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# Musical Representation and Vivaldi's Concerto *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio*, RV 544/572

MASSIMO OSSI

The four concertos of Vivaldi's *Le quattro stagioni* have become emblematic of his "programmatic" compositions—and indeed of his instrumental music in general. The elaborate explicatory apparatus that accompanies them—the dedication, the sonnets keyed into the notated parts, as well as the additional comments in the parts that further characterize specific passages—has become so well known that it seems to require no further explanation. In fact, neither the *Seasons* themselves nor their elaborate presentation are typical of Vivaldi's output, as becomes apparent from even a superficial survey of his published concertos and his other works with titles.

It is rather the vagueness of his titles—such as "Il piacere" (Pleasure) or "Il riposo" (Repose)—that is the norm, and their relationship to the music can best be described as enigmatic rather than explicatory; their function seems to be to pose a hermeneutic problem, rather than to provide a ready-made guide to the music. As well as giving titles to individual concertos, Vivaldi attached them to instrumental collections, implying overall themes, as in *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* (The Trial of Harmony and Invention), whose actual significance still tantalizes commentators.<sup>1</sup> To complicate matters further, some titles appear to have been added after the fact, which makes their relationship to the music at best ambiguous, and modern scholars have been divided in their assessment of the programmatic nature of the named concertos. This raises questions about Vivaldi's compositional practice. Did the title guide the composition, or was it an afterthought? In either case, what is its function in the reception of the piece? Even accepting that the title does have hermeneutic import, within what context should it be viewed? And, most importantly, how far can it take its audience into the workings of the music?

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1. See, for example, Everett's discussion of the problem in *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 7–19.

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This article takes a particularly intriguing concerto, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* (Proteus, or The World Upside Down), as the point of departure for an investigation of Vivaldi's use of titles, and of his contemporaries' attitudes toward musical mimesis, using the metaphors invoked by the title to delineate the hermeneutic discourse generated by named compositions in general. Accepting titles as integral to musical works, rather than dismissing them as merely a superimposed veneer, initiates an open-ended, culturally grounded dialectic process between music and verbal cues, in which, rather than providing the "key" to a fixed meaning that the music supposedly expresses, the title serves to stimulate the listener's imagination to puzzle out a range of potential meanings.

The title of *Il Proteo* invokes a popular metaphor, the *mundus inversus*, and a mythological figure (Proteus) whose name had long been used as an adjective ("protean"); these components were part of the vocabulary of the time. This pairing of references poses an immediate question: what is a musical "protean upside-down world"? The title challenges the audience to shoulder the burden of constructing a hermeneutic framework by both puzzling the significance of the given metaphors and hearing the musical text in relation to them—in essence, to take an active role in the creation of the music's meaning. The process is not unlike the deciphering of emblems, in which a group of symbols, images, and texts provides the framework by which meaning is generated. A listener is not obliged to take up that challenge, but disregarding the title altogether leads to a trivial solution (one that merely sidesteps the issue); moreover, as will become apparent, approaching this particular piece as "abstract" music raises some questions of style and technique that may lead to the conclusion that it is not a particularly good composition and can therefore be dismissed altogether.

Unlike emblems, however, whose solution is guided by long-established and generally understood principles, the question of instrumental music's mimetic potential was only just beginning to be explored in the early eighteenth century. Programmatic compositions were still relatively uncommon—it is not by accident that a small number of examples stand out in hindsight and are repeatedly cited in the musicological literature—and their purpose and the ways in which they functioned, at least for modern historians, remain equivocal.

### *Il Proteo* and Its Patron

At some point in the mid-1720s Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni acquired a large collection of works by Vivaldi that comprised twenty-six concertos and twelve sonatas for solo violin. The preparation of the manuscripts was clearly an important task that must have required Vivaldi's attention. Not only is it likely that he chose the individual concertos, but he even participated in the

copying: thirteen of the concertos are either entirely or partly in his hand. The connection between Vivaldi and Ottoboni extended beyond the sale of these concertos to include the cardinal's other major interest, opera.

Ottoboni, who was Venetian by birth, spent almost his entire life in Rome, first under the tutelage of his great-uncle, Pope Alexander VIII, and then as cardinal and vice-chancellor of the church.<sup>2</sup> As vice-chancellor he inhabited the famous Palazzo della Cancelleria, where he housed both his great-uncle's and his own extensive art collections, and where he built a theater, designed by the architect Filippo Juvarra, for the production of operas, which included works by Alessandro Scarlatti and Handel. As patron of the Accademia degli Arcadi, which emerged in 1690 from the academy that had been organized by Queen Christina of Sweden and that had been left directionless after her death in 1689, Ottoboni, who was himself a librettist and had aspirations as a theatrical impresario, established himself at the relatively young age of twenty-two as one of Rome's most important patrons of art and arbiter of *buon gusto*. Among his musicians were Corelli, Bernardo Pasquini, the violinist Filippo Amadei, and the castrato Andrea Adami.<sup>3</sup>

Vivaldi's operas had been heard in Rome for the first time during Carnival of 1723 (*Ercole sul Termodonte*) and again in 1724 (*Il Tigrane* and *Il Giustino*), and in later life he claimed to have been in Rome for three opera seasons.<sup>4</sup> It is entirely likely that when in Rome he established his connection with Ottoboni, who was the patron of the Teatro Capranica where the three operas were performed during the early 1720s, and also that he was again in contact with the cardinal in Venice when the latter visited the city in 1726—the year in which it is assumed Vivaldi assembled his collection for him.<sup>5</sup>

In the years leading up to Vivaldi's activity in Rome and his cultivation of Ottoboni, the cardinal had sought, and eventually obtained in 1710, an official relationship with France as Protector of the French Crown in the College of Cardinals. The appointment met with official disapproval in Venice, where he was accused of treason, his family property was confiscated, and his family was removed from the *Albo d'Oro* that recorded the lineage of Venetian nobility. These strictures were lifted in 1720 after the death of Ottoboni's father and he was able to reclaim his inheritance;<sup>6</sup> this also cleared the way for his eventual return to the city. Ottoboni's Francophile leanings may account for Vivaldi's emphasis on named concertos in

2. On the cardinal's extensive artistic activities and patronage, see Olszewski, "Enlightened Patronage," 139–65, and La Via, "Il Cardinale Ottoboni."

3. Olszewski, "Enlightened Patronage," 139–44.

4. Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 52–53. On Vivaldi's singers, including the castrato Giovanni Ossi, who sang in both *Ercole* and *Il Giustino*, see Monson, "Trail of Vivaldi's Singers," 563–89.

5. By association, Everett dates the original version of *Il Proteo* (RV 544), on which the Ottoboni revision is based, to sometime after 1724; see his "Vivaldi Concerto Manuscripts: II," 35.

6. Olszewski provides the basic facts of the relationship between Ottoboni, France, and Venice in "Enlightened Patronage," 151, 153.

assembling works for the cardinal, given the French vogue for programmatic and titled works.

In light of the patron's importance, it is tempting to read at least some elements of self-fashioning into the particular mix of concertos that wound up in Ottoboni's possession. Like *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione*, op. 8, which was published in 1725 and is nearly contemporaneous with it, the Ottoboni collection includes a large number of titled concertos, eleven out of the opening group of sixteen (see Table 1).<sup>7</sup> The timing suggests that Vivaldi's name was perhaps being associated with the composition of programmatic pieces precisely in the years leading up to the publication of op. 8, and that Ottoboni was eager to own a representative sample of this new concerto type, or that Vivaldi himself wanted to reinforce this association by including them in the collection. The fact that five of the most important concertos from op. 8 appear among the manuscripts for Ottoboni would suggest that perhaps his acquisition might predate the appearance of the published version, otherwise Ottoboni could simply have bought the print itself.

The collection opens with *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio*, RV 572, a reworked version for winds and strings of the double concerto in F major for violin, cello, and strings, RV 544.<sup>8</sup> This arrangement, partly in the composer's own hand, would have worked well for Ottoboni's private ensemble, one of the earliest in Italy to include winds as well as strings, as it is scored for two *traversi* and two oboes in addition to *violino principale*, solo cello, first and second violin, viola, *basso*, and solo cembalo.<sup>9</sup> On the face of it, however, it would have had little to recommend itself to a discerning patron of Ottoboni's stature, as it seems to have been arranged on the fly by Vivaldi, who appears not to have taken the trouble to fix problems that rendered the wind parts awkward and in places even unplayable. Moreover, unlike the other works in the collection, *Il Proteo* appears at first glance to have been intended as a kind of musical joke or curiosity: the solo violin and cello parts of RV 544 were notated in each other's clefs, with the instruction that each player could choose to play either part, and this trick is retained in the Ottoboni version. With the addition of wind parts doubling the violin and

7. Table 1 reflects the list of concertos given in Everett, "Vivaldi Concerto Manuscripts: I," 24–25, and contains only the first sixteen concertos.

8. The concerto survives in two manuscript sources, one in Ottoboni's collection, which now resides in the Henry Watson Music Library in Manchester, UK, and a second, of unknown origin, in the Giordano-Foà collection of the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria in Turin. Paul Everett has recently published a new edition of the concerto (Vivaldi, *Two Versions*), and provides detailed discussions of the Ottoboni source in his earlier trilogy of articles "Vivaldi Concerto Manuscripts." See also his "Roman Concerto Repertory" and Talbot, "Vivaldi and Rome."

9. Federico Maria Sardelli has argued that Vivaldi knew of the availability of oboes and flutes in the cardinal's ensemble and would have adapted the concerto accordingly: Sardelli, *Vivaldi's Music*, 39–40. Everett finds Sardelli's argument "persuasive" but cautions that "it is not safe to assert as fact that RV 572 . . . [was] designed specifically for Ottoboni's orchestra": Vivaldi, *Two Versions*, v.

**Table 1** Vivaldi concertos acquired by Pietro Ottoboni between 1723 and 1726

MS order	RV no.	Title	Hand	Paper	Reworked from
1	572	<i>Il Proteo</i>	part autograph	Venetian	544, with added <i>traversi</i> , oboes and cembalo concertante
2	294	<i>Il ritiro</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
3	270	<i>Il riposo</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
4	391	[none]	not Vivaldi	Venetian	
5	234	<i>L'inquietudine</i>	autograph	Venetian	
6	90	<i>Il gardellino</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
7	302	[none]	not Vivaldi	Roman	
8	349	[none]	part autograph	Venetian	
9	269	<i>La primavera</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
10	315	<i>L'estate</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
11	293	<i>L'autunno</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
12	297	<i>L'inverno</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
13	253	<i>La tempesta di mare</i>	not Vivaldi	Venetian	
14	286	[none]	part autograph	Venetian	
15	95	<i>La pastorella</i>	part autograph	Venetian	
16	334	[none]	not Vivaldi	Roman	

cello, often high in their range, the result cannot have been especially pleasing, suggesting that the point of the piece (assuming that it was not merely a hastily made arrangement) may have had more to do with its title than with its aesthetic merits. In producing RV 572 Vivaldi focuses on the solo episodes in order to accommodate the wind instruments; the ritornellos are left untouched, with the exception of the addition of winds doubling the upper string parts. The manuscript is almost entirely in Vivaldi's hand, and Paul Everett notes that it gives the impression that he was working quickly, very likely directly from the original score: a number of awkward passages, particularly at the ends of solos, suggest that he did not want to bother with actual recomposition, but settled instead for a less than ideal fit for the wind instruments, with parallel octaves, notes outside the natural range, and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Everett concludes that the anomalies of this rescoring are the result of Vivaldi's working under time constraints in advance of a particular performance or perhaps of the cardinal's departure from Venice, and that the composer was either unaware of, or chose to ignore, the problems created by the introduction of new instruments.<sup>11</sup> I will return to this point at the end of the article; however odd the arrangement might appear, the Manchester

10. Everett, "Vivaldi Concerto Manuscripts: II," 29–31.

11. *Ibid.*, 30–31.

material at least preserves one of the few extant examples of Vivaldi's arranging process. As for how the result might have struck the cardinal's expert ear, one can only speculate. Nevertheless, a close inspection of the style and structure of *Il Proteo* suggests that, for a discerning listener familiar with Vivaldi's approach to concerto composition, or who had the opportunity to hear this work alongside less eccentric pieces, the anomalies evident in the opening measures would raise questions about the workings of the concerto, the metaphors of the title, and the nature of musical representation.

## Vivaldi and Musical Representation

By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries music's powers of imitation or representation were already a contested subject, drawing criticism and requiring careful definition. As early as the 1580s, in his *Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna*, Vincenzo Galilei expressed the view that musical representation, although common in vocal music, was in bad taste.<sup>12</sup> And by the 1620s Monteverdi, at the time perhaps the most sophisticated and ambitious practitioner of the art of musical representation, addressed the central problem of what natural models instrumental music could reproduce, and to what end:

Music can suggest, *without any words*, the noise of winds and the bleating of sheep, the neighing of horses and so on and so forth; but it cannot imitate the speech of winds because no such thing exists [my emphasis].<sup>13</sup>

For Monteverdi, working within the parameters of dramatic music, verisimilitude—the context for representation—was the governing principle and music could credibly reproduce the sounds of “things”; as speaking characters “winds” lacked credibility, although as natural phenomena their noise could be represented even without verbal cues. In Italy, such an interest in musical representation did not continue in any significant way after Monteverdi's lifetime,<sup>14</sup> although in France, Austria, and elsewhere there

12. Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 125–26.

13. Monteverdi, letter to Alessandro Striggio, December 9, 1616, in Monteverdi, *Letters*, 117.

14. There are isolated examples, such as Marco Uccellini's “Maritati insieme la gallina e il cucco” (The Marriage of the Hen and the Cuckoo) from his *Sonate, arie et correnti* (1642), but thus far they have not been shown to constitute a consistent trend. For an introduction to seventeenth-century birdsong pieces, see Brewer, “Songs of Biber's Birds.” The penchant of Italian composers for naming sonatas (such as Carlo Farina's “La franzosina” and “La desperata,” or Tarquinio Merula's “La Vincenza,” “La Gonzaga,” or even “La Merula”) seems to reflect associations with particular patrons or musicians rather than suggest a programmatic intent. Programmatic music in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has not been surveyed systematically, making generalizations problematic.

was some interest in programmatic pieces, exemplified by such works as Louis Couperin's *tombeau* for Monsieur Blancrocher for harpsichord,<sup>15</sup> Marin Marais's viola da gamba sonata "The Gallbladder Operation," Heinrich Biber's *Rosenkranz-Sonaten*, and Johann Kuhnau's "Biblical Sonatas."

In spite of a nascent interest in what Carolyn Abbate calls "plastic images [and] natural scenes" (properly, mimesis or representation, as opposed to the later "drama and plot" that characterizes true "program" music) in instrumental composition, the seventeenth century did not generate a body of prose about the aesthetic implications of musical imitation. From the modern historian's perspective, the practice of composing such pieces in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is thus woefully under-theorized by comparison with later repertoires.<sup>16</sup> Programmatic music has as a result been considered largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon, having at best rudimentary precedents that are viewed, however incorrectly, as belonging to an innocent, unproblematic age in which composers could represent nature, emotions, and even abstract concepts in instrumental pieces without giving the process a second thought.<sup>17</sup> In fact, as statements as early as Galilei's and Monteverdi's demonstrate, such an uncomplicated age of naive, unexamined musical representation probably never existed.

In his discussion of *Le quattro stagioni* (RV 269, 315, 293, 297) in the dedication of *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* to his patron Count Wenzel von Morzin, Vivaldi expressed anxiety over how the publication of these already familiar concertos might be regarded. His emphasis on the inclusion of the sonnets and other verbal cues as a means of expanding the listener's experience of the music apparently expresses his own concern with imitation and the communication of concrete images through music. His special pleading for the "newness" of the music in light of its literary recontextualization cuts straight to the heart of the matter, and perhaps even suggests that the subject of musical imitation had already been discussed with his patron on the occasion of earlier performances of the concertos.

15. While *tombeaux* in general might not fit into the category of program music, the *tombeau* for Blancrocher, with its final truncated descending scale that never reaches the tonic, reflects the circumstances of Blancrocher's death from falling down a staircase and breaking his neck.

16. Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 20.

17. Richard Will shows how German composers and critics grappled with the problem of representation in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Will, *Characteristic Symphony*, esp. 129–43. Examining a period closer to Vivaldi's time, Steven Zohn contextualizes Telemann's characteristic overture-suites in light of contemporary writings both by composers (Telemann himself, Johann Kuhnau) and by such writers on aesthetics as Jean-Baptiste Du Bos and Johann Adolph Scheibe: Zohn, *Music for a Mixed Taste*, 65–72. Emotion, rather than depiction, was their focus, although earlier writers such as Kuhnau had argued that emotion could be achieved by depicting objects or events.



Musical imitation seems to have occupied Vivaldi's attention over an unspecified period prior to the publication of *Il cimento*, by which time he had devised a further elaboration of this concept:

Your Most Illustrious Lordship will find here the Four Seasons, for so long regarded with indulgence by the generous goodness of Your Most Illustrious Lordship; be assured that I have judged it a good idea to publish them, because although they are in every way the same, *albeit expanded* not only by the sonnets but also with *clear indications of all the things that are illustrated in them*, I am certain that *you will find them new* [my emphasis].<sup>18</sup>

It may seem an exaggeration for Vivaldi to maintain that familiar works somehow appear “new” when heard in light of having put into words “all the things that are illustrated in them.” But he is keen to make this point, and with good reason.

Numerous passages within the *Seasons* consist of music whose illustrative purpose cannot be understood solely on the basis of hearing. Unlike the birdcalls in the first movements of *La primavera* and *L'estate*, which connect to a well-known tradition of birdcall imitations in instrumental music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many passages in the *Seasons* do not readily convey their representational function. For example, the ritornello of the first movement of *La primavera*, intended to announce “Giunt'è la primavera” (Spring has arrived), contains no specific signifiers, and its bright, perky character might well convey nothing at all were it not for its title and descriptive sonnet (thanks to which it has become a universal symbol of the season). Similarly ambiguous are such passages as “the horrid wind” in the first movement of *L'inverno* or “Il pianto del villanello” (The tears of the young peasant) in the second movement of *L'estate*; even the insertion of the “flowing brook” passage in the ritornello of the first movement of *La primavera* or the insistent pizzicato representing the drumming of raindrops on the roof in the second movement of *L'inverno* are not obvious as imitative effects. Indeed, given the complexity of the sequence of images presented by the sonnets (they cannot properly be described as narratives, although the combination of text and music may not be said to be undramatic or plotless either, lying somewhere between mimesis and program), most listeners might not garner more than a general impression of the subject matter from listening to the concertos themselves without the verbal program provided by the sonnets, their perceptions probably varying according to their experience of musical representation in other genres, such as opera.<sup>19</sup>

18. Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 8: “V. S. Ill.ma troverà le quattro stagioni sino dà tanto tempo compatite dalla Generosa Bontà di V. S. Ill.ma, mà creda, che hò stimato bene stamparle perche ad ogni Modo che siano le Stesse pure essendo queste accresciute, oltre li Sonetti con una distintissima dichiarazione di tutte le cose, che in esse si spiegano, sono certo, che le giungerano, come nuove.” Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

19. Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 40–43.

The rubrics printed in the parts, together with the key letters linking passages in the music with specific images in the sonnets, could also be seen as providing performers with clues as to how particular passages should sound (an example being the viola part in the second movement of *La primavera*, which is marked “il cane che grida”—the dog that barks—clearly not meant to be either beautiful or blended into the texture, suggesting at least a rough attack).<sup>20</sup> Performers who strive to realize their parts in light of the sonnets, and following the “clear indications of all the things that are illustrated in them” contained in the rubrics, will undoubtedly convey the spirit of the music in such a way that, again, even a listener familiar with it might find it “new.”

Even if the music was not new, Vivaldi boldly maintained that the attitude of the audience itself toward the music had been changed by reading the texts, and its experience of the concertos therefore could not be the same as before. No Italian composer of his time—or of any time since Monteverdi’s—had made such a bold claim for the way instrumental music could engage its listeners’ imaginations, nor such a clear case for the intrinsic link between the “extra-musical” verbal description of a program and the perception of the music to which it is applied, although, as we have seen, composers did explore such possibilities elsewhere in Europe. For example, a similar line of thought pervaded François Couperin’s preface to his first book of *Pièces de clavecin* (1713), which includes a number of movements with titles that resemble Vivaldi’s—“Les papillons” (Butterflies) and “Les ondes” (The Waves), as well as the more abstract and psychological “Les regrets” (Regrets) and “Les idées heureuses” (Happy Thoughts). In it he remarks on the process of composing with particular ideas as points of reference:

I have always had an object in composing all of these pieces; different occasions have furnished them to me. Thus the titles correspond to the ideas that I have had; I may be excused for not rendering an account of them.<sup>21</sup>

We can only speculate about Vivaldi’s theoretical understanding of the stakes, but it seems likely that he was at least aware of the issues involved. Questions of aesthetic theory had become increasingly important for philosophers in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and the nature of certain arts—music, painting, poetry, and drama among them—as “imitative” was central to debates occurring throughout Europe. Although most of the discussion took place in England and France it had widespread repercussions, as ideas about imitation and its particular manifestations in the various arts seemed to circulate quickly and widely during the first half

20. I am indebted to Kristina Muxfeldt for this suggestion.

21. Couperin, *Œuvres complètes*, 2/1:10: “J’ay toujours eu un objet en composant toutes ces pièces: des occasions différentes me l’ont fourni. Ainsi les titres répondent aux idées que j’ay eues; on me dispensera d’en rendre compte,” translated in Fuller, “Of Portraits,” 167.

of the eighteenth century. The Arcadian Academy, of which Ottoboni was patron (under the pseudonym Crateo Pradelini), participated in such debates and involved librettists as well as composers.<sup>22</sup>

In the years in which Vivaldi was exploring the possibilities of mimetic or quasi-programmatic composition, the Venetian clergyman, scientist, mathematician, and later literary theorist Antonio Conti was developing ideas of musical mimeticism that resonate with Vivaldi's compositions:

It is not enough that music should awaken the passions; it should also awaken ideas, because the soul loves passion no less than meditation. *Now music cannot make us think, except through imitation*, nor can it imitate in any way other than by *imparting to the nerves those vibrations that they receive from things both animate and inanimate*. The murmuring of the waters, the din of tempests, the bellowing of earthquakes, the crashing of thunder and lightning, the whispering of the leaves, the whistling of the winds, are different kinds of noise that pierce the eardrum differently. Thus, if we can find the proportion of their sounds, and assign it to a musical instrument, then every time this instrument sounds we will believe that we are hearing the thing itself that is being imitated [my emphasis].<sup>23</sup>

For Conti, musical works, even non-theatrical ones, can engender both emotions and "ideas" in their audience through the accuracy of their imitation. "Ideas" in this context does not necessarily refer to abstractions, but rather to mental images elicited by presenting the "nerves" with stimuli that recall those imparted by already familiar phenomena. There was a great deal of confusion as to what difference there may be, if any, between "ideas" and "emotions," and what music was capable of generating. James Harris, for example, in his *Three Treatises Concerning Art* (1744), maintained that "the genuine charm of music" was "not in imitations [of] and the raising [of] ideas, but in the raising [of] affections, to which ideas may correspond."<sup>24</sup>

22. Carter, "Arcadian Academy." Alongside librettists Apostolo Zeno, Pietro Metastasio, and for a time Girolamo Gigli, the academy also included composers such as Alessandro Scarlatti and Leonardo Vinci, as well as philosophers such as Ludovico Muratori. On the academy's aesthetic thought, see Minor, *Death of the Baroque*, esp. ch. 5, "A Short History of the Academy of the Arcadians."

23. Antonio Conti, "Trattato dell'imitazione," in *Prose e poesie*, vol. 2 (1739 and 1756), quoted in Fertonani, *Antonio Vivaldi*, 32: "Non basta che la musica svegli le passioni; conviene ancora che risvegli l'idee, poichè l'anima non ama meno d'appassionarsi che di meditare. Ora non può farci pensare la musica, che per via d'imitazione, né può in altra guisa imitare, che dando a' nervi quelle stesse vibrazioni, che lor danno i suoni ch'escono dalle cose animate ed inanimate. Il mormorio dell'acque, il fracasso delle tempeste, il muggito de' terremoti, il fragor de' tuoni e de' fulmini, il sibilo delle foglie, il fischio de' venti, sono varie spezie di strepito, che feriscono diversamente il timpano dell'orecchia. Se dunque si trovi la proporzione de' loro suoni, e si dia allo stromento musicale; ogni volta che questo suoni, si crederà d'udir la cosa medesima imitata."

24. Quoted in Lippman, *History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, 100.

Although Conti's "Trattato dell'imitazione" was not published until 1756 in the second volume of his collected works (*Prose e poesie*), by which point both its author and Vivaldi had died (in 1749 and 1741 respectively), the substance of Conti's aesthetic thought had much earlier roots.<sup>25</sup> His ideas were developed in the years in which he was first in England (1715–18) and subject to the influence of Joseph Addison, Francis Hutcheson, Anthony Ashley Cooper (third Earl of Shaftesbury), and, most importantly, John Locke; Conti's writings show a deep knowledge of their work, which he analyzes and critiques at length.<sup>26</sup> The theories he acquired from his readings in England were further refined in Paris, where he met Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, whose notions on mimesis echo throughout Conti's writings. Conti was drawn into Parisian musical life, particularly the circles that were partial to Italian music. The correspondence he conducted from Venice in the later 1720s with Countess Marthe-Marguerite de Caylus, whose salon at the Luxembourg he had frequented, is filled with reports of Venetian musical life that would have been of interest to his friends. The focus falls mostly on operas and singers, and on Venetian musical fashions; he was particularly close to Benedetto Marcello and he liked Vivaldi, especially his *Farnace*, although he found it to contain errors of verisimilitude.<sup>27</sup>

Du Bos, one of the earliest and most widely circulated eighteenth-century writers on the arts, held that music was directly aligned with poetry and painting:

The basic principles that govern music are . . . similar to those that govern poetry and painting. Like poetry and painting, music is an imitation. . . . [It] cannot be good unless it conforms to the general rules that apply to the other arts on such matters as choice of subject and exactness of representation.<sup>28</sup>

For Du Bos, instrumental music could also convey "imitative truth" in natural sounds, especially when it occurred within dramatic works. The essential purpose of music was to move the affections, and it failed to do so when its purpose was not imitation, for only through imitation could the listener's passions be affected.<sup>29</sup> Conti's position, developed from his contacts with and readings of writers abroad, strikes a fleeting but resonant chord in favor

25. On Conti's aesthetics, see Melillo, *L'opera filosofica di Antonio Conti*, 93–96, 136–44; Pugliese, "Aesthetics of Antonio Conti"; and Ariani, *Drammaturgia e mitopoiesi*.

26. Hamm, "Antonio Conti," 12–27.

27. The countess had some training in acting and singing. Her son, Anne-Claude-Philippe de Thubières de Grimoard, Count Caylus, was an avid musical amateur, and Conti sent her a variety of scores for him, including a cantata by Nicola Porpora and an aria by Tommaso Albinoni, as well as two cantatas on his own texts (*Il convito di Alessandro* and *La Casandra*); see Conti, *Lettere da Venezia*, 13, 46–57. For Conti's comments on Vivaldi, see *ibid.*, 48–49.

28. Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Reflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719), quoted in Lippman, *History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, 86.

29. *Ibid.*, 86–87.

of musical mimeticism, a chord that rings dissonantly against the background of rationalistic denial of musical mimesis, increasingly articulated by eighteenth-century writers on aesthetics.

For Du Bos, Conti, and others who contemplated the question of how music generated its effects, the boundaries between ideas and emotions were highly permeable and related to the notion of what the mind perceived as beautiful. As Elio Franzini puts it, “In the eighteenth century . . . there is in fact continuity, rather than a separation, between the pleasures of the senses and those of the intellect: and consequently the latter, too, are rooted in the sensible, in unconscious or confused perceptions.”<sup>30</sup> Intellectual pleasure focuses on the apprehension of proportions, of the rational mathematical relationships between component parts and the whole; sensual pleasure encompasses a range of sensations, including those generated by music, in which one might sense the existence of proportions but which one ultimately perceives as “beautiful.” Such perceptions, however, share one basic, and essential, element: they can be analyzed through a rational process, and that is the basis of aesthetic appreciation, as opposed to other forms of pleasure.<sup>31</sup> It is precisely this analytical impulse that is at once stimulated, and guided, by such elements as titles, programs, and poems integrated with musical compositions (but not themselves set to music). Daniel Chua argues that it was the act of naming that imbued instrumental music with the power to represent, to “occupy the conceptual spaces of the mind,” or, as Rousseau put it, “the word is the means by which the music most often determines the object whose image it offers us.”<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, a label makes all the difference: as Lawrence Kramer observes, Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* would be a different work were it titled *The Toothache*.<sup>33</sup> Without the sonnets, the *Seasons* are merely concertos infused with impressionistic features intended to evoke a range of feelings associated with the seasons of the year. For good measure, the cycle is punctuated by unambiguous effects, such as birdcalls, that confirm these impressions. Heard together with the poems, however, the concertos become detailed essays in the musical representation of particular, identifiable natural phenomena and of the emotional states these phenomena engender. The four sonnets fulfill a polyvalent function by connecting the performing and listening experience: they are keyed into the score for the performers, and are also available to the audience, now, as they were in Vivaldi’s time (as implied by his dedicatory essay). The poetry, in short, is an integral part of the finished composition,

30. Franzini, *L'estetica del Settecento*, 48: “Nel Settecento . . . vi è infatti continuità, e non frattura, tra i piaceri dei sensi e quelli intellettuali: e anche questi ultimi, di conseguenza, sono radicati nel sensibile, in percezioni inconscie o confuse.”

31. *Ibid.*, 48.

32. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768), s.v. “sonate,” quoted in Chua, *Absolute Music*, 88–89.

33. Kramer, *Classical Music*, 69.

put there by the composer to condition as much as possible the listener's response to the music. Unlike a more general title such as *Il Proteo*, then, it forecloses interpretive possibilities while sharpening a single one. Consequently, it highlights the way the representation is effected through the interactions of the various components with each other (as proportionally related components of the musical whole), making artifice as much a part of its subject matter as are the images and feelings it evokes. Vivaldi rightly contends, then, that heard in conjunction with the "clear indications of all the things that are illustrated in them" the *Seasons* are indeed new, because the focus of the listener's engagement with them has been radically altered by the added texts.

### Vivaldi's Problematic Titles

The *Seasons* remained an isolated case of representative overdetermination within Vivaldi's output. In Rousseau's later description of the exaggerations of the Italian sonata style, to "know what all this fracas of sonata would mean we must do as the painter who was obliged to write under his figure 'this is a tree,' 'this is a man,' 'this is a horse.'"<sup>34</sup> That, of course, is exactly what Vivaldi does, and Rousseau's caustic remark could easily have been aimed at the *Seasons*, which enjoyed sustained popularity in Paris from 1728 into the 1760s.<sup>35</sup>

Modern scholars, for their part, have found Vivaldi's titles puzzling at best, regarding them as clever marketing tools, often barely related to the music they introduce, and intended primarily to distinguish his works from those of his competitors in an attempt to lure eighteenth-century customers toward something apparently novel and intriguing.<sup>36</sup> Indirect evidence to bolster this view has been derived from Vivaldi's notoriously commercial attitude toward composition. Instances such as the one described by Johann Friedrich Armand von Uffenbach in 1715, in which his audience with the composer resulted in his obtaining a set of ten concerti grossi, "which he claimed to have composed especially for me" in the space of three days, together with a rather pushy offer of private violin lessons, support such notions, and when combined with the high prices Vivaldi commanded for his works have led to the view that "music could, in the Venetian environment, become a simple commodity turned out to order for the casual visitor."<sup>37</sup>

34. Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique*, s.v. "sonate," quoted in Chua, *Absolute Music*, 90.

35. Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 3–5.

36. Michael Talbot discusses the general characteristics of Vivaldi's output of titled or programmatic concertos in what is still the standard study of the composer: Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 121–23. Paul Everett treats the question of titles and their interpretation in his *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 15–18, 50–59, 67–90. The focus is largely on the *Seasons*, but his comments are applicable generally to other titled concertos, which he discusses in passing.

37. Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 43–44.

Given the composer's own apparently casual attitude, it is no surprise that virtually all modern studies have taken a skeptical view of the titles, and this has led to an almost inescapable conclusion: the *Seasons* aside, listeners to Vivaldi's titled concertos are largely abandoned to their own devices in terms of understanding the link between the work and its title, and more often than not the music bears little if any resemblance to the advertised subject matter.<sup>38</sup> In this light, Vivaldi's use of titles could be seen as just another aspect of his salesmanship, especially in view of reports that he sometimes attached them to pieces after the fact.<sup>39</sup> Such arguments, however, prompt us to ask why, if giving concertos titles was an effective marketing strategy, no other Italian composer adopted it either in Vivaldi's time or later; surely, had he achieved particular commercial success with such titles others would have imitated him, whereas in fact virtually none of his followers and competitors in the burgeoning concerto genre copied his example by titling either individual works or entire collections.<sup>40</sup> Commercial and artistic interests need not conflict with each other or cancel each other out, especially in the case of an ambitious composer working in the highly competitive environment of the early eighteenth-century international freelance musical scene, on which Vivaldi was a dominant figure seeking to maintain his position.

One critic who has recently challenged the supposed superficiality of Vivaldi's approach to program music is Cesare Fertonani, whose *Antonio Vivaldi: La simbologia musicale nei concerti a programma* addresses the significance of titles and attempts to classify the musical symbolism of the named concertos by proposing an intellectual context within which to

38. Talbot suggests that those works with descriptive titles that "make no attempt to forge an intelligible narrative from their allusive effects" might be more suitably considered "characteristic" concertos, which at least accords with later eighteenth-century terminology: Talbot, *Vivaldi Compendium*, 149; see also Talbot, "Improvvisata." This has the advantage of shedding the nineteenth-century connotations of "program music," but it does not address the question of how the "characteristic" title affects the way the music is perceived.

39. The case of the *Seasons*, in which Vivaldi claimed to have added programmatic materials in the print so that the concertos would appear to be "new," is a particularly complicated example of this, discussed by Everett in *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 11; Everett also discusses the addition of titles *ex post facto* (52–53). Zohn reproduces a passage from Scheibe's *Critischer Musikus* that condemns as charlatans composers of characteristic overtures who added titles after the music had been written, asking how one could set about composing something without knowing what it was going to be about: Zohn, *Music for a Mixed Taste*, 71. Scheibe's criticism focuses largely on titles attached to dance movements and overtures in which the music, in fact, signifies nothing at all.

40. Isolated examples do occur, such as Francesco Durante's "La pazzia" (*Nove concerti a quartetto*, composed in the 1730s and 1740s), Pietro Antonio Locatelli's "Laberinto armonico" (*L'arte del violino*, op. 3, no. 12, 1733), and Lorenzo Gaetano Zavateri's "Tempesta di mare" (*Concerti da chiesa e da camera*, op. 1, no. 12, 1735); the latter has the indication "Principio di cativo [*sic*] tempo" at the opening of the first movement. See Dietz, "Durante, Francesco"; Schnoebelen, "Zavateri, Lorenzo Gaetano"; and McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 352.

consider the scope of Vivaldi's musical imagination, and whose more recent massive survey of Vivaldi's entire instrumental corpus takes its place alongside Michael Talbot's seminal studies of the composer.<sup>41</sup> Fertonani's main argument rests on the assumption that titles reflect a stock of musical, affective, and visual tropes upon which the composer draws as he works, and that these tropes can be traced across concertos that share topics. He makes the point convincingly that Vivaldi began to take an interest in programmatic composition just at the time when he was developing in his operas a representational musical language for dramatic purposes.<sup>42</sup> Exploration of the links between concertos and dramatic arias reveals not only a consistency in use of keys, figuration, tempos, and other musical elements, but at times even direct relationships between instrumental melodies and texted arias (making some of them essentially songs without words).<sup>43</sup>

Like Everett and Talbot, Fertonani starts out from the question of how the "extramusical" verbal elements—titles, sonnets, etc.—might have driven Vivaldi's compositional process, how they might have engaged his imagination and helped him to generate musical ideas illustrative of his chosen subject. From this standpoint, the function of the title becomes essential: if it was added after the work was finished it cannot have served as a guide during composition and is therefore seen as irrelevant to the musical content. This chicken-and-egg question seems not to have particularly bothered the composer, if he considered it at all.

Vivaldi's own words in the dedication of op. 8, as well as the testimony of his contemporaries, suggest a more flexible, less mechanical, and, most importantly, performer- and listener-oriented attitude toward musical representation. Rather than serving as crutches to support the composer's imagination, or as extramusical, precompositional concepts around which to construct instrumental music, titles and programs function as rhetorical devices intrinsic to the performance of a work and to its apprehension by its audience. Their addition, even if it occurs after the fact and only as a result of

41. Fertonani, *Antonio Vivaldi and La musica strumentale*.

42. Fertonani, *Antonio Vivaldi*, 49–55.

43. Walter Kolneder explores just such a context for the first movement of the bassoon concerto RV 471 in "Vivaldi's Aria-Concerto," and John E. Solie discusses the relationship between aria and concerto ritornello structure in "Aria Structure and Ritornello Form." Their work is not concerned with meaning, however, but with the origins of concerto ritornello form and its relationship to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century operatic aria. For more on the connections between Vivaldi's dramatic and instrumental works, see Ryom, "Antonio Vivaldi," 249–62. Reinhardt Strohm discusses Vivaldi's mimetic tendencies largely in terms of their application to simile arias, which describe such physical phenomena as storms, sleep, battles, and so on: Strohm, *Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*. Strohm's aim is not to establish a repertory of musical effects, and indeed he concludes that "the descriptive music in Vivaldi's operas of the 1730s is not found in independent instrumental versions" (105). The broader context of mimetic effects in opera—not just Vivaldi's but those of the repertory as a whole—has not been studied and lies beyond the scope of this article.



the composer's observation of certain musical characteristics that have come to his attention only in retrospect, represents an intrinsic step in the fashioning of his artwork and becomes central to it and to its exegesis. The title links the concerto to a set of cultural associations, which the audience is thereby prompted to call upon in order to make sense of the musical events as they unfold. The work's meaning is generated by, and exists within, this discursive interaction; it results from a quintessentially rhetorical approach that focuses on the reception of the finished work as the aggregate of verbal and musical components, rather than on the composer's working process.

Far from being limited to plastic images and visual representations, Vivaldi's titles explore a wide range of subjects, most of which are abstract. All four major titled collections draw on abstract aesthetic concepts: harmonic fertility or imagination in *L'estro armonico*, op. 3 (1711); extravagance (a term that since the seventeenth century had been used to describe *sui generis* compositions) in *La stravaganza*, op. 4 (1716); the contest between, or trial of, harmony and invention in *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione*, op. 8 (1725); and Apollo's lyre, the source of divine musical furor or creativity, in *La cetra*, op. 9 (1727). None of these collections contains an explanation of the significance of the title in relation to the music itself, but the pattern of references to precompositional sources of ideas and to compositional "problems" or outlooks is strong enough to suggest that such concepts were important to Vivaldi over a long span of his career.<sup>44</sup> Even without going so far as to argue that he was indeed literally working out the implications of the titles in his compositions (a project that extends beyond the limits of this article), it seems fair to surmise that Vivaldi sought to fashion himself as an inspired composer (what later generations would call a "genius"), conscious of reconciling the diversity and fertility of ideas flowing from his imagination with violinistic technique and compositional craft. For a musician who had become famous for his near-mythical improvisational skills, this may have been a logical strategy for self-promotion. It also indicates that he was able to connect the problems and sources of creativity with the technical challenges of composition, at a time when such problems occupied critics and philosophers in Rome, Paris, London, and elsewhere. There is no reason to assume that these two purposes could not coexist.

Individual concertos also address abstract concepts from different perspectives. Although such works as the *Seasons*, *La caccia* (The Hunt, op. 8, no. 10, RV 362), and *Il gardellino* (The Nightingale, RV 90) fit into the category of

44. Although publishers often had considerable say in the presentation of their publications, the consistent topical references of the Vivaldi titles reflect an overarching thematic continuity, which suggests that they originated with the composer rather than the publisher. This is reinforced by the uniqueness of Vivaldi's publications in this respect: no other volumes of concertos issued by Roger and Le Cène bear any titles at all, let alone ones comparable to those given to Vivaldi's works.

representation of specific sounds or concrete images, the representation also elicits a range of human responses to such natural phenomena and activities (and does so explicitly in the *Seasons*), adding a strong affective dimension. Like the many seascapes showing ships in violent storms that were painted in this period, *La tempesta di mare* (The Storm at Sea, RV 98, 433, 570), with its evocation of tumultuous waves, was probably meant to engage emotions of awe, excitement, fear, and eventually relief, perhaps even calling such paintings to mind. And *Il riposo* (Repose, RV 270), *Il piacere* (Pleasure, op. 8, no. 6, RV 180), *L'inquietudine* (Restlessness, or Inquietude, RV 234), and *Il sospetto* (Suspicion, RV 199) allude to states of mind and affects similar to the Couperin titles mentioned earlier. Lacking specific signifiers, such concertos challenge audiences to identify musical elements onto which to map the meaning of the title and engage the music with a web of “outside” references (although the “outside”/“inside” dichotomy can hardly be said to apply to compositions with titles, as cultural references are embedded within the work itself—if, that is, it is conceived as the unity of music and title together).

### *Il Proteo* as Program Music

Among the programmatic concertos, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* is generally described as a “trick” piece, because of its obvious inversion of violin and cello parts.<sup>45</sup> This “clever musical jest” is one that the listener, unaware of the notational inversion, is likely to miss, apparently proving once again that the title is irrelevant to the music itself.<sup>46</sup> But the concerto’s rhythmic and motivic character, evident from the very opening, as well as its formal structure and instrumentation, all present peculiarities that challenge the listener to question what is going on in the music. By raising doubts as to the quality and purpose of its musical substance, *Il Proteo* presents a sophisticated commentary on what the world looks like when it is right side up—more specifically, it is a clever essay on what Johann Nicolaus Forkel characterized as “musical thinking.”<sup>47</sup> In addition, the title invites the listener to construct an interpretive framework around the musical discourse of the concerto, drawing on the cultural

45. For discussions of this piece, see Fertonani, *La musica strumentale*, 448–49, and *Antonio Vivaldi*, 43.

46. McVeigh and Hirshberg refer to *Il Proteo* as one of Vivaldi’s “oddities”: McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 50. See also Zohn’s review-article “The Baroque Concerto in Theory and Practice,” which discusses McVeigh and Hirshberg’s book together with Richard Maunder’s *The Scoring of Baroque Concertos* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2004) and Bella Brover-Lubovsky’s *Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

47. Johann Nicolaus Forkel, *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (1802), reprinted in David and Mendel, *Bach Reader*, 317–18.

and social implications inherent in its components—the *mundus inversus* and the Proteus myth.

Essential as it is to the perception of *Il Proteo*, the title exemplifies Vivaldi's own mercurial approach, reinforcing the appearance of casualness mentioned above. According to Everett, the earlier score preserves unmistakable evidence of the composer's tinkering with the title: two different ink shades distinguish the words "Il mondo al roverscio" and "Il Proteo ò sia," suggesting that the latter was added, in Everett's words, as "an afterthought." In the Manchester partbooks the full title is given as "Il Proteo ò il Mondo al Rovverscio" (*sic*), without any sign of later revision.<sup>48</sup> At what point the change was made in the score is not known, but it possibly coincided with the copying of the Ottoboni parts, suggesting that Vivaldi may have introduced the classical allusion merely as window-dressing for his learned patron's benefit, and added it to the original title of the concerto at that point. Even if this is how the title came to assume its final form, however, it does not preclude the possibility that the composer was aware of the link between myth and popular metaphor from the outset, and that he intended it to add a further symbolic dimension.

The metaphor of the world upside down, or *mundus inversus*, was common currency in eighteenth-century music, letters, and visual arts. It dates back to biblical times and reaches beyond Europe to a wide variety of cultures.<sup>49</sup> In Western European art it found broad application to both sacred and secular topics, and its humor ranged from moral and social sarcasm to plain foolishness. Among its precedents are the Roman Saturnalia, feasts that celebrated the agricultural and fertility gods Saturn, his son Faunus, and Faunus's wife Fauna. In the Middle Ages this tradition manifested itself in the famous "Feast of Fools" celebrations that took place around Christmas and Easter.<sup>50</sup> In these parodies of sacred religious observances, mock liturgical texts were read, ecclesiastical hierarchies were reversed, and street parades and feasting with music and dancing formed part of the celebrations. Mikhail Bakhtin cites the *joca monacorum* (monastic jests) in which such irreverent parodies as the "Liturgy of the Gamblers" or that of the drunkards would be used in place of the sacred texts.<sup>51</sup>

The Lutheran Reformation, in attacking the worldliness of the Catholic church, turned to the *mundus inversus* metaphor to symbolize its own "inverted" beliefs. The image "Adoratur Papa deus terrenus" (The Pope Is Worshipped as an Earthly God), for example, taken from Martin Luther's *Depiction of the Papacy* (1545), shows German foot soldiers defecating in an

48. Everett, "Vivaldi Concerto Manuscripts: II," 29.

49. For the need to interpret the world-upside-down metaphor according to the social and cultural context within which it is used, see Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs 30:21–23," 599–610.

50. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 74–82. On the Saturnalia, see Feder, *Crowell's Handbook*, 391, and *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, 205–7.

51. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 85.

upside-down papal tiara (bodily functions, according to Bakhtin, were among the most important aspects of the carnivalesque). Inversions could also be used for less provocative, more symbolic purposes: Michael Marissen has argued that in the aria “Wie jammern mich doch die verkehrten Herzen,” from Cantata 170, Bach subverts normal scoring practices by using an odd instrumental ensemble (violin and viola in a low register supporting a pair of high melodic lines for organ) and reversing the usual roles (rather than providing harmonic support for the strings, the organ has violin-like lines, while the viola and violin move in the manner of a continuo part), in order to emphasize the text’s reversal of righteous behavior and to capitalize on the knowledge that, in God’s kingdom, “the meek will inherit the earth.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, in the sixth Brandenburg Concerto, although the inversion is not textually motivated, typical scoring practices are inverted: the concerto employs an ensemble of low strings (cello and two violas; violone and two tenor gambas; and harpsichord), without violins and bass viola da gamba (Prince Leopold of Cöthen’s instrument, and highly virtuosic); the violas are given the most elaborate solo parts and the gambas are relegated to ripieno functions; and the solo episodes are imbued with ritornello characteristics while the ritornellos lack the syntactical structure characteristic of Bach’s Vivaldian models, subverting the familiar *Vordersatz–Fortspinnung–Epilog* segmentation.<sup>53</sup> Marissen argues that the accumulation of reversals of musical order would not have gone unnoticed at the Cöthen court, familiar as it was with instrumental conventions, and indeed might have been seen as a subtle commentary on sociopolitical structures. Although Marissen does not invoke the *mundus inversus* metaphor in relation to this case, Bach’s treatment of instrumentation, musical language, and structure is strongly reminiscent of it.<sup>54</sup>

Musical instruments underwent similar transformations: in charivari processions, which were closely allied with Carnival, pots, pans, and other cooking utensils were the instruments played by comic devils and other theatrical characters—Harlequins, Punchinellos, and the like.<sup>55</sup> And reversals of reality also gave rise to the dream of a world of ease, in which everything comes to

52. Both the image and the discussion of Cantata 170 are found in Marissen, “On the Musically Theological,” 48–64.

53. This terminology, although not original to Vivaldi and the Italian concerto, has become part of standard analytical discussions of concerto ritornello structure, and I adopt it here for the sake of convenience.

54. Marissen, “Relationships between Scoring and Structure,” 502–4, and *Social and Religious Designs*, 61–62. The relationship between the social and theological dimensions of the *mundus inversus* is clearly established in Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs 30:21–23.”

55. Charivaris were processions in which loud percussive instruments were used to draw attention to and shame prostitutes loitering in the streets as well as couples living together outside of marriage in contravention of community moral norms; see Crawford, *European Sexualities*, 41, 166. For possible connections between charivari and the satanic, see Johnson, *Venice Incognito*, 57.

those who in the real world have to fight for even the smallest tidbits: in Bruegel's *The Land of Cockaigne*, for example, cooked geese, carving knife already inserted in their flesh, walk up to already well-fed clerks who have abandoned their ledgers to enjoy the easy life.<sup>56</sup> David Kunzle traces the concept to the publication of broadsheets devoted to the topic of the world upside down, in which a whole repertory of "reversals" were illustrated. The earliest such prints appeared in the sixteenth century, but publishers continued to issue new versions into the nineteenth century. The subtext of these images, which were typically presented without commentary beyond a mere description of their contents, was at least potentially social, as they could be read as both "what is wrong with society now" and "how society might one day evolve." Moreover, the forms of ridicule employed were often aimed at peasants, whose penchant for foolishness and for losing control to the point of creating social disorder and even violence (a typical carnivalesque occurrence) constituted a well-established trope.<sup>57</sup> Thus the particular follies represented could be interpreted in various ways according to their audience and its prejudices.<sup>58</sup>

In his *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (Aristotelian Telescope, 1654) Emanuele Tesauro specifically located such reversals among the comic devices—"il ridicolo"—of rhetoric: they are examples of what he called "Deformità comparative" ("Comparative Distortions" or "Mismatches"), in which two supposedly related agents do not in fact correspond, such as when a very short woman marries a very tall man (his example) or when an ignorant hired hand (*zanni*) finds himself in power as ruler of the people.<sup>59</sup> From the Middle Ages on, the most enduring examples of such sanctioned social inversions take place in conjunction with Carnival, and in particular with Mardi Gras. Citing from Rabelais's "Pantagruelisque Prognostic," Bakhtin notes the following "carnavalesque picture of carnival": "Men will change their dress so as to cheat others, and they will run about in the streets like fools and madmen."<sup>60</sup> In Venice, Carnival rituals, which went on for months, had included public reversals of official functions as early as the Middle Ages.

56. In another painting by Bruegel, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, the specific image associated with the proverb, an upside-down globe, hangs on the wall of the house on the left and is a small detail, although the title "The World Upside Down" has been applied informally to the painting as a whole.

57. On the occurrence of violence at Carnival, often as a pretext for addressing deeper personal, societal, or political grievances, see Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring*, esp. 89–98, 110–32, and Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 85–116.

58. Kunzle, "Bruegel's Proverb Painting," 197–202.

59. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, 587–88.

60. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 246. McVeigh and Hirshberg note the carnivalesque nature of solos in Vivaldi's concertos that border on the loss of control on the part of the performer: McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 29–30.

The Venetian Carnival also involved the performance of plays organized by the Compagnie della Calza (young noblemen who identified themselves by the colors of their hoses), which ranged from classical works by such authors as Plautus and Terence to the popular—and scathingly satirical—plays of Ruzante (Angelo Beolco), who focused on social injustice and the plight of the rural populations of the Venetian terra firma.<sup>61</sup> As Muir notes, “Carnival could become far more than a moment of indulgence: it was a vast celebratory commentary on the material aspects of life.”<sup>62</sup> *Commedia dell'arte* characters such as Punchinello, Harlequin, and Pantalone made their way from the stage to the streets as masques, alongside the white half-mask that became the symbol of the Venetian Carnival and that by the eighteenth century had to be outlawed because it provided anonymity for a wide range of criminal activities.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, the particular variation of Carnival described by Rabelais—in which the social order is subverted by adopting the dress of other social classes, often with larcenous intent—became central to the construction of the fictional world of the novel. As Terry Castle has shown, in the English novel of the first decades of the century the carnivalesque masquerade assumed the function of an officially sanctioned *mundus inversus*, in which the focus—derived from the Venetian Carnival—was on disguising one's identity, social status, gender, and even nature (the latter by dressing as animals or gods).<sup>63</sup> Commercially organized masquerades became a main attraction in London, and were often the setting for libertinage aided by the secrecy provided by masks and costumes: women acted as men and partook of their sexual power and freedoms, and the lowborn consorted with their betters.<sup>64</sup> In novels, carnivalesque masquerades generally symbolized danger and had potentially catastrophic consequences for the characters (usually women) who attended them. Some of the basic elements of the English masquerades were also common to operatic plots: in a more comical vein, librettists drew on the older traditions of the *commedia dell'arte*, whose characters are also connected to Carnival as traditional disguises. The social reversals of comic operas, in which servants hoodwink their masters, entertained opera audiences with such preposterous notions as Pergolesi's oxymoronic *La serva padrona*, Telemann's *Die verkehrte Welt* (TVWV 21), and Goldoni's *Il mondo al rovescio, ossia Il governo delle donne* (set by Galuppi) and *Il mondo della luna* (also set by Galuppi and later, more famously, by Haydn).<sup>65</sup> Vivaldi's concerto alludes to the kinds of reversals

61. Carroll, *Angelo Beolco (Il Ruzante)*.

62. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 88.

63. Castle, “Carnivalization,” 903–16.

64. *Ibid.*, 904.

65. Umberto Eco connects the world upside down with the comic in his essay “The Frames of Comic ‘Freedom,’” in which he identifies the inversion of reality with the freedom to enjoy that which is not possible within accepted rules (2, 5–6).

that animate these operatic plots and plays with musical conventions in similar ways. As in social situations, knowledge of the rules being broken is a prerequisite for enjoyment, and I will argue that understanding Vivaldi's musical style as well as the musical semantics governing the construction of a ritornello allows the listener to recognize the infractions against these rules that occur at the opening of the first movement of *Il Proteo*.

The other component of the title takes the metaphor in a different although not unrelated direction, imbuing it with added significance: the myth of Proteus is not, strictly speaking, about the *mundus inversus*, although it deals with another potentially chaotic element, the shape-changing seer Proteus, "The Old Man of the Sea," who was first described by Homer in the fourth canto of the *Odyssey* and later by Virgil in the fourth book of his *Georgics*, in which he introduced some minor variations and linked the myth to that of Eurydice. Subsequent writers also transfer Proteus's characteristics to Thetis in the story of her marriage to Peleus, as Ovid does in the *Metamorphoses* (the myth itself seeming to partake of the protean qualities it describes).

In Homer's original story, Menelaus—husband of Helen of Troy and king of Sparta—is driven off course by a storm after leaving Troy, lands on an island, and questions a sea nymph about his misfortune; she advises him to set sail for another island near Egypt, where her father, Proteus, comes ashore every night with his flock of seals. "The Old Man of the Sea" is clairvoyant: he sees into the future and knows the causes of things; Menelaus should ask him why the gods hold him back and whether he will ever return to Sparta. Proteus, however, will not yield his knowledge willingly: Menelaus must ambush him by hiding under sealskins among the flock, and bind him in a net when he falls asleep. Once captured, Proteus will change his shape repeatedly, taking on a bewildering array of forms, among them a tree, a lion, and a burning flame. Only if he is held down long enough will he return to his normal appearance: at that point he will answer Menelaus's questions.

Virgil's *Georgics* (Book 4, 315–558) provided the other and perhaps more widely known image of Proteus in the story of the beekeeper Aristaeus, who seeks his mother's help when faced with the loss of his beehive to disease. Cyrene leads him to Proteus, who, after having been subdued, reveals the source of Aristaeus's misfortune in the anger of Orpheus, whose story he famously recounts (453–527), advising Aristaeus to placate this demigod, whose nymphs have wrought disaster on his hive.<sup>66</sup> Virgil's story, although much embellished, does not alter the characterization of Proteus as an allegorical figure, the source of hard-won knowledge.<sup>67</sup>

66. Virgil, *Ecloques, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, 240–59.

67. For a survey of the visual and literary representation of Proteus in the Renaissance, roughly between 1540 and 1650, see Pestic, "Shapes of Proteus," 57–82. In a striking, indeed

The original myth of Proteus is about steadfastness in the face of surprise, chaos, and the fear engendered by an unstable reality; it is about Menelaus and Aristaeus, not Proteus himself, who remains an indeterminate, other-worldly figure. By the eighteenth century, however, it was specifically the shape-changing aspect that dominated the story's reception: Proteus became the symbol of an ineffable, flowing, watery, and ever-changing world, sometimes figuring in alchemical lore as the alter ego of Mercury, another shape-changing deity, from whom the magus derived his powers to transform reality.<sup>68</sup>

Vivaldi's invocation of Proteus's name in his concerto title may seem odd in conjunction with the *mundus inversus* topos, but in fact Proteus shares with it its carnivalesque character: masks and shape-changing demigods both call into question the integrity of perceived reality. This connection between the two elements was not lost on eighteenth-century moralists, who in their attacks on the masquerade as an excuse for lewd behavior focused particularly on two manifestations of social transgression: homosexuality and prostitution.<sup>69</sup> According to Castle the public masquerade offered an ideal occasion for homosexual liaisons: as Joseph Addison characterized it, nature itself was upended in the masquerade, where one encountered "women changed into men, and men into women, children in leading-strings, seven-foot high, courtiers transformed into clowns, ladies of the night into saints, people of first quality into beasts or birds, gods or goddesses."<sup>70</sup> As for prostitutes, the pretensions and dissimulation characteristic of their arts, which as a matter of

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protean rethinking of the validity of Vivaldi's title, Everett comments in the introduction to his new edition of the concerto that the addition of Proteus to the title represents a "drastic change of conceptual tactic" that "personifies" the music with its new mythological and allegorical implications: Vivaldi, *Two Versions*, v. This is a misreading both of the figure of Proteus, whose humanity or persona was never relevant, and of allegory, which depends entirely on the abstraction of the concepts involved, and indeed there is nothing more sympathetically "human" about the new title, which remains highly conceptual. Everett's idea that Vivaldi's change was prompted by the transformation of the original string parts into the new wind ensemble, thus emphasizing the music's new guise, is more perspicacious.

68. In *Vom hylealischen Chaos* (1708) Heinrich Khunrath refers to Mercury as Proteus, "who has the keys to the sea . . . and power over everything, the son of Oceanus . . . who reforms and returns in diverse forms": quoted in Roob, *Hermetic Museum*, 424; for the image of Mercury as Proteus, see also Roob, *Hermetic Museum*, 24. For a number of images in which the "son of Oceanus" is represented in his marine environment, see Pesic, "Shapes of Proteus."

69. The wearing of masks in conjunction with Carnival in Venice is now taken for granted, but by Vivaldi's time the mask had become an everyday article of clothing, serving not only as a disguise for transgressive erotic or criminal behavior but also as the converse—an honorable means of preserving modesty and smoothing relations in a highly stratified and ritualized society. Indeed, in the eighteenth century masks were compulsory attire for well-born Venetian women attending the theater; see Johnson, *Venice Incognito*, 105–28.

70. Addison, *The Guardian* 154 (September 7, 1713), quoted in Castle, "Eros and Liberty," 159.



course included dressing to look like respectable ladies, led to their characterization as the “female Proteus.”<sup>71</sup>

### Reading *Il Proteo* in Light of Its Title

This cultural context in place, I now turn to the musical substance of Vivaldi’s *Il Proteo*. A glance at the overall structure of the work suggests a conventional double concerto, in which the outer movements adhere to the ritornello principle while the middle movement, for reduced ensemble, resembles a trio sonata slow movement (see Figure 1). From its very inception, however, the concerto boldly advertises its idiosyncrasies. First, there is the “trick” of writing the parts in the wrong clefs, a rubric instructing the players on what to do: “The principal violin can play the solos of the cello, and conversely the cello can play the solos of the violin,” and “The solos of the principal violin must always be played an octave above.”<sup>72</sup>

Each player can play either part (Vivaldi uses “al rovescio” to make this point), provided that the violinist transposes the cello part up an octave.<sup>73</sup> None of this is evident to the audience, since the parts are identical and the instructions would be available only to the performers. Although there is no compelling reason to assume that Ottoboni would not have known the concerto by its name or would not have understood its technical cleverness (it is included in his manuscript, after all, and he seems to have been a keen musical connoisseur), or that the audiences to whom he presented it would not have been told the title (if for no other reason than to underscore the special nature of the work, something that would have highlighted the patron’s sophistication), it seems unlikely that the technical aspects of the performance, such as the question of transposition, would have been explained. The reversal functions at a precompositional structural level, since the transpositions and instrumental ranges establish a set of preconditions

71. John Brevall, *The Lure of Venus, or A Harlot’s Progress* (1733), quoted in Carter, “This Female Proteus,” 72.

72. Reproduced in Vivaldi, *Concerto in fa maggiore*, 1: “Il Violino principale può suonare li soli del Violoncello et al rovescio il Violoncello può suonare li soli del Violino”; “Li soli del Violino principale vanno sempre suonati all’ottava alta.”

73. Fertonani, *La musica strumentale*, 136: “In *Il Proteo* . . . RV 544, the imaginative title alludes to the bizarre metaphor of a topsy-turvy world, a metaphor that is nevertheless turned into a purely musical game, objectively extraneous to any actual representational implications: in the episodes, the normal notation of the solo instruments, violin and cello, is reversed, and [Vivaldi] moreover leaves open the possibility of an alternative performance in which the parts are exchanged” (“Nel *Proteo* . . . RV 544, il titolo fantasioso allude alla bizzarra metafora di un mondo sottosopra che tuttavia si risolve in un gioco puramente musicale, di fatto estraneo ad autentiche implicazioni rappresentative: negli episodi, la normale notazione degli strumenti solisti, violino e violoncello, è invertita ed è inoltre prevista la possibilità di un’ esecuzione alternativa mediante l’interscambiabilità delle parti”).

First movement

R1	Solo 1	R2	Solo 2	R3	Solo 3	R4	Solo 4 = modified Solo 1	R5
	a— b— c—		d— e—					
mm. 1-13	13-17; 17-23; 23-29	29-41	41-47; 47-50[57*]	51-61	61-70	71-75	75-95	96-108
F: I	I	I—V= C: I	I—V/a	a: i	i—V/F	F: I	I	I
I	I	I—V	V	iii	iii	I	I	I

Second movement

A	B	C	D	E
mm. 1-4	5-9	10-11	12-17	17-25
C: I	I—V= G: I	I	I	C: V-I

Third movement

R1	Solo 1	R2	Solo 2	R3	Solo 3	R4	Solo 4	R5
	a— b— c—				d— d'—			
mm. 1-25	25-32; 33-38; 39-46	47-62	63-78	78-83	83-96; 96-101	101-10	110-27	128-45
F: I	I—V/a d: i	i	i—V/a	a: i	i—C: I (V/F)	F: V-I	I	I
I	I	vi	vi	iii	iii	V—I	I	I

Figure 1 Structural diagram of the movements of RV 544 (\* indicates a cut in movement 1, mm. 50-57)

involving ambitus, technique, and musical substance: the parts must be playable on both instruments, and they must remain within a relatively narrow range to allow the octave transposition. Regardless of how the performers choose to realize the instructions, the solos present identical phrases in a protean succession of different octaves and instrumental timbres, realizing at least in part the implications of the title. Far from being a clever but limited musical joke, the game involving the soloists' clefs actually ensures that both Proteus and "the world upside down" determine the foundation of the concerto's solo sections—their subversive implications being the more significant for the apparent insignificance, at least for the audience, of the compositional constraints and performance instructions. The veneer of insignificance that pervades much of the concerto has prompted Fertonani to muse that "the concerto does not offer particularly memorable musical material, whether in the ritornellos, the solo episodes, or the slow movement. . . . And yet, at least in the ritornello of the opening Allegro, one detects extravagant elements that introduce the bizarre subject [of the title] from which the work draws its inspiration," seeing in this strategy a kind of "irony and paradoxical game."<sup>74</sup>

Vivaldi chose F major, one of the quintessential pastoral keys, for *Il Proteo*, the key of such concertos as *L'autunno* (RV 293) from the *Seasons*, *La tempesta di mare* (RV 98, 433, 570), and appropriately *Il riposo: Concerto per la Notte di Natale* (Repose: Concerto for Christmas Eve, RV 270), where it accords with the *pastorella* tradition of such pieces.<sup>75</sup> Even if not always bucolic, in music of the eighteenth century and earlier F major evokes more often than not the world of Arcadia, of dancing peasants, shepherds, and nymphs engaged in carefree sensual pursuits, as well as in the excesses of Bacchus and Dionysius. As we have seen, in the contemporary literary imagination this world is also not far removed from that of Carnival, the land of Cockaigne, and the reversal—or at least temporary suspension—of the demarcation between the *mundus rectus* and the *mundus inversus* in their myriad incarnations.

The concerto's play on its title does not end with the performance instructions, however: even before the protean solos, other disturbing sounds suggest that all is not well in this musical world. The opening measures of

74. Ibid., 449: "il concerto non offre una sostanza propriamente musicale in sé memorabile, né nei ritornelli né negli episodi né nel tempo lento. . . . E tuttavia, almeno nel ritornello dell'Allegro' iniziale si colgono elementi stravaganti che introducono il tema bizzarro cui s'ispira la composizione"; "ironia e gioco paradossale."

75. On the Christmas pastoral tradition, see David Wyn Jones's useful synopsis in *Beethoven: Pastoral Symphony*, 14–16. G major was also associated with the pastoral topic, particularly in the works of Viennese composers: "There is . . . sufficient scholarly consensus for considering both F major and G major as pastoral keys. Certainly examples from the repertoire abound. . . . The convention continues well into the nineteenth century, particularly in operetta": Garland, "Topics and Tonal Processes," 461.

the ritornello, for example, assault the listener with a startling motto:<sup>76</sup> an emphatic anapestic rhythm in the violins (marked “1” in Example 1) dominates the upper sonorities, while its dactylic opposite drives the lower strings (2); both motives are fanfare-like and static, traversing a full octave to rise to, and fall from, the tonic F; moreover, their contours are exact opposites of one another, reaching the highest and lowest notes at the same point; the violins open in canon at the unison (3), confusing the ear with constant crossings—and reinforcing the inverted quality of the motivic material.<sup>77</sup>

In the middle of the texture the viola plays a long-note pedal point (4). Because of its placement, the pedal penetrates the confusion and takes on disproportionate importance, its long notes standing out in the midst of the percussive rhythms that surround it. (These pedal notes are among what Fertonani refers to as “extravagant elements that introduce the bizarre subject [of the title] from which the work draws its inspiration.”) The viola begins on the tonic, then in measure 3 switches to middle C, on which it remains, with no further articulation for the rest of the ritornello except for the last quarter note of the cadence, which is bowed separately—surely an unnecessary and, under the circumstances, humorous effect. C is also the pitch of intersection for the motivic material of the violins and cellos as well as that of the first and second violins: in the vertical space of the ritornello, C (as a common tone in both I and V) represents the surface of the mirror that inverts the parts, a fixed axis around which the world rotates. I will also argue that, at the level of large-scale formal organization, C is the pivot around which the structure of the concerto is organized.

The harmonic layout of the ritornello reflects the imbalances of the motivic material. The opening two and a half measures seem stuck on F major, the work's tonic, while the next two and a half oscillate back and forth between tonic and dominant every half measure; after this the tonic returns unabated for four more measures. The harmonic implications of the melodic material are at times not congruent with the underlying harmonies. This is true in the case of motive 5, whose tendency toward the dominant is undermined by the reiteration of material in the bass in which the tonic chord becomes part of the dominant and which by this point may be seen as acting as an ostinato figure (Fertonani identifying it as one of the ritornello's odd features).<sup>78</sup>

Taken together, the elements that give the ritornello its peculiar character can all be seen as distortions of the pastoral style. Their awkwardness suggests a kind of carnivalesque parody, as if the ritornello “dresses up” to be

76. McVeigh and Hirshberg discuss the opening material of the first ritornello as a “motto” whose function is both to define the character of the movement and to serve as an audible marker for the listener: McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 83–94.

77. Examples from *Il Proteo* are taken from Vivaldi, *Concerto in fa maggiore*.

78. Although this may not be atypical of Vivaldi's style; see Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 79. Fertonani, *La musica strumentale*, 449.

**Example 1** Vivaldi, Concerto in F Major, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* (RV 544), first movement, mm. 1–29. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the *Journal*.

**Allegro**

Violino concertante  
 (f)  
 R1 ①  
 Il Violino principale può suonare li soli del Violoncello et al roverscio il Violoncello può suonare li soli del Violino.

Violoncello concertante  
 (f)  
 ②

1 Violini  
 (f)  
 ①

2 Violini  
 Canon  
 (f)  
 ③

Viola  
 (f)  
 ④

Violoncelli  
 (f)  
 ②

Contrabbassi  
 (f)

Cembalo  
 (f)

## Example 1 continued

3 End phrase 1 —

The musical score consists of several staves. The top staff is a violin part, starting with a measure number '3' and ending with 'End phrase 1'. Below it is a bass line. The middle section contains a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The bottom section contains a piano accompaniment with a grand staff. The music is in a minor key and features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

*(continued)*

Example 1 continued

The image displays a musical score for a piece, labeled "Example 1 continued". The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). It consists of several staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff, starting with a measure number "6". A bracket labeled "Phrase 2" spans from the beginning of the first measure to the end of the third measure. A circled "5" is placed above the final measure of the phrase. Below the top staff is a bass clef staff. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The bottom two staves are grouped together by a brace on the left, indicating they are part of a single instrument's part, likely a piano. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

## Example 1 continued

The musical score consists of several systems of staves. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a circled '9' at the beginning, a bass clef staff, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Annotations include 'End phrase 2' with a bracket over the second measure of the treble staff, and 'Extension' with an arrow pointing to the third measure. A circled '6' is placed below the first measure of the treble staff. The second system contains a grand staff and two bass clef staves. The third system contains a grand staff and two bass clef staves. The fourth system contains a grand staff and two bass clef staves. The fifth system contains a grand staff and two bass clef staves. The sixth system contains a grand staff and two bass clef staves. The seventh system contains a grand staff and two bass clef staves.

*(continued)*



Example 1 continued

The musical score consists of several systems of staves. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a measure number '12' and a bass clef staff. Above the treble staff, there are annotations: 'End [R1]' with a bracket, a circled '6' above a group of notes, 'Solo 1' with a right-pointing arrow, and 'Section 1' with a right-pointing arrow. A circled '7' is located below the treble staff. The second system contains four staves: two treble clef staves, one alto clef staff, and one bass clef staff. The third system contains two bass clef staves. The fourth system contains two bass clef staves. The fifth system contains a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a bass clef staff. Annotations include '1 Solo' above a note in the second bass staff and 'Ostinato' below it. The sixth system contains a grand staff and a bass clef staff, with 'End [R1]' and a bracket at the bottom.

Example 1 continued

15 — Section 1

The musical score consists of six systems of staves. The first system includes the Violin I staff (with a circled '8' above the first measure), the Violin II staff, the Viola staff, the Cello staff, and the Double Bass staff. The second system includes the Piano staff (treble and bass clefs). The score shows measures 15 through 18. Measure 15 has a circled '8' above the first violin staff and a trill in the first bassoon staff. Measure 16 has a trill in the second bassoon staff. Measures 17 and 18 show the continuation of the piano accompaniment.

(continued)

Example 1 continued

Section 2

18 (9)

IV

Example 1 continued

Solo 1

21 — Section 2 —

(continued)

Example 1 continued

Section 3

The musical score is presented in a system with multiple staves. At the top, a horizontal line spans the width of the page with the text "Section 3" centered above it. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a circled number "10" above the first measure. It contains a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a few notes and rests. The next three staves are empty. The fifth staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a melodic line. The sixth staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, containing rests. The seventh staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat, containing a piano accompaniment with chords and a melodic line. The eighth staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a melodic line.

Example 1 continued

The musical score is arranged in systems. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a 'Solo 1' box above it, a bass clef staff, and a grand staff. A bracket labeled 'Section 3' spans the first two measures. A box labeled 'R2' is placed above the treble staff in the third measure, with a line pointing to a specific melodic phrase. The dynamic marking *(f)* is present below the treble staff in the third measure of this system.

The second system consists of five staves: two treble clef staves, two bass clef staves, and a grand staff. The dynamic marking *(f)* appears in the first treble staff and the first bass staff in the third measure. The word 'Tutti' is written above the second bass staff in the third measure.

The third system is a grand staff with a dynamic marking *(f)* in the right hand and a first ending bracket labeled 'I' in the left hand in the third measure.

something it in fact is not. The imitative, canonic opening gives the listener a peek behind the mask—perhaps this is a polite Venetian gentleman who is “slumming it” in rustic costume but cannot fully carry off the pretension, and is merely awkward rather than authentic.<sup>79</sup>

Thus far I have emphasized the music’s oddities, yet the ritornello also presents some more usual Vivaldian traits.<sup>80</sup> It comprises two nearly symmetrical phrases, the first ending in measure 5, and the second in measure 10, with an extension consisting of a restatement of measures 8–10 that carries it to measure 13. The two phrases stand in an antecedent-consequent relationship: both begin with the principal motivic material (1), while phrase 2 introduces a new motive (5) that functions as the antecedent to the answering cadential figure derived from the opening rhythm (6). Everything in the ritornello is modular and can be repeated as necessary, as is characteristic of Vivaldi’s style.

Vivaldi’s blend of typical and anomalous features in the first-movement ritornello of *Il Proteo* stands out particularly clearly when compared with what might be thought of as “normative” examples from other concertos. In Vivaldi’s case, finding the normative is particularly problematic: all scholars agree that defining what is typical in Vivaldi’s compositional practice is difficult, given his virtually inexhaustible imagination and the flexibility inherent in his approach to concerto composition. As Talbot famously and aptly put it, Vivaldi was a “deviant Vivaldian,” a statement confirmed by McVeigh and Hirshberg’s exhaustive recent study of the Italian solo concerto repertory.<sup>81</sup> Even within the relatively restricted element of the ritornello Vivaldi explored a wide range of melodic, textural, and harmonic possibilities.

Despite the difficulty of the task it is still possible to arrive at some relatively safe generalizations. As Talbot notes, the ritornello is almost a “piece within a piece” that may even encapsulate the harmonic pattern of the movement as a whole—in other words, it contains the essence of the movement in terms of rhythm, melody, and harmony.<sup>82</sup> Melodic modular construction is its most common feature; indeed, it is the key to the freedom with which Vivaldi treats the return of the ritornello throughout concerto movements, as its constituent elements can be rearranged, removed, or expanded at will.<sup>83</sup> Phrase structure varies greatly, and is not as regular as it might seem at first glance, but the repetition of material, in either identical or varied form, is very common, often as a way of rounding

79. I am grateful to Steven Zohn for suggesting this connection, reinforcing the concerto’s pastoral elements as part of the program.

80. See Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 110–11, and McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 94–97.

81. Talbot, “Concerto Allegro,” 170; McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*.

82. Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 110–11; see also Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 26–27.

83. See Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 29, and McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 94–95.

off a ritornello.<sup>84</sup> This establishes a sense of balance and symmetry. Harmonically, ritornellos tend to be closed, Everett aptly characterizing them as being driven by “immensely strong cadential forces.”<sup>85</sup> As regards texture, Vivaldi generally prefers homophonic rather than imitative treatment of the opening material. Even when they include counterpoint, “Vivaldi’s ritornellos, including cases . . . with some counterpoint, are homophonically conceived.”<sup>86</sup> McVeigh and Hirshberg calculate that over 60 percent of Vivaldi’s ritornellos are either homophonic or make use of unison scoring, emphasizing a preference for clearly articulated textures. About 20 percent feature imitative counterpoint and another 11 percent free counterpoint.<sup>87</sup>

This general context enables the evaluation of some of the more unusual features of the first-movement ritornello of *Il Proteo* relative to representative examples of similar techniques, including the treatment of imitative counterpoint, of pedal points in ritornellos, and of the rhythmic and melodic character of the motto itself. Vivaldi’s imitative contrapuntal ritornellos range from fugal technique featuring extended subjects to imitative entries based on simple motives and following one another at shorter time intervals. In the first movement of *La tempesta di mare* from op. 8, for example, a repeated-note motive in the *violino principale* and first violin is imitated at one-measure intervals by the second violin, viola, and continuo (see Example 2).<sup>88</sup>

The relationship between the parts is unambiguous, each entry being clearly audible in relation to the others and to the overall texture. An even clearer example occurs in the fugal opening of the first movement of concerto no. 11 of *Il cimento*, where a two-measure subject in the first violin is answered at the fourth and octave below in turn by the second violin, viola, and continuo in unison with the soloist and first violin, each time against whole or half notes in the other parts, a procedure that is repeated in the ritornello of the third movement, which also starts fugally. As these examples illustrate, Vivaldi’s approach to contrapuntal entries is generally to maintain the clarity of the texture by having distinct layers of activity in the upper, middle, and lower parts, against which each entry can be distinctly heard before being absorbed into a prevailing homophonic texture. This clarity of texture is precisely what the opening of *Il Proteo* avoids.

The use of the pedal point, with its placement in the middle of the texture rather than in the bass, is another anomalous feature of the ritornello of *Il Proteo*. Although a number of Vivaldi’s ritornellos feature pedal points

84. McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 84–85.

85. Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 28.

86. *Ibid.*

87. McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 86.

88. Examples from Vivaldi’s op. 8 are taken from Vivaldi, “*Four Seasons*.”



**Example 2** Vivaldi, *La tempesta di mare*, op. 8, no. 5 (RV 253), first movement, mm. 1–11.  
A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the **Journal**.

**Presto**

Violino principale

Violino 1

Violino 2

Viola

Violoncello  
Basso continuo

3

7

Example 2 continued

5

6 6

7

7 5/3 6/4 7

(continued)

## Example 2 continued

(for example, in the third movement of *La primavera*, where an open-fifth pedal point is used to evoke the sound of the bagpipes for the “Danza pastorale”), they are more common in solo sections, particularly final ones, as preparation for the return to the tonic of the closing ritornello. When they occur in a ritornello, pedal points are generally placed in the bass; in many cases, moreover, they consist of reiterated notes that produce a strong motoric effect (as, for example, in the first movements of *La caccia* and *L'inquietudine*).<sup>89</sup> In a few instances they occur in the middle or upper parts (as in the first movement of RV 281 in E minor for solo violin, where it is given to the first and second violins, or in the first and last movements of RV 527 in B-flat major for two violins, where the viola has it), but these are a very small minority.

89. Of the ritornello of RV 544 Fertonani writes, “in the ritornello of the opening Allegro, one detects extravagant elements that introduce the bizarre subject [of the title] from which the work draws its inspiration: the two very long, uninterrupted pedal pitches in the viola, and the imitative repetition in the bass of fanfare motives introduced by the violins in the opening measures” (“nel ritornello dell’Allegro’ iniziale si colgono elementi stravaganti che introducono il tema bizzarro cui s’ispira la composizione: le due lunghissime, ininterrotte note di pedale della viola, e la mimetica ripresa da parte del basso dei motivi di fanfara già esposti dai violini nella sezione di testa”): Fertonani, *La musica strumentale*, 449.

Two concertos that feature melodic and rhythmic elements similar to those in *Il Proteo* are *L'autunno* (RV 293, third movement) and *La caccia* (RV 362), both from op. 8 (nos. 3 and 10 respectively). The shared hunting theme accounts for much of the similarity, the program of *L'autunno* being explicitly laid out by the sonnet, beginning with the bustle of dogs, hunting horns, and gunshots:

I cacciator' alla nov'alba a caccia	At dawn, the hunters head out for the hunt
Con corni, schioppi, e canni [ <i>sic</i> ] escono fuore.	With horns, guns, and dogs.
Fugge la belva, e segguono la traccia.	The game flees, and they follow its trail.
Già sbigottita, e lassa al gran rumore	Already dazed, and weakened by the great confusion
De' schioppi e canni, ferita, minaccia	Of gunshots and dogs, wounded, it threatens
Languida di fuggir, ma oppressa, muore.	Weakly to flee, but overwhelmed, it dies. <sup>90</sup>

Rubrics in the parts identify “La caccia” with the ritornello (see Example 3), “La fiera che fugge” with the third violin solo, and “La fiera, fuggendo, more” with the passage at measures 129–42 that closes the final solo. In *La caccia* there is no program or rubrics, but the excitement of the hunt is conveyed both by the nature of the ritornellos and by the interaction between soloist and ensemble in the two outer movements.

The motivic material of the ritornello of the third movement of *L'autunno* (which is in rounded ABA' form, and like *Il Proteo* in the pastoral key of F major) is less melodic than rhythmic: the motivic material for the first thirteen measures consists of a single cell (1), a percussive unit that Vivaldi modifies first to generate the cadence to the dominant (2, mm. 3–4) and later to generate a melodic descending line in the high-note accents (3, mm. 9–12) against a pummeling tonic repetition in all the parts. The simplicity of this material, together with its emphatic unison presentation, generates excitement while preserving the clarity of both texture and harmony, which is articulated in balanced four-measure phrases (the last of which does not return at the end of the ritornello). The middle section (mm. 14–21, not shown) is derived both rhythmically and melodically from cell 1; like the previous section, it emphasizes rhythm over melody and harmony, consisting largely of repeated pitches and remaining resolutely static on the tonic. In spite of the overall percussiveness and bustle of the ritornello, however, its construction remains clear and well balanced, unlike that of *Il Proteo*.

90. Translation adapted from Vivaldi, “*Four Seasons*,” xi.



## Example 3 continued

The image shows a musical score for five staves, likely representing different instruments in an ensemble. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. A circled '3' above the first measure indicates a triplet. The notation consists of repeated eighth notes and quarter notes, creating a rhythmic pattern. The staves are arranged vertically, with the top staff being the highest and the bottom staff being the lowest.

The triple meter of the first movement of RV 151, *Alla rustica* (In a rustic manner) in G major (the other pastoral key), evokes the bustle of a peasant festival, but its texture, like that of *L'autunno*, is clear and its motto, with its repeated notes and predominantly conjunct motion, suggests an orderly dance.

The opening ritornello of *La caccia* (the first section of which is shown in Example 4) makes use of elements that closely recall that of the third movement of *L'autunno*. Its opening motive consists of a repeated-note figure on the tonic B-flat, and it features an accent note, this time at the octave. Two rhythmic figures are superimposed (one in the violins, the other in the bass), but they provide a strong additive percussive ostinato. The second violins enter with the opening motive against scalar figures in the solo and first violin parts, but the overall effect does not detract from the rhythmic clarity of the texture. A brief tonic pedal in the bass that supports descending figures in the upper parts (mm. 19–21, not shown) provides a suspension of time (a kind of Baroque “stop-time” passage) rather than having to cut through the rest of the texture. The overall harmonic structure of the whole ritornello is I–V–I–IV (as V/ $\flat$ VII)– $\flat$ VII–II $^{\circ}$  (as V $^{\circ}$ /V)–V–I–V–I, considerably more complex than that of the ritornellos of either *L'autunno* or *Il Proteo*, and the ritornello is also longer. It is articulated in three sections to form a rounded but

**Example 4** Vivaldi, *La caccia*, op. 8, no. 10 (RV 362), first movement, mm. 1–17. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the **Journal**.

**Allegro**

Violino principale

Violino 1

Violino 2

Viola

Violoncello  
Basso continuo

5

7

7

b7





not symmetrical form: the first section is eighteen measures long and consists of a single motivic idea; the second (mm. 19–26) consists of the “stop-time” descending figures over the tonic pedal, followed by a stripped-down version of the opening motive over a dominant pedal, which comes to a sudden halt followed by rests; and the brief final section (mm. 27–31) condenses the material of the opening into a cadential progression.

The ritornello of the third movement of *La caccia* (Example 5) evokes the rhythmic and melodic characteristics of that of the first movement, and again it resembles that of *Il Proteo*. Two rhythmic cells (1 and 2) are heard together, as in *Il Proteo*, but thanks to the scoring, in which the three upper parts have cell 1 and the lower parts cell 2, the texture remains clear. As in the last movement of *L'autunno*, the first phrase of the ritornello consists of four measures plus a bridge (the descending scale in measures 5–6) that articulates the repetition of the opening. A second section (mm. 13–30) consists of two variations of the opening rhythmic motive: the first, in the minor mode, retains the same rhythm but changes the melodic shape; the second plays on the octave range of motive 1 but treats its lower pitch as an accent, an effect reminiscent of motive 1 from *L'autunno*. These two new motives, arranged in a four-plus-seven-plus-seven pattern, make up the second half of the ritornello; there is no return to the opening. The texture of the ritornello is homophonic throughout; even the two simultaneous motives in the opening phrase may be regarded as being closer to “animated homophony” than true polyphony. Despite the excitement and evocation of confusion that drive the programmatic elements of these three ritornellos, none approaches the level of awkwardness that characterizes *Il Proteo*.

In terms of affect, what is perhaps the closest parallel to *Il Proteo* occurs in another concerto that addresses a disordered state of mind: RV 234, *L'inquietudine* in D major. In this concerto, according to Fertonani, “with a sensibility worthy of the eighteenth-century libertine tradition, Vivaldi throws himself into an exploration of the deepest and most obscure recesses of existence.”<sup>91</sup> It too opens with an abrupt arpeggiated motive (although without the angularity of the wide range and anapestic rhythm), static tonic and dominant harmonies, and insistent rhythmic activity. The effect of confusion is similar to that of *Il Proteo*, although the sense of restlessness is then further reinforced by shifts in articulation, motives, melodic contour, and dynamics—elements that do not occur in *Il Proteo*. In spite of the differences, however, the two ritornellos function as metaphors for similarly disordered conditions.

91. Fertonani, *Antonio Vivaldi*, 152: “Vivaldi si immerge a scandagliare, con sensibilità degna della tradizione libertina settecentesca, le pieghe più oscure e riposte dell'esistenza.”

**Example 5** Vivaldi, *La caccia*, op. 8, no. 10 (RV 362), third movement, mm. 1–23. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the **Journal**.

**Allegro**

Violino principale

Violino 1

Violino 2

Viola

Violoncello  
Basso continuo

6      6      6      6

5

6      6      6      6

*(continued)*

Example 5 continued

10

*p*

6 6

15

*f*

*f*

*f*

*f*

*f*

## Example 5 continued

The ritornello of *Il Proteo* plays on a series of disruptions of musical logic that violate principles of order, organization, continuity, and proportion, according to which musical ideas are combined and developed in a manner that later eighteenth-century writers ascribed to Vivaldi. Forkel used these terms (“Ordnung,” “Zusammenhang,” “Verhältnis”—order, connection, proportion) to define what he meant by the kind of “musical thinking” Bach had learned from Vivaldi.<sup>92</sup> In an article on Vivaldi’s “musical thinking” Christoph Wolff has argued that these principles can be broken down into a series of discrete criteria by which melodic, harmonic, and textural elements can be brought to bear on motivic “cells” in order to generate larger structures.<sup>93</sup>

Example 6 is taken from Wolff’s article, and shows the opening of the Largo of Bach’s keyboard concerto BWV 978 arranged from Vivaldi’s concerto op. 3, no. 3 (the movement is transposed from its original E minor). The D minor triad of measure 1 is transformed into a linear motive in measure 2. The original pair of measures demonstrates both continuity, provided by the restatement of the triadic material, and contrast, provided by the linear extension of the triad. This contrast is then taken as the constructive principle for the rest of the movement, which is generated through

92. David and Mendel, *Bach Reader*, 317.

93. Wolff, “Vivaldi’s Compositional Art.”

**Example 6** Johann Sebastian Bach, (Keyboard) Concerto in F Major BWV 978, after Vivaldi, Violin Concerto in G Major RV 310, second movement, mm. 1–5. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the *Journal*.

Largo

a process of variation of the opening music.<sup>94</sup> It is precisely this balance of similarity and contrast, of restatement and development, and of variation within a logical process that the opening ritornello of *Il Proteo* plays with in order to create a topsy-turvy musical environment.

Several characteristics of the outer movements of *Il Proteo* highlight the difference between *rectus* and *inversus*, and indeed the third movement seems designed to illustrate, by contrast with the first, the elements of coherence identified by Forkel. Its ritornello follows a familiar ABA' structure and makes use of one of Vivaldi's favorite textures, the unison presentation of the material in section A. The opening motive of this section, like that of the first movement, is based on an arpeggiation figure, but one that moves down rather than up (another example of inversion of the original motive), and that builds slowly to its full range rather than traversing it immediately (see Example 7). Although the two motives share the ambitus of a full octave, that of the third movement is bounded by the dominant, c' to c'', rather than the tonic, again implying a more dynamic construction, and in fact from the beginning it suggests motion between tonic and dominant, instead of remaining static. This ritornello, in short, conforms to what I described earlier as the more "typical" Vivaldian model. After the first repetition of the opening cell, Vivaldi varies it and expands its melodic and harmonic range, creating a seven-measure phrase that moves away from and returns to the tonic, describing a rising and falling arc that contrasts with the frenetic but ultimately static arpeggiation of the first movement.

94. *Ibid.*, 7–10.

**Example 7** Vivaldi, Concerto in F Major, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* (RV 544), third movement, mm. 1–7. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the Journal.

Violino concertante

Cembalo

4

**Example 8** Vivaldi, Concerto in F Major, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* (RV 544), third movement, mm. 8–12. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the Journal.

Violino concertante  
Violino 1

Violino 2

8

In the B section of the ritornello violins 1 and 2 follow one another in a short imitative passage, trading the triadic motive at one-measure intervals (see Example 8). Again, this motive resembles that of the first movement, but its overall shape, combining its rising motion with a two-note falling figure, is more balanced and varied than that of its counterpart. Here, as in the A section, the repetitive nature of the material is offset by its active and goal-directed harmonic structure, which leads it to dominant seventh harmony.

For the third section of his ABA<sup>1</sup> ritornello, Vivaldi delays the return to the opening motive in the tonic by first reintroducing the rests that characterize it and merging its pick-up figure with the arpeggiations of the B-section motive; when the full opening motive returns it is transformed into a triadic descending figure. A remarkable amount of variety and harmonic interest is thus achieved using materials that are more economical than those of the first movement, but that are subjected to a rational process of variation and expansion. The question posed for the listener by the ritornello of the first movement—“What is wrong with this ritornello?”—is thus

answered by that of the third, which, in highlighting the structural oddities of the first movement, exposes it for what it is—a studied, deliberately awkward parody of a Vivaldian ritornello. Heard in the proper order within the concerto as a whole, the two ritornellos present a marked contrast precisely because that of the third movement conforms to expectations, and a listener anticipating a return of the strange elements of that of the first is struck by their absence.

The four solo sections of the first movement appear ordinary by comparison with the ritornello, once their notational peculiarity is taken into account, but they, like the ritornello, contain elements that undermine their expected functions. Vivaldi typically distinguishes solos from ritornellos in texture and musical material, giving the solos over to virtuosic figuration that contrasts with the more melodic ritornellos.<sup>95</sup> The solos generally modulate to the appropriate keys, providing harmonic linkage between ritornellos, which articulate the tonal outline of the movement. The first and last solos of the first movement of *Il Proteo* depart from this common template by presenting more lyrical material than the ritornellos, and also by reaching stable harmonic areas while the ritornellos are modulatory. The balance of the four solos relative to one another is more conventional: the first and last are the longest while the second and third are both shorter, and the last solo repeats the first. The nearly exact return of the first solo as the last has some counterparts elsewhere in Vivaldi's oeuvre (in the first movement of *La primavera*, for example, where the return is motivated by the program), although, as Talbot notes, thematic links between the first and last solo episodes are not uncommon.<sup>96</sup> Once again, however, appearance and reality are at odds.

The first solo consists of three distinct sections—measures 13–17, 17–23, and 23–29 (see Example 1 and Figure 1). It opens with a two-bar melodic statement (7, mm. 13–15), whose contour and octave range is an inversion of the motive that begins the ritornello. Other reversals of the tutti material characterize the violin's opening measures: the disjunctions of the ritornello are replaced with conjunct motion; rhythmic cell 8 (m. 15) inverts that of the opening, recalls that of the second melodic idea of the ritornello (5, m. 8), and inverts cadential figure 6 (m. 10). Most importantly, however, unlike the ritornello this melodic statement progresses to the dominant, suggesting a half cadence on C. The exact same material then passes to the cello, again implying motion to V. This harmonic structure, however, does not line up with the motion of the bass, which, as in the ritornello, consists of an ostinato figure whose harmonic motion (V–I) arrives on the tonic just as the

95. According to McVeigh and Hirshberg, in about 60 percent of Vivaldi's concertos the solo has entirely different material from the first ritornello: McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 99.

96. Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 110.

soloists suggest the dominant. This appears to wrong-foot the melody in a manner that is similar to the willful avoidance of coordination between melody and bass in the ritornello.

The violin again leads to open the second section, which consists of arpeggio figurations (9), and the cello follows as before; melodically this phrase picks up where the last leaves off, its long descending sequence leading to the tonic without, however, making a strong cadential gesture toward it. The most striking aspect of this middle passage is its sudden expansion of the harmonic range: given that to this point we have heard essentially only tonic and dominant, the appearance of the subdominant seems almost startling. This is reinforced by the shift from the ostinato figure to quarter-note motion, although the harmonic rhythm here remains at the half measure.

The third section starts out with more figurations (10, mm. 9–10), but now the sequence rises, balancing the previous descent, changing harmony every beat and building up to the cadence on the tonic, which is emphatically restated for good measure. The cello's phrase leads directly into the second ritornello. By this point, the structure of this first solo has taken on a familiar appearance, although one that is not generally associated with solo episodes: opening figure; middle elaboration (although measures 17–23 are not constructed on a sequential pattern, but primarily oscillate between subdominant and tonic); and repeated cadential close (mm. 23–29). In other words, *Vordersatz–Fortspinnung–Epilog*, one of the common ritornello forms.

The second solo also follows this pattern, with a similar *Fortspinnung–Epilog* construction (the *Epilog* being built on a sequence, as in measures 23–29). For this solo the sources present a problem: Vivaldi appears to have cut eight measures from the original string version, thereby altering the proportions of this section. Everett's new edition of the two concertos "restores" to RV 544 measures 50–57, which are not included in Malipiero's edition of the concerto because they are crossed out in what was his only source, the Turin manuscript.<sup>97</sup>

Everett's argument for including them is that the passage was cut in RV 572 because Vivaldi ran into difficulties with the wind figurations beginning at measure 47 and decided to resolve the problem by curtailing the second solo. This plausibly accounts for the cut itself; more problematic is Everett's interpretation of Vivaldi's corresponding marks in the string version, which he explains by arguing that Vivaldi had marked the passage with pencil strokes only "as a reminder to himself while making the conversion" and did not actually intend to cut the passage.<sup>98</sup> But the procedure Everett proposes for the creation of the new version, in which Vivaldi first copied the

97. Respectively, Vivaldi, *Two Versions* (Everett), and Vivaldi, *Concerto in fa maggiore* (Malipiero).

98. Vivaldi, *Two Versions*, viii n18.



structural outline of the concerto (bass and non-solo parts) and then added the new edited solos, as Everett surmises, in “an act of improvised composition” in which Vivaldi found himself having “some entirely unplanned moments to negotiate,” would not require that the original version be marked up as part of the process. In such a scenario the solution to the wind figuration problem, with its attendant cut, was presumably reached in the process of recomposition and was not preplanned.

In restoring the passage Everett effectively dismisses the possibility that Vivaldi intended to excise those measures as a result of having made the change in the wind version. The composer could have had several reasons for making the change, possibly deciding that he preferred the new structural proportions (solos of sixteen, ten, nine, and twenty measures respectively, as opposed to sixteen, *eighteen*, nine, and twenty), or that the extended figurations of those eight bars were merely a prolix and tonally circuitous extension of the figurations in measures 47–49. He may also have decided that in the original version the balance between the soloists was skewed—the opening three-measure violin phrase is repeated by the cello, but then the violin takes over for twelve measures—and that cutting the last section to four measures produced a nearly symmetrical solo. The manuscript and musical evidence is not definitive either way, and although the change alters the large-scale proportions of the movement (see Figure 1), it does not fundamentally modify the nature of the solo’s musical material or its eventual resolution.<sup>99</sup>

The third solo, for the cello alone, almost behaves like a *Fortspinnung* linking two ritornello sections, whose function seems recast as parallel *Vordersatz* and *Epilog*. The near literal return of the first solo between the fourth and fifth ritornellos underscores the procedures outlined thus far. It clarifies the relationship between the inner and the outer solos, and although it points up the regularity of the solo material, the two added cadential extensions (mm. 89–90 and 94–95), which are curiously unsupported (again) by the bass line, appear rather comically overemphatic, once more inviting the listener to consider the awkwardness of the movement as a whole.<sup>100</sup>

The solos of the third movement, like its ritornello, contrast sharply with those of the first. In place of the melodic material presented by the violin and cello in the first movement, throughout the third the soloists are given virtuosic figuration that reestablishes the distinction between thematic ritornellos and nonthematic episodes. The pedal point of the first-movement ritornello has its counterpart in this movement, where it appears twice, restored to the bass: in the first solo episode, first on the tonic F and then on A, as a springboard for the modulation to D minor that is the eventual goal of the

99. All these arguments, including Everett’s, are of course speculative, whereas Malipiero’s solution takes Vivaldi’s manuscript at face value.

100. On the reuse of material between episodes, see Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 47.

episode; and again on A in the second episode, as a tonic first inversion pedal. As in the first and second movements, the appearance of solo material in different octaves and instrumental colors extends the protean metaphor to include the entire concerto, and although the contrasting sonorities result from the ranges of the two soloists, in the protean context of this concerto they take on added significance.<sup>101</sup>

The second movement features only the solo instruments in a trio sonata texture. Given that the function of the second movement in a concerto is to contrast with the two allegros, it is not unusual for Vivaldi to use reduced scoring. (In op. 3 there are two examples of this, nos. 5 and 6, and in op. 8 five, nos. 1, 9, 10, 11, and 12, although not all are trio sonatas.) Here again, as in the solos of the outer movements, Vivaldi opts to have the instruments play essentially the same part, exchanging the material phrase by phrase and eventually joining together for the concluding section. In melodic terms the movement can be broken down into five sections, identified in Figure 1 as A–E. The first consists of a two-measure phrase (repeated) that arches from c' to d'' and back (see Example 9a). It recalls the first solo of the opening movement (see Example 9b), but—significantly—inverts both its contour and its rhythmic construction, continuing the manipulation of material from the first movement.

Section B (mm. 5–9) also describes an elaborate arc ending on the tonic (see Example 10a), but contains the first intimations of the move toward the dominant that characterizes the third section (C, mm. 10–11), whose function is largely cadential. Section D (mm. 12–17) presents a triplet variant of the second, with its emphasis on short melodic units separated by leaps and with a similar arc contour (see Example 10b), and is followed by an

**Example 9a** Vivaldi, Concerto in F Major, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* (RV 544), second movement, mm. 1–3. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the *Journal*.

101. Vivaldi wrote very few concertos for unequal instruments. (The majority of his double concertos are for pairs of instruments in the same range, such as violins, trumpets, or horns.) Only two are scored for violin and cello beside *Il Proteo*—RV 546 “All’inglese” and RV 547.

**Example 9b** Vivaldi, Concerto in F Major, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* (RV 544), first movement, mm. 14–16. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the **Journal**.

**Example 10a** Vivaldi, Concerto in F Major, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* (RV 544), second movement, mm. 5–7. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the **Journal**.

**Example 10b** Vivaldi, Concerto in F Major, *Il Proteo, ò il mondo al roverscio* (RV 544), second movement, mm. 12–14. A sound recording of this example is included in the online version of the **Journal**.

extended variant of section C (E, mm. 17–25), featuring parallel motion between the soloists.

The reversals evident from a comparison of the ritornellos of the outer movements suggest that a kind of palindromic effect connected with the programmatic title is at work. The overall structure of the concerto visible from Figure 1 points to some additional features that seem to underscore both a close relationship between the outer movements and ways in which the program may be seen to operate at a deeper structural level.

The second movement repeats the tonal procedure of the first solo of the opening movement. Set in the dominant—not Vivaldi's typical choice for slow movements, which tend to be in either relative or parallel minor keys for a major-key concerto—it breaks down into three harmonic areas of almost even length. (In Figure 1 the top row shows the five motivic sections discussed earlier, grouped by harmony, which is shown in the bottom row.) Again, these follow a threefold design consisting of a two-part opening statement (mm. 1–9, sections A and B), a long elaboration in the dominant (mm. 10–17, sections C and D), and a closing section returning to the tonic (mm. 17–25, section E).

The closing Allegro reverses the oddities of the first: what went awry in the first is put right in the third, using motivic materials and procedures that are remarkably similar to those of the first. In the third, the ritornello returns on vi (D minor), iii (A minor), V (C major), and I; the intervening solos are not distinguished by recognizably “thematic” material but focus instead on Vivaldi's more usual virtuosic figuration that does not usurp the ritornello's character; and the pedal point is used prominently in the solos, not in the ritornello, and in the bass, where it belongs.

As may be seen in Figure 1, similarity between the tonal plans of the first and third movements extends the elements of continuity and variation to the largest scale of organization of the concerto, evoking the specular inversion and protean mutability of the title, a strategy that will involve the second movement as well.<sup>102</sup> In the outer movements, the submediant and mediant keys are allotted nearly the entirety of the middle section, and the dominant serves primarily as a transition to and from the tonic. In the first movement the stable presentation of the dominant occurs in the second solo rather than in the ritornello that precedes it, which, in a reversal of typical functions, contains the modulation. In the third movement the dominant appears in the fourth ritornello, which again serves a modulatory function back to the tonic. Even allowing for the great variety of possibilities offered by Vivaldi's flexible approach to tonal relationships within fast-movement schemes, which are well documented by McVeigh and Hirshberg, by Talbot, and by Everett, the tonal organization of the first and third movements of *Il Proteo* stands out as

102. McVeigh and Hirshberg place the tonal scheme of the first movement in “Group A, subgroup A.2” of their Table 5.1a, which summarizes the various tonal schemes found in Vivaldi's ritornello movements. “Group A” consists of the variants of the basic pattern “I–V–x–I.” The third movement falls into “Group B” as a variant of the “I–vi–x–I” pattern. See McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 110–11. I agree that, fundamentally, the initial movements I–V and I–vi represent different harmonic impulses and therefore also implications, which warrant their treatment as separate schemes. For the purpose of comparing these two movements, however, I give more weight to their reverse symmetry, which is evident in the scheme I emphasize in Figure 2 below.

Movement	1	2	3
Texture	T-S <sup>1</sup> -T-S <sup>2</sup> -T-S <sup>3</sup> -T-S <sup>4</sup> -T	S	T-S <sup>1</sup> -T-S <sup>2</sup> -T-S <sup>3</sup> -T-S <sup>4</sup> -T
Key (F)	I—(V)—V-iii-I—	V-V/V-V	I—vi—iii—(V)-I—

Figure 2 Key structure of RV 544

unusual.<sup>103</sup> In both, extensive stretches in the tonic frame a central block in secondary keys, and the approximate proportion of the three parts to one another produces a balanced arrangement of three tonal groups. In the first movement, forty-one measures of tonic precede and thirty-eight measures of it follow the central dominant-mediant group, which spans thirty measures. In the third, forty-seven measures of tonic precede the first arrival of D minor at the beginning of R2, while another forty-five follow a central submediant-mediant section lasting some fifty-five measures. These nearly symmetrical schemes are all the more remarkable if we consider that they almost exactly mirror one another: I–V–iii–I in the first movement and I–vi–iii–(V)–I in the third, with R2 and R4 in the respective movements having opposite modulatory functions.

At this point it seems plausible to suggest that the similar designs at work in the three movements are variations of a single plan clothed in different—indeed protean—guises. This sense of protean transformations working over the whole of the concerto is reinforced by its tonal organization, in which the dominant key of the slow movement (and indeed its own dominant, which it reaches around measure 12, the middle of the movement and the center of the concerto) serves as the pivot around which the outer movements mirror one another (see Figure 2). As suggested earlier, the dominant pedal (on C) in the ritornello of the first movement also marked the middle for the mirroring of the violin and bass motives. Finally, the tonal organization also lines up with an unbroken succession of tutti-ritornello and solo sections. The very “conventionality” of the second and third movements following the unusual features of the first reinforces both the “protean” and “upside down” metaphors of the title.

## Vivaldi's Wit

Unlike the *Seasons*, *Il gardellino*, and *La tempesta di mare*, *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* takes as its topic an abstract concept. Lacking the more accessible signposts of onomatopoeia and pictorial representation provided

103. See McVeigh and Hirshberg, *Italian Solo Concerto*, 125–29; Talbot, “Concerto Allegro”; Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 109–11; and Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*, 39–45.

by more concrete images, the music is tasked with conveying such concepts as order, disorder, instability, and distortion by means of a purely musical language dependent on conventions of style and form. If the first five concertos in the Ottoboni collection are any indication, Vivaldi confronted the problem head-on: four of them deal with precisely such abstractions. (*Il Proteo* opens the group, followed by *Il ritiro* (no. 2), *Il riposo* (no. 3), and *L'inquietudine* (no. 5).)<sup>104</sup>

The rough and awkward rhythms and jumbled textures of the opening movement bear a faint echo of the rough fiddling and foursquare, percussive dance music that opens *L'autunno*, where Bacchus is invoked to introduce a tottering, unstable element into the “domesticated” peasant dances; they also have something of the wild, jagged quality of the hunting music in the third movement of the same concerto. The result evokes the frenzied orgiastic bacchanalia of Greek myth, and the subversive, parodistic, and disorderly elements of the charivari and Carnival, impressions that are reinforced by the reversal of compositional techniques that Vivaldi jams together in the ritornello. And the structural mirror effect that links the first and third movements similarly ensures that the world's dual nature operates at the very foundation of the concerto.

The constant exchange of the solo material between the two instruments, a very prominent consequence of the constraints imposed by the clef reversal between violin and cello, also plays into the title's implications by introducing another element, that of shape-changing Proteus. As the melody remains unchanged, its timbre and octave placement, like maskers' identities, are in flux. Variation, too, wears a double identity in this concerto: as materials are recycled—the dactylic rhythms and inversion of melodic contours of the first and second movements, the structural foundations of the first and third, and the melodic reworkings of the second movement—their varied form promotes unity, but it also, in truly protean terms, masks that unity beneath superficially different appearances. The metaphor of the title puts listeners on their guard: beware, for all is not as it seems. Lacking a didactic guide, such as the sonnets and verbal cues that accompany the *Seasons*, they are forced to rely on imagination and discerning taste; this was familiar territory for Vivaldi and his audiences, whether at the Pietà, in an *accademia*, or at the theater.<sup>105</sup>

I return now to a question raised earlier in passing, namely what Ottoboni might have made of the hastily arranged version of this concerto. The arbiter of Roman *buon gusto* might have dismissed it as a botched,

104. The problems posed by the titles of some of these concertos have to some extent been addressed by Fertonani in *Antonio Vivaldi*, 145–61, and lie outside the focus of this article. The present study is part of a larger project in which I seek to place Vivaldi's use of titles—particularly those of the published collections—within the wider intellectual context of the pre-Enlightenment interest in imagination, creativity, and the concept of genius.

105. See Rosand, “Vivaldi's Stage,” 8–30.

even uncouth attempt at musical mimesis, but this seems unlikely: the sonorities of the wind version are “absolutely unique, unprecedented and fascinating. . . . For the baffled listener . . . there could be no better musical imitation of this deity, whose face, it was said, *variat mille colores*.”<sup>106</sup> Vivaldi’s pointed choice of concertos for Ottoboni, with eleven titled works out of the opening group of sixteen, suggests otherwise. His inclusion of *Le quattro stagioni*, *Il ritiro*, *Il riposo*, *L’inquietudine*, and *La tempesta di mare* seems calculated to evoke, and perhaps polemically to underscore, the cause of instrumental music as a mimetic art. Ottoboni, who had been the patron and friend of Arcangelo Corelli (widely regarded as the model of a kind of “abstract classicism” in instrumental composition), would certainly have been alert to the aesthetic claims made by Vivaldi’s insistent use of titles. And as patron of the Arcadians, whose writings manifest at best a dismissive attitude toward music even in opera, he might have found Vivaldi’s emphasis on programmatic concertos at once intriguing and useful.<sup>107</sup>

The parodistic quality of the opening ritornello reminds us that Vivaldi himself had an earthy, rough sense of humor, and that he was not above the occasional bawdy musical joke, as in his labeling an unnecessary (because obvious) set of continuo figures in concerto RV 340 “per li coglioni”—obviously an in-joke intended for his copyist.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the parallel octaves and unplayable notes for the wind players, together with the unorthodox use of the harpsichord in the solo sections, in which, as Everett suggests, its traditional role is reversed, might have been the result less of haste than of a desire to emphasize the awkwardness and carnivalesque character of the concerto.<sup>109</sup>

*Il Proteo* shows Vivaldi capable of mocking his own compositional trademarks, but it also shows the sophistication of the humor involved, in that only listeners familiar with contemporary style as well as with the conventions of Vivaldi’s own concertos would have been able to follow the intricate interplay of structure, variation, and style involved. In this regard, the addition of “Il Proteo” to the title might serve as a further clarification of the concerto’s conceit: it is not only about the low humor of Carnival but also includes classical allusions and the subtle twisting and misaligning of technical details.

106. Sardelli, *Vivaldi’s Music*, 226.

107. One might even speculate that Ottoboni himself specifically instructed Vivaldi as to which works to include in the collection.

108. Talbot, *Vivaldi*, 71. Talbot’s translation of “coglioni” as “blockheads” is, as he himself notes, much too polite. Literally, “coglioni” means “testicles”; in Italian the reference—carnivalesque in its invocation of lower bodily parts—can be both disparaging (the insult “coglione” referring to a single and thus less than fully masculine or functional testicle) or admiring (as in having “quite a pair”).

109. Everett, “Vivaldi Concerto Manuscripts: II,” 30.

And if the present-day organization of the manuscript reflects Vivaldi's own, the fact that *Il Proteo* is so prominently placed at the head of the Ottoboni collection adds yet another element of significance to its playful commentary on concerto form—it is a self-effacing but intellectually sophisticated proem to the more serious and typical concertos that follow, perhaps inviting the patron to think about structure and style beyond the surface, and to take the titles seriously. *Il Proteo*'s multidimensional humor appeals to both *Kenner* and *Liebhaver*, to borrow from a later Bach, flattering the cardinal by including him among the former.

The close reading I have offered focuses on the listener's ability to create connections between musical events, both singly and in the aggregate, and the cultural associations elicited by the title. This process in turn depends on the identification of unusual features in the music, such as the odd elements in the opening motto, and their relationship to stylistic conventions. As a result the audience's attention turns to elements of compositional technique that in a more conventional work might be taken for granted. Artifice becomes an integral part of the work's rhetorical discourse, enabling the shift in focus to generate "ideas" as well as emotions from musical "abstractions." In a similar vein to Rousseau's conception of the "word" as the means for mediating musical meaning, Vivaldi's title functions as the catalyst by which aural (sensible) perception merges with intellectual apprehension of the music's workings, thereby generating aesthetic pleasure. *Il Proteo* makes a direct appeal for the listener's intellectual engagement: only by bringing into play a well-trained critical sense and imaginative power of association can the listener tap into the hermeneutic network and experience the full extent of Vivaldi's wit.

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## Abstract

Vivaldi's concerto titles draw ambivalent reactions from historians, who see them as commercial hooks, rarely reflecting musical substance. But titles condition a work's reception, connecting it to a cultural context by which to steer a listener's reactions, both intellectual and affective. Eighteenth-century writers on aesthetics recognized the role of textual "ideas" in the reception of music. Vivaldi's *Il Proteo, ò Il mondo al roverscio* is regarded as a "trick piece" in which the solo violin and cello parts are "reversed," each being written in the other's clef. The concerto, however, invokes a deeper conception of the *mundus inversus* metaphor, in that it constitutes a remarkably sophisticated exploration of upside-down compositional practices. While the opening movement challenges notions of "correct" musical syntax, evoking the Carnival celebrations of the "world upside down," the last presents a well-ordered example of Vivaldian ritornello form. Vivaldi included *Il Proteo* as the first concerto in a large group sold to Pietro Ottoboni in the mid-1720s, twelve of which bear titles. Some are as concrete as "The Four Seasons," but others are more abstract, deriving from affective or intellectual subjects such as "Il riposo." *Il Proteo*, in this context, seems especially sophisticated, cleverly satirizing some of the composer's own trademark compositional techniques. Its self-conscious treatment of style appears to address contemporary debates regarding music's ability to carry "meaning," an ability that members of Ottoboni's Arcadian Academy seemed to deny but that others, such as the philosopher Antonio Conti, endorsed. Might Vivaldi have fueled these debates with a provocative set of concertos headed by *Il Proteo*?

**Keywords:** Vivaldi, concerto, program music, *mundus inversus*, Proteus