A KEY TO OPERA

FRANK HOWES &
PHILIP HOPE-WALLACE

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APPRECIATION OF MUSIC

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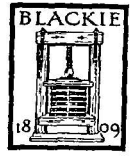

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PREFACE

BOOKS about opera are usually either a collection of synopses of opera plots or the memoirs of dead singers. This book is neither, nor is it a history of opera nor a volume of musical criticism. It attempts to be a discussion of the nature of opera; the answer to the question "What is opera?" requires, and in its course embodies, a good deal of history, a certain amount of criticism, a small quantity of plot narrative, and some discussion of singing, but none of singers. The chief defect of this method has been the resulting disproportion in the amount of space devoted to particular traditions, composers, and individual operas. If it be borne in mind that the primary purpose of the book is æsthetic—it professes to be a "key to opera" —and not critical nor historical, this disproportion may perhaps be excused. The attempt to bring into focus in one survey the many aspects of opera which are usually treated separately has disclosed the reason why there are so few books in English about opera. There is plenty of good critical study about particular composers of opera, but except in Professor Dent's numerous but mostly scattered writings very little general discussion of opera is available. Opera is a very various and wide-ranging subject, such that the explanation of some elementary mysteries (for example, the curious discrepancies of sex which always affront

the newcomer to opera) is not readily to be found in print, but in a knowledge of tradition that takes time and experience to accumulate. Even the facts, that is, are often hard to come by.

The difficulties, then, of making an adequate survey in a limited space have been great, and I should have despaired of ever completing it, if I had not been fortunate enough to persuade my colleague in journalism, Philip Hope-Wallace, to relieve me of the chapters on French and modern Italian opera. His specialized knowledge of the French language and of Latin culture has been particularly valuable, and I am indebted to him also for information about, and criticism of, one or two particular operas—the operas of Tchaikovsky are the chief instance. Otherwise the general responsibility for the book is mine, and he must not be held accountable for the discursiveness and lack of proportion which are the outcome of my original plan to make the æsthetic problem of music drama, specifically posed in Chapter I, the central theme.

I decided to use history to show how in fact the problem had been solved in various ways at different times, to classify opera by language rather than the categories (" grand ", " comic ", and their sub-species) and to relate its growth to national traditions rather than to the general development of music. Within this scheme which he accepted from me, Mr. Hope-Wallace has freely expressed his own views in the chapters which bear his initials. Our collaboration has, however, revealed a large measure of general agreement, and the reader will not be distracted by inconsistency or wide divergence of view.

F. H.

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CHAPTER I

The Nature of Opera

IN the heart of every Continental capital and in many of the larger provincial towns there is an imposing theatre built on some conspicuous central site. This building is The Opera. Many foreign cities in Europe and America boast more than one opera house. In Paris there is L'Opéra Comique as well as L'Opéra. Vienna had a Volksoper as well as the old Imperial Opera House on the Ringstrasse; Berlin has several theatres devoted concurrently to opera, and even a provincial capital like Munich has three opera houses which are used for different types of opera. The foreigner who comes to London and asks to see the English Opera is directed to pick his way through sacks of potatoes and crates of oranges to a massive building opposite Bow Street Police Station—the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Unless he is here in early summer the chances are against him finding any opera being given there, and a few years ago he would have found the building delivered over to the uses of a public dance-hall. A few years ago—more than five and less than ten—if he had insisted on seeing some one of his favourite operas, he might have found it on Thursdays and Saturdays at an out-of-the-way theatre called by the odd name of the Old Vic, though the name of the lady who ran it was Lilian. And that was

all the opera that London could provide, save for sporadic enterprises like the British National Opera Company and the irregular visits of the Carl Rosa and D'Oyly Carte touring companies. From which it may be deduced that we have no national opera. A Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer once gave a modest donation towards fostering the Cinderella of our arts, but to this day, when things are certainly very much better, we have neither National Theatre[1] nor National Opera House.

One result of this defect in our cultural equipment is that opera is always with us on the offensive or defensive. It is not yet taken for granted as an instrument, an expression, of our national culture. It is still what Dr. Johnson called it, an "exotic entertainment", and half the musical people in the country subscribe to his second epithet, "irrational". Of the other half some are fanatics, cultivated fanatics mostly, who are by no means the light-minded vulgarians of whom Parry wrote fifty years ago as the mainstay of opera; some are more catholic in their general musical tastes, but less wide in their operatic sympathies, and care only, it may be, for fairy tales or light comedies, and reject two-thirds of the operatic repertory. The remainder value it not in any partisan spirit, like the fanatics, because it is not symphonic or choral or solo music, but because, while participating in the nature of all these, it has a distinctive contribution of its own to make to musical experience. These are the apologists for opera, and such is the state of musical opinion in this country that a defence of opera must be included in an exposition of its nature.

Opera is easily defined; it is a drama carried on

[1] Though we now have a site for one.

with or in music, a combination of two arts each claiming sovereign status and jealous of its rights. There is no fundamental hostility or incompatibility between them, for they have a common parent in the dance.

Dancing is mimetic and it is rhythmic; mime, which arises easily out of the magical intentions of primitive man, is rudimentary drama; rhythm is one of the components of music. Dancing, of course, is more than mime, and music more than rhythm, but that is not saying any more than that we must all of us have two parents. The other party to the creation of music is melody, and melody without rhythm has two components, pitch or contour and the sensuous quality of sound (its tone quality). Drama, as the derivation of the word shows, is concerned with doing—with action—but it gets its significance from the feelings (or the characters, if we prefer the wider term) of the actors. Every term in each of these pairs is in opposition to its partner, and the fundamental problem of every act of artistic creation is to reconcile these opposites, to harmonize their claims, to synthesize them in a satisfactory unity. The rhythmic and the rhapsodic principles pull against each other; rhapsody lingers and rhythm presses on; when they are synthesized, music is born. Doing and being or, more specifically, events and character impinge on each other and their integration is drama. The antithetical principle can be seen in the other arts; in painting, colour and form, and at the next stage, representation and pattern; in a poem sense and metre, and at the next stage, manner and matter; in sculpture, the material and the idea; in architecture, proportion and construction, or the volumes and the function of the building. These inner

tensions are resolved in the complete work of art, but opera consists of a balancing of self-subsistent arts—music, drama, décor, and occasionally dancing, with a number of ancillary crafts of the stage, like production, lighting, and cinematographic projection. Décor, which includes costumes and stage sets, is a conveniently stationary art, out of time, except in extreme case like the transformation scenes in *Parsifal*, where the scenery actually moves in order to suggest the passage of Gurnemanz and Parsifal through the woods to Monsalvat. But the root problem of the rest is to synchronize them, for drama and music tend naturally to move at different speeds. Music is a slower art altogether. Drama has to compress events which may occupy much longer periods of time into the three acts of a three-hours play; sometimes it spans a lifetime, though now that the old dramatic principle of the unity of time is no longer observed, twenty years may be skipped between the second and third acts. But even so, drama must almost inevitably be quicker than real life, and it develops to its climax by concentration.

Music, on the other hand, takes time merely to utter itself apart from commenting on the situation or elaborating the feelings of the characters. It develops by expansion, and the moment the dramatic situation is ripe for elucidation in song the action is brought to a standstill while the characters describe their feelings at length in music. The Quintet in the third act of *Die Meistersinger* is a supreme example of the way in which music can crown an emotional situation, provided it is allowed to impede ruthlessly the natural development of the dramatic situation. But accommodation rather than ruthlessness is the normal relation

of composer and librettist to each other. It is true that the strain of mutual accommodation between two uncongenial partners was in the end too much for the collaboration of Gilbert and Sullivan. But the published correspondence between Strauss and von Hofmansthal shows how two men of very dissimilar temperament, the hard-headed brusque German and the sensitive unworldly Austrian, combined to produce a number of music dramas. But it is not a question of prestige so much as pace that complicates the relationship of the two arts to each other, and the history of opera is the story of the different ways in which the balance has been struck between their conflicting claims.

The problem of adjustment was eased quite early in this historical development by the logical classification of operas into categories. We hear of grand opera, comic opera, lyric opera, operetta, light opera, ballad opera, and in them a rough relationship is prescribed beforehand, so that within certain broad limits the prominence of the music in the scheme is known to the composer before he starts to write. These technical forms and their even more technical names in Italian, French and German, will be defined and the composer's province *vis-à-vis* the dramatist's marked out, but though I have called it a logical classification it was in fact the result of evolution, and actual definitions can only be extracted by reference to the history of opera. History, which goes by nationality, and logic, which works by classification, thus send one backwards and forwards across frontiers and centuries in any inquiry into the nature of opera as such.

From the point of view of logic, it is instructive to

plot the position of music in the theatre. Its lowest function is to provide a background for conversation when the curtain is down. A higher state is reached when it has a definite, though a small, contribution to make to the play, such as a song or dance whose purpose is to give verisimilitude to the action or to be a decoration or to provide a momentary suspension of dramatic interest—the incidental music in *The School for Scandal* performs all these functions. Incidental music may have a more organic connexion with the plot, as in *Peer Gynt*, where Grieg's music is considerable in quantity, or in Priestley's *Time and the Conways*, where Schumann's song, *Der Nussbaum*, is utilized as a time-switch. Shakespeare in *The Tempest* uses music consistently as a switch-point between natural and supernatural. Music, however, seems to have been demanded wherever reasonably possible in any Elizabethan comedy, because the audience liked it, and this taste continued and grew for a century till it absorbed the energies of a Purcell to supply music for Restoration plays. But what never happened in England was speech becoming transmuted into song at the moments of chief emotional excitement, as it often did in the folk-ballads of all countries, and as it did in Italy, where from an attempt to discover an appropriate form of declamation for the revived classical drama, modern opera was conceived. In English poetic drama impassioned speech remained speech and the music ancillary to it. In a play like *The Tempest* one can see exactly where the development of music-drama stopped short, nipped in the bud by poetry. One result of this has been that in England the somewhat violent transitions from speech to song and song to speech in the deployment of the drama have been tolerated in

preference to the other, the Italian, way of throwing all verbal utterance into some form of melody. This is the great division: operas in which the spoken word is admitted and operas which dissolve all speech and all gesture into music.

(In opera which admits of the spoken word, i.e. German *Singspiel*, English ballad opera and French comic opera, the arbitrary change-over from the one plane of utterance to the other necessitates set numbers for the music, so that the artificiality of the arrangement is never lost in illusion, as it may be either in a stage play or when the operatic convention of sung drama is wholeheartedly accepted and everything is expressed in music.) Indeed the break is often exploited deliberately to heighten a comic effect with incongruity.

The convention of working on two different planes, however, is not confined to comic subjects, but is found in romantic works of the German School, like Weber's *Der Freischütz* and the operas of Lortzing, and even in a heroic opera like Beethoven's *Fidelio* the spoken word is retained, though much reduced in amount. When, however, the whole action of the play is carried on in music, a new issue is raised, which is one of pace. Music, as I have already said, develops by expansion, drama by concentration, and the problem of music-drama is to reconcile those divergent tendencies, those different speeds. And in most operas it is the drama which has to give way. There have been a few isolated attempts to make word-for-word settings of pre-existing plays in which the composer has exercised self-restraint and bent his music to the demands of the text, and as far as possible to the tempo of spoken dialogue—Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* is

the most conspicuous example and Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea* the most recent.

But the general rule is that music slows up the production. It may intensify the dramatic force of the action, as in Verdi's *Otello*; it may ease the dramatic tension as the Greek Chorus regularly did in ancient drama—the Chorus, for instance, eases off the almost intolerable emotions of *The Trojan Women* each time before another twist is given to the dramatic screw; but in all cases music slows down the pace of the drama. For this reason many people say opera is a spoiling of two good things; the drama contracts the liberty of the music, and the music reduces the drama to something perilously like nonsense. The problem is real and unescapable, and since a large proportion of music-lovers in this country are anti-operatic, and they find powerful spokesmen among musicians whose authority cannot be ignored or belittled, the issue must be faced. Is opera an impossible hybrid? Do its conventions condemn it to absurdity? Is it "too artificial"? Is it a meretricious form of art?

The fallacy at the base of all these objections is a realistic approach on the part of the spectator. People go to the theatre to see others as they wish or know themselves to be; sometimes the dramatist stresses the wish-fulfilment, sometimes he concentrates on literal realism. However, to act as a photograph of life is only one of the uses of the theatre, which may from time to time meet fashionable taste, and, even so, employs conventions—the three-sided room, the soliloquy, the audible whisper and the purposeful aside—which are not felt to be stumbling-blocks to acceptance of the situation as depicted on the stage. But one does not need to go as far as opera or the poetic drama to find

the stage put to non-realistic usages; there are historical plays, symbolical plays, fantastic plays, plays in which the supernatural personifications of such forces as conscience or chance, death or destiny, and creatures of the imagination, work out their dramatic purposes without causing a strain on the spectator's sense of probability. The framework of theatrical convention must be accepted. No art is possible without some such convention. Convention as such is itself a lubricant of human intercourse; its purpose is not to restrict but to facilitate behaviour. Ordinary speech is a set of pre-agreed semantic conventions, and art, like speech, is a communication between minds. The vehicle of both is convention.

The objectors, however, find the conventions of opera too artificial. The chief artificiality is, no doubt, that the actors sing instead of speaking, that this in turn makes the pace of the action and of the human intercourse being portrayed on the stage slower than real life, slower than drama itself demands. Many musicians are, however, prepared to accept all this in an oratorio; a bald Elijah in a white waistcoat denouncing a plump Jezebel in black velvet is not felt to be so ridiculous as a middle-aged soprano weighing fifteen stone dressed as a Japanese girl of eighteen. Yet the only difference of convention is the literary one that *Elijah* is a musical epic and *Madame Butterfly* a musical drama, though it must be admitted that the incongruity is sharpened a little by its nearer approach to realism on the stage. It is, however, a shallow objection that because of the exigencies of casting by vocal quality instead of by physical type, that, in short, because heroines in opera are middle-aged and heroes fat, therefore the convention cannot be accepted.

What are Shakespeare's requirements for Juliet? The body of a fifteen-year-old girl and the mind of a woman of forty? The difficulty of incongruity in dramatic tempo, that operatic acting has to be in slow motion, can be circumvented with the help of an intelligent producer since the composer himself sets the pace of the action in his overture or his first scene. The listener should gear his mind to the appropriate tempo indicated by the music. The Overture to *Figaro* or *The Barber of Seville* tells him that the pace of the intrigue will be brisk; the Overture to *Rheingold*, which takes ten minutes to spell out a chord of E flat, warns him that cosmic events take time.

Librettists also do something to adjust the speed of the action when it is conjoined with music by deleting or compressing subsidiary episodes and excluding minor characters. A dramatist builds up his characters by inventing little episodes to show them in action before he confronts them with the main crises of the plot. In opera such episodes fritter the interest and bulk too large. They are therefore discarded and the requisite characterization is provided in music. Thus in Beaumarchais's *Figaro* Count Almaviva holds a formal court in which other pleas are decided besides that of Figaro's bond. In the opera we know enough about Almaviva to dispense with his legal decisions, and pass straight from the domestic issues involved in the broken flower pot and the mystery of Cherubino's commission to the scene of Marcellina's demand for the honouring of her bond with Figaro. The two episodes are telescoped by Mozart with no more than a change of key (from B flat to E flat) to save operatic time. Similarly in operatic settings of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* the farcical episode of Mother Prat,

the fat woman of Brentford, is dropped by both Verdi and Vaughan Williams. (But it is expanded by Nicolai.)

Bad librettos and bad translations are other stumbling blocks to the beginner in opera. Don José's "What a glance saucy and audacious" (in *Carmen*) and Gurnemanz's question to Parsifal "Know'st thou what thou saw'st?" are irresistible incitements to laughter at the wrong moments. Operatic translation presents great difficulties because idiomatic equivalents for the original text have to be found which do not run counter to the melodic accentuation, and if that reconciliation is accomplished, the resulting overtones of meaning have to be not too flagrantly out of tune with the sentiment of the new language. The appeal to the mother-motif that is found alike in the French and the German operas causes discomfort when proclaimed in English, i.e. almost any translation, however good, is not sufficiently reticent. Bad librettos have contributed to the mortality of operas, but this means no more than that, like translation, the construction of opera-books is difficult, and that any art must be judged not by its failures but by its successes.

An even stronger, though more remediable, objection to opera in England is bad production, ridiculous dresses, and scenery of palpable cardboard. Operas have been mounted in a way that would not be tolerated for a play, for the curious reason that once a convention is accepted, so far from its artificialities protruding, they are apt to grow a blind spot on the eyes of the spectator. If the voices of hero and heroine are right, the opera-goer ceases to notice after the first scene that their owners are unshapely. Operatic managements therefore grow slack on the theatrical side and

incongruities are tolerated quite unnecessarily. The care bestowed at Glyndebourne on the production and on the casting, where attempts are made to enrol only singers of reasonably suitable physique, has been responsible for the conversion of many objectors to a better frame of mind about opera as a legitimate and delightful form of art. Every inducement is offered to the spectator and auditor to accept the amount of convention Mozart demands, to ask for the right amount, and no more, of illusion from scenery with sufficient sophistication or fantastication,[1] and to adjust his mind to the tempo of the action. If he does this, he finds no impediment to the music but an additional pleasure in the perfect collaboration of the arts.

But your true puritan is not likely to be moved from his position even by the allurements of Glyndebourne. He descries in opera—in all stage plays possibly—that element of falsity which Plato found in all forms of mimetic art. Two removes from reality, said Plato of tragic poetry, and something of the same sort seems to have been in Parry's mind when he wrote that "Opera is the shallowest fraud man ever achieved in the name of art". This was in his diary—he was too wise to commit so violent an epigram to print. But it is quoted by Sir Walford Davies,[2] who boldly endorses it and defines his own attitude to opera by calling it "an astonishing and phenomenal enormity". His chapter on Music and Drama is likely to be the classic

[1] The Glyndebourne scenery designed for Mozart by Mr. Hamish Wilson has been adversely criticized. It is not perhaps so distinguished as the other elements in the total production, but it is pretty and certainly offers no impediment to the spectator's dramatic sense.

[2] In *The Pursuit of Music*, p. 394. Even Rimsky-Korsakoff once called opera "a false artistic genre" but found it alluring because of its immense variety.

statement of the case against opera as an art form for that declining number of persons who can see no good in it. Parry appears not to have liked the sort of people who want to go to opera and thought them stupid. Davies finds that many people whom he respects approve of opera; opera-goers in fact are not so wrong-headed as they once were; the intelligent musical people of to-day who are still hostile usually lack experience of the thing they criticize—the only opera which Sir Walford specifically criticizes is Liza Lehmann's *Vicar of Wakefield*! But the criticisms which he makes in a general form are echoed and approved by many musical people who have often tried to acquire a taste for opera and have failed. Common to all is the fundamental refusal to accept any of opera's conventions, but one sometimes hears another objection which Sir Walford does not share: that attention is distracted by the double assault on sight and hearing, that each art impedes the other. Ballet, in which the problem of dramatic adjustment looms less large, puts music to the same disadvantage *vis-à-vis* dancing as that which the drama is thought to suffer in opera at the hands of music. At the ballet musicians have been known to complain that they cannot attend to the music because the stage distracts them. But if the problem of pace is adjusted, this objection does not go very deep, and Sir Walford Davies is even prepared to contrive a stage setting for a chorale from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*—a sketch for an ideal opera! The strength of his criticism lies in the discrepancies of "incompatible magnitudes" which a mixture of the arts involves, its weakness in his demand for literal correspondence between them. He speaks of the natural articulation of words being desirable and

apparently means by " natural " conversational, which is more than one would demand of any vocal music whatsoever. He demands reticence at times of emotional crisis, which is sound enough psychology for an Englishman though not perhaps for all the races who have ever produced operas, but overlooks the fact that art and life do not operate in the same way; expression is on different planes in real life and in its crystallization into art. He takes exception to " miscalculated emotionalism " by which he means that any utterance in music drama must be " normal ", i.e. not translated to any abnormal level of pitch, any abnormal loudness or any abnormal syllabic sostenuto. This is to curtail the normal powers of music. Dynamics is one of the dimensions of music, as it is not of speech. We raise our voices somewhat in anger, but speech shows no range of dynamics comparable to the difference between *ppp* and *fff*, and when pitch is added to dynamics and duration to both, the dramatic expression is not impeded but enormously enhanced, though it is not a literal reproduction of a scene from everyday life. This is the photographic fallacy. Take a case of a loud high musical scream where the values are unerringly true, and where music conveys them with a combined subtlety and power that is beyond the achievement of a Shakespeare, Desdemona's scene in the fourth act of Verdi's *Otello*.

In Shakespeare's play Desdemona calls to mind an old song sung by her mother's maid Barbara, who lost her lover, and she cannot get it out of her head on this sinister night. She sings the " Willow Song ", interrupting it with comments. After this, she talks with Emilia about the question whether women are as prone to take lovers apart from their spouses as men

are, and finally she says "good night" in a regular Shakespearian couplet:

> Good-night, good-night; heaven me such uses send,
> Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend!

This is the end of the Act, a deliberate anti-climax, striking a quiet, if rather foreboding, note. In Verdi's opera the whole of the last Act takes place in Desdemona's bedroom, and the Willow song leads on into another, a prayer to the Virgin, and the whole of the situation is filled in from Desdemona's point of view. In this long scena Desdemona's fears are alternately roused and soothed. At one point, it would seem, Emilia reassures her for sleep and there is a calm and quiet good night spoken; then happens a sudden passionate outcry on a high A sharp, a full tenth above the quiet F sharp of her good night, with all the power of the orchestra behind it, which is overwhelming in its appeal to our compassion—the whole horror of her situation, exorcized with so much difficulty, floods back in on Desdemona. This is a stroke of psychological insight that only music can convey because it needs a wider range of pitch, a more sudden acceleration of power and a greater degree of force than the speaking voice can command. This is something beyond any dramatist's resources.

Verdi's and Shakespeare's versions of the story of Othello are both supreme works of art. In them the ingredients of drama, poetry and characterization are differently balanced and blended. But the addition of music upsets the equilibrium only to establish a new one. Verdi's *Otello* is enough in itself to rebut the demand for a precise correspondence between the dramatic elements or for a realistically reticent expression

of emotion. In it the need does not arise for the give and take between the component arts which Sir Walford Davies would theoretically permit. The music has absorbed the drama, but it has not destroyed it; it has detracted something from Shakespeare's poetry, but it has clothed the action in new poetry of its own; it has effected a new synthesis.

There is no ideal synthesis, with equal rights predetermined for all the artists contributing to it, which operas should strive to achieve. It is for the musician to take the elements provided by his colleagues and fuse them into the newly compounded work of art. His is the main responsibility in opera just as it is the producer's in a revue or the dramatist's in a play with incidental music. Wagner's " art work of the future " was an impossible abstraction, but every now and again a perfectly satisfactory alliance of the arts of the theatre is established in individual operas. But in no two operas need the balance of forces be the same.

Subtlety and flexibility of expression are not the only additional resources that music can lend to drama. It is counterpoint that invests music with a unique dramatic power. By virtue of the capacity inherent in music of combining simultaneously themes, melodic lines, instrumental commentary and harmonic colour to make good, clear sense, a composer is enabled to make his characters speak all at the same time in an ensemble. So that in a complex situation we know about all the characters at once as in no other form of art. We know from the words what they are saying, and from their actions what they are doing, but the music is also telling us what sort of persons they are and how strongly they are feeling about it. In real life we have to guess what the motives of the other

party are and how strongly their emotions are driving them. In the novel the author can tell us something about the play of forces that determine their conduct and by taking each person in turn he can put his reader in possession of the whole situation. The playwright can do the same thing with rather more force in that he can put all his characters on the stage at the same time, though he cannot allow them all to speak at once as the composer can. But in an operatic ensemble we have all the cards on the table, emotions as well as situations, motives as well as actions, and interrelationships in every degree of subtlety.

Thus in an "ensemble of perplexity" each character is differently affected by the situation in which all find themselves; they express their reactions to it simultaneously in the corresponding number of contrapuntal voices. They even use the same words but with appropriate changes in gender, number, person and case that are in themselves a source of dramatic piquancy. Further, two parallel lines of action can be carried on at once and made gradually to converge as in *Rigoletto*, where a stage property, a wall pierced by a door, provides the necessary dramatic verisimilitude. Another example is the quartet in the third act of *La Bohème* where one pair of lovers effect a reconciliation and another a violent quarrel in one coherent piece of music. But the enormous dramatic possibilities of counterpoint find their fullest use in the operas of Mozart, and especially in the great concerted ensembles and finales. Here we have not merely the vehicle for singing as in lyric opera, the symphonic texture valued by Wagnerians, but the reinforced prosecution of the drama with the extra-dramatic capacities of music.

Opera needs no justification to many people. Some

love it because their passion is for singing and opera calls for singing in its longest and most sustained flights. Those who dislike it because it employs conventions which cause them discomfort have had its defence. Its more positive claims to be a proper part of culture are founded on its distinctive properties, the dramatic powers of music itself, and the ever varying synthesis which it can make with the other arts of the theatre.

CHAPTER II

Early History

OPERA was born in Italy. Conceived at Florence in Count Bardi's circle under the dual influences of the revival of classical learning and the decline of contrapuntal music, it was born promptly at the beginning of the seventeenth century which was to mould the future along the lines we now recognize as of our own modern world. The century which gave us scientific method and parliamentary government also gave us opera. In 1600 the poet Ottavio Rinuccini and the musician Jacopo Peri produced a music drama on a theme well adapted to musical treatment, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. The work was produced at Florence to grace the festivities connected with the marriage of Maria de' Medici to King Henry IV of France. And so opera began its career under royal patronage with which even now it cannot altogether dispense. In countries where they have no king the State itself supports and administers the Opera. In England where we have a king we have no official Opera—but that is another story. The patronage of the powerful is essential.

Peri's *Eurydice* consists almost entirely of recitative, with a few interruptions of occasional chorus and simple instrumental ritornello, which aims at declaiming the poem with natural inflexions of speech set to notes of

definite pitch. One of the latest operas, Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*, does precisely the same thing and the purpose is the same, namely to draw at will on the greater emotional power of the singing voice. Opera has employed other means, such as the concerted ensemble, and has pursued other objects, such as the production of a sumptuous and multiform theatrical entertainment, but its primary purpose, which is to invest dramatic action with all the emotional resources of music, resources that give it subtlety as well as intensity, was thus set forth quite clearly in the first complete example that we know.

Peri then is the first operatic composer, but his name means little more to us than a fact out of a history book. His successor, Monteverde, however, wrote music that can still come to life on the stage.[1] The original score of *Orfeo* was published in 1609 and a second edition, of which a perfect copy exists in the Bodleian Library, in 1615. Modern scores have been made by Eitner, D'Indy and Malipiero. For practical purposes, then, Monteverde's *Orfeo* may be regarded as the first opera. Furthermore its composer was a man of vivid personality whose imprint is distinctly visible even in the history books where he lay so long praised as a pioneer but unperformed. Not the least remarkable thing about him is that this innovator in the new monodic style continued alongside of his operatic experiments to write polyphonic music for the church and for the still-flourishing Italian practice of madrigal singing. It is a paradox of musical history that the most revolutionary innovations are always well grounded in tradition, and Monteverde combined

[1] This was proved by the Oxford University Opera Club when they chose his *Orfeo* for their first production in 1925. Subsequently it has been performed at Cologne and in Italy.

the conservative and the radical in his single person.

Claudio Monteverde, the son of a doctor, was born in 1567 at Cremona, where so many of the best musical instruments were made. In 1591 he obtained a post as viol player to the Duke of Mantua and was travelling round Europe with his employer when the experiments in revived Greek drama were being made by Count Bardi's literary society. It is probable that he was present at the performance of Peri's *Eurydice*, for the Duke certainly attended the royal wedding. In any case he felt the influence of the Florentine *stile recitativo*, for his next sets of madrigals show it in an increasing prominence of a single voice, in close attention to the enunciation of the words combined with emotionally tinged harmony and ultimately with the addition of an instrumental figured bass to the five vocal parts. The Duke was keenly interested in the Florentine experiments, and caused his secretary to prepare a libretto on the theme of Orpheus which was handed to the court composer. Monteverde's opera was performed privately in 1607. Its success was great; it was repeated and was taken to other places in Italy.

The first thing that strikes one about *Orfeo* in the theatre is the opening Toccata in C major, a summons to attention obviously intended to be played by brass; the first thing that strikes one on opening the score is the elaborate table of instruments that are prescribed. There are bowed strings—viols mostly but two of the new-fangled violins are required; there are plucked strings—lutes, harp and harpsichord; there are wind instruments—trombones, cornets, trumpet, flutes and small chamber organs. There are indications at the head of some of the numbers how these forces were employed, but the work is not scored in the

modern manner. Instrumental ritornelli are employed as a structural feature of the opera to create the appropriate atmosphere for each situation. Thus, Music personified comes on as soon as the curtain goes up, and her utterances are punctuated by a ritornello of eight bars, which is repeated five times in two different keys. And similar little ritornelli and somewhat longer "symphonies" in seven-part harmony occur throughout all five acts.

The main dialogue is carried along on nimble recitative, very simple and direct, but constantly adorned with picturesque touches. But the balance between the claims of the words and of the music, whose conflict and reconciliation is the æsthetic basis of all opera, has already begun to move away from the strict declamation of the Florentine *littérateurs* in favour of more music, and the dialogue is interspersed with solos that are arias in embryo, with dances and with choruses. (Orpheus, for example, has two set solos, one demanding great technical virtuosity, the other a charming pastoral air written in a gently lilting rhythm of alternate $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ time.) The story follows the usual course until the fifth Act, where, in order to bring about a happy ending, Apollo descends from heaven and carries away his son to dwell with him in bliss. They sing a duet as they ascend to the skies, while the mortals break into a chorus of rejoicing. The *deus ex machina* and an apotheosis are a common feature of heroic opera henceforth until the romantic movement begins.

Orfeo is emphatically an opera for the theatre; all the elements of showmanship, and all the decorative elements, which contemporaneously in England were combining in the masque, were available at the princely

courts of Italy and France. But the music is not subservient to them, as it was in the masque; it co-operates on equal terms and though " dry " recitative is not fully saturated music, Monteverde's use of it is expressive and musical. The *recitativo secco* of the eighteenth century was capable of longer flights because harmony was further developed, and the cadences could in consequence be less frequent and emphatic, but all the same much of it, as e.g. in Mozart, is drier and more conventional. The arias, which later pushed the claims of music in the collaboration of arts to an illogical predominance, here serve their proper dramatic purpose of expanding the emotion as it arises from the situation in the plot, and do not hold up the action merely in order to develop an independent musical interest. The choruses in the same way add to the musical interest without impeding the drama. *Orfeo* is a successful opera because it strikes a definite balance between the component elements, and if it comes down on the whole on the side of drama and so entails a large proportion of recitative it is only the first stage in the long duel between drama and music, with the attendant arts of the theatre as secondary combatants, which has constituted the history of opera.

In 1612 Monteverde left Mantua for Venice, where he became director of music at St. Mark's. In this city he spent the rest of his life, and beside his church work composed a number of operas for the newly established municipal theatres as well as intermezzi and cantatas. Of these operas two have survived, *The Return of Ulysses* and *The Coronation of Poppea*, both of which have been heard in recent times. He died in 1643 at the age of 75.

The Venetian operas show certain changes, due in

part to the different conditions of performance and in part to the influence of the cantatas and operatic writings of other composers at work both in Rome and in Venice during the thirty odd years that elapsed between *Orfeo* and *The Return of Ulysses*. In the first place the number of instruments comprising the orchestra is smaller. The theatres in Venice were dependent not on the privy purse of a Duke, but on the subscriptions of the public, and the need for balancing their budgets led to greater economy. Strings, which probably included lutes, and a harpsichord have to suffice for the accompaniment, and in *The Coronation of Poppea* the texture is reduced from five to three parts. The instruments thus ruthlessly ejected were to come back by degrees a century later. *Ulysses*[1] was written in 1641. Its plot, reflecting a later fashion than that of *Orfeo*, is extremely complicated and its machinery is handled by gods and goddesses who intervene in mortal affairs—a dramatic convention that persisted for a long time. Recitative is still Monteverde's chief technical resource, but it is already growing into arioso and songs as used for the delineation of character —one or two of the liveliest have been edited by Mr. Westrup and issued separately. Even the chorus has disappeared in *Poppea* (1642), so that now the whole burden of the opera has to be borne by the singers; the trappings are gone and instead of the simple issues and spectacular presentation of *Orfeo*, we have a complex drama of human character worked out in all the resources of the human voice—recitative, arioso, which is recitative turning itself into aria, true arias like Seneca's splendid solo in which he welcomes

[1] This has not, so far as I know, been staged in modern times, though a concert performance of it was given by the B.B.C. in 1928.

death, passages of coloratura, patter songs and ensembles of two and three voices. One feature of *Poppea* of great intrinsic charm, some structural importance and historical significance, is an episode between two servants. The scene is complete in itself and serves the same function as Shakespeare's comic interludes. Here the relief is provided by the contrast of a frank and ingenuous flirtation with the pathetic farewell which Seneca has just taken of his pupils. This duet is an example of an intermezzo and it was from such intermezzi in the operas of the Neapolitan School that *opera buffa* developed; here is the germ of all comic opera. There is a similar intermezzo in *Ulysses* in which two subordinate personages sing of their love.

Between Monteverde, who disappears from operatic history in 1642, and Alessandro Scarlatti, who comes on the scene with *Gli Equivoci nel Sembiante* (i.e. Mistaken Identity) in 1671, there are no great names nor are any of the operas, which by this time were being assiduously written in more than one Italian city, likely to achieve a modern resurrection. But history is not made only by great men and undeniable masterpieces, and in these thirty years of the mid-seventeenth century musical technique was being consolidated and theatres were being built all over Italy. Venice, however, appears to have remained the chief nursery of the young but rapidly growing art. Burney [1] gives a list for the century 1637 to 1730 in which some twenty-eight poets and a like number of composers are credited with three hundred and sixty operas, and these, as he declares with dubious mathematics, "but a small part of the whole number of operas which, in less than a century, amounted to six

[1] *A General History of Music*, IV, 1.

hundred and fifty-eight, the chief part by poets and composers who were natives of the Venetian state". No fewer than fifteen theatres were built during this period.

Venice also attracted composers who were domiciled in other Italian cities and there are records of operas being commissioned for the Venetian theatres. from Cesti, a singer in the Pope's Chapel at Rome, from Luigi Rossi of Apulia in the south, from Lucinda, master of the Chapel Royal of Sicily, and from Novi and Alessandro Scarlatti of Naples. These operas naturally went the rounds, and Burney relates that Cesti's *Orontea*, for instance, which was written for Venice in 1649, was revived at Milan in 1662, at Venice again in 1666, at Bologna in 1669, and once more at Venice in 1683.

While opera was thus spreading through Italy, it was also making conquests on foreign soil. It was brought to Paris by Cardinal Mazarin, the Sicilian who succeeded to Richelieu's place at the French court: he got Rossi's *Orfeo* performed in 1647, and in 1660 Cavalli's *Serse*. From France it crossed to England, though the pure Italian opera, which dominated London in the early eighteenth century and still leaves its mark on the policy of Covent Garden, was not due to arrive for half a century. But the operatic idea was transmitted by Sir William D'Avenant, the maker of masques, who was in close touch with Paris at a time when French fashions and French ideas were irresistible to English society. From Venice the operatic idea easily spread over the mountains to Vienna where the Imperial Court enthusiastically adopted it and produced works by Cavalli and Cesti. Infiltration into Germany was slower, owing to the Thirty Years'

War and its after effects, but by the middle of the century knowledge of the new art had spread from Italy over the rest of civilized Europe, and experiments in the combination of music with drama were everywhere being made.

In Italy itself the balance of these components began to shift. Opera had started from a literary impulse, but it had taken to the stage under aristocratic patronage which demanded that it should be finely dressed and splendidly accoutred. All through the seventeenth century fashion demanded lavish stage spectacle, which was an inheritance from the masque. Burney describes the extravagant equipment required for an opera called *Berenice* produced at Padua in 1680, with its hundreds of virgins and soldiers and various sorts of animals.

Nevertheless the tilt of the balance towards a greater lyricism in the music and away from dramatic verisimilitude can be traced in Monteverde's successors, of whom the chief was Cavalli. So can many other traits and tendencies afterwards to become conspicuous in opera: the formal aria, the ground bass, the overture in more than one movement, even the comic duet incorporating a stammer. All these find a precedent somewhere in the forty operas which Cavalli wrote, most of them for Venice, but a few for Paris, where he provided the fertilizing connexion with Italy needed by the emergent French opera. The innate Italian taste for singing soon made itself felt, and Cavalli, who appears to have had a less volcanic and more orderly type of mind than Monteverde, set himself to evolve a more highly organized kind of melody, capable of longer flights than a recitative which was enslaved to the enunciation of words. All through the middle of

the century Italian taste was gravitating more and more towards extended formal melody for the solo voice, and all the composers of the time, Carissimi, Cesti, Legrenzi, followed it and fostered it.

With Alessandro Scarlatti the history of opera passes from Venice to Naples via Rome, which acted as a centre of gravity all through the early developments of dramatic music. The early Florentine opera found its most secure home in the palaces of the Roman clerics and nobles. The cantata, with its influence in the direction of solo singing and the elimination of the chorus, flourished in Rome, and the Neapolitan Scarlatti divided his career between his native city and Rome. By the time Handel came on the scene Rome had become the focal point of Italian opera. Not, however, without some vicissitudes of fortune due to papal opposition which at one time went so far as to close down the theatres on the ground that they were subversive of public morality. For the Church kept its eye on secular music, since it was still the main channel for the flow of culture. Music was a vital concern of the Church and the Church provided the posts in which professional musicians earned their livings. Rome, the headquarters of the Church, the seat of the papacy, the residence of cardinals, became the musical capital of the world, as Vienna was in the nineteenth century and as London is now. It attracted other patrons of the arts like the queer Queen Christina of Sweden who arrived there in 1656 and founded her Arcadian Academies, of which in due time Scarlatti became a member.

But Alessandro Scarlatti, probably a greater man but a more remote figure to-day than his more famous son Domenico, the composer for harpsichord, was the

bright particular star of the Neapolitan School. He was of Sicilian origin and was educated in Rome; born in 1659 he was an exact contemporary of Purcell. His most famous opera was *Tigrane*, produced in 1715, for which he introduced horns into his orchestra. He declared that this was his 106th work for the stage. Of his total output only thirty-five survive and none of them are very likely to be put on the boards again. Only one has ever been performed whole in London and that was *Pirro e Demetrio* in 1708 at the Haymarket when Italian opera was the latest fashionable craze. Even Professor Dent, Scarlatti's only English biographer, who knows what can be done with the energy and enthusiasm of university amateurs in producing operas that no professional organization in England will touch, holds out no hope of revival for anything but his one comic opera, *Il Trionfo del Onore*.

Sure enough this work has recently had a modern performance in England. In the summer of 1937 an open-air production of it was successfully presented in a private garden in Essex.[1] The plot deals with the confused love affairs of a young rake of Leghorn who encounters in Pisa the two young women whom he has wooed in Lucca. The scene is laid at an inn in Pisa and provides three of the stock characters of *opera buffa*—the soubrette, the amorous widow, and the well-to-do old man. It is all very conventional, and seems the more so, in that it constantly calls to mind persons and situations familiar to us in the later operas of Mozart and Rossini, while the phraseology of the music suggests sometimes Handel and even, occasionally, Bach. The hysterical Leonora,

[1] At the house of Mrs. Howard, Loughton, Essex, on July 23 and 24, under the editorship and direction of Mr. Geoffrey Dunn.

who goes round asking each man in turn to put her out of her misery, is the prototype of Elvira, and Erminio would pass for Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, while Flaminio the inn-keeper carries the opera on his shoulders like a regular Figaro.

But the general farcicality is nearer to Rossini than to Mozart, and there is none of the aristocratic atmosphere that pervades Mozart's operas. The music is suave, and even when it is not distinguished it provides an adequate vehicle for the comedy. There are several duets, most of them comic, and a couple of quartets. Most of the arias are in the conventional ternary form, in which the middle section is often only padding, but it is sometimes turned to good dramatic account, as when Rodimante brags of his pugnacity in a brisk $\frac{3}{8}$ time, but changes to a languishing $\frac{12}{8}$ for the middle section in which he turns from thought of Mars to Venus. This device Scarlatti carries out on a larger scale in a comic duet between the two servants, who ape their masters in one rhythm and make their own comments on this mockery in another.

Mockery is indeed a feature of this *opera buffa* which pulls the leg of its sister *opera seria*; and though music in itself is not very successful in conveying any but genuine emotion, the combination of heroic music with a ludicrous stage situation will yield all the richness of mock heroics such as Leonora flings off in one of her please-kill-me arias.

Serious and comic opera had thus both emerged in Italy by the first half of the eighteenth century. In the second half Italian opera became international opera, and this paradox ultimately worked itself out in the fissiparous break-up of the tradition into con-

sciously national schools of opera. But this was a development of the nineteenth century, and the intervening period provided the world with the first masterpieces which still keep their place in the repertory.

CHAPTER III

International Opera to Gluck

LANGUAGE is the core of national culture, since over and above the bond of common usage between a man and his neighbour it represents a common way of thinking about things. The bane of Babel was not only the practical difficulty of communication, but the well-founded suspicion that the other fellow had different axioms and did not really understand the workings of his neighbour's mind. Language is the great uniter and the great divider, and cultures tend to form round the nucleus of language. In the history of opera no doubt national temperament—a recognisable, though not a definable or defensible conception—helped to make Italian opera differ from French and German and Slav, but the deciding factor in our classification is language. We can classify by language and explain by history.

But if opera as a manifestation of national culture has followed the political trend of the nineteenth century, and can only be studied like history on national lines, its own earlier history followed the politics of the day in being, in spite of language, largely an international organism that found no difficulty in crossing frontiers. Italy had a long start and international opera during the seventeenth century was Italian opera, however modified to suit the taste of Paris or

Vienna. In the eighteenth century shoots from the main plant began to sprout on their own in most of the chief centres of culture, but the international tradition was carried on by two of the greatest composers in operatic history, Gluck and Mozart. Their works refuse a national birth certificate, decline to be classified on national lines, and in spite of their Austrian parentage behave in an altogether international manner.

Gluck was born in 1714, eleven years, that is, before Alessandro Scarlatti died. But Gluck was not a prodigy who began writing operas in his teens. His first opera, *Artaserse*, was produced in 1741, when the composer was twenty-seven, and it was twenty years before he established himself as an unquestionable master with *Orpheus*. There is thus something like half a century of operatic history between the works of Scarlatti's old age, written for Naples and Rome, and the works of Gluck's maturity written for Vienna and Paris.

During this period only one great composer of operas emerged—Handel. And he shows clearly in his own person how international eighteenth-century culture was. He, a German, came to London in order to compose Italian operas for English audiences. But language is a bar to internationalism even in opera, and though the musical speech of the eighteenth century was not yet subdivided into our modern national dialects and idioms, it was Italian music during the first part of the century, just as in the second half it was Viennese music, that passed as pan-European. Nevertheless, wherever opera took root as an institution, the supremacy of the Italian language was soon challenged and a national opera struggled to be born. The story of those struggles varies from country to country, but the fountain-head of international opera remained

in Italy where there was a strong and continuous tradition. Porpora, Sammartini, Jomelli, Pergolesi, though not composers of the front rank, carried on the tradition from which in turn Hasse, called " Le Sassone ", Handel, another Saxon, Gluck and Mozart all sought not so much inspiration as that technical mastery which only comes from contact with a living and assured tradition.

This tradition, assured though it was, was dangerously hardening all through the earlier part of the eighteenth century, and the emergent comic opera was the only corrective to a too woodenly heroic style. The cold air that was congealing serious opera more and more stiffly into set moulds, which the composer could not break, was the influence of singers.

Singers, as a class, are usually credited with more than their fair share of original sin, which shows itself as fanatical egotism in the double form of conceit of self and jealousy of others. Their love of limelight grows by what it feeds on, no doubt, and the owner of a fine voice is placed in a dazzling position by combining in his person a physical gift, artistic prowess and exceptional powers of emotional suasion. It is a psychological fact—deplore it if we will, ignore it we cannot—that the human voice makes the most immediate and the most universal appeal. Instrumental music, for all its greater resources of tone-colour and texture, has a hard job to compete with the music of voices, though Wagner achieved the impossible task of making the orchestra his protagonist, and sacrificing not only the singers' voices but the stage itself to what the instruments were doing. But operatic history as a whole confirms the remark of William Byrd that " there is not any music of instru-

ments whatsoever comparable to that which is made of the voices of men", though he said it centuries before the expressive power of the modern orchestra was dreamt of.

If then the public is constant through the centuries in its estimate of the voice, is it any wonder that singers become tyrants when this secular tendency is reinforced by fashion? In Italy vocal music has always taken precedence of instrumental, and with the possible exception of Verdi's *Falstaff* the balance has always been tilted in the theatre in favour of the singer against the orchestra. In Germany the orchestra has competed on more even terms, and the experience gained by composers in making the unaided orchestra articulate in the symphony and concerto has been used to enhance the dramatic power of music in the theatre.

A new balance was undoubtedly struck in the ding-dong art of opera in which words pull against melody and drama against music, when instruments began to assert themselves against voices. For fifty years after Wagner's influence became paramount, composers concentrated on telling their story through the many-tongued voice of the orchestra, and they are still fascinated by its inexhaustible resources of subtlety and violence. But while the concert hall has gained enormously by this obsession, the opera house has lost, and unless the voice is restored to its supremacy in opera, the whole art of dramatic music is likely to be jeopardized.

Singers have always had and still occupy a key position in opera, but they no longer dominate the situation as they did in the eighteenth century, when a composer could not call his faculty of invention his own, but must submit it to the dictates of a fashion-

able singer. The singer's demands were for technical display, *fioriture*, trills, runs, and flourishes, an insistence on arias of a certain character and length according to category and a complete disregard for dramatic verisimilitude, if that clashed in any way with the exhibition of their personality and talents.

An analysis of Handel's thirty-six Italian operas written for London, made by W. S. Rockstro, shows that a set of arbitrary rules formed the construction of these "exotic and irrational entertainments" (Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755). There must be six principal characters, three of each sex, of whom the *prima donna* was a high soprano, and the *primo uomo*, the hero, an artificial soprano (*castrato*); the seconds might be either sopranos or contraltos; the third man might be a tenor, and if a fourth man was admitted, he might be a bass. Each character must have at least one aria in each act, and these arias must be one or other of five conventional types, though all were in the regular *da capo* form. There must be a duet for the first man and woman, and an ensemble of the principals constituted a "Chorus" for the conclusion. Such an opera could be no more than a concert in costume, and it represents the extreme point at which music completely swallowed the drama. It was to re-establish something like dramatic truth that the reforms of Gluck, enunciated in the famous preface to *Alceste*, were directed.

Against this indictment must be set the fact that they did sing magnificently. They must have done, or the opera which we find so frigid could never have satisfied men of taste for a whole century. The human voice is charged with emotional power, and when applied to a suitable medium, such as these operas, it can make

them incandescent at a touch. Perhaps such singing is a lost art; the operas, at any rate, are most of them past all hope of revival.

In Austria, the land that produced both Gluck and Mozart, North meets South, and East meets West; the cultures of Germany and Italy make contact, and ultimately make the Viennese School the supreme fact in musical history, and while Vienna has regarded itself as the last outpost of Europe against the barbarous East, the Near East has infected the last outpost of the culture of Versailles with that grace and delight in arabesque that is the chief feature of oriental art. In Vienna baroque architecture and rococo decoration flourished as nowhere else in Europe, except Spain, where the oriental element of extravagance was provided by the Arabs. But in the early eighteenth century whatever the influence of Versailles might be in other departments of life, its music was dominated by Italy.

The taste of the Hapsburg emperors was decisive, and though Slavs and Germans in their heterogeneous empire no doubt made their own local music, the main current of musical history was determined by aristocratic patronage. "The Emperors," writes Burney, "from the time of Ferdinand II (1619–1637) to Charles VI (1711–1740) had an invariable partiality for the Italian language and music." And so for a period Italian opera is international opera.

In 1730 an important figure in operatic history came to Vienna, the Italian poet Metastasio, who remained laureate until his death in 1782. He wrote some thirty dramas, which were used as the basis of opera books by a dozen different composers. He not only wrote for music, he was himself sufficient of a

musician (he played the harpsichord, sang, and composed) to give to a composer an idea of the kind of music he had in mind for this or that aria in his librettos. He is therefore one of the few librettists who has approached his work from the truly operatic angle with a definite idea how music and drama should pull together in double harness. So good were his librettos that they sufficed as a stock on which composers drew regularly for the best part of a century. Much has been written about the stupidity of librettists who have wrecked many an opera by the fatuity of their plots and the inanity of their words. There is not one to put beside Metastasio for fertility and durability, and in quality only Da Ponte, Boito, W. S. Gilbert, and more doubtfully von Hofmansthal, are his equals. Some of his librettos were set thirty times over, and their wearing qualities may be gauged from such instances as his *Didone Abbandonata*, which was set by Alessandro Scarlatti in 1724, and by Reissiger a hundred years later, with Porpora, Hasse, Jomelli, Piccini, Paisiello and others in between. His *La Clemenza di Tito* was set by Caldara in 1734, by Gluck in 1751, and by Mozart in 1791. Another book of his, set both by Gluck and Mozart, is *Il Re Pastore*.

Christopher Willibald Gluck was born near Carlsbad on 4th July, 1714, of peasant parentage. The name is Czech, and his nationality, in so far as geography or blood gave any meaning to that category of being in the eighteenth century, was Bohemian. But there is precious little of the Slav in his music, and his career took him from Prague to Vienna, thence to Italy, where he learnt to compose, and finally to Paris, though his home remained in Vienna from 1736 to the end of his days. (*d.* 1787.) His travels should have made him

a cosmopolitan, for he is found all over Europe up to the time of his marriage in 1750, as far north as Hamburg, as far west as London, and as far south as Naples. Originally he was an itinerant performer, for he played the harpsichord and the violin, and was a good singer; in London he played publicly on the musical glasses, and at an earlier stage in his career had learned much practical musicianship in a travelling opera company. But after his studies with Sammartini he quickly made his mark as a composer, and began to contribute to the pasticcios which were then the fashion in all Italian opera houses, including that in the Haymarket, where Gluck produced one of his own, *Piramus e Tisbe*.

The Pasticcio [1] is one of those phenomena which helped to give opera a bad name, though in musical comedy the practice still survives of compiling the music from several hands, and the one best known to English people is the highly popular *The Beggar's Opera*, in which requisition is made of the most varied material from many sources.[2]

But it is significant of the decline of the dramatic element in serious opera and of the domination of the singers that composers were willing to tumble anything they thought likely to attract, including proved favourites from previous works, into a dramatic scheme contrived by some man of the theatre who might employ two or three composers to produce a single "opera". There was therefore neither unity of style

[1] An example which has enabled Londoners to discover what sort of thing such a pastiche is, was staged in the autumn of 1938. *An Elephant in Arcady* was an ingenious compilation of Italian eighteenth-century music, which, in spite of its origin in half a dozen different composers, proved to be extraordinarily uniform in style; the plot was a satire on Arcadian Academies of the period.

[2] See below, Chap. VIII, p. 198.

nor unity of design in a pasticcio. Gluck, whose name was to be associated with a complete reform of operatic construction, for a long time showed no disposition either to question the formality of Italian opera or the formlessness of the pasticcio. Yet the leaven was working within him, and in 1762, when he was already forty-eight years old, he suddenly produced *Orfeo ed Euridice*. The leaven was without doubt his experience of French opera. He had seen Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* and had been struck with the truth and vigour of French recitative, as well as Rameau's effective use of the chorus and the dramatic treatment of ensemble, which contrasted strongly with the conventional string of solos that constituted Italian opera of the period.

The choice of the story of Orpheus's visit to the underworld in search of his lost Eurydice as the point of departure from the Italian convention which ruled in Vienna was probably determined by the similar dramatic scheme of *Castor et Pollux*, in which Pollux visits the underworld to retrieve his brother. The contrast of atmosphere between the infernal regions inhabited by Furies and the fields of the Blessed offers an opportunity to any composer who realizes that musical atmosphere can serve dramatic truth. At any rate Gluck's *Orpheus* is as notable a landmark in operatic history as was Monteverde's a hundred and sixty years before.

Gluck's *Orpheus* is the oldest opera in the regular repertory. It lives while the operas of a greater composer, Handel, have vanished from the boards, because it marks the departure from the old rigid conventions of *opera seria*. These reforms may be summarized under four heads; the chorus plays an important part musically and dramatically; the orchestra is enlarged

to contain horns, trombones and drums; to it was transferred the accompaniment of the recitative hitherto undertaken by the harpsichord; and the *da capo* form of aria is no longer accepted as *de rigueur*. But it retained at any rate in its original version two features of regular Italian opera, the high-voiced male for the principal character and the Italian language. On the other hand, it has only three principal characters, and is more intimate in style than the usual Italian opera.

When it was first produced in Vienna in 1762, Orpheus was sung by the male contralto Guadagni, a famous singer to whom Burney devotes several pages. When he came to England, he had a "full and well-toned counter-tenor" (i.e. a true and not a falsetto male alto), "but at a later visit he had changed it to a soprano, and extended its compass, from six or seven notes to fourteen or fifteen." The part of Orpheus is for an alto voice, and is now usually sung by female contraltos, but when Gluck revised the opera for production in Paris in 1774, he made his hero a tenor and effected the necessary transpositions. In England the version which Berlioz made in 1859 for the great contralto, Madame Viardot-Garcia, is generally used, but at the Paris opera Gluck's own version with a tenor hero is also mounted.[1]

Alceste, Gluck's next big opera, produced in Vienna in December 1767, is remembered by reason of its preface and the famous aria "Divinités du Styx".[2]

[1] It was so performed when the Paris Opera came over to Covent Garden in 1937.

[2] It has been performed by amateurs in recent times; the Oxford University Opera Club chose it for their second production in 1926, and the Hammersmith Literary Institute staged a performance in 1936, but before these there appears to have been no revival in England since Stanford did it with the Royal College of Music Students in 1904.

It is a landmark in the history of opera in that its preface makes explicit the principles that had guided the composer in *Orpheus* and its construction exemplifies them even more clearly. Orpheus and Eurydice are not strongly characterized, but the dramatic situation, arising out of their love, is the *raison d'être* of the music.

In *Alceste*, one central figure, the heroine, dominates the scene, and her character is built up in a succession of arias which bring out her various deep feelings of devotion, despair and courage. Admetus, even in Euripides, is not a very sympathetic character, and Gluck makes no attempt to do anything with him but provide him as a foil to his heroine. The part was sung by a male soprano at its Viennese performances in Italian, but a French version was prepared for performances in Paris in 1776 in which Admetus became a tenor and was provided at the last minute with a bass counterpart in Herakles, restored from Euripides' tragedy to help rescue his friend's wife. In this form the situation is cleared up in a trio from these three principal characters before the final chorus. It is probable that the aria assigned to Herakles, which sounds like a colourless variety of Handel, was not by Gluck at all, but by Gossec. The pasticcio habit was still infectious.

But it is situation, not character, on which Gluck concentrates, and for the sake of dramatic situation he over-simplifies the plot to the extent of making it emotionally monotonous, which was Rousseau's criticism of the opera. His music is designed, as he says in his preface, to enforce the interest of the situations. And he makes good his claim in "Divinités du Styx" which brings down the curtain on the first act, for the

tempo is constantly varying, and though it has a middle section and shortened recapitulation, it is a dramatic and not a formal aria. Other dramatic features are the march labelled Pantomime in the first act, which introduces the High Priest of Apollo and the pronouncement of the oracle in a monotone accompanied by trombones. Throughout the music is designed to intensify dramatic suspense, as his preface claims. But his manifesto also says a good deal more than that:

> When I undertook to set the opera *Alceste* to music, I resolved to avoid all those abuses which had crept into Italian opera through the mistaken vanity of singers and the unwise compliance of composers, and which had rendered it wearisome and ridiculous, instead of being as it once was, the grandest and most imposing drama of modern times. I endeavoured to reduce music to its proper function, that of seconding poetry by enforcing the expression of the sentiment and the interest of the situations, without interrupting the action, or weakening it by superfluous ornament. My idea was that the relation of music to poetry was much the same as that of harmonious colouring and well-disposed light and shade to an accurate drawing, which animates the figures without altering their outlines. I have therefore been very careful never to interrupt a singer in the heat of a dialogue in order to introduce a tedious ritornelle, nor to stop him in the middle of a piece either for the purpose of displaying the flexibility of his voice on some favourable vowel, or that the orchestra might give him time to take breath before a long-sustained passage.
>
> Furthermore, I have not thought it right to hurry through the second part of an aria if the words happened to be the most important of the whole, in order to repeat the first part regularly four times over; or to finish the air where the sense does not end in order to allow the singer to exhibit his power of varying the passage at pleasure. In fact, my object was to put an end to abuses against which good taste and good sense have long protested in vain.
>
> My idea has been that the overture ought to indicate

> the subject and prepare the spectators for the character of the piece they are about to see; that the instruments ought to be introduced in proportion to the degree of interest and passion in the words; and that it was necessary above all to avoid making too great a disparity between the recitative and the air of a dialogue, so as not to break the sense of a period or awkwardly interrupt the movement and animation of a scene. I also thought that my chief endeavour should be to attain a great simplicity, and consequently I have avoided making a parade of difficulties at the cost of clearness; I have set no value on novelty as such, unless it was suggested by the situation and suited to the expression; in short there was no rule which I did not consider myself at liberty to disregard for the sake of effect.

This vigorous document not only shows the aims of the reformers—with Gluck must be associated his new librettist Calzabigi and the Imperial intendant, Count Durazzo, both of whom were in revolt against the ideals of Metastasian *opera seria*—but reveals the conditions then obtaining on the operatic stage in a vivid light. It has been said of Gluck that though he was not a first-class composer he was a first-class artist, and there is a remark attributed to him to the effect that when a composer begins work on an opera, he should try to forget that he is a musician. The pressure of the hand of fashion must have been heavy indeed to wring such a remark from a composer. In pursuit of dramatic truth, he was prepared to go further still, and in the preface to his next opera, *Paride ed Elena*, he explains that he has had to do some violence to his inspiration in order to emphasize the differences of national character between a Phrygian hero and a Spartan heroine. An author, he says, who is concerned for truth, must not shrink from harshness, and even vulgarity, if they are required, since beauty of melody

and nobility of harmony may be positive faults in some contexts.

The Italian style demanded the addition of one beautiful air to another; the effect of the whole did not matter so long as the details were attractive. Gluck repudiated the Italian ideal of suavity at all cost and worked from the whole down to the details. History does not fully warrant his statement that music must be "reduced" to the secondary function of reinforcing the drama, since operas live by their music or not at all, but it is none the less true that operatic mortality is very high, and that the chief of the killing diseases is a faulty libretto. In Gluck the eternal tug-of-war between music and drama reached a satisfactory equilibrium.

The fact that both *Orpheus* and *Alcestis* exist in two forms, an earlier in Italian and a later in French, is due to the invitation which Gluck had when well on in life, to turn Racine's *Iphigénie en Aulide* into an opera for Paris. Paris had in 1752 split over the merits of Rameau's French classical opera and the invading Italians. Victory in this *guerre des bouffons* had gone to the Italians and the somewhat frigid style of Rameau was left with no one to carry it on after his death in 1764.

But nationalist passion is not so easily extinguished, and a new champion was found for French opera in the Austrian Gluck. Gluck, however, was a widely travelled man, who could speak three languages and, considering his peasant origin, was extraordinarily adaptable. His practice was to live with his librettos a long time before attempting to set them, and in *Iphigénie en Aulide* he mastered French declamation as well as the high classical style of French drama.

He attempted the portrayal of the ordinary love of a man for a maid in the delineation of Achilles as a hot-headed young man in love with the young Iphigenia, victim of a father's dilemma. Gluck's librettist, the diplomatist Bailly du Roullet, who had first suggested the project to him, used this motive for the dénouement of the plot, herein following neither Euripides nor Racine. Racine had substituted another human victim and Euripides a hind. Gluck, in pursuit of dramatic probability and accustomed to the habit of Greek deities (as portrayed by eighteenth-century poets) of changing their minds at the last minute, advances a stage further in the humanizing of his characters, which reached its highest development in the other *Iphigénie* which he wrote four years later.

But if Gluck humanized persons who in the ancient classical drama were drawn larger than life size, he never individualized them very sharply. As Professor Dent has wittily observed, they give the impression to the modern listener of being statues of white marble rather than human beings. It may be the cult of the novel which has given modern people so strong a taste for characterization, and judged by modern standards, Gluck's heroes and heroines are types rather than persons, but compared with Rameau's personages preserved in ice, they are creatures of flesh and blood. Throughout his career he aimed at verisimilitude and he increasingly achieved it, though he remained faithful to the well-established operatic tradition of drawing subjects from classical mythology, except in the case of *Armide*, which is a tale of mediæval, knightly chivalry.

Iphigénie en Tauride, produced in Paris in 1779, is his last and greatest opera, written when the composer

was sixty-five to a libretto by one François Guillard. It is cast in four acts, and the overture is not detachable, but depicts the storm which breaks over the Temple of Artemis as the curtain goes up. Iphigenia, having escaped the sacrificial knife, has been taken by the goddess into her service and is now a priestess in Tauris, i.e. the Crimea, where the Scythians dwell. Clytemnestra has by now been murdered, and her son Orestes is pursued by the Furies. Indeed they bring before him in his delirium a shade of the murdered Clytemnestra, and when Iphigenia appears Orestes at first mistakes her for Clytemnestra. This scene is the most powerful in the opera, and indeed, as far as emotional stress is concerned, the most vivid thing Gluck ever wrote. Recognition between brother and sister is delayed until the last act. Finally the goddess appears from the machine; Artemis lifts the curse from Orestes and bids him return with Iphigenia to Mycenæ.

Gluck seems to have been limited not only in purely musical accomplishment—Handel once contemptuously remarked that he knew no more counterpoint than his cook, who happened to be a trained singer—but also in emotional endowment.[1] At any rate he was defective in the musical expression of the one emotion that has usually been to the fore in opera—erotic passion. *Armide*, as well as to a less extent *Iphigénie en Aulide*, fails in the portrayal of a certain kind of

[1] *Iphigénie en Aulide* was revised and partially rescored by Wagner while he was in charge of the Dresden Opera, and this version is in general use in Continental Opera Houses, but when the opera was revived in England (by amateurs, of course, the Oxford University Opera Club in 1933) Gluck's own score was used. *Iphigénie en Tauride* has been similarly retouched by Richard Strauss, whose version is used at the New York Metropolitan. It too has been recently revived in England by amateurs, the Falmouth Opera Singers, who gave it in 1933 and brought it to London in 1934. When *Armide* was done at Covent Garden in 1928, it was sung in English.

sensuous emotion. In *Iphigénie en Tauride* there is no place for erotic love; the catastrophic emotions and the love of man for man, and of brother for sister, are its subject-matter. Gluck in his pursuit of dramatic truth here achieves also musical beauty. Here at last there is no divorce between them. In his greatest opera—it was not quite his last, for *Echo et Narcisse* followed it four months later, in 1779, but was not a success—the reformer of opera has solved his problem —beauty and truth are not antagonists after all. He leaves their reconciliation to young Mozart, who was in Paris when Gluck's fame was at its height, and young Mozart shows in *Idomeneo* that the lesson has not been lost on him.

CHAPTER IV

Mozart

MOZART has become the idol of contemporary taste. Less than fifty years ago it was quite otherwise. Those in Britain who derived their education and their inspiration from Sir Hubert Parry can recall that so good a judge of music rated Mozart low among the greatest composers for his superficiality. Mozart, who belonged to the age of reason and never breathed any other air than that of eighteenth-century formality, was not highly accounted by the later generations of the nineteenth century, whose ideal was a combination of moral earnestness with romantic exuberance. But the natural swing of the pendulum, the practical advocacy of Sir Thomas Beecham, the perfection of the Glyndebourne performances, the pre-Anschluss vogue for Salzburg as a holiday resort, the sensitive writings of Mr. W. J. Turner, and the more discriminating criticism of Mr. Dyneley Hussey and Mr. Eric Blom [1] have combined to drive up Mozart's quotation on the musical stock market to the highest figure of all. Not everyone, however, will feel bound to follow this distinguished advocacy to the point of idolatry; his more sober admirers may grant that there is a case for the Victorian view without denying that Mozart was a heaven-sent genius.

[1] All of whom have written appreciative biographies during the last ten years.

Mozart was a prodigy as an infant, and he never fully grew up. He had trouble enough in his life and there was a core of character to his personality, the hammer and the anvil respectively that might have made a great man of him. The last works show that the process had begun—the three symphonies, the string and clarinet quintets, the five comic operas, but not the *Requiem* nor *La Clemenza di Tito*.

He was by natural disposition a consummate artist, so that whatever he touched was shaped in formal perfection; his stream of invention never ran dry; but the actual stuff of his creation plumbs neither the heights nor the depths of human life. His was the limited perfection of immaturity as compared with wise old Haydn or tempestuous Beethoven. Creative art is a contradictory business; no one who is not as prodigally fertile as Nature herself attains to the highest rank, yet a facility as copious as Mozart's spares the composer the blood and the tears and the sheer labour which are necessary ingredients of the greatest art.

Mozart, who was little in stature, insignificant in person though great in charm, was no Titan, he was in fact no greater than his own Tamino. Even had he lived, he could not have ushered in the new age as Beethoven, his junior by fourteen years, was destined to do. He was the most musical composer who ever lived, but the greatest composers are musicians plus something else. That something else, which few men are likely to acquire in their twenties, dawned on him at thirty; at thirty-five he died.

All this sounds like disparagement in these days of his canonization, beatification, deification. All that it means is that his was a creative but not an original or

a powerful mind; that he accepted the conventions, the very forms even, of contemporary music, that he worked on them without even a feeling of constraint, though not quite so much can be said of his acquiescence in the social code of his day. His idiom was not distinctively his own, so much as the current musical speech of his time raised to a higher power. No one ever had such a power of throwing off a few notes, a scale maybe, or five-finger exercise, a momentary dwelling on the important note, a feminine cadence, and lo, there is a melody. This is not the pure lyricism of a folk-song or of a Schubert, but it is the basis of that unfailing stream of symphonic writing which carries the dialogue so effortlessly in his operas. His style, his idiom, his melody even, is Gluck's and Haydn's and Boccherini's and that of a score of other grey-wigged gentlemen who talked the same language, but it is a little more nimble than Gluck, a little less robust than Haydn, a little more distinguished than Boccherini, and very much more alive than the twenty others. But it was not personal to himself; the eighteenth century, unlike the nineteenth, did not ask that it should be. But the operas show an expansion of his vocabulary, not apparent in his symphonic and chamber works, when he turned from Italian to German texts. With him the international language of music comes to an end and nationalism begins.

He was not the originator of *Singspiel*, whose origins go back to the miracle plays, but he was nevertheless the founder of German opera, which grew out of the series of *Singspiele* which he wrote in the course of his career. The first was *Bastien and Bastienne*, composed in 1768, when he was twelve years old, the last was his greatest work, *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic*

Flute). In between came *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Elopement* or *Seraglio*) and *Der Schauspieldirektor* (*The Impresario*), with one or two fragmentary works.[1]

Singspiele, however, are only one class of dramatic works to be found in Mozart's total output of twenty-two titles. Several of these pieces for the stage are incomplete; three are technically described as serenatas, i.e. cantatas capable of presentation in tableaux; and four are his contributions to the dying tradition of *opera seria*. But the largest class of Mozart's stage works is Italian *opera buffa*, of which the first he wrote (in 1769) was *La Finta Semplice*[2] (K 51) or *The Pretended Simpleton* on the stock theme of the amorous old man, the crafty young woman and her lover, and the last was *Cosi fan Tutte* (K 588) in 1790. Between them came five others, not all of them complete, of which *Le Nozze di Figaro* (K 492) (*Figaro's Wedding*) and *Don Giovanni* (K 527) are among the greatest operas of all history, and show to what a pitch of development the rudimentary organism, the comic intermezzo, could reach in the course of a century.

La Finta Giardiniera (K 196) (*The Counterfeit Gardener-Girl*), coming six years after the similarly entitled *La Finta Semplice*, naturally shows a musical advance, but is written to a worse book about equally conventional figures of comic opera, six lovers and an old bachelor. It contains more concerted numbers and some of the arias are relieved with descriptive touches of musical humour.

[1] See p. 72-3.

[2] A performance, edited and conducted by Mr. Leslie Heward, was given at Mr. R. L. Stuart's season at the Scala Theatre in January 1930. *La Finta Semplice* has been performed in recent years, at Karlsruhe in 1921 and in Vienna, its first performance in the city for which it was written, on 10th February, 1925.

The next two essays in *opera buffa*, both belonging to the year 1783, were sketched but abandoned after a few numbers had been composed.

From such unpropitious antecedents sprang the greatest of all comedy operas, *Figaro*. For it is wrong to call *Figaro* a comic opera, even in the sense in which Rossini's *Barber* is a comic opera, though in form it belongs to the category of Italian *opera buffa*. Its plot concerns not the puppets of traditional farce but real people, people indeed who helped to make history, for Beaumarchais's trilogy, on which the libretto is founded, is always said to have played its part in the generation of the French Revolution. The trilogy consisted of *Le Barbier de Seville*, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and *La Mère coupable*, of which the first two have become familiar to musicians the world over. Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Seviglia* and Mozart's *Figaro* do not fit together in any way, though *Figaro* himself is recognizable as the same man in both pieces. Mozart made Don Basilio, the egregious musician, a tenor and Count Almaviva a baritone; Rossini reversed the allocation of voices and made Basilio a deep bass, and the Count a lyric tenor. But the two stories must be considered together, since the saddened Countess in *Figaro* was once the high-spirited Rosina who eloped with Almaviva in *The Barber*, and an acquaintance with the two busybodies, Dr. Bartolo and Marcellina, is presupposed from the earlier play in *Figaro*. Both are comedies of intrigue, but that in *The Barber* is straightforward compared with the final complications in *Figaro* which can hardly be followed in the last act of the opera with its darkened stage, its assumed disguises, its feigned voices (which no singer ever succeeds in conveying to the audience) and its causal

dependence on so invisible an object as a lost pin.

Stripped of complications, the tale is as follows:

The Sevillian nobleman, Count Almaviva, succeeds in carrying off the desirable young heiress, Rosina, from under the nose of her elderly guardian, Dr. Bartolo, who had every intention of marrying her himself. The elopement is made possible by the boldness and resource of the barber Figaro who, as he describes himself in Rossini's famous aria, is everyone's factotum, and has the entry to every house in the place. The duenna who is responsible for Rosina's upbringing in Dr. Bartolo's house is his discarded mistress, Marcellina. The turning-point in the second play is the discovery that Figaro is their unacknowledged son.

Sufficient time has elapsed between the two plays for the Count and Countess to have grown tired of each other. The Count at the moment is seeking distraction by the pursuit of his wife's maid, Susanna, while the Countess reaps the fruits of her unhealthy upbringing by an almost neurotic preoccupation with her own emotions. Figaro is about to marry Susanna —indeed it is his wedding-day—and he is concerned to ensure that his bride comes to him a virgin, for this is the end of the feudal period, when the *droit de seigneur*, the old *jus primæ noctis*, has indeed been discredited but not wholly discarded. The drama thus turns entirely on class distinction and a cynical sexual morality. The Count has publicly declared that he renounces this old "right" to the persons of his tenants' female dependants, but he hopes all the same to obtain his desires in the case of the vivacious and pretty Susanna by means of cajolery and bribes. Susanna is determined that he shall by no means treat her so, but she has only her mother wit to fend

off the Count's attentions, aided by her Figaro's resource and the moral support of her lady. Figaro's freedom of action, however, is somewhat cramped by a bond made with Marcellina over a loan, and he only escapes marriage with her by the opportune discovery that he is her son. His marriage with Susanna therefore can proceed, and the festivities are converted into those of a double wedding, for Marcellina and Dr. Bartolo now resign themselves to sober matrimony. But none of them has yet done with the Count; the Countess wants to make a bid to regain her husband's affections, and is prepared to use Susanna for the purpose; an assignation in the garden is arranged for that night, and after a series of misunderstandings in the regular *buffa* manner the Count's goings-on are revealed and reconciliations all round bring an eventful wedding-day to a close.

Doubts have been thrown on the *droit de seigneur*; perhaps it never obtained the legal status of a *droit* or *jus*, but the custom must have had wide prevalence over large tracts of Europe for centuries, and Beaumarchais could not have made his play turn on it so explicitly if the practice was unknown—the satire would have lost its edge.

The play was banned by the censorship for five years in France, and because of the social criticism it implied, it was still under the ban of the Viennese censorship when Mozart suggested to da Ponte that he should adapt *Figaro* for him, since an opera might get past the censor and attract the curiosity of the public. Paisiello's setting of *The Barber of Seville* had already had a success which Mozart hoped to repeat.

Lorenzo da Ponte, like Beaumarchais, was a lively customer used to intrigue. His father was a Venetian

Jew who became a Catholic and had his son baptized. The only career open to an educated man who was not a noble was in the church, and da Ponte was ordained, but he was not a person of devout life, and he made several places too hot for him before settling in Vienna. There he found employment in providing librettos for Salieri, who was then in charge of the Italian opera which the Court maintained. He was a godsend to Mozart, and provided the books of all three comic operas of his maturity.

Beaumarchais had an even more adventurous career. The son of a clockmaker, he got employment at the Court of Louis XVI, and rose to be a secretary to the king, for which he was ennobled. His financial ability won him a fortune, but that, as such successes often do, led to litigation and even to imprisonment. At one time he was in the French Secret Service, and undertook several missions to England, which in turn induced him to help the American colonies in their revolt against Britain. He survived the Revolution, wrote his memoirs and died in 1799.

Figaro, the opera, opens with two duets. It was more usual to introduce the principal characters in an aria, which would define their personalities for the audience, but *Figaro* is full of extraverted people who are so busy getting on with their jobs or their intrigues that they have little time for reflexion such as a soliloquy or set solo would impose upon them.

The duets, besides their psychological fitness, have the merit of exposing at the start the symphonic character of the opera. Each is in a binary form, suitably adapted to dramatic purposes. In the first Figaro has a staccato phrase balanced by a cantabile phrase from Susanna, both in the same key (G). The phrases are now reversed;

Susanna pattering out her staccato chatter about her hat is followed by Figaro admiring her in the smooth phrase he has taken from her lips, all of which proceeds in the key of the dominant. A little bridge passage leads to the second part where the second subject, now back in the tonic key, is taken first, both singers carolling it in tenths, and the duet ends with the first subject, now become more confident and rounded off with a flourish of horns. In the second duet the lay-out of keys is similar, though the range of modulation is a little wider—Figaro begins in B flat and goes to the dominant, Susanna picks up the same phrase, but sings it in the relative minor.

Susanna is the most fully developed character in the opera and continues to grow even in the last act where a new light is shed on her character in the aria " Deh vieni non tardar ", in which she reveals unexpected depths of feeling and fundamental seriousness. Cherubino, whose fate it is always to turn up in the wrong place, shows his youth in the breathless aria " Non so più ", describing the pangs of calf-love for anything in petticoats from the Countess down to the gardener's daughter, Barbarina. Although on the verge of a military career he is a soprano, a relic of the tradition which assigned the chief male parts to male sopranos, though the castrati themselves never sang in *opera buffa*.

The third soprano does not appear till the second act, which she begins with a cavatina " Porgi amor ", proclaiming her unhappy condition in having lost her husband's love. Here and in " Dove sono " the Countess is a rather pathetic figure, but she never loses control either of herself or the situation and she plays her cards well. Figaro, for all that he is the prime intriguer, is

a frank person who shows two sides of his boisterous humour in the two arias he has in the first act. Thereafter except for a darker moment near the end he is the central thread through all the intrigue and its development in concerted numbers. The less important but more thorough-paced rascals, Marcellina and Basilio, are sketched as they appear in ensembles, but in the last act they are given an aria apiece to round off their characters. But as these songs do nothing to forward the action they are usually omitted.[1]

Such is the main characterization. It is developed in half a dozen duets, a couple of trios and a sextet in addition to the great concerted finales. Some less essential numbers are an enrichment to the score: Cherubino's little song "Voi che sapete", a lilting wedding march, a fandango for the sake of its solitary patch of Spanish local colour, and Barbarina's wisp of plaintive song over the lost pin.

This is the best of all Mozart's operas in the sense that form and matter are most completely at one. Here is true music drama, and though the old forms are retained, they are at the service of the action. The music floods a rather hard play with warm humanity. Da Ponte rightly removed the direct political satire from Beaumarchais's play, perhaps with an eye on the censorship, but more likely with a just appreciation of what music can absorb in the way of affairs. But the satire remains and the privileged classes are still castigated in the person of the Count, and more subtly in the self-centredness of the Countess. There is the salt; the sweetness is provided by Mozart, who rightly claimed against an objector that not wantonness but fidelity is the real subject of the opera. The opera may

[1] *Not however at Glyndebourne.*

not be so great, music for music, as *Don Giovanni*, but it is a much better constructed piece; it may not be so original as the German operas, and certainly has not the depth of *The Magic Flute*, but it has more body and more humanity than the more brilliant *Cosi fan Tutte*. It is therefore most people's favourite.

It was first performed in Vienna on 1st May, 1786, with the aid of the Emperor's intervention, and was well received, yet did not retain the favour of the fickle Viennese who passed on to another novelty, Martin's *Una cosa rara*, a snatch of which Mozart quotes in the supper scene of *Don Giovanni*. But Prague, which always showed a consistent enthusiasm for Mozart's music, welcomed it wholeheartedly, and when Mozart visited the city in January 1787 he found his opera making money for the management of the national theatre so comfortably that he was asked to provide a successor to it in the following winter. He therefore approached da Ponte for another libretto, and da Ponte suggested the story of Don Juan as a subject. *Don Giovanni* in due course was brought to birth, and was first produced in Prague on 29th October, 1787. It marked a growth in Mozart's powers which, applied to an episodic plot, have dislocated its structure and made its emotional complexion ambiguous.

It is laid out in eleven scenes divided into two acts, though it rather looks as though the sextet in the second act was originally designed as a finale, and as though the Don's encounter with the statue was intended to be relegated to a third act. The opera as we have it suffers further from a revision which it underwent after the Prague performance for production in Vienna. It presents many problems to the

producer and mentally leaves a disjointed effect on the listener, whether because, as at Glyndebourne, there are too many changes of scene or because, as at Sadler's Wells, there are not enough, or whether in the last resort because the story itself is not homogeneous however it is presented. It is not even clear, for instance, how long the action takes. Professor Dent surprisingly puts it all within twenty-four hours. But this seems quite impossible, since even Spanish profligates must sometimes sleep, but still more because Donna Anna must be given time to provide herself with the mourning she is instructed to wear in a stage direction of the second act, and most of all because the Commendatore has not only been committed to the cemetery before Don Giovanni encounters him for the second time, but has had a fine equestrian statue erected to him complete with an inscription which the wretched Leporello tries to decipher in the moonlight. Don Giovanni's attempts to seduce four different women is perhaps not an extravagant allowance for one day, for if he was as uniformly unsuccessful on very many days in the week as he is in the cross section of his life which we are shown, it is difficult to see how he could ever have amassed the totals chronicled in the catalogue which Leporello recounts to Donna Elvira in a famous aria. But it would be hard going even for a man of Don Juan's abundant vitality to encompass a homicide, a wedding party, a street row, an encounter with a ghost, a supper party and finally the visitation of a stone guest and a descent to hell all in one day. There is no need to assume so much, and it is better to accept the episodic, not to say undramatic, character of the libretto—for drink (the "champagne" aria) and seduction are usually only

dramatic in their sequelæ, not in their theatrical presentation.

Then too the Don himself embodies two different and not necessarily related moral qualities—unbridled licentiousness and unabashed impiety. It is not so much his sexual exploits as his irreverence towards the dead that brings him to a bad end, though the two sins have a common quality of utter shamelessness. This lack of restraint is what endears Don Juan to civilized humanity, on the same principle as the most economical of us enjoys the smashing of crockery at a cock-shy or vicariously in a film.

His first known appearance was in Spain in 1630; Molière introduced him to France in 1665, Shadwell with the assistance of Purcell to England in 1676, Goldoni to Italy in 1736. Since then he has reappeared in modern music in Strauss's tone-poem about a very psychological Don Juan, and in Goossens's opera about a repentant and perhaps different Don Juan de Mañara.

Apart from its structural irregularity *Don Giovanni* has out-grown the *opera buffa* form in emotional weight and almost turned itself into a tragi-comedy. The nineteenth century with an error of perspective natural to a romantic epoch saw it as a romantic opera—were not graveyards and the supernatural part of the stock-in-trade of romance? They therefore clipped off the *opera buffa* finale in which after the Don's disappearance in fire and brimstone the rest of the party reassemble and sing a cheerful "good riddance" to him, and accepted Don Ottavio's sententious summary of the situation that Heaven had championed the cause of morality. If this was an error, as indeed it must be if it leads to such crude surgery, there is still some excuse for it. The overture

sounds too powerful a note for *opera buffa* right at the start; the key is D minor, most romantic in association for Mozart, and the hysterical Donna Elvira is almost a romantic novelist's creation. Mozart and da Ponte, however, definitely designated it as *dramma giocoso.*

It is unconventional too in another though not exactly romantic way, in having no heroine among the three soprano characters. As in *Figaro* these women are drawn with a sure characterization, as though Mozart had an unusually acute insight into the female heart. Mr. Eric Blom makes a suggestion of great psychological probability when he says that Mozart's " sympathy with his women characters was his compensation for his lack of that complete understanding between him and any real woman that was one of the afflictions of his life ".

Donna Elvira has the best claim to be regarded as the heroine of the opera, but her emotions are not altogether healthy. She shows symptoms of the neurosis brought on by the sex starvation of education in a nunnery. She falls at once for Don Giovanni and can never rid herself of her passion for him, as she admits in so many words in the trio at the beginning of the second act. She is faithful to the end and is in at the death, making a final effort to redeem her reprobate lover. The division in her mind, pulling her towards her seducer even while she feels horror at his wickedness and some anger at her own betrayal by him, is made more explicit in the aria which Mozart added for the Viennese performance, which begins with a raging recitative but melts into " Mi tradi "

The Commendatore needs no elaboration as a person in the play, though Professor Dent is a little hard on him when he calls him a stage-property like his own

horse. He is, after all, the rock on which Don Giovanni splits. His heavy bass voice—yet he sings mostly in the high part of it, and only goes below A once to touch a G sharp—is heard right at the beginning of the opera in that opening scene, which defies formal classification but belongs in style to the accompanied recitative of *opera seria* as used by Gluck. And he is heard again announced by trombones in the churchyard, and for the last time in the supper scene accompanied by the same relentless syncopation as was heard at the beginning of the Overture. The use of trombones reserved for occasions of awe was suggested by Gluck in *Alceste* and was copied by Mozart in *Idomeneo* to solemnify the voice of the *deus ex machina*; it never fails to be impressive.

I have stigmatized the plot as episodic rather than truly dramatic. Its logical coherence was not strengthened by the changes which Mozart made for its performance in Vienna, where in spite of a certain amount of intrigue and opposition it had to be produced after its great success in Prague. The tenor found "Il mio tesoro" beyond his capacity and Mozart gave him "Dalla sua pace" instead. The soprano, Madame Cavalieri, was a gifted singer and thought herself inadequately served with Elvira's music and was therefore provided with "Mi tradi". The other addition was a whole scene for Masetto and Zerlina, in which she ties him to a chair. This piece of farce is now never retained, though the additional arias often are. The dramatic weakness of da Ponte's witty libretto is further exposed by the lack of any expedient for getting Don Giovanni out of his fix in the finale of the first act, when the masked guests at the wedding party, so handsomely given for Zerlina by Don Giovanni,

have driven him into a corner. Most producers make him break through the crowd and run away; but there is no stage direction and no allusion is made in the second act to the episode, and he begins his games again immediately.

On the other hand the dramatic moments are very dramatic. The opening scene has already been mentioned, though not the dark tragic quality it takes on at the duel between Donna Anna's father and the Don. The triplet figure in F minor, afterwards borrowed by Beethoven in the "Moonlight" sonata, strikes a chill of tragic horror after the cheerful grousing of Leporello with which the number began—Leporello "giving in his notice" is entrusted with the opening of each act. Leporello and the Commendatore point the antithesis of the two forces in the tragi-comedy. At the other end of the opera the contrast is emphasized by a happy flash of musical wit. The stage band lends a touch of cultured gaiety, as a foil to the stark reality of Elvira's shriek when she sees the statue approaching, a shriek intensified by a sharp modulation from B flat to C minor which upsets even the Don's equilibrium. Here again tragedy and comedy elbow each other first one way and then another for dominance of the score. But comedy has the last word, and the opera ends on a note of moral cheerfulness.

There is no suggestion of tragedy, hardly any of human feeling about Mozart's last essay in *opera buffa*. *Cosi fan Tutte* might be a marionette opera, a sort of grown-up *Bastien and Bastienne*, for all the real humanity its characters possess. Here is the last perfection of that formal and riotously artificial art that is called baroque before the deluge of humanitarian sentiment and romantic seriousness let loose on Europe by the

French Revolution. But we need not look for shadows of coming events in it—the fatal year, 1789, was over when *Cosi fan Tutte* reached the stage and the society satirized in *Figaro* was already in the early stages of its dissolution while Mozart was writing the opera. Nor is there social satire, for though the inconstancy of woman is its theme, the moral is not pressed home. " Cosi fan tutte—they're all alike," sings Don Alfonso, and is echoed by Ferrando and Gratiano when the case is proved to them—the musical phrase being the opera's motto prominently placed in the opening and closing bars of the overture. But the end is the conventional one of " they lived happily ever after ". The plot indeed is rather a game played with counters than a drama played by humans. Its construction is too fantastically symmetrical for real life, and its motives too mechanical for real people. We do not even know at the end whether the sisters are to marry their original choice or the changelings.

Da Ponte's two pairs of lovers behave with such mechanical rigidity that for the better part of the nineteenth century the opera went unperformed because of its absurdity. Dorabella and Fiordiligi react, they " go through the motions ", they " register emotion ", but they never behave or feel as persons of flesh and blood behave and feel. The human facts are that men and women choose each other for purposes of love; the comic facts about these two are that when the mechanical stimulus of a male lover is applied to the female heart, the female heart in each case mechanically reacts by showing erotic behaviour towards the man who, when undisguised, was her sister's lover. This is a case, in the Bergsonian phrase, of " something mechanical being encrusted on the living ", for if these

lovers are not human, but only machines, they still look like humans and human behaviour is assumed from them—certainly no mechanical clock would enable them to sing Mozart's florid melody, which is a specifically human accomplishment. The very conventions of *opera buffa* themselves make their antics funnier, for the stiffer the convention, the more funnily it "encrusts itself" on the wayward working of the human heart.

The symmetry of the plot gave Mozart four voices which might conveniently be soprano, alto (or mezzo-soprano), tenor and bass. To the two pairs of lovers were added a baritone in the person of the cynical, philosophical bachelor Alfonso, who lays the wager against the girls' constancy, and the indispensable soubrette who impersonates—quite incredibly on any rational or realistic approach to the story—a doctor and a lawyer in turn. This is Despina, a light soprano in distinction to the high coloratura style required for Fiordiligi. Don Alfonso, who pulls the strings, sings only in recitative and ensemble and has no aria; Despina has an aria in each act, and the lovers get altogether ten arias between them. But it does not take a mathematician to see at a glance that the possibility of permutations and combinations of voices in ensemble is considerable. The two ladies can warble of their love in thirds and sixths with clarinets echoing their sighs, or they can apportion the dark stranger and the handsome blond in playful runs. The two men (tenor and bass) can extract a flourish in imitation from stern thoughts of duty. Bass and mezzo-soprano, having newly paired off when the departed lovers return in Oriental disguise, can exchange heart-beats over fluttering staccato semiquavers. Ferrando has

more difficulty in causing Fiordiligi's heart to waver, and oboes take the place of clarinets in the number which begins as a duel and ends as a duet.

The two women are differentiated in character as well as in voice: Fiordiligi, the coloratura, is the less susceptible of the two, and does something, as she shows in the duet with Ferrando just mentioned, to justify the claims she makes in her big tempestuous aria in the first act, " Come scoglio " (" Firm as a rock ").

But the emotions are also abstractions. It is as though Mozart was a chemist who could distil the emotions proper to operatic business, and decant it in bottles of the shapes and capacities provided by the forms of *opera buffa*. It is this alembic which is Mozart's distinguishing characteristic among composers, and that places him in the supreme trio of operatic geniuses.

To be added to Mozart's list of Italian operas are the four examples of *opera seria*, of which only one needs more than passing mention—*Idomeneo*, written for Munich, produced there for the first time in 1781, and still to be seen and heard in that city at the little rococo Residenz Theater. *Idomeneo*, however, in spite of a symphonic style and a musical content which relates it more closely to his symphonies than to the five great comic operas, retains many of the characteristics of traditional *opera seria*: the part of Idamante is written for castrato, there is a good deal of florid vocal writing, the text sets forth the correct emotions of a formal opera of the period, the duets carol in Italianate thirds and sixths more frankly than in the more dramatic comedies, and the ending is brought about by a *deus ex machina*. Its formality and comparative inhumanity have caused it to suffer

the same fate as its predecessors in spite of the guarantee of Mozart's name.[1]

The story deals with one of those rash promises to sacrifice to a mercenary-minded deity which, in the legends of antiquity, symbolize man's desperate resolve to mortgage his future if he can but redeem his present. Several features besides the oracular trombones recall Gluck's methods, notably the use of the chorus, which in a formal opera of a previous generation had no part at all, and the accompaniment of the recitative. There is less *recitativo secco* than there is orchestrally accompanied recitative in *Idomeneo*, and a great range of dramatic suggestiveness is obtained by mixing them and passing flexibly from one to the other.

The Clemency of Titus has also been revived by the Falmouth and Glasgow amateurs, who solved the difficulties of parts written for male sopranos by boldly accommodating them to the tenor range. The libretto was remodelled from Metastasio and the whole conception was that of a moribund form. Mozart's own mind was full of the new and more romantic ideas suggested by *The Magic Flute*, whose composition he interrupted in order to execute the royal command for an opera at Prague to celebrate the Emperor's coronation there as King of Bohemia in September. The mysterious commission for the *Requiem* had come to him in July. *Titus*, commissioned in August, was therefore written in haste. Even compared with *Idomeneo* the opera is a failure. Ten years separate it from *Idomeneo*, and three months from Mozart's death. After Mozart Italian opera develops along its

[1] In Britain it is never done except by courageous amateurs like the Glasgow Grand Opera Society and the Falmouth Opera Singers, both of whom have staged it in the nineteen-thirties, and most recently by the Cambridge University Musical Society.

own less international lines. With Mozart's *Singspiele* German opera really begins.

Singspiel, like English ballad opera, is a play with music to be distinguished from opera in that no dramatic development takes place in the music. The plot is developed in spoken words, though recitative is not absolutely precluded; the situations are crowned with a song or an ensemble. The credit for the establishment of this kind of opera as a separate form of art is generally assigned to Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804) who adapted French operettas for a company of actors at Leipzig, who were not trained singers. He therefore gave them simple strophic songs to sing among the dialogue and a few concerted numbers. "At present the comic operas of Mr. Hiller," says Dr. Burney, "in the language of the country and without recitative are the favourite amusements of that city." Of these the most famous is *Die Jagd*.

Haydn wrote one (1751), and might perhaps have developed as an operatic composer if his professional duties had not prescribed Italian operas, commissioned *ad hoc* chiefly for the private theatre at Esterhazy and all of them now dead, with the exception of *L'Isola Disabitata*, a one-act *opera seria*, which is from time to time revived.[1] The marionette operas of which he wrote several, however, belong to this category, and it is as a marionette opera that Mozart's *Bastien and Bastienne*, which is for practical reckoning the oldest surviving *Singspiel*, is most often heard, though it has been sung several times in London by the Vienna Choir boys. It is a slender Arcadian story of the reconciliation of two lovers by a professed magician—a parody of

[1] E.g. at the Haydn Centenary at Vienna in 1909, and at the Florence May Festival in 1937.

Rousseau's *Le Devin du Village*, which contains a joke at the expense of Dr. Mesmer. The music composed by Mozart in 1768 when he was ten years old is as pellucid as one would expect, but startles the modern listener when the overture begins because its theme is that of the opening horn tune of the "Eroica" symphony. Two unfinished *Singspiele*, *Zaide*, with a Turkish theme, and *Thamos* with an Egyptian, are respectively the forerunners of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *The Magic Flute*.

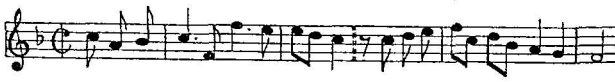
With *Die Entführung*, which is sometimes called *The Elopement* in England, though the tail of its Italian title, *Seraglio*, is commoner, *Singspiel* develops into something bigger and more highly organized than anything previously produced in the form. Mozart, as we know from a letter, took a good deal of pains to make the music a predominant feature, arguing from the success of Italian comic operas that, provided the situations are well planned, the words should be written for the music rather than the other way round, herein differing from the professed æsthetic of Gluck and Wagner. It is the more surprising therefore that the Turkish ruler, the Pasha Selim, who is charged with the function of resolving the crisis of the plot by an act of clemency, is not a singing part at all. When it is well done—as in the Glyndebourne production of recent years it has been by Herr Carl Ebert who brings to the part the real dignity of a magnanimous ruler—the drama steals the music's thunder and at the climax of an opera the composer is mute.

Seraglio has an incidental interest for English people, because in it appears that familiar figure, the Englishwoman abroad, in the person of Blonde, who is maid to the heroine Constanze. Constanze, who is neither

English, German, nor even Spanish (Spain has always been a country conveniently over the border for libretto writers, who, either because of censorships or for the sake of vaguely foreign local colour, wish to lay their scenes abroad), is merely a heroine transferred from Italian opera, complete with an enormous aria, to the German stage. This famous show-piece of coloratura singing with a compass of two octaves from D to D in alt, "Martern aller Arten" ("Tortures of every description"), is, besides being a vocal aria, an instrumental concerto into the bargain, since flute, oboe, violin and violoncello form a concertante group in antithesis to the tutti of voice and orchestra. This is not the only instance where Mozart has over-weighted the music: Belmonte's second aria and a duet for the lovers are also rather too intense, too heroic in style in fact, to fit consistently into the general scheme of a comic opera. Belmonte, being an aristocrat, is a lyric tenor with a very ingratiating aria in "O wie angstlich". Pedrillo, his companion, is also a tenor, and he has a serenade to sing which some connoisseurs of Mozart pick out as the best thing in the opera. On paper its strains look simple enough except for a surprisingly wide sweep of modulation, but its key is left purposely indeterminate to make it sound exotic, like the Moorish lands of which it speaks. Pedrillo is responsible for circumventing Osmin, the Pasha's formidable chamberlain, and excites his animosity at an early stage. From the dramatic point of view therefore the part is a lively one, just as Blonde's is. These two servants are by no means the stock characters of comic opera; Pedrillo therefore should not overplay the part too broadly, nor should Blonde be represented as a common spitfire. Osmin, however,

is more sharply defined still, though he should not on that account be allowed to run away with the opera. But in him Mozart has created a character on Falstaffian lines, though not of his size physically or spiritually. He has to sing through a compass of two octaves and to combine the formidability of a sergeant-major with the irresponsibility of an Oriental slave-driver. At his first appearance he is simpering with thoughts of love, but when interrupted, quickly changes his aspect to ferocity. But he remains a figure of fun, for when the Pasha releases Blonde along with the two lovers he collapses like a pricked balloon. He comes forward, however, to sing his verse in the vaudeville which ends the opera, and his mind is still running on the tortures he would like to apply to his victims who have escaped him.

This vaudeville [1] is an elaborate rondo based on a gay, almost impudent tune, which begins and ends



It has to be distinguished from a finale in that no dramatic developments take place in it. The play is over and each character comes forward to make his comment on it, while between these statements the whole company, as in a revue, sing a refrain or other apt chorus.

Der Schauspieldirektor (*The Impresario*) which chronologically comes next for consideration in this category, though a work for the stage, is not, in the form in which it was written, an opera at all. The score consists only of five numbers and they are em-

[1] The word originally meant a satirical street song. Cf. Chap. VI, p. 134.

bedded in a mass of dialogue, satirizing the theatre of the period, to be spoken by actors. But in the form contrived by Mr. Eric Blom, which retains the satire but gets rid of the topicality, it makes an entertaining little *Singspiel*. The actual music, however, which is contemporary with *Figaro* is by no means little, and is a good deal more than mere entertainment, for it is in Mozart's most mature manner. Since two of the three characters are operatic singers there is ample scope for florid singing as well as satire on the perennial jealousy of prima donnas.

Die Zauberflöte fits well enough for purposes of classification into the category of *Singspiel*, but in every other respect it is unique. Mozart himself embarked on it with some apprehensions because, as he said, he had never attempted a magic opera, and because, as he may have realized, he was to address in it a different type of audience. Opera had hitherto been composed for an aristocratic audience; *The Magic Flute* is addressed to the gallery. Emmanuel Schikaneder, who commissioned it, was an actor-manager, a rolling stone, accustomed to rely on box office receipts; and it is perhaps a measure of Mozart's despair at obtaining official recognition from the new Emperor Leopold II or support from Viennese society that he consented to go into partnership with this strolling player.

Schikaneder, however, was a man of parts; a musician who could sing, a character actor and obviously a good man of business. Furthermore, he was an old friend of Mozart's who had written odd pieces of music for him before, and—strongest reason of all for a renewed association—he was a brother Freemason. He had the resourcefulness of the theatrical

mind and turned out numbers of librettos for popular operas in the vernacular. At the moment magic and animals were the strong theatrical suits, and he was prepared to play them for all they were worth. The part of Papageno, the bird-catcher, in the proposed new opera he designed for himself. It was to be a grand pantomime sort of affair, but not otherwise a piece of any special interest.

In the course of its composition, however, a profound change came over its general character, though the framework of the story, borrowed from a collection of oriental fairy tales, was preserved. Two of the characters in it were turned upside down in the interest of the new ethical twist that was now imposed upon it. The wicked sorcerer became the good Sarastro, a sort of high priest of humanitarian idealism, and the fairy queen became the source and personification of evil, especially the evil of obscurantism and privilege which, according to the liberal ethics of freemasonry, were the sins against the light. The explanation of this remarkable change is to be found in the allegory which alone makes sense of a tissue of unreality. All opera plots are unintelligible in synopsis; this one far more so. It has the inconsequentiality of a dream before the psychoanalyst has scrutinized the material. Fortunately we have the key to it, and the elucidation of the double allegory may serve to outline the plot and to account for the profound significance of the music provided for a nonsensical text. For there can be no doubt that this opera rather than any of the Church music is Mozart's own testament.

Freemasonry, in England a movement for mutual self-help, sociability and charity, was at this time in Europe a rallying ground for political liberalism and

ethical rationalism. It therefore encountered the opposition of the Church, but in Germany and Austria at least it had influential members. The Empress Maria Theresa had attempted to suppress the order, but her son had regarded it with favour. Mozart had been a conforming Catholic at the time of his marriage —so much the *C minor Mass*, though not a devout work, does attest—but it was the lofty ethical doctrines of Reason, Liberty and Equality that sustained him spiritually after he was initiated in 1785. He has left several Masonic cantatas, one of which was composed just after *The Magic Flute* to a text by Schikaneder for the installation of a Master in one of the Vienna Lodges. Tamino in the opera is an involuntary self-portrait; his ideals were Mozart's, just as Papageno's less lofty motives were possibly Schikaneder's. Both the earnest and the cheerful come through the ordeals and achieve their purposes—so did Mozart and Schikaneder travel together. Their difference in character is set out plainly in music very early in the opera. Papageno is the cheerful Viennese, the instinctive man, who likes the good things of life without troubling about the ultimate mysteries. Even in love he does not look for the deeper companionship of a marriage of true minds. He and his mate, Papagena, sing a love duet like a pair of healthy and playful young animals. Mr. Hussey suggests that this was the basis of Mozart's own relationship with Constanze, and that the deeper feelings of Tamino and Pamina are what he craved but did not find. Mr. Hussey's further psychological suggestion is even more interesting: Tamino and Papageno are the two sides of Mozart's own nature.

Many scholars regard with suspicion any direct

correlations between an artist's work and the facts of his life. Yet music comes from the inner consciousness and opera exteriorizes such intimate substance of a man's thought more than the other forms of music. So that this subtle characterization is a clue to Mozart's own thoughts, and therefore to his experience. Conversely a knowledge of his experience, such as the inadequacy of his marriage, sheds some light on his artistic creation. Sex plays a potent part in the determination of a man's total emotional life: even in Brahms who did not dramatize his experience many traits of his music can be accounted for by the peculiarity of his sex-life. In Wagner the connexion is unmistakable. There is no reason why this aspect of human life should be left to the irresponsible speculations of novelists, and without claiming too much for psychology we are entitled to any light we can get on the inter-relation of emotion and music.

Mozart was not a case of dual personality as pathologists understand the term; like the rest of us he had more than one strain in his make-up but unless these component strains are at war with one another no harm is done. If, however, some sort of integration of them is not made the most normal man's life cannot be called successful. And it is only the incurable romanticism of modern commentators that obscures the unhappy fact that the failure of Mozart's life was due to a moral defect, as his father foresaw: the Papageno in him prevailed over the Tamino. The development of the serious side of Mozart was not unduly delayed except in relation to the precocious development of his purely musical gift. But purely musical gifts are not enough to make great works of art, and *The Magic Flute* shows in its difference from the rest of Mozart's

work why they are not enough. It shows also that this more earnest side of him was waiting for expression through some German vehicle. He had long been anxious to write a German opera and though this pantomime was not what he was looking for, it proved to be his opportunity of declaring his own faith and of emancipating German opera from bondage to Italy.

The allegory has a political and a moral interpretation. On the political and less important side the Queen of Night represents the Church which has lost the allegiance of the Austrian people (Pamina) who have been captured by liberalism (Sarastro and the Priests of Isis); Tamino represents the young Emperor Joseph II and the Queen of Night may also stand for his mother, the Empress Maria Theresa. Sarastro may have been drawn from Ignaz von Born, the leader of the Masonic movement. All allegories creak before they have gone very far, and there are difficulties in working out the detailed applications to the personages of the time, though the audience of 1791 would recognize them readily enough as topical allusions. Allowing, however, for the change of plan in the construction of the plot, the other allegory, the moral parable which traces the emancipation of the mind from authority to reason, presents less difficulty. Pamina is the Truth which every earnest seeker (Tamino) wishes to attain. She is the daughter of the Church (Queen of Night) who has, however, fallen from grace and is no longer fit guardian for her; she is therefore rescued by Freemasonry, which guards her from the corruption of the Jesuits, the clerical party or the monasteries, which Monostatos the Moor may be variously supposed to represent.

The Three Ladies, who serve Church and State

personified in the Queen of Night, stand for conventional education, which puts padlocks on people's lips if they break the elementary code of morals, as Papageno did by his false boasting. Tamino only learns that it is not sufficient to accept things at their face value when he is told to stand back from the Temple. The Three Genii, on the other hand, whose music is most mercurial and was in fact sung by two boys with Schikaneder's daughter at the original performance, are content with counsel and encouragement, true education, as the art of pedagogy is never tired of insisting. The ordeals, which are impressive in their musical simplicity—a flute solo and a few drum taps—have an obviously symbolical significance. Monostatos is a caricature of the authority which is disconcerted when the discovery is made that it has no basis in reason. The Queen of Night is Privilege having outgrown responsibility and fighting without scruple to retain the power that is slipping from it. She bids her daughter kill Sarastro so as to get possession of the shield of the Sun which is in his keeping and is the symbol of his authority.

Mozart, Schikaneder and Giesecke, who had a hand in the shaping of the play, were at one on these fundamentals—hence the coherence of the opera. Mozart, who for all his new-found convictions could be in music all things to all men, revelled in the opportunities provided for variety and turned out catchy tunes for Papageno, Italianate coloratura for the Queen of Night, masonic seriousness and ceremonial for Sarastro, strange colour for the orchestra with glockenspiel and solo flute and pan pipes in addition to a very full complement of wind (trumpets, horns, trombones, and corni di bassetto), comic business for the comedian

in the padlock quintet, counterpoint à la Bach for the Men in Armour, and hymn-like harmony in the German male-voice manner for the chorus. To have brought such unity out of such variety is one way of achieving great art—the method of collaboration such as was to produce the ballet *Petrouchka*. The other is the method of intense concentration by a single mind, such as we see at work in the creation of the Wagnerian music drama. In the case of the *Magic Flute* the concentration was achieved through the close daily contact of the authors, for Mozart worked in the little summer-house, now to be seen on the hillside at Salzburg, that was provided for him by Schikaneder near the theatre; the two men more or less lived together while Mozart's wife was away during the summer.

A good deal of the music beside Papageno's was written for definite artists in the actor-manager's company, with the result that it is not an altogether easy opera to cast, though it offers an exceptionally free hand to the producer. Satisfactory Queens of Night are not easy to come by, and good Sarastros are not common, but the vague suggestion of Egypt as the scene of the plot is an invitation to a designer to embark on quasi-mathematical fantasy and to feel entirely free from the claims of period.[1]

At Glyndebourne the producer has adopted the dubious expedient of introducing "gags" to make Papageno's part correspond to its original pantomimic character, but a good idea is vitiated by the fact that

[1] Covent Garden in 1938 borrowed the scenery designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel for a Berlin production in 1816, which reflected the taste of the period but was no indication of the original, and was realistic in character. Mr. Proctor Gregg once designed a set for the Royal College of Music in which the initial motif of pyramids and oblique planes gave to the opera at the start the suggestion of a solid but not quite real world in which the inconsequentialities of the opera therefore seemed to follow a natural enough chain of causation.

the "gags" must be in English and so project with excessive prominence from the German text. The favour which this work now enjoys in England it owes very largely to Professor Dent,[1] who, besides translation and critical exposition, rendered it the vital service of intelligent production in a famous performance by the Cambridge "syndicate" of local amateurs and professionals in 1911.

[1] All students of Mozart owe much to Professor Dent's great book, *Mozart's Operas: A Critical Study*. From it I got my first understanding of Mozart's operas and acknowledge here a further debt of obligation in writing this chapter.

CHAPTER V

German Opera

§ 1. *From Mozart to Wagner*

GERMAN opera for the modern world, if not for the painstaking historian, begins with *Die Zauberflöte*. Jahn, Mozart's biographer, after pointing to the Italian operas as the culmination of a long tradition, says that in *Die Zauberflöte* Mozart "treads on the threshold of the future and unlocks for his country the treasure of national art." With Mozart the international tradition came to its end, only lingering on in Paris in a changed form as "grand" opera; with him began German opera and the reassertion of the national principle that had been inherent in the form through its history, but had been overlaid by the cosmopolitanism of the eighteenth century. Though there was no sharp break in Italy, and the "grand" tradition of Rossini, Spohr and Meyerbeer persists, opera is henceforth in the main either Italian, or German, or French, or Slav, or, in aim if not in achievement, English.

From *Die Zauberflöte* the line runs through Beethoven's *Fidelio* to the romantic operas of Weber and thence direct to Wagner. After Wagner comes Strauss, still alive and productive, and several lesser figures. In post-War Germany some reactions against the Wagnerian tradition manifested themselves, but they

have become lost in contemporary Nazi Germany. The period of German opera then is 150 y ars. Before Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail,* which preceded *Die Zauberflöte* by nine years and marks the point of departure from Italian tradition, it has a history, but only two names need be mentioned, of which the first is that of Reinhard Keiser, who wrote no less than a hundred and sixteen operas for the German stage. They are all gone into limbo, as are those of Handel who came under his influence and himself wrote a number of German operas before he became completely Italianized. Keiser worked at Hamburg from 1694 to 1739, and made the place a centre of national opera until it too became submerged in the same Italian flood as swept over London but never completely drowned Paris.

These Hamburg operas are on heroic themes, though the *Oxford History of Music* (Vol. IV) quotes a waggish piece of humour from one of Keiser's arias that is itself comic, though not part of a musical comedy. The other name has already been mentioned, that of Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804) who fashioned for Mozart's hand the form of the German *Singspiel.*

Mozart, as we have seen (in *Die Entführung*), laid emphasis upon the necessity for more and more music, and even converted a vaudeville into a great concerted finale. Beethoven in *Fidelio* made the form carry a still greater weight, the heroism of Leonora; but he retained spoken dialogue, the subplot of the love affair of Marcellina and Jaquino, and, in the opening and closing of the opera at least, the lighter musical substance of *Singspiel.* Spoken dialogue is found in Weber's *Der Freischütz* and in Lortzing's comic operas, but with Wagner it vanishes until the satirical operas

of Kurt Weil in the post-Armistice period. Wagner's device for overcoming the gap between the prosaic necessities of the drama and the expansive lyrical emotions engendered thereby was not the old distinction between recitative and aria, but " unendliche Melodie ", continuous melos which might rise to the heights of true melody but could descend almost to the level of speech, though tone and notes of definite pitch were never wholly discarded. Flexibility is the essence of " unendliche Melodie ". Its great drawback is its slow speed, but that never worried Wagner, and the use he made of the device in solving the fundamental problem of all opera will be considered when his operas are discussed in detail.

Beethoven wrote one opera and only one, though he sought anxiously enough for other librettos that would satisfy him. But he was hard to please, as he himself admitted. Thus he turned down a project for a fairy opera, because the magic business was too risky, and rejected an oriental subject. He announced that he could not compose operas like *Don Giovanni* and *Figaro* because " they are repugnant to me ". He fancied a historical subject, preferably one from the Dark Ages, such as Attila, and at various times Macbeth, Ulysses, Romulus and Remus, and Alfred the Great were candidates for operatic canonization at his hands. Shakespeare, Voltaire and Schiller were approached for the loan of a character sufficiently heroic for Beethoven's taste. Prometheus and Egmont, who gave him their life-stories for incorporation in dramatic music, were both heroes and liberators, and the intensity of conviction which he brought to the portrayal of Leonora in *Fidelio* would be enough in itself to show us that his mind was dominated by the ideas let loose

over Europe by the French Revolution, even if we did not know it already from other sources. The counter-marchings of French soldiers in Vienna at the very time *Fidelio* was produced and the defection of Napoleon from revolutionary and democratic ideals, for which he paid by the loss of the dedication of the Eroica Symphony, served only to intensify Beethoven's worship of liberty, fraternity and heroism.

The subjects of Mozart's comedies, the antics and philanderings of an aristocracy dancing on the edge of an abyss, would indeed appear "too frivolous" to a world where revolution and war had turned all the old values topsy-turvy. If therefore *Fidelio* owes much to the direct ethical inspiration of *Die Zauberflöte*, perhaps also it derives indirectly its terrific driving force from the amorality of *Figaro* and the frivolity of *Don Giovanni*.

There is a chance that the world owes not only *Die Zauberflöte* but *Fidelio* to the actor Schikaneder, for on and off between 1801 and 1806, he was responsible for the conduct of the Theater an der Wien, which he had been instrumental in getting built. Thus the vicissitudes of theatrical management have some historical importance, for Beethoven had rooms in the theatre for a time, and there is the evidence of an operatic trio for the possibility that Schikaneder and Beethoven were working together on an opera. But it was not *Fidelio*, and whatever it was it came to nothing. All that is definitely known of the origin of *Fidelio* is that an opera was certainly commissioned from Beethoven by the management of the theatre; that its text was provided by Josef von Sonnleithner, a legal official of the Court; that Beethoven lavished intense enthusiasm and effort upon its composition

over a period of two years, and that it was produced on 20th November, 1805, i.e. seven days after Murat's entry into Vienna and twelve before the battle of Austerlitz, and withdrawn after three performances.

What was the cause of its failure? Perhaps the French soldiers, but partly the arrangement of the libretto. A letter from an English medical student who attended the first performance says that "Few people were present at a time when the house would otherwise (i.e. presumably but for the presence of an army of occupation) have been crowded in every part." But he also records that it was received with great applause and a shower of complimentary verses from the gallery. His own view is worth quoting. "The story and the plan of the piece a miserable mixture of low manners and romantic situations—the airs, duets and choruses equal to any praise—the several overtures (for there is an overture to each act) appeared to be too artificially composed to be generally pleasing, especially on being first heard; intricacy is a character of Beethoven's music and it requires a well-practised ear, or a frequent repetition of the same piece to understand and distinguish its beauties"![1]

The plan, if not the story, of the piece was certainly found to be unsatisfactory. A committee of Beethoven's friends with some difficulty persuaded him to mutilate this favourite child of his by extensive cuts, and a revised version for which Stephan von Breuning was mainly responsible was put on in 1806, but ran for only two nights. For this revival Breuning reduced the three acts of Sonnleithner's libretto to two. When

[1] Letter from Dr. Henry Reeve in a contemporary journal of 1805, quoted by Dr. F. M. Craven in a letter to *The Times* of 19th May, 1927.

Fidelio was once more revived in 1814 it was put into the form in which we now have it, and was well received during the brilliant period of the Congress of Vienna.[1]

The opera is still so far from satisfactory that it is not fool-proof in performance, and it is a stock criticism of it that it is undramatic, though the emergence of the prisoners, the recognition scene in the dungeon and the electrifying trumpet-call are powerful enough "theatre" in all conscience. The failure at the 1806 performances may also have been due to the prevalent taste for Mozart, just as its ultimate success in 1814 came on the crest of a wave of popularity of Beethoven's own music. Mozart's music has a lighter gait than Beethoven's quite apart from the "frivolity" of his plots, and to anyone expecting the vivacity of *Figaro* the heavier tread of *Fidelio* might well appear slow.

I have more than once noticed that so sensitive a musician as Sir Thomas Beecham disturbs the opening of *Fidelio* by his natural assumption of a Mozartian frame of mind in music of this style (i.e. early Beethoven). The *Fidelio* Overture, Beethoven's fourth attempt at providing a prelude to his opera, is nimble enough to take the sort of polish which Beecham lavishes on Mozart, and I have heard him whip it up to such a brilliance at the end that he has been unable to drop the tension to the quiet domestic scene revealed by the rise of the curtain when Marcellina is ironing and Jaquino going about his menial duties.

The plot was founded on a true incident of the Reign of Terror in France. Jean Nicolas Bouilly, who

[1] What these actual changes amounted to can be fairly well determined. Mr. Scott Goddard in an article in the *Monthly Musical Record* for November 1937 summarizes them from Otto Jahn's edition of the score, giving details of the 1806 revision, and the reviser's own account of the 1814 version is to be found in Thayer's *Life of Beethoven* (Vol. II, p. 264).

had provided Cherubini with a libretto for *Les Deux Journées*, held an administrative post in the town of Tours and he made a local event the basis of a libretto which he wrote for the composer Pierre Gaveaux. This opera, *Léonore ou L'amour conjugal* travelled into the Germanic countries. For political reasons the scene was changed to Spain. The subject is political. Don Florestan is being slowly starved to death in a dungeon of a prison through the hostility of the Governor; whether the other inhabitants are political prisoners we are not told, nor are we told the nature of Florestan's offence beyond the fact that the Governor of the State was of his way of thinking and did not know of his captivity. Beethoven's aim was certainly political in the largest sense, for the opera is a tract against tyranny, injustice and oppression.

His conception of heroism is personified in Leonora, the wife who, disguising herself as a boy, takes service with the gaoler. The situation in which the supposed boy attracts the affections of the gaoler's daughter would seem to be one more instance of dramatic licence indulged in the interests of music if the basis of the story was not in fact historical. But actually the scene in the dungeon where the wife helps to dig the grave in preparation for her husband's murder is so intensely moving that no thoughts of improbability weaken for a moment the force of the climax when she confronts her enemy, Pizzaro, draws a pistol from her belt and proclaims her identity. At that moment the trumpet-call from the battlements, the signal that help is at hand for her and frustration of his plans for Pizzaro, brings about the *dénouement*, the Aristotelian περιπέτεια, the reversal of fortune, not, however, the tragic fall of the hero to disaster but the

heroine's triumph snatched by her own courage out of the depths of adversity. Thereafter the opera is concluded on a note of joyous anti-climax.

Fidelio is unique in the range and intensity of its emotions. In form it is a *Singspiel* with spoken dialogue. Formally and spiritually therefore it is a child of *The Magic Flute*. Its music begins lightly with a duet between two subsidiary characters but both situation and emotional fervour begin to develop in the quartet "Mir ist so wunderbar". The garrulous Rocco's song about money, however, prevents the intensifying process from going too fast and too far all at once. Pizzaro, heralded by a military march, is introduced in an aria which lends a certain dramatic force to a figure who would otherwise be only a cardboard villain of popular melodrama. With Leonora's aria "Abscheulicher", the tension is once more increased; her alternating feelings of horror and resolution are depicted with deeply felt melody, such as Beethoven poured out in his slow movements, interrupted by a confident tune founded on a mounting arpeggio and propelled by the horns which, as usual with Beethoven, colour the sound with virtue (in the old Roman sense). The Prisoners' chorus is a great humanitarian hymn which transforms itself into a formal operatic finale inspired by the theme of liberation from tyranny. In the next act the grave-digging scene employs not recitative but the spoken word with orchestra (melodrama).

Such direct assaults upon the emotions seem to me to sweep away the suggestion that *Fidelio* is "not dramatic". The first time I saw the opera was when Sir Hugh Allen did it at Oxford in 1910, and the producer, Rosina Filippi (I believe), achieved a more

striking effect with the prisoners' scene than any I have ever seen since, though I do not know what they did in the Beethoven centenary production in Vienna. At Oxford the prisoners came up from under the stage through trap-doors as well as from the wings, and this simply realistic device avoided all suggestion of an operatic male chorus assembling to sing its conventional part-song, which even the thoughtful production at Sadler's Wells does not wholly escape. The men were coming up out of dungeons in the different wings of the prison, and the sight of them as well as the welling chord of B flat made an impression that has lasted all these years.

The essence of *Fidelio* is known to thousands, who have never heard the opera, through the Leonora No. 3 Overture, an epitome of the work so compelling that no conductor[1] can ever persuade himself not to play it during an interval of the opera, though he knows that in the magnitude of its conception it runs the risk of upsetting the proportions of the opera itself. This overture was written for the second performance of *Fidelio* in 1806—an enlargement and reworking of the design and material of Leonora No. 2, which was the overture actually played at the first performance in 1805, and did not satisfy its composer any more than did Leonora No. 1, which he suppressed almost at birth. Leonora Nos. 2 and 3 are both too big for the purposes of introducing the opera, and so Beethoven wrote a fourth, the *Fidelio* Overture in E, a lighter work and without the dramatic trumpet-calls, for the 1814 revival.

After Beethoven the torch of German opera was

[1] Sir Adrian Boult had this strength of mind at Sadler's Wells on 14th March, 1939, to the great dramatic benefit of the opera.

borne by Weber, and by him fanned to a purer Teutonic flame. Between *Fidelio* and *Der Freischütz* a few small works call for mention.

Schubert wrote a dozen operas, most of them *Singspiele*, and some of them incomplete. But they were all failures. One or two had a few performances in his life-time, some never reached the stage at all, others only after long lapse of years as historical curiosities. *Alfonso und Estrella*, for example, a full-length opera composed in 1822, was first performed by Liszt at Weimar in 1854, and *Die Verschworenen* (*The Conspirators*), whose title frightened the censor, was a one-act *Singspiel*, which had its first performance in 1861 and was given at the Crystal Palace under Grove's compelling instigation in 1872. *Fierrebras* was a heroic opera in three acts on a chivalric theme. The subjects of Schubert's operas, it is worth noting, show the strong tendency towards romance of German thought at the time, in spite of the musical domination of Vienna by Rossini. It is clear from Schubert's songs how romantic subjects could kindle melody in him and in the operas he made ample use of that peculiarly German vehicle for romance, the male-voice chorus, a feature that is constant in German operas from the Chorus of Priests in *The Magic Flute* to the Chorus of Vassals in *Gotterdämmerung*. The only opera of Schubert to be performed in Britain in recent times is *Vierjährige Posten* (*The Faithful Sentinel*) which was done in a version arranged by Fritz Busch and Donald Tovey in an English translation by Steuart Wilson at the Court Theatre season of 1928, and by the Glasgow Grand Opera Society in 1936. The piece deals with a deserter who is saved from the consequences of his default by the local chatelaine claiming him as her

faithful sentinel during the four years of his freedom in her village. The music has an amiable Austrian character, but like all Schubert's stage works is lacking in the tension essential to drama.

Abu Hassan, which brings us to Weber, has been recently performed at Cambridge (1937–8). It was Weber's first success after four previous essays of which only two survive complete. It was first produced at Munich in 1811, when the composer was twenty-five. It is a farcical *Singspiel* on a story derived from the *Arabian Nights* of the shifts to which an impecunious and cheerful young couple are driven to deal with their more pressing debts and importunate creditors. The parent of this oriental comedy in ten numbers is *Die Entführung*—without Osmin. The *Singspiel* form and the oriental setting combine with the actual cut of the tunes and the ensembles of intrigue to recall Mozart's broadest comic opera, though the characters are more lightly sketched.

No doubt much of the resemblance is due to the fact that Mozart crystallized the musical speech of the period and the first wholly German composer took over the idiom as well as the apparatus of writing for the stage. If Weber's melody is fresher and less sophisticated than Mozart's, his texture is less highly wrought. The Creditors' Chorus is more direct and forcible than anything in Mozart, and Fatima's sentimental aria with a florid violoncello obbligato is as lightly accompanied as Rossini would have written it. Fatima's other big aria, however, written a dozen years later, has a more symphonic accompaniment, which in true Mozartian fashion is turned to dramatic purposes by suggesting crocodile tears as clearly as those depicted by Puccini in *Gianni Schicchi*.

Der Freischütz (literally "The Freeshooter", who uses charmed bullets, but best translated as *The Forester*, or possibly *The Demon Hunter*) is Weber's masterpiece, since *Euryanthe* written for Vienna (1823) and *Oberon* written for London (1826) suffer from internal weakness, mainly due to the librettos, that have brought them more perhaps than their fair share of neglect. Oddly enough even *Der Freischütz* is not in the repertory of English organizations. Its only recent performances in London were at Mr. R. L. Stuart's season at the Scala in 1930, and in an autumn season in English at Covent Garden in 1935. It has been given twice at Oxford in a generation.[1]

Der Freischütz is the first completely German opera viewed in the perspective of history. Weber had nourished himself on German folk-song and turned its idiom to good account, most obviously, to take definite instances, in the Bridesmaids' and Huntsmen's Choruses. He continues to use the form of German *Singspiel* and he takes for his plot a typically German legend. It was a Bohemian custom that the suitor for the Head Ranger's daughter should shoot for his bride. Rodolph (Max), having been off his stroke as the critical trial of marksmanship approaches, is persuaded by his colleague, Caspar, to indulge in black magic and obtain from Zamiel, the Demon Hunter, some infallible bullets. Commerce with the devil has its usual results, but repentance brings the opera to a happy ending on a great swinging tune that was first

[1] Sir Hugh Allen gave a remarkable "town and gown" performance at Oxford in 1911, and the Oxford University Opera Club, founded after the War, chose it for their 1928 production. The first of these two amateur productions was notable for the facts that the part of Zamiel was taken by Adrian Boult, then an undergraduate at Christ Church, the stage manager was W. Bridges-Adams, then an undergraduate at Worcester College, and Julian Huxley was one of the Chorus, as also was the writer of these words.

heard in the overture. Weber in all his three big operas used the device of acquainting his audience in the overtures with the outstanding themes of the opera that was to follow, and by a paradox common in art, that which was designed for a narrow end, namely to prepare the mind of an audience for a specific drama, achieved a wider value and enriched the orchestral repertory with three independent masterpieces.

The new-found feeling for nature, quite outside the mental atmosphere of the eighteenth century, finds unfettered expression in the two great cavatinas of the hero and heroine, "Through the forests" and "Softly sighing". The terrors of the Wolf's Glen are depicted in simple musical terms that owe their force to their direct assault, since a century of over-employment of the chord of the diminished seventh has blunted the modern ear to its naïve appeal. Resourceful production, however, can make the scene effective since the music is in fact designed for effect. Benedict, who was Weber's pupil, relates that a property owl refused to flap its wings at the dress rehearsal of the first performance at Berlin, and more modern productions that rely too much on electrical contacts and dry batteries sometimes find that their horrors stir the wrong emotions in the spectator. But the music has warmth and spontaneity, and is free from Teutonic heaviness, Annie's (Aennchen) music especially being immediately captivating and providing a good foil to the dramatic soprano of Agnes (Agatha). The orchestral writing foreshadows Wagner's dramatic use of instrumentation.

Wagner's *Lohengrin* owes more than a hint to *Euryanthe*, whose plot it resembles in its use of the paraphernalia of chivalry and the character of its

agents of mischief. The plot is an involved story of wagers, jealousy, poisoned rings, secrets, and so on, which were further complicated by the unhappy librettist, the poetess Helmine von Chezy, whom operatic history holds up to ridicule; she added an episode designed to avoid the production of a birth-mark as proof of chastity, which, however convincing in a romance, presents practical difficulties in a play. *Oberon* survives in the great soprano scena, "Ocean, thou mighty monster". It awaits revival in the scholarly spirit which has rescued so many other neglected operas in recent years. We no longer ask that spoken dialogue shall be turned into recitative, especially as English taste prefers the *Singspiel* form with transitions between speaking and singing. Weber complained that the cut of an English opera was different from a German—the English, he says, is more of a drama with songs. So indeed it is and always has been. In the country of Shakespeare and Purcell there should be no difficulty on that score to hinder its revival, and the fairy music is Weber at his best. *Preciosa* was not an opera at all, but a play on a Spanish subject with plenty of incidental music including melodrama.

After Weber the history books provide some names of composers who handed on the tradition till it was taken up by Wagner. Kreutzer (1780–1849) turned out as many as thirty operas; Marschner (1795–1861) had a liking for uncanny subjects and wrote a romantic opera called *Der Vampyr* which had a success in this country in 1829, and another, *Hans Heiling*, which may have suggested some features of *The Flying Dutchman* to Wagner; Spohr, the violinist, was a contemporary of Weber and dealt in romantic subjects, but is now

entirely forgotten as an operatic composer. Lortzing (1801–51), Flotow (1812–83), and Nicolai (1810–49) are now remembered for one successful work apiece, though for Lortzing the reckoning in his native country is still four in the current repertory.[1]

With *Zar und Zimmermann* (*Czar and Carpenter*) we come back to the comic tradition of *Singspiel*.[2] Lortzing was a man of parts, one of those clever fellows born for the theatre, who can act, turn a play inside out and put it on the stage, or write and compose an original work. He was not actually born into the theatre since his father was a leather merchant of Berlin who married a wife of French stock, but from amateur theatricals his parents turned to the wandering life of strolling players and Lortzing took to the same sort of happy-go-lucky life when he grew up, and he married an actress. But he had a further string to his bow in that he was a singer and a string-player as well as man of the theatre, and he started writing operettas as early as 1823. For a time he was Capellmeister at the State Theatre at Leipzig, but appears not to have mixed with the musical celebrities of the city so much as in literary circles.

His attitude to opera, therefore, somewhat resembles Gluck's, to whom the remark is attributed that the composition of the music is not the overruling consideration in the production of an opera; the piece must be thought of as a work for the theatre, in which the various arts are to collaborate on terms of mutual accommodation. His music is not particularly dis-

[1] 288 performances of *Zar und Zimmermann*, 269 of *Der Waffenschmied*, 179 of *Undine* were given in Germany in 1938.

[2] The opera's most recent performance in this country was by the Oxford University Opera Club in 1930 under Mr. Bernard Naylor. It had previously been given at one of the Cologne Festivals, when Herr Hans Strobach was producer there, and it was he who superintended the Oxford production.

tinguished, but *Czar and Carpenter* is a capital opera, with the gaiety, if not the verve, of Rossini, German enough in the cut of its melody but free from heaviness, with a nice clear texture and some effective concerted pieces, including a male-voice sextet, and an amusing "rehearsal" of a complimentary cantata. Lortzing was his own librettist and took for plot a story of Peter the Great of Russia, who apprenticed himself in disguise to a Dutch shipbuilder. Hence high politics somehow become intertwined with a humble love affair—a musical comedy sort of a story but without the finery of modern musical comedy. Like a musical comedy, it requires acting as well as singing, and it is interesting as a work that has survived with this, for an opera, unusual balance of ingredients.

Flotow's *Martha*, which has only just vanished from the English repertory, is described by Kobbé as of world-wide popularity, and he accordingly devotes to it thirteen pages of commentary and quotation of its dialogue. He deliberately classifies it as a French opera for its "elegance" and "grace", though it was first produced in Vienna and Flotow was a German by birth; Flotow, however, spent a good deal of time in Paris and got his musical training there. The story deals with an English aristocrat who to relieve her boredom gets herself hired as servant to a farmer at Richmond hiring fair. "The last Rose of Summer" is incorporated into the second act, and a tenor aria "M'appari" has a wide currency. The situations are "stagey" and the music facile, so that to present taste it appears as just the kind of work which has given opera a bad name. It has, however, been filmed in recent years and so obtained a new currency.

Nicolai's *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor* is remem-

bered chiefly for its overture, but the whole opera was performed by the students of the Royal College of Music in 1937. The chief stumbling-block to its acceptance by an English audience is the un-Falstaffian character of the principal person, and the consequent degeneration of the story into broad German farce. Regarded, however, as, what in fact it is, a German *Singspiel*, though Falstaff is but a pale reflection of Osmin, the opera is lively and entertaining. It has a few set arias, plenty of ensemble movements, and finishes with a charming ballet in Windsor Forest; the music is consistently happy and sparkling.

§ 2. *Wagner*

With Wagner we enter a new world. Wagner transformed German opera. He refashioned its structure on a new architectural plan, replacing the spoken dialogue and the set numbers with a continuous texture. He moved it back to the heroic plane, but substituted Teutonic for the classical mythology which had provided the themes of heroic opera in the eighteenth century.

An ocean of ink has been spilled in discussion of Wagner and his works, and Wagner himself poured more than a bucketful into it. He was his own apologist and pamphleteer, for like most Germans, but unlike most musicians, he was a systematic thinker. The creator is rarely an analyst, but Wagner was sufficiently a philosopher to think out the theoretical basis of what he was doing, and his theories had a strengthening effect on his work as a creative musician. It is customary to speak slightingly of his quality as a philosopher and maybe he would not have taken a

first in Greats if he had been at Balliol any more than he would have achieved immortality as a poet on the strength of his versified librettos. All the same, Wagner's capacity to grasp a metaphysical issue had a profound effect on his music, and Professor Dent in hacking away the clusters of nonsense that have been written about the ulterior significance of Wagner's music dramas goes too far when he says that it is impossible to translate philosophical ideas into musical notes [1] and that these underlying ideas may be ignored by modern opera lovers.

Almost anything except brute statements of fact can be translated into music—certainly ideas can be most fully presented in opera where the implications are in the music and the explicit statements can be presented in words and gesture. From *Der fliegende Holländer* onward every opera has its root in a philosophical idea, pointed in most cases by personal experiences of the composer's own, so that the universal and the particular are combined in their address to the mind. Hence his choice of myth for his plots; for myth embodies in concrete form the wisdom of the race and combines the sharpness of a particular story with the weight of a universal idea behind it. In *The Flying Dutchman* the theme is redemption by love, an idea which, in the form of woman spending herself for man, ran right through Wagner's life as well as his thought, and emerges at the end of his career with the roles reversed in Parsifal's reclamation of Kundry. The redemption idea is strong also in *Tannhäuser*, where it is combined with the idea of the antithesis of sacred and profane love, which reappears in *Parsifal*, and with the idea of a contest of art, a tournament of

[1] See *The Musical Companion* (Gollancz), p. 340.

music, which constantly occurs in the history of ideas from the combat of Apollo and Marsyas to a modern competitive festival and is elaborately worked out in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. In *Lohengrin* there is a logical problem as well as an ethical one: what's in a name? If you cannot put a name to a thing, you cannot effectively handle it or deal with it. And one cannot withhold some sympathy with Elsa for finding her position as wife of an unidentifiable husband too difficult to maintain indefinitely. Even Wagner himself admits as much.

In *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a social document, the idea of revolution and the Nietzschean superman is developed. In *Tristan und Isolde* Schopenhauer's pessimism, love leading not to more abundant life but to death, is pursued more single-mindedly than are the corresponding ideas in the other operas. In *Meistersinger* on the other hand, the story maintains a larger measure of independence; national art and the principles of criticism are discussed in every act, it is true, but the handling is looser. In *Parsifal* we have the idea of renunciation, which haunted Wagner all his life. He was unable to work it out of his system until the last opera of all, written when he was sixty-six, for all his life through the one thing he was completely unable to do was to renounce either money or women or his own indomitable egotism.

Wagner's power of systematic thought made him a voluminous prose-writer. His collected works in this form include formidable volumes with the titles *The Art Work of the Future, Opera and Drama, Art and Politics, Religion and Art.* The doctrines they contain were not formulated *a priori* and the operas written to illustrate them. Wagner was primarily a creator

and theory in art follows practice. But the theorizing did help to clear his mind and elucidate his procedure; *Opera and Drama* was written during the composition of the poem for *Siegfried*. This ratiocinative process must also have operated simultaneously with the art of musical creation, for he specifically says in a letter of 1844 that he does not first look for a suitable story, then get it versified and then set it to music. On the contrary, he says that before he sits down to sketch a scene or write a verse he is already obsessed with the musical imagery called up by the subject. That his mind worked in this way is responsible alike for his doctrine and his practice in the later operas. For he reasserted in a new form Gluck's protest against the sacrifice of dramatic truth to purely musical considerations. Gluck's shaft had really been directed against the singer. Wagner's is turned against the acceptance by composers of the conventional forms of opera. He had in *Rienzi*—which is now regarded for practical purposes as his first opera, though it was preceded by *Die Feen* (The Fairies) and *Das Liebesverbot* (Forbidden Love)—himself written a "grand opera" such as was being contemporaneously produced by Meyerbeer, and he did not wholly discard the formal division into numbers (aria, duet, ensemble, &c.) until *The Ring*, though *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* approximate nearer to this new "art work of the future" which he was so busy in creating, the music drama.

Opera and music drama are for Wagner antithetical conceptions, but we are not obliged to accept the distinction except as a convenience of classification. For all opera is music drama, and Wagner supports his arguments with erroneous history and an entirely

unhistorical criticism of the problem of opera as it presented itself to previous composers—Mozart, for instance. But there is something in what he says. The trouble at the root of opera as an art-form, he declares, is that in it the means of expression, which is music, has been made the object, while the object of expression, which is the drama, has been made a means—to the writing of agreeable music. The correct relationship of the two arts he defines in the astounding statement that "Music is Woman". Music must therefore yield to the embraces of the poet before music drama can be conceived. The implied logical priority of drama is thus similar to that promulgated by Gluck, but it is not in itself inconsistent with music continuing to play the dominating role—as in fact it does in Wagner's operas.

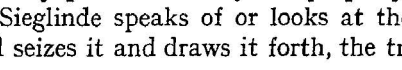
The art work of the future so conceived was also to be a fusion of all the component arts of the theatre, an admirable idea, but founded on some faulty premises, such as that absolute music had spoken its last word because Beethoven found it necessary to add a choral movement to the Ninth Symphony. Much of his detailed exposition of the form which this reformed music drama is to take is extremely interesting. He explains, for instance, how identity of key can express the continuity of an idea and modulation a change or development of the idea, a device of enormous flexibility and allusiveness that does in his hands unify great stretches of music which earlier composers would have broken up in order, paradoxically, to preserve its coherence. He prescribes alliteration for his verse, though he did not stick to that in *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, where he allowed rhyme, and he goes into a long disquisition on operatic melody, in which he

distinguishes between the aria which derives in the last resort from folk-song and the newer instrumental melody of Beethoven. From these he evolves his own idea of *aria parlante* or *unendliche Melodie*.

But the chief novelty of Wagner's operatic method lay in his fruitful use of leitmotif, the guiding theme, the musical idea associated with a particular non-musical object or idea. Leitmotif was not a new thing, and there are the rudiments of it in Monteverde's *Orfeo*; in essence it is as old as programme music, of which it is one special kind. Its efficacy lies in the fact that it uses a basic power of the human mind. Observant parents discern in the developing consciousness of their children that the mind's most fundamental operation is to associate one thing with another. Anything can go with anything else; there need be no causal, nor logical, nor emotional connexion, but if an event or object A is presented to the child in a context B, A and B are immediately associated and so retained in his mind. Wagner's method is to associate a musical theme—it had best be pithy and easily grasped—with the things, the persons, the emotional states, the natural phenomena and the abstract ideas of his drama. Following Weber, Wagner introduced into his Overtures (e.g. *Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser*) the tunes that were subsequently to reappear as the musical equivalents of dramatic persons or events.

In the later operas, when the leitmotif system is fully at work, the associative process is carried much further. So much so that the redundancy of showing a sword on the stage, mentioning it in the words of the singer and announcing its motto in the orchestra, has been held up to ridicule as leaving nothing to the

imagination and therefore defeating its own aim. It may be admitted that Wagner was a regular German in his thoroughness, and thoroughness is a vice that destroys judgment and leads to that excess which the Greeks so much feared. But the reverse side of association is recognition, and dramatic recognition, as Aristotle pointed out long ago, is one of the most acute pleasures the theatre affords. I myself never fail to feel a shiver of excitement down my spine in the first act of *Die Walküre* when dying embers of the fire in Hunding's hut flicker (at the electrician's bidding) and cast a gleam upon the sword hilt plunged into the tree (carefully placed there by the property man) and when, if Sieglinde speaks of or looks at the sword or Siegmund seizes it and draws it forth, the trumpet-call



rises from the orchestra. The simple arpeggio charges itself with more significance and more emotional power at every repetition. I know the motif, I wait for the moment; dramatic surprise has been banished by Wagner's insistence and my own foreknowledge. Yet the pleasure of recognition never fails, the theatrical excitement never gets blunt. Wagner's musical method is built on the best of all possible psychological foundations.

The motifs he uses in *The Ring* fall into three categories. Natural phenomena, like the deep currents of the river in the *Rheingold* Prelude, the fire blazing on the fell at the end of *Valkyrie*, and the murmurs of the forest in *Siegfried*, are depicted in programme music in the ordinary sense, though it is made out of germinal

motifs which intrinsically suggest the object by their rhythmic disposition or melodic contour. There is also a large class of motifs which are arbitrarily attached like a label to their objects. There is for instance nothing sword-like about the arpeggio quoted above, nor is there anything golden about another arpeggio which stands for the Rhine-maidens' treasure. But Wagner makes their significance clear enough by association, and he is able, having thus turned fragments of tune into symbols, to use them symbolically. Thus the sword theme breaks when it is shattered on Wotan's spear (the triad becomes minor and is compressed into half its length), Siegfried's cheerful horn-call has its intervals transformed when the hero's body is borne into the hall of the Gibichungs in *Götterdämmerung*. This kind of superficial change can be carried to almost any degree of subtlety when the motifs represent not things or persons but states of feeling or abstract ideas, like Ruin, or Fate or Impotence of the Gods. So much so that the same motif is often given widely different names by different commentators. Wagner himself grew a little careless during the second period of the composition of *The Ring* (i.e. after 1869 when he resumed work on *Siegfried*) and attached more importance to the psychological than to the strictly dramatic significance of his motifs. He sometimes uses two themes to indicate the same idea; the opening chords of *Götterdämmerung* and a later theme of thirds with a trill are both called *Weltbegrüssungsthema*, i.e. Greeting to the world. They are combined and expanded at the moment of Siegfried's murder, as the scales of ignorance drop from his eyes. This passage, lasting a couple of pages, is a wonderful instance of Wagner's method. Siegfried's

greeting resolves itself into the chordal motif of Fate, modulating from C to E as it does so, in exact accord with Wagner's own theoretical description of the purposes of key changes, which are quite different from the formal considerations that govern modulation in a symphony.

No composers, with the possible exceptions of Beethoven and Verdi, have shown a comparable development to that measured by the difference between *Rienzi* and *Parsifal*. *Rienzi* reflects even in harmony and melody as well as in general style and treatment the conventional opera, such as Wagner himself was conducting in the opera house at Riga during the time when he was writing it (1838–40). He says of it himself that he saw it in no other light than that of a "five-act opera" with two brilliant finales and filled with hymns, processions and musical clash of arms. In *The Flying Dutchman* the real Wagner emerges from a context of contemporary romantic music, such as Weber might have written—the spinning chorus, Senta's ballad, and the sailors' shanties and drinking songs—as well as some pretty bad stuff, such as the duet of the two sea-captains in the first act. But the Dutchman himself is a striking figure, and the redemption theme gives to the opera a greater unity of purpose, a greater striking power, so to speak, than a merely romantic story attempts, and though it is the lightest of all Wagner's operas by reason of its ardour and youthful freshness and is far from consistent in style, yet in it the grip of the giant can be felt, and the opera remains in the repertory, part of the Wagnerian canon to this day. It is typical of Wagner in the heavy demands it makes of the scenic engineer, who has to be capable of bringing two ships to harbour,

one of them a phantom, that is ultimately to sink in deep water within reach of the shore. It is also typical of Wagner in that its universal theme has been crystallized by a very particular and personal experience—a stormy voyage across the North Sea which has been fixed for good in the overture.

Tannhäuser and *Lohengrin* used to be the ordinary person's introduction to Wagner, since they were regularly toured by the Carl Rosa Company. But young people nowadays spend their holidays abroad at operatic festivals where they run straight into the mature Wagner. *Tannhäuser* (1844) seems slow and lacking in tension to those who know the later operas, but it is capable of making a profound impression of a quasi-religious kind. This religious appeal is less tawdry than that of *Parsifal* (1882) because it is less stressed. There is something a little revolting to a fastidious taste in the violence of the contrast of carnal and spiritual love in the later opera. The theme is legitimate enough and the handling of the Grail and Eucharist is reverent enough, but there is a lack of delicacy in the juxtaposition of Klingsor's pleasure garden and Mont Salvat. This coarse streak in Wagner is visible also in his characterization of Beckmesser in *Meistersinger*, a crude and brutal caricature of the Viennese music critic, Eduard Hanslick. Tannhäuser himself with his divided loyalties is a more credible being than Kundry, who in *Parsifal* has to present the same conflict, while Elisabeth and Wolfram are both likeable people. The opera is something of a patchwork, since the romantic tournament of song does not musically coalesce with the conflict in Tannhäuser's soul, to which Wagner has ingeniously attached it, and the discrepancy is further emphasized

by the revision of the Venusberg music which the composer made for the Paris performance in 1861, when he was writing in the fully matured style of *The Ring* and *Tristan*.

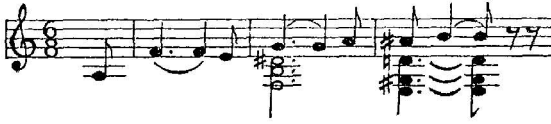
It is still easy to underestimate *Lohengrin* (1850) by looking at it with a historical eye and seeing in it only the early stages of the symphonic drama that was to come later, but it is not necessary to make the same allowances for it as for *Tannhäuser*. For *Lohengrin* shows an advance on its elder brother in continuity of texture and in lyrical sweetness. It is both a singer's opera and a symphonic drama. On this account it is possible to regard it as transitional, though historically it belongs to the earlier operas, the last to which Wagner himself applied the term "romantic opera"; the five years which divide it from *Das Rheingold* decisively mark the change of style. The scoring of *Lohengrin*, however, looks forward to the music drama rather than back to romantic opera since the grouping of the instruments and their association with people and ideas serves a definitely dramatic purpose. Its musical character on the other hand is so lyrical, as appears most strongly in performances conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham (whose favourite among Wagner's operas one would on internal evidence judge it to be) that the singer is still a singer, and not the musical actor he is destined to become.

It is difficult to say anything in general terms about *The Ring* that is new, though attendance at a performance of the cycle seems always to bring to light some hitherto unnoticed aspect of the colossal work. Its implications for social philosophy have been expounded by Bernard Shaw in *The Perfect Wagnerite*; its musical structure has already been described. Its

gigantic span is the most wonderful thing about it. It took twenty-six years in composition from the writing of the book of *Siegfried's Death* to the scoring of the last act of *Götterdämmerung* which it afterwards became. The words were written backwards; that is to say, *Siegfried's Death* was found to need an introduction which Wagner called *Young Siegfried* and that in turn proved to be incomplete without *Valkyrie* and *Rheingold.* He finished the poems in 1852, and began on the music, working forward, in 1853. He broke off in the middle of the second act of *Siegfried* in 1857 to write *Tristan,* which he finished in 1859. After *Tristan* came *Meistersinger* (1861–7) and it was not till 1869, that is to say after a break of twelve years, that he resumed work on *Siegfried.* One is aware of no discrepancy in the style, no inconsistency, no hesitation, in the unfolding of the huge epic, because one advances with the music. If Wagner was not the same man at sixty-one when he finished *Götterdämmerung* as he was at forty when he began to write the music of *Rheingold,* neither is the auditor the same person emotionally when the curtain at last goes down on the overflowing Rhine as when he saw it go up to reveal the river's bed three days before. *The Ring* is therefore the most astonishing example of artistic integrity and consistent purpose that music has to show.

The personal and particular experience behind it was Wagner's radical politics, which drove him into exile after 1848. The personal root of *Tristan and Isolde* was his association with Mathilde Wesendonck. Its musical germ is the opening phrase of the Prelude, three bars long, a sinuous rising strand of melody that floats up over a chromatic progression of harmony

that is designed to avoid resolution and to delay the establishment of a definite tonality. Everything follows from the principal theme of the drama:



and it is only the interruptions—the sailors in Act I, the hunting horns in Act II, honest Kurwenal in Act III, and King Mark, who inclines to speak in the interval of a seventh—that cleave their way through the twining chromaticism to some sort of diatonic utterance. *Tristan*, though a legendary subject, has none of the paraphernalia of a saga to carry—there is a love potion at the beginning, it is true, but all the business of magic, dragons, symbolical swords and rings and helmets are discarded—Isolde has not even Tristan's little dog which Hardy's version of the legend allows her in *The Queen of Cornwall* (set by Boughton). *Tristan* is as concentrated as *The Ring* is vast, and its closer comprehensibility has won for it the crown of perfection—this is the ideal realization of the Wagnerian music drama. But between perfection of form and richness of content, a balance has always to be struck in æsthetic judgments: those who seek perfection choose *Tristan*, those who prefer riches care more for *Die Meistersinger*, valuing genial warmth more than fever heat.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg is a comic opera, but it is still symphonic drama without spoken dialogue. Its hero is Hans Sachs, the poet cobbler of Luther's Reformation—the chorale tune in which

the crowd acclaim him at the end of the opera belongs to the hymn with which the historical Sachs greeted Luther in his poem "The Wittenberg Nightingale"—but he is slow to emerge out of the crowded canvas of the first act. He is in true Wagnerian fashion the embodiment of a theory. "I took him," said Wagner, "as the last manifestation of the art-productive spirit of the Folk and set him, in this sense, in contrast to the pettyfogging bombast of the other Mastersingers to whose absurd pedanticism I gave a concrete personal expression in the figure of the 'Marker'." The renunciation theme also has to be worked in—Sachs, a widower, renounces Eva to the young aristocrat Walther von Stolzing, with a rather far-fetched allusion to King Mark in *Tristan*. But Sachs is no mere personification of abstract ideas, he is a man whose humanity gives to a singer rich opportunities of interpretation. We gather, for instance, that he had a quick temper and a rough side to his tongue, though all his music asks for the "sympathetic" baritone type of voice. For the revelation of his character Wagner assigns him two monologues, "The Elder's Scent" in the second act, and "Wahn! Wahn!"[1] in the third; in the first act he is only gradually differentiated from the other masters, in the finale he dominates all Nürnberg gathered in the meadows on the Feast of St. John. Sachs is in fact Wagner's most striking creation, approached only by Brünnhilde, for Wotan and Siegfried, though drawn in the round, are by comparison abstractions and Tristan and Isolde victims of obsession. Leitmotif is used in *Meistersinger* but more loosely and with more extraneous musical

[1] The usual English translation is "Craze! Craze!" which is totally unintelligible. Why not "Mad! Mad!"?

matter bound up with it than in *The Ring* and *Tristan*. It is as consistently diatonic—does it not start with a loud common chord of C major?—as Tristan is chromatic, and the less tightly wrought structure allows of such almost detachable numbers as the monologues already mentioned, Walther's Prize Song, and the wonderful quintet which holds up the action to tell us in one revealing piece of music, that is also pure ravishment, exactly what the emotional situation of the five participating characters is at the moment when they all came together.

Parsifal like *Tristan* deals with sexual love, the outcome in the one case being fulfilment at all costs and in the other renunciation at all costs. Logically the consequence of each is death. Life demands a balance, but for dramatic purposes this balance must tilt right over in one direction or the other. In point of fact Wagner's own life was not one of balance, but of oscillations between such contrary poles. It was not merely a case of psychological compensation in his art for what he could not achieve in life, namely the renunciation of anything at all. It was also an intellectual necessity to a mind that not only saw but experienced the two sides to every question. In *Siegfried* he had worked out to its conclusion the active positive fulfilment of life, in *Parsifal* the withdrawal from life, and in the operas bearing their names he is only arguing musically the cases which far back in his Dresden days he had set forth in words—in the projected drama " Jesus of Nazareth ". To the same period incidentally belongs the musical forerunner of the Grail music—the cantata called " The Love Feast of the Apostles ".

The conjunction of sex and religion is uncomfortable

for modern civilized man, but since both are forces that inform the whole of his life, they are bound to touch. In *Tannhäuser* they are separated and their conflict externalized, Venus taking the one side and the saintly Elisabeth the other. In Kundry they are wrapped up together, as in the rest of us. But they are associated also in a very curious piece of symbolism whose subconscious significance runs counter to the overt main theme of continence. The spear and the grail are universal symbols of the male and female principles, doing and suffering, destroying and conceiving, each of which by itself is barren. Wagner consciously in *Parsifal* comes down on the side of renunciation, the giving up, the negation of the active or male principle, and achieving, for the price so paid, the fulfilment of the contemplative conservative or female principle. But his symbols had a force of their own which he could not control. While the two elements were parted the Knights were impotent and their Order futile. In the rededication to life in the Good Friday scene the symbols are united in defiance of the outward worship of barren virginity, the ideal which obsessed the first thousand years of Christian thought and inspired the legend of *Parsifal.*

Mr. Ernest Newman, like Professor Dent, is inclined to belittle the value of philosophical ideas and to say that they are merely the perplexities which we all feel. "Wagner is simply a perplexed and tortured human soul (hence his oscillations between contrary ideas) and a magnificent musical instrument." Now it is quite true that Germans are heavy-handed and solemn-visaged about abstract ideas, and Englishmen easily become impatient with their metaphysical fuss, but it is a mistake to dismiss Wagner's philo-

sophizings because he did not reconcile his opposites *into the higher synthesis* commended by another German thinker and left them to oscillate. He was not sufficient philosopher to systematize his thought, and he was not in fact a magnificent musical instrument, in the sense that his thoughts ran entirely in music. Had he been a musical-box he would have turned symphonies and sonatas out of it, for that is how the purely musical mind works (Mozart is an instance). Wagner is unique in that his musical fertility is due to the contact of the musical faculty with philosophical ideas. Music has been defined (by Combarieu) as "thinking in sound without concepts". Wagner could not do this. He had to have concepts—one might almost say concrete objects—for his mind to work on before his musical faculty began to function at all. He is the only composer whose music is the art of thinking in sound *with* concepts.

§ 3. *Strauss and Modern Germany*

Richard to Richard succeeded. The music drama embedded in a continuous symphonic orchestral texture, relying for its musical unity upon a use of leitmotif, was taken up at the point where Wagner left it by Richard Strauss (*b.* 1864), who is still productive in his seventy-fifth year and has even seen two premières in 1938. For his first opera *Guntram* (1892) he followed Wagner in a choice of theme, "the inevitable redeeming female", and in writing his own text. Of this his son says[1] that "the only partial success of this work put all thoughts of writing again for the theatre out

[1] In the Preface to the illuminating volume of letters exchanged between Strauss and Hofmannsthal. English translation by Paul England. Secker, 1927.

of his mind for nearly eight years." *Feuersnot* (1900), he continues, "is rather the mocking improvisation of the whimsical symphonist than a serious attempt at progress in dramatic composition." Strauss began in fact to follow his own bent in choice of plot, though he has pursued the same musical methods throughout his career. The satirical element crops up again, e.g. in the ballet *Schlagobers* (1923), which contained political parables, and the opera *The Silent Woman*, which laughs at operatic manners. But the decisive change was made to morbid psychology in *Salome* (1905) and *Elektra* (1909).

This seems a strange aberration for a vigorous, healthy and eupeptic man of the world like Strauss, but the glitter of Oscar Wilde's text or the chance for the expression of violent emotions—necrophily in *Salome* and obsession for revenge in *Elektra*—tempted him, and though in them he reached the limit of horror through stridency and made a swerve to comedy in his next opera, *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), he had not completely worked out of his blood the desire for "a quite modern subject, very intimate and extremely neurotic" as he says in a letter to Hofmannsthal, who from *Elektra* onwards became his regular librettist. He ought to have taken Buchner's novel *Wozzeck*, which Alban Berg appropriated a year or two later. Strauss has not the psychological subtlety for psychopathological subjects, but he has the determination to see his horrors through. He is murderous to the voice, and in both operas he asks his principal female characters to make a show of dancing into the bargain. The creator of the role of Elektra abandoned it in distaste for the character and despair for the voice. No singer can dominate the orchestra, and it is to the

orchestra that the composer has assigned the main responsibility for the drama, which in spite of Wagner's success is a cardinal error in an operatic composer.

Der Rosenkavalier is a deliberate attempt to write a comedy of manners "after" Mozart; in the result it comes nearer to *Die Meistersinger* in length, weight and balance of lyric with dramatic elements. It is the only one of Strauss's operas which has really conquered English taste, and though after many repetitions at Covent Garden and some performances in English its length has begun to seem too great for its subject-matter—*Meistersinger*, though long, is not too long for the material—its many Viennese ingredients make it irresistible. There is the rococo setting in eighteenth-century Vienna and the dubious erotic motif much to the fore; there is the inevitable waltz and that sweetness, now with a touch of bitter as in the Princess's luscious harmonies, now tingling as in the chords for celesta which go with the presentation of the silver rose, now pure as in the little tune of the final duet that catches one echo from Mozart and another from Schubert; and everywhere, except in the strident farce of the third act, that all-pervading lusciousness that spells the charm of Vienna to sober English people. The opera fascinates.

Fascination is an ambivalent emotion compounded of attraction and repulsion, and the repulsion acts as a lever to make the attraction stronger. It is not merely that the crowded scenes of the opera—one in each act, the levee, the duel, and the horseplay in the inn—are accompanied by complicated, discordant and sometimes ugly music which offsets the almost unbearable loveliness of the Princess's soliloquy, the presentation of the rose, which is the heart and kernel

of the opera, and the exquisite tenderness of the final trio. It is inherent in Hofmannsthal's play. The eighteenth century covered corruption with rococo crimson and gilt, and the corruption is revealed by Baron Ochs in his coarse narrative to the Princess in the first act and in his crude philandering with the boy-girl Octavian. Count Almaviva had waived his feudal rights to the bodies of his female dependants; Ochs tells how he exploits his sexual privileges. The opening scene of Octavian's love-making with an older woman easily jars a fastidious taste but it gives the key to the action, and the precocious boy's youth enables Strauss to avail himself of the old tradition of a male soprano: he turns it inside out, and makes Octavian a mezzo-soprano to be sung by a woman. The resulting complication by which a woman dressed as a boy acts a lover's part and then disguises herself as a girl does, however, give a handle to those who complain of operatic absurdity.

Hofmannsthal was a poet of fine sensibility and great culture. The mixture of learning and taste did not lead in him, as it so easily may, to barren elegance. He had a genuine creative gift which was at the disposal of a thoughtful mind. The quasi-philosophical theme that runs like a thread through *Rosenkavalier* is Time; "Where are the snows of yester-year" sings the Princess as she sees in her mirror the change wrought by time and experience. Sophie is untouched by both. In Octavian we see the ferment of love and experience brought by time leading to change. Time, experience and change spell character, and character is the dramatist's material.

Hofmannsthal draws his characters with acute insight. But his wide reading and historical knowledge

sometimes tempted him into an excessive allusiveness. Although collaboration with Strauss, who was quite blunt about the amount of literary subtlety an opera libretto could stand, generally kept the proportions right, in their next opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the whole conception is too far removed from real life and too much like the artificialities of the old Arcadian academies to allow it to become a universally acceptable opera. It was originally intended as an appendix to Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, for which Strauss has written a suite of incidental music. M. Jourdain commissions an opera to further his snob's progress and with characteristic ostentation engages also a troupe of masks to play the comedy of Harlequin. To save time he orders the two entertainments to begin simultaneously. The music was written for a performance of Molière's comedy in 1912, but could hardly obtain a place in the repertory in that form. So it was recast and provided with a prelude in which a composer bewails the troubles of operatic production behind the scenes. He does not reappear in the opera dealing with the loves of Bacchus and Ariadne which follows, but the harlequinade, especially Zerbinetta the dancer, interrupts the stiff and old-fashioned operatic dialogue which is being parodied. Hofmannsthal was attempting to recapture the grand heroic manner of Gluck, and Strauss was trying to be Italianate, as in the aria of the tenor singer in the levée in *Rosenkavalier*. In pushing the coloratura to fantastic lengths of extravagance for the sake of parody Strauss has actually in Zerbinetta's aria created a piece of lovely music and has struck a new balance (for him) between voices and orchestra, for he uses a small orchestra throughout, and Hofmannsthal's idea of reverting to

something like *opera seria* throws the emphasis upon singing. But Hofmannsthal is over-subtle, and the opera altogether too recondite for the commerce of the opera house.

Strauss's next opera was written during the War. *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (*The Woman without a Shadow*) was produced in Vienna in 1918 but was, comparatively speaking, a failure; it has not been heard in England at all and is not likely to achieve general currency. Here again Hofmannsthal plunged into a highly complicated and symbolical plot. In his next opera *Intermezzo* Strauss swings to the other extreme and forsaking legend and high emotions takes an episode from his own early married life as the subject of a comedy. In *Die Aegyptische Helena* (1928) Strauss returns to a heroic subject, and to Wagnerian method with, however, more consideration for the vocal possibilities that a great soprano might find in it than in his earlier works. But Hofmannsthal again has been over-subtle and so complicates the old tradition that Helen was not at Troy at all but away in Africa, that one German critic says frankly that the libretto is unintelligible even when read away from the stage; Menelaus himself is distracted to know which Helen he is seeking. This was destined to be Strauss's last bid for a world-wide currency, a final attempt to recapture for Germany the power to make the world's telegraphic wires busy with the news of a new opera, such as Puccini had won for Italy.

Strauss's ambition for *The Egyptian Helen* failed, after a splendid and apparently successful launching of the opera, and events occurred within the next five years to write *finis* to his further development. He lost his librettist when Hofmannsthal died at the end

of 1928, though not before the libretto for the next opera had been written. By the time *Arabella* was produced in 1933 the Nazis had come to power and expelled Fritz Busch from Dresden. Strauss was too old and too established to be affected by the change of government—even the Great War had passed over his head, as appears from his published correspondence with Hofmannsthal—but he had exhausted his power of making a new operatic synthesis, or even of writing new music. *Arabella* is a second and inferior *Rosenkavalier*, a Viennese musical comedy with a waltz and a disguise, set in the bourgeois nineteenth instead of the aristocratic eighteenth century. Otherwise it is the mixture as before and not so good. *Arabella* is the only one of Strauss's post-War creations to have been given here; it was put on at Covent Garden in May 1934 under Herr Clemens Krauss.

In spite of the Nazis, Strauss's next opera *Die Schweigsame Frau* (*The Silent Woman*), with a libretto by the eminent Jewish author Stefan Zweig, came to performance at Dresden in 1938. The text is based on Ben Jonson's play and Strauss has made some quotations and allusions to things English in his score, but the opera has not yet come to England. *Der Friedenstag*, with a hymn to peace and reconciliation for its finale, has also been produced in Nazi Germany amid the war-like preparations of the summer of 1938, and its locale was Munich. The peace which it celebrates, however, is the peace of Westphalia which marked the end of the Thirty Years' War and united all Germany after civil strife. It is therefore unexceptionable from the political point of view of the present rulers of Germany, although it is a protest against an ideological war. The opera is brief, swift-moving and intensely dramatic,

but does not rise at the end to the height of its theme. The last of the series to date is also a one-act opera with libretto by the same author, Joseph Gregor, on a legendary subject, *Daphne*. In this the music is more lyrical and there is more scope for the chorus than is usual with Strauss.

It is an astonishing output and nothing is more striking than the apparently endless supply of music and the copious resource with which any dramatic demands can be met, especially in the orchestral writing. Yet the sound of Strauss's music, which rarely fails to intoxicate—he has that essential quality for the theatre, glamour—soon cloys and its fundamental monotony begins to tire the ear. There has been no growth for twenty-five years. Nevertheless, there is no successor either to him or to the tradition of music drama in sight in Germany.

We have reached the present day, but we must retrace our steps to glance at some of Wagner's and Strauss's German contemporaries. Shoots of the Wagnerian tree are Peter Cornelius (1824–74), Hermann Goetz (1840–76), Carl Goldmark (1830–1915), Engelbert Humperdinck (1854–1921), and Hans Pfitzner (*b.* 1869), with the ambiguous figure of Eugen D'Albert standing by. Cornelius is remembered for one opera out of the three that he wrote on Wagnerian principles; the *Barber of Bagdad* is a comic opera that is regularly performed in Germany and occasionally outside. It was given by the Royal College of Music Students under Stanford in 1891; it is done from time to time in America, and a broadcast performance was recently arranged in London. Goetz is remembered for *The Taming of the Shrew*, which was given in England by

the Carl Rosa Company in 1880, and at the Metropolitan, New York, in connexion with some Shakespeare celebrations in 1916. Goldmark, a Hungarian Jew, made a hit with the oriental colour of his first opera, *The Queen of Sheba* (1875), and subsequently wrote five others, of which one drew upon Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth* for its story. Both of these operas were produced in England by the Carl Rosa Company in the early nineteen hundreds, and both have been given in America. The fame of *The Cricket on the Hearth* was sufficient to overshadow Sir Alexander Mackenzie's setting of the same story composed about that time.

Humperdinck has enriched the international repertory with one unquestionable masterpiece, *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893), a children's fairy opera, which comes up fresh every Christmas, though the Babes in the Wood ate wild strawberries and covered themselves with strawberry leaves that are unobtainable at Christmas. But adults, like children, have a mind for fairy tales at Christmas, and one is now more likely to hear the opera at this than any other season; it is one of the Vic-Wells's annual contributions to Christmas festivity. This slender music-drama goes far to demonstrate the validity of Wagner's method as a method, for apart from the fact that the two composers are both Germans, and both alike speak a German musical language, Wagner's epics and Humperdinck's little fairy tale are so unlike in size and weight—æsthetic categories, these, which largely determine the forms of expression in art—that the disparity would seem to make the use of the same dramatic form wholly inappropriate.

In *Königskinder* (1896), Humperdinck's other attempt at the same kind of thing, the composer felt the force

of this critical principle and used the form of the ballad opera (though he eventually rewrote it with a continuous musical texture). But in *Hänsel und Gretel* he uses the whole complicated machinery of leitmotifs and orchestral commentary (there is, for instance, the touching Dream Pantomime of angels guarding the children) with a lightness of touch that prevents the music from ever impeding the telling of the tale or from clogging its own easy flow by over-elaboration or from overwhelming the light voices that are required for the two principal parts. The Mother's song over her broken jug sometimes slips out of scale, but a capable actress can remind us that a peasant's poverty and overwork may easily precipitate her over the brink of tragic emotions. The dramatis personæ allow only one male voice—Peter the broom-maker is a baritone, and those productions which so far yield to the English traditions of Christmas pantomime as to cast a man for the part of the contralto ogress, upset a balance of voices which, however lop-sided it appears on paper, is perfectly satisfactory with an all-female cast, Peter alone excepted. Perhaps one reason why the opera in its small way approaches perfection is that it needs neither heroic tenor nor buffo bass!

Eugen D'Albert, the pianist, who was English by birth and training but German by naturalization and acclimatization of style, won popular successes in German opera houses with half a dozen operas of which *Tiefland*, a kind of German Carmen, is the best known. Pfitzner, on the other hand, is a composer of austere temperament and high ideals who has won fame, though not close acquaintance, outside his own country with *Palestrina* (1917), of which some orchestral excerpts

have been played at symphony concerts in London. The plot is constructed from the apocryphal story of the Council of Trent and the composition of the Missa Papae Marcelli, but the hero, we gather, is a portrait of Pfitzner himself—in this as in other respects he imitates Wagner and Strauss.

Both in *Palestrina* and an earlier romantic opera *Der arme Heinrich* (1895) he exemplifies the danger of taking over from a great man just those things which lesser men ought to avoid, in this case the elaboration of static moments or of episodes like the squabbles in the Council of Trent, which however effective in themselves upset the dramatic balance. Wagner was saved from these consequences of his dramatic theories by his own sure dramatic instinct. It may be recorded here that Siegfried Wagner, Richard's son by Cosima von Bülow, and Liszt's grandson, who managed the Bayreuth Festival when his mother became too old, was also a composer, with a dozen operas to his credit.

After the War a reaction against music drama set in in Germany, and a new enthusiasm was shown for Handel and Verdi, that is to say, the voice once more asserted itself against the orchestra. Musical interest had left the stage and concentrated itself in the orchestral pit. It was not merely that Strauss was drowning his singers with orchestral tone, it was a case of symphonic commentary usurping the functions of the actors in the drama. During the whole of this period of roughly fifteen years European music was also in strong reaction against romanticism, and Stravinsky's crusade for neo-classicism had spread far and wide among the younger generation of composers. Of these the most conspicuous is Hindemith (*b.* 1895),

whose dry and machine-made non-stop counterpoint would seem *a priori* to be quite unsuited to dramatic ends. Yet his two big operas, *Cardillac* (1926) and *Mathis der Maler* (The Painter Mathis) (performed as a symphony for the first time in Berlin in 1934 and staged for the first time in Zurich in 1938) show the contrary—both works make a powerful impression in the theatre. *Cardillac*, which portrays a goldsmith who is so obsessed with his own works of art that he murders his customers in order to regain possession of them, is described by the composer as neo-Handelian, by which he means that the score is laid out in formal numbers and that the music does not attempt in the Wagnerian manner to reflect and intensify each passing allusion of the text. *Mathis der Maler*, however, marks a return to a more romantic way of writing opera: the first scene, for instance, recalls the first Act of *Tosca*. Its subject, however, is modern, although based on the history and character of Mathis Grünewald; the opera is a mediæval allegory on the most urgent of present problems: what is an artist to do in a desperate political situation? Hindemith was his own librettist and he is dealing with a situation he knows at first hand. Though completely "Aryan", Hindemith is not persona grata to the Nazis as a quotation from one of Dr. Goebbels's essays in musical criticism will show.

"Technical mastery is not an excuse but an obligation. To misuse it for meaningless musical trifles is to besmirch true genius. Opportunity creates not only thieves but also atonal musicians who, in order to make a sensation, exhibit on the stage nude women in the bath-tub in the most disgusting and obscene situations, and further befoul these scenes with the

most atrocious dissonances of musical impotence." [1]

Women in the bath is an allusion to Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage* (1929), a stage essay in *Gebrauchsmusik* with parts for typewriters in the score. This quasi-journalistic way of writing operas was one form of the reaction against romantic music drama—everyday life is taken as the subject. *Hin und Zurück* (1927), which puts on the stage a film scenario run backwards, was a previous experiment on the same lines. Low life was chosen for the same purpose by Kurt Weil in his *Dreigroschen Oper*, (The Threeha'penny Opera) which was suggested by *The Beggar's Opera*. The intention was satirical but the impression one gets from the music is that it is itself corrupt, a reflection of the malaise that afflicted Berlin during the Weimar republic and shedding some political light on Hitler's rise to power. Weil is responsible for two other social satires in opera—*Mahagonny* in a jazz idiom, and *A Kingdom for a Cow*, produced in London in 1935. This also made use of jazz and was a play with music that suggested now comic opera, now musical comedy and now farcical extravaganza. Its satire sometimes hit the mark, but on the whole it left a bad taste in the mouth and some of the music was nauseous.

Jazz was also used by Ernst Krenek (*b.* 1900) in an opera that raised storms in Central Europe and required a racial modification of its rascally negro hero when it was presented in New York, *Jonny spielt auf* (1927, Leipzig) (in English *Johnny strikes up*). Krenek wrote his own text and provided it with jazz too good to be authentic, though scored for jazz orchestra and incorporating quasi-extemporizations on tunes like "Swanee River". The writing for the negro Johnny

[1] Quoted by Nicolas Seminsky in *Music Since 1900*.

gives opportunities to a good baritone for something between the declamation of Wagner and the cantilena of Puccini. This was the first of a trilogy on politico-satirical subjects, but his most recent operas have been on heroic subjects, Orestes and Charles V. His first opera—*Sprung über den Schatten* (1924), a picaresque *opera buffa*, is described as neo-classical and constructivist, that is to say, it was built in the form of a suite of dance movements, passacaglias and so on, in this respect resembling Hindemith. But the most famous, because the best, of all the works written on this plan of reaction from Wagner in post-War Germany is Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, which took six years to write (1914–1920) and was first produced in 1925.

This is an astonishing opera from whichever angle it is considered: the story reads like a page from a psychoanalyst's case-book, and so at first sight appears to be as modern as the music. Yet the author of the novel from which its eighteen scenes have been drawn, Georg Buchner, a young scientist, died at the age of twenty-four a hundred years ago. Wozzeck is an orderly, a poor tool who is tormented by the Captain whom he serves and by a doctor who does in fact treat him as a psychological case for investigation. His lover Marie, who is a type of the poor unfortunate female, is attracted momentarily by the Drum Major, who is almost a caricature of the virile male in excelsis. Wozzeck in jealousy murders Marie and in remorse drowns himself. The curtain comes down on their child playing in the street in ignorance of the tragedy. German commentators do not fail to point out that these are the characters of myth, i.e. not human types so much as individuals who symbolize the subconscious forces of human character, and this is the impression

one gets in the theatre. The dramatic power of the opera is not that of the realism of *I Pagliacci*, which is crude by contrast with the psychological subtlety of *Wozzeck*, but that of general poetic truth to life. It grips from start to finish.

Berg (1885–1935), who is a disciple of Arnold Schönberg, discards the key system in favour of arbitrary configurations of the twelve-tone scale. He is therefore faced with the problem of large-scale construction without key to help him. Mozart had used tonality as a unifying agent, and though Wagner's more sprawling designs did not require so strict an application of the principle of unity of key, he used modulation for dramatic purposes and worked within the key system. The opera composer, unlike the symphonist, has an extraneous plot to give cohesion to the dramatic structure of his score, but it would be extremely dangerous to rely on that, and Berg, so far from merely adding an accompaniment to dialogue declaimed in recitative, introduces a new principle of construction borrowed from pure instrumental music. He uses a variety of musical forms taken over from the early developments of instrumental music; he depicts this scene in a passacaglia, that in a march, the other in a fugue and a fourth in sonata form, most of them very strictly worked out. He employs an enormous orchestra with four each of the wind and goes even further than Wagner in taking the musical interest from the voice and assigning it to the orchestra. His dialogue is carried on in a naturalistic speech-song, varied with *Sprachstimme* or a rhythmic declamation, such as Schönberg had employed in the speech-choruses of his *Die Glückliche Hand*. The structural side of the work is further reinforced by the division into three acts which correspond

in their time span to the old A B A form; they are respectively Exposition, Dénouement (in place of Development) and Catastrophe. The B Section, that is the second Act, is weightier and more closely wrought as well as longer than the two A sections which are by comparison episodic. The last Act consists of six "inventions" on a Theme, on a Tone (a pedal-point or rather a passacaglia on one note), on a Rhythm (not, however, a strict ostinato), on a Chord, on a Key (D minor), and on a Persistent Rhythm (perpetuum mobile).

All this elaborate and conscious construction would be barren in the hands of a composer without creative imagination. But Berg was a true composer and would write true music in whatever style, technique or system he chose to adopt. In the theatre one is only conscious of the compulsive power of this music drama which is immediate and enthralling, as Berg himself wished and intended. The music seems to have little life apart from the drama, the drama has absorbed the music, the music has invested the drama with its own life, subtilizing, symbolizing, and enforcing its message.

Another great opera of this period which makes some use of separate musical forms is Busoni's *Doktor Faustus*, left unfinished by the composer at his death and completed by his pupil Philip Jarnach.[1] In it the composer aims at conveying by dramatic means and through the symbolism of the characters high philosophical truth after the manner of *The Magic Flute*. He felt unwilling to attempt Goethe's version of the Faust legend and wrote his own book in which Faust

[1] The first stage performance was given at Dresden in 1925, and it was subsequently produced for the international audience of the International Contemporary Music Festival at Frankfurt in July 1927. A concert performance has been given in England by the B.B.C. (in March 1937).

is for ever striving after the ultimate perfection and ever launching forth upon a new beginning in the search for it. The music is difficult, complex, and even repellent, but it and the poem achieve their dramatic unity and carry the listener along on the current of the creator's thought towards his metaphysical goal. Busoni, like his contemporary D'Albert, was a great pianist who, though not of German origin, wrote for the German stage. The conflict between his Italian birth and the German cast of his mind was responsible for the frustration which is apparent in this great man's music. Previous to *Doktor Faustus*, he wrote *Die Brautwahl* (1912) and two short operas on Italian stories, *Turandot* and *Arlecchino*. The latter is satirical —it parodies operatic manners; the text which is Busoni's own is cynical and the music crackles amusingly to match it; Harlequin's is a speaking part in order that the seductions of tone and melody shall not spoil the dryness of the melodrama.

There remains for mention one other branch of the German operatic tree—Austrian operetta. Operetta is another of those terms that defy logical definition. Its dictionary meaning is " little opera ", too short for an evening's amusement, an equivalent therefore of the old comic Intermezzo. But in England operetta is used loosely for a comic opera in which the dialogue is spoken; it connotes something between a comic opera and a musical comedy; that is, its music is of better quality and of more importance than in a musical comedy but not of such merit as to override every other consideration. *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*) of Johann Strauss the younger (1825–99) embodies this situation perfectly. It is built on a frankly farcial plot and music that is both infectious and sweet-tasting. Waltz rhythm

predominates and the whole atmosphere recalls the Vienna of Franz Josef, which the War killed and Hitler buried. It abounds in ensemble numbers, especially trios, as well as solos, and there is a vaudeville in the second act in which seven of the principal characters participate against a choral background.

This may be operetta, but its workmanship is that of a first-rate craftsman who also possessed the gift of captivating melody and had the lilt of South European dances in his blood. Performances which are musically heavy-handed or which allow the farce to degenerate even before the last act, whose scene is laid in a wholly incredible prison, may pall on any listener who is affronted by imbecility; but given a good performance in which the rhythm is preserved, the singing is up to grander operatic standards and the farce kept within bounds, this descendant of *Singspiel* merits the enthusiasm with which its revivals are greeted. The part of the Russian Prince Orlovsky is written for a contralto and is sung by a woman. The drunken gaoler, Frosch, has no singing to do, but everyone else must be a capable singer, especially Adele the soubrette. This insistence on the importance of the music removes the piece from the category of Viennese musical comedy like *The Merry Widow* and her numerous progeny, in which music is subsidiary to spectacle. It is an example of pure farce in music, a descendant in slightly poorer circumstances of Mozart's *Entführung*. It has enjoyed a great measure of popularity in England recently, and even attained to the dignity of a Command performance at Covent Garden during the grand season of 1930. There have been occasional performances by amateurs of *Der Zigeunerbaron* (*The Gipsy Baron*) but few others of Strauss's sixteen operettas have had any

professional revival here since they first went round the world in the last years of the nineteenth century.[1]

Austrian composers whose works rightly find a place in the repertory of the Vienna opera but are not suited for export include Julius Bitner (1874-1939), a writer of powerful romantic opera; Eric Korngold (*b.* 1877), a kind of German Puccini whose successful *Die tote Stadt* is to be met with in excerpts and gramophone records; Franz Schreker (*b.* 1878), who goes to Freud for his themes; Egon Wellesz (*b.* 1888), now resident in this country, an authority on Byzantine music and a disciple of Schönberg who prefers Euripides to Freud; Walter Braunfels (*b.* 1882) of Frankfurt, who on the strength of a setting of *The Birds* of Aristophanes, raised hopes for the continuation of German opera on its less earnest and turgid side. None of these has lately been heard of internationally. Meantime, though operatic performances continue unabated and a Volksoper, reorganized by the Nazis, has done something to popularize dramatic music even more widely than in the past, there is a pause in the creation of new and significant works. The new trends have been abruptly cut off and no one can tell in what direction the German tradition will sprout again.

[1] The work of The Alan Turner Opera Company of amateurs in reviving them one after the other, must be acknowledged; *Der Lustige Krieg* was their latest (February, 1939).

CHAPTER VI

French Opera

IN considering the development of the opera in France, and the French solution of the operatic problem, it is well to keep certain general characteristics in mind. In general, then, let us say that the French respond very quickly to music: they like to hear it and to make it. "J'aime bien la musique" is the majority verdict. Yet for most Frenchmen music has never been, as it has in some lands, a substitute for religion. It has usually been, and still is, regarded as a valuable ornament of the good life, but not as the immediate and obvious means for expressing the stronger emotions and sentiments.

Music in fact has taken second place beside literature. She—all arts are feminine in France—is a younger sister in the sorority of *les beaux arts*, and is usually represented as a well-nourished young woman with a harp in those imposing groups which adorn public buildings and memorials to great men.

With the quick temperament and natural exuberance of the race goes a great admiration for form, logic and analysis, and just as literature and especially dramatic literature, was early bound by strict conventions—the rules of the *Académie* remained in force from the time of Richelieu's foundation until 1830 or so, when Victor Hugo's *Hernani* successfully flouted them and pro-

voked a riot—so too were the conventions of opera quickly established and easily accepted. And although large-scale dramatic expression in terms of music is probably no more natural to the French habit of thought than it is to ours, the mind attuned to Corneille and Racine is well prepared for conventions in the opera house.

It is usual to divide French opera into two categories: *opéra* and *opéra comique*. The distinction is sometimes confusing. But it serves, and it is emphasized by the existence to-day in Paris of two separate opera houses, both supported by public money. The *Opéra*—or *Académie de la Musique*—is a vast and pompously handsome building by Garnier. The *Opéra Comique*—or *Salle Favart*—is a much smaller theatre, where a pleasant face and acting ability stand a better chance of being appreciated. It is not a *Volksoper* in the true sense, but it ranks lower socially than the *Opéra*. This is worth mentioning, for the social aspect of opera has played nearly as important a part in its development in France as the prevailing fashions of literary taste.

Opera did indeed develop along two distinct lines in France, and the roots of both can be traced to Italy. But it must not be thought that the one house is now exclusively the home of tragic pieces, the other that of comic pieces. *Opéra comique* is a term loosely and ambiguously used to label any opera which is not in the grand tradition; the proper force of the adjective will be seen if it is recalled that the French for "He is a good actor" is "Il est bon comédien". It is common to define *opéra comique* as opera which allows the spoken word, and in default of an exact definition this will do. But it must not be rigidly applied. The

distinction is as much one of feeling as of form. *Opéra* is heroic. *Opéra comique* is unheroic.

The origins of both types, however, can be found in Italy. *Opéra* is an offshoot of the Italian *opera seria*. *Opéra comique* is a child of the marriage between Italian *intermezzi* and the popular little "sketches" with music—vaudevilles—such as can still be seen at fairs in the country.

Both types were quickly tempered by certain qualities of French taste and spirit, and by considerations of language and the native manner of singing. To define these is not easy and necessarily involves generalization. Order, elegance and economy we have noted as features of French taste. The spirit of French music is marked, since the earliest times, by a love of animation, neat rhythmic effects, and a pretty, if rather shallow, sentiment. Admiration for a strong personality in the entertainer can also be noted in the reactions of the audience at any *Café Chantant*. The art of the *diseuse* flourishes.

There is a genuine love of song. But the French voice, using a language of light, shallow vowel sounds, weak accents and nasal resonances, is not suited to sustained flights of song in its most essential form. It was necessary when accepting the model of opera from Italy to compromise with the Italian idea of *bel canto*. And to this day expressiveness in singing is more esteemed than great skill, range or power.

An outlet for the national love of acting, dancing and light singing could be found in opera, but these pursuits do not of themselves compose opera of heroic dimensions; it was left to a Florentine, Lulli, to write the first French operas. The creation of heroic opera is not then a natural habit of thought, and it will not be

surprising to find that the great names of *opéra* are more often foreign-sounding than French. As Lulli came to work for the court of the young Louis XIV, so later did other composers come to write for the National Opera of France. We are accustomed to think of Paris to-day as a thoroughly cosmopolitan city, sheltering countless foreign artists. It attained that questionable distinction early, and because of its wealth, its free press and its pleasure-loving public, it gradually became a sort of bazaar of all the arts. Verdi angrily called the *Opéra " la grande boutique "*, and one can imagine a painter to-day applying some such epithet to the Parisian picture market. It must be remembered then that the history of French opera is as closely linked with the social history of this town as it is with the literary history of French culture. Any criticism of Meyerbeer, for example, must be tempered by recognition of this fact. Indeed in the first half of the nineteenth century the *Opéra* came to occupy a place in the social scheme for which Edwardian Ascot might serve as a parallel.

But let us return to the beginnings, which are significant. The virtual rulers of the court of the young Louis XIV were Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarin. The tedium of court life was relieved by masquerades, balls and ballets, in which distinguished persons took part, and more occasionally by firework shows and *fêtes d'eau*, music serving as an agreeable accompaniment to dancing, spectacles, conversation and love-making which was, in theory at least, polite. In 1647, at Mazarin's instigation, an Italian company performed Luigi Rossi's *Orfeo*. It was not received with enthusiasm, but the way was open for Lulli who, some twenty years later, after ingratiating himself

with the court by supervising the musical side of their entertainment, finally produced operas in French. To the scholar these works show definite marks of the influence of French taste. To the modern listener they seem much like the Italian pieces of the period: dull and stiff. They reflect indeed the grand and rather hollow formality of court life. Where they chiefly differed from the Italian species was in the opportunity they afforded for spectacular scenic effects and dances —their appearance may be deduced from contemporary prints, scene designs and tapestries—and also in their treatment of recitative which proved more sympathetic to the French than did the Italian variety, and was esteemed to be a fairly logical extension of the declamation in vogue among the actors of the day. The arias too were rated more expressive and free, and though they did not attempt the greater dramatic power of the Italians, they reflected in some degree that taste for light and sentimental song which has been noted.

Foreign observers, and many Frenchmen too, found Lulli's operas tedious, but they evidently supplied some local need, for they set a fashion strong enough to make Rameau's operas in the next century seem at first highly unconventional. *Alceste* and *Armide* (1686),[1] which contains the simple and expressive "Bois épais", are among the best remembered of Lulli's operas, though both, like Rossi's *Orfeo*, were to be eclipsed by finer works with the same stories.

At this distance Rameau's music seems very much akin to Lulli's. Yet his operas in fact marked a great advance on those of his predecessor. Some of the

[1] Recently (1938) performed by a Hammersmith company of amateurs at the Century Theatre, West London, under Miss Olive Daunt.

more rigid conventions were swept away. The musical style was more vigorous and better knit with the language. Rhythmic variety and orchestral "colour" made a more effective contribution to the drama, and though Rameau's invention was less profound than that of Handel or Scarlatti, it was nevertheless distinguished. Recent revivals of his works—at Oxford and in Paris—have shown that his ballet music especially can still sound fresh. *Castor et Pollux* (1737) established him as the leader of the French School, and it was not until 1752 that his position was challenged. In that year, however, an Italian troupe performed several *intermezzi* in Paris, including Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*, and opera entered on one of those periods of æsthetic squabbling to which French artists, at once excitable and analytical of mind, have always been partial.

This *guerre des bouffons* was really less complicated than it seems. Many people were bored with Rameau, fine musician though he was, and catching eagerly at the cheerful popular style of the Italian *intermezzi*, used it as a stick to beat the traditionalists. The real issue was not whether Rameau's style was too stilted, nor whether French was a possible operatic language—Italian had won the day everywhere else—but whether the native tradition of Lulli and Rameau was to be fertilized by the growing vogue for "naturalness". It is significant that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose cry was "Back to nature", became counsel for the prosecution. He himself, though an amateur, wrote a model "natural" opera. And certainly the *intermezzi* were more natural than Rameau's heroic pieces, not least in that they eschewed the castrato voice and the classical plot.

The "war" in fact was merely a preliminary skirmish in the coming battle for the reform of the opera, led by Gluck. The only important result was a partisan support for little comic operas in French on the Italian model, which later enabled various foreign composers of slender talent, such as Duni, and later Frenchmen such as Monsigny, Philidor and Grétry (a Belgian) to achieve success in this line.

Gluck, who is dealt with in Chapter III, emerges in the history of French opera in a rather confusing dual role. He was at once the great reformer of the whole idea of opera, and also the champion, under Marie Antoinette's protection, of the court tradition of opera, embellished by Lulli and Rameau. His opponents, reluctantly led by Piccini, a second-class musician, were once more the Italians. Gluck held his fort and before he died he won for *opéra* a position which it retained in some measure until the days of Verdi and Wagner. The French language remained. But in one sense the Italians gained the battle; *opéra* survived, enriched by Gluck's five great French works, but many of the exponents of the species who came after him bore Italian names, and the *Académie de la Musique* echoed to the sound of Italian voices.

It is not necessary to insist again on the importance of Gluck's æsthetic theories. They were not always well illustrated by his own work—he had, for example, to bow to the popular demand for irrelevant ballets—and they were imperfectly understood by his immediate successors, who were mere craftsmen for the most part. But his precepts are still those by which we judge opera and their contribution to its general development can scarcely be overstated.

The French Revolution and the revolution of senti-

ments, which in literature produced such phenomena as the *comédie larmoyante* of Diderot and his school, was not without effect on the course of opera in all countries then producing it. *Opéra*, however, was at first little affected. The mantle of Gluck fell on the shoulders of such composers as Cherubini and Spontini, expatriate Italians who worked in France and Germany, and who not unsuccessfully allied Gluckian precepts with the socially acceptable elements of vocal display and ballet. Cherubini's *Les Deux Journées* deserves mention as having influenced Beethoven in his composition of *Fidelio*. Spontini's stately *La Vestale* was the success of 1807. The manner is Gluckian: the music, which attests the growing vogue for expert vocalization, lacks deep inspiration. Other accomplished craftsmen abounded. Paisiello and Méhul are remembered only as names, though the latter's choice of librettos and his seemly musical manners suggest that there was still a serious element in the public to be reckoned with.

The romantic movement, which reached its zenith in literature in the 1820's, struck *opéra* with its full force in Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (otherwise *Masaniello*) and the influence of the romantic playwrights becomes strongly marked in librettos from then on. Auber is now chiefly remembered for his cheerful and admittedly catch-penny light operas, but *La Muette* [1] is a highly romantic historical drama, and whatever its weakness as music it is important in that it paved the way for a composer who, though hardly a genius of the first rank, was to loom very large on

[1] The " mute " is the heroine who was played by a *figurante*, a type to be met frequently in French opera: which may suggest that the Frenchman looked first for the " woman " and only secondly for the voice in his operatic heroines.

the starry horizon of grand opera, Meyerbeer, a Jew of German birth, who enjoyed an enormous Parisian and European success. But before we speak of his contribution, one other example of the romantic, historical opera deserves mention. In 1829 *Guillaume Tell*, the last of Rossini's serious operas, which he wrote with great labour specially for Paris, was brought to the stage. This typically cosmopolitan collaboration (a French text of a German play by an Italian librettist) is neglected to-day, partly of course because it demands singing of a kind that is no longer to be found. But in spite of its dismaying length and poor, anti-climactic libretto, it is by no means without power. The orchestration is, for Rossini, remarkably unconventional; there is much really fine melody, dramatically expressive in itself as well as being a splendid vehicle for *bel canto*—Matilda's Romance for example—and in the ensembles the attempt to express the conflicting emotions and thoughts of the characters simultaneously in music is one of which Verdi himself would not have been ashamed. Moreover, the musical style has a consistency rare at that time in *opéra*, and the play with local colour is far more successful than in most of the contemporary French works.

Meyerbeer's operas, it had best be said bluntly, are artistic failures, taken as a whole. They lack all consistency of style: they are filled with glaring anachronisms: to us they seem patchy, tawdry and immensely long: and they abound in passages which set the sensitive musician's teeth on edge. Yet they are extremely interesting artistic failures, and at the time their success was enormous. Schumann raised a dissentient voice, but many critics pronounced them imperishable and even compared them to the work of

Michael Angelo. Others found them "piquant", which they undoubtedly are in one sense!

The composer was a man of untiring energy but little self-confidence. Bribery and corruption stalked the creation of his operas, and they usually reached the stage as a jumble of highly effective and often original theatrical strokes, interlarded with pieces to assuage the vanity of singers, the greed of managers and the worst sensation-mongering elements in the audience. Little fresh ground was broken in *Robert le Diable*—a conventional romantic libretto decked with attractive if rather laboured melodies—"Robert, toi que j'aime" is a song which obstinately stays in the memory. But in *Les Huguenots* (1836) Meyerbeer had a really fine subject—the religious strife of the Catholics and the Protestants and the massacre of St. Bartholomew. In spite of all the conventional padding the treatment of the story is undoubtedly powerful: it seized the public imagination. Scribe also provided him with good subjects in *Le Prophète* (John of Leyden) and *L'Africaine* (the voyage of Vasco da Gama); in all these Meyerbeer was able to exploit every conceivable theatrical effect to excite the listener. He strove, too, to ally vocal display and orchestral effect with dramatic truth, and the manner was at the time considered a wonderful amalgamation of Italian *bel canto* and German "symphonic art". Sometimes the result sounds inspired. Properly sung, the fourth act of *Les Huguenots* still makes a tremendous impression. Note the use of the chorus in the scene of the blessing of the daggers before the massacre, and the manner in which ardent passion is suggested in the great duet "Le danger presse . . .". But against these fine passages must be set the complete

failure to give the characters individual life—however exciting the situations in which they find themselves —and a fatal weakness for all sorts of trite and incongruous padding in the form of waltz songs, show pieces, cavatinas for the soubrette, and so on.

Le Prophète will no doubt always be remembered as the opera with a skating ballet. The musical invention is more laboured than in *Les Huguenots* and many of the arias illustrate only too well Meyerbeer's short-winded melodic gift. *L'Africaine*, from a purely musical point of view perhaps his most acceptable work, suffers from a confusion of purpose and a lack of drive which are in part due to endless tampering with, and alteration of, the score and libretto during the slow course of its creation. It did not reach the stage till after the composer's death. In all three works the most serious weakness is the lack of characterization. Raoul, Valentine, Vasco and Zuleika are merely puppets.

Thus, though Meyerbeer set a fashion, brought wealth to the Paris Opera, and greatly increased the scale of theatrical effect in music, and though many composers—for instance Verdi in *Don Carlos*—were indebted to him for his vivid strokes of stage-craft, the years have dealt harshly with his works. Their fundamental lack of artistic integrity, their poverty of purely musical invention dissatisfy the modern listener. They now serve only occasionally for galas. (*Les Huguenots* needs eight " star " singers.)

There were other exponents of this type of opera. Halévy avoided Meyerbeer's worst excesses but also failed to achieve any such impressive moments. *La Juive* (1835) is still to be heard in France.

With the death of Meyerbeer and the posthumous production of *L'Africaine* the main line of heroic *opéra,*

which may be traced from Rameau and Gluck, comes to an end. *Opéra* had outlived its time. Had a figure arisen of the stature of a Wagner or a Verdi, the line might have continued to develop: but as far as the fortunes of *opéra* were concerned, the great French musician of the century, Berlioz, might scarcely have existed at all. Berlioz, with his powerful imagination and his exceptionally original talent, was too independent a genius to fit into a scheme of things hostile to any innovations of which the public could not immediately see the point. Composers of a very different breed, more truly representative of the bourgeois public who now held the power in Paris, were to occupy the scene of the Opera. To trace their pedigree we must return to *la guerre des bouffons*.

But first a word for the neglected operas of Berlioz. They are best approached by way of his other music, the mixture of the great and the utterly ineffective in which will help to explain the unevenness of the stage works. Some passages in them burn with the pure flame of inspiration, others simply do not "come off". Berlioz was too much the artist, too little the craftsman to rub along where he felt no inspiration. Moreover his talent was descriptive rather than essentially dramatic. At least he seems to have found it difficult to express drama in terms of voice, and much of his writing for the voice is ineffective, though exceptions abound. Those are some of the reasons why so many of his scenes make the effect of oratorio or concert-opera. *La Damnation de Faust* was so conceived, and so presented makes an undeniable impression.

Les Troyens shows Berlioz harking back to Gluck. This monumental work is now seen, if at all, in two

parts.[1] The first, which is bound by the conditions imposed by Virgil's indirect method of narration (in the *Æneid*), is static and oratorical. The second is much more freely operatic and also more vital as music. Many of the characters, however, still strike one as frigid. As in *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838) it is the descriptive passages, especially those for orchestra, which stand out. Mention, however, must be made of the great septet, much of Dido's music, and the final scene. *Béatrice et Bénédict* (1860) is a light comedy opera, but lacks the strokes of originality found in *Cellini*. But none of these works held the stage in Paris, even if they reached it, nor do they seem even to have exercised a direct influence on later operatic composers, though of course the influence of Berlioz on music generally must be taken into account. But it was Gounod's Faust, not Cellini or Æneas, who became the operatic hero of the sixties.

The vogue for Italian *intermezzi*, which were the occasion of the *guerre des bouffons*, stimulated the production of comic operas in French. At first the practitioners were foreign. Gluck, when in Vienna, and Duni, an Italian who settled in France, produced successful examples of what was more or less a French equivalent of *opera buffa*. The species had many varieties and one can hardly speak of a school. But there is one characteristic of the French comic opera which sharply differentiates it from the *buffa* type. The *recitativo secco* was replaced by the spoken word. Monsigny, Philidor and Grétry are the most notable exponents of this kind of opera, which during the last half of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries became the most typical expression of French

[1] It was so performed at Glasgow in 1935 under Dr. Erik Chisholm.

operatic talent. While the grand tradition of opera was carried on elsewhere, this unheroic brand, aiming frankly at commercial success, offered an excellent field for composers of more slender talents, and for actors and actresses who added skill in singing to other theatrical accomplishments. The purely musical worth of these little pieces is small, but their vivacity and tunefulness are by no means despicable. Their *jolies mélodies* furnished the popular music of the day and were often turned into dance tunes, if they were not that already.

In its lowest form this type of comic opera was no more than operetta or musical comedy, which, increasing in sophistication, established a vigorous tradition of which Offenbach's racy frivolities are perhaps the finest flower. But a more serious type also flourished, making a great appeal to the bourgeois society which dominated Paris after the Napoleonic wars. As the taste of this public grew, so did the musical worth and dramatic range of *opéra comique*, and soon it became a respectable vehicle for musicians who also aspired to the position of serious opera composers. It learnt to imitate many of the more popular features of the grander tradition. Boieldieu's *La Dame Blanche* (1825) set a standard. Auber found himself more at home in this world and followed his *Masaniello* with *Fra Diavolo* in 1830, a charming work which still survives[1] and which by its vocal style, its well-developed ensembles and its touches of the fashionable romantic spirit, shows clearly the progress that this rather insecure medium has made since it first gained hold. Adam's gay and delicate *Postillon de Longjumeau* also calls for some really serious singing and is typical of

[1] Revived at Sadler's Wells in 1935.

a class to which even the exalted Meyerbeer was not too proud to contribute.

For us these pieces survive chiefly in the form of selections to be heard in tea shops and music halls. The excellent tunes are well known even if the names of the composers are forgotten. Any patron of the circus would recognize the overture to Hérold's *Zampa*; and anyone who has heard Adam's ballet *Giselle*, which has had constant revival, will have a good idea of the naïve sentimentality and gaiety that so pleased the public of the day. The animated acting and the pretty, light singing must have redeemed much that on paper looks terribly trivial. But not many of these pieces reach the stage to-day, even in the French provincial towns.

The more serious elements of the public could not, however, remain permanently satisfied with this unheroic species. The grand opera was still very important socially, and though after Meyerbeer no master was forthcoming, the need of a national product more serious, affecting and beautiful was still felt. It must be remembered that chamber music and symphonic music were less cultivated and less accessible than nowadays, so that the public did not desert the theatre as it would, and does, to-day when operatic talent fails. The great French operatic composer of the period did not materialize: neither a Verdi nor a Wagner appeared to satisfy advanced tastes. A compromise, however, was reached and accepted between the decaying grand tradition and the younger and healthier tradition of *opéra comique*. Each borrowed from the other, abandoning its own peculiar characteristics. Grand opera ceased to be heroic in its musical and literary style. The grand Italianate manner of

aria or duet was abandoned in favour of a less ambitious style more suited to French voices; recitative flowed more easily in and out of the main numbers and was less sharply differentiated from them; often it had a suggestive orchestral background of melody; the spoken word was never adopted but the new kind of recitative retained the main characteristics of French speech. Many of the conventions of *opéra comique* were allowed, however: minor comic characters made their appearance, more latitude was given for realistic acting, and the design of the opera became freer and more fluid, as the general movement away from set numbers, already noticeable in Meyerbeer, continued. The love-music no longer expressed heroic passion: it became lightly sensuous and elegant instead. Waltz songs and ballads and light music of all kinds found a place in the scheme without seeming so incongruous as in Meyerbeer.

Opéra comique, meanwhile, achieved a new dignity. Its subjects became increasingly serious and finally even tragic. The orchestral and vocal style grew richer, until it was sometimes scarcely to be distinguished from that of the pieces played at the grand opera. It clung, however, to the spoken word, and though the dramatic climax was still often conceived as a *scène parlée*, musical and dramatic tension were seriously cultivated. The former role of *opéra comique* in provoking mirth and mingling frivolous comedy with music passed to the operetta and *opéra bouffe*, and this remained a perfectly distinct species. But the gulf formerly existing between *opéra* and *opéra comique* was bridged. Composers, and singers too, could pass from one to the other without effecting radical changes in their equipment.

Typical of this generation of composers is Ambroise Thomas, who applied the more ambitious *opéra comique* style to perfectly serious subjects from Goethe and Shakespeare—*Mignon* (1866) and *Hamlet* (1868)—but in deference to the public gave them happy endings. Gounod, who was soon acknowledged master in both worlds, likewise went to these poets for his two most successful serious operas, *Faust* (1859) and *Roméo et Juliette* (1867); only, here the debased style of grand opera was applied and the works are tragic in intention at least. It is significant that the former was first conceived as an *opéra comique* with spoken dialogue. The connecting music was written in later.

One cannot speak of Gounod without regret. His talent for opera was unquestionable. His gift of melodic invention and his command of dramatic effect should have enabled him to achieve great things. But a disastrous facility and a complete failure to realize his own limitations were his undoing. He won great popularity, and still wins it with the uncritical who can scarcely be blamed for drinking greedily from his fount of vulgar melody. But generally speaking, the more serious the aim of his music, the more does it repel the sensitive listener. He is at his worst when reaching out towards the sublime. His "noble" and religious music is at once pretentious and trite. And it was a tragedy that the taste of his day impelled him towards subjects for which he was least fitted. His gifts were all for grace, sensuous prettiness and a rather effeminate brand of erotic emotion. They are illustrated with charming effect in his lighter operas, especially *Mireille* and *Le médecin malgré lui*, and they are much, though often incongruously, used in *Faust* and *Roméo*.

To appreciate the many merits of *Faust* it is necessary to forget all about Goethe: otherwise Gounod's complete failure to match in music the penetrating poetry of the Gretchen incident in that great work—as Schubert did in a small way in a single song—will continually irritate. We must accept his libretto for what it is and allow that Gounod's treatment of it is, for the period, neat and effective. The characterization is superficial but clear; the action is made vivid by the conventional means, moving swiftly—but not, as in early Verdi, too swiftly—and the lyrical expansions though often too long are mostly well distributed, from a dramatic point of view. The ballet is charming, but of course redundant, and the opera would be the better for the excision of many bathetic religioso touches, sham antiquities and downright vulgarities. But there is much in the garden scene which shows Gounod at his best, and whatever the shortcomings of this Act—they need not be stressed—the brand of light erotic emotion which it purveys and the solution of the operatic problem that it most typically represents, set a standard for serious lyrical opera writers not only in France but elsewhere as well. *Roméo* repeats the success of *Faust* in a lesser degree. The method is the same in both, and this method with its typical characters and voice types—especially the unheroic lyrical tenor and soprano—is to be found, with modifications, in many later operas.

A work of the seventies which has kept its place in the repertory is *Samson et Dalila*. Like much that Saint-Saëns wrote it is conceived and carried out with excellent taste and distinguished craftsmanship. All that is lacking is inspiration. The libretto is a dignified and effective treatment of an impressive subject. Yet

the opera hangs heavy and only comes to life fitfully in the second act where, in their proper place, the too-hackneyed melodies make an excellent dramatic effect. It was not immediately mounted in Paris—and in England it won fame first as an oratorio. But for that fact its seemliness and dignity might have acted as a much-needed corrective to the composers of the school of Gounod.

Meanwhile, though any composers who broke fresh ground had to contend with facile accusations of Wagnerism, the influence of the German made slow headway in Paris—not only because of the Franco-Prussian War. The Wagnerian ideal was simply not understood. Efforts were made, however. Reyer's *Sigurd* (1883) and Chabrier's *Gwendoline* were Wagnerian in aim, though both suggest that the composers had assimilated the literary features of Bayreuth more fully than the musical. It is significant of the power of Wagner's reputation that Chabrier, whose real talent lay in the same direction as Offenbach's, should have felt impelled to try to deal with Nordic sagas.

But it was a disciple of Gounod, Jules Massenet, who won the greatest following in Paris, and in his works, whether serious or light operas (the style remained much the same in both) the influence of Wagner is hardly discernible. He made, it is true, some play with leading motifs for dramatic purposes, but this was hardly more than an extension of the use of *reprises* already thus employed with good effect by Gounod. Massenet's range is extremely limited. He found the perfect medium for his ingratiating and sentimental talent in an adaptation of Prévost's exquisite little novel *Manon Lescaut*, which he treated in the more serious *opéra comique* style, reflecting the senti-

ment of his story very successfully in his music and atoning for his somewhat weakly style by his uncommonly happy portrait of the heroine—a daughter, it is true, of Gounod's Marguerite—and by his pretty sense of period and of the picturesque. Puccini's treatment of the same story seems by contrast too heavily sensuous and dramatic. It throws into relief Massenet's success with lightly erotic and tasteful characterization of the feminine. But to know Manon is to know all his heroines, and his powers of characterization did not extend to his men; his lyrical tenor heroes somehow suggest women in disguise. Massenet's talent, though completely apt for such a work as *Manon*, shows its limitations all too clearly when applied to Goethe's *Werther*, or Anatole France's *Thäis*. In the latter the music is continuous and so qualifies for the stage of the Grand Opera. Elegance and charm here of necessity had less scope, and the sentimental melodies float in a rather sickly gloom. The principal characteristic of the work is a blend, displeasing to some tastes but not to that of Massenet's public, of emotional piety and erotic appeal, traces of which indeed are found in nearly all his operas. It was part of Gounod's legacy.

Massenet remains extremely popular in France: but even the best of his numerous works scarcely bear transportation. Like Manon herself, they die in the process. They are too intimately linked with the peculiar qualities of the French language, the French voice and above all French bourgeois taste.[1]

Though Massenet was the best he was by no means the only disciple of Gounod. Delibes is remembered

[1] *Cendrillon* (*Cinderella*) has recently (1939) been revived in English by amateurs at Swindon.

for *Lakmé* and much good ballet music: and Offenbach, not content with the huge popularity of his operettas—which incidentally owed much of their success to their mockery of the monumental manner of Meyerbeer and others—also tried his hand at a more serious type of light opera. *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881), produced after his death and scored by another hand, is a minor masterpiece. The story is a charming fantasy. The hero's three amorous adventures, which he is supposed to be recounting, bring him successively into relation with three different types of women—a doll, an adventuress, and a sentimental girl. The music of each tableau varies accordingly in character and a different type of voice is required for each heroine. The distinction of the little opera lies not in its purely musical invention, which is commonplace enough, but in its acceptance of its own limitations. It is never over-inflated.

A somewhat similar ease and economy of expression is also to be noted in *Carmen*. This much finer work is also a last and isolated masterpiece. It appeared in 1875 and was followed almost immediately by Bizet's death. To modern tastes this is far the most vital example of *opéra comique* but it was not at first a great success. It was its subject which shocked rather than the music, which was still essentially in the Gounod tradition, though here subjected to the influence of positive genius. Bizet's earlier operas sometimes show a very individual turn of mind, but their aim was frankly commercial and the form as well as the manner frequently conventional. But his *melodrames* for Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne* show clearly a great gift for subtle harmony, exquisite scoring and neat and vital phrasing. Be it noted too that the

local colour in this background-music derives directly from Provençal folk-music, whereas in *Carmen*, except for the *habañera*, the evocation of the Spanish scene is an original one—a picture of Seville seen through French eyes.

It was the subject which shocked. The heroine of Mérimée's masterly short novel is a creature of a very different breed from that of most of the ladies of *opéra comique*. The librettists, turning the story into conventional couplets, greatly toned down the realism of the original. The character and the personal tragedy of the hero were weakly translated, and a conventional light soprano, Micaela, was thrown in to satisfy public taste for the insipid Marguerite type of heroine, Carmen herself thereby escaping a sentimental metamorphosis. But although it softens the bold outlines of the novel, the libretto remains a strong one. To those used to the platitudes of Faust or Roméo, Don José's love-story looked like a vulgar brawl.

Bizet's treatment is for the most part extraordinarily apt, quick and dramatic. There are, it is true, several purely conventional numbers—the Gounod-esque duet for José and Micaela in Act I, the commonplace quarrel duet in Act III between José and Escamillo, a very poor patch, and the little amorous exchanges between Carmen and Escamillo in Act IV. The triteness of the latter is, as it happens, dramatically justified, since this love-making was superficial compared with José's passion. Nor could the role of the chorus be described as original, effective and stirring though their music is.

But the drama is carried forward at just the right pace and tension, the story is never held up by irrelevances; even the little song-dances of Carmen serve a dramatic end, for example the *seguidillas* which grows

into a duet perfectly expressive of the situation. The rousing Toreador song is apposite in its context, and the use of it as a background to the final tragedy is one of those essentially operatic points which so effectively convey the under- and over-tones of a theatrical situation. Another is Carmen's *reprise* of the *habañera* against altered harmony when she is feigning a carefree manner before her bid for escape, at the end of Act I.

The melodic phrases, without any straining, seem always accurately expressive of the sense; they are cut neatly to the shape of the words and render in music with a skill that is quite unselfconscious the speed, elegance and poise of spoken French. This partly explains the instant impression of "rightness" which the spectator feels, and accounts for the ease with which spoken dialogue passes into music and vice versa. (Recitative was written later and is sometimes used.)

The suggestion of Southern life is so captivating and vivid that it alone would explain the success of the opera. Masterly too is the subtle suggestion in the orchestra, by strokes which seem intuitively apt rather than calculated, of the sentiments and moods of the characters. The phrase for the *cor anglais* associated with José's fatal love, which Nietzsche called an epigram of passion, may serve as an example.

Some of the harmony is for the period astonishingly original, and the scoring, especially in its use of the wood wind, is exquisite. The purely musical merits of the work are indeed beyond question and in reaction to the long, deeply reflective and mystical dramas of Wagner this lively piece with its clear, apt and neatly cogent music has come in for some violent championing. Nietzsche held it to be the perfect example of "Mediterranean" music, carrying the smell of the

plaza and the bright, clean colours of the southern climate. Certainly one returns to it gratefully after a surfeit of Nordic gloom. But it must not be thought of as a work *sui generis*, nor must too much be claimed for it on the score of originality. From the formal and theatrical point of view it is merely a peculiarly successful example of serious *opéra comique*.

Composers in many countries, especially in Italy, were indebted to it especially for its realism, the fashion for which had already been set in literature. Zola was brought to the opera house by Bruneau, using librettos in prose, a new and significant departure. *L'Attaque du Moulin* (1891), a Franco-Prussian War story, is a brave attempt to combine together realism, Massenet's lyricism and the Wagnerian method, and the result is acceptable if somewhat lacking in individual character. A more interesting and successful combination of the kind was Charpentier's *Louise*, still much played in France. It came out in 1900 with the Exhibition and its success was partly topical, for it celebrated Paris, the gay and wonderful city, and touched on the then vexed question of female emancipation. Now that the novelty of the subject and the method has worn off, large stretches of the work seem rather colourless. We are no longer astonished to see a labourer's family drinking soup over a symphonic orchestra. The style vacillates too and never seems quite certain how to combine French lyricism with the Wagnerian method. In the Montmartre scenes clever use is made of an impressionistic manner which we find invading many operas at about this period. Yet Louise's conflict of choice between filial duty and Bohemian love is appealingly portrayed. Much in the last act repays investigation, and the work still lives, though

its impact is weak if one already knows Puccini's realistic operas.

It is yet another isolated masterpiece, however, which stands as the best equivalent in French for Wagner. Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) brings us into the new century—the century in which all categories are broken down and experiment runs riot. *Pelléas*, though influenced by Wagner, represents a reaction to him rather than an adaptation of his ideas. It is the work of a man temperamentally the antithesis of Wagner and one who had to work with means (voices) of a very different calibre. Instead of *unendliche Melodie* Debussy gives his characters a kind of flat, pale recitative, set against an impressionistic and marvellously sensitive orchestral background. The orchestra reflects the moods of Maeterlinck's bloodless creatures, but its function is to create a poetic atmosphere in which they exist, rather than to lead them in action and to explain them. Appreciation of the work considered as a musical poem is extremely rewarding. As an opera it demands from the audience very close attention and sympathy with Maeterlinck's fey and symbolical vein of fancy. The whole treatment is so restrained and delicate that it seems scarcely to pass the footlights. It does not impose a theatrical spell, yet if one surrenders to the music, the consistency and subtlety with which the drama is worked out in the chosen medium continually astonish. The work is unique though its influence on later composers can be observed.

Dukas's *Ariane et Barbe-Bleu* is likewise Maeterlinckian in its symbolism of the " new woman ". It owes much both to Wagner and Debussy. Its poetry is distinguished but not very vital—*Pelléas* founded no school

and from this point we notice that the best talents in French music began to turn away from the opera house. Opera continued to flourish, living on the repertory and foreign works in translation—even Wagner was sung in French—but later composers favoured secular oratorio, song cycles, and above all the ballet. Diaghileff and the Russian Ballet claimed the attentions of the vanguard. Poets and painters, with various freakish cults, replaced the novelist and the playwright in providing the "literary" support on which French musicians have always leaned. Ravel and the Russo-French Stravinsky produced more dance-dramas than operas, and the former's *L'Heure Espagnole*, for all its wit and charm, started no fresh line.

Landmarks are hardly visible in the contemporary fog. Stravinsky's *Perséphone* is a secular oratorio. Poems are bawled by a tenor and spoken by an actress against a background of chorus and orchestra. Milhaud's *Christophe Colombe* (1926) is as yet too "modern" to gain entry to any opera house. He seems to have a real feeling for opera, but this example is unlikely to establish itself.[1]

Meanwhile, from Bordeaux to Brussels, the public is fed on a diet of Massenet, Wagner, Puccini and the rest, with occasional novelties. One of them may one day be the work of a composer with the genius, singleness of purpose and individuality to start a new school. He is much needed, but has not appeared yet.

[P. H.-W.]

[1] Cf. below Chap. X. p. 235. The opera was performed at the Berlin State Opera in 1930. In France and Britain it has only been heard in a concert version. It was broadcast by the B.B.C. in January 1937.

CHAPTER VII

Modern Italian Opera

SOMETHING has already been said about the Italian, and especially the Neapolitan, tendency to stress the importance of the purely vocal side of opera to the exclusion of other considerations. As the age of patronage drew to an end, and operatic composers found themselves increasingly obliged to rely on commercial success for their livelihood, the influence of this tendency becomes more and more marked. Right up to the last decade of the nineteenth century—and even in some degree to-day—Italian composers regarded themselves less as artists, in the romantic sense, than as craftsmen supplying a wanted form of entertainment to the public. Now this public was what we should call to-day essentially vocal-minded: but it was not a specifically musical public. These facts must be kept in mind: they are the key to an understanding of opera—quite apart from its place and importance in musical history—all through its succeeding development in Italy.

Whence came this intense interest in voice *per se*? The question is one for the anthropologist, perhaps. But at any rate, for reasons of temperament, climate or throat-formation, which we cannot discuss here, Italians are above all people endowed with generous voices. The language, with its many open vowel sounds and

easily vowelized consonants, quickly dissolves itself into song, especially if spoken fast or excitedly, and the division between speech and song is a thin one. Singing is for the Italian a perfectly unselfconscious and immediate form of self-expression, and there is a response to voice—we speak generally of course—as alive and quick as the response common in all people to physical beauty. It is not fantastic to note in an Italian's reaction to a fine voice—" Una bella voce!"—something of admiration at least as keen and spontaneous as in a Frenchman's " Une belle femme!" The Italian, as it were, " sees " the voice as a physical thing. A loud voice, or a voice attacking and holding a high note, which requires a corresponding output of physical energy in the singer, can represent for him—or anyone similarly affected by voices—the equivalent of a tremendous gesture, a leap in the air or the verbal expression of a strong sentiment. It is easy for him to hear in the play of voice against voice a vocal drama as vivid as the equivalent physical or verbally expressed drama of the ballet or play. This leads to a conception of opera as a drama carried on almost entirely in terms of varying degrees of vocal tension and excitement. It is also, of course, an opportunity for a vocal exhibition, a vehicle for story-telling, for scenic display and the expressing of sentiments by an alliance of voice, word and orchestral music: but only so in a lesser degree.

That alone explains the success in Italy—and anywhere with a public similarly responsive to voice *per se*—of operas that considered from a purely musical or literary-dramatic point of view have small merit. Their success derives in the first instance from their vividness as " vocal drama ". If the work so con-

sidered holds attention it will succeed in Italy, whether it is musically a great masterpiece like Verdi's *Otello* or meretricious like Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. This idea of opera can be discerned influencing, perhaps unconsciously rather than consciously, almost every important Italian operatic composer from Scarlatti to the present day. But of course it is only an idea; other considerations count also in some degree.

But we shall see that the literary element played a smaller part in determining the success of an opera than in France, for instance. Words served to clinch dramatic points, to tie the vocal drama to a definite story, but they were not otherwise important, and, alike in passages of lyrical expansion or vocal dramatic intensity, they often seem merely stuck on to a melodic line already expressing adequately the appropriate sentiment. We shall see too that the orchestra, which in Germany gradually came to assume an independent role, was in Italy long restricted to the function of mere accompanist who served to introduce, point and heighten the effect of this vocal drama produced by the varying tensions of the melodic line and its shape: and by the contrasting character of the voices singing. (Incidentally we may suppose that the audience talked as they are apt to do even to-day during the performance of orchestral interludes.)

It follows that characterization was less a matter of writing individual *music* for each figure, than of writing a *vocal part* in terms of a type of voice, its range, power and timbre. As the eunuch voice fell out of use—after raising the standard of virtuosity to undreamt of heights—all types of voices came to serve the needs of opera. The classification of characters by voice types became more definite, though not of course a

rule. Generally speaking, the younger the character the lighter and higher the voice, but not only the age was suggested by the type of voice. To some extent too the role played in the drama by each character was similarly predetermined. The principal tenor and soprano were the lovers; so much is immediately noticeable in nearly all Italian operas. But a little reflection will reveal that the mezzo-soprano, the baritone, the bass, the secondary tenor and the light soprano also tend to be associated with certain kinds of characters. The classification need not be rigidly applied. There was much latitude and many exceptions. But if this and the tendency to regard opera in the first instance as vocal drama are kept in mind, it may be found easier to judge and to understand the main works in the tremendous output of opera in Italy during the next centuries.

These tendencies are already discernible in Scarlatti. But Pergolesi his successor makes them clearer still. He wrote a great number of serious and comic operas which are forgotten to-day. What, however, is remembered and is of lasting importance, from the point of view of opera, is one of his intermezzos—or entr'acte operas, performed by singing actors during the intervals of a full-scale work. The importance of *La Serva Padrona* is threefold. First, the unaristocratic nature of its plot, which concerns an old bachelor's tactical error in marrying his chambermaid. Such a plot was no novelty in Italy, but it was a revelation abroad, especially in Paris, where such unexalted pieces had no place on the stage beside the heroic, mythological operas and had flourished only at fairs. Secondly, the vocal parts are comparatively simple and unadorned, and could be remembered easily and sung

on the way home. Thirdly, the style of melody was easily recognizable as an extension of the kind of popular song sung in the streets of Naples, or on the canals of Venice; with *La Serva Padrona* this kind of song came into the theatre and began to play a part in vocal drama.

The new style of melody, to be found in *La Serva Padrona* and of course in many other intermezzi of the period, was again much refined, embellished and extended when it took its place as part of the vocal drama of real *opera seria* and real *opera buffa*. But from then onwards the public's awareness of vocal drama in full-scale works increased. Opera was seen to be not only a grand, remote, aristocratic entertainment for those interested in music, or in the finesses of the singer's art, but, among other things, a vocal drama appreciable by all who responded to the expressive powers of the voice. The interest in the story and interest in virtuosity remained, of course. But for the great mass of the public opera became, during the eighteenth century, " human " through its contact with the voice of the people.

Cimarosa and Rossini were the men who were to give this new-found vitality immensely popular and successful expression. Cimarosa need not concern us greatly, though he claims the most attention among the many quick-writing craftsmen turning out operas during the latter part of the eighteenth century. He wrote serious and comic operas, mostly forgotten to-day, though *Il Matrimonio Segreto* (1792) is still revived, and illustrates well the easy, glittering music that Cimarosa could turn out so quickly. It sounds much like elementary and unimaginative Mozart, and indeed it was from the Italian that the great

composer learnt much of his operatic method. We can find too the pattern of many of those types of ensemble, aria and recitative that we think of as characteristically Rossinian in the works of Cimarosa and his contemporaries in the last decades of the century. The particular cast of vocal melody in such works foreshadows, too, that which was to become almost the whole of Italian opera: melody that, owing little to words, and with little help from an orchestra whose development was stunted, grew to be the sole vehicle for the drama. With Rossini it put forth elaborate and gorgeous flowers (*fioriture*), with Bellini and Donizetti it gained a new elegiac and slightly effeminate pathos—which was typical of the romantic era: one may observe a somewhat similar note in the lyric poetry of the day—and with Verdi, passion, masculine vigour and a new depth of expressive power. Further, Verdi's melody, at first conspicuous for its animal strength and resilience, passed by the 1870's under a new discipline and refinement, which can well be called classical. Italian operatic history indeed is written in the character of its melody.

Rossini's triumphant vitality left its mark in nearly all countries: the German romantic composers show traces of it; and Rossini in his turn learnt from Germany something of the power of the orchestra. It is his forgotten serious operas which best illustrate that debt, but his comic operas reveal it too sometimes, and they still conquer by the irresistible snap and sparkle, by the charm of their tunes and their intoxicating rhythmic *élan*. Like the hacks of his day Rossini wrote fast and carelessly, stuffing in bits of his earlier works which came in handy, showing little concern for artistic integrity and pandering to

the popular desire for vocal excitement. But he must not be thought of simply as a jester. *Tancredi*, *Otello*, *Mosé* and *Semiramide* and, of course, *Tell* (composed for Paris) are by no means without intrinsic merit, though to-day their manner sounds too much like that of the comic operas. Nor can we find the singers to cope with the music. The Rossinian roulade has to be faked, which is all right in comic opera, but elsewhere displeases. *L'Italiana in Algeri*, *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*), both recently revived in London, and *La Gazza Ladra*, with a delicious overture, are outstanding in his enormous output of opera buffa. But it is *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816) which carries his fame to-day. The overture belongs to another work: a mésalliance as typical of Rossini's methods of composition as is the exciting music itself with its thrumming accompaniments, suggestive melodic phrasing and final wild crescendo. Typical too is the tenor's aria at the beginning of Act I, an elaboration of an earlier piece but essentially any Neapolitan fisherman's serenade. The stock characterization is superficial, no doubt, but clear cut and implicit in the voices. Rosina's famous aria might fit almost any of the comic operas, but the succeeding duet with Figaro ("Dunque io son") brilliantly portrays the characters in the dramatic situation.

The speed and wit of the great ensemble in this act are unrivalled, though a similar number in *L'Italiana*, where all concerned imitate various instruments in a military band, is perhaps an even more picturesque example of concerted vivacity. The final act is on a lower level of inspiration, but the thunderstorm is among the best of the many that Rossini wrote. The famous numbers give the singers exceptional oppor-

tunity for displaying agility. Figaro's "Largo al Factotum", for instance, needs speed in "tonguing", or enunciating the patter, mastered by very few English baritones to-day, or by Italian ones for that matter; and in general it is very difficult for non-Italian singers to make the proper effect in the racy recitations and the gabbling ensembles.

With vitality as usual went coarseness; artistic blemishes abound and one does not notice a progressive refinement in the style, as in that of many Italian composers. But Rossini's high spirits were and still are a splendid tonic for music. And he really did less than many people suppose to debase opera by making it merely exciting and frivolous. In Italy at any rate Rossini was in some measure a reforming influence, especially in that he gave the orchestra a larger share in the proceedings, even allowing it to accompany fully the recitative: and by writing out the singer's embellishments himself imposed some discipline on habits of irrelevant display. (Even to-day Italian singers will introduce completely incongruous cadenzas into arias which need none, and even to the extent of mitigating the excitement aroused by the song, and so allowing the audience's enthusiasm to cool.)

But Rossini's attempts to give the orchestra a better status were not much improved upon by his heirs. Bellini's orchestration has justly been likened to a large guitar. Donizetti's is more various but hardly bears serious examination, and seldom plays a dynamic role as does Verdi's from the first. At best it was lucky and conventionally effective; often it is simply wretched. But both composers excelled in writing for the voice. Bellini's was a small-range talent applied in *Norma* (1831) and *I Puritani* to large subjects: respectively

a drama concerning the breaking of a Druid priestess's vow of chastity, and a tale of England's Civil War. *La Sonnambula* tells a naïve tale of a girl whose sleep-walkings were misinterpreted by the dirty-minded. All ends well with a charming aria—a gracious adagio and a skipping little allegro—which is the one thing worthy of note in a work otherwise singularly mild. It is significant too that the best music is reserved for the soprano. Bellini's operas, like those in vogue later in the century in France, revolve round a central female figure. His comedy lacks sparkle, his tragedy, though sometimes hauntingly sad, lacks fire.

The masterpiece is *Norma*, which illustrates at its best Bellini's peculiar talent for long-drawn melodic cantilena of a gentle, elegiac and highly individual character. Chopin's debt to it is obvious. The melody is accompanied mostly by simple arpeggios, with a bald but often strangely effective tonic-and-dominant scheme of harmony, or supported by a chorus who sustain the tune while the main voice decorates it. Less happily, as in emotional allegros, the rhythm is just thrummed with heavy accents. Yet the melodies are extremely beautiful. It is true that they lack variety so that an aria in which a character is recalling past happiness may sound very much the same as one in which he or she is begging someone to escape. It is true that they do not convey a specific emotion and that their words hardly matter. But they suggest in some strange way a purity and classical dignity that were rare in opera at the time. Indeed so peculiar to Bellini is this pattern of cantilena that he is held by some to be the inventor of an original brand of melody. Its vogue was, of course, considerable, but it is perhaps simpler to regard it as the once new style of melody

that had come into the opera via the *intermezzi*, here subjected to the influence of romantic wistfulness and the discipline of a fastidious taste.

It is these slow-moving melodies which are Bellini's claim to distinction. No one fortunate enough to have heard them sung by a great singer is likely to forget them. The allegros which follow them are usually trifling and little of the other music bears much hearing. "Casta diva" and the final scena in *Norma* dominated by the soprano, and "Qui la voce sua soave" in *I Puritani* have an enduring beauty. Bellini died young. He might have developed like Verdi, though that is unlikely: he had too little vitality.

Donizetti was a facile, prolific and more various composer. Not in this only was he like Rossini. But though he had less sparkle than his master, he had also a spring of more touching and tender melody, and quite as much resource in ringing the changes on the conventional effects. His output is extremely uneven. *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), on a libretto from Scott, abounds in easily memorable and charming tunes and is comparatively distinguished by the clearness of its characterization, which can be observed not only in such solos as the wistful "Regnava nel silenzio", but also in the duets and the famous sextet. Moreover, in spite of their naïvety, the melodies express the requisite sentiment with great felicity. The well-known "mad-scene" has a hopping waltz-rhythm, but it is much more than the show-piece which most sopranos make it. But Donizetti's range is not great either. His attempts at dramatic force quickly decline into sentimentality; but there is much in *La Favorita* (incidentally the heroine is a mezzo-soprano, by exception) and in *Lucrezia Borgia* which

foreshadows dramatic effects that Verdi, with greater invention and resource, later turned to powerful use. Note, for instance, in the final act of the former the scena for the heroine backed by a chanting chorus off stage.

His comic operas, however, are more to present tastes. *La Figlia del Regimento* and *Don Pasquale*[1] contain a rich store of appealing and spirited tunes. Norina's aria, in the latter, with its effective little introduction, points the way to Gilda's "Caro nome"; her duet with Pasquale is at least the equal of that between Figaro and Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia.* Peculiarly happy, too, is the tenor's serenade and his "Sogno soave e casto", and so is the "hush-hush" chorus of domestics.

The great operatic figure who was to achieve in Italy an eminence as high as that held in Germany by Wagner, was Giuseppe Verdi. Both were born in 1813. Verdi lived eighteen years longer—to 1901. At one time it was fashionable in England to praise Wagner at Verdi's expense. Now the tables are turned, Wagner is disparaged, Verdi over-praised. But all such comparative estimations are foolish. Each in his own way produced incomparable works. Verdi, who had to contend all the latter part of his life with accusations of Wagnerism, in fact owed almost nothing to the German directly, though the ideas of "symphonic opera" and "music drama", as they permeated musical consciousness, may have set Verdi thinking on similar lines. Bellini, and later Meyerbeer, are more obvious influences. But truly Verdi and Wagner have only artistic success in common. The men and their methods of solving the operatic problem are

[1] Revived recently at Covent Garden and at Glyndebourne.

entirely distinct. The German approached opera with the realization that it *was* a problem, and evolved an astonishing method of his own, writing even his own librettos. The Italian went bald-headed at the job of writing successful musical settings of other people's plays, taking the commercially acceptable model as he found it, and bringing it, more by artistic intuition than intellectual striving, to a new force of expression and a new birth. He wrote in all twenty-six operas, six or more of which are mainstays of the repertory, while others are often revived.

Verdi was of humble birth. In some ways he remained a peasant all his life—if such generalizations be permitted for the sake of convenience. He lived through stirring times in a country which was struggling for emancipation. Patriotism of the truest and simplest sort, faith and honest piety were dominant motives of an ardent and powerful temperament. His character, to generalize again, was singularly noble, sincere and courageous. Action and love—more often of family, country, or cause, than merely erotic love—and a profound pity for the oppressed are recurring motives in his work. But he had no background of literary culture; he made his own out of an intense love of the theatre, which, in this romantic era meant love of Shakespeare, Schiller and Victor Hugo. For philosophy and mysticism he had no time or taste, at any rate as long as he had to write hastily for money. In later years he took up with Boito, a librettist of genius, a poet also and a composer of merit; one result of the friendship was that Verdi came to give more earnest thought to literary and poetic as well as to musical questions. So much is apparent in his last works and in his revisions of earlier works.

But although all his life he sought librettos that would satisfy the artist in him and urged, in the face of opposition, theories of dramatic truth which he saw to be necessary for the artistic salvation of Italian opera, he never in youth stopped long to ponder. He got on with the job, accepting compromise where necessary.

It is common in England to regard Verdi as a composer with an enormous natural gift, who learnt to be an artist only at the end of his life. The estimate is unjust and arises from the fact that the well-known operas are three early works and the last three masterpieces. His style matured, his technique increased, and his taste developed consistently and steadily. There is no break. *Otello* is implicit in *Il Trovatore.*

It is true, however, that the mainspring of his creative power was a fount of melody. It ran crude at first: later it was refined, but even when Verdi was eighty years of age it still welled up unceasing. We cannot hope to define Verdi's melody. But the epithets "masculine, animal, resilient", applied to it may indicate something of its essential nature. In his earlier works we observe it at its simplest, impelling forward, with tremendous speed and passion, close-packed and complicated historical and romantic dramas many of which were ill-suited to the current operatic scheme. But though here drama is carried mainly in terms of the voice, and characterized on the accepted principles we have noted, we observe too that Verdi's conception of the function of the orchestra is from the start far more vital than that of his immediate predecessors in Italy. There is much conventional thrumming of accompaniments to lilting tunes. But the

orchestral introductions are not always the mere "preparations" of Donizetti. They seek seriously to conjure a definite emotion, to implant a germ from which the aria springs: the orchestra leads the vocal drama besides accompanying it. However crudely used—the actual scoring is sometimes lamentable—it has a dynamic responsibility.

It is significant to compare not only the prevailing cast and character of the melody, but also the use of the orchestra in these early works with those found in the established favourites of Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini which they failed at the time to rival in the public esteem. The influence of Rossini's pioneering in orchestration in works such as *Tell* (see Chap. VI, p. 140) and the influence of Bellini will not escape note. Verdi owes to them not only devices but also the whole musico-dramatic ideas for some big scenes. In *Nabucco* (1842), the first opera, the justly famous choruses are essentially Bellinian, but the Prayer for the bass is highly characteristic and a forerunner of many, while much of the fast and excited music has a range and vitality far exceeding Bellini's. Verdi's characterization, which remained until *Aïda* radically the stock characterization of Italian opera—i.e. in terms of voice-types—his intensification and poetic application of conventional dramatic effects, his unfailing wealth of melody, and the characteristic speed and passion, are well illustrated in *Il Trovatore*. It is the second opera of what is usually called his middle period, and is also typical of much that has gone before. From the early period we may mention in passing *Louisa Miller*, because it has a non-heroic setting and a correspondingly more restrained and elegiac musical treatment, and *Macbeth* (revived at Glyndebourne recently) because it makes

melancholy comparison with the later masterly handling of Shakespeare (incidentally much of it was revised) and because it illustrates Verdi's concern for dramatic truth: viz. in Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking scene, for which he demanded above all an actress, and one with powers of dramatic expression, even of gruffness and brutality, rather than a soprano pure and simple. The libretto of *Il Trovatore* (1853) has come in for much mockery. It is complicated, certainly, and seems more so because the original play is " telescoped " so that the dramatic situations succeed one another with bewildering rapidity: the action is too tersely explained for the needs of opera. The characters express their sentiments vigorously, but not their reasons for adopting a course of action. The resulting impression is of a lot of excited and opinionated people acting irrationally.

Similar constructional failings vitiate a good many of Verdi's operas, making them difficult to follow and giving a handle to those who find opera " absurd ". Verdi is often to blame as well as the librettist. But if the sequence of events seems arbitrary, the situations themselves are made vivid enough, so expressive of the sentiment is the music, so keen Verdi's sense of the theatre. A fine example is the famous scena ("Miserere") at the beginning of the last act of *Il Trovatore* and it shows what progress Verdi was making if we compare it with a rather similar scena at the end of Donizetti's *La Favorita*. The hero is in prison, awaiting execution, the heroine stands outside. A distant chorus intones the death psalm with bell tolling. Leonora's anguished imprecations in a rhythm suggesting sobs and knocking heart-beats are suddenly cut short by the voice of the hero (off-stage) singing a dauntless farewell to

life and love. The means employed are the simplest but the effects of these contrasts of rhythm, mode and voice is overwhelmingly dramatic. Even if one does not understand from words and story what exactly is happening, the music is bound to convey broadly some such situation: the female lover-voice in anguish: the male lover-voice exhorting to courage: the chorus and the tolling bell establishing the atmosphere. One cannot pretend that the opera excites genuine tragic pity, but such is the force and theatrical effectiveness of the purely "vocal drama" that the listener is affected. And perhaps it would not be too much to say that unless something in you, quite apart from considerations of taste or education, responds to the vocal excitement of *Il Trovatore*—which of all operas still in the repertory illustrates the radical elements of Italian opera in their crudest form—then the fundamental appeal which Italian opera makes to its devotees will always remain obscure for you, however much you appreciate it for other qualities and the purely musical refinements, subtleties or vitality that can be discovered in its history in the nineteenth century.

Il Trovatore was preceded by a much less crude work with an excellent libretto. Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse* furnished the story of *Rigoletto*. The characterization is absolutely clear. Verdi writes music for each character individually, and preserves the characterization even in ensembles, e.g. the famous quartet. Observe that the tenor, though the "lover", is also the villain: the baritone not merely the man of action, but also the hero. On purely artistic grounds *Rigoletto* is the most defensible of his operas to this date; it even won Rossini's reluctant admiration. It is notable for

two things. It was conceived as a sequence of duets and continuous accompanied recitative with a minimum of set-pieces—the quartet is really a pair of interlocking duets.

Such movement away from the old formal scheme, which led ultimately to Bayreuth, was beginning to be felt for by composers in other countries too. Here we see Verdi independently feeling his way towards continuous music-drama. Secondly, *Rigoletto* shows a great concern for " atmosphere ". The storm in Act IV with humming chorus off-stage, the suggestion of rain-drops and sighing wind is a great advance on Rossini's set-piece *temporale.* Interesting too is the use of a reprise of a theme—the curse—a sort of Verdian leitmotif. This device owed, of course, nothing to Wagner and had existed in many earlier works: for example *Lucia di Lammermoor*, where the heroine in madness takes up again the strains of the love-duet in Act I. Note too the astonishing tenderness of the music dealing with the love between father and daughter, the deliberate suggestion of vulgarity and sensual flippancy in the Duke's music and the characterization of the tiny minor part of the assassin. The melodies have been terribly hackneyed. In their context they are all dramatically apposite.

La Traviata (1853) is a version of *La Dame aux Camélias* by the younger Dumas. The contemporary subject was voted preposterous and far too realistic for opera. To-day it is seen as a peculiarly apt and restrained realization in music of a sentimental character study of a courtesan. Verdi ennobled Violetta (Marguerite Gautier) somewhat, but she lives, and though the musical characterization of the other figures is weak, it must be allowed that they are weak

in the play too. Violetta is for the period a very subtle study of a woman at once frivolous and passionate, frail and pathetic, and the music in which her nature is portrayed is individual, in a way that defies brief analysis. The famous solo scene at the end of Act I ("Ah, fors 'e lui") might be taken as an example. Violetta's dawning realization of the meaning of real love is evoked in an aria which begins with slow-moving meditative phrases: the hectic frivolity of the life which she finds it so hard to abandon is reflected in the flashy waltz allegro which follows, and into which the strains of the tenor's declaration of love are suddenly projected: the sound of his voice echoing off-stage is a brilliant little operatic stroke of the kind in which Verdi excelled.

But as in *Rigoletto* it is the duets which illustrate best Verdi's powers of characterization. In Act I the long, gentle melody of the hero's wooing ("Un di felice") is contrasted with Violetta's undecided, arch replies (little coloratura phrases): his sincerity persisting against her laughter. Note how the two are combined, the characters expressing the sentiments simultaneously. It is a simple example of the essential operatic duet. In Act II the father's earnest pleading for his son's release and Violetta's gradual change from passionate obstinacy to resignation are portrayed in a duet of a singular beauty and almost Bellinian purity. Observe how the extremely simple accompaniments clinch the changes of mood: one recalls similar devices, extremely simple but magical in their effect, in Schubert's songs. Violetta has many fine opportunities for vocal acting, a sad letter to read, a passionate declaration of love when it is too late—("Amami, Alfredo", the main tune of the overture) and a great

renunciation scene: in the play a classic example of the type. As in *Rigoletto* the means used in this work are extremely simple: they seem almost intuitive. But the orchestration for Verdi at this period is unusually delicate. The use of the wood-wind to support the voice and finish its broken phrases of sorrow in the wistful "Addio passato" should be noted and compared with a similar use later in Desdemona's bedroom scene in *Otello*. The brisk and cheerful "party music" is better of its kind than much that Verdi attempted in this line: it well conveys the prevailing atmosphere of hollow gaiety in Act I, while the use of muted and divided strings, pianissimo, with the gentle sobbing wind underneath, make a wonderful preparation for the mood of the final scene of illness and death.

The librettos of the next five operas were none of them well-chosen, and Verdi's failure to effect in music a proper exposition of the play is all too common. The libretto of *Un ballo in maschera* was much weakened by the necessity for altering the setting to comply with the censorship. Yet it is quite sharply characterized: the casting in terms of vocal types, including a female coloratura page, is highly typical. The orchestration shows a decided refinement of style. There is once more the effective use of reminiscence and suggestive orchestral figures, though there is much that is trite as well, and one misses the lucky strokes of *La Traviata*. In spite of isolated and extremely fine moments, the total effect is disappointingly commonplace. The white heat of *Il Trovatore* has cooled, but in this and two others there is little compensating advance in shaking off the stock conventions. Verdi had not yet freed himself, and work commissioned for

the Paris opera, ruled by Meyerbeer, did not permit him to pursue his struggles for freedom.

Don Carlos (Paris, 1867) is extremely uneven. The last two acts are full of imagination, surely characterized and sounding a new note of really *tragic* intensity, as for example in the scene between Philip and the Inquisitor. Much of the rest is merely banal. But what is best here is all better done in later examples. For which reason *Don Carlos* disappoints those who start with a knowledge of the later works. *Simon Boccanegra* was revised at a later date. As it stands it contains some of Verdi's most lovely music, but it is vitiated by the dramatic lay-out of the story. *La forza del destino* is important not only for the superior quality and the noble passion of much of the music, but also because of well-developed comedy scenes with truly comic characters, which look forward to *Falstaff*. These were, of course, in the play from which the libretto was made, but the preservation of them in the opera is typical of the tendency towards a fusion of the styles *seria* and *buffa* which was on the increase. It was due in part to the influence of current romantic literary notions of combining the beautiful and the grotesque. The tendency is clearer in France than anywhere else. (See Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell*.) The device of using the soprano voice backed by chorus is much used in *La forza del destino* (a casting back to Bellini perhaps) and provides some of the most splendid music. Note also two very fine and characteristic tenor-baritone duets and the finale in which contrasting sentiments—remorse (tenor), pious hope (soprano), exhortation (bass, priest)—are vividly delineated. Distinctive too is the part played in the scheme by that element of Latin piety which achieves

such powerful, quasi-dramatic expression in the Requiem Mass, a work which Mr. Ernest Newman pointedly describes as Verdi's best opera.

Aida (1871) was commissioned for the opening of the Cairo opera house. The story was, suitably, one of Egyptian history and provided great opportunities for spectacle. The pomps and ballets and grand ensembles were, of course, a gift for a showman such as Verdi. That is one, but not the main, reason for the success of the opera. The libretto is on the conventional heroic model, but a peculiarly simple, direct and serviceable example, as clear cut as a play by Racine. It turns on exactly those emotions of patriotism, noble love, and jealousy which appealed to Verdi. The main characters are the essential types we meet constantly in his operas and they are cast according to voice in exactly the way we expect. *Aïda* is Verdi's most perfect example of the heroic type of grand opera. All the elements to be noted throughout his earlier works achieve here for the first time their fullest, most sensitive and most consistent expression, in a treatment that is unified and disciplined throughout with the most conscious artistic aim.

Comparison with *Il Trovatore* will illustrate what is meant by the epithet "classical" applied to *Aïda*. The melody, though exuberant as ever, now has a far greater length, ease and freedom. It is shaped with an astonishing skill and subtlety, where before it was poured forth crudely. The element of sheer vocal excitement is still present—for example Amneris's solo scene in Act IV and the quarrel between father and daughter in Act III—but it is welded into the dramatic scheme with a much surer touch. It is not merely the motive power of the drama: it is truly a

part of the drama. We must stress too the constant note of restrained lyricism, which can only be called chaste—for example Aïda's " O patria mia " in Act III and the early part of the duet in the tomb. Lyricism of this kind is not new in Verdi: but here is the finest use of it as yet. It is a strain that is developed in the music of Desdemona and Nanetta (Anne Page) in the Shakespearian masterpieces which were to follow.

At the same time all that Verdi had been feeling for in his use of the orchestra was consistently and successfully realized. The scoring of the Nile Scene (Act III) achieves effects which are utterly individual and, at once from the theatrical and the musical point of view, flawless. The evocation of mood and atmosphere is masterly, and in the music of the pomps and triumphs, the concerted ensembles (close of Act II), the establishment of the historical setting and the strokes of stagecraft, Verdi succeeds in doing everything which Meyerbeer would have wished to do. No catalogue of the beauties of *Aïda* can be attempted, but it must be said for certain too-famous pieces that the vulgarity sometimes alleged against them is largely brought to them by the singers and the hacks who misuse them. " Celeste Aïda ", sung pensively, not bawled or blared on the cornet, is a poem.

After *Aïda* Verdi was no longer pressed by the necessity for commercial success. The matchless *Otello* was written slowly. It appeared in 1887 and it was even then much in advance of the public taste. (So for that matter had *Aïda* been. Accusations of Wagnerianism had been made and generally the work, while successful, had been thought " difficult ".) The libretto which Boito made from Shakespeare's tragedy is in every way superior to anything Verdi had handled

before. It is for the most part a translation of the original. Some scenes disappear, the opera beginning in Cyprus. Some of the characters too are weakened (e.g. Emilia) or omitted. But this libretto had not only positive literary merit. It was a far freer and subtler scheme than the usual rather crude piece of work on which Verdi had to exercise his genius. It enabled him to treat in music not merely the salient situations but the whole play.

Verdi's sense of characterization, which for all its struggles had previously been dominated by the voice-type convention, became from contact with Boito, the poet, far deeper. Words and verbal poetry, of the importance of which he had been increasingly aware all through his career, developed a richer significance for him. Finally, too, he could afford to break with the traditional formal lay-out of heroic opera, as he had attempted to do in several earlier ones. Even so *Otello* retains traces of the set-piece, but the alliance of music and drama deserves the rather confusing title of music-drama.

The term is confusing because of its Wagnerian associations. Let us beware. *Otello* is not Wagnerian. It can be approached directly via *Aida*. The clue to understanding it is still the voice which carries the drama. (Note the typically Verdian duet with its martial rhythm at the end of Act II. "Now by yon marble heaven . . . .") The use of the orchestra is infinitely subtler and richer than before, but it is still radically the Verdian, not the Wagnerian, conception; it heightens the play of the voice, it evokes, alludes and comments on the action to a greater degree but fundamentally in the same manner as we noted, for example, in *Un Ballo*. Truly astonishing are the sinister under-

tones that it gives to Iago's seemingly innocent jocularity, the twist that it gives to the account of Cassio's dream, the haunting tenderness that it brings to the love passages in Act I and the sense of desolation that it conjures in the final scene in Desdemona's room. There are magical strokes at every turn. One cannot forbear to call attention to the way in which Otello's entry into the bed-chamber is heralded on the double-basses.

But the orchestra hardly ever and only momentarily develops symphonically like Wagner's. The so-called leitmotifs are not integral parts of the score; they are allusions, e.g. the climax of the love-duet recalled with poignant effect at the end of the final scene, when Otello kisses his murdered wife. The actual scoring is masterly. Having found what flute and strings could do beside the Nile, Verdi went confidently forward, triumphing everywhere.

Let us call *Otello* not a music-drama but the richest expression of the Italian conception of serious opera in the century. Nor let us attempt any list of its sublimest passages. For the characterization and the atmosphere one cannot say more than that they match in music Shakespeare's in poetry. Nor for the dramatic power of the opera than that it creates in terms of sound which can be examined on paper the tension brought to it by a fine performance of the play.

The qualities of *Otello* that unite in admiration so many different classes of music-lovers are to be found also in *Falstaff* (1893), produced when Verdi was eighty. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* provides the libretto and the planning of the opera is on the same principle as that of *Otello* only even more thoroughly put into execution, the play being completely dissolved

in music with scarcely a trace of the formal set-piece. (The final vocal fugue is an epilogue.) The extraordinarily rich and resourceful treatment while remaining brilliantly theatrical has yet an intricacy, clearness and a delicacy of touch that makes one think of chamber music. The opera is apt at first to baffle those accustomed only to Verdi's less subtle works. The clue is still the voice. But whereas in other Verdian operas there are just a few main voices and a chorus, here the individual voices are many, and the emphasis shifts rapidly from one to another. It needs close attention like a string quartet. The poetic atmosphere in which the comedy exists is lightened now by the pure lyric love-music of Fenton and Anne Page, now clouded by Ford's jealous outbursts, now crackling with the mischief of the wives, now heavy with the Fat Knight's mock-heroic meditations. The sound of the laughter in *Falstaff* is an abiding joy.

The fact that these two operas are Shakespearian (by no means the first, be it noted, to be drawn from that poet) makes it tempting for those who love both the plays and the operas to indulge in comparisons between their merits as works of art. We will not embark on such difficult comparisons here, but one or two observations may be allowed. An operatic composer has this advantage over a playwright. He can control absolutely the timing of his drama and the relative emphasis to be given to any particular word, mood or situation. He can also, as we saw in Chapter I, impart different kinds of information simultaneously on more than one plane. Speech moves on a single plane, music can move on many. The composer can clinch in advance—even irrespectively of his interpreter—the over- and undertones of a situation.

An illustration of this from the last act of *Otello* has been given earlier. Here is one from *Falstaff*, Scene II. The wives are scanning the identical love-letters; Falstaff's flagrantly insincere protests of affection are read out mockingly. Yet suddenly in the music comes a surge of what seems perfectly genuine passion. It subsides into rippling laughter. The sudden contrast of nobility and mischief gives a new turn to the words of that letter and their effect on the ladies. Is Falstaff's passion after all so ridiculous? He is old now, but once he was a fine man. Are not all declarations of love a little absurd? The musical phrase in its context sets many thoughts amove. In the play a clever actress too may awake them by a change in her expression or tone of voice. So too may the singer but the effect has been predetermined by the composer.

We may regard *Falstaff* and *Otello* if we will as the final flowering of *opera buffa* and *seria*—though the former can be also approached as the Italian equivalent of *Meistersinger*; comedy *in music*. Verdi has been treated at length because he completely overshadows all other Italian composers in the middle of the century. We may mention Boito whose *Mefistofele* is a conception of Goethe's *Faust* far more poetic than Gounod's. His ideas are promising and owe something to Wagner, but as a whole the working out of them seems decidedly amateurish. Ponchielli's *Gioconda* (1876) is an extravagantly picturesque work which still lives by virtue of some crude but undeniably powerful numbers. It is quite without genuine artistic merit and gives some idea of what might have been the norm of Italian opera had it not been for Verdi. We have already seen what happened in France in default of a genius of grand opera.

And as a matter of fact after Verdi's death the standards fell rapidly. Opera continued to flourish, but its blooms were coarser. Realism became the mode for librettos, and though in a sense characterization made progress away from the stock types, the new figures were no aristocrats and did not live in terms of noble music. Theories of symphonic opera were but slowly appreciated, though a crude use of leitmotifs can be observed in some of the works and the orchestra increased much in size and somewhat in importance. But seldom was the balance between the claims of voice and orchestra skilfully effected. More often the idiom of vocal-excitement opera was simply superimposed on a thickened accompaniment so that singers now had to bawl to sustain their tunes. Whence started the decline of Italian singing.

Two young composers achieved noisy fame at the beginning of the nineties with short operas on realistic librettos. Invention failing, neither afterwards wrote a success, though both learnt better musical manners. Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* is perhaps less defensible on musical grounds than Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*, but neither has the least distinction. Yet the hysterical passion and blatant force of the music agrees well enough with the sordid story of Sicilian adultery in the former, and the classic Grand Guignol incident in the latter. And it must be said for both that they are supremely effective in the crudest fashion and are calculated to "move" in some measure anyone who responds to the theatre. But subtlety is not to be found and as soon as poetry is attempted the idiom becomes that of inflated musical comedy—Nedda's Balletta (*I Pagliacci*) is intolerably vulgar in its search for beauty.

The falling off was general. Giordano inflated the idiom of Ponchielli. *Andréa Chénier* (1896), and *Fédora* both have exciting librettos on the Sardou model: the theme in each case is love amid the horrors of revolution. They hold the stage with their loud, luscious and banal melodies, and their stock effects. But no list can be attempted of the vast number of box-office successes turned out by worthy craftsmen from this date onwards. They vary greatly in musical value.

Alfano and Wolf-Ferrari both show better taste and a higher standard of musicianship than many of their contemporaries. The former's *Resurrezione* (1904) draws on Tolstoy. Wolf-Ferrari had theories, which might be summed up as " back to Mozart ", and illustrated them in a modern comic intermezzo, *Il Segreto di Susanna*, about a modern wife caught smoking; but his talent was a minor one. Zandonai's orchestration is luscious but all too derivative. Ciléa wrote simpler and prettier things. Catalani's melodies appeal. And there are countless other successes—nearly all containing at least one good tune, which retain immense popularity in Italy, whence they are frequently broadcast.

One figure, however, stands out. It is to Puccini (1858–1924) that we must look for really vital artistry in the phase that succeeds Verdi. Puccini has affinities with Massenet, and his technique indeed derives much from *opéra comique* as well as from the examples of Verdi's last works. Like Massenet's his operas are nearly all concerned with feminine erotic emotion. The central figure is always a woman. Nobility and heroic passion remained outside his range. The subjects were sentimental and realistic. But where Massenet had to be lightly sensuous because of the limitations

of French voices, Puccini could afford to intensify the lyricism, make it more voluptuous to suit Italian tastes, and deck out the attractions of lyrical opera with new ideas. He was adept at moulding to his own use other people's ideas. But he used them in a personal way and he was a real, though a minor, artist. He was a master too of the operatic craft. His operas are short and pithy, his characterization sharp, especially that of his women. The action is neatly and vividly portrayed: the lyrical expansions are dramatically apposite, brief and highly concentrated. The latter show clearly that he was very much aware of the importance attached by the Italian public to vocal dramatic excitement. Frequently the whole emphasis is thrown on the voice parts by making the strings and other instruments back the voluptuous voice part in octaves. Note too a typically Puccinian device of introducing his heroine—the chief figure—as a voice off-stage, thereby establishing her character as a voice before her appearance has had time to impress the spectators. His treatment of words was rather haphazard. Harmony he learnt from everyone, Wagner included, and he had a thoroughly comprehensive system for striking the right note at the right moment. Fondness for certain kinds of progression and certain casts of melody make his works instantly recognizable as his. Broadly speaking those who like any will like all his operas.

Manon Lescaut (1893) seems clumsy compared to Massenet's work. But the passion is as fresh and spontaneous as in any of his later operas, perhaps even more so. The love duet and Manon's song in Act II contain the essential Puccini. *La Bohème* (1896), which contains a greater variety of material than any but the

post-war works, consists of four vignettes of life in the Latin quarter of Paris. It exercises a strong though obviously sentimental appeal; the contrasted types of female lover, Mimi and Musetta, are peculiarly successful, but indeed all Murger's characters really live. The clever light impressionism of the street scene and the snowy dawn at the octroi are brilliant examples of atmosphere. No doubt they owe something to Debussy. The opera abounds in clever strokes, touches of wit and pathos which please even those who feel superior about the general run of the music, as music; while those to whom occasions for full-throated song are the chief attraction are continually delighted by the flow of singable melody.

La Tosca (1900), a rapid full-blooded and intensely exciting treatment of Sardou's play, is by comparison uneven musically and lacking in variety. The lyricism is peculiarly ardent and sensual, as becomes the subject, but it stales quickly. The piece grips its audience, however. *Madama Butterfly* (1904), from a sentimental story by Belasco about a geisha abandoned by her American husband, failed at first. The experiments in Asiatic music—interesting experiments—set the public against it in spite of the wealth of highly characteristic and erotically appealing melody and the prettiness of the Japanese setting. Much also is characteristic in the cowboy opera *La Fanciulla del West* (1910) though it never really "gets going". Both operas have modern realistic settings.

A *trittico* (triptych) of one-act operas (1919) show an advance in technique and taste. *Suor Angelica*, too sentimental for most English stomachs, is tinged with a Massenet-like effeminate piety, which seems to belie the assertion that it shows a refinement of taste.

So too might the police-court subject of *Il Tabarro*. But the element of sheer vocal excitement is more restrained, the impressionism in the latter, street-noises, water, &c., reveals a surer touch and so does the musico-dramatic construction, viz. the steady crescendo with which the story is unfolded up to its gruesome climax. A bargee kills his wife's lover, hides the body under his cloak (*tabarro*) and then invites the adulteress to share it with him. The best, however, is *Gianni Schicchi*, a tale in Boccaccio's most engaging manner treated in terms of comic opera deriving from *Falstaff*, i.e. a musical whole without spoken word. It is lighted in two places with the former sensuous lyricism. It has been suggested that these are a burlesque of his early manner, which seems unlikely. Rather they are attempts to match the love-strains of Nanetta. Musically the work lacks the supreme distinction and piquancy of Verdi's comic masterpiece, but the tale is told with gusto. It may be regarded as a very successful extension of the comic scenes in *La Bohème*, and is all the more notable because after Donizetti Italian comic opera decayed and is almost dead to-day.

Turandot, his last work, was left unfinished at his death. Alfano drew the threads together and the work is performed. It is marked by an originality rare in Italian opera at this date. From a purely musical point of view it is Puccini's most interesting work. Note the first act chorus. Dramatically the work is apt to fail, the unrealistic legendary subject was outside the composer's scope. He could not warm to the cruel, frigid Princess Turandot. Cruelty he could, and did, depict as in Scarpia (*La Tosca*) with apparent relish, but though the straining and bitter

music of the Princess is vocally exciting, it does not well convey a psychological conflict, in the way that Strauss for example sometimes succeeds in doing. Nor is the tenor—portrayed in more commonplace fashion—a very human figure, and only Liu, the second soprano, a perfect example of the type celebrated by Massenet and Puccini, really comes to life. Her two songs are exquisite. It is interesting to compare them with, say, Manon Lescaut's second act song. They reveal a chastening of the former facile melodiousness, similar to that in Verdi's treatment of Desdemona. The harlequinades, provided by a trio of Chinese ministers, are usually clever musically but they do not fulfil their proper function of relief, for the main drama never creates tension: the climax fails.

Respighi wrote several operas, excellent from an academic point of view and often well-contrived for the stage. His good scholarship and his concern for the orchestra have been a valuable influence in his own country. But characterization and invention are not his strong points. Malipiero and Casella, being Italians, of course, wrote operas. Their importance is greater in other fields of music. Pizzetti too had theories. He wished to escape from the inflated lyricism which dominates Italian opera and attempted to combine declamatory and dramatic recitative with a more sensitive use of the orchestra and chorus. *Debora e Jaele* (1923) illustrates the attempt, not unsuccessfully. But it has not apparently founded a school.

Opera is still very much a going concern in Italy. The public for it is enormous and never seems to tire of the huge repertory presented. Wagner, Strauss and much French opera, though little Mozart, are to be heard. Novelties and *succès d'estime* (i.e. Mascagni, &c.)

are not infrequent. But one looks in vain for a new Puccini, still less do we see a figure of Verdi's stature.

[P. H.-W.]

CHAPTER VIII

English Opera

THE English contribution to European music has been small, though at the present moment English musical life appears to be sturdier than that of any other of our neighbours. In opera the record is even worse, for our operatic history has been chequered with many more dark than light patches. Few English Operas have ever obtained a footing in continental opera houses, and the only operas that have ever established themselves in their own country are Purcell's miniature *Dido and Æneas* of the seventeenth century, *The Beggar's Opera* and other ballad operas of the eighteenth, and from the nineteenth century those two hardy plants whose leaves have only just withered, *The Bohemian Girl* and *Maritana*, together with the Savoy canon of Gilbert and Sullivan. A poor harvest for three hundred years of effort. It may be that we owe our poverty to the fact that we have no national opera like the continental nations, so that there is little inducement to composers to write operas, but it is more likely that the lack of operas and the lack of an official opera house are both symptoms of a natural indifference to the art. And the responsibility for it in the view of continental observers [1] is Shakespeare's.

[1] Professor Egon Wellesz, late of Vienna now of Oxford, a composer himself, has been emphatic in his lectures on opera that the place of opera as an organ of national culture has been taken by the poetic drama in England.

The poetic drama deals with the kind of subject for which opera is a fitting medium, and in the hands of a genius like Shakespeare poetry takes the place of music as the instrument for raising the temperature to the highest degree of dramatic intensity. And since, as Professor E. J. Dent has said, "To an Italian music is a natural means of self-expression while to an Englishman it is a thing apart, a message from another world", the Italians took to opera for lofty or emotional themes, the English to poetic drama. The crucial years in both countries were round 1600 and the streams which then burst from the springs of the Renaissance have continued to flow in the same divergent directions for three centuries.

As if to make it quite certain that music should not prevail in the English theatre, there followed hard on Shakespeare's track the vogue of the masque, in which the *décor* had the upper hand in a partnership of the dramatic arts. Neither the play nor the poetry was the first consideration in the masque but the stage setting and its "machines". Music was there in plenty but in a subservient position, and dancing. The masque began as a lavish entertainment in which distinguished persons, royalty even, took part at any rate in the dancing. Subsequently the balance of ingredients shifted and its private and aristocratic character gave way to public presentation on a stage; the so-called operas of Purcell represent its final development. For Purcell only wrote one true opera, and *The Fairy Queen* is really four masques tacked on to the ends of the Acts of a mangled version of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. The influence of the masque is not extinct yet and its lineal descendant is the revue, of which the chief characteristics are lavish production,

a very loosely knit plot, and plenty of female legs as a substitute for dancing. The historical pageant too with suitable incidental music and various occasional forms of entertainment, such as the festivals of folk-dancing designed by Mr. Douglas Kennedy, show the persistence of the masque idea in English dramatic life.

The most notable survivor from the seventeenth century is Milton's *Comus*, which was provided with music by Henry Lawes, and again a century later by Arne.[1] Ben Jonson and Campion wrote a number of masques, but the one that has had most modern revival is James Shirley's *Cupid and Death*, first produced privately, and therefore amateurly, during the Commonwealth (1653) with music by Christopher Gibbons and Matthew Locke.[2] Its plot derives in the last resort from a fable of Æsop, in which Cupid and Death exchange their arrows with what comic results may readily be guessed. The music is transitional in style between the old counterpoint, notable in the choruses, and the newer harmonic idiom that came to maturity in Purcell.

The first English opera also saw the light during the Commonwealth. This was *The Siege of Rhodes*, which is wholly lost, but some references to it in *The Fairy Queen* testify to its having been a genuine opera with music by half a dozen composers, of whom the chief were Henry Lawes, Captain Cooke of the Chapel Royal and Locke.

The first surviving English opera is Blow's *Venus and Adonis*, dated somewhere round 1685. It is described

[1] Recent performances of *Comus*, to Arne's music, have been by the Arne Society in London in 1931, and by Stowe School in the same year *al fresco*.

[2] It has been performed at Glastonbury, Cambridge, Haslemere, and in London at the Scala Season of 1931, and is well suited to amateur production.

as a masque, but apart from the suitability of the subject and the opportunities it affords for tableaux and dancing, it has outgrown the title and is a true opera with continuous music. Its music has not always the assured touch of Purcell, but there is in it at any rate one first-rate "ground" for dancing, much agreeable, easy-running vocal writing, and an amusing spelling lesson for Cupids. *Venus and Adonis* is still occasionally performed.[1]

Purcell's *Dido and Æneas*, which came a few years later, in 1689–90, to be specific, since its attribution to Purcell's youth has been disposed of by Barclay Squire, has achieved widespread popularity and obtains modern performances by amateur singers in schools and villages, as well as by the stars of the Vienna opera. It is admittedly a masterpiece and some of its admirers call it faultless. Mr. Westrup,[2] however, for all his admiration will not allow this on the ground that the subject is too big for treatment in the scope of a work designed for, and first performed by, schoolgirls. Dido is drawn in the round, but Æneas and the other characters are mere sketches, and the action moves too fast—a rare fault in music drama of which a conspicuous instance is *Il Trovatore*.

Dido and Æneas was designed for schoolgirls—Mr. Priest's academy in Chelsea—and the only part which could not have been taken by a schoolgirl is that of Æneas, whose lines are kept down to a minimum. He has no aria—hence the sketchiness of his character, since there is no room in which to deploy the conflict which Virgil in the *Æneid* and Berlioz in *Les Troyens*

[1] The Royal Academy of Music and the Oxford Opera Club have given it in recent years.

[2] *Master Musicians*, Purcell, p. 124.

depict between obedience to the gods (*pius* is Virgil's regular epithet) and the dictates of his heart. His impetuosity and momentary defiance of the gods' commands make him appear even weaker than do the hesitations he shows in the *Æneid* ("cunctantem et multa parantem dicere"), but the librettist's short way with him is still sufficient to make him a foil to Dido and to provide the leverage by which she can rise to the heights of tragic despair in her great lament. The choruses which entail male voices that were doubtless imported by Purcell from the Abbey or one of the theatres for the original performance, are mostly brief commentary in the manner of a Greek chorus. The opera has a preface which was not set by Purcell but is occasionally recited in modern performances. The libretto, which is the work of Nahum Tate, has had hard things said of it, but besides containing some pretty touches like "the deceitful crocodile on the fatal banks of Nile", it has the supreme merit of economy, which is also matched by Purcell in his descriptive music, as when he suggests the supernatural status of the witches by the device of an echo choir. There is one word to describe *Dido and Æneas* both in its beauty, its brevity and its limitations, its circumstantial origin and its place in history—it is virginal opera. Its ending is the token of its maidenhead—Dido dies of a broken heart. But when the opera was done in Vienna (at the time of the Beethoven centenary in 1927) that sophisticated city could not accept so sentimental, so girlish a catastrophe, and Dido stabbed herself, just as she does upon her funeral pyre at the end of *Les Troyens*.

Purcell's output of dramatic music was tremendous, but he never wrote another opera. The demand of

the Restoration theatre was for plays *with* music rather than plays *in* music, or as Mr. Westrup succinctly puts it, the "semi-operas in which Purcell collaborated are an apposition, not a combination, of drama and music". The masques, the plays with incidental music, and the semi-operas are revived from time to time, usually by amateurs, and extremely attractive entertainments they are. Thus D'Urfey's *Don Quixote* was done at Haslemere in 1934, and Dryden's *The Tempest*—which is the Restoration poet's idea of what Shakespeare might have written had he been the contemporary, not of Byrd and Morley, but of Purcell—was put on jointly by the Marlowe Society and the Cambridge University Musical Society at the summer festival of 1938. Cambridge has led the way with these Purcell revivals, and has given us modern reconstructions of Purcell's two chief musical plays, *King Arthur* and *The Fairy Queen*.

King Arthur, unlike *Dioclesian* and *The Fairy Queen*, was not an adaptation of a previously existing play, but a new composition by Dryden who rather condescendingly entered into a true partnership with Purcell for this patriotic pantomime—for that is what it is—with all the proper ingredients, including two transformation scenes, a love interest, a battle, a heathen sacrifice, and a watery duet by two syrens, that inevitably recalls to the modern opera-goer Siegfried's colloquy with the Rhinemaidens. The music has no formal unity, so that it is difficult to give it as a cantata, and the play is too loose for ordinary dramatic presentation, so that the only thing to do with it, if its wealth of splendid songs, dances and ensembles is not to be lost, is to reconstruct it lavishly in the Restoration style with all the resources of historical and

artistic scholarship, as they did at Cambridge in 1928. It might perhaps make a pastoral play, but the famous Frost Scene would be difficult to stage effectively in a garden in summer, though perhaps flood-lighting might make it possible.

The Fairy Queen is not quite so hopeless a hybrid, though it presents the same practical problems to a modern producer who would revive it. It is frankly a series of masques; Purcell thus reverts in it to an older and established art-form after his experiments in opera, pantomime and every other conceivable kind of dramatic music. No word of Shakespeare was set by Purcell, and the musical episodes come at the end of each of five acts, in which the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* is condensed into doggerel by an unknown hand to provide a rickety dramatic framework for the "opera". The dance music and various instrumental interludes form a substantial part of the music, which is Purcell at his lightest. *The Fairy Queen* contains broad comedy and smacks of the open air; it is gay, and above all it has the qualities of fantasy which it derived from its Shakespearian original, and of fantastication which it borrowed from the Restoration theatre. So near did Purcell come to writing that opera for which the English stage is still waiting. Actually it came near to losing *The Fairy Queen* itself, for the score disappeared at Purcell's death and did not turn up again for two hundred years.

At the beginning of the new century English taste turned aside to the Italian operas of Handel, and when it tired of them it adopted the same composer's oratorios as its chosen sustenance upon which it lived for a century. Opera did, however, make one protest in the eighteenth century. *The Beggar's Opera*, which

began as a satire, left a numerous progeny of ballad operas, and their immediate success was a factor in Handel's bankruptcy and his diversion to oratorio. The differentiating feature of the species is that musically the ballad opera is a pastiche of pre-existing tunes. *The Beggar's Opera* itself draws on Playford's "The Dancing Master" (e.g. "Cold and Raw"), on Purcell ("What shall I do to show how much I love her?"), on Handel (e.g. The March in *Rinaldo*), on folk-song (e.g. "Good morrow, gossip Joan"). John Gay who put the book together is said to have got his idea from a remark of Swift that "A Newgate pastoral might make an odd pretty sort of thing". The musical editor was Dr. Christopher Pepusch, a German émigré, who took an Oxford degree and was musical director at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre at the time when it was put on by John Rich. The piece was so successful that according to the popular quip it "made Rich gay, and Gay rich", and it ran for sixty-three nights.

Its success was no doubt partly due to its satirical intention which clothed Walpole in the highwayman's costume of Macheath and which guyed Italian operatic manners. But its intrinsic merits are such as to have sustained various revivals in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. In the version prepared by Frederick Austin and put on at the Lyric, Hammersmith, by Sir Nigel Playfair in 1920, it ran continuously for three and a half years, and was subsequently revived until its tenth anniversary marked the 1685th performance at that theatre.

In its own day it had a sequel, *Polly*, which has also had a recent revival, and between 1728 and 1735 some fifty ballad operas were produced. Later in the century there was a recrudescence of the taste for this

kind of entertainment, but as the supply of popular tunes had by this time run short, more original work was required and Dr. Arne contributed, for instance, to Isaac Bickerstaff's *Love in a Village* (1762). In 1775 Thomas Linley and his son compiled and composed music for *The Duenna* by his son-in-law, Sheridan. This ballad opera has also been revived by Sir Nigel Playfair at Hammersmith, and by Sir Barry Jackson at Birmingham, since the War.

Arne is indeed the only composer to be considered between Purcell and Balfe. He made one attempt at an *opera seria* in English and set Metastasio's *Artaxerxes*, of which the song " Water parted from the sea " in his most compelling vein is still sung, though " The soldier tired of war's alarms " with trumpet obbligato is even better known and for years remained a soprano's stalking-horse. The opera had a long life. Like Purcell he wrote a good deal of music for the stage that fell short of opera, provided incidental music for Shakespeare's plays, reset old masques, and in *Alfred* emulated Purcell's patriotic score with " Rule Britannia " as the corresponding song to " Fairest Isle ". *Cavalcade* seems to be the twentieth-century equivalent of this recurrent type of spectacular play and it is a pity that Mr. Coward did not find a composer who might have immortalized it for him. Arne's collaboration with Fielding in *Tom Thumb* is similarly an eighteenth-century equivalent of Purcell's semi-operas. Its revival by Sir Barry Jackson at the Malvern Festival of 1932 suggested that it might have a wider popular success as a Christmas Play than any of Purcell's musical dramas could hope for. Some of Arne's shorter operas have been restored to the stage recently by Mr. Geoffrey Dunn's " Intimate Opera ", notably *Thomas and Sally*

or *The Sailor's Return*, an extravaganza in continuous music, described as a " Dramatic Pastoral "

The story of opera in London from the mid-eighteenth century until now is a melancholy one from the point of view of native achievement, but as history it is not without interest. Covent Garden theatre became the centre of operatic activity, with Drury Lane across the road as a convenient basis for rival operations. It was twice burned down and the present house dates from 1858. It was the chief scene of the activities of Sir Henry Bishop (1786–1855) who provides the bridge between the centuries. Nothing of his work remains save a few charming songs. But his chief successors, Balfe and Wallace, have left behind them operas which enjoyed uninterrupted popularity for nearly a hundred years. *The Bohemian Girl* and *Maritana* were played till recently at the *Old Vic*, but were found too worn to bear transplantation to Sadler's Wells. *The Bohemian Girl* indeed enjoyed an international reputation and was translated into Italian, French, and German for production abroad. Balfe was himself a singer as well as a conductor, and as a composer he had a vein of sentimental melody which in the event has shown surprising powers of endurance. Wallace (1812–68), like Balfe, was of Irish origin, and has half a dozen operas to his credit, of which *Maritana* is now the least forgotten. Benedict's *The Lily of Killarney* is another opera of the same melodious type which has done a long period of service. Its revival at the *Old Vic* in 1928 showed that it had sufficient vitality and merit to warrant its inclusion in the repertory if we had an *Opéra Comique* in London. Although the story, taken from Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn*, dates a little, the dialogue is good, and

the transitions from speech to song are more than usually smooth. The music is sweet in the manner of Weber whose pupil Benedict was, but it is not insipid or cloying. It was originally produced at Covent Garden in the winter of 1862.

By this time that theatre had become the headquarters of international opera during the Season; chiefly Italian at first, later under the management of Augustus Harris German operas were added, and the first performances in England of *The Ring* (1892) were given there under his management by Mahler, Mottl and Richter. Meantime, the Carl Rosa Company had been founded (1875), which has done more for opera in English than any other institution, and has from time to time sponsored and encouraged new English operas, the first of which was Goring Thomas's *Esmeralda*, which was sufficiently successful to be given in Germany and France. It is a somewhat sobering thought that several of these now forgotten or despised Victorian English operas got an amount of recognition and performance on the Continent such as we no longer expect for our best modern operas and ballets.

This line of opera derives from the ballad operas, and may therefore diverge either in the direction of comic opera, or by decreasing the amount of spoken dialogue may become more lyrical and more symphonic. Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Sir Charles Stanford, writing in the lattet part of the nineteenth century when the influence of Wagner's ideas was being felt, produced operas on weightier themes in more substantial music which was of some importance for the general revival of which they were the heralds. Meantime Sullivan (1842–1900) was making not operatic history, but masterpieces of comic opera.

No one can deny, whether he likes or dislikes Gilbert and Sullivan, that the Savoy operas [1] are a phenomenon of the first importance. They are the only operas of musical merit which appeal to the entirely unmusical, and that is their chief value. The topical foibles of a bygone generation which they hold up to ridicule are only intelligible by an act of historical imagination, yet they have never offered the smallest obstacle to the continuous enjoyment of the operas by subsequent generations of people, young and old, both here and in America where their allusions are quite unknown. They suffer, paradoxically enough, from being performed according to an unbroken tradition, and cry aloud for fresh treatment. Gilbert's stock theme of the suppressed sexual impulses of ageing women, which the Victorians regarded as pure, is revolting to a less fastidious age, and some of Sullivan's tunes are banal to the point of vulgarity—the tune of "With cat-like tread" in *The Pirates of Penzance*, for instance, which a discriminating admirer of the composer like Mr. T. F. Dunhill admits to be worthy of the black list.

Sullivan's enormities in this respect were appreciated as such by his contemporaries, who, however, made the mistake, natural enough at the time but ludicrous in the light of after-events, of thinking that he was wasting on ephemeral entertainment time and talent that might have more properly been devoted to symphony and oratorio. The next generation could not fail to see that there was something wrong with this estimate and this diagnosis; the operas are even

[1] Strictly speaking, only the later operas commissioned by D'Oyly Carte for his new Theatre should be included in this term, but it may conveniently be extended to include all in the regular repertory of Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

more alive than the oratorios are dead. They have therefore been submitted anew to critical examination, and their merits, which theatrically have never been in doubt, were seen to reside in the extreme felicity with which words and music are fitted together, whatever their worth in isolation. Indeed such a true marriage of voice and verse is unique in opera. The situations of logical topsy-turveydom have given the word "Gilbertian" to the English language. The deftness of Sullivan's music extends to details of orchestration, to the humours of parody as in the frightful "Pilgrims of the Night" sextet in *Patience*, the Handelian song in *Princess Ida*, and sometimes to sheer saturation of creative art such as makes a trifle, like the merry madrigal that is no madrigal in *The Mikado*, into a gem.

The fact is that Sullivan, like Berlioz, divides musical opinion. In his own time it was the serious critics who deplored the frivolities of the stage; to-day it is the serious connoisseurs of operas who somehow cannot extend their otherwise catholic enthusiasms to Gilbert and Sullivan. The cause seems to be very much the same as that which, in my view, keeps both Purcell and Mozart from the highest rank of composers, and it is a moral cause—all three men were too easy-going and accommodating and allowed their extraordinary fecundity to cover certain weaknesses of artistic judgment and failures of artistic probity. In each case the composer can urge that he was writing not for posterity but to meet a current and passing demand. Sullivan certainly turned out one opera to take the place of another in the entertainment world of London just as Purcell had done before him, and the topicality of Gilbert's sallies is support for the view that

immediate theatrical entertainment, rather than more solemn views about the sacredness of art, animated the partners. There is nothing wrong in this, but it does explain why their popular success is more assured than their critical standing.

The success of the Savoy Operas naturally has attracted hosts of imitators in the past forty years. It looked at one time as though Sullivan's mantle had fallen on Edward German (1862–1936), for he had a vein of melody equal in charm to Sullivan's and less subject to lapses into banality. *Merrie England*, however, is not a comic opera, but a light opera written according to the formulæ of English *Singspiel*. He actually set a libretto by W. S. Gilbert in *Fallen Fairies*. *Tom Jones* frequently, *A Princess of Kensington* more rarely, and *Merrie England* regularly are to be heard from amateurs. Most light operas since Sullivan do not rank musically higher than musical comedies, and things like *The Arcadians* and other similar works by Lionel Monckton, Alfred Cellier (*Dorothy*) and Paul Rubens (*Miss Hook of Holland*) are after-dinner relaxation, not opera. Stanford's *Shamus O'Brien* (1896), however, belongs to the tradition of English *Singspiel*, though it is a comedy, and not a comic opera, and its music is strongly Irish in flavour, whereas Dunhill's *Tantivy Towers* (1930) is comic, satiric even, in character though formally its music is continuous. The contemporary composer who shows most talent for English light opera is Walter Leigh, whose *The Pride of the Regiment*, produced in 1932, guys the upper middle classes of Victorian times, and whose *The Jolly Roger* (1933) was even more uproarious from the presence in the cast of that great music-hall comedian, Mr. George Robey.

Shamus O'Brien is a first-rate work, and was the only one of Stanford's seven operas to be really successful. Its personal interest is considerable: it was toured the world over by O'Mara, its first conductor was Henry Wood, its first "Nora" was Kirkby Lunn, and in the orchestra the trombonist was Gustav Holst. Let the vivid pen of Stanford's biographer state the other facts about it: "It had no rival. It owed this monopoly to the land of its birth. It was an Irish story founded on the poem of that name by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, set to Irish music by an Irishman, and sung almost exclusively by Irish singers. There were no Paddies or pigs or manufactured brogues in O'Mara's company. He and they played it for years on end, and it was a gold-mine to them and the composer. There was only one halt in its triumphal progress, and that was when the trouble broke out in Ireland. The play dealt with the '98 rebellion, and Stanford refused permission to perform it for fear of exacerbating the situation." [1] Father O'Flynn appears in the story and his famous tune is quoted. The opera is marred by one dramatic falsehood—the Banshee is heard keening for Shamus, but Shamus does not die, and our hearts have been stirred for nothing and our intelligence misled. There is life in it yet.

Of Stanford's other operas, which were dogged by ill-luck, the first *The Veiled Prophet*, produced at Hanover in 1881, survives in one number, the magnificent soprano aria "There's a bower of roses". *Savonarola*, also produced in Germany, failed in London. *The Canterbury Pilgrims* is usually described as an English *Meistersinger*, with "Sumer is i-cumen in" for its "theme song". *Much Ado about Nothing* was given

[1] *Charles Villiers Stanford*, by Harry Plunket Greene (Arnold).

twice at Covent Garden in the grand Season of 1901, but has only since been heard in student performances of the Royal College of Music in 1901 and 1935; Shakespeare's sub-plots confuse the issue in an opera and Dogberry's comic scenes move at the wrong tempo for the rest of the opera, which, however, is delightful, full of tenderness, playfulness and good tunes. *The Critic* is a setting of part of Sheridan's play with opera substituted for tragedy at the mock rehearsal, and contains many amusing musical allusions and quotations. It came out in 1916 during the War.

The last opera was composed during the same dark time and was suggested by H. P. Greene. Hans Andersen's story of *The Travelling Companion* was made into an opera book by Henry Newbolt. Stanford set it, but did not live to see it on the stage. It was published in 1919, and first performed at Napier Miles's Bristol Season in 1926, and it has since been put into the repertory at Sadler's Wells, though the public does not wholeheartedly take it into its affections. It is not an opera that clutches at the heart-strings, since its atmosphere is tranquil and confident, but its music enhances and enforces the universal truth that lies embodied in the fairy tale; it speaks in parables yet avoids the rigidity of an allegory, and Stanford has made human beings of the figures of the story. It begins and ends with a scene in a darkened church in which a dead man lies on a bier before the altar awaiting burial. He is the Travelling Companion who befriends one who defends him from impious hands just as Everyman was helped by Good Deeds. This is an unusual opening for a comedy opera and its individuality grows with every hearing.

Since the War interest in opera has increased, and

both traditions, the popularly miscalled grand and the comic, have had notable additions. The position of English music in general has become clarified by the break away of composers from continental training and continental models. Holst and Vaughan Williams, building on the preliminary work of Mackenzie, Parry and Stanford, effected the emancipation, and both have written operas. Both have made definite use of folk-song as an ingredient in the creation of a truly national style. But even their contemporaries whose outlook has been still largely determined by German methods and ideals, Ethel Smyth, Nicholas Gatty and Rutland Boughton, achieved something of distinctively English flavour without such radical departure from the accepted notions of pre-War English music. Ethel Smyth (*b.* 1858) made a reputation abroad with *Fantasio* and *Der Wald*—note the cosmopolitan titles! The latter was given with success at Covent Garden in 1902 and 1903, but it is by *The Wreckers* that she established her position at home and abroad.

Its original book was in French, and its first performance at Leipzig, but its scene is Cornwall, and the composer has concentrated the force of her music upon a situation in which love, religion, and greed (if that is the right word for the motive behind deliberate wrecking of ships) contend. The opera is powerful; it needs some great tune to clinch the end when the lovers are punished by their neighbours with drowning, but it is all on a big scale dramatically and a true music drama, not of legend but of life—for the practice of wrecking was common in Cornwall in the eighteenth century.[1]

[1] Its abiding vitality has just been demonstrated by revival at Sadler's Wells (April 1939).

Boughton (*b.* 1878) deliberately follows the method of Wagner, but he has chosen English legends and writes a lighter texture than Wagner. His Arthurian cycle was performed at the Glastonbury Festivals which he organized between 1916 and 1925. These summer performances were on a humble scale without orchestra and in a small hall, but they had important results of which *The Immortal Hour* (1914) was the chief, though *Alkestis* and *The Queen of Cornwall* (1924) were also first brought to a hearing there. *The Immortal Hour*, which is about shadowy personages moving in a dream through the Celtic twilight, is an extraordinary work to have caught on with the general non-operatic, one might almost say non-musical, public. But it has many beauties, one of them the famous Faery Song with its haunting yet elusive quality, and its symbolism, which is not too didactically obtruded, is such that it has a message for everyone; in a later opera *The Ever Young* the composer let the symbolism run away with him. In this opera, as in the earlier *Alkestis* the chorus is important. Some of the best music in *The Queen of Cornwall* too is for the chorus. Hardy's libretto is magnificent and almost overbalances the music, though no decent performance has ever been given of the opera and so it cannot be confidently known whether it is more than an honourable failure. Boughton's latest work, *The Lily Maid*—again the subject comes from the Arthurian legends—similarly failed to clinch its argument though it received more adequate treatment at its London production by Mr. Steuart Wilson in 1937.

Next to *The Immortal Hour*, which owed some of its initial success to the mood of reaction from the War, *Bethlehem* has been Boughton's chief success, and it

may well be the most enduring, for here his choral predilections have found a favourable outlet in providing a frame for a musical setting of the Coventry Nativity Play. Both of its themes, the sacred mystery and the naïve rusticity, are brought together in the music and only the quasi-Orientalism of Herod's court is a little out of focus. There is nothing Wagnerian about this dramatic fantasia on Christmas carols; it is wholly English and has therefore a native strength such that it has even been successfully presented, with some political *arrière pensée*, in modern dress.

Nicholas Gatty (*b.* 1874) announced himself as an operatic composer in 1906 with *Greysteel*, founded on an Icelandic saga. The nature of the subject and the musical atmosphere of the period almost inevitably prescribed treatment in the manner of the symphonic music drama. The danger of inappropriate comparisons was avoided in *Prince Ferelon* which had nothing Nordic about it but is purely fanciful in the deftest, most light-hearted style. There is a pinch of salt in the sweet humour of the fairy-tale of a suitor who came to seek his lady in four disguises, but it is gay, delicate, euphonious, and instinct with youthful happiness. The composer constructed his own plot and wrote his own book, and the result is English to the core. He has also written a comic opera, *Duke or Devil*, two comedy operas, *King Alfred and the Cakes* and *First come, first served*, and two more ambitious settings of Shakespeare—*The Tempest* and *Macbeth*.

The most Wagnerian of all English operas is Sir Donald Tovey's (*b.* 1875) *The Bride of Dionysus* to a libretto by R. C. Trevelyan. It is an extraordinary vindication of Wagner's method, for Tovey's music

has no distinctive idiom; it is accomplished and apt, but lacks a personal signature. Nevertheless, this epic opera on a large scale holds; it contains some beautiful choruses, the symphonic writing for the orchestra never impedes the vocal writing, and the drama is borne along convincingly in the music.

Delius, though an Anglo-German in more than a musical sense, writes music of so personal an idiom and of so undramatic a character that his operas are not calculated to fit into any category. There are half a dozen of them, but *The Village Romeo and Juliet* is the only one that is at all familiar, though Sir Thomas Beecham put on *Koanga* in 1935, and took it on tour. *Koanga* is a story told by an American Negro and presented rather than enacted. The *Village Romeo and Juliet* is described as a "lyrical drama in six pictures", and the love story of two children whose parents have quarrelled is shown rather than acted, for the dramatic action is kept subdued and is spread over a sufficient number of years for the children to grow up and one of them to change from a soprano to a tenor. It is intimate opera, though it requires a large orchestra and cast, and made its true effect in the small theatre of the Royal College of Music rather than in the spaces of Covent Garden, for simplicity is the keynote of its proper performance, and there must be no over-emphasis, such as the stage usually demands. Heseltine well says of it that "the drama is but the overflowing of the music from the region of the audible into that of the visible"

The nationalist composers, following the powerful lead of the Russians and the Bohemians, wrote their music in an idiom largely determined by our native folk-song, and even quoted folk-tunes in their operas.

Holst (1874–1935) and Vaughan Williams (*b.* 1872) have both written operas on one of the great figures of our national portrait gallery, Falstaff, and both embellish their scores with folk-songs. Actual folk-songs are also quoted in Vaughan Williams's first opera *Hugh the Drover* which was composed between 1911–4, but not produced till after the War. This opera has been much revised, and though there is no doubt whatever about the way it soars from the ground the moment the curtain goes up on a Cotswold fairground, it has some awkward dramatic corners to negotiate. There was originally too much ado in getting the hero in and out of the stocks, and the end of the opera, when Hugh and Mary go off hymning the open road, never quite satisfies one that Mary ought not to have taken better precautions against wind and rain. It is not the village maidens but the fine ladies who go off with the ragglé-taggle gipsies. But the first act with its boxing match is exhilarating, and though the present two acts[1] are not long enough to fill an evening, and too long to combine very easily with anything else in the same bill, the opera quickens the heart-beat of an Englishman, because its axioms are his and need no stating, and because it sends him away from the theatre with tunes, whether folk or composed he neither knows nor cares, singing in his ears.

Sir John in Love is a full-length setting of the essential scenes in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and since I have written at length of this opera elsewhere[2] I may, perhaps, be allowed to refer the reader for a detailed

[1] Without the interlude that was added for the Royal College of Music Jubilee in 1933, but was discarded for the production at Sadler's Wells four years later.

[2] In *The Dramatic Works of R. Vaughan Williams*, Oxford University Press's "The Musical Pilgrim Series".

discussion of its many beauties, its greater Englishness than Verdi's *Falstaff*, its use of folk-tunes, to my little book on this composer's stage works. Similarly with *Riders to the Sea* which has already been mentioned[1] as a word-for-word setting of a play in which music makes fewer demands on the drama than usual, but adds something to its poignancy.

Folk-tunes and popular songs are embodied, not always appropriately, by Ethel Smyth in *The Boatswain's Mate*, a comic opera founded on a story by W. W. Jacobs. The opera is lively and the characters well drawn, but it suffers from a mixture of styles: the spoken dialogue of the first act is largely replaced in the second by a more symphonic texture. Holst uses folk-tunes only in his one-act Falstaff opera *At the Boar's Head*.

Holst's best opera, a little masterpiece of a severe spiritual beauty that one does not associate with the stage, has nothing English about it except its language. *Savitri* is an Oriental tale of wifely devotion, which, like Leonora's, conquers death. It needs only three singers, a small stage, a small orchestra and an invisible choir for performance. Its texture is tenuous, much of the solo singing is unaccompanied and *senza misura*; elusive and aloof, intangible, it yet speaks directly of things that everyone must ponder in his heart; it is music alone that makes such candour possible. From here to *The Perfect Fool* is a far cry, for this satiric drama, for which the composer prescribes the manner of high comedy, is about . . . what? There are moments in it, parodies of Verdi and Wagner, when Holst seems to be laughing at opera itself, a favourite sport of many of his fellow-country-

[1] See p. 8 and p. 20.

men, but a dangerous and improper thing for a composer to do. Holst had an esoteric sense of humour, and he exercises it here, but the outsider can at any rate wholeheartedly enjoy the ballet music.

To the English School belongs Thomas Dunhill (*b.* 1877), who has written a number of light operas, of which *Tantivy Towers* achieved the greatest success. Dunhill must not be assigned to the folk song school, however, on the strength of the enormously effective use of "John Peel" which he made in this story of extremes, Chelsea and the Shires, meeting and attempting to fraternize. The splendid libretto was by A. P. Herbert, who seems subsequently to have preferred to work with dead rather than living composers, and now to have abandoned opera for politics. Dunhill's music is most felicitous, and its aptness to the situations is weakened at one point only—he has ostentatiously avoided any allusions to jazz in a Chelsea studio of the nineteen-twenties. This should rank as a comic opera, but its music is continuous.

In the true comic tradition is Vaughan Williams's *The Poisoned Kiss* (1922–8), which is described as a romantic extravaganza. The extravagance consists in the witty antithesis of modern foibles with magical paraphernalia and the romance in the implicit theme that love conquers hate. For sheer tunefulness this opera outdoes its predecessors and returns to the composer's earlier manner—with, of course, a difference and an enrichment. Its first performance was at Cambridge in May 1936. In the following November, during an English season at Covent Garden, another tuneful opera in the *Singspiel* tradition by another English composer was produced for the first time. This was Roger Quilter's *Julia*, a pretty, romantic

period piece. Since then nothing new in the line of ballad opera has appeared, although it is the form of opera most favoured by English taste. For some time past British composers have been leaning towards a preference for continuous music, and if they do not wish to write "grand" opera, they choose a short story and write their music in one act. A considerable list might be made: Napier Miles's *Markheim*, Ethel Smyth's *Entente Cordiale*, a war product, Armstrong Gibbs's *The Blue Peter* to a libretto by A. P. Herbert, Arthur Benjamin's witty farce *The Devil Take Her*, Anthony Collins's amusing study of royal domesticity *Catherine Parr*, Eugene Goossens's *Judith*, are a few of them. Benjamin and Goossens write the drier kind of modern music. Goossens pays too little attention to the voice and too much to the orchestra to write good opera. His later opera, *Don Juan de Manara*, produced at Covent Garden in 1937, whose libretto, like that of *Judith*, is by Arnold Bennett, is a larger affair in four acts, but not much more mellifluous. Mellifluous but too episodic was Albert Coates's *Pickwick* produced in the previous autumn.

Far less accomplished, but more promising, than these full-length operas by eminent conductors are the first two operas of a young man, George Lloyd. The line he pursues among this welter of tendencies, in which classification by categories has broken down, is that which was followed by Boughton, the Wagnerian method transplanted. In his first opera, *Iernin*, written at the age of twenty-one round a Cornish legend, he showed an extraordinary grasp of the essentials of dramatic construction, and the balance to be maintained between voices, stage situations and orchestra. The music is not strikingly original, but it is dramati-

cally conceived, and is therefore exceptionally apt to its purpose. In his second opera, *The Serf*,[1] he showed the same certainty of grasp of the form of music drama and a new power of investing his chorus with a personality and writing for it some original and effective mob-music. But the opera, as a whole, suffered from having a historical, instead of a legendary, subject. What is remarkable, however, is Lloyd's ability to fill out a large design even before his actual musical style has become consolidated.

Composers of the next generation older than him, William Walton, Constant Lambert, Lennox Berkeley, have in writing for the stage chosen to compose not operas but ballets, and the immediate future of English opera is therefore, as it always has been, obscure. Nor does the New World show any signs of reinforcing the Old. In America there have been some stirrings towards an indigenous opera. Deems Taylor is the best known composer (*b.* 1885), whose two operas, *The King's Henchman* and *Peter Ibbetson*, have reached the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York but have not crossed the sea. The work of the younger American composers is experimental.

[1] Produced during an English season at Covent Garden in the autumn of 1938.

CHAPTER IX

Slavonic Opera

IT will not be possible to deal with Russian and Bohemian opera at all fully in this chapter, nor will it be necessary since opportunities for hearing these comparatively strange and exotic operas are rare in this country by comparison with the French, German, and Italian repertories that are acclimatized to England. Moussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is the most familiar of the Russians from the fact that it provided Chaliapin with one of his greatest roles; also it has now been successfully transplanted into Sadler's Wells. But for the most part the strongly pronounced national flavour is still for most of us a special treat of exotic colours, costumes, rhythms and dramatic inconsequence.

One great division on the lines of national taste has already appeared, viz. the admission or the exclusion of the spoken word. A somewhat similar difference in large-scale design is the loose structure which is tolerated in Russian opera. Many successful Russian operas are so episodic that it hardly matters in what order the scenes are presented. Russian music is visually inspired compared with German, which loves to deal in general ideas, or with Italian, which is sensuously determined by considerations of voice and euphony, or with English which is ruminative and akin to poetry; it is enough for it to present a series of pictures and not insist too firmly on a strictly dramatic order.

The Russians, like the English, for a long time lived on imports. Italians and afterwards Frenchmen made music, opera and ballet for the Russian aristocracy. The emancipation began in the nineteenth century and is usually attributed to the labours of Glinka (1803–57) whose two operas, *A Life for the Tsar* and *Russlan and Liudmilla*, were based, if not on actual folk-tunes, on melody of a national flavour. Glinka himself speaks of his idea of contrasting the national music of Russia and Poland in *A Life for the Tsar*—he duly includes a polonaise and a mazurka in the ballet music—and he was sufficiently successful in writing in the national idiom of the folk to draw the criticism that it was the music of coachmen. By comparison with its successors, however, it seems almost Italianate, and the same mixture of styles was noted in *Russlan and Liudmilla* when it was performed by de Basil's Paris-Russian Opera Company brought over by Sir Thomas Beecham to the Lyceum in 1931. Only the vivacious overture to this second opera is familiar, but in it the composer turns east for his folk-song influence. This time he introduces into Russian opera a strain that was to reappear in the works of the "Kutchka", the mighty brotherhood, the five great nationalist composers, who have to be distinguished from the Westernizing composers, Rubinstein, Tchaikowsky, Rachmaninoff, and Glazounov. Of the "Kutchka" Balakireff wrote no opera, and Cui none on Russian themes. Borodin and Moussorgsky, both of whom were amateurs, each wrote an epic masterpiece based on Russian history. Legend as a subject for opera is to be found in Dargomijsky's *Roussalka* (The Water Nymphs). Water sprites are common in Slavonic folk-lore, and Dvořák wrote a symphonic poem and an opera on these same Roussalka.

The mad Miller in Dargomijsky's *Roussalka* was one of Chaliapin's parts, and he carried the opera abroad.[1] It contains comic scenes which became a recognized ingredient of Russian opera, and in it he shaped his dramatic æsthetic of fidelity to the intonations of speech in musical declamation, which he was to work out further in *The Stone Guest*, an opera which has the further interest of anticipating Debussy's use of the whole-tone scale. It was left to Rimsky-Korsakoff to introduce the fantastic (and satiric) element of Russian fairy tale, which we meet in the Russian ballet and in Stravinsky.

Moussorgsky was convinced of the validity of Dargomijsky's dramatic creed—realism on the stage and in the vocal line. The action is carried forward, as in Wagner, in melodious speech, but no archaic verse form has been specifically contrived to make the *unendliche Melodie* run off smoothly. His early operatic efforts were inspired by Dargomijsky's daring setting of Pushkin's *The Stone Guest* just as it stood without any adaptation for musical purposes. He did not go quite so far in *Boris* as to set Pushkin whole, and by means of an interleaved text of Pushkin's "early pseudo-Shakespearian drama" (Mr. Gerald Abraham's description—the allusion no doubt being to Boris's likeness to Macbeth), he prepared a libretto. But much of Pushkin's text was retained and the great monologues and narrations are set in magnificent arioso. Even before he became fired with the idea of *Boris*, he was at work on a word-for-word setting of Gogol's novel *The Marriage*. This he called his *opéra dialogué*, and for it he devised a suitable musical prose. There is both dialogue and prose in *Boris*, but the

[1] It was done at the Lyceum in 1931.

composer's passion for truth to life does not stifle his musical impulses, though his harmony was regarded as uncouth by his contemporaries. The cadences of Russian speech even in an English translation seem to fall naturally into melodious declamation and the orchestra, though less apt to suck the voice into its luscious and ample embrace than in Wagner, animates the recitative with music of the right degree of saturation for musico-dramatic purposes.

In *Boris Godunov* then the Russian solution to the central problem of music drama is presented quite clearly, and the answer can be stated in the two words—arioso and chorus. The orchestra's texture is not symphonic like Wagner's but it is used as Wagner uses it, both as parallel running commentary on the action and as providing the tonal medium in which the drama takes place. The dramatic structure, being episodic, is weak; the nature of the subject of *Boris Godunov*, which is the confused historical events that happened in Russia at the beginning of the seventeenth century in the time of Ivan the Terrible, makes any more formal structure out of the question: the historical dramatist can only select salient episodes for presentation and must rely on the rightness of his choice for the building of them up dramatically to a significant climax. At the same time Moussorgsky never succeeded in finding a definitive form for his drama and the various revisions that were made between its completion in 1868, its first presentation and publication in 1874, and the publication of Rimsky-Korsakoff's editions of 1896 and 1908, leave a critical problem of the first magnitude which requires practical decisions from any producer who mounts the opera.

But it is well to start from Moussorgsky's own first

draft. This is now available in the edition brought out by the Oxford University Press in 1928, but it is not what was performed at the Marinsky Theatre on 24th January (old style), 1874, for it had been rejected by the management of the Imperial theatres when it was first submitted. As originally planned the opera was in four parts as follows:

Part I.	First tableau.	Courtyard of the Novodevichy Monastery, near Moscow.
	Second tableau.	Coronation of Boris in the Kremlin.
Part II.	First tableau.	In Pimen's cell.
	Second tableau.	Inn on the Lithuanian frontier.
Part III.		The Tsar's apartments in the Kremlin; Boris with his children and scene with Shuisky.
Part IV.	First tableau.	Scene by St. Basil's Cathedral.
	Second tableau.	Scene in the Duma and the death of Boris.

But the vocal score of 1874, which makes Part I into a prologue, proceeds as far as Boris's scene with his children and Shuisky, and then for third act introduces a new act in Poland in which the Lady Marina Muishek appears as the lover of the false Dmitri (the novice Grigori) and so introduces the only female character on the heroic scale—the innkeeper is a comic character. The scene of the second tableau in the Polish act is a garden in the Chateau of Muishek in which the Pretender Grigori meets the Jesuit Rangoni and subsequently joins a kind of garden party, given by Marina, which is introduced by a polonaise that gives an opportunity for ballet. The fourth act was rearranged so that instead of disaffection being shown in the square of St. Basil, a scene of revolution taking place out of Moscow near Kromy, in which a nobleman is tortured by the crowd, brings on the Pretender in

triumph but brings down the curtain with the lament of an idiot on the prospective state of Russia. This scene came after the death of Boris at the council of Boyars.

Moussorgsky owed the production of what was substantially this version to the intervention of a singer who demanded *Boris* as her choice for her benefit performance, and got her own way with a reluctant director. The production was a qualified success, and except for some serious cuts it was performed from time to time in Russia. After 1881, however, when the composer died, it was not performed in Russia or anywhere else until Rimsky-Korsakoff in 1896 led a revival by re-editing the score, and it was a second edition of this version, in which some restorations of excised episodes were made, which introduced Moussorgsky to Western Europe in 1908. The form of the opera which Rimsky-Korsakoff adopted, apart from numerous editorial alterations in matters of detail, was as follows:

Prologue.	Scene 1.	The monastery.
	Scene 2.	Coronation in the Kremlin.
Act I.	Scene 1.	Pimen's cell.
	Scene 2.	Inn on the Lithuanian frontier.
Act II.		Boris's room in the Kremlin. His aria "I have attained to power"
Act III.	Poland.	
	Scene 1.	Marina and her maidens and the Jesuit Rangoni.
	Scene 2.	At the fountain—love scene between Marina and Gregory.
Act IV.	Scene 1.	The forest near Kromy. Revolution and the idiot's lament.
	Scene 2.	Council of Boyars: Death of Boris.

This makes a long opera and something is generally cut. It is the version used by Beecham when he first

performed the opera at Drury Lane in 1913 with Chaliapin in the name part, and it is the basis of the various versions that have been heard in post-War seasons at Covent Garden and at the Lyceum in 1931. By the time the opera was proposed for inclusion in the repertory of Sadler's Wells, however, the original score had been made available and strict views about editorial tamperings with other people's work held the field. So Moussorgsky's own original version, never previously performed, was mounted for the first performance there on 30th September, 1935. But the scene in the Square of St. Basil was not felt to be an adequate substitute for the great revolution scene—it should be remarked that St. Basil and Revolution are alternative and virtually exclusive of each other, the idiot being the factor common to both. The revolution scene is Moussorgsky's own second thoughts for the conclusion of the opera. A compromise was therefore effected in the following season and the revolution scene restored to the conclusion of the opera. When it was revived in 1938 the order of the two scenes of the last act was reversed and the opera ends with the death of Boris, which avoids anti-climax (the composer's own deliberate anti-climax) but is less faithful to historical chronology. In this production the Polish act is omitted altogether.

Moussorgsky's two other operas *Khovantchina*, which deals with the internal struggles in the time of Peter the Great, and the unfinished *Fair of Sorochinsk*, full of thumbnail sketches of typical Russian figures, are only occasionally to be heard on the English stage. *The Fair of Sorochinsk*, which is a more intimate opera than the epics, has been given twice in recent years in a version completed by Tcherepnine.

Prince Igor, another national epic on a historical subject, is a true companion to *Boris Godunov* in magnitude of conception and in the full saturation of its music, for Borodin was working at it in his head from the moment in 1869 when the subject was suggested to him, till his death in 1887, when he left it still incomplete. The overture he never wrote down at all but played on the piano sufficiently often to his friends to enable Glazounov to write it from memory. Rimsky-Korsakoff was called upon to perform for *Igor* a similar, though not the same, service as he had done for *Boris*, and he was responsible for finishing it. Borodin's method is not Moussorgsky's: he retains the old operatic forms inherited from the Italians and uses accompanied recitative to carry on the dialogue. Since the story deals with the war between Russians and Tartars in the twelfth century a good deal of the music has an oriental flavour—the interval of the augmented second inevitably tints the more arabesque-like melodies. The dances with which Igor is entertained by his captor, the magnanimous Khan Kontchak, swept London off its feet when they were performed with Fokine's choreography by Diaghilev's ballet in its heyday during the Beecham season at Drury Lane immediately before the outbreak of war in 1914. They form an integral part of the opera in that they are chorally accompanied and their music is in itself important. They are no mere concession to a convention such as has prevailed in France for centuries, that an opportunity for dancing must be found somewhere in the course of an opera. Yet they are frequently heard or seen in detachment, either in choral concerts without the dancing or at the ballet without the choir. A comic element is provided by two minstrels, to whom is assigned the role of

time-serving politicians. The sombre lament of Igor in captivity and the plaintive lament of his wife left desolate at home provide a contrast to the brilliance of the martial music of the chorus and the barbaric energy of the dances. And the love music between Igor's son and Kontchak's daughter adds further variety to the score. It is an historical not a tragic opera and presents many characteristics of Russian life on its broad canvas.

Rimsky-Korsakoff (1844–1908), who made himself more technically proficient than the amateurs in the Kutchka—Borodin incidentally was a chemist of some distinction—was also the most prolific. He has a dozen operas to his name, most of them of a fantastic character or on a fairy-tale subject. In the first of them, however, *The Maid of Pskov*, or *Ivan the Terrible* as it is usually called in English (1873), he follows Moussorgsky in taking a historical subject and he treats it in something like the same way, i.e. in arioso to which he added that particular bright and clear orchestral accompaniment which it was his special talent to command. The Tsar, who is a maniac-depressive, has a final aria that is a rough equivalent of Boris's "I have attained to power". A maestoso theme associated with Ivan even bears some resemblance to the sombre opening of Igor's soliloquy. The chorus is an important character in that it is the Tsar's opponent. These features are common to Russian nationalist opera and, though Korsakoff wrote *The Maid of Pskov* when *Boris* and *Prince Igor* were very much in the air which their circle breathed, they may be a testimony rather to Dargomijsky's *The Stone Guest* than to mutual indebtedness. The *Snow Maiden*, which is the opera best known to English audiences

through its regular revivals at Sadler's Wells, draws upon legend and depicts the coming of the northern spring. Rimsky-Korsakoff, expert in his native folk-song, could hardly fail to catch the poetry and wisdom implicit in the most universal of all folk-tales—the anticipation of life renewed. The song of the old Tsar in the second act deals explicitly and very poetically with these mysteries of nature, but all the choral work is impregnated with the same pantheistic feeling.

Before this *A Night in May* had shown the way he was to go towards lyricism, the picturesque and fairy tale. The title conceals some more Roussalka who get some enchanting water-music; but the plot is sufficiently inconsequential to allow the admission of a typical Russian " drunk " scene and a couple of human lovers with songs to sing. Magic also becomes an important source of inspiration to Rimsky-Korsakoff and where it is not worked by his wizard's command of the orchestra it is done, as Mr. Gerald Abraham points out, by means of a kind of crazy mathematics. This double trait he passed on to Stravinsky. Another innovation which grew out of the important place taken by ballet in the Russian theatre is its admixture in opera not as ancillary to, but in partnership with, the voices. *Mlada*, which had originally begun as a co-operative undertaking by the Kutchka, was ultimately taken over by Korsakoff and emerged as a ballet-opera. The same technical description may be applied to *Sadko*, for when that maritime personage goes off to sea in a very unseaworthy craft he ends up in the submarine hall of the Sea King and is regaled with ballets by all the creatures that dwell beneath the wave. But it is in *Le Coq d'Or*—the French name seems to have established itself for general European use—

Korsakoff's last opera (1908), that the new form has been most fully worked out, though Rebikoff in *The Christmas Tree* (1903) had previously presented a character who may require to be mimed on the stage by a dancer and sung by someone else off stage. *Le Coq d'Or* was so presented with a double cast very early in its career, which was in fact delayed by the Russian censorship taking fright at a tale with a popular moral—Pushkin, whose pseudo-folk-tale it is, said it contained a hint and a warning to all good men, and such obscurity made it doubly alarming to the censor.

The death of the composer prevented him from superintending the first production in 1910, but his family protested when, to solve the difficulties of combining singing and dancing in the same actors, dancers usurped the places of the singers on the stage. Benois persuaded Diaghilev to mount the opera and for this production, which came to Paris and London in 1914, Fokine arranged the singers in two pyramids at the side of the stage—he had originally intended to banish them altogether to the orchestral pit. More than twenty years later he made a completely choreographic version for the ballet season of 1937 at Covent Garden, which drew some criticism. It certainly made a pleasing and amusing ballet, but the Queen of Shemakhan was a poorer creature without her voice than she would be without her seductive posturings. And it is worth remembering that in his preface to the score Rimsky specifically makes the points that the actors on the stage—of whom there are whole processions of grotesques—must not distract attention from the singers in lyrical passages—" an opera is above all a musical work," he adds in italics—and he warns King Dodon and the Queen not to be

so athletic in their infatuated dance as to incommode their breathing. The music is Rimsky at his most wizard-like—he works wonderful tricks with his stationary basses and fluctuating chromatic harmony above them. He has assigned two themes to the Cockerel; both begin alike but the one that descends after the opening cry is a warning and the one that ascends a reassurance. The general atmosphere is slightly sinister in spite of the action being farcical and King Dodon is a butt for satire.

The general character of these operas[1] has been summed up by Mr. Gerald Abraham in words that cannot be improved upon: "Though he never wrote anything quite as fine as *Boris* or *Igor*, Korsakoff must be granted the quite peculiar power of evoking a fantastic world entirely his own, half real, half supernatural, a world as limited, as distinctive and as delightful as the world of the Grimms' fairy tales or as *Alice in Wonderland*. . . . He was not its inventor, of course; he owed it in the first place to Pushkin and Gogol. But he gave it a queer touch of his own, linking it with Slavonic antiquity and hinting at pantheistic symbolism, which makes it peculiarity his; . . . he invented the perfect music for such a fantastic world: music insubstantial when it was matched with unreal things, deliciously lyrical when it touched reality, in both cases coloured from the most superb palette musician has ever held."[2]

[1] Although superficially these Russian operas, with their need for highly coloured production and heavy demands in the matter of dancing, would appear to be beyond the range of English amateurs many have in fact been successfully staged. *Prince Igor* had a remarkable spectacular production at Leicester in 1933; Swindon has done a whole series of Rimsky-Korsakoff operas, including *Ivan the Terrible*, *Tsar Saltan*, *Sadko* and *Mlada*, while the Oxford Opera Club has done *A Night in May* (1931).

[2] *Masters of Russian Music*, p. 22.

Quite otherwise are the operas of Tchaikovsky, which do not make frontal assaults on the emotions as his symphonies do but appeal by their common humanity. Of the eight only *Eugene Onegin* has been heard in London in recent years, and only *Pique-Dame* besides has kept the stage.

The libretto of *Onegin* is taken from Pushkin's great poem: those who know the original complain that it is a poor adaptation. For the ordinary opera-goer it seems, if not particularly suitable for opera, at least "different". The first three acts have a Russian country-house setting: one of Turgenev's comes to mind. A "domestic interior" atmosphere is uncommon in opera: Massenet's *Werther* is another example of the kind, and though *Onegin* is far more appealing than that too sentimental study it is just to point out that the frame for these "lyric scenes", as Tchaikovsky called them, is the serious *opéra comique* model from France. The colour, however, is Russian: or rather the whole work is permeated with that peculiar strain of sadness which is to be felt through so much of Tchaikovsky's music and especially his songs. The music is continuous, though the effect is often one of ill-disguised set-pieces connected by lightly melodic recitative. The pivot figure is not the hero, Onegin (baritone), who rejects and then regrets rejecting the love of a simple girl. The libretto unfortunately makes him seem rather a prig. The pivot is Tatiana, the girl. Into her Tchaikovsky seems to have poured all the yearning of his unhappy soul. The connexion between the story and his own unhappy private life will not escape those who are acquainted with them both. Undoubtedly his most affecting scene is that in which Tatiana writes to Onegin

declaring her young passion (Act I, Scene 2). The evocation of mood by the orchestra is throughout astonishingly successful, whether it suggests rustic peace, nostalgia or desolate loneliness. There are two or three bursts of gaiety—the duet that portrays the very ordinary love-affair of Olga (Tatiana's sister) and Lenski (Onegin's friend whom he kills in a foolish quarrel), the famous waltz in the country house, and the polonaise and schottische in the ball-room at St. Petersburg.

The Queen of Spades (*Pique-Dame* is the French name and more like the Russian) follows the same pattern, a rather vacillating adaptation of the French model. It is a little weightier, as fitting the subject which is taken, and somewhat spoiled in the taking, from Pushkin's short novel (or long story). A young officer, Herman, who has gambled away his fortune, hears that the protectress of the girl he loves knows a secret by which she can always win at cards. He breaks into her house at night—an extremely eerie scene in the opera—and by trying to force the old lady to speak frightens her to death. The old lady—*who incidentally sings snatches from Grétry*—haunts him. She arises at the card table, confronts him at every turn in his barrack room. "Queen of Spades," she mutters. Madness overtakes Herman. The subject was the ideal one for a composer so much of whose music sounds "haunted". One cannot but identify Tchaikovsky with the hero—and indeed with all his principal characters in turn in both operas; Onegin, Tatiana, Lenski, Herman and Liza *are* Tchaikovsky. That is the strength and weakness of the operas. These intensely subjective characterizations are compelling, but we always seem to be watching the same person.

These operas are still immensely popular in Russia. Stalin has pronounced them his favourites.

Of the modern and still living Russian composers Stravinsky, who derives from Rimsky-Korsakoff, has deserted opera for ballet, and his early *Nightingale* and his one-act *Mavra* are still virtually unknown. Prokovieff's *The Love of the Three Oranges*, brilliant, vivacious, witty and brittle, was first performed at the Chicago Opera in 1921, but has not reached this country. Shostakovitch's *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk*, "grand opera in four acts and nine scenes to Leskov's quasi-Shakespearian [with emphasis on the quasi!] story of a provincial uxoricide", was produced under Soviet auspices at Moscow in 1934 before the composer fell from favour, and has been heard here only in a concert performance. Rachmaninoff has written no operas since he left Russia, and it would seem that for the present no more Russian operas are forthcoming for Western ears.

Bohemian Opera

The nationalist movement of last century has also produced operas from the other branch of the Slav race, but Bohemian opera has never acquired a general European currency comparable to that of the Russians. Smetana's *Prodaná Nevesta* (*The Bartered Bride*) has won its way abroad but not his larger operas on national themes. Dr. Colles describes the purely local Czech operas as "long and to the outsider tedious works".[1] Why is it that Dvořák's operas too have never travelled round the world as his symphonies have? The folk idiom is the chief attraction of Bohemian music, but

[1] *Oxford History of Music*, Vol. VII.

it has not the exotic appeal to the Westerner of ancient, unknown, remote and half-oriental Russia. For centuries Bohemia has been a province of a Germanic empire and, though it has preserved its national individuality, its culture has inevitably been provincial rather than that of a segregated and independent people. Yet in the case of *The Bartered Bride* its local atmosphere, its homely provincial comedy is its chief charm. After all, the story of village life and traditional marriage custom is of more universal acceptability and easier intelligibility than the highly sophisticated and involved plot of *Figaro's Wedding*. The comparison with Mozart is not inept since the action moves forward in concerted numbers over a continuous texture of orchestral accompaniment. It is a more melodic and a less symphonic way of writing than Mozart's: Dannreuther calls it " an enlarged *Singspiel* of the family of Mozart ", though the spoken word does not break up the flow of music. Its affiliation is undoubtedly to Mozart rather than to the rising house of Wagner (its date is 1866). The actual melody which carries the opera so easily and delightfully along is fresher than Mozart's, and Smetana seems to have solved the problem that has defeated the symphonist of making a continuous quasi-symphonic tissue out of folk, or at any rate folky, material. Although Smetana did not quote actual folk-tunes extensively, it is the folk element in the music that is the source of the opera's strength.

Smetana's later opera, *Hubička* (*The Kiss*), which similarly turns on village life, beliefs and customs about marriage, has recently (1938) been introduced into England by a company of Liverpool amateurs. Its plot is slighter and turns on a superstitition that cannot be

shown but must be explained. It is not therefore so well constructed but it is no less attractive than *The Bartered Bride*. No one of Dvořák's operas has crossed the Channel except *Čert à Káča* (*Kate and the Devil*) which was given in an amusing modern-dress production by the Oxford University Opera Club in 1932. *Dmitry* is a bigger tragic opera, but most of the nine are peasant operas with plots turning on rustic customs. National opera on these lines is by no means impossible, as Smetana has proved, but *Kate and the Devil* is altogether too naïve to stand transplantation from its native land. The plot on the familiar theme of the woman who was too much for the devil himself is flimsy and not pointed enough; it is in fact farcical rather than witty. Dvořák's music is neither. Perhaps if it and its companion operas were brought here by a complete company from Prague and played complete with vivid local colour we should enjoy them. But it is fairly clear not only that they will not obtain admission to the international repertory, but also that they do not even lend themselves to production by our bolder amateur organizations which have been responsible for the most interesting revivals, introductions and curiosities that have enlivened our operatic life in the last half century.

One recent Czech opera, however, enjoyed a brief international currency. Jaromir Weinberger's *Schwanda der Dudelsackspieler* (*Schwanda the Bagpiper*), produced in Prague in 1927, had a success in Germany because it was cheerful, until it came under the Nazi ban (of Jewish authorship). Its frank absurdity, derived from a fairy-tale libretto and a scene in hell, was a relief after the portentous and the overwrought emotions of Wagner and Strauss. It was in fact a part of the anti-

Wagnerian reaction, but it fell into the Wagnerian heresy of trusting to the orchestra and giving to the singers inferior vocal material. It is tuneful, for its composer is a Czech, and Czechs are always willing to exploit their vivacious national folk music, but the simple song and dance tunes (already used by Dvorak) are here over-garishly scored, and the whole opera, in spite of an entertainment value which should not be despised, sounded a very second-rate affair when it was brought to Covent Garden in 1934 and 1935. Still, it may not mark the end of Bohemian opera, for there are still composers active in Prague, and Czech national culture is a tough plant that defies the secular storms of politics.

Poland, Scandinavia, Hungary and the Balkan states all have state-supported opera houses, but no indigenous products have established themselves. There are a few Polish operas, one by Paderewski. From Spain only one opera has crossed the frontier, Falla's *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* (*Master Pedro's Puppet Show*), an episode from Don Quixote of which the chief musical interest is in the orchestra. Bartok has produced a Hungarian opera on the theme of Blue Beard, which got as far west as Italy for the Florence festival of 1938. The Scandinavian countries, including Finland, specialize on drama with extensive incidental music, of which Greig's *Peer Gynt* is the most famous example, though Sibelius has written a good deal of dramatic music of this sort. It remains to be seen whether the incipient national ballets in these countries will stimulate their native composers to go one step further and write operas in their own languages.

CHAPTER X

The Outlook

OPERA is only one of music's many branches. It did not develop in isolation, but in many countries, though not in England, it has maintained a tradition of its own and can at any rate be regarded as a separate manifestation of the art. It is sometimes claimed that without an operatic organization as a training ground for composers, singers and players, no healthy musical life can be established in a country. The evidence is not conclusive: Germany and Italy and to a smaller extent France have thriven on such an operatic nucleus, England has starved without one. On the other hand, the Balkan, Iberian, Scandinavian and American countries have provided themselves with the organization, but have not succeeded so far in producing more than an intermittent supply of artists from it, while the English renaissance refuses to be damped down by lack of one. But clearly English experience must be excluded from the reckoning, since it may be argued that our historical lack of an operatic tradition is a proof that it is fundamentally alien to our national taste. It is equally clear that opera as such has contributed much to the development and well-being of the whole art of music. It has contributed something even to purely instrumental music: the concerto, for instance, owes a good deal to the operatic aria, and

Wagner enlarged the language of the orchestra for all who have come after him. But on balance, non-dramatic music has contributed more to opera than opera has to the music of church, home and concert-hall. In tracing the evolution of an operatic tradition in the various modern nations of Europe the influence of purely musical developments in these other fields has been insufficiently stressed, since this is not a history of music, but it has been a constant source of fertilization for opera through the centuries—until now.

But looking round Europe, as we have done in the last four chapters, we observe a dearth of operatic composers and a faltering in the operatic tradition, just at the moment when music itself is enlarging its borders by experiments in new scales, more varied rhythms and freer harmony. Much modern music, it is true, seems too experimental and too uncertain of its aims to provide a basis on which an operatic composer could devise some new synthesis of music and drama. Yet the case of *Wozzeck* must not be forgotten; no sooner had Schönberg systematized atonality than Berg wrote an opera in it. But in general, too many of the operas now being written are experimental themselves. Milhaud's *Christophe Colombe*, for instance, tries to conduct a drama simultaneously on a symbolical and a mundane plane and involves the additional machinery of a speech-chorus and a cinema to achieve this new and double synthesis. But the bold attempt sinks under its own weight. Opera has reached an impasse. Is it the end? Has music acquired in the course of three hundred and fifty years a self-sufficiency that can dispense with dramatic excitements? It seems very unlikely on *a priori* grounds, and much more probable that as in every similar crisis in the past a

great composer will arise and strike a new balance in the ding-dong alliance of music and drama. But another possibility is canvassed—that the future of dramatic music lies with ballet, that dancing and miming rather than words and acting will henceforth be music's partners in the theatre.

The recent achievements of the ballet are certainly very great. The superiority of its theatrical technique, especially production and *décor*, has enabled it to steal a march on opera, and its appeal to the eye has recruited to the theatre many adherents whose tastes are not primarily either musical or dramatic. But the foundation on which modern ballet was built by Diaghilev is "the steadily growing appreciation of purely instrumental musical speech". These are Dr. Dyson's words [1], and although the underlying note of his book is disquiet at an apparent drying-up of the sources in every branch of musical activity, he is plainly less disturbed at the decay which he finds in opera because the loss is offset by a gain in ballet. He states the history of three centuries of operatic effort in the form of a paradox: "The first great step, from lyric song to vocal drama, turned singing into declamation. The last step from music-drama to dramatic ballet, reduces the singer to silence." But he is not going to weep for the singer, since his disappearance solves the problem of vocal balance, and there is a gain in musical freedom, since in ballet "there is room for the keenest shafts of musical thought". In short, it is the orchestra which counts.

The orchestra has had things all its own way for a good many years now, but the reaction will come. Already in the Germany of the Second Reich it mani-

[1] *The Progress of Music*, p. 150.

fested itself as a movement for the revival of Handel and Verdi, the vocal composers *par excellence*. The limitless fascinations of the orchestra induce a satiety and create a desire for the direct appeal and simplicity of the human voice. Singing will not for ever be eclipsed. Since Dr. Dyson wrote, the dangers of his policy of surrender to the *maître de ballet* and the ballerina have been revealed in M. Massine's extremely interesting but fundamentally vicious experiments in symphonic ballet. The twinkling toes of a pretty girl are an even less reliable custodian of musical values than the vocal chords of an eighteen-stone soprano—the appeal to the eye has at one stroke dethroned the supremacy of the music and to expect music to flourish in such subservience is a vain hope.

Ballet is certainly an enchanting entertainment; it is still going forward on the impetus it received from its renaissance under a man of genius, while opera is suffering from a corresponding decline as the force of the Wagnerian reformation is spent. But it is an insubstantial art by comparison—as sufficient attendance at both gradually proves. The reason is largely one of size and scope. Magnitude is after all an æsthetic category, and as that great philosopher, Samuel Alexander, pointed out, it enters art by way of subject-matter. It would be going too far to say that ballet is essentially frivolous—our own youthful ballet has achieved its greatest triumphs (in *Job* and *Checkmate*) with fundamentally serious subjects—but it has not so far acquired the power of sustaining the flight of a three-act drama. This means that its emotional range is restricted and its dramatic power strictly circumscribed. Only in *Giselle*, which is now a hundred years old, in *Petrouchka* among all the Diaghilev and post-

Diaghilev repertory, and in *Checkmate* is there any real grasp of a tragic theme in terms of dancing, and in *The Green Table* any effective social satire. Ballet excels in the lighter manner with fantastic and fairy-tale themes, where in comparison with opera its greater conciseness and concentration give it an advantage over a drama with words—it is difficult for instance to name an operatic equivalent of *La Boutique Fantasque*, though *Coq d'Or* is better treated as opera than ballet. But ballet can show no equivalent for *Figaro* and *The Barber* or even for *Gianni Schicchi*, still less for epics like *Igor* and *Boris*, and although choreographers have shown a disposition lately to tackle highly metaphysical subjects like the creation of the world and spiritual themes like the life of St. Francis, the effect has been, with the conspicuous exception of *Job*, which is outside the tradition of classical ballet *en pointes*, to emphasize the earth-bound limitations of ballet. Also, the preoccupation with the female is another source of weakness to ballet in its more ambitious essays. Dancing as such has from time immemorial been associated with ritual of the highest solemnity, and on a long historical view is more often a male prerogative than a female accomplishment, and there is no reason in the nature of dancing as such why the limitations of range and scope which are certainly operative in "Russian" ballet, should be permanent. But they are at present a decisive factor against ballet proving a substitute for opera as an opportunity for music to exercise dramatic functions.

The film has also been suggested as a substitute for music-drama, but here again the new medium is not ready for such responsibilities. Whether existing operas can be reproduced in film versions is, of course,

quite another question. Various attempts have been made but the main difficulty is always one of tempo. If stage drama runs too quickly for music, *a fortiori* so does the steeplechasing film.

Ballet and film are arts in the ascendant; opera is momentarily at a standstill, but it seems contrary to every probability that an art, which in essence goes back to Greek drama and in current practice is capable of such variety as has appeared in these pages, will suddenly cease. A new synthesis will be made in which voice, orchestra, spectacle, drama, and dancing too, will recombine with changes of emphasis according to national taste, with new resources made available by modern tendencies in musical composition, and with improved theatrical presentation incorporating, perhaps, contributions of film technique. Some such revival of opera will come in the course of a generation. No one can guess where the awaited composer will come from. Considering that England is once again after three centuries a nest of singing birds, a hive of composers, and that political conditions on the continent are not conducive to artistic creation, one might look for him in this country, if it were not that we still have no operatic tradition, and that our operatic history is the tale of one disappointment after another. Let us keep our faith in opera but not indulge in too high hopes that England will be its salvation.

GENERAL INDEX

N.B.—Italics indicate the pages where the main discussion of the subject will be found. Names of operas will only be found in this index under their composers.

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