**John Torpey** 00:05

Welcome to International Horizons, a podcast of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies that brings scholarly and diplomatic expertise to bear on our understanding of a wide range of international issues. My name is John Torpey, and I'm Director of the Ralph Bunche Institute at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Today we discuss the Eurovision Song Contest with Dean Vuletic, historian of the Research Center for the History of Transformations at the University of Vienna. He's the author of Post War Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest, which deals with the historical and political importance of the annual contest in the post war era. His current research focuses on the Intervision Song Contest, an alternative to Eurovision created in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Professor Vuletic holds a PhD from Columbia University and designed the first ever course syllabus for the Eurovision Song Contest, which was taught at New York University. He speaks with us today from Vienna having just returned from Rotterdam where this year's Eurovision Song Contest took place over the past week. Thanks so much for taking the time to be with us today, Dean Vuletic.

**Dean Vuletic** 01:27

Thank you John. As we say in the Eurovision world, "this is Vienna calling".

**John Torpey** 01:34

Great. Well, good to have Vienna on the line. So first of all, let's try to help our audience understand the Eurovision Song Contest a little better than they may at present. To an audience outside of Europe you know the contest is pretty widely unknown, or if it is known, it's kind of understood as sort of kitschy campy event. Yet you argue this annual event where each European country nominates a pop music act and then all countries vote for a winner is a cultural and political phenomenon of major significance. Could you tell us more about what you have in mind?

**Dean Vuletic** 02:15

Well, Eurovision was founded in 1956, first of all, as a technical experiment, an attempt to broadcast simultaneously and live a television show that would be watched across Western Europe. The organizers of Eurovision then, and still today, believe that the contest is non-political, or they presented as having non-political aims. Nonetheless, because the entries have always represented states, the contest has been a stage for the playing out of international relations. And this we've seen, for example, in the themes of certain entries, but especially in the voting. All of Europe stops to watch the voting results in Eurovision every year. And the voting is always analyzed for the political meanings of the connections between the voting results of different states.

**Dean Vuletic** 03:14

I should also point out that for a long time, Eurovision was considered a kitschy event. But I think that this term kitsch is in itself, full of meaning. Milan Kundera calls "kitsch the ultimate aesthetic of totalitarian regimes". And for me, one very interesting aspect of my research is how dictatorships have used Eurovision to whitewash their international images, or to gain some sort of commercial and political benefit internationally.

**John Torpey** 03:48

Thanks for that explanation. That's very helpful. But I'm sort of curious. I mean, very early on the contest was really between, I think seven countries, and over time has expanded to include something like 39 countries, some of which are not geographically, Europe. So I wonder if you could explain how that's happened and what that's all about.

**Dean Vuletic** 04:12

The basis for participation in Eurovision is states belonging to an area known as the European Broadcasting Area, which was defined in the interwar period along the lines of 40 degrees longitude east and 30 degrees latitude north. So this includes North Africa and the Levant. It extends all the way from Iceland to just beyond Moscow. And the reason for the definition of this technical area in the interwar era was for the organization of radio frequencies.

**Dean Vuletic** 04:49

Now, this has essentially remained the basis for the organization of international cooperation in broadcasting ever since. And it is also the basis for membership of the European Broadcasting Union, the Association of Public Service National Broadcasters, which organizes the Eurovision Song Contest every year for its members. So essentially, belonging to Eurovision is based on a very technical definition.

**John Torpey** 05:20

I see. I mean, I guess to a relative novice in Eurovision matters, the thing that comes to mind is a kind of point of comparison is soccer. And, you know, soccer has this kind of national character to it in much of the European organization of the sport. But it's never had, as far as I can recall, I mean, the kind of significance, let's say that it's had in Latin America, where there have been so called soccer wars and things like that.

**Dean Vuletic** 05:51

There have been the same, especially in the former Yugoslavia.

**John Torpey** 05:57

Okay, well, maybe I wasn't aware of that. But I mean, just sort of wondering how you see the political significance of the song contest, you know, in comparison to something like soccer, which is much more it seems to be straightforwardly nationalistic in a certain sense. I mean, not the Champions League, but you know, the national, the world, the European Cup, and that sort of thing.

**Dean Vuletic** 06:20

Of course, soccer is a very good example of a lot of the same trends that we see going on in Eurovision and we have to remember that Eurovision is the biggest cultural mega event in Europe as the longest running and one of the most popular television shows that is broadcast here and which attracts now around 200 million viewers annually.

**Dean Vuletic** 06:49

I've spoken with the European Commissioner for this portfolio called Promoting the European Way of Life, this newly created portfolio, Margaritis Schinas, and he has said to me that there are only two big events which bring Europeans together, the Champions League and the Eurovision Song Contest. So certainly Eurovision as a mega event also shares many parallels with this big soccer event.And barracking for one's nation is certainly part of it.

**Dean Vuletic** 07:27

The big differences are that Eurovision entries are selected on the basis of their singing talents. Whereas in soccer, you know the selection is done very differently. Soccer players aren't selected by popular vote, for example, their advancement depends on their talents. So in Eurovision, you get a lot of public involvement in terms of the voting in the national selection and then in terms of the final voting in Eurovision as well, which is interesting, because in the final voting, you can't vote for your own country. So the country which you're calling from, you cannot vote for.

**Dean Vuletic** 08:11

The other big difference between Eurovision and let's say soccer, is that soccer is very gendered. The media focus is largely on the male soccer teams, even though in Europe today, UEFA for example, is trying to give more attention to female soccer competitions as well. But still the most of the attention, the big money, is with the male teams. Eurovision is very different, of course. You know, we have women and men participating alongside each other. Historically, there have been more female performers in the contest, and more female winners. And in the past around two decades, we've also seen a lot of acts performed by members of sexual minorities getting a lot of attention, and even winning the contest. And indeed, Eurovision has historically been very popular among the gay community in Europe. For a long time, the contest wasn't open about that part of its fandom. But with all of the social and political changes in Europe regarding the rights of sexual minorities in recent years, Eurovision has also become more comfortable with that. And now the hosts very often even refer to the fact that gay men especially are big fans of Eurovision.

**John Torpey** 09:37

Interesting so I'm sort of curious about the careers that the people who win this competition or who would simply participate in it, you know, what becomes of them. I think there's some sort of critique that these are kind of one hit wonders and don't really go on to great careers, but I gather there's an Icelandic performer who has had a great hit, you know, during the pandemic, despite not having been able to, I guess, perform it in last year's competition, which of course, wasn't held. So, I mean, I have to confess I'm a little outside my swim lane here. And, you know, I guess there are some American Idol participants who go on to, you know, significant careers, but I don't think it's particularly common. So I wonder how would you compare it to something like American Idol in terms of the careers that the people have?

**Dean Vuletic** 10:34

Well, it depends, let's say, Eurovision has launched some big hits. For example, in the late 1950s, the most successful entry to come out of Eurovision was Domenico Modugno's 'Volare', which still today is the world's most successful non-English language pop song. It also launched ABBA, when ABBA won in 1974. It launched Celine Dion in the late 1980s. So there have been some big stars, big hits to have come out of Eurovision, but they're more the exception than the rule.

**Dean Vuletic** 11:08

Generally speaking, the acts that are sent to Eurovision are high profile, usually high profile, national personalities who come to Eurovision probably won't have much success internationally with their song, but because of their participation in Eurovision, they'll use that to advance their careers in the national or regional context. So it's not as if they are one hit wonders, they might be one hit wonders in an international context. But when it comes to the national local setting, then certainly the Eurovision scene is, have usually been more successful. And I should point out that, you know why we might see Eurovision as an international stage, there are also a lot of these regional blocks in Europe; let's say are sub regions of the Eurovision world, and many of the Eurovision singers use the Eurovision performances to promote their international image on a regional level. For example, if you have a Croatian singer, they're more likely to use the Eurovision stage to promote themselves to an international audience in other parts of the former Yugoslavia such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia where Croatian popular music is also widely consumed.

**John Torpey** 12:40

Interesting, I mean, this all raises for me certain questions about what popular music is popular around the world. And I think it's incontestably the case that American and British popular music have in many ways, been the most successful on a kind of global scale. My friend Tom Cushman wrote a book called Rock Around the Bloc, which was about the role of rock and roll in kind of dismantling communism behind the Berlin Wall, the iron curtain. And, I mean, this probably has something to do with the worldwide prevalence of learning English as a language, in part, but of course, it's part of what made English that most prominent global language as well.

**John Torpey** 13:33

So, I wonder what you would say about that question, which is sort of national or cultural product kind of is more successful in this. I mean, it's interesting, I didn't know that about Volare, which I learned, I guess, really, basically, when I was in Italy, living in Italy, for a year about 25 years ago, you can certainly imagine, you know, it's a very catchy kind of danceable song. But there aren't that many like that, certainly not that come out of Italy. So I wonder what you would say about the cultural transportability, so to speak, of different musical culture, popular musical cultures.

**Dean Vuletic** 14:23

I think what is great about Eurovision and the fact that it has been held every year, almost without fail until last year because of the pandemic, is that because we have, you know, 65 years of the contest to study, we can really see how different national cultures have influenced European popular culture so we can see the different waves. So for example, if we go back to the late 1950s Eurovision itself was inspired by the Sanremo Italian Song Contest which had been started in 1951. This was the model that the organizers of Eurovision looked to to set up Eurovision. Then, as I mentioned, and as you discussed, Volare became one of the biggest hits to come out of Eurovision in the late 1950s. It also won a Grammy Award for Best Song of the Year, the first ever Grammy award I should point out, which non-English language song has ever done since, but also in in the late 1950s.

**Dean Vuletic** 15:32

In the 1960s, you see a French language songs as being especially successful in the contest. This is a time when French popular culture is still widely consumed in Europe. Then in the 1970s, you really see an Anglo wave coming in, the influence of American and British popular music, especially on the songs. This is a time when entries still have to be sung in their national languages that that language rule was abrogated in 1999. But nonetheless, we see the influence, for example of American pop-folk from the late 1960s, the student movements, the hippie movement, this all comes out in Eurovision entries as well. Then what we see in the mid 1960s, actually for a brief period of a few years, when the language rule was abrogated, after the Nordic states put pressure on the European Broadcasting Union to change the rule because they wanted to sing in English, thinking that their languages were not euphonious enough to attract votes from the national juries.

**Dean Vuletic** 16:52

So this is where we had an ABBA perform in 1974 in English, ABBA performed Waterloo and won then. And then we see the rise of Sweden as a popular music power internationally. And Sweden is now the third biggest exporter of popular music globally. And one of the big reasons for this is its success in Eurovision, first of all with ABBA, and in the last two decades with several other entries, and actually Swedish composers and lyricists play a huge role in the production of Eurovision entries for other states these days. So, you know, there has been this Swedish wave in international popular music as well, and that's something that Eurovision has certainly highlighted.

**Dean Vuletic** 17:47

In the 1990s, we also had Ireland win Eurovision four times, that proved to be rather somewhat of a financial burden for Ireland then when it still wasn't experiencing its Celtic tiger economic boom. But nonetheless, that also put a focus on the Irish popular music industry, Irish acts which are very strong like U2 and Westlife, Sinead O'Connor. The heads of some of these artists even appeared as puppets in one of the Eurovisions that were staged in Ireland in the 1990s, as an homage to, you know, great Irish figures that have made an impact internationally.

**Dean Vuletic** 18:33

So even Ireland, which is a rather small country by Eurovision standards, has left its impact on European popular culture, through popular music and through Eurovision especially. And in recent years, I think what we've seen is a Russian wave; Russian artists, artists have done extremely well in Eurovision coming first in 2008. In the last 10 years, they've also finished highly second or third, in many cases. And this is also an expression of the fact that Russia has a very important popular music industry, which is still very regionally concentrated in countries of the former Soviet Union. But nonetheless, the ambitions of Russia, Russian artists, the resources that Russian television and music companies have put into producing Eurovision entries --the biggest I would say, resources of any entry-- have demonstrated that the Russian popular music industry also has ambitions to grow internationally. And they've also reflected the fact that the Russian government is taking popular culture much more seriously, in its cultural diplomatic efforts, especially as Russia has never been so strong in terms of popular culture globally, especially in comparison to the United States, the United Kingdom, or even Italy, Sweden and South Korea.

**John Torpey** 20:09

Interesting. I mean, this could be seen from a kind of politicians or political scientists perspective, as you know, an aspect of soft power. And maybe you could talk about it a little bit in that respect. And, you know, what role do governments play and getting involved even though they're supposed to be you can't vote for your own country. Is this the kind of thing where they're kind of backroom shenanigans about who gets to win and bribery scandals of the soccer kind? And, you know, how does it work in the sort of arena of soft power politics?

**Dean Vuletic** 20:47

Well, it's very different in each of the states that participate because the connection between the national broadcaster and the government varies. So we have liberal democracies, you know, largely members of the European Union these days in which these are ideally separated. So there is no government influence on the choice that the national broadcasting organizations make in their organization of Eurovision or in their organization of anything else. But we see situations now even in the European Union, in which the governments effectively control the national broadcasting organizations, especially in Poland and Hungary.

**Dean Vuletic** 21:33

Hungary is a very interesting example because it was in Eurovision until 2019. But then, it withdrew from Eurovision, and this became a point of argument between the Orban regime and the liberal opposition in Hungary, some members of which allege that Hungary withdrew from Eurovision because Eurovision has become "too gay". So it's become too activist in promoting the visibility of sexual minorities. The television officials from Hungary haven't said anything to this effect, so this can't be proven. But it's just interesting to see how Eurovision is used in this way in internal politics.

**Dean Vuletic** 22:24

We also had that in Austria, when the bearded drag queen Conchita Wurst won Eurovision in 2014. I mean, she was selected by the public and, you know, very much supported by the national broadcaster. But the far right party in Austria, the Freedom Party, was critical of her because of this message of in favor of the rights of sexual minorities that she was sending, she was also calling for same sex marriage to be allowed in Austria. And so in internal politics, Eurovision can become a symbol as well.

**Dean Vuletic** 23:06

When it comes to how governments actually use Eurovision for soft power, usually that comes into play much more when a country has won Eurovision. And then it becomes a big effort to stage the contest. And that's when local governments get involved as cities try to win bids to host Eurovision. It's also when national governments get more involved in how they use Eurovision to promote certain images of their state. So, you know, this goes way back to the beginnings of the contest. But I think probably the most interesting example of this, let's say in the 1960s, was when the government of Francisco Franco in Spain really put a lot of money into the hosting of Eurovision in Madrid in 1969, at a time when the government was trying to improve its image in Western Europe, but also to promote Spain's burgeoning tourism industry whose principal markets lay in Western Europe. So this was about, you know, whitewashing the international image of Francoist Spain and in making it a more appealing destination for Western European tourists.

**Dean Vuletic** 24:24

In recent times, we've also seen the dictatorship in Azerbaijan do that in 2012, when Baku hosted Eurovision, and spent the most money ever to host a Eurovision Song Contest, even re-developing a whole part of the city of Baku for the event, constructing a new arena for the contest. The hope then of the Aliyev government was that this would be a springboard to host even bigger international mega events, such as the Olympics Games, but Baku's application for that was actually rejected while it was hosting Eurovision. Nonetheless, Azerbaijan has gone on to host the European games, the Formula One Grand Prix. So it did serve as a way of improving or even starting Azerbaijan's CV when it comes to hosting international mega events. And of course, you know, this is also related to the commercial interests of the government, the commercial interests of parties in Azerbaijan that have close ties with the government. It was also related to Azerbaijan improving its international image, an image which was not very well known until then, especially in Europe.

**Dean Vuletic** 25:51

Other organizations also tried to use the event to improve the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, and especially media freedom. So never before had Eurovision been so discussed in the European Union, the European Parliament, as in 2012, when it came to Azerbaijan, leaders of the European Union issued statements telling Azerbaijan to use the event as an opportunity to open up, to democratize. But unfortunately, in this regard, Eurovision did not have a lasting effect. And in actual fact, media freedom has worsened in Azerbaijan since then.

**John Torpey** 26:33

Unfortunate, but Eurovision can't do everything, I guess. So you've just come back from Rotterdam, there was no Eurovision contest last year because of the pandemic. I guess that's the first time it's been canceled since it started in 1956. So what was it like to be there and what happened?

**Dean Vuletic** 26:55

It was fantastic. I mean, the emotions, the excitement, were wonderful. It was really not that different to previous Eurovisions in the arena, I would say. A lot of fans came dressed up in various costumes influenced by national colors and flags. There was a lot of singing and dancing in the arena, even though we were all only in seated areas. So in previous years, there has been a fan area in front of the stage in which people stand up and can dance more easily and wave flags, of course. So movements were a bit more restricted this year. But the emotions were still there. And it felt really wonderful to be a part of that crowd again.

**Dean Vuletic** 27:43

And just to just to have people singing along together and singing along to the songs or you know, in the warm up before the actual contest they we're playing old Dutch Eurovision hits, which Eurovision fans who aren't Dutch speakers, like myself, and it still happened to know, even though probably my Dutch is very bad. But this was a great feeling. The press room was emptier than in previous years, not as many journalists could travel, of course. But there was still a lot of reporting on Eurovision, people watched a lot of the press conferences on the internet, so there has been a digital move in that regard. And I think actually, that is something that will stay that Eurovision press conferences will be continue to be a hybrid event just means that more people can participate in them when there is more of this digital interaction going on.

**Dean Vuletic** 28:54

And I think also one of the reasons why this was an exciting Eurovision was that the voting results were very interesting. For example, we had a lot of entries that were not in English, which placed highly including the Italian "Zitti e Buoni" and the French and Swiss entries were both in the French language, they also did very well. And this is great because what we've had in recent years, since the language rule was abrogated in 1999 is that most entries have been English. And there have only been three winners including this year's one which have not been in English, and I think this is very bad for diversity in Europe. There's a lot of talk about diversity in Eurovision but generally that has been promoting social diversity, racial diversity, immigrants, sexual diversity, but linguistic diversity has really been lost.

**Dean Vuletic** 30:00

And this is something that makes Eurovision distinctive. And the fact that the Eurovision public, this year the Eurovision audience voted for so many entries that are not in English is, I think, really a strong statement on what Europeans want to hear and that they want to hear different languages that they want to hear entries, such as the ones that finish so highly, which are produced by the performers themselves, and which do not come out of some pop music factory in Sweden, for example. The plastic pop songs didn't do well, the songs with artistic meaning, with a socio-political meaning were the ones that did well. And this, I think was the great message to come out of Eurovision this year. The fact that a glam rock act, which speaks about rebellion, won is really you know, quite something, but it probably also says that European society is feeling quite rebellious itself now, especially following all of the restrictions that we've experienced here, as a result of the pandemic. This might also have some impact on political changes in the future; that we'll have to see. But that Europeans were really blown away by this song about rebellion. And, you know, being yourself and you know, doing what you want to do is a political statement in itself.

**John Torpey** 31:38

Interesting. I think a lot of people are predicting as they experienced, as has happened 100 years ago, a lot of people are predicting a kind of new roaring 20s, you know, that there's going to be this upsurge in cultural innovation and excitement and that sort of thing. So maybe that's part of what we're talking about.

**John Torpey** 31:59

I guess the question I want to sort of close with, it really is about in a way, I guess, the democratization of culture, or the the way in which the Eurovision contest may reflect a kind of democracy when it comes to cultural preferences and choices. I mean, a lot of people have complained for a long time about the so-called democratic deficit in the European Union as an institution. And this is a kind of different sort of thing. And from that perspective, right, I guess every country gets to vote essentially. Now, whether it's really a representative vote, I don't know exactly. But it's a kind of democratically elected, you know, bunch of competitors who go forth into this contest. And, you know, as you were just saying, you know, the winners seem to reflect what Europeans want to hear. And then that seems to be maybe more diverse than it used to be, or whatever.

**John Torpey** 33:03

And I guess, you know, in some ways, culture doesn't really work that way, you could say, right, I mean, high culture is defined by usually relatively, you know, privileged social groups, and what their preferences are. You know, pop music isn't really like that, although there are, you know, sort of elites who argue about what's good and what's not, you know, U2 is good, but I can't think of a bad example, but you understand what I'm saying. So I'm just sort of curious how you would what you would say about the way in which the Eurovision Song Contest, how it relates to the question of you know, what people get to hear, in effect.

**Dean Vuletic** 33:51

I think this term that you mentioned, democratic deficit is a perfect way to end our conversation, because this is a big issue. In my book, I've mentioned the involvement of dictatorships in Eurovision. But there's also, you know, this question of who selects the entries? And what do these entries actually represent? I mentioned that they appear under the names of states, but we need to know the commercial interests, the political interests behind them.

**Dean Vuletic** 34:22

So for example, the question of the democratic deficit is an important one when it comes to the national selection, because very often, the television stations will decide to just select the entries themselves, either because they don't want to organize a national selection out of financial reasons. Or, they might have won Eurovision in recent years and don't want to have the burden, financial burden of hosting the contest again, so they'll choose a weaker entry in order to avoid winning the contest or because they want to advance someone's commercial interests be it their own, those of music companies, those of artists.

**Dean Vuletic** 35:05

So there are a lot of different players involved here. And sometimes that provokes resentment from the public because the participants in Eurovision are national public service broadcasters financed by public money. So the public thinks that it has a right to decide which entry should represent it or its state because it is financing these broadcasting organisations and these broadcasting organisations are there to advance the public or national public and or national interest, I should say. So this is an example where you have the democratic deficit in Eurovision.

**Dean Vuletic** 35:53

You also we have it in the European Broadcasting Union. Because when it comes to the voting for example, from 1999 to 2008, the voting was all done by public televoting. But then problems emerged, especially after there were a string of winners from East European countries. And that provoked a lot of resentment from West Europeans, who thought that the East European publics were behaving and undemocratically, unmeritocratically when it came to the Eurovision voting.

**Dean Vuletic** 36:31

So then the European Broadcasting Union reintroduced expert juries into the voting and now the voting is determined 50% by public televoting and 50% by the national expert juries. But then, of course, you know, what are these juries, jury members representing? What are the connections between them and their colleagues in other juries? Very often these are musical experts who also have close interest in other countries participating in your revision. And you can track these relationships in their voting patterns as well.

**Dean Vuletic** 37:11

And as we saw this year, what the public decides can be very different to what the juries decide, for example, the Italian entry received many more votes from the public than it did from the expert juries. So there are a lot of issues related to democracy here. And again, this is why I think what we've seen this year is a victory for democracy and diversity in Europe.

**Dean Vuletic** 37:40

And this, I mean, you mentioned how elites determine what high culture is, but there are also commercial interests that seem to determine or think they know what popular tastes are. And you saw that in Eurovision this year with just so many acts, which had the same formula. So a pop song, a catchy dance pop song, produced by a solo female singer. And while in some cases, this reflected the impact of the Me Too movement, some of the entries in their themes had, you know, female empowerment as, as their topic which was certainly something to be praised, it was more the style of a lot of these songs that suggested that the producers really thought that a winning entry in Eurovision needed to be a very plastic pop song, reflecting some of the most popular trends in popular music at this time, which is not the case, that's not the result that we got.

**Dean Vuletic** 39:01

So actually, European viewers, when it comes to Eurovision, they want to see something more diverse. Yes, they're probably also consuming, you know, American pop acts, British pop acts, but when it comes to Eurovision, they want to see something of the national cultures, the various national cultures that are being represented. They want to see new acts, acts which may not be new in a national context, but which will be new in an international context, like this Italian group Måneskin which won. They want to hear songs in different national languages. They also want to hear songs which are politically and socially engaged, you know, so with issues such as those of the Me Too movement, Black Lives Matter and, and so on, but they also want to hear these issues presented creatively and perhaps with a story behind them. So the Russian entry this year also did well, Manizha; she's been very active in women's rights issues in Russia. Her song Russian Woman was a feminist song. And it was so well done a combination of hip hop and Russian folk. This is what viewers of Eurovision want to see.

**Dean Vuletic** 40:15

And if I can give you one last example, I mean, Eurovision is now expanding to America, the format will be produced in America as the American Song Contest. The European Broadcasting Union has sold the rights for this to NBC. And this is reflected a trend in recent years that the organizers of Eurovision have wanted to promote Eurovision in the United States, as, you know, a new market in which Eurovision can expand. And one of the examples of this has been the fact that American artists, very prominent American artists have been to invited to perform as the interval act in Eurovision, starting with Justin Timberlake in 2016, and then continuing with Madonna, in Israel in 2019.

**Dean Vuletic** 41:06

And I think that, you know, the case of Madonna really shows you what Eurovision is about, because they paid a lot of money to get Madonna there. But first of all, Madonna's performance was not very good, it didn't have an impact. And the Eurovision fans I've spoken to have generally said "what we want to see in Eurovision is a national act, we wanted to see an Israeli act there" or, you know, maybe an act that would have brought together Israeli and Palestinian artists, that would have been very meaningful. Madonna didn't mean anything in the Eurovision Song Contest. And the performance, you know, was widely regarded as not being of very good quality. And it just drew attention away from the artists who were performing in the actual contest.

**Dean Vuletic** 41:56

So these Eurovision artists who may be like the Icelandic artists, you know, are these unknown acts internationally, but then come on stage from a nation of quarter of a million and blow viewers away. That's what Eurovision is about. And that's what we need to see more. We saw a lot of that this year, and that's the way Europeans voted. So I hope that your revision in the future will continue to promote these European acts, European culture, and will not become some sort of Americanized event because Europeans love American culture, but there are other stages for that. Eurovision is a stage for something else: underdogs, small nations' stage to produce big European acts, let's say, that we'll make a global impact.

**John Torpey** 42:53

Fascinating. Well, we can look forward to seeing this then on the American stage, sometime in the not too distant future it sounds like, and we'll get a better understanding of it, then. And then we'll invite you back and have a comparison of the Eurovision and the American Song Contest.

**Dean Vuletic** 43:07

I'd love to do that. Because I'm a bit skeptical of how the American contest will work. It will be based on state identities. But you know, that's very different. You know, that national identities in Europe are very different to state identities in America and, you know, Delaware competing against California, well, maybe we'll have an underdog there, but it's still very different from, you know, Iceland or San Marino competing against the United Kingdom or Germany.

**John Torpey** 43:38

Well, I hate to say it, but I think the only obvious comparison is with the beauty contests that are now mostly, you know, off the radar, but in any case, we'll have to see what happens.

**John Torpey** 43:50

So let me say thanks so much to Dean Vuletic for sharing his insights about the Eurovision Song Contest. It's been fascinating. Remember to subscribe and rate International Horizons on SoundCloud, Spotify and Apple podcasts. I want to thank Merrill Sovner for her production assistance and Hristo Voynov with his technical assistance and to acknowledge Duncan Mackay for for sharing his song International Horizons as the theme music for the show. This is John Torpey, saying thanks for joining us and we look forward to having you with us for the next episode of International Horizons.