Federico Spinetti (Köln)

Antifascist Legacies: The memorialization of the WWII Resistenza in contemporary Italian popular music

A gunshot echoes from 1944, leading post-punk musician Massimo Zamboni to uncover his family’s past. Long after the break-up of C.S.I., the historic Italian rock band which he co-founded, Zamboni calls back the former members to engage once again with the memory of the WWII antifascist Resistenza and its contested legacy in today’s Italy. Private and collective memories collide as a new musical project is born. Moving from my ethnographic work with C.S.I. and the documentary film The Enemy – A Partisan Hymnbook (2015) that I directed on occasion of their reunion, my presentation interrogates more generally the vast movement of Italian popular music artists who, since the 1990s, have brought the memory of the WWII partisan struggle to the core of their creative activity and intellectual reflection.

My presentation inspects music as a site of memory making and an agent in the construction of historical narratives. Recapturing perspectives from memory and media studies, it highlights processes of mediation and remediation as foundational strategies of musical memorialization, and elucidates the creative reformulation of the past in Italian popular music through intertextuality, irony, and formal experimentation. In dialogue with contemporary historiography and political philosophy, it further brings in sharp focus the musical mobilization of antifascist memories as an avenue of active vigilance over the present, tracing meaningful connections between the WWII Resistenza and its continuing legacy as an ethical and existential point of reference vis-à-vis current contentious social issues in Italy and Europe, and offering a resource for critical reflections on utopian desire, violence and insurrection.

Federico Spinetti is a professor of ethnomusicology and director of research at the University of Cologne, Germany. His main research fields include music and politics, music and memory, auditory cultures and the built environment. His research to date has addressed the political economy of music in post-Soviet Central Asia, the music-architecture nexus in Iran and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and historic musical relations across the Mediterranean. He is currently undertaking research into contemporary musical memorializations of the WWII antifascist resistance in Italy and leading, together with Dr. Monika Schoop, the DFG-funded project “Klingende Erinnerungen – NS-Verfolgung und Widerstand in zeitgenössischer Musik aus Deutschland” as well as the newly-established SONACT: Music | Memory | Politics Study Lab at the University of Cologne. An active filmmaker, he has directed several documentaries, including Zurkhaneh – The House of Strength: Music and Martial Arts of Iran (2011) and The Enemy – A Partisan Hymnbook (2015).