

[Working Title:] Music for Great Exhibitions in Post-Unification Italy (1861-1911)

Alberto Napoli

In *fin-de-siècle* Europe, great exhibitions of industry and arts represented one of the most characteristic media through which national communities represented themselves on the international stage, and music played a central role in shaping such representations. On one hand, music was considered as a cultural good to be traded, displayed and classified, and on the other it was an irreplaceable complement to the celebrations, contributing to the festive character of the space and time of the fairs.

The first fifty years of the Italian nation-state constitute a remarkable study case in order to understand the functions of music in the process of locating national identities. Starting from 1861, the year of the country's formal unification, Italian cities hosted many national, international and local exhibitions, culminating in Turin in 1911 with the first proper world's fair ever held in Italy. Due to the characteristic fragmentation of a nation resulting from the assembly of former states, exhibitions in Italy are critical to the definition of clear identity borders, both internally – where nationalist narratives were intertwined with regionalisms – and in comparison with foreign, more powerful empires.

The study of these events also allows to understand how music, far from being a mere tool in the interest of political power, also had a liberating function and creatively designed, commented on, and questioned the very medium of the exhibition as a practice to entertain diplomatic relationships, to stereotype peoples, and to sample cultures.