Bellano, Marco. "Concerto in C Major RV 559." : *Bruno Bozzetto's Animated Music*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 185–192. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501350894.ch-009>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 12:45 UTC.

Copyright © Marco Bellano 2021. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

9

Concerto in C Major RV 559

Description

The music begins. A red stage curtain opens on an idyllic summer landscape in the countryside. The slow panoramic shot transitions to the same landscape in autumn, with a curtain-shaped wipe effect. The same happens with a transition to winter, when all the leaves have fallen from the trees. Snow starts to fall and covers everything with white. Three transitions show different stages of the snow melting down; a new curtain wipe marks the arrival of the spring. Flowers appear on the tree branches; grass grows on the ground, stretching out in synch with the music chords in the slow introduction (Larghetto) of the first movement of Vivaldi's *Concerto*. One after one, all the trees get in full bloom at once. The flowers and their vivid colors appear on the ground. A swift zoom-in focuses on the flower that was the last to appear.

The Allegro section of the movement starts. From the foliage of a flower a funny bee-housewife comes, with a big nose and an apron. With an efficient and content air, she swiftly cleans everything in her reach with a little handheld duster. She takes her apron off and rests it on a petal of a big daisy; she extracts some cutlery from it and, after cleaning that as well, she rests it on another petal. Then she also extracts two glasses; she is actually setting the flower as a table.

A whip pan to the left reveals a car rapidly approaching. It parks on the grass; from a low angle the camera foregrounds a tire and a leg of a man coming out of the vehicle and stepping on a flower.

The bee keeps on with her preparation. She flits about and brings a stool to the flower, while continuing with her unstoppable dusting.

A man and a woman playfully run on the grass; we just see their legs. The man is pulling the arm of the woman, inviting her to come with him; she removes her shoes while the man impatiently taps his foot on the ground.

The bee prepares her meal. She grinds, shakes, grates, and slices: her side dish is now ready on a plate. She flutters toward the flower and decks it; she is not content with her first arrangement, though, so she changes it fast. Then, she goes to retrieve a small TV that she rests opposite to her sitting place at the “table.” She dusts some more, and then she puts some seasoning on the yellow seeds of the flower. She licks her lips in anticipation; the seeds seem to release some kind of aroma.

However, a shadow appears over her. A black handkerchief covers the bee and the flower, soon followed by a foulard. The bee emerges from underneath, with a huffy countenance. She pulls the fabric away to reveal that her flower has gotten completely disarranged. She is angry, but then she gets a sudden scare; she sees that the man letting himself falling seated to the ground nearby. Everything gets shaken.

The bee puts on glasses and disconcertedly looks at the woman getting seated on the ground as well. The two humans rest their hands on the grass, side by side. The man moves his fingers in a walking motion toward the hand of the woman. He touches her; they hold hand under the horrified gaze of the bee. They get closer and embrace each other. Their shadows gradually fall over the bee and cover the sun. In the dark, the insect has to fetch an abat-jour and light it near the table, to be able to see again. She rearranges the table, checks a glass, and cleans it with a rag. She is ready to have lunch again; she prepares the cutlery and casts a worried glance to the humans. Everything seems quiet, though, so she takes a forkful of seeds from the flower. However, she cannot bring it to her mouth.

The humans, whose face profiles are now visible, exchange a kiss on the lips. They hug and lie down, right on the bee who barely manages to collect all her things and scramble to safety. Quite upset, she fixes her “hair” and sets a new flower up like a table. She puts some oil on the seed to season them and smugly grins toward the humans. However, in horror, she sees that they are now rolling on the grass toward her while embracing. She desperately picks up her things again, but she has to throw them away, as they are coming too fast. The human beings finally end up on top of her.

The music ends and the sound of bird singing fades in. The two lovers are now laying on the ground. But the peace gets violently broken: the man tenses up and jumps in the air, giving out a loud shout. The bee has stung him. The shout is still going on when the film cuts to the conductor from the live-action interstitial, who has just gotten stung by the same bee.

Program Notes

In popular culture, Antonio Vivaldi is synonym with *Le Quattro Stagioni* (*The Four Seasons*), the first four concertos for violin, solo strings, and basso continuo from the series of twelve *Il Cimento dell’Armonia e dell’Invenzione*

(*The Contest between Harmony and Invention*, 1723–5). They are among the best-known pieces from the “classical” repertoire; their presence in the contemporary musical landscape is so pervasive that they have even reached the unflattering status of “an ever-present piece of muzak,”¹ as the composer Max Richter puts it. In the twentieth century, the reputation of Vivaldi’s musical originality declined also because of an oft-quoted joke attributed to Luigi Dallapiccola (1904–1975) and Igor Stravinsky, according to which the only thing Vivaldi had ever accomplished was to write four hundred times the same concerto. However, it seems that neither Dallapiccola nor Stravinsky ever said that; the only documented remark that comes close to it appears in the book by Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*: “Vivaldi is greatly overrated—a dull fellow who could compose the same form so many times over.”² Such opinions are not shared by the most recent scholarship on the author, which holds Vivaldi as one of the most creative authors who voiced the musical idiom of the late Italian Baroque: as the musicologist Bella Brover-Lubovsky wrote in 2008, for example, “Vivaldi regularly displays stunning imagination in creating shades of dramatic feeling through a masterful exploitation of major and minor keys within a single work.”³

Bozzetto’s interpretation of the first movement from the *Concerto in C Major RV 559* seems to acknowledge the common parlance on Vivaldi and his music, even though in a matter-of-fact way, far from being derisory. The point is made by using a “four seasons” visual theme on a concerto that is not part of those staples of Vivaldi’s repertoire; this basically implies that Vivaldi cannot be separated from *The Four Seasons*, and that any music of his could stand in for those famous concertos. To be honest, a recurring motif from the *Allegro* section of the concerto movement picked by Bozzetto sounds identical in melody and rhythm to one of the hallmarks of the first movement of *The Spring* from *The Four Seasons*: the motif made up by the notes G-A-G, which insistently wraps up the first thematic idea. The parallel extends even slightly beyond that: in the *Concerto RV 559*, the notes that immediately precede the G-A-G clause are different in pitch from the equivalent ones in *The Spring*, but their harmonic function is identical to those in the other concert. The coincidence was perhaps noticed by Bozzetto, as he ostentatiously set the story on a spring day. The bee’s

¹Max Richter in uDiscover Team, “I Fell In Love With The Original Again”: Max Richter on Recomposing Vivaldi’s Four Seasons,” uDiscovermusic, August 31, 2019, <https://www.udiscovermusic.com/classical-features/max-richter-recomposed-vivaldi-four-seasons/> (accessed November 28, 2019).

²Igor Stravinsky in Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 84.

³Bella Brover-Lubovsky, *Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008), 101.

fixation with dusting, moreover, could be intended to convey the idea of “spring cleaning.”

While playing with the Vivaldi prejudices by summarizing the seasonal cycle in a series of countryside views from summer to spring, Bozzetto simultaneously treats the audience with one of the rare *Allegro non troppo* explicit visual references to *Fantasia* (the other ones appear in the *Boléro*; see Part Two, Chapter 7). The short film begins with the view of a proscenium; its curtain then opens on an open-air scenery. The outline of the opening curtain becomes a graphic pattern for wipe effects in scene transitions. The *Dance of the Hours* short from *Fantasia* equally used the proscenium and curtain motif to introduce the action, which then continues among architectonic elements that allude to a theatrical stage. In the Disney film, however, the proscenium is not seen in its entirety: the camera frames the rising curtain only, after having traveled through heavy doors and a tall columned hall. Those elements are a likely attempt at substantiating the introduction by Deems Taylor, who concluded his speech by mentioning that the original ballet from the opera *La Gioconda* took place during a party hosted by the duke Alvisio Badoero in the hall of a Venetian palace (the Ca’ d’Oro); anyway, no resemblance exists between the hall in the *Dance of the Hours* and that of the actual Italian palace. In Bozzetto’s case, even though the camera similarly moves toward the curtain, the proscenium is visible (but it depicts no real place, being quite abstract and brightly colored). The *Fantasia* quotation stays here not only in the opening curtain but also in the connective function it has in respect to the content of the live-action interstitials; it is not making an allusion to the narrative setting of the music, like in the case of Taylor’s introduction, but it instates a thematic continuity with the main location of *Allegro non troppo*, which is precisely a theater, the Donizetti in Bergamo. Moreover, just before the beginning of the short, the host repeatedly (and awkwardly) calls “curtain!” to mark the beginning of the piece.

Another parallel with *Fantasia* is that soon after the beginning of the short film the theatrical context is dropped altogether; the space expands well beyond the reasonable limits of a stage, in a flight of fantasy that Robin Allan, in his commentary of the *Dance of the Hours*, connected with visual formulas found in American musicals:

The theatrical setting is emphasized at the beginning, but it quickly becomes apparent that this is too large a stage to be contained within the bounds of a proscenium arch and within an ordinary theatre. Here is a reminder of the Hollywood tradition of the musical number extending beyond the theatre or cabaret setting in which it is placed.⁴

⁴Robin Allan, *Walt Disney and Europe* (London: John Libbey, 1999), 151.

The main role in Bozzetto's *Concerto RV 559* is played by a funny anthropomorphized animal; the female bee, however, is much more stylized and caricatural than the ostriches, the elephants, Hyacinth the Hippo, and the alligators in *Fantasia*. Moreover, the bee is not playing the role of a classic dancer (an archetype that has an arguably timeless quality) but that of an Italian housewife from the 1970s. Her movements are choreographed to the music, with an abundance of minute synchronizations that foreground strong temporal perceptual functions. It is a choreography of obsessive efficiency and practicality, though, and not of transcendent artistic passions. The *Dance of the Hours* was ironic also in this respect, as the graceful moves of the ballerinas were ridiculed by their use in the satisfaction of primal feeding needs. In Bozzetto's case, the bee's choreography tells that she contently controls every single detail of her "domestic" domain through a chain of automated actions. Her final goal is to enjoy a meal while watching TV, but only after having achieved absolute cleanliness and organization in her environment. This stereotype of the overefficient housewife is not new to Italian animation. During the economic boom, many female characters from the "Carosello" commercials were positively presented as resourceful and practical housewives or caregivers. This was to suggest that, by using the advertised products, women would have better dealt with the challenges of a household of the 1960s and the 1970s. This conservative and exacting view of the female role was evident, for example, in the Studio K animated "carosellos" for the Ambrosoli honey drops (1965–72, 1976), which starred a mother of many children who always knew how to step in and fix their mischiefs (and was praised by the children with a jingle that saluted her as a "beautiful, sweet, dear mommy").⁵ Similarly, the "carosellos" for the Bertolini baking powder (1970, 1974–6) by the Studio Marosi presented a little girl named Mariarosa, who lived in a tidy small house, was a good cook, and was always ready to come help. A small marching band of children celebrated her inevitable success with a "brava, brava, Mariarosa" song.

The twist in Bozzetto's story, the arrival of an unexpected, uncontrollable external force in the form of a gigantic (from the bee's perspective) couple of humans in love, feels like an allegory of the rupture in the falsely safe life models that occurred to the 1970s Italian society (see Part One, Chapter 2). The bee's attempts at regaining control of her environment are all frustrated; she tries to readjust her plans, but she cannot flee the impending menace. It is likely not by chance that the threat comes from two people engaging in a rather innocent leisurely activity that should be supposed to vehicle positive feelings: a young couple enjoying their free time. This couple, though, is barely positive at all. They cast ominous shadows over the idyllic landscape. They seem completely alien to it, also because they are rotoscoped: their

⁵"Bella, dolce, cara mamma."

movements, unlikely those of the bee, are traced from a live-action performance by Guido Manuli and a female student from the acting school “QuellidiGrock.”⁶ They show no respect for the life of plants and animals. They act as if they are entitled to that place. In this, they might embody the sense of entitlement that many Italians developed during the economic boom in respect to leisure time, as it got largely commodified and made into a status symbol (see Part One, Chapter 2). The presence of an extravagant-looking car just reinforces this feeling, as well as the hint at stereotyped social roles in the attitude of the man, who gets ostentatiously impatient at the woman when she decides to take off her shoes. The tale of the bee and the couple might thus be Bozzetto’s way to represent how the carefree years of the economic boom took a toll on the Italian social development. The old, crystallized ideals of richness and social order collapse over themselves, unable to coexist anymore; the entertainment of a well-to-do, conventional couple crushes the domestic efficiency. In the end, though, the bee goes apparently out of character, as she abandons the idea of sorting up the domestic chaos, and instead resorts to a weapon she had always had on her body, but that she had never used. The bee stings; the man finally becomes aware of her, and in the most painful way. In the 1970s, the struggle of Italian women for a proactive role in a patriarchal society started to raise awareness and controversies (see Part One, Chapter 2). The final resolution of Bozzetto’s bee might be a funny way to represent the shocked reaction of the old mores to the puncture in carefree security imparted by one of the trusted pillars of society, the good housewife.

As already mentioned, the audiovisual workings of the *Concerto RV 559* episode are mostly at the service of temporal perceptual functions that also appear in connection with the fast camera movements inherent to Bozzetto’s directing style. This makes the tone of the episode light, and the pacing fast. The usual care for making the editing correspond to the phrasing of the music is present and thoroughly developed. The dynamic attitude of the music–image relationship is also instated by spatial perceptual functions that make here their debut in *Allegro non troppo*. Those are instances where the music reinforces the motion on screen without close synchronies. This happens, for example, when the two lovers roll in the grass down the hill: the music is there playing a descending progression. Finally, there is also an elegant coincidence between the *solo* and *tutti* alternance typical of the Baroque concerto (the soloists and the whole orchestral ensemble take turns, creating a typical “terraced” pattern of symmetrical soft “proposals” and loud “answers”). At first, the soloists are reserved to the small bee, while

⁶Bozzetto in in the documentary “Ricordando *Allegro non troppo*,” in the *Allegro non troppo* DVD, part of the DVD collection “Tutto Bozzetto (o quasi)” (Roma: Multimedia San Paolo, 2005).

the whole orchestra enters with the towering humans. This *compositional motivation*, which makes the sound of the solos almost a leitmotiv for the bee, is however later abandoned. The solo and tutti get freely associated with the characters, so as to allow a more tightly knitted mickey-mousing that enhances the growing frenzy.