

Johann Sebastian Bach

The Two Violin Concertos
Double Concerto
Concerto for Violin and Oboe

Vesko Eschkenazy violin

Tjeerd Top violin

Alexei Ogrintchouk oboe

Concertgebouw
Chamber Orchestra

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto in D minor, BWV 1043 for two violins, strings and continuo

1	Vivace	3. 38
2	Largo, ma non tanto	6. 29
3	Allegro assai	4. 28

Violin Concerto No.1 in A minor, BWV 1041

4	(Allegro moderato)	3.
50		
5	Andante	6. 43
6	Allegro assai	3. 31

Violin Concerto No.2 in E major, BWV 1042

7	Allegro	7. 53
8	Adagio	6. 19
9	Allegro assai	2. 48

Concerto in C minor, BWV 1060

for oboe, violin, strings and continuo

9	Allegro	4. 54
10	Adagio	5. 40
11	Allegro	3. 31

Vesko Eschkenazy Violin

Tjeerd Top – violin (BWV 1043)

Alexei Ogrintchouk – oboe

Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra

Total playing time: 60. 18

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Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra

First violin

Tjeerd Top (*Concertmaster*)

Henriëtte Luytjes

Borika van den Booren

Michael Waterman

Robert Waterman

Second violin

Monica Naselow

Joanna Westers

Herre Halbertsma

Paul Peter Spiering

Viola

Pieter Roosenschoon

Ferdinand Hügel

Eric van der Wel

Cello:

Fred Edelen

Arthur Oomens

Double bass

Olivier Thierry

Harpsichord

Christina Edelen

Bach was director of court music at Weimar, when, in the summer of 1713, he first set eyes on the solo concertos of Vivaldi. It was through the editions of the Amsterdam printer and publisher, Estienne Roger, that he became familiar with these in their time revolutionary compositions. During a journey to the Netherlands, Bach's employer, the young Count Johann Ernst, had purchased the scores in Roger's shop as part of a copious stack of new compositions. Bach's first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, characterises this encounter with Vivaldi as marking a crucial moment in Bach's creative development, and, citing Bach's oldest son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, as his source, goes as far as to assert that it was as a result of it that Bach began to think 'musically.'

Prior to this immersion in Vivaldi, Bach had primarily been oriented toward organ music, following in the footsteps of such composers as Buxtehude and Johann Adam Reincken. But although he had succeeded in enriching their musical styles with an even more refined contrapuntal language and more daring harmonies than they had employed, he nevertheless saw himself as part of a tradition of organists who, not only in their improvisations, but in their written-out works as well, liked to surprise their audience with ever new inventions – which indeed accounts for the capricious character of many organ works from his early period.

Vivaldi, in contrast, had a different strategy for capturing the attention of his public. He, too, built surprise effects, such as colourful contrasts, into his solo concertos, but he also provided aids to the listener, through the repetition of particularly striking passages and through great clarity of design. It was above all in these solo concertos, of which he wrote some 500 whilst in the employ of a Venetian orphanage where, amongst other things, he gave music instruction to girls, that he developed his own unique style. Vivaldi owed his amazing productivity to the

use of fixed schemes. Each concerto consisted of three movements: fast–slow–fast. Passages in 'chamber instrumentation,' featuring a single soloist or small group of soloists, alternated with ones employing the entire ensemble. The first movements were based on the so-called ritornello form, in which the main theme 'returns' a number of times. Further, Vivaldi ensured that the sequence of harmonic modulations in a movement was transparent and gave his themes and other melodic material balanced proportions. It now takes something of a leap of imagination fully to appreciate the significance of this clarity of structure: due to the very fact that it was eventually adopted as the norm for baroque concerto writing, we now tend to take this compositional style for granted, whilst its newness in Vivaldi's own time left listeners virtually dumbstruck.

Bach initially made Vivaldi's compositional methods his own by arranging a number of his concertos for solo organ. And from that moment onward, his own compositions, too, are characterised by a higher degree of thematic equilibrium, as well as a clearer harmonic plan and increased expansiveness and drive. That Bach also wrote original concertos in the new Italian style in this period is quite likely, however, as many of his compositions from the Weimar period have been lost, and none of those that have been preserved is in the concerto form, this cannot be established with certainty.

In 1717, Bach changed working environments, obtaining the position of Capellmeister for the music-loving Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, who spared neither cost nor effort to raise musical standards at his court. When the Prussian king's penury had led to the disbanding of the court orchestra, Leopold brought the cream of Berlin's musicians to his court, and in so doing created an ensemble of the highest order. Bach could not have wished for better conditions to further hone his skills as an instru-

mental composer. Another advantage was that, due to his employer's strict Calvinist creed, he was not required to add oratorios and cantatas to the consciously austere liturgy at the court. In Bach's personal life, as well, things were going well for him: In 1721, he remarried, wedding the court's first soprano, Anna Magdalena Wilcken, who not only looked after the four children from his previous marriage (Bach was a widower), but also proved an indispensable source of support to him as a copyist. It was during his period of employment at Cöthen, upon which Bach would later look back as the happiest time of his life, that several dozens of his instrumental compositions first saw the light of day, including the Brandenburg Concertos, Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and many of the solo works for violin and cello. Until recently, it had been assumed that the concertos included on this CD had been composed at Cöthen, since the ideal conditions there made such a conclusion likely (the works are preserved in copies from a later date, such that these contain no clues as to their correct dating). However, stylistic investigation – including that based on later cantatas in which parts of these concertos were reused – makes it plausible that only the Double Concerto for Violin and Oboe can be assigned to the period. In broad outline, this concerto indeed exhibits great similarities to the solo concertos of Vivaldi. The detailing nevertheless betrays the highly personal touch which Bach gave to the Italian concerto genre, including a higher degree of refinement in the working out of the inner parts and a predilection for more complex vertical structures than his Venetian colleague. Another point of contrast is the fact that whilst Vivaldi attained international fame through

the publication of his compositions, the works of Bach remained for the most part unpublished during his lifetime, with only a few undergoing publication later in his life.

Bach's happiness at Cöthen however began to sour when Prince Leopold married his 19-year-old cousin, in Bach's view, an "amusa" with little interest in music, and an exaggerated devotion to outward show. A new ceremonial palace guard numbering 75 was created, leading to several dismissals amongst the members of the court band. Due to the chillier cultural climate, but also because Bach wished to provide his sons with a university education, which the provincial Cöthen could not supply, in 1723, upon hearing that Leipzig's *Thomaskirche* was searching for a new cantor, he seized the opportunity: he applied for the position and was taken on. The new job was particularly demanding. Not only did he have to compose a new cantata each week, but also had to provide the music for weddings and funerals and now and then even maintain order at the *Thomasschule*, the church's boarding school for young choristers. In rapid succession, he composed some 300 cantatas, as well as such masterworks as the St. Matthew and St. John Passions. Due to the volume of sacred works he had to compose, hardly any time was left for writing purely instrumental works. But the situation changed once the point had been reached where he had composed music for every conceivable moment in the liturgical calendar and increasingly was able to make use of existing compositions. In 1729, there was even room for a new challenge, and in addition to his duties as *Thomascantor*, Bach took on the position of director of Leipzig's Collegium Musicum. Founded by Georg

Philipp Telemann in 1702, this musical association comprised some 40 musicians who, in addition to giving public concerts, also catered for the musical needs of the nobility. At the Collegium's weekly series at Zimmermann's coffeehouse, Bach performed a wide range of works by contemporaries, as well as ones of his own composition. He composed both chamber and solo works especially for the Collegium Musicum, including several solo concertos, three of which (the Double Concerto and two concertos for solo violin) are presented on this CD. In the works composed for Zimmermann's coffeehouse, Bach could not, owing to the informal atmosphere there, place the same high demands on listeners' concentration as in those intended, e.g., for the *Thomaskirche*, and for this reason, generally opted for Vivaldi-inspired ritornelli and exciting contrast effects. Occasionally, though, the works also featured expressive, at times serene, slow movements, permitting us to conclude that the clatter of cups and saucers must have gone silent, now and then.

The more musically versed amongst Bach's audience (as well as Bach himself), will have been pleased with the countless sublime inventions in these concertos (such as the splendid fugato in the first movement of the Double Concerto), as are we, who are able to listen over and over to them on such CDs as this. He created solo concertos one never tires of – thanks in part to Antonio Vivaldi.

Dimitri van der Werf

Translation: Nicholas Lakides

