

Double Pipes in the Mountains of Amatrice

David Marker (March 29, 2014)



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In September 2010, during a three-week trip in southern Italy to make ethnographic field recordings of traditional Italian music, I spent several days in the small cluster of mountain-villages around the town of Amatrice in Lazio. I was accompanied by my friend Andrea Di Giambattista, a large-animal veterinarian and musician who plays a rare type of Italian bagpipe indigenous to the region known colloquially as “le ciaramelle amatriciane.”



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The Amatrice pipes are used to accompany improvised sung poetry as well as for dancing the “saltarella,” the regional folk dance. It is also used to escort the bride from her home to the church as part of the traditional Amatrice wedding ceremony. Aside from accompanying Andrea on the occasional veterinary call (I watched him and two old men rather comically chase a cow all over a field so they could administer a pregnancy test) our main objective was to track down a rather elusive bagpiper in the area named Rosolino Rosati.

Up until a few years prior, Rosolino was just one of just two remaining players of this strange instrument (the other was Nello Sciarra). Andrea, as well as a couple other guys in their late 20s, had recently learned the instrument saving it from the brink of extinction. In order for the young musicians to learn the traditional repertorio and playing style, it was important they learn from the last two remaining pipers. Nello Sciarra, the other elderly piper, was very available to the young musicians. But Rosolino seldom played in public, and had not been recorded in 20 years, thus it was critical that we convince him to let us record him. Andrea and

I arrived at Rosolino’s house to find his wife telling us that he was out with his sheep in the field but that he would not be able to play because a relative has recently died. In Italian culture it is forbidden to be heard playing music during a time of mourning. We went out to the field to find Rosolino in the hopes that we could convince him to play. Standing across the barbed wire fence surrounded by his sheep dogs, Rosolino explained that he did not have his pipe with him and could not play anyway since there had been a recent death. Andrea had brought his pipes with him and played for him. I had started to learn to play this instrument the year before after acquiring an antique pipe from the son of a deceased pipemaker, and while I was not very good at it yet, I thought that perhaps if I played for Rosolino it might convince him to play for us. I took Andrea’s pipes and huffed up the goat-hide bag and started to play through my riffs that I had learned. Even though my playing was less than stellar as a beginner, Rosolino was shocked.

He had perhaps never seen an American before and here I was standing before him up in the mountains playing this rare instrument that until a few years ago only two people in Italy played. His demeanor changed and he described to us the location of a field out in the country. He said if we met him there at sundown he would bring his pipes and play for us, this way no one in the town would hear him play. That evening Andrea and I drove out to where we understood the field to be. We waited for what seemed an eternity. We were full of nervous excitement at the opportunity to record this legendary piper. Finally we saw Rosolino’s Fiat Panda pull up and we followed him into the field. I quickly began to set up my recording equipment. Andrea dug a bottle of wine out of the cluttered back seat of his veterinary equipment filled car and gave the bottle to Rosolino who took long swigs and even poured wine into the goat hide bag to give the cane reeds some moisture. Rosolino began to play the instrument and Andrea and I looked to each other in complete contentment that we were finally getting the recordings!

The look on Andrea’s face as he played the tambourine accompaniment was unforgettable. He was so excited. After we made several different recordings I conducted a brief interview with Rosolino in which he reminisces about learning the instrument as a kid. He mentions a locally famous piper named “Raffone” who had influenced him greatly. Alfredo “Raffone” Durante, was a piper who was recorded by Alan Lomax in 1954. The recording can be heard on The Alan Lomax Collection: Italian Treasury – Folk Music and Songs of Italy, on iTunes. Interestingly, the antique bagpipe that I had purchased the previous year was made for Raffone by a local carpenter.



When I acquired the pipes they still had the cane reeds made by Raffone mounted in them. I purchased the pipes from the son of the now deceased pipe maker who also spoke to me about Raffone. Rosolino Rosati passed away in 2012. Fortunately, there are a handful of young enthusiastic men from the region who have started to learn this instrument. The influence of the last two pipers, Rosolino Rosati and Nello Sciarra were critical for helping to preserve the authenticity of the tradition. I have felt honored that I could be a part of this process, and I continue to learn and play “le ciaramelle” to this da

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