

Review: Church Music in Northern Italy

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CHURCH MUSIC IN NORTHERN ITALY.*

As in his previous valuable writings on cathedrals, English and foreign, Mr. T. Francis Bumpus, in this his latest volume, has made architecture his main theme, but he keeps his ears as well as his eyes wide open and, while graphically describing 'frozen music,' he, as heretofore, records his impressions of the music he heard during his pleasant peregrinations. His Italian journey included Trent, Verona, Venice, Ravenna, Milan, and cathedrals and churches in Lombardy.

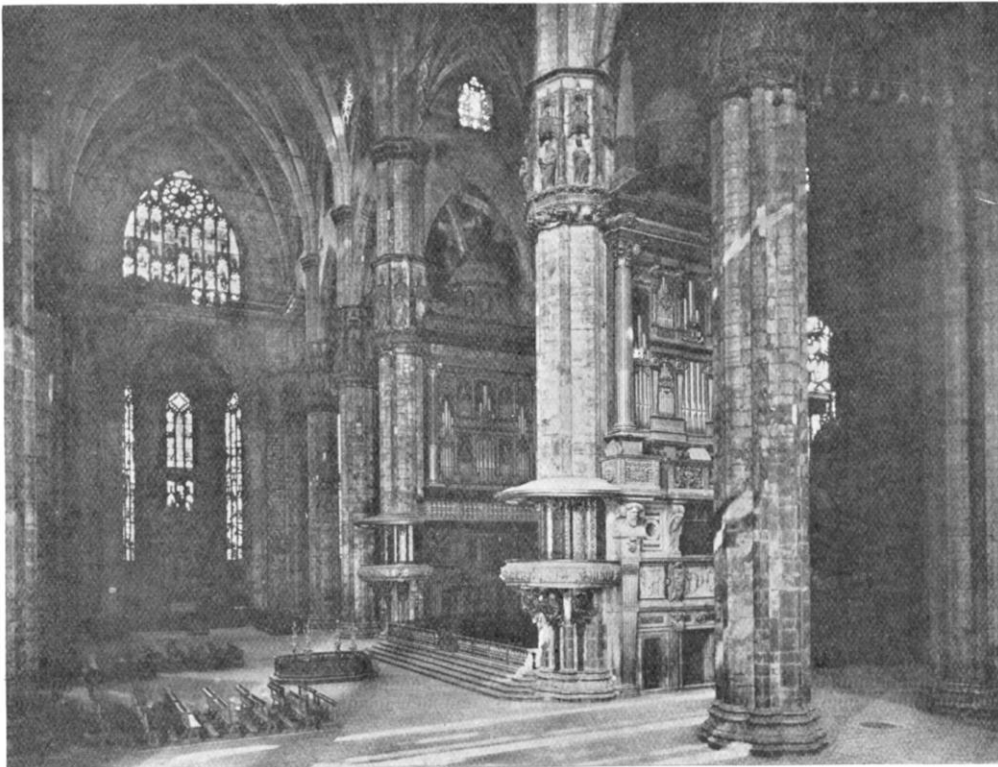
The limited use to which the great organ, at the west end, is put in Italian churches is referred to under Trent Cathedral :

The organ, situated in the stone gallery at the west end, already alluded to, now broke in with ravishing effect. It was, however, only used for the interlude which, as I subsequently found in all the Italian cathedrals I visited at

At half-past nine Terce was sung by the canons in the apse and by a choir of men and boys in the garb of every-day life in the gallery, before the organ which, in accordance with almost universal usage in Italy, is placed above the stalls. At Verona, and indeed in many another great Italian church, there are two organs thus situated, the cases of which are truly magnificent, being flanked by two lofty Corinthian columns, while the pipes are protected by painted shutters, thrown back when the instrument is in use.

The singing of the psalms in this cathedral evidently impressed Mr. Bumpus. He says :

The psalms were most interesting, the verses being sung alternately to the plain chant by the canons, and in concerted parts by the choir in the gallery, not however, I thought, with much feeling or delicacy. Such a rendering was quite a novelty, as I had never heard the psalms chanted in a



MILAN CATHEDRAL : VIEW ACROSS THE CHOIR, SHOWING THE DIVIDED ORGAN.

(From 'The Cathedrals and Churches of Northern Italy,' by Mr. T. Francis Bumpus.)

the time of service, is played between every clause of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, *Credo*, etc., the plain chant being unaccompanied. But when the Offertorium, *Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur* had been sung, the instrument was heard to great advantage in a short piece, but of so solemn and church-like a character, that music and architecture seemed on this occasion at least to be thoroughly in accord.

At Verona—where, it will be remembered, Sir John Stainer died—the two organs in the cathedral are enclosed. To quote further from this interesting book :

Continental church except to the Gregorian tones, with, in France, the occasional addition of an embroidery in the shape of the *faux bourdon*.

The fullest account given of a church service is that of Modena Cathedral, a very beautiful building possessing one of 'the loveliest of North Italian campaniles' :

Solemn Vespers of the *Corpus Domini* were about to commence when I passed from all the glory of the afternoon sunshine into the cathedral. As I set foot within the nave, where the first thing that attracted my wandering gaze was a black poodle dog, shaved in the most approved fashion, and calmly seated on the steps of one of the side altars, the organ

* *The Cathedrals and Churches of Northern Italy*. By T. Francis Bumpus. With eighty-one illustrations, nine of which are in colour. London : T. Werner Laurie. 1907. Price 16s.

struck up a solemn piece, and the officiants—three priests and two choir rulers, all in cloth of gold copes—came slowly forth from the sacristy.

Advancing up the dusky northern aisle, I mounted the stately *escalier* at the end of it, and took my station close to the parclose screen of the choir, ready to assist at the service. A small one-manual organ—the only instrument the cathedral boasts—stood on the floor against the northern wall of the quasi-transept, and about it was stationed a choir of men who sang the psalms in concerted parts under the baton of an ecclesiastic, while the antiphons were chanted to the plain song by the clergy in the apse of the high choir. The latter got a trifle flat, causing the faces of the outside choir, who, by the way, were in the garb of every-day life, to exhibit tokens of risibility, while sundry winks and nudges which passed between them had anything but an ecclesiastical appearance. The Office hymn, the *Lauda -Stant Salvatorem*, sung to its proper ancient melody, was very enjoyable, but at the conclusion of the *Magnificat* the individuals in plain clothes above mentioned decamped, leaving the inside choir to get on as best they might, and making a good deal of unnecessary clatter as they descended the steps and went out along the aisle, through whose open door the sunlight playing on the pavement of the piazza in front of the cathedral produced a most charming effect.

Organ-playing seems to be at a low ebb in Italian churches, judging by some of the voluntaries Mr. Bumpus heard. At Verona

The procession did not at once enter the choir but passed across the Cathedral to a chapel in the South aisle, where the Bishop offered up some preliminary devotions, the organist playing meanwhile the slow movement from the overture to *Zampa*! But then one does not feel surprised at anything he may see or hear in an Italian place of worship. Mr. Street in his *Brick and Marble* alludes to the abominably light opera music he heard in many a church, and which sounded, as may readily be imagined, very discordant within their solemn walls, adding that he had even heard a polka played by the organist of St. Mark's, Venice; and a friend whose veracity is not to be impugned informs me that one of the organ pieces played during High Mass at Milan was the *Largo al factotum* from Rossini's *Il Barbière di Siviglia*!

The following summarises the opinion which our author formed of Italian church music during his travels:

Many a student of ecclesiastical music starts for Italy under the impression that he will hear the sublime strains of Allegri and Palestrina, Orlando di Lasso, and Vittoria in the land of their birth, but when he arrives there he will find himself woefully deceived, *Experto crede*. Although my visit to the Land of Song extended over the whole of June, which last year embraced the great festivals of Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, the Sunday within its octave, the Nativity of St. John the Baptist and St. Peter, spent respectively at Verona, Bologna, Modena, Piacenza, Pavia, and Turin, each containing a cathedral of the first class, the music I heard in them was of the feeblest and most trivial description. Travel certainly expands the mind, but it destroys many a pleasant illusion.

In conclusion, the book is a most readable one from cover to cover. It is fully illustrated and beautifully got up. To anyone interested in church architecture or church music, no more suitable Christmas present or New Year's gift could be found than 'The Cathedrals and Churches of Northern Italy' by Mr. T. Francis Bumpus.

SCHUBERT'S (UNFINISHED) SYMPHONY IN B MINOR.

BY SIR GEORGE GROVE, C.B.

Allegro moderato. B minor.
Andante con moto. E major.

These two movements, and nine bars of a third, are all that exist of Schubert's Eighth Symphony.

They were composed in the year 1822, in company with the opera of 'Alfonso and Estrella' and the Mass in A flat. The autograph manuscript—now in the possession of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna—is on oblong paper, freely but very neatly written, with great grace in the writing, and with but rare corrections. The first page is dated 'Vienna, Oct. 30th, 1822.' This was no doubt the day on which Schubert began to write, and judging from the dates marked on his other Symphonies, the two movements probably occupied him no more than a week or ten days to put on paper. For the *Scherzo* he made considerable sketches, which are also preserved in the library of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna, but they do not seem to have satisfied the composer, and were never completed. The Unfinished Symphony remained in manuscript and concealed till the spring of 1867, when it was published by Spina, of Vienna, and it was first performed in this country at the Crystal Palace Saturday Concert of April 6, 1867.

Symphony No. 6, in C, was performed at the Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts of November 21, 1868, and March 12, 1881. No. 7 (in the key of E) is a sketch, or skeleton, of an unprecedented nature, the work being complete from beginning to end, as to the leading parts; but the score is not filled up after the middle of the first *Allegro*. [This Symphony, which bears the date 'August, 1821,' was given by Ferdinand Schubert to Felix Mendelssohn, who, it is said, intended to have completed it, an intention which his premature death prevented him from carrying out. The score then came into the possession of Paul Mendelssohn, the composer's brother, who presented it to Sir George Grove. The symphony was ultimately completed by Mr. John Francis Barnett, and performed at the Crystal Palace Concerts of May 5, 1883, and March 8, 1884. See a paper, by Mr. Barnett, on the subject, read before the Musical Association on June 9, 1891. *Proceedings*, vol. xvii., 1890-91, p. 177.—ED. M.T.]

Four years and a-half had passed between the Symphony of 1818 (No. 6) and that under notice, and in the interval Schubert had become a man. If we wish to know what that interval did to him, we have only to listen to this B minor Symphony, and to bear No. 6 in mind, and we shall not be in doubt. *That*, though full of the fire and fusing power of real genius, was coloured by all sorts of antecedents. It reflected Haydn, it reflected Rossini, it was the work of a youth—a splendid youth—but still a youth open to all the influences and impressions around him. But, as in the case of a youth not less remarkable, it was the time for 'swallowing formulas,'* and here in his 'Unfinished' Symphony we see Schubert, after swallowing and digesting all the formulas that his predecessors had to administer, giving them out in his own truly original and independent forms and colours. While the Symphony of 1818 was continually recalling some obscure or half-obscure reminiscence, that in B minor never (except perhaps in one place) suggests a thought of anybody or any music but Schubert and his own most characteristic strain. In fact the gap between the work of 1818 and the work of 1822—between the ages of twenty and twenty-four—is both wide and deep.

* Carlyle on Mirabeau in his *French Revolution*, vol. i., Book IV., chap. iv.