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Eleanor Selfridge-Field

Music at the Pietà before Vivaldi



Venice, Chiesa della Pietà (engraving, late 17th century)

The idea of the great man has dominated cultural and political history throughout the 20th century. In musical history 'progress' is usually equated with a series of contributions made by such commanding figures as Josquin, Bach, Wagner and others. A corollary of the 'great man' perspective on history is that the gaps between these pinnacles have been filled by dull valleys in mediocrity, for one can only be great in relation to something. When history is the discipline in question, one must be great in relation to the past.

Although Vivaldi is not by most accounts quite in the ranks of great men, the manner in which he is often depicted is tinged with elements of that perspective on history. Indeed the highlights of his life lend themselves very well to such interpretation. Although the Mantuan court and the opera houses of central Europe provided patronage for Vivaldi, the Venetian orphanage-conservatory of the Ospedale della Pietà remains

the institution that lent the most stability to the composer's affairs and provided the largest part of the motivation for his music. No figure of the past could hope for his image to have been flattered in retrospect more generously than Vivaldi's has been by popular conceptions of his labours at the Pietà. The Vivaldi of numerous record sleeves and programme notes is a lonely figure, forced by asthma to abandon his priestly vocation and to devote himself to the perfection of the musical skills of orphaned girls. The image created is one of great art moulded from the clay of obscurity.

Facts somewhat inconvenient to this view have been accumulating steadily over the past 15 years. First came the discovery that some of the music students at the Pietà were not the illegitimate girls passed anonymously through the window grills at birth, but rather daughters of the nobility who were admitted to Vivaldi's tutelage as fee-paying students.¹

Then came the suggestion that Vivaldi may have been banned as an opera composer for the Ferrarese stage because of presumed sins with his favourite prima donna, Anna Giraud.² Next came the determination that Vivaldi's wish to realize the maximum capital gain from his instrumental music led him to avoid the publication of collected works in order to sell manuscripts of individual ones.³ Most recently it has been demonstrated beyond doubt that some of the 'girls' of the Pietà chorus and orchestra stayed on for decades.⁴ Current investigation continues to promote a more realistic evaluation of Vivaldi's achievements by indicating (1) that the standards of musical performance at the Pietà were really very fine for at least 15 years before Vivaldi was employed there; (2) that music in the other three Venetian conservatories (degli Incurabili, dei Mendicanti and dell'Ospedaletto) was comparably good; (3) that the repertory was shaped in part by social and political, rather than liturgical, considerations; and (4) that what are perceived today as Vivaldi's musical strengths may, in the context of the conservatories, have been seen as weaknesses.

Music in the Venetian conservatories or 'ospedali'

Two sources of documents have become available in recent years. The first is a series of quite specific archival accounts concerning the Derelitti (or, as it was more popularly known, the Ospedaletto); these were published in 1978 in connection with Vivaldi's tercentenary.⁵ Given the roster of 17th-century *maestri*, which included four early composers of music for instrumental ensemble—Giovanni Bassano, Giovanni Rovetta, Massimiliano Neri and Giovanni Legrenzi⁶—it is quite likely that instrumental music of some merit was consistently presented. However, none of the surviving instrumental works by these composers can be specifically linked with this institution. At the Mendicanti, which received more limited treatment in the same publication, the emphasis can be inferred to have been more on the organ and solo string instruments, perhaps used exclusively in the accompaniment of vocal music. Among the Mendicanti's early *maestri* Paolo Giusto and his daughters as well as Carlo Fillago were organists, Francesco Bonfante was a violinist and Carlo Fedeli a cellist.⁷ But Bonfante and Fedeli, both with reputations as string players, successively served as concertmasters of the instrumental ensemble at St Mark's. It is not therefore unexpected that in 1689 the Mendicanti hired a *maestro di strumenti*, Giovanni Battista Vivaldi (the composer's father)⁸

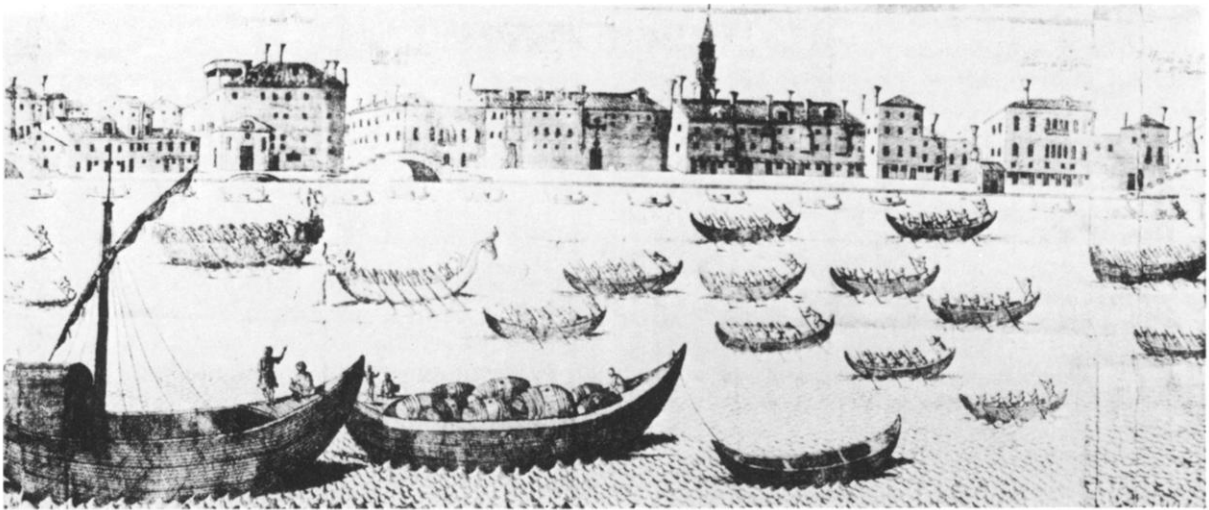
whose position was, however, discontinued four years later.

Affairs at the other two conservatories can be sketched briefly. Little is known about personnel at the Incurabili before c.1700, although the tenure of Carlo Pallavicino as *maestro di coro* (1674–88) was hailed in contemporary accounts as a glorious one. At the Pietà, Giacomo Spada was engaged as *maestro di musica* in 1677, and upon his retirement in 1701, was succeeded by Francesco Gasparini. Spada was assisted from 1682 by his brother Bonaventura, who played the organ and served as *maestro di strumenti* and *violino*. Earlier accounts, such as that of Denis Arnold, have suggested that the Spadas were diligent organizers. In 1684 a set of regulations—restricting entry into the choir, requiring attendance at music lessons and authorizing advanced students to teach elementary ones—was adopted by the governors.⁹

The second new source of information on the *ospedali* is the long-ignored Venetian journal *Pallade veneta*, a broad-spectrum periodical initiated in 1687 in conscious imitation of the *Mercure galant*. Seventeen issues of *Pallade veneta* were published at monthly intervals, thereafter the journal was continued in weekly manuscripts up to 1751 (discontinuous fragments survive in three Venetian libraries).¹⁰ The material found in this source, particularly in its published portions, is valuable both for its factual information and for the interpretations that it offers of the significance of individual performances. Such interpretations are rare in accounts of the period.

The reasons for the existence of this journal appear to have been complex. The original author is identified as Francesco Coli, a priest from Lucca who served the Holy See in Venice. Because he worked for the Inquisition's censor of printed books he was unusually conversant with all new publications, including libretti. Each of the printed volumes, following the model of the *Mercure*, was cast in the literary form of a letter. The addressees of these volumes were noblewomen from Lucca and Modena. The dedicatees included Duke Ferdinando Carlo of Mantua, three members of the Medici family, and two members of the Este family. Thus to attribute a Venetian point of view to the material is inappropriate; only the printers were Venetian.

The character of the manuscript portions of the journal is somewhat different from that of the prints. The authors are unknown and were probably multiple, but the viewpoints expressed show progressively



View of the Riva degli Schiavoni with the regatta, Venice: engraving by Vincenzo Coronelli (d. 1718). The Pietà is the second building on the left.

greater likelihood over time that clergy were involved. Unlike that of the printed journal, the format of the manuscripts resembles the *avvisi*, or secret agents' reports, that flowed profusely from one European capital to another through much of the later 17th and early 18th centuries. Whereas the printed versions are abundant in detail, the manuscripts provide only skeletal information. The focus of the printed journal is essentially political; the manuscripts are more narrowly informative. The style of writing in the prints is extremely lively, even exuberant, but that of the manuscripts is prosaic. To illustrate the way in which our views of Vivaldi might be altered by this material, the present article will concentrate on notices concerning the Pietà from 1687, the year in which the journal was first published, until 1703, the year in which Vivaldi became affiliated with the institution.

Study of *Pallade veneta* reveals that Francesco Coli found his way to the Incurabili and the Mendicanti in February 1687 and to the Ospedaletto in June. It was not until the end of August that he visited the Pietà. He forthwith apologized to the addressee of his volume:

'... it was negligent of me not to have mentioned to you the charitable institution of the Pietà, which is not inferior to those I have discussed. Here also there is a seminary for young girls to learn the art of music and of playing every agreeable instrument, and it produces performers who are so lively of voice and so accomplished in singing that they stupefy masters of the art; nor do I believe there can be another institution that can boast of having a set of better concerted and more eruditely played instruments.¹¹

Each of Coli's observations is weighted with consider-

ations that modern historians have been inclined to exclude from their purview. Since the Mendicanti is known to have had an impressive collection of instruments at this time,¹² Coli's final statement is well worth noting. No other information on the availability of such resources at the Pietà in the 17th century has ever come to light. It is also worth noting Coli's quiet implication that this collection was viewed as an important adjunct to vocal music rather than as a resource for music without voices. As a censor of publications, he was officially uninterested in textless works, but even taking that bias in his writings into account, one senses that he may, inadvertently, be telling us something of real importance.

This commentary also suggests an effort to encourage high musical standards that predates the 1684 reforms, for collections were not assembled, nor accomplished standards of performance achieved, in the short space of three years. Giacomo Spada may well deserve some of the credit for promoting instrumental music at the Pietà. In common with many who demonstrated an interest in music for instrumental ensembles, Spada passed through the rank of second organist at S Marco (1678–90).¹³ Previously he had been organist at the church of SS Giovanni e Paolo (1667–76); subsequently serving at S Marco as first organist (1690–1704).

Although the oratorio was apparently unknown in the Venetian conservatories before the 1680s,¹⁴ the progress of Coli's comments on music at the Pietà suggests that oratorios represented the most ambitious works presented there. This is surprising because no

Venetian oratorio from the 17th century survives in actual music and only a few libretti attest to the use of oratorios at the Pietà in the 1680s. Here are Coli's first impressions of Spada's lost oratorio *Santa Maria Egizziaca penitente*:

In this charitable institution on the 28th, the feast of St Augustine, an oratorio was sung with such satisfaction to the public that I suppose they will find it necessary to repeat it at other times, the nobility and commoners feeling desirous of satiating themselves with hearing it.

The poetry was by Signor Bernardo Sandrinelli and the music by Signor Don Giacomo Spada, organist of San Marco, a spirit so nimble in his works that he has nothing to concede to the Cavallis, to the Frescobaldis, nor to others [who] have united voices into concord. . . . The members of the cast were as noted below:

S Maria Egizziaca, portrayed by Signora Lucretia
First angel, by Signora Prudenza
Second angel, by Signora Barbara
Penitence, by Signora Paolina
Narrator, by Signora Lucietta
Zosima, by Signora Francesca

This last one, beyond her virtues as a singer, possesses a superhuman quality in playing the theorbo and also plays nobly on the lute, such that after the first part of the oratorio, with the galant *ricercate* that she played on the lute she carried the entire audience into ecstasies of admiration. The singers turned out to be so agreeable in singing [and] so articulate in pronunciation that no one could ask for more.¹⁵

This passage prompts speculation about the use of plucked string instruments. It implies, for example, that although the theorbo may have been the preferred accompaniment instrument of this family in the closing decades of the century, the lute was the preferred solo instrument. Scores of appropriate provenance do not make such a distinction manifest. There are solo passages for theorboes from time to time; there are few designated accompaniment parts for them; their use is confirmed largely by summary descriptions in title pages and by documentary evidence such as records of payment. Moreover, no *ricercate*, or indeed other kinds of solo work for lute, survive from this place and time. Quite possibly Signora Francesca improvised what she played.

In his next account of Spada's *Santa Maria Egizziaca*, based on a performance of 16 September, Coli was even more rapturous in his praise and focused his remarks particularly on the singing:

On the 16th the greatly esteemed oratorio of *Santa Maria Egizziaca* was repeated in the church called the Pietà with those most virtuous young girls with such acclaim and

applause that they could not desire more for actual glory. The attendance was so great that, the church being unable to accommodate so many, the streets and the balconies and windows nearby were filled to capacity with those desirous of consoling themselves with, if nothing else, at least an echo of those voices of Paradise.

I realize that I described this work to Your Excellency in my last [letter], but perhaps not with that eloquence which is merited by the *passaggi*, the *trilli*, the *gorgie*, the *graces*, and the sweet *maniere* of the never sufficiently praised Signora Lucretia, Signora Barbaretta, and Signora Franceschina, the soul and spirit of the most charming Sirens of this Adriatic Sea, the tiny instruments of gold on which Apollo has established all the highest prerogatives of music. . . .

I would avail myself to recount for you at the least each of the more elaborate passages, but that would be too tedious, and . . . I am inclined to be too prolix. . . . Even so I want to narrate for you the precise verses of an arietta sung by S Maria Egizziaca, who said this:

O rising sun, laugh on the sea.
Do not illuminate these grottos.
May it always be dark night here
Because I live with such sorrow.

. . . Let us turn to the end of the work, for otherwise, wanting to tell all there is to tell, I would find myself so involved that I would fill more than one sheet of paper. She who portrayed the part of Zosima, the Abbot, sang this toward the end:

O beautiful penitence
How agreeable you are to Heaven, O how able,
O how powerful are your adornments.
Much it does, much it can do,
Everything from Heaven entreats
The brow that cries.
I shall cry, how I shall cry!
Amid the rigour of cruel punishments
I shall find the Highest Good.¹⁶

This account concentrates on the devices of singing and their intended effects on the hearers. The authors of *Pallade veneta* had a strong allegiance to the triumph of the faith, and when they spoke of the *affetto* in sacred music, they referred principally to a response to the message of the text rather than simply to the manner of execution. Particularly in the mind of a book censor for the Inquisition, music succeeded or failed on the basis of its ability to move its hearers. The value of ornamentation was perceived to be in its capacity to promote this end.

To judge from *Pallade veneta*, the motet shared many qualities with the oratorio, but the context was personalized to suit the occasion. In November 1687 Coli elaborated on the performance of 'particular motets' in

a report smothered by metaphors familiar from the texts of contemporary vocal works. His account reads: . . . in [the Ospedale] of the Pietà . . . three of the most able Sirens sang with such acclaim that no more can be desired, even with the passing of the centuries. Signora Prudenza does not proffer a note that does not raise the brow to bring triumph to her glories. Signora Barbaretta transforms herself into such a vivacious, sweet, gentle spirit, so swiftly conveyed through the musical heaven, that she enraptures the souls of her hearers. Signora Lucretia, the pride of our age and the foundation on which one can engrave the *non plus ultra* of *canto figurato* because she enjoys a voice so full and sustained, such unpretentious ease, an affect so appropriate, whether pathetic or joking, that, born to be carried now between the turbines of sighs in a tempest of tears singing and, now with the guidance of the notes to which Apollo lent his splendour, pacifying the air with melody, almost [like] a pretty little bullfinch among the greenest branches of the spirit she hops, dances, and makes merry in a way that, making herself a patron of the heart of whoever hears her, now she urges him among the sharps and B flats, and now with flying fugues lifts him up on the wings of joy to the heaven of every contentment. In sum, I do not know if the centuries past had more galant singers, nor can I believe that they will have them in future centuries. I well know that at present she excels among those who claim to sing well.¹⁷

Two of Coli's three Sirens, Prudenza and Barbara, remained at the Pietà for a substantial time. They sang in such works as Gasparini's oratorios *Triumphus divinae misericordiae* (1701) and *Iubilum prophetarum* (1703). Both singers' names remained on the books in 1707.¹⁸ This Barbara may even be the same as the Barbara for whom one aria in Vivaldi's oratorio *Juditha triumphans* (1716) was revised.¹⁹ Francesca, in contrast, is said in a later passage of *Pallade veneta* to have been a young girl, and neither her name nor that of Lucrezia appear in accounts of significantly later times.

For Coli, each singer he heard superseded the last. On one occasion Prudenza sang a motet by Spada 'with that supremely suave contralto and in that spontaneous way of hers as a demonstration that makes me confess that our century has none better. . . . [The work] was sung by this girl with such sweetness and melody that one could not believe he heard with a mortal ear'.²⁰ Tonina of the Mendicanti 'with her galant ornaments (*maniere*) and affective methods of producing notes' sang a setting of *De profundis* of unknown authorship for the funeral of the doge Marc' Antonio Giustiniani in April 1688 'with such tenderness, with such noble frankness, with such sweet languidness that in the soft hearts of those assembled she separated the frozen

Venice, entrance to the Grand Canal: engraving (BBC Hulton Picture Library)



boulders of the Caucasus, unleashing a roaring [avalanche of] sorrow'.²¹ This responsiveness to the individual occasion suggests a dynamic quality to life in the conservatories that traditional studies of the role of music in the liturgy tend to obscure. That is, by seeking to fix general models and then cast individual pieces into an appropriate slot, we risk overlooking the real significance that such a piece had at that time. The firm view emerges from an extensive reading of this journal that the individual piece, rather than representing a class of works that was permissible, conveyed the uniqueness of the occasion. Perhaps this is why oratorios and motets attract so much comment in a repertoire in which it might be expected that masses and psalms would predominate. Similarly it suggests reasons why composers attached to the *ospedali* were such prolific composers. Legrenzi counted four masses, 70 psalms, 80 or more motets and an unspecified number of sonatas for both strings and keyboard among his legacy to the Ospedaletto,²² where he worked for only six years (1670–76), and a later *maestro*, Vinaccesi, claimed in 1713 to have composed more than 450 compositions over a 30-year-period for the same institution.²³ Pre-eminently, however, the emphasis on the individuality of each piece demanded a corresponding emphasis on the individuality of each performance that is the purest manifestation of the Baroque spirit.

Patronage

Closely related to the characteristics of the musical work and of its performance was the nature of the patronage that engendered both. Individual patronage in the *ospedali* has been largely invisible and therefore little explored. Musical virtue as its own reward has long been the popularly imagined motive behind the accomplishment of the *ospedali* performers. In fact it has been known for some time that in 1688 the governors of the Pietà arranged for one-third of the proceeds of church offerings to go to Spada, the other two-thirds being distributed, after payment of fees to sacristans and teachers, among the members of the choir. (By the end of the century Spada himself was lending money to the Pietà with an interest rate of 3%.)²⁴

To explore all the diverse lines of patronage that are touched upon in *Pallade veneta* is too great a task to undertake here, but to touch on the relationship of the Medici family to the Pietà in the later 1680s will give some indication of the rest. It must be emphasized that

oratorio was very much more of a favoured genre in Florence and other Tuscan cities than it was in Venice. The strong emphasis on the oratorio in this journal must therefore reflect the interests of the author and his patrons; it is not surprising to note that a large number of Florentine and Venetian nobility were present at the Pietà to witness a performance of *Santa Maria Egizziaca* during Lent of 1688. Coli particularly emphasized in his report of the event the response of the Grand Duke Cosimo III and the Grand Prince Ferdinand III:

... placed in good order with their musical instruments in the form of an angelic choir, they sang that galant oratorio with such sweetness and melody that they filled the breast of that Grand Duke of Tuscany with jubilation. On that evening they performed similarly well some canzonettes, which the Grand Prince enjoyed so much that he wanted them repeated many times. And what caused him to marvel was hearing Signora Franceschina (called this for her young age) play the lute with such distinction that he asked her to repeat the same fugues, and he praised her in particular manners and ways.²⁵

The popularity of *Santa Maria Egizziaca* in the eyes of Coli may suggest that it had a political meaning to its audience not patently obvious from its libretto.²⁶ Certainly, the oratorio *Tomaso Moro*, given at the Mendicanti in 1688, had an overtly political meaning. In recounting the martyrdom of the English chancellor Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), it celebrated the pregnancy of the English Queen, Mary of Modena, herself a Roman Catholic and sister of Francesco [II] d'Este, the dedicatee of the issue of *Pallade veneta* in which the report appeared.²⁷ The music for this work, which had roles for Henry VIII, Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and others, is lost; it was probably composed by Partenio, who was then *maestro* at the Mendicanti. The undercurrent of political metaphor in the Venetian oratorio forces a revision of the view that Vivaldi's *Juditha triumphans*, a thinly veiled celebration of Venetian subjugation of the Turks, was in 1716 an isolated example of political symbolism in the context of the oratorio.

The use of instruments

Although Giacomo Spada retired in 1701, he did not die until 1704. The first years of Gasparini's tenure at the Pietà emphasize vocal music and accounts from that period make no reference to the use of instruments. This could be attributed to the generally more concise reports of the manuscript issues of 'Pallade Veneta'. During the week preceding Christmas of 1701

Gasparini's oratorio *Triumphus divinae misericordiae* was reported to have been given every day 'by those accomplished *figlie*', whose melody seemed like 'the lullabies of the angels at the manger'.²⁸ In July 1702 Gasparini's music for the Feast of the Visitation was cited as having merited 'a good measure of applause',²⁹ as was his oratorio *Prima culpa per redemptionem delecta*, which was given at Christmas and repeated on New Year's Day, 1703.³⁰

When in August of that year Gasparini petitioned the governors of the Pietà to appoint masters for the violin, viola, and oboe, his request must have signified the final disengagement of the Spada family from the institution's affairs as well as his own unwillingness or incapacity to provide instruction on these instruments. It would seem reasonably likely that his intention was to further practices already well established rather than to encourage instrumental genres that were detachable from the services held at the Pietà.

The consequences first become evident in an account relating to 18 May 1704, in which the correspondent reported:

On Sunday the *figlie del coro* of the Pietà presented in their Vespers a *sinfonia* of instruments placed in every niche of the church with such harmony and with such novelty of ideas that people were ecstatic at the marvels produced and supposed that such manifestations must come from Heaven rather than from Earth.³¹

Although he is not named in the document, Vivaldi's first pay instalment had been issued two months earlier. Thus this appears to be the earliest document describing his work at the Pietà.

The document itself is subject to myriad interpretations. To the extent that the music was heard 'in their Vespers' it could refer only to the accompaniment of vocal music. To the extent that the instruments were 'placed in every niche of the church' it could refer to the polychoral method of performance. Either of these suppositions violates the 'novelty of ideas' clause, however. One can deduce two further possibilities: that the music was performed in the concerto grosso manner (that is, with full orchestra at one location and multiple responding trios elsewhere) or that the performance represented one of the more unusual distributions of instruments suggested in Vivaldi's earliest published concertos, *L'estro armonico* op.3, which were published in Amsterdam, 1711. There is no surviving music of the time that suggests a concerto grosso performance and that can be linked with anyone associated with the Pietà. Even among the works of

those not associated with this institution, works of this kind are few and far between in the Venetian repertoire.

The effort to emphasize the process of contrast rather than the simple repetitive scheme of contrast is central to Vivaldi's op.3. In eight of these 12 works the resources that are contrasted with the *ripieno* are themselves subdivided. The nature of the *concertino* group is interchanged from work to work so that it may require two independent solo violins, two groups of two violins, or two violins acting as one solo unit and a cello acting as another. Any one of these subdivided *concertino* arrangements would have suited the two lateral organ lofts and single chancel gallery of the Pietà reasonably well: the side galleries were certainly too small to hold more than three or four players. (One could of course argue that the performances took place on the oval main floor of the church. However, slightly later practice was expressly designed to discourage mere visual admiration of feminine charm by concealing the 'girls' behind the grills of the lofts.)

The fact that the op.3 set was published in Amsterdam has always allowed the speculation that they were composed somewhat earlier in Vivaldi's life. Indeed the format of most of Vivaldi's other concertos, although they often retain that fluidity of contrasting elements that makes the label 'solo concerto' seem inaccurate, is generally more settled than the spectrum of options offered by this early opus. The kind of experimentation with medium that is found in op.3 can be well imagined to have represented a first effort to emulate the prodigious legacy of the Spada brothers. Refinements and reworkings may have accumulated over the years. What is perhaps most striking in this scenario is that publication awaited a devoted patron, the same Prince Ferdinand III who in 1688 was enraptured by the performance of *Santa Maria Egizziaca*.

As in the earlier experience of the Tuscan prince, the role of instrumental music at the Pietà long after Vivaldi's arrival seems to have remained primarily that of an adjunct to vocal music, not, as we might otherwise assume from the current popularity of Vivaldi's instrumental music, as a self-validating medium. In 1711, for example, an audience at the Pietà was rendered 'ecstatic by the spirited harmony of that great variety of instruments' used in Gasparini's long since forgotten oratorio *Maria Magdalena*.³² The few references to music at the Pietà that occur in the subsequent manuscript numbers of 'Pallade Veneta' describe vocal music to the exclusion of any reference to the use of instruments.

Reviewing the preceding material in its journalistic context, however, reveals a final and fascinating new perspective on the musical culture in which Vivaldi worked: there is a consistent failure to refer to instruments in any of the numerous and long accounts of Venetian opera of the same period. We know that instruments were used in the opera, but we must deduce from this discrepancy that their employment was more perfunctory. The variety of instruments used in theatre orchestras was modest: a solo ensemble of strings and a continuo complement of harpsichords and lutes was standard; trumpets were occasionally admitted. Other accretions generally occurred only when instrumentalists were actually required on the stage, as they were in Carlo Pallavicino's *Il Nerone* (1679).

The most impressive documentation of the extremes to which instrumentation could go in the oratorio is provided by Vivaldi's *Juditha*, one of the earliest surviving Venetian oratorios. Most of the special instruments employed illustrate specific connotations of the text. A viola d'amore represents mercy, a solo violone represents sleep, two oboes appear in one soldiers' chorus, two clarens in another, and the chalumeau represents faithfulness in a simile aria that speaks of the turtle-dove. A walking bass taken by plucked instruments, four theorboes in one case and a mandolino in another, suggests the relentless passage of time.

Taken together, the absence of references to instruments in the opera accounts, the lavish praise heaped on them in accounts of oratorio performances, and the evidence of this lone surviving score from an otherwise almost totally lost repertoire suggest that instruments may have been to the oratorio what lavish sets were to opera—to those who were accustomed to seeing the splendours of the earth set forth on the stage, they were devices for intimating the glories of heaven. In a fundamental sense, oratorio aimed for a celestial effect by means of that art which, in the fine phrase of Francesco Coli, was 'the science of Paradise'. It is certainly noteworthy that three collections of Venetian instrumental music from the first years of the 18th century were dedicated to a patron who was a prodigious promoter of the oratorio.³³

If, however, the value attached to instruments during this time at the Pietà was strictly related to the enhancement of vocal works, which seems possible, Vivaldi's talents and instincts may have led to the deterioration of his relationship with the governors of

that institution. His own efforts in the composition of sacred vocal music (psalm settings and motets as well as oratorios) seem in general to date from the first few years following Gasparini's unofficial departure in 1713. Even so, most of the oratorios performed at the Pietà over these next years were revivals of Gasparini's own works. Only two oratorios other than *Juditha* are known to have been composed completely by Vivaldi.³⁴

That Vivaldi saw the virtue in instrumental music as an independent medium is not news. The news is firstly that instrumental music, apparently of a colourful and highly articulated nature, was already well integrated into the Pietà's programme when Vivaldi was still a child; secondly, that what Vivaldi brought to the Pietà was not simply variety in instrumentation but also novelty in the employment of an already partially assembled ensemble; and finally, that both before and during Vivaldi's tenure the primary value attached to instrumental music was in its supporting role in the sacred vocal repertoire. In short, what we see today as Vivaldi's virtue may then have been seen as a vice. Far from being viewed as the anomaly that it has always seemed, Vivaldi's oratorio *Juditha triumphans* should perhaps be regarded as the only fully intact example of a glorious tradition that circumscribed much splendid instrumental music in the Venetian *ospedali* in the later 17th and early 18th centuries.

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¹D. Arnold, 'Instruments and Instrumental Teaching in the Early Italian Conservatoires', *Galpin Society Journal*, xviii (1965), pp.72ff

²A. Cavicchi, 'Inediti nell'epistolario Vivaldi-Bentivoglià', *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana [NRMI]*, i (1967), pp.45-79

³M. Talbot, *Vivaldi* (London, 1978), p.80; and ed. F. Degrada, 'Charles Jennens and Antonio Vivaldi', *Vivaldi Veneziano Europeo* (Florence, 1980), pp.67-75.

⁴G. Rostirolla, 'L'organizzazione musicale nell'Ospedale veneziano della Pietà al tempo di Vivaldi', *NRMI*, xiii (1979) [special Vivaldi issue], pp.190ff; and ed. F. de Seta and F. Piperno, 'Il periodo Veneziano di Gasparini', *Francesco Gasparini (1661-1727): Atti del primo convegno internazionale* (Florence, 1981), pp.115-118.

⁵G. Ellero, M. C. Paolucci, J. Scarpa, eds., *Arte e musica all'Ospedale: Schede d'archivio sull'attività musicale degli ospedali dei Derelitti e dei Mendicanti di Venezia (sec.XVI-XVIII)* (Venice, 1978)

⁶*Ibid.*, p.43

⁷*Ibid.*, p.157 ⁸*Ibid.*

⁹D. Arnold, 'Orphans and Ladies, the Venetian Conservatoires (1690-1797)', *PRMA*, lxxxix (1962-3), pp.33ff. The Spadas' dates and responsibilities reflect more recent research by Don Gastone Vio, for whose assistance I am most grateful.

¹⁰More than 400 extracts concerning various aspects of musical life and an extensive description of the source are published in E. Selfridge-Field, *Pallade Veneta: Writings about Music in Venetian Society, 1650–1750* (Venice, 1985).

¹¹... nè mi sovviene per mia negligenza già mai mentovato il luogo pio della Pietà, non inferiore a quanti ne ho nominato. Qui pure s'alleva un seminario di verginelle nell'arte della musica e del suono d'ogni più grato strumento, e vi riescono soggetti così vivaci nella voce e manierosi nel canto che recano stupore agl'istessi maestri dell'arte; nè credo che si possa altro luogo dar vanto d'havere una muta di strumenti più concertati e più dotti', (*Pallade Veneta [PV]* (Agosto, 1687), p.97)

¹²In 1669 there were two chamber organs, a spinet, three harpsichords, seven bowed instruments of various descriptions, two theorboes, three trombones, and a bassoon; see S. Bonta, 'The Church Sonatas of Giovanni Legrenzi', ii (diss., Harvard U., 1964), p.488.

¹³On the consistently close relationship between second organists and music for instrumental ensemble see E. Selfridge-Field, 'Gabrieli and the Organ', *Organ Yearbook*, viii (1977), pp.2–19, and 'Canzona and Sonata: Some Differences in Social Identity', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, ix (1978), pp.111–119.

¹⁴There was extensive activity at the church of Santa Maria della Fava—where the Oratory of St Philip was established in 1661—throughout the 1660s. The earliest oratorio performance in a conservatory occurred in 1677, when Pallavicino's *Santo Francesco Xaviero* was given at the Incurabili. The earliest at the Pietà was *Il giudizio universale* in 1684. The libretto was by Sandrinelli; the composer, although not specifically identified, is likely to have been Spada. On the oratorio generally in Venice, see M. A. Zorzi, 'Saggio di bibliografia sugli oratori sacri eseguiti a Venezia', *Accademie e Biblioteche d'Italia*, iv–vii (1930–33), *passim*.

¹⁵In questo luogo pio il dì 28, giorno di S Agostino, si cantò un oratorio con tanta sodisfazione del popolo che suppongo necessario doveranno replicarlo più volte, sentendosi la nobiltà e la plebe vaga di satiarne l'udito.

La poesia era del Sig. Bernardo Sandrinelli e la musica del Sig. D. Giacomo Spada, organista di S Marco, spirito così vivo nelle sue opere che non cede ai Cavalli, ai Frescobaldi, nè a quanti di più bizzarri hanno unito voci alle corde. . . . Gl'interlocutori erano i sotto notati:

S Maria Egizzia, portata dalla Sig. Lucretia
Angelo primo, dalla Signora Prudenza
Angelo secondo, dalla Sig. Barbara
Penitenza, dalla Signora Paolina
Testo, dalla Signora Lucietta
Zosima, della Signora Francesca

Quest'ultima, oltre la virtù del canto, possiede qualità sovrumane in toccar di tiorba, e suona così nobilmente di liuto che, dopo la prima parte dell'oratorio, con le galanti ricercate che ella tentò su'l liuto portò in estasi d'ammirazione l'uditorio intiero. Riuscirono così grate nel canto, così articolate nella pronuntia, che non restava da bramar di più' (*PV* (Agosto, 1687), pp.98–100)

¹⁶Il dì sedici si replicò il tanto gradito oratorio di *Santa Maria Egizzia* nella Chiesa dell'Ospedale detto della Pietà da quelle virtuosissime fanciulle con tanto grido d'applauso che maggiore non potevano desiderarlo per la propria gloria. Il concorso fu così numeroso che, non potendo la chiesa capirne tanti, stavano all'intorno piene le strade e i balconi e finestre circonvicine colme di popolo desideroso di consolarsi, se non con altro, con qualche eco almeno di quelle voci di Paradiso.

So d'averlo accennato a V[ost]ra S[ignoria] nella mia [lettera] ultima, ma forse non con quell'espressiva che meritano i passaggi, i trilli, le gorgie, le gratie, e le dolci maniere della mai abastanza lodata Signora Lucretia, Sig. Barbaretta e Sig. Franceschina, anima e spirito delle più grate Sirene di questi mari dell'Adria, instrumentini

d'oro su quali Apollo ha roversciato tutte le più alte prerogative della musica. . . .

Io mi distenderei a raccontarli *per minima* ogni passaggio più fiorito, ma sarei troppo tedioso, e . . . mi converria esser troppo prolisso. . . . Con tutto ciò voglio narrarli i versi proprii d'un'arietta cantata da chi faceva le parti di S Maria Egizzia, che diceva così:

Riedi al mare, o sol nascente.
Non dar luce a queste grotte.
Sia quì sempre oscura notte
Perch'io viva più dolente.

. . . Passiamo alla chiusa dell'opera, che per altro a voler dir tutto mi ritoverei in impegno tale che empirei più d'un foglio. Quella che rappresentava la parte di Zosima, Abbate, cantò così verso il fine:

O bella penitenza
Quanto al ciel grata sei, o quanto puoi,
O come son possenti i fregi tuoi.
Molto fa, molto può,
Tutto dal ciel impetra
Ciglio che lacrimò.
Piangerò, si piangerò!
Fra il rigor di crude bene
Sommo Bene io troverò.

(*PV* (Settembre, 1687), pp.56–60)

¹⁷. . . in quello della Pietà . . . cantarono tre delle più canore Sirene con grido tale che più non potrà bramarsi anco con l'andar de' secoli. La Sig. Prudenza non proferisce nota che non faccia notar il ciglio per sostener trionfi alle sue glorie. La Sig. Barbaretta traforosella così vivace spiritello, così veloce per il cielo musico, che rapisce con sè gl'animi di chi l'ascolta. La Sig. Lucretia, decora della nostra età e base nella quale si può incidere il *non plus ultra* del cantar figurato perchè gode una voce così piena e sostenuta, una disinvoltura così franca, un' affetto così proprio ò sia nel patetico o nel giocondo, che par nata hora a portarsi fra i turbini de' sospiri in una tempesta di lagrime cantando e, hora col lume delle note a cui Apollo prestò lo splendore, rabbonacciando l'aria con la melodia, quasi vezzosetto cardellino fra i più verdi ramuscelli del brio salta, danza, e festeggia in modo che, fattasi padrona del cuore di chi l'ascolta, hora lo preme fra i diesis e i B molli, ed hora con le fughe volanti li solleva su l'ali della gioia al cielo delle contentezze. In somma io non so se i secoli andati ne ebbero di più galanti, nè posso credere che siano per haverne i futuri. So bene che al presente porta il vanto fra quanti pretendono di cantar bene' (Novembre, 1687), pp.36–9

¹⁸Rostirolla, *op cit*

¹⁹The aria 'O servi volate' was revised from a setting scored for four theorboes to one for string ensemble. The revision was expressly written for 'Sig[no]ra Barbara' (see the facsimile of the autograph (Siena, 1948)).

²⁰'con quel soavissimo contralto, e con quella sua disinvolta maniera a segno che fece confessare che il nostro secolo non ha di più. . . . Cantata con tanta dolcezza e melodia da questa signora che più non poteva desiderarsi da orecchio mortale' (*PV* (Gennaio, 1688), pp.83f)

²¹'con tenerezza tale, con franchezza così nobile, con languidezza così dolci che haveria spezzato i più gelati sassi del Caucaso, non che resoluti in rugginoso pianto i molli cuori de' circostanti' (*PV* (Aprile, 1688), p.33)

²²*Arte e musica*, p.124

²³*Arte e musica*, p.125

²⁴Arnold, 'Orphans', pp.33–5

²⁵. . . poste tutte in buon'ordine con i loro strumenti musicali in forma d'un coro angelico cantarono quel galante oratorio, con tanta dolcezza e melodia che riempirono di giubilo il petto di quel grand'eroe della Toscana. Portarono in tal sera così bene alcune canzonette che invaghitone quel gran Principe volle che si replicas-

sero più volte. E quello maggiormente li risvegliò la meraviglia fu il sentir toccare il liuto alla Signora Franceschina, detta così per l'età fanciullesca, a segno tale che la necessitò a ripetere l'istesse fughe, e la lodò con modi e forme particolari. (PV (Marzo, 1688), pp.20f)

²⁶Sandrinelli's libretto concentrates on Mary's repentance of her heathen past in Egypt and by extension promotes the idea of conformity to the Christian faith.

²⁷Through Queen Mary's pregnancy the Italians felt assured that Roman Catholicism would be re-established in England as a result of the ascension of the Catholic James II; in fact, the newborn heir and his parents were routed from the throne before the year was out.

²⁸'da quelle eruditiss[ime] figlie viene ogni giorno cantato il già scritto oratorio, che sembra per la loro melodia le nenie degli angeli cantate nel presepio'. (PV [MS] (17-24 Dicembre, 1702, f.1); Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod.It.vii-1834 [7622])

²⁹*Ibid* (1-8 Luglio 1702, f.1). The proper name of the church affiliated with the Ospedale della Pietà was Santa Maria della Visitazione, hence the special importance of this feast.

³⁰*Ibid* (16-23 Dicembre 1702, f.1; 30 Dicembre 1702-6 Gennaio 1703, f.3).

³¹Domenica le figli del choro della Pietà fecero sentire nel loro vespero una sinfonia d'instromenti ordinata per ogn'angolo della chiesa di tant'armonia e con tale novità d'idee che resero estatiche le meraviglie e fecero supponere che tali componimenti venghino più dal Cielo che dagl'uomini.' (*Ibid* (17-24 Maggio 1704, f.1)

³²*Ibid* (25 Aprile-2 Maggio 1711, f.2); Venice, Archivio di Stato, Inquisitori di Stato, busta 713, 'Giornali'

³³Predating Vivaldi's *L'estro armonico* op.3, Albinoni's [12] *Balletti a tre* op.3 (Venice, 1701) and Gentili's [12] *Concerti da camera a tre*, op.2 (Venice, 1702) were dedicated to the Tuscan prince. These earlier volumes both contained four-movement suites for two violins and bass.

³⁴They were *Moyses Deus Pharaonis* (Venice, 1714) and the pastoral *L'adorazione delli tre rè magi* (Milan, 1722).

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