

## VIVALDI CON AMORE

### Program Notes

By Charlotte Nediger

*The most popular composer for the violin, as well as player on that instrument, during these times, was Don Antonio Vivaldi . . . if acute and rapid tones are evils, Vivaldi has much of the sin to answer for.*

—Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (1789)

*The famous Vivaldi, whom they call the Prete Rosso [the Red-Haired Priest], very well known for his concertos, was a topping man among them at Venice.*

—Mr. Wright, in his *Travels through Italy* (1720–22)

Such contemporary accounts show us that the appeal of Vivaldi's music in his own time was comparable with its great popularity today. Vivaldi was born in Venice in 1678, and received his early education from his father, a violinist employed at St. Mark's. In 1703 Antonio was ordained a priest, and in 1704 was appointed as a violin teacher at the Ospedale della Pietà. A few years later he was also named *maestro de' concerti* and took over direction of the Pietà orchestra.

The Pietà, founded in 1346, was one of four Venetian institutions for children who had been orphaned, or whose parents were unable to care for them. At some point during the history of the Pietà, its charges became exclusively female. Musical education became an important part of the curriculum, and by the end of the seventeenth century, the Pietà had virtually become a sort of conservatory of music, its concerts enjoying enormous prestige and popularity.

Vivaldi was to remain an employee of the Pietà until his death in 1741, and during his tenure supplied the orchestra with a wealth of instrumental concertos, several hundred in all. Many of the concertos were published

by Roger in Amsterdam for circulation throughout Europe; others were circulated in manuscript form by travelling musicians. As his fame spread, Vivaldi started to receive commissions for works from abroad: he wrote many works for the brilliant court orchestra at Dresden, and had close ties with musicians in Vienna. Equally renowned as an opera composer, his many opera sinfonias complete his orchestral output.

The constant demand for concertos inspired Vivaldi to turn to instruments not usually given solo roles in the orchestra. Included in his worklist are, for example, no fewer than 40 concertos for bassoon, and several for one or two oboes. For his own instrument, the violin, he wrote over 250 solo concertos, and numerous concertos for two, three, and four violins. Occasionally Vivaldi added descriptive titles, such as the violin concertos “L’amoroso” and “Amato bene,” which inspired our own title of this week’s concertos. The form and spirit of Vivaldi’s concertos were to provide the model for the late baroque instrumental concerto both in Italy and abroad, and to delight listeners far and wide.