

"Vivaldi's Music for Flute and Recorder" by Federico Sardelli

Jane Bowers

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr>



Part of the [Music Practice Commons](#)

Bowers, Jane (2008) "'Vivaldi's Music for Flute and Recorder" by Federico Sardelli," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 13: No. 1, Article 9. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.200813.01.09

Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol13/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Book review: Sardelli, Federico Maria. *Vivaldi's Music for Flute and Recorder*. Aldershot, England, and Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing in association with the Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi, 2007. ISBN 978-0-7546-3714-1.

Jane Bowers

Copyright © 2008 Claremont Graduate University

According to Federico Maria Sardelli, much of Vivaldi's music is performed on the wrong kind of "flute" today. This pertains particularly to Vivaldi's chamber concertos (i.e., "works composed for diverse groups of concertante instruments . . . , chosen from the string and woodwind families alike," which "reproduce in miniature the outlines of the ritornello form typical of the solo concerto" (91), but it is also true of other music of Vivaldi's. It is, according to Sardelli, usually a case of recorder players appropriating for their instrument popular flute concertos. Is there a good reason for this in that Vivaldi's terminology leaves something to be desired? No, according to Sardelli, who states that the "the type of flute specified by Vivaldi is always clear and unambiguous" (280). By "flauto" Vivaldi invariably meant a recorder of some sort, although in a detailed investigation of the repertory Sardelli concludes that while the recorder Vivaldi wrote for was usually a treble (alto) instrument pitched in F, some of his chamber concertos suggest the use of an alto instrument in G (see the table, 131); indeed, he unequivocally states that "whenever an f" sharp occurs, this is always a clear sign that the recorder is pitched in G" (171), since Vivaldi allowed the recorder only two octaves. (Since elsewhere, Sardelli mentions an alto ivory recorder pitched in G made by Anciuti, or whomever used this name, in Milan [see page 49 and Plate 5], this suggests that such instruments would have been available for playing Vivaldi's music in Italy during his lifetime.) There is also one instance of Vivaldi's use of tenor recorders pitched in d' in an aria from the otherwise lost opera *La fede tradita e vendicata*. The idea that the two *flauti* written for here could be transverse flutes is excluded by two factors, Sardelli claims; not only did Vivaldi not use transverse flutes simply to double the violins or impart orchestral color, always treating them instead as individualistic, noble instruments suited to solo parts; but also he always mentioned the transverse instrument by its full name (263-64).

Indeed, Sardelli states that whenever Vivaldi wished to use the transverse flute, he always used the term "flauto traversier" or "traversier" or one of its abbreviations, and he considers it wishful thinking to imagine that one type of flute might simply be interchanged with the other. Moreover, Sardelli claims that until the middle of the eighteenth century, the term "flauto" alone almost always denoted the recorder, and from the end of the seventeenth century on, Italians always used the compound term ("flauto traversier") for the transverse flute, or the simple adjective alone if they wanted brevity ("traversier" or "traversiere"; also occasionally

“traversiero” or “traverso”). Occasionally, a part clearly designated for the transverse flute in a Vivaldi score may later be marked simply “flauto,” but such cases may all be explained as space-saving abbreviations of the full name, according to Sardelli. While there is a possibility that some chamber concertos with a part designated for transverse flute were later performed on the recorder, in only one case, that of *Il (or Del) gardellino* (RV 90), are there two different manuscripts that designate the same part, in one instance, for the flute, and in the other, for the recorder, although in one other concerto, RV 88, there are clear signs of adaptation for the other instrument.

Before addressing the meaning of other instrumental terminology used by Vivaldi, as presented by Sardelli—for example, the term “flautino,” over which much ink has been spilled—let me turn to the broader content of the book. Divided into two parts, *Vivaldi’s Music for Flute and Recorder* first tackles the broad subject of the use of the recorder and flute in Italy in Vivaldi’s time, especially in Venice and Rome, also touching on members of the *Hofkapelle* in Dresden who performed and disseminated some of Vivaldi’s music. In the second, much longer part of the book, the author investigates all of Vivaldi’s music that includes these instruments, in chapters that are organized by genre and scoring. In the first part, Sardelli begins with the statement:

“It is hard to trace the history of flutes (of all types) and their performers in Italy during the first half of the eighteenth century. Following a practice that in Italy persisted up to the 1770s or thereabouts, flautists were equated almost totally with oboists and were identified as such (3).”

Although we are ignorant of the names of many of the earliest players, there were occasions on which the recorder or flute was used as a named instrument, and Sardelli cites musical performances in which the transverse flute took part in Roman academies and in the Ruspoli household—including some involving the notable French flutist Jacques Hotteterre, whom the family employed for a couple of years beginning in 1698.^[1] It may have been Hotteterre, or perhaps the Neapolitan flutist Domenico Laurelli, also active in the circle of Francesco Maria Ruspoli, who played flute in a quartet for two violins, transverse flute, and bass composed around 1698 or so by Quirino Colombani. By drawing on the archival work of other scholars, as well as on such scores as Handel’s *La Resurrezione* of 1708, which requires two flutes and two recorders, and Antonio Caldara’s cantata *O del gran Fabro eterno* of 1710 with its part for “flauto traversier obbligato,” to trace the use of the flute in Rome and Venice, Sardelli attacks what he calls the myth of the late arrival of the transverse flute in Italy. Indeed, Sardelli

¹ Sardelli calls attention to Saverio Franchi’s recent discovery of documents that establish Jacques Hotteterre’s employment by the Ruspoli family in Rome between October 1698 and [August] 1700; see Sverio Franchi, “Il principe Ruspoli: l’oratorio in Arcadia,” in *idem*, ed., *Percorsi dell’oratorio romano. Da “historia sacra” a melodramma spirituale* (Rome: IBIMUS, 2002), 280-81.

believes that the transverse flute was a familiar and widely cultivated instrument there during the first two decades of the eighteenth century, citing such works as Haym and Bitti's *VI Sonate da camera a flauto traversa [sic]*, *hautbois o violino solo*, which though issued in Amsterdam by E. Roger in 1708-12, constituted the first published works for transverse flute to have a confirmed Italian origin. Moreover, there is Francesco Gasparini's little-known "Concerto a traverso," which may belong to the composer's Venetian period (1700-13) or, if not that, to his "second" Roman (1716-27) period. Then there are Vivaldi's own chamber concertos RV 84, 96, and 107, as well as the original version of his *Tempesta di mare* concerto (RV 98), which all date from the mid-1710s, well before the publication of his path-breaking Op. 10 *VI Concerti a flauto traverso* by the Roger-Le Cène firm in Amsterdam, as well as Carlo Tessarini's *XII Sonate per flauto traversie*, op. 2, both of which Sardelli dates 1729. Sardelli thus concludes that in both Rome and Venice the transverse flute was already a familiar and widely-cultivated instrument during the first two decades of the *Settecento*.

To turn now to the recorder, Sardelli suggests that the creation of an abundant repertory for the instrument by such composers as Benedetto Marcello, Francesco Veracini, Ignazio Sieber (or Siber, as the name was spelled in Italy), and others in the early decades of the eighteenth century reveals the presence of an appreciable number of recorder players, both professional and amateur, who required pieces specifically tailored to the instrument's technique. According to Sardelli, "it is clear that in Italy, as early as the late 1710s, the figure of a 'recorder virtuoso,' as opposed to that of a mere 'wind player' was starting to emerge" (8). Sardelli points to a manuscript volume entitled "Sinfonie dei varij autori" preserved in Parma at the Biblioteca Palatina (now available in a facsimile edition by Marco Di Pasquale) as evidence of the existence of professional recorder players in Italy in the first decades of the eighteenth century. As the volume includes many transcriptions of works for violin, it "reveals that in those years players of the recorder were in the habit of performing, alongside the first purpose-written sonatas, pieces for violin of forbidding difficulty" (10), thus demonstrating how quickly recorder technique was advancing. Yet, at the same time that a repertory expressly intended for the recorder, based on the idiomatic exploitation of its characteristics, emerged during the second and third decades of the eighteenth century, the transverse flute began to "oust its end-blown cousin" (9). Nevertheless, this did not preclude the emergence of a spate of difficult works for recorder by Vivaldi and other composers after this date, and Sardelli considers Vivaldi's contributions to the technical evolution of the recorder as well as to the flute as important as those of any composer.

Before concluding Part I of his study, Sardelli turns to the production of flutes and recorders in Italy in a chapter entitled "Missing Workshops and Instruments." His aim is to investigate the apparent paucity of wind instrument makers in Venice and the surrounding area during the time period under discussion, and he suggests that such instruments were likely to have been imported, for the most part, from other states, such as Germany and Milan. Yet, Sardelli does manage to piece together a little evidence that may shed some light on woodwind instrument-making activities in or near Venice. On the basis of a recently discovered invoice, he is able to identify the "D. Perosa" who made a recorder now in a collection in Vienna, as well as four oboes in France and Denmark, as the Domenico Perosa who repaired or supplied head joints

for a number of transverse flutes to the *figlie di coro* at the Ospedale della Pietà in the 1750s. On the basis of this evidence, which “bear[s] eloquent witness to the manufacture and employment of flutes in Venice” (49), Sardelli infers that during the last decade in which Vivaldi worked for the Pietà, “the production and consumption of flutes (and of music written for them) was hardly less intense” (53). Sardelli also calls attention to a Giuseppe Castel, who made some privately owned flutes in Bensheim and Padua as well as recorders elsewhere, who may have had his workshop in Venice or at least in the Veneto, if one can judge by the “Venetian” lion with which he marked one of his flutes. Since this flute seems to belong to the first generation of flutes made in four pieces, thus, dating from approximately the third decade of the eighteenth century, it “may be considered the earliest Italian transverse flute of the baroque period (ignoring the much older ‘Assisi’ flute)” (53). The recorder by Domenico Perosa now in Vienna at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, and the older of the two transverse flutes made by Giuseppe Castel, now in the Pelzel Collection in Bensheim, are both depicted in Sardelli’s book (see plates 6 and 7).

In Part II of *Vivaldi’s Music for Flute and Recorder*, Sardelli investigates all of Vivaldi’s music that includes these instruments, as I have already stated, in chapters that are organized by genre and scoring. First, there is a chapter on the sonatas for recorder and transverse flute, with subsections on sonatas for transverse flute, sonatas for recorder, sonatas for two instruments and continuo, and the Nicolas Chédeville forgery, *Il pastor fido*. Then there is a chapter on the composer’s chamber concertos with recorder or flute, which includes a valuable investigation into the keys and ranges of the flute and recorder parts in all these works. There are also chapters on the concertos for flute, the concertos for recorder, the concertos for “flautino,” the sole concerto for two flutes, and the concertos with multiple soloists and orchestra in which a pair of recorders or, in a couple of cases, a single flute or pair of flutes takes part. One of these concertos, RV 585, is in “Due Cori con Flauti obligati” and has a pair of recorders in each choir.

The final chapter in Part II that deals with repertory focuses on Vivaldi’s use of recorders and flutes in his vocal music; this is separated into sections on sacred works, cantatas, serenatas, and operas. Here the author is clearly adept at describing the pictorial and descriptive ways in which Vivaldi used these instruments, and the affects and atmospheres with which he associated them. He also discusses in some detail which size recorders Vivaldi wrote for in these works, his opinions not always agreeing with those of other authors. One of Sardelli’s descriptions that particularly stands out has to do with the aria “Sol da te, mio dolce amore” in the opera *Orlando furioso*. Here, Sardelli states that “it is at this point that Vivaldi, whose ability to create musical atmospheres was as great as that of Tiepolo to paint scenes, depicts the casting of the spell by calling on the magic of the transverse flute, a bewitching and at the same time sweetly lascivious instrument.” Vivaldi also pays “loving attention to detail in the formation of the accompaniment [which] is matched in the flute part by an extraordinary beauty of musical invention and a very advanced technical level. In fact, ‘Sol da te, mio dolce amore’ is one of the most significant pieces in the whole of the flute repertory.” Moreover, “it shows what technical excellence was already being achieved on the instrument in Italy halfway through the 1720s[,] from which we may draw positive conclusions about the breadth of its diffusion and the number of its players”

(265-66). Besides deftly conveying the dramatic effects of the flute and recorder in the pieces Sardelli discusses here, this chapter can be a wonderful resource for flute and recorder players who wish to incorporate vocal works into their repertory.

Now let me return to Sardelli's discussion of Vivaldi's use of the term "flautino," in the three concertos he wrote for that instrument, strings, and continuo (RV 443, 444, and 445). Sardelli argues that these concertos were meant for an eight-hole recorder smaller than an alto instrument, and not for a small transverse flute (or piccolo) in d", or for the flageolet. One of Sardelli's arguments rests on his understanding that small side-blown flutes like the "flauto piccolo" had fallen completely out of use in Italy by Vivaldi's time, although they were known in France and Germany. In addition, there is scant evidence of the use of the flageolet in Italy, "shown by both the paucity of surviving instruments and rarity of testimony to its use" (185). Buttressing his arguments with an overview of references to and the use of small flutes of any size in England, Germany, France, and Italy, Sardelli concludes that flageolets were considered very special instruments, and parts for them had to be named specifically. Next, Sardelli considers the range required of the *flautino* in these concertos. Arguing that in tutti passages in concertos where the solo instrument doubles the violins, it may transpose its notes or simplify some of its passages in order to avoid notes that do not fall within its range, and pointing to Vivaldi's practice of not writing out every such deviation in full, Sardelli concludes that the required compass for the *flautino* in these three concertos shrinks to the following sizes: in RV 443 and 444, f'-f''', and in RV 445, e'-f'''. Although not minimizing counter-arguments for the use of an instrument that can play the low e' in RV 445, he dispenses of them one by one and concludes that the e' must be regarded as a simple error due to the working out of a sequence. Considering passages specifying the *flautino* in vocal arias as well, Sardelli concludes that "it becomes as clear as daylight that all these works are intended for the only small end-blown flute pitched in F—the sopranino recorder" (191), further citing passages that "ram home" the impossibility that the instrument could have been a flageolet in G. While crediting Peter Thalheimer "for having conducted serious experiments in an attempt to demonstrate the performability of this repertory on an Italian flageolet of the early eighteenth century," Sardelli suggests that Thalheimer had a mistaken view of the instrument's compass. In sum, "all the extant evidence—whether derived from organological knowledge, performance technique, the instrument's diffusion (or lack of it) in Italy, the custom of identifying it by its own name, the reservation, within the Italian repertory, of the term *flautino* for the eight-holed recorder, the notated compass, or Vivaldi's manner of writing for the instrument—conspires to rule out definitely any possibility that the flageolet served as the composer's *flautino*" (194).

Yet, to conclude that Vivaldi's *flautino* concertos were intended exclusively for the sopranino recorder would be incorrect. Sardelli cites Vivaldi's autograph instructions written next to the titles of RV 443 and 445— "Gl'Istrom:ti trasportati alla 4:a" and "Gl'Istrom:ti alla 4a Bassa." These instructions indicate that Vivaldi was asking his copyist to transpose the orchestral parts down a fourth, leaving the *flautino* part untransposed, and they suggest that Vivaldi found himself in the position of having to have parts copied for performance by a "small" recorder in C (that is, a soprano recorder) instead of a small recorder in F (the sopranino), and that he derived a

solution that involved the simultaneous presence of a “real” transposition (one that the soloist would execute by playing with the fingerings of an F recorder on an instrument in C), and transposed notation for the accompanying orchestral instruments down a fourth. When these parts are transposed, the keys of the two concertos, instead of those in which they are written, C major and A minor, become G major and E minor, and, indeed, Sardelli finds the lower keys to benefit the register of the orchestral instruments. Although Sardelli credits Winfried Michel with making other scholars take account of these inscriptions, he does not hold with him that all three *flautino* concertos were intended for the soprano recorder. Rather, he believes that Vivaldi’s directions for transposition arose from some particular occasion of performance, rather than enshrining a general principle in favor of the soprano as opposed to the sopranino instrument. While all of this makes sense to the present writer, I find Sardelli’s summary of these matters in his penultimate chapter entitled “Conclusions,” and his description of RV443 and 445 in his concluding “Inventory of the Works for Recorder and Flute by Antonio Vivaldi” unnuanced; readers consulting only those sections will be led to conclude that Vivaldi intended these works to be played only by a soprano recorder. Let me add that Sardelli does not overlook the problem of the low f[♯]-sharps and g[♯]-sharps that occur in solo passages in these concertos with some frequency; he simply concludes that “whichever kind of instrument Vivaldi had at his disposal, it must have been one provided with double holes for the comfortable execution” of these notes (197-98).

Another of Vivaldi’s instrumental designations that has challenged scholars and performers is that of “flauti grossi,” which appears in two of Vivaldi’s operas, *Tito Manlio* and *La verità in cimento*. In another detailed discussion, Sardelli concludes that the term designates ordinary alto recorders, which are “large” only in relation to the “flautinos” that appear in the same works. As for Vivaldi’s designation of “2 Flasolet” in one detached aria, “Di due rai languir costante,” Sardelli questions the use of flageolets in G (the type of flageolet most likely favored in Italy) for a piece written in the key of F, and wonders whether Vivaldi used the term “flasolet” as a synonym for “flautino,” since the parts are entirely appropriate for sopranino recorders in f[♯]. Yet, he does suggest another possible explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the instrumental designation and the written pitch of the aria—that “a pair of G flageolets built according to the traditionally low French pitch standard . . . might indeed result—especially in Venice, where the pitch was the highest in Europe—in an ‘effective’ pitch of F” (272).

Sardelli’s final chapter in Part II, aside from his “Conclusions” and “Postscript: A Late Discovery,” is devoted to “Remarks on Instrumental Technique.” Sardelli, who is obviously an expert player of the recorder and *flauto traverso*, addresses in detail many passages from a technical point of view. Among other things, he attempts to demonstrate Vivaldi’s own direct practical knowledge of these instruments by examining passages where the composer “plays around” with a few positions that are highly comfortable, yet brilliant in their effect. Sardelli also points to Vivaldi’s intensive use of what he calls, by analogy, the “open strings” of the recorder and flute, in passages which alternate rapidly between an easily fingered single pitch which returns again and again and other notes which form a melodic line. If Vivaldi had not known

these instruments so well, Sardelli suggests, Vivaldi also would never have written certain solo passages that would be puzzling if fingered normally, but which become perfectly straightforward when alternate fingerings are used. Sardelli's detailed knowledge of Vivaldi's oeuvre also emerges throughout the book in his many comparisons of passages in works for flute or recorder that are derived from or resemble closely passages in other compositions; for this, he draws on his own obviously extensive, although so-far unpublished, catalogue of Vivaldi's self-quotations.

Finally, a word about Sardelli's "Postscript"—a brief chapter dealing with the recent discovery of a sonata in G major for recorder and bass preserved in the archive of the Sing-Akademie in Berlin (now housed in the Music Department of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin), which had been displaced due to the Second World War—and his inventory listing all the known works by Vivaldi, including lost ones, in which one or more flutes or recorders appear. This list also includes spurious and insecurely ascribed works, as well as authentic works with non-original flute parts. Then a bibliography and two indexes—one general in nature and the other organized by RV number—conclude Sardelli's study. I should perhaps point out that Sardelli's inventory in the present English edition of the book (which was preceded by an Italian edition published in 2001) is slightly more up-to-date than Michael Talbot's list of Vivaldi's works in the Second Edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (vol. 26: 824-38). Yet Sardelli is extremely indebted to Talbot's prior work on Vivaldi, as well as to Talbot's translation of the present book, to which Talbot made some "small contributions" as well (see the translator's note, xx). Both owe a further debt to Peter Ryom, as do all current Vivaldi scholars, whose systematic cataloguing of Vivaldi's work provided the RV numbers used by Sardelli to identify these works. Indeed, in his preface, Sardelli speaks about having had early sight of large portions of Ryom's vastly expanded 2007 edition of his thematic catalogue,^[2] although it had not yet appeared in print, which allowed him to include some numbers appearing for the first time, as well as information "not yet generally available concerning sources and versions of Vivaldi's music in manuscript" (xvii). In the case of the late discovery of the sonata for recorder and bass in the collection of the Berlin Sing-Akademie, Sardelli reports that the work "was immediately taken into the main section of the Ryom catalogue as RV 806" (283).

By now it should be overwhelmingly clear that *Vivaldi's Music for Flute and Recorder* is an excellent resource for instrumentalists who want to learn just what Vivaldi wrote for the flute and recorder, investigate the question of which instruments they should use in various works, and consider when, how, and where the repertoire Vivaldi wrote for these instruments was played. Readers will also discover excellent insights into Vivaldi's working methods, the markings and comments in his original manuscripts, speculation about flute and recorder players for whom he may have written certain pieces as well as those who were active in his milieu, questions regarding the authenticity of various works, and problems of dating. Sardelli's opening section on the flute and recorder in Italy in Vivaldi's time, especially in the years immediately preceding

² Peter Ryom, *Antonio Vivaldi: Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis seiner Werke (RV)* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2007).

his writing for those instruments, is also highly informative and may serve to bring further attention to Italian works in future accounts of the history of their repertoires. Sardelli's study is extremely thorough and impressive throughout; it is broad at the same time as it is highly detailed, and it demonstrates a thorough technical understanding of the literature. I found it a pleasure to read, and I now know where to turn first for information about any of Vivaldi's works including the flute or recorder.