Cosmopolitan Provincialities Exhibition Culture and Music in Italy after the Unification (1861-1911)

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Great Exhibitions — A Transnational Medium

Great exhibitions of industry and arts ('Expo') became internationally popular since the mid-nineteenth century. They fostered specific professionals a designated public participating in an 'exhibition culture'.

Italian Exhibitions — Outposts of Provincialism?

The inherent fragmentation of the Italian nation-state was reflected in the creation of many exhibitions in different cities. They were not equal in relevance and scope, and usually failed in their cosmopolitan aspirations due the limited financial and cultural resources available.

Exhibitions triggered competition among different nations, producing apparently conflicting consequences:

- Standardization. Each community wanted to meet the expectations of the global visitors of the fairs;
- Distinction. In an age of growing nationalism, each community struggled to highlight the characteristics that united its members and separated them from other national identities.

Regional Exhibitions	National Exhibitions	International Exhibitions
 Bologna 1888 Brescia 1904 Perugia 1907 	 Firenze 1861 Milano 1871 Milano 1881 Torino 1884 Palermo 1891 Torino 1898 	 Genova 1892 Venezia 1895 Torino 1902 Milano 1906 Torino 1911

Functions of Music

Music was used to give shape to these events, and served four main, often overlapping functions:





Celebration

Music was created, exhibited and performed to celebrate virtues and values of the hosting city and community.



Far from being a mere tool serving top-down political interests, music could also be used to question the medium of the exhibition itself.

Research Questions

- How did localism and regionalism interplay with the nationalist agenda of the main exhibitions in the newborn Italian nation-state?

Participation

Through the organization of choirs and marching band competitions, music encouraged the community's engagement in the celebrations.



As a performing art, music was used to amuse the visitors, participating also in the merchandising of souvenirs from the exhibitions.

Methodology and Sources

- A comparative approach to a multitude of musical events, covering fifty years of exhibitions.
- A study of the different layers underlying the exhibitions, in order to escape broad-stroke nationalist narratives that can still permeate current scholarship.

- How did exhibition culture impact the musical life in Italian cities at the end of the nineteenth century?
- What can music tell us about the development of international tourism and other cultural and economic networks on the occasion of great exhibitions?
- Can we great exhibitions as a whole through the lens of 'performance'? How can the study of musical events contribute to this epistemological tool?
- A focus on the occasional publications produced during the exhibitions and on musical practices that didn't necessarily take place in the theatre and the concert hall.
- A research based both on administration documents in private and state archives, and on the chronicles and debates appeared on local and national periodicals.

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