Part 1 – THE ORIGINS

A musical genre with very ancient roots, whose renewal continues to this day, classical Neapolitan song is a phenomenon that stretches from the early 19th century to the 1920s, when the so-called golden age came to an end, and continued into the period after the Second World War.

We know relatively little about the origins of Neapolitan song. Much of the knowledge that has come down to us is due to the valuable work of the "Cottrau" family, who, through an important effort of collecting, transcribing and publishing, helped transform a predominantly oral musical tradition into a documented, widely circulated and commercially distributed heritage, laying the foundations for its extraordinary international success.

It is therefore a story made up of legends, populated by the washerwomen of "Vomero", "li guarracini", "li turchi" landing at the harbour, "Michelemma'", "Cicerenella"; by popular villanelle that found their way into royal courts; by tarantellas that evolved from exorcistic rituals into eunuch dances for clueless tourists; and by tammurriate, ignored for centuries until they became a post-punk trend...

1 Canto delle lavandaie del Vomero
2 Fenesta vascia
3 Michelemmà
4 Te voglio bene assaje

CANTO DELLE LAVANDAIE DEL VOMERO (Composer and Author Unknowns)

NEAPOLITAN	ENGLISH
Tu m'aje prommiso quatto moccatora	You promised me four handkerchiefs,
Oje moccatora, oje moccatora!	Oh handkerchiefs, oh handkerchiefs.
Io so' benuto se, io so' benuto	I have come if, I have come
Se me lo vuo' dare	If you want to give them to me,
Me lo vuo' dare!	Will you give them to me,
Me lo vuo' dare!	Will you give them to me,
Me lo vuo' dare!	Will you give them to me,
Me lo vuo' dare!	Will you give them to me.
E si no quatto embe', dammenne ddoje	And if not four, well then, give me two,
Oje moccatora, oje moccatora	Oh handkerchiefs, oh handkerchiefs.
Chillo ch'è 'ncuollo a tte,	What you are wearing
chillo ch'è 'ncuollo a tte nn'e' rroba toja	What you are wearing does not belong to you!
Me lo vuo' dare	Will you give them to me,
Me lo vuo' dare	Will you give them to me,
Me lo vuo' dare	Will you give them to me,
Me lo vuo' dare!	Will you give them to me.
Tu m'aje prommiso quatto moccatora	You promised me four handkerchiefs

FENESTA VASCIA (Composer Unknown, Text transcribed by Guglielmo Cottrau)

NEAPOLITAN	ENGLISH
Fenesta vascia 'e patrona crudele,	Low window of a cruel mistress,
Quanta sospire m'haje fatto jettare!	How many sighs you have cost me!
M'arde 'sto core comm'a 'na cannela,	My heart burns like a candle,
Bella, quanno te sento annommenare!	My beauty, whenever I hear your name!
Oje piglia la sperienza de la neve!	Oh, take a lesson from the snow!
La neve è fredda e se fa maniare.	Snow is cold, yet lets itself be handled.
E tu comme sì tant'aspra e crudele?	And why are you so harsh and cruel?
Muorto me vide e non me vuò ajutare?	You see me dying and will not save me?
Vorria arreventare 'no picciotto,	I wish I could become a little boy,
Co 'na langella a ghire vennenn'acqua,	And go selling water with a jug,
Pe' mme nne jì da chiste palazzuotte:	To get away from these grand houses:
Belle ffemmene meje! Ah! Chi vò acqua?	My lovely ladies! Ah! Who wants water?
Se vota 'na nennella da llà 'ncoppa:	A young woman turns around up there:
"Chi è 'sto ninno ca va vennenno acqua?"	"Who is this boy selling water?"
E io responno co parole accorte:	And I reply with careful words:
"Sò lagreme d'ammore e non è acqua!"	"These are tears of love–it is not water!"

MICHELEMMÀ (Composer Unknown, Text transcribed by Guglielmo Cottrau)

NEAPOLITAN	ENGLISH
È nata 'mmiez' ô mare,	She was born in the middle of the sea,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
È nata 'mmiez' ô mare,	She was born in the middle of the sea,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
Oje 'na scarola, oje 'na scarola,	Oh, a curly-haired girl, Oh, a curly-haired girl.
Oje 'na scarola, oje 'na scarola.	Oh, a curly-haired girl. Oh, a curly-haired girl.
Li turche se nce vanno	The Turks go there,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
Li turche se nce vanno	The Turks go there,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà	My Michela, my Michela,
a reposare, a reposare,	To rest, to rest.
a reposare, a reposare,	To rest, to rest.
Chi pe' la cimma e chi	Some by the top and some,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
Chi pe' la cimma e chi	Some by the top and some,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà	My Michela, my Michela,
pe' lo streppone, pe' lo streppone,	By the bottom, by the bottom.
pe' lo streppone, pe' lo streppone,	By the bottom, by the bottom.
Biato a chi la vence	Blessed is he who wins her,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
Biato a chi la vence	Blessed is he who wins her,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
Co 'sta figliola, Co 'sta figliola,	This girl, this girl.
Co 'sta figliola, Co 'sta figliola,	This girl, this girl.
'Sta figliola ch'è figlia	This girl who is the daughter,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
'Sta figliola ch'è figlia	This girl who is the daughter,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
oje de notaro, oje de notaro,	Oh, of a notary, of a notary.
oje de notaro, oje de notaro,	Oh, of a notary, of a notary.
E 'mpietto porta 'na	And upon her breast she bears a,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
E 'mpietto porta 'na	And upon her breast she bears a,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
stella diana, stella diana,	Daytime star, daytime star,
stella diana, stella diana,	Daytime star, daytime star,
Pe' fá morí ll'amante	To make her lovers die,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
Pe' fá morí ll'amante	To make her lovers die,
Michelemmà, Michelemmà.	My Michela, my Michela,
a duje a duje, a duje a duje,	Two by two, two by two.
a duje a duje, a duje a duje,	Two by two, two by two.

TE VOGLIO BENE ASSAJE (Composer Gaetano Donizetti, Author Raffaele Sacco)

NEAPOLITAN	**ENGLISH**
Pecché quanno me vide	Why, whenever you see me,
Te 'ngrife comm'a gatto?	Do you bristle like a cat?
Nennè, che t'aggio fatto	Darling, what have I done to you
Ca no' me può vedè?	That you cannot bear to see me?
Io t'aggio amato tanto,	I have loved you so much,
Si t'amo tu lo saje.	You know that I love you.
Io te voglio bbene assaje	I love you so very much
E tu non pienze a me.	And you never think of me.
La notte tutte dormeno,	At night everyone sleeps,
Ma io che bbuò durmì!	But I cannot sleep!
Penzanno â nenna mia,	Thinking of my beloved,
Mme sento ascevolì.	I feel faint.
Li quarte d'ora sonano	The quarter hours chime
A uno, a ddoje, a tre.	One, two, three.
Io te voglio bbene assaje	I love you so very much
E tu non pienze a me.	And you never think of me.
Recordate lo juorno	Remember that day
Ca stive a me becino	When you were beside me
E te scorreano 'nzino	And tears were flowing
Le llacreme accossì!	Down your breast!
Deciste a me: "Non chiagnere, Ca tu lo mio sarraje!"	You told me: Do not cry, for you will be mine!
Io te voglio bbene assaje	I love you so very much
E tu non pienze a me.	And you never think of me.
Guardame 'nfaccia e vide	Look me in the face and see
Comme song'arredutto:	What has become of me:
Sicco, peliento e brutto,	Thin, pale and ugly,
Nennella mia, pe' tte!	My darling, because of you!
Cusuto a filo duppio	Stitched with a double thread,
Co tte me vedarraje.	You will see me bound to you.
Io te voglio bbene assaje	I love you so very much
E tu non pienze a me.	And you never think of me.
Saccio ca non vuò scennere	I know you do not want to lower
La grada quanno è scuro.	The grille when it is dark.
Vattenne muro muro,	Hold on to the walls,
Appojate 'ncuoll'a me!	Lean on me!
Tu, 'n'ommo comm'a chisto,	Where will you ever find
Addò lo trovarraje?	Another man like this?
Io te voglio bbene assaje	I love you so very much
E tu non pienze a me.	And you never think of me.
Quanno sò fatto cennere,	When I have turned to ashes,
Tanno me chiagnarraje.	Then you will weep for me.
Sempe addimannarraje: "Nennillo mio addò è?"	You will always ask: Where is my beloved?
La fossa mia tu arape	You will open my grave
E llà me trovarraje.	And find me there.
Io te voglio bbene assaje	I love you so very much
E tu non pienze a me.	And you never think of me.