New Findings of Sicilian Folk Songs in Luciano Berio´s *Naturale*[1]

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Abstract: This paper gathers and analyzes information concerning *Naturale*, a work written by Luciano Berio in 1985 for viola, percussion and recorded voice, based on Sicilian folk songs. Several aspects surrounding *Naturale's* creation are taken into consideration in this study: Berio's compositional style and traits, the manner in which he relates his works one to another, what he sees in folk music and his own personal desire to intertwine art music and folk music. For Berio, *Naturale* is not an isolated venture into the realm of mixing folk music and his own avant-garde style; it is instead one of many works resulting from his long-standing relationship with folk music. Another essential aspect in this case is the study of the sources used by Berio to find the folk songs by which he was inspired. An interview with Maestro Aldo Bennici, the Sicilian violist for whom *Naturale* was composed, helped in the discovery of the usage of two more folk songs in a section of the piece, being their identification suggested in this paper.

Keywords: Luciano Berio, Naturale, Sicilian Folk Songs, Alberto Favara, Aldo Bennici.

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This document intends to examine and illuminate the piece *Naturale,* written in 1985 by Luciano Berio, in order to emphasize and elaborate upon its role as a substantial and significant work in the viola repertoire. This spectacular work, based on Sicilian folk songs, carries great cultural significance, however is not well-known by either audiences or the academic community. Berio composed *Naturale* using the same material as *Voci*, a concerto for viola and two orchestras composed by himself in 1984. Both works use Sicilian folk songs extracted from the transcriptions of Italian ethnomusicologist Alberto Favara. These songs collected by Favara were published in four volumes between the years 1907 and 1959.

In *Naturale* the viola, percussion, and voice form three different musical layers that, when combined, have an unusual and compelling interaction. The viola takes the central role, alternating between passages with built-in freedom and folk material such as works songs, love songs, street cries, and lullabies, all modified and adapted by the composer. For the most part, the percussion provides the supporting background to the viola, as if simply providing commentary. As a last layer Berio adds the recorded voice which punctuates the work with seven street vendor songs. These songs are performed by Sicilian storyteller-singer Peppino (Giuseppe) Celano, who completely seizes the listener's attention with the surprisingly raw and intense quality of his singing.

The subject of Sicilian folk music seems rather remote from the disciplines studied by music performers in most academic circles. Berio himself mentioned that his intent in composing works based on these folk songs was to contribute to an increased awareness of this most fervent form of expression (BERIO, 1990). To close this gap, special attention is given in this document to the sources of these songs, their meaning, the environment and the occasions on which they were sung. Two articles, both published in 2006 by the Italian researchers Candida Felici and Cecilia Vendrasco, have already initiated the identification of the songs used by Berio.

Felici's article (FELICI, 2006) focuses primarily on *Voci*, while Vendrasco (VENDRASCO, 2006) studies the connection between *Naturale* and *Voci*. This present research is the result of my doctoral dissertation in which I have identified two more songs used by Berio that are not mentioned neither in the score nor in those articles. These findings were only possible by following clues in an interview I had with Italian violist Aldo Bennici[3] (PIERMARTIRI, 2013: 96-110), to whom these works were written for, and searching through the songs collected by Favara.

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[3] Aldo Bennici is a Sicilian violist and had a lifelong friendship with Berio. He was the one who introduced Berio to Sicilian folk songs. The interview took place at The Accademia Musicale Chigiana, Siena, in 2012, which he was the Artistic Director from 1996-2014.

1. LUCIANO BERIO´S WORKS AND FOLK MUSIC

When writing about the music of Luciano Berio it is inevitable that one must talk about his involvement with the twentieth-century avant-garde movements. The search for new compositional styles in the post-World War II era, characterized by the rejection of tonality, was a prevailing ideal among young composers.

Berio was in his twenties after the war and had given up pursuing a career as a concert pianist after a hand injury due to a gun accident while in the army. Instead, he decided to focus on composition. It was in Tanglewood, under the influence of Dallapiccola that Berio first gained interest in twelve-tone music. This interest led to his association with a group of composers formed at the Darmstadt Summer Festival for New Music in the late nineteen fifties, a group which included such names as Boulez, Stockhausen, and Ligeti. They were composers who shared the same compositional ideals of serial music. Also, this quest to produce music that was ahead of its time lead to his association with Bruno Maderna, and together they created a studio devoted to electronic music in Milan. Years later at the invitation of Pierre Boulez, he also became director of the electro-acoustic division of IRCAM in Paris in the nineteen seventies.[4] Experimental music, unusual fusions of different genres, and tendencies towards a modernist style are expected traits in Berio's compositions. However, this search for new forms of expression through sound did not prevent him from searching back in music history to find inspiration. Many of his compositions have been some way inspired by works of great masters such as Bach, Beethoven, and Mahler. According to Berio himself (as quoted in OSMOND-SMITH, 1985: 107): the third part of his well-known *Sinfonia* has a skeleton which is the scherzo from Mahler's *Second Symphony*…it's accompanied throughout by the "history of music" that it itself recalls for me, with all its many levels and references.

The use of musical references to other composers and also to his own works (auto-citation) is in fact a recurrence that permeates all his music. He followed the principle that "for a composer, the best way to analyze and comment on a piece is to do something, using materials from that piece. My *Chemins* are the best analyses of my *Sequenzas"* (Berio as quoted in OSMOND-SMITH, 1985: 107).

This practice of using materials from his own previously written pieces has generated a connection between his own compositions in such a way that it is possible to find distinct groups, or "families" inside Berio's own output. Works in the same "families" are the ones that share the same material or the same concept: for example, all the works that use folk material. By grouping together works this way, one can understand better the relation between Berio's compositions. Some of these "families" are originated by pieces that quote neither the work of other composers nor his own, but are

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[4] IRCAM stands for *Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*.

a starting point for this process.

The best example of this is Berio's series of solo instrumental compositions called *Sequenzas*. There are a total of fourteen *Sequenzas*, which were composed between 1958 and 2002. They explore the fullest possibilities of each instrument, often calling for extended techniques. One of the ways in which Berio creates contrast between sections in these pieces is to relate different thematic areas to specific instrumental techniques (pizzicato, tremolo, double-stops etc.). In this way these sections become more distinct than the traditional "themes". This aspect is also present in *Naturale*, which in its particular mosaic structure, every song is set in a specific viola technique resembling the structuring of a *Sequenza*.

Several of the *Sequenzas* became the basis for larger works, most notably the series called *Chemins*. For example, as Berio mentioned, *Sequenza VI* (for viola solo) generated *Chemins II* by adding extra instrumental parts around the original solo. In both works, the harmonic spectrum is developed by playing chords using an extended technique where the four strings are played simultaneously in a tremolo. Such passages are also cited in *Voci* and *Naturale* as well, creating a line of reference that connects all these pieces.

Naturale was built by extracting excerpts from *Voci*, which in its turn was called *folk songs II*, relating it to Berio's famous vocal work *Folk Songs* (1964). These three pieces form a "family" with similar traits: they have ethnic music as an inspirational source, and they have a specific focus on solo instrument resulted by the close collaboration between the composer and a virtuoso. In *Folk Songs* the composer built a cycle based on eleven folk songs from around the world for his wife, virtuoso American singer Cathy Berberian. One of these songs, *A la femminisca*, comes from Sicily and it is found in the same source in which Berio found his songs for *Voci* (VENDRASCO, 2006: 49).

Berio's interest in folk music, jazz and even pop music dated back to his early years as a composer. For example, his prize-winner work *Laborintus II* from 1965, has a brief jazz episode amongst other musical references. However, for Berio that is: "(…) most banal thing to appear in the (entirely invented) musical catalogue that is *Laborintus II*"(as quoted in OSMOND-SMITH, 1985: 105). On the other hand, his relationship with folk music was not anecdotal as it was with jazz and pop music. That interest had his origins when Berio was a young boy, writing pastiche folksongs.

> My interest in folklore is very long standing—even as a boy I was writing pastiche folksongs. Recently this interest has put down deeper roots, and I' ve tried to gain a more specific and technical understanding of the processes that govern certain folk idioms...I tend to be interested only in those folk techniques and means of expression that I can in one way or other assimilate without a stylistic break, and that allow me to take a few steps forward in the search for unity underlying musical worlds that are apparently alien to one another (Berio as quoted in OSMOND-SMITH, 1985: 107).

Some of Berio's works that show this interest throughout his career are the following: Tre

Canzoni Popolari (1948), *Folk Songs* (1964), *Coro* (1974-76), *Cries of London* (1974), and finally *Voci* and *Naturale.* These masterpieces are the result of Berio's utopian dream of creating a unity between folk music and western classical music. According to Berio (1990) "there are three conditions which can be identified in the act of transcribing, as in translating: (…)the transcriber can identify emotionally with the text, the original text can become a pretext for experimentation; or, finally, it can be overwhelmed and philologically "abused."

He believes that, when these three conditions coexist the transcription becomes a real creative and constructive act. *Voci*, and by extension *Naturale*, explores the problem of the convergence of these three conditions (BERIO, 1990).

2. CONNECTION BETWEEN *NATURALE* AND *VOCI*

Voci (*folk songs II*) for viola and orchestra was written for violist Aldo Bennici with a dedication to Laura and Paolo Martelli. Its premiere was on October 26, 1984 in Basel, Switzerland with Berio conducting and Bennici playing the solo viola part (FELICI, 2006:12). To understand where this work stands in relation to Berio's other compositions it is important to consider why he chose that name. *Voci* means "voices" in Italian and refers to the array of expressions found in the folkloric realm. The title in parenthesis (*folk songs II*) recalls Berio's *Folk Songs*, a work for voice and orchestra composed twenty years earlier. Berio's search for unity between the diverse contemporary musical expressions and the folkloric expression finds a resolution in the solo viola part of *Voci*. Not only did his friendship with Bennici give him strong personal reasons for choosing the viola as the solo instrument, the composer also found in the dark and mellow quality of the viola sound an effective and meaningful translation of Sicilian folk singing. In the setting of the *Folk Songs* of 1964, the viola has an important role opening the work with a solo marked with the indication: "like a wistful country dance fiddler." The appropriate writing and the tone of the viola provide a successful realization of the country fiddler. But it is in *Voci* that the viola finds a voice even closer to the folk expression, and Berio himself writes in the score the names of the actual Sicilian folk songs in the viola part (VEDRASCO, 2006: 52).

Voci, in contrast to *Folk Songs*, does not bring the words in to the context but instead uses extended techniques in the viola as a means to portray the expression found in the voice. The use of quarter-tones to imitate the Sicilian singers, left-hand pizzicato when simultaneously playing with the bow to emulate the glottal stop, intense vibrato, and harmonics are some of the means he uses to portray this expression.

According to my interview with Bennici, the great friendship he had with the composer was the reason why Berio decided to score *Naturale* for viola. The concurrence of a dance company from Reggio Emilia, called Ater Balletto, commissioning a stage work from Berio, along with his friend's

desire for a work for solo viola, created the impulse for this composition.

> Back when he wrote *Naturale* (this story is very personal but I'll tell it anyway) I was separating from my first wife and there was a heavy financial burden on me. Berio wanted to help me and he acted as a true close friend. He thought of writing this choreography for me, and in about six months performing this piece I was able to pay all that I owed. It is a story very unimportant but of great reciprocal friendship and great love. Berio wrote it so that I would be well (PIERMARTIRI, 2013: 96).

Naturale had its first performance in January 1st, 1985 only a little over two months after *Voci* came out. It took place at the Festival "Taormina Arte" with choreography by Amedeo Amodio, with scenery and costumes by Luisa Spinatelli; the dance company was Ater Balletto with Aldo Bennici on the viola (VENDRASCO, 2006: 54).

In order to fulfill the commission of a staged work for the dance company, its creation demanded traits that were essential to a choreographic spectacle; he adapted the material with complete simplification of the orchestral part adding to it only the percussion, making it more agile and flexible. *Naturale* has a clear structure of sections easily adaptable to the needs of a scenic narration by using transition moments between each section. There is much room for interpretation, and the performers can pace the flow with much freedom. Berio specified several metronome markings throughout the piece, but he compensated for the issues of synchronizing the viola and percussion parts with the recorded voice on the compact disc by writing some free repetitions of "ostinato" figures, and fermatas. *Voci* is also built with moments of rest between its sections, leaving the viola the freedom to finish phrases or start new material.

What really strikes the listener as setting the two works apart is the dense and complex elaboration of the orchestra timbres in *Voci*. Berio developed the material with his sophisticated avant-garde writing to create a large-scale work, as Bennici describes:

> Consider that when you will play *Voci* with an orchestra, it is a different language even if the material is the same. That piece is a great orchestration manual. In other words, it is a very complex orchestration using magically very few elements that expand becoming a score with two orchestras. These two ensembles are eight meters apart and at the same time create these dissonances that play a game of call. If you analyze well, you'll see that the material is very limited but intertwined, a real model of how you build a score (PIERMARTIRI, 2013: 102).

Naturale is in fact a derivation of *Voci*, with almost all the material coming from the earlier work. Entire songs in the viola part are transferred to the new score and set in a different order with nothing but minor adjustments. For *Naturale* instead, Berio decided to have a different sound concept. Between the folk songs he interspersed seven recordings of street vendor cries, sung by Peppino Celano of Palermo Italy. Berio recorded them himself when he met Celano in 1968. This is how Berio describes Celano:

> He was a remarkable story-teller – he could tell tales for days on end, sometimes sang, and he spoke in a rhythmical manner marking the beat with his feet. He even had a sword and beat the rhythm with it. He had an astonishing singing technique which enabled him to sing all the *abbagnate*. That is what the cries of Sicilian street vendors are called…Celano introduced me to these tunes and I recorded them on tape (Berio as quoted in OSMOND-SMITH, 1985: 149).

In *Naturale*, Celano's singing is raw and poignant; it grabs the listeners' attention early on, as the first street vendor cry of Celano comes about one minute into the work. The singer's melody is mostly in step-wise motion, with quarter-tones variation in pitch (as if going out-of-tune). At times he uses glissandi, spoken words, and throughout sings with an intense projection of the voice using no vibrato, which is typical of Sicilian folk singing. These are characteristics that Berio utilizes to build the viola's sonority and discourse, as if "imitating" this way of singing. This new element in the score of the street vendor cries produces not only a strong impact in the audience but also on the harmonic structure of the work. It generates completely new material not found in *Voci*. That is accomplished by the elaboration on the pitches sung by the voice in those seven recordings.

3. THE SOURCE OF THE SONGS USED BY BERIO

Around the second half of the nineteenth century, in the heart of the Romantic Era, an interest in documenting folk manifestations started in many countries of Europe which before then had been neglected. That interest was the first sparkle to what became today's ethnomusicology, although in Italy that discipline was not consolidated until the mid-twentieth century. In Sicily, the first prominent figures in this field were Giuseppe Pitrè[5], Corrado Ferrara and Alberto Favara. For this study the focus will be on the work done by Favara.

According to Felici (2006) and also Vendrasco (2006), his anthology called *Corpus di Musiche Popolari Siciliane* (Corpus of Sicilian Popular Music) (1957), is the most important source Berio used to find Sicilian folk songs for his compositions. This is a monumental collection of more than a thousand songs, narrated stories, procession chants, lullabies, drum and church-bell calls among other expressions. Alberto Favara (1863-1923), a Sicilian composer and scholar, was also a serious folksong collector who engaged in fieldwork, transcribing ethnic music between 1898 and 1923, the year of his death. According to Ottavio Tiby (1957: 5) he was among one of the first to pose the problem of "objective documentation" when collecting material from definite groups (farmers, seamen, herdsmen);

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[5] Giuseppe Pitrè (1841-1916), a great Italian folklorist also a medical doctor, professor, and senator. Pitrè was exceptional in his work as a folklorist. He was the first scholar to study and collect systematically Sicilian folk tales, legends, songs, and customs between 1871 and 1913; he compiled a collection of Sicilian oral culture in impressive twenty-five volumes called *Biblioteca delle Tradizioni Popolari Siciliane*, first published in 1870.

in other words, he would only select songs which he felt were from traditional roots, discarding those based in external models.

The discernment of what really comes from the core of a specific culture is a controversial issue. External influences are a normal development to all folk manifestations, making it impossible to track far back in the past. Favara set new research procedures, under the climate of positivism, attempting to find the true expression of Sicilian folk music. In addition to being objective in his documentation, what makes his work distinct from other collections of the time is that Favara is true to the source. In a note he writes: "I reproduce the songs the way I found them, striving to write them exactly the way they were presented to me, without stylizing it" (Favara as quoted by TIBY, 1957: 5, translation by the author).

It is interesting to notice in the preface of the edition that Favara started his research eight years before Bartók and Kodály were transcribing and collecting Hungarian music. For many years they did not know of each other's work and yet they had identical conditions of work and the same ideal to penetrate the spirit of folk music (TIBY, 1957: XIII-XIV) For the ethnomusicologists of today *Corpus di Musiche Popolari Siciliane* is "… a confirmation of an ethnic foundation of Italian music, different…from the character of Italian classical music and decidedly different than the altered and adulterated picture which some of the music collectors of the l800s had attributed to it."(CARPITELLA, 1974: 89).

Favara never saw the publication of his complete work, which happened in 1957. After he died in 1923, Tiby[6] organized and edited all the 1090 songs and musical samples. Favara, to create attention and interest to this music heritage, had actually published two smaller anthologies of songs arranged with piano accompaniment named *Canti della Terra e del Mare di Sicilia*, the first in 1907 (25 songs), and later in 1921 (20 songs). Both were published by the known Italian publishing house Ricordi. These first publications were followed by two posthumous volumes that were edited by Tiby, and published later in 1954 (30 songs) and 1959 (15 songs). By harmonizing these folk melodies Favara himself added his own external influence on them. Berio comments about these harmonizations made by Favara saying that at times they are arbitrary, but made by a musician with a sensitive ear (OSMOND-SMITH, 1985: 149-150).

But it is in *Corpus* that the monumental work of the scholar is consolidated. *Corpus* was published in two volumes, the first and smaller one is an introductory study written by Tiby explaining the organization and the attempt to classify the material collected by Favara. The second volume comprises the actual transcriptions Favara collected in the field. According to Tiby, the typical Sicilian folk song is

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[6] Ottavio Tiby (1891-1955) Italian ethnomusicologist was one of the pioneers of the scholarly study of Sicilian folk music as well as Alberto Favara´s son-in law.

based on the modal sensation instead of the tonal. That is the most important element in this music. The modal song is usually associated with a melody of serene calm and minor tonalities, which in fact, is generally the distinctiveness of the Sicilian folk song.

Of the 703 songs in the first part of *Corpus*, 508 are modal, subdividing them into 335 Doric, 145 Lydian, 23 Phrygian and 5 Mixolydian. The other 203 are mostly tonal or are difficult to define due to incompleteness. Tiby thinks that it is possible to observe the profound intimate analogies between the Greek poetic musical art and the Sicilian folk song. In a way, the interior of the island became less affected by the different invasions and its soul retained the musical forms of the culture that first colonized it. He found no proof that Sicilian folk music comes directly from the Greek culture; there are just not enough samples of that ancient music to make that a statement, but what they certainly have in common is the modality.

In fact, Paul Collaer, in reviewing the findings of Tiby, noted that the modality of Sicilian and Mediterranean ethnic music is not a "descendant" from the classical Greek musical theories, "but is a basis of musical expression, pre-Hellenic and verifiable in diverse and distant civilizations and cultural areas." (CARPITELLA, 1974: 93). Collaer's observations of traits found in Sicilian music free the critical analysis from its "learned prejudices by establishing historical precision and freeing studies from literary provincialism." (CARPITELLA, 1974: 93). Literary provincialism was the general thought before serious ethnomusicology practice was established in Italy in the twentieth century.

Tiby mentions that it is common to find altered intervals in many Sicilian folk songs; they were added with the passing of ages and cultural influences or even modern innovations. He gives us the example of the augmented second, which was probably added by the influence of the Arab mode *asbein*, or Byzantine hymns of the II mode. This interval was incorporated and became a common melisma in the island songs, bringing with it a Mid-Eastern flavor (TIBY, 1957: 32).

Figure 1: *Corpus di Musiche Popolari Siciliane,* Lyrical Song n. 92

According to Carpitella, there are two styles of Italian folk music, the ancient and the modern, and the division between them is clear. The modern style is the one that evolved influenced by the growth of European art music, starting to use major and minor tonalities and harmonic accompaniment that in turn influenced its melodies. The ancient style, in turn, remained with the traits

of the medieval and renaissance period, using church modes and short scales up to five tones (CARPITELLA, 1960: 137). This style is generally found in the mountains of south and central Italy, and the islands of Sardinia and Sicily. These places are generally less developed than the north of the country. To investigate the state of folk music across Italy, Carpitella and American ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax went for an eight-month exploratory field trip in 1954 that resulted in many findings.

> It is also necessary to consider the fact that during the period 1952-1954, the situation, particularly in southern Italy and on the Italian islands, was still quite favorable for the conservation of traditional heritage, while from 1954 on, the processes of urbanization, of emigration, both internal and external, have created many lacerations in the tradition (CARPITELLA, 1974: 87).

Carpitella's study found a relation between the use of the ancient style and the fact that these places have not developed and modernized at the same pace as the rest of the country in the twentieth century. In fact, because Sicily is geographically distant from most European countries, its folk culture was not influenced as much as the northern part of Italy. Perhaps the powerful presence of ancient style in Sicilian folk music is one of the reasons that lead Berio to mention "…I hope to contribute to bring out a deeper interest in Sicilian folk music, that, along with the Sardinian it is surely the richest, the most complex and incandescent of our Mediterranean culture."[7]

4. THE SICILIAN FOLK SONGS USED IN *NATURALE*

There are some common elements that characterize the music-making in Southern Italy; some of these features are: predominance of solo song, melody oriented (as opposed to harmony oriented), a tense high-pitched voice singing style, frequent melismas, a modal system, predominance of eleven-syllable textual meter, and freedom of rhythms. The Sicilian creates his music spontaneously and instinctively. Usually, the process of combining melody and text is not planned out, as described by Nino Pirrotta:

> …the relationship between the verbal and musical text and the processes of production and performance… is based on creative actions that make an impromptu union of text and music, using a 'way of singing' specific to a social group or geographical zone, or both, whose realization is based on principles shared by the whole community (PIRROTTA).

This "way of singing" is improvisatory and can be applied to a wide variety of texts, not specific to a single song genre. Tiby (1957) explains in his introductory study of *Corpus*, that he was faced with a problem when he set out to classify and organize the folk song repertoire collected by Favara. In most

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[7] Luciano Berio, composer's note on *Naturale*, http://www.lucianoberio.org/en/node/1396

of the songs, there is no clear division of purpose between text and melody. Because of this "way of singing," it is possible to find the same melodies, or its variants, with texts of love or texts of disdain and threat. He consulted Pitrè's collection and realized the division of the songs was according to the content of the text, for example: beauty of woman, desire, hope, etc. That division presents a problem when you consider that, because of the freedom from the "forms," the same melodies and some variants were applied to completely different poetic texts. Having that in mind, his decision was to create a large and most important category called "Lyrical Songs," which in fact considers the poetic content independent from the melodic structure. Other classifications found in Corpus are: Stories, Lullabies, Repiti, Songs of the Sea, Religious Songs, Games and Nursery Rhymes, Dancing Songs, Instrumental Music, Abbanniatine, Drum Calls and Other Musical Means.

Berio had both *Corpus* and Favara´s arrangement with piano part of the songs (*Canti*) at hand for composing *Voci* and *Naturale*. He used them at different times: certainly, he used *Corpus* for the instrumental dances, and *abbagnatas*, which are not included in the harmonized edition. Of the seventeen songs he used in *Voci*, only twelve were transferred to *Naturale*. He chose a wide variety of songs to elaborate his portrayal of Sicilian folk music.

Lyrical Songs	*A la Marsalisa* (*Voci* only) *A la Muntagnisa* (Identified by the author) *Nota di Monte Erice* (*Voci* only)
Songs of the Sea	*A la Sciacchitana* (two, very similar to one another) *Canto dei Pescatori di Corallo* *Cialoma quando s'issa la vela* (*Voci* only)
Working Songs (land)	*Tunazione de li Catitari*
Religious Songs	*Ladata* from Riesi *Lamintanzi* from Caltanissetta (*Voci* only)
Repitu	*Chiantu* (Identified by the author)
Instrumental Songs	*La Scala* *LuViddanu*
Ninna Nanna	*Ninna Nanna* from Petralia Soprana *Ninna Nanna* from Carini
Dancing Song	*Tubbiana* *Ballettu di ciaramedda* (*Voci* only)
Abbagnata	*Persichi*

Table 1 – Sicilian folk songs used in *Naturale and Voci*

Along with the songs in the table above, the seven voice recordings used in *Naturale's* score are *abbagnatas*, as Berio (1990) himself described:

> The original texts used in *Naturale* are Sicilian songs commented by the voice of Celano, maybe the last true Sicilian storyteller, whom I had the privilege and luck to meet (and record) in Palermo in the summer of 1968… Celano's voice inserts itself in the viola's instrumental path singing *abbagnatas* (street vendor cries) of rare intensity.

This traditional form of expression is named in different ways: in *Corpus* they are classified as *abbanniatine*[8], and it is also common to see *abbanniata*. These particular cries of street vendors are typical from Palermo, Sicily's capital, but also found in other localities as well. They can also be considered songs, usually with short melodies, very imaginative, and full of metaphors. The rhythmic division of these cries is absolutely free; it is subject only to the accents of the words and phrases. Usually the metric consists of two short phrases, but there are some rare examples that are longer, using ABA or ABAB forms. They are used to call the attention of the customer and sometimes to spread news, but with modern times, during the twentieth century, they started to lose ground to advertising and big stores. Sadly, nowadays the *abbagnata* have become a series of "short shouts" without much musical content. It is rare these days to hear even one *abbagnata* with the many flourishes and artistry as a century ago.

Here, in one example from a strawberry vendor found in *Corpus*, (TIBY 1957: 7) calls attention to the softness of this melody: "Happy is the Land in which the artistry of its humble son, knows how to express so sweetly, in order to make a living."[9]

Figure 2: *Corpus di Musiche Popolari Siciliane*, *Abbagnata*.

Some of the street markets in Palermo have been active for centuries. Among them, the most famous are: Vucciria (which means confusion), Ballaro and Lattarini. The street markets are usually crowded with people, especially because the streets of the Palermo are narrow, so in order to call attention the vendor sings, praising his product. This way, following the sound through the crowd, the customer has an idea in which direction to go for the vendor he or she is looking for (i.e.,olives, fish,

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[8] I could not find an official way of writing this name in any Italian dictionary, so for this study, I am going to keep it as Berio uses, which is *abbagnata*.
[9] Translated by the author

meat and so on). As Pitrè said: "Some of these abbanniatore's voices are hard to understand. These abbanniatas are like riddles with their double meanings, nicknames, poetic and figurative expressions and truncated words" (as quoted in TIBY, 1957: 96).

In the seven *abbagnatas* used for *Naturale*, Berio did not seem to have developed on the meaning of their words, although it is still interesting to find amusement in many of those aphorisms. Some use metaphors, like: "Berries recreate your heart and at this time (of the day) refresh you." Others have jokes or double entendre as he says: "you are sweet now," (as in, you ate the blueberries and became sweet). Sometimes they use aphorisms: "There is no table without a plate of olives."[10]

5. THE TWO SONGS

One of the results of this research was the unveiling of two songs that Berio used from *Corpus* but did not mention in the score or in any later document, neither in Vendrasco´s article. This was possible by crossing the bibliographic information gathered with clues from my interview with Aldo Bennici, violist and personal friend with Berio. These two songs appear one after the other at the rehearsal letter K. This section is the dramatic center of the entire work, where death definitely makes its presence. The range of the expression pallet goes from the mournful and inconsolable to the weeping and suffering. It is the section with most fortissimo markings in the piece and perhaps the longest one; therefore, it can be divided in two parts. There is no indication in the score about any folk song source for this section's first and second parts. By following clues in Bennici's interview, I found in *Corpus*, the song which inspired Berio's elaboration on this section's first part.

> Yes, indeed, they are called *repitu*, they are mournful expressions. …this motive has a tragic meaning, and there is no indication of it in the score. In Sicily, like in ancient Greece, up until the beginning of the twentieth century, they used to have the *prefiche*[11]. The *prefiche* were women who cried for a fee at funerals. For example, this is a song they would often sing: *fiiiigliu* (son), *figliu meu* (my son) *garofano mio* (my flower). [Bennici sang several times two notes, matching the two syllables of *figliu*, with a falling interval of 4th and also 3rd, the first note was fading away and there was almost no energy in the breath when the second note was sung]. After this the *prefiche* began to cry, then all the commotion would start. That's how you do this motive. It represents death. You will find this figure later on in the score; he uses it in another way, as a lament (PIERMARTIRI, 2013: 102).

The mournful songs of the *Corpus* were therefore compared intervalically with the first part of section K. This led to the identification of the first song as Chiantu (n.569), a mourning song (*repitu*) which Favara transcribed from the singing of Antonina Vario from the town of Erice, also known as

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[10] Author´s translation

[11] *Prefiche* is also mentioned and explained by Salomone-Marino in *Customs and Habits of the Sicilian Peasants* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981) p. 208.

"goldfinch", born in 1826.

Figure 3: *Corpus di Musiche Popolari Siciliane,* n.569, *Chiantu.*

The title of the song, *Chiantu*, meaning "cry," is already evocative of its content. At the top of the song there is an indication, "*Cu cori attiratu,*" which means "with a broken heart, in pieces," setting the emotional state on how this is sung. Here is the translation of the compelling text:

> Son, breath of mine! Son, my carnation!
> How did you leave me, breath of mine!
> How am I going to do, breath of mine!
> Breath of mine, breath of mine, breath of mine!
> Breath of mine, oh breath of mine! Breath of mine, oh breath of mine![12]

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[12] Author's translation

At the fourth system the emotional state changes where it reads, "*Comu fussi* chi *calma,*" indicating to sings as someone that is calming down. But that state does not last long. The last system is the dramatic peak of this song, with the indication "*Aisa di novu*" the singer indicates to raise the voice again. Reaching the highest pitches in the song, this last line it is supposed to be sung with heart-rending cries![13]

In the note at the bottom of the song's page, Favara transcribes the singer's moving testimony: "The use of weeping still exists. The heart vents, crying also the brain. How can you not raise your voice? It is the actual urge from nature that moves it. Funeral music was created after a woman's weeping."[14]

Perhaps in this vivid description of how these mothers and women live this heartbreaking moment, we can find the inspiration behind this work. The name *Naturale* could have been chosen to illustrate the "actual urge from nature" that moves the folk expressions in this work.

Through an intervallic comparison it is possible to conclude that *Chiantu* and the first part of Section K are directly related (see 3rd and 4th systems of *Naturale´s* page 9 at figure 4). Berio elaborates on the song's intervals (mostly in F minor) and intertwines it with figures, some of them quoting elements from his previous works. He uses left-hand pizzicato (from *Naturale's* Section O), pizzicato bariolage, two finger pizzicatos, four string tremolos (from *Sequenza VI*), and repeated notes (from *Sequenza VIII*).

Figure 4: Berio's Transcription of *Chiantu* (BERIO, 1985: 9)

Note how the song's second system starts at the fortissimo, and the pizzicato effects that precede it, provide a poignant mood. The percussion contributes to that effect by playing eight notes on the rototoms with wood mallets.

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[13] The indication "*Grida strazianti*" is in Italian and probably from Favara. The three previous ones are in Sicilian; I believe they are from Antonina Vario, the singer.
[14] Author´s translation

In *Naturale* the very first note in this section is a F#, different from *Voci* and the original song that start with F. Two explanations are viable for the disparity in this important note in the scheme. It is either because of a misprint (which a fair amount is found in the piece), or Berio wanted it that way to match the key of the preceding recording of the *abbagnata*, which in this case was in D major.

In *Chiantu's* fourth system there is an important motive that will permeate *Naturale* until the end (Ab-Ab-F, repeated three times). I am labeling it the "mourning motive" after Bennici's comment:

> There's always this kind of declamation, as in ancient Greece, these women stay around the coffin and say: "You were so beautiful!" Realize that when you die you are always remembered as a better person than what you are. They could also say: "You that smelled like carnations, you had a mouth like this or like that." Then, it could get excited and become more intimate "you were so good that…" there were no limits. And in all, there is always what mothers say: "*ciatu meu*" my breath, "core meu" my heart…In this rhythm there are two notes and the pain of humanity (PIERMARTIRI, 2013: 103).

Berio did not develop it much in *Voci*, but in *Naturale* it becomes a connecting motive, almost like a leitmotif. It appears several times in the first part of this section, also before and during the last of the seven recordings of *abbagnata*, and as an interruption of the final and last song, *Ninna Nanna di Carini*.
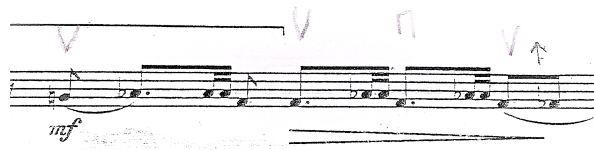

Figure 5: Mourning Motive (BERIO, 1985: 9)

Bennici was very emphatic when talking about these notes: "Never play them separate and placed. Remember we are talking about a (deceased) son, play it without hope and strength."

Figure 6: Section K Second Part (BERIO: 1985, 10)

Continuing, after the first song there is a brief bridge in which the viola plays double-stops with the open G string, preparing for the second part of this section. The percussion returns after a brief *tacet*, this time playing a written-out part with 16th notes in accelerando, adding a sense of instability to the ambiance. At this point the viola starts the second thematic zone in this section: a long passage in pizzicato in a Baroque -like bariolage with the open A string. This passage reminds Bach's *Chaconne*

from his *Partita II*, which in its turn inspired Berio to compose his *Sequenza VIII* for violin.

The pitch center here is D, and it seems to be in Aeolian mode with some altered intervals (more specifically, raised 7th and lowered 9th). These intervals bring a Middle-eastern flavor to the melody, enhancing its expressivity. This is, in fact, another folk song, according to Bennici: "Here (pizzicato sequence before L), it is a simple thing, as well. It is another version of a simple song, also an *abbagnata*, of one that sells" (PIERMARTIRI, 2013: 104). This unknown *abbagnata* was not found among those present in *Corpus*, although it is possible to find several lyrical songs that are built with the same intervals and have similar phrase shape. The song that resembles it the most is *A la Muntagnisa*, *Corpus* n. 38. The key is in E, one step above from the melody in *Naturale*.

Figure 7: *Corpus di Musiche Popolari Siciliane* n. 38, *A La Muntagnisa*

Other songs in *Corpus* with similar traits are numbers: 34, 40, 41, 54, 210, 213, 355, and the *abbagnatas* number 881 and 900. There should not be exclude the hypothesis of Berio adapting these intervals to create a line that would better suit his intents. Once this pizzicato melody arrives to its end, a confirmation of the pitch center D is heard in the continuous repetition of D and A open strings. One last pizzicato chord in *sforzandissimo* defines the end of the section. The next sound to be heard is Celano's crude voice in the recording.

Berio also elaborated on elements he extracted from these songs, and has the viola play it as if "commenting" the actual story. These comments are mostly atonal, rhythmically irregular, and at times abrupt and violent. They create a duality with the simplicity of the songs that can also be seen as ancient versus modern. He comments about his search to unify these two musical worlds:

> I'm not a ethnomusicologist, just a pragmatic egoist: so I tend to be interested only in those folk techniques and means of expression that I can in one way or other assimilate without a stylistic break, and that allow me to make a few steps forward in the search for a unity underlying musical worlds that are apparently alien to one another (Berio as quoted in OSMOND-SMITH, 1985: 106).

He did not allow a stylistic break to happen in this story told by the viola. The only song that was actually manipulated to an extreme was *Chiantu*, in Section K. It was so much inserted into Berio's own material that previous researchers were not able to identify it. Thanks to clues in Bennici's interview, this song is coming to light. This intense and extreme cry of a woman is so powerful that we can suppose her testimony ("How can you not raise your voice? It is the actual urge from nature that moves it.")[15] might have had an influence in Berio's choosing the name *Naturale*. This testimony is the only place in this entire study that the word nature (or natural) has appeared. The "urge from nature" mentioned above may represent the vital energy behind the expression of folk music, and this is what attracts and inspires Berio to use this music. In bringing into being this powerful composition of folk music within the greater complexities of an art music setting, he was certainly successful in creating a deeply moving and personal piece, which will mean something slightly different to everyone who has the good fortune to study and play this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[15] Antonina Vario (as quoted by Favara in TIBY, 1957: 326)

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