

Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series

ROUTLEDGE

A Song for Europe

Popular Music and Politics in the
Eurovision Song Contest

An Ashgate Book

Edited by
**Ivan Raykoff and
Robert Deam Tobin**

A SONG FOR EUROPE



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Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest

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Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>General Editor's preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Additional reading and resources</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xvii</i>
1 Camping on the borders of Europe <i>Ivan Raykoff</i>	1
2 Return to ethnicity: The cultural significance of musical change in the Eurovision Song Contest <i>Alf Björnberg</i>	13
3 Eurovision at 50: Post-Wall and Post-Stonewall <i>Robert Deam Tobin</i>	25
4 <i>Chanson, canzone, Schlager</i> , and song: Switzerland's identity struggle in the Eurovision Song Contest <i>Michael Baumgartner</i>	37
5 Chasing the "magic formula" for success: Ralph Siegel and the Grand Prix Eurovision de la Chanson <i>Thorsten Hindrichs</i>	49
6 Fernando, Filippo, and Milly: Bringing blackness to the Eurovision stage <i>Lutgard Mutsaers</i>	61
7 Finland, zero points: Nationality, failure, and shame in the Finnish media <i>Mari Pajala</i>	71
8 The socialist star: Yugoslavia, Cold War politics and the Eurovision Song Contest <i>Dean Vuletic</i>	83
9 Lithuanian contests and European dreams <i>Bjorn Ingvoldstad</i>	99

10	“Russian body and soul”: t.A.T.u. performs at Eurovision 2003 <i>Dana Heller</i>	111
11	Gay brotherhood: Israeli gay men and the Eurovision Song Contest <i>Dafna Lemish</i>	123
12	Articulating the historical moment: Turkey, Europe, and Eurovision 2003 <i>Thomas Solomon</i>	135
13	“Everyway that I can”: Auto-Orientalism at Eurovision 2003 <i>Matthew Gumpert</i>	147
14	<i>Idol</i> thoughts: Nationalism in the pan-Arab vocal competition <i>Superstar</i> <i>Katherine Meizel</i>	159
15	“Changing Japan, unchanging Japan”: Shifting visions of the Red and White Song Contest <i>Shelley D. Brunt</i>	171
	<i>Index</i>	183

List of tables

5.1	Ralph Siegel's compositions for the Eurovision Song Contest, 1974–2003	50
6.1	“New-Dutch” representation in the Eurovision Song Contest, 1964–2005	65
12.1	Scores for Turkey by country, ESC 2003	139
12.2	Estimated population of diasporic Turks in five European countries	141



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Lemish is the author of *Children and Television: A Global Perspective* (forthcoming), co-author of *Media and the Make-believe Worlds of Children* (2005), and co-editor of *Global Trends in Media Education* (2003) and *Children and Media at Times of Conflict and War* (2007).

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General Editor's preface

The upheaval that occurred in musicology during the last two decades of the twentieth century has created a new urgency for the study of popular music alongside the development of new critical and theoretical models. A relativistic outlook has replaced the universal perspective of modernism (the international ambitions of the 12-note style); the grand narrative of the evolution and dissolution of tonality has been challenged, and emphasis has shifted to cultural context, reception and subject position. Together, these have conspired to eat away at the status of canonical composers and categories of high and low in music. A need has arisen, also, to recognize and address the emergence of crossovers, mixed and new genres, to engage in debates concerning the vexed problem of what constitutes authenticity in music and to offer a critique of musical practice as the product of free, individual expression.

Popular musicology is now a vital and exciting area of scholarship, and the *Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series* aims to present the best research in the field. Authors will be concerned with locating musical practices, values and meanings in cultural context, and may draw upon methodologies and theories developed in cultural studies, semiotics, poststructuralism, psychology and sociology. The series will focus on popular musics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is designed to embrace the world's popular musics from Acid Jazz to Zydeco, whether high tech or low tech, commercial or non-commercial, contemporary or traditional.

Professor Derek B. Scott
Chair of Music
University of Salford



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Additional reading and resources

For readers interested in a thorough and entertaining chronological survey of the Eurovision Song Contest including voting results, we recommend *The Eurovision Song Contest, 50 Years: The Official History* by John Kennedy O'Connor (London: Carlton Books, 2005). An earlier compendium that covers the contest up to 1997 is *The Complete Eurovision Song Contest Companion 1999* by Paul Gambaccini, Jonathan Rice and Tony Brown (London: Pavilion, 1999).

A necessary resource for any Eurovision fan is the *Congratulations* anniversary packet that includes songs by “all the winners and favourites” from 1956 to 2005 on four DVDs or four CDs—available from the ESC’s official website www.eurovision.tv, which also provides extensive current news and information, photos and video clips, and a live-streaming Internet broadcast of the competition each May. Other exceptional resources include the Eurosong fansite www.eurosong.net, the independent Eurovision news website www.esctoday.com, and the Internet radio station <http://escradio.net> for live-streaming Eurovision songs.

For this volume we have relied on “The Diggiloo Thrush” website at www.diggiloo.net for detailed information on contest rankings, names of performers and composers, and song lyrics in the original language as well as English translations.



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Introduction

“Even intelligent people with good taste in music have taken to pronouncing Eurovision in respectful tones, but it is really the ‘Euro’ bit of the word that they revere.”

Andrei Kurkov¹

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2005, the Eurovision Song Contest is the largest and most-watched international festival of popular music, as well as one of the world’s longest-running annual television programs. Established in 1956 by the European Broadcasting Union as a live televised spectacle to unify post-war western Europe through music, the contest features singers who represent a participating nation with a new original pop song. Viewers vote for their favorite song (but not for their own country’s song), and the winning country hosts the event the following year. The 2005 contest, held in Kiev, featured contestants representing over three dozen European nations and attracted hundreds of millions of viewers across the continent and abroad.²

Eurovision is probably best known for catapulting ABBA to international fame when the Swedish pop group took first place with “Waterloo” in 1974. Now-famous names such as Céline Dion, Olivia Newton-John and Julio Iglesias performed in the contest early in their careers. A few Eurovision songs have gained international airplay over the years: “Nel blu, dipinto di blu” (more famous as “Volare”) is probably the contest’s most familiar song, though it placed only third in 1958; “L’amour est bleu” (“Love is Blue,” 1967), “Eres tu” (“Touch the Wind,” 1973) and Gina G.’s “Just a Little Bit” (1996) have also hit the American charts. The Irish step-dancing show *Riverdance* became a major international theatrical sensation soon after it premiered as the interval act of the 1994 contest held in Dublin.

The Eurovision Song Contest was originally modeled after the San Remo Festival, an annual popular music competition held in Italy since 1951.³ During the Cold War, Eurovision’s success in western Europe prompted Eastern Bloc countries to organize their own short-lived Intervision Song Contest (1977–80), actually a continuation

1 Andrei Kurkov, “A Song for Europe in the Wake of Revolution,” *The Observer* (15 May 2005).

2 According to the Museum of Broadcast Communication’s *Encyclopedia of Television*, “the contest has developed into a spring ritual now viewed by 600 million people in 35 countries.” Matthew Murray, “Eurovision Song Contest,” <www.museum.tv/archives/etv/E/htmlE/eurovisionso/eurovisionso.htm> Accessed 24 February 2006. In 2005 there was also a spectacular Eurovision 50th anniversary show, *Congratulations*, broadcast from Copenhagen on October 22.

3 See Dario Salvatori, *Sanremo 50: La vicenda e i protagonisti di mezzo secolo di Festival della canzone* (Rome: Edizioni RAI Radiotelevisione italiana, 2000).

of the Sopot International Song Festival held in Poland since 1961.⁴ Other similar events include the Benidorm International Song Festival (in Spain, since 1959) and the Yamaha Music Festival (or World Popular Song Festival) in Japan (1970–89). Many television viewers today are familiar with the *Pop Idol* phenomenon, which started in the United Kingdom and has become enormously successful in the United States as *American Idol*. While this show has many similarities to Eurovision, it does not require exclusively original songs and does not have the same element of international competition. Eurovision has never been broadcast by a major television network in the United States, but NBC has announced plans to develop an American version of the show with contestants representing individual states.⁵

This collection of essays is the first interdisciplinary study of the social, cultural and political significance of the Eurovision Song Contest. Fifteen essays by an international group of scholars examine the event through various academic approaches, including musicology, communications and media studies, history, politics, aesthetics, race and ethnicity, and gender and sexuality studies. With chapters on Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Lithuania, Russia, the former Yugoslavia, Turkey and Israel, this collection offers a wide-ranging view of the contest's participating countries. Furthermore, it intentionally broadens the scope of inquiry beyond the European realm to examine comparable televised international song competitions in the Middle East and Japan.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the European Union's eastward expansion in 2004, as well as the recent challenges to ratifying a new EU constitution, the perennial question of a shared European cultural identity arises again. Eurovision, founded as Europe was similarly refashioning itself in the aftermath of World War II, provides one context for re-examining the definition of "Europe" and notions of European identity in the new century. Modernity characterizes the ideal of post-war Europe to which the Eurovision Song Contest provides literal and figurative access: a society that is democratic, capitalist, peace-loving, multicultural, sexually liberated and technologically advanced. Each of the chapters in this collection examines the challenges of this ideal—and the negotiation of such access—through particular theoretical, analytical and historical perspectives.

For many contributors, the song contest is an arena in which participating nations stage their relationship to this vision of Europe. Ivan Raykoff considers how Eurovision's reception as "camp" maps onto political factors surrounding membership in the European Union, depending on whether countries see themselves as central or peripheral to the project of European identity. In the case of Finland, Mari Pajala argues, long-time political and geographic marginality contributes to typically defeatist attitudes about Eurovision participation, while Dean Vuletic suggests that

4 The Sopot Festival was initiated by Władysław Szpilman, the hero of Roman Polanski's 2002 film *The Pianist*. For a historical overview see Marcin Mierzejewski, "Teaching the World to Sing," *The Warsaw Voice Online* (31 July 2003), <www.warsawvoice.pl/view/3105> Accessed 24 February 2006.

5 Josef Adalian, "NBC turning on 'Eurovision,'" *Variety.com* (9 February 2006), <www.variety.com/article/VR1117937807?categoryid=1071&cs=1&s=h&p=0> Accessed 24 February 2006.

the former Yugoslavia—the only Communist country to take part in the contest—demonstrated other kinds of ambivalence about its relationship to western Europe. Some “peripheral” participants reveal the complexities of an evolving national identity still caught somewhere between East and West, as Bjorn Ingvoldstad shows in the case of Lithuania. Matthew Gumpert interprets Turkey’s winning entry of 2003 as a case of “auto-Orientalism,” an intricate play of stereotypes through which “the East watches the West watch the East” (p. 154).

Other contributors consider marginality in terms of the social politics surrounding Eurovision. Addressing western Europe’s post-colonial situation, Lutgard Mutsaers relates how non-white singers represented the Netherlands in the contest long before any other country. Sexual identity has often been an implicit theme around Eurovision, perhaps most spectacularly when the transsexual Dana International won for Israel in 1998.⁶ Robert Deam Tobin asserts that the queer community finds in Eurovision a means toward European citizenship, while Dafna Lemish demonstrates the social and personal investments many Israeli gay men have with the contest. According to Dana Heller’s analysis of the “faux lesbianism” of Russia’s 2003 entry, the contest’s inevitable cultural misunderstandings call into question certain liberal assumptions about sexuality.

The paradigm of center and periphery can also apply to musical aspects, as when Eurovision’s dominant musical conventions contrast with more distinctive “local” sounds and styles. According to one study, the “perfect” conventional Eurovision song conforms to a seven-part compositional formula: 1) fast pace and catchy rhythms, 2) memorable and repetitive lyrics, 3) a harmonically or dynamically contrasting chorus, 4) a key change leading to 5) a clearly defined finish, plus 6) an appealing dance routine and 7) costumes.⁷ Analyzing some of these classic Eurovision songs, Thorsten Hindrichs offers a case study of the contest’s most prolific composer, who has held a near-monopoly on Germany’s participation in the show, and Michael Baumgartner presents Switzerland’s frequent dilemma in deciding which of its three dominant cultural traditions (French, German or Italian) would best represent the country musically in the contest. On the other hand, as Alf Björnberg explains, some countries have chosen to assert a local ethnic identity through their performances in recent years, moving away from the pan-European Europop ideal that had generally characterized contest entries up until the 1990s.

Eurovision’s elaborate voting ritual constitutes the second half of each year’s show, as a representative from each participating country reports the scores assigned by an expert jury or, since 1998, by viewers’ telephone voting. Songs are awarded from 0 to 8, 10 or 12 points; excitement grows as the votes are tallied and the winning

6 On Dana International’s pre-Eurovision career and cultural significance, see Ted Swedenburg, “Saida Sultan/Danna International: Transgender Pop and the Polysemiotics of Sex, Nation, and Ethnicity on the Israeli-Egyptian Border,” *The Musical Quarterly* 81/1 (Spring 1997): 81–108. On the singer’s play with language and gender, see Liora Moriel, “Diva in the Promised Land: A Blueprint for Newspeak?” *World Englishes* 17/2 (1998): 225–37.

7 “Boom Bang-a-Bang and Ding-a-Dong: Pop Science Reveals ‘Waterloo’ as the Perfect Eurovision Song” (2005), analysis by Harry Witchel in collaboration with the Music Choice company, <partners.musicchoice.co.uk/content_files/Eurovision20050505.doc> Accessed 24 February 2006.

song/country is eventually determined. This procedure generates a substantial amount of data each year, and charts of scores and rankings provide an endless trove for statistical analyses by fans and scholars.⁸ Artistic value is supposed to determine song rankings, but there are many extra-musical variables that can influence the outcome too.⁹ In his chapter, Thomas Solomon makes a case for political and cultural context influencing the vote as he frames certain events and factors surrounding Turkey's 2003 victory.

The final two chapters of the collection take the focus on popular music and politics in international song contests beyond the European realm to envision, as Katherine Meizel writes, "a multinational set of studio stages wherein the politics of national, regional, ethnic and even religious identity are continuously being performed" (p. 159). Meizel describes the *Idol* franchise's "pan-Arab" song contest and how its contestants fared in the context of the regional as well as the subsequent "global" competition. Shelley Brunt relates the history of Japan's popular and long-running Red and White Song Contest, which predates Eurovision by five years and demonstrates a similarly complex interplay of gender, national and global identifications.

Many people deserve recognition for helping to make this book possible, but we would like to extend special thanks to Heidi May, our commissioning editor at Ashgate, and series editor Derek Scott for their support of this project. Mark Prentice, our student assistant supported by the Abshire Fund at Whitman College, provided exceptionally keen assistance with editing and proof-reading. Arun Bharali has our eternal gratitude for the encouragement and research help he provided to two Eurovision-deprived Americans during early stages of this project. Six contributors to this collection (Björnberg, Brunt, Pajala, Raykoff, Solomon and Tobin) presented their papers at the 13th biennial conference of the International Association for

8 One article analyzes ESC voting patterns from 1975 to 1992, before the participation of new East European nations, to reveal three main blocs (Western, Northern and Mediterranean) based on political, cultural, linguistic and/or geographic connections: Gad Yair, "Unite, Unite, Europe: The Political and Cultural Structures of Europe as Reflected in the Eurovision Song Contest," *Social Networks* 17/2 (1995): 147–61. A follow-up article expands on this premise to consider reciprocal voting between blocs as an explanation for Western dominance: Gad Yair and Daniel Maman, "The Persistent Structure of Hegemony in the Eurovision Song Contest," *Acta sociologica: Journal of the Scandinavian Sociological Association* 39/3 (September 1996): 309–25.

9 On the significance of the jury voting system, see Marco Haan, S. Gerhard Dijkstra and Peter Dijkstra, "Expert Judgment versus Public Opinion: Evidence from the Eurovision Song Contest," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 29/1 (February 2005): 59–78. On the significance of performance order, see Wändi Bruine de Bruin, "Save the Last Dance for Me: Unwanted Serial Position Effects in Jury Evaluations," *Acta psychologica* 118/3 (March 2005): 245–60. On favoritism among Eurovision voting cliques, see Bertjan Doosje and S. Alexander Haslam, "What Have They Done for Us Lately? The Dynamics of Reciprocity in Intergroup Contexts," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 35/3 (March 2005): 508–535. On vote exchanges as a factor of linguistic and cultural proximity, see Victor Ginsburgh and Abdul Noury, "Cultural Voting: The Eurovision Song Contest" (2004), <www.core.ucl.ac.be/services/psfiles/dp05/dp2005_6.pdf> Accessed 26 February 2006.

the Study of Popular Music, held in Rome in July 2005; two other contributors (Gumpert and Heller) presented their papers at the 2004 meeting of the Modern Language Association, held in Philadelphia, on a panel titled “Performing Gender on the Margins of Europe.” Our thanks also to the conference organizers for giving Eurovision studies a place on these programs. We hope that the present volume will inspire further reflection on this unique cultural institution from scholars, critics and fans alike.

Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin
April 2007