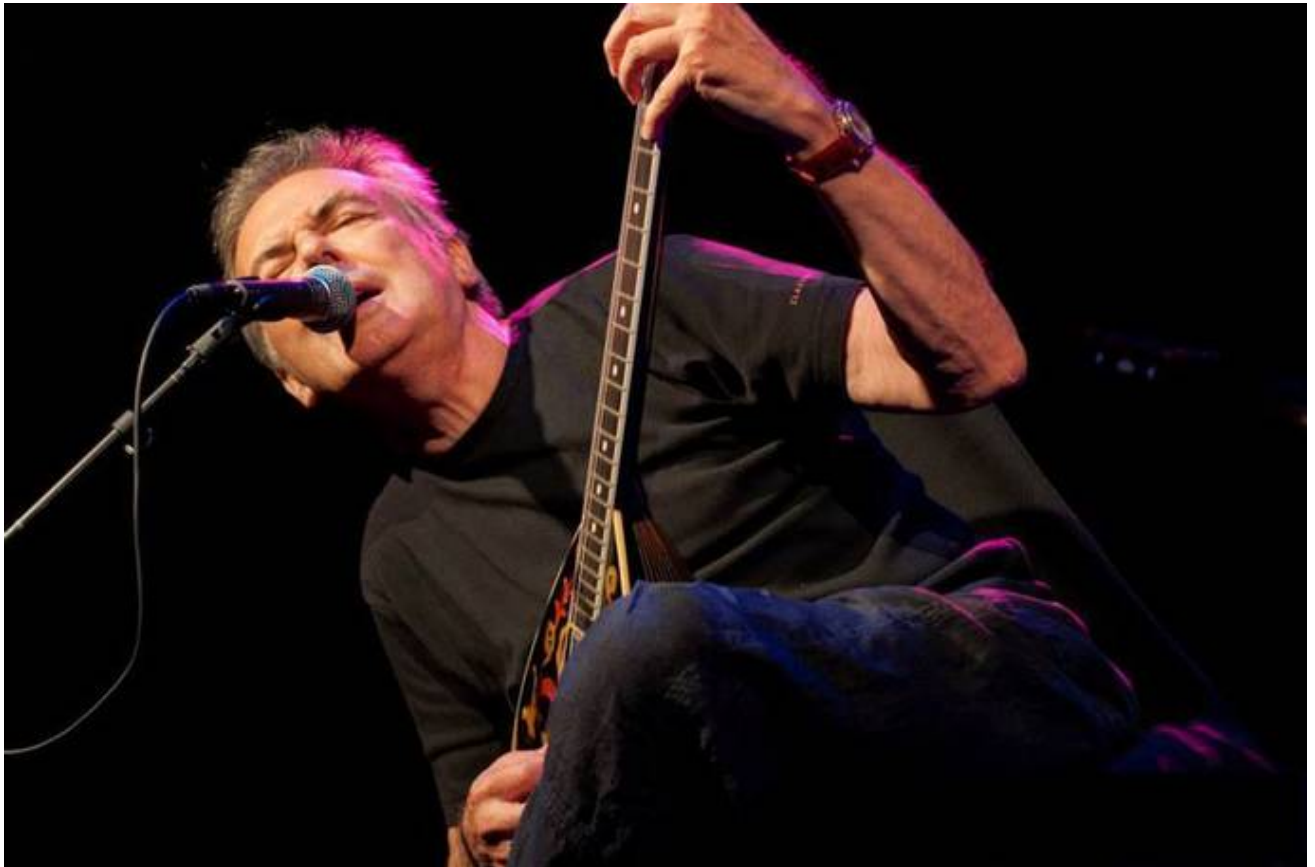


The Global Power of Music

Tiziana Rinaldi Castro (January 07, 2014)



Continuing our conversation with Maestro Mauro Pagani, with whom I met over the course of the summer in the city to talk about music, politics, culture, and his New York experience. One of the topics we covered during a long walk along the Hudson River was Southern Italian Music and its influence on Italian music at large “Modernity’s problem is communication, especially in this time of cultural globaliza-tion. And good communication depends upon cross-cultural exchange.”

“Central to our Southern music is the tradition of Neapolitan song, which in itself has had a very interesting evolution. On one side, in fact, it is learned and very refined, seeing as musicians of great caliber, educated in the classical tradition, have composed music for that immense repertoire. On the other, Neapolitan music (as well as more traditional trance music such as [Tammurriata](#) [2], [Tarantella](#) [3], or [Pizzica](#) [4]), has for centuries been heavily influenced by

Arabic and North African cultures, from which it has inherited the strong rhythms that distinguish it. Rhythm is fundamental to the construction of Neapolitan song, and in that sense Naples has



influenced the rest of northern Italy, which traditionally did not have much rhythm, introducing, for example, the ternary rhythm.”

How far back can we trace the rhythms of Pizzica and Tarantella (the dance of the spider)?

Frescoes, reliefs, painted pottery, and ancient documents from various sources suggest that similar trance dances were performed with cymbals and tambourines during the Eleusinian mysteries and the [Dionysian festivals](#) [5] in Ancient Greece dating back to the 5th century BC.

Sure, and also later on, during the conquest of the East by Alexander the Great, we can identify traces of Eastern influences in the polyrhythmic corpus that arrived in Greece, the Balkans, and eventually Southern Italy. In the Pizzica, for example, the influence of Balkan rhythms is most evident.

So can folkloric music interest an international public?

Modernity’s problem is communication, especially in this time of cultural globalization. And good communication depends upon cross-cultural exchange, which is in itself a twofold process. One has to be equally good at taking, importing, and absorbing different rules, as well as at conserving one’s core principles, to avoid completely losing the original form. It is important, in other words, to remain authentic, that is, tied to one’s roots but open to a new breath, and capable of remaining in dialogue with the other culture in order to coin a new language.

It’s no different with music, and if any part of that process fails, the whole project does. We will either have fixed rules that won’t adopt the new, and in that case music will belong to ethnomusicology, or, on the contrary, there will be a music so heavily contaminated that it will be hardly recognizable, and therefore lost. In the case of the former, it will still be powerful, as traditional music from all over the world usually is, but it won’t necessarily cross over because it hasn’t created a more universal language in which to be expressed.

In the specific case of Tammurriata, Pizzica and Tarantella, the exhilarating power of the music and its ability to move people of all ages to dance almost immediately is uncanny. Yes, its physical, repetitive, enthralling quality recalls the Blues in a way, and that what is universal about the latter: a recognizable rhythm, texts made of a few repetitive lines, and the evocative power in its yearning and sensuality.

That the rhythm is so fast paced and invites us to dance makes it definitely more exportable to a wider international public than modern Italian song. The latter, still short on rhythm and more concentrated on stylistic features of melody that are more traditionally Italian, would only interest a public either versed in the language or more culturally attuned to Italians, as is the case with Latin Americans, who have historically appreciated our more popular repertoire.

Mauro Pagani is a musician, composer, violinist and one of the founding members of the progressive 1970s rock band [Premiata Forneria Marconi](#) [6]. A leading voice in Italian music, he has directed the 63rd Edition of the [Festival of Sanremo](#) [7] in 2013 and will again next year. He has won numerous prizes for his movie soundtracks and is also a writer currently working on his second novel. [Tiziana Rinaldi Castro](#) [8] lives in Brooklyn. She is a novelist, poet, and journalist from Italy. She teaches Ancient Greek Literature at Montclair State University.

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