

like that for the Andalusian baile, the dancer executed a stylized interpretation of the bolero, amid the growing excitement of a crowd of spectators, encouraging her with their applause and their pounding heels. At the moment when the music took a dramatic turn, we saw a brawl. Everything seemed to be swept along by the music, a most beautiful spectacle.

If the *Baiser de la Fée* lacked life, *Le Bolero* overflowed with it. This music has absorbed all the sunlight of Spain; Ravel, born near the frontier, in real Basque country, has always been fascinated by Spanish art. We remember his fine *Rapsodie Espagnole* with which in his youth he demonstrated his mastery of the orchestra. His newest work is destined to immediate popularity because of its irresistible rhythmic force and dazzling color.

Henry Prunières

PIZZETTI'S FRA GHERARDO

FRA GHERARDO, Ildebrando Pizzetti's opera soon to be introduced to New York, instead of being a logical development of his original dramatic style, shows a marked divergence from it.

Not that Pizzetti has betrayed or denied his conception of the drama, which made such a splendid clean sweep of all previous musical traditions of the stage in *Fedra* and later in *Debora e Jaele*. He is too fine and conscientious an artist for that. But it is obvious that he has been grafting alien elements on his own austere and logical style, tending to a new method, which, in *Fra Gherardo*, reveals a gradual, though not complete, reunion of his art with that of nineteenth century melodrama, especially Verdi's.

Is the result a conflict of two antagonistic forces, harmful to his own operatic style? Or is it a new and living form? While his original conception was, it is true, a fused and solidified synthesis of various elements, it was dominated by one logical idea. His new work is the fruit of two mutually contradictory theories.

Most of us are familiar with his original principle that drama should eliminate purely decorative elements and lyrical outbursts which interrupt its development. This dictated the style that

gave us the rich tragedy of *Fedra*, the vigorous, kaleidoscopic life of the crowd in *Debora* (the most marvelous living crowd on the musical stage), and the dramatic episodes of Jael and Lisera. *Debora*, despite certain obvious reminiscences, contains some of the most original and lovely passages in music-drama.

Such a conception seems a priori to prohibit any possible union with nineteenth century melodrama, whose arias and recitatives usually preclude a logical evolution. (Even in *Otello*, apparently a model for Pizzetti, it is not hard to separate the units which have been joined together and, marvelous though they may be, are so many breaks in the continuity of the drama.)

With first rate skill and boldness, Pizzetti has dared graft the art of the nineteenth century on his own. But the result is not the perfection of *Fedra* or *Debora*, and this undoubtedly is due to the fundamental opposition of the two conceptions. Furthermore the libretto must be condemned even if we condone the espousal of Verdian opera. The story is uninteresting. Fra Gherardo, the exalted weaver, believes he is prompted by the Apostles. He casts off Mariola, a girl who gave herself to him for love. Nine years later, as founder and leader of an apostolic brotherhood, he incites popular rebellion in Parma and, captured, dies on the scaffold, despite Mariola's efforts to save him.

It is all too gloomy and remote to really hold us. Mariola is a splendid figure of womanhood but she is the one living character. The crowd is only a little more than the chorus of nineteenth century melodrama, except in the rich and stirring third act. Strangely enough, for Pizzetti has written that characters waxing verbose about their emotions are poor material for a musician, the individuals of this opera are too prosy. And all of them seem to have stepped out of a popular romance. Their simple psychology might have helped the composer had not their effusions and the greyness of the opera subdued everything else.

The libretto's defects are, to some extent, projected into the music. Because of the emphasis on words Pizzetti had to make sure that the diction was clear and precise. Therefore the vocal writing is largely recitative, moving within a limited group of notes no matter who the speaker, thus creating a certain monotony. No musical highlights pick the characters out of the depths

of the drama. The speeches are always less interesting than the instrumental discourse, nor is the latter always intriguing. To put the solo voices, the proper center of action, in second place is a mistake. Plastic musical relief for the characters, emphasized by the great masters from Monteverdi to Wagner, Debussy and Pizzetti himself (in *Fedra* and *Debora e Jaele*), is markedly lacking.

The instrumental writing, woven out of a rather dense polyphony with rare moments of transparency, is continuously held to a low tone, which does not contribute to clarity. The constant interweaving of themes and of fragments in an everchanging contrapuntal pattern results in a greyness that is darkened by the instrumentation. The strings are continually divided and each division doubled by woodwinds and brasses. Without exaggeration, there is no pure sound in *Fra Gherardo*. The whole orchestra is like an enormous pedal tone, a tumultuous but distant and confused background for the speeches of the characters.

The long drawn out situations compelled the composer to make interminable musical developments of his themes. The beginning of the second scene is typical. After the night of love, Gherardo, torn by remorse, comes out of his house into the fresh dawn. This, one of the opera's most successful passages, describes the poor man's despair in a few measures. Unfortunately Pizzetti felt it necessary to spin his material out through three pages and we cease to follow them, so cold and distant is the development.

Before we leave the summary of flaws in this work, let us consider the choral passages in the first two acts, especially the *Laudes* which closes Act. I. Here are arbitrarily written pages, distinctly reminiscent of nineteenth century opera. The banal, popular quality of the parent theme is constantly emphasized. It is a grand finale of the past century, clearly and honestly presented by the composer. The melodramatic element and Pizzetti's drama do not fuse. As a result, we have a work which fails to be one thing or the other.

Is there anything really living in the opera? Only one character, Mariola, and the setting, the Emilian countryside. The latter is probably a subconscious achievement, for it is hard to conceive of Pizzetti, the dramatist, striving to paint a background. None

of his other works has so vivid an atmosphere. The first few measures, which only give us the themes of the protagonist, already create an impression of the freshness and spaciousness of the broad landscape. It is vivid and clear descriptive music. The personality of the composer is apparent from the very first notes. This is his own land, and it is love for it which dictates the wonderful evocation of his countryside and inspires the splendid scene of the night of stars, when Gherardo tells Mariola the story of the Magdalene, one of the most moving passages in the opera. It is the same instinct that prompts Pizzetti to depict the first, fresh purity of the dawn which brings remorse to the mad weaver.

Mariola, the only vital character in the drama, is also the only one who is given musical relief. When she enters and speaks, all the music rises in tone, the orchestra kindles. She is a breath of fresh air across the murkiness of an opera whose weight oppresses like an incubus. The freshness of a sad, loving girl, the melancholy of a mother who has vainly sacrificed herself for her child, the fervor of a lover dying for her idol, all this has an extraordinary splendor, truth and nobility. She alone has reality in the revolt of the third act. Speaking musically, this revolt is a little decorative but it has two marvelous passages, the lamentation of a group of women for a boy who has been killed and an episode after the assassination of Mariola, when the unmistakable voice of Pizzetti himself cries out from the midst of the terrorized crowd:

Oh Lord! if love is thy law

Why hast thou placed hate in the heart of man?

Here the poet and musician have struck an authentic chord, which, though brief, echoes in the heart of the listener.

These are my impressions of Ildebrando Pizzetti's new opera. It may be a transitional work or mark a crisis, and is perhaps the precursor of a transformation in the composer's style. That it is one of these is obvious because of its various and opposite elements. Perhaps his next work will show us definitely where Pizzetti is going.

Domenico de Paoli