

**HILTON HEAD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**  
**PROGRAM NOTES: JANUARY 25, 2021 ORCHESTRA SERIES CONCERT**

**George F. Handel – Concerto Grosso in A Major, Op. 6 No. 11**

Arcangelo Corelli, for all practical purposes the father of the *concerto grosso*, began composing his most famous set in the 1680s. At the time, he was leader of an orchestra in Rome and most likely wrote them for himself to perform. Also around the same time, Corelli gave the premiers of a couple of Handel's oratorios, working with the young German composer on the production. Fast forward to the Autumn of 1739, when Handel, after a long dearth of creativity, suddenly broke forth with a flurry of composing which resulted in the Ode for St. Cecilia's Day and a set of Concertos, including tonight's No. 11 in A Major. Is it mere coincidence that Handel composed 12 concertos as his Opus 6, the same Opus and number as Corelli's, exactly 25 years after the first set were published? I suspect not!

Handel certainly worked hard on these concertos. The autograph manuscript shows plenty of strong, almost violent scratchings as the composer changed his mind. Another interesting enigma concerns the solo cello part which, unlike the majority of chamber music from the Baroque Era, is unfigured, suggesting that Handel did not expect a traditional basso continuo. Even before he finished, the concertos were offered by subscription (through a special Royal License) to help pay for the costs of copying. The concertos quickly became popular, resulting in five English and two French editions all printed before 1800. In fact, there is evidence that they were played at fundraisers for the "Fund for the Support of Decayed Musicians and Their Families," an organization that was founded by Handel, among others.

The 11<sup>th</sup> concerto actually started life as an organ concerto, although the melody of the third movement Andante comes from a sonata by Johann Kuhnau (remember, there was no copyright law!). Like all of the concertos, it is written for two solo violins and a solo cello, together forming the concertino part, and strings, forming the ripieno. The first two movements function like a French overture, similar to the Messiah Overture: there is an Andante, with a snappy dotted rhythm, and an Allegro fugue. The third movement, a Largo, is all of six measures long. The fourth, the centerpiece of the concerto, is in the style of Italian concertos, which alternates between an orchestral ritornello and flashier solo parts. The final movement also uses the Italian style, but overlaid on the form of a da capo aria: ABA.

**Johann S. Bach – Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor, BWV 1043**

The concerto for two violins, affectionately known by violinists as the Bach Double, was probably composed while Bach worked in Köthen from 1717 to 1723. The only existing parts, however, are dated 1730 and were used while Bach was director of the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig, which gave concerts almost every week. Regardless of the specific date, Bach was quite familiar with concertos written by Italian composers, especially Albinoni and Vivaldi. He even made harpsichord arrangements of several of Vivaldi's concertos and was influenced by their artful balance between ritornello and solo sections. Bach later made harpsichord arrangements

of his own violin concertos, most likely for his sons and students, and those manuscripts have survived.

The writing for the two solo violinists is absolutely equal and epitomizes Bach's mastery of contrapuntal "conversation" as the violin parts weave in and out of each other. The orchestral parts are unusually complex and there are moments in the first and third movements where the cellos are working harder than the soloists! The first movement, *vivace*, features two main themes and each performer gets to play each theme alone, in addition to sections with intricate duets. The second movement, a *largo*, is one of Bach's most beautiful and the main theme's long soaring notes leading into downward scales is the stuff violinists live for. The last movement, *Allegro*, has some of the most rhythmically complex passages, with syncopations that could be straight out of a jazz tune. Listen for the moment when the two soloists become the background harmony and the rest of the orchestra plays descending arpeggiated figures in a unique reversal of roles.

### **Wolfgang A. Mozart – Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, K. 525**

Mozart's most famous instrumental work, technically a serenade, was completed in Vienna in 1787 while he was working on *Don Giovanni*. It is not known why the piece was composed or even if it was performed during Mozart's lifetime. The name comes from a reference Mozart made in his personal catalog, most likely writing down that he composed "a small serenade" and not an actual title. In that same entry, Mozart lists 5 movements, an additional minuet and trio coming before the Romance. It is unknown what happened to that missing minuet, although Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein has suggested it found its way into a piano sonata by August Müller (where are those copyright laws when you need them!).

The first movement is the one that is so famous and was featured in the opening scene of *Amadeus*. That delightful, arpeggio-based melody is unmistakable! The second movement, a slow Romanze, follows a typical rondo form, with the main theme starting in the middle of the measure like a gavotte. The minuet has a stately theme, albeit one which does not necessarily fit the triple meter, certainly not as elegantly as the contrasting trio does. The final movement is a fun light-hearted example of a rondo form that wants to be a sonata form. Wait, is that a development? Is that a coda? I daresay it is simply Mozart being his brilliant self.

—Jonathan Aceto, DMA  
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