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The path to rediscovery

By the 'rediscovery' of a composer we seldom mean much more than his rescue from a presumably unmerited neglect, and sometimes as little as the dutiful revival of some of his major works on the anniversary of his birth or death. Vivaldi is one of the very few important composers to whom the notion of rediscovery applies in the most literal sense. He died over two and a half centuries ago, yet until about 60 years ago the musical world was totally unaware of the existence of the great majority of the works, totalling over 770, that can today be ascribed to him. Until then not one opera, not one sacred vocal piece, had, it seemed, survived for scholars to inspect and audiences to hear. Now scarcely a year passes without the announcement of some fresh discovery: one might mention a partly autograph set of 12 violin sonatas (seven hitherto entirely unknown and the rest known only in incomplete or variant form) as well as two violin concertos unearthed in Manchester in 1973, and a highly original sonata for violin, oboe and obbligato organ, also autograph, preserved in Dresden, which was brought to light as recently as 1976. As more and more private collections of old music are acquired by libraries accessible to the researcher and the bibliographer one should expect a narrowing of the avenues of discovery. That this has not happened in Vivaldi's case is a testimony to his enormous productivity and the unusually wide circulation of his music in his lifetime.*

Naturally, rediscovery in the other, more figurative sense of revaluation has gone hand in hand from the earliest times with the growth of our knowledge of his life and works – a process sometimes slow, sometimes spectacularly rapid. After his death in 1741 his name continued to be mentioned by bibliographers, lexicographers and writers of memoirs, but his music plunged into oblivion almost immediately. Indeed, his reputation as a freakish violinist and eccentric cleric largely overshadowed his fame, even in retrospect, as a composer. To his sometime collaborator Goldoni, in the first, serialized version

of the Venetian dramatist's memoirs, he was still a 'famous violin player ... noted for his sonatas [sic], especially those called the *Four Seasons*',[1] but when Goldoni came to write the definitive account of his first meeting with Vivaldi a quarter of a century later he dismissed the musician as an 'excellent violin player and mediocre composer'.[2] E.L. Gerber's *Historisch-biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler*, a pioneer dictionary of musical biography written shortly afterwards, mentions Vivaldi as a composer merely in passing, turning Goldoni's vivid and amusing description of the Italian composer's exaggerated (and by implication feigned) piety into a claim that Vivaldi never let his rosary out of his hand except when he took up his pen to write an opera.[3] Even the comparatively generous amount of space allotted to Vivaldi in Count Grégoire Orloff's *Essai sur I'histoire de la musique en Italie*, representative of the contemporary French view, is largely filled with a romanticized account (which may nevertheless contain a grain of truth) of how Vivaldi once, while celebrating Mass, temporarily retired into the sacristy in order to write out a fugue subject which was obsessing him.[4]

Apocryphal anecdotes of this kind abound in historical writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; we find them also in biographies of Corelli, Benedetto Marcello and Pergolesi. The difference is that in the case of these composers and a few other Italians contemporary with Vivaldi at least some of the music retained a shadowy presence in the repertoire. Corelli's continually reprinted violin sonatas served a didactic purpose, while Marcello's *Psalms* and Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* still found admirers among connoisseurs of church music. The complete void that was our knowledge of Vivaldi's music might have remained unfilled until the present century, had it not been for the almost fortuitous exhumation of a small part of it in the course of the Bach revival.

J.S. Bach's indebtedness to Vivaldi was first brought to public notice by his pioneer biographer J.N. Forkel, much of whose information had been obtained at first hand from Bach's two eldest sons. The celebrated passage runs:

> J.S. Bach's first attempts at composition were, like all such attempts, deficient. With no instruction to point a way forward and lead him on gradually, stage by stage, he had to begin like all those who set foot on

[1] *Commedie*, vol. xiii (Venice, 1761), p. 11.
[2] *Mémoires de M. Goldoni* (Paris, 1787), vol. i, p. 287.
[3] Vol. ii (Leipzig, 1792), col. 736f.
[4] Vol. ii (Paris, 1822), p. 290.

> such a path without guidance, and let things take their own course. To run or leap up and down the instrument, occupying the two hands as fully as their five fingers will allow, and to carry on in this undisciplined fashion until some point of repose is snatched quite by chance: these are the arts common to all beginners. Hence they can only be 'finger composers' (or 'hussars of the keyboard', as Bach called them in his later years): that is, they must allow their fingers to dictate what they write instead of telling their fingers what to play. But Bach did not remain for long on this path. He soon began to feel that all was not right with this ceaseless running and leaping, that order, coherence and interrelatedness must be brought to the ideas, and that some form of instruction was needed for the attainment of this end. Vivaldi's violin concertos, which had just appeared, served this purpose for him. So often did he hear them praised as excellent pieces of music, that he hit upon the happy idea of arranging them all for his clavier. He studied the treatment of the ideas, their mutual relationship, the pattern of modulation and many other features. The adaptation of ideas and figurations intended for the violin but unsuited to the keyboard taught him in addition to think in musical terms, so that when he had finished he no longer needed to draw his ideas from his fingers, but instead preconceived them in his imagination.[5]

Though Bach could hardly have arranged 'all' Vivaldi's violin concertos for keyboard, a good number of transcriptions were soon unearthed, totalling 17 concertos for solo harpsichord, four for solo organ and one for four harpsichords and string orchestra. A further organ transcription (BWV 596),[6] though in J.S. Bach's own hand, was believed until 1910 to be a composition by his eldest son on account of its ambiguous added inscription 'di W.F. Bach manu mei patris descriptum'. The original composer was scarcely ever mentioned (and then not always correctly) in the manuscripts, so scholars, acting on Forkel's lead, hunted through whatever original sources of Vivaldi's music were accessible, hoping to make a match. In 1850 C.L. Hilgenfeldt identified the concerto for four harpsichords as the tenth concerto of Vivaldi's op. 3. By the end of the century six harpsichord and two organ transcriptions had been established from concordant sources as Vivaldi works, to be joined soon by BWV 596. The identification of the authorship of the 12 remaining concertos, eight of which are known today to be by other composers, lagged behind, so that when the transcriptions came to be published by Peters in 1851 (16 works for

[5] *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig, 1802), p. 23f.

[6] *Bach Werke Verzeichnis* (BWV) numbers are taken from Wolfgang Schmieder, *Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke von Johann Sebastian Bach* (Leipzig, 1950).

harpsichord),[7] 1852 (four for organ) and 1865 (that for four harpsichords), and later in the 42nd (1894), 38th (1891) and 43rd (1894) volumes of the Bach-Gesellschaft edition respectively, they were described collectively as concertos 'after Vivaldi' – an oversimplification whose unfortunate consequences have persisted.

The German scholars who first evaluated these Vivaldi concertos, comparing them with Bach's often very free arrangements, were ill-prepared to sit in judgment. Since they were infinitely more familiar with the music of Bach (and Handel) than with that of the Italian masters of the late Baroque, they tended to see Vivaldi's music as deviant from the Bachian style (lines more scantily ornamented, inner parts simpler, fewer types of dissonance), whereas it would be more accurate historically and aesthetically to see Bach's music as deviant from the Vivaldian style (lines more richly ornamented, inner parts more complex, more types of dissonance). In the light of the performance practice then current, in which Bach, Mozart and Wagner would be played very similarly, they could scarcely imagine what crisp articulation and tasteful improvised embellishment could do to passages which on paper seemed jejune and repetitious. Undeniably, too, a general attitude towards Italian music which at best was patronizing and at worst distinctly hostile coloured their judgment. To have denied Vivaldi any merit whatever would have been to accuse Bach of a lack of discrimination. Some writers solved the dilemma by allowing Vivaldi the virtues of an artisan, while reserving for Bach those of an artist. The following passage from W.J. von Wasielewski is not untypical:

'He [Vivaldi] belongs to those natures who, possessing considerable technique and exceptional skill at handling form, are always ready to compose, without thinking much about the significance and content of the result. Indeed, his compositions (we are thinking especially of those for violin) only very rarely contain stirrings of deeper feeling, notable power of thought and true dedication to art.' Or again: 'The less imagination and depth Vivaldi evinces in his compositions, the more inventive he becomes in superficialities of all kinds.'[8]

Still, a trickle of Vivaldi's music began to be published in its original form, beginning with three concertos reproduced (one incompletely) as supplements to the transcriptions in the Bach-Gesellschaft volumes.

The great breakthrough came with the publication, in 1905, of Arnold Schering's classic monograph on the history of the concerto:

[7] One of the harpsichord transcriptions (BWV 592a), being concordant with the organ transcription BWV 592, remained unpublished.

[8] *Die Violine und ihre Meister*, 6th edn (Leipzig, 1927), p. 111f.

Geschichte des Instrumentalkonzerts. The scope of Schering's study led him to view Vivaldi's music in its proper historical perspective; he had the added advantage of close acquaintance with the large collection of Vivaldi manuscripts preserved in the Saxon State Library, which revealed a composer of wider range, particularly in regard to instrumentation, than the works published in his lifetime suggested. He communicated his enthusiasm for the music vividly to the reader and ended with a bold declaration of Vivaldi's historical position: 'Vivaldi is as exemplary for the shaping of the violin concerto as Corelli was for that of the sonata'.[9]

Modern editions of Vivaldi's concertos, which still gave preference to works transcribed by Bach, slowly multiplied. The growing awareness of his stature is reflected in Fritz Kreisler's 'attribution' of one of his pastiche compositions to Vivaldi around 1905 – a charming deception which provoked a young French violinist and musicologist, Marc Pincherle, into initiating a lifetime's research into the music of the Venetian.

This phase of Vivaldi rediscovery closes with the publication, in 1922, of a thematic catalogue by Wilhelm Altmann containing virtually all the music seen in print during the composer's life, and a few extra items.[10] Had no further works been discovered, Vivaldi's reputation might have remained to this very day on a par with, say, Corelli's: he would have occupied a niche in the concert repertoire, but a very small one.

The focus of our attention now shifts to Italy, which had been surprisingly slow in taking up Vivaldi's cause. One more pleasant consequence of the wave of patriotism after World War I was the direction of musicians' energies towards the rehabilitation of Italy's glorious pre-Classical past. In 1926 a collection of music belonging to the Salesian monks of the Collegio San Carlo in San Martino (Monferrato) came up for sale. Dispatched to investigate this collection with a view to its possible purchase by the Turin National Library, Alberto Gentili, a lecturer in musical history at Turin University, found that among its 97 volumes were 14 containing music by Vivaldi. These held manuscripts, mostly autograph scores, of 140 instrumental works, 29 cantatas, 12 operas (one in duplicate), three shorter dramatic works, one oratorio and numerous fragments. With the generous assistance of the banker Roberto Foà, after whose late son Mauro the collection

[9] *Geschichte des Instrumentalkonzerts* (Leipzig, 1905), p. 96.

[10] 'Thematischer Katalog der gedruckten Werke Antonio Vivaldis', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, vol. iv (1922), pp. 262–79.

was named, the library acquired all the volumes in 1927. Realizing from gaps in the original numbering of the Vivaldi volumes and the incompleteness of some compositions that the Foà collection was only one part of an originally larger library which had been divided, probably on inheritance, Gentili speculated whether a nephew of the Marquis Marcello Durazzo, who had bequeathed his collection to the Salesian monks, might possess the complementary volumes. This nephew, Giuseppe Maria Durazzo, was with great difficulty induced to show his collection of musical manuscripts to Gentili, confirming the hypothesis. By even more strenuous efforts, Durazzo was persuaded to reunite the original collection by selling his manuscripts to the Turin National Library. A Turinese industrialist, Filippo Giordano, provided the funds, and the volumes passed to the library in 1930. By a strange coincidence, Giordano had also lost a young son, Renzo, after whom the new acquisition was named.

Ownership of the Foà–Giordano collection (or 'Turin manuscripts', as they are commonly known) could be traced back to Count Giacomo Durazzo (1717–94), Genoese ambassador to Vienna from 1749 to 1752, director of theatrical performances at the imperial court from 1754 to 1764, and finally imperial ambassador to Venice from 1764 to 1784. More recently, it has come to light that the manuscripts were in the library of the Venetian bibliophile Jacopo Soranzo by 1745.[11] It was once widely believed that the Turin manuscripts stemmed from the Ospedale della Pietà, the foundling institution with which Vivaldi was associated for much of his life, but the character of the manuscripts belies this. That they belonged to the composer himself and constituted his 'working stock' of music is suggested by the following facts:

(1) The wide coverage of genres and chronological spread. All genres in which the composer is known to have worked are represented (sonatas rather thinly, however). The operas stretch from *Ottone in villa* (1713) to *Rosmira* (1738). No institution, religious or secular, would have a repertoire capable of accommodating such diversity.
(2) Scores form an overwhelming proportion of the manuscripts. Any performing body like the Pietà's orchestra would need the music in parts.

[11] See Gabriella Gentili Verona, 'Le collezioni Foà e Giordano della Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino', *Vivaldiana I* (Brussels, 1969), pp. 30–55; also Fabio Fano, 'Una traccia prossima alla prima origine della raccolta di musiche vivaldiane conservata alla Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino', *Medioevo e umanesimo*, vol. xxiv (1976), pp. 83–93.

(3) Most of the manuscripts are autograph, and many of the remainder are partly autograph or contain autograph inscriptions. Composers normally retained their autograph manuscripts, having copies made as required.
(4) Many of the scores are first drafts in a very rough state – suitable for copying but not for presentation. There are also several fragments in Vivaldi's hand which appear to be sketches or memory aids.

Since all the works come in separate gatherings (or, for longer compositions, series of gatherings) their binding into volumes sometimes containing several dozen works must have taken place, at the earliest, at the very end of Vivaldi's life. In general, each volume contains works in a single broad category (secular vocal music, sacred vocal music, concertos, operas), sometimes subdivided into groups within the volume, but there are anomalies arising from an exceptional format or leaf-size such as the two lute trios at the beginning of Foà 40, a volume of sacred music. The operas are preceded by uniform, non-autograph title-leaves obviously inserted at the time of binding. These cannot have been prepared under the composer's supervision or by someone well acquainted with his operatic output, since the date and place of performance, when supplied, are taken either from the score itself or (for operas performed in Venice only) from some contemporary reference work of the time.[12]

Since Vivaldi died in Vienna, it would be very interesting to find out how Soranzo came by the collection. Was it left behind in Venice and sold off by relatives, or was it brought back from Vienna by the composer's companions?

The discovery of the Turin manuscripts stimulated interest in Vivaldi's biography. Very little was known beyond the few facts already recorded by the earliest lexicographers, although in 1871 Federigo Stefani had published privately in Venice six letters from Vivaldi to the Marquis Guido Bentivoglio d'Aragona, initially valued more for their information about operatic conditions generally than for the wealth of data they contained on the composer's life.[13] In 1928 Arcangelo Salvatori published an article establishing, by reference to documents, some key facts about Vivaldi's training for the priesthood

[12] Possibly Antonio Groppo, *Catalogo di tutti i drammi per musica recitati ne' teatri di Venezia* (Venice, 1745).
[13] *Sei lettere di Antonio Vivaldi veneziano.*

and subsequent employment at the Pietà.[14] Ten years later, Rodolfo Gallo was able to announce his discovery of the place and date (Vienna, 1741) of Vivaldi's death and identify some members of the composer's family (besides his already well-known father).[15]

The publication and wider diffusion of the Turin works was hampered during the 1930s by legal, economic, political and even personal factors, but the shape of things to come was revealed in 1939, when the Accademia Chigiana organized at Siena a Vivaldi 'week' (16–21 September), during which a representative selection of his works, including sacred and secular vocal music, was heard. There were even two staged performances of *L'Olimpiade*.

The momentum, lost during the war years, quickly picked up again. In 1947 the publishers Ricordi began to bring out, on behalf of the newly founded Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi, the complete instrumental music. By 1972, the series was not far from its goal, 530 volumes having appeared. Although there are features of the editorial policy governing the series, as well as of the actual editing itself, which fall short of the scholarly standards expected of this kind of publishing venture, musicians everywhere have welcomed the opportunity to study and perform these works. More recently, Ricordi and Universal Edition have begun to issue systematically the sacred vocal music, and one can only hope that, this task complete, publishers will turn their attention towards the operas and cantatas, still very meagrely represented in print.[16] In the last few years, however, the world of recording has done a little to redress the imbalance favouring the instrumental music.*

In the 1940s two large-scale studies of Vivaldi's life and music appeared: Mario Rinaldi's *Antonio Vivaldi* (Milan, 1943) and Marc Pincherle's *Antonio Vivaldi et la musique instrumentale* (Paris, 1948). The first was justly superseded by the second, a beautifully written work of massive erudition which had been in gestation (if one discounts a few articles which appeared on the way) for some 40 years. An abridged version of Pincherle's book soon appeared in an English translation.[17]

Several general introductions to Vivaldi's music, all heavily indebted to Pincherle, have since appeared in a variety of languages. Readers

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[14] 'Antonio Vivaldi (il Prete Rosso)', *Rivista mensile della città di Venezia*, vol. vii (1928), pp. 325–46.

[15] 'Antonio Vivaldi, il Prete Rosso: la famiglia, la morte', *Ateneo Veneto*, vol. cxxiv (December 1938), pp. 165–72.

[16] Of the operas, only *La fida ninfa* has appeared in a modern edition (ed. R. Monterosso, Cremona, 1964).

[17] *Vivaldi* (Paris, 1955); *Vivaldi: Genius of the Baroque* (New York, 1957).

of English will be most familiar with *Antonio Vivaldi: his Life and Work* (London, 1970) by Walter Kolneder, an Austrian scholar who has contributed several monographs on specialized aspects of Vivaldi's music.[18] One must also mention Remo Giazotto's *Vivaldi* (Milan, 1965) and *Antonio Vivaldi* (Turin, 1973), biographical studies containing some precious new material from Venetian archives.

The more recent publication of a thematic catalogue of all Vivaldi's works by the Danish scholar Peter Ryom is an event of great importance.[19] Vivaldi has been cursed with more catalogues – which is to say unsatisfactory catalogues – than any other composer. Since no catalogue has yet succeeded in winning universal acceptance, no fewer than four (including Ryom's) are current today. The earliest (1945), by Rinaldi, is not merely inaccurate and incomplete, but groups Vivaldi's works into fictitious opus numbers reminiscent of the 'suites' into which Longo grouped Scarlatti's harpsichord sonatas.[20] Pincherle's *Inventaire-thématique* (1948) would have been adequate, save that he was not consistent in distinguishing between two variants of the same work and two different works with common elements, and that his main series of numbers (1–443) comprises only concertos (sinfonias have a separate series (1–23). Sonatas, though listed by incipit, have no numbers at all, and vocal works are entirely absent).[21] Because of the unusually complex relationships between Vivaldi works in different genres, it is essential that all his works be brought within the scope of the same catalogue. Antonio Fanna's *Catalogo numerico-tematico delle opere strumentali* (Milan, 1968), being in essence a finding list for the Ricordi edition, which does not include incompletely preserved works or some important variants and tacitly or expressly 'modernizes' the instrumentation (Vivaldi's *flauto* is always given as 'flute' instead of 'recorder'), will clearly not do.*

Ryom's catalogue passes the tests of comprehensiveness, accuracy and rationality of organization incomparably better than its predecessors. Instrumental works, *Ryom-Verzeichnis* (RV) 1–585 and late entries RV 751–768, are grouped first by the size of ensemble required

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[18] This book is a translation, with additions, of the same author's *Antonio Vivaldi: Leben und Werk* (Wiesbaden, 1965).

[19] *Thematisches Verzeichnis der Werke Antonio Vivaldis: kleine Ausgabe* (Leipzig, 1974, ²/1979). The 'Large' version of Ryom's catalogue has started to appear, although to date we have only the volume containing authenticated instrumental works: *Répertoire des œuvres d'Antonio Vivaldi: les compositions instrumentales* (Copenhagen, 1986). Certain additional Ryom numbers that are due to appear in the remaining volumes have begun to be cited in scholarly literature and are mentioned in the present book where appropriate.

[20] *Catalogo numerico tematico delle composizioni di A. Vivaldi* (Rome, 1945).

[21] Vol. ii of *Antonio Vivaldi et la musique instrumentale* (Paris, 1948).

(from one instrument and continue up to several instruments, double orchestra and continue), then by instrumentation. This arrangement corresponds closely to the generic distinction between sonata and concerto; sinfonias are perhaps treated inconsistently, however, some being listed among the concertos for strings (without soloist) and continue, while others share the number of the operatic or other work to which they are attached. Sacred (RV 586–648) and secular (RV 649–740) vocal works are grouped by genre (Mass movement, psalm, hymn, etc.). RV 741–750 are works which for one reason or another cannot be assigned to any group, and there is a long appendix (*Anhang*) listing 68 works of dubious or disproved authenticity.*

As this book is being written, Ryom's numbers are rapidly passing into general circulation. It will nevertheless take some time for those accustomed to Pincherle numbers to abandon them. For this reason, the Pincherle numbers for concertos (those for sinfonias have never achieved wide currency) will be quoted in addition to Ryom numbers in the present work unless an original opus number renders them superfluous.[22]*

It is salutary to consider, three hundred years after Vivaldi's birth, what is not known about him. First, there are tantalizing lacunae in his biography from one end of his life to the other. Research in archives, no doubt aided by serendipity, will surely yield discoveries in years to come. Second, we have hardly begun to establish the chronology of Vivaldi's music. For this, the most painstaking study of paper types and copyists' hands will be needed, and there is no guarantee of a high degree of success. The most sobering thought, however, is that we are still unfamiliar as listeners with well over half of Vivaldi's surviving music, as measured by the time taken to perform it. To remedy this ignorance must be our foremost task.

[22] A concordance table of Pincherle and Ryom numbers is included as Appendix F.