

# HOLDING THE MIRROR UP TO LEONCAVALLO

### "Pagliacci's" Author Soliloquizes on Himself and His Works in an Interval of a Six-Weeks' Trip to San Francisco—Regrets That but One of His Ten Operas Is Familiar to Americans—Opinions of Contemporary Musical Tendencies Delivered in a Hurried Visit to New York—New Operas He 'Is Working On



OMEHOW or other it does not seem natural that a personage of eminence and distinction should find his way into New York without having the tidings of his advent blazoned forth in the daily prints. Somehow or other that seemingly impossible phenomenon has strangely come about. At this moment Ruggiero Leoncavallo, composer of the perennially popular "Pagliacci," coequal with Mascagni (and no one else) as a propulsive potentiality of Italian operatic veritism, is peacefully inhabiting San Francisco. A bare week ago he adorned New York with his presence for two entire days, yet scarcely any one appears to have been apprised of the circumstance. He had arrived, big as life, on the *Oceanic*, and took up a brief abode at the Astor. None the less the dynamics of publicity never exceeded a *pianissimo*. One journal printed a brief notice of his arrival and that constituted practically the sum and substance of the matter.

Possibly the composer of "Ridi Pagliaccio" wanted to avoid obstreperous acclamation. If so, he succeeded rarely. It is scarcely credible that under any other conditions the populace would not have endeavored in some way to pay more intimate respects to him who had created the music of its best-loved talking-machine record.

Leoncavallo's rotundity makes him appear in his portraits taller than he actually is. His real height scarcely exceeds five feet five. In all other respects his pictures do him complete justice. His hair curiously suggests Nahian Franko's in its unequal commingling of black and white. His mustache rears itself at angles that make it seem a first cousin of the Kaiser's. Casual inspection will disclose the interesting fact that it is tricolored—black, white and reddish. Portly though Leoncavallo is he shuns chairs proportioned to his dimensions, and during his talk with a representative of *MUSICAL AMERICA* he maintained himself valiantly upon one that struck the observer as perilously small.

Genial is the term that most appositely pertains to the personality of the expansive Ruggiero. He radiates good nature and *bonhomie*. On occasion he is almost naïve, while satisfaction bubbles up within him, and illumines his face with smiles when he meditates upon his achievements and the effect they have had upon the popular mind. Whether or not one is disposed to esteem his works as highly as he himself values them it is impossible not to react in some fashion to the warmth of his good nature. And he adds volubility to his other assets of personality. His conversation (in a far better French than is usually at the command of an Italian) was a monologue delivered with due Italian effervescence and characteristic stress of emphasis. Though his train for the West left in two hours he had no objection in the world to talking about questions of art. He was happy, very happy, for had not a cablegram from his dear wife, Bertha, just reached him telling him of the success of his opera "Zingari" in Florence, a city that had never heard it before? The visitor was greeted with fluent cordiality.

Here Only Six Weeks

"So happy am I to be here," he exclaimed when the object of his visit was mentioned, "that it grieves me to have to leave after only six weeks or so. In San Francisco I shall conduct several of my operas—"Pagliacci," "Zingari," "Zaza." Also 'Aida' for the unveiling of the Verdi monument. Ah! but I should like to stay longer and to see the presentation of others of my works in America. It is really not fair that only one of them should be heard in so many places. Is it not a pity that there are opera houses over which a publisher exercises so powerful an influence that the operas of one particular composer are constantly

exploited and those of another barred? Mr. Puccini's works are always heard. Naturally I am not in the least objecting to this, for they are thoroughly worthy of that honor. But it is the idea of restraining others that I find unjust. My operas I am sure would be well received. Think of the successes I have enjoyed and the esteem I have been held in in so many music

#### SAYS LEONCAVALLO:

"ITALY has been the teacher of the world in music, and it still has much to impart.

"My operas (other than 'Pagliacci') I am sure would be well received in America. Think of the esteem I have been held in in so many music centers of Europe!

"I am very fond of 'Zingari'; it has been called the sister of 'Pagliacci.'

"Strauss and Debussy will not last because they are not natural and sincere.

"I hold it a greater and more difficult accomplishment to have written 'La Donna è Mobile' than to have composed 'Salomé.'

"The public is the final arbiter in questions of art and the public is right.

"I can treat operatically only such themes as are vital and natural. It would not be possible for me to write music for fishes that sing and Valkyries that fly through the air.

"To contend that a musical genius cannot arise in America is ridiculous; a genius could suddenly appear in the midst of the Sahara."

centers of Europe! Think of 'Zingari'! Think that the Emperor of Germany selected me above the innumerable German composers to write a work for his Royal Opera House! Think that, despite all the harsh criticism and ill-will with which it



Photo by Underwood & Underwood.

Ruggiero Leoncavallo, Who Is Making a Six Weeks' Stay in America for the Purpose of Conducting Three of His Operas in San Francisco—Photographed in His Hotel for "Musical America" During His Brief and Unheralded Visit to New York

on a good American play if I could find such a one. But were I to write an American work I should collaborate only with an American."

A question as to his possible preference

only had it for a month, though, and have not yet started work on it. Ah! but when it is done—!

"The 'Camicia Rossa' upon which I was engaged? That opera," he said, lowering his voice as though the import of his statement were fraught with the gravest mystery, "I never completed. I was advised not to by many important persons. It dealt with the Irredentists, you see, and there was danger that it might arouse political feeling at an inopportune moment. Ah! I put that work aside quietly and I say nothing more about it."

#### His Own Librettist

In one thing, at any rate, Leoncavallo suggests Richard Wagner. He writes his own librettos—at least he has written most of them. In answer to a query as to the why and wherefore of the procedure, as to whether it sprang from sheer love of literary work or the express conviction that the best operas result from the incarnation of librettist and composer in a single individual he answered that "most librettists in Italy are journalists"; and further intimated that journalists were not the most pleasant of persons to cooperate with—at least when it came to turning out operas. But apparently the subject was more or less painful to him. He disposed of it with celerity.

Composers often go notoriously awry in their valuation of the works of their colleagues. Nevertheless their opinions continue to be eagerly sought; one likes to know them if only to disagree with them. One need not be argumentatively inclined to find oneself at loggerheads with Signor Leoncavallo's notions. But at all events his beliefs and contentions are delivered in the best of faith.

"Sir," he began when the matter of contemporary tendencies and composers was broached. "I have always been and I always shall remain Italian. Italy has been the teacher of the world in music and it still has much to impart. In the early days Germany, France and other nations have learned from my nation. Only in the course of time did they evolve characteristic features of their own. Mozart came to Italy and studied. Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn—they and no end

Handwritten musical notation for the phrase "Canto not-tur-wo!" from the opera "Zingari". The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a tempo marking of "Andant<sup>ius</sup>". Below the notation is a note: "Pet giornale 'Musical America' Souvenir sympathique de R. Leoncavallo New York - 17. octobre, 1913".

A Phrase from Leoncavallo's New Opera, "Zingari," in the Maestro's Own Hand

was met, 'Roland of Berlin' has already been sung between sixty and seventy times. In Paris there are numberless French composers clamoring for and receiving hearings. And what does the public prefer, what receives the widest attention? Italian works, mine included. They love me and treat me like a god in Vienna. I was lionized at the Opera there one evening when I was coming down the stairs after a performance of 'Lohengrin.' Does it not seem unfair in the face of all this, that only one of my ten operas can be given a hearing in this part of the world? Oh! I should so very much like to introduce the others myself. I should even like to stay here and write an American opera—base it

for any one of his operas brought a bland smile to the face of the composer. "That I cannot tell you," he said presently; "a father cannot say which of his children he prefers and my works are my children. I am very fond of 'Zingari.' It has been called the sister of 'Pagliacci,'" he added proudly. "I am a hard worker. In twenty years I have composed some ten operas. My 'Medici' trilogy is still to be completed—'Savonarola' and 'Cesare Borgia' are unfinished. But the others—'Pagliacci,' 'Bohème,' 'Zaza,' 'Roland of Berlin,' 'Malbrück,' 'Rose Queen,' 'Zingari,' 'I Medici.' Now I'm about to begin a new one, 'Ave Maria.' The libretto is Illica's—anything more beautiful I have never read. I have