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# Vivaldi: Voice Of The Baroque



## Synopsis

Vivaldi boasted that he could compose a concerto faster than a scribe could copy one. Despite his prolificacy, *The Four Seasons*, and the majority of his already published work had fallen into obscurity by the time of his death in poverty in 1741. Most of his music—concertos, sonatas, operas, and sacred music—has been published only recently. Very little has been written on Vivaldi for the nonspecialist, especially in English. Landon rediscovers the composer in this accessible and musically informed biography while presenting documentation of the musician's life discovered after the Baroque revival in the 1930s. This book includes illustrations of eighteenth-century Venice and several newly translated letters, thoroughly evoking the style of the time and revealing some of the more personal aspects of Vivaldi's life. "Belongs on the shelf of every serious music student." —Kirkus "Gives a good feel for Vivaldi's life and times . . . and describes particularly well how Vivaldi has been revived." —Booklist "Robbins Landon is marvelously entertaining, extravagantly learned." —The Independent

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## Customer Reviews

If Antonio Lucio Vivaldi (1678-1741) were living today, he would be comfortably fixed through royalties from recordings and other performances of his *The Four Seasons*. The "red priest," so-called for his red hair, spent many years in an insecure position as music master for a charitable school. Eventually, Vivaldi moved on to concentrate primarily on opera composition and production, but his financial demands and questionable relationship with the prima donna Anna Giraud stymied

his efforts. In this compact yet illuminating book, Landon explores why Vivaldi's music, with the exception of *The Four Seasons* and the second *Gloria in D*, has been largely ignored. The inclusion of newly discovered correspondence and other documents pertaining to Vivaldi and his music is the most significant aspect of this book. Landon contemporizes the life and contributions of Vivaldi in a succinct and attractive style. Recommended for academic and large public libraries.- Kathleen Sparkman, Baylor Univ., Waco, Tex. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Short in length but long on scholarship, a "life and works" of the 18th-century Venetian master that belongs on the shelf of every serious music student. Robbins Landon, the distinguished musical archaeologist whose labors led to the rediscovery of much of Haydn's lost or neglected music, has also turned his attention recently to Mozart (1791, etc.). He now skips back a generation to focus on the composer whose name has become synonymous with the Italian baroque--not wholly new territory, since Robbins Landon also coauthored *Five Centuries of Music in Venice* (1991--not reviewed), but what prompted him to attempt a complete life of Vivaldi was the worldwide fascination with *The Four Seasons*. Prior to the 1950 Cetra recording of those four violin concerti, Vivaldi had been virtually forgotten for 200 years after having been buried in an unmarked pauper's grave in Vienna; today, he's one of the immortals. Yet Robbins Landon chooses not to speculate about the cause of the amazing "Vivaldi renaissance." He's content to present a detailed, chronological, strictly factual biography, including Vivaldi's years as violin virtuoso and teacher of gifted orphan girls; his growing list of compositions; and his travels around Italy and, ultimately, Vienna--almost all undertaken in connection with his frustrated attempts to become established as an opera composer. Robbins Landon's method is to quote verbatim documents, letters, and dedicatory inscriptions in the original language (most are then translated): This exact but stern presentation may not appeal to the casual reader. The author inserts himself only long enough to recount his unsuccessful attempt to edit some of Vivaldi's many operas for modern presentation; he soon decided that the attempt was doomed. He notes that, unlike Haydn's operas and surely unlike Vivaldi's instrumental and religious music, Vivaldi's operas seem to offer little to contemporary listeners. But the author also has the good grace to hope that he'll be proved wrong. No fluff--just the facts and an invitation to explore the music. (Thirty illustrations) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

According to author H.C. Robbins Landon, Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" is the most recognizable or popular piece of classical music in the world. What of Chopin's "Funeral March," Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," Beethoven's "5th Symphony," "Für Elise," or "Moonlight Sonata," Strauss' "Blue Danube" or Bizet's "Carmen"? JS Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D minor" and Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies" and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee" are also rivals. The inspiration behind the book, however, is not popularity but the obscurity of a man about which little had been known well into the 20th Century. Any reader expecting an academic miracle about the daily and personal routines of Vivaldi will be disappointed. The book can only produce so much. Other than the "Four Seasons," to which is devoted an entire musical chapter, Robbins Landon can confirm two things about Vivaldi's musical life that may come as a surprise: Vivaldi was a highly prolific yet largely panned opera composer. He boasted of 94 operas. Also, his religious works are on the contrary seminal. His operatic efforts were very dramatic behind the scenes, leading to a falling out with, in particular, Antonio Mauro. Players were not paid, parts were too difficult, and contracts came under great scrutiny. A tense exchange of letters follows dozens of pages of epistles during which Vivaldi constantly uses "Y.E." for "Your Excellency" while addressing Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio. The "only well documented episodes in Vivaldi's life" begin on page 130 and involve the Ferrara operas. There are 2 tellings of an interaction between Vivaldi and playwright Carlo Goldoni, starting on page 123. These both reflect a demanding and competitive craftsmanship of the time. Robbins Landon refers to one city in the book, I believe Vienna, as a "police state". Briefly, the book steps outside of music with the Giraud sisters, one likely to be an intimate, both possibly. On page 122, one of these sisters is the subject of chryonism charges, Anna, who could not sing well but looked the part. Page 100 calls attention to "La Senna Festeggiante," what the author calls "Vivaldi's most famous cantata". I looked it up on YouTube. A 4-month old video had 170 views. On page 87, he is also very complimentary of "Gloria Patri". I only noted Vivaldi's physical limitations on page 149, when he discusses the brief amount of time, about a year, when he was able to say Mass.

Antonio Vivaldi's life is hardly well documented: certainly not as well as Mozart's or Beethoven's. Even Bach's biographical details, scarcely thorough, are significantly greater than the "Red Priest's". Vivaldi's music and reputation nearly disappeared following his death, along with a substantial number of his manuscripts and the day-to-day details of his sui generis career. His resurrection as a composer and the dogged efforts of musicologists have provided at least the rough outlines of a biography. H. C. Robbins Landon, whom some consider Joseph Haydn's alter ego, has written an

excellent biography of Vivaldi, managing to provide the details of his life in only 170 pages (including illustrations). Hardly a voluminous tome, there just isn't much day-to-day knowledge available, and what is known must often be teased out of official documents that are still coming to light. What Robbins Landon reveals about Vivaldi, especially in his few surviving letters to the nobility or the inevitable dedications to his various noble patrons, is painful. Cringing obsequiousness, fawning servility, even an occasional whining sycophancy when things go wrong and Vivaldi pleads to a patron for assistance, are all prominently displayed. This was coin of the realm for the era: the artist as flotsam in a hierarchical world. It is painful to witness, nevertheless. What is also revealed is a certain wolfishness on Vivaldi's part. His strange and lengthy menage with the attractive and moderately talented Giraud sisters, slightly unusual for a Priest. His peculiar working habits and relationships with other artists. His somewhat craven demeanor throughout his compositional career, finally inducing him to abandon Italy for Vienna at the end. This portrait of Vivaldi seems more enigmatic and his biography more of a palimpsest than the usual life story. Given the data, Robbins Landon does a superb job of at least revealing Vivaldi's milieu, picturing beautiful Venice during that era and outlining the splendid music this peculiar man created. For it is ultimately the music, and only the music, that contains the blood and heart and sinew of this marvelous composer. Mike Birman

Kind of wordy but a good companion to the Red Priest . To get a feel for Vivaldi you should have both. Then there is couple of novels, Vivaldi's muse, and the Red Priest's Annina. Vivaldi was a prolific genius.

Nice

HC Robbins Landon is scholarly yet writes with the enthusiasm for these composers like one might write about a modern day pop star. There didn't seem to be a lot of info in Vivaldi when this was written, perhaps compared to now, but he made hay with what he had... plus he wondered about the popularity of Vivaldi's operas which back then weren't given a lot of play, yet now they seem to be coming out more often. Anyway it's a good book.

Very dry. Endless minutiae. Found myself scanning and skipping paragraphs in search of the life of Vivaldi. There is very little effort made to place this artist within the context of his times. The chapter on Vivaldi's church music reads like an inventory list, and the chapter on the production of Vivaldi's

operas in Ferrara is a collection of petty, verbose, litigious letters. This book may be valuable to some scholars, but for those of us looking for a readable biography, it was extremely unrewarding.

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