

of Hugh Tracey's career and work are addressed in this book.

By not exploring the complexities inherent in the various ways that Hugh Tracey sought to capture and classify the music of Africa, this exhibition and book misses the opportunity to provide valuable insights into a collection that forms the core of one of South Africa's most prominent music archives. Critical engagements such as these would also have enabled this publication to take part in a much broader discourse of post-colonial thinking about the archive and the processes of archive making. The disregard for the critical discourse and context that exists around Hugh Tracey's legacy diminishes what could have been a remarkable and insightful exhibition and publication.

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Forma divina: Saggi sull'opera lirica e sul balletto. By Fedele D'Amico; curated by Badolato and Lorenzo Bianconi. (*Historiae Musicae Cultores*, vol. 125) Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2012. [2 vols (578 p.) ISBN 978-8-82-226213-4. €54]

Fedele D'Amico (1912–1990) is considered one of the most authoritative musicological voices in twentieth-century Italy, and was very much part of the intellectual elite that re-shaped the country after World War II. He was the son of Silvio, a theatre critic, historian and theorist, friend of Pirandello and Coupeau, who founded and directed for twenty years the *Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica*, which now bears his name, in Rome. After a degree in law, D'Amico studied music with Alfredo Casella, whose salon was frequented by the intelligentsia, musical and otherwise, of the time, and started to collaborate as music critic to various publications. In 1938 he married Suso Cecchi, who was to become one of the most prominent screenwriters in Italian cinema, collaborating amongst others with Luchino Visconti, Michelangelo Antonioni and Franco Zeffirelli, and one of the authors of the screenplay of Vittorio de Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette*, a masterpiece of Italian neorealism. Between 1944 and 1957 D'Amico was editor of the music and dance section of the *Enciclopedia dello spetta-*

colo (published between 1954 and 1965), an enterprise considered to be the most comprehensive international performing arts encyclopedia. From 1963, D'Amico was Professor of Music History at Rome University, whilst continuing his career as music critic for *L'Espresso*, and author of the programmes for the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome. The editor of Busoni's writings and Musorgsky's letters, he also provided rhythmic Italian versions for several operas, including Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Barber's *Vanessa*, and Henze's *Der junge Lord*, as he firmly believed that opera should be sung in the language of the country where it is performed, and not in its original version, to guarantee an immediate understanding and emotional response in the listener.

D'Amico was a highly prolific writer, with a style at the same time conversational and yet formal, but never patronizing, and he offers an engaging reading to the specialist and the layman alike. His students at Rome University recall how D'Amico had the ability to 'enlighten' a work, providing a guiding light for its interpretation and understanding, but leaving to the student, or the reader, the process of discovery, without being overly didactic or prescriptive. His considerable output, notable also from a literary perspective, is available in many collections, mostly published posthumously.

As part of their series '*Historiae Musicae Cultores*', Olschki has now issued two volumes containing a selection of eighty essays written by D'Amico as programme notes for operas (mainly) and ballets (few), performed in Italian theatres between 1950 and 1988. The selection, curated by Nicola Badolato and Lorenzo Bianconi, is organized in chronological order according to the composition date, and is a portrait of D'Amico's own passions: from Gluck and Mozart to Rossini and Verdi, from the Russian composers to Puccini, from Weill and Hindemith to Henze and Berio.

The essays, some of which are quite concise, are conceived as an introduction for the general public, but they are never simply 'programme notes'. Each of the essays appears to be the result of a process of research and of reflection on the work, where D'Amico's critical intelligence and insight shine through. The first thing that impresses the reader is the breadth of their intellectual and cultural references:

D'Amico is never happy with simply giving some basic information on a piece, but always contextualizes from an historical, socio-political and literary point of view. Great attention is given to the libretti, seen as a fundamental element in the fabric of the work ("Good music, but another demonstration that in order to have a good opera even Donizetti, and perhaps he more than others, needs a good libretto", he writes after a performance of *Le Duc d'Albe*), to their sources and to the literary text's own cultural relevance, in relationship with the musical version. From this point of view, the collection represents a fascinating overview not only of the history of opera, but of the cultural history of which opera is at the same time a product and a driving force, sometimes analyzed in the individual details, sometimes seen as a result of the interplay of the powerful forces that shape its development.

The text is never considered as a stand-alone object, but always put to the test of the theatre, because opera is a dramatic form, not a musical one: "Read at the piano some operas of Donizetti" he would say, "they will seem nothing, but then go and listen to *Anna Bolena* at La Scala with Callas and Simionato and Gavazzeni, and let me know what you think". For D'Amico music, and even more so opera, make sense only in a human and social context, and more importantly, only when performed in relationship with the audience, a relationship that is the job of the critic to clarify, and when necessary, try to improve, as the educator he is supposed to be.

The first volume is dedicated to works from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and it is perhaps a sign of the times that there is no mention of any author prior to Gluck. The second volume gathers essays relative to the twentieth century, some of which examine less-known works, mostly by Italian authors, such as *La Donna Serpente* by Alfredo Casella (1932), *La Collina* by Mario Peragallo (1947), *Il Contrabbasso* by Valentino Bucchi (1954), *Il Buon Soldato Svejik* by Guido Turchi (1962), *L'Albergo dei Poveri* by Flavio Testi (1966) and *La Visita Meravigliosa* by Nino Rota (1970). The selection also constitutes an interesting overview of the development of artistic pro-

gramming in Italy, and of the shifts in repertoire and taste.

Two themes appear to be constant and stand out. The first is D'Amico's attitude towards the assumptions of modernity, towards the avant-garde, towards the concept of atonality, which he considers an ingenuity. His perceptive examination and criticism of twelve-note technique, seen as an abstraction rather than a linguistic tool (and analogous in some ways to that of Ernest Ansermet in *Les Fondements de la Musique dans la Conscience Humaine*), his rebuttal of contemporary historicist and evolutionary dogmas, and his appreciation of composers at the time considered too traditional, too popular and therefore irrelevant, such as Nino Rota or Benjamin Britten (whose *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he defines as 'a non-conformist modern opera'), make him stand out from the chorus of critical voices of the 20th century.

D'Amico looks at the games played by the champions of modernity or post-modernity with a certain irony, pointing out how the "contemporary" serious composer is out of date because there is no organic relationship between the music he composes and the music that his times sense as 'musica naturalis'. As such, D'Amico is a solitary and independent voice in a conformist cultural context whose standards had been set by the "diktats" of Boulez and of the Darmstadt school. It is his belief that the artist can make art as it has always been made, through a dialectic tension between the existing expressions and the individual creative impulse that brings renewal, rather than by abstracting, detaching and objectifying, an aesthetic that only produces ambiguous and irrelevant epiphenomena - ideas that are explored also in his thirty-year long correspondence with Luciano Berio, published by Archinto in 2002 with the title *Nemici Come Prima* (Enemies as Before), where their disagreement on almost everything did not prevent the forging of a friendship based on mutual respect and appreciation.

The second theme, one of the tenets of D'Amico's thought, is that opera is not simply theatre through music, but theatre through the voice. The centrality of the human instrument, in its natural, almost primeval expression, able

to excite direct emotional response in the listener, is restated over and over: unlike straight theatre, where a character is defined also by its body language, in “opera” a character is its voice. There is no need to suspend disbelief in front of a large soprano playing an 18-year-old girl, because it is not through the eyes that we can get to the essence of the dramatic form, but by giving an ear to the subtle facets of vocal expression. These ideas are stated directly in a stand-alone essay which concludes the collection, written in 1962 and entitled ‘In che senso la crisi dell’opera’ (‘In what sense a crisis for opera’). In it, D’Amico tackles the problem of the crisis of opera in terms of new contemporary writing, blaming the aesthetics of modern music, which does not allow the composer to put their trust in the human voice and in singing. In its most natural expression, singing implies a total abandonment to immediate communication, with the understanding that there is a shared common way of feeling, a natural way of feeling, and also entails an element of sex appeal. These are ideas which modern aesthetics appear to consider too popular or too low brow to be taken seriously. It is almost an anthropological approach, that recognizes the shared need of human beings to ratify the habits, the dreams and the myths of their times, and to create a social bond through singing, a function that opera had fulfilled for the past four centuries, but that the modern aesthetic cannot fulfill, because it is paradoxically disconnected from its own time. In this light we can understand also the rise in importance of the production value, and of Regietheater, which, tuning into the *Zeitgeist*, is able to bridge the gap between the vocal expression of the past and today’s life, with its different issues and challenges, providing a connection that is otherwise lacking, and not even sought after by the contemporary ‘serious’ composer. D’Amico sees in the popularity of operas from the past a proof that it is not the art form that has reached a crisis point, but rather certain assumptions about the relevance of communication through music, and the means through which such communication is achieved: in a world which suffers from lack of communication and connection, and therefore craves it even more,

what is left is either to look at the past, or at ‘lesser’ forms, such as the pop song. Therefore he advocates for contemporary opera a return to the voice, that voice-character so different from any other form of vocal expression, which has been the focus of opera since its inception, and which modern aesthetic aims to stylize, abstract, and ultimately dehumanize.

D’Amico’s writings have withstood the test of time, and after many years still appear current and relevant, not only because of his convictions, but also for their precision and insight, and for the freshness of his approach. The reader can consult the two volumes as a handbook before and after single shows, or go through them as stills. The volumes are provided with two separate indexes, one for works and the other for names. There is the problem of the language barrier, as the essays are only available in Italian, but it has the advantage of preserving the author’s unique stylistic voice. It does not seem out of place, though, to advocate the opportunity, if not the need, for an English translation of D’Amico’s writings, to allow a broader perspective of music criticism in the twentieth century.

Ultimately, this selection is as near as it gets to the history of opera that D’Amico never wrote, he might have wanted to write, and he certainly should have written.

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Le fonti musicali in Piemonte. Vol. 3. Asti e Provincia. A cura di P. Cavallo. (Cataloghi di fondi musicali del Piemonte, 7) Torino / Lucca: Regione Piemonte / Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2011. [428 p. ISBN 978-88-7096-679-4. €40.]

There has been a widespread opinion among scholars and musicologists that Piedmont, the Italian north-west region whose main centre is Turin, was scarcely gifted by musical Muses, in comparison with other Italian regions.

In order to promote its musical heritage, Regione Piemonte has started a detailed census in every province of the region, coordinated by the Istituto per i Beni Musicali in Piemonte.