

Vivaldi's *Te Deum*: Clue to a French Patron?

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Vivaldi's *Te Deum* (RV 622) is known only from a reference in the *Mercure de France* of October 1727. By species the *Te Deum* occupies a class by itself in Vivaldi's repertoire. The details of the performance of this work at the church of the Madonna dell'Orto, in the Cannaregio district of Venice, merit an ample rendering:

Le 19 [septembre] le Comte de Gergi, Ambassadeur du Roi T[rès] Ch[rétien] à Venise, fit chanter le *Te Deum* dans l'Eglise Paroissiale de N[otre] D[ame] del Horto, qui étoit très magnifiquement ornée et très ingénieusement illuminée, à l'occasion de la naissance de Mesdames de France. Du milieu de l'église s'élevoit sur une charpente, une tribune qui contenoit quatre-vingt musiciens... Le Comte de Gergi arriva à l'église au bruit d'une décharge de boîtes... Il fut sauvé par une seconde décharge de boîtes en sortant de l'église pour retourner à son palais, à l'entrée duquel deux fontaines de vin coulerent pendant toute la fête.¹

The church of the Madonna dell'Orto had a long-standing association with the French throne. We may read, for example, of another *Te Deum* that was performed there in 1687, in honour of Louis XIV:

... il Signor Ambasciatore di Francia fece pure una bella e galante festa nella Chiesa della Madonna dell'Orto, dove si cantò Messa con bellissima musica ed il *Te Deum* in rendimento di gratie a S[ua] D[ivina] M[ajestà] per la salute ricuperata della Maestà del Re di Francia, ed il giorno fece ricca col[laz]ione a tutti i cavalieri della natione.²

Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-90), a particular champion of French music in the last years of his life,³ may be suggested as the possible composer of this work,⁴ although the *Te Deum* was performed often in the early eighteenth century and must have been set by many composers.

The occasion for the performance of a *Te Deum* in 1727 was the birth of twin daughters to Louis XV. Vivaldi is identified as the composer of this work later in the account of the *Mercure*, where there is a description of a two-hour concert of instrumental music which « ainsi que celle du *Te Deum* étoit du fameux Vivaldi ». Vivaldi's lost serenata *L'unione della Pace e di Marte* (RV 694), which was dedicated to the newborn princesses, appears to have formed part of the palace entertainment, but there is no mention of it by name in this account.

The features of the performance of the *Te Deum* suggest a work somewhat different in character from Vivaldi's usual fare for the Pietà. The use of specially erected stands for the performers had been prevalent in Venice for generations, but the use of 80 musicians was exceptional. The support of Count Languet de Gergy for this particular work seems to form part of a consistent pattern of patronage that extended over the several years of his service in Venice (see the discussion of this patronage by Michael Talbot elsewhere in this issue).

Trumpets were customarily used in the performance of a *Te Deum*, and this causes one to wonder whether Vivaldi's single concerto for two trumpets (RV 537) could have been associated with this same event, since like the *Te Deum* it seems to stand as an isolated work in the repertoire. (Conversely, however, the trumpet concerto could have formed a pair with the *Beatus vir* (RV 594), which requires two trumpets.)

The jubilation of the French court over the birth of a Dauphin in 1729 was very great indeed, and this event was marked by the Parisian performance of a *Te Deum* that was composed by a violinist whose first name was Antonio. Owing to Vivaldi's *Te Deum* for the birth of the Dauphin's sisters, it is natural to wonder whether it was not the same work or a similar one by the same composer. But on that event, the description of the composer is quite interesting. In the *Mercure* of September 1729 we read:

A l'occasion de l'heureuse naissance de Monseigneur le DAUPHIN, M[onsieur] le Chevalier d'Orléans, Grand-Prieur de France, a fait chanter le Samedi 17 de ce mois, dans l'Eglise Paroissiale du Temple, un *Te Deum* en musique, à grand chœur, de la composition du sieur Antonio ci-devant Violon de feu S[on] A[lt]esse R[oyale] qui fut fort applaudi.⁵

This passage requires comment on two identities: that of « sieur Antonio » and that of the « feu S. A. R. » Regarding the first, the Italian baptismal name would seem to rule out a French composer, since a French author would have no reason to render « Antoine » as « Antonio ». The fact that this Antonio played the violin rules out virtually every Italian « Antonio » associated with the court in any fixed capacity. Up to 1733, for example, there were three singers — (Gian)Antonio Bagniera (from 1680), Antonio Favalli (from 1697), and Antonio Paccini (from 1700 or 1707) — all *castrati*, and all naturalised citizens.⁶ There are once-only references to Antonio Paressa (1720: « pour avoir joué aud. ballet »)⁷ and to a singer named Antonio Toricelli who was permitted on 3 September 1722 « d'aller à Venise pendant six mois »⁸ and is not heard of subsequently. Among *simphonistes* of the same period we find two Antoines (Forqueray,

from 1689, and Hardelay, 1717 only) but no Antonios. Specifically among both the « Vingt-Quatre Violons » and the « Violons, Haut-bois, Saquebouttes et Cornets » of the Ecurie we find neither Antoinnes nor Antonios between 1700 and 1729.⁹ Apparently then the description « Violon » in the 1729 *Mercure* is not used in the institutional sense and may easily allude to special patronage on an individual basis.

The task of identifying the « S. A. R. » of the *Mercure* account is less perplexing. « His Royal Highness » has to have been a blood prince (one who had died before 1729). Within the context of Vivaldi's working years (which were roughly the same as those of any other composer working in 1729) the only real possibilities are the Duc de Berry, who died in 1714, almost too early to be a serious possibility, and the Duc d'Orléans, Philip de Bourbon, who served as the Regent of Louis XV from 1715 until his death on 13 February 1723. Philip seems an eminently qualified candidate for patronage of Vivaldi. He was a musician and composer¹⁰ who, to the dismay of some of his compatriots, was known to favour Italian music.¹¹ In a violinist he might well have sought someone who could imitate or indeed emulate Corelli, whose sonatas were extremely popular in France during the Regency.

French patronage of Vivaldi's music from the wedding of Louis XV in 1725 onward is known to have been evident in a series of spectacular works, all apparently produced in Venice under the auspices of the ambassador. As Talbot points out elsewhere in this issue, relations between France and the Most Serene Republic were cool during most of the Regency. The thaw occurred rapidly when it came, however, and just in time for Venice to be swept up by the wave of international interest that was generated by the consecration of Louis XV. The event itself took place at Reims on 25 October 1722, but it dominated French affairs for most of the year. Already in February two special ambassadors, Tiepolo and Foscarini,¹² were making preparations to represent Venice at this event and its contingent activities. They arrived in Paris on June 4 and were received in separate audiences with the young King and the Duke of Orleans.¹³ Additionally they had an audience with the Duchess on August 4.¹⁴ Tiepolo and Foscarini made their Public Entry into Paris on 20th September¹⁵ and were officially saluted by the French and Swiss guards in the forecourt of Versailles on 7th October.¹⁶

In the midst of all these activities we may well wonder whether they brought with them a musical offering, and whether there were musicians who travelled with them. Some of the reasons put forth by Talbot for the representation of *La Sena festeggiante* in Venice in

1726 could equally well support its performance for the Public Entrance in Paris in 1722. The theme of the work, in which Virtue and the Age of Gold return to the banks of the Seine and discuss their privations elsewhere, certainly would have suited the situation, although the text is admittedly too vague to make solid evidence for any theory. An outdoor performance, which would also suit the work well, seems also more probable in Paris in September than in Venice in November, although there is no guarantee that the work was intended for outdoor presentation.

Tiepolo and Foscarini were relieved of their duties by 9th December, when the official ambassador Morosini arrived in Paris.¹⁷ He was received by the King and the Duke on the 30th of the month.¹⁸ Six weeks later the Duke of Orleans was dead.

Vivaldi's whereabouts through most of 1722 are not known. His pastoral *La Silvia* (RV 734) was presented at the Nuovo Teatro Ducale, Milan, on 26 August 1721. A libretto for the lost oratorio *L'adorazione delli tre rè magi al bambino Gesù* was published in Milan in 1722, but its exact date of performance has not been determined. The subject would best have suited the Feast of Epiphany (6 January). Giazotto's information that places Vivaldi in Venice in April for festivities preceding the marriage of the Princess of Sulzbach seems actually to relate to the environs of Brescia in March.¹⁹ According to a report from Turin published in the April 1722 *Mercur*,²⁰ « La Princesse de Sultzbach... est arrivée à Brescia le même jour [*i.e.*, 11 Mars]... M[onsieur] le Marquis Pietro Martinengo donna à souper à cette Princesse le soir du jour de son arrivée, & la regala ensuite d'une belle serenade. »

On 12th March the Princess reached Cavernago, a village west of Brescia where a castle belonging to the Martinengo family was situated. The account continues,

Il faut observer que cette Princesse a été accompagnée par quarante Nobles Venitiens durant son séjour dans les Etats de la Republique de Venise, & que M[onsieur] le Marquis de Martinengo l'a reçu magnifiquement dans deux ou trois de ses maisons dans le Bressan... il avoit joint à ces spectacles brillans, les charmes de l'harmonie, & donné des concerts compose des meilleurs voix, *qu'il avoit fait venir exprès de Venise* [*Italics mine*]. On avoit aussi représenté devant la Princesse un opera pastoral. Des qu'elle fut arrivée à Cavernago, elle fut complimentée par M[onsieur] le Comte Baldiani de Belgioioso, au nom de M[onsieur] le Comte de Colloredo Gouverneur, qui lui fit en même-temps offrir un Bucentaure pour faire par eau le voyage depuis Vaprio jusque auprès de Milan; elle accepta l'offre & s'embarque sur le Bucentaure, où on lui servit un dîner magnifique; elle partit ensuite avec sa Cour, précédée d'un batteau couvert rempli d'excellens musiciens, qui abregerent le chemin par l'agrément de leurs concerts.²¹

The Princess cannot have back-tracked to Venice as a « futura sposa » after these events, for the wedding was celebrated at Verceil on 13th March, with a triumphal entry into Turin on the 18th (Palm Sunday).²² If there were any celebrations in Venice to mark her progress, they should have occurred somewhat earlier than these events. In any case, Vivaldi's direct participation is not firmly established. However, the splendid reception provided by the Venetians in March 1722 for a German princess makes it seem all the more likely that similar or more lavish entertainments would have been provided for the Public Entrance into Paris of their own special ambassadors a few months later.

If Vivaldi had gone to Paris as part of a special entourage in the spring of the year, it is entirely understandable that he could have appeared in Rome for the production of *Ercole sul Termodonte*²³ for the Carnival of 1722-3. But wherever he had gone in 1722, he may have intended not to return. The only documented mention of him in the later part of the year comes from the reassignment of an apartment in Venice that he had rented for ten years to another cleric. The change was recorded on 2nd October 1722.²⁴ If he had found any lingering association with the French court, the reduced esteem for Italian music after the passing of Philip might well have discouraged him from returning.

It has recently been noted that Vivaldi's patronage by representatives of the French court goes back at least to 1705, when he played for a concert given by the Abbé de Pomponne (then Ambassador) to benefit the nuns of San Girolamo.²⁵ The long-lived Abbé (1667-1756) could have introduced Vivaldi to a host of other court figures despite the diplomatic breach between Venice and Paris that occurred subsequently. Until Vivaldi's possible connections with the French court can be consistently and fully documented, any judgement on the interpretation of the *Mercure's* 1729 report must be reserved.

¹ *Mercure de France*, Octobre 1727, pp. 2326-7. The capitalisation and punctuation of documents have been edited to facilitate readability.

² *Pallade veneta*, Febraio 1687, pp. 53f.

³ Legrenzi included music by Jean-Baptiste Lully, who had died the preceding year, both in a concert of sacred music at the Chiesa degl'Incurabili in 1688 (Stephen Bonta, « The Church Sonatas of Giovanni Legrenzi », 2 vols., doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1964, I, 111-112) and in a concert of secular music at his own home in the same year (*Pallade veneta*, Marzo 1688, pp. 58-60).

⁴ *A Te Deum* by Legrenzi survives in I-Rvat, Cappella Giulia.

⁵ *Mercure de France*, Septembre 1729, p. 2322. An apparently different *Te Deum* honouring the same event is described in the files of the Écurie: « Au

roy d'armes et a 5 herauts, aux 8 Tambours et Fifres de la Chambre et Écurie, pour le *Te Deum* qui a esté chanté en l'Eglise metropolitaine de Paris, en action de grace de la naissance d'un fils dont la Reine est accouchée, y compris la gratification desd. 8 Tambours et Fifres pendant le séjour de Compiègne ». (MARCEL-LE BENOIT, *Musiques de Cour: Chapelle, Chambre, Écurie*, Paris, 1971, p. 400).

⁶ *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 325.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 475-485.

¹⁰ Philip collaborated with his teacher Charpentier on *Philomèle*, which was given at the Palais-Royal in 1694, and with Charles Hubert Gervais on *Renaud et Armide* (1705), which was given in a concert performance at Fontainebleau in 1712. He seems to have composed all the music for *Penthée* (1705; 1709); further on Philip see CUTHBERT GIRDLESTONE, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols. (London, 1980), XV, 630.

¹¹ JAMES R. ANTHONY, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau*, rev. edn. (New York, 1978), p. 321.

¹² *Mercur de France*, Février 1722, pp. 117f.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, Août 1722, p. 193.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 196.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, Septembre 1722, pp. 186f.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, Octobre 1722, p. 153.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, Janvier 1723, pp. 188f.

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁹ According to REMO GIAZOTTO (*Vivaldi*, Milan, 1965, pp. 174f), « La principessa di Sultzbach "futura sposa del principe di Piemonte", entrata nelle terre dello Stato veneto per Brescia, proseguì il viaggio fino a Venezia, dopo essere stata l'oggetto di numerose attenzioni da parte del governo serenissimo. "Cenato in pubblico in casa del marchese Pietro Martinengo fu udita una bellissima serenata e due concerti coi violini e gli oboè opera del monsignor A. Vivaldi." »

Giazotto cites as his sources the *Mercur* (no volumes or page numbers given) and an archival source, « Inquisitori di Stato, B. 560 » (no folio given).

²⁰ *Mercur de France*, Avril 1722, pp. 153f.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 154f. Vaprio, the site of a famous Roman bridge across the Adda River, lay a few kilometers west of Cavernago.

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 178.

²³ GASTONE VIO, *Antonio Vivaldi prete*, « Informazioni e studi vivaldiani », I (Milano, 1980), 40.

²⁴ Only miscellaneous pieces of the work are preserved. These include a sinfonia and seven arias in the Paris Conservatoire. See WALTER KOLNEDER, *Antonio Vivaldi: Leben und Werk* (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 204, and ALAN KENDALL, *Vivaldi* (London, 1978), p. 233.

²⁵ KENDALL, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

Il « Te Deum » di Vivaldi: indizio conducente verso un committente francese?

Scopo del presente articolo è esaminare la possibilità di un legame di lavoro di Vivaldi colla corte francese; lo spunto è dato da due resoconti apparsi sul *Mercure de France* a due anni di distanza e riguardanti l'esecuzione del *Te Deum*, in S. Maria dell'Orto a Venezia nel 1727 (in occasione della nascita delle figlie gemelle di Luigi XV) e nella parigina chiesa del Temple, nel 1729, per celebrare la nascita del Delfino. Mentre nel primo caso Vivaldi è espressamente citato quale autore del *Te Deum*, nel secondo non si parla che di un « sieur Antonio », violinista di un principe del sangue defunto. Per quanto riguarda l'artista, deve trattarsi, secondo la studiosa, di un italiano (« Antonio » e non Antoine) il quale, violinista, non è alcuno dei regolari musicisti italiani di quel nome addetti alla corte di Francia. Il principe dovrebbe essere il Reggente, duca Filippo di Orléans, morto nel 1723, musicista e compositore egli stesso e amante della musica italiana.

Avendo Vivaldi lavorato ripetutamente dietro commissione dell'ambasciata francese a Venezia, la studiosa si chiede se non sarebbe possibile che egli avesse accompagnato in qualità di compositore e suonatore gli ambasciatori speciali recatisi da Venezia a Parigi nel 1722 per l'incoronazione di Luigi XV, nel caso — ipotetico — che un'offerta musicale sia stata eseguita per il Pubblico Ingresso della legazione veneziana. Confrontando questa circostanza con un'altra che interessava meno da vicino il prestigio della Repubblica — il passaggio attraverso le terre della Serenissima della principessa di Sulzbach — e considerando gli splendidi ricevimenti a lei offerti, i quali includevano rappresentazioni di opere e concerti sull'acqua, l'autrice ritiene più che probabile che simili intrattenimenti abbiano accompagnato l'ingresso degli ambasciatori Foscarini e Tiepolo a Parigi. Comunque, anche se Vivaldi vi prese parte, ciò non proverebbe che egli sia rimasto al servizio di un principe del sangue. Recentemente sarebbe stato affermato che Vivaldi lavorò per dei committenti francesi fin dal 1705, almeno. Tuttavia, conclude prudentemente la studiosa, per quanto riguarda l'articolo del 1729 sul *Mercure*, ogni giudizio deve aspettare una documentazione completa e consistente circa i rapporti di Vivaldi con la corte francese.

(Riassunto di David N. Urman)



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