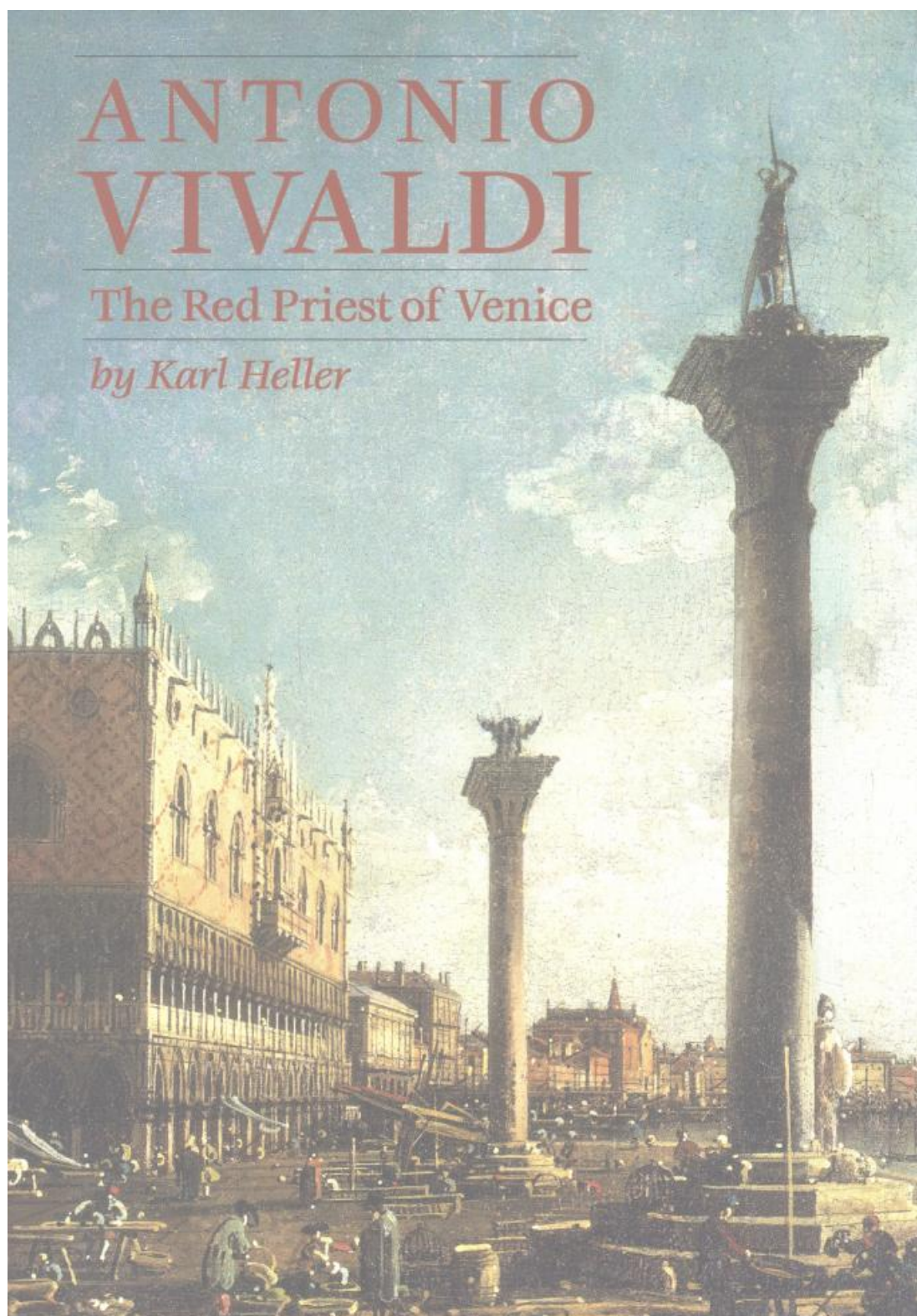

ANTONIO VIVALDI

The Red Priest of Venice

by Karl Heller



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Antonio Vivaldi from an engraving by F.M. La Cave (1725).

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Translated from the German by David Marinelli

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Jacket illustration

Giovanni Antonio Canal (called Canaletto) (1697–1768), “The Riva Degli Schiavoni towards the East,” oil on canvas, the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida.

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Preface to the English Translation

This English translation of my 1991 German edition incorporates much recent Vivaldi research, my own as well as that of others. As a result, this edition includes new factual material and fresh insights. In addition I have taken the opportunity to correct a number of errors found in the German edition.

My thanks go to both the translator of the book, Dr. David Marinelli, and to the general editor of Amadeus Press, Dr. Reinhard G. Pauly, for their interest and for the care they have devoted to the preparation of this edition.

Karl Heller
Rostock

Preface to the German Edition

A new biography of Antonio Vivaldi certainly does not require an explanation or the justification of an anniversary or some other external event. A number of years ago, Reclam, a Leipzig publisher, suggested I write a biography of Vivaldi; by coincidence, it is being issued in 1991, the year commemorating the 250th anniversary of the composer's death. I try to portray the artist in the light of the latest research and to present the most important facts of his life, of his works, and of his influence on musical history in a clear, concise form. I have written for musicians and for music students as well as for the many other lovers of Vivaldi's music; also, the book offers musicologists little-known material, new information, and new perspectives on the composer.

Even though I have devoted a considerable period of time to the study of both Vivaldi's life and works, I have found it necessary to base this biography on numerous contributions made by scholars of many countries. I feel deeply indebted to colleagues for the new biographical details and for the latest painstaking efforts – reflected in this book – at dating Vivaldi's works. The bibliography and notes testify to the vast amount of additional knowledge that has been gathered over the past decade. I feel especially indebted to scholars Michael Talbot of Liverpool, Gastone Vio of Venice, and Paul Everett of Cork.

My greatest debt of thanks, however, goes to Professor Rudolf Eller of Rostock for his continued interest and invaluable support in helping to make this book a reality. He has been assisting me in Vivaldi studies for almost thirty years, as well as having provided materials, expert advice, and critical comments on this manuscript. For this I convey to him, one of the senior scholars in international Vivaldi studies, my warmest gratitude. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Antonio Fanna, director of the Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi of Venice, for procuring sources, printed scores, and literature; and to Dr. Christoph Hellmundt of Leipzig for the care taken by the publishers in preparing the final text. In conclusion, I also wish to thank all those who freed me from other tasks, both professional and private, during work on the manuscript.

Karl Heller
Rostock

Chapter Two

“The Glorious Venetian Republic”— The Historical and Musical Setting of Vivaldi’s Venice

Vivaldi spent well over fifty of his sixty-three years in his native city of Venice. Except for a roughly two-year stay in Mantua (1718–20), his final months in Vienna (about 1740–41, though the exact dates are still unknown), and musical travels, Vivaldi lived in the *Serenissima*, the Most Serene Republic. In Venice he worked throughout his life as an artist, and from Venice his fame emanated throughout Europe. Yet Venice was more than his home city: it served as the native soil and as the vital nerve of his art. The unique atmosphere that had grown out of the interaction of many different factors—from social and general history, landscape and climate, and culture and the arts—made Vivaldi’s lifework “Venetian art” in a sense far beyond the narrow or local sense of the word.

By 1700 the Republic of St. Mark was no longer a leading economic or political power. As early as the sixteenth century the Republic had lost its dominant position as the center for trade with the Orient because of both the shifting of international trade to the oceans and the colonial expansion of other European states. During the seventeenth century, and as a result of the momentous and difficult struggle with the Ottoman Empire, it not only lost important possessions in the eastern

Mediterranean—for example, the island of Crete in 1669—but it also declined in political authority. In 1668, ten years before Vivaldi's birth, the Venetians managed to retake the Peloponnesus (formerly known as Morea) from the Turks, and in 1699 the Treaty of Karlowitz (Karlovac), which ratified a victory over the Turks in alliance with Austria, placed the *Serenissima* in a more positive position. This change of fortune did not, however, last. Following a new, protracted war with the Turks, Venice was forced in 1718 to cede its former possessions to Austria at the Peace of Passarowitz. Venice had ceased to be a major power.

Of course, the island republic's decline as the dominant maritime-mercantile power in the Levant touches only one side of a development that included Venice's economic and social structure and, not least, the life of its citizens. Most of all, it affected the city itself, which—although it had a population of 140,000, or about 50,000 fewer inhabitants in 1696 than at the end of the fifteenth century—was still almost three times larger than Hamburg (fig. 2). The leading patricians who had originally engaged in commercial shipping became increasingly involved in finance and in speculative ventures in a crisis-ridden society clearly on the decline. Venice had turned from a dynamic trading power into an El Dorado for culture- and for pleasure-hungry travelers, a metropolis of art and amusement. The Venetian Carnival attracted tens of thousands of foreigners as early as 1680, and during Carnival nights one could place unlimited bets at twenty different casinos.¹ Venice had become a city of amusement and of elegant festivities, not only for the



Figure 2. Venice in an engraving by Matthäus Merian the Elder (1638).

ANTONIO Vivaldi's rediscovery after World War II quickly led him from obscurity to his present renown as one of the most popular and frequently performed eighteenth-century composers. The Venetian's long-silent music was assured a rebirth of immense proportions when it began to be available through the medium of the long-playing record, and an average of forty new Vivaldi recordings have been issued each year over the past thirty years. There are currently about two hundred recordings of *The Four Seasons* alone.

Karl Heller's biography of Antonio Vivaldi, originally published in Germany in 1991 in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the composer's death, presents the most important facets of Vivaldi's life, of his works, and of his influence on music history. This new English translation incorporates recent Vivaldi research by the author and others, providing new factual material and fresh insights, including the latest painstaking efforts at dating Vivaldi's compositions.

Written for musicians and music students as well as for the many other lovers of Vivaldi's music, the book also offers musicologists little-known material, new information, and new perspectives on the composer.



KARL HELLER was born in 1935 in Thuringia, Germany. From 1954 to 1959 he studied historical musicology in Weimar, Jena, and Leipzig. In 1961 he became an assistant at the Musicology Institute at Rostock University, where he completed a doctoral dissertation on Vivaldi

sources in Germany in 1965. He was promoted to professor, and since 1992, he has held the chair for historical musicology at Rostock. He also teaches at the recently founded Academy for Music and Theater in the same city. A contributing editor of the new complete edition of Bach's works (*Neue Bach-Ausgabe*), his research has dealt chiefly with the music of Bach and Vivaldi.

Jacket front illustration: *The Riva Degli Schiavoni towards the East*, by Canaletto. Courtesy of the John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art.

Jacket back illustration: Caricature of Vivaldi by Pierleone Ghezzi (1723).

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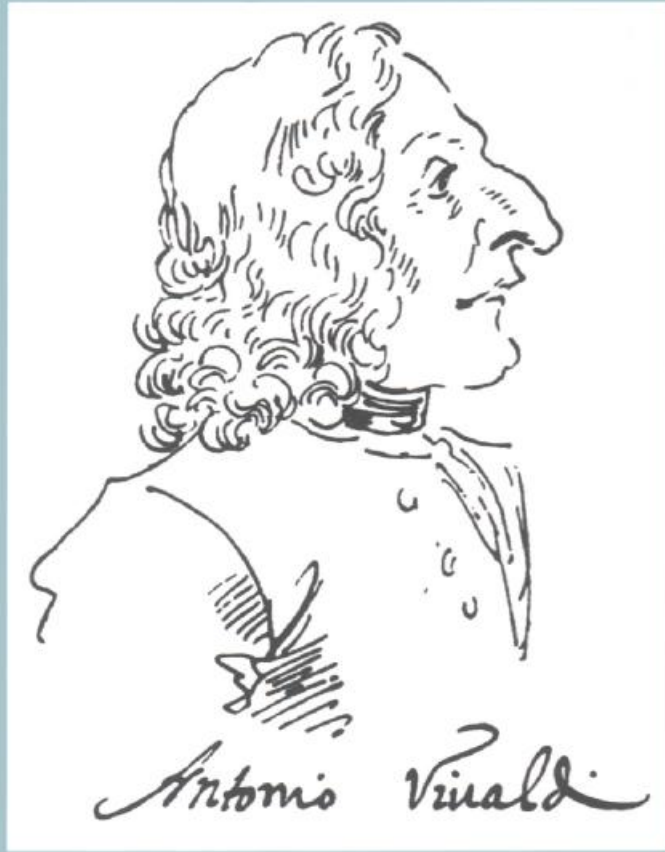
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