Proportional Tempos in the Performance of Vivaldi's Oboe Concertos

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Concertos by Antonio Vivaldi lend themselves to a consideration of proportional tempos. In an article in The Double Reed 24/2 (2001) this author discussed common approaches to the selection of tempos in Baroque Music, introduced theories on proportional tempos and applied the principal of proportional tempos to one of Vivaldi's bassoon concertos.[1] In a companion article Todd Goranson documented the selection of tempos by eight bassoonists performing 20 different concertos.[2] This article follows up the prior publications with documentation and comments on recordings by four oboists performing nine concertos by Vivaldi.

Only simple proportions (1:2, 3:1, 2:3) are noted in this article. Relationships exceeding 4% deviation are ignored, with only one exception noted below. In some cases the tempo set by the soloist differed from that in the opening orchestra tutti. The tempos given were determined during the soloist's first entrance, since it best represents the soloist's intended tempo for the movement.

Oboists are privileged to have evidence of 18th century performance tempos for two of Vivaldi's oboe concertos. William Malloch's research derived from the catalogue for a "barrel organ" built by the London Watchmaker Cumming (1722-1795) contains timings from which performance tempos can be ascertained. Figures 1 and 2 contain the tempos derived from Malloch's work. The fermata passage (which calls for a cadenza) at the end of the second movement in Figure 1 seems to justify a faster tempo than 48. If greater time is taken at the end of the movement than Malloch calculated, then the rest of the movement would be performed slightly faster. If we assume a tempo of 50 then the last two movements are in a 1:3 relationship. In the other B_ oboe concerto, F.IV, no. 10, the movements do not appear to be in any simple tempo relationships whatsoever (Figure 2).

Figures 3-11 present the tempos chosen by the performers and note simple proportions. Alfredo Bernardini employs proportional tempos in only one of the three concertos. The concertos recorded by Malcom Messiter (2) and Stefan Schilli (6) contain proportional tempos in half of their concertos. The real surprise, however, is the astonishing 100% use of proportional tempos in the six concertos performed by Hansjörg Schellenberger. Not only does every concerto contain a proportional tempo between two movements in each concerto, but two concertos contain more than one proportional tempo (Figures 10 and 11).[3] This consistent use of proportional tempos between movements gives evidence to either careful consideration by Mr. Schellenberger or an acute subconscious sensitivity to the multi-movement compositions.

DISCOGRAPHY

Antonio Vivaldi: Concerti pour hautbois, basson et cordes (1995). Alfredo Bernardini, oboe; l'armonia e L'inventione. Astrée Auvidis E8537.

Baroque Oboe Concertos (1990). Malcolm Messiter, oboe; Guildhall String ensemble. RCA Victor 60224-2-RC.

Vivaldi Oboe Concertos (1995). Hansjörg Schellenberger, oboe; Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra. Sony Classical SK 66271

Vivaldi Oboe Concerti, Vol. 2 (1993). Stefan Schilli, oboe; Failoni chamber Orchestra. Naxos 8.550860.

END NOTES

1. Terry B. Ewell, "Proportional Tempos in the Concertos of Antonio Vivaldi," The Double Reed 24'2 (2001): 113-121

2. Todd Goranson, "The Bassoon Concertos of Antonio Vivaldi: A Survey of Performance Tempos and Proportional Relationships," The Double Reed 24'2 (2001): 122-132.

3. The proportional relationship between Allegro and Adagio in figure 11 exceeds the 4% criteria, but if the tempo was less free in the Adagio the proportions might be closer.

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Mvt.	Barrel/Pc.	Meter	Tempo (in words)	Malloch's Tempos	Relation
I	11-1	2/2	Allegro	𝅗𝅥 =66	
II	11-2	2/2	Adagio	♩ =48 (♩ =50?)	1:3 Δ3.8%
III	11-3	12/8	Adagio	♩. =156	

Fig. 1. Vivaldi's *Concerto in Bb Major for Oboe, Strings, and Cembalo* (F. VII, no.14; P. 331).

Mvt.	Barrel/Pc.	Meter	Tempo (in words)	Malloch's Tempos	Relation
I	11-1	2/2	Allegro	𝅗𝅥 =62	No appreciable relationships
II	11-2	C	Adagio	♩ =35	
III	11-3	3/8	Adagio	♩. =75	

Fig. 2. Vivaldi's *Concerto in Bb Major for Oboe, Strings, and Cembalo* (F. VII, no. 15; P. 334).

Mvt	Indication	Messiter recording	Relation
I	Allegro 3/4	♩ = 120	No appreciable relationships
II	*Largo* 4/4	♪ = 50	
III	*Allegro* 4/4	♩ = 126	

Fig. 3. F. VIII, no. 1; RV 554.

Mvt	Indication	Bernardini recording	Relation	Schilli recording	Relation
I	*Allegro guisto* 3/4	♩ = 126	No appreciable relationships	♩ = 132	2:1
II	*Grave* 4/4	♪ = 66		♪ = 66	
III	*Allegro* 12/8	♩. = 138		♩. = 132	1:2

Fig. 4. F. VIII, no. 2; RV 455.

Mvt	Indication	Schellenberger recording	Relation	Schilli recording	Relation
I	*Allegro molto* 4/4	♩ = 120	3:2	♩ = 120	No appreciable relationships
II	*Largo* 4/4	♪ = 80		♪ = 84	
III	*Allegro* 4/4	♩ = 90		♩ = 92	

Fig. 5. F. VIII, no. 4; RV 451.

Mvt	Indication	Messiter recording	Relation	Schilli recording	Relation
I	*Allegro non molto* 4/4	♩ = 92	3:2 △1%	♩ = 92	3:2 △ 4%
II	*Larghetto* 4/4	♪ = 60		♪ = 64	
III	*Minuetto* 3/8	♪ = 152 ♪ = 138 (minor section)		♪ = 156 ♪ = 132 (minor section)	

Fig. 6. F. VIII, no. 6; RV 447.

Mvt	Indication	Bernardini recording	Relation
I	*Allegro* 4/4	♩ = 112	No appreciable relationships
II	*Largo* 4/4	♪ = 72	
III	*Allegro* 12/8	♩. = 134	

Fig. 7. F. VIII, no. 10; RV 453

Mvt	Indication	Schellenberger recording	Relation
I	*Allegro molto* 4/4	♩ = 132	1:1
II	*Larghetto* 3/8	♪ = 42	
III	*Allegro* 3/4	♩ = 132	

Fig. 8. F. VIII, no. 11; RV 450

Mvt	Indication	Schellenberger recording	Relation	Schilli recording	Relation
I	*Allegro non molto* 4/4	♩ = 96		♩ = 84	No appreciable relationships
II	*Andante* 3/4	♩ = 104	1:1 △3.8%	♩ = 92	
III	*Allegro molto* 2/4	♩ = 108		♩ = 108	

Fig. 9. F. VIII, no. 12; RV 457.

Mvt	Indication	Bernar-dini recording	Relation	Schellen-berger recording	Relation	Schilli recording	Relation
I	Allegro 4/4	♩ = 112	◄	♩ = 116	◄ 2:1	♩ = 116	◄
II	Largo 4/4	♪ = 63	1:1 Δ3.6%	♪ = 58	◄	♪ = 70	1:1
III	Allegro 4/4	♩ = 116	◄	♩ = 120	◄ 1:2 Δ3.4%	♩ = 116	◄

Fig. 10. F. VIII, no. 13; RV 463.

Mvt	Indication	Schellenberger recording	Relation 1	Relation 2
I	Largo 3/4	♩ = 56		◄
II	Allegro 2/4 Adagio	♩ = 138 ♪ = 96 (free)	◄ 3:2 Δ4.3%	2:3 Δ2.4%
III	Presto 3/8	♩. =82		◄

Fig. 11. F. VIII, no. 16; RV 456

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