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{Ian.Pace.1@city.ac.uk}

Luigi Dallapiccola and Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy. By Ben Earle. pp. xv + 304. Music Since 1900. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2013. £65. ISBN 978-0-521-84403-1.)

Extended studies of music, musicians, and musical life in fascist Italy first appeared in the mid-1980s, since when there has been a plethora of studies and essay collections, including three major monographs with diverse methodologies: Fiamma Nicolodi, *Musica e musicisti nel ventennio fascista* (Florence, 1984); Harvey Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (New York and London, 1987); Jürg Stenzl, *Von Giacomo Puccini zu Luigi Nono. Italienische Musik 1922-1952: Faschismus-Resistenz-Republik* (Buren, 1990). The first and third of these authors in particular manage to avoid one of the worst factors blighting some musicology today: the use of context as a substitute for musical engagement. Ben Earle's new book clearly demonstrates awareness of these issues, and could never be accused of a lack of attention to musical specifics. He makes explicit (p. 78) the importance of a primary focus upon the music, working backwards from that towards the biography, rather than vice versa (though the traffic is sometimes two-way). He incorporates a range of generally ad hoc musical analyses, employing basic pitch class terminology, which works better for music on the threshold between tonality and atonality than some more systematic methods, though he tends to neglect timbre and more crucially vocal style. Clearly sceptical of overtly 'formalistic' approaches, Earle tries throughout to navigate a path between politics and formal analysis (more successfully in the earlier parts of the book), though he is reticent about acknowledging aspects of relative musical autonomy. Cultural institutions of Fascist Italy only surface briefly, certainly in comparison with Sachs' study.

Undoubtedly and unsurprisingly, the central focus of the book is Earle's revisionist view of key works by Luigi Dallapiccola and his role as a dodecaphonic composer complicit with fascism. But he also diverges from this to write a wider history of early twentieth-century modernism, and of music under Italian fascism (notably in Florence, where Dallapiccola lived from 1922). He falls short of fusing these different perspectives into a fully coherent and comprehensive narrative and interpretation, but the book nevertheless stands as an extremely significant contribution to the historiography of early twentieth-century Western Art Music.

Earle's range of reference and reading on music, philosophy, and aesthetics across four languages is extensive and impressive. He also exhibits a commanding knowledge of Dallapiccola literature – both scholarly work and published reception. His political verdict on Dallapiccola is undoubtedly harsher than that of many of his predecessors, especially Nicolodi and Sachs. He shows how the composer benefitted immensely from selection for performance during the 1930s, cites the work of David Osmond-Smith to demonstrate that Dallapiccola held bureaucratic roles in the musical life of Florence, contrary to his own pronouncements, and highlights further references to fascist mythology in early work. Some of his hermeneutical arguments are over-extravagant, but these wider political arguments are nonetheless strong.

The first two chapters of the book are the most convincing, presenting a subtle picture of the development of Italian musical modernism prior to the Fascist take-over, then viewing Dallapiccola's earlier works in the context of those of Casella, Malipiero, Stravinsky, and Dallapiccola's teacher Vito Frazzi. The other three chapters (3 and 5 have been published elsewhere in earlier versions) consider three

key vocal/theatrical works of Dallapiccola: *Volo di notte* (1937-9), *Canti di prigionia* (1938-41), and *Il prigioniero* (1944-8), with a little on some other transitional works. The latter two works have regularly been viewed as resounding statements of antipathy to oppression, marking a shift in the composer's output, and epitomizing 'protest' and 'committed' music respectively; these are the views Earle seeks to challenge.

The first chapter portrays in vivid fashion the chasms between bourgeois operatic quasi-populism, aristocratic aestheticism, and a post-1918 new music that is neither of these things. Earle's familiarity with wider aesthetic and philosophical thought of the time enables him to illuminate the positions of Italian composers and critics more than is possible in narrowly focused studies. He identifies a stream of early Italian musical modernism in such works as Casella's *Elegia eroica*, op. 29 (1916), whose 1917 first performance generated audience indignation comparable to that at the premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps* in 1913; and *Notte di Maggio*, op. 20 (1913), in which the use of a twelve-note chord almost identical to one found in Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre* leads Earle to allude to Richard Taruskin's historical category of pre-war 'maximalism'. The Taruskinian theme is apparent from an early stage, when Earle loftily asserts that 'the question of class distinction (not to speak of other social aberrations) is inseparable from the modernist project' (p. 22), alluding to Schoenberg's *Verein*. But is there any aesthetic project, at least as has existed in history up until now, which is wholly separable from issues of class (or any society in which class distinction is an aberration rather than a norm)? He continues along this path, equating Schoenberg's mandarin idealism, at least as represented by Dallapiccola, with the power of the Duce and his wish for man in fascist society to commit energy and disdain comfort – which he roots in Nietzsche and *Zarathustra* (pp. 173–5).

There is much else that is more original and less didactic, including the distinction he makes between an extended conception of Dahlhausian *musikalische Moderne*, which encompasses pre-war aestheticism of *art nouveau* and *Jugendstil* and is linked to the work of Gabriele D'Annunzio, and a *Neue Musik*, also from Dahlhaus as interpreted by his translator J. Bradford Robinson (though this is historically problematic given the provenance of the term). This underpins contrasting categories of aestheticism and modernism, whilst the mention of D'Annunzio helps to ease the transition to music during the fascist era in Italy – though his positions here remain nuanced. He also critiques dominant views of the 1932 *Manifesto di musicisti italiani per la tradizione dell'arte romantica dell'ottocento* (opposing 'atonal and polytonal honking', 'objectivism and expressionism', and so on) as a turning point in Italian musical life, noting that the implied composers attacked – Casella and Malipiero – continued to be performed and to receive commissions.

Chapter 3, entitled 'Fascist modernism', sets the biggest challenge in terms of grasping its object. As early as January 1922, nine months before the March on Rome, the French-American composer and author Dane Rudhyar had delineated the concept of a 'Musical Fascism', linking tonality to imperialism and seeing the neoclassicism of *Les Six* as a force of reaction. Heinrich Strobel had in 1937 branded Dallapiccola's *Terza serie die cori* a type of 'fascist classicism' (p. 131), and in 1944 Hanns Eisler cautioned that those who wanted their music to be performed and supported by the Nazis must write an eclectic style somewhere between Richard Strauss and other 'moderate' moderns (Hanns Eisler, 'Contemporary music and fascism', typescript for 1944 lecture, in *Musik und Politik. Schriften 1924-1948*, ed. Günter Mayer, (Leipzig, 1973), 489–93). Whilst Earle, unlike Sachs, does not have a problem understanding

how Casella could effect a rapprochement between modernism and fascist hierarchies, he falls short of providing a new theoretical model for fascist modernism in music which could be applied elsewhere.

Part of the reason for this is that Earle's engagement with political or historical theory dealing with fascism is small: he relies on Roger Griffin's, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York, 1996) and a few primary sources, though also some important texts on fascism from an aesthetic perspective. It is difficult to discern anything other than a vaguely 'authoritarian' conception of what fascism means either in theory or practice, with no consideration of different interpretative models and how they might affect his own. He also lacks a clear definition of modernism, relying at times on some of the more simplistic characterisations provided by some anti-modernists, overstating in particular the element of negation and claiming 'the incompatibility of musical modernism with pleasure' (p. 132), which would require the exclusion of the neoclassicism of *Les Six* and others.

His work also comes up against an issue which has dominated, perhaps plagued, so much historiography: the assumption of some significant rupture in Western art music, perhaps around 1890, perhaps around 1918, but undoubtedly a rupture. This view makes sense in the context of a German-dominated view of nineteenth-century musical history driven by antagonism between Wagner and Brahms. But with a greater focus upon nineteenth-century French, Italian, and Russian musical traditions in particular (as is Taruskin's strategy, though his primary interest appears to be their non-Germanness), many of the most apparently radical early twentieth-century developments in music can be situated within longer traditions without too much difficulty.

Dallapiccola's opera *Volo di notte* (1937–9) is a heroic tale of aviation, featuring an airfield director, Rivière, who has introduced night flight, and in the face of weather problems and lack of fuel persuades a pilot, Fabien, to undertake a fatal mission. Dallapiccola told Malipiero in 1938 that he perceived some universal value in the figure of Rivière standing outside the mass and tending to the future. Earle strives to counter the common assumption that Fabien is the spiritual hero, insisting (like Stenzl before him) that the opera's sympathies lie clearly with Rivière, and drawing attention to the chorus worshipping him in an almost religious manner in Scene 6. He also compares Dallapiccola's appropriation of twelve-tone techniques with the celebration of a form of modernism, as demanded by Mussolini himself for the 1932 exhibition *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista*, even likening a 'crescendo-catharsis' structural model of *Volo* to the internal structure of the exhibition.

The types of musical hermeneutics Earle explores include the use of suspended triads and a lyrical wordless soprano to evoke the phantasmagoria of the stars (linking the work to Wagner and earlier symbolist opera), and distorted blues to imply moral degeneracy. Then, with some brilliance, he reads the work in terms of Dallapiccola's very public disagreement with the attacks on technical fetishism by critic and aesthete Alfredo Parente (1905–85), a disciple of Benedetto Croce. He relates it to issues of self-expression in opposition to beauty, and conscious effort rather than more spontaneous creation, all of which can be understood in terms of the plight of Fabien in *Volo di Notte* as he enters his moment of ecstasy after ascending above the storm.

Such loaded comparisons do however betray an easy type of populism and technophobia. Earle is on stronger ground with his comparison of Rivière's insistence upon 'hierarchy and discipline' to the culture around Mussolini (p. 165). Even more potent is his identification of a key passage from Dallapiccola's essay 'Di un aspetto

della musica contemporanea' (in which Mephistopheles disdains the mediocrities of bourgeois taste in the name of an ill-defined appeal to the people, citing Mussolini) as part of 'the cultural politics of late fascism', a 'seemingly leftist attitude' which 'was a commonplace among middle-class fascist intellectuals of Dallapiccola's generation' (p. 173). However, such a view resembles that of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians in the 1920s, as a manifestation of an aesthetic 'workerist' view, though here the critique of bourgeois taste was framed in terms of social division rather than mediocrity. Earle chooses to read Dallapiccola's aggressive anti-bourgeois polemics in terms of a defence of elite taste rather than an appeal to the working classes, combined with a neo-Nietzschean desire to lead the people, all of which he associates with a politics of the right rather than left.

The chapter on *Canti di prigionia* marshals arguments against a reading of this work as a piece of 'protest music' (implied by Dallapiccola in a talk given to an American audience in 1953), but the case is unconvincing. The genesis of the work in terms of a series of pitches does not preclude the application of 'purely aesthetic' motivations to other personal or political purposes. Early critics of the work may have been drawn primarily to its aesthetic qualities, but this is hardly surprising following the relentless politicization of culture during wartime. For each of the three *Canti*, Earle provides a detailed analysis of sections of the music, considering the central importance of octatonically derived harmonies in the first song, and in the third the interplay between different materials (tonal, modal, and dodecaphonic), intricate harmonic progressions, and hermeneutic elements. But the transition between this and the political analyses of the songs is unclear and uneven, in ways that could be solved easily by a more relaxed analytical model explicitly allowing for musically autonomous elements.

To give a more detailed example of where the demands of hermeneutics might overly skew analysis: I cannot really agree with Earle's reading of the harmony at bar 148 of the second song as a ii^7 of C major. The thunderous reiterated low D_1s , not to mention the emphatic statement of tonic and dominant pitches in the vocal lines, maintain this pitch as a clear tonal centre, anticipated by a D-flat at the bass of a coloured augmented chord in bars 146-7, and thus serving enharmonically as a leading note. The superimposition of prominent C major triadic harmonies certainly anticipates the direction in which the music is moving, but Earle must explain that this tonality has already been established in order to argue that tonic resolution in bar 157 is thwarted by the addition of a flattened seventh. I hear this harmony instead as a V^7 onto the relative major of F, which only then can form part of the $IV-v^7$ progression into C major which Earle identifies as 'the central point of the *Canti* as a whole' (p. 216). This is just a small difference in interpretation of part of a carefully planned harmonic progression, but as Earle takes it to represent Boethius's 'shining fount of good' (as set by Dallapiccola), the degree to which this bursts into the music relatively quickly, or is more strongly anticipated before, are key analytic questions. Earle opts for the latter view, mostly on the grounds of the presence of triads earlier on in the work, relating these to the triads in *Volo di notte* (pp. 216-19); this hermeneutically overloads a commonplace musical device.

These problems are exacerbated in the uneven and sometimes rather crude consideration of *Il prigioniero*. Earle makes the odd decision to consider the libretto first, then the music, when many of the arguments about the former would have been tempered by introduction of the latter at an earlier stage. He first surveys the work through the prism of *musica impegnata* or 'committed music', drawing on key texts from Sartre, Camillo Togni, René Leibowitz, and Adorno, arguing at length for

Dallapiccola's relationship to but also distance from Croce and Adorno, primarily on the basis of an obscure 1953 essay in which he discerns Schopenhauerian themes. More convincing is the argument that Dallapiccola's universalism and aristocratic detachment are distinct from Adorno's dialectical formulation of loneliness, not least because the composer's appropriation of the notorious anti-populist quotation from Cocteau: 'Ce que le public te reproche, cultive-le, c'est toi'.

Earle's interpretation of the libretto is through a now very dated (following seven decades of Holocaust scholarship) 'totalitarian' model of fascism. He uses Hannah Arendt's formulations on passivity in the face of genocide as a model for the Prisoner, but it is not clear what the relationship between these and Slavoj Žižek's more psychoanalytical interpretations (setting out distinctions between ideological sympathizers, apparatchiks, and an elite supposedly in contempt for facts), demonstrates more widely in this context.

For Earle, anti-fascist interpretations of *Il prigioniero*, especially relating to the behaviour of the Catholic Church, rest too heavily on evocations of the sixteenth-century 'Beggars' revolt' against Spanish rule in the Netherlands, well known through Schiller and Verdi's *Don Carlos*. One of his grounds for disputing this is the lack of reference to the Lateran Pacts of 1929, or the reticence of Pius XII concerning protest against Hitler's policies. But such topical references would have seemed very strange in this archaic setting. Earle is nevertheless determined that the opera is as much anti-communist as anti-fascist, which he argues on the grounds that in 'Musica pianificata' Dallapiccola compares the 1948 Prague Manifesto to the 1932 *Manifesto musicale* mentioned earlier, and the Czech five-year plans to the policies of the fascist *ventennio*. This is enough for Earle to claim that Dallapiccola himself adhered to an Arendt-style near-equation of the Nazi and Bolshevik systems---which he criticises as Cold War 'totalitarianism' despite being in part beholden to this model himself a few pages earlier. The model given by both Arendt and Earle of systems characterised primarily by repression neglects the fundamentally different attitudes towards private property in fascist and communist regimes.

More broadly, Earle appears to view post-war political engagement almost entirely in terms of allegiance with the Soviet bloc, ignoring the existence of other Marxist thinkers and activists such as Trotskyites or Gramsci's adversary Amadeo Bordiga. The Sartrean position, cited approvingly by Earle, on how demanding modern music apparently generates elite cadres, causing the mass of workers once again to fall into a state of barbarism, is typical Stalinist dogma, reifying proletarian consciousness with little consideration of the possibilities through education. Earle's 'either capitalism or Stalinism' bind informs exaggerated claims about anti-communism and the representation of modernism within the musical sections of the festivals in Paris in 1952 (where *Canti di prigionia* was performed) and Rome in 1954 (for which Dallapiccola was on the music advisory board). That Nicolas Nabokov and other planners of the festival had a clear political agenda is not in doubt; to indict every work performed and every musician involved on this basis is much too crude. If, as Earle argues, the fact that *Il prigioniero* was performed regularly in the German Federal Republic implies support by Dallapiccola for the US cause, then one would have to indict Luigi Nono, Hans Werner Henze, or almost any composer with even a medium reputation in the West (and many jazz musicians). The conspiratorial hypothesis that 'dodecaphony's capacity for "authentic" expressions of anguished humanity fitted the propaganda needs of the West to perfection' (p. 258) would need a whole book to substantiate properly.

Dallapiccola, in Earle's reading, understood *Il prigioniero* as part of a canon of operas by Schoenberg, Berg, Busoni, and Malipiero that expressed 'doubt' and 'solitude' as part of an archetypal mid-century 'contemporary condition'. Earle extrapolates from this that the opera portrayed the 'confrontation of the truth-telling individual and the lying collective' (p. 256), which he links to the discourse surrounding Elliott Carter's Piano Concerto and several twentieth century novels. But of course tales of the individual set against an oppressive collective can be traced back through Western culture to the Bible. Conversely, Earle dismisses the views of Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt and Josef Rufer that *Il prigioniero* not only stood as a musical response to fascism and Nazism, but also addressed 'a matter of eternally relevant concern for the whole of humanity' as just aspects of 'anti-communist Cold War propaganda' (pp. 258–9). This high-flown rhetoric is disingenuous: would Earle dismiss the fact that a sizeable literature dealing with political prisoners can be found beyond the Cold War? Whilst there exist repressive regimes or institutions all around the world that persecute individuals on grounds of belief, religion, or conscience, Rufer's claim is quite reasonable.

Earle's Stalinist and primitivist retort is to imagine an opera that 'would condemn the subjective freedom fostered by modernity for the damage it inflicts on traditional collectives – on working-class solidarity, for example' (which he asserts that Dallapiccola would never write) (p. 259). But the working classes, at least in the sense of the Marxist proletariat, only exist as a product of industrial capitalism. This is a key aspect of modernity as the term is widely understood, and Marx envisioned in *The German Ideology* and the *Grundrisse* the liberation of individuals from such collective identities; an idyllic pre-subjective 'solidarity' is a romantic myth. Earle claims such a view can be found in immediate post-war Italian neo-realist cinema, but most of the films of this period of which I am aware are concerned with material deprivation, not the dangers of subjective freedom.

Earle argues that since the opera presents the Prisoner as not responsible for the actions of the torturer in the opera, liberal consciences are left 'shocked but confirmed in their own blamelessness' (p. 261). Quite incredibly, in light of this remark, an SS officer is presented as an example of the type of figure for whom the Jailer/Grand Inquisitor might stand. Earle also claims, through a questionable allusion to Herbert Marcuse, that 'the very freedom on behalf of which [*Il prigioniero*] proselytizes, far from being universalizable, is itself contingent – under present socio-economic conditions, just as under those of 1950 – on domination, exploitation, slavery' (p. 261). Only the most self-deluded of liberals could turn a plea against political/religious imprisonment into a 'plea on behalf of individual freedom conceived as an absolute good' (p. 261), and turn freedom from torture and arbitrary imprisonment into a mindless form of bourgeois affirmation.

Otherwise, Earle draws attention to Dallapiccola's letter to Massimo Mila in 1949 (asking Mila to 'pass over' what appear to be anti-clerical elements in the work) and to the idea that the Prisoner achieves a type of salvation as he is taken to the stake. He ignores the most obvious interpretation: that Dallapiccola had not wholly abandoned the church, or the cults of Christian martyrdom, but rather wished to separate a disdain for cruel oppression as associated with the Inquisition or fascism from the Catholic Church, realising the work might seem over-preachy in that respect. To find some hope or affirmation in the ending of *Il prigioniero* is not difficult for one enamoured of martyrdom.

All of the above comes before Earle begins to look at the music, and as with the *Canti*, his sensitive and probing investigation interacts only obliquely with the rest

of his interpretation. In particular, his development of Mila's comparisons with Verdi and Puccini is very meaningful and might reasonably lead to a conclusion that Dallapiccola employed some post-1918 techniques in the service of an operatic conception that did not break fundamentally with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practices.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the book is an invaluable contribution to the history of music during the period when fascist regimes of various types were in power in Europe. It adds to the wider contextualisation of that historical period, and thus to a more refined understanding of early twentieth-century musical history in general. If it is still possible to further integrate contextual and work-immanent approaches to the study of music under fascism, parts of Earle's book have definitely set new standards for this.

Ian Pace
City, University of London