

Along with the Brandenburg Concertos as a set, only two more concertos for solo violin and the D minor for two violins survived out of who knows how many, beyond the ones Bach rewrote at Leipzig after 1729 for one, two, three, and four clavier. All of his concertos, Brandenburs included, had Vivaldi as their point of departure, and some were even transcriptions of the Italian master's works. Bach's genius was, of course, that he could individualize as well as transcend the music of a man indirectly his mentor. His works hadn't the sensuality or esprit of Vivaldi's; Bach was German Lutheran, bound beyond climate and environment by a religion that denounced the secular excesses in which Roman Catholicism (as Luther viewed it from within) had wallowed since the Middle Ages.

While opera had no place in Bach's education, life, or music, he was nonetheless sublimely capable of lyricism, warmth, and gentleness, never more so than in the Largo, ma non tanto middle movement of this Double Concerto, with its 12/8 Siciliano rhythm and solo lines that seem to caress one another as they overlap and intertwine. On either side of this blissful duolog, however, the Baroque contrapuntist displays his mastery of synthesis and organization. The concerto opens with a fugal exposition of two contrasting themes, and their "development" in the ritornello style through G minor and C minor before the orchestra "reprises" the opening theme one last time. The allegro finale, in triple meter, likewise features imitation and repetition with the soloists front and center. Even more than in the first movement, there is a feeling of sonata form in embryo, with the charming surprise of a reprise in G minor instead of the tonic D minor.



J. S. Bach

VIOLIN CONCERTOS

BWV 1041 · BWV 1042 · BWV 1043

HDTCO
HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

Violino concertato.
Violino I.
Violino II.
Continuo

All.
6

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The court of young Prince Leopold at Cöthen was the penultimate step on Bach's professional ascent from organist at Arnstadt, in 1703, to Kantor at Leipzig, from 1723 to the end of his life. He had been Konzertmeister at Weimar (1708-1717) before his appointment as Kapellmeister at Cöthen, where he remained for six years. He wrote much instrumental (rather than liturgical) music in this secular position, although most of it has been lost. Among the survivors were the Brandenburg Concertos and three other concertos for one or more solo violins with string and continuo accompaniment: the A minor and E major concertos for his concertmaster at Cöthen, Joseph Spiess, and the D minor Concerto for Two Violins.

Formally, he cast all but Brandenburg No. 3 in three movements -- quick, slow, quick -- modeled on the Italian Baroque concertos of Vivaldi. Bach's genius was the ability to individualize as well as transcend the style of that older and admired contemporary who was indirectly his mentor. In the Violin Concerto No. 1 in A minor, BWV 1041, as in the other two violin concertos, the central movement is an aria without words -- lyrical, expressively warm, ever gentle, yet inescapably melancholic in case of the A minor, perhaps the most inherently somber key in the tonal lexicon. On either side, an implicit although unmarked Allegro leads off in 2/4 time, with ritornello structure. As usual in Bach's concertos, the soloist's relationship with the full-ensemble passages hangs in a fascinating balance between competition and cooperation. A jig concludes in 3/8 time, marked Allegro assai and foreshadowing the rondos that Haydn and Mozart developed after Bach's death.

This work, along with Bach's other surviving violin concerto, was composed during his stint in the service of the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen. J.N. Forkel, Bach's original biographer, describes the concerto as being "full of an

unconquerable joy of life, that sings in the triumph of the first and last movements." By the time Bach composed this concerto he had long been familiar with Antonio Vivaldi's influential works in the same medium. In the concerto's scintillating and ebullient first movement (Allegro), Bach takes the basic idea of ritornello form (around which Vivaldi's and almost all other Baroque concertos are composed), employs the essential motivic processes involved in that kind of composition, and shapes the whole into a superb da capo-form dialogue between soloist and accompanying ripieno group in which neither has supremacy over the other. While a certain balance between the soloist and the accompaniment is maintained, the basic content of the movement, defined by a powerful arpeggiated triad motif (reminiscent of Vivaldi's violin concerto "Il favorito"), becomes a springboard for continuous invention and subtly virtuosic embellishment. In the central Adagio, a deeply mournful instrumental aria of unique beauty, the violin's intricate musings are woven in and around a quiet ostinato in the bass instruments. The Allegro assai rondo finale is a dance-like movement of an extraordinary exuberance. Each successive contrasting passage exploits the violin's bravura capabilities more and more, until at last the final refrain swoops in on the wings of wild thirty-second notes. The Harpsichord Concerto in D major, BWV 1054, is a transcription made by Bach, probably during the late 1730s, of this E major Violin Concerto.

This music was composed at Cöthen between 1717 and 1723, and very likely first played by Joseph Spiess and Martin Friedrich Marcus with Prince Leopold's court orchestra. At Cöthen, Bach had no organ to play, despite his pan-German reputation as a virtuoso on that behemoth among Baroque instruments. However, he was proficient as well on the violin, the viola da gamba, and of course the clavier. Without his first choice available, or church duties such as Leipzig demanded later on, Johann Sebastian concentrated on instrumental music in various combinations -- much of it subsequently lost.

JS Bach Violin Concerto No.1 In A Minor, BWV 1041
Violin Concerto No.2 In E Major, BWV 1042
"Double" Concerto For 2 Violins, Strings And Continuo In D Minor, BWV 1043
Violin, Conductor - Henryk Szeryng

Violin - Peter Rybar (tracks 7 thru 9)
Collegium Musicum Winterthur

Violin Concerto No.1 In A Minor, BWV 1041

1 Allegro Moderato 4:15

2 Andante 6:54

3 Allegro Assai 4:22

Violin Concerto No.2 In E Major, BWV 1042

4 Allegro 8:27

5 Adagio 6:57

6 Allegro Assai 3:16

"Double" Concerto For 2 Violins, Strings And Continuo In D Minor, BWV 1043

7 Vivace 4:09

8 Largo 6:45

9 Allegro 5:31

Recording Info: Recorded by Philips 1965 Engineer - Henk Jansen, Tony Buczynski
Producer - Vittorio Negri



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