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In the early Baroque period Italian composers applied the terms sonata, concerto and sinfonia rather indiscriminately to their instrumental works. The Northern Italian city states, such as Bologna and subsequently Rome, were the most important centres for the development of two forms which we now classify much more distinctly as, firstly, the sonata and, secondly, the concerto. The earliest form of instrumental concerto, emerging during the second half of the 17th century, was the concerto grosso, in which a small group of string players (usually three, called the concertino) contrasted with a larger body or small orchestra (ripieno). An offshoot of this form was the solo concerto, in which one soloist (sometimes two or more) would be accompanied by an orchestra. Originally no more than a variant of the concerto grosso, the solo concerto eventually became established as an important genre in its own right, one which still flourishes – in diverse shapes and sizes – more than 300 years later. The term ‘concerto’ has a complicated history and an entire range of associations, but one common principle is that of contrasting – or concerted – forces. The form as we know it today, conventionally in three movements, fast–slow–fast, was first exploited by the many historically important 18th-century composers – including Vivaldi, Telemann, J.S. Bach and his son C.P.E. Bach – while there are hundreds of examples by lesser-known figures.

Whereas Vivaldi’s oboe concertos include many passages influenced by typical violin-writing, those of the Venetian **Tomaso Albinoni** (1671–1750/51) are more vocal in style and more idiomatically suited to the instrument. Of course, Vivaldi was familiar with the instrument’s strengths and limitations, but Albinoni was more considerate of the player’s lung capacity. Although Albinoni composed about 80 operas, he is now chiefly remembered for his instrumental music, but the influence of his operatic works is evident in his concerto slow movements. As long ago as 1959 Arthur Hutchings (in *The Baroque Concerto*) described Albinoni as ‘ridiculously undervalued’. No Baroque composer wrote more memorable oboe concertos, works of joyful vitality which greatly enhance the soloist’s repertoire. His two sets of concertos numbered Opus 7 and Opus 9 include several works for solo oboe or for two oboes.

J.S. Bach’s (1685–1750) six Brandenburg Concertos were described in the first edition as ‘Concerts avec plusieurs instruments’ (Concertos with several instruments), but this modest subtitle gives scarcely a hint of Bach’s extraordinary achievement, the compositional tour de force which these concertos represent. Bach dedicated them to the Margrave of Brandenburg on 24 March 1721, but it is possible that he composed these wonderful concertos over a period of several years while Kapellmeister at Köthen, or even during his earlier period at Weimar. As he was becoming restless

with his position at Köthen, this display of his range as an instrumental composer – his deliberate compilation of works composed at different times – may well have been intended as a disguised application for new employment.

While research has shown that some of Bach’s predecessors and contemporaries (e.g. Telemann) also wrote concertos for unusual combinations, it is difficult to imagine a wider diversity of instrumentation than is displayed in the Brandenburg Concertos. Similarly, Bach’s handling of concerto form is imaginative and unpredictable. The ‘plusieurs instruments’ required for the First Concerto are two horns, three oboes, bassoon, violino piccolo (a small violin tuned higher than the normal instrument), strings and continuo. As horns were hunting instruments associated with the open air, Bach’s use of them in a concert piece performed in an elegant chamber would have startled the earliest audiences. Equally surprising is the way in which the hunting-call figures cut across the rest of the orchestra at the beginning, the triplet rhythm heard in bar two (and subsequently throughout the movement) being totally ‘foreign’ to the opening theme. Bach varies the role of the violino piccolo. Predominant in the Allegro third movement, with its infectious 6/8 dance rhythm, it is then completely silent in the concluding minuet. In this final movement Bach provides a whole sequence of contrasting trio sections – one for oboes and bassoon, the second a polonaise for strings, and the third a vividly rustic section for horns and oboes. In Brandenburg Concerto No.2 Bach contrasts four soloists – trumpet, recorder (flute in some modern performances), oboe and violin. This is the most heterogeneous scoring found in all these concertos, with each of the families of orchestral instruments represented. Brandenburg Concerto No.3 is for strings – three each of violin, viola and cello, accompanied by the usual continuo. In the first movement Bach achieves the maximum variety of texture by regularly changing the three main instrumental roles open to each string player – i.e. as soloist, or partner in dialogue, or part of the accompaniment. The central movement is a curiosity – merely two chords with a pause over the second. Did Bach intend an improvised cadenza? There are several theories but no conclusive answer. Brandenburg Concerto No.4 has three soloists – violin and two ‘fiauti d’echo’, or ‘echo flutes’. In Bach’s general usage the term fiauto, flauto, or other variants, always referred to recorders, but it has been suggested that an instrument called the echo flute (about which little is known) was intended here. In the outer movements the violin has some highly virtuosic passages, whereas in the central Andante the three soloists are treated as equals. Unusually, the violin often provides the bass line below the two recorders. The Fifth Brandenburg

also requires three solo instruments – harpsichord, violin and flute – but its most innovative feature is Bach’s elevation of the harpsichord from its accustomed continuo role (providing harmonic support) to that of soloist. In the central episode of the first movement the increasingly virtuosic writing for the keyboard player culminates in an extraordinary cadenza-like passage which begins in relatively restrained style before overwhelming us with cascades of notes. The generally relaxed character of the finale, comparable to that of the opening movement, extends to the harpsichord part, which is now free from the extravagant technical demands of that first Allegro. This work has often been described as the first keyboard concerto in musical history. In common with the Third Concerto, Brandenburg No.6 is scored for strings, but here another aspect of Bach’s bold originality is evident in the scoring for two violas, two violas da gamba, cello and continuo. Here Bach not only treats the violas soloistically (belying their usual subsidiary role) but also gives easier parts to the gambas – again a surprising contrast with their difficult obbligato parts in two arias from his *St Matthew Passion* and one from the *St John*. Much of the first movement is written in close canon, suggesting an element of competition between the two violas, whereas the slow movement is essentially a lyrical duet for the same instruments and the finale is a gigue.

Bach’s three celebrated concertos for violin are the two solo pieces in E major and A minor and the ‘Double Concerto’ in D minor for two violins. One interesting general feature is the much less virtuosic violin-writing in comparison with his unaccompanied violin music – the sonatas and partitas which he wrote for the greatest contemporary German players. The E major Concerto begins with a theme with three ‘hammer blows’, an opening gambit which Vivaldi often favoured.

The central Adagio, in which the soloist weaves a wonderfully sustained melodic line above an ostinato bass, is followed by a genial, dance-like finale. The A minor Concerto also shows the influence of Vivaldi, a composer whose concerto style Bach greatly admired – even to the extent of transcribing some of his works. However, Bach’s textures and harmony are more elaborate, his structures more flexible and sophisticated. The Double Concerto begins in fugal style, before the soloists – in the first of their solo episodes – introduce a new theme characterised by wide leaps of a tenth. Every new melodic idea is played by each soloist in turn. In the central Largo, one of Bach’s most sublime instrumental movements, the accompaniment is completely subordinated to the unfolding of the soloists’ melodic line. Unlike the more typically dance-like Baroque concerto finale, the final Allegro is restless and urgent, with the orchestra reassuming its former importance. Indeed, in two passages the soloists become accompanists, their repeated chords hammered out against the orchestra’s semiquavers.

While Kantor at St Thomas’s in Leipzig (1723–50) Bach was required to regularly provide sacred works, including cantatas, but from 1729 he also directed the Leipzig collegium musicum, an association consisting of students and musical citizens. To provide the secular works needed for instrumental gatherings in Zimmermann’s coffee-house, Bach returned to concerto form – harpsichord concertos in particular. Rather than compose completely new works, the ever-resourceful Bach adapted concertos he had originally written for other instruments. Musicologists believe that the seven works known today as Bach’s concertos for solo harpsichord were initially composed as violin or oboe concertos. The D minor and G minor Concertos for violin recorded here are reconstructions of what may well have been Bach’s original scoring.

Each of Bach’s four Orchestral Suites opens with the traditional French overture and continues with a group of dances but, after the relatively conventional First Suite, the Suite No.2 features a solo transverse flute and includes a Polonaise and a final Badinerie – both less common. The Badinerie provides a brilliant conclusion. Suite No.3 is the best-known, the famous Air being among the most widely popular pieces of Baroque music. Both the Third and Fourth Suites include oboes, trumpets and timpani, the latter concluding, like Handel’s *Fireworks Music*, with a Réjouissance. With these four works Bach elevated the orchestral suite to a new level.

Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) published his 12 Concerti grossi Op.6 in 1714. These were regarded as consummate examples of the concerto grosso genre, so much so that composers would advertise their debt to Corelli’s model. Handel’s 12 Concerti grossi Op.6 are more wide-ranging, dramatic and adventurous than Corelli’s, but we should remember the characteristic qualities for which Corelli’s concertos were so admired. They are musically satisfying because their intrinsic variety is combined with clarity, elegance and an impeccable sense of proportion. They were perfect models because of their general restraint and avoidance of extravagance. No.8 in G minor is the popular *Christmas Concerto*, but none of this deeply rewarding set should be overlooked. In the last concerto the prominence which Corelli gives to the first violin anticipates the evolution of the solo concerto.

François Couperin (1668–1733), often known as ‘Couperin le Grand’ to distinguish him from other members of a musical family, lived in Paris from birth to death. Two genres in which Couperin excelled were the Ordre and the Concert, both equivalent to the suite and each consisting of a sequence of short pieces. His *Sonades* [sic] *et Suites de Simphonies* [sic] *en Trio* comprise numerous brief movements, except for the occasional concluding passacaglia or chaconne which are more substantial. One aspect of Couperin’s importance as a major composer of the French Baroque is his pioneering of such ‘character pieces’, while he also significantly contributed to the integration and combination of the French and Italian styles.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) composed his *Water Music* some time after the arrival of King George I, who landed in Greenwich on September 18, 1714. According to popular legend, the German Handel had obtained permission from the Elector of Hanover to visit England, but stayed far longer than was intended. The Elector, in his new role as king of Great Britain and Ireland, was naturally displeased at Handel's prolonged absence, but he loved Handel's music, so the composer saw a way to regain favour. The legend suggests that the King was persuaded to form a boat party on the Thames. Handel quietly prepared music for the occasion, and in the event the King was surprised and delighted. In fact the only firm evidence shows a boat trip dating from two years later, in 1717. Further royal trips down the river were enjoyed (in 1736, for example), during which further music was performed. Thus the complete *Water Music* as we know it – about 20 movements in all – is probably a compilation of music used on different occasions.

When the peace treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) ended the War of the Austrian Succession, elaborate victory celebrations were planned. King George II commissioned Handel to compose the music for a spectacular firework display in Green Park, planned for April 1749. The *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, like the *Water Music*, belongs to what was originally a French tradition of outdoor music composed to accompany royal banquets and water parties at Versailles. King George II asked Handel to write for 'warlike instruments' – only brass, woodwind and percussion – but Handel's preference for the inclusion of strings eventually prevailed. As ever, Handel manages to appeal to popular taste without any sacrifice of dignity or cheapening of his style. The *Music for the Royal Fireworks* begins with the traditional French Overture, the remainder of the work consisting of much shorter dance movements. Among these is the rousing 'La Réjouissance' ('Rejoicing' – a rather uncommon title also used by Bach for the last movement of his Fourth Orchestral Suite). A strongly contrasting pair of minuets concludes this marvellous example of Handel's most festive style.

Handel is generally credited with the invention of the organ concerto, a genre closely connected with another of his innovations, the English oratorio. When the vogue for Italian opera began to wane, Handel developed this new type of choral work as well as the practice of playing organ concertos during the intervals. In this way he compensated the public taste for virtuosity, a quality lacking from the new oratorio genre. His performances actually became a major selling-point, as the words 'With a Concerto on the Organ', often included in advertisements from 1735 onwards, indicate. Handel's organ concertos, about 20 in total, include two groups of six published as Opus 4 and Opus 7 respectively. Of the Opus 4 set, published in 1738, the most popular is No.2 in B flat major, but these are all attractive works and not merely of ground-breaking historical interest.

Born in Bergamo, **Pietro Locatelli** (1695–1764) lived in Amsterdam from 1729 until his death. He chose the career of a travelling virtuoso, while his music became a major influence on violin technique. Judging from contemporary accounts, the description 'the Paganini of the 18th century' is apt. Of the four concerti grossi recorded here – from his 1741 publication Opus 7 – No.4, for example, has a finale with lively violin-writing, but for serious virtuosity we must turn to the outer movements of his 12 Violin Concertos Op.3 (*L'arte del violino*). These include solo passages – capricci – written for his own virtuoso performance and marked *ad libitum* to excuse those of more modest ability.

The modest output of the Venetian nobleman and dilettante **Alessandro Marcello** (1673–1747), brother of the better-known Benedetto, includes several sets of concertos. One group of six, titled *La cetra* (The Lyre), is notable for the inclusion of solo wind parts (oboes or flutes). In these characterful concertos Marcello avoids other composers' models, while his occasional favouring of dark or turbulent moods marks him as a romantic. His fine Oboe Concerto in D minor was admired by Bach, who transcribed the work for solo keyboard.

The fantasia consisted of a number of short sections in contrasting tempos, creating an impression of spontaneity or improvisation. When **Henry Purcell** (1659–1695) composed his dozen or so examples (probably 1679–1680), the form was already outmoded. In domestic music-making the viol consort had been superseded by the violin family, yet Purcell chose to write for the old-fashioned group of viols. In these remarkable works, both deeply expressive and often dramatic in their use of chromaticism and unpredictable harmony, he shows every possible kind of contrapuntal mastery.

The brothers **Giuseppe Sammartini** (1695–1750) and **Giovanni Battista Sammartini** (c.1700–1775) were born in Milan. Giuseppe, who spent much of his life in London, was the finest oboist of his day. Many of his works include the recorder or flute, both of which he played extremely well. The Recorder Concerto in F major is his most popular work. The younger Giovanni Battista is best known for his contribution to the early development of the symphony, while he also composed over 50 sonatas. His generally more forward-looking music reflects the change from the baroque idiom to the newer galant style. The compositions of the two Sammartini brothers were commonly misattributed between them in their own day, but modern scholarship has allowed us much better judgement of their relative merits.

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725) was the father of Domenico, a composer who has now overshadowed him on account of his several hundred keyboard sonatas. However, in his day Alessandro established a fine reputation, only to subsequently fall upon financial hardship and a decline in popularity. Of his last decade Donald Jay Grout has written: 'He may have felt unwilling,

or unable, to adapt his style to the rising fashion for livelier, simpler, more superficially cheerful operatic music. He was subsiding into the status of an old master, admired and respected but unable to compete with younger composers in meeting new demands.' Today his importance in the development of both opera and cantata is more appreciated. His *12 Sinfonie di concerto grosso* (published 1715) are scored either for different combinations of concertante instruments or for recorder and strings. One likely reason why the 55-year-old Scarlatti decided to turn to instrumental music was his need for greater income at a time of financial insecurity.

Born in Bologna, **Alessandro Stradella** (1639–1682) belonged to an aristocratic family. His succession of reckless love affairs culminated in his vengeful and fatal stabbing by a rival. He was probably the first composer to clearly indicate, in his operas and cantatas, a reduction in forces during a passage for a solo singer. Probably this was already common practice but Stradella actually used the terms 'concerto grosso' – large ensemble – and 'concertino' – small ensemble. From this grew the earliest kind of instrumental concerto, the concerto grosso, in which passages for a solo group of two violins and cello (the concertino) contrasted with the full string ensemble (concerto grosso). Stradella's string sinfonias, some of them initially intended as overtures to large-scale vocal works, are notable for their originality, daring harmonic tendencies and unpredictable mood changes, marking him as a natural man of the theatre. There has been a great and fully justified revival of interest in his compelling music.

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767), one of most prolific composers of any period, wrote concertos for many instruments and instrumental combinations. There are recorder parts in numerous works, either in a solo role (as in the concertos included here) or within the orchestra. Generally his treatment of the instrument is much more ambitious than the conventional mode – naively pastoral or lamenting – typical of so much Baroque recorder music. Scholars have suggested that the 'flûte pastorelle' cited for the Suite in E flat major TWV55:Es2 may well have been a recorder. The Suite in A minor TWV55:a2 for recorder and strings is a thoroughly delightful piece ending with a Polonaise, reflecting the composer's first-hand experience of (and affection for) Polish folk music. Showing an advanced understanding of the recorder's capability, Telemann superbly exploits both its expressive potential – in such movements as the Affettuoso which begins the Concerto in F TWV51:F1 – and its virtuosic capacity – in the following Allegro.

Wherever Telemann went – he held successive positions at Leipzig, Sorau (now Żary), Eisenach, Frankfurt, Dresden and Hamburg – he made a significant impact on musical life by establishing performing ensembles or by printing and distributing his works. As an illustration of his wide reputation, his publication of *Musique de table* (or *Tafelmusik*) in 1733 attracted more than 50 personal subscriptions from abroad. (Handel was another subscriber.) The successive publications (or 'productions') of *Tafelmusik* included both orchestral and chamber works. Works recorded here include the splendid Suite in D major (with solo trumpet and oboe) from the Second Production and the no less impressive Concerto in F for three violins.

Regarding Telemann and the oboe, Bruce Haynes has commented: '...it is clear that he had a particular fondness for the instrument'. He composed about a thousand cantatas, many of which include obbligato parts for oboe, while there are also dozens of trios and at least ten oboe concertos, although others may have been lost. In these fine concertos the vitality and invention of the allegros contrast with the eloquence of the slower movements. His Oboe d'amore Concerto in A major, beginning with a Siciliano, is one of at least three which he composed for that instrument.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) wrote hundreds of concertos for various instruments. His Opus 8, *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione* (usually translated as *The Contest between Harmony and Invention* or sometimes *Bold Experiments with Harmony and Invention*), is a set of twelve works for solo violin of which the first four are known as *The Four Seasons*. This vividly pictorial set has become the most popular of all Baroque works, but the remaining eight concertos from Opus 8, as well as most of his other 200 or so violin concertos, are unjustly neglected.

Vivaldi regularly composed concertos for his gifted pupils at the Venetian girls' orphanage Ospedale della Pietà, where he worked as a violin teacher and, later, as *maestro dei concerti*. However, it is possible that he wrote his oboe concertos for the German Johann Christian Richter, who visited Venice as a member of Prince Frederick Augustus of Saxony's entourage.

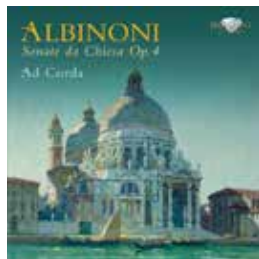
The indefatigable Vivaldi included nearly 30 cello concertos and six cello sonatas in his vast output. Typically inventive and diverse, the concertos are probably the very first composed for the cello but, belying their historical position as examples of the genre in its infancy, the majority are mature works with adventurous solo parts. Michael Talbot has noted that these cello works (similarly the bassoon concertos) possess a melancholy eloquence rarely found in Vivaldi's music. He composed some of these concertos for his talented girls at the Pietà, while others were commissioned by cellists visiting from various parts of Europe.

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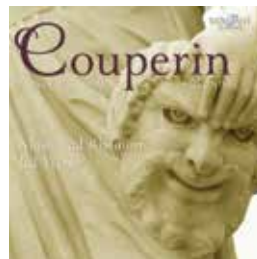
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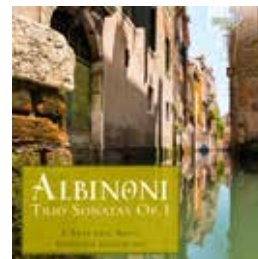
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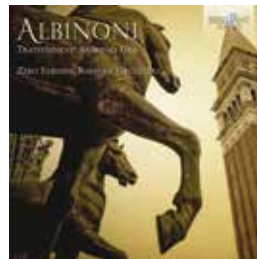
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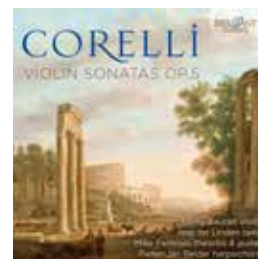
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