

Visual Ethnography

REVIEW

I suoni dell'albero. Il Maggio di S. Giuliano di Accettura

Edited by Nicola Scaldaferrri and Steven Feld.

Authors: Nicola Scaldaferrri, Giuseppe Filardi, Stefano Vaja, Ferdinando Mirizzi, Steven Feld.

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The *Maggio* di San Giuliano in Accettura is one of the most important arboreal rites in Italy, a ‘classic’ subject for the Italian ethnographic research. In the last decades it has trans-formed into a highly resonating event attracting thousands of visitors and tourists that gather in the little town in the province of Matera, Basilicata, during the days of Pentecost.

Nicola Scaldaferrri and Steven Feld edited a volume in which diverse perspectives and methodologies systematically cross in order to convey the complex dynamics of the *Maggio*. Sound recordings, photographs and texts converge in a multimedia account of the rite; fur-thermore, the authors propose a multimodal approach for each typology of documentation, with the clear intent to put alternative perspectives into dialogue and decentralize the authori-ty of the researchers. Two CDs contrast techniques of recording such as soundscape compo-sition (Feld) and repertory documentation (Scaldaferrri); two photo-reportages by Stefano Va-ja and Lorenzo Ferrarini provide complementary points of observation, integrating black-and-white and color images, choosing to focus respectively on the overall development of the rite and on close-ups of singular events.

In each case there seems to be a particular focus on the subjectivity of the researcher and his creative supply. Feld’s soundscape composition can to a certain extent be assimilated to an electroacoustic musical piece which proceeds from a chronological recollection of the events to a gradually more creative remediation in which sophisticated editing techniques en-courage imaginative reconstructions of space and time in the listeners. The radical subjectivity of Feld’s work, in which every single phase of the documentation process— from the record-ing/re-listening, through the selection/assemblage, to the montage/mix—exposes its poetic potential, is complemented by Scaldaferrri’s selection of dozens of hours of field recording collected by him and his collaborators over 5 years (2002-2007).

Despite resembling classical approaches to ethnomusicological collections, Scaldaferrri deliberately hybridizes his materials with tracks from folkloric groups that play a central role in the celebrations of the *Maggio*, and with historical recordings realized by Giuseppe Filardi, the parish priest of Accettura, who is also a local historian; a chant recorded by Filardi in 1988 in North Bergen (New Jersey) from an immigrant woman from Accettura is of particular geo-cultural relevance.

The collected essays display a comparable diversity of voices. Scaldaferrri's introduction provides a guideline of the main features of the rite and describes how his field-research was structured. The necessity of concentrating on the sound profile of the event does not on-ly descend from Scaldaferrri's ethnomusicological background, but mostly from the entangle-ment of the sound-layers with every moment of the rite, as constitutive elements of the ritual experience. Filardi's text is both a precious testimony by an insider and an informative ac-count of local history. Vaja's article contextualizes his and Ferrarini's visual reportages in the framework of the abundant historical photographic documentation of the *Maggio* since the 1930s. Ferdinando Mirizzi discusses the anthropological literature about the *Maggio* and in particular questions the Frazerian interpretation of the rite as a symbolical marriage of two trees. Mirizzi evidences how this scholarly idealization took over in media accounts over the decades (especially through documentary films) and ultimately became a constitutive ingredi-ent of local narratives about the rite.

The book culminates in a dialogic essay between the two curators, in the style of Feld's well-proven conversational style. Several methodological core issues are addressed. Among them, Feld thematizes the determining role of technologies as performative tools, namely the DSM recording system that he used in his soundscape composition; than he traces back this role of technology to Jean Rouch's reflections on ethnographic film, suggesting the definition of "film for the ears" for his composition. Scaldaferrri points out how a close listen-ing of the apparently chaotic sound environment of Accettura enables to acknowledge the cultural implications of overlapping musical practices and repertoires, such as the professional marching bands coming from outside town, folkloric bands and '*bassa musica*' ensembles, which altogether spontaneously concur to regulating and disciplining the extremely complex structure of the *Maggio*. Finally Scaldaferrri and Feld discuss the method of participatory re-search. Scaldaferrri explains how playing the *zampogna* and the *ciaramella* during the rite is a way of establishing privileged connections with local people and most importantly to access the emotional dimension of the event, which is eminently conveyed by the sound environment. This opens the conversation to parallel methodologies developed by Feld in his experience with the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea and especially in his realization of the CD *Voices of the Rainforest* (1991), whose editing process benefited from the determinant interaction with the locals.

from the review by Ignazio Macchiarella in *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia*
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I suoni dell'albero: il Maggio di S. Giuliano ad Accettura, edited by Nicola Scaldaferrri and Steven Feld, is dedicated to one of the most famous (and most studied) rituals from Basilicata. Beyond the specific contribution on this ritual, it is definitely challenging from a methodological standpoint, putting together different interpretive perspectives expressed through particular uses of images and sounds...

First, the musicological perspective by Nicola Scaldaferrri, who knows very well the subject matter and arboreal rituals from a long experience of documentation and research in the field, but also for having taken part as a performer; he is a native of the area and an appreciated bagpipe player... The other perspective, very special, is that of Steven Feld... author of fundamental works that have opened (and still open) new horizons for the representation and analysis of music making... The views of the two editors meet directly in the central essay, in the form of a dialogue, where the specific experience of the research carried out in Accettura is the pretext for a wide-ranging debate on issues of representation and the ability to know music making.

This way of interpreting music opens new horizons for the disciplinary field that commonly is defined "ethnomusicology" ... Or rather, proposes a kind of new general anthropology of sound, what the American scholar usually defines as acoustemology...as a way of knowing the world through sound...

I suoni dell'albero has the undisputed merit of opening new research perspectives with great potential in the study of traditional music-making...like all really relevant books, this one edited by Scaldaferrri and Feld is ultimately qualified by the strength of the methodological issues proposed and the quality of the stimuli offered to the development of research, far beyond the specific topic of the musical festival...