



Orchestras in Eighteenth-Century Venice

Author(s): Denis Arnold

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Orchestras in Eighteenth-Century Venice

IT is rather strange that so little is known of the development of the orchestra in eighteenth-century Italy. If, as Carse pointed out,¹ this is due to the concentration of critical attention on the operatic activity of the country at that time, today, when the concerto grosso is being revealed as a form in which much attractive music was written, and the most minor composers of the many Italian towns are being discovered afresh, it is evident that a concert life of some importance existed quite apart from that of the opera houses. In Venice, to take an example where it is still possible to find some documentary information, such composers as Vivaldi, Albinoni and Galuppi have left a heritage of instrumental music as rich as could be found coming from any one city. Yet, apart from its famed conservatoires, no organizations have been investigated with any thoroughness, and little has been published² to show how varied and how modern a life existed for the orchestral musician and composer.

The stable element in Venetian musical life was the *cappella* at St Mark's. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it had been one of the most progressive of all institutions in the treatment of its musicians, who, if not paid as well as at some of the more opulent of North Italian courts, had a measure of security unknown elsewhere. Posts for singers and players were advertised publicly and were filled by competition. Musicians were given three-year contracts, and, unless they committed some misdemeanour, they were fairly certain that these would be renewed for the rest of their lives. There was no fixed age for retirement, but if a player or singer became inefficient after long service, he was excused his duties even though his salary was continued. At a time when, as Monteverdi remarked acidly in one of his letters to Mantua,³ a change of prince or duke could mean a wholesale change in the musicians of his court, this was indeed a Welfare State.

But much though we may applaud such a humane attitude, this, like other welfare states, could and did lead to inefficiency. While Monteverdi was in his first enthusiasm in Venice, the music at St Mark's was clearly very good. Later in his life, his interest waned.

After the great plague of 1630, he did not always bother to appoint new musicians promptly when vacancies occurred, and when the public opera houses opened in 1637 we may wonder whether both he and his successors did not find the pleasures of dramatic music too tempting. And not only the pleasures. The profits of composing for the theatre were considerable. Cavalli received the equivalent of a whole year's salary of the *maestro di cappella* for a single opera,⁴ and he was one of several composers at the basilica who produced operas at regular intervals. Other musicians, less enterprising or talented, nevertheless found part-time work at local churches⁵ or in the conservatoires.⁶ St Mark's was beginning to take second place, and this situation was not helped by yet another trait of the welfare state. The salaries of musicians in official employ tended to remain the same throughout the years. There was no significant increase during the seventeenth century, and although admittedly there was no general inflation of prices, the demand for musicians in opera houses and at other courts was completely ignored by the responsible church officers, the Procurators of St Mark's. Their only hope of keeping their better musicians was to match the salaries elsewhere, and this was never done promptly enough.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the situation is well revealed in a list of instrumentalists,⁷ apparently drawn up for the attention of the Procurators. Both the salaries and the instruments mentioned are revealing.

CONCERTI DELLA CHIESA DUCALE

Girolamo Penere Violino 15d [=ducats],	Franc° Valeta Viola da Braccio 15d,
Aless° Fedeli Tromba 50d,	Ludovico Vatio Tromba 15d,
P (=Padre) Franc° Calotti Violetta 25d,	P. Gio Batt. Mazzoni, Violetta 15d, Giorgio Gentili Violin 40d,
P. Franc° Palma Tiorba 50d,	Lunardo Laurenti Tromba 50d,
Lorenzo Norcelloni Violino 25d,	Michiel Lucatello Violin 15d,
Zuane Toso Violino 15d,	Gasparo Merienghino Violin 15d,
Ant° Gabriato Violino 25d,	Bortolo Brigadi Tiorba 30d,
Franc° Beneglia Violino 15d,	Lorenzo Nanello Tiorba 30d,
Carlo Pesati Violetta 15d,	P. Zuane Venerandi Violon 15d,
Fra Girolamo Corsini Cornetto 30d,	Onofrio Peneti aboe [=oboe] 55d, Giacomo Lazarino Violin 15d,
Gio. Batt. Vivaldi Violino 25d,	

The first feature to gain our attention is the fact that even allowing for the somewhat indistinct nomenclature of the stringed instruments

(*violetta* is a term hard to define) the ensemble seems a little disorganized. The bass section of the strings is much weaker than we might expect. To have a *cornetto* at this time is perhaps not too unusual, but it is not part of the comprehensive brass section which traditionally had the function of supporting the voices of the choir. There is no wind section as such, and clearly the oboist is a virtuoso paid at a higher stipend than the rank and file. In fact, the orchestra looks as though it has evolved from the customary Venetian ensemble of the sixteenth century. The trumpeters and oboist are a relic of the *piffari* who were the skilled town musicians given the special duties of accompanying the Doge in processions and on other civic occasions. The others are the *ripieni* who were originally hired *per diem* for performances in St Mark's itself.

This feeling of evolution rather than planned development is equally evident from the salaries of the players. The basic wages of 15 ducats a year are exactly those paid to the old ripienists under a contract arranged by Monteverdi in 1614,⁸ when for the first time they were given a regular stipend. The 50 ducats given to the brass are somewhat above the salaries paid to the old *piffari*, who originally had been hired as a group with a block payment given to their leader.⁹ The cornettist was paid rather more than the rank and file, since the instrument had been out of favour for many years, and the Procurators were concerned to give an incentive to whoever would learn to play it.¹⁰ The other fees were the result of increments for long service, and were awarded on a casual basis, without any hard and fast rule. Vivaldi's father, for example, had been a violinist at St Mark's for over twenty years and still only received 10 ducats more than the minimum—hardly a generous increase. And the basis for these fees was perhaps even more muddled than it seems. In the sixteenth century the *piffari* were paid more than the *ripieni* because their duties were much more arduous. They were expected to keep themselves free to play in St Mark's at any time. The *ripieni*, on the other hand, had a set number of festivals at which they must appear, and this left them free to accept other engagements. By 1708, the dividing line seems to have vanished. Clearly the whole basis of the orchestra needed reconsideration.

This was to happen in 1714, when the then *maestro di cappella*, Antonio Biffi, brought up the matter of the musical establishment before the Procurators. He prepared a new list of players¹¹ who now consisted of 9 violinists, 3 violette, 1 violon, 1 viola da brazza, 1 cornetto, 1 oboe, 2 trombones, 3 *piffari* (probably trumpeters), and 2 theorbos—the same number as six years earlier, but a slightly more balanced band. Biffi nevertheless was dissatisfied. His choir was thirty-

six strong, and he felt the need for a bigger orchestra.

. . . with regard next to the number of instrumentalists [*concerti*], since we lack many instruments, to the considerable detriment to the music which must be provided by this Office on Christmas Eve and other important festivals, when it is customary to provide special music, Their Excellencies have decided that they must proceed to repair this defect, and bring the establishment [of instrumentalists] to thirty-four; but because it is impossible to find more players of bassoons, trombones and theorboes, they will allow the substitution of suitable stringed or wind instruments, which could serve to make for a balanced ensemble according to the advice of the Maestro di Cappella, and the necessary money to make good these arrangements will be provided. . . .¹²

This minute of the Procurators was taken seriously. The newly-established posts were advertised and the competition was held on December 9, about six months after the decision had been taken. Biffi had decided to appoint four new violinists and had eight applications; four players of *violette* (seven applicants), two cellists (the only two to apply); and two players of *violone* and a trumpeter (again the sole applicants). The rank and file violinists and *violetti* were paid the minimum salary of 15 ducats, although the other string players obtained 25 ducats and the trumpeter 30 ducats, perhaps a sign of the relative shortage of these instruments.

It is typical of Venetian conservatism that, having brought order into their orchestra, the Procurators of St Mark's were content to maintain the *status quo* for the next fifty years. When players died or retired they were replaced, more often than not, at the meagre 15 ducats salary which had sufficed in 1614. At times minor changes were suggested to them and these they were content to accept, at least if no more money had to be paid; as in 1732 when

. . . considering well founded the suggestions made by the Maestro di Cappella, D. Antonio Biffi, to Us with regard to improving the orchestra [*concerto*] of the Doge's Chapel, to the effect that the Trombone player Lodovico Vaccio deceased be replaced by a player of the trumpet, an instrument better adapted to the use of modern orchestras [*concerti*]; Their Excellencies have determined that the trombone player should be replaced by a trumpeter, who must be elected with the annual salary of 15 ducats; and as a result of this minute, the post should be publicly and widely advertised, and in case there is no suitable candidate, this decree shall still stand. . . .¹³

The Procurators were, it will be noted, actually saving money, as the

trombonists were usually paid 50 ducats; and it is also interesting to note that the remaining vestiges of the old *piffari* were at last disappearing. Another minor change took place in 1748, when another minute of the Procurators records that:

. . . on the death of Bortolo Arriga, a post of theorbist has become vacant; our *maestro di cappella* suggests that it would be to our advantage to substitute an oboe for the theorbo; the more especially since Onofrio Penati, the oboe player, is now advanced in years, and can no longer sustain the arduousness of playing this fatiguing instrument: Thus in response to the advertisement published last February 5th for an oboist, the undermentioned applied in writing; and after he was given the usual trial, he was elected with a salary of 40 ducats.

Ignazio Siber: for, 6 votes; against, nil.¹⁴

Siber was, by all accounts, a good player who was also employed by the Ospedale of the *Pietà* as a teacher. Nevertheless, on other occasions, there are signs that the failure of the Procurators to move with the times was causing some difficulties. In 1735, the orchestra needed several violinists and the Procurators arranged to hold the usual elections on October 2. Their minute book records that:

The following made written applications for the posts of violinists for the Doge's Chapel in response to the advertisement published on the 14th September 1735. The undermentioned were elected with the usual salary of 15 ducats each:

Domenico Ciani—did not appear.

Angelo Colonna—did not appear.

Bernardo Fabris—for, 7 votes; against, 3 votes; elected.

Nicolò Pasquale—did not appear.

Domenico Venerandi—for, 10 votes; against, 2 votes; elected.¹⁵

The fact that half the applicants did not bother to arrive at the auditions is hardly a recommendation of the salaries which they were offered. At other times, indeed, the Procurators obtained a poor initial response to their advertisements, as in 1744 when only four candidates presented themselves for three posts of *violone*.¹⁶ And a further sign that all was not well is contained in the minute recording the election of two violinists in 1740:

The following applicants for the posts of violinist [in the orchestra of St Mark's] in place of Lorenzo Carassi, departed for a foreign state, and of Domenico Boscarì deceased, were elected with the usual salary of 15 ducats.

Zuane Maria Prandini: for, 6 votes; against, 1.

Iseppo Madonij: for, 7 votes; against, nil.¹⁷

No doubt in part, the trouble was that by this time Venice was in economic decline. It could no longer hope to compete with the larger German courts, still less with the opera houses and orchestras in St Petersburg and London. Worse still, it could no longer attract good composers to take charge of the music in St Mark's. The period of decline in the orchestra is a reflection of a series of indifferent *maestri di cappella*, at the worst mediocrities, or at best local rather than international celebrities. When the Procurators did manage to find a distinguished figure to direct the Doge's music, the effect was immediate. Galuppi was admittedly a local man; but by the time he came to be *maestro di cappella* at St Mark's in 1762, he had a world-wide reputation—so world-wide that the Procurators had to give him leave of absence from time to time for extended visits abroad. Moreover, when in Venice he had most of the time a second responsibility as director of music at one of the conservatoires, a fact which doubled his income, and must have made it worth his while to stay. He found the music at St Mark's in a most unsatisfactory state. The choir was well below strength, for the obvious reason that, as the Procurators admitted, there was 'a scarcity of money'; and the singers who were in service were either superannuated or ill, so that 'a majority are unable to carry out their duties'. The only thing to do in the circumstances was to reduce their number and pay those remaining in service more adequately. This was agreed by the Procurators on October 8, 1765, and in December they decided the maximum to be paid to any singer was 600 ducats a year—by earlier standards, an enormous sum. The eighteenth century was catching up with St Mark's; and with these new principles, the Doge's Chapel even managed to attract a foreign singer or two.¹⁸

It would be pleasant to record that the orchestral players were treated equally well. Alas, they were less important than virtuoso voices in an attempt to *fare una bella figura*, and did not benefit to the same extent. Nevertheless, their maximum salary was now allowed to be 100 ducats, and their attendance was restricted by a rule which said that

. . . on all the functions attended by The Most Serene Prince and Most Excellent Senate, there must be singing in the organ loft with only one half of the orchestra, and the full choir . . . on all other occasions of the church in which the Pala d'Oro is exposed, but not attended by His Highness and The Senate, as, for instance on Sundays and the normal festivals of the year, Mass and Vespers must be sung in the organ loft by a half of the choir without instruments. . . .¹⁹

Galuppi went to work on his re-organization with a will. He pensioned off ten singers and fifteen players, who were generously allowed their salaries 'during the rest of their lives'. He elected some new singers who were paid salaries of not less than 150 ducats and not more than 300 ducats, and arranged for the three-year contracts customary at St Mark's to be taken seriously. And, most interesting, he kept the orchestra at some thirty-five players '[to be arranged] thus, 12 violins, 6 violette, 4 violoncelli, 5 violoni, 4 oboes and flutes and 4 horns and trumpets'. Presumably the brass and wind players were to be capable of performing on two instruments so that flutes or oboes, horns and trumpets would be available, even when the orchestra was divided in half. Galuppi also arranged for the appointment of two leaders of the orchestra, the senior being called 'concertista', the other given the rank of 'primo violino'. The salary scales are fully revealed in the revised orchestral list given to the Procurators in February 1766.²⁰

LIST OF THE INSTRUMENTALISTS NOW IN SERVICE

<i>Violini</i>	<i>ducats</i>	<i>Violette</i>	<i>ducats</i>
Antonio Nazari, concertista	100	P. Antonio Ruffo	40
P. Francesco Negri, primo violino	60	Domenico Gallo	40
Angelo Colonna	60	Bernardo Negri	25
Mattio Puppi	50	Francesco Rizzi	25
Gio. Maria Prandini	40	Antonio Valier	20
C. Angelo Bodio	40	Alessandro Canea	15
Giuseppe Madonis	30		
Angelo Abendio	30	<i>Violoncelli</i>	
Santo Trento	30	Antonio Martinelli	50
Lorenzo Zugno	30	Pasqual Pericoli	50
Benedetto Legato	30	Antonio Forsico	35
Alessandro da Ponte	20	Gio. Antonio Danese	25

Violoni

Francesco Siroti Modonese	50	<i>Oboe e Flauti</i>	
Giuseppe Forsico	40	Piero Savalia	35
Michiel Berini	30	Piero Giaffoni	35
P. Antonio Rotta	30	Domenico Scolari	35
P. Antonio Martinelli	25	Fioravanti Agostinelli	35

Corni e Trombe

Giuseppe Boschetti	40
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Giuseppe Gissoni	40
Antonio Lodi	40
Ferdinando Monte Allegri	40

This was clearly a well-balanced ensemble, and if there are no new-fangled instruments such as clarinets and no kettledrums (already well in use in the orchestras of the conservatoires)²¹ at least the *cornetto* and the trombones are gone. It is a modern orchestra, by the standards of its day, and perhaps it was also a good one, for Burney, on his travels in 1770, reports that the leader was excellent:

. . . I went again to the church of the convent of Saint Laurence, where, besides a mass of Signor Sacchini's composition, I heard Signor Nazari, the first violin of Venice, play a concerto; but we have long heard that instrument so well performed upon in England, that nothing is left to admire. However, Signor Nazari is certainly a very neat and pleasing player; his tone is even, sweet, and full; he plays with great facility and expression, and is, upon the whole, one of the best solo players that I had heard on this side of the Alps.²²

Burney also provides evidence that the band may have been augmented for special occasions, for, although for the most part he heard music in the *a cappella* manner in St Mark's, on one festival

. . . the doge was present, and upon this occasion there were six orchestras, two great ones in the galleries of the two principal organs, and four less, two on a side, in which there were likewise small organs.²³

It is difficult to imagine an orchestra of thirty-five split into six sections, even if some were virtually string quartets, and it may well be that Galuppi had persuaded the Procurators to provide money for the extra players. In fact, Galuppi's enthusiasm was causing the cost of musical activities to get out of hand. By 1772, the Procurators were beginning to feel the pinch, and they issued a decree to restrict expenditure by making it impossible for musicians to receive an increase in salary until they had served St Mark's at least ten years. No one was to be pensioned off before the age of sixty, and then only if they had given twenty years' satisfactory service.²⁴

By this time, Venice was approaching virtual bankruptcy and it was only a matter of time before the Doge's Chapel was forced to resign itself to its mediocrity. In spite of pensions and security, in spite of Galuppi and in spite of the occasional musician of distinction who preferred to live in Venice, the trend was too strongly established to be reversed. The better singers were continually asking for leave to spend a few months, or perhaps a year, at more profitable places, and

when the orchestra had the occasional virtuoso, such as Dragonetti, he too was tempted away to England or Germany. At the approach of Napoleon, the end was inevitable—at least for St Mark's.

* * *

St Mark's had never paid its orchestral musicians enough for them to live from this source alone. Paradoxically, it was this fact which fitted Venice for the private enterprise of the nineteenth century, for when Doge and Senate had gone, the musical life of the city continued on a rather bigger scale than at, say, Mantua and Parma, where the ducal courts carried on music in straightened circumstances. And if we shall never know how much work an orchestral player could find, and how well he was able to live, there are many hints to suggest that his life was not very different from that of his counterpart today. He too had to teach, to play in other orchestras, and even found a union to protect some of his interests, if he were to survive.

It is uncertain whether there was a great deal of private teaching to be had in the eighteenth century. Contemporary paintings and drawings of music lessons are not uncommon, and occasional references in diaries and letters show that music teachers visited the houses of the gentry; and there is no reason to suppose Venice different from elsewhere in Europe.²⁵ Documents certainly prove that the better players at St Mark's were given employment by the conservatoires. Of the list of the 1708 orchestra, the well-paid oboist Onofrio Peneti (or Penari) supplemented his income by teaching at the *Pietà* for several years from 1716. His colleague Siber, who was appointed to help him in 1748, had in fact been his predecessor at the *Pietà*, and returned there to teach the flute in the 1720's. Of the members of the St Mark's orchestra in 1766, Nazari was professor of violin at the *Pietà* from 1770 until his death in 1775; Puppi taught at the *Incurabili*. Martinelli had derived part of his income from the *Pietà* and the *Mendicanti*—and (although the documentary evidence is not quite clear) he may have taught at both simultaneously. Lodi had been appointed *maestro di corni da caccia* at the *Pietà* in 1765. The 80 or 100 ducats a year that such posts provided must have made the meagre salaries of the basilica a little more tolerable.

Orchestral activity was equally helpful in supplementing players' incomes. The major religious confraternities may not have been as wealthy as they had been in the early part of the seventeenth century, when they could afford to employ large numbers of musicians for their celebrations of festival days, but they still had several instrumentalists to take part in processions, and no doubt the players at St Mark's obtained their share of work. The hundred and more churches

certainly provided employment for musicians. Coronelli's often-reprinted guide to Venice takes care to tell the visitor of the special festivals of the various churches and says, for example, of the not important church of the monks of the *Corpus Domini*:

. . . the solemn feast of Corpus Domini is celebrated with all the pomp imaginable and with solemn music, both at First Vespers on the Vigil as on the day of the festival itself, at the morning sung Mass; and in the afternoon after the sermon in the church of St Jerome they take the Saint [=relics] from the throne where he has been shown and they carry him in procession to the church of Corpus Domini, preceded by the six great confraternities and accompanied by numerous priests clad in copes, and by all the brothers of the confraternity of St Jerome, and by all the Wardens of all the confraternities of Venice, on the orders of the Most Excellent Council of Ten; and when [these] relics are exposed to public adoration in the church of Corpus Domini, there follows solemn Vespers with music. On the Octave of the feast, in the morning, they sing solemn Mass with music, and in the afternoon there is a second procession as on the festival day, to return the relics to the church where benediction is given. . . .²⁶

When a Mass or Vespers is given 'in musica', this nearly always means that instrumental music was to be heard, and we learn something of the fees given to the players in an account made out by an official of the church of S. Giacomo di Rialto probably in the later part of the eighteenth century.²⁷ For the most part this is concerned with singers but it includes the following entries.

EASTER SATURDAY

At Mass

to the organist	2 lire
12 instrumentalists for the <i>concerto</i>	24 lire

At Compline

to the organist	1 lire, 10 soldi
Violon	1 lire, 15 soldi
Maestro	2 lire, 10 soldi

CHRISTMAS EVE

At Mass

Organist	8 lire
Violon	8 lire
4 violinists	32 lire
1 oboe	8 lire

2 trumpets	16 lire
first tenor [singer]	10 lire
3 boys	24 lire
<i>At Mass on Christmas Day</i>	
Organ	5 lire
Violon	4 lire
Violoncello	4 lire, 10 soldi
Violetta	4 lire, 10 soldi
1st violin	4 lire
2 violinists	8 lire
oboe	4 lire
2 trumpets	9 lire
1st tenor	5 lire
5 boys	20 lire
Maestro for Mass and Vespers	16 lire

Since the Venetian ducat was worth 6 lire, 4 soldi, one can hardly call these fees generous; but there must have been plenty of them, for in the fortnight Burney was in Venice (and that during the dead season of August) he heard instruments playing in churches other than St Mark's no less than four times, including one mass by Furlanetto written for double orchestra and, on another occasion, a violin concerto played by Nazari.²⁸

It may well be such performances in church which developed the taste for orchestral music in Venice. Certainly they were enjoyed, for, to quote Burney again:

At the hospitals and in Churches, where it is not allowed to applaud in the same manner as at the Opera, they cough, hem, and blow their nose to express admiration.

So it is not surprising that orchestral concerts began to form part of the Republic's musical life. Some were doubtless informal 'academies' at private houses, such as the one attended by Burney at the Grimani Palace, where there was a full band conducted by Sacchini, and the programme included some vocal music and two or three concertos played by one of the young ladies from the conservatoires. But there is evidence that more formal occasions were graced with orchestral music.

Probably the first of these was when a special concert was arranged for the visit of the Prince of Saxony in 1740, the orchestra being formed by forty pupils of the conservatoires specially chosen for the task. This was held in a hall in the Procuratoria surrounding St Mark's Square, and was such a success that similar concerts were organized on practically all State visits to Venice until the end of the Republic, a reason for their popularity also being, we must suspect, that they were not

too expensive to organize. The accounts of a concert given by the girls of the Mendicanti in 1776 again for the Prince of Saxony and his wife include the following payments:

To Maestro Bertoni	132 lire
Allesandro da Ponte for music	352 lire
Copies of music (hired) from the Mendicanti	34 lire, 15 soldi
Consolidated payment to the Pietà for hire of music, etc.	272 lire ²⁹

This modest payment of some 700 lire represented only a sixth of the total expenditure for this occasion—refreshments were obviously lavish. And if the girls themselves were unpaid, it was not much more expensive even to pay professionals, for on the same visit a concert given by what was virtually a section of the St Mark's orchestra cost the state treasurer 704 lire. Admittedly it was a rather thin ensemble with 6 violins, 2 cellos, 2 basses, 2 oboes, 2 horns and harpsichord, each receiving a fee of 44 lire, with the exception of the leader (88 lire) and sub-principal (66 lire). Still, compared with the 6,000 lire subsidy for producing an opera at the Teatro S. Benedetto, an orchestral concert was reasonable indeed.

It was on this occasion that someone had the idea of having some Water Music, a pleasant thought in the heat of July. The musicians gave two concerts, and were divided into two groups, each one on a *peotta* or boat. On the first day, the orchestra of St Mark's seems to have been the basis of the band, with the usual string players supported by four horns and two timpanists. The second concert was given by an ensemble more suitable for the open air with each *peotta* filled by a group of four oboes, 2 trumpets, 2 horns, 2 bassoons and timpani. The fees given to these various players are not clearly stated (there is some doubt whether the amounts are in lire or ducats on one loose page in the accounts) but at a generous estimate it is noticeable that the wind players received much less than the string players—a commentary on their relative social status.

Such comparatively economical entertainments must have pleased the authorities very much, the more so since they were arranged through the *concertista* of St Mark's, and therefore did not need a permanent and expensive organization. Yet the orchestra was virtually a State Band, and it received recognition as such when in 1777 the Procurators provided rehearsal rooms for its use in a delightful minute:

. . . that the hall of the Procurators where Signor Tomaso Querini used to live which on the 3rd August last year were assigned to the Most Excellent Minister of Health for the use of the School of Obstetrics and Surgery; together with that now vacated by the

Most Excellent Mestarin be conceded, together with two rooms in the same Procuratoria overlooking St Mark's Square, for the use of the various bodies comprising the Philharmonic Academy. . . .³⁰ Again Venetian tradition was at work. Without its taking full responsibility for a new organization, the orchestra was kept alive (at the minimum of expense) by the State.

* * *

A Venetian tradition? We need not go so far to recognize the situation. The modern orchestral musician will know the opportunities of the eighteenth-century player—and also the hazards of his life. That these hazards were as real then as now is made plain by the fact that in the Venetian Republic the players found it necessary to band together for their mutual protection. Unionism was indeed a part of Venetian life, and the attempt by musicians to protect their interests had been made in the sixteenth century, when the singers of St Mark's had succeeded in persuading the Doge to permit them to form a guild which ensured them an almost complete monopoly of casual engagements in the churches of the city. The players of the basilica followed with a similar organization in the early years of the seventeenth century. But how effective these unions were is difficult to determine, and when the conservatoires began to take music seriously after 1650 both their pupils and the foreigners brought in to teach in them must have made it impossible for the musicians of St Mark's to maintain their unique position. A more broadly based association was necessary.

The initiative came from the more important figures at St Mark's in 1687. Legrenzi and his assistant, Partenio, founded a guild of 'Signori Musici sotto l'invocazione di Santa Cecilia Vergine e Martire'. They took their first set of rules to the Council of Ten for official approval, which was finally granted on November 16, 1690.³¹ There were ninety-six founder members, many of them in the service of St Mark's, but also a number of others whose names are not in any known official documents—presumably free-lance musicians without secure employment. The principal officers of the guild were a Warden (*priore*), two ordinary committee members, two 'deacons', four *visitatori*, from whom were elected a beadle and a secretary (these latter probably were non-musicians). The total membership was limited to a hundred and new members had to have at least two-thirds of the votes of the whole guild to be admitted.

The regulations of the union are a strange mixture of ancient and modern. The religious basis on which it rested was particularly strong. It was, after all, a guild in honour of St Cecilia, to whom Mass and Vespers were to be sung each year on November 22 in the church of

St Martin. The head of the guild and his deputy must write music for this occasion, 'nor can that of any other be used', and each member must give 1 lire, 4 soldi to the Warden to pay for the expenses of the festival. Each member also had to attend a Mass for the soul of a deceased member within a month of the death, and also attend a corporate Mass for past members each November 23. Similarly when a brother died, the guild must pay for a number of Masses for his soul equal to the number of members of the guild, together with twenty Masses on the day of his funeral.

There were more worldly benefits, among which the provision of sick pay was surely most welcome:

. . . It is decreed that whenever one of the brothers has any sort of illness, he will be given benefits to the value of 2 ducats a week for the period of three months; and if the illness continues for a long time, the said benefit can be continued if the Committee are unanimously agreed; and after this, the confirmation of the benefit must be decided by a general meeting of brothers. . . .

It is decreed that if the brother is poor at the time of his illness, the Warden must pay the two ducats week by week as stated above, only, however, if he has been given a medical certificate. And if the brother is not in immediate need, he may receive it in a lump sum, and this must also be done by the Warden, always after a doctor has attested his unfitness, according to the numbers of weeks the brother has been obliged to stay in bed. . . .

It is decreed that the above benefit is not available until one year after the member had joined our guild.

The cautious emphasis on medical certificates is also mirrored in a further rule which lays down that before receiving any such pay, the Warden must ensure that the member is fully up-to-date in his dues. Members in arrears are not eligible for help, and since these dues were monthly payments (10 soldi a month in 1790), this must have been one way of keeping income regular. An additional benefit was accorded to each member's family on his death. If the member had left too little money to pay for a decent funeral, the Warden was empowered to contribute what was necessary. If he had left any debts, they too could be drawn from the guild's funds; but again in a cautious note, the Warden is instructed to try the member's relatives first. Such death benefits were payable immediately on joining, without the delay of a year necessary for sick pay. Moreover, the secretary and the beadle were instructed to investigate any reports of sickness or poverty amongst musicians (and incidentally to arrange for visits to members claiming benefit by the other *visitatori* to see that there was

no malingering) and were empowered to take appropriate action without calling a full meeting of the committee.

These surprisingly humane and forward-looking arrangements must have provided some measure of security in a most insecure world. They also reveal how badly most instrumentalists were paid. If two ducats a week was considered basic and presumably minimal sick-pay, the salaries of fifteen or twenty-five, or even fifty, ducats given by St Mark's seem little and inadequate indeed. It is easy to understand why even the better-off musicians such as Galuppi and Faustina Hasse-Bordoni (one of the most famous singers of the day) were keen to join the guild; and at some stage in its growth, the rule restricting membership was abandoned, for in 1773 there were about 300 members. This must have helped to keep the funds in good shape, since in some years the bill for sick pay was formidable. Admittedly in the same year of 1773, only eight members received this benefit; but in 1790 some eighteen musicians were helped, two of them during extensive illnesses.³² In an average year such as 1681, about half the income of the guild was distributed in this way, and the treasurer must have been grateful for the occasional legacy of a well-wisher, or a *confratello dilettante* (probably an honorary member of some kind). The lists of funeral expenses hint at the relative penury of musicians too. If the *maestri* and organists at St Mark's had no need of help, the oboist Siber and the cellist Antonio Martinelli left little for their families, in spite of working at both the basilica and the conservatoires—though it is probable that they suffered also from that most impoverishing of all conditions, old age.

It is, of course, significant that there is no hint of any negotiating powers with employers in the rules of this Union of St Cecilia. It was impossible for it to improve conditions for its members directly. Nevertheless, its very existence and the conditions which gave it birth may well account for the continuity of musical life in Venice after the demise of the Republic. While Spohr and Berlioz complained that orchestral playing was on the whole bad, or worse, in nineteenth-century Italy, Venice could at least produce a band which led one observer to write³³:

The opera was the Barbier de Seville of Beaumarchais, adapted to music, and badly performed. Rosina seemed a vulgar girl, wrangling with frantic gestures and a sharp voice. . . . The orchestra when heard at all appeared excellent. . . .

The love of tradition and order in the Most Serene Republic had done at least something to preserve the art of music for the pleasure-seeking city of the future.

NOTES

- ¹ Adam Carse, *The Orchestra in the 18th Century*, Cambridge, 1940, p. 82.
- ² F. Caffi, *La Storia della Musica Sacra nella già Cappella Ducale di San Marco in Venezia*, Venice, 1855 (reprinted Milan, 1931), Vol. II, Chapter 3, is virtually the sole source.
- ³ v. G. F. Malipiero, *Claudio Monteverdi*, Milan, 1930, p. 199.
- ⁴ v. H. Prunieres, *Cavalli et l'Opera Vénitien au XVIIe siècle*, Paris, 1931, p. 33.
- ⁵ For example, Fillago who became organist of the church of SS Giovanni e Paolo in 1631. v. D. Arnold, *Francesco Cavalli: Some recently discovered documents in M. & L.*, Vol. 46 (1965), p. 55.
- ⁶ For example, the Spada brothers who taught at the *Pietà* in the later part of the seventeenth century.
- ⁷ Archivio di Stato Veneto, Procuratia de Supra, Busta 91, Processo 208.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, Registro 135, f. 9.
- ⁹ The original contract is printed in the preface to *Istituzioni e Monumenti dell'Arte Musicale Italiana*, Vol. I.
- ¹⁰ v. Caffi, *op. cit.*, II, p. 59.
- ¹¹ Museo Correr, Codice Cicogna 801.
- ¹² A. S. V. Proc. de Supra, Reg. 152, f. 26 v.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, Reg. 153, f. 150.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Reg. 155, f. 45 v.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Reg. 154, f. 13.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Reg. 155, f. 19 v.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Reg. 154, f. 113 v.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Reg. 156, f. 84 v. *et segue*. One of these, Guadagni, was a famous castrato.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 93 v.-94.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 97 v.-98.
- ²¹ v. D. Arnold, *Instruments and Instrumental Teaching in the Early Italian Conservatoires*, GSJ XVIII (1965), p. 79.
- ²² C. Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, ed. Scholes, London, 1959, Vol. I, p. 122.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- ²⁴ A. S. V. Proc. de Supra, Reg. 157, f. 39 v.-41.
- ²⁵ For a reference to a Venetian drawing on the subject, v. Blunt and Croft-Murray, *Venetian Drawings of the XVII and XVIII Centuries in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle*, London, 1957, p. 29.
- ²⁶ Coronelli, *Descrizione di Venezia*, 1724 edition, p. 257.
- ²⁷ Museo Correr, Cod. Cicogna 3235, undated paper amongst a general collection assembled in 1808, apparently by an archivist of the church.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

²⁹ This and subsequent documents are in A. S. V. Savio Cassiere, Busta 585, 2nd bundle.

³⁰ A. S. V. Proc. de Supra, Reg. 157, f. 96 v.

³¹ The account which follows is largely based on the documents copied by Rossi in his *Costumi Veneziani*, Biblioteca Marciana MS. 9285, DXII.

³² These payments are recorded in A. S. V. Scuole piccole, busta 273.

³³ L. Simond, *A Tour in Italy and Sicily*, London, 1828, p. 41.