did then settle into a period of relative calm.

In the present century, however, increasing dissatisfaction with life under French rule - which, in parallel with the situation in Scotland and Wales, intensified with the experience of the postwar generation and in particular with the loss of the colonies which had previously offered stable employment for large numbers of Corsicans - naturally led to a situation where questions of identity occupied a central place in the island's concerns. Since the 1970s, nationalist organizations demanding varying degrees of autonomy and supported in many of their concerns by a significant proportion of the population have been a prominent presence. In the face of the refusal of the French government to cede to their demands to an extent that they find acceptable, the political climate remains volatile. Corsica's position as part of the French state has, of course, brought her into particularly close contact with France's other most notoriously disgruntled minority, the Bretons, with whom Corsican militants have shared both platforms and prisons.

As McDonald has pointed out, "... the apprehension of mismatch ... will usually have a dominant discourse ... in which to find ready expression" (McDonald 1993, 228). Others will recognize the discourse, even if they are unfamiliar with the new situation to which it is being applied. They can then attribute to this situation the appropriate set of

conditions, which might, for want of better information and a deeper understanding, really be little more than assumptions. A related trend sees a transference of aspects of this discourse from one situation to another. Not surprisingly, therefore, the discourse of French domination in Corsica has much in common, at surface level, with the discourses of English domination in Wales and Ireland, Spanish domination in the Basque lands and French domination in Brittany, even if both the historical determinants and the conditions which form the backdrop to the present manifestation of the conflict are in each case quite different. The details of the situation are, however, less important to those united in occupying the victim position than the overriding experience of oppression and injustice which brings with it a moral as well as an emotional obligation to enter into a relationship of solidarity and mutual support, both ideological and, in some cases, practical. Hence the assertion common among Corsica's political activists and sympathizers, singers included, that "we are the friends (or brothers) of all minorities." (Note 9) Most recently, the singer Petru Guelfucci and his group Voce di Corsica, who have performed to huge acclaim in Quebec, have found themselves in the curious position - whose irony is by no means lost on them - of sharing a common ground with the French-speaking Canadian population in their fight for equal recognition in a predominantly English-speaking territory.

Like today's Celts, the Corsicans are also clearly distinguished from the rest of the 'nation' to which, by an accident of history, they now belong by their use of an entirely separate language which cannot be understood by those speaking the majority language (even if the difference is not quite as profound as in the case of the Celtic languages). A Romance language which developed from Latin during the period of Roman occupation, the Corsican language as it is spoken today is closely related to Sardinian, Sicilian and the

dialects that have become modern-day Italian and, to a lesser extent, Spanish and Portuguese. It has always operated as an essentially oral language and different areas of the island have their own linguistic variants, with the main divide being between north and south. It is only in latter years that attempts have been made to establish a unified orthography. In the context of the French state, however, the Corsican language has until recently been consigned to the status of a dialect of Italian, which as a foreign language could be accorded no formal recognition on French soil. (Note 10) Needless to say, this has hardly helped smooth relations between the long-suffering Corsicans and their latest governors and the language question continues to play an important role in the island's demands for greater autonomy.

An examination of the language issue as a political preoccupation in Corsica and, for example, Wales does, however, reveal some interesting differences. Ethnicity in Wales today is defined almost exclusively in terms of language. As Trosset has noted, though by no means everyone accepts the equation 'language = identity', this idea has nevertheless firmly set the terms for debate to the extent that all debates about Welshness inevitably center on the language issue (Trosset 1993, 40). The true Welsh are the 'Welsh Welsh' who live in 'Welsh Wales' (*Cymru-Cymraeg*) which, geographically speaking, is for the most part situated in the western reaches of the principality where a more rural lifestyle continues to hold sway and where one is furthest away from possible contamination from across the border. The English-speaking Welsh (such as myself) are not thought of by the Welsh-speaking Welsh as - and are alive to the considerably complexities involved in thinking of themselves as - 'really' Welsh. Indeed, as Trosset notes, "among Welsh-speakers ... everyone who does not speak Welsh is considered to be a *Sais*, literally "a

Saxon"" (Trosset 1993, 32). There is certainly no concern here with blood groups, skull measurements or any other biological definition of ethnicity. Everyday definitions of Corsican-ness are less problematic for the majority of Corsicans insofar as it is obvious to everyone where the boundaries are and there is no disputing the fact, even by those who are happy to see Corsica as a part of France, that the whole island is Corsica. (Note 11) Those not fluent in the Corsican language are not simply redefined as French: those identified as French have literally 'come from Lyon', or wherever. Language issues have nonetheless played a vital part in 'the struggle', and the 'minority language' status of Corsican has certainly served to reinforce a sense of identification with the Celtic nations of the British archipelago. (Note 12)

The 'fringe' status enjoyed by both Celts and Corsicans in a geographical sense also accounts for certain cultural parallels which might in their turn be suggestive of a more profound kinship. Typically occupying a place apart in time as well as in space, these cultures have often preserved, independently, fashions and traits which in earlier times were widespread in continental Europe as a whole but which have later come to be seen as a central identifying feature of the 'traditional' heritage of the areas in which they have survived. This trend has often been observed with respect to what comes to be seen as 'national costume', while Chapman (1994) has also addressed the question of traditional 'Celtic' musical instruments within the framework of this debate. Dance music represents another case in point which has relevance to the present discussion. What passes today for Irish dance music is a case of a musical style and repertoire, together with its associated dances, having been preserved in Ireland (at the periphery of its catchment area) long after it had been superseded at the center by newer fashions. A similar style of music is

currently being resurrected in Corsica in association with the revival of the quadrille, a lost part of the 'traditional heritage' now being reclaimed and promoted by an enthusiastic network under the auspices of the association *Tutti in Piazza* ('Everyone in the Square'). The delicious whimsicality of this circumstance was neatly captured by an Irish resident on the island who commented: "To me, what they're playing is Irish music. But it's not, it's Corsican." And indeed, the tradition they are continuing is that of the old Corsican violinists from villages such as Sermanu, whose tunes fill many a reel in the field recording collections of Quilici and Laade (which together cover a period from the late 1940s to the early 1970s). Meanwhile, the delightful and popular "Panica Nera" on Canta u Populu Corsu's disc *Ci Hè Dinu* (Ricordu 1982), an original instrumental composition by group member Christophe Mac Daniel, sounds just about as 'Celtic' as you can get.

Finally, as we have seen, history has endowed both Celts and Corsicans with a reputation for being troublesome and prone to all manner of uncivilized behavior. (Note 13) Stereotypes of this nature can become self-fulfilling prophecies as struggling minorities either unconsciously live up to their reputations or make a more conscious choice to behave in a certain (oppositional) manner in order to emphasize their lack of identity with the 'colonizer.' Angelini, following his quotation of Thierry's description of the Celts and his recognition of the Corsican in this description (see above), concludes: "We delight in the qualities set forth. We are bad at accepting failings and yet haven't we seen in Corsica at times of domination ... indiscipline and disunity triumph?" (Angelini 1977, 61). Similar processes can, of course, be seen to be at work in the more discrete realm of musical activity, as I now aim to demonstrate.

Music and its Role in the Articulation of Identity in Present-day Corsica.

My intention in the second half of this chapter, in which I focus directly on music in Corsica, is not to propose any primary kinship between Corsican and Celtic musics at the intrinsic level of musical language but rather to explore points of contact in the role played by indigenous music in these cultures today and in the recent past and, with specific reference to the Corsican case, to highlight issues of musical meaning and representation which relate to themes in the preceding discussion. I also consider the ways in which the evolution of a wider cultural and political consciousness in recent years has informed musical practice at a multitude of levels.

My examination of developments in Corsican music from this broader socio-political perspective will, I trust, suggest further resonances with aspects of the dialogue between music and politics in today's Celtic nations and inspire comparisons with other studies devoted to one or other area of the so-called Celtic fringe. Rather than belaboring every such resonance, however, I will for the most part allow them to speak for themselves, being confident that the reader will readily make his or her own connections, in the course of which I hope that further new perspectives on developments in Celtic areas might emerge.

The prime focus of musical expression in Corsica is the voice. Historical evidence relating to instrumental music or older indigenous dances is comparatively thin. The oldest stratum of traditional song features a range of mostly familiar monodic song types, including laments, lullabies, songs of departure, threshing songs, and the *chjam'è rispondi*, a form of sung improvised debate. More recent genres include serenades, satires, election songs and soldiers' songs. The notion of a song as consisting of text and melody forming a

single immutable unit is, however, a relatively recent one. The collections of field recordings made in the middle decades of the twentieth century offer plentiful examples of the lengthy improvisations sung to a comparatively restricted range of melodic prototypes which are more characteristic of the tradition. A number of polyphonic song types have also been preserved, including the *paghjella*, typically sung at fairs, patron saints' day celebrations, gatherings of shepherds (e.g. for sheep-shearing) and informal gatherings of friends, and settings of the Latin mass and other liturgical and paraliturgical texts which operate as part of local oral traditions and which vary from one village to the next. (Note 14)

Most of the older songs are based on a modal tetracord or pentacord, with more elaborate melodies employing two conjunct tetracords. Within this framework, pitch relations are relatively labile, with certain intervals often being subject to slight expansion or contraction. The third degree of the scale tends to be particularly flexible, with an apparently wide margin of both individual and regional variation. In the case of the melismatic figurations (known in Corsican as *rivucate*, sing. *rivucata*) which are characteristic of many of the older monodic songs and also of the two upper voices in polyphonic songs, a range of quarter tones and other divisions are used, although it is rarely possible to distinguish the precise placement of a note. (It should be noted that, while they have often been described as ornamentation, the *rivucate* are not considered by the singers themselves as secondary features but as an integral and indispensable part of a satisfactory performance.) In addition, a single note can be kept in motion by means of a rapid microtonal variation with the result that the tuning of that note might be perceived to

change during its execution. In the case of polyphonic singing, this technique allows the singers to adapt constantly to one another so as to remain 'in tune'.

Melisma plays a crucial part in maintaining a constant balance between tradition and personalization. The art of mastering the technique of using *rivucate* lies in finding a balance between, on the one hand, intimate knowledge of the tradition and the ability to reproduce it and, on the other, one's own creativity. A singer has to learn, by repeated listening and imitation, where the *rivucate* should or should not be placed and understand the parameters which dictate the forms they might take; but he must then be able to liberate himself from the constraints of mere reproduction and be able to arrive at his own personalized and spontaneous interpretation. Thus while the *rivucate* might come at predictable points within the line, their actual structure will differ from one performer or performance to another. The ultimate aim is for each *rivucate* to be unique yet at the same time recognizably traditional.

Corsican songs rarely conform to a strict meter. Even where a melody is clearly conceived according to an underlying rhythmic or metric unity, it is rarely executed in a regular or symmetrical manner. Some notes are drawn out, with a special emphasis being placed on long sustained final notes, while others are extended by means of melismatic elaboration. Despite the overall impression of rhythmic flexibility and metrical freedom, however, the notion of timing - sometimes referred to by the singers themselves as 'rhythm' - remains a crucial component of the singer's art, the ideal delivery of the vocal line involving a judicious interplay of suspense and propulsion.

The songs of the oldest extant layer are characterized by a vibrant timbre (sometimes described in the literature as 'forced') with varying degrees of 'gutterality' and,

more often, nasality as often found in rural voices accustomed to singing in the outdoors. This choice of timbre in turn allows for the use of related vocal techniques. Other features of the older Corsican style of singing (often strikingly reminiscent of those found in flamenco) include: specific uses of breath control to add impulse to the melodic line; the associated practice of inserting aspirants at the beginnings of phrases in order to emphasize the vocal attack, resulting in a sob-like quality; an alternation between an open and closed mouth which is associated with nasalization techniques; and the markedly extended nasalization of final syllables which approaches the phenomenon of overtone. Each of these makes a particularly significant contribution to the texture of polyphonic singing.

All of these elements combine to form a style of singing that is, to the majority of outside listeners, obviously, distinctively and profoundly 'other'. The reader will already have begun to appreciate the scope for its practitioners to be perceived, from a supposedly more 'civilized' perspective, to fall far short of the skills required of a 'proper' musician, namely the ability to sing in tune, maintain a certain 'purity' of tone, keep time, and reproduce faithfully what is written in the score. Furthermore, this way of singing does not operate at a level that can easily be cultivated, as witnessed by rare attempts by non-Corsicans to emulate it. The main area of difficulty for those trained in Western or classical music is that of modality - where by modality is understood not simply the use of pentatonic scales or old Church modes, but the density of vocal modulation and melisma with its use of microtones and flexible pitches. The situation is completely different from that of learning an average 'folk song' where the main points of reference might be the 'melody' and the text. Here, where vocal inflection often constitutes the very fulcrum of the

song, matters are rather different, these inflections or modulations constituting an intrinsic part of the melody, rather than an optional, ornamental extra.

The fact that the youngest generation of singers continue, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, to sing in much the same way, even when performing their own compositions on stage, demonstrates the extent to which aspects of musical style and performance practice such as those referred to above appear to be culturally ingrained - an assessment supported by Jean-Paul Poletti's reference to the difficulties he encountered when first working on his own newly composed *chansons* with fellow members of the group *Canta u Populu Corsu* due to their inability to 'keep time', which in turn was largely a result of their inability to sing without melisma (interview 1995). Their ears at that time were not tuned to a 'regular' style, in terms of meter and singing on the note: they automatically reproduced the material in what we might call a 'long' style (typical of many rural idioms in the Mediterranean region), drawing out the individual notes and punctuating the line as a whole with relatively flexible melismatic elaborations. (Note 15)

From my first encounter with the distinctive Corsican style of polyphonic singing in particular, I was struck by the way in which the sheer power and intensity of the music seemed to cut a path straight to the soul. These were not songs in the usual sense of the word, but incantations. I can think of no more eloquent and evocative description than that offered by Dorothy Carrington of her first encounter with a group of *paghjella* singers at the Fair of the Santa di u Niolu more than half a century ago: "The sound was like none I had ever heard before; yet I recognized it as one I had always longed to hear. The three strong voices ... rose and fell in a series of deliberate discords; this rich harsh clashing music was more poignant, far, than any of the wailing solos I had heard, even the *voceru*,

so remote and rending that it seemed to issue from the birthpangs of the world. ... The cries of loneliness and thwarted love, however moving, seem insufficient for this music, which by its violence and mystery exceeds the range of even the more extreme personal emotions" (Carrington 1984, 239-240).

Corsican Music in the Twentieth Century: Changing Fortunes and Perceptions.

The twentieth century brought rapid change to Corsica, accompanied by an inexorable process of social, economic and cultural decline, in which both the practice and the status of traditional music were severely compromised. The decimation of the male population and the economic devastation caused by the two world wars, together with the rampant emigration, depopulation of the interior, increasing urbanization and linguistic decline which followed in their wake, all took their toll on the musical life of the island. Many of the old songs were deprived of their functions as the activities with which they had once been associated were abandoned. The interwar years saw a move away from indigenous *chant* to the continentally derived *chansonette* as Corsican music entered a period of decline from which it was not to emerge until the 1970s (de Zerbi 1993, 15). The traditional modal melodies with their characteristic melismatic interpretation were displaced - in terms of public presentation and endorsement, at least - by jolly, even-tempered melodies with guitar or mandolin accompaniment and standard tonal harmonization, which could hold their own in Continental circles as 'proper' music.

In the eyes of many of those who were to be swept up by the cultural revival of the 1970s, the *chanson* singers - exemplified by the enormously successful Tino Rossi, who recorded his first 'hit' (the lullaby 'Ciuciarella') in 1932 and whose name could at the time

scarcely be evoked without the adage "*il chante la Corse*" ('he sings Corsica') - were to come to represent a betrayal of the true Corsican tradition, whose integrity they had traded for a comparatively facile, commercially attractive style of song, even abandoning the mother tongue which was central to insular identity in favor of the language of the dominant culture, French. In their own era, however, the *chanteurs de charme* belonged in the context of an attempt to counter the enduring popular Continental image of Corsica as wild and backward, bristling with bandits and assassins. The Corsica of the *chansonette*, by contrast, was '*l'isula bella*' ('the beautiful island'), peopled with beautiful girls living out a rural idyll of innocence and tranquillity against a backdrop of glowing sunsets. The siting of the songs in a Parisian frame of reference and their attraction in particular for the Corsicans of the diaspora also needs to be stressed: they appealed to a gaze which was colored by the romanticism and idealization which distance inspires. Salini draws attention to the fact that the numerous Amicales des Corses (Corsican friendship societies), established by populations of Corsicans living in self-imposed exile from their island of birth, provided the *chanteurs de charme* both with a receptive audience and with an eminently suitable context for the evocative style and emotional symbolism of their performances (Salini 1996, 194). The appearance of an increasing number of texts in the French language was perhaps inevitable, occasioned in part by the desire of the record companies to appeal to a wider audience. Songs in French eulogizing the island for its environmental attractions and the tranquil existence enjoyed by its inhabitants can also be understood in the context of tourist appeal where Corsica is presented as '*la plus proche des îles lointaines*' ('the closest of the far-away islands').

Despite the fact that the *chanteurs de charme* were essentially an export item, the immortalization of their performances in the form of records meant that they had a direct affect on musical life within the island as amateur singers were inevitably to appropriate both the repertoire and the style of singing. With the advent of the recording industry, therefore, a shift had already begun away from locally specific repertoires to one that was more general, 'the repertoire that everyone knew', accompanied by radical changes in vocal style as many singers - especially women - abandoned the comparatively raw insular sound in favor of the more lyrical and operatic voices of their favorite artistes.

As the style's wide dissemination via the media rapidly established it as the norm, this was the sound that listeners came to identify as Corsican. The extent to which such identification had taken root by the late 1940s is revealed in the indignant horror which greeted examples taken from the field recordings of traditional Corsican music collected during Félix Quilici's 1949 mission, made under the auspices of Radiodiffusion Française, when they were broadcast that same year in a series of programs by Radio Monte-Carlo; heated debates followed in the press. "It's a disgrace! They're making fun of us!" exclaimed one outraged correspondent. "We were expecting 'Nina-Nana' [a lullaby]," wrote another, "and what we got, instead of these nostalgic airs, were *chjam'è rispondi* fit to chill the spine!" "Heavens above!" complained a refined Ajaccian, "whatever will the Continentals think of us?". "Or perhaps it is the case," proposed another, "that, when the recordings came out, someone mixed up the records, because what we heard - oh! our poor ears! - was more reminiscent of the confines of the Sahara than 'The mountain of the Cuscione' [again, the title of a popular Corsican lullaby]." (Note 16)

To the ears of Corsican town-dwellers, everything about the rural styles of singing sounded alien and, by implication, barbaric. This was the age in which traditional singers were perceived as being perpetually drunk and singing horribly out-of-tune. Their singing was, in keeping with their lifestyle as a whole, a display of their inability to embrace any sort of discipline or order. (Note 17) The Corsican language was similarly stigmatized. One acquaintance described to me how its use was strictly forbidden at the girl's *collège* she attended in Bastia. If she did speak Corsican, even outside the classroom, she was called a shepherdess. (Note 18)

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, a conscious reversal of this value system was set in motion with a positive reframing, from an emic perspective, of those features which had so horrified urbanized post-war audiences. On several occasions during my original fieldwork (1993-5), I found myself party to what I came to recognize as an evolving popular discourse on the merits and values of traditional indigenous music, based largely on a system whereby it was directly, and in this case favorably, juxtaposed to 'other' music, variously identified as French, Continental, Anglo-American or Western. Inevitably, perhaps, there is an overlap between this discourse of musical difference and the broader discourse of colonization.

It is common for singers in Corsica today, for instance, to talk of a 'colonization of the ear', alluding to the domination of the equal-tempered scale and the duality of major and minor to which most European ears have now become accustomed, depriving them of the ability to clearly distinguish and reproduce other intervals. Comment has already been made on the characteristic flexibility of pitch in traditional Corsican singing. The middle or neutral third, known in Corsican as the *terza mezzana*, has in latter years come to be

identified by Corsicans themselves as one of the most characteristic hallmarks of the Corsican singing style which now needs all the help it can muster to hold its ground against the encroaching tide of major and minor thirds. Retaining or reclaiming this aspect of the indigenous musical heritage can, for some, become part of a conscious resistance to colonization.

The apparent rhythmic liberty of traditional singing styles can similarly assume a political dimension. Within a particular melodic figure, part of the function of the *rivucate* (melismas) is to militate against an impression of rhythmic regularity or predictability. Regularity can, in the terms of the colonization debate, be seen as something imposed from outside, and slavish adherence to a regular beat is, in this context, clearly both undesirable and distasteful. The older indigenous singing, by contrast, unfolds naturally in its own time. Maintaining rhythmic freedom can thus take on the aura of a revolutionary campaign with the slogan '*Il faut casser la logique!*' ('you have to break the logic!')

The favorable comparison between Corsican music and its supposedly more derivative French or Continental counterparts was further reinforced by the analogies which were suggested on a number of occasions with wine, cheese and milk, the mass-produced, pasteurized and processed varieties being associated with the continental mainland and the increasing blandness of its products resulting from its dedication to the mass-market ethos (now encroaching on insular territory in the form of hypermarkets in the larger towns), while the less refined and to some extent less predictable Corsican equivalents stood for spontaneity, lack of artifice or stylization, and a natural organic wholesomeness.

Such missionary fervor does not mean that the types of musical distinctions referred to are in any way imagined or fabricated, even if they are on occasion prone to exaggeration. Nor does it in any sense detract from the validity of attempting to reestablish the Corsican musical language in a Mediterranean as opposed to a Continental (and predominantly urban) frame of reference. In Michel Raffaelli's assessment, "The song of the Mediterranean is Arabo-Andalusian, Iranian and Lebanese song. We, too, have this Oriental song, but colonization killed it for us. People became ashamed of it." (in de Zerbi 1992, 35). In this context, the distaste which informed the rejection of *paghjella* singing through the post-war years and into the early years of the revival with the accusation "they sound like Arabs" is rephrased as a positive concept of the 'Oriental' with its suggestion of a higher form of artistic culture. While any identification of Corsican music with Oriental music inspired by the opposition established to Western music as a whole is certainly not as straightforward as it is sometimes made to sound, there is, nevertheless, a kinship which cannot be denied with respect to some aspects of some types of musical expression.

The current interest in Oriental musics is part of the process of rediscovering the deep roots of the Corsican vocal tradition. Part of the reason for making the connection in Raffaelli's case is to draw attention to similarities in vocal technique and in the conception of the voice and the vocal line, in particular with respect to its modal flexibility, its melismatic nature and its rhythmic liberty, and by so doing, perhaps, to add a greater sense of legitimacy to this style of music by relating it to non-Western traditions which might be seen as 'classical' in their own right. (Note 19) The results of such reflection can then be applied equally to new compositions and to the interpretation of traditional material, where

they serve in part to counteract the tendency to subconsciously 'westernize' or modernize the singing style. (Note 20)

The *Riacquistu* and the *Soldats-chanteurs*

A growing sense of economic abandonment by the French state, coupled with a climate of increasing socio-political oppression, lay behind the cultural and political movements which began to flourish anew in Corsica in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In a broader context, Corsica was not immune from the reactionary, anti-authoritarian spirit which swept across most of the western world in the 1960s in response to the increasing imposition of a global, capitalist ethic at the expense of local systems and networks. In Corsica, this sense of political awakening took the form of a return to the question of cultural identity which had lain dormant since its airing by the *félibres* and their journals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The new regionalist and autonomist groups which now began to blossom subscribed to the principles of cultural as well as political reacquisition.

The ensuing decade saw a vastly increased output across several disciplinary areas - historical, political, archeological, scientific, literary and artistic. Corsican was reinstated as a language in its own right, as opposed to a mere dialect, and classes were established at community level where the language could be learnt and practiced. (Note 21) Many of those active in cultural contexts were also prompted to reclaim the Corsican versions of their Christian names which they now used for their professional or semi-professional work as a further statement of their Corsican identity. (Note 22) *A generazione di u settanta*, literally 'the generation of the seventies', is the name by which this era in Corsican

history has come to be known. It is also referred to as *u miraculu di u settanta* ('the miracle of the seventies'). The process of cultural revival which it fuelled is referred to in Corsican as the *riacquistu*, literally, 'reacquisition'.

Music, too, had its place within this ferment of activity. Alongside the fighters for political autonomy, there developed the notion of *militants culturels* ('cultural militants'), an epithet applied predominantly to those who sang in the newly formed 'groups'. (Note 23) The act of singing in the Corsican language was in itself a powerful political statement and the old songs - which offered such blatant proof of Corsica's non-Frenchness - now came to play a vital role in the demands for political recognition. (Note 24) This new alliance between music and politics saw a transference of the fervor which had built up in connection with political action to the realm of musical activity. The groups which came together in the 1970s and identified themselves as *groupes engagés*, epitomized in the example of the now legendary *Canta u Populu Corsu*, typically engaged in a variety of activities which included visiting old singers in the villages to learn their songs and their manner of singing and then disseminating the material via their own recordings and through *veghje culturale* ('cultural evenings'), where they performed the songs, and later *scole di cantu* ('schools of singing'), where they taught them to others. In addition, they began to seek out old field recordings from which they could add to their repertoire, thereby bringing songs which had been little known or forgotten back into circulation.

Initially, *Canta* was concerned primarily with the restitution and transmission of the repertoire: their over-riding concern was that the songs should be sung again. Soon, however, encounters with musicians from other cultures who were already using their art as a more direct vehicle for political assertion (in particular in parts of South America)

awakened individual members of Canta to the fact that "the *chanson* could also carry a message" (interview 1994). Coupled with the rapid deterioration of the political situation, this realization led increasingly to new *chansons* composed by the groups themselves, expressing their reactions to contemporary concerns and incidents. A retrospective report in *Kyrn* magazine (119, May 1981) highlights the dramatic nature of the change in the group's orientation: "Gone the laments and the lullabies, "Canta" seeks and finds its inspiration in the noise of the light armoured-cars, the acrid smoke of the tear-gas grenades, the grey walls of the Parisian prisons and the maquis where the "clandestine" wages the battle of national liberation."

New songs now began to appear with such titles as *A Rivolta* ('The Revolt'), *Clandestinu* ('Clandestine'), *Compañero*, *Corsica Nazione* ('The Corsican Nation'), *Corsica Nostra* ('Our Corsica'), *Lettera di u Prigiuneru* ('Letter of the Prisoner'), *Suldatu di u Populu Và* ('Soldier of the People Advance') and *Un Soffiu di Libertà* ('A Breath of Freedom'). For many of these songs, invocations of '*unità*' (unity), '*libertà*' (liberty), '*verità*' (truth) and '*sulidarità*' (solidarity) offered a ready rhyme. Some songs were dedicated to 'events' in the struggle, such as the incident at Aleria (Note 25); others were composed in honor of Corsica's own contemporary martyrs, both those who had lost their lives and those who had been imprisoned for their nationalist activities or allegiances (themselves often active as singers with one or other of the groups). Others again - such as *A Pasquale Paoli* and the *Paghjella di Ponte Novu* - celebrated moments of glory in the island's past. The over-ridingly political content of many of these songs was further reinforced by the commentaries which accompanied them in performance and the groups

who sang them were increasingly referred to in the press as '*soldats-chanteurs*' ('soldier-singers').

To many of the older generation of islanders, this political rhetoric sometimes smacked alarmingly of terrorism. If a Canta song was played on the radio at this time, the radio base would be bombarded by people ringing up to complain, typically reiterating the by now familiar objection that they were "singing like Arabs." Petru Guelfucci (now one of the island's most successful singers and one of the original members of Canta) observes that what people were responding to was more the 'political coloration' of the group's activities, but since they were not able to attack them directly for their politics, their rejection was transferred to an attack on their style of singing (interview 1995).

Meanwhile, the mayors of a number of communes prohibited concerts or *manifestazione culturale* from being held in their villages, accusing the groups of attempting to impose a political ideology on their audiences. The manner in which the authorities sometimes sought to reinforce these bans, however, only served to increase the revolutionary fervor of those affected and to implicate traditional music, together with the new *chanson engagée* or *cantu indiatu*, ever more deeply in the nationalist cause. By the early 1980s, Canta had become more or less synonymous with the nationalist struggle, functioning as "a sort of legal expression of the clandestine struggle which was developing at the time" (de Zerbi and Diani 1992, 67). (Note 26)

The nationalist movement in Corsica inevitably drew inspiration in general from what was going on in other parts of the world, in particular in the Pays Basques, Northern Ireland and Chile, which at that time were very much in the news. Fusina comments on how reports in the press of outbreaks of violence in Northern Ireland attracted the attention

of young Corsicans, especially when the emphasis was on "the exemplary destiny of romantic heroes in an eternal struggle against outside domination" (Fusina 1993, 143). A number of new compositions were inspired by these other struggles and conceived as an expression of solidarity. Jean-Paul Poletti's *Surella d'Irlanda* ('Sister of Ireland', featured on Canta's 1978 disc *A Strada di l'Avvene*), for example, evokes the troubles in Northern Ireland and its perennial resistance to English colonization. The text opens with a reference to reading of Ireland's tribulations in the newspaper and expresses the sense of brotherhood (or in this case sisterhood) that the writer derives from the knowledge that both islands are oppressed by the same hand of iron, imprisoned and condemned to death by the colonial order. Another later song inspired by events in Northern Ireland was A Filetta's *Sintenza per tè* ('A Sentence / Judgement for you', from *In L'Abbriu di e Stagioni*, Kalliste 1987), which was dedicated to Bobby Sands.

Canta now became increasingly active on the circuit of festivals and concert tours outside the island, presenting programs which consisted of a combination of traditional songs, including local polyphonic settings of the Latin mass, and their own political *chansons*, as part of a semi-formalized 'internationalization of the Corsican problem.' They also took to the stage specifically as a gesture of solidarity with other minority struggles, for example in Brittany and the Pays Basque, appearing in particular in support of political prisoners. Boswell's earlier efforts were equaled as regular reports appeared in the press detailing Canta's latest success in spreading the message of Corsica's oppression across the continent whilst also 'bringing Corsica's support to those fighting against fascism and repression' (report in *Le Provençal* 12 June, 1980, reproduced in de Zerbi et al 1995, 216). Meetings with other 'soldier-singers' in the context of these gatherings inevitably led to

direct exchanges of both songs and discourses, as well as to more general musical influences, and *Canta* now began to include occasional 'foreign' songs in its own repertory, the texts sometimes remaining in their original language and sometimes being adapted into Corsican.

The move towards newly composed *chansons* brought with it a change in musical language. As the style matured, the melodic basis moved further away from the traditional model and, aided by the addition of instrumental accompaniment, the songs became increasingly rhythmic and at the same time began to lose touch with the strongly modal character which distinguishes the island's traditional unaccompanied singing. Turchini characterizes the new style as a meeting between the traditional polyphonic *paghjella* style and a more contemporary harmonic style centred on the arpeggio (Turchini 1993, 199). The way in which the vocal harmonies were added was, however, far removed from the manner of constructing the traditional polyphonic sound. The pattern increasingly adopted was that of a solo voice singing a verse with the other voices joining in a refrain with chorus-like harmonies dictated by the triadic chordal progressions of the guitar, which now featured prominently as accompanying instrument. This new style was further enriched by the conscious assimilation of elements from other musical cultures, specifically justified by some on aesthetic grounds. One member of the group I Chjami Aghjalesi, for example, explained to me in 1995 that while the group's own creations are, in their own eyes, firmly rooted in the tradition, what they have added is 'the rhythm'. This move to a more upbeat presentation was inspired by a search for 'something a bit happier', but since there was no rhythmic tradition in Corsica, he explained to me in 1995, they had to look for inspiration elsewhere. Portuguese *fado* offered one such inspiration.

The stylistic choices which were made can also be seen to be related in some instances to the songs' function as vehicles of a political ideology. While the overt message is carried by the lyrics, a number of features incorporated into the musical setting (presumably often subconsciously) serve to stimulate an emotional response in the listener. Such features include melodies which have a comparatively wide range and feature a high proportion of ascending patterns, the choral style of triadic harmonization and in particular the use of dominant seventh chords with their feeling of suspense, and the manner in which the voice is projected, the combination of these factors in some indefinable way seeming to evoke an image of heroic resistance, determined self-assertion and the claim to a more just and hopeful future. It could also be observed that, as the musical interest increased in the sense of becoming more varied and the idiom became more widely recognizable, so the appeal of the material was no longer dependent on an understanding of the text and so became more accessible to foreign as well as local audiences. Meanwhile, within Corsica, this style has now come to be seen as traditional in its own right, especially by the younger generation who have, after all, grown up with it, many becoming ardent practitioners in their own right. (Note 27)

Polyphonic Renaissance and the Salvage of the Corsican Soul.

This is not to say that the older styles and repertoires have again been abandoned. While the number of groups operating in the *Canta mould* continues to multiply, so too does the number committed to a cappella polyphonic singing. Indeed, many groups cultivate both, moving with apparent ease between rousing revolutionary-sounding choruses and heart-stopping renditions of extracts from their local village mass in the same concert

performance. In the early days of the *riacquistu*, particular attention had been paid to the polyphonic heritage. The *paghjella*, which had survived as a living tradition only in the villages of the island's isolated interior, mainly among those still practising a pastoral way of life, now came to function as 'the symbol of the profound Corsican being, the major expression of its musical discourse' (Berlinghi 1993, 230). According to Petru Guelfucci, the original motivation of *Canta u Populu Corsu* was intimately connected with the salvage and safeguard of the polyphonic tradition: it was indeed as a result of a visit on the part of other future members of the group to the saint's day celebrations near Guelfucci's own village of Sermanu, an occasion characterized by extensive polyphonic singing, that *Canta* was first formed. Iviu Pasquali similarly talks of an act of salvage by people who realized that 'in losing these songs which had come down to us from the beginning of time we were soon going to lose a part of our soul' (Pasquali 1993, 7).

The unprecedented scale on which the *paghjella* has been taken up by young people during the past decade even in those parts of the island which do not have a history of *paghjella* singing - albeit largely as a direct result of the influence of the groups and their recordings and of the *scole di cantu* - suggests nevertheless that there are certain qualities embodied in the singing of polyphony which continue to appeal strongly to the Corsican male psyche. The psycho-social function of the *paghjella* - the act of men singing together - has always taken precedence over the function implied by the text, whether it be a lullaby, a lament or a serenade, such singing owing its perennity in considerable part to the immediate metaphysical benefits derived from the collective acoustic experience for which the text serves largely as a pretext. For today's youth, the *paghjella* is the perfect embodiment of the notion of *patrimoine*. On the one hand, it has become emblematic of

the old indigenous way of life whose values remain enshrined in the songs: by singing them, young culturally disinherited singers hope that they will somehow find their way back to the Corsica of their ancestors, in spirit if not in practice. In this sense, the act of singing *paghjelle* represents a literal return to the old ancestral rhythms.

On the other hand, in the context of the nationalist discourse of identity, the *paghjella* operates as a symbol of unity and solidarity. *Paghjella* singing in particular has always been experienced, by both singers and audience, as something liberated and primal, unrestrained by any externally imposed discipline. Together with the fact that the development of the song is controlled by the singers themselves in an essentially democratic manner - with reference to the independence of each voice within the wider collective framework - this would seem to marry well with the desire for self-determination on a social and political level. (Note 28) The attractiveness of the Corsican style of polyphonic singing to contemporary 'world music' audiences has also been an important factor which, together with the new state of grace in which polyphony has come to find itself in the island itself, has led to a wealth of new polyphonic 'creations'.

Forging New Futures.

Whether they relate to the polyphonic or *chanson* framework, today's groups are consciously striving in their new compositions to find an appropriate marriage of tradition and modernity which will allow them to explore their own creativity and give expression to contemporary concerns and values whilst remaining faithful to their roots. In a discussion regarding the style of new polyphonic compositions devised by the group Voce di Corsica, Benoit Sarocchi agrees that certain elements of the traditional musical language

are consciously retained. They want fellow Corsicans who hear their songs to be able to say, "I don't know it, but it is from here" (interview 1995). Some of the new songs incorporate traditional motives but combine them with more original elements while others owe their 'Corsican' sound to more general stylistic or procedural features such as the arrangement and interaction of the voices, the behavior of the individual voices, the melismatic style, the timbral qualities, the nature of the cadences and, in particular, the *tierce de Picardie* type ending. At a broader level, the re-adoption of traditional Corsican instruments, the fact of singing in polyphony, and the inclusion of improvisatory elements are all seen to provide a strong sense of continuity between contemporary developments and 'the tradition', whilst the utilization of the Corsican language is for many enough in itself to allow a song to qualify as traditional. While any more detailed analysis of these developments lies beyond the scope of the present article, it should be noted that some of the features mentioned above are interpreted at a relatively liberal level. (Note 29)

Corsican groups continue to take opportunities to perform outside the island, both through individual concert tours organized by continental agents and through the festival circuit. Many invoke the need to actively look beyond the confines of the island and its sometimes stifling concerns and value meetings with musicians from other cultures as a means of maintaining a sense of proportion, at a socio-political as well as a musical level. As Iviu Pasquali (of the group *Madricale*) expresses it, "it also demonstrates to us that we are not the centre of the world" (Pasquali 1993, 40). At the same time, part of the motivation is to make Corsican music known to a wider audience; in the words of Patrizia Poli (of the ensemble *Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses / Soledonna*), "to show the whole world the strongest things we have, the most beautiful things we have" (interview 1995),

thus helping to counteract the often negative image of Corsica abroad. This desire to export the best of what Corsican culture has to offer as a means of drawing attention to the island in a positive way is their manner of demonstrating their 'engagement' to the cause, while their commitment to portraying Corsica in as advantageous a light as possible necessarily entails working on producing a quality product.

Patrizia Gattaceca (*Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses / Soledonna*) also draws attention to the part played by musical exports in creating a presence at an international level for the Corsican language: "[song] is a vector of our language. It permits us to convey it everywhere" (cited in de Zerbi 1992, 75). This connection with the language issue was again emphasized in a media interview with the group *Voce de Corsica* following their appearance at the award ceremony of the 1995 *Victoires de la Musique* in which they had been awarded first prize in the category of traditional music, when they expressed the conviction that, having accorded this degree of recognition to Corsican culture, the French government would no longer be able to maintain its entrenched position vis-à-vis the language itself. In the words of Petru Guelfucci: "It will no longer be possible, at a political level, to continue to maintain a double parlance. Since we win prizes, our language must be given recognition, it must be given a statute, and the means to develop." (*La Corse* 15 February 1995).

At the same time as acting as ambassadors for Corsican culture, today's groups continue to forge links with other musical cultures, in some cases working on recordings together with established musicians from outside the island. *Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses'* first disc (*Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses*, Philips 1991) famously included instrumental contributions from Manu Dibango, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Shaymal Maltra, Ivo

Papasov, John Cale and Jon Hassel, while Cinqui Sò's *Tarraniu* (1996) features the Sardinian singer Elena Leda, the Occitan singer Miquèla Bramerie and the Catalan musician Pedro Aledo. A number of semi-composed, semi-improvised performances have also taken place in the context of festivals as a literal enactment of the notion of a *rencontre* ('meeting').

This impulse to reach out and embrace the other would appear to belong to a new climate of global dialogue and the recognition of a shared humanity. Indeed, the language of universal love and fraternity permeates many of the edicts of today's groups, as exemplified by the statements of Jean-François Bernardini of the group *I Muvrini*, who says: "We want to make our concerts into places of meeting and dialogue. To show, certainly, our face, our identity, our differences ... But what we want to say most of all through our songs is that we are all citizens of an identical love!" (*Corse-Matin* 30.5.1994). *Canta u Populu Corsu's* 1995 disc *Sintineddi* (Albiana 1995) was described on its release by a spokesman for the group as "a veritable gift of fraternity" (*Corse Matin* 2 July 1995), while a song on the disc entitled *Beal Feirste* ('Belfast') says, in the words of the disc notes, "that the time has come for the people of Ireland to strike out the chords of fraternity." This new perspective can perhaps be seen as the other face of nationalism - a perspective which has both been inspired by, and in its turn lent further endorsement to, the increasingly ecumenical approach to the musical product itself.

The Performance of Identity in Contemporary Corsica and the Celtic Fringe.
Chapman (1994, 30) has drawn attention to the "two rather distinct spheres" which might be seen to exist with respect to the performance of identity in Celtic areas today. This

divides, on the one hand "the area of self-conscious 'Celtic' activity" typically entered into by "intellectual incomers with folkloric tastes" and "some small part of the university-educated local youth", and, on the other, "genuinely popular activity in the "Celtic" areas." This latter often has little to do with the cultivated style of the former group which has, nonetheless, been disseminated and marketed to the rest of the world as distinctively 'Celtic', often fuelling a quite unrealistic expectation that this is the sort of thing that people in Brittany or Wales or wherever commonly do of an evening, whereas in truth a fair proportion of them are settling down for a fix of their favorite soap, whether it be London's 'Eastenders' or (Welsh language) *'Pobol y Cwm'*.

This model does not lend itself so readily to the Corsican example. Despite the fact that there has been a very definite 'return' to traditional music in Corsica in recent decades which, in itself, has in many cases been deliberate and self-conscious, the current state of traditional musical practice cannot fairly be described in revivalist terms. The situation is also very different from that pertaining in Wales, for example, where there is an indisputable element of 'invention' or at least repackaging in what now passes for traditional Welsh culture, at least as far as its roots in 'ancient times' is concerned, together with what is often a rather formalized compartmentalization of 'traditional' activity, with the annual cycle of *eisteddfodau* serving as the prime arena in which people act out their Welshness - even if, as Trosset (1993, 42) has pointed out, this enactment takes place for the Welsh themselves and not for any outside observer. There is not, in Corsica, such an obvious break in continuity, either between past and present or between the stage and grass-roots manifestations of present-day culture. (Note 30)

Whilst it was true in the post-war years that the inhabitants of Corsican *towns* "[knew] little or nothing about this music, and [had] no interest in it" (Chapman 1994, 30), having acquired more cosmopolitan musical tastes en route to their membership of a more modern age, the situation in the *villages* was often quite different. Here, many of the musical genres now included in the repertoires of the more traditional groups remained part of a way of life which, whilst being under threat, was still practiced in direct continuity with the past. It is true that many of those who were at the forefront of the *riacquistu* in its early days and became the most fervent promoters of traditional music had benefited from an outside perspective through having lived and studied, as young adults, in France or Italy (in particular at the universities of Nice and Aix-en-Provence) where their education had often undergone both a political and a musical fine-tuning.

They did not, however, simply reinvent some rather spurious and fragmentary notion of an authentic past. Rather, they either sought out those rural traditions, still being practiced by a minority, to which they had lately been alerted, or came to see in a new and more appreciative light (inspired partly by the simple fact of distance as well as by a heightened consciousness) the village traditions with which they had grown up. In the context of cultural renewal and the salvage of nationhood, these now became treasures to be preserved and nurtured - a responsibility as well as an opportunity. Moreover, it tends to be items of repertoire - such as rarely sung musical variants or texts, collected either from an isolated singer or re-learned from old field recordings - which have been revived, rather than the style of singing, which - as noted above - has to be seen as something distinct and which is a more enduring, 'natural' and apparently in-bred inclination.

The fairs and festivals which take place out-of-doors in the summer months are still community events and while they now attract all manner of fairground paraphernalia quite foreign to their true nature and are, to the regret of many, 'no longer what they used to be', the songs that are sung there are still much the same songs as in the past, with improvised poetic debates and spontaneous *paghjella*-singing taking pride of place. Although they might now be in the minority, shepherds do still sing when they take their flocks up the mountain or gather their friends together for the shearing. In a few villages, groups of friends still go out serenading. Religious ritual remains for many an integral part of community life. Comparatively 'ancient' polyphonic masses continue to be sung in isolated chapels on mountain-tops or in olive groves in honor of particular saints.

Thus while the profusion of recordings which have come out of Corsica in recent years are a fair reflection of the high density of musical activity at 'group' level, what is not immediately evident from this is that there is a parallel population of those who are still to be found in respectable if diminished numbers singing their hearts and lungs out at fairs and similar gatherings and for whom such an activity remains in the realm of 'being' as opposed to 'performing'. Nor is there a clear dividing line between the groups and the village singers. Notwithstanding what I have written elsewhere about differences in musical perception and interpretation between older and younger generations of singers (Bithell 1996) or about the dangers of reading the vitality of the stage culture as proof of a thriving 'living tradition' (Bithell 1997), the distinctions between the different singing populations often turn out, on closer inspection, to be somewhat blurred. While some groups may now be composed of young singers who have learnt their art at the *scole di cantu* or of older educated singers who have not grown up immersed in the rural traditions

but have later come to recognize their value and potential, many include members who are themselves the direct inheritors of village traditions and the descendants of some of the most revered singers and poets of the past (see Bithell 2001). Moreover, even the most well-established groups, for whom performance has become a professional activity, do not operate exclusively in performance mode but often manage to function with one foot in the market and the other in the life of the local community. Many regularly sing the mass for weddings and funerals, usually at the request of friends; some can also be found singing *paghjelle* informally in the bars or at the fairs.

It is perhaps because Corsicanness belongs to, or is delineated by, the island as a whole that one does not find an 'alternative' social strata such as one finds in 'Celtic' areas of Britain (Glastonbury included). The island does not attract droves of incomers in flight from the rat-race, eager to rediscover their Corsican roots and recreate their vision of a utopian Corsican existence. Nor have those Corsicans reluctant to relinquish the possibility of a trickle of Celtic blood in their own veins felt the need to give expression to their inheritance by sporting baggy jumpers, matted locks, and the sort of beard that "appear[s] to have declared itself an autonomous region" like the would-be Celts encountered by Stanley Stewart during his visit to the Lorient Inter-Celtic Festival (*The Sunday Times* 20 June 1999). Corsicans do on occasion invoke their pagan roots in general or allude to the more arcane aspects of vocal technique associated with polyphonic singing, which is itself commonly referred to as having its origins 'in the mists of time', but there is not the insistence on an elaborate and consciously constructed mysticism such as that popularly associated with the Celts. This is again in part because many of the types of ritual practices and beliefs which form the basis of Celtic mysticism do not, in Corsica, belong to a far

distant past but to a surprisingly recent past which in some cases, as we have seen, continues to coexist with a more modern present. The passing of the 'old' way of life is certainly viewed with nostalgia, but for many it still exists in the realm of personal memory. It is not distant enough to have become collectively sanctified.

Folklore groups do exist but, unlike the situation found in some other parts of Europe, traditional musical activity does not center on such groups. There remains a clear distinction both between folklore and the living tradition, and between folklore and the groups who 'perform' traditional music. (Note 31) Apart from a handful of artisans selling animal bells and goat's cheese at the fairs, it is, generally speaking, only in the context of the self-styled folkloric groups that one now finds the 'traditional' costume of corduroy or velvet trousers and waistcoats and red and white checked shirts for men, and long skirts and headscarves for women, together with flags, guns, cowbells and other accessories supposedly suggestive of the 'traditional' way of life. (Note 32) Even here, the wearing of a 'national' costume has its *raison d'être* in the rules imposed by the folkloric federation in the context of which these groups had their origins in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In at least one case, it is seen as a regrettable but necessary compromise by the group itself.

Among the new generation of groups which have come into being from the 1970s onwards, there is little attempt to cultivate a special 'Corsican' image through their appearance. For concerts of predominantly traditional polyphonic songs, the singers typically wear black trousers and white or black shirts; for concerts featuring original *chansons* they are most likely to wear jeans and coloured shirts or T-shirts. The majority of the younger generation of singers wear their hair cropped close to their heads; beards, if

worn at all, are similarly well-maintained. Their image is that of the average modern Corsican. Like the music they perform, their appearance is an expression of a contemporary reality as opposed to a museum-like reconstruction of a bygone era.

By comparison, the remaining folkloric groups are a literal anachronism, representing the tastes, fashions and practical networks of a past age. The majority are, moreover, a part of *town* culture. People tend to join them because they appreciate the social outlet which such groups provide or because they enjoy dancing. The constitution often contains clauses referring to the society's commitment to keeping the traditions alive, but essentially people are there to have a good time. The typical musical repertory of these groups is similarly that of the towns - serenades, fishing songs and barcarolles, redolent of languid summer evenings by the shore and relying heavily on an instrumental accompaniment - all a far cry indeed from the ruggedness of the a cappella polyphonic singing of the mountain-dwellers. (Note 33)

Aspects of my arguments for seeing members of the professional and semi-professional groups in Corsica today as being integrated into what might be described, for want of a better word, as 'normal' Corsican life as opposed to existing as a race apart, preoccupied with living up to a mythic past, can, of course, be applied to many of their counterparts in Celtic lands - I do not wish to suggest that Celts en masse be tarred with the same brush as the over-enthusiastic new convert, or that the majority of those 'performing' their Celtic heritage should be seen as actors in a historical reconstruction. Indeed, meetings between ordinary Corsicans and ordinary Celts seem to be on the increase, thanks in part to the activities of the association Tutti in Piazza. Having inaugurated two new festivals, *A Festa di u Viulinu* (the first 'edition' of which took place

in 1997 in the village of Sermanu) and *I Scontru di Quattrigliu* (launched in 2000 in the village of Evisa), in 2002 the organizers combined the two initiatives to form *FestiBallu*, which took place over three days in the town of Corte (the size of the Viulinu gathering in particular having outgrown its original village location) and to which The Glencairn Scottish Dance Band and Irish musicians Seamus and Fidelma Bellew were invited as guest performers and teachers.

Another forum which promises regular contact between Corsican and Celtic musicians is the European Festival of Insular Cultures, currently in development within the Interreg III framework. As part of the preliminary exchanges, the group Caramusa (who include in their repertory traditional dance music as well as polyphonic songs) represented Corsica at the 2001 edition of the Gaelic Festival in Stornoway. At the level of the musical fabric itself, intimations of acoustic links with Celtic culture now linger intriguingly not far beneath the surface of some of Corsica's musical output - partly, perhaps, as a result of a certain conflation between 'world music' and Celtic music but also as a result of more permanent collaboration on the part of some Corsican musicians with others from France's Celtic fringe. A report of a concert given by the group *I Muvrini* in Calvi in 2001 enthuses: 'The public was hypnotized by a sumptuous tour of song where "word music" (sic), jazzy and Celtic in color, entered into a marriage with traditional polyphonies and well-known standards' (*Corse-Matin* 21 August 2001). While this perceived Celtic coloration undoubtedly derives from the incorporation of bagpipes and a hurdy-gurdy in the group's line-up (played by Loïc Taillebrest and Gilles Chabenat respectively), the resonances in themselves would appear to belong - not surprisingly - to a relatively recent manifestation of technologically enabled and commercially propagated 'Celtic' style.

Meanwhile, the abiding sense among today's groups that an important part of their role is to safeguard indigenous forms of expression does, on occasion, have recourse to familiar imagery. The title of Canta's 1995 come-back album, *Sintineddi* ('Sentinels', evoking the island's statue-menhirs), suggests that the group continues to see itself as guardian of traditional culture or at least of the insular spirit. These ancient stone sentinels had similarly been invoked in the context of I Muvrini's 1994 summer tour, which incorporated into its stage-set polystyrene models of the famous prehistoric statues found at the site of Filitosa, thus metaphorically associating the music with the earliest stages of the island's (pre-Celtic!) history and the deepest roots of its culture.

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Notes

1. As Chapman notes, the Anglo-Saxons, upon their arrival in Britain, appear to have associated the megalithic monuments they found there with the Celts. Scholars writing in the eighteenth century then made a close association between the Celtic Druids and standing stones, "an association that is now firmly embedded in the popular imagination, and is thus truly part of the myth of the Celts" (Chapman 1992, dedication page).

2. Unless otherwise stated, English translations of non-English sources cited throughout the article are my own.

3. The existence of a specific 'ethnic' group who can readily be defined as 'the Celts' is, of course, also contested.

4. According to Carrington (1995, 4), the megalithic faith appears to have originated in the Near or Middle East, from whence it was carried around western Europe by missionary seafarers, reaching Corsica by the third millennium BCE.

5. Two works devoted specifically to a study of the *mazzere* are Carrington 1995 and Multedo 1994.

6. Speculation on the symbolic potency of the head is not entirely unscientific. Carrington (1984, 300) reports that: "Belief in the supernatural power of skulls survived in Corsica into the present century: in times of drought the members of a village would walk in procession with one or several skulls carried aloft on poles; the skulls were laid in a river bed and were thought to bring rain."

7. Further accounts of Boswell's involvement with Corsican affairs can be found in Daiches 1976 and Carrington 1984.

8. Having finally been granted the status of an autonomous *région* in 1970, in 1982 the island became the first *région* of France to elect a Regional Assembly. This body has executive powers and has to be consulted by the French government regarding any state involvement in the island's affairs. It nevertheless has fewer powers than the Scottish Office.

9. This perspective on latter-day intimations of Corsican-Celtic affinities is shared by the Corsican writer and anthropologist Jacques (Ghjacumu) Fusina, who comments

with respect to the numerous resemblances reported by observers between Ireland and Corsica that "the analogies doubtless relate less to the landscape than to the particularism of the character of the two insular communities and to the tormented relationship which history has established with the nations to which they are respectively bound" (Fusina 1993, 143).

10. In 1951, the Corsican language had been excluded from the Deixonne law, which made provision for the inclusion of regional languages in education. Only in 1974 was this decision finally reversed. In accordance with a decree that 'regional languages and cultures' might be taught on a voluntary basis, one hour's teaching a week in Corsican was initially granted. This was increased in 1982, at which time the writer and linguist Jacques Fusina was made responsible for establishing and coordinating a Corsican syllabus for the Académie de la Corse (Fusina 1988). Further ground has been gained in recent years. See Jaffe 1999.

11. The question as to whether one can be both 'Corsican', and 'French', remains nonetheless a perplexing one for many Corsicans. See McKechnie 1994.

12. It is relevant to note that my own Celtic pedigree was of some significance to my Corsican acquaintances and a sense of shared experience and understanding certainly paved my way in some contexts. Meanwhile, those campaigning for greater use of the Corsican language on television had recently established a direct connection with Wales via the Welsh television channel S4C.

13. In the case of Corsica, this reputation has been unfortunately reinforced by recent events, culminating in the assassination of the French Prefect Claude Erignac in

1998. At the same time, it has to be noted that French state involvement in Corsican affairs has often been heavy-handed in its own right (witness the Bonnet affair of 1999).

14. For a detailed study of the various genres, see Laade 1981. My own PhD thesis (1997) focuses primarily on polyphonic song types. In terms of recordings, a selection of pieces representing different genres of traditional music, taken from Laade's field recordings dating from 1958 and 1973, can be found on the CD *Corsica: Traditional Songs and Music* (Jecklin-Disco 1990). A more extensive set of examples, taken from Quilici's field recordings of the early 1960s and accompanied by detailed notes, can be found in the boxed set of three LPs *Musique Corse de Tradition Orale* (Archives Sonores de la Phonotheque National 1982). Interpretations of a similar range of traditional songs by contemporary singers can be found on the CD *Canti Corsi in Tradizioni: Canti, nanne, lamenti, voceri, paghjelle a capella* (Fonti Musicali 1989, conceived and directed by Mighele Raffaelli). Recordings of traditional polyphonic masses re-released on CD include *Corsica: Religious Music of Oral Tradition from Rusiu* (Unesco, 1989; recorded 1975) and *Messa Nustrale in Sermanu* (Consul 1990; recorded 1977). Interpretations of songs from the polyphonic canon as a whole can be found in the output of numerous recent and contemporary groups (sometimes in combination with their own polyphonic compositions, thereby offering the listener a useful insight into the stylistic relationships between these two strands of musical activity): examples of landmark CDs devoted almost exclusively to polyphony (sung a cappella) dating from the late 1980s and early 1990s are E Voce di u Cumune's *Corsica: Chants Polyphoniques* (Harmonia Mundi 1987), A Filetta's *Ab Eternu* (Saravah 1992), Donnisulana's *Per Agata: Polyphonies Corses* (Silex 1992), and Voce di Corsica's *Polyphonies* (Olivi 1993). More recent releases are too numerous to list

individually but include a number of compilations featuring items from the polyphonic canon performed by a range of different groups. Visitors to Corsica itself have ample opportunity to hear the current groups in performance, particularly during the summer months when many go 'on tour' around the island as well as appearing at the various fairs and festivals: in July and August the local newspaper, *Corse-Matin*, carries daily listings of concerts, festivals, and other events.

15. I have examined elsewhere (Bithell 1996) the differences in detail between the style of singing and performance practice of the older singers still operating at a local level on the one hand and the younger semi-professional groups with their more 'modern' and cosmopolitan frames of reference on the other. Despite these differences, however, the style remains distinctively and recognizably Corsican, the degree of transformation being outweighed in most cases by the degree of continuity.

16. These quotations are taken from letters and articles reproduced as part of Florence Pizzorni-Itié's contribution to the Musée de la Corse's publication *Cahier d'Anthropologie no. 4: 100 ans de collecte en Corse* (1997, 68-73). The popularity of lullabies - songs which were non-threatening and heavy with nostalgia - is noteworthy.

17. Chapman has similarly noted how the propensity for pentatonic scales in much Celtic vocal music with its greater latitude in terms of the pitch of individual notes has the effect of appearing to those trained in the system of twelve-note harmony as "a kind of wild freedom, an emotional excess, or a lack of order and control," as a corollary to the more general perception of the 'other' as inconstant, irrational and dramatic (Chapman 1994, 39).

18. A similar situation pertained in Wales where the prohibition of Welsh in schools was a major contributing factor to the loss of the language among my grandparents' generation.

19. See also the reference in the introduction to this volume and chapters by Reiss, Vallely and others to the perceived similarities between Irish *sean-nos* singing and Middle Eastern styles of vocal ornamentation.

20. The fruits of Raffaelli's research and reflection can be heard, for example, on the disc *U Cantu Prufondu* (Ricordu 1993), which features a selection of traditional monodic songs sung by Mighela Cesari accompanied by Raffaelli on the *cetera* and other instruments.

21. Again, an obvious parallel can be drawn here with a similar ferment of activity in Wales during much the same period. Here, too, people reverted to Welsh forms of their name, in particular their family name, adopting the traditional practice of calling themselves 'ap [father's name]' ('child of [X]').

22. Many people nevertheless continue to be generally known by the French version of their Christian name with which they are required to be registered at birth, which is subsequently used in all official contexts (including school registration) and to which everyone has therefore become accustomed. Their Corsican name remains a more formal one, a type of artist's signature which appears on discs, books etc., while also being used in articles or books written in the Corsican language. This can lead to interesting confusions as an individual is known by two different names in different contexts, but it is not always clear which name should be given preference in a particular situation. Family names, on the other hand, are always indisputably Corsican

23. The concept and practice of music in Corsica remains inextricably bound up with politics. In my own experience, conversations about music almost invariably seem to revolve around political issues: indeed, some of my original interviewees deemed it essential that, before we could even begin to talk about music, I should have a clear appreciation of the recent (or even not-so-recent) political history of the island. In this way, the central role played by the discourses and activities of the autonomist movement in a specifically musical revival became increasingly clear.

24. Salini comments on the fundamental and intimate links between cultural expression and the recognition of an independent national identity which accounts for the importance of cultural products to the autonomist movement: "A people exists only insofar as it possesses its own culture and ... to the extent that it masters it" (Salini 1996, 193). For an account of the relationship between popular music and the nationalist movement in Wales during the 1970s which would make interesting reading alongside my discussion of the Corsican case, see ap Sion 2002.

25. Algerian independence in 1962 had brought over 15,000 *'pieds noirs'* (French who had formerly settled in Algeria) to Corsica for resettlement, many being given fertile land on the east coast for cultivation. In 1975 a group of nationalists occupied the farm of a viticulturist (near Aleria) suspected of serious malpractice. The authorities responded by bringing in, by helicopter, 1200 *gendarmes* and state security police who proceeded to stage an assault on the occupied buildings. Two of the police were killed and one of the demonstrators seriously wounded. Further demonstrations and confrontations followed.

26. Their position was finally contested when the *Consulta di i Cumitati Naziunalisti*, co-organizers of a reunion at Barcelona in the summer of 1983, made it

known that, as far as they were concerned, *Canta* was no longer representative of nationalism in Corsica. *Canta* cancelled its appearance at Barcelona and, a year later, the group disbanded. (cf. de Zerbi and Diani 1992, 68)

27. A selection of songs by a range of groups involved in the *riacquistu* can be found on the disc *Canti di Liberta* (Ricordu, 2000).

28. At this level, *Canta*'s style might be seen to relate in some ways to that of nationalistically inclined troubadours elsewhere, such as Wales' Dafydd Iwan

29. For an exploration of other factors which might be seen to account in part for the tenacity of *paghjella* singing, see Bithell 2002.

30. For a detailed discussion of issues relating to the 'tradition-creation' debate, together with an analysis of a series of musical examples selected from the recent output of three different groups, see Bithell 2001.

31. In parts of Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union, 'folklore' does not carry the negative connotations which it now tends to have in Western Europe. During a recent visit to Georgia, for example, I was struck by the frequent use of 'folklore' in the sense of 'traditional' or 'authentic'. Corsica, on the other hand, very much shares a view of folklore as something inauthentic, derivative and cheapened - a shallow reflection or a more wilful travesty of the real traditions upon which it claims to be based.

32. Although McKechnie (1993, 129) reports that, at the time of her fieldwork on the island, 'amongst young nationalists, the keenest young men grew beards, wore waistcoats and dark wool 'Corsican jackets', symbols emblematic of their serious intent.'

33. A notable exception is the group *A Mannella*, featuring singers from the village of Sermanu (in the centre of the island), which has always included a proportion of polyphonic songs in its repertoire.

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