

**VOICES ACROSS THE OCEAN:
RECORDED MEMORIES AND
DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN
THE ARCHIVE OF
GIUSEPPE CHIAFFITELLA**

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In this chapter, the topics explored in the book are approached from a new perspective, deriving from the analysis of a private archive, dating from the twentieth century, which includes written texts, photos, films and, above all, sound recordings. Thanks to these media we can retrace the story of an immigrant who, especially through his recordings of songs and voices of distant relatives, was able to reinforce the sense of community among emigrants in the USA.

In this case, the community is no longer a local one, confined to a single village or a small regional circuit, but a diasporic community whose identity must be understood on a wider transnational scale. Music and sound continue to play a crucial role in giving a meaning to its identity thanks to their strong evocative function and nostalgic component (Pistrick 2015). However, in addition to music-making practices, an even more important role is that of sound recordings. Emigrants who recorded on tape voices, musical instruments or church bells were able to offer them to their diasporic community through the magnifying glass of acousmatic listening, whereby sound is separated from its original source, to 'focus the listener on some intrinsic feature of the sound' (Kane 2014: 29). In this case, the sound itself, now separated from its source and confined to a new magnetic support, becomes more powerful and evocative, with an emotional charge which sometimes can be even stronger than its live performance.

Listening to the tapes was the first stage of this research, which became an archival sonic ethnography that revealed the role of the recordings in sustaining a network of relationships. Dealing with these recordings is also a way of listening to histories of listening; it allows exploration of the way temporary communities have been created around practices of recording and listening, with the actions of recording and listening themselves becoming meaningful practices of evocative value.

Giuseppe Chiaffitella (1900–1980) is remembered by the people of San Costantino Albanese as ‘the friend of young people and sports’. He was known by his family nickname *Pepini Shirokut*, or *laj Pepini Merikani*, Uncle Peppino ‘the American’ (Scaldfarri 2014b: 9–14). Shortly before the First World War, as a teenager, he followed his father to New York, where he found a job as a tailor. He joined a large community of Italian emigrants, some from his own village, who knew him as Joe Chiaffitella. An amateur guitar player and singer, he was a member of the *Casa Italiana* choir during the 1930s (Faedda 2017). This choir, at the time directed by Sandro Benelli, was made up of various Italian amateur singers who at times performed in folkloric costumes.

Chiaffitella strived to keep alive the relationships between his birthplace and the community of migrants in the US by means of the frequent journeys that, except for the interruption of the Second World War, he made back and forth across the Atlantic. He was fond of technology, and from the 1930s he always travelled with a still camera. He would shoot a large number of snapshots, which he would send to relatives and friends with messages handwritten on the back. From 1957, he also started to travel with a Recordio tape recorder that he used to record both voices and music. A few years later he added an 8mm movie camera that he used to film public and private events. On every journey between New York and San Costantino he exchanged photographic and audio souvenirs with friends and relatives. Bearing witness to his energetic activity, there is a large collection of documents, made available to us by his heirs and recently digitised. This includes seventeen audio tapes, eight rolls of 8mm film and hundreds of photographs, in addition to letters, diaries, unpublished poetry and music scores from his days with the *Casa Italiana* choir.

Chiaffitella’s generosity towards the young people of his natal village and his constant efforts to keep the memory of the village alive should probably be read in the light of the principal tragedy of his life: the death of his only son at the age of thirteen, which happened in San Costantino in 1943, while Chiaffitella was in the USA. Due to the disruptions caused by the war, he was informed of his son’s death only after the end of the conflict. This threw him into a state of emotional turmoil, which he tried to address, probably only with partial success, by trying to bridge the distance that separated him from San Costantino.

Chiaffitella’s is not a unique case of sound memories recorded in private and domestic contexts and used to transmit information at a distance and provoke emotions. We also know about the examples of voice mail recorded during the first half of the twentieth century (Levin 2010) and of the records sent in the 1950s by Kostantinos Chronis from the USA to his family in Greece, with recordings of vocal

letters, songs and news of the family (Panopoulos 2018). Chiaffitella's uniqueness lies in the fact that he would never mail these recordings; he would always take them with him, together with his tape recorder, to organise listening and recording sessions with his fellow villagers. Unlike Chronis, then, Chiaffitella would make the recordings travel both ways. These sessions were opportunities for celebration but also, in many aspects, ritual. At a time when transatlantic phone calls were not a realistic prospect for most people, he used sound recordings to stimulate memories and provoke emotions among his friends in the San Costantino diaspora, strengthening the sense of belonging to a community divided over two locations.

The concept of community has been under substantial discussion since the 1970s. In particular, writing about the Ethiopian diaspora in the USA, Shelemay (2011) demonstrates how, in a time of mobility and cosmopolitanism, the notion of community has broken the ties with associations to a specific geographical location, and has been revisited on levels that range from the local to the global. This debate has drawn on the works of Cohen (1985) and Anderson (1983) who, in different ways, underlined the imagined and symbolically constructed character of the processes that come to define a sense of community. If community is no longer conceived of as an entity defined in space and time, it becomes then a sort of mental construction based on the sharing of symbolic and ritual elements, and of practices that include musical ones (Shelemay 2011: 358). These are crucial in the preservation of collective identities. As underlined by Turino: 'Music, dance, festivals, and other public expressive cultural practices are a primary way that people articulate the collective identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are, in turn, basic to survival' (2008: 2).

Together with direct involvement in musical activities, mediated musical and sound events play an important role in processes of identity construction, as confirmed by scholarship that examines newer contemporary digital media in addition to older analogue practices (Connell and Gibson 2003; Panagakos 2003). The importance of musical recordings for specific communities, and especially those of migrants, has been evident since the early days of phonography, when the commercial exploitation of this market was first suggested. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the North American records market was divided into ethnic catalogues and some of these exploited the strong sentimental and nostalgic involvement connected to listening to this music by explicitly targeting migrants. Ranging from Caruso to the songs played by street musicians of the main American towns (Kelly 1988; Kenney 2003; Spottswood 1992), Italian music made up a significant portion of these catalogues. Often these records would

make themselves vehicles for the diffusion of stereotypes, contributing to the creation of preconceptions as much as they were creating communities. Many records of southern Italian music, for example, were full of references to the Sicilian Mafia (Fugazzotto 2010). The importance of musical practices and sound recordings for maintaining identities in diasporic communities is even more crucial wherever the connection with the country of origin is less clearly defined and the imaginary component is more pronounced. A good example is provided by Shelemy in her work on Syrian Jews: it is a musical genre, the Pizmon, that is crucial to preserving a complex and hardly definable identity such as that of the Jews from Aleppo who moved to the USA (Shelemy 1998).

As explored below, Chiaffitella and his New York friends come from an Arbëresh village, founded in Italy by Albanian refugees in the sixteenth century. Theirs is a second-stage diaspora, able to preserve in these transitions traces of both Italian and Albanian identities. Chiaffitella seems fully aware of the value of his recordings whenever he plays back music, songs and instrumental pieces, but also soundmarks with a strong power to evoke memories of the village, such as the church bells on a holiday. But voices are the sounds that attract him the most: voices of known people who send greetings from a faraway place or send messages in Arbëresh and Italian, able to provoke loving and engaging memories in those who listen.

Voice, thanks to its connection to language, communicative and artistic performances, and embodiment, is a complex phenomenon examined by philosophers, anthropologists and scholars of voice studies including Derrida, Zumthor and Ihde. Disembodied and (decon)textualised through recording, voice can be fixed on a new medium. In this process not only does it not lose its emotional charge, but it also returns it amplified during acousmatic listening; it becomes a new object, with a variety of new symbolic and evocative functions.

Sound souvenirs

The domestic and private use of technologies of recording applied to voices addressed to distant interlocutors is as old as the heyday of phonography. Phonographs allowing recording and playback became available on the market at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the time, sound recording was seen to have a future as a communication device, as talking postcards or as a support to stenography (Attali 1977: 90–96). In early twentieth century advertisements the phonograph was described as a talking machine. Even its inventor, Thomas Edison, described its future uses along similar lines (quoted in *The Talking Machine News* 1905: 12). The phonographic industry would

in fact have little interest for these uses; thanks to the introduction of flat disc records and the improvement of the quality of recordings, it would soon move to marketing works of music, selling the gramophone as a listening-only home appliance for pre-recorded music.

After the Second World War, recording technologies made a leap thanks to the introduction of magnetic tape, which due to its flexibility spread to professional contexts. The tape recorder, which allows both recording and playback, changed for good the way of working of recording studios, allowing experimentation and the development of new musical genres. The diffusion of experimental music laboratories, especially in Europe, bears witness to the versatility of magnetic tape supports. The new electroacoustic music produced in these centres created new compositional and aesthetic paradigms, which often used recorded voices as their favoured material (De Benedictis and Rizzardi 2000; Manning 2013: 19–98; Scaldaferrri 2014a).

At the same time, tape recorders appeared on the market that were aimed at amateurs and home environments. In their user manuals, as in the adverts of the time, they were described as tools to record family voices and create sound souvenirs, which were to be the sonic equivalent of family photographs. The underlying assumption was that sound souvenirs would take a more important role than photographs because ‘sounds carried more meaning than photos’ (Bijsterveld and Jacobs 2009: 29).

The expression ‘sound souvenir’ was first introduced by Schafer to designate ‘endangered sounds, such as the sounds of pre-industrial life, that could be captured by recording technologies or stored in archives, and thus remembered after their extinction’ (1977: 240). It is recovered and discussed by Bijsterveld and van Dijck (2009b), for whom it takes on a different meaning: the variety of sound artefacts, recorded on various media – reel to reel tapes, cassette tapes, long-playing albums – that acquire value because they contain traces of a family or private event that is meant to be preserved. Their playback allows the listener to re-live through memory an event at which they were present, but can also acquire meaning for listeners who were absent. Once recorded, sound acquires a power of its own, able to evoke the feelings of a past event:

It is not merely through words that people either consciously or involuntarily recall past events and emotions, but also through sound and music. These memories of past events include the sensory experiences of having listened to particular recordings and interacted and tinkered materially with the devices that play them. Audio technologies allow people to reopen such experiences ... cultural practices in which people make use of audio technologies

to elicit, reconstruct, celebrate, and manage their memories, or even a past in which they did not participate. (Bijsterveld and van Dijk 2009a: 11)

During the 1950s, the tape recorder was presented as a way to stockpile family memories to be preserved in time: voices of children or elders, or bringing into the home sounds recorded outside. While gramophones and radios only allowed a passive experience of content created by others, the tape recorder allowed an active role. It could be used to record conferences or radio programmes, or one's favourite songs in a playlist always available – thus anticipating the introduction of the more convenient cassette tapes in the mid-1960s. The interaction between tape recorder and the radio left an impression on Chiaffitella, who often recorded radio songs and programmes on his tapes. In particular, in July 1969 he recorded the moon landing during a listening session with his fellow villagers, who had to keep a strict silence.

The tape recorder, though, was not able to attain success in the home-use market. It did not replicate the success of the radio, which became a feature of most home furnishings, or of the television, which in some ways replaced the fireplace. In their analysis, Bijsterveld and

5.1 San Costantino
Albanese, August 2016.
Chiaffitella's recording tools:
8mm projector and camera,
medium-format folding
photocamera and Recordio
tape recorder.



Jacobs (2009) show how one of the reasons the tape recorder never became a mass commodity was its inability to find a specific location in the home, having to shift from one place to the next and ending up set aside. At the same time, they show how the analogy with the family photo album had been overstated, mainly because of the different modes of fruition: playing back tape requires competence and time, unlike browsing photos.

These supposed weaknesses of the tape recorder are what made it fit for the use that Chiaffitella had in mind. A lover of technology, he had no problems handling the fragile magnetic tapes or storing them in an appropriate manner. Perhaps precisely because the tape recorder had no designated place in the home, Chiaffitella felt encouraged to take it on his transoceanic journeys, together with the voltage adapters he needed in the two continents. His Recordio machine, bought in the USA in the mid-1950s, travelled multiple times on the New York–Naples ship route, before ending up, after his death, in an attic in San Costantino, with other unwanted objects.

Setting up the tape reels for the recording, and especially in order to listen back to them in group sessions, were for Chiaffitella ceremonial moments, with their own gestures and timings. These were ritual moments, requiring silence and concentration, with a solemnity that was alien to a photographic album. The voices and the sounds that entered and left the machine acquired an interpersonal and collective value. Chiaffitella's sound souvenirs supported the preservation of a collective memory, which was always rich in linguistic, historic and imaginative implications (Halbwachs 1992).

Identity on the move

Chiaffitella's biography is part of the massive flux of Italian migration towards New York and the American continent. He came from an Arbëresh village, though, and maintained traces of its complex history in the USA. There, the Arbëresh call themselves *Albanesi*, using the Italian term for Albanians (Renoff et al. 1989), which is distinct from *Shqiptar*, used in Albanian to refer to people coming from the Albanian nation, as if to retain a trace of both identities that make up their heritage and at the same time to state their distinctiveness. In Italy, the Arbëresh villages have preserved for five centuries an identity in which language plays a crucial role, along with specific oral traditions, Catholic faith of Byzantine Rite, costumes and music (Ahmedaja 2001). Even though the official language studied in school is Italian, the Arbëresh language has been preserved in everyday practice but with frequent linguistic loans. Only in 1999, in Italy, did a law on the safeguarding of linguistic minorities put in place measures aimed at its

protection. The Arbëresh villages of the mountains of southern Italy have shared the same poverty and marginality of their neighbours, including the mass migration towards America. During the 1920s, the time when Chiaffitella was settling in the USA, San Costantino Albanese had about 1500 residents, who today are less than half this number due to outgoing migration.

New Jersey and in particular the New York area were one of the main targets of Arbëresh migration. Some blocks in Jersey City or Brooklyn at the beginning of the twentieth century were entirely populated by Arbëresh, who intermarried and referred to their community with the term *katund* (village). Still today, as became evident during research visits made during the 2010s to the American descendants and friends of Chiaffitella, they hold gatherings, dance to traditional musical instruments and prepare characteristic food, such as the *kulaçi* or Easter bread – now more commonly baked for Thanksgiving. In Chiaffitella's American photographs there are often celebrations and traditional costumes. He often appears as a member of the *Coro d'Italia* with an Arbëresh outfit. The recordings echo a trace of the two diasporas in the constant use of three languages, depending on the familiarity of the speakers or intended audience: English, Italian or Arbëresh. Chiaffitella translates as much as he can, constantly trying to make everything understandable for everyone.

The Arbëresh language is handed down mainly through oral tradition, and its literature, though important, was the domain of a small class of intellectuals. Furthermore, its oral tradition is steeped in a system of versification connected to rhythmic formulas, that relies on forms of embodiment (Scaldaferri 2014b). These characteristics, as will become apparent, also echo in some of Chiaffitella's recordings.

Nouns and verbs referring to technology, absent in Arbëresh, are often Italian loans or neologisms whose semantic nuances can reveal cognitive mechanisms and contain specific cultural references. For the action of sound recording, especially of voices and songs, the verb used is *marr*, which means to take, grab, but also to learn. *Marr* is also used to explicitly refer to learning by heart a song on the basis of listening, with a process of mouth-to-ear transmission typical of oral tradition. The expression *marr vesh*, literally 'taking by ear', is also common, with the meaning of listening with extreme attention and obeying, memorising a command from which one cannot be exempted.

In the lexicon and imaginary of the people who first know the 'marvel' of the tape recorder, gestures not yet consolidated in use are given meaning by first connecting them to more familiar actions that are considered to be related. The innermost meaning of the action of recording voice is assimilated to learning, implying a humanisation of the machine. The recorder is an ear that learns something to then

repeat it, as a person would after having listened closely to a song to make it available in another place and time. In this sense, Chiaffitella's tape recorder became for his fellow villagers a sort of friendly interlocutor to whom one could teach things. For those who were older and less familiar with technology recording was more than a mechanical process, to the point that they would address the machine using the parameters of teaching within oral tradition. The disembodied voice was entrusted to a new body, with almost human characteristics, which 'took' the voice and preserved it on the journey to make it resound again in front of the addressee.

Such instances of proximity between humanity and machine emerge from Chiaffitella's tapes, together with the awareness, shared by the people he recorded, of the uniqueness of the recording experience. As we will see in the next paragraph, Chiaffitella's trust in the contribution of technology to the preservation of the memories and identity of a community also emerges, especially thanks to the use of recorded voice and the emotions it can provoke.

'As my voice will come to America, I wish I could come there too'

Group recording and listening sessions are moments with an intense ritual value. They create a sense of community around the tape recorder, perceived as an object capable of creating connections that go beyond spatial and temporal barriers. An emblematic example is a tape from a recording session carrying the handwritten label 'The voice of the relatives and friends of San Costantino Albanese – to their loved ones in America, year 1958'. Chiaffitella had invited into his home and gathered around the tape recorder some of those who had relatives in America. Using different languages – Arbëresh, English or Italian – depending on the interlocutors, Chiaffitella played an authoritative role of master of ceremonies. He provided an introduction to the message of each guest, and his words betrayed a sense of wonder about the possibility of owning a machine able to record the voice and allow it to travel across the ocean.

With this tape recording machine, we are sure living in a marvellous age, when even if we are separated from our friends and relatives by a great distance ... you will have the great pleasure of hearing the voice of your relatives. And now I will talk in Albanian: I wish I could know what your heart is going to feel when you hear the voices of these relatives you left behind among the mountains of S. Costantino many years ago. Heaven knows how much they'd like to tell you, and how much they'd like to thank you for all that you've done for them.

The tone of the messages recorded on this occasion varies depending on the age and experience of those present; these variations reveal different levels of awareness of the function of the medium. Among the recordings is a message by the brothers Andrea and Franco Schillizzi, then just over twenty years old. They greet their far-away relatives with enthusiasm, expressing – as Chiaffitella had done – their amazement at the device that allows the voice and its emotional charge to travel, and gives listeners the sensation of having their relatives right beside them when they hear their voices. Note how the brothers switch to the Italian language (italicised in the translation) to emphasise their enthusiasm for the new technology:

I am your nephew Franco, and just as my voice will come to America, I wish I could come there too; *we thank* uncle Peppino for bringing *our beautiful voices* to you in America, where you can hear *it in all comfort*, as if we were next to you.

I am your nephew Andrea, and I thank uncle Peppino who has been so clever and has brought from America *this marvellous thing* that lets you listen to our voices.

The recording session opens, however, with a heart-rending message: the greeting of the old miller, *ce Dhurana* – Dorina Abitante – to her daughter Maria, who departed to America thirty years before with part of the family. Because the old woman is addressing a daughter she has neither seen nor heard since the day of her departure, she performs a ritual lament that closely follows the melodic modes and formulations of a funeral lament (*vajtim*). *Ce Dhurana* lists the names of their relatives, uses interjections and ritual expressions: all markers of the structure of the funeral lament carefully identified around the same time by De Martino (1958):

O my Maria / what are you doing now / how I wish I could see you, my daughter / how is Giuseppe, my daughter / and Antonio, how is Antonio / and how is his wife / and how is Celestina / and how is little Giuseppe / Pietro, how is he my daughter / how I wish I could see you, my daughter / my daughter, how is Stella / my sister / how are all our relatives, oh my daughter / and we here are all well o my daughter / because they all love me, and I keep going / my daughter, the many things you sent me / you supported me with sweets, my daughter / o my heart, o my daughter / Maria I thank you for all the grace Christ gives me / so many years you've been away / and I wish much peace to you and your sons.

The funereal atmosphere of this song is perhaps especially apparent to a contemporary listener who, with hindsight, is able to grasp the tragic

proportions taken by mass emigration to North and South America in the first decades of the twentieth century (Baily 2004; Gabaccia 2003).

In the imagination and spoken practice of the inhabitants of San Costantino, as is the case with many towns and villages that have experienced transatlantic emigration to the US, 'America' (*Merka*) was the land of well-being by definition, a place where one went to make one's fortune. From there, one could gain an income that would support the family, all the while keeping up hope of going back home one day. It is worth noting that the help was often in the form of small symbolic tokens, like the sweets that *ce Dhurana* occasionally received from her daughter via Chiaffitella. There existed, however, also a complementary and opposite vision of America: the *America sperduta* (America of the lost), or *America disgraziata* (unfortunate America), where emigrants who gave no further news of themselves were said to have disappeared, whether because they had died, or because, having failed to make a fortune, they were too ashamed to keep in touch.

In rural society the metrical structuring of vocal expression could accompany not only the event of a funeral, but also traumatic moments of separation like a bride's goodbye to her parents, or a mother's goodbye to a conscripted son. The discipline of rhythm and melody was to serve as a means of controlling emotion and keeping composure while publicly expressing one's feelings, a means of banishing the risks of the phenomenon that De Martino termed 'crisis of presence' (1958: 126, 2012). For *ce Dhurana* the message to her daughter is not a personal emotional outburst but a greeting to be performed in public, in front of Chiaffitella and her other relatives. Therefore, she could only express herself by adopting a ritual form, recalling stereotypical formulas well worn by tradition.

Besides, this greeting was also to be entrusted to someone who would then pass it on to her daughter. Her greeting was to be 'taken', in the sense we explored earlier, so as to be reproduced later. For the illiterate generation, a text could be better memorised by an external subject if it was metrically formalised. As highlighted by early research on orality and literacy, the better a text is organised in verses, the more easily it will be memorised and reproduced (Ong 1982: 33–6). For the old miller, it is the metrical structure of the song that will allow it to extend itself beyond the individual performance. Verses and song-form allow the message to be easily learned by either a human ear or a machine that is listening and memorising; the content of the performance may then be reproduced later in front of the intended final recipient.

After *ce Dhurana's* lament, Chiaffitella likely sensed that the remaining messages, especially those from female guests, were running the risk of turning into a series of formal lamentations; in passing the microphone to the next guest, he asks her pre-emptively not to sing any laments (*mos bëni bir birò!*) and to limit herself to a few words of



5.2 San Costantino Albanese, August 2016. Some of Chiaffitella's tapes and 8mm reels with labels in his own handwriting.

greeting. His sister-in-law obeys and does not intone a lament, but she does address the tape recorder as if she were communicating with 'something' that joined the recording apparatus to the distant figure of Maria. She thus begins by saying '*Nimirenj me Marien dopo trent'anni*' (I speak again with Maria *after thirty years*). Like the Schillizzi brothers, Chiaffitella's sister-in-law also uses a few Italian words in her message. She seems to do so in order to emphasise the special occasion that is the recording session, but also to hint at the foreignness of this machine that 'takes' her culture and language.

The laughter of Fiorina

The tape recorded in San Costantino in 1958 – which begins with the lament of the old miller – can be put side by side with one labelled 'The famous laughter of Fiorina Calimano, Brooklyn US 1960'. It was recorded while Chiaffitella was in Brooklyn, having dinner at the house of the emigrant couple Fiorina and Nicodemo, so as to listen with them to the tapes recorded in the village, and then record new greetings to take back there on his next trip. Faced with the tape recorder, Fiorina could only burst into uncontrollable laughter – which then gave the title to the tape – as if, in the absence of a guiding social

context, she were unable to keep her emotions in check. Nicodemo used instead a more traditional and rigorous mode of address in order to speak to the distant fellow villagers: a metrically formalised text. This was not, however, a lament – which is a predominantly female form – but a poem (*një kënkë*) in which he expressed his gratitude towards Chiaffitella for this wonderful experience. Here we are probably dealing with a nostalgic reprise of a social practice common in Nicodemo's youth: that of formulaic verse greetings shared among villagers. As is clear from Nicodemo's recorded command to the recorder – 'thuaj' (you must tell) – he humanises the artificial ear that is to 'take' his verses and later sound forth his greeting.

You must tell them: this is the song that Nicodemo told / because
I like that village so much / but I am too far away and cannot go
/ but tonight I have dear Peppino as my guest / and he's making
merry with us / may the Lord grant him every wish / now and for
a thousand years / you must be merry when he comes to the village
/ because he spends his whole life in merriment / be careful / and
don't bother him / hearten him and have fun / because he will get
you to know the world.

'The song that will forever remain in the history of our village'

Tapes and recorders are media whose use can serve different purposes. The years in which Chiaffitella makes use of his tape recorder are the same that mark the scholarly 'discovery' of Italian traditional music through field research, thanks to the CNSMP and the *Accademia di Santa Cecilia*. Researchers from these institutions, with the use of tape recorders, captured the musical practices of rural Italy. A decisive moment is represented by De Martino and Carpitella's trips (Giuriati 1995; Magrini 1994), as well as Alan Lomax's Italian journey between 1954 and 1955 (Lomax 2008), partly accompanied by Carpitella, and the resulting publication of two LPs on Italian music in the Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music series. The records include a selection of songs of the Arbëresh, called *Albanians* and recorded by Carpitella and De Martino in 1954 (Lomax 1956). On that occasion the two scholars recorded twelve songs, capturing on tape for the first time the musical traditions of San Costantino Albanese (Scaldfarri 1994).

Chiaffitella often recorded music and traditional Arbëresh or Italian songs; sometimes he would even sing in them. In his recordings, he shows a clear intent to give a sense of the event where the song is being performed and the meanings it assumes from that context. He

would also decide to point his microphone on sound events from the local soundscape, if they had a specific evocative value. This was the case with the festive church bells, a soundmark whose importance had already been acknowledged by Schafer:

The most salient sound signal in the Christian community is the church bell. In a very real sense it defines the community, for the parish is an acoustic space, circumscribed by the range of the church bell. The church bell is a centripetal sound; it attracts and unifies the community in a social sense, just as it draws man and God together. (1977: 54)

On the other hand, the ethnomusicologists who worked in Basilicata at the time would instead focus on the capture of a 'musical document', almost removed from its context, in order to analyse its stylistic and structural characteristics. This process of removal is evident in the comparison between the records published alongside their research, and their unedited tapes, which often preserve traces of the context and of the interaction between musicians and researchers (Agamenone 2015).

Chiaffitella is motivated by different aims, and he conceives of the recording technology as a means to evoke feelings. His interest is never for the specific musical piece on its own, but in the event as a whole and in the network of relationships and affects that make it meaningful. So he never records songs isolated from their context – they are inserted in a continuous stream of conversations; they are introduced and commented on, in a sort of dialogue, with singers and musicians. Such an approach, though springing from motivations that are far from scholarly, makes his recordings essential to understanding the extent of social relationships on which musical practices always rest (Small 1998; Torino 2008).

In addition to recording private events with the purpose of creating sound souvenirs for distant friends, Chiaffitella also recorded important collective events in San Costantino. In these moments he had an awareness of creating a 'monument' of the event through sound, making it part of cultural heritage as a memory that would make the past audible for the next generations. This awareness emerges in a tape labelled 'The traditional song of the *valle* of the Albanians, sung by the women in their dazzling costumes. Recorded on Easter Monday 1957'. The *valle* or *vallja* is an important ritual that used to take place every year and involved dancing and singing. A group of women, dressed in festive costumes and led by some men, would walk the streets of the village for hours, singing with a timing synced to their dance steps.

The lyrics sung on that occasion are one of the mainstays of Arbëresh poetic tradition: the story of *Kostandin* and *Jurendina* tells of the dead



man who rises from his grave to keep a promise. It's the myth of the *besa*, the promise to keep at any cost, which has its roots in Balkan epics and is present in all Arbëresh villages. Chiaffitella's recording, at about eighteen minutes in duration, represents the first complete version of this song, which includes antiphonal singing with two alternating groups of women. Recordings of similar performances of the *vallja* by researchers – including De Martino and Carpitella – are limited to fragments of the duration of a few minutes, perhaps due to a lack of awareness of the value of this song, or due to the cost of the tape.

The importance for Chiaffitella of the ritual of the *vallja* of Easter 1957 is clear from the fact that he dedicates a whole tape to it, without worrying about durations. During the dancing phases of the *vallja*, out in the streets, Chiaffitella followed the group and took pictures. Once the dance was over, he invited the women to his house and put them in front of the tape recorder, asking them to perform the song, which was recorded in its entirety, or more precisely for the whole duration of the tape.

The recording session is opened by an emotional and solemn introduction in which Chiaffitella voices the importance of the moment. The recording this time is not just something addressed to friends and relatives in the US, but to all those who in the future will be able to

5.3 San Costantino Albanese, January 2020. The door of the dressing rooms of the football pitch sponsored by Chiaffitella, reading 'Zio (Uncle) Peppe 1947'

listen to the tape and imagine the intensity of that moment. He even asks each singer to tell their name – which they do with some embarrassment – as if to give each component of the group an individual identity.

Today is Easter Monday, year 1957. It is a day we will all remember because today, my heart tells me, this is perhaps the last *vallja*. *Valljas* that for years have cheered up this beautiful village, and when one day we'll listen to these voices and these songs, our heart will sigh for the songs of today. So I'd like you to sing the song you did *Ka Konget* [village location], the song that will forever remain in the history of our village [clapping]. These women who take part in the *vallja*, you who listen, I wish you could see what a beautiful *vallja*, these women with *keza* and *çofa* [parts of the headdress of a married woman], their shirts all ironed and embroidered. Now you'll hear the names of these women here present. Let's start from my wife. What is your name? [each woman tells her name] Now sing the most beautiful song you ever performed in my house, the song of the *vallja* of Kostandin.

Rural southern Italy during the 1950s was a context in motion. The years of post-war and the economic boom brought much change in small villages, including the Arbëresh ones. Chiaffitella probably had a sense of the incoming change, being an attentive traveller who had had a chance to visit the village periodically and see the broader Italian context from the vantage point of his experience of a migrant worker. Some of these same feelings pushed some researchers to practice urgent ethnography, gathering and documenting traces of Italy's rural ways of life that were thought to be about to be lost for good.

From the testimonies of the elders of San Costantino emerges how the ritual of the *vallja* of 1957, today audible in Chiaffitella's recordings and visible in his photographs, was in fact the last performance in its itinerant format, as a ritual in which the inhabitants took to the streets to reinforce their ties with the place, in the name of *besa*. The village, struck by poverty, was in the midst of different forms of emigration, this time towards Europe and northern Italy, and was abandoning many of its cultural practices. These would be recovered decades later, in decontextualised and spectacularised forms, in the frame of folkloric festivals with a nostalgic angle, as part of processes of heritagisation.

A loyal companion

In 2015 Stella Scutari, the relative who took care of Chiaffitella during the final years of his life, found a box in her attic with about two hundred film negatives made by Chiaffitella, which enlarged the

existing archive of dozens of photographic prints. In this archive there are images that echo the situations portrayed by De Martino's photographers, together with photos of friends and social occasions in the USA. Often Chiaffitella himself appears in the photographs, asking his friends and relatives to take the shot. These photos highlight his active role in the events he recorded, where he is sometimes among the singers. The discovery of these negatives confirms the long span of his activity as a photographer – all his adult years, including the time he spent in the US – compared with his relatively brief use of the tape recorder – between the end of the 1950s and the 1960s.

In the box were a group of colour negatives shot in June 1957 in San Costantino, on the day of Stella's wedding, of whose existence she was unaware. In what are likely to be the first colour photographs ever shot in the village, Chiaffitella portrays the bride and groom, relatives and friends, plus the women in their festive 'dazzling' costumes – finally rendered in colour. The choice of colour marked a special occasion in honour of Stella, who would take care of him at the end of his life and would become his heir.

The biggest surprise, though, came the following year, when in one of the tapes, unlabelled and wound backwards as if to keep its

5.4 San Costantino Albanese, August 2019. Stella Scutari holds a photograph of herself on the day of her wedding, shot in 1957 by Giuseppe Chiaffitella.



content hidden, was found a recording from the wedding. The day after the wedding the newlyweds held a more intimate reception for close friends and relatives in their home. Chiaffitella brought his recorder, to capture the voices of those in attendance. The content of this tape remained unknown to everyone until 2016, when it was digitised and Stella could listen to the voices of people who had passed away decades before. The tape acquired the value of a resonant tomb (Sterne 2003: chapter 6), able to provoke strong emotions. Chiaffitella had recorded the voices of the people he had portrayed in colour the day before, perhaps aware that sound could transmit more meaning than a photograph.

It is telling to remark how this is the only case in which Chiaffitella, even though he shot colour images and recorded voices, did not share any photographic prints with the subjects, as if the images had been for private use only. Before playing a role in the building of a sense of community among his fellow villagers, sound souvenirs and photographs probably answered a personal need to build and maintain in his memory a network of loved ones. After the death of their son, Chiaffitella's wife continued to live in Italy. The couple were reunited for only a few years when Chiaffitella settled back in the village and dedicated his old age to supporting young people, for whom he sponsored the building of a football pitch. In many ways Chiaffitella did not have a family of his own. His affects were split between a wife who lived in Italy and a circle of friends living in places a two-week ship journey away. Evocative voices and images were for him, then, primarily useful to rekindle a sense of identity, before they performed the same function for friends and fellow villagers. He was always the first listener, since the moment he used the tape recorder. His need to feel part of a community was played out through mediated memories, that were able to evoke meaningful emotions. He would listen to his recordings in private, especially those that did not need a label because they were not made to be shared with others.

If his friends were already anthropomorphising the tape recorder, teaching it to repeat correctly their greetings, Chiaffitella saw in the machine something more, a loyal companion, carried along from one end of the world to the other, across land and sea, always ready to incite a chain reaction of emotions and give a sense to his individual identity.

Conclusion

Dealing with archival sound recordings, as I did in this chapter, offers an opportunity to explore in other ways the function of listening as a research method. During ethnographic fieldwork, listening to the field is the initial source of knowledge; the sounds we record, and

later listen to, constitute a memory of our experience in the field. In the case of sound archives, listening to them is not connected with a personal experience in the field; we know sounds recorded in the past only in their mediated form. Listening to these recordings requires a comparison and completion with other materials and documents to reconstruct and imagine their context of origin. Listening is the starting point of a research which requires complementary information and documents.

The journey through Chiaffitella's materials represents an archival sonic ethnography; listening to the sounds fixed on tape, combined with his photos, historical documents and other information, provides a valuable perspective on the role of sound recordings and listening in building and sustaining a sense of identity (Panopoulos 2015). Moreover, as archival material, tapes and other objects involved in these processes constitute boundary objects (McMurray 2015: 265) whose importance and functions exceed their primary intended purposes as a medium, making of them objects of affection but also cultural objects at large.

Chiaffitella's recordings help us understand how recorded voices can be attributed social value, how they derive from negotiations between recordist and recorded person, and what functions and meanings they acquire once in their mediated form. Group identity in a diasporic context is maintained also thanks to the existence of listening communities, whose connections are not only imagined and symbolically constructed, but also built over time thanks to recording and listening practices.

Following three pages: a selection of prints, negatives and writings from the archives of Giuseppe Chiaffitella

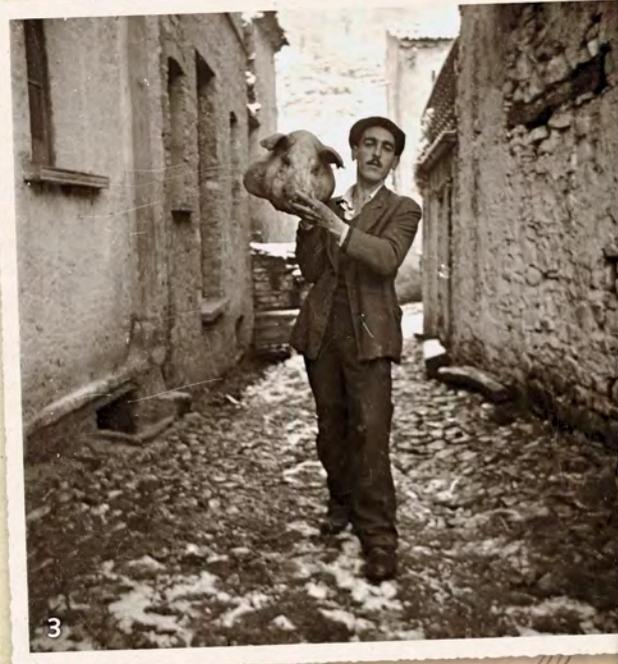
Tries to count his Wealth
 The blues caught me napping the other evening
 They were upon me without warning. That
 their strategy. Fortunately I
 counter attack in time. Inclia



St. Barrington - 30.7.48
 Scritto esclusivamente
 per la gioventu sportiva del
 nostro paese.
 Un cordialissimo saluto da chi si ricorda
 spesso di voi, e di quelli che nel 47 dettero
 opera, e denaro, nella speranza di poter
 dare finalmente al nostro paese un
 "Compo Sportivo" - che a secondo le ambizio-
 ne di allora doveva essere il piu
 bello in quella
 Ebbene per tante
 non si pote
 Uno dei ostacoli



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Barros

CORO D'ITALIA

SANDRO BENELLI, Director

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Group *Barros*

Name *Giuseppe Chiappitel*



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AS ITS SONGS. MEMBERS ARE REQUESTED TO PROVIDE THEMSELVES WITH AUTHEN-
TIC COSTUMES AND TO LEARN THE DANCES.

5.5 (Previous spread, left)

1. Chiaffitella's wife Maria (right) and her friend Domenica Cortese dressed in the traditional Arbëresh festive costume.
 2. Boys at the football pitch.
 3. The slaughter of a pig in the winter.
 4. Easter Monday, 22 April 1957. Women in festive costume perform the *vallja* in the streets of the village. Shortly thereafter they will move to the house of Chiaffitella to record the song on tape.
- Background: Letter with thoughts on the blues.

5.6 (Previous spread, right)

1. View of San Costantino Albanese.
 2. "The memorable time of the birth of the football pitch", sent to his friend Salvatore D'Amato, 1947.
 3. Photo souvenir sent to his neighbours Lorenzo and Rosa Scaldaferrì, 1961. Handwritten: 'From your friend Peppino'.
 4. Chiaffitella's wife Maria (right), in Arbëresh daily clothes, with workers in a field during harvest.
- Background: Letter to the young sportsmen of San Costantino, 1948.

5.7 (Facing)

1. Chiaffitella singing in the USA for his distant friends in Italy. Handwriting: 'How unhappy I am, away from you my friends. But if one day I'll see you again, I will sing for joy'.
2. Studio portrait autographed 'My best souvenir': Chiaffitella, his wife Maria and their infant son Salvatore, born in the USA. 5 September 1930, shortly before mother and son moved back to San Costantino.
3. Chiaffitella travelling. Background: Inside cover of his personal songbook as a member of *Coro d'Italia* choir.

Sound-chapter 5 – *Memories from a loyal companion*

This sound-chapter uses Chiaffitella's recordings from 1957–62 to create a narrative inspired by the pioneering compositional experiences of radio documentaries and electroacoustic music, which often revolved around recorded voices. Chiaffitella's own voice, which speaks in three different languages – English, Italian and Arbëresh – acts as a leitmotif. This main thread is woven with other voices in a plurality of moods and expressive registers, as well as with instrumental music.

