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MUSICIANS  
VIVALDI

MICHAEL TALBOT

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**THE DENT MASTER MUSICIANS**

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**VIVALDI**

*Michael Talbot*

J.M. DENT, LONDON

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## Preface

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The admission of Vivaldi to the select company of the ‘Master Musicians’ is a sign of the growing esteem in which he has been held in recent decades. Fortunately, this surge of interest has stimulated research into Vivaldi’s life and works, so that an author today can draw upon much information unavailable at the time of the pioneer studies. Gone are the days when he was regarded principally as a composer of concertos; we now have to see him as an important contributor to several genres: vocal as well as instrumental, sacred as well as secular.

I must gratefully acknowledge here the help of several musicians, scholars and librarians, among whom I should like to mention by name Eric Cross, Jean-Pierre Demoulin, Eleanor Selfridge-Field, Anthony Hicks, Wolfgang Reich and Reinhard Strohm. The University of Liverpool, and in particular the staff of the University Library, also aided me in many ways.

The musical illustrations nos. 1–3, 8–11 and 18–32 are included by courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino; no. 13 by courtesy of the Sächsische Landesbibliothek; and nos. 7 and 15 by courtesy of Manchester Public Libraries. Extracts from the correspondence of Charles Jennens and Edward Holdsworth are quoted by kind permission of the owner, Gerald Coke.

The issue of *Vivaldi* in paperback has given me the opportunity to make some corrections and to bring the volume up to date in a few places. I should like to thank my editor, Julia Kellerman, for her help in making the necessary changes.

*Liverpool*  
1984

*Michael Talbot*



## Preface to the 1993 edition

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This is the fourth occasion, since its first appearance in 1978, on which I have had the opportunity to revise *Vivaldi*. Each time I have been able to make a certain number of corrections, revisions and additions, but I have not been able before to produce, for publication in English, a new version that was not constrained by the need to retain the original pagination. This time no such restriction applies, and I am free to modify the text almost at will.

But the question then arises: how much do I really wish to change an account that has, so to speak, publicly ‘represented’ my thoughts on Vivaldi for 15 years? Should I alter it so much as to impose on everyone wishing to refer to the book the irksome need always to specify which edition has been consulted? Should I censor my earlier formulations merely because my position has shifted subsequently or because I have come into possession of new information?

On the other hand, I cannot leave uncorrected simple errors of fact or judgment as if I did not now know better. The reader also has a right to receive an image of Vivaldi that reflects the 1990s rather than the 1970s.

I have resolved the dilemma in the following way. The seven original chapters have been corrected and revised (relative to the 1984 paperback edition by Dent). To these I have added a series of endnotes which contains various arguments expanding on, or qualifying, those presented in the previous chapters. This additional discussion takes full account of the extraordinary efflorescence of Vivaldi research that has followed the celebrations in 1978 of the tercentenary of his birth and still shows little sign of waning. Each addition is prefaced by a page number guiding the reader back to the precise point in the earlier text (marked with an asterisk) to which it refers. In this way, the integrity of the original conception has been preserved as much as possible. The volume of scholarly literature on Vivaldi that has appeared in the last 15 years is truly immense, and it has been a hard but necessary task to be somewhat selective in making mention of the more recent



*Vivaldi*

information and introducing the arguments based on it. Fortunately, I have found no reason to modify significantly the general view of the composer that I had when I first wrote the book.

The appendices have all been revised, though I have resisted the temptation to make sweeping changes to them. The most significant alterations are found in Appendix B (Catalogue of Works), which has been fully updated to take account of recent discoveries, and Appendix C (Personalia), which has acquired over 20 new entries.

I am especially indebted to Polly Fallows for her expert advice on the revision of the text. This new edition is dedicated to Carlo Vitali, who has over the years been a most valued correspondent, informant and stimulus as well as a contributor to Vivaldi scholarship in his own right.

M.T.

*Liverpool*

1992

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# Illustrations

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- 1 Portrait of Vivaldi (*Liverpool University Library*)
- 2 Page of the autograph score of *Arsilda, regina di Ponto* (*Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino*)
- 3 Autograph page from the quartet sonata discovered in Dresden in 1976 (*Sächsische Landesbibliothek*)
- 4 Part of a letter from E. Holdsworth to C. Jennens (*Gerald Coke Handel Collection*)
- 5 Page from Le Cène's edition of Vivaldi's op. 8 (*Bodleian Library*)
- 6 Page from the volume of violin sonatas discovered in Manchester in 1973 (*City of Manchester Cultural Committee*)
- 7 Sketch of Vivaldi by Pier Leone Ghezzi (*Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*)

Title-page of Sala's edition of Vivaldi's op. 1 (*Conservatorio di Musica Benedetto Marcello*) 96

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## The instrumental music

Vivaldi's music for instruments falls into three broad genres: sonata, concerto and sinfonia. If one takes the catalogue of works in Appendix B as the basis of computation, discounting variants and excluding lost and incompletely preserved works, one arrives at a total of 92 sonatas (including two works with lute entitled 'Trio' and the *Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro*, which is generically a sonata),<sup>1</sup> 474 concertos and 14 sinfonias. This count includes some works recognized by many as spurious and – perhaps rather artificially – sinfonias not preserved independently of the larger vocal work to which all, presumably, originally belonged. By and large, I have followed Ryom's system of classification, but a word of warning is needed: Ryom's criteria of authenticity are bibliographical rather than stylistic, which means that provided that at least one original source names Vivaldi as the composer, the attribution is likely to stand regardless of any musical incongruity, unless another composer's name appears in a concordant source whose reliability is thought at least equal. Without doubt, several unauthentic works are listed by Ryom as genuine.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, one concerto (RV Anh. 91, for violin and cello) is regarded by Ryom as of uncertain authorship despite its evident (to me) genuineness. For statistical purposes, however, I shall treat as genuine all works presented as such in the most recent Ryom catalogue.

### The sonatas

The impression gained from the statistics given above that Vivaldi cultivated the sonata merely as a sideline to his production of concertos

<sup>1</sup> Until the beginning of the eighteenth century sonatas of the 'church' variety were often termed 'sinfonia', particularly when scored for many instruments. Manfredini's *Sinfonie da chiesa*, op. 2 (1709), and the six sinfonias (individually entitled 'Sonata') in Albinoni's *Sinfonie concerti a cinque*, op. 2 (1700), fit this description.

<sup>2</sup> These include the sonatas RV 24, RV 54–59 (*Il pastor fido*) and RV 80, the *Introduzione* (Sinfonia) RV 144/P.145 and the concertos RV 415, 464/P.334, RV 465/P.331 and RV 373/P.335.

### *The instrumental music*

may be a little distorted by the vagaries of preservation; it is remarkable that only eight sonatas, none of them for the 'solo' medium, appear in the Turin manuscripts. Most of the sonatas were probably written not singly (like the concertos for the Pietà) but in groups, and were destined not for institutions but for private patrons.

A classification of the extant sonatas by medium and instrumentation produces the following picture:

#### *1 'Solo' sonatas (one instrument and bass)<sup>3</sup>*

violin	41
cello	9
flute	4
recorder	1
oboe	1
musette, etc. <sup>4</sup>	6
TOTAL	62

#### *2 Trio sonatas (two instruments and bass)*

two violins	20
two flutes	1
two oboes	1
two unlike instruments	5
TOTAL	27

#### *3 Quartet sonatas (four instrumental lines)*

two violins, viola and bass	2
violin, oboe, obbligato	
organ and chalumeau	1
TOTAL	3

The 12 *Suonate da camera a tre*, op. 1 (1705), in which the cello (*violone*) and harpsichord are designated (following normal practice in chamber sonatas) alternative rather than complementary instruments, may well be the earliest of Vivaldi's works to have survived. Like many juvenile compositions they oscillate between excessive dependence on a model and striking, often clumsy, attempts to break

<sup>3</sup> The term 'bass' denotes, according to context, a melody instrument (cello, bassoon, etc.) and/or a harmony instrument (harpsichord, organ, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> Alternatively *vièle* (hurdy-gurdy), flute, oboe or violin. These works are now (1992) known to be pastiches by Nicolas Chédeville.

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Michael Talbot is Alsop Professor of Music at Liverpool University and a Fellow of the British Academy.

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