

MARIO ZAFRED

David C F Wright

Here is an Italian composer of real class who deserves to be known and is a composer I have admired for very many years. I may not have liked him as a person because of his Communist beliefs.

Reginald Smith Brindle wrote, 'Zafred condemns equally the return to the past and atonal formalism for political reasons. He follows the artistic dictates of the Soviet regime in the ideals of immediate communication and a musical language which is healthy and robustly popular. He is a composer of considerable technical skill and after using serial music in his Concerto for two pianos of 1945 and his Trio of 1946 settled down to a style which acknowledges Communist ideals and superior technical skill'.

He was born in Trieste on 2 March 1922. His studies in music began with Malipiero in Venice before he attended the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome from where he graduated in 1944. However, he continued to study, this time with Pizzetti.

Gian Francesco Malipiero was born in 1882 and died in 1973. He studied with Marco Enrico Bossi and later, in Berlin, attended Max Bruch's classes. In Paris, he encountered the music of Ravel, Debussy, Falla, Schoenberg, Berg and Casella. Malipiero was very prolific with 19 operas, 11 symphonies and 6 unnumbered ones, 8 string quartets, 6 piano concertos, two each for violin and cello respectively, a flute concerto and a concerto for piano trio and orchestra

Ildebrando Pizzetti hated all music that was modern. He lived from 1880 to 1965 and composed 18 operas, concertos for violin (played by Menuhin), viola, cello and harp, a piano sonata and 2 string quartets.

In 1947, Zafred went to Paris where he studied for a further two years. He was very keen to avail himself of the experience of established musicians.

On his return to Italy in 1949, he pursued a successful career as a music critic for L'unita (1949-1956) and La Giustizia (1956-1963). His writings showed his supreme knowledge of music and impeccable insight.

He married Lilyan Merengo. They had a daughter, Natasha who became a good pianist

His Piano Concerto no.1 of 1957, and apparently revised, was dedicated to Lilyan and is in three movements, allegro, lento and a rondo marked allegro giusto. It has a tonality of B minor or B major without a key signature. It is a real concerto requiring brilliant fingerwork and excellent articulation with piano passages where the right hand is in chromatic thirds; there are double octaves, big but logical chords, and a rhythmic drive. The slow movement has a tremendous atmosphere.

His personal appearance was always tall, thin and somewhat gaunt or 'hollow'.

In 1956, he was awarded the prize of Premio Marzotto, the Sibelius prize of 1969 and the City of Treviso prize of 1963.

In 1968, he became artistic director of the Teatro Comunale Giuseppe Verdi but left to become the artistic director of the Teatro Lirico Sperimentale Spoleto up to 1974. In the previous year, he was appointed Principal of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome. He was not only a brilliant musician but an excellent administrator and, deservedly, had the admiration of all Italy.

His ravishingly beautiful Viola Concerto was played by Bruno Giuranna and broadcast in the UK by the amazing Harry Danks.

His music sometimes used serialism but it is often accessible and simple , but never banal. Sometimes , he used Istrian folk songs from the Adriatic.

The Sonata for harp of 1979 is brilliantly written and very difficult and , thankfully avoids all the usual cliches. The Piano Sonata no 5 of 1980 is originally virtuosic but the ignorant will object to some of the fascinating chords. It is remarkably original.

In 1985, he was chosen to be the honorary president of the Fondazione Arts Academy and the Istituziono Sinfonica di Roma.

One cannot emphasise strongly enough how respected he was. His neglect is totally unjustified.

He died in Rome on 22 May 1987. He was 65.

It is difficult to list all his works and their dates, but his works include

String Quartet no 1 (1941), Quartet no 2 (1947), Quartet no 3 (1948), Quartet no 4 (1948)
Piano Trio no 1 (1942), no. 2 (1948), no 3 (1954)
String Sextet (1967)
Wind Quintet
Trio for flute, viola and harp
Five piano sonatas
Recitative e Varazioni for violin
Sonata for solo viola
Sonata for harp
Sonata for flute and bass flute
Operas Amieto (1961), Wallenstein (1965), Kean (produced 1983)
Vocal Canto di Novembre, Epitaphe in form of a ballad , All'Isonzo
Choral Elegia di Duino
Seven film scores (1951-58)

Orchestral Music

1941: Two Ricercari for small orchestra
1943: Symphony No.1
1944: Symphony No.2
1946: Preludio a Marina” for orchestra
1949: Symphony No.3 “Canto del Carso”
“Come se camminassi sul’erba tagliata di fresco”(“Suite lirico”) for speaker, chorus and orchestra
1950: Symphony No.4 (“in onore della Resistenza”): 30 minutes
1951: Flute Concerto: 24 minutes
Sinfonia Concertante “Canto della Pace” for Viola and Orchestra
1952: Symphony No.5 “Prati e boschi della primavera”: 36 minutes
“Concerto Lirico quasi una fantasia” for Violin and Orchestra: 20 minutes
1953: Triple Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra: 30 minutes
Sinfonietta for soprano and small orchestra: 20 minutes
1954: “Elegia di Duino” for chorus and orchestra: 14 minutes
1955: Harp Concerto: 20 minutes
Sinfonia breve for strings: 15 minutes

- 1956: Cello Concerto: 25 minutes
Viola Concerto: 21 minutes
- 1958: Symphony No.6: 25 minutes
- 1959: Piano Concerto No.1
- 1960: Piano Concerto No.2
- 1961: Double Piano Concerto: 20 minutes
- 1962: “Musica notturna” for Flute and Strings
- 1963: “Metamorfosi” for Piano and Orchestra
- 1964: “Elegia in tre tempi” for Viola and Orchestra: 20 minutes
“Variazioni Concertante su l’introduzione dell’ op.111 di Beethoven” for Piano and
Orchestra: 20 minutes
- 1966: “Invenzioni” for Violin, Viola and Orchestra: 20 minutes
“Epithaphe en Forme de Ballade” for baritone and small orchestra: 13 minutes
- 1967: Symphonic Overture (“Festival Piece”): 6 minutes
- 1969: Symphony No.7: 23 min
Concerto for strings

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