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Full details of the Society's officers and activities, and information about membership, can be obtained from the Administrator. Contributions for *The Viola da Gamba Society Journal*, which may be about any topic related to early bowed string instruments and their music, are always welcome, though potential authors are asked to contact the editor at an early stage in the preparation of their articles. Finished material should preferably be submitted by e-mail as well as in hard copy.

A style guide is available on the vdgs web-site.

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Abbreviations used in issues of this Journal:

GMO *Grove Music Online*, ed. D. Root <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com>>.

IMCCM *The Viola da Gamba Society Index of Manuscripts Containing Consort Music*, ed. A. Ashbee, R. Thompson and J. Wainwright, I (Aldershot, 2001); II (Aldershot, 2008). Now online at <www.vdgs.org.uk/indexmss.html>

MGG2 *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. L. Finscher <<http://www.mgg-online.com>>

ODNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. L. Goldman <www.oxforddnb.com>.

RISM *Repertoire internationale des sources musicales*. www.rism.info

Bettina Hoffmann, *I bassi d'arco di Antonio Vivaldi*
Violoncello, contrabbasso e viola da gamba al suo tempo e nelle sue opere

Collana "Studi di musica veneta, Quaderni vivaldiani", XIX, Leo S. Olschki editore, Firenze, 2020, xvi-596 pp. ISBN: 9788822266903. Paperback, £60 [In Italian]

[Antonio Vivaldi's bass stringed instruments - The cello, double bass and viola da gamba at his time and in his works]

In the second half of the 16th century poetry and theatre prospered in England as did secular performances of music, in particular arrangements of vocal works and also new compositions for the delicate stringed instruments of the viol family. Leading scholars of all stripes have shone light on this fascinating period and have also mapped out the developments which took performances out of the grand houses, where whole families were often proficient viol players, and into public spaces. But it was not until the early 18th century, when the viol's potent relatives in the violin family had gained popularity, and professional music-making developed, that sturdy (Baroque) music reached these shores.

By contrast the Italians, or should we say the cognoscenti of the different city states of the peninsula, had lost interest in viols already by the mid 17th century (except in niches such as Messina, home to the Ruffo family of instrumentalists), because performances by virtuoso violinists, and even cellists, had come to dominate musical taste. The phenomenon is one of many important themes in the new book about the music of Vivaldi (1678-1741) by the excellent musicologist, Bettina Hoffmann, herself a performer of both the bass viol and cello. Her apology early in the book for the lack of enthusiasm for viols in Italy will endear her to fellow contributors and members of the Viola da Gamba Society, even if its publications over the last 70 years have encompassed all bowed stringed instruments.

As her major publication of 2006, a wide-ranging history of *The Viola da Gamba*, only became available in English in 2018, I am delighted to have read in Italian and be able to champion this new book, published in 2020, which focusses on a really important Baroque composer. Until comparatively recently, Vivaldi has been ignored or belittled. Ordained in 1703, and on account of his red hair, he was just the 'Red Priest' who wrote 'boring and repetitive concertos' for his pupils to perform (so at least 50 operas and some 60 sacred works were overlooked). Thankfully the king of Venetian music has now fully emerged from the Ospedale della Pietà, the orphanage where he lived and worked for most of his life, due in large part to the excellent research of Michael Talbot, Peter Ryom, Micky White and others, and his music is now ubiquitously performed with enthusiasm.

While much of *'The bass stringed instruments of Antonio Vivaldi'* might be regarded only as compulsory reading for cellists, as Part 2 is devoted to detailed analysis of all of the cello concerti (RV398 through to RV423, two spurious ones and one for two celli), the book takes an engaging view of many historical facts and thus provides a rich picture of the musical life around Vivaldi. Bettina Hoffmann gives her own insights into the many sources, both original and modern, found in Italian and German libraries and also Manchester (!). She brings with her the knowledge of an internationally known performer and also the salt and pepper of being German but living in Tuscany, married to a very successful Florentine flautist. She studied with the legendary viol player, Wieland Kuijken in the Netherlands, who surely instilled in her a broad understanding and brought rigour to her analysis of works for bass instruments. The whole subject has been neglected in part because treble instruments have a more solistic profile than do the bassi (and continuo keyboard) used predominantly to accompany them. This study is therefore very welcome.

Part 2 is full of musical examples to help interested performers chose works and also identify technical problems caused, for example, by fingerings. Each cello concerto is set into the context of the composer's life, maybe when the same music had been used in another compositional context or performances of it were well documented in church or noblemen's records. There are references to the rastrographic work of other researchers and also to the transgressions of copyists. We have forgotten the importance of their role, namely that every note of a manuscript had to be re-written for others' use by either the composer or an 'assistant'. Germans were apparently good at it, as is testified by, for example, material found in the castle of Schönborn zu Wiesentheid in Bavaria.

How music and musicians continually criss-crossed Europe, given that travel was always arduous, could merit a whole separate study. Meanwhile Part 1 of this book draws attention to the many instrumental performers in demand throughout Italy, as well as north of the Alps, during Vivaldi's lifetime. There are brief outlines of the situation in the major cities: Naples flourished as part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which was Spanish, and enjoyed a rich musical life. Rome had the Popes as well as many noble families, whose properties are still today familiar landmarks for tourists, and the city was a magnet for the best performers coming from elsewhere. Florence had the Medici, for centuries ardent patrons of the Arts as well as bankers, while across the North, each of the quite small cities competed for artistic recognition, often exchanging musical performers and composers. Indeed why did Vivaldi take employment from the governor of Mantua for just three years from 1718, live briefly in Milan, then Rome, and return in 1723 to Venice, the influential city of his birth, resuming his employment at a girls' orphanage?

A discussion of terminology highlights the fact that dialects and eccentric spellings are found everywhere and can cause confusion among performers, and

maybe historians, even today. While a violin was always a violin, there were some 20 names for the bass instruments in use well into the 18th century (and a viola was not necessarily what we know as one!). For the purposes of defining their roles, the book settles on Violoncello and Contrabbasso and in addition the Viola da Gamba, the ‘abandoned instrument’, is accorded its own eloquent chapter. Vivaldi specified its use in just four of his works, but Hoffmann declares that he is the ONLY composer to write idiomatically for it. Interestingly Vivaldi consistently called it the Viola all’inglese, the English viol.

To back up the text, there is iconographic evidence and I suggest that the images reproduced in the chapter about the double bass are particularly entertaining, as well as informative about bow holds and left-hand positions. Inventories of what instruments wealthy families owned also contribute to the story, for example that Prince Ferdinando de’ Medici owned many ‘violette all’inglese’. Details of who did what at the Ospedale della Pietà at the start of the book reveal a fully developed social environment. Vivaldi was employed to compose regularly for both the choir and orchestra of young players and to teach them not only his own instrument, the violin, but also the larger string instruments. Presumably this helped him hone his composing skills for the bassi. Descriptions of the attitude to lessons of the youngsters are quite revealing and several of the most talented, like the cellist Teresa della Viola, are colourfully depicted. Other duties for Vivaldi included purchasing strings and organising instrument repairs, all of which was detailed in regular bills from a luthier, Matteo Selles (or Sellas). Great instrument makers known to us today, such as the Venetian Matteo Goffriller who specialised in making cellos, are also mentioned.

Bringing clarity to our composer’s artistry, chapters at the end of the book closely analyse the numbers of bass stringed instruments (and harpsichord or bassoon) that were used in orchestras. One chart shows how many instruments played in Vivaldi’s works in which venues of different cities, and in which year. The other lists nearly all the works from RV88 to RV749, detailing which movements called upon which accompanying instruments in which solo concertos and also which ones accompanied singers in sacred works and in operatic arias. One of the obvious functions was word painting, but in fact the information is anyway essential for any player wanting to reproduce accurately Vivaldi’s colours and textures and control the overall balance of sound. If today’s Baroque ensembles want help to ensure that their performances are authentic, this book is an essential guide.

So much for our reclusive priest living in Venice. It is perhaps an irony that after moving to Vienna in 1739 at the instigation of the Emperor Charles VI, he did not live long, in part because his patron died before him. Fortunately fame had already been achieved as many of Vivaldi’s works had been widely distributed by Le Cène, the Amsterdam publishers, as well as by itinerant performers who had

known him in Venice. Many manuscripts have been found in major artistic centres such as Dresden, Ansbach and Prague where Italians were engaged by the Princes as resident or visiting artists. Maybe a book shedding light on the musical life at these richly endowed centres could be Bettina Hoffmann's next publication?

CELIA POND