

THE RISE OF THE CONCERTO IN ITALY IN THE 16TH & 17TH CENTURIES

ORIGINS

The origins of the concerto go back to the vocal music being developed in Italy c. 1600 by composers like Claudio Monteverdi and Giovanni Gabrieli. They were tired of the uniform Renaissance style and created a style which was called *Concertato* style. In the word *concertato* they read two meanings from the two languages they commonly used: the Italian "concertare", implying two or more musicians playing in harmony (in concert) with each other, and the Latin "concertare", meaning to contend or dispute. The style therefore deliberately emphasizes the contrast of one voice or instrument against others, or one small group against another larger one.

One of the most radical changes to musical taste which came with the Baroque period was the introduction of the concept of *Basso Continuo*. The *basso continuo* style aims to show off the potential of melody by simplifying the accompaniment down to a simple bass line. This supporting bass line was then usually supplemented by appropriate chords played (improvised) by a harpsichord-, organ- or theorbo(lute) player. In a Baroque concerto the soloist, whenever he or she plays alone, is always supported by the instruments of the *basso continuo* group.

Another feature of the Baroque musical revolution was to abandon the old scales ("modes") of the church chants in preference to the major and minor scales which are still commonly used today. The concertos of the end of the 17th Century are amongst the first works to be unambiguously in major and minor keys. Particularly impressive composers of concertos at this time were Torelli in Bologna and Corelli in Rome. Corelli's concertos are known as *concerti grossi* or "big" concertos, because they used several soloists: a small group (usually 2 violins and cello) contrasted against the string orchestra.

By the early eighteenth century, the time of Antonio Vivaldi, most "solo concertos" consist of a standard plan of 3 different movements - fast, then slow, then fast again. Most commonly these movements were built up using a structure known as RITORNELLO FORM.

Ritornello form: is the principal used to build up a musical structure in a Baroque concerto movement. It comes from the Italian word *ritornare*, meaning to return. We can therefore expect a plan to the music similar to that which we would find in a "rondo", where the opening music returns several times within the movement. There are, however, three important differences between the two forms.

1. The Italian word ending (or suffix) *ello*, meaning "small", implies that, when the opening music returns, we hear a shortened version of the theme. In a rondo the whole theme is normally heard when it returns.
2. When the opening theme returns in a rondo it is nearly always in the same key as the opening theme. However, each new *ritornello* in ritornello form may be in any key of the composer's choice.
3. In the episodes between the various *ritornelli*, the music features above all the soloist(s). In a rondo there is no clear-cut distinction as to who plays the returning opening theme and who plays the episodes.

As one might expect, ritornello form is only used where the music features a soloist with accompaniment from other instruments. e.g. in the Baroque concerto or in the operatic aria of the Baroque.

Optional Exercise 1: Complete the appended charts to show the application of ritornello form in the 1st movement and the 3rd movement of Vivaldi's "L'Autunno" op.8 No. 3

Optional Exercise 2: Listen to the "Rondeau" from Bach's 2nd Suite for Orchestra to hear the difference between ritornello and rondo form.

DA CHIESA AND DA CAMERA

Purely instrumental music (Sonatas, Concertos etc.) in the Baroque period fell into two main categories according to the place where the music was expected to be performed. If the music was intended for performance in a church it would be of the DA CHIESA ("for the Church") category; if for performance at a society gathering it would be DA CAMERA ("for the room").

The musical styles of each type reflect their intended place of performance. *Dachiesa* music tended to be more conservative in style, with movements titled only by the tempo in which they would be played (Allegro, Largo etc.). It laid little importance on technical brilliance and aimed to avoid rhythmic features of dances popular at the time. Generally, the tempo of the movements followed the pattern: slow - fast - slow - fast.

The *dacamera* music by contrast had an informal sequence of movements, often named after dances popular at the time. Often these works were devised to show the technical brilliance of a soloist or group of instrumentalists.

In the instrumental works of the first half of the 18th century (Bach, Handel, etc.) these stylistic divisions became less and less clear to define.

SOLO CONCERTO AND CONCERTO GROSSO

Concertos, too, were divided into two categories according to the number of soloists used in the concerto. If only one soloist was used (as in Vivaldi's Four Seasons, Albinoni's oboe concertos, etc.), then the concerto was known as a solo concerto. If several soloists (most commonly 2 violins and violoncello) dominated the concerto (as in Corelli's concertos or Bach's Brandenburg Concertos), then the concerto was known as a concerto grosso ("big concerto"). Solo concertos tended to be the most virtuosic, while concerto grossos were often performed in churches and had many "da chiesa" features.



This caricature of Vivaldi was created by the artist Pier Leone Ghezzi in 1723, two years before his famous concertos "The Four Seasons" were published. Vivaldi wrote over 500 concertos, of which 350 were solo concertos. 230 of these feature the violin as soloist. His next most frequently featured solo instrument was the bassoon with 39 concertos.

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First Movement (Allegro) of Concerto Op.8 no. 3 (“Autumn”) by Antonio Vivaldi

4/4 time - key: F major

Descriptive poem: With dance and song the villagers celebrate their fine pleasure at the good harvest. And many succumb to Bacchus’ liquor. They finish their merry-making in sleep.

<u>Bar nos.</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Ritornello/Episode?</u>	<u>Description of the Music</u>
1 -13	F major	Opening statement of ritornello theme	<i>Tutti</i> - 5 short phrases, each restricted to mainly the I, IV & V chords harmonically. Phrase 2 is a repeat of phrase 1 an 8ve lower; Phrase 5 a repeat of phrase 4 an 8ve lower. In phrases 4 & 5 constant 1/8-notes replace the staggered rhythm of phrases 1 & 2. The 3rd phrase contrasts with more melodic leaps and is a 2-bar sequence. Violin 2 always plays a 3rd below Violin 1. Very dance-like.
14 - 27	F major	1st episode	Solo violin (double stopping) supported by b.c. First 2 phrases as in opening ritornello. 3rd & 4th phrases employ the same rhythm, but a new melody evolves. 4th phrase repeats the 3rd an 8ve lower.
27- 32	F major	Ritornello	<i>Tutti</i> - only the final two phrases of the opening ritornello.
32 - 57	F major A minor D minor G minor	2nd episode	

Third Movement (Allegro) of Concerto Op.8 no. 3 (“Autumn”)
by
Antonio Vivaldi

3/8 time - key: F major

Descriptive poem: The hunters go out at the break of dawn with horns, guns and dogs. The beast flees. They follow the scent. Already confused and exhausted by the great noise of guns and dogs, fatally wounded it drops and dies oppressed.

<u>Bar nos.</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Ritornello/Episode?</u>	<u>Description of the Music</u>
1 -29	F major		Opening statement of ritornello theme