



The Autumn of Italian Opera: From Verismo to Modernism, 1890-1915

By Alan Mallach

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The Autumn of Italian Opera: From Verismo to Modernism, 1890-1915 By Alan Mallach

With the passing of giants like Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, and with Verdi in decline, Italian opera at the end of the nineteenth century appeared to be on the wane. Then, suddenly, with the legendary premiere of Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1890, Italian opera entered into a period of enormous artistic creativity and commercial success. In *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, Alan Mallach chronicles the last years of Verdi and Catalani and the emergence of the *Giovane Scuola* (young school) of Italian composers led by the superstar composers Puccini and Mascagni, and including such lesser-known but important figures as Giordano, Cilèa, and Leoncavallo. Mallach carries their story through to the first World War and a new generation of composers, including Zandonai and Wolf-Ferrari, through the rise of musical modernism in Italy early in the twentieth century. In doing so he offers opera scholars and aficionados a detailed and richly textured perspective on an important but widely misunderstood period in Italian opera.

Mallach places the emergence of the *Giovane Scuola* firmly within the great social and political upheavals of the time, which brought previously unexplored themes and exotic settings into the Opera House. Their works expressed an intensity of passion, sentimentality, and violence, which appealed to a new generation of operagoers, reflecting the growing dominance of the bourgeois in the new Italy that emerged after unification. Their music reflected the nation's growing cosmopolitanism, integrating themes and styles from composers as diverse as Massenet and Wagner, Strauss, and Debussy into the Italian operatic tradition.

While the author's principal emphasis is on operas and composers, he also provides portraits of the outstanding operatic singers and conductors of the time, and the developments that transformed the opera industry toward the end of the nineteenth century. Mallach discusses the powerful role played by the two dominant publishers, Giulio Ricordi and Edoardo Sonzogno, the ownership and operation of the nation's opera houses, the make-up of the operatic audience, and the diffusion of opera throughout Italy through civic bands and choral societies. This is a landmark and highly readable work of scholarship that sheds light on

the last great era of Italian opera.

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Editorial Review

Review

“The most valuable aspect of this book is the way Mallach brings to life a group of once-popular composers who—Puccini excepted—have been consigned to the fringes of today’s repertory.”—*Opera News*

“Superior scholarship.”—*Opera Journal*

Review

“This carefully researched and well-organized study sheds light on a critical transition period in the history of Italian opera.” (Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, author of *Puccini: A Biography* (NUP, 2002))

“From 1890 to the start World War I, Italian composers gave us some of the most popular operas ever written. Mallach is our perfect guide through that period as he casts an authoritative, affectionate, but not un-critical eye over his colorful cast of composers, placing them in the milieu of post-Verdi Italy, and charting the complex and often troubled relationships that existed between composer, publisher, impresario, conductor, librettist and, indeed, the Italian nation.” (Roger Flury, Music Librarian, National Library of New Zealand and author of *Pietro Mascagni; a bio-bibliography* (2001))

About the Author

ALAN MALLACH is a pianist, composer, and independent scholar living in New Jersey. He is the author of *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas* (Northeastern, 2002).

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