

# ALTRE VOCI

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## MUSICAL MIGRATION

### *From Italy To America*

*"Angelina," "Buona Sera," "Volare," "That's Amore" and "Cara Mia" are all classic pop songs that revel in their Italian roots, boasting titles, words, and phrases that are clearly in la bella lingua.*

But there are many other American pop hits with Italian origins that are less known for their Italian roots.

One of the best known is Elvis Presley's reworking of *"O Sole Mio"* after hearing it while serving in the US Army in Europe. The King of Rock'n roll was a lover of Neapolitan music and listened to the Neapolitan ballads of famous tenor Mario Lanza as a teenager. He recorded two hit songs that were actually remakes of Neapolitan classics. The first, *"O Sole Mio"* was made in 1959 as *"It's Now or Never"* which became a number one hit for Elvis. He often sang it in the original Italian at concerts. In 1961 he recorded *"Surrender"* an English language version of *"Torna a Surriento" (Come Back To Sorrento)*, another number one hit for him. In 1964, Elvis sang the beautiful Neapolitan ballad *"Santa Lucia"* in Italian in the film *Viva Las Vegas*.

Legendary Italian-American singer Frank Sinatra, renowned for his Italian roots turned Italian song *"Piano,"* performed by Italian pop star Mina, into *"Softly as I Leave You"* in 1964. The English version of *"Il Mio Mondo" (You're my World)*, was recorded by American singers such as Dionne Warwick, Tom Jones and Glen Campbell. It reached the top of the charts in 1964 in Europe and the United States by British singer Cilla Black who took another Italian hit song by Lucia Battista, *"Prigioniero del Mondo"* to the charts in 1968 as *"Only Forever Will Do."*

Another English pop star, Dusty Springfield, found Italian inspiration with her version of *"Io Che Non Vivo,"* as *"You Don't Have To Say You Love Me"* which reached No.4 in the U.S. and No.1 in England. Elvis Presley scored a No.11 hit with his version in 1970. British

singer Tom Jones had several Italian into English hits. His hit *"Help Yourself"* first captured attention as *"Gli Occhi Miei"* at the San Remo festival in Italy in 1968. Another Jones hit *"Love Me Tonight"* was a translation of *"Alla Fine Della Strada."* In April of 1969, Petula Clark offered her rendition of the romantic ballad *"Lontano Dagli Occhi" (If You Are Ever Lonely)*, another haunting ballad of lost love.

*"My Love Forgive Me"* translated from *"Amore Scusami"* made the charts for Jerry Vale, Robert Goulet and Mario Lanza. In 1968 the British invasion group, Herman's Hermits translated *"Luglio"* into *"Something's Happening"* which was featured on an album of the same name in 1968.

The bulk of this musical migration took place in the 1960's. The flood of musical translations slowed by the 1970's but in 1977, Helen Reddy recorded her own version of *"You're my World" (Il mio Mondo)*. That was followed by Laura Branigan's pop hit *"Gloria,"* perhaps the most popular Italian to English hit song from Italy which hit No.2 on the charts in 1982 where it remained for 40 weeks; earned a grammy nomination and was featured in the film *Flashdance*. The Italian version, by Umberto Tozzi had the same song title *"Gloria"* and was a top Italian hit.

There are no doubt many more Italian hits that have made their way into the English language and into the American charts. The connection with the songs of Italy should not surprise us given how Italian culture and its musical traditions have influenced the world and the United States. Next time you are listening to your favorite music, stop and consider, the song may have roots in Italy

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