THE Musical Times

ESTABLISHED IN 1844

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 60, No. 919 (Sep. 1, 1919), pp. 500-501

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3701995>

Accessed: 31/01/2015 18:34

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round, the music at the picture-houses is of a fairly good class, up-to-date classical items being included in most programmes.

Dr. Grattan Flood's 'John Field: Inventor of the Nocturne,' will shortly be published by the Caudle Press.

Recent visitors to St. Patrick's have been sorry to learn of the rather serious illness of the accomplished organist, Dr. Charles G. Marchant, who has so capably directed the music of the national Cathedral since 1879.

ITALY'S VOCAL TRADITION.

BY E. HERBERT CESARI.

In most quarters of the world, and particularly in English-speaking countries, the ambition of students of the vocal art is to complete their studies in Italy. While the reasons for this predilection are many, it may be cited that the most perfect examples of beautiful singing have been provided by the Italians, and indisputably the finest voices have come from Italy. These alone would be sufficient to inspire vocal students with a desire to study in the same school which produced these prodigies; but another, and perhaps more impelling reason is that the highest pinnacle attainable by a singer is to take part in Italian Grand Opera. The principal passport into the great opera houses throughout the world where Italian opera is performed is a record of operatic successes in Italy. The singer who has not achieved success in Italy has very little chance of being engaged by the impresarios of the big undertakings, although there are of course exceptions to this, as indeed there are to every other rule.

The attraction that Italy has for vocal students from all parts of the world is extraordinary. It is also very dangerous, because the average student regards Italy as a sort of magic land where vocal miracles are performed for the asking, so that it is only necessary to get there and the rapid mounting of the ladder of fame will follow as a natural consequence. Singers have generally such supreme confidence in their latent powers that it seems to them that if only they can get to Italy then the great obstacle has been overcome and the rest is easy. But no art is easy, and singing is as difficult and complicated an art as any other.

This exaggerated estimate of Italy is unfortunate because students come here with a wrong idea. Instead of coming prepared to settle down to the hardest work, they regard study as a light affair, and seem only to plan to have a good time, combining business with pleasure. Thus much disillusionment and the crumbling of dream castles can be accounted for.

Italy has always been representative of the art of singing, and will always continue as such notwithstanding the distinctly palpable decadence which the art has undergone during the last fifty years. In no other country in the world is song felt so acutely to be the quintessence pervading the very existence of the entire nation, from the highest to the lowest rank, as it is in Italy. It is predominant and all-prevalent. The mystic attraction and fascination enshrouding Italy, of which most foreigners are keenly sensible—and which is indefinable—is also felt by the Italians themselves. As with many other branches of art, song had birth in Italy. The memory of the past is the attraction of the present. Song has had its part in the formation of this fascination and subtle magnetism. Song flourished in Italy long before other countries became alive to the latent potentialities of the human voice. The Italian voice is universally recognised as being the finest for beauty of tone and flexibility. Further, the question has often been asked concerning the reason for the abundance of voices in that country. A solution may be found in the hypothesis that the intrinsic melliflence of the Italian language (to which must be added, as contributory factors, the effects of climate and temperament) is directly conducive to the development of a superior set of throat muscles which are constantly receiving from early childhood not only physical exercise but also mental excitation, such development being atavistic, and the aptitude for song instinctive in the race. This mental development might be compared with the theory advanced that racehorses and greyhounds have attained their present proportions indicative of speed and agility through the continued mental and physical endeavour of generations of these animals pitted

against one another in the race. Where thought is action and action thought, the sum of well-directed continuity is growth and development. In Italy song is a national development, mental as well as physical—it is a national exuberance. Spain can be said to be the rival of Italy in point of quality in voices. It is however the quantity as well as the quality of voices born in Italy which is so astounding. So many of the *contadini* have glorious voices, developed naturally, singing, as do the birds, out of pure joy, with absolute freedom of throat. If approached by an inquiry as to whether they would care to study for the theatre, they enjoy the 'joke,' shrug their shoulders, and say that they have no desire whatsoever to become a *comico*. Many of these peasants, and especially those of Southern Italy, are far from lacking the requisite intelligence and verve to follow a serious course of vocal study, but to them the idea of the theatre is preposterous and not serious. Many of the greatest singers, past and present, come from the people. Italy still gives birth to many wonderful voices; competent masters, however, are lacking.

It is a fallacy that all throats are alike in construction. Nothing is further from the truth. The difference lies not only in the greater or lesser elasticity of the vocal ligaments, but also in the major or minor mobility and responsiveness of the pharyngeal parts as an integral whole when co-operating in the formation of sounds the spontaneity of which is but the direct result of throat muscles brought to a pitch of obedient perfection.

Very little reflection is required to satisfy ourselves that among more Northern nations speech tends to become guttural, and the number of fine voices fewer. With exceptions, English, German, and Russian voices do not possess the attractive quality and thrill of Italian or Spanish voices, neither have they that same facile extension and soulfulness. The Irish are more akin to the Latin races in temperament, while approaching them also in euphony of racial speech. They have given birth to some superb voices, quite capable of holding their own abroad.

Speaking a smooth, sweet-flowing language is a continual vocal gymnastic, and is undoubtedly a distinct aid to the correct 'placing' of the singing voice. The Italian language, into which no guttural sounds have been introduced, is first for suavity, whilst it is also first for the emission of pure vocal sounds. Yet Italy is not now producing singers that could be favourably compared with those of past glories, although beautiful voices still abound. The *bel canto* is, however, in a deplorable state of decay.

ITALY'S VOCAL DECADENCE.

The scarcity of genuine masters is the prime cause of vocal decadence to-day, whose baneful repercussion is everywhere manifest. This pernicious decay element could be crushed by solving the question of 'methods'—so-called—of singing. The terms 'method' and 'school' as applied to the teaching of singing should be abolished, because they are misleading. Half a century ago fifty masters had but one way of teaching, based on natural emission; to-day fifty masters have fifty different 'methods' or 'schools,' each vaunting pet theories of his own, duly magnified by the masters as discoveries or innovations.

In her time Italy has yielded the finest master-singers and singer-masters. How does she stand to-day in this respect? As a matter of sober fact she can lay no claim to superabundance, whether it be in singers or masters. There is still a slight ascendancy over other countries by reason of the existence of some of the 'old guard,' who are imparting their knowledge to the younger prospective exponents of the art as conceived by them and by their precursors. Masters who have reached the very core of their art are now rare among Italians. Some have emigrated, a few only remain. There are also some good masters abroad who are not Italians. It is difficult, however, to get a grip of the *bel canto* idea as the old singers meant it without having first sojourned in this country, which is so very much more in touch with nature in this respect. The air would seem to exude music and song. The sweet musical language, the surroundings, tradition—all are powerful coefficients in a musical education, especially with regard to singing. The *bel canto* means beautiful singing, and is but the development and education of the voice along natural lines. Rather than an art, it is an artful return to nature. The frequent fault of many masters who

have received accurate teaching is that they try to improve on the hard-and-fast rules handed down to them, and adduce for so doing the dogma of modern physiology on the subject, which is still unsatisfactory in its attempt to explain the mystery of vocal mechanism. Many *soi-disant* masters profess to teach the *bel canto*, about which they have not the remotest idea. The intelligent perusal of treatises is useless for the acquisition of sufficient knowledge. Nothing short of actual personal endeavour, into which meditation takes no small part, guided by suggestions and examples of an experienced *bona-fide* teacher, can give an insight into the *bel canto*.

In Italy to-day there are hundreds of masters who are devoid of all fundamental knowledge of the art of singing except for a few ideas picked up haphazard, interspersed with some stock phrases drawn from a treatise or two written by competent men. Such is their sole equipment for an enterprise abounding in intricacies. During the last decade there has been a mania—as unscrupulous as it is insensate—on the part of many pianoforte- and music-teachers generally, and even accompanists, to turn their hand to teaching singing in consideration of its lucrative possibilities. In passing, I may state that one of the most distinguished professors of music in Italy admitted having been drawn momentarily into this cajoling vortex only to retire immediately on feeling his total incompetence. The conscientious ones—the real artists—have returned to their own particular profession. The song-wolves, styling themselves professors, would seem to prosper for a time. They impose their ‘method’ on the inexperienced, trustful, and, may be, enthusiastic pupils. Often they are brilliant pianists, and hypnotise their pupils by pianistic acrobatics. Dazzled by such technique, the tyros take for granted their ability to teach singing, and do not reflect that in order to train a voice much experience on the part of a master is necessary, the only way to sing being that based on naturalness, the understanding and absorption of which entails profound personal study of the idiosyncrasy of the vocal organ, not essentially from a physiological but rather from a practical point of view. Only years of unremitting, thoughtful study can give experience, competency, and consequent mastery over one of the most difficult of arts.

My limited space does not permit development of this subject as it merits. It is so vast that a volume would be necessary to embrace the whole question satisfactorily, and appease the appetite of curious students hungering for definite, reliable information.

There is a potent force, a very great fount of power and good behind the beautiful voice of a singer. Every effort to redeem and restore to present and future generations the traditions of a glorious past would be worthy of the noble art of singing.

Musical Notes from Abroad.

BRUSSELS.

The summer holiday of the Monnaie was of a month's duration only, and on August 1 it re-opened with ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ chosen as a tribute to the memory of Gounod, whose centenary it was impossible to celebrate at Brussels last year, as the Opera House was closed. The revival of this charming opera was a marked success. It was evident that a lot of work had been done in connection with the scenery both in new effects and in re-painting the old ones. Two artists new to the Monnaie were in the cast—Madame Helbronner, a delightful soprano from the Opéra-Comique, Paris, and Mlle. Terka Lyon, who was formerly an actress at the Théâtre du Parc, Brussels. Her change to the operatic stage had been a success in Paris and naturally in Brussels she was warmly welcomed. The season at the Monnaie promises to be very interesting.

M. Anseau, fresh from his successes at Covent Garden, has returned, and goes to the Monnaie in October.

On the occasion of the recent visit of President Poincaré several decorations were handed to musicians, notably E. Ysaye, Kufferath, director, and Strong, conductor of the orchestra of the Monnaie. At the recent examinations at the Conservatoire, Brussels, a boy of ten gained the ‘1er prix’ with honours in advanced theory of music.

The death is recorded here of F. Renard, the violinist, at the age of seventy-one. His latter years were devoted to teaching more than to public performances. He is best known, perhaps, as the composer of a popular ‘Berceuse’ for violin.

MILAN.

A NEW OPERA, ‘IL PERGOLESE.’

The first performance of a new opera, ‘Il Pergolese,’ composed by Maestro Lamberto Landi, took place at the Carcano Theatre on June 7. The subject of this work is based on the legendary love-story of Pergolesi and Princess Maria Spinelli. According to this story, the tie of ardent sympathy was discovered by the young patrician's brother, who constrained her to enter a convent. For Pergolesi nothing remained but to compose and conduct the music of the vestural Mass to be held in the church on Maria taking the veil. The unfortunate attachment caused the death of Maria a few months after this event. On this legend, which has found credence with various historians and even by Florimo—although it is practically certain that it has no sure foundation—Marsili, the librettist, has built the subject-matter for this opera. It lays no pretence to literary merit, but effectively exploits the romantic and sentimental elements of the story.

The impression made by the first performance was favourable. The opera is not, neither is it meant to be, a ponderous score requiring dissection. It will work into the sympathies of music-lovers, especially as it calls into prominent relief the figures of the genius Pergolesi. Landi, the composer, who hails from Lucca, the birthplace of Puccini, had several calls before the curtain, and was given a whole-souled reception.

To judge by the frequency of performances, Beethoven's ninth Symphony has come again into particular favour. On June 7, in the Teatro Regio at Turin, it received an admirable performance under Toscanini, when a hundred professors played, and the choral forces numbered three hundred voices. The soloists were Di Giovanni, Toti, Dal Monte, Ida Bergamasco, and Paolo Ludikar. The Prelude and the ‘Good Friday’ music from ‘Parsifal’ preceded the Symphony, which was repeated the next evening. Since then the Beethoven work has been given in the large hall of the Verdi Conservatorium, Milan, again preceded by the Wagnerian items above mentioned. The choir of two hundred and eighty voices was divided into four groups—sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, tenors, and basses. Of these, a hundred and fifty singers were amateurs. The orchestra numbered a hundred and twenty players. The same soloists who lent their services to the Turin performances were also present on this occasion, and Toscanini was the conductor. One and all got a tremendous reception. On June 20 the Symphony was heard for the fourth time. Every performance saw the Conservatorium packed to overflowing. A few days later the great Maestro gave his last concert there. The programme consisted of Haydn's Symphony in D major, the Overture to Beethoven's ‘Leonora’ No. 3, Respighi's ‘Fontane di Roma’ (‘The fountains of Rome’—a great favourite), Dukas's ‘L'Apprenti Sorcier,’ the Prelude to ‘The Mastersingers’ and ‘Life of the Forest,’ Wagner.

Toscanini the indefatigable closed the season of symphonic concerts at the People's Theatre on June 24 by conducting the same programme given a few days before at the Conservatorium: The Overture No. 3 of ‘Leonora,’ the Prelude to ‘The Mastersingers,’ and smaller pieces.

There is to be a grand open-air concert, ‘pro orfani infanti,’ on July 13, at the Arena, Milan.

E. HERBERT-CÉSARI.

Milan.

The ex-service men at the Chappell Pianoforte Company's factory made a presentation to Mr. William Boosey on July 18, in token of their gratitude to Mr. Boosey and the firm for generous treatment during their absence on service.

The South-West Choral Society re-starts work on September 23, the season's programme being ‘Elijah,’ ‘Hiawatha,’ and ‘The Redemption.’ The conductor is Mr. Arthur R. Saunders.