



LUCA BARRA, CECILIA PENATI\*

## ***ENLARGED FAMILIES***

*Developments of a Television Genre: Italian Family Comedy*



Family comedy represents one of the most popular and important sub-genres of contemporary Italian small-screen fiction, being widely popular in prime time television in both commercial networks (Mediaset) and Public Service channels (Rai), and capable of receiving some of the highest ratings among a wide and mainstream audience.

This TV genre, peculiar to Italian television<sup>1</sup>, relies on some fixed and common patterns. First of all, family comedies are normally scheduled in prime time. This determines the length of each episode, which ranges from fifty (with two episodes on air back-to-back) to ninety minutes. Secondly, Italian family comedies are usually long-running series, divided in various episodes and extended over progressive seasons: generally, an inter-episodic running plot is accompanied by an episodic and self-contained anthology plot. A prime-time family comedy would show the daily life of a middle-class family, focusing on minor dilemmas and everyday complications caused by the interplay between the various household members. These complications eventually lead the characters to a learning experience through a process of problem-solving. Several storylines are interweaved, following each character in their life experiences inside and outside of the family circle. Comedy is merged with a number of more serious and dramatic situations, eventually solved through peaceful resolutions of arguments. The kind of humour displayed in this TV genre is character-based, and often combined with morally complex and poignant issues of gender and generational conflicts. Due to this assortment and fusion of themes, tones and registers, the genre un-

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<sup>1</sup> Although a considerable amount of themes and stylistic features of Italian family comedy is comparable to the model of the American sitcom, the Italian genre presents several peculiarities (for instance: the size of the episodes, the serial structure, the locations, and the more broad-based kind of comedy and humour). A proposal of classification of the American sitcom genre is suggested in Newcomb, H., 1974. *TV: the Most Popular Art*. Garden City: Anchor Press. See also Marc, D., 1997. *Comic Visions. Television Comedy and American Culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell; and Mills, B., 2005. *Television Sitcom*. London: BFI.

doubtedly presents elements of similarities to domestic melodrama<sup>2</sup>. The model of family that came across through the first examples of this TV genre, during the early stage of Italian television, was a traditional and nuclear one, whereas more recent episodes branch out the concept of “relatives” to include workplace relations and members of enlarged families. The aim of this paper is to investigate the development of this traditional TV genre, from the early stage of Italian television in the Sixties, to the most recent examples of small-screen family comedies. This analysis will suggest how, in the mutable scenery of media convergence, established and strictly genre-specific devices can take new and more modern forms, while maintaining a strong continuity with the conventional patterns of the genre<sup>3</sup>. After a historical overview on the first examples of Italian family comedies, we will discuss two contemporary case studies, in order to conceptualise how the generic category of “family comedy” has progressively renovated itself through its fusion with other elements belonging both to different TV genres and to different cultural products (teen literature, cinema, popular music).

### **Raise and development of a genre**

It can be argued that the first example of a family comedy series on Italian TV was produced in 1968, and placed in the prime-time slot of the main public broadcast service channel (Rai1)<sup>4</sup>. The show, *La famiglia Benvenuti* (*The Benvenuti's*), told the story of the ordinary life of a middle-class family based in Rome, made up of a father (an architect), a mother (a housewife) and their two sons (a child and a teenager). The serial immediately turned into a considerably popular success. *La famiglia Benvenuti* was the first Italian TV fiction to present multiple episodes, running for two consequent seasons (1968-69).

According to Lynn Spigel, American television was founded in the early fifties on the genre of domestic sitcom, which contributed to shape “a new electronic neighbourhood”: «the families that populated the screen extended a hand of friendship across the border between real life and the parallel universe we now call “TV land”». This «helped naturalize a strange new technology because it conveyed stories about everyday situations that took place in familiar settings»<sup>5</sup>. Conversely, the image of Italian television in its early stages has been deeply shaped by the ideal of public service, underpinned by the policy of broadcast focused on the concepts of education, entertainment and information<sup>6</sup>. Programmes had to be addressed to a middle-class target and to convey the best of Italian highbrow humanistic tradition. As a result, TV fiction was mainly organised around the model of *sceneggiato*, a television adaptation from classic literature.

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<sup>2</sup> Italian family comedy can be convincingly associated with some cinematic counterparts, particularly to the subgenre known as “Commedia all’italiana”, established in the Fifties and Sixties with movies such as *Divorzio all’italiana* (*Divorce – Italian Style*) which often represent similar melodramatic familiar settings, mixed with a comic and humoristic glance. See Brunetta, G. P., 2003. *Guida alla storia del cinema italiano*. Torino: Einaudi.

<sup>3</sup> We therefore intend television genres as “discursive practices”, as categories not only running through the programmes, but also constructed by the specific and historical practices of television production and consumption. See Mittell, J., 2004. *Genre and Television: from Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Buonanno, M., 1985. *Matrimonio e famiglia. Ricerca sui racconti televisivi*. Torino: Rai Eri.

<sup>5</sup> Spigel, L., 1992. *Make Room for TV. Television and the family ideal in postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 136-137.

<sup>6</sup> Grasso, A., 1992. *Storia della televisione italiana*. Milano: Garzanti.



Figure 1. *La famiglia Benvenuti*

It was a drama generally divided into two parts, created by a single author (usually the director) and often transmitted live.

Therefore, *La famiglia Benvenuti* represents an interesting case for two different reasons: first of all, a decade after the beginning of regular television scheduling in Italy, it was the first original long-running TV series. Secondly, it institutionalised the family comedy on the public service schedule. In fact, it can be said that *La famiglia Benvenuti* shaped the principal standards and the main conventional features of Italian domestic comedy, which became long-lasting features of national television. For instance, the vast array of characters, covering a wide set of ages (children, teenagers, parents, grandparents) was included to address the largest possible family audience, which represents the bulk of mainstream consumption. Another peculiarity was the choice of a well-known and reliable pair of actors playing the role of the parents at the core of the story: Enrico Maria Salerno and Valeria Valeri. Finally, the narrative structure of each episode followed a semi-fixed scheme: an everyday complication temporarily troubles the family's routine, until the situation is resolved with irony and common sense. This generates a feeling of intimacy in the audience, who could empathise with the Benvenuti's experiences and feel a sense of inclusiveness. It is interesting to notice that the story is often told from the point of view of the youngest son, Andrea, whose thoughts and considerations can be heard through voice-over, with an expressive result typical of this genre.

The pilot of season one establishes some of main stylistic features of this series: the family is portrayed while moving out of their home and resettling in a different Roman neighbourhood. The new location provides the characters with the chance of starting new relationships and to get in touch with different life situations (new school for the children, new colleagues for the father), in a pattern that has also become usual for some of the subsequent family comedies. The comic insight of the story is delegated to only a few characters: the father, whose interaction with the mother is inspired by screwball comedy dialogues,

and the housekeeper, who embodies the lowbrow side of the series. Although *La famiglia Benvenuti* was mainly founded on a strong episodic plot, it constituted one of the first attempts to develop a running plot focused on the sentimental issues of both parents and their teenage son.

For a long period of time, *La famiglia Benvenuti* represented an isolated example of small-screen family comedy on Italian TV, at least until the second half of the Seventies, when the monopoly of the Public Broadcasting Service (PSB) was challenged by the growth of new commercial channels, initially on a local scale and later on a national one.

### Family comedy and commercial TV

During the Eighties, the original production of Italian long-running fiction entered a long period of crisis, which involved the sub-genre of family comedy as well. The birth and the consequent diffusion of commercial TV networks led to the shift to a television schedule filled by US sitcoms and series, compared to which Italian fiction was not appealing and “modern” enough.

The role of commercial channels as a driving force modifying languages and rhythms of public service programmes is an assumption widely accepted within the field of Italian television history<sup>7</sup>. Domestic comedy is also involved in this re-shaping of languages. The first isolated example is *Casa Cecilia*, presented by Rai1 in 1982 and extended over three seasons<sup>8</sup>. The series represents an attempt to contrast the massive import of American fiction with a local production, shaped on the expressive models of domestic sitcom from the US. Delia Scala, former *soubrette* and *revue* actress, already familiar with mainstream audience, plays Cecilia, a dentist who tries to cope with the complex management of professional and family life, surrounded by her husband Aldo and their three kids. This sitcom represents a form of hybridisation with the newly-born genre of talk show: at the end of each episode of the series Delia Scala deals with a letter involving family matters sent by a member of the audience, turning fiction into factual.

Only at the end of the Eighties, the main commercial broadcaster, Fininvest (now Mediaset) began to create and produce TV fiction. For the first time in the history of Italian TV, “stories” were not told by Rai, but by a competitor not tied to the duties and the constraints peculiar to the public service. Alongside some situation comedies and a teen drama set in a school, the young-oriented network of Fininvest group, Italia 1, also produced its first family comedy. *Chiara e gli altri* (*Chiara and the others*), broadcast on Italia 1 in 1989 – a second season aired two years later<sup>9</sup> –, tells the story of a family with three sons and divorced parents: the first non-nuclear family portrayed by an Italian family comedy mirrored a changing society. Because of the immaturity of the parental figures, a judge paradoxically forces the children to permanently

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<sup>7</sup> Grasso, 2003; Monteleone, F., 2003. *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*. Venezia: Marsilio; Ortoleva, P., 1995. *Un ventennio a colori*. Milano: Giunti.

<sup>8</sup> Silj, A., 1988. *A Est di Dallas. Telefilm Usa ed europei a confronto*. Torino: Rai Eri.

<sup>9</sup> Buonanno, M., 1992. *Sceneggiare la cronaca. La fiction italiana, l'Italia nella fiction. Anno terzo*. Torino: Rai Eri.

live in their house, while the parents have to respect a tight shift regime: each parent gets to spend every second week with the kids. Except for this unusual family situation, inspired by a real journalistic case, this fiction obeys to every standard of this genre: all the episodes have a happy ending; the main focus is on the squabbles and the following pacification between the characters; the plots deal with the relationship between generations; the main actors are well-known (i.e. Ottavia Piccolo and Alessandro Haber).

In the Nineties, firstly with a slow pace, and then with increased confidence (and subsequent monetary investments), Italian fiction, with its local and large appeal, became once again one of the main strategic assets of the TV market, together with football matches, variety shows and then reality shows. Once again, the commercial broadcaster produced a domestic comedy first, while the public service broadcaster, in the early years of a sort of new “fiction Renaissance”, was more interested in other subgenres, such as serious workplace drama and “social” dramedy (*Amico mio*, *Commesse*).

One of the first experiments of this new trend, in 1993, was *Papà prende moglie* (*Daddy's new wife*), aired on the largest commercial channel, Canale 5. The comedy tells the story of two divorcées, each with two kids, who meet each other and decide to start a new life together, with all the subsequent difficulties and funny circumstances. Some aspects of this show are particularly worth noticing. The first is the overarching plot, which in some way will become archetypal for subsequent fictions: two families that become one, in order to restore the traditional patriarchal family in a contemporary fashion. This contains more narrative elements and can appeal to a wider audience belonging to different generational layers. The second element is that *Papà prende moglie* underlines the new connections between this subgenre of fiction and factual TV programming: the theme song is very similar to other television jingles and tunes; furthermore the lead role was played by Marco Columbro, at the time host of several quiz shows and one of the most recognizable faces of commercial television.

A real turning point was then *Un medico in famiglia* (*A doctor in the family*), a series with huge success which started in 1998. Produced by Publispei, the show marked the return of family comedy on the PSB<sup>10</sup>.

Once again, the main characteristics of this genre remain the same. The story follows a widower who has to take care of three children – a teenager, a child and a toddler – and is helped in the task by his father, his parents-in-law and a witty maid. The comedy, which tells the story of different generational groups, absorbs some elements of other fictional subgenres, such as medical drama, workplace sitcom, soap opera and teenager school drama. Some television stars (such as Lino Banfi, whose previous career included both cult movies and variety shows) share the stage with theatre performers.

Besides being one of the major hits of the decade – in fact, the series is still being produced, now filming its eight season –, *Un medico in famiglia* is interesting also because it is one of the first scripted formats ever “localized” in Italy: its model, *Medico de familia*, was a big Spanish hit, but the roots of Italian popularity lay

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<sup>10</sup> Useful data and early perspectives on *Un medico in famiglia* can be found, for instance, in Buonanno, M., 2000. *Ricomposizioni. La fiction italiana, l'Italia nella fiction. Anno undicesimo*. Torino: Rai Eri.

in the quality of the local adaptation, which was able to efficiently portrait national stereotypes, the Italian popular culture and, most of all, the longstanding tradition of national family comedy.

### **Family comedy and convergent TV: *I Cesaroni***

By the early years of 2000, television fiction had to re-collocate itself in the mutated context of media convergence, characterised by digitalisation, multiple distributive platforms and an increasing difficulty in hitting wide targets. Family comedy faced the challenge to find new possible models of consumption, also based on the strong interactivity made possible by the Internet and new touch-points to engage audiences. As a result of the economic and popular success of *Un medico in famiglia*, Publispai devoted its mission almost exclusively to the development of small-screen family comedies, acquiring from Spain the rights of a number of new scripted formats and somehow imposing a turning point in the Italian TV market, putting forward a new model of production, partially inspired by the American one. In fact, all its productions are characterised by a highly recognisable style and brand.



**Figure 2.** *I Cesaroni*

In 2003, Publispai created for Canale 5 the first season of *I Cesaroni* (*The Cesaroni's*), a long-running family comedy composed of 24 episodes of 50 minutes each, aired in prime time<sup>11</sup>. The serial, with five seasons currently broadcasted, is based on the successful Spanish format *Los Serrano*, property of Globomedia and Telecinco. It shows the daily complications caused by the marriage of Giulio, a widower with three sons of different ages, and Lucia, divorced with two teenage daughters. The story is deeply rooted in the suburban context of a popular neighbourhood in Rome, the Garbatella, and presents a choral cast, with key

<sup>11</sup> Penati, C., 2010. *I Cesaroni*. In: A. Grasso & M. Scaglioni, eds. 2010. *Televisione convergente. La tv oltre il piccolo schermo*. Milano: Link Ricerca, RTI, pp. 169-178.

family members surrounded by other characters (friends, relatives...). The system of characters is modelled on a generational stratification, to reflect the various segments of Canale 5's ideal target.

If we consider it from a merely narrative point of view, *I Cesaroni* can be defined as a very traditional and mainstream serial, which respects many of the conventional features of the genre described above, and presents strong elements of continuity with *La famiglia Benvenuti*, including the use of the child's voice-over to comment and collocate the incipit of the story in a definite frame. Each episode follows a constant pattern: there is an anthology plot, with the family's daily routine troubled by some sort of complication, which is eventually resolved by the end of the episode. This is found alongside a running plot mainly based on the sentimental issues between the teenage characters.

A variety of styles and references to various subgenres are mixed in this TV fiction: on one hand, there is a comic dimension, delegated to the leading male actors, expressing a lowbrow and local humour (very different from the surreal humour of the Spanish format). On the other hand, *I Cesaroni* is also built around several plots that concern serious and dramatic situations, on the model of family drama.

The main element that distinguishes *I Cesaroni* from all previous family comedies is the presence of some storylines which stem from the teenage characters, following the pattern of American teen-drama<sup>12</sup>, mixed with traditional family comedy situations. In fact, during the five seasons, the focus of the story progressively shifts from familiar situations to the exploration of love affair between step-siblings Eva and Marco. The hybridisation with some features peculiar to the teen drama also includes the musical dimension of *I Cesaroni*, a real element of innovation and novelty of the series. As established by the Spanish format "bible", the main teen male character, Marco, is a musician. Several storylines follow his route to success: Marco is shown while composing original songs and performing them in front of an audience, while presenting its album in a real radio programme. Fiction and elements of reality are productively mashed up. Often diegetic music turns in an extra-diegetic comment.

Notwithstanding its traditional structure, this family comedy also represents a successful attempt to turn a mainstream series, addressed to a wide and popular audience, into a cross-medial TV fiction, whose storytelling is developed across multiple platforms and different media<sup>13</sup>. Following John Fiske, it can be said that the primary text, composed by the TV episodes, is expanded by the medial industry through a considerable amount of "secondary extensions". These top-down products are conceived in order to multiply the access points to the text and to distribute it (even in different, short forms) on several platforms<sup>14</sup>. Different brands and firms (Publispei, Mediaset, various publishers and industrial groups) co-operate in

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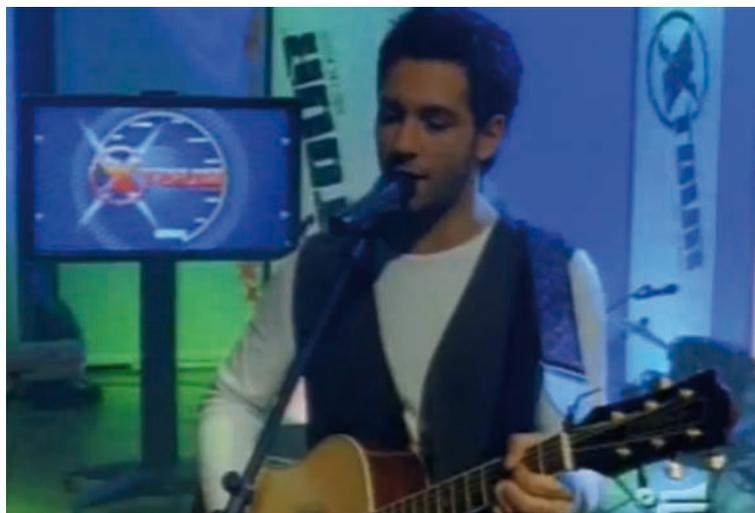
<sup>12</sup> See Davis, G. & Dickinson, K. eds., 2004. *Teen Tv. Genre, Consumption, Identity*. London: BFI.

<sup>13</sup> The relevance of transmedia storytelling in contemporary TV fiction is postulated by Jenkins, H., 2006. *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NY University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Fiske, J., 1987. *Television Culture*. London: Routledge. For an overview of new models of audience engagement see also Askwith, I. D., 2007. *Television 2.0. Reconceptualizing TV as an engagement medium*. MS, Boston: MIT; and Gray, J., 2011. *Show Sold Separately. Promo, Spoiler and other Media Paratexts*. New York: NY University Press.

order to pursue this production strategy, in which audience engagement and involvement are pursued to create a brand-loyal community of fans.

This process of brand extension follows two main directions. The first one stems from the teen plots of the series. The main teen characters of the fiction, Marco and Eva, have inspired two novels. Following the patterns of teen literature – an editorial phenomenon which has gained visibility and high relevance in Italy in recent years – these novels are composed in the form of a diary written by the two characters. The content of these diaries acts as a bridge between the fictional events that occur to the couple in the few months separating one season from the following one. The two novels represent an attempt to maintain the attention on the series even when it is not on air: this is a crucial strategy for a multi-season series placed at the heart of an extremely rich and competitive market. The second novel is accompanied by a “digital spin-off”, in the form of an official blog where Marco and Eva post messages and explain to the fandom community their deepest feelings about diegetic events happened on television, thus enriching their interpretations of the series. Fans can therefore establish a personal and intimate relationship with the characters, based on an emphatic feeling: reply posts (on average more than a thousand for every single post) very often contain suggestions and direct invocations. Moreover, the teen plot inspires part of the merchandising: for instance, various copies of some branded objects are produced. Starting from a necklace worn by a female character, a whole collection of jewellery is created and successfully retailed.



**Figure 3.** Marco Cesaroni (Matteo Branciamore) singing in *I Cesaroni*

The second direction of brand extension is connected to both the musical comment of the series and the teen plot. It develops mostly around the character of Marco Cesaroni and the actor that plays his role (Matteo Branciamore). These two identities, fictional and real, are mixed up and overlapped in all the musical extensions of the TV fiction, including the official profiles of the singer on social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace. The music label Cinevox Record, which produces Marco’s albums and

singles, firstly published the soundtrack of the first season of the series, interpreted by Marco/Matteo Branciamore. After this, music gained a more and more crucial role into the series, and Cinevox released *Parole nuove (New Words)*, an album by Matteo Branciamore, which contained all the songs that Marco has composed and played in the episodes of season two and is widely available in stores and on iTunes.

The album developed alongside season three, *Ovunque andrai (Wherever you go)*, represents a real case in point to analyse the strategy of brand extension: together with the music album, the homonymous novel is commercialised and the homonymous blog is launched online. *Ovunque andrai* is also the title of the season finale episode, with Marco performing the main song of the album on the stage of a pretend talent show. Several contests involving fans of Matteo/Marco were organised, as well as concerts and live events, mixing the fictional world with the real one.

### **Family comedy and convergent TV: *Tutti pazzi per amore***

In 2009, a new step in Italian family comedy history took place. With an unusually large-scale advertising campaign (including billboards in major cities), public broadcaster Rai launched a new Publispei production, this time not based on a previous format but developed originally, and called *Tutti pazzi per amore* (literally *Everybody is Crazy about Love*, while the international official title is *There's Something about Love*)<sup>15</sup>. The aim of this series was to refresh the traditional genre with more modern themes and language, in order to attract new and younger audiences. At the same time, *Tutti pazzi per amore* relies on all the conventional *topoi* of the genre, not to alienate the traditional mainstream audience.



**Figure 4.** *Tutti lazi per amore*, a western viral video for *Tutti pazzi per amore*

As part of its promotional strategy, three viral videos were distributed on YouTube and other social media and websites in the weeks preceding the series premiere. The clips were short and funny and employed original footage from the series and “coloured” it in a cartoonish way. Every video developed the themes of the series according to the conventions and stereotypes of a classical movie genre, such as science-fic-

<sup>15</sup> Barra, L., 2010. *Tutti pazzi per amore*. In: Grasso & Scaglioni, eds. 2010, pp. 179-188.

tion, spaghetti-western and horror: therefore, a series intended to “update” a classical genre such as family comedy relied on even more conventional genres, “exploited” in a sarcastic and playful way.

These clips introduced the main characters and the secondary ones, but do not give hints about the plot or the relationships depicted in the series. In these aspects, *Tutti pazzi per amore* is similar to the previous family comedies: a widower, Paolo, and a divorced woman, Laura, who lives next door, meet for the first time in the lift, fall in love and soon decide to form a new family, together with her two children and his daughter. A key difference to the previous series is the greater presence of minor characters, including the colleagues of Laura at the editorial office of a magazine called *Io donna*, the water polo team trained by Paolo, the children’s schoolmates, Laura’s sister and her husband, Paolo’s best friend, the parents-in-law and Paolo’s aunts. This leads to the adoption of a choral approach to story-telling, with a multi-layered plot focused on multiple generations and a variety of settings (family, work...).

The real innovation of the series lies in its light and surreal “tone of voice”: for instance, a number of “what-if” and “dream-like” scenes often interrupt the regular flow of narrated events, creating a visualization of the thoughts and the emotions of some characters. While this linguistic device is a common feature of many American TV series (i.e. *Ally McBeal* or *Scrubs*), in Italian prime-time fiction this represented a complete (and somewhat strange) break-through.

Another novelty is the constant presence of a clear meta-linguistic device: in every episode there are some fragments of a mock TV talk show, in which two people – a know-it-all expert called Dr. Freiss (played by Giuseppe Battiston) and a stereotypical host – discuss the main problems of the characters, explain what is happening on screen and make sarcastic comments on the episode.

This would-be talk show is an apparent parody of contemporary factual television, which allows the viewer to take a break before coming back to the “real” action of the series. It is also a “frame” that gives space to and justifies meta-textual “exterior” (productive) interventions in the story. For instance, at the beginning of the second season, one of the main characters had to be replaced: Stefania Rocca, who played Laura, the female protagonist, could not participate to the shootings of the new episodes for maternity-related reasons; a new actress, Antonia Liskova, took up her role. The meta-linguistic and television-like segment is used as a mean to explain everything to the viewers as well as to include them in the production (and narrative) dynamics and joking about previous indiscretions and gossips on magazines and blogs. All the techniques of live TV (including the direct look into the camera) are used to introduce a change into a fictional world, explaining it and finally switching back to the fictional narrative.

Another innovation of *Tutti pazzi per amore* is the fundamental role played by the musical elements of the show. Every episode is titled after a famous Italian pop song. Every dialogue is filled with quotes and references to popular lyrics. In some occasions there are cameos by Italian singers and bands (such as Mathia Bazar). Most of all, various musical performances are inserted into the narration, giving strength to particular feelings and attitudes.

The family comedy is hybridized here with musicals and music videos: usually songs, interpreted by some characters, accompany the development of the plot and actions, but sometimes these musical interludes represent a playful impersonation of well-known singers or videos (as Beyoncé's *Single Ladies*), in a surreal camouflage. The musical element is used differently than in *I Cesaroni*: there is not a direct connection to discography and talent shows, but a strong emotional link with songs taken from the Italian and international repertoire. Songs are often an external element, a meta-linguistic device, while at the same time deeply rooted into the plot. It happens, for instance, with Marilyn Monroe's *Bye Bye Baby*, used to accompany the funeral of Michele, one of the main characters. Death and its sacred ceremony are soon transformed into an explosion of joy and relief, accompanied by a final choreography that unifies all the characters of the series. The lyrics and the music evoke nostalgic feelings, and help connecting fictional characters and real viewers in a common and shared generational memory.



Figure 5. The funeral scene in *Tutti pazzi per amore 2*

The insertion of meta-textual and musical fragments into a family comedy not only contributes to the appeal of the series towards younger demographics, but also helps the expansion of this TV fiction on other media: as for *The Cesaroni*, with *Tutti pazzi per amore* the most popular and mainstream TV form succeeded in creating a “convergent environment”.

On one hand, fans of the series use social media to select and disseminate some aspects of the fiction: music clips and playlists on YouTube, as well as fan groups dedicated to Dr. Freiss on Facebook are only some examples of a media discourse that sometimes transcends the original episodes and concentrates on these new touch-points that involve new viewers.

On the other hand, the production tries to exploit these practices. For example, for the second season of the series, a soundtrack album with a selection of the main music moments of the series was launched in

music stores (both online and offline). A blog on the official website, with all the news and gossips related to the episodes, is assumed to be written by the largely popular character of Dr. Freiss.

## Conclusions

As demonstrated by the case histories of *I Cesaroni* and *Tutti pazzi per amore*, Italian family comedy is currently facing the dynamics of media cultural convergence in two distinct ways.

Firstly, these series testify the persistence of the traditional main features of the genre, which, in a new television system, became even more emphasized and popular than before, in order to create rituals and appointments “not to be missed”. The national fiction, even in a context of digitalization and cultural convergence of texts and practices, in order to be successful has got to be interpreted as a live event, watched with the family (and maybe discussed somewhere else, in real time, with friends).

Secondly, there are clear contaminations of this long-established genre with other genres and other media: some external elements (such as TV parody, music, teen literature, merchandise, forms of online and offline interaction) are experimented, selected, highlighted and carefully cultivated to develop a fictional franchise. These hybrid components are particularly useful in creating an important fandom base, loyal to the program and eager to know more about the diegetic characters and events; and, most of all, in helping to spread the series through media and public discourse.