

# Antonio Vivaldi

*An-tohn'-ee-oh Vee-vahl'-dee*

born March 4, 1678, Venice, Italy  
died July 28, 1741, Vienna, Austria



## 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 twenty-five 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 thirty-five).

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 twenty-seven years. He also served as the director of a musical conservatory in Venice.

By 1719 (age forty-one), 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 sixty-three), 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 ninety-four operas but musical scholars have found scores for only fifty.

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.

## Famous Works:

*The Four Seasons* — a set of four concertos for violin and orchestra

*Concerto Grosso in D minor* — for two violins, cello, and string orchestra

His concertos for various instruments and orchestra

His masses, and sacred choral works

His operas

*"I heard him undertake to compose a concerto, with all the parts, with greater dispatch than a copyist can copy it."*

Charles de Brosses, French historian, describing Antonio Vivaldi