

Trento 20th February 2025

The folk theatre called *maggio drammatico* in the Apennines between Emilia and Toscana



Nataschia Zambonini and Corinto Zambonini performing the *Cantico delle creature* during the *maggio drammatico* entitled *Le vele dei crociati*, by Luca Sillari, Sologno, 31st July 2022. (<https://vimeo.com/743396746>)

This seminar explains briefly the difference between two singing traditions designed by the word “maggio” in Italian. The words “cantare il maggio”, or “cantamaggio” or simply “maggio” often designate an itinerant begging song which is performed in a large part of the peninsula on the eve of the

Mayday. The songs for Mayday highlight the beginning of spring and the renewal of vegetation, often paying homage to young girls. Sometimes the text of the songs also celebrates the labour day. In particular traditions, called “maggio delle anime”, songs are dedicated to the souls in Purgatory. The singers normally collect donations, which are used for charity and to pay a collective meal. The *maggio drammatico* is a kind of sung folk theatre which takes place in Toscana (Garfagnana and Buti) and Emilia Romagna (Apennines of Modena and Reggio Emilia). The text of the plays is composed in verses by local poets and it is performed by singers who learned by oral tradition the melodic structures used to sing poetry. According to historical and ethnographic evidence, the two traditions were originally connected, and the *maggio drammatico* was born as a Mayday form of theatre.

This seminar is an introduction to the traditions of *maggio drammatico* in Buti and in the Apennines of Reggio Emilia, especially in Villa Minozzo. Particularly attention is paid to the melodic patterns used to sing the various metrical structures employed in the text: *quartine di ottonari* (four eight-syllables lines), *ottave* or *sestine di endecasillabi* (stanzas of six or eight hendecasyllables) or the so called *sonetti* or *ariette*, that is *quartine di settenari* (four seven-syllables lines).

References

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