

The Cellist's Vivaldi by Nancy Pierson Price. Lulu 2014

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) – The Father of the Concerto.

Vivaldi wrote almost 600 instrumental works and 145 Vocal works. He was a famous violinist stretching the limits of technique. Associated with the renowned orphanage, The Pieta, for almost 40 years, he composed concertos for violin, cello and many combinations of instruments to show off the virtuosity of the Pieta musicians and provide choral music for the Pieta religious services. For cellists we are fortunate to inherit 25 complete concertos, one 2-cello concerto, and 9 sonatas.

1. Venice – An independent republic. A major port with extended territories in the eastern Mediterranean. A mecca for wealthy travelers on the Grand Tour of Europe
2. High excellence of the Venice musical life--7 opera houses and a citizenry of musical elites and players. The attraction of the 4 Ospedali orphanages and homeless shelters with well-trained musicians.
3. Vivaldi. A prolific composer and father of the concerto. A violinist of amazing technique. An opera composer, impresario, and traveler. His association with the Pieta for 40 years demanded a stream of new music for the ospedale as well as the many musicians who came to see him and study with him.
4. The concerto form as Vivaldi standardized it. Vivaldi's concerto had 3 movements—fast-slow-fast. He used a background of strings (2 violins, viola, cello/basso continuo). This grouping usually started the concerto as the ritornello, then dropping the group for the solo episode usually with just the basso continuo. Ritornello and solo alternated 4-6 times with a ritornello end. The slow movement usually had only the solo and basso continuo and had 2 binary sections, each repeated.

The last movement much like the first movement. The movements were named with allegro, andante, etc—no more dance movements. Of course over 40 years he made many deviations from the basic form and in that respect was quite inventive. There are 27 cello concertos RV 398-RV224 listed in the Ryom Catalog. RV 404 and 415, however, are considered spurious. Two more are only known of by the viola parts. RV 531 is the beloved concerto for two cellos.
5. Vivaldi Sonatas. Six sonatas were published by LeClerc in Paris around 1740 in an unauthorized printing. In 1916 the 6 sonatas were again published by Salabert in Paris. Three more have come to light in Napoli and the Schonborn collection.
6. Disappearance of Vivaldi's music. The non appearance of Vivaldi in music catalogs. The amazing story of tracking down hundreds of his concertos in Italy. 27 folios of over 300 works came to light in the 1930's. J.S. Bach studied Vivaldi's music and composed harpsichord concertos based on Vivaldi's music.
7. Violoncello – Transformation from gamba to cello. The improvements of wound strings were made it possible to make the cello smaller. In Venice Goffriller, Guernerius, Tononi, and Montagnana were making the cellos used by the Pieta musicians and which are worth a fortune today. Vivaldi's violinistic prowess spilled over into more virtuosic cello playing which shows in some of the cello concerto.

