

Brandenburg Concerto No.3 in G Major, BWV 1048
by J.S. Bach (1685 -1750)

Duration: Approximately 10 minutes

First Performance: unknown

Last ESO Performance: March, 1988; Robert Hanson, conductor

Even geniuses need to keep an eye on the job market and so it was that in 1721 J.S. Bach sent off a set of six elegantly copied concertos to Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg and brother of the King of Prussia. To be sure, Bach had a job, and a good one at that, as court musician to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen. For various reasons, however, he was becoming dissatisfied and was beginning to cast about for new possibilities. The set of concertos was carefully designed to show him at his best, constituting, as we might say today, a portfolio of favorite works written over a period of years, and, inscribed, not by a professional copyist, but in some of the most beautiful calligraphy that has survived in Bach's own hand. The dedication page and accompanying letter were written in the obsequious style characteristic of the time and, unusual for Bach, were in quaintly stilted French. (His knowledge of the language was rudimentary and he very likely had help in writing the letter.) Addressed to "His Royal Highness" from "His very humble and very obedient servant," Bach mentions already having performed for His Nibs at an earlier time and having received a request to send examples of his work. The groveling continues with mention of "the fine and delicate taste which the whole world knows Your Highness has for musical pieces", and a request not to judge "the imperfections" of the works, etc.,etc.

There is no evidence that the margrave ever replied or ever had the works performed by his court orchestra. The manuscripts were eventually passed on to his heirs, having been listed in an estate evaluation as being worth just a few groschen. They were not discovered in the archives of Brandenburg until 1849 and were published in 1850, the 100th anniversary of Bach's death. Incidentally, in 1723, just two years after sending off this impressive resumé, Bach left Köthen for good to go to Leipzig, where he spent the rest of his life.

Now known as the Brandenburg Concertos, these *Six Concertos avec plusieurs instruments* (*Six Concertos for several instruments*) as Bach called them, are among the greatest glories of baroque instrumental music and are perhaps the best known of Bach's works. Indeed, so familiar have they become that it is difficult to appreciate how revolutionary they originally were. As examples of the concerto grosso, one of the most important types of baroque instrumental music, they provide a spectacular survey of instrumental techniques of the period done in the spirit of lively, sophisticated court entertainment. Unlike the solo concerto which features a single soloist, the concerto grosso (literally, "big concerto") employs a small group of soloists pitted against the full orchestra. Much of the interest of the concerto grosso consists of the contrast in color and texture between groups of instruments, and Bach exploits this contrast to the full by

using imaginative and unprecedented combinations of instruments for each concerto. Each work has its own distinctive color and character.

The Third Concerto is scored for strings alone and thus does not have the contrast of color of some of the others that use wind instruments. What it does have is an amazingly rich exploration of texture, i.e., the relationship between the various instrumental lines. Bach uses a unique arrangement of three violins, three violas, and three cellos (in addition to the bass and harpsichord that are customary in virtually all baroque music). In one sense there is no soloist, yet in another there are many, for at some time most of the instruments assume a solo role. Sometimes all ten parts play together but often groups of three are pitted against each other to produce a fascinating variety of texture.

All of this textural ingenuity is demonstrated in the wonderfully energetic first movement, which begins with a ritornello or refrain played by the entire group. This ritornello will return a number of times (hence the term), and contains almost all of the melodic and rhythmic ideas of the movement.

Instead of the customary slow movement Bach gives us something of an enigma. He writes simply two chords that form what music theorists call a Phrygian half cadence: i.e. two chords which function like an incomplete punctuation mark designed to lead into the final movement. Although at one time the practice was simply to play the two chords as written, today it is usually assumed that Bach intended to have an improvised flourish or brief cadenza over one or both of the chords. (Some performers have gone so far as to interpolate an entire slow movement from other Bach works.) In any case the movement is incomplete and demands resolution by the finale, which is a spectacular demonstration of contrapuntal skill, including much canonic imitation. Despite such a learned style, it is set to the exhilarating rhythms of a gigue, reminding us once again that no matter how lofty or sophisticated Bach's music became, he was never far away from dance rhythms.

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Muse

by Christopher Theofanidis (1967 -)

Duration: Approximately 12 minutes

First Performance: December 8, 2007 in New York

Last ESO Performance: These are the first ESO performances of the work

A native of Texas, Christopher Theofanidis received his undergraduate degree from the University of Houston, and, like many young people, considered pursuing a perfectly sensible career in business. Apparently the Muses whispered in his ear, however, and, instead of business school, he enrolled at the Eastman School of Music where contact with such prominent composers as Joseph Schwantner, Christopher Rouse, and Samuel Adler convinced him that his future lay elsewhere. After receiving a graduate degree from the Eastman School he would go on to receive a Ph. D. from Yale University, where, incidentally, he is today a member of the composition faculty.

In the meantime, his career path has proven to be the right choice- he has established himself as one of this country's busiest and most successful composers. His works have been performed by many leading orchestras including those of London, Philadelphia, New York, Atlanta, and St. Louis, and in 2006 -2007 he was Composer of the Year for the Pittsburgh Symphony. His orchestral work *Rainbow Body* has become one of the most often performed works of the last decade, with performances by more than 100 orchestras. Comfortable in many genres, he has also written successfully for the stage, including the opera *Heart of a Soldier*, commissioned by the San Francisco Opera, and *The Refuge*, commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera. Among his many awards have been a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Rome Prize, a Charles Ives Fellowship granted by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Grammy nomination.

In 2006, the New York based Orpheus Chamber Orchestra launched "The New Brandenburg Project", an attempt to create new works for small orchestra that also serve as a bridge to the past. Six distinguished composers were selected to write works based on each of the six Brandenburg Concertos. The new works would, of course, be modern in style, but would be required to use Bach's original instrumentation. The assignment of the Third Concerto went to Mr. Theofanidis, the result being *Muse*, which was completed and first performed in 2007.

The unusual distribution of string parts in the Third Concerto described above (10 separate lines rather than the 5 that are usual in orchestral writing) presents special problems for the composer. Mr. Theofanidis has written that, despite such complexity, Bach "achieves a light and transparent sound, and I tried to move toward this way of working in my piece." Another interesting problem was writing for the harpsichord, which was of course an integral part of most baroque instrumental music. The composer has described the experience as follows: "It terrified the daylights out of me but I had a great time doing it. It's such a fantastic, wonderful, metallic instrument, and I kind of think of it as the electric guitar of the baroque."

The following are the composer's own program notes.

The first movement has a running sixteenth note figure, which is actually a minor, triple- meter version of the main melodic line in the first movement of the Bach. This is balanced by a short motive of three repeated notes followed by a single lower note. The second movement is highly ornate with a long-lined melody always in the background. The third movement is based on one of my favorite Bach chorale tunes, *Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland*.

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Concerto grosso in D Major, op.6, no. 1
by Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Duration: Approximately 12 minutes

First Performance: unknown

Last ESO Performance: March, 1977; Margaret Hillis, conductor

If Bach's writing for the *concerto grosso* broke the mold, it might be said that it was Arcangelo Corelli who created the mold in the first place. Writing in the generation before composers such as Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi, Corelli was a pivotal figure in the development of the style that is now familiar to us as baroque music. To begin with, he was a virtuoso violinist who can lay claim to being one of the founders of modern violin playing, both by his own example as well as by being teacher to many important 18th century violinists such as Geminiani and Locatelli. As composer, he helped to establish such important genres as sonata and concerto, and was one of the most important early developers of the basic principles of tonal harmony, ideas which are still taught in music theory courses today. All these things, incidentally, were accomplished by this composer whose small output included not a single note of vocal music, something that would have been unthinkable in an earlier era. Through the influence of composers such as Corelli, the baroque era marked the first time that instrumental music had finally achieved a status equal to that of vocal music.

Corelli did not invent the *concerto grosso* but he was the first major composer to utilize it. His set of twelve such works was published as his Opus 6 in 1714, the year after his death. These works were quickly disseminated throughout Europe through the newly developing industry of music publishing and were closely studied by innumerable composers, including Bach and Handel. They are among the earliest works of instrumental music to achieve the status of classics, having enjoyed repeated performances throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth.

Today's program features two concertos from the set, both of which fall into the category of so-called *concerto da chiesa* (church concerto). Such works were written for actual church use, inserted between liturgical events such as between the reading of scripture or at the offertory. Corelli's standard orchestration was a group of soloists consisting of two violins and cello (known collectively as the *concertino*) which played against a supporting group of strings and harpsichord (often called the *ripieno*).

The Concerto No. 1 opens with two pairs of *Largo-Allegro* movements. In both cases the slow movement ends inconclusively and is meant to lead directly into its faster companion. The third *Largo* is the most elaborate and expressive, being in a minor key with a repeating bass line reminiscent of the so-called ground bass that was so important in baroque music. Two *Allegros* complete the work, the first being a fugue, and the second a lively showpiece especially for the two solo violins.

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Concerto grosso in D major, op.6, no. 4
by Arcangelo Corelli

Duration: Approximately 9 minutes

First Performance: Unknown

Last ESO Performance: These are the first ESO performances of the work

The Fourth Concerto is one of the most popular of the set of twelve. Although it is also a *concerto da chiesa* suitable for church use, there is nothing prim nor solemn about this lively music which even dares to use dance rhythms. It begins with a brief, introductory *Adagio* which is followed by a fiery and virtuosic *Allegro*. A soulful, minor key *Adagio* leads to a *Vivace* which is actually a minuet, the popular social dance of the time which here has found its way into church. Sacred again meets secular in the finale, which begins with the triplet rhythms of a lively *gigue* and then segues into a stormy concluding *Allegro*.

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Symphony No.25 in G minor, K.183 (173dB)
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 -1791)

Duration: Approximately 24 minutes

First Performance: unknown

Last ESO Performance: These are the first ESO performances of the work

Of the more than 40 symphonies that Mozart wrote, only two are in a minor key: the familiar great Symphony No. 40 in G minor, written near the end of his life, and the Symphony No. 25, also in G minor, written when he was seventeen years old and the earliest of his symphonies to find a place in the standard repertoire. (The latter is often called the “Little” G minor Symphony to distinguish it from its grander sibling.) This predilection for major keys is entirely in accord with the spirit of the times, when the symphony was widely understood as a genre conveying a spirit of optimism, grandeur and nobility, rather than the darker emotions.

Because of the unusual choice of minor keys for these two symphonies, however, an enormous amount of musicological ink has been spilled as scholars have tried to get under Mozart’s wig, so to speak, to explain the aberration. Some biographers have, for example, suggested that the turbulent emotions of the “Little” G minor Symphony were the result of some sort of emotional crisis, perhaps a disappointing love affair for the young composer, or dissatisfaction with the inhibiting conditions of his position in his hometown of Salzburg. Plausible as these suggestions might be, there is no clear evidence to support them. What we do know is that if Mozart had reason to write somber music, he had models in the musical culture around him. The period of the 1770’s saw a brief fashion for stormy, minor key symphonies which ran counter to the accepted

practice. Composers such as Mozart's close friend and mentor, Franz Josef Haydn, produced a number of such works, including his Symphony No. 39, which also happens to be in G minor and also employs four horns, an unusual practice of the time. Some scholars now think that Mozart's work was strongly influenced by this symphony. Works in this style are now often called *Sturm und Drang* ("Storm and Stress") symphonies, after the literary movement of the same period represented by such writers as F.M. von Klinger, Schiller, and Goethe. Cultural historians now see the emphasis on subjectivity and violent emotional states in all the arts during this period as a precursor of the Romantic movement which would sweep over Europe at the beginning of the next century. The musical techniques for such effects were easily transported from the opera house, where depictions of such unsavory melodramatic scenes as storm, shipwreck, warfare, suicide, and murder were the stock-in-trade of every successful composer.

The symphony begins immediately with the darkly emotional quality which pervades the movement and, incidentally, was put to good use in the sound track of the film *Amadeus*. This mood is due not only to its dark minor key but also to strongly syncopated rhythms, and much use of *tremolando* (a "trembling" effect on a single note in string instruments). Adding to the drama is the unusually full sound of four horns.

The slow movement changes to a major key and to a different emotional climate, expressing not stormy passion but feelings of yearning and sadness through frequent sighing effects. G minor storminess soon returns in the minuet, however, which must have been a shock to eighteenth century listeners who were expecting the usual polite social dance. The middle section or trio finally provides some refreshment by a change to major key as well as by its use of the typical Austrian wind band or *Harmonie*, consisting of pairs of oboes, bassoons, and horns. The minor key minuet returns to complete the ABA form.

The work is brought to a close with an *Allegro* in the home key of G minor again filled with driving, irregular rhythms and a feeling of unresolved tension and anguish. Those listeners familiar with the better known Symphony No. 40 may hear this youthful work as a kind of preliminary sketch. Though it lacks the formal perfection of the late work, it is a remarkable achievement for a seventeen year old composer.

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