

Eric Pfeil: *Azzurro. Mit 100 Songs durch Italien.*

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As the title *Azzurro. Mit 100 Songs durch Italien* already suggests, Eric Pfeil's book is a personal musical journey through Italy. Preceded by a preface by the author, where he explains, in an exhilarating yet nostalgic way, his first trip to Italy and the beginning of a long-lasting love for the Belpaese, the book is divided into one hundred short chapters, one for each song in alphabetical order. As Pfeil explains in the preface, his aim is to describe and understand Italy, a complex country full of contradictions, where good and evil, religion and immorality, beauty and vulgarity coexist.

The songs belong to different musical genres, including genres that are not normally associated with the *canzone italiana*, ranging from the *cantautori* (the Italian songwriters) to the Italian disco of Gazebo or Giorgio Moroder, to rock and *neomelodico* and even the most recent waves in Italian music with artists like Madame.

The book doesn't present itself as a scientific manuscript, but it is nevertheless a precise, accurate, and valid piece of work. As music is a fundamental part of Italian popular culture, analyzing a song means more than merely understanding its lyrics. By means of song analysis, it is possible to uncover important yet hidden aspects of the country and this is exactly what Pfeil aspires to do. In fact, each song offers a brief but concise explanation of important events in recent Italian history such as the *anni di piombo* or Pasolini's murder. Moreover, song analysis is supported by the description of the socio-cultural changes that have occurred in Italy after the Second World War.

In the one hundred short chapters, the meticulous narration of the singers' lives intends to illustrate changes that have occurred in Italian society within the past 60 years: Mina's scandalous relationship with Corrado Pani, Claudio Villa's marriage with Patrizia Baldi or De Gregori's concert interrupted by student protests are represented here as symbols of change. The analysis of the lyrics pursues the same purpose as it is aimed at offering an exhaustive image of the evolution of Italian society, such as the transformation of the role of women that can be seen in the dissolute love described in Patty Pravo's songs, or the explanation of new habits in Italy as is demonstrated by the poetics of everyday life in the most prolific musical production of Lucio Battisti.

In this musical tour d'horizon cities, too, play an important role. Rome, Naples, Genoa: As a careful observer, Pfeil describes these hectic but fascinating cities, their contradictions, their characteristics. He thus finds a unique opportunity to speak about cinema and music, in the case of Fellini and Nino Rota, or about dialectal songs, in the case of De André's

“Crêuza de mă”. By describing the cities, Pfeil also evokes their sounds and sketches the elements of the latter’s evolution, as he does, for instance, in the case of Naples and of Neapolitan music, of which he manages to give a complete, though short outline.

Special focus is also given to the history of Sanremo and its paramount importance for the growth of the Italian musical production. The singers’ stories often intersect with Sanremo as one of the most influential Italian musical festivals: from Luigi Tenco, who committed suicide during the festival in 1967, to Vasco Rossi, who presented his famous “Vita spericolata” in Sanremo and started his successful career, or Achille Lauro, who brought his scandalous songs to Italy’s most famous stage.

Therefore, the book offers a thorough overview of the history of the *canzone italiana* in the 20th and 21st centuries, without omitting other aspects of Italian culture such as the cinema, e.g., by exploring the cinematic production of directors like Fellini, De Sica, and Argento.

Pfeil’s writing is lively, his style is personal and amusing. In his song analysis he does not proceed schematically; rather, he often starts from far back and draws on anecdotes to explain the creation of the songs. Although *Azzurro* is closer to an essay than an academic work, the book is based on solid knowledge and sustained by accurate research. Proof of this is the great abundance of details that characterizes Pfeil’s entire narration. As a result, the one hundred chapters appear informative without being pedantic, brief without being hasty. The choice to present the songs in alphabetical instead of chronological order also contributes to this effect by bringing an element of surprise to the reader in each new chapter. In addition, Pfeil’s careful selection of songs allows to discover niche artists like Franco Fanigliulo or Brunori Sas, besides the more internationally recognized singers and songs as “L’italiano” by Toto Cotugno or “O sole mio” by Caruso. At the same time, the author’s selection criterion, though personal, helps to outline the relationship of Italian discography and German music charts. By telling stories of hits and flops, Pfeil achieves to describe the reception of certain Italian songs in Germany that are not well known in their native land, thus providing yet another perspective on the cultural impact of Italian music.

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