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Pound, Olga Rudge, and the "Risveglio Vivaldiano"

Considering that Vivaldi was not even a name to the general musical public until the early nineteen fifties, Pound's devotion to his music in the mid-thirties was cause for some justifiable pride. The story of the "Risveglio Vivaldiano" really belongs to Olga Rudge. Yet Pound is personally responsible not only for encouraging her first contributions to the revival, but also for having indirectly suggested the format of the crucial "Settimana Vivaldiana" of 1939, the Siena festival which first established the composer's modern reputation. With the experience of their Rapallo concerts of 1933 and 1934 behind them, Pound and Olga Rudge together helped to bring about the first extensive presentation of Vivaldi's music in this century.

Pound first became aware of Vivaldi in 1936, after the busy first two Rapallo musical seasons had been closed by the departure of the pianist Gerhart Munch. In an article for *Il Mare* on March 14, Pound declared that his musical activities would resume in the form of a "laboratorio di studio, allo scopo immediate di esaminare l'eredita musicale d'Italia nell'epoca prima di Bach."¹ They would begin by reading through all of Vivaldi's works for one or two violins and continuo then available. Pound sets off the composer's name in capital letters:

ANTONIO VIVALDI
a.d. 1685-1743

Vivaldi's dates have since been corrected (c. 1675-1741); Pound would have had him Bach's exact contemporary, for just as he was attracted to Arnaut Daniel through Dante's admiration, so he seems to have taken notice of Vivaldi through the knowledge of Bach's arrangements of sixteen of his concertos. (Since Pound wrote, however, all but six of these have been assigned to other Italian masters of the period.) In his

¹ "Studi Tigulliani," *Il Mare*, 14 March 1936, p. 1.

article, Pound notes Vivaldi's high contemporary reputation and the esteem of Bach; he notes the existence of at least twenty-eight operas; he notes the work of Wilhelm Altmann, whose *Thematischer Katalog* (1922) covers only works published during the eighteenth century; and he lists the works available in modern editions—a mere thirteen concertos and fifteen sonatas (among them Walter Rummel's 1916 edition of the six 'cello sonatas).

Pound had known Vivaldi's name previously from Parisotti's standard collection of *arie antiche*, and perhaps from Rummel's work; as music critic William Atheling, he mentions Vivaldi now and then without special enthusiasm; the article of March 14 and the concert of March 29 are the first signs of recognizing a phenomenon out of the ordinary. The concert was calculated to explore the relation between Vivaldi, followed by an "elaborazione di un concerto di Vivaldi" by Bach (presumably the Concerto in E), and that followed by Bach's original Concerto in A minor. Pound unfortunately does not say how his interest was first aroused, whether through his own or Olga Rudge's curiosity, or advised by someone who already suspected the composer's stature.

In any case, Pound's actions during 1936 were his most direct contributions to Vivaldi studies. First he organized a study group within the framework of the temporarily discontinued Rapallo concerts. Then Olga Rudge travelled to Turin to examine the manuscripts there. Meanwhile, Pound sent to Gerhart Münch in Dresden for photocopies of Vivaldi material there. The libraries in Turin and Dresden contain, respectively, the two largest collections of Vivaldi material anywhere. Turin, Pound discovered, held some twenty-five volumes containing about 18,000 pages by Vivaldi alone; included were some 309 concertos and many vocal works. The Dresden collection amounted to about 90 concertos.² Out of Olga Rudge's journey came a thematic catalog of the concertos in Turin, besides a few others at Dresden and elsewhere taken from photocopies secured by Pound. This work, prepared in 1936, was not published until 1939, when Eric Blom singled it out for praise in *Music and Letters*.³

Glimpses of the activities of Pound's study groups are obtained through the pages of *Il Mare*. They were lecture-demonstrations, Pound speaking, Olga Rudge performing, comparing Vivaldi's works with Bach's, Mozart's, and inevitably, Janequin's "Canzone degli Ucelli":

² Ruth Sterling Frost, "Vivaldi Society Is Formed for Execution of His Works . . ." *New York Herald*, Paris ed., 18 April 1938, p. 4.

³ Rev. of *Antonio Vivaldi: Note e documenti sulla vita e sulle opere*. *Music & Letters*, 21 (1940), pp. 192-93.

Possiamo, dopo tre ore, distinguere il suo stile con maggior certezza dal Bach, il suo ammiratore, da Mozart, che lo rassomiglia in certi movimenti, e dalla folla delle luci minori, pure incantevoli come sono: Marcello, Paisiello, Pergolesi.⁴

On May 16, 1936, *Il Mare* printed "Vivaldi: la sua posizione nella storia della musica," by Olga Rudge, summarising the conclusions of the third formal study evening. Perhaps Italy can claim an equal to Bach, she suggests, but no one can know until Vivaldi's music is brought out of manuscript. Meanwhile, she prepared a sampling from the composer's unpublished letters, which was printed in the *Listener* before a broadcast of one of Vivaldi's works.⁵

If Pound's efforts had been confined to Rapallo, nothing would have come of them. But in 1938, Olga Rudge and David Nixon, a violinist who had performed at Rapallo in October 1937, attempted to bring Vivaldi to the attention of his own city, Venice:

Through the initiative of an American violinist living in Venice, David Nixon, and Miss Olga Rudge, it was suggested to form a society, with headquarters in Venice, Vivaldi's birthplace; to have an annual festival of Vivaldi's music in September in Venice where there will be awarded the Vivaldi prize for the best violin performance of his music. This would be international and...in conjunction with the society's aim of bringing to light all those works of forgotten music.

The first concert of the Vivaldi Society was given on March 24 in the stately ballroom of one of the most beautiful eighteenth-century palaces of Venice, the Ca' Dolfin. The second concert, on April 16, was given at Mrs. Sterling Frost's.

The third concert will be given in the church of La Pietà on the Riva degli Schiavoni. It is of special interest to have it in this church, for this is the very church where Vivaldi, who is called "il prete rosso," officiated in his lifetime, and where he gave renditions of his beautiful compositions for organ, choir, and stringed instruments.⁶

Pound had written in *Il Mare* for December 4, 1937, "Non vogliamo chiamarci i 'precursori' dello sforzo veneziano, ma ci teniamo a far presente la nostra priorità nel far ritornare in voga la musica del Vivaldi stesso."⁷ The Venice concerts did not continue, however, and nothing came of the Vivaldi Society until, one year later, the plans of Olga Rudge and David Nixon were absorbed into the important "Settimana Vivaldiana" at Siena, which, according to Walter Kolneder, "heralded the Vivaldi renaissance which today is immediately evident."⁸

⁴ Pound, "Studi Tigulliani," *Il Mare*, 11 April 1936, p. 1; see also "Studi Tigulliani," 25 April 1936, p. 1.

⁵ Olga Rudge, "Letters of Antonio Vivaldi," *Listener*, 16 (28 October 1936), p. 834.

⁶ Ruth Sterling Frost, *op. cit.*

⁷ "Vita musicale Tigulliana," *Il Mare*, 4 December 1937, p. 1; compare Pound's reference to the "abortive Vivaldi society" in "A Letter from Rapallo: Annual Music Week Proposed...," *Japan Times & Mail* (7 January 1940), p. 8.

⁸ *Antonio Vivaldi*, trans. Bill Hopkins (London: Faber, 1970), p. 6.

Before this, however, in 1938 the *Centro di Studi Vivaldiani* was organized within the Accademia Musicale Chigiana at Siena, one of the major music centres in Italy; its founding members were Count Guido Chigi Saracini, patron of the Academy, with Antonio Bruers, S.A. Luciani, and Olga Rudge. The Accademia Chigiana quickly made Siena the centre for Italian Vivaldi studies, and in 1939 mounted the "Settimana Vivaldiana." Olga Rudge served as secretary-receptionist for the Academy, a full-time job whose duties, not precisely musical, involved a good share of drudgery. According to Mary de Rachewiltz,

Count Chigi, being the Fondatore e Presidente, the last perfect Renaissance art patron...had restricted his field to music, filled his palazzo with fine instruments, and invited the best musicians in the world. Mamile had been introduced to him socially by a friend. It turned out that she personified the ideal public relations secretary for the Musical Academy the Count was dreaming of. As usual, it's not what you are most passionately interested in and best equipped for that lands you a job, so that she who was described as "one of the very few violinists before the public who have a definite gift for the work they undertake." was forced to lay aside her instrument for many months a year. To earn her living, she had to rely on her charm, her flair for dressing, her *savoir faire*, her fluent French and Italian, and of course her talent for organizing and her knowledge of music and musicians.

And the great Vivaldi revival started in Siena-via Venice and Rapallo. "She pulled it off on her own...."⁹

Olga Rudge's position kept her close to developments in Vivaldi scholarship. So close that Count Chigi, according to Mary de Rachewiltz, used to introduce her as "Miss Rudge-Vivaldi." Several items written by Olga Rudge appear in the publications of the Accademia. Typically they are practical, self-effacing editorship, often signed only with initials; perhaps there are others unsigned.

In the course of their studies, Olga Rudge and Pound both became enthusiastic over the possibilities of microphotography for reproducing music from manuscript. One of the Rapallo conceits (February 5, 1938) was given to a demonstration of the process, and Pound began to advertise it frequently in articles, notes in little magazines, and correspondence.¹⁰ This economical process is one of the points of the Janequin music in Canto LXXV. Olga Rudge reproduced an entire Vivaldi concerto in the pages of *Broletto*, monthly magazine of the city of Como, and publicized the process herself in the *Townsmen*, the *Delphian Quarterly*, and *Il Mare*.¹¹ The treasure of unpublished music

⁹ *Discretions* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 130-131.

¹⁰ For example. "Notes on Micro-Photography," *Globe* (Milwaukee), 2 (April/May 1938), p. 29.

¹¹ "Music and a Process," *Townsmen*, 1 (January 1938), p. 21; "Venice and Vivaldi," *Delphian Quarterly*, 21 (January 1938), pp. 9-10, 56; "La rivista *Broletto* di Como e la Microfotografia," *Il Mare*, 26 February 1938, p. 1.

could be made available to the world without the expensive engraving and printing process; musicians had only to read directly from photocopies of the manuscripts. Pound had the idea from Arnold Dolmetsch, who had hoped that musicians would train themselves in archaic notations.¹² The Accademia Chigiana followed up the suggestions, especially after the war, publishing many works by Vivaldi and other composers in photo-facsimile. Pound was naturally interested in an economical means for reproducing music, having seen so much time-consuming copyist's work over the past decade. He had done some of this work himself, in fact, not only in connection with his two operas, but also, it seems, in a personal effort to get editions of Vivaldi into print. He wrote to Tibor Serly in 1939, "If I get to N.Y. in the spring, we might work up some of my Vivaldi reductions. Better stuff for the publisher, I think, than that sonata on my opera basis."¹³

In the face of such enthusiasm, obtuseness such as Pound sometimes encountered must have been hard to bear. In his *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound remarked that "with 309 concerti of Vivaldi unplayed, lying in Turin as I write this, it is as useless as it wd. be idiotic to write of musical culture in Europe." A reviewer for the *Musical Times*, identified only as "Feste," in a casual, generally admiring discussion of Pound's book, takes exception to the claims for Vivaldi. "Many of us," he writes,

think that the present old music revival phase has reached the point where it ought to be called a craze; but Mr. Pound evidently thinks you can't have too much of a good thing—even when he may be singular in regarding it as good. Someone ought to look into this matter of Vivaldi's output. According to 'Grove' he wrote only about seventy concertos. And—*pace* Mr. Pound, who is a warm Vivaldian—most of us who know those that Bach arranged will say that the seventy are probably sixty too many.¹⁵

It seems incredible now that no less an authority than *Grove's Dictionary* should have left the impression that Vivaldi wrote only seventy concertos; the article, in fact, listed only works published during the composer's lifetime, and Feste took the list to be complete. As for the old music "craze," he perhaps lived to wring his hands at its reckless progress. But the reviewer's sarcasm did not pass unchallenged, for in the next issue of the *Musical Times* appeared the following letter from the eminent musicologist W. Gillies Whittaker:

¹² Arnold Dolmetsch. *Select English Songs and Dialogues of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, 1 (London: Boosey, 1898), preface.

¹³ *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, 1950), p. 327. The "sonata" is probably the "Sonata Ghuidonis" for unaccompanied violin, the title of which suggests its relationship to Pound's opera *Cavalcanti*.

¹⁴ *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1952), p. 237.

¹⁵ "Ad Libitum: An American Poet Glances at Music," *Musical Times*. No. 1149 (1938), p. 819. Murray Schafer has identified "Feste" as *Times* editor Dr. Harvey Grace.

Sir Pound's figures are *post-Grove*. A young American musicologist, Miss Olga Rudge, has catalogued an immense quantity of Vivaldi's concertos which lie practically unknown in Turin, and Mr. Pound has been agitating to induce powers-that-be to have these microphotoed and made available to students.

"Feste" expresses surprise...at Ezra's acquaintance with William Young's Sonatas. Mr. Pound not only knows them thoroughly, but has given all the eleven plus the First Set of Purcell's twelve string sonatas at his chamber concerts in Rapallo, a piece of enthusiasm not approached by the countrymen of the composers....¹⁶

Pound's own response, in a lengthy letter restating his position, was surprisingly mild:

Quite possible that a simple-minded bloke like myself, copying out the Dresden concerti note for note, and being pleased by the quality of Vivaldi's mind therein apparent, become more enthusiastic over the possibilities of the unpublished Vivaldi than I wd. if I had heard even the same concerti played (as I have) by a heavy and heavily led orchestra.¹⁷

One practical result from this exchange was the revision of the Vivaldi entry in *Grove's*. The article was entrusted to Olga Rudge, whose initials still stand beneath it in the current edition. This reviewer's solecism may stand as warning to all those too eager to impugn Pound's accuracy.

According to Pound, credit for the 1939 "Settimana Vivaldiana" belongs chiefly to Olga Rudge. He wrote at the time to Tibor Serly, "Siena now proposes to do one composer or group of related composers, not merely mixed salad, Due mainly to O.R. but don't rub it in too hard, not tactful. Politeness to Casella will do you no harm."¹⁸ Historical notes published by the Accademia have this to say:

Primo animatore delle "Settimane" é Alfredo Casella, che ha al fianco collaboratori e revisori preziosi quali S.A. Luciani, Virgilio Mortari, Vito Frazzi, [ed] Olga Rudge....¹⁹

Pound did not exaggerate, for the design of the Siena "Settimana" clearly incorporated several of Olga Rudge's proposals for the 1938 Vivaldi Society in Venice, and the presentation of large blocks of music by one composer was a regular feature of Pound's Rapallo concerts. Even the designation "Settimana" reflects, for example, Pound's "Settimana Mozartiana," a cycle of twelve of Mozart's violin sonatas presented on June 26, 27, and 28, 1933—the earliest of the concerts at Rapallo. Casella had been active in Italian festivals for years and de-

¹⁶ *Musical Times*, No. 1150 (1938), p. 930.

¹⁷ "Mr. Pound Replies," *Musical Times*, No. 1151 (1938), pp. 57-58. Pound would have been pleased to know that he himself will be included in the forthcoming sixth edition of *Grove's* as a composer.

¹⁸ *Letters*, p. 343.

¹⁹ Armando Vannini, *L'Accademia Musicale Chigiana: Note Storiche* (Siena: Accademia Chigiana, 1956), p. 11.

voted great energy towards propagating the music of the Italian baroque, but he nowhere displays any exceptional interest in Vivaldi.²⁰ Olga Rudge had known Casella for many years; she may have proposed the festival to him, being in position to secure the services of the Accademia Chigiana, or she may have simply initiated the idea that the festival should be given over entirely to Vivaldi. In either case, the "Settimana Vivaldiana" was a more important benefit from the Rapallo concerts than anyone could have predicted, for the effect of the Siena festival was to impress Vivaldi's stature on European musicology at large. Six concerts were given on successive evenings, September 16-21, 1939; there were two orchestral programs, one of chamber music, one of sacred choral music, and two performances of the opera *L'Olimpiade*, on a libretto by Metastasio. Pound took deep personal pride in the festival, especially in the concert which included one of Bach's adaptations from Vivaldi.²¹ Among publications connected with the festival was one which included Olga Rudge's thematic catalog.²² The Siena "Settimana" became an annual event, in 1940 devoted to the Scarlatti family ("con tre o cinque Scarlatti non si faun Vivaldi," said Pound²³), in 1941 to "La Scuola Veneziana," in 1942 to Pergolesi. After the war, it resumed in 1948 with a festival of music by Galuppi, for which Pound again supplied manuscript material from his collection.²⁴

One other postscript to the story of the "Settimana" concerns the story that Pound's photocopies, donated to the Accademia Chigiana, were all that survived of several of Vivaldi's works after the bombing of Dresden during the war. This is untrue apparently, according to Murray Schafer, who has been informed by Dresden that the Vivaldi holdings survived intact. The story was first told by William Carlos Williams in his *Autobiography*, and then by Charles Norman; it was supported by the good authority of Olga Rudge, who mentions it in a brief note to photo-facsimiles of four concertos published by the Accademia in 1949.²⁵ The story's popularity, however, must testify to the sense of poetic justice that it satisfies.

²⁰ See Alfredo Casella, *Music in My Time: Memoirs*, trans. Spencer Norton (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1955).

²¹ "Vocale o Verbale," *Meridiano di Roma*, 4 (26 November 1939), p. 3.

²² *Antonio Vivaldi; Note e documenti sulla vita e sulle opere* (Siena: Published by the Settimana Musicale, 1939).

²³ "Vivaldi Siena," *Meridiano di Roma*, 6 (15 June 1941), p. 4.

²⁴ Olga Rudge, "Manoscritti di opere di Galuppi a Genova," in *B. Galuppi detto 'Il Buranello' (1706-1785) . . .* (Siena: Ticci, 1948), p. 76. I do not know how Pound came into possession of the manuscript of Galuppi's Sinfonia in D, but his interest was doubtless spurred by Browning's poem.

²⁵ *Antonio Vivaldi: Quattro Concerti Autografi...* (Siena: Accademia Chigiana, 1949).

Compare William Carlos Williams, *Autobiography* (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 225; Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound*, 2nd ed. (New York: Minerva Press, 1969), p. 319.

Given the circumstances described here, it still seems impossible either to separate the contributions of Pound and Olga Rudge to the Vivaldi revival, or to set a value on them. The task was not small, and a glance at the history of the revival published by the *Centre International de Documentation Antonio Vivaldi* (Brussels)²⁶ will show that the contribution from Rapallo was only one of many from all over Europe. In addition to the Italian scholars, there was an international effort led by Marc Pincherle in France, who had been a student of Vivaldi since 1910; just before the war, in fact, scholarship was marked more by rivalry than co-operation, Casella having refused Pincherle access to the Turin collection.²⁷ But among the many participants in the revival, the names of Pound and Olga Rudge are not out of place. Pincherle, in his biography of the composer, especially praises "the impressive series of Vivaldi publications made possible by the munificence of Count Chigi of Siena and the untiring industry of Miss Olga Rudge, secretary of the Accademia Chigiana."²⁸ The Rapallo concerts were a modest beginning, but the work of the Accademia and the 1939 "Settimana" take prominent positions in the chain of events which finally, in the mid-fifties, made Vivaldi part of the public musical consciousness. A project of such proportions cannot be credited to one or two persons. Very likely Vivaldi would have been rediscovered had neither Pound nor Olga Rudge existed. But to say this does not diminish the fact that Pound recognized Vivaldi's quality when all who cared were a few eccentric musicologists, and that he and Olga Rudge together had energy for productive action.

²⁶ *Vivaldiana*, No. 1 (Brussels, 1969).

²⁷ Marc Pincherle, "Recontre de Vivaldi," *Vivaldiana*, p. 10.

²⁸ *Vivaldi* (New York: Norton, 1957), p. 262.