The vocal music

'Vivaldi, who wanted to be active in both fields [vocal and instrumental], always got himself hissed in the first, though he enjoyed great success in the second.' Thus Tartini, arguing his case that vocal and instrumental composition, being so different in character, could not be mastered equally by one man.[1] This opinion, which smacks of sour grapes, is belied not only by the facts of Vivaldi's career but by remarks of other contemporaries, notably Mattheson, who, having observed that vocal writing does not tolerate the leaps found in instrumental writing, states: 'Vivaldi, albeit no singer, has had the sense to keep violin-leaps out of his vocal compositions so completely that his arias have become a thorn in the flesh to many an experienced vocal composer.'[2]

The sheer mass of Vivaldi's vocal music, sacred as well as secular, would not disgrace a composer who never wrote a note of instrumental music: over 45 operas, of which 16 survive in their entirety and four (including Vivaldi's contribution to *Il Tigrane*) in sufficiently complete form to merit analysis; eight shorter stage works (three extant); 40 cantatas; over 60 sacred works, including four oratorios (one extant).

Although the knowledge of Latin and of Catholic ritual acquired during ten years of training for the priesthood must have served Vivaldi well in his sacred works, he cannot have found much time – nor can his humble origins have afforded him much opportunity – to gain more than a rudimentary acquaintance with vernacular literature and the classical tradition by which it was still so heavily influenced. One must remember, of course, that true literary connoisseurs like the Marcello brothers were in a minority among composers. From Vivaldi's original drafts we can see how often a hasty or superficial reading of a text to be set led him into error. For example, the first (1727) version of *Farnace* misreads 'schiva' (shy) as 'schiava' (slavish) – the object of

---

[1] As reported in de Brosses, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 316.
[2] *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739), p. 205.

reference being an aloof princess – and a few lines later turns the 'essa' (it) of the libretto into a syntactically inexplicable 'esca' (goes out).[3] In the score of *Orlando*, where the text in the recitatives corresponds not to the 1727 libretto but to that published in 1714 for Ristori's setting, Vivaldi betrays his unfamiliarity with French at the point when the delirious paladin begins to speak in that language.[4] Through a typographical error the earlier libretto appears to split the oath 'ventrebleu' into two words: *ventreb leu*. In his innocence, Vivaldi follows suit.

Literary novice though he was, Vivaldi did not lack confidence. The operatic scores abound in petty alterations to the text in his own hand. Since these revisions are often so inconsistent – they may be lacking, for example, when a portion of text is repeated – they can hardly all have been introduced at the bidding of a literary collaborator. One case establishes beyond doubt that he was capable of writing serviceable, if trite, verse. The central recitative in *Nel partir da te*, *mio caro*, a solo cantata for soprano, achieved its final form only at the fourth attempt. In his first two attempts Vivaldi gave up after sketching the notes of the vocal line up to the third bar and taking the text only as far as the third word. Five bars were completed in his third attempt. By now, he must have become dissatisfied with the words, for the final, successful version has a new text, paraphrasing the old, which only he can have supplied.

> *Original text*
> Parto, sì parto lungi da te, mio bene.
> Via in pegno del mio amor ti lascio il core
> Tradiscilo, ti priego,
> Perch'un dì lo gradisti
> …[5]
>
> *New text*
> Parto, mio ben, da te, io parto, addio,
> Ma il cor qui resta in ossequioso pegno.
> Di gradirlo ti priego,
> E all'afflitto mio core
> Donali in premio almeno un dolce amore.[6]

These texts are written in the form known as *versi sciolti*, in which lines of seven and 11 syllables are mingled freely and rhyming is usually

---

[3] Act II, Scene 2, lines 2 and 9. In the later (1739) version of *Farnace* Vivaldi corrects the first error.

[4] Act III, Scene 5. The 1727 libretto paraphrases the French passages in Italian.

[5] 'I am going, yes, 1 am going far from you, my sweetheart; but I am leaving you my heart as a pledge of my love. Deceive (?) it, i beg you, for once you welcomed it …'

[6] 'I am going, my sweetheart, from you; I am going, farewell! But my heart is remaining here as a humble pledge. Accept it, I beg you, and deign to reward my suffering heart with sweet affection.'

confined to a final couplet. Such verse was standard in recitatives, the length of line corresponding excellently to the length of phrase a singer could sustain in a single breath. The 12-syllable opening line of the original text (presumably also by Vivaldi) is a blemish not entirely removed in the new version, where, although the syllable-count is now correct, the flow is very halting (note the clumsy hiatus between 'te' and 'io'). But perhaps one should not expect a composer to be too scrupulous about prosody; like many of his colleagues, Vivaldi often chose to ignore elisions essential to the poetic rhythm but irrelevant, even awkward, in a musical setting.

In regard to accent and length his word-setting is generally irreproachable. When writing in declamatory style, either block-chordally as in the outer movements of the *Credo* RV 591 or imitatively as in the 'Sicut erat in principio' concluding *Lauda Jerusalem*, he often achieves that compromise between fidelity to the spoken word and imaginative artificiality that results in true memorability. Like Handel, he uses dotted rhythms to impart zest and lend emphasis. It would be unfair to judge the melismatic style of his arias by the same standards, for the extension of one syllable over several bars is an artificiality so blatant as to mask most other deviations from the natural, but he selects the syllables so treated intelligently, with due regard to their vowel quality. The following example, from Emilia's aria 'Come invano il mare irato' (As in vain the angry sea) (*Catone in Utica*, II, 14), illustrates the exuberance of his bravura writing in the later operas. Vivaldi does not take Mattheson's advice so literally as to spurn all leaps, but such as occur are eminently singable.

Ex.23

(**Allegro molto**)

Instances of bad word-setting are most numerous in *contrafacta*, old pieces furnished with new texts. Even in lines with the same number of syllables, variations in the stress pattern and a different placing of diphthongs, hiatuses and elisions can have adverse effects. The great quartet 'Anima del cor mio' from *La Candace* (II, 9) begins with a phrase which accommodates the diphthong in 'mio' very happily with a feminine cadence. Later in the same year (1720) Vivaldi adapted the movement as a quintet in *La verità in cimento* (II, 9), where its first line is amended to read 'Anima mia, mio ben'. The feminine cadence on 'ben' sounds unnatural, especially as the syllable is closed. Minor infelicities of this kind were more or less inherent in the technique of *contrafactum*; we find them, too, in the music of Bach and Handel.

Vivaldi's ability as a word-painter is unrivalled for his period. It is remarkable how pictorial significance can permeate the whole of the texture, bringing simple accompanimental figures into relief. The obsessional quality of Vivaldi's natural musical thought, which can, in extreme cases, sustain a single idea for the duration of the entire movement, helps to establish a basic 'affection' (*affetto*) for the movement; supplementary motives and figures suggested by individual words and phrases of the text increase the richness of allusion. No finer example can be found than Tito's aria 'Se il cor guerriero' in *Tito Manlio* (I, 2; Ex. 24). The rhythmic ostinato ♩♫♩ ♩ , usually on a monotone, sets the warlike mood in a manner reminiscent of Monteverdi's *stile concitato* as featured in *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda.* Abrasive, tardily resolving dissonances evoke the clash of arms in the A section, while in the B section rushing semiquavers on the violins accompany Tito's stern command to his son: 'Flee the challenge of battle'.

The allusive significance of a motive is usually clear from the words with which it is initially heard. Once announced, the motive tends to be developed autonomously, almost as in a purely instrumental composition. When the motives appear in contrapuntal combination, there is little risk of inappropriateness, since one or other of them is likely to be relevant to the words as they occur and recur. This is the case in Holophernes' aria 'Agitata infido flatu' in *Juditha triumphans*, which describes a swallow's flight to its nest, buffeted by stormy winds. Three important motives, mostly heard simultaneously, occur in the voice and the upper instrumental parts (the bass underscores the restlessness with pounding quavers and some tortuous intervals): a chromatically descending line in semibreves or minims expressive of the soughing of the wind; a semiquaver figure representing the flapping

Ex. 24
(a) (Allegro)

Se il cor guer - rie - ro   T'in - vi - ta al -

Strings   vla   vn 2

- l'ar - mi,   t'in - vi - ta al - l'ar - mi,

vn 1

♯10   7

(b)

Sfug - gi il ci - men - to   Del - la bat - ta - glia,

of the swallow's wings; a jagged figure in dotted rhythm evocative of weeping (see Ex. 25). This is in essence the 'tableau' manner of representation as found in the slow movements of programme concertos. Where the style is more homophonic, however, and the motives

Ex. 25

appear one by one, Vivaldi sometimes cannot – or will not – maintain the strict correspondence of word and motive observed at the outset. His setting of Metastasio's famous comparison aria 'Qual destrier ch'al albergo è vicino' (*L'Olimpiade*, I, 3) bears this criticism out. In the A section Vivaldi illustrates the whinnying of a stallion with trilled appoggiaturas, and the commanding voice of his rider with a high-pitched monotone in even crotchets. These onomatopoeic touches recur in the B section, where their presence, justifiable on purely musical grounds, is no longer textually apposite, since Metastasio has abandoned the simile of a headstrong horse to describe the object of comparison: a man intoxicated by the vision of his impending happiness. To regard the motives as a subtle reminiscence-cum-anticipation of the A section would be mistaken. Impulsive rather than reflective, Vivaldi was apt to let such a movement take its own course once

he had set it on its path – a slightly risky prescription for vocal composition.

The cantatas

After opera, the cantata was the most important new vocal form forged in the early Italian Baroque. It is generally conceived as a monologue (the singer sometimes also acting as narrator), less often as a dialogue. With rare exceptions, the Italian cantata, unlike the Lutheran church cantata, is a setting of secular verse in the vernacular. The most modestly scored type, that for solo voice and bass (realizable on harpsichord or cello, or the two combined), was by far the most popular, rivalling the solo sonata in the number of works composed if not in depth of social penetration. Alessandro Scarlatti and Benedetto Marcello, the two most accomplished composers of cantatas contemporary with Vivaldi, each produced hundreds. The currents of reform associated with the Arcadian Academy in Rome, whose purifying and disciplining effect on opera cannot be denied, restricted the scope and imagery of the cantata to a stultifying degree. The setting is invariably Arcady, peopled by lovelorn shepherds and fickle nymphs (the epithets are reversible), with whose vulnerable hearts Cupid plays havoc. Invariable, too, the form of the poem: alternating strophes of *versi sciolti* (generally set as recitative, though a few lines may receive arioso or fugato treatment) and rhymed verse for the arias. *Da capo* form – as much a poetic device as a musical one – is normally prescribed for the latter.

The main sources for Vivaldi's cantatas are two volumes (nos. 27 and 28) in the Foà collection, though a few are preserved elsewhere. Twenty-two of the continuo cantatas are for soprano, eight for alto, a ratio quite normal for the time. The absence of 'natural' male voices is not surprising: works for high voice, which could be sung either by women or by castrati (the sex of the character portrayed by the singer was not a restricting factor), had greater versatility; also, it is uncommon for arias, whether in cantata or opera, to be written for a low voice unless there is an instrument in an upper register to act as a foil. On his scores, some of which are very rough drafts, Vivaldi left several instructions for transposition or change of clef. Such directions, often misunderstood when occurring in the instrumental works as afterthoughts or corrections, enabled a pre-existing score to be used as a copyist's exemplar when a work (or individual movement) was arranged to suit new circumstances. Several works contain more than one 'generation' of instructions, testifying to their popularity with

either the composer or his customer. The cantatas with instrumental accompaniment comprise five for soprano and four for alto.

Vivaldi is at his least original in terms of form when working in the cantata genre. It is interesting, however, that whereas most contemporaries, including Albinoni, whose 40-odd solo cantatas offer the closest comparison with Vivaldi's, preferred a four-movement cycle (recitative–aria–recitative–aria) related in scale and the pattern of movements to the traditional church sonata, Vivaldi shows a slight preference for a three-movement cycle (aria–recitative–aria) after the fashion of his concertos. The older plan possesses an advantage in that the first of the arias, being enclosed within the work, can be in a new key, but Vivaldi guards intelligently against the danger of making the second aria too much like the first, varying the rhythmic character and the pattern of modulation.

The structure of the *da capo* aria, which varies very little, can be summarized thus:

(1) Introductory ritornello.
(2) First vocal period, modulating to the dominant or alternative key.
(3) Ritornello in the new key (vestigial in solo cantatas).
(4) Second vocal period, leading back to the home key. Sometimes capped by a coda.
(5) Reprise of introductory ritornello, often abridged.
(6) One or two vocal periods cadencing in new keys.
(7–11) Recapitulation of 1 to 5, ornamented *ad libitum.*

The ritornello, no doubt often added after completion of the vocal portion, may paraphrase either the opening of the vocal melody or (particularly in works where the bass has a strongly instrumental character and uses ostinato figuration) its accompaniment. That the A section (1–5) is so much longer than the B section (6) is due, first, to the presence of ritornellos and, secondly, to the twofold presentation of the text, once in each vocal period. The most extended melismas are usually reserved for the second vocal period, an appropriate point for the climax.

Like Albinoni and other Venetians, Vivaldi tends to differentiate the idioms of the voice and the bass sharply; the first is sinuous and flowing, the second jagged and assembled from short motives. He is less of a natural tunesmith than Albinoni, but the rhythmic invention and frequently highly virtuosic conception of his cantatas amply compensate. His recitative, though lacking in the more extreme

dramatic effects found here and there in the operas, is subtle and imaginative, especially in flights of arioso.

Two of the instrumentally accompanied cantatas, *All'ombra di sospetto*, with flute, and *Lungi dal vago volto*, with violin, require a single obbligato partner; the remainder, operatic in style if not in spirit, call for a full complement of strings (*Qual in pioggia dorata i dolci rai* for two horns in addition). Vivaldi handles his obbligato instruments with great sensitivity and discretion, never forgetting that outside the ritornellos the voice must reign supreme. Of the orchestral cantatas *Amor, hai vinto* should be singled out for the contrapuntal complexity of its first aria.

The popularity of Vivaldi's cantatas will depend on that of the genre as a whole, which, being more limited by period than its instrumental equivalent, the violin sonata, has so far failed to establish itself strongly in the concert repertoire. Given the opportunity to hear the best of them, many listeners will concur with the opinion of Charles Burney (a severe critic of the instrumental music) that 'D. Antonio Vivaldi merits a place among the candidates for fame in this species of composition'.[7]

The serenatas

Giovan Mario Crescimbeni, historian of the Arcadians, explained the meaning of *serenata* thus: 'Nowadays, cantatas of this sort [i.e. as opposed to other poetic genres], when performed before an audience, are customarily put on at night, and are called *serenate*.'[8] He might have added that most serenatas have solo roles for between three and six singers, and a few include a chorus. It remains unclear whether serenatas were normally performed in costume on a stage (Crescimbeni implies this in speaking of the 'consummate magnificence and splendour' of certain productions), but they can easily be distinguished from operas proper by their compact dimensions, division into two 'parts' (without subdivisions corresponding to the operatic scene) and subject-matter. As in a masque or an operatic prologue, the *dramatis personae* of a serenata are allegorical, gods or stock figures from Arcady, whose sole purpose is to unite in praise of the potentate to whom the work is addressed. A serenata unites the lyricism of a cantata with the resources of an opera.*

Of Vivaldi's three preserved serenatas by far the most interesting,

---

[7] *A General History of Music*, vol. iv (London, 1789), p. 178.
[8] *Dell'istoria della volgar poesia*, vol. i (Venice, 1731), p. 300.

as well as the longest, is *La Senna festeggiante*, whose circumstances of composition are discussed elsewhere.[9] It has three characters: La Senna (the Seine – bass), L'Età dell'oro (the Golden Age – soprano) and La Virtù (Virtue – alto). If the optional tenor part is included in the final ensemble (borrowed from *Giustino*), it would be logical to use a chorus (Vivaldi's description 'Coro' is ambiguous, as the word can apply to any ensemble, including one comprising merely the soloists). In the first part there are 21 numbers, headed by a *Sinfonia*; in the second, 15 numbers, headed by an *Ouverture*. The distribution of movement types is unexpected: seven simple recitatives against ten *accompagnati*; three duets and three terzetts ('cori') against 11 solo arias. These statistics, which reveal an unusually high incidence of 'complex' settings (*accompagnato*, ensemble numbers), hint at a quality fully realized in the music. In many movements Vivaldi captures the wistful tenderness at the heart of 'le goût français', as in Età's aria 'Al mio seno il pargoletto' (no. 14; see Ex. 26). The direction 'alla francese' refers not so much to the minuet character as to the dotted rhythms, which should be exaggerated where appropriate.

Of all Vivaldi's large-scale secular vocal works *La Senna festeggiante* is the most varied and most carefully wrought. As it is also the one most likely to appeal at a purely musical level, it deserves to join works like Handel's *Alexander's Feast* in the modern repertoire.

The operas

In Vivaldi's day Italian opera was less an amalgam of its various components – music, literature, acting, dancing, scenery and machinery – than a loose conjunction where smooth co-ordination was rendered possible only by the adherence of each to universally recognized conventions. The autonomy of the principal contributors, the composer and the librettist, was respected, so that no librettist would think ill of a composer for omitting to set part of his drama, provided that its integrity was preserved in the published libretto, where such passages would be identified by double commas (*virgolette*). The librettist had no lien on the music, which could reappear with or without its original words in opera after opera; and the composer had no lien on the libretto, which successive operatic managements would obtain, have revised to suit their needs, and entrust to the composer of their choice. The scenery would offer permutations of the same settings: palace antechambers, open fields, sacred groves, riversides,

---

[9] See pp. 54f and 168.

Ex. 26

Largo alla francese

and so forth. Whereas in modern times a cast of singers is chosen for a particular work, it was more normal then for a work, selected for its literary merits, to be adapted to the cast already engaged. Since the services of the singers cost the impresario considerably more than those of the composer, they were in a position to insist on alterations that went beyond the strictly necessary (such as the inclusion of favourite items from their repertoire). In his penetrating study of Italian operatic arias in the early eighteenth century[10] Reinhard Strohm argues convincingly that only two fixed musical entities can be recognized in the opera of that time: the individual aria (or ensemble) at the lower level and, at the higher, the individual production for a specified place and season. The 'work' is something elusive and intangible.

---

[10] *Italienische Opernarien des frühen Settecento*, vol. i (Cologne, 1976), p. 11f. This work includes the best evaluation of Vivaldi's operatic music yet to have appeared as well as a detailed catalogue (in vol. ii) of the operas and their surviving fragments.

When adapting one of his operas for a new production (or even in the course of a production) Vivaldi liked to retain as much as possible of the score in the form in which he had previously left it – crossing out, writing in, pasting over, removing and inserting material with an ingenuity born of long experience. If the result of these metamorphoses often looks untidy, we must remember that, once completed, a score's only function was to serve as an exemplar for copyists. Some detective work is often needed to unravel the previous history of a work. Naturally, one should check the score against librettos, but since divergences between scores and librettos for the same production are common, the physical structure of a score needs careful examination. With typical self-confidence Vivaldi nearly always wrote the recitatives, and sometimes the arias, straight into score, accepting the probability of errors and changes of mind that would result in deletions. He wrote on four-leaf sections of paper (one bifolium being enclosed within another), numbering them consecutively within each act and identifying the act by the number of strokes (one to three) under the numeral. Generally, he left no unnecessary gaps, so that an aria or recitative often straddles two sections. The same procedure is followed by copyists working under his direction, as in the earlier *Farnace* score (Giordano 36), where three different hands besides his own appear. When Vivaldi later came to remove material, either outright or with the intention of making a substitution, he had many methods at his disposal: he could take out an entire section or one of its bifolia, or cut down any number of leaves to stubs (these measures would normally entail the subsequent restoration of some of the material); he could cross out material (when a number spreads over two sections, it is noticeable that Vivaldi often deletes only the shorter – hence less reusable – portion); he could leave it intact, indicating its supersession by inserting the replacement in the middle of the section, so splitting it in two. Inserted leaves may be written out specially or lifted from other scores; in the case of pasticcios like *Rosmira*, which acknowledges borrowings from Mazzoni, Paganelli, Handel, Hasse and Pampani, the insertions can be handy copies of individual arias perhaps acquired through singers. Clues to the presence of 'imported' arias are blank pages at the end of a section or an irregular number of leaves in it. Minor alterations may be entered directly on the score or supplied on a slip of paper pasted over it (the first movement of the overture to *L'Olimpiade* was slightly lengthened in this way). Special problems arose when, in a revival, a role was allotted to a singer in a different vocal range. Inevitably, the arias for that character were replaced, as

well as his more extended passages of recitative, but in recitatives where the character was only one of several participants Vivaldi saved himself labour by merely inking in note-heads in vertical alignment with the original notes. In this way Medoro's part in *Orlando* was changed from alto to soprano, and Aminta's in *L'Olimpiade* from bass to soprano.

The themes of Baroque opera were most often taken from the history and mythology of the ancient world, which were embroidered and adapted with little restraint. Medieval romances, such as form the basis of the librettos of Vivaldi's *Orlando* and *Ginevra*, were also popular. Lastly, a vogue for the exotic caused operas to be situated in places as far-flung as America (*Motezuma*) or China (*Teuzzone*). The Muslim east was also a favoured locale, as we see in *La verità in cimento*. In their prefaces librettists normally stated the sources from which they had directly or indirectly culled their story, only to expound the various licences they had permitted themselves 'for the convenience of the modern stage'. Metastasio himself did not scruple to change the names of Cornelia and Juba, historical characters in *Catone in Utica*, to Emilia and Arbace for the sake of euphony.

Although there was a fashion for five-act operas, in the style of classical models and the French tragedies patterned on them, at the start of the reform movement associated, perhaps too exclusively, with Apostolo Zeno (1668–1750), three acts continued to be the norm (discounting intermezzos and ballets inserted between, sometimes inside, them). Each act was divided into a number of 'scenes', generally between ten and 20. The criterion of a scene change was not, as in modern usage, a *mutazione*, or change of set – this occurred only three or four times during the act – but the exit of one or more characters. Since it was customary for singers to sweep off the stage, having acknowledged the audience's applause, at the end of their aria, most arias inevitably occur at the end of a scene. By no means every scene has an aria or other closed number; as many as four scenes sometimes pass without one.

It was part of the librettist's skill to distribute arias equitably among the approximately five principal singers and perhaps two lesser singers, to vary the character of each singer's arias, and to space them well out so that no one singer held the centre of the stage for too long. Theorists devised rules for the guidance of librettists, but practice admitted some flexibility. In its original form *L'Olimpiade* was a model libretto, as the table below shows. It is interesting to note that in Vivaldi's setting of 1734 the disparity between the number of arias

allotted to the principal and minor characters is somewhat mitigated, perhaps in an attempt to satisfy all members of the cast. Figures for this revised version appear within parentheses in the following table.

	Act I	Act II	Act III	Total
Aristea	1(1)	2(2)	1(1)	4(4)
Megacle	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	3(3)
Argene	1(1)	2(1)	1(1)	4(3)
Licida	2(2)	1(1)	0(0)	3(3)
Clistene	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	3(3)
Aminta	0(1)	1(1)	0(1)	1(3)
Alcandro	0(0)	0(1)	0(1)	0(2)
Meg + Ari	1(1)	0(0)	0(0)	1(1)
Chorus	1(1)	1(0)	2(2)	4(3)

Plots revolve around palace intrigues, conflicts between love and honour or passion and piety, and the resolution of old vendettas, all enmeshed in complex love-chains. The mainspring of the plot is often wound before the curtain goes up, necessitating a lengthy exposition of the background in the *Argomento* before the libretto. A happy ending (*lieto fine*) was favoured by custom and out of respect for the established order. Dramatically, this was unfortunate, as many otherwise good plots are spoiled by a contrived and over-hasty dénouement. In Lucchini's *Farnace*, for instance, the superbly implacable Berenice quite arbitrarily recovers her maternal instincts in the very last scene. The force of the custom is shown in Vivaldi's adaptation of *Catone in Utica* for Verona. In Metastasio's splendid original libretto Cato dies by his own hand on stage in the final scene, prophesying Caesar's downfall. This was too strong for contemporary taste, and Metastasio was persuaded to amend the ending so that Cato died off-stage. Vivaldi (or his collaborator) goes further: Cato lives to capitulate gracefully to Caesar, leaving the prophesying to Emilia.

The division of function between recitative and aria is absolute: recitatives carry the action forward, while arias and other closed numbers freeze, like a still in a motion picture, thoughts and feelings at one particular point. The dynamics of action or character development are absent from the aria; the most one will find are antitheses between the framing A and central B sections. The self-contained nature of arias and the small variation in their construction and scale make the formation of overall climaxes within the act – still more within the work – virtually impossible. One can rarely guess from

looking at an individual number at what point during the act or the opera it occurs. In this respect contemporary French opera, where numbers were frequently linked to make complexes and which had at its disposal more (and less sharply differentiated) types of musical setting, possessed an advantage.

One should not look for much originality of character portrayal in the world of Vivaldi's operas. It is the traits which are predetermined and then coupled with suitable persons, historical or invented, rather than the reverse. Stock character-types such as the amorous warrior, the faithful wife, the vengeful widow and the blustering tyrant regularly appear (which makes it easier to transport an aria from one opera to another). It is observable, however, that Romans are painted in rosier colours than their barbarian opposite numbers. In *Farnace* Pompey is a more honourable conqueror than his ally, the Cappadocian queen Berenice, and his lieutenant Aquilio is harder to suborn than her captain Gilade. Poor Arbace, in *Catone*, nobly struggles against the handicap of his Numidian background. This ethnic discrimination, inherited, of course, from the classical writers themselves, serves to eulogize those patrons of opera who, like the Viennese court or the Venetian senators, regarded themselves as latter-day Romans.

Vivaldi's recitative is not normally the most dramatic, but it is inventive in the resources it employs. Whereas expressiveness in the cantata recitatives is concentrated in the vocal line, it is the harmonies and sometimes the accompaniment which are most telling in the operas. The marvellous setting of the ninth scene in Act II of *L'Olimpiade* makes appropriate use of all the main varieties of recitative.

The hero, Megacle, bound by a debt of gratitude to his friend (and rival suitor) Licida, bids a last adieu to his sweetheart Aristea. Here, as previously, the most common type of recitative, over sustained pedal-notes, suffices. Aristea's uncomprehending anger is signalled by violent twists in the harmony, and when she feels cold sweat on her brow, just prior to fainting, the key lurches from B minor to D minor. To express Megacle's bewilderment and shock at seeing her lie motionless, Vivaldi chooses the most extreme form of 'detached' accompaniment: sparse crotchets, doubled at the octave by the entering upper strings. Realizing that she is unconscious, Megacle panics at the thought that she may be dead; the upper strings break into chords, and the unison violins twice evoke horror with searing arpeggios which change chord during their descent (Ex. 27). Resigned to the worst, he gathers his confused thoughts to an accompaniment of detached chords

Ex. 27

alternately on continuo and the full ensemble. As he bids Aristea
farewell, the texture changes to that of the traditional *accompagnato*
reserved for solemn moments such as a prayer or the reading of a
letter: a 'halo' of sustained chords. Finally, he looks around for Licida,
and the accompaniment reverts to continuo pedal-notes.

More than any other type of movement, the aria charts Vivaldi's
stylistic development over the decades. In his earlier operas, up to
about the mid 1720s, he often allows the instrumental parts, much
more active than those of most contemporaries, to define the phrase
structure, impose thematic coherence and even arrogate to themselves
the main melodic interest. A parallel with Wagner's operas is not out
of place. In the aria from *Tito Manlio* illustrated on p. 134 the voice
starts as an added counterpoint against an orchestral texture which
has already been heard by itself as the ritornello. In later operas Vivaldi
tends to conform to Neapolitan practice, letting the vocal part (possibly
doubled by violins) dominate every aspect of the composition. The
busyness of the accompanying instruments is likely to base itself not
on a density of motivic play as formerly, but on simple technical

devices like the bowed tremolo. In the early operas arias tend to be compact – of necessity, since the librettists were more lavish with them – and uniform in character as between A and B sections. Arias in the later operas are both fewer and longer. Internally, they have become more varied and less continuous in their flow. 'Motto' openings followed by a cadenza as well as terminal cadenzas are common in the vocal part. Whereas the B section was formerly contrasted texturally (being more thinly scored) rather than thematically with the A section, the reverse is now more general; differences of tempo between the sections are not uncommon. Once again, librettists must be held partly responsible, for these contrasts mirror the use of antithesis and paradox in verse of the Metastasian age.

Where Vivaldi discards the *da capo* layout, the reason is almost always to be found in the unitary construction of the text. Not surprisingly, old or old-style librettos like those of *L'incoronazione di Dario* and *Orlando* afforded him most scope for through-composed arias which, on account of their brevity, are accompanied by continuo alone. There is one outstanding aria, however, which respects the *da capo* of the text without reproducing it literally in the music: Clistene's 'Non so donde viene' (*L'Olimpiade*, III, 6). There are no breaks between sections: the music set to the first quatrain modulates to the dominant; that of the second quatrain moves to the relative major; the reprise of the opening lines relates to the first section as a recapitulation to an exposition in sonata form. This partial dissociation between musical and poetic form in an aria from the 1730s is a remarkable foretaste of developments in the aria later in the century.

The number of duets and ensembles Vivaldi could include in his operas was limited by the parsimony of librettists, itself a response to actual conditions of performance. He left four particularly fine examples: the duet 'Ne' giorni tuoi felici' in *L'Olimpiade* (I, 10), the terzett 'S'egli è ver' in *La fida ninfa* (I, 12), the quartet 'Io crudel?' in *Farnace* (III, 7), later borrowed for *Bajazet*, and the quintet 'Anima mia, mio ben' (based on the quartet in *La Candace*) in *La verità in cimento*. When the participants have a common text, as in the terzett, the music may be set after the fashion of a chorus, either contrapuntally or homophonically. If the element of dialogue is present, or if the characters voice contrasted thoughts, a different treatment is needed. Vivaldi follows a common practice by introducing his characters separately, one after the other, so that they can establish a separate personality (and acquaint the audience with their words). The next stage is to overlap their phrases, producing sometimes quite intricate

contrapuntal patterns. In preparation for the main cadences the voices unite homophonically. The *Farnace* quartet demonstrates in its 105 bars Vivaldi's superb control of pace, his gift of succinct characterization and his secure sense of form. It opens immediately with a tirade by Berenice against her hated son-in-law Farnace, now her captive. More tersely and less ferociously, Pompey (Pompeo) echoes her sentiments. Farnace's wife Tamiri now pleads hysterically with her mother for his life, the gasping, tonally unstable vocal line showing graphically her state of mind. Finally, Farnace enters, stoically accepting his fate. A few further exchanges lead to a ritornello in the mediant minor. During this first section (bars 1–40) there are only two bars (31–2) of ensemble writing, Berenice and Pompey singing in thirds. The second section (bars 41–83) goes through the text once more, as in a conventional aria, returning to the home key for a concluding ritornello. This time, however, frequent overlaps and one passage of ensemble writing (bars 63–5) increase the urgency and intensity. In the third section, equivalent to the B section of an aria, the voices are coupled, following the libretto, in pairs (Berenice–Pompey and Tamiri–Farnace), finally coming together in a peroration. A reprise of the first two sections is not required, but Vivaldi rounds off the movement with a ritornello.

Choruses in the operas are as perfunctory as they are infrequent. The briefest binary form, with or without ritornellos, is preferred, and the texture is resolutely homophonic. Sometimes, indeed, the chorus part, to be sung in unison, is written on one stave. The borrowing or adaptation of an old chorus for a new work is often practised. One choral movement, written for performance in Rome, where elaborate choruses were part of local operatic tradition, does something to redeem this unimpressive showing. 'Dopo i nembi e le procelle', which concludes *Giustino*, is a 62-bar-long chaconne of some contrapuntal merit. In the extract below (Ex. 28), in which the voices (words omitted) are doubled by instruments, the delayed entry of the tenor in the first statement of the ostinato and the imitative interplay of soprano and alto in the second are particularly attractive.

Vivaldi's use in operas of instruments other than the orchestral quartet of strings and continuo reveals, as one would expect, his sure grasp of their technique and expressive potential. Few scores are without a pair of horns in F, which are summoned for arias, ensembles or choruses in hunting style. He notates for horns in three ways:

(1) Parts ascending no further than the 12th harmonic transpose down an octave. Walter Kolneder has argued, referring to the concerto RV

Ex. 28

(**Allegro**)

538/P.320, which features this transposition, that such parts, being written for a horn in 'high' F, sound at written pitch (one recalls a similar theory about the horn parts in the first 'Brandenburg' Concerto).[11] Were this so, however, the horn pedal-notes in *Farnace* ('Nell'intimo del petto', I, 7) and *L'Olimpiade* ('Mentre dormi amor fomenti', I, 8) would shriek out from the top of the texture.

(2) Parts ascending to the 18th harmonic (g'') are written at sounding pitch.

(3) A few parts ascending to the 13th harmonic employ the modern transposition for horn in F, sounding down a fifth.

If his use of the horns in a hunting vein is disappointingly conventional, Vivaldi's horn pedals are little short of sensational. The device was not entirely new, Vinci having exploited it as early as 1725,

---

[11] *Antonio Vivaldi: his Life and Work*, p. 140.

but Vivaldi introduces special, magical touches in both arias. In *L'Olimpiade* a single horn restricted to the sounding notes *f–c'–f'* is accompanied by muted strings expressive of sleep. In *Farnace* two horns in unison playing the notes *c'–f–g'–b♭'*, usher in the first stirrings of Gilade's love for Farnace's captive sister Selinda. Remarkably, the aria is in C minor. Vivaldi's use of the natural horn in a key foreign to its harmonic series is several decades ahead of its time. This aria was retained in the later version of *Farnace*, where Vivaldi, aware of the technical problems of sustaining long notes on a wind instrument (a *g'* is sustained *piano* from the 32nd to the 44th bar), wrote a characteristically precise instruction: 'This horn pedal must never cease sounding, so two horns have to play in unison softly throughout, taking turns to draw breath.'[12] The modern habit of 'bumping up', it seems, was familiar to him.

Many operas introduce trumpets in C or D, sometimes accompanied by timpani (called 'tamburri', 'timballi' or 'timpani'), in martial or festive movements. In comparison with their imaginative use in the sacred music (for example in the *Gloria* RV 589 and the *Dixit Dominus* RV 594) their operatic appearances are unexciting.

Oboes and recorders, always in pairs, are used together with strings in an obbligato or semi-obbligato role to lend a bucolic touch. The appearance of both in 'Bel riposo de' mortali' (*Giustino*, I, 4), a gentle pastorale, is typical. Sometimes, oboes are complemented by a bassoon. This instrument is used only once as a true obbligato instrument, to accompany the huffing and puffing of the comical old philosopher Niceno (*L'incoronazione di Dario*, I, 19), ancestor to Doctor Bartolo (see Ex. 29).

Those instruments introduced as occasional novelties that have not been discussed in the previous chapter include the solo violin and cello, the psaltery (in *Giustino*), the *flauto grosso* (probably a tenor recorder: used in *Tito Manlio* and *La verità in cimento,* which also require the *flautino*), the flute and the solo harpsichord. The solo violin is generally used in some special way: with solo cello in parallel tenths in 'Sentirò fra ramo e ramo' (*Dario*, III, 2) in imitation of birdsong; on stage in 'L'ombre, l'aure e ancora il rio' (*Ottone in villa*, II, 3) to evoke the breezes; as an echo-effect in *Orlando finto pazzo*. The flute obbligato in 'Sol da te, mio dolce amore' (*Orlando*, I, 11), hauntingly lyrical in

---

[12] 'Questo pedale del corno non deve mai mancare; per tanto devono suonare due corni unisoni e sempre piano affine uno lascia prendere fiato all'altro.'

Ex. 29

its more subdued moments, includes passages (some with 48 notes to the bar) of a technical difficulty surpassing that of his flute concertos. Vivaldi uses solo harpsichords (more than one instrument was employed for operatic performances) in 'Io son quel gelsomino' (*Arsilda*, I, 15) for purely colouristic effect; not for him the bold virtuosic display of 'Vo' far guerra' in Handel's *Rinaldo*.

Despite their many beautiful moments, Vivaldi's operas cannot lay claim to the historical importance of his concertos. Yet the vigour, complexity and variety of their instrumental writing, especially in the works of the first decade, set a fashion for his older contemporaries. Had he begun to write operas earlier, or had the rise of the Neapolitans occurred later, their orchestra-dominated style might have established itself more firmly. Though he continued after the critical period around 1725 to produce innovations, these never became consolidated in a 'late-period' style. A work like *Catone in Utica* betrays a self-consciousness foreign to the early operas for S. Angelo and S. Moisè: the malaise of a composer whose ambition has outlasted his capacity for self-renewal.

The sacred vocal music

No area of Vivaldi's creativity is so hard to survey as his sacred vocal music, because the factors most subject to variation – the nature of the texts set, the scale of the setting and the forces used – occur in so many combinations. A Vesper psalm, for example, may be set as one long movement (*Beatus vir* RV 598) or several movements (*Beatus vir*

RV 597); its vocal complement may be solo voice (*Nisi Dominus* RV 608), choir alone (*Laudate Dominum* RV 606) or single or double choir with soloists (*Dixit Dominus* RV 594); the work may be *a cappella* (in eighteenth-century usage this means not that instruments are absent but that they double the voices strictly) as in the *Credidi* RV 605, include independent instrumental parts, as in *Lauda Jerusalem* RV 609, or treat the instruments in both fashions at different times.

The most important distinction to be drawn, however, is that between settings of liturgical and non-liturgical texts. The Ryom catalogue lists in the first category: one complete Mass, and separate settings of the *Kyrie*, *Gloria* (twice) and *Credo* (twice);[13] Vesper music comprising the response *Domine ad adiuvandum*, Psalms 109 (twice), 110, 111 (twice), 112 (four times), 113, 115, 116, 121, 126 and 147 (all numberings according to the Vulgate), nine assorted hymns and antiphons, including three settings of the *Salve Regina*, and the *Magnificat* in four closely related versions. The non-liturgical category embraces the oratorio *Juditha triumphans*, 12 solo motets (two incompletely preserved), eight *introduzioni* and three independent movements, one of which (the *Aria de Sanctis* 'Eja voces plausum date' RV 647) is a *contrafactum* of the aria 'Benché nasconda la serpe in seno' in *Orlando* (II, 2).[14]

It is convenient to begin with the works on non-liturgical texts, as they bear the closest resemblance to the cantatas and operas. Quantz supplies a good definition of the Italian motet of his day: 'In Italy one nowadays applies this term to a sacred solo cantata with Latin text consisting of two arias, two recitatives and a concluding "Alleluia", commonly performed by one of the best singers during Mass, after the Credo'.[15] Mozart's *Exsultate, jubilate* K. 165 is a late representative of the genre. As in most of his cantatas Vivaldi omits the introductory recitative, but because of the separate 'Alleluia' movement (through-composed with a hint of ritornello form), the second of the two arias, which with few exceptions are in a straightforward *da capo* form, can offer a contrast of key.

The *introduzioni* are very similar to the motets, though having no 'Alleluia'. As the name suggests, these are introductory movements, to the *Gloria*, to the *Dixit Dominus* or to the *Miserere*; exceptionally,

---

[13] The authenticity of the complete Mass and the *Credo* RV 592, both preserved in Warsaw, is very dubious. All statistics given here refer to extant works, discounting minor variants.

[14] The same aria appears with new words in *L'Atenaide*. It was also borrowed (as 'So che nasconde in livore') for the pasticcio *Catone* (*1732*) arranged by Handel for the King's Theatre.

[15] *Versuch*, p. 288n.

Jubilate, *o amœni chori*, RV 639/639a, leads into the *Gloria* RV 588 without a break.

Motets and *introduzioni* are scored alike for soprano or alto with strings and continuo. The instrumental accompaniment is more discreet than in most of Vivaldi's operatic arias before the 1720s, and the vocal writing correspondingly more florid; yet their style, and what little other evidence exists, suggests that most were written in his first flush of sacred vocal composition following Gasparini's departure from the Pietà. Though unashamedly treble-dominated and not particularly subtle in their manner of expression, these 'concertos for voice' have considerable melodic appeal. The dog-Latin of their anonymous texts, in which Arcadian images such as the warbling nightingale (Filomena) incongruously appear, is less admirable.

The earliest known performance of an oratorio at the Pietà dates from 1684. From then until 1820 well over 50 oratorios of which librettos have been preserved were produced by successive *maestri di coro*, the most active being Gasparini (eight between 1701 and 1713), Andrea Bernasconi (five, 1744–51) and Bonaventura Furlanetto (31, 1768–1808).[16] As befitted an institution for the female sex, a large proportion celebrated biblical heroines such as Mary Magdalene, Athalia, Abigail and Susannah. Vivaldi's 'sacrum militare oratorium' *Juditha triumphans*, whose bellicosity, as we have seen, suited the times,[17] was the first on that subject for the Pietà; Cassetti's libretto was refurbished for a setting by Gaetano Latilla (1757), and Furlanetto returned to the story in 1787.

In *Juditha* Vivaldi puts virtually the whole of the Pietà's arsenal of instruments on display. The score calls for two recorders, two oboes, soprano chalumeau, two clarinets, two trumpets with timpani, mandolin, four theorboes (playing in two parts), obbligato organ, five *viole all'inglese* and viola d'amore in addition to strings and continuo. In many cases the same player probably doubled on more than one instrument, since, for example, only one kind of woodwind instrument is heard at a time.

Juditha completely lacks duets and other ensembles; the only inter-action of characters in the closed numbers is provided by one chorus ('O quam vaga, venusta') with a solo part for Vagaus, and an aria of Vagaus ('O servi, volate') with choral interjections. The choir,

---

[16] Statistics based on Maria Antonietta Zorzi, 'Saggio di bibliografia sugli oratorî sacri eseguiti a Venezia', *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, vols, iv (1930–1), pp. 226–46, 394–403, 529–43, v (1931–2), pp. 79–96, 493–508, vi (1932–3), pp. 256–69, vii (1933–4), pp. 316–41.

[17] cf. p. 44f.

representing Assyrian warriors and Bethulian maidens in turn, has two further numbers in each of the two parts of the oratorio; these expand somewhat – but do not outgrow – the binary conception of the operatic chorus.

The ever-changing instrumentation of the arias serves in a rather rudimentary way the ends of dramatic characterization, although the prime aim is still to depict a situation as viewed by a character rather than a character as revealed by a situation. Judith has to herself the 'feminine' tones of viola d'amore, *viola all'inglese*, chalumeau and mandolin, while Vagaus, Holophernes' obsequious henchman, flatters him to the strains of oboes, recorders and theorboes. Of sterner stuff, Holophernes makes do with orchestral strings for all his arias save one ('Noli, o cara, te adorantis') when, in a rush of tenderness, he woos Judith with the aid of oboe and obbligato organ.

Excellent though most of the arias are in their own right, *Juditha* suffers from a dramatic diffuseness exceeding even that of the operas. Vivaldi neglects his opportunity to build up excitement in preparation for Holophernes' beheading, and the *accompagnato* during which Judith carries out her gruesome task is deplorably lame. A more dramatic moment arrives immediately after, when Vagaus, gingerly approaching and entering the love-tent, recoils in horror at the sight of his decapitated master and then launches into a vituperative 'revenge' aria, 'Armatae face'. No finer *scena* exists in the whole of Vivaldi's music. Over-all, however, the pace is too leisurely, the price paid for stringing together a long work from units whose length and structure are unusually uniform, even in the context of the time.

The works on liturgical texts offer a far greater variety of movement types. *Da capo* form is ruled out, since the words, while they sometimes permit a short refrain, cannot be coerced into the familiar tripartite arrangement. Shorter movements can be set in through-composed fashion, the stylization depending on the forces involved: arioso or *accompagnato* is appropriate in a work with solo voice (for example, 'Cujus animam/Quis non posset' in the *Stabat Mater*); chordal dec-lamation in a choral work (for example, the 'Gratias agimus tibi' of the *Gloria* RV 589). Longer movements can be set fugally in traditional style (this holds good even in the solo voice medium), but the most common solution in works with obbligato instrumental parts is some kind of ritornello form. In movements for solo voice ritornello form (which, in its variety with two episodes, coincides with the plan of the A section in *da capo* form) can be taken over unaltered from the concerto. In movements with choir (e.g. the 'Credo in unum Deum'

of RV 591) some adjustments have to be made so that the choir lends its weight to the ritornellos (the introduction excepted) as well as to the episodes. Where vocal soloists as well as a choir participate, the latter has overwhelmingly a 'ritornello' function.

The hymns follow their text in adopting a simple strophic pattern. An exception is the *Stabat Mater* RV 621. Whereas the other well-known settings from the period of Jacopone da Todi's poem, such as those by Astorga, Caldara, Pergolesi, A. and D. Scarlatti and Steffani, include all 20 stanzas (plus the 'Amen'), appropriate when the work is sung as a sequence at Mass, Vivaldi's setting uses only stanzas 1 to 10 as prescribed when the *Stabat Mater* is sung as a Vespers hymn at the two feasts of the Seven Dolours of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15 September and the Friday before Good Friday). The form is a compromise between strophic and 'cantata-style' setting. Movements 1 to 3 (on the text of stanzas 1 to 4) are repeated as movements 4 to 6 (on the text of stanzas 5 to 8). The remaining two stanzas and the 'Amen' are set individually. In this closely knit work, whose sombre mood is dispelled only by a radiant *tierce de Picardie* in the final chord, Vivaldi achieves a remarkable, almost oppressive degree of unity. Until the 'Amen', which has no original tempo marking, tempi range from *Adagissimo* to *Andante* (a foretaste of Haydn's *Seven Last Words from the Cross*). All the movements are in either F minor or C minor, and several are related in cyclic fashion.

Quite the most compelling feature of these works is the large (if not yet Bachian) scale on which many of the movements are built, and the careful planning that complements it. The *Beatus vir* RV 598 for two sopranos, alto and four-part choir, cast in a single, ritornello-form movement of 420 bars, exhibits a range of modulation and a thematic affinity between ritornello and episode unmatched by the instrumental models. In the second movements of the four great D major works – the two *Gloria* settings and two *Dixit Dominus* settings – where, as a foil to the brilliant opening movements, Vivaldi moves to B minor and adopts a slow tempo, we find a deliberateness of tragic mien and epic proportion wholly foreign to the world of the concerto. He also shows unsuspected skill in combining motives originally heard separately. In the first 'Kyrie eleison' of the *Kyrie* in G minor, RV 587, the boldly modulating chords and striding arpeggio figures appearing successively in the orchestral introduction come together for the first time after the modulation to D minor. The 'In memoria aeterna' terzett of the *Beatus vir* RV 597 not only combines a vocal fugato with contrasted material from the introduction but also subsequently integrates the subject of

this fugato with the two of another fugato heard later to the words 'ab auditione mala non timebit'.

In the multi-movement works there is a lurking danger that because of all the variety of key, scoring and style the work will dissolve, aesthetically speaking, into fragments. Vivaldi was not unconscious of the problem. In the *Beatus vir* RV 597 a repeated five-bar strain extracted from the opening movement comes back as a kind of refrain before five of the eight remaining movements. This rather artificial device soon becomes wearisome, particularly as the refrain is not intrinsically very attractive. More successful is the reprise of the opening movement near the end of a work. In psalm settings this generally occurs at the start of the Doxology ('Gloria Patri'), so that the following words, 'Sicut erat in principio', can have punning significance.[18] In the *Gloria* RV 589 Vivaldi is inspired to prepare for the reprise (on 'Quoniam tu solus sanctus') by introducing the five-note motive following its initial octaves (see Ex. 1, p. 74) into the preceding aria, 'Qui sedes'.

From the governors' commendation of Vivaldi in 1715 it is evident that the Pietà required him to compose an 'entire' Mass (here, the Kyrie, Gloria and Credo) and a similar 'Vespers' (minus, perhaps, some or all of the antiphons). Some of the works preserved separately must therefore have been composed for the same service, and to that extent belong together. In the knowledge that the Pietà's *Maestro di Coro* had to supply new Mass and Vesper settings for the two principal feasts of the year – Easter, and the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Piero Damilano has sought to identify among the extant works two Vesper cycles, taking into account not merely liturgical requirements but also congruence of scoring and key.[19] The attempt is valiant, but misconceived. It fails to reckon with the hymns and antiphons, which fall outside these two liturgies; it does not consider the near-certainty that several works in which male voices are prominent (for example, the *Beatus vir* RV 597 and the *Dixit Dominus* RV 594) were not composed for the Pietà; it includes a few spurious works; most important, it ignores connections established by the bibliography of the manuscripts. This last factor still awaits thorough investigation, but one may give as an example the autograph manuscripts of the *Introduzione* and *Gloria* RV 639/588, the *Credo* 591, the *Laudate pueri*

---

[18] J.S. Bach, who in his *Magnificat* BWV 243 begins the reprise on the very words 'Sicut erat in principio', is a less subtle punner.

[19] 'Antonio Vivaldi compose due vespri?', *Nuova rivista musicale italiana*, vol. iii (1969), pp. 652–63.

Dominum RV 602 and the *Laetatus sum* RV 607 – two Mass sections and two Vesper psalms with Marian associations – which are the only works among the Turin manuscripts written on a certain kind of paper. It is safest to conclude that the Turin manuscripts contain fragments of more than two Vesper cycles, together with other works composed individually.*

Misconceptions also surround Vivaldi's numerous works 'in due cori'. Rather romantically in view of the lack of evidence, some writers have taken them to have been written for St Mark's, forgetting that while the use of *cori spezzati* may have originated there in the sixteenth century, it spread rapidly to become a universal means of achieving an exceptionally grand and spacious musical effect. *Lauda Jerusalem*, at any rate, was written for the Pietà in the late 1730s, for two of its girls, Margarita and Giulietta, are assigned by name to the solo soprano part of the first *coro*, and two more, Fortunata and Chiaretta, to that of the second *coro*.[20] All four sang in *Il coro delle muse* (1740), Chiaretta also in the late version (RV 611) of the *Magnificat*. Since the contemporary manuscript poem referred to earlier describes Fortunata as 'young', Giulietta as 'an adolescent' (giovinetta) and Chiaretta as 'a girl', a date before 1735 is unlikely.

By the eighteenth century the *concertato* style, the very basis of polychoral writing, had become obsolete. Increasingly, one finds alternate phrases of an essentially 'monochoral' piece allotted to each ensemble until they eventually join forces in a peroration; or there are imitative dialogues between the two ensembles reminiscent of those between the two violin parts in an orchestral ritornello. In both cases, antiphony is preserved, however artificially. More ominously for the style, polychorality may survive only in the layout of the score, the composer simply writing in as many parts as the *cori* between them can provide, without regard for the spatial aspect.

All these tendencies characterize Vivaldi's works. At one extreme, one finds a monochoral work, the *Magnificat* RV 610, turned into one for two *cori* by the addition of the cues 'P.C.' (primo coro) and '2.C.' (secondo coro); at the other, the ornate and contrapuntally complex 'Sicut erat in principio' finale of the *Dixit Dominus* RV 594, where the two choirs and orchestras interweave in as many as seven real parts. Though the artistic possibilities of antiphony remain largely unexploited, these works do not disappoint in other respects. The

---

[20] It is best to avoid translating *coro* as 'choir', since the term can refer to an ensemble of voices, instruments or both combined.

little-known setting of the response *Domine ad adiuvandum me*, cast like a concerto in three movements, demonstrates in compact form Vivaldi's ability to weld very differently constructed movements into a perfect whole. An opening ritornello-forni movement captures the urgency of the plea 'ad adiuvandum me festina'. It is followed by a setting in the relative minor for solo soprano of the first part of the Doxology; the singer slowly threads her way through a tight dialogue between the two orchestras. The 'a cappella' movement with united *cori* which follows (Vivaldi achieves greater luminosity in time-honoured fashion by having the first violins double the altos an octave higher and allotting the soprano line to the second violins) is shaped as an introduction and fugue, well knit together by a running bass in quavers. The traditional element in Vivaldi's settings of liturgical texts should not be underestimated. Their fugue subjects tend to follow textbook patterns, unlike those in the instrumental music, and (in William Hayes's words) are 'well maintained'. Vivaldi is fond of pedal-note themes which suggest plainsong, though, unlike several in the sacred music of Leo, Pergolesi and Handel, they do not actually quote from it. The 'Amen' motive from the *Credo* RV 591 is typical:

Ex. 30

(Allegro)

A — —   —   —   —   men,

The chaconne bass of the *Giustino* finale, metamorphosed into ponderous semibreves, serves the *Dixit Dominus* finale as a fugue subject-cum-ostinato, lending it a truly monumental character.[21] Its entry on first violins, the choirs momentarily pausing, recalls the instrumental interludes in Handel's great choral fugues. Towards the end, Vivaldi subjects his motive to diminution and inversion with a nice sense of climax if few contrapuntal pretensions.

Nevertheless, he was less at home with the *stile osservato* than, say, Lotti or Marcello. Significantly, the two unacknowledged borrowings from other composers so far traced in his music (outside the special case of opera) occur in this context. One, the 'Credidi a 5 a capella del Vivaldi' RV 605, is largely a *contrafactum* of an uninspired, anonymous *Lauda Jerusalem*, RV Anh. 35, found among the Turin

---

[21] Couperin uses the motive similarly in the last movement of the sonata opening *L'espagnole* (composed *c* 1692, published 1726).

manuscripts. Haste, or perhaps uneasiness in this style, may explain (though hardly excuse) Vivaldi's opportunism. In the other instance he made two separate adaptations of the 'Cum sancto spiritu' fugue from a *Gloria* (dated 9 September 1708) by G.M. Ruggieri, also preserved in Turin. Ruggieri's work is laid out for two orchestras of five-part strings, one with trumpet and the other with a pair of oboes, and two four-part choirs. In one adaptation, probably the earlier (for the *Gloria* RV 588), Vivaldi introduces Ruggieri's movement with a short peroration on a D major chord. His alterations, other than those implied by the reduction of forces to the level of a single orchestra and choir (both in four parts) tend to concentrate the movement and reduce the importance of the instruments. The other adaptation (for the *Gloria* RV 589) eliminates the peroration and tends to increase the role of the instruments (some passages for the solo trumpet are newly invented.) Moreover, it departs more radically from Ruggieri in word-setting and certain thematic details, greatly improving the original. No apologies need be made for these creative transformations, though what prompted the use of borrowed material remains obscure.*

Vivaldi makes such sparing use of exotic instruments in the works belonging to this group that it is unnecessary to enlarge on incidental references already made. His methods of combining the string orchestra with the choir are so original and forward-looking, however, that they deserve close examination. They would have occurred only to a composer conversant with the practices of the instrumental concerto.

Ex. 31

(Allegro)

The problem lies in reconciling independence and idiomacy of part-writing in both choir and orchestra with an avoidance of the confusion and turgidity that can so easily result. He solves it by composing on two different planes, which we can term for convenience foreground and background. If instruments occupy the foreground with motivically significant material, the voices will supply a simple background whose contribution, almost like that of a keyboard continuo, is perceived more in terms of texture and rhythm than of melody, as in the above bars from *In exitu Israel*, RV 604 (Ex. 31). The roles can easily be reversed, as in the 'Et in terra pax' from the *Gloria* RV 588 (Ex. 32).

Ex. 32

(Largo)

In both examples one is aware of the part-writing within each section – choir or orchestra – but the dissociation of the two planes makes the relationship of, say, the tenor and the viola of very secondary importance. Analogous developments in the relationship of the wind and string sections of the orchestra itself are a vital element in the symphonic art of the later eighteenth century. To give Vivaldi a large share of the credit for the introduction of a 'symphonic' style to church music may seem a bold act, but the evidence justifies it.

It is ironic both that 'the Red Priest' came to write sacred vocal music through an accident of circumstances, and that he then revealed an exceptional talent for it. Fervour, exaltation and mysticism; these qualities break forth from the scores. A further irony: the dramatic element is very subdued. One will find no touches comparable with the diminished seventh on 'superbos' in the Bach *Magnificat* or the

hammer blows on 'Conquissabit capita' in the *Dixit Dominus* of Handel. It is as if Vivaldi sought in church music a dignity and serenity for which his life as virtuoso and entrepreneur, invalid and globe-trotter, left him too little time.