

BIOGRAPHY OF ANTONIO VIVALDI BY BRYAN COLLEY

VIVALDI THE LOVER

Very little is known about Vivaldi's personal life. We know about his professional career through the records of the places his music was performed. We know what people thought of Vivaldi from letters they wrote praising or denouncing him. What we know from Vivaldi's own mouth (or hand) is minimal. His personal opinions or thoughts are next to impossible to determine, as are the events that have nothing to do with music; romance for instance (only a step away from music). Vivaldi did not marry, and it is not known if he had romantic relations of any kind. This has not prevented musicologists (wishful thinkers that they are) from speculation.

The strongest case is made for his star opera soprano Anna Giro, or Anna Giraud, who played the lead in his operas starting with "Farnace". She was 16 or 17 years old and Vivaldi was already 48 when they met. She and her sister Paolina lived at Vivaldi's house and became his traveling partners, accompanying him on his excursions all over Europe for many years. Vivaldi said the sisters provided much needed health care for the ailing composer, whose asthma severely hindered his priestly duties (without, apparently, affecting his abilities to travel, perform, teach, compose prolifically, or manage an opera house.) It is no surprise that historians were putting two and two together to make love.

The first attacks against Vivaldi's lifestyle came in 1737, when Guido Bentivoglio refused to allow Vivaldi to stage an opera in the city of Ferrara. He claimed that Vivaldi was unfit for such high an honor because he did not say mass (which was true) and that he was having an affair with Anna (which was hearsay). Vivaldi protested in a long rambling letter which is the only hard evidence we have of Vivaldi's involvement with the singer. He denied the accusations, of course. (Vivaldi eventually got an opera into Ferrara, but it was a commercial failure.)

Whether Vivaldi was intimate with Anna does not deter from their interesting relationship. He was more than likely a father-figure and mentor, and she a pupil and close friend. Their travels may have been strictly business, or Vivaldi may have acted as her chaperone. She was not regarded as an outstanding singer or object of beauty, but she was known to be a convincing actor with a strong presence, and she received several compliments and denunciations in surviving accounts. She was married seven years after Vivaldi's death. We more than likely will never know exact details of their alliance, which means the historians (as well as I) are free to speculate.

VIVALDI THE TEACHER

At the age of 25 Antonio accepted what to any 25 year old male today would be a dream job. He became the music teacher at an all girls orphanage called the Ospedale delle Pieta (the Hospital of Pity or Compassion.) There were four such schools in Venice. It was his job to teach the young girls to play music and write two concerti every month for them to perform. This accounts for the variety of instruments Vivaldi wrote for, since he had to showcase each of the young girl's talents. Judging from the difficulty of the music, these girls, all of them under twenty, possessed considerable talent. Vivaldi must have enjoyed this work since he stayed at the Ospedale off and on for thirty-five years, although his interests in opera and travel constantly drew him away. If it sounds like paradise for a hot, young maestro, consider this account by Rousseau:

"Vespers...are performed in barred-off galleries solely by girls, of whom the oldest is not twenty years of age. I can conceive of nothing as voluptuous, as moving as this music. What grieved me was these accursed grills, which allowed only tones to go through and concealed the angels of loveliness of whom they were worthy. I talked of nothing else. One day I was speaking of it at M. le Blond's. "If you are so curious," he said to me, "to see these little girls, I can easily satisfy you. I am one of the administrators of the house, and I invite you to take a snack with them." When going into the room that contained these coveted beauties, I felt a tremor of love such as I never experienced before. M. le Blond introduced me to one after another of those famous singers whose voices and names were all that were known to me. "Come, Sophie," -- she was horrible. "Come, Cattina," -- she was blind in one eye. "Come, Bettina," -- the smallpox had disfigured her. Scarcely one was without some considerable blemish. Two or three, however looked tolerable; they sang only in the choruses. I was desolate. During the snack, when we teased them, they made merry. Ugliness does not exclude charms, and I found some in them. Finally, my way of looking at them changed so much that I left nearly in love with all these ugly girls."

One odd element to the performances of these girls was that the audience couldn't see the performers. Screens divided the viewer from the orchestra, the religious purpose of which I can only guess at. I'm certain, however, that everyone in the audience returned home believing the orchestra was made up of only the most heavenly beauties imaginable, since their only mental image was that provided by the music being played.

Not all of the girls at the orphanage were orphans. Many of the girls were poor or illegitimate, and some were just unruly types for which the Ospedale was their "reform school". Graduation meant a dowry for each girl, which was to be

used for a husband or a nunnery. As Vivaldi grew in popularity, so did the fame of his all-female orchestra. The Ospedale's soon became more popular than the churches (though not as popular as the operas.) Even the pupils made names for themselves, especially the vocalists. Many of Venice's elite began to send their daughters to the school to study music. It is said that many noblemen justified this by reasoning their legitimate daughters should get the same quality education as their illegitimate ones. The girls performed in groups of up to forty players and performed every Saturday, Sunday, and on holidays.

The Ospedale review board had to renew Vivaldi's position every year. His initial employment at the school lasted six years before he was voted out in 1709. There was nothing scandalous behind this. It has been said that the board was upset with his continued refusal to say mass. He had apparently been afflicted with asthma since birth, which made the long religious ceremony difficult for him and he had to step down from the pulpit several times before calling it quits. Vivaldi had also been pursuing several outside interests at the time and probably was ready to live outside of Venice for a while. Another possible reason for his dismissal was that the fame he had earned at the Ospedale also promised to earn him a lot of money. Vivaldi may have wanted to split his interests (they permitted him an occasional leave of absence for travel) and the Ospedale wanted a full time worker, so they let him go. Proof that there was no ill will shows in the fact that they whole-heartedly accepted him back when he returned to Venice in 1711 at 60 ducats a year, and they allowed him to devote his time to other projects.

Vivaldi was not the only music teacher at the school. There were others that specialized in different instruments and since Vivaldi wrote for so many, it seems likely they gave Vivaldi advice on the specifics of each one. It is known that Ludwig Erdman and Ignaz Siber taught at the school, both German experts on the oboe. Siber was hired again as an expert on the transverse flute, a new instrument at the time. Outside of the school there were several musical Venetians, among them the famous Tomaso Albinoni, seven years Vivaldi's senior, who was especially influential in Vivaldi's Opus 4, "La Stravaganza". Archangelo Corelli of Rome also influenced Vivaldi greatly. 25 years older than Vivaldi, he was a well established composer in Roman circles. Other direct influences have been attributed to Giuseppe Valentini, three years younger than Vivaldi and working in Rome.

VIVALDI THE PRIEST

Vivaldi was known as the "Red Priest" because of his red hair (inherited from his father.) He became a priest before he became a composer, but it is obvious that his heart, mind, and soul were completely devoted to music. He refused to say

mass after a year at the Ospedale, claiming his health wouldn't permit it. Asthma made it difficult for him to say mass every day. This point is commonly made to indicate he was using it as a scapegoat to avoid an activity he abhorred. This is probably not the case, although it is obvious where his interests were strongest. It is likely he didn't compose any religious music until he had been with the Ospedale for ten years (but he is not entirely to blame for this. The Ospedale had a sacred composer already, Gasparini, but his post was vacant for six years before Vivaldi took it up.) It was probably his lack of interest rather than his outside activities (traveling with an alleged mistress, composing operas) that led to his near ex-communication.

It was a circumstance of the time that if you wanted to compose or play music it helped to become part of the religious institution. As a priest Vivaldi was free to devote his time to writing and playing. He took the position at the Ospedale the same year he was ordained, 1703, so it was obvious he was using the church to attain the position. This is not as immoral as it sounds, since many priests had private vocations. There were thousands of priests in Venice. The priesthood was more of a religious education than a way of life. The Italian church must have been a fairly liberal bunch, because I have never heard of anyone interfering with Vivaldi's composing, progressive and inventive as it was. No doubt the committee understood Vivaldi's importance and influence, and allowed him exercise free reign over musical matters.

VIVALDI THE COMPOSER

Vivaldi achieved fame in Venice by emulating the style of Archangelo Corelli's famous Opus 6, a collection of twelve violin concertos (including the baroque war-horse #8, the Christmas Concerto) that were not unlike the several collections that Vivaldi published. It was Opus 3 that brought fame to Vivaldi. *L'Estro Armonico* ("The Musical Inspiration") is a collection of twelve concertos for violin that established Vivaldi's style: tight, rhythmic compositions, three fast-slow-fast movements, and dazzling instrument solos.

They were published in Amsterdam by Estienne Roger in 1711. The publishing house printed most of Vivaldi's works-- over 500 in his lifetime. He used the Amsterdam house rather than a local one because they engraved the music on plates rather than using movable type as the Venetian printers did. The results were much more accurate and readable, although they cost a fortune to have made. The final printing came in two volumes, considerably larger than any other Venetian composition at the time. Vivaldi and Albinoni were the first Italian composers to have their works published this way, and after this every composer in Venice was having their work printed in northern Europe, which had the beneficial side-effect of exposing the north to Italian music, which in turn

had the effect that Italian composers started writing for northern tastes--a giant circle of influences. The concerto form, popular throughout Italy, was something new in the north. Roger exposed this music to the northern countries and the Italian influence spread across Europe, especially in Germany. Vivaldi was at the forefront of this influence.

Vivaldi was progressive musically. He established the concerto form as an instrumental standard, played with the idea that the soloist was at war with the larger orchestra and using the contrasts to dramatic effect, not only between players but in speed and volume levels as well, and he pushed the envelope on violin technique, something in which he probably remained untouched until Paganini. His usual writing style was antiphony, a simple style, which allowed him to experiment with instrument solos and maintain a light and innocent texture to the music.

Over 500 Vivaldi concerti exist today, as well as 40 cantatas, 22 operas, and more than 60 sacred works, and there were many more that have not survived (or been discovered.) The era demanded the composer be prolific. Older works were not played unless excessively popular. In fact, older works were often not even kept around since they were all written for a specific performance, and there was little use for the music following that performance. Popular concertos were published so that other orchestras might play them. Works which had not been published tended to become lost. It is likely that an output greater than what exists today found its way to a Venetian dumpster as Vivaldi discarded work that had met its purpose in performance. Vivaldi often took older pieces of music and worked them into his current writing; perhaps to meet deadlines and perhaps to rework a good idea. Such is the case with RV.442, a concerto for flauto (a treble recorder) which was to reappear with slight alteration in Opus 10, a published collection of flute concertos. The same piece of music later found its way into arias for the operas *Teuzzone*, *Il Tigrane*, and *Giustino*. If a composer were to do this today, we would consider it an artistic exploration of an integral idea. In Vivaldi's case, before the recording studio and orchestra revivals, it was simply a way to hold on to work he felt deserved another listen. The task of preserving music was generally left to collectors of that time, rich noblemen who had commissioned work from Vivaldi or who had purchased the published form. The works belonged to whomever paid for the manuscript, not the composer. The composer never saw royalties for the music that was played--the royalty receive the royalties! Composers only received payment for the printed material. This may be one reason Vivaldi took up opera, as a way to get his hand in the pot.

Vivaldi was one of the rare Italian composers interested in woodwind instruments. He composed several concerti for the bassoon, oboe, recorder and

flute, as well as the rarer chalumeaux and clarinet. Woodwind instruments had become an integral part of northern European orchestras, but the trend hadn't made it to Italy, where the violin was king. It is partly through Vivaldi's interactions with travelers to Venice (among them G. H. Stoltzel and Johann Heinichen) and his own travels to Germany and France that led him to explore woodwinds, as well as his obligations to produce music for the instruments to be played at the Ospedale and abroad. It is likely that Vivaldi played some of these instruments as well. The oboe, for which Vivaldi composed several concertos, became very popular in the early eighteenth century. It first appeared in St. Mark's in 1698, and at the Ospedale della Pieta in 1707. The earliest known appearance in a work by Vivaldi is in the Opera "Ottone in Villa" in 1713. In 1726 Johann Joachim Quantz, a celebrated flautist, visited Italy and most likely met with Vivaldi. Following his visit, the flute also became very popular in Venice, and Vivaldi was quick to capitalize on this market.

He not only composed for a variety of instruments, but was attuned to each instrument's unique properties and tonal qualities. This is probably best shown in his concertos for mandolin and lute, which are among the few existing works for these instruments from the 18th Century. Generally used in place of harpsichords when none were available, lutes and mandolins had been relegated to the continuo by most baroque composers. Vivaldi, again probably influenced by the visitation of talented soloists, put these quiet, plucked instruments in the spotlight. They are among his most famous works, and when played on guitar (a very rare instrument in Vivaldi's time) seem to communicate to modern audiences more directly than any other instrument. Other exotic instruments in Vivaldi's oeuvre include the viola d'amore--which has a second set of thin strings behind the first that vibrate sympathetically when played, thereby amplifying and enriching the sound.

Vivaldi was obligated to write religious music for the Ospedale, since it was after all a religious organization. He certainly didn't balk at the task, as he had balked at the saying of mass. Vivaldi's religious music did more than fulfill his duties as a priest. It expanded his musical range in new directions and gave us a wider variety of music to listen to rather than simply concertos. Now we have motets, liturgical works, an oratorio, two Magnificats, and two large scale choral and orchestral works set to Gloria. One of these Glorias (RV.589) has become his most popular religious work, short by the choral standards set by later composers, but nonetheless full of memorable musical passages true to the "Vivaldi sound" and nearly too much fun for a church-going event. Only one oratorio exists today, "Juditha Triumphans". Oratorios by Vivaldi's time had come to resemble operas, only with a religious theme. "Juditha Triumphans" is a bit of a propaganda piece for Venice, which was involved in a war at the time with the Turks. It is a very

martial piece complete with battle scenes and dramatic action of the highest order.

Later in life Vivaldi became interested in opera. The opera form in Venice had been perfected by Claudio Monteverdi nearly a hundred years before. In 1637, Venice opened its first public opera house, the San Cassiano. The popularity of opera by Vivaldi's time made it one of the most prosperous forms of musical entertainment in Venice, where a composer could earn around 200 ducats per opera (as opposed to the 60 ducats Vivaldi was being paid annually at the Ospedale) There were six opera houses in Venice producing about six new operas a year, but the popularity of opera was not entirely because of the music. Tickets were cheap, which enabled even the lower class citizens to attend. The nobility was equally enthralled by the spectacle, and attended the opera along with the lower classed patrons. There were few places in Venice where gentry and peasantry could mix. It is likely the luminaries attended the opera to show the under-classed their devotion to the arts. Obviously, the opera was more of a social event, lasting all evening, with food, wine, laughter, flirting, and from time to time music. Very often residents attended the opera several times a week, some every day. The audience was more interested in each other than the performers. They would pause in their festivities from time to time to listen to an aria, but most of the music was intended as a background, and operas often lasted four hours or more. This was also the time of great scenic spectacle, with mechanically moving flats, *deus ex machina*, and forced perspective, making the visual entertainment as important as the music. The following eyewitness account is a lively example of opera at that time:

"The Operas, which are performed every day, begin at 7:00 in the evening and last until 11:00 at night, after which most people go to the fancy-dress ball. Foreigners should not be ashamed to go to the orchestra section at the opera. Even princes, counts, and other persons of quality occasionally take seats there because you have a better view than in the boxes. Moreover, everyone wears a mask. But whatever you do, do not do anything wrong, because the people in the boxes, especially the upper ones, are at times so insolent they will do anything -- even spit -- particularly when they see someone using a small candle to read the libretto. The most insolent of all are the...common folk, who stand below the boxes on all sides. They clap, whistle, and yell so loudly that they drown out the singers. They pay no attention to anyone, and they call this Venetian freedom...It is customary to give the fellow who shows you to your place a few sols to keep him happy."

It must have been exciting for Vivaldi to move from the drier academic Ospedale to the world of opera where pleasures were primary. He became the manager of the San Angelo (St. Angelo) Opera House where he wrote forty-six operas (and

perhaps forty more) as well as directing productions by other composers. The opera form Vivaldi used came from Naples, and was appropriately called the Neapolitan form. This consists of a recitative (where the dialogue and story occurs, more fun to watch than listen to) and the aria (the story stops for a character solo which enabled the singers to show their stuff, probably much better to listen to than watch.) For some reason, the audience concentrated attention on the arias and ignored the recitatives, thereby neglecting the main story (which might already be familiar to them anyway.) The first Vivaldi opera we know of was "Ottone in Villa", presented in 1713. He wrote the opera "Orlando Furioso" three times, the first in 1714 being a failure, the second presented a month later as a contractual obligation, and a third final (and popular) version in 1727. All of this was done after first presenting the opera in 1713 with music written by Giovanni Ristori, which goes to show how Venetians didn't mind seeing operas based on familiar stories (I suppose so they didn't have to pay as much attention to what was happening on-stage.) Never one to let good things go, this opera contains echoes of "The Four Seasons" and Vivaldi used some of the arias in other operas. We know of 50 operas, although only 22 exist today. Vivaldi once claimed that he had composed 94 operas.

Of course, dealing with the opera world involved cooperating with more people than working at the Ospedale. Not only was he using the words of a librettist, but opera productions involved scenery, lighting, costumes, financial backers, and worst of all--the opera divas! There survives an account of Vivaldi's wranglings with a producer, Marchese Luca Casimiro degli Albizzi, to get one of his operas produced. The producer continually hounded, "you are not to touch the substance of the libretto nor the division of the acts, because that is the way I wish it. I know you say it is all to improve it, but in Florence I know what is needed." He added, "I don't object to the few words in the recitatives which you have changed, but as for the arias, I think you have taken unwarranted liberties; I have counted twelve, and I abhor totally those which have been composed like this and which block the action when they ought to reprimand, or exhort, or pray." Albizzi even scolded Vivaldi for relying on past works, "you will do as I said and said repeatedly to you, not to seek out old arias and then include them arbitrarily as you see fit. And if in the theater they recognize them, you know that such a thing does no credit to you, and perhaps those who sing the parts are obliged to change them anyway, and that means the loss comes out of my pocket." Of course, Albizzi was not completely against Vivaldi (he did not hire a new composer) and at times he even defended him, "I don't disapprove of the idea that Your Gracious Self proposes...to change the aria on behalf of your daughter. I permit this because it is not a new score. But in that of Vivaldi you must sing everything he sends." I present this as just a small example of life in the opera world. In fact, it shows how our historical viewpoints are entirely dependent on existing evidence. For example, the above letters only show

Albizzi's point of view, and we have no idea how Vivaldi replied. Also, while we may look upon this as a typical incident in the opera world, it is merely the only incident that exists, and chances are it is as much unusual as it is ordinary (although, judging from opera productions of today, it seems little has changed.) Had we more information, the picture might be quite different, and there is undoubtedly a storehouse of knowledge to be stumbled upon in the ancient holdings of Europe's libraries and family archives.

The opera world that began in Monteverdi's time and boomed in Vivaldi's time continued booming as Vivaldi grew older (and kept booming thereafter, right up to the booming excesses of Wagner!) A second generation slowly took ground, and Vivaldi found that he was now an established composer with the popular upstarts surrounding him, just as he had once been. Styles were changing, and the castrati singer Farinelli (who appeared in some of Vivaldi's operas) was the toast of Venice. Where Vivaldi had earned around 4,200 lire at the peak of his fame, this new generation commanded astronomical salaries of 12,400, 18,600 (Farinelli) and 22,000 lire. This no doubt illustrates how immensely popular Venetian opera had become (thanks in no small part to Vivaldi.) While Vivaldi was a success in the opera world, he was by no means top dog, as he had been when he headed the Ospedale. By the time of his death, the wave of excitement he stirred over his first concertos had long since subsided, and his operas were generating less than a ripple. Indeed, the same can be seen today, where several versions of "The Four Seasons" have been recorded, but very little is known of his operas.

We should now look at Vivaldi's published works, those which were accessible to the greatest number of people in Vivaldi's day, as the most influential work of his life, yesterday and today. Vivaldi published twelve collections of his works as opus 1-12. An opus (Latin for "work", the rarely used plural being Opera) was a collection of six or twelve concertos, and they were usually similar in style or solo instrument. The concertos usually weren't written as part of a collection, rather the collection was made from already existing parts. What follows is a list of the opus volumes Vivaldi published:

* 1705 Opus 1 - This is a collection of sonatas - four movement pieces written for three instruments (2 violins and harpsichord) that are heavily reminiscent of Archangelo Corelli's work. It is highlighted by a sonata titled "Variations on La Folia", a popular folk tune of Vivaldi's day which has been worked over by several composers, including Corelli and Stradella. Dedicated to Annibale Gambara, a Veronese nobleman.

* 1709 Opus 2 - This is another set of sonatas for two instruments (violin and harpsichord) in the style of Archangelo Corelli. However, Vivaldi's inventiveness

is beginning to show. Dedicated to Frederik IV of Denmark during his visit to the Venetian carnival.

* 1711 Opus 3 - L'Estro Armonico (The Musical Inspiration) - Freed from his obligation to teach at the Ospedale, Vivaldi took up the challenge of one of the largest concerto collections ever attempted in Venice. "L'Estro Armonico" rocketed Vivaldi to European fame, especially in Germany, and propelled the sale of several collections that followed. The typical Venetian concerto at the time was written with two violin parts, a lead and a secondary. "L'Estro Armonico" contains 4 violin parts, two sets of lead and secondary. Corelli is often credited with exerting grand influence over Vivaldi's musical tastes in these concerti, mainly because they are written in a Roman style, using 4 violin parts, much like Corelli's celebrated Concerti Grossi Opus 6. There is, however, some dispute about this. Corelli's Concerti Grossi Opus 6 was not published until 1714 (by the hard working Estienne Roger) and may have only been available to Vivaldi if he had gone to Rome, but influential credit may be given to another Roman composer, Giuseppe Valentini, who's Concerti Grossi Opus 7, published in 1710, uses the same style as Vivaldi does in this collection. Another secondary influence on this collection is Venice's own Tomaso Albinoni. Influences are always sought for "L'Estro Armonico" in an attempt to explain where Vivaldi got all of his wonderful ideas, and to understand which composers he had learned from and was patterning himself after. These influences may not have been as direct as it seems, since the Roman style of concerto was becoming commonplace throughout Venice and Vivaldi might have been simply jumping on something new and exotic (as he was want to do). The concerti themselves are a strange mix of Venetian and Roman styles. Influences aside, Vivaldi's presence is commanding-- full of exuberance, joy, and Mediterranean warmth. Vivaldi had now become the influence for composers throughout Europe, such as Johann Sebastian Bach and Johann Joachim Quantz, and ironically it is the Venetian elements rather than the Roman ones that most composers emulated. Of the twelve concertos, number 8 has achieved widespread popularity, although many in the collection have found modern recordings. J.S. Bach took five of the concertos and transcribed them for organ--which was one of the primary elements that kept Vivaldi's name alive after his death. Vivaldi promised in the dedication of "L'Estro Armonico" that he would follow this with 12 concerti for solo violin (such confidence in his success!) Dedicated to the Grand Prince Ferdinando of Tuscany.

* 1714 Opus 4 - La Stravaganza - Riding the success of "L'Estro Armonico", Vivaldi followed it up with this smorgasbord of violin technique more closely aligned to his own style. He was now clearly confident with the concerto form and used it to play and invent as many combinations as he could dream up. The purpose of the twelve is to break from tradition and show the violin in all its

extravagant forms, even the traditions set by Vivaldi in the "L'Estro Armonico". Vivaldi was researching the varying sounds the violin could make, and the varying techniques used to make them. Concerto 8 provides the best example of this thinking, and it is also the strongest concerto in terms of structure and theme. All but two of the concerti are in three movements, fast-slow-fast. Vivaldi was finally settling on this as his favorite form, and he developed the slow movements considerably, drawing them out and complicating them to contrast with the faster outer movements. It is hard to understand how impressive these two collections must have sounded to music lovers of the time without first having a firm grasp of the traditions that existed, the norm of the day, that everyone was accustomed to. It was only a century before that composers were breaking away from the vocal church music, chant, and solemn Latin biblical text-based church music. This form of music was still popular in Vivaldi's day, and he wrote an enormous amount of it, but it is accompanied by lively, non-religious instrumental music and opera spurred on by the development of instruments capable of performing complicated music (and sounding pleasing at the same time). These were new forms of music that remain as popular today as when they were introduced. Dedicated to Vettor Dolfin, a Venetian nobleman, card shark, and student of Vivaldi's.

* 1716 Opus 5 - A collection of six sonatas that seems to be written for the tastes of northern Europe. They are more restrained and noble, less "joi de vive" and fun. There is no dedicatee.

* 1717 Opus 6 - Six violin concerti, reminiscent of early Vivaldi rather than Corelli. There is no dedicatee.

* 1721 Opus 7 - 12 violin concerti. Another return to form in what has become "the Vivaldi sound." It is possible that some of these works are not Vivaldi's. It may be that Vivaldi gave six concerti and his publisher Roger added six more from other composers. I leave it for you to decide which ones they might be, but if I were you I would suspect the two oboe concerti. It has been proposed that Vivaldi boycotted the publisher because of this and did not publish again until after Roger's death in 1723. There is no dedicatee.

"Concerto no. 4, the one least doubted on the basis of style carries a handwritten note by its original owner 'cattivo e non e di Vivaldi' or 'bad and not by Vivaldi'. As regards the doubts over the 2 oboe concertos, the Pieta was employing oboe teachers from 1703 onwards and indeed Vivaldi's sonata RV 779 contains a very demanding part for oboe dated to 1710. They are mainly doubted because they sound more like concertos 'with oboe' rather than 'for oboe' -- a non-characteristic composition for Vivaldi. My personal opinion & feeling are for their

authenticity." (comment graciously donated by Vivaldi Homepage visitor Vincent Farrugia)

* 1725 Opus 8 - "The Four Seasons" were published in Amsterdam in 1725. There are four violin concerti each named after a season of the year. Each includes a sonnet, written by Vivaldi, that describes the intent of the music, which makes them unique among Vivaldi's canon. The four concerti are part of a larger collection of twelve called "Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invention", or "The Contest of Harmony and Invention", Opus 8. The title indicates an ongoing battle between harmony, form, and rationality and the opposing forces of invention, fantasy, and creativity. This may be intended to show how Vivaldi used the rigid concerto form (three movements, fast-slow-fast, each with specific guidelines) to display his imagination and inventiveness. Programmatic music such as this was very uncommon in the baroque era (and the classical era, for that matter) and it is probably a part of the whole idea of invention and creativity that Vivaldi ascribes a story (or outline, really) to his music. The idea of contrasts was one of his foremost objectives, so to join musical notes with written words makes them part of the overall concept. During the time of this composition, about 1717-1720, Vivaldi had taken a post with Landgrave Philipp of Hesse-Darmstadt and found himself in Mantua. "The Four Seasons" are obviously much influenced by the Lombardy countryside of this region, as are many other pastoral works he created during this period, such as "Alla Rustica", "Il gardellino" (The Goldfinch), and "La Caccia" (The Hunt). "The Four Seasons" was written for Count Graf Wenzel von Morzin of Bohemia, to whom Vivaldi sent many concerti.

* 1727 Opus 9 - La Cetra - This collection of twelve violin concerti emphasizes what Vivaldi had learned in the opera business. The concerti are full of lyricism and melody unlike his earlier work. It is also the first time Vivaldi solidified his concerti by making each of the three movements in the same key. Before the middle movement was usually minor and the outer movements major. It is notable in that two of the concerti, #6 and #12, required instrument tuning common only in German-speaking countries. They are dedicated to the Austrian Emperor Charles VI. (Vivaldi was rewarded with a gold chain and medallion.)

* 1728 Opus 10 - Il gardellino - This is the only collection written for an instrument other than the violin. This was also the first collection of flute concerti ever published, six concerti in all, and was commissioned of Vivaldi by his Amsterdam publisher to quell the burning rage for this new instrument in the 1720's. Actually called a transverse flute (an early incarnation), it was introduced to the Ospedale during Vivaldi's occupation. The flute eventually replaced the recorder as the upper woodwind of choice. Vivaldi wrote concerti for both instruments and their parts are commonly switched. In fact, all but concerto 4 are arranged from previous concerti, most of them recorder concerti. The timid little

flute might seem like a difficult solo instrument for Vivaldi's outward bravado, but quite the opposite is true. Vivaldi turns the flute into a fiery little pipe. In the first concerto, "La tempesta di mare", Vivaldi shows he has no qualms pushing the flute to its limit. Normally used for color to depict flighty, feathery sounds, Vivaldi's flute becomes a storm at sea with crashing waves, and he imbues the instrument with an ornery fury quite unlike its reputation. The second concerto, "La Notte" (the Night) has become a baroque favorite and is popular among Vivaldi collections. It is not a sleepy, contemplative concerto as the title indicates, but rather a nightmare, a restless sleep, that continues to show the flute is a mean instrument. Having established the presence of the soloist, Vivaldi retreats to delicate birdcalls in the third concerto, "The Goldfinch". The final concerti are all individual, the fifth being played entirely with muted strings. There is no dedicatee.

* 1729 Opus 11 - Six more violin concerti, with an oboe in the mix, characteristic of Vivaldi's familiar style. There is no dedicatee.

* 1729 Opus 12 - Vivaldi's final collection is a set of six violin concerti. There is no dedicatee. Vivaldi stopped printing his works after this, claiming it was more profitable to just sell the autographed manuscripts.

* Opus 13 - There is an Opus 13, "Il pastor fido", dated 1737, but the true author is Mr. Nicolas Chedeville, a Parisian musician who published this collection and claimed that Vivaldi had written it. He even stole some bits of Vivaldi's opus 4, "La Stravaganza", to make it sound authentic. It is generally not considered part of Vivaldi's published oeuvre.

* 1740 Opus 14 - These six cello sonatas were published in Paris in 1740 right before his death, only without an opus number. The opus 14 was added later. It is generally not considered part of Vivaldi's published oeuvre.

VIVALDI THE TRAVELER

Italy at the time was a collection of city-states. Each city was ruled according to its own laws, and acted independent of the nation as a whole. Venice was as popular and prosperous a city as it is today, more so in fact. In the seventeenth century, it had begun to lose a lot of its military holdings to the Ottoman Empire, as well as its trade with the orient and far east. Seeking new ways to sustain itself, it focused on elaborate festivals held every year around Christmas. It became a prime destination for travelers all over Europe (what better way to spend your winter than in the warmer climes of Italy?) and Vivaldi's Ospedale orchestra was one of the prime attractions, as was the father/son virtuoso duo-- Giovanni and Antonio Vivaldi. It is no wonder that so much of Vivaldi's music is

intended as entertainment rather than personal reflections or holy inspirations, and why he never wrote anything for solo instruments. Venice was a tourist mecca, but another city in Italy was probably an even larger center for music and art: the city of Rome. The home of several great composers, the style of music in Rome differed in some ways from the music of Venice. Rome attracted visitors from as far away as Sweden (Queen Christina was a pupil of Corelli's.)

While Vivaldi spent much of his time teaching at the Ospedale, he began to travel as his fame grew. Certainly meeting musicians and tourists from all over the continent helped spur his enthusiasm for foreign lands, as well as the possibility of raking in the ducats! He left Venice for three years to live in Mantua and work in service of the governor Prince Philip of Hesse-Darmstadt. His official title was nothing less flowery than Maestro di Cappella da Camera. When he returned to Venice he took up a sort of part-time employment with the Ospedale, writing two concertos a month without having to direct each performance. This gave him room to travel as he wished. He went to Rome, Bohemia, Amsterdam, and Dresden. Johann Sebastian Bach, ten years Vivaldi's junior, was never to meet the Italian composer (Venice was too far to walk) but he was impressed with "L'Estro Armonico", Opus 3, and transcribed six of the concertos to instruments Vivaldi never wrote for, the harpsichord and organ (Vivaldi used these instruments to provide a rhythmic baseline, not as the lead solo as Bach did-- the difference between a keyboardist and a violinist.) It is odd they never met up during Vivaldi's travels, since "L'Estro Armonico" was fairly early in Vivaldi's career. I guess Bach's children kept him too busy for wandering Italian composers.

Vivaldi's travels were partly a desperate search for work. He was not poor by any means, for he was at one time worth 50,000 ducats a year, but as he got older he invested most of this money into the opera business and lost it. To further aggravate matters, the people of Venice had become accustomed to his music and his popularity was starting to wane. There were only two ways to make money as a composer, either by appointment to a court, church, or similar position, or by the sale of a published work. Often the appointment was paid on a per work basis, so the only way to make money was to keep writing music. He sought appointment in Paris and Vienna with no luck. As he traveled he took with him a collection of concertos and other works which he sold in various cities. Another way to make money was through dedications. Very often composers were commissioned to write works by whatever wealthy patron happened to need them. Sometimes, however, music could be dedicated to someone the composer hoped would favor the music, expecting a return on their investment in the form of expensive presents. This was the riskiest proposition, since the cost of writing and publishing was entirely up to the composer. Often, the best bet for a profit was to collect a number of works into an opus. The opus

was a highly marketable commodity against a single work, and also a good way to include older unpublished work with new work. Vivaldi published 12 collections, conveniently titled Opus 1 - 12.

He scored a success in Dresden, where the violinist Johann Georg Pisendel exalted his works before becoming Vivaldi's pupil in Venice. Pisendel was part of the Dresden court orchestra and used his influence to get Vivaldi's music performed. Vivaldi wrote several concertos for the orchestra, including the "symphonic" concertos for many solo instruments (first performed at the Ospedale in 1740.) These works were designed to highlight the talents of the entire ensemble rather than individual performers, with tiny solos for each instrument. The idea of contrasts appears again with the words "many soloists", a contradictory term which conjures up images of individual instrument players battling on stage for the solo spot. In a way, that's what these concertos are. They were to be some of his final compositions in Venice. They are a musical curtain call with which Vivaldi departed for Germany and his fate, but listening to these concertos you cannot hear the slightest hint of death. They are lively, bouncy, and joyous; as optimistic as the music of his youth. (For what it matters, RV. 558 is my personal favorite of all Vivaldi's works.)

VIVALDI THE CHILD

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi was born on March 4th, 1678. His father, Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, was a barber who took up violin, and was apparently good enough to dazzle the basilica of St. Mark (San Marco) since he got a job there performing in 1685, and later performed in operas. It is likely he has not been given enough credit for Antonio's abilities as a musician and composer. Not only did he teach Antonio to play the violin, but they performed together on several occasions. Before Antonio's popularity with "L'Estro Armonico", the Vivaldi's were a father/son team marked as one of the main tourist attractions of Venice. Because of this, comparisons have been made between Vivaldi's early life and that of Mozart's, although in Mozart's life the father/son relationship was much more extreme. I have not heard anything as to whether Giovanni performed any of his son's work, or if he composed anything himself. It is likely he played something and would be an interesting side note if it were known to be so. Giovanni hand copied some of Vivaldi's manuscripts, as did three of Vivaldi's nephews. Vivaldi was part of a large family. He had four brothers and four sisters, but he was the lone musician.

Vivaldi was a master violinist and continually dazzled the patrons of the Ospedale with his wild bowing. A colorful account by the German traveler Johann Friedrich Armand von Uffenbach sums up Vivaldi's mastery very well. "Vivaldi played a solo accompaniment-- splendid-- to which he appended a

cadenza which really frightened me, for such playing has never been nor can be: he brought his fingers up to only a straw's distance from the bridge, leaving no room for the bow-- and that on all four strings with imitations and incredible speed." Vivaldi later met with Uffenbach and without much coercion talked him into buying several concertos Vivaldi claimed to have written specifically for him. He accompanied this sale with the offer to teach him to play the concertos (with due compensation) emphasizing his role as teacher and businessman. After all, selling his music and mastery was his bread and butter. I do not know if Uffenbach took him up on the offer.

VIVALDI THE UNKNOWN

Antonio Vivaldi died in 1741. He was far away from home at the time, in Vienna, and as he had spent the wealth of his lifetime, he was buried in a pauper's grave (ironically, just like Mozart, and even more ironically, the young composer Joseph Haydn was a choir boy at the funeral). Having remained popular across Europe his entire life, Vivaldi fell out of favor during his last ten years. As the musical world inched its way towards the classical period, Vivaldi's music was soon forgotten. His name was barely mentioned for almost two hundred years.

All that remained of the name Vivaldi was in the compositions of Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach had transcribed several concertos from "L'Estro Armonico", Op. 3, and Bach scholars were more interested in what he did with the concertos and why he was influenced by them rather than their original forms or original composer. Vivaldi was unfairly compared to the "baroque master" by those already prejudiced to Bach's music. The search for Vivaldi's original concertos, however, was the road to one of music history's greatest comebacks. Widely regarded as an insignificant composer whose existing works were rare to say the least, we now have hundreds of works that put Vivaldi at the fore-front of the baroque period. The first major discovery was in a music cabinet in Dresden. Vivaldi had composed a large quantity of music specifically for the Dresden orchestra, and once it had fallen out of fashion (in the 1760's) it had been placed in storage where it collected dust for a century. The discovery of these works led to the most important historical study of Vivaldi in the 19th century, "Antonio Vivaldi and His Influence on Johann Sebastian Bach". The author refuted Bach's genius and reduced Vivaldi to an over productive scribbler upon whose soil Bach grew a pleasant flower bed. There were, however, 83 Vivaldi concertos existing by this time, and this was not the end of the discoveries.

The first historian to take Vivaldi seriously was Arnold Schering in the very early part of the 20th century. Since the Vivaldi movement began in Germany with the Dresden discovery, it was followed by other German historians, such as Alfred Einstein, Karl Straube, Ludwig Landshoff, and Wolfgang Fortner. The 1920's saw

a renewed interest in "old music" that resulted in the first widespread publishing of Vivaldi's work. You would think that all this growing interest in Vivaldi would lead scholars to Venice in search of Vivaldi's past, but quite the opposite happened. Vivaldi came to them.

In 1926 a monastery in Piedmont was looking to sell part of its archives for some needed cash. They were sitting on a huge collection of music, 97 volumes worth, which they did not know what to do with nor what it was. They called on an Italian musicologist, Alberto Gentili, to go through the enormous stash and sort it out. He happened upon 14 volumes of Vivaldi's music, mostly unknown, including over a hundred concertos, twelve operas, 29 cantatas, and a complete oratorio. This music had sat idle for nearly 200 years, and is perhaps one of the greatest discoveries in musical history. Seeing that the collection was not a complete one, it led scholars in search of the missing half. It was discovered in the private collections of two brothers whose family had handed down volumes of Vivaldi's music over the past 200 years (unaware, apparently, of its value.) These collections were bought by the Turin National Library where they reside today.

The rediscovery and Vivaldi's place in music history was cemented with the "Vivaldi Week" celebration in Siena in 1939. Vivaldi then spread throughout the world following World War II with the establishment of La Scuola Veneziana, I Virtuosi di Roma, and I Musici, three of many orchestras that concentrated on the recording and performing of Vivaldi. Alberto Pincherel became the most important Vivaldi scholar in the 50's and 60's by cataloging his works, a numbering system (designated with a "P") that is still in some use today. By the 1960's, Vivaldi had regained his fame throughout the world, mainly because of "The Four Seasons", Gloria, and a few other concertos. What had remained hidden for almost 200 years had been brought back in less than forty.

Vivaldi's future place in the classical world is still being formed. He gains in popularity year after year as more of his works are recorded (about 40 new CDs are released each year) and become part of the standard repertoire, and there is an increasing interest in his operas and religious works. None of his operas have fallen into regular rotation, but "The Four Seasons" is now perhaps the most recorded work in the classical world, with over 100 different recordings. Vivaldi has joined hand-in-hand with the period instruments movement; his music helping the performers and the performers helping his music find a wider audience in the past three decades to the point where nearly all baroque music is now recorded on authentic devices. His music has been used in films such as "Shine", "The Four Seasons", "Kramer vs. Kramer", and "After Hours", and can even be found in TV commercials. The radar says that Vivaldi is still on his way

up the musical ladder, and perhaps one day we will re-evaluate his contribution to western music and find him first and foremost among baroque composers.

SUGGESTED READING

H.C. Robbins Landon. *Vivaldi, Voice of the Baroque*. 1993 Thames and Hudson. Rather than interpret the facts, Landon gives you the facts. The pages are full of eyewitness accounts and include the complete (and effusive) dedications of Vivaldi's published works.

Walter Kolneder. *Antonio Vivaldi: His Life and Work*. 1970 University of California Press.

I may know a little about Vivaldi, but I don't know much about music theory. Anyone looking for a musical interpretation of Vivaldi can turn to this book, which examines every style of his music and includes a brief bio. There are 154 musical examples which are referred to in the text. An excellent scholarly look at the composer side of Vivaldi. Because it was written in 1970, he uses the Pincherel catalog to reference work, so you'll need a conversion guide handy (anybody want to program one for me?)

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Thank you very much and I hope you enjoy this biography.

BRYAN COLLEY

THE VIVALDI HOMEPAGE