

Schubert's "Conspirators"

SPEAKING of a friend's loyal, if undiscriminating, enthusiasm for his music, Franz Schubert dismissed him with the phrase: "He likes everything of mine," and in that implicit self-criticism Schubert anticipated the judgment of posterity which has left many of his scores on the shelf unplayed.

Among the pile of unplayed or seldom played works (estimated at 800) lies the bulk of Schubert's dramatic writings—nine complete operas and operettas and a number of miscellaneous fragments. One of these operas, however, is slowly coming into its own, justifying Sir George Grove's comment on the neglect of the operas and symphonies that "he can afford to wait." This is the one-act comic opera *The Conspirators* ("Die Verschworenen") which Schubert once said he had composed "all to no purpose."

The libretto of this opera (or more correctly, operetta) is a clever adaptation of the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes—the story of the wives who go on strike to wean their husbands from war. In this version, the time is that of the Crusades. The author, Ignaz Castelli, an acquaintance of Schubert, and also a friend of both Beethoven and Wagner, had published his text with a challenge to German composers to set it and "strike a blow for German opera." Schubert accepted the challenge, but ran into difficulties from the start. The very title was suspect to the touchy Austrian censorship, and they would not pass the opera till the name had been changed to *War in the Home* ("Der Hausliche Krieg"). The opera was still, however, not performed, and though it was completed in 1823, it was not until 1861—some 30 years after the composer's death—that it had its first performance in Frankfurt.

Since that time *The Conspirators* has been occasionally performed in Germany and Austria and also in France, but it was not presented in England (except as a concert version) until 1954, when it was staged by the A.D.C. Theatre, Cambridge, in an English version by George Barker and Humphrey Trevelyan. It is this version of the opera that the BBC have used in the presentation to be heard from 3YZ and 4YZ at 7.30 p.m., Saturday, September 14.

In this work, wrote Humphrey Trevelyan in the *Radio Times*, "Schubert achieved something of higher artistic value than his better-known *Rosamunde* music. That is merely incidental music for an absurd play, but *The Conspirators* is opera in that the musical numbers are an integral part of the drama, as with Mozart—lyrical and dramatic solos and duets, choruses and ensembles. The

rhythmical variety and gusto of the music are brilliantly Viennese, and through it all weave and sparkle tunes that only Schubert could have written."

In keeping with the spring season, the other three operas to be broadcast this week, deal in one way or another with the verities of love; and two, at any rate, end in a happy fashion. The exception is Giordano's opera of the French Revolution, *Andrea Chenier*, which will be heard from 2YC at 8.32 p.m., Wednesday, September 11, with Renata Tebaldi in the role of Maddalena.

The other two are Cimarosa's *The Secret Marriage* (YCs, 7.0 p.m., Sunday, September 15), a bright tale of marriage-broking in the 18th century; and von Flotow's ever-popular *Martha*, which this year—if one counts from its first performance in Vienna—is 100 years old (3YC, 7.0 p.m., Friday, September 13).



Franz Schubert

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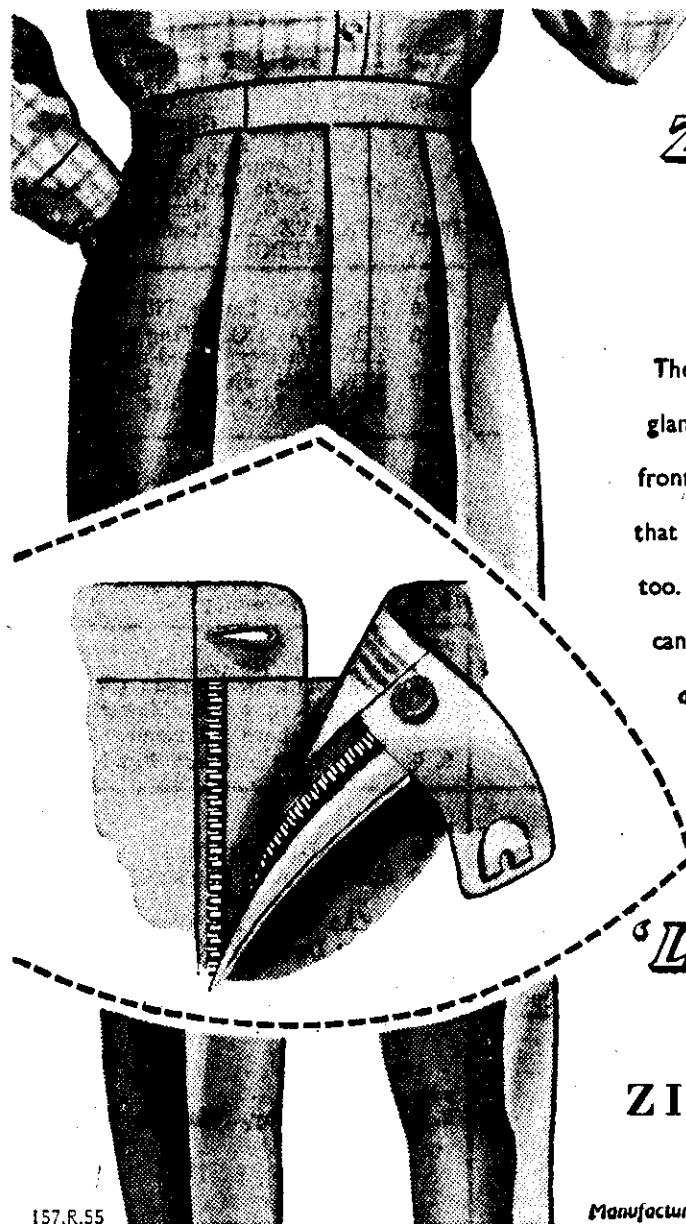


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