WHEN THE TREES RESOUND:  
TOWARDS A SONIC ETHNOGRAPHY  
OF THE MAGGIO FESTIVAL  
IN ACCETTURA  

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In the village of Accettura, a settlement of less than two thousand residents in central Basilicata, every year around Pentecost the festival of St Julian culminates in the raising of a massive tree in the main square by means of a system of manually operated winches. The process of carrying large oak trees from the nearby woods – with ox-teams – and a holly tree – borne on the shoulders of teams of men – as well as the mass participation of the village population, have resulted in the festival achieving widespread renown as the most impressive and spectacular such event in Italy.

Over many years, scholars, photographers and filmmakers have provided a number of perspectives on the festival. However, in this chapter, which is based on long-term team research led by Scaldaferri since 2002 (Scaldaferri and Feld 2019), we argue that the sonic aspect of the festival has often been overlooked – perhaps precisely because of its striking visual characteristics. A sonic ethnography, on the other hand, allows the detection of mechanisms at work during the festival that were previously unnoticed. Importantly, it also highlights the experiential dimension for the participants, which has been neglected because of the way an abstract symbolic interpretation has become officially institutionalised as a result of processes of heritagisation. The intersection between sound and the experiential dimension of the festival, we argue, remains the central aspect for the participants despite the increasing relevance of cultural tourism and heritage politics.

By ‘sonic ethnography’ we refer to an approach to ethnographic fieldwork that puts sound at its centre, beyond its definition as ‘the sounded representation of ethnographic data’ (Gershon 2013: 259; see also Borbach 2017: 85; Gershon 2012: 5). This is only one component of a threefold methodology that starts with taking sound seriously and listening critically. It requires re-balancing the ocularcentric bias identified by the early anthropology of sound and treating hearing as a cultural process (Feld [1982] 2012; Roseman 1991; Stoller 1984),
which in turn allows sound to be conceived of as a way of knowing (Feld 2015a; Rice 2003). This sensibility opens up listening to, among other things, senses of place (Feld and Basso 1996; Gell 1995), technologies and ideologies of mediation (Katz 2004; Sterne 2003) and histories of class and power (Fox 2004; Ochoa Gautier 2006). Sound is here treated not so much as a natural-cultural given, as in the classic notion of soundscape, but as the emerging aural outcome of acts of listening that are embodied, mediated and inscribed in historical and ideological contexts.

The second aspect of this methodology concerns the different positionalities of the listeners. This entails doing research in and through sound, involving research collaborators in processes of elicitation, feedback and dialogic editing over sound recordings (Feld 1987), but also performing sound collaboratively as a research practice (Wilson 2017). This answers calls to adopt ethnographic methods that put sound at the centre, for an ‘anthropology in sound’ (Feld and Brenneis 2004) or a ‘sounded anthropology’ (Samuels et al. 2010).

The third methodological component of sonic ethnography is the representational one, which for us includes framing sound recordings as more than illustrative material, developing arguments in sound through strategies of editing borrowed from electroacoustic music (Drever 2002; Scaldaferri 2018; Truax 2008). The post-production of sonic ethnographies is a powerful analytical device that allows detection in the recordings of unexpected relationships and structures that the ethnographer might otherwise have missed (Feld and Scaldaferri 2019: 82–84). However, finally it is important to stress that a sound-centric approach to ethnography is not meant to replace other, more established ways of working, but can be useful to complete the frame and build on existing scholarship as we do here.

The Maggio festival

The raising of the tree is only part of a ritual cycle that involves extensive preparations and a number of side events including processions of statues of the patron saint, St Julian, and of a painting of St John and St Paul. The part of the festival taking place around Pentecost is called Maggio, a term meaning ‘maypole’ that is also used to refer to the tree raised in the village and to its lower component, a massive oak with its branches removed, which is joined to a leafy holly (called cima (top)). After being chosen by a group of forestry officials (since the trees are taken from regional forest parks), loggers and members of the festival committee, a number of oak trees are felled on Ascension Thursday. These are the maggio itself and the supporting posts for the winches that will raise it. On Pentecost Saturday, nine days later, the oak trees
are dragged by ox-teams towards the village, and on the following day, Pentecost Sunday, the holly cima is also felled in a forest at the opposite end of Accettura’s territory. On the same day, the parish priest holds a mass for each group and in the evening the oak trees and the holly reach the village. All along there is a festive atmosphere, with plenty of food and wine, music and singing.

Monday begins with a procession of the painting of St John and St Paul, while most of the day is dedicated to preparing the square for the raising of the maggio on the following day. This is not a simple endeavour, since the tree is so heavy that the winch used to raise it is large enough to require another winch to put it in place. In the evening of the Monday a procession with a small statue of St Julian takes place. On the Tuesday morning, with the aid of large wooden dowels, the cima and the maggio are joined while still on the ground, and some metal tags are tied to the branches (formerly cheese, cured meat and even live animals). After a mass is celebrated a larger statue of St Julian is carried in a procession, stopping in the main square where the maggio is finally fully raised, often totalling more than thirty-five metres. Women dance balancing votive offerings of candles on their heads, and towards the evening some young men climb the tree and perform acrobatic feats. Until a few years ago, men would shoot at the tags with shotguns. This is the climax of the festival, which usually also includes a concert and fireworks display, as on other similar occasions. The maggio remains in the square until Corpus Domini Sunday, when it is publicly auctioned and taken down.

This is the rough timeline of the festival as we witnessed it in 2004 and 2005, and at various points over the following years. Although small changes are common, the available historical sources suggest the relative stability of the festival cycle since the turn of the nineteenth century, when the cult of St Julian first became associated with the festival. Colclough interprets this period as crucial to the history of the festival, when it acquired new significance and an egalitarian character in the face of increasing concentration of land ownership and loss of communal rights (2001). Until the 1970s, in fact, the committee organising the festival was still representative of the main categories of peasants and artisans who would also contribute to its practical unfolding with their specialised knowledge of forestry, carpentry and ox-driving, and excluded the landowning gentry. Although many phases of the festival are in fact displays of masculine strength and prowess, women also fulfil essential organisational functions behind the scenes. Their appearances in the public phases of the ritual, however, are limited to singing during processions and dancing with votive offerings. It is hard to overestimate the importance of the Maggio for the community of Accettura, which includes the hundreds of emigrants who return to
their village of origin for the duration of the festival. Not only is the Maggio crucial in identity terms, being the pride of the community and a main selling point for cultural tourism, but it is also the object of considerable local investments in the form of grassroots funding or acts of devotion such as caring all year round for teams of oxen that only work during the festival. Since the 1960s, this local relevance of the Maggio has acquired a specific tint that derives from the interplays between anthropological scholarship and heritage politics.

The Maggio as ancestral symbol

Whether its origins lie in an episode of Langobard history, are inspired by revolutionary liberty trees or derive from even earlier pre-Christian cults (Filardi 2001), the Maggio festival is clearly distinctive on account of its deliberate anachronism evident, for example, in the procedures used to raise the tree or in the way its components are transported to the village. The uniting of two (gendered) trees at springtime has led a number of scholars to suggest that the Maggio represents a powerful atavistic rite of natural renewal. These interpretations often distinguish between a primordial layer, consisting of the pagan ritual of the marriage of the trees, and a much more recent addition in the form of the Christian cult of St Julian. The best known example of this type of approach to the festival is that of Giovanni Battista Bronzini, who attended the Maggio at the end of the 1960s and published a number of essays that were later gathered in a monograph (1979). Ferdinando Mirizzi (2019) underlines how Bronzini, although claiming to favour an approach close to the experience of the protagonists, based his analysis on Tylor’s notion of cultural survivals, framing the coupling of the trees as an ancient pre-Christian ritual of tree worship by reference to Frazer – who in actual fact had not described anything comparable to what happens in Accettura. Seeing the Christian component as a later addition, Bronzini proposed the label – now commonly used – of Maggio di San Giuliano (Maggio of St Julian) for what was otherwise simply referred to locally as the festival of the patron saint. Shortly afterwards, Bronzini’s colleague Lanterna also insisted on the syncretic character of the festival (1977), though he acknowledged that the marriage of trees had no direct connection with the lifeworlds of the participants, underlining instead the function of the Maggio as an expression of local identity.

In parallel to the writings of these scholars – often problematically dubbed the ‘discovery’ of the festival in the Italian literature – the national media started taking an interest in the Maggio. The first documentary was an 8mm film by Giosuè Musca produced for the University of Bari (1969), while shortly after the national television
company (RAI) aired the short *Il matrimonio degli alberi* (*The Marriage of the Trees*) directed by Carlo Alberto Pinelli (1971). The former film had a commentary written by Bronzini, and the latter by Lanternari. Both expository voiceovers proclaimed that the *Maggio* was an archaic ritual of renewal of the natural world, an interpretation which then began to spread to tourist guide booklets and to the protagonists of the festival themselves – to eventually end up in the *New York Times* in recent years (Silverman 2018). Colclough, though aware of the influence of ‘post-war south Italian folklorists’ (2001: 384), speculates that these survivalist interpretations could date back to the pre-Unification period, a time when itinerant Neapolitan missionaries were seeking to get rid of pagan elements among local Christians.

In actual fact, the expression ‘marriage of trees’ appears to derive from the description of the festival that Nicola Scarano, a poet and primary school teacher in Accettura, sent to Bronzini in 1961 after he had asked his students to do research on the festival as a class activity. Both Bronzini and Lanternari took up that idea, but the evidence of its presence among the protagonists of the festival is weak. In the transcripts of the interviews conducted by Bronzini all the respondents stress the importance of the cult of St Julian, and the equal importance of the roles of the saint and of the tree. Significantly, the only mention of a marriage as such is in response to a leading question by Bronzini, which prompts the interviewee to compare the *maggio* and *cima* ‘more or less’ to husband and wife (Bronzini 1979: 43; in Mirizzi 2019: 34). Vincenzo Spera, who was Bronzini’s student at the University of Bari, reports a conversation that he had in 1971 with some key figures in the organisation of the festival, who commented to him that the idea of the marriage was something that ‘the professor from Bari told us’ (Spera 2014: 125).

Regardless of the details of this debate, what is interesting for our purposes is that the idea of the ancestral fertility ritual based on the marriage of the trees has taken root in the community of Accettura, particularly since the festival has started to attract tourists and its media coverage has increased. People in Accettura have begun producing their own representations of the festival in order to promote it with tourists and local institutions – and inevitably to think about it as heritage and as something that they partly perform for an outside audience. Official publications about the *Maggio* by the city council or the *Pro Loco* (tourist office), self-produced videos or online portals echo the interpretations provided by these scholars, who lend an aura of authenticity to the tradition by connecting it with the past. As a result of these processes, it is now common to hear festival participants provide interpretations that follow the framework provided by Bronzini.

The institutionalisation of Bronzini’s interpretation of the *Maggio* festival came close to reaching an international stage with the
preparation of a candidacy for the UNESCO register of Intangible Heritage in 2007. A possible inclusion in the register, with its attached value of international recognition, is a prospect that is raised time and again in local political discourse. The dossier, which was never actually completed, was heavily reliant on a reading of the festival as an ancient pagan rite and quoted Bronzini in claiming that the ritual was unique in Europe. However, at the time that he first wrote on Accettura, Bronzini was not aware of a number of similar tree rituals in the area surrounding Accettura and in the Pollino mountains further south. Scaldaferri documented seventeen such festivals over these two areas, taking place between April and September and invariably connected to a figure of the Christian calendar (2019b: 13–16), while Spera relates Accettura’s Maggio to the tradition of raising trees of Cockaigne (greasy poles) in the kingdom of Naples since at least the seventeenth century (2014: 130–31). In the context of these examples, the case of Accettura has come to appear much less unique. Partly as a result of this new ethnographic data, the strategies of heritagisation have evolved towards creating a network of tree rituals in the region, in which Accettura heads nine municipalities, with the aim of promoting the rituals as intangible heritage and a form of ‘territorial marketing’. The village now also hosts a museum dedicated to these festivals, which gathers literature, photographs and videos from the region and beyond.

While the reading of the festival as a survival of a pagan fertility ritual is currently under increasing scrutiny in the light of historical and ethnographic data, it is striking how it has nevertheless taken on a life of its own, even beyond the intentions of its original proponents. Its use in websites, documentaries and in the captions of the vast numbers of photographs of the event published every year testifies to the desire for a mark of authenticity by professional experts, and it has now become a favourite interpretation even for the festival’s own protagonists. Its original scholarly origins have been forgotten and it has become instead part of the tradition. At the same time, the festival is losing its connections with the everyday practices of its protagonists and also the rebellious character that it is reported to have had since the eighteenth century (Colclough 2001; Spera 2014). Instead, the Maggio is increasingly becoming more and more a representation addressed to outside audiences, a performance of local identity influenced by processes of heritagisation in which local institutions play a major part.

Another striking aspect of these contemporary debates about the meaning of the Maggio festival is that they have remained within the domain of the symbolic level, with scholars arguing over whether it represents the generative power of the natural world, or rather stands for the community of Accettura united in common labour or divided along class lines. The overwhelmingly sensuous character of the celebration,
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The days around Pentecost, when the central phases of the Maggio festival take place, offer what is undoubtedly a remarkable visual spectacle. It is not by chance that generations of photographers including Mario Dondero, Joseph Koudelka, Fausto Giaccone, John Vink and Ivo Saglietti have turned their lenses on the tree. However, the festival is an assault on the full sensorium that includes the strong smells of the forest, of the sweat of men and animals, the taste of the festive food and abundant wine consumed in the woods and around the village, and the very tactile experience of being hit by branches, bumped into by drunken people, or slipping and falling on the muddy paths trodden by crowds. However, we decided to approach the festival in its sonic dimension, which is especially complex and has been left underexamined in most existing studies. In particular, our sonic ethnography has revealed how sound is a major organising principle of the festival.

Many of the early accounts mention the sonic density of the Maggio. For example, in 1961 Scarano described ‘eardrum-shattering’ marches performed by the band. Other scholars simply omit any mention of music or other sounds in their otherwise very evocative descriptions. Too often the sonic component of ritual has been considered an accessory, and as ethnomusicologist Roberto Leydi once put it, from the works of anthropologists and ethnologists there often emerges ‘a terrifyingly quiet world, an anachronistic silent film’ (1991: 119). But even when sound is mentioned, it is presented as an index of a festive atmosphere, or as a background or surrounding effect without any particular function.

At first listening, the Maggio can indeed give the impression of a chaotic clash of noises, shouts, animal calls and diverse forms of music. In order to reach some form of informed understanding, it is useful to start by distinguishing between institutionalised sounds – those that are part of the official ceremonial and are planned during the organisation of the festival – and spontaneous sounds – including improvised, peripheral musical performances and non-organised sounds that are contingent upon certain activities. Spontaneous sounds have the distinctive character of affording active participation in the festival by
people who are otherwise not directly involved in the organisation or transport of the trees.

Among the institutionalised sounds are the religious musical repertoires, especially the devotional songs for St Julian, which happen at strictly defined moments and places. The music of *tarantelle* played on the *organetto* accompanies the dancing of women with votive offerings of candles on their heads, and later on the Tuesday when these offerings are brought in the procession for St Julian. Moreover, it has now become common, as in other village festivals in southern Italy, to schedule a well-known Italian pop music star to give a concert in the main square on the culminating night.

Perhaps the most significant form of institutionalised sound is the music of walking wind bands, of which two kinds are usually heard at the *Maggio*. The large ensembles — symphonic wind bands simply called *banda* in Italian — play a repertoire of marching music and symphonic compositions during the key official moments of the festival, including the arrival of the trees at the village, the processions of the small St Julian statue and of the paintings of St John and St Paul, and the Tuesday procession of the main St Julian statue. One *banda* ensemble is resident in Accettura, and another is usually invited from neighbouring regions. Much more active throughout the more labour-intensive phases of the festival are smaller ensembles called *bassa musica* or *bassa banda* (literally ‘low music’ or ‘low band’), which are composed of a few wind and percussion instruments. There is a clear difference in prestige between the two, and the word ‘music’, in the parlance of many elders of the area, is still used to refer mostly to symphonic wind bands, the larger ensembles, while ‘ending up in *bassa musica*’ is a regional idiom to refer to a financial collapse.

Early *bassa musica* ensembles probably originally had the function of making public announcements and were often heard outside of festive circumstances (Scaldaferri and Vaja 2006: 31–32). Their presence at the *Maggio* is documented since at least 1862, and today one often hears ensembles from Apulian towns such as Carbonara or Mola di Bari (piccolo, snare drum, bass drum and cymbals) and Accettura’s own ensemble, which performs only during the festival (clarinet, trumpet, saxophone, various percussion instruments). Both *bassa musica* ensembles provide an almost continuous sonic accompaniment for the most physically demanding components of the festival, playing quick marches, *tarantelle* and catchy popular songs, or sometimes particularly fast-paced percussion improvisations called *scasiatammorr* (drum-wreckers). It would be easy to dismiss the *bassa musica* as a marginal phenomenon, derivative of the more prestigious symphonic wind bands and not suitable for the official occasions where institutional figures are present. However, we noticed that during the *Maggio*
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its particular function is to provide sonic encouragement to those doing the hard work and entertainment for the more peripheral participants. If the bassa musica falls silent, before long one can expect to hear shouts of ‘Musica!’, loudly demanding that the music be resumed. In 1961, Scarano even wrote that if the band took a break during a procession, the bearers of the statue would refuse to proceed until they had started playing again. This is not unique in the context of tree rituals in southern Italy. Across the border with Calabria, in the village of Alessandria del Carretto, for example, the selected fir tree called pita is dragged by hand by the participants. At the head of the procession is a group of zampogna players who lead the way and ‘pull’ the tree by sound (Scaldaferri and Vaja 2006: 27).

The bassa musica also fulfils a crucial role in ensuring the safe realisation of the potentially very dangerous operations of transporting the trees. For example, the cima launched at full speed on the shoulders of more than thirty men constitutes an unstoppable force that will sweep over anyone in its path. The characteristic way in which it is carried, with brief accelerations that almost reach running pace, and the fact that most of its carriers cannot see because of the branches, create potential danger for the numerous bystanders. Moreover, in the festive atmosphere massive quantities of wine and beer are consumed. Along the path of the cima many of the participants are teenagers, some of whom will be getting drunk for the first time. In this chaotic situation the bassa musica ensemble works as a sonic announcement of the moving cima, allowing those in front to move away before they can see it. It also works as a magnet, drawing the crowds away from the more dangerous operations: while the intoxicated crowds dance nearby, a few specialists can, for example, ‘park’ the cima suspended on a system of wooden forks that allows preservation of its branches. It is striking to compare the soundful scenario of Accettura with another tree ritual — that of Rotonda, a village of the Pollino area. Here the transport of the tree, called pitu, is much quieter and sometimes even silent, thanks to the strict organisation of every aspect of the festival. Music is confined to planned, official moments and is mostly devotional. Yet, despite the almost militaristic organisation, the festival in Rotonda has seen a number of fatal accidents that over the years have been entirely absent in the apparently chaotic Accettura – something that the locals call ‘St Julian’s miracle’.

Many forms of spontaneous music-making are just as important in involving the numerous participants who do not directly contribute to the labour of transporting, joining and raising the maggio. One of the main sources of danger, in fact, is the presence of so many more people than is needed for these operations. Along the path of the trees, and around the main moments of the ritual, a number of musical
'jam sessions' take shape, involving zampogna, organetto, tamburello and improvised musical instruments such as glass bottles struck with keys. In Accettura, many men and a few women excel at a semi-improvised style of singing that is accompanied by a zampogna – sometimes replaced by an organetto – and their skills attract players from all over the region. While at the time of the research there were no active zampogna players left in Accettura, the visiting performers are figures often found in other festivals of the region, especially pilgrimages and processions. These temporary communities of performers are constantly forming and dissolving in succession, sometimes overlapping with each other, following modes that are common in other mass festivals in the region and represent a form of sonic participation (Scaldaferri and Vaja 2006: 21–28).

Not all the sounds relevant to a sonic ethnography of the Maggio are musical ones. Many of them emerge from the interaction between humans and materials, and in some cases between humans and animals. For a few days of the year in Accettura one can hear sounds that belong to a way of life that is now all but abandoned, one that is based on former modes of agriculture and forestry: the bellowing of the oxen, the crack of the whips, the chopping of axes and the roar of falling trees deep in the woods. Some of these sounds emerge from engagements with materials requiring skills whose practice is in decline, even though it is occasionally possible to hear chainsaws too. These sounds acquire special significance for those who previously lived through that way of life, and are preserved for the limited duration of the festival by the rigidity of the protocol adopted to transport and raise the trees. They are also dense in meaning for skilled ears, as evident in the crucial moment of the raising of the tree on Pentecost Tuesday. These tense minutes are one of the few moments of relative quiet in the whole festival, when the senior specialists charged with directing the operations are nervously listening for signs of instability. As those operating the massive winch desperately fight the weight of the tree, hisses and shouts of ‘Silence!’ alternate to the loud creaks of the rope under several hundred kilos of tension. When the maggio is finally stabilised in the almost vertical position that it will preserve until the arrival of the statue of St Julian, a collective sigh of relief is marked by a renewed musical explosion by both the banda and bassa musica ensembles. Around the tree, people sing their joy to the zampogna and praise St Julian.

These examples of skilled listening highlight the relevance that sound as a way of knowing still has for some of the participants. Across the whole festival, sound fulfils a denotative function of the changes between the various phases of the ritual, between locations or between different emotional atmospheres. It helps greatly with the coordination
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of the transport and raising of the trees, in addition to improving the safety of the participants. Even though some aspects of the Maggio festival are clearly developing towards representing the community to an external, growing circuit of heritage tourism, the production of sounds is still very much directed to listeners internal to the community. The meaningfulness of these sounds is perceived in different ways by different categories of participants, in some cases almost unconsciously.

**Sonic ethnography as research practice and as mode of representation**

The experience of team research carried out at the Maggio in 2005 was a fundamental stepping stone to developing the concept for this book and its formulation of sonic ethnography. In particular, there was a first realisation of the potential of sound-making as a way to facilitate research and an exploration of the possibilities afforded by sound recordings as forms of ethnographic representation. While some elements are presented here, the work in its entirety has also been published in the format of a book comprising two CDs, two photographic sequences and some short essays (Scaldaferri and Feld 2012, published in English 2019).

The idea of putting sound at the centre of an ethnography of a well-studied and documented event such as the Maggio in Accettura was planned by Scaldaferri during early visits in the role of zampona player. While playing for the Accettura singers, he noticed the emphatically sonorous qualities of the festival, and decided to assemble a research team that could deal with the complexity of the event through different methods and media. One of these modes of research was music-making, and two of the most prominent zampona players of the region – Alberico Larato and Quirino Valvano – joined the team with the aim of eliciting performances by the singers. In the turmoil of the festival, the players were able to attract the singers to favourable positions for the sound recordists. This way of using sound to facilitate research became Scaldaferri’s own main mode of engagement, since after his arrival he was requested to play during most of his time in Accettura. The use of this strategy effectively represents an application to research of the same organising principles of sound within the festival that we describe in the previous section. Using zampona players to influence the unfolding of the festival for the benefit of the researchers was for Scaldaferri a first step towards developing his double role of researcher and performer in the direction of a more engaged and experimental creative practice (see chapter 6).

The sonic ethnography of the Maggio also resulted in two CDs, each providing a distinct approach and contribution. The first consists
of a seventy minute soundscape composition by Feld, divided into six tracks. Recording through Dimensional Stereo Microphones (see Ferrarini 2017), Feld used his body as an emplaced ‘point of listening’ (Scaldaferri 2015: 377) to balance the different sound sources within a very wide perspective and portray the sonic unfolding of the festival from the perspective of a participant. In combination with the editing techniques of soundscape composition, Feld achieves a poetic representation of the festival that revolves around points of sonic tension and release. Consistently with the perspective of sonic ethnography, Feld dedicates a large portion of the composition to the Monday, which is usually considered a phase of stasis between the more spectacular days of Sunday – with the transport and arrival of the trees in the village – and Tuesday – with the raising of the maggio. Acoustically, on the other hand, Monday is extremely rich in events, from the religious processions to the preparations of the trees, which are meaningful for their religious significance and for the ways sound interacts with the space of the village, despite not being as visually remarkable as the events of the other days. On this day, privileging listening over observation, one notices the layering in space of various musical sounds – religious and profane – with the sounds of work made by chainsaws and hammers, as well as the politics of space evident for example in the procession of St John and St Paul, representing the participation of the outlying rural communities. We include the final track from Feld’s soundscape composition as an opener to the sound-chapters of this book.

The second CD creates a complementary perspective, which concentrates instead on a broader documentation of musical repertoires. Part of it was recorded during the 2005 experience by four researchers with training in ethnomusicology – Fabio Calzia, Cristina Ghirardini, Elisa Piria and Guido Raschieri; part derives from Scaldaferri’s 2002–7 corpus of recordings of the festival; and part comes from the archives of Don Giuseppe Filardi, the parish priest of Accettura, recorded since 1983 in the village and among communities of emigrants in the USA. This CD gives a deeper diachronic perspective to the musical repertoire present in Feld’s composition, especially through the inclusion of archival recordings, and explores the geographical ramifications of the Maggio through the voices of the emigrants from the diaspora. Its twenty-five tracks present a narrative that is analytical and wide-ranging, in contrast to the synthetic and personal approach of the first CD. As is the case with the sonic component of this book, both discs are meant to constitute narratives that take the listener on a coherent path of discovery, and were never meant merely to document or support the texts.
One of the advantages of developing a sonic ethnography in the medium of sound was that we could establish a dialogue over the two CDs, which found attentive listeners able to engage critically. This is evident in the conversations with three protagonists of the *Maggio* festival published in the English translation, where they discuss with Scaldaferri their interpretation and reception of the book and of its audio component (see Scaldaferri 2019a). The community has been involved in the project since the beginning, at first helping with accommodation and access, and later supporting financially the publications, which even now they help us promote at a national level. Thus, even though nobody ever tried to condition our way of working or influence our conclusions, we too became part of processes of heritagisation and touristic promotion, and our work – though in different ways from Bronzini’s – is used to validate the *Maggio*’s exceptionality, this time to an international public. We consider these to be legitimate appropriations of scholarly work by the community that made it possible, and we are particularly happy that our sound-oriented perspective seems to resonate with many in Accettura. Its value lies in evidencing the critical role of local ways of listening, meant as phenomenologically and socio-historically emergent, and offering to the researchers the possibility of integrating them in their ethnographies.

**Notes**

Photographs
Maggio di Accettura, 2005
Soundscape composition – Accettura 2005 –
Tuesday 17 May

This soundscape composition by Steven Feld is taken from When the Trees Resound (Scaldaferri and Feld 2019), where it is the sixth and final track of the first CD. Through intense editing, the composition condenses the main sonic elements of the concluding day of the Maggio festival.

Sound-chapter 1 – The Saint and the tree

This sound-chapter includes field recordings made during the Maggio festival in 2004–5, which focus on musical performances within the soundscape of the event, including bassa musica, symphonic walking bands and a zampogna singing. It also includes an older recording of a religious song from the archive of the parish priest of Accettura, Giuseppe Filardi, and a recent recording of the procession for St Julian’s day, in January. The sound-chapter displays the variety of sound-making practices that revolve around the tree ritual of the Maggio and people’s devotion to St Julian.