

**Brass Band Music in Naples Between the Ritual Dimension and Innovation:
The Case-Study of Madonna dell'Arco's *divisioni musicali***

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While I was conducting my doctoral research on musical phenomena related to the cult of Madonna dell'Arco in Naples, one of my main goals was to account for the presence within such an established ritual of a number of radical formal and aesthetical innovations that took place after 2000.² Musical practices associated to this cult can be grouped into two broad typologies: firstly, the various forms of devotional vocal music; secondly, the music played by band ensembles during public rituals enacted by devotees. I already focused on the former in a previous article (Rizzoni 2017a; 2017b); in this article I will attempt to analyse the latter.

A theoretical first-time spectator of a Madonna dell'Arco ritual could not help but notice that the music played by the bands includes new and atypical elements that, as we shall see, are to do with certain stylistic elements and the repertoire performed. These elements seem to contrast rather stridently with the framework of the catholic cult in which they are employed, to the extent that they may appear, to those witnessing the ritual for the first time or who are unfamiliar with the local context, highly unusual or even incongruous. Part of the repertoire fully belongs to the range of compositions performed during processions and other rites that involve band ensembles in Southern Italy: a few examples may include popular religious hymns such as *Noi Vogliam Dio*, *O Maria, quanto sei bella*, *Mira il tuo popolo, bella Signora*. Other songs may be well-known locally, such as those dedicated to the patron saints of towns in the Province of Naples. If the choice of this material does not need any further investigation or explanation, other strongly diverse selections performed along with the songs just mentioned, such as adaptations of movie soundtracks and pop songs, are a different matter altogether. Even though, as we shall see, the

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² I carried out this field research between 2011 and 2013. The resulting PhD thesis (Rizzoni 2014) was discussed in 2014.

symbolic and aesthetical context relative to Madonna dell'Arco rituals allows local actors to include such music, in order to shed light on its diffusion within the ritual it is necessary to go beyond the cult's restricted framework and investigate the wider context of activities and relations within which band members involved with the rituals operate: such complex and composite environments have only recently been surveyed more in depth within ethnomusicology, especially in Italy.³ The imbalance between the cult's intrinsically urban character and the scientific concerns that characterised ethnomusicological studies until at least the 1990s could be among the reasons for the dearth of material in Italian scientific literature prior to the last ten years. Given that scholars have almost exclusively focused on practices proper to the rural context of peasants and shepherds, band music remained at the margins of ethnomusicological studies for a long time.

If we turn our attention to literature on the cult, we will get substantial confirmation: from this point of view, Roberto De Simone's mandatory writings on Campania traditional music are typical of the approach prevalent at the time they were written (the 1970s). In his work, and specifically where he writes about Madonna dell'Arco's *battenti* or *fujenti*,⁴ De Simone relayed important details on the ties between ritual and band music, filling an information void on the subject. His reports highlighted very interesting facets: specifically, De Simone analysed a band performance of the patriotic song *La Leggenda del Piave* which is still included in set lists to this day and which devotees, as we shall see, associate with peculiar homage procedures to the Virgin Mary icon (De Simone 2010, 212–15; De Simone and Jodice 1974, 25–28; De Simone, Rossi and Russo 1974); however, as his focus was almost exclusively on the symbolic systems of the ritual and on those 'traces' of pre-Christian elements they incorporated, he neither examined this thoroughly nor did he investigate the framework in which the bands operate in order to explain his findings. Therefore, to attempt an analysis of the dynamics that characterise this framework one has to start from the present-day background. As we shall see in the following pages, the network of relations and the paths connecting musicians to even widely different educational and performative contexts are extremely tight and branch out to such an extent that it is neither possible nor useful to

³ There has recently been a great surge in the literature on this theme in the Anglo-American sphere: I shall just mention the work of Helena Simonett (2001; 2007), Matt Sakakeeny (2010; 2011) and Katherine Brucher (2006), as well as the one by Suzel Ana Reily and Katherine Brucher (2013), which collects essays by various authors. On the other hand, there is little material available within Italian ethnomusicology. With the exception of Giovanni Giurati's research on ensembles playing at Nola's *Festa dei Gigli* (Giurati 2007; 2009; 2010; 2017) – analysed in detail in the second part of the present essay – one of the few contributions I am aware of is a MA degree thesis on bands playing during the Holy Week in Trapani (Gianno 2004).

⁴ 'Those who run' in the Neapolitan dialect.

isolate any single ‘band music framework’ such as pop music, be it *neomelodico*⁵ or otherwise, and separate it from the others.

As will become clearer later on, within these circles, musicians can move amidst quite different contexts. Their competences make the extensive reworking of traditional practices that take place within the cult context possible, and fully demonstrable. However, it is easy for ambiguities or even misunderstandings to arise when using the term ‘tradition’: therefore, before starting the analysis of this case-study it might be important to clarify how I shall employ such a concept in the present essay. As ‘tradition’ is the inner element of the conceptual apparatus employed by local actors, it may reflect personal positions and strategies concerning the legitimisation of events and practices that are related to authority received from the past; in other words, it is a highly alterable concept, in relation to which elements such as continuity in the transmission of ‘traditional’ practices or the resistance to change (of style or of genre, in the case of music) can subsume a central importance, or on the contrary, as we shall see in the last section of this essay, none at all.⁶ Therefore, it would be appropriate to start from the emic definitions of ‘tradition’ – a concept I shall analyse in the last section of this survey – to correctly apply a historically and locally connoted concept, whose negotiable meaning refers to practices subject to change and, occasionally, redefinitions.

Bands, *maestri di banda*, musicians

The cult of Madonna dell’Arco is a devotional phenomenon of significant complexity. For further analysis and in-depth descriptions of its practices I suggest turning to references previously mentioned;⁷ nevertheless, a brief summary of some of its essential aspects might be useful in order to better understand the context in which the ‘small bands’ that accompany *battenti* (the name given to the devotees who take part) rituals operate. The cult is spread throughout the Province and the city of Naples and is followed by about 150,000 devotees⁸ who take part in the annual pilgrimage held on Easter Monday at

⁵ ‘Pop *neomelodico*’ is a subgenre of Italian pop music that developed in Naples between the 1980s and the 2000s. ‘Neomelodic’ songs generally feature a typical mixture of *popular music* styles marked by distinctively local traits (the lyrics are sung in contemporary Neapolitan and mainly deal with the everyday life of the urban underclass). This genre is currently also very popular beyond the city borders. For further reading see Aiello (1997), Ravveduto (2007), and Pine (2012).

⁶ The notion of ‘tradition’ – employed as such by the actors – as a conscious legitimising model has been theorised and debated by many scholars, both in general terms and to refer to various ethnographic contexts – cf. Linnekin (1983); Handler and Linnekin (1984); Ronström (1996, 7–8); Baumann (1996, 80–82).

⁷ Specifically, see Rizzoni (2017b, 205–09).

⁸ Generally, police figures on the number of devotees attending are based on estimates determined at the sanctuary during Easter Monday’s annual pilgrimage, while the number of *battenti* is drawn from data collected by the various dioceses where the cult has spread. With the exception of a few figures reported by local newspapers, which oscillate between 150,000 and 200,000, I was unable to find more recent estimates than those given by *La Madonna dell’Arco*, a quarterly review published by the Dominican Friars who run the Santuario della Madonna dell’Arco in

the Santuario della Madonna dell'Arco (Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco) in Sant'Anastasia. Other participants are 30,000 *battenti* – a segment of devotees joining the pilgrimage – who enact a cycle of extra-liturgical public rites in the months preceding the celebration. The cult is widely spread among lower social strata, whose financial and cultural capital is more limited: people from a working-class background, the lower middle-class and especially the unemployed underclass, which is the most relevant component of Naples' social structure.⁹

The practices I am referring to include *questue* (a ritual form of begging) and a second kind of ritual, called *funzione* by the local actors, in which devotees of the Virgin perform a public homage in the street that follows strongly codified choreutic sequences. Ritual practices, especially the above-mentioned *funzione*, take place in the presence of the band, here called *divisione musicale* – ‘musical division,’ whose role is to accompany the ritual and the *battenti*'s coordinated actions. *Funzioni* are organised and enacted by more than six hundred associations dedicated to the cult, located in different Neapolitan neighbourhoods and in provincial towns, each organising their own rituals almost completely independently from the others:¹⁰ such circumstances, as well as the commitment to a ritual schedule whereby *funzioni* must be generally performed by the associations in the period preceding the pilgrimage (Rizzoni 2017b, 207), make it possible to calculate a rough estimate of the number of bands involved in this activity. Although there is no reliable data, bands involved in the ritual may amount to a few hundred; considering that each ‘division’ is composed of anything between five and twenty musicians, it could be said that this musical practice involves more than one thousand musicians in the whole Province of Naples.

Although they belong to the brass band framework,¹¹ these groups' line-ups are quite varied, because of the number of musicians involved and their instrumentation: these are brass bands with percussions, without a fixed proportion between different kinds of aerophones. Some instruments – such as flute, clarinet or flugelhorn – are not present at all while others, like different kinds of trumpets, trombones and saxophones, can be found in varying assortments that occasionally include combinations

Sant'Anastasia. This review, edited by Centro Studi Arco, reported figures of about 150,000 devotees and 30,000 *battenti* for 1998 (1998, 16); the only figure reported later (2004) indicates an unchanged number of *battenti* (2004, 21)

⁹ See De Matteis (2011, 22–25). For further details on the social environment where the cult of Madonna dell'Arco is more widespread, which Italo Pardo called *popolino* (Pardo 1996, 2), see D'Agostino and Vespasiano (2000, 113–23).

¹⁰ Despite many attempts by the diocesan authorities to keep the activity of associations under control, the strong fragmentation caused by their high number makes such a proposition quite unfeasible. Most *funzioni* are unauthorised and unattended by either civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Therefore, *battenti* have sole responsibility for checking and deciding on ritual activities.

¹¹ In the next section I shall examine a kind of ensemble which accompanies *battenti* rituals in Barra – the so-called *bande amplificate* (‘amplified bands’) – which cannot be regarded as brass bands in the strict sense. However, in general considerations on Madonna dell'Arco's *divisioni musicali* this detail can be omitted for the sake of brevity.

seldom seen in other brass bands: for example, a group I observed during the 2012 *funzioni* in the Traiano *rione* included only one trumpet and four trombones apart from the usual percussions. This scant uniformity should be assessed along with a tendency to aesthetical informality and the general fluidity that marks the management of these ensembles: apart from a few exceptions, these bands have no uniforms; established groups coexist with others whose line-ups are constantly changing or may even be especially assembled just before enacting the rituals.

Although the musicians – usually only boys and men – adhere almost uniformly to the Catholic faith and many among them are Madonna dell'Arco devotees, very rarely are they also *battenti*, and their participation in the *funzioni* is very different in nature from the ritual obligation that characterises the actions of the former: performances of *divisioni musicali* are treated as work shifts and are paid accordingly. Among band members, the *maestro di banda* ('bandleader') has a higher hierarchical standing and is in charge of band organisation (taking care of hiring musicians and their wages) and maintaining relations with *battenti*. The *maestro* is not necessarily the best or the most qualified musician, although in many cases he may well be: rather, he is a leader, an organiser and a mediator. The *maestro* enters into negotiations with selected representatives of *battenti* associations to determine, through annual contracts, all details relative to agreed-upon performances which are also called *servizi*: during these negotiation meetings, which take place many months before the start of the ritual cycle, the number of such performances, their duration, the number of musicians involved, the repertoires, the exact pay for the band and payment methods are usually defined. Often the *battenti*'s musical knowledge is not so advanced as to allow them to ask technically detailed questions regarding the arrangements; rather, their requests are often generic and limited to non-musical needs: such is the reasoning behind the number of musicians hired, which might be explained in simple terms of quantity (hiring more musicians results in a more imposing and 'spectacular' presence). Essentially, all this means that *maestri* usually have large margins to make their choices, starting with the selection of the musicians.

This takes place within networks of deeply articulated relations that *maestri* are part of and from where they pick musicians. Because of the position they hold, *maestri* themselves are instrumental in giving shape to such networks, which include many professional musicians or people whose main or unique income comes from musical activities; others are semi-professionals, or people who perform in professional environments (such as paid gigs or teaching activities) but whose income is also generated by other means. Almost all *maestri di banda* are also music teachers; this can take on different aspects, but it is mostly characterised by marked informality: private lessons may be held at *maestri*'s homes. Their pupils, usually 14–20-year-olds, are the most important source of new additions to the *divisioni musicali*. Playing with their *maestro* in his band is often the first performative experience for these young learners; this often comes quite early on in their musical careers and is something they value highly because of its

nature and the relations it entails (of a hierarchical nature with the *maestro* and of an economical nature through an agreed, possibly reduced, fee). It takes the shape of an apprenticeship to becoming a professional musician. In most cases, direct hiring can also co-exist with intermediation by other *maestri di banda*, who may be pupils recommended by their teacher, sometimes on his own initiative and other times following an explicit request.

What I have just reported can be found in many of the life stories I collected from musicians in *divisioni musicali*:

[when I started going to the association] I was very young – I was five or six years old [...] I had been participating in *funzioni* for years and then in just a year the band changed completely, proper professionals arrived, not just Madonna dell'Arco specialists, they were all qualified working teachers, so they teach how to play [...] they teach children, teenagers, people who are interested in learning an instrument... so I met a trumpet teacher. I met him because somehow his job, his way to express his thoughts on music really appealed to me [...] Obviously I contacted him, Pasquale, and he immediately accepted me as a pupil. Basically this was a new thing for him, because it was very rare to have a pupil who was also a *fujente*, who played for an association in the streets; let's say that our paths crossed, in this case, because the musical journey starts overlapping with that of life, which one leads according to one's religious faith; indeed, it was exactly this, in a way, that pushed me towards studying the trumpet, because whenever I played the trumpet I felt as if I was in my role of *fujente*, playing those songs made me feel as if I was carrying the banner for my association [...] [to study the trumpet] in the beginning I had to make some sacrifices: when the *maestro* meets you and starts teaching you privately he doesn't train you to play religious songs [...] before studying them you must be taught music properly, how to read music and play scales [...] to broaden your music knowledge, in a way; I studied, because I liked it, but at the same time I started learning in secret all the religious Madonna dell'Arco songs. I studied them from music sheets that I was given, one a week, by a friend of mine who was playing them [...] [When I thought I could play them] I said to my *maestro*: "Let me play with you." But then he would have had to give me part of his pay. In fact, he said: "The bandleader gives me €500: if I bring you, too, I'll have to give you €100 at least, which means that I'll earn less, and I can't afford that right now." Then he added: "What I can do, I have a friend who is looking for musicians to form a band and I could talk to him and suggest you join them, I could tell him you're one of my pupils and if he likes the idea he could hire you." And then he dismissed me, saying, "Alright, off you go, let me know if you have any problems." So, I was introduced to one Luigi Grassia, who was a bandleader, in a way. And he took me on the spot, because he needed people: "He was in a hurry, he really needed musicians quickly." (Ernesto, 19, Aversa)¹²

¹² The age references of the interviewees date to 2013 when I conducted these interviews.

This interview excerpt helps to trace a path that presents some of the recurring elements that have been mentioned on the previous pages: the initial approach to musical practice, followed by private lessons based on classical music teaching procedures (solfeggio, the study of scales), the hiring of a young musician in an ensemble following his *maestro*'s recommendation (after the student's solicitation). Although such a learning process is a common and recurring element, it is important to note that musicians who have learnt to play music 'by ear' are as commonly found here as those classically trained. Usually they are self-taught – they only consulted expert musicians to learn a few basic techniques they could not manage by themselves. This approach, particularly common among older musicians, often combines the learning of performative techniques with that of repertoires usually played on ritual-festive occasions. Another element that emerges from the interview is the substantial informality that underpins the organisation and management of *divisioni musicali*, which provides a rationale for the absolute prevalence of networks of relations as a means of recruitment and of recommendations as a guarantee.

Recruitment procedures are not limited to the 'swapping' of learners between *maestri*, nor do they only involve Madonna dell'Arco's *musical divisions*. Apart from being teachers, *maestri di banda* are primarily musicians, who often have extensive experience in playing with different ensembles: their network is structured, incremented by and articulated upon such experiences, as is their reputation as performers and *maestri*.

Many life stories I collected during my research depict an image of working 'circuits' where these experiences take place which largely transcend the borders of Madonna dell'Arco's 'small bands.' To illustrate this, let me report the words of Stefano, a 54-year-old public worker in Brusciano and *maestro di banda*:

I have been playing with the association for 45 years: when I was 15 or 16, I was brought here by my *maestro*, who had a commitment to it. Then he got older, he couldn't do it anymore, so I joined. I think that all these continued years of playing set a record unsurpassed by any other band. When I started, as a young kid, I was following my brother, who is in the band as well: I used to pick up his saxophone and pretend to play. He saw me doing these things, trying to make some sounds so he taught me the basics. This is when I started playing, that's before the *battenti* [...] Later, whilst studying, the *maestro* taught us what we were supposed to play here [at the association]. Then I grew up, had my experiences... it really helped me to start playing at the Gigli, initially with my *maestro* but then on my own: I am from Brusciano and so it has been natural to find myself playing at the Giglio in Brusciano... in time we did others as well: Nola, Barra [...]. (Stefano, 54, Brusciano)

This excerpt features elements that keep on recurring in the biographies of musicians I have met: apart from the recruitment modalities of the *divisioni musicali*, which confirm the diffusion of procedures already

observed, Stefano's participation at the *Feste dei Gigli* held in different towns in the Province of Naples makes his experience similar to that of many other musicians who perform at the *Madonna dell'Arco* rituals.

Many of the musicians I interviewed have had very similar experiences to Ernesto and Stefano. Accompanying *funzioni* is invariably how musicians make their debut as members of an ensemble. The recurrence of this element in musicians' biographies can certainly be explained by looking at some characteristics of the *Madonna dell'Arco's divisioni musicali*: as I previously stated, in the province of Naples, the *funzione* is the most important event out of all those in which bands or comparable ensembles are involved; it is certainly the one which mobilises the greatest number of musicians at the same time. The continued request for musicians, coupled with the *maestri di banda's* substantial autonomy in selecting them, makes *divisioni musicali* a particularly suitable environment for the debut of teenage performers. Moreover, many of the musicians I have met have had the chance to play, irregularly or more often in a structured and continued way, with other ensembles such as military bands (composed of musicians enrolled in the army), bands that are hired for public celebrations or private events and municipal bands. In some cases, the musicians I interviewed were involved in activities that went beyond a strictly band environment:

When I was young I wanted to play because I saw the band march through town but I didn't think of doing that for a long time, because at the time the only way to study was to get private lessons and my family couldn't afford it. When I turned 18, I told myself: I have to go to a music school. It was too late to go through the whole Conservatory process, so I went to Acerra's Civica Scuola di Musica. I studied keyboards there for six months, but I didn't like it... it wasn't for me. At school they suggested I try the horn: they said, "learn to play that, we'll let you join the band then." But it felt like a strange instrument to me... so I ended up studying the saxophone and I realised that to do things properly I would have to go to the Conservatory... so I took lessons from a *maestro* for four or five months and I took the entrance exam, gaining second place on the pass list. I attended the Conservatory for years, but in the meanwhile I had to work and little by little I ventured into different environments: *battenti*, then cruise ships... there I played jazz and Neapolitan songs... and I also started playing weddings, because in Naples that's a very good scene; I still do that professionally, along with playing on ships. I also went to Teatro Augusteo in 2003 with Acerra's municipal band for the musical *Novecento Napoletano*: let's say that I can't complain and that I have a steady job. [...] Throughout my career I've always played with different people, because if you want to be in this field you have to know a lot of people who might call you to play and sometimes it's you who could be making those calls when you have to find musicians. In all situations you also change musicians according to the caller's requests. [...] [at weddings] I mostly played piano bar: I would accompany a singer, or if there were a whole band, we would occasionally play Neapolitan songs. At *Madonna dell'Arco* I initially played percussion instruments, like cymbals, because I was still learning the saxophone, but then I switched. I joined associations through a friend that invited me to a band, and for

many years I played in different bands with other *maestri*. But then the local association in Acerra had to change bands because they were no longer happy with the one they were calling. I had already played with them and I knew them... we were friends... so they nominated me as *maestro*: I was in charge of finding the musicians, paying them and so forth. Since then I have become the bandleader here, I am the conductor... even though I don't really see myself as that, because I have a very friendly relationship with my colleagues: I never put to them that I am in charge. [...] Musicians often get changed at Madonna dell'Arco, but I tend to avoid that if I can, because I know and trust most of them... but we have changes, occasionally someone can't come, others quit, sometimes they find someone who pays them more... you do think in those terms, too. (Michelangelo, 43, Acerra)

I shall now attempt to summarise what I have presented in the previous pages and highlight some essential points:

- The *divisioni musicali* that play at Madonna dell'Arco rituals are comparable to brass and percussion bands and are characterised by fluidity in their complement and in their management, which is handled by *maestri di banda*;
- Groups are occasionally stable; more often they are subject to continued changes in band members; *maestri* hire musicians through informal channels that coincide with networks of relations between teachers-pupils or between colleagues;
- Musicians come from varied backgrounds, experience and age groups: a considerable number of members are teenagers (14–20) generally starting out, but there is also an older component (up to their sixties) largely composed of professionals and semi-professionals;
- The latter move in extended and diverse 'circuits' of activities that generally include other performative band contexts; they may also be active in very different frameworks (such as jazz, pop and rock music, Neapolitan song).

It is these elements, unsurprising in themselves, that help to account for the quick – and sometimes radical – innovations that invest the musical practices associated to Madonna dell'Arco rituals.

Funzioni and Feste dei Gigli

In their discourses on the ritual's effectiveness, *battenti* attach great significance to the fact that the *funzione* has to be 'beautiful.' A strong aesthetic investment imbues the whole ritual system, becoming evident in the attention paid to the choice of coordinated ritual uniforms, the banners and the *toselli* (imposing shoulder-borne processional structures) carried by the *battenti*, as well as to the orderly course of the ritual action to pay homage to the Madonna effigy. Apart from being an individual devotional act, this is also primarily a collective rite of self-representation,¹³ where the groups involved in the ritual stage their own

¹³ The *funzione* can be interpreted as a ritual of self-representation; communities that take part use it to show an image of themselves, somehow giving shape to an imagery that they would want to be associated with and, fundamentally, reflecting their own nature in an objectified way – as noted by Marco Aime, after Benedict Anderson, in his analysis of army parades in Italian celebrations (Aime 2014, 14).

image as a mirror of some of their own values, which are exalted and socially shared. The ritual is perceived as an act through which *battenti* associations offer a service to the whole neighbourhood community¹⁴ – which includes members of the associations to which they are tied by family, friendships and neighbourly relations – by paying homage to the Virgin and performing the ritual on their behalf.

Within Madonna dell'Arco associations, some *battenti* hold elective posts reflecting the internal hierarchies of the associations themselves. Each association has a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, a board of directors that includes at least a Chief Councillor and two councillors, and one or more *battenti* who are in charge of directing collective activities during the rituals. The most significant constituents in the social body are represented by the spatial set-up of devotees at the beginning of the ceremony, which includes the deployment of the *squadra* (the *battenti* group enacting the *funzione*) in a layout organised according to age groups (children are at the head of the cortège, while older and more experienced *battenti* are at the back) and by gender (devotee groups usually have a man at the centre and several women on both sides). The associations' internal hierarchy is usually shown through emblems on people's garments that are similar to those displayed by State or public officials (for example, senior members wear a suit rather than the ritual uniform and a tricolour band similar to that sported by mayors at official events).

This assessment makes it easier to frame some of the relevant elements in the ritual:¹⁵ the performance of the symbolic homage to the Madonna effigy (called *saluto* – 'salute') develops through a series of choreutic actions codified by *battenti* groups, who cross the ritual space one at a time before the banner, brought by a *battente* called *portabandiera* ('banner-carrier') at the centre of the group, is dipped towards the Madonna icon. The band accompanies these actions throughout the ceremony; the speed of the pulsation and the songs performed have a strong influence on the ceremony's shape, highlighting its

¹⁴ The term 'community' refers to a system of dense social networks which constitutes a 'geography of relations' articulated in a locality framework often coinciding with the neighbourhood or parts of it: in Naples these are highly connected and interacting layers of family, friendships and neighbourly relations, which can influence the structure of other relevant networks. When examining social structures configured by such networks, Thomas Belmonte (1989, 143) identifies actual neighbourhood communities, upon whose insularity he places great emphasis: "[local actors] inhabit a world connected and apart from the main, a dense and crowded urban world." Belmonte's thesis suggests that it is possible to call these groups 'communities,' as they are founded on a strong sense of belonging and of separateness, which informs a basic negative outlook on anything that comes from outside and to which richly articulated internal relationships correspond. This structure is also recognised by Italo Pardo (1996, 3, 83–104), who identifies the connection in networks of family, friendships and neighbourhood, disagreeing with Belmonte on his excessive emphasis on the community's insular character, which Pardo believes to be much more flexible and indeterminate. Conversely, Italo Pardo and Jason Pine (2012, 2–18), carefully reviewing the agency dimension of single actors, emphasise the negotiability of the network of relations and their extending beyond the neighbourhood's confines, constituting structures where familial and neighbourhood networks are only the initial social resource at the actors' disposal.

¹⁵ Among the musical practices that characterise the cult and the rituals, vocal music – both traditional devotional songs and new pop songs – has as important a role as brass band music. However, here I will not mention any aspects or phenomena, including musical ones, not strictly connected to the *bande musicali*. For a detailed analysis of vocal repertoires and practices related to the cult, see Rizzoni (2017a, 168–71).

two-part structure. In the first part (called *primo saluto* – ‘first salute’) the tempo is quite slow (around 50-75 bpm) and the songs performed belong to actual processional repertoires; conversely, the second part – where the *battenti* perform a second homage before giving way to the ritual – is characterised by the performance of the patriotic song *La leggenda del Piave*, composed in 1918 by E. A. Mario and usually performed at military parades; other compositions from the military band repertoire (marches, army hymns) are seldom played. In this second part the tempo is much faster (120–160 bpm) and the ritual features explicit elements that recall the symbolism of military parades.¹⁶ According to local actors, the repertoires performed during Madonna dell’Arco’s *funzione* rituals are indispensable to the ritual system, as they subsume a centrality that overcomes their being a merely functional and relevant item, making them decisive markers of the complex semantic and symbolic network crucial to the effectiveness of the ritual action. In other words, local actors describe the music performed by bands as a practice equipped with an aesthetical dimension, a symbolic dimension and closely related functional characteristics. What is considered as the traditional ritual practice, whose existence was first attested in the 1960s, already comprises, by its very nature, the chance for local actors to re-work heterogeneous elements and integrate them in their own ritual ‘tradition.’¹⁷

This ritual’s ‘porous’ character has become even more evident after the strong innovations that have been affecting ritual practices and the related music since the 2000s (influencing repertoires as well as the choice of instruments). As we shall see, this phenomenon only affected some of the associations active in the Naples area. Since some of these associations are widely renowned across the city, what were initially idiosyncratic initiatives of single groups have progressively spread. This is also due to the common practice of comparing and imitating between associations – which I shall analyse later – and although many actors regard this as unacceptable, it has played a role in making the whole context even more complex. One of the associations that has made the largest contribution to innovating the ritual is *Gli Angeli* – better known as *Associazione Mezzafila* after a former president’s surname – located in the

¹⁶ *Battenti*’s ritual activities are notably heterogeneous, differing in their formal structure from one area to another according to the location of the associations. The structure of the *funzione* described in this essay is that of the so-called *tradizione di Napoli* (‘Naples tradition’), by far the most common in Naples and in most of the hinterland and towns around Vesuvius. Other versions – which I shall not focus on here – include the *tradizione di Aversa* (‘Aversa tradition’), whose *funzioni* are significantly different from those enacted in Naples (for example, instead of the *tosello* or the *carro* we find the so-called *quadri*, should-borne structures made from enormous pictures) and the *tradizione di Nola* (‘Nola tradition’), which is quite distinct in that it does not even feature *funzioni*.

¹⁷ It is not possible to summarise here the cult’s centuries-old tradition, which can be reviewed in Bronzini (2000). Suffice to say that although the cult originated in the 15th century, devotional practices historically associated to lower, rural or urban social classes are, as yet, scarcely known. With the exception of some figurative descriptions, there are no other detailed accounts of ritual activities of devotee groups called *battenti* or *fujenti* until the 20th century; more precisely, the *funzione* has been described only in the work by Roberto De Simone cited previously. Arguably, these ritual activities are the result of a long history, and yet only the most recent decades can be determined with certainty.

Pendino area. *Associazione Mezzafila* is currently known in Naples for being one of those with the capacity for staging the most ‘majestic’ and ‘spectacular’ *funzioni*. In contrast with the most common variations of the ritual, the one progressively elaborated by this association lasts longer (about two hours, as opposed to thirty minutes) due to the introduction of a long preliminary phase which precedes the homage itself. During this phase the *squadra* – organised in groups that perform the *saluto* – parades in the ritual space, watched by the devotees attending the ceremony and enacts what *battenti* call *coreografie* (‘choreographies’), meaning sequences of actions codified choreutically and derived from those traditionally adopted to pay tribute to the Virgin, although these are more complex and articulated.¹⁸ This new part of the ritual, which features several recreational and spectacular moments is accompanied by diverse songs, foreign to the standard procedures of *battenti* until recently: band arrangements of movie soundtracks – such as Hans Zimmer’s *Gladiator* or Kalus Badelt’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* – Italian songs – such as Cesare Andrea Bixio’s *Mamma* or Dalida’s *Uno a te, uno a me* – or Anglo-American pop music – like the famous disco song *That’s the Way I Like It* by KC and the Sunshine Band.

This list of songs, far from being exhaustive, clarifies what *battenti* call ‘modern songs,’ in contrast to ‘traditional songs’ performed at other moments of the ritual. These choices may, at first, seem confusing for two reasons: they are picked from very different genres, and, at least at first glance, they do not apparently belong to the cult’s symbolic framework. Notwithstanding possible differences as regards the reference imagery between a 1940s Italian song, a disco hit from 1975 and the soundtrack of a Hollywood blockbuster, what connects them is the common belonging to a ‘modern songs’ framework of re-elaboration of items that have passed through both the national and international entertainment industry channels. This kind of appropriation by musical bands is not surprising in itself; indeed, the procedure of adapting popular songs carried out by brass bands has been widely documented, in Campania, in Italy and beyond (Reily and Bruchner 2013b, 8). Rather, what is of great interest is the re-contextualisation of this procedure within a Marian ritual characterised by a dense and articulated symbolic apparatus, with strong references to a ‘tradition’ whose foundations are of a devotional kind.

Apart from specific repertoire items, other elements call for close observation. As already seen, the rite’s traditional bipartition is also highlighted by the prominent adoption of diverse rhythm and tempo choices: a slow 12/8 for *primo saluto* religious hymns and a faster 2/4 march in the second half. Both the tempo and rhythm employed for the performance of ‘modern songs’ are heterogeneous, being different for each song; nevertheless, a fast 2/4 time is prevalent (120-160 bpm), with samba accentuations (indeed called “samba” by local actors).

¹⁸ Homage rituals that employ choreutic motions usually feature a standard-bearer moving towards the Virgin icon and dipping the banner towards the icon itself. *Choreographies* are complex elaborations and interpolations of these basic actions undertaken by *battenti* groups that comprise various standard-bearers.

Within *Mezzafila*, these new additions to the ritual are accompanied, as we have seen, by the reconfiguration of some of its parts; this process has been facilitated by the continued collaboration of *battenti* with a single *divisione musicale* which has been playing for them for 45 years; Stefano, their *maestro di banda* for some twenty years, is the saxophonist from Brusciano whose career I recounted in the previous section. According to Stefano there is no incongruity between respecting devotional and ‘traditional’ character of *funzioni* and the innovations brought to the ritual, also through the music performed by the band:

What we do is a bit different from other associations...because both us [the musicians] and the lads from the association, we’re all very passionate...Salvatore might tell you that, too [one of the association’s *capi-battenti*]... we’re not just going through the motions with our *funzioni*, as if we didn’t care... for us it’s true love, we are devoted to the Mamma dell’Arco. So we love doing new things all the time, new music, everything we can to show the *rione* [neighbourhood] that we care about the Madonna and that we’re doing this for them too, because our *funzione* is the most beautiful [...] And then, well, it’s easier for us because we’ve been together for 45 years, we’re a family... each year we debate, we all share our ideas and try to add something new, a move, a song... by adding something all the time we’ve ended up with the most beautiful *funzione* in Naples... and you’ll see that this will improve with each passing year [...] We’re very lucky to be playing at the *Giglio*, [we’ve been doing this] for a very long time now... we’ve revived *Gigli* music [...] all the people that are here have experience of the *Giglio* and we’ve brought something of that experience to this experience... because the *Giglio* is not easy: if you can do that, you can do anything. [...] In time I’ve started writing my own material to bring it both to the *Giglio* and here: better, I’ve written a few things for the *Giglio*; and then more special material for the Madonna dell’Arco [...] You could say that the *Giglio* represents the best there is in Neapolitan music... it is a unique celebration, there are no others like it... I mean all *Gigli* [not just those in Brusciano], Nola as well as others... for the music, [the *Gigli* celebration] is the best because it is a real show and every year it is different, with new songs added... and we have brought this passion to Madonna dell’Arco, I mean we have brought the *Gigli* music there. (Stefano, 54, Brusciano)

With his words, Stefano clarifies why, as I mentioned in the introduction, it is necessary to frame the cult’s musical practices within a broader framework. To sum up the elements necessary for the present analysis:

- Innovations in music (and more generally in rituals) are explained as a sign of devotion and ‘passion’ for the cult, which are signs of distinction from other associations, whose rituals instead feature more conservative practices and who perform *funzioni* ‘listlessly’ or as if they were a chore to be done with;
- Moreover, innovations are part of the dynamic between associations and neighbourhood communities, where the former offer a ‘service’ – whose nature is also recreational and

spectacular – to the latter, at the same time showing that they are capable of fulfilling their role as ritual mediators and representing communities through their action;

- Innovations in musical practices are largely borrowed from practices developed within the context of the *Feste dei Gigli*, flatteringly described as “the best in Neapolitan music.”

This analysis might conveniently start from such ‘borrowings,’ before moving to examining the other points in the following section. The *Feste dei Gigli* mentioned by Stefano are public festive events, held every summer in many towns in the Province of Naples and in some areas of the hinterland such as Nola, Barra, Bruscianno, Casavatore and Crispano among others. Formal and aesthetical features, as well as practices enacted in the various celebrations, strongly resemble each other and faithfully follow the Nola model, which is the longest standing and the most established of all.¹⁹ At the centre of a complex process of capitalisation which led to its inclusion on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists, Nola’s *Festa dei Gigli* has recently been the object of several research projects which also focused on its music. Referring to dedicated ethnographies for in-depth descriptions,²⁰ I shall mention only a few distinctive features of the Nola celebration by describing aspects which are largely shared by the other *Feste dei Gigli* as well. Nola’s *Festa dei Gigli* is the event which traditionally celebrates the figure of San Paolino Vescovo di Nola (354–431 AD) and his homecoming after his long imprisonment in a foreign land. However, the celebration’s devotional character currently serves as the background for a spectacular and recreational show: the celebration – preceded by several preliminary events which take place in the preceding months – consists of a parade lasting 24 hours which is held on the Sunday following the summer solstice. During the parade, imposing shoulder-borne structures, about 25 metres high called *Gigli*²¹ are paraded through the city streets, carried by groups of about one hundred bearers called *paranze*. As usually happens in events that involve a group of people transporting a structure on their shoulders, the bearers’ actions, which require a high level of coordination to be safe and effective, are punctuated rhythmically by the music performed by ensembles that accompany the parade, positioned upon the transported *Giglio*. The *Festa dei Gigli* has remarkable peculiarities which clearly differentiate it from other similar events, such as the groups involved in the parade. Although wind and percussion bands used to play on the *Gigli* until

¹⁹ The first account of the enactment of a festive ritual event in Nola, held to honour San Paolino and featuring the parading of *ceri* dates to 1511, while the word *giglio* started to be used in the 18th century to define the structure carried on the shoulder of the *paranze* during the procession (Ballacchino 2015, 64–65). As for other places where *Gigli* celebrations are held, the first document attesting their existence in Barra dates from 1822; in Bruscianno the celebration has been held since the end of the 19th century; in Casavatore since 1896; and in Crispano since 1867 (Ballacchino 2015, 288).

²⁰ Apart from Giuriati’s work on the music of Nola’s *Festa dei Gigli* (Giuriati 2007; 2009; 2010; 2017), already cited here, a mention should be made of Katia Ballacchino, who wrote a detailed ethnographic monograph on this celebration and the process of patrimonialisation it underwent (Ballacchino 2015).

²¹ There are nine shoulder-borne structures: eight of these are known as *Gigli*, and they correspond to one of the town’s historical corporations; the ninth is called *Barca* (‘boat’) and indeed is boat-shaped.

the 1980s, those groups have since undergone significant changes which have progressively modified their size and complement: the number of trumpets and saxophones has now shrunk to one or two units and other instruments typically found in bands (for example clarinets and trombones) have been removed, while electrophones (electric guitars, electric basses, keyboards), common in contemporary pop music, have been included and are now played over imposing PA systems actually set up on the *Gigli* and fed by generators. The sole element preserved from ‘traditional’ bands is a percussion section (locally called *piccola batteria* – ‘small drum set,’ composed of bass drum, snare and cymbals).

The major discontinuities in which musicians plays correspond to radical innovations introduced in the repertoires performed during the parade: every year, each of the nine *Gigli* features new purposely-written and orchestrated compositions. These compositions – which comply with specific needs related to the various phases of the transportation of the *Giglio*, each corresponding to distinct rhythmic patterns that facilitate the *paranza*’s coordinated movements – are only a part of the music performed at the parade. During most of the procession, the groups perform long medleys that include songs – or more precisely, song excerpts and adaptations – of varied origins. These may be related to those recently introduced during *funzioni*, but – because of their length within the celebrations and the amount of time that has passed since their inception, as well as the markedly recreational character of the celebration itself – such medleys also feature even more mixed repertoires: TV and cartoon theme tunes, jingles, soundtracks, themes taken from pop, jazz, disco, funk songs, etc. Local actors regard this mixture as a standalone genre, clearly recognisable by certain stylistic features that include elements interacting with each other: different arrangements which vary according to the musicians involved and the mixing of music elements of different origins – Afro-American, Latin, jazz and pop (specifically *pop neomelodico*). Local actors succinctly label the outcome as *stile giglistico*. These practices, initially only found in Nola, were later adopted in Barra and, in the 2000s, in other towns (such as Bruscianno and Crispano).

It is particularly difficult to ascribe these groups and their repertoire to the brass band category: ensembles playing at *Gigli* cannot be labelled as brass bands in the strict sense. Having said that, their direct lineage from the old fanfares active at the *Gigli* until the 1980s (Giuriati 2009, 155) and the presence of musicians active playing first and foremost in brass bands (trumpet players, saxophonists, percussionists) facilitate the placing of *Gigli* within a broad backdrop where brass bands and other groups find themselves coexisting both temporally (because of the genre affiliation just mentioned) and contextually (as they operate in a related environment and partly share the same musicians). Within the brass bands framework, groups playing at the *Gigli* – generally called *divisioni musicali*, like the bands that accompany the *battenti* or, even, *bande amplificate* (‘amplified bands’) – play a key role. As emerges from Stefano’s words – whose accuracy is reflected in the interviews I carried out – groups playing at the *Gigli*

are considered to be among the most technically proficient, an ideal goal for musicians who belong to the brass band environment in the Naples area.

The music produced for the *Gigli* is widely appreciated, not just in ‘*Gigli* towns’ but in Naples as well. Therefore, it is not only musicians who love it, but the great majority of *Madonna dell’Arco* devotees as well. This appreciation is not only expressed by the widespread attendance of celebrations by people from Naples and other towns, but also by the sales of CDs featuring new *Gigli* music, regularly released a few months before the celebration each year, and in the number of visualisations of videos shot during the parade and shared on a number of social networking platforms (Facebook, YouTube, etc.). During my research I have been able to ascertain that *Gigli* music and the ‘*Gigli* style’ is a very common feature among band members, and that the innovations that have characterised (and continue to characterise) *Feste dei Gigli* are seen as a point of reference by *Madonna dell’Arco* devotees, as well as by associations where the appropriateness of ritual practices similar to those enacted by *Mezzafila* is not sustained or is at the centre of debates and negotiations.

‘New traditions’: rhetoric and strategies between ritual and recreational-spectacular dimensions

The rituals enacted by *Mezzafila* are not the only instance of appropriation of musical practices within the *Feste dei Gigli* framework; on the contrary, I have come across such procedures several times, albeit with different outcomes. It is worth noting that *Mezzafila* is not the only association that has modified the ritual to facilitate the introduction of the *Gigli* repertoire; another association which has developed comparable concepts is *Pescatori di Mergellina* (‘Mergellina Fishermen’). In the last few years, in the wake of these large associations which are both so popular in Naples,²² many *capi battenti* have started requesting ‘*Gigli* music’ or more generally ‘modern songs’ from *maestri di banda* when signing contracts and agreeing on set lists for the following year; musicians have started highlighting – truthfully, other times falsely – their participation at *Feste di Gigli* on their own CV as this may actually get them higher wages, compared to non-*Gigli* performers. Another original *Gigli* feature the *Mezzafila* association introduced to the ritual is the samba rhythmic pattern, later adopted by other groups; lastly, and beyond a strict musical framework, *Mezzafila* has also elaborated a specific coordinated step called *mezzopasso*, to be performed during some choreographies with the *tosello*, which enhances the oscillation of the shoulder-borne structure. Some of the associations located in Ponticelli, San Giovanni a Teduccio and especially in Barra differ from the others mentioned so far: for the last eight or ten years, groups which are quite similar to

²² Chiaia’s ‘Pescatori di Mergellina’ has been active since the 1980s and it is one of Naples’ most popular associations.

those playing at the *Gigli*,²³ albeit with a reduced line-up, have replaced the ‘traditional’ *divisioni musicali*. These groups, called *bande amplificate*,²⁴ play traditional *funzioni* repertoires but in the style of *Gigli* ensembles. As a result, the overall sound of their performances is quite similar to that of *Gigli* celebrations, as is the style adopted by the musicians, even though they play the same repertoire.

As we have seen, this phenomenon varies from one area to another and has spread in a very diverse fashion. As for the innovation of repertoires, two very well-known associations in Naples have spurred many imitations; in the case of Barra’s *bande amplificate*, the innovations have been adopted only within the confined borders of one neighbourhood and its adjacent areas, becoming an identity marker of locality in a short period of time, recognised (and emphasised) as such by local devotees (Rizzoni 2017a, 166–68).

The assessment of such dynamics clarifies how musicians may have increasingly taken on such a central role, which becomes particularly evident when analysing the mediation, as they operate between different performative and musical contexts, in terms of genre and style. Such centrality has its roots both in the foundations of the phenomena analysed in these pages and in the individual experiences of learning and professional growth, which in many cases are at least partially beyond the experiential framework of brass bands. More specifically, studying an instrument privately and – especially – at the Conservatory is an educational route that compels musicians to deal more swiftly with different repertoires and styles, with composition and orchestration. Playing different genres (pop, jazz, rock etc.) in other bands broadens their education and musical awareness on many different levels. Indeed, all the musicians I met during my research have an in-depth knowledge of the festive and ritual events that feature their performances; their knowledge often comes from personal childhood and teenage experiences, lived on the streets of the city and connected to their family relations. In short, musicians were born and bred in those areas where the *Madonna dell’Arco* celebrations and *Feste dei Gigli* take place: they have taken part in the rituals and celebrations both as *battenti* and as devotees (cf. Ernesto’s testimony above); most of all – and here the focus is mostly on *Madonna dell’Arco* rituals – their debut as musicians was with the *divisioni musicali*. The changes that the *Feste dei Gigli* have undergone are first and foremost the result of the employment of these competences: the knowledge of different musical languages and the knowledge of festive and ritual systems, of their logic and the aesthetical and symbolic assumptions that determine their continued existence.

²³ When I made contact with some associations from Barra in 2012, many informants told me that *bande amplificate* were a very recent innovation, “from the last five years or thereabouts.” Nonetheless, people I talked to could not agree on the specific year when these groups were introduced.

²⁴ As we have seen, *divisioni musicali* are both groups that play for *battenti* and groups that play at the *Gigli*. I only heard people use the term *banda amplificata* in Barra, to distinguish groups that use electrophones and amplifiers.

Madonna dell'Arco is different from *Gigli*: on the one hand, the *Festa dei Gigli* is a celebration that involves people from every social strata in the towns where it is enacted, prompting *maestri di festa* and private investors (mostly local bigshots) to deploy consistent resources (Ballacchino 2015, 134–135); on the other hand, *Madonna dell'Arco* is a ritual devotional cycle, confined in fact to the lower strata and despised by the middle classes. *Battenti* associations are much less solvent than *maestri di festa* and they do not have the means to support a complex and articulated system such as that of the *Gigli*, where dozens of new songs are released each year. From a musical point of view, compared to the constant reworking of genres, styles and repertoires, we can see a second-stage reworking in the cult, a bricolage operation where selected elements are adapted to the ritual tradition. In the ambiguous overlap of the ritual-devotional dimension with the recreational-spectacular dimension lies another peculiarity of the *Madonna dell'Arco's funzioni*: the legitimacy of innovative or, in any case, divergent stances from the accepted ones is a matter at the centre of continued negotiations between the different actors involved, that is *battenti*, devotees and musicians, with the latter playing once more a central role.

We have already seen how the relationship between *Madonna dell'Arco* associations and *divisioni musicali* is basically of a professional nature: services are provided in exchange for money and are regulated by negotiations, at times lengthy ones, that precede a final agreement on the details of the musical 'services' to be offered during the rituals. In this context, *maestri di banda* are essentially freelancers who have to find new ways to distinguish their offer from their competition and justify fees charged to *battenti*:²⁵ some of the recent updates to their offer have seen expansion of the bands' repertoires to include 'modern songs' and specifically *Gigli* music, or, for Barra and neighbouring areas, the chance to accompany *funzioni* with a *banda amplificata*. On this note, it is important to bear in mind that the actual band members are quite heterogeneous: we have already seen how the age of musicians, their musical education and their technical proficiency are wide-ranging range: teenagers and middle-aged men or Conservatory-graduate professionals and self-taught amateurs may all be part of the same performance. Even the ability of *maestri di banda* to accommodate requests for specific repertoire items is quite variable: being able to play *Gigli* music or to be backed by a *banda amplificata* are distinctive elements in the varied backdrop of brass bands performing for *battenti*.

Maestri di banda, then, are usually very familiar with the *battenti* environment, so they know how to incorporate updates into the rituals (what to propose, what sections of the ritual are more suited to innovations, what are the essential elements). During negotiations on the appropriateness of certain musical practices that take place between *battenti* and devotees (but which musicians can take part in too,

²⁵ The annual wage agreed upon can vary greatly according to many factors: the number of musicians involved and their experience; the number of 'services' required, their length, the repertoires they have to perform and to study beforehand. Based on my experience and what I was told, their pay may range from about 3,000 euros to over 15,000 for the whole band.

if they have a good relationship with the association), there are many factors at play: the ritual is viewed as a symbolic capital which involves overlapping family, neighbourhood, friendship or even business relations that bind together different components of the neighbourhood community and it is inextricably tied to events that involve the associations, mainly due to the mutable ‘geography of relations’ that ensures their existence. Such events – especially when partial or total overlaps in their areas of reference take place²⁶ – can easily lead to the development of mutual competition; conversely, the prestige enjoyed by associations such as *Mezzafila* or *Pescatori di Mergellina* may induce smaller associations to imitate their approach. To assume the role of representing the neighbourhood or part of it can result in the cultivation and emphasis of micro-identity elements, filtered through the ritual and its formal elements. In the case of Barra, for example, members consider some associations’ use of *bande amplificate* as an identity element that implies their belonging to Barra, as well as an element of distinction from other associations in the same area that employ ‘traditional’ *divisioni musicali* instead.

The overlap in the nature of *funzioni* between the devotional and the aesthetical-recreational-spectacular characteristics is strictly connected to the previous point. As the interview excerpts show, the *funzione* is not only enacted to represent the neighbourhood, it is also performed for the neighbourhood itself. As a service offered to local devotees, it has an ‘entertaining,’ spectacular undercurrent (the *funzione* has to be beautiful), although all aesthetical choices have to fall within the ritual’s religious remit and its symbolic system: thus, *battenti* proposing changes to the ritual explain that such changes are devotional acts and part of their homage to the Virgin; they interpret the ‘updating’ of tradition as the staging of an aesthetically successful performance (a beautiful *funzione*) that features something new not just to the devotees but to the Madonna herself, as part of the ritual. I have heard this argument voiced many times by all the *battenti* involved in such processes, and it is generally connected to the strategies of distinction mentioned in the previous point: according to this line of reasoning, an association which does not update the ritual and does not offer anything new to the Madonna is not truly devoted and will perform ceremonies with little enthusiasm.

The last central element is how devotees interpret the term ‘tradition,’ whose different meanings are negotiable, contextual and at times contrasting. ‘Tradition,’ meant as a positive quality for the ritual and as a mark of authority linking the present to the past, is a founding element of the rhetoric underpinning the authority of the cult and of the *battenti* as mediators. All the subjects involved consider *funzioni* a ‘traditional’ ritual. What such ‘traditionality’ is actually made of is a matter for frequent debate

²⁶ The presence and the lifespan of associations in the hinterland neighbourhoods and towns are often subject to instability, as relations within neighbourhood communities constantly change. A group will often split into two new mutually hostile associations, or clusters of *battenti* may choose to move from one association to another. Whenever such dynamics occur, they cause a partial overlap of many of these associations’ reference areas, resulting in conflicts and remonstrances that occasionally last for a long time.

and discussion. The concept of tradition is sometimes interpreted through a formal and conservative perspective (something is traditional because it retains formal elements from the past), while at other times it is a matter of procedure (testifying one's own devotion by staging a constantly renewed show is traditional). Such projection into the past is, nonetheless, extremely pliant, to the point that innovations proposed in the present may be expected to turn into legitimate future practices: indeed, that innovations may introduce – by their virtue of being good – ‘new traditions’ that will be maintained and transmitted onwards.

Arguably, the elements listed above are part of widely diverse rhetorical strategies: due to the extreme fragmentation of the world of associations and the scant relevance of forms of centralised organisation in the cult, they can be mutually opposed. Associations that consider themselves to be ‘more devoted’ than others, because of their eager search for ways to renovate the ritual every year and start ‘new traditions,’ coexist with others who condemn this orientation, regarding it as “an excuse to turn *funzioni* into *music hall* or a circus” and considering the observance of practices already established in the 1960s as signs of devotion and respect of tradition.

In such dynamics, decisions are clearly deferred to *battenti*: musicians – hired hands paid in exchange for a service – have to adjust to their client's requests. However, they have wide margins to influence the choices of associations through suggestions and proposals. It is essentially the bands that put in place forms of mediation through the different contexts that I have presented here, to elaborate new musical languages and to adapt them to different circumstances. Some of the most radical changes implemented in the *funzione* ritual are the result of long and intense cooperation between *battenti* and musicians, as seen in the case of *Associazione Mezzafila*.

Conclusions

I have sought here to highlight connections and correlations between different frameworks (ritual and festive systems, institutional and informal initiatives for the transmission of musical knowledge and recruitment networks of musicians within the brass bands environment and other contiguous or related music environments) which, if taken individually, would make it difficult to understand the spread of the phenomena described in this essay. The highly articulated and dynamic context presented here undermines a number of supposed dichotomies – between the ritual and the festive dimension of some events; between tradition and pop culture; between local aesthetics and that of the wider global sphere – which in the current context of the Province of Naples can only confuse or obstruct the study of musical phenomena in its quest to understand their dynamics.

Although I have illustrated – albeit not exhaustively – only part of the background that characterises brass band music (and the music environments somehow connected to it, like those found

at the *Feste dei Gigli*) in the province of Naples, what I have presented is sufficient to outline elements worthy of further study: more specifically, if we consider both the ritual's local symbolic framework and the multiple codes employed to constantly rework the forms of the ritual itself, musicians emerge as key figures that facilitate the renewal of local aesthetics. Endowed with competences and knowledge that allow them to turn local actors' often generic requests into clearly outlined aesthetical and stylistic options, they have codified musical aspects of 'new traditions,' by means of which one can understand the self-representational need of local actors. After thorough analysis, this apparently incoherent bricolage-style approach is revealed as a form of cultural reworking, which employs codes from other contexts and re-contextualises them by giving them new meanings.

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