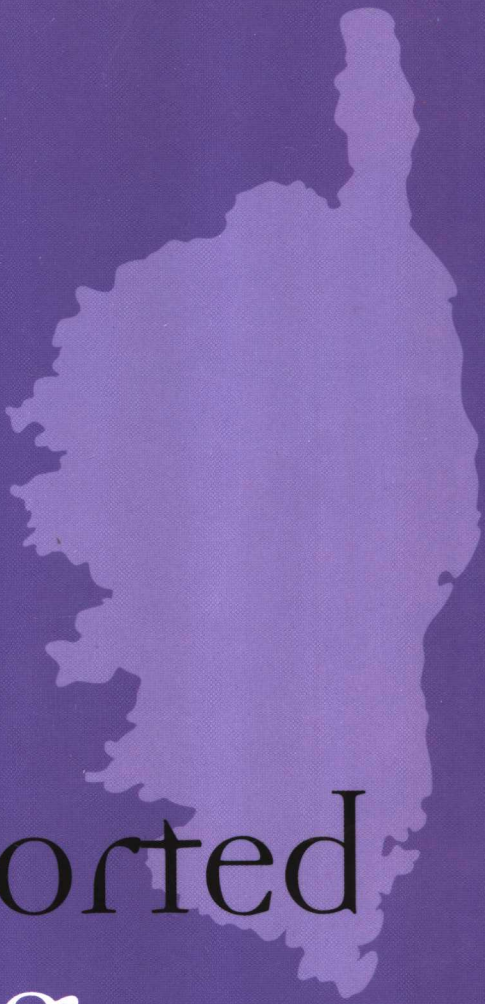


transported by song

Corsican Voices from Oral Tradition to World Stage

Caroline Bithell

Transported by Song

Corsican Voices from Oral Tradition to World Stage

Caroline Bithell

Europea: Ethnomusicologies
and Modernities, No. 5

THE SCARECROW PRESS, INC.
Lanham, Maryland • Toronto • Plymouth, UK
2007

SCARECROW PRESS, INC.

Published in the United States of America
by Scarecrow Press, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of
The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.scarecrowpress.com

Estover Road
Plymouth PL6 7PY
United Kingdom

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bithell, Caroline, 1957–
Transported by song : Corsican voices from oral tradition to world stage / Caroline Bithell.
p. cm. — (Europea ; no. 5)
Includes bibliographical references (p.) , discography (p.), filmography (p.), and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-8108-5938-8 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-8108-5439-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-8108-5938-6 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-8108-5439-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Folk music—France—Corsica—History and criticism. 2. Folk songs, Italian—France—Corsica—History and criticism. I. Title.
ML3620.7.C67B58 2007
782.42162'58—dc22 2007003013

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.
Manufactured in the United States of America.

Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities

Series Editors: Philip V. Bohlman and Martin Stokes

1. *Celtic Modern: Music at the Global Fringe*, edited by Martin Stokes and Philip V. Bohlman, 2003.
2. *Albanian Urban Lyric Song in the 1930s*, by Eno Koço, 2004.
3. *The Mediterranean in Music: Critical Perspectives, Common Concerns, Cultural Differences*, edited by David Cooper and Kevin Dawe, 2005.
4. *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island, Ireland*, by Lillis Ó Laoire, 2005.
5. *Transported by Song: Corsican Voices from Oral Tradition to World Stage*, by Caroline Bithell, 2007.

Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities

Series Editors: Philip V. Bohlman and Martin Stokes

The new millennium challenges ethnomusicologists, dedicated to studying the music of the world, to examine anew the Western musics they have treated as "traditional," and to forge new approaches to world musics that are often overlooked because of their deceptive familiarity. As the modern discipline of ethnomusicology expanded during the second half of the twentieth century, influenced significantly by ethnographic methods in the social sciences, ethnomusicology's "field" increasingly shifted to the exoticized Other. The comparative methodologies previously generated by Europeanist scholars to study and privilege Western musics were deliberately discarded. Europe as a cultural area was banished to historical musicology, and European vernacular musics became the spoils left to folk-music and, later, popular-music studies.

Europea challenges ethnomusicology to return to Europe and to encounter its disciplinary past afresh, and the present is a timely moment to do so. European unity nervously but insistently asserts itself through the political and cultural agendas of the European Union, causing Europeans to reflect on a bitterly and violently fragmented past and its ongoing repercussions in the present, and to confront new challenges and opportunities for integration. There is also an intellectual moment to be seized as Europeans reformulate the history of the present, an opportunity to move beyond the fragmentation and atomism the later twentieth century has bequeathed and to enter into broader social, cultural, and political relationships.

Europea is not simply a reflection of and on the current state of research. Rather, the volumes in this series move in new directions and experiment with diverse approaches. The series establishes a forum that can engage scholars, musicians, and other interlocutors in debates and discussions crucial to understanding the present historical juncture. This dialogue, grounded in ethnomusicology's interdisciplinarity, will be animated by reflexive attention to the specific social configurations of knowledge of and scholarship on the musics of Europe. Such knowledge and its circulation as ethnomusicological scholarship are by no means dependent on professional academics, but rather are conditioned, as elsewhere, by complex interactions between universities, museums, amateur organizations, state agencies, and markets. Both the broader view to which ethnomusicology aspires and the critical edge necessary to understanding the present moment are served by broadening the base on which "academic" discussion proceeds.

"Europe" will emerge from the volumes as a space for critical dialogue, embracing competing and often antagonistic voices from across the continent, across the Atlantic, across the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and across a world altered ineluctably by European colonialism and globalization. The diverse subjects and interdisciplinary approaches in individual volumes capture something of—and, in a small way, become part of—the jangling polyphony through which the "New Europe" has explosively taken musical shape in public discourse, in expressive culture, and, increasingly, in political form. Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities aims to provide a critical framework necessary to capture something of the turbulent dynamics of music performance, engaging the forces that inform and deform, contest and mediate the senses of identity, selfhood, belonging, and progress that shape "European" musical experience in Europe and across the world.

To my parents, Auriol and Peter,
and my children, Magdalene, Chloe, and Finn

Vurria chì la mo voce
Trapanassi ogni muntagna
Ch'ella ghjugnissi in Niolu
Risunà pè la Balagna
Ch'ella varcassi lu mare
È le fruntiere di Spagna.

I should like that my voice
Should pierce through every mountain
That it should reach the Niolu
And resound throughout the Balagne
That it should cross the sea
And the frontiers of Spain.

—Santu Casanova, "U Lamentu di Spanettu"

Editor's Foreword

Mediterranean islands have played a significant role in our discipline, shaping the way we think about what constitutes "our music," its history, and its others. If the number of conferences on islands in recent years is anything to go by, they also constitute an emerging paradigm in studies of musical globalization. They invite a particular kind of thinking about movement and dislocation, about the centers and peripheries of nations and empires, about (inaccessible, "traditional") interiors and (vulnerable, cosmopolitan) coasts, about fragile ecologies in swirling seas of change. They provoke questions about the idea of Europe, about music culture, and about ethnography: the very questions that have preoccupied us from the outset in *Europea*. Caroline Bithell has responded with a book as polyphonic and intricately wrought as its subject matter.

It is also a book about Corsica and France, about the politics of culture that has articulated this quasi-colonial relationship, and about the European space in which this politics increasingly develops. This has a long history. When Rousseau championed Corsican independence, it became a point of reference for the European intelligentsia, a romantic site of struggle between local authenticity and the expanding empires. "One day this little island will astonish Europe," he once wrote. Eighteenth-century travelers habitually understood Corsica in these terms, seeing a prefiguring of the ethnic-nationalist struggle of periphery against center that would later consume the continent. Enduring and

politically significant ideas about culture were forged during this struggle. These bear on Corsican musical practices, institutions, and exchanges in complex ways. Bithell's book suggests new critical angles on the cultural politics of the new Europe.

It will also introduce many readers to the Corsican groups that have explored Corsican vocal polyphony with such style, imagination, and commitment in recent decades: A Filetta, Voce di Corsica, Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses, I Muvrini, Canta u Populu Corsu, Donnisulana, Jean-Paul Poletti and his Chœur d'Hommes de Sartène, and many others. Caroline Bithell draws on over ten years of fieldwork, a deep and affectionate knowledge of the island, and a musician's ear for the intricacies of this remarkable but (in the Anglophone world, at least) somewhat neglected music. We have here, then, a detailed critical ethnography, a celebration of Corsican musical culture, and an invitation to think European music afresh.

Martin Stokes
The University of Chicago

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been completed without the practical, financial, institutional, and moral support of numerous individuals and organizations, which it is my pleasure to acknowledge here. The greater part of the research was undertaken during my time at the University of Wales, Bangor. My dissertation supervisor, Wyn Thomas, and former departmental head, John Harper, were pillars of support and advice throughout my Ph.D. years and beyond. I would like to thank all of the staff in Bangor's School of Music for their collegiality. The final stages of guiding the manuscript through to publication were undertaken at the University of Manchester, a task made lighter by the unfailingly good-natured support of David Fallows, subject leader in music, and by the dynamic and stimulating environment created by my new colleagues in the Martin Harris Centre for Music and Drama.

The fieldwork central to the preparation of this book benefited from the support of a number of funding bodies. The research for my original doctoral dissertation (Bithell 1997) was made possible by a British Academy postgraduate award (1993–1996), with fifteen months' fieldwork supported by travel grants from the British Academy, Music and Letters Trust, and the then Department of Music at the University of Wales, Bangor. A shorter period of fieldwork in 2002 was also funded by the British Academy. The book was written during a year of research leave (2004–2005) granted by the University of Wales, Bangor, and generously supported by an award from the Arts

and Humanities Research Council. Four months of additional fieldwork in Corsica during this year were funded by the British Academy, Music and Letters Trust, and the University of Wales, Bangor. The British Academy, University of Wales, Bangor, and University of Manchester also contributed to my attendance at a series of international conferences, where I presented papers based on different aspects of the material that has found its way into these pages. The Research Committee of Manchester's School of Arts, Histories and Cultures helped with the cost of producing the book's illustrations.

Dorothy Carrington's rich and eloquent writings on Corsican culture and history, together with Wolfgang Laade and Markus Römer's meticulously researched studies of Corsica's musical traditions, have served as invaluable foundation stones since my first tentative steps into Corsican territory. At a broader level, I owe an intellectual debt to many colleagues in the field of ethnomusicology whose work has helped sharpen my own critical awareness and theoretical stance. Of those working in areas close to my own I would particularly like to mention Bernard Lortat-Jacob, Tullia Magrini, Timothy Rice, and Jane Sugarman. I am also indebted to David Looseley's work on cultural policy and popular music in France, which alerted me to the need to situate my analysis of trends in Corsican musical activity more firmly in the context of comparative trends in France as a whole. During the years of the book's incubation I have greatly valued the lively collegiality, scholarly enthusiasm, and personal encouragement of fellow-members of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology.

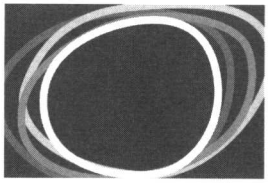
My sincerest thanks go to the many people in Corsica who welcomed me into their lives and so generously shared with me their knowledge, concerns and enthusiasm. To thank by name each and every one of the groups and individuals without whom this book could never have been written would be an impossible task. While many are named in the pages that follow, many more remain anonymous. I owe my initial introduction to Corsican polyphony and several of my early contacts to Nicole Casalonga. Of the many individuals who made themselves available for my enquiries on numerous occasions, offered useful leads, posed provocative questions that encouraged me to consider my material from new perspectives, or simply welcomed me as an old friend, I would especially like to mention Jean-Claude Acquaviva, Christian Andreani, Francescu Berlinghi, Pierre Bertoni, Jean-Michel Casanova, Patrizia Gattaceca, Jean-Pierre Godinat, Petru Guelfucci, Jany, Georges, and Ceccè Guironnet, Santu Massiani, Francis Marcantei, Jacky Micaelli, Minicale, Tumasgiu Nami, Francette Orsoni and Philippe Buisset, Elisabeth and Pierre Pardon, Paulu Santu Parigi, Iviu Pasquali, Philippe Pesteil and Francesca-Maria Ceccaldi, Jean-Paul Poletti, Jean-Luc

Raclot, Mighele Raffaelli, Claude Robertson-Forcioli, Valérie Salducci, Dominique Salini, Benedettu Sarocchi, Louis Savelli, Ghjiseppu Turchini, Max Vuillamier, and Ghjermana de Zerbi. In addition I thank the members of the groups A Cumpagnia, A Filetta, A Mannella, A Ricuccata, Canta u Populu Corsu, Caramusa, Cinqui Sò, Diana di L'Alba, Donnisulana, I Chjami Aghjalesi, I Muvrini, Isulatine, Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses, Madricale, Madrigalesca, Santavuglia, Tavagna, Tempus Fugit, Vaghjime, Vitalba, Voce di Corsica, and Zamballarana, many of whom graciously granted me interviews and allowed me to attend their rehearsals; likewise members of the confraternities of A Costa, Ajaccio, Bastia, Bonifacio, Calenzana, Calvi, Cargèse, Cervione, Corte, Erbalunga, Figarella, Lumio, Muro, Pioggiola, Poretto di Brando, Pozzo di Brando, San Martino di Lota, Santa Maria Poggio, Speloncato, Vescovato, and Venzolasca. I am greatly indebted to the following individuals and institutions for helping me locate, and allowing me access to, invaluable source materials: Bernardu Pazzoni at the Phonothèque of the Musée de la Corse, Corte, Christian Peri at the Centre d'Études Corses, Palazzu Naziunale, Corte, and the staff of the Ajaccio municipal library, the archive of the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles at Ajaccio, the Archives Départmentales of Haute-Corse (Bastia) and Corse-du-Sud (Ajaccio), the Bibliothèque Provinciale des Franciscains de Corse in Bastia, the Centre de Musiques Traditionnelles at Corte, and the association E Voce di u Cumune at Pigna. Staff at the Collectivité Territoriale likewise showed me every courtesy and provided me with useful documentation. My attendance at workshops and *écoles de chant* ("singing schools") hosted by a number of groups and associations contributed greatly to my understanding: in particular I would like to thank A Filetta and the Phonothèque of the Musée de la Corse for allowing me to attend their sessions on a regular basis in Lumio and Corte respectively. My time in Corsica would have been infinitely more precarious without the friendship and hospitality so generously extended to me by Line Mariani-Playfair and her husband John Playfair, and by the people of the village of Vero, where I lived with my family for several months in 1996. In compiling my text I have endeavored to honor my professional responsibilities to both my academic readers and my Corsican collaborators. I trust that I have lived up to the confidence placed in me by the latter, to all of whom I owe the utmost respect and gratitude. Any errors, omissions, or shortcomings are my own.

This book would have been a shadow of its present self without the scholarly stimulus and personal encouragement of Martin Stokes and Philip V. Bohlman. Both have long been sources of inspiration through their own incisive thinking and stylish writing, and I am honored by their invitation to

contribute to this series. I have benefited from their advice, support, and constructive critique throughout the book's preparation. Bernard Lortat-Jacob, Terri Madison, and Alan Bates kindly undertook to read and comment on the entire manuscript. Their queries and suggestions have contributed immensely to improving the final product (even if I have not been able to rise to every challenge), and Terri's ruthless highlighting of my literary excesses has greatly improved the book's readability. Line Mariani-Playfair has been a constant source of help with the finer points of translation. A number of colleagues at Manchester helped prepare the book's illustrations. Graham Bowden produced the map. Nina Whiteman set the musical examples and brought her expertise to bear on some of my notational conundrums. Derek Trillo prepared black and white versions of my original color photographs. I am grateful to Renée Camus at Scarecrow Press for her patience with the delays occasioned by my change of home and institution during the editing process and for her expert guidance of the manuscript through to production.

My children, Magdalene, Chloe, and Finn, have accompanied me on this adventure. I am grateful to them for their patience at times when I seemed to be "always working," for sharing my passion for music, travel, and intellectual exploration, and for apparently having few regrets about what was in some respects a rather wayward upbringing. My parents, Auriol and Peter Bithell, instilled in me an early passion for both music and learning. I can never thank them enough for their unflagging and ever-cheerful support.



Arts & Humanities Research Council

This research is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The AHRC funds postgraduate training and research in the arts and humanities, from archaeology and English literature to design and dance. The quality and range of research supported not only provides social and cultural benefits but also contributes to the economic success of the UK. For further information on the AHRC, please see our website, www.ahrc.ac.uk

Readers' Notes

Musical Examples

Since music samples are now readily available via the World Wide Web, it was not deemed imperative to include a CD of musical examples with this book. Numerous websites carry MP3 files containing extracts from the albums of contemporary groups. At the time of writing, two excellent starting places are www.musicorsica.com (the website of the regional Centre de Musiques Traditionnelles) and www.musicorsica.net (both accessed 18 July 2006). Many of the groups' own websites carry both musical and photographic archives. General sites with links to those of a range of individual groups, both professional and amateur, include www.corsemusique.com and www.corsica-isula.com (accessed 18 July 2006). Typing the name of any group into a search engine will bring up a wealth of material.

Useful selections of different genres of traditional song can be found on the discs *Musique Corse de Tradition Orale* (Archives Sonores de la Phonothèque Nationale, Paris, 1982; field recordings by Félix Quilici), *Corsica: Traditional Songs and Music* (Jecklin-Disco, 1990; field recordings by Wolfgang Laade), and *Canti Corsi in Tradizioni: Canti, Nanne, Lamenti, Voceri, Paghjelle a Capella* (Fonti Musicali, 1989). A set of transcriptions of representative traditional melody types and polyphonic arrangements accompanies their discussion in chapter 2.

Corsican Names and Terminology: Orthographic and Regional Variants

Christian Names

It is common practice for Corsican children to be registered at birth with a French Christian name, which is then used on official documents. These French names often continue to be used on a day-to-day basis, but with their Corsican equivalents being preferred in cultural contexts (including CD liner notes and publications). As a general principle, I have used the names by which people are more usually known or which they have used in their interactions with me, but have retained the alternative forms when referring to material in which these forms are used. Thus the following pairs of names (for example) will often refer to the same person: Michel/Mighele, Jean-Pierre/Ghjuvan-Petru, Jacques/Ghjacumu, François/Francescu/Ceccè, Benoît/Benedettu.

Place Names

Alternative spellings and pronunciations also exist for the names of many Corsican towns and villages. For ease of locating the places referred to in the text, I have opted (with some reluctance) to use the standard spellings found in most maps and guidebooks. Alternative versions favored by many Corsicans more accurately reflect local pronunciation, with, for example, a final "u" where Italian would have an "o"; in some cases, the existence of more than one Corsican spelling is accounted for by the lack of a standardized orthography. Local spellings and other variants sometimes found in publications or disc notes are given below. These variants occasionally appear in my text when I am quoting from interviews as well as from printed material.

Ajaccio, Aiacciu
Asco, Ascu
Bocognano, Bucugnanu, Bucugnà
Bonifacio, Bonifaziu, Bunifaziu
Bozio, Boziu
Bustanico, Bustanicu
Calenzana, Calinzana
Cargèse, Carghjese
Cervione, Cervioni
Col de Prato, Bocca di u Pratu
Corbara, Curbara
Corte, Corti
Fiumorbo, Fiumorbu

Folelli, Fulelli
Francardo, Francardu
Giunsani, Giunssani, Giussani, Ghjunsani
Guagno, Guagnu
Île Rousse, Isula Rossa
Isulaccio, Isulacciu
Lampugnano, Lampugnanu
Lumio, Lumiu
Moncale, U Mucale
Murato, Muratu
Muro, Muru
Nebbio, Nebbiu
Niolo, Niolu
Occhiatana, Occhjatana
Patrimonio, Patrimoniu
Pianello, Pianellu
Pioggiola, Pioggiula, Pioghjula
Poggio di Venaco, Poggiu di Venacu
Ponte Novo, Ponte Novu
Porticcio, Purticciu
Porto Vecchio, Porti Vechju
Propriano, Pruprià
Querciolo, Querciolu
Rusio, Rusiu
San Lorenzo, San Lurenzu
Santa Lucia di Mercurio, Santa Lucia di Mercorio, Santa Lucia di Mercuriu
Santa Maria Poggio, Santa Maria Poghju
Santa Reparata di Balagne, Santa Riparata di Balagna
Sartène, Sartè
Sermano, Sermanu
Speloncato, Speluncatu, Spiluncatu
Taglio, Tagliu
Tallano, Tallà
Venaco, Venacu
Venzolasca, Venzulasca
Vescovato, Viscuvatu
Vero, Veru
Vico, Vicu
Zicavo, Zicavu

General

There is no single standard or official orthography for the Corsican language. While there is broad concensus about many aspects of Corsican orthography, the polynomic principle of Corsican spelling allows for many features of local or regional pronunciation to be reflected in orthography. Consequently, there is no one "correct" spelling for every word. In addition, nondialectal usage is variable, for example, regarding the use of accents and apostrophes and the doubling of consonants. This situation inevitably leads to apparent inconsistency. In the case of Corsican terminology used in the text, alternative spellings and regional variants are noted in parentheses at the first mention. Thereafter the most common variant is retained, although alternative spellings may again appear in quoted material.

I am grateful to Alexandra Jaffe for her general advice and for her help with the formulation of the above note.