



The Sounds of Venice: Interpreti Veneziani

by [Brenda Murphy](#)



The Ensemble

It's hard to explain why the Interpreti Veneziani are so extraordinary, except to say that they're a perfect marriage of virtuosic individual talent and intense ensemble cohesion. If the group had a conductor, it would not be so. As it is, anyone privileged to have heard them in Venice or anywhere else in the world has had an unforgettable musical experience.

That is not to say that the Interpreti Veneziani are the only string ensemble playing in Venice; there are many. But this group stands out.



Formed in 1987 and comprising nine members — 5 violinists, violist, cellist, bassist, and harpsichordist — the Interpreti Veneziani play over 300 concerts to approximately 70,000 listeners each year, most of them in the Chiesa San Vidal, a church where Vivaldi himself often played. The group's repertoire includes not only an impressive number of works by Vivaldi and other Venetian composers, but also pieces by composers such as Bach, Mozart, Sarasate, Saint-Saens, and Bartok — all played with consummate virtuosity, sensitivity, and humor.

The Music

In the course of a typical concert, individual members are highlighted as soloists in particular pieces. As one musician steps forward, the others rearrange themselves to support him (or her). To the delight of audiences, each has his own distinctive sound and personal performance style.

A perfect example is the solo performances in *Le Quattro Stagioni* (Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*) on November 5th in Troy NY. In the first concerto, *La Primavera* (Spring), soloist Paolo Ciociola played with a dignified delicacy and purity, while Sebastiano Maria Vianello's performance in the second concerto, *L'Estate* (Summer), was both humorous and furiously energetic. In the third concerto, *L'Autunno* (Autumn), Pietro Talamini displayed a range of musical emotion from pensive to forceful. Then, to top it off, Giuliano Fontanella's inspired interpretation of the last concerto, *L'Inverno* (Winter), made the listener feel as well as hear the shivery cold of winter and the cracking of ice underfoot.

It should be noted that the spirit of invention in classical music performance was probably most alive during the baroque period, when musicians were expected to improvise freely on the composer's score. The figured bass in baroque scores is certainly evidence of that practice, as the interpreter could do as he pleased with the given harmony (within reason, of course).

When asked about his reading of the figured bass in *Le Quattro Stagioni*, for instance, harpsichordist Paolo Cognolato says he varies his realization at each performance, according to the soloist's interpretation and mood. Decisions as to pace, tempo, and dynamics are all up to the soloist and the moment, the result being the essence of live performance, unique and unrepeatable.

Expressing much the same sentiment, violinist Nicola Granillo says that each of his performances is characterized by a "mix" of three elements, body, mind, and soul, in varying proportions depending on what's happening at any given time. He says it's as though the music is a stream flowing by and, as he takes a drink from it, it becomes part of him, flowing through and from him. For example, Granillo's performance of the introductory section of Sarasate's *Introduction and Tarantella* is an intensely cerebral experience which then gives way to a breathtakingly virtuosic and joyous allegro.

In rehearsal it's interesting to see how the group interacts. Often, a senior member such as Paolo Ciociola or Giuliano Fontanello will suggest a particular phrasing or dynamic, resulting in a brief discussion and then consensus. There never seems to be disagreement.

Several of the selections played by the Interpreti Veneziani in concert (and on the most recent of their 18 CDs) are orchestrations by Cognolato or Granillo – for example, Granillo's brilliantly dynamic arrangement of the Fandango from Boccherini's 4th Guitar Quintet (G. 448), and Cognolato's perfectly balanced arrangement of the Fugue from Bach's well-known Toccata & Fugue (BWV 565). Demonstrating a probable generational shift, Granillo works with the Finale software while Cognolato prefers to write his arrangements by hand.

On Tour

The Interpreti Veneziani are normally to be found playing their music in the Chiesa San Vidal in Venice, except when the group is on their annual tour.

As they performed in various countries on this year's six-week tour of the Americas, other members of the ensemble continued to play in Venice. In the course of the tour, some members went home and others came from Venice to replace them.

Being on tour is both exciting and a challenge, says bassist Angelo Liziero. As traveling orchestra musicians all know, the bass and the cello, because of their size, have to be handled as cargo on flights, meaning that they travel in the unheated belly of the plane. Consequently, Liziero and cellist Nazzareno Balduin cannot bring their best instruments on tour. Even the violinists must leave their most delicate instruments at home, as changes in temperature, humidity, and air pressure can be damaging. As for the harpsichord, Cognolato must play on a different instrument at each stop, whatever the concert venue can provide.

Returning to Venice in mid-November, the ensemble continues to perform on their home turf, in the Chiesa San Vidal, where visitors can experience the beauty and passion of the music produced by this unique ensemble. What could be better than Venetian music played by Venetians!

For more information on the Interpreti Veneziani and their CDs, visit their [website](#).

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