

## Chapter 6

# **Traditional Medicine and Music: The Pastellessa as Musicotherapy**

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On 17 January, in Macerata Campania,<sup>3</sup> a small town in southern Italy, the citizens repeat the ancient feast of St. Anthony the Abbot (in the local language, *A festa 'e Sant'Antuono*). On this occasion, the citizens build huge boat-shaped floats, i.e. ornamental wagons dedicated to St. Anthony called *carri di Sant'Antuono*, on which the *battuglie di pastellessa* parade through the streets of the town, performing the ancient music of St. Anthony, accompanied by a percussion of barrels, vats and sickles.

The *battuglie di pastellessa* are a local group formed of about 50 people called *bottari* (i.e. particular musicians called “barrel-beaters”) and coordinated by an orchestra leader known as *capobattuglia*.

During the festival, over 1,000 *bottari* (young people, adults and even children) play percussions with barrels, vats and sickles, common tools for agriculture, to give life to the typical music of St. Anthony, commonly called *pastellessa*.

The outcome is extraordinary, and it turns into a sound that immediately goes inside the listener's heart and mind, a syncopated rhythm that overwhelms musicians and audience.

The *pastellessa* performed by the *bottari* is not only an extraordinary example of primitive music and a genuine expression of the Italian sound heritage, but it is also a tangible and visible history of a community, of an identity and of a belonging, unparalleled worldwide.

Even as children, the citizens of Macerata Campania devote themselves to performing the music of St. Anthony, and their teachers are the elders of the community.

The most recurring rhythm performed by the *bottari* is called a *Sant'Antuono* and involves the use of barrels, vats and sickles. Usually, this rhythm starts and ends with a continuous note called *ruglio* or

**Moments of the feast of St. Anthony the Abbot—Macerata Campania, Italy, 17 January © Vincenzo Capuano**



The image displays a musical score for the 'A Sant' Antuono' rhythm, consisting of five staves. The top staff is labeled 'Sickle' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Barrel'. The two middle staves are labeled 'Vat, dx hand' and 'Vat, sx hand'. The music is written in 2/4 time. The 'Sickle' and 'Vat, dx hand' staves feature a series of eighth notes with accents, alternating between the two hands. The 'Vat, sx hand' staff features a series of eighth notes with accents, including triplets. The 'Barrel' staff features a series of eighth notes with accents, including triplets. The notation is in black ink on a white background.

"A Sant' Antuono" rhythm. Thanks to Giuseppe Bruno for the transcription.

*strenta*, whereby the performers beat their instruments in a simultaneous and continuous manner; the *capobattuglia* draws the performers attention by using his hands, until he suddenly sends out the cry *Oh!*, followed by a simultaneous and concise shot of the three instruments.

Then, new rhythms are added to the original one, and are combined with no predetermined rules, to give rise to sounds that for centuries have characterized the community of Macerata Campania.

In 2011, the musician Fausto Mesolella<sup>2</sup> provided some remarks about the music of St. Anthony:

When it comes to playing a barrel, there are awesome decibels that go to the lowest frequencies: it is said that the low frequencies drive off the Devil, and by making as much noise as possible He gets removed... The human rhythm starts from the rhythm of the heart, which is a constant rhythm... At birth, we get used to recognizing the rhythm: Even in our mother's womb a noise reassures us, mostly a repetitive noise. In the human body, a constant rhythm provides security through a sense of tranquillity and protection; the low frequencies are very reassuring compared to the high tones, which instead cause anxiety... It is like you were beating your rhythm, your time, so that you feel good and feel a sense of protection, you don't know, but you feel someone is protecting you... (santantuono, 2017).

The first experience in the use of the music of St. Anthony as a music therapy took place between 2015 and 2016, with the experimental project *Traditions without Barriers* (in Italian, *Tradizioni senza barriere*), realized by the Associazione Sant'Antuono and le Battuglie di Pastellessa<sup>3</sup> and the Associazione Pinocchio & Geppetto ONLUS.<sup>4</sup> The project developed in the frame of the feast of St. Anthony the Abbot, and provided an opportunity for people with disabilities to learn to play the music of St. Anthony by using barrels, vats and sickles. The activity has highlighted the centrality of the social inclusion of people with disabilities, obtained through the protection and the safeguard of the right to equality, equal opportunities and tolerance, achievable through various means, such as education, training, job, and the belonging to a community, through the expressions of its intangible cultural heritage.

In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the project, based on sound, music and movement, has given



**The bottari (“barrel-beaters”)  
of Macerata Campania.**

people with disabilities an opportunity for full and effective participation and inclusion in society, by activating a process of socialization and social inclusion indicated by Prof. Rolando Omar Benenzon (1998) with the definition of the concept of music therapy.

Thanks to the knowledge gained through the project Traditions without Barriers, in 2015 the Associazione Sant’Antuono and le Battuglie di Pastellessa with the battuglia di pastellessa Carro ‘e Vascio ‘o Vasto<sup>5</sup> participated in the project Prometheus, carried out by the Neuromotor Rehabilitation Centre, ANTARES, of San Marco Evangelista, Italy. In this frame, the patients of the Occupational Therapy Department were the protagonists of the short film named *Di Luci e di Ombre*, winner of the Audience Award 2015 section 14/20 MyGIFFONI—competition organized on the occasion of the 45th edition of the Giffoni Film Festival (Associazione Sant’Antuono and le Battuglie di Pastellessa, 2015; Centro Antares, 2015). This short film has made possible to raise awareness among the audience about the issues common to the protagonists. Part of the short film was shot on a typical ornamental wagon of Macerata Campania, “each scene was not simply turned, but based on the patient’s experience... scene after scene, the desire to overcome limits and fears emerges”, said Dr Renata Ricci, director of the short. The outcome realized has gone beyond what we were expecting: the music played by the bottari on the musical track “Without Fear” (in the Italian language “*Senza paura*”), written by the battuglia di pastellessa, has reduced the level of anxiety in the protagonists and has increased their security to shoot the movie scenes.

Based on the first two experiences, we can ask whether it is really possible to use the percussive music of Macerata Campania as a form of alternative therapy for psychiatric disorders.

The answer lies in the interesting experience (best case) that involved the *battuglia di pastellessa*, Suoni Antichi,<sup>6</sup> and the Falco e Futuro community of Galluccio, Italy and managed by the social cooperative Aria Nuova. The main purpose of their cooperation was to involve psychiatric patients in the making of a theatrical spectacle.

The initiative is part of a wider special rehabilitation program for psychiatric patients, as part of the Better Together project (*Meglio insieme*),<sup>7</sup> focused on the opening of new and stimulating channels, as an opportunity for people with mental disorders to achieve emotional growth and a social integration.

The decision to use percussive music was due to the familiarity of percussive sound, a sound whose rhythm and regularity is a key factor in treating psychic disorders. The mental rhythm, in fact, requires regularity, because regularity means security. It is familiar. From a more technical point of view, it is proven that musical percussion creates a beneficial message for our organs and tissues, favouring the release of physical and emotional blocks.

For these reasons, it was decided to involve eight psychiatric patients<sup>8</sup> in a music therapy workshop made by Suoni Antichi, with performers Raffaele Piccirillo, Mario Celato, Francesco Caserta and Michele Antonio Piccirillo, and with the collaboration of social workers of the social cooperative Aria Nuova.

The aim was to lead the patients involved to learn the music of St. Anthony. The project was focused on the rhythm called *tarantella* that,

The image displays a musical score for the 'Tarantella' rhythm, consisting of four staves. The top staff is labeled 'Sickle' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Barrel'. The two middle staves are labeled 'Vat, dx hand' and 'Vat, sx hand'. The music is written in 6/8 time, indicated by the '6' over the '8' in the time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic symbols such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests, with some notes marked with an accent (>). The score is organized into 12 measures, with a double bar line at the end.

"Tarantella" rhythm. Thanks to Giuseppe Bruno for the transcription.

through the percussion of barrels, vats and sickles, is normally used to accompany the songs. It is a simpler rhythm and, therefore, more suitable to reach the goal.

For two months, from January to March 2016, the patients actively and enthusiastically participated in the rehearsals that took place once a week at the Rehabilitation Centre of Galluccio.

During the rehearsals, the initial problems, due to the type of patients involved, were overcome. In particular, their pathologies involved low levels of concentration and attention, troubles in motor coordination, and relational difficulties.

Nevertheless, after only two months, the patients were able to perform in a theatre, staging, with no reticence and, above all, without making mistakes, a musical show in a high-performance emotional setting.

This experience is a practical example of applied music therapy in the sense of non-pharmacological intervention that aims to increase emotional well-being through cognitive stimulation and social interaction.

This gains greater importance by virtue of two cross-cutting aspects of the project:

- the staging of a theatrical performance and thus the performance with an audience;
- the relationship between patients and *bottari* (performers) in a confidential and emotional way.

In fact, musical activity and the theatrical activity connected to it, are powerful factors that can bring to the patients involved a number of personal, cultural and social benefits.

Theatrical performance is an opportunity to activate personal skills on multiple levels: the presence of rehearsals, the realization of a show and the management of the resulting emotion, the improvement of the memory capacity and personal self-esteem, strengthen the identity and the ability to be part of a group and to exercise different roles.

In addition, the preparation and production of artistic products in cooperation with people outside the mental health service can help to

**The theatrical spectacle carried out by Suoni Antichi and Aria Nuova within the framework of the *Meglio insieme* (Better Together) project**  
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improve social well-being, strengthen relational skills and initiate a process to consolidate a positive relationship system built around the surrounding territory and inside the same rehab community.

The results achieved, therefore, far exceeded the ones expected: not only did the patients successfully perform the show in March 2016, but they also delivered two more music performances in May 2016 and December 2016, with the same commitment and fervour. After the first two months of rehearsals in Galluccio, the patients welcomed the opportunity to take the rehearsals in Macerata Campania: an experience in a new context compared to the usual one, in a different territory with a wider socialization.

The results encouraged the renewal of the cooperation between the battaglia di pastellessa and the social cooperatives.

## RÉSUMÉ

La musique de Saint Antoine interprétée par les musiciens de Macerata Campania (une petite ville du sud de l'Italie), appelée "bottari", n'offre pas seulement un exemple extraordinaire de musique primitive et une expression authentique du patrimoine sonore italien, c'est aussi l'histoire tangible et visible d'une communauté, d'une identité et d'une appartenance, sans équivalent dans le monde entier.

La musique de Saint Antoine est également une forme de thérapie pour divers types d'inconfort. En trois ans environ, le jeu simultané et concis d'instruments traditionnels (barils, cuves et faucilles) a entraîné des porteurs de handicaps physiques et psychologiques dans plusieurs projets d'une grande valeur culturelle et artistique : projet "Tradizioni senza barriere" (2015), projet "Prometheus" (2016), projet "Meglio Insieme" (2016-2017), impliquant un grand nombre d'institutions (association "Sant'Antonio & le Battuglie di Pastellessa" accréditée par l'UNESCO, association "Suoni Antichi", groupe "Carro 'E vascio' o vasto", coopérative sociale "Aria Nuova", centre de réhabilitation neuro-moteur "ANTARES", association "Pinocchio & Geppetto ONLUS"). Ces expériences offrent des exemples pratiques de musicothérapie appliquée dans le sens d'interventions non pharmacologiques visant à améliorer le bien-être émotionnel par la stimulation cognitive et l'interaction sociale. De fait, l'activité musicale et théâtrale qui s'y rattache sont des facteurs puissants qui peuvent apporter aux utilisateurs impliqués un certain nombre d'avantages personnels, culturels et sociaux.

## NOTES

- 1 Macerata Campania is called the Town of the Pastellessa.
- 2 Fausto Mesolella (**B**: 17 February 1953, Caserta; **D**: 30 March 2017, Macerata Campania) was an Italian guitarist, composer and arranger. From 1986 to 2017 he was part of the pop-jazz band Piccola Orchestra Avion Travel, winners of the 50th edition of the Italian Sanremo song festival.
- 3 Associazione Sant'Antuono & le Battuglie di Pastellessa, with headquarters in Macerata Campania, Italy, was accredited in 2014 by UNESCO as an NGO to provide advisory services to the Intergovernmental Committee under the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). The Association, founded in 2008 with President Alfonso Munno, joined the UNESCO-accredited ICH NGO Forum. About <http://www.santantuono.it>.
- 4 The Association Pinocchio & Geppetto ONLUS, with headquartered in Santa Maria Capua Vetere (Italy), and with President Rita Di Mauro, provides support for families with disabled ones.
- 5 Carro 'e Vascio 'o Vasto is a battuglia di pastellessa founded in Macerata Campania, Italy, in 1981 and coordinated by Antonio Trotta.
- 6 Suoni Antichi is a battuglia di pastellessa founded in Macerata Campania in 1999 (initially named Le ombre colorate). The Suoni Antichi group was formed as a non-profit association, with President Simmaco Ciarmiello.
- 7 Better Together, conceived by Gabriele Capitelli, deals with the planning and realization of a rich and varied rehab program that includes sports, music, theatrical and artistic activities aimed at promoting the re socialization of psychiatric patients.
- 8 The patients involved are: M.F. (age 43) afflicted with chronic psychosis and mild mental retardation; P.G. (age 31) afflicted with anxiety depressive disorder; A.A. (age 40) afflicted with personality disorder; A.F. (age 45) afflicted with chronic psychosis and mild mental retardation; I.G. (age 52) afflicted with depressive psychosis; D.P.G. (age 38) afflicted with mental illness; C.L. (age 26) afflicted with psychotic disorder; R.S. (age 33) afflicted with undifferentiated psychosis.

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