

## Venice 2002

**Chiesa della Pietà, Venice - 1 September, 2100**

Oxford Girls' Choir and Oxford Baroque Ensemble

### **programme**

Giovanni Gabrieli	<i>Sonata per 3 violini</i>
Antonio Vivaldi	<i>'La Folia' Op. 1/12 (RV 63)</i>
Antonio Vivaldi	<i>Lauda Jerusalem (RV 609)</i>
Antonio Vivaldi	<i>Concerto Op. 3/11 (RV 565)</i>
Antonio Vivaldi	<i>Nulla in mundo pax (RV 630)</i>
Antonio Vivaldi	<i>Laetatus sum (RV 607)</i>
Antonio Pampani	<i>Confitebor tibi (1756)</i>

### **Oxford Baroque Ensemble**

violin 1	Marshall Marcus (leader), Simon Kodurand
violin 2	Jim O'Toole, Giovanna del Perugia
viola	Ruth Player
cello	Jenny Bullock
horn	Kate Goldsmith, Alistair Croft
bass	Alix Scott
continuo	Richard Vendome



the Figlie di coro singing in the gallery of the Pietà  
in Vivaldi's day



Oxford Girls' Choir rehearsing in the gallery of the  
Pietà

The aim of tonight's concert is to present the music of Vivaldi as it was heard in his day. In fact "heard" is the operative word. The way Vivaldi's music is performed today is very far removed from how it was performed in his day. I speak of the music he wrote for the *Pietà*. To have a fuller and more appreciative understanding of tonight's music, one must first understand what the *Pietà* was, and in what context Vivaldi wrote his music for this institution.

In the 18th century there were four *Ospedale*, each with a different function, the *Mendicanti*, housed the poor, specially the nobles who had fallen on hard times, the homeless, beggars, war wounded, etc. The *Ospedaletto*, for orphans, the *Incurabili*, for those with incurable diseases, and the *Pietà*. The *Ospedale della Pietà* was for abandoned and unwanted babies, and not as is often wrongly described as a school for girls, a convent or an orphanage. These babies were brought for various reasons, some were found by the roadside, or floating in the canals, families too poor to bring them up, the mother who had no milk, but by far the most common reason were children born through prostitution. The children were placed in foster homes for the first six years, in Venice and in the country, and then returned to the *Pietà*. The boys were given training in stone cutting, weaving, and shoe making, so at the age of 16, when ready to leave, had a skill, for the future. The girls had three options: they married, or became nuns, or stayed at the *Pietà* for the rest of their lives.

There were two groups, the *Figlie di Comun* and the *Figlie di Coro*. The non musicians and musicians. Vivaldi started as *Maestro di Violin*, in September 1703, aged 25, six months after being ordained a priest. His duty was to teach the girls the violin, the cello and a year later the *Viola all'Inglese*. It was up to him, where necessary, to acquire new instruments, bows and strings.

1714 was the turning point for Vivaldi, and indeed for the history of music; the *Maestro di Choro*, Francesco Gasparini asked the Governors for six months leave of absence, but never returned. Finding themselves without a replacement, the Governors asked Vivaldi to fill the post, but Vivaldi refused, as he was not a man to be confined, however a compromise was reached, and a short time later, Vivaldi was given the position as *Maestro dei Concerti*, a post unique only to him in the history of the *Pietà*. It was during this period that Vivaldi as "acting" *Maestro di Coro* composed his first period of Sacred Music, as was his duty to do so, for the Sacred rites of the Church.

*Laetatus sum* was sung during the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, on the 26th December, and the first of the year, as was also the *Lauda Jerusalem*, including the feast of Corpus Christi. They were sung in the choir lofts by the *Figlie di Coro*, who also sang the tenor and bass parts. Vivaldi used three cellos, to help the girl tenors and basses. They were concealed from view, behind the grills, which are in the choir lofts, so the music was "heard", and not seen. *Lauda Jerusalem*, was composed for the *Pietà*, and has the names of the soloists written on the manuscript by Vivaldi, as was the rule. It was written for double choir and double orchestra, and would have been performed in the two choir lofts, with the small orchestra and large choir in one loft, and large orchestra and small choir in the opposite loft, as Vivaldi intended, but with the difference, that it would have been part of Vespers. The *Laetatus sum*, will be performed in view of the audience, but in Vivaldi's time would have been sung in the choir lofts. The motet *Nulla in mundo pax* was also written for the *Pietà*, between 1714-1717, his "first period" of sacred music.

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Antonio Pampani's exuberant setting of *Confitebor tibi* (Psalm 110, or 111 in the Authorized Version) was written for the neighbouring *Ospedale dell' Ospedaletto* in 1756. It is scored for soloists, SSAA chorus, strings, horns and continuo, and has been edited by Richard Vendome from a photocopy of the original MS provided by the late Jane Berdes, a research student who first introduced the Oxford Girls' Choir to this fascinating and neglected female musical tradition. Pampani (1705-75) composed many oratorios, solo motets and operas, and worked at the *Accademico Filarmonico* as well as the *Ospedaletto*.

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