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THE MUSIC OF FUTURISM:
CONCERTS AND POLEMICS

By RODNEY J. PAYTON

FOR a number of years before the First World War and in the period immediately after, the Futurist movement both entertained and amazed the European intellectual community. Yet unaccountably, though Futurism is a mine of art and polemics rich in cultural insights into the European scene, the history of the movement failed to capture the imagination of either the general art public or the scholarly community in America until very recently. With the Museum of Modern Art show in 1961, however, the situation began to improve, and now we possess much information about the Futurist painters. But the movement was more than painters. It was originally a literary group, and its poetic and dramatic experiments foreshadowed much that is fashionable today in literature. Even less known is the musical side of the movement, yet the Futurists were just as daring in music as they were in the visual arts and literature. During the years 1911–12 the two Futurist musicians, Francesco Balilla Pratella and Luigi Russolo, published their radical manifestos, gave many concerts, and invented a number of new instruments that are spiritual ancestors to the very latest synthesizers. Today Pratella and Russolo are largely forgotten; a few journal articles, an occasional passing reference, is all they have received from scholarship. They deserve better. In their own time their experiments were no less an affront to contemporary sensibility than Le Sacre du printemps, and until their efforts are recognized and evaluated we cannot say we have an adequate picture of the early twentieth century or understand how deep are the roots of some of our contemporary artistic expression.

William W. Austin, in Music in the Twentieth Century, makes
a comment which reflects the general state of scholarship as it relates to Futurist music:

The art of noises, now called "bruitisme," was introduced by Marinetti into the group of painters and poets that rallied in 1916 with the slogan "Dada" whence its fame reëchoed in histories and dictionaries. No composers were directly associated with Dada. The terms "futurism" and "Dadaism" have been loosely applied to composers as staid as Richard Strauss. They are seldom illuminating in talk about music.¹

Now, Futurism and Dadaism were actually separate things. Dadaism did indeed originate in 1916, in Switzerland, and Futurism dates from 1909 in Italy, where Marinetti was its founder. But in 1916 the Futurist leader, an ardent patriot who was then an officer in the Italian army, had other concerns than the international group of war resisters who called themselves "dada." As for the term Futurism, it may seem to lack usefulness because, rather than being used to refer to the efforts of the musicians of the Italian movement, Pratella and Russolo, it has, as Mr. Austin reports, often been used as a catch-all term for almost any avant-garde effort.

It would appear that quite early in the course of the movement, even before Russolo published his 1913 manifesto, the term Futurist, as it defines a musical movement, was used in English to describe almost any composer whose works could be considered "difficult." Thus, in May of 1912 the Literary Digest printed "Futurists Breaking Out in Music," by Thomas J. Gerrard. This title refers not to the Italians, but to a Schoenberg concert given in London.² The article sets the tone for most popular commentary throughout the twenties, when the term was still often used; writers of that decade refer with monotonous regularity to the Futurism of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Scriabin, or Ornstein.

In The Musical Quarterly of January, 1916, the term Futurism appears. "Futurism: A Series of Negatives," by Nicholas C. Gatty, disparages the destruction of traditional musical values by "modern" composers, but does not refer to any individuals by name. The article concludes with the following paragraph:

On the face of it, their productions are little more than studies in musical noises, and it is perhaps quite in keeping with the inner logic of things that they do not

adapt their ideas for musical instruments but seek to obtain more stimulating effects with specially constructed machines.\(^3\)

This reference might indicate that Gatty knew of Russolo's *intona-rumori* concert of 1913–14 or had at least read of his experimental instruments. There is no way to be sure of this, of course, but it is difficult to imagine to what else he is referring (unless it is to the widely publicized attempts of Dr. Thaddeus Cahill to introduce his "Dynamophone" to the city of New York in 1906).\(^4\)

After the article in 1916 there is one other mention of Futurist music in the pages of *The Musical Quarterly*. This occurs in a 1920 article by Georges Jean-Aubry, who was then the editor of the *Chesterian*. Pratella's *Musica futurista per orchestra*, performed in 1913, and his current composition, *L'Aviatore Dro*, are there deemed worthy of further study.\(^5\)

The *Chesterian* itself sometimes carried articles by Italian composers and critics. Two articles in the December 1920 issue point, each in its own way, to the passing of musical Futurism, properly defined. "A Letter from Italy," by Guido M. Gatti, mentions Pratella's opera *L'Aviatore Dro* favorably but calls Pratella a less attractive composer than the others mentioned in the article.\(^6\) The other article, "Some Reasons Why a Futurist May Admire Rossini," by Alfredo Casella, is an explanation of why a modern composer may admire the past. The word *Futurist* in the title refers not to the original group but to Casella himself. By 1920 evidently the term *Futurist* had acquired somewhat different connotations even in Italy.\(^7\)

One possible reason why the title *Futurist* should have escaped the Italian group, in the field of music at least, is that Pratella's and Russolo's primarily nationalistic concerns had kept the two from being generally recognized by an international public. But how had composers themselves reacted to the Futurist stimulus? The trail begins with the publication of Busoni's essay "Futurism in Music"


\(^4\) Ray Baker, "New Music for an Old World," *McClure's Magazine*, May–October, 1906, p. 291. Yet it seems unlikely that Dr. Cahill's machine would have offended Mr. Gatty's sensibilities, since it was an experiment in the mechanical reproduction of traditional music.


in *Pan* of September, 1912. Busoni quotes Pratella’s 1912 musical manifesto and reacts favorably to it: “That is right. It pleases me, and I stood on this side long ago, if only as a theorist.” He concludes by wondering if the Futurists have the talent for the task. Due to the resistance of conservative circles to the radical fringe, this article created some resentment. In 1917 the Austrian Hans Pfitzner published his *Futuristengefahr*, which accused Busoni of being a Futurist. Busoni was moved to defend himself.

Other composers were at least aware of the Futurists, and some have left their comments and opinions. One of these, Igor Stravinsky, who heard the music of Russolo and Pratella in 1915, recalled the encounter some forty years later:

On one of my Milanese visits Marinetti and Russolo, a genial quiet man but with wild hair and beard, and Pratella, another noisemaker, put me through a demonstration of their “futurist music.” Five phonographs standing on five tables in a large and otherwise empty room emitted digestive noises, static, etc., remarkably like the *musique concrète* of seven or eight years ago (so perhaps they were futurists after all; or perhaps futurisms aren’t progressive enough). I pretended to be enthusiastic and told them that sets of five phonographs with such music, mass produced, would surely sell like Steinway Grand Pianos.

Francesco Cangiullo, a poet associated with the movement, remembered the incident in greater and somewhat different detail.

That evening in the salon of Marinetti — Casa rossa, Corso Venezia, Milan — there was a meeting of the Futurist musicians, all of whom were present: Luigi Russolo, Balilla Pratella, Igor Stravinsky (who came especially from Lucerne), Prokofiev, Diaghilev (director of those Russian ballets that had become a choreographic epidemic), Massine (first ballerino), an exceptional Slavic pianist whose name construe who can, made up of difficult consonants, neither known nor written nor pronounced; there entered Boccioni, Carrà, the brother of Russolo, Ugo Piatti, the Visconti di Modrone, Buzzi, the female Bohemian painter Rongesca Zottkova (neither is this name a joke), and, naturally, the dynamic owner

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10 Busoni, p. 28.

The composer of *L'Aviatore Dro*, Balilla Pratella, stout, heavy though still young, with a top hat with a large brim and a pendant on a chain, had come to Milan — a city that he did not take very well — from his Lugo di Romagna, looking very bored, like a farmer who had descended to market and made bad deals. Actually, though, for a plate of mutton *alla livornese* he was always willing to go from Lugo to Livorno.

On the other hand, Diaghilev. This person arrived from Paris, by express, very fresh, rosy, with powdered face, but very modernly dressed; unfortunately, he looked like an eccentrically dressed vertical hippopotamus. In his buttonhole he had an enormous chrysanthemum, unraveled and drooping like the mane of Leoncavallo; his head of hair was parted in the middle, the mop well combed, half white and half black, similar to a hard piece of lemon and coffee. The specimen had a very short turned-up nose, with out-looking nostrils, the teeth white as ivory, the upper jaw receding, the protruding lower jaw nearly trapping two little mustaches, colored with velvety tint; his snobbish and decadent mask was completed with a great monocle encircled with black tortoise shell; the pupils were little, and they always met at an angle, in ambush, under the long eyelids which were always lowered. They love to look so, but never looked at a woman; is it clear? Stravinsky is slightly built, blondish, and near-sighted. In compensation he has a nose of great caliber that supports the bicycle of his eyes. . . . Ugo Piatti, docile mechanic, collaborator with Russolo in the construction of the *intonarumori*, was doomed to accept with humility the frequent rebukes of the hysteria inventor who could have used some opposition. . . .

. . . the major attraction was Luigi Russolo with his twenty *intonarumori*.

Stravinsky wanted to have an exact idea of these bizarre new instruments and, possibly, insert two or three in the already diabolic scores of his ballets. Diaghilev, however, wanted to present all twenty at Paris in a clamorous concert. He had also come to hear the compositions of Pratella. . . .

On the contrary, the swan of Romagna arrived at Milan expecting to find hospitality or, in the worst hypothesis, to not sound a note! Not even a demi-semiquaver! Except, man proposes, God disposes, he was dragged to the piano by the hair and forced to sing and play his music with a mouth that had had aspirations toward a fish soup, with his fingers similar to ten sausages that he would more willingly have thrown in the frying pan in order to eat them rather than place them on the piano.

. . . eight or nine *intonarumori*, peaceful quadrupeds expecting a sign from their trainer who nervously waited for conversation to die down. This happened, and it was then that Russolo turned a magic crank.

A "crackler" crackled with a thousand sparkles like a fiery torrent. Stravinsky gushed, emitting a syllable of crazy joy, leaped up from the couch of which he seemed a spring. Then a "rustler" rustled like petticoats of winter silk, like leaves of April, like sea rending summer. The frenzied composer tried to find on the piano that prodigious onomatopoeic sound, in vain proved the semitones of his avid digits while the ballerino moved the legs of his craft.
These gentlemen remained enchanted and called the new instruments the most original orchestral discovery.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus musical Futurism knew, and was known by, composers from all of Europe. In general, its history followed the lines of development of Futurism itself, thanks to the magnificent organizing abilities of the caposcuola Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944). Officially, Futurist music celebrated the new urban environment with its speed, noises, and machines. The actual course of musical Futurism can be charted by studying its two composers’ different responses to this idea. Luigi Russolo (1885–1947) was a true believer in this aesthetic. Francesco Balilla Pratella (1880–1955), on the other hand, while subordinating himself for a time to these ideals, retained his own original personality and lived out an artistic history which goes beyond that of Futurism. Born at Lugo di Romagna, Pratella remained an enthusiastic proponent of Romagnese culture all his life — notwithstanding his Futurist period.\textsuperscript{14} By 1909, when Pratella was twenty-nine, he had written two operas on traditional Romagnese themes, \textit{Lilia} and \textit{La Sina d'Vargöun}, both of which won prizes in competitions and were produced. \textit{La Sina}, in particular, attained some critical notice, and it was the work which attracted Marinetti’s attention. Aleco Toni, writing in \textit{Rivista musicale italiana}, said of the work:

\textit{La Sina d'Vargöun} — scene della Romagna bassa, \textit{per la musica} is what Pratella has called his work. It is animated by the breath of folklore which breathes out of every scene, in the constructive element of poetry, in the faithfully introduced music of popular songs. The color of the environment has a truly living part, a

\textsuperscript{13} Francesco Cangiullo, \textit{Le serate futuriste} (Milan, 1961), p. 245.

\textsuperscript{14} Information about Pratella’s early life is to be found in Alba Ghigi, \textit{F. B. Pratella} (Ravenna, 1930). This seems, in the section about Pratella’s youth, to be an expanded version of Alfredo Grilli, “La Musica di un giovane romagnolo,” \textit{La Romagna}, VI, fascicle 7, Series 3 (June, 1909), which was extracted and reprinted. The copy of this reprint in the collection of the New York Public Library bears Pratella’s autograph, and it is possible he paid for the reprinting. Also useful are: Claudio Marabini, “Per una storia del futurismo: Balilla Pratella, Music e Futurismo,” \textit{Nuova antologia}, XC VIII (1963), and Pratella’s own \textit{Autobiografia}. The Marabini article appeared eight years before the \textit{Autobiografia} and served as the basis for my research. Having seen the \textit{Autobiografia}, I have rechecked this research, and I shall give parallel citations to the \textit{Autobiografia} whenever I cite Pratella from the Marabini article: e. g., for p. 86 in Marabini, cf. F. Balilla Pratella, \textit{Autobiografia} (Milan, 1971), p. 140. The \textit{Autobiografia} was written in 1958, but not published until 1971, when it was released by Pratella’s daughters Ala and Eda. Marabini evidently saw the work in manuscript, for he refers to it as “Sinora rigorosamente inedite.” Marabini, p. 68.
major part, in the explication of the drama. Every scene is a realistic reconstruction of the life of Romagna. Customs and costumes come to life. Every sentimental manifestation of the characters has its determinant in the popular soul of the region. The drama, thus, is localizzato and does not draw on the universal motives of life.15

Pratella met Marinetti on August 20, 1910, at Imola during a concert in which some of Pratella's music was played.16 By that time, of course, Il primo manifesto del futurismo, Il manifesto della pittura futurista, and Il manifesto tecnico della pittura futurista had already been published, and to judge from the tone of these documents, all inspired by Marinetti, the subject of the opera certainly would not have been attractive to the Futurists. (In fact there is one conclusion of the Manifesto tecnico which would seem to label La Sina's plot as definitely passatista: “Against the nude in painting, as nauseous and as tedious as adultery in literature.)17 However, Pratella's reforming zeal made him attractive to the Futurists and the Futurists attractive to him. In his memoirs Pratella says: "The condition of my art at that time and my particular state of mind, so to say, predisposed my spirit to abandon itself to the persuasive fascination of promises and salutary liberation which the ideas and practical actions of the Marinetti group emitted."18 The actual introduction of Marinetti and Pratella was accomplished by Luigi Donati, a journalist of Oriani, who knew both Marinetti and Pratella, the latter because of the success of La Sina. The conversation was evidently amiable. Pratella records in his memoirs: "From then on we were faithful friends, and so we have remained. We reciprocally tolerate one another, notwithstanding the changed times and events and the evolution of ideas and principles."19

More immediate evidence of the agreement between the two can be ascertained from the fact that by September 28 Pratella's Il mani-

15 Aleco Toni, "‘La Sina d’Vargöun’ di F. B. Pratella," Rivista musicale italiana, XVII (1910), 196. The nationalism which Toni admired in Pratella's work, indeed, which moved him to praise it in spite of defects, is one of the strongest characteristics of music in the early days of this century. What Toni calls drama localizzato is part of the same stream which is the source of Bartók's attempts at Hungarian national opera in Duke Bluebeard's Castle of 1911, of Stravinsky's Firebird of 1910 and even of Rimsky-Korsakov's Golden Cockerel of 1907.
16 Marabini, p. 67 (cf. Autobiografia, p. 100).
18 Marabini, p. 67 (cf. Autobiografia, p. 100).
19 Ibid.
festo dei musicisti futuristi was in Marinetti’s hand. Marinetti immediately put his editorial oar in:

I have received your kind letter and your beautiful proclamation. I am enthusiastic. I will work on it tomorrow, since it might be possible to make some cuts in the printer’s proofs that seem necessary to me: not of ideas or of violence, but of simple phrases, and this to stay within the proportions of a manifesto, easily reproduced by newspapers. I will send you the proofs as soon as they arrive and you yourself judge these cuts.20

By October 8 the manifesto was circulated. Marinetti now addresses Pratella as “tu.”

8-11-10: In great haste, I have sent the manifesto to all your addresses. Five-thousand copies have been sent to good addresses, and more than one thousand copies have been distributed by hand.21

Much later, after the Second World War, Pratella was to complain of Marinetti’s editing:

In the field of music I tend to recreate the world humanly and never to go against humanity and therefore against nature. I must say that some affirmations, of a polemic and others of a theoretical nature, which one can read in my Manifesto, refer to a rapport between music and machine. These were neither written nor even thought by me and often are in contrast to the rest of the ideas. These inventions were added by Marinetti arbitrarily and at the last moment. I was then astonished to read them over my signature, but the thing was already done.22

Il manifesto dei musicisti futuristi was quickly followed by Il manifesto tecnico della musica futurista, on March 11, 1911, and by La distruzione della quadratura on July 18, 1912. These three works form the backbone of Futurist musical polemic and have very much the flavor of the other Futurist manifestos, in particular those signed by the painters connected with the movement.23 This unanimity is probably due to the iron editorial fist of Marinetti, who maintained considerable control over the polemics of the movement.24

20 Ibid., p. 69. This letter and next cited do not appear in the Autobiografia.
21 Ibid., p. 70.
22 Ibid., p. 85 (cf. Autobiografia, p. 103).
23 These manifestos are all available in English. For a selection, see Michael Kirby, Futurist Performance (New York, 1971). For complete texts of the musical manifestos, see Rodney J. Payton, “The Futurist Musicians: Francesco Balilla Pratella and Luigi Russolo” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1974).
The three manifestos form the basis of a complete musical aesthetic program. Il manifesto dei musicisti futuristi is a dramatically written attack on the passato of contemporary Italian composers and their tendency to perpetuate the musical forms of the past rather than attempt what is new and truly creative. Il manifesto tecnico places the blame for Italy’s unprogressive attitudes on conservatories and teachers who inhibit experimentation for their own benefit and explains that the new Futurist music will be rhythmically free and microtonal. La distruzione della quadratura presents Pratella’s notational system designed to free music from repeated rhythmic pulses.

By the time of the publication of La distruzione della quadratura Pratella’s theoretical program was substantially complete. What was needed now was an example of music composed to conform to the program, and Pratella was not long in providing it. Inno alla vita, Musica futurista per orchestra was first performed in February, 1913, and again in March. Pratella tells of both occasions in his Autobiografia:

My first true direct contact with the public, as a Futurist musician, took place at the Teatro Costanzi di Roma on two evenings, February 21 and March 9, 1913, with the first and second performances of my Musica futurista with the great orchestra of the Teatro Costanzi itself under my direction.

The first performance on February 21, reserved by the Mocchi firm of impresarios for season ticket holders and those who were invited, went off fairly well: applause, ironic comments, discussions in a loud voice, but nothing more, and these were reserved for the aggressive and polemic addresses of Marinetti, Boccioni, Carrà and Russolo.

At the second performance on March 9 pandemonium broke loose.

The spectacle was opened by me with my Musica futurista per orchestra, which proceeded to the end amidst an infernal clamor, made up of whistles, applause, cries, acclamations, and invectives. The public seemed driven insane, and the frantic mass boiled and from time to time exploded in rage resembling a mass of burning lava during a volcanic eruption. Some threw upon the orchestra and also on me, the conductor, an uninterrupted shower of garbage, of fruit, of

25 Pratella, Musica Futurista per Orchestra, riduzione per pianoforte (Bologna, F. Bongiovanni, Editore, 1912). This is the only published form of this work and includes Pratella’s three manifestos.

26 Pratella may mean his first contact as a composer. There exists a sketch by Boccioni published in Uno due e... tre on June 17, 1911, of a Futurist performance which shows a portly man conducting an orchestra who might well be Pratella. See Taylor, p. 10.
Umberto Boccioni’s drawing of a Futurist performance, which appeared in *Uno, due e ... tre*, June 17, 1911.
The Music of Futurism

chestnut cakes; others shouted themselves hoarse crying every kind of thing; some protested not being able to hear; some became exalted, others infuriated, some laughed and enjoyed themselves, others quarreled and started rows, with frequent blows between friends and enemies.

Finally, as if God willed the music, without which most people would not even have heard it, I turned towards the public, made a beautiful smile of thanks to friends and of mirth to enemies, and then went up to the stage where I found Marinetti, who was pronouncing in a loud voice some strange formula of exorcism to which he attributed a great mystical power like a magical mascot, and woe to anyone who contradicted him.27

These performances evidently supplied the impulse which brought Luigi Russolo onto the Futurist musical scene. Russolo, flamboyant inventor of the intonarumori and other marvels, painter and eventual mystic, would be precisely the sort of disciple Pratella and Marinetti might have wished for. Where Pratella could promote real reform with subtle polemic, Russolo could truly believe. A brilliant man, he faced the world pragmatically; if a program like that described in Pratella's manifestos existed, it existed to be acted on. A little ingenuity would make it all a reality. The scope of his vision was staggering. Witness this passage from the conclusions to his manifesto L'arte dei rumori:

8. Let us therefore invite young musicians of genius and audacity to listen attentively to all noises. . . . Our increased perceptivity, which has already acquired futurist eyes, will then have futurist ears. Thus the motors and machines of industrial cities may someday be intelligently pitched, so as to make of every factory an intoxicating orchestra of noises.28

Born on May 1, 1885, at Portagruoro, a small town north of Venice, Russolo was the son of the local cathedral organist, who was also the director of the local Scuola filarmonica. The father's most cherished ambition was fulfilled when his two elder sons, Giovanni and Antonio, graduated from the conservatory in Bologna.29 Luigi, too, was from the first interested in music and began the study of the violin, but soon announced that he wished to learn to draw. This desire was indulged by his father, who said he did not wish to fail

27 Pratella, Autobiografía, pp. 114-16.
to be of help to his children.\textsuperscript{30} When Luigi's family moved to Milan, he stayed behind with an aunt in order to finish the ginnasio. At the age of sixteen he joined his family in Milan and continued to study painting, although he did not enroll in any school. From 1901 to 1909 he seems to have worked as a painter in Milan. In 1910 he joined Marinetti and the Futurist movement and with Carlo Carrà, Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Arnoldo Bonzagni, and Romolo Romani signed the Manifesto della pittura futurista. Russolo's career as a Futurist painter continued until 1913, when he issued \textit{L'arte dei rumori} and officially joined Pratella in musical Futurism.\textsuperscript{31}

The document is in the form of an open letter:

My Dear Balilla Pratella, Great Futuristic composer:

In the crowded Costanzi Theater, in Rome, while I was listening with my futurist friends Marinetti, Boccioni, and Balla to the orchestral performance of your overwhelming \textit{MUSICA FUTURISTA}, there came to my mind the idea of a new art: The Art of Noises, a logical consequence of your marvelous innovations.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus was the concept of \textit{rumorismo} presented to the public, but it is important to note that while Russolo proclaims the "art of noises" to be a logical outcome of Pratella’s efforts, Pratella himself does not specifically advocate any such innovation in any of his manifestos. Indeed, it is tempting to speculate that the appearance of the \textit{L'arte dei rumori} was conceived and masterminded by the \textit{caposcuola} himself, F. T. Marinetti. This speculation is prompted by Pratella’s specific denial of any interest in “a rapport between music and machines.”\textsuperscript{33} In addition, there exists a letter from Marinetti to Pratella which seems to indicate that the \textit{intonarumori} were Marinetti’s passion, not necessarily Pratella’s.

Work with great confidence. Do not hold back, not forgetting that all, absolutely all extravagances are obtainable by you. I will mention, almost insist on, the necessity of confusing everyone and always going forward. Not forgetting, moreover, your most important intention, it seems proper to me, to introduce into the orchestra of your \textit{Aviatore Dro}, two, three, four, or five or even more of Russolo's \textit{intonarumori}. This is of enormous importance, I think, because while Russolo prepares a complete orchestra of \textit{intonarumori}, you absolutely...

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 1720.
\textsuperscript{31} For a discussion of Russolo's career as a painter during the years 1909–14, see Taylor, \textit{Futurism}.
\textsuperscript{32} Slonimsky, p. 1298.
\textsuperscript{33} See note 22, above.
The Music of Futurism

must, it seems to me (in one part of your new work, perhaps best in the finale of the second act) create the first example of a mixed orchestra or, better, of a conventional orchestra enriched with intonarumori. Think about all this. I believe this innovation is absolutely necessary to your work, from your personal point of view as an innovator and from the point of view of Futurism. One would then be able to frankly define you as the first musician who has with his genius revolutionized the orchestra, courageously leaping the gap that separates Futurism from passatism in music. You know that I see exactly, and that I am armed with great discernment.\textsuperscript{34}

Whatever the source of Russolo's innovations and the ideas for the applications of this theory, his own dedication to them is not subject to debate. He continued to work on various noise instruments, occasionally giving concerts until the 1920s, when he turned to Eastern mysticism.

\textit{L'arte dei rumori}, dated March 11, 1913, agrees theoretically with Pratella's manifestos in that it views the history of music in terms of a purely melodic art which only gradually evolved the idea of vertical organizations:

The Middle Ages . . . [regarded] music from the point of view of linear development in time. . . . In a word, the medieval conception of music was horizontal, not vertical. An interest in the simultaneous union of difficult sounds, that is, in the chord as a complex sound, developed gradually, passing from the perfect consonance, with a few incidental dissonances, to the complex and persistent dissonances which characterize the music of today.\textsuperscript{35}

One of the problems faced by the composer or theorist seeking to renovate the art of music, according to Russolo, is that the circumstances surrounding the birth of music were such that a mystic character was assigned to the art:

\textit{Noises} being so scarce, the first\textit{musical sounds} which man succeeded in drawing from a hollow reed or from a stretched string were a new, astonishing, miraculous discovery. By primitive peoples musical sound was ascribed to the gods, regarded as holy, and entrusted to the sole care of the priests, who made use of it to enrich their rites with mystery. Thus was born the conception of a musical sound as a thing having an independent existence, a thing different from life and unconnected with it. From this conception resulted an idea of music as a world of fantasy superimposed upon reality, a world inviolate and sacred. It will be readily understood how this idea of music must inevitably have impeded its progress, as compared with that of the other arts.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} Marabini, pp. 70-71.
\textsuperscript{35} Slonimsky, pp. 1298-99.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.} This is another area of apparent agreement between Pratella and Russolo,
As the machine has proliferated and added noise to the environment, says Russolo, human response to sound itself has changed:

... the machine today has created so many varieties of noise that pure musical sound — with its poverty and its monotony — no longer awakens any emotion in the hearer.\(^{37}\)

Russolo is careful to note that not all noises are by any means disagreeable: "I need scarcely enumerate all the small and delicate noises which are pleasing to the ear." Modern man needs more and more complex sounds, and this is a need that can be met by Futurist musicians, as Russolo states in his conclusions:

1. Futurist musicians must constantly broaden and enrich the field of sound. This is a need of our senses. Indeed, we note in present-day composers of genius a tendency towards the most complex dissonances. Moving further and further away from pure musical sound, they have almost reached the noise-sound. This need and this tendency can only be satisfied by the supplementary use of noise and its substitution for musical sounds.

In order to use the richness of noise creatively, noise must be controllable. This can be accomplished by determining the predominating pitch or pitches of a given noise:

Every noise has a note — sometimes even a chord — that predominates in the ensemble of its irregular vibrations. Because of this characteristic note, it becomes possible to fix the pitch of a given noise, that is, to give it not a single pitch but a variety of pitches, without losing its characteristic quality — its distinguishing timbre.

That the modern ear requires more complex sounds (noises) is important, but more important is an assertion relating to the very function of music:

Every manifestation of life is accompanied by noise. Noise is therefore familiar to our ears and has the power to remind us immediately of life itself. Musical sound, a thing extraneous to life and independent of it, ... has become to our ears what a too familiar face is to our eyes. Noise, on the other hand, which comes to

an agreement which might be attributed to the editorial efforts of Marinetti. In an article "Musica futurista e futurismo," dated May 4, 1914, Pratella makes the following assertions: "Music, until today, has been judged as the abstract art par excellence: the gift of the gods, the sublime, the intangible, the ethereal, the otherworldly. ... [But] its major appeal depends on other factors, not its pretext of immateriality." — Pratella, *Scritti vari di pensiero* (Bologna, 1932), p. 117.

\(^{37}\) Slonimsky, p. 1299. Further excerpts, given below, from *L'arte dei rumori* are also taken from Slonimsky, pp. 1299-1301.
us confused and irregular as life itself, never reveals itself wholly but reserves for us innumerable surprises. We are convinced, therefore, that by selecting, co-ordinating and controlling noises we shall enrich mankind with a new and unsuspected source of pleasure.

However, in spite of the fact that noise reminds one forcefully of life itself, Russolo categorically moves beyond mere programmatic imitation of natural sound:

. . . the Art of Noises must not limit itself to reproductive imitation. It will reach its greatest emotional power through the purely acoustic enjoyment which the inspiration of the artist will contrive to evoke from combinations of noises.

Russolo lists the six families of noises proper to the Futurist orchestra: booms, whistles, whispers, screams, percussive sounds, and the voices of men and animals.

Russolo must have been working on these instruments, which were to be called intonarumori, by the time of the manifesto's publication or immediately thereafter, since the first demonstration of a single intonarumore was held at the Teatro Stocchi in Modena on June 2, 1913, only three months after the publication of L'arte dei rumori. The instrument demonstrated was a scoppiatore (crackler), which, according to Russolo's "Gl'intonarumori futuristi," imitated the sound of an internal combustion engine. In his article Russolo takes the opportunity to state again the aesthetic considerations behind the art of noises in response, he says, to the lack of understanding of his program by the foreign press. He proceeds to a description of the workings of his machines:

It was . . . necessary . . . that these instruments, intonarumori, be as simple as possible, and it is in precisely this that we have succeeded perfectly. It is enough to say that a single stretched diaphragm, correctly positioned, will produce by variations in tension a scale of more than ten whole tones with all the divisions of semitone, quarter tone and of even smaller fractions.

. . . Varying, then, [the manufacture and] the way of exciting the diaphragm, one obtains yet a different sound as to type and as to timbre, always preserving, naturally, the possibility of varying the pitch. So far we have used four different means of excitation and have already completed the relative instruments.

The first makes the scoppio [explosive] sound like an automobile engine; the

38 Russolo, "Gl'intonarumori futuristi," Lacerba, 1/13 (July 1, 1913), 140-41. This article is dated May 22, 1913, was published on July 1, 1913, and is about a concert that was held on June 2.

39 Ibid., p. 151.

40 The "we" in this passage refers to Russolo and Ugo Piatti, his assistant.
Luigi Russolo (left) with his assistant Ugo Piatti and some of the intonarumori.
second makes the crepitio [crackling] sound like rifle fire; the third makes the ronzio [hum] sound like a dynamo; the fourth makes different kinds of stropicci [stamping, shuffling of feet].

In these instruments the simple movement of a graduated lever suffices to give the noise the pitch that one wants, even in the smallest fraction. Just as easily regulated is the rhythm of every single noise, making it easy to calculate the beat, be it equal or unequal. . . .

Research is already complete to obtain noises (always, understand, tunable) — of the first series listed in the Manifesto, the rombi [rumbles], the tuoni [thunderers,] and the scrosci [crushers]; of the second series, the sibili [whistlers]: of the third, the gorgoglii [gurglers]; of the fourth, the stridoni [screamers], and the fruscii [rustlers]. For these noises the instruments are already being built: rombatore, tuonatore, scrosciatore, gorgogliatore.41

Russolo concludes the article by emphasizing again that the music of the intonarumori is not to be merely imitative.42

During the period between the printing of “Gl’intonarumori futuristi” and the first concert given at Teatro del Verme in Milan on April 21, 1914, Russolo published two more theoretical articles in Lacerba. The first of these, “Conquista totale dell’enarmonismo mediante gl’intonarumori futuristi,”43 seconds Pratella’s assertion, in Il manifesto tecnico, that “enarmonia gives us the possibility of rendering the natural and instinctive intonations and modulations of enharmonic intervals presently impossible, given the artificiality of a tempered scale which we wish to overcome.”44 Russolo believes not only that, when the sounds of nature change pitch, they invariably do so by “enharmonic gradation” but that the world of machines is no different:

Equally, if we pass from natural sounds into the infinitely richer world of the sounds of machines, we again find that all the sounds produced by rotary motion

42 “The noise must become a prime element to form the work of art . . . though the resemblance of the timbre to the natural sound imitated is attained by these instruments almost to the point of deception, nevertheless, no sooner one senses that the noise changes in pitch than one perceives that it loses its uniquely, episodic, imitative character. . . . And thus, liberated from the necessity that produced it, we dominate it, transforming at will the pitch, the intensity and the rhythm, we quickly feel it become anonymous malleable material, ready to be transformed by the will of the artist, who transforms it into elements of emotion, into a work of art.” — Ibid.
43 Russolo, “Conquista totale dell’enarmonismo mediante gl’intonarumori futuristi,” Lacerba, 1/21 (November 1, 1913), 243-45.
44 See Pratella, Musica Futurista, p. xii.
are in their crescendo or diminuendo constantly enharmonic . . . examples: the dynamo and the electric motor.45

Furthermore, the human ear is quite capable of hearing these micro-intervals, even those as small as one eighth of a tone. Since these sounds exist and are natural, and since they are easily perceptible to the ear, it behooves Futurism to enlarge the field of music with them “as it has enlarged the field of painting with dinamismo, poetry with immaginazione senza fili and free words, music with antigrazioso and the abolition of any rhythmic system.”46 The intonarumori are the means by which Futurism will accomplish the task:

In fact, in the construction of the intonarumori we have attempted not only the possibility of changing the sound-noise by whole and half steps but also by any gradation between one tone and another.

We have succeeded perfectly in obtaining any fraction, however small, of pitch.  
Enarmonismo is today, thanks to the intonarumori, a musical reality.47

Russolo’s second article in Lacerba, which appeared on March 1, 1914, is entitled “Grafia enarmonica per gl’intonarumori futuristi.”48 It includes an example from Rete di rumori, Risveglio di una città, and this seven-measure excerpt is the only available specimen of Russolo’s own work for intonarumori.49 In spite of Russolo’s seeming determination to embrace all of Pratella’s polemic program, the excerpt does not include any rhythmic innovations derived from Pratella. It is somewhat surprising that there is only one instance of a quarter tone in the excerpt.

Russolo’s concert in Milan at the Teatro del Verme was given on April 21, 1914.50 In L’Intransigeant of Paris, Marinetti wrote

46 Ibid., p. 244.
47 Ibid. Russolo concludes with a progress report: “We finally have the sound-noise material, capable of taking on all forms without exception . . . I was convinced of all this during the first private concert of intonarumori which I recently directed in the hall of the Direzione del Movimento futurista — and especially by the performance of my two reti [networks] of noises entitled Risveglio di capitale and Convegno d’automobile e d’aeroplani.” — Ibid., p. 245.
48 Russolo, “Grafia enarmonica per gl’intonarumori futuristi,” Lacerba, III/5 (March 1, 1914), 74-75.
49 The present author does have in his possession a tape made from a record of 1921 of two compositions for orchestra and intonarumori by Antonio Russolo, the brother of Luigi, which he obtained from Fred K. Prieberg of Baden-Baden.
50 Slonimsky, p. 238, provides information on the orchestra and the pieces played at this concert.
an account of the occasion. He reports on how the Futurists responded to the large number of unruly passéistes among the audience.

For an hour, the Futurists offered passive resistance. But an extraordinary thing happened just at the start of Network of Noise No. 4: five Futurists — Boccioni, Carrà, Amando Mazza, Piatti and myself — descended from the stage, crossed the orchestra pit, and, right in the center of the hall, using their fists and canes, attacked the "passéistes," who appeared to be stuftified and intoxicated with reactionary rage. The battle lasted fully half an hour. During all this time Luigi Russolo continued to conduct imperturbably the nineteen bruiteurs on the stage. It was a display of an amazing harmonic arrangement of bloody faces and infernal mêlée. . . . The performing artists were suddenly divided into two groups: one group continued to play, while the other went down into the hall to combat the hostile and rioting audience. It is thus that an escort in the desert protects the caravan against the Touaregs. It is thus that the infantry sharpshooters provide cover for the construction of a military pontoon. Our skill in boxing and our fighting spirit enables us to emerge from the skirmish with but a few bruises. But the "passéistes" suffered eleven wounded, who had to be taken to a first-aid station for treatment.51

In the May 15, 1914, issue of Lacerba there appeared a short article, "Gl’intonarumori nell’orchestra," and a short composition for intonarumori and orchestra, Gioia Saggio di orchestra mista, both by Pratella. The piece is printed in a piano score plus parts for scoppiatori and ronzatori. In the article Pratello acknowledges his debt to Russolo. He ends his remarks by speaking of the role of the intonarumori:

As one can easily see, the intonarumori in practice lose any sense of objective reality; they move from an objective reality, to stand aloof from it immediately, coming to form a new abstract reality — the abstract expressive element of a state of mind. Their timbre does not joint itself to the other sound elements as heterogeneous material, but joins as a new sound element, emotional and essentially musical.52

One has the feeling that the Saggio might be the direct result of Marinetti's urgings, but, be that as it may, the two forces in Futurist music were now officially unified, even though no compositions were ever produced by the two musicians in collaboration and even though Pratella was to use the intonarumori for little more

51 Slonimsky, pp. 238-39.
than sound effects in his opera *L'Aviatore Dro*, which was performed only in 1920.

The third concert of Russolo's *intonarumori* took place in the Politeama theater in Genoa on May 20, 1914. It was evidently held in a more genial atmosphere. Maria Russolo, the widow of the master, quotes him:

> At the Politeama of Genoa, the evening of May 20, 1914, followed a performance with the same orchestra. The conduct of the Genoese public was not as unreasonable and indecorous as that of Milan. . . . The Genoese had the rare good sense to want to hear. They did not lack troublemakers, but the majority made them keep silent. Thus the Genoese public could get a general idea of that which is my orchestra.53

The chance to hear Futurist music was afforded London audiences on June 15, 1914, at the London Coliseum, where Russolo and his *intonarumori* were presented. This took place during the time when the Futurist painters were on exhibition at London's Dore Gallery. Little information is available about the concert, since it does not seem to have had the same impact on British cultural life as Futurist polemic implied. The review of the concert in the London *Times* is indulgent, but hardly laudatory:

> . . . the curtain rose upon an orchestra of weird funnel-shaped instruments directed by Signor Luigi Russolo.

> It is impossible to say that the first of the "noise-spirals" performed "The Awakening of a Great City," was as exhilarating as Futurist art usually is; on the contrary, it rather resembled the sounds heard in the rigging of a Channel-steamer during a bad crossing, and it was, perhaps, unwise of the players—or should we call them the "noisicians"?—to proceed with their second piece, "A Meeting of Motor-cars and Aeroplanes," after the pathetic cries of "No more!" which greeted them from all the excited quarters of the auditorium.54

These six occasions, Pratella's two concerts in February and March of 1913, and Russolo's four concerts on June 2, 1913, April 21 and May 20, 1914, and the Coliseum concert (or, possibly, concerts) in June of 1914 constitute the Futurists' chief musical exposure in the years before the war. It is hoped that with a knowledge of this record and on the basis of the documentary evidence scholars will recognize that musical Futurism, in combination with the other artistic aspects of the movement, forms an important and fertile part

53 Maria Zanovello Russolo, p. 54.
of the cultural history of the twentieth century. It seems particularly significant that the Futurists were the first group to be aware of the possibilities of a larger technological aesthetic. Long before musique concrète the Futurists were attempting to enlarge the vocabulary of sounds available to the composer; long before the Surrealists they demonstrated how categorical might be the imperative of épater les bourgeois in achieving an artistic objective. Before the Fascists they showed how to use art as propaganda, and before almost anyone they practiced an art of violence demonstrating the use of art as a weapon against the past, against the present, in short, violence as art and art as violence. However unhappily, this motive has had its way not only in music, painting, and the other arts but also in the world of political action.