# LA *COMPILATION SOUNDTRACK* NEL CINEMA SONORO ITALIANO

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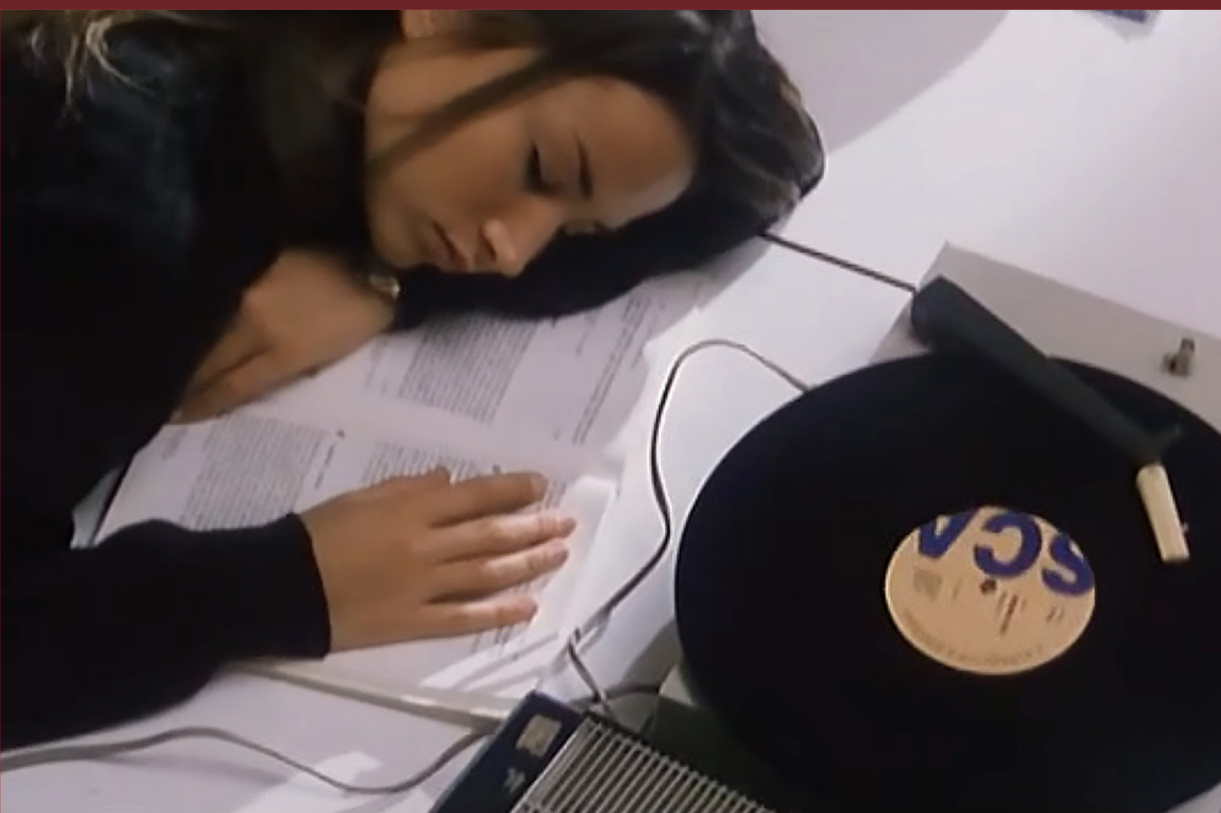

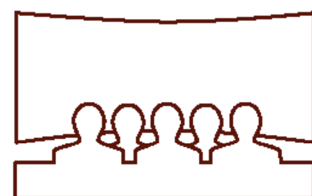

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# OVERTAKING “VIRTUOUS” MASCULINITIES: MUSIC, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN *IL SORPASSO* (1962)[1]

*Elena Boschi (ricercatrice indipendente)*

*This article focuses on the construction of opposed masculinities and queer desire through the interaction between period pop songs and other composed cues in “Il sorpasso”, considering how period pop songs place protagonists Bruno (Vittorio Gassman) and Roberto (Jean-Louis Trintignant) in Italy’s popular culture landscape and the score articulates a queer attraction that most accounts of this film do not address. This analysis of the interaction between different approaches to film scoring also adds a syntactical dimension to the application of assimilating and affiliating identifications proposed by Kassabian to understand the role of composed and compiled scores in the reproduction of dominant ideology.*

Keywords

Commedia all’italiana; masculinity; queer desire; popular music; film music; compilation soundtrack

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The *commedia all’italiana* has received its share of long overdue scholarly attention since its popular success in the late 1950s and 1960s[2]. However, the soundtracks of famous films like Dino Risi’s *Il sorpasso* (1962) and *Poveri ma belli* (1956) or Luigi Comencini’s *Pane, amore e fantasia* (1954) are still relatively under-researched, with only rare mentions that do not account for the narrative role that songs played in the films. With the exception of Mauro Buzzi’s book

[1] I am very grateful to Maurizio Corbella, Dom Holdaway, Tim McNelis, and the anonymous reviewers for their precious feedback on earlier drafts of this article, and I would like to thank the participants of *The Italian Way to Pop II* Symposium at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, of the *Masculinities* panel at the 2017 NECS Conference, and of the screening of *Il sorpasso* at CinePop Buridda in Genoa for their insightful comments on my work and on the film.

[2] Lanzoni, 2008; D’Amico, 2008; Comand 2002, 2010; Buzzi, 2013; Fullwood, 2015.

*La canzone pop nel cinema italiano. Gli anni del boom economico (1958-1963)*[3], which is fully devoted to the soundtracks of these films, other scholarship on the *commedia all'italiana* spends very little time considering their music. At best, it often limits itself to the dismissive term "canzonette" (pop ditties), showing its contemptuous attitude towards these complex cultural texts which are usually discussed briefly – if at all – and without a focus on the connotative baggage the songs bring into the films.

The importance of film soundtracks has been explored extensively, with work on composed scores (a.k.a. original scores) as well as compiled scores. On the interaction between these two scoring practices, Anahid Kassabian's book *Hearing Film*[4] still remains among the most fruitful contributions available. She notes how the connotations that pre-existing songs bring to films often invite more open «affiliating identifications [which] track perceivers toward a more loosely defined position that groups, or affiliates, several different narrative positions within a fantasy scenario together»[5]. While Kassabian finds these identifications in particular in films with compiled scores, she makes a distinction between these soundtracks, which frequently use pre-existing songs, and traditional scoring practices, that is composed scores made of music specially written for the film, that tend to invite «assimilating identifications [which] track perceivers toward a rigid, tightly controlled position that tends to line up comfortably with aspects of dominant ideologies»[6].

When it comes to *Il sorpasso*, on the one hand, different relations to the many songs present in the film offer a broad range of positions vis-à-vis Bruno (Vittorio Gassman), the unpredictable, energetic character who interacts with them. On the other, the way composed music is used in the film might challenge the links with dominant ideology that Kassabian hears in composed scores, as Roberto (Jean-Louis Trintignant) is not only old-fashioned and guarded, but also clearly drawn towards Bruno – something the music clearly articulates. The interaction between pre-existing songs and composed score and the way the latter shakes off its general association with dominant ideology make this a queer text – a feature which would not surface without the key musical moments I will analyse in this article. Following Alexander Doty, I do not talk about queerness in *Il sorpasso* as "connotation", since

> queerness [...] is only "connotative", and therefore deniable or "insubstantial" as long as we keep thinking within conventional heterocentrist paradigms, which always already have decided that expressions of queerness are *sub*-textual, *sub-cultural*, *alternative* readings, or pathetic and delusional attempts to see something that isn't there – after all, mass culture texts are made for the "average" (straight, white, middle-class, usually male) person, aren't they?[7]

[3] Cf. Buzzi, 2013.
[4] Kassabian, 2001.
[5] Kassabian, 2001: 141.
[6] Kassabian, 2001: 141.
[7] Doty, 1993: XII.

Rather, I would class *Il sorpasso* among the Italian equivalents of those «films [...] that have been on dominant culture lists of the greatest films of all time for decades, but as far as I can tell have never been considered queer classics»[8].

*Il sorpasso* (literally "the overtake") follows the development of the unlikely bond between two diametrically opposed men who spend a hot mid-August day together on the road after their chance meeting. Part road movie, part buddy film, the story has complex and often contradictory emotional tones, and as Sergio Rigoletto has noted in the only overt examination of sexuality available to date on *Il sorpasso*: «These two buddies can actually say what they feel. Their statements of emotional proximity are, however, always quite oblique. In so doing they comply with the dominant social conventions according to which the love between two men cannot be clearly spoken in films»[9]. While these feelings do remain unspoken, I will argue that they are articulated musically through a sophisticated combination of period pop songs and composed score, which place the film's protagonists on the cultural map of a country going through major changes in the early 1960s. In this article, I focus on the construction of opposed masculinities in *Il sorpasso*, considering two key aspects. Firstly, I will look at the period pop songs, considering their socio-cultural relevance and the way songs construct the two characters, Bruno and Roberto, in relation to Italy's popular culture landscape. Secondly, I will look at how the composed score works in parallel, voicing a queer attraction that most accounts of this film do not address. Finally, I will reflect on the interaction between jazz, pop songs, and the composed score, and use film music scholarship to argue that the association of a "feminising" score with Roberto points to the importance of considering the positioning of music, adding a syntactical dimension to Kassabian's ideas about affiliating and assimilating identifications. I will also draw some parallels between the way popular songs place non-heteronormative masculinities outside the popular culture landscape of the time in *Il sorpasso* and produce a similar musical opposition between queer characters and straight ones in later Italian films.

Songs in *Il sorpasso* are not mentioned often in the literature about *commedia all'italiana*. Still, these few remarks and Buzzi's book about pop songs in Italian cinema during the boom years[10], which dedicates a chapter to it, offer interesting insights into the broad connotations which music brings to the film, particularly in relation to the two protagonists. In her monograph on *Il sorpasso*, Mariapia Comand talks about the «songs, or rather the pop ditties in the film» as «collective sites in which to recognise and find oneself»[11]. Comand notes how, in the last sequence, the song entitled *Don't Play That Song (You Lied)* accompanies the only close-up in sharp focus of Roberto:

> After all, even their relations with the pop ditties [...] is telling of an antinomic dialectic: Bruno hums almost as a discursive filler, a way of punctuating his actions; Roberto (who listens to classical music in his apartment) does not know how to navigate that (musical) world that seems to annoy him, like

[8] Doty, 2000: 15.
[9] Rigoletto, 2010: 43.
[10] Buzzi, 2013.
[11] Comand, 2002: 63. All quotes from work originally published in Italian are my translation.

> when he finally decides to phone Valeria [his love interest] from the beach, hindered by the deafening music that makes it hard for him to hear and be heard.[12]

Music is central to this antinomic dialectic in more ways. Buzzi[13] discusses the key role music plays in the development of Bruno and Roberto, who are instantly pigeon-holed by music as "modern" (Bruno) and "classical" (Roberto). Buzzi's analysis does recognise the music's ability to «highlight both [Bruno's] extreme vitality and his reckless fascination for technology»[14], through the close interaction between Ortolani's «roaring»[15] jazz score and Bruno's driving style. However, this rather binary contrast between "modern" and "classical" does not fully capture the nuances that music brings to Bruno and Roberto's complex characters, their opposed masculinities, and their budding friendship; as I will argue, this is articulated as more of a queer romance through the film's unusual musical choices. Bruno is active and up to date – a feature articulated through his musical taste, as Comand notes, but not necessarily matched by a real ability to stay afloat in the new order ushered in by the economic boom. He produces (by humming along) and reproduces (through his car radio) various pop songs of the time, talks of his admiration for Domenico Modugno and his song *Vecchio frack* (1955), and despises Michelangelo Antonioni and the alienation explored in his film *L'eclisse* (1962). Roberto is passive and out of touch: he does not listen to or know the songs of the time, and his interaction with them is quite limited, when they do not outright annoy him, as in the above-mentioned phone call scene. The fact that French film star Jean-Louis Trintignant plays Roberto helps to place him outside the Italian popular culture orbit, while his fair hair, pale skin, and slight body contrast with Vittorio Gassman's exuberant and brash physicality. Crucially, Roberto is not only defined through "his music", but also through his initial suspicion towards Bruno's music and his temporary but significant opening towards Bruno's favourite songs. In her book on the *commedia all'italiana*, Natalie Fullwood notes how,

> Stasis, or slow movement, is repeatedly coded as a marker of inferior, or backward, social status in the comedies. This is particularly emphasized in frequent scenes of overtaking, most famously in Gassman's harassment of the cyclist or the family on the motorbike and sidecar in *Il sorpasso*.[16]

Roberto is also static, but rather than being a marker of social inferiority or backwardness, his stasis seems to mark him as a character belonging to a surpassed culture and a masculinity which has been "overtaken", much like the cyclist and the family on the motorbike and sidecar. Fullwood also mentions the prominence of the car radio in *Il sorpasso* and other films[17], and while her study interprets certain films from this period as queer, it does not focus on the role of pop songs and music in these. While the role which pre-existing songs and

[12] Comand, 2002: 77.
[13] Buzzi, 2013: 108.
[14] Buzzi, 2013: 108.
[15] Buzzi, 2013: 107.
[16] Fullwood, 2015: 160.
[17] Fullwood, 2015: 135.

Ortolani's original score play in the film is acknowledged by both Comand and Buzzi, their work does not address the interaction between the pop songs and a score which uses film music conventions in ways that play with audiences' – and film music scholars' – expectations. In this analysis of *Il sorpasso*'s soundtrack, I will show that this interaction articulates queer[18] desire between the two men, while potentially Othering Roberto's non-heteronormative masculinity – two key aspects which would not surface without the music's influence.

### I. Jazz, pop songs, and the bad guy

As anticipated, it is important to note that Italian pop music and other "modern" songs are predominantly associated with Bruno, carrying with them a diverse range of connotations: from very positive ones for the many fans of this popular phenomenon, to very negative ones for those who (in a rather Adornian spirit) despised them as mere "products" aimed at anaesthetising mass audiences, and all the various positions between these two extremes. The film's opening sequence introduces the three genres that will accompany Bruno and Roberto through the rest of the film, with only a few significant exceptions. The film starts abruptly – both visually and musically – on a medium shot of Bruno at the wheel of his car as he zooms along empty curvy residential streets, clearly looking for something, and continues with long shots showing the car quickly going through deserted neighbourhoods. The first dramatic cue by film composer Riz Ortolani – a piece combining cool and modern jazz atmospheres in a score that sounds distinctly televisual[19] – is loud, fast, and frantic right from the start, providing a nervous accompaniment to his reckless driving. The tyres screech every time the car swerves around a bend, as he accelerates to avoid losing control, and when he slams on the brakes. The sound of speed – screeching tyres and roaring engine – is clearly audible in the background, heightening the sense of urgency built by the quick percussions, the *sforzando* brass parts, and the melody rising progressively.

On the edge of town, Bruno pulls over and the music fades out while he drinks from a fountain on the side of the road, before he notices someone at the window. As they see one another, strings playing a slow, ascending melodic pattern – a textbook "love theme" – instantly evoking a romantic atmosphere. The cue – a clear example of the influence classical Hollywood scoring practices had on Italian film composers like Ortolani – gives away the queer attraction Roberto feels for Bruno, something later reinforced by editing and a few intense glances

[18] The way I use the term "queer" to describe what is happening between Bruno and Roberto does not imply that the two men share a strong, constitutive trait, but follows Dyer's fluid notion of Queer as «something you might do (have done), feel (have felt), mainly, sometimes, once, maybe» (2002: 3).

[19] It is worth noting how this style was very much of its time, both in relation to what jazz musicians and arrangers including Charles Mingus, George Russell, and Gill Evans were doing, and trends in the way jazz was used in film scores such as John Barry's music for *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964) and Quincy Jones' score for *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1964) in Hollywood. In Italy, Piero Piccioni's music for *Mafioso* (Alberto Lattuada, 1962) and *Le mani sulla città* (Francesco Rosi, 1963), and Piero Umiliani's scores for *I soliti ignoti* (Mario Monicelli, 1958), *Colpo gobbo all'italiana* (Lucio Fulci, 1962), and *Omicron* (Ugo Gregoretti, 1963) also featured jazz.

towards him. The music seemingly starts as a dramatic comment, but it is then revealed to be (or becomes) source music, as we see Roberto turn off a record player. This is what Claudia Gorbman has defined as «metadiegetic»[20] music and what I have called «inner scoring»[21], as it is positioned between the non-diegetic/dramatic dimension and the diegetic/source dimension, and this element tends to offer a perspective on the inner world of the character with whom it is associated.
Bruno brazenly asks a visibly nervous Roberto to call a woman for him, to let her know he is late. Roberto accepts, but, quickly realising that he does not even know the other man's name, invites Bruno upstairs to use the phone himself. As he skips towards the front door, Bruno sings *Pinne fucile ed occhiali* (flippers, rifle and goggles), a famous hit single in the summer of 1962 and, once inside, he sings its B-side, *Guarda come dondolo* (watch me swing), in the bathroom, disrupting Roberto's exam revision of a law text. Besides delineating their diametrically opposed personalities, as noted by Comand, the three musical genres define Bruno and Roberto's cultural features in relation to the time of the film's release.
Writing about popular music in neo-realist films, Richard Dyer notes that the different music genres associated with various sources of corruption include period pop songs, swing, Latin American music, boogie-woogie, and jazz (and since his example of the latter is the American radio station in *Roma città aperta* he is talking about a popular swing style which sounds much more "innocuous" than Ortolani's breakneck-paced and dissonant opening cue)[22]. Despite the differences between the films Dyer discusses and *commedia all'italiana*, pop songs and jazz, I argue, serve a similar purpose in *Il sorpasso*. The cool-jazz-influenced score and period pop songs accompany Bruno without exceptions, creating an aura that is simultaneously modern and disquieting for a complex character who, while lacking intellectual, ethical, and emotional depth, has been lured and "corrupted" by the economic boom's delusions. While the aura of negativity these genres brought into many classics of neo-realism was usually not challenged by other music that could redeem unequivocally negative characters[23], the combination of jazz and pop songs of the time in the decidedly different socio-political context of the early 1960s may not signify negativity as straightforwardly as when it scored characters who overtly betrayed the Resistance and let down their fellow countrymen during German occupation. In other words, while retaining the connotation Dyer noted, through their new association with Bruno's rather more innocent "corruption" and perhaps through their massive popularity in the 1960s, jazz and pop songs are inflected as the musical markers of Bruno's – and other characters' – socially accepted corruption.
While problematic in many different ways, Bruno remains a generally agreeable character and, despite his wife's indifferent behaviour towards him, and the suspicion his daughter's older boyfriend Bibì (Claudio Gora) has for him,

[20] Gorbman, 1987.
[21] Boschi, 2014: 192.
[22] Dyer, 2006; cf. in particular p. 33.
[23] An example of this is Marina in *Roma città aperta* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945), a "bad", unreliable, and corrupt young woman who listens to jazz on American radio stations and whose continued collusion with a beautiful (and potentially queer) Gestapo officer makes her utterly irredeemable.

he has no enemies and can charm almost everybody. This includes Roberto, who finally falls for his ways and wants to be more like him. Bruno is a loveable scoundrel, embodying a kind of puerile masculinity which, at the time when I started researching this film in late 2013, I defined as quasi proto-Berlusconian – or rather, aspiring to be that kind of man – in view of his distinctive sneering attitude towards the law and his scorn for other men who do not match the profile of the (new) Italian macho masculinity, for women who do not indulge him, and for queer men. Below his surface arrogance, however, Bruno shows his insecurity and inadequacy, a humanising trait which makes him more likeable and therefore even more insidious, as his contagious exuberance along with his weaknesses may “redeem” his recklessness and its tragic consequences. Giorgio Bertellini calls *Il sorpasso* «gloomy»[24], while for Peter Bondanella it is a «tragicomic»[25] film. Watching it again today, as Berlusconi still looms on the side-lines of the Italian political landscape, with more ominous figures to his right – some of whom have also displayed similarly puerile attitudes – Bruno’s brand of loudmouth, egotistical masculinity seems to be still popular in the real world, despite the obvious ineptitude of these real and fictional men. Today, *Il sorpasso* somewhat prefigures the country Italy would become a few decades later, but also embodies the country it had been until a few years earlier. Writing about the “new Italian” in a series of works, among which *Il sorpasso*, film historian Gian Piero Brunetta observes that,

> we witness the collapse of rural and working-class Italy and the rise of a new species that retains some clearly recognisable genetic traits of the Mussolinian man, moving through spaces totally redesigned both by the new expanses of cement and by the path of their own roaring Gilera motorbike [...], Seicento [FIAT’s 1960s economy car] [...], or convertible sportscar [*La dolce vita*, *La ragazza con la valigia*, *La voglia matta*, *Il sorpasso*], leaving behind the ruins and relics of a life forever abandoned.[26]

While Bruno is clearly an example of the new species that continues to echo fascist masculinity, Roberto does not represent rural and working-class Italy, but rather the responsible petit bourgeois with their feet firmly on the ground, who seek to improve their condition without resorting to the kind of shortcuts that Bruno pursues to land a good deal, without any sympathy for the people around him. An example of this is when he attempts to purchase damaged goods after a road accident, seemingly unaware of the dead body lying covered on the ground or of the surviving driver’s desperation. However, while Bruno is quite popular despite his maladroit manners, Roberto’s old-fashioned, non-threatening honesty clearly does not fit this new order – and Bruno never misses an opportunity to tease Roberto about it or point out how modern others are. Roberto is also self-doubting, shy, rather repressed, attracted by but distrustful of Bruno at the same time, constantly second-guessing his decisions about whether to follow Bruno or go back to Rome. Overall, these different aspects paint a character who invites sympathetic reactions but feels comparatively

[24] Bertellini, 2004: 5.
[25] Bondanella, 2009: 192.
[26] Brunetta, 2004: 183.

charmless vis-à-vis Bruno's exuberant personality, which Roberto awkwardly tries to imitate later on in the film, despite mistrusting the world towards which Bruno and everybody else seem to gravitate – even two nuns who play *Quando quando quando* (when when when) for a few cents.
It is worth considering how music articulates Roberto's exclusion – not only through the composed score predominantly associated with Roberto and his emotional state, but also through the popular songs in the film's prominent compiled score. *Quando quando quando*, a major 1962 hit that topped Italian charts after its debut at the Sanremo Music Festival that year, punctuates various moments of their journey, further hinting at the unspeakable queer attraction between the two men through its lyrical content about longing for love. It is first heard outside a restaurant, in front of which Bruno pulls over but does not stop, and later at the service station where Roberto accidentally locks himself in a toilet cubicle. Meanwhile, in the café, *Guarda come dondolo* follows *Quando quando quando* on the jukebox and accompanies Bruno's failed attempt to chat up a beautiful young cashier. At the restaurant where they have lunch, two nuns play *Quando quando quando* on a mandolin while begging for money. In the crowded coach station outside the restaurant, some musicians play *Quando quando quando* with an accordion and a classical guitar.
These two brief moments featuring traditional figures playing this song show that even nuns and street musicians are taking part in that (re)production of popular music which defines Bruno, while Roberto stays on the side-lines, looking – and presumably feeling – like a fish out of water. The instruments these musicians are using add another significant element, as their clear association with folk and decidedly non-modern music does not match contemporary musical taste, and yet even these traditional instruments are playing the pop songs Bruno loves, leaving Roberto alone in his musical isolation.

## II. Composed music, Pop Corruption, and the "Virtuous", Sad Young Man

It is interesting to note that, aside from the one English-language song, whose lyrics (about a painful parting) and sombre melody are quite different from Bruno's favourite pop songs, Roberto's other cues are predominantly in the classical score tradition, featuring prominent strings playing ascending melodic lines which would suit the female protagonist of a classical Hollywood drama. Furthermore, the use of popular songs as incidental music that I have described is reminiscent of the compositional strategies found in the scores that were emerging at the time, which combined music composed for the film with (pre-existing and original) pop songs whose melodies were used in brief, composed dramatic cues[27]. The compositional style typical of the classical Hollywood tradition has a limited but significant role in *Il sorpasso*. The classical music that Comand understands as straightforward source music in Roberto's flat reappears as the leitmotif that, along with the sad English-language song that accompanies Roberto, and his relative lack of interaction with Italian period

[27] An example of this is *Breakfast at Tiffany*'s (Blake Edwards, 1961), in which Henry Mancini used a fusion between classical Hollywood scoring practices and the kind of compiled score that was later to be found in the films of the New Hollywood season from the late 1960s, such as *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) and *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969).

pop songs, positions him among those who – willingly or accidentally – have remained excluded from the social changes of the economic boom.
The "love theme" comes back during a confessional moment between Roberto and Bruno on the road to Roberto's family home in Tuscany, as he tells Bruno about his admiration for his uncle Michele. Roberto confesses preferring his uncle over his father. For the first time since they hit the road together, the two men talk about Roberto's childhood and family relations extensively, which seems to capture Bruno's attention. The cue fades out as Bruno pulls into the courtyard, noisily interrupted by the loud sound of his car horn, which he keeps honking impatiently. Once arrived at the house, Bruno mocks the caricatured homosexuality of Occhiofino[28], a man who works on the country estate where Roberto's uncle lives. He then insinuates that uncle Michele is not the biological father of Roberto's cousin Alfredo, who is the spitting image of the farmer with whom aunt Enrica had allegedly had an affair. Uncle Michele – a scrawny, genteel older man – lacks the stereotypical characteristics of the new Italian masculinity that Bruno exudes. The admiration Roberto feels for uncle Michele indirectly defines his own "inadequate" masculinity, which is neither in line with the expectations of the times nor coherent with the values used by Bruno to judge others. The "love theme" returns as Roberto wanders around uncle Michele's villa, on a wave of nostalgia, but with the arrival of aunt Lidia, on whom Roberto had had a juvenile crush, the music stops, as if to jolt Roberto back into the heteronormative world. Moments such as these contribute to a depiction of Roberto as a sad young man, whose «image is frozen on the moment before "becoming" or knowing that one "is" a queer»[29], forever torn between good women who might rescue him and his attraction for Bruno.
Once they get back on the road, a rather personal conversation between Roberto and Bruno is accompanied by Roberto's leitmotif which, curiously, returns as source music as Bruno puts a record on in the car (*fig. 1*). For the first time it is Bruno who plays the music from their very first encounter, sealing the growing emotional connection between the two men. The cue accompanies a strange moment, as Bruno seriously questions the appropriateness of his visit to Roberto's uncle's house. Roberto reassures him, nostalgically but lucidly speaking of people's rose-tinted childhood memories, which significantly distances Roberto from a past he had been quite sentimental about until Bruno met his relatives. There are clear differences between the way Roberto talks about the past before and after the visit, and his newly found objectivity about his own idealised understanding of it draws him closer to Bruno's overt celebration of the present. Interestingly, Roberto's leitmotif is no longer played by strings, but by a trumpet – a significant musical synthesis of a melody associated with Roberto and a brass instrument, typical of a genre associated with Bruno, therefore symbolising their growing connection. Brass instruments moreover carry another interesting connotation vis-à-vis classical instrumentation. As Kathryn Kalinak has convincingly argued in her work, classical music, violins and flutes, ascending melodic lines, simple harmonies, and regular rhythms often accompanied the "virtuous wives" of classical Hollywood and the heterosexual romance be-

[28] The nickname "Occhiofino" is a conscious inversion of the homophobic term "finocchio" (literally "fennel"), the Italian equivalent of "faggot".
[29] Dyer, 2002: 128-9.

*Fig. 1 – Bruno plays Roberto's leitmotif.*

tween these women and their upright men, while jazz and blues music, brass instruments, increased chromaticism, complex harmonies, and dotted rhythms belonged to Hollywood's "fallen women", drawing a connection between these sexually excessive and "dangerous" females and hyper-sexuality, that jazz music evoked for American audiences of the time[30]. On the one hand, the music which typically defined righteous women therefore "feminises" Roberto, questioning his masculinity and his heterosexuality, as the cue accompanies their first encounter and the ensuing conversations between the two men. On the other, Bruno's loud jazz introduction signals his exuberant personality and announces him as the dangerous, hypersexual character he reveals himself to be. If Roberto's initial leitmotif matches Kalinak's description of the virtuous wife's score, then the use of a trumpet in this iteration shows a significant contamination, with a prominent element of a genre that can signify various changes for Roberto. From this moment, Roberto will "fall from virtue", both socially, as he is increasingly drawn towards Bruno's carefree hedonism and away from the dutiful attitude he had tried to cling on to up to this moment, and emotionally, as the music articulates his growing closeness to Bruno which, despite remaining unspeakable[31], becomes clearly audible. The way the two characters' musical markers are fused in the composed score – which had already suggested the potential emotional tie between the two men through the "classical" version heard earlier – disrupts both Roberto's morally upright image and any assumptions regarding his heterosexuality – assumptions which, as Alexander Doty

[30] Kalinak, 1982.

[31] While there are never any allusions to anything more than camaraderie between the two men, after they see a gallery of amusing characters at the village fete Bruno tells Roberto «That's how I like you, you're nicer when you're laughing» – a comment stereotypically addressed to women. Later Roberto repeats one of Bruno's stock phrases and Bruno, who has noticed Roberto untypically mocking him, replies: «You know what? You and I get on pretty well. As soon as we're back in Rome, I want to introduce you to my mum and we'll see each other every night». His tone seems joking but, again, Roberto's playful imitation and Bruno's words suggest a growing bond.

*Fig. 2 – Roberto smiling after Bruno tells him about his interrupted flirt.*

notes, are never "safe" since «any text is always already potentially queer»[32]. As Roberto's convictions about right and wrong are questioned, his general fascination for his new companion grows and their musical union suggests something more than just male bonding[33]. However, a pop song at a village fete distracts the two from their deep conversation and drowns out the music coming from the car radio, rupturing the emotional connection their musical union had temporarily brought to the fore.

After they get to a club where people are dancing to pop hits of the time like *Guarda come dondolo*, Bruno bumps into an entrepreneur to whom he owes money and gets stuck having dinner with him, his wife, and their friends. Roberto tries to ditch Bruno to go back to Rome but returns a few hours later and finds Bruno dancing a twist with a curvaceous Bolognese blonde, the entrepreneur's wife, on the fourth occurrence of *Guarda come dondolo*. This is followed by *Per un attimo* (for a moment), a 1960 hit song on which they do a slow dance. The party is disrupted by a brawl between Bruno and two near victims of his dangerous driving. Roberto belatedly and awkwardly defends Bruno, punching them while he tries to charge them like a bull with his head down, then they drink brandy with jazz playing in the background. When Bruno notes that the brawl disrupted his promising evening with the blonde, Roberto's smile betrays his feelings for Bruno, seemingly happy about the disruption in Bruno's attempt to pick her up (*fig. 2*). Later Roberto briefly sings *Guarda come dondolo*, in what will be his first and last active interaction with a pop song. His momentary transformation happens while he is drunk and overexcited, waiting outside Bruno's wife's house after driving a car – Bruno's sportscar – for the first time. His rather atypical behaviour and brief musical performance show Roberto's at-

[32] Doty, 2000: 2.

[33] It is worth noting that, despite Roberto's declared crush on his elusive neighbour Valeria – who does not actually appear in the film – and his flirtation with the girl he meets at the train station one night after leaving Bruno at a party, neither of these connections with women are accompanied by music.

tempt to emulate Bruno, once Roberto «has let Bruno charm him and has given himself over to him, imitating his behaviour [...] and taste»[34]. *Guarda come dondolo* seems to accompany moments when Roberto either feels excluded from Bruno's world – when Roberto is locked in the service station toilet while Bruno flirts with the cashier, and later at the club when Bruno bumps into the entrepreneur to whom he owes money and Roberto leaves – or is drawn (back) towards Bruno – when Bruno sings it in the bathroom at Roberto's in the opening sequence and after Roberto gets back to the club to find Bruno and the blonde dancing together. In these moments Roberto not only "swings" to and from Bruno's world – until he finally decides to embrace it by attempting to emulate him – but also "swings" between embracing and denying his attraction towards Bruno, and therefore his queerness.

The interaction between pop songs and composed music in the development of these opposed masculinities and their links to heteronormativity tests Kassabian's association between composed scores and "tighter", assimilating identifications, on the one hand, and "looser", affiliating identifications and compiled scores, on the other. Roberto's composed leitmotif invites audiences to hear him as sensitive, emotional, and decidedly not an alpha male. It channels our understanding of the character as "feminine", and thus reinforces a dominant, heterocentrist/homophobic reading which wants us to interpret Roberto's queer masculinity as "inappropriate". However, the same music can offer alternative subject positions, which counter dominant ideology regarding his sexuality, since the film's queerness depends on the significant placement of Roberto's leitmotif from the couple's first encounter and throughout their bonding on the road. In other words, through its significant placement, the same music which "feminises" Roberto makes *Il sorpasso* a queer text, as it instils queer desire where otherwise all one might see is a budding friendship or, at most, homoeroticism.

In the same way, Bruno's pop music exclusively "belongs" to him, the characters who approve of him, and the minor characters who embrace current popular culture. This marks pop songs as a conforming element in the film, a "tightening" rather than "loosening" force, therefore restricting the compiled score's openness. While, in general, songs offer a broader range of subject positions through their pre-existing baggage – the "lives of their own" in the realm of popular culture that songs bring into a film – that same baggage can also "tighten" the available options if we associate them with "following the herd", and being inherently suspicious towards anybody who, like Roberto, does not. I would suggest that this role reversal is also produced by the unusual association of musical conventions that typically accompany a "virtuous" woman with a male character, opening otherwise unavailable possibilities for identifications which challenge heteronormative, dominant ideology. Thought the compiled score retains its openness, insofar as it can attract or repel, depending on audiences' different pre-existing ideas about 1960s pop songs, their extensive and pervasive use and the way the film foregrounds their popular appeal might ultimately "tighten" identifications, restricting possibilities to hear alternative positions that go against the dominant ideology. Overall, while the two broad tendencies Kassabian identifies perhaps are not straightforwardly related to ei-

[34] Buzzi, 2013: 110.

ther type of soundtrack, this film shows how the syntactical relations between different scoring practices and their narrative placement can influence identifications significantly when unusual combinations occur – like with Roberto's "virtuous wife" music.

Assigning a "feminine" leitmotif to a male also works because in *Il sorpasso* women do not have music that defines them, since the female characters are few and generally not very prominent. The main instances are Bruno's daughter Lilli (Catherine Spaak), whom he nicknames "doll", his ex-wife Gianna (Luciana Angiolillo) and the few other women who dare to contradict him. While Lilli shows affection for her father, her adult choices set her apart from Bruno's chronic immaturity, something of which he is quite aware. The women who do not indulge Bruno are not associated with any distinctive music, while those who approve of his ways – or merely tolerate him – interact with the pop songs associated with him. The only woman unrelated to Bruno who briefly appears while a current pop song is playing is a beautiful young woman who continues to stare at Roberto in the club, while Bruno and the blond woman are dancing. Roberto is sitting alone, looking at Bruno, while she shares a table with a wealthy-looking older man who blows cigar smoke in her face. Roberto notices her but, after meeting her insistent gaze, he immediately looks away and directs his gaze towards where Bruno and the blond woman are still dancing cheek-to-cheek. While his awkward avoidance of eye-contact could be attributed to his shyness, the way his gaze quickly returns to Bruno and his dance partner with whom he is shamelessly flirting suggests more than just lack of interest in the girl. His focus on Bruno could be a sign of Roberto's willingness to learn from his older "master" how to pick up a girl – especially as he has just failed with the girl at the train station. However, the way Roberto keeps staring at the happy couple dancing could give away not only admiration, but also jealousy, as Bruno distances himself from Roberto and from their bonding during those earlier introspective moments on the road. Later, Roberto's alcohol-induced mimicry of Bruno's style – singing his favourite music, driving his car – signals a clear attempt to earn the other man's approval by recreating his image.

However, Roberto's attempt to emulate Bruno has taken him too far and Roberto ends up making a fool of himself, and rebukes him for his inappropriate behaviour when they arrive at his wife's house. Besides not being confident and outgoing, Roberto never manages to feel at ease in the world defined by pop songs, which remain Bruno's musical territory until the end. The only song associated with Roberto is *Don't Play That Song (You Lied)*, Italian singer Peppino di Capri's cover version of a piece by Ben E. King. Neither Comand nor Buzzi say much about the coincidence between Roberto and Don't Play That Song (You Lied), despite it being significant on many levels. In addition to being sung in English, this song is also rather more sombre than the other songs associated with Bruno, and its lyrical content – about a song that brings back memories of lost love – might express Roberto's emotional state in two ways. Before this moment, Bruno shows little interest in spending time with Roberto, as he is too busy water-skiing, swimming and mingling with other people, including his daughter Lilli, her wealthy boyfriend, Bibì, and various other women. The song follows a significant turning point for Roberto, who looks and feels isolated, mocked even by Bruno's daughter Lilli for his passive behaviour, and accompanies a scene showing Roberto walking through a dancing crowd looking forlorn,

*Fig. 3 – Roberto walking through the crowd alone.*

in a close-up of his face in focus amidst a sea of blurred faces (*fig. 3*). As the song keeps playing, he attempts to reach Valeria on the phone without success, reaffirming his inability to break free of his isolation. While the song might be heard as a musical signifier of Roberto's isolation and of a general failure to connect with girls, the lines «Don't play that song for me / 'Cause it brings back memories / The days that I once knew / The days that I spent with you» do not seem to refer to Valeria or any of the other girls Roberto has met along the way, but rather to the days he spent with Bruno, who seems to have lost interest in Roberto after finding his tribe again.

In my research on much more recent Italian films[35], I have found a recurring association between different non-dominant identities – women, queer characters, and so on – and non-Italian-language pop songs[36]. These associations between non-dominant identities and non-Italian pop songs and culture, I argue, can Other such identities, which are musically represented outside the construction of national identity that films offer. By expressing the alienation Roberto feels from the alpha masculinity embodied by Bruno and the others who dance cheerfully to the notes of period pop music, *Don't Play That Song (You Lied)* marks Roberto apart from the other characters, musically excluding his queer masculinity. Roberto's leitmotif, with or without instruments that recall the jazz music associated with Bruno, further distances him from the moment they are going through, quite literally, in the sportscar that Bruno drives irresponsibly towards a tragic conclusion – a car crash which kills Roberto, leaving Bruno shocked but unscathed.

[35] Cf. Boschi, 2015.

[36] The films of Ferzan Özpetek, which generally use non-Italian songs for all queer characters, exclusively associate Italian songs with the women who get between queer men. Similarly, strong women like Iris Blond (Claudia Gerini) in Carlo Verdone's *Sono pazzo di Iris Blond* (1995) are defined predominantly through non-Italian pop music and other markers of foreignness.

## III. Conclusion

Non-Italian pop music and the star image of the French actor Jean-Louis Trintignant exclude Roberto from a national identity that was under (re)construction in the early 1960s, on the centenary of Italy's unification; at the same time, Bruno is positioned at the heart of the new national identity precisely through the Italian pop songs with which he constantly interacts. The swing pieces with bebop references give Bruno more signs of the modernity already foregrounded by his sportscar and its speed which, for Adriana Baranello, carry echoes of futurism in Risi's film[37]. Masolino d'Amico observes that

> the great merit of the film is not only to have isolated and described that emblematic character so well, but also to have judged him, with the final catastrophe fruit of his recklessness; to have therefore insinuated some doubts, some symptoms of apprehension in the times of seeming abundance...[38]

And yet, despite Roberto's tragic death, Bruno's wanna-be lady-killer character prevails, visually and musically placed at the centre of a national identity that was going through a tumultuous renegotiation in the years of the economic boom. However, in the final crash it is not only Roberto's misguided trust in Bruno's new ways which dies, but also his decidedly non-alpha masculinity and the queerness his "sad young man" character had represented. The Bruno Cortonas, as we know, would continue to prevail in subsequent years, and often to the detriment of the Roberto Marianis who did not dance along or take advantage of whatever and whoever came their way, without worrying too much about the consequences – like many real Italians in the following decades. Roberto seeks to emulate and internalise Bruno's vision, but is eliminated in a Darwinian finale which, according to a cultural rather than natural selection, lets Bruno survive and the estranged, not fully "evolved" Roberto perish. This is a somewhat predictable outcome for the sad young man figure. Nevertheless, queer desire emerges prominently from the very start of the film, articulated primarily in musical choices which, through changes in the instrumentation and their unusual positioning, offer paths for affiliating identifications which challenge the dominant ideology rather than reinforcing it like composed scores tend to do. Similarly, the alleged "openness" that pre-existing songs could bring becomes "tightened" through these songs' association with Bruno and the other characters who are embracing the new order, inviting examples of Kassabian's assimilating identifications. Finally, *Il sorpasso* articulates a clear narrative contrast between Bruno and Roberto using songs that position them on board and outside of a national identity under revision, where there is only room for puerile, swaggering alpha males. Despite being clearly audible, the film's queerness is Othered, suppressed, and finally eliminated.

[37] Baranello, 2010.
[38] D'Amico, 2008: 141.

**Table of Acronyms**

**a.k.a.**: also known as
**NECS**: European Network for Cinema and Media Studies

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