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DATING VENETIAN OPERAS:  
IMPLICATIONS AND QUANDARIES FOR VIVALDI STUDIES

Until recently, it has been very difficult to parse the Venetian theatrical year with confidence. Dates in multiple libretti for the same operas often seem to indicate multiple (adjacent) years, even though we know that opera productions were generally limited to about three weeks. There may be contradictions within a single libretto between the printer's year and the librettist's. Magnified over centuries in countless bibliographies and encyclopedias (in which compilers have generally striven for "uniformity"), the problem of dating Venetian operas seems like one that should be susceptible to a simple solution. The running chronology of all opera productions that occurred in Venice between 1660 and 1760, the origins of which reach back to the early 1980s, has only now reached fruition.<sup>1</sup>

It proved to be necessary, in the end, to look at the entire spectrum of dramatic productions with music, not simply the *dramma per musica*, in order to gain perspective on how Venetians structured time. It was necessary to examine in close detail the many ways in which Venetians parsed the year: for the theater was hardly alone in having to fit its "year" (which amounted to three or four often interrupted months) within the carefully prescribed bounds left available by other cyclical activities. It was beneficial to consider carefully the underlying conflict between clock-time and bell-time – the first regular and relatively precise, the second conscious of the tempo of bell-ring according to the measure of hour-glasses. These lateral issues arose from my wish to interpret reliably the bounteous quantity of documentation that is preserved in many thousands weekly news-sheets from Venice. The sources are widely scattered and, despite their abundance, incompletely preserved, but they consistently refer to ways not familiar now and not subsumed under the designation M.V. [*more Veneto*]. My purpose here is to use general conclusions about the theatrical year as a background against which to profile Vivaldi's theatrical involvements. The variable starting point of the year (the possibilities number at least eight) is paramount to understanding why theaters were open at some times and not

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<sup>1</sup> The general principles of Venetian time-keeping are given in *Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice*, while the sequence of individual works and relevant documentation can be found in *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660-1760* (both Stanford University Press, 2007). Taken together, they form the series called *The Calendar of Venetian Opera*.



others. Some calendarial markers were moveable feasts, and therefore the lengths of periods and seasons dependent on them were somewhat elastic.

## 1. YEARS, SEASONS AND PERIODS

All discussions of the Venetian theater that look below the level of the year come to focus on seasons, because seasons (autumn, winter, spring) are mentioned ubiquitously in opera libretti. Close comparison of the ways in which the terms are used reveals that these designations are insecure as specifications of the year because the definition of the seasons was in constant flux. Nor were the seasons comparable in length or importance. Taking the various levels of Venetian time-keeping into account, I constructed a model of the year with artificial segments called theatrical periods (Fig. 1). 1 October sits at the top of the pie-chart.

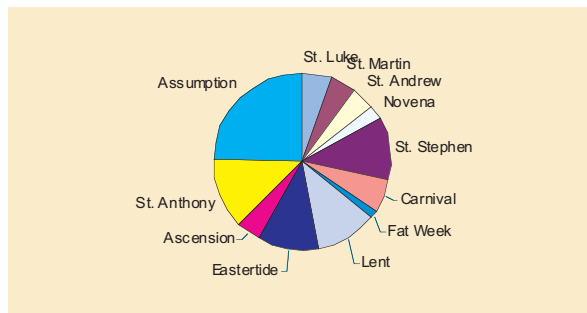


Figure 1. The 12-part division of the theatrical year. At one time or another St. Luke's, St. Martin's, St. Andrew's, St. Stephen's, Carnival, Fat Week and Ascension were all periods during which either comedies or operas (or both) were offered at one or more theaters. Not all theaters participated in all periods. Ascension was not in regular use until the 1720s.

The model is especially useful for explaining how the constituent parts of seasons (i.e., periods) were grouped and coupled (or uncoupled) in various accounts of Venetian time. They are useful because those relevant to the theater corresponded more or less to the length of productions. Productions sometimes crossed periodic boundaries, but on the whole they tended to fall fairly squarely within a specific period. Because of their antecedents in medieval feasts, some periods are closely allied with works of dramaturgical distinct types.

Of the twelve periods that constitute the year, six were in use at the start of Vivaldi's working life, seven after 1720. Names of periods are derived from the vocabulary frequently used in news-sheets. Generally speaking, the autumn season consisted of St. Luke's, St. Martin's and St. Andrew's Periods (1-3); the winter, of a slowly shrinking St. Stephen's (5), a growing Carnival (6) and a Fat Week of fixed length but negligible importance for theaters, since it was filled with public entertainments and large private parties; and a short Ascension period (10), which was designated "spring" but filled only a small portion of the agricultural season so-named.



During the five periods during which Venetian theaters were not open,<sup>2</sup> separate but complementary activities involving music and drama occurred under other auspices. These could be both religious and private in Venice, but they were public and theatrical in some of the provincial cities of the Veneto.

The interactions between the year and the hour were such that the senatorial and academic years, which were roughly coincident, were bipartite. The “winter” schedule of the Senate, which commenced in principle from 30 September and lasted through the Tuesday of Holy Week, called for meetings in the afternoon. These were necessarily recessed, like all other work in Venice (save that of artisans near the Rialto) at sunset. It was precisely at sunset that Venetian theaters were permitted to open. They were required to close four hours after sunset [the variable time called 4 *ore*]. (In December and January, sunset occurred at what on the modern clock would be about 17:00. Thus theaters were closed by about 22:00.)

The winter schedule of the senate explains why operas were, in the seventeenth century, so heavily concentrated during the long nights of winter. Functionally, opera in the seventeenth century was designed to cater for the important princes and dukes enticed to Venice for political negotiations. Temporally, those exiting the Palazzo Ducale at sunset would have found the family box at the theater a convenient stop of recreation and refreshment (boxes were furnished and refreshments were regularly brought into boxes). It behooved visitors to be present when government bodies were sitting, and particularly when the government was reconvening after its long autumn *villeggiatura*. This occurred by degrees in late November and early December.

From the Wednesday of Holy Week through the feast of St. Michael (29 September), the Senate met in the morning.<sup>3</sup> It can be confidently stated that when an Ascension period of 14-17 days was introduced in 1720, it would not have been able to depend on the trade of government figures or those wishing to appear before government bodies. There was no physical convenience to be had by passing from an early morning meeting in the ducal palace, where adjournment would occur at midday, to a theater, for the theater would not open until roughly 20:30. Although the morning bells would have begun to ring on the longest days of the year around 3:30. The doge’s ritual trip to the Lido in the Bucintoro on Ascension, which became a cliché of diarists and painters in the eighteenth century, was a more regular attraction than opera.

<sup>2</sup> The latter part of Advent (the Novena of Christmas), Lent, Eastertide, St. Anthony’s and Assumption. St. Anthony’s was a time for occasional operas in Padua from roughly the 1670s onward, but until the arrival of Napoleon it was never used for opera in Venice.

<sup>3</sup> “Summer” mornings, at least in June and July, were considerable longer than “winter” afternoons. It is evident from the capacious *buste* that fill the state archives in Venice that more work was done in the summer (to capitalize on available heat and light) than in the winter. School and university sessions were held both in the morning and the afternoon during most of the year, but the hours were shorter in a “winter” defined along the similar terms to those of the senatorial winter and summer.



## 2. HOW THE THEATRICAL YEAR CHANGED DURING VIVALDI'S LIFETIME

Vivaldi was born at one of the pivotal points in Venetian opera history – a few weeks after the opening of San Giovanni Grisostomo and a year after that of Sant'Angelo. San Giovanni Grisostomo was an opulent house that charged a high price and lured more esteemed clientele than Sant'Angelo, which functioned for 71 years (1677-1748) on the edge of financial chaos, after which it succumbed to prose comedy. It perennially survived on hopes unmet and promises unkept. San Giovanni Grisostomo was in vigorous good health for most of its existence but had a speckled history from 1747, and presented only a handful of *drammi per musica* in ensuing years.

Prior to the establishment of these two houses, there were four theaters in which operas were performed through the end of the century. Of these, San Salvatore and San Cassiano vacillated between comedy and opera, although San Salvatore was renowned for the beauty of both its music and its productions. San Samuele, which like San Giovanni Grisostomo was owned by the Grimani brothers, produced only prose comedies until after the death of Vincenzo Grimani (1710). SS. Giovanni e Paolo, established in 1639, was also a Grimani theater. It was gradually eclipsed by San Giovanni Grisostomo and presented only a few works after 1700.

These changes created much of the turbulence which was a constant condition of Venetian opera. Whereas in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries one could be an opera composer for the whole of one's adult life, in the seventeenth century those who composed operas could survive only with regular employment of another kind. Vivaldi responded to changing times by becoming peripatetic. It is understandable that he constantly sought a better position, because after 1717 Venice found its finances (and certainly its international prestige) in rapid decline.

One significant cause of this decline can be traced to the War of the Spanish Succession (1700-13), which imposed financial hardship, as well as personal dislocation and periodic plagues, on much of northern Italy. Theatrical personnel could be stranded for months or years far away from their intended venues. Visitors curtailed their travel. Among the consequences were a rise of provincial opera and a purge of practices in Venice. Prologues, together with the lavish scenery and celebrated machines of the seventeenth century, largely disappeared. More "characterization" was left to instrumentation, which offered an inexpensive alternative to visual display. Comic intermezzi spiced lengthy treatments of classical lore with brief reflections on the anxieties of everyday life – especially manners, speech, dress and marriage prospects. These were real preoccupations of a Venice newly visited by those who were successful in trade but little schooled in classical subjects.



### 3. TIME-OF-YEAR ISSUES IN THEATRICAL RELATIONS

Although six theaters operated during many of Vivaldi's working years, San Giovanni Grisostomo cut such a wide swath that the theaters with more precarious finances (Sant'Angelo, San Cassiano and San Moisè) compensated for the competition in winter by offering works in the autumn. San Giovanni Grisostomo (in common with San Salvatore through 1700) pre-empted the St. Stephen's period, which began the day after Christmas and ran until the start of Carnival, which was usually declared open by the Capi of the Council of Ten a month before the start of Lent.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas San Giovanni Grisostomo almost always offered one new work during the St. Stephen's period and another during Carnival, Sant'Angelo retreated into the St. Martin's (mid-November) period in the 1690s. In that position it could avoid competition with San Giovanni Grisostomo. Other theaters soon joined into the autumn fray, however, and by the 1710s an opening in the St. Luke's period (mid-October) was not uncommon at Sant'Angelo. Here, they experienced little competition except from spoken comedy, which had long been a staple entertainment of the early autumn. San Giovanni Grisostomo had no interest in autumn works because the noble families who made up its main audience were ensconced in their villas on the mainland. Those who were available to attend operas given in October and early November had less exalted tastes than those who attended winter performances. They were also less likely to be oriented towards classical subjects. Their musical tastes are impossible to judge.

Against the profile of Venetian opera in general, we see Vivaldi consistently avoids any theatrical involvements in late autumn and early winter. This could be owing to the demands on his time of music for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, but it could also be a legacy of Sant'Angelo's retreat from confrontations during the St. Stephen's period. A theater that did not have a new work to show off was nonetheless open. However, theaters counted on first night revenues (from doubled ticket prices) to bolster their operations, and it may be that they were unable to lure people to attend when other openings were taking place.

A general phenomenon among those who composed operas over several decades was an apprenticeship spent on works for autumn followed by a mature period invested largely in works for the winter, especially Carnival. This was less the case with Vivaldi than with most other composers. Autumn works remained a staple of Vivaldi's theatrical involvements into the 1730s. Among autumn works, openings during the St. Luke's period were disproportionately high (Fig. 2), for a composer who today is among the best regarded of his era.

<sup>4</sup> After 1720, Carnival usually began (irrespective of the date of Easter) in the first half of January, but it was still the case that it could not open without the express sanction of the Capi, who announced the opening from the Loggetta of the Campanile on the Piazza.



Works which enjoyed most of their performances during the St. Luke's period included the original production of *Arsilda* (27 or 28 October 1716) and *Tieteberga* (18 October 1717).

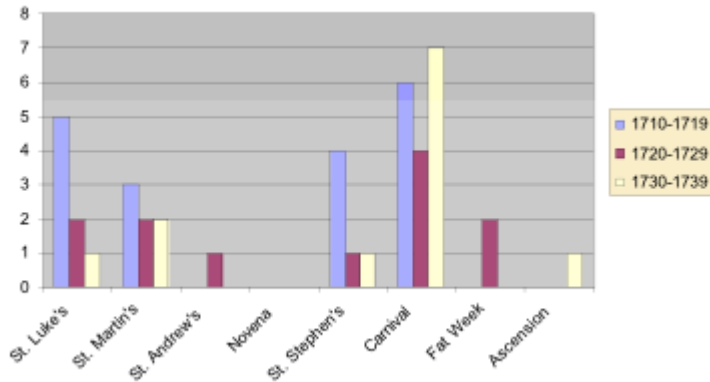


Figure 2. Theatrical periods in which the operas of Antonio Vivaldi opened, 1710-39.

Works by Vivaldi were also disproportionately unchallenged by other operatic activity. Among autumn instances of this phenomenon were *Orlando finto pazzo* (c. 10 October 1714) and *Motezuma* (14 November 1733). Of works that opened in direct competition with others, *La verità in cimento* (26 October 1720) ran successfully against Buini's *Il Filindo* at San Moisè, and this should surprise no one. However, if the competition was against San Giovanni Grisostomo, the outcome was less certain. *Orlando [furioso]* (1727/10), for example, opened one week after Giovanni Reali's *Il regno galante* (1727/9) at San Moisè and one week ahead of Porpora's *Arianna e Teseo* (1727/11) at San Giovanni Grisostomo. *Orlando* cannot have had a happy fate because it scuttled for a revised version (1727/12) of *Farnace* in early December. Into the bargain, Reali's work was dedicated by its librettist, Michel Angiolo Boccardi, to Antonio Ferdinando Gonzaga, the duke of Guastalla.<sup>5</sup> (*Arianna* was undedicated.)

As though to counterbalance the emphasis on early autumn, we find a significant concentration of works by Vivaldi at the other end of the conventional theatrical year, i.e., running only during the last ten or so days of Carnival. Most theaters avoided opening works so late in the season. As distractions mounted, it is unlikely that performances occurred every night, at least, at Sant'Angelo. During Fat Week (the last week before Lent), four days were filled with civic ritual, two more with special concoctions for the zany last nights of Carnival. A work that opened on, let us say, on the Tuesday before Shrove Tuesday may have had only two or three performances. Examples such as the pastiche *Nerone fatto Cesare* (c. 9 February 1715) are representative of the trivia that seemed to suit the slot. The only other theater that scheduled openings close to Fat Week was San Moisè, and it did so mainly in the 1720s. It

<sup>5</sup> Previously the dedicatee of *L'incoronazione di Dario*.



is clear than an opera which was performed at most five or six times could not have begun to draw revenues sufficient to support the production itself. At the same time, pastiches did not require the direct involvement of a composer, although they did require an accompanist who knew what the component parts of the work were.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. COMPOSER PROFILES BY PERIOD AND SEASON

Sant'Angelo's rank-and-file patrons seem, in many cases, to have been landed aristocracy from the far reaches of the Veneto. They prospered in the eighteenth century through farming, mining and trading, but they did not necessarily enjoy great respect among the nobility who governed the Serenissima. They may have been more comfortable visiting Venice when the government was in recess. It is not at all clear who recruited dedicatees at Sant'Angelo. At San Giovanni Grisostomo, the Grimani did much of the recruiting of singers and librettists, often with a view towards appropriate dedicatees. Sant'Angelo never followed this pattern. Its owners were not nearly as powerful politically as the Grimani, and several of its impresarios (excluding the Vivaldis) seem to have been pressed into service somewhat reluctantly. The rate of turnover of impresarios at Sant'Angelo was very high compared to that of other theaters. In some cases (following the usual example of other theaters), librettists wrote the dedications to libretti. Fairly often, at Sant'Angelo, impresarios wrote dedications.

When we look at the general characteristics of dedicatees for works set by Vivaldi's main contemporaries – C. F. Pollaro (c.1653-1723), Lotti (c.1667-1740) and Albinoni (1671-1751), for example – we see that none of them interacted with cyclical time in the same way as any of the others. This may owe to patterns of patronage, which although discussed in the *New Chronology* and *Song and Season*, cannot be adequately summarized here. General profiles are worth reviewing, however, because they separate these figures into two groups – Pollaro and Lotti, who worked chiefly at San Giovanni Grisostomo, and Albinoni and Vivaldi. Albinoni was substantially involved with Sant'Angelo, although he built his reputation as an opera composer alternating with Gasparini at San Cassiano. This is largely a story of those in favor with the rich and powerful versus those who were clever and resourceful but were not courted with the same favor.

The works of Pollaro and Lotti were largely concentrated in a few theatrical periods. Were it not for the fact that both established their careers at lesser theaters, there would have been still less activity in the autumn than we see in Figs. 3 and 4, because once they were taken on by San Giovanni Grisostomo there was no further call upon them for autumn works.

<sup>6</sup> By 1718 the principal cembalist at Sant'Angelo was Francesco Ziani (*I-Vas*, Capi, Consiglio dei Dieci, Notatorio, Busta 42, Fasc. 1717, entry of 22 January 1717 [=M.V.]), but it is not certain who filled that role earlier on.



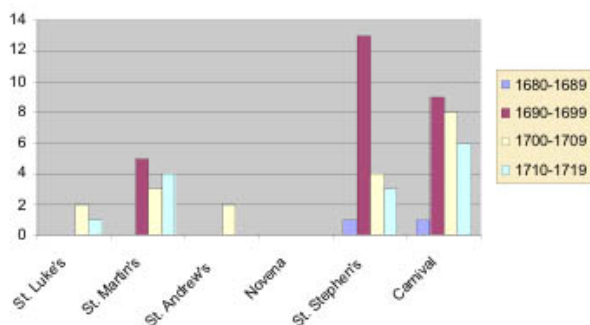


Figure 3. Theatrical periods in which the works of C. F. Pollarolo opened, 1680-1719.

Pollarolo's decade of greatest activity was 1690-99. The decline of his activity in the St. Stephen's period between the 1690s and 1710s reflects changes in the underlying situation of the Venetian theaters. It typifies the pattern of seasonal migration of many other composers.

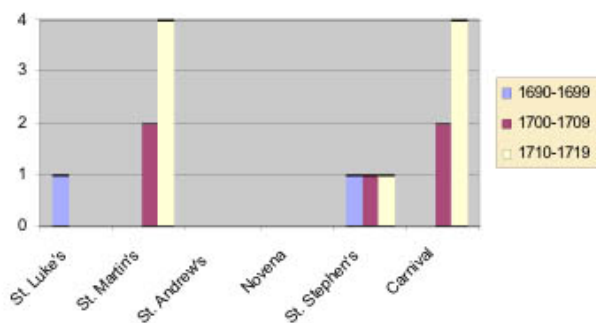


Figure 4. Theatrical periods in which the works of Antonio Lotti opened, 1690-1719.

Lotti's career as an opera composer was peculiar in that after his return from a three-year stay at the Dresden court (1717-1719, roughly coincident with Vivaldi's stay in Mantua), he never composed another opera for performance in Venice, whereas Vivaldi assumed ever greater responsibilities in the opera world, but sought his opportunities all over Italy, Austria and Bohemia. Lotti enjoyed immense respect as a composer of sacred vocal music, particularly in Germany, where he retained ties until his death (1740). The increase in his operas in the 1710s is ascribable partly to Pollarolo's gradual decline in that decade. It is noteworthy that the (autumn) St. Martin's period remained far more prominent among Lotti's commitments than the (winter) St. Stephen's one. Eventually rising to the position of *maestro di cappella* at San Marco, Lotti may have been more conscientious in composing new music for Christmas than Pollarolo, who, as an organist at the ducal church, was not expected to furnish new music with the same regularity. (As an organist, Pollarolo was less



encumbered by the need to write new keyboard pieces, because organists were expected to improvise their solo works and also to accompany vocal and instrumental music.)

Albinoni's activities as an opera composer were scattered across five decades and all the operative theatrical periods (Fig. 5). More like Vivaldi than like Pollaro or Lotti, Albinoni continued to provide works for the early autumn into the 1720s. Since he was not bilaterally a church composer, his theatrical activities during the St. Stephen's period were also robust. Albinoni seems to have been easily able to adapt to changing circumstances, and this extended to a few works for Ascension.

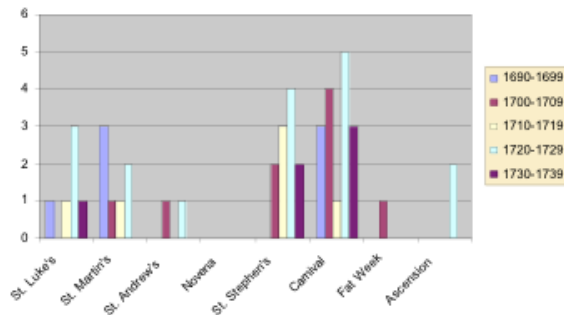


Figure 5. Theatrical periods in which the works of Tomaso Albinoni opened, 1690-1739.

## 5. THEATERS BY DECADE

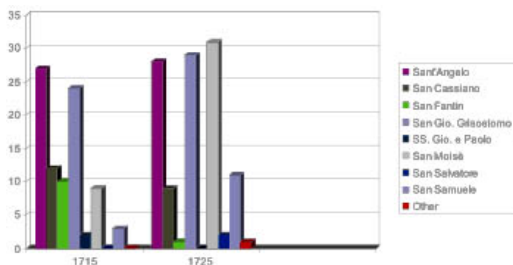
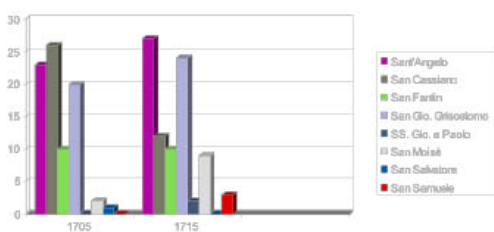
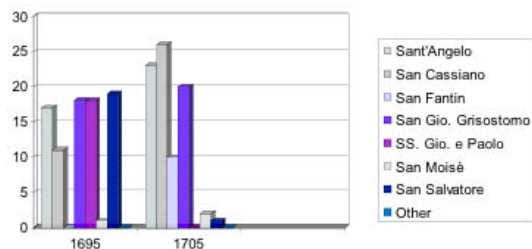
The chemistry of relations between composers, theatrical periods and the theaters themselves was not at all simple. Composers were fortunate when they settled into cozy relations with the management of the theater and when the theater did well. Theaters were almost always on guard, however. They had to respond to many circumstances beyond their control – vicissitudes of weather, desires of patrons, personnel issues, plagues and the whims of government. The first, fourth and fifth were common to all theaters, but the second and third were particular to each. Theaters often prepared for one eminent visitor, only to be frustrated at the last minute by his or her absence. The concept of “taste” as it was later to be known was almost never an issue affecting the financial backing for, or general success, of an opera. By Vivaldi's time, commentators might remark on singing and acting ability, whereas in the seventeenth century they had been more likely to notice the sets, the machines and the elaborate prologues. There was little effort to judge a work as a whole other than by the size of its audience (often as judged by the volume of the acclaim).

Theaters were essentially in competition for the same singers, although each one cultivated particular groups of singers. Many singers at Sant'Angelo during Vivaldi's years of activity were from Bologna. This implied singers who habituated to norms of entertainment which were not especially noted for acting or singing ability, nor were they associated with works that were highly

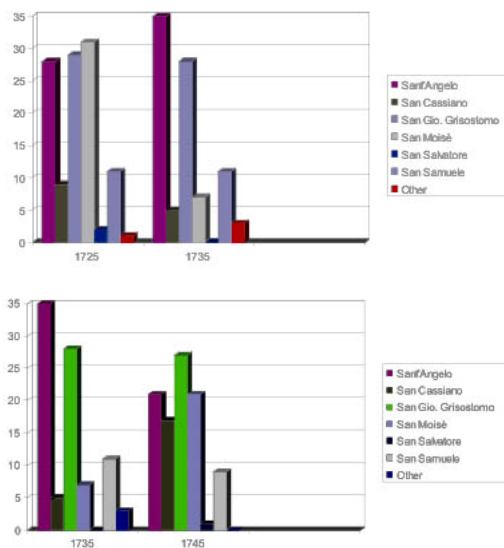


sophisticated dramaturgically. A disregard for classical ideals enabled Sant'Angelo to make exceptionally great use of "breeches" casting (female singers cast as male figures) – quite in contrast to the continuing use of castrati to portray noble female figures at San Giovanni Grisostomo. (The antecedents of Sant'Angelo's practice can be found in seventeenth-century usage.) San Giovanni Grisostomo clung to battle scenes, as befitted a repertory of bellicose works alluding to great military victories of the past, while the other theaters made more use of *balli*. In Vivaldi's day, battle scenes were rare outside San Giovanni Grisostomo, but this theater shunned comic intermezzi, which were the standard fare of Sant'Angelo and San Cassiano from 1706 onward. Sant'Angelo was singularly involved in spawning opera troupes that traveled up and down the Adriatic and across the Julian Alps in pursuit of new audiences. Their travels caused considerable impact on Sant'Angelo's ability to carry on in its accustomed ways in the 1720s and 1730s.

All these factors bear on the decade-by-decade profiles given in Figs. 6a-e, representing the fluctuations in offerings from theater to theater between 1690, when Albinoni and Pollaro were establishing their reputations, and 1750, by which the four composers profiled above were all dead and prose comedy had reclaimed some of what had been the "opera" year. (The central year of each decade is used to identify the decade itself.)







Figures 6a-e. These figures show each decade from 1700-09 through 1740-49 relative to the preceding one.

The competition between Sant'Angelo and San Giovanni Grisostomo was heightened by the fact that they were active to roughly the same extents over the same decades, even though they did not compete for the same audiences.

Together, however, they eclipsed all the other theaters of Venice. Only in the 1730s did Sant'Angelo manage to produce more works than San Giovanni Grisostomo. As we well know, Vivaldi played no significant role in that escalation. It was caused by Sant'Angelo's participation in the Ascension period in augmentation of its autumn and winter offerings. In this undertaking it competed only with San Samuele and San Moisè. Vivaldi's sole contribution to spring opera was *Griselda* (1735/5).

## 6. PATRONAGE AND SEASON

Although associations of particular theatrical periods with patronage profiles break down in the eighteenth century (partly because of the promotion of canonical texts by Zeno and Metastasio that were dedicated to no one), vestiges of the earlier system remained intact in Vivaldi's time. The most conspicuous political figures of the time were most likely to appear in Venice for Carnival, particularly if (a) they arrived in December to interact with the Venetian government or (b) they were en route to Rome or Loreto for Lent. Works given during the St. Stephen's period, which preceded the official period called Carnival, were more likely to find their dedicatees from among the leading families of Mantua, Modena, Florence or Rome. Works given in the autumn were less likely to be dedicated at all, but if they were, the dedicatees might be from the provinces of the Veneto or from adjacent duchies. (Provincial



opera had the advantage that autumn productions might find concourse from among the many noble families passing long weeks in *villeggiatura*. Such families were not limited to Venetians. We find many English noblemen among those ensconced in villas throughout the Veneto and a generous number of Austrians, Bohemians and Germans in Friuli.) Spring audiences seem to have been drawn primarily from those attending the Ascension mercantile fair.

It is against this background that we may evaluate the profiles of Vivaldi and his contemporaries. Pollarolo was a great favorite of those with imperial ties from his earliest years in Venice. A majority of the dedicatees of his works were themselves connected with the Empire.<sup>7</sup> In the 1690s Pollarolo's works also found patronage among Prussian officials. This, of course, is the profile that San Giovanni Grisostomo sought to cultivate. The Grimani brothers worked hard to maintain the theater's links with the Empire while, conversely, shunning French interests, particularly after 1700.

The dedicatees of Lotti's works were singularly prominent but not necessarily Germanic. Among them were Ferdinando della Torre (baron of Taxis), but also Isabella Cesi Ruspoli from Rome; Frederick IV of Denmark, but also Charles Mordaunt (count of Peterborough); Karl Ernst (count of Waldstein), but also John Churchill (duke of Marlborough).<sup>8</sup>

The dedicatees of Albinoni's works were somewhat less distinguished but broadly arrayed with respect to both nationality and social status. They included Jan Casimir Bochum, a Polish special ambassador; Giacomo Riccardi, a Venetian sergeant-general; Franz Anton, count of Berka; Louis-Nicolas de Neufville, the nephew of the governor of Lyon; Clement Augustus, the electoral prince of Bavaria; and Francesco Maria Pico, the duke of Mirandola (termed by one Venetian correspondent as the "prince of traitors" for his political dealings).<sup>9</sup>

Vivaldi's association with early autumn and just-before-Lent productions guarantees that dedicatees will have been atypical. We should not be surprised to encounter a disproportionately high ratio of landed gentry from the western edge of the Veneto and the hill towns of the *marche*. It is worth noting, however, that that 40 per cent of the works not only by Vivaldi but also by Lotti and Albinoni were dedicated to no one. (Works with recycled texts rarely had dedicatees, for these had traditionally been the people who had given employ to the poets of the texts. With the collapse of the duchies of Mantua, Modena and, eventually, Tuscany, the population of court poets was decimated.)

Of the dedicatees of the operas produced under the administration of G. B. and Antonio Vivaldi at Sant'Angelo (1712-14), the most distinguished was Aurora Sanseverino, the duchess of Laurenzano and one of the most noted female members of the Arcadian academy. She is a figure one might expect to

<sup>7</sup> Pollarolo worked with a wide range of librettists. Chief among them were Matteo Noris, Roberto Frigimelica-Roberti and Apostolo Zeno.

<sup>8</sup> Lotti's most frequent librettists were Francesco Silvani and Apostolo Zeno.

<sup>9</sup> Albinoni worked with a very broad array of librettists including Noris, Zeno and Silvani, as well as Antonio Marchi and Domenico Lalli.



find at San Giovanni Grisostomo sooner than at Sant'Angelo. A Neapolitan, she was honored with *La Gloria trionfante in amore* (1712/6). Among dedicatees at Sant'Angelo, the name most familiar to Vivaldi specialists would be that of Giuseppe Maria Gonzaga, the melancholic duke of Guastalla, who was the dedicatee of Ristori's *Orlando furioso* (1713/5). The Vivaldis seem still to have been in office late in 1714, when Pietro Denzio was expected to take over the position of impresario, and it may be they who deserve to be credited with recruiting the imperial general Karl, margrave of Baden-Baden, but it was Giuseppe Boniventi who was concurrently in their service, and the cast of *Orlando finto pazzo* (1714/4) included Elisabetta Denzio. The august Marsigli brothers (Angelo and Annibale) from Bologna were the dedicatees of Vivaldi's [first] *Orlando furioso* (1714/5), which was a singularly popular work – perhaps the most popular to be given at Sant'Angelo at any time before or after. In these years Grazio Braccioli was the usual librettist.

The influence of the Denzio troupe becomes very evident in 1715. A novel dedicatee was Karl Josef Novohradsky, a Slovakian count in whose honor the text of Predieri's *Lucio Papirio* (1715/1) was written. (There is some uncertainty over whether this work was actually performed.) One dedicatee of the next few years whose role in Vivaldi's life was probably significant was Pietro Emanuele Martinengo Colleone, the patron of *La costanza trionfante* (1716/3). This libretto (by Antonio Marchi) was the first to praise Vivaldi's skills as a composer. The Martinengos were very prominent in Brescia, but also held lands in the Bresciano and Bergamasco as well as on the island of Murano. *La costanza*, which developed a great following, was revived as *Artabano, re dei Parti* (1719/2). Antonio Ferdinando Gonzaga was the dedicatee of Vivaldi's *L'incoronazione di Dario* (1717/3), and we know that the Carnival was 1717 was stellar. In this case, the text was by the Mantuan court poet Adriano Morselli.

Although neither Vivaldi nor his peers may have recognized this, the composer's return to Venice in 1720 was not so much a continuation of his old life as the beginning of a new one in which he was more often away than present. It appears that Roman know-how was interjected into Sant'Angelo's presence by the involvement of the Valeriani brothers (Giuseppe and Domenico) in Vivaldi's homecoming work, *La verità in cimento* (1720/7). Palazzi's text as reworked by Domenico Lalli was dedicated to another Eastern European, Sava Vladaslavich-Raguzinsky, a councilor to the czar. Sant'Angelo at this juncture was under the management of Francesco Rossi. All the Vivaldi works of 1725-26 involved recycled texts. One of them, *La fede tradita e vendicata* (1726/3), was dedicated to Johann Mattheus, count of Schulemburg, who had been the dedicatee, a decade before, of Vivaldi's sole surviving oratorio, *Juditha triumphans*.

The most notable dedicatees of Vivaldi's last years were Leopold, count of Paar, for Palazzi's text of *Rosilena ed Oronta* (1728/2) and Friedrich, margrave of Brandenburg, the dedicatee of *Rosmira* (1738/2). Paar, an Austrian knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece, was one of the imperial delegates to the meeting of



the emperor and Venetian ambassadors in Trieste in September 1728.<sup>10</sup> One can easily imagine that he had some influence over the involvement of some ten Venetian musicians in the celebrated conclave at Trieste. Friedrich's connection to Sant'Angelo appears to have come about through the inclusion of the singer Giacomo Zaghini in the production of *Rosmira*. Zaghini was in the regular employ of Friedrich's wife, Sophie Dorothea.

For other Vivaldi operas of the 1720s and 30s, it seems probable that the dedicatee was a choice of the librettist Anton Maria Lucchini could have cultivated the interest of Antonio San Bonifacio, the dedicatee of *Dorilla in Tempe* (1726/9), more easily than Vivaldi. Federico Valignini, marquis of Cepagatti, the dedicatee of the libretto for *Griselda* (1735/5), was almost certainly Goldoni's choice. It was Goldoni who revised Zeno's text. His sole encounter with Vivaldi seems not have formed the basis of any continuing association: when Goldoni revived *Griselda* in the autumn of 1735, it was as a prose work with a cast of actors (*comici*). Ferdinando Monti, the dedicatee of Vivaldi's final opera, *Feraspe* (1739/4), could have been recruited by Bartolomeo Vitturi, who revised Silvani's text, or he could have been an occasional visitor to Venice.

The episodic nature of Sant'Angelo's base of support among figures from widely scattered locales was insecure and undependable. It cannot be a surprise that this foundation failed to support the theater up to the mid-century. Above all, Sant'Angelo was broadsided in the 1730s by the rise of prose comedy. Antonio Gori's *Le metamorfosi odiamorose* (1732/4)<sup>11</sup> changed the course of Venetian opera insofar as it demonstrated more fully than prior works of a similar nature the viability of setting comedies to music. *Le metamorfosi* could not have been more *au courant*, since it replaced the familiar image of virtuous Venice with the squabbles of Mestre and Marghera, as a *nouveau riche* gentleman with a heavy German accent seeks to engage first one, then the other. Had Vivaldi remained attached to Sant'Angelo into the 1740s, he would have been dismayed, and his reputation further diminished, by the uproar caused by the Mingotti troupe (1744-47) and their remarkably popular *opere buffe* at San Moisè.<sup>12</sup> The efforts of the Gozzi (1747-48) to reinvigorate Sant'Angelo failed, and in 1748 Goldoni signed a four-year contract as house dramatist. It marked the end of all opera at the theater with which Vivaldi had for so long been associated.

<sup>10</sup> My cordial thanks to Luigi Cataldi for this information.

<sup>11</sup> Newly edited, with extensive introductory material, as *Le metamorfosi odiamorose in birba trionfale (Mestre e Marghera)*, eds. Piernario Vescovo and Maria Giovanna Miggiani, Ravenna, Longo, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> MARIA GIOVANNA MIGGIANI, *Sulle tracce della troupe Mingotti*, forthcoming in these proceedings.