

THE TARANTA & INFANTINO

The sound environment is virtually a taboo issue, it's so rarely mentioned. Sound and music reveal our origins and history. They connect us to the deepest secrets of life and determine and define who we are. They unveil the past and mirror the future present. They bring us together and have the power to prophesy change. The ear constantly conditions our minds and actions, soaking up sonic information and influencing our interpretation of forms and images. Sound and music can exalt life and awareness and make us dance and feel alive. They've always accompanied day-to-day functions, from work songs alleviating fatigue, to healing music and lullabies, to sirens and alarms warning us to hide or run. They can persuade us to buy products we don't need, or make us drink to excess or stay calm in crowded elevators. They're utilised for every significant political, religious, and ceremonial event. Many of music and sound's past functions are continuing into the future. Their age-old use as a social control device is an essential part of human existence. Music and ambient sound have always been essential for establishing order and keeping social hierarchies in power.

Originating over a thousand years ago in the Salento and Brindisi area of Southern Italy, the Taranta is one of the last remaining early dances in the entire world. Its origins lie in the remote past and in the music of Greek shamans and the theory of cosmic harmony of Pythagoras. Similar to participants in the Qawwali musical rituals of Pakistan, dancers of the Taranta enter a state of trance and finally collapse in an ecstatic climax.

The legendary modern interpreter of the Taranta, the poet and architect Antonio Infantino (1944 - 2018) was a primal force of nature. Admired by major contemporary thinkers like Julian Beck of the Living Theatre and Fernanda Pivano, who brought American literature and the Beat Generation to Italy, Antonio wrote lyrics protesting modern injustices and was influenced by Brazilian music and Free Jazz as well as by the traditional music of Southern Italy. Wearing a piece of cloth over his head that he dramatically used to cover his bearded face when he spoke in voices like an ancient Greek bard, Antonio's volcanic performances of the Taranta, with its thousand-years-old energy and iron-hard roots, seethed with energy and the force of prophesy. Humanity has progressed towards a single technological language, a sole global culture like that of the remote past. The last culture recounting experiences of life and the world of dreams was that of early human beings. For millennia, we loved pagan Stone Age music, and we all know we still have it deep inside of us, those of us who can remember how to listen.

The world used to be thought of as divine; everything in it was imbued with divinity. In old mystery cults, people were concerned with loving nature and its perfection. Music was part of day-to-day life and it was thought to be essential for communicating with the spirit world. The power of the dead never died. All human wisdom sprung from the past, from the ideas and deeds of one's ancestors. There was an impersonal force inherent in all things. Everything was possible, and it was believed that sound and music could bring the dead back to life. The myth of Orpheus relates how he summoned the spirit of his dead wife Euridice from the underworld through the magical music of his lyre. Although resurrection is the cornerstone of its belief, the

church was especially frightened of the reanimation of the pagan dead. All ritual and music suspected of calling up the dead, like the Egyptian *Zar* and the Italian Taranta, was banned for being Satanic. Going by the popularity of movies about zombies and voodoo, the return of the dead still strikes terror into some hearts.

Believing their music was a gift from the gods, pagans knew that it was good and that it pleased the gods. The church obsessively hated pre-Christian culture and rulers have always had a passion for taking gifts away. Everything pagan had to be cancelled out. Age-old ceremonies were obliterated, usurped, and assimilated, their image and story altered. The Taranta possibly managed to miraculously survive because it apparently cured female farm labourers of the hysteria caused by the bite of the tarantula spider. Like the blues and reggae, music often springs up in an emergency, where it's needed, as a collective concept in order to stay alive, as well as for therapeutic reasons. In the summer, after endless hours bent over in the fields, working like slaves under a burning sun, it was hardly surprising that women desperately needed a psychiatric release. Dancing the Taranta, with its savage obsessive rhythm, saved them from going completely insane.