

Growing Up with Sanremo

Cristina Fei (February 21, 2010)



I was a big fan of the Festival of Sanremo since my childhood. Now that it celebrated its 60th edition, I look back and regret the songs, the singers, the hosts I saw before on the stage of the Aniston Theatre. What happened to the Italian music tradition? I tried to retrace the history of the Festival...and this is what I saw...

[>> Click here for the Italian Version](#) [2]

SANREMO - "Come to the table everybody, dinner's ready!". That evening, the usual dinner call from my mom had a special meaning. We were in the 1980's and my family and I would gather in front of the TV to watch the [Sanremo Festival](#) [3]. All of us watched the same program in religious silence for that one only night. Just like in the '50s when there were very few TVs in Italy and members of different families gathered in the living room of the few that could afford to buy one. Enchanted by

the lights of the screen, all of them stared at that one channel in black and white.

On January 28 1955, 10:45 pm, eight million people were waiting for the first edition of the Festival to be broadcast on TV right after the end of the variety show "Un, Due, Tre" with Tognazzi and Vianello. It was an exceptional event. In fact the very first edition of the Festival in 1951 went on air on the radio, on Rete Rossa, as a form of entertainment for the gamblers playing in the casino of the city of Sanremo. At that time, an admission ticket for the [Festival Room of the Casino](#) [4] would cost 500 Italian lire, and allowed them to listen to the twenty songs in competition sung by three and only three singers: [Nilla Pizzi](#) [5], Achille Togliani and the Fasano duette.

Festival of Sanremo (1954 - 1955 - 1956 - 1958)

My first memories of the Festival trace back to 1984. Although the artists sang in playback, I- just a kid at the time - couldn't care the list. More than anything else, I was fascinated by the luminous set, the long stairways on the sides of the stage and the colourful flowers on the front. The newly weds Romina and Albano won with the song "Ci sarà". That was also the first time that the Festival was broadcast in the United States, thanks to a radio network in New York: the [INC](#) [6].

From 1986 on, singers were asked to play live again. I remember it well because of the rough voice of [Loredana Bertè](#) [7]. Her aggressive look scared me a little. In a tight short black dress, high heels and studded jacket, Bertè was a real provoker: she performed with the song "Re", pretending to be pregnant.

It was nothing compared to the scandal provoked a few years later by a shoulder pad flipping out of a dress and the naked breast of the international guest star [Patsy Kensit](#) [8], leader of the [Eight Wonder](#) [9] music group. And then there was "Etienne" by the French artist [Guesh Patti](#) [10], filled with explicit sexual references...

Do you believe that when I was a child Anna Oxa's bony face, her funny hairstyle and her skinny body, were enough to scare me easily? I used to listen to her songs covering my eyes with my hands.

In the '80s the Festival's set design was very dark, blue and green were the dominant colours. Colour was a privilege given to TV audience only from 1977 on, the same year when the show was hosted for the first time at the [Ariston theatre](#) [11].

Loredana Bertè, "Re" (1985)

Very soon the Festival crossed space and time boundaries. The first "historical" host, Nunzio Filogamo, knew it very well: every night he started the show with his famous "My dear friends near and far, good evening, wherever you are". It was an invitation to the audience to feel part of a common Italian tradition, in any place and any moment.

The Festival belongs to the culture of the Bel Paese, it portrays its social evolution, and mirrors its recent history. In Primary School I used to dance the song "Papaveri e papere" with my pals. I didn't know that the song, in 1952, was considered a political anthem of the Italian Communist Party: the



poppies were the leaders of the Christian Democratic Party; the ducks were the people. Someone else said the joyful refrain was instead a way to ridicule women's role at that time.

Nilla Pizzi and Mina in "Papaveri e Papere"

During the '70s the Festival dictated fashion as well: the "bushy" hairstyle of [Marcella Bella](#) [12], participating with her "Montagne Verdi", became a mania among girls. Not to mention the sexy miniskirt [Sabrina Salerno](#) [13] and [Jo Squillo](#) [14] wore in 1991 when they presented their "Siamo donne".

As I grew up, the Festival changed little by little. But it still was an appointment I couldn't miss. I liked music more and more, the audience loved the singers. Vasco Rossi was a rock icon, a rock that was very different from Adriano Celentano's rock'n'roll in "24mila baci". In the '90s new talents populated the music scene: [Andrea Bocelli](#) [15], [Giorgia](#) [16], [Laura Pausini](#) [17], were some of them.

Giorgia, "Come Saprei" (1995)

Since I love music just as much as I love writing, I had a dream: one day I would become an on-field reporter in Sanremo.

Ten years later I was there, walking down the streets of the town. It smelled of tulips, sunflowers, roses and orchids. With a notepad in my pocket and a video camera in my hands, I wanted to capture the most significant moments of the Festival. I was one among hundreds of journalists but, most of all, on that February afternoon of 2006 I was in the famous Ariston Theatre, watching the rehearsals of the singers.

I was sitting in front of the stage. The same one where hosts Pippo Baudo and Mike Bongiorno presented the singers time ago... the same that saw icons such as [Domenico Modugno](#) [18], Claudio Villa, [Luigi Tenco](#) [19], [Mina](#) [20] and [Giorgio Gaber](#) [21] performing for the Italian public. As I was listening to the orchestra playing, the music went straight to my stomach, then to my heart. I cried. I was overwhelmed with emotions. They were too strong to be buried inside: too great to be described in words.

After sixty years the Festival seems to have lost its meaning, genuineness, its essence of magical appointment that used to be waited for every year by the ears and eyes of Italian people

In 2010 people need to forget their daily worries. That's why, already after the second night of the Festival, the audience knew by heart the theme of "Malamorenò" by Arisa and whistled it. A nice 28 year old girl, she is not too cute, and looks almost like a cartoon, with her big eyeglasses and big red lips. She tries to be ironic about the future singing "The sun might explode, everything might end, everything but love". She sings with the "Marinetti sisters", three men dressed like a woman. They reminded me of the Sorelle Bandiera (Tito Leduc, Neil Hansen and Mauro Bronchi), a comic trio that



was very popular on TV during the '70s.

Sanremo Winners (1997-2007)

We miss Modugno's performance of "Nel blu dipinto di blu" in 1958, when the audience accompanied the music by tapping their feet on the floor. We also miss his great success "Piove", better known as "Ciao amore ciao". He was inspired to write it during his tour in America, when he saw the farewell of two lovers in the station of Pittsburg.

Nowadays the songs' lyrics talk about corruption, euthanasia, unemployment and economic crisis. "Lucky us that have Carla Bruni", sings [Simone Cristicchi](#) [22] in his song. He criticizes Italy, portraying it as a country where people don't care for being informed on what is happening around them: gossip is all that really matters, because at least it makes people smile.

I regret the old times. Especially when I see on TV a grotesque trio such as the one composed by Pupo, tenor Luca Canonici and [Emanuele Filiberto di Savoia](#) [23], the Savoia dynasty's heir. That dynasty was sent to exile Italy became a Republic in 1947 and could come back only after more than fifty years.

Pupo, Emanuele Filiberto and Luca Canonici in "Italia Amore Mio"

Blond hair, blue eyes. Though he's not in tights and he doesn't ride a white horse, prince Emanuele Filiberto drives teenagers crazy. Last year he won the Italian edition of "Dancing with the stars"; this year he competes in the Sanremo Festival. He can't sing, but he acts like a rockstar. He's there for a reason. He's popular, very popular.

The jury eliminates him, the audience at home votes to bring him back in competition. People at the Ariston Theatre stand up angry, they are against the result. The musicians in the orchestra rebel by throwing their music papers away. What a chaos. And the prince sings "I'm here to tell the world and God, Italy you're my love!".

This Festival offered nothing of good quality. The prince is too busy flattering our country, another young singer is the bad clone of Freddy Mercury. The winner is [Valerio Scanu](#) [24], he comes from a talent show.

What happened to the Italian tradition? Who knows what Nunzio Filogamo would say on the 60th Anniversary of the Festival. Maybe he would sigh disappointed: "My dear friends, near and far...this is your Italy!"

Valerio Scanu, Winner of the 2010 edition of the Festival of Sanremo



Festival of Sanremo - The Winners (1951-2010)

EDITION SONG SINGER 1951 Grazie dei fiori Nilla Pizzi 1952 Vola colomba Nilla Pizzi 1953 Viale d'autunno Carla Boni e Flo Sandon's 1954 Tutte le mamme Gino Latilla e Giorgio Consolini 1955 Buongiorno tristezza Claudio Villa e Tullio Pane 1956 Apri le finestre Franca Raimondi 1957 Corde della mia chitarra Claudio Villa e Nunzio Gallo 1958 Nel blu dipinto di blu Domenico Modugno e Johnny Dorelli 1959 Piove Domenico Modugno e Johnny Dorelli 1960 Romantica Tony Dallara e Renato Rascel 1961 Al di là Betty Curtis e Luciano Tajoli 1962 Addio...addio! Domenico Modugno e Claudio Villa 1963 Uno per tutte Tony Renis e Emilio Pericoli 1964 Non ho l'età Gigliola Cinquetti - Patricia Carli 1965 Se piangi se ridi Bobby Solo e i Minstrels 1966 Dio come ti amo Domenico Modugno e Gigliola Cinquetti 1967 Non pensare a me Iva Zanicchi e Claudio Villa 1968 Canzone per te Sergio Endrigo e Roberto Carlos 1969 Zingara Bobby Solo e Iva Zanicchi 1970 Chi non lavora non fa l'amore Adriano Celentano e Claudia Mori 1971 Il cuore è uno zingaro Nada e Nicola Di Bari 1972 I giorni dell'arcobaleno Nicola Di Bari 1973 Un grande amore niente di più Peppino Di Capri 1974 Ciao cara come stai? Iva Zanicchi 1975 Ragazza del Sud Gilda 1976 Non lo faccio più Peppino Di Capri 1977 Bella da morire Homo Sapiens 1978 E dirsi ciao Matia Bazar 1979 Amare Mino Vergnaghi 1980 Solo noi Toto Cutugno 1981 Per Elisa Alice 1982 Storie di tutti i giorni Riccardo Fogli 1983 Sarà quel che sarà Tiziana Rivale 1984 Ci sarà Al Bano e Romina Power 1985 Se m'innamoro Ricchi e Poveri 1986 Adesso tu Eros Ramazzotti 1987 Si può dare di più Tozzi-Ruggeri-Morandi 1988 Perdere l'amore Massimo Ranieri 1989 Ti lascerò Fausto Leali e Anna Oxa 1990 Uomini soli Pooh - Dee Dee Bridgewater 1991 Se stiamo insieme Riccardo Cocciante - Sarah Jane Morris 1992 Portami a ballare Luca Barbarossa 1993 Mistero Enrico Ruggeri 1994 Passerà Aleandro Baldi 1995 Come saprei Giorgia 1996 Vorrei incontrarti fra cent'anni Ron e Tosca 1997 Fiumi di parole Jalisce 1998 Senza te o con te Annalisa Minetti 1999 Senza pietà Anna Oxa 2000 Sentimento Piccola Orchestra Avion Travel 2001 Luce Elisa 2002 Messaggio d'amore Matia Bazar 2003 Per dire di no Alexia 2004 L'uomo volante Marco Masini 2005 Angelo Francesco Renga 2006 Vorrei avere il becco Povia 2007 Ti regalerò una rosa Simone Cristicchi 2008 Colpo di fulmine Giò Di Tonno e Lola Ponce 2009 La forza mia Marco Carta 2010 Per tutte le volte che Valerio Scanu

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- [13] <http://www.sabrinasalerno.com>
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