

# Sociology of music and its cultural implications

**Interdisciplinary insights  
from theoretical debate  
and field work**

edited by Ilaria Riccioni,  
Paolo Somigli

Laboratorio Sociologico

Ricerca empirica  
ed intervento sociale

FRANCOANGELI

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# Contents

<b>A double perspective foreword, by <i>Paolo Somigli, Ilaria Riccioni</i></b>	p.	7
<b>Part I – Cultural diversity and social role of music</b>		
<b>The social role(s) of music in a bilingual context: Insights and hypotheses from field work in Alto Adige-South Tyrol, by <i>Ilaria Riccioni</i></b>	»	15
<b>Music in South Tyrol: Data and reflections at the end of a research project, by <i>Paolo Somigli</i></b>	»	39
<b>Meeting of cultures through music, by <i>Mariselda Tessarolo</i></b>	»	61
<b>Part II – Impact of music in social practices and construction of reality</b>		
<b>Music and young audiences in the 1970's: A debate revisited, by <i>Alessandro Carrera</i></b>	»	81
<b>The Doors, 1965-71: Towards a new aesthetic, ethical, social, and political perception of reality, by <i>Alberto Nones</i></b>	»	93
<b>Part III – Social implication in music teaching</b>		
<b>Impact of social changes on the development of teaching music in Croatia and Slovenia since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until today, by <i>Tomislav Košta</i></b>	»	113

<b>A socio-economic perspective of intercultural music teaching,</b> by <i>Paola Besutti, Maica Tassone</i>	p.	127
<b>Authors</b>	»	153



# *A double perspective foreword*

by *Paolo Somigli* and *Ilaria Riccioni*<sup>1</sup>

## **1. Music and society: the point of view of the musicologist**

This publication derives from the research project “Music culture and social function of music in South Tyrol”, which was carried out from 2011 to 2014 in the double perspective of musicology and sociology. It aimed to observe and analyze some aspects of the presence and of the role of music in the South Tyrolean society (for a description of the research project, see the two introductory chapters in this book and the literature there indicated).

The intersection between music and society, the possible reciprocal effects of the one on the other have historically stimulated a wide production of reflections, studies and researches which nowadays can be summarized as “sociology of music” (for an introduction to this research area, see Serravezza 1980; Sorce Keller 1996; de la Motte-Haber & Neuhoff 2007). Since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a tendency to cross over the disciplinary boundaries of musicology and sociology has been outlining a complex scientific field that encompasses both disciplines. Sociologists and musicologists have applied their perspectives and methodological tools in the analysis of the complicated relationship between these two elements, often stressing either one or the other term of the binomial “music” and “society”, one or the other phenomenon, according to their scientific training and their theoretical and disciplinary background.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the research on the relationships between music and society was enlarged and enriched through the introduction of concepts and theoretical tools derived not only from general sociology but also from the field of the “popular culture studies” (about this aspect see Shuker 2001: 1-

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<sup>1</sup> Paolo Somigli is the author of the first paragraph and Ilaria Riccioni is the author of the second.

25; a discussion in Somigli 2010: 13-19). This has happened in particular with the rise of the studies on “popular music” – an object very hard to define in which we nowadays comprehend soundtrack music, rock music, pop music etc.; The Doors and The Beatles; Michael Jackson and Justin Bieber etc.; and so on<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, and more in general, the introduction of “popular music” as a field of academic investigation has quickly opened the doors to new musical and musicological perspectives not only about sound, musical forms, stiles, but also about the functions of music in the society. Thus, topics such as the function of music activity and consumption among young people (discussed in Carrera’s chapter for the period from the Seventies), or controversial aspects such as the assumption of substances and their effects on music and art creation have become part of the scientific analysis and still today stimulate a great deal of research. Alberto Nones’ article about The Doors and their role and position in the cultural, musical and political life of the United States of America during the second half of the Sixties can be seen as an interesting example also of such a perspective.

New factors in present society, such as the global processes of migration, the frequent possibilities of meeting people from different countries and cultures, the world-wide diffusion of information through media and new media and, as a consequence, the increase of intercultural studies and researches, are highlighting new problems about the role of music in a multicultural society. These factors stimulate new themes, methods and perspectives in the research, too, which sociologist Mariselda Tessarolo addresses in her chapter. The new phenomena also affect the field of music education, presenting new questions and demanding specific pedagogical models (see for example the recent Reiners 2012). Paola Besutti and Maica Tassone’s chapter is a significant example of these tendencies. With the help of a relevant amount of data, graphics and tables, the authors show how music education can favorably act on the social life of the individual in a multicultural and intercultural society. This happens not necessarily through the choice of an inter-ethnic or intercultural repertoire for music activity but, more simply, through the action of making music and sharing music experience. In their contribution, Besutti and Tassone present the results of a music education project based on suggestions from music therapy and stress how these outcomes should encourage teachers and educators to focus on music activities in order to promote social (and personal) values like self-esteem, interpersonal-esteem, relational capabilities. Shared musical practice

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<sup>2</sup> A discussion of this concept lies outside the characters and the purposes of this introduction. For a discussion and an essential bibliography, see Somigli 2010: 23-41.

promotes interpersonal knowledge and confidence, and suggests a way for social intervention. If one aim of school education (and of music education in the school) is to promote the peaceful coexistence of different social groups in a multicultural society, maybe only the mutual knowledge between the individuals ‘can be the beginning’<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to the topics discussed just now, several controversial themes regarding the relationship between music and social life, such as the expression of social instances or individual/group identities through music, are quite common in the present scientific discourse and have originated a wide and rich debate (see for example Negus & Velázquez 2002). Nevertheless, and even now, many other important aspects can be addressed more in depth and appear to be very interesting when observed more in detail.

Two of these themes clearly emerge in this book, and in particular in the chapters by Carrera and Košta. They are, on the one hand, the relationship between socio-political contexts and music education (about this aspect, see also Wright & Davies 2010), and on the other hand, the reciprocal action not only between music and society but also between society and musicology, and, more in general, the theoretical discourse on music.

About this latter point, once again I will mention Alessandro Carrera’s chapter, since it offers a clear overview of how the social and ideological tendencies in a given historical and geographical context act on the work of the observer, orienting her/him to some objects and perspectives and not to others. On the one hand, as I have pointed out above, the article is a reflection on the reception of music – not only “popular music” – by the young people in the last four decades. On the other hand, it shows clearly how wider systems of values orient the scholar him/herself – values to which he/she more or less consciously adheres. This condition influences whether, in a given moment, a musical subject “deserves” the scientific treatment or not, and, if it does, according to which perspective, which bias, and conclusive evaluation. It is easy to see how this response can affect the system of values itself.

Last but not least, the chapter by Košta. It is a short and exhaustive outline of music education programs in Croatia and Slovenia in the last century. On the one hand, it stresses how political tendencies can influence school programs also in music education, and, on the other hand, how this pressure does not erase local characters and specificities easily. Even when music

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<sup>3</sup> *Knowledge Is the Beginning* is indeed the title of Paul Smaczny’s film documenting the experience of the West-Eastern Divan orchestra, founded in 1999 by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said with Israeli, Palestinian, and coming from other Arabic countries musicians (see [www.west-eastern-divan.org](http://www.west-eastern-divan.org); 20.11.2014).

education aims to reinforce social or political values, it has in itself a potentiality of independence, a dimension of freedom. And if on the one hand it is affected by social contexts, on the other hand it reveals to be not so “innocent” and “passive” but on the contrary able somewhat to counteract on those social contexts themselves and change them.

In conclusion, the research project “Music culture and social function of music in South Tyrol”, moving from the analysis of a circumscribed geographical context, had necessarily to examine a wider frame of studies and problems. The overall activity and observation – from which the reflections exposed in the two introductory chapters derive – was conducted in different ways according to the different background and perspectives of a sociologist and a musicologist particularly interested in the topic of music education. The different but not incommensurable (and, on the contrary, sometimes quite similar) answers to similar questions testify how, still nowadays, a multidisciplinary approach can enrich our perception and our knowledge of a phenomenon not in spite of differences in the approaches but by means of them. And the analysis and discussion of the results into a wider and global context stimulate new hypotheses and possibilities.

## **2. Insights from a field research on music: a sociological perspective**

Music is out of time, ambiguous and inexhaustible. However, music meets specific meta-historical needs in a particular time and place and has its specific basis in a located and historically-based human experience. Music keeps together emotions and feelings of belonging in a visible, or acoustically visible, form. In music not *logos* but emotion is the texture of a possible ethnic identity, therefore for a sociological perspective of music the historical and social basis of music is essential and the sociological analysis of music has to take into account the historical, social and political context in which the music itself is generated, practised and participated. Only field research can succeed in merging the meta-historical characteristics of music with its origins and experience therefore defining a situated sociological frame.

The idea of this joint research between a sociologist and a musicologist was born mostly by chance. At the moment I was finishing a major field research on the city of Bozen, I had already carried out a field research on the city of Brixen and the peculiar cohabitation in the bilingual context of Alto Adige, and I was thinking about going back to my sociological studies on arts, but with a field research on an observable use of art and its eventual

impact on the community. At this point the next step into the world of music of South Tyrol seemed to me practically obliged for many reasons, of which two were absolutely outstandingly demanding for this research: on the one hand the potential of music to overcome language boundaries sustained, among others, in the book of Ferrarotti *Homo sentiens* (1998) and in Barenboim and Said *Parallels and Paradoxes* (2002), as well as the Tyrolean Austrian culture pervading most of South Tyrolean habits and identity issues. The question was to inquire how and if music had a role in the small, diverse and tri-cultural identity of the South Tyrolean region and how the everyday life of this region could/would be affected by the use and practice of music groups, choirs and any type of music event. As such, and within a sociological perspective, this is the only study of this kind in this region, and a second part of the research will be carried out for the next two years only on youth music in South Tyrol.

The article of Mariselda Tessarolo develops a knowledge of many years experience on the studies of sociology of music, from where she actually started, and is rich in references and insights about the complex relation between music and an intercultural social texture; even if the article does not provide a field research report, however it does give reasons for a number of interesting connections and cases of music and how many different possible perspectives can be assumed from a sociological analysis.

The article of Alessandro Carrera is an entertaining excursus of how a period of time can impact social taste as well as the possibility of enjoying music, or, on the other hand, using it as an elitarian form of belonging. A very interesting and culturally engaging point of view which calls also for a generational kind of reflexivity on time, politics, culture and the impact they have on young generations' education and intellectual trends. The article of Alberto Nones about The Doors offers an interesting example of how history, politics and social needs can be interpreted in music and how it can become the picture of a generation, its values and political rebellion. The following article of Tomislav Košta opens the third part of the book, which is more concerned with the question of music didactics and its historical and political connotations. The article of Košta describes the educational system, within which music teaching is observed in Croatia and Slovenia, offering the historical, social and political frame of the different situations up to now.

Finally the article of Besutti and Tassone, starting from a field research in the city of Teramo and its peculiar situation of immigration flows, proposes a valid example on how music can be a tool in order to impact social issues and how research on a theme such as music is capable of grasping

social issues and social interdependences as well as any other more “classical” social theme.

This book is a first step towards the theme of social development and music use based on an ongoing pilot research with the next part on music of young generations in a bilingual context.

I would like to thank especially the group of the Institut für Musiksoziologie in the Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Wien and all the choirs and music groups who allowed us to make interviews, research and observations.

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*Part I*  
*Cultural diversity*  
*and social role of music*





*The social role(s) of music in a bilingual context:  
Insights and hypotheses from field work  
in Alto Adige-South Tyrol*

by *Ilaria Riccioni*

This paper originates from a field work in qualitative sociology research on music behaviour and culture in Alto Adige South Tyrol. The chosen perspective is to use the tools of field work in sociological research, integrated with the study of repertoires from a musicological point of view. This paper is concerned with the sociological perspective on the use of music in Alto Adige-South Tyrol, on a theoretical approach to music and art in general as an answer to social needs, and will follow all the steps from the very first hypotheses that generated the research itself, up to the single steps and subjects of the research process. The collected data through qualitative methods were initially intended as an attempt to answer two main questions. Is it possible to trace in traditional songs the system of values of a given community? Is music a factor of potential cohesion and cultural commitment in a bicultural and bilingual region such as Alto Adige? Moreover, can music be the vehicle towards a progressive commonly shared culture and sensibility towards living together and on what basis?

The peculiarity of this region has suggested the research itself. The sociological value of this area resides in the multicultural and bi-tri-lingual culture cohabitation. Indeed, this peculiar aspect of the different cultures in a formally cohabitation context of languages and culture has already been object of some of the previous field works I have carried out in recent years. Therefore, many of the assumptions that here are developed take part of an already open dialogue with the context that started with the very first pilot research in 2007 on “The cultural everydaylife experience of a bilingual context: the case of Brixen in Südtirol”. Furthermore, other main subjects are to be added to the very first sociological inquiries carried on previously,

such as: in the first place, art and its impact on social development<sup>1</sup> as well as social and cultural awareness. A further necessary interest is the methodological knowledge for qualitative research<sup>2</sup>. These interests find here a good mid-term encounter: field research on a multicultural context and the sociological issue on how art, in this case music, can foster knowledge, cohabitation and socially impact on a territory in the process of developing a critical and historical consciousness, thus freeing new and old generations from inherited traumas. After this research the sociological dialogue has been going on ever since in order to investigate the conditions of living and developing of such a peculiar region: apparently multicultural, but in fact producing sorts of parallel lives, cultures and identities, in other words: parallel worlds. I therefore assume such research as the pre-cognition allowing me to inquire from other point of views and on different themes, the issue of cohabitation of three official languages and cultures in the same, small, region. The two former field sociological research results have been published in Riccioni 2008, Riccioni 2009a, Riccioni 2012a and in a number of review articles.

## **1. Music as a social need**

Despite the fact that for the ancient Greeks music was a basic element, a proper musical notation for writing musical notes had never been developed. The notes were designed as sounds corresponding to some letters of the alphabet. Writing a letter of the alphabet already meant for ancient Greek culture writing a sound, and therefore there was no need to have another way of writing notes. In other words, in ancient Greece there was a fusion between music and language fonetics: is this the sign of a lack of importance of music in the society or can it be seen as another way of looking at sound as well as at alphabetical letters?

Indeed, sounds could create a new way to share feelings of belonging, emotions, building up an immediate relation out of a spatial proximity and a shared acoustic. For this reason, the organization of sound, intended as music, while difficult to define in its social function, can however be understood as a response to a social need. To what kind of social need does music answer in all its different genres? How can we gather music or sound

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<sup>1</sup> Riccioni 2003, Riccioni 2006a, Riccioni 2006b, Riccioni 2009b, Riccioni 2010a, Riccioni 2010b.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding methodological issues see also Riccioni 2006c.

active work inside social dynamics (Martin 2006) and in social construction of knowledge from a sociological point of view? There are many examples: the possibility to observe the collective work organization of music (Becker 1982); or the intellectual interpretation of music as artwork in a given society (Weber, Danto, Bourdieu, Shapiro, *et alii*); another point of view can be the high potential of binding people together by the experience of music itself (Durkheim), or a in a direct relation with identity and sense of belonging inside small communities in a particular context.

How can this framework be useful for a field research inquiring into the role of music in our times in a bilingual region in the Dolomites of Northern Italy? If the organization of sound can have many functions, from strengthening an identity to creating a community and also separating it from within, is it possible to find the original values of each community through its music?

The aim of this research was initially to trace the consequences of history in the everyday life of a community through its music. The three aspects considered are: the sense of belonging (identity), the history of the region and the repertoires and practises of music according to membership of the different language groups.

The sociology of arts studies and research is highly differentiated and in this specific context the inquiry will be based on the concept of art, in this case music, as a response to a specific need in society as well (Duvignaud 1972; Ferrarotti 2002; Ferrarotti 2005; Riccioni 2003; Riccioni 2006a). To inquire into the role of arts within society means to look for social innovation and to switch from the generalizing process of sociological interpretation to the singularity of artistic action, with all its consequences (Heinich 1998). Moreover, also statistical inquiries into culture and music culture in Italy (ISTAT 1999; ISTAT 2002; ISTAT 2008) as well as Austria and Germany (STATISTIK 2008/09; DESTASIS 2010) have pointed out that music fruition, but also music production, has a significant role in society and in the everyday life of the population with some specific differences between the contexts (in Germany, for example, *Musikschulen* are a long-lasting cultural tradition, widespread in all the regions in order to facilitate music practices and culture). Recent research carried out on music culture of young people in German speaking countries has highlighted that music practices develop aggregation and identity belonging (Baroni & Nanni 1990; Ferrarotti 2002; Schulten 1999; Müller 2002; Müller, Rhein & Glogner 2004; Großegger und Heinzlmaier 2004; Müller, Calbach, Rhein & Glogner 2007; Somigli 2010; ISTAT 1999).

All artistic expressions are connected with a given social context. Each social context has a unique relation with imagination and the role of the arts is the outcome of such a peculiar relationship. As well as cultural and aesthetic values, every artistic expression has a potential social function: art and music can create a sense of belonging, improving social cohesion, as well as its contrary, according to their original values; art can also contribute either to the change of cultural taste, opening the way to new social order conceptions, or confirming old traditions and identity. Moreover, music as culture can play a crucial role in the process of understanding the cultural dynamics acting in a given place. South Tyrol is a peculiar territory and its history has strengthened this peculiarity: there is a great variety of cultural traditions connected with three different official linguistic groups (German-South Tyrol, Italian, Ladin). Such diversities and divisions are likely to be represented also by local music cultures, and one of the aims of the research will be to verify the social role of music within such a multicultural coexistence.

Applying this idea to a field research can make a contribution to the knowledge of music use and need in everyday life within a community, but it can also furnish some insights for a wider reflection on the function of music in our society.

According to Barenboim and Said in *Parallel and Paradoxes* (Barenboim & Said 2002), music is, as well as other cultural issues, the evidence of our state of mind in relation to otherness. From another perspective, can we define the level of potential cohesion of differences by observing the cultural behaviour of a population and the choices of its cultural institutions? In this research data are considered in order to answer such questions, and add one more point of view on the multiple realities, cultures and languages that are living together in Alto Adige.

The aims of this research are the following: 1. to analyze the social function of music, considering education, culture and cohabitation needs (from a conservative function to an emancipatory one); 2. to observe if and how music contributes to the local dynamics of inclusion/exclusion; 3. to make a comparison with similar multicultural contexts in order to widen sociological field work from a particular case to more theoretical considerations on the function of music in the society. Moreover, in a social context where various cultural influences act, can music call for different values than in other regions? The focal points of the research are: a. the characteristics of the relationship between young people and this aspect of culture and of art, also with reference to the wider Italian and European context; b. which cultural and social memberships can be ascribed to the different ways of making experience of music?

This is an interdisciplinary research and operates on two levels: on one hand the issue of music education, on the other the sociological implications connected to the experience of music and the relationship between the region, its tradition and the needs of young generations. Through these two perspectives, observed by the methods of quantitative and qualitative social research, it will be possible to read and understand the phenomenon in its complexity. This paper is concerned with the sociological analysis of the phenomenon as well as with its qualitative significance according to identity, tradition, and the cultural response to a structured bilingual context.

The research starts from the pilot research case of Alto Adige, but it aims at understanding the phenomena in a wider context and in a comparative way.

## **2. Starting points: how arts interact with society**

Considering art as a way of thinking and organizing reality is already a sociological issue. Therefore neither the concept of art as a mere mirror of society (eg. Lukács) nor just an aesthetical phenomenon (idealistic philosophy) is here considered, rather, art as a “homologic” process that offers insights and receives stimuli on/from groups, cultures, political and social conditions (Goldmann). Some approaches to the relation between arts and society:

- 1) A “representative” approach. The so-called “conservative” art: a tradition-bound art. Art as the representation of the social context in continuity with the past;
- 2) An approach which considers art as a tool for research, experimenting connections of meanings for opening new possibilities of meanings in the changing society, (avant-garde art);
- 3) A third kind of approach, which considers art in its relation to economy, the “market-oriented” kind of art, the realization of what the Frankfurt School called the semi-culture. A kind of art and culture which does not live for itself but is born to live inside the industrial system, following its rules, needs and aims;
- 4) A more specific approach that considers art and culture in general as the outcome of a combination of social-ruled symbolic meanings, in other words, a kind of approach which tends to see arts and cultural “productions” as the result of an already class-bound imagery that tends to reproduce itself and the logic of its class. (Bourdieu 1992)

According to Bourdieu «All cultural productions – artistic production, philosophical production, scientific production - have some sort of debt to the