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Reviews

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Haworth, Rachel. *The Many Meanings of Mina: Popular Music Stardom in Post-War Italy*. Bristol (UK): Intellect, 2022. Pp. 240. ISBN 9781789385601. \$ 113.50 (hardback). \$ 85 (ePdf). \$ 85 (ePub).

Through her sharp and comprehensive analysis of the professional trajectory of Italian music icon Mina Mazzini (1940-), Rachel Haworth provides a long-awaited contribution to the little-explored field of stardom and celebrity studies in the Italian context. By focusing on more than sixty years of Italian history, as seen for the most part through the eyes of the famous singer from Cremona, the author also contributes significantly to broader international discourses regarding gender, sexuality, societal issues, and music and television criticism. Leaving any biographical approach aside, *The Many Meanings of Mina: Popular Music Stardom in Post-War Italy* traces the way in which Mina's star persona was created and how it evolved within the world of Italian popular culture from the 1950s onwards. In particular, Haworth wants to "demonstrate what Mina has come to mean within Italian culture and, [...] how these meanings have been produced and how they have continued to circulate and thus inform our understanding of Mina as Italian popular music star and icon" (xiv). In order to achieve this goal, the author approaches Mina's opus through the framework of intermediality, which is useful to analyze "the intersections and interactions of mediums" (xvi) through which Mina rose to fame and maintained her status as superstar and national icon. For Haworth, then, reading Mina as an intermedial star persona means recognizing that her star status was produced "at the intersections and interactions of [the] media and mediums" (23) in which she appeared.

The Many Meanings of Mina contains eight chapters structured as chronologically as possible for purposes of clarity, plus an introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on a single medium that was particularly important for shaping Mina's star persona. Chapter 1 provides the necessary cultural background to contextualize Mina's popularity. It also gives to the reader an overview on how one can "read popstars" (21) as signs. In addition, the opening chapter outlines the media that constitute the focus of the book (popular music genres of *urlo*—Italy's answer to rock 'n' roll—and *canzone all'italiana*—Italian traditional song epitomized by the Sanremo Festival, *musicarelli* films—Italian musicals, scandals, tragedy, television, advertising, album covers, and absence). In Chapter 2, the author analyzes Mina's star status at the beginning of her career, between 1958 and 1961, in order to establish how *urlo* and *canzone all'italiana* shaped her significance for the audience in this period. In particular, she demonstrates how the star's image evolved from the potentially transgressive *urlatrice* (Italian female rock 'n' roll star) thanks to her appearances at the Sanremo Festivals of 1960 and 1961, stressing the need for her to conform to *canzone all'italiana* in order to achieve national success and recognition. Diversely, Chapter 3 focuses on Mina's cinematic appearances in the famous *musicarello* genre, between 1959 and 1963. Here, Haworth shows how, in these movies, Mina's images of *urlatrice* and *cantante* actually intersect precisely because of the intermedial nature of these products, which had a clear commercial aim to support the career and album sales of the featured singer.

The second half of the book moves away from music strictly speaking to approach other relevant media. For example, Chapter 4 deals with the various media reporting scandal and tragedy, which were crucial for the public perception of the singer as a young woman in 1960s Italy. Two interesting case studies (the birth of Mina's son Massimiliano out of wedlock in 1963 and the death of her brother Alfredo in a car crash in 1965) are carefully analyzed to shed light on how the ways in which these events were reported by the press to reshape the star's significance. This time around the concepts of sexuality, morality, and family. Chapter 5 centers on the key role that television had in disseminating Mina's star status to large audiences. Haworth conducts an extensive analysis of the shows in which the singer was one of the primary hosts (*Studio Uno / Studio One*, 1961 and 1965, *Sabato Sera / Saturday Evening*, 1967, *Canzonissima / Super Song*, 1968, *Teatro 10 / Theater 10*, 1972, and *Milleluci / A Thousand Lights*, 1974). The author asserts that the singer, who initially had to shape her star image according to accepted perceptions of gender roles and femininity, could assume more agency over her

role and public image, now that she had become one of the most important hosts of Saturday night variety shows. Chapter 6 examines Mina's performances for the television show *Carosello* (*Carousel*), specifically its advertising, which allowed the star's image to be permanently associated with iconic Italian brands such as Barilla pasta. Chapter 7 explores Mina's single record and album covers asserting their importance in shaping the popstar's image for public consumption, especially after her sudden retirement from public performances in 1978. Finally, Chapter 8 offers a case study of Mina at 80. Using the celebrations for Mina's 80th birthday carried out by the official fan club, a Facebook group, and Italian television, Haworth reveals how the medium of absence allows the audience and fans to create new and personalized meanings of the star.

Being one of the first monographs completely devoted to an Italian female singer, *The Many Meanings of Mina* is original for its approach to the concepts of stardom and celebrity that extends the discourse far beyond the more usually studied *divismo cinematografico* (film stardom). Haworth successfully establishes a theoretical framework aimed at analyzing non-cinematic Italian female stardom, resuming and expanding on the studies of Italian cinema and media scholars, such as Stephen Gundle, and classic theorists of Hollywood celebrity, such as Richard Dyer, always emphasizing the marked differences between American and Italian show businesses. A remarkably appreciable aspect of the book are the close reading skills of the author who is at ease at dissecting a wide variety of written and multimedia texts. The framework of intermediality is a meaningful critical lens because it allows the author to study everything that surrounds a singer, going beyond music. In fact, as Haworth points out, most singers, at least in the Italian context, are intermedial stars and, therefore, their social implications are to be found not only in music, but also in other media appearances. This is an aspect that has been largely ignored by American scholars who focus on American popular music, for example.

The fact that the volume focuses on a single case study proves to be a winning strategy because Haworth compellingly manages to weave Mina's career into the Italian national fabric, without distracting the reader with unnecessary analyses of other female stars who had similar career trajectories. However, Mina's uniqueness, which allows her to become something more than just a star, is also underlined. Through her study, Haworth effectively proves that Mina can be considered a true national icon for Italian people, someone they should be proud of. All of this clearly connects to larger discourses that go beyond celebrity and stardom. Mina's ongoing popularity, as the author highlights, has to do with how Italians relate celebrities to social developments, and perceptions of gender roles and femininity.

The Many Meanings of Mina: Popular Music Stardom in Post-War Italy is the starting point of a new interest in stardom and celebrity studies, which although grounded in cultural studies, have been little approached by scholars of Italian studies probably due to some preconceptions related to the study of popular culture. Nevertheless, Haworth's volume is an invaluable tool not only for researchers interested in Italian female stars, but also for those whose research focuses on media, television/film/music, feminist/gender studies more broadly speaking. Moreover, the book can also be easily adopted in graduate and undergraduate courses dealing with contemporary Italian society, music, and television. A secondary market for the work is represented by the general public and fans interested in Mina's personal and musical story. Written in English and in an accessible way, *The Many Meanings of Mina* succeeds in broadening the scope of stardom and celebrity studies beyond Italian national borders allowing the reader to grasp the similarities and differences between Italian and Hollywood entertainment worlds in a transnational perspective.

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