Fake Music Re-Anticipations
Various musicians — The Tarantella
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Certain human recipients of the bite of a tarantula local to southern Italy fall into states of confused torpor. The spider’s venom strains victims’ respiration and blackens their hands and faces. Untreated, the spider bite results in death. Fortunately, there is a treatment, which constitutes the object of our attention here. Francesco Cancellieri summarizes the cure in an 1819 epistolary treatise on the ailment: “Sweat and antidotes relieve the sick, but the sovereign and the only remedy is Music.”†

Upon exposure to the correct rhythm, the afflicted’s lethargy is lifted into a swaying dance that soon escalates to leaps and shouts. Accompanied by musicians, the dancing continues — for hours or even days — until the victim’s coloration returns and the ailment is cleared. Named after the region of its occurrence, the province of Taranto, the frenzied analeptic dance became known as the tarantello. A potential confusion here: tarantello names as well other Tarantine folk dances, these latter generally better known today than their homophonic arachnid counterparts.‡ In this present release, we refer solely to the tarantella dance made necessary by the bite of the spider.

Some details of the tarantella’s musical accompaniment are recorded. Justus Hecker writes in 1839 that “soft, calm harmonies, graduated from fast to slow, high to low, prove efficacious for the cure.”§ Cancellieri notes the presence of the guitar in accompaniment, and a number of purportedly curative musical scores are preserved. Nevertheless, certain facts foreclose the possibility of this music’s release by our label. In his review, Cancellieri proposes that tarantism’s symptoms may be locally specific, noting that in 1693, a doctor in Naples — located several hundred kilometers from Taranto — induced bites from two tarantulas but remained unafflicted. Being ourselves farther still from Taranto than the 17th-century Neapolitan doctor, we are unable to confirm the therapeutic efficacy of tarantella music. Far from allowing the possibility of releasing ineffective music, we restrict ourselves from any music that purports to aid in the cessation of symptoms related to the bite of the spider Lycosa tarantula.

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Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, New York

† Translation from the Italian by Wikipedia user Rococo1700
‡ Perhaps the most well known of these other Tarantine folk dances is “C’è la lu a mezzo mare,” which appears in the opening scene of The Godfather (1972).
§ Translation from the German by B.G. Babington