

## THE FESTIVAL AT VENICE

BY ALFREDO CASELLA

FOR two years I have had the honor—quite a dangerous one—of being a member of the jury which chooses the works for the festivals at Prague, Salzburg and Venice. I have, of course, done my duty conscientiously each time. And each time when I hear the chosen works played at the festivals, I ask myself how it is possible that music read in December in Winterthur and executed a few months later in Austria, Czecho-Slovakia or Italy produces such different impressions. Many works, which, when they presented themselves, trembling and timid, before their judges, seemed good or at least passable, are revealed as frankly poor at the performance.

And this impression is strengthened at each festival organized by the International Society for Contemporary Music. Since I am happily not a member of the jury for the next year, I allow myself to dwell on this observation because I think it touches a problem which is essential, even vital, for the future of the Society. There is no need today to point out the benefits of this institution, even if, beneath the beautiful aspect of disinterestedness and international fraternity it conceals the play of intrigues, ambitions and interests. These are after all inevitable. It is nevertheless evident that the choice of works grows steadily more difficult. The proposal from Zurich that next year the two annual festivals of chamber and of orchestral music be combined into one, and that the orchestral be limited to one concert and the chamber music to three at the most, would undoubtedly serve as a partial remedy for this state of things. But a problem postponed is not a problem solved, and the delicate question of a jury and its composition, its directors and the final choice of works, sooner or later will demand a more satisfactory and definite solution. The future of the Society depends on it.

Meanwhile, as president of the *Corporazione delle nuove musiche*, which has had the honor of organizing the festival of chamber music this year, I would like to speak of the pleasure we had in receiving so many of our foreign confreres at Venice. I think the beauty of the city had more to do with the eagerness of the audience than the beauty of the music we offered. But this criticism is really too obvious, since there are unfortunately no composers today who can produce in music anything to rival the Palazzo Ducale or the Basilica of San Marco. Materially, however, the result was brilliant. There were from five to six hundred visitors more than at Salzburg, and two theatres were sold out the seventh and eighth of September. For the first time there was a financial profit instead of a loss.

As I have already said, the festival did not produce any striking revelations, if one excepts the Hindemith *Concerto* for piano and orchestra, which is a highly dynamic work of singular power. Strawinsky played his new *Sonate pour piano*. (Toscanini became enraged at this music.) It disconcerted those who expected to hear again the Strawinsky of *Petrouchka* or *L'histoire du Soldat* to be suddenly confronted with a work in which were mingled Bach, Beethoven, Chopin and even Thalberg and Cramer. But this sonata is really the logical consequence of the *Octuor pour instruments à vent* and the *Concerto pour piano et harmonie* and therefore offered nothing unforeseen to connoisseurs of Strawinsky. I personally prefer the *Octuor* but the *Sonate pour piano* is nevertheless the work of a great musician and a figure who still occupies the commander's post in international music.

Schoenberg presented his new *Serenade* for voice and seven instruments. Like all of his preceding works, this serenade moves always in the atonal regions, which seem more than ever the most confining of prisons and represent a phase as outgrown in the evolution of music as cubism is in painting. This, needless to say, does not in the least detract from the personality of Schoenberg, which is tremendous, or from the greatness of his art, which is certainly beyond discussion. A work rewarded with great success was the *Daniel Jazz* of Gruenberg. It is very lively and dynamic, full of a delicious humor and, what is most important, thoroughly American in its general spirit. It was the first time

that Broadway made an authentic appearance at the festivals of the Society.

Undoubtedly the best of the French works was Honegger's magnificent *Sonate pour piano et violoncelle*. Ibert's two movements for flute and clarinets also proved a great success. The Italians presented a fresh and gay sonata by Vittorio Rieti for three wind instruments and piano, which recalled the concerto for orchestra by the same author, but is, however, very amusing. Labroca was applauded for his string quartet with which he succeeded in demonstrating that diatonism still has a brilliant future and that the young Italians will no longer have anything to do with atonality. Finally the *Stagioni Italiane* of Malipiero, for voice and piano, won an indisputable triumph—possibly the greatest success of the whole festival. It compels recognition as a work of unusual power, of a vastness of design and a sweep which suggest some great painting by Veronese or Titian, or, in the field of music, of some imposing cantata by Marcello. Also worthy of mention is an interesting, somewhat Scriabinian *Sonate* by Samuel Feinberg, the Soviet pianist. There was other music which was interesting but nothing more.

I believe I may say that of all the works heard during the festival, the most "modern" was without doubt the *Sonata sopra Sancta Maria* by Claudio Monteverdi, which was given on the seventh of September at the Palazzo Ducale.

Nevertheless, the festival as a whole showed a decided majority predisposed to music that is tonal, solid and anti-impressionistic. The other music seemed to belong definitely to the past. This conclusion, which accords with the impression made by former festivals, is sufficient in itself to establish the value of such international tournaments, and is entirely in agreement with my own ideas and those of Italians in general.

