

## The Reception History of Antonio Vivaldi in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland

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The reception history of Antonio Vivaldi states that, despite his initial widespread popularity, the composer's music fell out of fashion in the last years of his life only to be revived during the twentieth century. This is, of course, a massive generalisation. The idea that Vivaldi's music fell out of popularity by the time of his death in 1741 is more a reflection of the composer's reception history in his native Venice than of his reception across Europe, where his music continued to be heard across French, German, and British cultures. Compared to the composer's presence in Italy, however, Vivaldi's reception history in these other European cultures has received less scholarly attention. This is particularly the case for Vivaldi's reception history in Britain and Ireland.

Vivaldi's musical presence and reception in Britain and Ireland can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when the composer's music was at its most popular, not only in Britain and Ireland, but also across Europe. However, despite Vivaldi's music falling out of performing repertoires in the nineteenth century, his name is still mentioned in primary sources, namely British and Irish newspapers. London was, of course, the heart and centre of British musical culture during these times. Ireland, although not part of Great Britain, was influenced by Britain musically, especially when it came to Vivaldi. This is likely because Dublin could be considered a secondary art music capital next to London, with many violinists — including Francesco Geminiani and his student Matthew Debourg, an avid player of Vivaldi's concertos — travelling to both London and Dublin.<sup>1</sup> However, there were some clear cultural differences between England and Ireland, with a notable disparity being Dublin's smaller cultural influence and size compared to London.

Studies on the presence of Vivaldi's music in Britain and Ireland have mostly focused on score dissemination. The most prominent

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Talbot, "The Golden Pippin and The Extraordinary Adventures in Britain and Ireland of Vivaldi's Concerto RV 519," *Studi Vivaldiani* 10 (2010): 91.

scholar in these studies has been Michael Talbot. Talbot has also taken the first steps of going beyond just dissemination and into reception history, where of particular relevance is his article “*The Golden Pippin* and the Extraordinary Adventures in Britain and Ireland of Vivaldi’s Concerto RV 519.”<sup>2</sup> This article provides the most detailed published reception history of Vivaldi in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, but also explores non-score based primary sources such as newspaper articles and pamphlets from the eighteenth century. However, Talbot mostly focuses on the dissemination and reception of RV 519, with a particular focus on its appearance in the English *burletta*, *The Golden Pippin*. As RV 519 was by far the most popular work in Britain and Ireland, Talbot’s study provides useful and important information on Vivaldi’s reception history, however, there is also room for further research into sources that do not specifically talk about RV 519. Similarly, Talbot’s work on the Manchester sonatas, while informative, is specific to that set of sonatas.<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to exploring Vivaldi’s reception history beyond score dissemination, the writings of the eighteenth-century musician Charles Burney tend to be given the most authority, although the writings of Sir John Hawkins, Roger North, and Charles Avison have also received some scholarly attention.<sup>4</sup> However, there has been little research that makes Burney or his contemporaries’ views on Vivaldi a specific focus. This has meant that while dissemination in Britain has received a fair amount of scholarly attention, non-score based sources have received less attention, and the bigger picture, or the larger context in which Vivaldi’s music was received, has yet to be fully addressed by scholars. Additionally, while the primary sources that scholars draw upon come from a variety of contexts, the impact and significance of those differing contexts is largely overlooked in the literature, as any distinction between a quote from Burney or a quote from a satirical novel, is usually implied, but not clearly stated nor explored in detail. Thus the reception history of Antonio Vivaldi’s

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<sup>2</sup> Talbot, “*The Golden Pippin*.”

<sup>3</sup> Michael Talbot, “Vivaldi’s Manchester Sonatas,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 1 (1977): 20–29.

<sup>4</sup> The most notable work that includes a discussion of these writers is Bella Brover-Lubovskiy, *Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 10–15.

music in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland remains an under-researched topic. As Vivaldi's music was, in fact, reasonably well known and popular in Britain and Ireland, and its reception differed from other European cultures, a study of the composer in eighteenth-century British culture is sorely needed.

In order to provide a detailed reception history, an analysis of a range of primary sources will be helpful in gauging Vivaldi's musical presence and reception in Britain and Ireland. Such sources can be categorised according to both their authors' and audiences' contexts, fitting into two broad categories — "learned musicians" and "popular entertainment." By making such a distinction between primary sources, one gains a more nuanced understanding of Vivaldi's reception in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland. This is important, as previous scholarship has largely ignored such nuance, with a particular problem being the over-reliance on sources from learned musicians, particularly the opinions of prominent figures such as Burney. These learned opinions, however, only form one part of Vivaldi's reception history. Contrary to the negative opinions displayed by Burney and Hawkins, Vivaldi was in fact reasonably popular and well known in Britain, as evidenced by popular entertainment sources, such as newspapers and various ephemera. Thus, in addition to providing new and more in-depth research on Vivaldi's British reception history, the re-evaluation of how much weight sources from learned musicians are given can be gained in the analysis of such new sources, addressing issues of balance in current scholarship in the process. What becomes clear from such a study is that references to Vivaldi made in popular entertainment sources suggest a different, more positive story of Vivaldi's popularity than that created by learned sources, while a more nuanced understanding of reception is gained than when looking at dissemination alone. Thus, unlike the composer's reception in his native Italy, the picture that emerges is one of Vivaldi's name and music being continually heard in Britain and Ireland beyond the composer's initial popularity in the early eighteenth century and death in 1741.

## **Dissemination**

Before one can start exploring the primary sources of either the popular entertainment or learned musicians categories, some background information on the dissemination of scores in Britain

and Ireland is needed. Talbot has been the primary contributor to research in this area, and the important points of Talbot's work are as follows.<sup>5</sup> John Walsh was the biggest provider of Vivaldi's music, first publishing part of Op. 3 in 1714, although the full set would later become available to English audiences. Op. 3 was the most popular set of works in England, with RV 519, more commonly known at the time as "Vivaldi's Fifth" (as it was the fifth concerto contained within Op. 3), being the most popular piece. This is a notable contrast with the rest of Europe where, although Op. 3 was incredibly popular and influential, the Fifth was not generally the most celebrated piece within the collection. The reasons for the Fifth's popularity are not overly clear. Talbot suggests that the opening ritornello with octaves would have sounded modern, which combined with the general "vigour" of the style, would have been "a breath of fresh air" to English audiences.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the higher register used by the solo violin would have added a touch of virtuosity.<sup>7</sup>

Besides Op. 3, the Op. 2 sonatas were also circulated, as were two "Cuckoo" concertos (RV 335 and RV 347), and parts of Op. 4. Some of Vivaldi's later concertos (Op. 6 onwards) were also available in England, but were not nearly as common. Surprisingly, and in contrast to the rest of Europe, Op. 8, including *The Four Seasons*, was not widely circulated. Talbot explains this by arguing that by 1730, Vivaldi was considered a "canonical" composer, meaning that while his already known works (like Op. 3) continued to receive attention, attempts by Walsh to introduce Vivaldi's later works were unsuccessful, as the composer was no longer thought of as "a contemporary voice."<sup>8</sup> In addition to Talbot's arguments, England's disapproval of illustrative and imitative music, particularly by the learned musicians, may also explain the lack of *The Four Seasons* in Britain and Ireland.

Vivaldi's works for instruments other than violin were rarer in Britain and Ireland, although some vocal works have been found

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<sup>5</sup> Talbot, "*The Golden Pippin*."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

there.<sup>9</sup> However, while Vivaldi's Fifth was a concerto written for two solo violins, it could be found in various other transcriptions. The work can easily be played with only one solo violin, without losing much in the process.<sup>10</sup> It was also played on other instruments besides violin. John Parry performed the work on harp, and some of his harp transcriptions can be found in Wales.<sup>11</sup> There are also records of the Irish bard Turlough Carolan playing the Fifth on his harp in Ireland, to be discussed below. Additionally, keyboard transcriptions of the Fifth also exist.<sup>12</sup>

### Sources from Popular Entertainment

While research into score dissemination is an excellent foundation for a reception history on any composer, a more nuanced understanding of reception can be gained with the additional consideration of non-score based sources. One such category of these kinds of sources is popular entertainment sources.

Audiences of these types of sources include those who might have read about Vivaldi's place in Venetian music history in a newspaper's "miscellaneous" section, or those who heard his Fifth performed at a London theatre. It also includes a number of what might best be described as "anecdotal" references to Vivaldi. The passing mention of Vivaldi's name, whether it be in a novel or a satirical pamphlet, demonstrates a certain familiarity with Vivaldi, and particularly his Fifth, within the popular consciousness, or at least within audiences interested in Italian art music.

In 1776, author Francis Fleming wrote in his comedic novel, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures, the Perils and Critical Escapes, of Timothy Ginnadrake, that Child of Chequer'd Fortune*, the following passage:

The old gentleman finding he had a genius for music, engaged a famous musician, one Dubourg, to teach him; The 5th Concerto of Vivaldi was often performed on the stage at the

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<sup>9</sup> Tiedge Tanenbaum Faun and Michael Talbot, "The Berkley Castle Manuscript: Arias and Cantatas by Vivaldi and his Italian Contemporaries," *Studi Vivaldiani* 3 (2003): 33–88.

<sup>10</sup> Talbot, "The Golden Pippin," 93.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 98–99.

theatre by Tim's master with great applause, as it was thought at that time it was not in the power of any human being, to execute a piece of music more difficult. This excited great emulation in our hero, who usually got up at four o'clock in the morning to practice the 5th of Vivaldi; he continued to do this for five months successively, besides what he did at other times, so that he did not upon an average play less than eight hours every day.<sup>13</sup>

As this example is from a comedic novel, it is thus quite hyperbolic in its descriptions. Nevertheless, it still serves as an excellent starting point for exploring Vivaldi's reception history through anecdotal sources. Firstly, the novel's date of publication is 1776. Although this was 35 years after the death of Vivaldi in 1741, it is but one example of Vivaldi's popularity in England in the years beyond the composer's death. Of course, Fleming's account of the Fifth refers to performances taking place in the past, not the present, of the novel's publication. Thus, it does not tell us whether Vivaldi was still being performed in 1776. However, that Vivaldi's name, along with his Fifth, were mentioned in this anecdote, as well as being continually mentioned in the sources throughout this section, most often without explanation of who the composer and his music was, suggests that Vivaldi remained in the popular consciousness of British culture well after Op. 3 first became available in England.

The second important thing to note about Fleming's description is its focus on the time and skill required to learn Vivaldi's Fifth. Again, this is of course a hyperbolic description from a satirical novel. However, it does highlight Vivaldi's association with virtuosity. This association was discussed in the previous section, in relation to the learned circles, where Vivaldi's music was portrayed negatively as being characterised by virtuosity for the sake of virtuosity, and often at the cost of the work's musicality. In Fleming's description, as well as the sources to be discussed below, virtuosity is portrayed matter-of-factly, if not praised.

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<sup>13</sup> Fleming, Francis, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures, the Perils and Critical Escapes, of Timothy Ginnadrake, that Child of Chequer'd Fortune*, volume I (Bath: Crutwell, 1776).

The last thing of note in Fleming's description is that it specifically states that Vivaldi was popular in theatre, as performed by Dubourg. The Dubourg in question is likely Matthew Dubourg, a student of Geminiani who championed Vivaldi's music in both England and Ireland.<sup>14</sup>

### Newspapers

Vivaldi's place in Britain and Ireland can also be found in relation to writings on other historical figures. This is particularly exemplified by references to Vivaldi in newspapers in relation to Turlough Carolan, who was an Irish harpist and composer. Blinded by smallpox at the age of 18, Carolan was subsequently given a harp, leading him to become a successful itinerant bard of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Carolan's songs were of course reflective of Irish harp music of the time, often taking the form of ballads or other folk songs. However, the harpist also took an interest in Italian composers, which "he preferred to all others: Vivaldi charmed him, and with Corelli he was enraptured."<sup>15</sup> However, more than these composers, Carolan apparently held Geminiani in even greater esteem. Vivaldi's influence on this particular Irish composer is, however, of lesser importance to a reception history of Vivaldi, than of how Vivaldi's name gets caught up in the mythologising of Carolan, the "last Irish bard."<sup>16</sup>

In 1760, an anecdote on the history of Carolan first appeared in London. It read:

Being once at the home of an Irish nobleman, where there was a musician present who was eminent in the profession, Carolan immediately challenged him to a trial of skill. To carry the jest forward, his lordship persuaded the musician to accept the challenge, and he accordingly played over the fifth concerto of Vivaldi. Carolan, immediately taking his harp, played over the whole piece after him, without missing a note,

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<sup>14</sup> Talbot, "*The Golden Pippin*," 92.

<sup>15</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*. 1814. "Anecdotes of Carolan, the Irish Bard." August, 1814, 121.

<sup>16</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*. 1760. "The History of Carolan, the Last Irish Bard." July, 1760, 413.

though he had never heard it before: which produced some surprise; but their astonishment increased, when he assured them he could make a concerto in the same taste himself, which he instantly composed with such spirit and eloquence, that it may compare (for we have it still) with the finest compositions of Italy.<sup>17</sup>

That someone would choose to perform Vivaldi's Fifth in a contest of skill again attests to how Vivaldi's music was associated with virtuosity. This anecdote is also an example of Vivaldi's Fifth being heard in Ireland, and not just England.<sup>18</sup> It should however, be taken with a grain of salt, particularly since if Carolan was an admirer of Vivaldi's music, it is quite unlikely he would never have heard the Fifth before this supposed encounter. That the anecdote would appear first in a London publication shows the cross-cultural interests between Britain and Ireland at the time. Although Ireland was not a part of Great Britain during the eighteenth century, England and Ireland shared a comparable culture of art music, with Dublin being a similar but smaller musical hub to London. The original anecdote was published anonymously, however was later published under Oliver Goldsmith's name. The anecdote was included in his third volume of collected essays, entitled *Essays and criticisms* and published in London in 1798.<sup>19</sup>

The significance of the above anecdote on Carolan lies with its continual proliferation throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even twentieth centuries, although it seems to have occurred most often in the nineteenth century. Although originating in England, the anecdote could also be found in Ireland and Wales. The anecdote also changed as it was reiterated, this process at times resulting in the further mythologising of Carolan. The original anecdote only specified that a Carolan challenged a "musician," no hints are actually given as to who this musician was. In fact, the anecdote does not even specify that the musician was a violinist, or that Vivaldi's Fifth was

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Although the anecdote does not specify that the home of the Irish noble was located in Ireland, one could still speculate that Vivaldi's Fifth was known in Ireland as the anecdote was later found in Irish publications (discussed below).

<sup>19</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, *Essays and Criticisms*, volume 3 (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 23.



played on a violin. Given that it is known that several different transcriptions for several different instruments of Vivaldi's Fifth existed in Britain and Ireland around this time, it is entirely possible (assuming there is some grain of truth to the anecdote at all) that the musician in the anecdote was not a violinist at all. Other renditions of the anecdote, however, do give further details. The Welsh newspaper *The Cambrian* in 1887 writes that Carolan was challenged by "a famous Italian Violinist."<sup>20</sup> Other sources go further, identifying the musician as Geminiani. This can be seen in *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* in 1885, two years before *The Cambrian*.<sup>21</sup> The presence of Geminiani can also be traced further back to *The Dublin Saturday Magazine* in their 1867 reiteration, which states "at the house of an Irish nobleman, where Geminiani was present, Carolan challenged that composer to a trial of skill."<sup>22</sup> Talbot argues that it is unlikely that Geminiani was the musician in question, as it is unlikely that Geminiani would have liked, never mind chosen to play, Vivaldi's Fifth.<sup>23</sup> However, Talbot also cites a similar anecdote of Carolan by Joseph Walker which claims that Carolan never met Geminiani.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that this is in contradiction with Carolan scholar Gráinne Yeats, who writes that Carolan "greatly admired Geminiani, whom he most certainly met in Dublin."<sup>25</sup> Regardless, Talbot is probably right in assuming that Geminiani was not the musician present in the anecdote, given Geminiani's likely distaste towards Vivaldi, and lack of evidence to support the newspaper's claim.

Interestingly, *The Cambrian* felt the need to clarify that Carolan was "a blind Irish harper and composer," but not give any such clarifications on who Vivaldi was. This is easily explained by a limited space in the newspaper's miscellaneous section, and the anecdote was after all about Carolan, not Vivaldi. However, it is worth mentioning as Vivaldi was rarely performed during the nineteenth century, and

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<sup>20</sup> *The Cambrian*. 1887. "Anecdote of Carolan." December 2, 1887.

<sup>21</sup> *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*. 1885. "Carolan, the Last of the Bards." December 1, 1885.

<sup>22</sup> *The Dublin Saturday Magazine*. 1867. "Anecdote of Carolan." August 1, 1867.

<sup>23</sup> Talbot, "The Golden Pippin," 97–98.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>25</sup> Gráinne Yeats, "Carolan," *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Accessed 10 October 2017,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04978>.

one assumes that the average newspaper reader would not know who Vivaldi was, making the lack of clarification somewhat curious. Although, if one was in Wales and so inclined, one could attend a free lecture on “Violins and Violinists” illustrated by “selections from Corelli, Vivaldi, Tartini, Viotti, Maysider, De Beriot, &c” by Mr. J. Squire in 1884.<sup>26</sup> The lecture was apparently so popular that “the interest in the subject itself, and, still more, perhaps, the high-class executant ability of Mr. and Mrs. Squire on the violin and pianoforte, attracted an unusually large crowd. The theatre was soon filled in every part, and some overflowing hundreds of persons were disappointed of a hearing.”<sup>27</sup> Those disappointed of a hearing, however, would be able to attend a second lecture on the same topic a fortnight later. As this lecture took place only a few years prior to the anecdote of Carolan appearing in Welsh newspapers, perhaps it is possible that there was at least some small amount of familiarity with Vivaldi’s name in nineteenth-century Wales.

The anecdote even made its way into twentieth-century history books, specifically Grattan Flood’s *A History of Irish Music*, first published in 1905 Dublin.<sup>28</sup> Flood, however, claims that the anecdote must be wrong, believing that Carolan never met Geminiani due to O’Conor’s account.<sup>29</sup> He also adds an additional account from O’Conor, which claims instead that “Geminiani, who resided for some years in Dublin, heard of the fame of O’Carolan, and determined to test his abilities. He selected a difficult Italian concerto and made certain changes in it, “so that no one but an acute judge could detect them.”<sup>30</sup> Geminiani apparently then sent the “mutilated” version to Carolan, who was then able to fix Geminiani’s changes, impressing Geminiani in the process.

If there is any truth to this anecdote on Carolan, it is likely hidden behind several layers of embellishment and mythologising. Regardless, the anecdote is one of very few examples of Vivaldi’s name being mentioned beyond the eighteenth century in any country, not just Britain and Ireland, before the composer’s modern revival.

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<sup>26</sup> *The Cambrian*. 1884. “Royal Institution Lecture.” February 29, 1884, 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Grattan Flood, *A History of Irish Music* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1905), 234.

<sup>29</sup> Flood, *A History of Irish Music*, 234.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

Additionally, the anecdote suggests Vivaldi's music had an influence over at least one Irish composer, and shows that the Fifth made its way from England to Ireland. Wherever and whenever this anecdote was retold, an association between Vivaldi's Fifth and musical skill was created, as well as an association with an Irish harpist and composer.

### Theatre

There are two documents which refer to Vivaldi being played in between acts at English theatres, both dating from around the middle of the century. William Cook's *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism*, reads:

In one article, indeed, it must be confessed, the Grecian model has greatly the advantage; its chorus, during an interval, not only preserves alive the impression made upon the audience, but also prepares their hearts for successive impressions; in our theatres, on the contrary, the audience, at the end of every act, carried away by a jig of Vivaldi's, or a concerto of Giardini's, lose every warm impression relative to the piece, and begin again cool and unconcerned, as at the commencement of the representation.<sup>31</sup>

The author then goes on to argue that music appearing between the acts is acceptable, but only if that music connects the passions of the first act to the passions of the second, so that the flow of passions is not interrupted.

A similar passage can also be found in Thomas Francklin's *A Dissertation on Antient Tragedy*:

To be convinced of our injustice and absurdity, let us suppose Sophocles, or Euripides, transported from the shades of Elysium, and entering one of our own noisy theatres, between the acts; the audience engaged with bowing or talking to each other, and the music entertaining them with a jig of Vivaldi, or the roast beef of old England, how they would be surprised in

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<sup>31</sup> William Cook, *The elements of dramatic criticism* (London: G. Kearsly, 1775), 97–98.

a few minutes to find that all this disorder, riot and confusion, was in the midst of a most pathetic and interesting tragedy, and the warmest passions of the human heart were broken in upon and enfeebled by this strange and unnatural interruption.<sup>32</sup>

In both these examples, one finds but anecdotal references to Vivaldi, rather than any solid criticisms against the composer or his music. Both Cook and Francklin refer to a “jig” of Vivaldi, which could have been taken from an Op. 2 Sonata. In these excerpts, Cook and Francklin take offence to Vivaldi being played between acts, as the character of this music distracts from the character and emotions of the staged drama. Thus Vivaldi is an inappropriate choice in this context, although as these references might suggest, perhaps a reasonably common one. Neither author is necessarily, or at least not directly, saying Vivaldi is bad music, however Francklin’s relegating of Vivaldi to the “disorder, riot and confusion” in direct comparison to the “most pathetic and interesting” drama suggest Vivaldi is perhaps not as good nor valuable as an Ancient Greek tragedy, or at least the choruses played during intervals of such tragedies, but in fact “enfeebles” such art. Similarly, Cook’s claim that the audience is “carried away” by Vivaldi suggests something of a different nature to the dramas he is describing, and is perhaps somewhat similar to North’s much earlier descriptions of Vivaldi as being uncivilised, as it only appeals to those inclined to be “hurried away by caprice.”<sup>33</sup> As both Cook and Francklin’s excerpts are remarkably similar in idea, it is entirely possible that the latter read and imitated the ideas in the former’s writing. Nevertheless, the way in which both sources choose Vivaldi as a prime example of music performed between acts, does at least suggest that Vivaldi might have been a popular choice for entertaining English theatre audiences in between the main dramas.

As well as being performed between acts, Vivaldi’s music also made an appearance in at least one theatre work itself. *The Golden Pippin*, an English *burletta*, featured an arrangement of Vivaldi’s Fifth.

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Francklin, *A dissertation on ancient tragedy* (London: published privately, 1760), 21–22.

<sup>33</sup> Roger North, *Roger North on Music: Being a Selection of his Essays written during the years c. 1695–1728*, transcribed and edited by John Wilson (London: Novello, 1959), 293.

The work, written by Kane O'Hara and featuring music from a range of mostly Italian composers, was first conceived of in 1771, and made its debut in 1773 on the London stage. The reason for the delay between conception, writing, and premiere was that although the opera was made ready for the 1771–72 season, it was at first rejected for its inappropriate content, particularly its crude language and poor portrayal of royalty.<sup>34</sup> Even after O'Hara revised the opera's content, *The Golden Pippin* was met with a negative reception, almost inciting riots on its second performance, due to its bad language, and possibly other factors such as its short length and poor plot.<sup>35</sup>

Vivaldi's Fifth appears in the final chorus of *The Golden Pippin*. In the chorus, the six main characters bicker, and as such, Vivaldi's concerto is turned into a *Sestetto* featuring a solo violin with accompanying continuo which more or less plays Vivaldi's original first movement, while vocal parts are overlaid onto the work, interjecting but also complementing its original tune. The score, which is known today from its simplified version published by Longman and Lukey, has already been reproduced and analysed by Talbot.<sup>36</sup> He suggests that Vivaldi's Fifth appeared in *The Golden Pippin* as a way for violinist John Abraham Fisher to display his skills as a musician within the opera.<sup>37</sup> While this is a perfectly plausible explanation, it is also possible, assuming Cook and Francklin's accounts are reflective of a general trend rather than a specific occurrence, that Vivaldi's Fifth might have been a familiar piece for theatre audiences, or perhaps even a crowd pleaser, hence its inclusion in *The Golden Pippin*.

Vivaldi's Fifth also makes an appearance in an English satirical pamphlet entitled *Fitz-Giggo*.<sup>38</sup> Such pamphlets and other similar ephemera were cheaply produced and never intended to be valued or survive through the centuries. However, some pamphlets still exist in

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<sup>34</sup> Talbot, "The Golden Pippin," 106.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 112–23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> *Fitz-giggo, a new english uproar; with the way to make him; or, A new overture upon the old score*. [England: Sold by E. Sumpter, Print and Bookseller, at the Bible and Crown, three doors from Shoe-Lane, Fleet-Street, 1763]. Although mentioned in a footnote by Talbot (Talbot, "The Golden Pippin," 107), *Fitz-Giggo* seems to have not been researched in any published form.

archives, and can provide valuable information on the opinions of their authors, which presumably reflected the ideas of those who bought such ephemera. Ephemeral pamphlets often contained the words of ballads, with the instructions to sing the text to the tune of a well-known song. These were often known as broadsides. The *Fitz-Giggo* pamphlet at first resembles such a broadside, however, on closer inspection, the satirical nature of the pamphlet becomes apparent. It appears to advertise “The New English Uproar” *Fitz-Giggo*, and as broadsides of the time typically did, gives a number of verses to be sung to the tunes of airs from Thomas Arne’s opera *Artaxerxes*. While *Artaxerxes* was by and large a successful work, a performance on 24 February 1763 resulted in a riot.<sup>39</sup> This riot had less to do with Arne’s work than it did with the theatre’s refusal to allow half-price entry into later acts, as it had previously allowed. This riot was headed by a man named Fitzpatrick, who is likely the person the pamphlet refers to as Fitz-Giggo. The other characters listed on the broadside are the original cast members of *Artaxerxes*. The pamphlet itself was sold and likely also published by Edward Sumpter, his shop located in Fleet Street, London.<sup>40</sup> Although there is no indication of date printed on the sheet, it would most likely have been printed in 1763, the year in which the riot occurred. This date also corresponds with the opening of Sumpter’s shop on Fleet Street.

Interestingly, Vivaldi’s Fifth does not appear in *Artaxerxes*. This raises the question of why the pamphlet would include an air clearly stated to be sung to the tune of Vivaldi’s Fifth. Alongside “the first air in the school of Anacreon,” possibly referring to the song by John Stafford Smith which was a favourite in London amateur music clubs and related to the now American national anthem, as well as the ambiguously titled “Symphony by the Gods and Goddesses,” the Fifth is the only piece mentioned that did not originally occur within *Artaxerxes*, while Vivaldi is the only composer named on the sheet. These three tunes all occur within the second act when Fitz-Giggo enters, and are all sung by that same character. Thus, while Tenducci,

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<sup>39</sup> John A. Parkinson, “Artaxerxes,” *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, accessed 4 February 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000900216>.

<sup>40</sup> “Sumpter, Edwards,” *British Book Trade Index*, accessed 10 October 2017, <http://bbti.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/details/?traderid=67238>.

Beard, Miss Brent, and the other original *Artaxerxes* singers make use of airs from Arne's opera, Fitz-Giggo sings non-operatic tunes. This perhaps suggests that Vivaldi's Fifth, despite being of Italian origin, was not associated with the higher brow Italian operas more commonly performed in London. The words sung by Fitz-Giggo, to the tune of Vivaldi's Fifth, are as follows:

With a damn'd noise and thunder,  
We'll make him now submit;  
Or else again we'll plunder,  
The Boxes and the Pit.<sup>41</sup>

The verse could easily fit with the ritornello of the Fifth's first movement. Additionally, the opening octaves of this ritornello would perhaps have complemented Fitz-Giggo's assertive personality as well as reflected the aggressive nature of the text. Whatever the reason for its inclusion, the fact that Vivaldi's Fifth is mentioned at all suggests that it was a common enough tune to be recognised by the pamphlet's buyers.

From the above sources, it is fair to say that Vivaldi's Fifth was his most well-known work in England. He was associated with rapidity and skill, and was generally talked about positively or neutrally. As Ireland had a similar culture of art music to England, with Dublin being second to only London as a musical hub of this culture, it was already reasonable to suspect that Vivaldi would be known in Ireland as well as England. The anecdote of Carolan adds to the validity of that suspicion. As well as being an example of how Vivaldi's name would have been encountered in newspapers of the time, the anecdote implies that Vivaldi had an impact on Irish music, as Carolan was influenced by his style, particularly in his concerto. That the anecdote would travel into nineteenth-century Wales shows how Vivaldi was reduced to a historical figure (in relation to another historical figure) in the nineteenth century, rather than someone who was performed, although this reduction was still yet a presence.

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<sup>41</sup> *Fitz-giggo, a new english uproar.*

## Sources from Learned Musicians

During the eighteenth century, there were many in England who believed that good aesthetic taste belonged to the learned. Only the well-educated (usually middle to upper class men with grammar school educations) could distinguish between “good” and “bad” music. Thus many musicians from learned circles took it upon themselves to educate those with poorer tastes, as well as debate the nuances of taste between themselves. Vivaldi’s music did not escape the learned musicians’ attention, and despite (or perhaps precisely because of) Vivaldi’s popularity in English theatres and homes, the composer and violinist was largely criticised for being in poor taste. The learned musicians took particular aim at Vivaldi’s rapidity as a form of virtuosity for the sake of virtuosity, and were also against the “frivolity” and “novelty” of his music, which will be discussed below. While these sources all mention Vivaldi by name, it is important to note that in many instances they were not just criticising Vivaldi, but rather condemning him for being the exemplar of the Venetian style, which they found to be in poor taste.

Sir John Hawkins and Charles Burney are perhaps the most significant representations of these learned musicians, for their influence both at their time of writing in the late eighteenth century, and in modern musicology, where their histories are often relied upon for discerning taste during that time. In addition to analysing the writings of Burney and Hawkins for what they can tell us about Vivaldi’s reception history, these sources can also be contrasted to the popular entertainment sources discussed in the previous section. By doing so, clear disparities arise between the two categories of sources. The clearest difference is that of tone — while the popular entertainment sources mostly portray Vivaldi in a positive light, the learned musicians, in contrast, tend towards portraying him negatively. This is most clearly evidenced with how the learned musicians criticise Vivaldi’s rapidity, while in contrast the popular entertainment sources clearly associated Vivaldi’s music with rapidity, but never criticised that aspect of his music. Other characteristics mentioned and criticised by the learned musicians, such as the novel and frivolous nature of Vivaldi’s music, are not mentioned at all by the popular entertainment sources, suggesting that there was a weaker association between Vivaldi and frivolity and novelty in British culture than what is initially suggested by the learned musicians. This might



be explained, at least partially, by the fact that while the Fifth was clearly the most well-known of Vivaldi's works in Britain and Ireland, and also what most popular entertainment sources refer to (if they refer to a specific piece), the learned musicians tend to use less popular works as examples of poor taste.

### **Sir John Hawkins and Charles Burney**

Sir John Hawkins, an English magistrate, author and amateur musician, dedicated as little as less than half a page to Vivaldi in his five-volume, large-scale history of music. Despite this, Hawkins' portrayal of Vivaldi within *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* is crucial to Vivaldi's reception history as it, alongside Burney's writings, are largely representative of learned musicians' views.<sup>42</sup> Hawkins' *A General History* was one of the first of its kind in England. It was both popular and influential at its time of publication, and beyond its author's death. Thus, it can tell one much of Britain's musical tastes during the mid-eighteenth century.

It took Hawkins sixteen years to write *A General History*, the completed version not being published until 1776. At its time of publication, Hawkins' work was reasonably popular. However, *A General History* would soon lose that initial popularity. This may have been caused by negative reviews in the media that were likely initiated and encouraged by Hawkins' rival Charles Burney.<sup>43</sup> The same year Hawkins' *A General History* first appeared, Burney published the first volume of a similar history of music to Hawkins, making the two direct competitors. Burney's *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* was an easier and more accessible work for the average reader, giving it an edge over Hawkins' work. The two histories also differ in that Burney took more of an interest in contemporary music, while Hawkins places greater value on earlier music.

Despite Burney's somewhat successful attempts at defamation, Hawkins' *A General History* were still widely known and discussed, remaining popular enough to be reprinted in 1853 and 1857. The

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<sup>42</sup> Roger North, Charles Avison, and William Hayes are other important learned musicians from the eighteenth century who wrote similar criticisms of Vivaldi.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Stevenson, "The Rivals' — Hawkins, Burney, and Boswell," *The Musical Quarterly* 36/1 (1950): 71–76.

books were also often cited in newspapers and other media during the eighteenth century and beyond. Thus, Hawkins' work has since been a standard point of reference for reception histories, due to its wide scope and large influence.

Hawkins was involved with several amateur music clubs over his lifetime, which would influence his musical taste towards that of a learned style. The most important of these clubs were the Academy of Ancient Music and the Madrigal Society. Hawkins would also become a member of the Ivy Lane Club and the Turk's Head Club. His membership in such clubs would allow him to become acquainted with the music of the "Ancients." The Ancients consisted of composers from earlier periods, and included the likes of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c. 1525–1594) and Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713). Despite what its name might imply, a composer might only have passed away a decade or so before being considered an Ancient. These amateur clubs specialising in Ancient music would have been filled with like-minded learned musicians with similar tastes to Hawkins. Corelli's concertos (as well as those composers who followed Corelli's model, such as Handel) would have been far more familiar to its members than the Vivaldian model.

Hawkins' writing on Vivaldi is brief and to the point, with his criticisms outnumbering any positive remarks. Hawkins admits that Vivaldi was a popular figure, singling out *The Four Seasons* as one of the composer's most well-known works, and even labels Vivaldi "a celebrated composer for the violin, as also a great master of that instrument."<sup>44</sup> That Hawkins would not only list but also give attention to *The Four Seasons* demonstrates the author's research beyond his own familiarity and personal tastes, as Britain was one of very few places where the work was not one of Vivaldi's most well-known outputs. However, Hawkins' own British tastes soon become apparent in his writing, as he condemns Vivaldi at several instances. *The Four Seasons* "must appear very ridiculous" for their illustrative nature, which Hawkins seems to hold little value for beyond novelty.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps more wounding is Hawkins' ability to criticise several of Vivaldi's most prominent traits in just one sentence:

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<sup>44</sup> John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* vol. 2 (London: Payne and Son, 1776), 837.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Indeed the peculiar characteristic of Vivaldi's music, speaking of his concertos ... is, that it is wild and irregular; and in some instances it seems to have been his study that it should be so; some of his compositions are expressly entitled Extravaganzas, as transgressing the bound of melody and modulation; as does also that concerto of his in which the notes of the cuckoo's song are frittered into such minute divisions as in the author's time few but himself could express on any instrument whatsoever.<sup>46</sup>

Hawkins disliked the "extravagances" of Vivaldi's music. These extravagances took the form of Vivaldi's unusual — arguably "unlearned" — harmonic practices, his imitation of nature (specifically birdcalls in this example), and the virtuosic nature of his concertos. Hawkins would then take these extravagances and argue that "from this character of his compositions it will necessarily be inferred that the harmony of them, and the artful contexture of the parts, is their least merit."<sup>47</sup>

To more clearly understand Hawkins' criticisms, it is important to note that Hawkins frowned upon extravagances in music beyond just Vivaldi. His feelings on the matter first become clear not in relation to a specific composer, but are rather brought up in his preliminary discourse to the first volume of *A General History*. He writes:

Hence it is easy to account for the obtrusion of such [virtuosic] compositions on the public ear as furnish opportunities of displaying mere manual proficiency in the artist; a solo or a concerto on the violin, the violoncello, the hautboy, or some other such instrument, does this, and gives scope for the exercise of a wild exuberant fancy which distinguishes, or rather disgraces, the instrumental performances of this day.<sup>48</sup>

In this instance, Hawkins criticises virtuosity for its tendency to draw attention to the soloist and their "mere manual proficiency." Hawkins

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, xxxvi.

believed that such displays did not necessarily have to be musically beautiful to entertain their audiences. He later uses the example of extremities of register to demonstrate this. Hawkins thought that the use of such registers made individual tones difficult to distinguish, while “the mean tones of all instruments, as being the most sweet, are to be preferred to those at either extremity of either voice or instrument.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, in the case of such music, the musically beautiful (harmonic and melodic clarity) are distorted and sacrificed for the sake of virtuosity.

Following this, Hawkins somewhat oddly chooses to criticise the use of birdcalls in music, labelling them as further extravagances. Apart from describing these birdcalls as “the imitation of tones dissimilar to the violin, the flute ... [and] the violoncello,” Hawkins does not seem to justify his reasons for disliking such imitation.<sup>50</sup> The reason for his dislike may lie in a linking of extravagance with novelty, and not just virtuosity.

Such extremities of register (the Tenth Concerto of opus 5 contains an, albeit optional, *b*”), imitation of birdcalls, and displays of virtuosity are all sins Vivaldi is guilty of displaying. By Hawkins’ standards, Vivaldi’s compositions could be the very definition of extravagance. It is perhaps not surprising then, that Hawkins thought that Vivaldi “gave into a style which had little but novelty to recommend it.”<sup>51</sup>

Burney is far less critical of Vivaldi compared to Hawkins. In a similar vein to Hawkins, Burney introduces Vivaldi as “the most popular composer for the violin [in Italy, during Vivaldi’s lifetime], as well as player on that instrument,”<sup>52</sup> although unlike Hawkins, Burney continues with this more neutral depiction of Vivaldi. He is unique in that he recognises Vivaldi’s place outside of instrumental, and specifically violin, music. He acknowledges Vivaldi as a composer of both cantatas and operas on numerous occasions.<sup>53</sup> He is, however, typical of eighteenth-century musicians in that he associates Vivaldi

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 838.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Burney, *A general history of music, from the earliest ages to the present period. To which is prefixed, a dissertation on the music of the ancients*, vol. 3 (London: published privately, 1776–89), 561.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 77, 175, 178, 302, 362, 381, 535–36, 538, 573.

with virtuosity, writing that “his pieces called *Stravaganze*, which among flashy players, whose chief merit was rapid execution, occupied the highest place of favour ... If acute and rapid tones are evils, Vivaldi has much of the sin to answer for.”<sup>54</sup> As a violinist, Vivaldi is described as “happening to be gifted with more fancy and more hand than their neighbours, were thought insane; as friar Bacon, for superior science, was thought a magician, and Galileo a heretic.”<sup>55</sup> While Burney does mention Vivaldi’s association with skill in the form of rapidity, he takes a less critical stance towards it than his predecessors. Overall, he seems quite neutral towards Vivaldi.

An explanation for Burney’s lack of criticisms may be that he saw Vivaldi as purely a historical figure. Considering that the limited amount of space dedicated to Vivaldi (one paragraph on his violin music, one paragraph on his cantatas, and a scattering of factual details throughout the third and fourth volumes) is significantly less than that dedicated to someone like Corelli, Burney likely did not even consider Vivaldi a particularly prominent historical figure. As one of Burney’s primary concerns was influencing good taste, and informing the “unlearned” as to what constitutes good taste, he would have been less concerned with criticising composers that he saw as no longer influencing modern tastes. While still somewhat known, Vivaldi’s music significantly declined in popularity during the latter half of the eighteenth century, when Burney and Hawkins were writing. As Hawkins was heavily invested in musical societies specialising in Ancient music, he would have encountered Vivaldi more often, and would have had an interest in slandering him. Burney, on the other hand, was more concerned with contemporary music, and thus would not have cared about what he viewed as an inconsequential historical figure.

By reading what Hawkins and Burney have to say, one might conclude that Vivaldi’s music was generally frowned upon for its frivolous nature. The composer had a penchant for rapidity and novelty, even imitation of non-musical sounds, which were all in bad taste according to Hawkins. While Burney is less harsh, he allows little written space on the composer, and talks more of Vivaldi in Italy than England specifically, thus allowing modern scholars to infer that

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<sup>54</sup> Burney, *A General History* vol. 3, 561.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

Vivaldi was not popular in England. Additionally, popular entertainment sources almost exclusively talk about Vivaldi's Fifth, a work which neither Hawkins nor Burney mention. While Vivaldi's "Cuckoo" concerto was somewhat known, the majority of Vivaldi's imitative works were not, including *The Four Seasons*, making Hawkins' criticisms on imitation redundant when analysing England's most well-known Vivaldian work, the Fifth.

If only the words of musicians from learned circles are taken into account, Vivaldi's reception through the eighteenth century in England seems to be rather poor. He is viewed as an overly extravagant composer and violinist, who wrote music only suited to the most flamboyant of performers and most easily entertained of audiences. However, the writings of Hawkins and Burney do not represent the whole of Vivaldi's English reception history. Despite what they might have liked, these musicians and writers could not stop music they considered in poor taste from becoming popular with wider audiences. Thus, one should be careful in basing an English reception history of Vivaldi solely on the opinions of these learned circles, as some scholars have been inclined to do. Nevertheless, analysing the views of these eighteenth-century writers still proves useful in detailing how Vivaldi's music played into larger debates in musical aesthetics and in learned society.

## **Conclusion**

While the histories and essays written by the learned musicians can tell us much about Vivaldi's British reception history, they only represent one part of the composer's reception. If one were to consider only the opinions of the learned, they might get the impression that Vivaldi had little value to British and Irish audiences. However, popular entertainment sources demonstrate that Vivaldi was more popular than the learned suggest. By analysing primary sources from popular entertainment contexts, a more nuanced view of Vivaldi's reception is given, as a larger audience base is accounted for. Thus, this reception history of Vivaldi in Britain and Ireland has attempted not only to bring deeper and more detailed analysis to primary sources than that of current scholarship, but also to help re-evaluate the weight that should be given to the writings of learned musicians when creating a British reception history.

The quest for a detailed reception history of Vivaldi in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland is far from complete. There are many other types of sources which may tell us more about Vivaldi in Britain and Ireland. Perhaps the most important of these are sources on score accessibility and dissemination. While some collections of music containing Vivaldi's pieces have already been undertaken, many primary sources still remain unaccounted for in Vivaldian scholarship. This includes a significant amount of auction catalogues and music sellers' catalogues. Additionally, previous studies on score collections tend to focus solely on the one collection, resulting in an assortment of isolated studies within academia. Thus, a study which would collate such research into a larger study on score availability and dissemination would prove highly beneficial to Vivaldian scholarship. Further study into score dissemination outside of England, in places such as Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, is also an area which requires further research. With the digitisation of archival material becoming a more frequent occurrence, more primary sources are becoming easily accessible to scholars, which will hopefully allow continual additions to knowledge on Vivaldi's reception history, not only in Britain and Ireland, but also across Europe and beyond.

## ABSTRACT

The reception history of Antonio Vivaldi's music in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland has been an under-researched topic within Vivaldian scholarship. While some literature on the topic has been written, studies seem to be scattered and fragmented — either overly focused on a specific and niche topic, or overly generalised and acting as background information in general books on the composer's biography or history. Furthermore, such literature tends to sideline the context of its primary sources — whether these sources were aimed at general audiences or professional composers. As Vivaldi's music was, in fact, reasonably well known and popular in Britain and Ireland, and that its reception differed from other European cultures, a study of the composer in eighteenth-century British culture is sorely needed. This article aims to provide part of that reception history by analysing a range of primary sources to gauge Vivaldi's reception. These sources are categorised according to both their authors' and audiences' contexts, fitting into two broad categories — “learned

musicians” and “popular entertainment.” What emerges is a contrast in views between these types of sources; while learned musicians such as Charles Burney and Sir John Hawkins heavily criticise Vivaldi’s music for its frivolous nature, sources from newspapers, satirical novels, and ephemera portray Vivaldi in a far more positive light. Thus, a detailed reception history of Vivaldi’s music in Britain and Ireland is one that would take the context of its primary sources into account.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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