

## ARTICLE

# Mina as Transnational Popular Music Star in the Early 1960s

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As a ‘timeless icon’, ‘sophisticated performer’ and ‘the most versatile singer in Italian pop music’, Mina is perhaps the most famous and successful proponent of the *canzone italiana*, Italian mainstream pop music. Her meteoric rise to fame in the early 1960s was mediated by television and the popular press, which both presented Mina as a quintessential Italian star. Her popularity also extended abroad: in the same period, and at the climax of her rise to fame, Mina embarked on television and concert tours of Spain, West Germany, Venezuela, France and Japan. Singles released in these countries during this period performed extremely well, with ‘Heisser Sand’ in West Germany and ‘Suna ni kieta namida’ in Japan charting at number one in each country’s singles chart in 1962 and 1964 respectively. Such success illustrates how, in the period 1960–5, the singer became a transnational popular music star, who was able ‘to produce cultural meaning in relation to (but not dictated by) the existing power structures of nations and states, to remain mobile, flexible, and open to multiple avenues of meaning and pleasure in different contexts of politics, social relations, and cultural assumptions’ (Meeuf and Raphael 2). Through this lens of transnationality, the article explores Mina’s status as star as it was established during the early 1960s in the Italian context before focusing specifically on Mina’s presence on the global market during the same period. It takes as case studies Mina’s star image in Italy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well as the singles released on the Japanese and West German markets, as a means of interrogating the extent to which Mina is transnational, with the potential to generate new cultural and social meanings, both in Italy and beyond.

## Article

As a ‘timeless icon’, ‘sophisticated performer’ and ‘the most versatile singer in Italian pop music’ (Prato, ‘Virtuosity and Populism’ 163–9), Mina is perhaps the most famous and successful proponent of the *canzone italiana*, Italian mainstream pop music. Her meteoric rise to fame in the early 1960s was mediated by television and the popular press, which both presented Mina as a quintessential Italian star. By 1965, her success was such that she was invited by RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana) to return to Italian television screens to host

another series of the popular Saturday night variety television show *Studio Uno*.<sup>1</sup> Mina then released an LP containing songs from the series, which charted at number one, selling more than 700,000 copies. Yet in the period 1960–5 her popularity also extended abroad. At the climax of her rise to fame in 1961–2, Mina embarked on television and concert tours of Spain, West Germany, Venezuela, France and Japan. Singles released in these countries in the early 1960s also performed extremely well, with 'Heisser Sand' in West Germany and 'Suna ni kieta namida' in Japan, for example, charting at number one in each country's singles chart in 1962 and 1964 respectively. Italian-language versions of her songs were equally popular. In 1962, she was voted most popular singer by fans in West Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland ('Mina ha conquistato la Germania'), and in 1964 she won the title of Best International Artist in Japan (Fratarcangeli 87). By 1965, then, it is clear that Mina's star status was firmly established not only in Italy but also abroad.

Yet quite what this status signified to her fans, the broader public and the industry at large is not so clear cut. Gundle has argued that Italian stars offer 'a significant way of "reading" Italian society and culture' (262). He explains that 'what is especially interesting for Italian studies is not so much the box office role of the star (in economic terms, stars serve mainly to attract the attention of the potential audience and ensure a film has good distribution and a strong opening) but his or her function as a cultural symbol and conduit for ideas about gender, values and national identity' (263). Although Gundle is speaking primarily of cinema stars, his arguments can be applied also to stars from other entertainment media, including popular music. As a result of the starification process to which they are subjected, Italian stars can arguably be seen to embody a set of meanings and connotations which reveal something about the systems of cultural value, and the wider established ideologies and ways of behaving at work in Italian society. Yet it is important to remember that these meanings may differ according to the different constructors and recipients of the star image. In particular, the uses to which the recipients may put the star can result in her coming to embody a set of contradictory things, even for the same recipient.

In addition, there is the question of what happens when stars move beyond their national boundaries. Do they continue to represent ideas and ways of behaving that are specifically Italian once they move outside of the nation? Or do they come to represent new ideas and thus symbolize new meanings and values? This article explores these questions in the case of Mina and her fame within and outside of Italy in the early 1960s. It builds on work on Mina as star, who 'con la sua voce mitica e le sue parole che etichettano un'intera ampia zona della nostra storia sociale, emotiva, sentimentale, culturale, è (se si può dire) più mito degli altri [cantanti italiani]' (Favaro 73), and on the notion of cross-cultural exchanges in Italian popular music through cover records (Prato, 'Selling Italy'), by focusing on a specific period in Mina's career and the cross-cultural exchange that her songs and appearances abroad then represent. The article examines the ways in which Mina's star image was constructed in the early 1960s and the extent to which her significance as a star remains associated with Italy and Italian culture. In this way, it contributes to our understanding of Italian popular music outside of its national context. Speaking about the perception of modern and contemporary Italy abroad, John Foot has argued that there exists a stereotype about Italy as a backward country, which follows trends and is not as a leader, nor is at the forefront of innovation, nor is a place for creativity (Foot). Such attitudes are certainly present in how Italian music

<sup>1</sup> Mina had been ostracised from Italian television in 1963 following the announcement of her pregnancy by Corrado Pani, a married actor with whom she had been having an affair. The scandal was covered by the popular press, which followed the story in detail as Pani sought to annul his marriage and as the baby was born. Yet RAI was forced to rescind the ban in 1964 due to public demand for the star, thus allowing Mina to return to successfully host another series of *Studio Uno* in 1965.

is often viewed in an anglophone context. Yet the case of Mina presented here begins to challenge this view and in fact shows that there is much to be gained from studying Italian popular music, from both a national and a transnational perspective. Indeed, in this latter context Mina in the period in question can be considered a transnational star, both at home and abroad, with the potential 'to produce cultural meaning in relation to (but not dictated by) the existing power structures of nations and states' (Meeuf and Raphael 2). The article thus also contributes to our understanding of the circulation and meaning of transnational forms of culture and their potential to foster challenges to established cultural meanings and practices.

### ***Mina, la diva nazionale***

Anna Maria Mazzini, or Mina as she is more commonly known, is a prolific Italian pop singer who rose to fame in the late 1950s and who continues to release albums to this day (which continue to sell well, demonstrating her extraordinary fanbase in Italy). She was particularly dominant from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, before her retirement from television appearances in 1974 and public performances in 1978. Her popularity with Italian audiences was cemented during this dominant period by her continued appearances on Saturday night variety programmes, produced by the state broadcaster, RAI. Indeed, Italian television of this period played a crucial role in making Mina a household name in 1960s Italy. Her resultant star image (Dyer 60) has been and is constructed through a range of different texts including music (both live and recorded), television appearances and her role as host on Saturday night Italian television shows, as well as film, magazines and the popular press, advertising and album covers. These different media interact to generate Mina's image and also the meanings that are associated with her. And in the context of Mina as a transnational star at the start of the 1960s, it is important to examine which mediums were interacting at that point to produce her star image and thus her status, so as to understand more fully what Mina signified to Italians at that point in her career.

At the start of the decade, and before her arrival on national television as host of shows such as *Studio Uno* in 1961–2, Mina's star status and thus her significance for the Italian public was informed primarily by the Italian popular music context of those years. Mina had begun performing in 1958 as an *urlatrice* and, as a result, quickly came to represent modernity and youth in the Italian context through magazine articles and concert reviews of the period that posit her as such. But she was also seen to symbolize musical innovation, given the apparent American influence of rock 'n' roll on her style of singing and performing. For example, an article from the magazine *Bolero Film*,<sup>2</sup> published in August 1959, explains that it is necessary to 'riconoscere l'enorme strada percorsa da questa ragazza che, meno di un anno fa, non aveva ancora mai cantata in pubblico. Per Mina Mazzini (ma il cognome non fa parte del suo nome di battaglia) si può dunque parlare di marcia trionfale' (28). We are told that 'la ragazza indiatolata dai ritmi urlati si era imposta tra i migliori della "nuova ondata", di quei giovani, cioè, antitradizionalisti, legati per lo più ai nuovi stili importati dagli Stati Uniti' (28). Even if she had not met the talent scouts, 'avrebbe fatto strada ugualmente. Lo dimostrano la rapidità con cui si è imposta, il suo temperamento deciso e personalissimo, le sue notevoli possibilità vocali' (28). As far as Mina's star image is concerned, the article concludes that

<sup>2</sup> *Bolero Film* was a *fotoromanzo* launched by Mondadori in 1947. Leonzi explains that 'rispettando i cliché dei romanzi sentimentali, i fotoromanzi ospitano, quasi sempre, avvincenti storie d'amore a lieto fine. La coppia di amanti protagonista della vicenda si trova, però, ad affrontare insidie e difficoltà che servono ad aumentare la suspense del lettore, prima di poter coronare il proprio sogno di felicità. I fotoromanzi rappresentano, inoltre, un primo trampolino di lancio per molti personaggi che diventeranno più conosciuti nel campo cinematografico e televisivo' (51).

'di un'eleganza sobria, senza gioielli, semplicissima, Mina passa facilmente dalla malinconia all'allegria sfrenata e canta, più che per mestiere, per dar sfogo al proprio temperamento, per esprimersi. E sono già molti i giovani che si riconoscono in lei' (28).

The magazine here presents Mina as the modern, young, intelligent *ragazza*; she has managed to rise to the level of being considered amongst the best of this new wave of singers; she is an anti-traditionalist *giovane*, very personable, understatedly elegant, very simple in her tastes and representative of many young people of this period. The emphasis on Mina as young and youthful is of particular significance here: she represents something innovative and against tradition in the context of Italian popular music, and is accepted by the industry purely thanks to her age. But acceptance is not wholly complete as she is described as being possessed by the rhythm of this new wave of *urlo* music. She easily passes from melancholy to frenzied glee, suggesting perhaps that she has little focus. And she sings not because this is her chosen profession, but rather because she is motivated by the desire to vent her own emotions, suggesting that she puts her own desires above those of her audience.

As an *urlatrice* at the end of the 1950s, Mina's star image is marked by her youth, her unconventionality, the perceived challenge that she presents to Italian musical traditions and her openness to non-Italian musics. In order to better understand these meanings, we need to see Mina in the context of the Italian popular musical landscape of the late 1950s. Broadly speaking, this can be categorized by the *urlatori* on the one hand, and on the other, the traditional *canzone*, epitomized by the Sanremo Festival. The *Festival della Canzone Italiana di Sanremo* is, as Agostini has pointed out, 'the most representative showcase for mainstream Italian popular music' (28). Songs at Sanremo evinced 'a national-popular element, easily accessible and escapist, rooted in a pre-World War II musical past' (Agostini 30). As a result, Agostini posits Sanremo as 'the stronghold of the "authentic tradition of the Italian melodic song" [and ...] an unwieldy event that was always the subject of criticism and heated debate, but was nonetheless celebrated and followed by the public and the critics' (31).

The *urlo* can be seen as being in opposition to these Italian traditions of song, and as not representative of mainstream Italian popular musical tastes, but an example rather of 'youth' music. Presented as an Italian version of American rock 'n' roll, *urlo* involved shouting the lyrics – as opposed to the melodic singing style of the *canzone italiana* – against a driving rhythm usually provided by electric guitars and drums. It is paradoxical that Mina's success came as she embraced a musical form that was not typically Italian in the first instance. However, Prato argues that the genre in fact paved 'the way to Italian pop' and that the *urlatori* eventually 'came to replace the old guard of melodic singers' ('Virtuosity and Populism' 162). He also explains that 'the new wave implicated more important issues around the present and future of the youth though, as underlined by the popular press of the time' ('Virtuosity and Populism' 163). These issues regarding Italian youth of the late 1950s are present in the *Bolero Film* article about Mina. The uneasiness at the freedom of expression and movement that the journalist expresses echoes the uneasiness with which *urlo* was viewed, particularly by the older generation in Italy. Campus explains that 'gli urlatori infatti erano per loro stessa natura uno dei simboli del "nuovo che avanza" (nella musica e nella società), dell'energia, della trasgressione, del cambiamento, della giovinezza' (3266). Many adults, he says, 'consideravano gli urlatori alla stregua di incivili, veri e propri scostumati. [...] Una questione di stili canori era traslata su un pieno di decenza, di general decadenza dei costume' (3266).

However, during 1960 and 1961 there was a transition in the way in which Mina was presented by the industry, as a new 'text' began to contribute to the construction of Mina's star image: the *canzone all'italiana*. Despite her association with the 'dangerous modernity' posed by the *urlo*, Mina's popularity had begun to grow, thanks primarily to her appearances on the

two popular television programmes of the moment: *Il musicchiere* and *Lascia o raddoppia?* Yet in order to maintain and increase such popularity, the Italian music industry at large required a more 'toned down' type of music and performance, as did the older Italian audience. This is thus the context in which Mina in the early 1960s began to move away from *urlo* and to embrace the more melodious and lyrical *canzone all'italiana*, a move that was in particular the result of the invitations the singer received in 1960 and 1961 to appear at the Sanremo Festival. This change in genre also necessitated a change in appearance that eschewed the rock 'n' roll image of trousers and leather jackets, and more overtly embraced a traditionally modest and feminine style that involved knee-length dresses with sweetheart necklines and a carefully coiffured bouffant. Yet whilst her hairstyle and outfits demonstrate the turn towards 'tradition' within Italian popular music, there is still an element of modernity and youth in Mina's appearance, as she keeps up with the fashion trends of the period. Even as a *cantante all'italiana*, then, Mina represents the new generation of young Italians of the late 1950s and early 1960s and her star image allows for multiple meanings, depending on the consumer in question: young and older audiences would see Mina as modern or traditional, according to their own personal ideology. It is important to highlight the multiplicity of meanings that are associated with Mina here: the ideas of modernity and tradition that she represents reveal two apparently contradictory ways in which we can 'read' Italian culture in this period. In this way, Mina can be seen as already possessing the propensity for transnational stardom, because her star status has meanings that are produced in relation to but are not dictated by existing power structures in Italy. Indeed, her very status as popstar, with the international influences of the USA and UK that such a model entails in this period, suggests that there is an element of transnationality to Mina's star image at the start of her career, before she began to perform outside of Italy.

This is the context for the identification by the press of Mina as Italy's national star by 1961. In an article from *Tempo*, the journalist Mino Guerrini states that with Mina, 'L'Italia del dopoguerra ha finalmente trovato la sua diva' (12). The significance of this star status is clear, argues Guerrini: 'Mina [...] è la diva nazionale, l'argomento che supera il pregiudizio etnico e unisce le due Italie: la ricca e la povera, la settentrionale e la meridionale, la rossa e la biancofiorata' (12). No longer just the 'ragazzetta del juke-box' who only the teenage audience follow, Mina now has universal appeal and status. She apparently transcends the divisions of class, geography, politics and generation inherent to Italian society of that moment and, in so doing, represents something quintessentially Italian for her listeners. Yet how she actually does this is not explored, nor does Guerrini expand upon the notion of 'the two Italies' or explain how Mina brings them together. Nonetheless, Mina's alleged ability to be able to generate new societal meanings that transcend what are apparently pre-existing social and cultural constructs again demonstrates her potential as a transnational star. In the context of the article specifically, for Guerrini *italianità* consists of both modernity and tradition, or social change and status quo in light of the changes in Italy during the *miracolo economico* of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, Crainz identifies various factors at work in Italian society during this period: 'la capacità di tenuta di vecchi assetti e culture, il loro sopravvivere e mescolarsi ai nuovi processi (talora minandoli dall'interno), e la qualità stessa della "modernità" che si afferma' (63). He ultimately concludes that 'l'identità collettiva, insomma, appare principalmente come l'esito del confliggere di diverse identità, di diversi modi di "essere italiani"' (176): the blurring of modernity and tradition is then a case in point. And Mina, as *la diva nazionale* of the moment, represents both aspects. The fact that her star image is constructed by 'texts' that appear to oppose one another (the *urlo* against the *canzone all'italiana* in this case) allows for blurring and overlapping meanings of her star status, which shed

light on the reshaping and reconstituting of Italian culture taking place in this period. These meanings, then, are not necessarily fully dictated by the existing power structures within Italy but rather are influenced by global developments in culture and politics more broadly.

### Mina abroad

Mina's popularity and success in Italy in the early 1960s was commensurate with her star status. Between 1960 and 1965, she released three albums and twenty-three singles on the Italian market, with one LP and three singles then charting on the Italian Hit Parade at the number one spot. However, this was also the period in which she released singles, EPs and albums around the world, as well as embarking on tours outside of Italy across Europe, South America and Asia. She was most prolific and successful in these years in Spain (three albums, two singles and twenty-one EPs), Japan (four albums, eighteen singles and two EPs), and West Germany (one album and seventeen singles). The initial trip to Spain took place in 1961, where Mina was accompanied by her then impresario Elio Gigante. Later that year, she travelled to Japan with composer and arranger Bruno Canfora. Both tours were seemingly organized by Gigante, following Mina's unsuccessful bid to win the Sanremo Festival in 1961. In an interview, Mina explained that, following the song contest, 'sentivo che non avrei avuto più il coraggio di presentarmi davanti al pubblico. Mi convinsi che la mia carriera era finita, perché quella forza che fino allora mi aveva sorretta si era improvvisamente spenta. Fu Elio Gigante, il mio manager, a ricaricarmi, a ridarmi fiducia. [...] Elio con molta umanità, ma anche con molta decisione, mi costrinse a tornare alla ribalta. Mi condusse in Giappone, e là, davanti a un pubblico in delirio, d'incanto ritrovai me stessa' (cited in Beppenovara). The first trip to Germany was then in 1962.<sup>3</sup> This article now focuses on Mina's presence in the two latter countries as case studies through which to read her fame and star status abroad.

In the Spanish context, we can begin to explain Mina's popularity as a result of an increased interest in this period in Italian popular music in general in Spain. Jesús Ordovás reveals that at the end of the 1950s and into the early 1960s, there were two particular music genres that were popular in Spain: American-inspired rock 'n' roll and French and Italian-influenced *canciones* (13). Spanish television showcased singers such as Cocki Mazzetti, Peppino Di Capri and Adriano Celentano, alongside Françoise Hardy, Sylvie Vartan and Johnny Hallyday (17), while new music magazines such as *Mosaico Musical* and later *Discóbolo* and *El Correo de la Radio* featured interviews with and photographs of such stars, along with reviews of their concerts and new albums (22). Ordovás concludes that these were 'años de inventiva, ocurrencias y creación de estilos, ritmos, modas y estéticas propias, revulsivas, cutres y heroicas al socaire de las mil y una canciones llegadas de américa, inglaterra, francia o italia' (23). Mina, then, is part of this broader wave of international music that was popular and influential in Spain in the period.

Yet in Japan and Germany, Mina appears to be popular first and foremost in her own right, and not as part of a wave of music arriving in these countries from Italy in this period. She is not obviously associated with Italy when presented on album and single covers in these two countries and, in Germany, does not even sing in Italian. Thus her impact and star status as the *diva nazionale* of Italy, who is 'a cultural symbol and conduit for ideas about gender, values

<sup>3</sup> There is little documented about the role played by Gigante as impresario and Mina's record company, Italdisc, in arranging these initial tours outside of Italy. More work is also required on the processes and marketing strategies of the Italian recording industry in this period, both at home and abroad. Studies thus far have covered the 1940s and 1950s (Forgacs and Gundle) or provide a brief overview of the history of the industry in general terms (De Luigi). These are areas that require additional investigation and research, which unfortunately remains beyond the scope of this article.



and national identity' (Gundle 263), are transformed in these different national contexts, where new cultural meanings of Mina and of Italian popular music are generated.

### Mina in Japan

In Japan, Mina's songs were first released in 1960. In the period 1960–5, many of these songs had previously been brought out in Italy, and were then released in Italian on the Japanese market. There were only five Japanese-language songs released in this period. 'Anata to watashi' (1960) was an original composition by the Italian composer and music arranger Bruno Canfora. The song was written especially for the Japanese market; for the subsequent release in Italy, only the title was translated ('Tu ed io'). The other four were all translations: 'Suna ni kieta namida' (1964) of 'Un buco nella sabbia'; 'Kimi ni namida to hohoemi wo' (1965) of 'Se piangi, se ridi'; 'Wakare' (1965) of 'Un anno d'amore'; and 'Kanashimiha sorano-kanatani' (1965) of 'Sette mari'.

If we consider for a moment the cover artwork of these Japanese singles, we can identify two primary promotional strategies at work in the presentation of Mina between 1960 and 1964. There is then a discernible shift from 1964 onwards, to which we shall return shortly. For the covers of 'Tintarella di luna' (1960) and 'Il cielo in una stanza' (1960), for example, the photographs of Mina clearly construct her as an *urlatrice* and even an anglophone rock 'n' roll singer.<sup>4</sup> She wears a white leather jacket, visually aligning her to the fashion trends of rock 'n' roll. There is also the presence of some English here ('New Top Rank International Record Hit') and images of a jukebox and some white Western teenagers as its audience. There is little obvious reference to Italy; rather, Mina is presented as a foreign star who reflects in Japan the wave of rock 'n' roll music sweeping the globe in the 1950s and early 1960s. The decision to represent Mina using an apparently American aesthetic can perhaps be explained by the turn towards American models of design and fashion within Japanese popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s. In his work on Japan in this period, Furmanovsky highlights 'the strong affinity for American consumer and cultural products' (55) that existed there. Stevens has underlined the presence of American music on the Japanese market in the 1950s, the emergence of the Americanized model of the pop star with the growing popularity of the record, the resultant connection between the song and the singer's image, and the increased use of music television programming in Japan in this period. In the 1960s, then, this American influence was appropriated to produce a new type of Japanese popular music: 'a more mature Japanese pop sound emerged: more than a cover, it was a sentimental yet playful genre of pop music that integrated American style with Japanese sensibility' (41). Yet Japanese culture in this period was also looking to Europe for cultural inspiration: Furmanovsky charts the emergence of a preference for European styles too, explaining the consolidation of 'the association of elegance, femininity and social mobility with European fashion sensibility' (55) in Japan.

The status of Mina as a popular singer from Europe, and thus as a legitimate model of fashion and femininity that can and should be emulated, is then present in the second promotional strategy at work in the Japanese covers. In this case, nine singles use photographs of Mina that are in fact stills taken from the *Musicarelli* films in which she starred from 1959 to 1962. These films in general had a deliberate commercial aim: indeed, the name *Musicarello* recalls the *Caroselli* television advertisements of the same period (Della Casa and Manera 11). Cecilia Brioni has argued that 'the films were part of a promotional circuit "film-singer-song", for which every element of the circuit promoted the other two. The commercial aim of these

<sup>4</sup> All single covers referred to in the article from both Japanese and German releases can be viewed at: [www.rahre-search.wordpress.com/2017/09/23/mina-in-japan-and-west-germany/](http://www.rahre-search.wordpress.com/2017/09/23/mina-in-japan-and-west-germany/) [accessed October 2017].

films is also the element that is mostly emphasized by cinema critics: as far as the predominance of musical performances and the weakness of the plots are concerned, these films are criticised as lacking any cultural interest' (42). She explains that these films were the first media product aimed at an audience of young people. As a genre, the *Musicarelli* developed at the end of the 1950s and sought to 'dare un volto ai beniamini della radio' (Capussotti 247) who were not yet involved in Italian television.

The two films that are referenced on Mina's Japanese single covers are *Appuntamento a Ischia* (1960) and *Appuntamento in Riviera* (1962). In both films, Mina's status as Italy's national star plays an integral part. *Appuntamento a Ischia* (1960) features Mina playing herself; she is apparently visiting Ischia to record songs and television adverts and is also the guest performer at the island's most popular nightclub. The segment in which we observe her being filmed as she records 'La nonna Magdalena' is not integral to the plot. Rather, it functions as an early instance of a 'music video', an element that is underlined for the viewer as we adopt the position of the camera filming the performance. Vernallis has noted that 'music videos derive from the songs they set. The music comes first – the song is produced before the video is conceived – and the director normally designs images with the song as a guide. Moreover, the video must sell the song; it is therefore responsible to the song in the eyes of the artist and record company' (x). The segment in *Appuntamento a Ischia* is a music video in that we observe Mina being filmed as she performs her song. The film shows the music video being recorded and this segment then functions to highlight the song itself and thus Mina as the artist, and to 'sell' them both to the audience, so promoting Mina's status as the popular music star.

This status is then picked up in *Appuntamento in Riviera* (1962), in which Mina plays a version of herself. She is introduced in the film as a guest performer at an awards ceremony but quickly becomes an integral part in the film, acting as the fiancée for the main character, Tony (played by Tony Renis). The 'Mina-as-star character' draws on Mina's own personal life and her actual star image, to enable audiences to read her performance and also the film. The twists and turns of the plot, together with our external knowledge of Mina's different relationships during the early 1960s (for which she had become famous in the popular press), underline the anti-traditionalist element of Mina's star image. In the film, she takes the lead in her relationships (be it her fictional relationship with Tony or her supposed actual relationship with her boyfriend) and engineers circumstances to get what she wants. Yet she is also the modern star: Paola Valentini has posited that in this film, 'it is the young *urlatrice* who takes the stage and announces her presence to the world. When Mina agrees to marry Tony, she takes advantage of the media, controlling it and no longer victim to its gossip. Instead she is a detached and ironic spectator to the manipulations, able to defend her apparent lack of scruples and well aware of her freedom and independence' (91). It is important to remember here that in the early 1960s Mina's various relationships and suspected flirtations had been the subject of much media interest and featured as the topic of several articles in *rotocalchi* such as *Gente* and *Oggi*. The fact that we see Mina in the film using the media to her advantage – rather than being used by it – brings an additional meaning to the star image. There is a crossover here between the external star and the internal character of the film, suggesting that Valentini's reading can be applied both to the character of Mina in the film but also to Mina the star outside of the film. In order to understand the performances, we must be aware of Mina's stardom and of her immense popularity. These films thus function as 'star vehicles': by choosing Mina to be the star within the films, they highlight her star status outside of the cinematic world and thus promote it even more.

Japanese audiences also had the opportunity to see Mina on film, as *Appuntamento a Ischia* was released there under the title *Vacanze a Ischia*. An article published in the Italian music



journal *Musica e Dischi* explains the important contribution the film made to the Japanese public's response to Mina in 1961:

Mai visto a Tokio tanto entusiasmo per una cantante. Il fatto è che Mina, preceduta oltre che dalla diffusione dei suoi dischi, dalla programmazione del film 'Vacanze a Ischia', ha conquistato immediatamente le simpatie di tutti presentando, avvolta in un magnifico kimono 'Il cielo in una stanza', in giapponese!!! I festeggiamenti in suo onore si sono susseguiti a ritmo incalzante, misti a comparse in televisione (in Giappone esistono ben 11 canali di diffusione) e ad esibizioni in alcuni dei più famosi locali notturni. ('Banzai Mina! Bentornata Mina!')

Mina is recognized as a popular music star in Japan and was welcomed as such on her first visit to the country in 1961. This status is visible on the Japanese singles through particular reference to her performances in the *Musicarelli* films. By using stills from the films, the covers highlight Mina's status as an Italian star who is famous enough to be the lead in several popular films. But significantly, this affirms her ability to represent to Japanese culture not specific notions bound up with *italianità* but rather the European, or arguably Western aesthetic that was making a mark on Japanese society in the 1960s. This is because the stills from the films that are used are not labelled as such and there is no obvious link to Italy or Italian culture here. Rather, Mina appears as a singing sensation whose sophisticated wardrobe and performance style mark her as European and, thus more broadly, Western. She wears a flamenco-style dress during the performance of 'La nonna Magdalena' in *Appuntamento a Ischia*, from which stills are used for five of the singles released in this period. In a later performance of 'Il cielo in una stanza' from the same film, Mina wears a stylish catsuit with black trousers and a strappy white leotard with a sweetheart neckline, and long black sleeves that accentuate her gestures during the performance. There is nothing that marks the clothing as Italian; rather, it is the outfit of a star performer from Western popular music of the period. This image is then used for the cover of 'Wakare/Un anno d'amore' in 1965. Finally, a still from *Appuntamento in Riviera* is used for the cover of 'Renato/Improvvisamente' (1963), where Mina is shown wearing a smart white jacket and skirt, with a black blouse. Again, there is nothing obviously Italian in her look and she appears rather to be fashionable and sophisticated in terms of a broader Western aesthetic.

The idea of Mina's 'look' as representative of Western sensibilities in Japan reaches beyond her single cover artwork: Furmanovsky identifies her influence on a popular Japanese pop duo of the period, The Peanuts, made up of twins Emi and Yumi Ito. He explains that the twins' manager and musical director would seek songs from around the world for the sisters to cover and:

Among those artists deemed worthy of attention [...] was the Italian chanteuse Mina Mazzini, whose slightly rock-tinged 'Tintarella di Luna' (1959) was covered in a more pop-oriented version by the sisters. Whilst dispensing with Mina's passionate on-stage vocal delivery, the Italian star's stylish looks, whether black slacks and white blouses or elegant sleeveless dresses, were plainly an influence on the style that was being shaped for the sisters. Indeed the sleeve of the duo's cover single of the Mazzini number, reveals The Peanuts demurely attired in elegant black and white chiffon party dresses. In June 1961, the Italian star, perhaps surprised at her popularity in Japan, came to Tokyo and appeared as a guest on *The Hit Parade*. Wearing her signature white sleeveless dress with black fur hem, the dark-haired Italian idol appeared standing next to the seated twins on the cover of the mass circulation *Heibon* magazine. The

latter, cute rather than elegant in blue flowery petticoat dresses and pink party sandals – are contrasted in the image with the adult-like Italian diva, who appears the epitome of European chic. (58)

It is important to underscore here Mina's apparent Europeaness. Her status as *la diva nazionale* is not obviously picked up on by the Japanese music industry and she thus does not represent a specific image of Italy. Rather, she symbolizes modern, Western music, firstly rock 'n' roll and then also melodic song, with its stars who embodied fashion and sophistication. Mina can thus be seen to be a transnational star for the Japanese market in the early 1960s, particularly in the light of what Meeuf and Raphael propose as the ability of transnational stars and media:

To produce cultural meaning in relation to (but not dictated by) the existing power structures of nations and states, to remain mobile, flexible, and open to multiple avenues of meaning and pleasure in different contexts of politics, social relations, and cultural assumptions [...]. The constructs of the nation or the inequalities of global capitalism, even when glaringly present, can be obscured or put aside in favour of the seemingly intimate and personal connections created by consuming transnational stars. (2)

The meaning of Mina in Japan is produced in relation to ideas and images that originate from Italy, but that have the potential to take on new significances which are not bound by that national context. The aim here is not to delineate the specific meanings that audiences created: rather, I want to highlight that, through Mina's relocation to a new cultural context, she acquires the potential to act as an exemplar of Western music, culture, gender norms and values, who can be respected and emulated by Japanese audiences.

### **Mina in West Germany**

In the period 1960 to 1964, Mina released seventeen singles and one album on the West German market. What stands out immediately is the presence of the German language in eighteen of the songs released. Many of these were written specifically for Mina by well-known Schlager songwriters. In the 1960s, the Schlager, or 'hit song', can be characterized as a light, easy listening popular song that deals with themes such as love, relationships and feelings. Larkey explains that:

Schlager, rooted in nineteenth-century operetta and dance traditions, blossomed into a vibrant form of cultural expression in the 1920s and 1930s and after World War II, served as a vehicle for expressing a variety of feelings – loss, abandonment, loneliness, disillusionment, and hope. Because Schlager is a historically syncretized genre capable of adapting various influences and traditions, it is difficult to pin down its specific characteristics [...]; in general, however, it employs 4/4 time, orchestral or pop arrangements, and, some exceptions aside, African-American musical characteristics like syncopation and blue-notes are not used. (1)

It is significant to note that Mina's big break in West Germany was thanks to her recording of Schlager, and she was therefore not initially identified as an Italian popular music star but rather as a foreign singer and 'exotic other' in the West German music industry.

As far as her single cover artwork is concerned, Mina is marketed along the lines of the 'look' of other popular Schlager singers of the period. 'L'éclipse twist/Chihuahua' (1962) is

the only single of the early 1960s that breaks with this strategy. The cover for this features a still from the film *L'Eclisse* by Michelangelo Antonioni, for which Mina recorded the songs as part of the soundtrack; the strategy here is to promote the single through the film and vice versa. The other single covers do not obviously highlight Mina's Italianness. There is only one slight indication of her origins on the cover of 'Stessa spiaggia stesso mare/Ollallà Gigi' (1963) with the use of a *tricolore* to frame the photograph of Mina and to indicate that the lyrics are in Italian. Beyond this, it is not obvious where Mina is from. The photographs that appear on these covers are also not those that were used for Mina's releases in Italy. Rather, they appear to have been taken solely for the German market. They feature headshots of Mina in various poses (on the telephone, with some gladioli, relaxing in a deckchair, holding her sunglasses), but always with the same sleek bouffant hairstyle and fringe, and with dark eyeliner and mascara. Although she is not overtly sexualized (through revealing clothing or provocative poses), there is an element of the exotic other that is reinforced through the consistent use of the close-up of the 'dark-haired Mediterranean beauty'.

Yet the style of these photographs and the styling of the covers is also very reminiscent of that used to promote other Schlager singers of the period, particularly Caterina Valente and Margot Eskens.<sup>5</sup> The three women are shown in similar poses and wearing similar outfits (tailored jackets and skirts, sweetheart necklines or strappy dresses) with carefully styled bouffants and make-up to accentuate their dark eyes and red lips, emphasizing their apparent exotic Mediterranean beauty (even if, in the case of Eskens, they were not of Mediterranean origin at all). Although born in Italy, Valente made her career in Germany before becoming famous across Europe and then singing in Italian and English. German-born Eskens was a highly successful Schlager singer, with most of her success coming in the 1950s and 1960s. She was signed by Polydor Records in the 1950s, and this may explain some of similarities in how she and Mina are presented on single covers: Mina's German-language releases were also with Polydor in this period.

Yet the similarities, I would argue, go much beyond this. There is in fact an apparent trope at work here that presents female Schlager singers in a certain way: they are elegant, sophisticated, demure, attractive (but not sexy), modern yet traditional and, perhaps most significantly, not obviously German. They are performers of a genre that 'came to denote conservative, obsolete, orthodoxy with regard to musical taste and social/cultural behaviors' (Larkey 4) and was arguably an example of popular music that was in opposition to 'the emerging hegemony of the United States, the political and military leader of the Western world whose culture industry challenged the weakened German cultural elite with a powerful combination of unbridled and unrepentant commercialism, populism, and consumerism' (Larkey 1).

In the context of this reassertion of German culture and values, it is important to reinforce that Mina's big break in West Germany was thanks to her recording of Schlager, and not because of her status as an Italian popular music star. Her first single, 'Heisser Sand' (1962), is a particularly good example of a Schlager; it sold more than 1.3 million copies and held the number one spot in the charts for nine weeks. There are no obvious audio cues reminiscent of Italian popular music. Rather, the sounds make us think of somewhere stereotypically 'exotic', 'middle eastern', 'Indian' or 'Arabic'. The plucked guitar at the start plays a melody that draws from the double harmonic scale, or Arabic scale, which is uncommon in Western music and so sounds exotic to Western listeners. The plucking is also reminiscent of an instrument such as a sitar, thus further exoticizing the sound. We even have low notes from a group of male

<sup>5</sup> These covers can be viewed alongside those of Mina at: [www.rahresearch.wordpress.com/2017/10/15/mina-as-schlager-star-of-the-1960s/](http://www.rahresearch.wordpress.com/2017/10/15/mina-as-schlager-star-of-the-1960s/) [Accessed October 2017].

singers at the start, which are perhaps reminiscent of throat singing. Significantly, the references to this 'exotic other' clearly do not consistently draw on one national influence or music type; yet the stereotypical audio cues illustrate an openness to other cultural forms and influences that do not originate in Europe or North America. The lyrics, too, illustrate this mixing together of 'other' cultural influences, with the Italian characters of the song – Dino, Nina and Rocco – surrounded by the dangers of the 'hot sand of the lost land' that evokes images of colonial domination in Africa.

Simon reads the song as 'one of the most striking instances of the patriarchal-colonialist aspect of identity formation that reads like a colonialist *bildungsroman*' (97). She hears Turkish-Moroccan instruments and a tribal drumbeat, which, she contends, turn the song 'into an orientalist sound painting complete with Freecorps-style adventurousness, licentious female sexuality, adultery, a man's true love, a murder of passion, and expatriation' (97–8). When we consider the fact that in the West German context Mina is seen first and foremost as a Schlager singer, another problematic stereotype of the 'other' emerges. Many German Schlager stars were of non-German origins and even those who were actually adopted accents that made them sound foreign (Simon 96). Simon argues that, in the broader context of the genre, 'the specific ethnic origin was of no interest, only the invitation, through appearance and/or foreign accent, to imagine the singer as the representative of an abstract Germanic wish-colony, a perfect combination of all things a German held dear paired with better food, better weather, and better sex' (96).

Whilst this reductive approach to the 'other' is clearly problematic, it can be argued that Schlager singers, like Mina, and their songs also point to more positive changes taking place in German culture in the postwar period that were to do with the construction of a new cultural and national identity, which marked a separation from Nazi German ideals and values. Simon explains that in the 1960s, 'young liberal Germans attempted to construct a politically safe identity – that is, as unpatriotic and therefore as nontraditionally German as possible – through appropriating non-German culture' (92). The fact that many of the Schlager stars were from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and that this difference was made evident in their pronunciation of German when singing, 'seemed to attest publicly to postwar Germany's newly won democratic ability not only to tolerate Otherness but also to admire and integrate it' (96). Mina's Italianness in the German context, then, although not a predominant marketing strategy, is testament to changes taking place within West German culture and society that in this case were facilitated through a form of culture that was nationally 'other'.

This, then, is another example of the ability of a transnational star to generate new cultural meanings that are not dictated by national boundaries, and to thus embody multiple possible things in different social, cultural and political settings (Meeuf and Raphael 2). In the West German context, Mina as a popular German singer of non-German origins becomes emblematic of a politically safe identity that is non-traditionally German, which is then showcased and circulated through popular music. In this case, in listening to her music audiences are able to produce new cultural meanings that challenge the existing and historical power structures of nation and state present in West Germany of the early 1960s.

### **Mina's star status abroad in the mid-1960s**

By the end of 1964 it is possible to discern a shift in the way in which Mina is presented in both Japan and West Germany. In the Japanese context, she released six singles and one album in the period 1964–5. Here, the covers all use photographs of Mina from the Italian releases of these songs or from their associated promotional materials that were also used in Italy. The only addition to the Japanese singles is translations of the song titles. This strategy

had previously been used once before, in 1962, to promote 'Sabato notte', but the photograph of Mina there was clearly visually reminiscent of her status as 'young pop singer and star' and therefore supported the strategy to present her specifically as a *Musicarelli* star. Indeed, that was arguably the strategy also at work in Italy to promote this single. However, for the releases in Japan from 1964–5, the photographs and layouts present Mina as an established star. At first glance, the covers demonstrate again the growing influence of Western models on Japanese culture and models of femininity. Yet whilst there is no explanation of Mina's status in her home country and so no guidance for the Japanese audience as to how they should respond to the singer, there is also no attempt to present Mina as being anything other than a popular music star. It is no longer necessary to present her as a star of films or of (ubiquitous) rock 'n' roll: her status as popular music star, who sings melodic songs specifically popular in Italy and Europe, is now firmly established in Japan. However, the quoting of images of Mina's Italian singles and albums makes indirect reference to her status in Italy too. Therefore, whilst her status as national Italian star is not explained to Japanese audiences, who could potentially still construct her as a European singer, by 1965 her status as national star was nevertheless beginning to influence the way she was presented and promoted overseas.

In West Germany, 1964 is again the year in which changes to Mina's presentation and status are discernible. Of the sixteen songs that featured on singles that year, half were released in Italian. Prior to this point, German had been the primary language for Mina's singles. The *tricolore* framing is again present for these singles, to visually indicate the Italian lyrics, until the release of 'Un buco nella sabbia/Se mi compri un gelato' (1964). Here, the record label employs the layout and photographs of the Italian version released in Italy earlier that year. Significantly, whilst this is again an all-Italian language single on the West German market, Mina is now well established enough as a popular singer in her own right – thanks to her German-language successes – to be able to appear in her 'Italian' form on a single cover. This is also the point when Mina took a break from recording in West Germany; she released no new songs there between 1965 and 1968.<sup>6</sup> When 'Il cielo in una stanza/Ma se ghe penso' (1969) and 'Non credere/Dai dai domani' (1969) emerged, the marketing strategy was clearly different, due in part to the change in record labels from Polydor to Columbia, but primarily because Mina's star status in her home country could no longer be ignored. Her success as an Italian popular music singer far eclipsed that of her Schlager career, a fact that the promotional strategy had to take into account. Thus, by the end of the 1960s Mina is presented in the West German context not as a Schlager singer but rather as an Italian popular music star.

In the case of Mina in the early 1960s, then, her star status outside of Italy is a product of both the national and transnational contexts within which she circulates. Her national meanings interact with her transnational connotations, and in fact become more important as her fame in Japan and West Germany increases. This is arguably because of the very nature of stardom and celebrity: as we consume our stars, we want to know all about them (their private lives, where they come from, what they are interested in) and so we discover the national, regional and even local contexts from which they originate. As far as stars are concerned, then, we can argue that the national never goes away; rather, it circulates as one of the 'media texts' that together make up star image (Dyer 60) and thus star status.

<sup>6</sup> The period 1965–8 saw increasing demands on Mina's time in Italy, where she hosted and starred in the television series *Studio Uno*, *Sabato Sera* and *Canzonissima 1968*. She also recorded and released nine albums and eighteen singles, produced a series of *Caroselli* for Barilla pasta, and founded the record label PDU in this period. Such levels of activity indicate time pressures that explain this decision to a certain extent, but I would also argue that they highlight Mina's ever-increasing star status in Italy and, concurrently, a growing level of autonomy, which meant she could choose to record and perform where and what she preferred.

## Conclusion

This in turn suggests that reading stars can become a process not only of discerning their national status and symbolic value (Gundle 263), but also of tracking how this national status interacts with global and transnational contexts to generate new meanings of the star in both the original and the receiving country. In the case of Mina, the aforementioned article in *Musica e Dischi* demonstrates some of these new meanings in the Japanese context and illustrates in particular their possible impact in Italy:

Considerato l'enorme e sincero successo della cantante, un impresario giapponese ha deciso di inaugurare un night a Lei dedicato e nel quale verranno serviti spaghetti e canzoni italiane. Ciò è particolarmente significativo in quanto ci rivela l'importanza commerciale del viaggio di Mina la quale, oltre naturalmente alla affermazione personale, può oggi vantarsi di aver aperto il mercato del Sol Levante alla musica leggera italiana. ('Banzai Mina! Bentornata Mina!')

The decision described here points to the potential of a two-way economic exchange between Italy and Japan, which is prompted by the desire to know more about a culture that starts with Mina but then transcends her. The star thus becomes a vehicle for learning about national status and values, for promoting this culture abroad and for generating new meanings of both the national culture and the receiving culture.

More broadly, then, the transnational can be a creative space for dialogue and interaction between nations, the circulation of ideas and the generation of new meanings of the stars and nations involved, as well as of questions of status, value and ideology. As far as the transnational and popular music are concerned, Zuberi has argued:

The contours of the national overlap and blur with the local, regional, and transnational. Culture cannot be contained by the boundaries of the state or smaller community units within it. Local identities within the nation-state are reshaped and reconstituted as part of global processes. At the same time, the national is not simply bypassed by transnational and local economies; neither the local or national can be assumed as stable ground against which cultural change is measured. (10)

Reading the idea of 'Mina as transnational star' in the light of the relationship that is outlined here, between the local, regional, national and transnational, allows for new ways of appreciating the potential of, in this case, Italian popular music and culture to act in a way that shapes and reshapes identities and changes cultures in response to the global circulation of cultural products.

But the idea of 'Mina as transnational star' also reveals the power of popular music to produce identity. Simon Frith argues that:

The issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience – a musical experience, an aesthetic experience – that we can only make sense of by taking on both a subjective and a collective identity. The aesthetic, to put this another way, describes the quality of an experience (not the quality of an object); it means experiencing ourselves (not just the world) in a different way. (109)

Frith here does not pin down the potential for popular music to create identities to one particular national form of music; indeed, he is arguing that all pieces of music have the ability



to produce identities and construct experiences that help us to make sense of the world. In a disciplinary context (of Popular Music Studies) where there has been and arguably still is a tendency to privilege and study first British and North American music, the case of Mina in Japan and West Germany illustrates the potential of Italian popular music to produce multiple new cultural meanings in the transnational context of popular music. This would suggest that we need to take a second look at Italian popular music, for the ideas it represents within Italy as well as the cultural meanings it is able to generate outside of the peninsula.

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