

## **Fieldwork research and website research. Keyword ‘Occitan music’**

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L'Italia nord-occidentale, in particolare il Piemonte e le aree transfrontaliere connesse alla vicina Francia hanno visto nascere negli ultimi decenni un particolare genere di musica neotradizionale: la cosiddetta *musica occitana*. Un primo cantiere di ricerca sulle espressioni sonore popolari nell'area fu avviato tra gli anni '60 e gli anni '70 del secolo scorso. Importanti campagne furono promosse dal mondo dell'etnomusicologia nazionale che proprio allora stava vivendo un momento di storico sviluppo. In parallelo e in congiunzione si stabilirono le basi per una ricerca interna alle realtà locali. Quest'ultimo processo scaturì un iniziale stadio di riappropriazione culturale, volto a evidenziare i confini di un'identità territoriale e politica. Dall'interpretazione del portato tradizionale ben presto si virò al piano della nuova composizione. Le recenti sperimentazioni, conservando un vincolo simbolico con il retroterra originario, hanno progressivamente assorbito linguaggi e strumenti comunicativi dall'esterno. Il presente lavoro ne analizza i risultati, focalizzando il crescente impiego di nuovi media.

In the last few decades North-western Italy, particularly Piedmont and the interregional area closely connected with France, has seen the birth of a distinctive genre: the so-called *Occitan Music*. The first fieldwork about the folk sound expression in this area started between the 1960s and 1970s. Significant research was promoted in the context of Italian ethnomusicology which was then living a historic period of development. At the same time, the basis for surveys within the local space was established. The latter process led to an initial phase of cultural reappropriation, designed to point out the confines of a territorial and political identity. The interpretation of traditional heritage soon turned towards modern composition. Recent experiences maintain a symbolic bond with the original background have absorbed languages and communication tools from outside. The present work analyzes the results of this process, focusing on the increasing adoption of new media.

**I**N this paper I would like to propose an analysis of the contemporary itinerary of the so-called *Occitan music*. Just like other ‘global’ labels, this distinctive formula is imposed on a homogenous expressive context, amongst a great multitude of record purchasers, assiduous concert-goers or dance lovers and in the general collective audience. However, it conceals complex reinvention dynamics, clear contrasts between convinced promoters and strict detractors, as well as long-standing internal conflicts.

The in-depth analysis of the resulting cultural and musical universe represents the heart of my inquiry route. The role of contemporary media channels and the vaster technological application will be the object of a fundamental critical reflection, in virtue of a position that is intrinsic to the current elaboration of stylistic and expressive modalities. This direction necessarily leads to a revision of the concept of field which today, more than ever, is a reunion of a virtual dimension and a real extension, and it also supplies the key for the understanding of the spaces of a new tendency, like a recomposed mosaic of traditional tiles.

As indicated by the denomination of *Occitan music*, we are faced with a reality in which the Italian territory is geographically circumscribed. It is located in the northwest of the country, within the borders of linguistic Piedmont, but with a specific concentration in the mountain valleys. More precisely, it comprises the zones included in the southwestern Alpine belt, next to the French Provençal region, an area of ideal reference and cherished contact. The localism of this phenomenon does not elude a full and progressive involvement in the field of the incidence of modern and past media instruments and channels. In actual fact, we can positively affirm that the confluence of polyhedral components in a homogeneous mould was the direct consequence, just as the mobile haven is today, of updated communicative means. Furthermore, as we shall see, this expressive manifestation seems to be so autonomous and isolated since it participates in a propagated ideal, esthetic and technological layout, closely joined to the central dynamics of a global cultural network.



vitality of the past, but the work of recovery, which became more concentrated from the second half of the 1960s onwards, was able to collect the token of numerous and refined domestic and collective vocal repertoires and important instrumental forms and uses with both festive and ceremonial destination. On the other hand, this operation highlighted and, in some cases, started to reinvigorate the still vital forces and the relative occasions of application; moreover, it continued in the re-emersion of other manifestations that were not completely left in oblivion.

More generally, in the decade between the 1960s and 1970s, the whole regional area saw the manifestation of a new dimension of ethnographic research, in which the consideration of musical heritage and its correspondence to multiple cultural traits gained absolute centrality. A chain of relationships weaned on the world of study and high cultural engagement, free from rigid academicism and ideologism and gathered around the central personality of Roberto Leydi, acted as a fundamental incitement. This condition and the collaborative terrain laid the basis, directly or secondarily, for the development of local experiences aimed at acquiring identity awareness. The incorporation of a musical 'self', also including performance competence, was a decisive step towards the involvement in a progressive direction and in opposition to mass culture. On the one hand, most experimentation at this time was condensed in small centres, close to the natural tradition sources. On the other hand, in almost the same period, even the urban milieu, especially the regional main city, Turin, was fascinated by the propulsive force of folk expression. In this sense, a significant role was played by an unprecedented type of manifestation: a *Folk festival*, organized in 1965-1966, almost unwittingly, was became a decisive occasion and crossroads between the early expression spaces that emerged through research, Mannerist forms of folk recovery, unknown paths of rehabilitation of foreign origin, modalities typical of the first phase of Italian folk music revival and germinal clues of new tendencies which were soon to ripen.<sup>1</sup> The latter, which developed over the following five-ten years in the urban setting, originated because of the will and industriousness of a new generation of actors. This experience was weakly linked to past itineraries, grounded in a popular, though far from mainstream, background and characterized by an attention directed to international stages.

The steps synthetically presented here lead to a temporal phase close to the first genesis of the Occitan 'genre', but also to the concomitant overlapping of actors and tendencies, to their opposition, as well as to the basic participation in a common horizon. Indeed, the neo-movements of the urban folk music revival – external in origin and culture to the Alpine areas of the linguistic and musical minority – established a first network of contacts with Alpine culture, since they were attracted by the allure of a primitive horizon, which they perceived and dreamt of and from which they drew inspiration.

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<sup>1</sup> DESTEFANIS - REPETTO 1965; VV.AA. 1966; *Folk Festival 2* (1966); *Folkfestival* (1998).

This very specific aspect – a sometimes-shared fascination, albeit with a different proximity to the objects of recovery – soon generated conflicts between local and urban groups. The clash reached its peak during another music festival in the ‘Piedmont area’, which saw the participation of urban bands involved in the revival of repertoires which were autochthonous to the specific Alpine sub-area.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, the ingredients blended in the initial urban mixture, which was based on juvenile experiences, came from record production and from different branches of the French *musique trad*, itself a mediator of British folk music revival. This source, temporarily anticipating the new Italian course of musical recovery, was joined by the recourse to fieldwork vinyl recordings converted to a functional use.<sup>3</sup> These actually allowed a first unknown, but real, internal alterity to be discovered which, in the peculiar established direction, became the material for an experimentation of modes and filters coming from abroad. The phenomenon also comprised the adoption of sources from erudite collections, mainly from the work from a century before of the folklorist Costantino Nigra, with unprecedented aims.<sup>4</sup>

As a specular phenomenon, albeit not a partially consequent one, the new system took root among active young people in the surrounding Alpine valleys. Since the 1970s a complex set of relationships established with foreign panoramas, specifically the French ones, firstly, thanks to the affirmation of the recording medium, and later through more direct acquaintances. As we shall see, the next step would be an autonomous but stylistically independent intervention.

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<sup>2</sup> The festival was not completely disconnected from the Turin experience described above, but it distinguished itself for its ideals and the media aspect because of a total harmony with the new expressive trend. It took place in the Piedmont town of Bra at the end of the 1970s with the name of *Canté j'euw* (a depleted reference to a traditional Easter collection, as a symbol of one of the research experiences that had evolved locally in the previous decade). This event was moreover the first goal of an operative unit which would lead, with a similar orientation but bent on other interests, to the present somewhat controversial enterprise of *Slow Food*. I wish to recall here one of the several discussions that the external experiences caused in the milieu of the alpine cultural movements, which clarifies the terms of the debate and illustrates the ideological premises of the reaction: «We began by ascertaining that it is a well-defined ethnic group that generated this culture: the Occitan ethos, and it is above all this one that has to take it back; only the ones who live and have profound links with a cultural reality can take possession of it in a correct way, otherwise the result is an expropriation against the Occitan people. It is useful and necessary to make this discourse because we have begun to glimpse weird and dangerous attempts in this field, it suffice to think that Piedmont Region and ARCI in their ‘cultural’ program for this summer preferred to have Occitan culture represented not by those who live and practice it in the territory, but by odd groups such as “Prinse Raimund” [...] which grabbed pieces of our culture, completely altered them and now go in the valleys and elsewhere as its bearer». (CAVALCANTI 1978, p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> Some of the declared sources were: COGGIOLA - LEYDI 1965, VIGLIERMO 1974, LEYDI - PIANTA - SANGA 1974, GRUPPO SPONTANEO DI MAGLIANO ALFIERI 1978.

<sup>4</sup> The collection is *Canti Popolari del Piemonte*, assembled by Costantino Nigra and published in 1888. It is meaningful that the first two Turin folk revival groups both adopted names coming from a text and a title of two ballads from that collection: respectively *Prinsi Raimund* and *La Lionetta*.

The new climate revolutionized the traditional pouring and exchange mechanisms between nearby populations, which had always been active in the boundary area, and which is partly directly documented and partly visible in the repertoires as a sort of watermark. This equal and twined relation was succeeded by external expressive and media supremacy, seen, on this side of the border and by the new actors of the musical scene, as a redeeming and liberating instrument and so welcomed with admired emulation.

### **The initial stages of a music renaissance**

This composite panorama, which I have broadly outlined here, represents the context on which a homogeneous musical universe is constituted. The first stage saw the formation of a canonical organization, characterized by favoured forms, instrumental adoptions, sound imprints, performance practices, symbolic attributes and communication vehicles. It was thus able to firmly take root in the 'original' terrain and appears today appears to act 'in reverse', like a naturalized and dominant model.

In my recent research I was able to examine some of these processes. I concentrated on the current soundscape of the main and ancestral Alpine Carnival feast, still alive in the *Baìo* of Sampeyre area, forty years after the documentation and divulgation work carried out by Roberto Leydi (with Bruno Pianta, Glauco Sanga, Italo Sordi and Ferdinando Scianna: cfr. LEYDI 1972; LEYDI - PIANTA - SANGA 1974). Since it was, and still is, an event that is invested with a supreme representativeness in the ritual projection of several identities,<sup>5</sup> and has acquired, also for objective reasons, the traits of a 'musical reservation', it constituted the first space of an operative engagement, which over time became a celebration of the 'authenticity' and re-union with a primordial source. First of all, the research pinpointed the critical conditions of the traditional music practices connected to the ritual, which were compromised by a global weakening of the repertoires and by the performing feebleness of a reduced number of old musicians. The reaction of the young people, who by then were engaged in a dual struggle, coupling brave autonomist claims and ardent cultural regeneration, dealt with those problematic tangles through the recordings on tape of the 'extinguishing' sound heritage and through a second strategy of a pragmatic relaunch. Exactly on this last level, the adopted solutions were decisive; in fact, because of a lack of internal alternatives, of an undeniable technical efficiency and of an ideologically not perceived distance, the promoters decided to involve external performers – in

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<sup>5</sup> I intentionally use a plural definition because the panorama of the involved actors became progressively polyhedral. The feast, already revisited in the abstraction of a local élite and concretely recomposed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the subject – in more recent times and with sometimes passionate conflicts – of divergent interpretations (the most internal and localist one, the political and autonomist one, the external and revivalist one, the promotional and touristic one).

particular, the Nice group *Lou Bachas*- for the new rendition, the recording and the consequent ‘transplantation’ of repertoires.

The first recording operation in 1973 was actually entirely internal and located itself between research and recovery experiences. It was indeed the recording on three 45 rpm records of the *Baïo* musics performed by the last old diatonic button accordion player, Giovanni *Jouan* Bernardi (ANGHILANTE - BOSCHERO - DEMATTEIS 1973). At the end of the decade it was followed by a second record, exclusively devoted to high Varaita Valley repertoires, whose very title showed the already established and unmistakable explicit attribute of Occitan music (BOSCHERO 1985). This was followed by a work dedicated to the low Varaita Valley (BOSCHERO - PERON 1989).

These initiatives were not only the true seal of the ideal connection and cooperation with the music revival world beyond the Alps; they also represented the test bench for young local performers, most of whom had been trained in this context, and lastly, paid homage, though somewhat on the fringe, to the main bearers of the tradition.<sup>6</sup> The action was completed by a third LP – this time dedicated to the violin versions of the *Baïo* musics, collected from the old player Giuseppe Galliano, alias *Juzèp da’ Rous* – which, because of the specificity of the repertoire and style, adopts an unorthodox conservative procedure of ‘musical restoration’, based on the model of cultivated genres.<sup>7</sup>

Thanks to these operations, especially the first ones, and then through the crossing or parallel ways, the essential itinerary of musical recovery developed. Several accounts report the spirit of those days, as well as the contrapositions between the different fronts that soon arose. Here I wish to quote an exemplar account signed by Gianpiero Boschero, the central ideologue and promoter of the renovation. The place discussed in the report is symbolic: a small hamlet in the central Varaita Valley elected as ‘place of the miracle’. While the occasion of the reportage is accidental, we can nonetheless identify some significant elements. First of all, the article underlines the re-establishment of an indigenous musical repertoire, primarily intended for dance. Then, it names the main protagonists – the local performers appearing in those years – especially Sergio Berardo, who was to have a key role in the following processes.

Just as in the LPs, we also find a tribute to the old musicians as bearers of traditional memory. The whole initiative saw the propulsive energy and the participation of the young people within a circumscribed community and according to a sort of ‘generational agreement’. Finally, the report gives an

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<sup>6</sup> This decision was motivated by its promoters on a double plan. The publication of ‘historical’ interpretations was limited because the advanced age of the performers made those imprecise and the final result would have represented a disrespect for the same informers. On the other hand, these recordings would not assume the priority function of a new circulation, of direct use and of exemplarity of the new operation.

<sup>7</sup> For an analytic examination of the adopted procedures, see: RASCHIERI 2013.

interesting image of the formation of an enlarged community, marked by the different origin of its members, around the affirmation of the belonging to a physical and ideal space.

Sunday the 28th of May, the celebration of Saint Maurice of winter took place in the hamlet of San Maurizio di Frassino. [...] They played our dances, the “countrodanso”, the “courento”, the “gigo” and several others, which started around six in the evening and lasted long after midnight. Good players did not lack: Walter, Daire, Sergio; but especially appreciated was “Melinot de Coustan”, capable player of mouth accordion. The most beautiful thing of the night was the wonderful atmosphere during dancing. This was possible, first and foremost, thanks to the local youth, who are very attached to their land and very united among them. But it is also the demonstration that in Varaita Valley a new manner of being together is developing, through the recovery of the best and most authentic aspects of our culture. Seeing all these youths coming up to San Maurizio from every village of the Valley and also from Maira and Grana Valleys [...], seeing the kids dancing marvelously well the old dances, seeing elders not even catching their breath between a dance and the following one, it was the best proof of the vitality of our culture and of the will of rebirth of our people.

(BOSCHERO 1979, p. 2)

At the beginning, the phenomenon presents trans-border cooperation initiatives, and then autonomous experiences, which are inevitably moulded by the entrenched forms of mediation. This very complexity of reinterpretation was the ground for new ensembles representing the wider regional area and the means of a further diffusion of clichés, extended to a part of northern Italy. From this time onwards, alternating phases of co-participation in common projects by performers of different origins took place in the pursuit of a transformed professional typology, itself a product of popular music modalities. The consequences in the delimited territory of the ‘Occitan valleys’ quickly appeared and were revealed through the creation of stable musical groups, which were provided with a modern organizational asset and promotional setup.

The ancestor and champion of this recent process is the *Lou Dalfin* group, active since 1982, which progressively shifted towards the folk rock genre, thereby gaining wide popularity and audience success. This very experience, which has been going on for thirty years, is still incredibly able to update itself, and catalyze identity impulses, imposing itself as a supreme sound effigy. Through direct action as well as through secondary propagation channels, a capillary network of instrument and dance didactics were established, numerous and very active satellite-groups arose and a change in the institutional self-representation of the broader territory also appeared (from signage to cultural politics).

### **The consolidation of new expression and communication dynamics**

Now that I have traced the fundamental coordinates of the phenomenon, it is possible to consciously deal with the more recent phases of maturation. A

significant stage of transition is represented by the decade of passage which, following global processes of immediate diffusion, saw the depletion of analogue recording systems, the conversion of performances to new forms of spectacularity, and the affirmation of social networks as a revolutionary field of action and interconnectedness.

To continue my analysis, from the bulk of available written sources I have chosen the ones that are closest to the following jump to the sphere of new communication systems: the direct narratives in first person. I shall mainly concentrate on the incredibly rich testimonies of the protagonists of musical life, concentrating on the experience of the *Lou Dalfin* group and its leader Sergio Berardo. It will become clear how this experience, even a personal one, occupies a central position, undoubtedly because of the dawning expressive modalities, but also because of the underlying ideological constructions. Some biographic data of the musician-inventor can give significant clues for further discussion. First of all, his starting position is midway between what I described as the elective place of musical tradition and the spaces of external involvement:

I was born in Turin, I came back to Caraglio just later.<sup>8</sup> In fact I was part of that generation of Occitans without roots and without cultural identity and for me the mythical Occitania was a significant datum point during my youth: I got the chance to hear certain sounds, to be exposed to a reality in a moment in which I was not yet an adult and in which the perception of what you see and what is around you is always transfigured, in a time of imprinting in other words.<sup>9</sup>

The initial drive, which is characteristic of the urban horizon, was soon canalized in the experimental outset of the Alpine environment and was located exactly in those salient spaces and moments of extreme contact between the sunset of a past musical world and the development of new loans:

In 1975 I was 17 and for some time I had been interested in Italian folk music, the one descending from American folk revival, to be clear. I already played guitar in a small group [...] when Dario Anghilante asked me to play with him. I accepted, so we started to play around. Usually we were joined by the Sampeyre folkloristic group with Juan Bernard and his diatonic accordion. At this point, I started to

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<sup>8</sup> Turin is the main city of Piedmont region and Caraglio is the town at the opening of the Grana Valley (Cozie Alps, Cuneo Province).

<sup>9</sup> <[http://www.occitania.it/ousitanio/old/t2\\_04\\_98.htm](http://www.occitania.it/ousitanio/old/t2_04_98.htm)> (excerpt from the newspaper «Ousitanio Vivo», April 1998).

play with *Sonaires Occitans* [*Sunaire Usitan*, A/N]<sup>10</sup>, and I gradually approached the Occitan nation.<sup>11</sup>

Entering from the outside but into the heart of a starting organism soon involved a personal investment and a distinctive stand as regards the construction of a cultural identity, a stand carried out primarily through the means of musical expression. His declarations dating to those years lead to a lucid vision of the ongoing phenomena and show a deep knowledge of the matrixes which generated them. Another piece of writing, connoted by a particular density, opens with a critical reflection on the current state of the musical trend and continues with a suggestion for a theoretical-cognitive advancement:

If we analyze the work done [...] recently, we would realize [...] that to an undeniable basic musical activity (both in quality and quantity terms) carried out in particular by the Center of “Sunaire Usitan” did not correspond a similarly in-depth theoretical debate on this issue. Without lingering on the reasons which produced this situation [...] I consider appropriate to start filling this gap with this paper». (BERARDO 1978, pp. 1-4)

Then, his analysis moves from the local reality to a unitary consideration of the territories connected to an ‘Occitan’ entity, in the perspective of a reunion, and not only in an ideal sense. The ‘folk music expression’ is thus observed in its historical and present subjection to the colonialism of the nations to which they officially belong. This introductory part is followed by the reasoned chronology of the interventions carried on in the name of a political militancy. Thus the paper continues with an internal evaluation of the primitive phase of the musical activism which was embodied, through the diffusion of global models, by singer-songwriters. Seeing the reasons behind this trend in the distinction between political struggle and the acquisition of a profound cultural awareness, the author formulates the central problem to be dealt with: «The first attention of Occitanism to music speaks in langue d’Oc, but not in Oc music» (BERARDO 1978, pp. 1-4). The new situation seems instead to be based on some favourable premises, «the stream of interest for ‘folklore’ which goes through the agonizing Western music» (BERARDO 1978, pp. 1-4) and the reached maturity of political intents. The heart of the consequent suggestion is the answer to the question contained in the title: *Which Occitan music?* This is central in my interpretation of the first steps towards the consolidation of a stable expressive asset.

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<sup>10</sup> The path of cultural rebirth had the rehabilitation and safeguarding of a linguistic unity as its cornerstones. The process was laborious and did not lack contrapositions. In particular, the spelling of an idiom or, better to say a linguistic koiné, did not reach a real agreement. The name quoted here, though referred to one of the first groups of this revival, exemplifies the gaps of autonomy in spelling the language.

<sup>11</sup> <[http://www.occitania.it/ousitanio/old/t2\\_04\\_98.htm](http://www.occitania.it/ousitanio/old/t2_04_98.htm)> (excerpt from the newspaper «Ousitanio Vivo», April 1998).

The purpose declared here is indeed to «search the most genuine roots of what remains of our culture, preparing the ground for the future building of national Occitan music» (BERARDO 1978, pp. 1-4). The consequent operative method, opposed to the effects of cultural colonization, supposed the finding of «peculiarity and originality, in technical canons, in the instruments to be employed, in the collection of different versions» (BERARDO 1978, pp. 1-4).

Finally, the closing part of this paper identifies the pragmatic actions to be carried out. Later, they will be fulfilled and deeply mark this precise stage, but they will especially open the way to a model which can be seen there in embryo and nowadays in its complete development:

The immediate recommendations [...] are to multiply the militant groups of musicians, the initiatives of animation in schools and in every situation, the “stages” to spread the most lively instruments of our music; the creation of new songs in traditional style by professionals, so that it is possible to give to Occitan people and especially to youths a cultural alternative which would itself become a political fact. This because it is our way of living life, the celebration, as a rejection of us the youths of the valleys to experience an emptiness of expression that colonialism imposed us. As the refusal of a decadence which is not ours.

(BERARDO 1978, pp. 1-4)

### **Interpreters, perspectives and means of Occitan music revival**

A unitary collective answer did not follow this indelible traced trail. An acceptance of the materialized model was vast and continuative, but it followed autonomous itineraries. The first expressive experiences of the Lou Dalfin group occurred in substantial isolation, then they slowed down, but prepared the ground for the evolution of the following decades.

In 1982 I founded Lou Dalfin. We recorded “En Franço iera de granda guera”, a record of songs and dances. I demanded Soulestrelh<sup>12</sup> to produce it but I got a refusal, so I was compelled to make it with Madau in Milan. “L’ase d’alegre” was our second record; up to 1985 we had several concerts, in the Valleys, in Italy and in Occitania, then we broke up. (BERARDO 1989, pp. 1-8)

On the base of the two mentioned records (LOU DALFIN 1982 and LOU DALFIN 1984, which I shall henceforth indicate according to their order of appearance: I and II)<sup>13</sup>, I suggest an interpretation of Lou Dalfin’s musical production, of their adhesion to the stylistic traits chosen as a model, of the real application of the recommendations presented in the programmatic plans I quoted. The tracks of these records are currently available on an unofficial YouTube channel.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, before passing to the particular analysis, I

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<sup>12</sup> A cultural association based in Sampeyre and active in the research about local music tradition. The pioneering recordings mentioned above were the result of its engagement in this sense.

<sup>13</sup> See <<http://loudalfin.it/index.php/discografia>>.

<sup>14</sup> [www.youtube.com/user/AlsatianKnight](http://www.youtube.com/user/AlsatianKnight)

believe it is important to make some preliminary remarks in the matter of the virtual presence of this music, which reveals a stable dialogue between the traditional field and contemporary ways.

The YouTube channel is a first signal of the presence of a bulk of fans, the maybe limited but potential circulation of niche musical works, the unquestionable reach of the web and of the specific platform of video sharing. To this positive picture we have to oppose a first amalgam of critical elements: the general weak regulation of the reproduction and diffusion of published works, the reduced quality of shared audio formats, and the unavoidable poorness of listening guides.

Nevertheless, starting from our specific case, I can propose some reflections about the connection between new communication and exchange systems, which are typical of the Net, and this field of study. Before the creation and development of those new modalities, the expression of positions, tastes and individual and collective ideas was certainly more occasional, fragmentary, static and isolated. As shown, it passed through records and printed media, in which the authors and users were identifiable, but known to narrow circles. Instead, the channel in exam has about 100,000 visualizations and is a mirror of a real community, but which today is extremely wide and variable. Furthermore, the contents are constantly updated and express an individual and almost anonymous point of view, but which in any case are representative of a community in the virtual sense.

The name of the container is *Alsatian Knight*, which is also how the same site manager identifies himself. This name is a first and intense marker, almost a flag, of a thought addressed to a temporary and mythical alterity, besides being situated in those regional spaces from which all the expressive movement drew inspiration. In the same way it is also interesting to read the synthetic presentation, reported in Italian and English, which says:

This is my personal welcome for this cybernetic temple of folk music; on my channel you will find the oldies goldies and also the very rare ones, the uncommon ones and finally the more 'badass' ones! Good listening!

First of all, the image of the temple is indeed metaphorical, but at the same time it tells us how this musical passion is lived as a form of creed. The object of the creed is folk music, in both a general and particular sense, acquired in the special cultural background.

Then we can observe the triple subdivision of the published documents. The headlines of every section and the related contents represent a significant synthesis and confirmation of processes which we have already discussed elsewhere. The *oldies goldies* are in fact the early attempts of the folk revival movement, with a largely French imprint and almost attributable to the seventies; *the rare ones* are mainly the by now unobtainable and venerated discs, played by the traditional musicians of the Italian side, whereas *the more 'badass' ones* are the most innovative experiments, in which *Lou Dalfin's*

music creation is the main lead and model. I can conclude that YouTube is a valiant diffusion instrument as a simplification vehicle, just as I am convinced that the platform can gather new communities, without establishing any intense ties as yet. Finally, if the immediateness of the listening prevails in this type of fruition, a different approach is necessary here in the perspective of a later interpretation of the choices which became decisive for the birth of a genre.

If we now start the analysis of the mentioned records, it is necessary to first consider the origin of the repertoires. An important section draws from traditional vocal heritage. The first record (I.1) opens with a very popular drinking song, here entitled *La femno lourdo* (The drunk wife), which comes from the repertoire of Robert Tagliero (*Rober le Diable*), the famous singer from the Waldesian Pellice Valley.<sup>15</sup>

The same informant also gives us the tune of the narrative song (I.7) *A l'Age de quatorze ans* (At the age of fourteen). The text, ascribable to the Medieval poetic genre of the *pastorella* and diffused in pastoral contexts, is in the French language and comes from a *cahier des chansons*, used in the Waldesian valleys for the family tradition of repertoires.<sup>16</sup>

The song that starts and gives the title to the second record (II.1), *L'aze d'alegre* (The donkey of *Alegre*) is founded partly on the fable genre connected to the animal world and partly on the narrative scheme of a contest of testaments, albeit in an ironical and absurd way, according to the motive of the upside-down world and to the instruments of Carnivalization. This piece, in the parlance of the Stura Valley, is taken from one of the founding ethnomusicological surveys carried out in the Cuneo area (south-western Piedmont) and from the documentation records that the research originated.<sup>17</sup>

Another piece (I.5.a), *Il prigioniere di Saluzzo* (The Saluzzo prisoner), has the form of a lament and is more popularly known with the title *À travers le grillage* (Behind bars) or *Le prisonnier de Saluces*. The text, in the French language, had already appeared in some song collections published in old local folklore works (BALMA - RIBET 1930); one of these melodies was found in the

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<sup>15</sup> The parallel version in the Piedmont dialect is usually entitled *Maria Giuana* (LEYDI 1998, pp. 290, 291, 459, 547; NIGRA 2009<sup>4</sup>, pp. 502, 503). This one, in the Occitan idiom, is widely diffused in the Alpine area (especially in the Waldesian zone). I should like to recall some versions collected in the nearby Germanasca (or Sanmartin) Valley by another research and revival group, *La Cantarana*, active in those same years: a similar interpretation recorded from the sisters Ilda and Liliana Tron in Rodoretto and two versions in French (*La femme ivre* and *Marguerite elle est malade*).

<sup>16</sup> The handwritten cahier, dated 1915, belonged to Henri-Théophile Bounous di Pomeano (Vallone di Pramollo, Chisone Valley).

<sup>17</sup> The informant was Caterina Chiardola from Sambuco (Stura Valley), recorded on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1972 by Glauco Sanga (LEYDI - PIANTA - SANGA 1974).

Germanasca Valley during surveys aiming to gather material to furnish the repertory of folkloric polyphonic choirs.<sup>18</sup>

Two other pieces belong to the genre of narrative songs on historical and military themes. The first one, (II.4) *Le siège de Coni* (The siege of Cuneo), whose other title is *Le Roi écrit une lettre au Prince Conti* (The King writes a letter to Prince Conti), refers to an incident occurring during the Austrian war of succession (1741-1748): the siege of Cuneo in 1744, abandoned by the French and Spanish troops, in spite of a crushing victory on 30<sup>th</sup> September against the Austrian and Piedmont army. This song, which adopts the form of a *contrasto* in the narration,<sup>19</sup> appears in printed anthologies and, as has been shown for previous cases, reemerged in the Waldesian area, both in *cahiers des chansons* and in singers' direct testimonies.<sup>20</sup>

The second song (II.2.a), *Din la valà de Pragialà* (In Pragelato valley), was collected by Roberto Leydi in the high Varaita Valley.<sup>21</sup> The subject of the piece, *La Bataille de l'Assiette* (from the name of a mountain on the ridge between the Chisone and Susa Valleys), can be found in more than one French version in the Waldesian Valleys.<sup>22</sup>

Particularly interesting is a narrative song in a more classic form, *Li trei soudà* (The three soldiers), included in Costantino Nigra's fundamental work, with the title *Il ritorno del soldato* (The return of the soldier), found one century later in the Germanasca Valley.<sup>23</sup> The version on the record (I.11.a), unlike all those sources in the French or Piedmont dialect, presents the text in the Occitan idiom. It was undoubtedly the result of a translation, that is, an absorption, according to criteria of linguistic normalization, in the sphere of a

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<sup>18</sup> The tune was recorded in Prali (Germanasca Valley) by Giovanni Bonino and Agostino Calliero. The two were members of the Badia Corale Val Chisone. This ensemble's first record contains a version of the piece (BADIA CORALE VAL CHISONE 1975, Side B, track 2).

<sup>19</sup> *Contrasto* is a medieval literary genre presenting a dialogic form.

<sup>20</sup> The song was first published in GHISI - TRON 1947. The music (collected by E. Tron in Rodoretto, in the Germanasca Valley) derives from a 17<sup>th</sup> century military march, already mentioned by J. Tiersot. Another version, in minor mode, was collected by Aldo Richard from Prali and its text appears in Jean-Pierre and François Richard's handwritten cahier in 1898; a further version can be found in a cahier from the Roure area, the Catholic zone of the Chisone Valley. The author of this piece, according to stylistic analogies, could be the Waldesian chansonnier David Michelin, who also wrote two other Waldesian historical songs: *Chanson de l'Assiette* and *Le siège de Genes*.

<sup>21</sup> The song was published in LEYDI - PIANTA - SANGA 1974. It was recorded by Roberto Leydi in Chianale (high Varaita Valley) on 25th September 1967 with the voice of Prof. Sergio Ottonelli.

<sup>22</sup> For a comparison of the different versions, a study on the origins of the song and a hypothetical version in the Occitan idiom from the Germanasca Valley, see: GENRE - TRON 1990.

<sup>23</sup> *Il ritorno del soldato* appears in Costantino Nigra's work, no. 28. The folklorist related four "lessons", with various developments and epilogues (versions found in Cintano Canavese, on the Collina di Torino, in La Morra d'Alba and in Pinerolo, at the opening of the Alpine valleys). Dino Tron, ethnomusicologist and member of Lou Dalfin, who helped me a lot in this reconstruction, reports that he found five versions, coming from the Germanasca Valley, in the archive of the mentioned *Cantarana* group.

forcefully homologated culture.<sup>24</sup> The vocal repertoire which can be more closely ascribed to the area ends with the *Chansoun di Espouze* (Song of the brides), originating in the Varaita Valley, and drawn from the first research and records of the internal revival. This interpretation (II.2.b) only picks up the musical tune, changing the ritual song into an instrumental piece.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the second record presents two songs from the adjacent French territory, in the name of a declared and pursued cultural unity. The first one (II.7) *San Giaouzè eme Mario* (Saint Joseph with Mary) is part of the *Nouvè* or *Nadalet* genre, a narrative and paraliturgical song with a Christmas theme, inspired by events contained in the Apocryphal Gospels. In this case the source of reference is Joseph Canteloube's *Anthologie des Chants Populaires Français*.<sup>26</sup> From the same collection comes the second piece from beyond the Alps (II.10.a), *Lou mes de Mai* (The month of May). The song, from the area of Valence, where the Rhone Valley cuts the Bas-Dauphiné, narrates the events of a young wool teaser who plants a May tree near his beloved's house as a declaration of his love. Unfortunately, she prefers a rich bourgeois to him.<sup>27</sup>

Continuing my examination of records by Lou Dalfin, I shall now consider the sources of specifically instrumental music. In this case too, the main terrain of reference is the complex of southwestern Piedmont valleys connected by a unitary link. A first set of pieces is in direct relation with the initial engagement of the leader of the group and dates from the start of the revival initiatives. As already observed, the Varaita Valley triggered the process. This was where *Doues Guihounes de la Chanal* originated, (I.3) recorded in 1967 by Gianpiero Boschero, from the blind musician Giovanni Gertouxi, (*Jouan Lou Borni*, 1896-1980), of Chianale. The first and very rare melody was only

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<sup>24</sup> The text of Lou Dalfin's rendition is in normalized Occitan language and it also has the second anomaly of a textual length that is uncommon in that territorial and linguistic area. The source of the new interpretation should have been the mentioned Badia Corale choir, Val Chisone. The booklet accompanying Lou Dalfin's second record mentions the singers from whom it was collected: some miners who met in the pub of Riclaretto (high Germanasca Valley) and sang it in French. The translation in the Occitan idiom was later realized by the Occitanist writer Franco Bronzati.

<sup>25</sup> The *Chansoun di Espouzes* was first recorded for the LP *Muziques ousitanes*. In that case the performance was entrusted to Patrick Vaillant, violinist and member of the *Lou Bachas* group. According to tradition, the piece was composed in 1771 by a folk singer on the occasion of the marriage of Maria Giuseppina of Savoy to the Count of Provence (the future King Louis XVIII). The employed version was collected in 1971 by Gianpiero Boschero in Choudane di Casteldefino (Varaita Valley) from Giovanni Chiaffredo Ruà (*Chafré de Touano*), player of the chromatic button accordion.

<sup>26</sup> This typology of song is attested throughout France; the main text of reference is *Trèsor des Noels Provençaux*, comprising the *Nouvè* of Rèire, des Felibres, by Denis Cassan, des Notre Dame des Doms, by Nicolas Saboly (organist and maestro di cappella at Avignon Cathedral). This *Nouvè* narrates the "Wheat miracle" and is drawn from Canteloube 1951. Another version of the piece, with the title *Lo Viatge* is contained in LODDO 2008. A third version *Fugida en Egipta* (Escape to Egypt) appears in Petit 1953-1954.

<sup>27</sup> The version of the song is drawn from CANTELOUBE 1951 (vol. 2).

known to him.<sup>28</sup> *Rigoudin*, (II.5.a) collected in 1971 from the memory of Domenico Serre, *Miquellou*, of *Champ Soubiran* in Frassinò was extracted from that same archival source.<sup>29</sup>

The vast repertoire of the last old violinist of the valley, Giuseppe Galliano (*Juzèp da' Rous*), supplied the melodic material for another remarkable set of pieces. *La Gigo Vitouno* appears on the first record (I.4.a). This piece was still in use at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the lower part of the municipality of Casteldelfino. *Juzèp da' Rous* learnt it from Antonio Ruà (*Touano Truheto*, 1881-1932) and renamed it *vitouno* (that is, 'of mountains') to sneer at the neighboring municipality, which was located closer to the mountains. The *Balet* (I.4.b) was played in the area of Sampeyre.<sup>30</sup> The two following *Courentes della Val Varaita* (II.6.a-b) were collected from the same violinist between 1971 and 1972.

The last piece from the Varaita Valley is the second of the *Due Valzer* (I.6.b), credited to Jouan Bernardi, a memorable player of the semi-diatonic accordion. Instead, the first one (I.6.a) was collected in several versions for diatonic accordion especially in the Grana and Vermegnana Valleys.

The Vermenagna Valley constitutes a very rich basin of instrumental practice which is still lively today. The *Balet-Courenta* couple (I.2.a-b) represents a shared heritage, which is also regularly practiced by all the players.<sup>31</sup>

Other new interpretations included on the two records belong to the same musical field. *Nineta pasa l'aiga* (I.7, *Nineta* crosses the stream) probably descends from the so-called *Curenta del preivi innamurà* (also attested in the Germanasca Valley with the name *La Ninetto*).<sup>32</sup> The *due Courente della Valle Vermenagna* (II. 3.a-b) come from the repertoires also played by the musicians of the valley associated with both Sergio Berardo and Silvio Peron, who by then was a musician in the group and who remains a remarkable musician). The first of these *curenta* is rarely performed today,<sup>33</sup> whereas the second one,

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<sup>28</sup> One of the two had already been published in *Muziques Ousitanes 1*, among the dances of Pount and La Chanal (Pontechianale and Chianale, Varaita valley) with the name of 'Doune-li de fen...' (Give him some hay).

<sup>29</sup> The piece appeared on the LP BOSCHERO - PERON 1989.

<sup>30</sup> The words of the text accompanying the dance make jokes about the inhabitants of that village, Frassinò, directly neighboring downstream Sampeyre.

<sup>31</sup> The *Balet* was also recorded on the first tape of a couple of musicians from Robilante, Vermenagna Valley (Silvio Vallauri and Franco Romana); the *Curenta* is found on the second tape by the same musicians under the name of 'Curenta di Cuscrit', but this is a fictive name, and this dance is not more used than the other pieces of the same genre in the feasts of the Cuscrit (conscripts).

For all the details concerning the repertoires of traditional musicians of the Vermegnana Valley, see Dino Tron's Doctoral dissertation (TRON 2011a).

<sup>32</sup> Nowadays the piece is part of the repertory of traditional musicians and was also recorded later by players from the same valley (Piero Giordano on the *Sounadour* tape, Dario & Manuel on *Ribota 2010*).

<sup>33</sup> Dario and Manuel, a couple of current traditional musicians, recently recorded it on *Ribota* (2010).

known by the name of *Curenta Dubia* (*Double Curenta*), is extremely diffused.<sup>34</sup> The *Balèt* of track II.9.b has also fallen into disuse.<sup>35</sup> The *Pastorella* in the first section (II.9.a, lit. Young shepherdess), though inspired by an ancient ballad from the same valley, has the character of a new composition.

The third set of pieces comes from the other valleys in the area. The *Giga di Sanfront* (I.9), from the Po Valley, was probably drawn from the repertoire of Trumlin Marchetti and Giuseppe Giusiano, musicians from the *I balarin del Bal Vej* folkloric group, established at the end of 1970s. The *Curenta della Val Chisone* (I.12) contains the juxtaposition of two other tunes: *Corenta di Garnier* (or of Laz Ocha) and *Ma Vaccho Mallho* (My cow eats).<sup>36</sup> The *Curenta di Caraglio* (I.10) from the Grana Valley was collected by Giuseppe Alberti (born in 1910) in the Rittanolo di Caraglio hamlet.<sup>37</sup>

The *Curenta della Valle Maira* (II.5.c) is also called *Corenta de La Rocha*, because it came to be known through the performance of a player from Roccabruna. An action of restoration and a new interpretation was certainly valued for to remedy the fragmentary nature of the testimony.<sup>38</sup>

These musics close the autochthonous *corpus* and are followed, as was observed for the vocal repertoires, by a song of French origin, the *Rigaudon* (II.10.b). This *Rigaudon de Saint-Bonnet* comes from the repertoire of Emile 'Papà' Escalle di Molines en Champsaur, peasant and one of the most important folk violinists from Pays-Gavot (Gap).<sup>39</sup> At the end and as a further ideal reference, we find *Due contraddanze* (II.8.a-b), pieces of classic 18<sup>th</sup> century French repertoire for the hurdy gurdy.

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<sup>34</sup> The first recordings of this piece were realized on 2st April 1973 in Robilante by Bruno Pianta, who collected it from Giuseppe Notou Vallauri; the same day Pianta also made a reel-to-reel recording of two musicians (Mauro Macario – button accordion and Mario Pirotti – Contralto sax), and the curenta constituting the track of the Le Valli di Cuneo record was extracted from this tape. As regards *Curenta dubia*, almost all the players from the Vermegnana Valley have published it on their records: it can be found on the tape by Bepe-Severin (Giuseppe and Severino Giordano), on the one by Silvio Vallauri-Franco Romana and on the afore-mentioned CD by Dario and Manuel. This piece also had a positive reception among folk revival groups, and indeed became part of a *suite occitana* in the CD LE VIJÀ 2001, by a large Piedmontese music group, active since the end of the 1990s, whose leaders were Maurizio Martinotti and Franco Lucà.

<sup>35</sup> Dario and Manuel, the most famous couple of local musicians, also performed a version of this balet on *Ribota* 2010.

<sup>36</sup> A new recording of this piece is also contained in the LP ARTEZIN 1985.

<sup>37</sup> The Grana Valley was explored by research campaigns too, although less than other valleys: the local researcher was and is Renato Lombardo. The previously -mentioned booklet for the LP ARTEZIN 1985 contains a *Curenta de Càouri* (recorded by Louren 'd Lenchin in Càouri of Castelmagno) and *Barbo Nòou* (lit. New Uncle, a burlesque song recorded in 1979 by Dino 'd Pore (Margherita Luciano) and *Madaleno 'd Uli* in San Pietro di Monterosso) and delivered by Lombardo to Gianpiero Boschero, who edited the writing of the texts.

<sup>38</sup> As regards the presence of musical repertoires in the Maira Valley, the information is full of gaps. Gianpiero Boschero provided two other pieces for the LP ARTEZIN 1985: *L'arbourin* he himself collected in 1980-81 from Anna Rovera from Borgata Ghio di Dronero, and *Lou Loup e la Chabro* collected in 1979 by R. Lombardo from *Marguerito di Coulane* from Colletto di Monterosso Grana.

<sup>39</sup> The piece is drawn from the LP DUTERTRE 1981.

I shall now deal with a more internal analysis of the growing musical mixture. In particular, I will observe the perspectives and modalities of definition of the identity horizon and reflect on the declared intent of reconnection to a true musical essence, which will be verified here.

The first part of the examination concerns the instrumental choices. This issue is really complex and every specific adoption responds to precise aesthetical criteria. The choice of the instruments is significant in connection to the link with the traditional fabric and with the models of revival, and show the stages of a formative itinerary.

First of all, every piece or sequence of pieces has an instrumental part, even when the traditional source employed as a song does not call for any kind of accompaniment. It is certainly true that the local folk use instrumental music, mainly destined for dance, which is globally separated (though without rigidity) from vocal music, and the innovation is much more striking in the case of domesticity of childhood repertoires.

Therefore, if we analyze the instruments employed, the main element that emerges is the loan of uses and new tendencies which at first were learnt from the French revival records of the preceding years; then, through cooperation with that very expressive environment and, finally, from the promoted didactic sessions. The reports of these years tell of the surprise in meeting the French structured setup, as well as the amazement at seeing what was an almost exotic discovery. I should like to quote here an episode that happened in the summer of 1979, during which the members of the so-called *Conservatoire Occitan* of Toulouse<sup>40</sup> were involved locally «to teach how to play typical instruments of Occitan valleys» (RIBET 1979, p. 3). The reportage about the venue recounts their dazzled encounter with the following instruments: *l'armoni a semitun* (diatonic button accordion), *lu pinfre* (fife), *lu pinfre* with three holes (normally called *galoubet*), *lu viulun* (violin), *l'esclop* (a sort of folk violin), *la viulo* (hurdy gurdy), the *corno grande* (large horn) employed in pastoral contexts, the *corno piccolo ciaramel* (described as folk clarinet), *la buo* (small bagpipe), some percussion instruments - *il tamburo* (big drum), *lu tamburinet* (small drum), *lu tabas* (small frame drum with rattles) – and some idiophones, *cilindri di legno* (wood cylinders), *nacchere in osso* (bone castanets), *la pignatto* (fiction drum).

Whilst the scarce competence of the writers emerges between the lines, the report well depicts the directions and the new acquisitions of the indistinct groups originating at that time.

Furthermore, *Lou Dalfin* adopted a similar stereotyped nucleus as the basis for their musical elaboration which they would actually replenish and refine, thanks to the gradual acquisition of their central position, regarding the Occitan nature of the instruments they used. The most glaring case of the symbolic elevation of an instrument is that of the hurdy gurdy, thanks to the

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<sup>40</sup> COMDT, Centre occitan des musiques et danses traditionnelles Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées.

multiple exotic and mythic connotations of the instrument and to the absolute technical and performance expertise rapidly gained by the group leader. As regards the hurdy gurdy, the traces of a traditional employment were also collected in the Italian territory of the western Alps (BIANCO *et al.* 1991). Since then, despite the sporadic information, it has become almost ubiquitous. With a minor degree of use, but on a similar level, we find recourse to folk oboes and bagpipes, on the one hand adopted in France, and, on the other, as a consequence of a pseudo-archeological research carried out in northern Italy and in the valleys involved in this revival project (LORENZATI 1979).

The new sound mixture created by these recent instrumental acquisitions, together with the re-elaboration of harmonic structures, is applied not only in the revisitation of forms that time has objectively eroded, but also in repertoires connoted by a different, genuine and lively style. (Es. I.2.a-b) Elaboration is sometimes based on the exposition of the theme according to traditional criteria (I.4), whereas the opposite can also happen at other times, when the form closest to the source appears in the conclusion (II.6). Thus, this characteristic of internal bipolarity denotes a real knowledge of the initial traditional element and a complete awareness of the re-elaboration process. It may also represent a declaration of intent against an opposite interpretative purism, an attitude which will become the object of a growing attack.

Another more radical form of internal dualism can be found in one track in the juxtaposition of renditions which are very faithful to the traditional model (II.9.b) and of pieces consecrated to a polished archaism and composed anew (II.9.a).<sup>41</sup>

This research and artificial construction of a primitive horizon calls for a wider examination. The process, descending from a plurality of incitements, takes shape in several compositional solutions. On the second of the considered records, we can see the simplest and more direct interpretation of compositions written during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The two *contraddanze* (II.8) are ascribable to the pastoral genre in vogue among French nobility of that time, a genre characterized by the internalization of forms and instruments from the folk strata. On the one hand, the itinerary that can be observed here re-establishes the original matrix through the combination with traditional repertoires, while, in contrast, it seems to refer to a glorious period of instrumental use and technique. The rendition indeed couples the harpsichord – which with other instruments should ‘ennoble’ the whole compositional discourse – with the hurdy gurdy, whose imposed centrality I have in part outlined. The next passage is the tracing of the Baroque stylistic elements actuated in some narrative songs glorifying 18<sup>th</sup> century historical events (II.2

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<sup>41</sup> This is the case of the above-mentioned *Pastorella*. What creates the pastoral atmosphere is the insertion of a drone (probably added during the editing phase and maybe realized by the ‘mouche’ string of the hurdy gurdy) and the performance of the melodic part by two *charamel* (or *caremere*), folk cane clarinets with a simple reed and, at the lower edge, a bovine horn, in the guise of a bell.

a-b e II.4). Furthermore, the celebration is renovated here as a construction of a mythical substratum for the new territorial complex. In particular, the declamatory and dramatic vocal style, the heroic and proud ardor acoustically translates the intent.

These intrusions into the field of classical music and into a temporal alterity which goes beyond the orality horizon represent an essential element, but they also reconnect this experience to the more general lure and rehabilitation of early music, a trend followed by the European and Italian folk revival movements of those years. A similar and even more intense attraction than the taste for the neo-Baroque came from the more remote and undefined boundaries of a mythical ancient Middle Ages. The choice of this expressive typology is displayed right from the first record. With Doues Guihounes de la Chanal (I.3), one of the most ancient forms absorbed by local tradition, the group starts to arrange a series of tools, materials and tricks on its worktop to achieve, mark and communicate the perceived distance. A first element is the inclusion of plectrum instruments to recall the ‘ancestors’ of the lute family.

This practice was consolidated in these years in the double direction of the interpretation of cultured repertoires and in some new compositions ‘in style’ by singer-songwriters, usually accompanied by the well-diffused guitar. In this last piece, as in other ones, the role is assumed by the mandola whose timbric connotation at a stage preceding the guitar shortens the temporal distance towards the imaginary Middle Ages. Moreover, just like other instruments are related to or further qualified by an ethnic mark, the one employed here evokes a folk symbolism, albeit an unauthentic one. As regards wind instruments, the transverse flute that reinforces the melodic element in the piece is the result of similar choices and represents a first step towards the incorporation of genres taken from the uncertain boundaries of tradition. The sound representation of the Middle Ages finds a strong point in the role given to the hurdy gurdy, first inserted to support drone notes and then presenting a clearly modal melodic line. In addition, the interposition of the drum imposes the martial style typical of several soundtracks of historical movies. A last field to be considered, limited here to two nonsense strophes, concerns the vocal style and technique. Generally speaking, as far as the singing is concerned, it is also important to underline the superiority of the revivalist model derived from international contacts, and partially filtered by some singer-songwriting production, as opposed to the emulation of autochthonous models. Within the limits of a quite restricted variety of solutions, this case presents the following main traits: a vocality in the medium-high register, an unnatural flute timbre and an emphatic declamation, the frequent use of portamento and of vibrato effects, and continuous repetition marking the strophic form. The expressive palette I have outlined comprises the primary colours which are chosen from time to time, using suitable undertones. This palette appears more clearly where it responds to a conscious desire

to make the traditional source more ancient, almost as if to re-establish its primordial essence (I.11b).

What we have presented here is a cultural process operating on an imaginary territory, and which is attempting to connect a multifaceted musical alterity to the present. Around this fundamental cornerstone, a critical comparison with the vast field of the so-called Celtic music cannot be avoided. Furthermore, in the light of the most recent and serious studies in this area (above all Stokes - Bohlman 2003) – especially for its character of transnational phenomenon within a global fringe – I consider it useful to understand whether and what kind of relation existed between the two expressive systems, which developed in really close times and areas. Even though it is worthwhile separating the two different streams, we can indeed find an undeniable conformity with expressive clichés typical of Celtic phenomenon in this first formative phase, both in already noticed constitutive elements and in some traits, which are the source of a more direct inspiration. For example, the repetitive form of the Irish reel, the pronounced instrumental embellishment typologies and the timbre and grace notes in vocal interpretation find an unquestionable space here (I,8). Similarly, reed instruments, whose internal reasons of use I have already described, show a sounding echo in the mythical air of the highland bagpipes (I,9).

Once again the interpretation needs to draw upon the mediating role of French experiences, which also took part in the creation of a Celtic sound imaginary. Nevertheless, according to a different perspective, if we consider the ingredients of the total production and the following developments, we cannot label Occitan music as a local sub-genre of Celtic music. Notwithstanding a more limited circulation, some elements, such as the distance from a Mannerist model, the possession of traditional sources, the creative freedom and the foundation of an internal mythology compose a globally autonomous reality. We could, if anything, consider the two expressive currents on tightly crossing levels, on account of their parallel presence on stage and diffusion circuits, for the audience perceptive sphere animated by a similar evasive and fantastic awesomeness, as well as expressive autonomy.

### **Thank you on behalf of Guido, to whom I will send this material**

The itinerary started in the first part of the 1980s and was developed and better defined at the end of the decade, preparing the ground for a new expressive trend which I shall now analyze in its present and current maturity, as the result of a lengthy elaboration.

The elements of innovation noticed in their first compositional experiences gradually evolved toward positions of radical change. Berardo's complaint was indeed directed at the narrow-mindedness and ideological rigidity of the original field of action and it demanded a space for creative freedom and discretion.

Some years ago I said: we keep on doing coterie things, always gathering with the same people, giving a too much political meaning to the music we do, so we will end by remaining only few people. I think that the political acrimony, as well as the archeological strictness of the ones who did research and the thousands attacks against those who dedicated themselves to the creation, had a negative influence. A creative Occitan shall consider current inspirations: his musical culture is different from *Jouan Bernardi's* one; he is not used to the sounds that he was accustomed to, nor to the environment where he lived. But it is clear that he should have first absorbed specific stylistic models; and to absorb them it is not enough living in Coumboscuro or in Chianale. (BERARDO 1989, pp. 1-8)

In this view, the traditional basin of inspiration, as can be read in later strongly polemical writings, is not incompatible with regeneration streams. Then, accepting inspiration, which is external to territorial boundaries and which contrasts with a supposed and atemporal expressive fixity, is the proposed way to pledge continuity, as well as the more faithful principle of intrinsic dynamism.

The only constant of all folk music, not of only the Occitan one, was change, stylistic mixture, the easy and natural attitude towards the most different influences. Thinking [...] that Occitan tradition could pass intact through our time, its musical influences, the musical experience of those playing it, seems to me barely supportable, but it is much more arduous hogging the right to judge with an ideologically driven certainty, with the conceit of those having firm "roots" in the tradition. I think that there is space for the ones who want to interpret Occitan music as they prefer, without quarreling because of stylistic or formal divergences, repudiating a mystic concept of identity which we do not know the mysterious initiates it could bestow. (BERARDO 1991, p. 2)

As in the section dedicated to the group's first phase, I should like to compare these new declarations of intent with the musical results of today, concentrating my analysis on Lou Dalfin's last record, *Cavalier faidit* (LOU DALFIN 2011).<sup>42</sup>

Before dealing with this specific issue, I first wish to briefly reflect on some initial contingent data. The record listening guide I am using here as a trail coincides with the author and musician's declarations. The title of this section comes from a smart phone recording made during a car journey by one of the group members, a colleague and friend of mine, who then sent it to me via cloud storage software. Without exaggerating this particular case and with no intention of overturning basic methodological criteria, this example illustrates the current methods of ethnomusicological research. Besides the broadening of the means for information acquisition, special attention should be directed to the complex and unprecedented dynamics involving the relations between the subjectivities involved in research today. The declarations about the first piece on the record, *Randolina* (LOU DALFIN 2011 - Track

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<sup>42</sup> <<http://loudalfin.it/index.php/discografia/18-cavalier-faidit>>

1, Swallow), supply some relevant indications concerning the compositional itinerary of the group, which has already reached a distinctive style.<sup>43</sup>

Some years ago, during my visit to an exhibition about the letters of emigrants from Occitan Valleys to Argentina, I happened to read the letter of a young man emigrated from our valleys to his mother, where he said that he would have liked to be a swallow to go back home, to his village. Then a song came to my mind from this situation. If we consider it from the melodic point of view, it's a tango, it's nothing but a tango, but performed "à la Lou Dalfin".

The piece does indeed start with a tango fragment drawn from a historical recording but, through a fast ascending passage of the hurdy gurdy, determines the piece's partially distinct physiognomy, characterized by a pressing and constant duple rhythm upbeat, with bass and drums. The hurdy gurdy is joined by the banjo embellishment with a typical bluegrass riff, which becomes more evident in the following vocal sections. Nonetheless, the singing, solo or doubled by feminine voices, and the instrumental parts of violin, accordion and trumpet in the latter highlight a freer rhythm. In the second half of the piece, the guitar performs a passage in jazz manouche, affirming another source of inspiration.

The form announced in the musician's communication is thus reductive, or better, the style mixture summarized by the expression *à la Lou Dalfin* reveals the experimental interpretation. The issue becomes even more complicated if we consider this piece in its habitual function of a dance piece. The problem is however easily solved: in a video of a concert, available on YouTube, the folksinger explains to the audience: «We made this song which is actually a disguised tango, but it is a duple meter bourrée».<sup>44</sup> Thus, compositional freedom seems to proceed in parallel with the conservation of dance structures of traditional origin. But the discussion cannot end here, as a series of elements already appear in the second track, *Serena* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 2, Syren).

So, in 1932 a shepherd from Maria Valley, emigrated to the Ubaye Valley, [...] had a subscription to a newspaper. Every week the mailman went to his village, they met in the pub, *à La Condamine* [...] One week, the mailman did not find him [...] so he decided to leave [...] and reach the mountain pastures to deliver the newspaper to him. Here he found a horrific scene: the first thing he saw was a human head and it was the head of that shepherd's lord. The shepherd was seated on a rock raving, he was saying that he had been asked to murder that man by a "periu", [...] described as a being that was half-woman and half-fish, a mermaid, a being living inside the stream, which had given him the energy of one hundred men and had compelled him to kill the man. The shepherd, the perpetrator of the crime, was taken to a criminal mental institution, where he spent the rest of his

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<sup>43</sup> As in previous cases, also for this phase of the group activity, besides the official recorded publications, most of this album can be enjoyed on the web. Copies of the audio tracks examined here are available on YouTube (<[http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu8RmPaQnN\\_jFebmm-pL5Uw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu8RmPaQnN_jFebmm-pL5Uw)>), together with a great quantity of amateur clips of the group's concerts.

<sup>44</sup> <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8WQFVwDurs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8WQFVwDurs)> [time: 6:45].

life, drawing this “mermaid” [...]. And this is a *chapelloise*. While the first one, *Randolina* is a duple meter *bourrée*, this is a *chapelloise*.

The dance called *chapelloise*, similar to the unified version of *bourrée*, is part of the large number of music and dance forms of problematic origin (every case usually follows independent itineraries), resulting from its absorption by the French folk revival from the 1970s onwards. The passage to an enlarged practice, through the channels of the so-called *bal folk*, led to its diffusion throughout the Italian territory, in connection to the phenomena I described at the beginning. The present organization of dance workshops, attended by a wide community of enthusiasts have contributed to the creation of a neo-traditional corpus, the first signal of the establishment of a real genre.

But when we consider the musical element, we are again faced with a very different result compared to the simple emulation of an established form.<sup>45</sup> The piece, in the recorded rendition, starts with an evocative recall of the mythological being at the centre of the narrated event, through a feminine vocalization in free time, edited during the studio mixing. This motive is then conjured up in the central section of the track, adapted to the rhythmical acceleration of the compositional development. The piece is indeed related to an Irish jig, in which the starting rhythm is displayed by the hurdy gurdy with bass drum strong bangs, significant of an inclination towards rock music. The percussions and the rarefied bass line meet the rhythmical uniformity of the hurdy gurdy and of the Jew’s harp and a series of electronic effects close to disco music.

As regards the topic, we could connect this piece with the following *Ome sarvatge* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 15, Wild man); in this case indeed, a second nucleus of the mythopoetic process related to a territorial belonging is found.

This is the poem of the wild man, of the *ome sarvatge* indeed, that mythical being which taught how to cultivate land, to domesticate animals, the wild man inside each of us, that feeling of being covered by branches, skins, that dimension of primitiveness, that dark corner inside us which is the memory of a faraway past, of our most remote ancestors. It is a song; it does not want to be any kind of dance, a tense song, with these distorted guitars, a very angry song. [...] I use the bagpipe as a bridge from one piece to the next one, a weird piano introduction with a chabrette limousine.

The introduction is a sort of *rêverie* with a minimalist and new age taste, in which the free tune of the bagpipe is inserted to evoke Celtic sonorities. Even in this case, with the complicity of the Jew’s harp hypnotic line, a rock arrangement is reached. The contrast between the sound translation of a faraway horizon and the will of ‘playing the present’ represents an invocation for the resurgence of the legendary being, a sort of guiding spirit awakened to lead the rebirth of a pagan religion.

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<sup>45</sup> As in the previous case, even for this piece we can listen to the indications for the dance from a concert video: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxC12R5OtSc>> (accessed March 31st, 2016).

And again a faith, which is completely different since it is connected to a football cheer, is the generative cell of the instrumental piece *Fila* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 6).

*Fila* is an instrumental piece, thought for the bagpipe. [...] I wanted to pay homage to one of my passions, football: I dedicated it to the Filadelfia stadium, which is the cradle of the “dark red religion”. There is a majestic, slow, epic, lyric part and a more bellicose second part, that’s it, as when we blew the trumpet at the time of Valentino Mazzola.<sup>46</sup>

The explained division into two sections responds to two different expressive phases. The whole piece is interconnected to the central use of the bagpipes, according to a style close to the perceived Celtic imaginary. In the first section, the melody is ampler, with a slow, articulated drum set part and the bass keeping a drone line. The bagpipe performs a sort of duet with the electric guitar or dialogues with the piano background. On the other hand, the thematic repetition, with a new age evocation, suggests a heroic tone, close to football cheer choruses. The passage towards the second section imposes acceleration on the leading instrument, through the drum set used as a snare drum, with echoes of highland bagpipes. The second section is a more combative dance piece with an Irish rock taste, involving the whole band, leaving the solo part to the hurdy gurdy, bagpipe and violin. The track adds one more piece to the previous definition of a complex dance form; the direct indication from the stage is indeed «It is a Cercle Circassien, for the ones who want to dance!»<sup>47</sup>

The piece entitled *Vidorle* belongs to the same dance structure (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 4), from the name of the Vidourle river that flows in the French Languedoc-Roussillon region.

Some years ago, I played with my group Lou Dalfin in a “genre trad”, “new trad” festival in France. And [this piece] is taking for a ride that environment where folk culture is lived not as an element to be shared, nor as an element connected to the territory, to Occitan identity, but as a sort of “board game” for seven initiates. It tells the story of Lou Dalfin at this festival where people could only eat strictly vegetarian food, women had long skirts and in the end there was also a scuffle with Gypsies [...] It is [a piece] to taunt, as musicians or singers should always do, in their dimension of jesters who denounce, while laughing, the vacuity of a world which used the pretext of tradition to play “board games”. There are several quotes in this text, from Guy de Maupassant’s short stories... there is a short story called *Minuet*, *Menuet*, in which two Ancien Régime dance trainers, in a garden in Paris, show the steps of a minuet to the writer and he got the impression of seeing a puppet dance, a doll dance. And this is somehow the

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<sup>46</sup> The *Filadelfia* was the memorable stadium of the *Torino Calcio* team. Valentino Mazzola was the iconic footballer of the ‘Great Turin’ in the second half of the 1940s, up to the airplane crash where all the football team players died. The reference to the trumpet is linked to the supporter Oreste Bolmida, a Turin stationmaster, who by then had the role of inciting the team using his old regulation instrument.

<sup>47</sup> <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayosr-VblSI>> [time: 5:59] (Accessed March 31st, 2016).

impression I got when I saw those people dancing their dances of their dance courses and they were not enjoying it, they were performing a ritual, a sort of grotesque minuet, a puppet dance.

The introduction of this piece is cinematographic, with a low frequency environmental sound and with bass drum bangs at regular intervals, when the violin emerges playing the first repetitive formula. The violin continues to expose the dance theme, simultaneously to the rhythmic thickening and to the entrance of the hurdy gurdy, which performs a sort of thorough bass. In the second half of the first minute, the singing starts, its melodic line doubled by a fife. The suggested atmosphere again has a neo-medieval, Celtic taste. In the following sections, apart from the bass and drums, the electric guitar also appears with a copious use of power chords. The last section returns to the ambience of the beginning, this time with the complete ensemble. It develops as a thematic *continuum, ad libitum*. As regards the compositional motivation, some trends of folk music revival are the target of the polemic. The debate is really controversial and delicate, since the group's production is fully englobed therein. Critics have addressed the Mannerist deviations of the phenomenon, to which the vitality, the contact with reality and a true connection with the territory is opposed.

The attachment to places, themes and figures of local context emerges with force. An example is *Bachasset* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 13) which starts with an autobiographical and intimistic spark and then touches universal issues.

In Castelmagno there is a fountain, on the road to Colletto, the *Bachasset* fountain, where water flows and it measures time, and day and night, it keeps measuring hours, independently of your presence there or not. It was the fountain where my father always went to get water and so I wanted to create a song, as I can do it, in my father's memory, who went to get water at the *Bachasset* fountain, and I think that that one was the last water he drunk, the water I carried him; so I wanted to pay homage to him with this tune and with this song. [...] It is a triple time *bourrée*.

The piece is essentially triparted; the beginning and ending instrumental sections are amply developed and gather electrified and traditional instruments, adopting a folk progressive language. The central sung part, without losing its decisive style, is more lyrical. On the whole, this piece could be ascribed to the combat folk trend, to which I shall return later, even though the sentimentalism of the subject seems discordant.

The piece *Anchoier* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 10, *Anchovy trader*) belongs to the parallel sphere of collective local imaginary. The depicted image is linked to a past traditional economy, but which is still alive in the present, as demonstrated by the environmental introductory sounds, recorded at a village market.

*Anchoier*, another mythical figure of Occitan culture, of Occitan past society: the anchovy seller. A mazarin trying to read memory: what do these anchovy sellers represent in the memory of our valley people? Roving figures, peddlers, so people like the hurdy gurdy players, sharing a dimension of their lives on the road; [...] anchovy sellers inviting women at the market to go and discover the silver fishes sleeping under the salt; one of the most important elements of our gastronomic culture: anchovies, a product which would not be ours, and at this point several discourses could start, among which the one of a cultural identity based on exchange.

The musical form is a waltz or a mazurka, in a quite essential rendition. The theme is exposed by the accordion, which has a fundamental part among the other instruments and which is supported by guitar, bass and drums at the beginning.. When the singing starts, the leading instrumental role is played by the guitar, then it is joined by the mandolin and the violin and finally there is a collective gathering of all the instruments. This melodic piece highlights Berardo's folk vocality, dealing with a typical ballad.

Beyond the cultural centrality of the portrayed figure, the roving character of the anchovy seller's job and thus the commonality with the folk musician condition is stressed.

The piece *Rota d'amont* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 5, Upper road) is dedicated to the latter people, in the aim of reaffirming the special mythic air of the hurdy gurdy man, with a reference to the group leader's current position and to the central role of the instrument in the musical rebirth process. The connection with a famous traditional Piedmontese repertoire ballad acts as inspiration, radically marked by the compositional autonomy.

A song that I have always found very beautiful is not Occitan, but Piedmontese [...] it is *La bergera*. [...] It should be a Piedmont hymn, because [...] it is really a celebration, a parable, a paradigmatic celebration of folk culture. Everyone knows the story: an elegant French man with his coat wants to cover a shepherdess, who is in the shade under a bush. [...] And the *bergera* tells him "Listen, go! I already have my shepherd who with his viola, with his hurdy gurdy makes me dance". So, according to me, it is a beautiful thing, a fable on identity value, as to say: «You come from outside, displaying your prosperity and I have something which is mine, it is my culture, my music, my language, my tradition which makes the ones sharing it with me more important than anything else». [...] and I imagine in this song, a *scottish*, what happened when the shepherd came out from the shed and grabs his instrument and everybody stops[...] everybody listens to *bergera's* husband.

An electric guitar plays a blues introduction and is joined by the drums, stressing the rhythm. On this base, the singer's voice appears almost immediately and unexpectedly, this time with a clear rap style, together with digitized percussions. The polyvocal refrain follows, alternating with the soloist voice and the accordion insertions. From the second strophe the wind section emerges, with Roy Paci in the frontline as guest star and as the protagonist of a solo in the second half of the piece. In the last refrain, coherently with the adopted language, the scratch technique appears. The final instrumental part,

with a loop effect repetition, is marked by the hurdy gurdy, which here lends itself completely to the style in use.

The pronounced and technically successful assimilation of musical idioms from outside the territorial perimeter involves a wide selection of pieces. Among these is the instrumental piece *Adiu Leon* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 8), written in homage to a friend Mixu Michelena, singer of the *Sustrai* Basque group who recently passed away. The formal sequence of *fandango* and *arin arin*, already assimilated in the syncretic Occitan anthology, refers to Basque tradition.

*Adiu Leon* is a fandango, a composed fandango. *Addio Leone* is dedicated to the great singer from Euskadi [the Basque Country, A/N], Mixu Michelena; a friend of ours, with whom Lou Dalfin collaborated in the past; we created this fandango. So, it's dedicated to a great Basque.

Apart from the commemorative choice and the immediate dance purpose, the first part of the piece includes a wider expressive hybridization. The compositional process indeed alludes to Latin America and takes the typical traits of Tex-Mex. The first bridge with this style is established by the steel guitar intro; the guitar is joined by the diatonic accordion accompanied by an ample *plateau* of percussion instruments: finally the wind section takes the upper hand in the refrain, together with Mexican screams of jollity. The passage to the second element of the suite is briefly marked by an electronic sound leading to a sourer vein, tending toward hard rock. The use of traditional instruments, however, conveys the impetuosity towards a kind of combat folk. Describing the departure for a journey overseas, *Lo retorn di corsaris* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 12, The return of the pirates) explores the field of Caribbean rhythms.

In the last record we did a *corenta di corsaris*. This one is a new episode of the saga about local thugs, young thugs who go to *festin* by *Apecar*. In the first [song] we introduced them, we defined these figures very well, with their names, with their nicknames. [This one] is a *bourrée*, a *polka*, with a Latin American taste; here, as our guest we have Tatou Moussu T, who sings with his deep and raspy voice, his very particular voice, really a corsair, a pirate voice: corsairs that for once want to go to a bash without getting drunk and without creating a scuffle, then they cannot control themselves, and the party ends and everybody leaves and so they manage to spoil the party for themselves and for others, as these people, for whom I have a fondness, usually do...

Sergio Berardo alternates with the voice of Moussu T 'Tatou', who was the singer of the Marseille band *Massilia Sound System* and then of *Moussu T e Lei Jovents*. Also within the contemporaneous expressive solutions, the meeting of experiences and stages from beyond the Alps welds the pursued territorial and cultural unity. On the other hand, the narrative topic is again inspired by the group's biographical and operative context, addressing the

unruly component of their public and turning the heroic image of corsairs upside down in an ironic key.

The basic characteristics of the historical Marseille groups are assimilated in *Labrit* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 1, Pyrenean Shepherd) which is a reggae piece.

*Labrit* was thought in La Crous di Castelmagno hamlet; it is story of a shepherd dog looking for its master, its mistress in a small village where the dog imagines it sees children playing, animals tracks, clean paths, it imagines the smell of manure, the smell of smoke... actually, there is nothing there anymore and the hamlet is desolated, abandoned; that is it, it is a song about mountain depopulation, a *rondeau* we made with a reggae arrangement; in fact we took advantage of a collaboration with Bunna. Bunna is the Italian historical reggae singer par excellence.

The Jamaican idiom is transmitted by the Italian pioneering experience of the *Africa United* group, whose co-founder and singer meets, bending the genre to the local language, the Occitan musician. The focused use of string instruments in syncopated rhythms, with the support of bass and drums, creates the specific sound frame, completed by the wind section from the second strophe onwards. In the conclusion, the ‘masters of the house’, the bagpipe and the violin, appear with a cyclic motive, which here as elsewhere is also fully integrated into the sound.

The metaphorical itinerary of the text implies a message of fundamental complaint about the abandon of the mountain environment, a years-long issue caused by economic political choices. The narrative pretext translates a more direct deployment of the group in contingent events. In particular, it reaffirms the closeness to the movements opposed to the current project for the high-speed railway (TAV) that should connect the Piedmontese main city of Turin to the French city of Lyon.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> This video clip shows, in the preliminary introduction, the piece’s connection with the specific politic issue: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNN1f5lwUqM>>. The support for the NO TAV movement is also revealed in other significant documents available on the Web: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uz5OS-BebHo>>; <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9197F\\_O94c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9197F_O94c)>; <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5qG7fLw-Ic>>.



Figure 2 – Sergio Berardo shows the audience the flag of the NO TAV movement  
(from the group’s Facebook page:

<<https://www.facebook.com/30411695741/photos/pb.30411695741.-2207520000.1404397215./10150570949795742/?type=3&theater>>).

A similar political feeling is displayed in the mockery of power, as happens in the piece *La frema del Rei* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 9, The King’s lady) addressed to the Italian ruling class. The track is then completed by an instrumental piece entitled ‘*O Gweddo*.

I remember that once I saw a picture of Berlusconi and his wife... he had the face of a carpet seller, of a canvasser, a bandana on his head... there was his poor lady that... Berlusconi was at the peak of his “political” glory... and this poor lady was keeping her eyes down and saying “That’s enough, I can’t stand it anymore”... in fact some time later she fucked him off... So I wrote this song “The king’s lady makes me feel sorry”. And so, this is the story, a grimace at powerful people, at their arrogance, at the insinuating cracks in their approval, at the pain of the ones who are surrounded by privileges. [...] ‘*O Gweddo* is an instrumental [piece], like a game, on a remotely Irish assonance. ‘*O Gweddo* would be... how to say it in Italian? The feeling, if you want... In Italian there is no specific word [...], the approach, the musical intention, that’s it... the one that you have or that you don’t have.

The introductory atmosphere once again evokes the Celtic air, through the bagpipe melodic theme, sustained by the regular rhythmicity of the drums and by the monotonous line of the bass. The meter becomes faster from the chord entrance of the guitar onwards. The rhythmical section continues in the following sung part, where the voice (alternated with choral sections) is doubled by the fife. The neo-medieval recalls, associated to the starting textual frame, are gradually handed over to a combat folk expressive area, which itself is compliant to the metaphorical transfer to present time.

The instrumental return coincides with the beginning of the second piece, where the hurdy gurdy and the violin (regularly sustained by the rock part of the band) create a dance inspired by Irish rock. The audible character of

excited anticipation and a breezy team spirit translate the idiomatic expression of the title.

The affirmation of the rights of the Occitan linguistic minority, whose offset or fundamental jet engine was the general musical unrest, is at the basis of the piece *Pica lo ferre* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 3, Iron hammering). The group's perspective assumes new traits of contestation in rapport with the useless financial waste carried out in the name of ideals, albeit shared ones.

*Pica lo ferre*, the text is not mine, but the music is. [The text] is by Fabrizio Simondi and if we want to compare it with the poetical composition of our noblest predecessors, the troubadours, it is a *sirventese*, a song with satirical intents about topical events [...] it denounces [...] how taxpayers' money was wasted by the government for Occitan cultural initiatives, extemporaneous ones, carried out by incompetent people, for inconclusive initiatives [...] We know very well how things work in Italy, it is always public money that usually goes not to the ones really doing culture [...]; so *Pica lo ferre* means to go and strike iron: an invitation to these people to go and really work [...] because they have already done enough damage [...] Following *Pica lo ferre* in the suite is a traditional *courenta* from the Vermegnana Valley, which is not exactly played in the traditional way, in 6/8, but if I'm not wrong, it was [...] elaborated from a traditional theme from the late 1970s, I think by Patrik Vaillant.

The initial melodic strophe, accompanied by the solo violin is interpreted by Fabrizio Simondi, the author of the text. Through a rhythmic passage, imitating the struck iron, and thereby evocating the title, we pass to an excited dance piece, with the group leader singing. Without any breaks, the *Correnta* from the Vermegnana Valley follows, approximately in the middle of the piece. The traditional piece seems accelerated compared to the usual speed, sustained by the drums pressing the rhythmicity. The musical motive, the central role of the violin and the dancers' shouts, albeit artificial, recall an authentic folk character. However, the most interesting element is the declaration concerning the origin of this piece: it is indeed the only one with a direct traditional origin appearing on a totally neo-composed record, and moreover already filtered through a re-elaboration of early local revival.

With *Passamontanhas* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 14, Mountain strider), we pass from a condemnation of the bad management of the rebirth of the community, to the recovery of the original dream and its transmission to young generations.

From past to future, from memory to hope: it is dedicated to my son, I try to make him understand what kind of riches are around him, what kind of riches the country where he lives has, the riches of dreams, culture, the poetry of Occitania. I tried to do this with a double meter *bourrée*. The child is almost sleeping and his father tells him a story [...], a story about a treasure, a treasure which is not on an island, nor in a cave or in a mysterious faraway country, but which is here, close to you: just look at the valley, just listen to your people, people who are not better than others, but they give you something. And this something is language, this something is a unique thing.

As usual the piece starts quietly with a drone, over which the violin and the bagpipe develop the thematic exposition. The nucleus of the song soon arrives and the acoustical instruments (violin, banjo and bagpipe in the instrumental phrases) assume a function of enrichment and of folk characterization of the rock background structure. The resulting explosive character appears perfectly in line with the fighting spirit of identity affirmation. Stefano Degioanni, the singer of *Lou Seriol*, sings with Berardo. The crossing with this last band, which can in part be assimilated and which in part descends from the older group, underlines the existence and the force of a relation network around a homogeneous expressive system.

The last declaration of the belonging to one people is in the track with the same title as the record, *Cavalier faidit* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 7, Exiled knight). Here the terrain for the creation of an Occitan Olympus is retraced, once again drawing material from an imaginary Middle Ages.

Cavalier Faidit is the imaginary stage of an exiled knight. They were the knights that in 1209 took up arms to defend their own land, at the time of the French invasion, during the crusade against the Albigensians and who, once defeated, *faidit*, were exiled: they lost their lands and wandered in the world, as errant knights. These are the figures that have always fascinated me and this journey, if we want, continues up to our days: these knights are [...] somehow a sort of an image of Occitan people, of a people without a State, of the people who does not even remember its name... [...] This knight who forgot his name, who lost his sword [...] could be seen as the Occitan people, could be seen as the person who does not surrender. There is a polyvalence of meanings [...], if one starts to read the text, to listen to the text at the beginning, he thinks of a medieval setting of the narration... actually, it finishes with the bypass road traffic, the wind-stricken rushes, one of the cities of the Occitan land. So a song without time, as our history is without time. [...] It is a double meter *bourrée*, a very strong one.

The combative folk rock trail reaches its peak in the mixture of traditional soundspheres with the global expressive tendencies of contemporary times. Here in particular, the drums' fast rhythmicity and the stressed double meter define an extraction from the ska genre. The overall result emphasizes the usual gap with the parallel comparison to the traditional dance form.<sup>49</sup>

The record ends with a brief instrumental piece, *Nebla* (LOU DALFIN 2011, Track 16, Cloud). In a mild and mellow sonority, the piano traces the harmonic fabric, the hurdy gurdy has a rhythmic-hypnotic role and the violin performs the melody. The track redraws an induction to a fable-like climate that evokes the imagined Celtic universe; on the same level, the thematic cyclic nature widens formal and emotional solutions already present in the background of other pieces. The composition appears as a farewell, but also as a stylistic condensation, with the last word left to the shrill close of the hurdy gurdy.

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<sup>49</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k87WmiWCSzk>> (accessed March 31<sup>th</sup> 2016).

Nebula is just a tune, simply performed by the piano, the violin and the hurdy gurdy, as a seal, as a way to say goodbye, softly, from those who had courage to follow this collection of short stories. When I was a kid, I loved Guy de Maupassant's short stories, which I mentioned before [...] and who wasn't an Occitan, alas! And he wrote in the oppressors' language, but this doesn't matter. And this [piece] wants to be an epilogue, a close, a sort of digestive, a binge of emotions, of situations, of atmospheres, which are also very different from one another...

The crossing of genres, expressive languages and communication levels finds further confirmation in the realization of a music video, created for the record promotion. The significant element is in the almost exclusive circulation of this multimedia product on the web, through the YouTube page of the small video production house, with a link to the group official page. Thus the Internet does not only widen the possibilities of global interconnectedness, but it also allows the very use of a means of auto-representation, otherwise possible only to big television networks.

In my analysis, the video assumes further importance, because it represents an unequalled place that summarises the current expressive asset, in a blend of ideals and functional elements. It starts with the viewing of a silent and neutral setting, a sidewalk and a concrete wall. All of a sudden the animation projects onto the background the group's name, *Lou Dalfin*, in graffiti, and the title of the album, *Cavalier Faidit*, with the same design as the record cover. This first effect already underlines the modernist tendency of the band. The silence is broken by feeble noises which turn out to be the steps of a young woman, who enters the scene. When she lights her cigarette, the action starts. She kneels to open her bag containing a CD player, and she switches it on, wearing headphones. Simultaneously, some sound elements highlight the present situation: the tolling of the village bell and a car passing by. A second sound channel diffuses the rhythm of the main track of the record, *Lou cavalier faidit*, at a low volume. The close-up of the woman with open eyes extends to her full figure concentrated on listening, then, always with a low volume the framing narrows again onto her enraptured eyes, which are now closed. This very fast sequence is accompanied by the changing of the sound, moving to the electronic intro of the piece. This is the connecting device for a parallel editing in which the woman reopens her eyes; her face illuminated by a different light, namely, the one of the concert venue evoked by sound in a dreamlike dimension. The shots of a real live performance appear as the recorded and unsynchronized track continues. The movement of the protagonist amongst the audience is alternated with periodical returns to the first situation, and towards the first sensorial sphere of headphone-listening, with the young woman dancing alone in the road. During the last exchange of levels, in the dreamlike dimension she leans out towards the barriers delimiting the stage, whilst in the real dimension she is getting dangerously close to a lorry. The music stops with the noise of the braking vehicle, while the CD player falls to the ground, and opens to show the CD inside which is still

whirling. Our attention is focused on this promotional image, as well as on the one of the *Apecar* lorry driver, Sergio Berardo himself. As he opens the door, he addresses an ironical reproach to the young woman. Then the music resumes and, after the superimposed advertisement, the video closes with the departure of the crackling *Ape*.

Going beyond the mere description, we can identify some details expressing the density of messages and characteristics implied in the musical expression, which are significantly condensed into little more than a minute. The last encounter between the woman with the group leader is depicted with humour: the protagonist is a well-defined human type, or better, a small town individual with all his symbolic attributes – the common and unpretentious vehicle, hat and toothpick between his teeth – ready to find fault with young generations. In actual fact, this game, based exactly on the intensity of local imaginary, overturns the real position, the position of an ideal and musical production which is completely addressed to a young audience. This destination section is not neutral, but culturally defined. Some elements, first of all the woman's clothes and accessories and the roll-your-own cigarette which is imposed on packaged cigarettes, identify the average typology of the public, far from fashionable elegance and often favouring alternative tendencies. The following framings of the audience and of the band confirm that general socio-cultural milieu. Finally, the performance images show the strong connections with the symbols of a cherished and autonomous identity, through the objects of more direct and ubiquitous links: the flag with the symbols chosen as a form of cultural unity. With its roots grounded in polished medieval evocations, it is already a recognizable icon of local autonomism and moreover, its red colour is a manifest sign of a political inclination.

Retracing the subsequent phases and the multiple faces of the expressive phenomenon I have dealt with, it is now the moment to locate its position in the current musical panorama. We can certainly relate the history of the group, as well as the constellation of similar experiences, to the contemporary folk music macro-genre. I am also convinced that this conclusion is weak, if we highlight the plurality of external loans. It is evident that no other musical experience in the area could create such a syncretism of forms, instruments and languages. However, the question I am unable to answer is whether the most representative exponent of contemporary Occitan music, following an expressive trend, mainly characterized by folk-rock formation and sound, originated a really new genre.

A second and conclusive problematic tangle concerns the relation between a precise territorial area and the expressive context which elaborates its sound representation. I tried once again to experience virtual research on the web, finding precious information about the presence and location of venues connected to Occitan music from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011 up to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014. The result, which could be hard to represent in other ways, is the mapping of over 4,000 events in an adequately representative time segment. The section of the

web page used as the data source is called *Appuntamenti di Musica e Ballo Occitano*, and works as a spontaneous updated calendar for aficionados.<sup>50</sup> It thus depicts with rare reliability a genuine interest in a homogeneous object.

Can one consider the will of the main Occitan music creators and performers to give new nourishment to traditional culture and their impulse to a radical regeneration as achieved goals? Although this map cannot demonstrate this, it does however tell us about a real presence that is indeed representative of a first area of emanation, rooted well beyond a fleeting and distant vogue, and to use Sergio Berardo's words, far more than a trivial 'board game'.

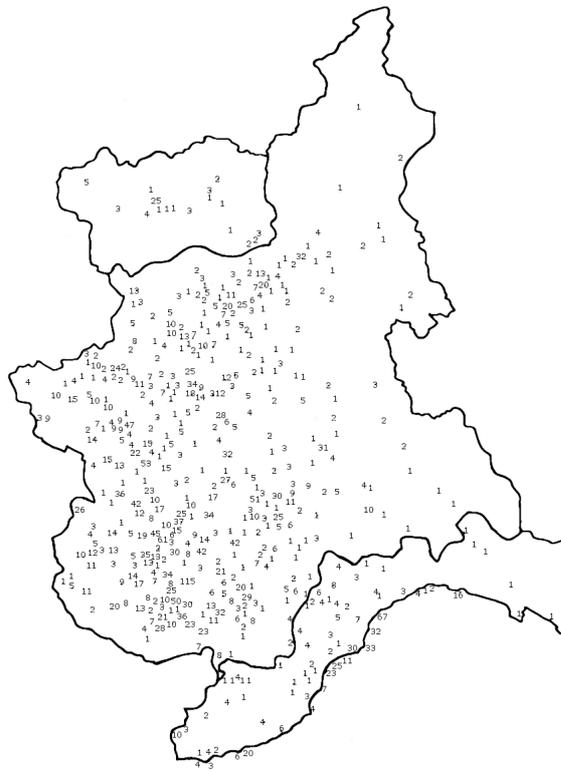


Figure 3 – Map of the *Appuntamenti di Musica e Ballo Occitano* (period between 2012-2014) in Piedmont, Liguria and the Aosta Valley.

<sup>50</sup> The web page referred to is: <<http://digilander.libero.it/occt/cronologico.html>>. I wish to thank the website administrator for the authorization to use online data, as well as his archive data.

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