

Antonio Vivaldi



born
March 4, 1678
Venice, Italy

died
July 28, 1741
Vienna, Austria

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Igor Stravinsky did not enjoy Vivaldi’s music. He called Vivaldi “a dull fellow who would compose the same music over and over.
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An-tohn´-ee-oh Vee-vahl´-dee

A composer of the Baroque era.

Antonio Vivaldi learned the craft of music from his father, a violinist in a church orchestra in Venice, Italy. Young Antonio served in church orchestras and eventually studied for the priesthood. He was ordained as a priest in 1703 at the age of 25 but never served the church in a religious capacity. However, he remained active in music, and served the church as a musician.

Vivaldi began composing **sonatas** for keyboard instruments around 1705. He also played violin in **opera** orchestras, developed a love of opera and composed several operas. This was unusual and controversial; priests were not supposed to compose music for non-church related activities. His first opera was performed in 1713 (age 35).

From 1709 through 1714, Vivaldi had the financial backing of an Italian prince in the city of Mantua, and he continued composing operas in addition to keyboard, vocal, and orchestral works. When the prince ended his support, Vivaldi accepted a position as orchestral conductor at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice, Italy, the same church and orchestra in which his father had played violin. He held this position for 27 years. He also served as the director of a musical **conservatory** in Venice.

By 1719 (age 41), another wealthy **patron** had begun to provide financial support for Vivaldi. For the next several years he composed operas for **opera companies** throughout Italy, including Rome and Milan, where audiences were the most discriminating. By 1725 his compositions, including his operas, were well known throughout Europe. His music was more popular in Holland, France, and England than in Italy; many Italians were uncomfortable with an ordained priest composing operas. In fact, in 1734, one of his operas was banned in Italy because he was a priest.

Vivaldi traveled throughout Europe in the late 1730s and early 1740s and lived briefly in Holland, where his music was very popular. Despite occasional disagreements with the church over his operas, Vivaldi remained as orchestral conductor at St. Mark’s in Venice. In 1741 (age 63), he moved to Vienna, Austria, hoping to receive an offer as a **court musician** or composer. However, he received no offers and died in Vienna.

After Vivaldi’s death, his music was rarely performed until the twentieth century, when musicians and audiences rediscovered it. During his lifetime, he was known as an opera composer. Today, while his operas are again being performed, his orchestral works are most popular. Vivaldi claimed to have written 94 operas but musical scholars have found scores for only 50.

Antonio Vivaldi was a pleasant man with a full head of bright red hair. For this he was sometimes referred to as “the red priest.” He was comfortable writing music for both religious and concert performances.