The excitement is undeniable when one of the great figures in the Italian-American popular singing tradition journeys to Italy to make his first recording there. The event might be summarized by saying: Rome conquered Perry Como and Como conquered Rome.

In May 1966, the popular recording and television star flew to the Italian capital for this historic session. It was not his first visit to the old country, for in 1958 he and his family had been privileged to have an audience with the late Pope Pius XII. In 1964, Perry had taken a large cast of his TV show to Rome for a Christmas show, which was partly photographed in Vatican City.

But this trip was different. The destination was the famed new RCA Italiana Studios, the sprawling recording center about ten miles from Rome. It is there, in buildings that nearly rival film studios in size and grandeur, that many operas are recorded for RCA Victor. Como and his associates headed for the more intimate surroundings of Studio B.

A large orchestra and chorus were assembled. Nick Perito conducted and arranged for a backing group of twenty violins, eight violas, eight cellos, six woodwinds, two mandolins, plus assorted other instruments and rhythm. A first-rate chorus of six women and eight men, called the Allesandro Allessandroni Singers, was called to work under the direction of the American chorus master Ray Charles.

For Perry Como, May was an inspired and inspiring time to be in Rome and Naples. Italy was bursting with spring beauty
and he drank in the sites and ate at every fabled restaurant his appetite could handle.

Although Perry was born in the Pennsylvania mining town of Canonsburg, his parents hailed from the Italian district of Abruzzi, east of the Italian capital. Through them, Perry Como has retained a grasp of the Italian language that served him well in recording this program of favorites.

While language was no problem for the album’s star, it proved to be something of a challenge for the producer, Andy Wiswell. He had to master many phrases in Italian phonetically to convey his instructions to the orchestra and chorus. Whether it was for a more lush sound from the banks of strings or for a touch more bounce from the rhythm section or chorus, Mr. Wiswell’s "instant Italian" worked effectively.

Here, then, in Italian or English, or both, are some of the most beautiful songs from the land of song. They range from the world of popular music, from a film, "La Strada," to such perennials as Santa Lucia to Oh Marie. The album closes with that song of farewell that Perry Como, like most visitors, is reluctant to sing: Arrivederci Roma.