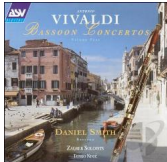


Vivaldi – Bassoon Concertos Vol.4 (1996)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 24 October 2014 15:43 -

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- I. Bassoon Concerto No.29 in G Major, RV 492 1. *Allegro non molto* 2. *Largo* 3. *Allegro*
II. Bassoon Concerto No.20 in F Major, RV 489
1. *Allegro* 2. *Largo* 3. *Allegro*
III. Bassoon Concerto No.30 in G Major, RV 493
1. *Allegro ma poco* 2. *Largo* 3. *Allegro*
IV. Bassoon Concerto No.6 in E Minor, RV 484
1. *Allegro poco* 2. *Andante* 3. *Allegro*
V. Bassoon Concerto No.36 in B Flat, RV 504
1. *Allegro ma poco* 2. *Larghetto* 3. *Allegro*
VI. Bassoon Concerto No.14 in C Minor, RV 480
1. *Allegro* 2. *Andantino (quasi Menuetto)* 3. *Allegro*
VII. Bassoon Concerto No.35 in B Flat, RV 503
1. *Allegro non molto* 2. *Largo* 3. *Allegro*
Daniel Smith (bassoon) Zagreber Solisten Tonko Ninić (conductor)

Known in his native Venice as the red priest, from the inherited colour of his hair, Antonio Vivaldi was born in 1678, the son of a barber who later served as a violinist at the great Basilica of St Mark. Vivaldi studied for the priesthood and was ordained in 1703. At the same time he won a reputation for himself as a violinist of phenomenal ability and was appointed violin-master at the Ospedale della Pietà. This last was one of four such charitable institutions, established for the education of orphan, indigent or illegitimate girls and boasting a particularly fine musical tradition. Here the girls were trained in music, some of the more talented continuing to serve there as assistant teachers, earning the dowry necessary for marriage. Vivaldi's association with the Pietà continued intermittently throughout his life, from 1723 under a contract that provided for the composition of two new concertos every month. At the same time he enjoyed a connection with the theatre, as the composer of some fifty operas, director and manager. He finally left Venice in 1741, travelling to Vienna, where there seemed some possibility of furthering his career under imperial patronage, or perhaps with the idea of travelling on to the court at Dresden, where his pupil Pisendel was working. He died in Vienna a few weeks after his arrival in the city, in relative poverty. At one time he had been worth 50,000 ducats a year, it

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seemed, but now had little to show for it, as he arranged for the sale of some of the music he had brought with him.

Visitors to Venice had borne witness to Vivaldi's prowess as a violinist, although some found his performance more remarkable than pleasurable. He certainly explored the full possibilities of the instrument, while perfecting the newly developing form of the Italian solo concerto. He left nearly five hundred concertos. Many of these were for the violin, but there were others for a variety of solo instruments or for groups of instruments. He claimed to be able to compose a new work quicker than a copyist could write it out, and he clearly coupled immense facility with a remarkable capacity for variety within the confines of the three-movement form, with its faster outer movements framing a central slow movement.

The girls at the Pietà had a wide variety of instruments available to them, in addition to the usual strings and keyboard instruments of the basic orchestra. These included the bassoon, for which Vivaldi wrote 39 concertos, two of which are seemingly incomplete. The reason for such a number of concertos for a relatively unusual solo instrument is not known, and the fact that one concerto is inscribed to Count Morzin, a patron of Vivaldi from Bohemia and a cousin of Haydn's early patron, and another to a musician in Venice, Gioseppino Biancardi, reveals little, although it has been suggested that Biancardi represented an earlier tradition of bassoon playing, as a master of its predecessor, the dulcian, in view of the range required of the bassoon in the concerto that carries his name. The bassoon was in general an essential element in the characteristic German court orchestra of the eighteenth century, doubling the bass line and found in proportionately greater numbers than is now usual, not least in military bands. The orchestral bassoon part was not written out, unless it differed, as it very occasionally did, from the bass line played by the cello, double bass and continuo. The fact that bassoons are specifically mentioned as being among those played by the girls of the Pietà seems to indicate that they were used there for this purpose at least. There had been solo works written for the instrument during the seventeenth century and technical changes led to a number of solo concertos by the middle of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless the quantity of bassoon concertos written by Vivaldi remains unusual.

Ten of Vivaldi's bassoon concertos are in minor keys. One of two in this key, the Concerto in D minor, RV 481, starts with a stormy ritornello, to which the solo bassoon adds its own contribution, before the descending contour of the first solo episode. Other solo passages introduce rapid triplet figuration and, as always, contrasts of register in the solo instrument. The G minor Largo has an orchestral introduction, before the poignant aria of the bassoon, with a return to the original key in the triple metre Allegro molto, with its first bassoon solo episode in triplets, and others bringing wide leaps between the bass and tenor registers of the solo instrument.

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One of seven bassoon concertos in this key, the Concerto in F major, RV 485, opens with a more stolid ritornello, ending with rapid ascending violin scales, before the bassoon takes up the same figuration. The ripieno is heard again, framing further solo episodes, before the movement ends with the return of the second part of the ritornello. The slow movement, in C major, is again in the form of a solo aria. The last movement is a duple metre Allegro molto with a fine display of contrasting bassoon registers.

Fourteen of Vivaldi's bassoon concertos are in the convenient key of C major. The Concerto in C major, RV 477, allows still further display of the contrasting bass and tenor registers of the bassoon in figuration with wide leaps. The relatively short slow movement, for solo bassoon and continuo, is in the same key, each half of the aria repeated with ornamentation. Characteristic scale figuration marks the last movement, with its exploration of other keys.

The Concerto in A minor, RV 499, one of four in this key, starts with the unanimous orchestral tutti that is to return to frame the following solo episodes, again providing amazing variety within the apparent formula of the Vivaldi solo concerto. The Largo gives the solo bassoon a continuing dotted rhythm, each half of the aria, with its sustained ripieno accompaniment, repeated with embellishment. The soloist enters at once in the final Allegro, the sequential opening followed by brief dialogue between bassoon and violins.

The Concerto in C major, RV 470, is introduced by a ritornello that brings surprises in its sudden pauses. Much use is made of descending scale figuration, with at least one solo episode offering a remarkable display of contrasting registers. The slow movement is an E minor aria, followed by a cheerful final Allegro.

Descending scale patterns mark the opening ritornello of the Concerto in G major, RV 494, one of three concertos in this key. The bassoon takes up the same pattern, with other characteristic figuration. The C major Largo allows instrument after instrument to enter in brief imitation in the ripieno introduction, before the bassoon aria. The effective final Allegro, in 6/8, with its usual use of sequential writing, brings further demands for virtuosity from the soloist and characteristic touches of ingenuity in the orchestral writing. ---Keith Anderson, classicsonline.com

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