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Marco Fazzini e Jacksie Saetti

mingle with the universe

**A Sixty-year Career Celebration
of Eric Andersen**

mingle with the universe

*Un ringraziamento particolare per la collaborazione a:
Eric Andersen, Inge Andersen, Paul Lamont, Oliver
Harris, Paolo Feltrin, Marco Philopat, Dino Della Casa,
Giorgio Checchin, Isabella Rizzato, Pierantonio Tanzola,
Anthony DeCurtis, Alessandro Scarsella, Barbara Di Noi,
Michele Gazich, Ian MacFayden, Stephen Petrus, Gregory
Dowling, Paolo Vites*

Introduzione	7
<i>Marco Fazzini</i>	
Mingle with the universe	
Musings and True Confessions of an Artist	13
Eric Andersen in Conversation with Marco Fazzini and Roberto Jacksie Saetti	
Riflessioni e confessioni di un artista	45
Eric Andersen in conversazione con Marco Fazzini e Roberto Jacksie Saetti	
“The State of Always Becoming”	78
The Songs of Eric Andersen <i>by/di Anthony DeCurtis</i>	
16 Selected Songs / 16 canzoni scelte	82
Be True to You	
The Gift of Voice	163
The Music and Words of Eric Andersen <i>by Ian MacFayden</i>	
“Be True to You”	187
La donna che danza tra i versi di Eric Andersen <i>di Paolo Vites</i>	
“Hail to the Pilgrim of Eternity”	209
Eric Andersen and Lord Byron <i>by Gregory Dowling</i>	
“His Words Will Never Die”	217
Eric Andersen and the Shadow and Light of Albert Camus <i>by Stephen Petrus</i>	

**Ritratto dell'artista da clown.
Eric Andersen e Heinrich Böll** 239
di Barbara Di Noi

Italy: A Crazy River

**Italy Like a Crazy River /
L'Italia pazzofiume** 257
by/di Eric Andersen

**Eric Andersen al Poetry Festival '96
di Conegliano** 257
*Una cronaca e una testimonianza
di Giorgio Checchin e Fiorenza Peruch*

**Tokyo, Tangeri, New York, Venezia,
Köln, Newstead Abbey** 279
*Vent'anni on the road con Eric Andersen
di Michele Gazich*

The Songpoet

**Eric Andersen: una breve biografia
umana e artistica** 293
di Roberto Jacksie Saetti

Discografia 303
a cura di Roberto Jacksie Saetti

Biografie degli autori 305

Introduzione

Marco Fazzini



Con la band



Con
Curcetti

“Hail to the Pilgrim of Eternity”

Eric Andersen and Lord Byron

by Gregory Dowling

Eric Andersen’s album is an intriguing late example of the phenomenon that has been known since Byron’s own time as “Byromania”. Probably no English-language poet, with the natural exception of Shakespeare, has been so passionately admired, homaged and imitated – and often by other important artists. In some cases (see the Brontë sisters, for example) it seems not so much a question of literary influence as of personal obsession. Remaining in the field of literature, his influence spread far beyond the shores of his own country, inspiring such major figures as Goethe (who inserted a figure based on him into his *Faust*), Heine, Hugo, Lamartine, Pushkin... In the visual arts, painters like Turner, Géricault and Delacroix were obsessed with Byron. However, one could actually make the case that his influence was most strongly felt in the world of music. Over 40 operas have been based on his works, most notably by Donizetti, Rossini and Verdi; his poetry inspired symphonic works and songs by

such composers as Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn, and (perhaps most importantly) Berlioz.

Byromania may have become less intense as the 19th century came to an end, but it never died away. A clear example is the passionate declaration of Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that Byron is the greatest of all English poets. Other Modernists, in the wake of Eliot, tended to distance themselves from the Romantics, but Auden, who might actually be considered an early post-Modernist, was attracted to Byron precisely because of his apparently anti-romantic qualities, praising the easy colloquial tone of his satirical verse and describing him, in "Letter to Lord Byron", as "master of the airy manner" (Auden, 1968: 58).

Auden could be said to have begun the general reappraisal of Byron whereby his lighter works – the satirical poems in *ottava rima* – began to be elevated over the brooding, dark narratives that had made him famous/notorious throughout Europe. Ironic Byron prevailed over Byronic Byron.

Nonetheless, a certain cult of personality remained crucial. There has hardly been a decade since the early 20th century without the appearance of at least one major new biographical study of the poet. And, ever since the publication of Caroline Lamb's novel *Glenarvon* (1816), Byron, whether under his own name or a borrowed name but no less recognisable for all that, has continued to make regular appearances in novels, plays, and, since at least the 1920s (*Beau Brummel*, 1924), in films. There is no getting away from it: Byron appeals not only because of his poetry but also because of his personality. Byron, in short, is glamorous.

Eric Andersen makes no mystery of the fascination that Byron, both as personality and as poet, exerts on him. His introductory essay revels in the complexity of his character: he was "both a lyrical love poet and a writer of epic narratives as well as scathing satirist deriding establishment hypocrisy";

he was "the most famous, and infamous, writer of his time – a brilliant, rebellious, provocative and seductive anti-hero". While providing a necessarily compressed account of the poet's activities he succeeds in bringing out the full richness of his life, going well beyond the apparently simplistic notion of Byron as "the original Bad Boy of Rock" (to quote one of the paragraph headings). He manages to touch on numerous aspects of Byron's character, without simplifying them, such as his determination "to challenge norms of hypocritical British aristocratic society", his undeniably "risqué lifestyle" in sexual matters, his attempts to triumph over the "humiliating impediment" of his club-foot by "training himself as a boxer, fencer, pistol target shooter (who loathed killing animals), accomplished equestrian, glacial mountain climber, first-rate sailor and navigator" (the last two accomplishments are perhaps slightly exaggerated), and, most importantly, his commitment to "freedom from oppression", which led to his joining the Greek struggle for independence, in which he met his death.

There is clearly a rare passion behind Andersen's engagement with Byron's poetry. As already indicated, numerous other composers have been inspired by Byron's poetry, in particular during the 19th century. However, Andersen asks why it is that the poems that Byron clearly labelled as songs have "been virtually ignored over the course of two hundred years by both the British and American folk traditional music scenes". There are exceptions, of course; "So We'll Go No More A-Roving" has attracted a number of songwriters, including Leonard Cohen (mentioned by Andersen) and Joan Baez, who recorded it in 1964, using a setting composed by the folk-singer Richard Dyer-Bennet nine years earlier.

However, Andersen's claim seems mainly true. "She Walks in Beauty", probably Byron's most famous lyric poem, was written specifically for music (for the composer Isaac Nathan), and Wikipedia lists eight composers who have composed settings

for it; however, Andersen's version is the first that can be described as a folk song.

Andersen's selection of songs is interestingly varied. Many of the poems he includes were clearly intended by Byron as songs (even declaredly so, as in "Song to Augusta"), but he has also chosen a selection of stanzas from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the opening and concluding lines of "Darkness", which, as the title forewarns us, is Byron's grimmest and most sombre poem, composed in a stately blank verse. For this latter poem Andersen chooses not to sing but to recite the lines to accompanying instrumental music; it is strangely potent, Andersen's recitation conveying all the horror of Byron's apocalyptic imagery.

For the most part he has left the poems intact but in a few cases he "created matching stanzas to round out the final lyric into a song pattern". Mostly the adjustments work well, but in a couple of cases (to this listener at least) the changes are disputable. For example, the lines added to "She Walks in Beauty" are perfectly acceptable, but the modification of the final line of the first stanza rather changes the meaning. Here are the lines as Byron wrote them:

Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

This becomes in Andersen's version:

Mellowed to that tender light
Which to heaven – gaudy day denies.

Here it is heaven that is bereft of tenderness, rather than "gaudy day", which rather goes against the overall message of the lyric, whose intention is to praise the beauty of both the night and the woman.

"Mingle with the Universe" is for the most part a highly

effective rendering of the final section of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, one of Byron's most powerful pieces of reflective verse. However, one of the redactions (as Andersen calls it) in the last stanza leaves a sentence mysteriously truncated. Here are Byron's lines:

And if the freshening sea
Made them a terror – 'twas a pleasing fear,
For I was as it were a child of thee.

These become:

And if the freshening sea
A child of thee – to something oh so dear...

This is cryptic, to say the least. It seems a pity to me, because on the whole Andersen's version of this section of Byron's meditative poem succeeds in conveying the full power of the poet's reflections; his use of the phrase "*Mingle With the Universe*" as a haunting and hypnotic refrain is particularly compelling.

The two original songs that Andersen decided to write for the album, "Hail to the Curled Darling" and "Albion", are especially interesting. The motive, as he puts it, was "to describe in song some aspects of Lord Byron's life and travels, writing habits, normal days, and not-always-so-normal nights". He chooses to adopt extended stanza forms, with interweaving rhyming schemes that recall the *ottava rima* and Spenserian stanzas of his most acclaimed narrative poems, *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. For the first of these longer songs, Andersen takes a phrase from one of Byron's letters (writing to his friend and biographer, the Irish poet, Thomas Moore), in which, at the age of 33, he recalls how he used to react to harsh criticism: "after all, what a fool I am to disquiet myself about such fellows! It was all very well ten or twelve years ago, when

I was a ‘curled darling,’ and *mind*ed such things” (Marchand, 1978: 250; Byron himself borrowed the phrase from *Othello*).

This ironic self-description suits the mood of Andersen’s poem, which gives an exuberant and spirited account of Byron’s life and loves, from his boyhood in Newstead Abbey to his heroic death in Greece. The song contains no direct quotations from the poetry but, with its deliberately attention-calling rhymes (“sister”, “kiss her”, “miss her”; “unfurled”, “world”, “hurled”, “curled”; “scandals”, “candles”), it evokes the tone as well as the wit of *Don Juan*.

The other wholly original song, “Albion”, comes immediately after the vigorously melancholy lament, “Childe Harold’s Farewell”, and, as its title might suggest, reflects on Byron’s status as exiled Englishman. The song of exile here becomes a song of defiance, with Byron, in the first person, responding ebulliently to his critics: Andersen succeeds in including a great number of the scandalous aspects of Byron’s life that had shocked respectable England, from homosexuality to incest, from the blasphemy of his play *Cain* to his admiration for Napoleon. The last stanza takes us again to Greece, where Byron caustically lambasts Elgin’s theft of the Parthenon marbles (“a squalid tale of horror”), concluding with the triumphant line, “But who wouldn’t trade a poem one time – to become the King of Greece!” (It has, indeed, been suggested – though I think rather fantastically – that had he lived Byron might have been offered the crown of the new nation.)

In conclusion, while there are one or two moments in this album that pedantic scholars (like myself) might squabble over, there is no denying the Byronic energy and passion – and, not least important, the wit – that have fueled it. As a lover of Byron’s poetry myself, I am happy to join in the toast with which Andersen concludes his introductory essay, raising “a brimming goblet to the soaring spirit of the curled darling. *Hail to the Pilgrim of Eternity!*”.

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- Marchand, Leslie A. (ed.), *Born for Opposition; Byron’s Letters and Journals*, (vol. 8), John Murray, London 1978.
- Suggestions for further reading (recent good books on Byron):*
- Beaton, Roderick, *Byron’s War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2014.
- Beatty, Bernard, *Reading Byron: Poems – Life – Politics*, Liverpool U.P., Liverpool 2023.
- McGann, Jerome, *Byron and the Poetics of Adversity*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2022.

An excellent website, offering authoritative texts of all Byron’s poetry and much of his prose, can be found here:

<https://petercochran.wordpress.com/byron-2/>

A good edition of Byron’s selected works (by way of introduction) is:
Levine, Alice (ed.), *Byron’s Poetry and Prose*, Norton Critical Edition, 2009.

- 2004 The Street Was Always There, Appleseed Recordings (APR CD 1082)
- 2005 Waves, Appleseed Recordings (APR CD 1092)
- 2007 Blue Rain Live, Appleseed Recordings (APR CD 1101)
- 2010 The Cologne Concert, Meyer Records (no 173)
- 2015 Shadow and Light of Albert Camus, Meyer Records (no 189)
- 2017 Mingle with the Universe: The Worlds of Lord Byron, Meyer Records (no 213)
- 2018 Silent Angel: Fire and Ashes Oh Heinrich Böll, Meyer Records (no 221)
- 2020 Woodstock Under the Stars, Y & T Music (YT-17)
- 2020 Rolling Coconut Revue Japan Concert 1977, Super Fuji Discs (FJSP387)
- 2023 Foolish Like the Flowers – Live in Italy Appaloosa (AP 268-2)

Official Videos and Film

- 2011 Woodstock Under the Stars, Nevessa Production – Webcast Stream
- 2018 Under the Shadows, Video w/Sari Andersen
- 2019 The Songpoet a P. Lamont and S. Sackett, Film
- 2023 Dangerland, Video
- 2023 Armed to the Teeth, Video

Biografie autori

Giorgio Checchin è nato a Conegliano (TV) nel 1952. Negli anni Novanta, dopo la parentesi di un'esperienza musicale con un gruppo folk-rock, culminata in un 'Tributo ad Andrea Zanzotto' – che gli offre opportunità straordinarie di incontro con artisti, letterati e accademici – si riaccende la sua inveterata passione per la Cultura, che lo induce a organizzare una lunga serie di eventi pubblici: dagli 'Incontri in Libreria' (con autori, artisti, cantautori italiani e stranieri, poeti e letterati, registi e critici cinematografici) fino al Festival di Poesia. Il suo giovanile entusiasmo per la letteratura americana si è esplicitato, in quegli anni, in una ribadita attenzione per Fernanda Pivano, e la passionale promozione del suo lavoro.

Anthony DeCurtis is a contributing editor at *Rolling Stone*, where his work has appeared for more than thirty years. He holds a Ph.D in American literature from Indiana University and is a Distinguished Lecturer in the creative writing program at the University of Pennsylvania. He collaborated with Clive Davis on Davis's autobiography, *The Soundtrack of My Life* (2013) and rose to number two on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list. He has won ASCAP's Deems Taylor awards for excellence in writing about music. He has appeared as a commentator on MTV, VH1, the "Today Show", and many other news and entertainment programs. From 2006 through June 2008, he directed and helped design the arts-and-culture curriculum at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism.

His main books are: *Rocking My Life Away: Writing About Music and Other Matters* (1998); *In Other Words: Artists Talk About Life and Work* (2005); *Lou Reed : a life* (2017). He has edited: *Present Tense: Rock & Roll and Culture* (1991); *Rolling Stone images of rock & roll* (1995); *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (2008); *Blues & Chaos: The Music Writing of Robert Palmer* (2009).

Barbara Di Noi insegna Letteratura Tedesca presso l'Università di Parma. Ha tradotto Kafka (Biblion, 2011 e Mimesis, 2014) e Heine. Ha scritto sulla dimensione orfica della poesia di Trakl (Cassino, 2007). Altri autori mitteleuropei oggetto dei suoi studi sono Rilke e Hofmannsthal; si è occupata inoltre, a più riprese, di Frühromantik e di Ottocento (Novalis, Stifter). Ha dedicato a Kafka due monografie (Biblion, 2009 e Clinamen, 2016). Per Königshausen & Neumann ha pubblicato, nel novembre 2022, *Die Wiederkehr des Mythos in Benjamins Passagen*. Ha preso parte a vari convegni di respiro internazionale ed è ora membro della redazione di "Comparatistica".

Gregory Dowling is Associate Professor of North-American Language and Literature at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. His academic research and publications have been focused on British and American literature, with a special interest in the Romantic poets and in 20th- and 21st-century poetry. He is a member of the Academic Committee for the Lord Byron Museum in Ravenna, which is to be inaugurated in 2024. He has published six novels, the most recent of which, *Ascension* and *The Four Horsemen* (Polygon and St Martins Press, 2015, 2017), are spy-stories set in 18th-century Venice.

Marco Fazzini è poeta, critico letterario e traduttore. Insegna Letteratura inglese e postcoloniale presso l'Università di Ca' Foscari (Venezia). Si interessa di Scozia, Sudafrica, e Irlanda,

e ha pubblicato libri sulla canzone d'autore, sulla traduzione poetica, e sulla poesia contemporanea di lingua inglese. Ha tradotto: Philip Larkin, Douglas Livingstone, Norman MacCaig, Charles Tomlinson, Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Morgan, Stephen Gray, H.D. Thoreau e Douglas Dunn. Le sue maggiori interviste a poeti di lingua inglese sono riunite nei volumi: *Conversations with Scottish Poets* (2015) e *The Saying of It* (2017). I suoi principali libri di poesia: *Nel vortice* (1999); *Driftings and Wrecks* (2010); *24 Poems in English and Italian* (2014); *Riding the Storm* (2016), *Canto dell'isola* (2020); *Poesie scelte* (2020).

Ian MacFadyen is an independent writer, scholar and visual artist. He co-edited *NakedLunch@50: Anniversary Essays* (2009) with Professor Oliver Harris. He is co-author of *William Burroughs: CUT* with Professor Axel Heil (2013). A number of his essays on William Burroughs and Brion Gysin are archived online at *RealityStudio: A William S. Burroughs Community*. His long essay on Ira Cohen, "The Mercury Mirror", was published in *Ira Cohen: Into The Mylar Chamber* (2019), a book edited by Allan Graubard. *Blue Iris, Black Rose: Ira Cohen and the Language of Flowers* was published by Counter Culture Chronicles (2022). Ian MacFadyen has given talks at the ZKM (Karlsruhe), the Parasol Unit Foundation (London), the University of Chicago in Paris, and the Vienna Poetry School. He lives in London.

Michele Gazich è musicista, poeta, produttore artistico, compositore, scrittore di canzoni. Opera professionalmente nel mondo della musica dall'inizio degli anni Novanta: tour in Italia, Europa e USA, collaborazioni con cantautori italiani, europei e singer-songwriter statunitensi (Michelle Shocked, Mary Gauthier, Eric Andersen e Mark Olson); orchestre; spettacoli teatrali; performance di poeti; colonne sonore cinematografiche; università e conservatori italiani ed esteri. Michele Gazich, a oggi, ha collaborato a più di cinquanta album e ne ha pubblicati

dieci a suo nome. Una dimensione di nomadismo artistico e di ricerca costante, che è diventata esistenziale.

Stephen Petrus is Director of Public History Programs at LaGuardia and Wagner Archives at LaGuardia Community College in New York City. He is a twentieth-century U.S. urban and cultural historian. In 2015, he curated the exhibition “Folk City: New York and the Folk Music Revival” at the Museum of the City of New York and co-authored the accompanying book, published by Oxford University Press. In 2016, he co-curated the festival “Camus: A Stranger in the City” with the Albert Camus Estate to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Camus’s visit to New York. His essays have been published in *Studies in Popular Culture*, *New York History*, and *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and his research has been supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Pew Foundation. His next publication will be “The Lights Are Out on the Mean Streets: Lou Reed’s ‘Dirty Blvd.’ and Inequality in New York City”, to be published in *From the Bowery to the Bronx: A Cultural History of New York Through Song* (Intellect Books, 2024). He is a member of the New York Academy of History.

Roberto Jacksie Saetti è nato a Carpi (MO) nel 1956 e ha costantemente alimentato le sue due passioni/ossessioni principali: la pesca e la musica. La prima lo ha portato in giro per il mondo e per i mari, la seconda lo ha condotto inevitabilmente a incrociare il percorso artistico e umano di Eric Andersen. Jacksie assieme agli amici Dino Della Casa e Alberto Anselmi ha organizzato il primo tour italiano di Eric Andersen nel 1980, esordendo in Italia il giorno 30 giugno 1980, al Picchio Rosso di Modena. Da allora i destini dell’artista e di Jacksie si sono incrociati regolarmente: nell’estate del 1982 Andersen ha ospitato il suo amico italiano nella sua dimora a Woodstock; nel 1998 lo ha invitato diversi giorni a Oslo, introducendolo agli

amici Bob Dylan e Lou Reed; nel 2006, a Utrecht, in Olanda, Jacksie è il testimone (“best man”) al matrimonio di Eric e Inge. Jacksie ha seguito diversi tour di Eric in Italia e in Europa per una stima approssimativa superiore al centinaio di concerti. Nel 2018 Jacksie, assieme al noto giornalista e scrittore Paolo Vites, ha scritto la prima biografia di Eric Andersen *Ghosts upon the road*, oggi praticamente introvabile.

Paolo Vites, giornalista e scrittore, ha collaborato con le massime testate musicali italiane. Ha intervistato Paul McCartney, Patti Smith, Joe Strummer, James Taylor e molti altri. Ha scritto 12 libri. Insieme a Roberto Jacksie Saetti ha curato *Ghosts upon the road - Eric Andersen disco per disco*. Tra gli altri libri ricordiamo: *Rock’n’Roll Suicide* (2022); *Enzo Jannacci* (2019); *Un sentiero verso le stelle. Sulla strada con Bob Dylan* (2011); *La canzoni di Cat Stevens* (2005); *Patti Smith* (2003); *Bob Dylan 1962-2002* (2002).