

**Vivaldi in Venice**  
**October 16, 2021**

**Sinfonia in G Major, RV 149**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Premiered in concert at the “Pio Ospedale della Pietà” in 1740.

Antonio Vivaldi, one of the most prolific composers of the Baroque era, was also a talented and technical violin virtuoso. At the age of 15, he began studying to be a priest, and was later ordained in 1703. He was nicknamed “Il Prete Rosso” or “The Red Priest” after his defining fiery red hair. Later that year, Vivaldi became master of violin at the “Pio Ospedale della Pietà” or “Devout Hospital of Mercy”, a Venetian convent, orphanage, and music school for girls. Vivaldi composed many sacred vocal works and other instrumental pieces for the students. The latter includes several sinfonias, scored for strings, such as this work. This sinfonia is composed in the traditional fast - slow - fast three-movement structure.

Vivaldi's *Sinfonia in G Major* can be connected to one very particular concert at the Pietà in 1740. The performance was constructed to honor Frederick Christian, son of the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. It functioned as an overture for Vivaldi's cantata entitled, “Il Coro delle muse” or “The Choir of Muses”. The first movement, *Allegro molto*, is lively and jovial with continuous and virtuosic movement in the upper, melodic voices. In the second movement, *Andante*, you can hear a delicate, lulling effect as the violin melody is accompanied by pizzicato in the accompanying strings. The third and final movement, *Allegro*, returns to the upbeat feel of the first movement with brief deviations into the minor key. Composed near the end of his life, this is one of Vivaldi's final works and became very popular with its use of catchy melodies, intense energy, and dramatic flair.

**Concerto for Piccolo in C Major, RV 443**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Details regarding the first performance of this concerto are unknown.

Antonio Vivaldi is best known for his approximately 550 concertos written for a variety of instrumental pairings. His *Concerto for Piccolo in C Major* is one of several you will hear at this concert. With his prolific composition, Vivaldi perfected and standardized the Baroque instrumental concerto form. The concertos followed the three movement, fast-slow-fast structure. He also developed the “ritornello,” or “little return,” form where the soloist, or group of soloists, alternates with the tutti, or accompanying orchestra, as they repeat statements of the thematic musical material. Of the long list of concertos that Vivaldi did write, only three were composed for “flautino” or “little flute” (equivalent to the modern piccolo).

This concerto was composed in Vivaldi's standardized three movement structure and demands virtuosic playing from the soloist. The first movement, *Allegro*, begins in C Major with a burst of energy. Here, you will see the first example of a ritornello as the thematic material is stated in the tutti followed by a gymnastic solo episode from the piccolo. These statements are passed back and forth between the accompaniment and the solo voice. The rhythmic drive continues throughout the movement as the difficulty of the solo passages increases. The movement concludes with one final statement from the tutti.

The second movement, *Largo*, is a singing aria in the key of E minor. You will hear the swaying siciliana rhythm, indicative of a Sicilian folk dance that was regularly used by Baroque composers. As was

expected of the time, the piccolo soloist is expected to add their own ornamentation and embellishments to this composed movement.

The third and final movement, *Allegro molto*, concludes the composition in its home key of C major. Once again, Vivaldi has employed the use of the ritornello. In the contrasting thematic statements, the soloist shines with the use of flourishing techniques, such as trills and arpeggios. The brief and interrupting tutti passages provide just enough time for the soloist to take a breath before continuing their virtuosic display.

### **Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro in B Minor, RV 169**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Details regarding the first performance of this concerto are unknown.

Antonio Vivaldi composed two different pieces bearing the subtitle “al Santo Sepolcro,” or “of the Holy Sepulchre,” and one of those is his *Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro in B Minor*. Due to the undated manuscript, it has solely been speculated that Vivaldi composed this piece for a special Holy Week ceremony at a chapel in the Sacro Monte complex in nearby Varallo, Italy. The particular chapel is a replica of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The harmonic language used by Vivaldi in this piece is rather unstable and dissonant, especially in comparison to his other works. This harmonic instability is not uncommon, however, for Baroque “passion music” - a phrase referring to sacred music of the time that represents Christ’s pain and suffering.

The first movement, *Adagio molto*, is full of dramatic dissonances, slow, sustained playing, and interesting uses of chromaticism (such as the use of minor second and tri-tone intervals). Each string voice provides their own melodic importance, eliminating a true continuo.

The second movement, *Allegro ma poco*, continues the harmonically chromatic and contrapuntal lines. This movement acts as sort of an imitative canzona as the string voices weave their way through the texture with quick melodic figures in a call and response pattern. While the piece is only three to four minutes in length, the Sinfonia showcases Vivaldi’s compositional flair for the dramatic.

### **Concerto for Two Trumpets in C Major, RV 537**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Published circa 1950 by Gian Francesco Malipiero.

Vivaldi’s *Concerto for Two Trumpets in C Major* is considered one of his best-known compositions; however, we know very little about it. The sole source for this concerto is a single manuscript at the National Library of Turin. This manuscript served as the source for Gian Francesco Malipiero’s edited publication in 1950. This concerto is the only solo work composed by Vivaldi to feature the trumpet and one of the few brass featured solo compositions of the early 1700s. This is likely due to the difficulties of playing the Baroque trumpet. Trumpets of the Baroque era were natural and valveless, restricting the range of the player and putting great pressure on the performer’s detailed lip control.

The *Concerto for Two Trumpets in C Major* is bookended by flashy, fanfare-like movements, both marked as *Allegro*. The first movement begins with a brilliant showcase of bright tones in the solo trumpets,

immediately catching the listener's attention. In the solo passages, the trumpets play in tandem, while in the tutti sections, they provide interesting color to the accompanying string voices.

The second movement, *Largo*, is a very brief bridge between the two vibrant outer movements. This movement is unusual in that it does not feature the trumpet soloists at all. Instead, you hear the accompanying continuo playing a series of repeated chords with improvisatory scalar movement from the solo principal violin.

The final movement, *Allegro*, is in triple meter and returns the fanfare-like style of the first movement. The composition takes an interesting turn to the relative A minor in the middle before returning to the flashy C major for the work's conclusion. Vivaldi ends this concerto with extremely quick and intricate passages for the solo trumpets.

### **Concerto for Guitar in D Major, RV 93**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Dedicated to Bohemian Count Johann Joseph von Wrtby.

The *Concerto for Guitar in D Major, RV 93* by Antonio Vivaldi is one of four works he composed featuring the solo lute (or guitar). It was composed in the 1730s, a period in which he wrote two of his other works for the lute. Though Vivaldi composed numerous operas and other various compositions, as stated above, he is most known for his approximately 550 concertos, such as this one. This concerto was originally composed for two violins, lute, and basso continuo. It consists of three movements: *Allegro*, *Largo*, *Allegro*. It was dedicated to the Bohemian Count Johann Joseph von Wrtby. The Austro-German and Italian lutes of the time differed greatly. Modern performances of this work on the guitar may more authentically represent the original desired tone of the composition for Italian lute.

All three movements of this piece are composed in rounded binary form, where the opening thematic music returns and is restated halfway through the second section. The first movement, *Allegro*, consists of a bounding repeating bass line with a returning, flippant, three-note melodic figure in the solo guitar and accompanying strings. The movement continues with persistent energy until its conclusion. The second movement, *Largo*, highlights the beautiful tone of the acoustic guitar with a singing line of dotted rhythms atop suspensions in the upper string voices. The concerto concludes with the final movement, *Allegro*. Sounding like a bounding race to the finish, this rhythmic gigue features triplets in the solo guitar voice with interjections by the tutti strings.

### **Concerto for Violin in F Major, RV 293**

**"Autumn" from The Four Seasons**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Published in 1725 by the Dutch firm Estienne Roger.

One of Antonio Vivaldi's beloved compositional series, the collection of concertos *The Four Seasons*, was published in 1725. His *Concerto for Violin in F Major*, is the work deemed "Autumn" in the collection. Unlike most nicknames of the time which were applied to a piece by the publisher after the fact, Vivaldi provided the titles of the collection himself as well as poems that followed the music, serving as a guide through the seasonal changes of the year. After Vivaldi's death in 1741, there was a long lapse in his

musical popularity. The one composition to remain in the standard repertoire during that period was *The Four Seasons* due to its accessible and programmatic style.

Vivaldi's *Concerto for Violin in F Major* is composed in three movements, *Allegro*, *Adagio molto*, and *Allegro*, and consists entirely of strings. The accompanying poetry provided by Vivaldi can be found below. The beginning *Allegro* is inscribed, "Dance and song of country folk - the Toper." The toper refers to a drunkard. The concerto is virtuosic yet rustic (the soloist's role almost fiddle-like), indicating the drunken peasant celebrations of the fall and their pleasure of the harvest. Over halfway through the first movement, we come to a shift as the celebratory music becomes slow and sleepy. This represents the "dozing drunkard" as they begin to fall asleep amid the revelry. The excitement suddenly returns as the drunkard awakes and continues to sing and dance.

The second movement, *Adagio molto*, continues on the sleepy slumber of the drunkard after the celebration has come to an end. This movement is interesting as the solo violin voice blends into the texture along with the tutti strings. The harpsichord is instead marked "il cembalo arpeggio" and provides the musical interest with arpeggios atop the chordal movement in the strings.

The final movement, *Allegro*, is representative of an autumn hunt. The dotted triplets give the movement a peasant fanfare feel. The solo voice enters providing the narration of the hunter and his wild dogs taking down a wild beast.

***Allegro***

The peasant celebrates with songs and dances  
The pleasure of a bountiful harvest.  
And fired up by Bacchus' liquor,  
Many end their revelry in sleep.

***Adagio molto***

Everyone is made to forget their cares and made to sing and dance  
By the air which is tempered with pleasure  
And (by) the season that invites so many, many  
Out of sweetest slumber to blissful enjoyment.

***Allegro***

The hunters emerge at the new dawn,  
And with horns and dogs and guns depart upon their hunting.  
The wild beast flees and they follow its trail;  
Terrified and tired by the great noise  
Of guns and dogs, the wounded beast,  
Tries futilely to flee, but harried, dies.