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MUSIC NOTES FOR ENGINEERS

With GEORGE S. BONN, '35

ITALY, according to Hollywood, is the land where everybody bursts into song at surprisingly opportune times; the people eat spaghetti and speak Italian when they aren't singing. All their music is light, very melodic, and singable; yet they have not produced exceptionally great names in the lists of art-songs or folk-songs, though the Neapolitan type of song is famous the world over. Such pieces as "Santa Lucia," "Funiculi, Funicula," "O Sole Mio," and "Maria Mari" were written by different men, mostly under the impetus of a contest of some sort. The greatest music produced in Italy was of two totally different kinds: religious music, and operas in which the action hasn't very much to do with the splendid melodies in them.

The foundation of the present-day church music was the work of Giovanni Pierluigi Palestrina, who lived in the sixteenth century. He lived in Rome most of his life, and was choir-master in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore when he composed his most outstanding piece of work, the "Missa Papae Marcelli," which has been considered for all time the perfect example of a Mass. It was written after eight Cardinals had been appointed by Pope Pius IV to investigate the condition of the church music and to discover whether sacred music could be written without resorting to melodies of the ordinary street songs. Palestrina composed this answer and it was accepted as the perfect pattern. Before he died in 1594 he had composed ninety-two Masses, all of which are still used, besides a great many offertories, hymns, and motets, all forerunners of our present church music. In those days church music was sung unaccompanied; today Palestrina's music is still sung without accompaniment.

Opera Buffa

"The Barber of Seville" has been the leading contender for the title of "comic opera," as well as the source of many a baritone's "pièce de resistance," e.g., Lawrence Tibbett in "Metropolitan." Rossini, the composer, was a leap-year baby (in 1792), but he lived long and wrote much. His "William Tell" overture is one of the best house-bringer-down orchestra or band selections we have, even though the rest of the opera is seldom heard. Another one like it is Rossini's "Semiramide." Both of these are brilliant, and full of melody. Remember "Mickey Mouse's Band Concert?"

Donizetti, famous for his "Sextet" from "Lucia di Lammermoor" based on Scott's novel, "The Bride of Lammermoor," wrote many other operas, several of which are comedies. One of these, "L'Elisir d'Amore" (The

Elixir of Love), has at least one number which a tenor can sing well and make his audience enjoy it; "Una furtiva lagrima" (A furtive tear) is frequently on Richard Crooks' programs, and he sings it well, but, here again, the remainder of the opera is seldom heard.

The greatest name in opera anywhere, not including Wagner's music-dramas, is undoubtedly Giuseppe Verdi. Most people are familiar with his music through numerous excerpts of various operas. The "Anvil Chorus" from "Il Trovatore," the "Quartet" from "Rigoletto," the "Drinking Song" from "La Traviata," the "Triumphal March" from "Aida," and parts of "Don Carlos," "The Force of Destiny," and "The Masked Ball" are really well known to the average radio listener, concert devotee, or even motion picture patron. The "Quartet," for instance, was recently done with eight people on each of three parts, and Grace Moore on the other. The important thing about these operas is that they are full of charming melodies, from start to finish. The action is not always consistent, but that doesn't make much difference anyway; however, the action is exciting and vivid, even though it isn't necessarily complete.

Verdi utilized Ethiopia in a much different manner than his present compatriots are; he used it for the setting of his greatest work: "Aida." It was composed for the grand opening of the opera house at Cairo, and has always been a shining example of how opera should be produced; it is one of the few that has an ideal combination of music and plot.

Modern Contributions

Giacomo Puccini, who died in 1924, is also well known through the moving pictures of his operas, or parts of them. "Madame Butterfly" and "La Bohème" are two that have been filmed; "La Bohème" appeared several times, in part, as well as complete. "La Tosca," Puccini's best, is melodramatic to the nth degree; it contains a tenor solo, "E Lucevan le Stelle" (The Stars Shone) which was the source of a lawsuit against the composer of "Avalon"; Puccini is said to have collected \$25,000 damages for use of his melody.

A frequent encore number of orchestras is the light "Intermezzo" from "The Jewels of the Madonna" by one of Italy's living composers, Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari. Perhaps you have heard it over the air—it is used very often. This same man wrote the delightful comedy, "The Secret of Suzanne" (she smoked!) which is short and full of clever songs and scenes. Its overture is also very light and musical, and is often played. No, all composers are not dead.