1 Modernism before fascism

This is a book about music in Florence, the city in which Luigi Dallapiccola arrived as an eighteen-year-old in May 1922, and where he made his home until he died, close to fifty-three years later. Florence was where he composed, where he wrote and taught, and where – in the first twenty years of his career – his most important premières took place. Unlike his older contemporary Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968), Dallapiccola was not a native Florentine. He was born some 150 miles away (closer to 300 by road or rail) in Pisino (today Pazin), a small town in Istria, the peninsula that juts into the Adriatic at its north-eastern corner, south of Trieste. We shall return to Istria, but not to Castelnuovo-Tedesco. If this were a general history of music in Florence during the first half of the twentieth century, Castelnuovo-Tedesco would play a leading role. From the mid-1920s until July 1939, when – following the imposition of anti-Semitic legislation – he found himself compelled to leave Italy, he was the best-known composer in the city, recognized as '"the Florentine musician" *par excellence*'. But Castelnuovo-Tedesco was no modernist. In a letter of January 1938 to his erstwhile friend Alessandro Pavolini (1903–1945), president of the Fascist Confederation of Professionals and Artists, he protested that notions of 'Bolshevising and subversive musical Judaism' were inaccurate. His work, like that of other Italian Jewish composers, had always been 'rather moderate in tendency'.[1]

In disgruntled mood, Dallapiccola might well have viewed the pre-war association of Florence with Castelnuovo-Tedesco's stylistic moderation as symptomatic of the city's attitudes. For what connection had Florence with musical modernism? As Dallapiccola scornfully recalled, late in life, when he arrived in 1922 the city was mounting its first ever production of *Tristan und Isolde* – fifty-seven years after the opera's première. 'Florence is a city deaf to music', he complained. And further: 'The composition teaching at the Conservatory in Florence remained without influence on my musical language.'[2] English-language musicology knows Florence as a musical centre: as the late sixteenth-century location of Giovanni de' Bardi's *Camerata*, the birthplace of musical modernity, in some accounts.[3] Musical modernism is something

[1] Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, ed. James Westby, 2 vols. (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005), I, 274, 292n409.

[2] Luigi Dallapiccola, 'Über Arnold Schönberg', in *Beiträge der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Musik 1974/75* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1974), 10; Ursula Stürzbecher, *Werkstattgespräche mit Komponisten* (Cologne: Gerig, 1971), 223.

[3] See, for example, Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29–40.

different, as this chapter will try to show. Given the intention, already declared, to give an account not just of Dallapiccola's early career, or of 'musical modernism in fascist Italy', but of Italian modernist composition generally, the decision to set the book in Florence may appear eccentric. So it needs to be pointed out that to the scholar of Italian literature or politics the idea of a Florentine modernism is entirely conventional. Part of the task of the present chapter will be to bring this background to light for musicology in English; to show that modernism in the city had its musical dimension too. It must also be acknowledged that what follows is, of course, not the only history of 'musical modernism in fascist Italy' that one might contemplate. A book centred on the early career of Goffredo Petrassi (1904–2003) would be concerned with a Roman environment apparently much more stimulating for a young composer in the 1920s and 1930s (though, as we shall see, Dallapiccola's complaints were exaggerated).

But it is in neither Florence nor Rome that we begin. At the start of the twentieth century, it was Milan that was the base for the iconoclastic movement that called itself futurism, which to readers less versed in music than in painting, sculpture, theatre or poetry surely counts as Italy's preeminent contribution to modernism. Thus it was in that city, on 21 April 1914, that one of the great cultural events of the century took place, a performance less celebrated in textbooks than the Second Viennese *Skandalkonzert* or the Parisian première of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (31 March and 29 May 1913 respectively), but in its way just as seminal: the first public outing, at the Teatro dal Verme, of Luigi Russolo's orchestra of *intonarumori* or 'noise-makers'.

I

Is it appropriate to group these events together? All three provoked noisy responses. Performances were rendered inaudible, or had to be abandoned, and were accompanied by brawling and police involvement. But the Milanese concert (or *serata*, to use the futurists' term) stood apart from the events in Paris or Vienna. For all their power to disturb audiences, the compositions that caused scandals in the latter two cities rested on musical conventions that had been developing for centuries. It is in terms of the flouting of such conventions (which they take for granted) that modernist compositions make their effect. Such works demanded a considerable refinement of taste of their listeners, and a remarkable virtuosity of their composers and performers. But Russolo (1885–1947), unlike Stravinsky – or Zemlinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Berg and Mahler (the composers of the *Skandalkonzert*) – was not a professional musician. How could a compositional autodidact hope to find his place among such exalted company?

In some respects he clearly wished to. He had written three pieces, or 'spirals', as he called them: *Il risveglio di una città*, *Si pranza sulla terrazza dell'Hôtel* and *Convegno d'automobili e d'aeroplani* (The Awakening of a City, Dining on the Hotel Terrace and

The Meeting of Automobiles and Airplanes). He had developed a method of notation; his performers, whom Russolo conducted in something like the normal manner, had been thoroughly rehearsed. Had the audience not been intent on drowning out their efforts, it would (Russolo tells us) have enjoyed 'really excellent performances'.[4] Although nothing more than the opening two pages of *Il risveglio di una città* has come down to us, and only the shortest recorded bursts of the *intonarumori* in their original form, we may take it that Russolo's *spirali*, like 'normal' compositions, were capable of more or less effective interpretation.[5] Yet in obvious contrast to the instrumentalists of a traditional ensemble, Russolo's performers had had – prior to their rehearsals – no experience of playing their instruments. For these had only recently been invented and built: a collection of 'howlers' (*ululatori)*, 'roarers' (*rombatori*), 'cracklers' (*crepitatori*) and so forth, in appearance boxes fitted with amplifying horns. And what they produced was not the last word in melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and timbral sophistication (with respect to the conventions referred to above), but noises. If the riots at the *Skandalkonzert* and the première of *The Rite of Spring* were the prime events of musical modernism, the unveiling of musical futurism at the Teatro dal Verme was of a different order.

In a study of musical modernism, it is as well to air such terminological anxiety as quickly as possible. Readers of English-language discussion of Italian repertory can nowadays expect to find the term 'modernist' used not just in relation to Russolo's compositions for *intonarumori*, and to the work of such post-1945 luminaries as Bruno Maderna (1920–1973), Luigi Nono (1924–1990) and Luciano Berio (1925–2003), but also with respect to such unlikely candidates as Verdi's *Falstaff* (Milan, 1893) and Puccini's *Turandot* (Milan, 1926). How can a single term, applied to repertories of such stylistic variety, have much meaning? The present account will take none of these examples to be 'modernist'. In the case of Russolo, the orchestra of *intonarumori*, in conjunction with the manifesto *L'arte dei rumori* (1913), will be read as an expression not of modernism, but of the avant-garde. The significance of the two terms is not co-extensive: it turns on the conventions noted above. For Peter Bürger, in his celebrated account, the *serata* in the Teatro dal Verme would be an instantiation of 'the break avant-garde movements made with art as an institution', an explosive revelation of art's ideological character, located in its 'imagined satisfaction of needs that are repressed in daily praxis'.[6]

Russolo was keen that the appearance of a traditional concert be preserved. Audiences were to appreciate the 'charm' (*bellezza*) of the sounds produced by his noise-makers, listening in 'the most absolute silence'.[7] Insisting on this

[4] Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, trans. Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon, 1986), 33.
[5] For the opening of *Il risveglio di una città*, see *ibid*., 72–3.
[6] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), li, 13.
[7] Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, 81.

conventional receptive attitude, Russolo confirmed the subversive character of his activity. At stake is aesthetic autonomy, the concept that defines 'the status of art in bourgeois society', as Bürger would have it, and the root of art's inherent tendency to neutralize critique.[8] Futurism's assault was directed, above all, at the aestheticism of the previous artistic generation, with its belief – summed up in the phrase *l'art pour l'art* – that art should be insulated from society. As Russolo explains in his manifesto, music has always been something apart, 'different from and independent of life'. It is 'a fantastic world superimposed on the real one, an inviolable and sacred world'. Modern orchestral music, in its increasing dissonance and complexity, is drawing closer to 'noise-sound'. The next step is a plunge into the noise that is part of reality. Russolo observes of his performers in Milan how,

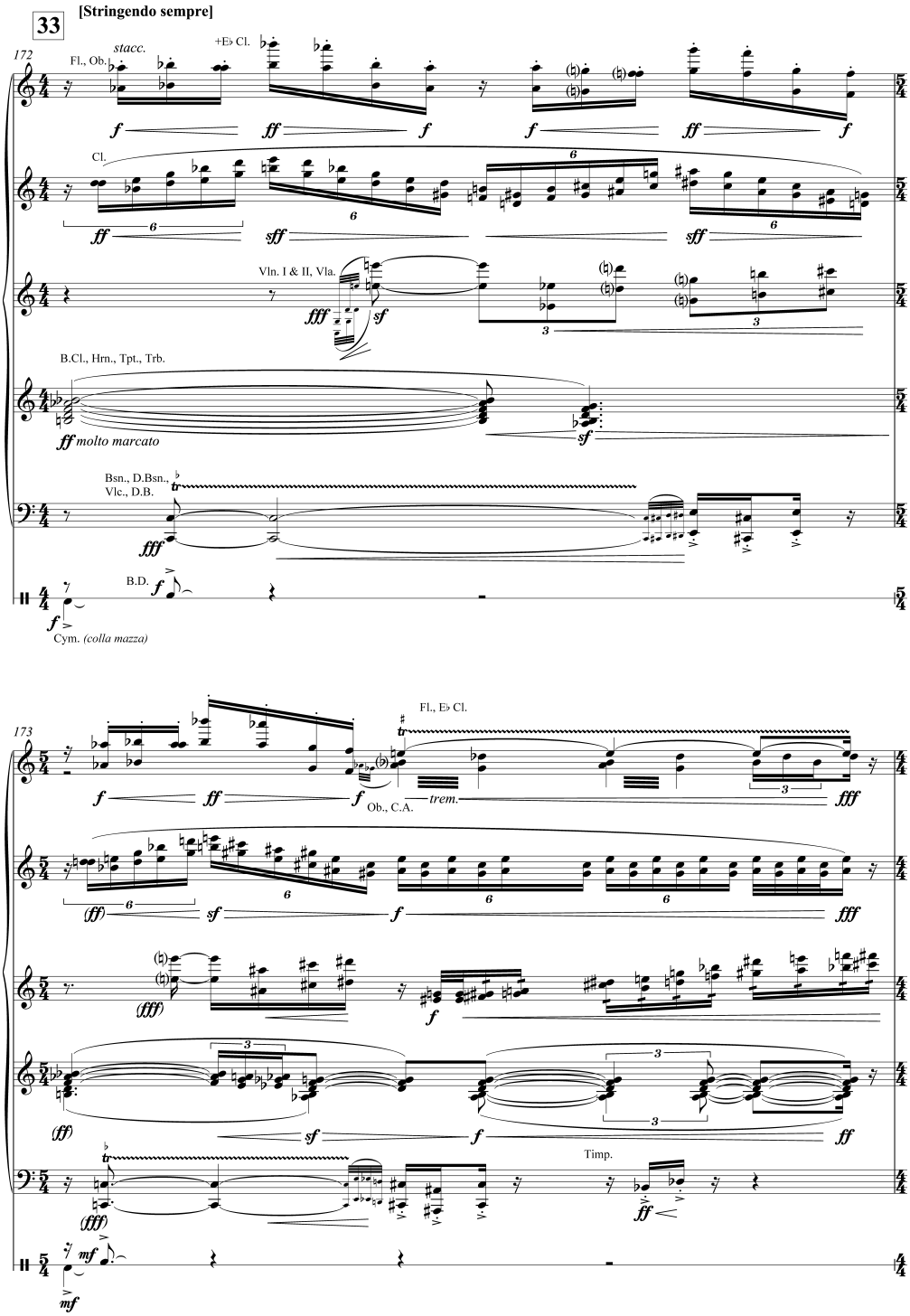
> [a]fter the fourth or fifth rehearsal, *having developed the ear* and having grown accustomed to the pitched and variable noises produced by the noise instruments, they told me that they took great pleasure in following the noises of trams, automobiles, and so on, in the traffic outside.[9]

This is the avant-garde utopia, the reconfiguration of the relationship between producer and recipient of an art-work in what Bürger calls the 'sublation of art in the praxis of life'. There are no more artists or works; the means-ends rationality that dominates everyday bourgeois existence has dissolved in an aestheticization that is all encompassing.[10]

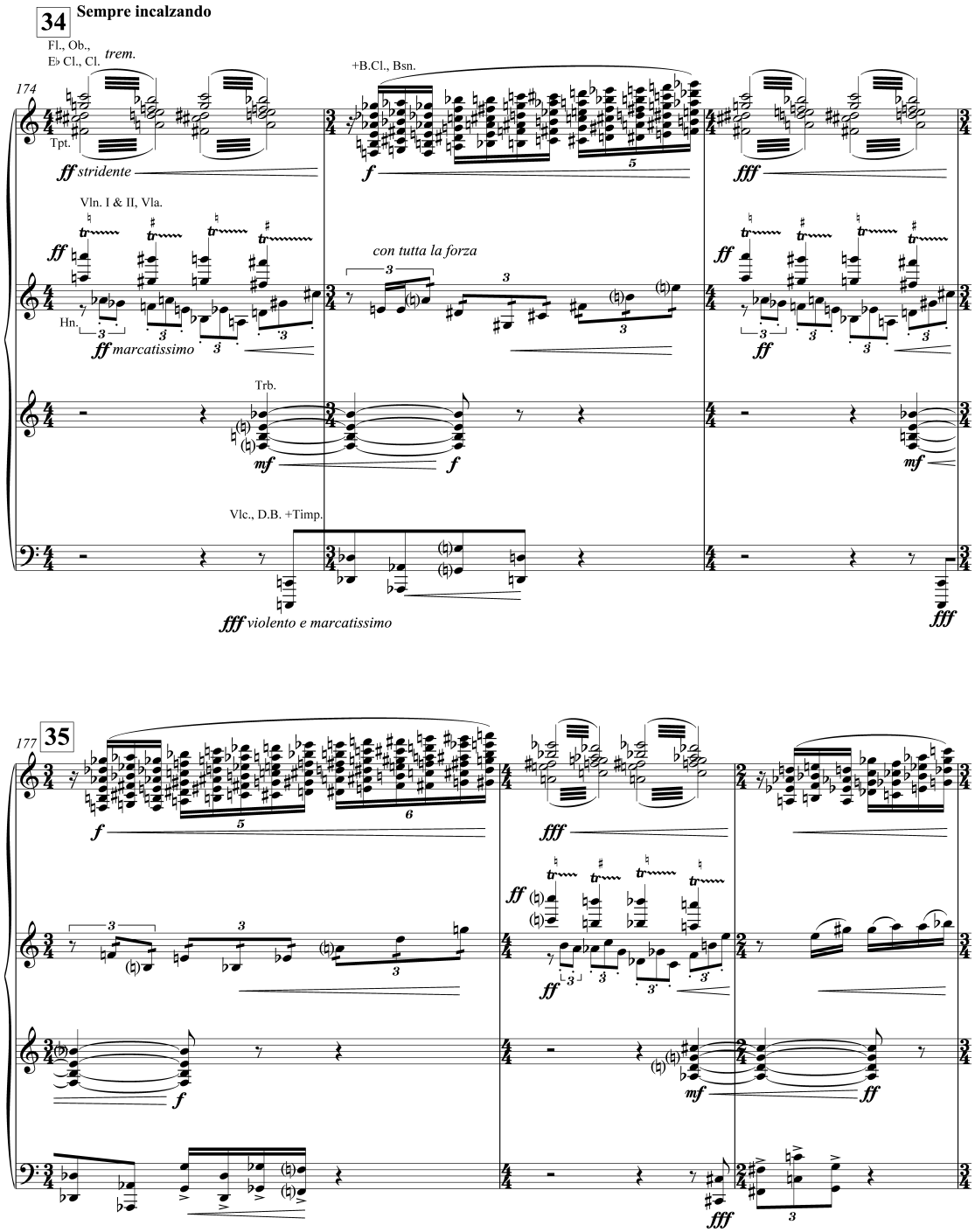
The work of both Stravinsky and the Second Viennese School, for all its 'revolutionary' characteristics, belongs on the side of music in Russolo's distinction. The use of the term 'avant-garde' to describe, say, *The Rite of Spring*, or Webern's *Sechs Orchesterstücke* (1909–10), might thus be thought inappropriate, as also its more common employment in the context of post-1945 composers such as Maderna, Nono or Berio. So what and when (not to speak of where) was Italian musical modernism? The beginning of an answer lies in Example 1.1. Up to somewhere near the point in the score shown here (about 10 minutes into this 15-minute work), so the composer tells us, the audience at the première had been listening 'in a pregnant silence, like that which precedes great storms'. But when the players reached the music given in Example 1.1 (or perhaps a few bars before), 'the public broke out thunderously with a wave of indignation' so furious that the later stages of the composition could not be heard. The work was the *Elegia eroica*, Op. 29 (1916), of Alfredo Casella (1883–1947), the date 21 January 1917; the French conductor Rhené-Baton (1879–1940) was directing the Orchestra della Regia Accademia di Santa Cecilia in the Augusteo in Rome.[11] It was a momentous occasion:

[8] Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22. [9] Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, 24–5, 27–8, 48.
[10] Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 51, 34.
[11] Alfredo Casella, *Music in My Time*, trans. Spencer Norton (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 140–1.

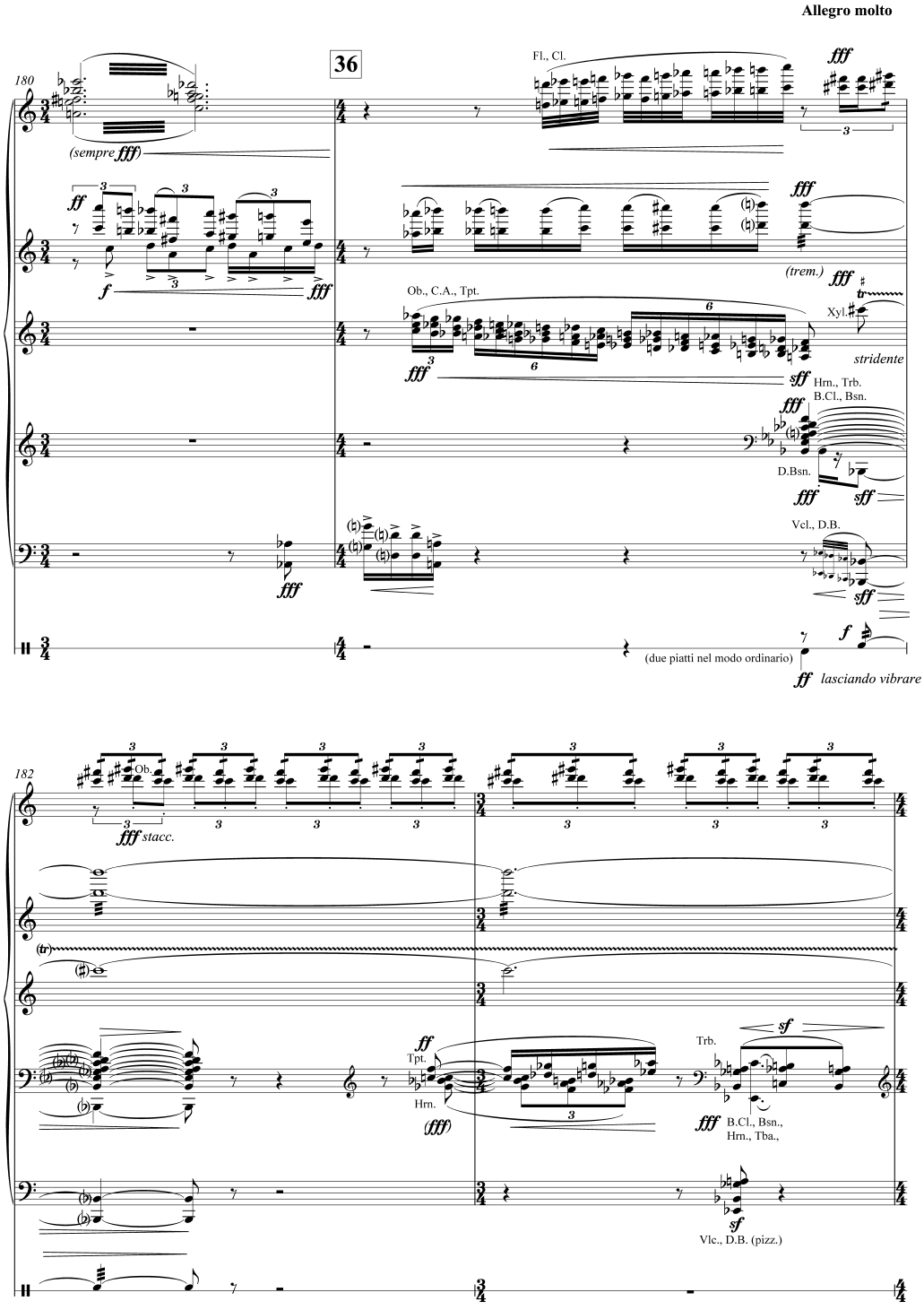
Ex. 1.1 Alfredo Casella, *Elegia eroica*, Op. 29 (1916), bars 172–86.



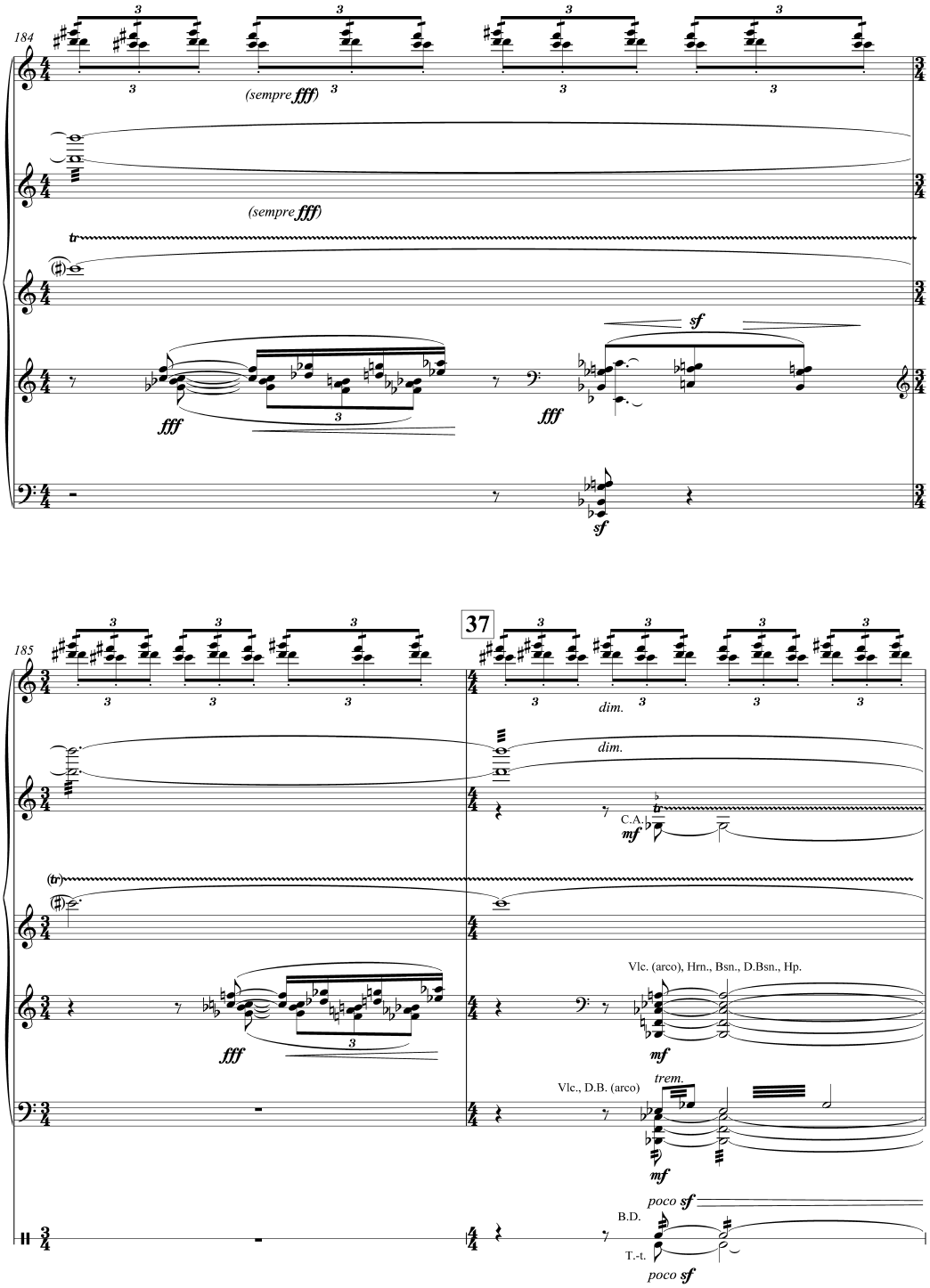
Ex. 1.1 (cont.)



Ex. 1.1 (cont.)



Ex. 1.1 (cont.)



'as tumultuous a gathering as the one that marked the first performance of Igor Stravinsky's *Sacre du printemps* in Paris', so one critic wrote.[12]

II

Born in Turin, Casella moved to Paris at thirteen to study at the Conservatoire. Apart from a period sitting in on Fauré's class in the winter of 1900–1 (the normally registered students included Ravel and Koechlin), he did not study composition.[13] Casella began his career as a precociously virtuosic pianist, winning the Conservatoire's *premier prix* at the age of sixteen. He did make a thorough study of harmony at the Conservatoire (*deuxième prix*, 1901), working with Xavier Leroux (1863–1919), who also taught him counterpoint. But there is a sense in which the first decade of Casella's published work – at the end of which he was still only thirty – constituted a self-education in public. The critical consensus has long been that in 1909–10 Casella came to a first maturity. On the insistence of no less than Gustav Mahler, on whose behalf Casella had engaged in a campaign of proselytization in an unenthusiastic Paris, two orchestral compositions of this period, the rhapsody *Italia*, Op. 11, and the Suite in C major (also known as *Suite à Jean Huré*), Op. 13, were published in Vienna by Universal Edition, a step up from the Parisian firm Mathot, which had handled the majority of Casella's music to date. As the twenty-one-year-old Theodor W. Adorno confirmed, commenting on the *Fragments symphoniques* from Casella's ballet *Le couvent sur l'eau*, Op. 19 (1912–13), the composer 'possesses a selfhood that clearly penetrates every one of his works'.

Adorno's account of the Fragments ends badly. In the lack of any 'compelling force' demanding 'that his music should sound one way and not another', Casella is condemned as a 'dilettante'. The score's Mahlerian elements, 'robbed of their meaning, become petrified in his work, and surround him like lifeless grimaces'.[14] Yet Adorno seems to have put his finger on one of the fundamental characteristics of Casella's work. Thus Virgilio Bernardoni, defending the music of 1908–10, simply treats as positive that which Adorno finds disturbing. There is indeed no deep connection to the material. Casella can hold together such a variety of stylistic elements (encompassing contemporary French and Russian idioms as well as Mahler and Strauss) because he assumes an 'emotional equidistance from each of them'. Taking shape here, Bernardoni suggests, is the desire for music that would be 'objective'.[15]

[12] Georges Jean-Aubry, 'The New Italy', *Musical Quarterly*, 6/1 (1920), 42.

[13] For the Fauré class, see Casella, *Music in My Time*, 59–60; for the Conservatoire in general, *ibid*., 37–66; also Roberto Calabretto (ed.), *Alfredo Casella. Gli anni di Parigi. Dai documenti* (Florence: Olschki, 1997), 1–18.

[14] Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 20 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–86), XIX, 285, 286–7.

[15] Virgilio Bernadoni, 'La Sinfonia Op. 12 e la genesi dell'idea sinfonica nel primo Casella', in Giovanni Morelli (ed.), *Alfredo Casella negli anni di apprendistato a Parigi. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Venezia, 13–15 maggio 1992* (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 123–4.

Casella's *Notte di maggio*, Op. 20 (1913), is the work generally held to mark the onset of his *seconda maniera* or *secondo stile*: his modernist period. A setting for solo voice and orchestra of a text by Italy's national poet of the late nineteenth century, Giosuè Carducci (1835–1907), *Notte di maggio* unleashes – in the words of the prominent critic Massimo Mila (1910–1988) – 'an astonishing flow of expressionistic lava'.[16] The description would be more appropriate to passages in the outer movements of Casella's heavily Mahlerian Second Symphony, Op. 12 (1908–10) than to this Carducci setting, in which, as the work's first reviewers appreciated, the Germanic character of Casella's earlier music has largely disappeared.[17] *Notte di maggio* is a 'Franco-Russian' piece, though not exclusively, as we can see from Example 1.2, which sets stanza 4 and part of stanza 5 of the poem, given below together with the first three words of stanza 6:

> O voi dormenti nei materni colli,
> E voi d'umili tombe a presso l'onde
> Guardanti in cielo trapassar le stelle;
> Voi sotto il fiso raggio della luna
> Rividi io popolar la cheta notte,
> Lievi strisciando sul commosso verde.
>
> Deh, quanta parte dell'età mia verde
> Rivissi in cima ai luminosi colli,
> E vinta al basso rifuggìa la notte!
> Quando una forma verso me sull'onde,
> Disegnata nel lume della luna,
> Vidi, e per gli occhi le ridean le stelle.
>
> Ricorditi: mi disse.
>
> [O you who sleep in these maternal hills, / And you of humble graves close by the waters / Who watch the skies through which move the stars; / Beneath the unbending ray of the moon / I saw you once again people the tranquil night, / Lightly treading the softly stirring meadow. // Ah, what youthful days in such a meadow / Did I relive on the peaks of those moonlit hills, / To whose foot now was fleeing defeated night! / When I saw come towards me on the waters / A form outlined in the light of the moon / Through whose eyes were shining the stars. // Remember: it said to me.][18]

[16] Massimo Mila, 'Itinerario stilistico 1901–1942', in Fedele d'Amico and Guido M. Gatti (eds.), *Alfredo Casella* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 36.

[17] See Calabretto (ed.), *Alfredo Casella. Gli anni di Parigi*, 172–82, esp. 173–4, 177.

[18] This translation, by Susannah Howe, is cited from the booklet accompanying the recording of *Notte di maggio* by Olivia Andreini, with Francesco La Vecchia conducting the Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma, on Naxos 8.572416 (2010), 10–11.