

Luigi Dallapiccola and Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy

Luigi Dallapiccola is widely considered a defining figure in twentieth-century Italian musical modernism, whose compositions bear passionate witness to the historical period through which he lived. In this book, Ben Earle focuses on three major works by the composer: the one-act operas *Volo di notte* (Night Flight) and *Il prigioniero* (The Prisoner), and the choral *Canti di prigionia* (Songs of Imprisonment), setting them in the context of contemporary politics to trace their complex path from fascism to resistance. Earle also considers the wider relationship between musical modernism and Italian fascism, exploring the origins of musical modernism and investigating its place in the institutional structures created by Mussolini's regime. In so doing, he sheds new light on Dallapiccola's work and on the cultural politics of the early twentieth century to provide a history of musical modernism in Italy from the *fin de siècle* to the early Cold War.

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Preface and acknowledgements

The five chapters of this book are designed as a single narrative that tells two interlocking stories. The principal focus is on the first twenty years (roughly 1930–50) in the career of the leading Italian composer of the mid-twentieth century, Luigi Dallapiccola (1904–1975). Special emphasis is placed on his one-act operas *Volo di notte* (Night Flight) and *Il prigioniero* (The Prisoner), which received their stage premières in Florence in 1940 and 1950 respectively. The operas are discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5. Between these accounts comes a reading of Dallapiccola's major choral work of 1938–41, *Canti di prigionia* (Songs of Imprisonment). Together, Chapters 3–5 attempt a balanced coverage of musical, philosophical and political points of interest in these three works. While the accounts of the operas do not neglect music-analytical discussion, they gravitate towards philosophy and politics. The discussion of the *Canti di prigionia*, by contrast, treats Dallapiccola's music in more depth. Yet here too, philosophical and political dimensions are never far away. These three compositions from the late 1930s and 1940s are outstanding in the history of twentieth-century music for the way in which they manage to sustain the highest aesthetic interest at the same time as they bear witness to a profound involvement in the socio-political currents of their times. They do not simply trace a movement from fascism to resistance, but engage with some of the darkest episodes of the twentieth century with an intensity that repays the closest attention.

Volo di notte, the *Canti di prigionia* and *Il prigioniero* are the three major works of Dallapiccola's that have been most frequently performed. They have also been widely discussed in print, not least by the composer. As they take into account the reception histories of these compositions, Chapters 3–5 examine the ways in which the interpretation of Dallapiccola's work has been shaped by his own writings. Throughout the present study, it is taken for granted that neither musical works nor their 'afterlives' can be comprehensible in the absence of an awareness of the social and historical contexts of their creation. The discussion of Dallapiccola's mid-career trio of major works is prefaced in Chapter 2 by an account of his compositions of the earlier 1930s – above all the three sets of choruses on texts by the seventeenth-century poet Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger – considered in relation to the institutions for the dissemination of new music fostered by the fascist regime. The book is equally concerned to place Dallapiccola's music in its stylistic context. His celebrated interest in the work of the Second Viennese School is addressed in Chapter 3. Just as significant, however, are the composer's debts to non-Viennese models, considered in Chapter 2. These include Ravel and Stravinsky among non-Italian composers; and

among Italians, Dallapiccola's teacher Vito Frazzi, as well as the more internationally prominent Gian Francesco Malipiero and Alfredo Casella.

The last two names bring us to the second story this book wishes to tell. Recent years have seen a marked increase of interest in Italian music of the first half of the twentieth century, as record companies have belatedly started to issue recordings of a repertory that, not so long ago, remained largely inaccessible. While Chapter 2 discusses the work of Casella and Malipiero in the period immediately preceding and following the fascist take-over of power in October 1922 as a background to Dallapiccola's first published compositions, Chapter 1 takes the account of musical modernism in Italy back to its origins before and during the First World War. This book's second story, inseparable from the first, is thus the more ambitious. In the light of the sudden availability of recordings capable of illustrating the full sweep of Italian musical modernism in its first forty years – from Casella's extended orchestral song *Notte di maggio* (May Night) (1913) onwards – it seems an appropriate moment to attempt the sketch of a complete history. To employ a pair of terms that will reappear in Chapter 4, this book has both a protagonist and a 'deuteragonist'. The leading role played by Dallapiccola for his generation was taken in the earlier decades of the century by Casella.

Some readers may balk at this vocabulary. A reminder of the title of the present book – it is a study of modernism and fascism – should be sufficient to indicate how the notion of cultural 'leadership' may be thoroughly apposite in the present context, for all that it has lately become unfashionable, particularly among those commentators set on the rooting out of supposedly outmoded 'teleological' visions of history. It is one thing to write teleological history, another to observe figures from the first half of the twentieth century consistently ascribing a teleological virtue to their own actions – typically that of occupying a stylistic 'vanguard'. If modernists did not in fact know where they were going, they certainly wanted audiences to believe that they did. To attempt to cleanse accounts of modernism of the kinds of future-orientated belligerence so characteristic of its leading figures – for leading is precisely what they did: others followed – is to attempt to write against the evidence of history. Modernism, as the following account will demonstrate, is inextricably bound up with desires for historical priority, for domination of perceived inferiors, for exclusion and/or estrangement of the work of others. If recent commentators have tried to find in it consoling signs of such liberal values as pluralism, compromise, cooperation and cultural exchange, the present book will suggest that these values are, for the most part, irrelevant to the discussion of this repertory. What is required for the adequate interpretation of those kinds of non-modernist music that were treated as beyond the pale by an English-language musicology backed into a corner by the ideological exigencies of the Cold War is not a dilution of the meaning of the term 'modernism', but a greater effort of conceptualization with regard to the repertoires against which modernism defined itself. Some suggestions are put forward in

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Chapters 1 and 2. Modernism itself is essentially anti-liberal. It is not a pretty topic. Appearances to the contrary, it is not finally a fascist topic either. And yet, as we shall see, the distinction can be a fine one.

An earlier version of Chapter 3 was published as 'The Avant-Garde Artist as Superman: Aesthetics and Politics in Dallapiccola's *Volo di notte*', in Roberto Illiano (ed.), *Italian Music during the Fascist Period* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 657–716. Chapter 5 appeared as 'Dallapiccola and the Politics of Commitment: Re-Reading *Il prigioniero*', *Radical Musicology*, 2 (2007). A still earlier version of Chapter 3, along with some of the material presented in Chapter 2, first saw the light in my doctoral thesis, 'Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy: Dallapiccola in the Thirties' (University of Cambridge, 2001). I would like to thank Anna Dallapiccola for permission both to reproduce the photograph shown on the front cover and (in Chapter 4) to quote from her father's correspondence with Alfredo Casella. In Florence, the staff of the Archivio Contemporaneo 'Alessandro Bonsanti' were unfailingly helpful; in Birmingham, the staff of the Barber Music Library no less so. Much of the work on the previously published sections of the book was carried out during my time as a Junior Research Fellow at St John's College, Oxford. At the University of Birmingham, John Klapper arranged funding for a research trip to Florence and for a teaching buy-out that enabled progress to be made on Chapter 1. Arnold Whittall kept faith with the project over many years, and read the entire manuscript in draft, making a number of acute criticisms, to many of which I have tried to respond. Others who helped, by lending scores, tapes and books, or in more or less friendly discussion, include Kathryn Bailey, David Gallagher, Alexander Goehr, Rob Keeley, Julian Murphet, the late David Osmond-Smith, Francesco Parrino, Dean Sutcliffe and the late Janet Waterhouse. Anna Linton made it all possible, and Daniel helped too – as, in his own way, did his younger brother Henry, who raced the book to its completion, and won.

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