

BRUNO MADERNA

David C F Wright PhD

As I have said elsewhere, I was removed from the Music Web International site because some people objected to my articles about Schubert, Chopin, Scriabin, Britten and Elgar.

All that I wrote was correct, accurate and truthful. One correspondent wrote that Schubert did not die of syphilis but he hoped that I would die of syphilis as did Schubert, and that I would die in agony and rot in hell.

Another complained that I had quoted a disgusting letter from Chopin yet it exists in a volume of his letters. That I said that he had a boyfriend named Titus caused vitriolic attacks upon me but this is a well-known fact and was an important part of Chopin's life at one time.

If I wrote about Ivor Gurney and did not refer to his serious illness after World War I, my biographical sketch would not be complete. The letters that Elgar wrote to my great uncle, which I have, and I have quoted, has upset Elgar fans, but these letters are here in Elgar's own hand. My opinion of Britten is born out by irrefutable facts and also because I knew him and so I am not expressing opinions, but facts.

The composer displays his own character in much of his music. The music is the man. All my fellow professional musicians agree with me.

Even if the objections to my articles were valid and therefore were unacceptable criticisms, the same policy should apply to all other writers to the Music Web International site, but it does not.

Rob Barnett is the classical music review editor and is an ignoramus and highly prejudiced.

Concerning Bruno Maderna, he writes of his music being " wisps and chards of ideas which ebb and flow dreamily, or pelt down like hailstones... includes lanky and muscular ideas... the final track groans and blares as if evoking some terrifying black and boiling planet... section three assaults the ears... this rages with all the searing qualities of vitriol."

One can hardly forgive him for his statement that Dvorak was undoubtedly influenced by Britten, that Liszt was not a good composer and did not understand the piano, and his scandalous attack on Wolfgang Rihm which only showed him to be so unmusical and laughably inane.

Barnett can be both libellous and ignorant and get away with such nonsense, and yet when I refer to established facts and truths I am abused.

He obviously does not like Maderna but this is largely due to prejudice and his not understanding his music or even bothering to try to. Can you understand his rant at Maderna?

Maderna was a very clever and skilled composer admired by those who knew him and by those who



also valued his music. He was, without doubt, a magnificent conductor of both standard repertoire and modern music. He tackled with ease many of the most complicated scores of the time. The so-called great conductors were unequal to such music.

I feel it is necessary to combat people's ignorance and prejudice with my assessment of Maderna which assessment would not be required had Barnett and others not written such rubbish.



Maderna was born in Venice on 21 April 1920. By the age of four, he was having violin lessons at Chioggia and, in a very short time, was a brilliant violinist, indeed a child prodigy. I have just heard a BBC Radio 3 announcer say that Elgar was a brilliant violinist. He certainly was not as Kreisler and others explained but, sadly, another myth and lie is being perpetrated.

By 1935, Maderna was studying in Milan where the professors and fellow students were amazed at his superlative skills. In 1939, his studies continued in Venice and the following year he graduated from the National Academy of St Cecilia in Rome with the highest honours. One of his tutors was Alessandro Bustini (1876-1970), now sadly forgotten, but his Quartet in G minor Op 13 is an excellent example of his compositional skill.

Maderna had some lessons with Antonio Guarneri in 1941, another musician completely forgotten. In the years 1942 and 1943, he studied with Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882-1973) whose music is somewhat conservative and includes eleven symphonies, six piano concertos, two violin concerts and eight string quartets as well as 17 operas. Malipiero also taught the gifted Luigi Nono.

During World War II, Maderna was briefly in the army but then joined the antifascist Partisan Resistance which was referred to as anarchist.

In 1948, Malipiero introduced Maderna to the brilliant German conductor Hermann Scherchen and, with Nono, Maderna attended Scherchen's classes. While Scherchen did not over extol the virtues of serial music this style of music appealed to Maderna because of its discipline and its requiring super human skill. As many musicians have rightly said, only the greatest composers can write in this style and lesser composers are totally inept at the dodecaphonic style and to cover their own incompetence they rubbish this technique.

In 1951, Maderna was invited to conduct new music at Darmstadt.

He co-founded the Internationale Kranichstanter Kammer-Ensemble which convened each year as an ad-hoc ensemble. Maderna met such outstanding musicians as Boulez, Messiaen, Stockhausen, Cage and Pousser.

Milan Conservatory appointed Maderna to teach serial technique which he did during 1957/1958. He also taught at the Dartington Summer School. Between 1967 and 1970 he taught conducting at the Salzburg Mozarteum. He moved to Darmstadt in 1963 to live and was made a German citizen.

In the early 1970s Maderna gave concerts in England. One particular concert was with the Halle in Leeds in which Stravinsky's impressive Symphony in three movements was performed along with Ligeti's Atmospheres a very subdued piece. During this performance, a horn player dropped his mute which clattered on the platform. The orchestra laughed and ridiculed the piece and Barbirolli, who was always a hateful man and a poor conductor commented, "Serves my orchestra right if they will play this rubbish and employ a useless conductor."

On 4 March 1971 Maderna conducted Mahler Nine at the Royal Festival Hall.

He had become a little overweight and it has been said that this caused a strain upon his heart. He had other health problems which he bore with fortitude. He died of cancer on 13 November 1973 when he was about to rehearse Debussy's opera Pelleas et Melisande and his own opera Satyricon.

I must confess to not being fond of electronic music and aleatory methods which were only used by Maderna on a very small scale.

I will make some brief comments on a few of his works but not in any particular order.

The Piano Concerto of 1942 is for solo piano lasting about 12 minutes. It opens gently but not weakly albeit reflective with gorgeous harmonies and memorable material. It teems with melodies and has a terrific climax around 2.04. At around 5.47 there follows some exciting music in a fast section contributing to a work of stature.

The Concerto for two pianos and instruments of 1948 continues in the same vein. It is stunningly original with rich chords and is dramatically impressive and often very powerful, always highly entertaining and fascinating.

His piano writing is absolutely amazing.

Between these two works is the 1946 String Quartet in one movement at about seven minutes. It is basically tonal, melodic and very well written and integrated.

The Improvisation no 1 for orchestra of 1949 is an original work as well of natural climaxes, woodwind solos, basically tonal with a rich and colourful orchestration. It is often very beautiful and of symphonic proportions. The final four minutes or so is splendid stirring stuff.

Aura for orchestra dates from 1972 and is a totally satisfying piece. It begins meditatively with layers of sound and it is music that glows. The concertante passage is equally remarkable.

Giardino Religioso also dates from 1972 and is scored for orchestra. Originality is an essential for any composer and work and this masterpiece opens with soaring strings and imaginative harp writing. There are choice melodic lines and the music evolves well and progressively with a strange ethereal beauty

The Composition no 1 for orchestra was completed in 1952 and lasts about 21 minutes. It is logical and coherent and often profound and moving.

COMPOSITIONS INCLUDE:

- Piano Concerto 1942
- Quartet for strings 1946
- Requiem 1946
- Concerto for piano and instruments 1948
- Composition 1 for orchestra 1949
- Composition 2 for orchestra 1950
- Music in two dimensions for flute percussion and tape 1952
- Improvisation 1 for orchestra 1952
- Improvisation 2 for orchestra 1953
- Composition in three tempi 1954
- Serenade no 2. electronic score 1954
- Flute concerto 1954
- Quartet for strings in two tempi 1955



Syntax for tape 1957
 Music in two dimension for tape 1958
 Continuo, electronic score 1958
 Dimension cello and tape 1960
 Piano concerto 1960
 Don Perlimplin radio opera
 La Rire, electronic score 1962
 Oboe Concerto no 1 1963
 Hyperion for voice flute and orchestra 1964
 Aria for orchestra 1964
 Stele per Dicotina 1966
 Widmung for violin 1967
 Oboe Concerto no 2 1967
 Quadrivium for four percussionists and four orchestral groups 1969
 Violin Concerto 1969
 Grand culodia for flute oboe and orchestra 1970
 Tempo Libero for tape 1970
 Ausstrahlung for flute mezzo soprano and orchestra 1971
 Viola for viola or viola d'amore 1971
 Piece for Ivry for violin 1971
 Dialodia for 2 clarinets
 Ages Radioinventions for soloists, chorus and orchestra 1972
 Venetian Journal 1972
 Aura for orchestra 1972
 Biogramma for orchestra 1972
 Giardino religioso for orchestra
 Standchen for Tini for violin and viola 1972
 Julliard Serenade for orchestra and tape ???
 Oboe Concerto no 3 1973
 Satyricon, opera
 Honeygreves flute and piano
 Music of gaiety for orchestra
 Cadenza for string quartet from Amanda
 Five film scores 1946-1968

As a conductor, he performed music by Luna Alcalay, Bartok, Piano Concerto no 1 with Brendel, Berg including the two operas, Konrad Boehmer, Boulez, Earle Brown, Hermanson, Kahowez, Kotoriski, Ligeti, Lutoslawski, Mahler, Symphonies 7 and 9, Malipiero, Mendelssohn, Monteverdi, L'Orfeo, Mozart, Bo Nilssen, Nono, Penderecki, Petrassi, Pousser, Ravel, Scarlatti Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Varese and Webern.



He was a remarkable conductor concerned about every detail. Orchestras loved him and admitted that he improved their own technique and understanding.

He was an outstanding teacher and among his pupils were Donatoni, Berio and Aldo Clementi. He also gave lessons to Nono.

Whatever Barnett and others say, Maderna was a great composer even if you do not understand or value his music or even bother to become acquainted with his superior abilities. It is wrong to savage a composer because you do not understand his music or, in this case, his genius.

(1773)

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