

Making music in the time of YouTube **Introduction**

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THE following essays derive from an initiative promoted by the Italian ICTM (International Council for Traditional Music) Committee, and supported by the Department of History, Cultural and Territorial Heritage of Cagliari University. In 2014 the Committee launched a call for paper with the goal to stimulate ideas about the influences and conditionings on music practices (regardless of genre or type of music) due to the unlimited possibilities of music spreading offered by the Web, with special regard to the *Youtube* phenomenon. The call was aimed primarily at young Italian ethnomusicologists, graduates and PhD-Doctorate. A panel of university ethnomusicologists selected the proposals and following (albeit in a different way) the writing of the essays that are gathered here.¹

On the whole, the volume is meant to be a contribution in the form of case studies collection, which mainly focus certain special uses of the network (and the so called virtuality in general) within specific real, contemporaneous music making scenarios in Italy and abroad. The specific reference to the large indefinable mishmash of Youtube is intended like a synecdoche to mean the contemporary phenomena of medialization. It is therefore a specific angle within the great deal of research about music in the space of virtuality and the like, that is a main trend in the ethnomusicological (and musicological at large) current researches (for instance *The new (ethno)musicologies* 2008, *Music and virtuality* 2016).

The attention on the impact of the transmission media on the musical performance is hardly a new theme in Italian ethnomusicology (although for too long it has been neglected and reduced to a contextual description: see *L'etnomusicologia italiana a sessanta anni* 2012). Today, this topic is essential and, for certain aspects, it is an absolute prerequisite for the analysis of any music content, if nothing because nowadays, any musical practice is somehow influenced and conditioned by sound recording and transmission

¹ The panel was made by Giorgio Adamo (University Roma-Tor Vergata), Sergio Bonanzinga (University of Palermo), Fulvia Caruso (University of Pavia/Cremona), Serena Facci (University of Roma-Tor Vergata), Giovanni Giuriati (University of Roma-La Sapienza), Febo Guizzi (University of Torino). Ilario Melandri substituted professor Guizzi, sadly passed away in 2015.

technologies. At the exact opposite of the romantic concept of ‘absolute music’, (that is meant to be appreciated without any reference to the context and to the ‘world around’), music is an «activity, something that people do» (SMALL 1998, p. 2) so that process of creation/transmission/ circulation/ fruition of music are never neutral for to the musical-text.

On this basis, the following essays pinpoint different music practices culturally located reflecting on the social network’s (above all YouTube, Facebook, but also Spotify, Twitter, MySpace) relevance on them. Each author starts from a deep knowledge of his/her research context and music practices, on which she/he has developed deep analytical studies: on this basis she/he proposes an original and specific thinking on the question referred. The result consists of different interpretations of the media’s relevance and influence within diverse interactions between music makers (and, in several cases, between local music makers and listeners/competent amateurs). Differently structured the essays ensure a relevant variety of foods for thought. Some of them can be disorderly mentioned.

New background and new consciousness

It is well known that the development of technology, particularly the digital one, has transformed the communication between people everywhere in the world, affirming new dimensions of aurality beyond the usually situational and participatory passage ‘from mouth to ear’ and this have substantial influenced the transmission of knowledge. It is a sort of ‘new age’ of the aurality, something completely new with respect to past time that is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious oral communication because of having lost (or perhaps having the illusion of have lost) the natural ephemeral character of sound that is substituted by the appropriate gestures to activate recording/ playback devices.

Of course, it includes radical changes and expansions in our concept of music (that is still continuously changing and expanding).² Any supposed ‘purity’ of means of musical transmission (like we have been accustomed to think) is baseless today. Results of this transformation are not yet fully evident, if only because it cannot be said that it is finished, and continuous innovations challenge incessantly our theoretical learning. Inter alia, we almost take for granted that music could be disconnected from the performance; that a fixed digital track *is* music; that a virtually ‘outside of time’ recording *is* music; that music can be a mere sequence of prefixed intangible sounds resonating through electro-acoustic devices. And, above all, we are induced to think «of music as a thing – an identifiable art object that can owned by its creator though copyrights and purchased by consumers» (Turino

² The bibliography on the matter is very large and varied: inter alia, for the general issues discussed in the following pages, they can be useful: TAYLOR 2001, BRIGGS-BURKE 2005, ZAGORSKI-THOMAS 2014, *Virtual Music* 2016.

2008, 24). An ‘object’ that is conceived as stable and autonomous; that is intended to be contemplated, enjoyed and eventually emulated, that could resound in every moment even when one doesn’t want to listen to it. And so on. After all, recorded music, mediated performances are often the primary medium for experiencing music.

These new ideas of music differ essentially from the one of, let's say, our ancestors' before the invention of the phonograph, since for them music was necessarily a real interaction between people in the flesh, during the here and now of the performance. They are different ideas of music that are not mutually exclusive, including a large palette of intertwining, according to (often imponderable) diverse paths. While the act of performing implies by itself a more or less large margins of unpredictability and variability and even a risk of failure (COOK 2014), recorded music (or canned music, as in a derogatory way it is called), reproduces with its absolute loyalty and (theoretically) for ever what was taped/video taped, guaranteeing against unexpected facts or errors.

On this background, albeit the more or less conceptualized, the music activity provides a diversification like never (one must assume) in human history. In particular, the pervasive diffusion of electronic medias not has resulted in a general standardization and homogeneity of music expression, like it was feared some decades ago (cfr. *The cultural study of music* 2012, 290 ff.) - this at least until today. Their explosive growth has triggered new forms of creativity and musical differentiation, much more analytical because they are based on the objectivity of the recording. Beyond unavoidable operations of mere emulation, in fact the sound technologies have acted (and act) on individual and collective self-awareness about the music making in general. The continuous re-listening, again and again, to a recorded message allows very detailed storages of a single performance.³ Beside the possibility to listen to the largest variety of individual interpretations of a music genre, typology, piece, fragment etc., also the smallest details can be (even unintentionally) perceived and memorized in sort of systematic representations of aural pathways. Thanks to the media, all the music actors share a wider range of musical possibilities than the ones rooted exclusively on pure mnemonic mechanisms of past times. These articulated depictions influence the mental elaboration of any performers, developing new music habits, new meaning of human musicality, i.e. «capability to make and to make sense of music» (RICE 2014, p.1).

Usually, who makes music reflects on what he/she does, imagines her/his performance in advance, discusses about his/her sound makings with other performers and/or with the listeners, reflects on aesthetic categories expressing his/her opinions. The idea of a deep reflexivity/awareness about the music

³ This had been guessed already by John Blaking (1995, p. 224) «The phonograph and the tape recorder helped to make people more aware of general human creativity in the invention, performance and appreciation of music».

making is usually connected with the figures of the professionals in the field of the so-called western-art music (composers, musicologists, great performers, etc.). Outside of this sphere, it usually tends to emphasize the image of a spontaneous approach to music or, however, to give minor or relative importance to the thinking and reasoning about music. Instead, it is to be presumed that any music maker (or at least, almost all of music makers) share a more or less intense awareness of being an actor of a ‘cultural manifestation’ of which they have as deep a knowledge as possible – and some talks by the musicians introduced in the following essays will clarify it.

Every music production inevitably involves a certain degree of consciousness, if nothing more than the recognition that what one is playing/listening belongs to a certain ‘typology of music’ and not to another one, which means whether it is suitable (or not) for those who are listening to it, for the circumstances, for the shared purposes of the participants of a gathering, etc. And this consciousness is often nourished by recordings’ listening: to collect recordings is a shared passion by music makers and also (or maybe more) by the local expert listeners – i.e. people who do not sing/play but have an active participation to the performance evaluating and expressing their opinion about it to the music makers, an opinion that is a set in high regards on account of their recognised expertise. The accumulation of recordings materials in YouTube (which will be discussed by more than one essay) is part of this trend, which, over the collection of tapes and discos, has the advantage of the immediate chance of collective sharing between passionate appreciators of the same music practice, beyond the ‘mysterious’ paths of the net.

Controversial virtual democracy

Expert listeners and many music makers typically try to go beyond the first step (so to speak) of this new music consciousness that consists in checking the sound suitability for a given time/space context. They dealing with music in depth, talking through it about the world – both about the micro world of their community/group and about the globalized world they experience mainly through the media. These talks have a basic relevance in the construction of the idea of what music is today: they set up a way of making music that is parallel (having emblematically the same relevance) to the sound production (TITON 1999, p. XVIII). It is a thinking and talking about music pivoted above all on *why music, what is music, what it is possible ‘to say’ (and not to say)* by means of music, beyond any discussion about technical aspects and contextual elements. It is an articulate thought about when, where, and, above all, who and how to make music.

Frequently, above all these expert listeners nourish their musical interests and passion, dedicating specific energies in seeking past times’ recordings - that means tapes of the Sixties and before – combining other initiatives. For instance they interview the oldest singers/players of their community in order to getting information about the supposed past ‘genuine tradition’. According

to a widespread commonplace, around the Sixties-Seventies, a big transformation has been, tracing a boundary line between the past time and the present. Against the supposed corruption of modernity, everything dating from previous periods is considered authentic; particularly, sound recordings are believed to be the ‘purest manifestations’ of presupposed ‘original’ music traditions.

The protagonists of these activities usually call them ‘researches’ (even ‘ethnomusicological researches’). As some essays will show, sometimes the results are rather botched accumulation of materials; other time they are interesting assortments of documentary materials. For them, to post these materials in YouTube or Facebook (often in form of montage, miscellany or medley) is a sort of must; actually the social media have, without doubt, stimulates this proliferation of ‘ethnomusicological amateurism’.⁴

After all, digital technology involves the apparent feeling that all human knowledge is available to all. It is the utopia of a sort of new form of cultural democracy that allows the latent talents of ‘everyday people’ the largest individual and collective expression and creativity, eroding any hierarchies of learning, reserved skills and expertise, traditions of researches and so on. Above all within the humanistic field, this sort of feeling (let’s call it that way) transpires on what circulates on the Internet – with special relevance in the social media. In short, it is the (utopian) impression which everybody can do everything; everybody can reason about everything and then everybody can make/⁵ record/ create/ mash-up etc. his own music. It is a very controversial question connected with the general effects determined by the digital revolution and open to the more unpredictable developments: so it is question too large to be addressed here (see, inter alia CHENG 2012, *Music and virtuality* 2016). Only, I underline that this idea that, ultimately, ‘we all can be ethnomusicologists’ is very spread – at least in Italy - and (of course) it is a research theme for the academic ethnomusicology (some indication arise also from the essays).

Paradoxical monumentalization

In 1888, reviewing the Edison Phonograph an anonymous columnist of *The Spectator magazine Archive* 1888, p.9), dealing with the wonders of the instrument (which began to spread at that time), imagining with horror the spread of ‘voices-galleries’ (similar to the ‘picture-galleries), wrote: «We have a very strong belief that the scientific ingenuities of our days, (...), will contrive to fill the world we leave behind us much too full of us for the free growth of

⁴ Of course, to do real ethnomusicology is much more a simple collection of sound materials and interview: of course, this is not the place to deal with it (cf. MACCHIARELLA 2016).

⁵ Recently the large diffusion of software like the Apple’s *garage-music* - which nowadays have price of a few euros, being affordable for everyone, that sounds as realistic as live instruments - discloses perspectives on the matter of music creation that are nowadays unforeseeable (see HARVEY 2009).

our posterity». (*What will come of the Phonograph* 1888) With the development of technologies the recording process «has slowly become ‘democratized’, allowing the consumer of audio to also be a producer of entertainment. This phenomenon could be compared to the personal photography revolution of the 1950s, when consumers purchased cheap personal cameras and suddenly fancied themselves as ‘photographers’.» (Tough 2016, p. 308)

Today, starting the button ‘record’ when one comes upon a music performance (or any sound manifestation at large) is a sort of ‘conditioned reflex’. There is always a smartphone on hand to record an occurrence. And, to say, according to my personal experience, in the last 5-6 years above all, I do not remember to have witnessed to a ritual event (religious or secular) without hundreds and hundreds of people (the number is not an exaggeration!) who were recording and photographing any moment of it by mean of the largest variety of devices. And, of course, part of these recordings ends up on YouTube & company, with the utopic hope that they will have a planetary diffusion.

It looks like music is not (is not longer) *something that one listens*, but more and more *something to own* via smartphones and digital devices. It is something that to one feels the instinctive need to (or better that technology pushes instinctively) to record: that means also, to monumentalize the sound and so doing to put it outside of the flow of time. A monument that might be considered and enjoyed regardless of the real performance act from which it was generated - but, in actual fact, it is paradoxical idea of monument since the monuments are immobile in the space, while music is unavoidably in the dimension of time!

Perhaps, this idea of ownership the music (or literarily a musical file) is filling the world that we leave behind us too full of us. And YouTube and the other social media, of course, work like stores of this sort of these monuments, encouraging it in a way. But, of course, YouTube and the other social media are much more than sterile deposits. They are virtual spaces that are impossible to understand as a phenomenon, as regards their uses and so on. Every definition, each metaphorical picture that can be proposed seems to be incongruent, when least insufficient and destined to be overcome by the continuous technological developments. They are places, theoretically at any rate for what concern music, where one can find any sort of ‘music monumentalization’ and is free to play with it taking his own purpose, intentionality, creativity etc. (although it must be remembered there a few who reap the rewards since, beyond the picture of an utopian collective sharing, YouTube is an economic enterprise – see SHZR EE TAN 2016, pp. 337-342)⁶.

There is another aspect of the paradoxical monumentalization of music that is the one by the professional scholars who, until twenty-thirty years ago, have had the prerogative of the ‘recording technologies’ (although, from the

⁶ Furthermore it must not forget that these phenomena fact concerns the individual living in that part of the world where you have the opportunity to access such technology (see TAYLOR 2001, p. 161).

Fifties – Sixties there have been local amateur collectors that have made a lot of recordings by means of tape and/or cassette recorders). As part of their job, ethnomusicologists have recorded and edited discos and cassettes (occasionally films, videos etc.) that often have created sound archives following classification criteria. In many cases, these materials have been (or are still) properly returned to the communities from which they come (according a trend recently developed by the discipline – RICE 2014) – although often ending up on the social media completely decontextualized. Beyond the scholar's purposes, these recordings, sometimes, acquired the value of a 'fondant monument' of a 'music tradition' on the whole. Ignoring that, ultimately, they are 'accidental fixations' of past performances, these recordings acquire an authoritative value and often one can find (also in YouTube like some of the essays will show) operations of (re)construction or (re)elaboration based on this kind of materials which are designed 'to restore' the 'authentic', the 'oldest repertory' – as it were possible to recreate a music sound of the past.

It must also be said that the music makers of which the essay discuss about, seem to have full awareness of the (let say) unnatural character of recordings that contradicts the ephemeral nature of sound, placing music out of time. They show evidently which they do not consider as an object nor the recordings (the past decades' ones and the contemporary digital ones), nor the audio-video files in YouTube or in other social-media. They do not simply imitate and reproduce what was recorded (what that is a common habit in the music main-stream), but any media-source works like an original stimulus for real musical activity – in both the senses, i.e. to produce sound and to elaborate a concept of music. Furthermore, if the audio-video recordings posted in YouTube reinforce inevitably the representation of music -as-an-object, the possibility to post a (supposedly) unlimited number of files may draw into question the issue of the essential value of the performance variability, of which music makers have however a certain consciousness. In this sense, maybe, it is not casual that for several music events considered in the following essays, there are different versions uploaded in YouTube (or elsewhere), sometimes of low and poor quality.

Uses of YouTube

To post a music video in YouTube has undoubtedly to do with this paradoxical monumentation of music. But, considering the instability of the contents on the Internet and the temporariness of the media (and of the social media above all), this monumentation is not projected in long term (as well as, to say, music writing is symbolically conceived in Western art music, or in other music 'great tradition' of the world).⁷

⁷ Great tradition in the meaning of Robert Redfield definition: for an application to music see MOLINO 2005.

In a sense, to post music video can be considered anymore as a part of the contemporary musicking process, that is – according the renown definition of Christofer Small (1988) - the entire process by which a performance has life, covering not only performers and listeners but also all those who actually favour the musical act (for example, people who organize the occasion within which the performance takes place, who takes care of the functionality of the place, the stage, and so on). The electronics undoubtedly enlarges without limits the extension of the musicking so that posting a video files, more or less intentionally, contribute to and influence the nature of a given musical event.

There are many different (sometime surprising) grounds and aims that lead people to post a music video in YouTube or in other media channels. The following essays, for their part, show a representative variety of them, from the (semi)profession musicians anchored to their native territories who try to promote and disseminate their ‘music proposals’ towards a larger audiences, to traditional musicians who use YouTube or Facebook or an own blog in order to strengthen their relationships with a locally situated listeners, regardless from eventual external fruitions; from traditional ensembles of local musicians who make use to YouTube to claim a peculiar performative identity, to construct and elaborate modes of self-representation within a specific festive event, to groups of passionate listeners (or virtual sound groups) that are based and developing thank to the media being powered almost daily; from musicians who consciously seek to find in the Medias new performance scenarios for traditional expressions, to groups of believers who use YouTube or Facebook for the circulations of audiovisual recordings concerning religious celebrations, as well as traditional music materials related to the devotional performance by parish choirs, organists, including comments and explanations. And so forth.

So it is a large range of situations (a drop in the bucket of the infinite variety of the possible situation) that, more or less clearly depending on the cases, seem to have at the basis a paradox: they emphasize a sense of place, affirm and elaborate local specificities through channels that (we can say) represent the de-territorializes processes *par excellence*. Actually, it is an apparent paradox: rather it is a crucial matter of the volume on which the eight case-studies give highlighted exemplifications.

Special musicians and music scenarios

Like any volume of this kind, also this one is not able to give response or general explanation (but is there a book that can do that in a matter so smooth?): rather than try to provide answers the authors offer propose issues, offer suggestions, elaborate point of view, calls into large question like the (supposed) opposition real/ virtual, the use of the virtuality in order to think over the real, or better over the different representation of real performance, and so on (*Music and virtuality* 2016, pp. 18 ff).

Many of the music makers of which the following pages speak about, are not professional musicians. In some cases they are very competent performers within exclusive music practices, that means musics that are performed within particular cultural contexts by very specialized groups (or single performers) who have been trained through a peculiar *iter* of musical apprenticeship, including the acceptance of unwritten rules of social life settled by the local customs. In other cases, they take part to very inclusive musical practices, mostly within community events which are expected by the social life of a village (like religious or secular feasts).

The effectiveness of the essays owes much also to the vivacity of the music makers' figures and of their musical awareness, choices, intentionality and so on that appropriately are pointed out, often in their specific individuality, in the analysis of the different music scenarios. It is a very important element since it testifies a good quality of the relationships between the scholar and the locally situated social actors: relationships that have however a crucial relevance in any ethnomusicological studies since they give the measure of the quality of the research (Macchiarella 2016, pp. 202-204). And this, ultimately, combining with the methodological rigour and the richness of the writing of the essays, is a well evidence for the future of the Italian Ethnomusicology.

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