



Twelve Cities – One Sea

Early Modern Mediterranean Port Cities
and their Inhabitants

edited by

GIOVANNI TARANTINO and PAOLA VON WYSS-GIACOSA



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NAPLES – THE SINGING CITY

[A Napoli] ogni fanciul pria che l'avvolgi in fasce | quasi cantando nasce.

In Naples every child before being wrapped in swaddling clothes | almost singing is born. (Giovanni Battista Del Tufo, *Ritratto*, 1588)

[In Naples] the country-people so jovial and addicted to musick, that the very husbandmen almost universaly play on the guitar, singing and composing songs in prayse of their sweete-hearts, and wil commonly goe to the field with their fiddle; they are merry, witty, and genial, all which I much attribute to the excellent quality of the ayre.

(John Evelyn, *Diary*, Naples 1644)

1. *A thousand colours*

Naples more than any other city in the world can be described by its songs. All Neapolitans feel entitled to sing because they are descendants of the Siren and singer Parthenope, the mythical founder of the city.¹ Their songs do not describe its appearance, which has changed over the centuries, but the regret for a past that is always better than the present. The most popular song in Naples today is not *O sole mio*, but *Napule è* (Naples Is) by Pino Daniele:²

¹ On this myth, see Dinko Fabris, *Partenope da Sirena a Regina. Il mito musicale di Napoli* (Barletta: Cafagna, 2016).

² Published in the first LP by Pino Daniele *Terra mia* (EMI Italy, 3C064-18277, 1977). It is curious to note that *O sole mio*, the best-known Neapolitan song in the world, was written by the composer Eduardo Di Capua during his stay in Odessa (on the Black Sea) in 1898. When later presented at the Piedigrotta competition in Naples, it only achieved a mediocre result.

Napule è mille culure | Napule è mille paure | Napule è a voce de' criature |
 Che saglie chianu chianu | E tu sai ca' nun si sulo ...

Naples is a thousand colours, | Naples is a thousand fears, | Naples is the
 voices of the children | rising slowly | and you know you're not alone ...

But what are the 'thousand colours' of Naples mentioned in this text? At the end of May 2023, like an enormous chameleon, Naples became of one colour, sky blue: its football team had won the Italian championship for the third time in its history, the previous two being during the time of Diego Armando Maradona, the city's greatest modern myth. The image of this Argentinian football hero is everywhere in the city, elevated to the same rank of protector that St Gennaro had held for centuries. The tourists, who came to Naples by the thousands, from all over the world, were all dressed in blue too, to ritually share the happiness of the inhabitants like in some ancestral fertility rite. But blue, per se, has never been a dominant colour in the long history of the city of Naples. It is true that blue and gold were the colours adopted by the monarchy established in Naples in 1734 by Charles of Bourbon, which lasted until 1861. These colours also painted the original foyer of the Teatro di San Carlo, the largest and most beautiful in Europe at the time, which opened in 1737. But this choice of palette reflected complex dynastic alchemies in which the white and blue of the Bourbons of France converged. Throughout the previous era, the dominant colours of the city had been yellow and gold, which still fly on the flag of the municipality of Naples.³ Red and gold have always been the colours of the Spanish monarchy and therefore they were adopted in Naples during the two centuries of Spanish domination (1503–1707). It is curious to note that these same colours had already been used by the monarchy of Aragon in Naples (1442–1501) and even before by the Anjou dynasty of the French kings of Naples (1282–1442), who chose them because they were the official colours of the church, which the Anjou claimed to defend. So for many centuries in the city of Naples the same colours marked both political and religious power, extending into an even wider collection of symbols: the glittering gold of the sun and of glory, the red of blood and fire in a city clasped between the Vesuvius volcano and the Phlegraean Fields,

³ 'The Arms of our City of Naples ... have the upper part of the field in gold, and the lower part in red': Filiberto Campanile, *Dell'Armi overo insegne dei nobili* (Naples: Antonio Gramignani, 1680), 11.

where a cult of ampoules containing the liquefied blood of saints still persists, giving it the name of ‘Urbs sanguinum’.⁴ These emblems of red and gold are still flaunted in the hundreds of churches in Naples and throughout the former kingdom of the South; in addition, archaeological excavations have revealed that these same colours, ‘Pompeian’ red and yellow ochre, were omnipresent in the ancient Roman houses of the Neapolitan coast before the eruption of Vesuvius in the year AD 79.

On the other hand, today Naples is a grey city, dominated by the colour of the lava that has been used for millennia to pave the streets.⁵ The first impression of a present-day visitor wandering through the old alleys of Naples will not be unlike that of the many travellers of past centuries: after having seen the harmonious Renaissance beauty of the many northern Italian cities of art and the composed elegance of papal Rome, the southern metropolis looks like an urban hodgepodge of overlapping styles, where fragments of spellbinding beauty overlap with apparent devastation and neglect. This was already the case in the seventeenth century and we can imagine the disappointment of the Grand Tour travellers, drawn to the capital of southern Italy by tales of the natural beauty of the most enchanting gulf in the Mediterranean and by the memories of ancient times scattered throughout the area. To the French traveller Jean-Jacques Bouchard who spent eight months there in 1632, the city appeared ‘obscure, morne et melancholique’.⁶ This was the effect of the rapid and massive urbanisation at the beginning of the seventeenth century which led the population of Naples to double to 400,000 inhabitants, making it the most populous capital of the time after Constantinople. To accommodate so many people in such a narrow area between the mountains and the sea, Naples had to resort to raising the existing buildings upwards, inventing the first skyscrapers of the modern age. All the spaces previously occupied by gardens and vegetation, which had painted Renaissance Naples with another colour, green, were sacrificed. The observer of the

⁴ Marino Niola, *Il corpo mirabile. Miracolo, sangue, estasi nella Napoli barocca* (Rome: Meltemi, 1997), 82, quoting Jean-Jacques Bouchard, *Journal*. Vol. 2. *Voyage dans le Royaume de Naples*, ed. Emanuele Kanceff (Turin: Giappichelli, 1977): ‘à Naples, qui pour cela s’appelle urbs sanguinum’.

⁵ Giovanni Maria Galanti, *Breve descrizione della città di Napoli e del suo contorno* (Naples: Gabinetto Letterario, 1792), 317: ‘The cooled lava is mostly of a dark ashen colour, spotted with red, blue, green and grey; when smoothed, it acquires a shine’, own translation.

⁶ Bouchard, *Journal*, 241–2.

famous *Tavola Strozzi*, which depicts the city of Naples at the end of the fifteenth century is taken aback to note that green is the dominant colour, both in the sea and in the sky, due to the mirror effect created by the rich vegetation that covers the most of the urban space. As in all the Mediterranean ports, the houses, on the other hand, are mostly white and pink, as is still the case on the islands of the Gulf of Naples. Dozens of enchanted gardens slope down from the hill towards the sea, and as many harmonious fountains add the colour blue with the refreshing sound of their waters.⁷ Tellingly, Renaissance Naples was labelled as ‘gentile’, or graceful.⁸

Now we have demonstrated that it is not possible to attribute a single dominant colour to Naples, we can better understand the meaning of *Napule è*, the song by Pino Daniele, which has become a true anthem of the city. The ‘thousand colours’ of Naples are actually a collective and ritual lament for the contradictory city that the singer at once loves and rejects as well as, we might add, for its extraordinary but forgotten past. Pino Daniele (1955–2015), who presented his song for the first time in 1977, was the last and most famous exponent of the group of artists defined as ‘Naples Power’ which played a significant role in the changes taking place in Italian popular music between 1970 and 1980, also as a reflection of the 1968 student revolutions. Many of the musicians who joined the ‘Naples Power’ movement opposed the saccharine image painted by the Neapolitan songs that had been handed down since the early nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century.⁹ The lyrics of the so-called ‘classic’ Neapolitan song repertoire had depicted many colours of Naples, as is immediately evident in the titles: *Luna rossa*, *Marechiaro*, *La grotta azzurra*, *Mandulinata blu* (Red Moon, Clear Sea, The Blue Grotto, Blue Mandolin Piece). On the contrary, ‘Naples Power’ picked out black as its colour of reference. In fact, one of the characteristics of this artistic movement,

⁷ The most important fountain designer in Naples was Giovanni Antonio Nigrone ‘oriundus neapolitanus’. He left a collection of over 300 drawings and projects, made between 1585 and 1609, of garden fountains and hydraulic machines, including sophisticated mechanical systems and automatons that anticipated the famous fountains in the Baroque villas of Roman cardinals (Giovanni Antonio Nigrone, *Vari disegni*, MS XII. G 59–60, Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale).

⁸ Michele Rak, *Napoli gentile. La letteratura in ‘lingua napoletana’ nella cultura barocca (1596–1632)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994).

⁹ Goffredo Plastino, ‘Naples Power. Neapolitan Sounds of the 1970s’, in *Made in Italy. Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Franco Fabbri and Goffredo Plastino (New York: Routledge, 2014), 56–7.

which included musical ensembles of different genres, from rock and jazz to folk revival, was the recreation of African-American musical models, starting from the blues, contaminated by the Neapolitan language and sounds typical of the Arab side of the Mediterranean. Daniele also composed a song called *Nero a metà* (Half Black) in which he expresses the aspirations of the whole generation of ‘Naples Power’ for a kind of ‘Neapolitan blackness’.¹⁰

In fact, ‘blackness’ was not a new phenomenon in Neapolitan music, since a sung dance called the *moresca* had already gained popularity there five centuries before. The first and most important musical sources of the *moresca* (dating from around 1555) were not printed in Naples, but in Rome, Venice and Paris. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the sung *moresca* was a Neapolitan tradition. Gianfranco Salvatore, who has systematically studied this repertoire, considers *moresche* ‘indirect documents of the history of the African diaspora in the West, in a period preceding the diaspora in the Americas’.¹¹ He also observed that the story told in the different *canzoni moresche* can be interpreted as a single narrative cycle, which can be summed up as follows: in an undefined location in the city of Naples, three African friends, the street musicians Giorgio, Martino and Cristoforo, are courting three black slave girls Lucia, Catalina and Patalena, making extensive use of explicit sexual references, with terms coming from

¹⁰ In the third LP by Pino Daniele (EMI Italy, 1980), dedicated to the singer Mario Musella, born to a Neapolitan mother and to a Native American father, who died in October 1979. See Plastino, ‘Naples Power’, 65–8 (‘Half Black’). Even a Neapolitan folk group such as the Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare did not fail to pay tribute to the colour black: think of their version of *Tammurriata Nera* (1974), a very popular song composed in 1944 by E. A. Mario.

¹¹ Six out of the nine pieces published in the *Secondo libro delle Muse a tre voci. Canzoni moresche di diversi autori* (Rome: Antonio Barré, 1555) were reprinted by the Venetian printer Gardane starting in 1560, and enjoyed great success. The most important *moresche* of the time were the ones published by the composer Roland De Lassus in his *Libro de Villanelle, Moresche et altre Canzoni* (Paris: Adrian Le Roy-Robert Ballard, 1581), which contained six. Only one ‘canzone moresca’ was printed in Naples: *A la lappia camocan*, in the *Secondo libro de canzoni a tre et quattro voci. Regolate & osservate con una moresca* by Grammatio Metallo (Naples: Cancer, 1577). See Gianfranco Salvatore, ‘Ritratti sonori. Musica, lingua, vita e socialità afro-europea dal teatro iberico alle canzoni moresche’, in *Il chiaro e lo scuro. Gli africani nell’Europa del Rinascimento tra realtà e rappresentazione*, ed. Gianfranco Salvatore (Lecce: Argo, 2021), 159–305 (Appendix II, 457–60).

their original African language.¹² Names of other Moorish characters also appear in later versions, and the story was included in the repertoires of *commedia dell'arte*.

Black characters were often found singing and dancing in both comedies and the refined Neapolitan-language literary works of seventeenth-century writers, such as Giambattista Basile. The Moorish character of Lucia was also connected to a kind of early Baroque Italian cantata called *Luciata*, and to a popular dance common until the twentieth century in the Naples area, known as *Tubba catubba*, *Sfesania*, *Lucia canazza* or simply *Lucia*. The presence of many 'black Moorish' musicians and dancers in early modern Naples was related to the intense practice of slavery which had brought thousands of prisoners to southern Italy, most of whom were African Muslims.¹³ It is possible that, in addition to their native African language, some of them introduced the music and rhythms of their homeland, which they performed on the Neapolitan streets. The *canzoni moresche* and the *Luciata* scores can be considered a valuable tool to reconstruct (albeit in a parodic way) the daily life of the Moorish communities in Naples. The black musicians also counted the slaves of the galleys anchored in the port of Naples, who were made to play wind instruments.¹⁴ Bouchard had described the same practice in 1632, which he observed outside some Neapolitan churches: 'there is always a band of cornetti and shawms played by galley slaves, who perform whenever a cavalier or lady of quality enters or leaves'.¹⁵ Even female slaves were often musicians in Spanish Naples, as recorded in Basile's *Cun-*

¹² Until recently, it was thought that the black characters acting in the *canzoni moresche* sang an invented language for comic effect. But Salvatore has proved that many of the words in these lyrics correspond to an actual African language, Kanuri: Salvatore, 'Ritratti sonori', 183–216.

¹³ A survey of the earlier baptismal registers preserved in the cathedral of Naples has demonstrated the presence, between 1583 and 1649, of at least 340 Africans baptised as Christians and called 'negri' or 'mori' (251 males and 89 females): Giuliana Boccadamo, 'A Napoli: "mori negri" fra Cinque e Seicento', in Salvatore, *Il chiaro e lo scuro*, 143–57 and Appendices I and II, 423–59.

¹⁴ Keith A. Larson, 'Condizione sociale dei musicisti e dei loro committenti nella Napoli del Cinque e Seicento', in *Musica e cultura a Napoli dal XV al XIX secolo*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Renato Bossa (Florence: Olschki, 1983), 61–77 (67); Nathan K. Reeves, 'The Oar, the Trumpet, and the Drum: Music and Galley Servitude in Spanish Naples', in *Music, Place, and Identity in Italian Urban Soundscapes circa 1550–1860*, ed. Franco Piperno, Simone Caputo, and Emanuele Senici (London: Routledge, 2023).

¹⁵ Bouchard, *Journal*, 184.

to de li cunti and in other Neapolitan language literary products. A particular role is assigned to black slaves in the plots of Neapolitan commedie dell'arte and in the librettos of operas staged at court and in the public theatres of Naples. The very first operas performed in Naples since 1650, almost all by Francesco Cavalli, feature Moorish dances ('Ballo di mori africani' in *Didone*), as well as black princesses (Zelmina 'Moorish queen of Calpe' accompanied by her nurse Zaide in *Veremonda*) or slaves (Fatama 'Moorish slave of Elmera dressed as a gypsy' in *Ciro*), just to mention a few examples of black female roles. Meanwhile, Moorish male characters continued to appear in Neapolitan operas until the beginning of the nineteenth century. And it was on the stage of the commedia dell'arte that the first 'Half Black' appeared, some 370 years before 'Naples Power': Pulcinella, the most important character in the Neapolitan comedies, wore a white tunic with a black mask on his face.¹⁶ This mask can still be considered the representation of all the contradictions and ambiguities of the Neapolitan population today: chubby or thin, male or female, brave or cowardly, cunning or stupid, dominated by an insatiable hunger; the character speaks little, in a voice disguised by the *pivetta*, whose croaking sound recalls that Pulcinella was a chick hatched from an egg, while the character's gestures display a natural talent for music and dance.¹⁷ Pulcinella, like Pino Daniele, is an interpreter of the perpetual regret for the 'bello tempo passato' (wonderful times past) similarly to all the storytellers whose names are set down in the literary works of the Neapolitan Baroque: Velardiniello, Gianleonardo dell'Arpa, Giovanni della Carriola, Compà Junno, the 'Re de la Museca', Masto Ruggiero, Nardo, Sbruffapappa, Mase and many others who have become proverbial over the centuries, including an idealised female singer, called 'the Siren of Naples'.¹⁸

¹⁶ For the history and iconography of Pulcinella (first documented on stage in Naples in 1609), see the two volumes edited by Franco Carmelo Greco: *Pulcinella: una maschera tra gli specchi* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1990) and *Pulcinella maschera del mondo. Pulcinella e le arti dal Cinquecento al Novecento* (Naples: Electa, 1990), exhibition catalogue. See also Teresa Megale, *Tra mare e terra. Commedia dell'arte nella Napoli spagnola (1575–1656)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2017), 266–78.

¹⁷ Rak, *Napoli gentile*, 244–51.

¹⁸ On the Neapolitan literary sources mentioning these singers, see Rak, *Napoli gentile*, 76ff.; Dinko Fabris, 'Il compianto per il perduto splendore artistico musicale della corte aragonese in un manoscritto napoletano del primo Cinquecento', in *Trent'anni di ricerche musicologiche. Studi in onore di F. Alberto Gallo*, ed. Patrizia Dalla Vecchia and Donatella Restani (Rome: Torre d'Orfeo, 1996), 305–21.

2. *A thousand songs*

A line of continuity between the earliest songs in Neapolitan, the *vil-lanelle*, and the classic Neapolitan song was created in the 1820s, when the first Neapolitan songs were collected and published by Guglielmo Cottrau.¹⁹ Some of the printed songs were presented as centuries old, for example *Michelemmà*, dated to the seventeenth century, or *Jesce sole*, the song of the washerwomen who ritually invoke the sun, dated to the thirteenth century.²⁰ On the other hand, *La Canzone di Zeza*, published in the first volume of Cottrau's *Passatempi*, had been performed in theatres since the seventeenth century and later became a popular feature at carnival (*Zeza* or *Lucrezia* is the wife of *Pulcinella*).²¹

From a philological point of view, the first Neapolitan-style song for which the musical score has survived is *Hora may che fora son*, a *canzone napoletana* whose music is reported in manuscripts dated to before 1500, connected with the Aragonese court of Naples.²² *Io te canto in discanto*, another song of the same period (whose score is missing), was presented as a masquerade during the wedding party of

¹⁹ Guglielmo [Guillaume-Louis] Cottrau. *Passatempi musicali. Raccolta completa delle canzoni napoletane* (Naples: Giraud, 1824–1829), sixty-eight songs, with further booklets published in the years 1843–1845 (repr. Naples: 1865 as a collection of 110 songs in total), it is considered the true start of the new Neapolitan song, intended to be performed in bourgeois salons. But the first intention of Cottrau was to record and arrange old popular songs still sung by Neapolitans, as clarified by the subtitle. Other collections arose with similar intentions, such as Francesco Florimo's *Scelta delle migliori ed originali canzoni popolari napoletane* and *Le Napolitane, scelta di canzoni popolari* (Naples: Giraud, 1845–1851). See Pasquale Scialò and Francesca Seller, eds, *Passatempi musicali. Guillaume Cottrau e la canzone napoletana di primo '800* (Naples: Guida, 2013).

²⁰ *Jesce sole* was also inserted in the neo-Baroque opera *La Gatta Cenerentola* by Roberto De Simone, whose premiere was staged at the Spoleto Festival in 1976 and then had a long European tour. The plot is taken from the fairy tale of the same title in Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*. The show, written in Neapolitan, was able to represent a living musical fresco of Naples, linking the Baroque age to the present day. See Roberto De Simone, *La gatta Cenerentola. Favola in musica in tre atti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977).

²¹ 'Antichissimo dialogo di Zeza che si canta in Napoli dal popolo colla maschera di Carnevale', in Cottrau, *Passatempi musicali*, part 2, no. 5 (1829).

²² A Siense chronicle from 1465 describes the picturesque use of this *barzelletta* during a dance party in which 'a Moresca of 12 richly decorated people came out, and they danced to a song, which says *Non vogl'esser più monica*': Allan Atlas, *Music at the Aragonese Court of Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 144ff. See also Elizabeth G. Elmi, *Singing Lyric in the Kingdom of Naples. Written Records of an Oral Practice* (Mainz: Schott, 2023), 86.

the king of Naples, Ferdinand II of Aragon, in 1496. The two-voice piece was performed by a knight dressed as a peasant playing the *sordellina* (a small bagpipe widely used at the court of Naples) and another dressed *alla corteggiana* playing a noble lyre.²³ The taste for songs had established itself in Naples since the time of the French kingdom of Anjou. During the subsequent reign of the Aragon kings, some of the most important improvisers and *frottola* composers of the Italian Renaissance, such as Serafino Aquilano, stayed at the court of Naples, and the salaried musicians of the Neapolitan court, from all over Europe, even included a female singer, Anna Inglese.²⁴

Song continued to be performed in noble palaces even after the end of the Kingdom of Aragon, at the start of the long period of Spanish domination that followed, when Naples lost its status as capital for over two centuries.²⁵ Yet, the Neapolitan language was not used in songs, nor does the only book of *frottole* printed in Naples by Giovanni de Caneto in 1519 (*Fioretti di frottole*) contain songs in Neapolitan. Gradually in the following years, with the stiffening of the government of Spanish viceroys worried about possible revolts in Naples, a sense of mourning spread for the loss of Naples' rank as capital. The viceroys had forbidden the Neapolitan nobles from using arms and riding horses, while they were free to make music. Hence, the young aristocrats began to intensively practise singing and composition, and play musical instruments. The most important Neapolitan noblemen gathered around Ferrante Sanseverino, prince of Salerno, whose palace in the heart of Naples was always open to comedies and musical performances in the 1530s. During Emperor Charles V's stay in Naples (1535–1536), Sanseverino invited the sovereign to listen to a new genre of songs performed by the virtuoso noble musicians of his court: this was the real birth of the 'villanelle alla napoletana', songs in Neapolitan that rapidly spread throughout Europe. The first known musical collection was printed in Naples by Giovanni de Colonia in 1537 with the title of *Canzoni villanesche alla napoletana*. It included fifteen anony-

²³ Anonymous, MS XXVIII D 24, ca. 1553–1555, Naples, Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, quoted in Dinko Fabris, 'El nacimiento del mito musical de Nápoles en la época de Fernando el Católico', *Nassarre* 9, no. 2 (1993): 53–93 (90ff.).

²⁴ Atlas, *Music at the Aragonese Court of Naples*, Serafino: 82–3, 102, 131 and Edition no. 14; Anna Inglese: 105, 107; Elmi, *Singing Lyric in the Kingdom of Naples*, 3–5.

²⁵ See Alfonso Colella, 'Musica profana a Napoli agli inizi del Cinquecento: i villancicos della *Cuestión de amor* (1513)', *Recercare* 28, nos 1–2 (2016): 5–41, with updated bibliography.

mous compositions, probably the same ones presented by Prince Sanseverino to Charles V.²⁶ *Villanelle*, based on texts in Neapolitan and recurring stylistic elements (onomatopoeia, references to the animal world, the ironic reproduction of peasant expressions), soon met with great success, with hundreds of volumes published in the following decades in Rome, Venice and even beyond the Alps, while in Naples no new editions of *villanelle* were printed until 1577.²⁷ The main reason for this vacuum can be attributed to the Spanish viceroys' ruthless repression of the Neapolitan nobles, starting with Prince Sanseverino who had created a true alternative to the viceregal court in his palace. Even people from the lower classes could attend some performances free of charge and this created great sympathy for the prince, who was considered the real governor of the city. When an anti-Spanish revolt broke out in 1547, the viceroy Pedro de Toledo, afflicted by the success of the Sanseverino court, had the opportunity to take his revenge, and the prince was exiled together with his musicians. Sanseverino's assets were confiscated and the palace, with its famous ashlar architecture, was transformed into a church, the still existent Chiesa del Gesù.

The *villanella*, in its guise of innocent, cheerful, double-entendre musical entertainment, hid a revolutionary content, however. This was their use of the national language (Neapolitan is not a dialect), which made the repertoire shared by the different Neapolitan social classes all but incomprehensible to the Spaniards. They were real protest songs.²⁸ After the death in exile of Ferrante Sanseverino in 1568, songs in Ne-

²⁶ Donna G. Cardamone, 'The Debut of the Canzone Villanesca alla Napolitana', *Studi musicali* 4 (1975): 65–130 (with full transcription of the only surviving copy and reconstruction of the missing bass part).

²⁷ The only exception is the collection *Canzoni vilanesche napolitane*, printed in 1547 in Capua by Giovanni Sultzbach, but no copies have survived. Subsequent books of villanesque songs 'alla napolitana' were printed in Rome by the printer Dorico in 1537 and Venice by Scotto and Gardane in 1541–1546. At the same time, Neapolitan composers began to print their works outside the Kingdom of Naples, especially in Venice. See Donna G. Cardamone, *The Canzone Villanesca alla Napolitana and Related Forms, 1537–1570* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1981), 1:5–31; 2:Appendix A. The commercial success of the *villanelle* (and related forms) is outlined by the 12,750 titles reported in Mauro Giuliani, *Catalogo delle villanelle alla napolitana canzonette e forme affini stampate dal 1500 al 1700* (Trento: Nova Scuola Musicale, 1995).

²⁸ Donna G. Cardamone, 'The Prince of Salerno and the Dynamics of Oral Transmission in Songs of Political Exile', *Acta Musicologica* 67 (1995): 77–108, reconstructs the European spread of the *Lamento del Principe di Salerno* and *Risposta della Principessa al Principe*, printed first in the collection of *Villanelle d'Orlando di Lassus* (Rome: Dorico, 1555).

apolitan style finally reappeared in Naples, explicitly linked to the theatrical activities which had resumed in the city: in Rocco Rodio's *Aeri raccolti* (Naples: Gioseppe Cacchio dell'Aquila, 1577), we find theatre music by several composers including Scipione del Palla, the Neapolitan teacher of Giulio Caccini, who later went on to found the Florentine monody.²⁹ In the same years, the performance of *villanelle* on boats became part of the 'spassi di Posillipo', summer festivals involving groups of young nobles along the coast of Naples. The collection of novels *Il fuggiloto* by Tommaso Costo, published in Venice in 1600, describes the summer festivals of 1571 of a group of Neapolitan gentlemen and ladies hosted in a villa, 'la Sirena', at Posillipo, where musicians sang *villanelle* among the many gentlemen in a boat.³⁰ The same usage is reiterated in Giovan Battista Del Tufo's *Ritratto ... della nobilissima città di Napoli* (1588), in which he associates the singing boats with the hundreds of colours of Naples.³¹ Del Tufo also lists many titles of the fashionable *villanelle* of the time, adding the multiple social backgrounds of the singers, from commoners to aristocracy. For example, the young apprentices of tailors or craftsmen sang 'the most beautiful of songs: *Parzonarella mia parzonarella*'.³² An impressive list of about twenty *villanelle* follows. Neapolitan-language literature of the seventeenth century expands on the ideal catalogue of popular *villanelle* (about forty titles are referred to in Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 1634), but hardly any of the music is known to us. Once again, the songs are associated with regret for a past now lost:³³ 'Oh beautiful ancient times, | solid songs, | tearful words, | concerts for two solo voices | music fit for a sovereign! | now you cannot hear anything good'.

²⁹ Nino Pirrotta, *Li due Orfei da Poliziano a Monteverdi* (Turin: ERI-RAI, 1969), 248ff. In this pivotal book Pirrotta proposes that the monodic performances within the comedies staged in the Sanseverino palace in Naples anticipated the birth of Florentine opera, which only occurred at the end of the sixteenth century.

³⁰ *Le otto giornate del Fuggiloto di Tommaso Costo ove da otto Gentilhuomini e due Dame si ragiona* (Venice: Barezzi, 1602), 2:137, 139.

³¹ 'Then the others coming out | much at ease placed in their *feluca* | not a single boat, | with banners and tents posted and explained, | but a hundred sets of beautiful coloured frigates, | either playing or singing ...': Giovan Battista Del Tufo, *Ritratto o modello delle grandezze, delitie e meraviglie della nobilissima città di Napoli* (MS XXX. C. 96, Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale); ed. Calogero Tagliareni (Naples: Agar, 1959), own translation.

³² Del Tufo, *Ritratto*, MS fols 209v–210v.

³³ Giambattista Basile, *Le Muse Napolitane. Egloghe* (Naples: Montanaro, 1635), 9:114–33, own translation. See Rak, *Napoli gentile*, ch. 2: 'Le canzoni del bel tempo antico', 75–97.

To ennoble the Neapolitan *villanella*, a mythical inventor of the genre was created, the sixteenth-century popular singer Velardiniello, known for his *Storia de cent'anni arreto*, a poem in Neapolitan published in 1590, once again full of regret for the city's former splendour.³⁴ Throughout the seventeenth century, *villanelle* were inserted in staged comedies or operas. Still in 1722, *Li Zite 'n galera* by Leonardo Vinci, the first Neapolitan-language 'Commedia per musica' with a surviving full score, begins with the song *Vurria addeventare soricillo*, based on a literary structure shared by many ancient *villanelle*, including *Vurria addeventare pesce d'argento* (*La canzone del pescatore*) that popular tradition attributed to the mythical figure of Virgil.³⁵ In this way, the songs continued to ensure the link with the forever lamented mythical past of the city.

When the new Neapolitan song was born after 1824, intended for domestic and bourgeois consumption, popular singers and improvisers continued to transmit the spirit of the *villanella* on the streets of Naples. A gradual transition occurred from artisan songs to the chamber genre of high society, in a similar way to the evolution of the Renaissance *villanella* which instead went from aristocratic beginnings to popular diffusion among the lowest social classes.³⁶ The new songs, like the old *villanelle*, never describe specific places in Naples, but only 'sun, sea, sky, the embalmed air: silent witnesses that illuminate situations and feelings'.³⁷ As occurred in the seventeenth century with Ve-

³⁴ *Opera di Belardiniello musico, nella quale si ragiona delle cose di Napoli, dal tempo di re Marocco fino al dì di oggi* (Venice: 1590). His name and his compositions are remembered in the great texts of Neapolitan Baroque literature by Basile, Cortese and Sgruttendo (Rak, *Napoli gentile*, 89ff.).

³⁵ Roberto De Simone, *Canti e tradizioni popolari in Campania* (Rome: Lato Side, 1979), 40. The folk singer Ferdinando Zaccariello, interviewed by De Simone, referred to the popular attribution to 'Virgil the Magician' of the most ancient *villanelle*. During the Middle Ages, in Naples, the Roman poet Virgil was considered a magician who had worked as a thaumaturge to defend the city, where he was buried; see Domenico Comparetti, *Virgilio nel medioevo. Virgilio nella leggenda popolare*, 2 vols (Florence: Seeber, 1896).

³⁶ See Raffaele Di Mauro, 'Canzone napoletana e musica di tradizione orale: dalla canzone artigiana alla canzone urbana d'autore', *Musica/realità* 31 (2010): 133–51. The author analyses the various typologies of urban singers in different periods of the city's history until recent times, whom I have not been able to mention in this article: storytellers, improvisers, 'viggianesi' (itinerant harp and shawm players), 'posteggiatori' (performers in taverns and restaurants) and others.

³⁷ Maria Luisa Stazio, 'Back to the Future. Guillaume Cottrau viaggio temporale fra 'Divertimenti per pianoforte' e canzone napoletana, ovvero: la storia ricostruita dai suoi esiti', in Scialò and Seller, *Passatempi musicali*, 245, own translation.

lardiniello, the modern Neapolitan song found its new mythical hero, Enrico Caruso, who at the beginning of the twentieth century wanted to give dignity to the communities of Neapolitans who had emigrated to the United States, spreading Neapolitan song all over the world through his recordings.³⁸ Meanwhile, in a city where the different social classes were united by language and superstition, the encounter between the old and the modern song ‘alla Napolitana’ happened at the Festa di Piedigrotta, an event that took place next to the Tomb of Virgil: here Neapolitans had all participated in pagan rites with music and dance ever since Roman times.³⁹ The Festival della Canzone Napoletana in Piedigrotta was a meeting point for the entire community of Neapolitans until 1971.

3. *The soundscape of a crowded city*

Piedigrotta was just one of hundreds of both religious and civic festivals celebrated in early modern Naples. For the entire seventeenth century, historians have calculated a total number of 230 festive days per year, a figure that some Spanish viceroys tried to reduce in vain.⁴⁰ There were eight patron saints of the capital at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but this number later rose to twenty-four before 1750. In addition to the main official festivities of the Spanish court and the church, in Baroque Naples each patron saint’s day was celebrated with religious rites, processions and other forms of expression, all including music. Since most of the massive population lived in the open

³⁸ Simona Frasca, *Italian Birds of Passage. The Diaspora of Neapolitan Musicians in New York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³⁹ Roberto De Simone, *Nel segno di Virgilio* (Pozzuoli: Puteoli, 1982). Pasquale Scialò, quoting a 1930 text by Amato Caccavale on *La Madonna di Piedigrotta*, summarises as follows: ‘In a cave near the Tomb of Virgil, there was the Temple of Lampsaco, around which, at night ... naked dancers performed nefarious functions ... Through these branches the Neapolitan song must have descended, while the rite itself was transformed into the happy Piedigrottesque uproar of other times. Which proves that nothing in the world is as tenacious as these folk traditions’. Raffaele Viviani, *La Festa di Piedigrotta* (1919) in *Teatro*, preface by Pasquale Scialò (Naples: Guida, 1988), 3:211–389 (385), own translation.

⁴⁰ John A. Marino, ‘Becoming Neapolitan. Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples’ (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 69; Gabriel Guarino, ‘Public Rituals and Festivals’, in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, ed. Tommaso Astarita (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 257–79 (269). The reference book for Baroque festivals in Naples is Franco Mancini, *Feste ed apparati civili e religiosi in Napoli dal Vicereame alla Capitale* (Naples: ESI, 1968).

air, in the streets and squares, the effect of the almost daily festivals was a continuous noise everywhere. The standard guide of Baroque Naples, Capaccio's *Il Forastiero* (1634), recorded the incredible multitude of people everywhere, whose effect was to produce a persistent hum 'as if it were the buzzing of bees'.⁴¹ Special musical elements could be made out in this general noisy soundscape: the street vendors' voices, emitting the kind of melody that could be imagined in any cosmopolitan market on the Arab side of Mediterranean,⁴² or the sound of peels of bells ringing at the same time in just short of 500 churches and chapels. In addition, choruses formed by hundreds of young singers, students at the four conservatories of Naples, took part in the almost daily processions in the streets of the city, accompanied by groups of instrument players. These groups included the *castrati*, the most appreciated voices of the time, who were educated with particular care in preparation for an often highly successful career. The newspapers of the time outline how during the public festivals, the innumerable population was enchanted by the music performed by professionals (and of course by the food distributed for the occasion). Here are just two out of hundreds of examples:⁴³

12.6.1685. [Coronation feast of the English Nation] ... to the sound of trumpets and kettledrums and with firecrackers ... we enjoyed the sweetest music, composed by the best singers of this city. The crowd of people who went there to enjoy the music was unspeakable ...

24.9.1686. For three evenings bonfires were made in Piazza della Guglia [of St Gennaro] as there was an infinite crowd of people and nobility to enjoy no less the beauty of the lights than the melody of the music ...

⁴¹ Giulio Cesare Capaccio, *Il Forastiero* (Naples: Roncagliolo, 1634), 847.

⁴² See the project put together by the Vanvitelli University of Naples, in collaboration with the Istanbul Technical University, 'The Soundscape Reconstructions of the Early 20th Century Vendor Cries in Streets of Istanbul and Naples with Two 3D Sound Spatialization Approaches', paper presented at the *Inter-noise Congress*, Seoul, 23–26 August 2020. On the survival of street vendor cries in early-twentieth-century Naples, see Cesare Caravaglios, *Voci e gridi di venditori in Napoli* (Catania: Libreria Tinelli, 1931).

⁴³ All of the music quotations in Neapolitan newspapers up to 1768 are collected and commented in Ausilia Magauidda and Danilo Costantini, *Musica e spettacolo nel Regno di Napoli attraverso lo spoglio della "Gazzetta" (1675–1768)* (Rome: Isemez, 2011).

The most popular summer festivals in Naples were the already mentioned ‘spassi di Posillipo’, which drew the entire population to the seashore, in three social groups: nobles, *popolo* (middle class) and *plebe*. Foreigners were astonished at the impressive crowd, which seems to have left Naples completely deserted. In this noisy location, nocturnal cantatas, called *serenate*, were performed outdoors in the evening, often on ephemeral theatres built on the water:

17.7.1696. It was a great delight to the eye all that sea covered with various boats filled with infinite people, as were all those [on the] shores, gathered there to delight the ear with the symphony of instruments and three very select voices, which sang this highly applauded serenade [composed by A. Scarlatti].

For these outdoor performances, given the background noise of the mass population, the Neapolitans invented voice amplifiers, machines that allowed singers to be heard from afar.⁴⁴

We have many elements to reconstruct the sound of Neapolitan festivals from 1600 to 1750: scores of religious music and secular songs and serenades, visitors’ accounts, newspaper descriptions and books printed for the occasion, but the iconography is almost non-existent. Among the few visual documents is the painting by Nicola Maria Rossi which depicts the procession of the *Four Altars* in 1732, at the time of Viceroy Harrach, with the instrumentalists and the renowned singers of the Royal Chapel in the foreground.⁴⁵

Even without images, we can perceive the impact of the singing city on the travellers of the time, who unanimously shared the opinion of Charles De Brosses that ‘Naples is the capital of the musical world’.⁴⁶

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⁴⁴ On 29 June 1674 in the Cicinelli noble villa at Mergellina, two female singers’ voices were amplified using a mechanical instrument ‘which carries the voice two miles away and more with the silence of the night’: Fabris, *Music in Seventeenth-Century Naples* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 169.

⁴⁵ Rohrau, Graf Harrach’sche Familiensammlung.

⁴⁶ ‘Naples est la capitale du monde musicien’. Lettre XXXI, 24.11.1739, in Charles De Brosses, *Lettres d’Italie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), 1:401.

Abstract

One of the most appropriate means to tell the ‘thousand colours’ of Naples is through its songs, because all Neapolitans are born to sing. A subtle coherence links the ‘classic’ Neapolitan song of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the songs that have resounded in this cosmopolitan Mediterranean port since the medieval era of the Anjou and then of the Aragonese sovereigns. This text diachronically connects the history of the *villanella* (born as an anti-Spanish protest song in the aristocratic circles of the sixteenth century to then spread through the commedia dell’arte and opera) and the *moresca* (a sung dance of African origin) to the birth of the new *canzone napoletana* starting from the collections of Cottrau (1824–1865), who transferred the popular songs of the Neapolitans to the living rooms of the city bourgeoisie. These songs continued to represent all the social strata of Naples, thanks also to moments of collective celebration such as the Piedigrotta Festival, and at the same time maintained their function of lamenting the city’s past, lost forever. Song constitutes but a small portion of the ‘noise’ typical of the most populous city of the Mediterranean after Constantinople, where festivities made up the majority of the days of the year, with hundreds of both civic and religious public festivals. Everywhere, on the shore or in front of churches, in the squares and on the streets, this massive population sang and danced, giving rise to the unique soundscape of early modern Naples, which made the city famous in Europe in the age of the Grand Tour.

Keywords: Neapolitan song, *villanella*, Renaissance and Baroque Naples, Naples Power



Fig. 2.2. *Prospect of the Dutch-German Cemetery, Livorno*. Courtesy of the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Città del Vaticano, St. St. M4 – b, ins. 2, cc. n. n.



Fig. 3.1. Francesco Roselli. [attr.] *Tavola Strozzi*, ca.1472. Naples, Museo San Martino (Wiki commons).



Fig. 3.2. Jacques Callot, *Balli di Sfessania. Pulcinella e Lucretia*, ca.1622, engraving (private collection).

The COST Action ‘People in Motion: Entangled Histories of Displacement across the Mediterranean (1492–1923)’, or ‘PIMo’ for short, united researchers in the conception of the Mediterranean as a flexible locus for a multitude of cultural transactions. Their primary goal has been to restate the region’s significance as a historic site of engagement and exchange. In this volume twelve Mediterranean port cities are considered as places of distance and proximity, conflict and cooperation, autonomy and control.

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