

family, friendship and a magic carpet: the music of franco cambareri

by john whiteoak

Dr. John Whiteoak is an honorary research fellow in the School of Music, Monash University. He has authored a monograph on the history of improvised music in 19th and 20th century Australia (Currency Press 1999) and was co-editor for the Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia (2003). He writes on a wide range of music and dance topics and his current book project, The Tango Touch, among other things, documents the role of Italian-Australians in popular music. This article, the second in a series on Italian Australian musicians for this journal, (See December 2007 issue), concerns the musical career of Franco Cambareri who migrated to Melbourne after WW2 at fifteen years of age with almost no musical background. Through sheer self-determination and the support of his migrant family, he became a leading combo musician and arranger within and well beyond the Melbourne Italian community and, in creative collaboration with his wife Lucy (Lucia), today produces CDs of fascinating original dance music compositions that are, at the one time, Italian-Australian and International music.

WHEN CALABRIAN-BORN accordionist and composer Franco Cambareri looks back on his nearly seven decades of life from the surrounds of his superbly appointed northern suburbs Melbourne home, the flood of memories and feeling he experiences must seem like a magic carpet ride: a varied and colorful journey – albeit with ups, downs, discomforts and exertions – shared for over four decades by his attractive and sharp-witted Puglia-born wife Lucy (Lucia). His own musical story, like that of many other notable Italian-Australian musicians, began “when he first heard the magic sound of the piano accordion, an instrument he promptly fell in love with and dreamed of one day possessing”.¹ It continues in a present-day collaborative project with Lucy, resulting in the release of ten CDs of his instrumental compositions since 1992, including one that reached the top ten instrumental compositions category of the 2007 Australian Songwriters Association contest.

Franco’s first musical love, the mellow and expressive accordion is, especially in the hands of a European master of styles, uniquely capable of carrying listeners to exotic or culturally distinctive lands or places. Therefore, as might be expected, the fascinating alchemy

of styles, colors, textures and rhythms heard in Franco’s compositions embody a magic carpet-like power as evocative sound-tracks for imaginary journeys. In fact, each composition is dedicated to a family member or treasured friend “in a musical style according to their country of origin”.²

A REDISCOVERED FRIENDSHIP

Over the course of a lifetime it is not uncommon to meet with someone interesting that you take an immediate liking to and later regret that you were unable to get to know better. This was the case with Franco, whom I first met in 1963. I was twenty-one and not long returned to Melbourne after five years in the British merchant navy. Over this time, I had also studied at the British College of Accordionists in London and developed a passion for the Hispanic and Continental European repertoire which the accordion is so well suited to. Italy was where I first became captivated by what Franco calls the ‘magic sound’ of the accordion and, therefore, back in Melbourne, I was naturally drawn to the company of Italian-Australian accordionists and the venues where they played.

One lively meeting place for accordionists was the music school and shop adjacent to the

¹ See Franco Cambareri Profile at www.groovymusic.com.au/profiles

² Cover notes to his 2002 CD *A Sentimental Touch* (Colossus Records).

old Channel 7 Studios in Johnson St, Fitzroy, run by a young, but already very experienced accordionist and teacher, Lou Chiodo. It was here that I met Franco as a softly-spoken and good natured twenty-five year old. Despite his already considerable musical accomplishments, he was genuinely interested in my less promising musical outlook (I had studied the obscure European five-row button accordion instead of piano accordion), and generously offered what advice he could at the time. Most people change over time, but Franco remains the unpretentious and good natured enthusiast I met all those years ago. I am very glad to have finally reconnected with him to tell the story of his musical career and of how it segued into his ongoing composing and CD production project with Lucy. This article is drawn from recorded interviews, discussions and email communications with Franco and Lucy, combined with broader research into the Melbourne-Italian music and entertainment scene for other writing projects.³

UNLIKELY BEGINNINGS

The circumstances that brought Franco to Melbourne aboard the steamship *Neptunia* in 1953 were similar to those experienced by many of the young men who joined the 'Great Wave' of post-WW2 Italian migration. Two years earlier, Franco's father, Carmelo Cambareri, had apprehensively left his wife Elisabetta, his sons Franco and Filippo and his daughters Filomena and Grazia at their small historic *comune* of Gerocarne, Calabria, to come to Melbourne as a fare-paying migrant. His dream, as for most married men who emigrated alone, was to make a more promising future for his family than seemed possible in post-war Italy. As the eldest son, it fell to Franco to join his father as soon as practical to help prepare the way for the rest of the family, which was happily reunited in Melbourne during 1954.

When Franco descended the gang-plank at Port Melbourne alone as a fifteen-year old, he could not possibly have imagined what the future held for him and, especially, that a successful music career lay ahead of him. He had no family or educational background in music to speak of, and his immediate imperative was to accept whatever work was available to assist the immigration and establishment of the rest of the family. This work turned out to be unskilled factory work and car-washing. However, what he did have was a strong desire to play the piano-accordion

and a family who would strongly support this enterprise.

A MUSIC EDUCATION

Despite coming to Australia without a formal musical background, Franco was to gain a very Italian-influenced musical education which added to his youthful recollections of the traditional and more modern popular music he had heard live or from Italian radio or recordings in Gerocarne. By 1955, enough family money could be spared to purchase a second-hand 120 bass Scandelli accordion. At seventeen – quite a late age for a beginner – Franco began weekly lessons with a Sicilian accordion player who lived next door to the Cambareris in Richardson Street, Brunswick. He also learned music reading and theory through the Italian music teaching method known as *solfeggio* from Alfredo Messina in Brunswick. The entwined learning of rhythm and pitch that is central to this method – as opposed to how these are taught in Australian musical education – arguably makes *solfeggio*-trained musicians more fluent as score readers and provides them with a stronger or more natural sense of pitch and rhythm. Franco says that *solfeggio* enabled him to read a score as naturally as reading the newspaper.

Despite learning rapidly, he eventually felt that he had to return to Italy to gain a much broader musical education and also find an accordion teacher who could bring his talent out to the fullest. In 1960, with the blessing of his family, he travelled to Rome and took up studies at the famous accordion academy Accademia Lanaro, where he learned every aspect of musicianship needed to become a professional musician, including composing and arranging. Accademia Lanaro was his defining musical learning experience. After only one year, however, he had to leave Italy to avoid becoming ensnared in the compulsory military service system and also because his mother Elisabetta very much wanted him back.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Back in Melbourne and now equipped with considerable musical knowledge and skill, Franco set his mind to becoming established in the local professional music scene. But there were many obstacles to overcome. The outlook for professional musicians became very bleak in Australia during the 1950s with the decline of the post-war jazz concert era, the collapse of the ballroom dancing scene and radio studio music, the impact of television upon live entertainment and the onset of the rock and pop era, among other factors. The situation

³ See www.ausmdr.com

was worse by the early 1960s and some leading Anglo-Australian jazz musicians even joined popular Italian-led bands such as Mokambo Orchestra or Sergio's Four. On top of all this, the accordion, while remaining very popular with Italian-Australians and European-style venue proprietors, had almost no role in contemporary Australian rock, pop, jazz, country, cabaret or classical music. The 'world music' scene, which has widely re-popularised the accordion, was still 20 years into the future.

Franco's best chance of establishing himself, therefore, lay in combo work for the rapidly growing Melbourne Italian community. This mostly involved playing at *balli Italiani* (balls and cabaret balls), wedding receptions, *spettacoli* (variety shows), sporting or regional club and civic or church organized functions such as Italian National Day or Saints' *feste* (festival) functions. Commercial venues employing Italian bands were still very few in number and the lavish Italian clubs of today were yet to be built.

Italian bands such as Estrellita, Mokambo, Cumbachero or Mirabella were already well established in Melbourne by the late 1950s, and by 1964 there were numerous additional Italian bands servicing community events or, in some cases, running their own regular *balli Italiani*. Among these were Calypso, Sparti, Conchiglia D'Oro, Diavolo Rosso, Duo Moreno Quartet, Orchestra (Egidio) Bortoli, Orchestra (Lou) Toppano, Roma, Sombrero, Happy Boys, Orchestra Fochi, Jamaican Seven, El Bajon, El Melons, Mambo, Cabana, Capri, Los Costenos, Titanus, Florentine, Napoletana, Valencia and Los Muchachos.

For historical and other reasons, Italians have a special affinity with Hispanic musics. Franco himself points to the mass migration of Italians to Latin America and the ability of Italians to understand and sing lyrics in Spanish. Latin American dance music was very popular with Italian-Australians, and many bands adopted Latino names and promoted themselves as *orchestra Sud-Americana* or *orchestra Latina*. Some band leaders, such as Egidio Bortoli, Ugo Ceresoli and television personality Lou Toppano, were long established accordionists of repute in this field, with public profiles extending well beyond the Italian community. Also at the forefront of the scene and leading their own combos were versatile professional entertainers and recording artists, such as the Latin music specialists Duo Moreno (Scartozzi brothers) and Sergio Fochi, who also

promoted his band as a leading *orchestra Sud-Americana*.⁴

The older established Italian bands generally did not differ greatly in appearance from conventional Anglo-Australian ballroom dance bands, except for the almost essential inclusion of a piano accordion and Latin-American percussion instruments for use in the Latin numbers. However, the influence of pop began to change the nature of the scene and its music in the early 1960s. These changes were a direct reflection of the influence of British and American pop on Italian pop, which absorbed and fused them with modern (post-1958) Italian popular song style into what has come to be known as 'Italian Beat' music.⁵ The turning point in Melbourne began around 1964 with, for example, the sensational success of the Beatles' 1964 Australian tour and a very successful tour by Peppino di Capri and his Rockers with Mina the same year. The shift included an emphasis on smaller rock band-like combos with electric guitars and, increasingly, electronic accordions or organs. It also enabled younger players – often without formal musical training or reading skills – to form combos and compete for Italian community work.

Franco, being young and progressive, wanted to engage with these trends, but his relentless music studies since the mid-1950s had prepared him for an all-around professional musical career in which, for example, excellent sight reading skills were essential. He did many auditions with newly formed bands, but his skills always turned out to be mismatched with those of the other players. In the meantime, he began teaching accordion for Lamberti's music store and music school in North Melbourne and for Lou Chiodo, and composed and self-published two Hispanic influenced accordion works, *Los Cubanos Samba* and the paso doble *Fiesta a Siviglia* (Fig. 1). He also appeared from time to time as a variety show artist and, with Lou Chiodo and a gifted young Thai accordionist, Damrong Chattalada, established an accordion quintet that recorded programs for ABC overseas broadcasts.

⁴For more on this topic, see John Whiteoak, 'Italo-Hispanic Music in Melbourne before Multiculturalism' in *Victorian Historical Journal* 78(2) 2007, pp. 228-250 and John Whiteoak, 'Mambo Italiano: Ugo Ceresoli and His Orchestra Mokambo' in *Italian Historical Society Journal* 15 2007, pp. 58-72

⁵ See, for example, Robert Agostini 'The Italian Canzone and the Sanremo Festival: Change and Continuity in Italian Mainstream Pop of the 1960s' in *Popular Music* 26(3) 2007, pp. 389-408.



Fig. 1 – Cover of *Fiesta a Siviglia* (1964). Courtesy Franco and Lucy Cambareri.

QUINTETTO JOLLY

During 1964, Franco finally encountered some young musicians with professional aspirations and skills similar to his own, and with the desire to come together as a first class music-reading combo that could offer a very modern repertoire plus all the more traditional ballroom and cabaret music required for Italian community functions. He first met guitarist Franco Zaffino who introduced him to the drummer Tony Midolo, and together they located a promising and good-looking young *cantante*, Sergio Giovannini, who later also played bass. Saxophone and clarinet player Luciano Mangarelli then joined to make up the fifth member of what became *Quintetto Jolly* or *Complesso Jolly*, simply because they had so much fun playing and being together. *Jolly*, which could present the latest in pop and rock but also back a floor show from sight-read arrangements, provided Franco with an excellent opportunity to begin developing his skills as a modern arranger.

By the end of 1964, Jolly already had a profile in Italian community entertainment. They had been chosen to appear as a support act for Peppino di Capri at his triumphant Festival Hall appearances and are pictured in *Il Globo* of December 12 performing for the Miss Italian (Miss Jolly) Community Ball at San Remo Hall in North Melbourne. A few weeks later they were prominently advertised as 'il famoso Complesso Jolly' offering a typical Italian atmosphere at a New Year's Eve ball. Of greater importance for the future than community work, however, was their success in gaining a regular several nights a week

'Supper Club' job at the Casbah Room of the prestigious Mario's Hotel in Exhibition St, Melbourne. Mario's was a popular Italian-Australian venue, but the Supper Club also attracted patrons from beyond the community, who expected a more international repertoire. 1965 was a busy and successful year for Jolly with major community balls, such as the Miss Italian Community ball at the Royale Ballroom in June, and numerous other social, sporting club and function venue engagements (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - *Quintetto Jolly*. Left to right: Franco Cambareri, Franco Zaffino, Luciano Mangarelli, Tony Midolo and Sergio Giovannini.

In addition to appearing with the Peppino di Capri tour troupe and also the visiting *cantanti* Nico Fidenco, Arturo Testa and Isabella Iannetti,⁶ Jolly cut a microgroove recording for the Spotlight label in 1965 called *Cabaret Italiano*. This featured their versions of the Joe Senterri ballad hit *Uno dei tanti* (One of Many), Mina's twist hit, *Tintarella di luna* (Moon Tan), Tito Puente's Latin hit *Esperanza* (Hope) and the Peppino Gagliardi ballad hit *T'amo e t'amerò* (I Love You and Will Love You). Five other tracks were never released by Spotlight, but all nine tracks demonstrate why the band achieved such rapid popularity.⁷ The sound is that of a polished cabaret act drawing upon contemporary Italian rock and pop for its colours, rhythms and overall textures, including compelling *bel canto*-style solos set against cleverly sparse and rhythmic backing harmonies. By this time Franco had purchased a combination acoustic/transistor accordion (a

⁶ Phonovox Super Festival of Italian Song, Palais Theatre, St Kilda, 20/10/1964 *Il Globo* 10 October 1964, p. 15.

⁷The five tracks not released were: *The Wedding Song*, *Perché* (Why), *Ti giuro* (I Swear), *Va bene così* (It's OK That Way), *La amo più della mia vita* (I love Her More Than My Own Life).

Cordovox) with which he expertly filled out and tinted the web of backing sound with modern effects.

TRIO FRANCO

Despite Jolly's rapid achievements, continuing popularity, and the fun, fellowship and musical experience the members had derived from working and developing together as a *complesso*, some disharmony was brewing by mid-1966 and *Quintetto Jolly* came to an end. Sergio Giovannini, who was by now a seasoned performer, set about forming his own pop and rock band, Sergio G and the Flippers, which remained popular on the Italian community scene for several decades. The demise of the quintet enabled Franco, Franco Zaffino and Tony Midolo to continue together as a small but dynamic show band, Trio Franco, with even more emphasis on professionalism, versatility and modernistic sounds and rhythms (Fig 3). Working as a trio also had obvious financial advantages. Franco was the tunesmith and arranger and contributed to backing vocals but never aspired to being a *cantante*. Franco Zaffino became the lead singer and main songwriter, but Tony Midolo was always solidly behind him as support vocalist and a strong encourager of his songwriting. The trio's regular job at the Copper Grill room of the prestigious Park Royal Motel in Parkville made them less reliant on Italian community patronage and able to develop a much more international repertoire. The Park Royal, being close to the City, attracted many international tourists and it became a Trio Franco convention to ask patrons where they came from and then play something associated with their homeland, region or city. In this modest sense, the trio's music provided a magic carpet for nostalgic travellers.



Fig. 3 - Trio Franco. Left to right: Franco Cambareri, Franco Zaffino and Tony Midolo. Courtesy Franco and Lucy Cambareri.

Il Globo of March 21 1967 published an evocative photograph of the trio posing with glamorous swimsuit-clad contestants for the Miss South Pacific quest (a feature of Melbourne's annual Moomba Festival). The caption explained that the trio was formerly known as Jolly. On June 5 they came to the attention of numerous Melbournians through their appearance on GTV-9's iconic *In Melbourne Tonight* show, and another captioned photograph in *Il Globo* of June 15 announced that their *elettrizzante* (electrifying) modern rhythmic repertoire would be a feature of a major event for the Italian community: a cabaret ball for the official opening of the huge and magnificently appointed San Remo Ballroom in North Carlton, combined with the conclusion of the Miss San Remo quest. While more and more of the trio's work came from beyond the community – the Jewish community in particular for weddings, *Bar Mitzvah* and *Bat Mitzvah* (coming of age parties) – their popularity and status within the Italian community continued to grow. In July 1967 their LP, *Living It Up at the Copper Grill*, was released on the W&G label.

The twelve tracks on the album, plus six others not released by W&G, evoke the repertoire presented at an evening at the Copper Grill beginning with atmospheric dinner music and building up to a full-on party atmosphere. Some songs are sung in English and several have a smooth Latin feel. The tracks, in particular, show the cleverness of the arranging which enables the trio to produce the dynamic cross-rhythms, colours and textures of a larger instrumental/vocal combo. This ability is seen, for example, in their version of Little Tony's modernistic 1967 Italian Beat hit *Cuore matto* (Crazy Heart) which had been presented by him at the 17th San Remo Festival in January of that year.⁸ Instead of individual displays of solo virtuosity, the trio sound is extremely tight and integrated, combining polished vocal and instrumental musicianship with youthful vitality and full utilisation of the new Italian Beat-style guitar and electronic keyboard sounds.⁹

During most of September and October 1967, Trio Franco was engaged with a concert tour of the Fiji Islands (Fig 4). They also won second prize in the first international Festival of Italian Song held in Melbourne with their *Come mai* interpreted by *cantante* Jo Muhrer. Then, what must have seemed like the opportunity of

⁸ Music by Totò Savio, lyrics by Armando Ambrosino, 1966; single released January 1967.

⁹ See

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjrOdUZkNq4>

a lifetime was held out to them: a job as producers, actors and stage band for Melbourne's first televised weekly 'Italian-style' music variety show, Carosello Italiano (later just Carosello).



Fig. 4 - Trio Franco Fiji Tour promotion. Left to right: Franco Cambareri, Franco Zaffino and Tony Midolo. Courtesy Franco and Lucy Cambareri.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

However, before this, something of far more lasting significance took place for Franco. On November 11 1967 at St Anthony's Chapel in Hawthorn he and Lucy were married. The service was followed by a reception at the San Remo Ballroom in North Carlton. This was the first wedding reception ever held at this venue, which quickly became central to the Melbourne-Italian private and public function, social dancing and cabaret scene.

Lucy's father, Michele Del Mastro, had arrived in Melbourne from San Nicandro in the province of Foggia in the Puglia region of southeast Italy, in 1951, the same year that Franco's father arrived. Lucy came with her mother, Incoronata, her sister Maria and her brother Matteo in 1953, the same year as Franco. Being only six years of age on her arrival and very bright, Lucy rapidly mastered 'Australian-English' and later gained a solid secondary education at Fitzroy Girls Secondary School. By 1962 she was employed as a secretary for the Transport Regulation Board and eventually became Manager of the VicRoads Registration and Licensing Office in Sunshine. Her initial attraction to Franco was not as a fan of his music, since their first meeting was at a shop owned by the Zaffino

family in Miller Street, Fitzroy. The attraction must have been mutual and strong, however, since they were engaged and married within nine months of their meeting. Marriage brought an entirely new dimension to Franco's life, including the suddenly increased importance of financial security.

CAROSELLO

The Age TV and Radio Guide of January 18 1968 carries a photo of Trio Franco posing with Carosello cast members for an outdoor sequence of the show to be broadcast on ATV-O at 5.30 on the following Sunday. Carosello, which commenced on December 19 1967, was sponsored by the furniture store chain mogul Franco Cozzo, whose inimitable promotion of his wares in English, Italian and Greek (spoken to the accompaniment of a catchy, up-beat pop tune composed and played by the trio) made him a Melbourne cultural icon that endures to the present day. Carosello was a social and cultural milestone for the Italian-Australian community, and connected its youth both visually and aurally to Italian musical modernity. For numerous Anglo-Australians, it was a glimpse – though an often unappreciated one – into an unfamiliar musical world: Italian-style pop and rock. The popular compere, Colin McEwen, was the anchor for the show, but Franco Cozzo left it to the trio to produce the show, create and act in the humorous sketches that broke up the musical content, audition *cantanti*, rehearse their acts for coming shows and provide accompaniment during the taping of shows, which were entirely based on local talent. Exciting as this opportunity must have seemed initially, the pressure on the trio was immense and the remuneration inadequate. Within seven months, the trio decided it was time to leave Franco Cozzo and concentrate on better paid work while their profile was at a peak.

In addition to the Copper Grill Room, Trio Franco continued to appear at Italian cabaret-ball venues such as the San Remo Ballroom, Copacabana Hall in Brunswick and Riviera Hall in West Melbourne, sometimes teaming up with an impressive African-American conga player, Antonio Rodriguez. Some highlights of 1968 were the July release of *Più buio della notte*, sung by Franco Zaffino and written by the two Francos, as a Phonovox single, and a November 3 appearance as a feature act for the Second Festival of Italian Song at Festival Hall. A large illustrated advertisement in *Il Globo* of January 14 1969 shows they were due to appear at a *Grande Spettacolo Di Varietà* (grand variety show) at Sydney Stadium as the

group that “makes beat-lovers delirious” along with Duo Moreno, Nino Palermo, the young accordion duet ‘Aurora and Robertino’, Anna Maria Manna and Vittorio Sacca. For whatever reason, they never appeared. The following month they appeared at the first *Concorso Nazionale Voci Nuove* (National New Voice Contest) where they introduced a new social dance, the *Ciuff Ciuff*, demonstrated by the stage dancers, *Lucciolette* (Little Fireflies).

AT THE CROSSROADS

The *ballo Italiano* scene was, however, now truly awash with new and older bands competing for work and Trio Franco was getting more appreciation of its progressive ‘modern rhythmic’ style from beyond the Italian-Australian community. Lucy recalls that older community patrons only wanted to hear music that was familiar to them. From this point on, the name Trio Franco appeared less and less in the entertainment pages of *// Globo*. In June 1970, they opened at Mario’s Brighton Beach Hotel where their modern approach and versatility was particularly appreciated by a mostly youthful patronage. This regular three times a week engagement, plus regular work at the Zebra Motor Inn in Parkville, gave the trio a secure basic income around which they could organise other lucrative engagements. These – such as the endless rounds of *Bar Mitzvah* and *Bat Mitzvah* parties – continued to roll in, sometimes amounting to several separate engagements in a day. For Franco, however, the musical and financial success of Trio Franco was increasingly outweighed by the detrimental effect that his professional overcommitment was having on his family, which by 1969 included Lucy and Franco’s first child, Carmine. Their second son, Lino, was born in 1974. By 1973 some social tensions were also building within the trio as the almost inevitable outcome of such a long-term creative collaboration, and Franco made the heart-wrenching decision to totally abandon his musical career and take up a new phase of life with Lucy in running a driving school with the very down-to-earth name of Keon Park Driving School. The trio continued to appear at Mario’s one night a week until early 1975 and occasionally accept other engagements, but Franco’s heart was elsewhere.

REDISCOVERING THE MAGIC: THE CD PROJECT

The Keon Park Driving School was financially successful, but the demands of the school soon found Franco working just as hard and for even

more hours than he had in music. The eventual solution was to join Australia Post as a State Driver Training Instructor/Tester. He formally retired from Australia Post at the end of 2000 and Lucy followed him into retirement four years later. By 2000, two and a half decades had passed since Franco had abandoned his musical career. His two children were adults and successfully making their own way in life, and the most obvious sequel to a shared life of family responsibility and demanding work was for Franco and Lucy to just ‘hang out’ and enjoy their growing family, friends, their beautiful home and other fruits of their former sacrifices and efforts, such as their romantic 1981 and 2005 holidays in Italy (Fig 5). But music had been reworking its spell over Franco since the mid-1990s, and Lucy was willingly drawn into his happy rediscovery of the muse.

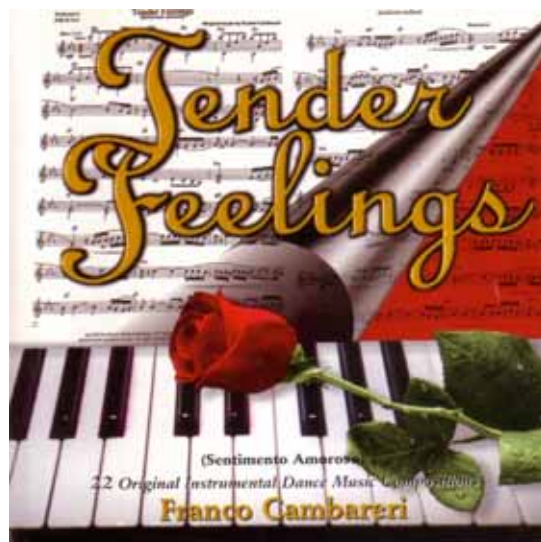


Fig. 5 - Cover of the 2001 CD *Tender Feelings* with cover design by Lucy Cambareri. Courtesy Franco and Lucy Cambareri.

This rediscovery began around 1996, when Franco purchased a small Yamaha electronic keyboard and began to practise diligently. Not only did his old technique quickly return, but he also found he could compose effortlessly at the keyboard, as if the musical influences he had absorbed over a lifetime were now at his fingertips. Reconnection with the piano accordion, his first musical love, was central to this musical renewal, and the internet eventually enabled him to connect into a vibrant world-wide network of performers, arrangers, composers, historians, collectors and other appreciators of the accordion, as well as to accordion organisations such as the Frosini Society. He also became a prolific composer of music for the accordion.

A shoulder problem had, however, become an impediment to playing the accordion and,

moreover, the music that was flowing into Franco's mind by the late 1990s featured all the colours, rhythms, textures and effects available to any modern ensemble. He had rapidly mastered the electronic sounds of his transistorized Cordovox with Quintetto Jolly and Trio Franco, and the digital sound technology that was available by the 1990s held out a solution to both problems. He – with the technical assistance of Lucy, who had used various forms of digital hardware and software in her job at VicRoads – could bring to life every aspect of the music that was going through his head. It could be done in their family home and entirely independently.

SENTIMENTO AMOROSO

By 2001 Franco had assembled twenty-two 'original instrumental dance compositions' for the production of the first Cambareri CD entitled *Tender Feelings (Sentimento Amoroso)*. This CD was mastered by Dex Audio and released under the Colossus Records of Australia label with a cover design by Lucy. Having the mastering done (i.e. creating the final fully edited 'master' of the album for mass reproduction purposes) in a commercial studio, however, turned out to be a very costly process. Franco and Lucy decided that, in future, they would produce, master and release all future CDs themselves under the name Franco Cambareri. Copyright was assigned or partly assigned to the Melbourne music publisher and distributor Groovy Music, which also promotes and markets the compositions, arrangements and CDs of various leading Italian-Australian professional musicians, many of whom were bandleaders and/or accordionists on the Melbourne or interstate Italian-Australian entertainment scene before Franco left it in 1975.¹⁰

THE COLLABORATION

Franco and Lucy's collaboration in producing the albums first requires Franco's composing and arranging of a sufficient number of pieces for a new album. At the digital keyboard he then separately records the rhythm, melody and harmony tracks and, finally, adds expression to the melody track almost as if it were a singing voice. Whatever instrumental countermelodies or other tracks are required to complete the arrangement are then recorded and the whole process is repeated for each of the remaining pieces in the compilation.

Lucy's role is to transfer the tracks of each composition from the digital keyboard to the

music program on her computer and balance these to get an overall sound they are happy with before 'bouncing' (mixing) them into a single music 'wave' ready for burning onto the master CD. The process is repeated for all the pieces in the CD compilation and the complete master is then burnt and named. Simple as it may sound, these are extremely exacting and time consuming processes, and the one circumstance in which Lucy becomes disenchanted with the project is when Franco comes up with a new idea after the piece has been mixed and wants to make changes. The other part of her creative input is designing the CD front and back covers and CD label. There is a new idea behind every cover image and the images are often personalised, such as the rose from their own garden for *Tender Feelings* or the abstract image of their young grandson, Adam, playing accordion for the 2005 CD, *Mystique* (Fig.6). Lucy produces printed covers and labels that are not only visually compelling but look as if they have been printed professionally.



Fig. 6 Franco and Lucy Cambareri on holidays in Venice. Courtesy Franco and Lucy Cambareri.

THE MUSIC

The ten CDs produced to date are *Tender Feelings* (2001), *Music A La Carte* and *Musical Carnival* (2002), *A Sentimental Touch* (2003), *Accordion Magic* (2004), *Cafe Arabesque*, *Guitar Romantica*, *Mystique* and *A La Francois* (2005) and *Cafe Lamour* (2007). About 150 of the pieces have also been published in sheet music form by Groovy Music in Melbourne and by the Frosini Society overseas and they are marketed world-wide through the Frosini Society and the MusicForAccordion.com websites.

¹⁰ See <http://www.groovymusic.com.au/profiles.htm>

Franco's renewed love of the piano accordion is apparent in many of the composition titles which suggest dance music repertoire still beloved by accordionists, such as polkas, tangos, sambas, rumbas, boleros, bossa novas, French musettes, paso-dobles, tarantellas, swing and so forth. The titles also evoke other exciting Latin, Continental or Mediterranean styles that might be encountered at an exotic European cabaret or cabaret-ball, including mambos, merengues, cha-cha-chas, 'Gypsy', Greek and even Arabic music. These are all styles that Franco engaged with as a combo accordionist in ballroom, cabaret-restaurant, dance-party and exotic floor-show backing work. A few examples are *Cafe Arabesque*, *Mexican Carnival*, *Flamenco-Cha-Cha*, *Vive El Torero*, *Grecian Holiday*, *Gypsy Fiesta*, *Rio By Night*, *Mambo Vibes* or *Souvenir De Paris*. Franco's minimalist but mesmerising *La Araña Negra*, from the CD *Mystique*, carries you on a carpet of sinuous melody and dark and mysterious rhythm to a 'somewhere' in an Africa of Franco's imagination: the Casbah perhaps?

The music on the CDs is therefore partly a reflection or imaginative reinterpretation of the type of repertoire Franco played as an accordionist or arranged for the modern rhythmic style of Quintetto Jolly and Trio Franco. On the CD *Accordion Magic* especially, you can hear Franco's mastery of the traditional accordion as the 30 compositions pass through a wide range of exciting, evocative, atmospheric or sensuous works, like *Fiesta A Seviglia*, *Accordion Tango*, *Carmelina* (musette) or *Midnight Blues*, and also playful and nimble pieces like *Ciccio's Tarantella*, *Busy Typist* and *Euro Polka*.

It is difficult to characterise Franco's music because it varies so much in style, form and detail. It is almost all popular dance music-like in character, with a strong, distinct basic beat (despite sometimes minimalist and other times very dense and complex rhythmic textures) and a catchy main melody or melodic idea in the foreground. But this description fails to do justice to the cleverness, playfulness and variety in the overall detail of the compositions. Franco demonstrates stylistic mastery and imagination in his employment of Latin rhythms (e.g. *Sonia's Mambo* on the *Tender Feelings CD*) and, while many of the pieces on the CDs are traditional in form, harmony and melodic shaping, they are often set in sparkling imaginative arrangements that make them sound like modern European film sound track music – which undoubtedly they could be used for. It is international music,

including jazz, but it is also music with a distinct Italian touch, which becomes apparent in Franco's style of playing, in musical gestures toward the Italian Beat music of his Trio Franco days, in traditional Italian ballroom styles like the waltz, polka and mazurka, in the affinity shown towards Hispanic styles, and in titles like *Calabrian Serenata*, *Venetian Sky*, *Italian Romance* or *Capricciosa*, which was recently performed by flautist Sally Walker and guitarist Giuseppe Zangari and broadcast nationally from Newcastle Conservatorium as part of the ABC's "Sunday Live" concert series.

COMPOSING THE MUSIC

Franco is a very sentimental man and the music he lovingly creates and dedicates to his family and friends is, in his own words, "straight from the heart". Yet it is also directly from his imagination. The art of composing is commonly thought of as filling out the detail of a pre-conceived musical plan or sketch. Hence the centuries old stereotype of the tormented master composer burning the midnight oil with quill or pen in hand. But, contemporary composers of electronic dance music sometimes work the opposite way: by trying out things as they go along – using what works and discarding what does not. As a one-time scholar of improvisation, I immediately recognized something in the freshness, design and detail of Franco's music that reminded me of what was once known as 'fantasy playing' (improvising as if in a dream or trance). This is discussed, for example, in Carl Czerny's 1836 study, *Fantasy Playing*.¹¹ True fantasy playing only becomes possible after a gifted musician has deeply learned and absorbed many musical styles, harmonic pathways, rhythms and so forth. It is, literally, instant composing.

When I suggested this resemblance, Franco enthusiastically gave the example of composing his award winning composition, *Pour Aline*. He had a dream in which his combo was playing at a cabaret-restaurant but, no matter what they played, two good friends (one of them was Aline) who had come to hear the band would not get up and dance. Finally, in exasperation, Franco said to the others: "try this piece". He began to play – the others joined in – and suddenly the couple got up

¹¹ *Systematische Anleitung Zum Fantasieren Auf Dem Pianoforte* (1836). Translated and edited version by Alice Mitchell, New York, Longman, 1983. It is generally referred to by music scholars as *Fantasy Playing* (Opus 200). See also John Whiteoak, *Playing Ad Lib: Improvisatory Music in Australia, 1836-1970*, Sydney, Currency Press, 1999.

from their table and began to dance. Franco awoke happy with the music still playing though his mind, and his entry for the 2007 Australian Songwriters Association contest was in the bag.

Fransco's story is one of outstanding achievement in professional musicianship and entertainment, despite many difficulties faced as a young post-war migrant. It suggests the dilemma encountered by many talented

CODA

migrant musicians of eventually having to reconcile a passion for music and a hard-won musical career with a love of family life and the growing responsibilities, pressures and deeply satisfying rewards that come with the latter. The happy ending is that, together with Lucy, he sought and found a deeply personal and satisfying way of expressing family love, friendship and musical creativity – one that, fortunately, allows all of us to experience a ride upon the magic carpet of his musical imagination.