

Alfredo Casella and Giovanni Salviucci. The Story of a Friendship Told Through Archival Documents

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2017 marks the eightieth anniversary of Giovanni Salviucci's death and also the seventieth anniversary of Alfredo Casella's demise. Although the two were only friends for a short time, their relationship was based on an enduring mutual respect. This friendship was cut short by an unfortunate turn of events: on 4 September 1937, before he reached thirty, Giovanni Salviucci contracted and died from galloping pulmonary consumption. The circumstances of their first meeting have to do with both Salviucci's private life and the artistic life of the composer from Turin. From the 1920s onwards Casella was in touch with Luigi Parpagliolo, writer, naturalist and director of the Ministry of Public Education's Department of Antiquities and Fine Arts. His daughter Ida was one of Casella's piano students and on 19 November 1932 she and Salviucci got married. Both father and daughter were certainly influential in bringing the two composers together.¹ It is also just as likely that Salviucci may have got to know Casella while he was studying composition with Ernesto Boezi at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory. Casella had started to give piano master classes at Rome's Santa Cecilia Academy in 1932, after having taught pianoforte until 1922 at Rome Conservatory. After Salviucci

gained his diploma in composition in 1932, it was almost a foregone conclusion that he would decide to further his counterpoint studies with Casella.² In fact, Casella was well known on the local Roman (and international) scenes of the time, also because his intense artistic activity, as conductor, pianist, concert organizer and essayist, made him one of the leading figures in the music world. Salviucci attended and reviewed several of Casella's piano performances on the pages of the *Rassegna Nazionale* journal, in the *Rassegna musicale* column he edited between 1931 and 1933. His words reveal the admiration he felt for the pianist's playing style, defined as 'un artista grandissimo [a great artist]' when he performs the piano accompaniment for a singer.³ Salviucci uses even more complimentary terms when he talks about Casella in his role as the pianist of the Trio Italiano, alongside the violinist Alberto Poltronieri and the cellist Arturo Bonucci, with whom he had been touring Europe and America since 1930. For Salviucci, this was when 'la personalità del Casella [dominava] benefica [Casella's personality stood out positively]' and it was often during these concerts that the heights of his compositional mastery also emerged. For example, Salviucci praised his and Bonetti's performance of the *Sonata* for cello and pianoforte as 'un brano di solida costruzione e di belle e fluide idee [a well-constructed piece with pleasing and fluid ideas]'.⁴

It is most likely that the young composer and music critic was also familiar with Casella's texts even though they are never directly mentioned in the documents held in the Fondo Giovanni Salviucci. Likewise, they had probably had the chance to discuss some of the debates that were ongoing in Italy in the early 1930s. The first of these involved Casella and Guido Pannain who led the discussion as to whether it could be said that composers of the time tended 'verso la *rappresentazione*' piuttosto che 'verso il *sentimento* [towards *representation* rather than towards *feelings*]' or rather, towards Classicism or Romanticism.⁵ Echoes of this debate in fact can be found in an article written by Salviucci explicitly dealing with 'Classicismo e Romanticismo musicale [Classicism and Romanticism in music]'. Although no attempt is made to attribute the style of living composers to one current or the other, and his starting point is Hugo Riemann's comment on the definition of the term 'classical [*klassisch*]' in *Musik-Lexikon* (1882), it is clear that Salviucci was trying to offer his own contribution to what was a crucial issue of the time: his aim was to 'intendersi chiaramente [clearly understand]' the meaning of Classicism and Romanticism and the peculiarities of each current and 'di conseguenza venire ad una più chiara visione del nostro momento musicale [as a result gain a clearer vision of our musical moment]'.⁶

Despite his young age, Salviucci was on his way to becoming an undisputed protagonist of that musical moment, something that Casella was well aware of. On more than one occasion, he used kind words and more tangible ways to express the 'viva stima d'arte ed affettuosa amicizia [strong artistic esteem and warm friendship]' he felt for the young man (FIGURE 1).

FIGURE 1. Photographic portrait of Alfredo Casella with a dedication to Giovanni Salviucci. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Giovanni Salviucci




In a letter to Salviucci on 17 August 1935 we learn that Casella often used to comment and offer stylistic advice on the scores the young man sent him. Moreover, Casella promised to either conduct or have someone else conduct the performances of these works, as can be deduced from the above-mentioned letter: 'Have no doubts that I will do my best for the Introduction [for orchestra] which I hope to conduct or have someone else conduct in the not-too-distant future'.⁷ In actual fact, Casella never got to conduct the *Introduzione*.⁸ The letter is however proof of his continuing strong interest in Salviucci, which had begun in the past when he had been personally involved in promoting the young man's music. A programme for a concert held at Rome's Accademia Filarmonica kept in the Fondo Giovanni Salviucci bears witness to this. Casella was musical director and in charge of the Academy's concert season and on 23 April 1934 conducted the *première* of Salviucci's *Sinfonia da camera* for 17 instruments (1933). A year later, on 11 April 1935, it was once again Casella who conducted the young composer's *Salmo di David* (1934) for soprano and small orchestra, during the second *Concerto di primavera* at Rome's Sala Borromini. The programme also featured his own orchestral transcription of Scarlatti's *Toccata, Bourrée e Giga*, Milhaud's *Concertino* for violin and small orchestra, Sauguet's *Divertimento da camera* and Alderighi's *Fantasia* for pianoforte and orchestra. The whole concert received great acclaim but the critics of the time underlined the fact that 'the works of Casella and Salviucci were the most successful' and that compared to the 'new French generation [...] they were, one might say, not just noticeably but blatantly superior'.⁹

Given the remarkable quality of Salviucci's music and its unanimous recognition by the critics, it comes as no surprise to find out that Casella was most upset to learn that Salviucci had not won third place in the young composer's contest at the 1934 International Festival of Contemporary Music in Venice. Casella had been a member of the Festival's Executive Committee and on August 20, writes a letter to Salviucci expressing his discontent (of the kind experienced by Gian Francesco Malipiero) for not having seen him come third alongside Luigi Dallapiccola and Riccardo Nielsen (first and second respectively); he hopes that Salviucci 'had already taken fresh heart (even supposing that such a small matter had made him lose it in the first place!)'.¹⁰ Similar words of encouragement are not uncommon in his correspondence with the young composer. For example, in a letter written some time after, he uses the same paternal tone to reassure the young man that 'everything always ends well for geniuses like you'.¹¹ Not counting his untimely death, it could be said that Casella's prophecy came true. Salviucci's fruitful and creative mind, coupled with a remarkable musicality and great determination led him to compose

pieces that received instant acclaim from both the Italian and foreign critics as ‘a full orchestration where the various themes move with evident ease [...] overlapping each other by virtue of a rare contrapuntal skill’ or ‘on the basis of a solid logical construction’; moreover, he also had a ‘decisione ritmica [rhythmic decisiveness]’ that his peers ‘sospira[vano] invano [yearned for in vain]’.¹² And Casella certainly played a quite important role in ensuring that Salviucci’s music if nothing else came to a more glorious end. In the months and years following the young composer’s death, and at least until Casella’s own demise ten years later, the illustrious mentor made sure that Salviucci’s works continued to be performed in Italy and abroad. As a Member of the Executive Committee of the 1937 edition of Venice’s International Contemporary Music Festival, he was responsible (with Mario Corti) for featuring the very first performance of Salviucci’s *Serenata* for 9 instruments, as part of the concert programme on 8 September. Two months later, he conducted *Sinfonia Italiana* at the Sala Maddaloni in Naples, in a concert with Italian music (Salviucci’s music appeared alongside Paisiello, Boccherini, Gorini, Petrassi and Casella himself; FIGURE 2).

FIGURE 2. Poster for a concert at the Sala Maddaloni, Naples, featuring Giovanni Salviucci's *Sinfonia Italiana* (1932) conducted by Alfredo Casella. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Giovanni Salviucci

 **CAMERATA NAPOLETANA**
ADERENTE ALLA CONFEDERAZIONE FASCISTA
DEI PROFESSIONISTI E DEGLI ARTISTI
SALA MADDALONI - Palazzo Maddaloni

Domenica 7 novembre 1937-XVI - ore 17 precise

Concerto di Musiche Italiane con Soli e Orchestra da Camera
diretto da **ALFREDO CASELLA**

PROGRAMMA

GIOVANNI PAISIELLO . NINA PAZZA PER AMORE - *Overture*

LUIGI BOCCHERINI . CONCERTO PER VIOLONCELLO E ORCHESTRA
Allegro moderato
Adagio (non troppo)
Rondò (allegro)
Solista violoncello Willy Lavolpe *)

GINO GORINI . DUE INVENZIONI - per Pianoforte e Orchestra (I)
Solista pianista **Gino Gorini**

GOFFREDO PETRASSI . INTRODUZIONE E ALLEGRO - per Violino concertante e
11 strumenti
Solista violinista **Giuseppina de Rogatis**

ALFREDO CASELLA . PUPAZZETTI (1918) - cinque musiche per marionette
Marcella
Berceuse
Serenata
Notturmo
Polka

GIOVANNI SALVIUCCI . SINFONIA ITALIANA - da Camera (I)
Allegro
Adagio
Allegretto vivace
Allegro

*) Vincitore della Gara Nazionale di Cremona.
(I) Musiche eseguite con successo al Festival internazionale di Venezia.

L'orchestra da Camera della "Camerata", è costituita dai più valorosi e noti solisti napoletani.

**Lunedì 22 novembre - Concerto del violoncellista
BENEDETTO MAZZACURATI**

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In 1940 the Turinese composer conducted Salviucci's *Sinfonia da camera* in Lausanne in the very particular context of a series of conferences and concerts dedicated to 'La Musique italienne contemporaine [Contemporary Italian Music]' organised by Casella together with the Institute of Italian culture and the Lausanne Conservatory. In his presentation of the festival, Casella acknowledges that the Italian music of his own generation and that of the younger composers had managed to break free from late-nineteenth-century German models: this was mainly due to the modern preference for a vigorous rhythm ('dopo un lungo periodo di morbidezza [after a long period of mellowness]'), and also because of the 'strumentazione rude, agile e "metallica" [rough, light and "metallic" instrumentation]' and a morphology at whose basis there is always a 'severa disciplina [strict discipline]' (which Casella warns must not be confused with a Neoclassical modelling of past forms).¹³ The inclusion of Salviucci's *Symphony* in one of the concerts at the Swiss festival, alongside works by Veretti, Petrassi, Dallapiccola and by Casella himself, indicates that the latter, as we already saw in the criticism mentioned earlier, recognised these stylistic traits in Salviucci's music too. There is therefore no doubt that even in 1940, Casella was still of the opinion that the works of the late composer were worthy of being included amongst our 'nostra migliore musica contemporanea [best contemporary music]' and emblematic of what was truly the Italian style.¹⁴ As he pointed out in an article in *La Rassegna Musicale* the day after Salviucci's death, in the short span of his existence, the young composer had succeeded in combining polyphonic rigidity with a formal construction that was free from conventional schemes, thereby giving his compositions a 'happy naturalness that is true art, but which is rarely found in European music today'.¹⁵ As far as Casella is concerned, this is what makes Salviucci a model composer and this is how he should be considered by future generations who, in the wake of his example, armed with music should carry on the fight to achieve the 'totale vittoria dell'arte italica [final victory of Italian art]'.¹⁶ This wish for the future concludes Casella's article in memory of Salviucci, where he publicly says goodbye in a phrase that epitomises the depth of their brief but intense friendship: 'I bow my head before your grave, as someone who had the exceptional good fortune of having you as a cherished disciple and dearest of friends'.¹⁷

Translated from Italian by Sally Davies

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Notes

- 1 The Fondo Giovanni Salviucci (FGS), housed in Venice at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini (FGC), contains a letter that Casella sent to Luigi Parpagliolo in 1924. He is addressed as ‘caro ed illustre Amico [dear and illustrious friend]’ and the letter is in a friendly style. The long-lasting ties of friendship between the two families are further demonstrated by a letter from Maria Casella, the composer’s mother, sent in 1926 presumably to Ida’s sister, Maria Teresa Parpagliolo. The letter praises the way ‘Iditta’ had conducted her own composition during a recital at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory. Dated 5 June 1926 it is kept at the FGC, Fondo Ida Parpagliolo, fasc. ‘Corrispondenza’.
- 2 The date is deduced from a typewritten manuscript, certainly written by Ida Parpagliolo after Salviucci’s death, and housed in her *fonds*.
- 3 Giovanni Salviucci, [All’Argentina, dopo viva attesa], *Rassegna Nazionale*, December 1933, pp. 384–386: 386. The review is of a concert with soprano Laura Pasini held at Rome’s Philharmonic Academy on 27 November 1933. This review and Salviucci’s later ones are kept at the FGS, fasc. ‘Recensioni’.
- 4 Giovanni Salviucci, [In questo mese al Teatro Reale], *Rassegna Nazionale*, March 1932, pp. 220–222: 221–222. Salviucci reviewed a concert on 27 February 1932 at the Santa Cecilia Academy.
- 5 Alfredo Casella, ‘Difesa ed illustrazione della musica contemporanea italiana’, *La Rassegna Musicale*, III/5, September 1930, pp. 349–361: 357. The article is in response to Guido Pannain’s remarks in ‘Problemi della musica italiana contemporanea’, *La Rassegna Musicale*, III/3, May 1930, pp. 196–205. In turn, Pannain replied to Casella’s comments in the September issue of *Rassegna Musicale*. Casella took up the topic again five years later in his article ‘Problemi della musica contemporanea italiana’, *La Rassegna Musicale*, VIII, May-June 1935, pp. 161–173.
- 6 ‘e di conseguenza venire ad una più chiara visione del nostro momento musicale’. Giovanni Salviucci, ‘Classicismo e Romanticismo musicale (Commento ad una definizione di H. Riemann)’, *Rassegna Nazionale*, January 1933, pp. 10–18: 10. For more on this, see Giovanni Arledler, *Prospettive critiche su Giovanni Salviucci*, Bologna: Università degli Studi, 1974, pp. 5–7.
- 7 ‘Non dubiti che farò del mio meglio per l’Introduzione [per orchestra] che spero di dirigere quanto prima e far dirigere ad altri’. Letter from Alfredo Casella to Giovanni Salviucci on 17 August 1935. FGS, fasc. ‘Corrispondenza’.
- 8 The *Introduzione* had already been performed in April of that year during the concerts at the Augusteo Auditorium in Rome, where Mario Rossi conducted *Introduzione, Passacaglia e Finale* in December.
- 9 ‘vero successo ottennero i lavori di Casella e Salviucci [che, posti a confronto della] nuova generazione francese, [...] hanno un grado di superiorità, non diciamo visibile, ma addirittura lampante’. Vice, ‘Musiche nuove ai concerti di primavera’, *Il Tevere*, 12 April 1935, s. p. (FGS, fasc. ‘Critiche di giornale 1933–1935’).
- 10 ‘abbia già ripreso coraggio (dato e non concesso che mai lo abbia smarrito per così poco!)’. Letter from Alfredo Casella to Giovanni Salviucci on 20 August 1934, published in Alfredo Casella, ‘Giovanni Salviucci (Rome 1907–1937)’, *La musica. Trimestrale di musica contemporanea*, 19, 1985, pp. 52–53: 53 (ed. or. *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, XLI/6, 1937, pp. 1–4, without the letter).

The Fondo Alfredo Casella (FAC) houses a letter from Adriano Lualdi (director of the Venice Festival that year) dated 18 July 1934, informing Casella and the other members of the Festival's Executive Committee of the results of the contest. In Lualdi's opinion, nobody had been awarded third place, because the jury had been unable to make up their minds between Salviucci, Ghedini, Gedda and Rosati.

- 11 'tutto finisce bene per chi – come lei – ha ingegno'. Unpublished letter from Alfredo Casella to Giovanni Salviucci on 17 August 1935. FGS, fasc. 'Corrispondenza'.
- 12 The quotes regarding *Introduzione* for orchestra, *Sinfonia italiana* and *Sinfonia da camera* are taken, respectively, from [s. n.], 'Il secondo concerto orchestrale della Rassegna', *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 5 April 1935, p. 4 ['una orchestrazione piena dove i vari temi si muovono con evidente facilità [...] sovrapponendosi in virtù di una rara abilità contrappuntistica']; Al. M., 'L'Augusteo au Victoria-Hall ou Un orchestre avec la manière de s'en servir', *La Suisse (Genève)*, 26 October 1937, s. p. ['pour une solide logique constructive']; m. l. 'Chiusura della Mostra Nazionale del Sindacato Musicisti', *Il lavoro fascista*, 11 April 1933, s. p. All the reviews are conserved at the FGS, fasc. 'Cronache di giornale 1933–1937'. More details on how Salviucci's music was received can be found in Angela Carone, 'Giovanni Salviucci: l'uomo, il compositore. Nuovi documenti', *Studi Musicali. Nuova Serie*, VII/2, 2016, pp. 455–479.
- 13 Alfredo Casella, 'Introduction', in: *La Musique italienne contemporaine*, s. e., Lausanne, 1940, pp. 3–10: 8. FAC, 'Programmi', folder LXIV, fasc. 1, progressive number 446.
- 14 *Ivi*, p. 10.
- 15 'felice naturalezza che è la vera arte ma che ha ben pochi riscontri nella musica europea odierna'. Casella, 'Giovanni Salviucci (Rome, 1907–1937)', p. 3.
- 16 *Ivi*, p. 4.
- 17 'si inchina davanti alla tua tomba chi ebbe la singolare fortuna di averti diletto discepolo ed amico carissimo'. *Ibidem*.