

*Jazz Italian Style: From its Origins in New Orleans to Fascist Italy and Sinatra.* By Anna Harwell Celenza. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Is Italian Jazz just a matter of style? This is the interpretation, also reflected in the book's title, that Anna Celenza seems to offer in her study, whose purpose, intrinsically historiographical, is to shed light on the peculiarities of the arrival of Jazz in Italy, from its origins to after WWII. The volume is developed in five main chapters.

The first chapter—"Italians and the Origins of Jazz"—focuses on Italian immigration to the United States starting at the end of nineteenth century, particularly in New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, and Chicago, in order to shed some light on the relationship between Italians and the Origins of Jazz. The second chapter—"Jazz Crosses the Atlantic"—highlights the arrival of jazz in Europe at the end of WWI, especially in Italy. The next chapter "Jazz and Fascism"— goes from Mussolini's "March on Rome" on October 28, 1922 to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. In this section, Celenza underscores Mussolini's musical interests, as well as the relevance of the rise of Jazz on Italian radio, and finally the role played by cinema and the record industry in the spreading of Jazz and African American music in Italy during the Italian Fascist dictatorship. The fourth chapter—"Jazz Italian Style"— positions the birth of Italian jazz in the political context of Mussolini's promulgation of racial laws in 1938. The final chapter—"A Nation Divided"— aims to study the political use of Jazz during the crucial years of the collapse of Fascism and the end of World War II, particularly during the civil war between fascists and anti-fascists that took place from 1943 to 1945. This ambitious plan provides the reader a wide excursus concerning the main social-political processes which contributed to the creation of a proper Italian jazz, in US as well as in Italy, underscoring as well as possible Italian contributions to the origins of jazz. According to Celenza: "Nick LaRocca didn't invent jazz, but he was the first to capitalize on the fact that it was a financially profitable, popular art form that could cross various ethnic and national borders with relative ease. False though it was, LaRocca's claim that he invented jazz played an influential role in Italy's early embrace of the music." (p. 4)

Although structuring the book this way allowed Celenza to achieve book's main goal to offer an articulate overview of the birth of an Italian Jazz, the broad historical and thematic approach of *Jazz Italian*

*Style* limited the degree to which Celenza was able to dig deeper into the historiography on her respective topics. In fact, beginning with the prologue, this study reveals some structural problems, caused by the lack of interaction with crucial primary sources as well as secondary literature. The first troubling point is Celenza's failure to name the source of an important quotation which she attributes to Mussolini: "Mussolini described it [jazz] as 'the voice of Italian youth'" (4). Similarly surprising is Celenza's statement: "Jazz Italian Style offers the first Anglo American study of Italian jazz, and until now, most scholars have simply assumed, due to the political alliances of World War II, that the reception of jazz in Fascist Italy mirrored what happened in Germany." (p. 2). In fact, starting from the early 2000, jazz studies have been emphasizing the Italian peculiarity in the reception of jazz during Fascist Italy's, shedding light on the ambivalent and contradictory relationship between jazz music and the Mussolini's dictatorship.<sup>1</sup>

Just as worrisome is the author's difficulty to incorporate in her work the rest of the Italian historiography, which began developing in the 1970s. This very significant debate among Italian scholars over the degree to which Mussolini successfully incorporated Italian consensus into his Fascist regime has been ignored by Celenza.<sup>2</sup> Instead, Celenza claims an alleged "national remorse over the legacy of Mussolini [which] have minimized the desire among scholars and musicians to dredge up the uncomfortable connections between jazz and the Fascist regime" (5). In fact, these overlooked studies are crucial for a full comprehension of the intriguing role which jazz music played during the whole Fascist era.

The lack of interaction with Italian historiography affects the structural bases of this volume. Scholars can consider music, and particularly jazz, not only as a historical source in contemporary Italian

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<sup>1</sup> Firstly, Luca Cerchiari's groundbreaking work on Jazz and Fascism published in 2003 emphasized the Italian peculiarity in the reception of jazz during Fascist Italy's, underscoring three main phases: "indifference" (1919-1925), "diffusion" (1925-1935), and "prohibition" (1935-1943) (Luca Cerchiari, *Jazz e Fascismo. Dalla nascita della radio a Gorni Kramer* [Palermo: L'EPOS, 2003]).

<sup>2</sup> Among many others: Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: fascismo e mass media* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1975); Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime 1929-1943* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2000); Renzo De Felice, *Le interpretazioni del fascismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991); Emilio Gentile, ed., *Modernità totalitaria* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2008); Emilio Gentile, *Il mito dello Stato nuovo: dal radicalismo nazionale al fascismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1999); Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Piergiorgio Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo. Miti, credenze e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime* (Bologna: Il Mulino 1985).

history, but also as a peculiar “agent” that is able to influence evolving social–political processes.<sup>3</sup> The lacunae in her bibliography prohibit a just assessment of not only the circumstances for which the ambivalent relationship between jazz and fascism gave birth to an “Italian way to jazz” but also to an understanding of why Italian jazz did not express an explicit revulsion to Fascism.<sup>4</sup>

The limited dialogue with the Italian historiography hampers her discussion of other topics, such as national identity and technology as it relates to Italian Fascism (chapters 3 and 4 in Celenza’s book); the result is that the core issues of the origins of Italian Jazz are not problematized. Concerning identity, the existing scholarship on the building of a Fascist nation and its offering a civic religion as the vital catalyst for Italian mass is not mentioned in Celenza’s work.<sup>5</sup> Concerning technology, the many studies that successfully explain the crucial relevance of the ambivalent relationship between Fascism and mass media, particularly referring to EIAR, the public national radio broadcaster, are also not discussed.<sup>6</sup> These studies are essential to understand the complex consequences of the “industrial model” on radio broadcast.<sup>7</sup> This model was deeply characterized by the dominant influence of the industrial Italian elite on the new medium;

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<sup>3</sup> Giovanni De Luna, *La passione e la ragione: fonti e metodi dello storico contemporaneo* (Milan: La nuova Italia, 2001); Marco Gervasoni, *Le armi di Orfeo. Musica, identità nazionali e religioni politiche nell’Europa del novecento* (Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2002); Roberto Giuliani, ed., *La musica nel cinema e nella televisione* (Milan: Guerini Studio 2011); Roberto Giuliani, “La musica nella radio italiana della Seconda guerra mondiale: ruoli e funzioni,” in *La musica alla radio: 1924-1954. Storia, effetti, contesti in prospettiva europea*, ed. Ida De Benedictis and Franco Monteleone (Rome: Bulzoni 2015), 93–110; Marilisa Merolla, “La storia d’Italia nei programmi musicali della Rai,” *Storia e problemi contemporanei. Cantare la storia* 39 (May/August 2005): 9–24; Marilisa Merolla, “Anche le canzoni fecero boom,” *Reset* (September/October 2004): 35–39; Marilisa Merolla, “Rock ‘n’ roll, Politics, and Society during the Italian Economic Boom,” in *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*, ed. K. Dubinsky, C. Krull, S. Lord, S. Mills, and S. Rutherford (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009), 187–195; Marco Peroni, *Il nostro concerto. Storia contemporanea tra musica leggera e canzone popolare* (Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2001); Stefano Pivato, *Bella ciao. Canto e politica nella storia d’Italia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza 2007); Paolo Prato, *La musica italiana. Una storia sociale dall’Unità a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Marilisa Merolla, “Jazz and Fascism. Contradictions and Ambivalences in the Diffusion of Jazz Music under the Italian Fascist Dictatorship (1925-1935),” in *Jazz and Totalitarianism*, ed. B. Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2015), 31–49.

<sup>5</sup> We can mention at least: Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Particularly: Valerio Castronovo, “Il modello industriale,” in *La radio, Storia di Sessant’anni (1924-1984)*, (Torino: RAI-ERI, 1984), 75–78. We can also recall: Alberto Monticone, *Il fascismo al microfono* (Rome: Edizioni studium, 1978); A. Lucia Natale, *Gli anni della radio, (1924-1954)* (Naples: Liguori, 1990); Peppino Ortoleva, “Linguaggi culturali via etere,” in *Fare gli Italiani vol. 2*, ed. Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 441–489.

<sup>7</sup> Castronovo, “Il modello industriale.”

any discussion of Fascism, national identity, technology, and the making of an Italian jazz must include this model in the discussion.

The same lack of integration with many previous studies and with the Italian historiography more generally, characterizes the final chapter on the collapse of Fascism and the end of Second World War. Starting from the 1990s, a huge debate flourished among scholars on the civil war that took place between 1943 and 1945 and which split Italy in two between the fascists and the anti-fascists—and ultimately contributed to the collapse of the first Republic.<sup>8</sup> Since then, several studies, which the author fails to take into account, have interpreted these crucial years not only through the lens of political chants and hymns, but also through jazz. They focused first on the so-called Victory Discs, the big vinyl records with the swing and jazz tunes played by the big bands which were broadcast by the Anglo-American military forces in Southern Italy from the newly liberated radio stations once controlled by the EIAR.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Gioachino Lanotte has shed light on the use of jazz music by Nazi-fascist propaganda.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, other research has definitively rooted the use of Victory Discs during the Italian Liberation in the signals of the exploding of the Cultural Cold War, but it is not cited in Celenza's work.<sup>11</sup> Over the last decade, these studies have introduced the Italian and the Mediterranean cases as pioneering in the international debate regarding the using of jazz as a propaganda instrument—a sort of a double-edged sonic weapon used by the US Department of State to contrast the perception of the United States as a racist society that also proposed new contradictions and ambivalence in the new relationship between African American music and politics.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri 1991); Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *La morte della patria: la crisi dell'idea di nazione tra Resistenza, antifascismo e Repubblica* (Roma-Bari: Laterza 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Gabrielli, “La propaganda anglo-americana alla radio in Italia (1943-1945),” in *La seconda guerra mondiale e la sua memoria*, ed. Piero Craveri and Gaetano Quagliariello (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2006), 29–60; Giochino Lanotte, *Il quarto fronte. Musica e propaganda dell'Italia liberata 1943-1945* (Bologna: Morlacchi, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Giochino Lanotte, *Segnale Orario. Musica e propaganda radiofonica nell'Italia nazifascista 1943-1945* (Bologna: Morlacchi, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Marilisa Merolla, *Rock'n'roll, Italian Way. Propaganda americana e modernizzazione nell'Italia che cambia al ritmo del rock (1954-1964)* (Rome: Coniglio Editore 2011).

<sup>12</sup> These pioneering studies have stimulated the birth, in 2015, of the “Music Making History Sapienza University of Rome”; a research unit which has its main focus on the social and political impact of African American music in the European and Mediterranean landscape in the political context of Fascism

In conclusion, *Jazz Italian Style* has the merit to offer an articulate overview of the birth of an Italian Jazz. Nonetheless, its lack of methodological engagement detracts from its main aims, as well as it emphasizes the difficulty while conducting studies which concern music as an historical source. A comparative approach, such as Bruce Johnson's *Jazz and Totalitarianism*, would have helped the work avoid the many pitfalls that any interdisciplinary study presents, particularly in a transnational perspective.<sup>13</sup>

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and during the Cold war era: <https://web.uniroma1.it/disse/node/7232> See also Merolla, *Rock'n'roll, Italian Way*.

<sup>13</sup> B. Johnson, ed., *Jazz and Totalitarianism* (New York: Routledge, 2016).