MY CANZONIERE

By Carlo Siliotto

I can't remember how it all started...
The first image I have in mind is the Parioli's branch of the Italian Communist Party, where Stefano Lepri, Teresa Marchesi, Maurizio Gnerre, and maybe Clara Sereni, are singing folk songs.
Songs like "Gli Scariolanti".
Songs easy to sing, just a few chords, simple and yet filled with something absolute, something fierce as you find in classic music. They are songs, yet they're not light, easy-listening stuff; they are songs you want to sing together, they talk about people and real feelings, they are inventions and yet they are not, they are the legacy you want to pass on, a gift you hand to somebody, something deeply physical inviting you to participate, calling you to clap your hands on the same beat, and join the chorus.
Those songs are different, a good vehicle for those of us in search for another dimension, an alternative project to what society and schools in the '60s tried to transmit.
I don't know why, but I feel my Latin and Greek teacher won't like those songs, not to talk about my math teacher! But they are fine to me: I feel like I suddenly found a dress fitting on me like a glove.
I go back in time when I was 10 years old, and to my mind runs to those long white shirts of the Gospel Choir of the Black Nativity which opened my eyes, ears and heart in Spoleto, where my mother brought me, on occasion of the Two Worlds Festival [Il Festival dei due mondi], in 1960, the moment I felt music anointed me.

I was 12 years old, and I was already very much into music. I used to study classical guitar with Maestro Raspanti; I was a fast learner, and he was blind, so he told me in all honesty that he wouldn't be able to teach me any further, since my hands could start developing some setting problems he couldn't possibly see and correct.
My mother then consulted my middle-school's music teacher. She suggested a teacher that she thought would be perfect for me, a young lady who played the lute with her ancient music ensemble.
We went to meet her in a big Roman palace in Via Marianna Dionigi: her name was Giovanna Marini, and after listening to me a bit she told my mother that I had "too much talent to study"; she said I didn't need studying, and that the best thing for me was to go on by myself, free of any brakes of a traditional teaching.
Today, having known Giovanna closely throughout the years, I'm convinced that I met

her at a moment in which she wanted to do everything but teaching music to young boys, and that perhaps she received us just as a courtesy to Professoressa Bertazzoli.
At any rate; I continued to study music by myself, for the time being.

Like many of my peers, I started putting together bands: two guitars, bass and drums, sometimes a keyboard. The type of formation very much in demand a that time: the first Beatles, the first Rolling Stones, the Italian groups.
But "Gli scariolanti" soon played a pivotal role in my young musical universe.

SANDRO

Sandro… Sandro… Sandro…
Yes, I think the first time we met was at political meeting at the Montesacro's section, in Piazza Sempione. I was sort of a defector, that is, I was coming from a different political group; he was coming from another.
Sandro was amazing, he never stopped doing something; he was trying to record Italian traditional folk musics, especially in the Lazio region, following the footsteps of Diego Carpitella, and more so of Alan Lomax.
He was in touch with the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano and he told me about Gianni Bosio, Franco Coggiola, Cesare Bermani, Michele Straniero, about the record label Dischi del Sole.
He introduced me to the "musica popolare", the Italian traditional folk music. I got acquainted with everybody thanks to him.
Giovanna Daffini, the Aggius choir, the music from Sardinia, the "a tenores" singers, the Piadena duo, the political songs, work songs, ballads, love songs, the zampogna - or bagpipe - the "launeddas" - the Sardinian triplepipe - the accordion.
I was struck by Sandro's scientific accuracy and his love for tradition and popular memory: tradition and memory different from those I was used to call as such.
At that time the word "tradition" used to evoke folkloric groups performing at gastronomic fairs, while the word memory would evoke Carducci's poems and pages of Latin and Greeks we were forced to swallow down at school.
His were political motivations. The tradition he was referring to was the oral tradition of those not in possession of writing tools and means of transmission, therefore unable to document; the memory he was talking about was the working-class memory, the poor people, the lower and weak social groups. These two words, when put together, would become a rich cultural entity impossible t to do without, a world we felt was our

duty to preserve before it was too late.

FRANCESCO

I met Francesco years earlier, when I switched from the Marconi "gymnasium" to the "liceo classico" Giulio Cesare.

During the first trimester at school someone told me that "there was somebody" going around talking trash about my brother Giustino.
I wanted to meet this guy, tell him something; one day, during recess, I went and looked for him in the students bathrooms - I was tipped - where indeed I found him.
“Are you Francesco Giannattasio?”
“Yeah.”
“Why are you bad-mouthing my brother?”
“I don't even know your brother, but I know his girlfriend, and let me tell you, she a royal bitch. Do you have a cigarette?”
Our shared vision about my brother's girlfriend made us friends, and we started soon to move our first steps in the varied universe of Italian traditional folk music.
He knew some "filastrocche" [simple, repetitive songs hinged on the storytelling] from Tuscany and Piedmont, songs he liked to sing during the school's field trips with Piero Caracciolo: I was there with them, playing guitar.

Then came France: Benedetto Manacorda and our Tunisian friends with whom we played jam sessions lasting entire days.
Francesco had an amazing physical resemblance to Dag (Mohamed-Habib Daghari-Ounissi), a young Tunisian history professor, and when they played percussion together they looked almost identical, even by the way they moved; so, to distinguish one from he other, we nicknamed Francesco "Bubù the Algerian".
The adjective - Algerian - was soon after left out, but to his friends professor Francesco Giannattasio is still known today as Bubù.

Slowly but surely the pieces started falling into place. We begun following Sandro in his errands in the northern areas of the Lazio region [Alto Lazio]: Arrone, Polino, Dante Bartolini, and the improvised rhymes.

So stato a lavorà pe coprì er fosso,
un giorno o l’altro lo farò un fracasso,
pe tre e cinquanta lavorà non posso,

me torna mejo conto d'annà a spasso.

E chi magna la carne e chi l'osso,
È giunta l'ora da cambiallo er passo,
non è più tempo de vecchi fascisti,
In Italia semo tutti comunisti.

[I went to work to cover the ground
one of these days I'll make a mess
I can't work for just two bucks
I'd rather go wandering around.

Some eat meat and some the bone
it's time to change, and moving on
no more time for old fascists
we now are all communists.]

When not moving with a clear goal in mind, we would choose a small town or a village, hoping to find a clue, a trace; we would drive up there, park the car, and start asking around:
"Excuse me, do you happen to know someone able to play and sing traditional folk songs?"
And there's was always someone, at his or her home, and more often than not at the "hosteria", where normally people get together in these places. I think I drank more wine in those days than in my entire life, since it was absolutely impossible to decline the invitation to drink.
We often ended up dancing and singing with our new friends that Sandro, for the sake of scientific accuracy, would call "i portatori", the carriers.

To entertain ourselves, we would challenge each other in popular-poetic contests.
We would adapt to the rhymes our own foibles, thus making fun of ourselves, and in the same way we would translate the Sardinian "Muttettos" [mots] to our political ideas, transforming and reworking step by step the language we were learning from scratch day by day.
In other words, we were making it our own.
Mao-tze Tung would become a song's subject, while some political leaders of the Rome student movement became the target of our bawdy ad-libbed rhymes.

A group of people started to gather around this endeavor.
Giannino Kesich, Marco Mueller, Nunzia Tambara, Giovanna Marinuzzi, Franco Mapelli, Carlo Muzi, Mariella Eboli. The main engine, however, continued to be Sandro, who, despite being our same age, seemed like an older brother to us.
He used to come by and pick me up at my house with his Fiat 850, and during the time-lapse between his ringing the buzzer and my arrival down the street to his car he had been able to handle an impressive amount of work. I never saw him without a book in his hands, a document or a working plan. He was never idling.
Even during our meetings and assemblies he wasn't able to keep his hands still; with scientific precision he would break hundreds of small plastic cups in tiny pieces exactly the same size, which he then would dispose in big black garbage bags.
He had a professional UHER audio recorder, and an enormous amount of tapes on which he had recorded every kind of material.

We're getting there, but how we'll able to transform all this material?
There were groups like the Canzoniere Veneto and Canzoniere Milanese... no doubt anymore: we needed to give birth to our Canzoniere del Lazio.

PIERO

I was studying Architecture at the University in Rome when someone told me about a student who was supposedly a wonderful singer, named Piero Brega.

Piero surely got himself noticed by wearing exclusively black velvet clothes, with knicker pants rolled inside his high boots.
I remember I introduced myself to him and I told him about what we were about to do, and right after that I heard him singing and playing at somebody's place.
One of his songs hit me hard, though he now claims it was not that one: but I have an emotional memory that tells me without any doubt that the song was "La pippa e la bottiglia" (The Pipe and the Bottle).
Piero had a great timbre, but most impressive his voice felt like it was coming out of Sandro's tape recorder. It was folksy, and it sounded like the voice of a peasant, or better siad, all peasants' voices.
Right before that Sandro had told us about a group recently formed in Naples, and what surprised him about it was that their voices felt authentic, voices not from professional

singers, and yet real, not studied, unadulterated.
Piero's voice had the same kind of truth, plus the unique traits of our region, Lazio. And that would have been the pivotal strength of our band, no doubt about that.

If I had to tell this episode in a film I would depict myself in my Fiat 500 speeding like a madman as to be the first to give Sandro and Bubu' news of such discovery.
Stuck in traffic in Rome, with no cell phones yet available, hyper anxious to announce the good news. Maybe it didn't go exactly that way, but I think I've given the proper idea.

Meeting after meeting in Montesacro (Rome), at Sandro's house; millions of smashed small plastic cups. Listening to hours and hours of tapes, selecting dozens of different lineups.
“We'll put together these two songs and make just one," Sandro says. "This is going to be sang by a man and a woman; we'll do an instrumental intro here; this is just for two voices; this is bad; Piero will sing this one solo with the guitar."

We had started sort of a movement. Great is the desire to communicate it, divulge it, maybe we should start a magazine, something unpretentious for the time being.
It's the time of mimeograph: everybody agree, we'll do it.
Now, we need a name for the magazine.
I have an hilarious memory about the discussion. Sandro of course is the most serious and the most scientifically invested in this matter.

We are instead more focused on the music itself and its revival, so our moods are quite different. Giannino Kesich proposes the first title: “I nostri Bororo” (Our Bororos).
Bubù retorts with “La voce dell’ignoranza” (The voice of ignorance). We are in stitches, and our laughter convey, though unaware at that time, the fact that we stand before something very important, and also that we start feeling a sense of responsibility.
Luckily, my older brother, who's also having fun, doesn't miss a beat and makes his bid. All agree.
The magazine will be called "I Giorni Cantati” (The Sung Days): fantastic!

We now need an endowment.
We prepare a lineup focused on emigration: “Jammose bella mia” (Let's go my lovely),

“Io parto per l’America” (I'm going to America).
We'll go to Milan to introduce ourselves to the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano at Dischi del Sole record company's headquarters in Via Melzo 4, close to Porta Venezia.
It's winter, and foggy.
We drive up North on our friend Giorgio Vivaldi's minivan, and once in Milan we perform for the record company's people in a huge hall, basically the archive of Italian traditional folk music. It's a loft plastered with shelves crammed with tapes, and lightened by three big windows floor to ceiling, looking down the typical Milan inner patio; it's like a temple, and we are under examination, and it's the first important step we are taking together.

Sandro is nervous; for him, more than for us, it's a decisive test, it's the validation of his work, while we are the voice he doesn't want to sing, we are his guitars, the hands that pinch the strings.

The people at Dischi del Sole are interesting, droll, original: one of them looks like a political leader, another like a mad scientist, another one a vaudeville actor, and together they look like a group of "Carbonari", speaking in secret codes and obscure languages.

We get to know musicians from Northern Italy, and I immediately fall in love with the girls singing with the Canzoniere Milanese.
I honestly confess I couldn't choose among them girls. There's also a violinist, she's small, her skin is very white, she looks fragile, and she plays Nordic ballads. She comes from Celtic culture, very aristocratic when compared to our earthy music.
She intimidates me, she make me think. She makes me fall in love with her.

I have a vivid memory of Via Melzo, I even remember the taste of the food we ate in a trattoria: green lasagne, and of course cotolette.
The second day in Milan I meet Giovanna Marinuzzi in Piazza della Repubblica. She's going to stay at her aunt's place. The doorman of the big bourgeois palace takes a good look at me and says: "Vendors enter through the back door!"
There are two Milanos, I know, the snobs and not so snobs, and we are in touch with the right one. We are "Carbonari" ourselves, and we have a mission to carry on, a long road ahead we're going to walk together.

The people at Dischi del Sole advise us to focus our energies on Lazio, since nobody did that before.
That's our endowment!
Once back in Rome, we are already The "Canzoniere del Lazio”.

NUNZIA

Nunzia and I would see each other every day, music or not. She had a wonderful, flexible voice. She used to dress as a college girl, blue pleated skirt, sweater of the same color with a white collar, elegant shoes; a white fly in an army of Eskimos, flowered shirts and clogs. She used to sing American and French songs, and together we experienced three trips to France, the improvisations and the Tunisian food Zhouzi cooked for us. The majority of our Parisian friends, aside from Benedetto, were from North Africa, and one of our favorite hangout was "Le Centre Americaine" in the Saint Michel quarter, where we used to go to play music with people our age coming from all over the world; Nunzia amazed everybody with the beauty of her voice. One afternoon, on our way to the American center, Ali, a young professor at the University of Vincennes, asked us to make a stop at a big hardware store. He talks to the salesmen, and they show him different types of rigid plastic pipes; after a careful examination, Ali selects one, cuts it down to a 50 cm. long section, and takes it with him. While walking on the sidewalk he starts to make some holes in the pipe, and when we get to destination the gray plastic pipe has become a flute, similar to and Andean "Quena", which Ali skillfully plays.

Nunzia seemed to have found home in Paris: she liked everything about the city, and was enthusiastic like a little girl for every new discovery. Despite her college-girl look, Nunzia felt very comfortable in that world, in which she moved with absolute lightness. Our peers in Paris, at that time , were used to living in a multicultural dimension, facing everybody and listening and respecting everybody else. All we had to do was learning from them. Fatah, for example, would never lock his apartment's door: if somebody needed to come in, they could.

Everybody in Rome thought that Nunzia and I were a couple, because we were always together, and indeed our friendship somehow prevented us to have other relationships.
But after the trip to Milan she told us that her father summoned her to let her know that she had to choose between music and university. One or the other. He basically forced her to face an aut-aut, and with great embarrassment, fearing the idea of a precarious career in music, she made her choice.
So we lost her voice.
Nunzia, who until her final days remained my best friend, never stopped questioning herself about that choice: was it the right one for her?
We need to understand that at that time there was very little to relate to: other than TV

shows like "Bella Ciao" or "Ci ragiono e canto", there was no outlet for that kind of "thing" that we were about to do. A bourgeois, middle-class family was still unable to fathom a future as a folk music singer for their daughter, Nunzia, who later completely changed her lifestyle; the time for emancipation had not come yet for her.
We were all very, very young.

Giovanna Marinuzzi, on the contrary, abandoned us because she loved Brazilian music more than Italian folk music, and Mariella Eboli didn't feel ready to carry the responsibility of every female singing roles on stage.
We had a problem, but Piero was able to fix it.

SARA

They met at the music club Folkstudio, and Piero invited her for the first time at Sandro and Mariella's house; that sort of "audition" in front of us daunted her.
We showed her a song, which she sang with little determination. After a moment of embarrassment, Francesco asked her to sing the same piece again, an octave higher; she than showed the singing skill she's still famous for.
The chemistry suddenly kickes in, mainly with Piero. When they sing together, they seem real characters from another story, and even visually they look like they are made from the same mold, with the same texture.
Sara brought he cheerfulness to the group, and her "romanità", which gave us confidence and a sense of legitimacy. Her authenticity became part of us, and we could finally start preparing the show we had in mind.

During those days everybody, more or less, used to perform at Folkstudio.
I used to sing Spanish songs while playing my guitar, and Giancarlo Cesaroni,

Folkstudio's owner, would announce on the newspaper: “Spanish folk songs by Carlos”. I was annoyed because my name was Carlo Siliotto, and he responded that it was a newspaper error, a typo: they attached the initial of my last name to the first name. Yeah, sure...
Truth was that he was trying to cheat the audience, and sell something I was not: luckily the patrons were not that many.

The natural venue for our debut was supposed to be the Folkstudio, where, at that time, all the musicians were coming about: from the "cantautori" - singer-songwriters - to the first Roma jazz movement, and than Antonello Venditti, Francesco De Gregori, Maurizio Giammarco, Tommaso Vittorini, Ernesto Bassignano, Rino Gaetano, Eugenio Colombo and Mario Schiano, Mimmo Locasciulli, Gianni Nebbiosi and Free Jazz bands, the Folkstudio singers, from Harold Bradley to Pablo Romero and Giorgio Lo Cascio; plus all the artists passing by in Rome, English and and South American musicians, among them Robert Zimmermann, whom would soon become Bob Dylan.
In short, a great movement and a fantastic exchange of ideas. A springboard, as Cesaroni called it.
Not true.

We made our debut at Spazio Zero, Lisi Natoli's theatre, in Trastevere, close to Santa Maria's church. I can't remember why.
Sitting in the audience I only remember Giovanna Marini, Dado and Elena Morandi, and no one else, as tough the three of them were the only people I didn't know well.
The rest of the audience consisted of our best friends, basically ourselves, I mean, our "similar".
That was, since the beginning, the magic and unique component that accompanied the entire Canzoniere's history. The total identification, that is, between us and the audience. For us the audience was not people we didn't know who came to listen to our music: the audience was us, and we were them
We had a deep knowledge about our generation, and we still do. We used to read the same books, dream the same dreams, we had the same expectations, we would listen to the same music, watch the same movies, hang out in the same squares and places in the city. In the entire history of the Canzoniere, maybe with the exception of a few tours abroad, there's never been a separation between us and our audience.
Squares and theaters were always crowded by people like us, and we were the instruments in their hands and witnesses of a "different" culture we searched and wished to find together.
A culture we used to call "alternative": it was certainly alternative in its contents, and more important was becoming so in its forms.
As a matter of fact there are formal solutions and combinations in folk music that are not studied even today with equal dignity.

It's wrong to the music knowledge at large, and a serious subtraction of instruments against composition.
It's like depriving a child whose parents have two different mother-tongues, of both idioms.
Luckily, other people before us had already started this kind of work, first among them Giovanna Marini.

"MAKING MUSIC"
(or Giovanna)

Giovanna was the music, that music, our music.
Not only she had divulged many traditional Italian folk songs, but she wrote new ones, and still today nobody knows exactly which are her original compositions and which belong to the tradition, what is hers and what is a reworking.
By now she had written many ballads in a complete personal style, and they always were able to evoke the culture Giovanna was referring to.
She was the Maestro everybody would turn to, and her lust for searching something always new, combined with our desire to get involved, produced a show which we repeated many times a the Teatro delle Muse, in Rome, close to Piazza Bologna.
Giovanna Marini, Elena Morandi, the Canzoniere del Lazio, Gianni Nebbiosi, with two additions: Fernando Fera on electric guitar, and Glauco Borrelli on electric bass.
The first signs of the contamination and fusion that were about to happen.
The concert was titled "Fare Musica", Making Music. A title perfect to describe the moment we were experiencing.

GIANNI

We'd spent our days at Gianni Nebbiosi's house, a villa on Via Cassia, adjacent to the Nerone's Tomb, where we would "rehearse". Rehearsing meant hanging out together all day while experimenting whatever came up to our minds.

At that time, Gianni was the most prepared of us, the one who had studied the most, and besides writing songs, whose harmonies reminded more of Kurt Weill than our folk tradition, he was fascinated by that new diversity that held us together.
It was a sort of laboratory for collective craftsmanship based at Nebbiosi's place, made

not only of musicians but also by a number of friends that were listening what we were doing, making comments, giving us suggestions.
We were never "just us". We were always a lot of people, and I think that this collegiality and assembly-like atmosphere gave us the strength to get to the theater at show time with great self-assurance, feeling the strength of a shared consent, knowing the we were bringing a message that needed to be sung out loud, as to claim the right to exist and belonging.

We were very cheerful and happy when we arrived at the Teatro delle Muse because just a few days before some of our friends were "freed". Yes, freed from prison, where they ended up because an idiot had hidden some "illegal stuff" at Anna and Pasquale's place, without their knowledge.
This guy, though admonished not to bring anything in that house, went on to do his trafficking in San Pietro, and then was followed by the police all the way to the Balduina (a neighborhood in Rome).
So there was a blitz and everybody ended up arrested and thrown in jail, at Rebibbia.
Some of them were freed just in time to attend the premiere of "Making Music".
I could see them from the stage, they were standing, leaning against the left wall with a miserable look, but mainly I remember how convincingly the would applaud. Those applause were a surprise for me, since what happened to them could have happened to me. Perhaps I should have applauded them, as happy I was to see them around.
Nevertheless, what we were doing we were doing it also for them and for their months-long absence. Especially for Pasquale, our rocker friend, with whom, through those new experiments, we were finding a contact point and beginning a common journey. Yes, because in the musical movement there were two distinct souls that had never met.
In other words, the Woodstock's soul and Piadena's soul, so apart and different and yet they were both inside us, even though each of us would practice more one rather than the other.
Objectively, big word, Fare Musica/Making Music was the beginning of a new phase, at least for us.
We did more shows outside Rome, and all over Italy, but I remember especially well the one in Bologna. Two shows in two different theaters.
In Bologna they have the Canzoniere delle Lame, with Eugenia de Paolis, and she gave me an appointment the following Wednesday, once our tour was over. So I go back to Bologna to meet Eugenia, who's the daughter of the station master.

In the following months the Canzoniere started performing everywhere. Public libraries, theaters, big tops, circus tents, political events and rallies; a Roman reality - inside the folk music scene - was progressively taking shape, and this reality included, for example, Paolo Pietrangeli, the author of one that period's anthem: “Contessa” (Countess).
The Circolo of Centocelle became that movement's epicenter, thanks to the

indefatigable commitment and work of Luigi Martella, an heroic Post Office employee who tirelessly would organize events of every kind in his neighborhood (Centocelle), including Feste dell'Unità [the Italian Communist Party annual festivals]. Our relations with the "Feste dell'Umidità" - the humidity fest, as we used to call them, since they were taking place in summertime, on hot and sticky nights - got somehow complicated due to our song "Canzone che ammazza li preti" (Song that kills the priests), an anarchic song which, as Loris Barbieri told me years later, the PCI [Italian Communist Party] didn't like at all, since at that time the PCI for trying a rapprochement with the Catholics, therefore song portraying clerics as pigs was not politically correct. We never thought priests were pigs, quite the opposite, but for sure some sense of humor was needed to understand that song, which was nothing else than a "tavern song, un "canto d'osteria", born under the influence of some local "vino [wine] laziale"! Humor has never been bureaucrats' forte.

The "Canzone che ammazza li preti" was instead very appreciated in a different context: the more liberal one of the first Festival di Re Nudo (Naked King Festival) in Zerbo, Alpe del Viceré. The audience was way more hippie, and we were considered the most politicized band, while at the Feste dell'Unità we ourselves were seen as hippies! The Festival di Re Nudo was fantastic. There were so many people, the river, the valley, every possible bands curious of one another, a very welcomed breath of freedom and a revolution of values that was surging in the music scene.
There was a small stage standing up by miracle, a P.A. system barely enough to propagate sound, but the perception of a great beginning was very clear, more than the sound itself. With our acoustic guitars, we were embraced by a heavy electric environment: the fans immediately showed a great attention to us, and great affection.

We recorded our first album in Milan, in just one afternoon, maybe two. It was titled "Quando nascesti tune", for Dischi del Sole record label.
Soon after that recording, Sara left for Canada, and old dream of hers.
It was just the three of us when we started that summer season: Bubù, Piero, and me. We performed at many Feste dell'Unità, and Partito Radicale's [Radical Party] events. Our fee was fifty thousand liras [today's 50 dollars approx] per gig, to be shared among us. We would travel with my Fiat 500, which was also able to carry:
two guitars,
a couple of accordion "abbruzzesi",
a violin,
every possible kind of percussion,
our personal luggage.
That was our first summer as "professionals".

One day we were supposed to play in Pontassieve, close to Florence, and we arrived there about lunch time. We bought some food in a place suggested by Bubù, and went

for a picnic on the river Arno's bank.
We were lying down on the grass, eating delicious game food. We looked at each other and said: “And they're even paying us for this!"
I might sound rhetorical, but at 23 we were doing what we dreamed about, we were making our imaginations true, and that thing was even better and more gratifying than we imagined.
We were happily lying down on the grass, under the sun, on the river's bank, with a small car full of musical instruments and an important show that evening... And they were even paying us for it!

During the following winter I remember two concerts: the first one featured the Canzoniere del Lazio and Gianni Nebbiosi in a city library close to Bologna, as part of a showcase called "Musica Realtà" (Reality Music); the second featured classical pianist Maurizio Pollini and composer Luigi Nono in a huge theater in Fabbrico di Reggio Emilia.
Gianni's concert had many of his songs in the lineup, and some of us performed with him; then the Canzoniere itself would play.
We moved as a team, we felt confident and we felt as though we had the world in our hands. And mainly we were always certain we were right!
This strong belief would sometimes make us react in a bizarre way against certain criticism or even against legitimate questions and curiosity toward our work. I remember that time, right during the debate after the concert at the city library close to Bologna.
I assume we were a little stoned, we must have smoked a joint or two, but the questions from the audience had the purpose to clarify some of the topics raised in our show, as to demonstrate the wisdom and culture of the ones raising those issues. Or it seemed.
We answer to a barrage of questions, until, as we used to say, “the pump still pumps". But then an unpleasant type starts ranting about higher matters using an over polished language good only at spitting a bunch of bullshit.
We look at each other in the eyes:
"Who wants to answer to this guy?"
Pause.
“Nobody!"
We look again at each other in complete silence and then, suddenly, as someone had counted, "one... two... three...", we collapse on the floor at the same time and stay motionless without muttering a word, until the whole audience get up and exit the room.

We are now in Fabbrico di Reggio Emilia.
Performing on the same stage with Pollini and Nono is an amazing honor, and the room is packed, despite the concert is taking place at night on a working day.

The audience is composed in its entirety by blue-collar workers from that industrial area, and their families.

The program starts with Beethoven sonatas, played by Pollini, a resounding success with the audience. Pollini is impressive not only for his technique, which we all know, but also for his amazing ability to communicate, and his fluency that make it seems as though he's just improvising, like he's creating music on the spot.
The crowd is moved, they feel personally honored by that presence, and the organizers are ecstatic: they made a dream come true, and won a bet.
It needs to be remembered that in the '70s classical music was still an almost exclusive to the upper classes, and was performed strictly in appointed places, be it concert halls or Conservatories. Listening Beethoven played live was, up to that moment, a privilege for the privileged few, and this glass ceiling was broken at Reggio Emilia, right on this occasion, "Musica Realtà".

It's out turn, we play some rhythmic music, it doesn't hurt at this time of the day. The crowd clap their hands, join the choruses. Then it's finally Luigi Nono's turn; we are full of curiosity and expectations.
On the stage they install two Revox tape recorder, and the same composer announces his piece: "La fabbrica illuminata" (The lightened up factory). The recorders start rolling and the sounds coming out of them are elaborations generated by industrial machines' noises which take the shape of a musical composition, and are used as an orchestra section. The audience is silent, attentive, but not completely.
At the following debate, despite the night hour, everyone stay, including the children, many of them already fallen asleep on their mothers' laps. The questions are interesting and engaging, we feel the audience is grateful for that concert and their organizers. But unfortunately the party's over, in a disappointing way, at least from our perspective.
A worker addresses directly to Luigi Nono the following question:
“Maestro, we thank you for coming here and perform for us: but I wanted to ask you, why did you choose this particular piece, why those noises from the factory, noises we'll hear again tomorrow morning for eight hours in a row?"
This question was asked elegantly, even reverently, it was not aggressive and less so provocative. It was just a legitimate curiosity.
Nono answered politely, explaining the reasons of his inspiration and choice, but then somebody else from the organization stepped in, without waiting his turn to speak, accusing of ignorance and incompetence the factory worker that asked the question: it was due to the lack of musical teaching in the school system if music was not understood and appreciated, and it was not people's fault if they were not able to absorb those advanced languages; in conclusion, he told the worker, he shouldn't feel ashamed if he didn't like that music.
Instead I felt ashamed for the speaker who, as part of the organizing committee, came across as though he was speaking on behalf of us all. I wanted to step in, say

something, but that person abruptly put an end to the debate and sent everybody home.
I always thought that if music doesn't "reach" it's not the listener's fault.
I always thought that he who has the gift of any kind of creativity should also have the responsibility of its communication, and that there's a musical ethics epitomized by the sincerity of the inspiration and the respect for those who will listen to it, meaning you're responsible for that language and only you will be able to make it comprehensible. "Understanding the music… Fuck you!"

Aldo Vitale was the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris. He was great friends with Giovanna, and an admirer of her work, and he organized for her a France music tour: the capital city then the South, the Camargue, where Roman Polansky filmed "Cul del Sac".
Giovanna wants us to perform with her, and for us is a fantastic chance to meet again our friends in Paris: Benedetto and Nunzia, who are now living together, Zhouzi, Dag and all the others. We play at the Italian Cultural Institute and at the University, and then off we go driving toward the South of France.
Here our audience consists mainly of Italian language students, curious to know about our traditions. Aldo asks us to introduce the songs one by one and explain to the audience their origins and contents, and this time it's Bubù turn to be the presenter, since, among us, he's the one who speaks better French.
It is well known that when speaking in another language, you shouldn't translate directly from your original language, Italian in our case, but tackle it directly to better and more appropriately use its syntax.
This rule, in the small theater of University of Montpellier, was totally ignored by Francesco/Bubu', who introduced a song more or less s as follows:
“La prochaine chanson…nous…l’ha cantat…un’homme…che…s’appelle…Dante Bartolini.” ("The proxime song was sang by a homme called, etc.")
Then slows down the words' rhythm:
“Il vive…vicin a Roma…dove…abit e… lavora come contadino…” ("Il lives close to Rome and work as a farmer".)
Francesco goes on talking for a couple of minutes, very, very slowly. He's convinced he's speaking French, he's translating straight from Italian, and unknowingly skips the last part of the proceeding. None of us warns him, and we let him go on for a few minutes. The audience is fascinated by his goofy eloquence, and the incident all but warms up the atmosphere.
Camargue is so beautiful, ponds, horses, sea. And so melancholic.
That tour is also the last thing we did with Giovanna, and, subconsciously, we know it.
Something is buzzing in our head: our paths are about to split, perhaps.

A little later, as a matter of fact, we got to our turning point.

We had to play in Sperlonga, a seaside town south of Rome, for the local Festa dell'Unità.
Our repertoire was supposed to last about 1 hour and a half. The person expected from Rome to give the key-note speech was very late; so the Communist Party's local section secretary come on stage and pleads us to play at least another hour and keep entertaining the crowd until the speaker's arrival.
"We completed our repertoire... we don't know what else to play!"
"If you play some more we'll give you forty thousand lire extra" [20 bucks]
"OK, it's a deal!"
We look at each other.
"What are we gonna do now?"
"Let's improvise!"
"How?"
"Let's jam over the songs' chords! Two of us will play the base, the third one will solo, and we'll take turns!"

From today's perspective it sounds basic, and yet at that time those musical pieces, fruit of a long search, found a deep reason in each single note, in every single word, and we felt that improvising over them was taking too much liberty.
It's like if a Catholic was called to improvise over the harmonies of "Ostia Divina".
So be it.
We improvised and had a grand time, and the audience too. We did it with the instruments, the voices, percussion. In the end we were able to cover the whole time requested, until the arrival of the orator, though we could have gone on and on.
"And they even paid us!"

I remember the return trip to Rome. I was driving, I was in cloud nine; we had an amazing outlook in front of us, an endless amount of possibilities. That night I couldn't shut my eyes.
We were going to be for Italian traditional folk music what jazz was for Blues in America; we were going to re-invent the canons and styles of folk tradition, and compose a "new" music nobody had listened before.
We needed other instruments: electric guitar, bass, percussion, winds.
The idea was very clear: we needed to start, and it was only a matter of choosing among our musician friends the most fitting and appropriate, those that had something to say, and that would have faced this bet without any bias and preconceived notions.

They were there, and they were only waiting to be summoned by us, and this was going to be the natural course of things, the inevitable shape that our experience from the past

two years was going to produce.

PAKI (Pasquale)

Pasquale Minieri, nicknamed “Ciminieri” (chimneys) from the amount of cigarettes he smoked no-stop, had played with Francesco with the Living Music, sort af musical Living Theatre whose main piece was “Govinda”, Indian music mixed with electric guitar, winds, bass, drums and whatever else was available.
He used to live with Anna Bernardini, and everywhere they went they "made it home", and that home would become a place of music. It was filled with instruments, mainly guitars, cushions, rugs, vinyl LPs, turntables and tape recorders.
Pasquale and Anna were a very solid couple, almost an existential reference point for us, a family open to others. Paki (Pasquale) had already started experimenting with guitar strings' open tuning, a field in which the main expert at that time was Luca Balbo.
He was always updated about everything new happening in the music world.
I remember particularly the first time he showed us the new Traffic album, and the song "John Barleycorn", sort of a folk ballad of rare beauty, and I felt it was very close to our work.
Paki's bond to Pop music was the guarantee that that culture would have penetrated in the band, and that our music would have been accepted even by those that up to that moment referred exclusively to that kind of culture.
Besides the guitar, we needed an electric bass, and Pasquale/Paki decided he would dedicate all his efforts to be able to play both instruments.

GIORGIO

Giorgio Vivaldi played percussion, he looked like a bonzo, and at 23 years old he was gifted with an amazing wisdom, an older soul. He had shared with us the France experience, and with Francesco and Pasquale the Living Music experience.
He was the most hippie of us all, at least in his looks, and maybe this worried me a bit because we really wanted to build up a band, meaning we intended to make a living with our music. One day I asked him how he saw his future, something like: "What do you want do as an adult?"
He answered: “I can't tell you exactly, but I'm sure about one thing: I don't want

anybody above me, nor anybody below me."
He already had clear ideas. He opened our minds us to Mediterranean and Middle-East cultures, and he pushed us to find the contact points between our folk tradition and those musical cultures.
He put together a very personal percussion set. Next to cymbals and bass drum were Indian bells, a tabla, a darabouka, cow-bells, Brazilian woods, and every day he would show up with a new instrument, with a new stimulus.

LUIGI

I met Luigi Cinque in Sardinia, in Santa Teresa di Gallura to be precise, while on vacation. Anna and Paki had rented a house that, as usual, became everybody's home. Luigi played the saxophone and had all the looks of a "sax player", those guys adored by Marilyn Monroe in "Some Like It Hot".

I didn't know much about Luigi, but someone proposed to meet him, and play together in the port area.
We did it: tenor sax and violin, him and I. One of us would play the musical base while the other would improvise.
To provide a fuller sound, I played many two strings at a time, and the effect was similar to a bagpipe's sound. That sound was eventually often used by the Canzoniere.
I remember Luigi's face at the end of our jam, filled with satisfaction; I can't remember mine, obviously, but I'm sure it was exactly the same.
We talked about our feelings about Sardinian music , which I was already familiar with, because in the past I had spent a few months living in Sardinia, and had the opportunity to meet personally local musicians Peppino Marotto, Giovanni Rubanu and the tenores of Orgosolo.
Though we were called Canzoniere del Lazio, that island culture couldn't possibly not becoming part of our project, it was so rich and fascinating.
I told him about my idea about expanding the group, about starting a work based on improvisation around the canons of folk music. We made an appointment in Rome, where we would have continued to play with the other members of the band, mainly with Gianni, with whom I was certain Luigi could do fantastic things. For example playing sax as if it were pipes from a "zampogna" [bagpipe]. There's was a lot to be done.

So, here is the first Canzoniere del Lazio's formation, in its new version:

Gianni and Luigi on winds, with Francesco sometimes joining that section with a tenor sax, besides playing bagpipes and percussion. Piero on vocals and guitar, Pasquale bass and electric guitar, Giorgio percussion, and Carlo (me, that is) on guitar and violin, and sometimes - fortunately not very often - vocals.

Gianni has tidied up and remodeled a spacious garage at the entrance of the villa. Sound proof panels and thick door. I think the people of the Albero-Motore band - that were sharing the rehearsal space ith us - took care of the job; Glauco, Fernando and the others are starting to work on Gianni's album, who in the meantime mentioned he wanted to play with us: he wanted to dedicate more time to the sax; he's just somehow intimidated because he never played folk music before, but Luigi's presence helps him to overcome his shyness, and this challenge intrigues him.

The space in Via Cassia 571 becomes our daily rehearsals room. We start with "Lassa stà la me creatura" [Leave my creature alone], with the idea of the bagpipe and music's circularity over which we begin building up some "feeling".
We love the results, and a more substantial shape and form gradually come to the surface.
Yet, the new version of the Canzoniere doesn't convince Sandro, therefore there's a fracture with him and the majority of the Circolo Gianni Bosio. Sandro even writes an article on the "Giorni Cantati" which reads like a critique, like he's almost accusing us.
I wish I could read that article again today, after all these years; and I think I'd be only able to find one more time the disappointment about the end of a common experience, the undertaking of different paths that inevitably separated us.
The split with Sandro saddened me, as well as Piero and Bubù, mainly because we had talked about our idea to the people from Milan, and we had hoped to continue that journey together. The "Milanesi" were skeptical, and yet open to see what we had to offer. The only person really full of enthusiasm was Giovanni Pirelli:
"But of course!" he said. "It's the evolution of the peasant culture as it meets the urban one! You guys go on playing, I can't wait to hear what you're cooking next!"
When Giovanni lost his life in a tragic traffic accident on the Milano-Genova highway, our tie to Dischi del Sole also was ceased to live.
Now we were even more alone, and with a bigger challenge to face. We needed a better technique and preparation, we had to study more. The political message we were trying to pass on was very strong, and the musical grammar and syntax were placed in the background. Music itself was now becoming the message, with no alibis and distractions of any kind, thus we needed to handle it, the music, expertly: the music, period!

The difference of language became the difference of the message, and the use of electric instruments would update the contents, making us an alternative band, in the way we were making music, to commercial bands. We wanted to give the peasant's

culture the right of way, and make it one of the languages the youth movement - which we were part of - was learning.

Gianni was the one who told us about Daniele Paris, the director of the new Conservatory “Licinio Refice” in Frosinone (Lazio's province town). Paris was a classic contemporary musician, and a member of Nuova Consonanza [New Consonance]. He studied with Goffredo Petrassi, and as an orchestra conductor he's credited, along with Bruno Maderna, to have brought to Italy the works of contemporary European composers like Edgar Varese.
For his composition course, Paris accepted students beyond the age limits set by the Conservatory rules. He extorted this freedom from the Ministry, since for years he had tried to transform the Frosinone School of Music into a Conservatory, therefore those to whom this access had been denied in the past had now the chance to attend his classes.
Good for us.
It's impossible to write about Daniele Paris, as it would be describing Africa to someone who's never been there. Paris represented the single most important and influential musical encounter in my entire life. He was not, though, my first composition's teacher. I had already studied composition privately with Iditta Parpagliolo, Giovanna Marini's mom, and Gino Marinuzzi Junior, who suggested me to study with Paris in a proper Conservatory, with a regular schedule and method.

I'd love to say everything about the Maestro, mainly about his humanity, a fruit of his musical discipline: “I teach life, not just music!" he used to say in his typical Roman accent.
And I thought: "What is he saying? What is he talking about?”
Now I believe I know exactly what he was saying.

Two episodes.
At the Conservatory the Canzoniere in general, and me in particular in the Composition Class, were seen by the others students with a hint of arrogance and bias.
We were people already working in music and able to make a living playing folk music, therefore lighter than light music, fronna’, lemon and tarantellas.
One day the Maestro, during a class, said:
“Today we'll compose a song; Siliotto, come here and help me!"
Together we composed a song in front of the whole class, lyrics and music.

This episode made the others change their snobbish attitude toward me and a musical genre: the song.
The class ended with everybody happy and satisfied, and with a sentence typical of the

Maestro: "Well, this is Music too!"

We were free to roam all over the Conservatory; Pasquale was studying upright bass with Buccarella, Luigi, Gianni and Bubù were studying sax with Baldo Maestri, I was studying violin with Milena Costisella first, then with Bice Antonioni, and finally with Riccardo Pellegrino, who became my friend and brother.

At the end of the first academic year, Daniele Paris told us to write a composition to be performed by the "Camerata Musicale Frusinate", an orchestra consisting of students and teachers.
I went to buy my first music sheet with 36 lines.
It was a huge sheet of paper, on which I composed a sort of a Sardinian dance for orchestra.
I showed it to the Maestro, humbly, and I told him that perhaps I had written something too simple, uninteresting from the harmonic point of view (he was a juggler and a monster with harmonies); nevertheless, well, that was my composition, it was the reflection of what I felt like doing.
He took a look at my song and he hummed it, then he stared at me and said: "Siliò [Siliotto], if you asked me to write like Wagner I could do it, as with Hindemith or Mahler; but if you ask me to write like Daniele Paris, I'm not sure I could do it. Now you know it, keep it for yourself!"

I don't think I need to explain my mood at that time, which is the same as today, and I don't think I need to explain the generosity of this sentence. That was him, Paris.
A year later, the Maestro invited us - The Canzoniere - to perform in the Auditorium dell'Edera in Frosinone. The Canzoniere got another important endowment, from no one less than Daniele Paris, that is, from the Conservatory itself.

We continued studying, and rehearsing on Via Cassia 571.
Gianni and I were studying composition with Paris, and together we wrote the music score for a stage production, "Tingeltangel" by Marco Parodi, with actor Massimo De Rossi in the role of Karl Valentin. In that occasion Gianni gave me as a present a tenor flugelhorn, which I immediately used it in a couple of tracks; a few notes, just to give the idea of a marching band. It was the second present I got from Gianni, the first being my first upright piano.

This yearning for sharing brought us to work together on the arrangements of his new album, "Mentre la gente se crede che vola" (While people think they're flying), which was then published by Riky Gianco for the new record label "Intingo".

Riky came down to Rome for this project, and he asked us to let him attend the

Canzoniere's rehearsals. He loved it, and asked us to call him back when ready to record an album. It wasn't the moment yet; we wanted play live first, in front of an audience, whereas God only knows what could have happened.
The new formation's debut happened in Urbino, in the palazzo Comunale [City Hall], along with other groups. It was a huge success, and for us a very important confirmation. The audience seemed to perfectly understand everything we played, and what we were trying to say came across as a straight arrow, with no need at all for words of explanation between our songs.
What happened after the show was even better.
I spent the night in an apartment in Urbino with Maura, a former girlfriend of Luigi he himself introduced me to; we were making out in one bedroom, while Luigi was doing the same in another one with a new girlfriend. I realized how lucky and happy we were, and what a gift our own music was giving us. A very auspicious beginning.

Anna Bernardini set up the Agency of Canzoniere's ofice at the headquarter of an insurance company next to Via Flaminia Vecchia, in Rome; she became our new manager.

ANNA

As I said, she was acting as Pasquale's [Paki] wife, and also as an older sister for all of us due to her composure and elegance, which still today are absolutely intact. She was never despondent, never in a bad mood, and she was able to pacify and brighten up the most difficult and dark moods.
Her kindness made it possible to have good relationships with everybody. She was an integral part of the Canzoniere, notwithstanding that generally speaking couples don't thrive in group situations. She would organize every single thing for us, concerts, vacations, lunches and dinners. She was that kind of person, one that any musician loves to have at his side at any time. The band's organization was in excellent hands, and while Anna was taking care of the concerts booking, Paki [Pasquale] was carrying

on the whole technical work.

The first P.A. System we bought was a Davoli : mixing consolle, speakers, amplifiers, cables and microphones. The new truck was a Ford Transit, white as a whale.

During our first foray with our new equipment, while driving up the hill in the vicinity of Passo del Furlo, in the Alps, the Transit's back hatches suddenly sprang open and the PA system falls badly on the asphalt, rolling over and almost crashing onto Pasquale's Mini Minor, who was riding right behind the truck.
Panic! We load everything back on, or I should say, the othger guys pick-up and load, not me, since I was diagnosed with a beginning of an hernia, which my mates never totally believed. I helped with the lighter stuff.
Luckily the equipment is fine and everything works perfectly. Those miraculous speakers never abandoned us, not even in the most dire predicaments. Viva Willy Davoli! Long live Davoli.

At any rate, the journey of this new electric Canzoniere was on, and though it's difficult to remember exactly the sequence of events, I can assure you that the squares, the venues, and the crowds became gradually bigger and bigger.

Besides curiosity and attention, we were surrounded by respect, because we were very serious in our choices. For example, we never accepted TV gigs, convinced as we were that TV was a brain-washing tool.
Italian state television RAI wanted us for a TV show, and since we thought it would be impolite to decline the invitation, we decided, after a troubled meeting, to ask "politically" a lot of money, hoping they would say" no": and that's just what happened.
The RAI's executive I talked to on the phone - I asked her one million liras [today's US $500 approx], as opposed to the third she was offering - told me we should feel ashamed, that there were people willing to spend one million liras [again, $500] just to buy a dress in order to appear in TV, people asking for nothing, willing to do whatever just to be on TV.

The present time was already on, but at that time we really didn't give a damn: we were living in the real world, among our fellow men, people like us, and we didn't belong at all to that other world. We were part of the "alternative culture", and there was no place for any kind of compromise.

The only thing we said yes to - luckily, because today there's at least a document - was an unplugged kind of live taping at the RAI's branch in Naples.
The show's presenter was Giorgio Calabrese, who was supposed to conduct some interviews with us in order to introduce the band. There was a young audience, good to avoid a cold musical performance conceived only for the TV cameras.

For the taping they placed us on offset foot boards, different heights, and though we felt it was intolerable, we had to play the game. We did a sound check and practice a couple of tunes before the taping. The audience was having fun during our rehearsal, as well as the technicians, one of whom asked me if I knew a very famous Neapolitan song. With my violin I hinted to the melody, and the whole studio had an unexpected reaction.
Screams, whistles, “Stop!"”, “Are you nuts?" and so on. I really had no idea why, maybe I played wrong notes, but that reaction seemed to way too much. Soon after somebody explained me that "that song" was a symbol of bad luck in Naples, and nobody was allowed to play it!
We had a good laugh over it.
Two minutes later there was a blackout. The entire studio fell into darkness, and I was accused of provoking the much feared "jella", the bad luck. We can't do anything for several hours, and people are annoyed by the prolonged wait. Luckily the audience starts to get mad at the studio manager who asked me to play that song. “It's his fault," they say. "He's from Rome, he couldn't know the arcane behind that song."
The power comes back on. Finally we start.

After a few bits an upright bass string breaks. Do you know the diameter of an acoustic bass A string?
“There you go again... see?”
“Oh… maybe they were right after all…”
Fortunately Pasquale is equipped with all the necessary replacement strings and quickly restrings the bass.
We start all over, but after two minutes poor Pasquale, the only Neapolitan among us, suddenly falls victim of liver colic that forces us to stop one more time.
“Here we go again!”
To make a long story short, we finished the taping late in the night, when part of the audience had already left; and yet it somehow managed to be a good recording.

My friend Paolo Luciani showed it to me recently, and I, in that taping, while answering to a question by Giorgio Calabrese, I explain that our music is really a collective work created by the individual contribution of each of us.
It was true. It's the feeling I had when, for the first time in many years, I listened again to the music of "that" Canzoniere. What I heard was exactly the result of this sense of togetherness, an ensemble projected beyond the usual idea of a performance; I could hear Bubu's cheerfulness, Pasquale's seriousness, Marcello's energy, Giorgio's volatility, Piero's truth, and my fragility mixed with the anxiety to keep everything under control.

Our attitude has always very rigorous toward the cost of entrance tickets to our shows; the prize needed to be low because we wanted everyone to afford it. We called it "the political prize."
We found ourselves arguing more than once with concerts' organizers that did not respect the agreement, and in some occasions we forced them to change the cost of the ticket just a few hours before the show, a few times even at the last minute.
In return, we didn't ask the organizers any guaranteed minimum, that is, the more tickets were sold, the more everyone made.

In Piazza della Signoria in Florence, where they play the traditional soccer game in costume, the organizing group, the ARCI [the recreational Communist Party's association), wanted us to play in that same square.
OK. Political cost, no guaranteed minimums, and let's hope everything will be all right. We get to Florence. The square is indeed huge, and the bleachers are enormous, it looks like a stadium. "Let's hope the PA system is powerful enough," we say.
Evening comes, the square fills up completely.
"How many people are there?" we wonder.
They tell us the number: between 40,000 and 50,000. Numbers that inevitably feed financial expectations, why not.
The concert is a triumph, with many encores.
"Let's go to collect the money," we say.
The organizer tells us that the tickets sold are more or less 2,000. What? We ready the cannons, but there's nothing we can do.
They tell us that only 2,000 people regularly paid, while everybody else climbed over the fences, or broke through the gates, getting in for free.
They are the “Autonomi” [members of an extremist left-wing fringe, Autonomia Operaia), they never pay, they break through barriers, and the only way to avoid it is calling the Police, not our style.
The music was wonderful, and it was the first time we had such a huge crowd, so we thought, "You know what? Who cares!”

Strict and rigorous was also our language, and we demanded the same by the others.
We hated cliches, generalizations, misunderstandings, and in particular we detested trendy verbal fashions.
It was the time of the "cioè” - the you knows, the likes, etc.
This was, you know, a way of saying, you know, like, you're abusing, you know what I'm saying, the political discourse. That is, you know, even a political discourse, and if someone needed to feel, like, adequate, you know, it's like he or she had to make a massive use, you know, of "you know" and "like" and "as if", that is, "cioe'" (pronouced "chow-eh").

In Rome there was a radio station called Radio Città Futura, where we often featured as

guests during an alternative music program conducted by Valerio Zecca, who was one of us. But the was also another DJ who was really one of those, you know, I mean, cioe'. He was the DJ and conductor once we were guests at the radio.
We decided to double each of his cioe' with our choral cioè.
The sound effect was more or less the following:
"Among the Italian groups, cioè…"
CIOÈ
"I think you are, cioè…"
CIOÈ
"the only one who make this kind of, cioè…"
CIOÈ
"experiment, cioè…"
CIOÈ
"Or maybe is there someone else, cioè…"
CIOÈ
"moving in the same direction?"
One of us would answer exaggerating the amount of his intercalate, and the group would ad-lib "CIOÈ, CIOÈ, CIOÈ:"

Another group sided with this linguistic majority were the feminists featuring in "Radio Donna" (Woman radio), part of Radio Città Futura.
To whatever sentence they punctually added the words: "Cioe', in quanto donna". "You know, as a woman..."
Personally I developed a phobia against that kind of language, so that Roberto Baratta, whom I was sharing with an apartment in Via San Giovanni in Laterano, in order to kick me out of the bed in the morning - which for me is still problematic today - used to place the radio close to my bed at full blast tuned on "Radio Donna", forcing me to get up and switch it off.

By and large, we didn't have an easy relation with the feminist movement, not individually nor as a group.
Francesco wrote an article somewhere, something serious, where he compared the critics new attitude and fear towards that new culture with the attitude of a middle-class American woman attracted, for example, to a black man.
A counter-article, published somewhere else, renamed us "Cazzoniere del Lazio" - the jerks of Lazio: its contents are easy to guess.

Our relation with the world of Nuova Psichiatria (New Psychiatry), on the other hand, was excellent. Gianni was our link with that circle of people and initiatives. It was the time of Franco and Franca Basaglia, who undertook a new path in which psychiatry's priority was the people's dignity. They began experimenting in Trieste with amazing results, and they published a book titled "The Madness Factory" (La fabbrica della

follia), which became to me sort of a gospel. In the book there was a photograph with a caption from Bertold Brecht, a sentence I still repeat as a prayer: “Di nulla sia detto: ciò è naturale!" [Never be said of anything: it's natural!]

In Italy, many doctors and experts in the field started following their footsteps and research, among them a group from Rome based in the Psychiatric Hospital Santa Maria della Pietà, at Monte Mario. They asked us to perform for their patients.
I confess we were somewhat afraid to play for the "the crazies", mainly because we didn't know how to interact with them. But we learned fast, once "inside", that we didn't even have to ask anybody how to behave with them.
The first person who approached us on the stage built for us in the hospital's courtyard, was a very elegant gentleman. He used to be a night club guitar player.
“It has been a long time since I touched a guitar," he said. "Do you mind if I borrow one and play a little bit with you guys?"
“Of course. What would you like to play?” I say.
“Whatever you want!”
“Is a blues OK?”
“ Great!”
“ Which guitar do you want?”
He chooses a red semi-acoustic Gibson and starts playing a blues with a rare taste, technique and elegance; we follow him, he's leading us.
Once done he says thanks you and walks away. At that point I think that maybe other patients would like to play with us, and I see Piero already talking to a 50something man who asked him to let him play the congas, that tall drums that you normally play standing. As Piero assents, the man unleashes his hands on the congas' skins, and launches in a demonic rhythm drumming with extraordinary force, with no intention to stop. We have to start the concert, the clock is ticking, so Piero, trying to interrupt the conguero, asks him: "Are you having a good time?”
The man stops abruptly, he seems to deflate, as the force in his body and arms had abandoned him at once. He looks shyly at Piero and in a whisper he says: "Quite so...”, to then plunging back on the drums with the same force as before, and goes on a while with no signs of getting tired.

A woman stares at me, looks like she wants to ask me something; I look around to make sure that she staring right at me, and turn back at her. Yes, no doubt, she wants to ask me something. I approach her.
“Good morning." I say.
“Good morning."
“How is going?”
She answers with her eyes: today it's OK, because there's us around, and our music.
“Is there something you wanted to tell me?”
She hesitates, than whispers something.

“Sorry, I didn't understand, could you repeat?” I ask.
“ I want to sing!”
“Sure, what?”
She whispers again. I don't understand.
“What?”
“' Marina Marina'!”
“ OK, come with me!”
We predispose to accompany her for the old cheerful song "Marina Marina", set the microphone for her and tell her to start. She starts directly from the verse:
“ Marina, Marina, Marina…ti voglio al più presto sposàr…" (Marina... I want to marry you asap)
“ Marina, Marina, Marina…ti voglio al più presto sposàr…"
While she's singing, behind her a long line is taking shape, everybody want to sing! So she gladly gives the microphone to the first on line. They are many of them, and all of take turn at the mic, singing one at a time, but each of them differently, the same verse:
“ Marina, Marina, Marina…ti voglio al più presto sposàr…"
The line finally ends, we start to play our songs, and many people in the courtyard start dancing in couple. Io play a violin solo, and Gianni is supposed to follow with his soprano sax, but I don't hear him, so I turn to him gesturing it's his turn to soloing, but Gianni isn't there at all, he's not on stage.
I sweep the crowd, the courtyard, and finally I see him: he's dancing with an elderly woman; we're playing in 4/4 but they dance a waltz in 3/4, and the woman looks at him happily, she can't believe her eyes, and he also looks as happy as a clam.
The Santa Maria della Pietà's courtyard became like a huge dance hall with mirrors and chandeliers, and any kind of horrors had been checked outside. We keep playing dance music until the prolonged sound of an electric bell announces that recess is over, and in come the nurses, who during all that time had stand patiently on the sides.

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The day after Santa Maria della Pietà's concert, we started recording our new Canzoniere's first album, at Chantelaine's, a studio in Via del Casale Lumbroso, in the outskirt of Rome, close to the historic Via Aurelia. The studio was owned by Roberto Satti, alias Bobby Solo, who very famous at that time as a singer. The sound engineer was Giorgio Lovisheck.
“Lassa sta’ la me creatura” (Leave my creature alone).
Intingo was the record label, the producer a very enthusiastic Ricky Gianco.
We pour in it the results of our first year of work. The cover is a beauty, felliniesque,

an idea of Cesare Monti and Wanda Spinello, Ricky's friends and collaborators.
It's a very accomplished album.
The work was easy, despite some serious arguments during the mixing between Giorgio Lovisheck and Pasquale, who since then got passionate with sound effects, including - particularly - his electric bass sound, which, in my experience, still has no rival.

Giorgio left for Latin America, and Gianni decided to dedicate his time researching a more meditative and repetitive kind of music. Luigi and Bubu' [Francesco] were working with the winds, while we were looking for a new percussionist, not an easy task.

PIERO AVALLONE

He was very likeable and funny, ed had a nasal laughter with a strong backwash:
he – he-he!
I think our first performance with him was in Via dei Fienaroli at the inauguration of Salvatore Lener's "Arci-Birra".
Avallone, though, never deeply bonded with the band. He liked our music, technically he was proficient, but his lifestyle and habits didn't share the Canzoniere's "communal" style, therefore he always felt like an added member, a guest musician. We felt like sharing with him a part of the road, not the entire journey.
I think that Piero Avallone was hurt, and I'm sorry for it still to this day, but group dynamics can be little cruel at times. Nevertheless, I have to say that thanks also to his good character an cheerfulness, during his stay with us there was a nice harmony in the band. Piero had a very important merit: he introduced the "drums" as we normally know it. Yes, a real drum set, with a brand name and all.
Now our stage setting was more similar to a pop group, and the presence of the new instrument required some changes in the balancing of the sounds, something we would never abandon from then on.
With Piero we recorded the second album for Intingo, "Spirito bono" (Good Spirit), again at Bobby Solo's Chantelaine studio.
The only problem was that we wanted a good sound engineer, and we asked Ricky, and he asked Bobby, who called an acclaimed English sound engineer from London: Paul Nun.
Thing is, a week before going in to studio, Nun forfeited for some reason. Ricky got mad at Bobby Solo, so Bobby upped the ante calling no one less than Peter Kaukonen,

from California, the younger brother of Jefferson Airplane's Jorma. Peter flew to Rome the day before the recording.

PETER

Peter was blond, his hair straight and clean and very long, almost to his butt: he was the quintessential Californian flower child. He smoked cigarettes of unknown brand, and if you asked him for one it was like you asked him for his sister. He was not used, like us, to "collectivize" everything.
He'd been advertised to us as a sound engineer, but we soon realized that he wasn't at all familiar with that profession. For sure he had never seen a Soundcraft mixing console, like the one we had in the recording studio.
He was a decent guitarist with a passion for sound, and he had recorded his own album ("Black Kangaroo") using places with specific acoustics, such as churches, convents, canyons: but this kind of experimentation doesn't make you a sound engineer.

There was another problem: the first day, despite the jet lag, Peter was quiet alert and full of energy; the second day a little less, and on the third he fell asleep on the mixing console, and didn't get up for a couple of days. We realized he was doing use of some kind of substance, and that he was prone to depression. We had a long meeting among us, and decided for a two-pronged strategy as a remedy. I personally took care of the first problem through a good connection in Campo de' Fiori, good enough to put Peter back in shape, even if in the group I was the most distant from those kind of acquaintances, e.g. drug dealers; I'm not saying the others had who knows what connections, but they were surely more tolerant than me in this matter. I don't remember why it was up to me to sort out that specific problem.
About the depression problem we resorted to the oldest therapy: we started thinking who, among our female friends, could be the best for Peter. The name of Anna Paola Bonanni came out: the embodiment of positivity. She was always cheerful, laughing, joking, she spoke perfect English, she was good-looking and she seemed the perfect choice for our purpose.
It was love at first sight, and Peter went back to work in excellent mood.

A week since the beginning of recording went by, and not even a note had been yet fixed on the tape.
The second week went by slowly, because Peter had to learn how to use some tools in the studio. Ricky was in Milan and was bombarded with phone calls, until he rushed back to Rome to reestablish some order.

I still regret the things I told him when he arrived at the studio: “What kind of a producer are you? You abandoned us with this inept guy who can't do shit!”
Ricky, on the other hand, answered to my protest very politely. He had left us alone out of respect. It was true: he didn't intend to intrude and having a say about the material that he considered "ours", not "his", and he didn't want his presence to be a hindrance to our project.
It doesn't sound like a big deal now, but I'm afraid I was very rude with him. The thing is I was worried about our album, that the project was in danger, and furthermore we were unnerved by the many journalists visiting us in the studio more because there was a member of the Jefferson Airplanes and less for whatever we were recording.

Finally we started. Rome's atmosphere surely had a positive effect on Peter, who by now was sharing with us his cigarettes, while the recording was constantly under collective control. We were glad that Giorgio, back from Latin America, was frequently passing by the studio, adding here and there the colors we needed.

“Spirito Bono” (Good Spirit) was more compact than the previous album; the tunes were better structured than those in “Lassa stà la me creatura”. They were longer, though, and this was considered a problem from the record and radio stand point. But it was difficult to synthesize in the typical 3 minutes and a half of a song all our thoughts. So be it. It was our way to be a group, and that was what mattered the most.

Once the album was finished, we went on a short tour; the idea was being able to self-produce a live album.
Peter was by now a true member of the group, and he would work for us not only as "live sound engineer", but would also record all the concerts on two tracks; at the end of the tour we would eventually select the best executions and performances.

Certain substances, as it happens, produce alterations in the perception of sound, and when we went to listen to the tapes, we immediately realized the recordings were a disaster. I remember particularly a piece in which Giorgio, who was back full time in the band, played the cowbell. The result of the taping was like a concert for cowbell and orchestra. The instrument's metallic sound was at least 10 decibel higher over everything else, as if Peter, while recording it, was not able to hear it. The tapes were unusable. Disappointment apart, the story ended on a cheerful note, like Zorba the Greek dancing with Alan Bates after the collapse of the cableway's pylons.
We had one more friend and maybe a few tapes less, and the former was more important to us than the latter.
Peter went back to California, in Mill Valley, where he still lives.

I can't remember why Piero Avallone left the band. Maybe his decision came about naturally, and yet we had a problem. We got used to his drumming, and even Giorgio

felt freer to play when the rhythmic burden was carried by someone else.

MARCELLO

The band "L'Albero Motore", which as I said was sharing with us the rehearsal space on Via Cassia, disbanded: I don't know why. We all thought they had huge potential in the Italian rock music scene: if they persevered a little bit more they would have represented a serious threat to many other bands. But something cut their journey off. They had a formidable drummer, pure energy, a train, an animal.

Marcello Vento recalls that Bubù, Giorgio and I went to him and asked if he wanted to join us, the Canzoniere. There was also Federico Troiani, that day, and Marcello remembers that he told us: "Why not?" His only doubt was that he didn't know a thing about folk music. We explained him that what we were doing was an ever evolving thing, a work in progress, and that he had a lot of creative freedom guaranteed. We decided to get together after a few days, during the next rehearsals, so we could experiment playing together.

I remember I wanted Marcello very strongly for the Canzoniere, because I felt he could become its pulsing engine.
Someone objected that his touch was too heavy, and that it could be difficult for him to adapt to some of the more suspended atmospheres we loved to create and the meditative moments spread here and there in our music. But everything went well and we started working together.
The first concert with him was in Naples, at the Galleria Umberto Primo, the occasion was the Cantata dei Pastori (The Shepards Cantata). Arturo Morfino was the organizer, a legendary figure in those years music scene.

Arturo was a sort of Antonin Artaud, to whom Arturo loved to make constant references. He was a genius of radio communication, with a pungent sense of irony, intelligent and very open minded; unfortunately he's not with us anymore. Every musician working in that period owe him something for their opportunities and the creative encounters that Arturo knew so well how to establish and invent.
He'd surprise us with his proposals, and when we implemented them, we regularly realized to have made a leap forward.

Once Arturo invited me to Naples to participate to a radio show he created called "I Giardini del Silenzio" ("The Gardens of Silence").
He wrote a very hermetic text.

Appointment at RAI, Radio 3 in Naples.
He introduced me to an American musician: she programs electronic sounds with the technology and tools available in those years, the ’70s. They are low frequency, square and sinusoidal waves, pink noises and any kind of whistles.
Arturo asks me and the American woman to choose any two pages of the text, and comment them as we wished, provided we did that together and with our instruments.
We chose two pages and read them; we look at each other as if to say “This guy is nuts!" Then we go into the studio and record in a tumult of violin's scream, whistles, widgeons, and everything the progression of that energetic text inspire us by the moment.
"Eli – Eli Sabaoth, Eli Sabactani, Elisabeth. I'm quiet… it's three eels!"

I leave Naples a little ashamed. I feel like I made fun of people, and I worry about the band's criticism when this "thing" will be aired.

Then one day Arturo comes to Rome to show me the taping of that installment of “Giardini del Silenzio” he'd entrusted me and the American girl with.
Viale Trastevere, at the house of a friend of him.
I guess we already smoked a joint before listening to the tape, but the effect of Arturo's mix is a miracle. Our sounds move amidst the words as in a colorful aquarium, transparency and depths. Everything flows, fluid. Arturo has edited our improvisation around his text in a magisterial way; I feel I understand, for the first time in my life, the meaning of abstract art, and now, while I'm writing this, I'm still moved by the thought of how much of that experience is still present in my music, how much, from that moment on, I never stopped searching sound and its depths in space. That's too what Arturo Morfino was.

Anyhow, let's go back to Marcello Vento, who introduced in the group a fundamental language: the language of... TRE.

TRE

It was invented by the vendors of the street market in Via Sannio, in Rome: they used it among them when negotiating the merchandise's price; the language of "Tre" is a way of talking without the others understanding you. It's a secret code.
The technique is simple: it's a matter of dividing the words in syllables, and adding, at the beginning of each syllable, the word “tre” (three).

Example: Can-zo-nie-re
Tre-can-tre-zo-tre-nie-tre-re.
Tre-song-tre-book...
Tre-Car-tre-lo-tre-si-tre-lio-tre-tto - with two "t" at the end, for Italian phonetic reasons.

It's a language/code that either you get a hang of it right away, or you don't at all. If it becomes a problem for you, you'll never be able to speak it; on the other hand, if you're able to jump into it, you learn it immediately.

So, we had our secret idiom, which came very handy, for example when we had to give instructions to the sound engineer directly from a mic on stage, or when it came to negotiate money at the end of a concert, or taking some group decisions in front of those of were going to suffer those decisions. Or more simply to swear and curse!

We learned that language right away, and we learn how to speak it in such a natural way that we didn't even pay much attention to it. At times you didn't even know, nor you asked yourself, why you were pronouncing so many "tre": you just did it, period.

Now we are in Reggio Emilia, we have to play in the inner courtyard of the former “Caserma Zucchi” [Zucchi Military Barrack], in the memory of Alceste Campanile, a leftist movement's activist who was killed a few months earlier.

It's a solemn affair, and we are very honored to have been selected to celebrate it.
There's also Alceste's father. The PA system is ready for the sound check; we check the microphones, the cable and everything else. We're ready.
Given the occasion we didn't ask for any compensation, and the organizers provide accommodation in a private home. Fall has started, and with the cold came my fear because of my chronic sinusitis. Somebody came on the stage asking us to follow him to arrange the overnight stay in a private home.
Luigi takes care of it and goes away with the organizers. I yell at him from the stage:
“Trellutreitreggi, tregguatrerda trecchetrè trella treccatresa trenon tressitrea treffretredda!” (Luigi, make sure it's not cold inside the house!)
Luigi doesn't blink an eye, and thinking he's talking with the 'tre", but instead talking normally, he yells back: “Take it easy. I will also make sure there's nice chicks!"

How embarrassing! Everybody turned their heads, and from my perspective I had a wide shot: in my memory that scene ends with a fade out to black, with Luigi at the center of a series of concentric circles made of people watching him in a very, very judgmental way.

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It's the moment of the great civil rights battles: divorce, abortion, voting rights at 18. All these battles are headed by the Radical Party and its leader Marco Pannella.
We often play for them.
We are leftists, as the Radicals are, but we belong to a strange kind of Left, with no membership card, no affiliation, though with many things in common. Our territory is made of unity, not controversy.

We're invited to perform at Palazzo dello Sport [Sports' Palace] in Rome, an event to promote the voting rights at 18.
It's a big unitary rally; every left wing Italian groups and parties are there, as well as the youth movement.

A wide democratic alliance if taking shape on the terrain of rights and freedoms, and among parties' younger people there's a fertile exchange of ideas and dialogue.
Backstage we are approached by a "compagno" [comrade] of the Young Communists Federation [FGCI], and he explains us that their party [the PCI, Partito Comunista Italiano] is looking for alliances with all the democratic forces, and that the young Republicans would like to invite us to play a concert for one of their event, I think it was in Latina [province city of Lazio, one hour south of Rome]. He goes on saying that it would be a good thing for us to accept, since it would be a demonstration of no-sectarianism, on the opposite, open to a wider dialogue.
Frankly, at that time we considered the Republicans [and the PRI, Partito Repubblicano Italiano] something akin to martians. OK, we were all in our 20s, we were very young, but they were a little different from us, that's for sure. They would dress properly, they looked like executives, well-mannered, educated, and yet distant [from our reality].
The FGCI's comrade introduce them to us, and we accept the invitation, even we already know, used as we are to "play at home", that we'll feel a little like strangers.

The day comes. As [PRI's leader] Ugo La Malfa enters the theater, the audience jumps up on their feet screaming: “Ugo, Ugo!”, as they do when PRI representative Oronzo Reale arrives, though the scream is a little more convoluted: “Oronzo, Oronzo!”
We really feel like intruders in a family reunion, and we don't understand that enthusiasm, less so what we're doing there. They give speeches, and there more they speak the more we feel uncomfortable. It's not as much the contents as the way and the language that doesn't belong to us.
We decide to behave, not to be jerks. We'll behave civilly; as they have explained to us, it's an important moment in the unification process for the civil rights movement in Italy.

We start the concert with the following spirit: “Let's hurry - let's not reveal who we are, let's play fast and get the hell out of here asap!" Yeah, as if...
We say some introductory words for some of the pieces before playing them; it's Bubù's turn to present, and he says: “This song was shown to us by a comrade from Polino…”
He's immediately interrupted by a voice from the audience: "Friend is the word, not comrade!" Francesco, unflinchingly, replies: “He might be a friend for you, but he's a comrade to us!”
We wrapped the performance in the chillest cold, and with God's blessing we returned hurriedly to Rome.
Anyhow, we won the referendum! So today people in Italy have the right to vote at 18.

It was a moment of great sharing among us. One's home was the other's home, and so the objects, the instruments, friends where the same for everybody, sometimes even the girls!
The weirdest thing happened to me with Francesco; after several hours of drive in our van, we were all silent and assorted, and all of a sudden Francesco and I started hummin the same tune, in the same exact moment, in the same key, starting from the same bar. It happened a few times, as though we were joined by the vibrations we all produced in the air.
Even the moments of embarrassment would be resolved and transformed in a deeper bond among us.
We asked Piero to play the electric bass in order to give Pasquale more freedom to invent on his guitars. Piero accepted with grace, but his way of playing, unfortunately, wasn't convincing; he had dedicated time to the bass, with good results, but for us it was still a problem. The effort of playing and singing at the same time was all but subtracting his focus on the voice and inhibiting his movements on stage. We had to find the right moment to tell him without hurting him. That moment came the day the Transit broke down.
Pianura Padana [River Po's flat lands], sunset. The engine dies.
Pasquale and I go walking toward the closest village in search of road assistance. It gets dark. We walk back and from afar we see the van getting lit up, on and off, on and off…around us only flat land and night.
We formulate a variety of hypothesis, among them an electromagnetic phenomenon, but even the possibility of extraterrestrial intervention. We get closer slowly and cautiously. The van keeps getting lit up, on and off, intermittently. No signs of the other guys who stayed behind. The extraterrestrial hypothesis becomes very realistic.
But reality is often jealous of fantasy.
It turned out it was just an intermittent traffic light placed in the middle of a triangular road stop sign that was facing our vehicle, a sign we couldn't see from our perspective. Our mates had disappeared in the sense that they were laying down in the seats trying to

get some sleep.

We have to wait for the mechanic to show up, and we take advantage to talk with Piero. We start for far away, with great caution, but he interrupts us: “Listen guys, there's something I 'd wanted to tell you for quite a while...". So he goes on explaining us that he had enough of doing something he didn't feel he was good at, and that he'd rather sing, just sing, and at the most play a second guitar when needed.
It ends with a liberating dance, a sort of "girotondo", a circle dance in the fog lit by the intermittent extraterrestrial light.

"WE WANT TO HEAR THE TRITONS!"

Viareggio, Carnival.
Tuscany's ARCI has invited to play at the Palazzetto dello Sport.
We are surprised that we can't find in town a single poster advertising the Canzoniere: "Nobody's going to show up!” we say, worried.
Our sound engineer is Sebastiano Pallottino, who, as Marcello, is a "defector" from Albero-Motore.
The truck got there before us, we are late, and the equipment is already set up. There no time for sound check and testing, the show must start right now. Despite the lack of billboards and posters, the "palazzetto" is packed, and we get on stage we are welcomed by a huge ovation.
The crowd applauds at the end of the first song, but the second song, a sort of "tarantella", it's not met with the same enthusiasm. The third song falls in the most absolute frost, until a voice plunges on us like a knife, screaming in perfect Tuscan: "Si vole sentire i Tritons!” - We wanna hear the Tritons!
The voice becomes many voices, they all chant: "Si vole sentire i Tritons!” - we wanna hear the Tritons!
“What the hell are they saying?”
“Si vole sentire i Tritons!!!!”
“What the hell they want?”

We see some movement next to the mixing dock situated in the middle of the stands, very far from us, and after a while we realize that the commotion is provoked by Sebastiano who's literally coming to blows with a few people in the audience. We can't explain what's going on. Then we get it!
The Tritons was a band that lasted more or less one single summer, a one hit wonder thanks to a cover story on Italian Rolling Stones: I think the song was "Satisfaction".

Thing is, it turns out I had a strong resemblance with their lead singer, and initially the audience thought we were the Tritons.
Then, one tarantella after another, they got suspicious, and finally they understood. Nobody, after all, had warned them of another band's presence, as no one had informed us of the nasty business about the Canzoniere being the opening act for the Tritons.
We felt used and exploited as a bargaining chip for small local political tricks; we furiously argue with the organizers, and we were very proud to have a sound engineer as Sebastiano Pallottino, willing to take physical risks, and blows, to defend the band's honor.

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Carlo Quartucci asked us to write the music for a radio-drama he was going to direct, “Fuentejovejuna” by Lope de Vega. We recorded the music in Via Asiago 10.
We improvise the music, and they are so happy with the result that they even propose us another work: “Borgatacamion”. This time, despite the fact that this time it's for TV, we accept, because it's a story about the social hardship in the Romanina, a blue-collar, poor Roman suburb.
But just before that we had committed to a couple of concerts in Sardinia.

"Ciao 2001", then the most popular entertainment/music weekly magazine, had just published a photo depicting our stage with electrical cables and wires chaotically all over the place. The caption under the picture described our "set up” as a negative example of what not to do on a stage. The article stressed how that mess could be even dangerous. Electricity everywhere, voltaic arcs in lay, risks of tripping on the cables and taking down the microphones.
We never had any problem with our stage set up. But one day we played in a Sardinian small town where the stage was placed basically at ground level.
Normally, in Sardinia, the stages were elevated from the ground - especially if we were playing in the town squares - because the kids had the tendency to get too close to the performing artists, forming human clusters and sometimes doing damages. Instead, this time we were at ground level, thus allowing a bunch of little creatures to completely surround us.
I started asking those kids, very politely, to move away; I had flashes in my mind of that "Ciao 2001" photos and feared they could get an electrical shock or get hurt; the kids had no intention to move away from our stage. So I changed my tone of voice, making it more authoritative, then I started yelling and even threatening. At that point the first child started: a shepherd whistle penetrating the ears as a laser, an endless

whistle, as it was emitted with the circular breathing method used to play the Launeddas. That single whistle was joined by two, then ten, then one hundred children whistling, a loud noise that accompanied our concert until the end.

They invite us for dinner at somebody's place, and the local organizers apologize about those "kids", saying, "They're are like that, when they are together it's impossible to control them."
It comes to my mind Giovanna Marini that time I went with her for a performance she gave at an elementary school's gym, somewhere in Puglia [Italian South-East region]; she had to stop playing guitar a few times so she could deliver a few resonant and well p[laced slaps to swarms of screaming children jumping all over her. But Giovanna is Giovanna!

Once dinner is over, I grab my violin case, strap it around my shoulder and walk to my car. The Sardinian comrades were really kind with us, they did everything they could to make us forget the children incident, and restore our mood.
I notice two elderly men seating close to the stage, which the day after will host somebody else, and I say goodbye to them with gratitude.
"Goodnight, my friends. Thanks for everything!"
The oldest one stares at me and apostrophes: "You guys sucked!"
I stumble, like I was hit by a hammer, I fall on the ground and even get hurt. I pick up my violin and leave without even having the guts to turn my head.
Can you imagine if had slapped those kids as Giovanna did in Puglia? Just scolding them was considered reprehensible by some, and anyway we played very good that night, we didn't suck at all.

The day after we are already a the Romanina. Piero, over the notes of "Un Canto a Braccio", has written one his most beautiful texts:

"Sono arrivato tardi per la festa
che mi è successa una cosa strana
mi è capitata veramente questa
d'esse investito sulla Tuscolana."

[I got very late for the party
a weird thing happened to me
it happened to me really
on Tuscolana they ran over me]

Street safety, especially in Rome's peripheries such as Tuscolana (and its eponymous

street), was one of the many problems of that hapless "borgata" [hamlet], la Romanina; Carlo Quartucci gave us some information so that our music could become a vehicle for the social work he had been doing for years in that neighborhood community.

That "borgata" was controllod by the Casamonica, a Rom family very powerful in the Rome suburban areas. The elder clan's boss used to go around on a trolley pulled by a pony, and he was always wearing a beautiful white wide-brimmed hat.
But something went wrong for him too. We played our concert and received appreciation by both the people and Carlo, who was recording everything; but while leaving the suburb, somebody set the stage on fire. It was a matter of money, a racket, we've never known exactly. Strange finale for a social endeavor: while we were leaving that place, we saw the hamlet burning.

BUBÙ LEAVES

We go back in the rehearsal room to work on new pieces. The Conservatory had provoked some conflicts among us. There are those very much interested in technique, theory and discipline, others are less interested in that, some already knew they wanted a career in music, others, like Bubù [Francesco] thought that the idea of career and professionalism was contradictory to the "making music" itself.
It was not a bizarre thinking, and it was not coming from the left field, since many musicians of our generations, after deciding to become "professionals", ended up being basically "turnisti" [musicians for hire], loosing in the process their spontaneity and creativity. It was a recurrent and somewhat sad phenomenon. Playing for anybody, any kind of genre, pop, commercial, simply executing: all of that could indeed become frustrating.
Even simply honoring the commitments could be risky. We begun our musical journey with a sense of total freedom, and even a small yielding to compromise could turn out to be a lethal mistake.
Albums, production, media, concerts, engagement dates to be respected; they represented obligations, therefore a profession.
I think that was the main reason Bubu' parted ways with the group, though the pretext was a different one. I remember a dramatic rehearsal when we were trying to put together the wind section. I remember a collision of languages, musical terms we were unable to share or interpret, and than Bubu's outburst: he shuts the sax's case and says fuck you - to me - than says goodbye to the band, slams the door and leaves.
“It looks like he's serious!” someone says.
“Nah, he'll come back.”

“No, I think he's serious!”
“It's just words!”
It happens even in the best of families, words take over, and a word after another lead to a point of no return.
We chased Bubu' all over Rome in the following days, to no avail, it was too late. He had said it and done it! He wouldn't backtrack, and the journey that we, the Canzoniere, were facing from now on was none of his business anymore, he didn't want it any longer.

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The most professional side of the group was represented by Vincenzo, who became our manager and organizer.
We met him at the Radical Party's demonstrations: he was handling the music at those events, with Paolo Scarnecchia. Vincenzo initially tried to launch an alternative concert organization agency for bands and single musicians working in Rome at that time. There were a series of meetings about various topics: the weakest groups were expecting new opportunities, hoping to be like us, a band which already had built its own space and core audience. During those boring meetings a lot of people were pouring their frustrations, many of them unfortunately with no talent to go legitimately on stage. Political membership has never created an artist. On the opposite, it frequently confused the ideas, even at a time in which people with little talent used political ideology to hide their artistic inadequacy. Their attitude was never sincere, it was rather premeditated, phoney, annoying.

So, Vincenzo called to inform us that he gave up the agency project, and that he wanted to just take care of us. Anna was very happy about this new entry, and they started to work together at once.
That same year we did a lot of shows. I think it was the summer of 1976, and everything was going at full speed: the Canzoniere, the recording studio, the Conservatory, the rehearsals, the new songs, the oncerts, the girls.

Our best performance was in Naples, at the Fiera d’Oltremare. At the end of the concert, I saw Clara Murtas backstage. It was not the first time she came to see us playing, and she told me, very sincerely, how much she loved our music and the force she felt was inside it.

Piero, in the meantime, got married, and the band didn't bond at all with his wife,

considered, perhaps, as a rival. As I already said, couples rarely find harmony in a group situation. Our evenings were more solitary, and even Luigi started to do something else, while Pasquale, Giorgio, Marcello and I continued to share basically everything.

Here is the news! Vincenzo summons us. The Foreign Ministry wants to pay homage to five African countries which recently gained independence: Somalia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia and Kenya. The homage is us: a band playing traditional Italian folk music with elements of "modernity", an expression I always detested.

The governments of these five African countries have a socialist matrix, and perhaps this is what pulled the Ministry toward us.
“Fantastic! What a trip!”
We talked about it and were overheated; Vincenzo's place in Via del Pellegrino becomes the mission's operative center. There's many things to do. Paki is going to call Willy Davoli proposing him to come with us and bring Edo as sound engineer. We have to think about the best PA system for the African tour. Vincenzo will take care of the paper works and documentation. We have to undergo five vaccinations: choler, typhus, yellow fever, and another couple I can't remember. We must start taking quinine against malaria, one pill once a week.
But something very anticlimatic arises.
Piero became very silent, and his attitude is in contrast with ours. Finally he spills the beans: he wants to take his wife along to Africa. We discuss the issue, though reluctantly, with Vincenzo and Anna to find out if it's appropriate to bring a guest, or if maybe we should come up with a working role for her; two hypothesis not very realistic.
Piero ups the ante: “Let's leave Vincenzo here and let's bring his wife with us!”
We tell him he's out of his mind. We need the organizer, he did everything after all, he created this tour from scratch; and mainly we're going to Africa, not to Switzerland. We need to deal with embassies, with ministries and local governments; you can't invent a professional role overnight. Piero will think about it, but after a while he tells us that between his wife and Africa he chose the former. He will not come with us.

The second bummer is brought on by Luigi: one day he shows up in Via del Pellegrino and incredibly demands us financial guarantees; he will come only if he will be paid adequately. He talks as though, all of a sudden, he's not anymore part of the group. Perhaps the great complicity existing among Paki, Marcello, Giorgio and I created some jealousy, without us realizing it; but it was something out the blue which really shocked us.
We have a comprehensive budget, and if something's left at the end of the trip we will share it equally among us. None of us think about the money, we are rather focused on geographic maps, to better understand where we're going. Nobody is guaranteed a fee,

we can't make an exception, and furthermore, what kind of relation would that be? A band with an employee. We aren't interested in it whatsoever, we even feel offended, we don't understand. So Luigi too turns his back on us.
We're suddenly without a singer and without a sax player.

CLARA

As I said earlier, Clara Murtas, a Sardinia native, had been following us for quite a while by now. Though our name was Il Canzoniere del Lazio, Sardinian music had really got into our bloodstream and codes. And we were observing, from a respectful distance, like older brothers, Clara's her musical adventures.
Clara had a powerful voice. I called her and soon we met. She was intimidated at first, afraid she couldn't measure up with our band, while we, on the other hand, had one only doubt: a woman was missing from our band since Sara's departure, and maybe we got too much used to that collegiate, sophomoric atmosphere typical among male musicians.
To join the Canzoniere, Clara left the cast of Giovanna Marini's show called "Correvano sui carri" (They ran on wagons), and it seems that Giovanna wasn't happy at all about loosing her. She told Clara: “You are leaving us because you want to sing with the guys!"
Clara brought Sardinia into the group, and her on-stage presence helped the audience to better understand our music's contents.

MAURIZIO

Dexter Gordon came to Rome, and someone invited him to attend one of our concerts. He loved it, and let people know, and the news spread throughout the Rome jazz scene. Jazz musicians started attending our concerts, they would come backstage to say hello, and we started sharing our experiences with them. Many of them were coming from Giorgio Gaslini's jazz school - they called him "Gasolio"; Gaslini was the first one in Italy to talk about “Musica Totale” (Total Music), which basically meant breaking down all the barriers between musical genres; as a result, his students were very open minded, not something typical among jazz players who were inclined, at that time, to conduct their research in a sort of monastic way, with no digressions. Among the sax players, the one we liked the most was Maurizio Giammarco. We frequently went to listened to him playing at the Folkstudio, and other clubs, so we

decided to call him.
He also was puzzled by our invitation to play with us, because he didn't know much about traditional folk music, so we assured him that besides some mandatory musical written segments, he would have been totally free to play and soloing as he wished. He would've had a lot of space to create with no linguistic limitations. After all, this was our philosophy.

We start rehearsing, with Gianni, still, and again in the space in Via Cassia 571; the results are immediately tangible. We feel honored we are able to share, a feeling musicians know very well. In our music there no room for lies or cheating, and if you admire someone, and he's with you body and soul in the project you thought about and desired, than you look at that as the best gift you got in the whole world.
Today I still thank God before I start any recording, or when I hear the orchestra great players studying their parts; to me it's a present, and an immense privilege.

Can you imagine having with us Maurizio Giammarco, considered by everybody the best and most mature among Rome jazz players? Having him playing our music?
Clara, meanwhile, had rolled her sleeves and jumped into the project, showing a cheerfulness and a sense of humor we didn't know she had.
The excitement was rising, we were ready, our friends were coming at our rehearsals to hear the new songs. Everything was going again wonderfully and at full engine.

AFRICA

I almost fear talking about Africa.
It's not just one place, it's not many places, it's not just a continent; it's a category of the spirit, a condition of the human being, a place of origin, a bond with divinity, of life and death.
Fortunately I had decided to write a travel diary, a travelogue, which I now rediscover, 30 years later. I'll try to follow those notes.

The first thing that struck my soul were the clouds at dawn filling my first African sky; I could see them from the airplane window on East African Airways, flying from Rome to Mogadishu after stop overs in Karthoum and Addis Abeba. The cloud formations are huge, like castles, cities suspended in the air. At down, clouds have a very strong density, and are lit by a purple hue which I'd never seen before. The pilot didn't fly into the clouds, he would rather find his way around them, and than fly back into the planned route: it was like a ballet in the sky. I swear I thought "how lucky are

we?" What was taking me to Africa? What was Africa going to give us? Our music, my music.

With us were also flying Giampaolo Santini, film director, and his son Luca, camera operator. They will film a documentary about our African tour. There's also Fabrizio Zampa, a music journalist who will report for Rome's daily newspaper "Il Messaggero".
On the plane we meet some interesting people: Simona from Bologna, who works as a volunteer in Mogadishu, a group of biologists from Firenze, who spend a great deal of time navigating the Indian Ocean gathering samples of plankton and micro organisms to be analyzed. We meet Hamed, Luca Santini's godfather's son, a Spanish lady, an Ethiopian girl. In Karthoum the plane gets almost empty, and I go to a three seats row, hoping I'll be able to lie down and get some sleep. Instead a bunch of Chinese passengers come on board; they're all dressed the same, with the same uniform, and three of them stare at me, arms folded, standing next to my row. At that time there weren't assigned seats on planes, you could seat wherever you wanted. It takes me a while to understand that the Chinese men are wordlessly, aggressively telling me: "Can't you see we are three and you are just one? Move over!"
I get it. I move mover. I fear I've been rude to them in my inability to interpret their posture right away, and I try to make it up. They wear on their uniform a red budge, not Mao's face, who ha recently passed. The golden head on that red glittering background must be the new Chinese president, I speculate. "Damn... what's his name?... Oh, right, Huà Kuò Feng..."
I assume I will be able to appease them by showing them my culture and knowledge about their country. I go back to the contested row, smiling, I point out to the badges and with confidence I pronounce the name looking at them straight in the eyes: "Huà Kuò Feng!" They turn purple and retort: "Kim Il Sung!!!"
What a fool I was! They were North Korean, not Chinese, and that budge is an absolute symbol for them, unmistakeable, untouchable. I withdraw with my tail between the legs, and go back to my previous seat. I fell their angry glances behind me the whole duration of the flight, until finally the Captain announces we're about to land in Mogadishu.
It's still dawn, the night lights still on in the city. Feeble lights, yellow, from the sky they look like candles. There aren't buildings, rather an endless series of brown houses, maybe made of mud. We start to joke and say foolish things as we always do when we are nervous, and finally the airplane lands.

AFRICA, AFRICA, WE ARE HERE!

Mogadishu, November 9, 1976

Now it's daytime, we climb down the plane's ladder and we are met by a very nice and polite gentleman with a black goatee like [Italian war hero] Italo Balbo: “Nice to meet you, I'm Paolo Sannella, first secretary of the Italian Embassy in Somalia. Welcome! Artists from the National Somalian Theater came here to greet you."

About a hundred yards away I see a line of people, among them many women dressed with colorful fabrics, turbans on their head of the same bright colors as their dresses. They are on lined up so we can review them, as presidents do with the military honor guards. We didn't expect such an official welcoming, so I make an effort to think something to say that is up to the situation. I wonder what language should I use, and I got the answer right away, because as we get close to the group a woman - an amazing beauty - addresses me in perfect Italian: “Welcome to Somalia! Did have a good flight? Unfortunately this plane, with two stops over, doesn't allow to sleep, and people always arrive from Italy a little tired...”
I suddenly recall that Somalia had been an Italian colony, and the stamps from my grandfather's collection come to my mind, the stamps with palms and camels; somebody told me that even during the Italian proxy administration the official language in schools and universities - in Somalia - was Italian. I feel like a colonizer. We are dressed very casually, and they are wearing ceremonial dresses. They're throwing over me 40 years of history!

They introduced us to Hamed Agi, the National Theater's director. They tale us to the hotel, where the first welcoming cocktail in our honor is ready. At the reception, in the garden of the hotel Rugtha Taleh, I discover that the beautiful woman that spoke to us at the airport is called Faduma Kassim, and with her there's also Faduma Nekruma: they the most famous Somalian singers. I immediately invite them to have lunch later with us.
“Was I too exuberant?" I ask myself. "Did I commit a gaffe?”
The hotel has separate bungalows, and in my room finally I can take a shower. I turn the cold water knob, already very hot likely because the pipes run externally and we are in the Equator. While the water is washing over me with beneficial effect, I hear sort of a chirping over my head. I look up and see, sticking to the ceiling, three reptiles of an unknown kind as big as rats. I jump out of the shower. They are three giant geckos, and the attendants I immediately call assure me they are innocuous. I finish my shower in front of them, fearing that the steam could knock the keckos off the ceiling and crash in my head! The chirping goes on.

The singers don't show up for our lunch. Did they flank on us? Was it a gaffe my invitation? Maybe they're married?
We seat around a big round table, and the waiter asks us what we'd like to drink. I think of Fiuggi mineral water.
A month earlier, in Italy, we performed at a concert in Taranto [Puglia]. After the show Marcello and I chose not stay in the hotel in Taranto, and instead decide to get on a train straight back to Rome leaving at 5 AM. We reached the train station at 4 AM, boarded the train and we found an empty compartment where could crash and sleep. At 5 AM the train departs. At 5:30 AM I feel an acute pain on my back and start complaining. Marcello wakes up. The pain worsens by the minute, and he runs all over the train looking for a doctor. He can't find one. So we decide to pull the alarm handle. I confess that I always dreamed of doing it, though in a different situation. The train manager rushes in, and seeing me like that, screaming in pain, clearly frightens him. The train will stop in Metaponto, where we'll find an ambulance which will take me to the nearest hospital. He promises that. At the Metaponto station there's no ambulance yet, but there's a nun who assists me and make lie down on a big table in the station's waiting room.
“About a month ago," she says, "the train was stopped by a German tourist who fell very ill. Poor man, he died!”
I cross my fingers and touch wood, and I ask Marcello to do same.
The ambulance arrives, I thank the nun, and on the route to the hospital in Policoro di Matera, I dictate to Marcello my last will: the piano goes to Gianni, the classical guitar to Carlo Ciasca, the Sardinian guitar to Luca Balbo, my violins to Riccardo Pellegrino, and all the rest to Marcello. I'm hospitalized: kidney stones. We go back to Rome after three days: I stay in bed, motionless, for a whole week; I can't afford to get sick again. We have to go to Africa next month.

Now, let's go back to that first lunch at the Rughta Taleh in Mogadishu.
When it's my turn to order a drink, I ask whether by any chance they have Fiuggi water, good for kidneys. There's a burst of laughter. The waiter doesn't seem to understand, and everybody start making fun of me.
“Don't you see where we are?”
“Why don't you also order a panettone?”
The waiter reappears after a short while with four bottles of Fiuggi water. The last ones they had in the kitchen. I feel safe.

Iussuf, the chauffeur, take us on a city tour. Mogadishu was like I had fathomed Baghdad when I was reading “Arabian Nights". Flowers, boulevards, palms, mosques, people, markets, camels, colors. I'm struck by the amount of mutilated people dragging along the streets. Clara is very touched, almost cries, maybe she's indeed crying.
In the evening the people from Bologna - the "bolognesi" - meet us at the hotel, they're Simona's friends, the girl we met on the plane. They are very nice, they know our band

and love our music. We have dinner together, then I fall ill with stomach pains, so I rush into my room, where, my travel log says, I write the first African journal's first page.

The morning after Iussuf arrives late at the hotel. He drives us to the National Theater. While Edo and Willy set up the PA system, the local musicians show us and teach us two beautiful Somalian songs, and a group of young people show me how to play an instrumental piece called "Indian Ocean."
Faduma Kassim and Faduma Nekruma apologize for not being able to attend our lunch the day before, they had to go out of town.
The beauty of this tour is also that in each country we'll visit, we'll meet a "twin band". We'll learn their music, they will learn ours. That's an incredible gift. Being able to communicate at such a deep and emotional level with people from different cultures, with whom, sometimes, it's difficult even just to exchange a few words. Music doesn't need interpreters, and when we look at each other in the eyes it's like we have known each other since we were born. God bless the music!

In the afternoon a reception at our ambassador's residence has been scheduled.
A splendid mansion surrounded by a large park, with towering cages for ostriches. "Danger, do not get close!" reads a sign: those animals have a long neck and can break your skull with their beak, as it happened last month to an attendant, maybe a gardener.
They introduced us to the Italian Ambassador Salimei, and the Somali Ministry for Information, Mister Osman Awes Nur. He's a very pleasant man, highly educated, intelligent.
He asks me if I would be available in the near future to spend some time in Mogadishu to teach Harmony and Composition; at the National Theater, he explains, there are only Korean teachers who unfortunately speak only Korean. It's difficult to understand them, and the classes go on by miracle, by gesturing and phonemes. "TA-TAA! No, no: TAA-TA!" And so on.
I immediately accept his offer and assure my availability from here to eternity.

Before dinner we swing by the "bolognesi"'s place, in the Mogadishu Lido area. Luciano gives me as a present a Charero, the typical Somali string instrument of which Hamen Agi, whom I met at the National Theater, is the absolute master.
We all go to eat in Makaya, in the city's outskirts.
There are acacia trees with a cupola shape whose fronds and leaves fall toward the ground. Spacious green rooms. We eat with our hands, goat and rise served on large saucers made of coarse cork. The whole in the trees' branches is the entrance door, and through it I can see the moon, and three camels passing by silently, in back light.
In a corner seats an old man, on the ground. In his right hand he holds a stick whose end has the shape of a slingshot. He's keeping an eye on us. His tool is meant to capture the snakes' heads and stick them to the ground.

Back at the hotel Marcello is over excited, he wants us to pose for some weird photos: one of us with a basket over his head, another one wearing a mask, a third with his image reflected on a mirror standing on a chair. It's his way to celebrate the moment. It's a new context for us, strange, unexpected, different, and as time passes by a nice feeling of well-being increases.

Mogadishu, November 11, 1976

We start the rehearsals in the theater; they are tiresome since the material is complicated, and it's difficult to put together a good lineup that would include everything. Faduma Kassim, also known as Fatmina, to distinguish her from the other Faduma, who way heavier than her, explains me what it means to be part of "State Group". She'd like to be freer in her choices.
During lunch Hassan tells me that his father has two wives, and overall he has 22 siblings.
In the afternoon we rehearse with our "twin group", Uaberi, which means Dawn.
They are awesome, especially Oyaye, the principal drummer and percussionist. He becomes Marcello's Somali brother, and Marcello gives him a couple of good drum sticks. In the percussion section things get quickly organized: they exchange parts, prepare the solos, get subdivided in sections, and Marcello shows his arrangement skills, until then unknown to us.
We select a program lineup: “Ciriò, Ciriò”, sort of an Italian folk national anthem, followed by "Lu Povero Antonuccio”, to be performed by the entire choir of National Theater; then a piece played just by us, a song by Fatmina, then again the Canzoniere, followed by Faduma Nekruma and the National Dance Group. We'll finish with "Somalie Tosò", a beautiful, melancholic song.

We're asked to say something before the concert, so it'll be up to me to give a sort of official speech about the Italian-Somalian friendship.
I take time, instead, to tell the story of our friendship with the Uaberi's and the National Theater's musicians.
There are no borders, no boundaries or nations, there's just men and women against any divisions, against History.
I manage somehow to finish my speech; as I went on, I realized it felt like we had always been there, in Somalia, not just three days.

We got into that role in an absolute natural way, and each of us seems to have found his/her role, relations, tasks. The distribution of duties was perfect, harmonious in a non manifested and planned way.

This is also Africa.

Clara will soon perform with us for the first time in a theater. I try to be close to her because I feel her tension, and I know she had longed for this moment for a long time. I expect from Clara a timid and subdued performance, instead she takes us by surprise one more time, even before starting. As the curtain opens up, Clara pulls her shirt up toward the audience, she flashes everybody as the actress in Bunuel's "Viridiana" does before the last supper composition; then she turns to us and bursts out in laughter.
We start on this note a long series of African concerts, with a jest, with something extra, aggressively.
Everything go smoothly, and the National Theater audience rename Marcello "Ginni", the devilish goblins that upsets Somali children in their dreams.
In the evening we go celebrating our success in the big dance hall at the Giuba Hotel with the "bolognesi" and the two Faduma. We play a jam session with Somali Jazz, the band that usually plays there, featuring Oyaye, Uaberi's drummer. Somali musicians are able to play pretty much everything; military marches, theater concerts, classical ballet music, night club tunes. They are the same people wearing different hats with nonchalance, with no bias or preconceived notions between a music genre and another, the exact opposite to what happens in Italy.

Marcello almost falls in love with a girl, but Oyaye advises him to give it up, while Clara gets rid of a sticky and insisting suitor who claimed to be "The Emperor of Arabia."
That night, before going to bed, we hang out in the hotel's garden with Giorgio and Marcello, smoking cigarettes, looking at the moon and contemplating the beauty of whatever is happening to us.

The day after we wake up very early; a visit to the Genale's banana plantation is planned. With us, as always, are the two Faduma, accompanied for the occasion by other people, among them Castàn, a young official of the Ministry of Culture I became friend with.
Before the banana field we go visit the surrounding villages with thousands of smiling, cheering children celebrating our presence. They tell us about a lion who savaged people and was able to escape capture hiding in the banana trees.
The paths through the plantation are very narrow, and the walls shaped by the banana trees are very tall: it reminds me of a special effect in the opening shot of the Red Sea in Cecile de Mille's "The Ten Commandments".
We sing and dance, and at the end of the lunch I insist with Vincenzo to pay the bill:
"They always pay," I say. "We pay this time."
He patiently explains to me that every meal we eat has been organized and paid for, and he laughs at my naivete, which, looking back at it today, still surprises me.
We take a stroll on the beach, and we buy necklaces made of seashells. Our rooms are

already overloaded with items, fabrics, bracelets, masks, instruments.
Castàn has understood who we are, what we are. He got it from our behaviors, from our "official speeches", but mainly our way to be musicians; he tells me of the Uebi Scebeli bloodshed, the Leopard River massacre, perpetrated by the Italians at the time of colonization: hundreds of innocent people, unarmed civilians, women and children massacred by the blind madness of a general and his machine guns. 50 years after that event I feel guilty just for being Italian, though the Somalis never showed me a hint of bitterness, on the opposite they did everything they could to relieve us from any guilty trip. Castan and I established a mutual strong bond.

In the evening we play again at the National Theater, though this time the situation is solemn indeed. Sitting in the audience there are Somali President Siàd Barre, and a number of ministries and dignitaries. Our Somali friends are nervous, for them it's an important moment, while for us those notables don't mean that much.
However, our official speeches change a little bit; they focus more on the beauty of Somali music, and the talent of our African colleagues.

I can see the Italian ambassador seating in the first row; next to him there's a priest, maybe a bishop, and next to him a gentleman in a uniform: they look like a poster from the Spanish Civil War.
We dine at the hotel with the guys from Bologna, who are giving us lots of kind attention. We are extremely tired and go to bed. But I can't fall asleep. I keep thinking about the Leopard's River massacre.

Mogadishu, November 13, 1976

Today, we have to play at the university's "seventh kilometer" campus.
We find ourselves young among young people, without the heaviness of the authority figures and dignitaries presence, thus we feel we can comfortably be who we are, just ourselves. Maurizio pays me a big compliment telling me that my high energy on stage is always very consistent and unwavering, show after show. “Thank you, Maurizio."

The only authority attending is the Magisterium dean, who gives a very moving speech about the past and the present, about the wars, peace and friendship among nations.
One has to know that countries as Somalia, before conquering their independence, were completely isolated from the rest of the world. The presence today of a Western music band, especially for young people, represented a hope for the future, for cultural exchanges and travels abroad, impossible before.

None of us could foresee that a little later another terrible war would break out, the Ogaden's war, which destroyed Mogadishu.

At the end of the concert, Paolo, one of the "bolognesi", introduce me to Kim, a very good looking girl with two canines coated in gold, a sign of distinction and elegance in Somalia; with her are Sofia, Mulky and Falastin. We decide to have dinner with them at the Safari, a place, like the Makaya, made of acacia huts. This time, though, they let us alone inside, and the women feed us, gently, with their hands; rise and goat.
On the way back Paolo explains for the first time what's a “Gersch”.
There's an herb called “Chat” or “Miro”, that is used by camel people to curb their hunger, to fight heat and thirst, and stay alert during the long hauls. It's a fresh herb; you eat the leaves and the green cortex of the stem, and make a bolus which you keep in your mouth.
Somali people, especially men, use the herb Friday night, their festive day, to stay awake and enjoy the whole night; yes, because the morning after you feel like you slept all night like a log, you feel totally rested, even if you didn't close an eye in 24 hours. If you combine this herb with alcohol, the effect will instead be like a muscle relaxant, including the muscles reflexes technically considered “involuntary”.
Here is what a “Gersch” is: you get together at somebody's place, guys and girls in equal number, women wear only veils, men wear a “futa”, sort of pareo tied with a knot at the waist. You lie down on cushions in a circle casually set. Don't take for granted that if you arrive with a woman you'll spend the night with "that" woman; the coupling combinations are dictated by random chance, moment, and the herb's chemistry.
You start getting closer, touching, skin contact, sweat, and the relaxing of your muscles allow rapports which can last hours, while taking your mind far away, not in an hallucinogenic way, rather in a light, fluid, harmonious way.
Paolo organized a “Gersch” at his place with Mulky, Falastin, Sofia, Kim Castàn, Hamed and me. My feet immediately touched Kim's.
I slowly slipped into her body, and her into mine. I remember we were sweating, and each sweat's drop was an act of tenderness; time started to dilate, we were moving as in slow-motion. I saw her transfiguring, from time to time taking on the appearance of Berit, my former Swedish girlfriend, redhaired and freckled. My heart's beat would slow down and Kim would become more and more like a black Berit, caressing me, taking care of me, slowly, very slowly, with kindness and sweet caution.
Now I feel like making love to her. But Kim stops me; I don't understand why - how could I? She's suddenly sad, and she's struggles to explain me what she wants to tell me: she was "infibulated" and sewn up when she was a young girl, and she has to cope with this mutilation not just as a violent abuse, but also as a terrible humiliation that makes her feel ashamed.
She proposes, if I so desire, an exchange with Sofia, who was able to "free herself" - but I don't even want to hear about it, because I'm already madly in love with Kim, with

whom I could spend the rest of my life. We keep melting into each other until dawn; the house is quite, silence, we get up with a great effort, it's time to go form me: today we have to leave for Tanzania.

I swing by the hotel and I see the rest of the group. They'd spent the night smoking joints with the others from Bologna. I tell everybody about my experience with the Chat.
We're all still very excited for the successful concert at the University.

I promised Sofia I would visit her store before leaving. She sells arts and crafts in Corso Roma, Mogadishu's main street, in the city's center.
She treats me with a headrest made of wood, used to keep your head up from the sand when you lay down on the beach, often times to preserve the hairdos; it's the first item of my considerable collection.

We rush at the National Theater for the official farewell to the musicians and the staff. Also, the trombone's teacher, reiterates the need for Italian speaking teachers, especially for the music harmony classes. Nobody has ever taught them how to divide the voices and move the parts, and, I discover with surprise that all those unison and octaves I thought were from their traditional heritage are instead considered by my Somali colleagues simply as a limitation due to the lack of theoretical preparation, a gap they can't wait to fill.
We ask Vincenzo to take to the Italian Embassy; with the excuse of saying goodbye, we could officially address the matter.
Paki and I meet Salimei with the presence of the first secretary, but the the ambassador reacts coldly, looking like he's afraid to propose anything to the Somali.
He tells the our visit got the desired effects, and met the objectives it was conceived for, and therefore we have, according to his point of view, to be satisfied as it was, and not thinking about anything else; diplomatic relations are affairs way bigger than us. He seems very happy that soon we'll leave the country.
It's understandable: he' a traditionalist, and we, with the exception of Vincenzo, are already wearing colorful dresses, we sport bracelets and necklaces, looking from head to toe like our African colleagues.

A farewell visit at the Ministry of Information has been planned; good old Osman Awes Nur asks us again, with all the force of his convictions, to make any possible effort to create in Mogadishu a real school of music with the help of the cooperation programs, or at least try to put together a group of good teachers for the main subjects.

We feel offended and disappointed by the reaction of our ambassador, who so quickly dusted off the matter, while no one less than Somalia Minister of Culture is begging for our help.

We swing by the airport to check if the truck has unloaded all the instruments and make sure nothing is amiss; everything's OK.
Back to the hotel, for lunch, we are joined only by Mulky, Falastin and Kim, who were driven there by the Somali Jazz organ player.

At the airport, on the other hand, there's everyone, literally. Uaberi, Somali Jazz, the theaters' musicians, all our Somali and Italian friends. I say goodbye and hug them all, one by one, the heart in my throat. My eyes fill with tears, I climb up the airplane's ladder without turning back trying not show my emotions, and swearing to myself that I will go back to Mogadishu, sooner or later, I will go back.

On the plane there's a big commotion; it seems they are having troubles loading some boxes and apologize to the passengers via intercom about the delay due to the "Italian band's luggage"!
It's the same crew as the first flight, same Captain, same flight attendants. By now they know us: East African Airways was the only airline to operate in that part of Africa. Once we take-off, the crew inform us that the majority of our luggage was left in Somalia.

DAR ES SALAAM
(The Peace Door)

November 15, 1976

We arrive in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's capital, at night. As they open the airplane's door we are hit by an extremely hot and humid jet of air, it's suffocating, and unexpected in the dead of night. It was like being under a giant hairdryer and its powerful blow.
We are greeted by Maurizio Melani, our Embassy's first secretary, Giancarlo, the Italian cultural attache and old friend of Pasquale, and only one Kenyan, doctor Kuama, an official working with our diplomatic delegation. Originally a Masai, doctor Kuama dresses in a typical Western way, suit and tie, but there's a detail that betrays his tribal origin: the ears. There's a whole in the middle of both lobes, and the flash around it elongated by at least 6 inches, so doctor Kuama had to knot the ear lobes, otherwise hanging. It's a Masai tradition. These warriors, considered among the oldest and noblest tribes in the entire continent, in order to enlarge at the max the lobe's holes insert in them the most diverse objects, such as Coca Cola cans or tennis balls.
Our official's ears represent, that night, a flag, the only sign we are indeed, and for the first time, in Black Africa; other than that, besides the heat and the humidity, we could very well be in a nondescript outskirts of any tropical city.

They take us at the youth hostel, a shit hole. We complaint, extolling the virtues - by comparison - of Somali's welcoming; poor Melani is very embarrassed, and he works overtime to find a better lodging for us.
In the meantime, at the hostel, we can't find a drop of drinkable water, so we go looking for it at the Simba Kilimangiaro Hotel; but it's too late.
Our young first secretary decides to give us free hospitality at his place, as does Giancarlo. We'll split in three groups; Marcello and Giorgio will stay at the hostel, not so inhospitable in their opinion.

The morning after, at the Lumumba theater, we meet our twin band.
They are the "Afro Seventy Band", all nice and funny, an electric band whose leader is called Patrick; he plays guitar.

Once the formalities and the welcome speeches are done, they entrust us to our colleagues, who will take us to the "bush", the savana, where we'll be able to start getting ready for the concerts.
We all get on a minibus with a sign of the band. Patrick is driving, and announces that we'll do a short stop to buy something. So he parks the vehicle on the side of a major square, in the middle of which there's a park with many trees. He gets out of the minivan and walks away. On the meadow in the middle of the square wee see many people - maybe one hundred - sitting cross-legged in a circle, their hands behind their heads. A large number of military have machine guns pointed at them. It's like a scene from a coup d'etat. Someone explains us that drug trafficking is going on in that square, and yet those people could be under fire for other reasons.
Patrick gets back to the minivan after a few minutes, carrying a large paper bag full of marijuana:
"It's for the rehearsal!" he says.
We arrive at the "bush" and stop next to a hut: the rehearsal room.

The band's drummer produces a long knife and rushes toward a tree; he looks closely at the brunches, touches them, selects some of them, he saws and then starts cleaning them from the bark and polishing them. He's creating his own drumming sticks: the "real" ones are not available here, unless you're willing to pay a fortune. Marcello arranges immediately a present.
Super joints, super rehearsal, awesome!
Their showpiece is called "Tanzania", and their peculiarity is the presence of a wind section (sax, trumpet, trombone) doing its duty beautifully: Maurizio joins it at once.

We play the first concert at the Lumumba Theater, in front of many ministries and dignitaries; official speeches here too, though in English this time, as well as the following day at the University. We miss the atmosphere of Mogadishu, here everything is more formal and solemn.

Edo still hasn't get used to doctor Kuama's ears, who is taking care of us like an older brother; every time Edo sees those ears he can't help but showing amazement and embarrassment, which get even worse when the Kuama asks him to let him listen the concert's recording through the headphones. Edo is fantastic, he's naive and innocence as a child, and of course he will eventually become Kuama's best friend.

The morning of our last day in Tanzania, our Ambassador, Ella Tozzoli, and Anna Melani, who had us staying over at her place, invite us to go with them to a small island in front of Palm Beach.
Journalist Fabrizio Zampa was able to bring along from Italy snorkels, flippers, and a spear gun. He dives for a fishing excursion, but soon after comes back panting, breathless. We follow him to the other side of the island, and on the shore we find a mound two meters tall, five of diameter, entirely covered with flies. It's a pile of dead turtles, massacred for their carapaces. Fade to black.

On the way back to Dar Es Salaam we come across a group of Maconde, a tribe living on the coast: they sell ivory and ebony objects. I can't find anything I like, until I see i a corner, thrown in a box with other abandoned items, a head of a Masai woman carved in ebony. It's wonderful, has a thin crack along the face, but her grace is intact. I buy it for very little money, and I immediately introduce her to my travel mates. We name her Tunu.

Then, on the way to our ambassador's residence for the farewell party, we run into a crowded protest demonstration, though nobody seem willing to tell us about the motivations.

At the reception Patrick comes to me to tell me how happy he was for that experience and the exchange he had with us, and also to let me know that there's a Canzoniere's piece that moved him to tears every time we played: "I Canti a Mete di Barbarano".
“Why does it move you much?" I ask him.
“Because it reminds me when I was a child living in the countryside. My father every morning used to send me to open the gates for the cows so they could graze, and I loved doing that. We were happy there, but then we were forced by necessity to come to Dar Es Salaam, this fucking city!”
The more Patrick spoke, the more goosebumps I felt.
"I Canti a Mete di Barbarano" means "harvest chants in Barbarano Romano", the place where we recorded them. It was a long chant whose function was giving the rhythm, from one side of the fields to another, to the sickle on the wheat.
With that piece we intended to tell the transformation of the peasant culture as it meets the urban culture. We designed a rhythmic structure in 4/4 with the accent on the first 2s 4 in each measure, and it would change as the configuration of the second 2s become more and more pressing, aggressive, violent, desperate. The first half of the piece was

instead sort of a meditative music, and yet concrete, built on long sounds, chimes, effects. The urbanization of that chant would become a scream telling the pain of a tradition and a culture that were disappearing amid the city's noises, violence, chaos.

Patrick had totally understood we wanted to tell. That song got entirely to him, as in a film, frame by frame. It was a source of great joy knowing that an African musician, so far away from us culturally and geographically, was able to catch so clearly the meaning of our music.
I called everybody to come around, and Patrick was pressed to tell of his emotions once again. He didn't just do that: as he was telling the story, he would take off all his necklaces and bracelets giving them one by one, as a present, to each of us.
Farewell Tanzania, tomorrow will go to Maputo. Thank you Patrick!

THE MOZAMBICANS

Pulcinella, completely drunk, throws up with his head fully stuck in the toilet of the dressing rooms at a small movie theater in Pomigliano d'Arco, in the Campania region (not far from Naples). Given the small dimensions of the place, the local FGCI has organized, in order to accommodate as many people as possible, two concerts, one in the PM and one in the evening. Before us the band "'E Zezi" will play: it's a workers' band from Pomigliano which, dressed in costumes, will tell the story of Zeza, wife of [comedy of art traditional character] Pulcinella, who at the present moment is not feeling 100 percent... The political side of the event is dedicated to Mozambique, which is fighting for its independence, a bloody liberation war. There will be a speech by a comrade member of the Frelimo, the Mozambican liberation front.
It's heavy enough for us to perform twice in a day, but we have the chance to present two different programs, and there's always room for improvisations; but for a politician having to repeat twice with the same unwavering passion the same issues must be really a tough task.

Amadio Chango was visibly limping as he was walking through the long hall leading to the stage. He was a large man, with strong hands, the face of a good man, and his words, afternoon and evening, were not the usual political cold words, which we don't like. They were instead full of principles, filled with passion and sense of urgency.
He would tell the fight of a nation in arms, and he guaranteed us, afternoon and evening, that within a year his country would be victorious and gain its independence.
And yet, about this point, he wasn't to entirely convince us.

Maputo, November 19, 1976 (3 years after that day in Pomigliano)

The trip from Tanzania was pleasant, and the crew of the airplane going back and forth through Eastern Africa is the same, so we sang and played for the whole duration of the flight entertaining the passengers; some of them even joined us.
At the airport we're received by our ambassador, Claudio Moreno, dressed as a Chinese. Moreno is extremely nice and funny. With him are two Embassy's officials, the Mozambique Ministry of Education and Culture and various representatives of Radio Maputo. They lead us to a airport hall for the first press conference.

We immediately notice that these Mozambicans are very smart; their words are political, witty, filled with motivated curiosity. At the end of the press conference, Moreno tell us that we'll have an early dinner and go to sleep right away since tomorrow we have to leave Maputo by bus at 5AM. And the trip is going to be long.

At dinner we seat at a big table full of people. Our host is Moreira da Silva, who holds some important position, there's the ambassador with Anna Pia, his wife, and a large group of Italian diplomats.

During dinner a very tall man walks in the restaurant's main hall, and he approaches us, limping: I can barely see him in against the light, and yet he has something familiar.
“Didn't we already meet each other?" I ask him.
“But of course, in Pomigliano D’Arco, I'm Amadio Chango!”
We talk a lot. His damaged leg is a souvenir of Portuguese colonialism, the visible evidence and oppressive memory of the tortures that he, and his whole nation, had suffered. He tells me of the fetuses extracted with machetes from their mothers' belly, and showed around as trophies on top of sticks. What he had to endure, he says, it's nothing in comparison.
Before being tortured he had an important role in the liberation fight, but then he to go to Italy, in Reggio Emilia, to have surgery on his leg. The region Emilia-Romagna at that time had launched a program to help Mozambican refugees, and Amadio was deeply grateful to our country not only for the medical care he received, also for the possibility to keep on with his political work.
I met him in exile and didn't give much credit to his hopes; now I found him again as a free man in his Mozambique which, as he promised us, had recapture its independence.

Maputo - Cardoso Hotel - 5.30PM

We leave by bus to the Njambane province, all of us plus Alex -he's driving, though it's not his profession - Moreira da Silva, who, as we discover, is a big shot at the Ministry of Information and Culture, and Francisco Pina of Radio Maputo, who's the

tour-leader and the more politicized of us all. He has the typical look of an intellectual: round glasses a' la Gramsci, and a perennial book in his hands.
After three hours or so of travel, we decide to do a stopover in a little village on the side of the road. We buy beverages and drink quickly seating on a low wall made of mud and rocks. We leave an hour later. Giampaolo Santini comes to the last row of the bus, where I'm laying down trying to get some sleep; he's looking for his son Luca, the cameraman. There's no Luca here.
“He must be seating in the front of the bus," I say.
"He's not there either!"
“Missing in action!”
We're more than sure that Luca left with us from Maputo, because we remember perfectly he was sitting with us on the low wall in the village, drinking orange juice with us. Panic! We make a U-turn and after an hour we find him where last saw him: on the low mud and rock wall, that is.
He's petrified and mad like hell, surrounded by curious children.
“ You guys didn't even realize I wasn't on the bus!” he yells.
“Luca, take it easy, we all thought you were somewhere on the bus…”
“OK, but I'm not going to talk to my father! I guys left me all alone in the middle of Africa. Screw you!”

A couple of hours later the storm was gone and the moods reestablished, but we arrived very late at the residence of Cristobao Colombo, president the Njambane's province, in the Zavala district.
The truck carrying the instrument and equipment fortunately was already there.

We're treated with an epicurean welcome banquet, then we leave at once to Qissico, where a stage made of mud and canes has been built inside a natural amphitheater as big as Rome's Circo Massimo. We're greeted by a crowd of 50,000 people.
They already started doing their dances in celebration. They are mainly war dances featuring also the women, pivotal protagonists of the revolutionary Mozambican process.

We rush to open the instruments cases, but something is wrong. Some of them are missing.
We blame Vincenzo for not having properly checked things at the airport. Missing are the electric bass, the upright bass, half drum set, a saxophone and Maurizio's flute. Lucily he always carry his tenor sax with him, he's glued to it, as I do with my violin.
Pasquale will manage with the guitar, while Marcello wittily build a makeshift drum with chairs and pieces of tin. He takes the rattles off tambourines so he can them as drums, and attach the bass drum pedal to a beer barrel which he miraculously was able to obtain. We make fun of the fact he saved was by the beer, a bit ironic since his father, sor Antonio, is a beer trader.

The dances are introduced and then accompanied by a "Chope music" orchestra. It's made of two dozens "Timbilas", sweet wood marimbas under whose and each keys (or teclas) there's a pumpkin with a hole on its top, as an acoustic case. The pumpkin hole is covered by a thin veil made of a mix of cobwebs with wax, which adds to the percussion sound a vibration similar to the one produced by a Kazoo's vellum paper.
Behind the main group there are four "Timbilas Basse", equipped with only four teclas: they produce a deep sound, involving, disquieting; it reminds me a dinosaur stride's sound.
At the front of the group, four dancers play metallic percussion similar to maracas.
There's also a comic act: after carefully soaping her, a barber is trying to shave a goat's goatee, but she keeps slipping out of his hold; he chases her, trips, falls, swears, and the crowd is in stitches, including us.

Our concert too becomes a collective dance, and it's fantastic seeing all that people doing war dances in the African dust, stirred by Southern Italy's rhythm.
It's very hot, we sweat, therefore a woman comes to dry our foreheads and necks while we play.
Than a group of women climbs onstage on a queue, dancing, like in a conga line, they catch Clara and take her away.
“Where the hell are you going?" I yell. "You've got to sing!”
She turns toward us as to say:
“What I am supposed to do? They invited me, and I go!”
And she disappears with them in a bowl of dust and dancing crowd.

Everything ends with an official speech, as in a script we already know well.

We dine again at the Cristobao Colombo's residence; we are by now very familiar with him, despite the etiquette.
“I think it's time to eat," he says. "And think it's time for you to relax."
We applaud him, showing him our utmost appreciation for each of his decisions.

The hotel it's not an hotel, but a private home temporarily expropriated to someone for our stay. But there's a problem: there's not enough beds. Looks like Marcello, Vincenzo and I will have to sleep together on a double bed. None of us love the idea, so we ask Francisco Pina where he, with Alex and Moreira, are planning to sleep. He says there a little house in the bush, half an hour drive from Quissico, with several beds and two bathrooms.
"Perfect!” We ask them if we can join them, and they seem happy to have our company; so we say goodbye Vincenzo, who's very happy to have a big bed to sleep all by himself. We set off for the bush.
Once gotten to destination, our friends can't activate the electric light and send Alex to

the village in order to find an electrician.
The little house in the bush is basically a single large rectangular room with two entrance doors on each of the shorter sides.
Laying on the longest walls are the beds, and on the opposite side there's a long metal and formica bench similar to those in medical ambulatories all over the world. Marcello and I are exhausted and sit down on the bench. In the meanwhile Francisco and Moreira start to create torches made of paper and trying to lit them up with matches. With these makeshift torches they examine the environment, scouring even under the beds, carefully, one by one.
“Moreira, what are you guys doing?" I ask. "Why those torches? There's a full moon and we can see perfectly inside!”
“ I know, I know," he answers patiently. "It's not a matter of lighting up the room; it's for the cobras. The torches' fire scares them, and keeps them away!”
My legs and Marcello's spring up over the bench.
Francisco asks me if I have some paper with me, because their provision is winding down. With the last available section of a newspaper they plug any opening under the entrance doors. The electrician is still nowhere near.
Moreira and Francisco too seat on the bench with us, their feet well off the ground.

Lit up by the bright moonlight, seating fearful on the bench, we cautiously wait, whispering. Our two friends are more scared than us, maybe because they already experienced the effect of a cobra's bite, and explain us that those wounds - actual holes - on people's legs, come as a consequence of the medical treatment. If you're bitten by a cobra you have to heat a knife up on the fire for sterilization, then you have to remove the flash around the bite, and finally treat the wound with a compress made of specific herbs, which many carry along in a little bag bound to the belt, just in case!
Thanks God, a couple of hours later Alex comes back with an electrician, who in a jiffy re-activate the electrical system and resumes the light in and out the little house.
But we are too tired, and between the cobras and Vincenzo at the end of the day we choose the latter and we ask the electrician to drive us back to Quissico.
We spend the night the three of us on a double bed, not even that big.

The morning after Francisco Pina tells me he wasn't able to sleep at all that short night: "Cobras knocked at the door," he says. "You know, around here snakes hang out in groups of five or six, and they were like crazy, sensing our presence inside the hut. And then at a certain point the electrical system went off again, and only at dawn, with the first daylight, the snakes finally left."

We play at Zandamela, another village in the same province, "chope" music capital.
Claudio Moreno had recommended us not to drink water, ever, unless it was previously boiled. The risk to get infected with amoeba or falling ill with dysentery was very high.
The heat was sweltering, and before the festive event the entire village had grouped

under the foliage of giant trees, in the shade. Right there I'm approached by an elderly woman, who, as an homage, offers me a drink: the water in the bottle is yellowish in color, with ectoplasm floating: I drink it all.

There are two stages, again made of mud and canes, with a cover of palm leaves. One stage is for us, the other, exactly opposite to ours, for the authorities; in the middle there are thousands of people. We play mainly fast rhythm tunes, by now we understood their taste, and they dance their war dances. It's a fantastic spectacle!
At the end of the concert Cristobao Colombo joins us on our stage and homage us with a Timbila and a war drum:
“Take these to Europe and show the voice of our people!”
Then he addresses the crowd, explaining that our meeting was meant to be an exchange of experiences in the framework of the literacy and cultural campaign that Frelimo is promoting in Mozambique.
He's speaking Portuguese, and a translator translates simultaneously in "Chope" language what he's saying, when, all of a sudden Cristobao Colombo himself switches to "Chope", rhythmically clapping his hands, and the crowd joins him in that clapping and responding to his words, in unison, words we don't understand, and yet more and more becoming music.

We go back to Maputo late at night; lightning literally rip the sky, it's a never seen spectacle. Those lighting strikes are amazingly huge. Any time one strikes, the landscape is lit like an endless daylight. This is Africa, everything there is bigger.

Once back at the hotel, none of us wants to go to bed; we're full of emotions to digest, and full of things to retain in our memory, a million of faces to remember forever.
We go through the events of those extraordinary days in the Njambane province, and as we usually do when we are very exited, we start talking nonsense and be silly.
I start:
“Can you believe the guy who wrote the 'Watussi' song?”
“Yeah, he sat at the typewriter and started: Nel continente nero... in the the black continent... (enter), paraponzi (coma), ponzi (coma) po’ (enter)... at the foot of Kilimanjaro (enter), riparaponzi, ponzi, po’ (enter). Ci stà un popolo di negri… there's a country of Negroes...
How the hell can you say "People of Negroes!" It's 1976!

Fabrizio Zampa turns slowly towards me, his face turned white, and confesses: “Do you know who was playing drums in that band? Well... it was me!"
There was a beautiful moment of deep communication between us: there's was no need for theoretical discussions, our eyes were full of images, the ears full of sounds, we felt we were the most fortunate people in the world, and yet we kept a door open as not to take ourselves too seriously, and a laugh, a joke, as always, came to rescue.

The following morning there's a crowded press conference at the embassy. It's very interesting: the speeches are about the actuality and benefit of folk music. What we're doing in Italy is similar to what they're trying to do in Mozambique.
In the afternoon we rehears for the official concert at the Laurenco Marquez theater in Maputo; tonight there's also Samora Machel, the beloved Mozambican president, with his wife and many authorities.

Vincenzo, even in the most improbable situations, wore suit and tie. Eben in Zandamela and other villages, our manager kept his habit. We were on the theater's stage, behind the closed curtain, one hour before the beginning of the concert, when he shyly asked me:
“Did you drink any water in the villages?”
“Actually, yes!”
“Did you have any problem?”
“Actually, no!”
“Well, I did….”
“ What do you mean?”
“I just farted, and shat in my pants!”
“ Mamma mia! Did you clean yourself?”
“Yes.”
“How?”
“ With my undies!”
“ Shit... And where did you dispose of them?”
“There!”
And he indicates a disgusting bundle hidden behind a drape, backstage. I think about the unfortunate people that tomorrow will have to clean up the stage, after the illustrious Italians' concert, in the presence of all those authorities.

Despite the unceremonious start, that night the music flows as raging river; and when Giorgio and Marcello begin to play the Timbilas, which they learned playing right away, it's a madhouse! The crowd throws flowers at us, people want to hug us, kiss us. Claudio Moreno is radiant, he looks at us with gratitude; who knows, maybe what we're doing is indeed purposeful to bring us near to them, increase the cooperation between our nations, and make the political journey of such mindful people easier.

The following afternoon we play in a big oil refinery's mess hall. A female choir welcomes us. They sing "La Mujer Mozambicana” (Mozambique woman) an emancipation song, with pride. Their voices, in spite of the lyrics content, are shy, a bit melancholic, humble. There's also a male choir, they are miners, and sing “Kanimambo Frelimo” (Thanks Frelimo).
At the end of the concert we meet we the refinery's workers, and they ask us many

questions; they treat us as we were very important guests, therefore us, to establish some sense of equality, ask them to sing something for us. One of them stands up:
“I'll sing a Party's song!”
A woman hands him a small book with the lyrics of political songs, surprisingly provoking our friend Moreira's reaction:
“You didn't memorize your Party songs?”
The small book is lay down and a moment of deep, silent embarrassment ensues; you couldn't hear a fly, which is weird to say in Africa!
We go back to spoken words, and they tell us how they handle social problems and their "Mozambican way" to Socialism. The hospital, for example, which was built by the Portuguese only for the Portuguese, originally could accommodate between 200 and 300 patients. Today the demand for hospital beds was between 2,000 and 3,000. There were huge problems: two women giving birth in the same bed, accidents, lack of medicines, hygienic deficit. Good! They invented "floor committees" and "ward committees" consisting of a patients representative, a doctor, a nurse and a student for each ward, in order to optimize the little they had, so that nothing would be left to chance, to the improvisation, or worse, the arrogance of the few.
They ask us how we managed to fix hospital problems in Italy, and if we too were organized in representation committees for the people. We don't know how and what to answer, and we're proud of our ambassador who, through his work, must have projected in that country an Italian image made of solidarity and democracy. Perhaps the Mozambicans think that Italy is a Socialist country!

Maputo, November 24, 1976 - last day of our stay.

Today we play at a school. They had printed a concert program with a photo of the Canzoniere and the lineup of the musical pieces. This rigid cover program turns out very useful since the temperature it about 50 degrees (Celsius) and nobody, in the audience, has brought a fan from home. We literally are too weak to honor the whole program, but nobody will find that out, given the use their doing of the brochures! The hall is under the afternoon sun and it has become an oven, and the audience is suffering just like us.
Pasquale is about to pass out, we cut short our playing, we thank the audience and everybody clearly appreciate that, including the organizers.

At 8 PM the whole group is immersed in the water of the Hotel Cardoso's pool. The sun is setting and it's the biggest I've ever seen, red as embers, it's good and loves me a lot.
“Excuse me?”
A shrill voice brings me back to reality.
“…. Pleasure, my name is Muscolino, I'm Italian."

I get out of the water.
"… My pleasure, I'm Carlo."
"This is my baby daughter," he says. "Rosina…give the gentleman a kiss."
The "child" is in reality a 20something bodacious beauty, and very shyly she kisses each of us, showing a strong sense of discipline to her father.

Muscolino heard us playing at the Marquez theater and wanted to come and say hello. He was of the 12 survivors of the bloody battle of Tobruk. After that defeat he hid in the desert a long time, then he swam through the Suez Canal, and was rescued, exhausted and close to dying, by a Bedouin's caravan, who took care of him and harbored him as one of them. During the two years he spent with that desert tribe Muscolino learned the Bedouin's costumes and culture. Then other vicissitudes brought him to Maputo. He very grateful to the Mozambican people; here he was finally able to create a life.
He saw a waiter with a metallic tray full of drinks and decorated with advertising images, and he ask him if he could borrow that tray, and he started singing a Bedouin melody using the tray as frame drum.
The sun disappears behind the horizon accompanied by a melancholic desert chant: that's our last night in Maputo.

The farewell reception starts with the singing of a group called "Alliance Workers - Peasants". Claudio Moreno pleads us to respond with our singing, and after consulting with him, since we are at it, we go down hard with "I Morti di Reggio Emilia" (the dead of Reggio Emilia) and "Bella Ciao" [both Italian traditional partisan songs]. Isn't it wonderful that our ambassador is urging us to sing "Bella Ciao" in such an official occasion?

I talk to Ottavio, of the workers-peasant's group, about the meaning of doing politics through music, and we are on the same exact wave length. We're interrupted, it's the inevitable moment for farewell speeches, and as always, it's upon me to say something appropriate; this time will be really difficult, though, and I fear I won't be able to make it, and that I will break down crying like an idiot.
I ask myself in what language should I address the crowd, and I realize I already gave speeches from the stage in Mozambique, at the National Theater, at the school, in the villages.
I realize I always spoke in Italian and them in Portuguese, I surprise myself by thinking that we never feel the necessity for an interpreter, and I realize that our level of communication and sharing with these people was so high that we didn't even paid much attention to the fact that we were speaking two different idioms. I decide there and then this is going to be the topic of my farewell speech.

I spend the rest of the evening seating on the floor outside of the hall, where the reception is going on. Next to me, silent, there's Alice. I saw her here and there over the last few days, maybe she has on official role, maybe not. Alice has a mature look, judgmental, big green eyes and an "afro" hairdo, very clear. We "feel" one another under the plastic transparent corrugated canopy, through which we can see hail stones as big as walnuts coming down noisily. We don't need to talk, we'd rather enjoy this moment hoping it'll last as long as possible, while that storm that keeps us together under the same shelter will never end.

At 4 AM Moreira takes us back to the hotel: he drove the bus, since Alex is drunk as hell! The lightnings keep liting up the night, non stop.
Kanimambo Frelimo!

November 25, 1976

At the airport everybody came, to say goodbye. The representatives of the Ministry of Education and Culture, our diplomats, the people from Radio Maputo, the musicians we met, and, to my surprise, Alice.
She came to tell me about her, but again, with no words. She brought along her son, a beautiful boy called Diego: he looks a lot like her mother, has the same colors. Alice came to silently and discretely let me know that in the event I wanted to go back, she would be there for me, with Diego.

LUSAKA – ZAMBIA

We flew just a few hours to get to Zambia's capital city, and yet I'll never forget the name of the plane's pilot: Captain Gordon, as in Flash!
Immediately after announcing the imminent landing, Gordon maneuvered a nosedive that left the passengers breathless, and speechless.
More or less the announcement went like: "Good morning, I'm Captain Gordon, and we've started the descent toward Lusakaaaa's airpooort!!!!"
And down we go on a dive.

We're received by the embassy's staff, and the overall atmosphere feels way different from that we just left in Mozambique.
The old chauffeur driving us to the Fiat Village, where we'll be lodged, calls me "Buana", which in Swahili means "Mister", or better, “Master". I ask him, please, to

call me with my proper name, but he can't.

At the Fiat's bungalows we're welcomed by Cavalier Moretti, a tired man in his 60s, overweight, dirty, and badly dressed. He's laying down on a hammock, browsing through a porn magazine. He looks down and out; according to him, he has been in bed with every Zambia's women, and the first thing he tells us is: "... I fucked them all!"

Once the luggage is settled, they introduce us to Alberto, the man who will drive the truck with our instruments. He's also Italian, an adventurer, a former mercenary in Belgian Congo, the type of person who, if back in Italy, couldn't stay out of jail for more than a week. Recently he lost more than two million lire [one thousand of today's dollars] playing roulette, therefore he's mad like hell, and reluctantly accepted this job with us, since he badly needs money. He brags that at least once a month he and his friends do "raids" in Lusaka's poor neighborhoods; two or three Land Rovers filled with criminals of the same kind as him, armed with sticks; they park the vehicles and start beating the shit out whoever comes around: "So they learn who's the boss!" he boasts.

His mercenary courage is clearly a fruit of the fear that's eating him inside. He's disgusting, but are stuck with him, since, according to our embassy
s people, he's the only person available in the entire city with a truck.
We're taken to eat at an Italian restaurant, where our compatriots seem of the same mold as Alberto. If they are not mercenaries, they are pimps who extol the erotic virtues of "their women", while offering them to us. We politely decline, but we feel dirty and seen as masters, we don't know how to get out of it and we fear to be confused with rotten people like those surrounding us, and they don't seem to be willing to let go.
To Alberto and co. we represent a novelty, a diversion for a few days, a presence good at breaking the usual routine.
It's a terrible situation, unbearable. We'd like to talk to the African people we eventually meet, letting them know we're different from those bad types, but they keep calling us "Buana" and keep their distance from us, and rightly so; we're not even able to say if the women around us are prostitutes or not. Those types are polluting the environment, and we feel paralyzed.
The only meager comfort is the Italian food from the restaurant's kitchen: a large "lasagna al forno", followed by "cotolette alla milanese". God bless the food!

In Maputo we didn't even had the time to unpack, so many were the things and undertakings to take care of; when I'm finally able to open one of my suitcases, jumps out Tunu, the ebony statuette with the face cracked I bought from the Maconde in Tanzania. I'd almost forgotten her.
Giampaolo Santini, who had traveled a lot in his life, especially in Latin America, has his own theory:

“You know why they threw her away?” he asks, referring to Tunu.
“No idea."
“Because when a statue portraying a human being gets broken, the popular belief is that it happened because the piece has a soul that is trying to get free from the prison of wood; so they are afraid, or better, terrified, that the portrayed person's spirit might materialize."
I get caught by the same fear of the Maconde, and tell it to Santini.
“Let's do this. Let's organize a Macumba….”
“What do you mean?”
“ Give her some presents, as they do Brazil, offerings, so that even if the spirit materializes, she will be nice to you!”
Luca, his son, start playing a guitar because they say that statues with broken faces like music a lot, while I do my best to prepare some votive offerings. I place the statuette on a chair, as it were a night stand next to my bed, in the room of one of the Fiat's Flat that I share with Maurizio. I place her on a green t-shirt full of little mirrors which gives to this set up the idea of an altar; then I slip on her two or three seashells little necklaces, and I fill a plastic cap with whiskey given to me by Giampaolo, just in case she'd get thirsty. Then I put in front of her a couple of cigarettes and some matches, and the offering is thus complete.
Now I feel better.
“Goodnight Maurizio," I say.
“Goodnight Carlo."
We turn off the light, but I can't sleep. Santini is sleeping in another house, so, in case of an appearance, I can't even consult him about the behavior I should keep.
“Shit, I didn't ask him!" I say to myself. "Will the offerings be enough?”
In the middle of the night I still have my eyes wide shut, when I hear a weird noise coming from the floor under my bed:
"Trrr…Trrrr…Tr…"
I restrain myself to turn on the light, because I don't want to wake Maurizio up with my paranoia, but the noise goes on:
"Trrr…Trrrr…Tr… "
Oh well! I turn on the light, I put on my sandals, wear my glasses and finally I realize that the noise it's nothing more than a small spider that's moving on my Somali camel bag's edge. Nothing serious!
I'm about to turn off the light, which luckily didn't wake up my sax player room-mate, when all of a sudden a huge hairy black spider emerges from a slit under the entrance door, and menacingly strides toward Maurizio's bed. The fact that I have my sandals on is providential: I chase the animal and squash him with my right foot. Maurizio wakes up, startled:
“What did you just do? Did you kill a rat?” he yells.
“No, it's a spider, look at this!”
The animal is indeed as big as a mouse. We pick up the poor remains and dispose of

them in an transparent plastic bag.
“First in the morning we'll go to the embassy and show them the bag with the spider inside!" I say indignant. "Then we'll move to the Intercontinental Hotel, which I saw while we were coming to this fucking place! Those who pay, pay!”
My statuette's spirit saved us from the black widow's aggression. She did it sending a small spider to make some noise and thus alerting me. Santini's macumba worked, and Tunu still today has a place of honor on my piano, and still today wears the same small necklaces.
"Goodnight Maurizio."
"Goodnight Carlo."

Lusaka, November 26, 1976

We give Dr. Guicciardi, our embassy's first secretary, the bag containing the black widow's remains, and before going the hotel we swing by the airport, where our boxes have arrived from Maputo, including the ones we had lost.
At the theater we're introduced to our twin band. They look sad, as everything in Zambia, though their leader, John, is a very nice guy.
At the evening concert there's a few people, maybe because it's raining, or more probably because our diplomats seem to have underestimate our "mission".
There's a party at the Italian embassy, kind of sad as well, though fortunately they invited many music teachers, s o we have something to talk about.
At night Maurizio and I stumble in the Hotel Intercontinental's Casino, and play together. 13 it's the number of my patron saint, Saint Anthony of Padua; we bet on it, it comes out twice in a row, and we win 40 Squash, a lot of money!

The day after our countrymen organize for us a visit at an ivory craft's factory; they hope we'll buy something. The factory belongs to an Italian - I don't remember the name - another piece of shit.

At the steering wheel of the car that is taking us to his factory, he [who?....] says to me:
“I have 40 animals working for me."
I imagine some donkeys moving some archaic machinery or a stone wheel as in the old oil mills; but when we get there I realize that this other nobleman was talking about human beings that he was used to treat as animals.
He proudly show us a huge amount of female elephant's trunks hidden under a bed in a hut:
"It's forbidden to kill female elephants, but their ivory is the most valuable and best paid!”
We don't have the guts to look at these people's faces, the "animals", while they, on the

other hand, stare at us: their Buana's friends. Quick fade to black.

We return to the hotel as fast as possible, and Maurizio rushes to his room for a shower. After the adventure with the spider we became usual room-mates.
I go down to eat something in the restaurant's terrace overlooking the swimming pool; I meet Edo, our shy sound engineer, and he points out at a very beautiful girl seating a few tables away, wearing a colorful wide-rimmed hat.
“Go talk to her," I tell him. "She's also looking at you, can't you see?"
“I'm too embarrassed," he says with his strong Modena accent.
In the meantime we're joined by Alberto, who starts making fun of Edo's shyness;
he calls a waiter and whispers something to him.
“What did you tell him?" asks Edo.
“Simply to go and ask the girl to come seat with us."
The waiter approaches the woman, he talks to her, pauses a bit, and comes back to us:
“The Miss says she would first like to eat something."
Alberto doesn't hesitate a moment:
"Give her whatever she wants!”
I take advantage to order a hamburger, and once lunch is over, the ex mercenary asks me for my room's number: “213". I assume he needs it to charge the lunch on my room, instead he writes it on a piece of paper and summons the same waiter, who ruishes to deliver it to the girl in the hat, who in the meanwhile had finished her lun.
“What the hell did you do?” I ask Alberto.
“Nothing; she will now come in to your room!”
“ Goddamn, who asked you to do that?”
“ I thought I was making you a favor….” he replies.
I sprint to my room to inform Maurizio, who's still under the shower:
“Hurry up and get dressed, the mercenary has messed up!”
Toc…toc…. a knock on the door.
“What do we do now?"
We let the girl in and explain her that there's been a quid-pro-quod. We do that in the most polite way, trying not to offend her. But she has a problem.
If she goes back to the lobby right away her pimps might think she was not able to do her job, or that we didn't like her. We reassure her on the point, and anyway we give her a good half of the Squash we won the previous night at the casino. We spend the following half hour smoking cigarettes to kill time and thus letting the pimps think that everything went down normally. The girl in the hat looks at us with gratitude, almost incredulous, and her face lit up with a big girlish smile when Maurizio starts playing for her his tenor sax.

Tonight we'll play at Lusaka's college. The president's name is William Shakespeare, exactly like that. He's an Englishman, 60something, thin, tall, lanky. To get to the stage that built for just us, we had to go through narrow alleys among the college's various

student residence buildings. We hear some music, maybe it's Edo doing a sound check; but then I realize it's Viennese Waltz. We follow the sound up to a wide glass transparent wall that gives into a large hall. Velvet seats, hardwood floor, chandeliers, and a dance floor with couples of young Zambians, dressed with the college blue uniforms, are dancing Strauss' Waltz. They look like a framed painting by Edward Hopper, they look sad, they are clumsy, too shy in their movements, they barely touch each other. It looks like they are testing their ability to conform to a stronger cultural model as to please the obvious delusions of who's running this place.
Fortunately, the musicians we'll play together with tonight seem to be feeling the same discomfort towards their university. There's only rich people's kids in that college, they say with little to add, but in Zambia this means a lot. Something click between us and our colleagues, a sense of complicity.

As a matter of fact the concert turns out fantastic: aggressive, liberating. People in the audience dance, jump, yell, and we move onstage as we were a mocking Heavy Metal crappy group. William Shakespeare observe the scene from his chair in the academy authorities' section; he's still, but maybe at the end even he cracks a smile. We hope our transit may turn out to be useful for those kids, who somebody would like to embalm.

Off we go with some new friends: John, Essa, Bob and his sister take us to a club out of Lusaka where they play music, it's an open air cafe', a beautiful place.
We a lot of tension to get rid off, and we do it egregiously with marijuana's joints we smoke before the befuddled eyes of our chauffeurs, who keep calling us, undaunted, "Buana", and yet we were to establish an almost "egalitarian" relation with. It's the most we could accomplish in such a short period of time, and we tried really hard.

NAIROBI – KENYA

November 29, 1976

At the airport we found all the instruments cases previously missing. They have been there for a few weeks, and they were left on the tarmac, under the sun, for several days. Paki's upright bass has literally exploded. The wood swelled up and blew along it length, its veining look like the arches of an abandoned boat's hull.
We lodge at the Davon Hotel, cottages owned by Count Borletti, he of the sewing machines (Borletti punti perfetti! - Borlettis perfect stitches).
The hotel hosts croupiers, musicians, dancers, and the entire foreign staff of the Nairobi's Casino, also own by the above-mentioned Count.

Nairobi is a green city, beautiful, full of boulevards, elegant houses were the English live, bougainvillea and colors.
The Kenyatta Hall, where we'll play, looks instead like any convention center all over the world, not a place. I get a weird sensation that the English, in the countries they colonized, have strongly imposed their model. From architecture to city planning, from culture to food, clothing and etiquette; Italians, after all, have not done that in Africa.
I can't stand, for example, the presence of four waiters standing on attention around the tables of the restaurants, also owned by the Count; they wear white gloves, and as soon as the water glass is empty they rush to fill it, as a crumb falls on the table cloth they remove if with a brush. The only thing I like is the unfailing presence on the table of bread and butter, also a very Anglo-Saxon custom.

We play for a few people, it's a melancholic affair; we are getting psychologically ready to go back to Europe. Everything is about to end, everything is about to disappear. The silver lining is that Clara showed up at the concert with a new hairdo made of braids ending to her neck like a bird's tail. It's her way to wear Africa on herself.

One evening, in a club close to the hotel, I see a very beautiful woman seating alone at the bar; the way she dresses, she looks Somalian. I approach her:
“Hi….” I say.
“Hi...”
“Nice to meet you, I'm Carlo!”
“I'm Fatma… are you Italian?”
“Yes, and you are Somali, right?”
“Yes, how did you guess?”
“We were recently in Somalia, to play music with my band; I recognized you by the way you dress, and furthermore your name is Fatma”.
“Hey, so it's you guys! My sister wrote to me there's was an Italian band performing at National Theater; she's a dancer!”
We talk a long time, we have common friends among Somali musicians; I tell her about our experiences in her country, including even Kim and the Chat.
“Do you know why I'm here alone?" she asks.
“I've no idea…”
“Because at my place, right now, there's a Gersh going on, and I didn't have anyone to bring along with me, so I had to leave."
“Take me!" I dare.
So we call a taxi cab and get to Fatma's house, where we spend a great Gersh night.

The day after I tell Marcello about my encounter. Both of us never stopped to think of Mogadishu and the offer to teach music at the National Theater.

"It can't end like this!" I say.
The only thought that in a few days we'll leave Africa is unbearable.
On the other hand, Giorgio organized with the Santinis a trip to Lake Turkana, the largest alligators' sanctuary in the world. Pasquale wants to get as soon as he can to Switzerland, where Anna had a surgery, while Clara and Maurizio urgently need to go back to Italy, where they had previous commitments to honor.

“What the fuck are we going back for?” I ask.
We rush to the Alitalia travel agency on Kaunda Street, nearby the Italian Embassy, and a nice bearded heavyset gentleman convert with no problem at all our tickets from a Nairobi- Rome to a Nairobi-Mogadishu-Rome.
It's done, our African trip is still on! We call Mogadishu, they are waiting for us!

With this happiness in our hearts, the following day we go visit the Nairobi National Park. Comes evening we settle on the edge of the river, which is running slowly, its waters as muddy as milk chocolate. We're waiting sunset, when the temperature becomes mild and the hippos come up to the surface. Our guide located one through the air bubbles emerging from the muddy bottom. We seat silently. The forest's sounds are fascinating: leaves rustle, mooing, baboons barking; but our attention is caught by the rhythmic sound of an unknown bird:

TaTaTà - - TaTa TaTa TaTa Tà.

The sound repeats the same pattern, it comes and goes, but it's exactly the same metronomic beat, 120 per minute. Finally we're able to decode a percussion pattern. Yes, since we learned that in Africa, oftentimes, when you hear a percussion group, you cannot use our music's codes. Percussion often plays a melodic role, a different design and configurations from one tune and another that are not submitted to any type of squaring other than the original authors'. This bird was instead traveling in a perfect 4/4, metronome 120. We didn't see any hippos, and yet we caught something very intriguing.

In the following days Marcello looks to me like he's constantly busy, and I'm not sure about what; he talks stealthily to the taxi drivers, as if they are in a deal, to truck drivers, to local organizer, with Vincenzo. He's preparing something that I'm not supposed to know, that's what it is!
Given the logistic difficulties, the time restriction and the official nature of our tour, our luggage always traveled with diplomatic privileges and priority which we never enjoyed, and mainly they were immune to any kind of customs inspections, that is, nobody had the authority to open our luggage up, as to avoid an international crisis.
Here lies the idea!
Marcello decided to fill the bass drum and all the other drums with Kenyan marijuana

of the best kind, and ship everything to Rome with the benevolent protection of our diplomatic delegation in Kenya... And he did it!
He tells me about his misdeed when there's only the two of us in Nairobi. Giorgio and the Santinis are already on their way toward Kenya's north, while all the others are flying to Rome on the same plane carrying that precious shipment.
“Screw you!" I yell. "You're nuts! If they get caught, they we'll arrest everybody!”
“Carletto, take it easy," Marcello responds. "We're gonna be fine; I talked nicely to the people at the Embassy, and nobody in this world is going to open those cases."
“Sure... and don't tell me you're taking weed even to Mogadishu?" I ask angrily. "Look, don't bullshit me!”
Marcello hesitates, then he shows me a tin container for cigars number Four, that is, big: “I'm taking along just this!”
What did he come up with this time around?
He had filled the container with pressed marijuana on top of which, on the screw cap's side, he had placed, to hide the weed, a layer of cotton, on top of which he'd placed strongly smelly candies of different colors. He was planning to place the whole thing at the bottom of his leather bag which he always carried strapped to his shoulder, and nobody would have notice that.
“Screw you one more time!” I say.
Customs, checks, everything's fine until a heavyset police woman goes through our bodies with a metal detector bar.
"Open up the hand bags!" she orders imperiously. We oblige, and of course the first thing rolling out Marcello's bag is the cigars container. I scramble to take out of my bag ivory objects, a little heart, a camel, which I kindly offer as a present to police woman. The diversion works, and the weed cigar remains unobserved. A few minutes later we are on the plane, finally in our seats. But it's not over.
As soon as the flight crew has completed the boarding procedures, the Captain makes an announcement we don't understand. Right after, from the plane back door, comes in a handcuffed man escorted by two plain-clothed officers, to whom is linked by a chain. He has gray hair, and looks Somalian. The three seat on the first row, on the right side. The hatches are closed, the handcuffed man is on a window seat.
Not even a minute later we hear a scream, a swearing in Arab and a loud bang. They tell us that the prisoner has punched the window, cracking the glass.
They say he's been sentenced to death! They are taking to Mogadishu for the firing squad; yesterday has semi-destroyed a plane transporting him to Nairobi from Lusaka, where he had been arrested. Maybe he's one of those rebels we heard a lot about.
The passengers are in turmoil and anxious, the rumors run around in a multilingual word-of-mouth. A group of Italians creates a sort of committee to talk to the pilot: they don't to fly on the same plane with a man sentenced to death, they don't feel safe. Half an hour goes by, it's hot as hell, there's no ventilation; the cockpit's door opens up and the Captain goes to talk to the custodian officers, and we understand by their gestures that he's ordering them to get off the plane. The three men get up and walks toward the

exit door, and as they are about to exit the plane the prisoner screams again in Arab: somebody translates: "He said there's a bomb on this plane!"

There a scuffle, the three men are taken back to their seats on the first row, and they order all of us to get off the plane with our hand luggage.
We were on the tarmac when the prisoner climbs down the plane's ladder. I will never forget his eyes: they were bright and light blue, and totally lost in the empty space. He knew he was going to die, and he did everything he could to gain some time. He succeeded for the time being, and that gave some comfort.

They unload all baggage from the plane's cargo, and each passenger will have to claim his or her own, and if so requested, will have to open them up for the inspections by the many armed policemen already mobilized in the area. Here we again: they will rummage everywhere. We line up, each of us with our luggage and suitcases at our feet, and they order us to open even the hand luggage; but luckily Marcello manages to hide the strapped-on leather bag behind his back. They don't notice it. One more time, we depart.

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Mogadishu, December 7, 1976

At the airport we're welcomed by Kim, Sofia, Falastin, Hamed, Castàn, Ali, Faduma Kassim and Faduma Nekruma. They organized a small party at the Somali National Academy directed by Mister Shire Giama, who's credited for the "invention" of the Somali written language. He did so gathering at his institute two or three elders from each tribe in order to confront the various languages, some of them very different from one another, in search for common elements. Once those were found, Giama started to work on phonetic, and devised a way to graphically represent it. He tells me that it was a fascinating process inspired by the respect for the various populations' traditions on that territory, but he had troubles to admit the existence of tribes, a tabu' concept in the new Socialist Somalia.

Let's go back to us. They loan us an SUV, the "Sannella Toyota", mythical vehicle among Italian volunteers. We'll be accommodated at Vincenzo Nesci's, a portly and nice man from Calabria, friend of my cousin Maura. He will give his house for the entire duration of our stay. He will go to sleep at his fiancee's place. Nesci untrusts us with Sahal, the cook who will also do the cleaning and groceries; he's very nice and likeable, and has a funny way to mangles words, for example "pscutini" are biscottini (little cookies) and "talinpichi" is the white cut of the meat.

The caretaker of our villa is called Sala, and he's missing the right hand. In the past he robbed in an Arab country, and his mutilation is the mark of the punishment. He spits continuously because he chews Chat round the clock, and his teeth are as red as his spits.
It's night time, and my room's window frames a huge moon, while in the back light a couple of chimpanzees move from branch to branch, and it's all real! It feels like I'm back home.

My first Composition class at the National Theater is packed.
Before starting I want to exchange some ideas about the class with Abdi Alaso Nur, the orchestra's first clarinet. I decide to work on a Somali piece: "Somalie Tosò". It's simple, just a few chords; I write the melody on the blackboard, and start to explain how to harmonize it by dividing the voices. My students are very attentive, and ask me many questions; it's clear they want to learn, go deeper to better understand.
Then I switch to an orchestration simulation, percussion included, though I ty to directly involve them in the instrumental choice, because I don't intend to influence them, nor impose my vision. I'm afraid that their tradition's original elements may be put aside by theory, and I couldn't forgive myself if that happened. Furthermore I know deep inside I'm not a teacher, since I never liked teaching; and yet over here everything is different.

The first lesson ends on a positive note; everybody's happy, especially Omar, the orchestra's conductor, who confesses that I showed him new perspectives and he's already able to see the developments. They want to meet me the day after. Tuesday, 10AM: they promise me they will be absolutely punctual.

Instead, nobody shows up! I think I misunderstood, maybe they meant next Tuesday. Whatever. Marcello is already in the theater and has begun to fix the percussion, with Oyaye's help. Around 1PM Abdi Alaso shows up, apologizing: the class was indeed set for today, but the students had a previous imperative commitment: a soccer game!
Daniele Paris, in such occasion, would have said: “Oh well, this is also music!”, and so do I. We decide to do classes every other day, except for last moment imperative commitments.
At the theater's entrance, an arcade smelling "regime" all over, a shy young man my age approaches me; his name is Sahal Mohalim Issa, and he asks me to please give him violin lessons. He's not a member of the theater's staff, so he offers to pay me. I decline his money offer, yet we agree he'll come over Nesci's with his violin, twice a week.

That same afternoon, at 3PM sharp, we hear a knock at the door. Two girls came to pay us a visit, they want to get to know us. We let them in, and we offer them whatever we have in the house: tea with some "pscutino".
At 4 PM sharp, as we'd set a clock or maybe they suddenly remember an appointment,

the two girls spring on their feet and leave.
"Maybe we didn't behave," I say. "Maybe we said something inappropriate."
While we question ourselves about our behavior, somebody knocks again at the door.
It's exactly 4.05.
"See? The girls are back!"
No, they are two different girls, who at 5 PM sharp leave in a rush.
At 5.05 PM two more arrive: same identical story.
These visits on a fixed schedule and no appointment go on for a few days, until we notice that one the 4 PM shift girl wears the same pink pants worn by a 3 PM shift girl the previous day. Maybe we got it.

Among the Italians coming to work for a period to Somalia, was common habit to get engaged "on a time line" with a Somali girl, that is, for the duration of their working contract. Our friends showed up in group of two, with no competing attitude between them, to be selected by us. "It's exactly like that!"
We concert our line of behavior and we summon them up all together, same day, same time.
They arrive, the six of them, and Marcello does the talking:
"Listen carefully, we understood what you girls are doing and we thank you, but we are not the same type of persons as the people that come here to work from Italy. We are exactly as you, we are simple people, we are musicians. If you girls want we can be friends and things can still happen, but we are not in the business of "hiring" people. If you need something, you can ask us, and if we can, we'll help you."
At first they look at us in an odd way, they talk among them in Somali, consulting each other, and finally they smile. They understood our point of view, they relax, they are becoming our friends.

Oyaye invites us for lunch at her place. There will be her entire family. We feel very honored, especially Marcello, who's by now Oyaye's teacher and her best friend. The house has the same shape of a "Domus Romana", only the material are different. This is mad of red mud and canes. Every room opens up on a inner central patio, the "Impluvium", where the dinner table is set for us. We brought malachite's necklaces from Zambia for Oyaye' mom, who loved them
"Lunch is ready!"
Somali spaghetti and rice, delicious, but only three of us are eating. The other member of the family, about 20 people, are seating on the floor, around us while the hostess goes back and forth with the kitchen waiting on us. I try to eat without looking around too much, and mainly I avoid the children eyes. That reception is just for us, and any transgression to the etiquette would be considered bad manners and a sign of non approval.
At the end of lunch Oyaye takes us in one of the rooms where she invites us to lie down and rest. "Thanks, we don't need it, and then after coffee, I can't sleep," I say.

Sh insists: we lie down. Two minutes later she returns with two girls, one for me and one for Marcello. I thank her but I tell her that I already have a girlfriend in Mogadishu, which was almost true. The girl destined to me smiles, says goodbye and leaves. The ball now in in Marcello's court:
“And now, what the hell am I supposed do?”
Oyaye insists that he should accept the offer, and the more Marcello come up with excuses to free himself, the more the remaining girl becomes sad; I can't say she felt offended, but there was no plausible reason for that rejection.
Marcello tries to laugh it off, he make jokes, sings, plays, and at the end he manages to postpone the encounter to a date to be announced, without offending anyone, and the girl finally leaves quite happy.

OH GIORGIO

He came alone all the way to the National Theater to get to know us. When we were there with the Canzoniere he was vacationing in Italiy. He's a friend of the "bolognesi", Paolo, Simona and the others.
“Hi, I'm Goffredo Vitali, I teach Italian at the University here, I'm a volunteer."
We chat, we joke, but he has a precise goal: he wants to sing! He knows that almost every evening we play with Somali Jazz at the Giuba Hotel.
“What would you like to sing?" I ask
“I'm not sure exactly... little bit of everything... maybe Gianni Morandi."
On the first available afternoon we rehearse with Somali Jazz the Morandi's famous song "C'era un ragazzo che come me" (There was a boy that just like me...), and Goffredo sings. I don't remember how, but we decide to include the song in that evening's program, and we'll get together at Nesci's house around 9 PM to then go at the Giuba Hotel. That evening Goffredo shows up dressed completely in white: a "suburban" Elvis, and here is where our friendship begun.
Marcello and I are in stitches with him, and he with us. He took that performance very seriously, maybe a bit too much.

About a month later Vincenzo Nesci gives us eight day notice.
He needs his house back; our stay is becoming longer than expected, or maybe the cohabitation with his fiancee is not easy, and then, frankly, all those women around the house...
I suspect that his decision was also influenced by our Ambassador, since somebody at the theater informed me that our diplomat wanted to communicate to Somalian authorities that if the Canzoniere's tour had an official role and coverage, our present

stay had none of that. Our friends didn't understand at all the necessity of this communication, and at any rate they didn't like it since it could have cast suspicions on us. Why this taking distances from us?

OK. Marcello moves at the bolognesi's place, at the Lido, while I go to our cultural attache's house - though he has a malaria's fit - then I move at Martin Stiglio's, an Italian friend who reminds me of Lawrence of Arabia, and finally at Goffredo's.
The first evening at his place we celebrate with a joint we smoke seating one in front of each other in the small leaving room. Goffredo tells me that for his Somali students the most difficult thing in learning Italian it's the diction, the pronunciation. There's no way they can correctly pronounce a "P". Not to talk about open or close vowels.
"You should find a sentence to be repeated over and over again as a vowel exercise," I say. He replies: "Oh Giorgio (Giorgio's O is closed), mi sembra - it seems (very close E) that you went in the bosco - in the woods (the O of bosco is very open)."
And I repeat: "Oh Giorgio!"
We start laughing as it happens when you smoke pot, and spend the rest of the night exchanging roles, teacher and student.
"Oh Giorgio!..."

Starting from the following day, Goffredo Vitali became "Oh Giorgio", and still today every phone calls and meeting with him starts like that.
Of course also Giorgio Vivaldi would become by law "Oh Giorgio", and the exclamation became an integral part of the Canzoniere's lexicon, along with the "Tre" secret idiom:
"Treohtrè Treggiotrergio!"

Marcello and I are summoned by the Somali Police. We have no idea why, and we're a little worried. Women, pot, political ideas we are unable to keep for ourselves.
They come and pick us up with a military vehicle, and take us to a station where an officer politely ask us if we have time to dedicate to the Police Musical Marching Band, in need of a tune up. They offer us money, we decline the money - again! - and of course we accept the assignment, again!
We don't waste any time, get on the back of the Police Chief's big black car with two little flags, Somali and Police corp, on the hood.
We drive out of Mogadishu, and after 20 minutes we enter a tightly sealed, dangerous and controlled zone, we go through barbwire barriers, a huge metal gate, and finally we enter a fortress, the barrack, which reminds of Sidney Lumet's "The Hill". A classic scene: groups of marching soldiers, others are at the shooting range, others are exercising or fixing trucks.
A band, I think, what a beauty, I'll be able to write music for them! But no!
The band consists of a keyboard, drum, a bass and an electric guitar, a couple of winds and three singers. They have a little hut for rehearsals, but they all look lazy and

depressed.
We start with "Ciriò Ciriò", which by now I know by heart, note by note. I teach the bassist his part, as well ass to the keyboard player and the guitarist, then with the trumpet and the sax I arrange very simple bi chords to be played on my cue. Marcello will play drums to show the percussionist the rhythm.
Within a couple of hours the piece is ready and we play it repeatedly.
The policeman in the band play with satisfaction, as it were the first time they played something, and even the drummer looks at ease with his instrument.
The police chief reappears in the rehearsal hut, somebody called him, and he looks very pleased.
In his office he invites us for a refreshment: we agree to rehearse with them every even days of the week, since on the odd days we're at the Theater; they will come to pick us up in a convenient spot in the city that both and Marcello can reach just by walking.
We're driven back home with great pomp, the flags weaving on the limousine's hood.

At the first appointment nobody shows up. We skip a day, then we go back to wait for the Police's limousine on the same spot. Nobody. A couple of tries later we give up, until one evening we meet in a bar, by chance, one the policeman from the barrack, dead drunk. We ask them an explanation: the plan, he slurs, was canceled due to the fact that Police is right now busy in operations he can't talk about, things way more important than a musical band. Fuck the little flags!

Meanwhile I met a girl and I'm madly in love. She's like a queen; a Somali noble class daughter, Hodan Hamed is tall and elegant, she moves like a gazelle and dresses only with long tunics with vertical soft colored stripes. We're are not together yet, but I'm sure the feel is reciprocal.
Martin Stiglio suggests to spend a week end at the beach with her and Mulky, at the "seventh kilometer" on the coastal road, camping out with a tent. Awesome!
We leave early Saturday and we set up camp half an hour outside Mogadishu, close to a well situated about twenty yards from the shoreline, a spot where the sand separates the ocean from a tall, dense forest, like an impenetrable mysterious wall. While we organize the camp, and lit up a bonfire in front of the tent, a semi-naked man appears from nowhere; he's missing the right arm, and with his left arm he's holding a rusty metal stick:
“You want fish?” he asks me.
“Why not, sure, thanks," I say.
“What fish you like?” I don't know...
"You want triglia? You want sarago?"
“Whatever is fine. OK, one of each!”
The man jumps in the water and after a few minutes he comes back with two triglie [mullets] and one sarago skewered on his stick, while we watch him in amazement.
Here I have to address the philosophical question about how each of us stands in front

at the wonder of life's events. I thought immediately I was in front a great fisher, a man able, without snorkel and and arm, to skewer fish on commission in the Indian Ocean waters, and the same Hodan, Mulky and Martin thought.
But many years later a cynic reacted to my tale claiming I was naive, that that man had definitely set up a fish trap full of fish in the water, under the surface, thus explaining both the precision of the selection and the speed of the fishing itself. Oh well!
Who had caught the fish in the trap? And at any rate, I don't give a damn! To me that one armed fisher will always be a mythical figure in my memory.

That evening we lit the fire and cook the fish; Martin tells us there are lions roaming around that area, and Mulky is terrified. Hodan, on the other hand, is calm as ever, she moves like in slow-motion, in a feline way; she talks little, but seems very happy to be there.
We sleep hugging each other enjoying the sound of the ocean a few steps away. But in the middle of the night Mulky wakes us up with shoves:
"What's going on!" I say.
She heard noises, she thinks of lions. No one dare to move, get out of the tent to get a look, and the noise is indeed there, sounds like somebody is walking over the metal dishes we'd left outside. We keep listening, and after one hour the noise stops, and we go back to sleep.
The morning after we found our dishware completely clean from the fish remains.
"They were crabs," says Martin, who had previous camping experiences in that "seventh kilometer"; we believe him, yet Mulky is not totally convinced.

In the meantime a huge number of monkeys has gathered around the well, close to us. They're drinking the water leftover by a caravan that must has passed by at dawn, while we were still sleeping.
We all dive into the water, except Mulky, and as Martin comes back on shore and starts breaking down camp, Hodan and I finally hug, we kiss and make love in that generous ocean which raises and floats her into my arms.
It doesn't seem real to me.
"Is it really happening?" I ask myself.
The idea of having to go back to Europe doesn't even brush me, and on the way back to the city I think I should find a stable job in Somalia and stay there with Hodan.

The other members of the Canzoniere start calling us by phone quite often, they are worried for us:
"When do you guys plan to come back? We've got a lot of concert offers! But we can't commit if you don't give us at least an approximate date for your return."
But the syndrome that struck both Marcello and I in Somalia has a precise name: "Insabbiamento", lost in sand! A person is called "insabbiata" when he or she got lost in the local customs and has no intention to return to his or her origins.

We discover this word at the Casa D'Italia (House of Italy), a sort of country club where a certain types of Italian residing in Mogadishu get together in order to feel wealthy and important. Even the "cappelletti" [little hats] - as Goffredo nicknamed them - the teenager children of our compatriots that is, feel very important.
The "cappelletti"'s favorite sport is shark hunt. They wear earrings, bracelets and necklaces made of sharks teeth. The hunting technique consists in swimming in the ocean water, locate the shark and knife it. That's really what they did, and after killing the shark they would take it to shore while others shook their hands in the water as to make bubbles and keep at bay other sharks, attracted by the smell of blood.
The "cappelletti", for whom Marcello had fixed on old drum set, invite us to go with them to see the whale shark, a huge animal said to stay motionless at the bottom of the ocean, about 50 yards from shore. It's a way for them to express their gratitude. But then Steve Spielberg's "Jaws" opens at Mogadishu's movie theaters. The day set for the aquatic safari nobody dares to get into the water! That movie terrified them, way more than the real sharks they killed, whose teeth they now wear as souvenirs.
We never saw the whale shark... the power of Cinema!

The phone from Italy keep coming, more frequent. Paki, Vincenzo, Oh Giorgio.
"So…. when are you guys coming back?"
The good news is that Anna's surgery was very successful, even if she's still not back to work. We overhear about a conflict between Vincenzo and Pasquale; if they didn't openly quarrel, they were about to do it. Anna's absence had its effects.
More phone calls. "So?"
We don't know what to say, we try to sidetrack their question just joking around on the phone, playing stupid. Truth is that Marcello is close to be engaged, and our life in Mogadishu looks perfect to us.
Music, love, the ocean, Africa.

Martin organizes an excursion for us. Finally somebody takes us to see the hippos. After a couple of hours of drive with the Campagnola Fiat, we arrive at a river's edge. He leaves us next to a sort of muddy slide through which the pachyderms are supposed to go when they get out of the water at sunset, then he disappears.
We hear a noisy rustle of leaves; they are baboons families going back home in the evening. But among the forest's sounds there's one that goes right to my heart:

TaTa Tà - - TaTaTaTaTaTa Tà!

It's the same small bird we heard in Kenya while waiting to see the hippos from another river.
"I can't believe it!" I say.
The rhythmic phrase is the same, absolutely identical in the division and metronome.

We really we are in mission from God, when al of a sudden a huge baboon, 5 feet tall, stands in front of us, and looking at us menacingly produces a blood-curling sound: CHHHHHHHH!
“And now what do we do?”
“Let's stay still! Don't move!”
“Are you nuts? I'm scared, and the car is open, no top, they will steal everything!”
“Where the hell is Martin?”
We look at each other for a second and a half and sprint as fast as we can toward the Campagnola. Even this time, as in Kenya, no hippos, but a mythical phrase stuck in my brain:

TaTa Tà - - TaTaTaTaTaTa Tà!

In the meantime millions of migrant birds cross the sky, a dense dark tube with no beginning nor end in sight.
"They fly from Southern Europe to Southern Africa,” later Martin explains.

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December 1976

The U.S. Ambassador, the last wheel of American diplomacy, invites us - via mail - at her private residence for the Christmas concert; her letter carries a golden seal on the back of the envelope.
We expect at least a string quartet, instead they just play records with different Christmas songs - though the ambassador even printed a concert program. She's a tall, very nice woman, cheerful, culturally vivacious, respectful of other people's traditions and customs. They sent her to Somalia, a country nobody in the States had an interest at that time, just to get rid of her, as she told me: “Because I’m gay!”
Marcello and I are Mogadishu's Western musicians, thus guests of honor, even if inappropriately dressed. We grew accustomed to that role and we would gladly comply.

The following days are marked by a series of weird events. If you met our friends on the streets, they wouldn't say hello, sometimes they even pretended they don't know us, or turning their heads to avoid our eyes. I we start dancing with a girl in a club, she soon disappears, and nobody is able to tell us where she's gone. We can't explain what's going on, and whatever it is we don't like it.
The theater is closed for Christmas holiday, therefore we are not even able to ask anybody to decode those ugly signals.
Finally, on New Year's Eve, I meet at the Giuba Hotel's pool my only violin student,

Sahal Mohalim Issa, who greets me in a very friendly way.
I tell him what's happening, but it seems like he already knows everything; he gazes around and pointing at a plain-clothed man 50 yards from us, he tells me:
“You see that man next to the bar?”
“Yeah, who's he?”
“He's a National Security's lieutenant.”
“So?”
“Carlo, I must confess that I'm also a member of the National Security force, but that man must not find out, as you shouldn't know either."
He continues: "Let's meet tomorrow at 10 AM at the National Theater, and I will explain to you what's going on. I cannot do it here: if that man see us talking he would ask me to give some explanations, and I cannot reveal myself. See you tomorrow!”

New Year's Day, at the theater, Sahal exposes the mystery.
“Here in Somalia foreigners are forbidden to have relations with other countries' diplomats. If they do it, as you guys did, they are put under surveillance at once by the National Security which is guided by the Russians, and they see conspiracy everywhere. You made a mistake going at the US Ambassador's residence, now you're on their list."
“OK, but why, then, our friends don't say hi anymore? Why girls disappear on us?” I ask.
“It's simple. If the agents see them with you guys they will arrest them for interrogation, and for the girls is even worse, because, with the interrogation excuse, they oftentimes take advantage of them."
We are shocked, speechless. We thank Sahal for the proof of friendship he gave us, and we try to ask him advise as what to do from now on, but he too doesn't know. There's an ugly atmosphere in the city, the Ogaden war is nearing and the Russians [the Soviets?...] have created a climate of suspicion in every single structure in the country.
I hang to some shreds of political belief, and I remember the Koreans I met on the plane months ago, the same people that later invited us to a symposium with music teachers in their rooms at the National Theater, with tea, pastries, and readings celebrating President Kim Il Sung's exploits; maybe they could help us.
“No, it's impossible," I say in desperation. "Now we have to deal with the secret police and with the Russians. I can't freaking believe it!”

Our Somali friends phone us, they apologize for their behavior; they confirm Sahal's version, they were interrogated, they were asked whether we inquired about the political situation or the Somali military positions. It seems like a movie, and yet we're in it up to here.
“What the fuck do we do now?”
We decide to get pro-active. One beautiful morning we dress up properly, we go

straight to the police station and ask to talk with immigration's officers. They make us wait a while, then we're received in a small office filled with paperwork by two officers in gray shirt, one is standing, the other sitting behind an old desk, like those in our ministries.
“Look," I say: "First, we are here to teach music; second, we're not spies, it's ridiculous just thinking of it. Our visa is about to expire while our friends here are arrested and interrogated. Some female friends told us you guys asked them if we inquired about military posts. This is absurd, crazy! We're musicians: drums and violin. Moreover, we are good friends with your Ministry of Culture, ask Osman Awes Nur, he's the one who asked to come back here to teach!”
They observe and scrutinize us, they consult each other just with their eyes:
“Your own Embassy told us you're not here in an official capacity!”
We don't know what to say, we feel disoriented.
“Listen, we're volunteers, we teach music, and we didn't ask any money to do it...”
While I talk I realize I made a mistake saying so; as a matter of fact the two officers get even more suspicious:
“Your visas expires in a week, by then you must leave the country. That's all, goodbye!”

Marcello and I are walking on a downhill road on our way home:
“Carletto, take a good look at this narrow road, at this city, at Africa, take in the smells, because once back to Italy we'll never be able to tell about all this to anybody who wasn't here. And maybe even we eventually will forget. Take a good look at Mogadishu!”
I often felt happiness during those months. It was like a heat wave in the chest, as though a special spirit penetrated my body; yet that day, walking that narrow road with Marcello, I felt it would never happen again.

"Stronzone" - big shit - is the name of "Oh Giorgio" Goffredo's dog. Stronzone greets me festively as I come in. He understood I'm sad, and even Aftinta, the housemaid at Vitali's, tries everything to restore my mood and heart. She offers me food and drinks; I thank her, but I tell her I'd rather wait until Goffredo returns. Finally, Oh Giorgio comes back home and I tell him right away what happened at the police station.
“Let's throw a big farewell party!” he says.
“How? We can't invite anybody!" I reply. "They're going to arrest everybody one more time!"
“OK, I'll take care of it," he says. "Nobody controls me. We'll take Martin's Campagnola: we'll close the top and hide people inside. I'll have to do a few trips, but once behind my house's gate no one can bust our balls!”
And that is what we did the night before leaving.
The Campagnola Fiat goes back and forth and all our friends get to Goffredo's house. Aftinta cooks for everybody. Of course there's also Hodan, wearing a beautiful long

tunic with brown stripes. She's mostly silent and remains aloof during the party, then she grabs my hand and leads me to the garden, where we're just the two of us, and she gives me a wood statuette of a man kneeling as he reads the Koran:
“This way you'll remember me while I'll wait for you," she says.
“Hodan, I'm going to another world, a different planet, far away. They will not let me back for a long time, they kicked us out, and there's a nasty air over here."
“I'll wait for you anyway, I'm with you!”

Late that night, the Fiat Campagnola starts shuttling people back to their places. Hodan is in the last group. We say goodbye without further pledges, I follow her with my eyes as she gets in the car and leaves, while Stronzone looks at me with sympathetic eyes, wagging his tail.
I spent the rest of the night looking for Hodan all over Mogadishu. I couldn't forgive myself for having let her go. "Idiot! Idiot! Idiot!”
At dawn we're at the airport.

IL MAL D’AFRICA
(The African Bug)

There once was an Englishman, we are in the 1940s, who worked as a guide for white hunters in Kenya. One day he was alone in a clearing in front of a buffalo. He aimed at the animal's head, he shoots it down, and he does the only thing a hunter should is never supposed to do: he gets close to the buffalo with his unloaded rifle. The buffalo is faking death: he springs up and starts goring the hunter and brutally stomping on him until the man is somehow able to find shelter in whole in the ground, where he passes out. He wakes up in a hut; he can't move, and a woman is assisting him. He stays there for a few months, until he's fully recovered. Back in England he feels an irresistible call and a raising malaise, and about one year later, as soon as his financial resources and business are in place, he goes back to Africa. He wants to see again that woman, the hut, the village. He finds the village, and in the hut there's a newborn baby, and immediately understands he's the baby's father. He's shocked, he asks himself a thousand questions, he doesn't know how to handle the situation. His conscience is telling him he has to take responsibility, and the best way, it seems to him, is to guarantee the child an education in England, where he's planning to take him as early as possible. He goes to Nairobi to get informed about the due documentations, but he returns to the village the hut is empty. The woman ran away with the child.
The Englishman spent the rest of his life in Kenya looking for that woman and that baby boy. “This is my 'African bug'," he kept saying.

I started crying on the plane, then, once back in Rome, I would wake up every night, startled, with my eyes filled with tears, in a state of deep malaise. Roberto and Giulio, who were sharing the house with me, had repainted my room, during my absence, to make me feel good on my return.
“Why are you crying," they'd ask.
“I don't know, I don't know."
“Siliotto, please stop!”

I also fell victim of an "acariasis", a disease similar to scabies. Miniscule parasites crawling under the skin provoking an horrible itch. When I scratch myself, I almost strip the flesh and start bleeding. I was forced to use a smelly ointment and bandage my arms and legs as not to grease the clothes. Absolutely disgusting. However I was proud and happy about my "acariasis" because it was as though I had Africa over me, under my skin.

The Canzoniere got together again, tighter and closer than before. Now we were bonded by an amazing experience, which still today bind us as an unbreakable secret.

Santini's documentary on our African tour, as rich as it was, properly telling about our journey, it didn't help us expressing what we felt inside. When Giampaolo showed us a rough cut, Francesco Vivaldi, Giorgio's older brother and a very dear friend, had an unexpected reaction. At the screening, while the images of the war dances in Quissico, Mozambique, were rolling, he said: “It's tourists crap!”
We took it bad and got very angry at him, poor Francesco! But now I understand our enraged reactions to his comment. The explanation lies in Marcello's words while we were walking down that little street in Mogadishu:
“We'll never be able even to tell about this," he said. And here we go: he was right.

The pressed weed in the drums had arrived as a diplomatic luggage without any problem, and the entire city of Rome was smocking it! Joints were crackling between all our friends' lips.

Now, my main worries was about my study at the Conservatory. I had disappeared for many months, and I was afraid that the Maestro Paris didn't appreciate a bit my absence in the composition class, a way longer absence than foreseen.
I got to Frosinone late on a Monday, day of orchestra and relative lesson. When I entered the big hall of the Auditorium dell’Edera, Paris was already on the podium directing Beethoven's Second Symphony first movement. I seat in the audience silently, I don't dare to join the orchestra without his authorization. When the first reading ends, Paris puts his hand on the music stands as to take a little break, then slowly turns toward the audience and he sees me.

“There we go!" I think.
He climbs down the podium saying no words to the musicians, walks fast straight at me and finally he hugs me: “Ah Siliò [in heavy Roman accent], take me too to Africa! With this lazy bums we're only wasting time!”

Dear Maestro,
in his study, in the afternoon of that same day, we were already writing down the list of music professors for the Italian Music School in Mogadishu. We would together select the best ones, the smarter ones, more adaptable and open minded.
“Giuliani yes, Ferrante yes, Baldo of course... this guy no way, he's an asshole!”

Dear Maestro,
his eyes were filled with curiosity while I was telling him about the National Theater, our concerts over there, the war dances, the African instruments, the choirs...
“ Ah Siliò, what about the women?”
I'm sure that had the Ogaden's war not broken out, we would have been able to open the music school in Mogadishu, the two of us together.
Daniele Paris got some of my bug for Africa, and he thanked me in his own way, generous as always, supporting me.

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With the Canzoniere we start rehearsing new pieces, the first, of course, is called "Mogadiscio".
Giorgio plays the intro, blowing in a small bottle of Amaro Averna, reproducing the rhythmic phrase that the two little birds sang for us, in Kenya and in Somalia, while we were waiting to see the hippos:

TaTa Tà - - TaTaTaTaTaTa Tà!

Clara wrote the lyrics: "Africa, Africa we are here, looks like Sardinia, like Campidano….” It's a beautiful text! Maurizio's solo starts with some notes from "Somalie Tosò", then it becomes something heart breaking and melancholic, before that there's a percussion moment, with Timbilas first, then two skins of the bass drum filled with tin pieces, on which Marcello and Giorgio dance rhythmically as the dancers at Somali National Theater thought us. We are together again, and we are each others' Africa.

We rehearse and put together an impressive number of new tunes, more than two hours of music for sure. Paki wrote some amazing stuff on guitar's open strings, and Maurizio and are by now an integral part of the band. It's a more mature phase for the

Canzoniere, our limits are way wider, and our codes are able to include any type of stimulus.
However, the tensions between Pasquale and Vincenzo - which Marcello and I had perceived - turn out to be real, and our manager abandons us to our destiny.
Anna has fully recovered and she's back to work. She's flanked by Gigliola Starita, Giampaolo Santini's acquaintance: one day she shows up in Via Cassia 571 to talk to us. She's a gorgeous woman, tall, long black hair, reminds me of a Native American.
“I'm here because you guys need me and I need you," she said while we are lying down on Nebbiosi's lawn during a rehearsal break.
“ Anna… what do you think?” I ask.
“It's fine for me, I need help."
“OK, it's a deal!”

We resolve for a new politic even for the concerts: they will be completely self-managed. What that meant, I must confess, I never totally understood, and yet the effects of that decision were felt quiet fast. We know little about self-managing, as we didn't know a thing about the "indiani metropolitani" (metropolitan Indians), since that festive, clownish protest group came to be while we were in another continent. I think self-management meant risking on your own without having to ask anything to anybody. I remember that in Sardinia, at Calasetta, the proceeds were so meager that couldn't even afford a hotel. We slept on the beach in our sleeping bags, while the technicians and the driver spent the night in a nice hotel paid, just as I was saying, by the self-management funds.

One of the best concert of that period was the one in the juvenile prison in Casal del Marmo, Rome, the day Marcello bought a portable cassette player he was so proud of.
There were prison guards all over the place, the stage built in the yard where the inmates have "the open air hour", and everybody inside at the first whistle. The audience space quickly gets filled with kids, who, like students at recess, arrive noisily running to get the best seats.
During the concert every single word we pronounce on stage is heavily commented out loud, but the music is fine. The more aggressive and dissonant, the better and appreciated is, and also Clara's presence is very appreciated. This event was requested by a group of educators, among them Luigi Conversa who wants to put together a theater show with young inmates as actors, a pioneer at that time.
After a couple of rounding up speeches, the whistle. In two seconds the yard is empty; the speed of the kids return to their cells makes me think that discipline here is kept with an iron fist. We break down the instruments and equipment and load them in the truck.

The back hatch is wide open, and the entire PA system has already been stowed, when we hear coming from behind the speakers a voice:

“Take me away!”
“Oh Jesus, who are you?”
“Take me away!”
“Where are you? Come out!”
From behind a bundle of cables and mic stands a curly head peeps out, he's little more than a kid.
“Please, take me out of here, nobody saw me!”
We don't know what to do, take time to think, and we just ask the kid to wait for a few minutes; we walk off to consult each other.
"Tressette treddatrevvetrero trenon trell’hatrè trevvitresto trennetressutreno trecchetrè trerritreschio tressi treccotrerre?" (If it's true that nobody saw him, what's the risk?)
"Treppetrerotrè treqquatrendo tressetrene treatreccotrergetreratrenno treppetrensetreratrenno tressitrecutreratremetrente trecchetrè treetreè treutrescitreto treccotrennotrei!" (But when they find out they'll certainly think he got out with us!)
"Trennotren trennetrecetressatreriatremetrente,treppotretretrebbe treetressetrere treetrentratreto trennetrel treffutrergotrene tressetrenza trecchetrè trennetressutreno tresse trene treatreccotrergetresse!" (Not necessarily, he could have stepped in our truck without our knowledge!)
"Trevvatrebbetrè, tremmatrè treddotreve trello treppotrertiatremo?" (OK, but where are we gonna take him?)
"Tre atrevratrè treutrena treccatresa!" (He must have a home, a family!)
"Treetrè tretti treppatrere trecchetrè tresse trene trevvatrè treatrè treccatresa tressutrea, treppotresto trecchetrè trenne treatrebbia treutrena…" (Sure, like he's going back home, provided he has one...)

While we discuss the matter, two guards arrive and go straight toward the truck. From our point of view we can't see what's going on, but soon after we see them going back with the kid hopping between the two; for a brief moment he was able to fool the guards. We feel sorry he was discovered and apprehended.

Leaving the prison, while the truck and the car are slowly driving through the alley leading us to the exit gate, we notice the kid behind the bars of the first floor's window in one of the prison buildings. He's stuck his arms and legs through the bars and he's hanging them outside. He looks like Abbacucche (from the Italian movie "L’Armata Brancaleone"). He's there, hanging, as a bird in a cage. Marcello sees him and stops the truck, rushes toward the kid and gives him his brand new cassette player; he salutes him with a bow, and comes back to the truck. The kid doesn't believe his eyes.
“Yo, will the cassette player make it through the bars?" Marcello asks.

Our new sound engineer was called "Zia Pina" (aunt Pina), due to a headgear that made him look like an old Brazilian lady. Gigliola, who was by now very busy with us,

introduced him to the band. With his and Anna's help we drafted a model agreement we were very proud of. One this contract's paragraph clearly stated that on the occasion of street festivals our concerts couldn't be interrupted because breaks were distracting and conducive to the audience's loss of concentration.

Leverano is a small town close to Lecce (Puglia), where Marcello, Clara and I arrive by train, while all the others preceded us with the truck and cars.
There a big square, very long, and a huge stage was built in a scaffolding. The sound check is already on, but as Pasquale see us coming, he lets the guitar down and approaches me.
“Carlo, we've got a problem!”
“What's that?”
“They want to give a political speech in the middle of our concert," he says. "They say that at the end of our concert everybody would leave at once, nobody would stay for the speech.”
“They can't do that! They signed a contract! Who's the responsible?”
“That guy is the secretary of the P.C.I. local section."
“Let's go talk to him!”
We produce our copy of the contract and show it to the responsible, politely pointing out the paragraph that specifically says that the concert cannot be interrupted, and we pledge him, even more politely, to keep his side of the agreement he himself has signed.
“No problem!" he says annoyed. "If we signed, we signed!”
“Thank you!” We're very proud of the effect our model agreement haa on the other party.

That night the square is packed with people, mainly young, again our similar.
We play exclusively new pieces, and we're happy with the performance, until somebody spoils the special communication between us and the audience. All of a sudden a man comes up on stage, steals Clara's microphone and announces the upcoming section secretary's political speech. Other people climb on stage creating a sort of wall between us and the crowd, and gesture to us to turn off the amplifiers. We have no alternative, though we're mad as hell.
“Let's get out of here!” I say.
“Are you crazy? We have to finish the concert, otherwise they won't pay us!”
“Who cares!”
“Who's gonna to pay the crew?”
“Fuck this shit!”
Meanwhile the square got half empty; it looks like no one care for that political rally.
The secretary talks about something happening at the factory; it looks like some workers were fired, but his personal point of view is that they deserved it due to the union's unacceptable behavior. He concludes his speech, thanks God, but as he

gestures to us to start playing again, one of the factory's fired worker grabs the mic and start speaking: his view on the facts is diametrically the opposite. They were fired arbitrarily, he says, with no just cause. However, he can't finish to explain his thoughts because the comrades from the section jump on stage, beat the shit out him and take him away.
“Start playing immediately!”

Clara is back in front of her mic stand, yet not to sing:
“Sorry... the right climate for festive music is gone, tell us please what's going on... you don't beat people like that!”
Somebody brusquely intimates her to mind her own business, and she backs up a few steps, she's petrified. So I speak, and try to patch up the situation by proposing to momentarily suspend the concert, in favor of a debate which, though not our business, it seems necessary to reestablish a civic tone; but someone yells: “Shut up and play, that's what you're paid for!”
The blood goes to my head, I loose it. “You fascists! Paid for... no one ever told me that!” Fuck the political cost! I rush to Pasquale, who's ready to play with his guitar strapped on, and I say:
“Let's go out of here!"
“ Carlo, I beg you one more time… we don't have any money to pay the crew."
“I don't give a flying fuck, that asshole told me: shut up and play, that's what you're you're paid for!”
Paki tries to placate my rage, but mainly he's worried about the money; besides the PA system we have to pay for the hotel, food, gasoline... All of a sudden a voice coming from the square reaches our ears as a whiplash:
“Are you guys gonna start again or not? Enough talking, you're paid to play!”
Pasquale slowly slips out the guitar from his shoulder, puts his instrument on its stand, and instead takes the electric bass which is way bigger and mostly heavier; he grabs it the other way around, from the neck, jumps down the stage and starts pursuing all over the square the guy who yelled at us, threatening him with his Fender Jazz:
“Repeat that if have guts! You dickhead! Don't run from me, asshole!”
Our "similar" have now seen us in action, they recognized us; they come under the stage and beg us to continue playing, and as the first note comes out the speakers the square suddenly is full again, and we go on playing for more than two hours. When the lights go off, we have to face the problem:
“Will they pay us?”
I'm chosen to negotiate. With some of the event's organizers I go to the P.C.I. local section, the other side of the square, and start talking at once. These kind of things shouldn't happen at the Feste dell’Unità, I say, the party's people in Rome would be very disappointed to know about it. I make him believe I've been a PCI registered member since "the Livorno split in 1921", but they don't buy it.
“You exhibited an attitude that has nothing to do with the Party's spirit!” I protest.

The section is situated on the second floor of a small building, its windows opening on the square. Many are waiting for us in the section. Among them a bald energumen, 400 pounds, which keep swearing against us in an incomprehensible idiom, which has nothing of the beauty of Pugliese dialect that I know quite well. He clearly wants to lay his hands on me, but luckily every time he charges against me someone manage to restrain him.
The secretary start with a tirade against us, he doesn't admit any reply. I try the pathetic card: "Our technical crews are blue-collar workers, you really want them to back home unpaid?"
While the energumen keeps swearing, the secretary offers to pay for the travel expenses but no our compensation, that, we can forget about. I grab the contract and shows him one more time hi signature, so he gets up from the chair that is under a big portrait of I don't remember who, and ask to follow him to one of the windows opening on the square. He points out at a couple of dozens young guys down there, menacingly hand-crossed in front of the exit door of the section:
"See? I'd be willing to pay, but they had no intention whatsoever!!"
I threaten him with a lawsuit, but he doesn't blink an eye. So I ask him where's the closest Carabinieri station, he tells me.
I go back to the stage empty handed. Our "similar" had formed a security cordon as to allow us to load the instruments on the truck without been assaulted. Then they accompany us to the town's outskirts and make sure we'll be safe. At the Carabinieri station we sign a legal action, then Marcello, Clara and I go back to Rome by train; we can't buy the tickets because we have no money, and of course the train inspector fines us big time.

Meeting: we decide to write an open letter to PCI's newspaper "L'Unità" to denounce the deed. The political climate hasn't been the same in a while, we feel that the Feste dell'Unita' there's no interest for culture anymore, and everything is squeezed for money. We are disappointed and saddened, that's why we wrote the letter; sure we're not the only ones worried about the issue.
Even the alternative scene, though, was starting to show the first creaking signs of a back down.

Gigliola and Clara decide to bring the letter directly to the paper's office, hoping to get an immediate response, which indeed comes right away: not only the letter will not be published, if we we'll not retract the lawsuit we can forget, from here to eternity, to perform again at a Festa dell'Unità. The editor they talked to, went even on to offend us telling Clara:
"What are you complaining about? You also play for Democrazia Cristiana's Feste dell'Amicizia!"
"You're so wrong!" Clara retorts. "We're progressive people and we only play for progressive liberals!"

“Too bad for you!” he concludes.

We're disappointed; we didn't expect such a reaction at all, so stupid and arrogant. We decide to go on with the lawsuit.
A few days later Zia Pina's father invites to lunh at his place, the entire Canzoniere. He's and independent senator and he was asked, given his link with us, to mediate. Nicola's mom cooked excellent spaghetti and the atmosphere is very cheerful and serene. We're assured by the senator that the Leverano di Lecce's PCI section secretary has been removed from his duty, and we're guaranteed that we'll get the concert compensation as per contract. He pleads to withdraw the lawsuit, even though he agrees with us that that person would deserve it, but the whole Leverano's party section would be hurt, and they are nice people that have nothing to do with that jerk. Gigliola looks nervous, she's seriously worried about our future.
We demand a guarantee that the jerk is really out of the loop, and we get it. After the lunch we withdraw the lawsuit.
We never saw a single penny from that concert.

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PABLO AND EAST BERLIN

Through Pablo and the [Chilean folk music band] Inti Illimani we were invited to perform at "Rote Lieder" (red song), the communist songs festival in the Deutsche Demokratische Republìk (DDR), the German Democratic Republic.
We leave from Rome with an Interflug flight with the Inti Illimani who, a little older than us, were accompanied to the airport by a large group of wives and children. The Inti were very nice people, excellent musicians, political refugees exiled in Italy after the military coup d'etat in Chile. Italy was their second homeland, and their families were here. They were beloved even in East Europe, since they were living witnesses of the horrors some authoritarian regimes were causing in the West.
When we got to the the Berlin Schoenefeld airport we quickly realized that East Germany had also become another second homeland for the Inti, since there were as many wives and children to welcome them.

At the arrival we were puzzled by a strong moving light coming from a transparent glass wall the other side of Customs. They were the light of National TV cameras. We were welcomed as rock-stars: people were screaming with enthusiasm, autographs, interviews, questions, and soon after very precise instructions!
Pablo Romero, my Argentinian brother, joined us for this trip as our organizer and

sound engineer, doing everything under the influence of strong sedatives because he's terrified by flying. The other notable news is the presence in the group of violinist Mauro Pagani, who had just left the [Italian rock band] Premiata Forneria Marconi. He will substitute, for this tour, Maurizio. who's busy with his quartet somewhere else in the world. Mauro will be the violin soloist and gladly accepted this role with us, since his musical interests are similar to ours, and he seems a little bored with Italy rock scene in general. This first step into folk music and this kind of new research is exactly what he needs at the moment.

We're introduced to Ingrid Schultz, our liaison and interpreter. She's a blond lady, medium height, she looks like a high-school teacher. She pleads, as soon as we get to the hotel, to quickly dispose of the luggage because we're late for the festival's opening ceremony taking place at the Republic Palace, behind Alexander Platz.

We leave the luggage on the 37th floor of the Stadt Berlin Hotel, and rush to the ceremony.

We were expecting the behind the Iron Curtain darkness, and instead we find an explosion of colors and light as we never saw before. Different African groups perform on a gigantic stage, and tables laden with any delicacy are set to welcome us we the seats neatly assigned and marked one by one. It's an amazing spectacle. Among the African group there are also our Mozambican friends from "Alliance Workers-Peasants", and there are also Americans, Russians, Mongolians, Cubans, people from all over the world, East and West, for a festival that looks like is going to be grandiose.

A long series of orators welcome all of us in every language; we're surprised, astonished, excited.

Round midnight Pablo and I are thirsty. The tables have already been cleared to create more room to the dance floor. “Let's go to the bar for an orange juice!" We go to a counter as big as an aircraft carrier bridge, and ask the barman, who's polishing the glasses, two orange juices. He politely and yet without looking at us explains that srvice ends at midnight, and he's not authorized to serve anymore. Luckily I speak German, and kindly retort that it's just one minute past midnight. Nothing he can do, orders are orders. I notice behind the counter some clean glasses and the water faucet, so, after reminding the barman we are foreign guests, and we just arrived after a long trip, and we're really dehydrated, I tell him I can help myself with a glass of tap water, and I'm also willing to rinse the glass afterword and replace it back. Nothing, not possible, it's past midnight and there's nothing he can do. “Tausend Dank!”.

We go back walking to the hotel, and on the way from the Republic Palace to the Stadt Berlin Hotel my mustache get frozen: it's -31 degree Celsius. They advise me not to touch them, or they would break as crystals; I need to take a decompression stop between the two glass doors at the hotel's entrance, waiting for the mustache to slowly thaw. Gute Nacht!

The day after the festival is officially on. It's more interesting than I could imagine. The concerts are amazing, the festivals' guys super friendly, the food is excellent, and the

girls are gorgeous. But the most wonderful thing is Das Haus der jungen Talenten, that is, the young talents' house.
It's an entire building at our disposal from 8 PM to 4 AM, a place where all the festival's participants are free to hang out, get to know each other, play together, and drink whatever with no apparent control. It's a real music house where we organize jam sessions with everybody, being Cubans or Afghans, Irish or Germans, Africans or Americans.
We befriend, among others, the "Gruppe Drei", a Berlin trio that plays a sort of Iron Curtain West Coast Music, and since they were outside the political chorus, we felt a special complicity, still on today. Yes, as Italian we were considered part of that Socialist world that had already broke ties with the Soviet Union, therefore they were looking at us as more liberal and liberated brothers.
Carsten Goerner, lead voice of the band, tells me the following joke:
“There's a workers' convention in East Berlin, and the Russians send to represent them comrade Dimitri. Before he leaves they summon him and tell him: Dimitri, you will say that in Russia the situation is excellent, and the production is skyrocketing. They will probably object that you earn just 20 rubles per month, and you will respond that you don't have to pay anything for education while they do, you don't have to pay anything for health care while they do, you don't have to pay anything for your house and transport while they do. You will say therefore that if you wanted, in Russia, with your savings you would be able to buy a cow per month.
Dimitri understands and goes to East Berlin; when it's his turn to speak, he's greeted with a standing ovation.
The situation in my country is excellent, Dimitri says... but a voice from the audience asks him at once: how much do you earn? Dimitri continues: the production in Russia is reaching very high levels; again the voice: how much do you earn?
Oh well, he goes, 20 rubles per month! At that point the convention reacts screaming and whistling and dismay: you poor man! you starving moron!
Dimitri shuts them up and goes on: listen to me, it's true I earn what I earn, but I don't have to pay for education, while you do, I don't pay for health care, while you do, I don't pay anything for housing and transport, while you do. If I want to, he continues, with my savings, in Russia, I'd be able to buy a cow each month! But I'm nobody's fool... I'm going to save for 15 years and than I'll be able to buy a beautiful t-shirt!”

None of the musicians at the festival approved the politics and social structures of that country, and this was a further bonding among us. We soon discovered that our peers in the DDR couldn't even own a passport, and not even think about visiting another Western country. They were living in poor homes, with a communal single bathroom, and that festival was for them a breath of fresh air; meeting people from all over the world was for them like a trip abroad, while staying inside their borders.
Many couples even decided to suspend their relationship for the whole duration of the Rote Lieder. That way they could entertain relations with different people that somehow

could lead them to different dimensions, even if for a little while. They were able to speak perfectly many foreign languages, though none of them had been abroad, besides other Eastern European nations.
One morning, at 4 AM, we stop chatting outside the "House of Young Talents", which had just closed its doors; we don't feel like going to sleep. We are a group of about ten people of different nationalities, and a girl proposes to go to her place, if we want to drink some wine and stay up a while longer. We take a taxi cab and off we go. On the route we talk to Rafael de la Torre, a "professional" Cuban poet.
“What do you mean by 'professional'?" I ask him
“It means that I write every day, as though I were an employee; at the end of the day I throw away what I wrote and didn't like, and keep what I like.”
“Can you recite a poem you wrote?”
“I'll tell you one I wrote when I was in Angola fighting with the liberation movement. It goes like this: 'I'm writing you from a planet...'"
Sorry, I remember only the first verse of his poem, but I remember it was beautiful, the rest was moving, heart breaking, intense. A professional poet.
We arrive at the girl's house, in a suburban neighborhood. It's a very poor dwelling, and its sadness is contagious, the atmosphere can't find any cheerfulness, and the girl appears to be very sorry for that. After a while she bursts into a crying spell, with no clear reason. Maybe she's embarrassed by her life conditions, maybe she thinks that her hospitality is not adequate to the International guests, maybe she's just drunk.
We go back home at dawn, and we're all sad.

The play the first concert at the Republic Palace's Theater, in front of thousands of people, and the Canzoniere formation with two violins works great. Mauro is a great improvisation soloist, and he sounds everything but a sub! The audience is super hot, and moreover we're pleased by our colleagues' comments, especially the Cubans, fantastic musicians. Groups like Chucho Valdez' Irakere, Arturo Sandovàl, Miriam Makeba, Dollar Brend, Victor Manuel and Afrocuba performed at that festival in the past. Gruppe Drei envies a music capable of drawing inspiration from popular traditions as rich as the Italian one, they have nothing else but military marches.

We'll perform also at the Berliner Ensemble, the historic Bertold Brecht's theater. We get there early, and have to wait in the foyer before being able to rehearse. We summon Ingrid and ask her to get some information: "I don't know," she says. "I'll go ask."
She enters a very long hallway, at the end of which we can see a guard, still on attention. Ingrid approaches the man and after an instant we hear a loud: “NEIN!” as sharp as a rifle shot.
Our interpreter doesn't loose composure, returns elegantly to us and says: “They pray you not to smoke, this theater has twice caught on fire, and they decided not risk any further. They pray you, kindly, to go outside if you want to smoke.”
That was the accurate translation of the word "NEIN".

While we smoke outside the Berliner Ensemble, in a glacial cold, Pasquale comments: “These people are not only communists... they are also Germans!”

The festival was marching fast for us, and friendships were forming, as well as sharing and solidarity. Our East German friends had us promised we would write letters and postcards from our world once that big event's lights were off. We were missing each other even before our return to Italy. Nevertheless we left a mark: the record company AMIGA proposes us to record a live studio album; we sign a contract of transfer of rights, fast and without reading it; the only thing we understood is that we'll be paid in DDR's Deutch Marks. We'll record the album on the only available day for us, the last of our stay in East Germany.

The Canzoniere has always been left wing, but none of us has been a card carrying member of a political party. That was how we were. We didn't like authorities and establishments, less so bureaucracy and centralism. As far as I know, we still think that way. In East Berlin it was incredible for us to discover that our aspirations and dreams were the same as our peers in East Europe, the same among African youth, Americans, Chileans, Mongols. Being young in those years meant hating wars, any kind of war, hoping and strongly believing in a world with no frontiers, with no social gaps, with no poverty, no injustice, no limits for imagination, creativity and research. This applied to all of us, no matter the continent we were coming from; maybe the angle varied a bit, but the point of view was absolutely identical for everybody.

Here's the day of the meeting with the Party members. A main figure, perhaps from the Central Committee, will talk to us about the world political situation and the role of the DDR; we'll be able to ask him questions.
There's a large rectangular hall, and the orator speaks behind a desk. We are seating around long tables, again rectangular, each group with its own simultaneous interpreter. The sound effect is a widespread rumbling produced by the interpreters' voices overlapping the voices of foreign guests asking questions and clarifications. After a while nobody gives a shit anymore, and we realize that we are not the only table where people talks everything but politics; where are we going for lunch, where for dinner, what are we gonna do in the afternoon, who's playing tonight.
The moment for questions arrive, and the only one who stands up is, guess who, is Spanish singer songwriter Victor Manuel. He politely asks the orator, after swearing he shares all his talking points, especially about the lack of freedom in the Western World, how he can explain some episodes that took place recently in the DDR relative to freedom of expression and political censorship. He furthermore arguments the facts with precise dates, name and last names. He was well prepared, Victor Manuel.

The orator, though embarrassed, doesn't loose his composure at all, an his answer is stentorian: “Comrade, you're lucky not be a German," he tells him. "Such a factious

insinuation could end you up in jail, and don't forget you are a guest over here!”
The hall gets frozen. The rumbling stops at once, in stony silence. We're freed by the noise of a chair, telling us to quickly go to the exit door.
I can't remember if Ingrid made an effort telling us something, I don't think so. But I do remember her light hair and her clear eyes suffering in the outside cold, while we were walking back to the hotel, in the snow.

The day after we are in the studio recording the live and "unplugged" album. The sound engineer is great, so much so that when we get there he asks us if we have the tracks' music sheets. Pasquale is very impressed; it seems that to be a sound engineer in East Germany one needs to have a Master degree in orchestra conducting.
The recording studio is in a building next to an ugly concrete wall dividing the two Germany, and from the entrance door we can even see a border guard in his sentry. The location is not not the best, but the music comes out pretty good. One piece after another, with no overlapping, and by mid-afternoon we're done recording, with everybody's full satisfaction. At that point an executive of the record company appears, with a big black leather bag; he opens it, and it's overflown with cash money, bundles of bills strapped together, as you see in heist action movies. He makes us sign some receipts and start the distribution. It's really good money, each of us will get the equivalent of a couple of million of than liras, something like five thousand euros today. Thing is it's 6 PM and our flight will depart tomorrow morning at dawn; we have only two hours to spend all that money which in Italy nobody will exchange, since in the West that currency is worth nothing.
We hastily say goodbye to the studio staff and rush to Alexander Platz, where's the biggest music store in East Berlin. We're in a major hurry. I buy a handmade viola d'amore, and a bunch of Peters Edition classical music sheets, very cheap over there; Paki buys a double bass and a violin; Mauro finds a beautifully decorated old violin; Clara buys a carpet, e tea set, a camera and some vinyl records, and Giorgio and Marcello a bunch of varied percussion, plus some trumpets with multiple pistons that sound like car horns. Pablo tries in every possible way to exchange the money in any Western currency, to no avail.
We leave Berlin and arrive in Rome welcomed, as on the way there, by our Chilean friends' families.

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Campo de' Fiori is the place for hanging in the evening, and the pizzeria in the nearby Via dei Giubonari has become for us a sort of daily refectory. We are a bunch of us the evening we meet by chance Nanni Ricordi, an important record industry executive

from Milan, Riky's friend; he's seating by himself at a bar's table, and he asks us to tell him about our African experience. We're a little in a hurry, but manage to put together a few episodes, and also to let him know that we're very happy with Intingo, the record label Riky has produced our records with. We complaint with Nanni about the bad distribution in the record stores, and also about our producer's recent absence: we have over two hours of new music, but there's no talk of recording. Who knows what Nanni Ricordi has understood that night; thing is two or three days later we receive a letter with the name of a Milan law firm as a sender. The Milan lawyers remind that our contract with Intingo doesn't allow a unilateral termination, only the record company can do it, and they remind us furthermore the penalties we might incur in the event we will not abide to every single provisions we undersigned.
We immediately call Riky, who's very offended with us for complaining with a third party, and we retort we were absolutely in good faith, we thought that Nanni was a friend, and mainly his friend. But it's too late and the feeling is damaged, we have a lot of music to record but we cannot go into studio with Intingo, nor look for a new label.

We perform in a beautiful park in Milan: “Let's hope Riky shows up!” we say.
Nothing!
The concert was organized by Adele Di Palma, and that same evening the Area will also play. Paolo Tofani, their Pasquale that is, the band's sound engineer, has invented a new devise. He has connected a very long cable to an oscillator, and he passes it, as it's get unrolled, in the audience's hands. While the contacts increase, diminish, modify, they intervene on the oscillator, thus producing ever changing sounds over which the Area improvise. One of their encore piece is "Trita il giàs col cul, trita il giàs col bus del cul" (literally: Chop the ice with with the ass, chop the ice with the asshole!)
While they play, their manager, Cesare Cattani, smoke a few joints.
The Area are amazing: "Luglio, Agosto, Settembre Nero" has become sort of an anthem to our generation, as their version of "The International". Area's leader and singer Demetrio Stratos is a force of nature and at the same time a very sophisticated musician, Patrizio is a juggler, Tofani a magician, and Ares and Giulio are the best rhythmic section I ever heard in the Italian music scene. They too ask us about Africa. Giulio is especially curious to know about African percussion, the rhythms, the instruments.
We then tell them about our recording business vicissitudes, and they say they will talk about it to the people at Cramps, their record company, and find out whether there's a way out for us.

GIANNI SASSI

The first contact was by phone, he called us.
Along with Giancarlo Cesaroni and Arturo Morfino, Gianni Sassi was the most important figure in that period. He was not only a record company executives and producer, but also an authentic cultural organizer, always in search for new challenges and risky bets. He immediately found a solution to our problem: we would record two albums, one of which will be published by Cramps, while we'll give the other to Intingo in exchange for our release from the contract.
We recorded in Milan, at Cinelandia, at the end of Via Palmanova. Two live studio albums, in four days. Paolo Tofani was the sound engineer.

In order to record "a live album" we had to behave exactly as though we were on stage, where we used to shift and change positions and microphones. Therefore the most complicated thing was the studio set-up, but the recording itself was a walk in the park. We had perfomerd those pieces hundreds of times, and our chemistry was absolutely perfect. Tofani worked on the mix with Pasquale, and the only difficult decision to make was whether keeping or not, at the beginning of a song, my voice saying: "Aò guys [heavy Roman accent] Clara showed me her boobs!"
Indeed Clara, behind the glass of her booth, as the tape started rolling, she pulled up her shirt and flashed her tits in a good-luck sign, as she did in Mogadishu before the curtain opening at National Theater.
We decide the two albums line-ups and destination: "Miradas" will'be released by Cramps, while "Morra" will be our last record with Intingo.

We celebrate the end of the recordings and the signing of a new contract at a Greek restaurant on the "navigli" Milan river-side district, where Gianni Sassi and the Area are regulars. It's a great moment of joy and sharing that culminates into a percussion only jam session that goes on into the night. Giulio and Marcello lead the dances, while Cesare Cattani rolls a few joints.

The phone's ring wakes me up one morning, it's Gianni Sassi:
“I need to ask you a few things…”
“Go on!”
“Give me the name of a poet…”
“ Pasolini!”
“ A city…”
“ Mogadishu!”
“A country…”
“ Mozambique!”
He goes on with this questionnaire, and then he says, OK, goodbye.

“ Excuse me, Gianni…”
“Yes?”
“What's this for?”
“Leave it to me, bye!”
For the album's inside sleeve he thought at a sort of small informative encyclopedia on the Canzoniere's world, wrote in first person. E wonderful idea. The cover would portray Marcello's heron, a pin our drummer always wore, while on the back of the cover there would be a photo of the band among the ruins of an archaeological-industrial site.
Gianni Sassi was a master of communication. He had worked a lot in that world, and his touch was unmistakable, at a point that a music journalist had something to say about our album graphics, which was - according to him - too much Cramps and too little Canzoniere. But critics, as we know, also make some blunders.
Gianni Sassi looked like Frankenstein, with the only difference he was a good-looking man. His life was full of Frankensteins, and even his favorite cafe had this moniker. The cafe was in Viale Umbria, close to his home, where he invited all the artists and friends to celebrate the release of "Miradas".
In that occasion I befriended singer Eugenio Finardi.
It was the time of his "Quindici bambini", and Eugenio was an amazing singer songwriter.
Together we went to Lugano, Switzerland, for a TV program taping; us, him, and the Area, strictly live music in a TV studio. A the end of the taping, we walk out of the studio to find ourselves in the middle of a snowy night. It's a beautiful scenery, a wide clean valley surrounded by snow covered trees. We stand there in admiration, when Eugenio says: "Can you imagine a concert right here? 200,000 watts shot onto the valley with dozens 10,000 quartz lighting up the whole place… Awesome!”
Eugenio was and still is a great person, from whom, throughout the years, I learned how to better recognize the best of human qualities. Gianni Sassi never made a mistake about a person, he was able to recognize the talent, and he knew how to guide it without influencing it.
The journalist who didn't like the graphics on our album's cover, didn't understand much about Sassi; and yet we know that Frankenstein was invented to separate the people in two categories: those who are afraid of him, and those who are able to see in his deepest and most hidden feelings.

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The social-political climate was starting to get heavy in Italy; the era that later would have been renamed "the lead years" [gli anni di piombo] was about to begin.
The mere fact of walking in Rome with a violin case strapped on one's shoulder meant,

nine out of ten, being stopped by Police and searched. At the concerts, not only ours, the atmosphere was often time tense, uncontrollable, and we were trying to react to it with a sense of irony, though the malaise level was so high that we rarely succeeded in doing so. The malaise was rather taking upon us.

At the entrance the Autostrada [highway] of Roma Sud, on our way to a concert in Brindisi, Puglia, the Police stops us, and tell us to pull the car over the right shoulder right after the highway's tollbooth. We are traveling with Paki's Mini-Minor station-wagon, and the trunk back is packed with instruments.
“Open up everything!” they order.
We're terribly late on the schedule, but luckily we manage to sort out the problem quite fast. When the instruments cases are closed and loaded back in the trunk, an officer approaches the car and orders the others - the ones who just searched us - to open up every single case.
I remind the officer, using the most referential tone, that this investigation had just been done; and he reacts badly!
He stares at me, scans me, and then he tells me:
“What? Do you have a problem if we open them one more time?”
Such an arrogant display of power, motivated simply by the fact that that asshole couldn't admit in front of his underlings he gave an order that was already executed, had an unpredictable and completely unconscious reaction on me: I saw my right arm starting swinging back and forth, and the right hand taking the shape of the so-called "beak". The gesture, that is, that in our country universally signifies:
"What the fuck do you want?” or: "What the fuck are you talking about?"
I had fallen in a sort of trance, a half conscious state I was unable to control; the swinging of my arm became faster, and from my mouth a series of heavy insults were coming out: there wasn't much for interpretation.
“Who do you think you are, you piece of shit? Just because you wear a uniform you think you can do whatever you want? You're nobody! You go ahead and open up yourself the cases, you motherfucking son of a bitch!”
I never behaved like that in my entire life, I never had such an outburst, such a violent expression of emotions; I cried a few times without realizing it, I might have laughed unaware of doing, that happened to me: but that reckless and unconscious outburst represents a unique event in my entire existence.
Luckily, in the middle of that explosion, I feel the force of two arms holding me, blocking from behind the uncontrollable swinging of my arm, and with this restrain the flood of words spitting out my mouth also came finally to a halt. It was Pasquale!
He starts talking to the officer apologizing on my behalf; he tells him that my grandmother just died - truth is she died many years before - and I was overwhelmed by grief, and that today I'm indeed out of my mind.
“He's been acting funny since this morning!" Pasquale says. "Please forgive him; I swear he's was not insulting you! We have a performance in Brindisi and we're very

late!”
The officer asks Paki to follow him to one of the tollbooth, where the Police had set up its post: inside a series of mugshots cover the walls.
“Your friend looks exactly like this one!" he says to Pasquale, pointing to one of the photos. “Documents please!”
Paki comes back to the car, picks up the documents, and goes back to the tollbooth.
In the meantime I was decompressing, and only now I was starting to realize what a mess I just did with that exaggerated reaction which, though unconscious, had put at risk also my mates.
Thanks God they let us go. Pasquale kept on telling the officer about my special relationship with my grandma since I was an infant.
Before getting to destination, the Police stops us and search us three more times.

In Brindisi we meet [drummer] Tullio de Piscopo, who got there with his quartet and all their instruments on a black Fiat 1,100: he'd loaded the entire drum set on the roof rack. He too had something to tell. They were stopped and searched twice, the first time on their way out of Naples, the second close to Bari. Even worse, the "autonomi" [left wing militant fringe] acted on protest during on of their concert the previous week.
“I didn't understand what happened," Tullio says. "We went to play for free in a small town's theater for a political event, and these guys didn't even let us finish!”
He looks bitterly disappointed, and demotivated.

The truth is that the alternative circuit was breaking down, and a consistent part of the youth movement was taking a very weird tangent. I'm talking about the people who chose the path of violence, but simply about the ones that thought and organized their lives believing in a different possible model, to which they sacrificed all the rest. The time of hundreds of "people's houses" and cultural associations and theaters animated by the enthusiasm, the desire to do of many youth groups full of ideas and good will, all this seemed already so distant, and those same individuals were starting questioning their future, the time they supposedly lost, the things they were late on, or more simply were questioning what chance they had to find a job.

The concerts were the only moment of togetherness, the only public occasions to give voice to the discomfort, to the anger, and that's why they punctually ended up becoming something else. Fabrizio de Andrè, who came with Massimo Bubbola to attend our concert in a stadium in the outskirts of Rome, was not able to stay quiet in the audience for more than half an hour, after which he was forced to go back home. He called us the day after to apologize for not having come backstage at the end of the concert, but he explained that had been harassed by a group of drugged out freaks who reproach him that he was rich and famous, and at same time they were insisting with him to get up on stage and sing for them. He told them he was there just to listen to the Canzoniere, and he intended to do so, so these guys started insulting him and pulling

him rudely, forcing him to leave.
Heavy drugs were also starting to circulate, and the number of drug addicts was skyrocketing; and the Police was using them, getting from them information about the [armed extremist group] Red Brigades, in exchange for informal immunity.
Campo de' Fiori became a dark and tough place, and even the Giordano Bruno's statue - sitting in the middle of it - assumed a menacing look. On that square the Radical Party members ("the Radicals") started a very bold initiative: the projection on a big screen of a series of slides with the faces, names and last names of every Roman heroin dealers who became police informers.

All that remained was Andrea Valcarenghi and his Festival di Re Nudo [The Naked King Festival] at Parco Lambro in Milan, and even here things were changing.
We traveled in our minivan all night, and arrived in Milan at dawn. As we enter the park I smell a sickening stench of chicken:
“Can you smell chickens?”
“What are you talking about?”
“Bad rotten chicken stench!”
"No way!"
Well, it was indeed ugly rotten poultry smell. The day before our arrival the "autonomi" had operated a "proletarian expropriation", ransacking a "Polli Arena" chicken truck destined to feed the festival's attendees. They didn't know how to cook them, and the frozen packs after a while became like mushy soccer balls, to be then abandoned all over the park, emanating a disgusting stench.

Backstage was filled with recording industry executives; the business had penetrated even at Re Nudo, and there were rules and regulations to be respected - a big difference from the previous editions of the same festival. The groups' managers were trying to grab the best performing time slots, and we were robbed of our 9 PM concert time slot, considered the best, since it was dark and the audience attention, thanks also to the lighting, was all on the music.
There where over 120,000 people at that last Re Nudo Festival, but the tension in Parco Lambro could be cut in half with a knife. Everything was circulating, along with the bad vibes.
On the huge stage the musicians were barely able to play, because they were constantly targeted with any kind of flying objects, being stones or "Arena" chickens.
When it's our turn to check the stage set-up, the situation is so critical that even the organizers don't know what to do, and any call for civil behavior is useless.
The festival's security service looks very nervous, and one of the guys shows of his instrument to keep the audience calm: it's a huge, heavy wrench at least 30 inches long, which he proudly keeps attached to his pants' belt, under his black leather jacket.
The great jazz trumpet player/multi-instrumentalist Don Cherry offers himself as a

sacrificial lamb; he grabs a Kora, a Western African string instrument, plugs it into an amplifier and starts playing a hypnotic-repetitive music he hopes will be able to calm the spirits down there. His try badly fails, and the flying objects increases exponentially. At this point the band that robbed us of the 9 PM time-slot chickens out, and offers us a schedule switch-over. The organizers agree, they think that that kind of crowd, given our image and reputation, might be a little more merciful with us, rather than other bands. We accept the time exchange, but the truth is Romano Rocchi is the one who saves the situation.
He's a friend of ours from Rome, he's a mime, and his best performance with the Canzoniere was in Piazza Farnese, where an entire group of actors and jugglers in colorful attires jumped down the stage animating the square for whole duration of our concert. Romano reassures us that he knows what to do, and that he'll be able to put that chaos under control; his only request is a headlight beacon on him wherever he goes. Done deal. He asks us to start playing while he's whitening his face ans begins moving goofy back and forth on stage; then he jumps down in the crowd, and every time he stops in the middle of that mess, a bunch of people gather around him. He's able to involve people with jokes, and as he catches a groups' attention he rushes to the next one. He goes through the entire length and width of the huge lawn we have in front of us, dividing it in quadrants of people, which after his passage seat on the ground and start concentrating on our music.
When Romano comes back on stage he brings on him the whole attention of 120,000 people, and he gives it to us as a present.
It'll be a fantastic concert, thanks to him, and one more time we realize that often times, when it comes to having to face the most difficult situation, all you have to do is an act of mockery, a jest.

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The last musician to join the Canzoniere is Tommaso Vittorini, who played with us just for a few months; he was a very creative musician and a true entertainer on stage. He'd admire our sense of irony, and yet when he joined us something among us had already started to wind down.

Looking back into my memory, I think our last concert was the one among the ruins of the Basilica di Massenzio, in Rome. Our last waltz... and perhaps the worst one.
At that moment I don't think any of us was able to explain the reasons, yet we felt, more or less, that our experience was at its sunset. We were the instruments to a generation, one of the many voices of wonderful utopia, which was not that utopian; however, now we had to face a journey made only of competition and commerce, which was humiliating that precious object that we always treated with such love and rigoeur.

The world in which we deliberately moved in didn't exist anymore, and the raison d'etre of our band ceased to exist.
Even our personal interests were going in different directions, and if that was something that represented the group's richness, for years, now our diversity was starting to become distance. I wanted to write pieces for orchestra, Pasquale and Giorgio wanted to go on a anew experimental journey, far away from the group's codes, Clara by now had decided to follow Tommaso Vittorini on his jazz path, and I think that Marcello was the one who was hurt the most, when we decided to disband, amidst all our best friends' dismay.
I think it was an act of courage, a noble decision, and a very coherent, mainly because nobody of us really knew how to make a living starting the next day.

I always thought that James Dean, Marylin or Che Guevara have become myths because they never got old; they didn't have the time for it. That's why the image we all have of them has the flavor, force and freshness of their youth. The comparison might be out of bounds, I know, and yet I now understand that we once guessed something that was there to come. The Canzoniere would have changed, it would have become wiser, more calculating, that is, it would have gotten older, and we didn't wanted that, and it didn't happen.

Today, the Canzoniere del Lazio is still here. It still lives, with the same spirit, in whatever each of us, who was part of it, continues to produce and create, and in the love that with no exception still binds us tightly together.

(Translated from Italian by Carlo Bizio)