



EUROPEAN CULTURE COURSE

The Eurovision Song Contest

10 Chapters

Philip Osztromok

Generated with Claude

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The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why Eurovision? Scope & Sources

Every year, tens of millions of people across Europe and beyond watch countries compete with three-minute songs, followed by a long evening of scoring that can turn on a single phone vote. The Eurovision Song Contest has run since the 1950s, launched some careers and ended others, produced catchphrases that outlast the songs, and been argued about as hard as any election. This opening chapter explains why a song contest deserves a course, sets out what the course covers, and shows how to read the sources. A lot of Eurovision lore is half-remembered, so the chapter marks what is firm and what is folklore.

Why a Song Contest?

Eurovision is easy to dismiss as camp entertainment, but it is a rare thing: a programme that has lasted for decades, is watched live in many countries at once, and is organised by the broadcasters themselves. That makes it a record of how Europe has changed. The list of countries has grown with politics. The voting rules have changed with technology. The music has shifted with taste. Even the jokes tell you something, because every era laughs at different things.

The question for the whole course

Is Eurovision a music competition, a television event or a mirror of European politics? The honest answer is all three, and the chapters take them in turn: the origins, the format, the voting, the music, the cost of hosting, the politics, the British story and the contest in fiction.

A One-Paragraph Version

The contest was first held in 1956 and has been staged every year since, with a break in 2020 when the event was cancelled. It is organised by the European Broadcasting Union, the same body behind the Eurovision network that carried the show in *Jeux Sans Frontières* (It's a Knockout): Europe's Game Show 3, and each participating country sends one song, chosen in its own way. After the songs, juries and the public award points, and the highest total wins. The

winning country normally hosts the next contest. These are the basic facts, and each is developed in later chapters, with the dates checked as they appear.

What the Course Covers

Chapters	Theme
2–3	The beginnings and the format, including the rules and the "Big Five"
4–5	The voting story, and the songs and stars that people remember
6–7	The cost of hosting, and the politics, neighbours and controversy
8–9	The United Kingdom's story, and Eurovision in fiction and fandom
10	What the contest says about Europe

What the course leaves out

This is a cultural history of the contest, not a catalogue of every entry. It does not list every song or every score, and it does not rank the winners. Where recent contests are mentioned, the course states a cut-off date, because the story is still being written.

Record, Folklore and Memory

Eurovision generates a great deal of memory and lore. Fans remember favourite songs, results and moments, often with great confidence. Three kinds of claim need different handling.

Record

Years, winners, scores and rule changes that appear in the contest's own records and reliable reference works.

Folklore

Sayings and legends that took on a life of their own, such as the way a country with a zero score could become a national joke. They often contain truth, but the version people repeat is usually tidier than the facts.

Memory

What viewers recall about particular acts, outfits and evenings. Good for atmosphere, unreliable for the exact year or order.

A note on accuracy

Dates, names and results in this course are given from general knowledge and checked as each chapter is written. Where a point is uncertain the text says so. Recent results change the picture quickly, so check anything recent against the contest's official site before quoting it.

The Contest in Everyday Life

Part of the contest's reach comes from how it spills into ordinary conversation. People who have never watched a full show know certain phrases and jokes about it. A run of poor results by one country becomes a national talking point; a famous winning song is hummed years later; a failed entry in a sitcom is as well known as a real one. Later chapters look at these threads, including the old habit of announcing a country's score with its name attached, which gave some countries a reputation that lasted far longer than the scoring practice that created it.

Where to Read and Watch

- **The official site and archive.** The contest's own website holds results, songs and many past shows. It is the first place to check a year or a score.
- **Broadcaster archives.** National broadcasters keep clips and background on their own entries.
- **Books and articles.** Look for histories of the contest and of European broadcasting, which set it in context.
- **Fan sites.** Fan communities keep detailed lists and statistics. They are valuable but are secondary sources, so confirm important figures elsewhere.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

In three sentences, explain why a song contest can count as European history. Use at least two points from this chapter.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Sort these into record, folklore or memory: (a) the contest was first held in 1956; (b) a country that once scored zero is forever "the country that always gets nul points"; (c) a favourite act's costume from a particular year.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Choose a Eurovision fact you believe is true, write it down, then find a source for it. Note whether the source agreed or corrected you.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Eurovision Song Contest:** an annual song competition between countries, first held in 1956
- **Organiser:** the European Broadcasting Union
- **Basic format:** one song per country; juries and the public award points; the winner usually hosts next
- **2020:** the contest was cancelled
- **Handling sources:** separate record, folklore and memory

- **Best first check:** the contest's official site and archive

Next chapter: The Beginnings: Lugano 1956, which looks at how the contest started and what it was meant to be.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · The Beginnings: Lugano 1956

The first Eurovision Song Contest was a small affair compared with what it became: a handful of countries, a modest theatre in a Swiss town, and results that were never announced to the audience. This chapter looks at the idea behind the contest, the organisation that made it possible, the 1956 event in Lugano, its first winner, and how the early years developed. The 1956 details are better documented than many later ones, but a few points vary between sources and are flagged.

The Organisation Behind It

The contest was created by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), an association of national broadcasters founded in 1950 to cooperate on programmes, rights and technical links. One result of that cooperation was the Eurovision network, the technical link that let broadcasters in different countries show the same live event at the same time. The same network later carried Jeux Sans Frontières (It's a Knockout): Europe's Game Show 3, and it is why the contest has "Eurovision" in its name.

Network and contest

Eurovision is the name of the broadcasting link, and the Song Contest is one programme that uses it. The contest took the name of the network and then became so famous that the name now usually means the contest.

The Idea

A song competition between countries was a way to give the new network something to show. Broadcasters wanted programmes that were popular, cheap enough to share and easy to watch across language barriers. A music contest met those aims, since the songs carried the content and the format was simple. The model most often named is the Italian Sanremo Music Festival, a national song competition that was already popular. The idea is generally credited to Marcel Bezençon, a Swiss broadcaster and EBU official, though accounts differ on how much the proposal was his alone and how much developed in committee.

Origin claims

As with many origin stories, the clean version ("one man had the idea") is probably tidier than what happened. It is safe to say that Bezençon is widely credited, that Sanremo is a commonly named model, and that the EBU adopted the idea.

Lugano, 1956

The first contest was held in 1956 in Lugano, in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. The reasons usually given for the choice are that Switzerland was a neutral country and a founding member of the organising body. Seven countries took part, according to the usual record: Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The event was a live radio and television broadcast of a single evening.

Feature of 1956	What happened
Host	Switzerland, in Lugano
Countries	Seven
Songs	Each country performed two songs (unlike later years, when each sent one)
Voting	Juries made the decision, and the full scores were not announced at the time
Winner	Switzerland, with the singer Lys Assia

The winning song was Switzerland's "Refrain", sung by Lys Assia. Because the host was Switzerland, the first winner was also the first host's own entry. The detail of two songs per country and the closed voting are widely reported, but the exact scoring details of that first evening are not well documented, so this course does not quote them.

A curious first

The first contest did not publish its scores. Later years placed great weight on the public announcement of the scores, which became the main drama of the night. In 1956 the audience simply learned the winner.

The Early Rules

- **Songs in a national language.** Early on, songs were generally sung in the country's own language, a rule that was later changed and changed back. Chapter 3 covers the format more fully.
- **Short songs.** Songs had a maximum length of a few minutes.
- **Live performance.** Songs were performed live with an orchestra.
- **Jury voting.** Decisions rested on juries, with no public vote.

Some of these rules have changed repeatedly over the decades, so this list describes the early pattern, not a permanent set of rules.

The Early Years

The contest was held again in 1957, and more countries joined. The United Kingdom is generally reported to have first taken part in 1957, along with Austria and Denmark, though check the year before quoting it. The winners of the early years came from several countries, which helped to establish the idea that any member could win. The pattern of the winner hosting the following year developed in the first years and then became the general practice, with exceptions when a winning country could not or would not host.

The beginning of a tradition

Several habits that now seem timeless started in these years: a host country, a presenter introducing each song, a scoreboard and the idea of a country "winning" the right to stage the next show. Later chapters trace how they developed.

Why It Worked

The contest filled a need. Broadcasters had a shared network and few programmes to put on it. Audiences enjoyed music, national pride and a clear result. The contest was cheap to share and easy to follow without the language, since a song's appeal does not depend on dialogue. In that way it resembles the games show of *Jeux Sans Frontières* (It's a Knockout): Europe's Game Show 6, where the action carried the programme. These conditions explain why it survived when many early television experiments did not.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain the difference between the Eurovision network and the Eurovision Song Contest, and say which organisation was behind both.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

List four facts about the 1956 contest and say which one is the biggest difference from the contest as people know it today.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

The chapter says the origin story is probably "tidier" than what happened. Name two claims about the origin that are safe to make and one that should be hedged.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Organiser:** the European Broadcasting Union (founded 1950)
- **Model:** the Sanremo Music Festival, commonly named
- **Credited with the idea:** Marcel Bezençon, widely, though the full story is more complex
- **First contest:** 1956, Lugano, Switzerland, seven countries
- **First winner:** Switzerland, Lys Assia, "Refrain"
- **1956 quirks:** two songs per country; scores not announced
- **Early joiners:** UK, Austria and Denmark, generally reported for 1957

Next chapter: How the Contest Works, which sets out the format, the rules and the "Big Five".

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · How the Contest Works

The contest looks simple: each country sends a song and the best one wins. Behind that lies a set of rules about who may perform, what they may sing, how a country chooses its entry, who qualifies automatically and who pays. This chapter sets out the format as it has stood in recent years, the main rules, the national selection shows, the semi-finals and the "Big Five". The rules have changed many times, and the dates given for changes are from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

The Basic Format

1. **Each participating country sends one song**, performed live on stage by an act chosen by that country's broadcaster.
2. **Countries are divided**: some go through a semi-final, and a group of countries goes directly to the final.
3. **The final** features a fixed number of songs (typically in the mid-twenties), performed in an order decided by the organisers.
4. **Points are awarded** by juries and by the public, and the totals decide the winner (Chapter 4).
5. **The winning country** normally hosts the next contest.

The Main Rules

Rule	Outline
Song length	A maximum of about three minutes
Performers on stage	A limit on the number of performers (commonly six)
Live vocals	The lead vocals must be performed live
Backing music	Recorded backing is used; the old live orchestra was dropped in the late 1990s (check the year)

Rule	Outline
Originality	The song must be new, not released commercially before a set date in the contest year
Language	Free choice of language in recent decades; earlier periods required the national language
Content	No political messages or offensive material; this rule has been contested

Rules change

The language rule, the live orchestra and the number of performers have all changed over the decades, and some rules have changed more than once. Treat the table as a recent snapshot, and check the rules for a particular year before relying on them.

National Selection

Each country decides how to choose its entry, and the methods vary widely. Some run a televised competition with a public vote, such as the long-running Swedish Melodifestivalen or the British "A Song for Europe", the name that became the title of a well-known sitcom episode (Chapter 9). Others select an artist internally. The method matters because it shapes who is chosen, and it is one of the places where a country's attitude to the contest shows. A country that treats the national final as a serious event often does better than one that treats it as an afterthought, though that is a pattern and not a rule.

The national final as a show

In some countries the national selection draws a bigger domestic audience than the Eurovision final itself. It is a television event with its own traditions, stars and arguments.

The Host-Country System

The country that wins normally hosts the next contest, and its broadcaster is responsible for staging it. This has produced the contest's geography: the host cities change from year to year,

and some countries have hosted several times. In practice this is a heavy commitment, which Chapter 6 discusses. On a few occasions another country has hosted on behalf of a winner, when the winning broadcaster could not or would not stage the show (the best-known recent example is covered in Chapters 6 and 7).

The Semi-Finals

For the first decades every participating country appeared in a single show. As the number of countries grew, especially after the end of the Cold War, there were too many to fit in one evening. Various methods were tried to limit the number, including relegating the lowest-scoring countries from the following year's contest. In the early 2000s a semi-final was introduced, followed by a second one, so that most countries must qualify for the final. The dates are generally given as 2004 for the first semi-final and 2008 for the move to two, but check the exact years before quoting them.

Why semi-finals mattered

They solved the problem of too many entrants, and they also gave smaller countries a chance to be seen without crowding out the established ones. They also changed the contest's drama: a country can now fail to reach the final, which was not possible for a participating country before.

The Big Five

A group of countries is exempt from the semi-finals and goes straight to the final every year. This is the **Big Five**: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Together with the host country, they are guaranteed a place in the final. The reason usually given is financial: these countries' broadcasters contribute the largest share of the contest's funding, partly because they have the largest television audiences. In return for that funding, they receive automatic qualification.

The group began as the "Big Four" (the UK, France, Germany and Spain) around the year 2000, and Italy rejoined the contest in 2011 and became the fifth, so the "Big Five" label dates from then. These dates are from general knowledge and should be checked. Automatic qualification

also meant that these countries were protected from the relegation rule that applied to others in the 1990s, though how that rule worked in detail is a matter for a dedicated source.

The Big Five and fairness

The arrangement is often criticised. Supporters say the funding justifies it; critics say it gives the largest countries an advantage and removes a risk of failure that others face. The argument is part of the contest's politics, and Chapter 7 returns to it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the five steps of the contest's basic format in your own words.

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Name the Big Five countries, explain why they get an automatic place in the final, and give one argument for and one against the arrangement.

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain why the semi-finals were introduced, and say what the chapter means by "rules change" with two examples.

[→ Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Format:** one song per country, semi-finals, a final, juries and public vote, winner hosts next
- **Rules:** about three minutes, a limit on performers, live lead vocals, a new song, free language in recent decades
- **National selection:** each country chooses its own method
- **Semi-finals:** first introduced in the early 2000s (generally 2004), two from 2008
- **Big Five:** UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain; automatic finalists, major funders
- **Big Four to Big Five:** around 2000, with Italy's return in 2011
- **Check:** exact years of rule changes

Next chapter: The Voting Story, which follows how the points have been awarded and why a zero used to be announced aloud.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · The Voting Story

For many viewers the voting is the real show. The songs take about three hours; the points take almost as long, and a result can be open until the last country has spoken. The voting has also changed more than any other part of the contest. This chapter follows it from the closed juries of the 1950s, through the 12-point scale, to the public phone vote and the later mix of juries and public. It also explains where the famous phrase "nul points" comes from and why it is now much harder to hear. The broad history is well known; exact years are flagged where they should be checked.

Juries and Secrecy

In 1956 the decision rested with juries, and the scores were not announced to the audience (Chapter 2). In the early years each country's jury awarded points to the other countries' songs, and the way points were counted changed several times. A scoreboard where viewers could follow the totals came later, along with the moment when each country was called in turn to give its points. The details of the early scoring systems differ between sources, so this course does not set them out song by song.

The 12-Point Scale

The scale most viewers know is generally dated to 1975: each country awards 12 points to its favourite song, then 10, then 8, then 7 down to 1 for the tenth. Ten songs therefore score from each voter, and every other song gets nothing from that voter. The scale has lasted, with changes to who does the voting, and the call of "douze points" (French for twelve points) has become a catchphrase in its own right.

Place in a country's ranking	Points given
1st	12
2nd	10
3rd	8

Place in a country's ranking	Points given
4th to 10th	7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
11th and lower	No points

A rule that never changed

Countries cannot vote for their own song. That rule has stood through every change of method, and it is why every country's own entry gets nothing from the home vote.

Televoting

For decades the points came from juries. The public phone vote was tried in a few countries in the late 1990s (1997 is the year usually given) and spread widely within a year or two. From then, most countries awarded their points partly or wholly on the public's votes, and viewers at home could influence the result directly. It made the contest feel more democratic. It also made it more open to national and regional loyalties, a theme taken up in Chapter 7.

Back to a Mix

Because televoting favoured some patterns of neighbourliness, the organisers brought the juries back. From around 2009 a country's points came from a combination of jury and public vote. In more recent years the two have been counted and announced separately, which changed the drama of the night: the jury points are read out by country in turn, and the public totals are added after. In 2023 the public vote was opened to viewers in countries that do not take part, in a "rest of the world" total. These are the broad changes and the years are generally reported as given here, but check each one against the contest's official rules before quoting it.

Why the method matters

A jury and a public can disagree sharply, and a song that is liked by experts may be ignored by viewers, or the reverse. When the two are announced separately, a song can finish high on one list and low on the other, which is part of the modern drama.

Tactical Voting and Scandals

Whenever a prize depends on votes, people look for ways to affect the outcome. At Eurovision that has meant arguments about voting blocs, accusations that juries traded votes, and occasional rulings by the organisers. A well-known recent example is 2022, when the votes from several national juries were set aside after irregularities were reported, and a substitute total was calculated for those countries. Details of which countries were involved should be checked in a reliable source. The general point is that the system is not purely a vote of taste, and the organisers keep adjusting it in response.

"Nul Points"

"Nul points" is French for "no points", and it became the contest's most famous phrase of failure. It comes from the way scores were once announced: countries were read out in English and in French, and the results could be given in full, so a song that gathered nothing was announced as having none. Norway is the country most closely linked with the phrase. Norway is generally recorded as having finished with zero points four times (the years commonly given are 1963, 1978, 1981 and 1997), and as having finished last more often than any other country. The country has taken that reputation with good humour.

Folklore versus record

The line "Norway, nul points" is better described as folklore than as something said once on air. The record shows the zero scores. The tidy phrase is what the audience remembered and repeated.

Could "Norway, nul points" be said today? The phrase belonged to the era when each jury announced its points in turn and the totals were read in full. Under the current method, with jury and public votes added, a zero in the final is rarer but not impossible, and it has happened: the United Kingdom finished with no points in 2021, and Austria and Germany did in 2015. Years should be confirmed in the official results. A zero is also announced differently, since no one reads a long list of countries that received nothing.

A Few Voting Traditions

- **The spokesperson.** Each country appears on screen through a spokesperson who reads out the jury's points, often with a greeting and a joke.
- **Ties.** Tie-break rules have been added over the years after ties for first place, most famously in the late 1960s, when more than one country shared the top spot. Check the year and the countries before quoting.
- **The final reveal.** The order in which points are read out, and the point at which the public totals are added, are designed to keep the result open for as long as possible.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the 12-point scale: how many countries get points from each voter, what the top three scores are, and what rule always applies about a country's own song.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Explain in your own words why the organisers brought juries back after televoting, and give one advantage and one risk of each method.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain where "nul points" comes from, why "Norway, nul points" is better described as folklore, and whether the phrase could be said as it was under today's scoring.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **1956:** juries; scores not announced

- **12-point scale:** generally dated 1975 (12, 10, 8, then 7 down to 1)
- **Own song:** a country cannot vote for itself
- **Televoting:** trialled in the late 1990s (1997), then widespread
- **Jury and public mix:** from around 2009; announced separately in later years
- **Rest of the world vote:** 2023
- **"Nul points":** French for no points; Norway generally recorded with four zeros
- **Check:** exact years, the 2022 jury ruling and the list of zero scores

Next chapter: Songs, Stars & Surprises, which turns from the scores to the music and the acts people remember.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Songs, Stars & Surprises

The contest is remembered for its music more than for its rules. Some songs became part of ordinary life, a few acts became international stars, and many more were forgotten the following week. This chapter looks at the songs and people who left a mark, the way staging became part of the contest, and the surprises that keep the result uncertain. It is a selection of well-known examples, not a ranking. Years and placings are given from general knowledge and flagged for checking, and the recent results end with the 2026 contest, so check anything later against the official site. The 2025 and 2026 winners were supplied by the course author and should be confirmed in the official results.

Songs That Outlived the Contest

The contest has produced a few songs that became far more famous than the night they were performed.

- **"Nel blu dipinto di blu" (Volare), Italy, 1958.** Sung by Domenico Modugno, it did not win (it is generally reported as finishing third), yet it became one of the best-known Italian songs in the world.
- **"Waterloo", Sweden, 1974.** Sung by ABBA in Brighton and widely treated as the contest's biggest launch pad. The group had a long international career afterwards.
- **"Ne partez pas sans moi", Switzerland, 1988.** The win that introduced Celine Dion to a wide European audience.
- **"Making Your Mind Up", United Kingdom, 1981.** Bucks Fizz won, and the skirt-removing routine became a famous moment of staging.

Winning and lasting are different things

The best-remembered song of a given year is often not the winner. Modugno is the standard example. The result decides a trophy, and time decides which song people still hum.

Stars the Contest Launched or Showed

Many acts used the contest as a first big stage, and others were already famous and came to it for the exposure. ABBA and Celine Dion are the examples most often given of careers that took off after a win. Others made an impression without winning: Cliff Richard came very close to winning for the United Kingdom in 1968 with "Congratulations", reported as finishing second by a single point, and Sandie Shaw's barefoot "Puppet on a String" won for the UK in 1967. Whether the contest creates stars or only reveals them is arguable, and most careers owe something to both.

Year	Entry and country	Why remembered
1958	"Volare", Italy	A worldwide hit that did not win
1967	"Puppet on a String", UK	A British win, performed barefoot by Sandie Shaw
1974	"Waterloo", Sweden	ABBA's win and international breakthrough
1981	"Making Your Mind Up", UK	Bucks Fizz and the skirt moment
1988	"Ne partez pas sans moi", Switzerland	Celine Dion's European breakthrough
1998	"Diva", Israel	Dana International's win
2006	"Hard Rock Hallelujah", Finland	Lordi and the monster costumes
2009	"Fairytale", Norway	Alexander Rybak's record score under the system of the time
2014	"Rise Like a Phoenix", Austria	Conchita Wurst
2021	"Zitti e buoni", Italy	Måneskin, who then had a wide rock career
2025	"Wasted Love", Austria	JJ's win, which gave Austria the right to host in 2026
2026	"Bangaranga", Bulgaria	Dara's win, reported as Bulgaria's first (to confirm)

Check before quoting

The table gives the year, country and the point for which each entry is usually remembered. Placings (for example Modugno's third place and Cliff Richard's second) and the claim about Rybak's record should be confirmed in the official results.

Repeat Winners and Songwriters

A few names recur. Johnny Logan won for Ireland as a singer in 1980 and 1987, and is also credited as the songwriter of Ireland's 1992 winner, an unusual double. Loreen won for Sweden in 2012 with "Euphoria" and again in 2023 with "Tattoo". Sweden and Ireland are generally reported as sharing the record for the number of wins (seven each at the time of writing), though check the current count. Chapter 6 returns to Ireland's run of wins.

Staging and Spectacle

For its first decades the contest was a stage with an orchestra. As television improved, staging became part of the entry. A costume, a prop, a dance move or a piece of lighting can decide whether an entry is remembered. Costume changes, wind machines and elaborate sets are all part of the tradition, and some of the most remembered moments, such as the Bucks Fizz routine, are about performance more than the song. The interval act, the entertainment while votes are counted, has become a showcase in its own right. Ireland's interval act in 1994 is the usual example, introducing a dance show that went on to a long life of its own (Chapter 6).

Camp is part of the point

The contest is often described as camp, meaning deliberately theatrical and playful. Many entries know this and play to it, and the audience enjoys it. It does not mean the music is not serious: the same night can hold a ballad, a rock band and a novelty entry.

Surprises and Firsts

The result is rarely predictable, and several results were surprises because of who won or what kind of act won.

- **Countries winning for the first time.** Finland's win in 2006 after many years near the bottom is a standard example. Greece first won in 2005, and Portugal in 2017. Bulgaria's win in 2026 with Dara's "Bangaranga" is, as far as the course author reports, its first, which would add another country to the list of first-time winners (confirm this in the official records).

- **Unexpected styles.** A hard-rock monster band winning in 2006 and a rock band winning in 2021 broke the picture of a ballad contest.
- **Identity and visibility.** Dana International's win in 1998 and Conchita Wurst's in 2014 were widely reported as significant moments for the representation of gay and transgender performers, and also provoked protest in some places. Chapter 7 returns to the politics.
- **Close finishes.** Several contests have been decided on the last set of points, which is part of the reason the voting ritual works as television.

Why surprises matter

A contest that was always won by the same kind of act would be dull. Variety of countries, languages and styles is part of the contest's identity, and surprises are how a small country, or an unusual act, gets a turn.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain why "Volare" is the standard example that winning and lasting are different, and give one other entry from the chapter that became more famous than its result.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Choose one act from the table. In a short paragraph say what it shows about staging, a launched career or a surprise, and name one claim to check.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Pick a Eurovision entry that you remember. Write down what you recall, then check the year, country and placing in the official archive and note any difference.

Quick Reference

- **"Volare" (1958):** Italy, a worldwide hit, generally reported third
- **"Waterloo" (1974):** ABBA, Sweden
- **1981:** Bucks Fizz, UK, skirt routine
- **1988:** Celine Dion, for Switzerland
- **2006:** Lordi, Finland's first win
- **Repeat winners:** Johnny Logan (Ireland, 1980 and 1987), Loreen (Sweden, 2012 and 2023)
- **Recent winners:** JJ, Austria, 2025; Dara, Bulgaria, 2026
- **Check:** placings, record claims and the current count of wins

Next chapter: Hosting: Prestige and Cost, which asks what winning costs a country.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Hosting: Prestige and Cost

Winning the Eurovision Song Contest is a prize with a bill attached. The winning country's broadcaster normally stages the next contest (Chapter 3), and that means a large arena, a television production on a scale most broadcasters do not usually attempt, security, and a city full of visitors. For a large country this is a showcase. For a small country, or a small broadcaster, it can be a heavy burden. This chapter looks at what hosting involves, why some countries have worried about winning, the story of Ireland's run of wins, and the occasions when another country hosted on a winner's behalf. Dates and details are from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

What Hosting Involves

- **A venue.** A large indoor arena or hall, suitable for television, an audience of thousands, delegations and press.
- **A television production.** A live broadcast of several hours, with a stage designed for the occasion, interval acts and a voting presentation.
- **Security and organisation.** Transport, accommodation, police, accreditation and rehearsals for dozens of delegations over about two weeks.
- **A fee to the organising body.** The broadcaster has obligations to the European Broadcasting Union, which owns and licenses the contest.

The amounts involved are in the tens of millions of euros for recent contests, according to general reporting, but the real figures depend on the year and on what is counted, so the course does not give a number.

Benefits and Costs

Prestige

The host city is on television across Europe for a week. Cities have used the contest as a chance to show themselves.

Visitors and trade

Thousands of fans travel to the host city. Hotels, restaurants and transport benefit, though how much is much argued.

The bill

Public broadcasters must find the money, sometimes from licence fees, sponsors and city or government support, and critics ask whether the spending is justified.

The risk

A small country can find that a win commits it to an event that is large for its size. The problem is not winning once, but winning at a time when the money is not there.

Evidence is mixed

Claims that hosting brings large economic benefits, or that it ruins a broadcaster, tend to come from supporters or critics of a particular contest. The truth is probably between the two and differs by country. Treat any single figure as a claim to check.

Ireland's Run of Wins

Ireland is the best-known case of a country that won so often that hosting became part of its national story. Ireland won in 1970, 1980 and 1987, and then won several times in the 1990s. The wins are generally listed as 1992, 1993 and 1994, followed by a further win in 1996, and Ireland is widely reported to hold a joint record with Sweden of seven victories in total (check the current count). The wins in the three years from 1992 meant three contests to stage in a row, and the third of them is the one people remember for what came next: the interval act in 1994 in Dublin, a dance show that grew into the stage production *Riverdance*.

The 1993 contest is also remembered because it was held in Millstreet, a small town in County Cork, in a venue built for the purpose. That is the clearest example of the host-country system placing a major television event in a very small place. The population figure of the town is often given as under two thousand, but check it before quoting.

Winning too well

A popular saying holds that Irish broadcasters began to fear winning again because of the cost, and the comic version of that idea is the basis for an episode of *Father Ted* (Chapter 9). It should be treated as folklore. There is no need to doubt that hosting was expensive; the part to check is whether a broadcaster ever tried to lose.

Hosting on Behalf of a Winner

The rule is that the winner hosts, but there have been exceptions when a winning broadcaster could not or would not do so. In those cases another country, often the United Kingdom, has hosted on its behalf.

Year held	Place	Why another country hosted
1960	London	The previous winner did not stage it (Netherlands, 1959 win; reported)
1963	London	The previous winner did not stage it (France, 1962 win; reported)
1972	Edinburgh	The 1971 winner, Monaco, was not able to stage it; the BBC did
1974	Brighton	The 1973 winner, Luxembourg, did not stage it; the BBC did
1980	The Hague	Israel, the 1979 winner, did not stage it a second year running
2023	Liverpool	The 2022 winner, Ukraine, could not host because of the war; the UK, the runner-up, did

Edinburgh's turn came in 1972, when the contest was held in the Usher Hall. This is one of several links between the contest and Scotland, and the 2020 film in Chapter 9 uses Edinburgh as its setting. The Liverpool contest in 2023 is discussed further in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

Check each row

The list is from general knowledge. The reasons given for the earlier hosting arrangements are brief and may be simplified, and some details (for example which broadcaster declined, and why) vary between sources. Confirm the years and reasons in the contest's own history before quoting them.

Small Countries and Big Occasions

Many hosts have been mid-sized countries and cities that took the chance. Estonia hosted in Tallinn in 2002 and Latvia in Riga in 2003, each a small country with a first contest to stage soon

after its first win. Ukraine hosted in Kyiv in 2005 and again in 2017. Turin, Rotterdam, Lisbon, Tel Aviv, Malmö and Basel are among the recent host cities, and the contest has shown the cities as well as the music. Austria's 2025 win with JJ's "Wasted Love" brought the 2026 contest to Austria, and Bulgaria's 2026 win with Dara's "Bangaranga", as reported by the course author, would bring the next to Bulgaria. Whether a city and a date have been confirmed should be checked in the official announcement.

Why hosts matter to the story

The identity of the host shapes the staging and the style of the show: the arena, the stage, the presenters and the interval acts all reflect the host country. Each contest looks and sounds a little like the place that staged it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List four things a host broadcaster has to provide, and give one benefit and one cost of hosting. Say why a small country might worry about winning.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Summarise Ireland's story as a host: the years of its wins in the 1990s, the small-town contest, the 1994 interval act, and what is folklore and what is record in the "fear of winning" idea.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Choose two occasions from the table when a country hosted on behalf of a winner. Explain the reason for each and say which detail you would check first.

Quick Reference

- **Normal rule:** the winning broadcaster hosts the next contest
- **Costs:** a venue, a television production, security, a fee to the EBU
- **Benefits:** prestige, visitors, a showcase for the city
- **Ireland:** wins generally listed as 1970, 1980, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1996; joint record of seven
- **1993:** Millstreet, County Cork, a very small host town
- **1994:** the interval act that grew into *Riverdance*
- **Hosting for a winner:** London 1960 and 1963, Edinburgh 1972, Brighton 1974, The Hague 1980, Liverpool 2023
- **Check:** the years and reasons for the exceptions, and the 2026 and 2027 hosts

Next chapter: Politics, Neighbours & Controversy, which asks whether Eurovision is only a song contest.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Politics, Neighbours & Controversy

The organisers say the contest is a non-political event, and the rules forbid political messages. Yet it is a contest between countries, voted on by countries, shown on state-linked broadcasters, and so politics keeps arriving. This chapter looks at the main arguments: whether neighbours vote for each other, whether the Big Five have an unfair advantage, who is allowed to take part and why countries outside Europe appear, and how the wars and conflicts of recent decades have affected the show. It is a difficult subject, so the chapter sticks to what is widely reported and marks what should be checked. Recent events change quickly, and the chapter ends with the 2026 contest.

Neighbours and Blocs

A long-running complaint is that countries vote for their neighbours or for countries with a shared history, so that results follow geography as much as music. Patterns commonly named include the Nordic countries, the countries of the former Yugoslavia, parts of the former Soviet Union, and pairs such as Greece and Cyprus. Researchers have looked at these patterns, and most find some effect, but the explanation is disputed. Neighbours may share musical taste, languages and migrant communities, and a diaspora vote from people living abroad can look like a bloc. The headline "they only vote for each other" is therefore too simple.

Bloc or taste?

A pattern in the results does not by itself prove a deal. People living in one country may vote for the entry of the country they came from, and neighbouring countries often have similar music. The honest position is that regional voting exists and its causes are mixed. The change from juries to televoting (Chapter 4) made the argument louder, and the return of juries was partly a response.

The Big Five Again

Chapter 3 introduced the arrangement under which the largest funders go straight to the final. The politics of it are straightforward. Supporters say the money justifies the place. Critics say it

protects the biggest countries and distorts the competition. A related point is that these countries have often finished low in recent years, which supporters use to argue that the place does not guarantee success. The argument is partly about fairness and partly about money, and no result settles it.

Who May Take Part

The contest is open to members of the European Broadcasting Union, and eligibility depends on the broadcaster, not on the map. That explains why countries that are not in Europe appear.

Country	Why it can take part
Israel	Its broadcaster is a member of the EBU. Israel is generally reported as first entering in 1973, and has won several times, including Milk and Honey's "Hallelujah" in 1979
Australia	Its broadcaster SBS is an associate EBU member. Australia was invited as a guest for the 2015 anniversary and has taken part since
Turkey, Cyprus, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan	Countries at or beyond the edge of Europe, with broadcasters in the EBU
Morocco	Reported to have entered once, around 1980, and not again; check this

The consequence is that "Euro" in the name describes the broadcasting union and its history more than a strict geography. It is also the reason a country such as Australia, whose public broadcaster has a large audience for the show, could become a regular entrant. Reactions vary: some fans welcome it, and others think it dilutes the idea of a European contest.

Dates to confirm

The first Israeli entry (1973), the Israeli wins (generally 1978, 1979, 1998 and 2018), Australia's guest year (2015) and the Moroccan entry should be checked against the official records. When Israel won in 1979 it hosted in Jerusalem, and in the following year it did not stage the contest, so the Netherlands did (Chapter 6).

Politics in the Songs and Staging

- **Songs with meaning.** Some entries have been read as political. Portugal's 1974 entry is often connected with the Carnation Revolution, since a song associated with it is reported to have been used as a signal in the coup, though check the details before quoting them.
- **"1944", Ukraine, 2016.** Jamala's winning song concerned the deportation of Crimean Tatars under Stalin. Some argued it was political and others that it was history, and the contest kept it. It is generally treated as a case where the rule on political content was tested.
- **Flags and gestures.** Rules on what may be shown or waved on stage have been changed more than once, and breaking them has led to fines or warnings.
- **Disqualification.** Some entries have been withdrawn or disqualified because of their lyrics, which shows that the "not political" rule is applied, though not always consistently.

Russia and Ukraine

Russia first took part in the 1990s, and won in 2008 with Dima Bilan's "Believe". Ukraine won in 2004 (Ruslana), 2016 (Jamala) and 2022 (Kalush Orchestra). Relations between the two countries have shaped the contest for years. In 2017 Russia withdrew after its chosen singer was refused entry to Ukraine, which was hosting. After the full-scale invasion in February 2022, the EBU suspended Russian broadcasters from the organisation, and Russia has not taken part since. In 2022, Kalush Orchestra won in Turin with a very large public vote, widely seen as a gesture of support. Because Ukraine could not host in 2023, the United Kingdom did, in Liverpool (Chapter 6 and Chapter 8). Belarus was also removed from the contest in the period after 2021, which is reported but should be confirmed.

Can a contest be neutral?

The 2022 result is a good example of the problem. The organisers kept the music rules, and yet a public vote can express a political feeling. Supporters of the result say viewers were free to vote as they chose; critics say it showed the contest cannot be kept separate from events.

Israel, Protest and Boycott

Israel's participation has been controversial, especially during the war in Gaza after October 2023. At the 2024 contest in Malmö there were protests, and calls to exclude Israel from the show were made in a number of countries. The EBU said that the contest is a competition between broadcasters and not governments, and kept Israel in. Reports since then say that some broadcasters have threatened or announced a boycott of later contests. The situation changes quickly, so this course does not list who is or is not taking part in 2026, and a reader should check the official participants list. The longer history of a boycott is older: some countries have withdrawn from particular years over the presence of another, and the Lebanese broadcaster is reported to have withdrawn in 2005 rather than show an Israeli song, which should be confirmed.

Identity and Visibility

The contest has a large LGBT audience and has been the stage for several moments of visibility, including Dana International's win in 1998 and Conchita Wurst's in 2014 (Chapter 5). They provoked support and anger, and some broadcasters or governments have been reported as unhappy with the show for this reason. Turkey's withdrawal after 2012 is sometimes linked to this and to the voting rules, but the reasons given vary, so the link should be treated as a claim.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain two reasons why a pattern of neighbours voting for neighbours might not prove that votes are being traded.

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Explain why Israel and Australia can take part in a "European" contest, and say what the word "Euro" actually refers to.

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Using the example of Ukraine in 2022, write a short paragraph on whether Eurovision can stay non-political. Give one point for and one against, and name one claim you would check.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Bloc voting:** patterns exist; causes disputed (taste, diaspora, bloc)
- **Eligibility:** EBU membership, not geography
- **Israel:** first entry generally 1973; wins 1978, 1979, 1998, 2018
- **Australia:** guest in 2015, regular since
- **Ukraine:** winners 2004, 2016, 2022
- **Russia:** won 2008; suspended from the EBU after February 2022
- **Recent protests and boycotts:** Malmö 2024; check the current position
- **Check:** all dates and the list of 2026 participants

Next chapter: The United Kingdom and Eurovision, which looks at one country's long and uneven record.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · The United Kingdom and Eurovision

Britain's relationship with Eurovision is unusual: a country with one of the largest music industries in the world, a founding group of entrants, five wins and a record number of second places, which has also finished last and even with no points. The British viewer's attitude has moved between enthusiasm, irony and indifference, and the British press has long had theories about why the results are what they are. This chapter follows that story and looks at the two attempts to change it that people remember best: Andrew Lloyd Webber in 2009 and Sam Ryder in 2022. Placings and years are given from general knowledge and flagged for checking, and the chapter does not claim to cover the most recent contests in full.

The Wins

Year	Song and act	Notes
1967	"Puppet on a String", Sandie Shaw	Performed barefoot; the first UK win
1969	"Boom Bang-a-Bang", Lulu	One of four countries that tied for first; the tie is discussed below
1976	"Save Your Kisses for Me", Brotherhood of Man	A pop group win
1981	"Making Your Mind Up", Bucks Fizz	Remembered for the skirt routine (Chapter 5)
1997	"Love, Shine a Light", Katrina and the Waves	The most recent British win

The UK is also widely reported to have finished second more often than any other country, including Cliff Richard's "Congratulations" in 1968, which was close behind the winner. The 1969 contest ended in a four-way tie for first place, between the UK, France, Spain and the Netherlands, and no tie-break rule existed, so all four were declared winners. This episode led to the introduction of tie-break rules. Check the details before quoting them. Lulu, one of the winners, was born in Scotland.

Check the counts

The number of British wins (five) is secure. The "most second places" claim and the details of the 1969 tie should be checked in the official results.

The Hosting Record

Because Britain won, and because it stepped in for others (Chapter 6), the UK has hosted the contest more often than most countries. Cities that have staged it include London, Edinburgh (1972, the Usher Hall), Brighton (1974), Harrogate (1982), Birmingham (1998) and Liverpool (2023). Several of these were not the result of a British win but of the BBC acting on behalf of a country that could not host.

The Slide

After 1997, British results fell. There were a few good years, and many poor ones, and the low points are well known: a last place in 2008 and 2010, a last place in 2019, and no points at all in 2003 and again in 2021. Several of the recent entries finished in the lower half. This pattern became the subject of a popular question: why does a country with so much music do so poorly?

"It's political"

The most famous theory is that countries vote against Britain for political reasons, such as the 2003 Iraq war, or later Brexit. Commentators including the long-time BBC commentator Terry Wogan were associated with the view that politics sometimes beat the music. The evidence is thin, and the theory is hard to test.

"The songs were weak"

An unromantic explanation is that the entries were not good enough, or were not suited to the contest, and that serious artists did not want to enter.

"The effort was half-hearted"

For some years the selection was treated as an afterthought, with little investment in the

"The contest changed"

Voting, the order of the show and the styles of music that win have shifted, and the older

song and the staging, while countries that cared did better.

British formula of a polished pop song did not travel as well.

Several causes, not one

The theories are not exclusive. A weak song, little investment and some resentment may all have played a part. The "political" explanation is the most popular in British conversation and the hardest to prove, since one can find both support and counterexamples.

Two Attempts to Change the Result

2009: Andrew Lloyd Webber. The composer Andrew Lloyd Webber wrote the British entry, "It's My Time", sung by Jade Ewen, and the BBC chose the act in a televised selection. Lloyd Webber appeared on stage at the piano in Moscow. The entry finished fifth, which was the best British result in some years. It is generally treated as the first sign of a serious effort to improve, and a mark of how a high-profile name could change attention. Confirm the placing and the number of points.

2022: Sam Ryder. Sam Ryder's "Space Man" finished second in Turin. It won the jury vote, which was a notable result for a country thought to be unpopular with juries, and was behind Ukraine overall after the very large public vote for Kalush Orchestra (Chapter 7). It was the best British result since 1998, according to general reporting, and led to the 2023 contest in Liverpool, hosted on behalf of Ukraine. The success was widely attributed to a strong song, a strong live performance and an investment of effort, a point that sits awkwardly with the "political" theory.

A test of the theories

The 2022 result is the best test case. If the contest were simply against Britain for political reasons, a strong entry should not have won the jury vote. The result fits the "effort and quality" explanation better, though one result is not proof.

After the high of 2022 the UK's results fell again in 2023 and 2024, according to the usual reports, which supports the view that quality and effort matter from year to year and that a single good year does not alter a trend. The course does not cover the latest contests in detail.

The Voice of British Viewers

For many British viewers, the contest is as much the BBC's commentary as the songs. The commentator for many years was Terry Wogan, whose dry, affectionate mockery set a tone for how a large British audience watched the show, and the role passed afterwards to Graham Norton. The commentary matters here, because it is part of why the contest in Britain is watched with a mixture of enthusiasm and irony. The UK selection show has had several names, and its older name, *A Song for Europe*, is the title of a famous sitcom episode (Chapter 9).

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List the five British winning years and one act for each. Say what happened in 1969 and why the contest needed a tie-break rule afterwards.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Pick two of the four theories for Britain's decline and give one point for and one against each. Say which you find strongest.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Compare 2009 (Andrew Lloyd Webber) and 2022 (Sam Ryder). What did each try, what happened, and what does each tell you about the "political" theory?

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **UK wins:** 1967, 1969, 1976, 1981, 1997
- **1969:** four-way tie for first, between the UK, France, Spain and the Netherlands
- **Hosting:** London, Edinburgh 1972, Brighton 1974, Harrogate 1982, Birmingham 1998, Liverpool 2023
- **Low points:** no points in 2003 and 2021; last places in 2008, 2010 and 2019
- **2009:** Andrew Lloyd Webber and Jade Ewen, fifth
- **2022:** Sam Ryder, "Space Man", second, with the jury win
- **Commentators:** Terry Wogan for many years, then Graham Norton
- **Check:** all placings, the 1969 tie and the claim about second places

Next chapter: Eurovision in Fiction and Fandom, which looks at the contest as a comic and cultural subject.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Eurovision in Fiction and Fandom

*A contest this recognisable is a gift to comedy. It has a fixed form that audiences know, a cast of exaggerated national types, and a sense of the absurd built in. This chapter looks at two well-known fictional treatments, an episode of the sitcom *Father Ted* and the 2020 film about an Icelandic duo, and then at the fans who keep the real contest alive. Plot details are given from general knowledge and from viewers' memory, and are flagged where a rewatch would settle them.*

"A Song for Europe": *Father Ted*

Father Ted is an Irish-British sitcom about three priests and their housekeeper on a remote island off the Irish coast. One of its best-loved episodes, titled "A Song for Europe" after the British selection show (Chapter 3), is about Eurovision. It is from the second series, in the mid-1990s (check the year), and was written by Graham Linehan and Arthur Mathews.

- **The premise.** Ted and Dougal write a song for the Irish selection, generally recalled as "My Lovely Horse". They are in rivalry with another priest, Father Dick Byrne.
- **The joke.** The humour depends on a real worry: Ireland had won so often in the 1990s (Chapter 6) that the cost of hosting was a running joke. In the story the characters' song is so poor that it can only lose.
- **The result.** According to viewers' memory, Ted and Dougal go to the contest and finish last with no points. That ending is the programme's reply to the real habit of Irish success.

Parody needs the real thing

The episode works because the audience already knew the real contest: the national selection, the nervous presenter, the scoreboard and the idea of "nul points" (Chapter 4). A comic episode like this is a good record of how the contest was seen in the mid-1990s.

Memory check

The plot points above are the general memory of the episode, and the course author remembers the final result as nul points and last place. The details of the rivalry, the

selection and the year of broadcast should be confirmed by a rewatch or a reliable episode guide before quoting them.

Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga

This 2020 comedy film stars Will Ferrell and Rachel McAdams as Lars and Sigrit, two musicians from a small Icelandic town who dream of entering the contest. The film is set partly in Edinburgh, where the fictional contest is held, which makes it of local interest to a Scottish reader (check where the filming was done). Several former Eurovision performers appear in cameos, and the song "Husavik" from the film was nominated for an Academy Award for best original song, according to general reports.

- **How they get in.** As the course author recalls, the other finalists in the Icelandic selection are killed when a boat explodes at a party, and the last-placed act, who had not been invited, is left to represent the country. This is the setting of the film's best-known joke.
- **Winning would ruin the country.** The film presents Iceland as a country that does not want to win, because hosting would be a heavy burden. That repeats the real worry behind *Father Ted* (Chapter 6).
- **Reality.** Iceland has never won the contest, though it has finished second (reported for 1999 and 2009; check the years).

Fiction and fact meeting

Both stories turn on the same odd idea, that a small country might prefer to lose. Whether any broadcaster really behaved that way is folklore, but the idea is common enough to underpin two quite different comedies.

Other Appearances

The contest turns up in many other places: documentaries, panel shows, songs that parody the format, and sketches in several countries. A British audience will think first of the BBC's commentary (Chapter 8). When the 2020 contest was cancelled, the organisers broadcast a special programme, *Europe Shine a Light*, in place of the show, which was an example of the contest acting as a shared event even without a competition.

The Fans

Eurovision has a large, devoted and often playful fan community. Common features include:

- **Fan clubs.** The best known is OGAE, an international network of national fan clubs, with its own polls.
- **Watching parties.** Many people host a party on the night, with national food, scorecards and sometimes drinking games.
- **Running jokes.** The key change, the wind machine, pyrotechnics, the singer in a very large costume and the "douze points" call are all part of the shared vocabulary (Chapters 4 and 5).
- **Online debate.** Fans compare songs, argue about juries and keep spreadsheets of past results, which is why fan sites are a useful but secondary source (Chapter 1).
- **Community.** For many fans, especially gay fans, the show has long been an event where they feel at home (Chapter 7).

Why the Contest Works as Comedy

Its elements are all easy to parody. It takes itself seriously and invites laughter, so the audience can enjoy the songs and the joke at the same time. It is built on national stereotypes, which comedy can exaggerate. It has a clear ritual of scores that anyone can recognise. And it is partly affectionate: most parodies are made by people who like the contest. This is why the comedy has not harmed it, and may have helped it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain the real-world background that makes the *Father Ted* episode work, and say which parts of your account are memory that you would check.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Compare the *Father Ted* episode and the *Fire Saga* film. What idea do they share, and how does each tell it?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe three habits of Eurovision fans, and explain why comedy about the contest is usually affectionate.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Father Ted, "A Song for Europe"**: second series, mid-1990s; Ted and Dougal, "My Lovely Horse"; last with no points (recalled)
- **Fire Saga (2020)**: Will Ferrell and Rachel McAdams; Icelandic duo; set in Edinburgh; "Husavik"
- **Shared idea**: a small country that would rather not win
- **Reality**: Iceland has never won; Ireland won often in the 1990s
- **Fans**: OGAE, parties, shared jokes, spreadsheets
- **2020**: contest cancelled; *Europe Shine a Light* broadcast instead
- **Check**: plot details, years and the filming locations

Next chapter: Capstone: What the Contest Says About Europe, which draws the course together.

The Eurovision Song Contest

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: What the Contest Says About Europe

This last chapter steps back from the details. It asks what the contest has been, what it shows about Europe and about television, and how to talk about it carefully. It draws on the earlier chapters and ends with suggestions for further reading and viewing. As throughout the course, it separates what can be checked from folklore and memory, and the exercises ask you to do the same. Recent results end with the 2026 contest.

What the Contest Has Been

The contest began in Lugano in 1956 as a way for the broadcasters of a few countries to share a live programme (Chapter 2). It built a format of national entries, semi-finals, a final and a points ceremony (Chapter 3), and a voting system that has been changed repeatedly, from closed juries through the 12-point scale and televoting to a mix of the two (Chapter 4). It produced songs and stars that outlasted their results (Chapter 5), put a bill on its winners (Chapter 6), absorbed the politics of its era (Chapter 7), gave Britain a long and uneven story (Chapter 8), and became a subject for comedy and a community for fans (Chapter 9).

What It Tells Us

About Europe

The list of participants has followed the map of politics: new countries after 1989, wars that shut some out, and members outside the geographic continent. "Europe" in the title means the broadcasters' union as much as a place.

About television

A shared live event, voted on by the audience, has outlasted many programmes. The shift from juries to phone votes to a mix tracks the technology of the time.

About national identity

Countries use the contest to present themselves, whether seriously or with a joke,

About taste

Popular music, camp, folk traditions and novelty sit side by side on one stage. The

and to settle old rivalries in a harmless way. Some of it is also not harmless (Chapter 7).

contest is a record of what Europeans thought a good song was, or a good joke.

The course's question, answered carefully

Chapter 1 asked whether Eurovision is a music competition, a television event or a mirror of European politics. A careful answer is that it is all three at once, and the balance changes from year to year. The songs are the reason people watch, the television format is what makes it shared, and the politics is what arrives whenever countries are asked to vote for one another. As my own judgement, and not a finding, the contest is probably best understood as a ritual that Europeans use to argue about themselves, in a form safe enough to enjoy.

What Stays and What Changes

Stays	Changes
One song per country, performed live	The voting method, repeatedly
Points read out country by country	The language rule and the live orchestra
The winner usually hosts next	The number of countries, and who counts as one
The mixture of the serious and the absurd	The semi-finals, the Big Five and the audience

Record, Folklore and Memory

The same three categories from Chapter 1 apply to the whole course.

Kind	Examples from the course
Record	The first contest in 1956; the 12-point scale (generally 1975); Britain's five wins; Ukraine's wins in 2004, 2016 and 2022; the 2020 cancellation
Folklore	"Norway, nul points" as a phrase said on air; the claim that a broadcaster tried to lose; the claim that all of Britain's low results were political

Kind	Examples from the course
Memory	Favourite acts, outfits, who commented in which year, the plot of a sitcom episode seen long ago

What still needs checking

Many facts in this course were given from general knowledge, the course author's recollection and a few supplied results, and the text has said so as it went: the dates of rule changes, the scoring history, individual placings, the list of zero scores, the reasons for each hosting exception, the details of recent controversies, the plots of the sitcom and film, and the 2025 and 2026 results. Before using any of them elsewhere, check each against the contest's official site and archive.

What to Read and Watch Next

- **The official site and archive.** Start with results by year and the full shows, and compare an old contest with a recent one.
- **Broadcaster archives.** National broadcasters keep clips and background on their entries. The BBC's coverage is a good place to hear the British commentary (Chapter 8).
- **Related courses.** The course *Jeux Sans Frontières (It's a Knockout): Europe's Game Show*, on this site, covers another shared European programme carried on the same broadcasting network (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this course). A future course on the European Union covers the political side of the continent.
- **Your own memory.** If you watched a contest, write down what you recall and then test each point against the archive. It is a good exercise in separating memory from record.

A Closing Thought

A song contest seems a light subject, but it records, year by year, what Europeans chose to send to each other and how they judged it. The costumes and the wind machines are the surface. Underneath are broadcasters, borders, money and the question of who gets to be part of the show. That is a reasonable thing for a course to take seriously, and a reasonable thing to enjoy.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Write a one-paragraph history of the contest, naming at least one fact from each of Chapters 2, 4, 6 and 8.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Pick one claim from the course and classify it as record, folklore or memory. Explain what you would check to confirm it.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

In about 150 words, argue whether Eurovision is mainly a music contest, a television event or a mirror of European politics, giving one point on each side.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Origin:** Lugano, 1956, organised by the EBU
- **Format:** national entries, semi-finals, a final, juries and public vote
- **Voting:** juries, the 12-point scale, televoting, a mix of the two
- **Hosting:** the winner hosts; a cost as well as a prize
- **Politics:** neighbours, eligibility, Russia and Ukraine, Israel
- **Britain:** five wins, many low results, 2009 and 2022
- **Culture:** Father Ted, Fire Saga, fan clubs

- **Habits:** separate record, folklore and memory; check before quoting

Course complete. Return to The Eurovision Song Contest 1 for the scope and sources.