

La Critica musicale (1918-1923)

La Critica musicale [CMU] began publication in January 1918. It is presented to the readers in an unpretentious, almost austere guise: in small format, without illustrations, and with an index of its contents printed on the front cover of each fascicle. Its structure is simple, featuring short monographic essays. Some of the essays are continued in successive fascicles. The periodical is issued in monthly installments, and each fascicle is priced one Lira.

The place of publication is Florence, a city renowned for its cultivation of philological-historical studies and for its glorious literary tradition. Perhaps it is not accidental that between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries various periodicals are flourishing there such as *Il Marzocco*, *La Voce* directed by Giuseppe Prezzolini, *Lacerba* directed by Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici.¹

The director *La Critica musicale* is Luigi Parigi (1883-1955), a young Florentine intellectual. His prose is vibrant, intensive, conceptual and at times characterized by piercing humour. In the opening pages of the first fascicle he outlines the aims of the periodical: it intends to be a useful cultural tool. He believed that artistic creation must be preceded by reflection and meditation: this is the strategy to follow and pursue for the advancement of artistic production. During this period Italian musical life was undergoing a phase of particular ferment, aiming to renew itself. It was deemed necessary to overcome the operatic tradition inherited from the nineteenth century, considered to be the cause of extreme cultural impoverishment. The principal aim of the new artistic trend is to give birth to a “musical renaissance.”² In the opening pages of the second year of publication—January 1919—the editor reaffirms his intent to enhance culture and to place emphasis on intellectual thinking. In order to prevent the collapse of the idealistic philosophy, he believes it necessary, to refute the empirical method of thinking. Such statements attest to the strong influence of the idealistic philosophy of Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), which at the time received wide attention from Italian intellectuals.³ The periodical thus gives particular emphasis to contemporary musical events, while marginal attention is paid to historical topics.⁴

In 1918 Parigi signs a series of essays titled “Il momento musicale italiano”⁵ in which he states that music constitutes the utmost point of the national soul and that music can serve to overcome the soul’s state of weakness with regard to other artistic expressions. We must not lose sight of the fact that Croce’s *Estetica* (1902) —the groundwork of Italian cultural renaissance — assigns a marginal role to music. It is thus necessary to establish a link between the various efforts aiming at cultural renewal. In the second essay Parigi deals with Pizzetti, whom he considers as the most important exponent of the new Italian renaissance.

¹ Giorgio Pestelli, *La “generazione dell’Ottanta” e la resistibile ascesa della musicologia italiana*, in *Musica italiana del primo Novecento. “La generazione dell’Ottanta”*, ed. F. Nicolodi (Florence: Leo S. Olschki editore, 1981), 31-44; Guido Salvetti, *La nascita del Novecento* (Turin: EDT, 1991), 291-94 (“Storia della musica”, X).

² Luigi Parigi, *Lettore*, CMU I, 1-2 (Jan.-Feb 1918), 1-3.

³ Pestelli, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁴ Parigi, *Illustrazione*, CMU, II, 1 (Jan. 1919), 1-5.

⁵ These articles form part of a volume titled *Il momento musicale italiano*, published in Florence by Vallecchi Editore in 1921. In the rubric *La musica e il libro* Parigi points out to the torturous experience he encountered when the book was going to the press.

Parigi instead criticizes the Augusteo Concert Hall⁶ in Rome for the excessive presence in its repertory of German instrumental music. In order to promote Italian instrumental music Parigi maintains that it would be ideal to organize small chamber music ensembles, without neglecting vocal polyphony.

Particular emphasis is given to contemporary music in a series of articles by Guido Maggiorino Gatti (1892-1973) that appeared in *La Critica musicale* of 1919-1920. Gian Francesco Malipiero is among the first Italian composers to be brought to the readers' attention since he is considered a point of reference within the process of musical renewal. He is the *homo novus* able to give character to his compositions by a well-defined musical structure. Next follows Alfredo Casella, a musical personality looking forward, amongst others, to the newest vanguard movement. The young Florentine composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco is seemingly quite original, as is Luigi Perrachio a rather reserved, self-taught musician. His music is almost metaphysical in character. Francesco Balilla Pratella, on the other hand—a declared futurist—puts emphasis on melodies of a popular character.⁷ Gatti also presents vivid sketches of the musical styles of Franco Alfano, Vittorio Gui, and Riccardo Pick-Mangiagalli. Attention is also reserved for foreign composers. Gatti introduces the readers of *La Critica musicale* to various relevant musical exponents active, at that time, on an international level: Eugène Goossens, Gabriel-Marie Grovlez, John Nicholson Ireland, and Ernest Bloch. Of particular interest is Gatti's essay on Claude Debussy.⁸ Considered an authentically French musician, and for certain aspects a traditionalist, Debussy is most original in his harmonic language: he treats chords as compact units that seemingly relate only to one another; he constantly places emphasis on suggestive sensations.

From 1918 to 1922 Fausto Torrefranca (1883-1955) contributes a series of essays concerning Italian conservatories of music entitled “L'ordinamento scolastico-musicale,” in which he traces the history and the organizational peculiarities of the most important musical institutions in Italy: the Neapolitan and Venetian conservatories, and the music schools of Florence and Milan. It is a sort of a critical reflection on the state of music education in Italy.

The topic is of major interest and in effect it becomes a hot issue when the periodical publishes in February 1919 an article by Attilio Brugnoli titled “Per una università musicale.”⁹ It argues against the project proposed by Giacomo Orefice in the *Rivista musicale italiana*.¹⁰ The debate between Brugnoli and Orefice is continued in the successive issues of *La Critica musicale*. In March 1920 Pizzetti publishes a commentary on the reorganization of musical institutes.¹¹ In the Summer of 1920 Parigi joins in the debate by pointing out the total ambiguity of Orefice's proposal.¹²

⁶ From 1908 to 1936 the Augusteo Concert Hall was reserved exclusively for performances of symphonic and chamber music concerts. See F. d'Amico, *Un ragazzino all'Augusteo* (Turin: Einaudi editore, 1991).

⁷ Guido Maggiorino Gatti, *Musicisti italiani. Malipiero*, CMU, I, 3 (March 1918), 40-48; *Musicisti italiani. Alfredo Casella*, CMU, I, 7 (July 1918), 133-43; *Musicisti italiani. Luigi Perrachio*, CMU, I, 12 (December 1918), 229-35; *Musicisti contemporanei. F. Balilla Pratella*, CMU, II, 5-6 (May-June 1919), 97-102.

⁸ Gatti, *Claude Debussy*, CMU, II, 1 (January 1919), 6-15.

⁹ Attilio Brugnoli, *Per una università musicale*, CMU, II, 2 (February 1919), 25-32.

¹⁰ Giacomo Orefice, *Conservatorio o università musicale?*, “Rivista musicale italiana”, XXV (1918), 461-80. The debate received ample attention by directors of the conservatories of music.

¹¹ Ildebrando Pizzetti, *I nostri istituti musicali e un loro nuovo riformatore*, CMU, III, 3 (March 1920), 65-81.

¹² Parigi, *L'equivoco Orefice*, CMU, III, 6-7-8 (June-July-August 1920), 129-32.

From early 1920 onward *La Critica musicale* reserves space for notices of current music activities such as concerts, operatic seasons, publications; two new rubrics are introduced entitled “Avvenimenti” and “La musica e il libro”. The first new rubric includes correspondence from the principal Italian cities: Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin, Bologna, Trent, [and] Mantova, and gives particular attention to special musical events. In February 1920, for example, Aldo Finzi reports enthusiastically on the reopening of Milan’s Teatro alla Scala with a performance of Verdi’s *Falstaff*, and states that Toscanini’s conducting was perfect since he was able to create a suggestive atmosphere. In December of the same year, also at La Scala, Pizzetti’s opera *Débora e Jaele* enchanted the public; the result was a flood of applause, once again with Toscanini on the podium. Critical judgments are published as well from the national press: *Corriere della sera*, *La Stampa*, and *Il Resto del Carlino*.

From early 1923 the rubric “L’Italia nel mondo” includes correspondence from Paris and London. The section “La musica e il libro” is reserved for reviews of editions by Italian and foreign composers: among them are Casella, Malipiero, Respighi, and Francesco Santoliquido, as well as Stravinsky, Poulenc, and Honegger. The latter two rubrics are signed by the director Parigi and other notable critics such as Adelmo Damerini, Augusto Guzzo, Cesare Valabrega, Giulio Confalonieri, and Castelnuovo-Tedesco. The reviews are often signed only with initials that could not always be identified with certainty.

From 1921 onward a new rubric—which appears at the end of each fascicle—is added with a curious title: “Fabulae et rumores”. It is devoted to brief notices of musical events: operatic performances in various theaters, the successes encountered by particular operas, music competitions advertised by institutions or associations, the publication of new music periodicals, and some obituaries.

In several successive issues of *La Critica musicale* Parigi denounces the lack of music critics. For this reason, the first fascicle of 1921 includes an invitation to collaborate with the periodical. The topic proposed is the study of the “minor” Ottocento that might deal with non-operatic composers, a publisher, a critic. The character of the contributions ought to be critically and aesthetically oriented.¹³ The director’s invitation, however, is not accepted by the musical public. Parigi, then, assigns ample space to some notable Italian music critics. A sizable part of the triple fascicle March-May of 1921 is dedicated to essays by Giuseppe Vannicola (1877-1915), which is preceded by a touching introduction by Giovanni Papini. The following essays by Vannicola appear afterwards: “Mistica della musica”, “Beethoven”, “La musica di Debussy”, which are intense, rather sophisticated reflections, imbued with “spirituality”. According to Parigi, Vannicola’s writings are perceptively refined in character when dealing with artistic topics. In January 1923 Antonio Tari is introduced to the readers of the periodical. Augusto Guzzo describes him as an intellectual of a wide ranging culture, as teacher of aesthetics at the University of Naples, as a genuine music lover. “Genesi della musica” is the first series of Tari’s essays, the last being “Opera, melodramma e dramma”. In these writings music is ranked on the same level as other cultural expressions, which is his particular contribution.

Parigi favors this type of topic. In his writings he encourages the association of music and other activities of the “spirit”, as literature, for example. Essays by other authors also explore the relationships between literature and music or emphasize the musical tendencies of famous literary writers. In this respect, primary attention is given to French writers: Jules Verne and

¹³ Parigi, *Invito a collaborare*, CMU, IV, 1-2 (January-February 1921), 1-2.

Théophile Gautier. There is an ethnomusicological interest in Verne's fictional writings. With regard to Gautier, his activities as a music critic are given due emphasis.

Particular attention is reserved to Italian men of letters such as Giosuè Carducci, Alessandro Manzoni, and Giovanni Pascoli. Special attention is also reserved for Gabriele D'Annunzio. In November 1919 an advertisement of the *Raccolta nazionale delle musiche italiane* – a series of 150 small volumes (Milan, 1918-21) comprising editions of vocal and instrumental compositions of the 17th and 18th centuries – is published. D'Annunzio himself was at the head of this notable project undertaken by the "Istituto editoriale italiano". The project was hailed as a sign of a cultural renaissance. The opening pages of the September-October 1922 fascicle are dedicated to an essay by D'Annunzio titled "Notturmo", which focuses on a violoncello constructed by Andrea Guarneri. D'Annunzio's writings, as Parigi notes, contain many references to music. In D'Annunzio's prose, more than in other writers, music is considered as the repository of magic and therapeutic power. D'Annunzio's adherence to the "Camerata per la musica italiana" is announced in the December 1922 fascicle. Also published is a letter from Pescara that the poet addressed to composer Mezio Agostini, in which D'Annunzio states that music represents the modern "spirit" and universal freedom. In the summer 1923 fascicle Parigi treats the topic once again; in a review of a book by G. Donati Petteni titled "D'Annunzio e Wagner" he puts emphasis on the musical nature of D'Annunzio's writings.¹⁴

Ample space is assigned to Giuseppe Baini's (1775-1844) biography of Palestrina¹⁵, with annotations by Alberto Cametti. Single chapters of this book are published successively at the end of each fascicle. Especially in the yearly issues of 1918-1919, it represents a regular point of reference for the readers of *La Critica musicale*. Historical essays are also contributed by Lino Righi on the music of ancient Greece dealing in particular on Pythagoras and the neo-pythagorean school.

Among the most noteworthy contributions published between 1919 and 1922 are the ethnographic studies by Giulio Fara, the analysis of Wagner's preludes by Paolo Rusca, and the panorama of musical activities in England by Vittorio Ricci.

From 1920 onward the periodical assigns increasing space to decorative designs in the opening pages of each fascicle, as well as to portraits and illustrated covers. The highest artistic point is reached in 1923 with the publication of original xylographies by Pietro Parigi.¹⁶ The format of each fascicle is doubled, yet the annual subscription of twenty Liras remains unaltered. The intent is to upgrade *La Critica musicale* to a sort of aristocratic rank.

As stated in an announcement published in January 1920, economic difficulties hinder the survival of the Florentine periodical. In the last fascicle of 1922 the readers are informed that the administration of the periodical is transferred in Via Cento Stelle 102, while the editorial office is maintained in Via Scialoja 52. The collaboration with Bagiardi, the administrator and printer of the typography "Il Torchio", is though interrupted shortly afterwards due to the delays in getting the fascicles off the press. All administrative matters are the exclusive

¹⁴ Parigi, *D'Annunzio*, CMU, VI, 8-9 (August-September 1923), 195-99.

¹⁵ Giuseppe Baini, *Memorie storico-critiche della vita e delle opere di Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina* (Rome: Società tipografica, 1828).

¹⁶ A series of 150 small volumes (Milan, 1918-21) comprising editions of vocal and instrumental compositions of the 17th and 18th centuries — a series of 150 small volumes (Milan, 1918-21) comprising editions of vocal and instrumental compositions of the 17th and 18th centuries.

responsibility of the editor. Yet this did not safeguard the future of the periodical, which ceased publication in December 1923. In the article “Giornalismo musicale” published in the last fascicle Parigi urges the creation of an index of Italian music periodicals. As a sample of this type of research he publishes a bibliographic essay by Arnaldo Bonaventura, thus precurring the future in this field of studies.

In the course of its six years of activity (1918-1923) *La Critica musicale* reports passionately, at times in a provocative almost mystical manner, on musical events in Italy and also abroad, thus reflecting an historical moment full of vitality.

The catalog was prepared on the basis of a complete collection of the periodical deposited in the RIPM Center in Baltimore. Among the authors who signed their contributions with only initials, the following have been identified with certainty:

A. C.	Alberto Cametti
a. g.	Augusto Guzzo
l. p., L. P.	Luigi Parigi
G. C.	Giulio Confalonieri
G. F.	Giulio Fara
M. C. T.	Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco
P. Ild	Pizzetti Ildebrando
p. m.	Pietro Montani

Translated by Elvidio Surian