



TEACH-IN: 'Ding-A-Dong' a worthy winner

by Barry Fantoni

IT IS worth getting straight from the start that the Eurovision Song Contest has as much to do with good songs as the Miss World contest has to do with beauty. I have not seen this annual display of international songwriting since four Italians in white sang their way into all our hearts with either "Volare" or was it "Ciao Ciao Bambino"?

If the two-hour marathon BBC I treated us to on Saturday night is representative of the last 20 years, then little has changed. Admittedly, Stockholm's St Erksmässan Alvsjö (where the excellent Pete Murray told us the Nobel Peace Prize is presented) is a step up from the tiny and often taste TV studios of yesterday, but in the main the contest still resembles a sporting event rather than a musical one. To be fair to the Swedes, their presentation of the marking was a departure from that used in my day.

Grinning

Previously the system for dishing out points took almost as long to explain as the actual singing. Apart from learning to count from one to ten in all the Common Market languages, I was none the wiser as the flashing numbers and all sorts of complicated figures mixed with grinning comperes split out the winner. Whereas all that was cast in the mould of It's A Knockout, the Swedes gave us the results with a solemnity which would have put Robert McKenzie's tone on election night to shame. As we hopped smoothly from Malta to Israel to Turkey and so on to learn their votes I would not have been surprised to hear the British judge announce: "I, the returning officer for this song . . ."

As for the songs themselves — since this is a song contest (the singing was pretty dreadful) — predictability was the key-note. In view of their plagiarism, I find it difficult to praise "Monty Python," but one of their few truly memorable sketches was a parody of A Song For Europe. The "song" had a lyric which sounded as if it was written in Esperanto (whatever happened to Esperanto?) — and a melody which was the product of a computer.

Parody

Such is the nature of a successful parody that it completely eclipses the original. This is most true when the original has no real substance. Given that all the songs which emerge as winners are stereotypes, the Dutch entry, "Ding-A-Dong" sung by the group, Teach-In was, in the last analysis, a worthy victor. I kept a record of points awarded, based on the system used by boxing referees. At the end of the evening, I made Italy's "When" sung by

Eurovision: a world miss



GERALDINE (Luxembourg) / SEMIHA YANKI (Turkey) / SHADOWS (UK) / JOY FLEMING (West Germany)

Wees and Dori Ghezzi, and Semiha Yanki of Turkey with "A Minaste With You," joint top with Portugal joint second with Holland and Great Britain. Italy, in fact, came third with 115 points while Hank, Bruce, etc. ended up in second place scoring 138 points to the Dutch 152. For reasons which can only be connected with an international conspiracy aimed as a retaliation against the Turkish aggression in Cyprus, the Turkish song which stood out for its original arrangement and genuine emotion came last. It got three points. For all I know, the Portuguese ballad failed for similar political reasons.

Identical

George Bernard Shaw prophetically stated in *The Apple Cart* that all hotels would one day serve identical food throughout the world. He could have added that the same songs would be sung. The pity of this contest is that its appeal, albeit successful to the tune of 600 million viewers, is primarily to dull old Nationalism.

In the theatre of combat all those gifted with a devil-may-care flamboyance will ultimately lose. No matter who, from inspired generals like Napoleon, to footballers like Cruyff, they will always be dragged down by the mass need for a secure plan. It is this weight of numbers that triumphs, and the same principles have been at work throughout history.

Hallmarks

As I listened to the shadows mechanically grinding their way through "Let Me Be The One" I was reminded of Sir Alf Ramsey. I suspect he wrote it. All the hallmarks were there — safe middle section, slow opening, heavy build-up, and no climax. The Dutch had obviously learnt their lesson in Munich, and although I said earlier that "Ding A Dong" was the best of its sort, the sort was bottom drawer. There were one or two lighter moments. I stayed off sleep at one point by trying to work out why the very beautiful Geraldine who sang not a note in June (a) got so many votes. (b) As an Irish girl represented Luxembourg. (c) Sang in French.

The musical director of the German entry, "A Song Can Be A Bridge," sung by an Arian Sophie Tucker (Miss Joy Fleming) got my vote. Of the Dutch award for the spirited way he got his song going, he stamped his foot heavily on the floor with a passion and enthusiasm I had not witnessed since the hey-days of traditional jazz. There was also a shot of him leaping in the air like Stan Kenton, and that was the closest the whole show got to music.