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IN MEMORIAM GASTONE VIO

With the passing of Gastone Vio, on 7 January 2005, the world of Venetian studies lost one of its kindest and most proficient practitioners. Modest, unassuming, and unfailingly helpful, Don Vio possessed a character significantly different from that of the Venetian Republic, to whose history he devoted so much of his life. A mentor to dozens of *studiosi*, he was always eager to share his insights, enthusiasm and skills.

Despite his authorship of more than one hundred articles, several pamphlets on local subjects and a recent major book (discussed below), much of his extensive archival research remains unpublished. Twenty-seven *buste* of his gleanings make up the newly formed Fondo Vio housed at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. These include his copious research notes, many scribbled on the backs of yellowing parish announcements. The collection awaits an inventory. Two articles are in course of posthumous publication.

Vio will be warmly remembered for his generous contributions to Vivaldi studies, primarily through his many articles in "Informazioni e studi vivaldiani". Among his studies were those reporting new information on the Vivaldi family, their musical connections, their impresarial affairs, the Teatro Sant'Angelo, Anna Girò, the Pietà, the houses in which Vivaldi lived, and events of the composer's last years. Names, dates and places that were fuzzy in 1970 were pinned down one by one in his studies of the next thirty years. Vio likewise contributed much new information to the biographies of several dozen other Venetian composers (among them Albinoni, Rovetta and Cavalli), principally of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In many of them he provided an integrated approach to cultural and ecclesiastical history in which the rôle of music was not entirely separable from the social conditions under which it arose. To him such relationships were compelling and endlessly fascinating.

Born in Venice, in the parish of Sant'Angelo Raffaele, on 11 April 1921, Vio planned for a career as a priest at an early age. His education, at the Seminario Patriarcale in Venice, was repeatedly interrupted by treatment for tuberculosis. The longest such period, which was spent in Pordenone, prevented him from

taking a charge immediately after his ordination (21 December 1946). In fact it was not until 1949 that he was assigned to the parish of Santa Maria Maddalena in Marghera, where he remained until 1953. He was then briefly assigned to the church of Spirito Santo (near the Ospedale degli Incurabili) in Venice.

His interest in local history and command of canon law attracted the attention of the Curia. From 1955 to 1971 he was engaged as a notary for the Tribunale Ecclesiastico della Regione Veneto. His diligence, aptitude for languages, and persistence in pursuing information led to his being invited to serve on various commissions investigating the lives of candidates for sainthood from the Veneto. It was in these efforts that he honed those skills which were to become so valuable in later studies of Venetian ecclesiastical and musical history. Among the candidates subjected to his scrutiny was a former patriarch of Venice, Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (1953-58), who vacated the post upon his election as Pope John XXIII (1958-63).

Vio's thorough familiarity with every "stone" of the *centro storico* provided a scholarly asset of inestimable value. It seemed that he could recite a series of former occupants – and their extended family members – at every doorstep. His unrecorded lexicon of Venetian sayings seemed inexhaustible. For every circumstance there was a colourful phrase which nuanced the present with a morsel of Venice's rich past.

Vio's pursuits as a historian were limited only by the survival of records. His personal interests were many, his depth of knowledge about each of them extensive. His published research primarily concerns the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, although it spills into adjacent periods. His personal knowledge of the Venetian State Archives and of the Patriarchal Archives, the habits of scribes, the conditions of parish archives and related matters was so extensive that his counsel was a comforting stop of last resort for researchers and professional archivists alike. His interest in music was stimulated partly by his late sister Evelina, an accomplished harpist.

From 1971 until his death Vio was able to give greater scope to his historical research than was previously possible. Resident at Spirito Santo, he immediately took notice of the physical trappings of the church. Notably among them were a painting of Sts. George and Jerome receiving a blessing from Christ and an organ from the late eighteenth century by Giacomo Bazzani. Vio's first scholarly article (in the "Ateneo Veneto", 1972) revealed that two additional figures at Christ's blessing had been over-painted. Spirito Santo and nearby churches were the hub of a wide range of other subjects that stimulated a long series of articles and short books over the next decades. One of the many "spokes" led to Vio's extensive study of Venetian organs. Never one to divorce knowledge from its potential for practical application, Vio saw his efforts lead to the restoration of both the Buonconsiglio painting and the Bazzani organ.

Among Vio's wide circle of friends, it was Loris Stella who shepherded the preparation of the final text of Vio's monumental study of Venice's "minor" confraternities. The final outcome was long in doubt, for Vio's last years were

marred by repeated episodes of illness and limited mobility. Thanks to his remarkable persistence, Stella's practical help, and Giovanni Morelli's sustained encouragement, *Le Scuole Piccole nella Venezia dei dogi* appeared in September 2004. Published under the auspices of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, the Regione del Veneto, and Angelo Colla Editore, *Le Scuole Piccole* gives chronologically arranged, abundantly documented commentaries on each of the 925 groups concerned.

These organizations were "worshipful companies" of secular figures, primarily artisans. Their original purpose was devotional. Outgrowths of medieval guilds (some reached back to the thirteenth century), most of the *Scuole Piccole* maintained a side chapel in a church close to the locus of their work. They have been very largely ignored in historical accounts by the six *Scuole Grandi*, which were preserves of rich merchants who could afford grand halls and generous commissions to Venice's best artists and musicians. In lieu of funding, *scuole* members generally donated their skills to the enterprise.

The book begins with a foreword by Vio's lifelong friend, Monsignor Antonio Niero, a distinguished historian of Venetian custom and currently canon at the Basilica of San Marco. Vio's long, informative introduction follows. Thirty-two pages of exquisitely reproduced colour illustrations bring the medieval past of the confraternities to life. The bulk of the illustrations come from *mariegole* – official books containing charters and statutes. Many were boldly illuminated, probably by members who were skilled artisans. The author has provided a glossary of Venetian terms and (a great rarity in Italian publications) an index of personal names. In all, the work runs to 982 pages. The whole is thoroughly documented.

Because there was no standing literature on the subject, this is a book that contains new information on every page. The records of the *Scuole* peaked in the sixteenth century. Although the stronger groups continued until the end of the Republic, only 290 were extant in 1732, and some of those were by then viewed with apprehension because of their boisterous pastimes and abuses of privilege. Overall, the book reflects the dignity that Vio so readily found in the activities of Venice's poorest, least celebrated workers. Without some appreciation of their diligent attention to the maintenance of premises and the celebration of appropriate occasions, he believed, it was impossible to understand fully the fabric of Venetian society and its devotional expression.

No one engaged in archival research will want to ignore *Le Scuole Piccole*. Among its many virtues are its ubiquitous decodings of obscure relationships between civic and religious bodies. The content defies generalization, for even nominal relationships are curiously non-obvious. The Scuola di Sant'Antonio Abate, convened by the guild of glass-makers, met in the church of San Francesco della Vigna. The Scuola di Santa Maria delle Grazie, a sodality of jailers, met in the prison "La Giustiniana" (it was newly built in the seventeenth century). Among the most unusual documents bearing on musical activities is one relating to the "company of [100] gentlewomen called the Concerto Spirituale", organized in 1724 under the protection of Santa Teresa and

convened in the Church of the Carmelitani Scalzi. Vio himself often mentioned the account, in his entry on the Scuola di Santa Caterina, of the imprisonment in 1658 of the organist Massimiliano Neri by the Council of Ten. Neri's offence was having "protracted" Vespers on the Saint's feast (25 November) by continuing the service for two hours beyond its statutory ending time of "midnight" [= nightfall]. The instrumentalists' guild of the time maintained a Scuola della Purificazione della Vergine at San Silvestro. Its altar, according to a notary's citation of 1623, was adorned with gilt reliefs of processional trumpets, pipes and violins, and flanked by angel musicians. By the 1740s the guild itself was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. This decline mirrors changes broadly evident through Venice and in many other *Scuole Piccole*.



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