GIAN FRANCESCO MALIPIERO

THE LIFE, TIMES AND MUSIC OF A WAYWARD GENIUS 1882–1973

JOHN C G WATERHOUSE

ROUTLEDGE

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Gian Francesco Malipiero

(1882–1973)

The Life, Times and Music of a Wayward Genius

John C. G. Waterhouse

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To the memory of the composer's widow
Giulietta Malipiero
(†14 *October 1996*)
with affection and gratitude for many things

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Nigel Osborne

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The photographs shown in plates 1–15 are now in the Malipiero Archive of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, which has kindly granted permission to reproduce them.

The publishers report with sadness the untimely death of John C. G. Waterhouse at the time this volume was sent to press.

Preface

When the Italian version of this book first appeared in 1990, the music of Gian Francesco Malipiero – like that of most of his immediate Italian contemporaries with the single (and only partial) exception of Respighi – had to a large extent fallen into obscurity. In most countries the general music-loving public hardly remembered that he had existed (if it ever knew), and the modest amount of exposure that his compositions enjoyed in Britain during the inter-war period and the immediately post-war years had long since receded into the past. Even professional musicians, though they usually knew his name, were too often content to accept highly simplified 'received opinions' about him, based on very limited awareness of the true range of his achievements. Usually the single best known fact about him was that he had edited the only complete published collection of Monteverdi's surviving works, which, despite the justified reservations of scholars about its evident faults and idiosyncrasies, has won him an honoured place among the pioneers of 20th-century musicology.

Even in Italy performances of Malipiero's own music had become rare, despite the continuing advocacy and enthusiasm of a small number of distinguished devotees. Like so many Italian composers (and other artists) of his generation, he had become a victim of a deep national revulsion against the entire fascist period, during which he happened to have arrived at full creative maturity. The vexed question of Malipiero's complex, ambivalent relationship with Mussolini's regime will be discussed at appropriate points later in the book. Suffice it to emphasize here that very few of his compositions reveal any really demonstrable signs of direct influence from the fascist environment, and that the cultural policies of Italian fascism usually allowed artists far greater creative freedom than was notoriously the case in Nazi Germany. Nevertheless the leading arbiters of Italian public taste from the 1960s onwards have too readily allowed gut reactions to an entire epoch of their country's recent history to colour their attitudes to artists whose mature careers coincided at least partly with that ill-fated time.

One of the most damaging effects of the resultant cloud of prejudice and neglect, under which all too many Italian composers of Malipiero's generation had fallen by 1990, was the extreme rarity of commercial recordings of their music, whether in Italy or abroad: to the best of my knowledge, during the 1970s and '80s only one gramophone record devoted exclusively to Malipiero appeared in any country of the world. Fortunately, however, it is precisely in this sphere that during the years *between* the publications of this book's Italian edition and of the present English version there has been a sudden dramatic improvement in

the situation, brought about to a considerable extent (significantly) by initiatives outside Italy. The full extent of the resurgence of interest in Malipiero's music by record companies from 1991 onwards will be evident from Peter Bromley's admirable discography on pages 397–407; but special mention should be made of the Orpheus Quartet's two-disc recording of his eight string quartets (ASV, London, 1991) and of the Moscow Symphony Orchestra's comparable survey (conducted by Antonio de Almeida) of his entire output of numbered symphonies and of almost all his un-numbered symphonies too (Marco Polo, Hong Kong, 1993–4).

Although these pioneering complete recordings are not in fact ideal (one can sense that most of the players have only recently discovered Malipiero, and have had little contact with more experienced Italian renditions of the works in question), the performances nevertheless exude a refreshing sense of enthusiastic commitment to a new-found, hitherto unjustly neglected cause. This enthusiasm seems to have communicated itself effectively not only to reviewers in several countries but also to a hearteningly large number of adventurous-minded record buyers – enough to raise one's hopes that Malipiero's reputation may at last have turned a significant corner, and that a substantial revival of interest in his music may now be under way. Moreover, at the very moment when this book was about to go to the publisher, news reached me of the imminent release of the first commercial recording of one of his major stage works: the *L'Orfeide* triptych (in which *Sette canzoni* serves as centrepiece), vividly conducted by Hermann Scherchen in the very last performance of his career, never previously available on record.

This book's English edition was already being planned before any of these recordings appeared. However, it is hoped that the timing of its publication may respond to a need for information which increasing numbers of music lovers must now be feeling, and encourage further exploration by performers, record-producers, concert-promoters and listeners alike. As my preface to the original Italian edition makes clear, the book's overall purpose has certainly not been to defend the whole of Malipiero's enormous output indiscriminately: the uneven quality of his achievement remains undeniable, and an important part of my intention has always been to sift the grain from the chaff and to indicate where his main strengths can best be found. At the same time it is fair to admit that since the appearance of the book's Italian version I have found myself substantially revising my opinions of certain works, usually in response to new experiences of them in performance; and nearly (if not quite) all my revised opinions have been for the better.

To take just two conspicuous cases, the Italian edition contained a brief, curtly dismissive account of the *Sinfonia per Antigenida* (1962), which had seemed singularly lifeless in the one Italian performance that I had heard. Now, however, Antonio de Almeida and his Moscow orchestra have demonstrated that a significantly faster and tauter rendering can reveal a real if somewhat esoteric power which I had previously missed, although some of my reservations about the piece remain. Similarly, a curiously blank and inert-sounding early recording of the Eighth String Quartet (1963–4) had previously persuaded me that this was one of the composer's weakest contributions to the quartet repertoire. Here my revised opinion was brought about less by the Orpheus Quartet than by the intensely expressive playing of the string players of the Ex Novo Ensemble of

Venice, whose recording of four assorted chamber works (Dischi Ricordi, Milan, 1992) is one of the best of Italy's still sadly few contributions to the recent upsurge of interest in putting Malipiero on to disc.

It is partly because of changed opinions of this kind that the present English edition differs significantly from its Italian predecessor. There are also a fair number of factual updatings, plus an expansion of the bibliography to include important recent publications about Malipiero as well as a few more general, context-setting items which may prove useful for English-speaking readers. The discography is wholly new. However, the single most important difference between the English and Italian versions is the addition of a substantial brand new *Life and Times* section at the beginning: this forms Part I of the book, replacing the original much shorter *Sintesi biografica*, which provided only the barest minimum of basic biographical information that was deemed indispensable in a study whose main emphasis was (and is) very definitely on the music. Clearly an English-speaking readership – with little or no prior knowledge of Malipiero's background and personality or of the vicissitudes of his exceptionally long career (and unable to read the fair-sized Italian literature on these subjects) – needs a clear frame of reference and a considerable amount of preliminary information of the kind that Part I is intended to provide, before proceeding to the comprehensive, detailed chronological survey of the composer's creative output which is contained in the twenty-eight chapters of Part II: these correspond approximately (even if not in every detail) to the same number of chapters which form the main body of the 1990 Italian version. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Italian or French are my own.

* * *

In the task of transforming the 1990 version into the present one I have been assisted in varying ways and degrees by many people, in addition to those who already helped me earlier (to whom my thanks and acknowledgements were recorded in the original preface: see pages xix–xxi). My gratitude to the performers and record-producers who have contributed to the substantially increased availability of Malipiero's music on discs will be obvious from the foregoing paragraphs. Their names and details can be found in the discography; but for personal reasons I would like especially to thank Giuseppe Garbarino, Aldo Orvieto (of the Ex Novo Ensemble), Klaus Heymann (director of Marco Polo records), Myriam Scherchen (of TAHRA records, and daughter of Hermann Scherchen) and the already-mentioned Antonio de Almeida. I also owe much to Professor Giovanni Morelli, of Venice University and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, who (among other things) made it possible for me to study recently-collected documents which are now housed in the Fondazione's Malipiero archive, and to which I had not previously had access. During the month that I spent studying these documents I was supported by a generous grant from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation of New York.

Professor Morelli is the teacher and mentor of several younger Venetian researchers who in recent years have given a new momentum to Malipiero studies by which my own book has been beneficially influenced: among these newcomers, special mention should be made of Paolo Cattelan, Paolo Pinamonti, Laura Zanella (who has made important discoveries concerning the unacknowledged

literary sources drawn on in some of Malipiero's theatre works) and Cecilia Palandri (who has made a special study of the composer's exceptionally long-lasting correspondence with the active and influential music critic Guido M. Gatti). I must particularly thank the 'two Paolos' for their extremely detailed and on the whole flattering review of this book's Italian version, which appeared in the *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia*, Vol. XXVI (1991), pp. 395–6 and 402–18: due note has been taken of some of their stated or implied criticisms when the work was being adapted into its present form.

During the technical preparations for publication of the book in English, the editors in Harwood Academic's various offices in Britain and Switzerland have been a frequent source of encouragement and help, not least where complex negotiations with the Italian publishers were concerned. I am also grateful to the Music Department of the University of Birmingham, and especially to Dr John Whenham and his pupil Dr Andrew Lewis, who patiently initiated me into the technological subtleties of preparing the text using the Department's own computers. Dr Lewis himself prepared the relatively few music examples which, instead of being taken over directly from the Italian edition, needed to be generated afresh on University equipment.

A further major reason for gratitude to Professor Morelli is his suggestion that I could simplify the formalities of seeking copyright clearance for the music examples by channelling my requests through the Fondazione Cini: thanks to the Fondazione's special role in conserving and promoting all Malipiero's music, I have obtained permission through them to quote excerpts from music published (or inherited) by C. C. Birchard and Co. (Boston), Edizioni Musicali Carisch (Milan), Chester Music (London), Edition Wilhelm Hansen (Copenhagen), Heinrichshofens Verlag (Wilhelmshaven), G. Ricordi & C. (Milan), Editions Salabert (Paris), B. Schott's Söhne (Mainz), N. Simrock (Hamburg), Edizioni Suvini Zerboni (Milan), Universal Edition (Vienna) and Edizioni 'La Voce del Padrone' (Milan). For permission to quote from several unpublished works (as for much else) I am extremely grateful to the late Mrs Giulietta Malipiero, about whom I have written at greater length in the preface to the Italian edition (see page ix).

My heartfelt thanks go above all to my dear wife Janet, who had not yet entered my life when the Italian edition was being prepared but has been by my side throughout the time when it was being reshaped into its present form. Her patience when I was preoccupied for too long at a stretch with this very large task, her fresh, enthusiastic perceptiveness when commenting on the music itself, on what I had written about it, and on subjects related to it, her loving moral support when difficulties sometimes arose, her skill and diligence in helping to correct the proofs – all these things have helped to create an environment without which the work might never have come to fruition.

* * *

At the proof stage the opportunity has been taken for further updating of the bibliography and especially the discography. Among the new items added to the latter, special mention should be made here of another excellent recording of the eight string quartets, played by the Quartetto d'Archi di Venezia.

Preface to the Italian edition

'The fact that you have been invited to write a thesis on what has happened in Italy since 1910 cannot displease me. Far from it! Because, as I see it, this new task will spur you to study in depth the music of G. Francesco Malipiero whom I regard as the most important personality that Italy has had since the death of Verdi.'

Luigi Dallapiccola (from a letter [in Italian] dated 20 [or 30?] October 1960 and addressed to the author of this book)

'It is obvious that in so endless an output, everything cannot be on the same level of excellence. [...] Consequently an immense task awaits a future music historian: somebody must set themselves down in front of that huge mass of music and arrive at a balanced evaluation of it.'

Massimo Mila (from 'Gianfrancesco Malipiero e l'irrazionalismo contemporaneo', in *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, Vol. CXXXII, 1973–4, Parte generale e Atti ufficiali, pp. 64–78: the quoted passage appears on p. 67)

I well remember the impression I had on receiving Dallapiccola's very polite letter from which the first of these two epigraphs is taken. It was a letter written to me in rather delicate circumstances. As a young student at the University of Oxford, I had just taken my first degree, a BA in music, and was about to start work for my second, a D.Phil. As subject for my thesis I had proposed to the Faculty of Music a comprehensive study of Dallapiccola; but the Faculty had refused my proposal and had suggested that I should choose a rather less limited field. This put me into a difficult position because, having previously been informally told to expect a positive response from the Faculty, I had already got directly into touch with the composer, to whom I now had somehow to break the news that according to the University of Oxford my thesis could not, after all, be concerned exclusively with him. I expected a terrible reply, or perhaps no reply at all: instead I quickly received the kind and courteous letter from which I have quoted. And I remain eternally grateful for that letter, not only for obvious human reasons, but also because it gave me my very first clear indication that Malipiero's music (about which at that time I knew very little) deserved to be studied in depth and with the greatest seriousness.

To cut a long story short, about eight years later I at last completed a very long thesis on a vast and complex subject: entitled *The Emergence of Modern Italian Music (up to 1940)*, it contains 835 pages of text, among which 117 are concerned monographically with Malipiero. Those 117 pages are in effect the first draft

(later extensively revised) of Chapters I–XII [in Part II] of this book. After the completion of the thesis (which as a whole has never been published, although it is available on loan from the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford) my researches in the field of early 20th-century Italian music have continued. During the 1970s I wrote many articles on Italian composers for *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Macmillan, London, 1980) and I began drastically to revise the thesis with the idea of publishing it in an Italian version. Then, however, the plan changed: given the huge size and complexity of the subject as a whole, it seemed more prudent to use and adapt the material of the thesis a bit at a time, turning it into several self-sufficient books. And the first of these more limited projects, in order of realization, is this present monograph on Malipiero, whose first twelve chapters (derived at least partly from the thesis) have been supplemented by sixteen further chapters about the music that he wrote from 1941 onwards. These new chapters, written specifically for the book, were written mainly during the summer months of 1980–83, when the preceding chapters were revised again.

The genesis of this book has therefore been long and complicated. Yet through all the various phases of its gestation, my work on it has been sustained by certain unchanging beliefs. While preparing my thesis I quickly became convinced that Malipiero, even if not quite 'the most important [musical] personality that Italy has had since the death of Verdi' as Dallapiccola suggested, was decisively the most original and interesting Italian composer of his own generation. On the other hand, during that very first phase of my work the opinion (which has been expressed by many) that the quality of Malipiero's music is extremely variable was abundantly confirmed for me, making it clear that any comprehensive investigation of his output must necessarily entail the task of distinguishing the good from the bad. Both in the pages devoted to Malipiero within the thesis and in the more complete and (I hope) mature survey contained in this book, one of my main aims has always been, quite simply, to sift the grain from the chaff in this immense and very uneven *oeuvre*. Consequently when, in the early 1980s, I got to know Massimo Mila's fine essay from which the second of my two epigraphs is taken, I was naturally much encouraged by the fact that so eminent an Italian critic was advocating precisely the sort of work on which I had already been engaged for several years.

It should be said that the methods adopted in this study remain shamelessly eclectic – always conditioned, in the most concrete and realistic possible way, by particular questions and problems arising from the various phases of Malipiero's output, and by the special characteristics of individual compositions. Different pieces can interest us for so many different reasons: sometimes it is the music's structural aspects that mainly call for our attention (see for instance Chapter XV, devoted to symphonies 3 to 7 inclusive); sometimes – particularly in theatre works – aspects of the libretto and of its relationship to a more or less famous literary source merit detailed comment (see for example my accounts of the Shakespeare operas, of *Venere prigioniera*, of *Le metamorfosi di Bonaventura*, of *L'Iscariota*, etc.); sometimes – especially in early compositions and in periods which in one way or other can be called 'transitional' – the evolution of Malipiero's fundamental musical vocabulary must be a central focus of our investigations; and so on.

Everywhere, therefore, the emphasis is much more on particular cases – on the characteristics, defects and merits of individual pieces – than on the dangerously simplified and glib generalizations which have so often abounded in over-hasty

accounts of Malipiero's art. Here too, it is true, more generalized discourses are not wholly absent: see for instance the beginning and the conclusion [of Part II], and the brief 'stock-takings' at the ends of Chapters V, XII and XXI. However, these aim merely to provide an inconspicuous unifying frame to support the more detailed commentaries and the evaluations of works taken one by one. If in the course of these evaluations (which, like all judgments of works of art, remain necessarily subjective in basis) I have openly revealed my great enthusiasm for the best compositions, I am pleased: I would like this to be seen, above all, as a 'music-loving book'.

* * *

Naturally in the course of more than twenty years of intermittent work on the various phases of this study, the number of people who have helped me in one way or other has become enormous: naming them all would have required a chapter to itself. Suffice it to refer briefly here to those who have helped me the most, and above all to Malipiero himself, whom sadly I was able to visit only once, for an entire week at Asolo in May 1963 – perhaps the most unforgettable week in my life. During that week I went to see him every day, for several hours at a time, and he helped me and entertained me with a generosity that seemed quite extraordinary, given that my age was little more than a quarter of his. Some of the more notable detailed fruits of our discussions are specifically cited in the course of the book; but our meetings also taught me other things that are less easy to define: direct personal acquaintance with Malipiero – with his character, with his ways of speaking and thinking, with some of his preferences and prejudices, with the environment in which he worked – undoubtedly enhanced my general understanding of his music.

Secondly, I am deeply grateful to his widow, Mrs Giulietta Malipiero, whom I had already met in 1963 and with whom I renewed contact in the 1970s when I embarked on the enormous task of revising my thesis. My improved financial situation then enabled me to travel more often and more freely, so that in the late 1970s and early 1980s my visits to Asolo and Venice were fairly frequent – visits during which Mrs Malipiero allowed me to study manuscripts and documents that I had not been able to see during the composer's lifetime. Most notable among these were the autograph scores of certain immature but far from negligible early works, which he himself always claimed to have destroyed. Mrs Malipiero also let me use the large library of tapes that her husband had accumulated during the last part of his life: this included recordings of many of his compositions, though by no means all of them.

Among the Italian critics who have helped me most, not only through their writings but also directly and personally, I should above all mention Fedele d'Amico and Domenico de' Paoli. Readers will soon notice that among the many writers quoted in the course of the book, D'Amico is the one whose name recurs most often and to whom my way of thinking about Malipiero is most indebted, even if I do not share all his opinions. Moreover, from our very first meeting in May 1962, D'Amico showed himself exceptionally willing to give me many-sided help with advice, loans, photocopies, bibliographical recommendations, constructive criticisms of what I had written, and so on.

De' Paoli, who was Malipiero's pupil during the First World War years and whose simple but useful *La crisi musicale italiana* was the first book in Italian that I managed (already in the winter of 1960–61) to read from cover to cover, helped me just as much, and in a manner completely different from D'Amico's. Especially valuable were his rich, vivid personal memories of early periods of Malipiero's career (and of 20th-century Italian musical life in general) – periods of which almost all other well-informed witnesses had been dead for some time. It was indeed De' Paoli's clear memory of some of the juvenile 'destroyed' works, and his hunch that they might still be extant, which spurred me in 1976 to ask Mrs Malipiero for more definite information.

Unfortunately, for reasons of geography or age, I have had little or no chance to seek the help of the other leading writers about Malipiero, contemporary with (or older than) De' Paoli or D'Amico. I rarely met Massimo Mila, but the second epigraph at the beginning of this preface may itself serve as a symbol of my great admiration for his writings. I never met Prunières or Ansermet, Bontempelli or Rossi-Doria; but my debts to them, and to other writers of their generations, will be evident from my end-notes. Of the critics born in the 1920s and '30s, Piero Santi is the one who has helped me most, both personally and (especially) through his long, richly thought-provoking essay 'Il teatro di Gian Francesco Malipiero', which I cite frequently, from note 6 [on page 94] onwards. In due course contacts with other critics of that generation – and especially with Luigi Pestalozza – stimulated and encouraged me greatly in continuing with my work.

Special thanks must go to certain Italian musicians and musicologists of my own generation (and younger) with whom discussions could be less formal, being based on reciprocal friendship 'between equals'. Even those of them who are not themselves 20th-century specialists (for example Agostino Ziino and Giorgio Pestelli) have contributed more than they think to the maturing of my ideas; and those who *have* been concerned with (among other things) 20th-century Italy have helped me still more, and in precisely the same sort of way. Among them I should mention Claudio Annibaldi, Marcello De Angelis, Carlo Piccardi, Sergio Sablich, and above all Fiamma Nicolodi, whose important studies of various aspects of Italian musicians and musical life in the early 20th century are in many ways complementary to my own.

In gathering material for my work I have also been much helped by various publishing houses (for example Ricordi and Chester); by certain shops selling second-hand music (for example Holleyman and Treacher of Brighton and Gallini of Milan); by many British and Italian libraries, ranging from the British Library and Central Music Library in London to the Biblioteche Nazionali in Florence and Rome and the Biblioteca Comunale in Milan, from the libraries of the Milan and Rome conservatories to that of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, which possesses a Malipiero archive. Outstanding among the librarians who, over the years, have helped me diligently and kindly is Emilia Zanetti of the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia in Rome, herself a musicologist of distinction.

For the chance to listen to many of Malipiero's compositions in performance, including several works that have very seldom been heard, my thanks go not only to Giulietta Malipiero but also to Maurizio Modugno and his colleagues in the Discoteca di Stato [national sound-archive] in Rome; to the programme planners of Italian Radio; and to certain private collectors of rare records and tape-recordings, among whom I should especially mention Antonio Latanza, Peter

Bromley and Bret Johnson. For the financial help which has enabled me to make fairly frequent research visits to Italy (sometimes for long periods) I am grateful to all the various organizations that at different times have given me grants or research fellowships: the British and Italian governments; the Leverhulme Trust; the British Academy; the research funds of the universities of Belfast and Birmingham. I also thank those two universities for the periods of sabbatical leave which have from time to time freed me from teaching responsibilities for entire terms; and I thank the British School at Rome which has repeatedly been my main place of residence in Italy. I am overwhelmingly indebted to Marcella Barzetti: not only did she play a leading role (along with the equally diligent Caterina d'Amico de Carvalho) in translating into Italian those large parts of the book which were originally written (or drafted) in English, but in her capacity as music adviser of the Italian Institute of Culture in London she helped me in countless practical ways over a long period from 1960 onwards. Last but not least, I must thank Giancarlo Rostirolla of the publishing house Nuova ERI, whose firm faith in the value of my work was the indispensable prerequisite for the book's eventual publication.

[This preface was originally written in Florence and Rome in 1985 and has subsequently been slightly revised by the author.]

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Part One

Life and Times

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I

Introduction

The enormous span of Gian Francesco Malipiero's life stretches across the most sustained period of rapid and drastic change in the entire history of Italian music: even the great transitional upheaval between the Renaissance and Baroque periods seems limited in scope by comparison. When Malipiero was born on 18 March 1882, Verdi's last two operatic masterpieces *Otello* and *Falstaff* were still to come, and Puccini had not yet written his first opera; by the time he died at the age of ninety-one on 1 August 1973 the careers of post-war avant-garde composers such as Nono, Berio and Donatoni were at their heights, and that of Maderna – himself a devoted pupil of Malipiero – was already approaching its untimely end, with his death on 13 November of the same year.

Malipiero himself was torrentially productive as a composer throughout an amazingly large proportion of his life. His earliest surviving composition – the orchestral tone poem *Dai Sepolcri*, written in 1904 – was completed soon after the première of *Madama Butterfly*; and he remained creatively active, with only minor interruptions, right through until 1971, by which time the definitive version of Berio's justly famous *Sinfonia* was already nearly two years old. It would be an exaggeration, of course, to suggest that Malipiero's own stylistic development reflected all the complex twists and turns of Italian musical trends throughout those sixty-seven years: on the contrary, certain basic aspects of his highly individual art remained remarkably constant and impervious to external influences. Nevertheless, to see his achievement properly in context, one clearly needs to take account of the changing environment (cultural and political as well as musical) in which he lived and worked, and of the ways in which his career and personality interacted with those of his leading contemporaries.

In Part I of this book successive periods of Malipiero's life are outlined briefly, and each section of biography as such is preceded by a short summary of various aspects of his background which were to influence him for better or worse during the period in question. No attempt has been made at comprehensiveness in the coverage either of 'life' or of 'times', and not only for reasons of space in a book whose main concern is with the music. One of the most basic problems is that Malipiero was notoriously secretive, and at times downright mendacious,[1] about many aspects of his past experience, especially where his earlier years (before 1922) were concerned: a would-be biographer is therefore repeatedly frustrated by unsolved mysteries and by a shortage of documentation. One may hope that in due course a determined and fortunate researcher may succeed in

shining a light into at least some of the many areas that at present remain obstinately in the shadows. Until then a relatively sketchy and fragmentary account must suffice, in the hope that it may nevertheless help our understanding of how Malipiero's music came to be as it is.

1. See n. 1 on p. 10.

II

To 1906

When Malipiero first began to find his feet as a composer, the kingdom of Italy, which had as yet been united for only a few decades, was gradually becoming more prosperous with the belated partial industrialization of (especially) the northern part of the country.[2] The national musical culture was still predominantly operatic, in a way that increasingly reflected the tastes of the newly affluent bourgeoisie of the time, and was also strongly influenced by the commercial interests of two almost all-dominating Milanese publishing houses, Ricordi and Sonzogno. These two firms together had a control over composers' public success which could be devastating for those who failed to find favour with one or other of them.[3] Ricordi had the advantage of publishing both Verdi (1813–1901) and Puccini (1858–1924); Sonzogno responded by taking on several other promising and easily saleable opera composers who first made their marks in the 1890s, including Mascagni (1863–1945), Leoncavallo (1857–1919), Giordano (1867–1948), Cilea (1866–1950) and Franchetti (1860–1942).

Meanwhile, outstanding among the less fortunate figures was the Istrian composer Antonio Smareglia (1854–1929), a richly talented Wagnerian who for personal rather than musical reasons had evidently earned himself the displeasure of both firms:[4] he consequently remained marginalized and unjustly neglected in his own country, though highly regarded abroad by judges as eminent as Brahms and Hans Richter. Smareglia understandably grew increasingly embittered, especially after total blindness had redoubled his sense of isolation from 1900 onwards. By his later years he had become the archetypal 'outsider' in the Italian musical world of the time. There is a certain symbolic appropriateness, therefore, in the fact that the young Malipiero – who (as we shall see) was himself not accepted by his country's major publishing houses until the 1920s – acted for a time, around 1905, as Smareglia's amanuensis.

In one respect at least, despite all, Smareglia remained typical of the predominant musical trends in Italy: he too was active mainly as a composer of operas. By the end of the 19th century, however, the Italian public's seemingly overriding preference for experiencing its music in the opera-house was increasingly being challenged by a serious-minded and vigorous élite, centred on the various concert societies that had been growing up in some of the peninsula's major cities. Small chamber music organizations were by then fairly numerous, but Italy's first really systematic series of public orchestral concerts (the Concerti Popolari, founded in imitation of Pasdeloup's famous Concerts Populaires in Paris) had been launched in Turin as recently as 1872.[5] Further progress in this sphere

remained slow, and it was not until 1908 that the opening of the famous Augusteo concert hall in Rome came as another major point of arrival in the resurgence of orchestral musical life in Italy.

In such circumstances, an Italian composer who chose to turn his back on opera, and to devote his energies principally to writing concert works instead, might be deemed somewhat unrealistic, even foolhardy. Yet such composers, surprisingly, had existed throughout the 19th century, and were becoming increasingly influential and prestigious as the turn of the century approached.[6] Unquestionably the outstanding non-operatic composer in Italy at that time was Giuseppe Martucci (1856–1909), whose two symphonies, Second Piano Concerto and several major chamber compositions had raised Italian instrumental music to a level of excellence which had seldom if ever been reached by anyone else working south of the Alps since the 18th century.[7] Inevitably Martucci's larger pieces could find comparatively few regular outlets in his own country, and much of his music significantly had to be published abroad. But the beneficial influence of his ideas, and of his practical activities as an enterprisingly exploratory pianist, conductor and organizer of musical life, can be discerned in many of the more idealistic aspects of Italian music in the years when Malipiero was first getting his bearings as a composer. Although Martucci's strong debt to the Austro-German instrumental tradition, and especially to Schumann and Brahms, did not in itself appeal greatly to Malipiero as his sympathies became increasingly anti-Germanic, this still did not stop him from retaining a great respect for the older man: as late as 1956 he described him as 'a genius in the fullest sense' and his Second Symphony (1904) as 'the starting point of the renaissance of non-operatic Italian music'.[8]

Malipiero was himself a pupil not of Martucci but of a lesser but by no means negligible composer who likewise played a significant part in the resurgence of serious Italian music for the concert hall: the organist-composer Marco Enrico Bossi (1861–1925) is often mentioned alongside Martucci – together with the slightly older Giovanni Sgambati (1841–1914) – as one of the three leading figures in Italian non-operatic music at the time of Malipiero's youth. In later life Malipiero's comments about Bossi's work tended to be far less respectful than his views about Martucci, or indeed about Smareglia;[9] yet the simple fact that he studied with Bossi at all must surely have a bearing on his decision to write three ambitious orchestral pieces before he even tried to compose for the stage.

One of the main factors which was increasingly to draw the young Malipiero away from the high-minded, Germanically-influenced 19th-century romanticism favoured by composers such as Smareglia, Martucci and Bossi was his growing awareness of alternative sources of inspiration in the remoter Italian past. At the turn of the century Italy's rediscovery of her own rich pre-19th-century musical heritage was still in its early stages; yet pioneering Italian musicologists such as Oscar Chilesotti (1848–1916) and Luigi Torchi (1858–1920) had already started to publish substantial collections of previously-forgotten Italian music, mainly from the 16th and 17th centuries.[10] Consequently, when in 1902 the twenty-year-old Malipiero began – seemingly almost entirely on his own initiative – to investigate the long neglected early music preserved in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, he was doing something for which there were already illustrious precedents, in Italy as well as abroad.

* * *

Malipiero was born into an old Venetian aristocratic family whose members in earlier centuries had included two doges.[11] The family's musical talents had emerged rather more recently; but by 1843 Gian Francesco's grandfather, Francesco Malipiero senior (1824–87), is said to have won praise from Rossini for his early opera *Giovanna di Napoli* (Padua 1842; revived in 1843 at Bologna). Two years later Francesco senior wrote an *Attila* which brought him into unintended rivalry with Verdi: the painful results of Ricordi's rather drastic response to this coincidence seem to have left lasting scars on the entire family's attitude to the operatic Establishment. Even at the very end of Gian Francesco's life this distant family crisis continued to haunt him. As he explained in a letter to Dallapiccola, dated 20 November 1970,

> From my childhood, at home, I heard people speak of Verdi as the cause of our family catastrophe. It was said that the success of my grandfather's *Attila* enraged the Ricordi publishing house because Verdi's *Attila* was a fiasco. The publisher acquired my grandfather's opera, changed its title [to *Ildegonda di Borgogna*] and prevented it from being performed. My grandfather therefore placed himself in the hands of an impresario: villa, country estates, everything was eaten up, and in my childish imagination the catastrophe was called Giuseppe Verdi.[12]

Whether this is an exact account of what really happened is less important for our present purposes than the impact the family's version of events had on Malipiero's future prejudices. Verdi's *Attila* indeed had a mixed reception when brand new, although it quickly recovered to win an early popularity which makes the word 'fiasco' seem a little exaggerated. It is also true that Francesco Malipiero senior was forced by the indifference of the publishing Establishment to make deep inroads into the family's wealth in order to get his works performed; however, his four later operas (from *Alberigo da Romano*, 1846, to *Linda d'Ispahan*, 1871), despite a handful of ephemeral local successes, seem in any case not to have fulfilled the promise that some had seen in the first two.

Luigi Malipiero (1853–1918), son of Francesco senior and father of Gian Francesco, was an able pianist and a conductor but not, it seems, a composer. Malipiero's deep reluctance ever to speak of his father in later life has left Luigi as one of the more shadowy figures in our story. We know, however, that in 1881 he married the Countess Emma Balbi, thus substantially compensating for his own father's financial recklessness. Gian Francesco, their eldest child, was born in the following year, and two younger sons also became musicians. The cellist Riccardo Malipiero (1886–1975) was to pass the family's musical talents on into a further generation, being the father of Riccardo Malipiero junior (b. 1914) who himself became prominent as a composer in the years following the Second World War. Gian Francesco's other brother Ernesto (1887–1971) was for a time a professional violinist, but in due course abandoned music for a non-musical career. Gian Francesco, too, began to learn the violin at the age of six, and kept it up for a while as his main instrument.

Luigi Malipiero's marriage to Countess Balbi did not last: the couple separated in 1893, reputedly because Luigi's parasitically spendthrift ways had antagonized the rest of the Balbi family.[13] There followed six restless and difficult years whose effect on the young Gian Francesco were so traumatic that he seems to have wanted to expunge them from the records. Unlike his brothers, instead of

remaining in Venice he embarked on a wandering life with his father and paternal grandmother, with whom he moved to Trieste, to Berlin and eventually to Vienna. Virtually our only written source of relatively concrete information about those terrible years is the first version of an important article by Henry Prunières,[14] who was a close friend of Gian Francesco around the end of the First World War, when he was evidently privileged to hear some very rare reminiscences about that troubled period of the composer's youth. (It is surely significant that in a later version of the same article most of the relevant passages were deleted, presumably at Malipiero's own request.[15]) According to Prunières, in those years the boy 'knew many painful hours, having as sole consolation the warm affection of his grandmother, who bore misfortune with much stoicism'. 'Consecutive study for the child was impossible', the article continues: 'he studied the violin without pleasure and was often obliged to play with his father in small light orchestras'.

In 1896, according to Prunières, an improvement came at least in his financial situation, thanks to the intervention of 'a rich Pole, in quest of young virtuosi whom he could launch upon their careers'. It was doubtless thanks to this benefactor that Gian Francesco was able to study for a year (1898–9) at the Vienna Conservatory – without, it seems, notable success or enthusiasm. Meanwhile an even more traumatic experience had deeply shaken him when 'his grandmother died under dramatic circumstances which left a profound impression upon his mind'. As a result of this accumulation of events, Prunières tells us that the boy 'took a great dislike to the city of Vienna, which he held responsible for all he had been forced to endure'. Eventually and predictably, in the summer of 1899 a breaking point came: the seventeen-year-old Gian Francesco left his father for good, and returned to live with his mother in his native Venice.

Because of Malipiero's own otherwise almost impervious reticence about his early years, it is understandably hard to find independent corroboration of Prunières's all-too-brief account. Within its limits, however, it seems plausible enough, and tallies remarkably with some of the psychological quirks and obsessions that notoriously characterized Malipiero in later life. Could his early hatred of Vienna have contributed to his strong preference for non-Germanic sources of musical inspiration in later life? May his unhappy memories of literally scraping a living in light orchestras have sown the seeds of those explosive denunciations of musical vulgarity which were to erupt in works such as *I corvi di San Marco*? If the (unspecified) circumstances of his grandmother's death were as dramatic as Prunières suggests, might we see there a precursor of the sudden, unsettling 'images of death' that were to appear repeatedly in his more personal stage works, from *Pantea* and *Sette canzoni* onwards?

Be all that as it may, there can surely be no doubt about the lasting importance that his return to Venice had for his future outlook: as we shall see, numerous Malipiero compositions of all kinds are explicitly related to his love of his native city, and more particularly of the city's past glories and of established Venetian traditions that remained strong at the time of his youth. On his homecoming, a new stability and security evidently entered his life, and it at last became possible for him to pursue his musical education more systematically. It was at this point that he began to study with Marco Enrico Bossi, of whose counterpoint class he became a member at the Liceo Musicale Benedetto Marcello (which many years later became the Venice Conservatory).[16] During this first period as a pupil of

Bossi, which lasted from 1900 until 1902, Malipiero's creative potential seems not yet to have been evident to his teacher, who encouraged him instead to study an instrument. Having given up hope of making his mark as a violinist (after disappointing experiences at the Conservatory in Vienna), Malipiero tried the bassoon, but seems not to have studied it for very long. Nor did he ever achieve much facility as a keyboard player.

Considerably more important than all this in the long run was an entirely extra-curricular programme of study on which he embarked in 1902: as has been mentioned, Malipiero's decision to explore the old musical manuscripts and editions preserved in the Biblioteca Marciana seems not to have come at all from his teachers. We may never know for certain who or what first put the idea into his head; but Fiamma Nicolodi's suggestion that he might have been excited by the pages about Monteverdi in D'Annunzio's controversial, characteristically empurpled novel *Il fuoco* (first published in 1900) may contain a significant grain of truth.[17] There is firm documentary evidence, at any rate, that on 28 August 1902 Malipiero consulted the Biblioteca Marciana's manuscript of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*: according to the library register in which this simple fact is recorded, he was only the second person to consult it since records of that kind began. Moreover the third person to consult it – no less a musician than Vincent d'Indy – did not arrive until November 1907.[18]

Malipiero's first attempt to transcribe the music of *L'incoronazione* seems to have been fragmentary and tentative. But he apparently also transcribed a great deal else (even though he was not destined to publish any editions of early music until after the First World War): in a letter that he wrote many years later to the critic Guido M. Gatti,[19] he mentioned among the other music that attracted his attention already at this early date 'the madrigals of Baccusi and Nasco, the organ works of Claudio Merulo and of Frescobaldi, the violin sonatas of Tartini', in addition to the writings of 'Zarlino and many other early [musical] theorists'.

Meanwhile, Bossi had left Venice in 1902, to become director of the Liceo Musicale (later Conservatory) of Bologna. Rather than remaining at the Venice Liceo Musicale, Malipiero for a time preferred to pursue his composition studies on his own. Information about what he was then writing seems to be non-existent (apart from vague references to 'sonatas and sonatinas'[20]), and the pieces in question appear not to have survived. Before long the need for a teacher reasserted itself sufficiently to induce him to follow Bossi to Bologna (evidently preferring his tuition to any then available in Venice[21]). By this time Bossi's opinion of the young man's potential seems to have gone up considerably, and Malipiero successfully gained his composition diploma in 1904. His final examination exercise was the already-mentioned *Dai Sepolcri*, the manuscript of whose original version (which presumably was used for the work's first performance) is still preserved in the library of the Bologna Conservatory.[22]

Having completed his studies at Bologna, Malipiero immediately returned to Venice, where his activities as a composer began to get into their stride. Having revised *Dai Sepolcri* in July of 1904, he proceeded, in the following year, to write another substantial orchestral tone poem which was originally to have borne the double title *Armonie della vita: Karma*, as one of its two surviving manuscripts reveals.[23] However, the title was changed (evidently at an early stage) to *Sinfonia degli eroi*, under which name the work in due course had several performances in Vienna and in Germany during 1908–9.[24] Other compositions surviving from this

time include the *Six morceaux* for piano, composed in 1905 and published as early as 1907 by the then small and fairly new Milanese publishing house Carisch & Jänichen. Until recently these unassuming little pieces were generally believed to be the earliest of Malipiero's compositions to have survived.[25]

It was apparently around 1905 that he acted for a while as amanuensis for Smareglia, who at that time was dividing his time between Venice and various places in the Veneto region. Right on into later life Malipiero seems to have regarded this as another of his really crucial early experiences: when I myself met him in May 1963[26] he spoke at length about what he claimed to have learnt (especially about orchestration) while taking down elaborately scored music to the blind composer's dictation. In retrospect he reckoned that Smareglia had taught him more valuable lessons than Bossi ever had. It should, however, be said that certain aspects of Malipiero's account of events may need to be treated with caution. Since Smareglia's penultimate completed opera *Oceàna* had already had its première in January 1903, and his last, *Abisso*, was not to appear until February 1914, one is faced with the question of exactly what music he was currently dictating. One possibility is that Malipiero was involved with the abortive *Morte dell'usignolo*, which Smareglia began to compose in 1903 but in due course abandoned after the completion of a single act.

More drastically tantalizing questions are raised by a passing remark in Ariberto Smareglia's biography of his father, which baldly states that Smareglia 'for a long time gave [Malipiero] lessons in counterpoint and orchestration, also helping him in the composition of his first successful achievements'.[27] Ariberto makes no mention at all of Malipiero working as an amanuensis! If, in truth, the young man's relationship to the blind composer was more that of a pupil than of an assistant, what were the works with which Smareglia helped him? Could he perhaps have had a hand in the *Sinfonia degli eroi*, which contains more recognizably post-Wagnerian elements than are usual in Malipiero? Or was Ariberto mistaken in his version of events? Since even the exact chronology of Malipiero's visits to Smareglia cannot now be determined, we shall probably never be sure of the answers to these questions.

It seems likely, at any rate, that his period of working with Smareglia (who had by then left Venice) was already behind him by the time he turned his attention in 1906 to the one large-scale work of these years that he never subsequently pretended to have destroyed: although, unlike the *Sinfonia degli eroi*, the *Sinfonia del mare* had to wait until 1928 before being performed, Malipiero always regarded it as his least unsatisfactory composition dating from before the first set of *Impressioni dal vero* (which did not follow until 1910–11).[28] This second of his so-called *sinfonie* – really another symphonic poem – already marks the culmination of his early prentice period, which was followed, as we shall see, by a phase of renewed uncertainty in which a further burst of restlessness in his life undoubtedly played a part.

Notes

1. He himself admitted, in a disarmingly frank passage in his book *La pietra del bando* (Ateneo, Venice, 1945; repr. by Amadeus, Montebelluna, 1990), that 'I have often told lies in order to satisfy the curiosity of those who wanted to know how, where and why my works were written. I lied because certain mysteries cannot be unveiled'. (See p. 35 in *La pietra del bando*'s 1990 edition.)

2. Among the various historical studies of Italy's transformation in the decades following unification, Denis Mack Smith's *Italy: a Modern History* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1959; 2nd edn. 1969) remains outstanding and much admired in Italy as well as in the English-speaking world. No apology seems necessary for repeated references to it in Part I of the present book.
3. For a grimly polemical but all-too-credible summary of the likely outcome if a composer tried to make his way in the Italian operatic world without the support of either firm, see for example the last few paragraphs of Tommaso Montefiore, 'Autori ed editori', in the Florentine periodical *La Nuova Musica*, Vol. XVI (1911), pp. 39–40. Claudio Sartori's *Casa Ricordi* (Ricordi, Milan, 1958) provides an informative if inevitably slightly partisan account of the changing face and policies of that powerful firm during its long history.
4. See especially Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte di Antonio Smareglia* (Mazzuconi, Lugano, 1932); also Luigi Torchi, 'Oceàna', *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, Vol. X (1902), 309–66; Vito Levi, 'Un grande operista italiano: Antonio Smareglia', *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, Vol. XXXVI (1929), 600–615; etc.
5. See especially Giuseppe Depanis, *I concerti popolari ed il Teatro Regio di Torino* (Società Tipografico-Editoriale Nazionale, Turin, 1914–15).
6. For a richly detailed survey of non-operatic Italian music in the 19th century, see Sergio Martinotti, *Ottocento strumentale italiano* (Forni, Bologna, 1972).
7. Fabio Fano's *Giuseppe Martucci* (Curci, Milan, 1950) provides a useful and illuminating, if uncompromisingly 'Crocean', introduction to this important composer's creative achievement. The first volume of Folco Perrino's substantial biography of him appeared in 1992 with the title *Giuseppe Martucci: gli anni giovanili 1856–1879* (Centro Studi Martucciani, Novara, 1992).
8. 'Contemporary Music in Italy', *The Score*, no. 15 (March 1956), p. 7. Malipiero reiterated this view in conversation with me in May 1963.
9. This was conspicuously the case when I met him in 1963.
10. Chilesotti's *Biblioteca di rarità musicali* (9 volumes, Ricordi, Milan, 1883–1915) and Torchi's *L'arte musicale in Italia* (7 volumes, Ricordi, Milan, 1897–1907) are well known examples.
11. Orio Mastropiero or Malipiero (1178–92); Pasquale Malipiero (1457–62).
12. The letter is printed in full on pp. 104–5 of *Luigi Dallapiccola: saggi, testimonianze, carteggio, biografia e bibliografia*, ed. by Fiamma Nicolodi (Suvini Zerboni, Milan, 1975).
13. Information supplied (in conversation in 1994) by Giulietta Malipiero, the composer's widow.
14. 'Le renouveau musical en Italie: G. Francesco Malipiero', *Mercure de France*, Tome CXXXIII (May–June 1919), pp. 212–30.
15. Cf. Henry Prunières, 'G. Francesco Malipiero', *La Revue Musicale*, Vol. VIII no. 3 (January 1927), pp. 5–25; repr. on pp. 40–60 of *L'opera di Gian Francesco Malipiero, saggi di scrittori italiani e stranieri con una introduzione di Guido M. Gatti, seguiti dal catalogo delle opere con annotazioni dell'autore e da ricordi e pensieri dello stesso* [hereafter referred to as *Op.M.*], ed. by Gino Scarpa (Canova, Treviso, 1952). There is evidence at several points in the composer's correspondence with Guido M. Gatti that he was profoundly annoyed with Prunières for having revealed so much about his early life in the original *Mercure de France* version of this article. However, he made no attempt to deny the essential truth of Prunières's account of events. See *Gian Francesco Malipiero: il carteggio con Guido M. Gatti 1914–1972*, ed. by Cecilia Palandri (Olschki, Florence, 1997), esp. p. 46.
16. These and other basic biographical details are tabulated in 'Cronologia della vita e delle opere', in *Op.M.*, pp. 355–63, and again (with additional details and relevant quotations) in Alberto Mantelli, 'Prospetto cronologico della vita e delle opere di Gian Francesco Malipiero', *L'Approdo Musicale*, no. 9 (January–March 1960), pp. 163–204.
17. See Fiamma Nicolodi, *Gusti e tendenze del Novecento musicale in Italia* (Sansoni, Florence, 1982), p. 119.
18. A photograph of the relevant page of the library register in question is included in *Op.M.*, facing p. 42.
19. Quoted in Alberto Mantelli, 'Prospetto cronologico...', cit., pp. 164–5.
20. See p. 355 of 'Cronologia della vita e delle opere', cit.
21. See ibid., and pp. 165–6 of 'Prospetto cronologico...', cit.
22. Cf. pp. 97–8, and n. 4 on p. 106.
23. For details see pp. 595–6 in the appendix to J.C.G. Waterhouse, 'I lavori "distrutti" di Gian Francesco Malipiero', *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana*, Vol. XIII (1979), pp. 564–602. The manuscript scores in question are now in the Malipiero archive of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice (hereafter referred to as FCiM).
24. The note to this effect on p. 268 of *Op.M.* is confirmed (though without dates) by a jotting in the composer's handwriting, added in pencil on one of the two above-mentioned surviving scores,

which simply says: 'Performed in Vienna and on tour in Germany'. In a letter to Guido M. Gatti dated 15 January 1918 (and now in FCiM), Malipiero specified that the *Sinfonia degli eroi*'s 1908 première took place at the Vienna Musikverein: see Palandri, op.cit. (cf. n. 15, above), p. 24.

25. Cf. p. 99.
26. Cf. p. xix, and nn. 8 and 9, above; also pp. 78–9.
27. Op.cit. (cf. n. 4, above), p. 59.
28. See pp. 99–100, and n. 11 on p. 106.

III

1906–14

In Italy, as in much of the rest of Europe, the years immediately prior to the First World War saw the first really strong manifestations of those new, dynamic and often disruptive forces which were to shape the 20th century, distinguishing it sharply from the 19th. Nowadays, with hindsight, it has become a commonplace to see in that period clear premonitions not only of the War itself but also of the social and political revolutions that were to erupt in turn in various parts of Europe as the century unfolded. Moreover, it is surely not too fanciful to suggest (as many have done) that the more radically-minded artists of the time were responsive at a deep level to these ominous tensions, almost as a seismograph is responsive to the approach of an imminent earthquake: thus the upsurge, shortly after the beginning of the 20th century, of turbulently new idioms in all the arts was symptomatic of the way the world was going.

In these various respects, the overall situation in Italy may, it is true, seem provincial when compared with what was happening in some other countries: it is no accident that the more adventurous Italian artists of the time (who were soon to include Malipiero) often felt the need to travel, so as to make closer contact with exciting new cultural developments elsewhere – not least in France and the German speaking world. Yet it would be wrong to suggest that Italy was without genuine avant-garde movements of its own, even if none of them were wholly unconnected with innovations north of the Alps.

The most famous avant-garde initiative launched by Italians in these years was undoubtedly the futurist movement, whose first manifesto – drawn up by the poet, writer and master-propagandist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1942) and published (significantly in Paris) in 1909[1] – advocated 'the love of danger, energy and boldness' as reflected, above all, in the more spectacularly dynamic new products of modern industry. The manifesto also, conversely, poured scorn on Italy's excessive preoccupation with her glorious heritage from a long dead past. Crude though the movement's basic philosophy may seem, few would deny that it gave rise to truly impressive results at least in the visual arts. In music it was far less fruitful (despite the intriguingly prophetic qualities of Luigi Russolo's famous 'noise-intoners', first demonstrated in Modena, Milan and Genoa in 1913–14[2]). It is hardly surprising that Malipiero had only transient, marginal connections with the futurists, and not until some years later:[3] he of all people was unlikely to sympathize with their denigration of Italy's great past, and only very seldom was he to show much responsiveness to the atmosphere and imagery of the machine age as such.[4] Yet even so, he could not be wholly

indifferent to the new sense of adventure that the movement so conspicuously embodied.

More direct and crucial in its impact on him, however, was the rather loose-knit literary and cultural movement centred on the influential periodical *La Voce*, which was founded in Florence in 1908 by Giuseppe Prezzolini (1882–1982).[5] Most of the younger, more forward-looking Italian writers of the next decade contributed to *La Voce* at one time or another, and the collective influence of the group was enormous. Moreover the periodical also published significant articles on the other arts and on general cultural and philosophical matters. Among the musicians who contributed repeatedly to *La Voce*, and were in a broad sense associated with the movement of which it was the main collective mouthpiece, the most notable were Ildebrando Pizzetti (1880–1968) and Giannotto Bastianelli (1883–1927), both of whom before long came into regular personal contact with Malipiero. Pizzetti was by then establishing himself as one of the most important and individual Italian composers of the generation to which Malipiero also belonged (the 'generazione dell'Ottanta', as it is usually called in Italy); while Bastianelli, though of only minor significance as a composer, was becoming increasingly well known as one of Italy's most perceptive, articulate and influential music critics.[6]

For a short while Bastianelli became the main ideological spokesman of an ambitious and high-minded musical pressure group, in which he, Pizzetti and Malipiero briefly joined forces with Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) and Renzo Bossi (1883–1965), son of Marco Enrico Bossi.[7] Provocatively, the group described itself as 'la lega dei Cinque' or 'i "Cinque" italiani', by explicit analogy with the famous Russian 'five'.[8] The polemical stand that the group intended to take was forcefully expounded by Bastianelli in a manifesto entitled 'Per un nuovo Risorgimento', which appeared in July 1911 in the Florentine periodical *Le Cronache Letterarie*.[9] It is worth quoting at some length from this strangely little known document, as its bearing on Malipiero's own gradually maturing creative outlook is strikingly clear and direct. The following extracts are typical of the manifesto's general tone and attitude:

> Italy may not seem worthy of any music other than that of the melodious and melodramatic opera composers of the now aging 'Giovane scuola',[10] patched up with more or less modern frills. [...] But do you not remember that in Italy [...] there once blossomed the limpid, celestial religious expression of Palestrina, [...] the chromatic profundity of Frescobaldi [...]; are you no longer aware [...] that [here] vocal polyphony, the art of the bow and the harpsichord, at least the beginnings of symphonic composition, the music dramas of Monteverdi and his great brothers, have stood on a level with the highest manifestations of poetry and painting in the history of the arts of Italy and elsewhere? No, O intelligent useless Italians: in Italy, too, great music can be written. [...] Now [our] poetry, painting and most recently philosophy have made giant strides. Therefore Italy no longer has the music that she deserves, but a music inferior to herself. It is therefore up to us, the younger generation, to respond musically to the new consciousness which is coming into being in Italy.

At a culminating point in the manifesto, Bastianelli summed up the main purpose of the 'lega dei Cinque' as being

> to bring about the resurgence of Italian music, of our true great music, which from the end of the golden 18th century until today has been, with very few exceptions, depressed and constricted by commercialism and philistinism.

Amplifying the idea of the group's supposed kinship with the great 19th-century Russian nationalists, Bastianelli declared that

> our task must be in line with that of the few heroes of Russian music, among whom flourished the Russian Homer, Modest Musorgsky – heroes who, rejecting the commercial blandishments of servile imitators of foreign musical styles, wished to create in their country a national music.

However, he was careful to emphasize that the group was no more than a free, informal association of generally like-minded young composers:

> So that our action may be more pure, we are not forming a Society in the true but vulgar sense. [...] We are [simply] friends, all animated by the same ideal [...]. We have joined together in this way because another serious defect of Italian musical life has up till now been the dispersal of its most energetic and youthful forces [...] through lack of intellectual dialogue and shared confidences.

Although the effective life of the 'lega dei Cinque' was short, its significance as an omen of things to come was clearly considerable. Here for the first (and almost the last) time Pizzetti, Malipiero and Respighi – three composers who in due course were to become recognized leading lights in the 'generazione dell'Ottanta' – were brought together voluntarily into a single group. Bastianelli's manifesto, for all its rather sweeping generalizations, put its finger firmly on an aim which these three major figures in the 'lega' all shared, and were to put into practice in their different ways in at least some of their works: the recovery, as a fundamental source of inspiration, of ideals of Italian music which had flowered in the remoter past and which these composers saw as being essentially finer and nobler than the aims of most of their immediate Italian predecessors.

Nevertheless the 'lega dei Cinque', in and of itself, achieved almost nothing beyond a parade of good intentions. Part of its problem was perhaps simply that two of the most naturally adventurous Italian composers of the time, who would doubtless have taken an active and systematic interest in the 'lega' if they had been nearer at hand, were then living outside Italy. Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) had long ago opted for more or less permanent exile, mainly in Germany: except during a short and unhappy period as a misfit director of the Bologna Liceo Musicale in 1913–14,[11] he was destined never to return to his native country except on brief visits for concert tours and the like. This did not stop him from taking a benevolent if sometimes rather guarded interest in promising new musical developments in Italy: Malipiero was not the only younger Italian composer whom he encouraged at least in passing.[12] However, Busoni's distance, both geographical and spiritual, from the current Italian musical scene had by then become too great, with the result that his direct influence on the course of events there inevitably remained marginal.[13]

Far more important as a long-term practical influence on the future development of music south of the Alps was a somewhat younger Italian composer (younger, indeed, than Malipiero) who since 1896 had been resident mainly in

Paris. Unlike Busoni, Alfredo Casella (1883–1947) was destined in due course – but not until 1915 – to return permanently to Italy, with conspicuous consequences for the modernization of Italian music about which more will be said later.[14] Suffice it to say here that in the period now under consideration Casella's continued residence in France gave him an important advantage over his compatriots who remained at home: he was able to keep in far closer touch with the most stimulating new developments in European music.[15] Consequently when Malipiero, too, paid a visit to Paris in 1913, his meeting with Casella – and a major experience arising from it – were destined, as we shall see, to transform his life.

* * *

That visit to Paris was not in fact Malipiero's first important trip abroad during these years: indeed, the whole period seems to have been dominated by an urge to widen his horizons, both in a literal and in a metaphorical sense. Already in 1906, the year in which he wrote the *Sinfonia del mare*, he spent some time in Berlin, where he took the opportunity to get to know Busoni personally (having heard him play as early as March 1902).[16] Although he seems to have reacted rather ambivalently to certain aspects of Busoni's character and lifestyle, that did not stop him, in 1908, from dedicating one of his own piano works to the great pianist-composer – the *Bizzarrie luminose dell'alba, del meriggio, della notte*. When back in Berlin for a rather longer stay during the winter of 1908–9, Malipiero wrote a short, enthusiastic introductory article about Busoni's first completed opera *Die Brautwahl* which was then still a work in progress: the article was published in the Roman periodical *Musica* on 24 January 1909.[17] There can be no doubt that Malipiero's informal contacts with Busoni in these years were much more important to him than the few of Max Bruch's classes that he attended at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik: the extreme conservatism of Bruch's tastes and approach to teaching seem quickly to have disillusioned him.[18]

Various other articles sent by Malipiero from Germany likewise show him taking an eclectic interest in the innovations of his slightly older contemporaries, rather than in longer-established styles. On 13 December 1908 *Musica* printed a news-letter from him which revealed that he had just made the acquaintance, in Berlin, of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Whether these were his first encounters with any of Debussy's works is difficult to determine: his own music written prior to that date may occasionally suggest the contrary.[19] What is quite clear is that during this later Berlin visit he was eagerly receptive even to certain styles that he was in due course forcefully to reject: his review of the world première of *Elektra*, published in *Musica* on 7 February 1909, is pervaded by an ingenuous, open-hearted excitement about Strauss's music which contrasts strangely with the damning things he was to say about the same composer only a few years later.[20] Clearly Malipiero's well known aversion to many aspects of the Austro-German musical tradition had not yet fully established itself, even if its seeds may indeed have been sown in Vienna back in the 1890s.[21]

The eclecticism of Malipiero's musical interests at this time was reflected, as we shall see,[22] in the unevenness and stylistic inconsistency that mars some of his less successful works written in these years. Yet that did not stop him from also

giving birth, in the *Poemetti lunari* for piano (1909–10) and the first set of *Impressioni dal vero* (1910–11), to his most distinctively personal musical expressions so far. His oft-repeated declaration, in later life, that 'I wish to have emerged from silence not before 1911, with the first *Impressioni dal vero*',[23] is understandable, though over-severe in its rejection of some of his better earlier pieces.

Up till this time performances of Malipiero's music had been extremely rare, in Italy as elsewhere, and the musical world at large still knew little about him. However, in 1913 he suddenly gained a certain notoriety by entering no fewer than five of his works, each under a different pseudonym, for the National Competition for Orchestral Compositions of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome (announced in 1912) – thus winning four of the five prizes and arousing considerable resentment in some of the other people involved. The prize-winning works included the *Sinfonia del mare* and the first set of *Impressioni dal vero*, as well as a new (and now lost) work for cello and orchestra entitled *Arione* (1912).[24] Furthermore, Malipiero's one-act opera *Canossa* (1911–12, to a libretto by Silvio Benco who had also written the texts for Smareglia's last three completed operas) also won a prize, in the city of Rome's National Competition for an Opera, announced in 1913. *Arione* and *Canossa* were then given, in 1913 and 1914 respectively, the only performances they ever had, with predictably disastrous results: the 'defenders of tradition' were against this opportunistic young upstart on principle, and *Canossa* in particular provoked such vociferous protests that 'the opera was condemned without having been heard'.[25]

From this time onwards Malipiero was frequently to become a centre of controversy, and his own rather prickly and at times perverse personality did little to help matters. His membership of the 'lega dei Cinque' put him firmly into the opposition where the Italian operatic Establishment of the time was concerned, and, after *Canossa*'s spectacular failure to win public approval, it was hardly surprising that Ricordi at once lost interest in the idea of publishing any of his works, despite overtures on his behalf by no less a person than Arrigo Boito.[26] By April 1914 Malipiero's attitude to the entire Italian opera 'industry' had become quite uninhibitedly hostile, as can be seen in the following passage from a letter written to the young up-and-coming conductor and composer Vittorio Gui (1885–1975):

> Our life in Italy is very difficult, and the good things we do or get done are always due to chance. There is no life outside the nauseating industry that the *coprophagous* public swallows and accepts without understanding that it is being humiliated: it is unseemly for a nation not to recognize any form of art other than one which makes us ridiculous in the eyes of the entire intelligent world. I have received newspapers from Paris which show what people think of us.[27]

It is no coincidence that by the time he wrote those vehement words Malipiero's crucial visit to Paris, which first brought him into contact with Casella, had already taken place; for Casella's attitude to the conventional Italian operatic world was every bit as hostile as his own.[28] It is therefore ironic that it was in fact an opera project that induced Malipiero to go to Paris in the first place. We know from his letters that as early as 1911 he had conceived the idea of turning D'Annunzio's controversial play *Sogno d'un tramonto d'autunno* into a

one-act opera, and had already written to the poet asking him for permission to do so.[29] By then D'Annunzio had moved to Paris (in order, it seems, to put a greater distance between himself and his various Italian creditors), and he was little inclined to respond to such a request from a composer who was still virtually unknown. In due course, after more than a year of waiting (during which he may perhaps already have jumped the gun and started work on the opera[30]), Malipiero decided to follow the poet to the French capital, with a view to broaching the subject face to face.

Malipiero arrived in Paris in January 1913, only to find that D'Annunzio was away in his retreat at Arcachon, where he repeatedly refused to let the young composer visit him.[31] Not until June did the poet return to Paris, whereupon the two at last met face to face; yet even then definite permission to set the *Sogno* was not forthcoming. Only later still did Malipiero learn from D'Annunzio's secretary Tom Antongini[32] the real reason for this persistent evasiveness: the poet (as the composer ruefully put it) 'had sold the sole right to set [the play] to music to a rich dilettante, and had not dared to confess it'.[33] Meanwhile, before receiving this clarification, Malipiero had impetuously forged ahead and completed a large part of the opera; nor was he deterred from finishing it even when he knew that the work could neither be published nor performed until his rival's copyright had expired. As he cussedly expressed it in his reply to Antongini, 'if my music is any good, it will live sooner or later'.[34] The première did indeed take place fifty years later, in an Italian radio broadcast on 4 October 1963.

Fortunately Malipiero's prolonged stay in Paris, though fruitless where its main original purpose was concerned, was certainly not a waste of time in other respects. No other city whatever was more likely, at that time, to broaden his range of musical experience drastically; and he took the opportunity to make many new personal contacts. His friendship with Casella – which began immediately when he was introduced to him in April 1913[35] – was to continue almost uninterruptedly until Casella's death. Despite their very different temperaments and musical preferences, the two quickly became 'companions in arms' in the fight to transform and modernize Italian musical life, which was to get under way in earnest as soon as Casella, too, had settled back in Italy in 1915. Meanwhile, during the period between Malipiero's return to Italy and Casella's, the two corresponded: their surviving letters from that time, although unfortunately they are all from Casella to Malipiero rather than vice versa,[36] nevertheless give us a valuable insight into their current activities and the direction of their thinking.

In later life Malipiero was repeatedly to express his deep gratitude to Casella for an enlightened tip-off given to him very shortly after their first meeting (at a time when Malipiero was evidently thinking of cutting his losses and going home empty-handed without further ado):

> In Paris, April 1913: 'Don't leave. In May we shall have the performance of Stravinsky's new ballet *Le sacre du printemps*, which will certainly mark another step forward in that direction which we must all follow for the health of the art of music'. That is what Alfredo Casella said to me when I was saying Good Bye to him, and I am grateful to him for having almost forced me to be present at the event. I am convinced, however, that I would have had to stay in any case, because certain meetings are inevitable.[37]

The impact of that astonishing première was to be one of the most decisive experiences in Malipiero's entire career: as he put it, 'I awoke from a long and dangerous lethargy on the evening of 28 May 1913, at the first performance of *Le sacre*'.[38] As a result, he soon decided to disown nearly all the compositions he had written up to that time – although, contrary to what he consistently gave the world to understand, he did not destroy most of the manuscripts.[39]

Two other, more purely personal events from these years should not go unmentioned. It was, it seems, in October 1910 that Malipiero first visited Asolo, the small and exceptionally beautiful medieval hill town (not far from Treviso) which in due course became his home for most of the latter part of his life. 'Neither San Giminiano, nor Siena, nor Volterra', he later wrote, 'captivated me as did Asolo, which from that day dominated me and made me her slave'.[40] In responding like this he had, of course, illustrious predecessors, including both Robert Browning and Eleonora Duse.[41] The other important personal event of 1910 was less happy, but also less lasting in its after-effects. It was likewise in October of that year that he married Maria Rosa, daughter of the painter Luigi Rosa. This first marriage is another of those darker areas in Malipiero's life story of which he was profoundly reluctant to speak after it was over. In the absence of more detailed information, suffice it to say here that although he himself may not always have been blameless, Maria's infidelities evidently wounded him deeply. She died in 1921, soon after giving birth to a child that was not his.[42]

Notes

1. In *Le Figaro* on 20 February. For an English translation (by R.W. Flint) of this pugnaciously subversive document, see *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Umbro Apollonio (Thames and Hudson, London, 1973), pp. 19–24.
2. The fullest (though not always most accurate) account of this naive but undoubtedly inventive aspect of the futurist movement is G.F. Maffina's *Luigi Russolo e l'arte dei rumori* (Martano, Turin, 1978).
3. See pp. 28 and 126.
4. See, however, pp. 178 and 320–22.
5. During its eight years of existence, *La Voce* not only acted as a rallying point for various new, restlessly exploratory creative trends, but it also increased the Italians' awareness of major literary innovators in other countries, from Rimbaud and Mallarmé to Ibsen and the great Russian novelists.
6. The most famous and influential of Bastianelli's several books is the extraordinary and perennially fascinating *La crisi musicale europea* (Pagnini, Pistoia, 1912; new edition [with introduction by Gianandrea Gavazzeni], Vallecchi, Florence, 1976). As recently as 1971 the leading critic Fedele d'Amico described *La crisi* as 'one of the finest books on music ever written in Italy'.
7. Significant excerpts from correspondence dating from 1910–12 and relating in various ways to the group have been published on pp. 7–13 of the catalogue (ed. by Fiamma Nicolodi) of the exhibition *Musica italiana del primo Novecento: la generazione dell'Ottanta* (Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 9 May–14 June 1980).
8. See also the unsigned note 'I cinque italiani' in *La Nuova Musica*, Vol. XVI (1911), pp. 71–2.
9. Vol. II no. 63 (2 July 1911), p. 3.
10. A widely used general term for the successful Italian opera composers of Puccini's generation (cf. p. 5).
11. See Edward Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: a Biography* (Oxford University Press, London, 1933; repr. Eulenburg, London, 1974), pp. 205–25.
12. See especially Fiamma Nicolodi, 'Equivoci del nazionalismo musicale: Ferruccio Busoni e i giovani musicisti italiani del suo tempo', in her *Gusti e tendenze...*, cit. (cf. n. 17 on p. 11), pp. 205–62.
13. Only after his death did a later generation of Italians – notably Luigi Dallapiccola – respond really significantly and lastingly to Busoni's creative example.

14. See especially pp. 23–5.
15. For Casella's own full personal account of this crucial pre-war phase of his musical experience, see the earlier chapters in his autobiography *I segreti della giara* (Sansoni, Florence, 1941; English trans., as *Music in my Time*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1955).
16. See Nicolodi, 'Equivoci...', cit. (cf. n. 12, above) and also Sergio Sablich, 'Malipiero e Busoni: un incontro personale e fra concezioni del teatro', in *G.F. Malipiero e le nuove forme della musica europea* [=*Quaderni di Musica/Realtà*, no. 3], ed. by Luigi Pestalozza (Unicopli, Milan, 1984), pp. 150–63.
17. Cf. pp. 213–4 of Nicolodi, 'Equivoci...', and p. 152 of Sablich, op. cit.
18. See especially Malipiero's own note dated 25 May 1932 and published in *La pietra del bando*, cit. (cf. n. 1 on p. 10), p. 89 in the 1990 edition; the same note also appears on p. 316 in *Op.M.* (cf. n. 15 on p. 11), which also includes many other passages from *La pietra*, with or without revisions.
19. When I met him in 1963 Malipiero at first claimed that he was still totally ignorant of Debussy's music even as late as 1909; but he declared himself 'imbarazzato' when I pointed out some seemingly Debussian whole-tone progressions in the *Sinfonia del mare* of 1906.
20. For example, on p. 101 of the second instalment of his article 'Orchestra e orchestrazione' – in the *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, Vol. XXIII (1916), pp. 559–69 and Vol. XXIV (1917), pp. 89–120 – Malipiero defiantly declares that 'the work of Richard Strauss is a rehash of stale old rubbish and is sustained above all by *instrumental surprises* skilfully and forcefully used to distract one's attention away from the commonplace material'. The passage is slightly mistranslated by Eric Blom on p. 24 of his highly readable English version of Malipiero's article, published in pamphlet form as *The Orchestra* (J.& W. Chester, London, 1921).
21. As already suggested on p. 8.
22. Cf. especially pp. 100–102.
23. See his letter to Gino Scarpa dated 26 August 1952 and printed on pp. 351–2 of *Op.M.*
24. See also p. 109 and n. 17 on p. 116.
25. See p. 45 of the version printed in *Op.M.* of Henry Prunières's important article 'G. Francesco Malipiero', cit. (cf. n. 15 on p. 11).
26. Part of the letter in which Boito broke the disappointing news to Malipiero is printed on p. 172 of Alberto Mantelli, 'Prospetto cronologico...', cit. (see n. 16 on p. 11).
27. For a fuller quotation from this venomous letter, see p. 21 of Fiamma Nicolodi's catalogue for the exhibition *Musica italiana del primo Novecento...*, cit. (cf. n. 7, above).
28. In the summer of 1913 Casella caused a considerable fracas with an article 'L'avenir musical de l'Italie' (published in the newspaper *L'homme libre* on 8 September), in which he claimed that Italian music had been in eclipse since the 18th century and that young Italian composers should learn from French examples. In later life Casella repudiated many of the views expressed in that notorious polemic: concerning his drastically changed opinions about Verdi in particular, see pp. 153–6 of his autobiography *I segreti della giara*, cit. (=pp. 113–6 of *Music in my Time*, cit.: see n. 15, above).
29. The letter in question – dated 11 June 1911 – is quoted (evidently in full) on p. 10 of Fiamma Nicolodi's catalogue for the exhibition *Musica italiana del primo Novecento...*, cit. (cf. n. 7, above), where it is followed by excerpts from a related letter from Pizzetti to Malipiero, dated 30 July 1911.
30. In his above-mentioned letter of 11 June 1911, Malipiero refers to an 'undeveloped sketch' ['informe abozzo'] that he claims already to have made for some of the music for the opera.
31. See especially Rubens Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica* (La Nuova Italia, Scandicci [near Florence], 1988), pp. 110–14; also Malipiero's own accounts of what happened, in *Op.M.*, pp. 189 and 294–6.
32. See p. 112 of Tedeschi, op. cit.
33. From a note, dated 1952, in *Op.M.*, p. 189. The 'rich dilettante' in question was in fact a certain R. Torre Alfina, not (as wrongly stated by Tedeschi) 'madame Germaine Corbin'. A privately printed vocal score of Torre Alfina's version is preserved in FCiM. Cf. p. 276 of my own mostly favourable review of Tedeschi's book, in *Music and Letters*, Vol. LXXI (1990), pp. 274–7.
34. Quoted by Antongini in his massive volume of reminiscences *Vita segreta di Gabriele d'Annunzio* (Mondadori, Milan, 1938), pp. 492–3, and thence in Tedeschi, op. cit., p. 112. It should be added that Malipiero's correspondence with Guido M. Gatti reveals that as late as 1921 he was still involved in negotiations with D'Annunzio in the hope of after all releasing *Sogno d'un tramonto d'autunno* from its enforced silence: see Palandri, op. cit. (cf. n. 15 on p. 11), pp. 98, 100, 102–3.
35. See the opening paragraph of G.F. Malipiero, 'Così mi scriveva Alfredo Casella (1913–1946)', *L'Approdo Musicale*, no. 1 (January–March 1958), pp. 20–53.

36. The Fondazione Cini's huge Casella archive contains no letters from Malipiero dating from earlier than 1921: see p. 507 in Vol. I of the *Catalogo critico del fondo Alfredo Casella*, ed. by Francesca Romana Conti and Mila de Santis (Olschki, Florence, 1992).
37. See *Op.M.*, pp. 346–7.
38. Ibid, p. 349.
39. See pp. 92, 97, etc. in the present book, and also J.C.G. Waterhouse, 'I lavori "distrutti" di Gian Francesco Malipiero', cit. (cf. n. 23 on p. 11), which includes a substantial appendix giving full details of the rediscovered manuscripts.
40. See *La pietra del bando*, cit. (cf. n. 1 on p. 10), p. 66 in the 1990 edition; also p. 303 in *Op.M.*
41. Browning's enduring love for Asolo is reflected in the whimsical title of his last published collection of poems – *Asolando*, which appeared on the day of his death in 1889.
42. See also pp. 26 and 28, in the next chapter.

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IV

1914–22

The story of the rather muddled and changeable yet at times flamboyant part that Italy played in the First World War, and of the resulting confusion and instability in the immediately post-war period which directly paved the way for the rise of fascism, has often been told, and nowhere more trenchantly than in Denis Mack Smith's now classic *Italy: a Modern History*.[1] At first there was much disagreement not only about whether the country should enter the war at all, but even about the side on which she should fight if she did. Despite vehement sabre-rattling by the interventionists (among whom D'Annunzio and Marinetti were conspicuous), neutrality was maintained until early in 1915, when contradictory steps were taken in opposing directions: as a result, for one week Italy managed to be allied to both sides simultaneously.[2] Eventually, however, in May 1915, war was declared against Austria, though not against Germany until August of the following year.

Ostensibly Italy's war experience was to culminate in a triumph, with the victory of Vittorio Veneto and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which made possible the annexation of the Trentino, the Alto Adige, Trieste and the Istrian peninsula. However, before that point was reached, the Italian army suffered severe losses and reversals – none of them more dramatic than the notorious Retreat of Caporetto at the end of October 1917, when 'seven hundred thousand men had to fall back so suddenly for a hundred miles [that] on the River Tagliamento there were not enough bridges to carry them'.[3] The impact of this catastrophic breakdown of military morale on the non-combatant Malipiero (who happened to be in Asolo at the time) was, as we shall see, devastating.

Although many artists – not least D'Annunzio and several of the futurists – chose to volunteer immediately for active service, cultural life was less severely handicapped by war conditions than might have been expected. It was indeed in the midst of the war years that the urge to reform and modernize Italian musical life – which before 1914 had been an unfulfilled major aspiration both of the 'lega dei Cinque' and, in a different way, of Busoni[4] – began to achieve really substantial results. The crucial turning point came with the return to Italy in 1915 of Casella, after almost nineteen years of residence in France during which (as we have noted) he was in frequent contact with some of the most adventurous musical trends of the time.[5]

After so many years of living abroad, Casella – like Busoni two years earlier – could not fail to be acutely aware of the provincialism of the Italian musical environment to which he had now returned. Yet whereas Busoni, after a few months