

## Vivaldi, Antonio

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## VII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The related issues of the twentieth-century encounters between Catholicism and both modern art and contemporary art are treated in other entries. The question of what happens to an identifiable Catholic art when it enters into a new culture, such as those in Africa or Japan, is the subject of specialized treatment, as is the issue of the relationship, especially the current relationship, between Catholicism and the museum world.

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## VIVALDI, ANTONIO

Italian priest, composer, virtuoso violinist, and theatrical impresario; b. Venice, March 4, 1678; d. Vienna, July 27/28, 1741.

Antonio Vivaldi's father, Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, was a staff violinist in the orchestra of the ducal CHAPEL, SAINT MARK'S (VENICE), and a freelance violinist in local theater orchestras. One of ten children, Antonio was the grandson of a tailor and a provisioner of military troops.

**Service at the Ospedale of the Pietà.** Antonio's preparation for the priesthood extended from 1693 to 1703, when he was ordained by the Venetian patriarch (Giovanni Badoer) on March 23. Less than six months later, he was given the task of saying Mass, at the Ospedale of the Pietà in Venice, for the soul of a recently deceased noblewoman. The *ospedali*, originally begun as hostels for Crusaders and other pilgrims to the Holy Land, were renown in the eighteenth century for their sacred vocal music, which was performed exclusively by adolescent and adult females trained in the same institutions. This soon led to Vivaldi's employment as a string (principally violin) teacher at the Pietà. He worked under the direction of Francesco Gasparini (1661–1727), who also engaged masters of the cello and oboe. After Gasparini's departure in 1713, Vivaldi took on greater responsibility for new compositions, including those for voice and chorus, though he never assumed Gasparini's title of *maestro di coro*. Vivaldi's solo motets (RV 623–634; "RV" refers to the Ryom catalog of works) come from his first stint at the Pietà.

At the time of Vivaldi's arrival, the musical *figlie* ("daughters") of the Pietà numbered fifty. Their ages (contrary to widespread belief) ranged from thirteen to seventy-one. Seventeen were singers, three organists. String players numbered twenty-eight. Two theorbists completed the *cappella*. Psalms and motets of high quality were expected for VESPERS and certain other services on particular feasts. Vivaldi expanded programs to include concertos. Although he followed Gasparini's lead in providing oratorios, Vivaldi's appear to have been intended for unique occasions, rather than for the Sunday afternoons of ADVENT and LENT, which was their traditional place in the Venetian *ospedali*.

The message of Vivaldi's only surviving oratorio, *Juditha triumphans* (1716; RV 644), was Christian conquest, expressed through the Old Testament story of Judith's beheading of Holofernes. The composition was dedicated to the commander of Venetian forces at Corfu. *Juditha* deploys the full roster of common and uncommon instruments of the time—violins and cellos as well as the *viola d'amore* (a bowed instrument with "sympa-

thetic” strings), several theorbos (archlutes), obbligato oboes, and trumpets. *Juditha* is also a work of profound feeling and delineation of character equal (or perhaps superior) to that found in most of Vivaldi’s operas. (Vivaldi’s other three oratorios—one for the Pietà, one for Vicenza, and one for Milan—are lost.)

Vivaldi’s singular skills, ambitions, and reputation as a violin virtuoso developed rapidly during his first years at the Pietà. He encouraged the players by procuring top-quality instruments, bows, and strings. A great gush of innovative new music—initially concertos, later motets and oratorios—issued from the Pietà. Visitors to Venice came in increasing numbers to hear these well-trained girls and women perform in the galleries of the long-gutted church of the Pietà. The modern church called the Pietà was opened twenty years after Vivaldi’s death.

**Musical Efforts outside the Pietà.** Growing fame lured the cleric-turned-composer to accept numerous invitations to give private lessons, serve at functions on the mainland, and write individual pieces on commission for wealthy amateur musicians. Additionally, the composer and his father were both involved in theater orchestras, especially that of the Teatro Sant’Angelo, where they served jointly as impresarios from 1713 to 1715. They were also involved with operas and serenatas in provincial towns of the mainland (e.g., Rovigo in 1705, Vicenza in 1713). Both Vivaldis developed reputations as tough agents in theatrical negotiations. Both were frequently defendants in complaints from singers and players about lack of payment. One innovation of their tenure at Sant’Angelo was the substitution of virtuoso violin solos for comic intermezzi between the three acts of an opera. To capture audiences’ imaginations, Sant’Angelo promoted works with dark, mysterious scenes portraying monsters and magic. The Vivaldis’ activities as impresarios and their, especially Antonio’s, availability as intermission violinists remained the most consistent activity of their lives until Giovanni Battista’s death in 1736.

The production of sacred music between 1717 and 1723, when Vivaldi was absent from the Pietà and largely absent from Venice, remained fairly steady. As a musician at the Mantuan court (mid-1717 to mid-1720), Vivaldi was mainly involved with the production of operas and cantatas, but incidental duties acquainted him with scoring for horns. Similarly, engagements in ROME (1720–1722) exposed him to the cross-flute, and it soon began to find a place in his chamber music. In addition to theatrical involvements, Vivaldi offered some performances under the patronage of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (1667–1740), nephew of the Venetian pope

ALEXANDER VIII (r. 1689–1691), in his famously musical palace.

During Vivaldi’s absence from Venice, music at the Pietà had languished. A condition of his reappointment (1723) was that he should provide two new concertos a month. Much like J.S. BACH (who, concurrently in Leipzig, was asked to provide one new sacred cantata a week), Vivaldi was tethered to a rigorous schedule of composition. The new concertos that flowed from his pen in the mid-to-late 1720s were to be among the most accomplished works written in that medium by anyone anywhere. Among his admirers was the emperor Charles IV (1685–1740), whom he entertained at a diplomatic meeting in Trieste in September 1728. The network of contacts Vivaldi gained from this one appearance stood him in good stead for several years, though in Venice the demand for his skills began to decline, as changing taste came to favor music of a more popular, less virtuosic nature. (Some of the titles that Vivaldi bore, such as “universal chapel master” to the landgrave Philip of Hesse-Darmstadt [1671–1736], were honorary.)

After the death of his mother in 1728, Vivaldi and his father became more adventurous in their travels. Late in 1729 they set off for “Germany” (a collective designation for lands in Austria, Bohemia, and Poland, as well as German principalities). Although the trip was intended to last for only a year, their itinerary and the duration of their trip remain hazy. Vivaldi produced operas in Verona in 1732 but did not consistently work in Venice again until 1733.

After the death of Giovanni Battista, Antonio seems to have been less able to defend the myriad confrontations that his theatrical involvements generated. While the Pietà *figlie* continued to excel (so much so that fee-paying residential students were occasionally taken in), Vivaldi was increasingly bothered by problems involving his siblings (only one of whom developed any musical skills). The husband of one sister led such a scandalous life in the later 1730s that his misconduct tarnished the composer’s reputation. It is likely to have been rumors of these activities, rather than any misdeeds of Vivaldi himself, that led to the cancellation of the composer’s contract to produce operas in Ferrara in 1738. His ban by the papal legate caused Vivaldi such profound financial distress that in the spring of 1740, after composing some stunning instrumental pieces for the visiting Saxon prince, Friedrich Christian (1722–1763), he clandestinely left the city of his birth for what turned out to be the last time. He died in Vienna on July 27 or 28, 1741, and was buried in a pauper’s grave that no longer exists.

**Further Sacred Music.** Vivaldi's remaining sacred music, little of which can be precisely dated, includes one complete Mass, a single Kyrie, three Glorias, and two Credos; twenty psalm settings; two Magnificats; a miscellany of hymns and sequences; and no fewer than nine musical "introductions" to vespers psalms and Mass movements.

On balance, the works for two choirs, noted for their majesty as opposed to the virtuosity of the instrumental music, are the best known of Vivaldi's sacred works. These include the Kyrie (RV 587), Dixit Dominus (RV 594), Beatus vir (RV 597), Laudate pueri (RV 602b and its variant RV 603), and SALVE REGINA (RV 616). Problems of attribution linger over several other works. Two of the Glorias (RV 588 and 589), as well as the Dixit Dominus (RV 595), incorporate movements by other composers. Conversely, another Dixit Dominus (RV 807) and Nisi Dominus of 1739 (RV 803) were until recently attributed to Baldassare GALUPPI.

A few of Vivaldi's orchestral works are linked to particular feasts. For example, the concerto for two oboes, two clarinets, two recorders, two violins, bassoon, and lute (RV 556) was composed for the feast of St. LAWRENCE, while the violin concertos (RV 581 and 582) are for the feast of Assumption.

Although the choral, sacred vocal, and instrumental works are taken to represent styles preferred in Venice, especially at the Pietà, many individual works can now be linked to feasts and consecrations in scattered Italian locations (e.g., Padua, Vicenza, Brescia, and Cento) or to distinguished patrons abroad (Saxony, Austria, and Bohemia).

**SEE ALSO** LITURGICAL MUSIC, HISTORY OF: V. 1600–1750; MUSIC AND CATHOLICISM.

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