

Preface and Acknowledgements

This monograph presents the results of a research path I have conducted (on and off, in the midst of several other scholarly and pedagogical activities at my university) since 2010, plus the early rudiments produced in an old article from 2004. Throughout this path, I intended to produce an analysis of the popular music repertoires of social protest, with a particular attention to some case studies that, for historical and geographical reasons, are to a lesser extent taken into consideration than others. I have tried to offer theoretical descriptions, methodological tools, and an approach encompassing various fields of musicology, cultural studies, semiotics, discourse analysis, media studies, political and social sciences.

Also, I made an explicit effort to keep my writing style as comprehensible and engaging as possible, without compromising the academic level. I hope this will make the reading of this text interesting and enjoyable.

The book is virtually divided into three main parts. The first one (Chap. 1) introduces the problem at the levels of terminological definition (suggesting upgrades on the existing and commonly used expressions) and musical categorization (protest songs are hardly taken as a musical genre on its own, while the book argues that they should be), and it also illustrates the main structure and methodological approach of the theoretical model developed in the book. The second part (from Chaps. 2 to 4) presents the model itself, focusing on the contextualization of protest songs, their lyrical and musical contents. The third part (Chaps. 5–8), finally, works around four case studies corresponding to four different semantic fields: the cultural and musical equivalent of the basic ideological distinction between left and right (with examples from various repertoires); a socio-cultural movement centered on music (the Lithuanian Singing Revolution); a genre (Italian pop-jazz during Fascism); and a musical act (The Beatles).

As an interdisciplinary form of investigation, hopefully the book will appeal to more than one readers' community. However, it is predictable that the following scholars (in the written order) may take particular interest in it: musicologists (in particular popular music scholars and sociomusicologists), semioticians, cultural and political theorists.

At the same time, as mentioned above, there is a number of topics that are approached in this book for the first time in general, or for the first time within certain contexts. For instance, the topic of the Lithuanian Singing Revolution was never analyzed in English by any scholar affiliated to Lithuanian academic institutions (the phenomenon has been exposed internationally only by Estonian, and most recently Latvian, scholars. In Lithuania, studies on this subject have appeared only in the local language): this may be an indication that the international readership interested in Lithuanian history will not be indifferent to this publication. Furthermore, the ever-crowded readership in Beatles studies may be intrigued by the fact that this book presents an analysis of the band's songs of environmentalist contents, a topic very seldom approached by scholars. Third, while the relationship between jazz and Italian fascism has been tackled (and very well) by various scholars, the main hypothesis formulated in the particular chapter I devoted to this topic is entirely novel, and in a sense risky (I took the responsibility, and the liberty, to qualify one particular song employed in a regime-friendly context, as a subtle mockery/protest against the oppressions inflicted to jazz by the fascist authorities): readers interested in Italian history may find these reflections worthy of consideration. Finally, although used and abused in various contexts, the ideological left–right opposition has been in recent times considered obsolete and inadequate to represent the current spectrum of political ideas and practices: instead, I defend the thesis that such opposition—particularly on a cultural level—is alive and kicking, and it is still well-represented musically. Hopefully, some sociologically relevant insight can be found in this part.

Overall, in preparation for this book, I have worked on several hundred cases between songs and albums, 348 of which are explicitly mentioned and/or discussed in this book. I was not really sure on what would have been a statistically significant sample that would have both a qualitative and quantitative resonance in my analysis, so I simply decided to let things flow naturally: in the end, some songs were analyzed in accordance to my initial plans, some others came my way during research work, and occasionally proved to be more interesting cases than the ones I had already chosen.

I was also interested in emancipating the study of protest songs from a traditional bias that affects popular music studies: their Anglophonocentrism (I shall return on this in Chap. 6), with a particular focus on Great Britain and USA, plus the occasional incursion of Ireland and Canada. I tried to focus on other repertoires as well, particularly those I had direct access to, due to my personal and professional conditions (in particular: I am Italian and I live and work in Lithuania: I suppose there is a reason why two out of four case studies in this book discuss songs from these two countries). Taking an overview on the final work, I must admit that I succeeded only in part in this task. Surely, readers will not only read about “Blowing in the Wind” or “Give Peace a Chance”, but will get acquainted with acts and repertoires that they will possibly be reading about for the first time. However, it is also true that—while searching for efficient illustrations of my theoretical reflections—I more often than not recurred to Anglophone examples, exactly because, in certain points, my main concern was *to be understood*, and I realized that, indeed, a Dylan, Beatles or U2 song (just to make three very famous examples) were much more a cultural *lingua franca* than anything else, and would not force

every time the reader to open YouTube or Spotify to get an idea of what I was talking about. I must say that, in particular, the book is too Beatle-centric, and not only for the case study at Chap. 7: I think that is due to both the fact that, arguably, the Fab Four are indeed *lingua franca* more than anybody else, and to the fact that I myself have more expertise on this band, having published academic material on them and having also given academic courses in Beatles Studies at Helsinki University. I therefore wish to apologize for a choice that made the UK–US vs. rest of the world unbalance even more evident.

In any case, out of 348 songs/albums analyzed, no less than 85, that is, roughly, one out of four, belonged to geographical areas outside UK or North America. Most of those I excluded from the final text had linguistic specificities that were hard for me to convey effectively in English. Paradoxically, the majority of those I dropped were Italian: maybe the fact that they were songs written in my native language was more intimidating for me, as I could both catch very subtle linguistic nuances and realize that I was not able to 100% get the idea across in English (whoever has been working on the translation of songwriters like Fabrizio De Andrè, Rino Gaetano or Sergio Caputo knows perfectly what I am talking about).

Anyway, in the end, as I said, 85 non-Anglo-American songs were considered, and about 25 countries were scrutinized. Whether this is a laudable result or not remains to be seen. I certainly feel I could have put more effort in, but at the same time I consider this percentage a clear step forward, in comparison to the average book on this topic (where nearly 100% of the songs analyzed are invariably from UK, USA, Ireland or Canada).

In any case, and regardless of the countries and styles represented here, there is no way the number of songs analyzed here is “representative” of the thousands that were produced in different times and places. Therefore, sincere apologies to all of those that are not even mentioned in this book, and instead should have been. My selection has been primarily functional, focusing on what I considered the most significant examples within the purposes of my analysis, in terms of aesthetics, contents, socio-cultural context, among others. Of course, I certainly made quite a few important omissions, and I have no doubt that more than one reader will not fail to contact me personally to point them out, as they have done on other occasions—particularly a recent book I wrote on the representation of animals in cinema, which prompted several colleagues to endlessly play the “Find the missing movie” game. What can I say? I can only warn about the futility of playing such a game (there will *always* be omissions, no matter how hard one tries, and there will *always* be someone who will consider the missing items as *totally impossible to ignore*), but I am sure it will be played anyway.

Another apology I intend to offer concerns the very limited amount of lyrics I was able to quote per song. In an ideal world, I would have transcribed the whole set of lyrics and I would have performed an accurate and non-fragmentary analysis of them. But no, the copyright laws do not allow scholars to do their job properly, and in order not to pay a fortune to already-rich artists and managers, I had to break song lyrics into small pieces that would be accepted as “fair use” (see notification at the end of this preface). I would like to state, loud and clear, that it is a shame that researchers and educators have to submit to such greedy stupidity, and that

copyright holders are determined to make profit out of absolutely anything. An academic monograph like this is not published for great profits, and in any case to make an artwork more visible to the readership can only be beneficial for that artwork: it does not damage anybody's reputation. Scholarly work aims to produce knowledge and understanding, and knowledge and understanding produce a better world. Anything that gets in the way of this should be regarded with disdain.

In conclusion, I would like to thank some of the people who have been helpful and inspiring during the making of this book, including students and colleagues of some academic institutions that have been gracious hosts of different events (lectures, articles or congress papers) where I had the opportunity to showcase the advancements of my research (some of these institutions, of course, are also the ones I am affiliated to). In alphabetical order:

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From this list, I would like to single out my language editor Brian Marmion and my colleagues and friends Leonidas Donskis and Leonardo Polato, who are sadly no longer with us, and all in a sudden, unfairly premature manner. Brian had worked on my previous two books and had just started working on this one. Leonardo was a great musicologist who also had an interest in political issues. Leonidas was one of Lithuania's greatest intellectuals, and his work—among other things—was also important for my research on the Lithuanian Singing Revolution. They had great brains and big hearts, and they are sorely missed.

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Give Peace a Chant

Popular Music, Politics and Social Protest

Martinelli, D.

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