

try. It celebrates a medieval Polish victory over the Teutonic Knights, and is an effective battle piece somewhat in the manner of Liszt's *Hunnen-schlacht*. Two overtures were also played, Szalowski's amusing piece and Hindemith's ballet overture, *Cupid and Psyche*. Finally the English section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, formerly a war casualty, has now revived and is giving a series of chamber concerts while it prepares actively for the ISCM Festival in July.

From all this several conclusions emerge. Popular interest in modern music has definitely increased during the war, though to nothing like the extent of the now widespread interest in the older classical music. Nevertheless some composers, particularly those like Britten whose style is not too complex to understand, have achieved a definite popular following. Interest in the more difficult styles is still confined to a comparative minority, but even here it is growing, and Bartok, for instance, has at last begun to come into his own with the general public. Lack of concert halls and shortage of labor for printing are still handicapping performances and publication. But the increasing exchanges of performers and new works with those of other countries should have an important effect on the future of English music.

Humphrey Searle

## ITALY THROWS OFF FASCISM

Florence, May 1946

**I**F the American public has been for many years little or ill-informed about the state of contemporary music in Italy, the same might be said of the Italians themselves, had we based our knowledge on our daily papers. The quality of journalistic criticism deteriorated during the years of dictatorship to an almost grotesque point. A few isolated critics of good faith (Andrea Della Corte, to name one of them) could do little to oppose the multitude of bankrupt musicians whose "criticism" at times brought terror to its victims, at others even resulted in extortion. Helpless too was the *Rassegna Musicale*, edited by Guido M. Gatti, one review which tried to keep free of political influence, to maintain its ideals without compromise.

The Florentine Musical May of 1939 included the first performance of Vito Frazzi's *King Lear*, which was received with general approval. The next day, in *Popolo d'Italia* (Mussolini's own newspaper) the critic Alceo Toni angrily attacked the composer for daring to put on the stage a situation so divergent from the theoretical Fascist conception of a "model family." A year later my own *Night Flight* (based on an excerpt from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry) was presented. And the same critic thundered, "What low altitude for a work of today. . . . Are we to send our aviators to see it, to tone up their nerve and kindle their enthusiasm?"

Every occasion was a good one to play politics. Once we read that it was high time to stop writing quartets and chamber music, since these could not be appreciated by audiences of twenty-thousand persons. The "Theatre for the Twenty-thousand" was part of Mussolinian rhetoric.

But there were even worse things. Some musicians never missed a chance to tax the avant-garde with "internationalist" mentality, which in Fascist language was equivalent to an explicit accusation of communism or at least anti-Fascism. At times these unsuccessful composers turned critics reached pathological depths. Ennio Porrino (author of a worthless opera, *The Horatii and the Curiatii*) wrote in *Perseo* in 1938, "We will remember these gentlemen who are trying to conceal the internationalist and Bolshevik character of their music under the covering term, Europeanism."

Criticism in Italy today has naturally improved, though not many Fascist critics have been eliminated. But at least there are new forces at work in the press. Now, if he wishes, a composer can strike back at unjustified accusations, something that only yesterday would have been not only rash but unimaginable.

### III

Pizzetti, Casella, Malipiero and Tommasini have been well-defined personalities for some decades. These masters, now past sixty, are not blazing new trails but rather working out further syntheses of their experience. Pizzetti's *Violin Concerto* last fall aroused the enthusiasm of both public and critics in Rome. Casella demonstrated his mastery once more in his *Missa Solemnis Pro Pace*. Tommasini's *Concerto* for string orchestra was a sensation, and much is expected of Malipiero's great oratorio, *Vergilii Aeneis*, based on two episodes from the Aeneid, the death of Dido and the wedding of Lavinia.

Antonio Veretti is reworking his *Il Favorito del Re*, which was the storm-centre of La Scala's 1932 season. Mario Labroca is composing a *Passion*. Virgilio Mortari and Nino Rota are still writing clear, spontaneous music; they both favor a simplicity of line and profess to be little interested in "problems." Louis Cortese, a polytonalist, is working on a *Prometheus Bound*, and Gian Luca Tocchi's *Nocturne and Dance* for flute, viola and harp shows the success of his recent rigorous study of the instruments.

The composers who are of greatest interest to the readers of MODERN MUSIC belong to the avant-garde. These are not composers from any one city, nor do they constitute a school. But it is they who are the most discussed, the most daring. I don't know what inner process led Federico Ghedini (born in 1892) to his great act of courage in 1940, the *Architectures* for orchestra, which immediately classified him with the group in question. Long before 1940 Ghedini had an enthusiastically receptive public.

When his *Albatross Concerto* was given in Florence recently, the press was unanimous in the opinion that the works preceding the *Architectures* were far superior to those following it – a judgment diametrically opposed to mine, to Ghedini's and to that of the better Italian critics.

Riccardo Nielsen of Bologna (born in 1908) has also found himself at a relatively late date. In 1943 he turned from a Stravinskyan model to the twelve-tone technique. In this style he has composed *Two Madrigals* for four voices and twenty-seven instruments, and, most recently, a one-act monodrama, *The Incubus*, his most accomplished work to date. Adone Zecchi, another Bolognese, also adopted the twelve-tone system for the first time, in his *Requiem* for men's voices and orchestra (1943). This was soon followed by an *Invective* for the same combination. Recently he has composed *Two Fugues* on a series of nine notes.

Goffredo Petrassi has had an international reputation since the success of his *Partita* in 1933. Lately he has achieved a more mature independence from his first influences, Hindemith and Stravinsky, as his most recent works testify, especially the *Four Hymns* for baritone and organ, the *Eight Inventions* for piano, and the recent ballet, *Don Quixote*.

About my own work I should like to add these few words. I was the first in Italy to study and apply the principles of the twelve-tone system. In *Night Flight* (1940) a melodic series appeared; in the three cycles of *Greek Lyrics* it is applied integrally. Now I am working on an opera in one act and a prologue, *The Prisoner*, the libretto taken from a *conte cruel* by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *La Torture par l'espérance*. In it I hope to express the sufferings of Europe during the last years.

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