

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

## A YOUNG FLORENTINE

THE imminent production of the opera, *La Mandragola*, by Mario Castelnuovo Tedesco, at the Teatro della Fenice in Venice carries the name of this young Italian, known and esteemed for several years among the musically cultivated, to a still larger public. To encourage the production of operas by living composers, a competition is sponsored annually by the Italian government; the verdict of the jury in this case represents almost official confirmation—late, to be sure, like most official manifestations—of the worth of an artist who, with fine discipline and unerring faith, has studied, worked and accomplished a great deal.

*La Mandragola*, written some years ago, is drawn from the comedy of the same name by Nicoló Machiavelli (1469-1527). The composer himself fashioned the libretto by a little judicious pruning of the original comedy, which remains virtually unchanged.

Castelnuovo has brought this recent work to maturity slowly. It fits ideally into a cycle of his works which one might term Tuscan, even though the individual titles have no direct regional appeal. This cycle begins with his *Canti All' Aria Aperta* and runs through his very recent work *Bacco in Toscana* founded on the famous dithyramb by Francesco Redi (1626-1698) and treated as a choreographic scene with voices.

Castelnuovo, a thoroughbred Florentine, was born in 1895. The general physiognomy of his work bears a striking resemblance to that of the country about him, rich in soft undulating lines, all delicately traced by a whole gamut of colors, grays and greens of every value. The psychology of his work also

resembles that of his own people, whose spirit is ironic, pungently satirical, yet at the same time practical and philosophic.

Castelnuovo is a pupil of Ildebrando Pizzetti and his works show unmistakable derivation from that of the composer of *Debora e Jaele*. But one must concede to him something new and quite his own: a certain sense of humor almost totally lacking in Pizzetti and an aristocracy of thought which reflects a native good taste and broad culture. His work reveals a technical mastery which is really amazing, especially when it is discovered even in his first compositions, written at the age of seventeen. Special mention should be made of Castelnuovo's pieces for pianoforte, an instrument of which he is especially fond, and of the sense of proportion and form manifest in these works. He is the only modern Italian whose music has become a part of the pianist's repertory.

As has been said, the most varied experience in composition preceded his operatic venture. Castelnuovo absorbed and expressed in music the most widely diverse, often the most antagonistic ideas, from the refinements of Aldo Palazzeschi to the classic forms of Leopardi; from the primitive ingenuousness of a French medieval legend to the fervid, bright humanity of Shakespeare, whose tragedies and comedies have yielded him material for about twenty songs.

A copious production, it is not all of equal value. One can detect a sort of shadow zone, a period of youthful groping, a phase of insecurity, almost of bewilderment, which has now been passed. Castelnuovo's latest efforts, *Piedigrotta 1924*, a Neapolitan rhapsody; *Le Danze del Re David*, a Hebrew rhapsody; *Concerto Italiano* for violin and orchestra; the *Ditirambo* for the theatre, and various delightful settings of poems by Redi are altogether reassuring.



An opera, especially a comic opera like *Mandragola*, should be judged in the theatre; to express even a superficial opinion after merely reading the vocal score is hardly opportune.

But one does not hesitate to say that *La Mandragola* shows the sure effect of the tendency to simplify, common to all the young schools. At the same time, there is also a tendency to sing which seems to me the leading characteristic of certain Italian musicians who are somewhat outside the modern movement—almost withdrawn in a sort of isolation which although it may appear to be provincial, is not.

In *La Mandragola* as in the *Concerto Italiano*, there is more than one surrender to the charm of melody, which is noteworthy not only as indicating a tendency but also for its value in expression. That this attitude might be called "Italian" seems to me beside the point, since we are no longer dealing with any artificial imitation of melodic formulas used in the past but with an out and out melodic line that unfolds itself amply, with restraint, and above all with an absence of qualms about being too sentimental or seeming *coram populo*. This, which may be either boldness or weakness, according to whoever judges, seems to me one of the greatest merits of the work of Castelnuovo. Young, even among the younger set, smiled upon by fortune from the beginning, this Florentine has known how to resist the temptation of throwing himself in the vanguard. Within the walls of his native Florence he has withdrawn more and more into himself, seeking always to reveal those characteristics which have gradually been shown to be individual. Thus he has followed one path without deviation or perilous turnings, not closing his ears to the voices of others but contemplating all with that true Florentine spirit which is pre-eminently ready to mock the defects and inconsistencies of things and of men.

*By Guido Gatti*

### HONEGGER'S "JUDITH"

FROM incidental music written last summer for the Swiss production of *Judith*, the biblical play by René Morax, Honegger has drawn the material for an opera which was most successfully performed in Monte Carlo on February thirteenth. To bind together the choruses, solos and symphonic passages already in existence, all that was necessary were some recitative