

## Rebuttal to Joan Whittimore's "Research Report: Venetian *Ospedali*, Setting the Record Straight" By Christopher Eanes

### INTRODUCTION

When I set out to write "Angels of Song: An Introduction to Musical Life at the Venetian *Ospedali*," my intention was to do just that: to provide the reader, and future performer, with an unbiased overview of this extensive and complex topic. It should be clear from the scope, length, and forum of this article that no attempt was being made to dispute current research, or to provide information that is not already available to scholars in their local university library.

Joan Whittimore's "Research Report: Venetian *Ospedali*, Setting the Record Straight" attacks the very premise of presenting a well-researched overview of information that is available in credible sources. As she is widely recognized to be a leading scholar in this field, she knows as well as anyone that there is an incredible wealth of information available in both primary and secondary sources, and that, when research reveals differences of opinion, it is the writer's obligation to provide guidance. New information on these topics, in the form of primary sources, is still being unearthed and interpreted, and until it appears in published form it is largely unavailable to the average performer. So, while I will defer to her firsthand knowledge of manuscript sources, it must be stated that other leading scholars in the field have debated her interpretation of these sources, and there is not as of yet complete agreement about many of the issues surrounding performance practices in the repertoire of the Venetian *ospedali*.

A glance at the copious citations that Whittimore uses in her "Setting the Record Straight" should suffice to show the reader that she is using the research of only a handful of scholars (herself included), to attack principles set forth by other well-respected writers on the subjects presented below. Furthermore, the presentation of her ideas sometimes obscures her valid points.

It would be easy to leave this rebuttal there, but since Dr Whittimore took the time and effort to list twenty-six individual grievances, I thought it only fitting that I should address each one in turn. For the few that were the result of my own oversight, I apologize. As for the rest, they seem to be the result of Whittimore's effort to change the reader's perspective towards her own, and in what follows I have endeavored to distinguish between the two categories.

### POINTS OF DISPUTE

1. Regarding the founding date of the Mendicanti, Baldauf-Berdes states: "Its long history, dating from 1182, is relevant to this study..."<sup>1</sup>. Whether or not the institution was yet named the Mendicanti is somewhat beside the point for a general outline of its history.
2. See Eanes, p. 72, column 1, paragraph 1: "Each...gave refuge not just to girls, but also to men, women, and occasionally to whole families."<sup>2</sup> It was beyond the scope of this article to provide complete demographic lists.
3. See #2
4. The use of "*illegitimate*" birth (emphasis in my original) is meant to provide a contrast to the statement in the previous paragraph (p. 72, column 2, paragraph 1), which reads "All three of these *ospedali* even-

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<sup>1</sup> Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes, *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations 1525-1855* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 60.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Eanes, "Angels of Song: An Introduction to Musical Life at the Venetian *Ospedali*. *The Choral Journal* 49/8 (February, 2009), 72.

tually set enrollment caps and admissions restrictions (such as proof of legitimate birth) for their inmates.”<sup>3</sup>

5 & 6. It is obvious that these footnotes were inadvertently reversed. My mistake.

7 & 8. Citation should read: Whittemore, 1986, p. 7. Whittemore discusses here the increase in donations to the *ospedali*, but the parenthetical insertion was my own.

9. *Figlie di coro* vs. *figlie del coro*. It must be acknowledged that these terms were to a certain extent used interchangeably, and that they don't invariably convey distinct meanings. Note Procurator Pietro Foscarini as cited in Marc Pincherle's "Vivaldi and the *Ospitali* of Venice":

In his will (1745) the Procurator Pietro Foscarini stipulated a bequest of 100 ducats for *le figlie di Coro della Pietà* upon condition that they sing a mass and recite the office of the dead at his funeral, and 12 ducats per year during their lifetimes to the *sei figlie di coro più degne nel canto, a sei altri più degne nel suono* ...<sup>4</sup>

10 & 11. Whittemore has clearly missed the point that Galuppi, having already achieved considerable fame and fortune throughout Europe, still found the post at the Incurabili to be a desirable one. As I state on page 74, Galuppi was indeed appointed to his post at the Incurabili in 1762, and, having been born in 1706, he was (in the neighborhood of) 56 years old.<sup>5</sup> He held this post concurrently with that of "vice maestro" and then "maestro" at San Marco.<sup>6</sup>

12. Whittemore is correct: the translation of *figlia del coro* should be read as "daughter of the chorus."

13 & 14. Clarification is in order: "In 1705 the rule at the Pietà was relaxed somewhat so that it became possible for a *figlia del coro* who was not among the *privilegiate* to perform as a soloist."<sup>7</sup> The rule was not "ignored" but rather, on occasion, relaxed.

15. The examples I chose are accurate and fit the scope of the article; complete lists were unwarranted for the demonstration of the idea.

16. The major source for this statement is Whittemore's own *Music of the Venetian Ospedali Composers: A Thematic Catalog*.<sup>8</sup> Many of the pieces that she clearly identifies as having been initially performed at one of the *ospedali* also contain an indication that they were scored for SATB chorus. However, I will clarify the statement in my article: "Even a quick browse through the *extant* repertoire from the *ospedali* confronts us with a point of interest: much of this repertoire is *scored for* SATB choir, and the *ospedali cori* were comprised of all women and girls."

17 & 18. Whittemore seems to have no doubt that "Evidence replaced speculation regarding this subject in 1986," the year of the publication of her own dissertation. Further, she cites Jane Baldauf-Berdes' own dissertation from 1989 (and presumably Baldauf-Berdes' monograph *Women Musicians of Venice. Musical Foundations, 1525-1855*) in support of this certainty. Whether she is right or wrong, my statement

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<sup>3</sup> Eanes, 72.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Pincherle, "Vivaldi and the *Ospitali* of Venice," *The Musical Quarterly*, 24/3 (July, 1938), 307.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Hertz, *Music in European Capitals. The Galant Style, 1720-1780*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), 182.

<sup>6</sup> Hertz, 262.

<sup>7</sup> Baldauf-Berdes, 118.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Whittemore, *Music of the Venetian Ospedali Composers. A Thematic Catalog*, (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995).

stands: “Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of historical studies of the *ospedali* avoid the question completely, since it is, to understate the case, a complex issue.”<sup>9</sup> Whittemore is again attacking my research on the grounds that what she has written is to be accepted as fact, whereas not all in her field would agree that this is the case. Again, this author would urge the potential performer of this repertoire to read Whittemore’s work in conjunction with that of Michael Talbot, whom Whittemore refers to as “an eminent Vivaldi scholar.”

I would also like to point the reader to Talbot’s conclusion (also cited in Eanes, p. 80, column 2, paragraph 2) about the universality (or not) of any one performance decision:

Before considering each proposed solution in detail, it will be helpful to think about how universally applicable we expect our conclusions to be. After all, we are dealing with four separate institutions, whose residents had distinct profiles. We are considering a span of over two hundred years .... We are talking about several dozen composers, who, even if they accepted in broad terms the conditions that they inherited, cannot be expected to have held back all together from innovation. All of the choirs of the *ospedali* went through both good and bad times, and we should not be surprised if in bad times they adopted expedients that they would not otherwise have favoured.<sup>10</sup>

Talbot further elucidates the complexity of the issue by stating: “Whittemore’s project to make more of the repertoire of the *ospedali* available to women’s choirs is probably harder to achieve (without resorting to outright arrangement) than her dissertation suggests.”<sup>11</sup>

19. I would again refer the reader to the research being conducted for the Schola Pietatis Antonio Vivaldi, by Richard Vendome and Micky White, where one can find information and a recorded example of women and girls singing SATB music of the *ospedali* at notated pitch. Furthermore, as a choral conductor and voice teacher, I am in no way advocating the teaching of faulty vocal technique, but rather suggesting (from personal experience) that it is not only possible, but often desirable, in many situations, for women (and in particular older women), to sing in the baritone and tenor register. Whether or not this happened only occasionally or quite often is the subject of ongoing research, and in my article I do not give preference to any single interpretation of the facts. That it most likely *did* happen (as is acknowledged by Whittemore) is important information for the reader of this article, as it opens up new possibilities for performance of the repertoire.

20. Whittemore notes that transposition up two octaves is not documented; I must allow her critique to stand.

21. Michael Talbot gives enough credence to this theory to list it as one of only four possibilities as to how the SATB question might be solved. He writes: “The suggestion is not quite so silly as it seems, for vocal bass parts in scores destined for the *ospedali* most often double instrumental bass parts written at the same pitch and can therefore be omitted without pulling the rug out from underneath the harmony.”<sup>12</sup> That Talbot does not completely support his own supposition is reinforced in my own article: “It seems that option (3) is unlikely: Michael Talbot cites the independence of each vocal line in the ‘Et in terra pax’ move-

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<sup>9</sup> Eanes, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Talbot, *Venetian Music in the Age of Vivaldi*, (Hampshire, Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 124-5.

<sup>11</sup> Talbot, 138.

<sup>12</sup> Talbot, 124.

ment of Vivaldi's *Gloria* RV 588 (Figure 1); were one voice simply omitted, the entire structure of the piece would fall apart."<sup>13</sup> Once again, it was my intention to provide the reader with all sides of the argument.

22. "Eanes relies too heavily on the words of visitors like Charles Burney." This is a gross overstatement; I used the words of this well-respected primary source to support the idea that occasionally one or more parts might have been omitted. To ignore a first-hand account of an *ospedale* performance is itself negligent. It must again be noted that I do not support any one of these options over another, but that I felt it necessary to provide supporting evidence for *all* options.

23. I refer Whittemore to the Elibron Classics 1995 facsimile of Burney's 1771 *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, in which Burney writes, "...as the chorusses are wholly made up of female voices, they are never in more than three parts, often only in two...." I did not alter Burney's original spelling in my article.<sup>14</sup>

24. From the website of the Schola Pietatis Antonio Vivaldi (<http://www.spav.co.uk/>): "...based on the work of Vivaldi researcher Micky White, who lives at La Pietà...."<sup>15</sup> On the same page, Micky White and Michael Talbot are listed respectively as "research adviser" and "musicological adviser."

25. In fairness to Whittemore's research, the note should read "In her 1986 dissertation, however, Joan Whittemore takes a detailed look at this issue, using works composed for the *ospedali* and revised for use elsewhere (or vice versa) to demonstrate the practices composers used in this circumstance."

26. That the *cori* of the *ospedali* did indeed last into the 19th century does not negate the fact that, by the end of the 18th century, the programs had been severely diminished. Note Denis Arnold: "The governors of the orphanages lost heart as their struggle to keep solvent became harder. At their deliberations, music could now form only a small part of their discussions, and by 1777, three of the *ospedali* had to succumb."<sup>16</sup> Or Arnold again: "The conservatoires were virtually bankrupt by 1780, and although state aid kept the essential charitable purposes in being, music became less important in their lives...If the orchestras heard by de Brosses and directed by such men as Vivaldi were excellent, by the end of the century they had disappeared."<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

What has become clear is that, having disagreed with my attempt to present a well-rounded picture of the subject, Joan Whittemore took it upon herself to pick away at the details of my article, from what she calls "Incomplete" or "Inaccurate Information" to simple spelling mistakes. Her extending this to cast doubt upon the accuracy of any and every article in the *Choral Journal* is both unfounded and, frankly, insulting to the authors and editorial board of the Journal.

The heart of the issue, however, lies in the distinction between the article that I wrote, which was a general overview of historical and performance issues to consider when *beginning* a study of the Venetian *ospedali*, and a primary-source research article that studies in detail a particular aspect of a larger topic. My article was clearly presented as the former (and as such is in keeping with the general role of the *Cho-*

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<sup>13</sup> Eanes, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, Elibron Classics, 2005, 142.

<sup>15</sup> [www.spav.co.uk](http://www.spav.co.uk/). Accessed 13 February 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Denis Arnold, "Orphans and Ladies: the Venetian Conservatoires (1680-1790)," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association, 89th Session*. (1962-1963), 43.

<sup>17</sup> Denis Arnold, "Instruments and Instrumental Teaching in the Early Italian Conservatoires," *The Galpin Society Journal*, 18 (March, 1965), 80.

*ral Journal*). I have conveyed this information accurately to the reader, in good faith and to the best of my ability, using as a basis for my research a broad variety of sources, spanning many different periods, geographical locations, and perspectives. Should anyone choose to further question or debate my efficacy in this matter, I encourage him or her to contact me directly.

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