5

Vivaldi's musical style

Many listeners must have discovered how much easier it is to mistake one Vivaldi composition for another than to identify its composer wrongly. To say this is neither to endorse Stravinsky's supercilious observation, inherited from Dallapiccola, that Vivaldi could 'compose the same form so many times over',[1] nor to make an obvious deduction from the fact that he borrowed copiously from his own works but sparingly from those of other composers. Even by the standards of his age, when plagiarism from other composers was frequently castigated by critics but self-borrowing raised hardly a murmur, his style remained remarkably constant. It was almost fully formed in op. 1 (1705) and complete in its essentials in op. 2 (1709); thereafter it underwent little change except in its more superficial melodic characteristics, which evolved continuously to keep abreast of current fashion. Had his style been half as malleable as that of his contemporary Telemann (1681–1767), who began as a neo-Corellian and ended as an immediate precursor of the Classical style, he would hardly have countenanced including his contributions to the 1714 revival of Ristori's *Orlando furioso* in his own *Orlando* of 1727, or using movements from the original version of *Farnace* (1727) in the ill-fated score for Ferrara of 1738.

Nor does his style vary much from one genre or medium to another, when the potentialities and limitations of different instruments and the human voice have been taken into account. He was not one of those composers like Caldara and Lotti who could write in a 'strict' style for the church and a 'free' style for the theatre. Try as he might on occasion to compose in the learned style, the French style or even the *bel canto* style, Vivaldi proved (perhaps fortunately) a bad imitator incapable of suppressing his individuality.

Because his style was so distinctive in a consistent manner, it is

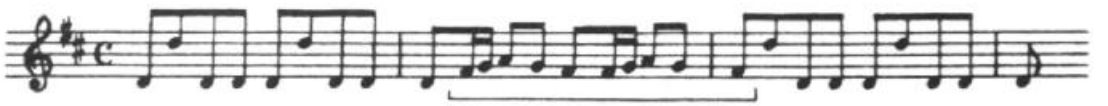
[1] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (London, 1959), p. 76.

useful to precede a discussion of Vivaldi's music with a look at some of the most original features of his style in general. The norm against which we shall be measuring him will be the mainstream of the Italian tradition, though inevitably major figures of the late Baroque from outside Italy will be drawn in.

In Vivaldi's melody one notes first a broad sweep and a great fondness for unusually wide intervals. Italian composers for the violin had long been accustomed to the practice of skipping back and forth between adjacent and even non-adjacent strings and were now beginning to move with greater freedom up and down the fingerboard; indeed, Venetian composers such as Legrenzi and (somewhat less) Albinoni often revelled in angularity for its own sake. The growing popularity around 1690 of unison writing for the string ensemble caused some types of melodic progression hitherto the prerogative of bass parts (especially the rising fourth or descending fifth at cadences) to be adopted by upper parts, which might retain them even when independent of the bass. What distinguishes Vivaldi is the expressive value he attaches to the octave and compound intervals – a value totally different from that of the corresponding simple intervals. Without historical awareness we might easily consider the opening of the *Gloria* RV 589 banal, even naive:

Ex. 1

Allegro



(bracketed notes in tenth with the bass, the rest in octaves)

To Vivaldi's contemporaries those pounding octaves were novel, exciting and worthy of imitation.

Where he uses large intervals we often find either that two-part writing is being simulated in a single line (the lower 'part' may be a pedal-note) or that an expected simple interval has been displaced upwards or downwards by one or two octaves, as at the beginning of the *Concerto funebre* RV 579/P.385:

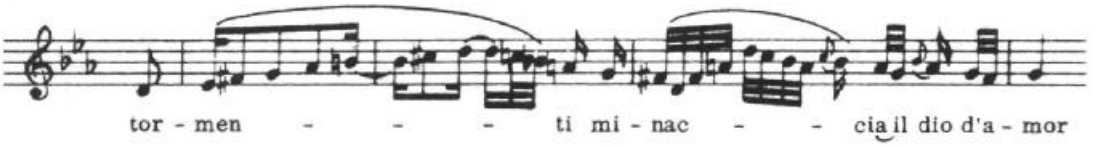
Ex. 2

Largo

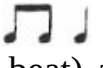
He shows no general preference for diatonicism or chromaticism in his melodies, tending to either as the occasion warrants, but it is remarkable how often melodic chromaticism is introduced without prompting from the harmonic progressions. A flattened ('Neapolitan') supertonic is common in minor tonalities, and a sharpened ('Lydian') subdominant in both major and minor tonalities. In minor keys the raised fourth degree is often preceded by a raised third degree – a curious reproduction of the structure at the upper end of the melodic minor scale (see the B natural and C sharp in the example below). He inflects (or fails to inflect) the sixth and seventh degrees of the minor scale in ways that still strike us as extraordinary: the 'descending' (i.e. lowered) forms can be used for an *ascending* line, and the 'ascending' (i.e. raised) forms for a *descending* line (outside the confines of dominant harmony, where they are conventional). Moreover, he exploits the augmented second of the 'harmonic' minor scale for frankly melodic purposes – this at a time when even in inner parts augmented seconds were carefully avoided, often being converted by octave displacement into diminished sevenths. The two augmented seconds in close succession in the next example, from an aria (sung originally by Anna Girò) for the enchantress Alcina near the end of the second act of *Orlando*, lend the vocal line an anguished intensity rare for its period.

Ex. 3

(Andante molto)



Sometimes, an unusual chromatic inflection suggests the influence of folk music, Italian or Slav. Given the location of the Pietà on the Riva degli Schiavoni (Waterfront of the Slavs), Vivaldi could hardly have escaped hearing daily the songs of Dalmatian sailors.

The first fact to note about Vivaldi's rhythm is his liking, particularly at the opening of phrases, for anapaestic patterns such as  or  , where two notes on the strong division of a bar (or beat) are followed by one on a weak division. He also evinces a fondness for the 'syncope' pattern  and its extensions, both in melodic and in accompanying parts. These two rhythmic traits are prominent in Slav (especially Czech) folk music, by which they may have been inspired. Quantz claimed that Vivaldi was one of the originators of 'Lombardic'

rhythm (the inverted dotted group  , or its variant ). In his *Lebenslauf* he linked its introduction with the performance of Vivaldi's operas in Rome shortly before his arrival there in 1724;[2] in his *Versuch* he stated that the formula emerged in about 1722:[3] Vivaldi's scores seem to bear out his belief. As Quantz himself admitted, however, Lombardie rhythm had long been a characteristic of the Scottish style ('Scotch snap'), so Vivaldi's popularization of it was innovatory only for the operatic idiom in which he worked. The *saccadé* rhythmic formula – repetitive use of the normal dotted group – is adopted by Vivaldi in certain stereotyped situations: the imposing tutti peroration; the illustrative accompaniment (in the central movement of *La primavera* to represent the rustling of leaves – in the 'Eja Mater' of the *Stabat Mater*, the lashing of whips); imitation of the French style (as in the aria 'Tornar voglio al primo ardore', headed *Alla francese*, from the last act of *Arsilda*).

Vivaldi pushes to the very limit the characteristic Italian fondness, absent from French music of the same time, for sharply differentiated rhythms, often expressed by contrasted note-values, in the various components (melody, counter-melody, accompanying parts, bass) of a texture. Each component carries its own rhythmic stamp, often maintained in ostinato fashion for several bars (see Ex. 25, p. 135). Then the rhythms are redistributed or abandoned in favour of new patterns, and the process is repeated. Sometimes triple and duple (or quadruple) division of the same note-value appears simultaneously in different parts, in a context where 'assimilation' of one notated rhythm to the other (e.g. the performance of a dotted quaver and semiquaver in 2/4 as a crotchet and quaver in 6/8) is improbable. In the finale of the oboe concerto RV 453/P.187, notated *alla giga* in 12/8, the dotted crotchet is often divided into *four* quavers in the solo part, an effect used later by Mozart in the finale of his Oboe Quartet K.370.

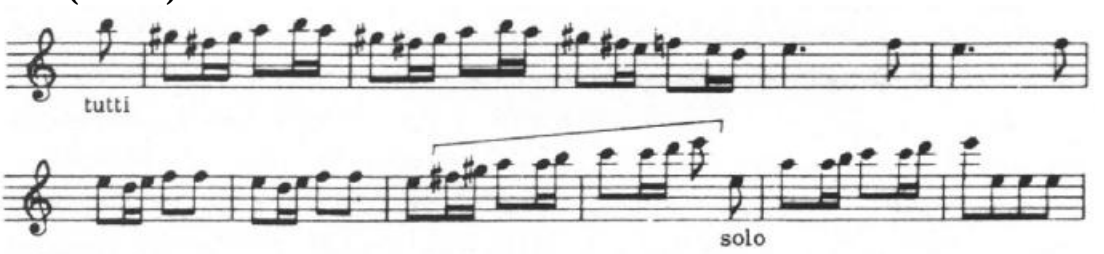
Vivaldi's phrase-structure is outstandingly fresh and original. Throughout most of musical history it has been normal to group cells, phrases and larger units in pairs, where the second unit (consequent) balances the first (antecedent). Sometimes – particularly at the lower levels of organization – antecedent and consequent are exactly matched in length, but their relationship can also be asymmetrical. In the late Baroque period repetition and sequence are often used to spin out the consequent beyond the expected length. What Vivaldi did that was

[2] Op. cit., p. 223.
[3] Op cit., p. 309f.

new was sometimes to group units of equal length in threes, so that an antecedent in effect had two consequents, or vice-versa. Ternary grouping of cells half a bar in length (in common time) lies behind most of the 'irregular' phrases including an odd half-bar which occur so widely in his music. Another of his favourite devices, later to be used in a more polished form by Haydn and Mendelssohn, was to make the same structural unit serve as the consequent of the one preceding it and the antecedent of the one following it – a kind of elision. In the next example, from the finale of the violin concerto RV 356 (op. 3 no. 6), the irruption of the soloist turns the bracketed motive, which one would have taken to be the flourish immediately before a cadence, into the opening of a new musical paragraph.

Ex. 4

(Presto)



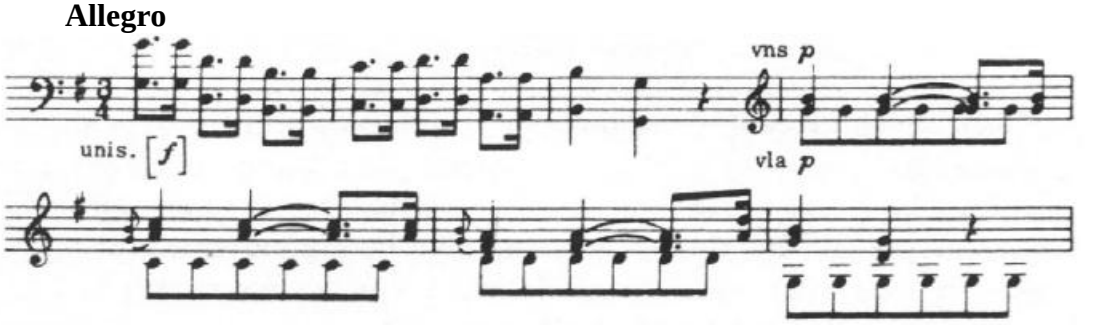
When Vivaldi recapitulates material, he likes to prune it drastically, eliminating the repetition of phrases or simply excising whole groups of bars. The consequences for the phrase-structure are often startling: what was previously symmetrical may now be asymmetrical, or vice-versa. He seems to regard a melody less as an organic entity than as a provisional arrangement of small units capable of recombination.

Much has been made by previous writers of Vivaldi's overdependence on sequence as a means of continuation. This is in fact a weakness (as we now see it) that he shares with most of his Italian contemporaries. Bach uses sequence hardly any less, but he so often enriches (or disguises) it through melodic and harmonic paraphrase, and has besides a better sense of when to call a halt. When they are enlivened by counterpoint (as in the imitative play of the violins in Ex. 6, p. 79) or are chromatically inflected to produce modulation, Vivaldi's sequential phrases bear repetition more easily than when such interest is absent. Some modern performers spare no effort to bring variety to Vivaldi's sequential writing, introducing long crescendos or decrescendos, or ornamenting each phrase differently, but these attempts often merely draw attention to the problem.

He likes to articulate his phrases by interpolating rests (sometimes amplified by a fermata) in all the parts. Interestingly, the breaks occur not only after imperfect cadences (e.g. I–V), where the incompleteness of the harmonic progression guarantees preservation of the momentum, but also after perfect cadences. In these cases the cadence will have occurred earlier than the listener anticipated, so that he is prepared for a continuation of the paragraph after the general pause.

Very occasionally, he anticipates the masculine-feminine antithesis beloved of the Classical period, as shown in the next example (note the asymmetrical relationship of the two phrases), taken from the finale of the concerto RV 300 (op. 9 no. 10). Strange to say, Vivaldi does not use the graceful 'feminine' answer again after its double appearance in the opening ritornello. Although Quantz recommended that the 'best ideas' of the ritornello be extracted and interspersed among the solo passages,[4] Vivaldi often shows a disinclination to exploit the more memorable parts of his ritornello, preferring to repeat the more conventional material.

Ex. 5

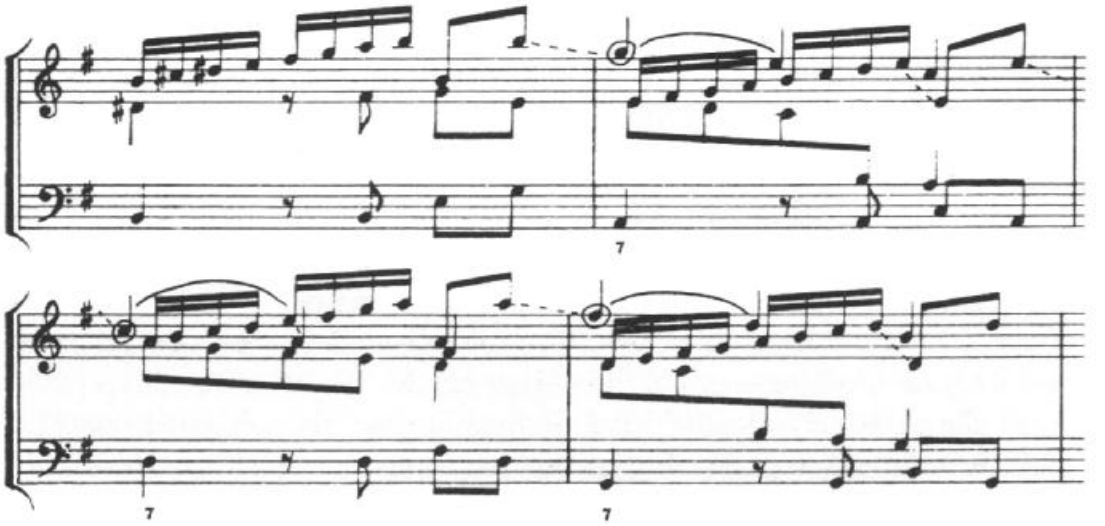


His harmony is equally forward-looking. No previous composer had used the seventh in a chord with greater licence. To be sure, he normally introduces the seventh in one of three ways current at the time: from the same note in the previous chord; from a note a step away; from another note of the same chord. Sometimes, however, the seventh is introduced by a leap from another chord, as the next example, from the finale of RV 279 (op. 4 no. 2), demonstrates (sevenths ringed). Chords of the ninth (as distinct from suspended ninths resolving to the octave) are less common, but are treated in equally emancipated fashion when they do occur. 'Higher' discords

[4] *Versuch*, p. 295.

Ex. 6

(Allegro)

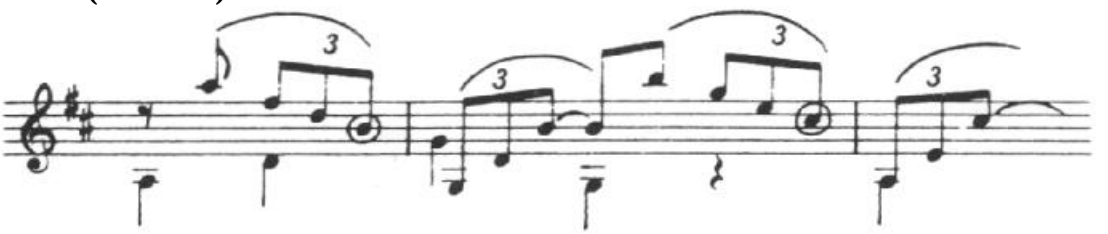


(the eleventh and thirteenth) also appear, usually as a result of repeating a phrase a third higher over a dominant pedal.

Not all Vivaldi's discords resolve in the orthodox manner, particularly when concealed in the middle of the texture. The resolution is often transferred to another part, sometimes to a different octave. It is interesting that when Vivaldi indulges his fondness for arpeggiating a chord in two or three parts simultaneously, a dissonance such as the fourth (a suspension which must eventually resolve to the third) can be treated as a normal member of the chord and pass from one instrument to another, generating great tension. This is not an example that his imitators were quick to follow.

Another peculiarity of his harmony, and the cause of some pungent effects, is the inexact synchronization of a harmonic progression in the different parts: one part (or more) moves to the new chord before the beat; the others arrive on the beat. This can be observed in the next example, from the first movement of the violin sonata RV 755, where the ringed violin notes are the advance guard of the new chord, dissonating rather oddly against the notes of the established chord.

Ex. 7 **(Andante)**



(bass note sound an octave lower.)

Then, there are cases of dissonance in Vivaldi's more florid writing which cannot be justified by any harmonic principle but seem to arise from the technique of the instrument itself – one might say, from the action of the fingers.

The harmonic rhythm of his music – the rate at which chords change – fluctuates more widely and more abruptly than in the music of any contemporary. An eight-fold or sixteen-fold reduction or acceleration, which may (or may not) be disguised by the maintenance of the same note-values or even the same figuration, is not uncommon. He seems to delight in teasing the listener, unexpectedly freezing the movement and then, once the ear has adjusted to the slower pace, suddenly unleashing a quickfire series of chords. We are miles away from the relatively steady tread of Bachian and Handelian harmony. One is tempted to cite this as an example of Vivaldi's 'dramatic' leanings, though it must be understood that the irregularities of harmonic rhythm are not prompted by extra-musical factors (they are no more marked in his operas) but are part of his natural musical thought.

Contemporary critics, anticipating some more recent voices, found his sometimes rather static basses, which for long stretches may consist of just a rhythmicized monotone, over-primitive. Quantz, obviously with Vivaldi especially in mind, inveighs against the non-melodic character of basses in Italian compositions and the 'drum bass' (*Trommelbass*) in particular.[5] It is true that Vivaldi's basses are often insubstantial, but their very simplicity may afford him an opportunity to produce dazzling flights of fancy in one or more melodic parts, unhampered by considerations of part-writing or balance.

Until the discovery of the Turin manuscripts it seemed not unreasonable to identify Vivaldi as a, if not the, prime mover in the retreat from counterpoint which was to lead first to the attenuation of Baroque style and then to the emergence of the Classical style. Critics of his own time who knew only the published instrumental music found the absence of traditional contrapuntal procedures disconcerting. In a section of his *Essay on Musical Expression* headed 'On the too close attachment to air and neglect of harmony' Charles Avison observed the following:[6]

> It may be proper now to mention by way of example on this head the most noted composers who have erred in the extreme of an unnatural

[5] Ibid., p. 313. C.P.E. Bach shared Quantz's dislike of the *Trommelbass*.
[6] *An Essay in Musical Expression* (London, 1752), p. 42.

> modulation, leaving those of still inferior genius to that oblivion to which they are deservedly destined. Of the first and lowest class are Vivaldi, Tessarini, Alberti and Loccatelli [sic], whose compositions being equally defective in various harmony and true invention, are only a fit amusement for children; nor indeed for these, if ever they are intended to be led to a just taste in music.

Interestingly, a rejoinder to Avison's strictures published anonymously in the following year cited in defence of Vivaldi one of the few movements in his published concertos cast in the form of a fugue (as distinct from others, such as the finale of op. 8 no. 11, which employ fugai techniques). The pamphlet's author was William Hayes, Professor of Music at Oxford. After quoting Avison's contemptuous remarks on the four composers, Hayes goes on:[7]

> In truth their style is such as I would not by any means recommend; and yet I think Vivaldi has so much greater merit than the rest that he is worthy of some distinction. Admitting therefore the same kind of levity and manner to be in his compositions with those of Tessarini, etc., yet an essential difference must still be allowed between the former and the latter, inasmuch as an ***original*** is certainly preferable to a servile, mean copy. That Vivaldi run into this error, I take to be owing to his having a great command of his instrument, being of a volatile disposition (having too much mercury in his constitution) and to misapplication of good parts and abilities. And this I am the more inclined to believe, as in the eleventh of his first twelve concertos, op. 3, he has given us a specimen of his capacity in solid composition. For the generality, in the others, he piques himself upon a certain brilliance of fancy and execution, in which he excelled all who went before him … But in the above concerto is a fugue, the principal subjects of which are well invented, well maintained, the whole properly diversified with masterly contrivances, and the harmony full and complete.

That this movement was in reality no isolated exception is proved by the existence of several equally rigorous fugal movements in the concertos (particularly those for four-part strings without soloist) of the Turin collection, as well as the sacred vocal music. When writing fugally, he is admittedly more concerned with the immediately expressive qualities of the texture than with its challenge to his – and the listener's – intellect. Thus he does not deploy the full array of fugal devices as we know them from Bach's works. Augmentation, diminution and inversion of the subject; the separate exposition and subsequent combination of different subjects: these rarely interest him.

[7] *Remarks on Mr. Avison's Essay on Musical Expression* (London, 1753), p. 39f.

However, he evinces a fondness for double and triple counterpoint (like many of his Italian contemporaries he frequently introduces his countersubjects, or additional subjects, together with the principal subject from the outset), for long pedal-points at the climax of the movement, and for stretto. His finest achievement in fugai writing is perhaps the fast section of the *Ouverture* which begins the second part of *La Senna festeggiante.**

As a French overture the movement is a very imperfect imitation of the genuine article (for one thing, the initial entries of the fugue subjects work their way upwards from the bass instead of downwards from the first violin; for another, the material is too severe, almost churchly, in character), but as an essay in fugal writing it will stand comparison with anything Marcello or Caldara – perhaps even Handel – wrote. The extract below (Ex. 8) begins just after the modulation to the relative major, E flat. The three principal subjects, labelled A, B and C, are first combined and then relieved by the episodic motive D (in combination with a form of B in the bass). A double stretto (B and C) leads to a stretto of A accompanied – miraculously – by both B and C, so that at the climax all four parts are strictly motivic. Vivaldi's skill at cadence avoidance is also shown by this passage.

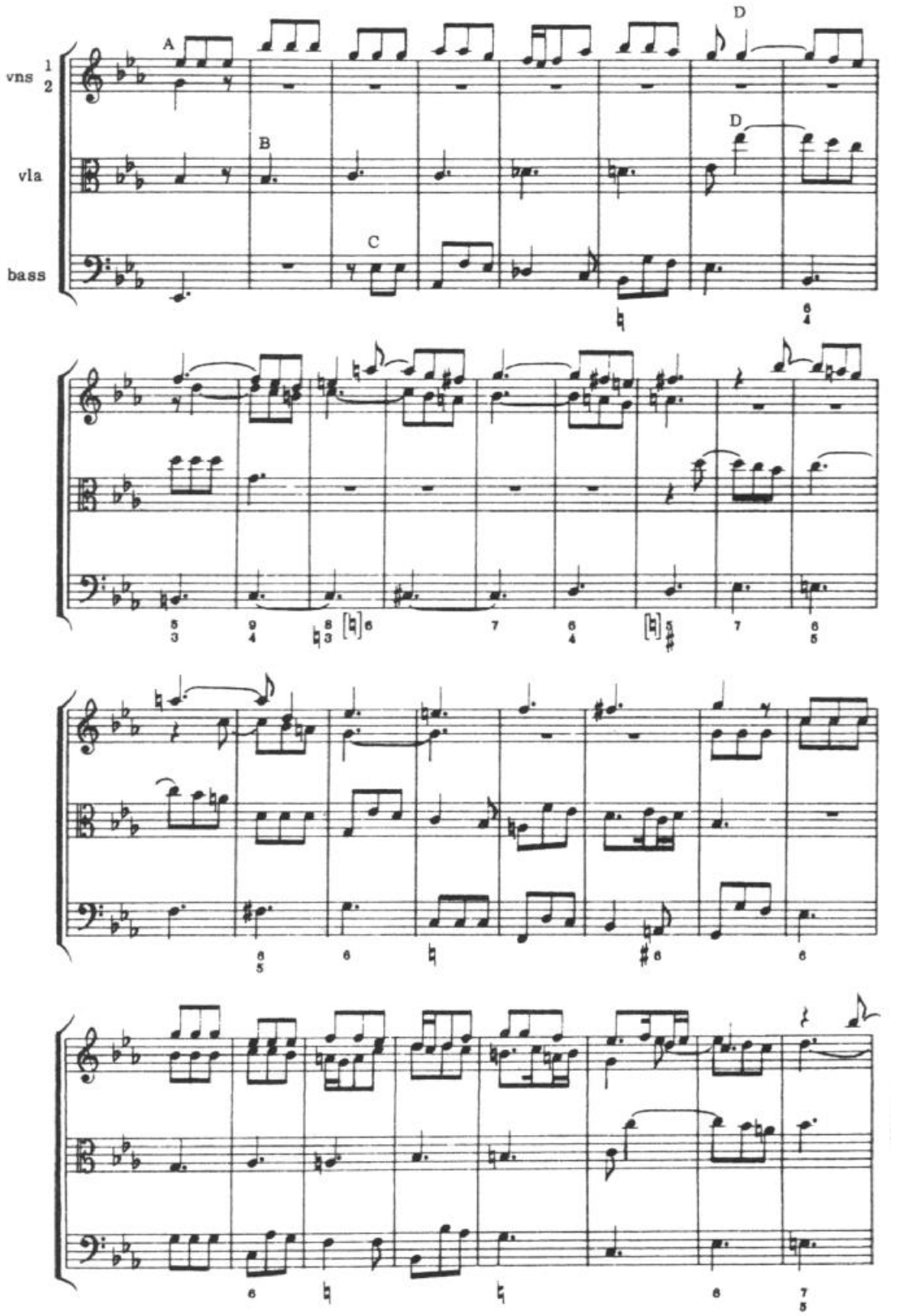
He is also exceptionally fond of ostinato. Ground basses, which may either stay in the same key throughout or be transported to other keys, are found in sonata and concerto movements, arias in cantatas and operas, even in one chorus (*Giustino*). One particular chaconne bass well known to his contemporaries (it is present in the first eight bars of Bach's 'Goldberg' Variations) appears in at least five movements. Unlike mid-Baroque Italian composers such as Cavalli (and their English emulators including Purcell), Vivaldi and his generation rarely attempt to disguise the regularity of the ground bass by avoiding a perfect cadence at the point of repetition or phrasing the melodic parts over the join, Instead, they diversify the texture or figuration of the upper parts on each restatement of the bass figure after the fashion of sectional variations.

Ostinato figures (groups of notes repeated at the same pitch) are also much used. Vivaldi often grants a repeated figure the harmonic licence of a pedal-note, superimposing it on the texture regardless of any clashes.

Imitation between two or more parts is regularly found in even the most homophonically conceived of his movements. Where there are two parts, they are commonly a fourth or fifth apart (as in the sequence in Ex. 6, p. 79), or at the unison. In either case, each part often plays

Ex. 8

(Presto)



(a) a motive and (b) a counterpoint to the same motive now heard in the companion part in alternation, producing the effect of straightforward repetition of a pair of motives in continuous voice-exchange. It is as if one hears an altercation between the two parts, growing more intense with each repetition. Vivaldi did not originate this type of imitation – one finds it in trio sonatas by earlier Italian composers – but the peculiar energy of his lines and the forthrightness of his harmony, often enriched by sevenths, gave it a new lease of life. Such passages are common in Haydn and Mozart, often producing curious echoes of Vivaldi.

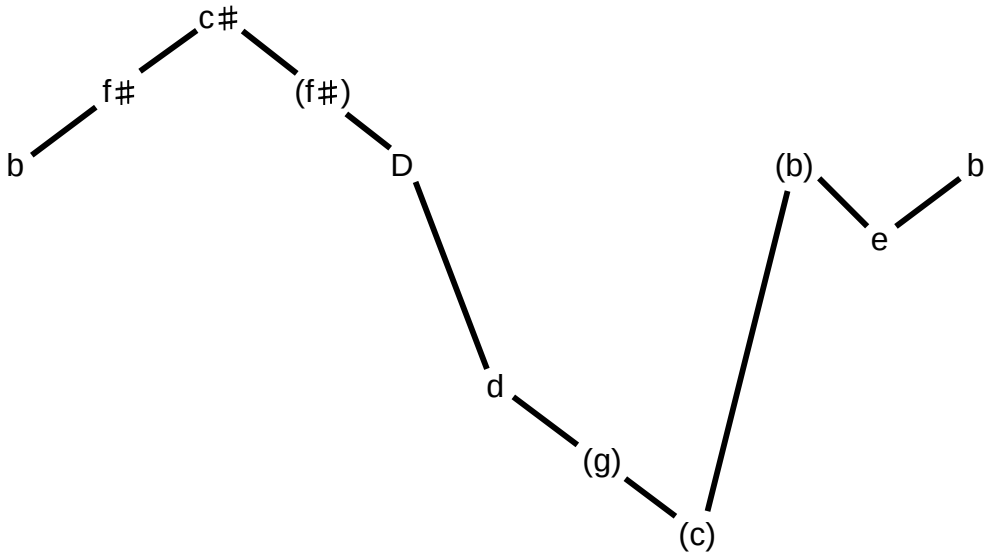
It would be a mistake, however, to equate counterpoint – the art of combining melodic lines – with specific contrapuntal devices such as ostinato or imitation, which are certainly less evident in Vivaldi's music, taken as a whole, than in that of Corelli, Couperin, Purcell or Bach. As a contrapuntist Vivaldi unostentatiously achieves excellence when he brings together two or three lines of contrasted melodic and rhythmic character. He has a gift for fresh – which is to say unusual – part-writing, so that even a viola part (in Italian music, generally a receptacle for the harmonic leavings of the other parts) may sparkle. Even more than Bach, he likes to 'drop' his leading-notes when he can thereby obtain an interesting melodic line or effective spacing of the parts.

Nevertheless, his part-writing is not beyond criticism. His liking for parallel movement in several parts, including the bass, often brings him perilously close to consecutive fifths or octaves. The type of passage which once embroiled Corelli in an acrimonious dispute with critics in Bologna[8] occurs again and again in Vivaldi's compositions. Perhaps it was to this shortcoming (in the eyes of contemporaries) that Goldoni alluded when he wrote: 'However much connoisseurs claimed that he [Vivaldi] was deficient in counterpoint and did not compose basses correctly, he made his parts sing nicely'.[9]

Vivaldi's approach to modulation is characteristically personal. He is apt to short-circuit the normal process of modulation, establishing a new key via its mediant, subdominant, submediant or leading-note chord rather than the conventional dominant. The listener is jerked, not smoothly carried, into the new key. Even when the dominant is the point of entry, it may arrive quite suddenly and entail the chromatic alteration of several notes.

[8] The controversial bars occur in the *Allemanda* of op. 2 no. 3.
[9] *Commedie* vol. xiii, p. 11.

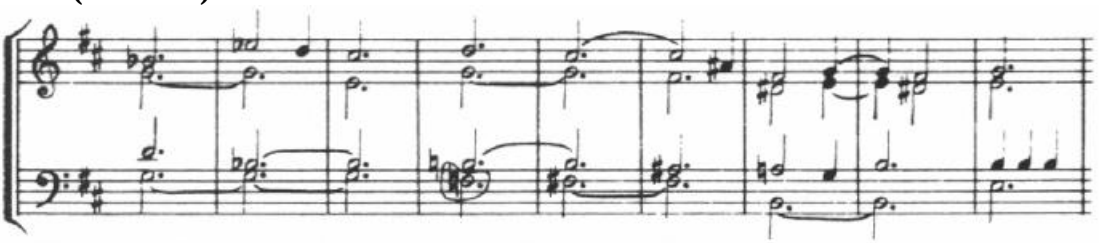
The range of keys visited in the course of a movement is rarely exceptional for the period, though some minor-key movements wander considerable distances up and down the circle of fifths. One of Vivaldi's boldest and most convincing tonal designs occurs in the 'Et in terra pax' of the *Gloria* RV 589. In the schematic representation that follows, major keys are represented by capitals, minor keys by small letters; the keys enclosed in parentheses are ones that are passed through, no cadence being made.



The transition from C minor to B minor is effected by an ingenious piece of enharmonic punning: the ringed bass note F, apparently a dominant seventh in C minor, resolves upwards to F sharp as if it were E sharp, root of a 'German sixth' chord.

Ex. 9

(Andante)



More than any previous composer he exploited with a sure sense of drama the contrast between the major and minor modes. It is normal for many, if not all, of the principal ideas of a movement to appear at some point in the relative key, major or minor, or one of its satellite

keys in the same mode, paraphrased if necessary. This is something never found in Corelli and practised only in the most timid and restricted fashion by Albinoni and Torelli, though it must be said that German composers were somewhat more adventurous. Vivaldi is also fond of fleeting visits to the parallel minor key (the key sharing a tonic with a major key), especially as a diversion before a final, clinching phrase. Such enclaves are often pathetic and lyrical in character, making a contrast with the more vigorous surrounding material. One frankly experimental movement, the finale of the concerto RV 159/P.231, jestingly employs this technique to produce a collage of two thematically self-contained movements – one, for three-part *concertino*, in A minor; the other, for four-part *ripieno*, in A major. In this crazy quilt of a form each 'movement' interrupts the other in turn.

Sometimes, Vivaldi anticipates the usage of the Viennese classics, Schubert especially, by juxtaposing major and minor versions of the same material. A well-known example is the fierce minor-key ending of the first movement of the *Concerto alla rustica*, RV 151/P.143, following the normal restatement of the opening material in G major; but there are many other, dramatically less highly charged instances.

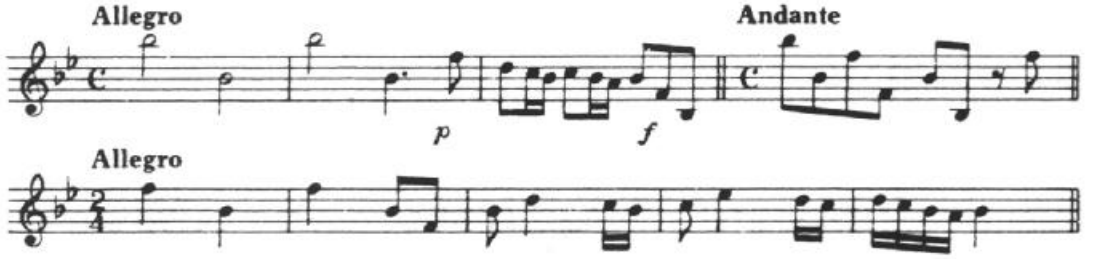
One aspect of Vivaldi's handling of tonality that has received surprisingly little mention in discussions of his style is his readiness to choose as the tonal area next in importance to the tonic a key other than the dominant or (for minor keys only) the relative major. By convention the dominant is usually the first new tonal area to be emphasized; it is the key of the first ritornello outside the tonic key in a concerto movement, or that of the cadence before the first double bar in a binary movement. The proportion of Vivaldi movements that deviate is small, but significant by comparison with other composers. In movements in a major key he sometimes substitutes the mediant minor for the dominant, something familiar only from a few keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti. In minor keys, however, one is surprised to see the subdominant used in this function (e.g. in the two slow movements of the cello sonata RV 42). This unusual procedure inverts the normal tonal curve of the movement, since the traditional 'sharp' and 'flat' areas have changed places. It should be added that this tonal bias towards the flat side is paralleled (though not necessarily within the same movement) by a frequent harmonic bias in the same direction, its most typical expression being the plagal (IV–I) cadence.

Vivaldi's attitude to what today's commentators call the 'thematic process' or 'musical unity' is best described as casual and unpredictable. Subtle thematic correspondences between one part of a movement and

another (one is not speaking of the repetition and development of ideas inherent in the chosen form) arise, if at all, quite spontaneously. A desire to treat ideas exhaustively, as opposed to merely intensively, is foreign to his nature – not for him the Bachian practice (so expressive of the Protestant ethic) of working material to the limit of its possibilities.

Thematic links between movements of the same work are quite often conspicuous. Here one must be cautious before imputing 'cyclic' intentions to him. Where similarities exist between dance movements in a chamber sonata, they can be explained as vestiges of the old variation suite and equated with instances in the music of many Italian contemporaries. Other, more literal correspondences can be put down to infertility of imagination or, more charitably, an obsession with a particular idea. One example occurs in the violin concerto RV 763 (*L'ottavina*), where the soloist enters in the Largo with a transposition of the phrase with which the preceding Allegro began. Nevertheless, one will find instances of links that are both subtle and purposive, especially among the concertos without soloist, which served Vivaldi as a test-bed for some of his most radical and ingenious experiments in form. The incipits of RV 163/P.410 offer interesting variations on the basic shape ***b♭″–f″–b♭′***:

Ex. 10



Any view of Vivaldi's music as inherently 'organic' must crumble before the fact of his self-borrowing, which both in incidence and pervasiveness greatly surpasses the showing of Bach and even Handel. To date there has been no comprehensive study of this aspect of his music, though valuable work on individual cases has been published.[10] This mammoth task would in principle require the examination of every bar in every source for over 700 works and would be hampered at every turn by uncertainties of chronology, hence of the sequence of borrowing.

[10] One particularly detailed study is Walter Kolneder, 'Vivaldis Aria-Concerto', *Deutsches Jahrbuch der Musikwissenschaft* (1964), pp. 17–27.

Boundaries of genre and form prove no barrier to Vivaldi's raids on his own music: sonata movements are transported to concertos; concerto movements to operas;[11] movements from sacred vocal works to the concerto medium. Binary movements are expanded into ritornello form; movements in ritornello form are redesigned as *da capo* arias.[12]

The portion borrowed is highly variable. Sometimes one or even two movements are taken over as they stand, or with minimal change of instrumentation. Sometimes the principal but not the subsidiary material is appropriated. This is the case in certain bassoon concertos arranged for oboe, in which Vivaldi troubled to write out only the recomposed (often only lightly paraphrased) solo passages. It happens, though less often, that the subsidiary material is retained, while the principal material is recomposed.[13] The opening movement of RV 210 (op. 8 no. 11) contains much episodic writing in which references to fragments of the ritornello are heard; however, the loss of thematic relevance entailed by the transference of the episodes, slightly pruned, to the first movement of RV 582/P.164, the D major concerto for violin and two orchestras 'per la santissima assontione di Maria Vergine', caused the composer no qualms. Then, what was previously principal material may reappear as subsidiary material, or vice-versa. The opening of the *Allemanda* from the violin sonata RV 3 is the basis of the first solo episode in the chamber concerto RV 101 and its later version for flute and strings RV 437 (op. 10 no. 6). When one examines the music at the level of the individual phrase, one discovers that the cadential bars of the ritornello in one concerto (RV 103/P. 402, first movement) can resurface as the opening bars of another (RV 156/P.392).

If one is determined to find excuses for Vivaldi's self-borrowing (the fact that so many instances have gone unnoticed speaks for the success of most transplants), it is inadequate to cite the haste with which he had to work, especially in view of de Brosses's testimony to his facility. Vivaldi obviously took pride in his *bricolage* and regarded it as a useful and legitimate part of his art.

A striking feature of his orchestral textures is their spaciousness, to

[11] A celebrated instance is the sinfonia captioned *La Fortuna in macchina* (*Giustino*, I, 5), a binary movement based on the ritornello of the first movement of *La primavera*.

[12] Each of the three movements of the recorder concerto RV 442 (better known in its version for flute, RV 434, published as op. 10 no. 5) is found in the shape of a *da capo* aria: the first in *Teuzzone* (I, 14); the second in *Il Tigrane* (II, 4); the third in *Giustino* (III, 7).

[13] This technique of remodelling was especially favoured by Albinoni. It often goes unnoticed, since thematic incipits do not betray the borrowing.

which the high tessitura of his violin parts, the wide compass of each part taken separately, and his great tolerance of part-crossing all contribute. When writing homophonically, he favours a texture composed of various strata (each represented by one or more musical lines) differentiated through characteristic figures. Many of these accompanimental stereotypes are recognizable as ones occurring, albeit often in a more sophisticated form, in the Viennese classics; they include the Alberti bass, which in Vivaldi's hands is generally not a bass but an upper part, showing its derivation from the type of arpeggiation found in display writing for violin from the time of Corelli onwards.[14]

He was also one of the first composers for the orchestra to use 'broken' accompaniments, where the 'figure' is assembled from fragments supplied by several instruments. The significance of this innovation is that for the first time in ensemble music (one is not speaking of keyboard or lute music, where free-voicing achieved a comparable result much earlier) individual lines are intelligible only in terms of a larger constituent of the texture, which is a milestone in the development of orchestration.

When Vivaldi writes in closely packed textures, they are apt to lie in extreme registers. The luminous aureole of three violins with viola surrounding the soloist in the slow movement of the violin concerto RV 356 (op. 3 no. 6) is a well-known instance; a counterpart in the lower register is Niceno's aria 'Non lusinghi il core amante' in *L'incoronazione di Dario* (II, 19), where the bass is partnered by a solo bassoon and a solo cello, apparently without continuo.

In comparison with the orchestral textures of the previous generation, those of Vivaldi and most of his Italian contemporaries (who may have been to a greater or lesser extent his imitators) show in several places the effect of three separate processes, applied singly or in combination. These processes may be called simplification, thinning and lightening.

Simplification entails the reduction of the number of real parts through doubling at the unison, the octave and even the fifteenth. Fluent contrapuntist though he was when working with three or four parts, Vivaldi seems distinctly uncomfortable when their number rises; the seven real contrapuntal parts (one short of the theoretical maximum, there being eight vocal parts) in the 'Sicut erat in principio' fugue of the *Dixit Dominus* RV 594 take him to the limit of his ability.

[14] The arpeggiations on one solo violin heard against a cantabile line on the other in the finale of the double concerto RV 522 (op. 3 no. 8) are an intermediate stage in the removal of this type of figuration from the foreground to the background.

Other practical considerations leading him at various times to double parts may have been to insure against absence of players, to avoid overtaxing the concentration of unsophisticated audiences, and to accelerate the writing of a score (since doubling instruments could be cued in from a fully notated part). Naturally, genuine artistic reasons are usually present. The ultimate stage of this simplification process, the orchestral unison, is employed to splendid dramatic effect, and two-part textures where both parts are doubled in at least one other octave can produce an evocatively bleak sound, which Haydn was later to make his own.

Thinning the texture entails the removal of doubling instruments normally present. In upper parts its most common form is the reduction to one solo instrument, which introduces a change of timbre. It is, however, the bass which is most often stripped down. Any of the possible constituent parts of the *basso* – the melody instruments cello, double bass and bassoon and the continuo instruments harpsichord, organ and bass lute – can be suppressed or reduced to a single player. Very often, the continuo players are removed *en bloc*, a warning of their eventual demise.

Lightening the texture entails the suppression of the bass register and the transference of the bass part to the middle register, where it is usually played by violins or viola. Vivaldi notates such *bassetto* parts in the bass clef an octave below sounding pitch. High-lying basses of this kind often cross middle or upper parts, producing second inversions of chords, offensive to orthodox theorists (including C.P.E. Bach, who deplored *bassetti*, the introduction of which he attributed to 'a certain master in Italy', by whom he may have meant Vivaldi),[15] but acceptable to many composers, among them Haydn in his early quartets. Vivaldi used the opening movement of his violin sonata RV 12 for the slow movement of the concerto RV 582/P.164, taking the bass up an octave and assigning it to violins. The last two bars show the curious effect produced by chord inversion.

Ex. 11

[15] *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell (London, 1951), p. 173.

Reserving our main discussion of instrumentation and instrumental technique for later chapters, we can mention here some special effects which are of importance for orchestral texture. Vivaldi is fond of the subdued sound of muted instruments. Normally, muting is prescribed (as far as possible) for the whole ensemble. Thus the *Sinfonia* in the third act of *Teuzzone*, a slow march, is headed 'tutti gl'istromenti sordini'; the instruments include not only strings but two trumpets, two oboes, a bassoon and 'timpani scordati' (which one should probably interpret as muffled rather than mistuned kettledrums). In another, probably later, version of the same movement opening the *Concerto funebre* RV 579/P.385 the muted instruments include a tenor chalumeau and three *viole all'inglese.* Sometimes, a solo violin is exempted from the general muting, so that it may stand out more strongly. As well as normal mutes (*sordini*) Vivaldi employs heavier lead mutes (*piombi*) for his strings; both types are called for in *Orlando.*

His use of pizzicato is more often selective than general, however, being found predominantly in bass parts. He does not lack ingenuity: the aria 'Sento in seno ch'in pioggia di lagrime' (I feel in my breast that in a rain of tears) in *Giustino* (II, 1) is picturesquely accompanied by a shower of raindrops on the strings ('tutti pizzicati senza cembalo') except for three instruments – a first violin, a second violin and a double bass – who are instructed to play the same parts with their bows.

Very occasionally, the Cinderellas of the violin family, the viola and the double bass, come into unexpected prominence. One aria in *Giustino* (I, 4), 'Bel riposo de' mortali' (Sweet sleep of mortals), which is very similar in style to the Pastoral Symphony in *Messiah*, has a drone, initially on C, for double basses alone. In an 'infernal' scene (II, 6) in *Orlando fìnto pazzo* all the violinists are instructed to play violas, the better to evoke the lugubriousness of Hades.

Vivaldi's concern for the fine nuances of music in such matters as tempo, dynamics, phrasing and articulation is quite remarkable for its time, as Walter Kolneder has shown.[16] Elsewhere, Kolneder has ventured the interesting suggestion that conditions of performance at the Pietà, where music was heard in silence and the players were well drilled, stimulated the composer's inventiveness.[17] True though this may be, it must be said that his operatic music, written for more boisterous surroundings, yields nothing in refinement of detail.

[16] *Aufführungspraxis bei Vivaldi* (Leipzig, 1955).
[17] *Antonio Vivaldi: his Life and Work,* p. 65.

The basic, universal indications of tempo are frequently qualified for greater precision; thus one finds expressions such as 'Allegro (ma) non molto' or (another example of Vivaldi's humour) 'Allegro più ch'è possibile'. Alternatively, or in addition, he may append a description of the general character of the movement, as in 'Largo (e) cantabile'. Variations of tempo within a movement – as opposed to composite movements like the 'Peccator videbit' from the *Beatus vir* RV 597 – are rare, if one excludes *accompagnato* recitatives and 'motto' statements or cadenzas in arias.

There seems little doubt that from his earliest days as a composer Vivaldi employed both terraced dynamics (instantaneous changes of dynamic level corresponding to the addition or withdrawal of ranks on the organ) and graduated dynamics (crescendo and decrescendo). The second type are not indicated by 'hairpins', which came into use somewhat later, but by repetition at intervals of directions such as 'più piano'. In Vivaldi's music this device occurs as early as the *Giga* in RV 79 (op. I, 11), begun by the unaccompanied first violin. Charles de Brosses was struck during his Venetian sojourn of 1739 by the subtlety of dynamic change in orchestral performances. He wrote:

> They have a method of accompanying which we do not know but would find easy to introduce into our performance, and which adds infinitely to the value of their music; it is the art of increasing or diminishing the sound, which I could term the art of nuances and shading. This is practised either gradually or suddenly. Besides *forte* and *piano*, *fortissimo* and *pianissimo*, they have a more or less emphatic *mezzo piano* and *mezzo forte*.[18]

Kolneder has identified 13 gradations of dynamic marking in Vivaldi's music, to which one can add a *forte-piano* effect seen in Cato's aria 'Dovea svenarti allora' (I ought to have killed you then) (*Catone in Utica*, II, 11), where the first notes in a series of bowed tremolos receive a sharp attack, presumably to illustrate Cato's bitterness at his daughter's betrayal. Different strata in the texture are often contrasted dynamically; thus in the second movement of *La primavera* the dog (viola) barks 'molto forte e strappato', while the leaves (violins) rustle 'pianissimo'.

Vivaldi phrases his string parts remarkably fully, especially where he desires some special effect. Slurs are numerous and vary greatly in the number of notes encompassed. One attractive novelty is a 'syncopated' style of bowing in which the change of bow occurs on a note before (rather than on) the beat, producing a pattern such as

[18] Op. cit., vol. ii, p. 332f.

 . Apparent inconsistencies in the phrasing of similar passages abound in the original sources. In some cases, Vivaldi, having made his intentions clear at the beginning of the movement, left the performer to carry on in similar manner; in others, the variation seems deliberate; very often, however, the discrepancy must have arisen through carelessness, abetted by the composer's habit of requoting material from memory without referring back to earlier pages of the score.

Directions referring to articulation are frequent. One meets expressions such as 'arcate lunghe' (long bows) and 'arcate sciolte' (detached bows) – both are especially common in the bass parts of recitatives – 'attaccata alla corda' (on the string), 'battute' (such notes being 'beaten', perhaps in *martellato* style) and 'spiccato'. Both dots and vertical strokes are used for staccato; placed underneath a slur, they seem to indicate *portato* and a flying staccato respectively. Different parts written in similar note-values may have contrasted articulation; a *locus classicus* is the B minor section of the slow movement in RV 580 (op. 3 no. 10), where each of the four solo violins phrases and articulates its series of broken chords (the first violin in demisemiquavers, the rest in semiquavers) in an individual way.

Even the improvised continuo realization does not escape Vivaldi's attention. The direction 'Il cembalo arpeggio' appears in the slow movement of *L'autunno*, a picture of dozing inebriates; arpeggiation is also prescribed for Angelica's recitative beginning 'Quanto somigli, o tempestoso mare' (How like you are, o stormy sea) in *Orlando* (I, 6).

No discussion of Vivaldi's style can be complete without a fuller mention of his occasional adoption, as a novelty or a compliment to a patron, of elements of the French style. Specifically French genres appear: the *Ouverture* introducing the second part of *La Senna festeggiante*; minuets found both in concertos and (as dance-songs) in operas; and a few chaconnes, notably the finales of the concertos RV 107/P.360 and RV 114/P.27, In these, and several other movements headed *Alla francese*, he uses dotted rhythms extensively, no doubt intending the length of the dot (and shortness of the ensuing note) to be exaggerated in the manner of the French. Another feature is their homorhythmic character, which contrasts with the differentiated rhythms more typical of the composer.