

# Music's Future Belongs to the Extremists, Declares Alfredo Casella

Italian Modernist Says War Has Conferred a Greatly Exaggerated Importance on Musical Nationalism—"Beauty Knows No Country," He Asserts—A Sketch of the Life of a Significant Musician of To-day and His Achievements as a Composer, Pianist, Conductor and Critic

By YVONNE A. LUMLEY

WALTER DAMROSCH, in presenting "Pagine di Guerra" a few weeks ago, with splendid understanding and great mastery, not only proved once more his excellent judgment and taste, but made New York music-lovers realize the existence of Alfredo Casella, an artist hitherto known only to the American musical élite, among whom MUSICAL AMERICA'S readers must be counted, since he has been correspondent for the paper for two years past.

This significant figure in the modern musical situation was born in Turin, in July, 1883, of a family of musicians. His father was an excellent 'cellist and professor at the Liceo Musicale of Turin; his mother was an accomplished pianist, pupil of Carlo Rossaro; and his ancestors had nearly all been 'cellists.

At the age of four Casella started to study the piano under the guidance of his mother, but this musical preoccupation did not keep him from following his other inclinations; for instance, he was always passionately fond of electricity and chemistry, and worked with so much perseverance at these studies that Galileo Ferraris, a friend of his father's, insisted that he devote himself seriously to science.

In 1895, on the advice of Giuseppe Martucci, Casella gave up all else to dedicate himself entirely to music, and took up the study of harmony with Cranero. In 1896, Louis Diémer, the noted professor of the Conservatoire National of Paris, having heard Casella play in various concerts and much impressed with his extraordinary talent, invited him to become a pupil at his school. There Casella took first prize in piano and in harmony at the age of fifteen, and remained another year to study composition with Gabriel Fauré.

At last, freeing himself of the influence of any one school, he entered on an independent career with astounding energy. Within a few years he had visited nearly all the European countries, appearing in something like 200 concerts, and in the course of this work met practically all the musical celebrities of Europe. He conducted many of the leading orchestras—Colonne, Lamoureux, Monteux, Amsterdam Philharmonic among them. He visited Yasnya Polyana, the home of Tolstoy, with the Société des Instruments Anciens, and played the harpsichord to the great delight of the Russian philosopher.

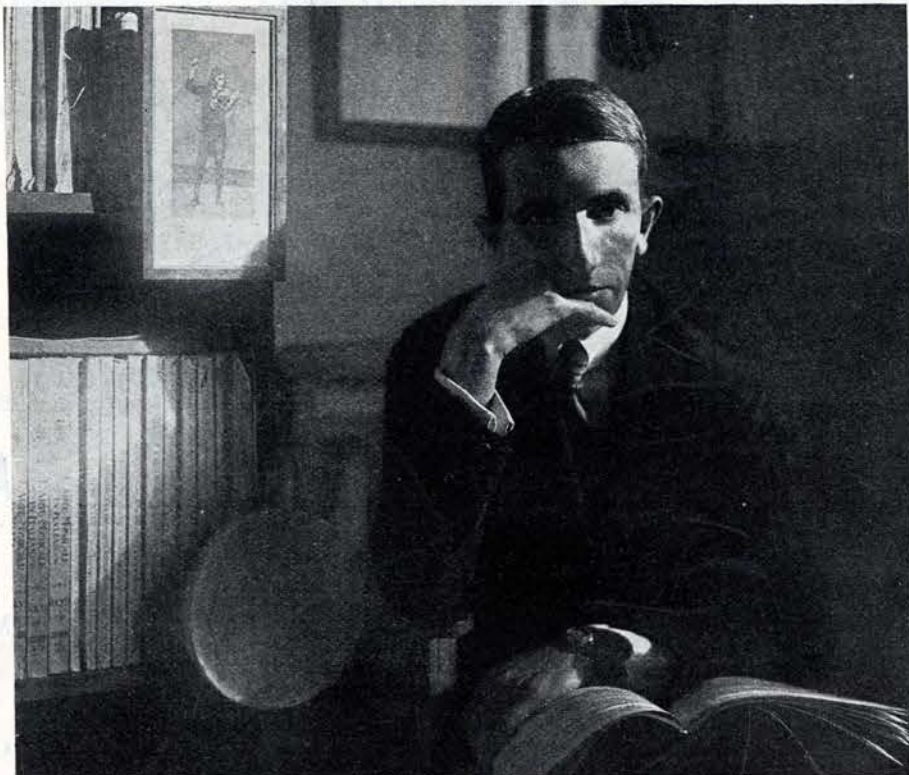
These activities as pianist and conductor did not divert him from his main interest in composition, from writing most interesting critical articles for Clémenceau's paper, "L'Homme Libre," and for many other reviews in various countries. At the same time he was teaching a class of advanced pupils of piano at the Paris Conservatoire and had many private pupils.

In 1914-15, Casella gave several piano recitals in his native land and made such an impression with them that he was immediately offered position as professor of piano at the Liceo Santa Cecilia, Rome, left vacant by the death of Giovanni Sgambati. On accepting this honor Casella left Paris to make Rome the center of his activities. He has done much there to stimulate in Italy, as well as in France, England and America, an interest in the works of the young Italians, hitherto almost unheard of.

The existence of the Società Italiana di Musica Moderna ("S. I. M. M.") is due to Casella's efforts. With the backing of his government he was able to organize splendid concerts in many European cities, despite the war and the many resultant complications. He has also been delegated to lecture in Paris and London on the modern Italian musical situation. "Ars Nova," the monthly organ of the

inspired by cinematographic views of the war, originally written as a four-handed piano number, but later transcribed for orchestra. This is the work lately produced and received with great enthusiasm.

"La Notte di Maggio," a poem for voice and orchestra on the lines of Carducci, is another significant Casella composition. Its orchestral material is sup-



Alfredo Casella, Distinguished Italian Composer, Pianist, Conductor and Critic

S. I. M. M.—a most advanced publication on art in general and music in particular—is widely read all over Europe.

### "Future Belongs to Extremists"

A few of his ideas here given will go to prove the sincerity and the broad-mindedness of this "independent" artist. "We already know that in art, as in politics, the future belongs to the extreme parties."

Casella has often been accused by his enemies at home of not being altogether Italian in his works. In his opinion, "the war has conferred a greatly exaggerated importance on the problem of musical nationalism." He further says: "The only *raison d'être* of a work of art is to be new—that is, different from those that have preceded it—and beautiful; that is, realizing a perfect harmony of sensations, of images, or of forms.

"For there is no art without novelty. And tradition means perpetual evolution of beauty through the personal sensibility of the different artists and not a sterile imitation of the past. If a work of art appears genuinely new and beautiful, it is secondary that it should be more or less national. Beauty knows no Country nor Religion."

Although still quite young Casella has a large number of compositions to his credit. Among his principal orchestral works are two symphonies, a "Suite in Do Maggiore"; "Italia," a characteristic rhapsody; "Le Couvent sur l'Eau," a theoregraphic comedy based on the theme of a charming early eighteenth-century Venetian story of the French poet, Jean Louis Vandoyer; "Elegia Eroica," an important work in commemoration of the men who have given their lives for Italy in the war; and the "Pagine di Guerra,"

ple and vaporous, yet has a distinct outline, although the declamatory phrase is closely molded by a flexible and sinuous melodic line of canto. New York will very shortly have a chance to appreciate the musical value of "La Notte" when it is performed by the New Symphony Orchestra. Balakireff's Oriental fantasy, "Islamey," has been brilliantly orchestrated by Casella, who has also set several Schubert marches for orchestra.

For the piano Casella has written a "Pavana," "Variations on a Ciacona," a Toccata, a "Berceuse Triste," "Barcarolle," a Sarabande, "Nove Pezzi" (nine short pieces, remarkable for their variety of rhythm), a Sonatina and "Notte Alta," the last-named an inspired tone-poem which Leo Ornstein will soon interpret for the American public.

The humorous and often satirical side of Casella's character is shown in his "Pupazetti," five easy pieces for four hands, supposed to accompany an action of puppets, and comprising a Marcietta, Berceuse, Serenata, Notturmo, Polka and "A la manière de," very clever imitations of various composers. These pieces appeared in two groups, of which the second was written in collaboration with Maurice Ravel.

Most interesting are Casella's five pieces composed for the pianola. In these the writing is so complicated as to be only playable on the mechanical piano, and brings forth in their integrity all the sonorous possibilities of the instrument. Here we have more evidence of Casella's scientifically constructive mind.

To the literature for other instruments Casella has contributed a 'cello sonata, dedicated to and several times played by Pablo Casals, once in New York a couple of years ago, and a "Siciliana e Bur-

lesca," written originally for nute as a *morceau de concours* of the Conservatoire in 1914, and later arranged for trio. He has also a number of songs to his credit. Of these, the most important and the most significant are "Pianto Antico" and "Il bove," setting of Carducci poems, and "L'Adieu à la Vie," four settings of Tagore's "Gitanjali" poems, translated into French by André Gide.

Alfredo Casella is, beyond a doubt, one of the most representative young composers of our epoch; his plastic construction, his surety of line and the dynamic quality of his rhythms make of him one of the masters of musical thought and expression. Even though the abstract form of his message to the world may not be understood and therefore not appreciated by the stubborn conservatoire, his art as a pianist alone would suffice to make him stand out as a most prominent and interesting figure among the great musicians of the day.

## SAN CARLO FORCES IN DENVER

Six Performances Draw Large Audiences During Week's Engagement

DENVER, COL., March 24.—The San Carlo Grand Opera Company gave six very successful performances here last week, the repertoire comprising "Aida," "Butterfly," "Lucia," "Secret of Suzanne," "Pagliacci," "Marta" and "Trovatore." The favorable impression created here by the San Carlo company in its shorter visits during preceding seasons bore fruit in a sustained patronage throughout the week. Hundreds who applied for tickets were turned away from the "Butterfly" performance, which was given as a number in the Slack Subscription Series. Among the principals of the company, conspicuous individual successes were won by Elizabeth Amsden, who sang the rôle of *Aida* splendidly and later proved her versatility by a light and vivacious portrayal of *Suzanne*; by Queena Mario, whose true, colorful voice was heard with equal delight in the parts both of *Lucia* and *Marta*; by Salazar, who redeemed his uneven singing as *Rhadames* by a thrilling performance as *Canio* in "Pagliacci"; by Doria Fernanda, whose rich contralto lent interest to the presentation of "Butterfly," in which she was the *Suzuki*, and who later scored brilliantly as *Azucena*, and by Haru Onuki, who rarely sang in time, but nevertheless won the enthusiastic plaudits of the audience by her impersonation of *Cio-Cio-San*. Antola's *Tonio* in "Pagliacci" was also a performance of outstanding excellence. To such isolated communities as our own, where metropolitan opera productions are not available, the annual visit of the San Carlo company is a veritable blessing.

J. C. W.

## APPLAUDS OPERA IN SCHOOL

"Trovatore" Draws Biggest Audience in Hunter College Series

"Trovatore" brought out the fullest attendance that has yet appeared at the Hunter College evening session opera course. The pleasure of taking a cultural course in opera has appealed with great force to a large number who registered for the course as they would for French, German, mathematics, science or any other study. Not a night has been missed in either term by hundreds who come with their scores and follow, pencil in hand, the readings of the artists who take part. The "Trovatore" evening, March 20, offered Lila Robeson in the rôle of *Azucena*. Long before the hour for opening the auditorium was completely filled with an audience that represented every borough of the city and many out-of-town places. Miss Robeson's impersonation of the gypsy was filled with dramatic intensity and emotional force.

The rôle of *Leonora* was in the hands of Agnes Robinson, who delivered both of the arias and the aged prison scene with commendable taste and brilliance. Ernest Davis represented *Manrico* with dignity. His attractive voice made a telling effect in the "Di quella pira" aria and also in the trio of the last act. Pierre Remington's *Fernando* added much to the general excellence of the performance, and so also did Mr. Robert's *Count*.

Arrangements have been made to continue these operatic evenings next year in all the boroughs, thus giving singers an opportunity to get experience in singing the rôles of the standard operas. This can be done without expense to those who lack both means and opportunity to acquire the traditions of Italian, French and German opera.

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