



Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 22nd October at 7:00pm

Primavera

Cert 15 111mins Italy 2025

Director; Damiano Michieletto

Stars; Michele Riondino, Teca Insolia, Andrea Pennacchi

Set in 18th-century Venice at the Ospedale della Pietà orphanage, the film follows talented young violinist Cecilia (Teca Insolia) as she meets her new music instructor, Antonio Vivaldi (Michele Riondino), and finds the courage to break free from her predetermined fate through his mentorship and music



The *Ospedale della Pietà* was a convent, orphanage, and music school in Venice. Like other Venetian *ospedali*, the Pietà was first established as a hospice for the needy. A group of Venetian nuns, called the Consorelle di Santa Maria dell'Umiltà, established this charitable institution for orphans and abandoned girls in the fourteenth century.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Pietà – along with the three other charitable Ospedali Grandi – was well known for its all-female musical ensembles that attracted tourists and patrons from around Europe.

Its fame is largely connected to its resident composer and violin teacher Antonio Vivaldi, who was also a Catholic priest.

Vivaldi was appointed a violin teacher in 1703 and served in various roles through 1715, and again from 1723 to 1740. Much of Vivaldi's sacred vocal and instrumental music was written for performance at the Pietà.

Vivaldi wrote huge numbers of works, both orchestral and choral, including many oratorios on religious themes, almost all of which would have been performed by the Coro (the girls' choir and orchestra of the Pietà) Opera, however, was another matter. He wrote nearly 50 operas for performances on the public stage, and these, usually based on stories from classical mythology, would not have been considered suitable for these young women to see, let alone perform. However, there is one work, *Il Mopso*, listed amongst his compositions, though completely lost today, which is described as an 'opera' rather than an oratorio (an oratorio being a sung but not acted work, telling a religious story). *Il Mopso* is believed to have been written for, and performed by, the girls on the occasion of a visit of Prince Ferdinand of Bavaria, a who was a Field Marshall in the Imperial Army, to Venice, possibly in 1738 or 9 (dates are difficult, partly because the Venetian year did not follow the same calendar as the rest of Europe.)

In his book *Vivaldi: Genius of the Baroque*, Marc Pincherle wrote that by the 18th century there was "a mania for music" in the Republic. Day and night, Venetians sang in the streets and on the canals, with each guild having its own tune. "There was neither a time nor a place where music was not present." Orphan boys could be put to work from a young age, but what to do with the large numbers of orphan girls? Give them a musical education, the Venetians decided. Teach them instruments. Let them learn how to copy and compose music themselves. The Pietà birthed generations of women with extraordinary musical talent. Women with superstar careers, women who were ambitious and competitive and determined. Women who could not only perform, but create.

Vivaldi, was a remarkable musician and composer who stunned his audiences. "He placed his fingers at a hair's breadth from the bridge so that there was hardly room for the bow," writes an audience member who saw him perform during the Carnival of 1715. "He played thus on all four strings ... at unbelievable speed ... everyone was astonished."

