

Vivaldi - New Discoveries (2009)

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- 01 *Se Lento Ancora Il Fulmine (Agrippa, 1733) - Allegro Molto*
- 02 *Concerto RV 578a - Adagio E Spiccato*
- 03 *Concerto RV 578a - Allegro*
- 04 *Concerto RV 578a - Largo E Spiccato*
- 05 *Concerto RV 578a - Allegro*
- 06 *Sonata RV 806 - Andante*
- 07 *Sonata RV 806 - Allegro* [play](#)
- 08 *Sonata RV 806 - Largo*
- 09 *Sonata RV 806 - Allegro*
- 14 *Sonata RV 798 - Andante*
- 15 *Sonata RV 798 - [Allegro]*
- 16 *Sonata RV 798 - Adagio*
- 17 *Sonata RV 798 - Allegro*
- 18 *Concerto In Sol Minore Per Oboe - Allegro*
- 19 *Concerto In Sol Minore Per Oboe - Largo*
- 20 *Concerto In Sol Minore Per Oboe - Allegro Cantabile* [play](#)
- 21 *Se Fide Quanto Belle - Aria RV 794.32 [Vivace]*
- 22 *Sonata RV 810 In Re Maggiore - Andante*
- 23 *Sonata RV 810 In Re Maggiore - Allegro*
- 24 *Sonata RV 810 In Re Maggiore - Largo*
- 25 *Sonata RV 810 In Re Maggiore - Allegro*

Romina Basso – mezzo-soprano
Modo Antiquo
Federico Sardelli – conductor

Modo Antiquo under the direction of Federico Maria Sardelli and mezzo Romina Basso turn in a stunning performance of "new to modern ears" Vivaldi compositions. The works on this disc are the result of both research and chance, and some of them are being given their premier performance. While this is incredibly valuable from a historical perspective, some of the pieces do come off a little formulaic, not Vivaldi's best work. It is a credit to these great performers that they still attack and savor these pieces.

For his recording of Vivaldi's "Folio Arias", conductor Federico Maria Sardelli makes the point that alongside the power and energy many modern bands bring to Vivaldi's music, one must always follow the structure, clarity, symmetry and overall sense of "line" which he sees as the hallmark of this music. With this recording, I continue to be impressed with Sardelli's approach, the way he balances energy with form. The concerto for 2 violins, cello, strings and continuo (first instrumental on the disc) perhaps illustrates this sense of form and energy best: basically a rearrangement of a concerto from "L'Estro Armonico", the soloists and orchestra play energetically, emotionally and elegantly all at once, neither flying off the handle nor making this music seem overly reserved. The sonata for flute and continuo could've stopped at being charming, but soloist Sardelli displays an exotic blend with the bassoon continuo, churning out some fun Baroque jazz. The concerto for oboe and cello offers some driven dialogue in the first movement, a lyrical oboe in the middle and closes with some lighthearted (if somewhat repetitive) dance pattern imitations between soloists and orchestra. The two violin sonatas are perhaps the weakest pieces, probably written for a novice player and extremely plain, but still pleasant enough.

The vocal numbers stand out on this disc, in their orchestration, variety of invention and Romina Basso's singing. Gifted with a powerful, beautiful mezzo voice and technical creativity in improvising some impressive ornamentation, Basso locks in with the band to turn these pieces into true "events" in themselves. The voice is neither bright nor dark, but perfectly focused to convey characterization and technique. The vengeance aria that opens the disc is tour de force, passionate yet balanced. In an interview in the liner notes, Basso talks about her process in improvising her ornaments, and I thought this merited special credit for an artist who has the training and confidence to improvise. The motet sounded like it might've otherwise been a perfunctory experience if not for the care and assurance that the performers bring to it. Not that this material is inferior so as to be overcome by good performance, but time and time again the orchestra's crisp textures and firm rhythm simply elevate the music into something truly dynamic.

This was an incredibly rewarding disc, not just for the opportunity to hear new Vivaldi but simply for the chance to hear excellent musicians who just happen to be reviving long lost works by Vivaldi. Modo Antiquo, Sardelli and Basso take what might have become an academic endeavor and turn it into an organic, sincere musical experience. ---M.Figg

The most enjoyable revelation on this recording is a motet for contralto, *Vos invito*, discovered in the library of the Basilica di San Francesco in Assisi, thought to have been composed for Assisi or for the sister house of the Basilica del Santo in Padua, where Vivaldi was known to have done some work in 1712 and 1713.

To hear it for the first time, we have the striking voice of Romina Basso, heard and much appreciated in the recordings of Atenaide and in Alan Curtis's recording of *Motezuma*. The narrator of this text, stated in the first person, is an unnamed virgin martyr tortured by fire, wild animals, and armed men. The text does not seem to line up with the life of St. Justina, an early martyr whose remains are in the Basilica at Padua and who is one of that city's patrons, but the three types of suffering are more or less an exact match to the vita of St. Thecla, the disciple of St. Paul who according to her legend was saved from three types of pain and death (being burned at the stake, thrown to savage animals, and raped by a band of ruffians). St. Thecla died in Syria, but she is venerated in the Cathedral of Este, not too far from Padua, where it was widely believed she had saved the city from plague in the 17th century. Just a thought.

Basso's voice is a force of nature in its low range, although in a few of the faster passages of runs she is less than elegant. Other delights include a sonata now identified in two slightly different versions, one for recorder (RV 806) played with daring panache by Sardelli himself and the other for violin (or possibly oboe, RV 810). Basso also sings two other individual secular arias, whose association with a Vivaldi opera, if any, is still being determined. Other instrumental selections include a recently discovered concerto for the unusual solo combination of oboe and cello. Do not be put off by the creepy cover art (who thought that a man in heavy mascara, lipstick, and pencil mustache would sell Vivaldi?) -- this disc is a delightful collection of curiosities, if not an essential purchase, other than for Vivaldi completists, who are surely already "subscribed" to the Vivaldi Edition. --- Charles T. Downey

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