**Gian-Francesco Malipiero**

**Peter Roderick**

Gian-Francesco Malipiero (b. 1882, d. 1973) was an Italian composer whose life spanned an expansive period of Italian history, from the post-Risorgimento years through two disastrous wars and into the turbulent *anni di piombo*.

Malipiero will be remembered as a Venetian, tied for a long period to his beloved Asolo in the hills of the Veneto, but in fact his early life was spent in a variety of locations, and his cosmopolitan upbringing took him to Trieste, Vienna, Paris, Berlin and Bologna, where he absorbed a variety of influences and studied with a variety of tutors. In early life he resided in two principal musical spheres: the first was Parisian modernism (he attended the riotous premiere of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* in 1913) and the second was the *seconda prattica* of Claudio Monteverdi, whose renaissance works he studied and later edited in their entirety – antique music would form a thread of meaning that wove through much of his later work. Into the 1920s, Malipiero spent frequent amounts of time in Rome, and was (with Casella and the poet Gabrielle d’Annunzio) a founding member of the avant-garde group the ‘Corporazione delle Nuove Musiche’. This was the era in which Italian modernism and Italian Fascism formed an uneasy partnership, and this group played its role in the bombastic nationalism of the 1920s. Yet despite a burgeoning friendship with Mussolini, Malipiero’s career was almost derailed in 1932 when the fascist ‘Manifesto of Italian Musicians for the tradition of Nineteenth-Century Romantic Art’ criticised his music heavily, and in 1934 his opera *Il Figlio della Cambiata* was banned by the authorities due to its subversive libretto by Pirandello. Thus, as Harvey Sachs writes, ‘a clinical psychologist might have a better chance than a music historian at explaining Malipiero’s dealings with the fascists’ (1989: 132). From the war years onwards, Malipiero retreated from public life and spent longer periods in Asolo, with his influence on Italian musical life felt most keenly in his tutelage of a young Luigi Nono and Bruno Maderna.

Together with Casella and Pizetti, Malipiero was part of the *generazione dell’ottanta*, whose chief compositional gambit involved the purging of the sentimental and Verdian reputation of Italian music in order to establish a new generation of serious, mannered and forward-looked composers. Their music was often labeled neo-classical, using language and style as colours on a canvas, renovating older music (note the many -ana compositions of these years, Scarlattiana, Paganiniana etc.) and creating refined sounds that owed much to the music of Stravinsky, Hindemith and de Falla. They treated the past as a reified object, suitable for use as subject material for the present – an impeccably modernist tactic. Malipiero’s *Sette* *Canzoni* (1918-19) and *Torneo Notturno* (1929) mark the boundaries of what Waterhouse calls Malipiero’s ‘vintage years’, and both works display a strong conception of form and musical concentration whilst acting their own right as highly effective musical theatre works. Though constituting a refreshing break from the sensuous world of *verismo* opera, this stylized aesthetic later concretised into a rather mannered, idyllic moderation, displaying the ‘ambivalent historical character of modernist classicism’ as Hermann Danuser judges it (Danuser, 275)

Having said this, Malipiero’s talent was so vibrant that later works gave the lie to any talk of ossification: the fifth of his *Dialoghi* (1955-57) is a sparkling jewel in his eighth decade, a romantic tone-poem in baroque form with a classical concerto dialogic, early twentieth-century harmony and frequent use of 12 tone-rows. Malipiero was by all accounts an enigmatic figure, but as Waterhouse has argued, his unevenness does not disqualify him from being the most original Italian composer of his generation.

Select Works

6 morceaux (6 pezzi) (1905)

Pause del Silenzio (1917)

Pantea (1919) Ballet

String Quartet n.1 "Rispetti e strambotti" (1920)

L'Orfeide (1919–1922), Opera

San Francesco d'Assisi (1920–1921)

Torneo notturno (1929)

Concerto n.1 for Piano and Orchestra (1931)

Epitaffio (1931)

Inni (1932)

Concerto n.1 for Violin and Orchestra (1932)

La favola del figlio cambiato (1933), Opera

Giulio Cesare (1935), Opera

Sinfonia n.1 "In quattro tempi, come le quattro stagioni" (1933)

I capricci di Callot (1942), Opera

Hortus conclusus (1946)

Mondi celesti for soprano and ten instruments (1948)

Mondi celesti ed infernali (1949), opera

Vivaldiana (1952)

Fantasie concertanti (1954)

I Dialogi (1955-7) for various combinations of instruments

Macchine per 14 strumenti (1963)

Bianchi e neri (1964)

Iscariota (1971)

Select Bibliography

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Waterhouse, John (1999) *Gian Francesco Malipiero: The Life, Times and Music of a Wayward Genius*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Stable URL for a collection of photos and resources on Malipiero:

<http://www.rodoni.ch/malipiero/homepagegfm.html>

Stable Spotify Link to selected music by Malipiero: [Gian Francesco Malipiero](http://open.spotify.com/artist/4EyY6oleYBgqoIGLu4WS2o)