

British and French Approaches to the Representation of Vivaldi in Two Films: Stereotypes, Romanticism, and Novelization

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ABSTRACT. This article shines a light on Antonio Vivaldi, the Italian baroque composer, and the way he is depicted in two fiction films: *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*, a French film directed by Jean-Louis Guillermou released in 2007 and *Vivaldi, The Red Priest*, an English-Italian film released in 2009 in television format, directed by Liana Marabini. Both paint a picture of the musician based on a number of historical facts while taking liberties with other parts of his life.

The early musical rendition tends to overdo a certain romanticism, far from the original spirit of baroque music: this particular aspect is found in both movies, where the directors favored the romantic image of Vivaldi. The chosen musical interpretations in the French film seem to illustrate the film sequences as a simple background music while the suffering of the musician is shown with complacency in *Vivaldi, The Red Priest*. Eventually, both films choose not to focus on the musician at work in his daily life.

These narrative strategies and the intentional focus on the romantic characteristics of the musician's life give nothing but a sanitized view of the 18th-century composer and baroque music.

KEYWORDS: Vivaldi, Representation, Movie, Baroque, Romanticism



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Approches britanniques et françaises de la représentation de Vivaldi dans deux films : stéréotypes, romantisme et novélisation

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article évoque Antonio Vivaldi, le compositeur baroque italien, et sa représentation dans deux films de fiction : *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*, un film français réalisé par Jean-Louis Guillermou sorti en 2007 et *Vivaldi, The Red Priest*, un film anglo-italien sorti en 2009 en format télévision, réalisé par Liana Marabini. Ces deux films brossent le portrait du musicien basé sur des faits historiques tout en prenant des libertés avec certaines périodes de sa vie.

Les premières interprétations musicales avaient tendance à imposer un certain romantisme, loin de l'esprit original de la musique baroque : cet aspect particulier se retrouve dans les deux films, où les réalisateurs ont privilégié une image romantique de Vivaldi. Les interprétations musicales choisies dans le film français semblent illustrer les séquences cinématographiques comme une simple musique de fond tandis que dans *Vivaldi, The Red Priest*, la souffrance du musicien est montrée avec une certaine complaisance. Les deux réalisateurs choisissent finalement de ne pas s'intéresser au musicien au travail dans sa vie quotidienne.

Ces stratégies narratives et l'accent mis intentionnellement sur les caractéristiques romantiques de la vie du musicien ne donnent qu'une vision aseptisée du compositeur du XVIII^e siècle et de la musique baroque.

MOTS-CLÉS : Vivaldi, représentation, film, baroque, romantisme

For a long time, Vivaldi's music has been used in films, in particular his most famous work *The Four Seasons*: the IMDb website lists more than 340 movies, series or documentaries that use one or more pieces of Vivaldi's music. It includes *Les Enfants terribles* (*Children of the Game*, Jean Cocteau, 1950), *Dangerous Liaisons* (Stephen Frears, 1988), and *Single White Female* (Barbet Schroeder, 1992). In these films, Vivaldi and the 18th century are generally linked to an airy performance, wittiness, marivaudage, eroticism as well as the *frizzante* (fizzy) angle of Italy¹. Yet, Vivaldi's works can also be used turning them into new clichés, but in a different way. One French film, *Intouchables*, contains the usual stereotypes of mainstream comedies²: we see an arbitrary and expected separation between the white, bourgeois, disabled character who likes classical music³ in general, and his black carer who *necessarily* does not know Vivaldi and prefers « Boogie Wonderland » by the 1970s disco-funk group Earth, Wind and Fire. Did Vivaldi become the symbol of an old-fashioned and elitist taste? Are things that simple? If they accept the term « classical », today's audiences seem to –that is our hypothesis– accept the romantic version and push away the baroque vision. Indeed, the books about music in cinema deal mostly with what is attributed to romantic music. One work that we should mention here is

1 However, there is an article which details the counterpoint use of Vivaldi in Hou Hsiao-hsien's films. See Guillemet, 2013: 129-135.

2 For an in-depth analysis of the stereotypes inherent in this film, see Moine, 2018: 229-235.

3 Here, the term « classical music » is understood as a whole: no distinction is made between Vivaldi, Bach, Chopin, Schubert or Rimski-Korsakov.

Figures du compositeur : Musiciens à l'écran (*Figures of the Composer: Musicians on Screen*). This French book deals almost exclusively with musicians of the romantic or post-romantic period, such as Chopin, Beethoven, Schumann, and especially with movies directed by Ken Russell. Although it contains some references to Marin Marais and Bach, there is absolutely no mention of Antonio Vivaldi. Another example that confirms our hypothesis that baroque musicians in contemporary cinema were forgotten or put aside: it is easy to find films based on the life of Mozart or Chopin, but how many movies are there that depict the life of a baroque musician? The musicologist and musician Karol Beffa wrote that Bach's life divided between his official duties and his children did not have « the same panache as Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz or Liszt » (Beffa, 2009: 72). Although Gérard Corbiau has never directly mentioned Vivaldi, his filmography shows an interest in Italian and French baroque (in particular Farinelli and Lully). We must mention a movie with an ambiguous position: *Barry Lyndon* by Stanley Kubrick. In this movie, scenes featuring a baroque accompaniment (Haendel, Bach, Vivaldi)⁴ can be followed by classical music (Schubert, Mozart). Kubrick explains his choice for Schubert's Trio because « there are no tragic love-themes in 18th-century music » (Ciment, 2001: 174). In Kubrick's movie, a paradox takes place: even though we are in a romantic mood and interpretation, the music gives more depth to this tragic destiny that took place during the 18th century.

Films featuring Vivaldi were non-existent until the 2000s. A notable foray into documentary with original writing was made by Alain Duault and Laurence Thiriart with *Sur les pas de Vivaldi*. But in this paper we will examine how Vivaldi is represented in two fiction films: *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise* (*Vivaldi, a Prince in Venice*) by Jean-Louis Guillermou⁵, released in 2007, and *Vivaldi, The Red Priest* by the Italian filmmaker Liana Marabini⁶, released in 2009. *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise* is a French film. Its production team was mainly French but the movie benefited from Italian financial support. *Vivaldi, The Red Priest* was made for TV. The film was made in English and it was shown on Italian television. The production company was the British firm Condor Pictures and the distributor was Europe Image International⁷.

Based on these two examples, we will study how French and Italian filmmakers seem to be unaware of both the historical reality and the methods of interpretation of the baroque repertoire. We will first of all clarify the context of these films —how they were promoted through trailers and how they were received. Then we will focus on their approach to baroque music by first reviewing what we mean by the baroque revival. This question will then be transposed to the

4 The *Cello Concerto in E Minor* (Third movement) of Vivaldi is played in two scenes.

5 A French director, he made other films about baroque music as *La messe en si mineur* (1990) or *Il était une fois Jean-Sébastien Bach* (2003).

6 An Italian director, strongly asserting her catholic faith, she presents herself as a historian. In her latest film *Shades of Truth* (2015), she pretends to rehabilitate controversial pope Pie XII.

7 Europe Image International was a subsidiary of the Lagardère Group and became Lagardère Entertainment Right in September 2012.

cinema to understand the reasons that led the film directors, in these works, to present a romantic vision of a baroque musician.

We will also consider which pieces of Vivaldi's music are favored in either film. From this, we will examine how the narrative strategies of either film and the emphasis on romantic aspects contribute to the sanitization of an 18th-century musician and the idea of the baroque.

Context and Reception

Trailers can reveal how a commercial film is being sold and the nature of its target audience. There are two trailers for *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*. The first one opens with a close-up of a left hand on a violin before the focus shifts to the candles in the background. The focus shifts again to Vivaldi and a tracking shot of a performance in a church. What it shows of Venice comes as no surprise: the gondoliers, the canals, the concerts, and the masks. The second trailer seems to be more interesting because it features a didactic voice-over:

The palace, the castrati, the theatres, the costumes, the characters, the masks, the great moments of Vivaldi in Venice... The stupidity of the 18th-century Church against the genius of the baroque composer, with Michel Galabru as Benoît XIII and the carnival of Venice which lasts for almost six months of the year⁸.

We experience a kind of immediate recognition of actors who are famous in France —Michel Serrault and Michel Galabru as the unlikely pope who does not know how to read music. Moreover, this trailer presents Vivaldi's confrontation with the Church by means of this peremptory formulation about the stupidity of the Church. This is a rather obvious interpretation which superimposes today's opposition on the 18th century. It is interesting to note how *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise* tries to copy the film *Farinelli* which was a box office success in France with 1.3 million tickets sold. Both of them feature Stefano Dionisi, and even the ocher and yellow tones of the movie poster are very similar. In *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*, the voice-over literally describes what you see on screen: the palaces, the masks. In comparison, *Farinelli* offers a trailer which is not weighed down by an over-significant voice-over.

The trailer for the film directed by Liana Marabini can be found on the website of Condor Pictures (Trailer *Vivaldi, The Red Priest*). The scenes in the eight-minute-long trailer are, as usual, not organized chronologically: a door is opened and we see the face of Vivaldi (played by the Scottish actor Steven Cree) emerging in medium close-up. It is followed by a long shot in which Vivaldi

8 « Les palais, les castrats, les théâtres, les costumes, les personnages, les masques, les grandes heures de la Venise de Vivaldi... La sottise de l'Église du xviii^e siècle contre le génie du brillant compositeur baroque. Avec Michel Galabru dans le rôle du pape Benoît XIII et le carnaval de Venise qui durerait presque 6 mois par an. » My translation.

is walking down the street, his back turned to us, wearing a black cloak. The first lines we hear in the trailer are from two female admirers of Vivaldi who say « he's a great musician [...] and a good priest ». We also hear some other extracts. The music that we hear the most is the *Concerto in C Major RV 558*: it gives a cheerful aspect to the trailer. Vivaldi's editor tells us, « I think all women secretly love Catholic priests, for their moral integrity, for their values ». We easily understand that the priest-musician generates some charisma that makes women fall for his charms, as the trailer tells us. We can see how the director emphasizes the suffering and the guilt Vivaldi endures on account of his feelings towards women.

It is quite easy to find positive reviews of *Vivaldi, The Red Priest* as a subjective selection is available on the Condor website⁹. We can read for example that Marabini presented a « pleasant and plausible story and drew a nice and documented movie » (Channel Riviera). However, the harshest criticism comes from the actor himself, Steven Cree, when he said he « [didn't] think of ever having seen a film as bad as *Vivaldi* » (Cree, 2018). The shooting, particularly difficult, reminds him of the film *The Room* as evoked in James Franco's *The Disaster Artist*:

I had to try and play on a day despite the fact I cannot play the violin, and I never had that piece of music, and the director wanted to me just to mime... mime! (Cree, 2018)

Vivaldi, un prince à Venise with around 100.000 seats sold, received catastrophic reviews in France. For the specialized press such as *Positif*, this movie was « nothing but a series of “historical paintings” accompanied by sung arias or concertos »¹⁰ (O'Neill, 2007: 50). Some spectators had divergent opinions: the movie allowed us to comprehend « [a] magical and deadly fate »¹¹ but for another one « the film sounds fake [...]. The Italian composer is not highlighted (where are the four seasons?) »¹². For other spectators, the music has the capacity to save the film. We will indeed study how music was used in these movies.

Music in the Movies: Back to the Question of the Baroque

The question of the interpretation of baroque music, and the way it should be played, was a sensitive one in the 20th century. Jacques Viret evokes a « baroque renewal » that began in 1957 with the musician Nikolaus Harnoncourt

9 Press Articles (last accessed 27.02.2021). <https://www.condor-pictures.com/index.php/press-articles/page/4/>

10 « Qu'une suite de “tableaux historiques”, accompagnés de concertos ou d'arias chantées ». My translation.

11 « [un] destin à la fois tragique et magique ». My translation. Nestor13 (last accessed 27.02.2021). <http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-109646/critiques/spectateurs>

12 « Le film sonne faux [...]. Le compositeur italien n'est pas mis en valeur (où sont les quatre saisons ?) », Alighieri (last accessed 29.02.21). <https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-109646/critiques/spectateurs/?page=5>. My translation.

and his group *Concentus Musicus Wien*. The program he set for himself seems particularly interesting to us: « historical music [...] is automatically part of our present » (Viret 2009: 95). From the 1970s onwards, especially in France, heated discussions took place. Some musicologists pejoratively used the French term « *baroqueux* » (« baroquish ») in their descriptions of certain musicians. Some critics like Jean-Paul Penin question an unlikely « authenticity » (Penin, 2006: 33-54). Yet baroque lovers are generally lucid about their search for authenticity. Orlando Perera –a musicologist and a defender of genuinely baroque performances– writes precisely that

we still do not know what the voice of these violins, téorbes or trombes really was, nor especially how such instruments sounded in the rooms with wooden, velvet and stucco floors, most of which have now disappeared (2011: 217).

What is special about Vivaldi is that he and his music were neglected for two centuries. Vivaldi's scores were deposited in the department of manuscripts and rare books of the National Library in Turin in 1930 before being actually exploited after the Second World War (Perera, 2011: 232–233). The first 20th-century interpretations of Vivaldi's music, dating from around 1918-19, were those of the *Regia Academia di Santa Cecilia*. This is how Perera¹³ defined this performance:

At that time, baroque music was rendered with mannerism, emphasis and high volume, with extensive use of vibrato, while the metal (not gut) strings of the instruments emitted a penetrating sound that was certainly unknown in Vivaldi's time¹⁴ (Perera, 2011: 221).

Afterwards, « the great symphony orchestras in turn sabotage[d] Vivaldi » (Perera, 2011: 221). To put it more schematically, these performers played baroque music in a romantic way. In what sense can we understand « romanticism »? For the German musicologist Wolfgang Boetticher, romanticism is

characterized by the strong differentiation of sonorities, the existence of a close symbolic link between the text [...] and the music, the use of extreme tonalities (simple or of great complexity), a refined sensibility, a penchant for associating with neighbouring arts, especially fantastic poetry, the sublimation of a type of exalted

13 In this particularly well-documented book, Perera explains the various stages of the dispersal of the musical scores (2011: 131-183).

14 « À cette époque, on donnait du baroque une lecture maniérée, rhétorique, à haut volume, utilisant abondamment le vibrato, tandis que les cordes métalliques (et non en boyau) des instruments à cordes émettaient un son pénétrant, assurément inconnu du temps de Vivaldi. » My translation.

artist, the opposition between stylized rhythms and irrationally shifted accents¹⁵ (1976: 885).

In fact, the desire to play new works took precedence over musicological issues, such as how to be faithful to the spirit of the times in which these works were written. In the 1980s, a baroque music group called *Il Giardino Armonico* came to prominence. The musicians of this Italian group came from all over Europe and used old baroque instruments (with curved baroque bows for the violins). Their version of « Winter » from *The Four Seasons* has something innovative, very different from the existing versions until then: the tempo is remarkably slow, and the beginning could be the soundtrack of a contemporary film. In a search for a certain authenticity, through in-depth musicological work, they wanted to capture the meaning of the baroque period in a way that had never been tried before: they positioned themselves against the dominant way of playing which was mentioned earlier. Then we had to wait until 1992 to see the release of a complete collection of Vivaldi's music. In cooperation with the record label Naïve, the researcher Alberto Basso recorded all of Vivaldi's music from the collection of the Turin National Library. The project was entitled « Vivaldi Edition ».

Now, we have to ask whether romantic imagery, « the apparent dominance of emotion over reason »¹⁶ (Warrack, 1988: 589), replaces the idea of the baroque in the cinema, and more precisely how the music is used in films.

The Choice of Music in Films

Guillermou chose some renowned professional musicians,¹⁷ including Shlomo Mintz, for *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*. Mintz can be considered one of the best contemporary violinists, but he is more suited to the romantic style (Sibelius, for example). Here, he seems to deliberately accelerate the tempo, and give the music a romantic emphasis. Liana Marabini chose the conductor Claudio Scimone for her film. The participation of this prestigious musician is emphasized in the promotion material for the film, e.g., the trailer and the official website. However Roger-Claude Travers described the interpretation by *I Solisti Veneti* under Scimone as having « polished phrasing, weird accents, rubato nuisance »¹⁸ (Perera, 2011: 216) that satisfies neither traditionalists nor those musicians that Orlando Perera calls « supporters of a philological read-

15 « Caractérisé par la différenciation poussée des sonorités, l'existence d'un lien symbolique étroit entre le texte [...] et la musique, l'emploi de tonalités extrêmes (simple ou d'une grande complexité), une sensibilité raffinée, un penchant à s'associer aux arts voisins, en particulier à la poésie fantastique, la sublimation d'un type d'artiste exalté, l'opposition de rythmes stylisés et d'accents déplacés d'une manière irrationnelle. » My translation.

16 « La domination apparente de l'émotion sur la raison. » My translation.

17 It should be noted, however, that many other titles are performed or conducted by musicians close to the Baroque revival, such as Fabio Biondi or Rinaldo Alessandrini.

18 « Les phrasés policés, les accentuations bizarres, les rubatos intempestifs. » My translation.

ing »¹⁹ (Perera, 2011: 216) that is to say, those seeking an interpretation that would be closer to the spirit of the baroque.

The beginning of the film *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise* offers an interesting opportunity to observe this question. The director introduces Vivaldi's *A Minor Concerto* in honor of Frederick IV, King of Denmark. Unlike other pieces in the film, this piece of music is heard at length. The director's purpose is to reconstruct the general mood in the church of the Pietà²⁰ as we recognize it today. At the beginning, we alternate between a long shot in the church, with Vivaldi sitting on the right side of the grille and a close shot where we see some young women from inside the grille: they are hidden from the audience. The director apparently relies on the descriptions by Jean-Jacques Rousseau or by Edward Wright²¹. In *Les Confessions*, Rousseau showed his frustration not to see these « angels of beauty »²². Then we see a close-up of a hand playing a violin, then the face of a young woman, and a view from behind the grille. It's as if the film invented an impossible point of view of an omniscient viewer. This film also systematically uses music as a transition. That is, the scenes are connected by means of pieces of music. At the beginning of the film, when Vivaldi leaves Frederick IV, we see a reverse shot of a gondolier. To connect two different scenes, the director uses « Winter » from *The Four Seasons*. The music stops for a few seconds when Vivaldi starts to talk to his family inside the house.

The choice of operas can be an important issue. In the French film, when Vivaldi walks through the streets to visit the bishop of Venice, we hear an excerpt from the oratorio *Juditha Triumphans*. Some of this music is used in a rather casual way, while some is justified. It is justified in the scene where Vivaldi asks Anna Girò to come to his house for a rehearsal: in the two shots showing her leaving Vivaldi's house we hear music from his opera *Fernace* in the background. When she is shown on the stage in a reverse shot, we see Vivaldi playing the violin, then a close shot of Girò starting to sing. However, the film makes us think that this is Girò's first interpretation of a Vivaldi opera. But in truth she had already sung in *Dorilla in Tempe* in November 1726. Overall, every scene in the film is either connected by dialogue or by a piece of music.

Vivaldi, The Red Priest –which does not feature a single opera extract– does not employ the same technique of using music as transition. For example, when Vivaldi returns to Venice in a horse-drawn carriage, the *Concerto Grosso op. 3 in D Minor RV 565* does not start until almost the end of the shot. The director shifts the shot from outside to inside the carriage. In Venice, the same concerto continues in the shot inside Laura's house and finally stops when Laura's mother begins to speak, but it resumes several minutes later when all of the characters go out into the courtyard for further discussion. Vivaldi's music is used as a con-

19 « *partisans de la lecture philologique* ». My translation.

20 If the Ospedella della Pietà on the Riva Degli Schiavoni was the most important, there were three other hospices: San Lazaro dei Mendicanti, Poveri Derelitti and Incurabili. See Roughol, 2005: 32.

21 « [The young women] are hidden from any distinct view below by a lattice of ironwork » (Dreyfus, 1996: 43-44).

22 (« *anges de beauté* »). The description of Rousseau refers to the Ospedale dei Mendicanti the writer visited in 1743-1744. See De Candé, 1967: 18.

tinuous enjoyable background support without any real issue. That is similar to what we have in *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*, with that excessively pleasant aspect on which the trailer is built.

Didactic Narrative Approaches

What is interesting in both films is the way that the filmmakers pretend to give us elements of the true story of Vivaldi. A fiction movie obviously has the right to take liberties with the truth. However, the way the directors prioritize some particular developments above others is an interesting symptom of a smooth representation without any mysteries. Basically, the French director Jean-Louis Guillermou bases his plot on historical fact, whereas Liana Marabini tries to involve Vivaldi in a romance with a woman, but her approach is not free of ambiguity. The purpose here is not to point out all the factual errors in the two films, but to examine the question of the historical approach.

At the beginning of Jean-Louis Guillermou's *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*, we see an intertitle stating: « On September 29, 1708, a concert is given at the church of the Pietà in Venice in honour of the Danish king Frederick IV ». However, the Danish king did not arrive in Venice until December 29, 1708 (Mamy, 2001: 75-76). As for the concert itself, Sylvie Mamy, who repeatedly insists that little information has come down to us about Vivaldi's life, notes that the musician's colleague was absent on that day; neither does any official document exist to prove that Vivaldi himself was even present at the concert. It is mentioned in a diplomatic report that « girls sang accompanied by the instrumental group [headed by] the master who stood at the lectern in the absence of Gasparini »²³ (Mamy, 2001: 78). What Guillermou's film neglects to mention is the fact that the church of the Pietà refused to renew Vivaldi's contract as music master on February 24, 1709: Gasparini was reappointed, whereas Vivaldi was dismissed after the members voted 7-6 against him (Mamy, 2001: 79). For two years, from 1709 to 1711, historians lost track of Vivaldi. Although we do not know if it is a conscious will of the director, we could find two reasons to explain why these elements are absent from the film. One is to ensure the logical continuity of the story and the other is to allow the invention of a plot between the governor and the bishop to get Vivaldi dismissed from the Pietà²⁴. This plot involves the governor's aide, Angelo, attempting to trap Vivaldi by arranging for a young woman from the Pietà to wait for Vivaldi naked on his bed. But according to the musicologist Sylvie Mamy, it might have been Vivaldi's extravagant expenditure on musical instruments that soured his relationship with the Pietà (2001: 79). It should be noted that the Pietà separated from Vivaldi long after, in 1738.

23 « Les filles chantèrent accompagnées par l'ensemble instrumental [dirigé par] le maître qui tient le pupitre en l'absence de Gasparini. » My translation.

24 The governors and not the Bishop were in charge of the Pietà even though there were probably issues of power.

Liana Marabini's *Vivaldi, The Red Priest* follows a fictional storyline: Vivaldi's brief romance with a woman. At 11 minutes 34 seconds into the film, an intertitle sets the scene as « Venice, 1709 ». The action in Marabini's film takes place during the period of Vivaldi's disappearance from Venice, and she explains his disappearance as being due to a romance with a young woman at Berkeley Castle from November 1709 to April 1711. It seems that Marabini chose this location because some Vivaldi scores were discovered in the castle in 2004 (« Rare Vivaldi Manuscript Uncovered », 2004). Marabini said she had spent ten years working on Vivaldi's biography (« Vivaldi The red Priest, ultimo ciak », 2008) and she mentioned that fact in order to justify her imaginary plot. She also claimed to have found a manuscript written by a ship's captain from the port of Genoa, dated 1711, indicating that Vivaldi had waited a whole day for a ship to dock (Dager, 2009). She imagines that he was awaiting the arrival of Laura and her son Antonio. In a dramatic scene, Vivaldi is informed that the boat has sunk. However, Marabini's research has not been confirmed by any historians. Consequently, her use of the intertitle indicating the date and place of the action in the film remains unjustified. At the end of the film, we read this:

[Vivaldi] died in Vienna and was buried in the cemetery of the poor. Today nothing remains of the « red priest » except his music: the cemetery where he was buried was taken apart and his bones were thrown in[to] a poor and anonymous common ditch.

If it is Marabini's intention to insert historical facts into a fictional story, the film falls into a complete historical confusion, where real events are only a vague framework for a fictional romance.

A Safe Representation of a Musician

What both films have in common is that they fail to show the musician at work. Repeating a shot can be a way of illustrating Vivaldi's work as a musician. In *Vivaldi, un prince à Venise*, this technique is used in a scene at the beginning of the film. The light is less artificial, the film is less stuffy and academic. But this is rather a short passage which is meant to create a sense of suspense concerning the governor's plot against the musician. Likewise, there is a shot showing young women tuning their violins. But the audacity of this scene immediately dissipates when we discover that it is meant to show Vivaldi's interest in one of the young women. In *Vivaldi, The Red Priest*, we see a scene in which Vivaldi is playing *La Folia*²⁵. This shot is rather interesting in that *La Folia* is not a credited piece although Vivaldi proposed his own version. However, we still have the impression that music is a background element. It is used to show Vivaldi's

25 *Sonata in D Minor Op. 1/12 RV 63. Vivaldi, The Red Priest* uses a version for two violins, cello, and harpsichord.

jealousy when his rival attempts to seduce Laura. Like the French film, this film tries to show heavily that Vivaldi is fascinated by women.

The way Vivaldi's body is shown in *Vivaldi, The Red Priest* raises some issues. At the beginning, we see a man bathing in a river (we learn later that this is Vivaldi), watched by two young women who seem to be amused until he gets dressed and they realize —the camera performs a very demonstrative dolly out— that the man is a priest. Marabini's view of the musician is paradoxical: at first, he has an athletic body and a flamboyant character, but a few years later he is sick and depressed. The image of the suffering artist is very much a romantic one.

A little later, an insert indicates: « Versailles, 1707 » and we see the meeting between the composer and Louis XIV. Everything here is improbable: according to Sylvie Mamy, Vivaldi did not leave Venice before 1718 and it seems impossible that he had already been to France and met Louis XIV. The king is also shown quietly pruning trees in the gardens, abstracted from any realistic historical contexts. Then, inside, we hear an excerpt from Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Marche pour la Cérémonie des Turcs*. The excerpt is very short, and it seems that the director has deliberately chosen it to strike a contrast with Vivaldi's music. When Vivaldi conducts this piece at Versailles in front of the king, the audience visibly gets over their boredom thanks to the performance, but when he follows it with his own *Concerto in D Major RV 562* « Per la solennità di San Lorenzo »²⁶, he brings other musicians onto the stage to the apparent satisfaction of the king. When the music begins, the audience seems to be more enthusiastic. Nevertheless, it is shown in a naïve and demonstrative way: thanks to a Steadicam, the camera is almost always in motion from left to right or from right to left and shots proliferate. From a historical point of view, it seems the musicians were not used to playing movement extracts in front of a king and his court and nothing suggests an ellipsis in the editing at that moment. The desire here is to satisfy the presumed expectation of the audience to the detriment of a certain true performance. Right after the concert, Vivaldi explains to two women that the music is already in his head and the writing process is easy: this reinforces the image of a genius who ultimately did not need to confront with the composer at work.

Conclusion

We have seen in the first instance how the trailers for each film are limited to a « delightful » aspect to *sell* a certain type of musician. The actor Steven Cree's misunderstanding on the shooting of *Vivaldi, The Red Priest* is, in this regard, characteristic of a film that departs from musical plausibility: he is amazed that he has to mimic the music without having been given any profes-

26 In the film, Vivaldi claimed to have written the title in honor of the French court. According to Sylvie Mamy, this piece would be written much later and corresponds to a trip to Rome in 1723-1724. It could have been composed for the feast of the saint of the church San Lorenzo in Damaso (Mamy, 2001: 51).

sional guidance on how to hold a violin. In this respect, one could compare this film with the work that was done on *Tous les matins du monde*. Unlike Steven Cree, Gérard Depardieu, Guillaume Depardieu and Jean-Pierre Marielle were given real musical training on the viola da gamba by the specialist Jean-Louis Charbonnier. Alain Corneau has also chosen to call on professional baroque musicians, in particular the violist Jordi Savall, who was also the advisor and musical director. The aim was to give the musical reconstruction a realistic look. The baroque revival that began only in the second half of the 20th century acted as a kind of mini-revolution in the music world. The late discovery of Vivaldi's scores was the subject of disagreement about the way it should be performed. At that time, most musicians tended to interpret Vivaldi's music in a pretentious and emphatic manner, playing in a romantic way music that was not intended for that purpose. It was not until the 1960s that music historians and musicians radically criticized the way baroque music was usually played.

In both films, the choice of the performers indicates an approach that tends towards romanticism. This approach can be found on a cinematographic level: Vivaldi's music appears as a simple illustration to mark the transitions between sequences without taking account of the essence of baroque music. These films are reduced to their narration in which the story only serves as a « guarantor », hence the many historical inconsistencies. In these two films, Vivaldi only conveys the image of a romantic genius, far from the baroque creator.

How would it be possible to portray Vivaldi's baroque spirit? In two important European modern films (away from stereotypes, and closer to the music) made forty years apart, accuracy (of costumes, etc.) is not the primary concern. They are the German film *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, released in 1968, and the Spanish-German film *Die Stille vor Bach*, directed by Pere Portabella in 2008. In the former, the letters and contracts that are shown in the film help depict Bach's daily life. Agnès Perrais notes about this movie that the appearance of the composer and the sound production « clearly go against the romantic notion of the artist and the myth of the genius »²⁷ (Perrais, 2014: 195). In the latter, Portabella creates a dialogue between several different time periods: the 18th century, the 19th century, and today. The idea of daily life which is present in *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* is precisely what is lacking in the films by Jean-Louis Guillermou and Liana Marabini. To suggest the daily life of Vivaldi in 18th-century Venice, the musician could be shown choosing and buying musical instruments, for example. We know that in 1706, Vivaldi filed a lawsuit against another composer (Mamy, 2001: 65-67); if that had been depicted in the movies it would have revealed some of the day-to-day problems a musician faced in that era.

Finally, to add some flesh to the accounts of the time, instead of « drowning » the film in a series of music tracks which are mostly purely illustrative, why could the filmmakers not trust —at certain moments at least— the sounds of the city of Venice? In Venice, it is difficult not to be aware of the lapping of

27 « ... [va] ainsi clairement à rebours de la compréhension romantique de l'artiste et du mythe du génie ». My translation.

water in the canals and the sound of church bells. This is a whole soundscape that has survived to this day and that is also a part of the baroque spirit.

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