

DON LORENZO PEROSI.

THE DIRECTOR OF THE SIXTINE CHAPEL AT THE VATICAN, WHOSE ORATORIO, "THE RESURRECTION," HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY PRODUCED IN PARIS.

Paris, March 20.

The musical event of the season is the advent of the new Italian composer, Don Lorenzo Perosi. He came to direct in person the first performance of his music in Paris, choosing for the purpose his latest oratorio, "The Resurrection of Christ." "Don" is his title as a priest, answering to the more familiar French abbé. He is a Piedmontese, only twenty-six years of age, and still has the callow look of a theological student, but he has already made his way in Italy from being maestro di capella at St. Mark's, in Venice, to his present post as director of the music of the Sixtine Chapel, in the Vatican.

Don Lorenzo, young as he is, has produced at Milan, Venice and Rome four oratorios, all of which it is said have been written within the last eighteen months. "The Passion" was finished in September, 1897; "The Transfiguration of Christ" in February, 1898; "The Resurrection of Lazarus" in November of the same year, and now "The Resurrection of Christ" is brought out. "The Nativity" is to come next, and Don Lorenzo during his week in Paris found time to compose for it a Te Deum, which he played over at the piano for some of his musical friends. The series, which is to cover the whole life of Christ, will be made altogether of twelve of these oratorios.

All this was enough of itself to provoke the scepticism of Parisian critics. Musicians were naturally indisposed toward the new prodigy by the overpowering success of his compositions in his own country. Since Wagner conquered Paris Italian music in general has been set down as pretty, at best, and unsubstantial when not absolutely meretricious. Verdi's later work and the "Cavalleria Rusticana," which Calvé succeeded in forcing on the unwilling Parisian public, are almost the only exceptions made to this sweeping condemnation. Leoncavallo and Puccini are practically unknown. Then Italian critics have united in proclaiming Don Lorenzo Perosi a second Bach in the upbuilding of musical forms, richer in his orchestration than Wagner, and, generally, the Messiah who is to redeem the music of the Latin races from its present low estate. Especially they dwell on the "dramatic emotion and passion" of the abbé's sacred music, but this only suggested to cynical Parisians that they were likely to hear echoes of Massenet's amorous "Marie-Magdeleine." Thus prejudice and common-sense alike seemed unfavorable to the success in Paris of the Italian abbé. The considerable success with which he has been actually rewarded ought to show that he may have something to say in the music of the future.

THE "FIGARO'S" "FIVE O'CLOCK."

The "Figaro," which remains what it has always been, the journal of boulevardiers, took it on itself to introduce Don Lorenzo Perosi to his first Parisian audience, at one of its select "five o'clocks." There was an unusual mixing of worlds, church, high-life and art. There was the Papal Nuncio, whose sudden death occurred a few days later, after he had been present at the production of the complete oratorio; there were the curés of the fashionable and musical churches of Paris, while ladies from the Faubourg Saint-Germain and men from the smart clubs, with diplomatic and other foreign notabilities, met together with composers like Massenet, musicians like Gullmunt and the Colonnes and a choice of musical critics and amateurs.

Alfred Bruneau, whose own music has had a fair measure of success at the Paris Opera and is certainly in the line of Wagnerian evolution, presented the new composer. He explained that the musical programme of the occasion had been arranged to bring out the special character of Don Lorenzo's composition. This is the direct outcome of the works of the old masters who founded oratorio and "built up the dream of Faith into cathedrals of sound." The forerunners of the new music are those "glorious fathers of the singing Church"—Vittoria, Roland de Lassus, Carissimi, the "true father of oratorio," and the one whom the Abbé Perosi seems to have studied most; Handel, in "The Messiah," and Bach, "the patriarch who had twenty children, wrote a hundred masterpieces and founded our family." M. Bruneau bespoke attention to "this music, which, though many and many years old, defies the centuries and bears through the ages the joy and strength and beauty of its eternal youth."

There was a little gasp of surprise when the Italian priest, closely buttoned up in his gown, made his way to the piano where he was to accompany the vocal interpreters of his music. Short and slender, and almost juvenile in look, he has a head too large for his body, with a simple and unaffected face, remarkable only for its piercing black eyes and protruding under lip. A scene from his "Resurrection of Lazarus," sung by a soprano and three male voices, did not sound ill, even after the selection from "The Messiah." But real success was reserved for the final chorus of "The Passion." This was chanted by the singers of Saint-Gervais, a church choir specially trained to the music of Palestrina and Bach by M. Charles Bordes, a Prix de Rome musician. When this was over one of the musical group spoke up: "That is one of the



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The young Italian priest-composer.

finest things I have heard." The speaker was Massenet.

The score of the oratorio is divided into two parts, of which the second, as all agree, shows the Abbé Perosi at his best. The first part reaches from the death of the Saviour to the entombment in the sepulchre. The next is made up from the Latin Vulgate of St. Matthew's Gospel. The music of this part is somewhat monotonous and dull. It has all the austerity of the old church music; but fragments of it are so noble and uplifting that they will doubtless find their way into the repertory of modern church choirs. Such, for example, are the chorus of the holy women at the foot of the cross singing the Good Friday hymn—"Crux Fidelis"—simple and sonorous, with pleasing melodies; the duo of the two Marias at the sepulchre, where the composer has made a real effort after vocal effect, with a touching expressiveness; and the final full chorus of the faithful in lamentation before the tomb. The chorus of the Jews, demanding from Pilate that he shall see the tomb is well guarded, is also full of dramatic vigor. In this part, too, there is a striking instrumental intermezzo, which shows that Don Lorenzo is not only a musician of solid training, but also that he has studied Wagner's instrumentation deeply. It recurs three times—before the death of Jesus on the cross, when darkness came down and the elements were troubled, and again at the death itself, and then at the entombment.

The second part begins with the Easter morning triumph as a prelude. It is constructed on a theme which is repeated again and again to the end. Its developments go on augmenting until to the sound of trumpets and trombones, breaks forth the "Alleluia" chorus of angels in the heavens. This is taken from the Gregorian plain chant, but harmonized into a wondrous effect of gladness and victory. Then the drama of the resurrection on earth begins. Mary Magdalen, in touching accents of the utmost musical simplicity, complains "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him!" This is the beginning of a scene admirable in its unity and beauty of sentiment. The two angels, with charming melody, ask of the Magdalen, "Woman, why weepest thou?" and her answer comes in short melodic phrases full of heartfelt sorrow. When the Saviour appears and says to her the one word "Mary!" she does not understand at once; and meanwhile the theme of the Resurrection is heard in the orchestra, ever mounting upward and unfolding until the Magdalen, whose eyes are now opened, breaks out into the cry, "Rabboni! Master!" which is the highest point of the work.

The unfavorable critic of the "Aurore" acknowledges that at the magnificent joy of this triumphant cry a thrill passed through the entire audience. Pierre Lalo, whose musical competence none will deny, says "this is the most moving page of the work; and, in truth, the musician who has written it is not far from being a great artist." Alfred Bruneau is still more emphatic in his praise: "This cry of joy, of passion, of enthusiasm, do you know, Monsieur l'Abbé, that it is one of the most magnificent, wonderful cries upon the stage which has ever been set to notes? Its daring alone marks the individuality of him in whom it has first vibrated, and I understand how it finds an echo in the depths of every soul."

In sum, it is this second part of "The Resur-

rection of Christ" which must now represent Don Lorenzo Perosi's claims to be a great musical composer. It seems that his success with critics and the general public in his own country has divided Italian musicians into two hostile camps, with Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Puccini, and the rest on the one hand, and the young priest alone on the other. He has been hissed because he is a priest; and stories have been circulated, on the other side, that he is about to throw his gown to the nettles and begin writing love operas. His coming to Paris has certainly done away with this most unmusical sort of criticism. Bruneau, whose close friendship with Zola, so actively proved during the Dreyfus agitation, removes him from any possible suspicion of Clericalism, sides with the Abbé. "By the way in which he spoke to me of the stage, I soon saw that I had to deal with a combative man of high temper. He is taken up with the restoration of the oratorio. He knows but a single drama, wherein all passions mingle—the Life of Christ. He affirms that this drama sums up all the past, present and future, that it is the eternal drama of all beings and peoples, the true drama of humanity, and, by the universal language of sounds, he intends imposing it on the entire world. But this is a war declared by the Church on the stage!"

This does not frighten M. Bruneau. "Others may discuss his mastery of the trade, polyphony, orchestration, music. I limit myself to congratulating one who, when bravery and frankness are so rare, has the singular and grand courage to allow his heart to sing freely, to express himself without hatred and without malice, to pronounce a word of love." Remain Rolland thinks the Italian abbé may bring us out of the romantic troubles which Beethoven began in music, that he may even "bring back to music that divine peace for which Beethoven clamored with despair." C. L. B.

NEW-YORK'S FIRST HEARING OF PEROSI. HIS "RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS" TO BE GIVEN FOR AN ITALIAN CHARITY.

To the Italian colony in the vicinity of Bleeker-st. and its interested friends New-York is indebted for the prospect of hearing one of Perosi's oratorios on Sunday evening, April 16, at the Metropolitan Opera House. It is fitting that the young Italian priest-composer, who has attracted widespread attention in Europe and crowded the auditoriums of Italy, should first be heard in America in behalf of his countrymen struggling for a foothold in the New World.

The only foreigner who lands at Ellis Island to find that no temporary abode has been provided for him is the Italian immigrant. Homes for the Irish, the German and the Swede confront the Battery to cheer and comfort the belated exiles of those countries, but the descendants of the Caesars look in vain for shelter. No immigrant, perhaps, is poorer or more helpless than the Italian. Seven years ago Father Bandini, touched by their misery, resolved to do something in their behalf. He was without means. The only possible way to raise money was to establish an Italian church. To this end he secured a small house in Waverley Place. There was organized St. Raphael's Society for Immigrants. The society knows no sectarianism in its charity, but Italians, being the neediest, are naturally the most benefited.

For some time Father Bandini was able by much labor and sacrifice to equip twenty beds at the rectory. He had scarcely begun the work, however, when he was transferred to Kansas. The church was moved to Sullivan-st., and Father Zabaglio became rector and continued the immigrant work of his predecessor.

In July, 1897, there occurred in the church a gas explosion, in which two Italians lost their lives and Father Zabaglio received frightful burns, the scars of which he still bears. For thirty-five days he lay at the hospital, and so low were his chances of life at one time that preparations were begun for his funeral. His miraculous restoration, the zealous missionary believes, was made for the purpose of enabling him to realize his dream of establishing a home for the Italian immigrant. A short time ago the Sullivan-st. property was sold, and the Church of St. Benedict the Moor, about to be abandoned by Father Burke's colored congregation, was purchased. Under the name of Our Lady of Pompeii, the abandoned temple of the Catholic American negro is today the church of the Italian Mission. Across the street is the rectory.

St. Raphael's Society for Immigrants has an agent stationed at the Battery. He shares the office of the Italian Consul. Every day he reports at the rectory, whose humble roof frequently shelters the disabled immigrant until a home is found elsewhere. How inadequate is the rectory for immigrant shelter is known only to the Italian colony. Without the church, despite its poverty, it would be impossible for the society to do anything in behalf of the Italian immigrant. The parish includes about 9,000 Italians. Of peasant origin, and inheritors of the splendid cathedrals and churches of Italy, endowed from time immemorial by legacies and land grants from kings, emperors and nobles, the Italians of the New World are wholly unaccustomed to contribute to the maintenance of a church. It is one of the many lessons they have yet to learn in their new home. It will take several generations for them to realize the obligation. This is one of the difficult problems that confront Father Zabaglio in his efforts to maintain a church and establish an immigrant home. In his work he has the



FATHER ZABAGLIO.

Rector of the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii.

hearty co-operation of the best Italian citizen, all of whom are actively interested in the coming oratorio in its behalf.

The right of production is given to the cause by Perosi's American agents, Boosey & Co. Giuseppe Campanari likewise contributes his services, while Ben Davies, as Storico; Mme. Antoinette Trebelli, as Martha, and Mme. Mantilla, as Maria, are the other solo singers. Some two hundred members of the Oratorio Society, in addition to a hundred picked voices from the leading Catholic church choirs, will comprise the chorus, which will be under the direction of Frank Damrosch. The orchestra includes seventy pieces. In the coming performance New-York anticipates London, since the latter will not hear a Perosi oratorio until October. Paris has just had his "Passion."

One of the moving spirits in the enterprise is Dr. Ferrante, the Italian private secretary to Archbishop Corrigan. A native of Rome, from which city he came to this country eight years ago, Dr. Ferrante, who is interested in music, is bending every energy toward the success of the performance. He is a member of the Committee of Organization, which includes the rector of the mission and his assistant, Father Lotti; George Maxwell, Alessandro Ruberti, A. A. Scartabelli and G. G. Conn. The Italian Consul, General Branchi, General Di Cesnola, His Excellency Baron Fava, Ambassador of Italy to the United States, and his wife, Baroness Fava, Countess Mackin and a long list of other prominent people are among the patrons and benefactors.