

BMC 4 *A Baroque Concert* featuring *Orchestral Works* by Corelli, Vivaldi, Geminiani, Torelli & Handel

Arcangelo Corelli exercised a wide influence on his contemporaries and on the succeeding generation of composers including Vivaldi, Geminiani and Handel represented on this disc. He was one of the “Founding Fathers” of Baroque music, having been called the Founder of Modern Violin Technique, the World's First Great Violinist, and the Father of the Concerto Grosso.

Born in Fusignano, Italy, in 1653, he studied in Bologna, moving to Rome in the 1670s where he was sponsored by a succession of influential patrons. A brilliant violinist, he organized the basic elements of violin technique, and made concert tours throughout Europe. Equally famous as a composer, his music was likewise known and performed in all the major European musical centers. His influence both on his students and on the Baroque music repertoire is illustrated by the fact that one of his students, Geminiani, re-arranged his Opus 5 Sonatas as Concerti Grossi – one of which appears later on this CD.

His popularizing of the *concerto grosso* form provided the model for those of Vivaldi, Geminiani, Handel, and many others not represented on this CD. The Opus 6 Concertos seem to have been among the composer's favorite compositions for they were frequently re-worked over a long period, and achieved a wide acclaim during his lifetime.

As the English essayist Roger North wrote in about 1726: “*Then came over Corelli's first consort that cleared the ground of all other sorts of musick whatsoever. By degrees the rest of his consorts, and at last the Concertos [Op. 6] came, all of which are to the musitians like the bread of life*”.

We open our Concert appropriately with No. 6 from this Opus 6 set.

Antonio Vivaldi was born in Venice on March 4th, 1678.

Though he wrote many fine and memorable Concertos, such as the *Four Seasons* and the Opus 3 for example, he also wrote many works which sound almost like five-finger exercises for students. And this is precisely what they were. Vivaldi was employed for most of his working life by the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice

Often termed an "orphanage", this Ospedale was in fact a home for the female offspring of noblemen and their numerous dalliances with their mistresses. The Ospedale was thus well endowed by the "anonymous" fathers; its furnishings bordered on the opulent, the young ladies were well looked-after, and the musical standards among the highest in Venice. Many of Vivaldi's Concerti were indeed exercises which he would play with his many talented pupils, whose varied expertise in a wide variety of instruments is born out by Vivaldi's equally varied instrumental repertoire.

The three works here included have been selected to show both the variety, and the influence of Vivaldi's compositions. First, a Concerto from the Opus 3, of which no less than six of the twelve were to be adapted by Bach - No. 8 which can be heard on this Disc for example, was destined to become the Concerto for Solo Organ, BWV 593. This is followed by a Concerto for Mandolin, transporting us to the waterways of Venice with its very typical Venetian sound. The third, is the D minor *Madrigalesco* Concerto, RV 129, which distinguishes itself from the majority in a number of regards. For one thing, it contains not three movements but four, with the usual fast-slow-fast configuration prefaced by a short, slow movement. Also it is one of a handful of Concertos with which the composer supplied nicknames. This so-called "Madrigalesco" Concerto seeks, in the contour and flow of its melodies, to create a distinctly vocal quality.

Francesco Geminiani was born in Lucca, Italy in 1687.

During his early years he studied the violin under Carlo Arnbrogio Lonati in Milan, then Corelli in Rome. In 1714 Geminiani came to England where his playing quickly gained him the support of leading figures at court and among the aristocracy. He was one of the very first composers to have concertos printed in England.

He moved to Dublin in 1733 where he opened a Concert Room and built a fine reputation as a teacher, performer, concert

promoter and theorist. Geminiani's sensitive and expert "adaptation" of his teacher Corelli's Opus 5 Sonatas may have been motivated by respect, by a genuine appreciation of the music's intrinsic worth... or an attempt to cash in on the enormous popularity of Corelli's works in London at that time.

Whatever the motive, Corelli could only have seen it as a mark of deep respect. We include on this disc the last, No. 12, of the set, which explores a form popular in the baroque idiom: *variations on a popular tune* – "La Follia" being the choice of several baroque composers when working in this medium.

Giuseppi Torelli was born in 1658, making him the earliest composer on this disc. He became known as a virtuoso string player (violin, viola and tenor viol) and was a prolific composer of concertos and sonatas many dedicated to noble patrons.

Based mainly in Bologna with the S. Petronio Orchestra, Torelli held posts in Ansbach, Berlin and Vienna where he composed an Oratorio which was performed in the Imperial Chapel. From his large concerto output, and by way of contrast in sound, we include here his Concerto in A for Guitar, Violin and Strings. He died in 1709.

Georg Friederich Händel was born in Halle on the Saale River in Thuringia, Eastern Germany, on February 23rd, 1685.

Following his musical studies in Germany, Handel went to Italy where he spent more than three years, in Florence, Rome, Naples and Venice. Much that is typical of baroque music can be traced back to Italy and particularly to Corelli, with whom Handel had studied. The influence of Italy was to show itself in Handel's lifetime preoccupation with opera – as well as Italian operatic "stars". His Concerti Grossi too, bear witness to the influence of Italy and Corelli.

Leaving Italy early in 1710 Handel went to Hanover, where he was appointed Capellmeister to the Elector, George Louis who, as a result of the Act of Settlement of 1701 which secured the Protestant succession to the Crown, would become King George I in 1714. In 1705 George had already been naturalized by Act of Parliament, and Handel was to follow the Elector in adopting British nationality, along with his "new" names of George Frideric.

Handel became deeply involved in the growing London opera scene. Later, during the 1730s he would lean more to the English musical forms, the oratorio, ode and the like, and indeed the Messiah belongs very much to the Anglican anthem tradition.

The Concerti Grossi Op 6 were composed during September - October 1739, and published in April 1740, by John Walsh. It was at this time that his organ improvisations and concertos during theatrical performances had become popular; these works may have been written as overtures preceding stage works, however his music was also popular at the Vauxhall Gardens and these Concertos would no doubt have been performed there also.