

Crossing the Sea of Song: Politics of Mediterranean Music between Israel and Italy

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Example 1. Noa (Achinoam Nini) performs *Beautiful That Way*, the lead song in Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* (1997), accompanied by the composer, Nicola Piovani, and Israeli musicians Gil Dor and Zohar Fresko, at Rome's Coliseum (2005). In this live broadcast for Italian National Television (RAI Tre), the song, which was composed for a controversial motion picture based on the Holocaust, was performed only a few steps away from a central site in the construction of Jewish historical memory: the Arch of Titus, on which Jewish slaves, captured during the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE, are depicted along with the treasures looted from the Temple. Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXHuwuwvjgM> (accessed 15 March 2008).

It is commonly observed that Italy and Israel represent two Mediterranean countries that share much more than just a close proximity in the alphabetical list of nations. Early twentieth-century Italy was one of the main points of passage for European Jews on their way to Mandatory Palestine: it acted as a launching pad for *'aliyah bet* (the Jewish clandestine immigration into Mandatory Palestine), as well as a training ground for several Zionist groups.¹ The year 1948 was foundational for both countries: the Constitution of the Italian Republic was approved on 2 June 1948, two weeks after Israel became a State. Sixty years later, the political systems of both Israel and Italy have grown to be strikingly similar, in their unabashed fragmentation between tiny conflicting political parties, widespread political corruption, and general lack of governability. A recent issue of the British weekly, *The Economist* (3 April 2008), made the following statements about the two countries:

Virtually every social group has its own political party, if not several, [and] as a result all governments are unstable multi-party coalitions subject to perverse incentives that have more to do with politicians' careers than with the wishes of the electorate at large. (p. 17)

¹ For an analysis of this phenomenon beyond the presentation of anecdotal or biographical evidence see, for instance, Dina Porat. "One Side of a Jewish Triangle in Italy: The Encounter of Italian Jews with Holocaust Survivors and with Hebrew Soldiers and Zionist representatives in Italy, 1944-1946. In *Italia Judaica: Gli ebrei nell'Italia unita, 1870-1945. Atti del IV Convegno internazionale. (Siena, Giugno 1989)*, 487-513. Roma: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1993.

[The country's] voting system did lead to a parliament in which a plethora of parties was represented [...] in a [...] government with a carpaccio-thin majority [which] predictably carried out few reforms. (p. 15)

If it weren't for the references to *carpaccio*, it would be difficult to know which of the two countries each statement describes. And yet, similarities do not stop at politics. Across the banks of the Mediterranean, parallels between Italy and Israel include social habits, ranging from the dominant role of religion in society to a wild nightlife scene in the coastal regions, and a shared predilection for (or obsession with) mobile phones. Considering even this short list of similarities, it comes as no surprise that they are particularly visible in the realm of popular culture, and especially in how Italian popular culture is represented by its Israeli counterpart.

The similarities between the popular cultures of the modern states of Israel and Italy fall into the general debate on the meaning of the "Mediterranean" as a cultural space, and, specifically, on its role within the cultures of the Jews. Seen in this global perspective, the representation of Italian popular culture in Israel suggests how anthropological traits may act as unifiers across geopolitical barriers. In this context, the role of music has a particular relevance. As recent scholarship has shown, popular music is a powerful indicator of global cultural features.² Indeed, the nuances of the cultural proximity between Israel and Italy are reflected in the realm of popular music. Since the early days of the State of Israel, Italian popular music has been a constant presence, as an imported product, with the voices of leading Italian singers populating the radio waves, and thus the lives, of Israelis as a source of inspiration and

² For a comprehensive approach, see Goffredo Plastino (Ed.), *Mediterranean Mosaic: Popular Music and Global Sounds*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003; and David Cooper and Kevin Dawe (Eds.), *The Mediterranean in Music: Critical Perspectives, Common Concerns, Cultural Differences*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press 2005. On the Jewish musical dimension, see Philip Bohlman, "La riscoperta del Mediterraneo nella musica ebraica: Il discorso dell' 'altro' nell'etnomusicologia dell'Europa." In *Antropologia della musica e culture mediterranee*, ed. Tullia Magrini, 107-124. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993; and "The Shechinah, or the Feminine Sacred in the Musics of the Jewish Mediterranean," *M&A. Journal of Musical Anthropology in the Mediterranean* 3 (1998); Edwin Seroussi, "'Mediterraneanism' in Israeli Music: An Idea and its Permutations," *M&A. Journal of Musical Anthropology in the Mediterranean* 7 (2002) (<http://www.levi.provincia.venezia.it/ma/index.htm>); and "Livorno: A Crossroads in the History of Sephardic Religious Music." In *The Mediterranean and the Jews. Society, Culture and Economy in Early Modern Times*, ed. Elliot Horowitz and Moises Orfali, 131-154. Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002; on Israel see Yaacov Shavit, "The Mediterranean World and 'Mediterraneanism': The Origins, Meaning and Application of a Geo-Cultural Notion in Israel," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 3.2 (1988): 96-117.

adaptation. Many Italian popular songs have been adapted to Hebrew lyrics and the Italian model was used for the creation of Israel's own musical institutions, especially via the absorption of the "music festival" as a leading modality of establishing and spreading musical culture by State-controlled institutions.

Taking a closer look at the musical relationship between Italy and Israel may thus do more than simply clarify how these two countries communicated through popular culture — even at times when their political relationship was not particularly vibrant — and instead contribute to highlighting the role of popular and art music within a larger narrative about national identity and cultural coexistence across the Mediterranean.

An important marker of the complex musical relations between Italy and Israel is the ongoing phenomenon of the adaptation of Italian themes into the soundscape of Israeli popular songs, especially between the late 1960s and the mid-1990s. This phenomenon is a recurrent feature in Israeli commercial recordings and television broadcasts from these periods. In Italian terms, this chronological spectrum includes a host of social and political events that go from the youth revolt of 1968 through political terrorism, and the achievement of a globalized economic prosperity — a process of increasing solidification of Italy's national status within Europe and the Mediterranean. In Israeli terms, these decades are framed by the Six-Day War and the Oslo Accords — a process in which Israel sought to increasingly strengthen its role vis-à-vis the European Union.

The analysis of how Italian popular music is featured within the Israeli soundscape touches on a number of factors. The inclusion of Italian materials in Israeli popular song involves musical themes and song arrangements, but also cultural traits and stage characterizations. It also entails the adaptation of an all-Italian phenomenon, the popular song contest, into Israeli public culture. Regev and Seroussi's recent study on Israeli popular music³ frequently points out how Italian popular music became a source of musical inspiration for Israeli artists and producers as early as the 1950s, when the ballads and vocal style of Italian crooners were replicated in Israel. More importantly, in the following decade, Italy provided Israel with an efficient model of the "national-popular" use of music, embodied in the "Festival della Canzone Italiana" ("Festival of Italian Song") commonly known as

³ Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Festival di San Remo. This national song contest, which opened in the coastal town of San Remo in 1951 and is screened by the Italian National Broadcasting Company (RAI) to this day, quickly became an important musical venue both at home and abroad. By showcasing entry-level performers alongside more seasoned ones, by emphasizing the role of the audience as a decisive force in controlling the outcomes of the musical “competition” among them (eventually by casting votes from home, via the telephone or phone text messages), and by openly showcasing the role of the State (by its proxy, RAI) as a producer of culture and entertainment, the San Remo Festival indeed represented an unbeatable cultural formula. By bringing the “people” and the national institutions together in a festive atmosphere, San Remo contributed to the creation of a commonly shared national cultural identity that did not evoke the recent ghost of Fascism. It also proved itself as a successful business model, and, for all these reasons, was adapted abroad, eventually inspiring a similar European song competition, which came to be known as Eurovision.

In Israel, the San Remo Festival became the organizational template for the *festival ha-zemer ha-yisraeli* (“Festival of Israeli Song”), organized by the Israeli Broadcasting Authority from 1960 on.⁴ The Israeli festival, in turn, became a model for other Israeli musical events, and an important cultural and media bridge with Europe. From 1978, it became the selecting ground for the Israeli songs participating in the Eurovision song contest. This parallel, which has more to do with the management and marketing of popular music than with musical production, is indicative of a trend that seems to reflect the musical relations between Israel and Italy: by looking at a not-too-distant Mediterranean country, the Israeli music scene may have sought out the “ingredients” that made it possible for Israeli popular music to become an active player on the European scene.

As Regev and Seroussi amply document in their study, the Israeli music industry paid close attention to all major international music scenes in Europe and the United States, and the same holds true for Italy. The relevance of Italian popular music is demonstrated by a handful of well-known songs performed by leading Israeli

⁴ Among the similarities between the Italian and Israeli competitions were the “Festival Rules,” which included, in the early versions of both festivals, the performance of the same song by two different competing singers. Regev and Seroussi see this as an emphasis on the musical material over the performers. See also Talilah Eliram, *Bo, shir ‘ivri’. Shirei ’eretz yisra’el. Hebetim muzikalayim ve-hevratayim*. Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 2006.

musicians, which merit closer study. In what follows, we will explore this process of cultural borrowing through the examination of four popular iconic Israeli songs that, in one way or another, derive from Italian popular music of the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

Example 2a. Arik Einstein, *Amru lo* (“They Told Him,” 1993).

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAaEYhYbEM4> (accessed 15 March 2008).

A paramount example of cultural adaptation comes in the form of the melody of a famous Italian hit, *Azzuro* (“Azure” 1968; lyrics by Vito Pallavicini, music by Paolo Conte), which outlived its era (late-1960s) and resurfaced in Israel a quarter of a century later, serving as the setting for the socially engaged lyrics (written by Eli Mohar) of Arik Einstein’s song *Amru lo* (“They Told Him,” 1993) — a multi-layered commentary on Israeli ethics, viewed through oblique references to soccer:

<p>zehu sipur atzuv ‘al yeled <u>a</u>har kakh na‘ar hayom kvar ish hu lo sham’a kolam shel eleh shehizkhiru hu nishar adish hu lo sham’a mah sheamru lo lakhen hayom hu be’esek bish</p>	<p>This is the sad story of a boy who became a young man and today is already an adult He didn’t pay attention to those who warned him and remained indifferent He didn’t hear what they told him and now he’s in bad shape</p>
<p>Amru lo sheha<u>h</u>ayim zeh lo mischaq vequntzim poh ein amru lo shehu mukhrakh lihiyot <u>h</u>azaq ki oy lo lamisqen Amru lo sheyihyeh kvar ma’asi ramzu lo sheyitbager az hu lo lamad shum lekakh ve’ein lo sekhel gam lehitz’taer</p>	<p>They told him that life isn’t a game and there are no “shortcuts” They told him that he must be strong and too bad for the weak They told him he has be realistic and suggested he grow up And so he didn’t learn about morals and now he doesn’t have enough brains even to feel sorry</p>
<p>[...]</p>	<p>[...]</p>
<p>Gam kshehalakh lekaduregel hu lo <u>h</u>ipes lo rak nitzahon uvehitlahavut shel egel viter al sheket uvitahon ve’ad hayom hu im hadegel ve’im hatzev’a ha’lo nakhon</p>	<p>Even at the soccer games he didn’t just want victory And with the enthusiasm of a calf He gave away his tranquility and security And he still cheers for the wrong [team] flag and color.</p>
<p>Amru lo sheha<u>h</u>ultzah ha’adumah zot lo metzi’ah amru lo she’hu nikhnas po letzarah ve’ein yetzi’ah [...]</p>	<p>They told him that the red shirt is not a keeper They told him that he is only looking for trouble and there is no way out. [...]</p>

Example 2b. Adriano Celentano, *Azzurro* (1968).

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U2qgTvfpgs> (accessed 15 March 2008).

What is particularly interesting about this Israeli adaptation, which concerns both the music itself and its televised performance by Einstein, is that it is informed by at least two Italian versions of the song. While the arrangement of Einstein's version is a carbon copy of the first Italian version of *Azzurro*, initially popularized by Adriano Celentano (an ex-crooner turned rock and pop superstar, and, in later years, TV "evangelist"), the costumes and setting of Einstein's music video are instead inspired by the charismatic stage persona of the original author of the song, Paolo Conte. Conte, a lawyer-turned-intellectual-liberal-pop-star-icon, is a singer and songwriter who, from the late 1980s, has been drawing large crowds throughout Europe, and especially France.

Example 2c. Paolo Conte, *Azzurro* (2003).

Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NJ_ifT4y0Q (accessed 5 January 2010).

The fact that the original version of *Azzurro* and Conte's unique style are both included in Einstein's song indicate how the entire span of this song's history, from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, was the object of Israeli adaptation. This in turn suggests that Israeli songwriters and producers carefully screened Italian musical productions with continuous interest for at least two decades. Moreover, while the earlier version of the song (by Celentano) had very popular connotations within the Italian culture, and was more easily accessible to non-Italian musicians due to aggressive marketing tactics, its reprisal by Conte is the product of a more elitist segment of Italy's popular culture. The references to Conte's persona in Einstein's staging thus seem to imply a deeper interest in Italy's musical culture, and a more profound level of observation than might have been suggested by the mere reproduction of Celentano's version.

A similar case of adaptation — focusing on music and arrangement rather than lyrics — and an indicator of how fast non-Israeli songs could be adapted into the Israeli culture, is represented by Tzipi Shavit's comedy hit, *Kulam halkhu ledjambo* ("They All Went to Djambo," 1971).

Example 3a. Tzipi Shavit, *Kulam halkhu ledjambo* (1971).

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB0tv-NmZjk> (accessed 15 March 2008).

Shavit's stage presentation, a made-for-TV satirical cabaret of sorts, is a parody of a song that "haunted" the childhood of virtually all Italians born in the late 1960s, *Volevo un gatto nero* ("I Wanted a Black Cat"), which was presented by the then three-year-old Cristina D'Avena at the 1970 children's song festival, "Lo zecchino d'oro" ("The Golden Coin"). The Italian festival, a televised contest created in 1959, has been hosted since its inception by the charismatic (so to speak) Mago Zurlì (Cino Tortorella) on National Television (RAI), and represents a "children's San Remo Festival" with strong religious overtones. In 1969, "Lo zecchino d'oro" was broadcast on Eurovision for the first time. In 2008, the program, which since 1963 has been performed by the children's choir of the Antoniano Institute of Bologna (a charitable institution owned and run by Franciscan friars), received a special mention by UNESCO.⁵ Not unlike Tzipi Shavit, Cristina D'Avena (the daughter of an immigrant working-class family from southern Italy, at a time when the north-south divide was particularly dramatic), went on to become Italy's prime performer of children pop music, and is the undisputed lead voice of the soundtrack of all major TV "cartoon" programs (especially Japanese animated movies for children). Television, and particularly the Eurovision network, was most likely the source that presented the Israeli comedienne with this song, making it the object of a parody based on the "performance style" and "stage attire" of the original performer, a three-year-old Italian girl.

Example 3b. Cristina D'Avena and the "Antoniano" children's choir, *Volevo un gatto nero* (1970). Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzmxHQp3MEA> (accessed 15 March 2008).

A different modality in the adaptation of Italian motifs into Israeli popular music is represented by Doron Mazar's 1984 hit, *Ani chozer habaytah* ("I'm Returning Home," which is based on Toto Cotugno's 1983 song, *L'italiano*, originally presented at the San Remo Festival. In this instance, the lyrics also play a role in the process, and show a degree of equivalence between the two songs. The original Italian version, aptly entitled "The Italian," presented a comprehensive list of Italian idiosyncrasies and (positive) stereotypes, from the love of food and beautiful women to the cult of car stereos and the Virgin Mary. The song also had explicit political references,

⁵As a cultural program that fosters world peace. The acknowledgment, which was made public on 4 April 2008, is unique among television programs. <http://www.antoniano.it/index.php?id=71>

including allusions to Sandro Pertini (1894-1990), a former opponent of Mussolini's regime and a leader of the Partisan war of 1943-43, who served as the President of the Italian Republic in 1978-85 ("un partigiano come presidente," or "a freedom fighter as President [of the Republic]), and an opponent of political terrorism, which was then at its peak ("Buon giorno Italia che non si spaventa," or "Good morning, fearless Italy").

Example 4a. Toto Cotugno sings *L'italiano* at the San Remo Song Festival (1983).
Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRDVQT_MT-o (accessed 15 March 2008).

The subtext of the Israeli counterpart to this Italian song, entitled "I Am Coming Home," was also political and existential. Under the cover of what Regev and Seroussi would define as a "globalized" love song, complete with synthesizer arrangements and repetitive electronic drum beats, the lyrics of *Ani hozer habaytah* portrayed a *yored*, an Israeli who had left his homeland, returning home. Thus, the globalized sound opens the way for what I would call a post-Zionist repertoire, highlighted by the lyrics. The song, which appeared in the years immediately following Operation "Peace of the Galilee," or the First Lebanon War, seemingly presented a conflicted relationship with the Israeli homeland as the (distant) object of (distant) love.

Example 4a. Doron Mazar, *Ani hozer habaytah* (1984).
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9ndh1Y9Jow> (accessed 5 January 2010).

In listening to both songs, in watching their performances on television, and in considering their lyrics, it is clear that the process of adaptation in this case was all encompassing. The Israeli version inherited the music, the performer's stage persona (or "look"), and a similar content-area, i.e. national-popular culture as a subject of representation and performance.⁶ This semantic overlapping is certainly not casual, as the iconic reference to the guitar, which is mentioned in the refrain of each song (although onstage it was held only by the Italian performer), may clarify:

⁶ I am intentionally adopting here Antonio Gramsci's notion of *nazionale-popolare* culture, as formulated in his *Prison Notebooks* (especially in Notebook 1), to underscore the conscious politicization of the popular musical/cultural discourse by its creators; for an overview of Gramsci's theory of literature, see William Q. Boelhower, "Antonio Gramsci's Sociology of Literature," *Contemporary Literature (Marxism and the Crisis of the World)* 22.4 (Autumn 1981): 574-599.

Lasciatemi cantare
 con la chitarra in mano
 Lasciatemi cantare
 una canzone piano piano
 Lasciatemi cantare
 perchè ne sono fiero
 Io sono un italiano
 un italiano vero

(Let me sing
 with a guitar in my hand
 Let me sing
 A song very softly
 Let me sing
 Since I am proud
 I am an Italian
 A true Italian)

ani hozer habaytah
 ani hozer elayikh
 ani hozer habaytah
 velashemesh be'enaykh
 ani hozer habaytah
 ani vehagitarah
 ani hozer habaytah
 vehaderekh 'od shara

(I return home
 I return to You
 I return home
 And to the sun in your eyes
 I return home
 [with my] guitar
 I return home
 And the road sings again)

In both versions, the guitar is the common “popular” element, while the “national” aspect is addressed in dramatically different ways in each version. In the Italian song, nationalism coincides with a call to freedom (of expression). In the Israeli one, it is instead manifested as a will (or a desire) to return to the homeland, a feminized object of love. It could thus be argued that this process of adaptation transformed this popular song into a “Song of the Land of Israel,” or SLI, as defined by Regev and Seroussi (56-60). I believe that it is precisely this transformation (and its reference to the Land, no matter how problematic) that in turn made it possible for the song to be adapted again, in a re-actualization of the *contrafactum* practice, by Rabbi Zion Vaqnin, who changed the lyrics into *ani hozer bitshuvah* (“I return in repentance”; see again Regev and Seroussi, p. 225), and incorporated it into the religious repertoire of *musiqah mizrahit* shortly after the release of the “original.”

A final example of this process of adaptation comes from Chava Alberstein’s hit song, *Had gadya*, a politically charged take on the popular Aramaic Passover Seder song, “One Kid.” The song, included in the album *London* (1989), sparked a bitter controversy in Israel, as it critically addressed government policies, especially those expressed by Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir in the course of the first *intifada*.⁷

Example 5a. Chava Alberstein, *Had gadya*, from the album *London* (1989).

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-dwR8s3i0c&feature=related> (accessed 5 January 2010).

⁷ See Scott Streiner, “Shooting and Crying: The Emergence of Protest in Israeli Popular Music,” *The European Legacy* 6:6 (2001): 771-792.

Although the album's notes define the melody of the song as "traditional," Alberstein's song is based on a catchy melody derived from the Italian popular music scene of the 1970s, and probably composed by Italian singer-songwriter Angelo Branduardi (born in 1950).

Example 5b. Angelo Branduardi, *Alla fiera dell'est* (1976).

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iP2gqdGf1qU> (accessed 15 March 2008).

Branduardi, who declared in an interview that the melody of this song blends "Mitteleuropean and Arabic" elements, set it to lyrics written by his wife, Luisa Zappa. The origins, or the authorship, of the melody remain obscure. Entitled *Alla fiera dell'est*, Branduardi's song was issued in 1976, and has since been a steady success in Italy and elsewhere.⁸ The lyrics of *Alla fiera dell'est* contain a narrative similar to that of the famous Passover song: a goat (or a mouse) is eaten by a cat (or wolf), which is in turn beaten with a stick, burnt by fire, etc. This narrative, often set to song, is part of a traditional co-territorial repertoire shared among Jews and non-Jews in several Italian regions.⁹ Because of its close relationship to the Jewish versions, *Alla fiera dell'est* has since occasionally even been sung on Passover by Italian Jews. Similarly, a version by the Israeli *mizrahi* singer (of Turkish origin), Shlomi Shabat, was used by the Israeli cell phone company, [Pelefon, in a commercial aired during Passover](#).

This last piece of trivia, which I owe entirely to wikipedia.org, further underscores the passion for mobile phones shared by Italians and Israelis, and allows me to conclude this survey. In the television commercial, Shabat, whose pronunciation of the Italian lyrics of *Alla fiera dell'Est* is markedly Hispanic (possibly an involuntary tribute to Sephardic identity), accompanies a scene in which a mobile phone becomes the prized reward for retrieving the Passover *afikomen*. In this case, the process of adaptation has come full circle: in Shabat's interpretation, the "music of the other" has been identified as Jewish *tout-court*, without the mediation of the Hebraist approach fostered by Alberstein. The lyrics and the narrative make the

⁸ On the origins of Branduardi's melody, see Angelo Branduardi, *Canzoni*, ed. Giampiero Comolli, 113-114. Rome: LatoSide, 1979; and the website maintained by Michelangelo Gargiulo http://guide.dada.net/angelo_branduardi.

⁹ See *Italian Jewish Musical Traditions from the Leo Levi Collection*. In "Anthology of Musical Traditions in Israel," No. 14, The Jewish Music Research Centre at the Hebrew University – Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Jerusalem – Rome, CD AMTI 0102.

Italian popular song “Jewish” beyond any doubt, and its association with the national cultural symbol of global connectedness is only a step away.

Example 5c. Shlomi Shabat, *Alla fiera dell'est*.

Source: download from Youtube (15 March 2008); file currently unavailable online.

The musical (and video) examples presented thus far are the manifestation of several modes of cultural adaptation applied to musical materials across the Mediterranean.

These modes can be summarized according to four patterns:

- 1) *Observation* of a “foreign” culture, through the media;
- 2) *Assimilation* of specific traits, which include verbal and body language, music and cultural structures;
- 3) *Sharing* of common sensibilities beyond the linguistic divides;
- 4) *Incorporation* of the (musical) culture of the “other” as a native element.

These modalities of cultural adaptation show how the Mediterranean, as a geopolitical and cultural dimension, can be understood both as an aggregative dimension and as a barrier to conquer. According to this analytical approach, the case of the adaptation of musical and cultural elements originating from Italy into Israeli popular music indicates a widespread degree of openness toward another national culture, and the ability on the part of Israeli musicians and audiences to incorporate and accept non-Jewish elements. This also points toward a preference for cultural themes that can easily be adapted into a Jewish context (when they are available). But the presence of Italian traits in Israeli music can also be considered on a different plane, as is perhaps true of all cultural adaptations, which often represent a society’s collective desires, or ethos. If the adaptation of American rock by Israeli musicians in the 1960s and ’70s can be connected, as holds true for other Mediterranean countries (including Italy), with the youth’s aspiration to financial, social, and sexual independence, then Italian music may very well signify a different aspiration, that of crossing the Mediterranean and reaching Europe from the Middle East, at least through song (and the Eurovision). In this perspective, Italy, once a bridge for Europe’s Jews to reach the Land of Israel, can be seen as a portal for re-entry into the European sphere. Perhaps only further multidisciplinary investigation, which takes into account other cultural expressions, like film and literature, can substantiate the hypothesis that the adaptation of Italian popular music in Israeli song reflects the attempt, on the part of the Israeli cultural

establishment, to create a musical/cultural language that the “dominant other” — in this case Europe, via one of its more approachable variants, represented by the “Mediterranean” flavors of Italy’s music and cultural values — may come to understand and accept as a vital component of mainstream culture, and whether this attempt really reflects the aspirations of Israeli society at large.