

# Italians find a moment of joy in times of crisis

From the southern islands to the Alps, they sang the national anthem and played instruments in chorus to keep spirits up

JASON HOROWITZ  
ROME

It started with the national anthem. Then came the piano chords, trumpet blasts, violin serenades and even the clanging of pots and pans — all of it spilling from people's homes, out of windows and from balconies, and rippling across rooftops.

Finally, on Saturday afternoon, a nationwide round of applause broke out for the doctors on the medical front lines fighting the spread of Europe's worst coronavirus outbreak.

"It was from our hearts, to say thanks and show that we can get past this," said Emma Santachiara, 73, who came out onto the terrace of her apartment in the Monteverde section of Rome to clap with her granddaughters.

Italians remain essentially under house arrest as the nation, the European front in the global fight against the coronavirus, has ordered extraordinary restrictions on their movement to prevent contagions.

As of Sunday, the virus had infected more than 21,000 Italians and left more



In unison: A woman playing music from her balcony in Milan and opera singer Laura Baldassari, right. Italians remain in self-quarantine to prevent spread of COVID-19. •NYT



than 1,400 dead, according to national officials — the worst toll reported anywhere outside of China. Italy has closed all of its schools, bars and restaurants and restricted movement for anything other than work, health or the procurement of essentials.

Like any national crisis, the virus has exposed the flaws of those countries it has struck the hardest, whether it be the reflex for secrecy in China, the down-

playing of the crisis in Iran or the initial confusion and fragmentation in the Italian response.

## COVID-19

But to the extent that this is a virus that tries people's souls, it has also demonstrated the strengths of those national characters.

In China, patriotic truck drivers risked infection to bring desperately needed food to the people of Wuhan,

the epicentre of the outbreak. In Iran, videos show doctors in full scrubs and masks dancing to keep spirits up.

And in Italy, the gestures of gratitude and music ring out above the country's vacated streets, while social media feeds fill with encouraging, sentimental and humorous web videos.

On Friday evening, at the exact hour that health officials normally update the daily numbers of the coun-

try's increasing infected and dead, Italians from the southern islands to the Alps sang the national anthem and played instruments.

Santachiara, in Rome, was among them. "It's not like we're maestros," she said, but "it's a moment of joy in this moment of anxiety."

### Keeping distance

On the web, one man showed off his new invention, a vest of horizontal cardboard that maintained a 1-meter distance from anyone around him.

"Cool," said the man, looking like the centre of a propeller. "I'm going to work."

Other irreverent posts showed a parrot smashing its beak into a mirror above a "fourth day of quarantine" caption and a father extolling how happy he was to be home as his bickering children drowned out his voice. In another, a teenager spritzed on some perfume for a walk to the kitchen.

Images of nurses collapsed from exhaustion or their faces bruised from tightly sealed masks have also spread across the web in recent days. One image cir-

culating widely on Saturday showed a nurse cradling the Italian peninsula in her arms.

Parents posted pictures of unicorns and rainbows drawn by young children with the hashtag "It will all be OK."

The Italian media reported a spike in sales of the Italian flag. The national anthem, usually limited to the start of soccer matches, reverberated off palazzo walls at 6 p.m. Friday.

Like many anthems, it is a martial call to arms and sacrifice — in this case, against the Austrian empire — and for unity after being for centuries "downtrodden and derided." /Because we are not one people.

"Let us join in cohort, 'We are ready to die! 'We are ready to die! Italy has called!"

"We're Italians, and being vocal is part of our culture," said Giorgio Albertini, 51, an archaeology professor who clapped from his apartment balcony in the university district of Milan, calling it a way "to feel a community and to participate of the collective grief." NY TIMES

# 17,700 bottles of sanitiser, but nowhere to sell them

E-tailers take action against stockpilers

JACK NICAS

On March 1, the day after the first COVID-19 death in the U.S., brothers Matt and Noah Colvin set out in a silver SUV to pick up some hand sanitiser. Driving around Chattanooga, Tennessee, they hit different stores and cleaned out the shelves.

Over the next three days, Noah Colvin took a 1,300-mile road trip across Tennessee and into Kentucky, filling a U-Haul truck with thousands of bottles of hand sanitiser and thousands of packs of antibacterial wipes, mostly from "little hole-in-the-wall dollar stores in the backwoods," his brother said.

"The major metro areas were cleaned out."

Mr. Matt Colvin stayed home near Chattanooga, preparing for pallets of even more wipes and sanitiser he had ordered, and starting to list them on Amazon. He said he had posted 300 bottles of hand sanitiser and immediately sold them all for between \$8 and \$70 each, multiples higher than what he had bought them for. To him, "it was crazy money." To many others, it was profiteering from a pandemic.

Amazon pulled his items and thousands of other listings for sanitiser, wipes and face masks. The company suspended some of the sellers behind the listings and warned many others that if they kept running up prices, they'd lose their accounts. EBay soon followed with even stricter measures, prohibiting any U.S. sales of masks or sanitiser.

Now, while people search in vain for sanitiser to protect themselves from the spread of the coronavirus, Mr. Matt Colvin is sitting on 17,700 bottles of the stuff



Noah Colvin moving boxes of hand sanitiser to his storeroom in Hixson. •NYT

with little idea where to sell them. "It's been a huge amount of whiplash," he said. "From being in a situation where what I've got coming and going could potentially put my family in a really good place financially to 'What the heck am I going to do with all of this?'"

The Colvins are among probably thousands of sellers who have amassed stockpiles of hand sanitiser and crucial respirator masks that many hospitals are now rationing, according to interviews with eight Amazon sellers and posts in private Facebook and Telegram groups from dozens more. Amazon said it had recently removed hundreds of thousands of listings and suspended thousands of sellers' accounts for price gouging related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amazon, eBay, Walmart and others are trying to stop their sellers from making excessive profits from a public health crisis. While the companies aimed to discourage people from hoarding such products and jacking up their prices, many sellers had already cleared out stores and started selling the goods online.

Now, both the physical and digital shelves are nearly empty. NY TIMES

# U.S. students beat virus blues with #SunshineSongs

As events are being cancelled, actor Laura Benanti's call to 'find some bright spots' in the crisis draws strong resonance online

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

American students are belting out show tunes on social media to make up for high school musical performances that were called off because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Schools have closed across the U.S. while cultural institutions such as Broadway have been shuttered in a

bid to slow the spread of the contagion.

Actress Laura Benanti sparked the Twitter trend after imploring her followers to "find some bright spots" in the public health crisis.

### 'Post yourself singing'

"If you were meant to perform in your High School musical and it was cancelled please post yourself singing,"

the Broadway performer tweeted.

Hundreds of students responded to the #SunshineSongs call over the next hours with clips from rehearsals or home renditions of musical numbers from *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables* and other popular theatre plays.

"Our senior class designed and built EVERYTHING and

have been preparing for this for a year," tweeted one woman, whose opening night performance of *The Jungle Book* was cancelled.

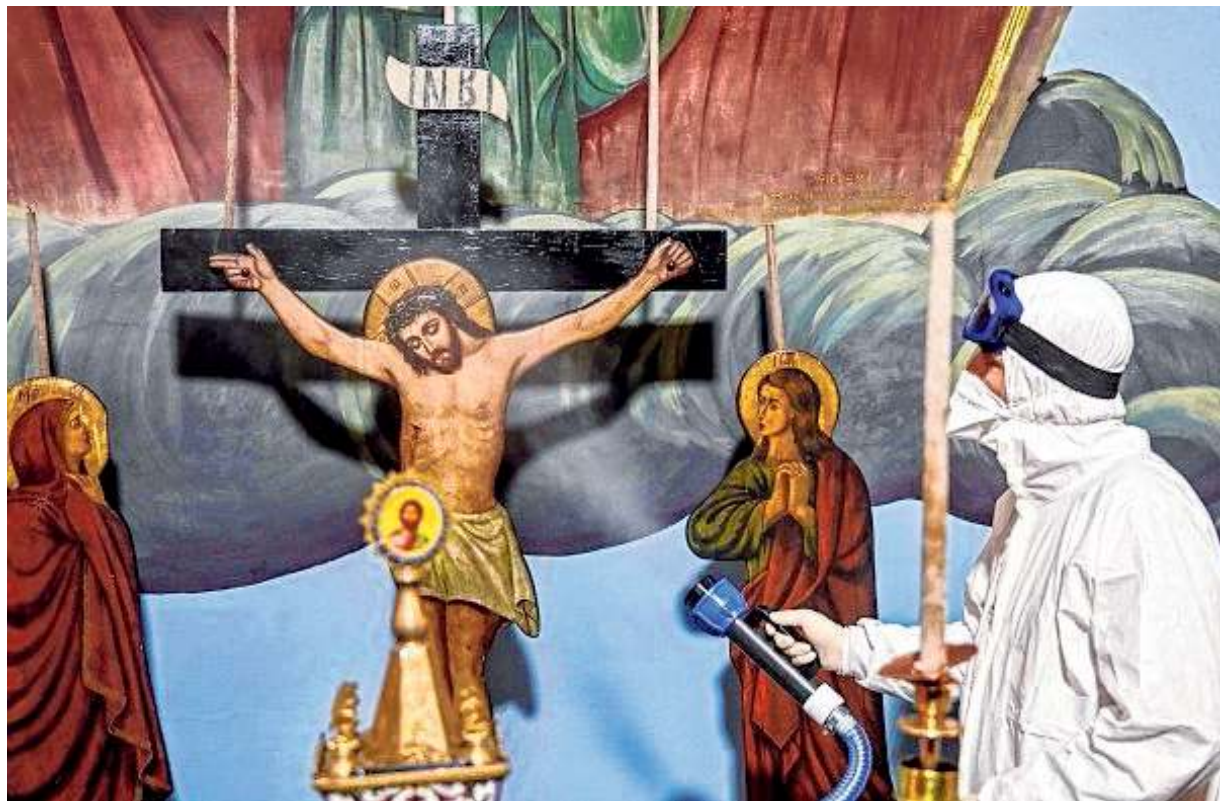
"Thank you for the chance to share this."

The craze caught the eye of Broadway composer and *Hamilton* playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda. "Thank you, @LauraBenanti, thank you kids, I'm watching too."



Laura Benanti •AFP

## Godliness and cleanliness



A municipal worker disinfecting the Panagia Altimermer Orthodox Greek Church in Istanbul to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 on Sunday. •AFP

# Red carpet events now in living rooms

Glitzy premieres are giving way to screenings at home and via online platforms

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LOS ANGELES

Hollywood directors who had their glitzy premieres cancelled due to COVID-19 are finding inventive ways to build buzz for their films — including bringing the red carpet into their living rooms.

Movie festivals such as SXSW in Texas and Tribeca in New York have been scrapped in recent days as the deadly pandemic spreads. This has shorn major titles of the publicity generated by opening night reviews and galas, and left hundreds of unsold indie films without distributors.

The makers of *The Carnivores*, a quirky thriller-meets-love story set to debut at SXSW, took matters into their own hands by shifting the "premiere" to the cinematographer Adam Minnick's Austin home.

"We have full catering, we



Creative solutions: People walking through downtown Austin, Texas, after the SXSW festival was cancelled. •REUTERS

have a red carpet, we have a photographer coming, we have local news," said director Caleb Michael Johnson.

The red carpet will run from the front porch, through the house, and back to a taco stand — which is being catered for free by a local sponsor.

The idea emerged from a bar conversation the day the festival was cancelled.

"Our world premiere was

on Saturday 14th and damn it we wanted to still have our screening on Saturday 14th in Austin."

The same tactic was employed by U.S. actor David Arquette, whose documentary about his controversial forays into pro-wrestling shifted from a SXSW premiere to his home near Hollywood within 24 hours.

Mr. Arquette and his wife flew in the director from the East Coast — and made a dash to wholesale store Costco for drinks — before guests gathered on couches and the living room floor, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

### 'No substitute'

Mr. Johnson said the more intimate nature of these events put guests at ease about the risk of contagion — but others are skipping physical events altogether, turning to technology.

SXSW's prestigious film competitions will go ahead as planned, with movies available to juries online.

Spencer Folmar's new drama about the opioid crisis, intended to screen at the postponed Beverly Hills Film Festival, will hit streaming platforms on the day it was due in theatres nationwide.

The movie will now rely on online advertising and sending digital "screener" links to critics.

## IN BRIEF



### Oman to ban single-use plastic bags from 2021

MUSCAT  
Oman will ban single-use plastic bags starting next year as part of efforts to reduce pollution and protect the environment. AFP



### No public participation at Pope's Easter events

VATICAN CITY  
The Vatican has said that its traditional Easter celebrations would be held this year without worshippers due to COVID-19 outbreak. AFP

# No warm greetings, no mosque prayers

Across the Gulf, 'corona phobia' is making people change their habits

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
DUBAI

No shisha pipe sessions, deserted streets, mosques and shopping malls, drones in the sky broadcasting public health warnings — the new coronavirus has turned life upside down in Gulf societies.

More than 800 cases of the COVID-19 have been recorded so far across the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), but so far no deaths.

Facing a mounting public health threat, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman have taken drastic measures to combat the pandemic.

**Awkward greetings**  
Drones in the skies were sounding messages in multiple languages urging people



When old habits die easy: A drone being used to disinfect the area around the Imam Hussein Shrine in Karbala, Iraq. •AFP

to return to their homes.

Residents in the Omani capital of Muscat told AFP there had been much "fear and panic" over what many of them have termed "Corona phobia" at a time when a small bottle of disinfectant is in almost everyone's pockets or bags.

They said many people have stopped shaking hands or kissing each other on the cheeks, a common greeting across the Arab world.

In Saudi Arabia, 60-year-old Abu Abdulrahman said he felt awkward about the rapidly changing social norms. "Do I shake hands and kiss

or do I not? I don't know," he said. "I try not to do that, but I get embarrassed. What if the other person puts their hand out first?"

Meanwhile, both the UAE and Qatar have advised their citizens to stop the traditional "nose to nose" greeting, with Abu Dhabi instructing residents that a wave would suffice.

Measures to combat the spread of the virus have also impacted the way many Muslims in the Gulf worship.

After Saudi Arabia suspended the "umrah" year-round pilgrimage, it advised residents against praying in mosques if they have any symptoms of the virus.

Kuwait banned all mass prayers, an unprecedented move. "Pray at home, pray at home," an imam preached.

# Mexico holds music festival despite coronavirus concerns

Tens of thousands of fans flock to Vive Latino

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MEXICO CITY

While the COVID-19 pandemic has led authorities around the globe to cancel concerts and sporting events, and even shut down daily activities in some places, Mexico City is going ahead with Vive Latino — one of the most important music festivals in the country.

Some acts backed out, but tens of thousands of music fans flocked on Saturday to the first day of the festival, which still expected Guns N' Roses, Carlos Vives and Zoe to be among its headliners. Organisers said over 70,000 tickets were sold for each of the festival's two days.



Staying upbeat: Fans dressed in biological suits strike a pose during the Vive Latino music festival in Mexico City. •AP

Concerns about the new COVID-19 illness were evident, though. At the entrance each person entering was checked for fever and a strong smell of antibacterial gel permeated in the air.

But once past that, the dynamics of the festival were not much changed. People walked excitedly toward the various stages and crowded together for the performances.